

Dawn of a new era

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Article

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The world premiere of *The New Dawn* was held at an open air geodesic theatre last weekend at the well-known Penang Hill.

With the flickering lights of George Town, providing a backdrop, the event was a glittering performance of world standard, featuring the internationally-renowned Ramli Ibrahim and the Sutra Dancers. Two Japanese master musicians were also in the programme.

The event lived up to its designation of being the "new dawn", not only due to the superb dance and musical presentations but, quite uniquely, the panoramic theatrical styles that naturally blended with the cool night breeze.

Indeed, the concept was mooted by Ramli himself.

In similar vein, the next morning, another new cultural dawn of sorts took place at a different location not too distant from Penang Hill.

It was an equally spectacular event involving the arts, albeit a different form, symbolised by the unveiling of the "new" museum and gallery at the USM campus in the name of Tuanku Fauziah, the third chancellor of the university.



She was inaugurated as chancellor in 2002 in an auspicious investiture held at the Dewan Tuanku Syed Putra, named after its first chancellor, the late Raja of Perlis, who held the position in USM for 25 years.

During Tuanku Tengku Fauziah's five years in office (2002-2006), the university successfully integrated the arts and sciences, as well as culture and technology.

Establishing a museum at USM was first proposed as early as 1971 after the establishment of the School of Humanities and the introduction of the Fine Art programme.

The university, then barely two years old with no more than 200 students, took the bold initiative under the patronage of the first vice-chancellor, the late Tan Sri Professor Hamzah Sendut.

An honorary curator was appointed (the position was made permanent in 1981).

This initial effort was further enhanced by the second vice-chancellor, the late Tun Hamdan Sheikh Tahir. More art works, paintings, silverware, kris and traditional musical instruments were purchased.

Some were acquired through bulk purchases from galleries all over the world.

This facilitated the development of the full-fledged USM Museum and Gallery, as it has been known until recently.

It houses numerous national and international exhibits, works of art and collections related to arts and culture, aimed at enriching teaching and learning, and research at the university.

There are also many valuable and unique collections that were donated by philanthropists, art lovers and collectors from all over the world.

Since its inception, the museum and gallery at USM has served as a focus for research on colonial architecture, modern Malaysian art as well as the traditional performing arts.

The USM Museum and Art Gallery was officially opened on Jan 21,1982, making it the first of its kind in a Malaysian campus.

Over time, it has collected a range of indigenous musical instruments, costumes, traditional theatre props and games.

It has one of the finest collections of art works produced during the 1960s and 1970s, both by local and international painters.

Befittingly, the campus site and area around the premises was once an English nobleman's estate, one Joseph T. Brown, a spice planter.

His residence on top of a hill was a source of inspiration for a painting by William Daniel in 1818. The site later became known as "Minden", after a town in Germany which was taken over by the British army in the world war.

It later housed the Malaysian army before being turned into a university campus, first named Universiti Pulau Pinang, but later changed to Universiti Sains Malaysia.

The beautiful and majestic building, reflecting a neo-classical style with Doric columns, was built during World War II with a scenic view of the sea-front.

The change in status also reflected a 180-degree turn in functions and purposes.

The august building is now an important seat of learning, promoting peace and harmony, bridging various cultures.

Before it became a museum, it was a library for the university for a brief period.

It is befitting that the USM Museum and Gallery has been inaugurated as the Muzium & Galeri Tuanku Fauziah on March 19.

Considering that this year coincides with the 25th anniversary of the official opening of the premises, and in celebration of Malaysia's 50 years of nationhood, the time could not be more appropriate.

In so doing, USM is grateful to Tuanku Tengku Fauziah for her generosity and contributions to USM during her tenure as the third chancellor of USM.

This set the stage for the museum and gallery to fulfil its mission to become a renowned teaching, learning and research in-campus museum.

This was in line with the efforts to develop sustainable human talent and society.

It will uniquely be an oasis of knowledge for the integration of creative, artistic, scientific and culturally-relevant learning experience, fostered within the "University in a Garden". This will be yet another new dawn in knowledge generation and dissemination.

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