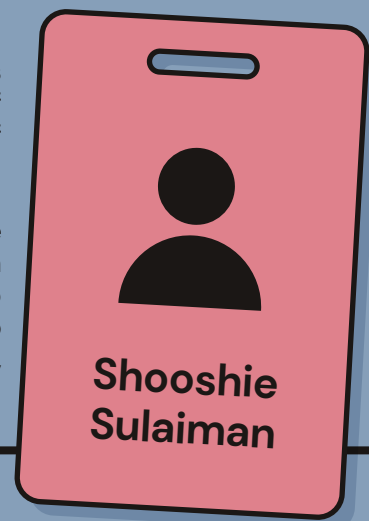


THE ARTIST

- Shooshie Sulaiman (b. 1973, Malaysia) has developed a practice that is informed by her Malay and Chinese heritage as well as the history of Southeast Asia. Her works often explore the culture of her homeland of Malaysia, her personal memories and identity.
- An almost mystical air permeates Shooshie's creations, which are made with a range of mediums, including drawing, collage, installation and performance. At times, she uses natural elements that are native to the land, such as trees, soil and water, in her works to urge viewers to consider the complex and close relationship between human beings, nature and art.



THE ARTWORK



KANCIL MENGADAP BERINGIN

2019–2022

Cement and wood on banyan tree, dimensions variable

Collection of the artist

- **MEDIUM:** *Kancil Mengadap Beringin* (The Mousedeer Comes Before the Banyan Tree) is a site-specific sculptural installation made of a living banyan tree surrounded by 99 mousedeer cement sculptures and wooden structures.
- **TECHNIQUES/PROCESSES:** Previously, this installation commemorating Malay cosmology was located on the historic grounds of the Malay Heritage Centre (MHC). It has since been moved to its new permanent home on Lazarus Island. The installation is accompanied by a children's storybook, likewise titled *Kancil Mengadap Beringin* and written by the artist.
- **IDEAS/INSPIRATIONS/CONTEXT:** Sang Kancil ("The Deer" in Malay) is the name of a mousedeer that is featured in various Malay fables. Often depicted as a creature who outwits his fellow animals, the mousedeer is seen as a symbol of intelligence. In this installation, Shooshie imagines Sang Kancil's encounter with the *pohon beringin*, or banyan tree. In Malay cosmology, the banyan tree, also known as the tree of life, marks the threshold between the spiritual and human worlds. Through its crown of leaves, it distills spiritual essence from the sun's nourishing rays whilst deeply rooted to the earth, connecting it to the *kefahaman khatulistiwa*, or lore of the equator.

DID YOU KNOW?

1. Cosmology is the study of the origin and structure of the universe. Different cultures have their own cosmologies, which can be used to understand how people from each culture perceive the world as well as their role within it.
2. Lazarus Island is also known as Pulau Sakijang Pelepah, or "Island of One Barking Deer and Palms" in Malay, where "sa" means "one," "kijang" means "barking deer," and "pelepah" refers to a palm frond.
3. The stories of Sang Kancil (pronounced "sung kahn-chill") are beloved traditional fables that have been passed down for generations. They are so well known in Malaysia and Indonesia that the expression "cerdik macam kancil" ("intelligent as a mouse-deer") emerged and is still commonly used today.
4. In the artist's children's book, *Kancil Mengadap Beringin*, a But-But (or coucal) couple are fighting to save their babies, who are threatened by a native belief that But-But nestlings can be made into a miracle cure-all. As a famous mediator between animals and the universe, Sang Kancil helps the But-But to send a message to the Creator with the aid of his followers, Puru, Landak and Kura-kura, and the banyan tree as a spiritual transmitter.

Artist Folio – MEETING NATASHA

SECONDARY:

SOCIAL STUDIES

HISTORY

ACTIVITIES AND QUESTIONS

PRE-VISIT

- Have you ever heard of the stories about Sang Kancil? What other fables do you know of?
- What do you understand by the term "site-specific installation"? Why do you think the artist Shooshie Sulaiman chose Lazarus Island as the site for *Kancil Mengadap Beringin*?

DURING YOUR VISIT

Walk around and experience the installation.

- Observe the mousedeer sculptures. Why do you think they are positioned in such a way?
- What do you find interesting about the artwork? Why?

Discuss with a friend.

POST-VISIT

Think of your favourite folktale character.

- Why is this character so special to you?
- What would a sculpture of this character look like?
- Where would you place this sculpture to best tell its stories?

Describe your answer to a friend.

FIND OUT MORE

- Look, Woon Wei, and Miranda Yeo. "Lazarus Island's Laid-Back Charm." *The Straits Times*, 5 June 2015. <https://www.straitstimes.com/lifestyle/travel/lazarus-islands-laid-back-charm>. (accessed on 19 January 2023).

