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By Sharyvit Kaur

MACALISTER MANSION

contemporary with a quirky twist

As you enter the driveway of Macalister Mansion, you are greeted by an oversized sculptural bust of Colonel Norman Macalister, the lieutenant-governor of Prince of Wales Island from 1808 to 1850. The bust, constructed in fibreglass and spray-painted a high gloss white finish, features a more modern rendering of traditional portrait busts seen through the sharp-edged fractal lines. The bust fits perfectly into the surroundings of the mansion, a place where heritage melds seamlessly into contemporary design.

Once you enter the reception area, your attention is immediately drawn to a projection art piece on the wall. Titled "Fragment" (Mansur Ramli), it features a collage of Penang scenes depicted in HD format, and weaves imaging manipulation and editing techniques with ambient sounds.

Macalister Mansion is more than a boutique hotel – it is an elaborate, artistic reminder of the past. This is seen in the specially commissioned artworks used to accentuate the mansion's eight rentable rooms that tie together contemporary architecture with colonial themes, maritime culture and Scottish influences.

The art pieces throughout the mansion were chosen under a joint curatorship between

owner Datuk Sean H'ng and Colin Seah of design, interior and architectural company Ministry of Design. An avid supporter of the local arts scene, H'ng believed it was important to commission local artists, or at least artists from South-East Asia. H'ng was also keen on taking things a step further by using a combination of 2D and 3D works.

▼ The bust of Norman Macalister.



▲ Room 5.



▲ The Dining Room

In the Dining Room, guests can enjoy a formal dinner surrounded by sculptures of fairytale-like animals which makes dining here a truly whimsical experience. The room also features various sketch paintings by Thomas Powell depicting Penang's colonial heritage as well as paintings inspired by the palm tree *Bismarckia nobilis* by Howard Tan.

The Living Room of Macalister Mansion is ornamented by murals reflecting the building's contemporary style. Inspiration for this room came from traditional English lace tablecloths where the motifs are repeated throughout.

Then we have the piece de résistance of Macalister Mansion, known simply as the Eight Rooms. Each rentable room features privately commissioned pieces of art that were influenced in part by the overarching themes of the mansion, as well as the life story of Macalister.

Room 1 features an art piece known as *Sonnet*, a short lyric piece by Aaron Lee that re-imagines and expresses the affection and longing between Macalister and his wife during a brief separation when he was stationed in Penang and she was in their homeland of Scotland.

In Room 2 one will find a photographic print on cotton paper called *The Eagle* by Penangite Howard Tan, which reiterates the majestic eagle sculpture at the entrance to the mansion.

Room 3 houses an artwork known as *Macalister Charm*. This delicate fabric and lace collage of the front facade of the mansion was handcrafted and had to be done in many parts.



▲ Room 3.



▲ Room 6.

▲ Room 7.

Local artist Low Chee Peng used the profiles of Macalister and his wife to show the innate relationship between men and women in Room 4. The connecting factor and fluidity in the usage of the sculpture's steel lines allowed the artist to give the piece more depth.

Ashley Yeo's piece in Room 5 depicts Penang's history. The juxtaposition between structures like the Clock Tower, Penang Hill Tram and St George Church against the *Cassia fistula*, a tree that is indigenous to the region, brings together the architecture and natural environment of Penang Island.

The piece in Room 6 is influenced by the importance of the sea as a connector, and is a metaphor for the journey that the soul goes on after death. The hand-cast porcelain ships are a combination of an abstracted shape of a ship and a bird's wing.

The artwork in Room 7 highlights the colour code of the Macalister Clan Tartan. This wall-mounted artwork is a 3D tartan constructed from fine mercerised cotton yarns weaved on a square solid surface frame.

And last but certainly not least, Room 8 features a portrait piece of Macalister through an array of images depicting defining moments in his life.