

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF INDONESIA



The mid-18th Century in Europe was a period known as the Age of Enlightenment when people began questioning traditional beliefs and set up societies to discuss scientific reasoning and development. European settlers in Indonesia were motivated to follow suit and on 24 April 1778, the Governor-General of the VOC or *Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (the United East Indies Company), Reinier de Klerk, gave his permission to establish *Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen* (The Batavian Society of Arts and Sciences). This was the first society of its kind in Asia and it aimed to analyze through scientific research the many cultural aspects of the people in the East Indies. The Society had its motto: *Ten Nutte van het Algemeen*, indicating that it would work for “the good of general public”. De Klerk was appointed Managing Director while several other council members became directors. One of them, Jacobus Cornelis Mattheus Radermacher, who was married to the Governor General’s step daughter, became the society’s executive director.

JCM Radermacher made the greatest contribution. In 1779, he donated his house in *Kali Besar, Jakarta Kota*, the trading district in the old part of the city, to the Society. He also donated a number of scientific instruments, for example, musical instruments, coin, manuscripts, books and other curios. His building and other contributions became the basis of the museum and library of the Society.

In 1813, two years after the British had ousted the Dutch from the East Indies (now Indonesia), Thomas Stamford Raffles became the Lieutenant Governor of Java and President of the Society. He was very keen to acquire knowledge about the history, culture and arts of the East Indies and he stimulated a great deal of new interest in the institution. A new building was constructed to be used as a museum and meeting hall for the “Literary Society” as the institution was called during that period. This building was located at Jalan Majapahit 3. Now, the location houses the buildings of the State Secretariat, near the Presidential Palace.

The Society's collection steadily increased, until the museum on *Jalan Majapahit* became too small. In 1862, the Dutch Government decided to build a new museum building. This edifice, today's Museum Nasional on *Jalan Merdeka Barat 12*, was opened in 1868. The museum, a rectangle that faces east, was built in Doric style, with its white Neo-classical facade and Doric columns. Since then, the building has undergone several alterations and extensions.

The museum is well known among the Indonesian people, especially among the inhabitants of Jakarta. They call it *Gedung Gajah* (Elephant Building) because of the large bronze statue of an elephant standing in the front yard. This statue had been donated by King Chulalongkorn of Siam (now Thailand), when he paid a state visit to Jakarta in 1871.

In 1931, the Museum's collections were shown in a world cultural exhibition in Paris. Unfortunately, a fire in the exhibition hall demolished Indonesia's exhibition pavilion and destroyed most of the objects. The museum received some insurance money as compensation and in the following year, these funds were used to build the old Ceramic Room, the Bronze Room and both Treasure Rooms on the second floor.

Because of the service rendered by the Society in the field of science and in the projects of the government, in 1933, the Dutch government conferred the title *Koninklijk* (Royal) on its name. The museum flourished and was very lucky that in the dangerous years of World War II and the Revolution, it did not suffer any damage.

On January 26, 1950, the society's name was changed from *Koninklijk Bataviaasch Genoorschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen* to *Lembaga Kebudayaan Indonesia* (Institute of Indonesian Culture). This change was in accordance with the conditions of the times, as seen in the new motto "to promote such cultural studies as are useful to increase knowledge concerning the Indonesia archipelago and other countries in the area".

Mindful of the importance of the museum for the people of Indonesia, the LKI or Institute of Indonesian Culture presented the museum to the Government of Indonesia on September 17, 1962, and it became known as *Museum Pusat* (Central Museum). The Museum was managed by the Indonesian Government under the Department of Education and Culture. By Decree of the Minister of Education and Culture on May 28, 1979, it was renamed the *Museum Nasional*. In 1987, all the books and manuscripts were relocated into a separate new building, the National Library in *Jalan Salemba Raya 28*. Likewise the visual arts collection was relocated to the National Gallery in *Jalan Merdeka Timur 14*.

In 1994, upon the initiative of the Minister of Education and Culture, Wardiman Djojonegoro, the expansion of the Museum began. Adjacent to the existing building and in the same architectural style, the new building is scheduled for completion early in the next millennium and will include an arena for theatrical performances as well as more space for exhibitions. Since 2001, the *Museum Nasional* has come under the Ministry of Culture and Tourism.

The museum's collections reveal important information about the Indonesian people's cultural history from the prehistoric period through the classical period of the 4th to 15th

centuries, to the rising influence of the Islamic religion in the 16th century, and the period of European influence beginning around the 17th century.

The collection has no less than 142,000 items from the 18th century up to the present day. It is divided into several disciplines, including prehistory, archaeology, numismatic, history, anthropology and geography.

In 1996 – 2007, a seven-floor building (*Gedung Unit B*) was constructed in the north side of the old one. This building, a synergy between a colonial style and a modern architecture, was officially opened by the president of the Republic of Indonesia, Dr. H. Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, as “Gedung Arca Museum Nasional” on June 20, 2007. The public were able to enjoy visiting the permanent exhibition rooms in the old building and the permanent exhibition rooms in the new wing (in the first floor up to the fourth floor). The layout of the four floors is as follows: 1) Man and the environment; 2) Knowledge, Technology, and Economy; 3) Social Organization and Settlement Patterns; and, 4) Treasures and Ceramics.

Address and Information for Visitors:

The *Museum Nasional* Indonesia is located on *Jalan Medan Merdeka Barat No. 12, Jakarta Pusat*.

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Opening Hours:

Tuesday – Thursday : 8:30 – 14:30

Friday : 8:30 – 11:30

Saturday : 8:30 – 13:30

Sunday : 8:30 – 14:30

Monday & Public Holiday : closed

Pictures:



