

NEWS

French artist is stumped by the Merlion, but it later becomes inspiration for his part in Asia-Europe Comics Project



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WHEN he saw the Merlion, Mr Frederic Felder's first thought was: Hmm... what a strange mix.

"I didn't understand it," the Frenchman said. "Just who in the world would have thought of combining a lion and a fish?"

No one explained the story to him.

But after the 36-year-old comic artist, here for the Asia-Europe Comics Project, learnt more about Singapore, he was inspired to invent his own little tale about how the Merlion came about.

His comic strip begins with a lion chewing on a fish, then spitting it out.

DIGEST AND UNDERSTAND

Quoting Confucius, the lion explains to the bewildered fish: "To understand something, you must first digest it."

Then, after professing his love for the fish, the unlikely duo morphs into — you guessed it — the Merlion.

"I drew that because I was inspired by the way people lived together in Singapore," said Mr Felder.

At the food courts, Mr Felder remembered being overwhelmed by the many different stalls selling different kinds of food.

"I had a great time going around, trying everything and asking the people around me what was in each dish," he said.

Watching the National Day parade was another eye-opening experience.

"I saw how the contingents, even though they were all dressed in green, were made up of soldiers from different races," he said.

Mr Felder's comic strip is one of 12 on display at an exhibition organised by the Asia-Europe Foundation.

He was one of 12 comic artists from all over the world who were invited by the foundation to Singapore for 12 days earlier this month.

Their aim was to discuss what migration really means.

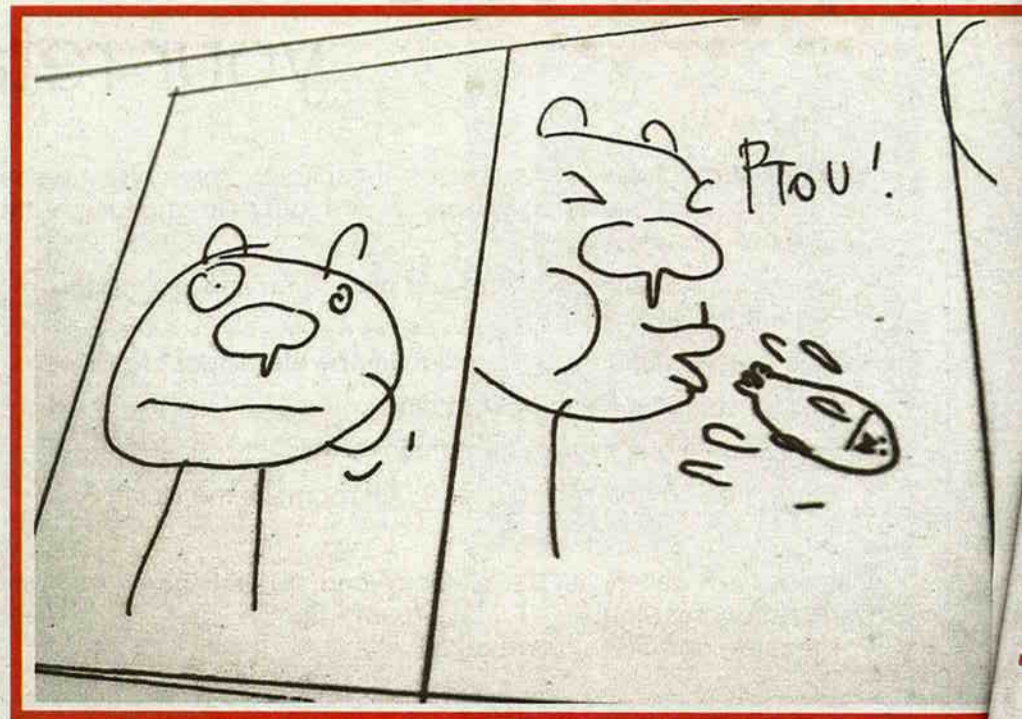
"We talk about globalisation all the time, but it is such a big word," said facilitator Mr Johnny Lau, 43, the creator of the Mr Kiasu comic series.

"What is really happening is migration."

Reflecting the individual experiences of the artists, who hail from countries such as the Czech Republic and Vietnam, the comic strips range from the fantastical to the whimsical.

Indonesian artist Al Fitri Muhammad Zachky drew a whimsical picture of a flock of birds flying off into the sunset.

Migration, he suggests, is not just practised by humans.



But he leaves you with the question: How different or similar are the reasons?

The artists' collaboration is still ongoing. The final artwork will be compiled into a book scheduled for launch at the end of this year.

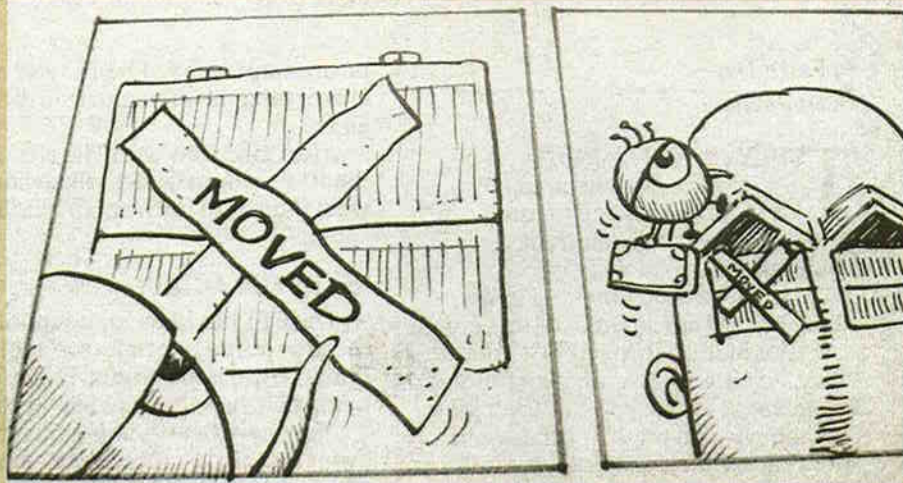
"Migration is a serious subject but comics can give a fresh and fun

perspective," said Mr Lau.

"It is a universal language."

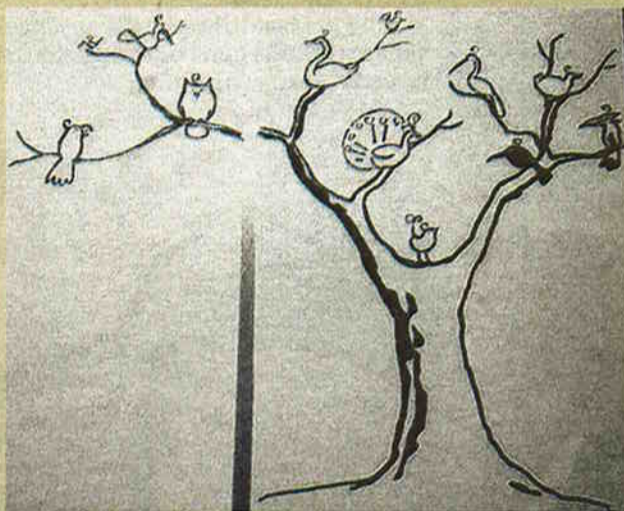
The exhibition is held at Level 9 at the National Library Board, 100 Victoria Street. It started on 18 Aug and ends on 31 Aug.

It's open from Mondays to Sundays, from 10am to 9pm. Admission is free.



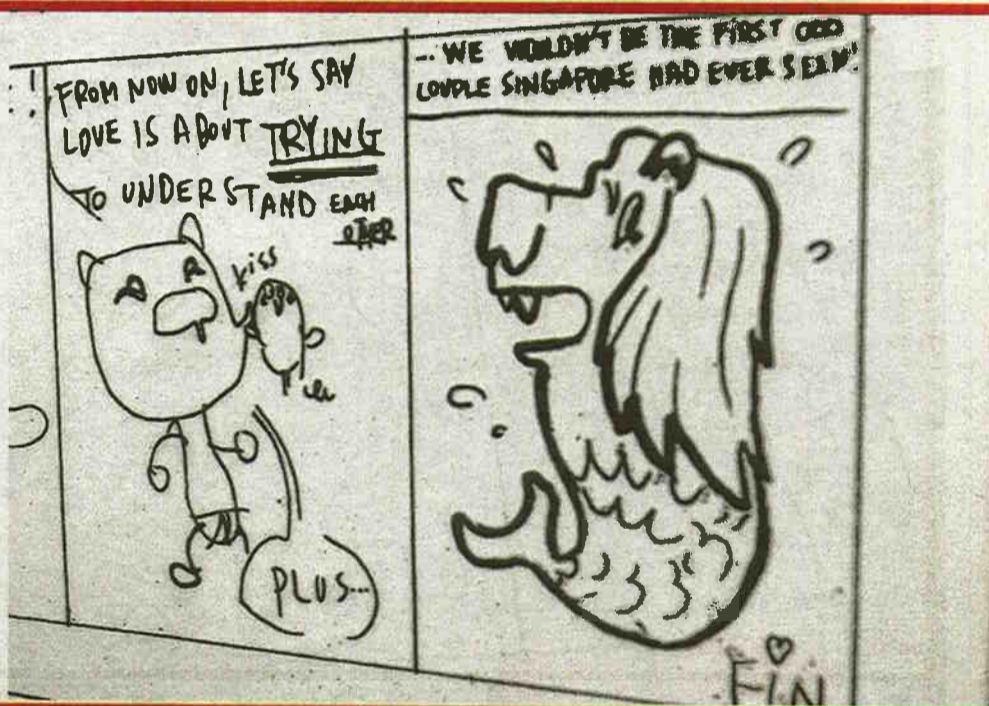
**Mr Le Phuong  
Vietnam**

“ I drew the eyeball migrating to the top of the head and setting up home there. The eyeball represents the way we look at the world around us. I want to show the migrant’s hopes for a better life and for new perspectives. But I also believe that no matter how far you travel, you will never forget your home. It will always be the peaceful place you want to return to at the end of your life. ”



**Miss Maaïke Hartjes  
The Netherlands**

“ This is a story about a bird that flies from tree to tree, trying to find a home. Finally, it finds one with different birds living in it. If you look carefully, all the birds have one little feather sticking out of their heads. I drew this to show that even though we may all be different, we can have things in common. The tree has no leaves, but to these birds, it does not matter. They are going to turn it into their home. ”



*I drew that because I was inspired by the way people lived together in Singapore.*

— French comic artist Frederic Felder, on his comic (facing page and above)