

Uprooted trees upcycled

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By Jasmine Koh



On display at the Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine (LKCMed) are 56 wood sculptures made from trees that grew on campus for over half a century before being cleared for construction of the school. PHOTO: ZHENG JUNCEN

OVER 70 trees that once stood tall on University grounds for 50 years have been made into furniture that will soon feature across campus.

The trees were uprooted two years ago to make way for the Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine (LKCMed).

But NTU Museum Deputy Director Faith Teh and Head of Medical Library and Heritage Centre Caroline Pang decided to repurpose the wood to make furniture for the school, including carving out a variety of chairs and sculptures.

With the help of two artists and 20 NTU students and staff, they created 60 pieces of wood furniture and art sculptures from the trees. Fifty-six of them are on display at LKCMed till 4 Nov.

The pieces, made of wood from albizia, acacia, and khaya trees, received a warm response from the NTU community.

Eight faculties and departments reserved pieces for their respective buildings. These include the School of Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS), the Student Services Centre, and the Department of Housing and Auxiliary Services (HAS).

Ms Teh said that it was a group of colleagues, including Associate Provost for Student Life Kwok Kian Woon, who first saw value in the conservation of the trees.

Ms Teh and Ms Pang then sent the wood for treatment and processing before it could be sculpted, but they almost had to stop work at one point due to a lack of funds.

NTU Deputy President and Provost Professor Freddy Boey then provided funding for the project for over two years.

The project is part of NTU's ongoing sustainability efforts, and seeks to boost awareness of repurposing local wood among the University body.

Renowned local sculptor Han Sai Por also accepted the invitation to sculpt a piece after she was informed that local wood would be the medium.

Titled "Heap of Books", Han's piece is a 1m-tall pillar of wooden books with jagged edges, which will be displayed at the lobby of the Student Services Centre.

Other designers also praised the grain quality of acacia trees, commonly known as rain trees, for being easy to mould.

Ms Teh and Ms Pang said they are willing to share their knowledge about relevant contacts, equipment and skills to staff and students interested in wood conservation.

Last August, they invited NTU alumnus Alan Chan, who uses local wood to make guitars, to conduct a talk on campus.

HAS Chief Officer Jimmy Lee also requested for Ms Teh and Ms Pang to contribute a piece for display at the HAS office.

“The pieces have a strong connection to NTU and depict what the University is about — a place of continuous learning,” he said.



The sculpture 'Heap of Books' by renowned local artist Han Sai Por will be moved to the lobby of the Student Services Centre after the exhibition at LKCMed is over. PHOTO: ZHENG JUNCEN

Students whom the Nanyang Chronicle spoke to responded positively to the works.

Gail Woo, 19, a first-year HSS student, said that it was good that the furniture also had a message about conservation, but added that a description should be placed beside each piece.

She said: “I feel that the concept has to be described clearly so that students know what the structure is there for.”

Associate Professor Neil Murphy, the Associate Dean of Undergraduate Education at HSS, said that the art pieces were visually appealing as well.

“It is beautiful to see the outcome of the exhibition. Therefore, I am definitely eager for the arrival of the pieces that will be in HSS,” he added.

Grace Tan, a second-year LKCMed student, said: "The exhibition is really unique and cute."

"It is a good break for students like us, especially if there is an event and we can just hang out," she added.



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