

Exhibit by NTU student shows fragility of MacRitchie

His final-year project looks at impact of new MRT line

By AUDREY TAN

A SLICE of Singapore's wilderness has been recreated at the Nanyang Technological University (NTU), complete with the sights, sounds and smells that come with a forest.

Visitors to the Developing MacRitchie interactive media exhibition will hear the chirping of birds, smell the forest and even walk on boardwalks similar to those found at the MacRitchie Nature Trail, a gateway to the Central Catchment Nature Reserve.

But they will also learn that all these could be at stake, when the new Cross Island MRT Line connecting Changi to Jurong is built by 2030.

Developed by NTU School of Art, Design and Media student Chu Hao Pei, 25, the exhibit – part of the ADM Show 2015 and his final-year project – draws attention to the threat faced by the nature reserve.

Said the interactive media major: "I hope people will re-think the idea that development is defined by new creations... I am not against the Cross Island Line, but I hope that it can be diverted."

The line was first announced by the Government in early 2013 and preliminary alignment plans show that it may cut through primary and secondary forests in the Central Catchment Nature Reserve near MacRitchie Reservoir.



Mr Chu Hao Pei, 25, an interactive media major, took about a year to prepare his exhibition. He went to the reserve often to take notes, videos and photographs. Then he edited the footage, did research on the 150-year-old portion that will be affected, and compiled them. ST PHOTO: NEO XIAOBIN

Mr Chu's stand echoes that of the Nature Society (Singapore), which had suggested in a position paper to the authorities in July 2013 that the line be built along Lornie Road – a route that goes around Singapore's largest nature reserve instead of through it.

The exhibit took Mr Chu about a year to prepare. For 10 months, he went to the reserve about two times a week to take notes, videos and photographs of the flora and fauna.

Then he edited the footage, did research on the 150-year-old portion of the reserve that will be affected,

and compiled them for the exhibit.

Included in the exhibit are three video monologues. Told from the perspectives of the primary rainforest, the plants, and the animals, they emphasise the impact of the construction on the inhabitants of the reserve.

The videos also provide the historical context of the nature reserve, such as how parts of it were used for gambier and pepper plantations in the early 19th century.

Environmentalists have cautioned that the land clearing needed for soil investigation works could affect the for-

est, home to birds such as the critically endangered white-rumped shama.

An environmental impact assessment to determine the effect of the development on the Central Catchment Nature Reserve is now under way and will be completed next year.

The study's results, input from green groups, and factors such as connectivity, travel times, costs and the compatibility of land use will help the authorities in deciding the final alignment of the rail line.

Ms Chloe Tan, project manager of nature group Love Our MacRitchie Forest, said that

video clips from Mr Chu's exhibit could be shared on social media to help spread awareness. The group conducts outreach activities, such as monthly walks to the reserve, to raise the area's profile.

She added: "It is our hope that the efforts of various individuals and organisations to raise awareness about the issue will urge the Government to reconsider the (proposed) alignment of the MRT line."

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The ADM Show 2015 at the School of Art, Design and Media at NTU ends on Sunday. For more information, visit www.admgradshow.com