ABSTRACT

The older generation of Singaporeans will never forget the atrocities of the Japanese Army during its occupation of Singapore. The sense of disillusionment and uncertainty of the war-torn years can never be experienced in the present day.

Many war museums distil the painful realities of war, so much so that they appear as clean and respectful storage of inherited war exhibits. “The wounds inflicted by and upon the civilian, the whole point of the weapons, are rarely admitted to by museums. A social history approach to war has possibilities, especially pertinent is the depiction of war as personal experience.”¹ It is thus the main intention of this memorial museum to highlight the atrocities and the futility of war. It aims to tug at the heartstrings of Singaporeans who have not personally experienced the Japanese Occupation and, in the process enable them to formulate a moral position on the problems of war.

The memorial museum will include the existing military bunker at Fort Canning Hill as part of its design. Based on the existing bunker as a “referent” to develop a site museum, the programme aims to expose the harsh realities of human destruction and the sufferings of civilians. This site museum will offer the opportunity to communicate to visitors at a place where a historical event actually happened and to present the event from a new perspective.

The insightful philosophical studies of war and pain as revealed by Elaine Scarry in her book, The Body in Pain, forms an important understanding of the structure of war and plays a critical generative role in the shaping of the design.

War has many faces. The whole journey through the memorial museum will provide a revealing and truthful understanding of the structure of war in its totality.