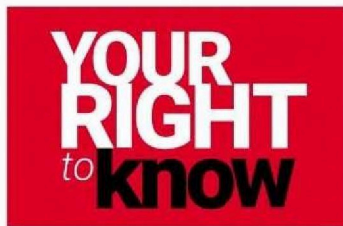


The Torana Gate has been defaced by illegal posters, marring the beauty of this symbolic structure. — Photos: LOW LAY PHON, CHAN TAK KONG and BAVANI M/The Star

A close-up of one of the Little India Dancer sculptures that has a bottle and tissue papers stuffed into it.

# Preserving KL's heritage



## Artists lament general lack of appreciation for commissioned art pieces by authorities

By **BAVANI M**  
bavanim@thestar.com.my

SOME cherished landmarks, commissioned to enhance Kuala Lumpur city's aesthetic charm have been left to decay much to the dismay of artists and the local community.

These include the *Little India Dancers* in Brickfields, designed over 15 years ago by Sculptureatwork for the multi-million ringgit Little India project.

The celebrated sculptures once represented the classical South Indian *bharatanatyam* dance form.

Today, the neglected 4.5m-high steel sculptures are makeshift shelters for vagrants.

Positioned at a prominent junction at Jalan Travers and Jalan Tun Sambanthan, opposite the iconic Elephant Fountain, they have suffered from poor maintenance, raising questions about the city's commitment to preserving its artistic heritage.

Another structure in Little India that is looking shabby and defaced by illegal posters is the Torana Gate.

It was gifted by the Government of India to Malaysia and symbolises the strong historical and cultural ties between the two nations.

This is not the first time Kuala Lumpur has seen the neglect of public artwork.

The demolition of *Puncak Purnama* (Lunar Peaks), once located at Jalan Sultan Sulaiman, remains a vivid example.

Unveiled in 1986 and created by the late National Art Laureate Datuk Syed Ahmad Jamal, the iconic sculpture, with its two triangular structures angled towards the sky, was demolished by DBKL in 2016.

It cited concerns over public



The art piece by Kuen has become a rubbish dumping ground at Lebu Pudu KL.

safety, vandalism and the misuse of the area by vagrants, framing the demolition as part of an effort to rejuvenate a "lifeless" landscape.

The fate of *Puncak Purnama* and the neglect of the *Little India Dancers* raise concerns about how the city treats its cultural assets.

Without proper maintenance and appreciation, these once-cherished landmarks risk fading into obscurity, taking with them important pieces of Kuala Lumpur's artistic legacy.

Similarly, at the historic triangle in Lebu Pudu, where Kuala Lumpur Heritage Trail 3 is located, two steel sculptures depicting red paper cuttings have also suffered from neglect.

The installations show clear signs of wear and seemed not to be maintained.

One was even seen being used as a makeshift hanger for rubbish and clothing, likely belonging to a homeless person.

The artist Stephanie Kuen said she was disappointed.

"When they (DBKL) can water and trim the plants there regularly, why can't they take care of the art pieces.



Kuen is disappointed that DBKL has no appreciation for art works.

"There is no appreciation for artists' work by the authorities. The notice board explaining the piece was removed after it was vandalised, and now it just sits there, with no one knowing anything about it.

"I feel the location of the sculpture is unsuitable," Kuen lamented.

While acknowledging the installations had added charm and character to the area, she said it was pointless if they were not properly maintained.

"There's always a big ceremony to launch these projects, but no continuity. It's such a pity," she said.

Artist Long Thien Shih who happened to be in the area and witnessed the destruction of *Puncak Purnama* nearly eight years ago, expressed his frustration with the lack of appreciation for art by the authorities and politicians.

"When I saw them destroying *Puncak Purnama*, I immediately called the chairman of the National Art Gallery, and he came down to the site.

"We couldn't stop the demolition as it was already in progress but why destroy it? A significant piece of cultural heri-

age was lost for a completely senseless reason.

"No one is standing up for the preservation of cultural art heritage," he lamented.

When contacted about the *Little India Dancers*, a DBKL officer stated they were unsure who was responsible for maintaining the sculptures.

An official from Sculptureatwork, which designed and fabricated the *Little India Dancers*, expressed the company's dismay.

"We were unaware the sculptures had fallen into such a state.

"It was installed over a decade ago and we are currently trying to identify the client who commissioned it.

"If the client decides the sculptures need repair or touch-up work, they can always reach out to us, and we would be more than happy to undertake the restoration.

"However, without their request, we unfortunately have no right to intervene, as the sculptures are their property.

"This appears to be a case of vandalism, and it's the first time we've encountered an issue like this."