Dead wood turned into new creations

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arts reporter

Visual artist Lucy Davis breathes new life into the term “dead wood” with her latest exhibition Together Again (Wood Cut), which is on show at Post-Museum from today to May 26.

In the wee hours of a cool January morning, she went around the streets of Little India to collect discarded wooden objects such as a stool, a washing board and a rolling pin.

She transferred their woodgrain onto rice paper in shades of black ink. She then sliced the paper into thin strips and used them to form collages in the shape of the trees they were made from.

The seven works, some measuring more than 2m by 1.2m large, will be for sale from $4,000 to $5,000 each. The smaller ones cost $1,500 to $2,000 each.

Davis, 30, who is an assistant professor at the Nanyang Technological University’s School of Art, Design and Media, says: “There is intrigue in wood but not much interest in the tree. There seems to be a disconnect between availability for the material but not where it comes from.”

So her exhibition aims to focus attention on the root of the matter.

Half of the proceeds will be donated to the Centre for Orangutan Protection, an Indonesian charity that protects the animals and their habitats in Kalimantan.

She identified the tree species the objects were made from by sending samples to timber-trading company Certisource. “The DNA samples are like our fingerprints,” says Davis, a Singapore permanent resident.

Ecological poeties are apparent in this exhibition, which has large collages of fingerprints, cross-sections of a tree’s stem cell and the recreation of certain tree species such as teak.

Accompanying them are short stories about her experience collecting the objects.

For instance, the stool was given to her by a karang guni man along Rangoon Road, and the washing board was bequeathed to her by a wood collector named “David, with the big eyes” in Rangoon Road.

Davis says she is drawn to the ties that bind politics, poeties, ecology and everyday stories.

She says: “The project merges these interests I have: my love for the mid-20th century Chinese woodcut movement, the ecological situation Singapore is in with regards to raw materials, and the micro-narratives of the city that are carried through the memories of wood.”