GIVING IT A MISS: The "museum mile" of Singapore, which includes the Singapore Art Museum (above) and the National Museum of Singapore, is close to several educational institutions, but students do not seem to be interested in visiting them.

Works of art on our doorstep?
Sorry, not many are keen to view them

BY ALICIA NG

TWO things stand in the way of students populating Singapore’s “museum mile”: They’re not that interested, and they’re too close to it.

Soon, LaSalle College of the Arts and the School of the Arts will join Singapore Management University (SMU), Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (Nafa), the Management Development Institute of Singapore (MDIS) and the BMC Academy in the Waterloo Street arts belt.

But though within sauntering distance of the National Museum of Singapore and the Singapore Art Museum, students are less keen to explore great works of art than you’d expect.

Instead, they are absorbed in internships and grades. When they do “hang out”, they distance themselves from their schools.

Diverse knowledge, historical artefacts and great art works are less tangible, after all, than the deliverables of Facebook.com.

It doesn’t help that the newly revamped National Museum, with all its “Neo-Palladian” architecture, isn’t exactly a welcoming notion for the ripped-jeans and T-shirt-clad college crowd.

Said Miss Mi Truong, 20, a second-year social science undergraduate from SMU: “It looks too European and unlike what Singapore really has to offer.”

Even SMU’s international students steer clear. As 22-year-old Ron John from Indonesia, a third-year SMU business undergraduate, puts it: “It’s not as interesting as the Smithsonian, and there aren’t many advertisements publicising their exhibitions any way.”

The issue is not about cost, but a culture of museum-going – which we do not have.

Not so our foreign counterparts in New York, London or Paris. There, museum tours are common weekend affairs for college types. Even after weekday lectures, they are likely to explore the Louvre or the Metropolitan Museum of Art, sources of inspiration to the artistic and art-illiterate alike.

In Singapore, that pursuit seems lofty, though reality is otherwise. One need only be willing to sample something new.

Tired of studying at Starbucks? Try Dome Café at the Singapore Art Museum. Want to impress on a first date but cannot afford Chitty Chitty Bang Bang tickets? Why not demonstrate your acumen for art interpretation with a visit to December’s Masterpieces From The Louvre at the National Museum – which includes classical Greek pieces. Students pay just $4 each.

Young blood will inject new relevance into museums, where works of giants are crying out for someone to stand on their shoulders.

Being impacted by centuries of creative wonders could be just what we need to break free of society’s mechanical operations.

Who knows, being around a great masterpiece may even lead you to create your own.

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