



# Bewildered, Once More

Toon Hian

Wei-Ling Gallery

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## Raising Koxinga.... Travels through East Asia with Paper, Pen and Ink

Caught between historical fact and mythology, the story of the great Chinese rebel-king, Koxinga is the epic stuff of Asian pride, familial turmoil, identity, place and Nation...

Born in Japan to a Japanese mother, Koxinga grows up to become the protector of the Manchus', bane of the Qing dynasty, who, when he is forsaken by his father proceeds to throw the Dutch out of Taiwan, introduces new agricultural initiatives, puts the Spanish in the Philippines on notice and then – quite unceremoniously - dies of Malaria.

He was 37.

Forever young, Koxinga's contested legacy, like many tellings of histories, especially in Asia where they evolve orally over time, is a delicious blend of probable truths, blatant exaggeration and convenient conjuncture.... the stuff of much dispute till this very day depending on your geographical and political points of persuasion.

In his newest foray, the artist Toon Hian succumbs to the allure of this wonderful and complicated Asian story, weaving contemporary events and actors into the famous legend, after travels through Japan, China, Taiwan, Korea and always - coming home to Malaysia.

Toon Hian, the artist and businessman - as with his hero Koxinga - wrestles with the contradictions of family, place, identity, time and circumstance. Part doyen of a family business dating back to the early mining patriarchs of *olde* Perak; a family business that today, has grown into one of the more prominent real-estate developers in new Ipoh ... and ... part artist of astonishing prowess, it seems appropriate, even obvious, that the intriguing mostly multifarious life of Koxinga would be the central inspiration to Toon Hian's artistic and philosophical explorations in his second solo exhibition, **Bewildered, Once More**.

And the results are quite spectacular.

For Toon Hian is undeniably, the unexpected hero of our local contemporary art scene.

Self-taught, the artist combines his early Western exposure as a student to that system of Literature and Art with his very pronounced Chinese background resulting in the delightful narratives that bring this new body of work to life.

While his first solo exhibition, *Bewildered*, took local audiences by surprise with their lyrical content and beautifully rendered white and grey linear vistas in miniature, this second installment, in spite of such a

short time since the last one, boasts another unexpected leap in the artist's very particular fused modern Chinese brush-painting aesthetic.

**Bewildered, Once More** retains that sense of wonder that made the first showing so special. The works in this show retain the innocence of making – of making, for its own sake – that in the face of the artist's enviable craft lends to the work a richness of aesthetics and meanings that – honestly – is difficult to surpass.

The first difference is that these works are much more sophisticated in the way they are much more designed. Yet they escape being too considered, retaining the spontaneity that gave the earlier series of much of their flamboyance. In fact with these works their sense of design only add to their levels of enjoyment.

And their sizes and formats vary to accommodate each narrative. According to the stage dictated by their story and players, the artist has begun to explore narrow horizontals in works such as *Early Morning Tai Chee* or long verticals in the scrolls that map out the 4 seasons of the great Taiwanese hero's life, which are also the title pieces of this current exhibition. While these works are awash with varying intensities of Blue, with other works like *Papan New Village View from Pusing*, their squat rectangles are suddenly interrupted by the special guest appearance of Red Aside from the occasional dramatic brushes with these spot-colors, the current work boasts a new treatment in how the picture-planes themselves are presented to the viewer.

Ranging from jam-packed surfaces in works like *Chasing out the Dutch* where fore-mid and back-grounds merge in the most extravagant play of line and black hues to the almost cartoonish *Tribute to Hermes* or the spartan, abstracted dots of the stars in *Koxinga – In the Taiwan Sky* and its partner *Captivated by the Aura*, Toon Hian, with a natural flair, captures the in and out movement in an expert play of space that is more enjoyable than other artists of more renown would care to actually admit.

And then there is the now-delicate, then-brusque linear quality of all these works that, when combined with the dynamic play of its ink and wash heighten their visual excitement that completely contradict their relatively modest scale. Wet fine washes, thin lines, fat lines; washes in grey, dark grey, darker grey, dark dark black: thick dry brush all this variety presented in the kind of unity that are completely at odds with how tiny his depictions can be.

The fact that their subject matter remains defined in spite of their tini-ness is another strength of Toon Hian's



Pangkor - 'The Last Fishing Village  
Giving Way To Condo City'  
Ink on Paper . 38cm x 27.7cm . 2013



drawings. In an art world where gargantuan scale is paramount, these new works – admittedly bigger than the entries in his last shows – continue to thrive on their intimate scale. They are often even defined by how tiny they are .... In a delightful work like *Melaka Port, Parameswara Period*, the vendors are contained in the tightly packed gait of an `S' separated by slim white space, each actor with his own distinct story and paraphernalia – beautifully distinct.

Thematically these works are a celebration of history, an exploration of human nature and always the autobiographical. The intricate weave of Toon Hian's lines and washes seem to convey – symbolically - *through their weaving*, the ways that we come together and interact as human beings. After all, human interaction visually is obviously at the heart of his compositions and their players.

Whether the stories reside in the 1600s reign of Koxinga or whether it is rooted in the commonplace complexities of living in the multicultural and multireligious Malaysia of the here and now brought to life in a sentimental work like *Perak – Democracy and Disagreement .... And my Heavy Heart* (in response to our recent GE13) the artist successfully bares his fundamental versions of various truths to the viewer.

It seems to be this sincerity of spirit and a sensitive reading of the world around him – expressed in line and grey and poetic sentiment that merges in his work, giving it a completeness, a coming together of the aesthetic and the emotional with loving labor that completes his work so beautifully.

**Bewildered, Once More** is a wonderful addition to **Bewildered** .... different but the same.

This is why, when Toon Hian asked me to write this essay I was hesitant. Its been less than two years since I wrote the essay for the earlier show – what new things would I be able to convey or add to the discussion of his work? But having sat with Toon Hian amidst this new body of work (he had lost his voice, so we literally just sat with the work around us and took it all in). After that I knew I wanted to write this installment.

While these new works may come from a similar – albeit much more developed aesthetic – their treatment of mark and line, of story and design, of composition and narrative, of symbol and meaning continue in the same direction and yet, deviate completely from his older work. Same but different.....

And with such grace and style.



**Koxinga - Off the Coast of Tainan, Formosa** . Ink on Paper . 28 cm x 109 cm . 2012

**Koxinga - Victorious Parade In Formosa** . Ink on Paper . 38.5 cm x 111.8 cm . 2012

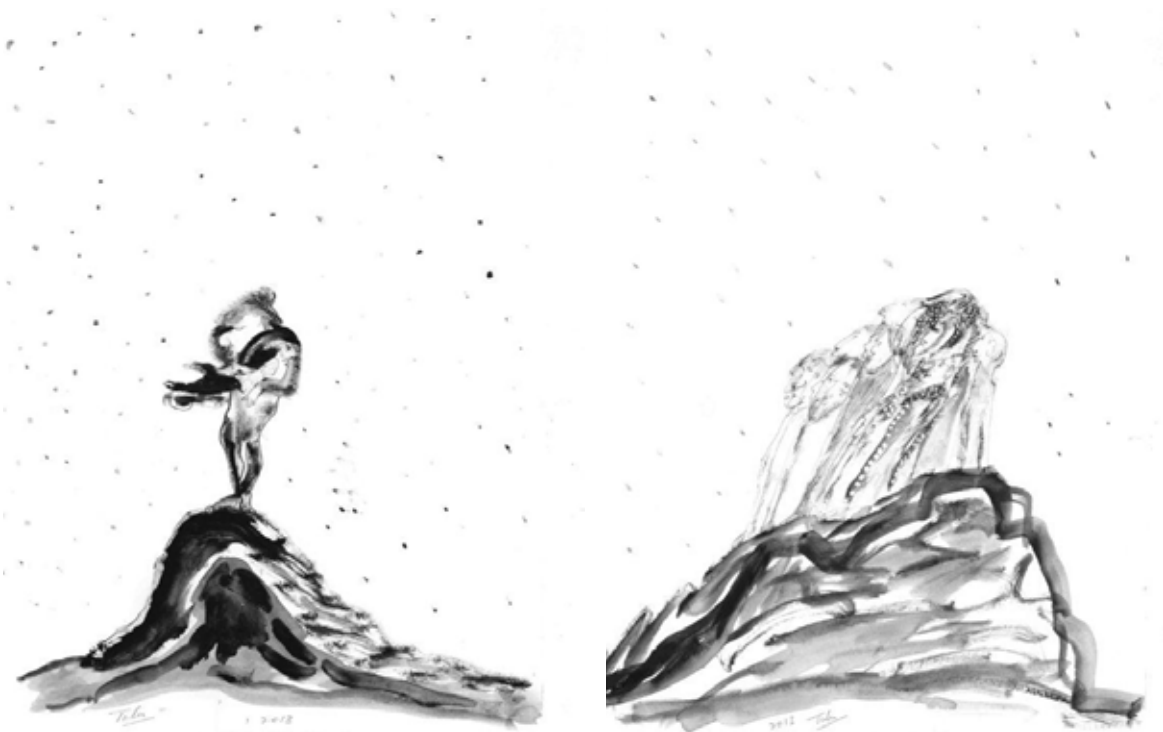
**Koxinga - Pirate King In Combat** . Ink on Paper . 38.5 cm x 116.8 cm . 2012

**Koxinga - Plot To Capture Fort Zeelandia** . Ink on Paper . 38.5 cm x 121.2 cm . 2012

Anurendra Jegadeva

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Koxinga - In the Taiwan sky . Ink on Paper . 38cm x 27.7cm . 2013

Koxinga - Captivated By The Aura . Ink on Paper . 38cm x 27.7cm . 2013

Opposite page : Koxinga- Chasing Out The Dutch . Ink on Paper . 38cm x 27.7cm . 2012





During Typhoon Season . Ink on Paper . 38cm x 27.7cm . 2011

Opposite page : Papan New Village View From Posing - Red Hills . Ink on Paper . 38cm x 27.7cm . 2013





'Windy Day And Couples' . Ink on Paper . 38cm x 27.7cm . 2012

Coming And Going . Ink on Paper . 38cm x 27.7cm . 2012

Lantern Festival – Long Time Ago Menglembu . Ink on Paper . 38cm x 27.7cm . 2012

Genghis Khan And The First Polo Known . Ink on Paper . 38cm x 27.7cm . 2011



Coronation Of Napoleon Bonaparte . Ink on Paper . 38cm x 27.7cm . 2012

Soul-Searching . Ink on Paper . 38cm x 27.7cm . 2013

Opposite page : Shakyamuni Buddha's Birthday . Ink on Paper . 38cm x 27.7cm . 2012





Untitled I . Ink on paper . 65.5cm x 138cm . 2011

Opposite page : Sichuan China . Ink on Paper . 38cm x 27.7cm . 2011





Teh 2011  
Training - Beijing opera  
among neighbours



Perak - Democracy  
and  
Disagreement  
and my heavy heart

Teh  
April 2011

Training – Beijing opera among neighbours . Ink on Paper . 38cm x 27.7cm . 2011

Perak – Democracy And Disagreement...And My Heavy Heart . Ink on Paper . 38cm x 27.7cm . 2011



Cavalry And The Lost Armada . Ink on Paper . 38cm x 27.7cm . 2011





Eight Immortals . Ink on Paper . 38cm x 27.7cm . 2011

Pretty Before . Ink on Paper . 38cm x 27.7cm . 2011



Visiting The Pious . Ink on Paper . 27.7cm x 38cm . 2011

Party By The Fountain, Ipoh . Ink on Paper . 38cm x 27.7cm . 2010





*Teh 2010*  
*Blocked head  
and  
muddled  
mind  
and awful  
Dragon temple.*

**Blocked head and muddled mind and awful dragon temple . Ink on Paper . 27.7cm x 38cm**

**Riding along . Ink on Paper . 27.7cm x 38cm**



**Two Temples In Tanjong Rambutan . Ink on Paper . 38cm x 27.7cm . 2012**





A Tribute To Hermes . Ink on Paper . 38cm x 27.7cm . 2012



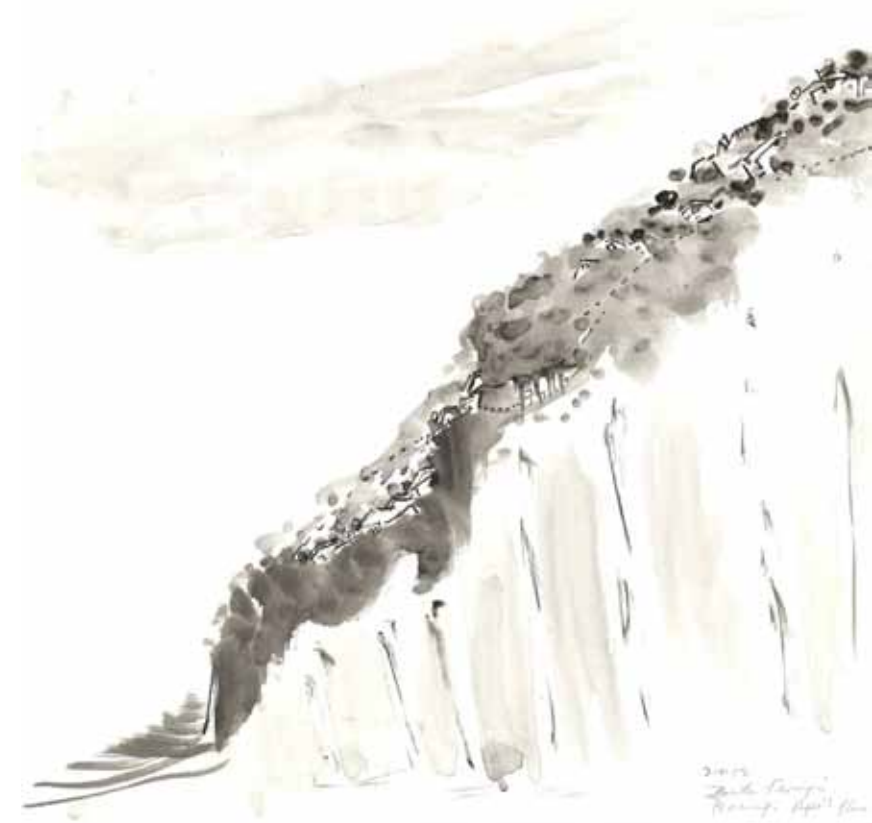
Morning After The Races . Ink on Paper . 38cm x 27.7cm . 2012



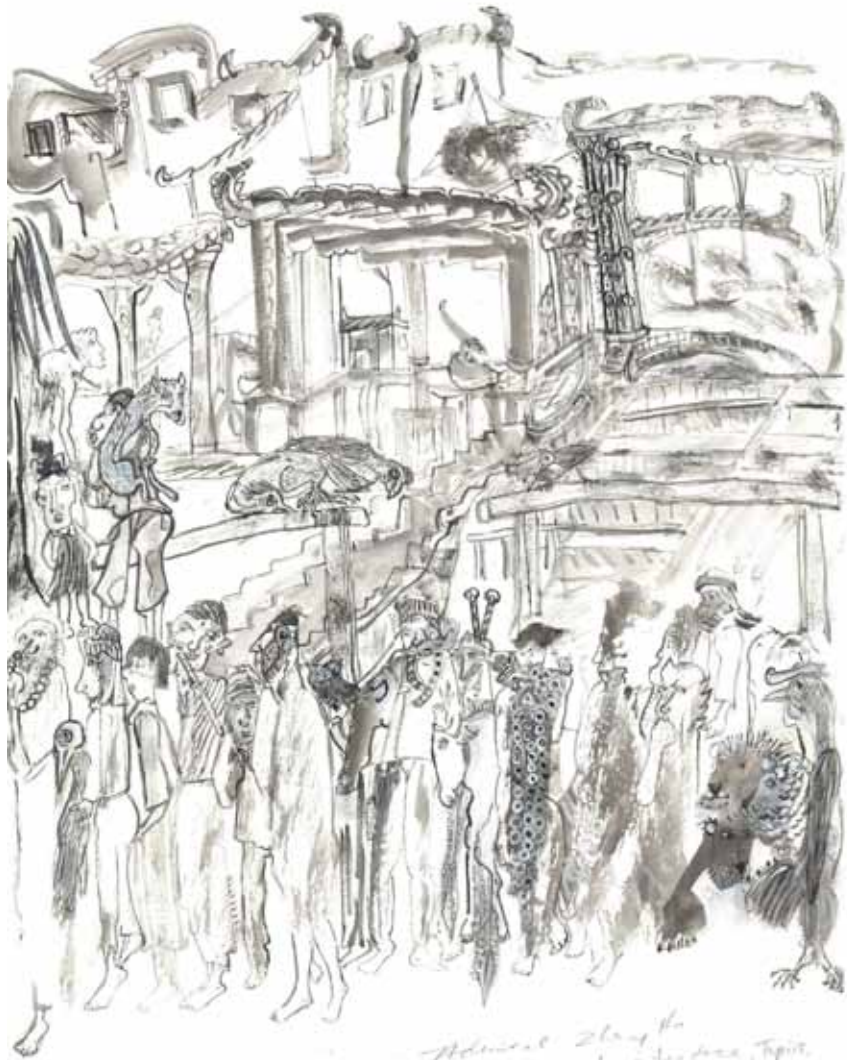
**Mongol Competition** . Ink on Paper . 38cm x 27.7cm . 2012

**Batu Ferringhi, Penang** . Ink on Paper . 38cm x 27.7cm . 2012

Opposite Page : **Mirage Parade** . Ink on Paper . 38cm x 27.7cm . 2011







Admiral Zheng Ho  
 was first to introduce Tapir,  
 Turkey and South East  
 Asia Other Animals To China

Admiral Zheng Ho Was First To Introduce, Tapirs, Turkey And South East Asia Other Animals To China . Ink on Paper . 38cm x 27.7cm . 2012



Meru  
 Tasek  
 From The Plane

Meru And Tasek From The Plane . Ink on Paper . 38cm x 27.7cm . 2012





A Tribute To Salvador Dali – Monsters And Demi Gods . Ink on Paper . 38cm x 27.7cm . 2011

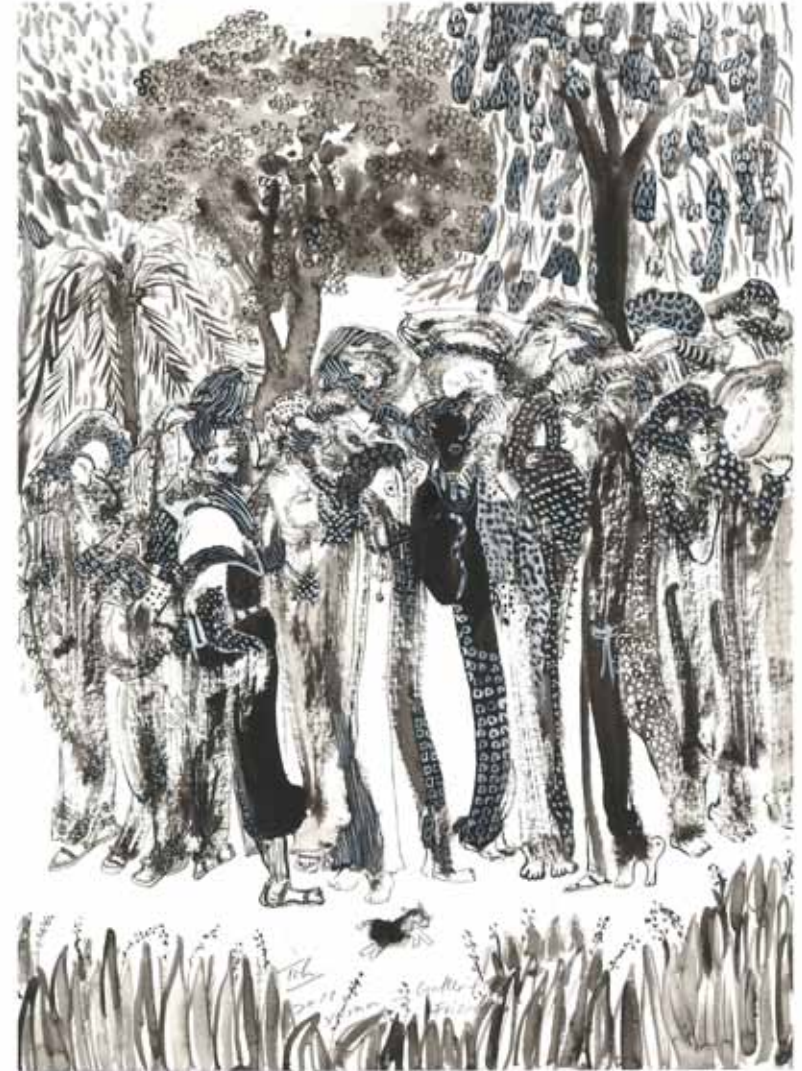


Brewster Road Between 'Old Radio And General' Shop And Hollywood Barber Shop . . Ink on Paper . 38cm x 27.7cm . 2011





Koxinga Victory With Mother . Ink on Paper . 38cm x 27.7cm . 2012



Gathering Friends . Ink on Paper . 38cm x 27.7cm . 2011



Melaka Port, Parameswara Period . Ink on Paper . 38cm x 27.7cm . 2011

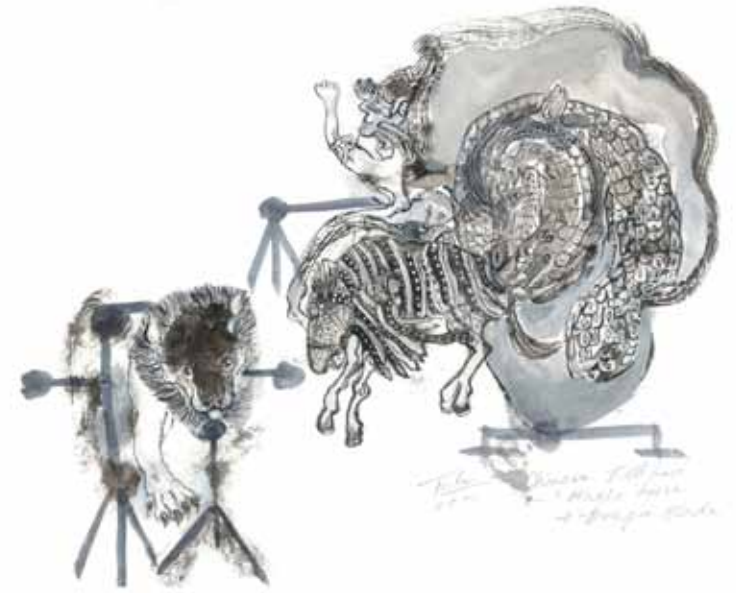


Inspired By Louis Cha Of Hong Kong . Ink on Paper . 38cm x 27.7cm . 2012





Untitled II . Ink on paper . 71cm x 93.5cm . 2011



Chinese Folklore - 'Magic Horse And Dragon Blade' . Ink on Paper . 38cm x 27.7cm . 2012

Inspired After A Visit Of The Taipei Museum . Ink on Paper . 38cm x 27.7cm . 2012





*The minimalist in Taipei  
- Jangsiingshan above the  
Peitou hot Springs  
Taku*

The minimalist in Taipei- Yongmingshan above the Peitou hot springs  
Ink on Paper . 38 cm x 28 cm



*17 MAY 2012  
The Road to  
Yong Ming Shan  
Taipei. Taku*

The Road To Yong Ming Shan . Ink on Paper . 38 cm x 28 cm . 2013





**Along The Way** . Ink on Paper . 19cm x 180 cm . 2013  
**Pilgrim To The West** . Ink on paper . 19cm x 180cm . 2013



'Starting Lion Dance'  
Tulu 2012

Starting Lion Dance . Ink on Paper . 38cm x 27.7cm . 2012

Favourite Pets . Ink on Paper . 38cm x 27.7cm . 2012



'Favourite Pets'  
Tulu 2012



Tulu 2012  
'In Deference to  
the Dalai Lama'  
- All is Not Lost

'In Deference To Dalai Lama' - All Is Not Lost . Ink on Paper . 21cm x 29.8cm . 2012



I wish to acknowledge the help and assistance from

Mr. Teh Siew Joo  
Mr. Philip Koh Tong Ngee  
Mr. Chan Kok Keong  
Mr. Eric Lee Kok Yeu  
Ms. Lim Wei-Ling  
Mr. Lim Cho Wei  
Mr. Chung Hoi Tong  
Mr. Shin Chee Fong  
Mr. Nickson Lee Fong Kin  
Ms. Celene Cheah Lai Yee  
Ms. Crystal Ng Mun Caeng  
Ms. Vivien Foo Siew Peng



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## BEWILDERED, ONCE MORE

### Produced & Published by

Wei-Ling Gallery  
8 Jalan Scott, Brickfields  
50470 Kuala Lumpur  
Malaysia

To accompany the exhibition entitled 'BEWILDERED, ONCE MORE' at  
Wei-Ling Contemporary  
G212 Ground Floor, The Gardens Mall  
59200, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia  
from 21st June 2013 - 30th July 2013

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cover image : **Arm And Horses** . Ink on Paper . 38cm x 27.7cm . 2012

above image : **Tartan Girl** . Ink on Paper . 38cm x 27.7cm . 2013

