

THE BANALISATION OF PERCEPTION

What? PORTRAITURE???

Heads Up! is an unpretentious exploration of contemporary portraits by Malaysian artists featuring works by Chong Choon Woon, Ng Bee, Kim Ng, Marvin Chan, Mohd Al-Khuzairie Ali and Chee Eng Hong.

As contemporary practitioners who draw from different disciplines - painters, printmakers and sculptors - it is extremely interesting to see these varied approaches applied to portraiture today.

Even more intriguing is the fascination that these contemporary artists have with the portrait in spite of its stigma of classicism and the argument that with portraiture, the search for 'a likeness' provides for nothing beyond the most banal of perception at the very best, it is servant to Kings and politicians, the stuff of fat men and ugly women.

And yet the portrait has a rich and long history - arguably at the very heart of the earliest beginnings of artistic practice and history. From the moment the hand-print adorned the cave-walls of primitive man, the reason for portraiture, the assertion that 'this is me' and 'that is you' was born.

And of course, this assertion of identity preoccupies us every single day from the music we listen to, the food we eat and how we vote but it seems we still don't know who we are - or how we fit.

In the case of our local art scene, no credible account of the origins of a modern Malaysian art can be discussed without taking into account the primacy of the portrait.

From the earliest recorded paintings by Malaysian artists, portraiture or rather, the figurative within larger narratives has largely dominated the picture planes of a Modern Art movement in Malaysia.

Its beginnings can be seen in 1963. Fresh from the euphoria of Merdeka! and in conjunction with the birth of a one Malaysia that embraced Sabah, Sarawak and Singapore, the Shell Petroleum Company commissioned the first ever Malaysian art 'coffee-table book' which showcased an inclusive series of over 70 portraits of Malaysians by Datur Hoesein Enas.

These luscious and beautifully romantic portraits fronted actors within the contexts of their everyday Malaysian lives depicted at work and in recreation, from worship to tradition - a progressive, capable and confident people with tremendous hopes for the future.

The line-up of portraits captures the diversity of a Malaysian people from the Nobat musicians and tribal elders to silat players; from the Malay youth from Kedah to the Indian rubber tapper and the speaker of the house of representatives.

The book defines who we are as a community and as a nation it spells out the values that are important to us, our aspirations for prosperity and enlightenment. It also implies an underlying concern for how all this wonderful diversity and exciting difference comes together in a real, meaningful and enduring way.

It tells the world who we are, where we live and how we live together.

Nearly half a century later, in the realms of One-Malaysia, within a world so complex and fractured philosophically, economically and socially the issue of identity, national, racial, occupational, spiritual, global, continues to dominate our collective consciousness.

Artists have been preoccupied with these issues for the longest time.

In Malaysia, even at the heights of the abstraction of the 60s and the consequent conceptual flirtations of the 70s, the portrait has always played a poignant part in the thinking and development of a contemporary Malaysian art movement.

It's iconic My Father and the Astronaut the portrait of his father alongside the American astronaut asks questions about how we fit into this brave/complex new world.

Amron's silat players of the 70s, with ethereal tenderness ponder the place of tradition and culture within modern living.

Since the 1990s, Portraiture has come to be an integral part of the social narratives that dominate contemporary art in Malaysia. Within its contemporary context, none of it intends to be direct portraiture straight-up formal or stylistic renditions of the sitter.

Wong Hoy Cheong's stylized Migrant heads, the massive self-portraits which have consumed the Matahatis'; Ahmad Zakii Anwar and Jailani Abu Hassan's cool jazzy juxtapositions of object and likeness all rely heavily on portraiture for their intensity, poignancy and connections with the viewer.

Ivan Lam's experiments with portraits of everyday people in ridiculous scale or Yau Bee Ling's modernist approach to reducing likeness to a weave of mark and primary color - all rely on the portrait for the resonance within their works. Meanwhile artists like Yee I-Lann and Nadiah Bhamadaj, explore the portrait in the allegorical and autobiographical all seeking to find their place within their worlds.

This grouping of artists showcased in the exhibition **Heads Up!** provides the starting point for a dialogue about the dynamism of a new figurism in contemporary art and the new relevance portraiture plays within that context.

In thinking about this exhibition and the relevance of portraiture in contemporary art we are faced with two recurrent questions. One is the anthropological, one with regard to identity, who are we, why are we here, blah, blah, blah.

More salient, if portraiture and more specifically figuration are seen as merely the most banal means of artistic perception IN SPITE of its ability to convey and connect with the viewer at large then this dialogue surrounding the relevance of the contemporary portrait begs THAT larger question what is art for?

ANURENDRA JEGADEVA

CHEE ENG HONG b. 1963



Stepson - Mixed Media on Canvas - 186cm x 134 cm - 2009



Gian - Mixed Media on Canvas - 186cm x 134 cm - 2009

EDUCATION

2000 Fine Art in MSC International College
1999 Drawing Workshop - National Art Gallery
1982 Malaysia Institute of Art

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2009 E.H.Chee: Works, The Balai Berita, New Straits Times, KL, Malaysia
2008 E.H.Chee: Works, Alpha Utara Gallery, Penang, Malaysia
2007 E.H.Chee Paintings & Drawings, The Art Commune @ Suria Stonor, KL, Malaysia
2006 E.H.Chee Paintings & Drawings, Alpha Utara Gallery, Penang, Malaysia
2004 Birth of Flow, Artspace Gallery, KL, Malaysia

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2009 Istandar Malaysia Contemporary Art show (IMCAS 2009)
2007 Tantalus, The Lookis Gallery, KL, Malaysia
Art without Frontiers, Asian Fine Arts, Bangkok
Deciphering the Body, A2 Gallery, Penang, Malaysia
2005 Open Show, National Art Gallery, KL, Malaysia
2003 10th. Organization of Islamic Conference Summit, Putrajaya, Malaysia
2002 The Teaching of Drawing by Dr.Jolly Koh, National Art Gallery, KL, Malaysia
2001 Open Show, National Art Gallery, KL, Malaysia

COLLECTIONS

Galeri Petronas, Malaysia
New Straights Times, Malaysia

MARVIN CHAN b. 1975

Each day there are people who do ordinary things in the most extraordinary way, in a seemingly devout manner.

They are a mother, father, son, daughter, brother, sister or friend.

Every person harboring their own special reason, a unique life experience that encapsulates a story that is summarized on their face.

These are paintings of ordinary people who are beautiful, not for what they are able to achieve, but for who they are for those whom they care for.

A hero.

Which makes them far from being ordinary, under that ordinary facade, away from the social barometer of success and achievement, beauty resides.

Marvin Chan



L-R : Beauty in the ordinary III, IX & X - Oil on Canvas - 49cm x 49 cm - 2010

EDUCATION

1991 Sunway College- A levels
1986 St. John's Institution Kuala Lumpur
1980 St. John's Primary Kuala Lumpur

SOLO EXHIBITION

2007 First Harvest @ a2artgallery, Penang

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2010 Heads Up!, Wei-Ling Gallery, KL, Malaysia
Tiger Show, Wei-Ling Gallery, KL, Malaysia
2009 Live draw, @ Sutra, KL, Malaysia
Locals only, @ Tahsu, KL, Malaysia
2008 The year that was, @ Weiling-gallery, KL, Malaysia
Susurmasa/Time lines, 50 years of Malaysian art @ The National Art Gallery, KL, Malaysia
Mind Body and soul 3 @ Weiling-gallery, KL, Malaysia
Three new voices @ Weiling-gallery, KL, Malaysia
2007 Deciphering the body @ a2artgallery, Penang, Malaysia
Black and white show @ a2artgallery, Penang, Malaysia
Filtered @ Weiling-gallery, KL, Malaysia
Nasi Campur @ Tahsu, Langkawi, Malaysia
2006 LiLy Oncology @ Royal College of Art, London, UK
Landshap Malaysia @ the National Art Gallery, KL, Malaysia
2005 Seoul International Art Exhibition 2005 @South Korea
Scripted Bodies @ Reha Art Space, Selangor, Malaysia
The Malaysian Open Show @ the National Art Gallery, KL, Malaysia
Group exhibition @ The Arts and Craft Guild of Selangor and KL, Malaysia

AWARDS

2010 Alternate grant for the Freeman Fellowship, USA
2009 Alternate Artist, VSC Freeman Fellowship, USA
2008 Alternate Artist, VSC Freeman Fellowship, USA
2007 Freeman fellowship, Vermont(Partial Grant)

COLLECTIONS

National Art Gallery, Malaysia

KIM NG b. 1965



The Portrait of Jia
Water-based Paint, Acrylic, Pencil, Coloured Thread, Varnish with Graphite Powder.
92 cm x 73 cm
2010

EDUCATION

2000 MA by Project, London Metropolitan University, London, UK
Teacher Training, Kensington & Chelsea College, London, UK
1997 MA Design & Media Art, University of Westminster, London, UK
Student/Teacher at University of Westminster, Ceramics Department
1996 BA (1st Hons), Fine Art, London Guild-Hall University, London, UK
1989 Diploma in Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur College of Art, KL, Malaysia

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2009 An Idyllic Space, Wei-Ling Gallery, KL, Malaysia
2006 Fact or Fiction, Wei-Ling Gallery, KL, Malaysia
2004 Ill, Townhouse Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
2002 Thought - A Process of Thinking, The Clay House, Malaysia
2001 Printing with Fire - Prints on Ceramic, Glass & Paper, The Integrated Resource Center, London Guildhall University, London, UK

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2010 Heads Up!, Wei-Ling Gallery, KL, Malaysia
2009 I8@8 - I Malaysia : Beyond The Canvas, Wei-Ling Gallery, KL, Malaysia
Man & God Beijing - 8th International Visual Feast, Beijing, China
2008 Sama-Sama, Lost Generation Space, KL, Malaysia
2007 Print, National Art Gallery, KL, Malaysia
2006 Rooster Mania, Townhouse Gallery, KL, Malaysia
2005 Art for Aids, National Art Gallery, KL, Malaysia
I Think I Sketch, Elle Six Art Gallery, Malaysia
High Voltage, Lost Generation Space, KL, Malaysia
2004 I8@8, Wei-Ling Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
2003 NothatBalai, Lost Generation Space, KL, Malaysia
4 Prints Art Exhibition, Elle Six Art Gallery, Malaysia
Phillip Morris Art Award Exhibition, National Art Gallery, KL, Malaysia
2002 Print Works, London Guildhall University, London, UK
LIFE/size, PM Gallery & House, London, UK
Small Scale Works, Buckingham Gallery, Suffolk, UK
Surface Tourist, Art House, London, UK
Mini Print Exhibition, Art Link Exchange, UK
2001 Haringway Seventh Open Exhibition, Haringway, London, UK
Printmakers Council Exhibition, The Royal National Theatre, UK
2000 National Print Exhibition, The Mall Gallery, London, UK
Chichester Open Art Exhibition, The Mall Gallery, London, UK
Chongqing Print Festival, Chongqing Municipal Museum & Touring Exhibition, China
Fresh Art, Business Design Center, London, UK
Philip Morris Malaysia Art Award Exhibition, National Art Gallery, KL, Malaysia
1998 National Print Exhibition, The Mall Gallery, London, UK
1997 National Print Exhibition, The Mall Gallery, London, UK
Sight Unseen- A Four Day Event, The Tannery, London, UK
4th Open Exhibition, Haringway, London, UK
1996 Open to Print 4, Reg Vardy Gallery, Sutherland, UK
Art Aid Exhibition in Association with Marie Curie, London, UK
Print Works 1996, Sir John Cass Faculty of Art, London, UK
1995 Print Exhibition, The Gallery, Cornwall, UK
National Open Print Exhibition, Sunderland, London, UK
1994 Print Touring Exhibition, Sunderland, UK

AWARDS

1997 John Purcell Paper Award, London, UK
Galleries Magazine Award Highly Commended, London, UK
1996 Owen Rowley Prize, 1st Prize, London, UK

COLLECTIONS

Chongqing Municipal Museum, China
Bank Negara, Malaysia
The Aliya and Farouk Khan Collection, Malaysia
Park Royal Hotel, Malaysia
Providore, Malaysia
Galeri Petronas, Malaysia

CHONG CHOON WOON b. 1972



Face I. 124 cm x 120 cm. Oil on Canvas - 2010

EDUCATION

2003 - 2006 Nanjing Forestry University College of Arts China (M.A)
1996 Nanjing Normal University College of Arts China (B.A)
1993 - 1995 China National academy of Fine Arts, China

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2009 Circumstances, TA HWA Institute of Technology, Taiwan
Circumstances Taipei Cultural Centre, Taiwan
2006 Views of Nanjing, Wei-Ling Gallery, KL, Malaysia
2004 Urban Perceptions, Wei-Ling Gallery, KL, Malaysia
2003 Look & You Will See, Wei-Ling Gallery, KL, Malaysia

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2008 The 5th China International Gallery Exposition (CIGE 2008) China World Trade Centre Exhibition Hall, Beijing, China
2003 Bare, Townhouse Gallery, KL, Malaysia
2001 Civilization Dialogue, international Art Exhibition, Metro Fine Art Gallery, KL, Malaysia
2000 Painting Shadows, two man show, Valentine Willie Fine Art, KL, Malaysia
1999 Aru Potre dari 99, Petronas Gallery, KL, Malaysia
1998 Tolong, Charity Art Sale Exhibition, Valentine Willie Art Gallery, KL, Malaysia
1997 Starting, a Painting Exhibition of Young Artists from four countries across two Continents, Petronas Gallery, KL, Malaysia
1996 Starting, a Painting Exhibition of Young Artists from four countries across two Continents, Shanghai Art Museum, P.R.China
1995 Figurative Expression, three man show, P.R.China

COLLECTIONS

Shanghai Art Museum, China
Siemens, Malaysia