

## Have You Ever

Social progress is the idea that societies can or do improve in terms of their social, political, and economic structures. From a logical standpoint, this of course seems to be something positive in nature. However, in this current day and age, we are boxed in with repetitive routines based on beliefs that society has set as the norm. This in turn, causes some to be completely overwhelmed and fall into a state of mire. Through this body of work, Wong Chee Meng seeks to share his self-revelation and positive view on life (after a particularly unsettling period in his own journey) in the hope that it might provide comfort or guidance to those in need.

*'Have You Ever'* features seven paintings, each depicting a familiar scene from everyday life yet fraught with deep underlying symbolism and meaning. The colour blue is dominant in the artworks, but a beach ball is incorporated into each piece. As Wong was travelling, groups of children playing with beach balls caught his attention. He noticed its familiarity among people, which then led to the decision of incorporating it into his paintings. To Wong, the beach ball is the perfect physical representation of Bruce Lee's quote "be water, my friend"; flexible in shape and colours. The balls are all caught in mid-air or placed on higher planes, as they are tossed up and juggled or tempting someone to pick them up and act as metaphors for new perceptions, action, willingness, optimism and the opportunities in life.

*'Who To Trust When Everyone's Out For Themselves'*. A common phrase, often said when facing hardship. The in and out motion of a chair sliding under the table is equated to the coming and going of people in our lives. But the beach ball, placed on the table signifies that someone will always be there for us. Though sometimes, when that certain someone does not show up, it is important that we have faith, stay strong and believe that another someone will come along.

The ability to stay strong is perhaps most prominent in a juggler, specifically, a juggler of life. Wong believes that, in life, everyone is a juggler. The visuals of *"The Juggler"* are self-explanatory and refers to the multi-tasking capabilities of humans. Every day, we juggle between our jobs, families and friends. Much the same as how a juggler juggles up to nine balls at once. Wong expresses how he truly respects the capabilities of a juggler of life.

Juggling life can be tricky as we are constantly making active choices between this and that. In *"Aim For The Best"*, a monkey is seen climbing a coconut tree, its job is to pick the best coconut from the tree. This may seem like a metaphor for passing the decision on to someone else, but at the end of the day, the choice of which is the "best coconut" has to lie with us.

We have a choice in life, to just give up when faced with the seemingly impossible, or to pick ourselves up and turn the impossible into the possible. *"The Moon and The Star For You"* is the artist's depiction of optimism. The visuals of this piece were inspired by William Blake's "I want, I want" (1793) and Georgia O'Keeffe's "Ladder To The Moon" (1958). Both of which depicted ladders leading up to the moon. Wong advises us to just "believe that anything is possible if we set our minds to it".

To set our minds is to focus. This is crucial as we have heard many times that *"Every Second Counts"*. Wong Chee Meng explains that the "golden opportunity" is forever present and that we only need to recognise what is in front of us. The painting likens this situation to a

shooting gallery at a funfair. Targets (opportunities) are constantly appearing one after another, and the person has to be forever ready to shoot (grab) it before it's gone.

Be that as it may, other times it is best for us to "*Watch In Silence For The Changes*". A swimming pool crowded with people is the scene depicted here; to the artist, a swimming pool is the most chaotic place that one can be in. We tend to respond to chaotic situations in a state of panic. But if we just take step back and slow down, it will allow us to properly analyse the situation we are in, and figure out the best response; or as the old saying goes "Slow and steady wins the race!"

Staying calm brings us many advantages; we will know when and where to set our goals. "*Run, Baby, Run!*" shows a gym with various objects dangling in front of the equipment. Wong takes inspiration from the idiom "carrot and a stick". It is named in reference to a cart driver dangling a carrot in front of a mule and holding a stick behind it. The title is a sort of tongue-in-cheek reference to the mule running away from the stick to avoid punishment. In this case, we are the "mule" and the objects are our "carrots". Realising that the stick is right behind us, we will then push ourselves to keep moving, to work harder knowing that our goal is just in arm's length.

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