

Heartland – Chen Wei Meng & Wong Perng Fey

“Each painting is a journey. It speaks about the artist’s attitude towards life, and about his experiences living his life. Each painting is a piece of the brick wall, of the jigsaw puzzle, that makes the complete picture. Like defining moments in life, each painting is an episode of the total sum of a person” - Chen Wei Meng

“A painting is an accumulation of experiences projected onto canvas. It is a composite of events, memories, experiences, and impressions. A painting is therefore a result of a quest for the meaning of life.” - Wong Perng Fey

These beliefs resulted in a body of work that is the sum of the artists’ lives to-date.

Chen Wei Meng has been dabbling in one form of creative expression or another almost all his life. He studied interior design but tried out several different vocations before settling down to work on canvas. In the early years he worked on forms and portraiture but felt that he needed to focus his energy on something that he could excel in and be passionate about.

He experimented with abstract art, but after some time felt that there was still a vacuum in his life. He then realised that he needed to express his thoughts and feelings in a simpler way using things or images familiar to him. To Chen Wei Meng, one needs to stand still before making decisions in order to get the panoramic perspective of life.

While he was living in Terengganu, his panoramic perspective resulted in an exhibition of landscapes but the exhibition was really for Chen Wei Meng a record of that time in his life. In this collection of paintings for ‘Heartland,’ it is about another journey, a different journey, building on his past journeys elsewhere, but focusing on his experiences and reflections in his

new home state of Selangor. Hence the collection of landscapes; the result of forays to the hinterland and the 'growth' land of the state. He observed; he recorded; and he painted his individual reflections to tempt the viewers to 'read' and to reflect too.

For Chen Wei Meng, 'Heartland' is a very solid documentation of the impact of his many journeys to-date. To him, it is about life; one can plan but one will never know exactly what would eventuate.

Hence, the restless artist in him is happy to let things happen; to see and observe everything around him and later to express visually his interpretation of what he feels and observes and his responses to the experiences.

The idealistic person in him worries that there is so much to do and to record before things or places change and not enough time to do everything. To the extent that Chen Wei Meng does not know where or what he will focus on next in his art making.

When Chen Wei Meng and Wong Perng Fey met a few years ago, they realized that they shared a mutual understanding of and beliefs about the artistic process. They discovered similarities in their perspectives and their views about life in addition to the shared position that art making is a very individual process; and that pace and time are concepts very individual to the artist.

There is 'chemistry' between the two artists. 'Indefinable chemistry', according to Wong Perng Fey when describing his connection to Chen Wei Meng.

Like Chen Wei Meng, Perng Fey speaks of his paintings as portraying his accumulated personal experiences. He is unable to paint about things of which he has no direct experiences. For

him, making art is about finding the right direction, going the right way and getting to the right place. Otherwise, the result will be 'null and void'; the painting will feel empty to him and will not work.

To Wong Perng Fey, his paintings must 'speak' to him. The 'conversations' between him and his paintings are effortless and smooth when the subject matter is something to which he as the artist, truly belongs. In other words, the subject matter is authentic to him; every stroke in his painting represents a part of his life, an experience he has personally lived.

It explains why he constantly adds and deletes from his painting-in-progress. The on-going 'conversations' with the painting triggering fresh recollections or different understandings of the lessons of life.

Wong Perng Fey shares the same concerns with Chen Wei Meng that many people forget about the need to understand the lessons of life. As an artist, he feels it is vitally important that there is space to think and to inspire himself before he can inspire others.

'Heartland' for Wong Perng Fey is a creative milestone. He has reached a stage in his artistic life where he has learnt to be more disciplined and controlled in making his art. His earlier works contained a lot of aggression, at times leaving him totally exhausted after completing them.

The paintings in 'Heartland' come from a more disciplined stage of his life. The simple lessons of his life have taken Wong Perng Fey through a 'sift and reflect' process. He believes he now has the patience to be calm and structured; to wait patiently for the paint to settle down and to use that time to reflect.

For Wong Perng Fey, his art making process has changed. Like Chen Wei Meng, he does not know what the future will be, but he has learnt to be patience and calmly waits.

'Heartland' the exhibition is about places and the experiences that each of the two artists with those places. 'Heartland' is about their connections to the land, and in the case of Perng Fey, particularly about authentic connection to the land and his place in it.

'Heartland' is also about the art-making process. It charts the journeys of two artists finding common beliefs in the art-making process; independently concluding some very fundamental philosophies: the need to focus on form or subject matter that inspires passion; the need to appreciate individual concepts of pace and time; the need to be patient, calm and sincere in the presentation of their experiences through their art.

'Heartland' is about two artists who believe that their paintings contain the DNA to their lives.

Mas Zetti Atan, 2010