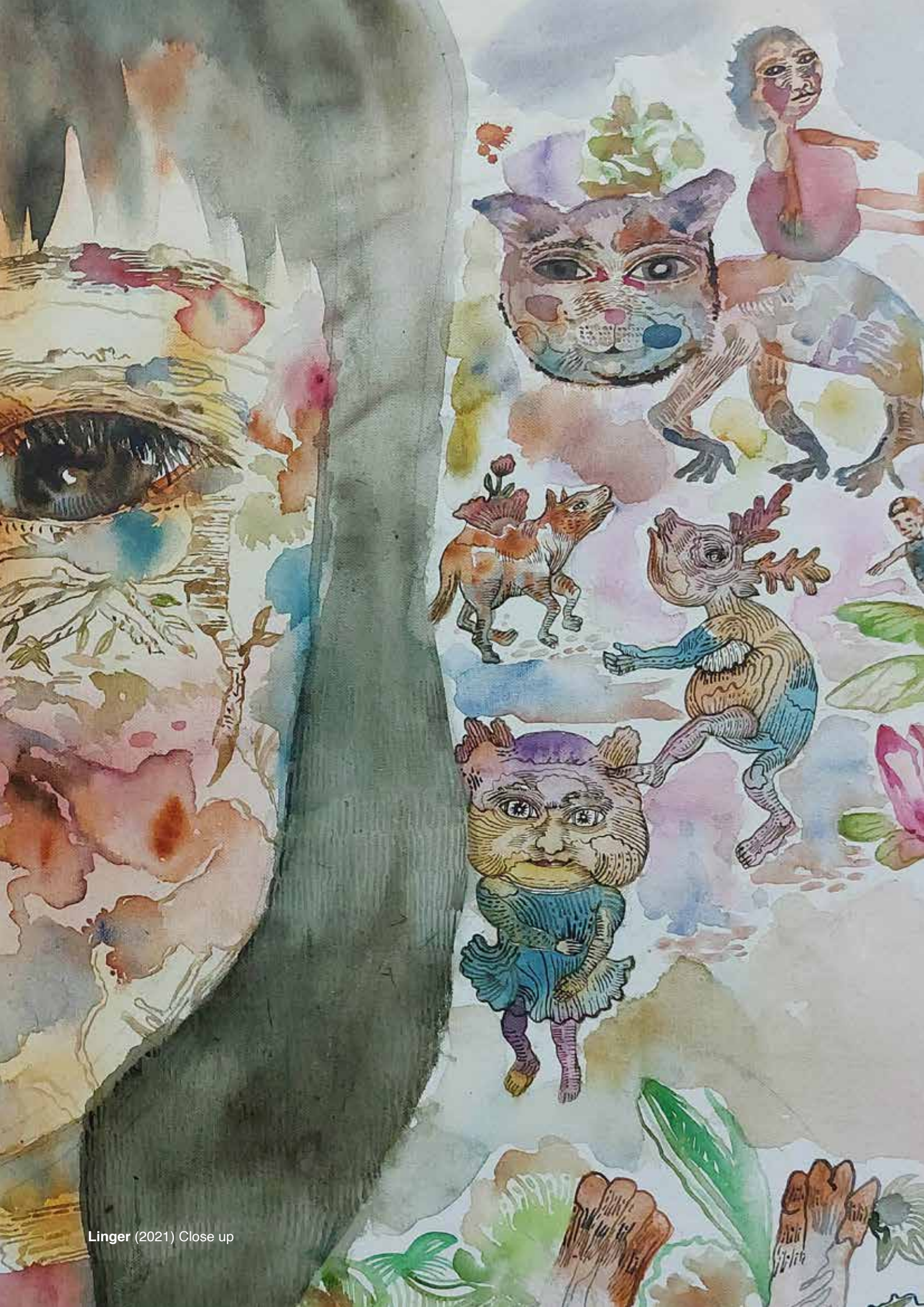


Cheong Kiet Cheng

*We Are Dreaming and
Awake In the Air*

Wei-LingGallery



“My mind was broadened and my life became much more colourful because of this trip“

- Cheong Kiet Cheng

We Are Dreaming and Awake In the Air

Cheong Kiet Cheng's fourth solo exhibition, '*We Are Dreaming and Awake In the Air*' was influenced by the artist's voyage, upbringing and everyday life. The show brings together new works that delve deeper into the creation of fictional creatures and narratives that continue to address the artist's reflections on womanhood and human relationship with nature.

Buddhist myths and beliefs have long been a source of inspiration for Cheong whose artistic practice is centred on spirituality and fiction. Practising drawing as a meditative practice since her stay in Japan for the 2019 UOB-Fukuoka Asian Art Museum Residency Programme, she continues to discover how other cultures connect with spirituality. Some of the paintings in the exhibition depict scenes in North India, where she travelled with her husband and visited two holy sites: Bodh Gaya and the Ganges river.



Under the Buddha Tree (2020)

Under the Buddha Tree (2020) depicts imaginary creatures - animals, ghosts and humans - from different dimensions, gathered under the Bodhi Tree. Known as the 'tree of awakening', Kiet Chieng was fascinated by the way it unites and serves people of different genders, races, and origins.

"My mind was broadened and my life became much more colourful because of this trip," Cheong shares. Upon returning to Malaysia, she focused on finding the right medium to express the tranquility and positivity that the trip left her with, resulting in her latest watercolour paintings. While her earlier works were painted in acrylic, the transparency of watercolour pigments allows her to eloquently translate the sense of peace. Yet, the medium doesn't fail to surprise her, as its fluidity creates stains and possibilities to be transformed into forms of mythical creatures.



Yin and Yang (2020)

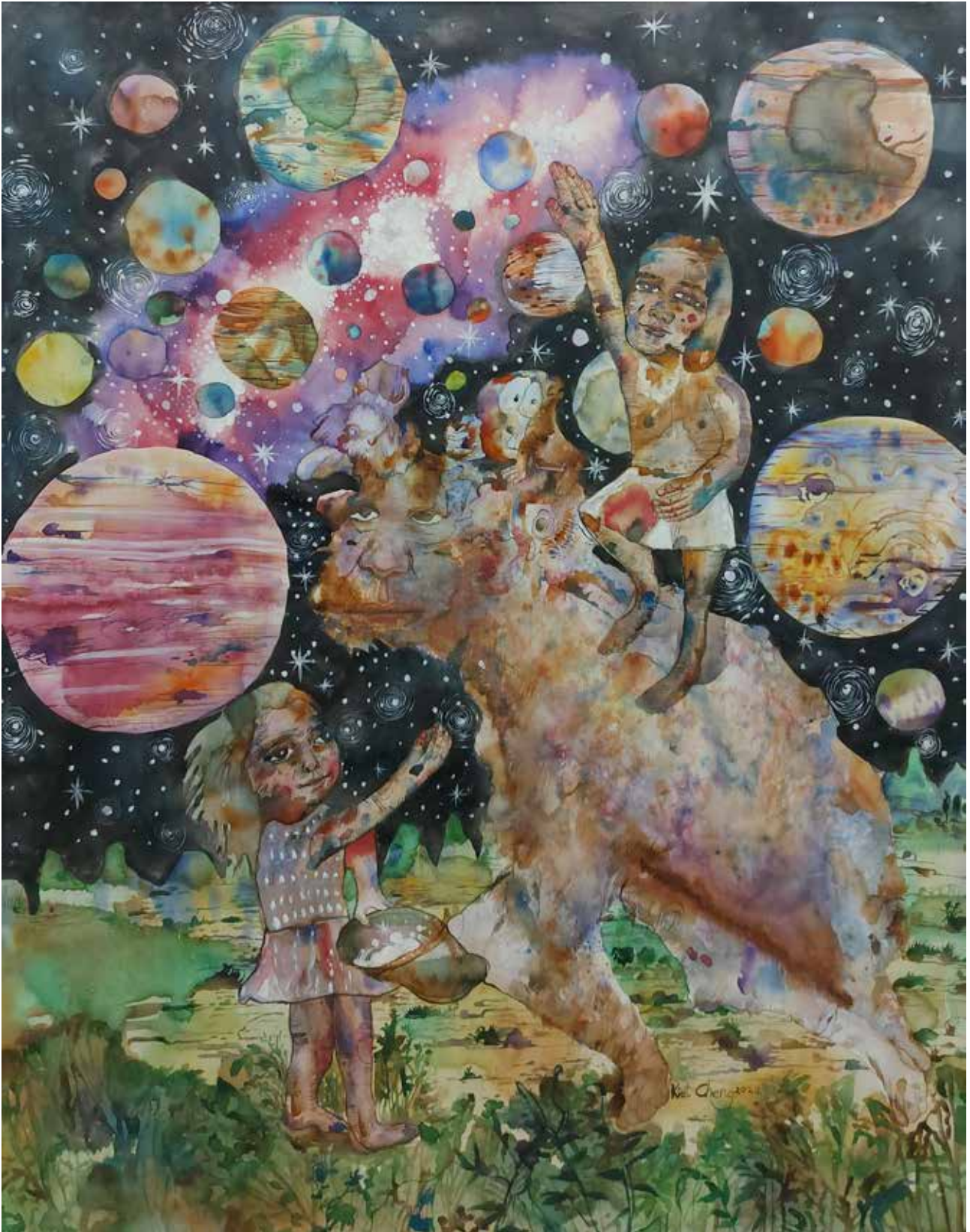
In *Yin and Yang (2020)*, the artist presents three characters to introduce the Chinese concept of dualism. Uniting the female sea spirit (Yin) and male mountain spirit (Yang) with the creator of the universe positioned in between, the painting conveys her hope for an equal world while illustrating our interdependence within the ecosystem.

Although Cheong's works are fantastical in nature, some of her characters correspond to her family members and self. In *Loving You (2020)*, she harnesses self-portraiture, characterising herself as a crocodile-like figure next to her elder daughter. On the artist's crocodile head are multiple expressions that articulate her struggles of juggling between her personal emotions and keeping her daughter happy. This painting, as with all of her works, shows how her pictorial language is always indirectly related to her inquiries into philosophy, spirituality, womanhood and the environment.



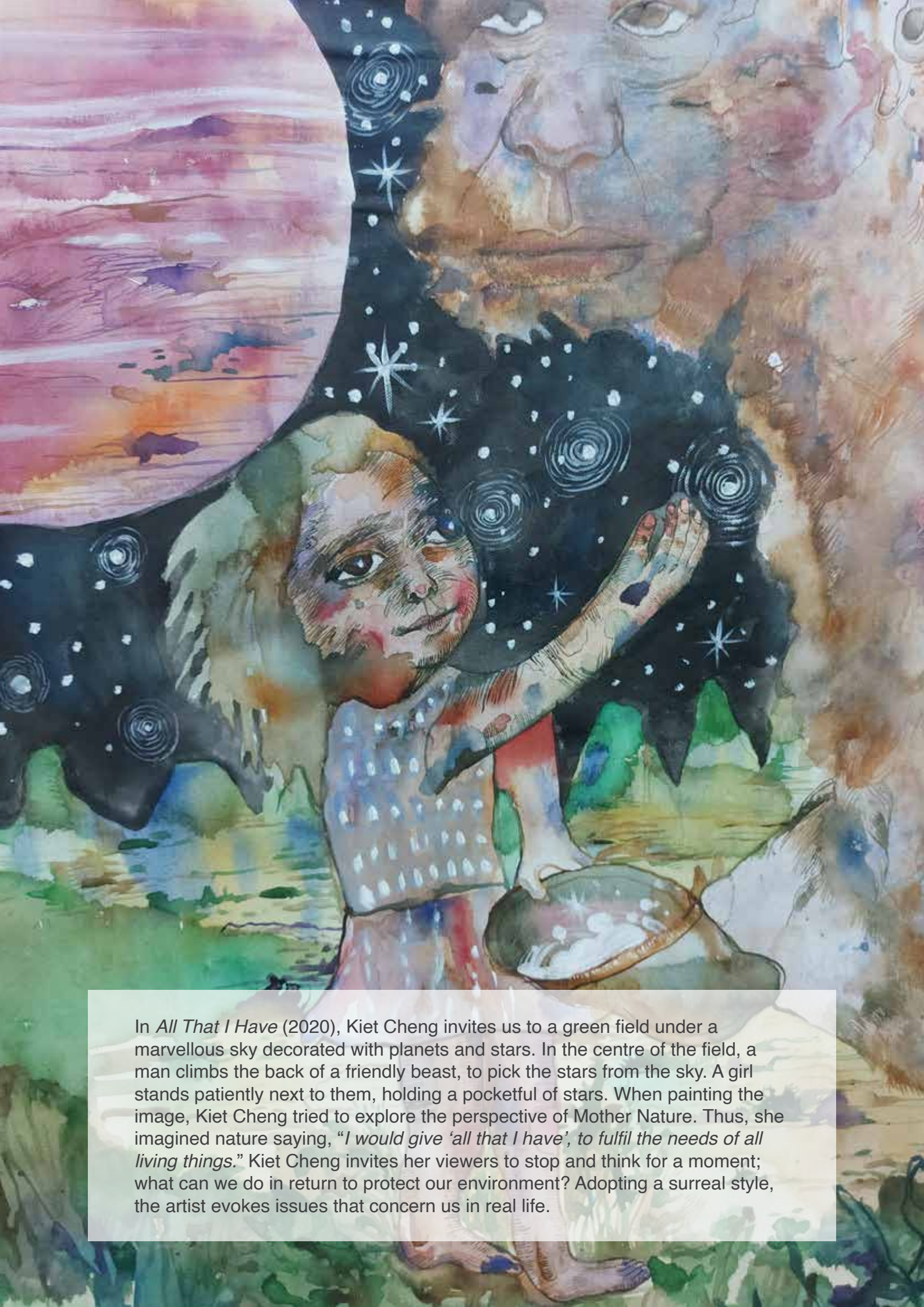
Loving You (2020)

'*We Are Dreaming and Awake In the Air*' culminates in an explosion of colour, with an array of Cheong's watercolour paintings and intricate ink drawings that form a web of stories about her life.

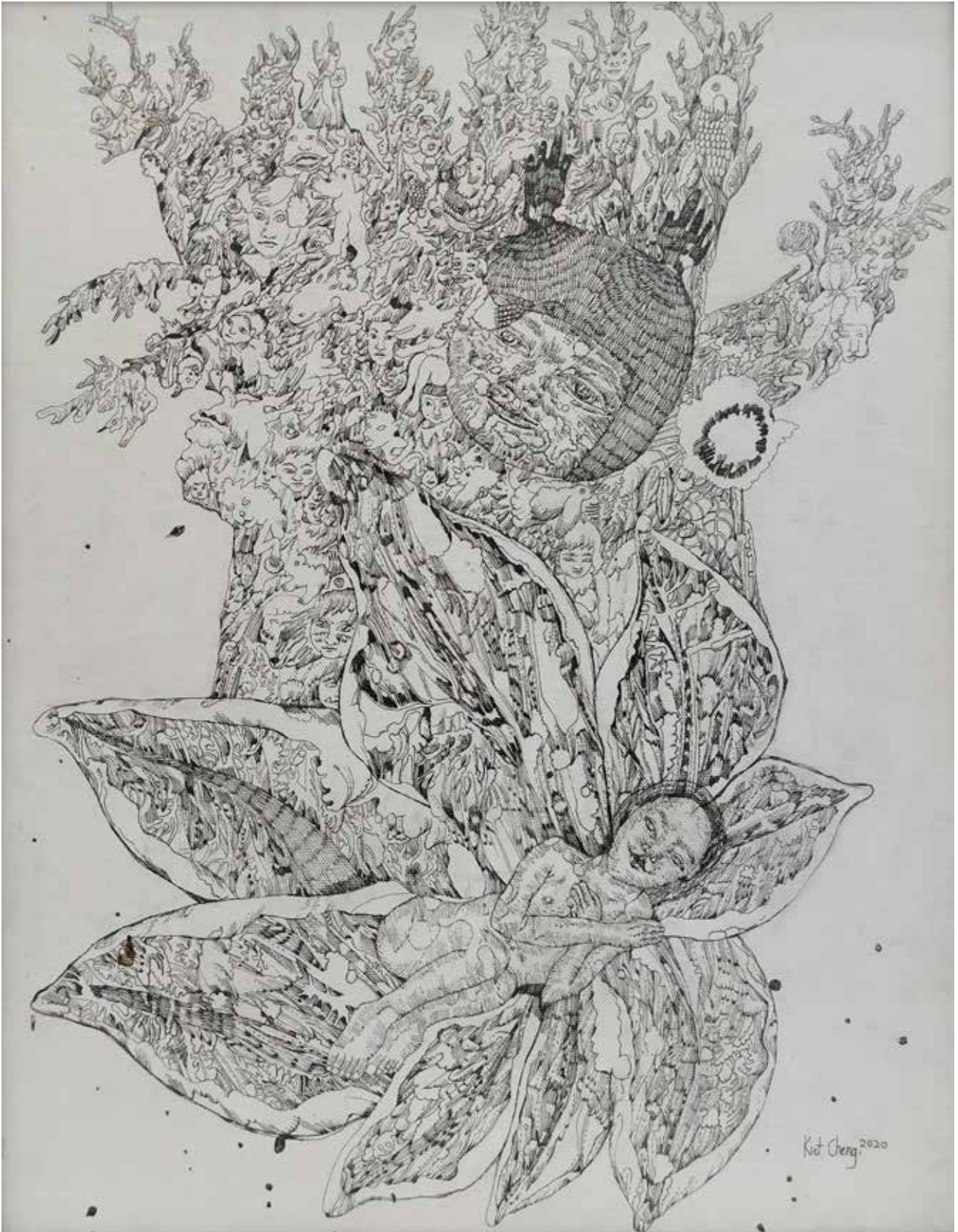


All that I have
Watercolor on canvas
165cm x 119cm
2020

All that I have (2020) Close up



In *All That I Have* (2020), Kiet Cheng invites us to a green field under a marvellous sky decorated with planets and stars. In the centre of the field, a man climbs the back of a friendly beast, to pick the stars from the sky. A girl stands patiently next to them, holding a pocketful of stars. When painting the image, Kiet Cheng tried to explore the perspective of Mother Nature. Thus, she imagined nature saying, *"I would give 'all that I have', to fulfil the needs of all living things."* Kiet Cheng invites her viewers to stop and think for a moment; what can we do in return to protect our environment? Adopting a surreal style, the artist evokes issues that concern us in real life.



Birth by the tree
Ink on canvas
57.5cm x 46.5cm
2020

Birth by the tree (2020) Close up

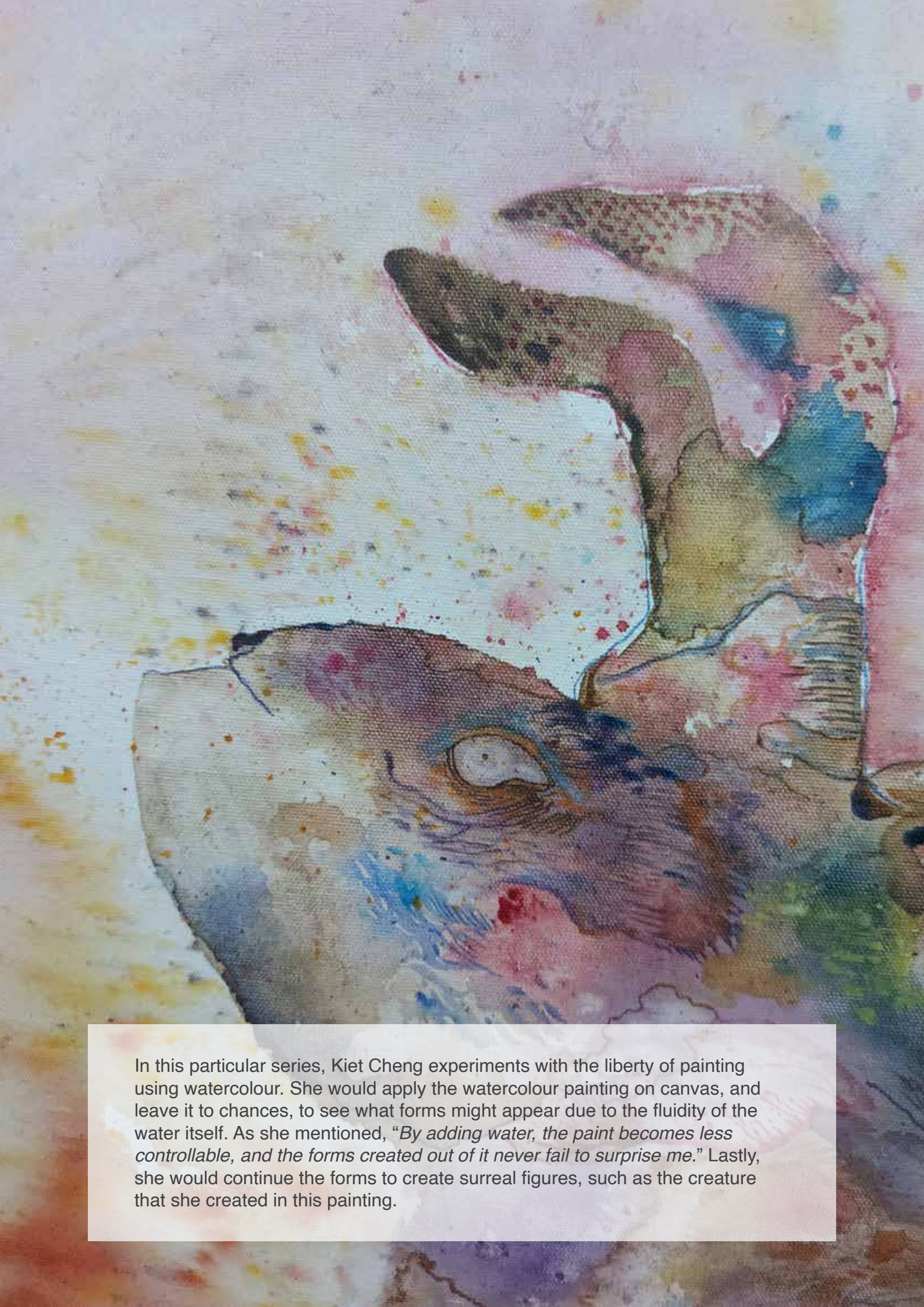


The philosophy behind this work is that all life comes from the same source. The artwork highlights a tree to which all living creatures are connected to. All creatures exist within an ecosystem or a tree of life, and all species are connected to one another. We have all evolved over time, and by now, we become creatures with souls.



Bring me to the end
Watercolor on canvas
96.5cm x 87.5cm
2020

Bring me to the end (2020) Close up



In this particular series, Kiet Cheng experiments with the liberty of painting using watercolour. She would apply the watercolour painting on canvas, and leave it to chances, to see what forms might appear due to the fluidity of the water itself. As she mentioned, "*By adding water, the paint becomes less controllable, and the forms created out of it never fail to surprise me.*" Lastly, she would continue the forms to create surreal figures, such as the creature that she created in this painting.



Earth's Nectar
Ink on canvas
165cm x 165cm
2021

Earth's Nectar (2021) Close up

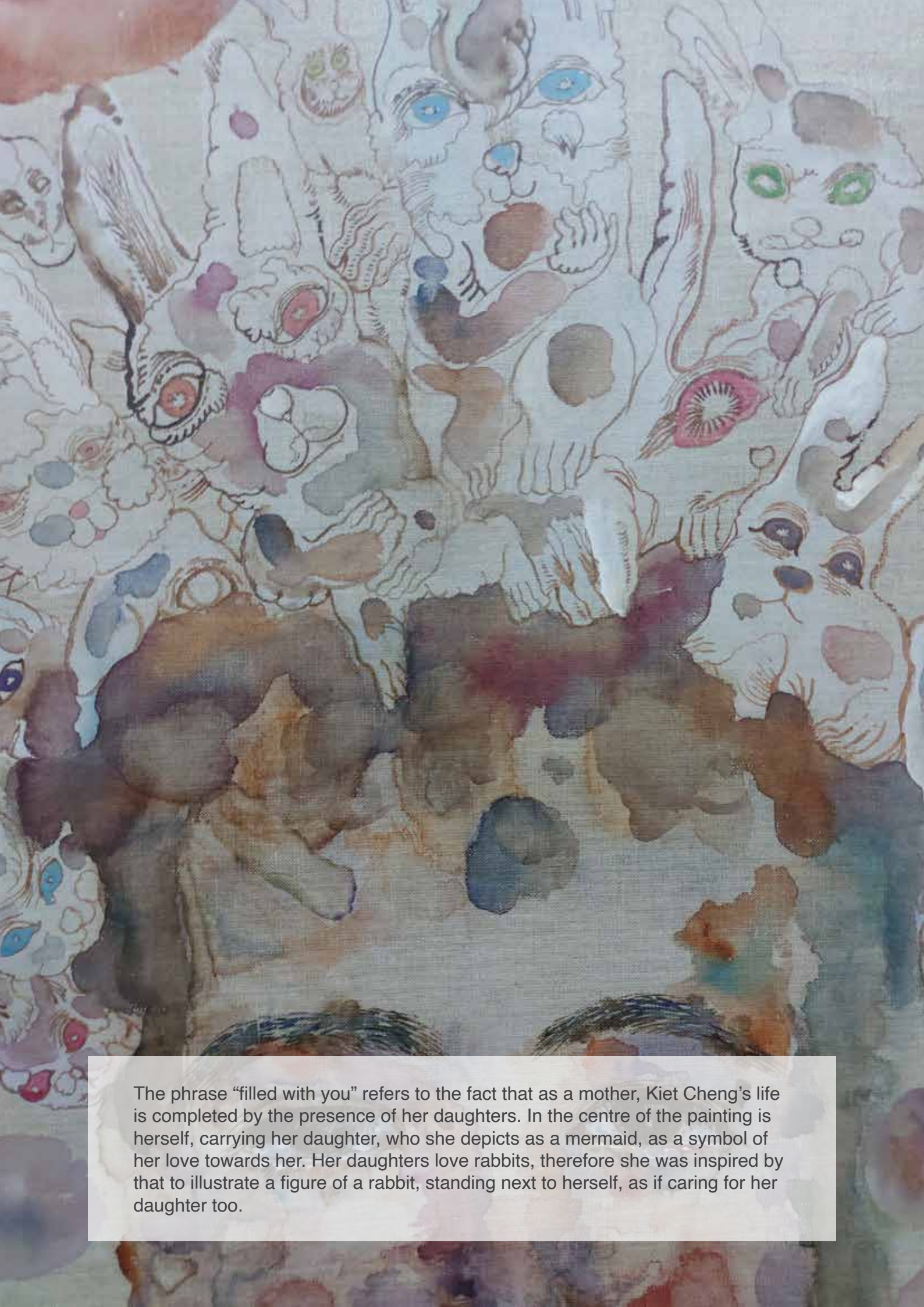


A long time ago, the earth was an empty place with no human beings. However, attracted by the earth's nectar, celestial beings with wings like fairies started coming from other realms. The more they drank, the more their bodies became heavy, and eventually their wings disappeared, and became human beings. As a surreal painter, Kiet Cheng uses her creativity to imagine the origin of human beings.



Filled with you
Watercolor on canvas
164.5cm x 134cm
2020

Filled with you (2020) Close up

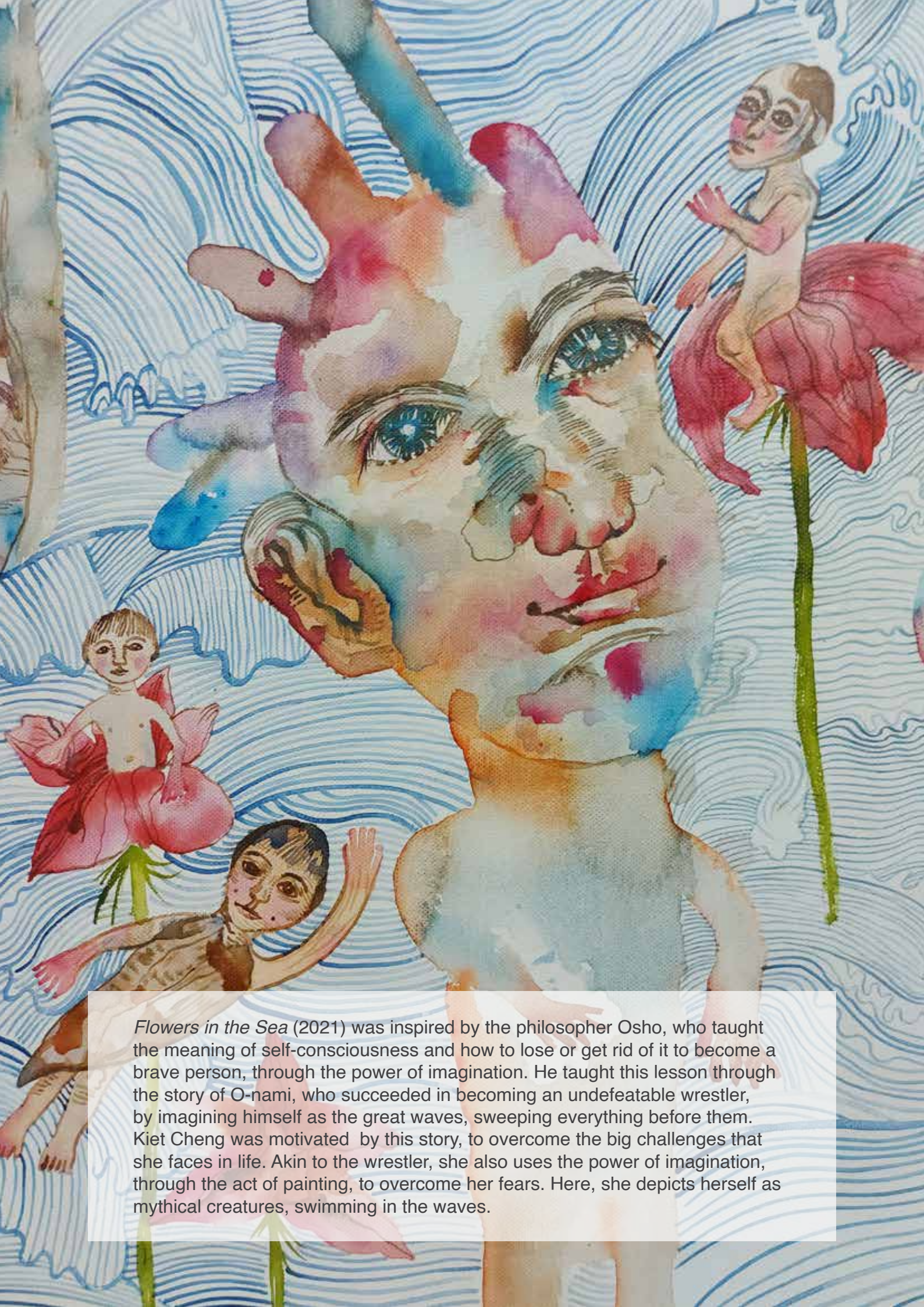


The phrase “filled with you” refers to the fact that as a mother, Kiet Cheng’s life is completed by the presence of her daughters. In the centre of the painting is herself, carrying her daughter, who she depicts as a mermaid, as a symbol of her love towards her. Her daughters love rabbits, therefore she was inspired by that to illustrate a figure of a rabbit, standing next to herself, as if caring for her daughter too.



Flowers in the Sea
Watercolor on canvas
77cm x 96cm
2021

Flowers in the Sea (2021) Close up



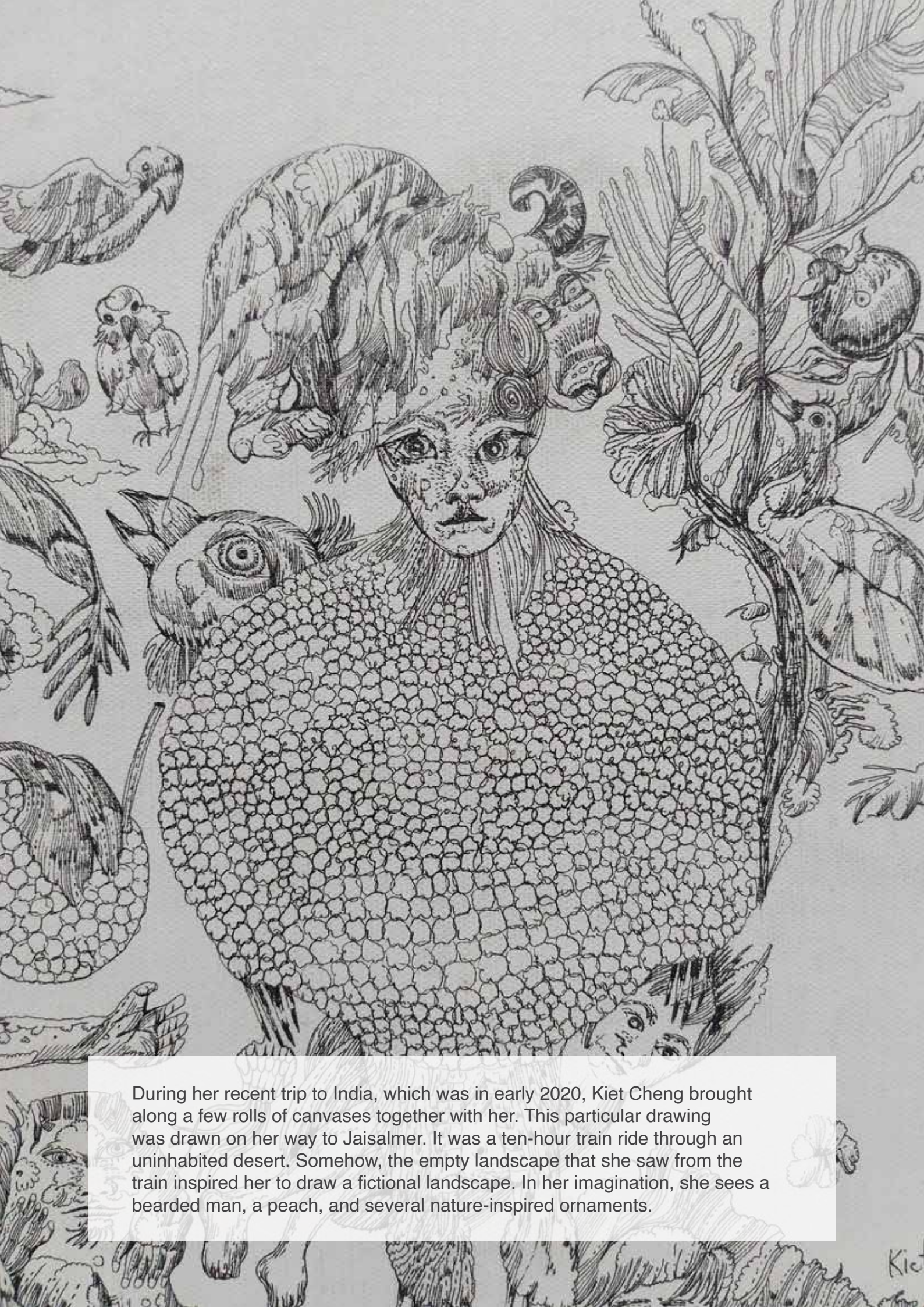
Flowers in the Sea (2021) was inspired by the philosopher Osho, who taught the meaning of self-consciousness and how to lose or get rid of it to become a brave person, through the power of imagination. He taught this lesson through the story of O-nami, who succeeded in becoming an undefeatable wrestler, by imagining himself as the great waves, sweeping everything before them. Kiet Cheng was motivated by this story, to overcome the big challenges that she faces in life. Akin to the wrestler, she also uses the power of imagination, through the act of painting, to overcome her fears. Here, she depicts herself as mythical creatures, swimming in the waves.



Going to the Spring (I)

Ink on canvas
46cm x 49cm
2020

Going to the Spring (I) (2021) Close up



During her recent trip to India, which was in early 2020, Kiet Cheng brought along a few rolls of canvases together with her. This particular drawing was drawn on her way to Jaisalmer. It was a ten-hour train ride through an uninhabited desert. Somehow, the empty landscape that she saw from the train inspired her to draw a fictional landscape. In her imagination, she sees a bearded man, a peach, and several nature-inspired ornaments.



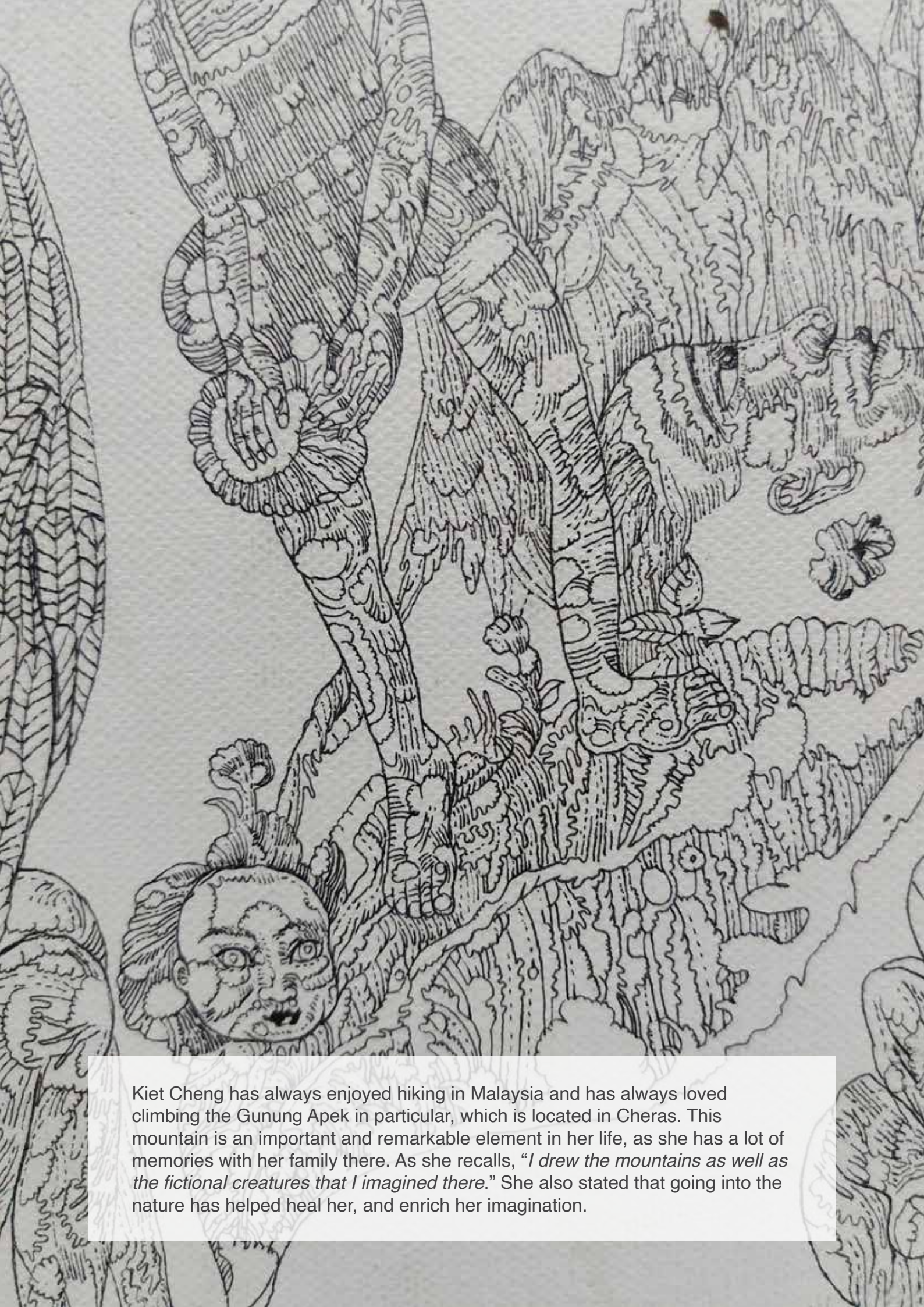
Going to the Spring (II)

Ink on canvas

46cm x 58cm

2021

Going to the Spring (II) (2021) Close up



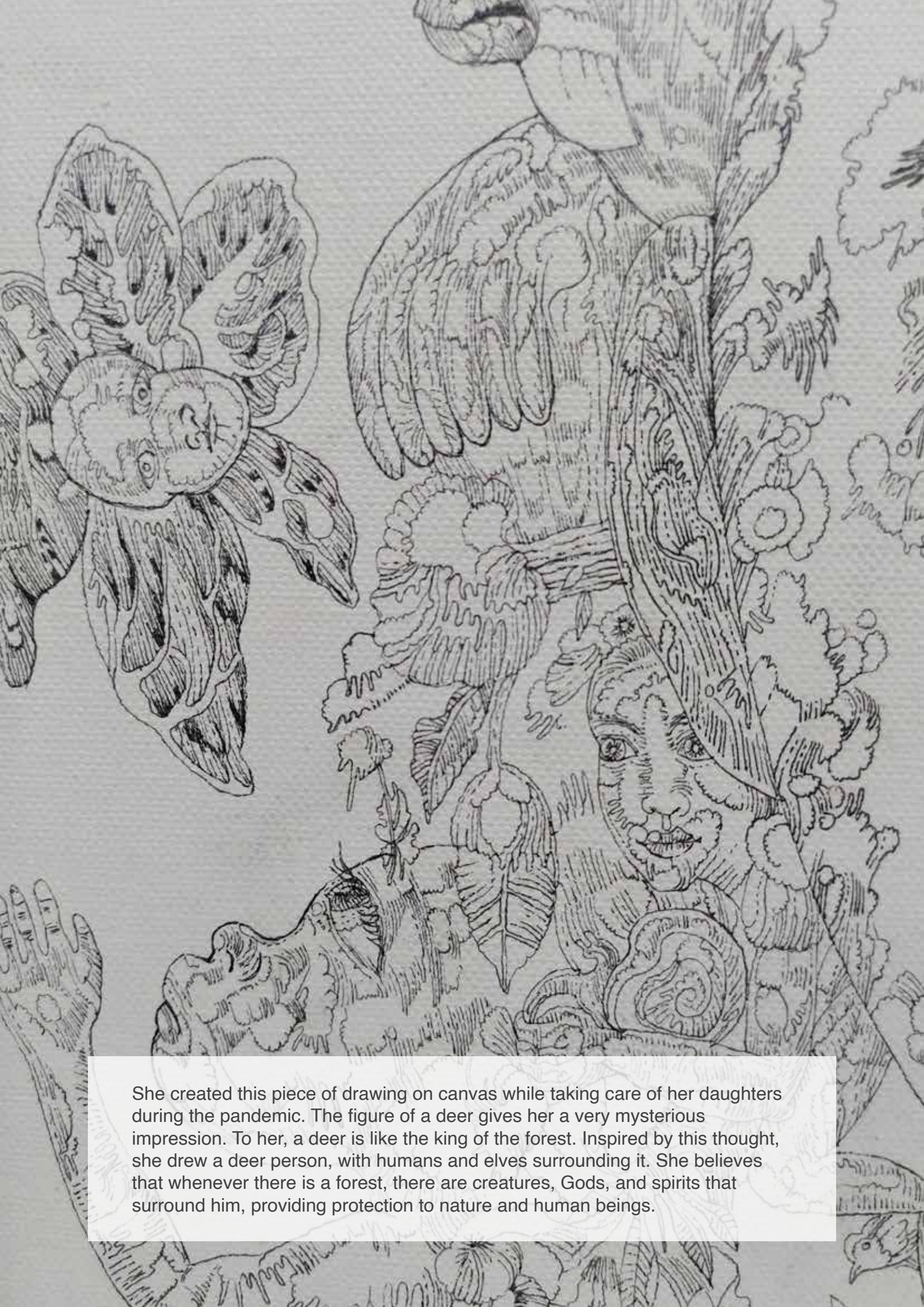
Kiet Cheng has always enjoyed hiking in Malaysia and has always loved climbing the Gunung Apek in particular, which is located in Cheras. This mountain is an important and remarkable element in her life, as she has a lot of memories with her family there. As she recalls, *“I drew the mountains as well as the fictional creatures that I imagined there.”* She also stated that going into the nature has helped heal her, and enrich her imagination.



Going to the Spring (III)

Ink on canvas
46cm x 48.5cm
2021

Going to the Spring (III) (2021) Close up

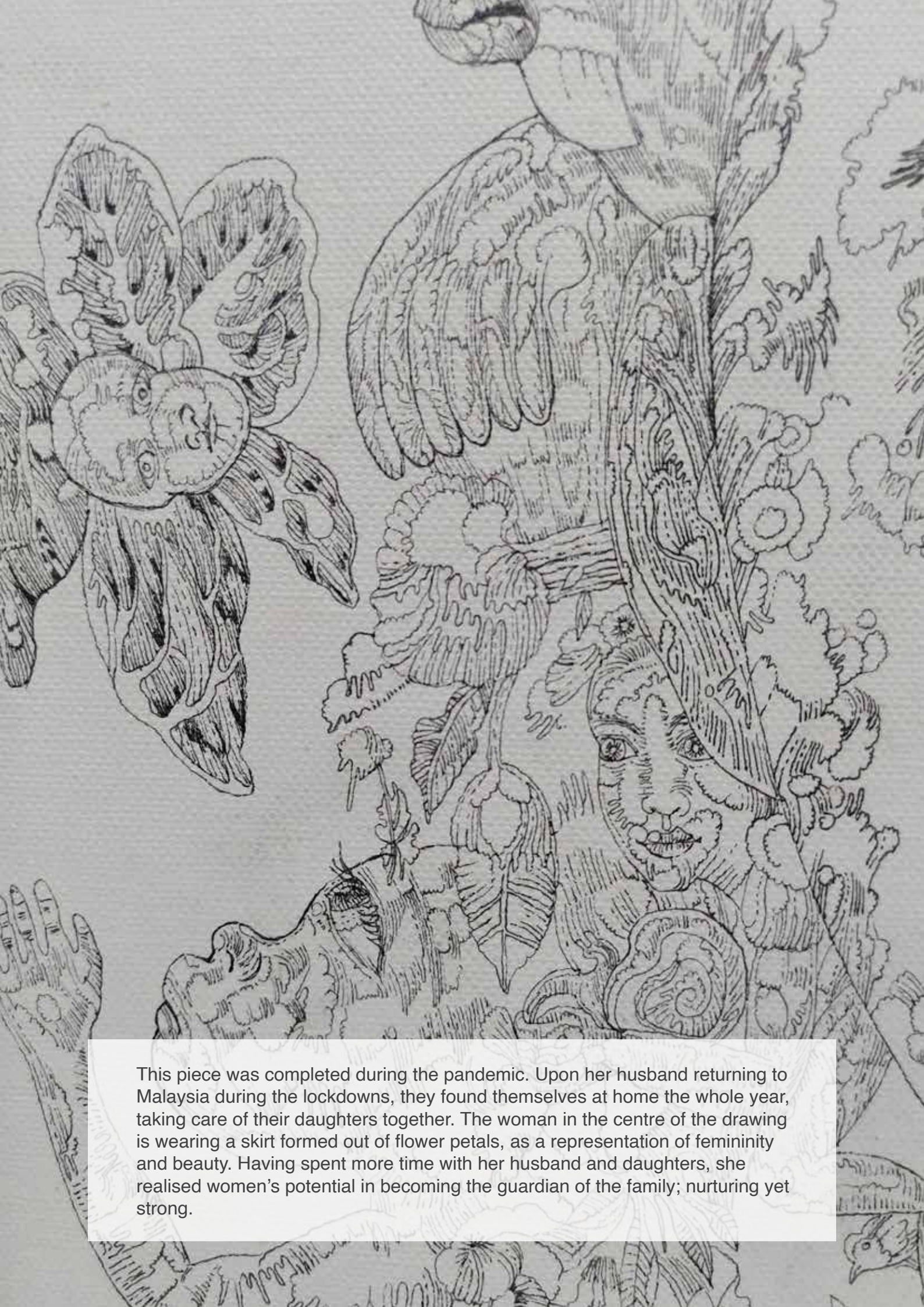


She created this piece of drawing on canvas while taking care of her daughters during the pandemic. The figure of a deer gives her a very mysterious impression. To her, a deer is like the king of the forest. Inspired by this thought, she drew a deer person, with humans and elves surrounding it. She believes that whenever there is a forest, there are creatures, Gods, and spirits that surround him, providing protection to nature and human beings.



Life Being
Ink on paper
58cm x 48cm
2020

Life Being (2020) Close up



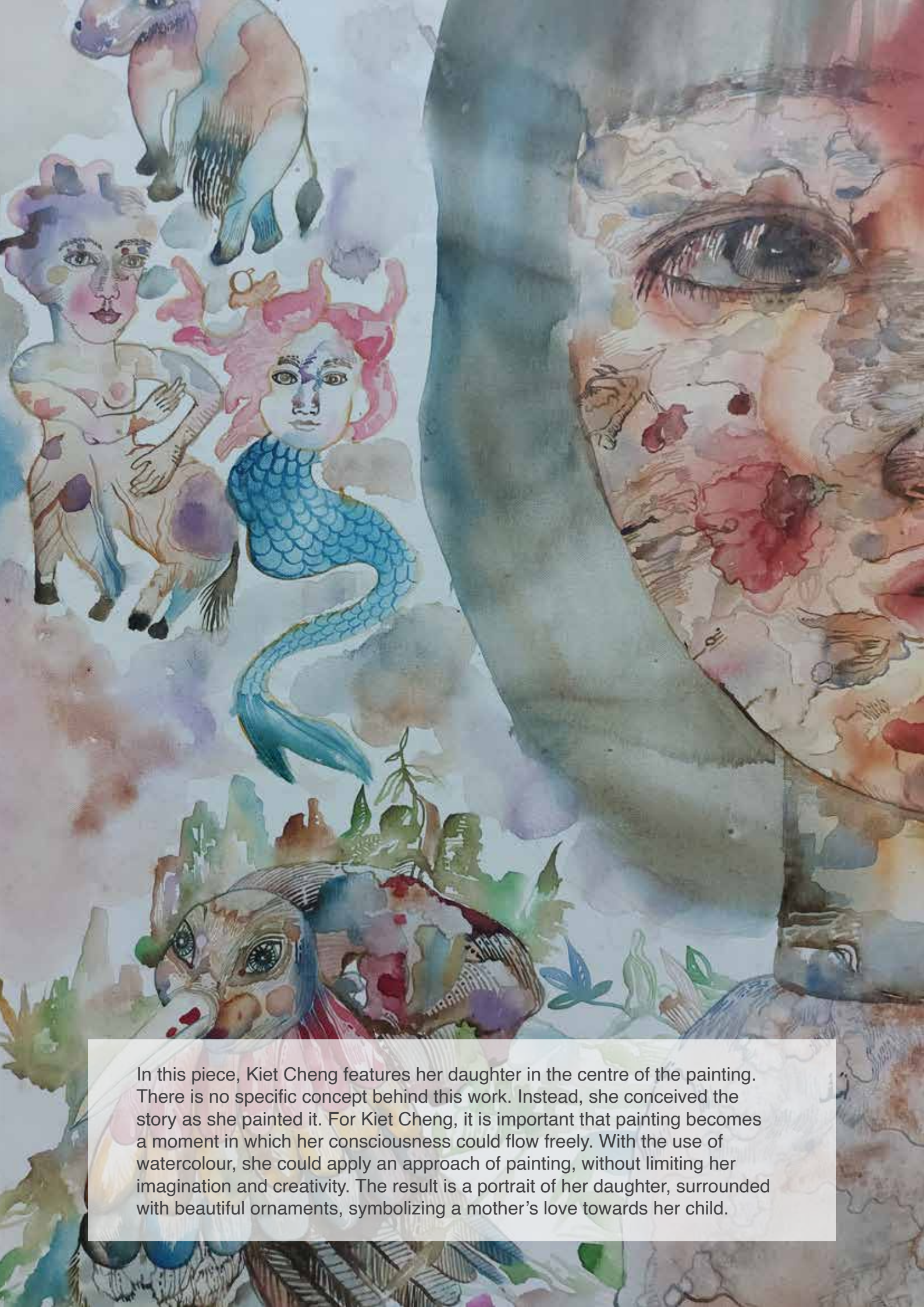
This piece was completed during the pandemic. Upon her husband returning to Malaysia during the lockdowns, they found themselves at home the whole year, taking care of their daughters together. The woman in the centre of the drawing is wearing a skirt formed out of flower petals, as a representation of femininity and beauty. Having spent more time with her husband and daughters, she realised women's potential in becoming the guardian of the family; nurturing yet strong.



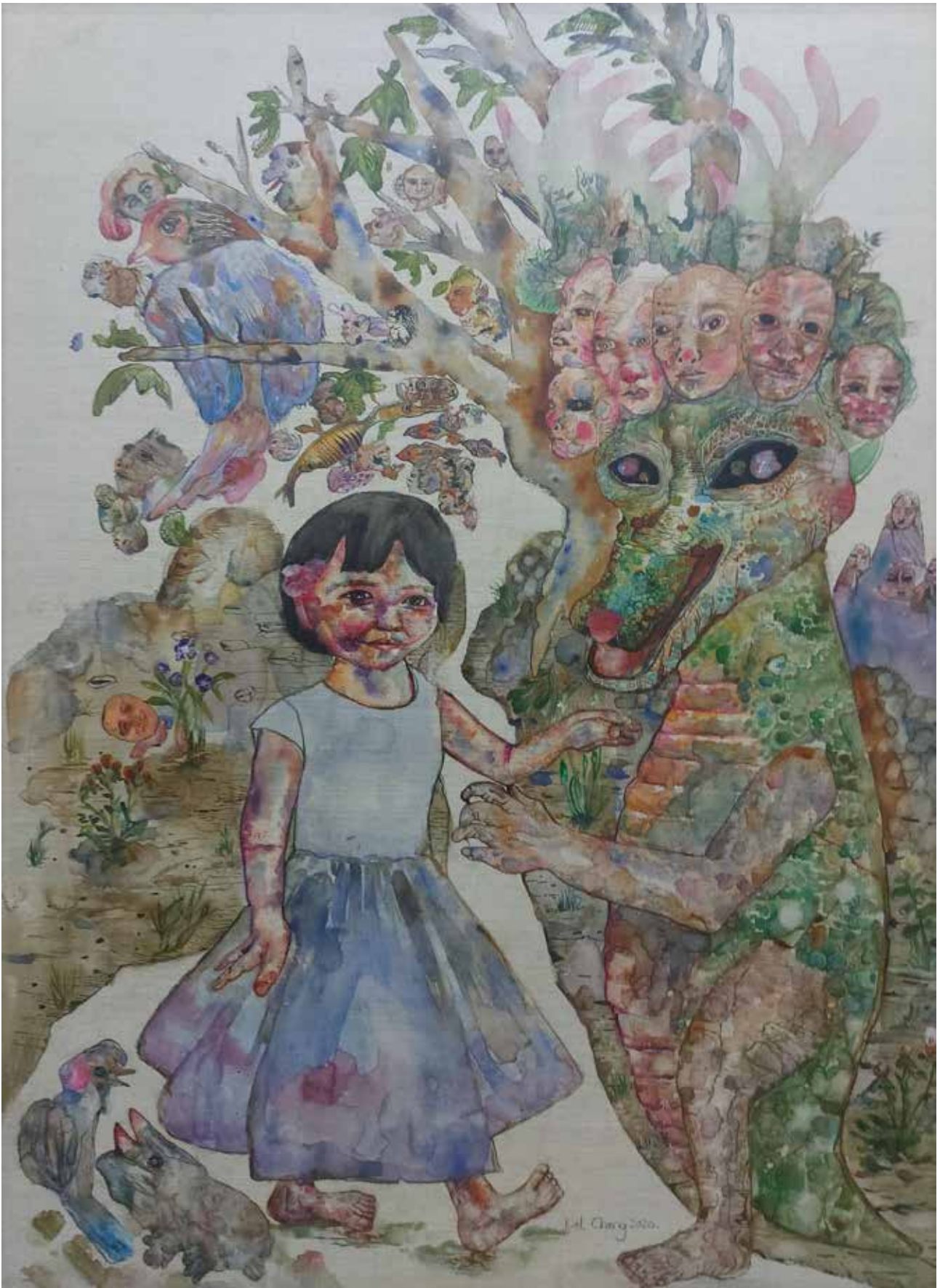
Linger

Watercolor on canvas
155cm x 137cm
2021

Linger (2021) Close up

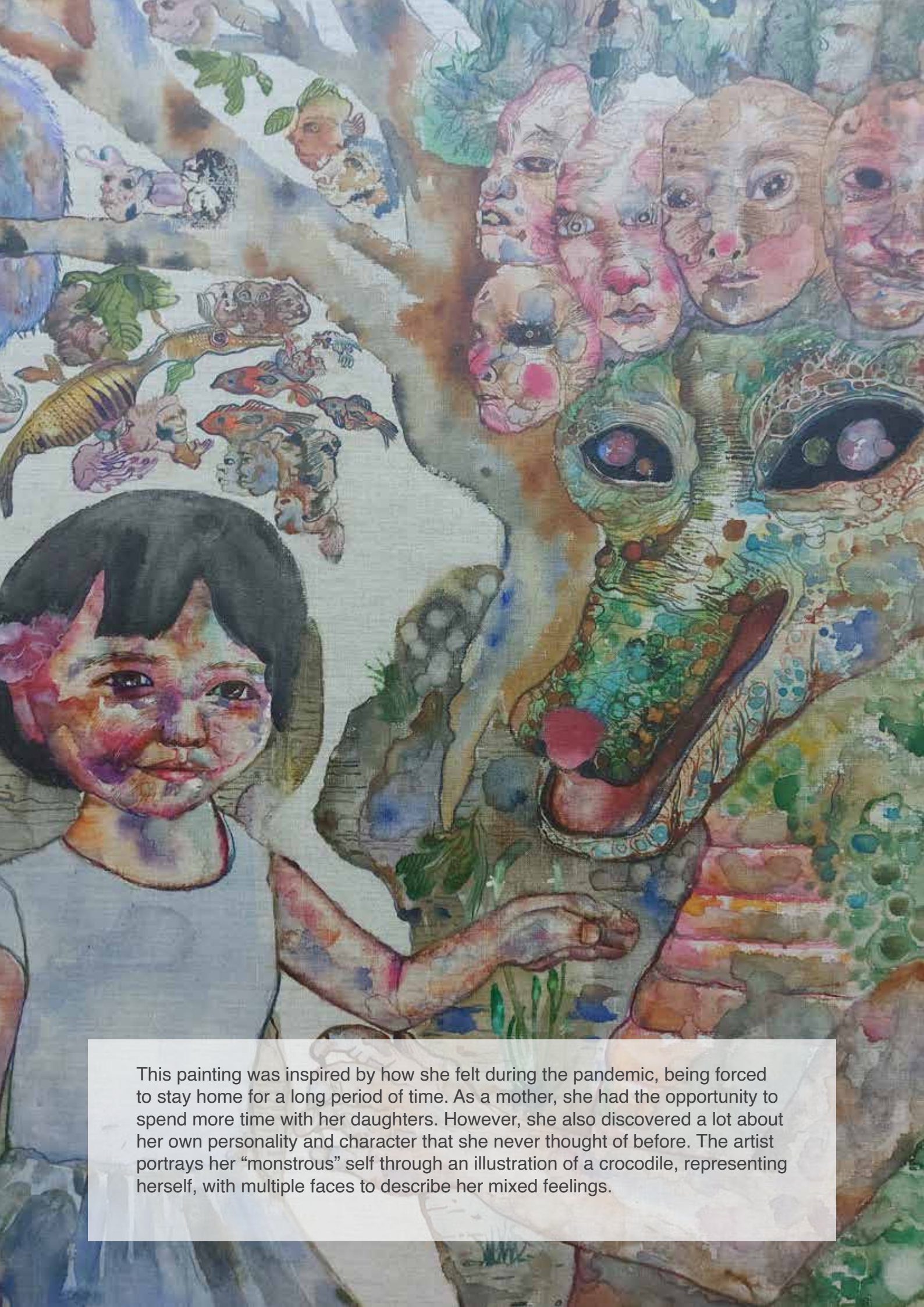


In this piece, Kiet Cheng features her daughter in the centre of the painting. There is no specific concept behind this work. Instead, she conceived the story as she painted it. For Kiet Cheng, it is important that painting becomes a moment in which her consciousness could flow freely. With the use of watercolour, she could apply an approach of painting, without limiting her imagination and creativity. The result is a portrait of her daughter, surrounded with beautiful ornaments, symbolizing a mother's love towards her child.



Loving You
Watercolor on canvas
164.5cm x 119cm
2020

Loving You (2020) Close up



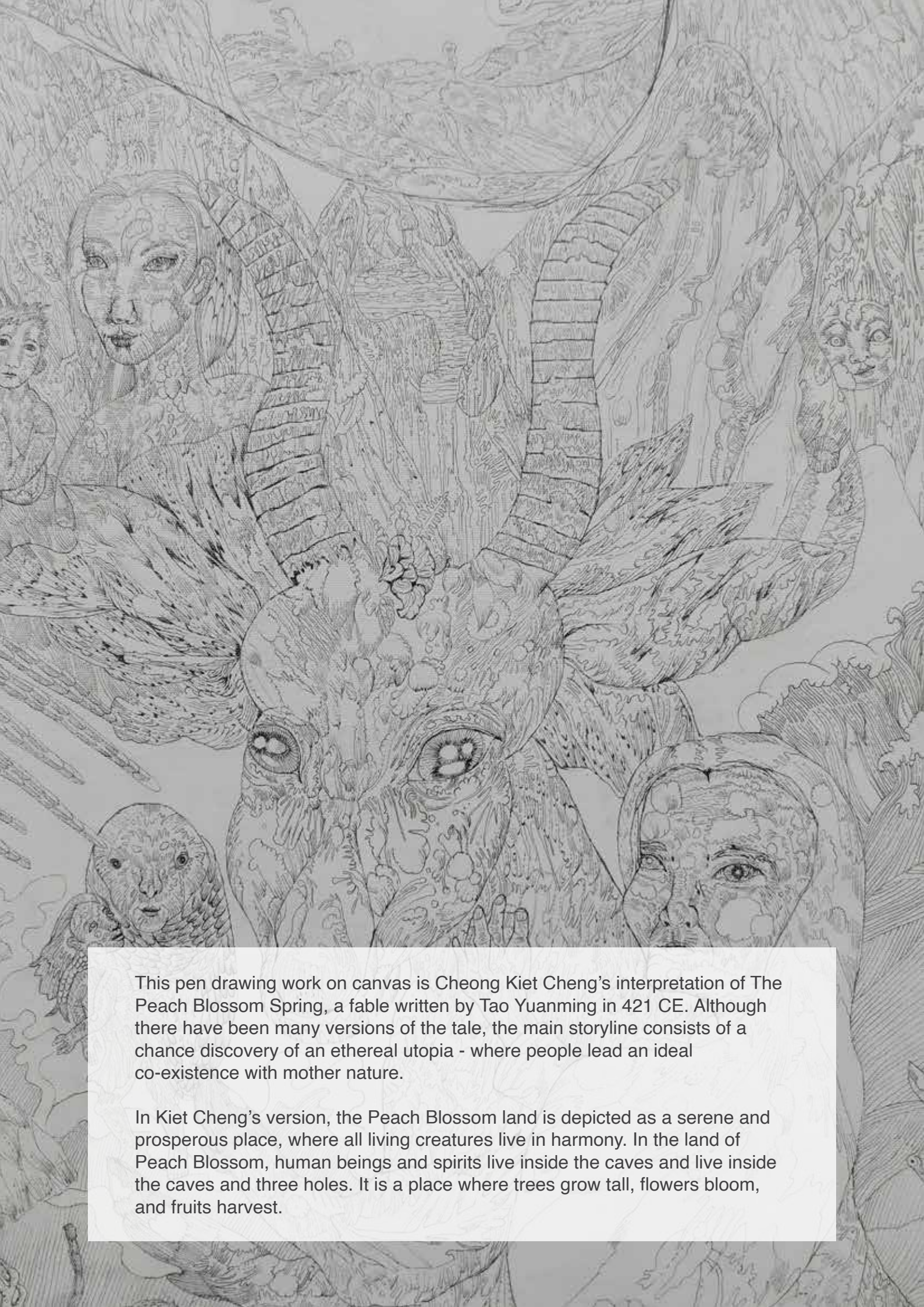
This painting was inspired by how she felt during the pandemic, being forced to stay home for a long period of time. As a mother, she had the opportunity to spend more time with her daughters. However, she also discovered a lot about her own personality and character that she never thought of before. The artist portrays her “monstrous” self through an illustration of a crocodile, representing herself, with multiple faces to describe her mixed feelings.



Migration to the Land of Peach Blossom

Ink on canvas
240cm x 290cm
2021

Migration to the Land of Peach Blossom (2021) Close up



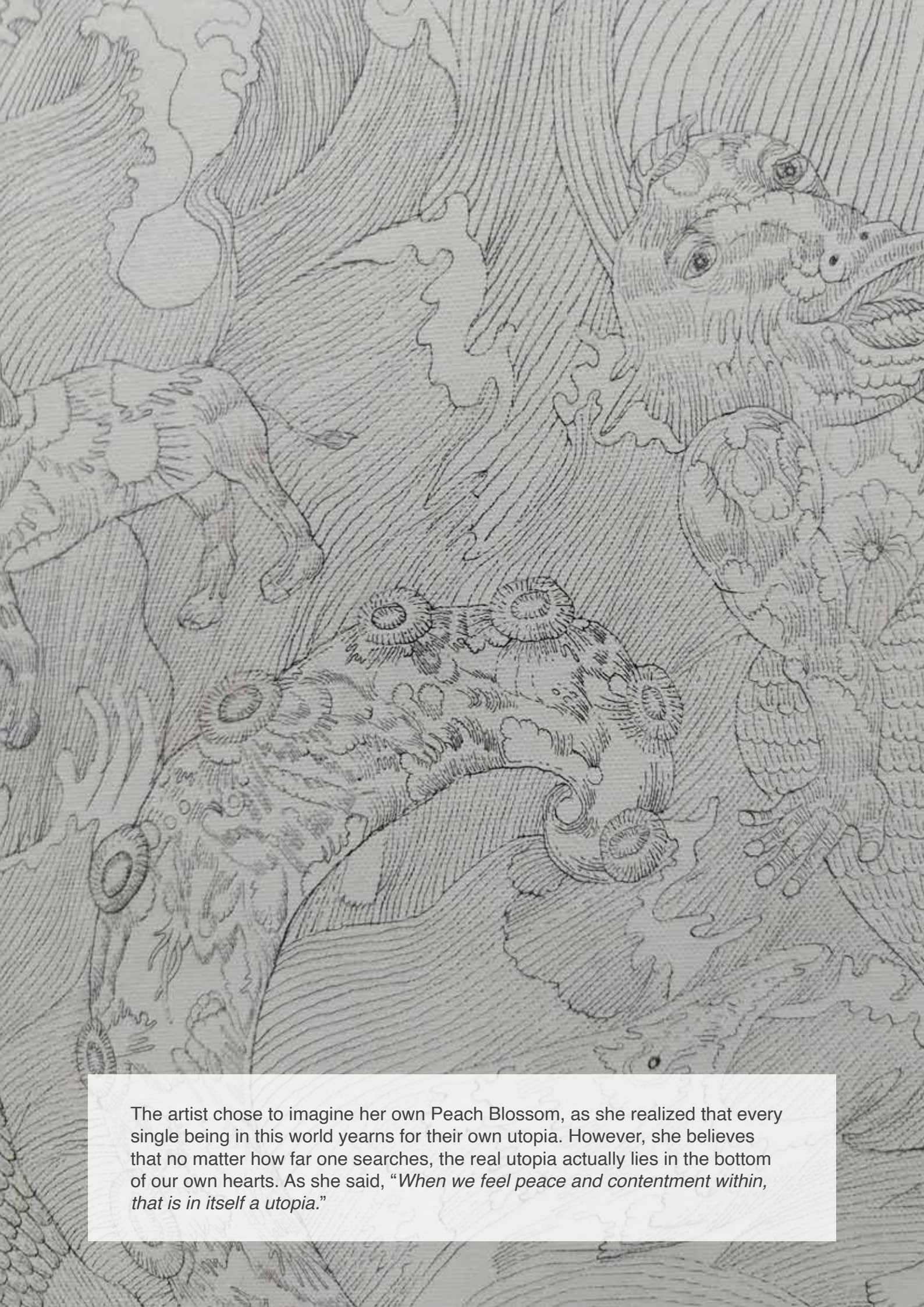
This pen drawing work on canvas is Cheong Kiet Cheng's interpretation of The Peach Blossom Spring, a fable written by Tao Yuanming in 421 CE. Although there have been many versions of the tale, the main storyline consists of a chance discovery of an ethereal utopia - where people lead an ideal co-existence with mother nature.

In Kiet Cheng's version, the Peach Blossom land is depicted as a serene and prosperous place, where all living creatures live in harmony. In the land of Peach Blossom, human beings and spirits live inside the caves and live inside the caves and three holes. It is a place where trees grow tall, flowers bloom, and fruits harvest.



There are also immortals who are in charge of life and growth in the whole land. As an example, is the figure with three eyes. “The third eye” is referred to as the eye of knowledge and enlightenment. While the physical eye perceives the physical world, the third eye sees the true world — a unified one, with an unyielding connection to the spirit.

Kiet Cheng’s Peach Blossom is full of mythical figures, often exploring the connection and hybridisation of human beings with animals. There is a woman riding a whale, a girl with deer antler. Under this deer child lies a rock with a hole on it. This hole refers to the entrance that leads the outside world to the land of the Peach Blossom.

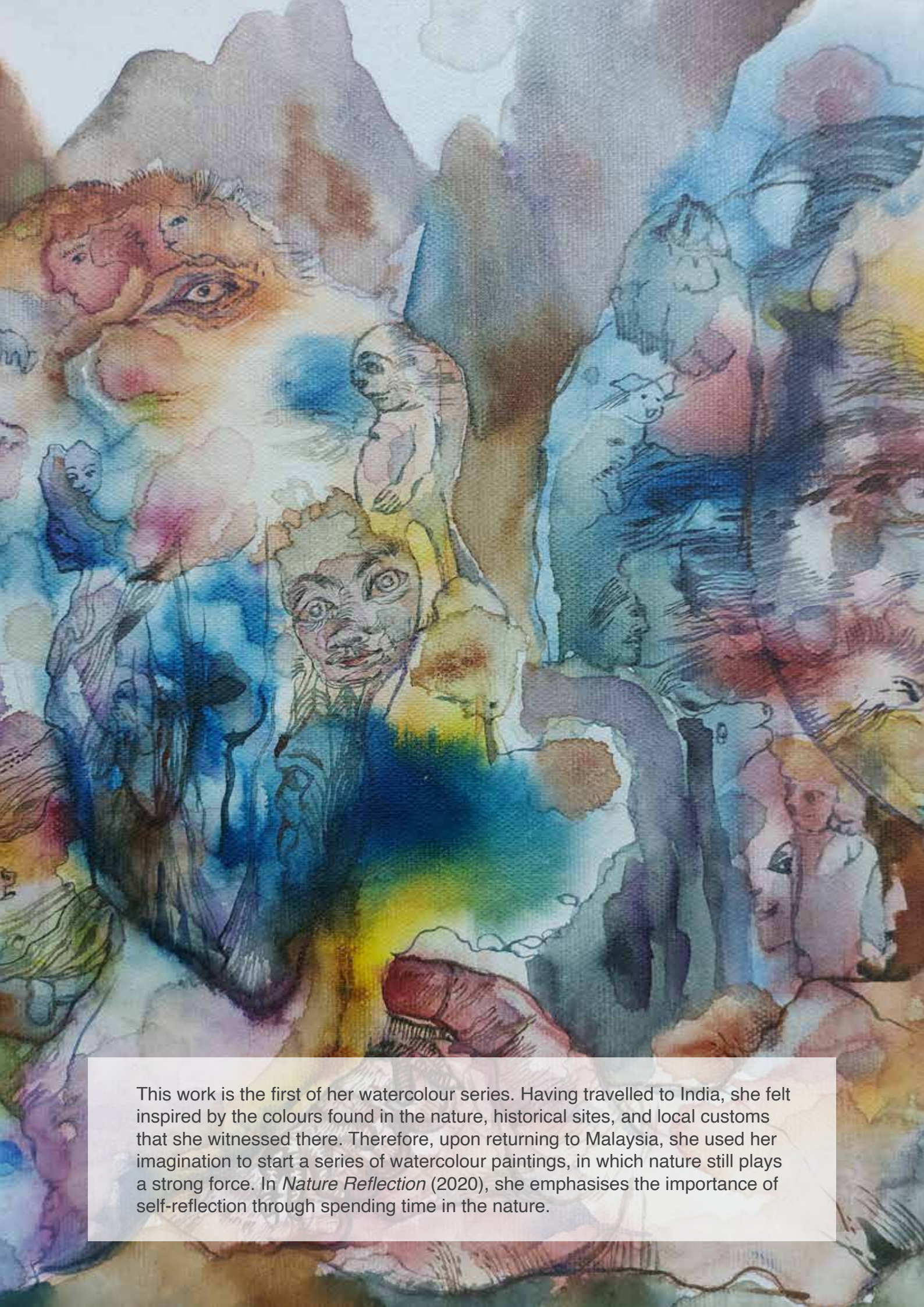


The artist chose to imagine her own Peach Blossom, as she realized that every single being in this world yearns for their own utopia. However, she believes that no matter how far one searches, the real utopia actually lies in the bottom of our own hearts. As she said, *“When we feel peace and contentment within, that is in itself a utopia.”*



Nature Reflection
Watercolor on canvas
46cm x 60cm
2020

Nature Reflection (2020) Close up



This work is the first of her watercolour series. Having travelled to India, she felt inspired by the colours found in the nature, historical sites, and local customs that she witnessed there. Therefore, upon returning to Malaysia, she used her imagination to start a series of watercolour paintings, in which nature still plays a strong force. In *Nature Reflection* (2020), she emphasises the importance of self-reflection through spending time in the nature.



Riding

Ink on paper
58cm x 48cm
2020

Riding (2020) Close up



Inspired by one of the scenes in *Lord of the Rings* that had left her a strong impression and fascination, Kiet Cheng drew an adaptation of the swan boat that appeared in the movie. As a surreal painter, Kiet Cheng often references science fiction and fantasy stories. Through this drawing, she compares herself being the swan boat – feminine and elegant, yet carrying a big responsibility. A fictional character is seen riding the swan boat with her animal friends, letting the swan lead them towards a better future.



The Wolves are waiting
Watercolor on canvas
96cm x 87.5cm
2020

The Wolves are waiting (2020) Close up



The Wolves are Waiting (2020) shows a little girl holding a bunch of items that symbolise her treasures in life. Apart from one's wealth, intangible things such as glory, talent, achievement, beauty and happiness, can also be considered as treasures. The wolves behind the girl stare intently at her wealth, eager to take them, as a metaphor for human ego.



Under the Buddha Tree

Ink on canvas
43cm x 48.5cm
2020

Under the Buddha Tree (2020) Close up

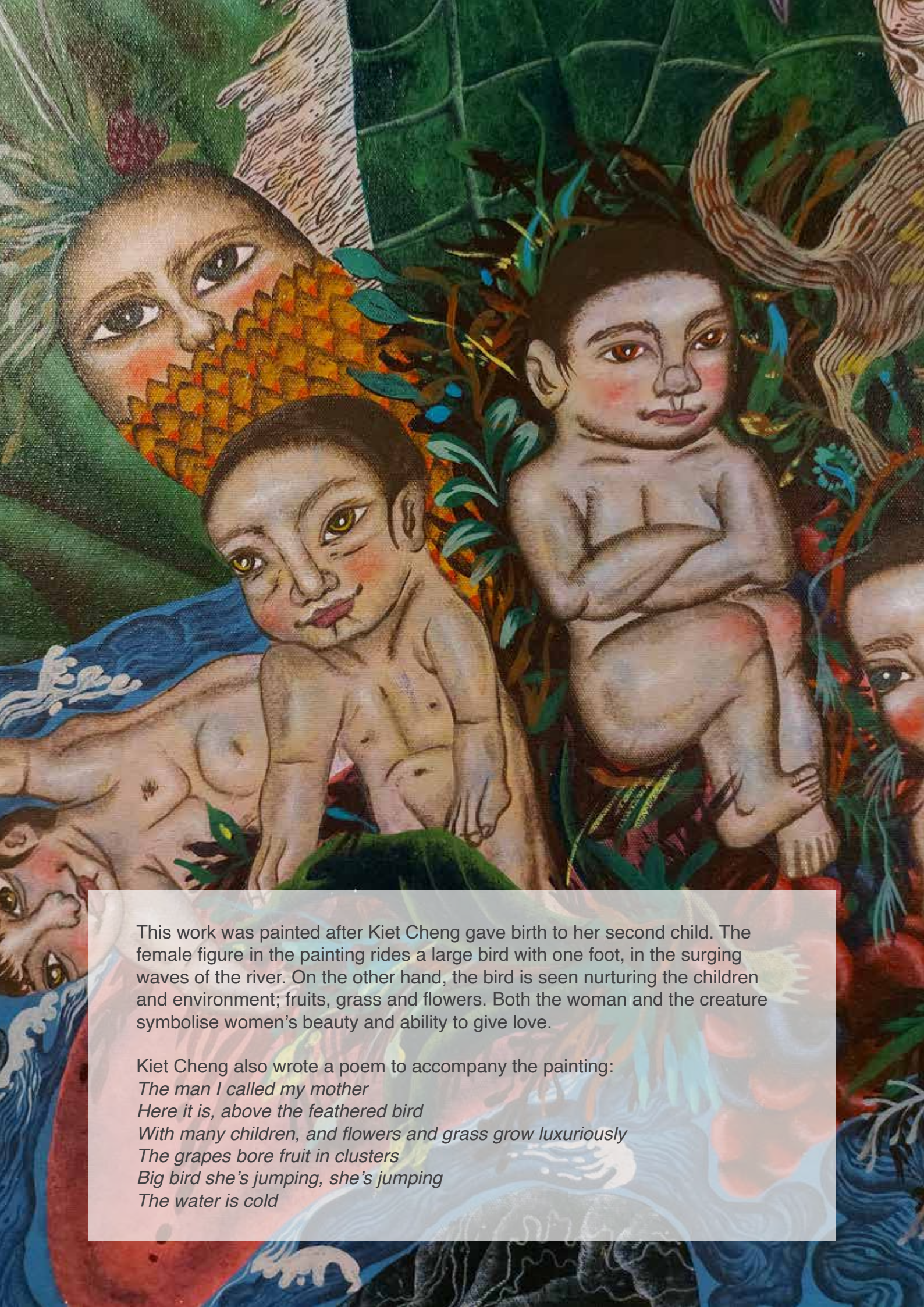


Buddhist myths and beliefs have long been a source of inspiration for the artist, whose artistic practice is centred on spirituality and fiction. Recently, she went on a trip to North India with her husband and visited two holy sites: Bodh Gaya and the Ganges river. *'Under the Buddha Tree'* depicts imaginary creatures - animals, ghosts and humans - from different dimensions, gathered under the Bodhi Tree. Known as the 'tree of awakening', the artist was fascinated by the way it unites and serves people of different genders, races, and origins.



When the grapes bear fruit
Acrylic on canvas
135cm x 170cm
2018

When the grapes bear fruit (2018) Close up



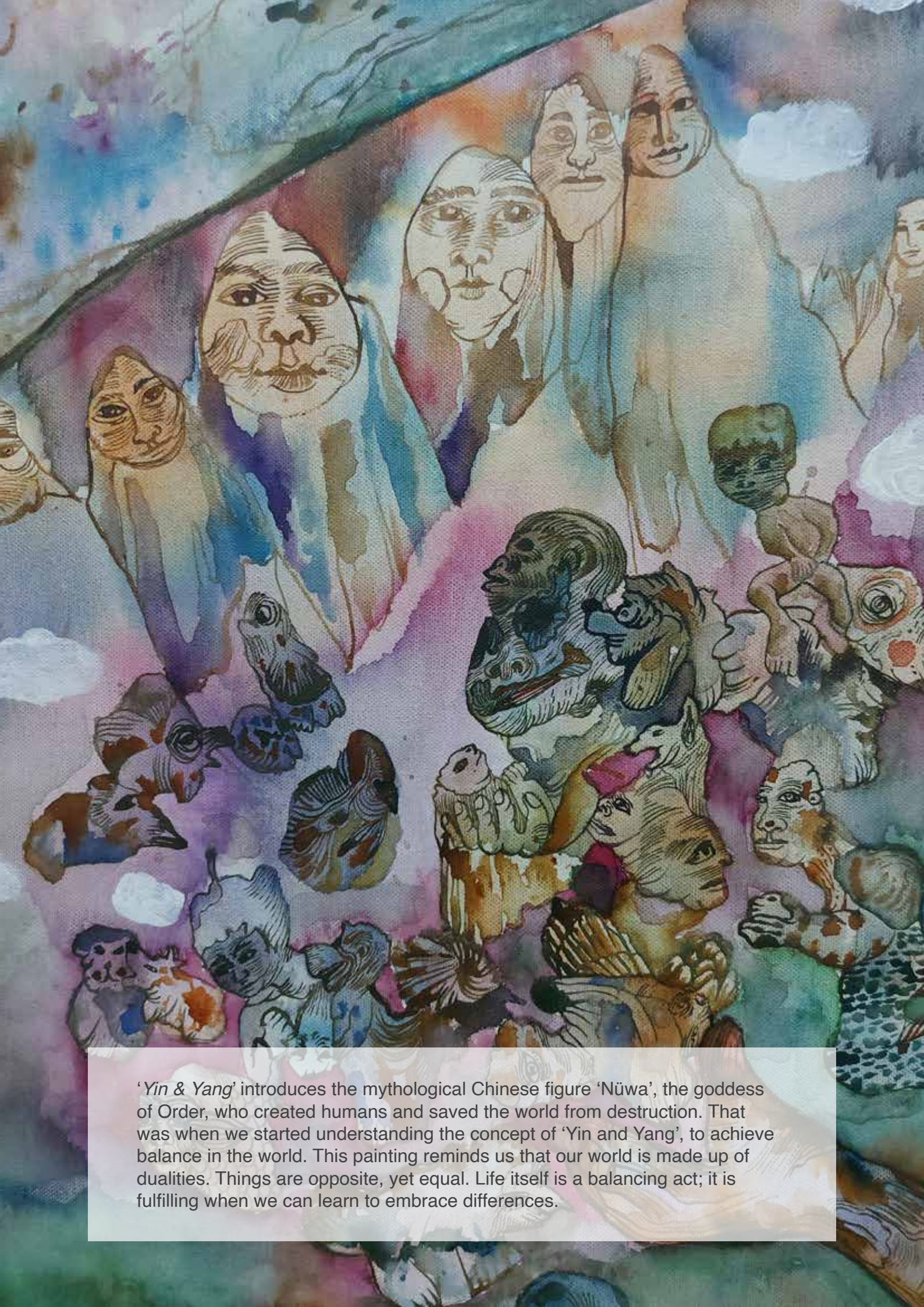
This work was painted after Kiet Cheng gave birth to her second child. The female figure in the painting rides a large bird with one foot, in the surging waves of the river. On the other hand, the bird is seen nurturing the children and environment; fruits, grass and flowers. Both the woman and the creature symbolise women's beauty and ability to give love.

Kiet Cheng also wrote a poem to accompany the painting:
*The man I called my mother
Here it is, above the feathered bird
With many children, and flowers and grass grow luxuriously
The grapes bore fruit in clusters
Big bird she's jumping, she's jumping
The water is cold*

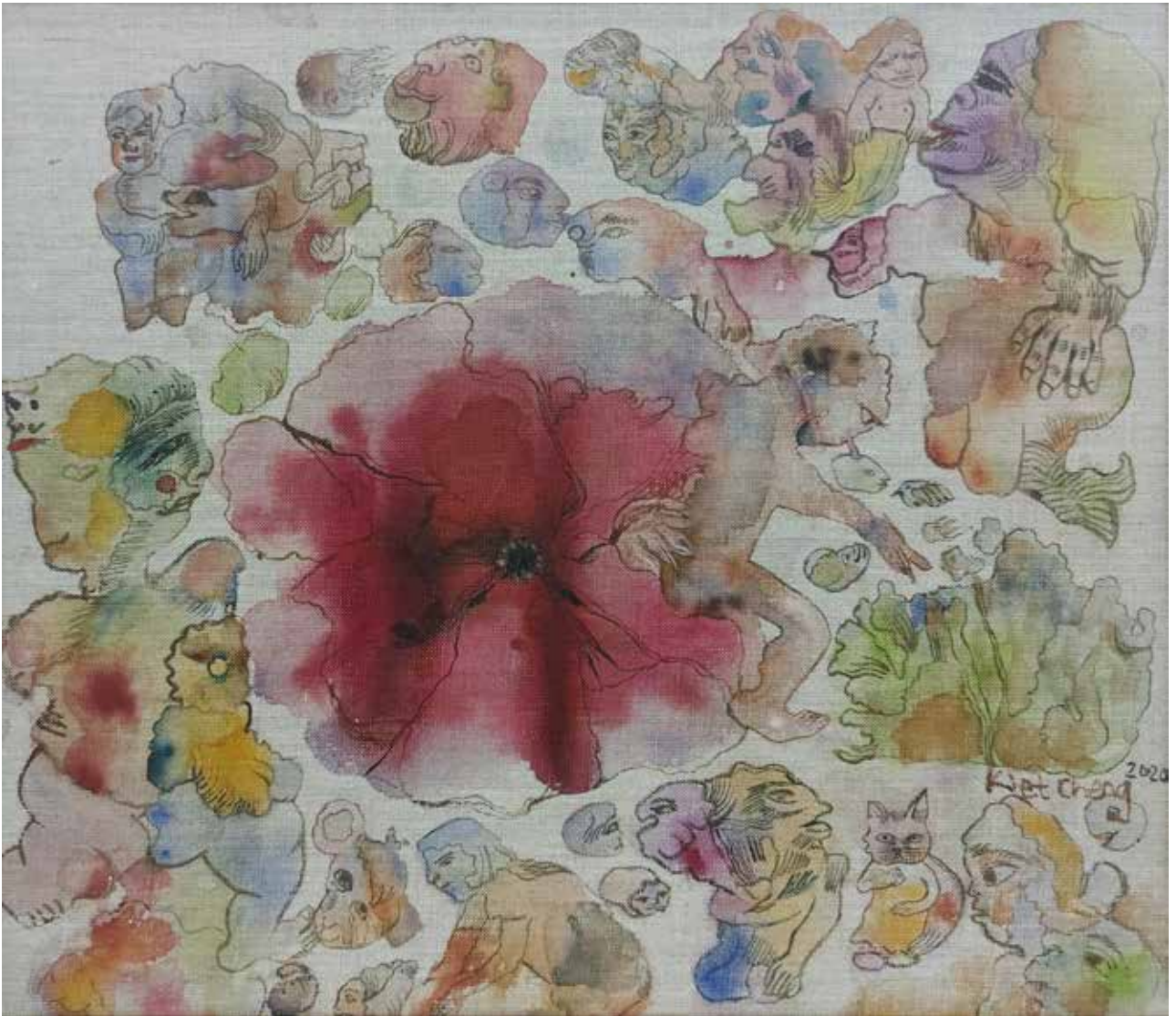


Ying and Yang
Watercolor on canvas
155cm x 196cm
2020

Ying and Yang (2020) Close up



'Yin & Yang' introduces the mythological Chinese figure 'Nüwa', the goddess of Order, who created humans and saved the world from destruction. That was when we started understanding the concept of 'Yin and Yang', to achieve balance in the world. This painting reminds us that our world is made up of dualities. Things are opposite, yet equal. Life itself is a balancing act; it is fulfilling when we can learn to embrace differences.



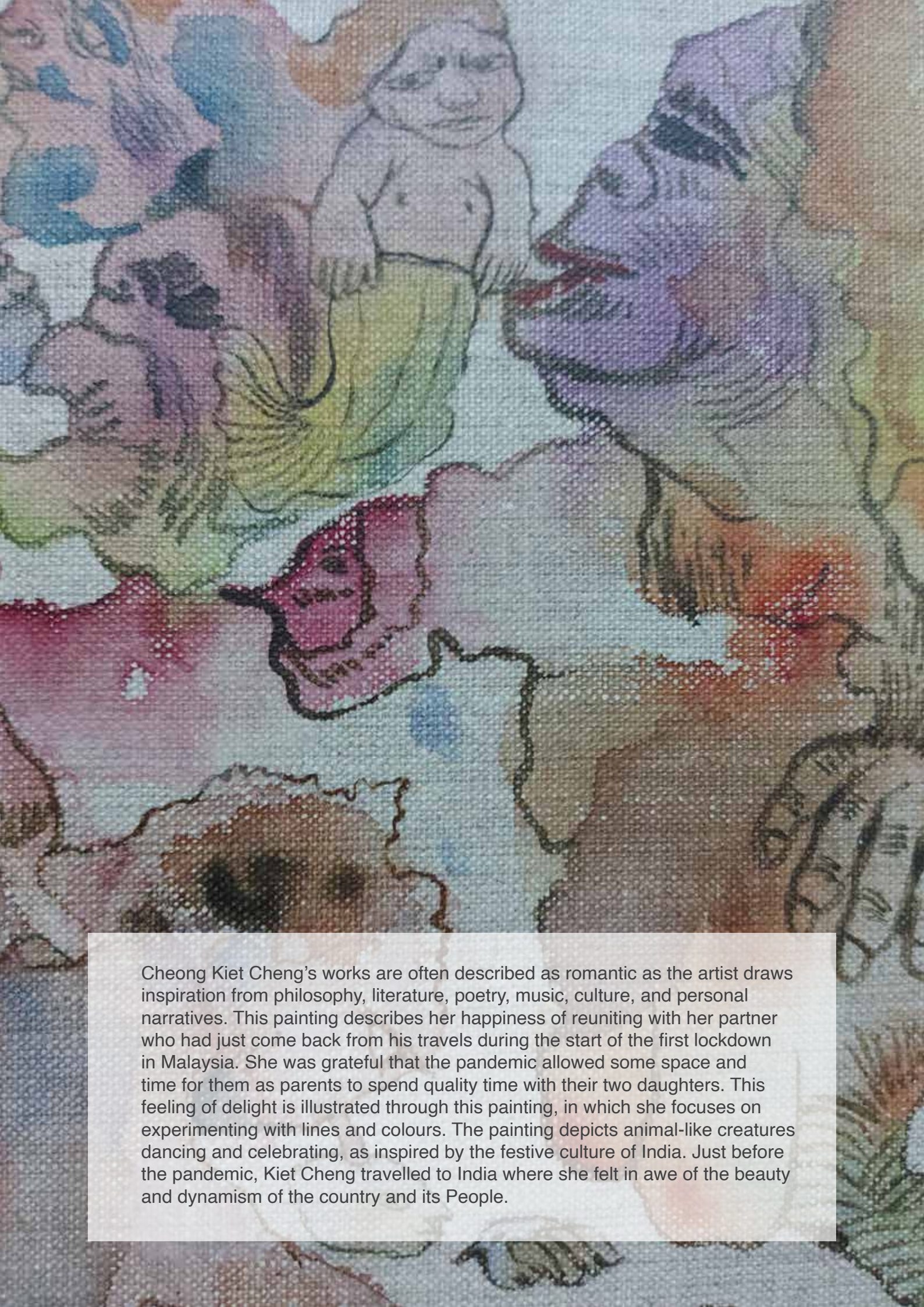
Blossom time

Mixed media on canvas

44cm x 59cm

2021

Blossom time (2021) Close up



Cheong Kiet Cheng's works are often described as romantic as the artist draws inspiration from philosophy, literature, poetry, music, culture, and personal narratives. This painting describes her happiness of reuniting with her partner who had just come back from his travels during the start of the first lockdown in Malaysia. She was grateful that the pandemic allowed some space and time for them as parents to spend quality time with their two daughters. This feeling of delight is illustrated through this painting, in which she focuses on experimenting with lines and colours. The painting depicts animal-like creatures dancing and celebrating, as inspired by the festive culture of India. Just before the pandemic, Kiet Cheng travelled to India where she felt in awe of the beauty and dynamism of the country and its People.



Tree's whisper
Mixed media on canvas
65cm x 48cm
2020

Tree's whisper (2020) Close up



Cheong Kiet Cheng's paintings have consistently highlighted the relationship between human beings and nature. As a person, she enjoys spending time in nature and believes in the spiritual connection that we have with our natural environment. Kiet Cheng has been visiting forests all her life; since a young girl, she has always loved hiking. As she stated, "*Some old forests really inspired me, such as the forests of Gunung Kinabalu, Taman Negara, and Gunung Rinjani in Lombok.*" This painting illustrates herself communicating with a tree that she encountered in the forest. It is to this tree that she tells her joys and sorrows. As the artist speaks her words, the tree seems to respond to her, shaking its branches and whispering answers to her questions. This mysterious connection between herself and the rest of the universe also makes her reflect on questions surrounding existence.



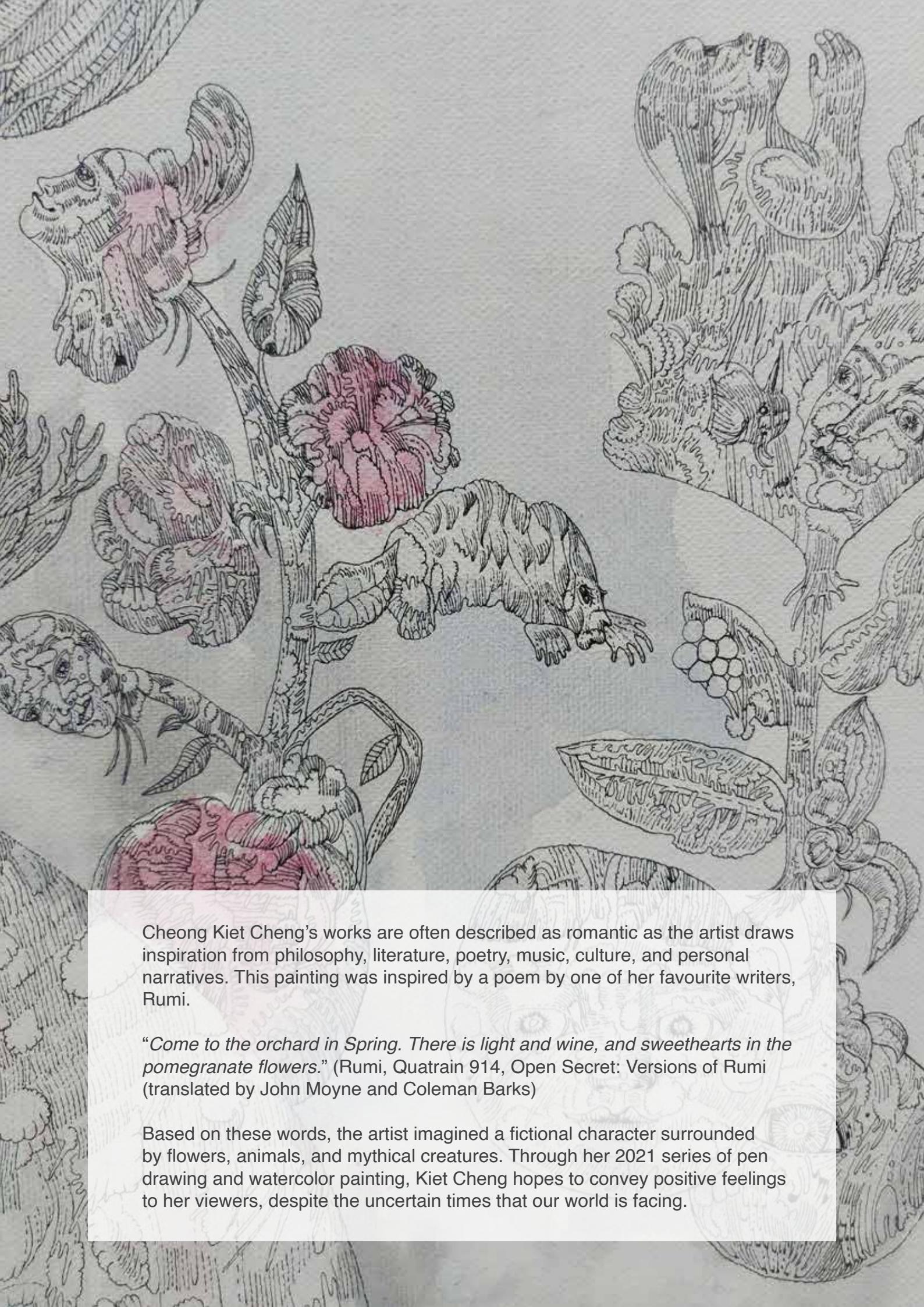
Went into the orchard in spring

Mixed media on canvas

54cm x 57cm

2021

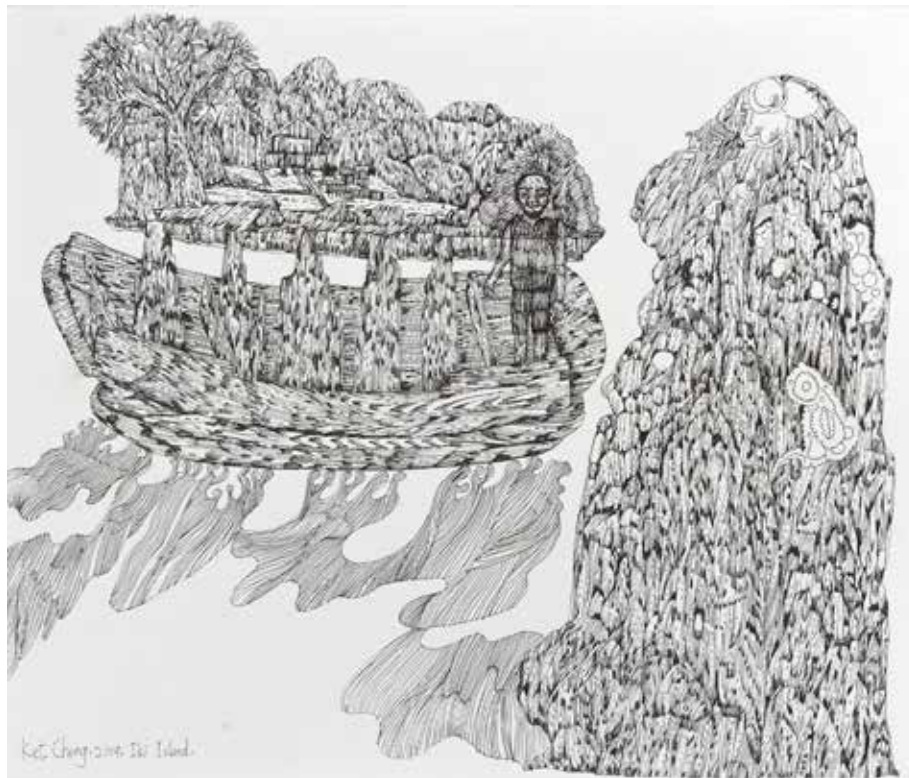
Went into the orchard in spring (2021) Close up



Cheong Kiet Cheng's works are often described as romantic as the artist draws inspiration from philosophy, literature, poetry, music, culture, and personal narratives. This painting was inspired by a poem by one of her favourite writers, Rumi.

"Come to the orchard in Spring. There is light and wine, and sweethearts in the pomegranate flowers." (Rumi, Quatrain 914, *Open Secret: Versions of Rumi* (translated by John Moyne and Coleman Barks)

Based on these words, the artist imagined a fictional character surrounded by flowers, animals, and mythical creatures. Through her 2021 series of pen drawing and watercolor painting, Kiet Cheng hopes to convey positive feelings to her viewers, despite the uncertain times that our world is facing.



The Creation of Sailing

Ink on canvas
38cm x 45cm
2019



Descendants of mountain

Ink on canvas
44cm x 53cm
2020



Kiet Cheng received the 2018 UOB Painting of the year and had the occasion to do a residency program in Fukuoka. During her stay there, she delved herself into the creation of drawings using pen on canvas. These small drawings are traces of her visits to different sites in Fukuoka, such as the Iki island, local villages, and the nature. As her first visit to Japan, the trip was memorable as she was deeply fascinated by the details both in the nature and traditional culture of the country.

Wild Flower
Ink on canvas
41cm x 32cm
2019

CHEONG KIET CHENG (B.1981)



Cheong Kiet Cheng's paintings have consistently highlighted the relationship between humans and nature. Although the situations she creates seem to convey over-riding feelings of beauty and love, the underlying elements of tension between the human and animal figures, emphasize that imperfection is unavoidable. Yet, one is still likely to find a tranquility within each of her works – an effect she achieves through a unique method of meditative, repetitive forms. As an artist, she is most interested in sharing positive energy through her work, rather than conforming to the conventional aesthetics in art.

Cheong Kiet Cheng is unrestricted by any particular medium, choosing instead to experiment with materials- from acrylic paints in earlier bodies of work to black ink in her latest series.-which allows her to evolve into new discoveries. The romantic quality of her work is a direct result of her own personal feelings towards nature, drawing much of her inspiration from philosophy, literature, poetry, music and theatrical drama.

She has won several major awards and prizes over the years, including the main prize at the 2018 UOB Painting of the Year (Malaysia) competition; Creative M50 Awards in Shanghai, China (2016); Nanjing International Art Festival Competition in China (2015); Water Color Category at Tanjong Public Limited Company, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (2006). Cheong Kiet Cheng was also the recipient of the esteemed UOB-Fukuoka Asian Art Museum's Artists Residency Programme in 2018, where she spent two months expanding on her practice in Japan.

EDUCATION

- 2006 Diploma in Fine Art, Dasein Academy of Art, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2002 Certificate in Journalism, Hang Xing Academy of Journalism, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Certificate in Basic Photography Course, PCP Art of Photography, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2003 Certificate in Drama Acting Course (Pin Stage)

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2021 We Are Dreaming and Awake In the Air, Wei-Ling Contemporary, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2019 Dust and the Silence in the Sun, Wei-Ling Contemporary, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2019 Life as a Stream of River, Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Fukuoka, Japan
- 2017 Between Two Hills - The Chorus of Life, Wei-Ling Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2015 Sing to the land of my heart, Wei-Ling Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2013 Jojo in the Wonderland, MAP – White Box, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
With Two Solo, Paradise of Gods by Hoo Kiew Hang

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2021 100 Pieces: Art for All, Wei-Ling Contemporary, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2019 18@8 Turning Points, Wei-Ling Contemporary, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Art Jakarta 2019, Jakarta Convention Center (JCC) Senayan, Jakarta, Indonesia
- 2019 Singapore 2019 Art Event, Gillman Barracks
- 2018 Art Jakarta, The Ritz-Carlton Jakarta, Pacific Place, Indonesia
Art Stage Singapore 2018, Marina Bay Sands, Singapore
- 2017 Through Rose-Tinted Glasses, Wei-Ling Contemporary, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
The 101 Women Show, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Group Show Art Expo Matrade, A2 Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2016 Shanghai M50 Emerging Artist Exhibition 2016, Shanghai, China
Malaysia Art Expo 2016, Matrade, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Intellectual, 3rd Nanjing International Art Festival, Baijia Lake Museum, Nanjing, China
- 2015 Nanjing International Art Festival 2015, China
- 2013 Young and New Part IV, HOM Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Malaysian Philippines Contemporary Art Exhibition, Mutiara Gallery, Penang, Malaysia
Measuring love, Wei-Ling Contemporary, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2011 VAA – Visual Art Award, Starhill Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2010 ‘Self Conflict, Social Cohesion’, Malaysia Tourism Centre (MaTiC), Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Malaysian Vietnamese Contemporary Art Exhibition, Mutiara Gallery, Penang, Malaysia
Asia Art Link, Philippines
- 2009 Iskandar Malaysia Contemporary Art Show, Johor Bahru, Malaysia
Global Warning-e11even, a2 Gallery, Penang, Malaysia
Reborn group exhibition, a2 Gallery, Penang, Malaysia
Art Expo group show, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

- 2008 Global Warming Group Exhibition, a2 Gallery, Penang, Malaysia
No Big Size Group Exhibition, Findars Space, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2005 Upstart 05: The NOKIA Creative Arts Awards Exhibition, ARTrageously Ramsay
Ong-The Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Pameran Terbuka Malaysia, National Art Visual Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2004 Upstart 04: The NOKIA Creative Arts Awards Exhibition, ARTrageously Ramsay
Ong-The Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

ART RESIDENCIES

- 2019 UOB-Fukuoka Asian Art Museum's Artists Residency Programme, Fukuoka, Japan
- 2012 Art-Residency in Sasaran Art Foundation, Selangor, Malaysia

AWARDS

- 2018 2018 UOB Painting of the Year (Malaysia) winner, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2016 Creative M50 Awards, Shanghai, China
- 2015 Nanjing International Art Festival Competition (Bronze Prize), China
- 2013 Finalist of Bakat Muda Sezaman, The Young Contemporaries '13, National Art
Visual Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2011 Finalist of VAA – Visual Art Award, Starhill Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2006 2nd Prize, Water Color Category, Tanjong Public Limited Company, Malaysia
- 2005 Finalist Upstart 05: The NOKIA Creative Arts Awards Exhibition, ARTrageously
Ramsay Ong-The Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2004 Finalist Upstart 04: The NOKIA Creative Arts Awards Exhibition, ARTrageously
Ramsay Ong-The Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia



Wei-Ling Gallery

Produced by Wei-Ling Gallery

To accompany the exhibition entitled '*We Are Dreaming and Awake In the Air*' by Cheong Kiet Cheng

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Cover image: *Linger* (2021) close up