







# REALITY IN WONDERLAND

Chin Kong Yee  
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Paris Cafe . 2008 . Oil on Canvas . 130 x 190cm . Private Collection . Featured in CIGE , Beijing, China

# CONTENTS

- 07** Foreword
- 10** Introduction
- 11** Chin Kong Yee : The Master of Beguiling Distortions  
by Francis Dass
- 14** Reality in Wonderland
- 36** A Decade of Practice
- 38** Reality in Wonderland  
by Kelvin Chuah
- 55** Temporal Grip and A Sense of Uneasiness  
by Chai Chang Hwang
- 59** Around the World
- 61** Temporal Grip and A Sense of Uneasiness ( English Translation)  
by Chai Chang Hwang
- 63** Curriculum Vitae
- 66** Acknowledgements



UOB is proud to be the presenting sponsor for the renowned local artist, Chin Kong Yee's "Reality in Wonderland" exhibition.

This solo exhibition showcases works derived from Kong Yee's recent trip to Europe and features many distinctive landmarks.

We are indeed privileged to be associated with a talented artist of his calibre and are happy to be able to continue to support his artistic development. The contemporary execution of his works is exemplary and refreshing and we would like to wish him every success as he continues on his artistic journey.

We are also delighted to work with Wei-Ling Gallery on this significant exhibition.

Mr. Chan Kok Seong  
Director & Chief Executive Officer  
United Overseas Bank (Malaysia) Bhd





Wei-Ling Gallery

The Gallery's relationship with Chin Kong Yee is a particularly meaningful one as it goes back more than seven years to when both the gallery and Chin Kong Yee first started out. For the gallery it was the second solo exhibition that the gallery had ever had and for Kong Yee it was his first ever solo exhibition! Those were challenging times, for neither Kong Yee nor the gallery had any past performances to go by. The only thing we had was fate, belief and luck. Fate because our paths crossed, belief because we both believed in one another and as luck would have it we came across people who had faith in us.

When I first came across Kong Yee's works all those years ago, I was immediately captivated by the way he envelops the viewer through his fish eye lens perspective and draws us into his magical space. I knew at that point that this artist had a tremendous gift. After having spent many hours getting to know him, I also began to understand Kong Yee. Here is an artist who has commitment and dedication to his artistic journey, who truly believes in his work. He is passionate to the point of being obsessive and he does not allow anything to come between him and his work. As a result his production of work is slow and arduous, with him making up to only six pieces a year. Over the last decade, Kong Yee has matured into one of the country's most promising artists, with a following which spans far beyond the shores of Malaysia. Through his work he has also had the opportunity to travel the world and this has added a new dimension to the way he sees and paints light.

With "Reality in Wonderland" Kong Yee has expanded his European repertoire to cover all the cities he visited on his last sojourn there. For Kong Yee the need to capture the 'essence' of the place still reigns most important and all the works reflect the spirit of what he experienced while he was there. We felt the timing for this publication was right as it marks a decade of Kong Yee in practice and documents his journey so far. After looking at what he has achieved over the last decade, I am confident to say that Chin Kong Yee is going to be a force to be reckoned with for many years to come.

We are very thankful to United Overseas Bank (Malaysia) for their continuous patronage of Chin Kong Yee over the years. I would like to say a big thank-you in particular to Mr Francis Lee for believing in and having the foresight to support the rise of this spectacular artist.

Lim Wei-Ling  
Gallery Director  
June 2009

It is good to see Chin Kong Yee's star rising again on everyone's radar with his latest and very compelling exhibition, titled "Reality in Wonderland", at Wei-Ling Gallery. Eleven wondrous new oil paintings are being showcased this time.

Looking at his new works, I do indeed get a sense of reality in wonderland, which has to be the most apt title for this exhibition. The structures in his paintings are real -- but there's Kong Yee's signature warping of the visuals and clustering of them to breathtaking effect. Yet, somehow, for all the exaggeration and heightening that the forms are put through, we all know that these places do exist. You can't help when you look at Kong Yee's oil paintings but smile in your mind and think to yourself, "Wow! If only the rest of us could see things that way!"

These new paintings are the fruits of Kong Yee's sojourns to Europe and Bali and were completed between 2008 and now. Places like Paris and Nice in France; Venice and Florence (Italy); Prague (Czech Republic); Portugal and Bali are rendered on canvas with twisted panache by Kong Yee. All the works are visually kneaded and stretched in Kong Yee's trademark style and what viewers get to see are indeed truly original and majestic portrayal of dignified buildings and places.

Like with all artists, colours, of course, play a major role in the success of Kong Yee's artistic endeavours. Colours do more than their assigned role of conveying emotions.

On the surface, the reds, blues, greens and a smattering of other colours indicate whether it is day or night or natural or artificial lights at play.

"Cathedral in Red" for example, has a nighttime setting but there is an interesting story behind the choice of colour. There was a fashion show being held at the cathedral when Kong Yee was visiting and the whole place was bathed in red light for effect by the fashion show organisers.

With other paintings, the tinges of green and blues on building and on the landscape in pieces like "Portugal", "Duomo Florence" and "Venice at Night" hint at dusk or nighttime. Yellow, naturally, depicts sunlight. These are simple and straightforward readings.

Now, all that was on-the-surface talk. Beneath the surface, however ( -- and despite Kong Yee's calm demeanour!), the artist intensely wrestles with the colours in each painting as he tries to subdue them and make them serve his purpose and vision.

"Red is actually a violent colour, although the Chinese see it as a lucky colour. I find red an exciting colour but a difficult one to express. You have to control it or it is going to go over-

the-top."

So, how do you deal with it?

"The artist has to find a way and this could take a lot out of him until he gets it to do what he wants to do," he explains, rather philosophically.

Kong Yee, needless to say, always gets his colours to do his bidding.

An outstanding part of the exhibition is a trifecta of paintings depicting people. "Walking"; "Bali" and "Nice 2" show Kong Yee's mastery of the human form. In his early days as an artist, he delved extensively into portrait painting and he has obviously mastered the dynamics of the human form. These three paintings are delightful because they draw our attention to the movement of people. There are no warping or distortions in these three particular pieces.

"These three pieces are like my "Life Museum" pieces. When a group of people are doing the same thing (in this case, walking), I find it very attractive. These are studies in movements," he reveals.

At this point, it bears saying that it has been one of my greatest privileges indeed to have met Chin Kong Yee and cultivated a friendship with this talented artist for about half a decade now. Born-bred-and-raised in the bustling city of Kuala Lumpur, Kong Yee's casual and easygoing manner run counter to the almost-staggering visions of reality that he presents both in his oil paintings and photography.

(Yes, he is also a very talented photographer. Earlier this year, I had the great privilege of seeing his digital photography works and I must say that they are beautiful glossy counterparts to the paintings that Kong Yee is most famous for. If you are interested in photography, his photography are must-see works.)

His mastery of paintings and photography are so complete that I dare say that he is a multi-medium genius indeed. Both in photographic print and on the canvas, his works are always visually vibrant.

In keeping with artistic traditions, on canvas, Kong Yee's works have indeed been informed by famous artists, like his favourite French painter, Paul Cezanne.

Even artists who made an impression on him in his student days, have had an effect on the works he produces today, however mildly it might be. Take Dutch artist M.C. Escher, for example.

"I saw works of M.C. Escher when I was a student and I was very inspired. Escher is more like a scientist than an artist. I like his logical take on things," says Kong Yee.

When prodded as to why he likes Cezanne, Kong Yee says, “Cezanne has always been very inspiring and has always been my favourite artist. I decided to become a professional artist because of Paul Cezanne. During my student days, he was always talked about as the father of modern art. I especially love the landscape works he has done. You can feel the landscape! Until today, I have not seen another artist who can paint landscape the way Cezanne did.”

Of his own style, actually Kong Yee himself says it best: “I was thinking about the kind of art works that I have done and I asked myself why my paintings have a lot of things surrounding me. That’s because Klang Valley really is a valley and we are always surrounded by things. We don’t have a distinct horizontal line.”

Indeed, our lives inform the kind of works of art that we produce!

With a capacity for self-reflection like that, is it any wonder at all that Chin Kong Yee’s star is on the ascendancy?

Francis Dass has been a journalist for the last 16 years with Malaysia’s leading newspapers. He writes on a range of topics from the arts, technology, education, health, fashion and “just about everything else,” he confesses. However, this highly regarded Penang-born journalist’s greatest passion has always been the arts. He is an avid photographer, short story writer and blogger.

REALITY IN WONDERLAND





Night in Venice I . 2008/09 . Oil on Canvas . 130 x 190 cm



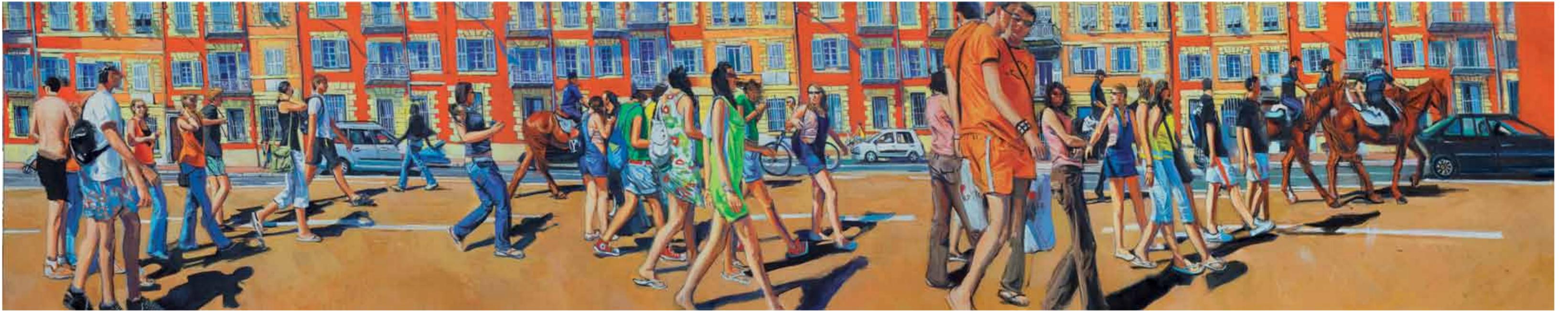
Nice . 2008 . Oil on Canvas . 190 x 340 cm

















Duomo Florence . 2008/09 . Oil on Canvas . 170 x 190 cm

Cityscapes & Landscapes

People

Portraits

Photographs

---

A DECADE OF PRACTICE



fig. 1

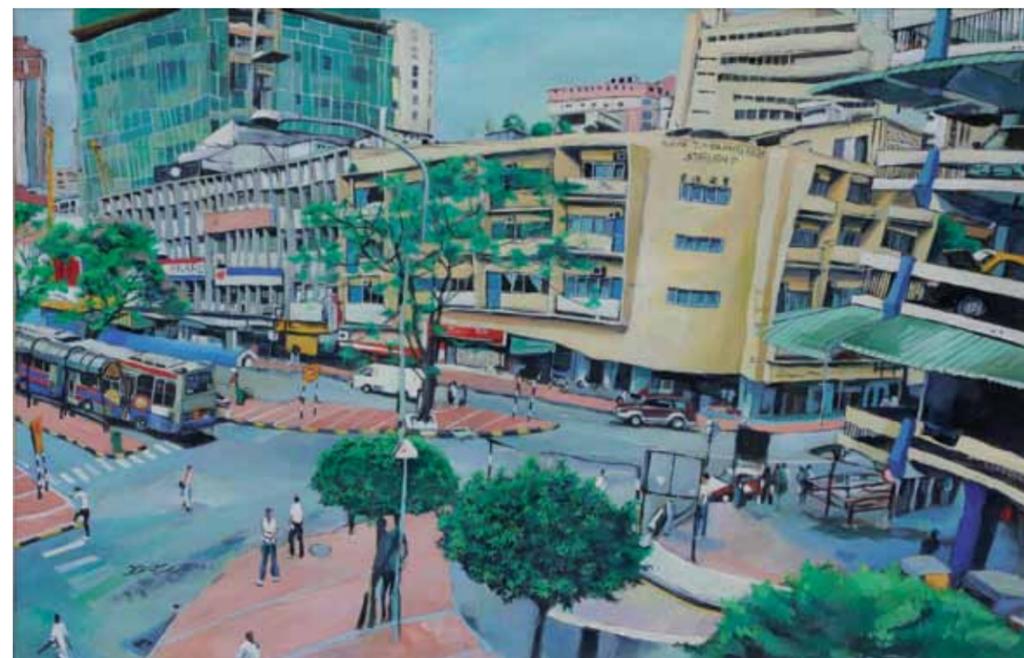


fig. 2

In the Introduction chapter of Heinrich Wölfflin's "Principles of Art History: The Problem of the Development of Style in Later Art," the author began with how 4 friends painted a similar landscape (same subject matter). They promised to remain true in the depiction of nature. At the end of the session, their productions reflected different results in accordance to individual character and personality. To artists and art historians, this observation is undoubtedly nothing new. Where everyone perceives and analyse things differently<sup>1</sup>. The question that comes to mind is, how do we comprehend and define our natural surroundings visually? Wölfflin further commented on the lesser interest of artists in style, stating that, "They take work exclusively from the standpoint of quality-is it good, is it self-sufficing, has nature found a vigorous and clear presentment..."<sup>2</sup> This quotation brings our attention to the uniqueness of highly stylized and individualized depictions. No doubt, the essentials of nature or a subject matter is faithfully portrayed. However, more questions stem from the end result of picture making. How do our minds see and digest visual and optical information? Disconcerting effects cause us to reflect on ambiguity and notions of the real.

Prodding on the notions of the real, it is perhaps essential to read into Wang Zineng's "Curatorial Notes" for "Strategies Towards the Real: S. Sudjojono and Contemporary Indonesian Art." Wang posed these questions, "Is the real an objective realm that can be seen and understood similarly by everyone... Is the real as plain and apparent as the reality that surrounds us?"<sup>3</sup> The real is further proposed by Wang to be conceptual in nature, when compared to reality.<sup>4</sup> In this instance, the proposition of the real in a configured setting fits the ideals and productions of Chin Kong Yee like a bullet to a gun. The artist's time-based studies created interesting and whimsical memories. Hence, actual scenarios seemingly become the stage for fantasy constructed and derived from the real to showcase recollections of the past.

In departure from academic training of depicting accurately what we see in front of us, Kong Yee plunged into the artistic problems that arise from visual possibilities. There is a sense of continual transformation. The vision is juxtaposed in incongruous space, creating multiple layers in its evolvement from past, present to future. Chin Kong Yee presents depictions with different perspectives and experiences flowing through the paintings. Closer observation would perchance provide more acute and rhetorical readings of his intentions.

Perhaps Kong Yee's artistic productions may also be seen from the viewpoint of pictorial representation. In "Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation," Ernst Hans Gombrich questioned the representation of the visible world in different periods or ages. The author used exemplifications from psychology, philosophy to science in his construction of the answer to the above. Gombrich also brought our attention to the concept of schema. Meaning that the artist "begins not with his visual impression but with his idea or concept" and that the artist adjusts this idea to fit, as well as it can, the object, landscape, or person before him or her. Gombrich calls this theory "making and matching."<sup>5</sup> To digress, Kong Yee obliged to share his working methodology with me in dialogue.

fig.1  
Jalan Hang Kasturi . 1999 . Acrylic on Paper . 42 x 76 cm . Private Collection

fig. 2  
Starlight . 2000 . Acrylic on Paper . 57 x 41 cm . Private Collection

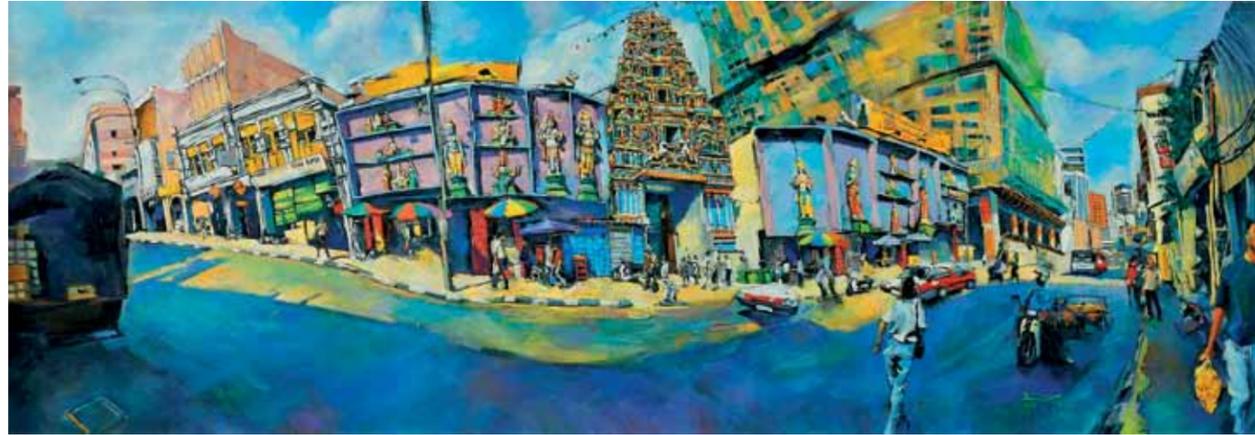


fig. 3

fig. 4



fig. 3

Indian Temple . 2001 . Oil on Canvas . 60 x 120 cm . Private Collection

fig. 4

Circular Street . 2002 . Oil on Canvas . 250 x 130 cm . Collection of United Overseas Bank (Malaysia)



fig. 5

He mentioned going to various places to capture the essence of the place. Kong Yee manipulates the images until he is satisfied before he works on the final art work. The artist has a preconceived idea of the desired effect and reconstructs existing images by kneading and wedging the idea to merge with the subject matter. Indeed, the concept of schema may define the stylistic tendencies of Kong Yee. It is interesting to note that the pictorial schema have also developed in ways that is different from the cult of the picturesque.

In 1768, William Gilpin published three essays on the Picturesque. The essays were entitled “Picturesque Beauty”, “Picturesque Travel” and “Picturesque Landscape”. They served as guidelines to professional and amateur artists.<sup>6</sup> In addition, the essays provided directives as to how landscape compositions should be drawn, proposing clear definitions between the foreground, mid-ground and background. These were seen as important aspects required for the portrayal of inspiring compositional landscapes. The elements featured details, depth-of-view, nature and atmospheric conditions.<sup>7</sup> Kong Yee’s paintings are in a way, an infusion of schematics combined with elements of the picturesque to create a unique vision of his surroundings (Fig. 7).

In a feature of Kong Yee’s previous solo exhibition, Li-En Chong wrote that the artist was inspired by Surrealism and Abstract Cubism.<sup>8</sup> My dialogue session with the artist suggested Cezanne as an important influence. The latter’s usage of colour and fragmentation of objects to basic shapes, coupled with his indifference from portraying reality as it is resulted in a huge impact on Chin Kong Yee. Here, we may sense the attempts made by Kong Yee not to create a reproduction but to express and enforce the feelings felt from depicting the subject matter (Fig. 6). He did not want to emulate Cezanne. Kong Yee wanted to look beyond, developing his own ideals and concepts of time and vision.

Another feature written by Francis Dass provided interesting insight on street scenes. Dass wrote that, “If one really takes the time to observe closely, the streets are very telling of the cultural influence that surrounds and pervades them. Streets lined with kopitiam have a distinctly Chinatown feel, while those with Indian or Indian-Muslim shops have a uniquely quaint air about them just as city centres and their buildings have a distinctively cosmopolitan and urban feel to them.”<sup>9</sup> (Fig. 8 and Fig. 9)

“Reality in Wonderland” sounds like a title for a Walt Disney cartoon, ala Alice in Wonderland. A paradox of living in the unreal or fantastical world we see in animation. Chin Kong Yee has made sense of this, by juxtaposing real situations within imaginative settings. The artist feels strongly for this, noting that in reality nothing is stagnant. Images change and evolve as we look at them. Years ago, the artist invented a painting style he coined Actuality Accorded Painting (AAP). The rendition of AAP may be read as

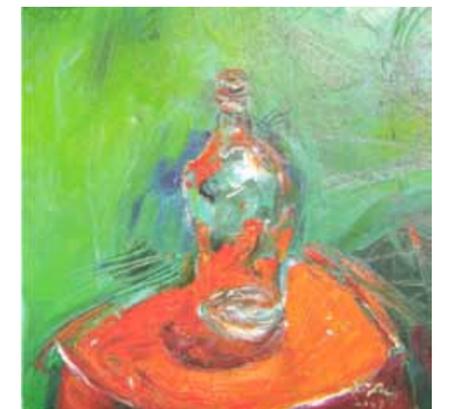


fig. 6

fig. 5 *Infinite* . 2003 . Oil on Canvas . 173 x 191 cm . Collection of Anika Insurance Brokers  
fig. 6 *Bottle on Red & Green* . 2001 . Oil on Canvas . 30 x 30 cm . Private Collection

the depiction of the real via non-stagnated images that change and evolve as we look at them. The unfixed image is thus the artist's impression of different times and happenings of a place viewed collectively in a single instance. This time-based study of the artist produced images that titillate our senses. Recently, I asked him about AAP again, in a bid to extract deeper meanings for this technique. His response was to paint according to one's feelings and intent, not to follow others. The painting will stand-out if it is done with honesty.

How did it all begin for Chin Kong Yee? What prompted him to create such idyllic and mind-bending images that we see today? For every artist, there is a starting point, a tiny step that set them on the yellow brick road in a bid to achieve their goals and objectives. Chin Kong Yee began his artistic practice in 1999. Swept up by the tornado that is the Asian financial crisis, he was inherently strong-willed and determined to succeed in his ambition. The financial instability and insecurity he felt prompted the need to look beyond the confines of stereoscopic vision. Kong Yee said, "How do we see in a wider scope in view of all the uncertainties we face?" Being aware of the focal issues in monocular visions, he sought for answers in the encompassing vision of living things like fish and dragonfly. He also voiced the human need for others to see in a wider spectrum, be it diagonally or vertically. His intention to expand our human view started the early paintings that would have been rejected decades ago. From Kuala Lumpur, Kong Yee created his own visual language, stretching our vision beyond the norm. He studied time, incorporating antiquarian and current elements in a historical dialogue. The title became a notation of the place, which is less significant to the point of inconsequence. Each painting was a narrative, filled with layering similar to Chinese paintings. Note the elongated Chinese format of certain paintings (left to right or right to left) (Fig. 8). The artist voiced his concern again stating that, "Everything is detailed and focused in the background. Good layering is a must of every painting. Then only do we have more things to see in the painting". Figure became a very important aspect of his works. 'Disjointed people' enforced the fleeting moments and our impermanence in time.

An avid traveller, Kong Yee is never without his trusty camera, looking for interesting objects or compositions. Photography is important to the work. He takes every view and angle into consideration before embarking on finalizing his composition, with a penchant to look at the environment, people and local life. The artist gently reminds me that he did not



fig. 8



fig. 9



fig. 7

fig. 7 **Dungun** . 2004 . Oil on Canvas . 114 x 195 cm . *Collection of Aliya & Farouk Khan*  
 fig. 8 **Queen Street** . 2004 . Oil on Canvas . 114 x 195 cm . *Private Collection*  
 fig. 9 **Place Series Kuala Lumpur** . 1999 . Acrylic on Paper . 56 x 76 cm . *Private Collection*



fig. 10



fig. 11

use fish-eye lens for photo shooting. Furthermore, much of how he shot was determined by ideas he had at that point of time. According to Kong Yee, photographs presented real documentaries, while painting dealt with colour and form. Colour, especially, was crucial in its definition of time and space.

If we compare the earlier productions to the later ones, Kong Yee has developed and matured rapidly as an artist. In a decade of practice, viewers are taken on a ride to grow and learn from this prolific artist. Older works positioned the viewer at t-junctions compacted with details and perspective. From 1999 to 2003 much of Kong Yee's attention was directed at buildings. From 2003, he arrived at crossroads in his practice. Being more at peace with himself compared to the turbulent years, his style also matured. Kong Yee began using a sphere to represent inner peace and calm at the center, protected against the storm raging at the periphery (Fig. 11). Until 2007, he was deeply ingrained in his use of the same colour range and confined himself to working within a specified space or frame. His recent works are poignant and suggestive. New works are more personal, featuring stairs and bridge(s) signifying a communicative discourse with his grandmother. The works are thus an outpouring of innate feelings and sensitivity in confluence with his experience of travelling abroad.

Kong Yee read a wide range of topics, including Chinese philosophy. The reason, he said was the need to know and to understand. He has also read extensively into Western and Eastern art history. I vividly remember his take on art history, "To be a contemporary artist, we need to know [art] history. Do not divide Eastern and Western Art. Collate all forms of history as reference for our work." Kong Yee recognized the

fig. 10  
C.B.G. in Penang Kopitiam . 2005 . Oil on Canvas . 111.5 x 111.5 cm  
Collection of Aliya & Farouk Khan

fig. 11  
Stuttgart Museum . 2006/7 . Oil on Canvas . 179 x 190 cm  
Collection of Aliya & Farouk Khan

importance of history as a foundation for art practice. "In order to move forward we have to understand our history", he added.

In the course of writing for Chin Kong Yee, one wonders at the surreal sensations experienced, falling deeper and deeper into his reality or is it wonderland?

*Footnotes:*

<sup>1</sup> Heinrich, Wölfflin. Principles of Art History: The Problem of the Development of Style in Later Art. M. D. Hottinger trans. United States: Dover Publications, Inc., 1950, p. 1

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 10

<sup>3</sup> Wang, Zineng. 'Curatorial Notes' Strategies Towards the Real: S. Sudjojono and Contemporary Indonesian Art. Singapore: NUS Museum, 2008, p. 7

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> "Art and Illusion" 17 June 2009 <<http://www.enotes.com/art-illusion>>

<sup>6</sup> Ades, Dawn, ed. Art in Latin America: The Modern Era, 1820-1980. Cambridge, New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1989, p. 74-75.

<sup>7</sup> Piyadasa, Redza. "The Cult of the Picturesque." Business Times [Kuala Lumpur] 11 Jan. 1997: n.p.

<sup>8</sup> Chong, Li-En. "The view from his crystal ball" The Star 6 June 2005, p. 19.

<sup>9</sup> Dass, Francis. "Under the sheltering sky" New Straits Times. 27 June 2005, p. 12-13.

Kelvin Chuah is an artist, curator, writer, lecturer and writer. He is currently researching into the art and art history of Southeast Asia.

fig. 12  
Barcelona at Night . 2006/7 . Oil on Canvas . 170 x 190 cm  
Private Collection

fig. 13  
Lisbon at Night . 2008 . Oil on Canvas . 170 x 190 cm  
Private Collection



fig. 12



fig. 13

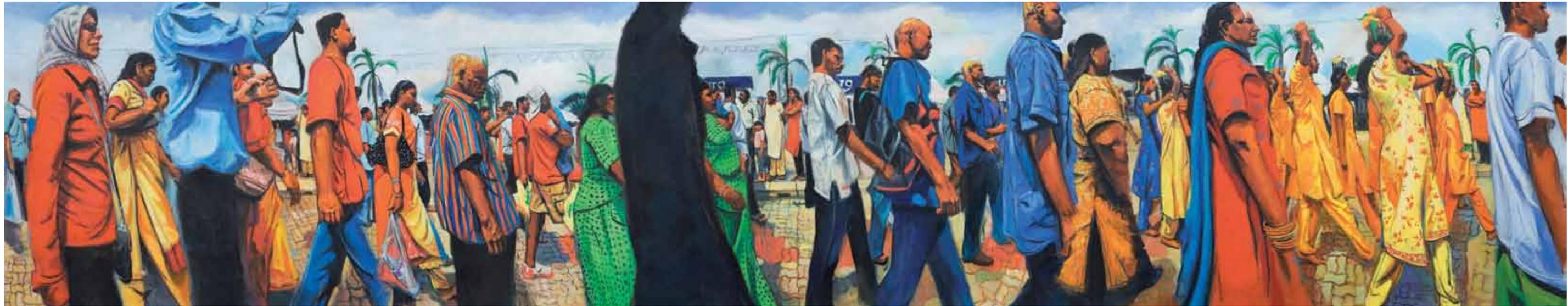


fig. 14

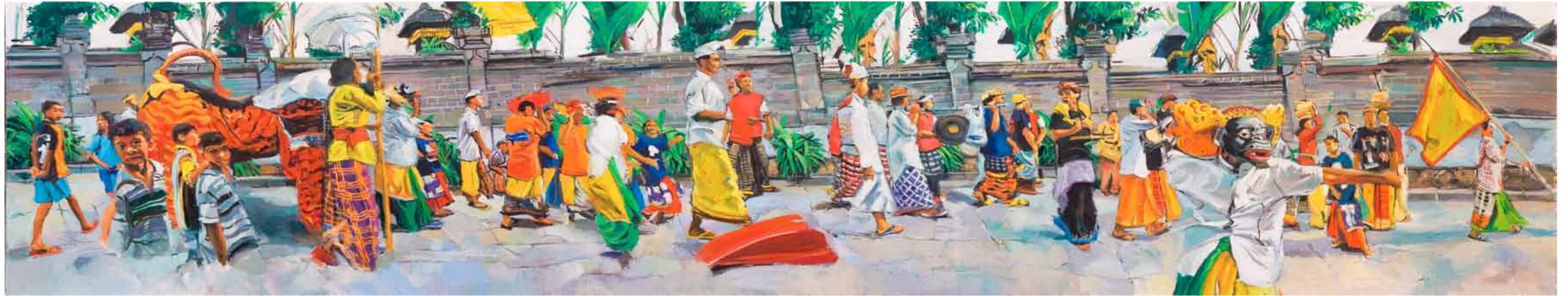


fig. 15

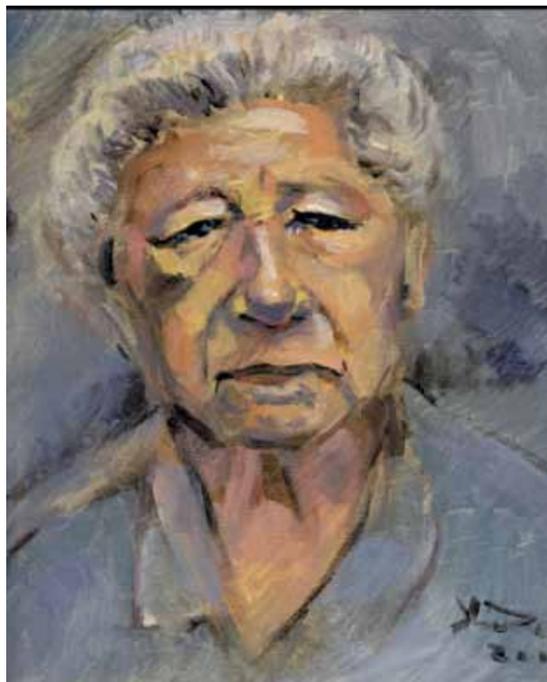


fig. 16



fig. 17

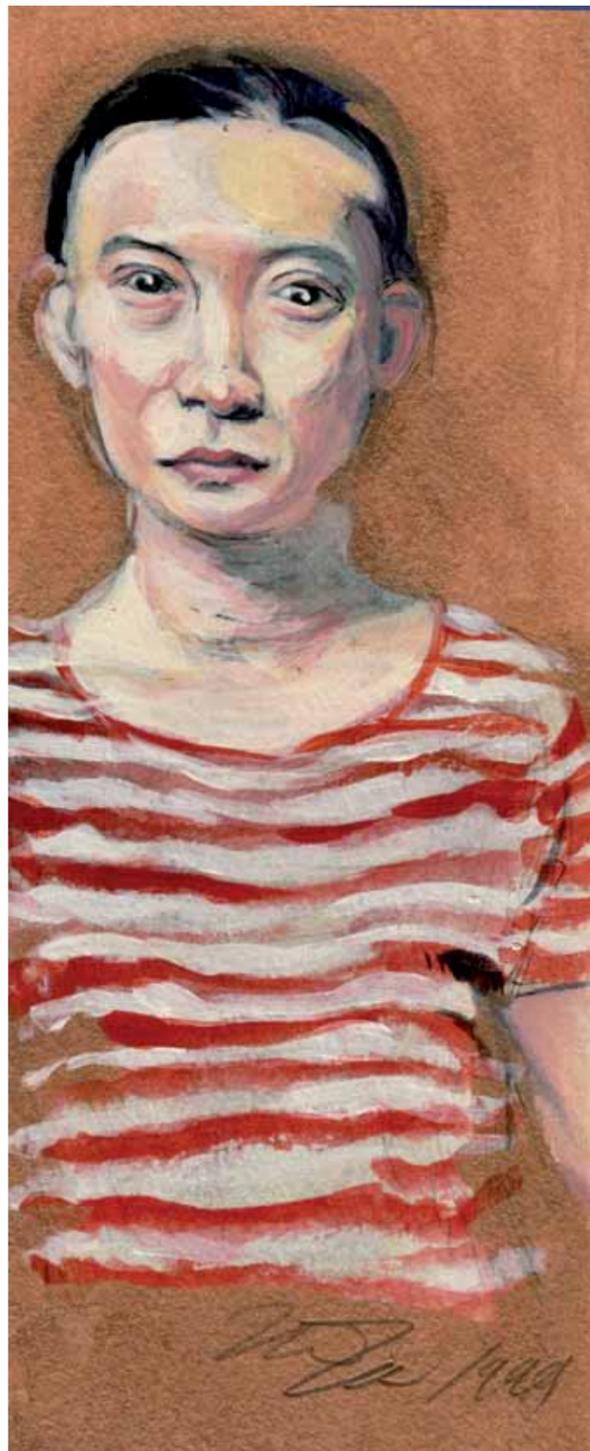


fig. 18

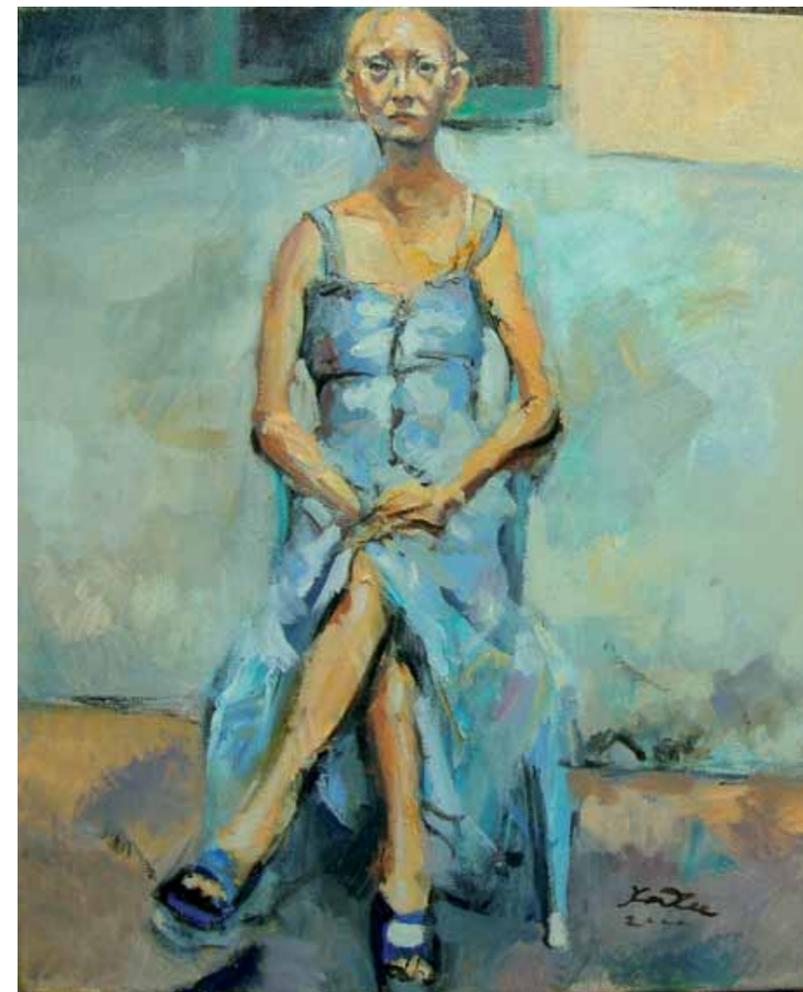


fig. 19

fig. 16  
Portrait of Chong . 2000 . Oil on Canvas . 30.5 x 30.5 cm

fig. 17  
Portrait of Ching Boon Geok 2 . 2000 . Oil on Canvas . 32.5 x 41 cm

fig. 18  
Portrait of Ching Boon Geok 4 . 2000 . Acrylic on Paper . 22 x 8.5 cm

fig. 19 Portrait of Ching Boon Geok 5 . 2000 . Oil on Canvas . 46 x 38 cm



fig. 20

fig. 20  
Bali . 2006 . C-Print . 100 x 70 cm

fig. 21  
Ampang . 2006 . C-Print . 100 x 70 cm



fig. 21



fig. 22

fig. 22  
Basilica S. Pietro . 2006 . C-Print . 100 x 70 cm

fig. 23  
Kunst Museum Stuttgart . 2006 . C-Print . 100 x 70 cm



fig. 23

## 抓紧时间，缠夹不安：浅谈陈刚毅的视觉秩序

文 / 蔡长璜 (Chai Chang Hwang)

真正的画触及一种缺席——没有画，我们或许察觉不到这种缺席。而那将是我们的损失。

——John Berger, 艺术批评家

### 一、时间长卷：塞尚的美学启迪

陈刚毅的《Batu Caves》发表于去年 Wei-Ling 画廊主办的一项群展上：图中显示了卫塞节游行庆典的情景，参与人群都秉持着一个信念——对宗教的虔诚，——而纵使彼此互不熟悉，依然并肩接踵地向前慢行，男男女女，从从容容。

无论如何，画家撷取“多视角的表现法”来制图，他的出发点，旨在消解“绘画乃是客观描述语言”的陈见：就审美享受言之，某些人物看似已经陷入一种神思恍惚的状态般，身体不由得左右摇晃，位移，乃至自我变形，前一秒钟和后一秒钟交织在一起，以致“过去的人”及“现在的人”得以图像方式集成，共存，不经意间竟成为时间绵延的例证。

这种类似中国手卷式绘画的横条形画面构成，一直都不是刚毅的创作重心。他坦言，上述倾向以人文景观来作为探索主体的作品，这些年来，大概只画过三四幅罢了，最早一个尝试便是完成于四年前的《Hari Kuningan》。此外，在新作当中，亦有一幅同样沿袭相关概念与章法的：该画取材自法国南部一个傍海小镇，只见年轻男女，成群结队，一派轻松自在地朝向海边走去；色彩捕捉了阳光的明媚和夏日的风采，值得一提的是，画家愈趋成熟的艺术造诣再次烘托出时光流转的感觉！

从意味层来说，时间感，由表及里，形成阅读其创作文本的一个关键字眼。

攸关西洋绘画的历史进程，刚毅本身拥有一套果于自信的诠释。在他看来，文艺复兴后期开始盛行的一种创造样式，即所谓符合科学理性原理以及人类视觉逻辑的框架条件，恰恰是许多艺术家对传译时间这个命题了无兴趣的导因。

“拉斐尔 (Raphael Sanzio) 之后，西洋画家越来越重视临场感——就像人在现场，身在其中那样的感觉，——显然，那不过是一瞬间的静态效果而已。”他接着说，“直到塞尚 (Paul Cezanne) 出现了，情况开始有所转变，各种试探时间的可能性才获得全面地挥发，譬如杜象 (Marcel Duchamp)，未来主义，等等。”

对于塞尚，刚毅的切入似乎也跟一般人迥异，藉着这名艺术家的静物画，他试图说明两个特征，一是塞尚有能把不同时间压缩在同一个画面空间里；二则其作品都是经由长时间从不同视角观察出来的结果。

稍有一点绘画经验的人理应了解，人的视域 (visual field) 委实难以一直处于固定状态下，因此眼前的观察对象不但会“随时变形”，甚至，其轮廓与位置还会“不停移动”，塞尚——也许应该包括刚毅在内——便是通过对事物反复观察的过程，进而把握住一种视觉形式的秩序结构；约言之，一幅画所呈现的，不仅是时间的赋形，“它还涉及了一种存有的探讨”。

“艺术的表达蕴含了创作者自我生命的流露。我的作品并不纯粹，即便是画一幅风景画，也不能够原原本本地照搬自然世界中的一石一木。”

总之，如果我们追究刚毅那些特别注重“视觉感知” (visual perception) 的艺术实践和创作观念的端点，源起，那么答案岂非素有“现代绘画之父”美誉的塞尚莫属，不是吗？

### 二、心灵空间：不安的直觉形式

城市，街道，对陈刚毅来讲，俨然是一个舞台，经常都有精彩演出，召唤着人们投以好奇的欣赏的眼光。然则，毋宁说，一幢富含历史代表性的建筑物外观，足以铸塑出时光流逝的厚重感，不如说，那些街头，人行道，交通标志，民众百姓等兼容了生命痕迹与政治意义的日常生活概貌，更适宜权充时间感之隐喻。于是，画家强调：

“城市无疑是一种表现当代生存感觉的最佳题材。”不但如此，而且，他尚有一种期待：“一座旧建筑的去留和存废完全取决于它的拥有者，街道的景观，无形中就是很多人的集体的意愿，我会尽可能忠实地揭示出这个事实来。”

起初，刚毅专注于描绘吉隆坡这个哺育出画家的城市。多年多年之后，其游踪才慢慢延伸到登嘉楼，檳城，曼谷与清迈等地方。2004年，他去罗马尼亚旅行，眼界打开了，于是，当下便有准备走遍欧洲各大城小镇的念头；惟，其后续结果没有令人失望，就在前年一项双人联展上，我们终于看到刚毅清一色“秀”出以当地街道和广场——还有旅行中间所见所闻——作为表现对象的佳作了。

“当你来到一个陌生的环境，刚刚踏上去那一刻，感觉准会特别敏锐。而且，你越是对那个地方不了解，就越容易产生不安全感！”

刚毅这番话，很清醒地，阐明了其作品与作品之间的连贯性，一如他在态度上在概念上的一致性，并且，把旁人的疑惑——误以为画家可能出于一种怀旧情愫，抑或，外国月亮比较圆的心理作祟，否则何来“到欧罗巴走一趟”之必要？——一并化解掉了。

不安全感，想必是驱使画家创作的不二法门！

像“吉隆坡系列”大多以描绘十字路口为主，画幅不大，却同时铺排着多重视角下的组合关系，宽广的视线范围把围绕人的各种景物统统包罗起来，形成一个极端混乱，窘促，悬乎不宁的画面。此外，在其早期作品中，甚至还能看到一种现代城市人普遍上都有的紧张，这或多或少跟画家彼时的处境息息相关：对未来充满不确定性，孤单，彷徨，焦虑，等等。

即使到了欧洲，刚毅于心酌量的，乃是自己的情感因何时何地而唤起冲动——创作的冲动，——约言之，画家完全凭着视觉感知，去洞察去搜集那些直觉的自然的反应。惟，最后呈显出来的视觉特性：波折回环，压挤叠错，零碎杂凑，等等，必然经过一番移情作用，就仿佛一连串经验，印象和记忆互涉过程中结构起来的审美情绪（aesthetic emotion），“从根本上说，那是艺术家个人生存状态的投射。”

结束本文之前，不得不提起，刚毅还擅于描绘天空，尤其常见画中晴空万里，浮云悠悠，看久了益发迷人眼目。另一方面，有趣的是，以《Infinites》与《Barcelona at Night》为例来讲，天空居然可以完整地乃至圆融地平展于诸多物象之间：前者有着弧一样的形状，后者则拟似一个十字架造型，甚且，是以一种感觉上异乎寻常的透视表现，即把平视角和仰视角糅合在一起并嵌入直立悬挂观赏的画面上，让看画的人宛如被笼罩其下！

就某种意义上讲，我们所习惯的观看方式被“重造”（re-making）了，反而大大地增强其动势张力。

事实上，面对这些画作时，我们切莫将之视为一种纯粹的绘制手段，或者，图像风格，更无法不通过创作者的直觉形式来深入他的心灵空间，抑或，不安气氛，亦可谓“新的感性”的。我们瞥见另一种视觉秩序。





1 & 2 : Ausstellung:  
zweihundertzweiundsie-  
bzigeinhalbstunden un  
mehr, Galerie Tanner,  
Germany

3 & 4 : Sos Chateau de  
Tremazan, France

5. Teaching in Romania

6 & 7 : East-West Con-  
temporaries, Cluj-Na-  
poca Art Museum, Ro-  
mania



# AROUND THE WORLD

# 61 | TEMPORAL GRIP AND A SENSE OF UNEASINESS: The Visual Order of Chin Kong Yee's Paintings

Chai Chang Hwang

Every painted image of something is also about the absence of the real thing. All painting is about the presence of absence.  
- John Berger -

## 1. Cezanne's Aesthetics: Unrolling the Temporal Scroll

Chin Kong Yee's "Batu Caves" (fig. 14) was featured in a group exhibition hosted by Wei-Ling Gallery last year. In this painting, the Wesak Day festivities crystallize into devotion of the colourful procession of believers. Strangers they may be to each other; nonetheless, they file past in ease, peace and harmony. The passage of time is expressively depicted by swaying bodies, stretched and distorted – the appearance of the same person seconds apart coexists, challenging the single-point perspective in conventional temporal representation. The painter uses a multi-perspective approach to define his viewpoints; the visual narrative is anything but objective.

Chin's use of temporal continuity resembles that of Chinese scroll painting. This, however, has never been the artist's creative thrust. Over the years, he has only produced a handful of such paintings that adopt human landscape for an artistic pursuit.

"The earliest work of this genre was "Hari Kuningan" (fig. 15) which I completed four years ago. Among my recent paintings, there is one with the same concept and approach. The painting portrays a seaside town in the South of France. Young men and women are strolling towards the waterfront, bathing in the sun and flaunting themselves in a chic summer style." Interestingly enough, as Chin's artistic prowess matures, the rendition of temporal flow is given an even defter hand.

The feeling of time, incidentally, penetrates his works and becomes the key to appreciating them. Chin has his own idea about the historical development of Western paintings. The so-called scientific and visually-logical framework that fascinated people during the late Renaissance is, to him, the very reason why time has fallen out of favour as a subject of artistic pursuit.

"Western painters after Raphael Sanzio were engrossed with the concept of being 'in situ' -- that is, at the scene of depiction. Obviously, this is but just a moment frozen in time. Cezanne brought changes; ever since, painters such as Marcel Duchamp and ideologies such as futurism, have untiringly explored the temporal possibilities to uncover their full potential."

Chin has chosen to approach Cezanne's works in a different manner. By focusing on Cezanne's still life paintings, he wants to highlight two characteristics: that the great master is capable of compressing stretches of time in a single space; and that his works are the results of long-time observation from different viewpoints. People familiar with paintings will agree that the visual field is constantly changing; as such, not only will images 'change' along the way, their outlines 'keep shifting'. The works of Cezanne (and Chin as such) are a visual rendition of a structural order. In simple words, a painting does not only realise an object at a particular point in time, it also involves the "exploration of existence".

"Artistic expression is by and large the artist's expression of his own life. My paintings are not just visual images – even with landscape, I do not just paint it the way Nature presents herself visually."

When we begin tracing the origin of Chin's creative concept and artistic practice along the path of visual perception, we may see Cezanne as the source of it.

# 62

## 2. Room for the Soul: an Unsettling Intuition

Cities and streets are to Chin a stage on which drama unfolds every now and then, to the curious delight of man. While historical buildings signify the heavy-hearted passage of time, these are but a befitted backdrop. The streets, the pavements, the traffic signs and people in general are far better metaphors of time – they are impregnated with the nuances of our daily lives. As the artist puts it:

"Cities are the best subject matter in expressing the contemporary feeling of existence; this is without a shadow of doubt. The decision to keep or demolish an old building lies entirely on its owner. The streetscape, however, is a collective decision and happening – something I seek to reflect in all its honesty."

To begin with, Chin focused on Kuala Lumpur, the city where he was born and brought up. He then widened his scope to include Terengganu, Penang, Bangkok and Chiang Mai. In 2004, he travelled to Romania, after which he decided to visit the cities in Europe. In a two-person exhibition (Eye-Ilusions) two years ago, he showcased the results of these trips – paintings of city scenes, highlighting the streets, squares and the happenings.

"The moment you set foot on a strange land, your senses will be heightened. The more unfamiliar you are with the place, the more insecure you will feel."

This, perhaps, illustrates the consistency in Chin's concept and attitude towards creativity. While people may doubt if his European trips are fuelled by nostalgia or worship for everything western, it is the feeling of insecurity he pursues. In other words, an unsettling mind may well be the creative drive behind the artist's works. Paintings in the "Kuala Lumpur" series, (fig. 1 & 2) for instance, zoom in onto crossroads in the city. The multi-viewpoint composition covers the people and everything in sight in a small painting, creating a chaotic, claustrophobic and unsettling scene. In fact, there is a prevailing sense of tension of urban folks his earlier works. This may be a projection of the artist's own situation at the time – being lonely, helpless, anxious, and uncertain about the future.

When he was in Europe, Chin was paying absolute attention to his own creative urge. He monitored his intuitive response to the world around, relying on nothing but his visual perception. The resulting collage of visual representation – distorted, compressed, overlapped and fragmented – is the artist's response with empathy. "Basically, it is the projection of the artist's state of existence." The aesthetic emotion is, therefore, structured by a series of experience, impressions and superimposed memories.

I would also like to bring up Chin's accomplishment in painting vast expanse of sky with passing cloud – scenes that are pleasing to the eyes and calming to the minds. Take "Infinite" (fig. 5) and "Barcelona at Night" (fig. 12) as examples, the sense of harmony which arises from the sky spreading uninterrupted across canvas, punctuated with a host of images. In "Infinite", the sky is a great vault, while in "Barcelona at Night", it combines both levelled and elevated viewpoints in a cross-like composition. The impact is overwhelming. As such, our habit of viewing is 're-made'. The paintings have taken on a greater impact and magnitude. To me, this is a means for the artist to render his paintings or to present images. It is almost impossible not to visit his soul or feel his restlessness through his intuitive approach. Perhaps, this could be the 'new sensibilities'. I see an alternative visual order in Chin's paintings.

Chai Chang Hwang b. 1969, Taiping, Perak, is a member of Rumah Air Panas an artist-run-space established in 1997. Graduating with a Diploma in Fine Art from Malaysian Institute of Art in 1990, he is also a freelance writer, contributing to local Mandarin publications and newspapers. Actively involved in the Malaysian art scene, he now lives and works in Kuala Lumpur.

CHIN KONG YEE

b.1973

**Education**

1990

Central Academy of Art, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

**Solo Exhibitions**

2009

Reality In Wonderland, Wei-Ling Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

2005

Cerulean Skies, Townhouse Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

2003

Undulating Spaces, Townhouse Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

**Selected Group Exhibitions**

2008

Chinese National Gallery Exposition, Chinese World Trade Centre, Beijing, China

Mind, Body and Soul 3, Wei-Ling Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

18@8 Vice and Virtue, Wei-Ling Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

2007

(Eye)-Illusions, 2 man show, Wei-Ling Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

18@8 2007, Wei-Ling Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

2006

18@8 Kuala Lumpur - Karachi, Amin Gulgee Gallery, Karachi, Pakistan

(in Collaboration with Wei-Ling Gallery)

Convergence - Contemporary Malaysian Art, Wei-Ling Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Ausstellung : zweihundertzweiundsiebzigminuten und mehr, Galerie Tanner, Germany

Mind, Body and Soul 2, Wei-Ling Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

2005

18@8 : Contemporary Artists from Malaysia and Beyond, Wei-Ling Gallery, Kuala Lumpur,

Malaysia

2004

East-West Contemporaries, Cluj-Napoca Art Museum, Romania

SEOUL International Stars Exhibition, Seoul, Korea

2003

Philip Morris Group of Companies Malaysia Art Awards 2003, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

2002

Identities Who We Are, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Figuring Splendour, Metro Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

2001

Locals Only! Gallerie Taksu, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Manusia, N.N. Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

2000

World in Square Feet, Central Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Colours of Brazil, Isetan Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

3 Man Show, Anugerah Gallery, Star Hill Libby, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

The Philip Morris Group of Companies ASEAN Art Awards 2000, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

**Workshops/Residency Programmes**

2004

Cluj-Napoca Art Museum, Romania (Seminar/Workshop/Exhibition)

Invited by organizer Dorothea Fleiss and East West Group of Artists

Artist in Residence at Pangkor Laut Resort

(Sponsored by YTL Hotels and Properties)

2002

Artist-in-Residence at Tanjung Jara Resort

(Sponsored by YTL Hotels and Properties)

**Awards**

2000

Honourable Mention, Philip Morris Group of Companies ASEAN Art Awards

**Public Collections**

Wong &amp; Partners

National Art Gallery, Malaysia

United Overseas Bank, Malaysia

Anika Insurance Brokers, Malaysia

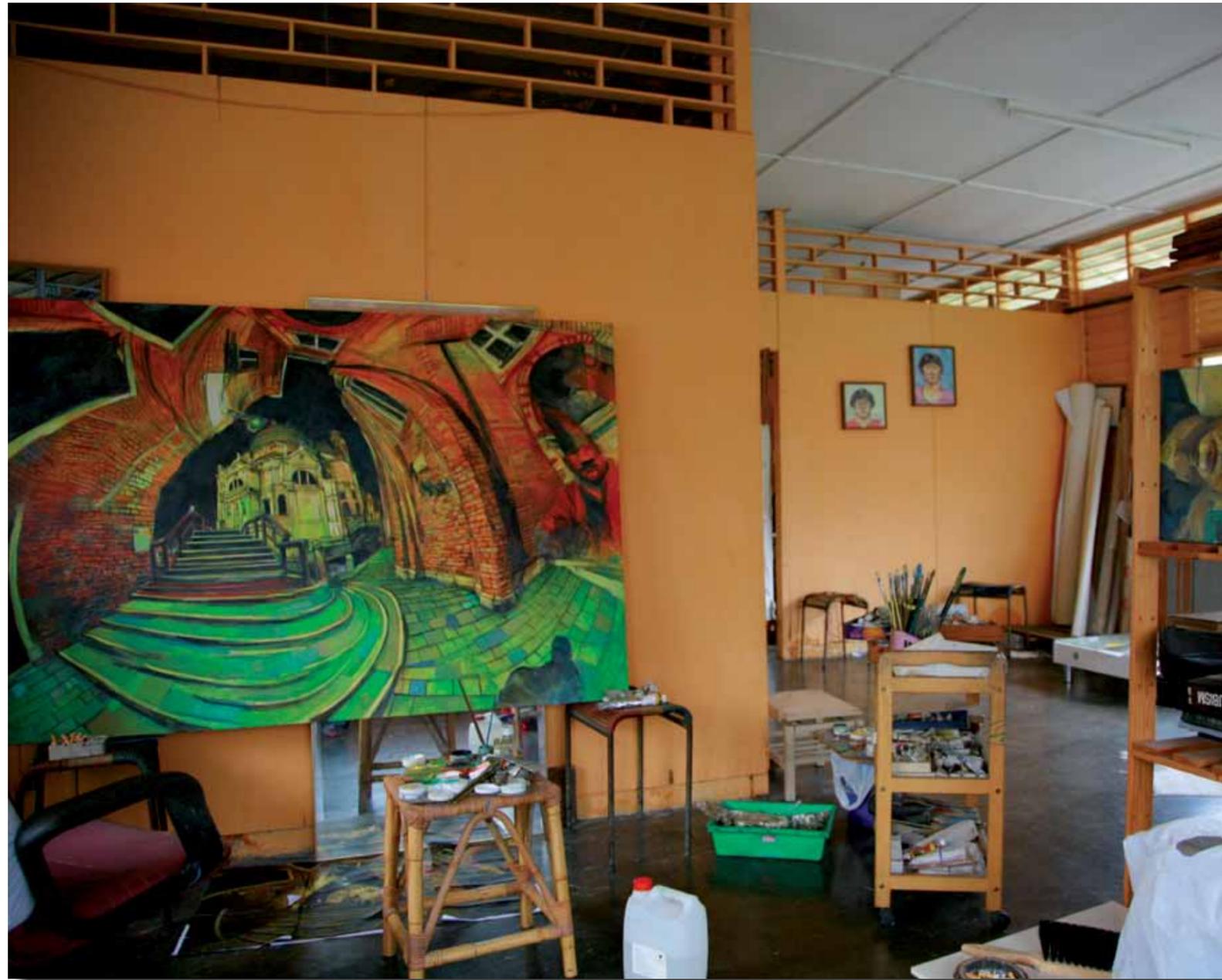
Shearn Delamore &amp; Co. Malaysia

Gleneagles Intan Medical Centre, Malaysia

Cluj-Napoca Art Museum, Romania

HSBC Bank Malaysia

The Aliya &amp; Farouk Khan Collection, Malaysia



Artists have the free will to practice his/her own works and to get appreciated is pure luck. I am a very lucky guy, because many people have helped me to make it happen. I have chosen the career of an artist for a decade now, and looking back over the past ten years; I realise that it is not a journey that I have taken by myself. I would like to say thank-you to everyone who has taken part in my artistic journey.

First, I have to thank Wei-Ling Gallery and United Overseas Bank (Malaysia), for their continuous support in presenting my 3rd solo exhibition in Kuala Lumpur: "Reality in Wonderland." Especially to Lim Wei-Ling (Gallery Director), who has believed in me and given me the opportunity to show my artworks over the last 7 years. Mr. Francis Lee and United Overseas Bank, whose generous support has made my obsession with painting to becoming an artist, a reality. Also a big thank-you to editor and writer: Kelvin Chuah, writers: Chai Chang Hwang and Francis Dass. Farzeera Emir (Gallery Manager), Lisa Ahmad (Gallery Assistant), who have assisted greatly in making this book possible.

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Chin Kong Yee

