

HERE AND NOW

Choy Chun Wei

GALLERY MESSAGE

About 10 years ago I was visiting a friend and noticed a wonderfully quirky canvas on his wall. It was a small work but beautifully crafted with a combination of paint and collage. I couldn't help but ask my host who it was by and he mentioned that it had been made by an emerging, young artist who was doing some interesting new works but his name escaped him.

That work stuck in my mind for many months until I saw another variation of it at Rimbun Dahan's annual WWF exhibition a few months later and had the pleasure of meeting the artist Choy Chun Wei.

Chun Wei's works have that mesmerizing effect on one's consciousness as they possess a distinctive quality that leaves an indelible impression. Over the years I have seen them develop from small interesting, experimental pieces into the most monumental, developed works that manage to transform a flat canvas into an almost 3-dimensional space which draws one deep into its fold. The dexterity, attention to detail and the amount of time devoted to building up these incredible canvases, piece by piece, layer by layer is truly mind-boggling. Using everything from found materials, recycled plastic pieces, bits of wood to fonts of all types procured from magazines, price tags and barcodes he methodically and deliberately builds them up into his own 'architectural cities'.

Choy Chun Wei is an artist of this age – a generation that is exposed to and confronted daily by advertisements, branding, consumerism and overt consumption in every form. The world has become globalized thanks to the internet which has changed everything and fast-forwarded our lives. The essence of this new world is immortalized in his works.

In his second solo exhibition, '*Here and Now*,' we are treated to a selection of paintings and objects which has seen him explore 3-dimensional objects in a bid to create 'real space' and in turn has allowed him to feed his paintings with new found spatial elements.

This body of work has been a long time in coming (it's been four years since his first solo) but the wait has been worth it. The trajectory from this point will be an interesting one as the possibilities going forward are endless. Needless to say, we can expect many more great works from this unforgettable artist.

For the moment though, take your breath away with what's '*Here and Now*'!

Lim Wei-Ling
Director
Wei-ling Gallery and Wei-ling Contemporary
Kuala Lumpur
October 2011



NEW

Cut from popular magazines and shopping brochures, or painted with graphic verve floating above densely collaged layers, the word new is visibly repeated across this body of work. It is part of an incessant chatter – *choose, go, subscribe, now, gain, spend* – words that populate Choy Chun Wei’s recent exhibition “Here and Now”. While they might scream for our attention with the zeal of their commercial origins, one wonders to what level do we filter their noise within their spatial context? To call upon T.S. Elliot,

**My words echo
Thus, in your mind.
But to what purpose**

Disturbing the dust on a bowl of rose–leaves

I do not know.¹

In our contemporary world we are bombarded with textual stimuli, a fraction of which we absorb. On buses, bus shelters, billboards, store signage, it grows across a city’s structure like barnacles. But this assertive use of text is more than spatial clatter in the hands of Choy Chun Wei. Like a dervish whipping up a dust storm, it enlivens his new works. And, when pushed into a three–dimensional dialogue as his canvases are expanded into freestanding sculptural constructions, it becomes palpable.

Across Choy Chun Wei’s career his works have been framed against the accelerated urbanism of our built environment. While the foundations of architecture – its visual stacking, striation, spread and geometry define the spaces we occupy – this body of work pushes beyond that singular dialogue. Architectural critic George Katodrytis wrote, “The city has definitely ceased to be a site: instead it has become a condition.”²

Katodrytis’s comment strikes at the heart of Chun Wei’s exhibition. An evaluation of the space we occupy must also examine who we are. Take this word *new* that recurs across the work like a pop–up event. It is a word riddled with complexities. While it heralds a push–ing forward in fresh directions, it is also a surging new that threatens the balance of the social structure – rapid development, consumer consumption and globalisation – a bitter sweet pill we swallow. The psycho–economic space trumps the physical space.

Speaking with Chun Wei about these new works he explained, “Modern development has inscribed and demarcated space as a meter of value, essentially commodity pragmatism. The shopping mall is a massive air–conditioned box fashionable for the modern lifestyle. It is the NEW convenience. It is the *absolute* future. There is something definitive about this contemporary symbol of urbanity and its commodities, metaphorically fenced in, defined by its imposed boundaries.”

Architecture has increasingly become a means of manipulating society based on tactics of inclusion / exclusion – the corporate skyscraper, the gated community, the shopping mall. Increasingly Chun Wei turns to these codified spaces as his primary subject. A good example is the painting *Absolutely New (2011)*, which plays out this demarcation graphically through a black line; a definitive last gesture that seemingly ‘fences off’ sections of the painting. Apart from the word ‘new’ that is badged across the work in a Constructivist palette of red and black, this collage is littered with discount price tags that play a new graphic role. Chun Wei describes them as, “...the very core existence of urban markings, signposts for survival.” Increasingly our world is a zone to be navigated.

These tags occur again in his huge triptych *Instant City (Yellow) (2011)*, a painting of billboard proportions it uses the vernacular of advertising to speak about consumerism. Here the ‘price spot’ is stripped back to its most elementary form, floated across the surface with pop abstraction. Yellow symbolises everything from wisdom, an imperial position and happiness to the colour executioners once wore in ancient Spain. Chun Wei uses yellow as a subliminal register reassigning commercialism with a positive psychedelic tone – a retinal ping.

Instant City (Yellow) is less about landscape per se and more about its fragments of text exorcised from their original source and recontextualised within a structural field that alludes to our built environment. It is interesting in comparison to another work of similar scale in this exhibition, Master Plan – Right Here Right Now, which blocks out the landscape with graphic clarity. Again there is a Constructivist echo to this bold line; the mechanics of a city inscribing itself ‘over’ the place.

Both paintings have patterned across their surface grouped horizontal and vertical lines almost like machine templates that pick up their palette, red and blue in *Master Plan* and black in the case of *Instant City*. Their deliberate repetition takes on a texture of their own. Chun

Wei says of these marks, “They are controlled and random pressing down onto the skin of the collage.” Skin is an interesting metaphor. It holds our scars, our age, our colour and is our first line of defence to the world. Like a tattoo, Chun Wei inscribes his voice over the noise and clutter of the city through these marks.

It offers an interesting leap to Chun Wei’s more sculptural works. *Architecture of Desire* and *Web–goal* flutter between 2 and 3–dimensional space. Through wooden battens Chun Wei lifts the text off the canvas in *Architecture of Desire*, bringing that illusionary depth of field that has defined much of his earlier work into physical relief. The battens sit in an orchestrated rhythm between horizontal and vertical, stacked at varying heights creating a surface tension and energy.

In *Web–goal* the text is collaged onto ribbons of canvas that are woven and held aloft from the substructure of the canvas. Colour becomes inconsequential to the text. The repetition of the word ‘goal’ threads across this construction and parallels the kind of bland aspirations of contemporary society – material aspiration, competition in sport, at the office – uniting people in the constant forward surge, caught in its web. A delightful aspect of this work is the way it flirts with the protocols of painting moving beyond the canvas edge as rogue pieces find their way into the gallery space.

It is an easy leap to Chun Wei’s most ambitious mixed media works to date, his Shopping Ghettoes series. Architectural historian Sabrina Foster notes, “Architecture addresses our metaphysical, philosophical and cultural identities within a material context...”³ Chun Wei takes that material cue to push his work into unexpected spatial and temporal frameworks that lift everyday objects into a world fantastical and surreal, like a sci–fi skyline populated with nostalgia.

Composed with a good dose of improvisation, these timber and paper constructions have grown organically like a city. *Take Shopping Ghettoes: Absolute Towers* for example; its airy construction gives it a fragility and yet encrusted with text it stands defiant like graffiti on a concrete structure. ‘Absolute’, like the word new, is heavy with connotation: unwaivering, conclusive, blind sighted – there’s no going back. It grows ever taller; ever ambitious.

While it is loosely defined by a stacked box–grid, Chun Wei’s tower is consumed from within with almost baroque excess. This fetish tone of consumer kitsch is best played out in *Shopping Ghettoes: Instant Child*, its array of plastic toys and building blocks a blatant comment on this highly marketed industry.

The labyrinthine structure of Chun Wei’s *Shopping Ghettoes*, deceiving everyday, layers urbanism, mythology, commercialism and domesticity in a complex system of order and knowledge. Spatially, like Web–goal, they extend beyond their own physicality playing off the architecture of the gallery and, placed at eye–level to the gallery visitor, allow us to connect across and through their forms to his canvases.

Architecture, we must remember, is a catalyst for the socialization of space. The very title of Chun Wei’s series Shopping Ghettoes sets up that stage – a new landscape and language that sits at the core of this exhibition. To return to Elliot’s question, ‘my words echo but to what purpose’ we can only conclude that above the drone of commercial text and contemporary boundaries, there is a humanity that breathes resilience into the frameworks around which we build our lives. Chun Wei’s see–through cities are dynamic and terribly exciting metaphors for that place where occupy, and the tone of experimentation and individuality that carries this exhibition is one to be championed in our ‘boxed–up world’.

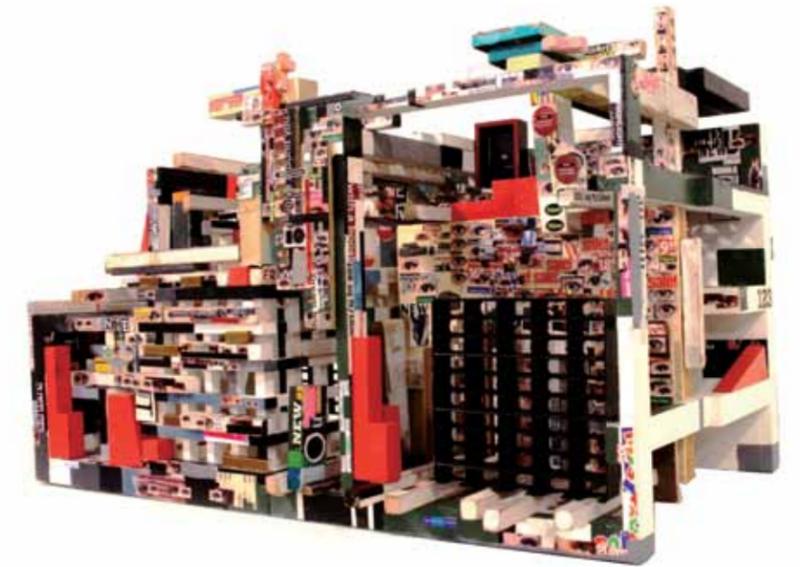
Gina Fairley

¹. TS Elliot, “The Four Quartets”, Quartet No. 1. “Burnt Norton” 1936, sited <http://www.tristan.icom43.net/quartets/norton.html>

². George Katodrytis, “The Dubai Experiment: Accelerated Urbanism”, published in Al Manakh, Gulf Survey, 2007, pg. 38

³. Sabiha Foster; “Multiplicity in Unity”, in Islam + Architecture Issue of Architectural Design, Vol. 74 No. 6, (London), Nov/Dec 2004, pg 5. All quotes by artist from email conversation with the writer, October 2011.



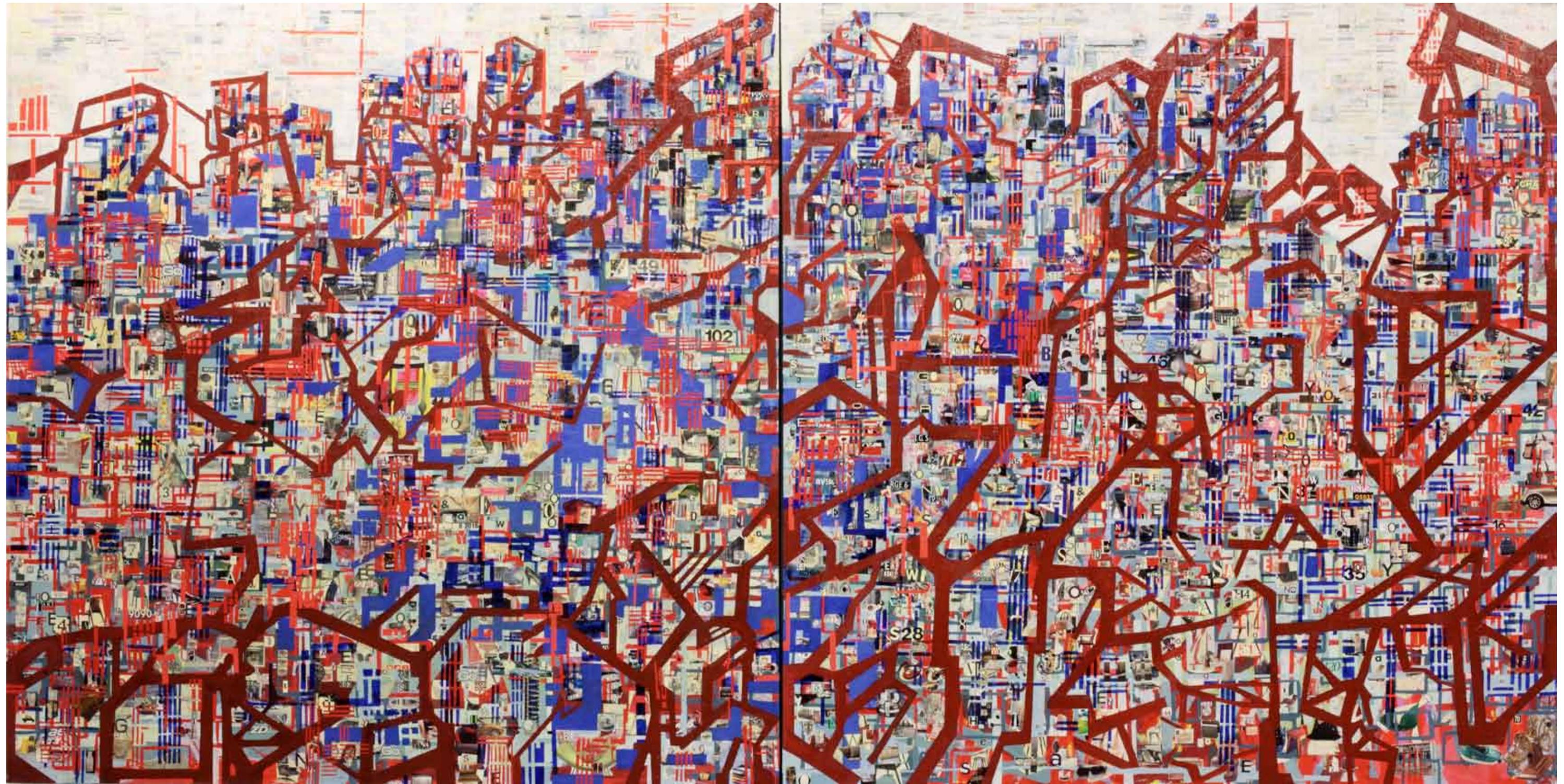


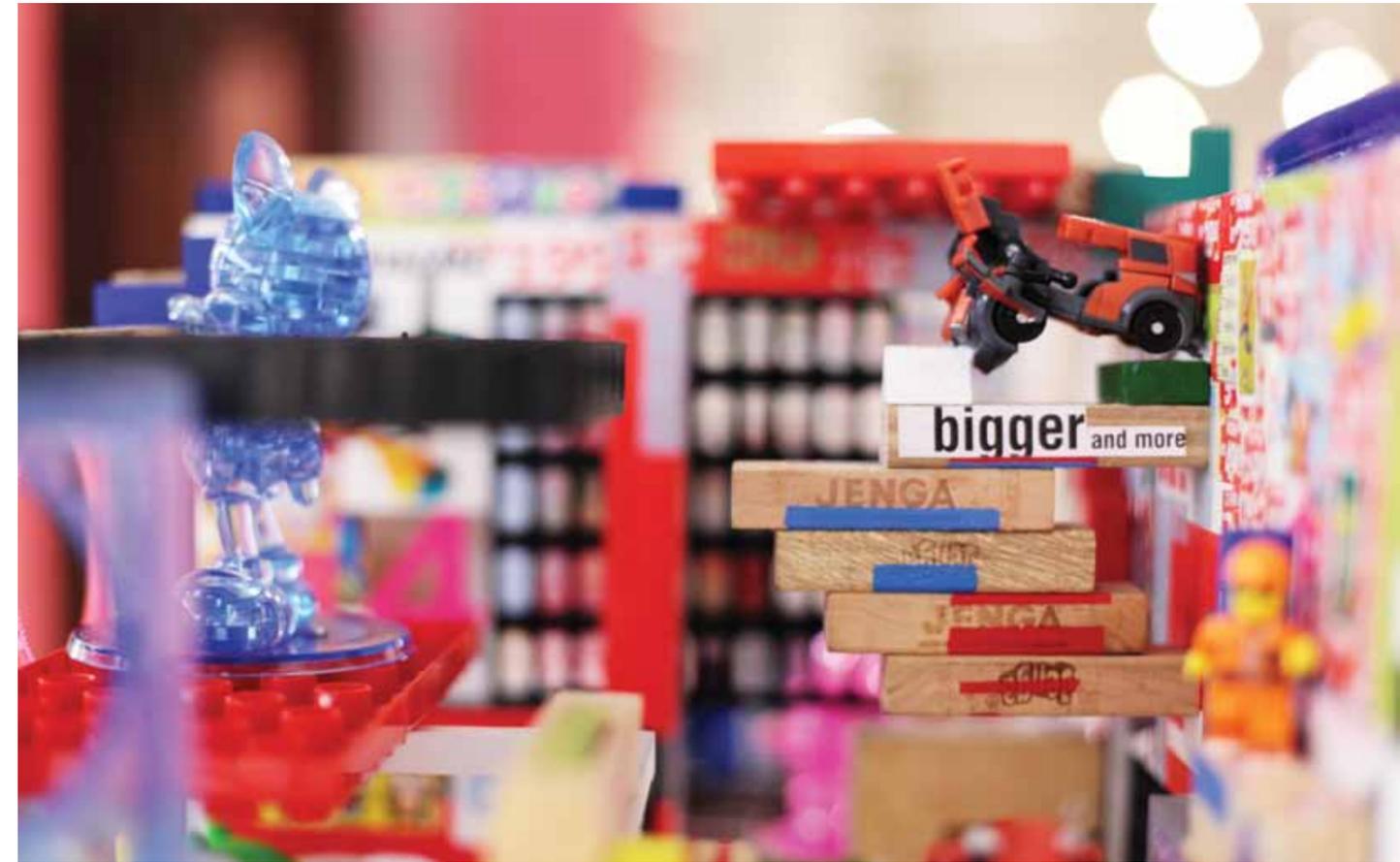


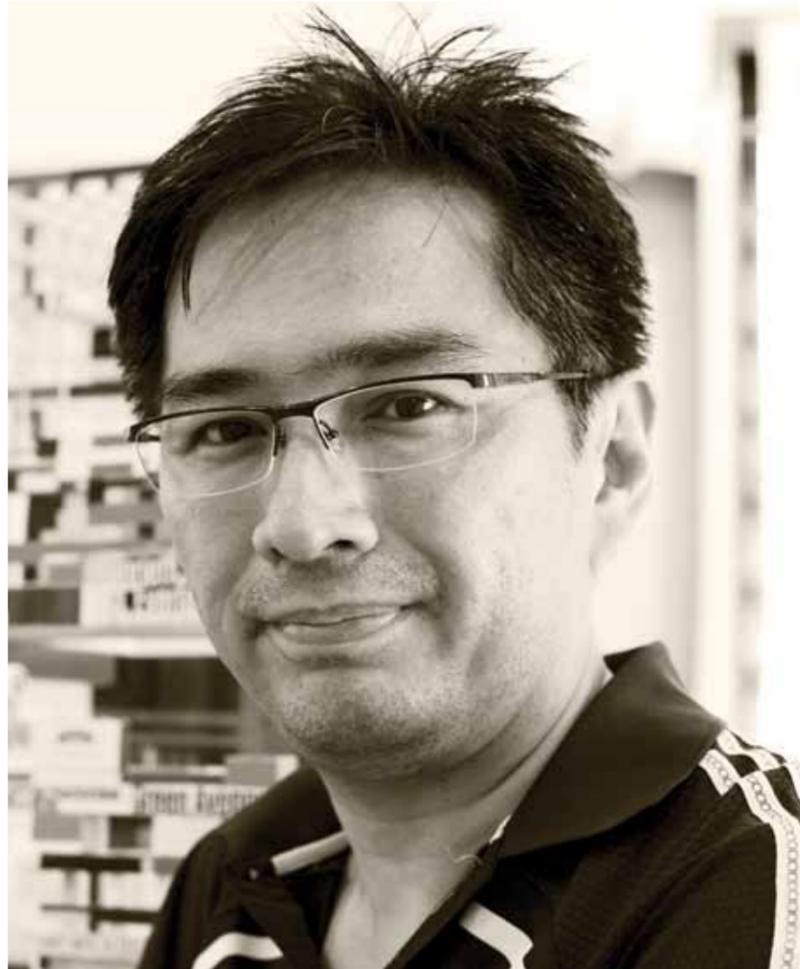


INSTANT CITY (YELLOW) . 122cm x 321cm (3 panels) . mixed media on canvas . 2011









CURRICULUM VITAE

Choy Chun Wei was born in Sungai Petani, West Malaysia in 1973. He is trained in graphic design, and graduated with honours under a full scholarship at Central St. Martin's College in London in 1998. Since graduating he has been practicing art and has lectured at the KBU International College and the Center for Advanced Design (CENFAD) from 1999 till 2006. Along with his wife Yau Bee Ling, Chun Wei has been involved in providing art workshops for children with special needs through the National Art Gallery in Kuala Lumpur. He has also participated in various workshops and conferences in the field of art and design. In 2001 Chun Wei embarked on his first painting series on suburban spaces and facades, which was exhibited at the Valentine Willie Fine Art Gallery under the title of "Inhabitants". Since then he has been widely exhibited in Kuala Lumpur. In 2003 he received an Honorable Mention at the Malaysian Phillip Morris Art Awards, and in 2004 he received the Juror's Prize at the Malaysian Young Contemporary Art Exhibition. In 2005 he was awarded the Rimbun Dahan Artist-in Residence placement, where he has spent the last years developing a new series of paintings on cartography and mental maps. In 2008, he was also awarded by a distinguished jury as a winner of 2007/2008 Asian Artist Fellowship by the Freeman Foundation for residency at the Vermont Studio Center in United States. At the end of 2008, two of his unconventional and challenging mixed media and collage paintings were collected by National Art Gallery as part of the permanent collection.

EDUCATION

1998 BA (Hons) Graphic Design, Central Saint Martins, London, UK

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2011 **HERE AND NOW**, Wei-Ling Contemporary, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
 2008 **TRAILS**, Red Mill Gallery, Johnson, Vermont, United States.
 2007 **KALEIDOSCOPIIC LANDSCAPES**, Wei-Ling Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2011 **ART STAGE SINGAPORE**, Marina Bay, Singapore
 2010 **NEGARAKU: NATIONALISM AND PATRIOTISM IN MALAYSIAN CONTEMPORARY ART**, The Aliya and Farouk Khan Collection, Galeria Sri Perdana, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
SURVIVAL, WWF Art for Nature, Rimbun Dahan, Selangor, Malaysia
ABSOLUT 18@8, Wei-Ling Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
 2009 **IMCAS**, Danga Bay City Mall, Johor Bahru, Malaysia
TANAH AIR, WWF Art for Nature, Rimbun Dahan, Selangor, Malaysia
 2008 **SHIFTING BOUNDARIES**, WWF Art for Nature, Rimbun Dahan, Selangor, Malaysia
18@8 VICE & VIRTUE, Wei-Ling Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
TUKAR GANTI : NEW MALAYSIAN PAINTINGS, Valentine Willie Fine Art, Singapore
LA GALLERIA, Pall Mall, London, UK
CIGE, China World Trade Center, Beijing China
FORCE OF NATURE, Pace Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
 2007 **00:15 SUPERSTAR WWF ART FOR NATURE**, Rimbun Dahan, Selangor, Malaysia
ARTRIANGLE: Malaysia Philippines Indonesia, Soko Gakkai, Malaysia
 2006 **RIMBUN DAHAN ARTIST IN RESIDENCY SHOW**, Rimbun Dahan, Kuang, Selangor, Malaysia
SIGNED AND DATED: VALENTINE WILLIE FINE ART 10TH ANNIVERSARY, Valentine Willie Fine Art, Bangsar, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
FEED ME! AN EXPLORATION OF APPETITES, WWF Art for Nature, Rimbun Dahan, Selangor, Malaysia
18@8 KUALA LUMPUR-KARACHI, Amin Gulgee Gallery, Karachi, Pakistan (In collaboration with Wei-Ling Gallery)
RIMBUN DAHAN ARTIST IN RESIDENCY SHOW, Rimbun Dahan, Malaysia
 2005 **ROOSTER MANIA**, Townhouse Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
THE POWER OF DREAMNG: TAMAN SARI, THE GARDEN OF DELIGHT AND IDENTITY, curated by Laura Fan, WWF Art for Nature, Rimbun Dahan, Selangor, Malaysia
18@8 CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS FROM MALAYSIA AND BEYOND, Wei-Ling Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
FREE SHOW, Reka Art Space, Petaling Jaya, Malaysia
 2004 **YOUNG CONTEMPORARY FINALIST EXHIBITION**, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
PARADISE LOST/PARADISE FOUND, curated by Laura Fan. WWF

Art for Nature, Rimbun Dahan, Malaysia
HOME IMPROVEMENT, Two -person Show. Reka Art Space, Petaling Jaya, Malaysia
SEMANGAT: ARTISTS FOR THEATER. Fund raising exhibition for 5 arts Centre. Valentine Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
FIFTEEN, Darling Muse Gallery. Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
FREE SHOW. Reka Art Space. Petaling Jaya, Malaysia
 2003 **PHILIP MORRIS ART EXHIBITION**, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
GAMES WE PLAY, curated by Laura Fan, WWF Art for Nature, Rimbun Dahan, Selangor, Malaysia
 2002 **TOUCH**, curated by Laura Fan, WWF Art for Nature, Rimbun Dahan, Selangor, Malaysia
WORKS ON PAPER, Valentine Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
 2001 **OPEN SHOW**, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
INHABITANT: Two Person Show, Valentine Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
 1999 **AKU' PORTRET DIRI 99**, Petronas Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
 1998 **MENTAL SAINT TART TINS**, Degree Show, Long Acre, London, UK
 1997 **YOUNG DESIGNERS**, Malaysian Design Council, Menara Tan & Tan, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
 1996 **WATERWORLD**, Bank Negara, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
 1995 **DIALOGUE**, Maybank Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

SELECTED AWARDS AND GRANTS

2008 Vermont Asian Fellowship Award
 2005 Artist In Residence. Rimbun Dahan, Malaysia
 2004 Juror's Choice Award (20), Malaysian Young Contemporary Exhibition
 2003 Honourable Mention, Pililip Morris Malaysia Asean Art Awards
 1997 The London Inslltute Full Scholarship
 1995 Higher National Diploma Teo Sao Ching Scholarship

SELECTED PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

National Art Gallery, Malaysia
 Hijjas Kasturi Association/ Rimbun Dahan, Malaysia
 Bank Negara Malaysia
 The Aliya & Farouk Khan Collection, Malaysia
 Australian International School, Malaysia
 Zain & Co. Advocates and Solicitors, Malaysia
 Edward Soo & Co. Advocates and Solicitors. Malaysia
 Veritas Design Group, Malaysia
 Big Dutchman Asia
 Amerada Hess, Malaysia
 Seksan DeSign, Malaysia
 CWL Design, Malaysia
 Architron Design Consultants, Malaysia
 Wei-Ling Gallery, Malaysia



CHOY CHUN WEI STUDIO