

# BEWILDERED

A solo exhibition by Toon Hian



Wei-Ling Gallery

## A Selection of Drawings by Toon Hian 1980-2011

At first, Toon Hian - like his art - is completely unexpected.

The scion of a third generation tin-mining family, Toon Hian is the atypical Perak businessman, brusque and busy, completely unassuming with fifteen minutes to spare before his next meeting. Possessed by the usual 'Ipoh-mali' hallmarks, he is refreshingly unpretentious, a contradiction in collared t-shirts with an obviously exuberant zest for living. At the same time, he also happens to be an ardent, unlikely follower and - as he describes it - a minor collector, of the romantic works of George Chinnery - an 18th century English painter from the fraternity of Constable.

Deliciously paradoxical, Toon Hian is of course the consummate gentlemen, gracious and hospitable, an old boy of St Michael's where he learnt the fundamentals of drawing and painting and mostly, as he puts it 'how to look after your brushes'. In the 1970s, he went to England to further his studies in Business Law and naturally returned to join the family business.

He also - improbably - draws and paints in his spare time. And what accomplished drawings they are.

**Bewildered** brings together for the first time, a selection of fine drawings in ink and wash that Toon Hian has, after nearly 30 years - for no apparent reason and out of no where - decided to share with all of us.

And it is an extremely refreshing exhibition.

Especially within the context of a contemporary art movement that is driven by its usual agendas and alliances; dictated by the hierarchies and egos and commercial interests we have all come to expect, **Bewildered** is a truly unexpected, unhindered and curious delight.

Their aesthetic merits, evident on every one of these precious slips of paper, are obviously undeniable but it will be interesting to try and place these 'outsider' works within the usual banal curatorial and art historical categorisations within the jealous confines of our larger art movement.

Nevertheless, it seems as if **Bewildered** will be loved unconditionally. Toon Hian's drawings are simply that good.

For this artist, it appears that art is not static, as demonstrated by the stream of images through which the lives of all his characters are realized. Loosely divided into various series - Chinese mythology, the landscape, human relations and the animal world - each little drawing is as vital and as paradoxical as the other - here a monkey, there a reference to Han Su Yin, suddenly a Chinese emperor, manic horses, lonely dowagers and then a group of old Indian people.

Unencumbered by the baggage and dictates of the art movement itself, Toon Hian makes his drawings intermittently during the day - between meetings, after work, any free time he gets and as such this body of works read like a diary.

His scenes are filled with figures, at times scant and at other times packed to the brim, beautifully placed within spontaneous and instinctively designed landscapes that point to delightful and unsettling stories that are his but nevertheless allows the viewer to divulge purely on the basis that they are such beautiful things.

Vaguely reminiscent of the animated surrealism of Picasso, these little jewels are never derivative and seem to owe as much to classical Chinese brush painting even as they refer to modern European approaches to image making.

With its vibrant lines and vivacious forms, Toon Hian's drawings are generally fiesta-like. They are quite simply, celebrations of themselves - unpretentious, instinctive and hugely enjoyable.

And again - very, very accomplished.

For all their celebratory aspect however, each and every drawing is seldom without its opposite, namely, a sense of the wistful and the misguided. Flashy washes of grey and blue and black are counter-balanced by abrupt, even intentionally awkward forms and illogical scale. Faces drawn so as to be freshly child-like in their pristine directness also feature a grace of line and a weave of details that is the opposite of naivete, an example of the paradoxical in Toon Hian's art can be seen in the tiny intricate Pantomime - one of the few drawings presented in tender washes of pinks and yellow and blue and greens.

Featuring a group of interwoven figures - perhaps risqué women dancers, perhaps everyday people waiting in line to meet a high official or at a line in the Post-office - this extravagant tiny painting, as with all his drawings, possess the standard elements for an erotic appeal. Yet this appeal is not what emerges, because the

depiction of these provocative actors and actresses undermines an easy indulgence in sensuality. Bright flourishes of colour in this particular work – mirrored by the luminous washes in his other monochromatic works – act as stage lighting, subverting the throbbing tonal ranges of blacks and blues – in this case, violets and mauves. All of which, again and again in works like *A Quarrel* with its circle of fighting dog-beasts or the flirtatious *Jade Necklace* darken with melancholy and a certain pensiveness on the faces and poses of his actors in his otherwise lightheartened places.

And it all happens in tiny scale often no more than six by nine inches! Among the steady stream of figures – in ones, threes or complex crowds is a wonderful rhythm of line – the artist chooses to place his figures and events in a colossal white space and in doing so seems to remove his compositions from any social reality. Far from being an endorsement of life as is, the artist depicts the world around him in exaggerated and manic terms making his celebrations a playful negation of real life instead. Such social distance illuminates the parody of daily life by fiesta participants or nimble, distorted characters in works like *Gopal* and *Jumbo the Elephant* or the somewhat indecipherable *Birth*.

Each one of these drawings, like Toon Hian's larger body of works touch us in different ways. First and foremost – they are eloquently beautiful but almost as important as their aesthetic prowess is that fact that they are surreal explorations in which the artist strips the actors of all their guises to reveal the human reality beneath. The works in *Bewildered* seem to be Toon Hian's very own set of parables, a kind of wonderful book of virtues.

All the more, because they are – again – so completely unexpected.

Anurendra Jegadeva





Top :  
**Running Wild**  
Ink on Paper  
38cm x 28cm  
2001

Bottom:  
**A Quarrel**  
Ink on Paper  
38cm x 28cm  
1992

Opposite page:  
**When All Animals Became Friends**  
Ink on Paper  
28cm x 38cm  
2004





Gopal & Jumbo The Elephant . Ink on Paper . 38cm x 28cm . 2005



In Deference to the 'Hermes Design' . Ink on Paper . 38cm x 28cm . 2004



Horse-Trading . Ink on Paper . 38cm x 28cm . 2010

Opposite page: Bewildered . Ink on Paper . 38cm x 28cm . 200-





*The Emperor's Dressing*



*— Chinese Phantoms*  
7th 2004



Arresting Mongkey  
By Heavenly Soldiers.



- 2 try to imagine  
1800's Penang Botanical garden.

Jul 2011



*Felix*  
After Reading Orwell  
"Down and Out"  
10 July 2003

After Reading Orwell "Down and Out" . Ink on Paper . 38cm x 28cm . 2003  
Opposite page: Battle of Wits . Ink on Paper . 38cm x 28cm . 2007



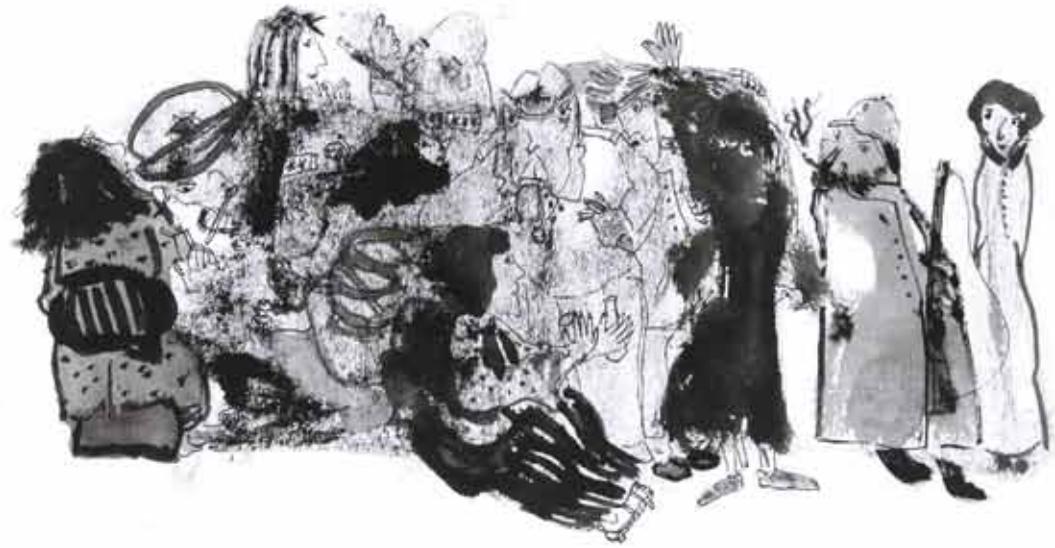
*Felix*  
Battle of Wits - Mr. Moore,  
in the end on the  
a Nazi - an effort  
to saving Kristian - life.

*Felix*  
2007 10 July





The Garden Fairies . Ink on Paper . 38cm x 28cm . 2005  
opposite Page : Once Upon a Time . Ink on Paper . 38cm x 28cm . 2007



Toby

The Japanese Army during the Second World War



the 2001  
- Choosing the right horse!

Choosing The Right Horse . Ink on Paper . 38cm x 28cm . 2001

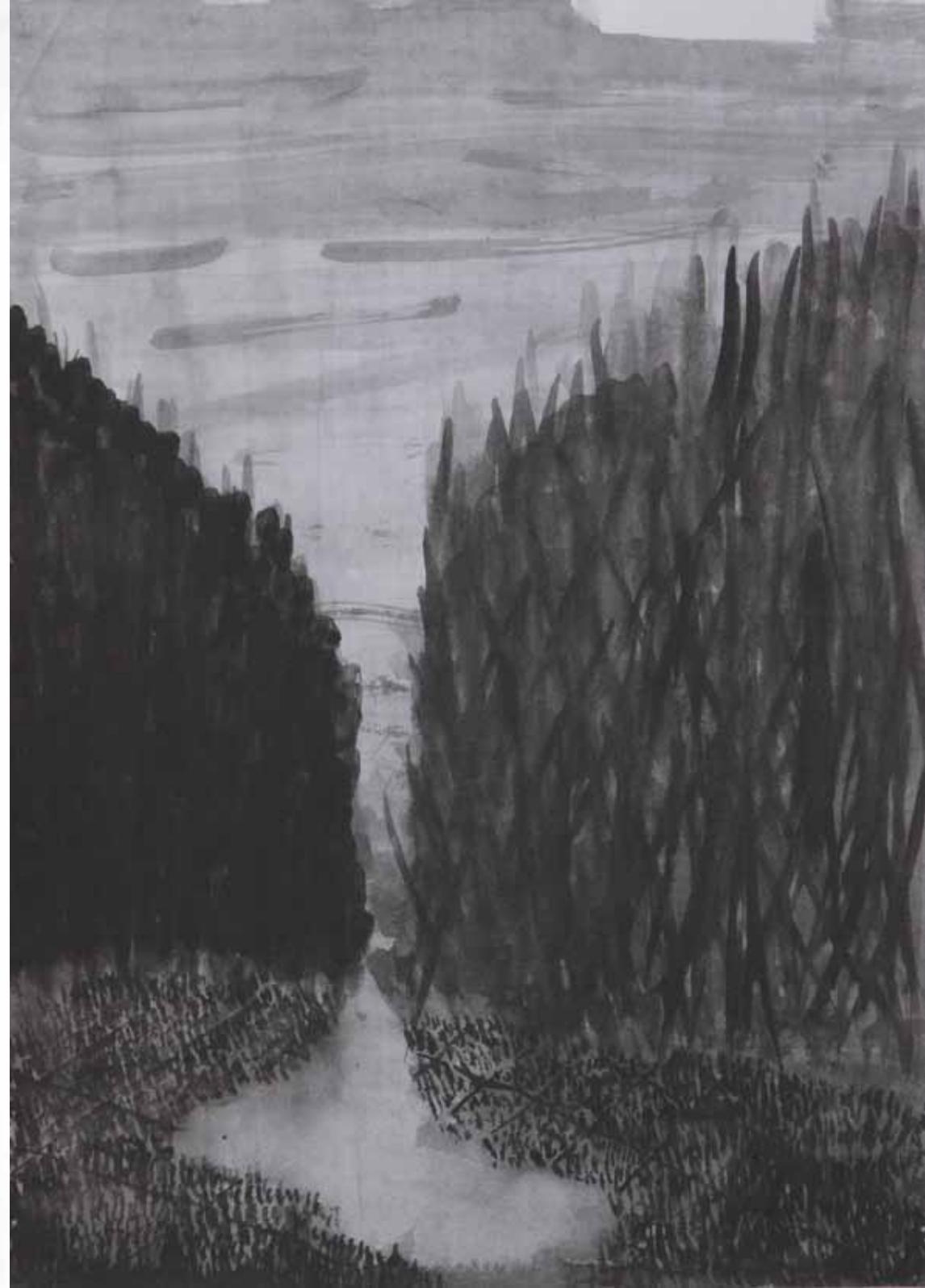


'Tomorrow we will  
profit'  
2010. 明天到水!

Tomorrow We Will Profit . Ink on Paper . 38cm x 28cm . 2010



Murder Unusual  
2002



Meru Hill - Ipoh City . Ink on Paper . 38cm x 28cm . 2007  
Opposite page: **Landscape** . Ink on Paper . 38cm x 28cm . 2011





Thaipusam . Ink on Paper . 38cm x 28cm . 2000

Opposite page: After Thaipusam . Ink on Paper . 38cm x 28cm . 2000



*The Three Magis Who Visited Baby Jesus*  
1999

top to bottom:  
**The Three Magis Who Visited Baby Jesus**

Ink on Paper  
28cm x 38cm  
2001



**The Birth**  
**Remembering The good earth - a novel by Hou Sei Yin how change in political systems affected the lives of ordinary people**

Ink on paper  
38cm x 28cm  
2001

Opposite page:  
**Defeat of the Indian Rajas Under the Hoard of The English Soldiers**

Ink on Paper  
28cm x 38cm  
2001



*Defeat of the Indian Rajas under the Hoard of the English Soldiers.*



*Remembering the good earth*  
Hou Sei Yin

# BEWILDERED

a solo exhibition by Toon Hian  
7 June – 2 July 2011 @ Wei-Ling Gallery  
4 July – 30 July 2011 @ Wei-Ling Contemporary

Produced and published by Wei-Ling Gallery  
8 Jalan Scott  
50470 Kuala Lumpur  
Malaysia

Wei-Ling Contemporary  
Ground Floor Lot G213 & 213A  
The Gardens Mall  
Kuala Lumpur  
Malaysia

T: +603 2260 1106

E: [weiling@weiling-gallery.com](mailto:weiling@weiling-gallery.com)

[www.weiling-gallery.com](http://www.weiling-gallery.com)

**Project Director** Lim Wei-Ling

**Edited By** Lim Wei-Ling

**Design By** Nur Khalisah Ahmad

Printed in Malaysia

Copyright © 2011 Wei-Ling Gallery

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any other information storage and retrieval system without prior permission in writing from the publisher.

cover image : **Snake Charmer** . Ink on Paper . 38cm x 28cm . 2002

above image : **The Bird Lovers** . Ink on Paper . 38cm x 28cm . 2002



ISBN 978-967-0147-08-6

