

Merdeka Project – In(ter)dependence

&

A Tapestry of Us

Singapore

25th – 29th August 2023

Anurendra Jegadeva • Choy Chun Wei •
Ivan Lam • Joshua Yang • Rajinder Singh •
Sean Lean • Wong Chee Meng • Yau Bee Ling



Foreword

In August 2023, Wei-Ling Gallery presented two pop-up exhibitions in Singapore, featuring 'Merdeka Project - In(ter)dependence' and 'A Tapestry of Us' coinciding with the shared history of independence days for both Singapore (1965) and Malaysia (1957), which fall on August 9th and August 31st, respectively. 'Merdeka Project - In(ter)dependence' by Malaysian artist, Ivan Lam, is a collaborative project that delves into the vibrant tapestry of Southeast Asia, utilising art as a medium of expression. Ivan Lam's first partnership with Singaporean artist Joshua Yang addresses identity, representation, and cultural exchange, with the goal of promoting dialogue and seeking common ground between Malaysian and Singaporean creatives.

'A Tapestry of Us' weaves together the works of seven prominent contemporary Malaysian artists - Anurendra Jegadeva, Ivan Lam, Rajinder Singh, Sean Lean, Wong Chee Meng, Yau Bee Ling, and Choy Chun Wei. This exhibition considers the interaction of time, location, and identity, providing intimate pictures that characterise the essence of Malaysians and the milieu in which they exist. As Malaysia commemorates its 66th year of independence, these artists venture into the communal achievements, concerns, and postcolonial legacies of Malaysian society and culture, constructing a discourse of human experiences that intertwine distinct journeys through life's hardships, diverse identities, and cultural allusions.

Building on the gallery's ongoing commitment to art accessibility, this dual exhibition aimed to create an ongoing discourse and reflect on art's potential, forging a meaningful connection between Malaysia and Singapore and our shared history.

Merdeka Project - In(ter)dependence

Ivan Lam & Joshua Yang

Merdeka Project - In(ter)dependence

At the heart of the collaborative artwork lies the message of "MAJULAH", a term derived from the shared Malay language between the two countries. Translated as "Onward" or "Progress", it becomes the embodiment of collective aspirations, resilience, and determination shared by both Malaysians and Singaporeans. It also subtly alludes to the lyrics of Singapore's national anthem.

The text 'I wish I were you' within the top panel serves as an open-ended statement, inviting viewers to interpret it from both literal and figurative standpoints. It acknowledges the simmering and lingering emotions between Malaysians and Singaporeans, as well as the mutual desire to address unresolved issues and move forward. These sentiments are not confined to a specific group, but rather shared by many, often left unspoken. This text also functions as a metaphor for the deeply ingrained perception that Malaysians often hold towards Singapore—a sentiment frequently referred to as "the grass is greener." It depicts the yearning Malaysians possess for Singapore's economic and political prowess.

The 9th and 31st of August mark the respective independence days of these two nations. These dates resonate with historical significance, underscoring the shared heritage of Malaysia and Singapore. Additionally, the artwork bears the date of 14th August, signifying Ivan Lam's own birthday and as a reflection of his very own adulation towards Singapore. The upper panel is predominantly red, reflecting Singapore's national flag.

Treating Ivan Lam's panel as representative of the entire Peninsula Malaysia, Joshua Yang's response is to add a footnote to the 170cm-tall painting, indicating an appropriately scaled-down version of the island to the south of the Peninsula. Simultaneously, he immediately gravitated towards the phrase 'I wish I were you'. Having grown up in Malaysia and moved to Singapore as a young adult, Joshua Yang empathises with Ivan's statement.

In response to the statement 'I wish I were you' and the associated sentiment, one might quickly text 'IKR' (I know right). However, as the painter, Joshua Yang has opted to write the phrase 'I know,' adding a wink emoji at the phrase's conclusion as a cheek nod. The colour scheme is reminiscent of Malaysia's flag, with the deep blue from which the yellow crescent moon and 14-pointed star radiate.

Ivan Lam & Joshua Yang

Majulah / Knowledge and Understanding

Oil pastel, vinyl and resin on flysheet on board

198cm x 122cm (Dptych);

170cm x 122cm & 28cm x 122cm

2023





(Left)
(1st Panel Only)

Ivan Lam

Majulah

Oil pastel, vinyl and resin on flysheet on board

170cm x 122cm

2023

(Below)
(1st Panel Only, Close-Up)

Ivan Lam

Majulah

Oil pastel, vinyl and resin on flysheet on board

170cm x 122cm

2023



MAJULLAH

9TH 14TH 31ST

AUGUST

I WISH I WERE YOU

(2nd Panel Only)

Joshua Yang

Knowledge and Understanding

Oil pastel, vinyl and resin on flysheet on board

28cm x 122cm

2023



i know ;)



i know ;)

(2nd Panel Only, Close-Up)

Joshua Yang

Knowledge and Understanding

Oil pastel, vinyl and resin on flysheet on board

28cm x 122cm

2023

A Tapestry of Us

Anurendra Jegadeva • Choy Chun Wei • Ivan Lam •
Joshua Yang • Rajinder Singh • Sean Lean •
Wong Chee Meng • Yau Bee Ling

'On the Way to School' was painted in the early part of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. It is made up of portraits of the children of middle class economic migrants from Malaysia - my daughter and friends daughters- all dressed up in battle fatigues as if going off to war. It imagines what it would be like to send our children to war - the work is made coincidentally with the decision for all young Ukrainian men to stay and fight in Ukraine rather than be allowed to evacuate - most young people, men, women and even children opted to stay and defend their homeland. As a non-Malay new migrant to Australia it made me ponder on issues of place and belonging and what is the stake we all have in where we live. But most of all it is an exploration of what it must feel like to sacrifice our youth to defend our tanah air.



Anurendra Jegadeva

On the Way to School

Acrylic on canvas with

pencils on paper in perspex box

Variable size approx. 126cm x 119cm; 41cm

diameter (top circle panel) (each) (total 3

pieces); 77.5cm x 56cm (bottom panel)

2022



Anurendra Jegadeva
(Close-Up)

On the Way to School
Acrylic on canvas with

pencils on paper in perspex box

Variable size approx. 126cm x 119cm; 41cm diameter (top circle panel)
(each) (total 3 pieces); 77.5cm x 56cm (bottom panel)

2022

Ivan Lam

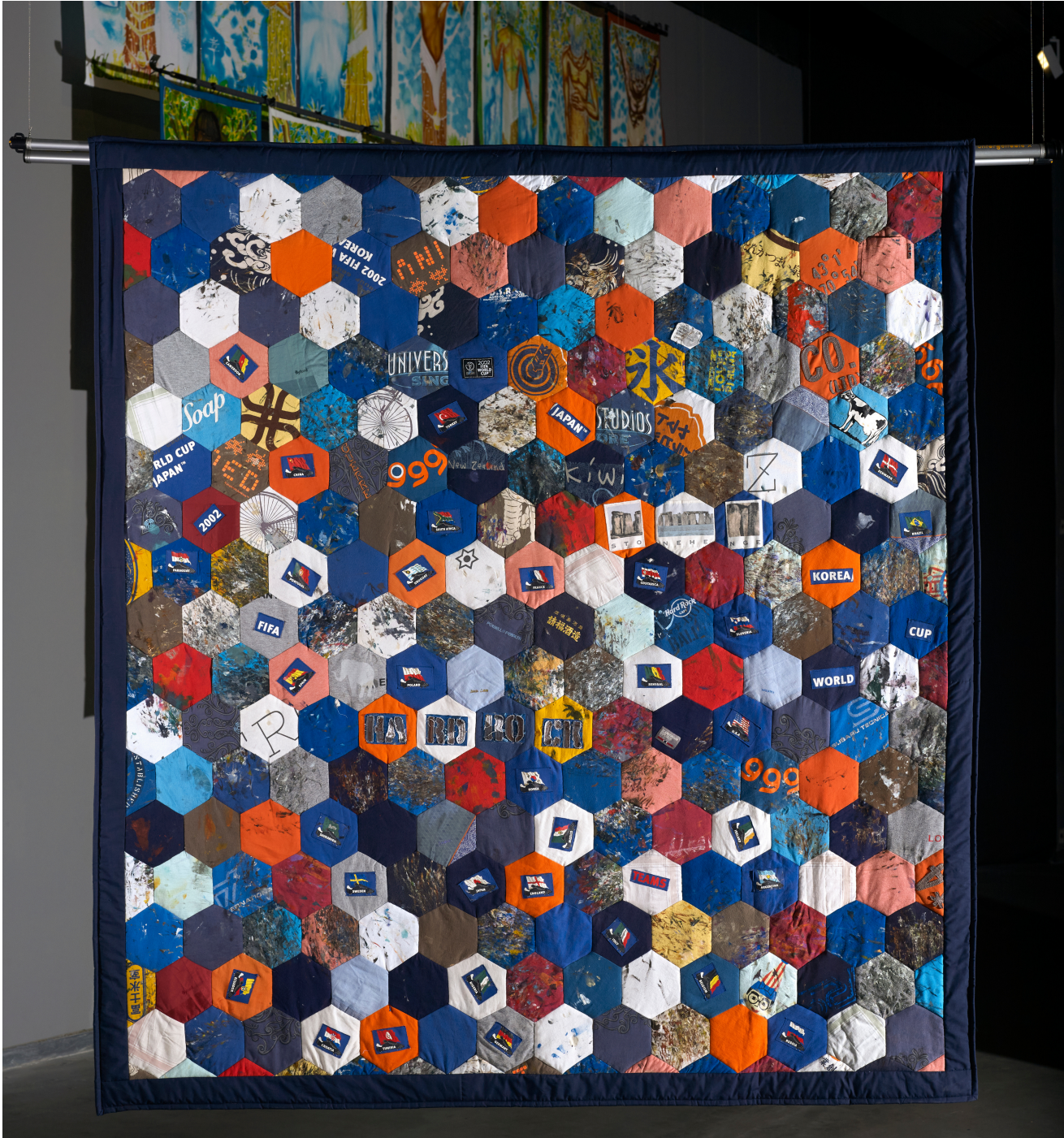
Unforgettable X - I

Fabric Tapestry

243cm x 222cm

2022

(Below: Close-Up)



'Unforgettable X' is Ivan Lam's tribute to his late grandmother and his attempt to deal with her loss. His grandmother who was born in Guangzhou, China, worked as a seamstress in a factory in Ipoh for most of her life to provide for her seven children. She often brought back leftover fabric materials home to make patchwork quilt blankets for all her grandchildren. For this work, Ivan has "collaborated" with his late grandmother by pairing the quilt she made him when he was twelve years old, with his own quilt blanket made from various paint-splattered t-shirts he used to wear while working in his studio throughout his artistic practice.



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Ivan Lam
Unforgettable X - II
Fabric Tapestry
243cm x 222cm
2022

(Below: Close-Up)





Joshua Yang

Wave and Particle 1

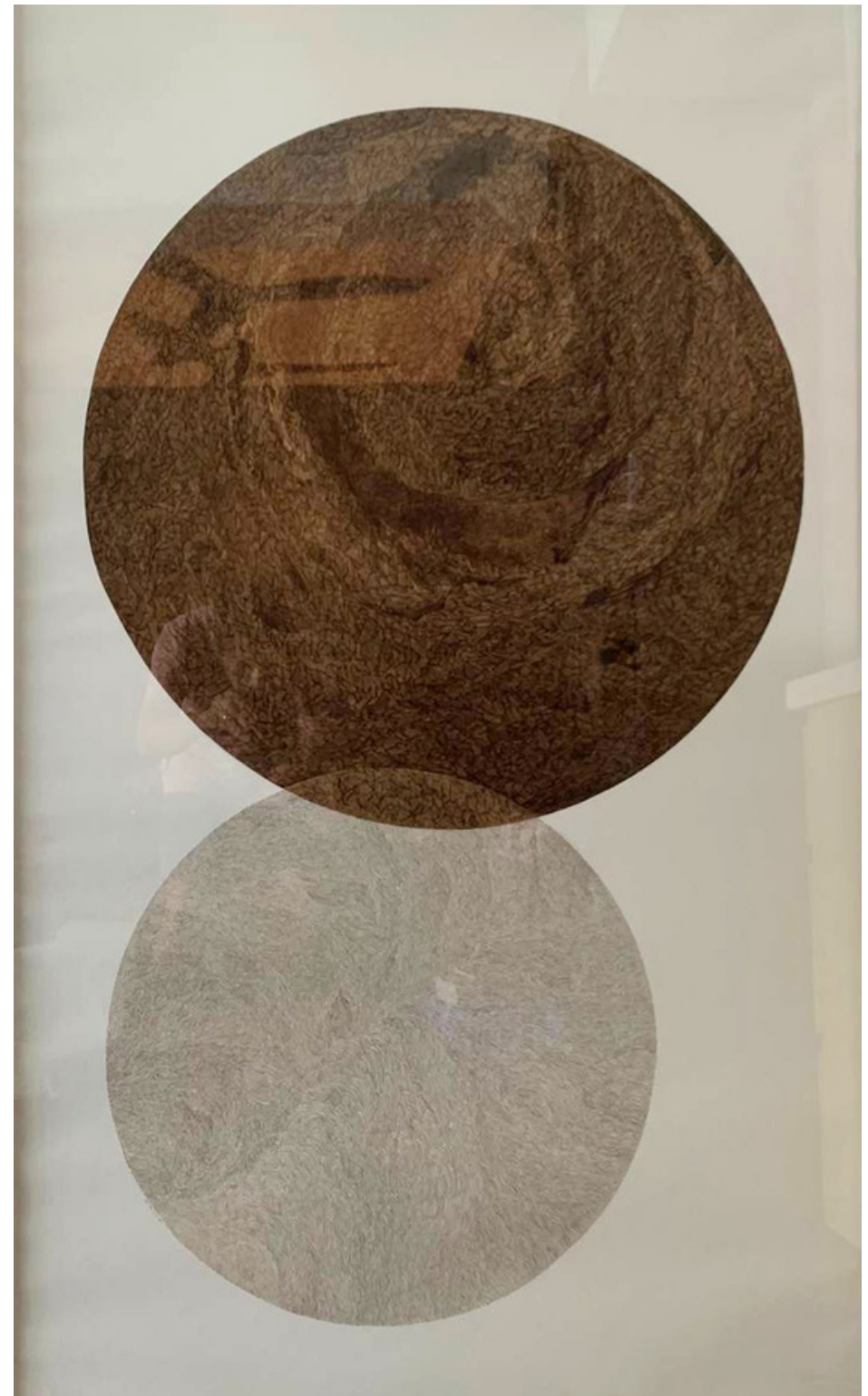
Ink on paper

153cm x 94cm

2015

In this project, Joshua Yang continues drawing lines as expressions and experiences of time, while departing from the rules he has previously set for himself. Previously, the lines do not intersect and line-breaks are marked with points. This time, there are multitudinous overlapping lines and intersecting spaces. Dots, lines and cross-hatched areas inhabit the same spaces on paper.

In thinking through his line-forms and dot-particles, Yang quotes Albert Einstein, "It seems as though we must sometimes use one theory and sometimes the other, while at times we may use either. We are faced with a new kind of difficulty. We have two contradictory pictures of reality; separately neither of them fully explains the phenomena of light, but together they do." Yang suggests history not as time unfolded but as a space, a space that meets time at tangential points the way two circles touch. If we can now accept the previously dichotomous time and space as a unified field of spacetime, and if light and other energies can present as both 'wave' and 'particle', why not history as both wave and particle, both time and space, and 'history painting' as 'spatial drawing'?





(Close-Up)

Joshua Yang

Wave and Particle 1

Ink on paper

153cm x 94cm

2015

Joshua Yang
Wave and Particle 2
Ink on paper
153cm x 94cm
2015



(Close-Up)

Joshua Yang

Wave and Particle 2

Ink on paper

153cm x 94cm

2015





Rajinder Singh

Redemption

Oil, powder and gold leaf on canvas

240cm x 147.5cm

2016

Rajinder's work is concerned with his impending and inevitable death. Recognition of one's finitude is perhaps the most traumatic event one experiences in a lifetime. When a person enters the later stages of the dying process (one after all is always already dying), the body begins a quiet series of physical changes towards an eventual and final shut down. It prepares itself to stop and the spirit begins its final process of release. Rajinder, his body ready but his spirit unresolved and unreconciled, is determined to be prepared. He has set himself on a path to pierce together his own song and ceremony of farewell. In this exhibition, he delves into his nomadic past and a lifetime of unanswered questions to pull together his fragmentary gods, rituals and ceremonies. All paintings in this series were partly painted with Vibuthi. The process involves dressing the canvas at various stages with this sacred ash of varying colours to insert a certain aspect of 'thaipusam' rituals into their making.

The discourse of 'Redemption' unfolds through a dynamic interplay of disparate elements, converging to narrate a tale of spiritual reclamation. A sinewy portrayal of Hercules intertwines with Hanuman's lotus-borne ascent, while the evocative crown of thorns signifies both sacrifice and ascent. Tribal face piercings evoke transformative ordeals, harmonising diverse symbols into a visual symphony of redemption.

Rajinder Singh

Purification

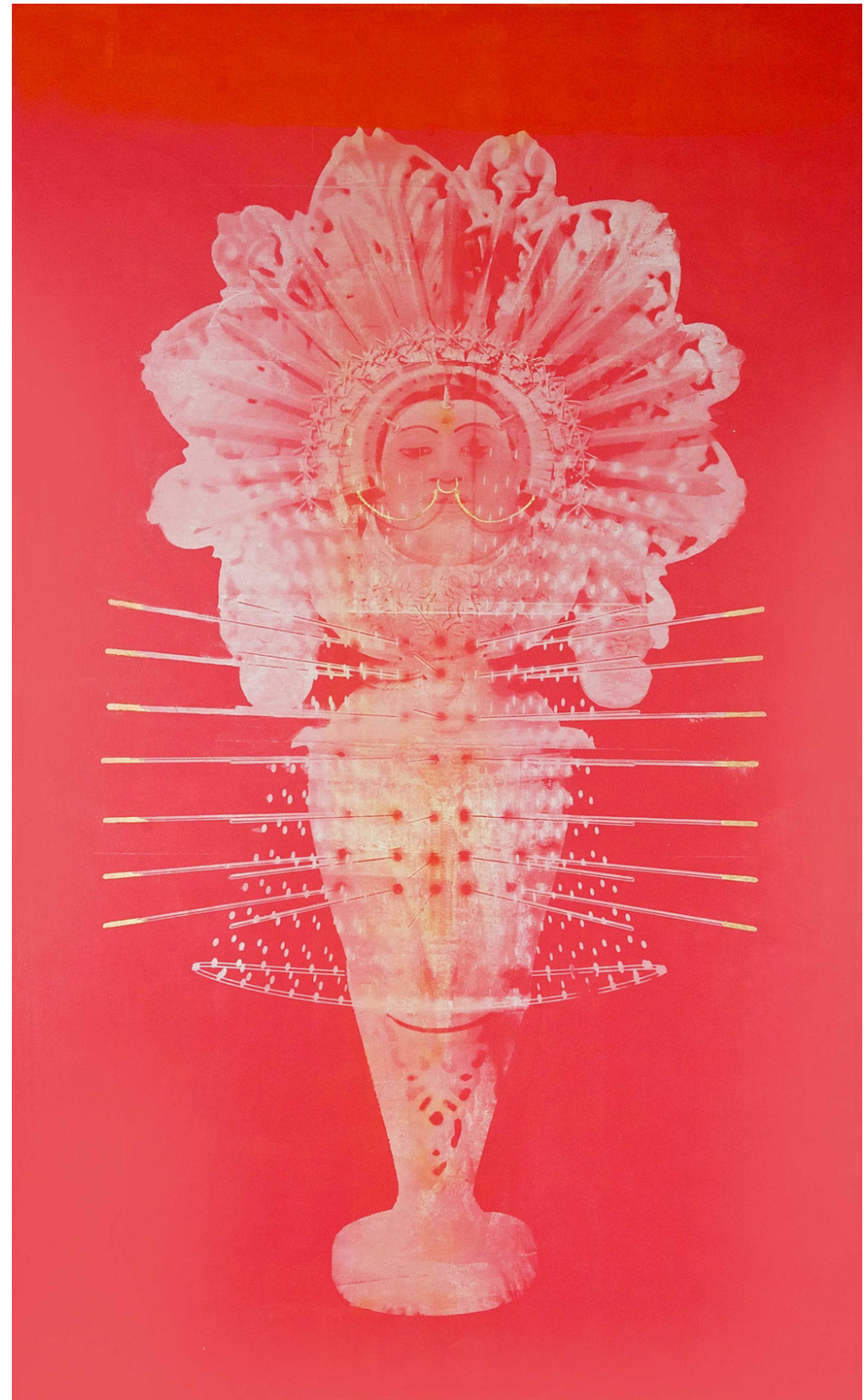
Oil, powder and gold leaf on canvas

240cm x 147.5cm

2016

In search of a lifting of some spiritual burden, Rajinder returns especially to his distant past to a life in Malaysia, to an unusual annual pageantry of human spirit triumphant over flesh, in order to construct spacious cages in his paintings, free to roam about in, their ocean-esque tranquility oblivious to the trauma transcribed onto their very walls. This terrorising calligraphy, unseen yet obvious, forms a salient component in Rajinder's 'simulation cages', strapped onto life's limbs, lancing together an algorithmic representation of the self.

The artistic tableau of 'Purification' unites cultural threads, weaving them into a luminous tapestry of renewal and transcendence. The countenance of Lakshmi Durgai juxtaposes contemporary armaments, forging a dialogue between divinity and the martial. Saraswati's elegance graces the waistline, while Celtic motifs symbolise ancestral wisdom. Viputhi ash crowns the composition, encapsulating an aura of purity. This synthesis incarnates the essence of purification, a transcendent embodiment resonating across epochs and cultures.





(left)

Rajinder Singh

ਮਰ

Sounds like : aa

Acrylic on heavy unprimed canvas

120cm x 120cm x 5cm

2022

(right)

Rajinder Singh

ਬ

Sounds like : b-ba

Oil on heavy unprimed canvas

60cm x 60cm x 5cm

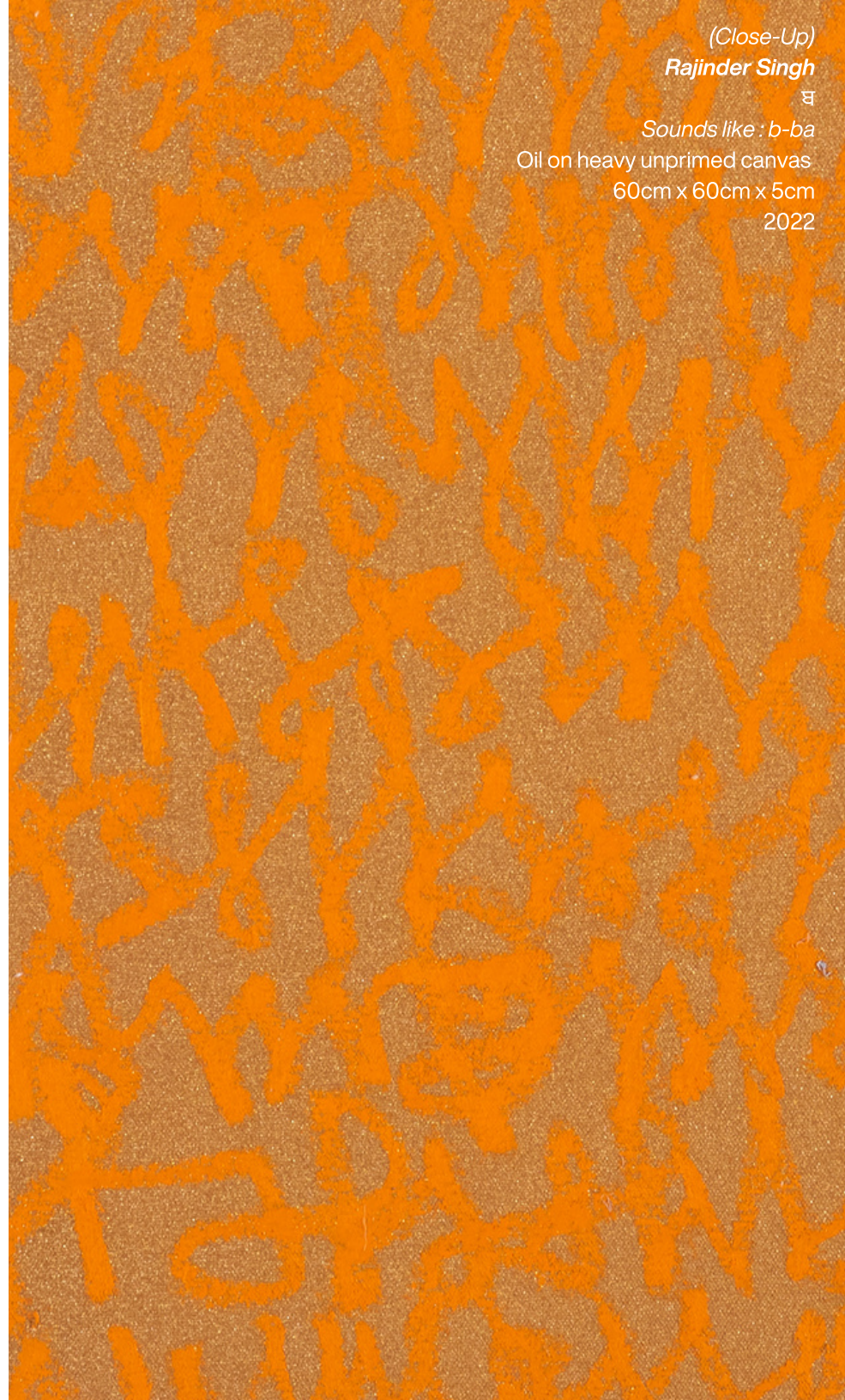
2022



Rajinder pays attention to the audible qualities of active citizenship through its connection to the sonic substance and materiality of a specially commissioned Punjabi folk song (lok git) in his paintings. The song, a paean to his deceased grandfather, investigates the nuances of a 'space of refusal' that he carved into his existence amidst the constant conflict and colonisation that took place around him in Malaya, in the first 60 years of the last century. Using sound to open up a field of transaction or a channel, not in the moment but through time and space, these pieces generate a space through a bridge in time into 1960s Malaysia. Rajinder hopes to learn from his grandfather and usher in the fugitive moments of his past into the turmoil of race relations that is present today in Malaysia.



(Close-Up)
Rajinder Singh
ਜੀ
Sounds like : aa
Acrylic on heavy unprimed canvas
120cm x 120cm x 5cm
2022



(Close-Up)
Rajinder Singh
ਬ
Sounds like : b-ba
Oil on heavy unprimed canvas
60cm x 60cm x 5cm
2022



Sean Lean
青花落花流水开光玉兔纹盘
120cm x 131.8cm
Automotive paint on Steel
2023



Sean Lean

(Close-Up)

青花落花流水开光玉兔纹盘

120cm x 131.8cm

Automotive paint on Steel

2023

There is always an uncertainty about our own histories—especially in a world where migration has taken people across lands, across water, across generations. It is hard to separate our history from our identity.

For the artist, he has grappled with this. Born in Malaysia, a second generation Chinese, he grew up in a household that reiterated that he should be proudly Chinese first, and Malaysian second.

China was always presented through rose-tinted glasses—from folklore to traditions. He questioned how he fitted into this China—this Motherland, that was so revered yet such a contradiction on so many levels. He looked back into China as an outsider—conflicted by all that China stood for. His journey has therefore been one of seeking clarity and answers to questions.

This body of work is his attempt to visualise and vocalise the conflict within. To observe and to document.

Through the use of blue and white porcelain, which harks back to how the West were originally initiated with the East, he presents these beautiful yet delicate, fragile pieces, which expresses the true struggles and suffering that went into their making.

These anonymous ‘porcelain’ objects, therefore act as a metaphor for the deceitful nature of the way issues are oft times disguised beneath a veneer of assumed truths.



Sean Lean

青花山水六方提梁壶

204.3cm x 120cm

Automotive paint on Steel

2023



Wong Chee Meng

Golden Flower

Acrylic on canvas

152.4cm x 121.92cm (Diptych)

2023

'Golden Flower' combines cultural elements to evoke feelings of gratitude, opportunity, tribute, and prosperity. In this artwork, diverse cultural symbols intertwine, forming a harmonious arrangement. The patterns and motifs reflect the richness and diversity of our world, reminding us to appreciate the wisdom passed down through generations.

This artwork incorporates augmented reality (AR) components, featuring animations that come to life when scanned from a mobile app. This integration of art and technology not only propels modern art forward but also develops a reinvigorated sense of national identity amid the changing terrain of the "new" Malaysia.

The title of the exhibition 'Golden Flower' debuted in, 'Rasa Sayang', takes its inspiration from a Malay folk song. This well-known melody, ingrained in Malaysian culture, represents unity and love. Wong Chee Meng references the song to honour its influence in fostering a shared common ground and appreciation for cultural diversity.

Wong Chee Meng

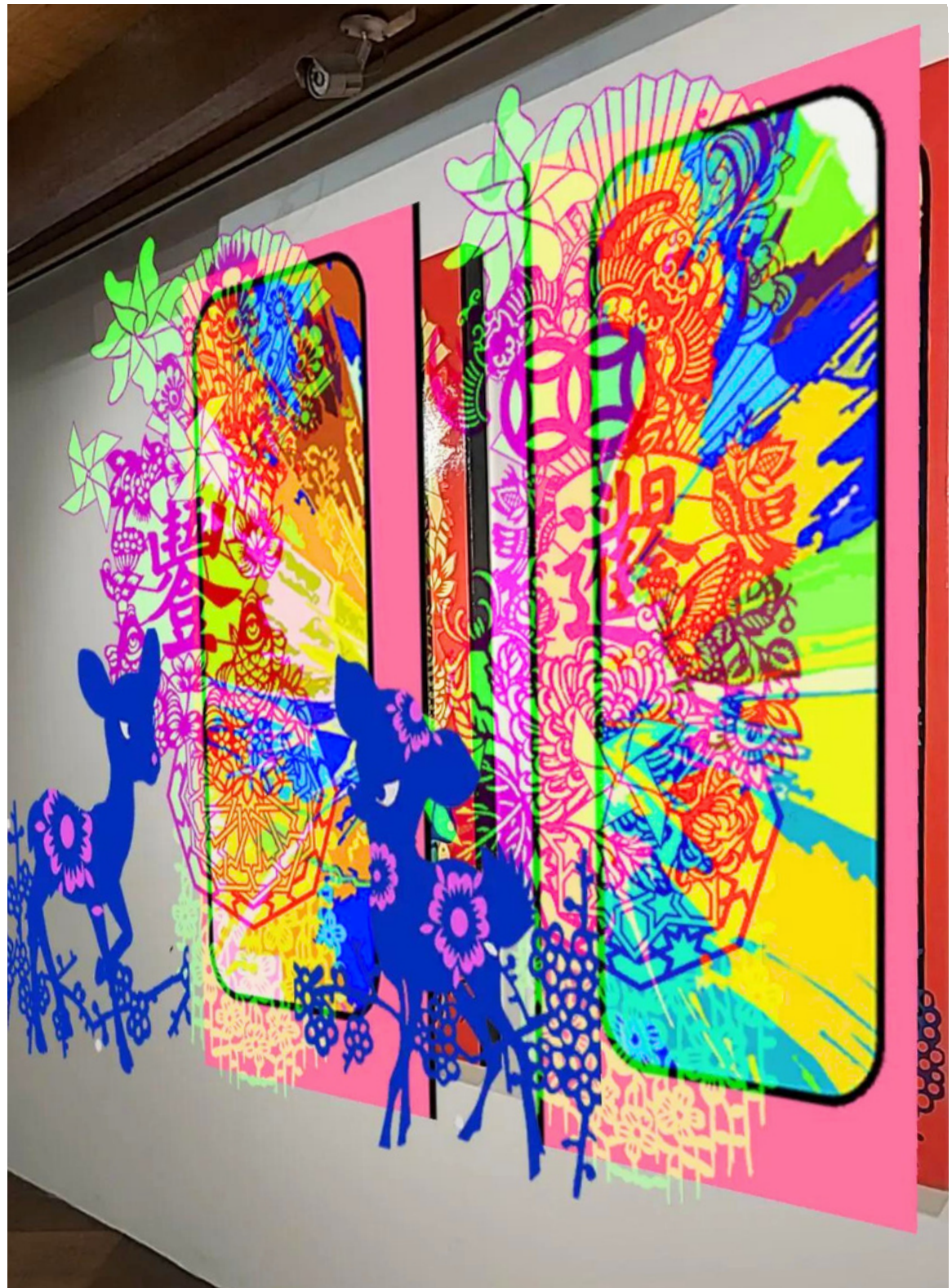
(With AR Effect)

Golden Flower

Acrylic on canvas

152.4cm x 121.92cm (Diptych)

2023



The planks of wood were painted in heavenly, earthly, and sea underworld palettes. All these manifest to demonstrate the unfolding of blooming life. The overlapping in a variety of open shapes represent one's flooding challenges in life preservation. The magnificent decks of joy open life up to the delight of beaming skylight hope.

Yau Bee Ling

The Unfold (Study I)

Oil on cut-out wooden relief
on pinewood panel

92cm x 122cm

2023

(Below: Close-Up)







The citizens create the city. This Plato-inspired model city inspires me to demonstrate that we all share the same part and characteristics of the city. The youthful origin of the human soul and spirit contains an elemental love of learning and life exploration, shaping and preserving the citizen's soul.

Yau Bee Ling
The New Dawn
Oil on canvas
101cm x 181.5cm
2023

(Below: Close-Up)





Produced by Wei-Ling Gallery.

To accompany the exhibitions 'Merdeka Project - In(ter)dependence' & 'A Tapestry of Us' from 25th - 29th August 2023.

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