



SEAN LEAN (B. 1981)

(Based in Selangor, Malaysia)

Having obtained his Diploma in Visual & Digital Arts from Limkokwing University College of Creative Technology in 2000, Sean Lean's work often deals with the issues of fragmented identities and the contradictions between traditional Eastern values and the lure of Western popular culture.

Through his works, Lean branches out with his own history and personal memory and reflects on the events that have shaped his country and his region. He traces social, political, and religious tensions, disparities, and engages with stories that have shaped the collective memory of his region. Despite the seriousness of the issue, elements of humor often find their way into his practice.

His earlier series '*Flesh: Blacks and Whites*' (2013) followed the artist's subconscious state as he underwent a period of introspection. The inspiration behind the works stems from his inherent obsession with flesh. Initially a compulsion, it consequently progressed into an investigation of his personal idiosyncrasies. Each painting, presenting an albinistic or melanistic animal, serves as an introspective measure, whereby each animal depicted represents a particular facet of Lean's 'selves'.

His previous exhibitions have followed a similar path. Through '*Motherland*' (2015) the artist examined the core of what it means to be Chinese, questioning the shifting definitions/criterion of what it takes to be a Chinese person, and the generational loss and gains of a culture inherited and gradually diluted. In his process, he leans towards methods that were more "industrial", and akin to techniques used in automotive painting. The artist feels that the exploration of methods that are more "mechanized" is more relevant and reflective of the time we live in.

His solo exhibition '3' (2018) presented various triptychs, each one highlighting the relationship between art and society. '3' is a body of work that delves into his own history, but at the same time transcends his own individuality in its line of questioning tradition, religion, way of living, dogmas, and long-held beliefs. Interrogating identity, navigating history, and questioning ways of being is a thread that runs throughout Lean's practice.

In 2018, he was one of 6 artists from around the world commissioned by KENZO, in collaboration with Tiger Beer and WWF to work on a project called *Rare Stripes* – a collection of garments inspired by actual stories of wild tigers. Sean Lean's design of Kamrita is very apt, as it showcases three sets of paw prints in different colours, signifying the Himalayan tigress with her two cubs walking through the forest floor. For years, Kamrita was "*WWF's adopted tiger and a symbol of hope for her whole species*". The collection was unveiled at the Ginza Six KENZO store in Tokyo, and was available in limited collection. He was also commissioned by Harper's Bazaar to create a cover specially for Bazaar Art magazine in 2017.



'M2' (2020), was a continuation of 'Motherland' and explored many similar concepts and ideas as Motherland. Lean treated his subject matter here with an undeniable sense of play and light heartedness, refusing to be bogged down by seriousness and guilt when discussing his cultural past. His approach for 'M2' was more experimental and metaphorical, playing with colour and materiality with his use of steel and unexpected palettes, all while tying his subject matter back to his disparate cultural upbringing.

'china' a solo exhibition by Lean in 2022, followed his exhibitions in 2015 and 2020. It visually expressed his feelings of doubt and uncertainty from researching his heritage and the 'idea' of China. Moving away from his previous formats, he drew inspiration from the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911) and fashioned industrial metals into Qing Dynasty porcelain shapes. 'china' combined hand-painted Chinese porcelain motifs with industrial metals like aluminium and mild steel. Sean inserted himself into his art through sectionalising his works and reference materials, culminating in his view that culture is ever-shifting and ungovernable.

His latest exhibition, 'COLORED', explores racial connotations in historical documents from Western imperial trade with China and offers multiple perspectives on how Western travellers perceived first contacts. Lean's artworks feature texts from early explorers like Elijah Coleman Bridgman and Matteo Ricci, shedding light on motivations that shaped foreign perceptions. This strengthens Lean's thesis on bias, discrimination, and admiration. His creative process evolves with material selection, applying automotive paint to aluminium sheets fashioned like Ming Dynasty ceramics, producing a "faux-porcelain" surface to highlight the illusory quality of his design. This approach honors ancestry in a contemporary manner and reflects Lean's own inner fractured identity. Each work is a triptych, paralleling Lean's process of assimilation, exploration and cultural identity.



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EDUCATION

2000 Diploma in Visual & Digital Arts, Limkokwing University College of Creative Technology

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2024 COLORED, Wei-Ling Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
2022 china, Wei-Ling Contemporary, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
2020 M2, Wei-Ling Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
2018 3, Wei-Ling Contemporary, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
2015 Motherland, Wei-Ling Contemporary, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
2013 Flesh: Blacks & Whites, Wei-Ling Contemporary, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2024 18@8 pLAy, Wei-Ling Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
And the invader's fear of memories, Wei-Ling Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
2023 A Tapestry of Us, Henderson Industrial Park, Singapore
HansaeYes24 Foundation International Culture Exchange Exhibition
"Embrace Malaysia, Insa Art Center, Seoul, Korea
2022 A Paradigm Shift - Reflecting on Twenty Years of The Malaysian Art Scene, Wei-Ling Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
2021 S.E.A. Focus 2022, Tanjong Pagar Distripark, Singapore
2018 Patriots: By Malaysians for Malaysians, Wei-Ling Contemporary, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Teh Tarik with The Flag, curated by Wei-Ling Gallery, in association with The National Visual Arts Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
2017 Through Rose-Tinted Glasses, Wei-Ling Contemporary, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
18@8 RIGHT HERE! RIGHT NOW!, Wei-Ling Contemporary, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
2016 Art Stage Jakarta 2016, Sheraton Grand Jakarta Gandaria City Hotel, Jakarta, Indonesia
2015 The Space Between, curated by Anurendra Jegadeva & Rahel Joseph, Wei-Ling Contemporary, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
2014 Bologna Fiere SH Contemporary 2014, Shanghai Exhibition Centre, China
2013 18@8 Mirror, Mirror on the wall, Wei-Ling Contemporary, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Measuring Love, Wei-Ling Contemporary, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
2012 Bright Young Things, Wei-Ling Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
2002 Urbanscapes, organized by Klue Magazine, Grappa, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia



- 2001 VDA Graduation Show, Loke Mansion ADKL, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Manusia, NN Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
Doors, Loke Mansion ADKL, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2000 Eyes Wide Open, LUCT, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

AWARDS

- 2002 Presidential Scholar Award, Limkokwing University College of Creative Technology
Young Achievers Award, Limkokwing University College of Creative Technology
- 2001 Best Student Award in Visual & Digital Arts, Limkokwing University of Creative Technology
- 1999 NST Scholarship Award, Limkokwing University College of Creative Technology