

# Journey to the South

## Wong Chee Meng

Malaysian artist Wong Chee Meng's newest exhibition, *'Journey to the South'* peers into the experiences of Malaysians who migrated to Singapore seeking better opportunities. Inspired by anecdotes from friends and family during the 80s and 90s, Wong illuminates the stories of these immigrants. Some left for education and jobs, returning home with success, while others forged permanent lives in Singapore.

Across his recent series, Wong navigates the interplay between both countries, juxtaposing their histories, cultures, and values. Vibrant colours echo the essence of these cultures, intertwining geometric shapes and symbolic elements to portray the intricacies of these regions. Nostalgia, identity, and belonging form integral parts of his exploration, probing the essence of being Malaysian in Singapore and Singaporean in Malaysia. He emphasises, *"Despite different nationalities, we share much in common."*

The exhibition is a tribute to shared aspirations, binding both Singaporeans and Malaysians, despite diverse life values. Wong believes in a collective pursuit of peace, prosperity, and happiness, advocating for learning from each other's perspectives. He aims to inspire viewers to cherish the region's richness, embracing both disparities and parallels that shape individual identities. He extends an invitation to follow him on this 'Journey to the South', encouraging reflection upon personal journeys, regardless of their destinations.



**The Tale of South (2023)**

**Acrylic on canvas**

**121.92 cm x 182.88 cm**

*'The Tale of South'* is a painting that narrates a family's quest for improved prospects. This artwork portrays an elephant and its charming calf gracefully journeying towards a new horizon, seeking a brighter future.

The majestic elephants, symbols embodying strength and wisdom, signify the resilience needed for the journey ahead. Their graceful movement evokes an air of optimism and determination, instilling a feeling of hope and anticipation. The pre-war shophouse windows, reminiscent of the colonial shop lots found in Malaysia and Singapore, adorned with bold hues, mirror the potential of new opportunities awaiting adventurous travellers.



**Harvest of Prosperity (2023)**

**Acrylic on canvas**

**121.92 cm x 182.88 cm**

*'Harvest of Prosperity'* is a painting that captures the essence of abundance and the hope for better days. The scene bursts with life as koi fish leap exuberantly, expressing the energy of a plentiful harvest. These fish serve as metaphors for optimism and progress in the pursuit of better opportunities. The canvas glimmers with gold. Alongside this lively display, a basket overflowing with treasures symbolises the rich rewards obtained from the market. It stands as a beacon of hope, a tangible reminder that diligent efforts lead to prosperity.

*'Harvest of Prosperity'* embraces the joyful essence of abundance and encourages contemplation on the positive changes that arise when we reap the rewards of our hard work. It stands as a visual tribute to the belief that within life's cycle, goodness consistently emerges, as a golden assurance of brighter days and a more prosperous tomorrow.



**We (2023)**

**Acrylic on canvas**

**121.92 cm x 182.88 cm**

'We' is a painting that joyously celebrates the shared humanity among individuals with diverse practices, beliefs, and education. In this artwork, three laughing Buddha figures stand united, gracefully adorned with Indian garlands and traditional kite 'wau', symbolising the beauty of our collective similarities.

The symbolism of the identical poses transcends cultural differences, conveying a universal truth that beneath the surface variations, we are bound together by a common thread. The deliberate choice of Indian garlands and traditional 'wau' kites as shared elements emphasises the interconnectedness of our shared human experience.

Despite our diverse paths and unique journeys, 'We' are fundamentally the same. This painting embraces unity, fostering a deep sense of understanding, compassion, and acknowledgment that, in our shared humanity, we discover strength, beauty, and the true essence of oneness.



**True Love (2023)**

**Acrylic on canvas**

**121.92 cm x 182.88 cm**

'*True Love*' portrays a symbolic tale through Chinese puppets, one that transcends geographical boundaries and speaks of romance. This painting depicts long-distance lovers residing in different places, facing the challenges of distance and separation. To reunite, they must traverse a bridge, presenting a metaphor for the connection, trust, understanding, and communication crucial for their enduring love.

Just as Malaysia and Singapore are linked by bridges, so too are the hearts of these lovers bound by a connection. The Chinese puppets represent the enduring strength of their relationship as they navigate the intricacies of distance, mirroring the delicate dance of maintaining a connection despite physical separation. '*True Love*' reflects on universal themes of commitment and perseverance, advocating the belief that *true love* can bridge any gap.



**The Guardians of Peace (2023)**

**Acrylic on canvas**

**152.4 cm x 121.92 cm (diptych)**

*'The Guardians of Peace'* is a painting that resonates with the universal desire for a tranquil home. The focal point is a door adorned with Chinese characters – on the left, the word for 'joy', and on the right, 'peace.' These characters stand as beacons, inviting positive energy into the space and setting the tone for a harmonious dwelling.

Flanking the entrance are two stone lions, dignified and stoic, serving as guardians of peace, referencing Chinese mythology where stone lions are often seen as protectors of homes and temples. With a watchful gaze and powerful presence, they symbolise the protective forces standing ready to preserve tranquillity within. Stepping into this depiction of a welcoming home, feel the positive warmth emanating from the characters and sense the reassurance provided by these steadfast stone lions.

This painting speaks to the innate human yearning for a peaceful haven, serving as a reminder of the collective aspiration for a home filled with joy and serenity, guarded by timeless symbols of peace.



**The Dragon's Gate (2023)**

**Acrylic on canvas**

**152.4 cm x 121.92 cm (diptych)**

*'The Dragon's Gate'* is a painting that signifies the entrance to a new journey, a fresh era filled with boundless opportunities. It radiates a welcoming aura, beckoning all to embrace a promising future and the prosperity that lies ahead.

At its heart lies the mystical secret garden, symbolising strength, fortune and auspicious beginnings. The opening of *'The Dragon's Gate'* offers each individual the chance to step into a realm of untapped possibilities. In Chinese mythology, the dragon is often revered as a symbol of power and good fortune.

The radiant colours and dynamic elements within the painting mirror the energy of positive change and growth. *'The Dragon's Gate'* presents anticipation and optimism, embracing the opportunities unfolding on their personal journey toward a bright and prosperous future.