

Biography

Leon Leong is a Malaysian artist and author. His work typically addresses man's interaction with the built environment and explores the broader themes of people, place, and history. It combines social critique and creative storytelling, weaving fact and fiction, documentation and memory into narratives. Leon has had solos at Richard Koh Fine Art and Cult Gallery, and a number of group shows in Malaysia. His work *Stilt Houses–The Floating World of Kampung Baru 2022* was shown at Ilham Gallery's Triennial Ilham Art Show 2022, and then at the IX Tashkent International Biennale of Contemporary Art, where it received a special jury prize. His mixed-medium installation series *Cracks in the Wall* 2018 was shown at the inaugural Kuala Lumpur Biennale and featured in the UNESCO Asia-Pacific Heritage 20/20 Forum. Leon's novel *Beautiful Things* 2006, published by Crown Publishing Taiwan and serialized in Sin Chew Daily, was a top five finalist for the Crown World Fiction Prize. His short stories have won international accolades and included in an anthology of Malaysian fiction. In 1992, he got a Bachelor of Science in Communication from The University of Texas at Austin in the United States.

Artist Statement

My work typically responds to man's relationship with the built environment and explores the broader themes of people, place and history. A combination of social commentary and creative storytelling, it interweaves fact and fiction, documentation and memory to construct narratives. I am interested in the interstices from which innovation happens, which one linguist describes as ‘the intersection of cultures [where] each one modifies and enhances what is borrowed from its neighbors. [...] these “between” places, the ancient clash of civilizations, the modern clash of culture, the covert clues to human cognition, society, and evolution.’ (Dan Jurafsky, “The Language of Food”) My fascination with these “between places” likely stemmed from my growing up as a son of a diaspora in a multiracial Southeast Asian country – an experience that positioned me on the outside, looking in. Later years lived in the West and the Middle East only heightened this sensitivity. Home is a recurring motif and theatre of history in my work, as I rethink the deep interconnectedness of societies and tribes.

My approach is context-based, derived from the people and place, culture and history. I prefer to paint live and in-person, often relocating to my subjects' home environments. Living and working closely with my subjects to gain first-hand knowledge is a crucial part of my process. I plot distance and space on the canvas – a Cartesian coordinate system of sorts – against which the characters effect an action. Colours, patterns and forms adapt and reform with stories and gossips, to make new conjunctions. Figures and grounds are fluxional, blurring the boundaries between the causal effect of action-reaction and destinable forces of genius loci, to seek alternatives to what we know. I play with non-linear perspective and spatial simultaneity to find unexplored possibilities in visual storytelling.

Inseparable from my work is my love of literature. I borrow structures from literature to make my series, to maintain a relationship between individual works, allowing tangential thinking and the freedom to investigate different ideas, so a series may paint a bigger picture than the sum of its parts. I have in recent years extended my medium to installation and film. They are an outgrowth of my curious desire to engage with the transitioning world around us.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Leon Leong Wai Pung, born 1971 Perak, Malaysia

BIENNALE

2022 *The Floating World of Kampung Baru*, IX Tashkent International Biennale of Contemporary Art, Museum of Kamoliddin Behzod, Uzbekistan

2018 *Cracks in the Wall*, Kuala Lumpur Biennale, National Art Gallery, Malaysia

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2018 *Leon Leong: Cracks in the Wall*, Cult Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

2015 *Optimistic Melancholics*, Richard Koh Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

2012 *Exorcising Demons*, Desa Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2023 *Realpolitik*, Cult Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

2022 *A Domestic Life*, Cult Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

2022 *Tukang*, e-Gallery, Multimedia University Cyberjaya, Selangor, Malaysia

2022 *Tukang–Design & Craft Festival*, Galeri Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia

2022 *ILHAM Art Show*, ILHAM Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

2020 *Sesumpah*, Publika Art Show 2020, Fergana Art, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

2019 *di antara ITU & INI*, National Art Gallery, Fergana Art, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

2015 *Eyeball Massage Fingers Exercise*, Fergana Art Space, Penang, Malaysia

TALKS

2022 'A Piece of Kampung: Thoughts on heritage and crafts', Galeri Shah Alam, Malaysia (Nov 27)

2022 'The Floating World of Kampung Baru', PAM NEXT YPLab22, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (July 13)

2022 'ILHAM Art Show: Artists in Conversation', ILHAM Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (June 18)

2019 'Cracks in the Wall', UNESCO Asia-Pacific Heritage 20/20 Forum, Penang, Malaysia (Oct 14)

2019 'Razak Mansion: Cracks in the Wall', USCI University, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (Mar 16)

2018 'Azam Belas Symposium: "Cracks in the Wall"', National Art Gallery, KL, Malaysia (Feb 25)

AWARDS

2022 IX Tashkent International Biennale of Contemporary Art: Jury Prize

2022 TUKANG–The First Craftsmanship in Selangor: Winner

2021 G-Short International Short Film Festival: Finalist

2015 Malaysiaku Photography Contest: First Runner-up

2006 Crown International Fiction Awards: Merit Award

2003 ASEAN Short Fiction Awards: Second Prize

2001 Huazong Literary Awards (Fiction): Special Merit

1998 Red Ribbon Media Awards: Winner

1998 Shriro Horseman Print Awards (Self-promotion Category): Winner

1998 4A Kancil Awards (Website): Special Merit

1996 Shriro Horseman Print Awards (Self-promotion Category): Winner

1995 4A Kancil Awards (TVC Category): Silver

1995 4A Kancil Awards (Print Pro Bono): Special Merit

1995 4A Kancil Awards (Typography): Special Merit

EDUCATION

1999 Visiting scholar Chinese Literature, Beijing University, China

1993 Photography course, New England School of Photography, Boston, MA, USA

1989–92 Bachelor of Science, Advertising, University of Texas at Austin, USA

SELECTED PUBLICATION

2022 *ILHAM Art Show*, ILHAM Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

2019 *Whale Watch* (Novella), Monsoon Review Literary Magazine, Malaysia/Taiwan

2018 *Hidden Naga, Makcik Fashion, The Naga Boy & Mixed Rice Uncle*, National Art Gallery, Malaysia

2017 *KL BIENNALE 2017: Alami Belas – Beloved*, National Art Gallery, Malaysia

2015 *Optimistic Melancholics*, Richard Koh Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

2007 *Anthology of Malaysian Short Stories*, YouRen Publishing, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

2006 *Beautiful Things* (Novel), Crown Publishing, Taipei, Taiwan

2003 *ASEAN Short Stories*, Lingzi Media Pte Ltd, Singapore

SELECTED NEWS

Art and Market, *Midpoint: Leon Leong – Authenticity through interdisciplinary practice*, 16 April 2023

Tatler, *Leon Leong's Stilt Houses Exhibition Explores the Floating World of Kampung Baru*, 29 Aug 2022

Malay Mail, *In 'Stilt Houses', artist Leon Leong explores the 'floating world' of Kampung Baru*, 11 June 2022

DESIGNBOOM, *Leon Leong recalls Malaysia's 1960s public housing with 'Cracks in the Wall'*, 27 July 2019

Leon Leong

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