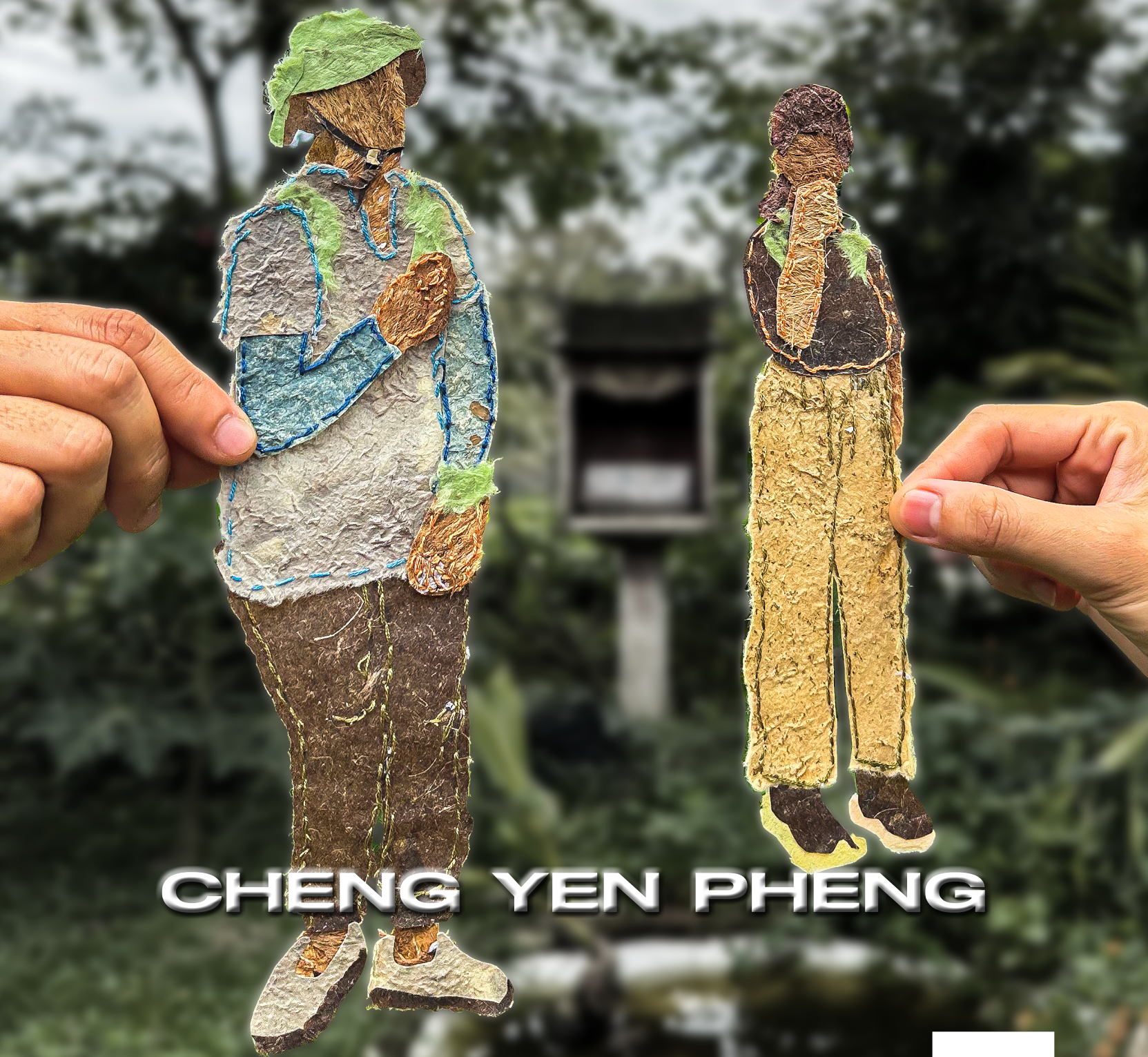


Salt of the Land



CHENG YEN PHENG

Salt of the Land

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9 October
—
8 November 2025

Wei-Ling Gallery
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia



'Salt of the Land', Cheng Yen Pheng's fourth solo exhibition, takes its name from the phrase "salt of the earth," which suggests humility and resilience. In Chinese culture, salt is one of the seven basic daily necessities, alongside firewood, rice, oil, soy sauce, vinegar, and tea. A grouping that dates back to the Song dynasty. *The Guanzi*, an early text on governance, illustrates the importance of salt, describing it as both vital sustenance and a means of maintaining social order that connects the household to the state.

The exhibition at Wei-Ling Gallery gently shifts away from her earlier series, *'Frugal Living – it's Mulberry Season'* (2022), which focused on daily rituals, her daughter's drawings, hand-stitched embroidery, and the mulberry trees she grew at home. This time, she looks beyond her doorstep, exploring the natural forces and fragile ecosystems that shape the world outside.

In this series, salt functions as a subtle symbol of continuity. Cheng engages with the four classical elements: water, fire, earth, and air. Each stage reveals a deliberate, attentive approach, reflecting the artist's ongoing relationship with her materials. Water becomes pulp for handmade paper. Fire and wormwood ash purify and stabilise materials. Earth, mixed with plant fibers, is shaped into bricks. Air aids in drying paper and lifting feathers.

Cheng produced these works in Batu Arang, Selangor, a former mining town that continues to exhibit evidence of its industrial history while confronting land repossession. In response to these conditions, the artist cultivates materials in her garden, thereby integrating acts of care into her artistic practice. The evolving environment and the community's adaptation directly inform her creative process.

By sourcing materials from her immediate surroundings, the artist foregrounds traditional craft techniques and situates them within a contemporary context. The use of pulp, clay, ash, and fiber demonstrates the transmission of artisanal knowledge and the preservation of cultural memory. For her, continuity signifies renewal, a living link between the past and what is still to come.

Cheng Yen Pheng: Salt of the Land

We live in times of extractions and technologies that promise speed and convenience. In this moment, to slow down—to sit with fibres, to make paper by hand, to bake bricks, to hand-stitch—is not only counter-cultural, but itself an act of resistance.

This is the space in which Cheng Yen Pheng's exhibition *Salt of the Land* breathes, held at Wei-Ling Gallery, Kuala Lumpur from 9 October to 8 November 2025. The new body of work asks: *what does it mean to be grounded? To care for land and community, not as metaphor, but as practice? And what role does the artist have in a world where the soil beneath our feet is contested and where labour is invisible?*

An Encounter

When I visited Yen Pheng's home-studio in Batu Arang less than an hour from Kuala Lumpur—for the first time despite our seven years of acquaintance—I found myself stepping into what felt like a lost moment in time. A wooden Chinese *kampung* house sits in a quiet *lorong*, dogs and cats co-existing, a kitchen that served kefir the artist had brewed, a *wau* (traditional Malay kite) hanging from the ceiling—a reminder of her Terengganu research project, *When the Land Tortoise Meets the Sea Turtle* (2020). The house was the studio, the studio was the house. Living, making, and breathing are all intermingled.

Here, I watched artworks being finished, and conversation shifted from paper pulp to incinerator proposals. It was intimate. It was ecological. And most of all, it was political. That was when it struck me: perhaps this is how Yen Pheng views art—not as separated, elevated, autonomous, but as embedded in the rhythms of home.

Her move to this small town with her daughter around nine years ago marked not only a change of address, but a shift of *modus operandi*. From the city's speed, she turned to the semi-rural, to the edge of town, to the land that bears the weight of the past and the futures still being contested. In that transition, *Salt of the Land* emerged.

Yen Pheng's earlier series—*It's Been Four Years Since...* (2018–2019) and *Frugal Living – It's Mulberry Season* (2022)—already placed emphasis on material, ritual, home-life. In these past works, she planted mulberry trees, made her own paper pulp, dyed it with onion skins, turmeric, and indigo. She traced the meanings of home, mother-and-daughter relationship, self-sufficiency and domestic rhythms.

Yet, in *Salt of the Land* she returned with a wider lens. Still working from home in Batu Arang and sourcing material mostly from her own garden, she extends the notion of self outward: into community, land-history, labour, and ecology.

Reading the Title

The exhibition title itself is both rich and thought-provoking. On one level, it recalls the English idiom “salt of the earth”—those who are humble, grounded, essential, and connected to the

soil. But as Yen Pheng shared, in Chinese tradition salt is among the “seven necessities of life”; firewood, rice, oil, salt, soy sauce, vinegar, tea are basic items for daily survival. To choose salt is to return to what is most elemental: ordinary, necessary, and sustaining.

For Yen Pheng, salt also becomes a metaphor of continuity: of history lived in the land, and of memory sustained against the pressure of ignorance and exploitation. The phrase thus becomes layered: *salt of the land* may refer to the people of the land, the materials of the land, the labour of the land, or the care of the artist all at once.

In the present moment, when incinerators are being planned in Batu Arang, risking the invisibilisation of communities—Yen Pheng’s work raises an important question: *what does being “salt of the land” mean when the land itself is under threat?* The title, in that sense, is not simply poetic; it is an invocation.

The Works and Their Impulses

In *Feathers on the Floor, but We Stand Firm and Tall*, flat human figures made of paper disk-cut from fibres of trees the artist planted herself, their edges stitched, recall the careful work of community building, performed thread by thread. Paired with the mud-bricks made from local clay and fibres referencing the local brick factory (now closed) and the industrial past, the figures emerge from the collective memory of Batu Arang’s people whose lives are bound to the land, now facing the threat of an incinerator. They represent neighbours who signed a common petition, who found each other through community WhatsApp groups, and through this act of art-making, came into relational proximity. They colonise one corner of the gallery floor, invade the space, asserting that the land is not inert.

Feather Mother, Feather Home is a three-dimensional bird-form, made entirely of fibre-paper feathers, reminiscent of the chickens whom Yen Pheng used to raise. Back in the day, she counted on their eggs as a source of protein. The mother hen sits with feathers expanded, as if protecting her eggs or chicks. Her body both a shelter and a symbol of nourishment and domestic labour that sustains rural life. Making the feathers by hand, cutting, layering, the artist turns a quotidian motif into a material meditation. The home becomes the site of a careful production.

Both *One Ringgit Chicken* and *The Corners Were Wet* reflect on undervalued labour and quiet resilience. *One Ringgit Chicken*, reimagines the one-ringgit note using paper pulp, plant fibre, and natural dye, turning monetary iconography into a handmade material form. At its centre, the chicken becomes a symbol of that undervalued labour. As if hatched from the economy itself, it asks what remains of worth when all value is reduced to a printed number on paper. *The Corners Were Wet* comprises a set of fibre-cut “pajama-clothes”; top hung, bottoms draped over a chair. The shirt’s damp edges, made possible by an internal mechanism engineered by the artist, become a subtle trace of labour. Drawing attention to the uncelebrated labour-class—those who act according to needs and the sensitivity of time. During the conversation we had, Yen Pheng also spoke of the contrast between them and the educated “procedure-people”, who, in contrast put less importance in urgency.

In the exhibition's eponymous work, *Salt of the Land*, more than five metres of stitched handmade paper, each piece connected like patchwork, bears Chinese characters that recall the seven daily necessities. The work mirrors the effort of convincing the community to be part of the collective struggle—day by day, one individual and another. It is not an instant process, yet just like the salt, it is elemental. The soft-toned and delicate work stretches across the wall and onto a pedestal in the gallery space as if whispering, “we are here, and we shall continue.”

Play Pause Stop evokes the village game of survival when protecting one's home from wildlife and danger. It was realised in the form of a dart, made of sack filled with straw and natural fibres. To my own personal reading, the title suggests agency in defending and conserving what you can. To the artist, it reflects on how the nature of “play” has changed from something natural to something by design. The arrows seem to question: *are our actions driven by intrinsic motivation, or are they shaped by external forces?*

In *Light Holds the Wind*, Yen Pheng combined kite-making with lantern-making. Both require bending bamboo sticks, which, as the artist claimed, is not an easy process. Once achieved however, it seems as if their characteristics mirror the artist's own rhythm of making and living: flexible yet resilient. Combining a vernacular technique, women's labour, and artisanal knowledge, the lantern holds a special position within the exhibition: suspended high in the air.

Altogether, the exhibition feels like a passage through Yen Pheng's interior world; her concerns, her quiet endurance, and her community's defiance. The way the works are displayed seem as if they encircle the viewer; there is no way out. Seen together, the constellation of works within the vertical space forms a psychological map that is both fragile and powerful. Stepping in, one automatically becomes part of her and her community's struggle made tangible through every piece. To witness is already to take part.

Artist and Care

Ultimately, what strikes me in Yen Pheng's *Salt of the Land* is the articulation of a deepened ethic of care. The works move beyond visuals to becoming an infrastructure of change, materialising memory and protest. Here, the artist is not merely a maker of objects, but a caretaker of the community and the land.

For a historical place like Batu Arang, which was once a coal-mining town, with the first railway line in Malaya, and abandoned brick factories—the past is underground and the future of its community is uncertain. Yen Pheng's work surfaces and imagines that feeling of “not knowingness” through forms.

In the context of today, the choice to slow down also becomes radical. The material and its environment become a witness to time: the water that makes the pulp, the clay that forms

the bricks, the air that lifts feathers. These are not (only) metaphors, rather processes.

While her earlier works were often autobiographical, this exhibition resists treating art in isolation. It insists that there is no self-liberation without the freedom of others. Here, the artist lives on the same soil as her neighbours, learns their histories, fights for their land, and folds them into her making. Her work, in that sense, is political, not as a slogan, but as a life choice and a living practice.

All in all, Yen Pheng's work calls back to the questions asked in the beginning of this essay. When our land resources are commodified and our labour becomes invisible, the decision to plant trees, to make pulp, to bake bricks, and to stitch by hand is once again, deeply political. It is an act of refusal: not to passively consume but to participate, not to extract but to cultivate, not to dominate but to collaborate.

This conviction feels grounded and easy to digest when witnessing Yen Pheng's day in her studio-home. Actions exemplifying what it means to live *with* the land, rather than merely *on* it. Again, the domestic and the artistic are not separate zones, rather continuous gestures of making and repairing.

In the end, *Salt of the Land* circles back to care as a method. In Yen Pheng's hands, care becomes a slow form of thinking: a way of attending to what is near, of making time for what the world overlooks. And art finds itself in the soil of that everyday, revealing what it means to belong somewhere, and how to care back for it.

Writing by Amanda Ariawan

Curator and writer based between Kuala Lumpur and Jakarta. Her practice looks at exhibition-making through a quasi-anthropological lens, tracing cultural narratives, historical memory, and the often-overlooked relationships between the human and the non-human. She works towards amplifying Southeast Asian identities and sustaining decolonised, inclusive perspectives.

Salt of the Land: A Tale made of Mud, Mulberry, and Care

There is something subtly radical about Cheng Yen Pheng's *Salt of the Land*, the quiet urgency that hangs in the air. Written from the perspective of an outsider — one who does not live in Batu Arang, who does not breathe its air thickened by the hum of industrial ambition — this exhibition at first glance is impressive just by the sheer craftsmanship evident in every piece of work. Yet to step into Cheng's world is to realise that her art, while rooted in a particular place, speaks to something much larger: the fraught relationship between land and humanity, between care and apathy, between what affects "them" and what ultimately implicates "us."

From this position, *Salt of the Land* fits within what is often called social art — or, in contemporary parlance, *artivism*. Yet Cheng's artivism feels profoundly different from the kind often encountered, in that it is not performative, not declared through slogans or spectacle. Rather, it is woven into her process, her materials, and the patience required to make them. Her works show that art can be both deeply personal and socially urgent without sacrificing sincerity; reflecting not only her observations but her belonging to it. Her art is made not to document or dramatise Batu Arang's plight; instead, they embody the emotional and material connections between people and land. They have become the physical manifestation of care, labour, and endurance. Growing out of lived experience: from tending to her garden, raising her child, and watching the seasons change in a town now facing the slow violence of development. This is not a cry for sympathy, but for awareness. It is a record of what is at stake.

The exhibition also poses a question: *why should we care?*

For those who do not live in Batu Arang, this appears to be another local dispute in a country full of them. Why should its fate matter to those beyond its borders? The proposed incinerator in Batu Arang will not simply affect its immediate residents. It will inevitably affect everyone. The toxins released, the ecosystems disrupted, the precedent set for future developments: these are not remote consequences. Cheng's works compel us to see how indifference to one community's plight becomes complicity in a much larger degradation. This awareness runs through like an undercurrent in the exhibition. *Salt of the Land* is not a plea for pity; it is an invitation to empathy. Asking viewers to consider how easily apathy takes root in a fast-paced, capitalist world that prizes convenience over care. We move too quickly to feel, too distracted to care, too comfortable to question. It begs the question of the emotional cost of detachment, whether our constant rush to move forward blinds us to the quiet devastations unfolding around us. Apathy is easy to justify when the problem seems distant. The very "curse of apathy" that will bring about our inevitable ruin. A sentiment often paraphrased from Plato's Republic, "*The price of apathy is to be ruled by evil men.*" (Plato, *The Republic*, 347c)

Yet more than environmental commentary, it is also a portrait of Cheng herself — as an individual, a mother, and an artist whose life and work are intertwined. Her garden, where she grows the plants that feed her practice, mirrors her home, where she nurtures her family. This continuity between living and making gives her art its quiet strength. It is not activism through confrontation, but through cultivation. The way she tends to her materials becomes a metaphor for how she tends to the world around her. There is something maternal in her

way of working — not sentimental, but steadfast. The paper she makes is delicate yet strong, its surface holding layers of dye like memory. The natural colours shift with light and time, much like the land itself. Through them, she expresses both vulnerability and endurance. Her art embodies the patience of caregiving, where repetition and gentleness become acts of resilience.

Her process itself is an act of devotion. Cheng makes her own mulberry paper from the trees she cultivates in her garden. The colours in her work come from natural dyes, many extracted from plants she grows herself. The blue that runs through her pieces, soft yet luminous, is drawn from indigo plant she nurtures at home. Other hues come from turmeric, leaves, roots, and bark — all transformed through her own hands. Every sheet of paper, every pigment, carries traces of her. The work, in its making, becomes inseparable from the life that surrounds it. There is awe in this attention to process. Cheng's choice to work slowly, to depend on her environment rather than on ready-made materials, is a form of resistance. It resists the speed of production and the detachment of consumption. Her practice turns sustainability from a slogan into a lived principle. To grow, harvest, dye, and craft is to be in dialogue with the land. Each gesture honours what the earth gives, and acknowledges the responsibility that comes with taking from it.

Encountering *Salt of the Land* is to experience both admiration and discomfort. Admiration for the meticulous labour and honesty behind each work; discomfort in recognising the collective complacency they expose. The materials feel fragile, almost ephemeral, yet their making required strength and persistence. This tension — between delicacy and endurance, beauty and unease — forms the emotional core of the exhibition. It mirrors the precarious balance of the world we inhabit, where quiet resilience continues beneath the pressures of exploitation.

Despite its subtlety, *Salt of the Land* is not a passive exhibition. It challenges through stillness. It speaks that to care is an act of courage, and to slow down is to stand one's ground. It endures. It asks for attention, and in doing so, teaches us what attentiveness can mean. Ultimately, the exhibition is not only about Batu Arang, or even about the threat of development. It is about what it means to live ethically within a shared world. Cheng's practice reminds us that the land is not a backdrop to human life, but its foundation — something alive, interconnected, and deserving of tenderness. To care for it is not a gesture of charity but an act of survival. She transforms the personal into the universal. Her art reminds us that resistance can begin in the smallest gestures: in the act of growing a plant, making a colour, or pausing long enough to listen. Her work insists that care is not naïve, but radical. It is an alternative to apathy, a way of living with integrity in a time of erasure.

Through this exhibition, Cheng Yen Pheng has created something both fragile and enduring — a record of love, work, and defiance. *Salt of the Land* stands as a testament to her perseverance, her ethics, and her faith in the quiet power of making. In her hands, art becomes not only a reflection of the world, but a way of repairing it.

Written by Prissie Ong

Salt of the Land

Installation view at Wei-Ling Gallery





Close-up of 'Salt of the Land' (2020–2025)

Salt of the Land



Salt of the Land

Self-made & natural color dyed mulberry papers, banana stem papers, threads, color pencils, ramie, gold leaf

Variable dimension

2020–2025

This work is made up of many pieces of handmade paper sewn together. The paper comes from mulberry bark grown at home, each sheet personally made by hand, carrying traces of sweat, earth, and sunlight.

Slowly, stitch by stitch, I sew the fragments together, piecing them back like the small debris of daily life. It does not seek perfection, but rather continuation and endurance, each piece supporting another, forming a whole.

The work is installed upside down, so viewers must bend down to see its details, and lift their heads to see the whole. It mirrors our everyday lives, we bow our heads to work, and sometimes lift them to think.

“Firewood, rice, oil, salt, soy sauce, vinegar, tea”, the simplest yet truest parts of life.

Under the theme *Salt of the Land*, it is like salt, ordinary, but giving life its flavor. It is a tribute to all who labour, and to everyone striving to keep order in their daily lives.

Feathers on the Floor, but we stand firm and tall



Installation view at Wei-Ling Gallery

Feathers on the Floor, but we stand firm and tall

Self-made & natural color dyed mulberry papers, banana stem papers, threads, color pencils, ramie, mud bricks, cardboard, bamboo stick

Variable dimension

2023–2025

An approximately 8 x 8 x 8 space, its walls coated in black charcoal, its floor covered with handmade mud bricks composed of red clay, sand, and plant fibres. Some bricks are laid flat to form a surface; others are stacked into uneven shapes. Their surfaces are rough and incomplete, with fibres exposed and sand seeming ready to crumble at any moment.

Discarded cardboard has been stitched and collaged into the forms of demonstrators, leaning and embedded among the piles of mud bricks. On the walls, silhouettes appear, figures walking toward the placard.

Over the past two years, my life has been deeply influenced by community movements. Regardless of how systems change, people should never forget their right to democracy and self-determination. It is not a gift granted from above, but a voice reclaimed brick by brick, from the soil itself.

The walls are covered in black charcoal, the floor laid with self-made mud bricks, a mix of red clay, sand, and fibre. They are fragmented and incomplete, yet continuously rebuilt. Cardboard is sewn into the form of a placard, with figures emerging from the walls, moving toward it. To fight for our right to democracy and self-determination is an inseparable part of life.

Amidst the disorder and fragments of everyday struggle, there is still collective strength, a fragile unity, yet steadfast as a wall built from many hands.



Close-up of 'Feathers on the Floor, but we stand firm and tall' (2023–2025)



Close-up of 'Feathers on the Floor, but we stand firm and tall' (2023–2025)

The corners were wet



The corners were wet

Acacia bark, wooden chair

Variable dimension

2023–2025

A shirt and a pair of trousers made from plant bark. The shirt hangs vertically, its damp corners bearing traces like the marks left after washing and roughly drying one's hands from labour. The trousers rest over the back of a chair, their folds still intact, as if just taken off. The chair quietly bears the weight, as though it, too, is taking a brief rest. Between the garments lingers the warmth and humidity of a body that has just moved and worked.

This work stems from the artist's attention to the "labourer", whether in the kitchen or the workshop, whether white-collar or blue-collar, these bodies share the same moment after work: the damp corners, the hung garments, the breath that hasn't yet dried. The bark fibres are processed by hand, soaked, pounded, and dried. Time seeps into the material, shaping its temperament. There are no shortcuts, no way to rush it. Only time can soften the fibres and allow the work to take form.

Perhaps this evokes a quiet sense of body heat. The work does not dwell on the hardship of labour, but holds on to the pause that follows it, the moisture after washing, the still-wet corner of cloth, the breath of a body momentarily at ease. Even the chair seems to rest in that instant. Within this pause, the labourer is no longer defined or divided. What remains are humidity, air, and time, simple and real, like life itself. A shirt and a pair of trousers made from plant bark: the shirt hangs vertically, its corners damp like traces left by freshly washed hands; the trousers drape over the chair, their folds intact, as if just removed. Both garments retain their moisture and form.



Close-up of *'The corners were wet'* (2023–2025)

One Ringgit chicken



One Ringgit chicken

Self-made & natural color dyed mulberry papers, banana stem papers, threads, color pencils, color ink pens

55cm x 104cm

2023

In Malaysia, “One Ringgit Chicken” is a colloquial phrase for something cheap or insignificant.

This work reimagines the one-ringgit banknote, remade by hand with paper pulp, plant fibres, and natural dyes, transforming the printed logic of monetary value into the tactile language of labour, land, and daily life.

At the centre, a chicken sits as if hatched from the currency itself, a humble creature of the kitchen and the market, of care and consumption. Here, it becomes a metaphor for survival, for the unnoticed labour that sustains a home, and for the quiet humour of living under an economic system that prices everything, yet values so little.

One Ringgit Chicken asks: When value is measured only in money, how much is life’s labour, and laughter, still worth?



Close-up of 'One Ringgit chicken' (2023)

Light Holds the Wind



Light Holds the Wind

Self-made & natural color dyed mulberry papers, bamboo, thread

Variable dimension

2023–2025

Over the past two years, I have learned to make traditional lanterns and Malay kites. The two crafts unexpectedly share the same foundation — both are built upon bamboo. In Southeast Asia, bamboo is one of the most common materials, but to me, it feels more like a personality. Bamboo is light, yet strong. Its strength does not come from force, but from judgment, patience, and the sensitivity of the hands. I often feel it resembles a woman — flexible, resilient, and requiring care, understanding, and gentle guidance.

Lantern-making taught me about support and unity. Each thin strip of bamboo connects with another, forming a structure that can hold light. It is not only illumination, but also a form of collective strength. Kite-making taught me the language of wind — how to tie, balance, release, and let the wind become part of the form itself. This work combines both experiences. Bamboo forms the backbone, holding up fragments of life; paper, like skin, breathes with light and air. It sways gently — not entirely stable, yet deeply real. Like our daily lives, it is held together by hands, wisdom, and a small measure of resilience, as we piece life together bit by bit.

In this work, *light and wind* are not merely natural phenomena, but two invisible yet tangible forces in everyday life. Light symbolizes awareness, knowledge, and hope; wind represents movement, unseen labour, and emotion. The bamboo frame and paper surface relate like body and breath — light yet resilient, separate yet mutually sustaining. “*Light Supports Wind*” is a reversal of common thought. We often say wind lifts light or fans the flame, but here, light instead supports the wind. It suggests an inner strength — that amid the turbulence and drift of life, what sustains us may not be power itself, but awareness and warmth.

Bamboo, an everyday material across Southeast Asia, is shaved, bent, and tied by women’s hands into the skeletal frames of lanterns and kites. Lanterns carry light; kites borrow wind — both depend on their frames, those seemingly delicate yet enduring structures, like the interdependence among family, community, and labourers. This installation, together with the previous work “*Firewood, Rice, Oil, Salt, Soy Sauce, Vinegar, Tea*,” belongs to the same life system — both are stitched together from handmade paper. But this time, the structure is more spatial, like a breathing space being held up. The bamboo pole stands like the spine of life, supporting two curtains pieced together through labour, while the colours of the paper — earth, rice, grey, and pale yellow — extend like the tones of body and land.

Feather mother, feather home



Feather mother, feather home

Self-made & natural color dyed mulberry papers, barks, ramie, bamboo,
color ink pens, color pencils

Variable dimension

2023–2025

Self-made & natural color dyed mulberry papers, barks, ramie, bamboo,
color ink pens, color pencils; Variable dimension

A hen sits in fullness, her body swelling like a quiet queen. Her feathers are not just plumage, they are home. The chicks live, hide, and grow within her warmth.

After the lockdown, I began raising chickens for eggs, the most basic source of protein in our family. From five to more than thirty, they have become part of our domestic world. One remarkable hen bred four or five generations, her daily walks with her chicks became our quiet joy.

In this work, the mother hen embodies the cycle of care and domestic labour. Her body is a house, her feathers are its walls, a shelter of tenderness and endurance that sustains everyday life.



Close-up of 'Feather mother, feather home' (2023–2025)

I thought I could fly



I thought I could fly

Self-made & natural color dyed mulberry papers, barks, ramie, bamboo, sack bag with straw and fiber, mud ball, color ink pens, color pencils

Variable dimension

2023–2025

I'm not entirely sure why I made this work. One day, I simply felt an urge to hang up something that looked like, and yet didn't quite look like, a chicken. That impulse to suspend something felt both absurd and strangely light. The bamboo pole seems to embody a supporting force; the lump of clay below it serves as grounding, as an anchor. And the suspended form in between, it looks as though it might take flight, yet is also caught mid-air, frozen in motion.

Beside the work stands an archery target, struck, marked, and bearing traces of impact. Perhaps there's a kind of dialogue between the two: one suspended in the tension of air, the other absorbing the force of being hit. I never intended to explain it. It feels more like a memory stored in the body: when I no longer need a reason, my hands simply know what to do.



Close-up of 'I thought I could fly' (2023–2025)

Play, Pause, Stop



Play, Pause, Stop

Installation on-site, bamboo-made arrows, sack bag with straw and fiber
Variable dimension
2024

This installation art piece features a suspended archery target, crafted from a burlap sack filled with straw and natural fibers. At its center is a striking red “play” button-shaped bullseye, surrounded by marks from previous attempts—some arrows hit the target, while others miss their mark—capturing the repetitive nature of this action.

Using archery as its theme, the work explores its rich history as a skill, game, and art of precision. The act of aligning focus, effort, and intent to hit a target parallels the modern behavior of repeatedly pressing the “play” button on digital platforms. Through this metaphor, the piece raises a critical question: are we actively choosing to engage, or are we guided by media design to act?

The “play” button, a universally recognized symbol, traditionally invites us to start or participate. Yet, in the digital era, it has evolved into a habitual interaction. By juxtaposing the ancient art of archery with the modern digital interface, Play, Pause, Stop reflects on how our behaviors have shifted over time.

In the past, “play” was a tactile, physical activity, rich with sensory engagement. Today, it is often reduced to the mechanical act of pressing a button—a habit requiring neither skill, physical effort, nor deep focus. The arrows represent our daily actions: are these actions driven by intrinsic motivation, or are they shaped by external forces? The target, marked by countless attempts, visually represents the monotony and repetitiveness of modern interactions.

This work invites viewers to pause and reflect: are we truly “playing,” or are we merely following cues designed to prompt our habitual responses?

**Untitled**

Self-made & natural color dyed mulberry bark

Variable dimension

2023-2025

**Untitled**

Self-made & natural color dyed mulberry bark

Variable dimension

2023-2025



Installation view at Wei-Ling Gallery



Installation view at Wei-Ling Gallery



Installation view at Wei-Ling Gallery

ABOUT THE ARTIST



CHENG YEN PHENG (B. 1982)

Cheng Yen Pheng, born in Penang, now lives and works in Selangor. Having graduated from Dasein Academy of Art with a Diploma in Fine Arts in 2004, Cheng's works are deeply personal and autobiographical, reflecting the struggles and decisions that have shaped her life. Her art examines the process of reconciling conflicting realities, overcoming loss, and navigating the unknown, while remaining steadfast in her beliefs. Despite life's uncertainties, her determination to stay true to herself and her principles remains a constant throughout her journey. This commitment to authenticity is mirrored in the powerful and intimate nature of her art, which captures her emotional and personal experiences.

Recognised as one of Malaysia's most daring contemporary voices, Cheng made a significant impact in 2014 when her provocative work 'ABU' was censored as a finalist in the National Art Gallery's Bakat Muda competition—a moment that underscored her boldness and refusal to compromise her vision. She was awarded the 2019 UOB Painting of the Year (Malaysia) and received the 2020 CENDANA Visual Arts Inspire Funding, which supported her research into local arts, crafts, and communities in Terengganu. In 2023, she was selected for the prestigious UOB-Fukuoka Asian Art Museum's Artists Residency Programme.

Her art serves as a visual narration of her life, with the act of making becoming a means of organising, materialising, and preserving experience. Through themes such as femininity, maternity, motherhood, death, and the shift from urban to rural life, Cheng reflects on her personal transformation; capturing both its joys and hardships. Her thoughtful use of materials and textures enhances this emotional landscape, with each medium chosen to express different facets of her identity and journey.

Cheng Yen Pheng's exhibitions, such as 'PRICKED!' in 2012 and 'It's Been Four Years Since...' in 2020, continue to explore themes of identity, gender, and societal expectations. In the 'PRICKED!' series, she used balloons as symbols of gender and sex to examine the fluidity of identity and the challenges of societal norms, especially from the perspective of a woman seeking empowerment. Her 2020 exhibition marked a transformative period, with her work addressing her personal struggles, the complexities of motherhood, and the search for self-discovery. In 'Frugal Living – it's Mulberry Season' (2022), she explores resilience through the act of stitching, using mulberry paper as a symbol of fragility. This series reflects her journey from city life to the countryside, capturing personal growth and the challenges of transitioning into a more sustainable, nature-based lifestyle.



CHENG YEN PHENG (B. 1982)

EDUCATION

2004 Diploma in Fine Art, Dasein Academy of Art, Malaysia

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2025 Salt of the Land, Wei-Ling Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2022 Frugal Living – it's Mulberry Season, Wei-Ling Contemporary, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2020 SEA FOCUS, Gillman Barracks, Singapore
- 2018 It's Been Four Years Since..., Wei-Ling Contemporary, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2012 Pricked, Wei-Ling Contemporary, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2024 18@8 pLAy, Wei-Ling Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2023 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
WLG IGNITE, Wei-Ling Contemporary, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Art Expo Malaysia 2022, GMBB, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2021 100 Pieces: Art for All, Wei-Ling Contemporary, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2018 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 Dasein Gallery Group Exhibition, 10th International Art Expo Malaysia, MATRADE Centre, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2015 Stories of 11 Artworks, HOM Art Trans, Malaysia
- 2014 Breaking Down The Wall, Young Artist's Group Exhibition, 8th International Art Expo Malaysia, MATRADE Centre, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
The Good Malaysian Woman: Ethnicity, Religion Politics, Black Box, MAP KL, Publika, Malaysia
Freedom Under Construction, Malaysia-Myanmar Exchange Program, HOM Art Trans, Selangor, Malaysia
- 2013 Measuring Love, Wei-Ling Contemporary, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2012 A Decade of Collecting Contemporary Art, Wei-Ling Gallery
18@8 KUL-SIN, ION Art Gallery, Orchard Road, Singapore

- 2011 18@8 Save The Planet, Wei-Ling Contemporary, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
The Garden of Hidden Desires, Wei-Ling Contemporary, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Asia Art Link, Philippines
- 2010 Absolut 18@8, Wei-Ling Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Artist in Residence, HOM Art Trans, Selangor, Malaysia
Young Malaysian Artist: New Object (ion), Galeri Petronas, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2009 MEA (Malaysian Emerging Artist Award) Exhibition, Soka Gakkai, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Sasaran International Art Workshop (Part II), Mutiara Gallery, Penang, Malaysia
Hanoi Welcome, Vietnam Fine Arts Museum
- 2008 Swash to Swarm, Findars Space @ Annexe Central Market, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
No Big Size, Findars Space @ Annexe Central Market, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2007 Mekar Citra, Shah Alam Gallery, Selangor, Malaysia
30 Finalists of Pact Max Malaysian Art Awards, Foodloft Art Gallery, Penang, Malaysia
Floral Kaleidoscope, Isetan Lot 10, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2005 Open Show, National Art Gallery Malaysia
Pameran Terbuka (Open Show), Shah Alam Gallery, Selangor, Malaysia
Seoul International Art Festival, Seoul City Art Centre, South Korea
Sejong Culture Art Centre, South Korea

AWARDS

- 2013 Bakat Muda Sezaman (Finalist), National Visual Arts Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2010 Artist in Residence, HOM Art Trans, Selangor, Malaysia

RESIDENCY

- 2023 UOB-Fukuoka Asian Art Museum's Artists Residency Programme, Fukuoka, Japan

PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

- Galeri Petronas, Malaysia
Aliya & Farouk Khan Collection, Malaysia

To accompany ***Salt of the Land*** by **Cheng Yen Pheng** from **9 October — 8 November 2025**

Gallery Information

Free Admission for visitors with appointments.

Walk-ins permitted upon registration, otherwise a RM10 fee will be imposed.

(Applicable to individuals aged 12 years and above.)

Operating Hours:

10 AM – 6 PM (Tuesday to Friday)

10 AM – 5 PM (Saturday)

Closed: Sundays, Mondays, and Public Holidays

Image courtesy: Wei-Ling Gallery & the artist, Cheng Yen Pheng

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