

SEAN LEAN



ART SG

23—25 Jan 2026
Marina Bay Sands
Singapore

Founding and
Lead Partner



UBS





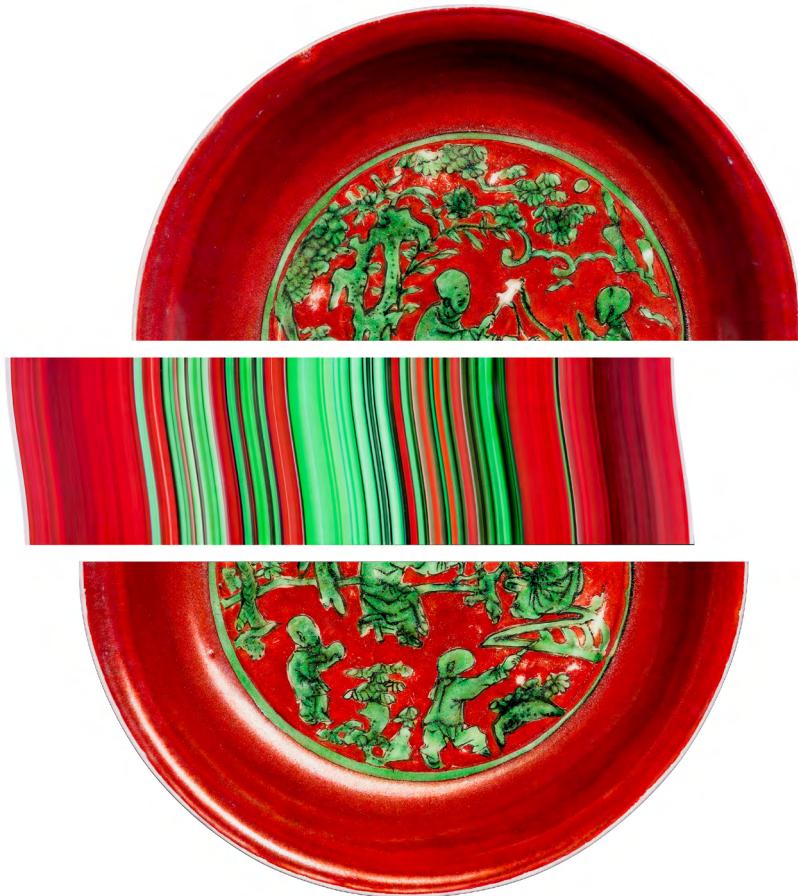
A tale
Automotive paint on aluminium
140cm x 158cm (Triptych)
2024-2026

"Sometimes a homeland becomes a tale. We love the story because it is about our homeland and we love our homeland even more because of the story."

– Refaat Alareer

Refaat Alareer was a prominent Palestinian scholar, writer, and professor at the Islamic University of Gaza. He played a crucial role in Gaza's literary community, co-founding the "We Are Not Numbers" project. This initiative provided writing workshops for young Palestinians to share their experiences and stories. Alareer was renowned for his poetry and writings that illuminated the struggles and resilience of the Palestinian people.

Tragically, on December 6, 2023, Alareer, along with his brother, sister, and four nephews, was killed by an Israeli airstrike in northern Gaza during the Israeli invasion of the Gaza Strip. According to the Euro-Med Monitor, Alareer appeared to have been deliberately targeted, as the strike "surgically bombed out the entire building," following weeks of "death threats that Refaat received online and by phone from Israeli accounts." On April 26, 2024, his eldest daughter and newborn grandchild were also killed by an Israeli airstrike on their home in Gaza City.

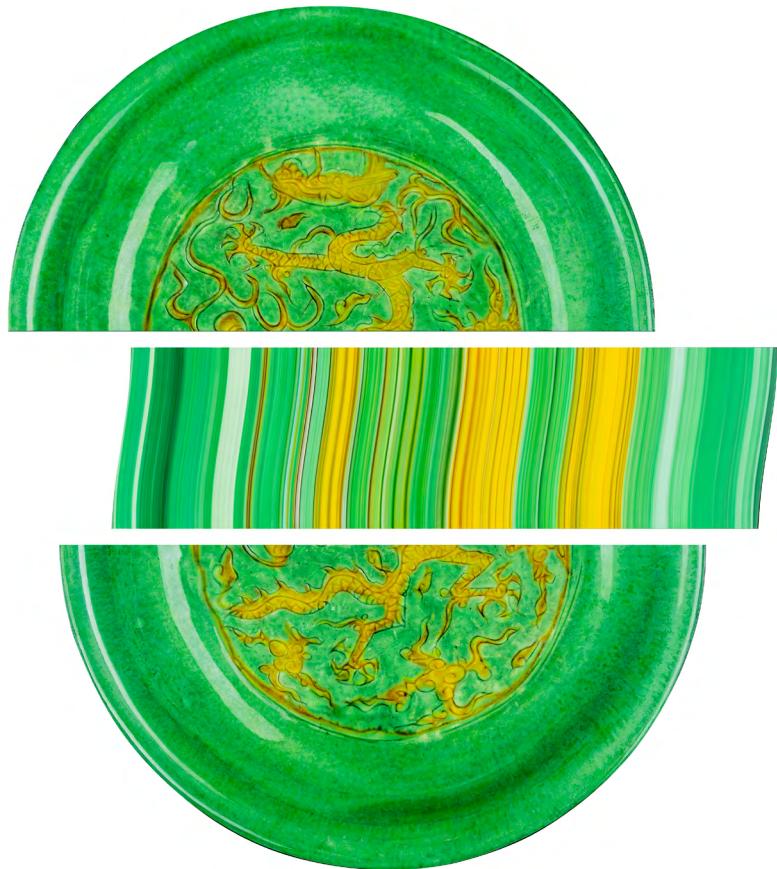


Inferior Physique
Automotive paint on aluminium
134cm x 128cm (Triptych)
2025-2026

"Men of inferior physique, mostly married and the fathers of numerous children."
– James Aitkin, 1909

Sean Lean's *Inferior Physique* takes its title from a 1909 remark by British colonial official James Aitkin, who described Straits Chinese men in poorer districts as "men of inferior physique, mostly married and the fathers of numerous children", a phrase that reflected wider colonial anxieties about tropical degeneration and racialized health in Southeast Asia.

Lean's use of the archive beckons to consider how such narratives survived through policy, rumor, and class aspiration long after formal colonial rule, lingering within modern ideas of family, productivity, and social mobility.



Tortoise
Automotive paint on aluminium
134cm x 128cm (Triptych)
2025-2026

"The Celestial Empire... moves with the majestic slowness of a tortoise."
– Sir Henry Yule (British Orientalist), *Cathay and the Way Thither* (1866)

Sean Lean's *Tortoise* draws its title from an 1866 travel compilation by British Orientalist, Sir Henry Yule, who characterized the Qing Empire as moving with "the majestic slowness of a tortoise", a line that carried a quiet mockery of perceived inertia and reluctance toward change. The work considers how such descriptions shaped global imaginaries and how their residues appear in narratives that frame cultural pace, adaptation, and modernity today.

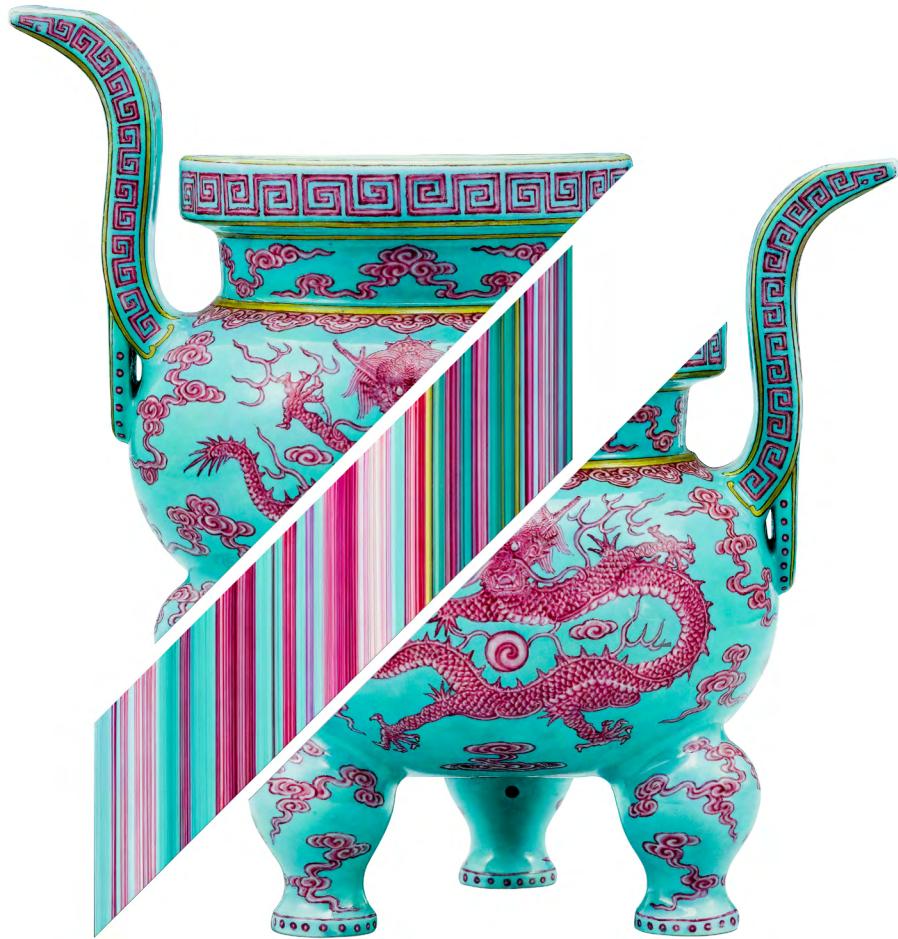


Something, nothing
Automotive paint on aluminium
114.5cm x 140cm (Triptych)
2025-2026

To live in the society is the meat and drink of a Chinaman; in a company of his fellows he is something, by himself, nothing. (pg.17)

THE CHINESE AS THEY ARE (1841)
— G. TRADESCANT LAY (an American missionary and sinologist)

Sean Lean's *Something, nothing* takes its title from an 1841 line in *The Chinese as They Are* by G. Tradescant Lay, an American missionary and sinologist who wrote that "to live in the society is the meat and drink of a Chinaman; in a company of his fellows he is something, by himself, nothing". The remark exemplified nineteenth century ethnographic writing that reduced Chinese social life to caricature while claiming authority through observation. This prompts attention to how cultural behavior was once described through sweeping judgments that folded into broader ideas of civilization, progress, and group character.



Dark and Vain

Automotive paint on aluminium
144cm x 137cm (Triptych)
2025-2026

"For ways that are dark, and for tricks that are vain, / The heathen Chinee is peculiar."
– Bret Harte (American Writer), "The Heathen Chinee" (1870)

Sean Lean's *Dark and Vain* takes its title from Bret Harte's 1870 satirical poem *The Heathen Chinee*, which declared that "for ways that are dark, and for tricks that are vain, / The heathen Chinee is peculiar." Harte's verse circulated widely during periods of anti-Chinese sentiment in California, reinforcing stereotypes of cunning and deceit to justify exclusionary policies. The work invites reflection on how narratives of suspicion and moral judgment persist, travel, and transform across time and place.



Provisional sketch of *Family Portrait* (2025-2026)

Family Portrait

Installation with painted wooden table and chairs, Chinese ink,

painted porcelain, porcelain fragments, video projection & audio

Dimension variable

2025-2026

Sean Lean's *Family Portrait* frames the domestic interior as a site where inherited histories are rehearsed, deferred, and reconfigured. Central to the installation is a faceted dining table surrounded by six chairs, each varying in form, scale, and finish to correspond to members of the artist's immediate family, reflecting distinct relations to inherited values and expectations.

Portions of the table tilt and buckle, spilling into a field of shattered porcelain, while bowls and cutlery remain ceremonially placed, suggesting a gathering suspended between ritual and rupture. Above, a looping projection of a manipulated recording of Nirvana's 1993 MTV Unplugged performance overlays the scene, accompanied by quiet Chinese folk songs from the artist's parents' generation, creating a tension between memory, cultural inheritance, and contemporary reference.

Through this layered orchestration, Lean considers how diasporic identity, familial memory, and postcolonial experience converge within the domestic space, rendering the home both a site of negotiation and a repository of affective histories.



SEAN LEAN (B. 1981)

Sean Lean (b. 1981, Kuala Lumpur) is an artist whose practice spans painting, industrial materials, and automotive finishes. His work develops from Malaysian-Chinese histories, personal memory, and the cultural tensions shaped by tradition, aspiration, and the shifting values of a multicultural society. He often begins with fragments from his own life and moves toward broader questions of identity, belonging, and the narratives that shape the region.

He has exhibited in Malaysia, Singapore, South Korea, Indonesia, and China. In 2024 he took part in *And the invader's fear of memories*, curated by Line Dalile, which placed his work alongside Lawrence Abu Hamdan, FX Harsono, and other artists engaged with memory, testimony, and the pressures of historical silence. Major bodies of work such as *Flesh: Blacks and Whites* (2013), *Motherland* (2015), *3* (2018), *M2* (2020), *china* (2022), and *COLORED* (2024) trace his ongoing engagement with introspection and cultural inheritance. These exhibitions investigate the changing meanings of Chineseness and the negotiations within diasporic identity, while his material language has expanded into aluminium, mild steel, and automotive paints to consider industry, modernity, and the uncertain stability of cultural symbols.

Lean has also taken part in international collaborations, including a commission for KENZO with Tiger Beer and WWF inspired by conservation stories of wild tigers, and a special cover for Bazaar Art magazine. Across his projects he considers how personal history intersects with collective memory, revisiting traditions, belief systems, and inherited expectations through a contemporary lens that combines research, humour, and attentive craft.

EDUCATION

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

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

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

2025 Crossing the Third Bridge, Wei-Ling Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

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
VDA Graduation Show, Loke Mansion ADKL, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

2001 Manusia, NN Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Doors, Loke Mansion ADKL, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

2000 Eyes Wide Open, LUCT, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia