

CV

WONG Xiang Yi

+6017-2916 538

w.x.yi0124@gmail.com

<http://wongxiangyi.wordpress.com/>

Artist Statement

“Manga” Style

As an artist born around 1980, I grew up during the era of former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad's "Look East Policy." Like many of my generation in Kuala Lumpur, I was completely immersed in Japanese culture. Before receiving any formal fine arts training, my initial way to start drawing was shaped entirely by imitating Japanese manga and anime. This early experience laid the foundation for my painting style, which continues to develop today.

My ambition is to move beyond the aesthetic of "manga-style" ink painting. Because of my early exposure to manga, storytelling has always been my most natural way of interpreting concepts. Malaysia's multicultural landscape—with its Hindu religious epics, indigenous perspectives on forest animals, and the often misinterpreted threads of our national history—provides a rich, complex nourishment for my narratives.

In my creative process, I deconstruct the elements that appear on the canvas, tracing their original meanings before reassembling them into my compositions. This method does more than just enrich the visual surface; it creates a space for multiple interpretations. By rearranging these cultural symbols, I invite the viewer to look past the "eye-catching" exterior and engage with the underlying layers of history and identity that I am exploring.

Subject Matter

During my undergraduate and master's studies in Hong Kong and Taiwan, my deep curiosity about Japanese subcultures, BL (Boy's Love), allowed me to establish my subject matter. To build a solid research foundation, I took Gender Studies courses within the Sociology department at The Chinese University of Hong Kong. This cross-disciplinary training did more than support my concepts; it cultivated my intellectual curiosity and the persistence needed for long-term exploration. Through this research, I realized that my efforts were ultimately a search for self: an exploration of the gender confusion caused by contemporary society and the roots of cultural aversion toward gender stereotypes. With this clarity, I became committed to communicating these concerns honestly with my audience.

As for why my work focuses primarily on the human figure, I believe it stems from my research into BL, which ultimately led me back to a concern for my own self. This process of reflection and constant self-interrogation acts like a mirror, and the human form is the most accurate way to express my internal journey.

Consequently, the figures in my work are often based on my own facial features. In the early stages, I focused on slender, young male bodies; at the time, I viewed the appearance of the female body in my work with a sense of shame, deeply influenced by the concept of the "objectified gaze" in John Berger's *Ways of Seeing*. Furthermore, as my technique was still maturing, I needed to constantly emulate the bodies I admired to bridge the gap between technical skill and emotional feeling. After more than a decade of practice, the figures in my work have evolved from slender youths into gender-neutral, "child-like" forms. To be precise, they are not "children" in the traditional sense, but rather "humanoid vessels" that serve the composition. They act as a vital medium to channel my spiritual focus and pull the viewer closer. The figure is no longer an idol to be worshipped, but a bridge that connects the artist's thoughts with the audience's perception. Additionally, I place immense importance on the depiction of facial features (especially the folds of eyelids) and the positioning of fingers and toes (their overlapping and bending angles), as I believe these subtle details are the most effective way to communicate complex thoughts.

Choice of Medium

I believe that simply adapting modern values to traditional forms, or mimicking Western mainstream art to cloak personal opinions, is like "pouring new wine into old bottles." The brush, however ancient, is merely a tool; its age is not a "sin" of being outdated. The responsibility as an artist is to use this tool to express contemporary perspectives and values, while honestly facing the strengths and gaps in my own identity. Ultimately, I believe an artist's true duty is the "localization" of their subject matter.

While I explored various art forms in university, I became fascinated by Meticulous Ink Painting (Gongbi). The rise of "New Ink Painting movement" around 2000 broke the stereotype of ink as a repetitive, traditional craft and opened up new possibilities for innovation. For me, the process of ink painting felt similar to my early experiences sketching manga, yet the materials required a much more rigorous and specific relationship. This medium has shaped my conceptual process: while my

ideas can be wild and free, I believe they must be organized through a disciplined system to communicate effectively. I am fascinated by the extreme discipline meticulous ink painting requires—the strict order of pigments and the precision of the process. I see this medium as a "plating system": my imagination and information absorption can be wild and free like a blender, but the meticulous technique helps me organize these ideas into a clear, attractive, and "eye-catching" visual language. My "manga-style" ink painting aims to be accessible and visually pleasing—catching the viewer's eye first, then slowly delivering unique and deep concepts.

Localization

Line from Batik to Meticulous Ink Painting: In the early stages of my practice, I introduced Batik patterns into my work to represent Malaysian culture. Over time, I began to merge the exaggerated, flowing lines of Batik with the expressive line-work of meticulous ink painting. This was the first step in localizing not just my themes, but my entire technique.

Space inspired by Persian miniatures: Upon returning to Malaysia, a visit to the Islamic Art Museum provided a breakthrough. The intricate Persian miniatures and their rich pigments inspired me to rethink spatial structures and move beyond the traditional boundaries of Chinese ink painting.

Temperature in Painting: I am not satisfied with simply placing clichés into my work and calling it "Malaysian Ink Art." Instead, I want to bring the very weather and temperature of Malaysia into my localization process. I was deeply inspired by Xu Zhimo's 1928 descriptions of Singapore's climate in *Too Thick to Carve*. His writing taught me how to translate weather, color, and feeling into art through botanical forms and clashing blocks of color.

In this transformation, I focus on the local plants that surround us—not the ones in official tourism brochures, but the ones found in everyday life, like the Iron Tree (Sago Palm) often grown in Chinese households, in Indian cemeteries, and along asphalt roads; to me, they represent the resilient vitality of Malaysia—thriving quietly, yet vigorously. The shapes of these plants share a high degree of similarity with Batik patterns. By applying the linear language of Batik to these plants and eventually to human figures, I have developed a transformation of line-work that is both locally rooted and technically solid.

Hot Weather in Painting: In recent years, my work has focused on the relationship between weather and human living spaces: Architecture. I find that Malaysian buildings from before 2000—specifically their ventilation openings—perfectly reflect the harmony between life and climate. These openings express the weather while carrying deep cultural colors. Whether it is the specific vents in Kampung Baru vs. the gardens of China, or the wooden houses of Japan, these shapes evoke a shared sense of region and temperature. Currently, I am obsessed with researching these forms, translating them into my ink paintings through the concept of "enframed scenery" (開窗).

Joint Exhibition

2025

The Fantasy Wonderland, Tainan Art Museum, Taiwan.

2022

KALEIDOSCOPE JAPAN: ONLINE EXHIBITION

2021

NAFAS – Maybank's Emerging Women Artists Exhibition

True reader in blind area, Zit-Dim Art Space, Tainan.

2020

Survival of the Exceptional, Tainan Art Museum, Taiwan.

2019

SHIFT – A Contemporary Visual Art Exhibition, White Box (Publika), Kuala Lumpur.

2018

Diversity Via Nature : Religion, Gender, or Art ?, pon ding (Taipei) and Tentacles (Bangkok).

2017

Suitcase 02 - Artsurrection, RAW Art Space, Kuala Lumpur.

Di Mana(where are) YOUng, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur.

2016

Grotto x CUHK Grads – The Passion of Discovery II, Grotto Fine Arts, Hong Kong.

(Room) No.7 Special Issue : Un Nomade, b. LAB , Taichung

Telling Arts, “(ROOM) NO. 7”, Taipei Artist Village (TAIPEI) & Asia Contemporary Art Show (HONG KONG).

2015

Master of Fine Arts, Graduation Exhibition of TNUA : “Lifestyle Guru Haunted by Anxiety”, Taipei.

2014

Affordable Art Fair Hong Kong, Artify Gallery, Hong Kong.
ArtLondon, A.Lift Gallery, London.

2013

Unspoken Tales: Dreams and Emotions New artworks by emerging Hong Kong artists, Leung Yee Ting and Wong Xiang-yi, Hong Kong.
AHAF 2013, Mandarin Oriental Hotel, The A.Lift Gallery, Hong Kong.
octave., The A.Lift Gallery ‘PROJECT’, Hong Kong.

2012

Here I am!, The A.Lift Gallery x Harbour City, Hong Kong.
Flurry, The A.Lift Gallery, Hong Kong.

2011

Fotanian Studio Opening Project, Fotan, Hong Kong.

2010

Ink Art in the New Century, Hong Kong Central Library.
K9+2 Local Artists Exhibition, K11 , Hong Kong.
New Trend 2010, Art Commune, Cattle Depot Artist Village, Hong Kong.
Popcorn Graduation Exhibition, Art Museum, Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong.

Solo Exhibition

2024

Nomad, The Back Room, Kuala Lumpur.

2019

Casually Peeking, Suma Orientalis, Kuala Lumpur.

Rimbun Dahan Residency Exhibition: You Belong to Night, Rimbun Dahan, Kuala Lumpur.

2018

Moisture, Telling Arts, Taipei.

2016

Whispering Void, Artify Gallery, Hong Kong.

2015

The Glamorous Insight, Art Alley Cafe and Mon Espaced D'art, Taipei.

2013

ze•ph•yr, The A•lift Gallery 'Checkpoint', Hong Kong.

2012

P.S, Grotto Fine Art, Hong Kong.

Education

2016

Graduation Master of Fine Arts, majoring in Chinese Ink Painting, Taipei National University of the Arts, Department of Fine Arts

2010

Graduation Bachelor of Arts, Chinese University of Hong Kong, Fine Arts Department

Awards

2010

Grotto Fine Art Award

2009

Hong Kong Chinese Meticulous Painting Association Creative Award

2008

Friends of the Art Museum Prize

Publish

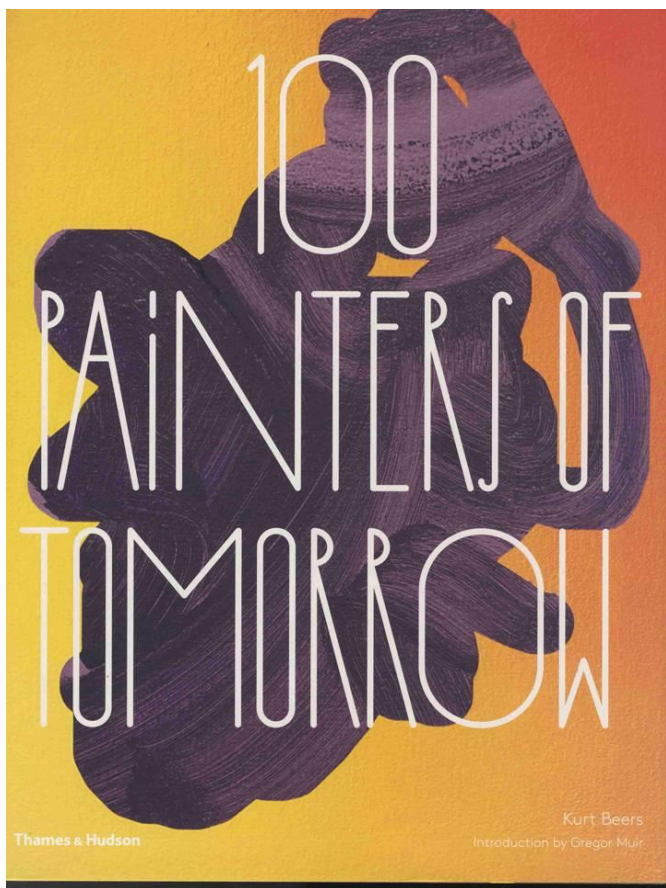
2014

100 Painters of Tomorrow, United Kingdom: Thames and Hudson Ltd., page 260-261.

Residency

2018

Rimbun Dahan year long artist residency



By TERENCE TOH
star2@thestar.com.my

A TWO-WOMAN show – *You Belong To Night* by Wong Xiang Yi and *Rojak Aesthetics* by Chuah Shu Ruei – are worlds apart in terms of content and artistic technique. Yet they are sharing the spotlight and attracting a diverse array of art enthusiasts. These solo exhibitions from Wong and Chuah are part of their works done during their recent art residencies at Rimbun Dahan, a private art centre situated in Kuang, Selangor.

Head to the underground gallery of Rimbun Dahan, an orchard-turned arts space, and you'll find many surprises from these relatively young artists.

Wong's *You Belong To Night* series packs in 27 ink paintings, many portraying porcelain-looking young men wrapped up in daily activities.

You Belong To Night, essentially, explores the female gaze through its depiction of a very specific kind of beauty.

In an interview at Rimbun Dahan, Wong reveals she is inspired by "Boy's Love", a genre of fictional Japanese media created by women for women.

"They usually feature very different figures of men and boys. The art gives me a feeling of comfort. I sometimes feel insecure in real life where you can feel an imbalance between the sexes. Even though we have feminism, we still feel insecure, and so this is a way of balance," explains Wong, 32, who spent a whole year working on this show series at Rimbun Dahan.

The Kuala Lumpur-born Wong is no stranger to the ink painting medium since she started exhibiting in 2010. She graduated from the Chinese University of Hong Kong and holds a masters from Taipei University of the Arts, majoring in ink painting. Interestingly, Wong's career path has seen her exhibiting in Hong Kong and Taiwan. *You Belong To Night* marks her first major Malaysian exhibition.

For this show, Wong adds a fresh take to ink painting by experimenting with materials such as canvas and gold paper. Batik patterns and tender curved lines have also surfaced in her new works.

Her paintings, done mainly on silk or gold paper, feature slender men lounging by a swimming pool (*Borrowed Heaven II*), sleeping in bed (*Blue Socks*), or merely enjoying each other's company (*Psst Psst*). Works like *Thinking* or *Yawn* are self-descriptive.

"I would rather indulge in mere illusion because imagination is more impressive than reality. The gold paper allowed me to use the wash technique. Through the process of stacking and peeling, the colour produced a dreamy and illusory effect," she says.

Twenty-four of these works were done during Wong's residency at Rimbun Dahan, which started last February. Look closely at the backgrounds of her work, and you might make out the orchard's distinctive scenery.

"It's my first experience with a residency and I feel it's such a big difference from doing work in a conventional white box space. I enjoyed my time here a lot," says Wong.

The painting that gives the exhibition its name *You Belong To Night*, reveals the artist is inspired by a dead owl she found in Rimbun Dahan. In her work, however, the owl is represented by a blonde youth.

"Before it died we saw its eyes... they were staring at us. It was very sad. But we couldn't do anything about it. This inspired the painting *You Belong To Night*," she reveals.

For a total contrast and a big change from gold paper and ink, the viewer can marvel at Chuah Shu Ruei's *Rojak Aesthetics*, a series of four large interactive installations placed all around the gallery.

Chuah's works are a good fit when you want to talk about the aesthetics of being a contemporary South-East Asian artist.

She isn't afraid to experiment. In her community-minded works, she mixes together video playback, shadowplay screens, arts and crafts, kitchen spices and utensils and many other found objects.

"There's this idea that Western thinking is all about categorising things. The Asian thinking is about being holistic, for all things to be one. That may be a stereotype. That may be true. Who knows? Through these works, I am exploring and making sense of this dichotomy. The layout is to try and have all the four artworks blend as if they are one," says Chuah, 32, who stayed at Rimbun Dahan for a half-year residency.

Pulling things together

Two vastly different solo exhibitions reflect Rimbun Dahan residency programme's diversity.



Chuah (left) and Wong are both featured in the Rimbun Dahan Residency 2019 exhibition.
— Photos: AZLINA ABDULLAH/The Star



Chuah's *Toys For My Children* (mixed media 2018), a workshop series with input from underprivileged children.

"You can walk around, and through (the artworks), and you can pick up things, touch them. Open them and interact, and you can make the artworks. I think inclusiveness is a very big part of Malaysian aesthetics. We want to be inclusive, or that's the ideal," she elaborates.

Chuah, a graduate of Aswara (National Academy of Arts Culture and Heritage), has had her installation works exhibited in community festivals and group shows at Core Design Gallery, Hin Bus Art Depot and the National Art Gallery.

At the heart of Chuah's interactive *Rojak Aesthetics* is a collaborative spirit.

Toys For My Children features input from community workshops and toy designs for children. Chuah worked with the Malaysian Arts & Crafts Guild and the The Hiichuikok Foundation Home For Children Care in KL for this new installation.

Recipe Rakyat, focusing on our sense of smell, involves visitors throwing local spices onto a gently heated iron pan.

After participation, these spice combinations will also be bottled up for the visitor to take home.

"They can try cooking with the spices and share a recipe or two," says Chuah.

Dunia (Jungle Garden) is a jumble of double-sided collages hanging from the ceiling. They interact with sunlight.

Chuah's long-term project *Dunia-Kalibutan-le Monde*, which began in 2017, is also part of this Rimbun Dahan exhibit.

This project – expanded through three artist residencies – involves collaborations from participants to create a 3D sculpture from drawings of their homes. To date, communities in Reunion Island, the island of Cebu in the Philippines and Kuala Lumpur are part of *Dunia-Kalibutan-le Monde*.

"It's about having separate worlds, who can't see each other. But you find a way for them to meet and then create a new world together," says Chuah.

You Belong To Night and *Rojak Aesthetics* are showing at Rimbun Dahan, Km 27, Jalan Kuang, Kuang in Selangor till Feb 3. Admission is free. The gallery is open on weekends from 10am to 6pm. Weekdays by appointment. Visit: rimbundahan.org. FB: Rimbun Dahan.



Wong's *Trio* (ink and pigment on paper, 2018).



Part of Chuah's sculpture project *Dunia-Kalibutan-le Monde* (2017-2018).