

IMPORTANT SOUTHEAST ASIAN MASTERPIECES FROM A DISTINGUISHED INDONESIAN PRIVATE COLLECTION

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Brilliant works by Lim Man Fong, Ong Kim Seng, and Eddie Hara are among the highlights that make up a fantastic and extensive art collection, owned by Madam Anne and her late husband.

Avid collector Madam Anne was introduced to the world of art by her late husband, whose passion and hobby was collecting art. Through him, she became acquainted with artists that he loved, who included celebrated artists, Lee Man Fong, Ong Kim Seng and Eddie Hara to name a few, and soon discovered artists of her own liking. This represented a unique opportunity for exploration, adventure, and the pursuit of beauty.

At the primordial days of collecting, she didn't pay much thought to the value of a painting, rather, its aesthetics and what delighted her eyes and soul. However, this changed when her knowledge of the art industry progressed and with that, Madam Anne began analysing artworks and artists. Over the course of their three-decade marriage, the couple assembled a remarkable collection of artworks and objects. For Ong Kim Seng's alone, they had amassed more than 300,000 artworks – each sizeable. The introduction to

the Singaporean artist, instantly gained the collector's liking for Ong's naturalist-cum-impressionistic style.

The treasury of Lee Man Fong's artworks possessed by the couple started by acquiring a handful of his paintings. The admiration and fascination for Lee Man Fong's works morphed into a beautiful friendship with the artist – one that spanned four decades. The late 1940's, during Lee's sojourn in the Netherlands, led to the apex of his artistic career. As the artist's fame grew, so did his works and their value. Upon the artist's return to Indonesia, he called for Madam Anne's late husband to aid him in transporting some of his paintings to his abode in Jakarta. Perpetually taken by all of Lee's paintings, the collector bought a myriad to adorn his home.

Besides Lee Man Fong, their stay in Indonesia exposed the collectors to paintings of other Indonesian artists such as Eddie Hara and Sri Hadhy. They became enamoured by Indonesian art for its loud expressions and affluence in culture, tradition and history.

LEE MAN FONG

Prolific Chinese-Indonesian Artist

Lee Man Fong was a Chinese-Indonesian painter who had his training in China and Western Europe, and lived most of his life in Indonesia, developing a particular style that amalgamated his teachings with a quiet yet passionate vision. His works are highly coveted by many for the fusion of Chinese brushwork and Western techniques which resulted in a richly sentimental yet elegant paintings. A leading painter and curator of his time, the artist pioneered the Nanyang style in the 20th century in Indonesia.

Lee was born in 1913 in Guangzhou, China, to a family of ten children. After his father's death, it was up to Lee to help support his family, so he began producing images for advertisements. The family moved to Singapore but eventually settled in Jakarta in 1930, where Lee secured a job at Kolff, a Dutch printing company. His six-year sojourn in the Netherlands from 1946-1952 earned him the prestigious Malino scholarship to study in the Netherlands for three years based on the recommendation of the Dutch Viceroy Hubertus van Mook, for whom Lee had produced a portrait for.

At that point, Lee became the first non-Dutch artist to be invited to provide works for an exhibition organised by the Dutch East Indies Association. During this time, he was introduced to the techniques



Lee Man Fong
Nude Sketch, Amsterdam, 1948
Pastel on paper
63 x 48 cm

employed by the Dutch masters, thus expanding his repertoire of artistic skills beyond classical Chinese painting. Lee, a Rembrandt aficionado loved the works of the legendary artist, especially that of chiaroscuro, and sought to incorporate it into his own works. Dutch genre paintings which portrayed the simplicity of daily life and amplified the beauty of quotidian happenings, also made an impression on the artist.

With his growing success, Lee consistently and successfully sold his works at the Hague and the Salon in Paris. Upon the artist's return to Indonesia in 1952, he touched down with an evolved artistic style which integrated Western, Chinese and Indonesian traditions in bold yet delicate compositions. In 1961, his long-time friendship with the late former President Sukarno (also an admirer and collector of his works) earned Lee the position of consultant to the Presidential Palace and chief curator of its art collection. The late Presidents' extensive collection of Lee Man Fong's works inspired the artist to assemble a series of books, cataloguing President Sukarno's amassed artworks.

Circa 1970's, Lee's tarriance to Cairo, Egypt was when the artist started dabbling in oil paintings. His time there inspired him to produce scenes of the Egyptian landscape and thenceforth, a prolific variety of oil paintings.

Lee continued to exhibit within Indonesia and was heralded as a major artist of the period. His final solo exhibition at the National Gallery in Singapore was a major success, and he donated its proceeds to the National Kidney Foundation. Lee died in Jakarta on April 3, 1988 at the age of 75.



Lee Man Fong
Rojak Seller
Oil on board
103 x 51 cm



Lee Man Fong
Untitled - Amsterdam, Circa 1948
Oil on masonite board
87 x 41.5 cm



Lee Man Fong
Untitled - Amsterdam, Circa 1948
Oil on paper laid on masonite board
71.5 x 38.5 cm

ROJAK SELLER

Lee Man Fong's artistic prowess was a confluence of the Oriental, Western and Indonesian charm. Through his travels that took him around the world to finally settling down in Indonesia, one can discern that his experience had a play in the evolution and maturity of his artistry. The Rojak Seller, lined up for KL Lifestyle Art Space's Art Auction in November is evidence of the artist's refined style as well as his penchant for illustrating vignettes of local Indonesian life. The painting portrays a quintessential Southeast Asian scene where a rojak seller is absorbed in cutting up fruits while a customer and his child look on patiently. In the painting, the subject has set up shop under a tree, seated on a wooden bench while fruits are on display on the wooden table. At her side is an urn of water while a dog keeps her company. The artwork is painted vertically, a reflection of his Chinese artistic vocabulary.

This substantial oil on board sees the usage of subtle sepia-toned palette of earthy browns, with the fruits, the rojak seller's attire and

the artist's stamp on the far right being the only brilliant points of colour in the entire work. The soft, dreamy hues of the painting evoke nostalgia as viewers gain an intimate glimpse of what can be assumed as the peaceful, self-contained world of the rojak vendor. Although oil paints were used, the artist's light hand in applying paint onto the board recalls the airy character of Chinese ink.

Classically recognisable, Lee Man Fong birthed similar works of the same 'Rojak Seller' series, some, made their way to major auction houses such as Sothebys and Christies in Hong Kong. Such an evocative piece, highly coveted by many, had recently gone on to garner an astounding price of HK\$2,750,000 at Sothebys during its Modern and Contemporary Southeast Asian Art Evening Sale on Oct 5, 2019. Two distinguishing elements that remain constant throughout these paintings are the hues and the subject matter, specifically that of a man carrying his child.

ONG KIM SENG

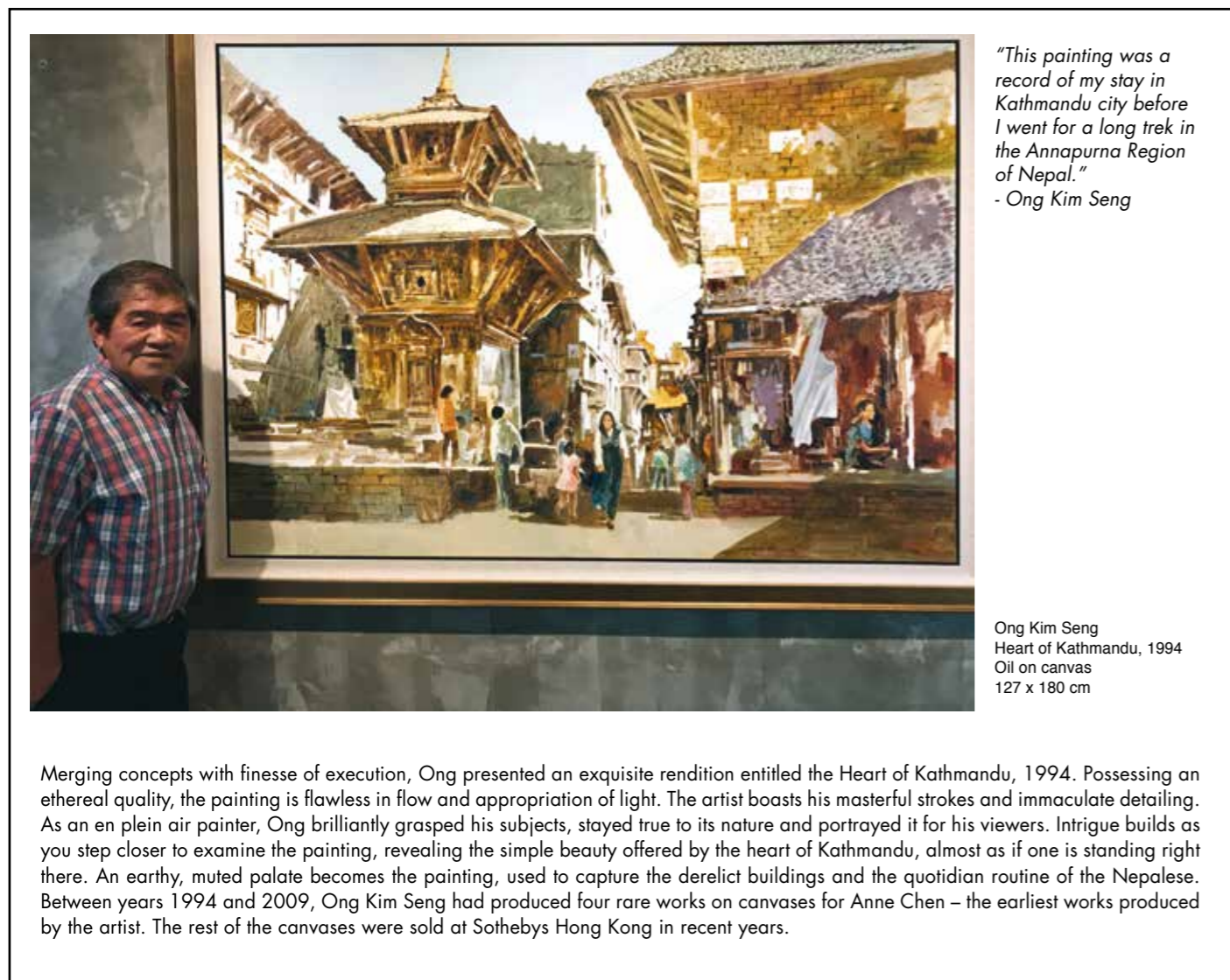
Portraying Life Through His Eyes

Ong Kim Seng came from humble beginnings, growing up in a kampung in Tiong Bahru, Singapore and has been a full-time artist since 1985. He has participated in both group and solo exhibitions in Singapore and around the world including, the United States, China, United Kingdom, Japan, Australia, Belgium, Germany, France, the Middle East, Taiwan, Hong Kong and ASEAN countries.

This watercolourist studied at Radin Mas Primary School in 1959 and later at Pasir Panjang Secondary School. Ong had innate interest in art since he was young but his mother had envisioned him having an office job, being either a clerk or teacher as it was a ludicrous thought for her son to become an artist. Not paying heed to his mother's dissatisfaction with his interest, Ong began experimenting with painting, beginning with pastels and oil and moving onto watercolour painting earnestly since 1960. It was during this period that he became a regular participant in a painting group at the Singapore River led by artist, writer and lecturer, Chia Wai Hon.

In 1962, Ong left school to join an advertising agency where he worked as a bill collector. He left the agency after four years and found his next job as a policeman at the British Naval Base in Sembawang. He lost his job in 1971 when the British withdrew their troops from Singapore. He subsequently worked as a welder at Pulau Bukom, a line technician at an electronics firm, National Semiconductor, and then at an audio-visual/graphic technician at the Colombo Plan Staff College for Technician Education.

While undertaking many stints in his working life, he had never stopped painting. In 1974, lady luck was on Ong's shoulders when he was presented with the opportunity to present his watercolour pieces at a group show with fellow artists Wan Soon Kam and Tan Jeuy Lee at the Meyer Gallery. When the Colombo Plan Staff College relocated to Manila in 1986, Ong made the bold decision of becoming a full-time professional artist in spite of having to care for an elderly mother, and with a wife and three children in tow.



"This painting was a record of my stay in Kathmandu city before I went for a long trek in the Annapurna Region of Nepal."
- Ong Kim Seng

Ong Kim Seng
Heart of Kathmandu, 1994
Oil on canvas
127 x 180 cm

Merging concepts with finesse of execution, Ong presented an exquisite rendition entitled the Heart of Kathmandu, 1994. Possessing an ethereal quality, the painting is flawless in flow and appropriation of light. The artist boasts his masterful strokes and immaculate detailing. As an en plein air painter, Ong brilliantly grasped his subjects, stayed true to its nature and portrayed it for his viewers. Intrigue builds as you step closer to examine the painting, revealing the simple beauty offered by the heart of Kathmandu, almost as if one is standing right there. An earthy, muted palate becomes the painting, used to capture the derelict buildings and the quotidian routine of the Nepalese. Between years 1994 and 2009, Ong Kim Seng had produced four rare works on canvases for Anne Chen – the earliest works produced by the artist. The rest of the canvases were sold at Sothebys Hong Kong in recent years.

ACCOLADES

This talented artist has garnered many accolades, including being the first and only Singaporean to have won six awards from the prestigious 138-year-old American Watercolor Society (AWS), of which he was conferred membership in 1992. He is also the only Asian artist outside the US to be admitted into AWS. Ong's collectors include Queen Elizabeth II of England, Prime Minister of the People's Republic of China, Secretary-General of the United Nations, President of the Republic of Korea, Prime Minister of Thailand, President of the Philippines; the Prime Minister of Japan, the Prime Minister of India; the Governor of Hokkaido, Singapore Arts Museum; Singapore, Maritime Museum, Agung Rai Museum and Neka Museum in Bali, Indonesia, and Singapore's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, foreign missions and embassies.

ONG'S ARTISTIC STYLE

Ong Kim Seng's style is described as being naturalist cum impressionistic and a combination of post-impressionist colour and outlook of the American realist masters. He paints en plein air and has stated that in order for him to paint a place, he has to feel it first. "I believe that inspiration comes naturally when there's a link between the artist and his subject," said Ong.

EDDIE HARA

Playful, Soulful and Colourful Artist



Eddie Hara
Java, 1995
Acrylic on canvas
71 x 90 cm

The enigmatic Eddie Hara was born in 1957, in Salatiga, Central Java, Indonesia. Eddie, one of Indonesia's most prolific artists has single-handedly contributed to the birth of a new genre through a display of distinct visual language, heavily generated by the wildness and innocence of raw art. He pursued an education in art at the Indonesian Institute of Arts (ISI) Yogyakarta, Indonesia, followed by Akademie voor Beeldende Kunst Enschede (AKI) in the Netherlands.

The subjects of his works revolve around inanimate objects, architectural forms, masonry, foliage and landscapes. He seems to have a way in materialising exactly what he sees on canvas, capturing the complexities and minute details of the buildings and the realistic play of light and shadow. Ong's exemplary use of watercolour and the balance between subject and space truly make his work a gem.

For a masterpiece to come alive, there has to be a special connection between the artist and the subject. In this breathtaking painting of street scenes, Ong Kim Seng captures the depth, the contours, the shadows and the beauty that is the architectural scenery. It is stunning, and although simple in its execution, it shows the meticulous and methodical use of fine brush strokes and skills. Ong said, "I have to feel a place before I paint it. If I have good feelings for a scene - just as I may have good feelings for someone I meet - I know I'll have the will to paint it well. For me, and for all painters, I believe, inspiration comes naturally when there's a link between the artist and his subject."

Eddie has held numerous solo and group exhibitions in Cuba, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, the Netherlands, and Switzerland. His paintings are displayed in the Singapore Art Museum, Museum der Kulturen, Basel, Switzerland, as well as at private foundations, corporate organisations and galleries in Indonesia and worldwide. The artist currently resides and works in Switzerland.

Eddie Hara created a name for himself in the art world through the irreverence and playfulness exuded by his works. For him, entertainment and fun are important aspects of art, as they have the power to lift the viewer from his daily preoccupations. The artist's paintings are representations of his unique personality – humorous, childish, trendy and original.

INFLUENCES

Eddie Hara is often described as a retired punk in love with under-sea creatures. His paintings blend children's mischievous fantasies and the wildness of urban street life. His muses are derived from children's drawings, underground, comics, robotic toys and bold colourful designs on skate gear, to modern graphics, primitive and folk art, rock and punk printed posters, TV news, sci-fi movies, graffiti, street art, and Mediterranean blue sky – all intrinsically rich and varied.

The artist's vivid imagination during his teenage years, fuelled by Javanese wayang kulit characters and the Western cartoon icons like Mickey Mouse, Alice in Wonderland or Batman bore fruition to a fantastical wonderland in his image. Eddie strays away from the 'cultural chauvinism' of Indonesian art and instead, embodies the style of Dada, Fluxus and Art Brut while still portraying his individual style of punk heavy metal and street art. These naive and enigmatic artworks were displayed in the bedroom of collector, Anne Chen's son.

AMBIGUOUS CREATURES

When discerning Eddie Hara's works, there are several characters that remain persistent, such as the jellyfish, squid, rabbit, hat-wearing shoe or boot, and the human skull – often flying or somersaulting. While at first glance, these creatures or objects seem fun and merry, but they deliberately depict the ambiguity of human nature, social norms and values – an inner battle of angels and demons.