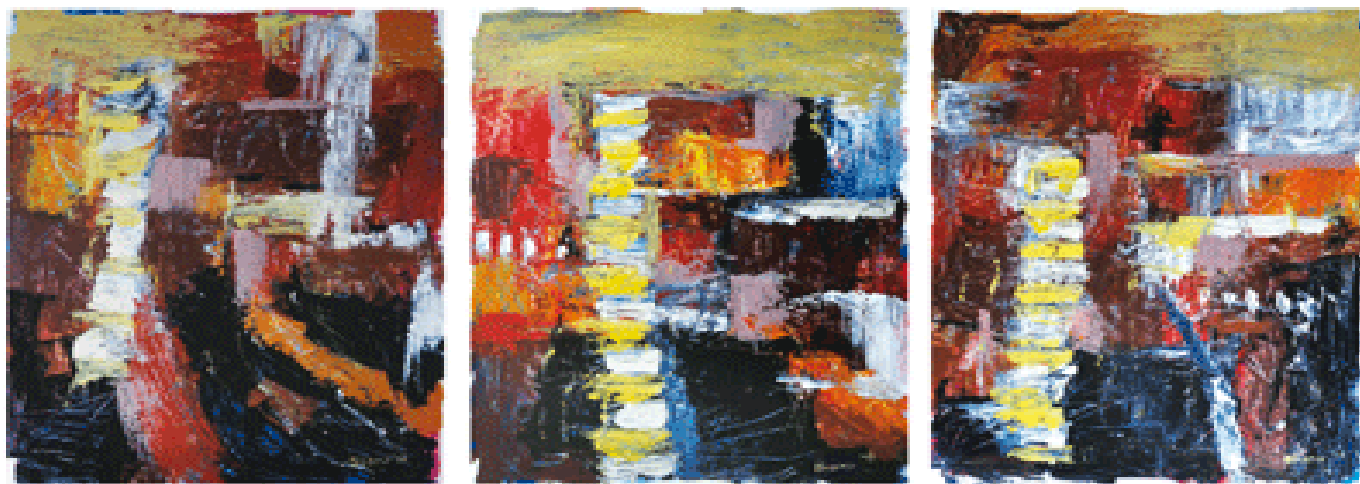


BHANU ACHAN

THE TRANSLATOR OF NATURE

BY HIRANMAYII AWLI MOHANAN



Abstract Landscape V, 2011
Oil on paper 54.5 x 67 cm x 3 pieces
SOLD RM 7,150.00
KLAS Art Auction 12 March, 2017

Kuala Lumpur born artist, Bhanu Achan is quietly content with life. He was meant to be an artist. His love for art has guided him through the twist and turns of his life to be where he is today. Leaving high school with an impeccable academic record and with a brilliant future ahead, Achan enrolled in medical school in India. Experiences in that deeply spiritual land introduced to him the divine and mystical side of reality that he eventually manifested in art. His growing ardour for his paint and brushes gave him no choice but to forsake medicine. Achan returned to Malaysia, an artist and has never looked back since. Over the course of his 40-year career of creating art, Achan has produced spectacular masterpieces with consistent frequency. His gift for artistry is derived from his love for nature. They are laden with underlying metaphors of Achan's struggle to find meaning beyond form and content.

"Although I have endured hardships in life as an artist, including financially, I would never choose anything else," Achan stated.

Achan sees the toil he goes through as a labour of love, painting imbues in him a profound sense of satisfaction. His struggle is glimpsed in his compelling creations of art that are thought-provoking, bewitching and sometimes even controversial.

ARTWORKS

Achan's artworks strive to escape the boundaries of form. Constantly inspired by nature, there is a raw and rustic mood to many of his paintings which are evident in works like the 'Journey to Mount Kinabalu' and 'Forest Impression'.

Achan's favourite piece though, is 'Lost in the Midst'. The ease and effortlessness of how it came together in his hands was

amazing even to him. "I was just pouring paint and it came out as an interesting composition of greenery, mountains and morning mist," Achan said. Breathing life to his preferred media, canvas and paper, Achan's orchestra of paint and colour never fails to harmonise fluidly, seeking to evoke an emotional response in all who lay eyes on it.

His work speaks for itself. "My messages are obvious. It is what it is," Achan said. He added that his paintings always came as a surprise to him. Achan is one of the few that creates subconsciously and moves as the art tells him to. A genius, ahead of his time, Achan has beautifully combined his love for nature and his deep spirituality to produce pieces that invoke a sense of calm, wonder and deep appreciation and insight into the complex and obscure world we live in.

EXHIBITIONS

Achan's works have been exhibited extensively across the country, and this national treasure has three of his pieces included as part of the National Art Gallery's permanent collection. Besides that honorary achievement, Achan has had a long and illustrious career in the art industry. With more than 50 exhibitions over the past 40 years under his belt, he has earned his place and position as one of Malaysia's most preeminent artists. In 1972, Achan exhibited and sold his works at Samat Gallery, at the National Art Gallery in 1980 and at Le Beaux Art Gallery in 1982. When the country launched its Visit Malaysia campaign in 1990, Achan was there to champion the art movement alongside the booming tourism industry through the Pemandangan Malaysia Travelling Art Exhibition organised by the National Art Gallery. In conjunction with the 1998's Commonwealth Games, Achan showcased his art at Armada Hotel. In 1996, he was part of the 'Up In The Clouds' Exhibition organised by DNA Studios at the National Planetarium, as well as the Star Hill Art Exhibition organised by Galeri Anugerah in 2000. In 2004, Achan's art graced the walls of Galeri Seni Maya and again in 2008 at "Interlude" Art Exhibition at RA Fine Arts. In 2011, his paintings stole the show at the art exhibition, 'Suara dan Rupa' at Yayasan Seni Berdaftar as well as in KLPAC during his solo exhibition there.

To add to the already extensive list, Achan has also exhibited 30 of his paintings during the art exhibition at MAA@KL Sentral Artspace in 2013, one of which was his vibrant Vincent van Gogh-inspired art piece, 'Himalaya 11'. The Empire Art Space was another home to his paintings as well as Grand Hyatt Kuala Lumpur at their festive art exhibition during Ramadan in 2015. Achan's paintings, 'Forest Impression' and 'Teluk Cempedak II' were sold in KL Lifestyle Art Space. His invaluable works, appreciated by many, have also found their way into countless private collections. The quiet beauty his art expresses has stolen many hearts and



Abstract Landscape, 2011 Abstract Landscape 2, 2009
Oil on paper 55 x 60.5 cm
SOLD RM 4,400.00
KLAS Art Auction 19 January, 2014



Rhapsody in Blue Series, 2016
Mixed media on canvas 121.5 x 91 cm
SOLD RM 3,719.76
KLAS Art Auction 23 October 2016



Forest Impression, 2016
Oil on canvas 152.5 x 88 cm
SOLD RM 5,072.40
KLAS Art Auction 12 March, 2017

will continue to do so for as long as Bhanu Achan can continue to use his paint brushes to translate his vision onto canvas.



CHUA MIA TEE

SINGAPORE'S VENERABLE REALIST PAINTER

BY HIRANMAYIL AWLI MOHANAN

Chua Mia Tee, one of Singapore's venerable realist painters, was born on Nov 25, 1931 in Shantou, Guangdong, China. This highly sought-after portrait artist had produced works of prominent businessmen and politicians in Singapore. He is also widely recognised for his works in oil that illustrate Singapore's vanishing traditional urban landscape. The "National Language Class" (1959) and "Workers in the Canteen" (1974) are two of his oft-discussed works.

EARLY LIFE

Chua was only six years old when he and his family fled from the Sino-Japanese war that took place in China and landed in Singapore in 1937. He enrolled in Shuqun Primary School and later, Tuan Mong School. In 1947, the artist enrolled in Chung Cheng High School but left the school mid-term to pursue formal education in art at the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA).

EDUCATION IN ART

As a young boy, Chua displayed a budding interest in art, dabbling in painting and sketching. His interest was well-received and supported by his father, who was also an artist. At NAFA, Chua's artistic talent was nurtured and developed as he received training in drawing, sketching with watercolour and painting in various mediums including oil on canvas, Chinese ink and colours

on paper. He studied under the tutelage of the academy's director, Lim Hak Tai himself as well as celebrated artists Cheong Soo Pieng, Koh Tong Leong and See Hiang To. This was also where Chua experimented with modelling using plasticine and plaster of Paris in his own time. He graduated from NAFA in 1952.

CAREER

Chua's inherent talent for art was recognised early on. While studying in NAFA, he was asked to teach part-time at the school, where he continued to teach as a full-time staff after graduation. In 1954, Chua went back to Chung Cheng High School to complete his secondary education. And thereafter, returned to his alma mater, NAFA to teach from 1956 to 1957.

Between 1957 and 1974, Chua practised his skills in the field of commercial art starting with his first job at the Shanghai Book Company where he worked as a book illustrator (1957–60). Following that stint, he worked with Grant Advertising International as a designer and illustrator, creating figure drawings for advertisements and comic strips from 1960 to 1965. He returned to book illustration in 1965 when Times Organisation's Federal Publication hired him as an illustrator and designer of books. He stayed with Times until 1974.

The year 1974 was a turning point for Chua's artistic career. At the age of 43, he staged his maiden exhibition at the Rising Gallery on Telok Ayer Street, which saw tremendous success and this gave him the confidence to become a full-time artist.

HIS OEUVRE

Chua's muse and subjects for his paintings came from his surroundings. Having spent his childhood in Chinatown and along Singapore River, it was natural that many of Chua's early works feature the traditional landscapes and life in Singapore that were disappearing as a result of urban redevelopment. He had a way of capturing the heart of these

places, but also the unbeatable spirit of the people living and working there. Chua once said that, as an artist, he saw the urgency to document these scenes before they vanished from Singapore's cityscape.

A handful of Chua's early paintings also depict the nationalistic concerns of the people in Singapore during the 1950's and '60s. Paintings like "Epic Poem of Malaya" (1955) and "National Language Class" (1959) conveyed the heightened sense of political and social awareness prevalent during those times. The artist brilliantly chronicled Singapore's significant and historic moments, including the former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew's return from London after the Merdeka talks; the swearing-in ceremony of Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong; and Singapore's ministers and members of parliament during the parliamentary sessions. His portrait of the late President Yusof Ishak also appeared on Singapore portrait-series currency notes. Noted for his portraits, Chua had also been called upon to paint illustrious personalities such as former Chief Justice Wee Chong Jin, former deputy Chairman of Singapore Airlines Lim Chin Beng and Singaporean billionaire Wee Cho Yaw.

Chua's oeuvre is one that captures realism because he believes it reflects life. His works showcase his keen eye for details and an understanding of light and shadows. To Chua, realistic art is not merely about transferring what the artist sees onto canvas, but also the artist's ability to sublimate the essence of a subject and present its beauty — what he refers to as "an organic combination of its universal characters, and a blending of reality with art". He has cited Xu Beihong, Leonardo da Vinci and Rembrandt as artists who inspired him.

The artist's preferred medium is oil, which he described as the most competent and perfect medium for capturing details on canvas. Although he paints en plein air, most of his pieces are actually refined and completed in the studio. He also paints from his memories of local places and people. Occasionally, Chua uses photographic aids to recall details or as substitutes for clients who are unable to turn

ARTWORK REFERENCES:

1. Christie's 20th Century & Contemporary Art Live Auction, 26 May 2019, Hong Kong

Chua Mia Tee
Temple Street (Singapore Chinatown)
Estimate: 120,000 - 180,000 HKD
Sold: 162,500 HKD

2. Sotheby's Modern and Contemporary Southeast Asian Art, 4 April 2016, Hong Kong

Chua Mia Tee
Wall Carving
Estimate: 40,000 - 60,000 HKD
Sold: 31,250 HKD

up for portrait sittings. Besides oil, Chua also employs various mediums including acrylic, mixed media, watercolour, bronze and relief. One of his best-known sculptures is a portrait bust of Zubir Said, who gained recognition as the composer of the Singapore national anthem.

Since the late 1970's, Chua travelled the world over including Hong Kong, Bali, Java, Spain and Italy to paint and draw. These trips helped him gain fresh insight to improve his practice. Chua exhibited in Singapore and internationally, in countries such as Belgium, Germany, Australia, New Zealand, Indonesia and Thailand. Besides that, Chua has taken on roles such as professional consultant to the NAFA Alumni Association and chairman of the Editorial Board of Nanyang Arts magazine. He is a life member of the Singapore Arts Society and the NAFA Alumni Association.

In 2015, Chua was conferred the Cultural Medallion, a national honour that recognises his artistic contributions to Singapore. The National Gallery's inaugural exhibition, "Siapa Nama Kamu?", derived its title from Chua Mia Tee's iconic painting, "National Language Class". In 2018, a book entitled, 'The Art Of Chua Mia Tee: A Portrait Of A Life's Work' was launched by the National Gallery Singapore, where more than 300 of his works were featured in the comprehensive book, highlighting the artist's oeuvre.

CHEN WEN HSI'S HERONS

AVANT-GARDE ARTIST

BY HIRANMAYII AWLI MOHANAN



Hérons
Ink on paper 65 x 68 cm
SOLD RM 61,600
KLAS Art Auction 1 March, 2020

Known for his avant-garde Chinese-style paintings, Chen Wen Hsi was born in 1906 in Guangdong, China. He was a highly regarded first-generation artist, who was at the forefront of the Chinese revolutionary movement in Singapore during the 1950's. Chen was among a group of five prominent artists that founded the Nanyang style, a landmark in the art history of Southeast Asia. The artist was also a highly esteemed art educator who played a significant role in developing the art community in Singapore.

Heavily influenced by traditional Chinese paintings and early Cubist works of Pablo Picasso and Paul Klee, Chen created his own repertoire and identity, which later became his trademark. In the span of 1923 to 1992, Chen had partaken in 38 one-man exhibitions within Singapore and internationally, including countries such as China, Taiwan, Malaysia, Japan, Australia, New Zealand and Hong Kong.

In 1926, the artist moved to Shanghai to enrol in the Shanghai College of Fine Arts. Due to growing dissatisfaction with the quality of education at the college, Chen along with a few others transferred

to Xinhua College of Art where he studied under the tutelage of renowned artists such as Pan Tianshou. It was also at Xinhua that he met his fellow peers, Chen Hen Hao, Chen Chong Swee and Liu Kang who all later became Singapore's Nanyang pioneer artists and art educationists.

In 1929, Chen graduated from Xinhua College of Art and returned to his hometown, Baigong. For approximately a decade, Chen taught art to students in primary and secondary schools in both Shantou and Jieyang, China. It was also

in 1929, when Chen went to Swatow at the age of 21 and displayed his works for exhibitions in Shanghai (1931 and 1933) and Guangzhou (1932 and 1936). It was not until 1937 that he was acknowledged for his talent and received praises from Chinese painter, Xu Beihong, at the second Chinese National Art Exhibition in Nanjing. He was even elected as one of China's contemporary 10 greatest artists by an English art magazine in that same year.

Seeking a new adventure and fortune, the artist planned a three-month trip to Nanyang. Then, in 1948, together with his paintings, Chen journeyed from China to Cholon, Vietnam via an oil tanker, to start what became a tour of exhibitions across Asia — Hong Kong (1949), Bangkok-Kuala Lumpur (1949), and Bangkok-Singapore (1950). Chen arrived in Singapore in 1950 without any intention of staying. However, the expiry of his visa and with the coaxing of fellow artist Liu Kang, and then Commissioner-General Malcolm MacDonald, the artist stayed. At the invitation of its then principal Cheng Anlun, Chen started teaching at the Chinese High School in Singapore, where he remained as a teacher until 1968. Learning of Chen's growing name and talent, Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA)'s then principal Lim Hak Tai, invited the artist to teach at its hallowed grounds. He taught NAFA until 1959.

Clearly influenced by Cubism and Fauvism, Chen produced various masterful renditions of the heron — paintings that encapsulate the artist's fascination with the form and figuration of this particular bird. This favourite subject of his was deeply inspired by the tropical scenery of Singapore, which was perhaps the main reason for him moving there in 1948. With the large array of birds in Southeast Asia, Chen found a profound interest in the heron and had featured this bird in many of his paintings. The heron holds a special meaning in Chinese culture as it resembles the word 'path' in spoken Mandarin. The underlying meaning of the heron paintings could be interpreted as an ever flowing and opportune path.

Using sharp and angular brushstrokes, Chen created bold, elongated bird-like figures, which were then simplified into abstract shapes and patterns. In some of the artist's works, the beaks and bodies overlap one another, suggesting dynamism and movements in the depicted scene. Chen then paired them with carefully selected shades of colours to create an illusion of depth, as the darker colours naturally assume the background, while the limelight is shed on the white-hued herons. Chen loved leaving a thin white space between each heron to intentionally highlight the interplay of light and shadows, a key aspect that evokes a certain mood and time to his paintings.

Chen's works were truly variegated, melding the different elements of Western styles of art and traditional Chinese painting techniques with a Southeast Asian subject matter. The exploration of space is a definite quality that Chen imposed upon his viewers through his oeuvre which produced very unique pieces. His ability to create three-dimensional forms on a two-dimensional plane illustrates his proficiency in this style of painting.

ARTWORK REFERENCES:

1. Sotheby's Breathless — Southeast Asian Art

Chen Wen Hsi
Hérons
Estimate: 80,000 - 180,000 HKD
Sold: 214,200 HKD

2. Sotheby's Modern and Contemporary Southeast Asian Art, 1 April 2019, Hong Kong

Chen Wen Hsi
Hérons
Estimate: 160,000 - 250,000 HKD
Sold: 250,000 HKD

3. Christie's 20th Century & Contemporary Art, 26 May 2019, Hong Kong

Chen Wen Hsi
Hérons in the Reed
Estimate: 150,000 - 250,000 HKD
Sold: 275,000 HKD



Hérons
Watercolour on paper 43 x 29 cm
SOLD RM 29,680
KLAS Art Auction 1 February, 2019