

# PROLIFIC LYE YAU FATT

## OF STILL LIFE AND NOSTALGIA

BY HIRANMAYIL AWLI MOHANAN

**L**ye Yau Fatt (born in Kedah in 1950) studied printmaking in New York and held his first solo exhibition in 1979 at the Sum Art Gallery and subsequently went on to win the Open Art Sculpture Award, the Malaysian Watercolour Society Award in 1987 and the PNB Watercolour Landscape Award.

### STILL LIFE BY LYE YAU FATT

The artist has a proclivity for looking for themes and substance for his art pieces in regular objects. This is clearly demonstrated in his prolific still-life pieces, each exquisitely painted such as a bouquet of lilies in a vase or a traditional teapot and teacup and figurines against a backdrop of subtle colours. He portrays his dexterity in systematically executed objects, with precision and



Nostalgia, 2017  
Oil on canvas 73 x 46 cm  
**SOLD RM 8,960**  
KLAS Art Auction 18 November 2018

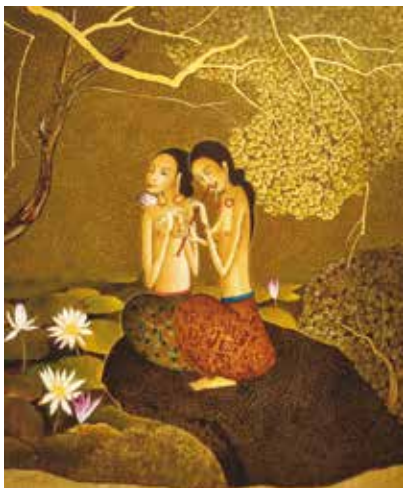


Cherries on a Table, 2016  
Acrylic on canvas 62 x 81 cm  
**SOLD RM 9,468.48**  
KLAS Art Auction 13 November 2016

absolute care for neatness. The intricacy of his technique in his paintings is like magic, evoking nostalgia, or could even remind viewers of their parents or grandparents — simple yet lovely. He brings about nostalgic feeling of antiquity in his still life pieces. At times, Lye imbues into his artworks layers of not only paint, but meaning. Take a step closer and you will see there are certain elements which can mean different things. In 'Flowers in a Vase, 2016', he exquisitely painted a set of Famille Rose teapot and cup, some red Saga seeds along with flowers in an old vase. Red Saga seed (called "xiang si dou" in Chinese) translates to "mutual love seed" and carries the symbol of love.

### INFLUENCES OF HIS MASTER, CHEONG SOO PIENG

The artist was heavily influenced by the Nanyang style, especially under the mentorship of the legendary artist and Nanyang art style pioneer Cheong Soo Pieng. Being mentored by Cheong, Lye admitted to being very inspired by Cheong's idea and compositions of art but despite all that, he often produced artworks that revolved around the Malaysian theme and lifestyle. Nanyang-style paintings in particular received much attention back in the day and the techniques employed were recognised as a creative blend of West and East, and the subject matter was inspired by his Southeast Asian surroundings, hence the label "Nanyang style". Cheong was one of the first artists to paint in this theme, stemmed from a Bali trip in 1952, which



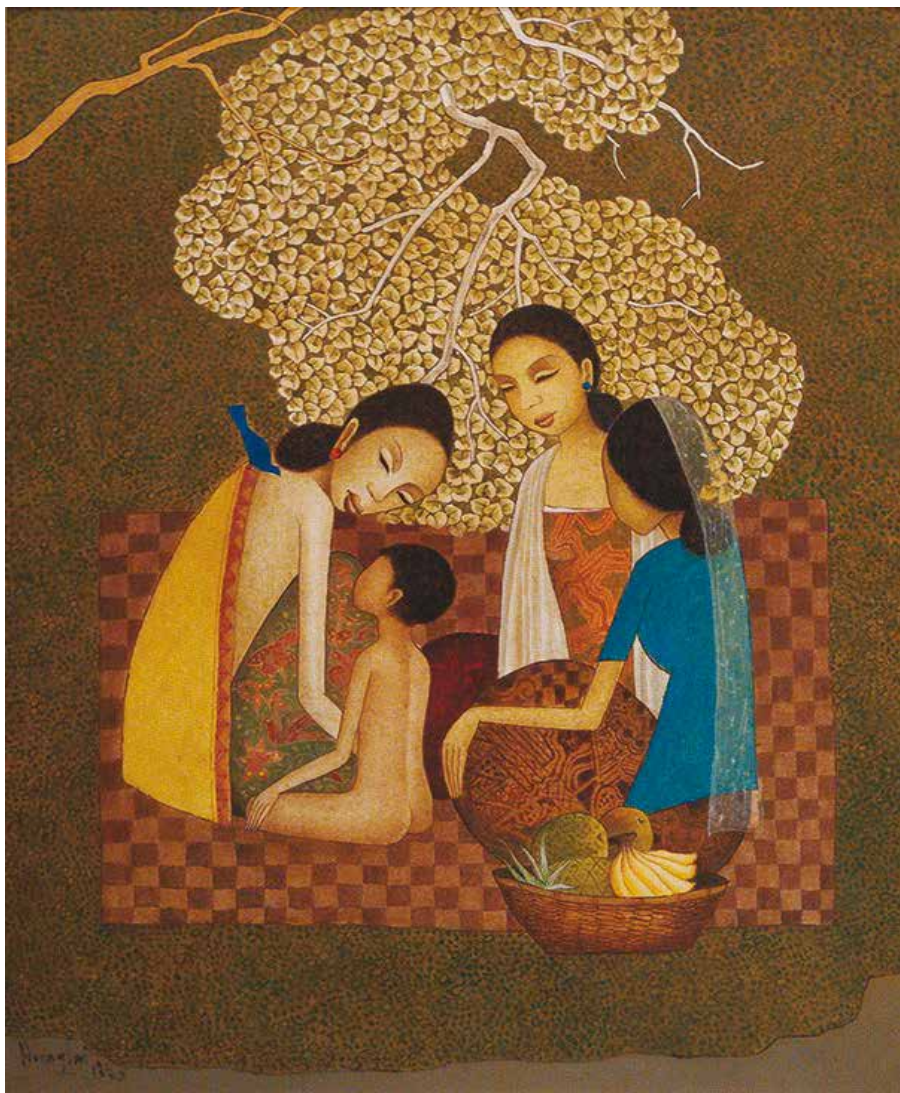
Two Maidens, 1980's  
Mixed media on canvas 81 x 63.5 cm  
**SOLD RM 19,162.40**  
KLAS Art Auction 12 March 2017



Crossing the River, 1983  
Mixed media on canvas 96 x 76 cm  
**SOLD RM 16,800**  
KLAS Art Auction 6 September 2020

he embarked on with three fellow artists — Liu Kang, Chen Wen Hsi and Chen Chong Swee.

If discerned closely. Lye's paintings share some semblance of his master's works. Viewers of his works almost feel as if they are imposing on the exclusivity of the moment, and the intricacy of paintings makes it seem even more homelier, warm and cosy, the pure epitome of serenity. For his artworks, Lye derives inspiration from what one might consider the mundane and monotonous settings in life. He draws on canvas a private moment between family and friends. He never fails to evoke a feeling of familiarity and warmth, and security, in a way. His motifs always revolve around the rustics in a rural setting, with



Gathering, 1985  
Mixed media on canvas 80 x 63 cm  
**SOLD RM 24,798.400**  
KLAS Art Auction 4 September 2016

intricate designs running along his canvas, discernible if seen closely. Lye's artworks are always bedecked with rich and earth tones, creating a homey ambience and mood, where viewers may find peace in.

Cheong formulated his distinctive style of painting Malay women after a 1959 trip to the Dayak longhouses of Borneo. Besides painting both in the Eastern and Western techniques of Chinese ink and oils, Cheong also sculpted and crafted metal installations, which Lye also dabbled in.

Lye's cement and granite sculpture entitled 'Malay Girl/Gadis Melayu' (Illustrated on page 7 of the Exhibition Winner Announcement Catalogue) won the 2nd Prize in the Sculpture Competition and Exhibition in 1983 hosted and exhibited by the Penang

State Art Museum in collaboration with Sin Pin Jih Pao Malaysia and Super Departmental Store Sdn Bhd. This particular sculpture retains some link to figuration, especially the appearance of the woman which resemble most of his famous elongated ladies in his canvas works, the subject is positioned in a way that would require a lot of deliberation from the viewers' part. She is seated, curled with her knees up to her chest as the material of her clothing is stretched. It is a quiet, serene moment — contemplative and solemn. It is the encapsulation of tranquillity. However, this sculpture has the potential to be something very subjective, especially to the most fertile of imaginations.



# THE EMOTIVE RAFIEE GHANI

## WEAVING COLOURS AND TRAVELS ON CANVAS

BY HIRANMAYI AWLI MOHANAN



The Yellow Mountain, 2013  
Watercolour and acrylic on paper 93 x 106 cm  
**SOLD RM 9,520**  
KLAS Art Auction 8 November 2020

Rafiee Ghani's artworks are just as colourful as he is. Born in Kulim, Kedah in 1962, Rafiee Ghani is one of Malaysia's most prominent artists. He began his education in art at the prestigious De Virge Academie Voor Bildeende Kunst at the

Hague in the Netherlands before continuing his studies at the Institut Teknologi MARA in Dungun. Much of his muse and exposure to art began in Europe, where he visited all the great art spaces and museums.

Consequently, Rafiee drew his inspirations through old masters like Vincent Van Gogh and Henri Matisse and their works. Rafiee has been actively involved in shows in both private and public galleries and art spaces around the world. His works have



The Floating Mosque, 2017  
Watercolour on paper 57 x 76.5 cm  
**SOLD RM RM 8,424**  
KLAS Art Auction 7 February 2021

been collected by major corporations both within and outside of Malaysia that include Bank Negara Malaysia, Petronas Gallery, Dynasty Hotel, Bank Utama, Malaysian Tobacco Company as well as Oriental Bank. His works are also in the collection of Mr Albert Rene, the President of the Seychelles and several private collections in the United States, Europe and Asia.

#### ARTISTIC PROWESS

Rafiee is known in the local fine arts sphere for his lyrical abstract and contemporary paintings, notably his oil paintings. His artworks aren't easy to miss for its loud, dynamic use of colours and strokes that make his style particularly distinctive and emotive. For Rafiee, aesthetics is an important part of his paintings — this is where balance and compositions are utilised to their fullest potential, often producing artworks that are artistic and pleasing for the eyes. The artist was formally trained in the arts and techniques of print-making, but it is his mastery in oil painting which sets him apart from other artists.

He is known to fully utilise the limited use of colours known in printmaking techniques. The artist also creates an imaginary illusion of objects and images by overlaying them with colours which are vibrantly mixed and integrated. Rafiee's Garden series is brilliant and every artwork from the series is a bold and vivid spectacle of colours.

The inspiration for this series is derived from the artist's hometown in Kelantan — his favourite place to be in as a child. This included swimming in the river with other children after school. Intimism remains prominent throughout his pieces. The bold strokes of colour were his way of conveying the brilliance of the local forest filled with natural colours to delight and excite. Rafiee's works evoke nostalgia, longing, tranquility and optimism.

#### WATERCOLOUR WORKS

Rafiee Ghani's works in watercolour are as brilliant as his oil painting, if not better. He still employs his signature loud and dynamic colours, complemented by brushstrokes where his style of Intimism are well established. Rafiee's watercolour artworks produce an imaginary illusion of images and objects which are submerged below his mastery in playing with colours which are vibrantly mixed and integrated. This is where one would be able to clearly see the objects or scenes which are portrayed amidst the sea of a strong tone of the colour scheme which epitomises Rafiee's body of work.

#### TAKING INSPIRATION FROM HIS TRAVELS

It's no secret that Rafiee's career on canvas has been long inspired by his travels. Whenever he came across a beautiful sight, he would take a photograph and later capture the scene on canvas. The artist first visited Morocco in 1986 as a young man and has since spent two months each

year in the Moroccan-Algerian-Tunisian region. He felt drawn to these places for a number of reasons, the first being that it's Africa but not really 'African' because of its proximity to Europe. Rafiee fell in love with the architecture and the influence of Moorish Islamic architecture and calligraphy on modern arts. It amazed the artist that the people of the desert were very accepting of his career as an artist and have on many occasions invited him to spend the night in their homes, huts or makeshift tents. It was moments like that that made him a curious traveller. Throughout his travels, he had made many friends and memories, some of which he can't put into words or paintings. Whether it is the rugged casbahs or crowded medinas of Moroccan cities or the vastness of desert sands at night, the artist captures the essence of a beautiful country with striking, brilliant hues and free-flowing lines.

An avid traveller, Rafiee has been travelling since being a teenager and has seen most of Europe, Middle East, as well as North and South Africa. He has also covered most of the Indian subcontinent, from Peshawar in the northwest to the tip of Bangladesh in the east; Kanyakumari, the southernmost tip of India; and also Gilgit in the north of Pakistan, where he attempted to cross over to China on a bicycle. The artist has also driven across North America, from coast to coast a couple of times. Rafiee has travelled so much that he said he can draw the map of Southeast Asia blindfolded. When he visits a location that has been depicted in a certain painting, he finds it very inspiring. For instance, when Rafiee was at the Maritime Alps in France, he contends that French painter Cezanne brilliantly translated the light, atmosphere and the colours of the region onto his canvas. Another instance was when he drove along the coast of California, the artist soaked in the myriads of colours and shades along the way, contemplating how the region influenced his favourite American painter, Richard Diebenkom.

When Rafiee was in Northern Thailand, he tried to decipher what inspired artist Latifd Mohidin to write his epic poetry entitled 'Sungei Mekong' and the famed series of paintings known as Pago Pago. In Morocco, he sat in the cafe where the venerable French artist, Henri Matisse produced his sketches. Rafiee was also in Tunisia where the German-born painter Paul Klee lived and produced some of his works for a while. "I think all my travels helped me refine my observations while understanding and enriching my creative process," said Rafiee Ghani.



# JUSTIN NUYDA

## PILLAR OF PHILIPPINE'S MODERN ART

BY HIRANMAYII AWLI MOHANAN

**F**ilipino visual artist Justin "Tiny" Nuyda was born in 1944. He is regarded as a pillar of the Filipino modern art and is a co-founder of the legendary Saturday Group (through which he enjoyed many years of friendship and camaraderie with his contemporaries and literary greats). This was a loose organisation that would attract an entire generation of artists. Some of these eventually became National Artists such as HR Ocampo, Cesar Legaspi, Vicente Manansala, Ang Kiukok, Jose Joya, and Benedicto Cabrera. Other artistes drawn to the group were Federico Alcuaz and Juvenal Sanso (whenever in town), Mauro Malang Santos, Ed Castrillo, Onib Olmedo and Sym Mendoza and even writers Rod Paras-Perez and Leo Benesa. He is a graduate of the University of Santo Tomas College of Fine Arts and Design (1966) and was one of the first batch of Thirteen Artists awardees — a distinguished list of who's who on the art scene that included Danilo Dalena, Angelito Antonio, Mario Parial and Romulo Olazo.

Alongside art, Justin Nuyda is also a lepidopterist specialising in Filipino butterflies. Having started collecting butterflies at the age of seven, he has described over a hundred species and subspecies. This passion for jewelled insects and the terrain they thrive in has served as a major inspiration for his works over the past fifty years. The colours of the butterflies have had a great influence on the artist's work. "I have my own choices of colours but a lot of times, I prefer the natural colour combinations evident in butterflies. There are colours that are real but do not look right," said the artist. He slants towards more natural, earthy tones, warm yet not bright and luminous.

The enigmatic Nuyda has been painting for nearly five decades and the discipline he subscribes to has a cerebral quality to it. While it's hard to pin point the exact kind of art he creates, it's breathtaking all the same. A highly regarded modernist, the artist has crafted a brilliant, lyrically surreal brand of art. From his ethereal abstract compositions to the magical landscapes borne from his 'Mindscape' series, Nuyda has elegantly put on display his complex musings. His abstractions are wavers on the brink of reality; from surreal to real, turbulent to placid and barren to beautiful.



Technically adept, he is able to humbly translate his stylised subject visually with ease — an excellent display of his deft hand. A cerebral artist, Nuyda's concern is to explore and challenge the boundaries of the mind. He uses visual techniques and definitions to explore these boundaries and present his own vision of the landscapes of his mind. With a combination of lengthy lively brush strokes and striking colours, the landscapes Nuyda commits to his canvases are reflections of his observations, experiences and his perspective.

The process of creating the artist's magical works first starts with priming the canvas with as much as seven coatings, followed by painting it with waif-like strokes that are both robust and delicate, invoking a solid slate and the fluidity of butterfly wings floating over the horizon. He learned a lot of this from the late National Artist Cesar Legaspi who had a special fondness for him. He then scrapes the paint to create a

gradient feel. Nuyda's colours are illusions of movement, going backward and forward. However, he only uses white for blending the vivid colours on his canvas. Nuyda's body of work demonstrates his considerable skill and imagination in reconciling the geometric and organic.

Nuyda's first exhibition was held at Solidaridad Galleries in 1968. He was already doing his Search Mindscape theme. In fact, this is where he met National Artist Benedicto "BenCab" Cabrera who lent him an easel when he was installing.

As the world was hit by the COVID-19 pandemic and various challenges that came with it, Nuyda weathered a storm of his own after being diagnosed with stage four cancer. Ever the artist and observer, Nuyda found himself inspired as he recuperated from the intensive treatments while on lockdown, particularly by the outstanding quality of care he received in the hands of his doctors.

# CHUNG CHEN SUN

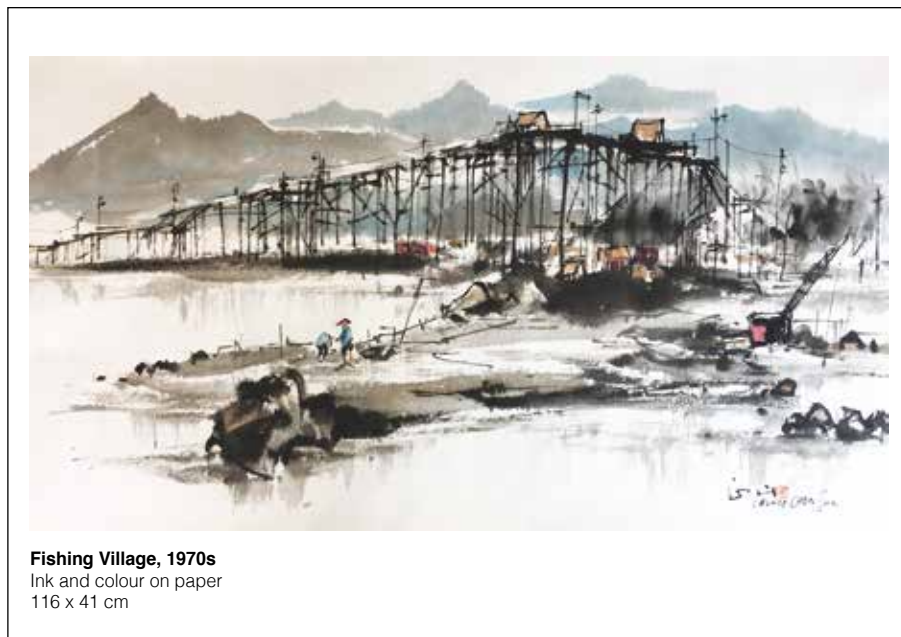
## FATHER OF MALAYSIAN MODERN ART EDUCATION

BY HIRANMAYII AWLI MOHANAN

**C**hung Chen Sun, born in 1935 in Malacca, is an internationally famed and recognised artist as well as art academician. He graduated from Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, Singapore under the tutelage of artists such as Chen Wen Hsi, Chen Zhong Rui and Cheong Soo Pieng. In 1964, Chung obtained a masters degree in Public Administration and Management from Los Angeles University. He is an artist and educator who is well-versed in the melting pot of multiculturalism. The artist is widely regarded as the “Father of Malaysian Modern Art Education” and “The Father of Malaysian Modern Ink Painting”.

Upon his graduation, he returned to Malaysia and founded the Malaysian Institute of Art in 1967 which he was the principal/president from 1967 until 1999. With that, Chung spearheaded art education in Malaysia. Today, MIA is one of the largest art and creative institutions in the Southeast Asian region. Besides that, he had founded and helped establish five art institutions in Malaysia and China. He also formed the International Contemporary Ink Painting Association in 1982. In 1992, he was honoured as one of the world’s Top 10 Hakka Personalities. In 2005, the Five Decades of Chung Chen Sun exhibition was held at the National Art Gallery, and in 2007, the international Art Expo Malaysia honoured him with a Tribute Pavilion.

After his studies at the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts in Singapore (1953-55), Chung did his Masters in Public Administration at the University of San Francisco, USA (1984-1986). He has participated in solo exhibitions in Taiwan, China, Singapore,



**Fishing Village, 1970s**  
Ink and colour on paper  
116 x 41 cm

Holland and Thailand since his first solo in Kuala Lumpur in 1964. It was only in 2009 that he held his homecoming solo in Malacca. He is also actively engaged in international art education exchanges and has held positions like co-chairman and vice-chairman of the Asia Pacific Art Education Association. When he was teaching at the Chinese Cultural University in Taiwan in 1981, he founded the International Contemporary Ink Painting Association to promote this form of art, ink painting.

Chung was diligent in the study of Eastern and Western paintings, with unstoppable brushstrokes and brilliant hands, modelling the hallmarks of a gifted painter. The artist has worked in the field of ink painting for decades and has brilliantly integrated the essence

of Chinese and Western painting. He is committed to promoting the modernisation of Chinese ink painting in the Nanyang region. Chung’s forte lies in ink painting and he is very diverse in his subject matters, creating works of landscape, figures and still life. He combines calligraphy with a palette of Western oil painting, evident mostly in his figurative works. The artist has a flair for combining varied elements, carefully composing them and infusing his mastery of lines and effects into his works. Throughout his journey in painting, he has been constantly seeking breakthroughs. His works have been exhibited in Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, Philippines, India, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, United Kingdom, United States, France, Germany, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Brazil. He has held 17 solo exhibitions over the years.