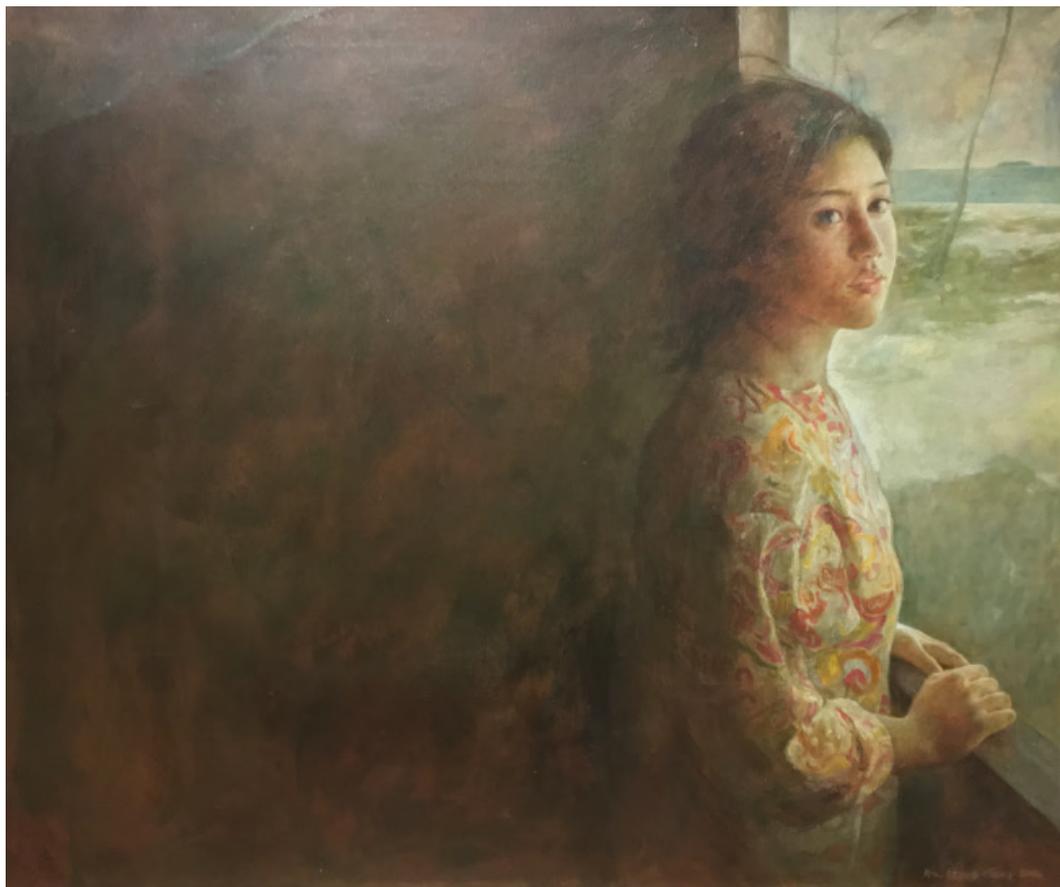


KLAS Art Auction 27 June 2021

# KOW LEONG KIANG

AN EMOTIVE PAINTER

BY HIRANMAYII AWLI MOHANAN



Portrait Series, 1970  
Oil on canvas 76 x 92 cm  
KLAS Art Auction 27 June  
2021

*"I like to observe the mannerism of Malay women because I think they are beautiful and East Coast ladies are very different from their city counterparts. Most of them still practise the traditional way of life and that is what makes them so special. I love travelling to the East Coast, especially to Terengganu and Kelantan, to head to the beaches, especially the fishing villages," explained Kow.*

**K**ow Leong Kiang has successfully established himself as one of Malaysia's respected figurative painters in the last 15 years since he won the grand prize at the Philip Morris ASEAN Art Awards in 1998. Since then, he has been working relentlessly to spread his artwork in the country and abroad. His works have also made their way into some of the permanent collections of corporations, private collectors as well as the likes of the National Art Gallery of Malaysia.

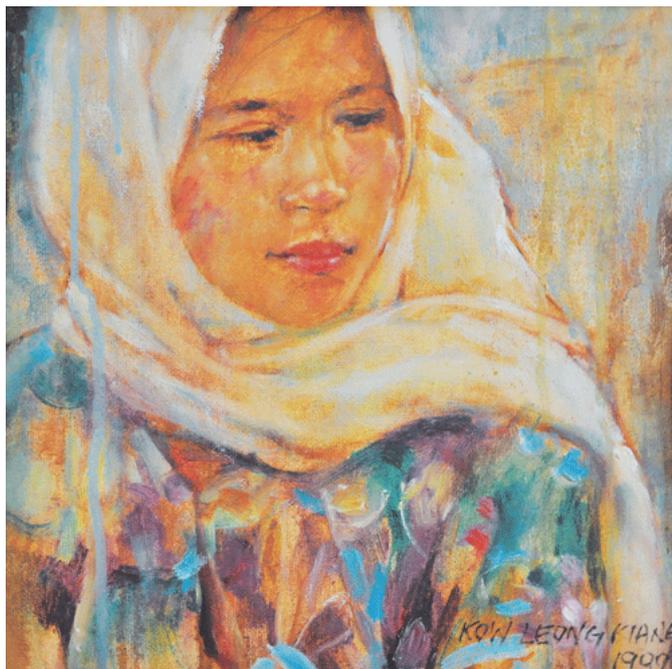
The Selangor-born artist received his early art education when he graduated with a Diploma in Fine Art at the Kuala Lumpur College of Art in 1991. Since then, he has had his artworks displayed and showcased in various public and private galleries in Malaysia as well as overseas. The hallmark of his works is the artist's exploration of personal expressions which he typically executes in a 'blur' motif. Most of Leong Kiang's works revolve around human emotions where he is never afraid to showcase his mastery in this technique.

It always feels as if his canvas is a piece of silk creating a veil over his subjects yet he brilliantly captures their emotions and expressions.

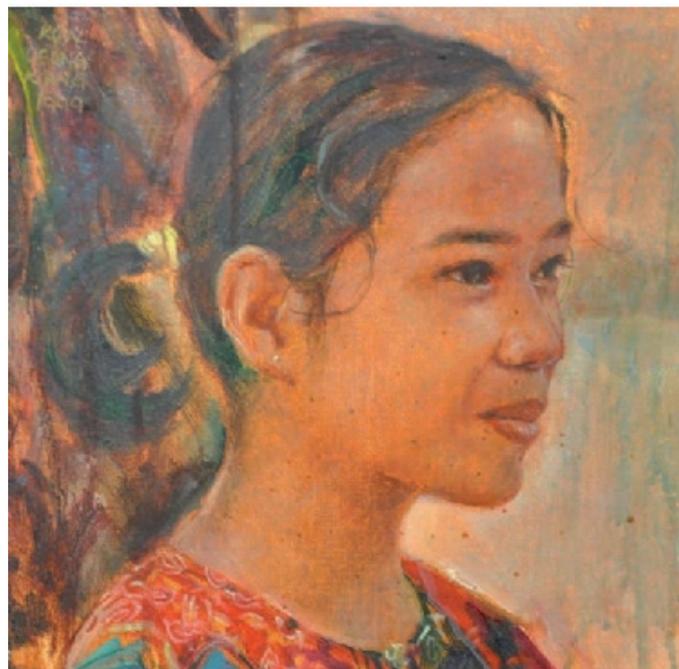
## DEVELOPING A LOVE FOR ART

His love for art developed when he was a secondary school student. A big fan of comic books, he was inspired by the artwork and that encouraged him to start drawing. He continued drawing things based on the comics he had read. "I loved reading comic

## KLAS Art Auction 27 June 2021



**Innocence Series, 1999**  
Oil on canvas 23.5 x 23.5 cm  
KLAS Art Auction 7 July, 2013



**A Little Beauty, 1999**  
Oil on canvas 24 x 23.5 cm  
KLAS Art Auction 2 December, 2012

books when I was in secondary school and discovered a liking for art and started drawing things based on the comics I read," he said. "I bought a lot of them from bookshops and then I decided that I wanted to become an artist. I wasn't that great in academics and I realised I was better at art than most of the school subjects, so I chose what I was better at. And I don't like the nine-to-five job lifestyle, anyway. I love this job because I have more freedom doing what I love," he continued.

#### TO THE SEA

This talented man is widely known for his portraits of East Coast Malaysian women's beauty and his depictions of nostalgic rural scenes captured through masterful feather-light rendering. He held his first solo exhibition in Singapore, *To The Sea* at Ernst and Young Gallery under The Asia Outreach Programme. In this exhibition, combining landscape and portraiture, Kow used a single painting subject and one of his favourite ones – a Malay girl – to tell a nostalgic story of Malaysia's history and explore the current socio-political issues facing the country.

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to Terengganu and Kelantan, to head to the beaches, especially the fishing villages," explained Kow.

#### GOING NUDE

In 2009, Kow launched his first solo exhibition, *Jogja Constellation*, in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, where he produced a series of portraits of well-known local artists such as Agus Suwage, Ugo Untoro, Putu Sutawijaya, Arahmaini and Angki Purbandono, among others. The vibrancy of Indonesia's art scene not only created chances for him to make new friends but also gave him a newfound confidence as he began to take more risks as a painter. He experimented with the most unexpected subject matter, the nude figure – something he had wanted to develop for many years. In 2010 and 2011, he created two series, *Intimate Collisions* and *Soft* that depicted bodies in physical and emotional conflicts. Alternating between balletic elegance and raw struggle. These represent some of Kow's most ambitious and technically sophisticated works to date.

"I was in Bandung in 2010, and I hired 12 models to do a series of nude poses for me to capture on my camera. I chose to do this in Bandung as there are many modelling schools in the area and I have a photographer friend there too and he helped get me the models. I ordered see-through boxes for the models to lie in and pose as I took their shots. The custom made boxes were quite costly. After I had finished taking all the photos, I brought

them back here to be painted," said Kow. *Collisions* represent one of the new chapters of his practice as he enters a mature period of style and contemplation.

#### HIS EXHIBITIONS

Kow Leong Kiang's most notable award came when he first entered the art scene where he was the recipient of the Grand Prize at the Philip Morris ASEAN Art Award back in 1998. Since then, he has been actively involved with the art movement of Malaysia where he has held solo exhibitions at public and private galleries around the country. One of his recent solo exhibition was held at the Valentine Willie Fine Art in Bangsar entitled '*Intimate Collisions*' which was also where he had several other solo shows including '*Silent Conversations*' in 2005 and '*Floating World*' 2 years before that. He also has had a show entitled '*Human*' at the Red Mill Gallery in Vermont, USA.

Leong Kiang's work has also been involved with various group shows that include the '*Art Cased by Jaguar*' as well as the 18 @ 8 series show organised by Wei-Ling Gallery, one of the most established private galleries in Malaysia. Apart from that, some of his work has travelled to the Guangdong Museum of Art in China while enjoying constant publicity at the National Art Gallery. Other notable group shows that he has participated in include the '*Three Man Show*' in Bali and at the '*The Contemporary Asean Art Fair*' in Suntec, Singapore.