

# CHUAH THEAN TENG'S

## EARLY AND RARE MASTERPIECES

BY HIRANMAYII AWLI MOHANAN

Not many realise Chuah Thean Teng's pre-eminence in the world of art and its history, especially in regard to batik painting. He was famed and credited for finding an entirely new and immediately convincing method of pictorial expression — a rare methodology.

As an artist, Chuah first started to draw when he was only a few years old. He acquired his own formal training at the Amoy Art School in China which he left to immigrate to Malaya with his parents. Although trained in the Chinese tradition, he came to prefer Western styles of painting. His early works as a part-timer painter reflected sound draughtsmanship and this was his primary asset. Chuah as a painter in oils was not outstanding, but his works in watercolour were always acceptable in any exhibition.

Chuah's pursuit of his passion in art was mainly self-taught, and he drew inspiration from the local rustic scenes of colonial Malaya, capturing them in woodcut prints. He signed his artwork, which comprised sketches, cartoons, comic strips, oil paintings, watercolours, Chinese brush paintings and even pastels, with the pseudonym Choo Ting.



Boys, 1980  
Batik  
90 x 87 cm



Contentment  
Batik  
94 x 63.5 cm



Trashing Rice  
Batik  
60 x 89 cm



Penang Village Scene, Circa late 70's  
Batik  
45 x 119 cm



Mother grooming with Children, 1980  
Batik  
90 x 60 cm



Working at Coconut Plantation, 1980  
Batik  
90 x 60 cm



Mother and Children, 1980's  
Batik  
74 x 52 cm



Mother and Children, 1983  
Batik  
61 x 45 cm

The artist was at the helm of batik renaissance in Malaysia — a new approach to a timeless medium. Painting by the batik method germinated from Teng's own idea and determination. The possibilities of batik painting as a fine art were a revelation, but equally remarkable was the revolution which occurred in Chuah's own approach to art. His style of painting was very much influenced by Pablo Picasso and Paul Gauguin and that translated onto his works.

Instead of carrying on a classical Chinese style, Chuah captured the vibrant, brilliant colours of the Malay culture of his adopted country. His draughtsmanship acquired sweep and rhythm; colours flared from his canvas. His themes opened up new vistas of Malaysian life, not only the scene but the people and all their daily activities. Women feeding chickens, children playing, farmers gathering the harvest — all warm human, simple and everyday subjects no other Malaysian artists seemed to have tackled with such relish before.

An exceptional and distinctive quality of Chuah's works was that he filled every space and surface with layers of registers or lines upon which the images are standing, sitting or carefully arranged with symbols. These pieces are uniquely stylised and symbolic, hence its allure. The artist had conceived the idea of making pictures in batik — not just decorative designs, but large and frequently complex figure compositions. Some of Chuah's early batiks embodied cork colours that also acted as an embalming shadow with figures all around etched out by lines that dovetail the batik cracking technique.

His productivity in batik painting was enormous, but even more incredible is the high standard and quality of his work. Never satisfied, he was always experimenting, seeking to give new depth and range to his batik art. Realism, impressionism, abstracts — he changed about and essayed them all. No matter what style he chose, the result in batik was always indelibly and individually Chuah.

*"Through his receptive eyes and masterly hands, Teng can show a rich vision of Malaysia to the world in his unique medium of batik art."* — Frank Sullivan

# A.B IBRAHIM

## THE MAESTRO OF WATERCOLOUR

BY HIRANMAYI AWLI MOHANAN



Fishing Village, 1960's  
Watercolour on paper  
27 x 37 cm

Born as Ibrahim bin Abu Bakar in 1925 in Kedah, he was commonly known as A.B. Ibrahim in the art sphere. While he didn't have an academic degree, his struggles and effort placed him as one of Malaysia's notable artists. He is known for his watercolour renditions, highlighting the natural beauty that surrounded him, the identity of communities and peaceful landscapes. This Kedah-born artist is internationally recognised, with approximately 20,000 of his paintings featured abroad, spanning Australia, Italy, London, Germany, Denmark, Britain, the United States, Singapore, Japan, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Qatar, Hong Kong and France.

A.B. Ibrahim was the fifth child of nine siblings. His brothers, Hassan and Kechik shared similar proclivity for art since they were young, but Ibrahim honed his own talent by delving into the medium of watercolour. His formal education ceased in the fourth grade in order to support his middle-income family. He worked at coffee shops selling ais kacang and assisting traders in Pekan Rabu. During the Second World War in 1941, Ibrahim was only 16 years old when he became a JKR labourer building roads. He later became a trader again in Pekan Rabu. Nevertheless, during that period, there were many drawing competitions exhibited through posters and logos organised by the Japanese. This was propaganda as a means to improve the standard of living. However, Ibrahim took this as an opportunity to be active in the arts and exhibit his works to the public. He was once again very grateful because due to the privilege of his drawing talent, he was able to escape from being mobilised by the Japanese to build a railway between Siam and Burma known as the "Deadly Railway." The Chinese at that time were also very familiar with A.B. Ibrahim and supported him by requesting painting portraits of the faces of their family members to honour them in the eventuality of death.



Crossing The River, 1960's  
Watercolour on paper  
27 x 37 cm

Predominantly self-taught, A. B.Ibrahim was one of the founding members of Persatuan Pelukis Melayu (Society of Malay Artists, Malaya) that was based in Singapore. His work, "Malacca Gate" is a permanent collection of the National Art Gallery in Kuala Lumpur and at the Kedah State Gallery and the Royal Museum in Alor Setar. Although he was based in Alor Setar, he spent most of his time in Penang where he sold his paintings along Penang Road and Chulia Street. The artist had held a solo exhibition in Dewan Besar Perniagaan Cina, Ipoh in 1962 and participated in group exhibitions including that of Persatuan Pelukis Melayu, Singapore (1945-1970), Penang Trade Fair (1948), and 4th Malayan Artists Association Exhibition and British Council, Kuala Lumpur (1958).

A. B. Ibrahim excelled in creating and romanticising local landscapes only with the watercolour medium. It is a common, quotidian and modest scene carrying a quiet and tranquil mood that accompanies the atmosphere of villages. The artist created very nostalgic and sentimental mood, reminiscing the days gone by or simpler times. His prowess in re-enacting moods and feeling as well as beautiful rustic landscapes on paper made him one of the most well-known artists in Kedah to date.

The artist passed away on December 25, 1977, a Christmas Day at his residence in Datuk Kumbar Alor Setar at the young age of 52. He left behind a great legacy in watercolour painting.



## KLAS ART AUCTION

### RECORD-BREAKING PRICES IN 2022

**K**L Lifestyle Art Space (KLAS) bids adieu to yet another wonderful and astounding year of its modern and contemporary art auctions. The esteemed gallery's concluding, and first art auction back in its flagship post in 150 @ Jalan Maarof, Bangsar on Nov 27 marked its final event for the 2022 calendar year. KLAS saw exceptional highs as it celebrated the brilliant and beautiful masterpieces of artists from Malaysia and South-East Asia. As we usher in the new year and the dawn of another year of discovering important artworks, we look back at 2022's momentous art pieces and highlights sold by this reputable auction house. Names that indisputably made the list were hot shots such as the late Khalil Ibrahim, Datuk Chuah Thean Teng, Cheong Soo Pieng, Datuk Ibrahim Hussein, Lee Man Fong and Awang Damit Ahmad – artists that frequented KLAS' auctions, and names that are always expected to fare very well. Besides the heavyweights, 2022 also saw artist Filipino artist, Mauro Malang Santos fare exceptionally well with his 'Abstract, 1979', along with Sri Lankan artist Senaka Senanayake's 'The Gleaners, 1963' soar past expectations. Marvel at these visual beauties and unfold their mystery – the pieces that fetched astounding prices and won hearts.

### KLAS ART AUCTION 20 FEBRUARY 2022



**Yeoh Jin Leng**  
Human Rot, 1969  
Oil on canvas, 100 x 100 cm  
**SOLD RM 134,400**



**Cheong Soo Pieng**  
Fishing Village, 1960  
Oil on masonite board, 50 x 70 cm  
**SOLD RM 257,600**



**Awang Damit Ahmad**  
Saging dan Pucuk Paku (EOC Series), 1992  
Mixed media on canvas, 106 x 91.5 cm  
**SOLD RM 95,200**



**Khalil Ibrahim**  
Pantai Irama, 1970  
Acrylic on canvas, 92 x 120 cm  
**SOLD RM 123,200**



**Mauro Malang Santos**  
Abstract, 29th January 1979  
Mixed media on paper board, 122 x 54 cm  
**SOLD RM 128,800**

**KLAS ART AUCTION 29 MAY 2022**



**Ibrahim Hussein, Datuk**  
 Untitled, 1996  
 Acrylic on canvas, 100 x 100 cm  
**SOLD RM 386,400**



**Lee Man Fong**  
 Bali Life  
 Watercolour on paper, 98 x 178 cm  
**SOLD RM 117,600**



**Yusof Ghani**  
 Siri Biring XXX, 2006  
 Charcoal and acrylic on linen, 127 x 97 cm  
**SOLD RM 89,600**



**Khalil Ibrahim**  
 Pantai Irama, 1970  
 Acrylic on canvas, 92 x 120 cm  
**SOLD RM 123,200**



**Chuah Thean Teng, Dato**  
 Contentment (Mother and Child), 1983  
 Batik, 94 x 63.5 cm  
**SOLD RM 67,200**



**Senaka Senanayake**  
 The Gleaners, 1963  
 Oil on canvas, 81 x 132 cm  
**SOLD RM 72,800**

**KLAS ART AUCTION 27 NOVEMBER 2022**



**Yusof Ghani**  
 Siri Tari III, 1984-85 (Washington Series)  
 Oil on canvas, 163 x 219 cm  
**SOLD RM 470,400**

**KLAS ART AUCTION 28 AUGUST 2022**



**Khalil Ibrahim**  
 Abstract II, 1968  
 Oil on canvas, 120 x 95 cm  
**SOLD RM 123,200**



**Lee Man Fong**  
 Bali Life  
 Watercolour on paper, 99.5 x 199 cm  
**SOLD RM 95,200**



**Awang Damit Ahmad**  
 Pun-Pun Unggu, 1993  
 Mixed media on canvas, 76 x 61 cm  
**SOLD RM 61,600**



**Awang Damit Ahmad**  
 Marista - Ingatan Yang Tersisa II, 2001  
 Mixed media on canvas, 110 x 118.5 cm  
**SOLD RM 61,600**



**Cheong Soo Pieng**  
 Fishing Village, 1960  
 Oil on masonite board, 50 x 70 cm  
**SOLD RM 257,600**



**Awang Damit Ahmad**  
 EOC Musim Kelabu 1995  
 Acrylic on canvas, 183 x 153 cm  
**SOLD RM 168,000**