

# STOREYS

Chuah Chong Yong

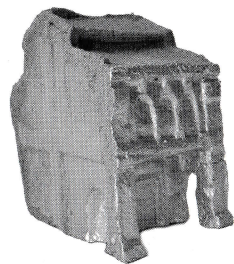




# STOREYS

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Alor Gajah: Jalan Naning



9 FEBRUARY 2000

I passed by Alor Gajah again after attending a friend's wedding dinner. It was almost midnight when I saw Alor Gajah town in her new dress.

9 JULY 2003

I revisited Melaka via Alor Gajah. The purpose of the trip was to take photos for paintings and to meet some friends.

around 11.00am: I was in my Pagoda t-shirt, jeans and Japanese slippers, shooting photos with my coolpix885, one shop house after another, from across the street. The locals saw me. Maybe they thought I was a tourist or a contractor.

I walked across the street towards the shop houses, when a shopkeeper asked me, 'For what?'

I explained, 'For my paintings. I am an artist. Since when were these houses painted like this? Last time when I passed through here, it was not like this.'

'Year 2000 to 2001. The Majlis Perbandaran said everybody has to paint their facades.'

'So, they pay or you have to pay?'

'They sponsored the material and asked contractors to paint. We pay for the workmanship. RM600.00 per facade.'

Some time in 1997 I decided not to take my usual route driving back from Melaka town to Kuala Lumpur, and I came across pre-war shop houses in Alor Gajah, Melaka. I recall that the building facades were mostly off-white, showing off their unique moulded plaster decoration and design, and remember noticing small plants growing out from the corners. Other shop houses stood proudly in their own charming colours of pastel blue, lime green, yellow ochre, with their individual signages and billboards. The shop houses were without pretensions, even though some parts were dirty and neglected, they contained and reflected the life and modes of living of Alor Gajah.

'Okay?'

'Okay, they use good paint, ICI, Jotun. Now the houses look new and beautiful.'

8 SEPTEMBER 2003

Early in the morning, I drove to Jalan Naning, Alor Gajah again, with my wife BeeTee and my son Shang Qi. We went early hoping to catch the mood when closed shops reopen for business. I managed to get a closer look at the shop houses this time. They each had two sign boards: the original signage by the owners themselves and the new one by the Majlis Perbandaran. The old one had Jalan Besar and the new one Jalan Naning as street address. I was confused of why the numbering of their addresses are not in sequence?

While waiting for the shops to open, I drove around. I noticed that actually the whole town was painted the same glaring colours of pinkish orange with bright yellow interspersed with cobalt blue. Suddenly I saw a shop house with a facade that had been gutted by fire. It made a nice contrast to the newly painted and uniformed look.

around 9.00am: I drove to the Majlis Perbandaran to ask for the town's logo. The receptionist girl asked me, 'We have changed the Alor Gajah logo, do you want the new one?'

I said, 'No, the original one is fine.'



After winning the Phillip Morris Art Awards (Malaysia) in 1996, I started working with installations and leaving painting aside. Now I return to painting again and become more aware of and responsive to the process itself. Before, it took me a short time to finish a painting, as compared to a longer time spent on researching and studying the subject matter. For my current works I intentionally decelerate the pace of painting. I put in more of my emotional response, and allow more time to deliberate and view each painting as it progresses. I become more aware of the factors of time and space. I appropriate different techniques—for example in the *Alor Gajah : Jalan Naning Series*, I used flat colours on the facade, drew freehand straight lines on the textured surface, and used masking lines for the billboards, and tinting and glazing for the interior of the shop houses. And I sprayed on 'blue-screen' for the background.

The *Salvaged* artworks are collected from heritage building sites such as terra cotta roof tiles and bricks. Why do I salvage these materials? Initially I had the simple intention of letting the material speak for itself. I applied layers of lime wash over these artefacts in order to add a degree of fragility and prompt the collector to handle them with greater care. As an artwork—with artist's signature—and mounted in an exhibition, how much can I price them at? They should not be here in the first place.

Why pre-war building? At first it was physical aspects such as the fine design, craftsmanship and aged character etched on its facades that attracted me to take on pre-war building as my subject matter. Perhaps at first there was nostalgia too. But then later, as I delved further beneath the surface, I became more aware of its architectural and cultural significance and at the same time the problems facing our built heritage. There are issues of preservation and conservation, the rent control act, the demolition of a number of these buildings because of redevelopment of our city and the resultant change of the urban structure.

I approached the *Pre-War Building Series* as an artist who paints his subject matter, bringing an emotional response to it and at the same time trying to address the issues that I was concerned with. I was then an artist-cum-heritage-supporter, approaching the subject with opinions about built heritage preservation and conservation, hoping that my artworks would change the situation and make a difference. I feel I have now evolved into an artist-cum-observer, bringing to the subject different perspectives and view points, for example, of the tenant, the owner, the developer, the authorities, the 'badan warisan' - a mixture of them all. Being on the outside, I try to see from the divergent points of view, and at the same time I begin to learn about myself.

Chuah Chong Yong  
born 1972

Education

1991 - 1993 Diploma in Fine Arts (Painting), Malaysian Institute of Art, Kuala Lumpur

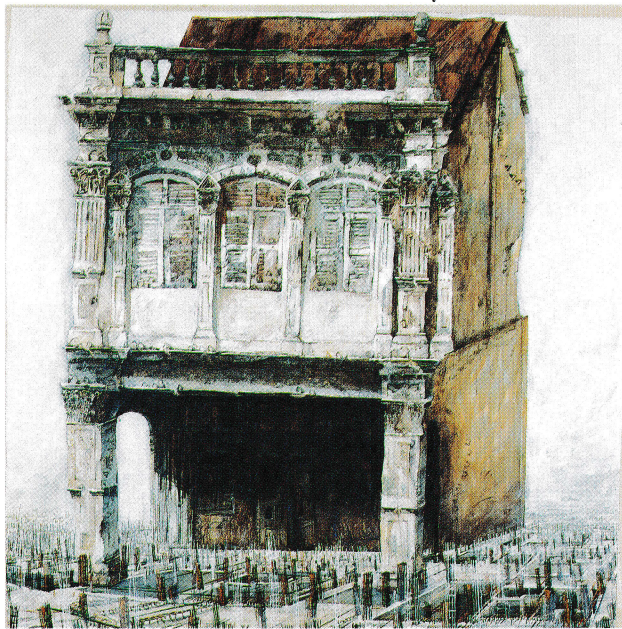
Selected Exhibitions

- 1991 - 1992 **Salon Malaysia 91/92**, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur  
1992 **8 x 6, Watercolor Group Exhibition**, Maybank Gallery, Kuala Lumpur  
1993 **Diploma Show**, Gallery MIA, Kuala Lumpur  
1994 **Life after MIA 84-94**, Creative Center, Kuala Lumpur  
**The City**, The Architecture Club @ The Equator, Central Market  
**7 Space**, Gallery MIA, Kuala Lumpur  
**Chinese Ink Painting**, Contemporary Ink Painting Society, Kuala Lumpur  
**Bakat Muda Sezaman 94**, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur  
**Positive a Life**, GaleriWan, Kuala Lumpur  
1995 **Expression 95**, Nanyang Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur  
**The Young Ones**, Nanyang Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur  
1996 **Periphery**, GaleriWan, Kuala Lumpur  
**Philip Morris Malaysia Art Awards**, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur  
**Philip Morris Asean Art Awards**, National Art Gallery, Bangkok, Thailand  
**Pekan Seni Ipoh**, Dewan Bandaraya, Ipoh  
**13th Gao Siong International Art Exhibition**, Taiwan  
1997 **Crates Classified: Art In Boxes**, GaleriWan, Kuala Lumpur  
**3 Young Contemporaries**, Valentine Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur  
**WU**, GaleriWan, Kuala Lumpur  
1998 **Coming Together**, Pelita Hati Gallery, Kuala Lumpur  
**Rupa Malaysia: A Decade of Art**, Brunei Gallery, London  
**Gema: Resonance**, Manes Gallery, Prague, Republic Czech  
1999 **1st International Ghost & Spiritual Festival**, Tacheles Art Centre, Berlin, Germany  
**Pameran Seni Rupa - Pekan Seni Ipoh IV**, Ipoh, Perak  
**Imbasan Bakat Muda Sezaman 1974-1997**, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur  
2000 **San**, GaleriWan, Kuala Lumpur  
**Apa Gendai?**, Malacca Old Court House, Malacca  
**trans[formation] : 6 from Malaysia**, curated by TK Sabapathy, Sculpture Square, Singapore  
**Rupa Malaysia**, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur  
**LIFA** (Langkawi International Festival of Arts), Langkawi, Kedah  
**In Limbo**, Spacekraft, Kuala Lumpur.  
2001 An exhibition in conjunction with **A Sensational Rendezvous**, Actors Studio, Kuala Lumpur  
**Headlights**, a group exhibition, Valentine Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur  
**Exhibit A: Still Life**, Valentine Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur  
**Flash Point**, Art for Nature 2001, Rimbun Dahan, Kuala Lumpur  
2002 **3 instalasi+3@rap**, Rumah Air Panas, Kuala Lumpur  
**2nd Fukuoka Triennale**, Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Japan  
**Exchange Programme**, 2nd Fukuoka Triennale, Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Japan  
**Touch**, Art for Nature 2002, Rimbun Dahan, Kuala Lumpur  
**Coming Together@Maju Junction**, organized by Pelita Hati Gallery  
2003 **Thinking><Space : Installation Art Exhibition**, Wisma Kebudayaan SGM, Kuala Lumpur

Selected Scholarships & Awards

- 1989 Malaysian Institute of Art Competition Scholarship  
1990 Central Academy of Art Competition Scholarship  
1992 Winner, National Chinese Calligraphy Competition, Nam Yit Primary School  
Winner, Dato Tan Kim for Chinese Calligraphy Competition, Kuala Lumpur  
1993 Merit Award, Malaysian Institute of Art  
1994 Minor Award, Bakat Muda Sezaman '94, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur  
1996 Winner, Philip Morris Malaysia Art Award  
Honorable Mention, Philip Morris Asean Art Award, Bangkok, Thailand





**Pre War Building for Sale Series:  
Issue 1; House Cracks**

2001  
Mixed media on canvas  
200 x 200 cm

**Pre War Building for Sale Series:  
Anai-anaiing**

2001  
Mixed media on canvas  
200 x 200 cm



*above*

**Hun Li Wu Series: Spit Bowl**

2001  
Acrylic on canvas  
62 x 62 cm

Exhibition dates: 9 - 25 October 2003

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*cover*

**Alor Gajah: 2890, Jalan Datuk  
Naning, Alor Gajah, Melaka**

**Alor Gajah: 2891, Jalan Datuk  
Naning, Alor Gajah, Melaka**

**Alor Gajah: 2594, Jalan Datuk  
Naning, Alor Gajah, Melaka**

**Alor Gajah: 2862, Jalan Datuk  
Naning, Alor Gajah, Melaka**

**Blue Screen, Jalan Datuk  
Naning, Alor Gajah, Melaka**

**Alor Gajah: 3178, Jalan Datuk  
Naning, Alor Gajah, Melaka**

**Alor Gajah: 2954, Jalan Datuk  
Naning, Alor Gajah, Melaka**

2003  
Acrylic on canvas  
122 x 61 cm