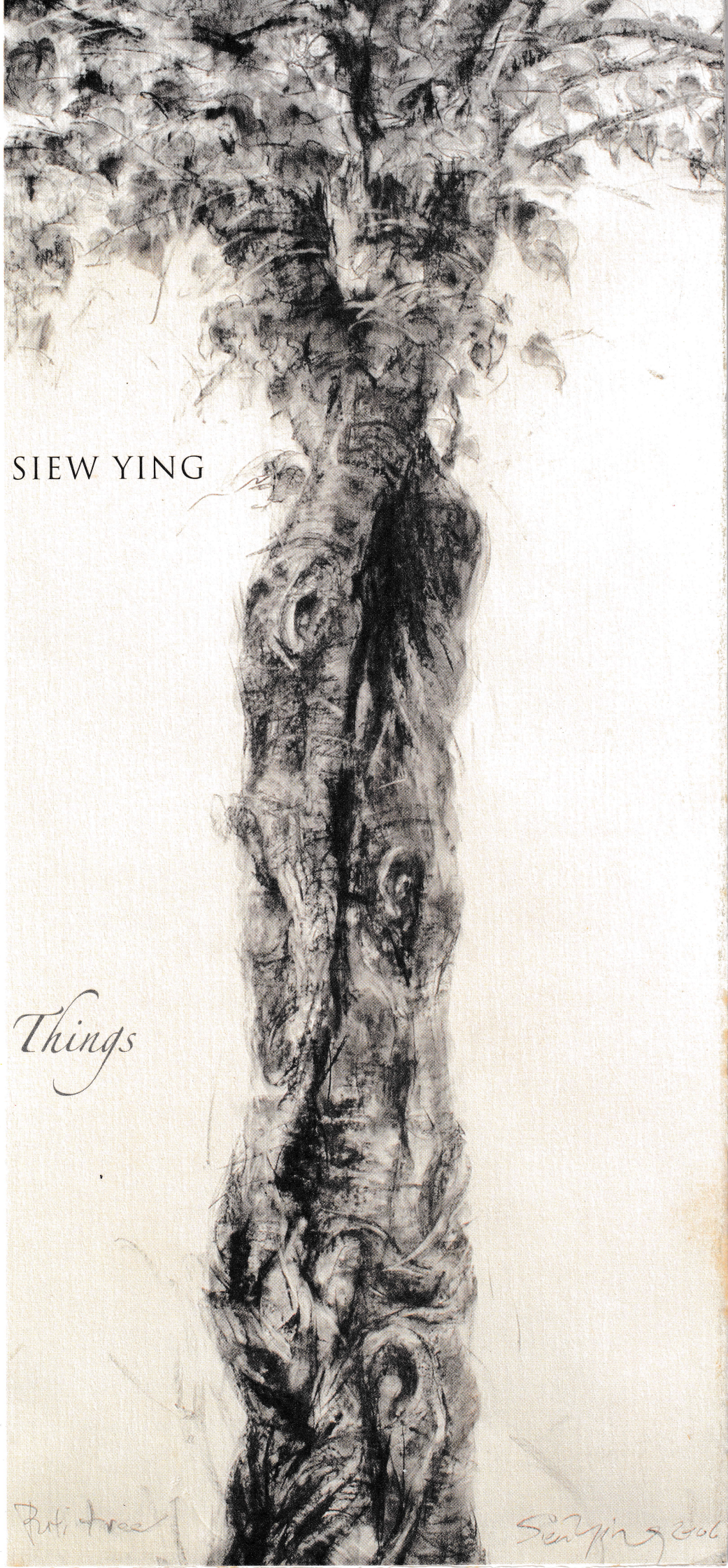


CHONG SIEW YING

*Many
Splendoured Things*





Kelapa Sawit II
2006, charcoal on paper,
180 x 97 cm

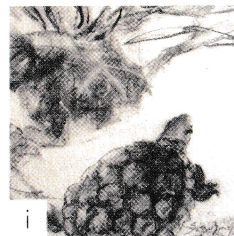


Un Coq à Paris
2006, charcoal on paper,
180 x 97 cm

MANY SPLENDOURED THINGS Recent Drawings by Chong Siew Ying

Some artists, whether consciously or not, use truth as a means of veneration, a method of clarifying the reveries embedded in their subject. Their imagery revels in what Baudelaire described as an "eternal adoration of visible creation, under all its aspects and in all its details", and they have developed the ability to isolate and diligently sustain the particulars of that which has attracted them. MANY SPLENDOURED THINGS, Chong Siew Ying's exhibition of deliciously heartfelt and always monumental drawings reveal an artist of such accomplishment.

A painter's painter loved for her larger-than-life infectious laughing heads, these works on paper are an impressive departure in medium and making that boast her usual level of artistic discipline, intuitive expression and intimate involvement. Taking in no less a problem than the narrative and the allegorical, these drawings appear to focus on almost adolescent and pre-pubescent moods and manners from her memory. The artist however reminds us - clearly - that the imagery and their subjects are not simply ruled by nostalgia and are an immediate response to her daily life.



Chong Siew Ying grew up in Kuala Lumpur's Old Klang Road. The daughter of vegetable farmers, she lived in a small, crowded wooden house, read **manga**, chased dragonflies and dreamt of going to Paris to be an artist. The sensitive tissues upon which experience, nostalgia and humor imprint their patterns are the matter from which her art derives its strength and originality.

Les Promeneuses (2005), small intimate drawings of a Malaysian tortoise strategically and accidentally situated throughout this hang are hilarious. The tortoises have attitude and their presence is auspicious, but theatrics aside, these small drawings are in themselves exquisite. The attention lavished on detail in works like **Kerbau Senyum** (2005), two smiling buffalo in the most economical of compositions or the contemplative **Generation Gap** (2005), an old man and his tiny chick, suggests her deep familiarity with the subject, and its ramifications, rather than a mere obsession with simply rendering an image. Yet Siew Ying does little to call attention to herself in these stories. Instead we are directed away from dialectics and formal considerations, and thus are moved with little hindrance toward the contemplated image. This apparatus of apparent modesty is typified by these drawings...they are her memories but they are yours and mine as well.



Siew Ying's skilful work combines the three-dimensional monumentality and mark-making of Western traditions with a lyrical play of space, depth and line that draws directly from classical Chinese

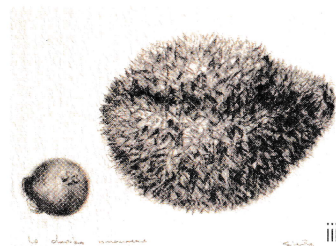
* i, ii, iii, iv details at back page

Grandfather

2006, charcoal on paper,
110 x 80 cm



painting. The specific subjects she depicts - from limestone formations and French roosters to old Chinese men thinking about youth, or the politics of mangosteen/durian dating rituals - all remind us of gentler times, the remnants of which are rapidly disappearing; the urban aspects are threatened by renewal while the rural surroundings - the ponds, the rubber plantations, the lalang-covered hills, are deprived of their function by development.



With many of these drawings, it would be natural to assume that their composition and detail are photo-derived but they are in

fact studio-constructed, based on sketches, photographs, newspaper and always the artist's hand and eye. As such, works like the lyrical **Friends** (2005) are a layering of observations rather than a replication of a singular view or objects. In many of these works the background is dominated by a wallpaper of detail - often flora and fauna - grasshoppers or tiny forget-me-nots. Their execution is a curious dense thing, light and sharp, that simply enhances the central subject rather than detracting from it. Huge hangings like **Kelapa Sawit** (2005) and **Coconut Tree** (2005) retain an abstract quality that never threatens the subjects' recognisability but conveys to them a graphic complexity created by the instinctive, vigorous and various marks that give her actors their gorgeous form.

MANY SPLENDURED THINGS dares to fly close to the sun. This body of works crowds close to the anecdotal, the sentimental, and the picturesque qualities of her subjects are perhaps even at odds with contemporary tastes. However, Siew Ying distils from these elements a language without temporal limit, a universalising mode. In these new drawings, form bespeaks content and content, form, in a unity rarely achieved in contemporary art.

Styles are governed by needs both personal and universal which in turn are influenced by the pressures of



time and history. From a historical perspective, perhaps in reaction to the technological nightmare that unfolds around us everyday, we are witnessing a shift from the rational to the romantic in our requirements of art, whether abstract or representational. MANY SPLENDURED THINGS does just that - whether it is the small **Sekinchan** landscape, **Sotong-Sotong** in parade formation or major works like **The Puti Tree** - they evoke a contemporary aesthetic emotion in us every single time.

J. Anurendra

14 March 2006

J. Anurendra is an artist-writer-student and part time lecturer at Universiti Malaya

Limestone

2006, charcoal on paper,
210 x 97 cm



Fish Talk, 2006, charcoal on paper, 107 x 142 cm



Sing a Song to the Kambing

2006, charcoal on paper, 107 x 71 cm

Front Cover

The Puti Tree, 2006, charcoal on paper, 210 x 97 cm



Essence, 2006, charcoal on paper, 150 x 200 cm



Thousand Mountains, Million Seas I, 2006, charcoal on paper, 40 x 107 cm

CHONG SIEW YING was born in Kuala Lumpur in 1969. After studying at a

local art college, she left Malaysia and enrolled at L'Ecole Des

Beaux-Arts in Versailles, France in 1991. After graduating,

she studied and taught at international printmaking centre

Atelier 63 in Paris, while working as an artist and

exhibiting in the city. She returned to Malaysia in 1998,

holding her first solo show in Kuala Lumpur that year. She

was artist-in-residence at Rimban Dahan in 1999 and at the

Vermont Studio Centre in the United States in 2001. The

artist's career has spanned a large number of solo and group

exhibitions in Malaysia, as well as across Asia, Australia,

Europe and the USA. Today she is based in Paris and Kuala

Lumpur. **Many Splendoured Things** is her fourth solo

exhibition with Valentine Willie Fine Art.

(essay images)

i Les Promeneuses I

2006, charcoal on paper, 20 x 20 cm

ii Les Promeneuses IV

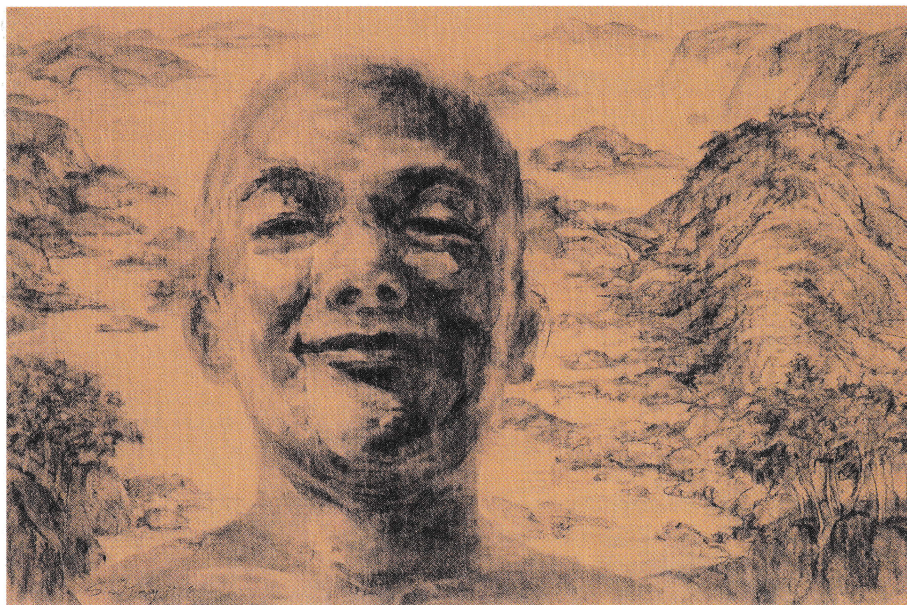
2006, charcoal on paper, 20 x 20 cm

iii Le Durian Amoureux

2006, charcoal on paper, 40 x 55 cm

iv Sotong-Sotong

2006, charcoal on paper, 25 x 55 cm



Finistère, 2006, charcoal on paper, 71 x 107 cm

Exhibition Date : 23rd March 2006 – 8th April 2006

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