

Other People

Kow Leong Kiang

Kow Leong Kiang: Other People

I

Sixty days in the Vermont fall, 2004. Nellie, Aiden, Rie, Yukinori, Oraib, Victor, Kyalo, Alanna – artists and writers at the Vermont Studio Center where Kow Leong Kiang was a resident that year on a Freeman Foundation Asian Art Fellowship. Three years have passed since and Kow Leong Kiang's new body of paintings reflects back on this crucial period of exposure and change for the artist.

The long interval is important, creating a necessary distance between the artist and his subject for this exhibition, which is a specific experience of a place and time and the people he encountered. Time and distance are pivotal to Kow Leong Kiang's work, in which painting explores the process of human memory, its revelations and secrets, its pathos. To paraphrase Alex Ong's words in his essay, "Memories-Vermont" which follows, Kow's colours measure the distance of time, while his emotional scale measures the weight of time. His response to his subject is not spontaneous, but rather derived from feelings filtered through time; it seeks to express the layered nature of memory, the way stories are joined together.

For several years, Kow's focus has been on the East coast of Malaysia, epitomised in the face of a Malay beauty, followed from childhood through adolescence to the cusp of womanhood. Forever far away and a creature of mystery, she has represented the distance, and perhaps longing, between his own Chinese, urban, male context and the Malay, rural, coastal, feminine romance of what might be claimed as our local heartland. He has sought, through a development of painterly techniques, compositional and narrative ploys, to explore the emotional, aesthetic and, arguably, political connotations of this relationship.

During this exploration, Kow's interest in the portrait has become central to his practice, and he has addressed in many ways the "problems" and issues of portraiture – the projection of identity, the relationship of artist to subject, the act of voyeurism, the nature of "otherness", the pitfalls, or gifts, of exoticism and strangeness, sympathy and intimacy. In his approach to the Malaysian East coast or Balinese subject, he fully exploits the "exoticism" of his subject because this underlies the romance and tension he seems to wish to express in these works. He presents us with local beauty in a tropical paradise – the East coast is always rendered in calm, ethereal blues and greens, where sea seeps into sky, an apparently timeless "floating world" in which "she" remains the unreadable muse we long to be in sympathy with.

The exhibition *Other People* marks a distinct break from this familiar milieu, and while it remains squarely centered on the portrait, there are radical, exciting shifts in the artist's focus and technique. For the artist, Vermont must have seemed the farthest place from Malaysia and home; one could hardly imagine a more different East coast. It was an eye-opening encounter with new light, new temperature, new faces, new ideas; and one precious enough it seems to store for three years in the bank of his memory, to be re-explored on this impressive scale.

The first major shift here is in focus — here are portraits of a number of faces, all "real" memories, of people Kow had met and got to know over the intensive period of the residency. As artists and writers, they are his kinsmen and women, although they come from all over the world. When describing his motivation for these portraits, he spoke of his fascination with the very different kinds of beauty he found in these new faces, in some a particular openness and strength, and about putting himself up to the challenge of capturing that. Alex Ong also writes of the diversity of Kow's subject, of the different faces, different colours and of the different levels of passion he encountered and has sought to encompass.

A new light and temperature — a cold grey October — has also created new challenges and opportunities for the painter. A cool, unforgiving starkness provides the backdrop for almost all the paintings, perhaps by its very nature bringing out the fire of the characters at play. There is a crispness here which allows for an open and candid approach, while all is coy and elusive in the sensuous warm and breezy tropics. It has also perhaps helped to bring about a major turn in Kow's technical approach.

Memory is central to this body of work, and the artist explores two primary techniques that reflect, by their very nature, the process of remembering. In *Nellie* and *Nellie III*, and *Alanna*, the images of the faces are not applied in paint, but rather removed. Applying a dark ground, and then a layer of white, quick outlines are drawn and the details carefully wiped and scratched away before the paint dries, so that the image is made by the stripping away of layers, like layers of time. The result, nonetheless, is resolutely classical, timeless. Meanwhile, in *Aiden*, *Rie*, and *Yukinori*, for example, the artist applies black oil paint in the manner of Chinese ink over a basic light ground, in quick sketches that somehow leave a deep, clarified impression of each subject. They are "drawn from memory", "releasing" each image in the same spirit perhaps as the Chinese ink brushstroke.

Other paintings, like *Fuschia*, and *Victor and Kyalo*, have a lightness of touch and transparency usually associated with watercolours, exquisitely capturing the mood and light and even temperature of their particular time and place, creating a powerful sense of intimacy. *Nellie II*, interestingly, is closest to the Malay beauty of previous years. Captured in profile, eyes downcast, and painted in pale blues and pinks, she is almost the latter's Caucasian counterpart, in an image that is imbued with romance and yearning quite unlike the other paintings in the exhibition. Perhaps she represents a new muse for Kow, or, subliminally, a playful retort to the Western male artist's, and his own, idealization of the exotic Asian beauty. Most certainly she is a key point of continuity in the gradually unfolding narrative of this artist's intriguing, deeply committed investigation into time, distance, memory and the human heart.

Beverly Yong

如果要记述时间的长远，他用的是色彩。如果要衡量时间的轻重，他用的是感觉。

或许，仍有许多人会依旧停歇在他马来少女那一节的范围里。蕉风与椰雨，远，近。我们熟悉的意境。

三年一节，这一节，他的创作节外生枝。

2004年，许量嵌获得了美国Vermont Studio Centre Award, 由Freeman Foundation 的11届Asian Artist Fellowship的助学金。时已置秋；他在佛蒙特的六十多个的日子里，往后许多的色彩，从这调起。许多贴身的记忆，在这个时候萌芽。

这并非是艺术创作上一种的激情刻意。当某种的情感被移植之后，感觉在每不同的时空里，阳光空气环境及心态潜移默化起了化学作用。有种漫不经心的意念悄悄浮现，在意念的层次里，有遗失与寻获，也有折散与重组的拉锯，渐渐提炼出创作上另一番的概念。

时间在记忆里来回奔走，有痕迹，有故事可说，有面貌可寻。

片片断断的记忆里，他重组一面面的碎片。三年前，三年后，他铺一个信念。

不再有热带海风轻拂，远天云朵舒展；椰杷摆动婆娑。灰冷的一切，十月佛蒙特的天气已转凉。

佛蒙特的十月，世界各地的画家都来了。天高气爽；但大家热爱艺术的心情是澎湃的。这里时间的分隔与衔接，流现着张张不同的脸庞；都说着不同的色彩。

他读到了，但那一撮的感触，是属于佛蒙特的秋季。

这感触，离开佛蒙特之后一直在创作的概念里浮浮沉沉，蕴含者、游移着。

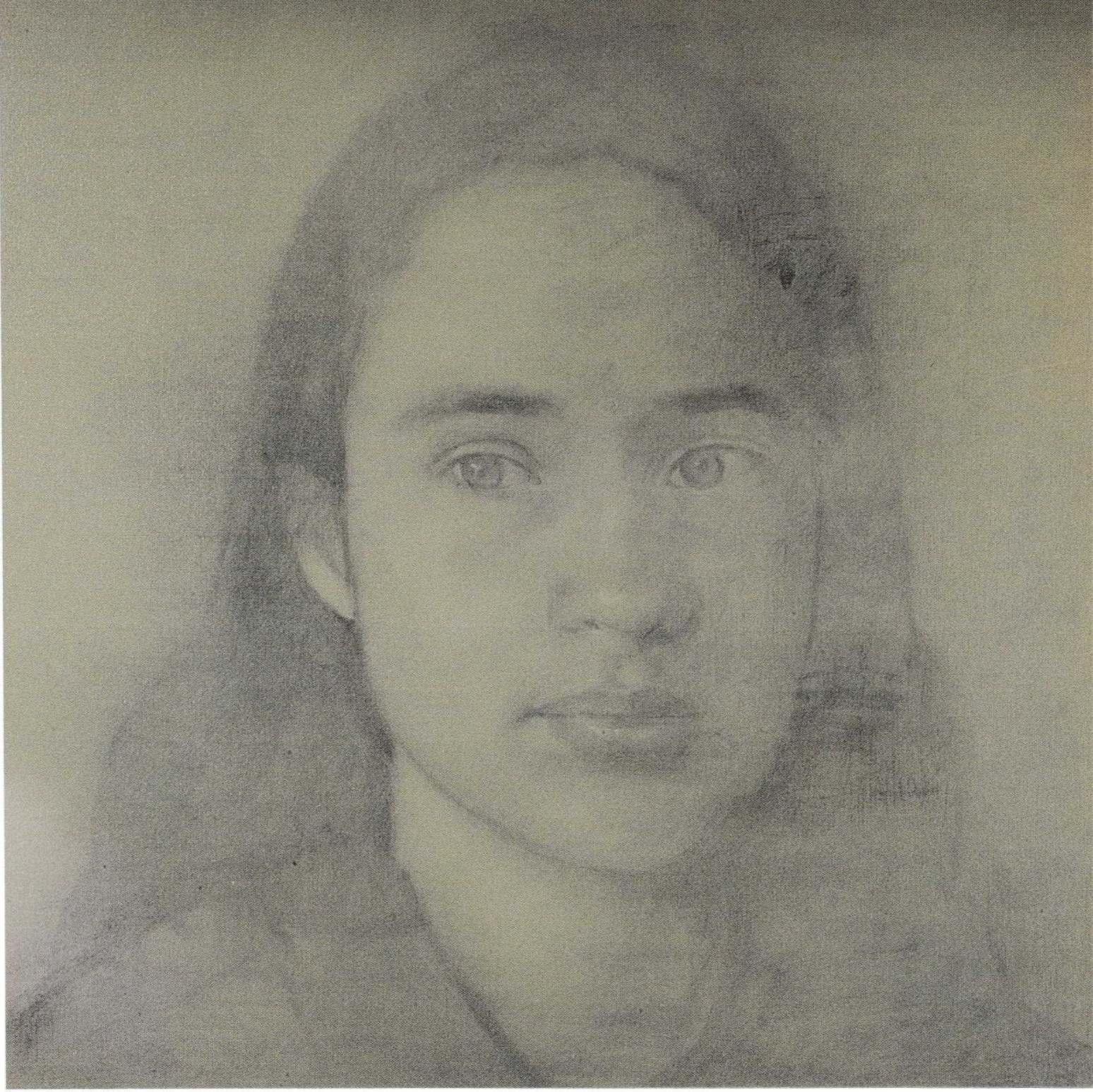
特别喜欢他以拨扫除去背景的手法来处理时间与人物互相关连。浓淡的虚实，灰黑的色调轻描淡写出人与人之间的人文气息；不同生命象征的精密性(Precision)，时空刹那的感悟的感动。这种创作记录方式，是Global Memories,世界观的记忆。

画家感悟的精神方向，是坚持的攸念，也是生命的温暖富足。

绘画艺术的创作生命的延续不断,的确不易。创作的关键在哪儿，就是自己。

他明白这一点。

许量嵌创作的内心版图，已壮阔。这条走着的路，路外有路。





Aiden

2007
Oil on linen
219 x 120 cm



Yukinori

2007
Oil on linen
120 x 120 cm

Fuchsia

2007
Oil on jute
149 x 149 cm



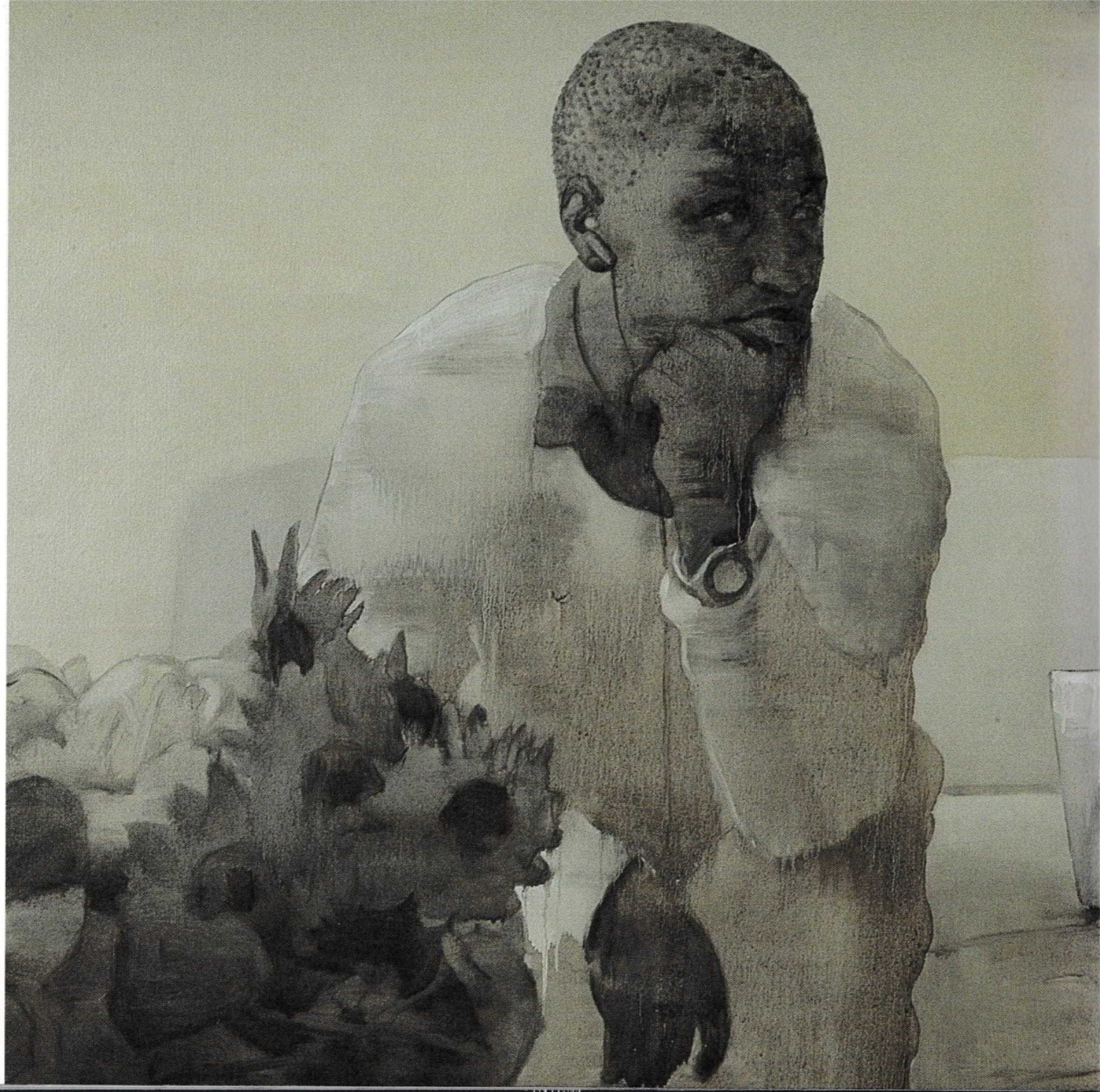


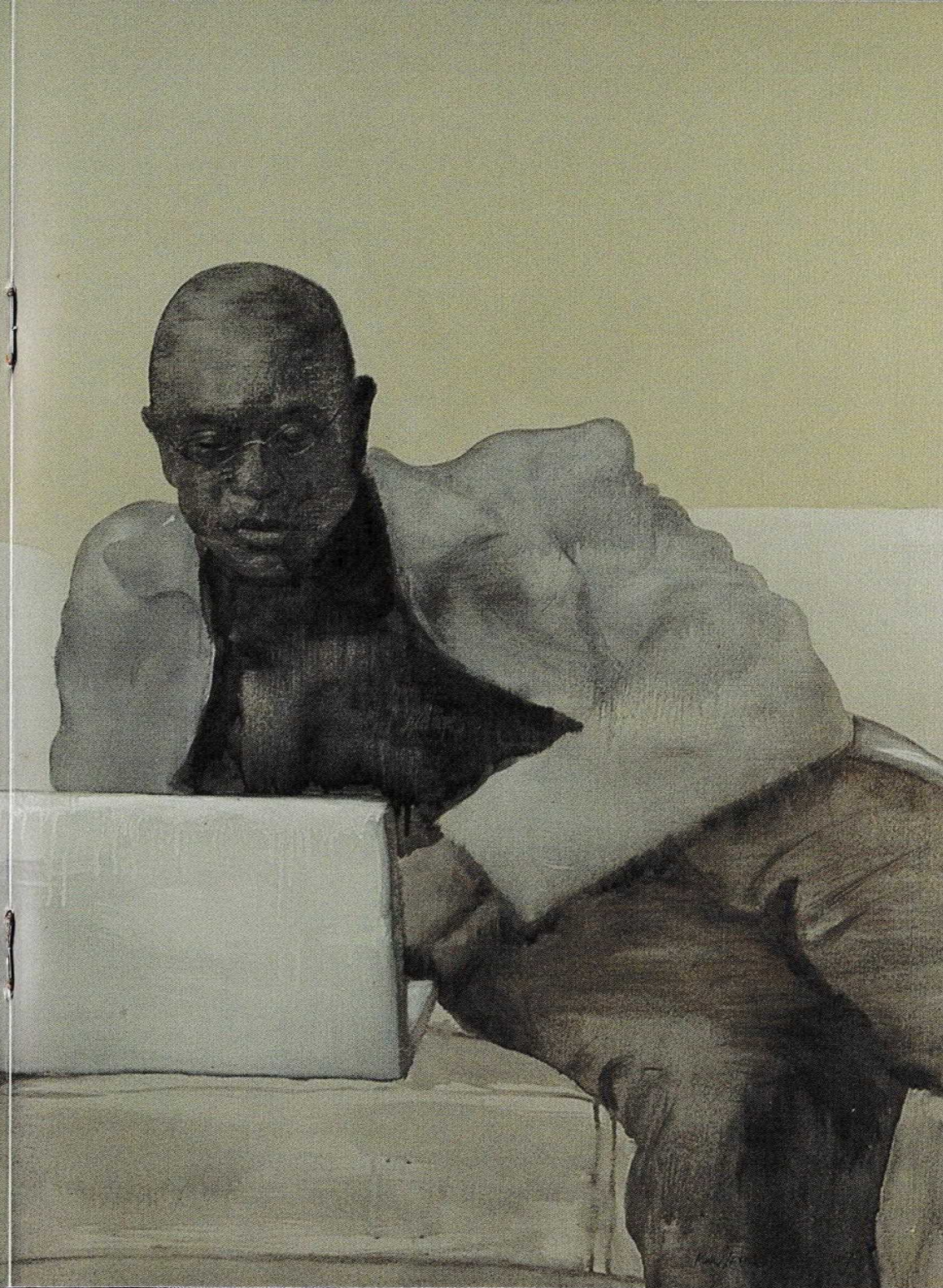
Aiden with Cup

2007

Oil on linen

120 x 120 cm



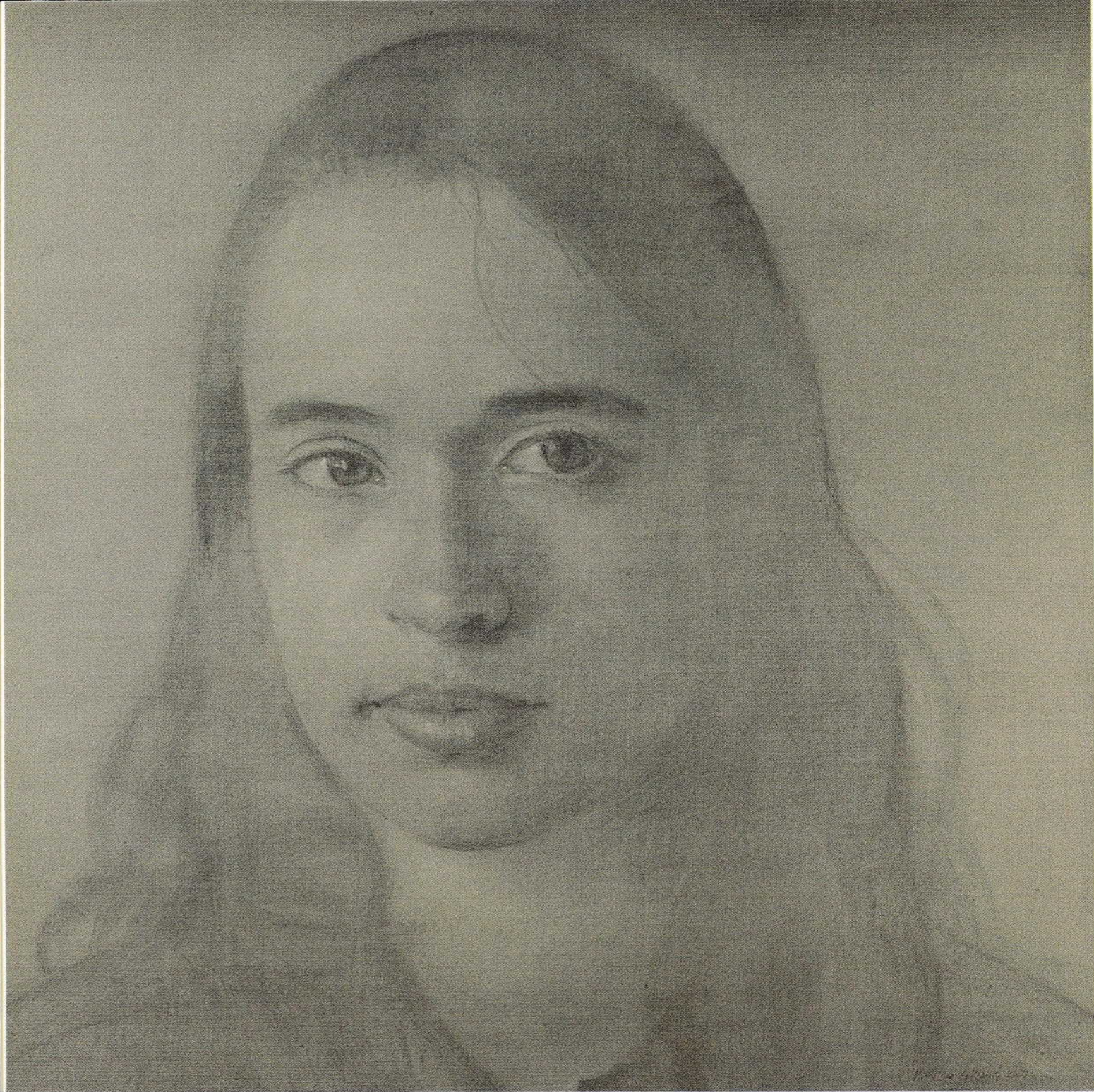


Victor and Kyalo
2007
Oil on linen
102 x 176 cm

Rie

2007
Oil on linen
120 x 120 cm





Nellie III

2007
Oil on linen
120 x 120 cm



Oraib

2007
Oil on linen
210 x 103 cm

Yukinori II

2007
Oil on linen
120 x 120 cm





Nellie II

2007
Oil on linen
120 x 120 cm



Alanna

2007
Oil on linen
90 x 90 cm

Kow Leong Kiang

Born 1970 in Petaling Jaya, Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia.

Education

1989-91 Diploma In Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur College of Art, Malaysia.

Awards

- 1991 Major Award – National Art Gallery / Isetan, National Day Art Competition.
- 1992 Minor Award – Young Contemporaries, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur.
- 1993 Winner of the International Competition for Student Artists, Savannah College USA.
Honourable Mention, Young Contemporary Ink Painting, Malaysia.
- 1997 Honourable Mention, Philip Morris Malaysia Art Awards.
- 1998 Grand Prize Winner, Philip Morris Asean Art Awards, Hanoi, Vietnam.
One of 5 Winners (Jurors Choice) Philip Morris Malaysia Art Awards.
- 2004 Asian Artist Fellowship, The 11th Annual Freeman Foundation, Vermont Studio Center Award – Malaysia Winner.

Solo Exhibitions

- 2003 Floating World, Valentine Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
- 2004 Inner Line, Metro Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
Human, Red Mill Gallery, Johnson Vermont, USA.
- 2005 Silent Conversations, Valentine Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
- 2007 Other People, Valentine Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Selected Group Exhibitions

- 1991 8 Man Watercolour Show, Creative Center National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur (KL).
Towards A Developed Nation – Vision 2020, Isetan Art Gallery, KL.
Salon Malaysia 3, National Art Gallery, KL.
- 1992 Young Contemporaries, National Art Gallery, KL.
Open Show '92, Shah Alam Gallery.
- 1993 Cetusan Rasa, Pameran Amal Bosnia – Somalia Shah Alam Gallery.
Imbauan Ledang, Maybank Art Gallery, KL.
Rural Malaysia, Shah Alam Gallery.
Malaysia Teochew Artist Exchange Exhibition '93, Swa Tow, China.

- 1994 Open Show '94, Shah Alam Gallery.
- 1995 Open Show '95, Shah Alam Gallery.
- 1996 The Philip Morris Malaysia Art Awards Exhibition '96, National Art Gallery, KL.
Reflective Kaleidoscope KLCA 30th Anniversary Exhibition, Putra World Trade Centre.
- 1997 The Philip Morris Malaysia Art Awards Exhibition '97, National Art Gallery, KL.
Pameran Karya Seni Kreatif Kebangsaan PNB '97, Theatre Menara PNB, KL.
- 1998 Philip Morris Asean Art Awards, Hanoi, Vietnam.
- 1999 Artistic Endeavours, Valentine Willie Fine Art, KL.
- 2000 Painting Shadows, Valentine Willie Fine Art, KL.
- 2001 Open Show 2001, National Art Gallery, KL.
- 2002 The Contemporary Asian Art Fair, Suntec, Singapore.
Three Man Show, Valentine Willie Fine Art, Bali, Indonesia.
Aku, National Art Gallery, KL.
- 2003 The Dharma Protectors, Shian's Art Gallery, Subang Jaya, Malaysia.
Bare, Town House Gallery, KL.
Lyrics of Drawing, Metro Fine Art, KL.
- 2004 Continuities: Contemporary Art of Malaysia At the Turn of the 21st Century, Guangdong Museum of Art, China.
Sojourn to Bali, Town House Gallery, KL.
- 2005 18@8 Contemporary Artists from Malaysia and Beyond, Wei-Ling Gallery, KL.
Art Cased by Jaguar, Jaguar Art Case, KL.
- 2006 Signed and Dated: Our 10th Anniversary, Valentine Willie Fine Art, KL.
- 2007 Headlights 2007, Valentine Willie Fine Art, KL.
Artriangle, Wisma Kebudayaan Soka Gakkai Malaysia, KL.
50 Ways to live in Malaysia, Petronas Gallery, KL.
Between Generations, University of Malaya, KL.
Between Generations, Muzium & Galeri Tuanku Fauziah, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang.

exhibition dates

14 November – 1 December 2007

cover

Aiden Smiles

2007

Oil on jute

149 x 149 cm

design

imaya, grainstudio

colour separation

Unico Services

printing

Tusen Prindesign

VALENTINE
WILLIE
fine ART

1st Floor, 17 Jalan Telawi 3
Bangsar Baru
59100 Kuala Lumpur
Malaysia

tel +603 2284 2348
fax +603 2282 5190
info@vwfa.net
www.vwfa.net

Southeast Asian Paintings
& Works of Art



