

The Painting Show

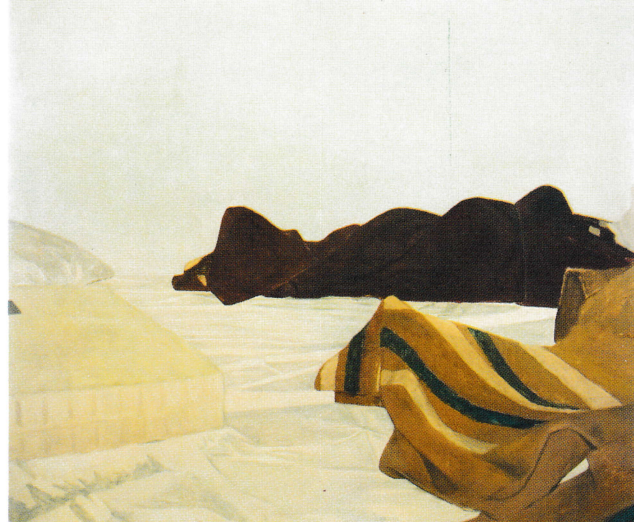
Gan Siong King

Hamir Soib

Phuan Thai Meng



Gan Siong King
Domestic Landscape
2002
Oil on canvas
149.7 x 176.7 cm



GAN SIONG KING

Hello. Hello.

Repetition is inherent in my work, my work is painting, and painting is a result of repeating the same act, over and over again. I use only paint and repeatedly make figure, landscape and still-life paintings.

Making paintings is also about working with a tradition. Tradition, culture, history are things that interest me, because I see them as a kind of collective memory. Memory is a result of remembering, and remembering is also an act of repeating, of representing.

My work is an inter-play between a form that's repetitive, that's representational and things that are a result of repeating, a result of representing. There is a strange logic in this, a recurring parallel, déjà vu. This is the basis for renewal and change in my process, because I perceive change only against a background of sameness, that is repetition.

While the works on show may speak about different things, I hope when viewed together, they represent an expression of play and freedom.

Cheers

Gan siong king

"Here are three damn good painters, take a good look."

"As a writer, one is busy with archaeology..." states Michael Ondaatje.

"On one level you're moving forward, but in the other, you're revealing the past."

Underlying this "archaeology" is an awareness of memory that shifts back and forth through time to inform what has been revealed. By its very nature, memory speaks towards or preempts a future that is to be signified or given meaning only through its past. Likewise, within its cyclical logic, the memory of the past can only be obtained from the memory of the future. On being questioned how she could possibly have a memory of the future, the Queen remarked rather cynically to Alice in Wonderland "It's a funny sort of memory that only works backwards", and followed with a bout of screaming to preempt the coming pain of pricking her finger on the pin of a brooch.

It is this interaction with the audience's own memory, the playful exploration of the medium and the willful engagement with painterly tradition itself that make Gan Siong King, Hamir Soib and Phuan Thai Meng such exciting contemporary artists and such good painters.

It is also in light of painting's waning prominence, eclipsed by the proliferation of new media practices – with its emphasis on the performative and on the spectacle – that the 'digging back' to formal painting and mark-making traditions becomes all the more revealing. The memory of 'old' traditional markers informs the changes and developments in the new. Gan writes of this in his artist statement: "This is the basis for renewal and change in my process, because I perceive change only against a background of sameness, that is repetition."

Gan Siong King in conversation spoke of a need to 'rebel'. "The most rebellious thing I could do was to go back to formal painting. The form is not dead. It's how you look at it. Just as you cannot say history is dead." At first glance his paintings appear to follow the medium's traditional trajectories but on further study we observe how he has cleverly subverted and made use of these historical lattices to comment on the medium and its artistic discourse. With 'Long' and 'Short', for example, Gan explores the act of image-making but presents the painting as objects that have been constructed, challenging its boundaries as well as cheekily begging for meaning. He plays with the need to 'have a meaning', and the mutability of truth in cohorts with its context. 'Long' is long until it is placed next to 'Short' when 'Long' suddenly becomes short and the truth becomes a lie.

Gan also spoke of living alongside the Malaysian obsession with the epic. As a probable reaction, Gan has turned inwards to pay closer attention to the objects in his home and the nature of his medium of choice. His works are often tinged with his searing humour in what appears to be a quest to find the epic in the banal. In choosing to paint, he has also retrieved an artistic framework that signifies autonomy and individuality.

Phuan Thai Meng
Fragment of Development – Fact and
Fake #1
2008
Acrylic on canvas
54.5 x 41.5 cm





Hamir Soib
Kering
2008
Oil on canvas
244 x 488 cm

On the other hand, Hamir's paintings explore emotional and spiritual realms where the depiction or capture of 'light' becomes paramount. 'Light' in 'The Black Ship' is an external interaction that works on two fronts. As an investigation on the phenomenological experience of art, the viewers are engaged to move around and position themselves according to lighting conditions before the image is gradually revealed. But Hamir's method of 'cari cahaya' is also a formal investigation. This is cogently articulated in his attempt at allowing light, which gives shape and form, to guide his painting process, allowing its textures and reflections to accentuate and underscore the rich properties in a monochromatic palette.

In 'Kering', 'light' is internalized as a subject, becoming a vehicle to "another reality, about energy and passion, secrets, fears, prayers, dreams and being honest to all that." For Hamir, painting is an expressive act whereby both the scale of his paintings and the strength of his brushwork magnify social issues that concern the painter.

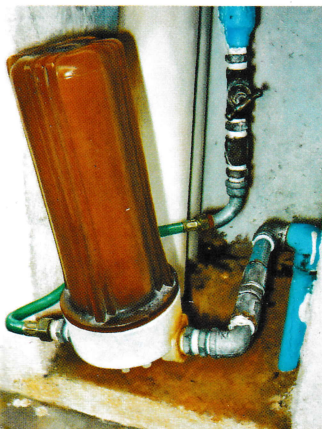
Hamir in his artist statement describes his process: "The work starts with a story and a script, there's the plot and the subplot and it becomes my job to make these come alive." All three artists have multidisciplinary backgrounds with involvement in film and theatre. This understanding of story telling, created space and signified 'propping' is evident in their works and in their manipulation of agendas.

Thai Meng's series of water meters and pirating pipes takes on the calculated photorealistic stance of the photographic snapshot. The clear reference to snapshot angles, unnatural to traditional painting compositions, forcefully refers back to the person taking the photograph. This manipulation of both space and object refers strongly to the absent photographer, which then informs the story of the pipes depicted. By using the camera as a painting tool Thai Meng not only references a partnership as old as the camera itself but also subverts both the photograph and the painting by suggesting the uncertainty of its representational register.

HAMIR SOIB

"I try to create a space in my paintings and 'mencari cahaya' ⁽¹⁾. It's important to me that the audience can feel the work, sense something about it, supported by their own compulsion and spirituality. I want the audience to be meticulous and give attention to the painting. I approach painting in a similar way to the way I approach my theatre and film production design work. The work starts with a story and a script, there's the plot and the subplot and it becomes my job to make these come alive. Painting is my therapy. I operate a lot on instinct and 'sesedap rasa', taste and feeling. Painting to me is about another reality, about energy and passion, secrets, fears, prayers, dreams and being honest to all that."

(1) mencari cahaya: 'find the light' — to find spiritual light (nur), to find (and create) light with (and on) the paint medium.



Phuan Thai Meng
Fragment of Development - Fact and
Fake #2
2008
Acrylic on canvas
54.5 x 41.5 cm



Phuan Thai Meng
Fragment of Development – Direction
2008
Acrylic on canvas
244 x 366 cm

Thai Meng's superbly crafted realist paintings also explore between-spaces within an urban environment, honing in to the ordinary as an attentive observer to the awkward relationship between these spaces and its inhabitants. Like the animated monster of a wheelbarrow reaching out to grab the hands of its partner, 'Fragment of development – Direction' reaches out to pull the observer into its pit demanding that the littered fragments are given attention. Thai Meng in his artist statement tells us "that which we 'see' is not what we are seeing and what we are seeing is not what we want to see. What we 'want' to see is not what we should be seeing." We are challenged to look beyond the construction site to see other possibilities, to open the study of this archaeological dig, utilise our faculties including that of memory. We are challenged to question 'direction' and preempt a memory of the future.

The boys collectively present a portrait of a place in 'The Painting Show'. The curatorial experiment was to describe a place or society through its objects and residue – the traces left by human interaction, thought and desire. There were to be no figures to illustrate this human stain, just the memento mori of a forensic-like archaeological dig. The physicality of objects and their relationship to each other was to illustrate the collateral evidence inflicted by and on the absent human presence.

One can therefore read 'The Painting Show' as an attempt at reinventing and reasserting the importance of the medium in contemporary art discourse by highlighting the index (of traces, footprints, stains) as an evocation of our cultural or personal memories as an important marker, both conceptually or formally, for further explorations.

It is always interesting to rhythm the collection of work in an exhibition to its broader sociopolitical time and place to consider what the climate outside of the show brings and adds to the work. The works in this exhibition have quietly taken form over the past months in the confines of the artists' studios informed by their daily experiences of living in Kuala Lumpur. What do these paintings show us of our immediate past and our city? With the tumultuous times we are now experiencing, what subconscious premonition, what memory of the future, do they hold for us?

Yee I-Lann

Gan Siong King
Bliss
2005
Oil on canvas
32 x 41.5 cm



PHUAN THAI MENG

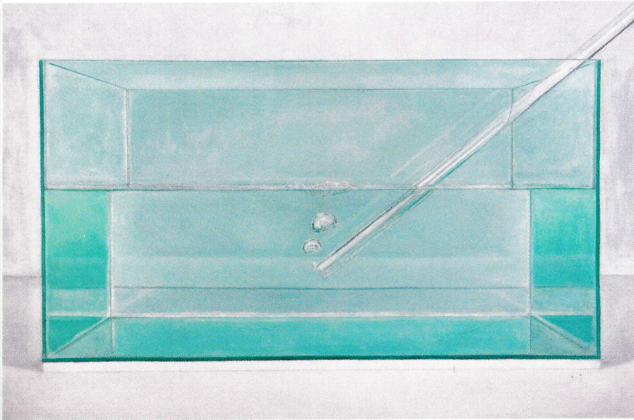
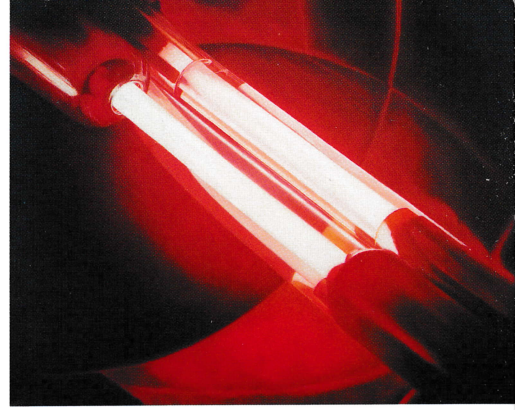
This series of work is a reflection and reaction to our social environment, its rules and the social ecology. Each day, we see around us all kinds of objects and spaces, but these are often forgotten spaces or spaces you don't think about. These spaces contain all kinds of metaphors and in a way describe the context of our lives or how we are affected by these spaces. This also raises the question of what we 'see': that which we 'see' is not what we are seeing and what we are seeing is not what we want to see. What we 'want' to see is not what we should be seeing.

I make use of photography elements, styles of painting, narrative and allegory to evoke and sketch out feelings of doubt, questioning and cynicism.



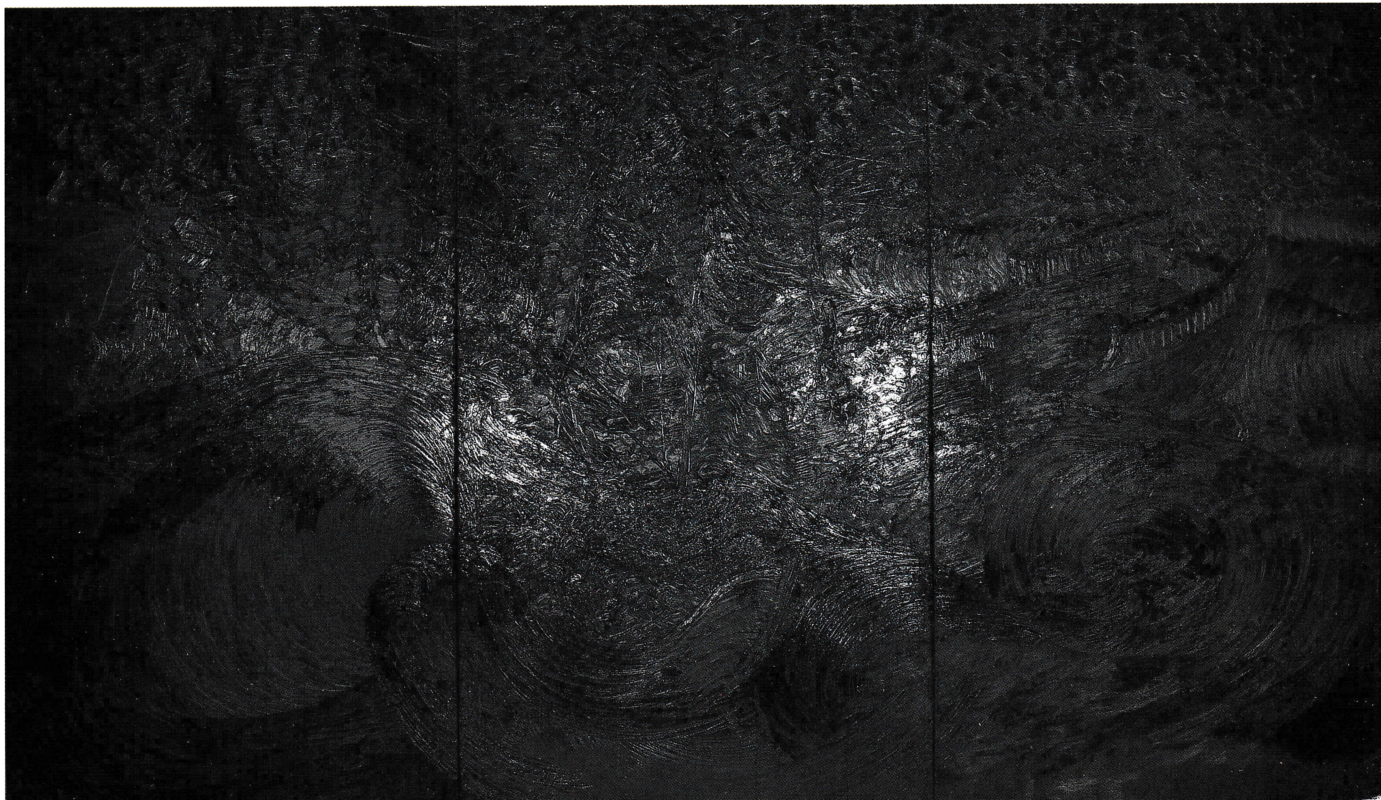
Phuan Thai Meng
Fragment of Development – Fact and
Fake #3
2008
Acrylic on canvas
54.5 x 41.5 cm

Gan Siong King
 L.A.S.E.R. a.k.a. I Love Malevich
 2006
 Oil on canvas
 35.8 x 43.3 cm



Gan Siong King
 Sigh
 2008
 Oil on canvas
 45.5 x 68.5 cm

Hamir Soib
 The Black Ship
 2008
 Oil on canvas
 213.5 x 366 cm



GAN SIONG KING

Gan Siong King wears many hats as artist, production designer for feature films and arts worker in numerous community based projects. Gan received his Diploma in Fine arts majoring in oil painting from the Malaysia Institute of Art in 1996. He was also the artist assistant to Wong Hoy Cheong from 1996 – 1999. Gan has taken part in several exhibitions including 'Sama-sama' 2007 at Lost Generation Space, 'Seriously Beautiful' at Reka Art Space, 'Seni: Homefronts' at Singapore Arts Museum 2004, and '3 Young Contemporaries' at VWFA Gallery in 2001. As a production designer, Gan's credits include Liew Seng Tat's 'Flower In The Pocket' which has recently won the VPRO Tiger Award at the 2008 Rotterdam Film Festival, Fahmi Reza's 'Sepuluh Tahun Sebelum Merdeka' and Tsai Ming Liang's 'I Don't Want to Sleep Alone'.

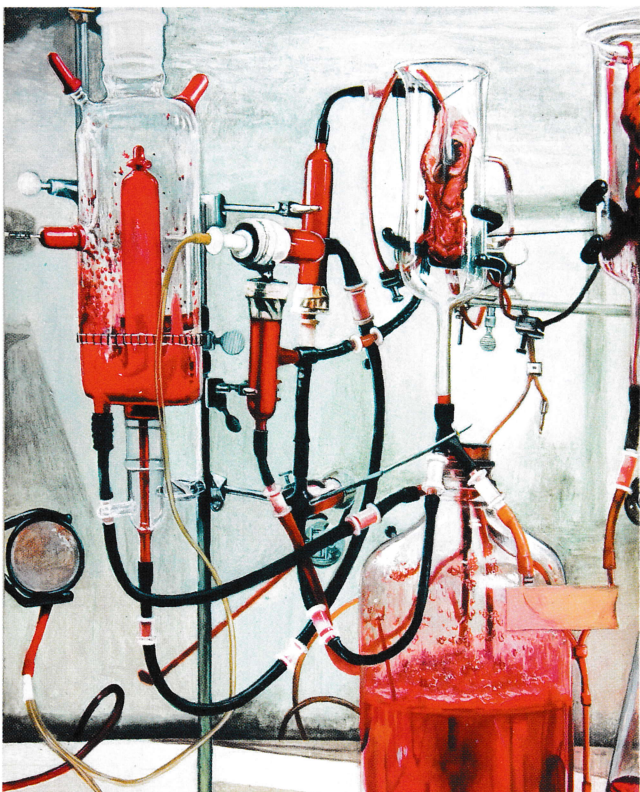
HAMIR SOIB

Hamir Soib is the founder of the artist studio Gudang. He is also a founding member for the influential artist collective Matahati, established in 1989. He graduated with a degree in Fine Arts from the Mara Institute of Technology, Malaysia in 1991 with a major in printmaking. Hamir went on to participate in numerous exhibitions both individually and as part of Matahati collective. Most recently, he was a finalist in the 2007 Sovereign Asian Art Prize, Hong Kong. Hamir has actively promoted artistic exchange with his Gudang Artist Residency program. 2008 also saw the celebratory retrospective of the Matahati collective, presented by Galeri petronas and the launch of an extensive catalogue 'Matahati'. His paintings have been acquired by all major public and private collections in Malaysia, including the National Art Gallery, Bank Negara Malaysia, MARA University of Technology, as well as the private collections of Farouk and Alia Khan, Pakharuddin Sulaiman and Dr. Steve Wong.

PHUAN THAI MENG

Phuan Thai Meng is a full time artist, arts educator and founding member of the artist collective Rumah Air Panas (RAP). He received his Diploma in Fine Art majoring in painting from the Malaysia Institute of Art in 1996. Thai Meng has been exhibiting regularly since 1995. His most recent exhibitions/projects include: Production Manager for KPS (Koletif Pembangun Seni – Collective Art Developer) 'Let Arts Move You' project with KTM commuter trains, 'Mind, Body & Soul 2006' at Wei-Ling Gallery, 'Crowds' at Reka Art Space in 2005 and '3 Young Contemporaries 2004' at VWFA Gallery. Thai Meng was a finalist in the 2006 Sovereign Asian Art Prize, Hong Kong, and won an Honourable Mention Award in 2003 as well as the Juror's Choice Award in 2000 from the Philip Morris Malaysia – Asean Art Awards.

Gan Siong King
Artificial Cow Ovaries
2008
Mixed media on paper
26.6 x 21.3 cm



Gan Siong King
Vanitas
2008
Oil on canvas
95.5 x 122 cm



Gan Siong King
I've-truly-lost-my-way
2007
Oil on canvas
43 x 56 cm

design imaya.grainstudio

THE ANNEXE
gallery-studio-theatre

VALENTINE
WILLIE
fine ART

The Painting Show Gan Siong King Hamir Soib Phuan Thai Meng

curated by Yee I-Lann

The Annexe Gallery, Top Floor
The Annexe, Central Market

Exhibition dates
10 April – 27 April 2008

Opening hours: 11 am – 7 pm daily
(Closed on Monday)

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

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With thanks to

CENTRAL
MARKET
SINCE 1888

Front:
Gan Siong King: Long, 2007, Oil on canvas, 4.4 x 61 cm;
Short, 2007, Oil on canvas, 4.4 x 63.6 cm;