

Wong Perng Fey **IN NEW LIGHT**



700  
9.1'595  
VON

VALENTINE  
**WILLIE**  
fine ART



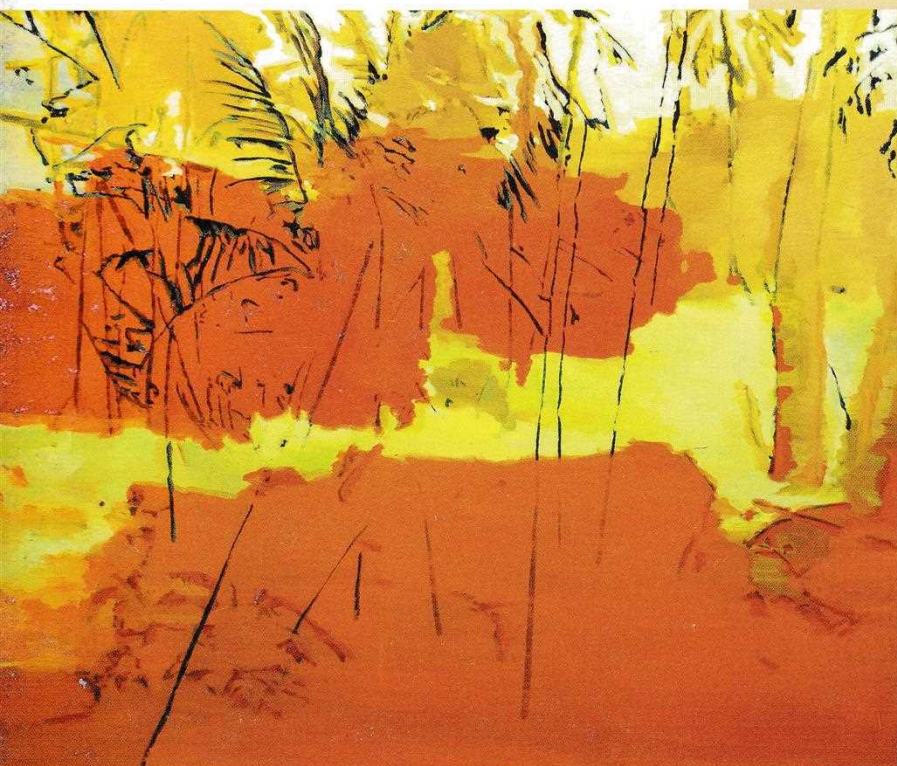
## Light Sears Memory Burns

Simon Soon

As a painter of the Malaysian landscape, Wong Perng Fey's vocabulary is ambitious and extensive. From his earlier works that sought to achieve a kind of panoramic vision of a national landscape to the later introspective inquiries into the "landscape" of his memory, the range of his creative responses in seeking for a sense of belonging with his country verges on the romantic.

For the artist, landscape and memory are deeply connected. The land is the lode of Perng Fey's memories, it is where he stores and enriches them, and finds ways of coming to terms with his past and larger history. Through painting, he distills this into an abstract relationship with a country that is in many ways still unsure and insecure of her identity. Hence his approach has hitherto been reductive, finding an essence to what landscape really means for his young country.

However, this new body of work has shied away from casting out an archetypal or mythic mold to the question of what constitutes the Malaysian landscape. Instead of modeling what is "home", or "the land" through his paintings, the artist has here abandoned the search for that which is essential or characteristic. In many ways, the new works are much less romantic. They no longer convey the Malaysian landscape as an abstract idea that can be captured in a singular arresting image. In describing his paintings, Perng Fey is quick to point out the locations of his subjects. Whether the paintings are of city views or abandoned shanties, scenery by the roadside or the lake near where he lives, they all refer to a particular time and a place that have captured his attention.



DREAMING OF A TROPICAL PARADISE  
2008  
OIL ON CANVAS  
122 X 172 CM





TOWARDS THE LAKE  
2008  
OIL ON CANVAS  
170 X 220CM

Perng Fey takes frequent drives in the New Village<sup>1</sup> and its surrounding area, exploring both the natural (or what is left of the natural as well as the built environment, capturing the distinct mood and flavour of a particular scene in a particular site. There is 'The Young Palm' which impressed him on one of these drives. He speaks of its monumentality and impact — the frontality of the fronds commands attention to its presence, standing tall against the backdrop of an equally majestic peak, to symbolize both prospect and growth. He sees an equally "organic" force in the rhythm and structure of the city as a concrete jungle. 'Downtown 80s' shows a burgeoning cityscape as tendrils creeping along a plotted lattice, rising upwards and onwards. The cost of development is never entirely concealed — the artist takes care to disclose its ramifications, as in 'Ulu-ulu', depicting the deserted rough shacks as the ruinous sites of our modern times, brown with neglect, forgotten and abandoned to a slow rueful dilapidation.

In encountering different places and different memories of the past, this series draws these locations into proximity, through a rhythm that suggests that they share no one binding feature. For Perng Fey this discovery has resulted in a conceptual shift: The land is no longer singular; the land is plural. This plurality engenders qualitative differences, not just in subject matter, but also in feelings and experience. By honing in on specific locations, the artist has been able to explore with greater accuracy how memory is linked to the landscape. Yet, this conceptual development has also convinced him to find a new visual language that is able to express succinctly the ambiguities (at once intangible and lucid) of memory.

Having traveled overseas in the past few years, Perng Fey came to observe that the tropical sunlight is much fiercer than its counterpart in countries with temperate climates. The revelation of this contrast and his fascination with it, has led him to work extensively with oranges and yellows, as if to flesh out the luminance and intensity of the lighted surface, accenting the gleaming tropical light as a determinant in how memory is approached and studied.

In 'Sunset in Pekingling', the artist plots the reflection of sunlight on the glass windows of a building. The pictorial field is awash in a burning glow, at times radiating like a mirage. The glow is paint, but it is also the pulsation of light animating and capturing the form and shape of the subject. It can be argued that a number of works in this exhibition form a new exploration into the nature of light in the painting of landscape. Swathes of paint are layered in works such as 'Towards the Lake' and 'Purple Twilight' in arrangements that respond to different light textures. Elsewhere, in 'Dreaming of a Tropical Paradise', the hermetic landscape is almost lost, basking distantly in the glow, luring us into its warm ecstasy.



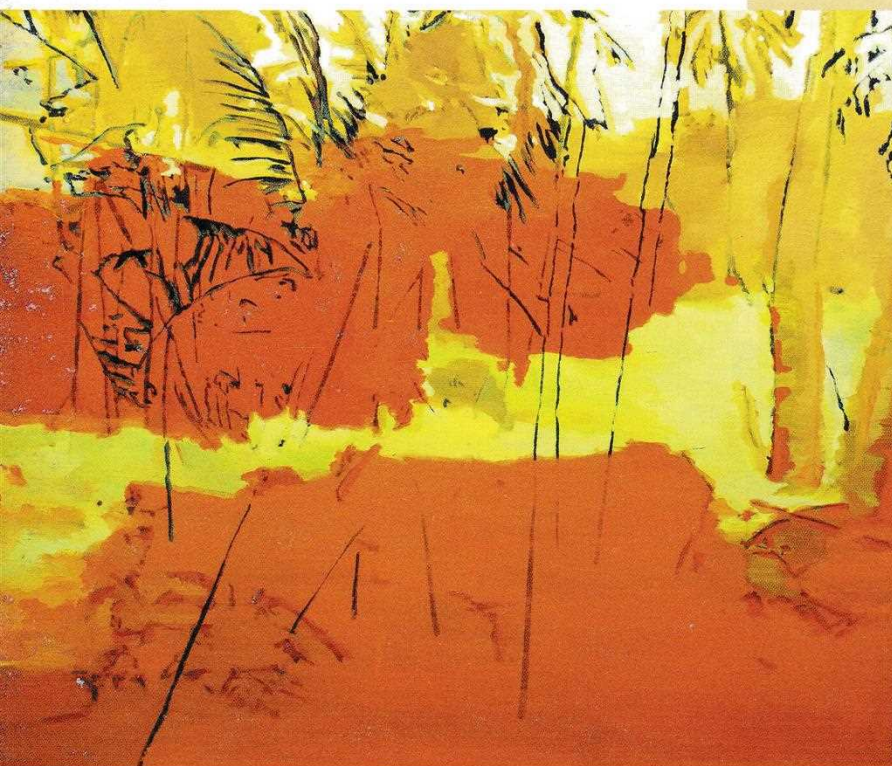
## Light Sears Memory Burns

Simon Soon

As a painter of the Malaysian landscape, Wong Perng Fey's vocabulary is ambitious and extensive. From his earlier works that sought to achieve a kind of panoramic vision of a national landscape to the later introspective inquiries into the "landscape" of his memory, the range of his creative responses in seeking for a sense of belonging with his country verges on the romantic.

For the artist, landscape and memory are deeply connected. The land is the lode of Perng Fey's memories, it is where he stores and enriches them, and finds ways of coming to terms with his past and larger history. Through painting, he distills this into an abstract relationship with a country that is in many ways still unsure and insecure of her identity. Hence his approach has hitherto been reductive, finding an essence to what landscape really means for his young country.

However, this new body of work has shied away from casting out an archetypal or mythic mold to the question of what constitutes the Malaysian landscape. Instead of modeling what is "home", or "the land" through his paintings, the artist has here abandoned the search for that which is essential or characteristic. In many ways, the new works are much less romantic. They no longer convey the Malaysian landscape as an abstract idea that can be captured in a singular arresting image. In describing his paintings, Perng Fey is quick to point out the locations of his subjects. Whether the paintings are of city views or abandoned shanties, scenery by the roadside or the lake near where he lives, they all refer to a particular time and a place that have captured his attention.



DREAMING OF A TROPICAL PARADISE  
2008  
OIL ON CANVAS  
122 X 172 CM



URBAN MIRAGE  
2008  
OIL ON CANVAS  
122 X 172 CM



Light sears. For memory and light are synonymous in Perng Fey's new paintings. Their qualities are windows beyond the specificity of the subject matter, opening our eyes to memory's intangible compound — light. The artist seems to suggest that light is that which creates the shapes and images of our memory and that the memorable — our ties and affections towards a particular place — is more than its shape and form. It is a glow, a nervous energy and a feeling of being seized and burned.

Memory burns. It impresses and imprints like the fierce sunlight that the artist has explored so thoroughly in his most recent paintings. The insights gained from a reading of his country's landscape as plural also compelled him to pay closer attention to the different intensities of light in particular places, forging compositions that convey with greater clarity his lamentations, sentimentality and hope for a place he grew up in, left and eventually returned to.

It is an enigma that memory is both weight (history as baggage) as well as lightness, at once abstract and particular, mythical and the specific. These contradictions are neither ironed out nor resolved in Wong Perng Fey's work. Instead they hover as a spectre that continuously haunts the paintings and the painter, challenging him to keep pushing for new means in seeking a balance to the scale. This inescapability from memory is the fire that drives him as an artist.

<sup>1</sup> The New Village here refers to the artist's hometown, Serdang. Known also as the Chinese New Villages, these settlements were created during British colonial rule after the Second World War to congregate as well as segregate the rural Chinese villagers from early independence insurgents, led by the Malayan Communist Party.





PURPLE TWILIGHT  
2008  
OIL ON CANVAS  
170 X 200 CM



**Wong Perng Fey**  
b. 1974, Malaysia

#### Education

1996 – 1998 Studied Fine Art at Malaysian Institute of Art, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

#### Solo Exhibitions

- 2006 *Habitat*, B4-4 Binova Industrial Centre and 67 Tempinis Satu, Kuala Lumpur.
- 2006 *Appearance*, Alliance Francaise de Penang, Penang.
- 2006 *Picturesque*, New Asia Hotel, George Town, Penang.
- 2005 *Still Views*, Valentine Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur.
- 2004 *Works 2003-2004*, Valentine Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur.
- 2002 *New Landscape*, Valentine Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur.
- 2000 *First Solo*, Valentine Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur.

#### Selected Group Exhibitions

- 2008 *Headlight*, Valentine Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur.  
*Shifting Boundaries*, Rimbun Dahan, Selangor.  
*Entry Point*, 1948 Art Space, Seri kembangan, Selangor.
- 2007 *Between Generations*, Asian Art Museum, University of Malaya, and Muzium & Galleri. Tuanku Fauziah, Universiti Sains Malaysia.  
*The Force of Nature*, Darling Muse, Kuala Lumpur.  
*Headlight*, Valentine Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur.  
*In the Future, Everyone Will Be Famous for 15 Minutes*, Rimbun Dahan, Selangor.
- 2006 *Getting Closer*, Maya Gallery, Kuala Lumpur.  
*Sign and Dated*, Valentine Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur.  
*Feed Me! An Exploration of Appetites*, Rimbun Dahan, Selangor.
- 2005 *Taman Sari, Garden of Delight*, Rimbun Dahan, Selangor.  
*You Are Here*, Valentine Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur.  
*Art Singapore*, Suntec City Convention Centre, Singapore.  
*Petronas Collection Series Three : Narrative Strain*, Galeri Petronas, Kuala Lumpur.
- 2004 *Sleight of Hand*, Darling Muse Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur.  
*Young Contemporary Art Awards Exhibition*, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur.  
*Paradise Lost, Paradise Found — WWF Art for Nature*, Rimbun Dahan, Selangor.  
*Semangat : Artists for Theatre*, Valentine Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur.
- 2003 *Inner Realm*, Town House Gallery, Kuala Lumpur.  
*Games People Play*, Rimbun Dahan, Kuang, Selangor.  
*Four Friends Meeting*, 21, Armenian Street, Penang.  
*ARTSingapore*, Suntec City, Singapore.  
*Puncak — Alami II*, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur.  
*MelbourneConnectionAsia*, City Tram Shelter, Melbourne, Australia.
- 2002 *Touch — WWF Art for Nature*, Rimbun Dahan, Malaysia.  
*Young Contemporary Art Awards Exhibition*, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur.  
*Artist Impression*, Guthrie Pavilion, Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia
- 2001 *Open Show*, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur.  
*Climbing the Walls*, MIA Art and Design Centre, Kuala Lumpur.  
*Face the Act*, Galeri Petronas, Kuala Lumpur.  
*Philip Morris Art Awards*, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur.
- 2000 *Landscape to Landscape*, Galeri Petronas, Kuala Lumpur.
- 1999 *Painted Memories*, Filmnet-Stonor Centre, Kuala Lumpur.  
*Aku — 99 Self Portraits*, Galeri Petronas, Kuala Lumpur.  
*'minority'*, MIA Art and Design Centre, Kuala Lumpur.  
*Art Connection*, Art Extreme Gallery and Studio, Kuala Lumpur.  
*Fine Art Diploma Show*, Galeri MIA, Kuala Lumpur.
- 1998 *Malaysian Heritage*, Bank Negara, Kuala Lumpur.  
*Expressive Drawing*, Galeri MIA, Kuala Lumpur.
- 1997 *Found — Installation Exhibition*, Galeri MIA, Kuala Lumpur.
- 1996 *The Cornucopia of Malaysian Arts*, Metropolitan Gallery of Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur.
- 1994 *Malaysian Art Open*, Galeri Petronas, Kuala Lumpur.

#### Awards

- 2002 *Artist in Residence*, Rimbun Dahan, Malaysia.
- 2002 *Honourable Mention*, Philip Morris Art Awards.
- 2000 *Honourable Mention*, Philip Morris Art Awards.
- 1996 *Scholarship Award*, Malaysian Institute of Art.
- 1994 *Honourable Mention*, Malaysian Art Open.

#### Activity

- 2002 *Alami II — Science Inspired Arts Camp*, UNESCO International Year of Mountain, Sabah, Malaysia. Sponsored by UNESCO, National Art gallery, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Sabah Parks, The Ministry of Culture, Art & Tourism, Science & Environment.

#### Exhibition Reviews

- 2006 Himanshu Bratt, "Making the Unseen Seen", New Strait Times, May 14
- 2006 Chan Seau Lan, "Artist having Exhibition in Hotel Room", Kwong Ming Jit Po, January 8
- 2005 Gina Fairley, "Wong Perng Fey at Valentine Willie Fine Art", Asian Art News, Volume 15 Number 6, November/December 2005
- 2005 Anansa Jacob, "Wong finds His Answer in the Land", The Sun, October 28
- 2005 Laura Fan, "A View to a Kill", The Edge, October 17
- 2004 Izuan Shah, "The Artistic Path", The Star Youth, January 5
- 2003 Laura Fan, "Natural Inspiration — Drawing as an end in itself", The Edge, Sept 15
- 2003 Kok Chuen Ooi, "In Search of the Light Source", New Straits Times, April 21
- 2002 Laura Fan, "Dominated Horizon", The Edge, Oct 14
- 2001 Victor Chin, "Adding a Local Flavour to Oil", Sunday Star, July 30
- 2000 Laura Fan, "The Power of Nature", The Edge, July 31
- 2000 Kok Chuen Ooi, "Mastering Space in Art", New Straits Times, Aug 3



ULU-ULU  
2008  
OIL ON CANVAS  
122 X 172 CM

4396

**Exhibition Dates**  
16 July – 2 August 2008

**COVER:**  
THE YOUNG PALM  
2008  
OIL ON CANVAS  
170 X 190 CM

VALENTINE  
WILLIE  
fine ART

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

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