

A black and white ink wash landscape painting. The scene depicts a vast mountain range with multiple layers of peaks. The foreground features dark, craggy rock formations and dense, dark foliage. A thick layer of mist or smoke fills the middle ground, creating a sense of depth and atmosphere. The background shows more distant, lighter-toned mountain ranges under a cloudy sky. The overall style is traditional Chinese ink wash, emphasizing texture and atmospheric perspective.

Chong Siew Ying

INFINITY

vwfa

Chong Siew Ying

I N F I N I T Y

6 - 29 MAY 2011
VALENTINE WILLIE FINE ART, SINGAPORE

JOURNEY INTO THE MIND'S HEART

BY EVA MCGOVERN

Malaysian artist Chong Siew Ying expresses a deep and emotionally driven sense of beauty through visual poems that instinctively flow from the mind's heart. Such sentiments naturally embrace qualities that the artist is best known for: sensual painting, elegant figuration and a type of philosophical searching driven by her own personal needs and intuition. *Infinity*, Siew Ying's latest body of work, presents one such meditation on the possibilities of imagined landscapes. These sites represent human desires as a type of inner paradise to consider one's place in the world and the conflicts involved in the process of self-awakening. Her cinematic monochrome works reflect the artist's many interests: from Chinese ink painting and philosophy, technique and composition, notions of the sublime and beauty, as well as her own multi-centred life, which influences her understanding of place and space.

At first glance the works throughout *Infinity* leads viewers to assume that many of the images have been made using ink in the vein of traditional Chinese ink painting. The fluid marks of earth, water and sky reflect ancient characteristics of ink and wash landscapes that relied on vivid brushwork and varying degrees of intensity of ink to express the artist's conception of nature, personal emotions and individuality. As a Chinese Malaysian, the ancient arts from China, whether ink painting, philosophy or poetry, certainly continue to influence Siew Ying in many ways. They allow for deep introspection and the expression of her own unique personality and emotions through thoughtful mindscapes from the absorption of a variety of texts and imagery. However upon closer inspection, viewers realise that it is not ink but something more mysterious and unknown with stylistic traces of European landscapes and composition. Siew Ying's works have been created in two stages, firstly through charcoal drawing and then through the layering of clear emulsion over the surface to push and mould form. Developed in both her Paris and Kuala Lumpur studios, large-scale paper-mounted canvases were attached to her studio walls upon which she applied her charcoal landscapes. Once complete and laden with grainy textures from her plaster backdrops, she then placed the work on the floor to layer it with a clear emulsion. Whilst wet she would sweep brushes across the surface, immediately pulling and lifting the canvas in order to merge charcoal and emulsion. The result of this labour-intensive process is an animated and atmospheric hybrid form indicative of how Siew Ying often combines dual forces from various areas of her practice.

One such duality is movement and stillness. Although her static images are rooted within the stoic resolve of the silent mountain, calm ocean and noble forest her images nevertheless infer a sense of transference. Additionally influenced by black and white cinema echoed in her textured surfaces, Siew Ying's skies, oceans and foliage are filled with movement from her brush strokes. These traces of the artist's hand create new expressions and hint at subconscious forms such as celestial beings floating through the skies or additional natural elements seamlessly absorbed into the landscape. Isolated trees anchor never ending paths and limitless horizons suggest a sense of physical and spiritual searching, reflected in titles such as *Flow* and *Faith*. These act as points of departure from the natural into the spiritual and mystical inner sanctum of the mind emphasised by the fact that these are not real places, since Siew Ying's combined tropical and Mediterranean flora and fauna do not naturally grow together. *Journey*, the most surreal image in the series symbolises this feeling at its most potent. A mysterious path fades into the distance with two solitary trees acting as curious sentinels. A full and lonely moon shines amidst dark voluminous clouds that merge with the mountains in the background. This misty and ambiguous place is the land of our unconscious desires and fears. Such dualities of quiet solitude and soaring natural activity, romance and tension, charge Siew Ying's work with powerful emotion, but also act as a subtle reminder that through such extremes one can also achieve balance and harmony.

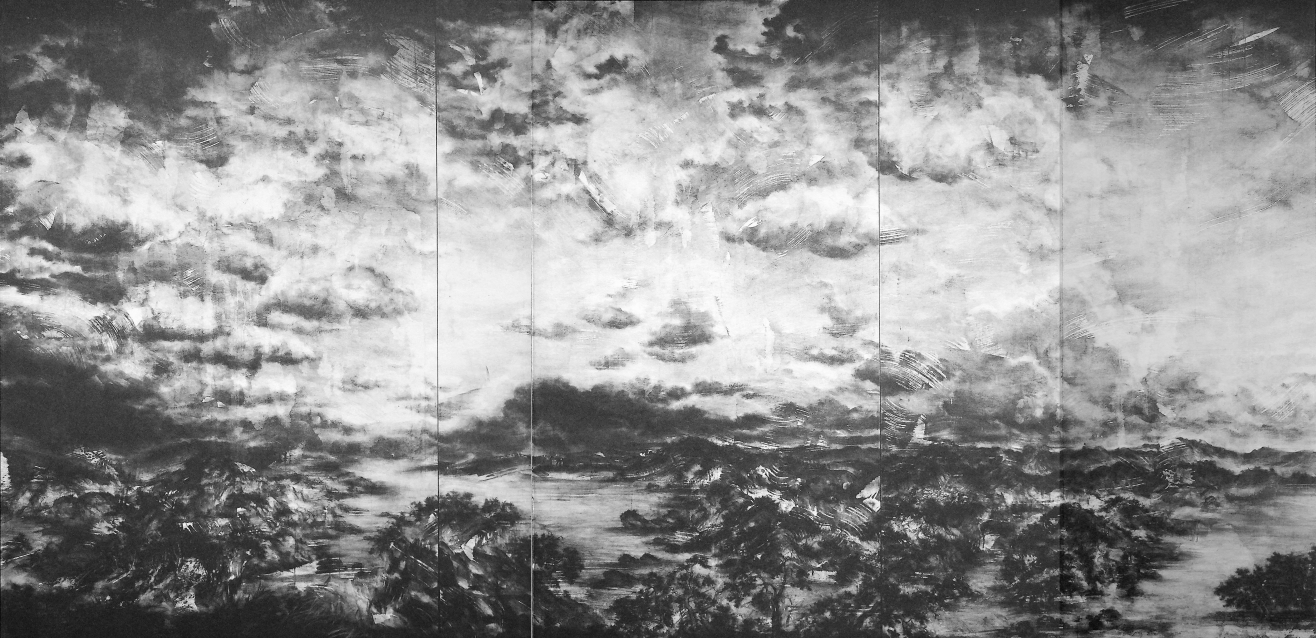
This type of lyricism is characteristic of the artist's practice that often evokes a sequence of dreams, profound yet constantly unanswered. Her previous portrait series dealt with concepts of beauty through idealised faces, flower blossoms, goldfish and distant mountainscapes. However, with *Infinity*, she removes her human figures altogether, their presence is inferred simply through their absence. By freeing the eye from a dominant foreground subject, she provides better vantage points into her landscapes, allowing audiences the opportunity to place themselves within them. This is one of the instinctual appeals of landscape as a genre, the ability to imagine oneself as part of what is seen, to envisage the physical experience of the land. This appeal is further heightened by a sense of mystery and desire to explore and discover the possibilities of these places. Stirring the imagination, the viewer is then swept away by visual passages of natural beauty romantically revisioned for philosophical inquiry and liberation. *Flow* provides a birds eye view of a sensual traditional Chinese ink inspired mountainscape, with low clouds slipping through the trees and rocks. But once again, it is a mythical place whose purpose seems to be more for contemplation through a bird's eye view of its majestic beauty. *Departure*, made up of three panels, locates the viewer on the shore of a melancholic beach whose soaring sky seems to merge with the land, creating a more abstracted representation of landscape. The only detail that roots the subject firmly in gravity is a single bird resting on the beach. Through Siew Ying's intuitive emotional handling, these subjects become places for personal understanding and connection to greater spiritual and philosophical viewpoints. This awakens in the viewer a sense of the past as well as experiences of the sublime. The sublime is often described as an intangible state of experience that deals with a type of darkness, privation, vastness and magnificence; this is an important philosophical aspect of Siew Ying's work. The works throughout *Infinity* triggers memories of places we have been, dreamt of, or simply yearn to experience and therefore represents the sublime power of nature to prompt self-introspection, as well as the ability to connect us to grand spiritual and physical forces. Her works evoke a form of Taoist visual sequencing, discussing the importance of the natural world and its positive effects on human life.

THROUGH DARKNESS AND LIGHT, MOVEMENT AND STILLNESS

INFINITY INTRODUCES AUDIENCES TO THE COMPLEX, SENSUAL AND EMOTIONAL LANDSCAPES OF CHONG SIEW YING.

Although the scenes from *Infintiy* are esoteric places and spaces, a reading of the work is not complete without reference to the personal biography of the artist. Perhaps a subconscious manifestation, this series marks an interesting crossroads in Siew Ying's life. Dividing her time in between Paris, where she studied to become an artist and Kuala Lumpur the home of her birth, Siew Ying's life has been negotiated by yet another duality, that of East and West, through a form of itinerancy. This 'metisage', a French term for hybridity, continues to repeat itself in many forms throughout the exhibition. Such fusion is found in her more European inspired landscapes with curious tropical details such as the inclusion of a coconut tree in *Faith* and a banana tree juxtaposed next to its more Mediterranean counter part in *Journey*. Is Siew Ying creating personal landscapes of desire and longing for her own Malaysian-Chinese identity? One conclusion could be that in the past, her multi-centred existence created a constant state of transit and flux, whereas now there is a self appointed shift towards a more rooted sense of being. *Departure*, another large-scale three-panelled work, has such various meanings in relation to the artist's current position. As a literal observation, it could be a personal introspection on her own departure and arrival into a new phase of both her life and career. Another more historically anchored reading could be that the viewpoint of the open sea relates to her Southern Chinese ancestors, longing for hope and a new life elsewhere. Finally, returning to the concept of 'infinity' on a grander scale, *Departure* represents the ability of the natural world to inspire and encourage human survival and fulfilment.

Through darkness and light, movement and stillness, *Infinity* introduces audiences to the complex, sensual and emotional landscapes of Chong Siew Ying. Her large scale romantic and rhythmic canvases allow audiences to reflect on their own desires and fears through the personal, historical and philosophical. Echoing the poetry of Chinese ink painting and European landscapes, Siew Ying creates forms of power and beauty, loneliness and liberation, as well as tension and peace. Developed over a period of two years, these imagined chiaroscuros highlight the artist's commitment to practice and experimentation of technique. Ultimately, the exhibition showcases the ability of Art to capture the intangible and profound infinite qualities of Nature and its inspiring qualities for personal growth and transcendence.



PULSE

2010

Charcoal & acrylic medium
on paper mounted canvas

201 x 137 cm each
(x 3 pcs)



FAITH

2010

*Charcoal & acrylic medium
on paper mounted canvas*

217 x 137 cm

JOURNEY

2010

Charcoal & acrylic medium
on paper mounted canvas

137 x 180 cm



秀 英 的 心

“菩提嗎？”

“心想著菩提畫出來好像榕樹”

她說“海也是想象的”

“啊”我說

“那是你心底的海

心中的菩提了”

去年歲末

走進秀英的畫室

大畫布

是

她的天地雲海樹林

她無盡頭的路

沙灘上一隻蹣跚蹣跚的海鳥

是多情失意的女子嗎

心中無色

隻余下野火狂盡的墨

黑呀 黑呀

黑到閃閃發光

一種靜默的震動

我想到老子

天地不仁 以萬物為芻狗

蔡明亮 永和・台北

Tsai Ming-liang *Film Author*



ROOT

2010

*Charcoal & acrylic medium
on paper mounted canvas*

138 x 200 cm



DEPARTURE

2010

Charcoal & acrylic medium
on paper mounted canvas

225 x 136 cm each
(x 3 pcs)

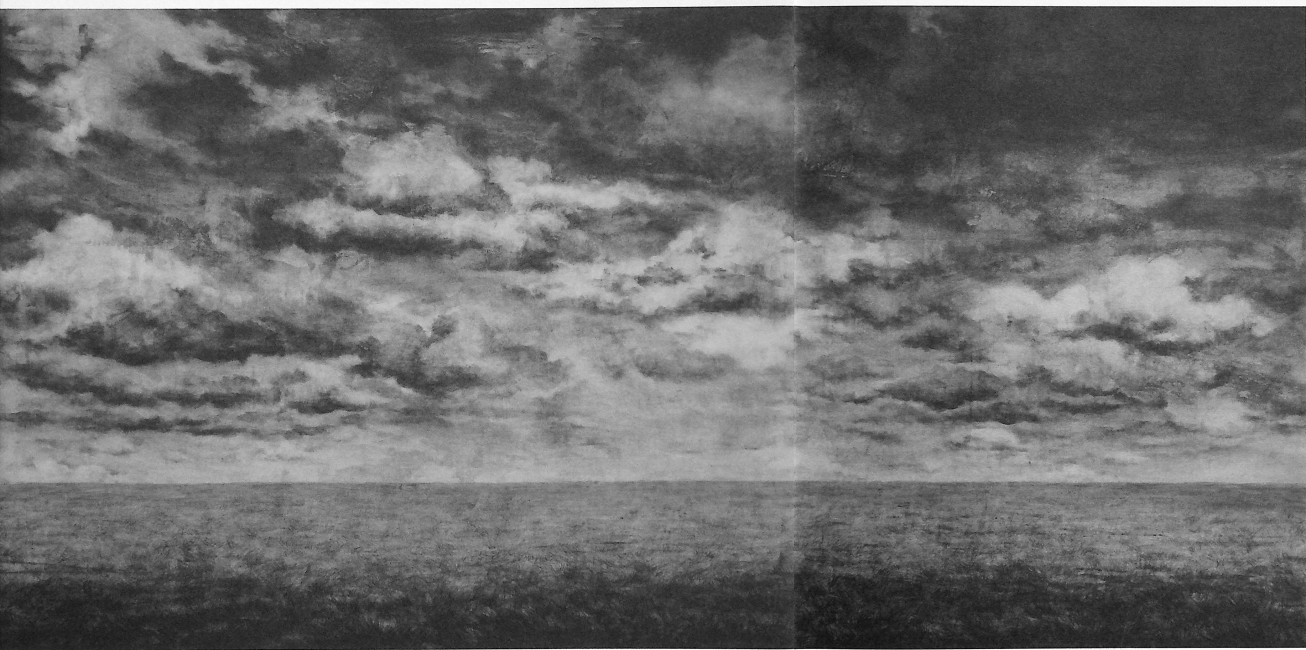
FLOW

2011

*Charcoal & acrylic medium
on paper mounted canvas*

137 x 235 cm





WHISPER

2011

*Charcoal & acrylic medium
on paper mounted canvas*

138 x 280 cm

INFINITY

2009 - 2010

M I R A G E

2009

*Charcoal & acrylic medium
on paper mounted canvas*

184 x 133 cm

*Collection of
Tunku Razman Shahariman*





JUMPING
DOG IN THE
VILLAGE

2009

*Charcoal & acrylic medium
on paper mounted canvas*

180 x 133 cm

*Collection of
Rosemary & Steve Wong*

M I G R A N T

2010

*Charcoal, oil & acrylic medium
on paper mounted canvas*

180 x 133 cm

*Collection of
Linda & Raja Kumar*



CHONG SIEW YING, (b. 1969, Kuala Lumpur) left Malaysia in 1990 to pursue her studies in arts in Paris, France. She returned to Malaysia in 1998, holding her first solo show in Kuala Lumpur that year. She was artist-in-residence at Rimbun Dahan in 1999 and at the Vermont Studio Centre in the United States in 2001. Her career has spanned a large number of solo and group exhibitions in Asia, as well as across Australia, Europe and the USA.

Chong Siew Ying remains a dedicated aesthete, grounded in the painterly traditions of both East and Western sensibilities. Well known for her strong gestural brush strokes and expressive compositional arrangements, Siew Ying continues to develop new techniques and approaches to subject matter that communicate a distinct visual poetry. A lyrical and elegant painter, her work is profoundly emotive, embracing broad themes such as nature, human psychology and emotions. As a multi-centred artist, travel and place continue to be an important influence on her practice. A true grand voyageur, she has conducted epic journeys overland from Europe to Asia, absorbing the cultures and landscapes of multiple places along the way that emerge in her work through a strong understanding of space and the human connection to home and culture.

Today she is based in-between Paris and Kuala Lumpur.

SELECTED ONE PERSON EXHIBITIONS:

- 2010 IDYLLE (Part II), Galerie Deprez-Bellorget, Paris, France
- 2009 FRAME OF MIND, Ernst & Young Asian Art Outreach Exhibition, Singapore
- 2008 IDYLLE, Valentine Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2008 CHONG SIEW YING, Byron Cohen Gallery for Contemporary Art, Kansas City, USA
- 2006 CHONG SIEW YING, Galerie Deprez-Bellorget, Paris, France
- 2006 MANY SPLENDURED THINGS, Valentine Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2004 MIRROR'S EDGE, The Substation Gallery, Singapore
- 2002 GOING AWAY COMING HOME, Valentine Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2001 CHONG SIEW YING, Red Mile Gallery, Vermont Studio Center, Vermont, USA
- 1998 96/97, Valentine Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS:

- 2007 SCOPE MIAMI, Byron Cohen Gallery for Contemporary Art, Miami, USA
- 2007 JEJAK, Galeri Nasional Indonesia, Jakarta, Indonesia
- 2005 THE SOVEREIGN ASIAN ART PRIZE finalist exhibition, Hong Kong
- 2004 FOOTSTEPS, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2003 OF SHADOWS AND IMAGES, Kunst Museum, Malmo, Sweden; Mercat de les Flors, Barcelona, Spain; Circulo de Bellas Artes, Madrid, Spain
- 2002 THE YOUNG CONTEMPORARIES AWARD, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2002 LAUGHTER: Works by Chong Siew Ying and Noor Mahnum Mohd, iPreciation Gallery, Singapore
- 2000 5th RIMBUN DAHAN ARTIST IN RESIDENCE EXHIBITION: Rimbun Dahan, Kuang, Malaysia
- 1999 THROUGH OUR EYES, Gallery Petronas, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 1999 9th INTERNATIONAL BIENNALE OF PRINT AND DRAWING EXHIBITION, Taipei Fine Art Museum, Taiwan
- 1997 4th TRIENNALE MONDIALE D'ESTAMPES CONTEMPORAIN, Chamalieres, France
- 1996 TRACE 96, 5th Biennale International Contemporary Prints, Paris, France
- 1993 BIENALLE DE MAASTRICHT, Maastricht, Holland

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