

...to Merdika  
by Tan Jing Quee

The night crizzled  
when the news broke  
in the early hours

sun rise we speeded southwards  
from Bangi the green hills heated past  
the morning sun burnt the highway

At Blandford Drive

garlands crowded the road  
mourners flew resolute  
in memory of a gentle hero  
a people's farewell  
no pomp, no parade

the rhythmic solemn applause of tearful hearts  
the sad, solemn soft refrain  
and lang syne

slowly followed the floral cortege  
at Mount Vernon

anguished memories of bitter years endured

You had come from Pontian  
to the Lion's gate  
with dreams in your eyes

Merdakai  
Your rousing oratory fired the flame  
in sharp, rising crescendo

Merdakai  
the cry resounded, reverberated  
from Bukit Timah to Kallang

green zeng

# MALAYAN EXCHANGE

Studies of Notes of the Future

Siong



green zeng

# MALAYAN EXCHANGE

Studies of Notes of the Future

*green zeng*

## Back to the Future: Symbols, History and the Transaction of Ideas

By Eva McGovern

*Malayan Exchange: Studies of Notes of the Future* by Singaporean artist Green Zeng, presents deconstructions of propaganda and multiple historical moments through the physical and ideological positions of money within culture and society. Money, although worthless in itself, functions as a system of exchange values for physical and virtual acquisition and investment. It is also a tangible object of paper notes and metal coins handled on a daily basis by almost every citizen of its represented country. However, despite its relationship to wealth and poverty, currencies also have a system of images ideologically exchanged on a daily basis. Encoded with a series of symbols, designs, pictures and text, money is a daily reminder of national heritage, social values and political doctrine. These semiotics form complex visual dialogues that actively and subconsciously ingrain themselves into the collective psyche, to propagate particular versions of history and identity. *Malayan Exchange*, presented by Valentine Willie Fine Art Singapore at The Arts House, features designs of computer-generated digital prints of re-imagined Singaporean currency featuring images of forgotten activists and politicians, important buildings, maps, flags, natural history drawings, poems and significant dates and texts. By presenting another type of exchange, the exhibition contributes the possibilities of contemporary Art as a starting point on the status of Singapore's history and social identity.

Zeng destabilises our expectations of currency imagery to present an alternate view of the nation. Although fictitious, the series is rooted in reality and the artist's understanding of the construction of images found on Singaporean money. The present official series of purple, green, red, blue, orange, purple and gold Singaporean bills is known as the 'Portrait Series'. On the front is an engraved portrait of the first president of the country, Encik Yusof bin Ishak, and on the back of each denomination are thematic scenes that



deal with educational values, sporting excellence, young people and the future, Singapore's position as a Garden City, concepts of knowledge and technology, and the establishment itself as represented by the Executive, legislative and judiciary offices. Previous series selected themes based on ships, birds and orchids that represented the ideals of the country. Maritime vessels symbolised the development of modern Singapore, birds were noted for their strength, adaptability and independence that supposedly 'characterizes the young Republic of Singapore with the potential of soaring to greater heights in its progress' and orchids are the national flower. Such icons all suggest a strong and dynamic society. But it is nevertheless a type of propaganda to control public opinion by subtle reminders of government leadership and political articulation. Under the guidance of (now retired) legendary statesman, Lee Kuan Yew, and the People's Action Party, Singapore has prospered to become one of the richest countries in the world, but the city-state is well known for its tightly regulated bureaucracy and strict censorship - an enduring legacy of the former Prime Minister. Such control continues to purposefully move the country into a stable and successful future enjoyed by its citizens and tourists alike. Problematically, the government, in order to maintain control, supports numerous ambitious development schemes that radically alter the landscape of the country, erasing the complexities of the past. A more simplistic national narrative is then recreated with officially sanctioned and polished histories to present a peaceful and conflict-free society.

Green Zeng is less interested in these idealised versions of the past. Instead he examines and questions the construction of national narratives and the scripting of history and its relationship to identity through the images found on money. History is a choreographed methodology, often confined to straightforward linear narratives, repackaged for public consumption. The reality is a far more complex and fluctuating entity with multiple perspectives in relativity to one another. Describing history as a shattered vessel of clay that is picked up and reconstructed, Zeng draws inspiration



from why certain fragments are not selected for dissemination. The images he creates, rich with details and layering, then act as triggers of memory to retrieve, re-present and re-imagine history for viewers to make their own conclusions about the past. Six denominations of alternative Singaporean currency (\$2, \$5, \$10, \$50, \$100 and \$1000) have been printed in various configurations of repetition and installed on the glass panels at The Arts House. On the front of the notes are portraits of left-wing unionists, politicians and journalists who played active roles in the anti-colonial and pro-independence movement in the earlier years of the fledgling nation. Often relegated to the backwaters of historical significance, contemporary and younger audiences may question the identities of James Puthuchear, Lim Chin Siong, Fong Swee Suan, Poh Soo Kai, Said Zahari and Lim Hock Siew. What would Singapore have been like if the Barisan Socialists led by Lim Chin Siong had come to power in the general election of 1963? This remains forever unanswered, due to Operation Coldstore that took place on 2 February 1963. The date itself is included, as a subtle reminder, on the front of all of Zeng's notes, signifying the imprisonment of BS leaders, including Lim, for fear of a Communist threat to the nation.

Such taboos are juxtaposed with the silhouetted figure of Lee Kuan Yew himself on the back on the notes. The ever-present shadow of the Statesman, portrayed at various ages, is combined with text taken from the Constitution of the Republic of Singapore. These two sides create clear tensions between civil freedoms, control and dominance, as well as the forgotten and the official. This is echoed by Zeng's use of natural history drawings from the collection of the first Resident and Commandant of Singapore, William Farquhar, who was also relegated to the shadows of his more glorious contemporary, Sir Thomas Stamford Bingley Raffles. Despite important discoveries, his failure to alert his findings to the Royal Society of London led to nothing more than a footnote of a grander version of history. These dichotomies are further emphasized by a purposeful exhibition installation. Zeng presents his works in a frame that can be viewed from both the front and back. A decision



must be made by the viewer to choose which version he wants to experience since he must move around the glass panels to see one side at a time. Forced to negotiate the historic old Parliament building that The Arts House occupies, Zeng encourages his audiences to absorb both his own complex observations on history and the historic setting of his chosen gallery space. This presents an additional site-specific reading and contemplation of architecture, itself a carefully constructed fixed symbol for government authority and cultural heritage. What emerges is a friction for audiences to negotiate as they begin to understand the fragile nature of history.

The title of the exhibition, *Malayan Exchange*, takes place in 1963, the time when Singapore was part of Malaysia. This was an optimistic moment of progress for the Federated States of Malaya, Sabah, Sarawak and the island nation. However, audiences are well aware that two years later, this optimism would be tainted by Singapore's expulsion from the alliance and the subsequent founding of the country as an independent nation in 1965. As such, Zeng once again problematises official versions of a glorious and solid nation, reminding viewers of the debated reasons for Singapore's departure. The exhibition therefore presents alternative possible timelines, spaces and places of history. The figures who shaped the texture of Singapore, both through direct representation and more subtle reminders – Zeng includes the anthems and flags of the nations that governed Singapore before independence (Great Britain, Japan and Malaysia) - all create a dense and layered archaeological site with hidden clues from the past. By selecting currency as his starting point, Zeng then highlights the counterfeiting of national heritage. History is not fixed; it is a loose and fluid concept filled with gaps and different configurations of 'facts'. Providing the entry point into such complex interrogations, the artist encourages a certain liberation. Unencumbered by the burden of prescriptive narratives, viewers will hopefully make their own informed choices on the stories of the nation, collective memory and the coercion of the past, in order to look more clearly towards an unknown future.





## Malayan Exchange (Study of a Note of the Future) – Blue

Front of 1 note

2011

Digital print on Hahnemuhle paper

21 cm x 29.7 cm

Edition of 10 + 1AP

Serial No: B01





## Malayan Exchange (Study of a Note of the Future) – Blue

Back of 1 note

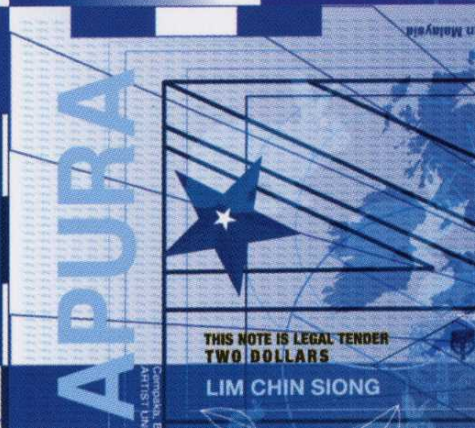
2011

Digital print on Hahnemuhle paper

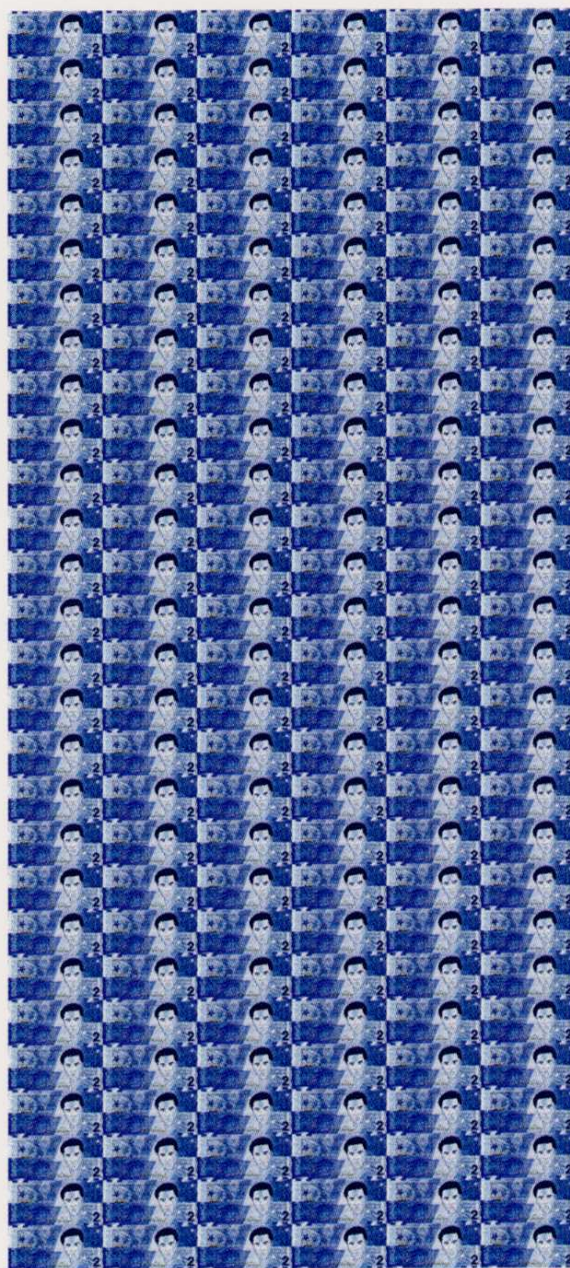
21 cm x 29.7 cm

Edition of 10 + 1AP









## Malayan Exchange (Study of a Note of the Future) – Blue

Front of 168 notes

2011

Digital print on Hahnemuhle paper

200 cm x 100 cm

Edition of 5 + 1AP

Serial No: B01 – B168





## Malayan Exchange (Study of a Note of the Future) – Orange

Front of 1 note

2011

Digital print on Hahnemuhle paper

21 cm x 29.7 cm

Edition of 10 + 1AP

Serial No: 001



## Malayan Exchange (Study of a Note of the Future) – Orange

Back of 1 note

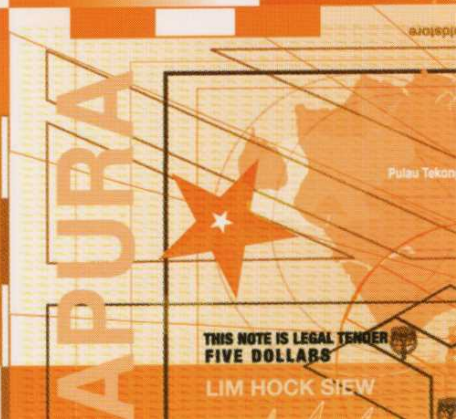
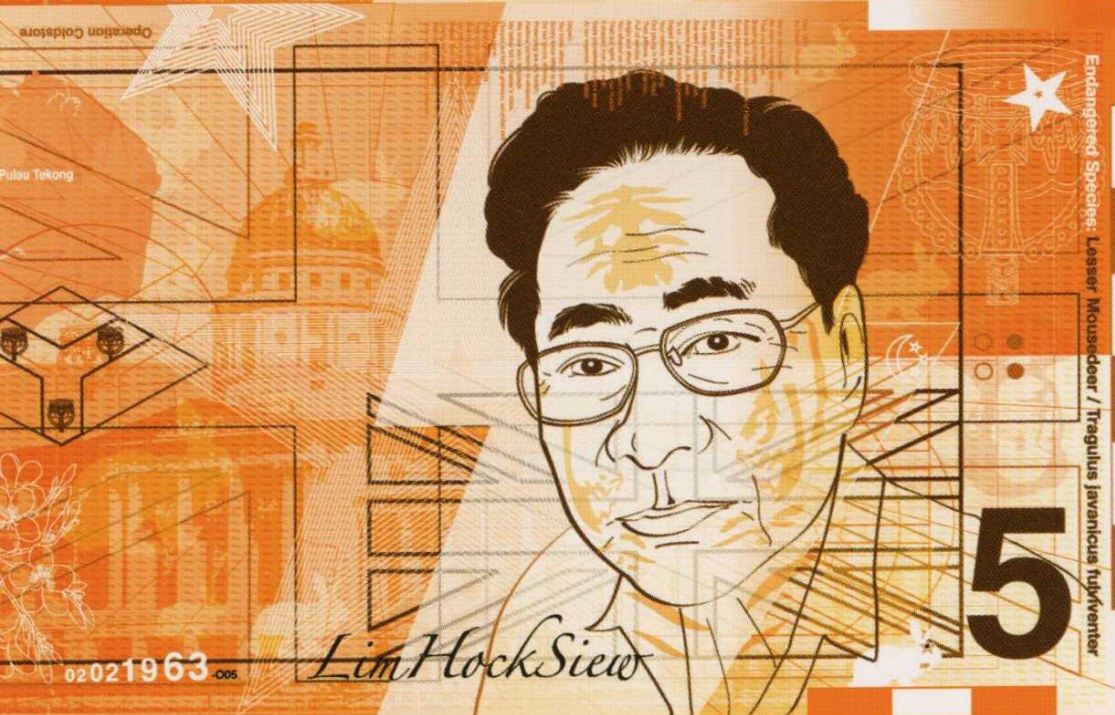
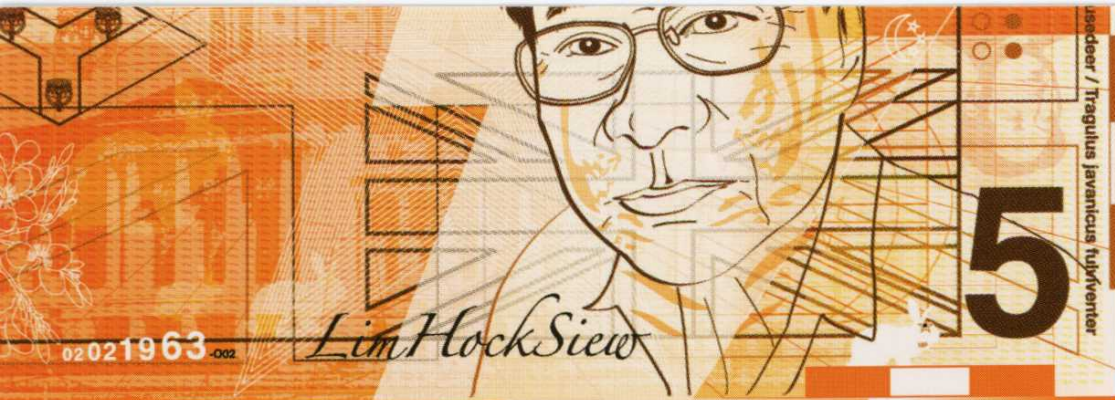
2011

Digital print on Hahnemuhle paper

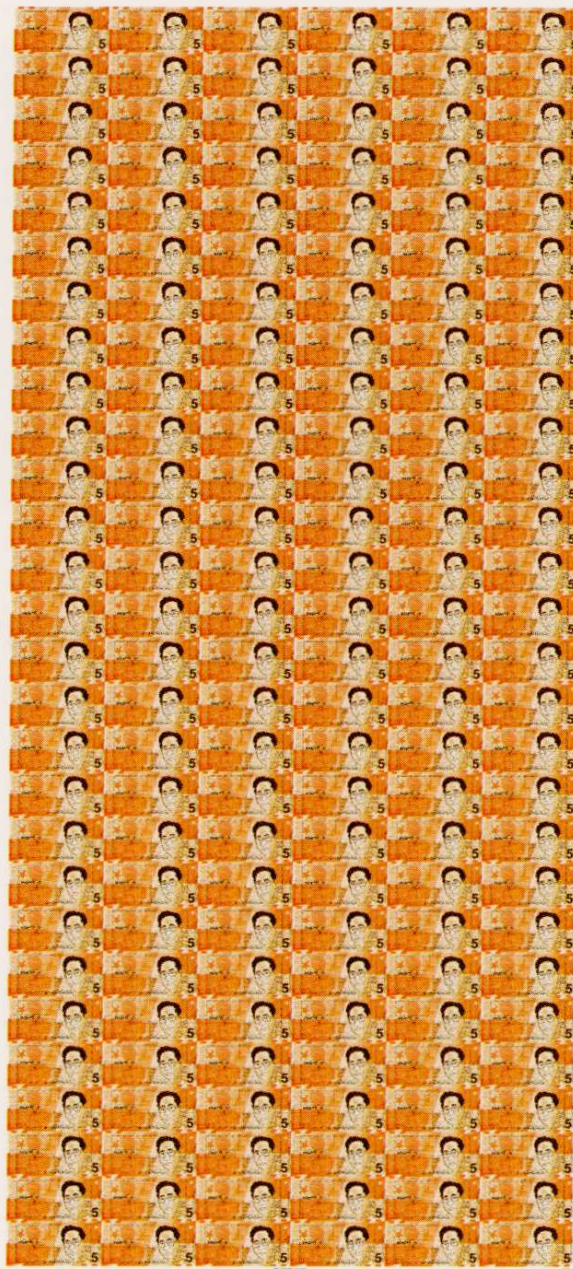
21 cm x 29.7 cm

Edition of 10 + 1AP









## Malayan Exchange (Study of a Note of the Future) – Orange

Front of 168 notes

2011

Digital print on Hahnemuhle paper

200 cm x 100 cm

Edition of 5 + 1AP

Serial No: O01 – O168





## Malayan Exchange (Study of a Note of the Future) – Green

Front of 1 note

2011

Digital print on Hahnemuhle paper

21 cm x 29.7 cm

Edition of 10 + 1AP

Serial No: G01



## Malayan Exchange (Study of a Note of the Future) – Green

Back of 1 note

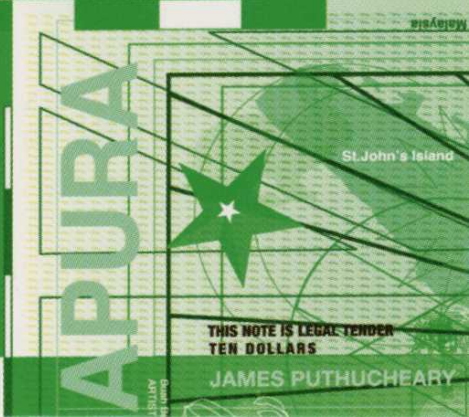
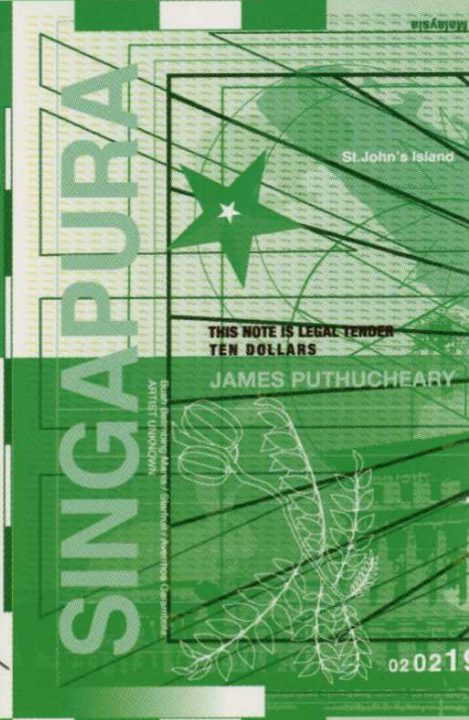
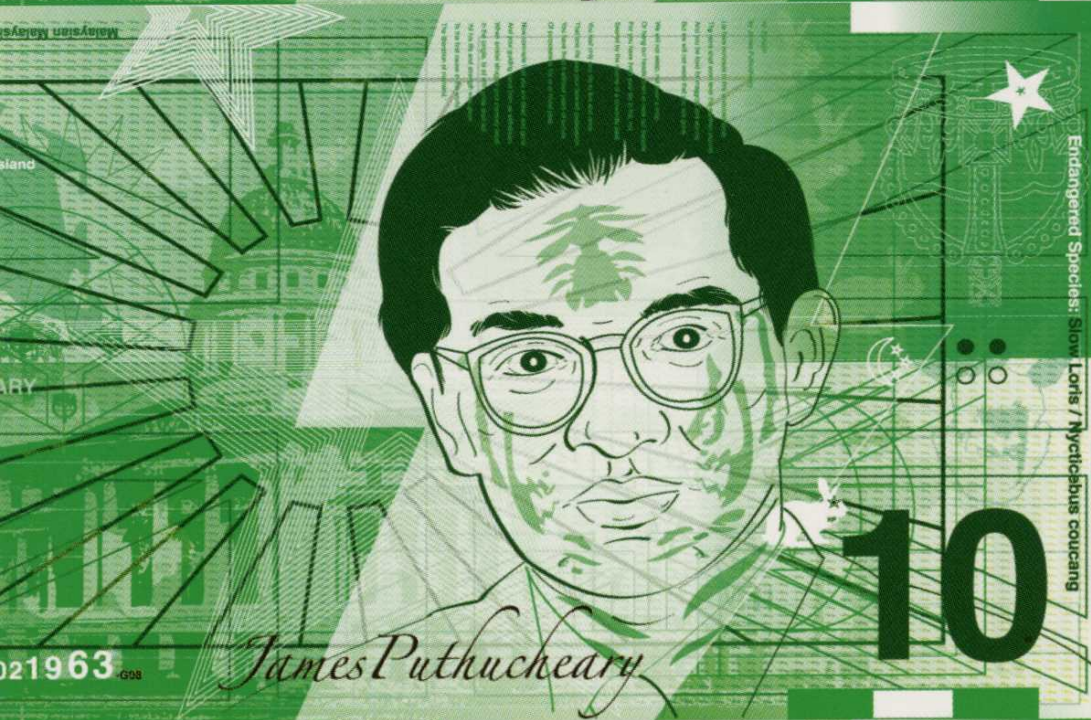
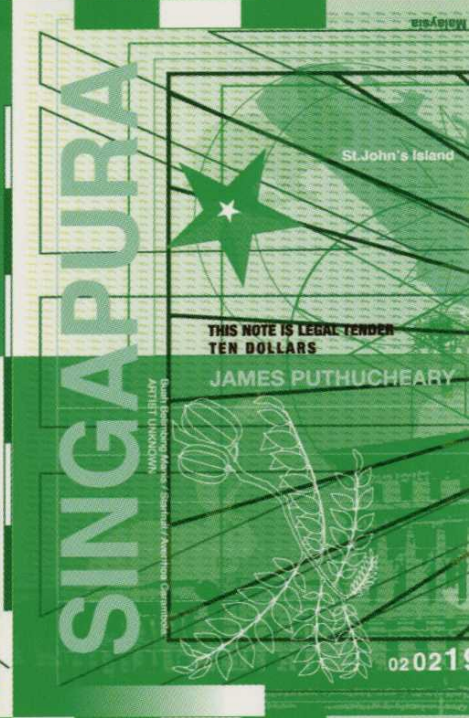
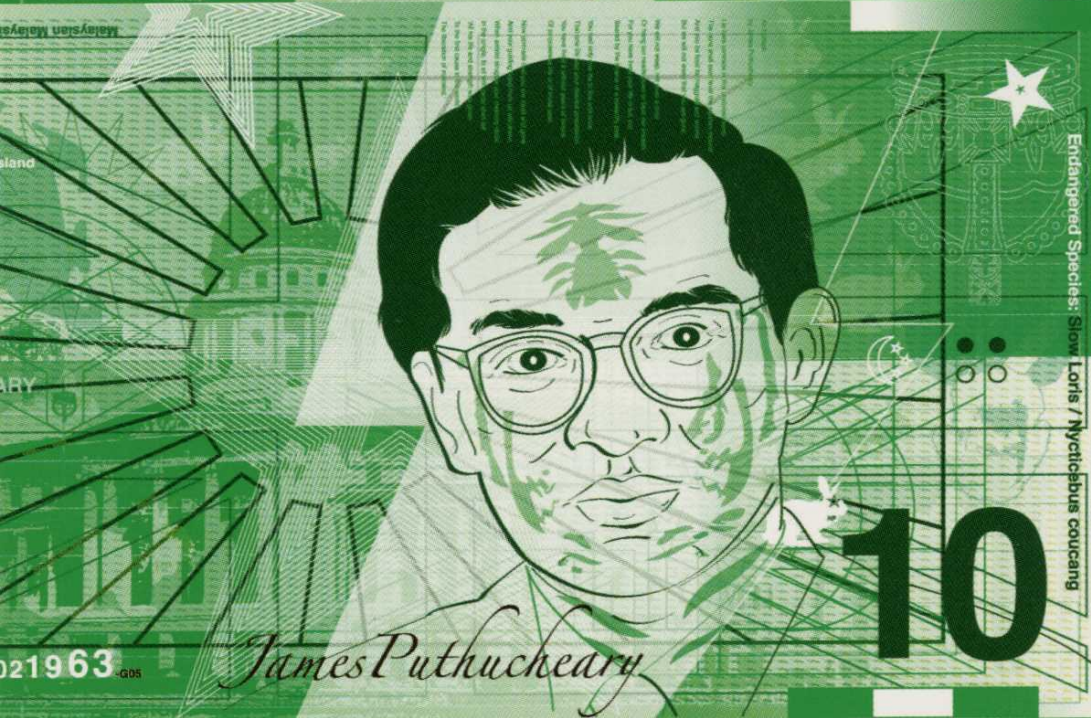
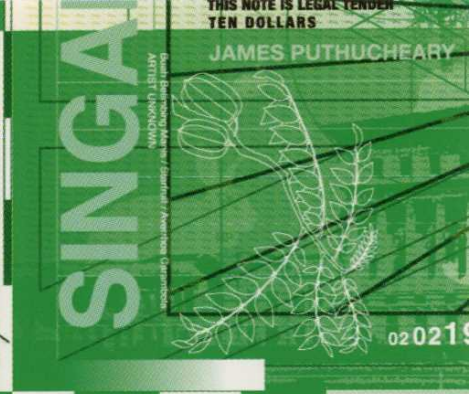
2011

Digital print on Hahnemuhle paper

21 cm x 29.7 cm

Edition of 10 + 1AP









## Malayan Exchange (Study of a Note of the Future) – Green

Front of 168 notes

2011

Digital print on Hahnemuhle paper

200 cm x 100 cm

Edition of 5 + 1AP

Serial No: G01 – G168





## Malayan Exchange (Study of a Note of the Future) – Red

Front of 1 note

2011

Digital print on Hahnemuhle paper

21 cm x 29.7 cm

Edition of 10 + 1AP

Serial No: R01



## Malayan Exchange (Study of a Note of the Future) – Red

Back of 1 note

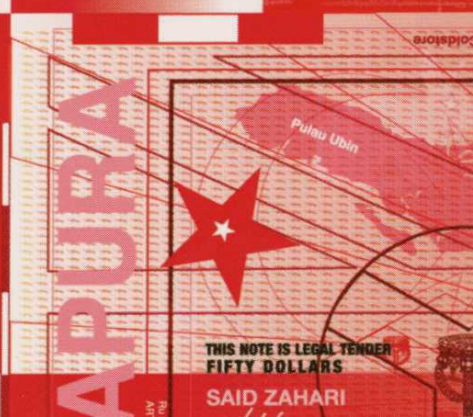
2011

Digital print on Hahnemuhle paper

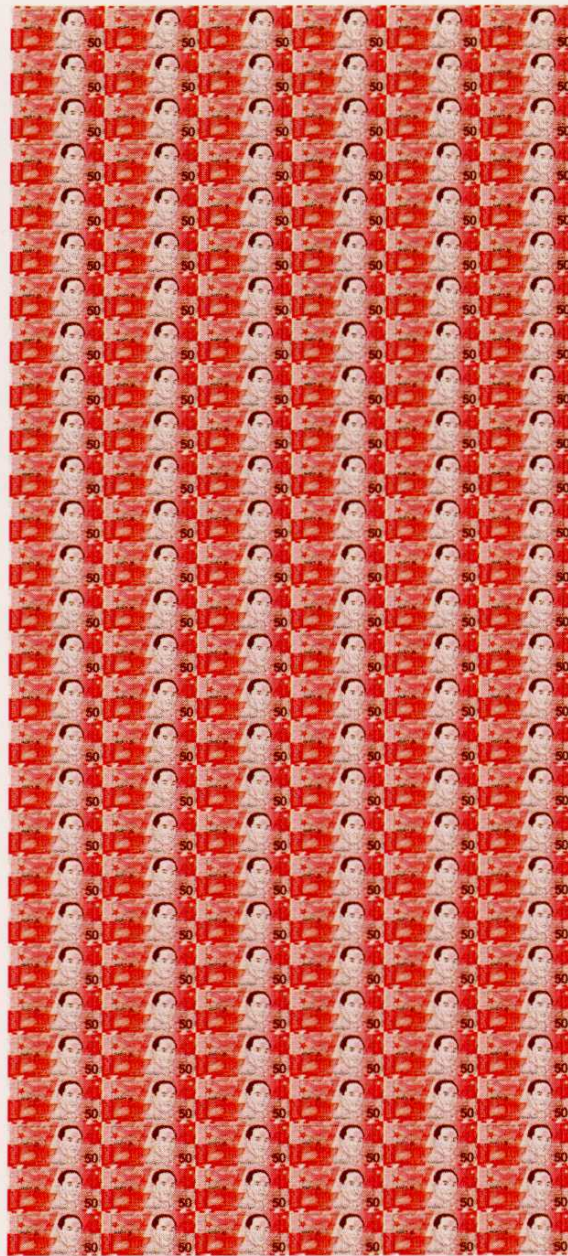
21 cm x 29.7 cm

Edition of 10 + 1AP









## Malayan Exchange (Study of a Note of the Future) – Red

Front of 168 notes

2011

Digital print on Hahnemuhle paper

200 cm x 100 cm

Edition of 5 + 1AP

Serial No: R01 – R168









## Malayan Exchange (Study of a Note of the Future) – Purple

Back of 1 note

2011

Digital print on Hahnemuhle paper

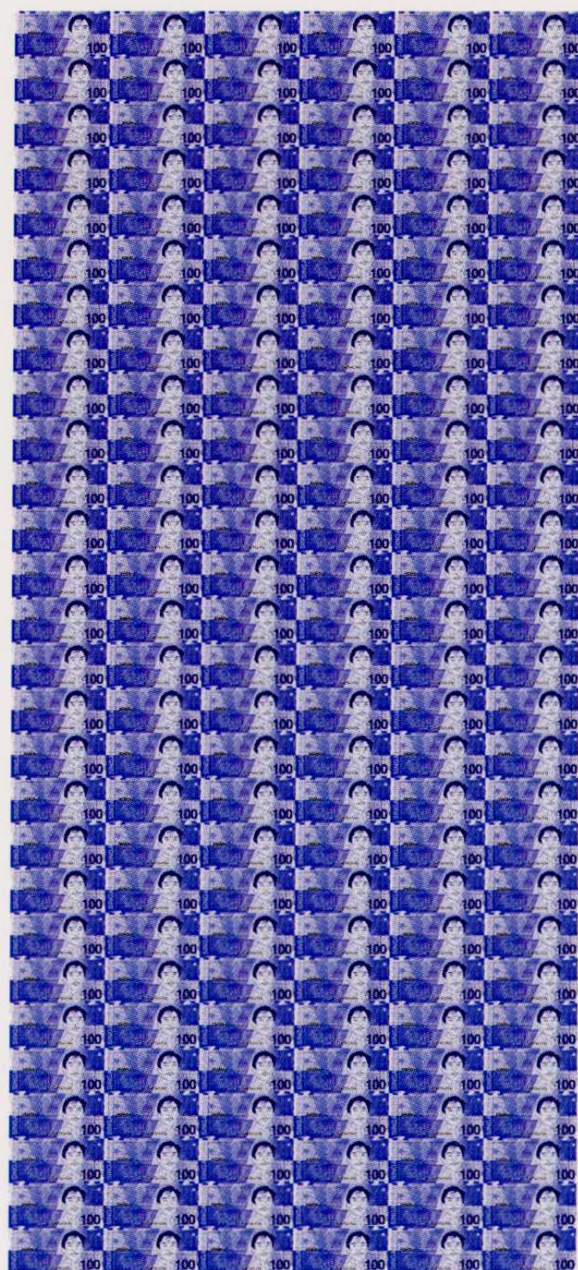
21 cm x 29.7 cm

Edition of 10 + 1AP



[illegible]





## Malayan Exchange (Study of a Note of the Future) – Purple

Front of 168 notes

2011

Digital print on Hahnemuhle paper

200 cm x 100 cm

Edition of 5 + 1AP

Serial No: P01 – P168





## Malayan Exchange (Study of a Note of the Future) – Yellow

Front of 1 note

2011

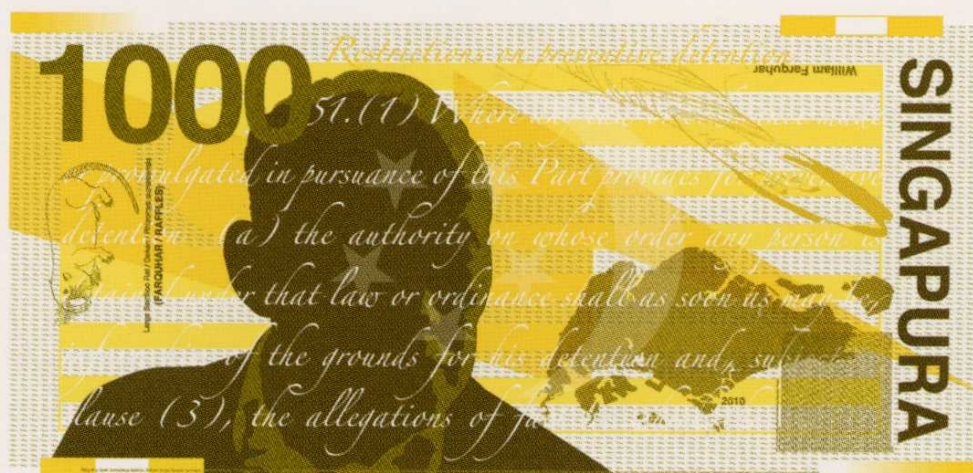
Digital print on Hahnemuhle paper

21 cm x 29.7 cm

Edition of 10 + 1AP

Serial No: Y01





## Malayan Exchange (Study of a Note of the Future) – Yellow

Back of 1 note

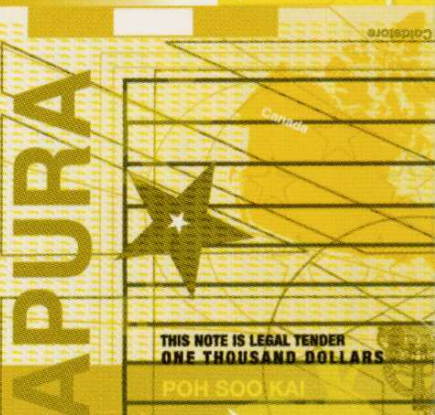
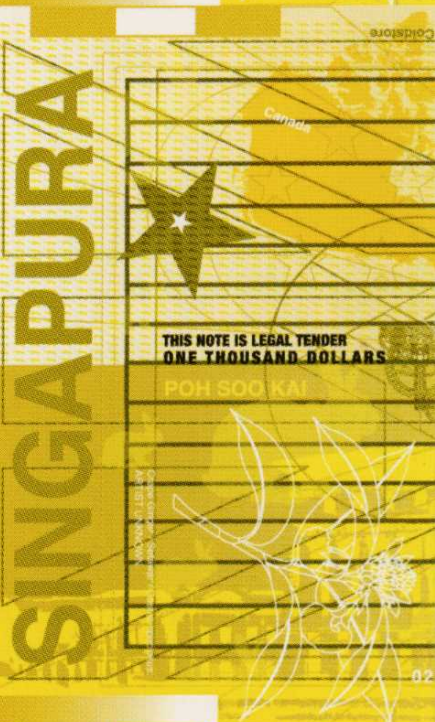
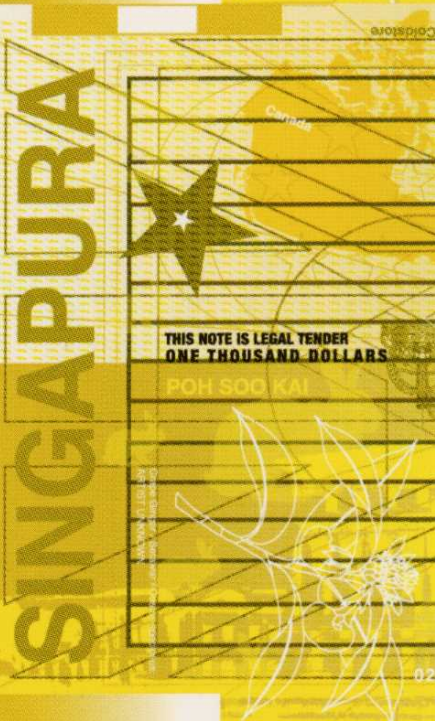
2011

Digital print on Hahnemuhle paper

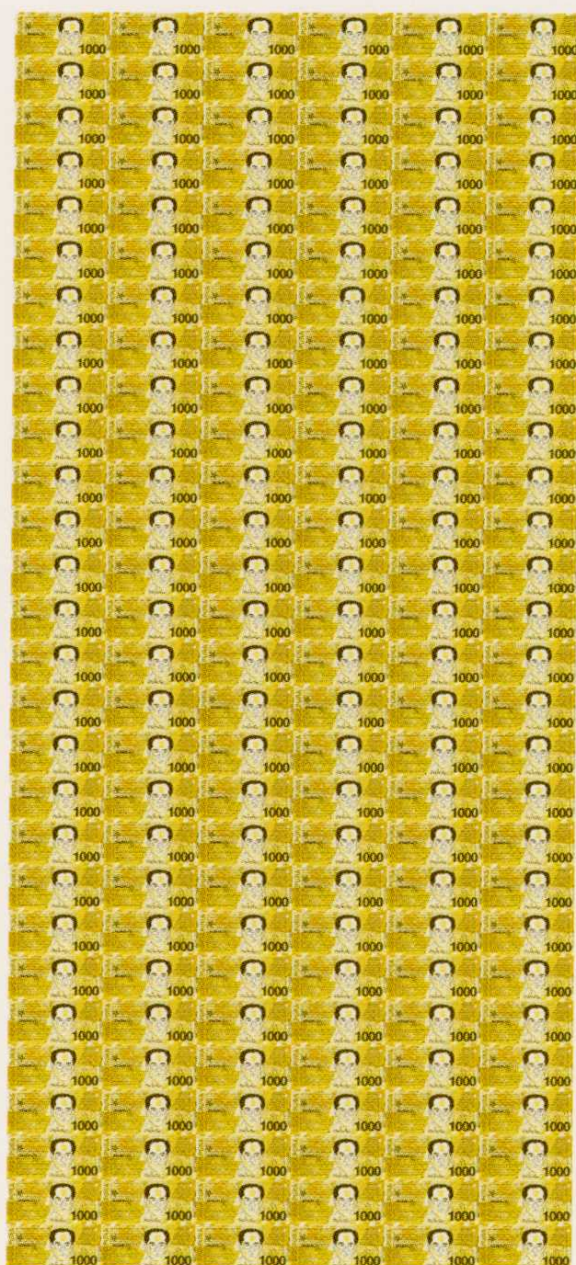
21 cm x 29.7 cm

Edition of 10 + 1AP









## Malayan Exchange (Study of a Note of the Future) – Yellow

Front of 168 notes

2011

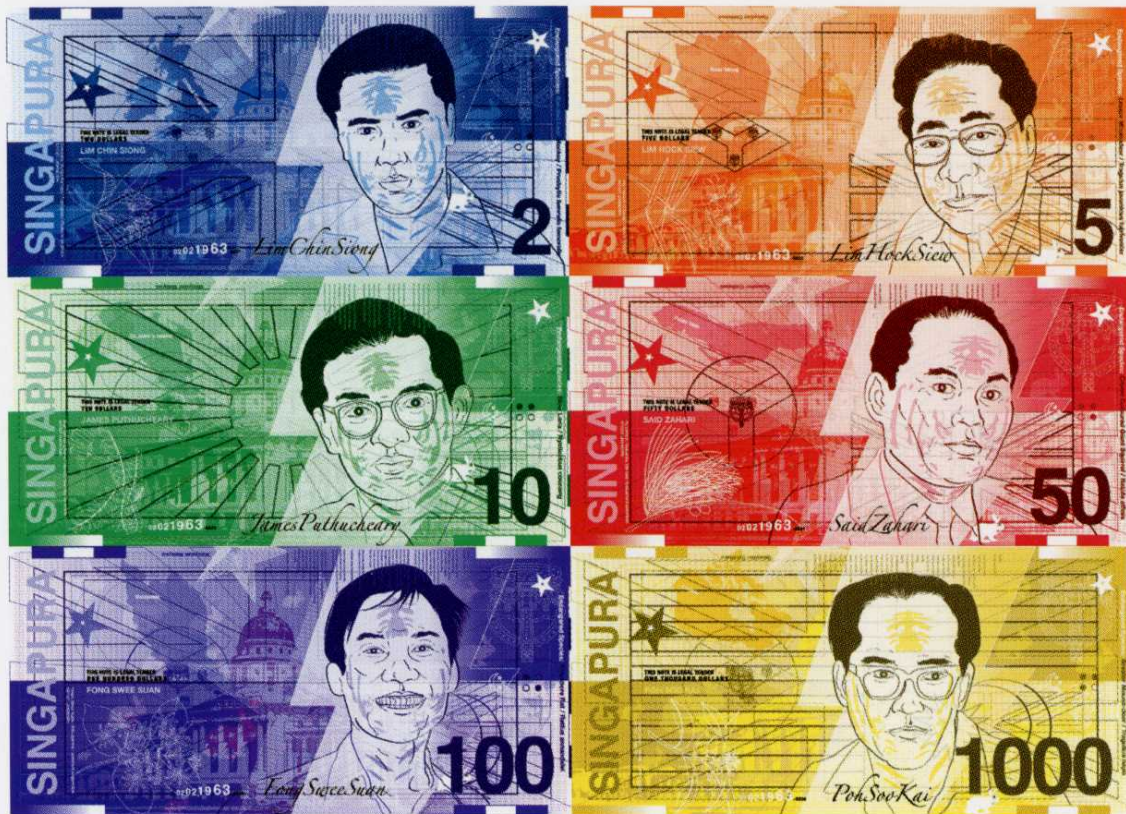
Digital print on Hahnemuhle paper

200 cm x 100 cm

Edition of 5 + 1AP

Serial No: Y01 – Y168





## Malayan Exchange (Study of a Note of the Future) – 6 Colors

Front of 6 notes

2011

Digital print on Hahnemuhle paper

29.7 cm x 42 cm

Edition of 5 + 1AP

Serial No: SE01 - SE06





## Malayan Exchange (Study of a Note of the Future) – 6 Colors

Back of 6 notes

2011

Digital print on Hahnemuhle paper

29.7 cm x 42 cm

Edition of 5 + 1AP





## Malayan Exchange (Study of a Note of the Future) – Brown

Commemorative Edition: 100th Anniversary of Independence

Front of 6 notes

2011

Digital print on Hahnemuhle paper

29.7 cm x 42 cm

Edition of 5 + 1AP

Serial No: CE01 - CE06





## Malayan Exchange (Study of a Note of the Future) – Brown

Commemorative Edition: 100th Anniversary of Independence

Back of 6 notes

2011

Digital print on Hahnemuhle paper

29.7 cm x 42 cm

Edition of 5 + 1AP



## GREEN ZENG

### EDUCATION

1991 - 1994    LaSalle College of the Arts, Singapore

### SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 1999    *Of Erocriticism*, Substation Art Gallery.  
2011    *Malayan Exchange*, The Arts House Gallery.

### GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 1993    *UOB Group 12th Painting Of The Year Exhibition*, LaSalle Cultural Hall.  
1994    *The \$300 Show*, Utopia Art Gallery.  
          *Stars And Moon Show*, Utopia Art Gallery.  
          *Phillip Morris Asean Art Awards Exhibition*, CHIJMES Art Gallery.  
1997    *All Must Go*, Substation Art Gallery.  
1999    *Collaboration*, Plastique Kinetic Worms.  
          *Picture the Mirroring*, Singapore Art Museum.  
          *Jotter Book*, Plastique Kinetic Worms.  
2000    *Post Ulu*, Substation Art Gallery.  
2010    *Making History*, Esplande Jendela Visual Arts Space.  
          *Singapore Survey: Beyond LKY*, Valentine Willie Fine Art.

### ART PERFORMANCES

- 1996    *Remnant 2000*, Substation Dance Studio.  
          *Blue Monkish*, Substation Guinness Theatre.  
          *Blue Monkish*, Tampines Cultural Centre.  
1997    *Strange Malady* (New Criteria 5 ), Substation Stairwell.  
          *Words Passing Through Me*, Substation Guinness Theatre.  
          *Prodigal Songs*, Substation Guinness Theater.  
1998    *Prodigal Songs 2*, S.T. Spot, Japan.  
          *Lobo 20*, S.T. Spot, Japan.



## FILMOGRAPHY

### 1. BLACKBOARD WHITESHOES

- 2004 In Competition, *19th Isfahan International Festival of Film and Video for Children and Young Adults*, Iran.
- 2005 Official Selection, *Asian Film Festival*, Italy.
- 2006 Official Selection, *Cannes Film Festival*, France.  
Official Selection, *Jordan Short Film Festival*, Jordan.
- 2008 Official Selection, *Hisar Kisa Film Festival*, Turkey.

### 2. ISLAND

- 2004 In Competition, *Borges En Curt International Short Film Festival*, Spain.
- 2005 Official Selection, *Bradford Film Festival*, England.
- 2006 Official Selection, *SHORTbl Moviefest*, Russia.  
Official Selection, *Jordan Short Film Festival*, Jordan.

### 3. PASSENGER

- 2006 Received the Incentive Award, *Akira Kurosawa Memorial Short Film Festival*, Japan.
- 2007 Received the Excellence Award, *JVC Tokyo Video Festival*, Japan.  
In Competition, *Inventa un Film*, *Lenola International Short Film Festival*, Italy.
- 2008 In Competition, *Euganea Movie Movement*, International Festival of Short Films and Documentaries, Italy.  
Official Selection, *Vladivostok International Film Festival*, Russia.

### 4. SENTOSA

- 2009 Screening, *22nd Singapore International Film Festival*, Singapore.  
Official Selection, *Jogja-NETPAC Asian Film Festival*, Indonesia.

### 5. BLANK ROUNDS

- 2009 In Competition, *Tehran 14th International Short Film Festival*, Iran.  
Official Selection, *22nd Singapore International Film Festival*, Singapore.  
Official Selection, *5th InDPanda International Short Film*, Hong Kong.
- 2010 In Competition, *Lenola International Short Film Festival*, Italy.

## AWARDS

Encouragement Prize, *Akira Kurosawa Memorial Short Film Festival*, Japan 2006.  
Excellence Award, *JVC Tokyo Video Festival*, Japan, 2007.  
Highly Commended, *UOB 12th Painting Of The Year*, 1993.  
Certificate Of Recognition, *Phillip Morris Asean Art Awards*, 1997.



## A Heartfelt Thank You To

Valentine Willie  
Eva McGovern  
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Steven Yip  
Vincent Tee  
Chua Family  
Staff of VWFA  
June Chua  
All friends and supporters

### PRESENTED BY



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[www.vwfa.net](http://www.vwfa.net)

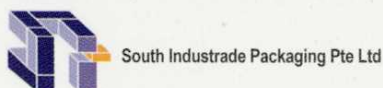
#### EXHIBITION DATES

1 to 13 March 2011  
7.00 pm - 10.00 pm

#### EXHIBITION VENUE

The Arts House  
1 Old Parliament Lane  
Singapore 179429

### SUPPORTED BY



### CATALOGUE DESIGN

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Malaysian Malaysia

United Kingdom

02 02 1963

Lim Cha

On the second day of February  
under ragged thru frightened streets  
lightning blighted all flames  
once again freedom was enchained  
hopes manacled, dreams outlawed  
how much agony can the heart endure  
Baptists, are merits truly earned by sufferings  
Christ, can torture truly transform from ruin and  
Was it man or god who devised painting sermons

we watched the liberated dove  
spanned the opened skies  
garlands and fireworks exploded  
celebrating peace, only liberty