

踽踽獨語 GAN CHIN LEE
S O L / L O Q U Y

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For decades now, the Malaysian socio-political condition has been a rich source of artistic inspiration. Fuelled by the paradox of multiculturalism artists continue to celebrate and criticise what is undoubtedly the country's biggest strength and weakness. Although Malaysia is promoted as 'truly Asia', filled with diverse cultures and peoples, the inability of government to transcend destructive racially divisive political policies results in a never-ending state of tense oscillation between progress and regression. Malaysian artist Gan Chin Lee continues to be inspired by these issues through a classically inspired type of portraiture and genre painting that adds to an ongoing artistic conversation about Malaysian identity. For *Soliloquy*, his first solo at Valentine Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur, Gan employs a common device from theatre and literature to collect his thoughts. A soliloquy is a lengthy speech or monologue by a main character to discuss their feelings, dilemmas, and motives for their actions. Shakespeare is filled with many of these famous speeches such as Hamlet's 'To be or not to be'. However, rather than a verbal or textual proclamation, Gan instead presents a visual sequence of angst, longing, and frustration on the Malaysian condition. Negotiated by the artist's own personal experiences as a Chinese Malaysian, his portraits and genre paintings reveal the feelings of the rakyat through the uniquely local setting of the mamak stall as well as other scenes from Malaysian daily life. These highly emotional portraits of the artist himself, the people he has observed as well as his friends and family present a subtle combination of anxiety and optimism on the future of the country.

Silent Conversations

By Eva McGovern

Mob, *Kedai Kopi Sungai Jarom* and *Silent Majority* are developments from his previous exhibition *Fragment Defragmentation* that once again looks at Malaysians in the mamak stall. A fond destination in our cultural landscape, the mamak is a site to discuss, lament and laugh at the state of the country. Through its inconspicuous familiarity it has become a 24 hour comfort zone for Malaysians to enjoy food as well as debate their frustrations amongst the safety of friends. Gan keenly observes these sentiments through numerous moments of sketching, discussion and interaction of unknown protagonists as well as the artist's friends, colleagues and students across Kuala Lumpur, Klang and Petaling Jaya. With relatively little social outlets for teenagers, the mamak is one of the few places to go for entertainment. However, rather than choosing moments of lighthearted amusement, Gan presents glimpses of boredom and stagnancy. His figures in *Mob* seem wistful and confused as they waste time before going home. The nine youths in *Silent Majority* depict a powerful solitude of young people lost in unknown thoughts of existential angst or simple moments of listless boredom whilst staring into space.

Further emphasizing this sense of isolation Gan punctuates his painterly realism with exaggerated perspectives and multi-paneled images that create an undulating experience that is at times dreamlike and disorientating. He states that the collaging of multiple scenes is a process of fragmentation and recomposition in order to create an

'incomplete painting'. This reflects the limitations of whilst also attempting to liberate the viewer from this by presenting different perspectives in one work. However, he goes one step further in *Silent Majority* and isolates his figures entirely into single portraits creating a sense of remoteness and seclusion, alluding to their own private monologues. Off-setting his multi-paneled works, these nine portraits create a further feeling of fragmentation as part of the constellation of artworks throughout the exhibition. Such elements reflect moments of segregation and distance between the different races, cultures and religions of the country that unfortunately have the potential to lead to misunderstanding and social division.

Although *Soliloquy* is a personal lament about fragmented moments of isolation in Malaysia, by purposefully including older works from Gan's practice, he inserts important notes of optimism and brightness. *Barber Shop in Little India* presents a sensitive portrait of Indian Malaysians in Penang. Proudly staring back at the viewer, with hints of smiling faces, this group of men and children declare their individuality whilst the Chinese characters on the shop front's glass window insert them within the network of multicultural Malaysian. Skillfully rendering their features, he presents a dynamic and active exchange between subject and viewer. *Lonely Friend* is another classic example of portraiture that can be found throughout the artist's practice. Depicting a young woman sitting in an interior setting, she stares directly at the viewer with the mirrored

cupboard revealing the contents of her room. The textures of her lace blouse and cardigan showcase the artist's strength in realism and the subject's stoic gaze hints at a direct but contemplative nature. This elegant connection and appreciation of the human spirit can also be clearly seen in *Grandma*, a portrait of the artist's grandmother. Peacefully sleeping in her rocking chair the artist lovingly recreates the design and folds of her clothing, and his sensitive use of light and shadow conveys the contented serenity of this important member of his family.

Gan's observations and reflections reach a powerful crescendo in *Crying Soul*. It is here that the concept of the soliloquy comes to fruition most clearly in the exhibition. As a self-portrait it reveals the unsaid thoughts of sadness, anger and loneliness experienced by the artist through swirling brushstrokes and an expressive use of colour. The creases and contortions of his face echo the misery in his eyes, contrasting against a light turquoise background. It is a painful image filled with sorrow and indicative of his continuing frustrations about the Malaysian condition. Stripped of all idealism, this searing portrait presents a lost soul searching for answers. In a personal statement Gan states:

'I went alone to Beijing for my postgraduate course. My life there was a simple three-step formula of eating, thinking and sleeping. Life was lonely but full of thinking; it was taboo to use the same color plate as

other students. So it was all a thinking process. In order to draw skin one had to understand the skeleton, as such things must not be judged from phenomenon but from its essence or nature. My loneliness stimulated my thoughts in order to analyze my life from a bigger prospective. Like many others I cherished the opportunity to study overseas, but I thought to myself why is that so many others are allowed to enjoy government sponsorship while some are not? Is it fair or is it rooted in a jealousy created by different communities in one nation?'

Although highly personal and rooted within the rhetoric of Malaysia, Gan Chin Lee's poetic visions are produced through a keen understanding of dramatic artistic influences from Antonio Lopez Garcia and David Hockney through to European Grand Masters such as Velasquez, Caravaggio, Fra Angelico and Fra Filippo Lippi. Such an informed approach allows Gan the vocabulary to play with motifs from art history and popular café culture scenes whilst developing his own unique approach to technique and subject matter. His commitment to draftsmanship and understanding of perspective and proportion has produced a confident approach to form and composition. However, it is the human element of his work that resonates most clearly with audiences. His portraits or visual conversations about Malaysians create a personal monologue on the status of the country that is filled with dilemma, but, despite these frustrations there still remains faint glimmers of hope as the politics of race and identity continue to unfold across Malaysia.

新光理髮店

Barber Shop in Little India

2003

oil on canvas

86 x 102 cm



孤獨的朋友

A Lonely Friend

2011

oil on linen

152.5 x 45.5 cm



阿嬷 **Grandma**

2003
oil on canvas
83 x 121 cm





雙溪嘉隆咖啡店

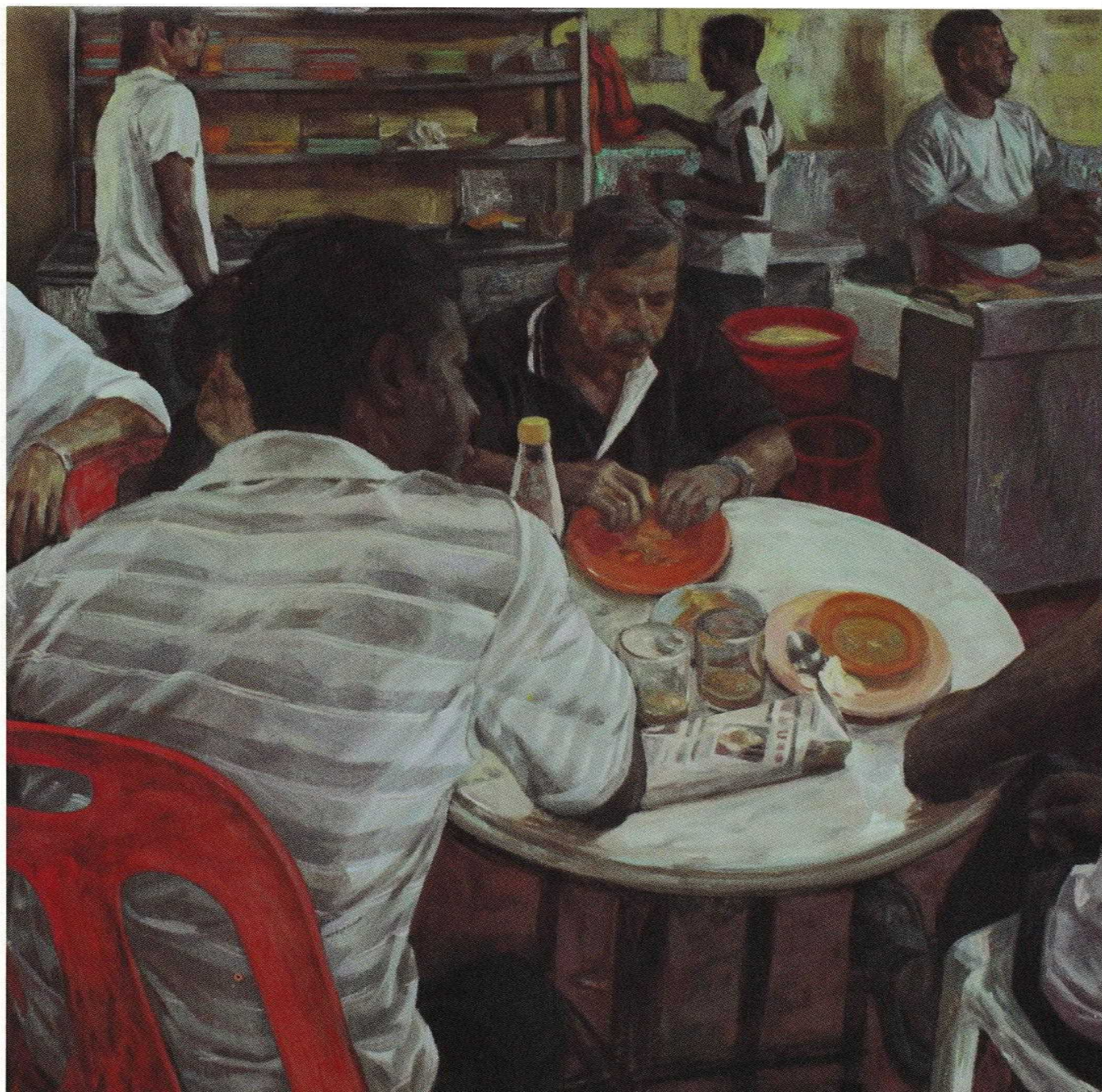
Kedai Kopi Sungai Jarom

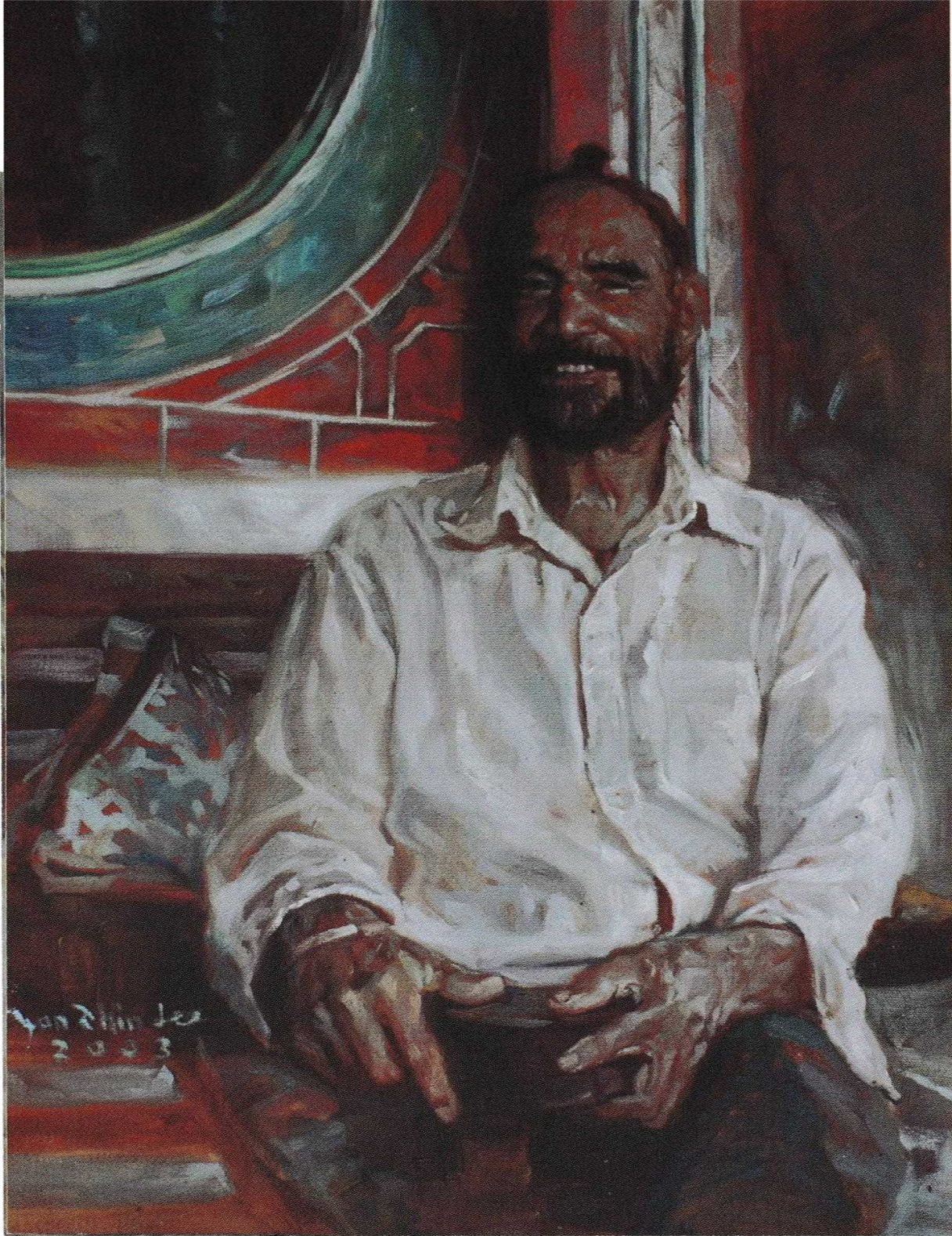
2011

oil on linen

122 x 122 cm each (triptych)

National Visual Arts Gallery Collection





錫克兄

A Sikh Man

2003
oil on canvas
51 x 38.2 cm



印度妹

A Little Indian Girl

2011
acrylic on canvas
45.8 x 35.5 cm

啊，我多懷念那時候的單向性思維啊，
即我只相信新聞和報紙所說的言，

這背後的意思，大抵就是國家的管理者

希望我們如何如何，我們就全無懷疑心無二致地那樣那
樣，並堅定認為那樣會帶來更多明媚的陽光，儘管，
終年夏天的熱帶國家的從來不缺這個，尤其太陽從來嫉妒思想，
已缺的是，更適合思考的冬天，嗯，相信一切，相信國家，這種狀態
曾經帶給我一絲美好，至少讓我那時候天天都賴十分鐘的床，

更迅速投入一天的工作，不過，它在我批判性思維肇始
以後，消失殆盡，對此我深表遺憾，顯然我讓自己的人生
開始陷入泥沼，我養成了八開外在美，並探問內在面龐
的習慣，但是，我不得不說，這個習慣同時讓我眼界大開，
這個改變，得從我隻身到北京念石容生開始說起，研究生
的生活，一般來說只簡化成三個步驟：吃飯、思考、上床

睡覺；一般來說可拆解成：吃飯、思考、上床、睡覺，

但總體來說非常單純，非常自由，也非常孤獨，也非孤獨不可，
要知道跟別人共用一個色盤和精神，是藝術大忌，不過問題是：

當代藝術還需不需要色盤？而當代藝術的精神到底是甚麼東西
無論如何，孤獨地求學倒底是個好東西，盡因它讓我詫異

不跟主流大流走，除了不再能頻密享受呼朋喚友、搖旗內喊
的群體樂趣以外，其它結果並沒那麼糟，天還是一樣的藍，而
大部份國家政府反正一樣糟，而我想說的是，在反思有利於
營養精神，而寂寞有助於吞棗精神的前提下，孤獨不但可以

驅走渴望共鳴的寂寞，還帶來反思與我同床共枕，當然，這
精神當不當代，另當別人去論，我倒是獲講究批判性思維，

從現象看本質，畫人物表皮要一併畫出骨架結構來的等等研究生
課程連環套帶校園圈吞了進去，怕是吞得太急，卻讓我反胃
地吐出了一些東西來，卻不受重視，

而是從前被逼得凶而吞下去的

糊塗奶油蛋糕，

惡心極了，話說回來，在外求學，

孤獨幫我掙控掘內心深處之餘，
也讓我得以從他方視角檢視我方架構，
少了只緣身在此山中感，或圓或方，

一目了然，譬如別國人家都是公費出國念書，而我卻只能
巨掏腰包追逐理想，其中便大有學問，而且這極可能成了

我嫉妒感的源頭之一，惟幸究到底，孤獨雖然蓋這個
個體帶來巨覺體驗，但過於孤獨，則對於那個社會
來說卻可能構成一種「獨善其身」的罪，尤其在多元結構
的社會裡，一個族群不常與另一個族群對話，卻耽於於
跟宇宙對話產生的孤獨，極可能造成更多野蠻，帶來更多
嫉妒吧，特別在有心人總是製造猜疑和白色氛圍的局勢裡，

想起來，倍覺危險，你看，反正宇宙從來不對話，
它只適時表態，所以，在宇宙的下一個表態以前，多真實
跟友族對話，少接收收不負責任的新聞消息，
不顯更為迫切而必要嗎？啊，卻說了，

我多懷念那時候的單向線性思維啊，

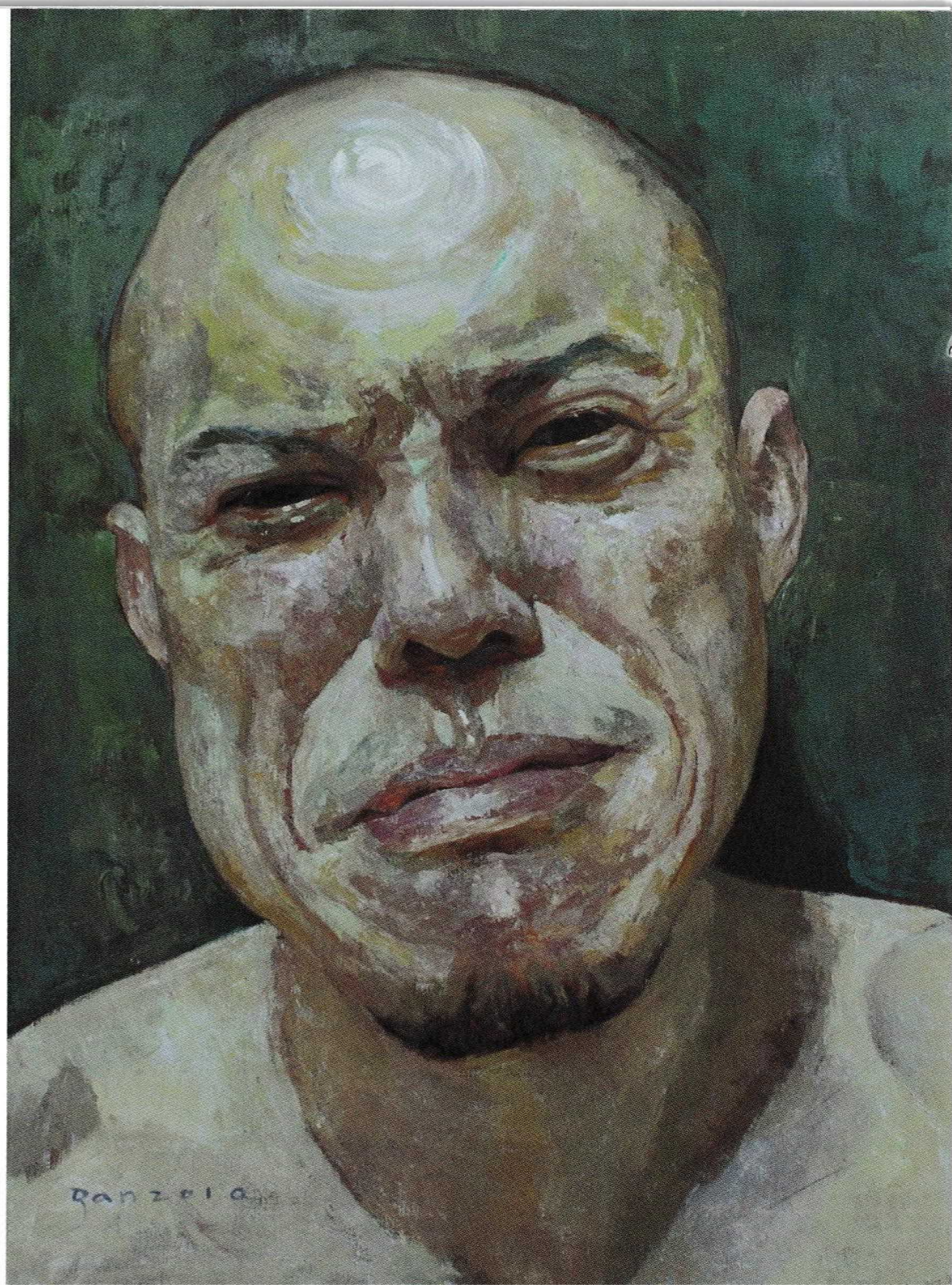
瞧我叨叨咕咕說的這些...

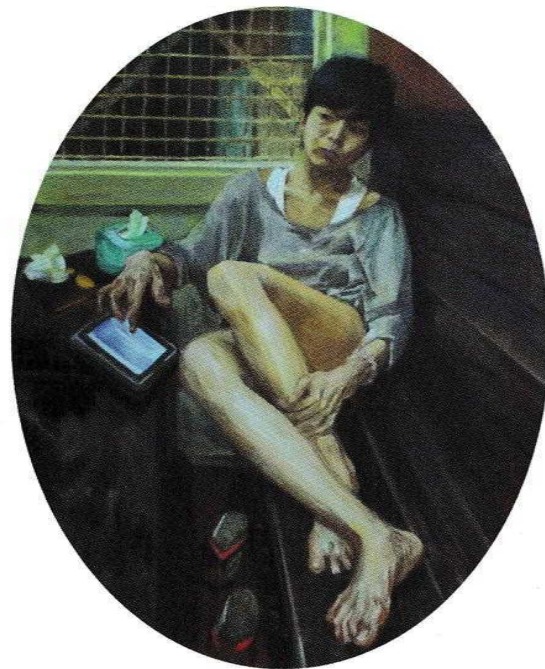
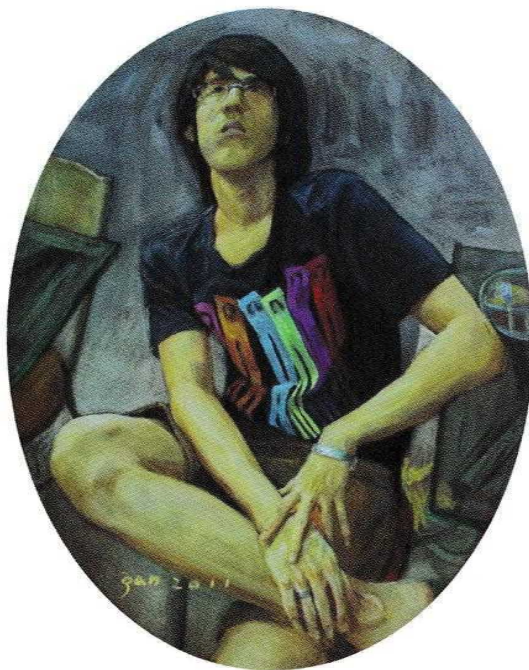
15/10/2011

愛哭鬼

A Crying Soul

2010
oil on linen
144 x 106.5 cm



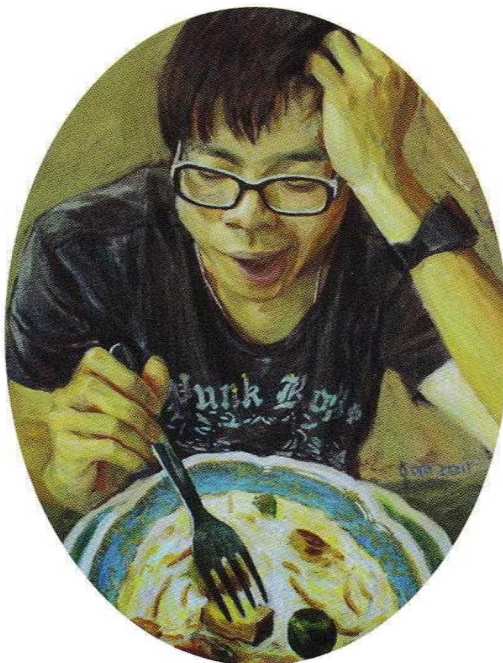


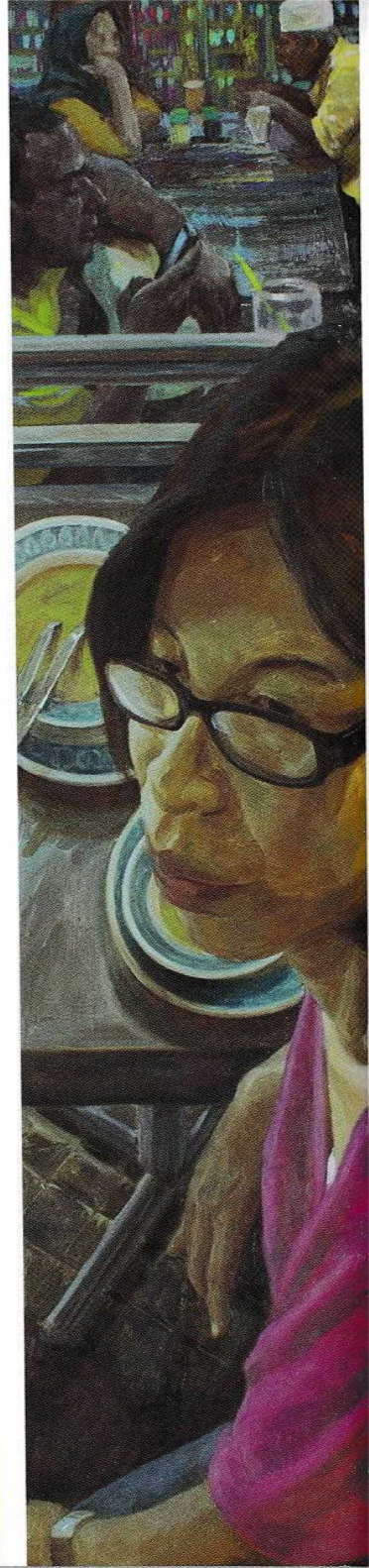
沉默的大多數

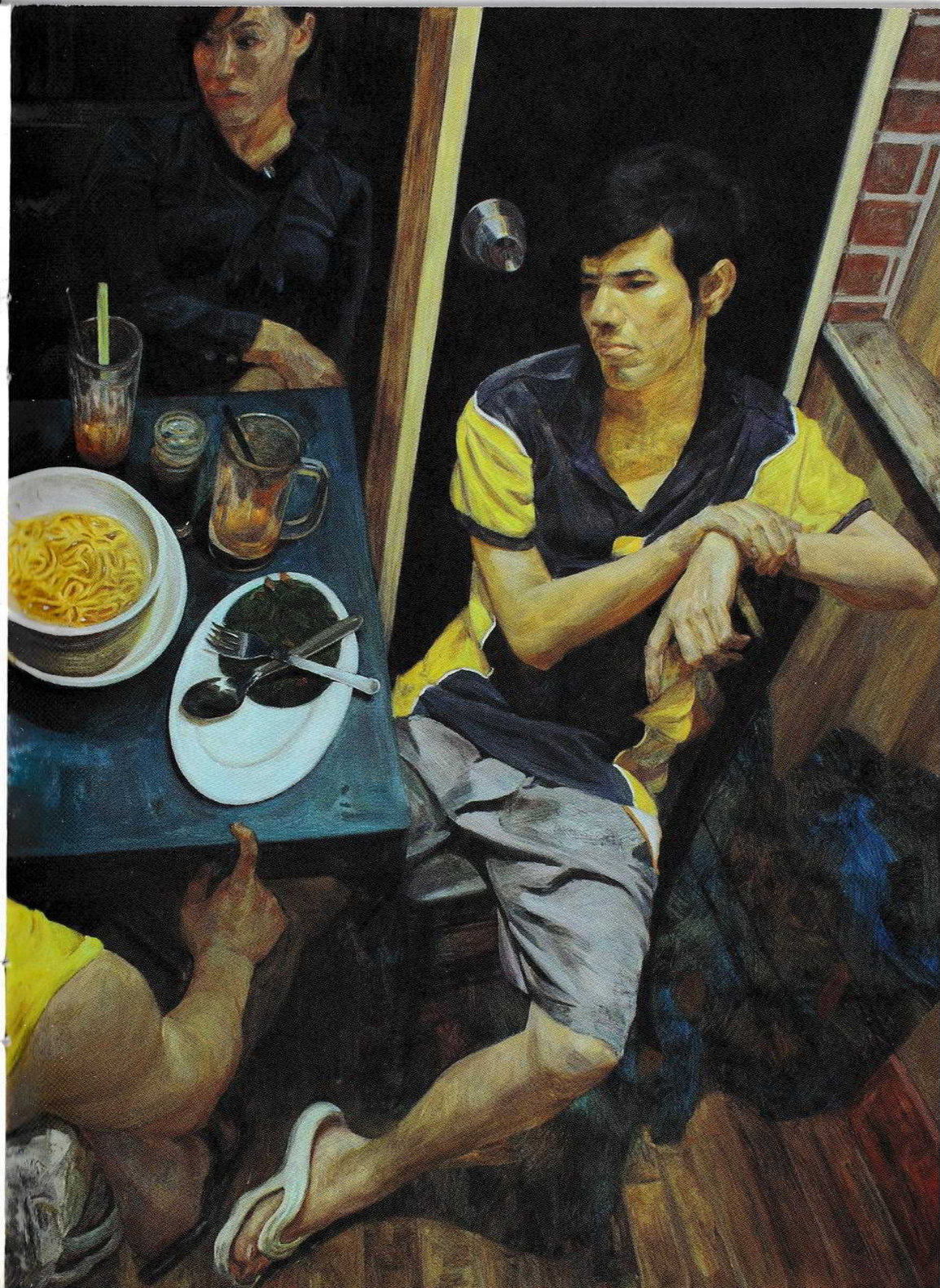
Silent Majority I, II, III, IV, V,
VI, VII, VIII, IX

2011
oil on canvas
51.5 x 42 cm each









暴民

Mob

2011
oil on linen
213 x 152.5 cm
(left and right panel)
213 x 45.5 cm
(middle panel)



首相們

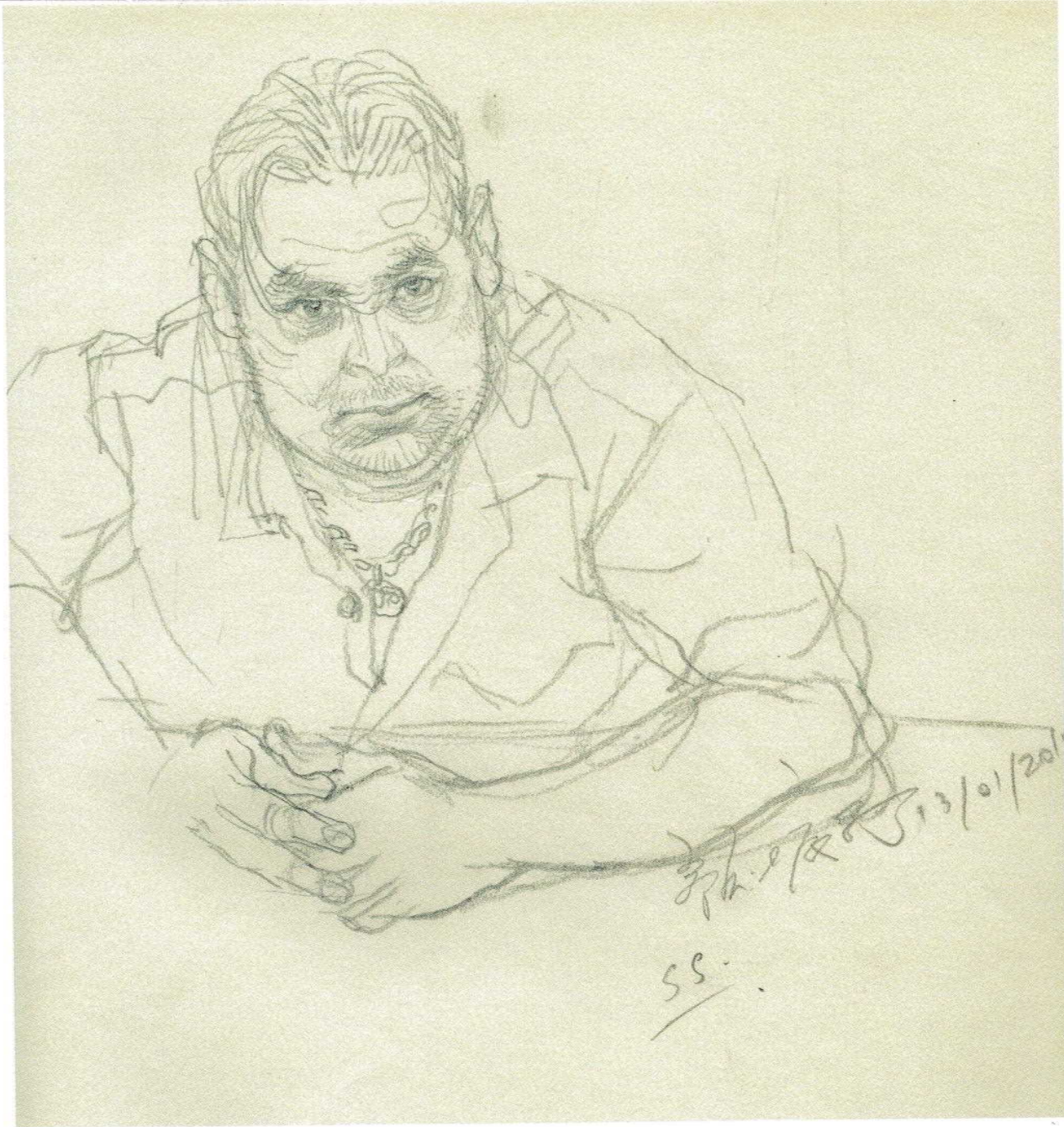
Our Prime Ministers

Oil on canvas

2002

91.5 x 76.3 cm

Drawings



S.S

Portrait of S.S

Pencil on paper
2010
30.8 x 22.4 cm

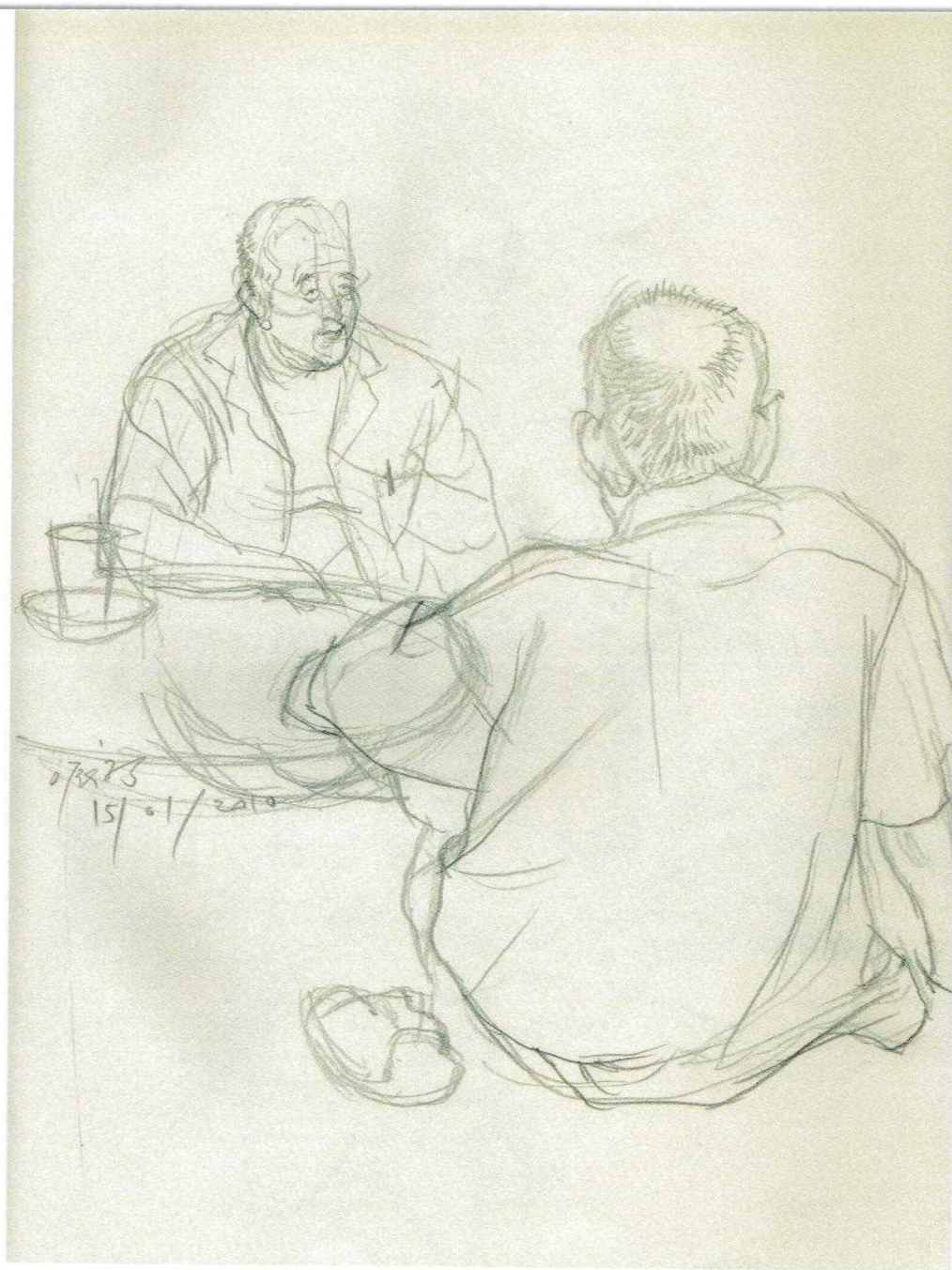
老人在咖啡店

Old men in Kopitiam

Pencil on paper

2010

30.8 x 22.4 cm





3/8/2010
13/01/2010

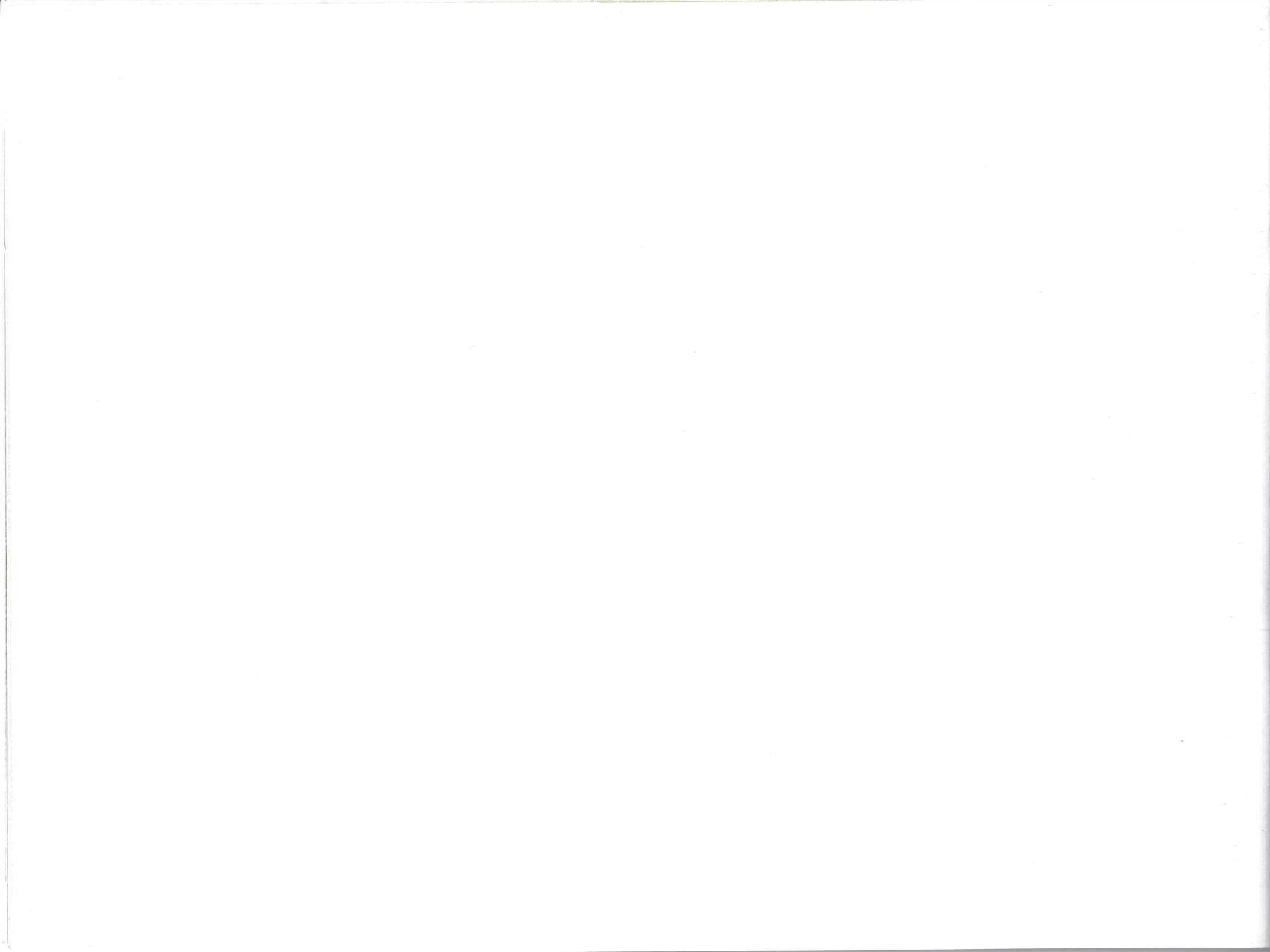
外勞

Portrait of foreign labourer

Pencil on paper

2010

30.8 x 22.4 cm



Gan Chin Lee

B. 1977

Education

2008

Master Degree in Fine Art

Central Academy of Fine Arts,
Beijing, China

2005

Advanced Studies in Mural Painting

Central Academy of Fine Arts,
Beijing, China

1998

Diploma in Illustration

The One Academy of
Communication Design,
Selangor, Malaysia

Selected Group Exhibitions

- 2011 *Proud to be Nude*, MOMA Fine Arts Gallery, Kuala Lumpur
Manifestasi Merdeka, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur
Bapak, MOMA Fine Arts Gallery, Kuala Lumpur
Pulp Friction (Going Across The Grain), Galeri Chandan, Kuala Lumpur
Private Affairs : Figures, Nudes and Secret Desires, Galeri Chandan, Kuala Lumpur
TANAH AYER: Malaysian Stories from the Land, Valentine Willie Fine Art and Selasar Sunaryo Art Space, Bandung, Indonesia
Headlights 2011, Valentine Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur
- 2010 *Face*, Metro Fine Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur
Fragment-Defragmentation, Galeri Chandan, Kuala Lumpur
Tempo, The Gallery @ Starhill, Kuala Lumpur
ARTRIANGLE III: The Grayzone Project, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur
Paperworks : Marks and Trails of Artistic Minds, Galeri Chandan, Kuala Lumpur
The Energy Trap – Painting and Sculpture Exhibition, Valentine Willie Fine Art offsite at The Annexe Gallery, Kuala Lumpur
Fresh Decade – Regroup: 2nd Group Exhibition, The Gallery @ Starhill, Kuala Lumpur
- 2009 *MEA Award 2009 Exhibition*, Soka Gakkai Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur
The 14th Da Dun Fine Arts Exhibition, Tai Chung City, Taiwan
- 2008 *51 Years, The Merdeka Visualogue*, The Gardens, Kuala Lumpur
Graduate Creation Show, Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing
- 2007 *My Story*, Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing
- 2006 *Studio Annual Exhibition*, Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing
- 2003 *PM 22 Years' Contribution Exhibition*, Mines International Exhibition Center Saksi Kebangsaan Malaysia, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur
The One Stroke Exhibition, One Gallery, Petaling Jaya
- 1998 *One Identity, 10th Graduation Art Exhibition*, The One Academy of Communication Design, Selangor

Awards and Honors

- 2010 *Platinum Achiever Award*, The One Academy of Communication Design, Selangor
- 2009 *Winners MEA Award*, Soka Gakkai Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur
- 2008 *Bronze Award, Graduate Creation Award*, Central Academy of Fine Art, Beijing
- 2003 *Finalist, Saksi Kebangsaan Malaysia 2003*, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur

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