

CHONG SIEW YING

96-97

selected works
1996-97

VALENTINE
WILLIE
fine ART



CHONG SIEW YING

selected works
1996-97

cover

Under the Pu Ti Tree II 1997-98

oil on canvas

101 X 110 cm

this page

Sketch (detail) 1997

by laura fan

Siew Ying's 1996 *Nostalgie* series make up her most visually luscious pieces

The *Poem Series*, 1996 incorporates writings by Chinese poet Zhou Mung Dye, poems which ask questions such as "Who hides a mirror in his heart? Who can walk through his entire life with unshod feet?" (This is recorded in her notebooks, as "Qui cache un miroir dans son coeur? / Qui veut marcher toute sa vie pieds nus?")

The product of two years of painting, the spectrum of Chong Siew Ying's work is unapologetically diverse and exploratory, embracing broad themes such as nature, human relationships and the meaning of life. While many artists have tackled these themes, what sets Siew Ying's work apart is her search for answers in the worlds of literature, psychoanalysis, and philosophy. By reaching outside of her personal experience, she taps into a rich vein of ideas and approaches which become manifest in her unique figurative paintings.

Siew Ying's 1996 *Nostalgie* series make up her most visually luscious pieces. Inspired by readings on psychoanalysis, Siew Ying looked inward, reflecting critically on the influence of past experiences. Figures here do not take on specific characteristics, appearing instead to be universal symbols of humanity. The backdrop of the figures are richly textured grounds of sepias, Chinese ink-light greys, and luminous blues, colours which evoke an escape from the present into the past or to an alternate realm.

Her *Les liaisons avec la mer(e)* presents a beautiful but forlorn scene of a monk-life figure suspended in a protective bulb while another shadowy figure appears to either dive or fly down into the water. Isolation also features in the expressive *Crying with Trees*, a work which sees the figure merging into part of Nature itself. The dissolving figure suggests the submission of self to another power greater than oneself, an integral step towards maturity according to Freud.

96-97

1996 also saw the emergence of her *Poem Series* and other related paintings which draw upon her Chinese heritage and enduring interest in literature.

The *Poem Series* incorporates writings by Chinese poet Zhou Mung Dye, poems which ask questions such as "Who hides a mirror in his heart? Who can walk through his entire life with unshod feet?" (This is recorded in Siew Ying's notebooks, as "Qui cache un miroir dans son coeur? / Qui veut marcher toute sa vie pieds nus?"). Written in Chinese using pencil and at times, in ink, the text lies on the rough surface of the work, occasionally broken up by the uneven surface, suggesting that these existential questions float over our consciousness rather than being an insistent dilemma.

The text rests on translucent Chinese rice paper layered on lines and shapes of paint on canvas. Siew Ying's multiple layers create a visual statement on the elusive purpose of existence itself, paralleling the intent of Zhou's poem. Always discernable beneath or cutting through the layers is a silhouette or a photograph of a person, suggesting that it is man who originates and is the focus of this questioning.

Siew Ying's multiple layers create a visual statement on the elusive purpose of existence itself, paralleling the intent of Zhou's poem

A year later, Siew Ying directed her attention to works on paper. Employed as a part-time teacher at the international printmaking centre, L'Atelier 63, she gained access to a wide spectrum of new techniques and materials. These works reflect an experimental openness to the medium. Oil on paper works range from the rough immediacy of *Men Who Look at the Sky* to the soft reflective quality found in *Reflection* and *Seduction*. Both works juxtapose imprints of shapes, from handprints to sliced apples, with a variety of painting techniques. Notably, Siew Ying actually used her hands to paint the figures seen, lending the work to tactile, melting, organic visual effect.

The irregular edges, repeated frames and monochromatic colours in Siew Ying's linoprints *Eclipse I*, *Eclipse II* and *Murmurs*, lend the work a gritty, experimental, Super-8 cinematic quality

These more lyrical and painterly qualities gave way to a harder-edge sensibility seen in her linoprints *Eclipse I*, *Eclipse II*, and *Murmurs*. Their irregular edges, repeated frames and monochromatic colours lend the work a gritty, experimental, Super-8 cinematic quality. Their grid-like pattern implies a mechanical process, even as the frames have been individually laid down and printed. Even the subject matter isn't spelled out for us, the relationship between the figures could be affectionate or threatening, voyeuristic or consensually erotic. The contrasts between film and painting, machine versus hand-made, the explicit versus the implicit provide the series an edge and tension that a more direct work would not have.

Ambiguity in human relations also appear in her *Urban Life Series*. The colourful paintings show people with differing degrees of solidity and transparency, paralleling the ways we selectively see people in cities. The chance encounter, the forced familiarity imposed by crowded rooms become moments observed and captured by Siew Ying in her works.

Ambiguity in human relations also appear in her *Urban Life Series*

Her most recent paintings included in the exhibition, *Under the Pu Ti Tree*, complete the circle where her *Nostalgie* and *Poem Series* began. A grid of bald heads, suggesting a group of monks, are painted on a backdrop of Chinese calligraphy. The words themselves come from the writings of Hsuan Tsang, also known as Tripitaka, the Tang Dynasty Buddhist monk who brought scriptures from India to China. However, it was not the text that Siew Ying wished to replicate but the style in which it was written. Written by calligrapher Dung Chi Zhang, the style is fluid, spontaneous and strong.

Her recent painting, *Under the Pu Ti Tree*, incorporates text written by calligrapher Dung Chi Zhang is fluid, spontaneous and strong

As with other works, Siew Ying layers text, ground, and figure so that they interpenetrate each other. At times, the ground covers the text, at others the text is seen coming through the heads. Siew Ying's paintings reminds us that existence operates on multiple levels, not just the one we think we can control.

While it is the work which we come to see, knowing Siew Ying's background also proves insight into influences which guide a person to become an artist.

Openness to change is something that Siew Ying is no stranger to. Born to farmers from Sekincha, her first experience with art came through school. Through reading Chinese translations of French novels, she nurtured an ambition to study and paint in Paris.

96-97

The risk of relating a story like this, however, is that the myth tends to overwhelm the reality of an artist's life

At first, pragmatism prevailed. She enrolled in a local design school, applying herself to taking up a trade and conducting art lessons on the side. Eventually, she saved up enough to buy an air ticket and left for Paris, against her parents' wishes without knowing a word of French, and any idea how she would provide for herself.

While this is a good story, with its classic Horatio Alger plot of a disadvantaged youth pulling herself up by the bootstraps to succeed in a cold, hard world, I relate this story because the path she has chosen for herself is somewhat unusual for a Malaysian from a

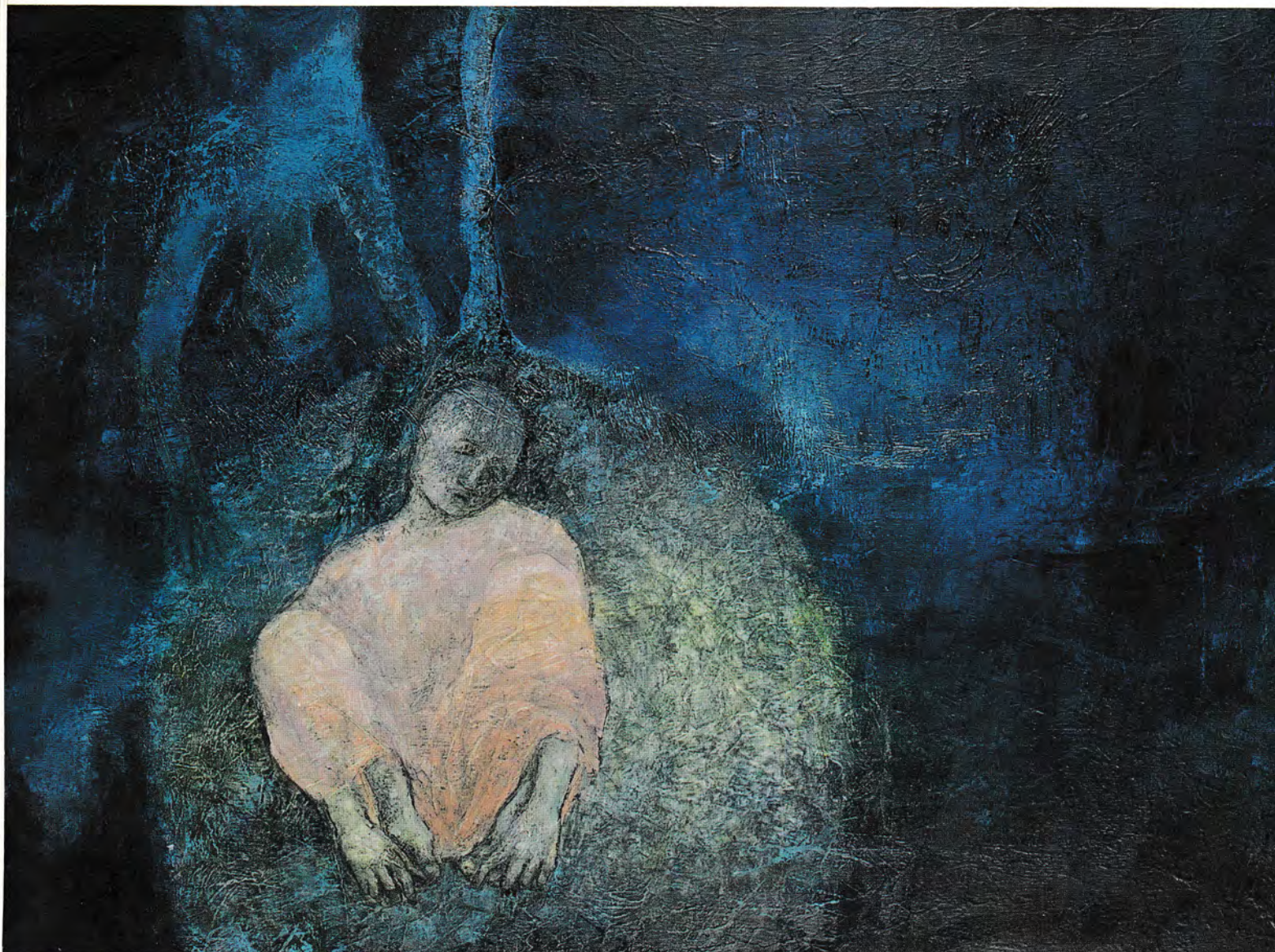
working class family, striking out for a foreign city to take up art without the aid of scholarship and bereft of parental support.

The risk of relating a story like this, however, is that the myth tends to overwhelm the reality of an artist's life. The romantic shape of the myth obscures the specific choices and strategies individual artists employ to survive.

Suffice it to say that while it's an inspiring story, it's not all there is. What matters is that Chong Siew Ying has come home and her work will start to take on the contours of her experiences here and now.

WORKS
1996-97

Les liaisons avec la mer(e)
Encounters with the Sea
(Nostalgie) 1996
oil on canvas
162 X 114 cm





Mirror (Nostalgie) 1996
acrylic and mixed media on canvas
195 X 114 cm

Crying with Trees
(Nostalgie) 1996
acrylic and mixed media
168 X 60 cm



Blossoming I 1996
mixed media on canvas
22 X 33 cm



Autoportrait
(Poem Series) 1996-97
mixed media on canvas
50 X 100 cm

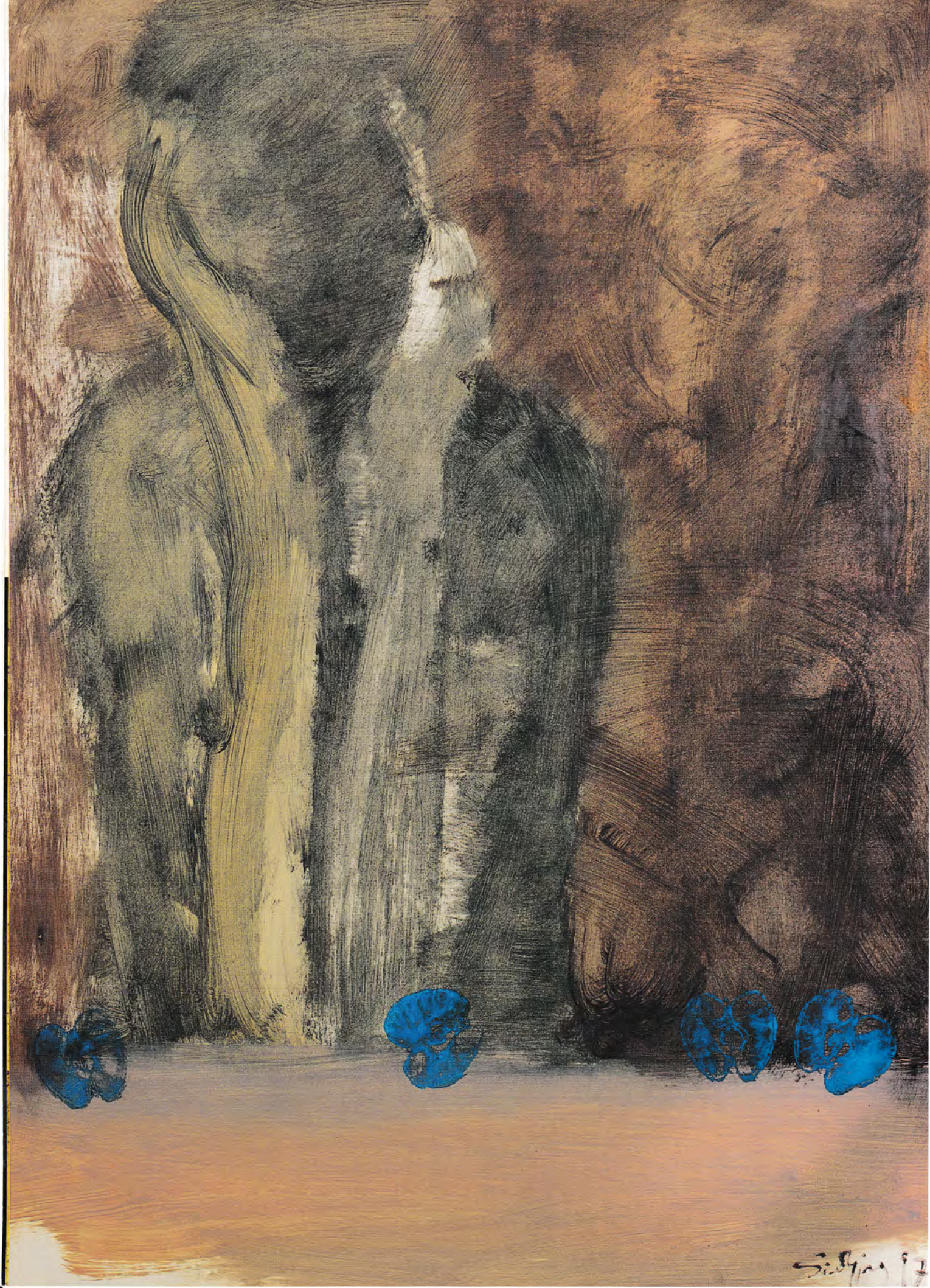


If I am in the Way 1996-97
mixed media on canvas
40 X 40 cm



next page

Reflection 1997
oil on paper
74 X 50 cm



Sidjan 97



previous page

Seduction I 1997

oil on paper

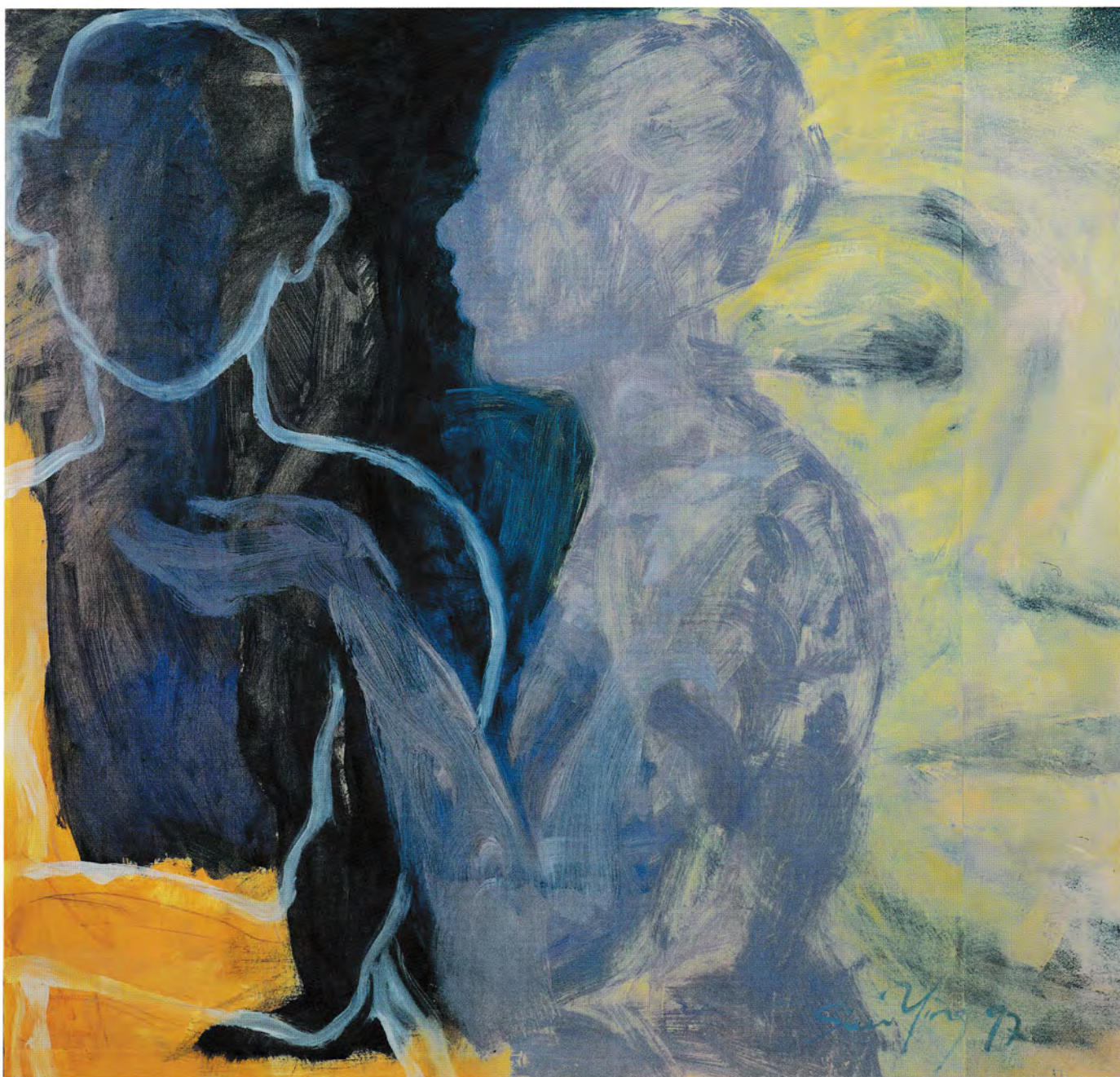
74 X 50 cm

Urban Life Series:

Introduction 1997

oil and paper on canvas

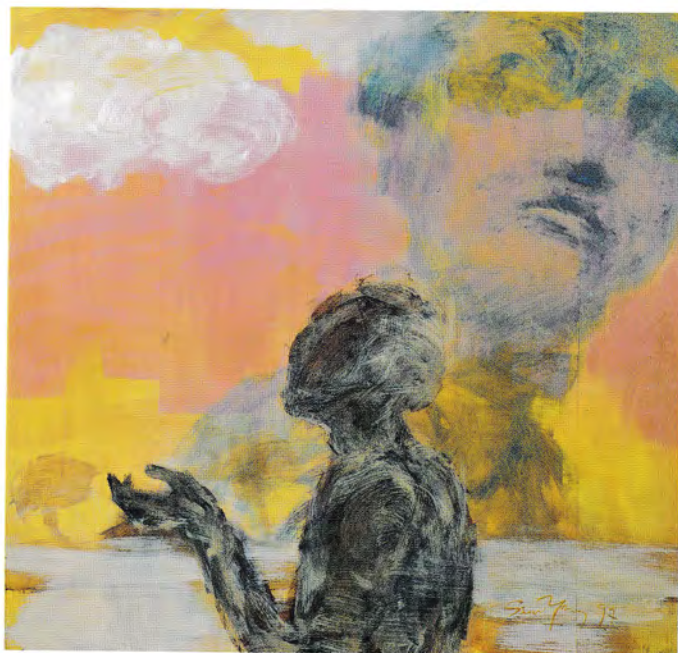
114 X 120 cm



Urban Life Series:
Colleague 1997
oil and paper on canvas
114 X 120 cm



Urban Life Series:
Beyond the Horizon 1997
oil and paper on canvas
114 X 120 cm





Eclipse I 1997
linoprint, oil on paper
148 x 100 cm



Under the Pu Ti Tree I 1997-98
oil on canvas
101 X 110 cm

CHONG SIEW YING
 biodata

Men Who Look at the Sky I 1997
 oil on paper
 148 X 100 cm



date and place of birth	March 26, 1969	Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
education	1998-1990	PJ College of Art & Design Malaysia
	1991-1994	L'Ecole Des Beaux-Arts Versailles, France
	1994-1996	L'Atelier 63 (Etching school) Paris, France
	1996-1997	Part-time teacher at L'Atelier 63 Paris, France
solo exhibitions	1997	Atelier D Maraval Bagnolet, France
	1997	Gallery Cafe Panique Paris, France
	1996	Gallery TCH'A Paris, France
selected group shows	1997	4th Triennale Mondiale D'Estampes Contemporain Chamalières, France
	1997	Euro-Estampe 97, Biennial Prints of Europe Lorient, France
	1997	Gallery K Trythall Hvasser, Norway
	1996	Trace 96, 5th Biennale International Contemporary Prints Paris, France
	1996	Sen'Art 96 Savigny, France
	1995	Mini Print Internacional Cadaques, Spain
	1995	Salon Contemporain Paris, France
	1994	11th Salon De Vernon Museum of Vernon, France
	1993	Biennale De Maastricht Maastricht, Holland
	1993	Galerie De La Geole Versailles, France
	1993	Artiste Dans la Rue by Youth Association of Versailles, Versailles, France

W
ART

75, Jln Terasek Dua
Bangsar Baru
59100 Kuala Lumpur
Malaysia

tel: 603 282 5260
fax: 603 282 5190
email: chia@artsasia.com.my
web: <http://www.artsasia.com.my>

1st Floor, 17 Jln Telawi 3 tel: 603 284 2348
Bangsar Baru
59100 Kuala Lumpur
Malaysia

Southeast Asian Paintings & Works of Art

This exhibition will be opened by
Dato' Dr Ronald McCoy
Co-President, International Physicians
For the Prevention of Nuclear War
on 1st October 1998, and ends on
24th October 1998

Curated by Laura Fan

concept & design Chimera Design

19

