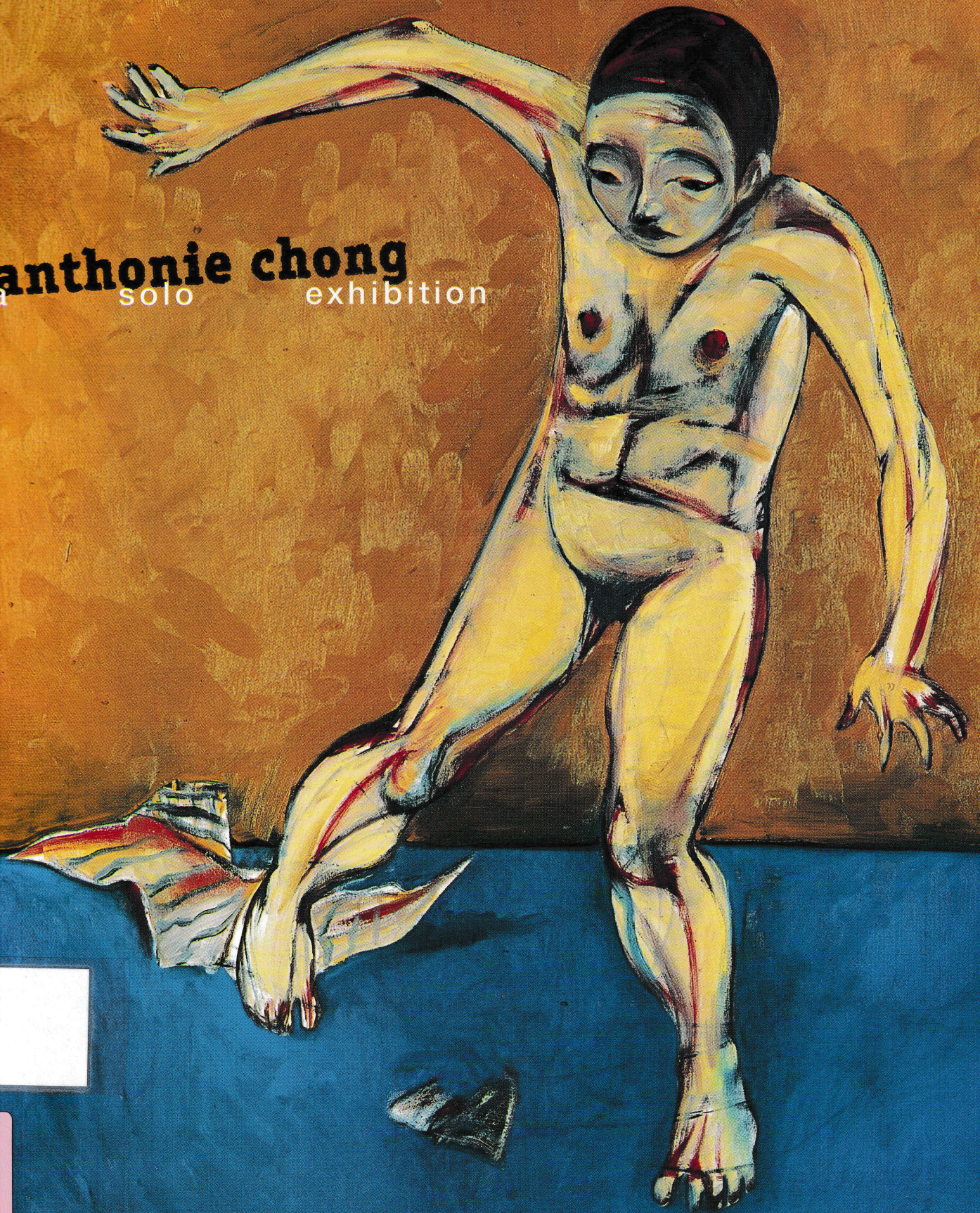


VALENTINE  
WILLIE  
*fine* ART

**anthonie chong**  
a solo exhibition

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**Wong Hoy Cheong:** *This is your first one-person exhibition since you started painting. You will have a body of about 30-40 paintings from the past three to four years. People will look at them and want to know what they are all about. They will want to know what you are trying to express, what the underlying themes in your paintings are. Some of the titles of your paintings give us clues. For example, the "Internal Man" paintings or the "Mime Series". Can you tell us more?*

**Anthonie Chong:** A lot of what I want to express cannot be put into words. They can be felt but not spoken. I guess I am interested in the complex human condition. I am not criticising it. I just want to present the world as it is. Full of violence, insecurity, confusion and gloominess. Man is trapped. We are trapped in boxes and we are reaching out. But what are we reaching for?

*Why such gloominess? Is there no joy?*

Yes, there is beauty and joy. Maybe I should try to express them but I am more interested in showing the darker side of man. I'd like people to know and see that life is not all happy.

*You have chosen to use the human figure to express this darkness, this confusion. Why the human figure, especially the nude?*

Because I am interested in reality, using the figure is the best way. It can say more than abstract art. Abstract art is abstract; it is not reality.

I want to depict the nakedness of man in showing the real thing. The truth. The naked body says more than the clothed body. Some people find this disturbing but to me, it is skin. It is the basic layer, the first layer of clothing over the flesh. This makes the image more revealing and direct.

*So it is not the form of the nude figure but rather the psychological nakedness of the nude figure that interests you. Most of your paintings depict a single, naked figure. Why one figure?*

I guess there is a psychological reason. I live alone and am alone most of the time. This condition is what I feel and understand. I do not relate well to groups. Maybe because I'm young, I don't understand how a group functions.

*However, in your recent paintings, you have started depicting two or three figures, groups of people.*

Yes, I am trying to understand how groups work in painting as well as life. An artist grows with his work: from something simple to something more complex.

*The other obvious shift in your work is the change in palette. Previously, you used to work in grey-blues and grey-browns. In the past six months, you have started using a lighter palette: reds, pinks and yellows. Again, why this shift?*

I have always not been very strong in the use of colour. Previously, I was interested in texture and the opaque rendering of paint. Then I felt the structure was too loose, and I became interested in form and structure. I used to think that colour was sweet. Now, I feel there is nothing wrong with using colours and I'm trying to learn more about it. I want to plan colours more. Artists are usually stronger in one aspect. For example, Picasso was a good draftsman but not a good colourist. Matisse was stronger as a colourist than as a draftsman.



**Sugu Kingham**

1994

Ink on paper

37.2 x 27.4 cm

Artist's collection

*on the cover:*

**Dancer II**

1997

Oil on canvas

126.5 x 96.5 cm





**The Dancer: A Drawing**

1995

Ink on paper

37.2 x 27.4 cm

**Seated Girl**

1997

Ink on paper

59.8 x 42.3 cm



*Are there any other reasons besides a shift in color due to the aesthetic process? For instance, is it due to a shift in how you see the world or are you trying to create different psychological effects with colours?*

Maybe because I was struggling then, I used darker colours. Yes, different colours say different things. But although I use different colours for my recent paintings, the sensibility remains the same.

*What do you mean by "sensibility"?*

It means the concerns of an artist. Like you - your sensibility is based on social commentary. Giacometti's sensibility was based on Man in an existential space. Whether the artist paints or sculpts, whatever medium he chooses, the sensibility will remain the same. It will be seen in the works.

*Are you suggesting that someone's sensibility never changes?*

No, it can change. But when the sensibility changes, the aims also change. For example, in Picasso's Blue and Pink paintings, the sensibility is the same. But when his aim became more intellectual when he did Cubism, his sensibility also changed.

*On the subject of sensibility, I find that your works have an "old" sensibility. The earlier works have this European, post-World War II, existential angst. Like the works of Giacometti, whom you mentioned, and Bacon. The more recent works remind me of some of the Nanyang paintings from the 40's and 50's. Does such a reading of your works bother you?*

No. I actually like some of the Nanyang painters very much. Like Georgette Chen. Also because my work is gloomy, people think it has a Germanic quality. But such comparisons don't trouble me. Restrictions are no good. I think the human experience is universal. Even though the Malaysian experience is unique, it is also universal.

*Another aspect about your work I'd like you to talk about is its voyeuristic quality. There is always the feeling that you, although visually absent, are peering, looking into a scene. And we, as the audience, are seeing something we shouldn't be seeing.*

Yes, because I am an observer, I'm always looking in. I'm not part of a group. I step aside to look in.

*And what do you see?*

I see violence, injustice and cruelty. But I'm too young to judge what is right or wrong. So I just paint the reality. It is a process of discovering, not in a direct way because it's not me. I believe in hidden statements. I'm the marginal person looking at the world.

*Why do you feel marginal?*

I don't think I fit well into the general art market. Also, I often don't like what I see. I tend to reject what people require me to do. In a way, I might be unconsciously marginalising myself from the art world. I feel more comfortable this way.

Every serious artist is always an outsider. You must paint what you believe in. If you get too involved in glamour and money, you might get lost. When Picasso became rich and glamorous, he lost his aim in art. Sometimes you get pulled in but are not conscious of it. We want success. We want to be accepted but at the same time also insist on what we believe in.



**Family**

1997

Ink on paper

42.3 x 59.8 cm

*Because you are more fluent in Chinese and the art scene in Malaysia is still dominated by people who speak English - does this make you feel marginalised? Does it relate to your family background as well?*

Yes, sometimes. Especially when people ask questions about my work. I find it difficult to explain.

I don't come from an intellectual or artistic family. My father is a hawker selling "kuay teow". My mother is a hairdresser. At first, I thought making art was simple but when I moved to KL and started exhibiting and selling, I realised that it is not that simple because it involves money and politics. Often I don't understand the art world. It is so complex and fragile.

*Around 1993-94, your work attracted the attention of some artists and art collectors. There was generally an air of excitement among these people for having "discovered" a young artist. How do you feel about this?*

I don't know what they said about me to other people. In a sense, I was happy. But it lasted only a short while. I feel they have contributed to my development as an artist. I believe in the artist-dealer-critic system. This is especially important for artists like me who are marginalised and trained locally because it is difficult for us to find access to the art world.

**Bad News: A Drawing**

1997

Ink on paper

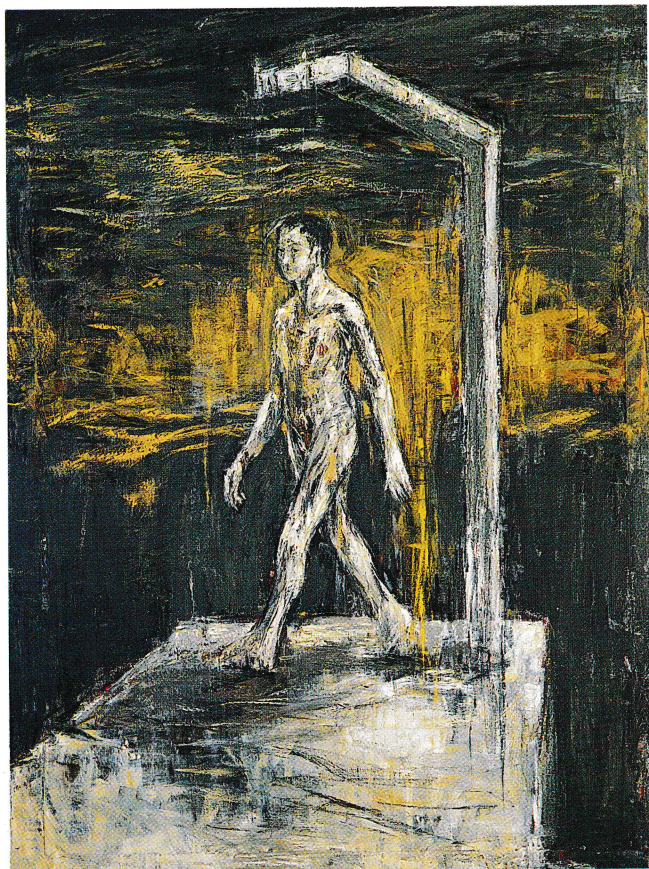
42.3 x 59.8 cm

*So it is important to make a living from art?*

Yes. I need money to eat. I need to live.







*from left to right:*

**The Park**

1995

Oil on canvas

122 x 92cm

Singapore Art Museum



**The Company**

1996

Oil on canvas

121 x 90 cm

Private Collection

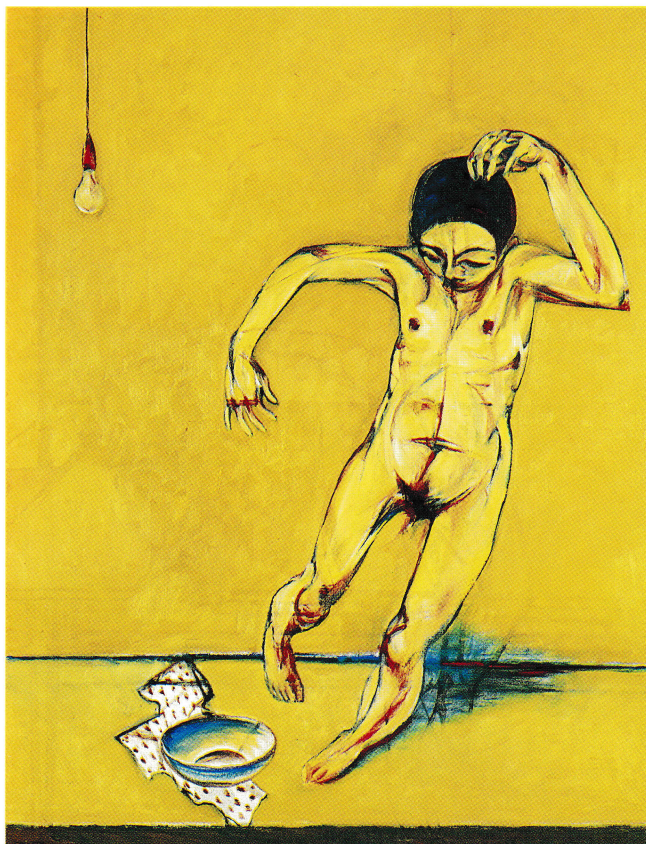
**Dancer I**

1997

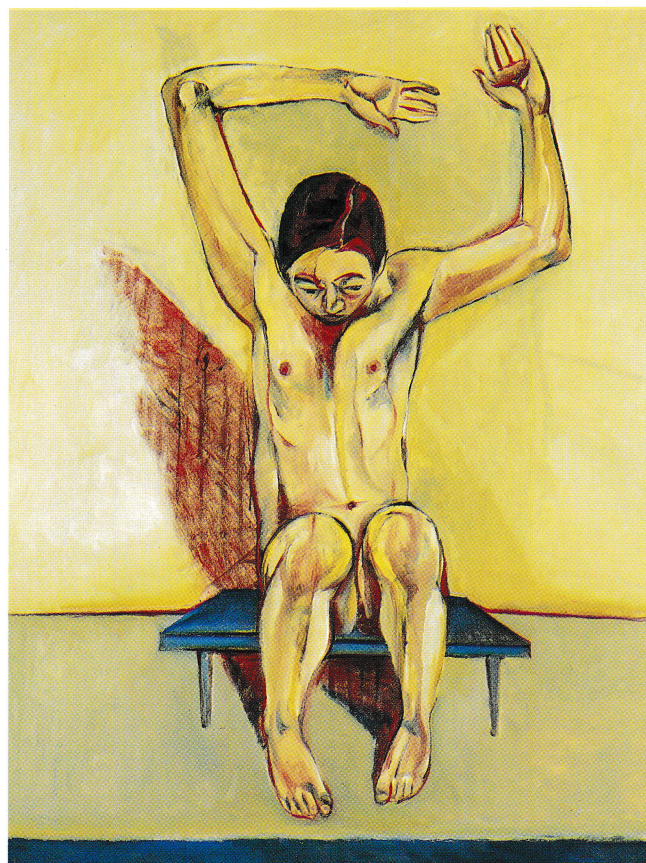
Oil on canvas

126.5 x 96.5 cm





**Seated Dancer**  
1997  
Oil on canvas  
126.5 x 96.5 cm







*from left to right:*



**Siblings II**

1997

Oil on canvas

126.5 x 96.5 cm

**Siblings I**

1997

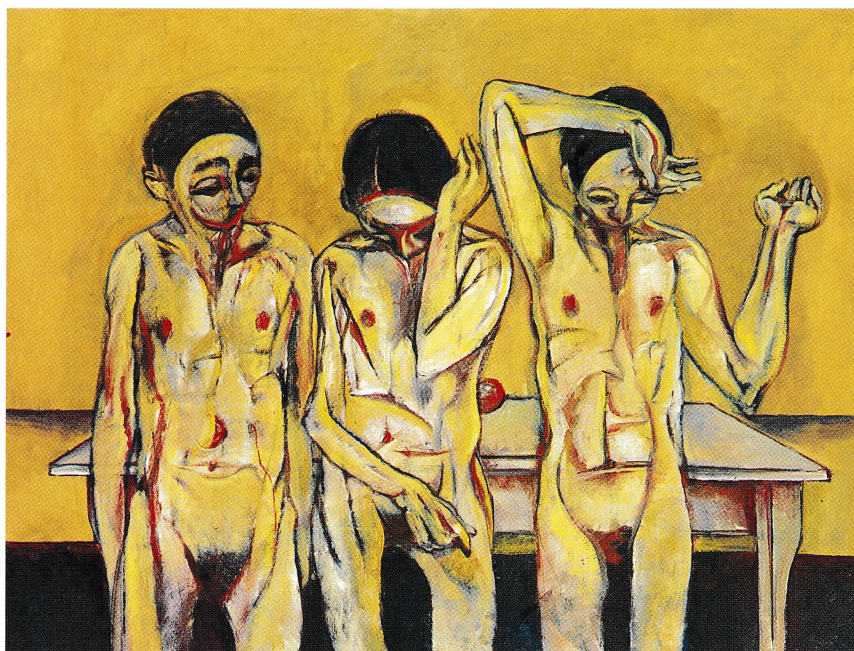
Oil on canvas

126.5 x 96.5 cm





**Trinity**  
 1997  
 Oil on canvas  
 126.5 x 96.5 cm



**Trinity Unclothed**  
 1997  
 Oil on canvas  
 96.5 x 126.5 cm



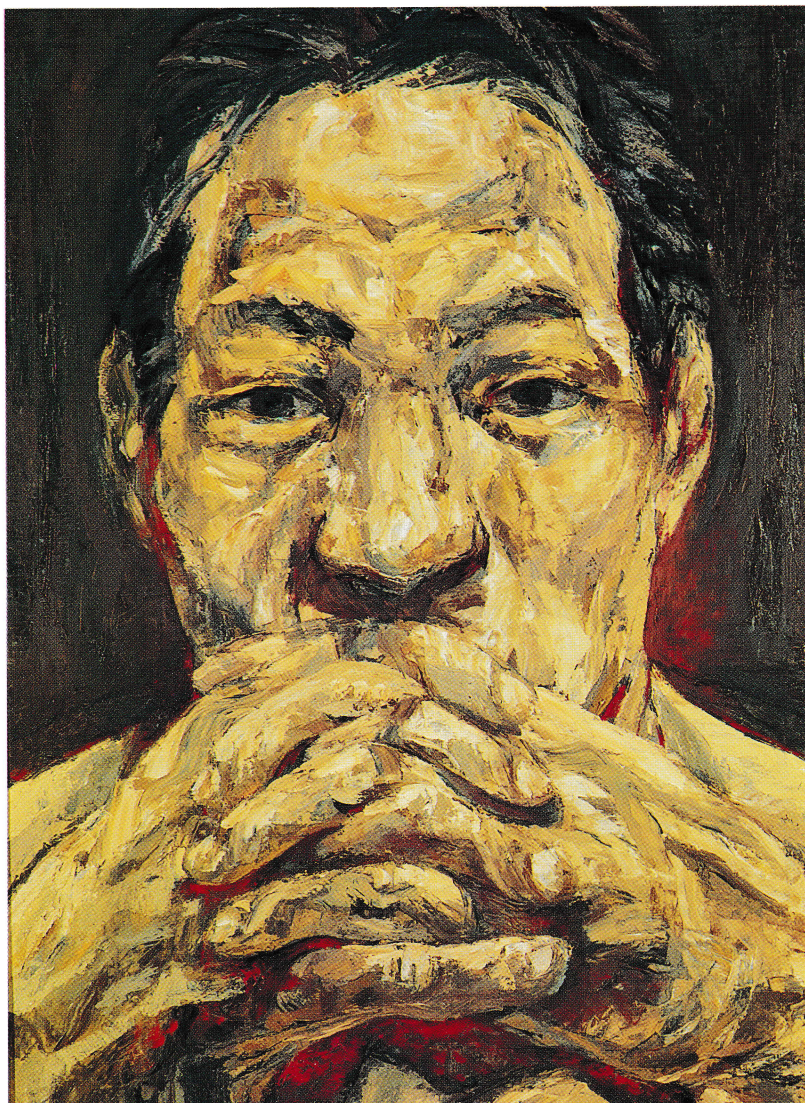
**Self Portrait**

1997

Oil on canvas

121 x 90 cm

Artist's collection

**Anthonie Chong****Born**

Chong Kah Leong, 1971, Perak, Malaysia

**Education**

1991 Graduated from Perak Institute of Art, major in graphic design

**Working Experience**

1991-92 Graphic Designer and Illustrator

1992-95 Lecturer, Art Direction Graphic Design Education, Kuala Lumpur

**Exhibitions**1994 *Young Contemporary Artists*, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur1995 *Paint on Print*, Petronas Gallery, Kuala Lumpur1996 *Modernity and Beyond: Themes in Southeast Asian Art*, inaugural exhibition of Southeast Asian Modern Art, Singapore Art Museum1996 *Imagining the Contemporary Body: Selected Works of Art from the Philippines, Singapore and Malaysia*, Petronas Gallery, Kuala Lumpur1996 *Young Contemporary Artists*, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur









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Malaysia

*Southeast Asian Paintings & Works of Art*

This exhibition will be opened by  
Y.Bhg. Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir  
on 4th July 1997, and will end on 20th July 1997.  
Curated by Valentine Willie.