

WONG HOY CHEONG



OF MIGRANTS & RUBBER TREES

OF MIGRANTS & RUBBER TREES

AN EXHIBITION OF DRAWINGS AND INSTALLATIONS

BY

WONG HOY CHEONG

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

For biography + bio notes, see [http://www.fivearts.com/exhibition/wong-hoy-cheong-of-migrants-rubber-trees](#)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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EDITED BY VALENTINE WILLIE

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Wong Hoy Cheong - Tycoon, 2008 - Melville & McMurtry

Melville - International migration by Arts Melville & McMurtry - Visual Conditions

Liberation Day, 2008 - Melville & McMurtry - Visual Conditions



Designed by Abdul Samad
Graphic Design by Wong Hoy Cheong
Five Arts Centre

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FINE ART

The views expressed in the exhibition are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the publishers.

EXHIBITION DATES

12-28 August 1996

VENUE

The Creative Centre
National Art Gallery
Malaysia

PUBLISHER

Five Arts Centre & Valentine Willie Fine Art
Five Arts Centre
4 Lorong Setiajasa 1
Medan Damansara
50490 Kuala Lumpur
Malaysia
e-mail: annuar@pc.jaring.my

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National Library of Malaysia cataloguing-in-publication data

Wong, Hoy Cheong

Of Migrants & Rubber Trees: an exhibition of drawings and installations,
Wong Hoy Cheong/[contributing writers Ray Langenbach, ... (et al.)]; Edited by Valentine Willie.

ISBN 983-99143-0-8

1. Wong, Hoy Cheong – Exhibitions. 2. Artists – Malaysia. 3. Art, Malaysia.
4. Malaysia – Emigration and Immigration. 5. Arts, Modern. 6. Malaysia – Social Conditions.
 - i. Langenbach, Ray. ii. Willie, Valentine. iii. Title. 758.93048595

Designed by Abdul Raof Ahmad, Lim Boon Hooi • Printed by MBf Printing Industry Sdn Bhd
Colour Separation by Tye Cine Colour Separations Sdn Bhd • Photography by David Lok
The views expressed in the catalogue are not necessarily those of the publishers.

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Artist's Statement

Wong Hoy Cheong

Men make history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of the dead generation weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living.

Karl Marx

I grew up listening to stories. Stories told by my father and mother, grandmothers, aunties and uncles. They were stories of remembrance layered with wonder and pain, conflict and reconciliation, mystery and miracle.

My drawings take these stories, rich with images, as a starting point. I am interested in how the histories of people are made; how the individual 'I' becomes the collective 'I' and the easily forgotten dreams of one person become the dreams of a people. I am interested in the migration of people, their paths, their continuous ebb and flow, from land to land searching for a better life and their eventual indigenisation in a new homeland. I am interested in the rude ironies of British colonialism and the emergence of a modern Malaysia, the clash and convergence of cultures and classes, the hopes and failures of a society.

But most of all, I am moved by the tenacity of the human spirit – the refusal to stand back against sickness, poverty and oppression.

WHERE DO WE COME FROM?

WHAT ARE WE?

WHERE ARE WE GOING?

Wong Hoy Cheong

by Valentine Willie

For ardent fans of Wong Hoy Cheong's early paintings, paintings redolent with tropical colours, peopled by wild, exotic women, and evocative of local legends, his new *Migrants* series seems to be a betrayal of his style. Yet sometimes it is important to betray a style in order to be true to oneself.

This is certainly true for Hoy Cheong. Feeling that his former vibrant colours and dramatic subject matter detracted rather than enhanced understanding of the world he lives in, Hoy Cheong moved in the opposite direction – rejecting colour and using a realistic style. In so doing, he hopes to focus our attention on the story he wants to tell, the story of his own family's migration and assimilation into Malaysian society.

Perhaps one of the reasons behind changing his style lies in his move from the city to the country. While in the city he romanticised the primitive, yet having moved to the country, he abandoned that approach in favour of a stark realism.

In the relationship between location and style, Hoy Cheong echoes the experience of an artist whose style, to his chagrin, his early work was most often compared: Paul Gauguin. Gauguin's move to Tahiti has been credited for being a crucial factor in the development of his exotic painting style. However, for Hoy Cheong, his movement towards the country prompted an opposite reaction, in a move away from the exotic.

In this way, as Karim Raslan puts it in his essay, Hoy Cheong's move from Subang Jaya to Kuala Kubu Bharu parallels his transformation from "Hoy Cheong the urban guerilla" to "Hoy Cheong the country farmer."

Ironically, in turning away from Gauguin's style, he brings the viewer closer to themes which Gauguin himself explored. *Where Do We Come From? What are We? Where are We Going?* The title of Gauguin's last painting aptly symbolises the angst and existential questioning prevalent in the times his work circulated, 19th-century France, while it underwent modernisation.

Malaysia is undergoing a similar social revolution. Questions of identity colour all aspects of cultural life, from the language used to the kinds of paintings deemed either noteworthy or popular.

Hoy Cheong's work is one approach to this complex issue. Using his family background as the basis of the *Migrants* series, he uses a realistic style to speak of identity issues common to all Malaysians.

The *Migrants* series, which he started in early 1994 and completed in June 1996, is made up of four 6' x 5' charcoal drawings and one drawing measuring 6' x 15'. An additional series entitled *New Migrants* consists of 10 charcoal portraits of recent migrants.

The first four drawings from the *Migrants* series trace a personal trajectory of settlers and arrivals

Valentine Willie
practised law for more than 15 years in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah. In the last three years, he has curated exhibitions for the National Art Gallery and Galeri Petronas in Kuala Lumpur and the Sabah Art Gallery in Kota Kinabalu. Currently he heads Valentine Willie Fine Art.

Artists' Studio in the Clouds of Memory

and the assimilation of his family into Malaysia. For the first time in Hoy Cheong's work, he depicts identifiable people and images culled from childhood memories.

Unlike his earlier works where details are sacrificed to colour, these new works are cramped with details. Squares featuring images relating to the central figures are located in almost every corner of each work. As Hoy Cheong, newly computer literate, explains it, these windows sometimes contain icons or show an alternate reality from the main image of each work.

In the first drawing, *Some Dreamt of Malaya, Some Dreamt of Great Britain*, he narrates the tale of his paternal grandparents' arduous journey to Malaya for a better life and juxtaposes their arrival with that of his racehorse-owning maternal grandmother who sent her son away for an English education.

In the second drawing, *She was Married at 14 and Had 14 Children*, an image of Hoy Cheong's paternal grandmother sits above a sprawling mass of bundled babies. This woman symbolises, as Karim Raslan says, "every grandmother, every mother, every migrant: selfless, uncomplaining and productive."

The third drawing, *Marriage of a Rubber Tapper to a Girl Dressed as Virgin Mary in a School Play* relates the tale of the marriage of the artist's parents. Emblems of Hoy Cheong's mother's elite background, such as riding trophies, appear on the left side of the work while on the right are rubber trees and an ominous structure evocative of the Japanese Occupation in which many of

Hoy Cheong's relatives suffered. In the centre of the work stand Hoy Cheong's parents, his mother wearing the costume of the Virgin Mary and his father clad in rubber tapper working clothes. This image speaks of the merging of the classes, the landed and the landless, the sacred and the profane.

The fourth drawing, *Aspirations of the Working Class*, takes an ironic look at the aspirations of colonised settlers whose dreams are no longer of China but of western capitals. Sitting in the centre are mother, father, son and daughter dressed in their Sunday best, posed for a photographic portrait in front of a backdrop of a western city. Colonial postcards of the indigenous natives dot the periphery of the image, reminding us of how colonial nations exoticised Malaysia as a land of freaks and curiosities.

But for a personal tragedy in early 1995, the *Migrants* series would have ended with the first four drawings. Hoy Cheong's mother suffered a debilitating stroke and his sisters and their families flew to her hospital bedside in Penang from the other side of the world, America and Canada. This final and largest drawing in the series, *In Search of Faraway Places*, evokes this flight back to Malaysia and documents the continuing emigration within Hoy Cheong's own family and the recent arrivals of new migrant workers to Malaysia.

In the 10 large charcoal portraits of *New Migrants*, Hoy Cheong challenges us to put aside our prejudices and look at these migrant workers as heroes and heroines much as he/we consider

his rubber tapper grandmother and all our migrant grandparents as heroines and heroes. Each of the 10 portraits are of real migrant workers who wrote their personal data below their own portrait and these works, in Khoo Khay Jin's eloquent words, "allow us to grasp in feeling and thought the complexity of contemporary migration, direct our ire away from the migrant and redirect it to the conditions that make migrants of people."

Whilst Hoy Cheong's *Migrants* series is his most profoundly personal work to date, its real strength and value rest in their recognition of the universal patterns inherent in all migrant societies: sacrifice, hard work, thrift, coexistence, integration, assimilation and loyalty. Khoo Khay Jin in his perceptive essay reminds us of the role of the artist in a land of migrants. He writes that the artist can be

...[a] perpetual migrant of the spirit who, simultaneously at home and always a stranger, turns a torch upon a people's experience and history, lighting up long-forgotten corners, pathways and by-ways, reminding us of things that should never be forgotten, raising questions that many may find discomfiting, challenging us to a different view of ourselves. In so doing, such a perpetual migrant enlarges our experience, prompts us to take stock and challenges us to consider different possibilities than the alleged inevitability of reality.

Wong Hoy Cheong - from Urban Guerilla to Country Farmer

by Karim Raslan

Karim Raslan was born in Petaling Jaya, Selangor in 1963. Educated in both Malaysia and England, he is a graduate in English and Law from St. John's College, Cambridge. He is a lawyer. His first book *Ceritalab* has recently been published by Times Editions, Singapore.

Watching Hoy Cheong's work over the years has taught me a great deal about the way an artist develops and grows. In the case of Hoy Cheong, his steady progress through different media – oil, installation work, charcoal and performance art – has reflected a rare purpose-fulness and dedication that few artists in the region can equal.

That's not to say either that I've enjoyed or approved of his artistic "outings." There are times when I would have wanted him to stop at a particular kind of work, subject or theme, and explore it more thoroughly. However, over the years I have realised the importance, at least to his work and his growing maturity, of exercising all these different opportunities, learning that with every foray he's moved forward.

Of course, I should confess that I didn't like the present series initially. The fact that he moved from his previous series has been a source of silent disappointment on my part. I say this because I've always been extremely impressed by his oils. Large and imposing, the more successful of his oils, such as *Old Tale Retold* 1986, have struck me with their silent luminous quality, evoking as they do, a certain moodiness and emotional intensity.

I have known Hoy Cheong many years. When I first met him he was teaching at MIA. He was heavily involved in the local Klang Valley "agitprop" scene and living in Subang Jaya. He was the archetypal "city" man, politically aware,

conscientious and a touch cynical. Like all Penang-ites he was argumentative and utterly convinced of his island's inherent superiority in all matters whether it was *char kway teow*, durian or architecture. Being an Old Penang Free Boy only accentuated his conviction that KL's mere existence was a conspiracy to defraud Penang of its true global prominence. We soon decided that he was "the man of the people" and that I wasn't. Having settled that we became fast friends.

His urban persona was a surprise to me because his paintings, by way of contrast, seemed to yearn for a pastoral, spacious time that was all reds, purples, magentas and yellows. In these early works, Hoy Cheong painted in oils – bright, vivid colours that made your eyes squint if you looked at them for too long. In retrospect, the bizarre colour palette he employed and the distorted perspectives should have alerted me to Hoy Cheong's subversive intention – unless, of course, *kampung* life really is lived on acid?

Years later and after many lunches, dinners, discussions, disagreements and kopi O's he moved from the city to Kuala Kubu Bharu, an idyllic country town at the foot of Fraser's Hill and an hour's drive from Kuala Lumpur. Before he moved, he told me about the big project he would be embarking on. I know I should have visited him more but our paths took us in different directions and it was a long while before I managed to make my way to Kuala

Kubu Bharu to see how his work was coming along and chat to an old friend.

To my surprise I discovered that my friend lived on the edge of the town and that his house was in fact little more of than a hut alongside a set of large fish ponds. The fish ponds and houses, he explained to me, were constructed as part of an agricultural project that appeared to have been discontinued. There was an air of quiet, gentle neglect about the project and I could see he liked that – that he liked the slowness and peace. Being an American graduate I thought it must have reminded him of Thoreau and New England.

The homeliness of the location was quite at odds with the very dramatic landscape that surrounded the hut. The fish ponds occupied the full extent of the narrow valley floor. There was a small stream that gushed and burbled like all mountain streams and hills, perpendicular and lush that rose out from behind the house, lending a sense of splendour to the isolated spot. And yet the tranquillity of the location and the soft patter of the neighbour's children was the last thing I expected to encounter. Having grown so used to "Hoy Cheong the activist" or "Hoy Cheong the urban guerilla", it was bizarre to be invited to inspect his vegetable garden and then discuss the virtues of different types of *bindi*. A little out of sorts I sat down on the plain unvarnished floorboards and sipped my coffee, confused by the discordant images of my good friend the "country farmer."

The day that I visited him was unseasonably hot and his little wooden house seemed to retain



the heat like an oven. The heat, my friend's new-found interests, and the sparseness of the house only served to make me feel uneasy. When Hoy Cheong unfurled the new drawings my unease only increased. All I could feel was deep disappointment. The works seemed drab, didactic and dull. They were ugly, over-political, tedious. Seeing my hesitation he changed the subject and, like two good friends who have agreed not to test one another too closely, we ignored the drawings.

Having grown familiar with his earlier work I was expecting a flurry of sensual colours, retina-shocking and invigorating. Driving back to Kuala Lumpur, it was the absence of colours in the new works that was to stick in my mind. The large and what appeared at the time to be unfinished works seemed drab and flat – a confusing mish-mash of images plundered from old photographs and postcards. The images were harsh and jarring. Their scale seemed daunting and I resented being overwhelmed by references, historical and political. I thought then the works were in need of a radical "edit." In fact I voiced my opinion, albeit delicately.

Months later and now surrounded by the completed works as I write, I find myself having to reappraise the works. As is so often the case with first impressions, I discovered that I had judged the drawings too hastily and from too

Wong Hoy Cheong
Old Tale Retold

Oil on Canvas
164cm x 274cm
1986

narrow a vantage. Expansiveness is their strength. I now see that the drawings possess a certain comprehensiveness. It is as if the drawings are the equivalent of a vast, all-encompassing novel – a novel that has swept its way through the lives of an entire people. Looking at the drawings now I see that amplitude is central to their purpose.

Hoy Cheong has turned his back on the quiet, empty spaces that marked the most successful of his oils. In this new series, by way of contrast, no space is left undrawn. What about the issue of the absent colours? I now realise too that the works are stronger for being monochrome. Colour emotes, supplanting an intellectual response. I imagine that Hoy Cheong wants to avoid a merely emotional response to the work. He wants to force the viewer to think whilst he looks.

Looking at the drawings one is impressed immediately by the remarkable personal tale that is being told. A grandmother with fourteen children, an incapacitated mother, the continuing diaspora – all of them subjects easily suited to pathos alone. However, Hoy Cheong has expanded the reach of his work because he is also documenting the migration and assimilation of a people. Having scanned all the drawings, I understand that it is from the personal and the particular that the epic and grand is born.

It has taken me a while to put the works in their context. As far as I see it, these drawings are not about one man or one family. These drawings, whilst rooted in the personal history of the artist, are in fact a depiction of a people.

These drawings are a tableau for and of the Nanyang Chinese. The artist's personal family history has acted as a prism for the entire Malaysian Chinese community – some may even argue for all migrants. Hoy Cheong is drawing and reflecting on all states of migration, transition and transformation, as if he has realised some core truth about our nation, that Malaysia is in itself a product of unending migration and that without that migration we will never be able to regenerate.

But, as I said earlier, the epic proportions (the drawings are physically large) spring from tiny family stories and incidents. Each of the figures in each of the drawings bears a relationship with somebody's ancestor. Each of the figures is a symbol or an emblem for someone we know. Whilst they are identifiable figures within Hoy Cheong's family context, for the rest of us their importance is their emblematic role. The stories that we have kept and stories that we have lost are interwoven with one another until the seamless web of personal memory and "grand" history become one. However, the movement from the particular incident and character to the general is not an easy one and it is all credit to Hoy Cheong that he has managed to pull off this feat.

I don't want to belabour the various nuances in the works because I think it is important for each of us to draw our own conclusions and trace our "ancestors" from his tableau. Hoy Cheong's epic belongs to all Malaysians. For me to point out one or two thoughts would supplant the process he is trying to force you, the onlooker, to participate in because he wants you to

recognise and realise your affinities and ties with this epic.

However, I must just comment on what I feel to be the most successful of the drawings, *She was Married at 14 and Had 14 Children*. Part of the success lies in the compositional balance of drawing. Here, the eye is drawn to the central figure of the squatting woman surrounded by her babies, each of them wrapped in swaddling. The image is all the more disturbing because the babies look like worms and yet their faces are adult. I remember thinking to myself, did she have all the children at once? Did she start to work immediately after each delivery? Which one of the babies was deported and which one was Hoy Cheong's father? In short, questions, questions, questions.

Hoy Cheong has taken the story of his paternal grandmother and turned her tale into one that belongs to all Malaysians. The image of a woman in a *samfu* whilst particular to him is more, much more. She is every woman, every mother, every grandmother, every migrant: selfless, uncomplaining and productive. What had at first seemed specific, leaden and unrelenting has become charged with meaning, enriching and universal.

The drawings are a powerful evocation of personal history. The drawings chart, much like a seamen's map, the particular journeys of his family, from his ancestors coming to Malaya to his sisters leaving for North America. It is also a reflection of all migrant experiences in Malaysia. The drawings are a touchstone for so many family stories and like all family stories there

are dead-ends, lacunae and unremembered names that no one can recall and faces that are now obscured by time.

On another level, the drawings trace the evolution of the *sinkeh* and the *nyonya* Straits Chinese, a compendium or an agglomeration of the Southeast Asian Chinese experience. Thus Hoy Cheong's drawings can be seen as a socio-economic document. But they are more than that. The drawings are also a product of the creative imagination and should be looked at in such a way. But as with all great paintings, whatever the artist's intentions it is open to the viewer to choose to see and read whatever he wants.



MIGRANTS SERIES

2. She was born in 19 and had 14 children
Cannal and pottery village in poto
TANAH LAUT
1996

migrant series is based around system to migrate from
country to country
and work
1996



1. **Some Dreamt of Malaya, Some Dreamt of Great Britain**

Charcoal on paper

190cm x 150cm

1994

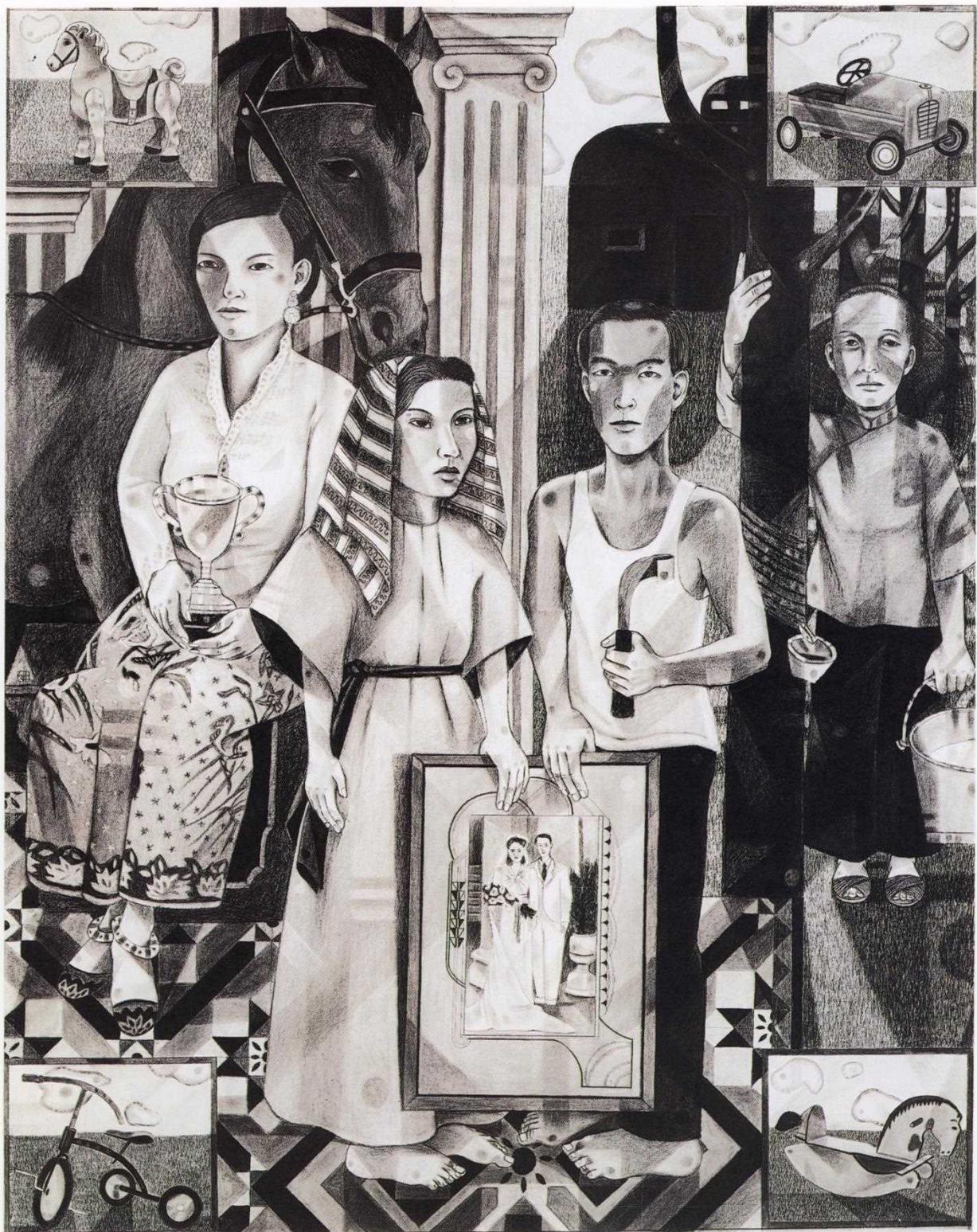


2. She was Married at 14 and Had 14 Children

Charcoal and photocopy collage on paper

190cm x 150cm

1994



3. Marriage of a Rubber Tapper to a Girl Dressed as Virgin Mary in a School Play

Charcoal on paper

190cm x 150cm

1994



4. Aspirations of the Working Class

Charcoal and photocopy collage on paper
190cm x 150cm
1995



5. In Search of Faraway Places

Charcoal, photocopy transfer and collage on paper

200cm x 445cm

1996

The Art of Migration and the Artist as Perpetual Migrant

by Khoo Khay Jin

Born and bred in Penang, except for a relatively brief if critical period in college, Khoo Khay Jin taught at the School of Social Sciences, Universiti Sains Malaysia, for nearly twenty years before taking early retirement in order to migrate to Kuching, Sarawak.

He now does occasional consulting work for a firm in Petaling Jaya, and otherwise occupies himself with historical and anthropological research.

A self-confessed philistine when it comes to visual arts, his finer faculties can only make sense of music.

The line-drawings and faded sepia-tinted photographs are dutifully reproduced at regular intervals – arrival at port, huddled together in transit houses, at work in a mine or an estate, laying down another road or railway.

Most people will glance with wonder and admiration at the courage of those who left home, family and friends to journey to another land to seek a livelihood, and perhaps a fame and fortune that was to elude the majority. Most of these leavers, perpetually destitute, would never return to their homeland, eventually fashioning for themselves a home in the strange land become familiar.

Malaysians of Chinese and Indian origin will recognise this scene. Many will ostensibly identify with it and marvel at the collective and individual distance covered since those days. But many of Malay identity, too, in these (perhaps) less ethnically-charged times, will acknowledge the shared experience of a forebear journeying across the seas as a migrant, becoming domiciled and, in due course, becoming “native” in distinctive ways in a physical and cultural space much altered and enriched by the fact of migration itself.

That we have all become “natives” to a greater or lesser degree – an achievement not to be derided particularly in the complex condition of a plural society – is attested to by our collective reaction to the latter-day migrants labouring in estate and factory, on construction sites and as garbage collectors, by the hostility towards the

settlements they have established in their attempts to fashion a home out of an “alien” physical and cultural space, by our resentments to their presence.

While this reaction results from a complex interplay of near-universal fears of “natives” vis-a-vis immigrants – of loss of job, of depression of wages, of competition, of alleged “crime-prone or immoral aliens” – as well as the more specific politics of a plural society, it is remarkable how resentments are often directed at the immigrants.

Thus, in the process of becoming “natives”, our memory fails us beyond the moment of gazing at the representations of past migrations. We also forget our neighbours, friends and relatives who have become migrants (again) to other lands, and we even forget that many of us are, in this age of increased mobility, migrants within our own country, having journeyed from one state, town or village to another, in search of jobs, and possibly of fame and fortune.

Ironically, this collective historical amnesia is accompanied by a popular, counterfeit history labelled “nostalgia,” as witness the staging of “Thirties Night” or “Colonial night” at one or another “international” hotel in one or another of our “world-class” cities or, on a grander scale, the revival of the “Orient Express.”

Nostalgia, as such, is not to be dismissed derisively, for certain forms of nostalgia serve as a bulwark against the juggernaut of a

homogenising modernity, reminding us of where we have come from, what we have lost or are in danger of losing, and pushes us to ask where we are heading. It guards against that facile modern assumption, all the more insidious for being unconscious, that later is invariably better, newer is surely superior – as in that advertising selling-point, “the latest technology.” But the selective “forgetting” and “remembering” around us today is debilitating, a result of a combination of the powerful hold of the colonial past and the seductiveness of a modernising present on our imagination. So much so that we are constantly caught in the contradiction of simultaneously receiving much pleasure when the former colonial masters rate us highly on some measure which they have constructed, such as competitiveness, and experiencing great bitterness when those same ex-masters rate us poorly on some other measure, such as corruption or human rights.

This perhaps is but to be expected. For the standards of our modernising aspirations, our unexamined notions of modernity itself, are established elsewhere, outside of ourselves – we mainly aspire to a better version. But the imbrication of what we judge negative and positive in modernity is never really examined, as though modernity were a basket of discrete items from which we can select at will, and not some sort of a totality.

Moreover, the continual exhortations to embrace change, to discard those of our old ways deemed incompatible with the modernising impulse, subtly acts to devalue our traditions and cultures, even while there are simultaneous assertions of



*Indonesian immigrants
at Tawau Harbour,
Sabah, 1968*

*Courtesy of New Straits
Times Library*

the necessity to be true to ourselves. What can “to be true to ourselves” mean in such circumstances? The dutiful parading of dress, colour and culture on special occasions but which enactment has little relevance or meaning in everyday life, or the invocation of that all too convenient and malleable term, “Asian values,” as of a mantra that will somehow surround us with an aura of distinctiveness?

But it can be asserted that our aesthetics, too, is caught in this tension as we adopt standards of “beauty” and “desirability” that are rapidly becoming indistinguishable from those of an alleged “metropolitan” culture. Our fashions and fashion designers, our graphic artists and advertising industry increasingly bear testimony to that “metropolitan” style that is its signpost. To the extent that two of our best lines of casual and semi-casual wear bear the labels of “East India Company” and “British India”, names which should recall piracy, conquest, racism, oppression, opium and degradation, rather than sophistication, taste and comfort. Can there be “racism, oppression, injustice and good style”? In truth, our sensibility is thus shaped – from pride in having the tallest building in the world to our own version of the “conquest

The Art of Migration and The Artist and Migrant

of Everest", with its underlying motif of the battle with nature.

In some measure, all such expressions are sadly reflective of a lack of self-confidence in our own estimation of ourselves and our values; more – a historical amnesia that makes us complicit in our own mental and material subjugation.

Chasing after such ends is, ultimately, to chase after chimeras and to court self-abasement and disappointment. This new act of migration – of the spirit, if not of the body – with its promised eldorado of modernity will indeed result in fulfilment for some but continued struggle for most, where instead of becoming "natives" in a new land, will find themselves perpetual migrants pursuing ever-receding goals.

And yet there is another version of the perpetual migrant of the spirit who, simultaneously at home and always a stranger, turns a torch upon a people's experience and history, lighting up long-forgotten corners, pathways and by-ways,

reminding us of things that should never be forgotten, raising questions that many may find discomfiting, challenging us to a different view of ourselves. In so doing, such a perpetual migrant enlarges our experience, prompts us to take stock and challenges us to consider different possibilities than the alleged inevitabilities of reality. Such a perpetual migrant is simultaneously at home with, and yet always a stranger to, that land, people and society which provide him/her a home and a space to work as well as the audience which renders that work meaningful. S/he is a stranger because s/he is always committing transgressions and stretching boundaries and crossing borders.

The artist can be one such migrant, although not all artists do assume such a role, being content to work in a celebratory mode, and those that do cannot be expected to do so relentlessly, without respite. But the artist who would ask questions that need to be asked, pose challenges that would otherwise be skirted, raise issues that many would wish to avoid – such an artist has to be a perpetual migrant, because to work in such a mode requires a constant reappraisal of comfortable and comforting assumptions, a willingness to risk pushing at boundaries to see if they are not indeed self-imposed shackles and fetters. In short, it would require a willingness to transgress what might be called the discourse of polite society.

This is not transgression for the sake of transgression. Such would be infantile, to abuse the very people and land who have provided that space and home which makes transgression a meaningful act. The supreme individualist, not

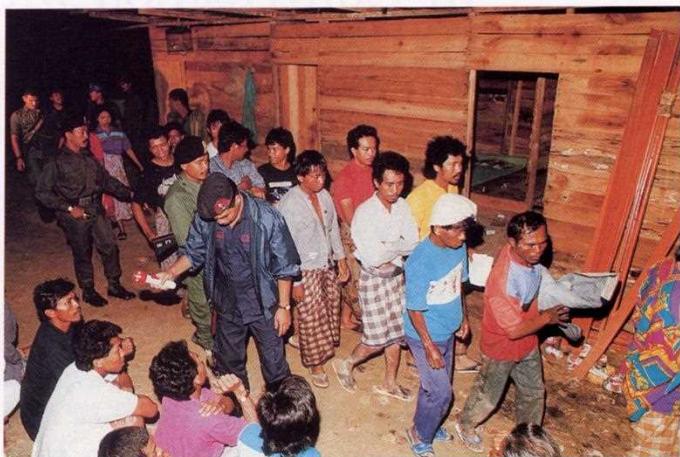
Malaysians protesting against illegal immigrants in Johor Bahru, 1987

Courtesy of New Straits Times Library



cognisant of the social boundaries which define the conditions of communication, can never transgress, but only offend. Rather, it is the socially-aware artist, conscious of his/her relationship with the land, people and society in which s/he is inevitably embedded who can transgress in order to remind, to enlarge and to raise to consciousness that which would be buried in the comforts of daily pursuits.

Thus, beyond words, images can illuminate and urge a reconsideration of comfortable assumptions. And, in an age when migration has exploded it is only right that a Malaysian artist should turn his art to exploring the experience of migration and, in doing so, perhaps revivify memories that can allow us to grasp in feeling and thought the complexity of contemporary migration, direct our ire away from the migrant and redirect it to conditions that make migrants of people.



Illegal immigrants being rounded up, 1988

Courtesy of New Straits Times Library

In Conversation with Wong Hoy Cheong

by Ray Langenbach

Ray Langenbach has lectured in the United States, in Malaysia at Universiti Sains Malaysia and the Malaysian Institute of Art, and currently at the Nanyang Technological University in Singapore. His installations, performances and video documentaries have been exhibited in the United States, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Japan, and the Philippines. He has written art criticism for journals from the United States, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Singapore and Australia.

"I have a different fever ...a nostalgia for the present. Each moment seems remote, even as I live it. I don't want to exchange the present. I accept it, but my bourgeois future is my bourgeois past. For me, ideology was something of a holiday. I thought I was living the revolution. Instead I lived the years before the revolution. Because, for my sort it's always before the revolution."

— Bernardo Bertolucci, *Before the Revolution*.

I met Wong Hoy Cheong on the morning of 7 April 1996 at Padang Merbok for a demonstration against the construction of the Bakun Dam. A group of women from Belaga, Sarawak, joined other people from Semenanjung Malaysia. Their statement to the press read:

"We are not against development but would like to see the kind of development which fulfills our basic needs like having medical clinics, better transportation system, basic facilities and most important of all, the maintenance of our rich cultural traditions and ancestral lands."

These were people who, it seemed to me, were being turned into migrants in their own land.

After a small scuffle, the crowd was maced and dispersed, about forty-five minutes after it convened. We then drove to the National Art Gallery which had recently purchased four out of five of Hoy Cheong's *Migrants* series. My eyes still stung whenever a drop of residual mace perspired into them. Somehow the

interference of a real social crisis in the visual field seemed an appropriate metaphor for Hoy Cheong's work. He has always allowed the residue of social crisis to penetrate the frame.

The following is an edited transcription from video and notes of two conversations. I have reordered the syntax and the sequence of our conversations when necessary, while attempting to stay true to the speakers' intended meaning. But perhaps with mixed results. After seeing the transcript of our first conversation, Hoy Cheong felt that I had ignored the power imbalances inherent in the interview situation, forcing him to answer to my agenda. This resulted, he felt, in the impression on the page of clarity on my part, against his spontaneous, necessarily equivocal responses. The challenge in an interview, he felt, was to balance the power relationships between interviewer and interviewee.

Ray Langenbach

Can you give a short description of the exhibition as you now have it planned?

Wong Hoy Cheong

There are three components in the exhibition: the *Migrants* drawings, the *Rubber Trees* installation, and the portraits of *New Migrants*. The first component, drawing from my family's experience as assimilated migrants, and taking migration from the first wave around the turn of the century to the present day, consists of five big drawings and about twenty studies.

The second component, *Rubber Trees*, is an installation of photographs, texts, botanical and literary references, rubber products and rubber-tapping paraphernalia. This section attempts to link the migration of the rubber plant to Malaysia with the migration of labour, and the issue of indigenisation – of both rubber and migrants.

The third component is made up of charcoal drawings of faces, together with short oral histories of the new working-class migrants, who have come here in the last ten to fifteen years. This is accompanied by texts on the problems and issues of the new migrants (such as the issue of legality), linking them to migration as a universal process which has been going on for thousands of years.

Drawing & Construction of Realities

Drawing has often been referred to in the west as the mother of painting, yet at the same time it has less value on the market, it is less commodified. It is peripheral to the central tradition of art. So is it a conscious choice to pick a tradition that is non-central to the canon of western painting?

Yes. In the Malaysian context too, no one takes drawing seriously. Nobody draws complete drawings. It is a way of bringing the periphery to the centre.

Are you referring in these drawings to the black-and-white photographic tradition of the late 19th century?

Yes. That's why I did them in black and white. They refer to the past, but they also come out of my own fascination with drawing. I like charcoal because of its immediacy. I find paint somehow less immediate.

It has always seemed to me that your paintings, as opposed to your drawings, work very strongly off the complementary colours, and that the precedent for your colour choice is Gauguin and his influence on the German school. So did you decide on black and white in this series in order to get out of that pre-eminently colonial circuit?

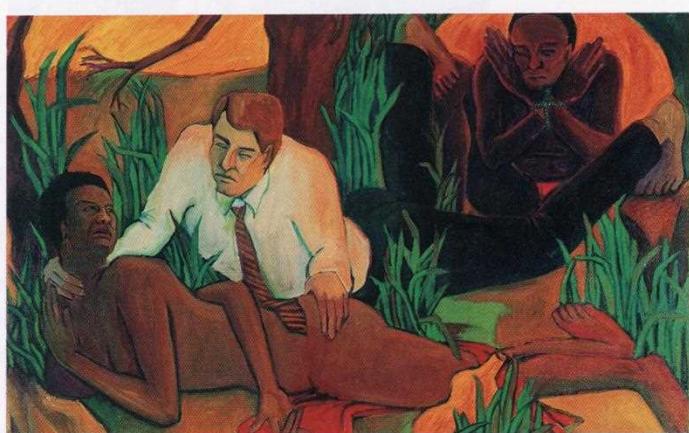
It has always been a struggle to have people compare my work to Gauguin's. On the one hand it is complimentary, on the other hand, he is someone I would not want to be compared to, because my works are not about the white man coming to see the native.

The local school of artists most influenced by Gauguin's painting was the Nanyang

Wong Hoy Cheong
Captive: Rape of the
Natives

Oil on canvas
118cm x 185cm
1984

Collection of Anne James
and R. Sivarasa, Kuala
Lumpur



In Conversation with
Wong Hoy Cheong

School, primarily Chinese artists who even travelled to Bali almost in deference to the Gauguin, but this time to reproduce not the colonial cycle but a voyeuristic...

...orientalist...

...yes, an orientalist cycle. Now that is a very important historical moment in Malaysian art with which you undoubtedly have had to negotiate your relationship. Was that part of your decision to move from colour to black and white?

It was definitely. My exposure to art was based in the west, so I have to constantly negotiate with my western training. I came back with orientalist eyes as well, but I feel that I have

now gotten out of that orientalist voyeurism: the romanticised orientalist vision of my own country that I held in the United States.

To go back to the drawings, by not allowing deep pictorial space or even the 19th-century penchant for photographic tinting, you seem to sponsor a kind of nostalgia for the past, but on the other hand, you never allow the nostalgia to take over completely.

I wanted the drawings to have that sort of nostalgia, but done in such a way that the nostalgia is broken by structuring them with windows – very much like computer dialogue boxes which allow for different realities to be viewed simultaneously. It is going back to nostalgia in order to break it.

Wong Hoy Cheong
Detail of Marriage of a Rubber Tapper to a Girl Dressed as Virgin Mary in a School Play.
(1994)



It seems that *Aspirations of the Working Class* is based purely on photographs while the others are based on memory reconstructions.

Not really. The image of it as a photograph (of the family) does not exist. It is an amalgamation of probably ten photographs. It is entitled *Aspirations of the Working Class* because it is a more general, intellectual projection of the working class. It reflects the aspirations of a class, not just one family.

In photo studios back then and even now, you have these picturesque backgrounds. The irony of the working class is that they want to be seen in this ideal landscape which does not exist for them. They capture for a moment in their lives this beauty and this ideal nature, beautiful hats, beautiful clothes, and then they

go back to their working-class environment, so that the sense of that fragment of time is caught and made permanent for them. The photograph makes permanent a reality which does not really exist.

Is this what your drawing does as well?

The image is a fusion of many little anecdotes and different realities. So in the drawing that particular reality does not exist, but the essence of that reality exists. There is no one reality. Realities are made up of fragments, of things happening together or apart in space and time, but linked together in our memory.

So, in a sense, you are calling up that function of memory that always creates pastiche, taking a moment of this, a moment of that to create a kind of short-hand of meaning.

Which might not be the real meaning...

...or the meaning of that time. Now in the others you are still working from photographs, but you have taken their edges out, with the exception of the wedding portrait in *Marriage of a Rubber Tapper to a Girl Dressed as Virgin Mary in a School Play*.

The wedding portrait is the only direct lift. My grandmother, for example, appears in three works, but all I have is a passport-size photograph of her face. And she's not standing like that. Most of the images are just made up, the figures are all made up.



So, in a sense, you are creating icons of them, somehow concentrating...

...the essence of them.

You've used the word "essence" a number of times. Is it essence or is it representation?

Perhaps essence is the wrong word because essence suggests a singularity. But there are many voices, many realities. But as a visual artist and as well as an audience, although we read these different realities through the images and through the windows that I have represented, we construct our own reality and understanding. This is the essence I mean. We construct our own singularity from the images.

Wong Hoy Cheong
School Girl as Virgin
Mary, study (1994)

When you use the word, essence, are you actually referring to a single ideology that holds your work together? It's the issue of modernity vs post-modernity: do you have a modernist ideology that is really central to your work, and that you really do believe in,

that is, an ideology that really is an “essence” for you?

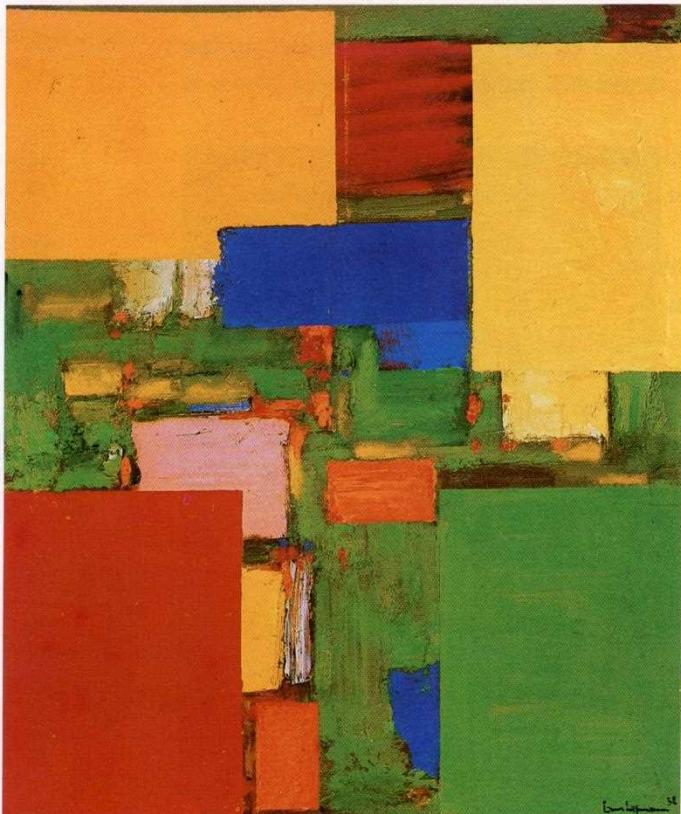
Hans Hofmann

Equipoise

Oil on canvas
150.5cm x 132cm
1958

Weisman Family
Collection/Marcia S.
Weisman

There is a constant tension for me between this sort of universalism that I enjoy with modernism and the plurality of voices of post-modernism; the idea that all the people of the world could unite with a singular voice, and my knowledge that they probably couldn't. There is a constant tension between these two, and I play with the tension. But if you were to strip everything away and ask whether the core of my experience is modernist, probably it is.



Hofmann & Push-Pull

By portraying your mother as the Virgin Mary in *Marriage of a Rubber Tapper to a Girl Dressed as Virgin Mary in a School Play*, you are filtering her through the western painting tradition, with the antecedents you mentioned to me earlier. Persian and Moghul miniatures, Giotto, Piero della Francesca, Georges de la Tour, Ingres, Picasso, Diego Rivera and Hans Hofmann.

I received Hans Hofmann's 1 teachings through my three professors, Paul Georges, Peter Grippo, and John Grillo, who had been his students. They taught me to believe that through Hofmann's intellectual understanding of art, his exploration of Picasso to Matisse, to Ingres back to Giotto, he synthesized the whole tradition of western art into some very essential thing. And I think that sort of essence, which somehow I picked up, has been able to link my work all the way back to Giotto from a western perspective.

In the case of my mother dressed up as the Virgin Mary, I did not construct the image. I actually have a photograph of her dressed up like that for a school play.

According to that ideology, the construction of deep space in the painting (such as in Raphael or Rubens) is a “material betrayal”?

Exactly, you betray the material. You should never try to carve a hole into the two-dimensional surface. Right or wrong, it's a thing that is not easy for me to get rid of.

Was that the first true ideology of art that you encountered and is that the reason it has been so important to you? Was that the ideology that opened up the notion that art carries meaning structurally and is a symbolic language?

I had two influences. One, which was around long before I felt anything for Hofmann, was the need to have a link to reality: between art and politics, the social, the content part of art. The other was Hofmann, who made me see that a Picasso was not very different from an Ingres, or an Ingres from a Japanese woodcut print. Hofmann's theories made me connect with even African or Papua New Guinean sculptures. As long as there are relationships of the verticals to the horizontals, with picture planes and forces pushing and pulling into each other, it will always work. It's a very totalising structure.

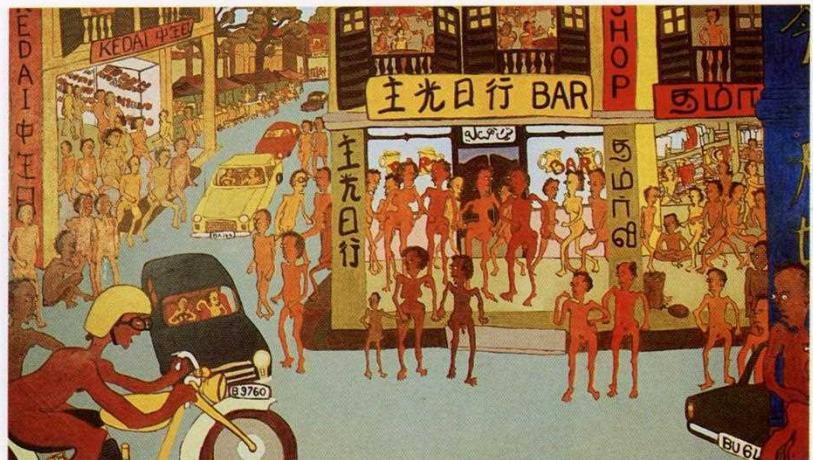
Would you say that such an aesthetic structure carries ideology in and of itself?

Of course it does.

Then what would you say is the ideology conveyed by Hofmannesque structure?

It says that western art history does not have a broken lineage. It is so linear that you can connect a Pollock to a Giotto, and further than that, you can connect a Pollock to African art. So it presumes that this structure is the ideal, the truthful structure in all forms of art.

Is it the structure of civilisation itself?



Yes, and western civilisation is the dominant civilisation.

That must give you some discomfort.

Yeah, it bothers me a lot.

So this totalising description is actually an imperial description?

We've talked about it before: my constant attraction to the great tradition of modernism, universals, total structures, master narratives, and my need to look at the deconstruction of these narratives. So I just allow them to sit within me. While I'm working in a very modernist tradition in terms of formal structures, I try to deconstruct them, for example, by creating the windows and having fragmented realities. So, I accept and deconstruct. I straddle and move between various realities and ideological structures.

Zulkifli Mohd Dahalan
Kedai-kedai (Shops)

Acrylic on canvas
157.5cm x 266cm
1973

National Art Gallery,
Kuala Lumpur

In the Lineage

So where do you place yourself then in the Malaysian tradition?

When I came back to Malaysia I saw a lot of abstract art. My initial response was why do



Frida Kahlo
My Grandparents, My
Parents and I (Family
Tree)

Oil and tempura on
metal panel
30.7cm x 34.5cm.
1936

The Museum of Modern
Art, New York; gift of
Allan Roos, M.D., and B.
Mathew Roos, 1976

abstract art? It is so unrelated to this context, it is so internationalist, not culture-located. I came back at the point where figurative art was coming back so I fit well into the general resurgence of figurative art. I locate myself in terms of subject matter in this country more than anything else.

Figurative...who? Ibrahim Hussein?

Zulkifli Dahalan because of his quirky sense of humour, and Dzulkifli Buyong. And also Latiff Mohidin, who best understands abstract art in this country, especially in terms of the use of space. Also Amron Omar, Tan Chin Kuan, Bayu Utomo, Raja Shahriman.

Are there any other Chinese painters you see your work related to?

No.

It feels like you're un-comfortable a bit when the issue of your placement in the Malaysian artistic lineage comes up.

Yes. Because I don't know where to see myself. I'm constantly straddling issues, places, and beliefs. I'm sort of accepted as part of the centre, but I'm never comfortable in the centre. I'd like

to be on the periphery, but then I'm also in the centre. So I'm uncomfortable because, when you say I'm part of this art lineage, I feel like I've been thrown into the centre which I do not want to be in. But I know I'm in it, at the same time. I can't deny it.

You're tacked into a generational position, is that it?

As well as a historical position.

Shifting to pedagogy for a moment, isn't part of your generational or historical position based on the fact that you have actually initiated a school of painting in Malaysia? You relate your painting to the story-telling of Malaysian and Indonesian literature and histories. This "narrative realism" – it's almost a "magical narrative realism" similar to the magical realist painting and writing from South America – is a tradition that you have passed on to your students at the Malaysian Institute of Art (MIA). Can you still avoid your historical setting, now that there are those who have followed?

I don't want to give myself so much...

I know, but looking from the outside in, it is quite unavoidable. You are middle generation in the scene right now. I see Eng Hwee Chu, who was one of your students, as the paradigm of this next generation that came out of your pedagogy. And, it's a pedagogical line reaching back to Hofmann.

That's right. Strangely enough, just before I left the States, Grillo gave me a birthday present. Two books: one on Frida Kahlo and the other a biography of Hofmann that came out just before I left. And in it Grillo wrote that I should plant the seeds of Hofmann in Malaysia. So I don't know if I'm propagating imperialist, totalising structures. But, actually, there are similarities and intersections between Hofmann's "push-pull" theory and other world-views. Hegel's metaphysical dialectics, Marx's dialectical materialism, and even the Taoist belief in the interactive relationship of yin and yang.

Art in a Socio-Political Dialectic

You taught "Aesthetics" with a strong Third World component at MIA.

The dominant view in Third World aesthetics is that content is very important and, through Augusto Boal for example, aesthetics functions as a tool of pedagogy: for liberation, for revealing the undercurrents of realities. So it wasn't the formal aesthetics of Hofmann. In fact, it was in direct contradiction to Hofmann, meaning that "push-pull" is totally irrelevant if you don't use it to convey something that can reveal or transform society.

In your writings you have discussed Paulo Freire's 2 work, and you studied with him when you were in the United States. I'm interested in how one subject, for example, literacy, can carry with it an understanding of the social structures surrounding it, in a particular society and in the global systems

of imperialism and power. You are concerned with power relationships in Malaysia, in works like *Detention October 1987* (1989), *Internal Security Act* (1988), and *ISA Detention* (1991), and your *Lalang* performance in 1994. In your work, *The Nouveau Rich, the Elephant, The Foreign Maid or The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* (1991), you look at the effects of the great influx of capital into Malaysia. So, is "push-pull" metaphorical of a larger social situation for you? Is it applicable to the analysis of actual social conditions?

Yes, "push-pull" definitely extends beyond aesthetic structures. Look at Malaysian politics, there is so much "push-pull." In many ways, we all exist in a "push-pull" condition. I think Mao once said: If things go too far right it must go left; if it goes too far left, it must go back to the centre; if it goes to the centre it must go either left or right again. It is a pendulum effect. Society moves within that sort of pendulum effect. Each pendulum swing creates a new set of effects.

This issue of formal relationships carrying ideology reminds me of early Soviet art, that very idealistic time of Constructivism, Suprematism and agitprop work where everybody felt that they were working together to create a better society. Artists and politicians saw the manipulation of fundamental structures in society as analogous to the manipulation of formal structures within a work of art. Abstraction 3 arose as a description of the forces within society and as propaganda for a future ideal society.

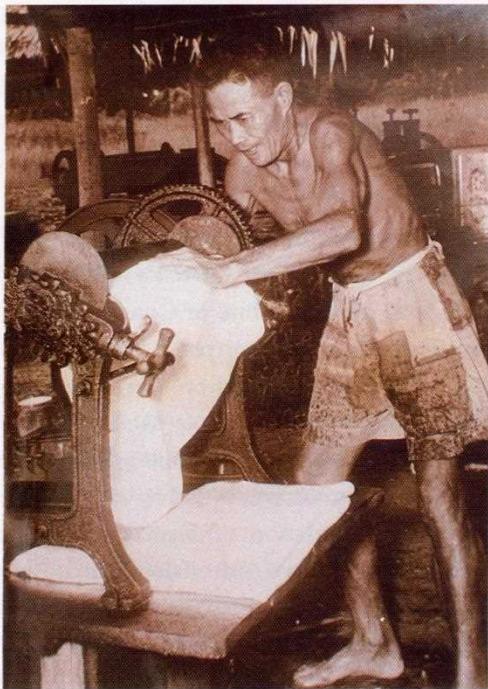
I'm not so idealistic. It has been proven time and again that art isn't going to change the world. At most we can depict or critique the structures of society. I believe in the possibility of agitprop, but the possibility of transformation can exist much better in areas other than visual art, for example, theatre or music. In visual art a moment is complete in itself, so the ability to conscientise is not there as powerfully as, say, music or drama which takes people through a space-and-time continuum.

Voices and Aspirations

The most immediate precursor of this series seems to be Redza Piyadasa's *Baba Nyonya* series.

A smallholder processing rubber sheets

Courtesy of New Straits Times Library



I think I see it larger than Piyadasa's view of a lost generation. I don't feel that it is a lost generation. For centuries people have been moving from one part of the world to another. The old as well as new waves of migration are not very different. The only difference to me is that since the liberation of our societies in the 40's and 50's, the creation of geo-political boundaries, post-colonial states in this part of the world, has made the movement of people illegal.

So I'm interested in using my family, the migration issue and the working-class issue. I don't want to be caught in a fragment of history. I think that the personal voice is irrelevant here, and my personal family is relevant only in so far as it represents a larger societal fabric. It's not my voice in the drawings. I function as a conduit for a collective voice of the thousands of rubber estate workers of my father's generation and all they had to go through, of the thousands of people who took pictures of themselves in photo studios to capture a moment of their lives that couldn't exist in reality. So, these works attempt to transcend the particularistic self.

In a sense you seem to be assigning yourself a meta-agency as the artist-spokesman who speaks for millions of immigrants. Aren't you in danger of essentialising your own voice by association, while subsuming theirs, in a sense, erasing the real class divisions between you, a member of the middle class, and them, uneducated labourers? You are not your father. There seems a great distance between you and your father and his generation. In a sense you empty yourself out to "become" the cause, by an act of

intellectual identification, rather than out of economic necessity.

Of course I am middle class and there is a tendency to romanticise the other. There is a great tendency in my work to create the heroic, whether the heroic is the native, the working class or the bourgeoisie. However, they are filtered through my own personal experiences which I think is unavoidable. In comparison, actors in a scripted play are able to interpret and shape their characters using their own voice and body. In visual art, the figures/characters are always filtered through an individual artist. It can't be helped. Despite what the artist might claim, ultimately they filter through the artist's aesthetic and political ideology.

It is a problem I am trying to resolve. Especially in the most recent three-panel work, *In Search of Faraway Places* (refer pg.20), I am trying to give the figures more independence, more agency. But I don't know if it will work.

This brings up the issue of agency in your drawn characters. Krishen Jit has suggested that the characters in your paintings have no happiness and joy. 4 What I hear Krishen saying is that there is an emotional component in the characters that is not being represented. I keep asking myself if your subjects have any control over their lives or are they just fragments of history and economies.

Maybe the characters are not happy, but I've always tried to push the fact that there's a refusal to stand back. So the characters refuse

to be subsumed by whatever is around them. They are capable of transforming their own realities. Within the dismal context, they are able to stand and fight.

Yes, you have picked poses which are frontal and confronting. They confront us with their gaze as we confront them with our gaze, so pure voyeurism on our part is impossible. Just as we walked in, Leow Puay Tin said about one of the small studies of your grandmother, "You know this one has transcendence. It's not so grim." I think it is that grimness that I am referring to. In that drawing (a study for the grandmother in *She was Married at 14 and Had 14 Children*) I saw the element of doubt, or possibly sorrow.

Do you mean you feel sorrow in these works?

Well, these are people who will not stand back. I do get sorrow in *She was Married at 14 and Had 14 Children*, but even the porcelain doll in *Aspirations of the Working Class* will not stand back. Even the child with only one arm (*Aspirations of the Working Class*), he will not stand back. Related to the element of sorrow, it seems to me, is desire. So when I read Krishen's statement, I asked myself, "Is there sexuality"? Sorrow, happiness, joy, desire, sexuality? Is there a whole complex of emotions that you don't want in the work? Your focus is on the genetic lineage, but not on their sexual pleasure.

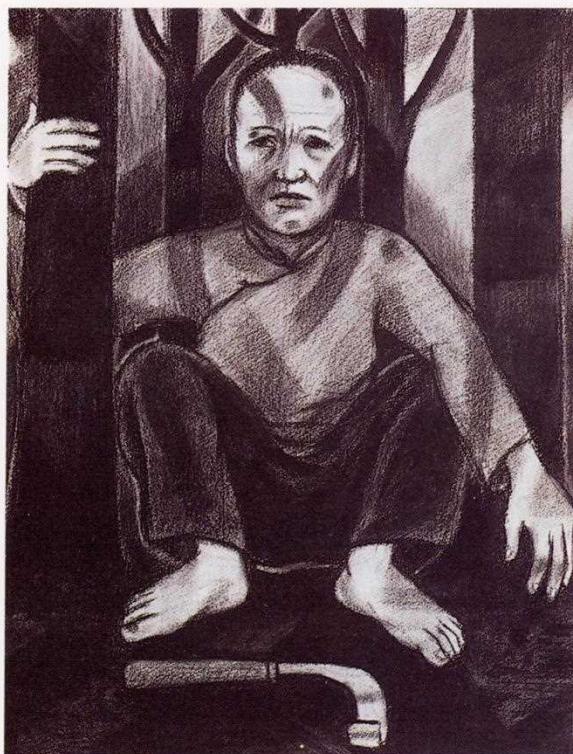
Slavoj Zizek 5, a Slovenian critical theorist, talks about how societies form oppressive

and democratic structures out of desire. What we want to marginalise and suppress in the "Others" is the way they enjoy, the kind of music they like, the spice they like in their food, the smells they like in their houses. We distrust "their" desire because their desire will cause instability in "our" desire. So, is it enough to show the struggle of the working class, or is there a need to address their desires as well?

Your focus is on the struggle, on their not standing back, but what is it they are not willing to give up?

They do not want to be drowned by sorrow. See,

Wong Hoy Cheong
Grandmother II, *study*
(1994)



in these works, sexuality didn't occur to me because there is something so much greater than the issue of sexuality in the condition of the rubber tappers. In a condition where people are executed by the communists, killed by the Japanese for being suspected communists; people die. Where you are the only woman, a woman supporting fourteen children, then what is sexuality?

But if you ask that same person on her deathbed what it is she remembers, it may be the whiff of a perfume. It may really come down to that. It seems that only the plural rather than the singular, the group rather than the individual, is ideological for you.

The whiff of perfume is sensual, not necessarily sexual. But yes, sexual politics is ideological as an issue, but here I'm dealing with rubber tappers. They are disenfranchised and emasculated; survival is all important. Their physical and spiritual lives are robbed from them. This doesn't deny that they are sexual beings, but their sexuality is being robbed from them.

One of the greatest fears regarding migrant labour, especially among employers, is that they, rubber tappers or construction workers or maids, are sexual beings with sexual desires. So employers find ways to curb their social behaviour, their sensual experiences, their sexuality.

I relate this to *Aspirations of the Working Class* because it's the joy of taking the photograph, a fragment of a moment when you are out of that

grim reality and you're in a photo studio in your Sunday best. Or you borrow costumes from the studio, like a hat or a nice tie, and then take a picture, with a windmill or a church in the back-ground. And that is the joy, you see. Preserved for prosperity in print. Such joy is not available in reality.

So the joy is aspiration?

Yes, aspiration.

Is the aspiration a desire for a nostalgia, something they can say that they have had? An icon for having arrived?

It is an arrival, but I'm also saying that there never is any arrival in the end. Migrants come and go. If there are new places with greater opportunities, and if that place they are in has not fulfilled their desires, then they will move on. This has always been true. All exiles or migrants feel a longing for a home, you see, as oppressive as the home is, or as disenfranchised as they were back home. In the new place there is always this longing for a past and a future that is never clear. A longing for a future, an ideal future which in fact is a vision of an idealised past.

In what way do these drawings function as your desire, your joy? Why do you do this activity?

Coincidences in history have made it such that this is what I know how to do. Particularly for this series of works, it is to reconcile my own understanding of myself in relationship to my

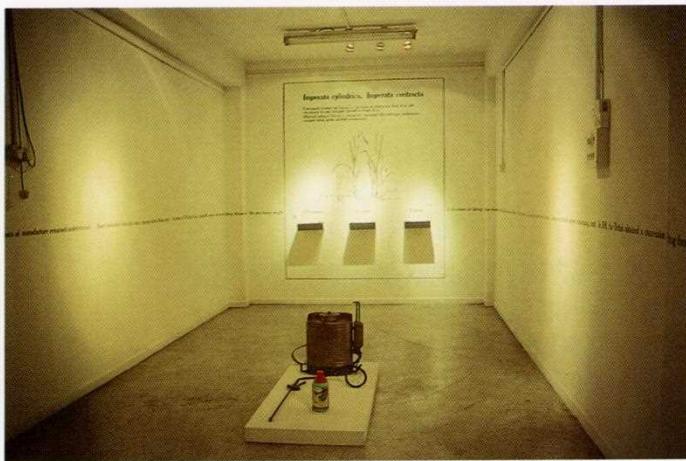
family, and how my family becomes possibly representations of other families and the society. On an intellectual basis, it is to understand history and its transformation.

Breaking the Frame

The research-oriented installation you are doing for this exhibition has its precedent in your *Lalang* installation at the Creative Centre last year. This type of ethnographic display seems to have recently become a central focus of your work. Are you purposely commenting on the many orientalist exhibitions of colonial ethnography in the

Wong Hoy Cheong
Detail of Aspirations
of the Working Class.
(1995)





**Wong Hoy Cheong
Lalang**

Installation at the
Creative Centre
National Art Gallery,
Kuala Lumpur
1994

**museums of the west, those created from
an outsider's perspective?**

It is not an attempt to critique ethnographic exhibitions. To go back to the Lalang exhibition, basically I was living in this area full of lalang and I was clearing it every day. It occurred to me that lalang is something very difficult to get rid of. So it became a metaphor for something I wanted to say.

In the same way, rubber started very personally with my family, their migration, and my father being a rubber tapper once. Realising that rubber is a migrant plant and my family is a migrant family that have been localised: the converging of two migrant flows into a place. It did not originate as an attempt to critique ethnographic displays. But as an afterthought, it could be.

One of the tacit assumptions of such researched ethnographic displays is their assumed objectivity. The wall labels provide a kind of authoritative voice-over through which we interpret the objects. Are you accepting this function of the “master-text” in your display or subverting it in some way?

I accept the notion of a “master-text” but decontextualise it so another reading will arise because

times have changed. For example, in early books on rubber, the colonial botanists would remark on the functions and characteristics of Chinese, Malay and Indian labourers in the plantations. Their observations were racist but in the colonial context they seemed very logical and reasonable. When taken out of the colonial context they are very stark – no longer masterful “master-texts.”

Now, looking at it in an art context, art installations of this type break the notion of the frame that is implicit in your drawings and can be related to the Conceptual Art movement of the 1960s and 1970s in the United States and Europe, at the time when you were there. For example, the artifacts and institutional actions of Joseph Beuys, the wall texts of Joseph Kosuth, and the political and economic researches of Hans Haacke. Are you commenting on this art tradition or is it simply a technique that you have chosen to use?

I'm not commenting so much on the tradition, rather I'm using it. For example, Kosuth, whom I really like, and Jenny Holzer. I haven't done many installations, so I am approaching it in a formal way. I'm trying to understand my own relationship to the tradition – how to present visual and textual information through installation.

You seem to feel compelled to not just present the drawings but to somehow present them in a context of political or social agency, in which you actually engage in the present-day issue of the civil rights

of new immigrants. Is that your way of transcending the nostalgia of the photographic space?

Yes, my intention is to bring out the fear towards migrants by telling the viewer, "You or your ancestor were a migrant at one point. Why do you fear the migrant so much now?"

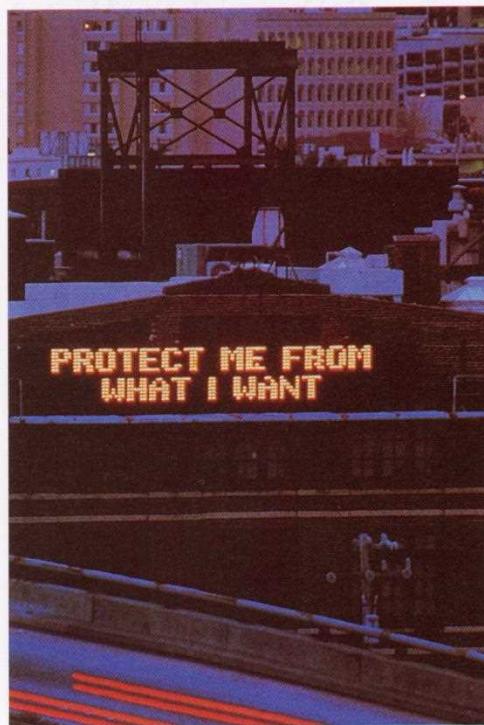
At the end of our first conversation, Valentine Willie came in and we had a discussion about the art commodity and the value of your work on the market. This exhibition is being co-organised by someone who owns some of your paintings. Even I own one of your earlier drawings. All this promotion inevitably helps to raise the value of your work and of our investment in your work.

So, the question is, does the social orientation of your work simply define its uniqueness on the market and, therefore, end up adding to its commodity value?

I'm very aware of this: my work becoming popular, saleable, buyable. I'm afraid I'll become the "one-dimensional man" that Herbert Marcuse wrote about – he who no longer means what he means, who has been institutionalised, co-opted. The oppositional voice, the "Great Refusal" negated. I don't know how to resolve it. Apparently, some Japanese artists of the 19th century, when they became famous, stopped painting, moved to a different province, assumed a new name, and started over. But I don't think that is possible in this day and age.

I constantly check myself and push my work to see how far the co-opting agent will allow me to go. So, in a way, I am testing the limits. That's the viable alternative. For example, do the whole show in black and white, bring in installations, change subject matter and medium.

At the beginning of this interview is a quote from Bertolucci's film, *Before the Revolution*, which nicely sums up the protagonist's alienation from both bourgeois Italian society and from the promise of a new international society of the proletariat in the 1960s. It struck me that there may be some correspondence with your position now in 1996, in this rapidly capitalising



Jenny Holzer
From the Survival Series

Installation in
San Francisco Barbara
Gladstone Gallery,
New York
1987

zone, Malaysia, where all art, even art that deals with issues like poverty, exploitation, imperialism, hegemonic relations, even art that attempts to conscientise, is subsumed into the market. Where do you position yourself in relation to Bertolucci's analysis?

Conscientising can still exist, but to what limit? I'm always accused of being too didactic – too much agenda. In a sense, I'm always waiting for the revolution. It's the romantic nostalgia for the revolution. I am being bourgeoisified but I maintain my distance, for example, by moving to Kuala Kubu Bharu (KKB). There, I'm not constantly submerged in the world where I don't have the critical distance to look back. But then, living in KKB is very bourgeois. Self-consciousness helps one not to be subsumed – consciousness of your own desires, your own frailties and limitation. Of being lured by money and recognition.

To end it all, I'd like to say that while I was working on the three-panel *In Search of Faraway Places*, I felt tired of so much agenda in my work. I told myself that after this series, I want to go back to light, colour and the sensuality of paint, go back to the modernist framework of exploring the sensual qualities of light and colour and abstraction. Intellectualisation is stimulating but it can also rarify. Often, in art particularly, it does not sustain.

I'd like to thank Krishen Jit, Lee Weng Choy, Valentine Willie, Leow Puay Tin and, of course, Wong Hoy Cheong, for their help.

Notes

1 Hans Hofmann (1880-1966), German painter and teacher; friend of Matisse, Delaunay, Braque and Picasso in Paris before World War I. Opened an art school in Munich in 1915. Emigrated to New York in 1931 to escape Nazism, where he opened another school in 1933. His theories strongly influenced the development of modern painting in the United States, particularly during the 1950s through the 1970s. Grillo and Grippo were part of the New York Abstract Expressionist school of painting, while Georges was one of the new figurative painters of the 1960s, along with Alfred Leslie and others.

2 Paulo Freire, Brazilian educationist and social activist, author of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. He believes that the teaching of literacy (or any other subject) must be accompanied by the “conscientisation” of the students, that is, developing an understanding of the political and social context which had kept them illiterate in the first place. This requires an analysis of local and global political structures, economic relationships, colonialism and imperialism. He promotes a notion of democratised education, in which students and teachers alike engage in a “learning environment” rather than a “teaching environment.”

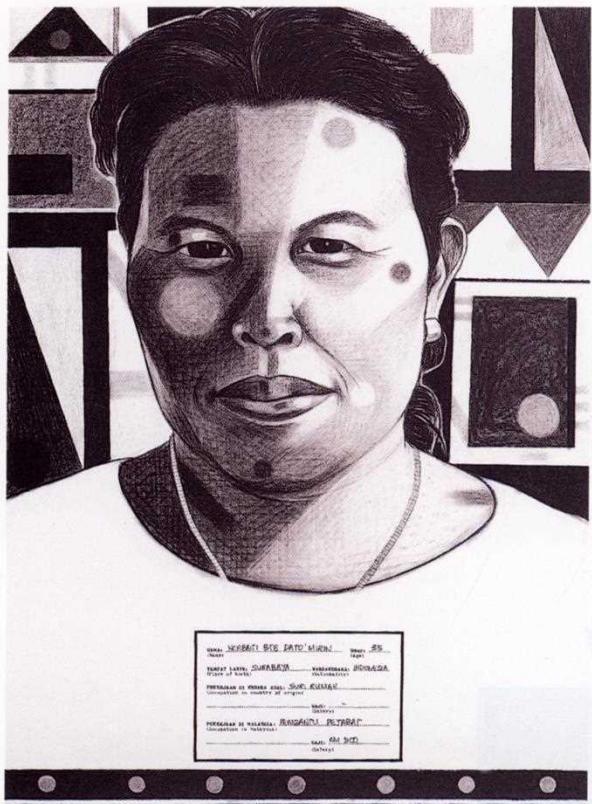
3 For example, Rodchenko, Popova, Tatlin and especially apropos El Lissitzky's *Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge* (1919-20).

4 “One of the first things you will notice in Hoy Cheong's painting is the absence of happiness and joy. Humour is also lacking in his works, even though in personal relations, Hoy Cheong can be funny. But his people nevertheless are in a state of extremis; they are overwhelmingly traumatized... the searing image of the socially oppressed state... an image of the human figure that can encompass a comprehensive social and political philosophy.” (Catalogue essay by Krishen Jit for the exhibition, *Wong Hoy Cheong: Selected Paintings and Drawings, 1982-91*)

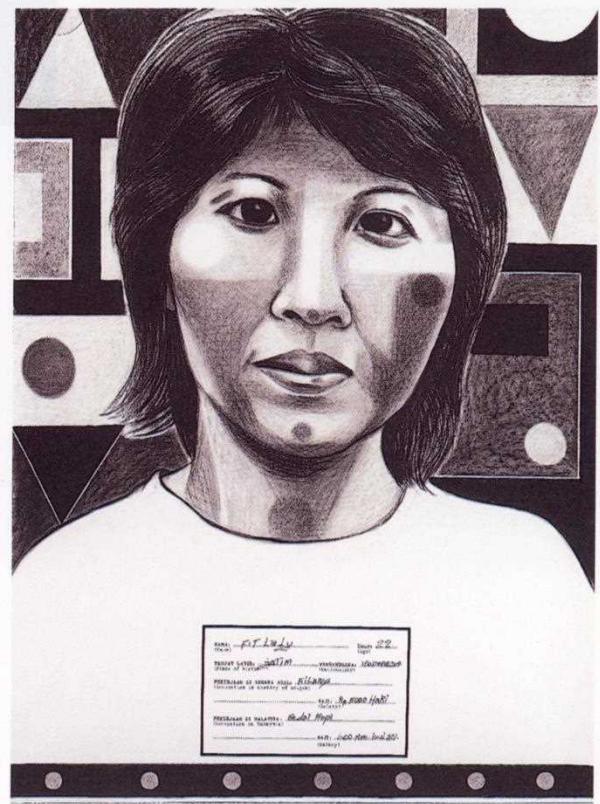
5 Slavoj Zizek , senior researcher with the Institute for Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia 1993, author of *Tarrying With The Negative: Kant, Hegel and the Critique of Ideology*, Duke University Press.



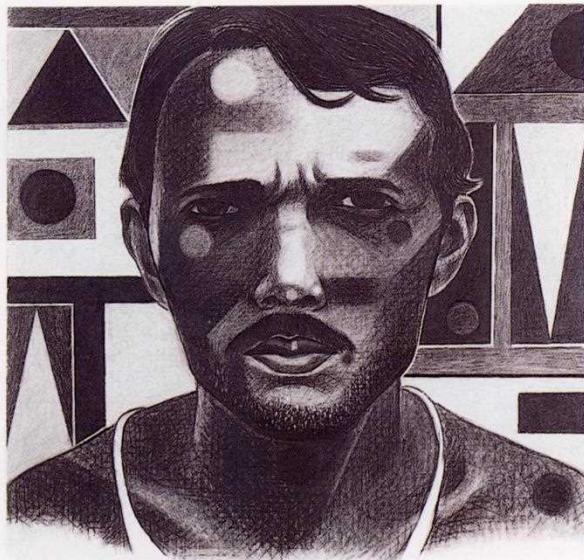
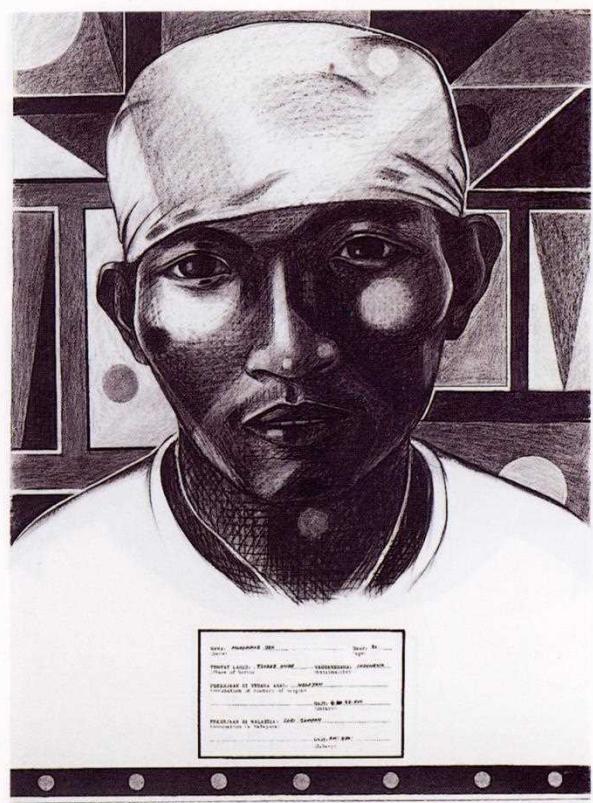
NEW MIGRANTS



1. Kak Norbati, Office Worker
Charcoal and silkscreen on paper
125cm x 91.5cm
1996



2. Fit Laly, Coffeeshop Worker
Charcoal and silkscreen on paper
125cm x 91.5cm
1996



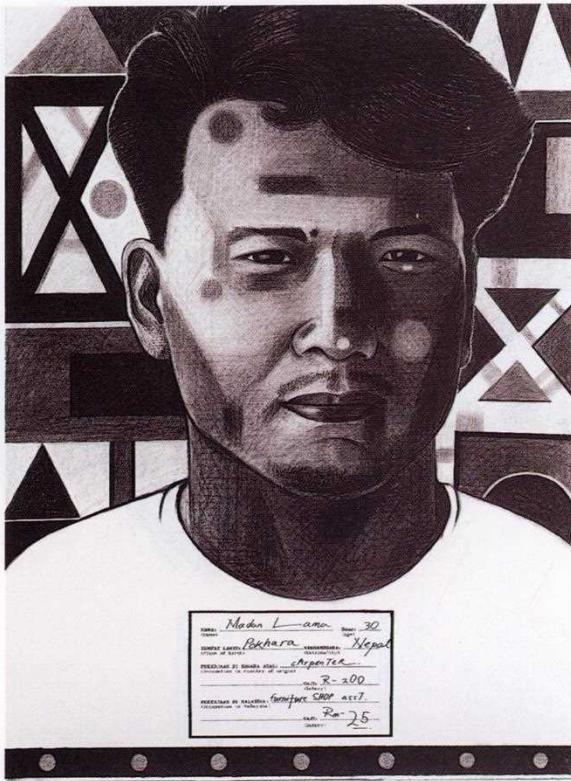
NAME: RAJUN	4-96
STREET ADDRESS: 1000	VANCOUVER, BRITISH COLUMBIA
POSTAL CODE: V6P 2E5	PHONE NUMBER: 604-552-1234
TELEPHONE NUMBER: 604-552-1234	FAX NUMBER: 604-552-1234
DATE:	1996
TELEPHONE NUMBER: 604-552-1234	CONSERVATION OF FRESHWATER
DATE:	1996

3. Rajun, Gardener

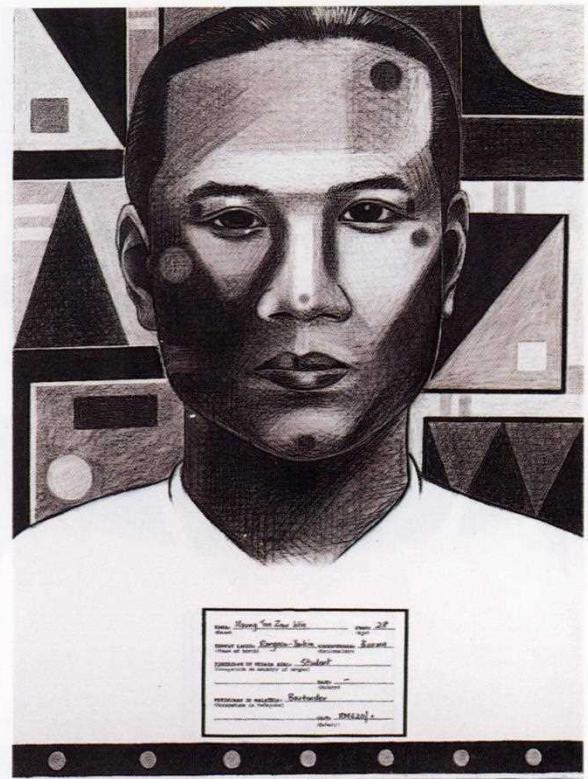
Charcoal and silkscreen on paper
125cm x 91.5cm
1996

4. Mohamad Jek, Garbage Collector

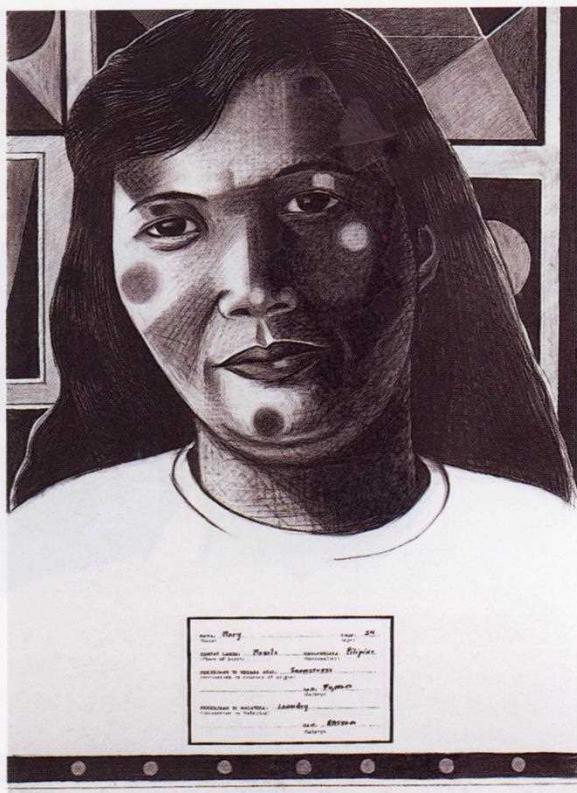
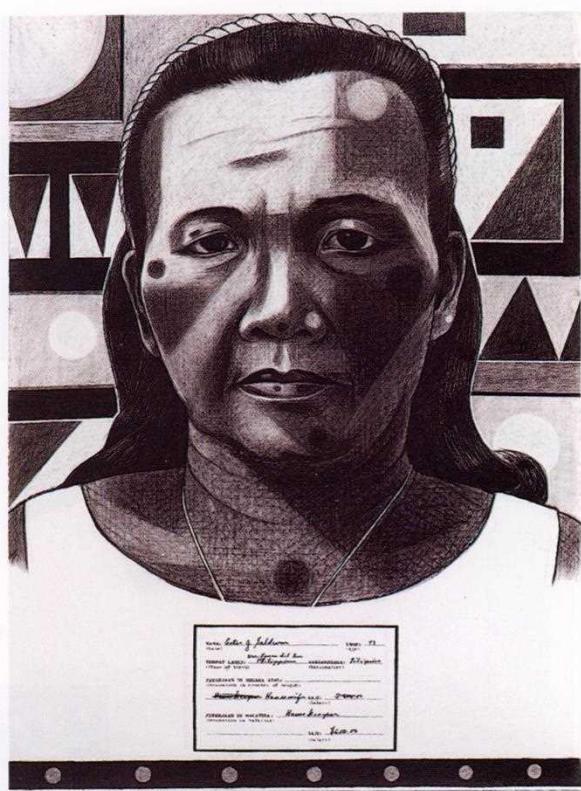
Charcoal and silkscreen on paper
125cm x 91.5cm
1996



5. **Madan Lama, Furniture Shop Worker**
Charcoal and silkscreen on paper
125cm x 91.5cm
1996

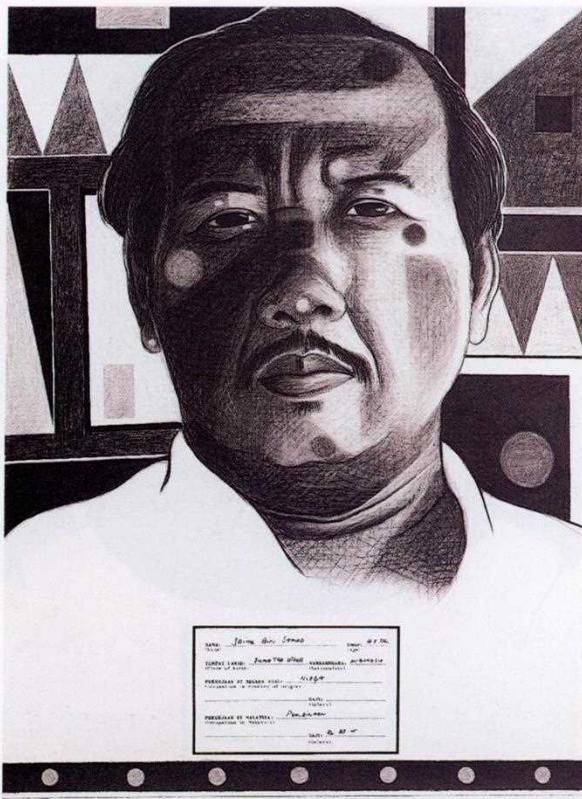


6. **Wing, Bartender**
Charcoal and silkscreen on paper
125cm x 91.5cm
1996

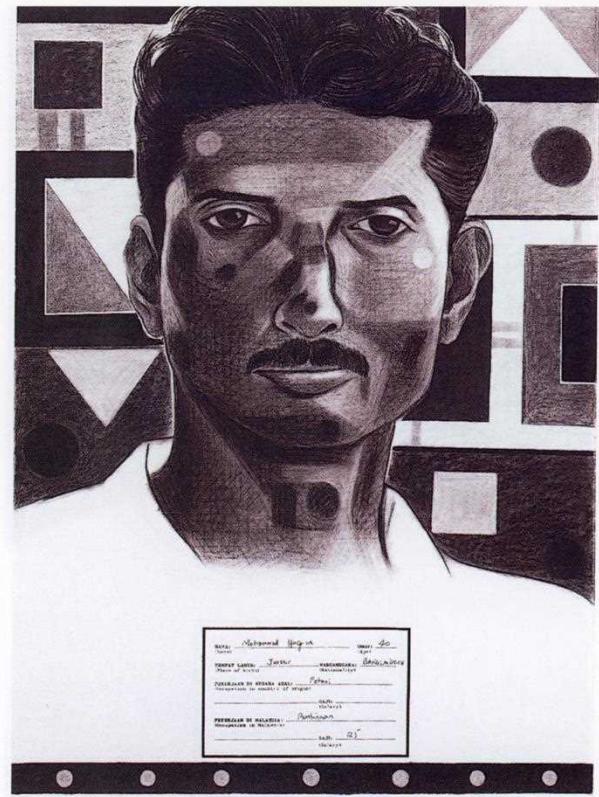


7. **Mary, Washerwoman**
Charcoal and silkscreen on paper
125cm x 91.5cm
1996

8. **Ester, Housekeeper**
Charcoal and silkscreen on paper
125cm x 91.5cm
1996



9. **Pak Saimo, Construction Worker I**
 Charcoal and silkscreen on paper
 125cm x 91.5cm
 1996



10. **Mohamad Haque, Construction Worker II**
 Charcoal and silkscreen on paper
 125cm x 91.5cm
 1996



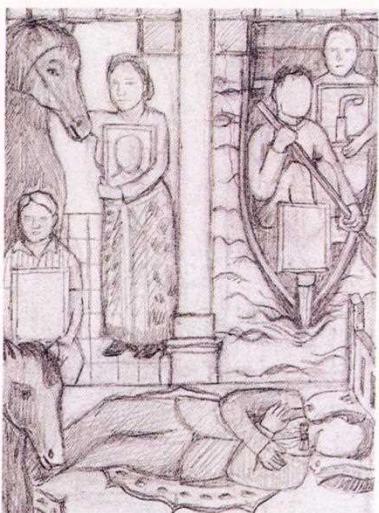
STUDIES FOR DRAWINGS AND INSTALLATIONS

• *Return to Mystery*, 1993, pencil on paper, 100 x 120 cm
• *Clouds of Depth*, 1993, pencil on paper, 100 x 120 cm
• *1000x4000*, 1993, pencil on paper, 100 x 120 cm
• *1993*, 1993, pencil on paper, 100 x 120 cm

• *return to current speed*, 1993, pencil on paper, 100 x 120 cm
• *return to current speed*, 1993, pencil on paper, 100 x 120 cm
• *return to current speed*, 1993, pencil on paper, 100 x 120 cm
• *return to current speed*, 1993, pencil on paper, 100 x 120 cm



2



1. **Some Dreamt of Malaya,
Some Dreamt of Great Britain
Sketch I**
Pencil on paper
13.5cm x 9cm
1994

2. **Some Dreamt of Malaya, Some Dreamt of Great Britain Sketch II**
Charcoal on paper
70cm x 52cm
1994



3

3. Sketch for **Marriage of a Rubber Tapper to a Girl Dressed as Virgin Mary in a School Play**

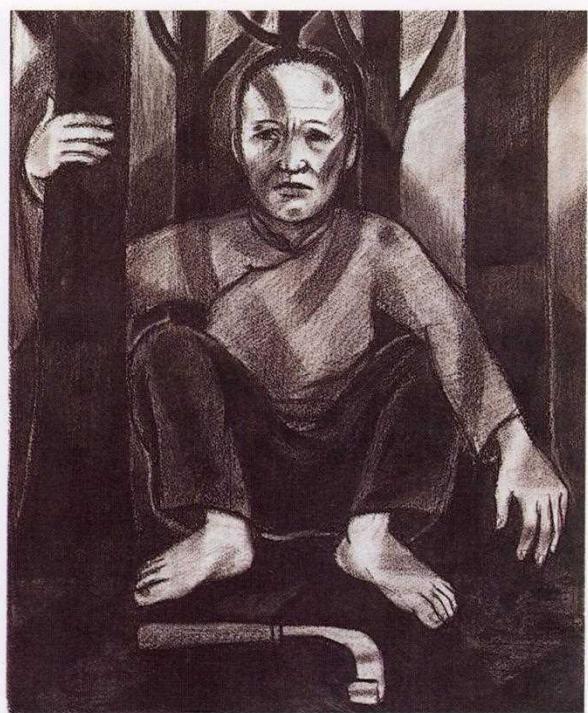
Charcoal on paper

102cm x 86cm

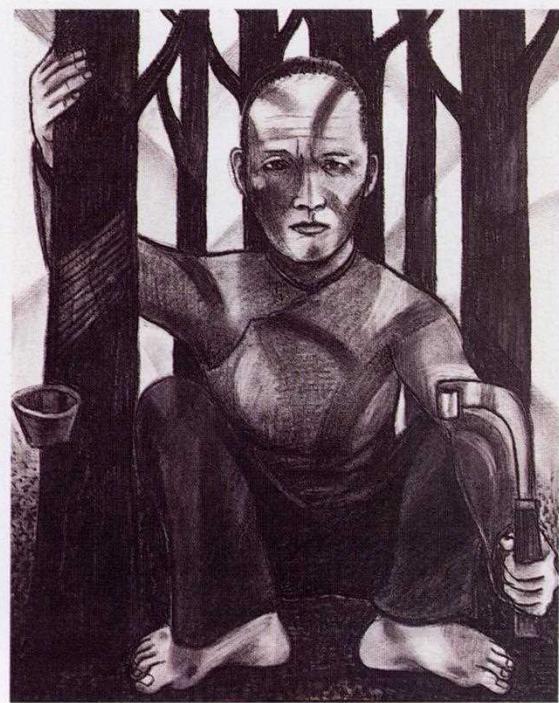
1994



4



5

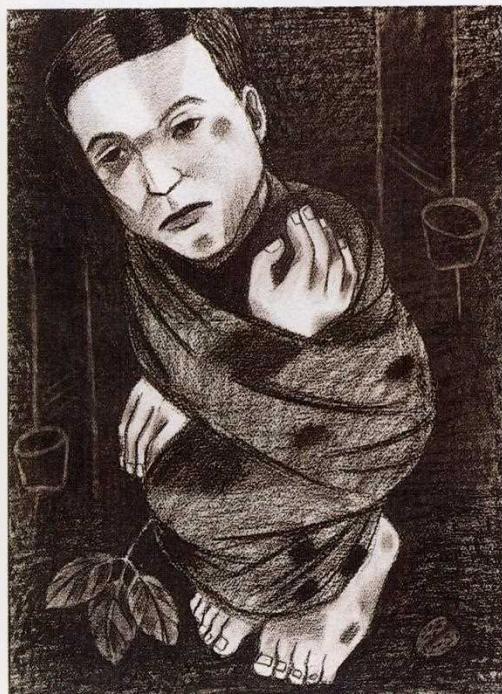


6

4. Grandmother Sketch I
Charcoal on paper
43.5cm x 37cm
1994

5. Grandmother Sketch II
Charcoal on paper
55cm x 45cm
1994

6. Grandmother Sketch III
Charcoal on paper
51cm x 41cm
1994



7



8



9a



9b

7. Bundled Boy 1
Charcoal on paper
55cm x 40cm
1994

8. Bundled Boy 2
Charcoal on paper
74cm x 54cm
1994

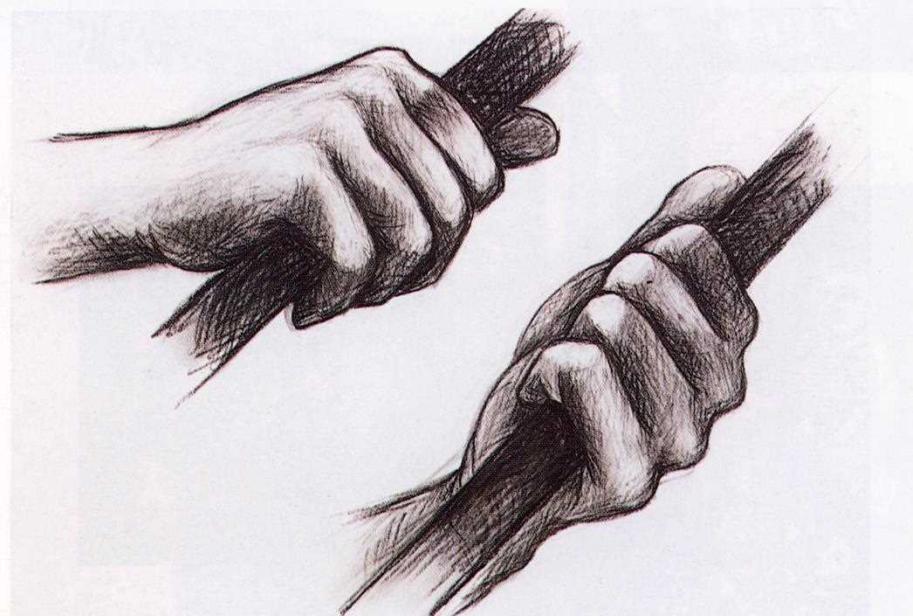
9a. Bundled Babies
Ink on paper
13.5cm x 10.5cm
1994

9b. Bundled Babies
Ink on paper
11cm x 11cm
1994



10a

10b



11

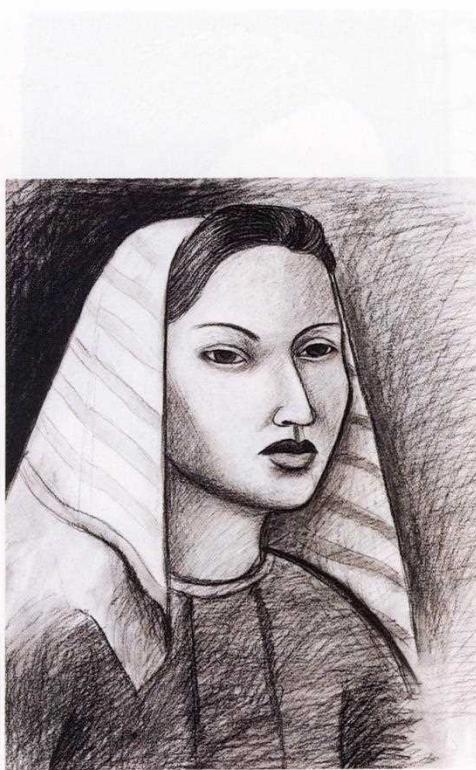
10a. Rubber Tree and Hand
Charcoal on paper
27.5cm x 22.5cm
1994

10b. Rubber Tree and Knife
Charcoal on paper
24cm x 14cm
1994

11. Two Hands
Charcoal on paper
25cm x 36cm
1994



12



13



14



15

12. Man Carrying Sack
Charcoal on paper
74cm x 54cm
1995

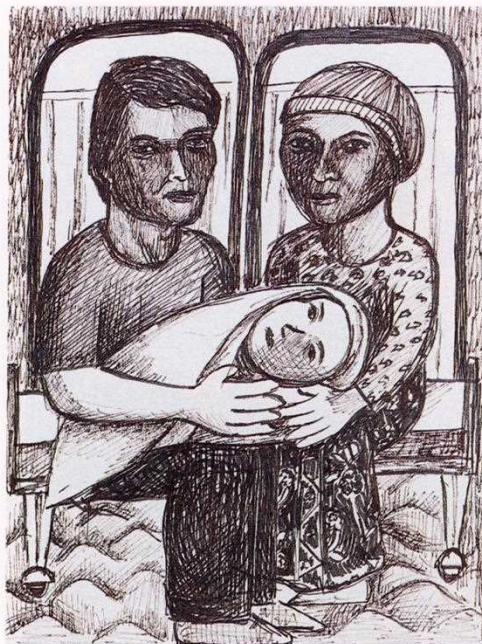
13. School Girl as Virgin Mary
Charcoal on paper
46.5cm x 38cm
1994

14. Couple in Boat
Charcoal on paper
20cm x 26.5cm
1995

15. Father and Son
Charcoal on paper
74.5cm x 47.5cm
1995



16



17



18

16. Woman in Boat

Charcoal on paper
26cm x 20cm
1995

17. Couple with Child

Ink on paper
24cm x 18cm
1995

18. New Migrants Sketch

Charcoal on paper
82cm x 58cm
1996



19a



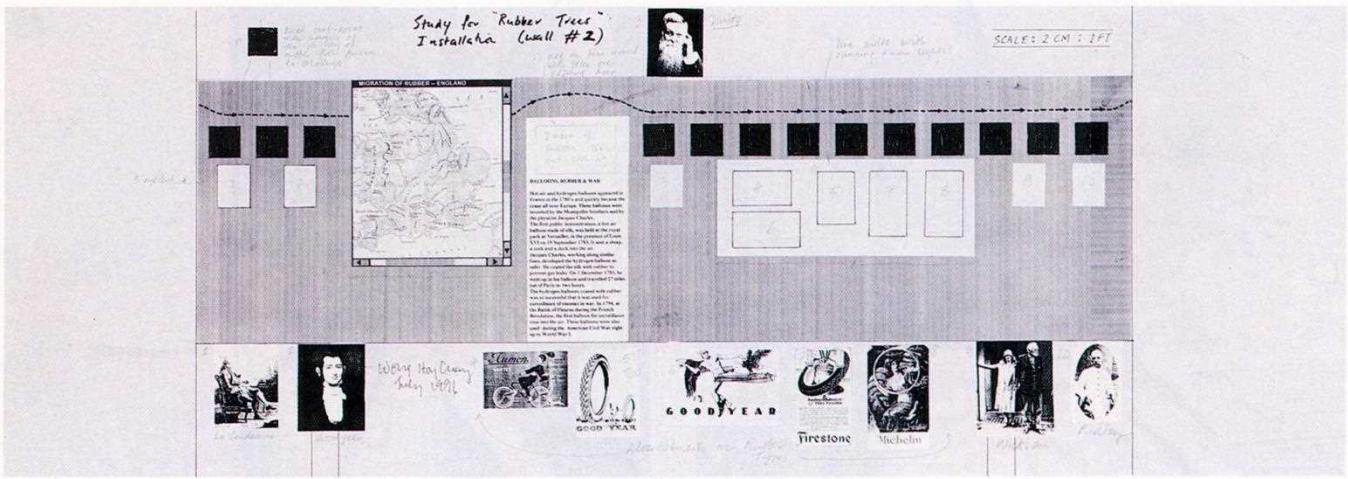
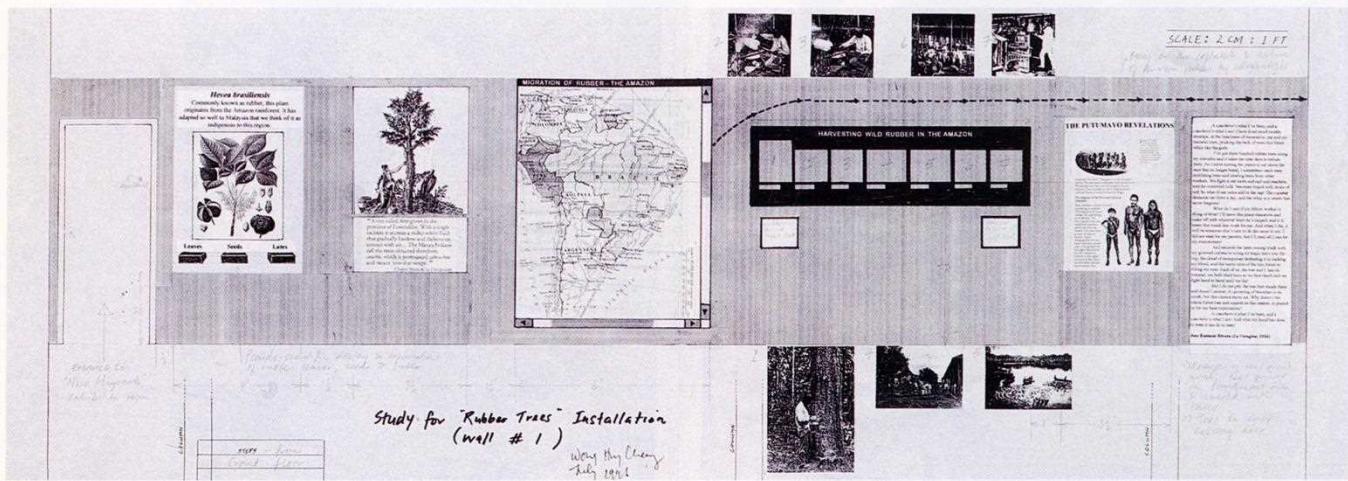
19b

19a. Migrants in Boat

Ink on paper
25cm x 16.5cm
1995

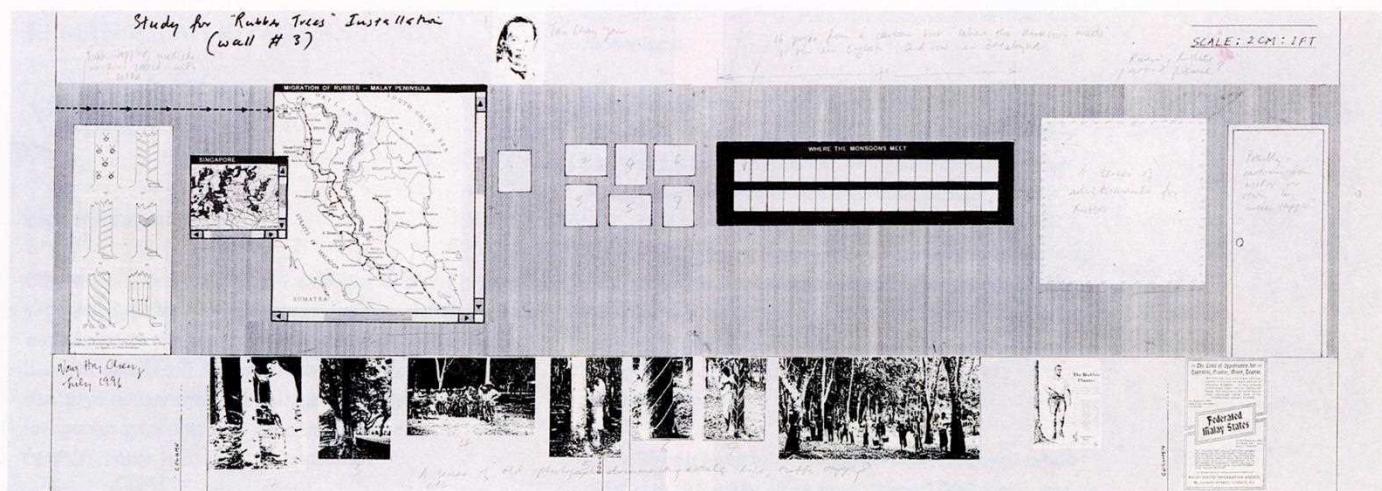
19b. Migrants in Boat

Ink on paper
25cm x 16.5cm
1995



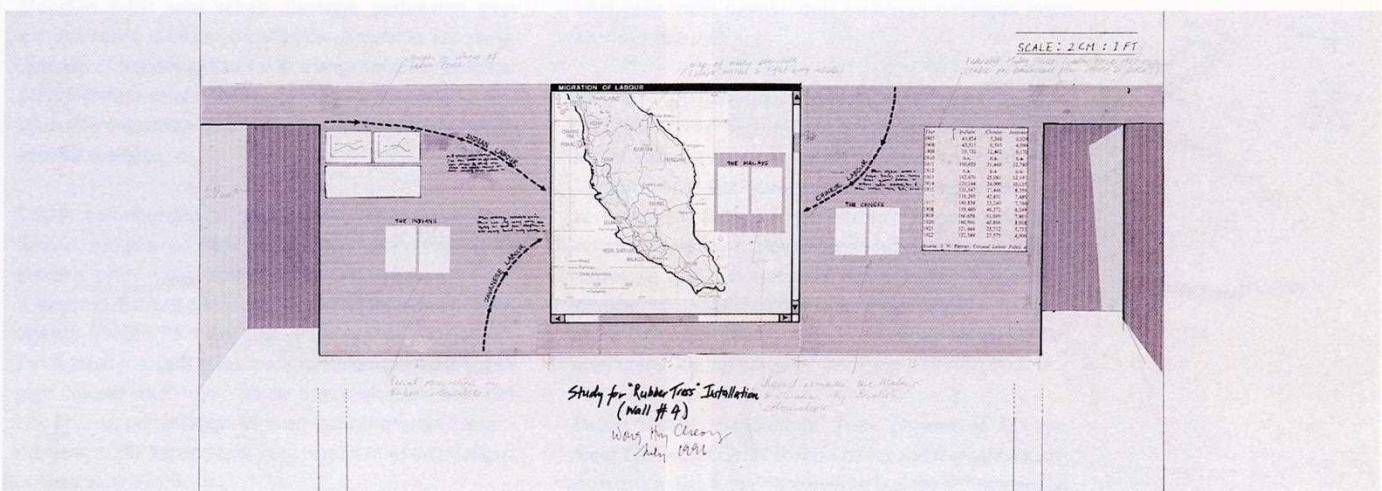
20. Rubber Trees - Wall 1
Study for Installation
1996

21. Rubber Trees - Wall 2
Study for Installation
1996



Wong Hoy Chee's 'Rubber Trees' Installation (Wall #3) is a study for a wall installation. It features a map of the Malay Peninsula titled 'MIGRATION OF RUBBER - MALAY PENINSULA'. Below the map are several small photographs of rubber trees and workers. A grid labeled 'WHERE THE MONSOONS MEET' contains numbered boxes (2, 9, 8, 3, 5, 7). To the right is a vertical panel with handwritten notes and a small illustration. A scale bar at the top right indicates 'SCALE: 2 CM : 1 FT'.

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Wong Hoy Chee's 'Rubber Trees' Installation (Wall #4) is a study for a wall installation. It features a map of the Malay Peninsula titled 'MIGRATION OF LABOUR'. Below the map are several small photographs of rubber trees and workers. A grid labeled 'WHERE THE MONSOONS MEET' contains numbered boxes (2, 9, 8, 3, 5, 7). To the right is a vertical panel with handwritten notes and a small illustration. A scale bar at the top right indicates 'SCALE: 2 CM : 1 FT'.

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22. Rubber Trees - Wall 3
Study for Installation
1996

23. Rubber Trees - Wall 4
Study for Installation
1996

DARI MANA KITA DATANG?
SIAPAKAH KITA?
KEMANAHLAH KITA AKAN PERGI?

Wong Hoy Cheong

oleh Valentine Willie

Bagi seorang peminat lukisan awal Hoy Cheong, lukisan yang menggunakan warna-warna tropika, gambar para wanita-wanita yang exotik dan lagenda tempatan, karya barunya dalam siri *Migrants* nampak macam terkeluar dari gaya lukisannya. Walau bagaimanapun, kadangkala mengubah gaya melukis itu penting supaya kita dapat bersikap benar kepada diri kita sendiri.

Bagi Hoy Cheong ini menjadi kebenaran. Merasakan warna-warnanya yang terang dan subjek lukisan yang dramatik kurang menimbulkan kefahaman tentang dunia tempat tinggalnya, Hoy Cheong telah berganjak ke arah yang berlawanan – menolak penggunaan warna dan menggunakan gaya realistik. Dengan berbuat demikian beliau ingin kita menumpukan perhatian kita pada cerita yang hendak beliau sampaikan – cerita tentang migrasi keluarga dan asimilasi mereka ke dalam masyarakat Malaysia.

Mungkin salah satu sebab disebalik pertukaran gaya melukis beliau ialah perpindahan dari bandar ke kampung. Semasa di bandar beliau telah menghayalkan keadaan primitif tetapi setelah beliau pindah ke kampung beliau telah meninggalkan gaya lamanya dan menuarkannya kepada realisma.

Dalam perhubungan di antara jarak tempat dan gaya lukisan, pengalaman Hoy Cheong seakan-akan pengalaman seorang artis, yang walaupun perbandingan ini tidak disukainya, lukisan awal Hoy Cheong selalu dibandingkan dengan lukisan Paul Gauguin. Pemindahan Gauguin ke Tahiti telah menjadi faktor penting dalam perkembangan gaya lukisan exotiknya. Walau bagaimanapun bagi diri Hoy Cheong, perpindahannya telah mengubah gaya lukisannya yang exotik kepada cara yang berlainan – bertentangan dengan yang exotik.

Dengan ini, seperti apa yang dikatakan oleh Karim Raslan dalam eseinya, perpindahan Hoy Cheong dari Subang Jaya ke Kuala Kubu Bahru adalah sejarah dengan perubahan dirinya daripada "Hoy Cheong gerila bandar" kepada "Hoy Cheong seorang petani."

Yang menghairankan ialah dengan menuarkan gaya melukisnya agar tidak lagi sama dengan gaya Gauguin, beliau telah membawa penonton lebih dekat kepada tema Gauguin sendiri. Antaranya ialah *Dari Manakah Kita Datang? Siapakah Kita? Kemanakah Kita Akan Pergi?* Tajuk lukisan akhir Gauguin dengan itu melam-

bangkan perasaan ragu dan kewujudan yang menyolal kelaziman yang terdapat pada zaman lukisannya diederikan iaitu kurun ke19 di Perancis semasa perkembangan modenisme.

Malaysia sekarang mengalami revolusi sosial yang sama. Persoalan identiti mempengaruhi semua aspek budaya, dari bahasa yang digunakan hingga keadaan bentuk-bentuk lukisan samada berharga atau popular.

Karya Hoy Cheong adalah satu pendekatan kepada isu yang kompleks ini. Dengan menggunakan latarbelakang keluarganya sebagai asas siri *Migrants* beliau telah menggunakan gaya realistik untuk memperkatakan sesuatu tentang isu identiti yang begitu umum kepada semua orang Malaysia.

Siri *Migrants* yang telah dimulakannya pada awal tahun 1994 dan disiapkan pada bulan June 1996 terdiri dari empat keping lakaran arang yang bersaiz 6' x 5' dan salah satu dari lakarannya berukuran 6' x 15'. Satu lagi siri tambahan yang bertajuk *New Migrants* mengandungi sepuluh buah potret pendatang baru yang bermedia arang.

Empat buah lakaran dari siri *Migrants* menyoroti kembali pengalaman pendatang dan waktu ketibaan mereka serta asimilasi keluarga Hoy Cheong ke Malaysia. Untuk pertama kalinya Hoy Cheong meng-gambarkan orang dan imej yang rapat diambil dari kenangan-kenangan masa kecilnya dahulu.

Berlainan dengan lukisan awalnya dimana keterperincian tidak diberi kepentingan berbanding dengan warna, karya barunya nampak padat dengan keterperincian. Bentuk empat segi yang merangkumi sesuatu yang ada kenamengena dengan wajah ditengah-tengah terdapat di setiap penjuru karya. Hoy Cheong yang baru-baru ini mahir dalam penggunaan komputer menerangkan keadaan ini sebagai "tingkap" (windows) yang kadangkala mengandungi ikon atau menunjukkan suatu realiti alternatif dari imej utama setiap karya.

Dalam lakaran pertamanya *Some Dreamt of Malaya, Some Dreamt of Great Britain* beliau menceritakan kisah perjalanan datuk dan neneknya ke Malaya untuk mencari kehidupan yang lebih senang dan mencantumkan kedatangan dengan neneknya (sebelah ibu) yang mempunyai sebuah kuda lumba dan telah menghantar jauh anak lelakinya untuk mendapat pendidikan Inggeris.

Dalam lakaran keduanya *She was Married at 14 and Had 14 Children* terdapat gambar nenek Hoy Cheong (sebelah bapa) mencangkung dengan bayi-bayi yang bergelim-pangan. Wanita ini melambangkan seperti yang Karim Raslan katakan "setiap wanita, ibu, nenek dan pendatang: tidak mementingkan diri sendiri, tidak pernah merungut dan sangat produktif."

Dalam lakaran ketiganya *Marriage of a Rubber Tapper to a Girl Dressed as Virgin Mary in a School Play* kisah perkahwinan ibu dan bapa pelukis digambarkan. Melambangkan latar-belakang ibunya yang dari golongan elit, dapat dilihat misalnya tropi perlawan kuda dilukiskan di tepi kiri lakaran, sementara di bahagian kanan terdapat gambar pokok getah dan struktur yang menggambarkan pendudukan Jepun dimana ramai dari saudara-maranya sengsara dalam zaman itu. Di tengah-tengah lakaran ialah gambar ibubapa Hoy Cheong dimana emaknya memakai baju Virgin Mary dan bapanya memakai pakaian penoreh getah. Imej ini meng-gambarkan gabungan kelas, yang mempunyai tanah dan yang tidak punya, yang kudus dan yang tidak suci.

Lakaran keempat *Aspirations of the Working Class* menggambarkan aspirasi peneroka yang telah dijajah yang mempunyai impian bukan lagi ke negara Cina tetapi ke bandar-bandar utama di Barat. Duduk ditengah-tengah karya adalah ibu, ayah, anak lelaki dan anak perempuan yang berpakaian baru, sedang duduk untuk mengambil foto keluarga di hadapan gambar kotaraya Barat. Poskad zaman penjajah menunjukkan gambar orang-orang asli dilihat di tepi untuk mengingatkan kita bagaimana negara-negara penjajah melihat Malaysia sebagai tanah yang dihuni oleh orang-orang aneh dan pelik.

Kalau tidak kerana tragedi peribadi dalam awal tahun 1995 siri *Migrants* mungkin telah tamat pada lakaran yang keempat. Ibu Hoy Cheong terkena angin ahmar dan kakak-kakaknya serta keluarga mereka terbang dari negara luar seperti Kanada dan Amerika untuk menjenguknya di hospital di Pulau Pinang. Lakaran yang akhir dan paling besar dalam siri ini *In Search of Faraway Places* menggambarkan kepulangan mereka ke Malaysia dan mencatatkan emigrasi terkini dalam keluarga Hoy Cheong dan kedatangan buruh pendatang ke Malaysia.

Dalam sepuluh potret media arang *New Migrants*, Hoy Cheong mencabar membuang perasaan prejudis kita serta melihat buruh pendatang ini sebagai wira dan wirawati sama seperti dia/kita lihat ketabahan neneknya sebagai penoreh getah dan kesemua datuk dan nene yang juga pendatang sebagai wira dan wirawati. Tiap-tiap potret adalah gambar sebenar buruh pendatang yang telah mencatatkan data-data peribadi mereka dibahagian bawah potret mereka dan karya ini, menurut Khoo Khay Jin bertujuan “supaya kita dapat berfikir tentang migrasi dalam zaman ini yang begitu kompleks. Dan dari sitolah kita dapat mengalah perasaan geram kita bukan lagi pada imigran baru tetapi kepada keadaan sosial yang menyebabkan mereka menjadi imigran.”

Sementara siri Hoy Cheong yang bertajuk *Migrants* ini adalah karyanya yang paling berkuasa dari segi peribadi masa kini, kekuatan dan nilai ini terletak pada gambaran bentuk-bentuk universal yang sedia ada dalam masyarakat pendatang: pengorbanan, rajin bekerja, ber-jimat cermat, kesedaran, bersatu, asimilasi dan kesetiaan. Khoo Khay Jin

dalam eseinya ada mengingatkan kita kepada peranan seniman dalam dunia pendatang. Antaranya beliau ada menulis bahawa seniman:

“berjiwa imigran. Hidupnya nampak tenteram tetapi terasing di negaranya. Peranan golongan ini adalah untuk menyalakan kembali pengala-man sejarah, peristiwa dan perjalanan hidup yang telah lama dilupakan supaya kita tidak melupakannya, membangkitkan soalan-soalan yang kurang menyenangkan serta mencabar kita dengan pandangan yang berbeza terhadap diri kita. Dengan berbuat begitu, mereka telah memperkem-bangkan lagi pengala-man kita, mendorong kita mengambil iktibar dan mencabar kita menerima kemungkinan lain dari menerima realiti yang mungkin tidak dapat kita elakkan.”

Wong Hoy Cheong

Seorang Gerila

Kota Menjadi

Petani Di Desa

oleh Karim Raslan

Sejak beberapa tahun yang lalu saya kerap mengikuti karya lukisan Hoy Cheong dan ia telah banyak mengajar saya meneliti perkembangan seseorang pelukis. Dalam hal ini, perkembangan Hoy Cheong dapat dilihat pada percubaannya menggunakan berbagai media dalam seni lukisnya dari cat minyak, seni instalasi, arang dan seni performan. Dan ini mencerminkan sesuatu dedikasi dan matlumat teguh yang tidak dilihat pada ramai artis di rantau ini.

Ini tidak bermakna saya suka dan bersetuju dengan cara beliau melukis. Adakalanya saya rasa beliau patut menumpukan perhatian dalam satu-satu siri lukisan, tema dan media, supaya beliau dapat berkembang dengan lebih pesat lagi dalam satu-satu lukisan. Walau bagaimanapun, setelah lama masa berlalu saya mulai sedar betapa pentingnya kepelbagaian itu sekurang-kurangnya kepada lukisan itu sendiri dan supaya dapat memupuk kematangannya dalam mencuba berbagai cara lukisan. Dengan setiap peneorkaan, beliau telah maju kehadapan.

Ya, saya terpaksa mengaku, pada mulanya saya tidak berapa suka pada lukisan baru beliau. Saya mersaa hampa bila beliau telah berubah melukis dari siri lamanya. Kata-kata saya ini kerana minat saya kepada lukisan cat minyak beliau. Antara lukisan cat minyak beliau yang besar, berjaya dan mengagumkan ialah *Old Tide Retold* (1986). Lukisan ini telah dapat menarik perhatian kerana kualiti cahaya yang membangkitkan perasaan dan emosi.

Sudah lama saya mengenali Hoy Cheong. Saya mula-mula bertemu dengannya semasa beliau masih lagi mengajar di MIA. Pada masa itu beliau terlibat dalam gerakan "agitprop" di Lembah Kelang dan tinggal di Subang Jaya. Ketika itu beliau adalah seorang "pemuda bandar" yang tulin, dimana peka kepada politik, mempunyai kesedaran diri dan suka membangkang. Beliau samalah seperti semua orang yang berasal dari Pulau Pinang, suka sangat bertengkar memenangkan negerinya. Padanya apa-apa yang datang dari Pulau Pinang mestinya baik, misalnya *char kway teow*, durian dan juga bangunan di situ. Beliau yang dulu adalah murid Sekolah Penang Free begitu yakin kewujudan KL hanyalah satu komplot untuk menidakkann kedudukan penting Pulau Pinang. Akhirnya saya terpaksa beralih dan mengaku beliau adalah sebahagian "rakyat" (man of the people) bukan macam saya. Selepas pengakuan itu kami menjadi kawan baik.

Pada mulanya saya agak terperanjat kerana lukisan

beliau tidak langsung menunjukkan personaliti sebagai orang bandar. Lukisan beliau menggambarkan kehidupan di desa yang menggunakan warna merah, ungu, merah kundang dan kuning. Dalam lukisan awalnya Hoy Cheong menggunakan cat minyak – warna-warna yang terang dan garang, juling mata kita tengok lukisannya lama-lama. Jika ditinjau semula pada palet warna-warna ganjil yang selalu beliau gunakan dengan perspektifnya yang telah dirobah bentuknya, saya langsung tidak sedar tentang maksud subversif Hoy Cheong – melainkan hidup di kampung itu macam tinggal atas asid?

Masa berjalan begitu lama. Selepas beberapa kali kami keluar makan tengahari bersama, makan malam, berbincang, banyak selisih faham dan minum kopi O, baru saya dengar beliau pindah dari bandar ke Kuala Kubu Bahru iaitu pekan kecil di kaki Bukit Fraser lebih kurang satu jam dari Kuala Lumpur. Sebelum beliau berpindah ke situ, beliau ada bercerita tentang projek besar yang dalam perancangannya. Saya patut selalu menziarahinya tetapi jarak perjalanan antara kami dirasa begitu jauh. Tetapi lama selepas itu saya dapat juga meluangkan masa untuk pergi ke Kuala Kubu Bahru. Masa itu saya datang untuk melihat lukisan beliau dan ingin bertanya khabar kawan lama saya itu.

Terperangat saya bila saya dapat tahu kawan saya ini tinggal dalam rumah papan yang kecil dan terletak di pinggir pekan itu dekat dengan sebuah kolam ikan yang besar. Kata beliau, kolam ikan dan rumah papan itu dibuat untuk projek perikanan yang telah dihentikan. Di kawasan projek itu angin bertiup perlahan-lahan dan nampaknya beliau cukup suka dengan keadaan itu – mungkin juga beliau suka pada keadaan yang aman dan tenteram. Tetapi pada tanggapan saya sebagai seorang graduan dari Amerika saya rasa beliau suka tempat itu kerana mengingatkannya pada Thoreau dan New England.

Keadaan kawasan itu yang terasa keseder-hanaannya, agak janggal kerana pemandangannya yang nampak dramatik di sekeliling rumah papan itu. Kolam ikan itu menenuhi keseluruhan lantai lembah yang sempit itu. Ada sebatang sungai kecil terpacut keluar airnya berbuih macam sungai yang terdapat di bukit dan di gunung – tegak gagah mengalir di belakang rumahnya dan ini menambah keindahan tempat yang terpencil itu. Ketenteraman tempat itu dengan bunyi suara lembut anak-anak jiran menghairankan saya kerana selama ini saya tidak melihatnya. Saya biasa dengan "Hoy Cheong seorang aktivis" atau "Hoy Cheong gerila bandar", rasa kekok juga bila di pelawa melihat kebunnya dan berbincang pasal jenis-jenis *kacang bendi*. Saya duduk atas lantai papan yang tidak dibarnis itu sambil menghirup kopii, saya menjadi keliru dan janggal dengan imej "petani desa" kawan baik saya ini.

Pada hari saya menziarahinya itu, cuaca sangat panas dan rumahnya terasa panas macam ketuhar. Kawan saya itu nampaknya tidak kisahkan keadaan hangat itu kerana padanya ia adalah sesuatu yang baru tetapi keadaan cuaca ini jarang sekali saya temui, ini membuatkan saya rasa

kurang selesa. Bila Hoy Cheong membuka gulungan lukisan barunya saya merasa hampa. Lukisan itu nampaknya berwarna perang pudar, didatik dan kabur. Hodoh betul, terlalu politikal dan membosankan. Apabila beliau melihat saya ragu-ragu, beliau terus menukar subjek, kami macam dua orang kawan baik yang faham akan sikap kami lalu membiarkan sahaja lukisan itu.

Saya lebih mengenali lukisan awalnya dan saya sebenarnya mengharapkan dapat semula melihat warna-warna yang sensual, garang dan segar. Dalam perjalanan baik ke Kuala Lumpur semasa memandu saya masih lagi terbayang-bayang dalam fikiran saya lukisan-lukisan baru beliau itu, tidak ada warna. Lukisan yang separuh siap itu nampaknya berwarna perang pudar dan rata – imejnya mengelirukan dan telah diambil dari foto dan poskad lama. Imej-imej itu nampak kasar dan kurang menyenangkan. Saya kecewa dan rasa sakit hati bila didedahkan pada isu sejarah dan politik. Pada masa itu, saya rasa lukisan ini perlu “disunting” terlebih dahulu, saya sendiri telah memberi pendapat saya biarpun ia secara halus.

Selepas beberapa bulan kemudian dan sekarang saya sudah melihat kesemua lukisan yang telah siap dan semasa karangan ini ditulis barulah saya dapat menerima lukisan beliau itu. Pada mula dulu, saya telah menilai lukisan beliau dengan tergesa-gesa dan sempit fikiran. Saya sekarang faham akan isi kandungan lukaran itu. Ia sama seperti sebuah novel – sebuah novel yang dapat menceritakan keseluruhan kisah hidup seseorang. Sekarang apabila saya melihat semula karya-karya itu, saya dapat juga melihat tujuan utama disebalik lukisan itu.

Hoy Cheong beralih dari menggunakan ruang kosong dan senyap yang digunakannya dengan berjaya dalam beberapa lukisan cat minyak. Dalam siri baru beliau hanya menggunakan kontras dan tidak ada langsung ruang yang ditinggalkan kosong. Bagaimana dengan isu tidak ada warna ini? Saya sedar sekarang, lukisan itu dapat menunjukkan kekuatannya dengan hanya berwarna monokrom. Warna yang dapat membangkitkan perasaan telah digantikan dengan pemikiran intelektual. Saya rasa bahawa Hoy Cheong cuba mengelak tindakbalas karyanya yang hanya bersifat emosi. Beliau hendak penonton berfikir semasa melihat.

Dengan melihat lukaran itu, seseorang dengan serta merta akan tertarik kepada cerita-cerita kehidupan dirinya yang digambarkan dalam lukisan. Kisah seorang nenek dengan empat belas orang anak, seorang ibu yang tidak berdaya tetapi terpaksa meneruskan hidupnya – subjek dengan mudah dapat disesuaikan dengan perasaan belas dan kasihan. Walau bagaimanapun Hoy Cheong telah berjaya membawa maksud luas ke dalam karyanya kerana dapat mendokumentari migrasi dan asimilasi. Setelah melihat kesemua karyanya maka saya faham bahawa dari sesuatu yang perbeda dan tertentulah apa yang epik dan agung telah dilahirkan.

Saya mengambil masa yang agak lama juga untuk faham perletakkan karya-karya ini dalam konteks itu. Sejauh yang saya tahu, lukaran ini bukanlah mengenai satu orang atau satu keluarga. Lukaran ini menggambarkan sejarah asal keturunan hidup pelukis dan juga satu gambaran kemanusiaan. Lukaran ini semacam tablo sejarah orang Cina Nanyang. Sejarah keluarga pelukis telah dibuat sebagai prisma untuk menggambarkan komuniti orang-orang keturunan Cina Malaysia – setengah dian-taranya menyoal isu pendatang secara keseluruhan. Hoy Cheong melukis dan menggambarkan keadaan migrasi, peralihan dan perubahan barangkali kerana ia sedar kedudukan sebenar negara kita di mana kemajuan Malaysia bermula dari migrasi yang terus berlaku dan tanpa migrasi kita tidak akan menuju kemercu ini.

Tetapi seperti apa yang telah saya katakan di awal tulisan ini iaitu tentang epik (bentuk fizikal lukaran ini yang selalu bersaiz besar) timbul dari cerita-cerita dan kisah-kisah kecil yang berlaku dalam sebuah keluarga. Tiap-tiap satu figura dalam lukaran ini menggambarkan perhubungan antara nenek moyang seseorang. Tiap-tiap figura adalah simbol atau lambang kepada seseorang yang kita kenal. Mereka dapat dikenal sebagai figura dalam konteks keluarga Hoy Cheong, tetapi bagi kita mereka juga adalah lambang (emblem). Cerita-cerita yang masih kita ingat lagi dan cerita-cerita yang kita telah lupa terjalin antara satu sama lain ber-sarang dalam ingatan diri sendiri dan sejarah “utama” dijadikan satu. Walau bagaimanapun, pergerakan satu-satu peristiwa dan watak pada umumnya bukanlah mudah dan pujian patut diberikan kepada Hoy Cheong kerana beliau telah berjaya dalam hal ini.

Saya tidak mahu lagi menceritakan apa-apa yang terkandung dalam karya beliau kerana saya fikir biarlah orang ramai sendiri yang mentakrifkannya dan mencari “nenek moyang” sendiri. Cerita-cerita yang disampaikan oleh Hoy Cheong adalah kepunyaan semua rakyat Malaysia. Jika saya memberi satu atau dua pendapat ini akan menggantikan proses dimana beliau cuba memaksa penonton untuk turut terlibat dalam isu itu. Beliau mahu anda kenal dan sedar perhubungan anda itu dan terikat dengan cerita-cerita itu.

Walaupun begitu, saya terpaksa beri komen saya pada lukisan yang saya rasa paling baik, *She was Married at 14 and Had 14 Children*. Sebahagian dari kejayaan ini terletak pada imbangan gubahan lukaran itu. Di sini, fokus utama adalah pada figura tengah iaitu gambar perempuan sedang mencangkung dikeliling anak-anaknya – dimana bayi-bayi itu dibalut oleh kain pembalut. Imej itu menakutkan kerana bayi-bayi itu nampak semacam cacing tetapi muka mereka muka orang dewasa. Terfikir juga dalam peringatan saya, adakah orang perempuan itu melahirkan tiap-tiap satu anak-anaknya dalam satu masa? Adakah ia terus bekerja sebaik sehaba melahirkan anak? Banyak soalan-soalan pendek, soalan demi soalan.

Hoy Cheong telah menggunakan cerita neneknya untuk dijadikan kisah-kisah yang dapat dijadi hakmilik semua orang Malaysia. Imej perempuan pakai *samfu* sungguh bermakna pada dirinya. Dia ialah lambang setiap wanita, ibu, nenek dan pendatang-pendatang; tidak mementingkan diri sendiri, tidak pernah merungut dan sangat produktif. Pada mulanya ia nampak terlalu khusus, berat dan tidak membantah. Ia dapat memberi maksud, kaya dan universal. Lakaran-lakaran ini menggambarkan sejarah hidup sendiri.

Lakaran beliau sama seperti peta ahli pelayaran khususnya jika dilihat dari segi perjalanan hidup keluarga bila nenek-moyangnya datang ke Malaysia hingga pada penghijrahan kakaknya ke Amerika Utara. Ia juga gambaran pengalaman semua pendatang ke Malaysia. Lakaran ini juga sebagai batu peringatan untuk semua cerita-cerita keluarga dan setiap cerita-cerita keluarga itu pasti ada jalan yang buntu, bahagian kosong dan nama-nama yang tidak dapat lagi diingat dimana tidak seorang pun dapat ingatkannya lagi dan muka-muka orang yang sekarang telah di-kaburkan oleh masa.

Pada peringkat lain, lakaran tersebut mencari balik evolusi *sinkeh* dan nyonya Cina Selat Melaka, suatu ringkasan atau kumpulan pengalaman orang-orang Cina Asia Tenggara. Lakaran Hoy Cheong dapat dilihat sebagai dokumen sosio-ekonomi. Tetapi lakaran beliau adalah lebih daripada itu. Lakaran beliau juga satu produk imajinasi yang kreatif dan patut dilihat dalam bentuk itu. Tetapi seperti semua lukisan yang terkenal walaupun apapun tujuan pelukis ia adalah terbuka kepada penonton untuk memilih cara mana yang harus ia pilih untuk melihat dan membaca lukisan itu mengikut kehendak hatinya.

Seni Dalam Migrasi Dan Seniman Yang Berjiwa Imigran

oleh Khoo Khay Jin

Lakaran yang menggunakan garisan dan foto lama yang berwarna keperang-perangan serta agak lapuk yang selalu dicetak seperti ketika tiba di pelabuhan, semasa berkumpul dirumah transit, semasa bekerja di lombong, diestet dan semasa disuruh bekerja membuat rel keretapi dan jalanraya.

Ramai orang akan merasa kagum diatas kecekalan hati mereka yang sanggup meninggalkan negara tanah air, sahabat handai untuk datang mencari rezeki dan kesenangan yang diidamkan tetapi sukar dicapai oleh kebanyakan orang. Kebanyakan imigran hidup dalam kedaifan dan tidak akan pulang ke negara sendiri. Mereka terus tinggal di situ lalu menyesuaikan diri dengan keadaan tempatan walaupun ia berbeza dari negara mereka sendiri.

Rakyat Malaysia yang berketurunan Cina dan India masih terkenangkan peristiwa-peristiwa itu. Ramai akan berasa kagum dan bersympati bila mengingati kembali perjalanan hidup mereka sejak migrasi. Tetapi ramai juga orang-orang Melayu pada masa ini yang kurang perasaan perkaumannya, akan bersympati dan tahu tentang pengalaman-pengalaman yang ditempuh oleh pendatang-pendatang asing ini ketika mengharungi lautan. Imigran ini kemudian menetap dan menjadi sebahagian dari penduduk serta menerima budaya tempatan. Kehadiran mereka telah sedikit sebanyak memperkayaan persekitaran dan budaya tempat itu melalui pengalaman migrasi mereka.

Tidak dapat disangkal lagi kita telah menjadi sebahagian dari "anak negeri" ini. Perkara ini tidak patut dipandang serong atau ditertawakan terutamanya dalam masyarakat majmuk kita yang kompleks ini. Ini dapat diperhatikan dari reaksi kita kepada imigran baru yang kini berkerja di estet-estet, di kilang-kilang, kawasan pembinaan dan sebagai pemungut-pemungut sampah. Dengan kehadiran mereka itu, kita terasa mereka seperti orang luar apabila mereka cuba meneroka tanah di sini, mendirikan rumah untuk dijadikan kampung halaman mereka dalam keadaan budaya dan tempat yang begitu "asing."

Sementara reaksi yang disebutkan tadi telah menjadi lumrah dalam keadaan hidup di dunia ini, perasaan takut "anak negeri" kepada kedatangan imigran asing yang dianggap jahat dan tidak bermoral ini yang mungkin menjadi saingan dalam pasaran yang akan menyebabkan kita ke-hilangan pekerjaan ataupun menjadi punca pendapatan kita berkurangan. Inilah politik masyarakat

majmuk kita yang hanya tahu melepaskan geram pada imigran asing ini.

Justeru itu, dalam proses kita menjadi sebahagian dari "anak negeri" kita telah terlupa kepada peristiwa pada satu masa dahulu. Kita terlupa juga, jiran kita, mungkin kawan kita, saudara-mara kita telah berhijrah ke negara-negara lain. Harus diingat dalam zaman mobiliti ini, penduduk negara kita juga sentiasa berpindah-pindah, misalnya dari satu negeri ke satu negeri yang lain, dari desa ke bandar, mencari pekerjaan, rezeki dan kesenangan.

Yang menghairankan kita ialah bagaimana dalam keadaan kealpaan kita pada sejarah, timbul pula trend menggunakan istilah-istilah yang dilabelkan sebagai "nostalgia", seperti pesta-pesta "Thirties Night" dan "Colonial night" yang begitu popular sekarang ini telah digunakan oleh beberapa hotel "bertaraf antarabangsa" di beberapa buah bandar besar di negara ini. Projek yang lebih besar lagi ialah "Orient Express."

Kita tidak patut membuang dan meninggalkan terus sesuatu dari nostalgia kerana ada bentuk-bentuk nostalgia yang masih lagi boleh digunakan. Ia boleh dijadikan benteng untuk meruntuhkan ancaman kemodenan. Ia mengingatkan kita semula dari mana kita datang dan kepada perkara-perkara yang telah hilang dalam hidup kita serta juga mengingatkan akan bahaya ke-hilangan itu. Ia dapat mendorong kita untuk bertanya kemanakah haluan kita. Ia dapat mengawal kita dari angkara pemikiran moden yang begitu licik dan yang lebih merbahaya lagi jika kita tidak menyedari ungkapan-ungkapan seperti "apa yang ada sekarang pastinya lebih baik" ataupun "sesuatu yang baru adalah terbaik" – semua ungkapan ini selalu digunakan dalam iklan "teknologi masa kini."

Tetapi keadaan yang membolehkan kita me-entuk pemilihan samada "melupakannya" atau "mengingatinya" telah di lemahkan oleh pengaruh penjajahan di masa dahulu dan kemodenan masa sekarang yang begitu mengasyikkan sedang bermain dalam benak fikiran kita. Kita selalu terperangkap dalam kancang yang bercanggah kerana kita suka menerima bulat-bulat kata-kata manis tuan-tuan penjajah tentang kebaikan persaingan yang mereka telah bentuk dan apabila tuan orang putih yang sama itu mengutuk kita kerana rasuah dan hak asasi manusia, kita merasa sakit hati.

Barangkali kita telah dapat mengagak perkara ini akan berlaku. Taraf pencapaian keinginan modenisme dan pemikiran kita tentang ke-modernen ini yang belum kita selidiki, sebenarnya diasaskan di tempat lain di luar diri kita – kita selalunya membuat pemilihan kepada sesuatu yang lebih baik, tetapi tingkatan ukuran anggapan negatif dan positif kita terhadap zaman sekarang sebenarnya tidak pernah di selidiki macamlah kemodenan itu sebuah bakul yang mengandungi bermacam-macam barang di mana kita boleh pilih semahu kita tetapi bukan dengan kefahaman yang menyeluruh.

Lagi pun, teguran banyak dibuat supaya kita menerima perubahan serta meninggalkan cara lama kita yang dianggap tidak sesuai lagi dalam denyutan nadi modenisma. Teguran ini adalah secara halus dan tersembunyi untuk merendahkan tradisi budaya kita yang dipandang tidak bernilai lagi. Kita juga ditegur supaya ikhlas dan berkata benar kepada diri kita sendiri. Dalam hal ini apakah maknanya ikhlas dan benar kepada diri kita ini? Mempamerkan baju, warna dan kebudayaan kita pada hari-hari keramaian sahaja sebenarnya tidak bermakna dan relevan dalam kehidupan sehari-hari kita. Istilah yang paling mudah diper-gunakan disini ialah "nilai-nilai orang Asia." Ia seperti mentera yang menyelubungi kita dengan keajaiban yang nyata?

Apa yang kita perlu nyatakan di sini, estetik kita juga telah terperangkap dalam tekanan ini dimana tahap "cantik" dan "apa yang menjadi idaman" kita semakin lama tidak dapat lagi dibezaikan dengan budaya "metropolitan." Fesyen dan pereka fesyen, pereka grafik hinggahalah kepada industri pengiklanan kita telah secara terang-terangan menonjolkan gaya "metropolitan" sebagai tunjang imej mereka. Sehingga kan terdapat dua jenama pakaian yang terkenal di sini yang menggunakan label "East India Company" dan "British India." Bukanakah nama-nama ini mengingatkan kita kepada pelanunian, penaklukan, sikap perkauman, penindasan, candu dan penghinaan lebih dari gaya sofistikated, citara sa dan keselesaan? Bolehkah sikap perkauman, penindasan dan ketidakadilan di samakan dengan gaya yang unggul? Apa yang benar di sini ialah, sensibiliti kita telah dibentuk dari perasaan bangga kita kerana mempunyai bangunan pencakar langit yang tertinggi di dunia hinggahalah kepada wawasan kita seperti hendak "menakluk gunung Everest" yang merupakan motif di sebalik pertembungan kita dengan alam semula jadi.

Dalam ukuran lain, apa yang menyediakan ialah kesemua jenis ekpresi itu mencerminkan ketidakyakinan kita dalam mengukur diri dengan nilai-nilai sendiri. Dan lebih lagi, oleh kerana kita alpa kepada sejarah, pemikiran kita selalu dibelenggu.

Dalam usaha mengejar apa yang dihasratkan sama seperti "chimeras" (sesuatu usaha yang mustahil) di mana pada akhirnya, kita akan merasa hampa dan mendapat penghinaan. Migrasi kini berlaku kerana hasrat kepada kemodenan yang menjanjikan peluang dan kesenangan yang dapat memenuhi hasrat segelintir dari mereka dan yang lainnya akan terus bergelut dengan gelumang dimana untuk menjadi seorang "anak negeri" di negara baru ini, mereka tetap kekal sebagai imigran yang masih mengejar matlamat mereka yang kian hari kian kabur.

Walau bagaimanapun masih ada satu lagi golongan yang berjiwa imigran. Hidupnya nampak tenteram tetapi terasing dinegaranya sendiri. Peranan golongan ini adalah untuk menyalakan kembali pengalaman sejarah, peristiwa dan perjalanan hidup yang telah lama dilupakan supaya kita tidak melupakannya, membangkitkan soalan-soalan yang kurang menyenangkan serta mencabar kita

dengan pandangan yang berbeza terhadap diri kita. Dengan berbuat begitu, mereka telah memperkembangkan lagi pengalaman kita, mendorong kita mengambil iktibar dan mencabar kita menerima kemungkinan lain dari menerima realiti yang mungkin tidak dapat kita elakkan.

Golongan yang berjiwa imigran ini berada dalam negara sendiri tetapi masih juga menjadi orang asing kepada negara dan masyarakatnya yang memberikan ruang tempat untuk ia tinggal dan berkarya yang mana pada masa yang sama mereka ini adalah penonton yang memberi nilai kepada lukisannya. Ia menjadi orang asing disebabkan ia selalu melakukan sesuatu yang dianggap salah, kerana ia bertindak melampaui batasan yang ditetapkan.

Seniman mungkin tergolong dalam kumpulan ini walau bagaimanapun tidak ramai seniman yang sanggup menerima peranan ini kerana mereka masih lagi terikat dengan seni yang dapat menjanjikan taraf mereka. Pada mereka yang sanggup menerima peranan ini, mereka tidak boleh berbuat begitu secara lewa dan tertangguh-tangguh. Seniman yang berani mengajukan soalan-soalan yang patut ditanya, mencabar isu yang selalu diketepikan, membangkitkan isu yang ramai diantara kita cuba elakkan. Pastinya seniman yang berjiwa imigran dengan jiwa yang kurang senang untuk meneruskan usahanya berkarya dalam bentuk ini memerlukan ketabahan meng-hindari diri dari memikirkan tentang nikmat kesenangan dan keselesaan. Ia juga sanggup menerima risiko bila melanggar batasan kerana hendak melihat jika sebenarnya ia dikong-kong atau dibelenggu. Pendek kata, ia sanggup melanggar sesuatu yang ditegah oleh masyarakat yang mementingkan kehalusan dan budi bahasa.

Ini bukanlah bantahan yang dibuat secara sia-sia. Tindakan ini kebudak-budakan kalau ia dibuat untuk mengutuk masyarakat dan tanah air sendiri yang telah memberi ruangan dan halaman yang mengikhtiraf bantahan ini sebagai satu tindakan yang bermakna. Seseorang individu yang mementingkan hal peribadinya sendiri sahaja akan kurang sedar tentang batasan sosial yang mentakrifkan keadaan komunikasi dimana ia tidak akan melanggar undang-undang untuk memperjuangkan sesuatu tetapi sebaliknya hanya melakukan kesalahan sahaja. Seniman yang mempunyai kesedaran sosial akan sedar hubungan yang telah lama tertanam antara dirinya dengan tanah air, penduduk dan masyarakat dimana bantahannya adalah untuk meluaskan dan membangkitkan kesedaran masyarakat yang telah dikaburi oleh nikmat kesenangan dalam hidup sehari-hari.

Justeru ini, tanpa kata-kata, imej-imej dalam seni boleh menerangi keadaan lalu mendorongkan kita berfikir tentang nikmat kesenangan. Dan lagi, dalam keadaan zaman kini dimana migrasi telah berlaku dengan pesatnya, memanglah tepat bagi seorang seniman Malaysia menggunakan lukisannya untuk menghuraikan isu migrasi

dan dengan tindakannya ini, barangkali dapat memberi semangat kepada kita untuk mengingatkan keadaan migrasi dahulu supaya kita dapat berfikir tentang migrasi dalam zaman kini yang begitu kompleks. Dan dari situlah kita dapat mengalih perasaan geram kita bukan lagi pada imigran baru tetapi kepada keadaan sosial yang menyebabkan mereka menjadi imigran.

Perbualan Saya Dengan Wong Hoy Cheong

oleh Ray Langenbach

Aku mempunyai pendirianku yang berlainan. Memilih nostalgia dari kehidupan masa kini. Setiap masa aku merasa diriku terpinggir walaupun pada zahirnya aku hidup dalam zaman ini. Aku tidak mahu mengubah keadaan sekarang. Aku menerima suratan, tetapi masyarakat elit di bari depan ku adalah masyarakat elit di zaman silam ku. Bagi ku ideologi itu sama seperti percutian. Aku ingat aku hidup dalam revolusi. Tetapi aku hidup dalam tabun sebelum revolusi. Bagi ku kehidupan selalu terletak dalam masa sebelum revolusi.

-Bernardo Bertolucci, *Before the Revolution*

Saya bertemu dengan Hoy Cheong pada 7 April 1996 di Padang Merbok. Hari itu ada demonstrasi tunjuk perasaan menyatakan tidak puas hati dengan projek pembinaan empangan Bakun. Di situ terdapat sekumpulan wanita dari suku Belaga, Sarawak. Meraka berkumpul bersama-sama beberapa orang dari Semenanjung Malaysia. Antara kenyataan mereka kepada pemberita :

"Kami bukan bendak menolak pembangunan tapi kami mahu pembangunan yang dapat memberikan kemudahan yang dapat menampung kehidupan kami seperti klinik, sistem jalanraya yang baik dan keperluan asas yang lain. Tetapi yang paling penting di sini ialah kami mahu menjaga dan mempertahankan budaya dan tradisi kami yang kaya dan tanah tinggalan nenek moyang kami."

Saya rasa mereka ini telah dijadikan kaum pendatang di tanah mereka sendiri. Keadaan menjadi gamat sebentar kerana berlaku sedikit pergolongan, orang ramai disembur dengan gas pemeredih mata dan di suruh bersurai selepas empat puluh minit berkumpul. Kami memandu ke Balai Seni Lukis Negara untuk melihat empat daripada lima lukisan Wong yang bertajuk *Migrants* yang telah dibeli oleh mereka. Mata saya masih lagi terasa sakit bila gas pemeredih mata yang masih tertinggal mengikut peluh ke mata. Walau bagaimanapun masalah sosial yang digambarkan melalui seni tampak rasanya telah dijadi metafora yang baik oleh Hoy Cheong dalam lukisannya. Beliau selalu menggunakan isu masalah sosial yang dipapar atas rengang kanvasnya.

Berikut adalah salinan bertulis kedua-dua temu bual kami yang saya telah sunting dari video dan nota-nota saya. Saya telah memesan lagi sintax dan rakaman temu bual kami jika diperlukan nanti untuk mensahihkan apa yang

dilihat itu adalah apa yang benar-benar dicapkan oleh orang yang ditemu bual itu. Barangkali kesannya mungkin tidak sama. Selepas melihat salinan bertulis temu bual pertama kami, Hoy Cheong berpendapat temu bual ini berat sebelah tapi saya tidak menghiraukannya sehingga ia terpaksa menjawab soalan mengikut agenda saya dan ia rasa, keadaan dimana soalan-soalan yang saya ajukan tampak lebih jelas berlawanan dengan jawapannya yang spontan dan menyangskan itu dapat dilihat dalam muka surat. Perdebatan dalam satu-satu temu bual pada beliau adalah untuk mengimbangi perhubungan antara penemuda dan yang di temuduga.

Ray Langenbach

Bolehkah anda berikan sedikit penerangan ringkas tentang pameran yang sedang dalam perancangan anda ini?

Wong Hoy Cheong

Pameran ini ada tiga koponen. Lakaran siri *Migrants*, seni instalasi yang bertajuk *Rubber Trees* dan beberapa buah lakaran potret yang bertajuk *New Migrants*.

Komponen pertama, adalah lakaran yang dilhamkan dari pengalaman keluarga saya sebagai kaum pendatang yang telah diasimilasikan dan saya juga cuba membawa balik sejarah migrasi dari zaman dahulu bila ia mula-mula berlaku hingga ke masa kini. Dalam komponen ini terdapat lima lakaran besar dan dua puluh buah lakaran kajian.

Komponen kedua, yang bertajuk *Rubber Trees* adalah sebuah seni instalasi yang menggunakan foto, teks, rujukan kesusastraan dan botanikal, hasil keluaran dan alat-alat menoreh getah. Dalam bahagian ini saya cuba menghubungkan kemasukan getah ke Malaysia dengan migrasi buruh-buruh asing dan isu status keaslian kedua perkara getah dan kaum pendatang.

Komponen ketiga adalah lakaran wajah yang menggunakan media arang dan lisan sejarah kelas buruh yang baru terdiri dari kaum pendatang yang telah berhijrah ke sini sepuluh atau limabelas tahun yang lalu. Saya juga selitkan teks tentang masalah dan isu yang berkaitan dengan pendatang baru ini seperti isu perundangan yang ada kaitan dengan migrasi yang menjadi proses universal sejak beribu-ribu tahun dahulu.

Lakaran dan Pembentukan Realiti

Di barat selalunya lakaran dianggap sebagai ibu kepada lukisan tetapi sungguhpun begitu pada masa yang sama di dalam pasaran ia masih lagi dilihat tidak begitu bernilai. Ia berada di pinggir dominan gerakan seni lukis. Adakah melalui kesedaran ini anda memilih cara melukis yang bukan dominan untuk mengkritik seni lukis barat?

Ya, di Malaysia juga lakaran tidak pernah di pandang serius. Tidak ramai yang menyudahkan lakaran mereka sepenuhnya. Ini adalah satu cara membawa sesuatu yang di pinggir ke tengah.

Adakah melalui lakaran ini, anda ingin mengingatkan kita kembali kepada zaman foto hitam putih dalam lewat kurun ke 19?

Ya, sebab itulah saya menggunakan warna hitam dan putih. Warna-warna ini mengingati kita ke zaman itu tetapi sebenarnya saya suka membuat lakaran. Saya sukakan media arang ini kerana dapat digunakan secara terus menurus dan mudah.

Lukisan anda nampaknya jauh berbeza dengan lakaran anda. Dalam lukisan, anda selalu menggunakan warna-warna komplimentari. Pemilihan warna anda ada persamaan dengan warna yang digunakan oleh Gauguin dan yang telah mempengaruhi kumpulan pelukis-pelukis Jerman. Adakah dengan memilih warna hitam putih ini, anda ingin melaikan diri anda dari dibelenggu pengaruh penjajah?

Memang rasa susah. Saya keliru bila orang membandingkan lukisan saya dengan Gauguin. Sepatutnya ia adalah satu penghargaan kepada saya tetapi beliau adalah antara pelukis yang saya tidak suka orang lain bandingkannya dengan saya kerana lukisan saya bukan tentang satu gambaran orang putih datang melihat orang asli.

Pelukis Nanyang adalah kumpulan pelukis tempatan yang telah dipengaruhi oleh lukisan Gauguin. Pelukis-pelukis dari keturunan Cina ini adalah kumpulan pelukis yang mula-mula melawat Bali mengikuti jejak Gauguin tetapi pemergian mereka kali ini menghasilkan karya-karya yang lebih bersifat ‘voyeurism’ dari menunjukkan belenggu penjajahan?

...orientalis...

Ya, golongan orientalis. Bukanakah pergerakan mereka ini penting dalam sejarah seni lukis Malaysia dan anda tidak seharusnya menafikan kaitan diri anda dengan mereka. Adakah ini meyebabkan anda mengambil keputusan membuat lukisan hitam dan putih?

Memang tepat sekali. Pendedahan saya kepada seni lukis bermula di barat kerana saya mendapat pendidikan di sana. Bila saya balik, gaya saya juga sama seperti seorang orientalis tetapi sekarang saya tidak lagi melukis lukisan dalam gaya orientalis itu: khayalan romantik tentang negara ini semasa berada di Amerika Syarikat.

Berbalik kepada lakaran anda, ruang gambar tidak mendalam dan tidak juga menunjukkan zaman foto hitam putih kurun ke 19. Anda ingin menggambar nostalgia masa lalu tetapi anda tidak memberi peluang kepada nostalgia itu digambarkan sepenuhnya.

Saya mahu lakaran ini memberi gambaran nostalgia tetapi ia dipisahkan dengan “tingkap” seperti kegunaan “dialogue boxes” dalam komputer; realiti terasing dapat dilihat secara serantak. Kita kembali ke nostalgia dengan tujuan memecah-kan tingkap ini.

Nampaknya *Aspirations of the Working Class* ini anda ambil terus dari foto manakala yang lain adalah dari ingatan anda.

Sebenarnya bukan begitu. Foto keluarga itu sebenarnya tidak wujud. Ia cuma cantuman sepuluh foto. Tajuk *Aspirations of the Working Class* ialah sebab ia umum, sesuatu pandangan yang lebih intelektual tentang kelas buruh. Ia memaparkan keinginan satu kelas sosial, bukan satu keluarga sahaja.

Studio foto dari dahulu sampai sekarang mereka masih menggunakan pemandangan sebagai latar belakang bila mengambil foto. Heran, mereka yang dari kelas buruh ini suka sangat menangkap foto dengan pemandangan cantik itu walaupun mereka tahu ia tidak wujud dalam hidup mereka. Mereka dapat mengkalkan dengan foto sesaat dari hidup mereka di hadapan gambar alam semula jadi yang mereka katakan cantik itu, memakai topi dan berpakaian cantik. Selepas itu mereka kembali kepada persekitaran hidup mereka iaitu sebagai kelas buruh. Foto ini menjadi realiti sehingga sekarang tetapi pada zahirnya kehidupan mereka bukan begitu.

Lakaran ini juga boleh memberikan gambaran keadaan ini?

Imej itu terhasil dari gabungan cerita-cerita pendek dengan realiti yang berlainan. Jadi dalam lakaran itu realiti sebenarnya tidak wujud tetapi intipatinya sahaja yang dapat dilihat. Realiti bukan satu. Realiti adalah dari serpihan-serpihan yang bercantum menjadi satu, dari kejadian-kejadian yang berlaku serentak atau berpisah-pisah di ruang dan masa tetapi bercantum dalam ingatan kita.

Dalam kata lain anda hanya menggunakan fungsi ingatan yang selalunya bertimpas-timpas itu ambil satu di sini dan ambil satu di sana untuk memberi maksud yang ringkas.

Tapi berkemungkinan ia tidak memberi maksud sebenar juga...

...atau maksud di masa itu. Anda masih lagi menggunakan imej dari foto dalam lukisan anda yang lain tetapi semua tepi foto-foto itu anda buang kecuali gambar pengantin *Marriage of a Rubber Tapper to a Girl Dressed as Virgin Mary in a School Play*.

Gambar pengantin itulah satunya yang saya ambil terus dari foto. Contohnya gambar nenek saya. Saya gunakannya dalam tiga buah lukisan saya. Sebenarnya saya

cuma ada gambarnya yang bersaiz paspot. Dalam foto itu neneh saya tidaklah berdiri seperti itu. Banyak dari imej-imej itu adalah rekaan saya semata-mata bukan figura betul.

Dengan kata lain anda mencipta ikon darinya dan memberi tumpuan kepada...

...intipatinya.

Anda banyak menggunakan perkataan "intipati." Intipati atau representasi?

Menggunakan perkatan intipati mungkin salah dalam soal ini sebab intipati itu menunjukkan satu. Tapi ada banyak suara, dan ada banyak cerita. Tetapi sebagai seorang pelukis dan sebagai seorang penonton kita melihat realiti yang berbagai ini melalui imej, melalui representasi "tingkap" yang saya reka dan kita membentuk intipati kita sendiri. Kita sendiri yang membuat satu peranadian yang hampir kepada intipati dari imej-imej tadi.

Bila anda gunakan perkataan intipati, adakah anda merujuk kepada satu ideologi yang menjadi asas kepada lukisan anda? Ia adalah isu modeniti berlawanan dengan isu paskal moden (post-modernity) dan adakah anda benar-benar berideologi modenis dan adakah modenisma benar-benar menjadi tunggak utama dalam lukisan anda. Adakah anda benar-benar yakin ia adalah ideologi yang menjadi "intipati" kepada anda?

Antara universalisme yang saya gemari itu dengan modenisma dan pluraliti suara zaman lepas modenisma kerap kali memberi tekanan kepada saya. Saya harap ide orang ramai dalam dunia ini boleh disatukan dengan satu suara tetapi pada pengetahuan sebenarnya, ia tidak boleh. Di antara kedua aspek tadi juga kerap berlaku tekanan dan saya pula memainkan tekanan ini. Tetapi jika anda buangkan semuanya lalu bertanya samada teras pengalaman saya ialah modenis, barangkali ia benar.

Hofmann & "Tolak-Tarik"

Dengan menggambarkan emak anda sebagai Virgin Mary dalam *Mariage of a Rubber Tapper to a Girl Dressed as Virgin Mary in a School Play* anda telah melukisnya dalam cara gaya lukisan barat. Anda ada menyebutkan beberapa nama-nama kepada saya tadi antaranya lukisan kecil dari zaman Persian dan Moghul, Giotto, Piero della Francesca, Georges de la Tour, Ingres, Picasso, Diego Rivera dan Hans Hofmann.

Saya diajarkan tentang pendekatan Hans Hoffmann oleh tiga pensyarah saya, Encik Paul Georges, Peter Grippo dan John Grillo. Mereka meyakinkan saya bahawa melalui pemahaman intelektual Hans Hofmann tentang seni lukis dan kajianya terhadap Picasso, Matisse, Ingres dan Giotto beliau telah dapat menggabungkan

semua jenis gerakan seni lukisan barat kepada sesuatu yang lebih penting. Saya rasa intipati inilah yang telah saya terima dan ini memberi satu kefahaman yang mengaitkan lukisan saya dari zaman sekarang kembali ke Giotto dari perspektif barat.

Lakaran kajian emak saya sebagai Virgin Mary tidak direka oleh saya. Sebenarnya, saya ada foto yang menunjuk dia berpakaian seperti itu dalam satu drama sekolah.

Mengikut ideologi itu dengan membuat satu ruang yang dalam di atas lukisan (contohnya seperti lukisan Raphael atau Rubens) ia telah "mengkhianati bahan lukisan"?

Tepat sekali, anda mengkhianati bahan lukisan. Kita tidak sepatutnya membuat lubang di atas permukaan dua dimensi. Samada ia betul atau tidak sukar bagi saya meninggalkannya.

Adakah ini ideologi seni lukis yang pertama anda ikuti dan adakah ini antara sebab anda rasakan ia sangat penting? Adakah dari ideologi ini anda berpendapat seni lukis membawa maksud melalui strukturnya dan berfungsi sebagai "bahasa" simbolik?

Ada dua yang telah mempengaruhi diri saya. Satu, yang sudah lama berlaku sebelum saya mengenal rapat tentang Hofmann. Saya mempunyai satu kesedaran ingin rapat dengan realiti misalnya seni lukis dengan politik, dengan sosial dan dengan maksud lukisan. Dan yang lagi satu ialah Hofmann. Beliau telah membuatkan saya melihat antara Picasso dan Ingres atau antara Ingres dan seni cetakan Jepun tidak jauh bezanya. Dengan teori Hofmann ini saya dapat menghubungkan arca Africa dengan arca Papua New Guinea. Selagi ada hubungan struktur antara yang melintang dengan yang menegak dan antara ruang permukaan yang aktif dan bertolak-tolakkan, lukisan itu pasti menjadi. Struktur estetik menyeluruh dan kadangkala mencengkam.

Setujukah anda dengan pendapat struktur estetik sahaja membawa ideologi tanpa perkaitan dengan unsur-unsur lain?

Memang benar.

Apa pendapat anda dengan ideologi yang menyampaikan struktur idea-idea Hofmann?

Turun temurun sejarah seni lukis barat tidak dinoda dan tidak berhenti. Ia lurus hingga kancang anda dapat menghubungkan Pollock dengan Giotto. Dan anda juga dapat hubungankan lebih jauh dari itu misalnya Pollock dengan lukisan Afrika. Jadi pada jangkaan struktur ini adalah yang ideal dan ia adalah struktur seni yang benar dalam semua jenis seni lukis.

Adakah ia struktur tamadun manusia?

Ya, dan tamadun barat menjadi tamadun yang dominan.

Anda tentu kurang senang dengan kenyataan ini.

Ya, saya kurang senang dengan kenyataan ini.

Sebenarnya gambaran sifat menyeluruh ini adalah satu gambaran penjajah?

Sebelum ini kita telah bercakap tentang aspek ini. Apa yang kerap kali menarik perhatian saya ialah kepada gerakan modenisma, struktur universal yang menyeluruh, naratif-naratif agung dan keperluan saya melihat dan mencari struktur naratif-naratif ini. Saya biarkan ia bertapak di dalam diri saya. Saya melukis dengan gaya modenis dengan struktur formalnya. Kemudian, saya cuba mengubah struktur ini dengan mencipta itingkap dan gambaran dari serpihan realiti. Saya menerima lalu mengubah strukturnya. Saya bergerak diantara berbagai realiti dan struktur ideologi.

Dalam Ikutan Turun-Temurun

Dimanakah anda hendak letakkan diri anda dalam pergerakan seni lukis Malaysia?

Bila saya balik ke Malaysia saya lihat di sini kebanyakannya hanya melukis lukisan abstrak. Reaksi pertama saya ialah kenapa pula seni lukis abstrak? Ia bukan ada kaitan dalam konteks negara ini, terlalu internasionalis, bukan juga di tempatkan oleh budaya. Masa saya balik, seni lukis figuratif mula bertapak kembali jadi saya dapat menyeseuaikan diri dalam keadaan ini. Pertalian saya dengan negara ini tergantung kepada kegunaan isu tempatan sebagai subjek saya.

Figuratif...Siapa ? Ibrahim Hussein?

Zulkifli Dahalan disebab lukisannya yang membawa unsur-unsur humor seperti juga Dzulkifli Buyong. Latiff Mohidin adalah pelukis yang saya anggap orang yang paling arif tentang lukisan abstrak di negara ini... Khusus dari segi penggunaan ruang. Amron Omar, Tan Chin Kuan, Bayu Utomo, Raja Shahriman.

Ada tidak pelukis lain dari keturunan Cina yang anda rasa mempunyai kaitan dengan lukisan anda?

Tidak ada.

Saya rasa anda kurang senang bila saya menyentuh isu kedudukan anda dalam perkembangan seni lukis Malaysia.

Ya, sebab saya tidak dapat melihat di mana kedudukan saya sebenarnya. Saya selalu berada di kangkang antara isu, tempat dan kepercayaan. Walaubagaimanapun saya telah diterima oleh golongan dominan. tetapi saya tidak

suka berada di dalamnya. Saya lebih suka berada di pinggir tetapi saya masih juga berada di tengah-tengah. Saya tidak berapa suka bila anda mengatakan saya juga sebahagian dari ikutan turun-temurun pergerakan seni lukis ini. Saya rasa seperti saya dicampak ke dalam establismen yang saya tidak mahu berada di dalamnya. Tetapi saya tahu saya sememangnya telah berada di dalam establismen dan pada masa yang sama saya tidak dapat manafikannya.

Jadi anda telah diletakkan begini untuk mempunyai kedudukan generasi, benarkah begitu?

Juga ke dalam sejarah.

Berbalik kepada pendidikan, bukankah kedudukan anda di dalam generasi dan sejarah seni lukis disebabkan pada dasarnya anda telah merintih satu kumpulan pelukis di Malaysia? Anda juga telah menggunakan cerita-cerita dari kesusastraan Malaysia dan Indonesia dalam lukisan anda. Ini adalah iNaratif Realisma dan ia hampir sama dengan "Naratif Magik Realisma" dari Amerika Selatan, dan ini adalah satu gaya lukisan yang anda telah ajarkan kepada anak-anak murid anda di Institut Senilukis Malaysia (MIA). Bolehkah anda masih lagi menafikan kedudukan anda dalam pergerakan seni lukis, sedangkan ada yang telah menjadi pengikut?

Saya tidak mahu beri diri saya lebih dari apa yang...

Saya faham, tetapi cuba lihat dari luar dan dalam memang tidak boleh dinafikan lagi. Anda adalah generasi tengah dalam gerakan seni lukis sekarang. Eng Hwee Chu adalah salah seorang dari anak murid anda yang telah berjaya menjadi seorang pelukis dan juga contoh kepada generasi akan datang. Dan dari hasil didikan ini ia mengingatkan kita kembali kepada Hofmann.

Benar. Yang anehnya sebelum saya tinggalkan Amerika Syarikat, Grillo telah memberikan hadiah harijadi kepada saya. Dua buah buku: satu, buku Farida Kahlo dan satu lagi sebuah biografi Hofmann yang baru sahaja keluar sebelum saya balik. Dalam buku itu dia ada menulis, menyuruh saya menanam benih-benih Hofmann di Malaysia. Jadi saya tidak pasti adakah saya telah menyabarkan pandangan dan struktur imperialis yang menyeluruh. Sebenarnya, teori "tolak-tarik" Hofmann ada perkaitan rapat dengan pandangan yang lain. Contohnya dialektik metafizikal Hegel, dialektik Marx dan pandangan Taois yang mementingkan satu perhubungan antara 'yin' dan 'yang'.

Seni Lukis Dalam Perbaasan Sosio Politik

Anda mengajar mata pelajaran "Estetik" dengan mem-beri kepentingan kepada Dunia Ketiga di MIA.

Kandungan dalam estetik Dunia Ketiga sangat penting. Sebagai contohnya Augusto Boal yang berpendapat

estetik boleh digunakan sebagai alat untuk pendidikan, untuk membebaskan, untuk mededahkan semula realiti sebenar. Jadi ia bukanlah estetik formal Hofmann. Ia bercanggah dengan Hofmann. Di sini "tolak-tarik" tidak kena pada tempatnya kalau anda tidak dapat gunakannya untuk menyampaikan sesuatu yang dapat menggambarkan atau mengubah masyarakat.

Anda pernah membincangkan tentang kerja-kerja Paulo Freire dalam sebuah karangan anda. Anda pernah belajar dengannya di Amerika Syarikat tapi apa yang menarik saya di sini ialah bagaimana satu subjek, contohnya pembacaan, dapat memberi kefahaman terhadap struktur sosial yang mengelilingi subjek ini di dalam sesuatu masyarakat tertentu dan dalam sistem global penjajahan dan kuasa. Anda nampaknya banyak memberi perhatian kepada isu-isu yang berkaitan dengan hubungan kuasa pentadbiran di Malaysia, misalnya dalam lukisan anda yang bertajuk *Detention October 1987 (1989)*, *Internal Security Act (1988)*, *ISA Detention (1991)* dan *Lalang*, sebuah seni performan yang diadakan pada tahun 1994. Dalam lukisan anda yang bertajuk *The Nouveau Rich*, *The Elephant*, *The Foreign Maid or The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* (1991) anda telah menggambarkan kesan kemasukan modal asing ke Malaysia. Jadi "tolak-tarik" hanyalah satu metafora kepada situasi sosial yang lebih besar? Adakah ia dapat terima sebagai analisa keadaan sebenar sosial?

Ya, "tolak-tarik" memang melampaui struktur estetik. Lihatlah politik di Malaysia terlalu banyak "tolak-tarik". Dalam kebanyakan keadaan, kita berada dalam keadaan "tolak-tarik". Saya masih teringat lagi kata-kata Mao: Jika satu benda itu pergi terlalu jauh ke kanan ia pasti akan ke kiri. Jika ia pergi jauh ke kiri ia pasti ke tengah dan jika ia pergi ke tengah ia pasti pergi ke kiri atau ke kanan semula. Macam bandulan. Ia seolah-olah sebuah bandulan. Tidak tanduk saya juga macam bandul. Tiap kali bandul itu bergerak ia akan membentuk serangkaian pergerakan yang baru.

Isu perhubungan secara formal yang dikatakan membawa ideologi mengingatkan saya kepada zaman awal seni lukis Soviet. Zaman yang begitu ideal kepada gerakan seni lukis Konstruktivisme (Constructivism), Supramatisme (Suprematism) dan agitprop. Pada masa ini setiap orang merasa mereka perlu bekerjasama untuk membina sebuah masyarakat yang lebih sempurna. Pelukis dan ahli-ahli politik berpendapat manipulasi kepada struktur atas masyarakat sebagai manipulasi ke atas struktur formal dalam lukisan. Seni Lukisan Abstrak bangkit menunjukkan kekuatan dalam masyarakat dan ia juga digunakan sebagai propaganda untuk membentuk masyarakat yang lebih ideal di masa akan datang.

Saya bukan seorang yang terlalu idealistik tetapi masa telah lama membuktikan seni lukis tidak akan dapat mengubah dunia. Apa yang boleh kita gambarkan hanyalah struktur

masyarakat. Saya percaya kepada peranan seni agitprop tetapi ia lebih berkesan membawa perubahan di dalam masyarakat melalui teater dan musik dari seni tampak. Sesaat sudah memadai bagi seni tampak, oleh itu kemampuannya untuk menimbulkan kesedaran tidaklah begitu kuat seperti muzik atau drama dimana ia dapat membawa orang ramai melangkaui masa dan ruang.

Suara Dan Aspirasi

Lukisan yang paling hampir kepada siri ini lukisan Redza Piyadasa dalam siri *Baba Nyonya*.

Dalam lukisan saya pandangannya lebih luas dari pandangan Piyadasa terhadap generasi yang telah hilang itu. Saya tidak rasa pun ia sebagai generasi yang telah hilang. Sudah berkurun lamanya orang ramai berpindah dari satu tempat ke satu tempat dan tiada bezanya juga dalam migrasi baru. Pada saya, yang berbeza hanyalah sejak masyarakat baru era zaman lepas bebas penjajahan iaitu pada tahun 40'an dan 50'an dimana terbentuknya negeri-negeri yang bersemangat geo-politik atau kenegerian di rantau ini. Kerana perubahan politik, penghijrahan orang sekarang dianggap salah di sisi undang-undang.

Dengan sebab itulah saya minat menggunakan keluarga saya, isu migrasi dan isu kelas buruh ini. Saya tidak mahu terperangkap di dalam serpihan sejarah. Saya rasa suara individu saya dan sejarah keluarga saya hanya untuk menggambarkan sebuah masyarakat yang besar. Bukan suara saya dalam lakaran itu. Saya hanya sebagai satu saluran kepada beribu-ribu suara pekerja-pekerja estet getah dalam generasi bapa saya dan pengalaman yang telah mereka alami dan hadapi. Mereka adalah antara beribu-ribu orang ramai yang mengambil foto mereka di studio foto mengabadikan sesaat dari hidup mereka pada hal dalam realiti ia tidak pernah wujud. Jadi, lukisan ini cuba menunjukkan gambaran diri dan perkara-perkara yang ada kaitan dengan sejarah hidup keluarga yang anda dapat lihat nanti.

Dalam kata lain anda nampaknya melantik diri anda sebagai wakil berucap dan juga sebagai pelukis yang bercakap untuk jutaan pendatang asing. Bukankah anda akan memburukkan lagi keadaan di mana suara anda menjadi penting dan anda hanya perlu menggiatkan diri dengan mereka. Dalam kata lain dengan menyatakan suara-suara mereka ini, anda telah memansuh kelas yang memisahkan anda yang dari kelas pertengahan dengan mereka, buruh yang tidak berpelajaran itu. Dan lagi, anda bukan bapa anda. Ada jarak yang besar memisahkan anda dengan bapa anda dan generasinya. Anda nampaknya telah mengosongkan diri supaya anda dapat menjadi penyebabnya tetapi tindak tanduk anda menunjukkan anda telah melakukannya melalui sesuatu perlakuan intelektual dan bukan kerana keperluan ekonomik.

Memang saya dari kelas pertengahan dan kemungkinan besar saya berangan-angan tentang keistimewaan kelas yang lain. Dalam lukisan ini, saya mungkin mencipta satu watak wira tetapi samada watak wira itu adalah dari kalangan orang asli, golongan kelas buruh mahupun dari golongan elit, semuanya akan ditapis oleh saya melalui pengalaman saya sendiri dan proses ini saya rasa, tidak dapat dielak. Berbanding dengan sebuah drama, pelakon dapat pula menggayakan suaranya supaya berintonasi lunak dan merdu dan juga gerak laku mereka untuk mencipta satu watak. Sementara itu dalam seni tampak, watak-watak selalunya akan ditapis oleh pelukis dan proses ini tidak dapat dielakkan. Walau apapun dakwaan pelukis, yang pastinya lukisannya telah terlebih dahulu melalui proses penapisan estetik dan ideologi politik pelukis itu.

Masalah inilah yang saya cuba selesaikan terutamanya dalam lukisan baru saya, *In Search of Faraway Places*, dimana saya cuba berikan lebih kebebasan dan agensi (peranan dan keinginan manusia) kepada figura saya. Tetapi saya tidak tahu samada ia akan berjaya atau tidak.

Berbalik kepada isu agensi dalam watak-watak lukisan anda, Krishen Jit pernah mencadangkan, watak-watak dalam lukisan anda nampak murung, tidak ada perasaan girang dan gembira. Apa yang saya dengar Krishen Jit ada mengatakan sepatutnya watak-watak itu mempunyai emosi tapi anda tidak gambarkannya. Saya ada bertanya pada diri saya samada subjek lukisan anda itu mempunyai hak membina kehidupan mereka atau mereka ini hanyalah serpihan sejarah dan ekonomi.

Mungkin watak-watak yang saya gambarkan murung dan tidak menunjukkan perasaan gembira tetapi saya cuba gambarkan satu perasaan enggan mengalah. Jadi watak-watak ini seperti tidak mahu dibelenggu oleh apa yang ada disekelilingnya. Mereka berupaya mengubah realiti kehidupan mereka sendiri. Dalam konteks murung ini mereka berupaya bangun dan melawan balik.

Ya, anda suka melukis watak-watak yang pandang kehadapan. Mereka seolah-olah merenung kita bila kita berdepan dengan mereka. Bukan ini membawa unsur-unsur "voyeurisma" tapi sebaliknya ia mustahil bagi kita berbuat begitu.

Semasa kita berjalan masuk tadi saya terserempak dengan Leow Puay Tin. Ia ada berkata tentang lakaran kajian kecil yang menggambarkan nenek anda, "Yang ini lebih baik. Tidaklah muram sangat." Saya fikir muram yang ia maksudkan itu adalah perasaan muram yang saya katakan tadi. Saya lihat dalam lakaran itu (lakaran kajian nenek yang bertajuk *She was Married at 14 and Had 14 Children*) ada perasaan ragu-ragu dan sedih.

Maksud anda, anda dapat rasakan kesedihan dalam lakaran itu?

Bukankah mereka-mereka ini adalah orang-orang yang tidak akan berganjak dan mengaku kalah. Saya dapat rasakan kesedihan dalam lukisan *She was Married at 14 and Had 14 Children* tetapi anak patung tembikar dalam lukisan *Aspirations of the Working Class* juga menggambarkan perasaan tidak mahu berganjak dan berundur diri. Kanak-kanak dengan tangan satu itu pun rasanya tidak mahu mengaku kalah. Berbalik pada perasaan sedih itu, bagi saya ia adalah nafsu berahi. Bila saya terbaca kenyataan yang ditulis oleh Krishen Jit, saya bertanya pada diri saya adakah unsur-unsur seks dalam lukisan ini? Sedih, gembira, riang, nafsu dan seks? Semuanya adalah antara emosi yang komplek dan anda tentu tidak mahu mengetengahkan emosi sebegini dalam lukisan anda? Fokus anda adalah pada ikutan turun temurun secara genetik tetapi bukanlah kepada kenikmatan seksual mereka.

Slavoj Zizek adalah seorang ahli teori dan pengkritik dari Slovenia. Beliau ada berbincang bagaimana sesebuah masyarakat dapat membentuk sendiri struktur-struktur perindasan dan struktur demokratik melalui pengawalan nafsu rakyat. Kita boleh meminggir dan menindas "orang lain" dengan hanya memperlakukan unsur-unsur yang menjadi kesukaan mereka contohnya muzik, rempah-rempah yang menjadi kegemaran dalam masakan mereka atau bau wangi-wangi yang menjadi kegemaran dalam rumah mereka. Kita curiga dengan keinginan nafsu "mereka" kerana kita takut nafsu mereka dapat meruntuhkan kestabilan nafsu kita. Adakah ini cukup untuk menggambarkan pergelutan kelas buruh ini atau adakah perlu juga bagi kita menggambarkan nafsu mereka? Fokus anda bertumpu kepada pergelutan mereka dan kepada sikap mereka yang enggan berganjak dan mengaku kalah tetapi apakah yang mereka tidak mahu lepaskan?

Mereka tidak mahu lemas dalam kesedihan. Lihat sahaja dalam lukisan ini unsur-unsur seksual tidak pernah terlintas dalam benak fikiran saya kerana saya rasa ada perkara yang lebih penting dari isu seksual dalam keadaan penoreh getah. Ramai orang mati dibunuhi komunis, dibunuhi Jepun kerana disyaki komunis, di mana seorang wanita harus menyara empat belas orang anak, apakah ini berunsur seksual?

Tetapi jika anda bertanyakan pada orang yang sama ketika nazaknya apa yang ia ingat, kemungkinannya bau minyak wangi. Mungkin juga ia akan memberi jawapan begitu. Nampaknya yang plural dan berkumpulan dan bukannya yang satu dan berindividu, adalah ideologi anda.

Bau minyak wangi itu sensual, tidak semestinya seksual. Tetapi ya, isu politik seks adalah satu ideologi tetapi saya berdepan dengan isu penoreh getah – mereka yang tidak diberi hak-hak taraf kewarganegaraan dan diragut jasmani dan rohani, bagi mereka apa yang penting adalah hidup. Hak mereka, jiwa dan tubuh badan telah telah dirampas tetapi

ini tidak pula bermakna mereka tidak mempunyai nafsu seks walaupun kenikmatan itu juga telah dirampas dari mereka.

Sebagai seorang manusia biasa tentunya buruh pendatang samada mereka penoreh getah, buruh pembinaan ataupun pembantu rumah mempunyai keinginan nafsu seks. Tetapi, keinginan mereka inilah yang sangat ditakuti oleh majikan mereka. Justeru itu majikan cuba menyekat perhubungan sosial, pengalaman sensual dan seksualiti mereka.

Saya cuba gambarkan keadaan ini dalam *Aspirations of the Working Class* kerana ia menunjukkan perasaan gembira mereka apabila dapat bergaya bila mengambil foto. Kegembiraan yang dirasai hanya ketika mereka di studio foto dengan memakai baju yang baru atau baju pinjam yang disediakan oleh studio foto itu. Di situ, mereka boleh pinjam topi dan tali leher yang disediakan khusus untuk sesi foto, berdiri di depan gambar latar belakang kincir angin atau gambar gereja. Dalam sesaat ini sahaja, mereka dapat terkeluar dari keadaan murung mereka. Inilah kegembiraan mereka. Kegembiraan ini yang dapat dikekalkan dalam foto walaupun pada realitinya, ia tidak wujud.

Kegembiraan itu adalah satu aspirasi?

Ya, aspirasi.

Adakah aspirasi itu suatu keinginan kepada sesuatu yang nostalgia? Sesuatu yang mereka dapat katakan hak kepunyaan mereka? Satu ikon yang mengatakan mereka telah sampai?

Memang mereka telah sampai tetapi bagi saya pada akhirnya mereka tidak pernah sampai. Pendatang asing datang dan pergi. Selagi ada tempat baru yang dapat menjanjikan kesenangan kepada mereka, mereka akan tetap berhijrah. Jika tempat itu tidak lagi dapat memenuhi hasrat mereka, mereka pasti pergi meninggalkan tempat itu. Selalunya perkara ini benar-benar berlaku. Semua pendatang asing tidak mengenal erti rindu pada tanah air mereka walaupun mereka rasa tertindas dan lemas di sana. Apabila berada di negara baru, satu sahaja yang selalui dikenang oleh mereka itu adalah impian masa lalu dan impian masa hadapan yang pastinya selalu kabur. Hasrat mereka kepada masa hadapan yang cerah adalah satu impian masa hadapan dari impian mereka di masa lalu.

Bagaimana lukisan ini dapat berfungsi mengikut kehendak dan kesukaan anda? Kenapa anda buat aktiviti begitu?

Secara kebetulan, sejarah telah menentukan cara inilah sahaja satu cara yang saya tahu. Ia mengajar saya memahami diri saya dan hubungan saya dengan keluarga saya dan bagaimana saya menggunakan keluarga saya untuk melam-

bangkan keluarga-keluarga lain dan juga masyarakat. Dari sudut intelektual, penting kita memahami sejarah.

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Memecahkan Bingkai

Kajian yang anda buat untuk menghasilkan karya instalasi anda ini telah dibuat sebelum karya instalasi Lalang yang telah dipamerkan di Pusat Kreatif pada tahun 1994. Karya instalasi ini akan dipamerkan dalam pameran. Pameran berbentuk etnik sejak akhir-akhir ini telah menjadi fokus utama dalam lukisan anda. Adakah tujuannya untuk mengkritik pameran-pameran yang diadakan oleh kumpulan orientalis yang dipamerkan di beberapa buah muzium di barat. Pameran-pameran lukisan yang dibuat mengikut perspektif orang luar?

Tujuan utama saya bukan hendak mengkritik pameran etnografik. Berbalik kepada pameran Lalang, idea ini timbul disebabkan saya tinggal di kawasan yang penuh ditumbuhi lalang. Tiap-tiap hari saya terpaksa menebas dan memusnahkannya. Terlintaslah kepada saya, lalang adalah sejenis rumput yang sukar dimusnahkan. Ia kemudian menjadi metafora kepada sesuatu yang saya ingin sampaikan.

Dengan cara yang sama getah mempunyai kaitan yang rapat dengan keluarga saya, penghijrahan mereka, kerja bapa saya dulu sebagai penoreh getah. Menyedari getah adalah pokok mendatang dan keluarga saya adalah juga kaum pendatang yang telah lama menjadi penduduk tempatan, saya cuba menyatakan jurang kedua pendatang ini. Jadi pada permulaan, tidak ada kena mengena tentang kritikan saya terhadap pameran-pameran yang dikatakan berbentuk etnografik itu. Tapi jika difikirkan balik ia mungkin juga benar.

Pameran yang dikatakan membuat kajian terhadap bentuk etnografik dianggap sebagai sesuatu yang objektif. Label di dinding semacam mengarah kita membuat tafsiran kepada objek pameran mengikut kehendak mereka. Bolehkah anda menerima fungsi "teks-agung" dalam pameran anda atau ada cara lain?

Saya terima konsep "teks-agung" tetapi cuba mengubah konteks sebenar kepada satu bacaan lain kerana masa kini telah berubah. Misalnya dalam buku-buku botanis awal penjajah, kita akan terbaca tentang sifat-sifat buruh Cina, buruh Melayu dan buruh India di ladang getah. Walaupun kenyataan mereka ini berbau perkauman tetapi dalam konteks mereka, ia dirasakan logik dan munasabah. Bila di lihat dari luar konteks penjajah, kenyataan ini tidak lagi bermakna dan ia bukan lagi "teks-agung".

Sekarang jika dilihat semula dalam konteks seni lukis, seni instalasi jenis ini telah terkeluar dari konsep seni lukis yang menggunakan renggangan kanvas seperti apa yang anda lakukan bila anda mula membuat lakaran. Ia berkaitan dengan gerakan seni lukis kon-

Wong Hoy Cheong has previously taught painting and drawing at the University of Brunei Darussalam and the University of Massachusetts, USA. He has also taught at the Malaysian Institute of Art for five years, developing and teaching courses in Alternative/Third World Aesthetics, Installation, Performance and Video Art. He was the Artist-in-Residence at the Canberra Institute of Art, Australian National University for 1992.

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Education

- 1986 Master of Fine Arts – University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Massachusetts, USA
1984 Master in Education – Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA
1982 Bachelor of Arts (Magna Cum Laude with Honors) – Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts, USA

Solo Exhibitions

- 1996 Of Migrants & Rubber Trees:
An Exhibition of Drawings and Installations
The Creative Centre, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur
1991 Selected Paintings and Drawings 1982-1991
The Gallery, TheatreWorks, Fort Canning Centre, Singapore
1986 New Works – New York University, New York City, USA
In Search of Faraway Places – Herter Gallery, Amherst, Massachusetts, USA

Selected Group Exhibitions

- 1996 2nd Asia-Pacific Triennial (forthcoming) – Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, Australia
1995 Visions of Happiness: 10 Contemporary Asian Artists – Japan Forum Gallery, Tokyo
1994 War Box, Lalang, Killing Tools – The Creative Centre, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur
Vision and Idea: ReLooking Modern Malaysian Art – National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur
1993 What About Converging Extremes? – GaleriWan, Kuala Lumpur
1992 New Art from Southeast Asia (travelling exhibition) – Metropolitan Art Space, Tokyo; Fukuoka Art Museum, Fukuoka;
Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art, Hiroshima; Kirin Plaza, Osaka Artists' Regional Exchange Perth Institute of
Contemporary Art/Lawrence Wilson Gallery, Perth, Australia
1991 ASEAN Travelling Exhibition of Paintings and Photographs – Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; Singapore; Jakarta, Indonesia; Bandar
Seri Begawan, Brunei; Manila, Philippines; Bangkok, Thailand
1990 Artists' Call – GaleriWan, Kuala Lumpur
1988 Contemporary Malaysia Art – Pacific Asia Museum, Pasadena, California, USA
1987 30 Years of Malaysian Art – National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur
Invitational Exhibition – Bank Negara Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur
Young Contemporary – National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur
1986 Annual Exhibition – Museum of Fine Arts, Springfield, Massachusetts, USA
Young American Artists – Centro Colombo Americano, Medellin and Bogota, Colombia
1983 Open Studios – Artists' West Association, Waltham, Massachusetts, USA

Video/Film/Art Festivals

- SOOK CHING (Purification By Elimination): An experimental documentary on the Japanese Occupation in Malaya
(VHS-PAL, 27 minutes)
1993 Artists' General Assembly – 5th Passage Contemporary Art Space, Singapore
1992 New Art from Southeast Asia, Tokyo, Fukuoka, Hiroshima, Osaka
Adelaide Arts Festival – Adelaide, Australia
1991 Singapore International Film Festival (Fringe) – Singapore
1990 First International Video Arts Festival – National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur

Performance & Installation

- 1996 Rubber Trees (Part of Of Migrants & Rubber Trees solo exhibition)
An installation linking the migration and indigenisation of rubber (*Hevea brasiliensis*) to the waves of migrant labour – Indians,
Chinese, Javanese – in the 19th and early 20th centuries in Malaya during the height of British colonial expansion. The
Creative Centre, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur
1994 Lalang
A two-part installation using lalang (*Imperata cylindrica*, an indigenous weed) as a cultural, historical and political metaphor.
Three performances done in conjunction with the installation: spraying of weed killer, cutting and burning of lalang and
resurfacing the lawn. The Creative Centre, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur
1993 Anak Semua Bangsa (Child of all Nations)
An audience-centred performance on the problematics of race and identity. GaleriWan, Kuala Lumpur

1991 Alter Art

A presentation of six pieces of multi-media installations and performances in collaboration with artists Kungyu Liew, Raja Shahriman and dancer/choreographer Marion D'Cruz. TheatreWorks, Fort Canning Centre, Singapore

1990 Sook Ching

A multi-media presentation of video, performance, painting and dialogue with Marion D'Cruz and Dancers at the International Video Art Festival. National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur

Swan Song

As 'the artist' in a performance on the last seven hours of a prostitute's life based on a poem by W.S. Rendra with Marion D'Cruz and Dancers at the 5th International Dance Conference. Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts, Hong Kong

Curatorial/Production Experiences

1996 Judge : The Philip Morris Malaysian Art Awards - Competition & Exhibition, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur

1995 Judge : The Philip Morris Malaysian Art Awards – Competition & Exhibition, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur
Malaysian Video Awards – Competition, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur

Curator : Skin Trilogy – A Visual Performance Event, Five Arts Centre & National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur

1993 Curator : What About Converging Extremes? – Installation, Performance & Painting, GaleriWan, Kuala Lumpur

Producer : US: Actions & Images – An experimental performance, Five Arts Centre, Kuala Lumpur and
5th Cairo International Festival of Experimental Theatre, Egypt

1992 Judge : Young Contemporary – Competition & Exhibition, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur

Co-Producer : Music of Sound – An Experimental Music Performance by Tan Sooi Beng & Ensemble,
GaleriMIA & Five Arts Centre, Kuala Lumpur

1991 Curator : 50 Ways to Torture Children – Exhibition, Discussion, Workshop of Children's Art and Theatre by MAYA , Bangkok,
Thailand, galeriMIA, Malaysian Institute of Art, Kuala Lumpur

Judge : Young Contemporary – Competition and Exhibition, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur

1990 Curator : 2 Installations – Installations by Kungyu Liew and Raja Shahriman, galeriMIA,
Malaysian Institute of Art, Kuala Lumpur

Awards

1992 Outstanding Educator, Certificate of Recognition Cornell University, USA

"Hoy Cheong Wong Scholarship" (established for Cornell University undergraduates)

Australian Cultural Award – Australian High Commission, Kuala Lumpur

1987 Young Contemporary, Minor Award – National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur

1982 Saltonstall Memorial Scholar, Harvard University, USA

1978-82 Fine Arts Scholarship – Brandeis University, USA

Public Collections

Fukuoka Art Museum, Fukuoka, Japan

National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur

Singapore Art Museum, Singapore

Bank Negara, Kuala Lumpur

Canberra Institute of Art, Australian National University, Canberra, Australia

University of Massachusetts, Amherst, USA

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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MBf Holdings Berhad	Bayu Utomo Radjikan
Fuji Xerox	Cho Chong Gee
Balai Seni Lukis Negara	Ricky Oh
School of Art & Design, Kolej Bandar Utama	Manohary Subramaniam
Kapitan's Club	All Women's Action Society (AWAM)
William Harald-Wong	Ivy Josiah
Ray Langenbach	Women's Aid Organisation
Khoo Khay Jin	Malaysian Medical Association
Karim Raslan	Pusat Komas
Hamidah Abdul Rahman	Anna Har
Wairah Marzuki	Rubber Research Institute Malaysia
Laura Fan	National Union of Plantation Workers
Zanita Annuar	A. Navamukundan
Hani Ahmad	Khoo Boon Wan
Loy Teik Ngan	Pastry Pro Sdn Bhd
Chin Chua Eng	Men's Review
Ee Poh Ngoh	The New Straits Times Press (M) Bhd
Chee Sek Thim	The Press

PRODUCTION TEAM

CURATOR: Valentine Willie

PRODUCER: Leow Puay Tin

PUBLICITY MANAGER: Charlene Rajendran

PRODUCTION ASSISTANT: Loh Kok Hong

DESIGNERS: Abdul Raof Ahmad, Lim Boon Hooi

TRANSLATOR: Hamidah Abdul Rahman

EXHIBITION ASSISTANTS & CREW: Chuah Chong Yong, Gan Siong King, Simon Yap

THE INSTALLATIONS WERE DONE IN COLLABORATION WITH

CHUAH CHONG YONG AND GAN SIONG KING



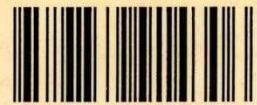
Five Arts Centre

Five Arts Centre is committed to the training, exhibition and production of distinctly Malaysian and contemporary works of art. The primary aim is to lead Malaysians to a finer appreciation of their plural and multi-dimensional artisitic heritage and promise. The Centre regularly stages performances and art exhibitions for the general public. The emphasis is on producing original works that reflect a Malaysian social context. The principal fields of the Centre's artistic works are: performing arts, including drama, dance and music; young people's theatre; playwriting; visual arts including performance and installation arts.

VALENTINE
willie
FINE ART

Valentine Willie Fine Art exhibits and represents established and contemporary Malaysian as well as selected Southeast Asian artists. The gallery stages large exhibitions at outside venues several times a year. Smaller exhibitions, featured throughout the year, are on view at the gallery itself. However, the Valentine Willie Fine Art gallery is open by appointment only.

ISBN 983-99143-0-8



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