

Half-century of S'pore modern art on show

An exhibition of artworks by 12 pioneers, aged 67 to 87, is on at the Visual Arts Centre

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Arts Correspondent

A number of pioneers of the modern art movement in Singapore 50 years ago are still painting and sculpting today.

Five painters in their 80s – Choy Weng Yang, Chieu Shuey Fook, Swee Khim Ann, Ho Ho Ying and Thomas Yeo – are exhibiting their old and new works at the Visual Arts Centre in Penang Road until next Tuesday.

The exhibition, titled Transcend:

50 Years Of Modern Art, pays homage to those who began, defined and fuelled the development of modern art in Singapore from the 1960s to 1980s. It is set up by gallerist Lola Liu and also features seven younger artists aged 67 to 77: Lim Leong Seng, Thang Kiang How, Low Puay Hua, Tay Chee Toh, Tan Ping Chiang, Sim Pang Liang and Leo Hee Tong.

Their stories are fascinating. Many swam against the tide, such as self-taught artist Swee, 82, who has been painting for nearly 70 years.

His parents could not afford art school, but his father's business was to provide flags and posters for celebrations and events. "Whenever he needed any art or paintings, I would be doing it for him," he says.

Transcend includes a total of 36 paintings, sculptures and mixed media works. None is for sale.

Works from older decades stand alongside contemporary creations and viewers are invited to appreciate how the artists have evolved.

There are signs of influence from older painters and indications of how each artist broke away.

Take Tay, 76, who studied at the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts while Cheong Soo Pieng was teaching there, for instance.

Tay's older, figurative paintings of the Dayak tribes evoke the lines and themes of Cheong's work, but his newer pieces are surreal and abstract.

Tay and Ho, 81, were among the seven founders of the Modern Art Society, set up in 1964 to advocate a

break from traditional methods and themes. This meant experimenting with techniques.

Ho started with plein-air outdoor works and calligraphy in the 1950s and moved into abstract styles in the 1960s. For the past 30 years, he has experimented with motion-painting techniques that involve pouring colours onto canvases.

He feels his age. "When I was younger, I had a lot of energy and could paint non-stop once my inspirations came. However, now that I am much older, I can paint for only several hours. Then I would have to stop to rest and continue the next day."

His 80-something contemporaries, however, insist they are as fresh as ever. Choy, 87, is the oldest featured artist. He says: "Ironically,

the older the artist, the better his art. His maturity gives him a wealth of advantages: technique with ease, his imagination sharpened, he is a wealth of artistic ideas."

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BOOK IT / TRANSCEND:

50 YEARS OF MODERN ART

WHERE: Visual Arts Centre, 01-02 Dhoby Ghaut Green, 10 Penang Road
WHEN: Until July 11, 11am to 8pm daily
ADMISSION: Free
Info: visualartscentre.sg



(Standing, from left) Low Puay Hua, Lim Leong Seng, Sim Pang Liang, Leo Hee Tong, (seated from left) Ho Ho Ying, Tan Ping Chiang, Thomas Yeo, Choy Weng Yang and Tay Chee Toh are among the 12 artists whose works are on display at Transcend: 50 Years Of Modern Art. ST PHOTO: KUA CHEE SIONG

In their own words



PEACE ON WINDOW BY LEO HEE TONG, 77
(acrylic on canvas, 2015)

"I used simplified strokes to express my love of Cubism. I was exposed to snow in my days as a student, so I use a lot of white in my work to express the cold and serenity of snow. Nowadays, I produce works which are warmer in tone."



COMPOSITION BY LOW PUAY HUA, 72
(oil on canvas, 2012)

"I prefer simplicity now that I am older. I enjoy creating large, abstract oil paintings. Composition is what I hope to express: using colours and the illusion of shapes and contours to express a balanced and comfortable composition."



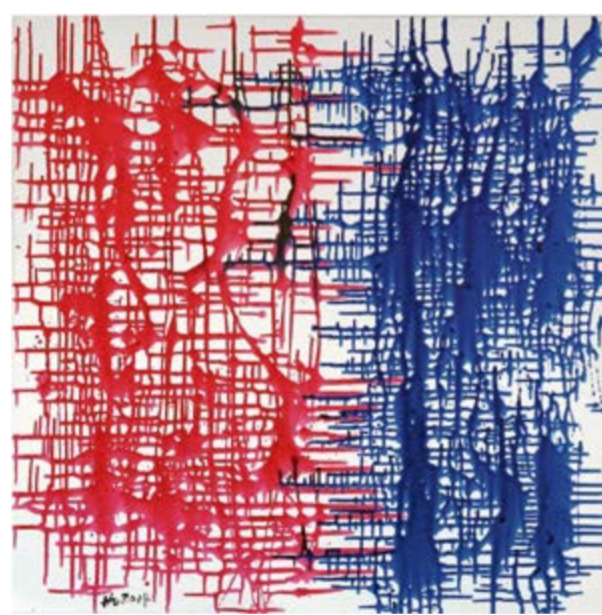
GALAXY 2978 BY THANG KIANG HOW, 71
(acrylic on canvas, 2016)

"Galaxy 2978 uses a singular shade of blue that is a personal favourite of mine. I use brush and air spray painting techniques. It allows me to be inventive in my expression of colours."



ABSTRACT CALLIGRAPHY BY SIM PANG LIANG, 77
(ink on paper, 2016)

"My early works were in aluminium, collage, metal relief, ink and oil. After the 1980s, I concentrated on ink painting and abstract calligraphy because of the numerous tones, immense depth and mystery of the ink medium."



SILENCE BY HO HO YING, 81
(acrylic on canvas, 2014)

"This work was derived from calligraphy. I like acrylic and use it mostly for my works now. It dries quickly and allows me freedom of expression with my painting techniques, which involve pouring."



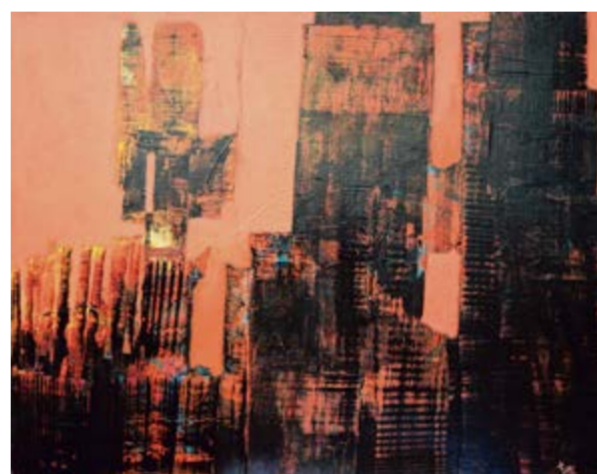
BULL JUMP BY CHIEU SHUEY FOOK, 83
(metal relief, 2014)

"My later works have become brighter and vibrant. Bull Jump represents a bullish spirit. The warm colours used for the background depict the raw energy and hustle and bustle of a city."



MAJESTIC LUSH LANDSCAPE BY SWEE KHIM ANN, 82
(acrylic on canvas, 2015)

"This painting makes me feel carefree and relaxed. Perhaps this is how I feel now – free and expressive. My earlier works tended to more neutral and darker colours. My works now are brighter."



CONSTRUCTION IN MOTION 2 BY THOMAS YEO, 81
(acrylic on canvas, 2013)

"This work reflects the situation in Singapore as well as countries around our region – constant change and development, the noise, heat and dust that come with the construction."



COFFEE ORCHESTRA BY TAN PING CHIANG, 77
(mixed medium, 2016)

"This series represents the harmony of the multireligious and multicultural society in Singapore. The two environments that best portray this Singapore Spirit are coffee shops and hawker centres."



AFLOAT BY TAY CHEE TOH, 76
(acrylic on canvas, 2015)

"Afloat is my interpretation of what outer space and aliens look like. I enjoy both figurative and abstract styles. Abstraction allows me to put my ideas into new forms."



RADIANT LOTUSES BY CHOY WENG YANG, 87
(acrylic on canvas, 2017)

"Painted in the spirit of Abstract Expressionism. I currently paint in oils and acrylic for their vibrant colours and expressiveness."



ARITHMETIC BY LIM LEONG SENG, 67
(bronze, 2010)

"This work pays tribute to our ancestors who came to Singapore to make it on their own. It represents our forefathers making a livelihood, planning and calculating."

PHOTOS: CHIEU SHUEY FOOK, CHOY WENG YANG, HO HO YING, LEO HEE TONG, LIM LEONG SENG, LOW PUAY HUA, SIM PANG LIANG, SWEE KHIM ANN, TAN PING CHIANG, TAY CHEE TOH, THANG KIANG HOW, THOMAS YEO