

Biographies of artists

See Hiang To (Shi Xiang Tuo) 施香沱 (1906 – 1990)

See Hiang To was born in 1906 in Longxi, Fujian, China and came to Singapore in 1938. Well-known for his calligraphy and seal-carving works See was also an accomplished Chinese ink painter and arts educator who dedicated more than 40 years of his life to teaching at Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA) since 1941. Born to a family of literati, See learnt Chinese ink painting and literature under the guidance of his father and grandfather from a young age, and had cited the eminent Wu Changshuo as one of his major influences. See was also inspired by the Shanghai School (海上画派), a regional art style developed in Shanghai in the 1850s that emphasized on decorative qualities and focused on birds, flowers and figural themes more than the old landscape tradition which traditionalist Chinese ink painting did. Over the years, See's works evolved to reflect on the scenes and characteristics of his living environment in Southeast Asia, often painting in rich colours. As an outstanding calligrapher, See breathes life into his characters by imbuing them with a sense of rhythm and vitality, effecting his works to be often described as simple, yet bold and imposing. See often writes in the clerical, bronze and small seal script and believes that the first step to grasping the three essential elements of Chinese brush painting – the image, calligraphic text and seal – lies in one's dedication to mastering calligraphy. The seals featured in this exhibition are donated by the son of the late Mr See Hiang To to the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts and forms part of the Shi Xiang Tuo Collection comprising of rare and valuable out-of-print books on arts and literature, some of which dates back to 300 years.

Tan Kian Por (Chen Jian Po) 陈建坡 (1949 -)

Tan Kian Por was born in 1949 in Chaozhou, China and moved to Singapore in 1962. A highly competent painter, calligrapher and seal-carver well versed in Chinese literature, Tan learnt Chinese brush painting under See Hiang To and Chen Chong Swee at NAFA. Since his graduation in 1970, Tan has made significant contributions to the local art scene. In 2001, Tan was awarded the Cultural Medallion for his artistic excellence and contribution to visual arts in Singapore and was the first Singaporean to be appointed the position of Overseas Honorary Member of the Xi Ling Art Society of Hangzhou, China in 1994. Eager to share his passion with others, Tan started to lecture in his alma mater since 1980 and also co-founded the Siaw-Tao Chinese Seal Carving, Calligraphy & Painting Society in 1971. As an artist, Tan does not believe in restricting oneself to a particular style or subject matter. When his artistic career took flight in the latter half of the 1970s, Tan was largely reputed for his innovative use of abstract expressionist features in his Chinese ink and brushwork, which he had adapted from his earlier training in Western art. To create bold and innovative works, Tan revels in the contemporary and has sought new techniques and mediums of expression in recent years. This includes the employment of technology in his work where he uses computer software and digital photography to compose and assemble the three essential elements of Chinese brush painting – the image, calligraphic text and seal – into a piece of artwork. On seal carving, Tan prefers the *baiwen* (白文) (seals that imprint the background in red, leaving white characters) and often carves in the clerical script and various derivatives of scripts popular in the Han dynasty.

The seals featured in this exhibition are on loan from the artist, Mr Tan Kian Por.

Lim Hak Tai (Lin Xue Da) 林学大 (1893 – 1963)

Lim Hak Tai was born in 1893 in Xiamen, China and held a certificate in Applied Arts from the Fujian Provincial Teachers' Training College. Upon graduation, he returned to Xiamen to teach before co-founding the Xiamen Academy of Fine Arts in 1923 with his contemporaries. In 1937, Lim migrated to Singapore and established the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA) in 1938. The school initiated a fine balance of Western and Chinese art traditions in its curriculum, which NAFA embraces till this day. The accomplishments of Lim cannot be fully rendered without discussing his ties with the academy. As the Founding Principal of NAFA, Lim was a visionary and passionate arts educator who endured many trials in the service of arts education, dedicating himself to the school and its students for 25 years until his death in 1963. As an educator, Lim had urged his students as well as fellow teachers to create responses to the Southeast Asian environment through the depiction of local subject matter in their artwork. As an artist, Lim was proficient in Western oil painting, Chinese ink painting and calligraphy, many of which, highlighted his sensitivity to his environment and reflected local cultural sensibilities.

The seals featured in this exhibition are on loan from the family of the late Mr Lim Hak Tai.

Zhang Dannong 张丹农 (1903 – 1975)

Zhang Dannong was born in 1903, Guangdong, China and moved to Singapore in 1940. Prior to his relocation, Zhang trained in the Shanghai Academy of Fine Arts and was formerly a professor of Fine Arts in Sun Yat-Sen University, Guangzhou before he left in 1937 to focus on artmaking. A well-rounded artist proficient in Chinese ink painting, calligraphy and seal carving, Zhang is reputed for his paintings of horses and tigers, and is noted to be one of China's best painters of the latter. Known for his excellent composition and use of opulent artmaking materials, Zhang had painted several tigers with pigments grounded from semi-precious stones and gold. While his paintings may come across as resplendent and elaborate with fine details, Zhang's calligraphy style is bold and unconstrained, yet his seal carvings are often kept neat and simple. As one of Singapore's pioneer artists, Zhang is also known as one of the first to popularise the art of seal carving in the region and is said to have produced more than 3,000 engraved seals in his lifetime.

The seal featured in this exhibition is part of the collection donated by the family of the late Mr Lim Mu Hue to the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts.

Lim Mu Hue (Lin Mu Hua) 林木化 (1936 – 2008)

Lim Mu Hue was born in Singapore in 1936. A teacher and alumnus of NAFA, Lim was trained in western painting and graduated in 1955 before he taught in the academy from 1960 to 1969. An innovative artist, Lim worked across a myriad of mediums and explored various ways to integrate Western painting concepts and techniques in his works. Though Lim was proficient in oil, charcoal, pastels, ink and watercolour, he was most well-known for his woodcut prints after his participation as a member of the "Six-Men Woodcut Prints Exhibition" in 1966. Apt with a carver's knife, Lim had created elaborate woodblock prints, many of which, were inspired by local themes, such as kampong scenes, puppet theatres and landscapes of Singapore, reflecting the cultural and historical heritage of Southeast Asia and its community.

The seals featured in this exhibition comprises of carvings by the artist and also his personal collection of seals by other artists, donated by the family of the late Mr Lim Mu Hue to the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts.

Tan Kee Sek (Zeng Ji Ce) 曾纪策 (1951 -)

Tan Kee Sek was born in Singapore in 1951 and graduated from NAFA in 1970 where he learned Chinese ink painting under the tutelage of See Hiang To and Chen Chong Swee. The second-generation artist is one of the founding members of the Siaw-Tao Chinese Seal-Carving, Calligraphy and Painting Society where he now serves as honorary chairman. Having spent the past 50 years nurturing his passion for painting, calligraphy and seal-carving, Tan continually challenges himself by creating works that are relevant to the present. The renowned artist often expresses his joy in the process of artmaking and seeks satisfaction in finding new ways to keep up with both time and tradition, taking care to retain the essence of traditional Chinese art. Tan is currently an adjunct lecturer with NAFA and has been an active art educator with the academy since 1982.

The seals featured in this exhibition are on loan from the artist, Mr Tan Kee Sek.

Wee Beng Chong (Huang Ming Zong) 黄明宗 (1938 -)

Wee Beng Chong was born in Singapore in 1938. Deeply revered in the art community locally and abroad, Wee is amongst the most versatile artists in Singapore. Wee graduated from NAFA in 1958 where he had studied under pioneer artists including Lim Hak Tai, Cheong Soo Pieng and Georgette Chen and learnt seal carving from Lin Qianshi and See Hiang To. In 1964, Wee enrolled in the L'Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux Arts in Paris, France to refine his skills in sculpture making. Prior to his time in Europe, Wee was already an important figure in the development of visual arts in Singapore. A founding member of the Modern Art Society, Wee played a crucial role in promoting public understanding of contemporary art in Singapore. After returning home in 1968, the multidisciplinary artist taught at his alma mater and was appointed Head of NAFA's Fine Art department from 1982 – 1989 before he stepped down and continued to teach in the academy as a senior lecturer from 1990 till present day. Wee is also the founder of the Lanting Art Society, Singapore, and co-founder of the Shicheng Calligraphy & Seal-Carving Society. In recognition of Wee's artistic excellence and contribution to the visual arts, the prolific artist became the first recipient of the Cultural Medallion for Art in 1979. As an artist, Wee embraces a diverse range of materials and creates works ranging from calligraphy, seal carving, printmaking, sculpture, mixed media works, oil and Chinese ink painting. He enjoys experimenting with composition and brushwork techniques in his contemporary ink practice and is often known to compose in mixed media, creating works ranging from realism to abstraction.

Tay Bak Chiang (Zheng Mu Zhang) 郑木彰 (1973 -)

Tay Bak Chiang was born in Malaysia in 1973 and graduated with a Diploma in Fine Arts from NAFA in 1995 before he went to study at the China Academy of Art in Hangzhou, China, in 1997. Tay has exhibited internationally in multiple group exhibitions and international art fairs across Asia, The United States and Europe since 2000 and was awarded the Young Artist Award for Visual Arts by the National Arts Council, Singapore in 2002. Some of Tay's other accolades include First Prize in the Chinese Painting category in the 19th and 22nd United Overseas Bank Painting of the Year

Competitions in 2000 and 2003, and the Dr Tan Tzee Chor Art Award (Chinese Painting) from the Singapore Art Society in 1999 and 2000. Tay is also the President of the Siaw-Tao Chinese Seal Carving Calligraphy and Painting Society. Tay's works are inspired by nature and evoke a sense of poetry and inner emotion. He seeks to reinterpret motifs of nature inventively in form, composition, technique, material and colour and is constantly experimenting with deconstructing and reconfiguring natural forms through clean brush strokes and minimal colours. Tay is often praised for his refreshing take on traditional Chinese ink painting where the poetic and symbolic value of traditionalist Chinese painting informed by literature is retained albeit with a contemporary sensibility.

Chung Chen Sun (Zhong Zheng Shan) 钟正山 (1935 -)

Chung Chen Sun was born in 1935 in Malacca, Malaysia and graduated from the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA) in Art Education in 1955 and the University of San Francisco in Public Administration in 1984. An internationally acclaimed artist and arts educator who has held several prestigious positions in academia, Chung is most notable for his contributions to art education. Chung is considered by many as the Father of Malaysian Modern Art Education and has founded five art academies in Malaysia and China, including the Malaysian Institute of Arts (MIA) in 1967, where he was appointed Principal for 33 years. Chung is also lauded for his contributions to strengthening ties between China and Malaysia through spearheading Sino-foreign cooperation in art education by embarking on joint ventures with universities in China to establish art and design colleges in Yunnan, Inner Mongolia and Zhuzhou. Some of Chung's many accolades include the decoration of Pingat Pangkuan Negara (Medal of the Order of the Defender of the Realm) – a Malaysian federal award presented for meritorious service to the country in 1977, the co-founder of the International Contemporary Ink Painting Association (ICIPA) to promote the modernization of ink painting where he was the president for a decade and also the President of the Malaysia Chinese Cultural Society for 16 years from 1982 where he remains as the honorary president till today.

As an artist, Chung has participated and represented Malaysia in multiple international exhibitions across Asia, Europe and the United States of America since 1964. Chung is often described as a forward-looking man who is bold in his creations and modern in his outlook. Schooled in both Western and Chinese art, Chung's works are usually a medley of both practices. According to Shao Dazhen, Chinese art historian and art critic, Chung's approach to contemporary Chinese ink painting and his vision for contemporary art education merits Chung the title of Father of Malaysian Modern Chinese Ink Painting. While Chung's ink paintings are mostly inspired by eastern philosophy and emphasise traditional technique, his composition is abstract, and his subjects, an expression of his thoughts and innermost feelings.

Poon Lian (Fang Liang) 方良 (1947 -)

Poon Lian was born in 1947 and graduated from the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA) in Western Painting in 1969. Before his training in the Western tradition, Poon studied Chinese ink painting under first generation Singapore artist, Chen Wen Hsi. His wide-ranging repertoire spreads across various styles and mediums, including drawing, sketching, ink painting, portraits, still life and landscapes in oil paint. Often drawing inspiration from his extensive travels around Asia, Poon enjoys depicting its people, objects and the environment in his art. Poon's works are a reflection of his training in both Chinese and Western art and he experiments with composition, brushwork and colours. Despite his deep passion for fine art, Poon only became a full-time artist at 56 after his retirement from the printing industry in 2003, prior which, he could only hone his skills in his free time. Poon has always kept close ties with his alma mater and took on various positions with the academy and its affiliates.

Poon had lectured at NAFA between 1972 and 1981, took on the role of Director of Nanyang Fine Arts Foundation, the holding company of the academy, for 15 years, and has served as assistant treasurer and secretary of Club NAFA, a networking platform aimed at promoting artistic dialogued between alumni, staff and friends of NAFA. His other accolades include the former president of The Society of Chinese Artists from 2002 - 2005 and founding member of the International Chinese Culture Exchange Federation.