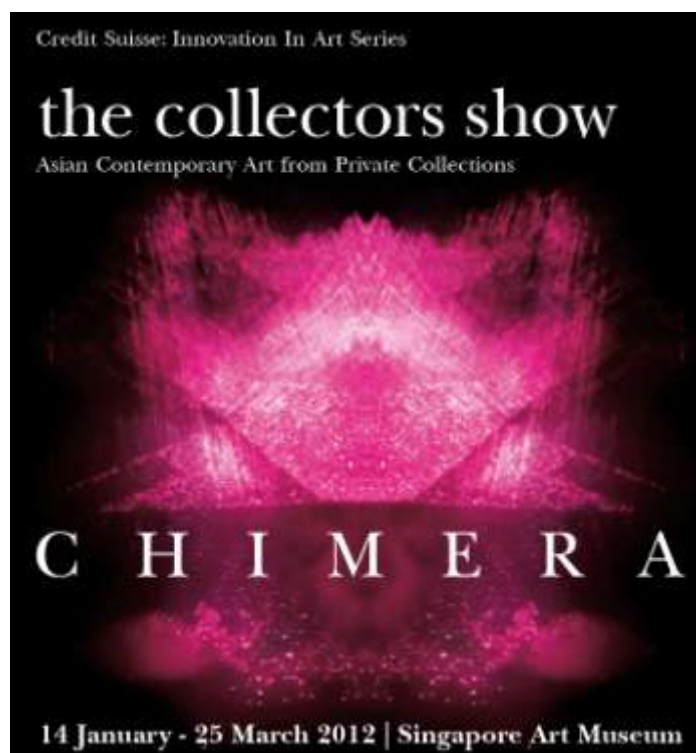


## The Collectors Show: Asian Contemporary Art from Private Collections



*The Collectors Show: Asian Contemporary Art from Private Collections* is an exhibition of artworks from Asia that have been collected by individuals and foundations from around the world. These artworks range from paintings and photographs to light installations and media installations, and are not the typical works one would think that collectors would want to acquire.

There is a subtitle (secondary title) for this exhibition, **Chimera**, which is a word that has numerous meanings.

In Greek mythology, the Chimera (pronounced *kee-meh-rah*) refers to a monstrous fire-breathing monster made up of various parts of animals: the head of a goat rising up from the spine, the body of a lioness and a tail that ends with a snake's head.

Building on that image, a Chimera also refers to the idea of hybridity: that is, of many parts making up a body, or object. This definition also applies to the various forms of contemporary art that are shown in this exhibition, as mentioned above.

The curator of this show also wanted to evoke a ghostly, haunting presence through the chosen artworks, as the last definition of chimera is that of an illusion, or fabrication of the mind.

Do you get that sense of the spectre, of illusion, and of monsters from your experience with this exhibition?

**DID YOU KNOW?**

In science (specifically genetics), a chimera also refers to an animal that has cells from two different species.



**Go to the lobby and look for this artwork by Lee Yong Baek**



Stay for a few minutes and look (and listen!) to this artwork.

1. What do you think is the purpose or function of mirrors?

2. What has the artist done to the mirrors in this artwork?

3. Why do you think he has done this?

4. Do the frames around the mirror remind you of frames used for other objects? What are they?

5. Why do you think the artist has chosen to frame the mirrors in such an ornate way?



**Go to Gallery 1.3**



6. Look for this painting titled *Orange Madonna* by the artist Yasmin Sison. What do you know of the term 'Madonna'? (Hint: 'Madonna' was often a subject in early religious paintings. What does a Madonna usually wear in such paintings, and how does she look? And who is she usually posed with?)

7. Does the figure in this painting look like a traditional 'Madonna' to you? How is this figure different from the traditional 'Madonna'?

8. What else is unusual about the way the artist has painted her Madonna?

9. The artist has said that she wants us, the audience, to think about what kind of expectations we might project onto the figure in this painting, and onto women in particular. How do you think she has achieved this?

***DID YOU KNOW?***

Yasmin Sison has chosen to depict orange trees in the background of this painting. Orange trees are an ancient Christian symbol of purity. How does knowing this affect your understanding of the painting?



**Look for this painting in the same gallery.**



Look carefully at this painting, *The Thomasites Were Here*, which consists of three panels placed together side by side, or what is usually called a triptych (pronounced *trip-tik*).

10. What can you tell from the three panels in this painting? What is the setting, and who do you think the people in the painting are?

11. What era, or period in history, do you think this painting depicts? Why do you think so?

12. Do you notice anything strange or disturbing about this painting? How has the artist used certain details to create this sense of strangeness?

***DID YOU KNOW?***

The Thomasites were a group of five hundred pioneer American teachers sent by the United States government to teach in the Philippines in 1901, using English as the medium of instruction, and the subjects in this painting were the students taught by these Thomasites.

A **symbol** is something which represents an idea, a physical entity, or a process, but is distinct from what it represents. For example, a green figure of a walking man at a traffic light symbolises that pedestrians are free to walk across the road.

13. Can you think of any other examples of symbols from daily life? Write down at least two examples.

14. Can you figure out what the artist is trying to symbolise with these images from the painting?

Symbols in the painting	What do they symbolise?
The paper planes in the right hand panel	
The shoelaces of the boy scouts being crossed over and tied together in the middle panel	
The 'highway stripes' connecting the three panels together	

The artist has based his paintings on actual photographs of students inside a Thomasite school, as well as photograph of boy scouts from the same era.

The artist wanted to convey the sense of the interruption and subsequent erasure of the native history of the Philippines by the arrival of the Thomasites, because these American citizens taught the schoolchildren another version of history that did not allow for the Philippine's own stories.

15. Based on what you know about the painting now, how do you think the artist feels about this period in the Philippines' history?

**DID YOU KNOW?**

Singapore has its own history of missionary schools. Search the internet to find out more about these early schools, and how these schools were different from the Thomasite schools of the Philippines.



**Look for this artwork in the same gallery**



Look closely at these photographs by the Malaysian artist Yee I-Lann, titled *The Orang Besar Series: YB#1 - 10*.

16. Do you recognise the objects that she has photographed? Who do you think usually wears these flowers?

17. How do the flowers look? For example, how do the colours of the flowers affect their appearance?

18. What do you think is the intention of the artist in depicting rotting corsages pinned on politicians' clothes? What is the connection she is trying to make between the two objects?

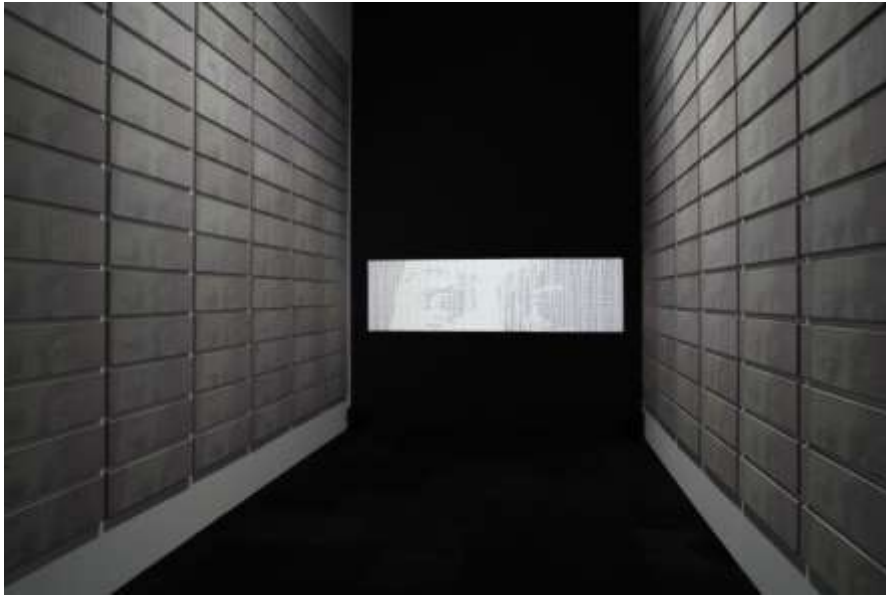
19. Do you agree with the artist's intention? Why or why not?

***DID YOU KNOW?***

'YB', which makes up part of the title of this artwork, is an abbreviation for the Malay term 'Yang Berhormat' ('The Honourable'), used to address a person of political power or status in Malaysia.



**Look for this artwork in the connecting gallery, titled *Extraneous*.**



Look carefully at the panels making up the artwork of the Indonesian artist collective Tromarama. (An artist collective is made up of a group of artists who work together towards shared aims or goals)

20. Do you recognise the symbols used on the panels? What are they usually used for?

21. Take a few steps back and look at the animation now. How does watching the animation make you feel?

*Extraneous* is made up of 210 pieces of batik fabric that have been painstakingly dyed and subsequently filmed by the artists to create the stop-motion animation that you see here.

The artists used binary codes (ones and zeroes) as a pattern on the fabric because they felt that it reflects today's online culture. With the Internet, we don't really know if people really are who they claim to be, and as such we cannot really trust these online presences unless we take a step back to really see them as what

they are. The resulting animation, featuring a pair of eyes blinking and staring out at the viewer, signals this distrust.

22. Do you agree with the artist's viewpoint that the people we meet online (and do not know in real life) cannot be trusted? Why or why not?

***DID YOU KNOW?***

Tromarama's works can be viewed on YouTube, and they have many other videos where they have used lo-tech methods such as woodblock cutting to create fascinating animations and music videos

**Before we look at the next artwork, take the time to answer these questions first:**

23. Do you go to the seaside often?

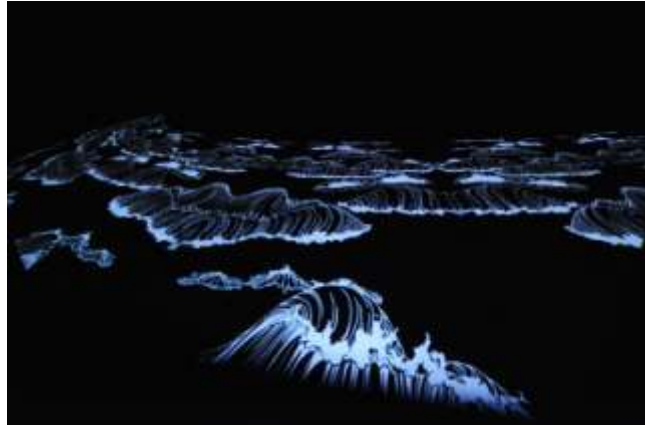
24. When you look out at the sea, how do you feel?

25. What do you think lies below the surface of the sea?



**Now, head into the next gallery and look for this work. (Be careful, as the gallery is very small!)**

The work shown here is a hand-drawn animation created by a Japanese artist named Tabaimo, depicting a seascape at night. Take a few minutes to watch the animation.



26. Do you notice anything unusual or eerie about this animation of the sea?

27. How does watching the animation make you feel? What is the atmosphere created by the artist in this work, and how has she created it?

28. The artist is fascinated by the sea and the idea of what lies beneath its mysterious depths. What do you think the creatures lurking in the depths of the sea in this animation look like?

29. To the artist, the sea with its fathomless depth is a metaphor for the human body or troubled mind as well. What do you think?





**Go to Gallery 2. 1**

Look for this work by the artist Patricia Eustaquio titled *Psychogenic Fugue*.



30. Do you recognise the object(s) in this artwork? What are they?

31. Is there anything out of the ordinary about the use of this object?

32. What is the mood or atmosphere created by this artwork, and how has the artist created this mood?

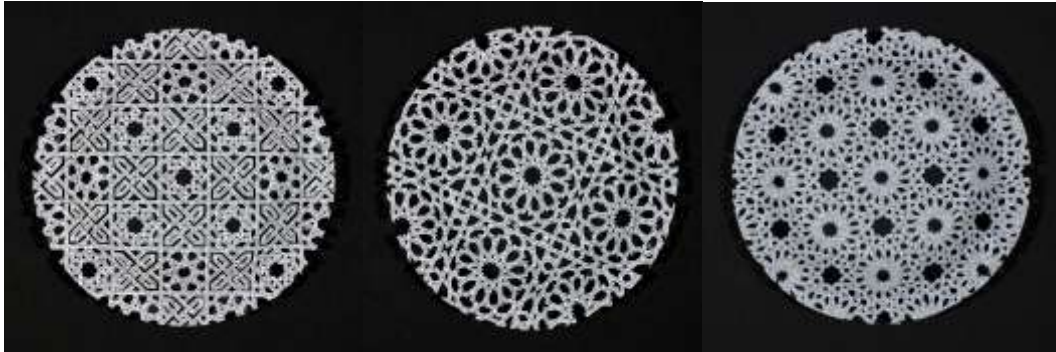
In this work, the artist has painstakingly crocheted a lace piano cover to cover the surface of a piano that is not there – the piano cover in this work acts as a shroud for something that has passed on, or is lost.

The title of this work, *Psychogenic Fugue*, refers to a psychological disorder where a person who, after embarking on a new life, has no recollection of his former life. The artist thus deals with ideas that deal with memory and loss in this work.



**Now look for the other work located in the same gallery**

Look carefully at the paper plates created by the Pakistani artist Hamra Abbas. Do the patterns on these plates look familiar to you?



The geometric patterns on these plates are reminiscent of those used in traditional Islamic art, where complex geometrical or repeating patterns were prized, and often used.

33. What are paper plates normally used for? Are they reusable, or disposable?

34. Do you think these plates are functional? Why or why not?

**Irony** can be described as a literary device in which there is a sharp contradiction that goes beyond the evident intention of words or actions.

35. Would you say that the artist has made use of irony in this work? How so?

36. What message do you think the artist is trying to get across with this artwork, with regard to consumption?



**Go to the Chapel, Level 2**



Enter the Chapel and take your time viewing this artwork by the Chinese artist Li Hui. Li has used advanced technology in the form of lasers to create this work, which has been described as a 'light sculpture'.


37. Why do you think the artist has titled this artwork V?

38. The artist has described visitors' encounters with his work as a 'spiritual' experience. Why do you think he has described it this way?

39. This work has also been described as 'the stuff of science fiction'. Why do you think this is so?

**Let's try this!**

All the artworks shown in this exhibition have been collected by people. Can you imagine owning an artwork like Li Hui's light sculpture? Sketch or write down your idea of how you would showcase a work of art in your own home in the space below!



– END –

## My day at SAM...

Complete this page and pass it to your teacher in exchange for a special token from SAM!

**Before today, I thought art was...**

**After today, I know that art is...**



**3 things I have learnt...**



**2 things I would like to find out more about...**



**1 thing I hope I can see more of at the museum...**

**\*For Teachers to note:**

Please collect all the pages as a single bundle and deposit them at the SAM front desk.

### Suggested Answers

1. Free response. E.g. to reflect the world around us, to see myself, affirm my self-image, etc.
2. He has 'broken' the mirrors by showing the cracks on the mirrors and having a loud cracking sound.
3. Free response. E.g. He has done this because he does not believe in the function or purpose of mirrors to reflect the world around us accurately or truthfully, he doesn't trust mirrors to show us what we see around us, he wants to shatter our expectations of the stability of the world around us etc.
4. Free response. E.g. they remind me of the ornate gilded/gold frames used to frame old 'masterpiece' paintings.
5. Free response. E.g. the artist is trying to say that art is like a mirror, reflecting the world around us.
6. In art, a Madonna refers to paintings or sculptures of Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and she is usually shown with the infant Jesus. She usually looks solemn/serious, or wears a slight smile, and often wears a scarf over her hair, with long robes covering her body.
7. No, it doesn't, because the figure's legs are not covered, and she is wearing high heels in the painting. The figure in the painting looks very modern compared to the usual depictions of the Madonna.
8. Free response. E.g. the artist has obscured the figure of the Madonna by painting over her in thick white strokes of paint, thereby blurring her out—we have to look really hard to see who this figure is. This is in contrast to the background of the painting, which is painted with a lot of attention to detail, such as the orange tree. This background looks like a setting for a traditional painting, even though the figure is a modern one.
9. Free response. E.g. the artist has done this by blurring out the figure of the Madonna, so that we are free to think whatever we want about her, because we don't really know what she looks like.
10. Free response. E.g. these people in the painting are students in a school, and the boys in the middle panel are boy scouts, as they are wearing uniforms.
11. Free response. E.g. the painting is showing us scenes from the past, because the colours/tones (sepia) used makes it look like an old-fashioned photograph. The clothes that the students are wearing in the first and third panel also look very old-fashioned, as though they are from a different time period.
12. Free response. E.g. the artist has made the students look very solemn and serious, as though they are very unhappy to be in school. The boy scouts in the central panel are wearing clown/Groucho Marx noses, and their shoelaces have been crossed and tied together, as though a bully has done so. The faces of the students in the right panel have been cut out, leaving blanks in their place. These all add up to create an unsettling atmosphere.
13. Free response. E.g. The figure of a person 'wearing' trousers to symbolise a male restroom, a red triangle with an exclamation mark on a sign symbolises danger, a red circle with a white dash in the middle is a sign that symbolises no entry for vehicles and so on.

14.	Symbols in the painting	What do they symbolise?
	The paper planes in the right hand panel	Military planes
	The shoelaces of the boy scouts being crossed over and tied together in the middle panel	A bully (perhaps America in this case of the Thomasites) causing a victim to trip over/ The boy scouts (or the Philippine people) tripping over themselves due to the actions of others
	The 'highway stripes' connecting the three panels together	The wide/pervasive influence of the Thomasites' education system on the Philippines

15. Free response. E.g. I think he feels bitter about the colonisation of the Philippines in the guise of 'education', as this led to an erasure of the Philippines' own stories and history, leading to gaps in their history, as seen by the blank spaces in the students' faces. The artist is trying to warn us about the well-meaning ways in which people can actually harm us, and for his countrymen to remember their own history.
16. The objects are corsages. Usually politicians, or VIPs who are attending a ceremony wear these corsages.
17. The flowers look very vibrant when you first see them, but actually they are starting to wilt, and are drooping and turning brown at the edges.
18. Free response. E.g. the artist is saying that actually these politicians are not as trustworthy as they might seem, because they should be wearing fresh corsages and they are not. Or she is saying that the people wearing these corsages are not as important as they might think they are.
19. Free response.
20. The symbols on the panels are made up of ones and zeroes, or binary codes, which are used in computer science.
21. Free response. E.g. it makes me feel nervous, or uncomfortable, as the eyes in the face are just blinking at me.
22. Free response. E.g. As long as you are careful and get to know people more over the Internet, they can be trusted. Or no, people you don't meet in real life cannot be trusted.
23. Free response.
24. Free response. E.g. I feel calm, happy, curious about what might lie beneath the sea etc.
25. Free response. E.g. sea creatures, coral, plants, etc.
26. Free response. Yes, there is something unusual and eerie, as the waves look like the back of human heads, and because there are strange creatures lurking in the water, and the creatures sometimes look like human intestines/entrails.

27. Free response. E.g. the animation makes me feel hypnotised, entranced, curious about the sea, as the has made us wonder what might kind of things or creatures might really lie beneath the sea, as we can't really know what lies beneath.
28. Free response. E.g. they look like jellyfish, and/or human entrails/intestines.
29. Free response. E.g. I agree, because in the same way that the sea is mysterious, and has many strange creatures swimming in its depths, so too does the human mind, which has a lot of thoughts and memories which are too numerous to mention or even understand.
30. The objects in this work are a lace/crochet piano cover over the shape of a piano.
31. The piano cover isn't actually covering a piano—the piano is missing.
32. Free response. E.g. the mood created by the artist is haunting and ghostly, as the piano cover looks like a funeral/ghostly shroud over the shell of the piano.
33. Paper plates are normally used for consuming food, or for art and craft. They are not reusable.
34. Free response. No, because they are too fragile to be used for food. Yes, if you put something very light on it.
35. Yes, because the artist has made a series of plates and titled this work *Please Get Served*, even though we cannot get served if we use these paper plates, as they are too fragile to be used.
36. Free response. E.g. I think the artist is trying to say that we should not consume so much food/materials, or get served so much, as she has made these beautiful paper plates for decoration, rather than consumption, thereby twisting their original purpose or function.
37. The laser beams/rays create the shape of a 'v' when they reflect off the panel on the floor.
38. Free response. E.g. the atmosphere created by this artwork is very spiritual, as there are gusts of smoke released by the artwork that slowly rise into the air and the path of the laser beams, mimicking the ascension/giving rise to a contemplative, introspective mood.
39. Free response. E.g. the work feels very futuristic and science fiction-like because the artist has made use of technology to create this work, such as the laser beams. The effect created is as though we will get beamed up to space when we step into the laser beams.