

MEDIA RELEASE

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Singapore Art Museum presents *Not Against Interpretation: Untitled*

*Exhibition features artworks from 15 contemporary Singapore artists
and invites visitors to name the works*

18 July 2013, Singapore – The Singapore Art Museum (SAM) is proud to present *Untitled*, an exhibition that challenges the extent to which titles impact the perception, meaning and interpretation of contemporary artworks. *Untitled* is the second edition in SAM's *Not Against Interpretation* exhibition series, a platform that explores the 'openness' of contemporary art and aims to open a dialogue on contemporary art appreciation.

Untitled showcases a collection of drawings, paintings, prints and sculptures all titled, 'Untitled'. The works are drawn from the National Heritage Board's collection and created by Singapore's leading contemporary artists such as Cheo Chai-Hiang, Chua Ek Kay, Goh Beng Kwan, Lim Tzay Chuen, Brother Joseph McNally, Anthony Poon, Tang Da Wu, Tang Mun Kit and Zai Kuning, amongst others. *Untitled* allows viewers to imagine the artists' intended message and visitors are invited to leave their suggestions for a suitable title for the untitled works.

Ms. Michelle Ho, curator of SAM says, "With *Untitled*, viewers are given complete freedom to draw their own conclusions and we hope to capture this tension and the dynamism of contemporary Singaporean art from the sharing amongst our audience in Singapore. We are challenging the viewer to draw connections from the subject matter, time and medium, amongst other visual cues, to derive meaning that resonates with their understanding of the world."

Dr. Susie Lingham, Director-designate of SAM, says, "One of SAM's key objectives as an institution dedicated to contemporary art in Singapore and the region is to nurture and develop art appreciation and a critical engagement with art in the museum-going public. *Untitled* is a unique exhibition that pushes boundaries and seeks innovative ways to engage with our audiences, encouraging them to ask thought-provoking questions on how titles may affect art-making processes

An institution of

and perception of artworks. Our *Not Against Interpretation* exhibition series seeks to initiate an ongoing dialogue with our visitors. We look forward to being surprised and informed by what our visitors have to say about the artworks exhibited in *Untitled*."

Re-staging Jason Lim and Vincent Leow's A Flog of Birdies in the 21st Century was the first edition of the *Not Against Interpretation* exhibition series. Museum volunteers were invited to offer their own interpretations of the artwork which were put up alongside those by SAM curators to see how the interpretations differed. *Untitled* opens on 20 July 2013 at the Singapore Art Museum and runs through 27 April 2014. A presentation by established artist Cheo Chai-Hiang, who has two works featured in *Untitled*, will be held on Friday, 16 August 2013. Cheo will share his approach to his own artistic practice and how audiences can find ways to interpret art.

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For more information, please read on:

- **Annex A** – Exhibition synopsis and in-conjunction Events
- **Annex B** – About the Artists and Artworks

About the Singapore Art Museum

The Singapore Art Museum (SAM) focuses on the creation of art in the present moment. It advocates and presents the contemporary art practices of Singapore, Southeast Asia and Asia, situating them within the global context of art making today. SAM has built up one of the most important collections of contemporary art from the region, and its programming aims to introduce new artistic practices and styles to the public, as well as nurturing discerning audiences for contemporary art. SAM is also organiser of the Singapore Biennale 2013.

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Annex A: Exhibition synopsis and in-conjunction Events

Not Against Interpretation: Untitled

Opens 20 July 2013 | Singapore Art Museum

While the appreciation of art has largely been perceived to be a visual affair, it is also a process that is often mediated by text. After all, artistic intentions and artwork subject matter are frequently conveyed to viewers through words, writings, and most of all, artwork titles.

If names matter, what can we say about untitled artworks that seem to say nothing, or quite possibly everything? To what extent do text and image attach meaning to art? Without titles and established commentaries, is it yet possible to gain a genuine encounter with art?

Untitled, the second edition in SAM's *Not Against Interpretation* exhibition series, draws from a selection of the National Heritage Board collection of works by Singapore artists that are untitled.

While artists' motivations for presenting their works as untitled ones may vary, many untitled works are frequently meant to allow viewers to discover meaning through their own perspectives. Besides artistic intent, viewers' interpretations of artworks also play a significant role in the definition of an artwork. In this exhibition, visitors are welcome to suggest suitable titles, placed alongside the artwork, as part of the exhibition objectives of opening up new readings in the experience of contemporary art.

Not Against Interpretation is an experimental platform aimed at nurturing appreciation for contemporary art, and invites visitors to interpret the artworks in their own way based on their experiences with the artists' works.

RELATED IMAGE



Angeline Choo, *Untitled*, 1988, oil on canvas, 121 x 80 cm, SAM collection

RELATED PROGRAMMES

ARTIST PRESENTATION: Cheo Chai-Hiang

Untitled features two of Cheo Chai-Hiang's fascinating pieces from SAM's collection. Cheo is primarily a conceptually driven artist whose work and thought explores domains related to identity, culture and place. Join him in this presentation, as he shares his artistic practice and how audiences can find ways to interpret art.

Friday, 16 August 2013 | 7:30pm – 8:30pm | Glass Hall, SAM

Free admission. Registration required. Visit <http://www.singaporeartmuseum.sg> to register.

Exhibition Venue

Singapore Art Museum is located at 71 Bras Basah Road, Singapore 189555.

Opening Hours

Mondays to Sundays | 10am to 7pm (Last admission at 6:15pm)

Fridays | 10am to 9pm

Admission Fees (Combined SAM and SAM at 8Q)

Citizens and Permanent Residents	: Free
Adults	: S\$10
Students (with valid student card)	: S\$5
Senior Citizens (Foreign)	: S\$5
20% discount on admission fees for group of 20 pax or more	

Ticket price includes \$1 SISTIC fee. Tickets can be purchased from the Information & Ticketing counter at Singapore Art Museum and SAM at 8Q or from SISTIC.

Admission is free for visitors aged six years and below, Singaporean and PR senior citizens, full-time National Service men (NSFs), students and teachers from local schools*.

Visitors can also enjoy free entry to SAM every Friday from 6pm – 9pm and on Open House days.

*Unless otherwise indicated.

SAM online

www.singaporeartmuseum.sg

www.facebook.com/singaporeartmuseum

www.twitter.com/IAmASAMbody

www.instagram.com/IAmASAMbody

www.youtube.com/samtelly

Enquiries

6332 3222 or 6332 3200
nhb_sam_programs@nhb.gov.sg

How to get to SAM

By Bus: SBS 7, 14, 16, 36, 111, 131, 162, 175, 508, 518
 SMRT 77, 167, 171, 700

By MRT: 2-minute walk from Bras Basah MRT Station
 10-minute walk from Dhoby Ghaut, Bugis or City Hall MRT stations

By Car: Carparks available at Waterloo Street, Queen Street, NTUC Income
 Centre, Plaza by the Park, Hotel Grand Pacific and Singapore
 Management University

Annex B: Artists and Artworks



AHMAD ABU BAKAR (b. 1963)

Untitled (Chair)

1992

124 x 49 x 46.5 cm

Mixed media

NHB Collection

Ahmad Abu Bakar made *Untitled (Chair)* in response to the rising consumerism of 1990s Singapore where portable music players became popular and frequently seen to be used by commuters on public transportation. The work was a reconstruction of an earlier piece, since lost, which Bakar made in 1992 at *The Space* exhibition at Hong Bee Warehouse, organised by The Artist Village. At this exhibition, participating artists created new works utilising found objects from the disused warehouse. The work became a subject of discussion during a sculpture forum, and critics have interpreted its form as representative of the electric chair, itself symbolic of capital punishment in Singapore. For the artist, it was the state of mental absorption amongst music listeners that was of his primary interest in the making of the work as the artist reflected on the relationship between meditation and torture.

Art as a form of contemplation continues to be a theme in Bakar's practice. Much of the ceramics that he subsequently produced through the course of his career stem from the artist's interest in representing ideas related to the body, mind, cosmos and universe. Born in Malacca, Bakar was trained at the LASALLE College of Fine Arts and the University of Tasmania. Presently a LASALLE lecturer, Bakar is also actively involved with art and community projects, most notably with prisoners.



BAET YEOK KUAN (b. 1961)

Untitled #01 Horn

1992

165 x 24 x 208 cm

Brass

NHB Collection

Versatile in painting, installation and sculpture, much of Baet Yeok Kuan's work through the 1990s can be seen as the artist's rigorous investigation of form, the relationship between objects and space, as well as ways of art-making that transform the characteristics that define these very mediums. *Untitled* is part of a series of 10 works that the artist presented in his graduating exhibition *Untitled: 1991-1992* at the University of Central England. In this exhibition, all of the works were deliberately not given a name, as part of an artistic strategy aimed for viewers to experience art through their primary senses rather than be imposed with pronounced artistic intent. For Baet, this project was premised on making works that conjured the opposing perceptions of sound and silence. Many of the pieces in this *Untitled* series such as the exhibited work, engage with musical instruments and found objects that have the potential to create noise. By reconfiguring these objects into sculptural forms within a gallery setting, the artist concurrently prescribes an atmosphere of quietude, presenting a subtle tension that is meditative at

the same time. Trained in the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA) and the University of Central England, Birmingham, Baet works as a part-time art lecturer at NAFA, the National Institute of Education and the Singapore Institute of Management (SIM) University.



CHEO CHAI-HIANG (b. 1946)

Untitled (Miles to go before I sleep)

1987

90 x 50 x 40 cm

Wood, mixed media

NHB Collection

The use of language in contemporary art-making can be a powerful tool, as artists engage with wordplay and their semantic allusions to open up new readings in art, beyond their visual qualities. This *Untitled* work by Cheo Chai-Hiang, submitted to the 1976 National Sculpture Exhibition, comprises of an adapted log of wood, lodged with a traditional washing board, that is designed to open and reveal text from the final stanza of the 1922 Robert Frost poem, *Stopping by the Woods on a Snowy Evening*. Initially rejected by the jury, the work was eventually accepted in the exhibition. By incorporating text into the artwork, Cheo's work navigates between the realms of the textual and the visual. By interchanging the location of meaning for viewers between text and art object, viewers are prompted to reconsider the processes of how artworks can be read and understood.

Cheo Chai-Hiang studied in the Department of Modern Languages and Literature in the former Nanyang University, Singapore, and went to England in 1971 to pursue art at the Birmingham Polytechnic, Brighton Polytechnic and the Royal College of Art, London. From the 1980s, he taught fine art at the University of Western Sydney, Australia. He has participated in the 2008 Singapore Biennale and the 2011 Asia Pacific Triennial.

CHEO CHAI-HIANG (b. 1946)

Untitled

1976

Variable dimensions (set of 8)

Etching and aquatint on paper

NHB Collection

An advocate of conceptual art practices since the 1970s, Cheo Chai-Hiang sought to redefine the purpose of art amidst the prevailing modernist style of representation in Singapore. A member of the Modern Art Society then, he rejected prevailing aesthetics that privileged art, particularly painting, as being beautiful, instead choosing to illuminate thought processes and conceptual thinking as a necessary way of evolving ways of perceiving art. This series of minimalistic etchings were executed during Cheo's studies at the Royal College of Art in London, and conceived as a way of revealing the characteristics of etching tools and the medium itself. Using oblong-shaped zinc and steel plates, Cheo created subtle incisions and, at different stages of the process, hammered and burnished parts of the plates to create textured impressions of what appears to be geometrical blocks in stages of deterioration.

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ANGELINE CHOO (b. 1959)

Untitled

1988

121 x 80 cm

136.2 x 95.5 x 3.5 cm

Oil on canvas

NHB Collection

Graduating with a diploma in Fine Arts from the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, Angeline Choo was actively participating in ASEAN organised exhibitions through the 1980s and 1990s. This included the First ASEAN Youth Painting Workshop in Thailand (1983), the 2nd ASEAN Travelling Exhibition of Painting, Photography and Children's Art (1992) as well as the Brunei exhibition in celebration of the Sultan 47th birthday (1993).

Choo's practice emerged amidst the landscape of a rapidly modernising Singapore, and painting floral still-life, orchids and nature became the artist's consistent theme in her practice, as a way of reflecting on the urban development of the city state, and loss of natural landscape. *Untitled* is a rare piece from Choo inspired by a scene in the courtyard of her family home, and features a mundane domestic environment that is at the same time, uncommon as a portrayal of still-life. When Choo's father, artist and art educator Choo Keng Kwang noticed the laundry in the courtyard one afternoon, he was struck by this unique combination of light and form and urged his daughter to paint it. The work entered the museum collection after it garnered a Distinction Award in the 1988 UOB Painting of the Year competition.



CHUA EK KAY (1947 – 2008)

Untitled
Undated
153 x 158 cm
Oil on canvas
Gift of Chua Ek Kay
NHB Collection

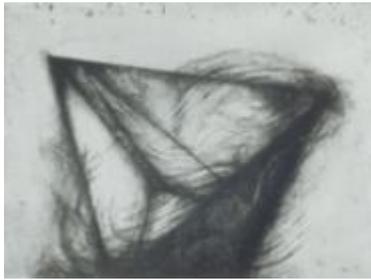
Adept in traditional Chinese ink painting and calligraphy, Chua is known for his practice that sought to push the boundaries of traditional Chinese ink painting, as well as establish contemporary ways of rethinking this pictorial tradition. First trained under ink painter Fan Chang Tien (1907 – 1987) in 1975, Chua later pursued formal art education at the La Salle SIA College of the Arts (1990), the University of Tasmania (1994) and the University of Western Sydney (1995). During this period, Chua's study and examination of both the formal properties and principles of Chinese and Western art pushed his practice to explore as well as attempt to resolve the differences between these two disciplines within his works. Throughout his career, Chua's consistent subject matters of street scenes, lotuses, nature and abstraction, showed his commitment to investigate and further distill representation in a way that reflected philosophical dimensions within the pictorial plane. This artistic endeavour can be traced back to his tutelage under Fan Chang Tien, an advocate of the *xieyi* style (literally translates to write ideas) of painting, an aesthetic principle that emphasises subjectivity and spirit over likeness and precision of representational form, as well as his interest in Zen Buddhism.



GOH BENG KWAN (b. 1937)

Untitled
1985
108.7 x 99.2 cm
112.7 x 103.2 x 4.8 cm
Mixed media
NHB Collection

Part of the second generation of Singapore artists, Goh Beng Kwan studied ink painting under Singapore pioneer artist Chen Wen Hsi and was a student at the Art Students' League of New York (1962) as well as the Provincetown Workshop, Massachusetts, USA (1964). Initially influenced by American Expressionism, Goh's subsequent practice saw the development of a language of expression that mediated between Chinese tradition and Western modernism. Known for his collages from the 1980s, Goh's collage works frequently incorporated materials like bamboo, fabric, rice paper and other materials that allude to the textures and nuances of Singapore culture and the Chinese tradition. His versatile approach was noted to have brought a renewed vitality to how the medium was perceived in Singapore at that time. Highly commended for his keen sense of using colours to create harmonious compositions, Goh's practice can be seen as part of the endeavour of the artists of his generation to redefine art and art-making that responded to the issue of Asian identity as a theme in Singapore modern art.



GOH EE CHOO (b. 1962)

Untitled
1992
56.7 x 76.1 cm
Etching
NHB Collection

Eastern philosophies of Buddhism, Daoism and geomancy form a large part of Goh Ee Choo's investigations which he explored throughout his practice, through the mediums of painting, print-making and installation art. In 1988, Goh participated in *Trimurti* with Singapore artists S. Chandrasekaran and Salleh Jappar, a landmark exhibition that raised issues on multiculturalism, identity and art practices in Singapore through the lenses of Eastern spiritual traditions of which the exhibition was themed upon. Schooled in the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (1979) and the Slade School of Fine Art (1988), much of Goh's work from this period to the mid 1990s were executed in monochromatic tones, as part of his exploration of both the conceptual and experiential characteristics of colour and void. Notions of duality, such as object and subject, space and time, artifice and nature, and the physical and the spiritual, were themes he examined through his art-making during this period. The devout Buddhist continues to make art and teaches at the LASALLE College of the Arts today.



LIM TZAY CHUEN (b. 1972)

Untitled
Undated
86.4 x 59.5 cm
Baby oil lotion and India ink on paper
Gift of Liu Thai Ker
NHB Collection

Singapore artist Lim Tzay Chuen is known for his conceptual practice that is pivoted on proposals and negotiations with art organisers and institutions. Much of the significance in his works resides in the intangible processes involved in realising artistic endeavours as well as the revelation of institutional bureaucracy, rather than the final presentation of a premeditated outcome. As a result, much of the principles that define his practice also take place in the documentation of unrealised projects which nonetheless evidences the conceptual rigour in Lim's practice. Actively practicing in Singapore from the late 1990s to the late 2000s, some of Lim's works include subtle alterations of The Substation gallery space, locating his artwork within a Singapore Art Museum catalogue rather than the exhibition space and presenting his work in the form of a pheromones-infused space. Lim's works challenge both exhibition visitors and users of public space wherein his work takes place, to realise the occurrence of the artwork through direct encounter, while resisting the demand for art to manifest as a tangible entity.

The characteristic of the invisible in Lim's practice parallels the way in which the artist names them. Much of the titles of Lim's work are minimalistic in as far as they seek to present his intentions in their most honest terms: Since 1999, much of Lim's works in the form of proposals to make subtle changes in public spaces have been entitled *Alter#* and *Alteration#*. *Untitled* is part of a series of paper works investigating abstraction in the human figure which the artist created during his studies at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Australia.

Lim has participated in various local and international exhibitions, most notably, Gwangju Biennale (2002), Sydney Biennale (2004), Venice Biennale (2005) and the Singapore Biennale (2006).



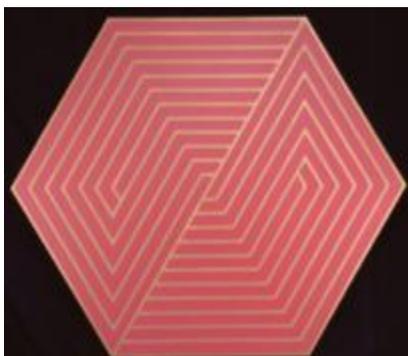
JOSEPH MCNALLY (1921 – 2002)

Untitled
Undated
117 x 68 x 31.2 cm
Wood
NHB Collection

Untitled
Undated
91 x 81 x 30.5 cm
Wood
NHB Collection

Joseph McNally was an artist, art educator and member the De La Salle Order of Brothers. Through the course of his career, McNally also carved a reputation as a skilled sculptor, with 200 works to his name. Known for his innovative use of material, McNally's creations often incorporated material such as marble, copper, bronze and epoxy, with his stone and wood sculptures being the most celebrated. McNally was deeply interested in the aesthetic and philosophical values of the East and the West, and Celtic mythology. The artist's contemplation on relationship between nature, humanity and spirituality is apparent in his works. His sculptures frequently expressed nature in abstract forms, and can be read as his way of conveying the inherent connections that can exist between notions of the ambiguous and the universal.

McNally arrived in Singapore in 1946 and taught in many mission schools in Malaysia and Singapore before becoming principal of the St Patrick's School in 1975. This would lead to the formation of the St. Patrick's Arts Centre in 1984, which became the La Salle-SIA College of the Arts in 1993, and the LASALLE College of the Arts today, for which he is been credited as the founder.



ANTHONY POON (b. 1945)
Untitled (Octagonal - Red/Gold)
C 1970s
133 x 152.5 x 4.8 cm
Acrylic on canvas
Gift of Family of Anthony Poon
NHB Collection

Emerging in the 1960s Singapore art scene along with artists such as Goh Beng Kwan, Thomas Yeo and Teo Eng Seng, Anthony Poon was part of what is known as second generation artists in Singapore, whose works can be said to define a new characteristic of modernism in Singapore that departed from the Nanyang style. Trained in the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, the Bradford Regional College of Art and the Byam Shaw School of Art in the UK, Poon's works are largely influenced by Western genres such as Optical Art and colour field theory, which he adapted to create his signature style of abstraction in Singapore. Throughout his career, Poon's works were

distinctive from his peers in terms of his method of pictorial analysis, precision in technique, investigation of issues relating to visual perception in art, as well as the exploration of colour as a visual language. Embedded in many of his geometric-styled paintings are the artist's examination of the relations between colour, form, line, space and surface. Some of his sculptural public commissions can be seen at Tampines Junction, Singapore Turf Club, Old Hill Street Police Station, UE Square, Nanyang Technological University Housing Development Board Hub and the St Regis Hotel.



TANG DA WU (b. 1943)

Untitled

1986

78 x 56 cm

97.5 x 77.3 x 3 cm

Watercolour on Handmade Paper

NHB Collection

One of the earliest proponents in Singapore modern art history to champion experimental artmaking, Tang Da Wu is known to have spearheaded the beginnings of The Artist Village in 1988, a collective of artists who started making installation and performance art. Tang's work is known for the themes of environmental concern and social issues in Singapore, often engaging with audience participation. The very question of how art can be relevant to society and its potential to transform it, are principles that defined Tang's art-making practice. This reflection of the purpose and duty of art has also translated in works which critiqued the institutional powers that define the infrastructure of art in Singapore, a theme that continues today, and can be seen in his works on paper in the 2000s. While Tang is known for his provocative installation and performances, ink painting is a medium that the artist consistently practiced through the course of his career. Departing from the formal calligraphic methodologies of the traditional ink painting genre, Tang's use of this medium can be interpreted as the artist's way of establishing his choice of aesthetic representation closer to his roots. Some of his most memorable series of ink paintings formed the *Heroes, Islanders* series of works (2006), inspired by impressions of the lives of ordinary Singaporeans. *Untitled* is an example of his early forays into ink-painting with colour, unlike much of his paper works of the past decade which have mostly been reduced to a monochromatic palette.

Tang Da Wu (b. 1943, Singapore) first obtained his art education from Birmingham Polytechnic and Goldsmiths College, University of London, and participated in the 52nd Venice Biennale (2007), the 3rd Gwangju Biennale, South Korea (2001) and the 1st Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale, Japan (1999).

TANG MUN KIT (b. 1955)

Untitled # 3 - 1
1988
32 x 50 cm
NHB Collection

Untitled # 3 - 5
1988
32.3 x 50 cm
NHB Collection

Tang Mun Kit's practice spans a broad range of mediums that include drawing, installation, painting and sculpture. It is in the realm of installation and sculpture where the artist primarily uses found objects that he has carved a name for, and this is a strategy of art-making that continues today. The principles that guide Tang's work with found object assemblage can be encapsulated in the concept of "hibernated works", a term and theme that he has used since the 1990s to describe his use of found material in his art as a way of reviving meaning in abandoned objects. Seen in Tang's works over the past 20 years are also the artist's allusions to social and political concerns which he has expressed in installation and paper works.

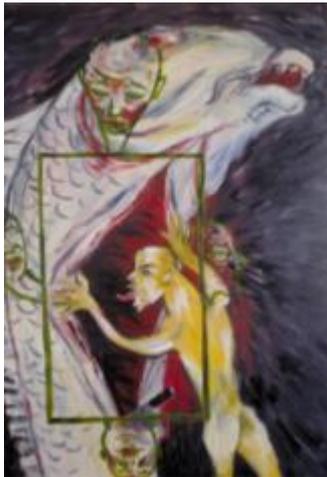
A self-taught artist and former engineer who started practicing art in 1985, Tang was actively involved in the artists' collective, The Artists' Village group, Singapore, in the late 1980s. These untitled works emerge from Tang's earlier days of practicing predominantly in drawing, painting and sculpture before he started examining process-based work and working with found material.



WONG KEEN (b. 1942)

Untitled (Grey Nude)
1998
86 x 61.3 cm
Oil on paper
Gift of Mr and Mrs Koh Seow Chuan
NHB Collection

Part of a second generation of artists known as the Singapore Abstract Expressionists, Wong Keen migrated to America in 1961 and enrolled in the Art Students League of New York, a renowned institution known to have fostered Abstract Expressionism, a style of painting characterised by non-figurative painting, gesture and spontaneity in brushwork. The currents of the New York 1960s art scene had significant impact on how Wong was to evolve his practice. Despite this influence, his earlier training in the Chinese ink medium continued to play a role in how he developed his mode of representation. Seen in Wong's paintings are his attempt and investigation of how the mediums of Chinese ink and Western oil can co-exist. From the mid 1960s, the female form became a consistent theme in Wong's works which he sought to examine in painting, in more conceptual rather than realist terms. Much of Wong's nude figures are poses illustrated in calligraphy-like strokes and executed with a sketch-like quality that are part of the artist's study of colour and form.



WONG SHIH YAW (b. 1967)

Untitled (Fish)
1989
226.5 x 175.2 cm
Oil on canvas
NHB Collection

Trained in painting at the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, Wong Shih Yaw was a member of artist collective The Artist Village during its early days at the collective's Ulu Sembawang enclave. *Untitled (Fish)* is exemplary of Wong's earlier practice in which his paintings, often allegorical renditions that in part reference his personal conflicts, are executed with emotional brushwork and a vivid palette of colours. During his early adult years, Wong struggled with issues relating to his sexuality. Much of his work during this period can be seen as the artist's way of illustrating an array of tormented psychological states resultant from his internal identity crisis. After embracing the Christian faith, Wong's paintings began to exhibit more idealistic narratives. Today, Wong's painting continues to be inspired by Biblical myth and symbolism, as well as his happier memories of growing up in Singapore life. His solo exhibitions in the past decade have shown the artist's paintings to encompass styles that range from contemporary expressionism to woodcut-inspired aesthetics.



ZAI KUNING (b. 1964)

Series 1 & 2
2006 – 2008
Chinese ink on Japanese paper (set o 30)
Variable dimensions
NHB Collection

One of the early members of Singapore art collective The Artist Village, multidisciplinary artist Zai Kuning works across a wide spectrum of mediums that include drawing, installation, painting, performance, sculpture and storytelling. Central themes in Zai's practice, such as historical identity, the politics of migration and geographical boundaries as national constructs stem from his ongoing research since 1999 on the history of the *orang laut* (sea gypsies) of the Riau Archipelago. A significant part of Zai's body of works in the past decade shows the artist's continuous reflection on the history of Riau, as well as the stories of the *orang laut*, one of the earliest settlers along the coastal areas of Singapore and the Indonesian islands. His drawings can be seen as a meditation on the geography, history and poetry of the Riau archipelago which are part autobiographical and part metaphorical, as a result of the time he spent in the islands. The artist refers to his drawings as a process of mark-making, rather than analytical and self-conscious compositions. For Zai, art-making is a way of understanding changing environments, reclaiming and reconciling with forgotten histories. Embedded in many of his drawings are his self-reflexive questions about assumptions in image-making, and *Series 1 & 2* contain both self-referential reflections as well as the artist's homage to the *orang laut*.