

Artist honoured for donation to NUS Museum

Harry Chin, whose art depicts early Singapore, received a Patron of Heritage Award

REENA DEVI
reena@mediacorp.com.sg

SINGAPORE—Prominent watercolourist Harry Chin Chun Wah was honoured for the donation of 19 of his works to the National University of Singapore (NUS) Museum.

The 76-year-old was one of the individuals recognised as a Patron of Heritage at the Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM) yesterday. The annual award from the National Heritage Board (NHB) was handed out to 74 individuals and organisations who made generous contributions to the museums and heritage sector in 2016.

The donors, who gave a total of S\$8.13 million to various heritage causes, received awards from Ms Grace Fu, Minister for Culture, Community and Youth, at the ACM.

The NUS Museum received many important works, including the pieces

from Chin. Ambassador Dato' N Parameswaran donated two pieces by Grace Selvanayagam, a Malaysian artist known for her abstract works; and Mohammad Din Mohammad, a Singaporean-Malay painter whose expressive art is inspired by Sufism.

NUS Museum curator Chang Yueh Siang said: "This year's donations are important in the art history of Singapore. Harry Chin's sketches and drawings are important documentations of the changing landscape and people of Singapore.

"Grace Selvanayagam's work is a rare example of cross-straits artistic exchange, and (is an important) addition to our collection of Malaysian modern art."

It is the first time that Chin — who helped found the Singapore Watercolour Society in 1969 and who was a well-known artist in the late 1960s and early 1970s — has made an institutional donation.

Chin's works often depict local scenes — from coffee shops to boats docked along the Singapore River. His donated pieces include sketches and paintings of people as well as Singa-



Among the works watercolourist Harry Chin donated to the museum is Street Scene (Coffee Shop), pictured above, which was painted in 1978.

PHOTO: NUS MUSEUM

pore scenes, and date back to 1965.

"My art is connected to Singapore's history," said Chin, adding that he wants the younger generation to understand what the country looked like in its early days.

He believes his paintings are "direct and easy to understand", in contrast to modern art, which tends to be more abstract.

Chin — who was an advertising manager for Far East Organisa-

tion from 1977 until his retirement in 1999 — had kept these paintings and sketches in his home. But the artist, who began showing his works again in 2013, unearthed them expressly for the purpose of donating them to the NUS Museum.

Chin recalls how he would often visit the Singapore River in the 1960s and 1970s to sketch the scenes and the people around it. "Dinner was cheap there," he quipped, adding that he visited the site so often, it was "like my second home".

Other major artworks donated to the museum include pieces from Chinese artist Huang Yao, who began his artistic career as the author of a series of comics featuring the character, Niu Bi Zi, which he created and became famous for in Shanghai in the 1930s.

The second Sino-Japanese War forced him to leave China, where his sojourns in South-east Asia brought him to Malaysia.

There, he produced Chinese ink paintings based on local Malaysian scenes. Three of these paintings have been donated to the museum anonymously.