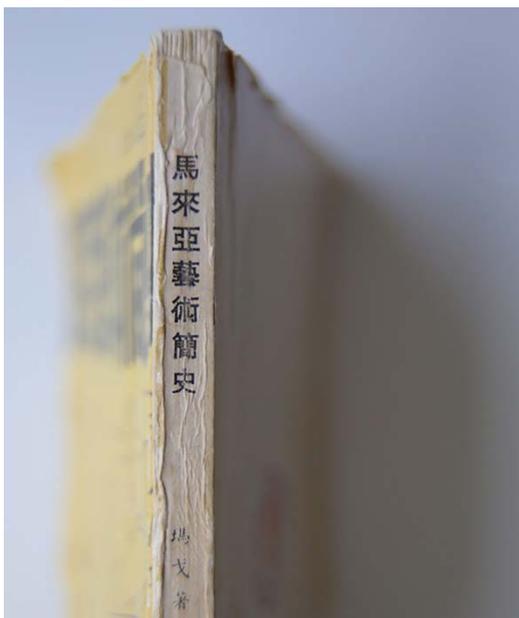


For Immediate Release

NUS Museum presents

Between Here and Nanyang Marco Hsu's Brief History of Malayan Art

The exhibition opens at NUS Museum on 21 Aug 2013 and runs till 2015



SINGAPORE, 6 August 2013 - This August, NUS Museum presents an art exhibition based on a book that may be considered Singapore's "proto-art-history": Marco Hsu's *A Brief History of Malayan Art*. Comprising of articles published in the *Nanfang (Southern) Evening Post* between 1961 – 1963, the book (published in the same month as the merger between Singapore and Malaya was announced in August 1963) is widely regarded by Singaporean and Malaysian art historians as essential reading. This year marks the 50th anniversary of the book's publication.

Marco Hsu's 1963 Chinese publication, 马来亚艺术简史, *A Brief History of Malayan Art*.

About the book: *A Brief History of Malayan Art*

In August 1963, Singapore joined Malaya to form the new nation state of Malaysia, effectively marking the culmination of independence from Britain, and the end of colonial rule. At this momentous point in history, the question of a national and cultural identity of the new nation was on the minds not only of the pioneer politicians on both sides of the Causeway during the march towards the formation of Malaysia, but also on the minds of many cultural commentators. One of these commentators was Koh Cheng Foo, a member of the Chinese intelligentsia, who wrote articles on art and culture frequently under the pseudonym Marco Hsu (for which he became better known).

Between 1961 and 1963, already an established author of books and articles on the cultural history of the *Nanyang*, a catchall term by the overseas Chinese community which referred to the the Southern Seas or the Southeast Asian region), Marco Hsu (or Ma Ge, in Mandarin) was invited by the arts editor of the Chinese-language *Nanfang Evening Post* to become a regular columnist with a remit to write about the history of Art in Malaya. In the same month that Singapore merged with

Malaya to form Malaysia, these serialised articles were compiled and published as the book *A Brief History of Malayan Art*.

The book was translated into English in 1999 by Dr Lai Chee Kien from the School of Design and Environment at the National University of Singapore, who is co-curating the exhibition. “I helped with the documentation of NUS Museum art and sculpture when they were transferred back from the National Museum Art Gallery, and got interested in local Art History. When my Dad passed me the original version of Hsu’s book in Chinese, I learned a lot from reading it. The book was one of the first that dealt with the subject matter on such a detailed scale, and it recorded Malayan art history prior to 1963. I felt it needed a new audience, and hence embarked on the translation.”

About the Exhibition

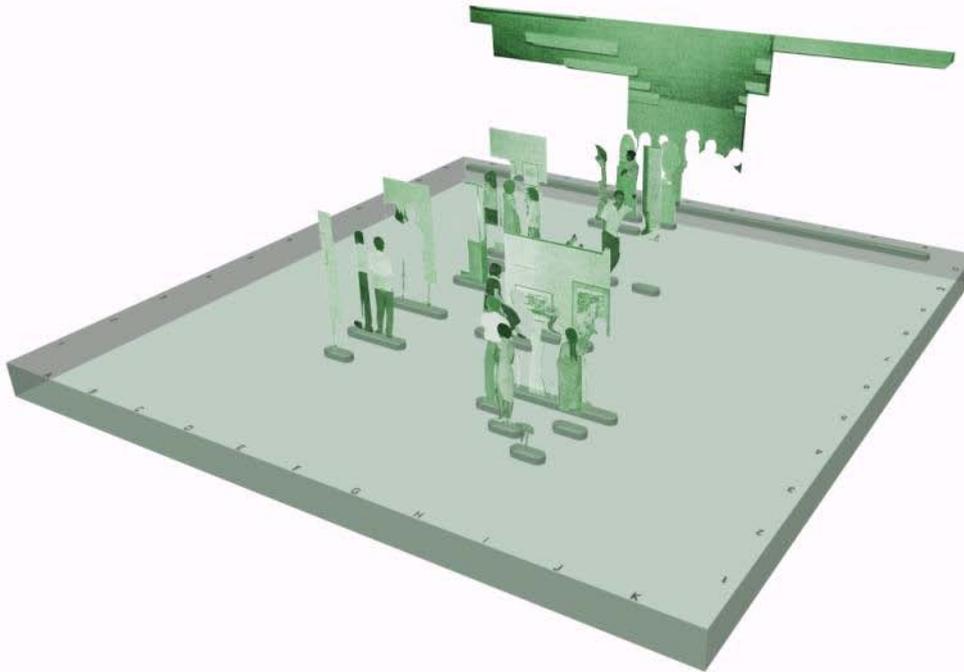
The exhibition showcases the strength of the NUS Museum collection: the collection is broad enough to contain many of the artefacts and artists mentioned by Hsu, from Indian temple sculptures dating to the 300AD (given in 1959 by the Government of India), Chinese ceramics from the 14th century, ink paintings, batik textiles from Malaysia, to modern paintings by many ‘modern-day’ artists (such as Liu Kang, Cheong Soo Pieng, Chen Chong Swee, Chen Wen Hsi, and others) collected for the museum by its first Curator, Michael Sullivan. Paintings from the Ng Eng Teng Collection, dating to the early years of Ng’s practice that Hsu mentioned, will also enliven the exhibition’s narrative. In addition, the exhibition will feature works from an important group of artists such as Zhang Daqian, Xu Beihong and Liu Haisu; painters who visited Singapore and Malaya, and left their imprints in our local art history, and other Chinese artefacts belonging to the Lee Kong Chian Art Gallery that was set up at Nanyang University (Nantah). These objects came to NUS when Nanyang University merged with the University of Singapore in 1980. Many previously unseen Chinese ink scrolls from the former group of artists will be featured alongside oil paintings that are well known favourites. Finally, throughout the two year duration of the exhibition there will also be opportunities to view paintings on loan from private collections.

In the course of researching the exhibition, the Museum’s curators discovered an important link between Hsu’s writings and the NUS Museum’s collection. One of the private collections named by Hsu in his book is the *Xiang Xue Zhuang* collection, one of the most important collections of Chinese art in Singapore by the 1960s built up by the late Dr Tan Sze Chor (and from which a significant bequest was made to the Asian Civilisations Museum in 2003). Some of the objects from the *Xiang Xue Zhuang* collection were donated by Dr Tan to the Lee Kong Chian Gallery of Chinese Art in the 1970s, and paintings from this collection will be shown during the exhibition.

NUS Museum curator Chang Yueh Siang feels that the exhibition has the potential to be a very rich experience, “Marco Hsu made an impressive compilation of a large number of artists, some of whom he correctly predicted were the ones to note (while they were, in his time, young, emerging contemporaries), others who for one reason or another are no longer remembered today. This provides us with the foreground for a visually exciting exhibition. The historical background of the time was also very charged, with different ethnic and political groups debating (often strongly) about the question of identity in the newly independent and merged nation state of Malaysia. Language and culture were domains that were particularly fraught with fault-lines, and what Hsu noted was

often as interesting as what he did not elaborate on. I hope that the exhibition will provide a platform on which opportunities to explore the complexities of the period will arise.”

Contemporary Singaporean Art



Michael Lee, *The Art Gallery of the former University of Malaya, circa 1959* (sketch), from the series "Sites of Maneuver", 2013.

Between Here and Nanyang will also feature a contemporary artist's intervention with the exhibition. Berlin- and Singapore-based artist Michael Lee has been invited to produce a series of models based on the important spaces that had been platforms for the promotion and exhibition of local art during the time of Marco Hsu. The venues selected are: British Council (which held art and painting courses, as well as exhibitions), University of Malaya Gallery (the first art museum created in Singapore), National Library (which staged many contemporary art exhibitions), and the Chinese Chamber of Commerce (which was the preferred venue for many artists from Chinese-educated backgrounds). Using chessboards as a metaphor, the models intend to provoke thinking about art spaces and exhibitions as loci where rules and strategies of engagements apply – sometimes with a dash of luck. Lee's participation is particularly pertinent, as it makes reference to the period of Hsu's writing, when all the artists he described were themselves 'contemporary'.

Featured Works



Zhang Daqian *Strolling under a Banana Palm*, Collection of NUS Museum

Zhang Daqian was one of the most prominent Chinese painters of the 20th century. His wide range of techniques enabled him to work in many styles. Painted with swift, broad strokes and suffused areas of ink wash, this work typifies Zhang Daqian's bold approach to figure painting.

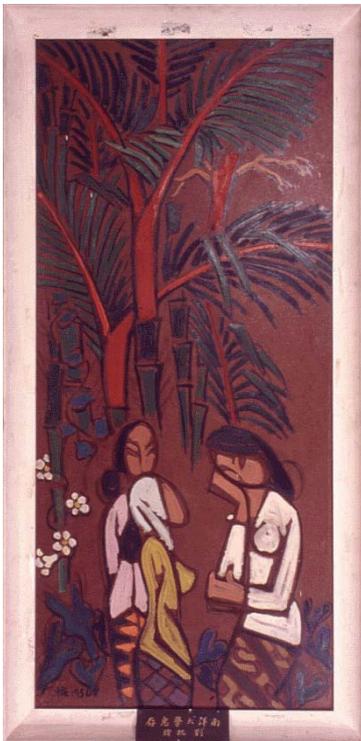


Sunyee, *Peacocks and Flowers*, Collection of NUS Museum

Sunyee studied at the Xinhua Art Academy in Shanghai and the University of Japan in Tokyo before going to France where she studied with noted French modernist, Fernand Leger. Having settled in Singapore since 1954, she established the Singapore Academy of Arts and was an active participant in the emerging Malayan artworld.



Liu Kang, *Indian New Year* (1957), collection of NUS Museum



Liu Kang, *Maidens Under a Tree* (1956), collection of NUS Museum

One of the seminal figures of modern Singapore art, Liu Kang, along with his contemporaries Chen Wen Hsi, Cheong Soo Pieng, Georgette Chen and Chen Chong Swee, are regarded as pioneer artists who practices shaped the pictorial language of the Nanyang School. Born in Fujian, China, Liu Kang's formative years were spent in Malaya. Settling in Singapore after World War II, Liu Kang's artistic activities extended beyond art making to teaching and writing, where he demonstrated to be a keen observer and articulate commentator on art, culture and society. Liu Kang worked largely in oil and pastel.

In the 1950s, Liu Kang advanced naïve and decorative qualities and gave precedence to bright hues, flat surfaces and bold outlines in his treatment of local themes, as seen in his 1957's *Indian New Year*. As with the rest of the Nanyang artists, Liu Kang was interested in local subject matters, this extended to the traditional customs and arts of the migrant Indian community in Singapore's multi-racial society.

In *Maidens Under a Tree*, with inspiration drawn from his trip to Bali, Liu Kang attempted to paint a Chinese scroll composition combining realism and semi-abstract forms. The artist once said that when he picked up a brush to draw, he was instinctively reminded and motivated by the great Chinese tradition, notwithstanding his allegiance to western art forms.



Cheong Soo Pieng, *Motherly Love* (1956), collection of NUS Museum

Born in 1917 in China, Cheong Soo Pieng moved to Singapore in 1946 and taught at the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts from 1947 to 1961. Cheong was an experimenter and his inventive streak developed into a distinctive visual style which influenced other contemporary artists.



Lai Foong Moi, *Pounding Spices*, 201 x 250 cm, Gift of the artist.

Marco Hsu noted of Lai Foong Moi, “Her main medium is oil painting, and her still life and human figure paintings are solid works.” In *Pounding Rice*, pays tribute to indigenous batik traditions as forms are simplified and the women’s physical attributes are abbreviated to solicit greater attention to the intricate patterns on the batik skirts they wear.



Ng Eng Teng, *Self portrait* (1955), collection of NUS Museum

Ng Eng Teng, a painter and ceramist by training, is recognized as one of Singapore's most innovative sculptors. The artist made three generous donations of his artworks to the National University of Singapore in 1997, 1998 and 2001. Ng's passion for art making and his determination were evident from the start. Although beset with earlier ailments, he graduated from the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts and went on to receive further training in ceramics in the United Kingdom. Upon graduation, Ng was offered the position of a designer at an Irish pottery factory and worked there for two years before returning to Singapore to start his own art studio.



Choo Keng Kwang, *Street Scenes* (1960), Collection of NUS Museum

Choo Keng Kwang was initially better known for his woodblock printing in the 1950s, but eventually, from the mid-1950s onwards began to turn his attention towards painting in oils.



Lim Nang Seng, *Bust of a Female Figure* (undated, possibly 1960s), Collection of NUS Museum

While most sculptors in the 1950s and 60s favoured plaster of paris as their materials. Lim Nang Seng began sculpting with local black river soil, and only later moved on to using pottery clay,

Credits

Co-Curated by Chang Yueh Siang, NUS Museum and Dr Lai Chee Kien, NUS School of Design and Environment.

Chang Yueh Siang is Curator of the Lee Kong Chian Collection of Chinese Art at the NUS Museum. Her current areas of research are modern art in Singapore and Malaya (1950-75), as well as Chinese paintings and decorative art (1600 – 1950s). She is also a graduate from the NUS Department of History and was formerly a Research Curator at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. She is also the author of *Chinese Textiles Pattern* (London: V&A Publishing, 2010).

Lai Chee Kien is a registered architect and Assistant Professor at the Department of Architecture at the National University of Singapore (NUS). He graduated from NUS with an M.Arch (by research), and from the University of California at Berkeley with a PhD in Architectural and Urban History in 2005. He translated Marco Hsu's *A Brief History of Malayan Art* into English in 1999, and wrote *Building Merdeka: Independence Architecture in Kuala Lumpur* (2007) and *Cords to Histories* (2013). In 2008, he co-curated *Constructed Landscapes: Singapore in Southeast Asia*, NUS Museum (2008 – 2009). He is also an artist participating in the 2013 Singapore Biennale.

Opening Night

Guest-of-honour: Professor Pericles Lewis, President of Yale-NUS College.

Date: Wed, 21 Aug 2013

Time: 7pm

Venue: NUS Museum

Please RSVP to 6516-8817 or museum@nus.edu.sg by 20 Aug 2013

Media/VIP preview: 11.00am

Please RSVP to 6516-4170 or trinabong@nus.edu.sg by 20 Aug 2013

Enquiries

For more information on the exhibition, media interviews, publications, gallery tours or high-resolution images, contact:

Trina Bong

Assistant Manager

NUS Museum

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E: trinabong@nus.edu.sg

Exhibition Details:

Exhibition period: 22 Aug 2013 – 2015

Venue: NUS Museum
University Cultural Centre
50 Kent Ridge Crescent
National University of Singapore
Singapore 119279

Opening hours: 10am – 7.30pm (Tuesdays – Saturdays)
10 am – 6pm (Sundays)
Closed on Mondays and Public Holidays

Admission: Free

About NUS Museum

NUS Museum is a comprehensive Museum for teaching and research. It focuses on Asian regional art and culture, and seeks to create an enriching experience through its collections and exhibitions. The Museum has over 8,000 artefacts and artworks divided across four collections. The **Lee Kong Chian Collection** consists of a wide representation of Chinese materials from ancient to contemporary art, the **South and Southeast Asian Collection** holds a range of works from Indian classical sculptures to modern pieces; and the **Ng Eng Teng Collection** is a donation from the late Singapore sculptor and Cultural Medallion recipient of over 1,000 artworks. A fourth collection, the **Straits Chinese Collection**, is located at NUS Baba House at 157 Neil Road.

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