



Lim Tiong Ghee
**ECHOING
FRAGMENTS**

3 Aug - 23 Sep 2018

Echoing Fragments
© 2018, The Private Museum Ltd
ISBN No. 978-981-11-8368-3
Printed in Singapore

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Published by
The Private Museum Ltd
51 Waterloo Street #02-06
Singapore 187969

Documented by
The Private Museum Ltd

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Printed by
1975 Printers

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The Private Museum is pleased to present *Echoing Fragments*, a solo exhibition by Singaporean abstract collage artist and painter, Lim Tiong Ghee. This exhibition is the third iteration of The Private Museum’s Artist-in-Residence programme and Lim was the first artist that we have sent to Yogyakarta for an artist visit. Through the immersive visit, Lim brings back with him the atmosphere and colours of Indonesia in the form of collage paintings – inspired pieces of fond memories from the time spent and connections made in Yogyakarta and Solo.

The Private Museum wishes to continue to support artists through its Artist-in-Residence programme, hopefully leaving in them a deep impression from the cultural exchanges that will permeate the minds of artists and viewers alike. In anticipation of the upcoming National Day celebrations, we also commemorate Singapore as a cosmopolitan city that embraces cultural pluralism and international exchanges. Without which, cross-cultural exchanges between the diverse societies that exist within Southeast Asia would have faced much more barriers inhibiting such enriching collaborations.

I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to our Guest-of-Honour, H.E. Ngurah Swajaya, Ambassador of the Republic of Indonesia to Singapore for gracing the opening reception and for his support for this exhibition.

Last but not least, I would like to thank Cemeti – Institute for Art and Society for their support for Lim’s artist visit and for being a kind host to the artist. This exhibition would not have been possible without their support.

Mr Daniel Teo
Founding Director
The Private Museum

I would like to begin by congratulating The Private Museum on celebrating its 8th anniversary this year. Over the course of these 8 years, the ever-diverse exhibitions held at the museum gives us a glimpse into the arts of Southeast Asia and also the great artistic potential of intercultural exchanges among nations of the region. We are excited to see The Private Museum’s Artist-in-Residence programme flourish and continue to give artists the opportunity to immerse deeply into the rich culture of Indonesia and other Southeast Asian nations.

We are hence delighted to invite you to discover the radiance of Yogyakarta through the heart and mind of the Singaporean artist, Lim Tiong Ghee. His works explore various aspects of Indonesian culture, from landscapes and people to colours and Batik, the collages embody in them a certain warmth of the human spirit. Through his visit, we hope that more artists would likewise be drawn to the fruits of cross-cultural immersion.

It is through collaborations in the same manner with this exhibition that we see fresh perspectives on what we consider known and familiar and have newfound appreciation for the obvious and warm atmosphere most take for granted. While it is common to find people dwelling within their comfort zones, Lim’s melding of the explored and unexplored manifests itself as the wondrous emotions of experiencing new things outside of one’s personal borders.

We are looking forward to more cultural exchanges in the future which will add greater creative diversity to the arts in Singapore. Being a cosmopolitan city, Singapore is no stranger to the advantages of communing with different cultures. We celebrate together with Singapore, through her 53rd National Day, as the arts of Southeast Asia continue to prosper.

H.E. Ngurah Swajaya
Ambassador of the Republic of Indonesia to Singapore
Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia in the Republic of Singapore

To and fro: Placing memory within a plane

Lim Tiong Ghee in conversation with Tamares Goh

Between 4-17 December 2017, The Private Museum sent artist Lim Tiong Ghee to Yogyakarta for their Artist-in-Residence programme¹. This is the third time The Private Museum has contributed to an artist embarking on a residency programme. Throughout the two weeks, Tiong Ghee visited more than 20 artists’ studios, visited historical monument sites of cultural importance, and stayed at the artistically significant venue, Cemeti – Institute of Art and Society².

The visit itself had immediate implications on his new work demonstrated in this exhibition, ‘Echoing Fragments’. Two distinct sets of work exist within this solo exhibition: one entitled ‘Impressions of Yogyakarta’ and another, the ‘Tropical Plants’ series. ‘Impressions of Yogyakarta’ is a series of fleeting excerpts, deftly constructed. Importantly, for the first time in Lim’s compositional approach, there are spaces left untreated: a deliberate functioning void, and interstitial white spaces that conjure up the transitional stages of memories, the white spaces in the composition functioning both as a respite and transitions between elements. The viewer’s eye traverses the canvas, picking up motifs prompted by visual symbols, perhaps re-enacting Lim’s perception in a foreign land. Collage is an appropriate approach on the canvas, true to how images are collected and collated through visual memory, a loosening of conventional methods to recreate a snapshot of a dominant genius loci. The colours that he uses are deliberately bright and lively as they reinforce the trip’s ambience. Is this how memory work through the process of assembling through collage – retold and overlaid, multi-functioning and multi-tasking, weaving together an account of an event, that could both recount narratives and provoke feelings simultaneously.



Artisan at work, Brahma Tirta Sari Studio

The ‘readymade’ object is a constitution in itself with embedded connotations of culture, language and history. The ‘readymade’ is highly charged and artists are readily seduced as they inform their surrounds and histories. A consistent use of the ready-mades is evident in this series, whether in the form of rice paper or Batik. Lim is attracted to the found qualities of rice

papers and Batik, and has amassed a collection of both over the years. However, this occasion calls for a stronger contextual approach. Batik is widely used as a clothing material and appears in everyday life, the symbolism of its motifs historically considered by the wearer for its relevance to tradition and ritual. These materials form the foundation for his canvas, a first compositional layer of a series of subsequent superimpositions that culminate with hand-painted images of figures such as Ramayana dancers, faces of people he has encountered or the lily pods.



Road leading to Ullen Sentalu Museum

to the Buddhist faith, but the embodiment of good deeds, essential but humbling, that lays the groundwork and his focus. The Bodhi leaves are featured as abstract shapes, as they are superimposed on one another. Yet they are fluid, as if fluttering in the wind; Lim suggests movement through the use of frayed edges and strands of rice paper as a language for continuum.

With the Chinese title of this exhibition “碎片的迴响 sui pian de hui xiang”, Lim expresses his particular fondness for the Chinese character “迴 hui”⁴ which suggests “rotation” or “curving”. As a pictogram, one side of the word appears as a beginning that has no end – a visual loop, an appropriate metaphor present in his approach. It is the continual reappraisal of experiences revisited through a non-linear memory, where a sense of place dominates the sequence of associated fragments collated. Within this process he re-evaluates, through memory, his previous journey and weaves together the components. It is perhaps in his studio, that the journey happens again and therefore “Echoing Fragments” offers the viewer the possibility to retrace, via the artist’s document, an experience of travelling within the canvas.

This is the tenth solo exhibition of Lim Tiong Ghee. A recurrent theme of looking towards nature is apparent in Lim’s practice, with works that attempt to capture atmospheric qualities of the sun, clouds, rain or stone. Leaves were largely featured in his last solo exhibition in 2010³. The Bodhi leaf motif, subtle but ever-present in another series, is featured in this exhibition. It is not about relaying an approach



The Stupas of Borobudur Temple



Tiong Ghee in conversation with Indonesian artists, Agus Ismoyo, Maryanto and Agus Suwage in their studios (left to right)

Tamares Goh (TG): Many think of the Bodhi leaf as a symbol of Buddhism or a symbol of spirituality. Would you say that you use the symbol as a descriptor of your faith in the way you use Bodhi leaf as a staple in one of your series?

Lim Tiong Ghee (LTG): I use it because it is a common plant there in Yogyakarta. Once, the tour guide showed us a whole stretch of road with Bodhi trees. I am a believer of the virtues of Buddhism, although I am not indicating that I am a spiritual person here, so it is not my intention to be an advocator of the religion through my art. I used the Bodhi leaf in this series as a reflection because Java has its roots in Buddhism, followed by Hinduism. It is the richness of various cultural aspects that I am impressed by. So, as a form, I use the Bodhi leaf as a cultural symbol of Java being the melting pot a few dominant religions, Buddhism and Hinduism being the two important ones from the past. So, in other words, the Bodhi leaf as a symbol acts as the constant backdrop of the whole experience. As well, visually, I like to use Bodhi leaf because as objects in nature, they introduce movement and fluidity in my work.

TG: I can see that there is movement suggested here.

LTG: I wanted to depict the fluttering of the leaf in the wind, in motion with the wind and air around it. The strands using rice paper are pieced together, composed to create a flow.

TG: You have a particular interest in Batik. You use it throughout the series “Impressions of Yogyakarta” by using cloths as the key collages. What particular aspect of Batik material are you drawn to and have you used any new findings from this trip in your work here?

LTG: They have beautiful motifs⁵ and I have always collected them, as with other kinds of fabrics and paper, using them as materials for collage from time to time. On this occasion I considered the choice of Batik more - there is a closer link as Batik is commonly worn as clothings in Yogyakarta. I visited a Batik studio, the Brahma Tirta Sari Studio⁶. The co-founder Ismoyo and myself conversed for a long time. This time, I was interested to learn about the dyes that the Batik craftsmen use. I realised that batik dyes are not so easily used in paintings, mostly they need to be colour-fastened. Although it was on the last day of my stay, I managed to find some dyes. I have used

them in this series. One must understand and study pigments well in order to use them. Some colours will fade in the sun, but some colours will turn brighter. For instance, murky yellows can last longer while reds and indigos are sensitive to the sunlight.

TG: The exchange and learning from like-minded artists must be rewarding. What other interesting discoveries did you find about materials? Did you recount any other interesting artist exchanges?

LTG: I visited more than 30 artists and seen more than 20 artists’ studios during my stay. There seems to be an abundance of materials because artists there tend to be quite resourceful, using old furniture and objects as their immediate materials. For instance, a found old exercise book from an antique shop can be used with an overlap of painted images on it and a new work suddenly exists! I was impressed with Heri Dono’s studio (house) where he was surrounded by many old furniture and objects while his artwork, mostly sculptures and installation, co-existing with one another. The furniture and objects become the “canvas” of his artwork as he works on them.

TG: Is there a stark difference there in comparison with the artists practising in Singapore?

LTG: Yes definitely. Artists in Singapore tend to start anew on a blank canvas, or tend to purchase materials fresh from the shops. In comparison, artists in Yogyakarta tend to look around and use their immediate surroundings, whether through objects or culture, as their absolute starting points - these starting points have already a rich layer existing. I would say it is the construct of the place as well, one can feel the expanse of spaces. Generally, there are no issues of working spaces for artists in Yogyakarta. The impression is that people are still closer to nature, there’s a sense of community, despite Yogyakarta being a city with a dense population.

TG: What would a lasting impression of Yogyakarta be for you from this trip?

LTG: People are very open and friendly, and I remember the wide openness of the paddy fields while travelling for instance. This is a place with a lot of history, and an old sultanate. Importantly, it is the cultural aspect of the place that would linger.



Farmer working the fields, Rumah Dharma

End notes

1. The Private Museum Artist-in-Residence programme started in 2015 with artist Hong Zhu An. Subsequently, Han Sai Por was appointed as the second artist in residence in 2016. Hong and Han went to Bali for their residencies. This is the first time an artist was sent to Yogyakarta on the programme.
2. Cemeti – Institute of Art and Society (Cemeti) was a key instrumentalist for many art activities and exhibitions in the late 1980s, right through the 1990s, with seminal artists, themes and artwork. The works were usually heavily charged with commentaries, especially during politically and socially unrest periods. Cemeti was co-founded by Nindityo Adipurnomo and Mella Jaarsma, and the space, till today, promotes communicating the works mostly Indonesian contemporary artists as well as forging ties with other contemporary artists, curators and researchers worldwide. The space is a multi-disciplinary space with intermediary purposes.
3. Lim Tiong Ghee’s last solo exhibition “Sense At Play” was in 2010 at Art-2 Gallery.
4. When the manager of The Private Museum Aaron Teo proposed for some key words leading to the exhibition’s title, Lim Tiong Ghee expressed that he liked the word “迴 hui” especially. Lim expressed his fondness and demonstrated in a calligraphy that Teo witnessed on-site. In a phone interview with Lim on 13 July 2018 by myself, Lim further expressed that he liked the pictorial form of the word, alluding to a kind of constant revolving.
5. Batik motifs are divided into different families of designs, such as the Parang, Kawung, Semen or Lereng, each with meanings, the design in motifs amounting to hundreds of variations evolving through time. Once upon a time, only the royals or courtly ranks could wear some motifs. Now it has been adapted to more common and utilitarian functions. There are signature styles that sets Yogyakarta Batik motifs distinct from other places in Indonesia.
6. Brahma Tirta Sari Studio is the leading Batik and fibre contemporary art studio in Yogyakarta, co-founded by Agus Ismoyo and Nia Fliam. They combine traditional craftsmanship with innovative contemporary approaches, resulting in genius workmanship in their products.

***Tamares Goh** heads the Curatorial Programmes team at the National Gallery Singapore. In 2013, she was the co-curator of the Singapore Biennale and in 2017, appointed as the producer for the Singapore Pavilion at the 57th Venice Biennale.*



Farmer plowing, Rumah Dharma



我以数彩的纸张，回应多彩的日惹。

在日惹的市区，有绿化的大树，庭院里的红花绿叶，在阳光下生辉。

在日惹的郊外，有千年的佛屠，戴头巾的回教徒，在佛像旁微笑。

我以华彩的蜡染，回应这多彩的日惹。

I echoed the hues of Yogyakarta with multitude of dyes on rice paper.

Urban Yogyakarta –
Lush green landscape and blooming flora,
thriving in the sun.

Rural Yogyakarta –
Borobudur of thousand years heritage,
Muslims in traditional headwear smiling by the Buddha statues.

I echoed the hues of Yogyakarta with rich Batiks.

林忠义
Lim Tiong Ghee



Fragments
01



Impressions of Yogyakarta 3, 2018
Collage and acrylic on canvas, 61 x 92 cm



Impressions of Yogyakarta 4, 2018
Collage and acrylic on canvas, 61 x 92 cm



Impressions of Yogyakarta 9, 2018
Collage and acrylic on canvas, 61 x 92 cm



Tropical Plants – Bodhi Leaf 1, 2018
Collage and acrylic on canvas, 76 x 102 cm



Tropical Plants – Bodhi Leaf 2, 2018
Collage and acrylic on canvas, 76 x 102 cm



Tropical Plants – Bodhi Leaf 3, 2018
Collage and acrylic on canvas, 61 x 92 cm



Fragments
02



Impressions of Yogyakarta 5, 2018
Collage and acrylic on canvas
61 x 138 cm diptych



Artisans at work, Laweyan Batik Craft Center



Impressions of Yogyakarta 6, 2018
Collage and acrylic on canvas, 61 x 92 cm



Tiong Ghee examining Batik patterns



Tropical Plants – Petals 1, 2018
Collage and acrylic on canvas, 76 x 102 cm



Tropical Plants – Petals 2, 2018
Collage and acrylic on canvas
122 x 205 cm polyptych



Fragments
03



left:
Tropical Plants – Flower Core 1, 2018
 Collage and acrylic on canvas, 102 x 76 cm



middle:
Tropical Plants – Flower Core 3, 2018
 Collage and acrylic on canvas, 76 x 102 cm

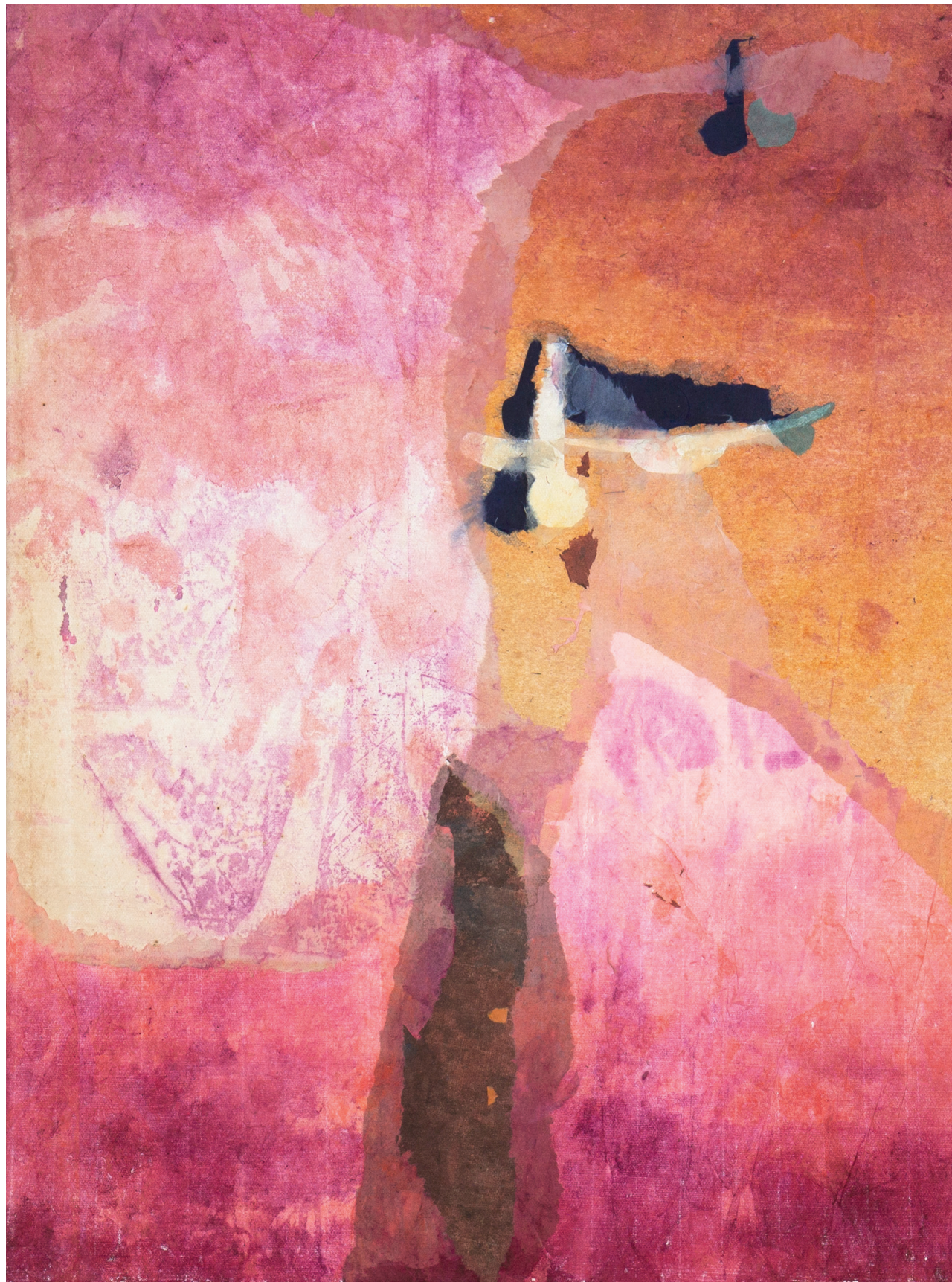


right:
Tropical Plants – Flower Core 2, 2018
 Collage and acrylic on canvas, 76 x 102 cm

Tropical Plants – Flower Core 4, 2018
Collage and acrylic on canvas
76 x 204 cm diptych

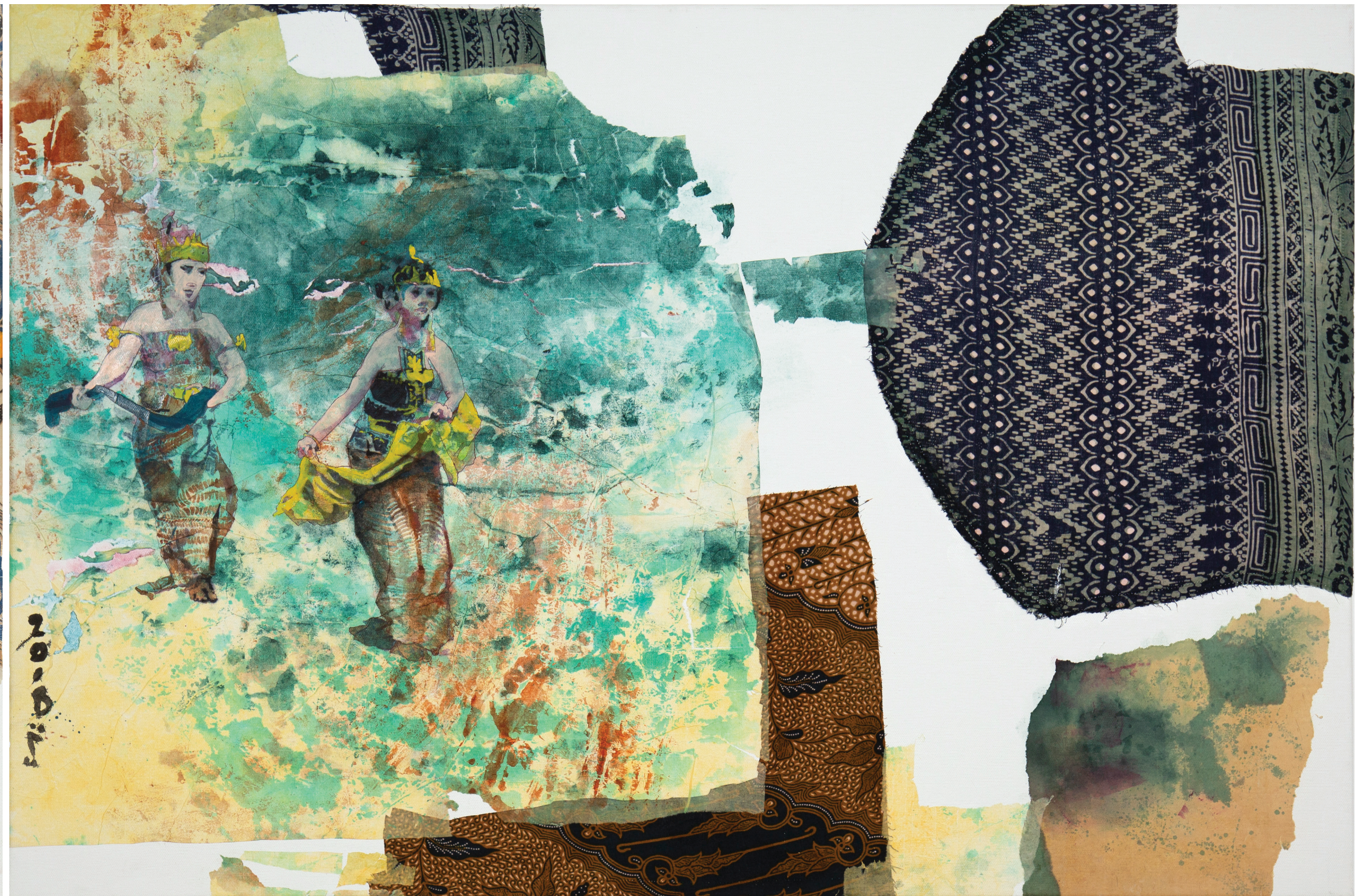


Tropical Plants – Flower Core 5, 2018
Collage and acrylic on canvas
61 x 138 cm triptych





Impressions of Yogyakarta 8, 2018
Collage and acrylic on canvas, 61 x 92 cm



Impressions of Yogyakarta 1, 2018
Collage and acrylic on canvas
61 x 138 cm diptych



Dancers performing the *Ramayana*, (Sanskrit Epic), Prambanan Temple



Impressions of Yogyakarta 2, 2018
Collage and acrylic on canvas, 61 x 92 cm



Dancers portraying Rama and Sita, Prambanan Temple



Impressions of Yogyakarta 7, 2018
Collage and acrylic on canvas, 61 x 92 cm



The artist visiting Imogiri Mataram's Royal Cemetry



Impressions of Yogyakarta 10, 2018
Collage and acrylic on canvas, 61 x 92 cm



LIM TIONG GHEE (*b. 1955, Singapore*) began as a watercolourist before moving to acrylic and collage. A self-taught artist, he has exhibited extensively and views painting as a medium to portray the quotidian. He gained critical acclaim when his collage “From the Turtledove” won the top award in the *8th UOB Painting of the Year Competition* in 1989.

Artistic Career

Lim never had formal art training other than the art lessons he took at GCE A level. He started painting seriously only upon the encouragement of friends when he was enlisted in National Service. His profession as a senior graphic artist at the Singapore Broadcasting Corporation also spurred his interest in art.

Clinching the grand prize in the *UOB Painting of the Year Competition* in 1989 proved to be a major catalyst for Lim. Although he had won various prizes before that, it was this win that launched his career. His work was selected by a team of formidable judges, including the late Ismail Zain of Malaysia, Professor Jose Joya of the Philippines and Singapore artist Thomas Yeo. Along with a S\$12,000 cash prize, Lim was accorded a solo exhibition the following year at the Empress Place Museum.

Stylistic Conventions

In the early days, Lim focused mainly on depicting landscapes using watercolour. He was adept with the medium and his brushstrokes were commended for being fluid and spontaneous. He frequently engaged in on-site painting and his subjects were often the familiar streets and scenes of Singapore.

Later, he shifted towards developing his paintings in the studio. He began to give critical attention to elements such as shape, form, space, perspective, colour and composition, and he utilised collage and acrylic paint to translate them into paintings.

Lim values the two-dimensional reality and purposefully flattens his shapes and forms as a way of creating abstractions of his subject matter without completely breaking them down.

His *Seabreeze* series depict the different nuances of the sea and land. In the series, yellows are contrasted with blues and reds with blacks. The waves are presented in a minimalist manner, as if to evoke an aural response from the audience.

Similarly, he prefers abstraction in his portrayal of landscapes and tropical flowers as he believes it can evoke a stronger reaction than purely figurative forms. The abstract imagery subsequently function as a creative starting point from which abstract rice-paper collages are constructed.

Source: National Library Board Singapore (eResources)

Solo Exhibitions

- 2010 *Sense at Play*, Art-2 Gallery, Singapore
- 2004 Vermont Studio Centre, United States
- 2001 *Sun Rock*, Karin Weber Gallery, Hong Kong
- 2000 *Tropical Contemplation*, Damasak Asia, The Alchemy Gallery, United Kingdom
- 1998 Goethe-Institut, Munich, Germany
- 1996 Art Salon, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 1992 The Substation Gallery, Singapore
- 1990 Empress Place Museum, Singapore
- 1981 National Museum Art Gallery, Singapore

Group Exhibitions

- 2013 *Season’s Interpretation*, One East Artspace, Singapore
- 2005 *6th Face*, MICA Building, Singapore
- 2003 *Singapore Group Show*, Karin Weber Gallery, Hong Kong
 - Two Man Show*, Art-2 Gallery, The Substation Gallery, Singapore
 - To Sleep, To Dream*, Art-2 Gallery, Singapore
- 2002 Joint exhibition with Goh Beng Kwan, Wetterling Teo Gallery, Singapore
- 2001 *The Watch Has No Numbers*, Art-2 Gallery, The Substation Gallery, Singapore
- 1999 *A Brave New World*, Soobin Art Gallery, Singapore
 - Abandoned Thoughts*, Art-2 Gallery, The Substation Gallery, Singapore
- 1998 Special exhibition in *Essen in China* exhibition, Museum für Volkerkunde, Germany
 - Art-2 Gallery, The Substation Gallery, Singapore
- 1997 Art-2 Gallery, The Substation Gallery, Singapore
- 1996 *Taipei Art Fair*, Taipei, Taiwan
 - Singapore Arts Festival* ‘96, Atrium Gallery, Singapore
 - Nine Artists in Bali*, Art Forum, Fort Canning Hill Gallery, Singapore
- 1992 *International Watercolour Exhibition*, Taiwan

- 1991 *International Watercolour Exhibition*, Korea
- 1989 *International Watercolour Exhibition*, Thailand
- 1987 *Centenary Art Exhibition*, National Museum Art Gallery, Singapore
 - New Direction* ‘87, Museum Art Gallery, Singapore
- 1986 *12 Singapore Artists*, Collectors Gallery, Raffles City, Singapore
 - Two Man Show*, National Museum Art Gallery, Singapore

Awards

- 2004 VSC Freeman Fellowship 2004/2005, Vermont Studio Centre, United States
- 1989 Top award in the *UOB Painting of the Year Competition*, Singapore
- 1984 1st prize in the representational category of the *UOB Painting of the Year Competition*, Singapore
- 1980 Special prize, *Young Art in Asia Now* competition, Hong Kong
- 1978 Special Award, *National Day Art Exhibition*, Singapore

Collections

- Asian Business Press Singapore
- Boeing International Corporation
- Citibank Singapore
- Defence Science & Technology Agency
- Economic Development Board
- International Enterprise Singapore
- Janssen-Cilag
- Orchard 290 Ltd
- Singapore Airlines
- Singapore Art Museum
- United Overseas Bank
- Private Collections in Australia, Europe, United States, Taiwan and Hong Kong

We would like to express our sincere appreciation to the essay writer, Tamares Goh and the following organisations, Singapore Night Festival, Bras Basah Bugis arts & heritage district, INDC Pte Ltd, 1975 Printers, Digit Design and FrameHub for their dedication and support in making this exhibition a success.

A very special thank you to the Guest-of-Honour, H.E. Ngurah Swajaya, Ambassador of the Republic of Indonesia to Singapore for officiating the opening of the exhibition and taking time to write the foreword.

We would like also like to thank all our donors, patrons and supporters for the kind support and generous contributions towards the production of the exhibition and catalogue.

Last but not least, our heartfelt gratitude to Cemeti – Institute for Art and Society, the Indonesian arts community, artists and friends for their gracious hospitality and support, without which this exhibition would not have been possible.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

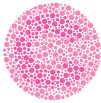
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The Private Museum is a registered charity and a registered Institution of a Public Character (IPC) under the Charities Act, dedicated in support of the growing enthusiasm for art, culture and heritage in Singapore.

Founded by Singaporean philanthropist and real estate developer, Daniel Teo, The Private Museum is situated in the heart of the museum precinct in an arts and culture centre at 51 Waterloo Street—within walking distance of The Singapore Art Museum. The museum was established with the objectives of providing a space for art collectors to showcase their collections in a curated display, as well as an alternative platform for artists to push boundaries in the expressions of various art forms. The museum’s public outreach programme also aims to bring art collectors and artists closer to the general public in order to help foster interest and support for the arts.

If you wish to support our efforts, you can do so by making a contribution or help us by sponsoring our exhibitions. Your contribution will attract the Dollar for Dollar matching grant from MCCY and help us generate more support for the arts.