

FLASHES OF BRILLIANCE: SELECTED WORKS OF CHEN WEN HSI FROM THE COLLECTIONS OF JOHNNY QUEK AND THE LEWIS SISTERS

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In celebration of Singapore’s 54<sup>th</sup> year of independence, The Private Museum (TPM) Singapore is pleased to present *Flashes of Brilliance: Selected Works of Chen Wen Hsi from the Collections of Johnny Quek and the Lewis Sisters*. As part of our museum’s *Collector Series*, visitors will be able to view previously unseen works by the late Singaporean pioneer artist, Chen Wen Hsi.

In this special edition, the exhibition brings together two private collections, from Johnny Quek—close friend and long-time patron of Chen—and the Lewis sisters, Jennifer Lewis and Geraldine Lewis-Pereira. The selected works will be accompanied by stories from the collectors as well as rare insights into Chen’s artistic process.

With the continued support of private collectors, it is our privilege to be part of many wonderful projects such as this—to showcase rare works from the private collection at TPM and share them with the public. Over the past nine years, our platform has contributed significantly towards the art eco-system in Singapore; this would not have been possible without the faith and generosity of our patrons, collectors, artists, and art practitioners.

We would like to express our sincere appreciation to the Guest-of-Honour, Deputy Prime Minister, Mr Heng Swee Keat for gracing the special preview with his presence.

Last but not least, our deepest gratitude to the collectors, Johnny Quek, Jennifer Lewis and Geraldine Lewis-Pereira for their dedication towards the arts. This exhibition is a testament of their generosity through the sharing of their private collections.

**DANIEL TEO**  
 Founding Director  
 The Private Museum, Singapore

## TRANSCENDING SIZE

### Chen Wen Hsi's smaller ink paintings

TEO HAN WUE

*Flashes of Brilliance* is an exhibition of interesting contrasts coming at a time that sees a rapidly growing popularity of the art of Chen Wen Hsi.

Hot on the heels of a high-profile showcase of Chen's paintings displayed at his former residence aptly titled *Homecoming: Chen Wen Hsi Exhibition @ Kingsmead Road* in April 2019, the present exhibition goes on a modest scale to offer some insights into the master's ink "miniatures" rarely shown to the public. Behind this series of events on our art calendar featuring the pioneer Nanyang artist is collector extraordinaire Mr Johnny Quek whose name readily comes to mind in most discussions about Chen Wen Hsi's ink paintings.

Art lovers will recall viewing Chen's works frequently at Merlin Gallery operated by Johnny Quek, whose collection runs into hundreds. Since the notable exhibition *Encounter: Chen Wen Hsi and Chua Soo Bin*, at Merlin last year, Johnny has taken to social media to broadcast regularly videos of himself talking about the artist who was also a close friend of his. One can, therefore, imagine how highly conspicuous Chen's art must have been kept over the recent months.



Interview with Johnny Quek (right) and Teo Han Wue (left)

Now, The Private Museum (TPM) Singapore has taken the lead to put together a selection of Chen's much overlooked smaller ink paintings from two collectors of decidedly different backgrounds, adding a refreshing perspective on the appreciation of Chen's work. While both Johnny Quek and the Lewis Sisters share a similar passion for the deft eloquent brushstrokes and finger strokes of Chen who was equally articulate in oil painting, they represent different approaches and responses to their respective selections.

Seasoned collector Johnny Quek teams up with elder sister Jennifer Lewis, a senior corporate communication executive, who feels reluctant to be placed in the same league with the veteran saying, "I feel uncomfortable being referred to as a collector because I was at the very beginning drawn to Chen's art purely for the emotion that it evoked in me rather than his creative genius which I came to recognise later. I am far from scholarly like Johnny!"

The exhibition, therefore, presents an interesting contrast in terms of tastes and preferences largely shaped by the aesthetic experience of two individuals each responding to Chen's paintings with intensely personal feelings though vastly different, yet equally deep and valid nonetheless.

For both sisters, Chen's paintings, particularly those of sparrows such as three pieces from their collections, hold special memories and strongly resonate with their Catholic faith. It was in one of the galleries at MICA (Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts) building where they were drawn to some paintings of sparrows by Chen Wen Hsi. The image of these small, perky and sprightly creatures immediately struck a chord with them. "It was an intimate emotional connection rather than an intellectual one. As the Bible tells us how much more God would look after us if He will protect even these tiny birds," recalls Jennifer who

describes this as a reminder to appreciate the little things in life we often take for granted.

Naturally, Jennifer went on further to other subject matter such as herons and lotuses mainly in the bird and flower category although she had begun with a preoccupation with Chen's sparrows. She mentions *Egrets*, 1970 (p. 45), another small painting from her collection, which strikes her profoundly as Chen seems to have completed herons each in one single ink stroke making them solid black.



Jennifer Lewis (left), Teo Han Wue (centre), and Aaron Teo (right) in conversation

With a background in literature, Jennifer admits to scant knowledge about Chinese art but is drawn to ink works because she finds ink, with the element of water and paper, full of uncertainty, and is therefore fascinated by how the master exercised control over so many uncertain elements. She is also attracted to its promise of possibilities which she attributes to the qualities of ink and water being fluid, dynamic and strong. Besides Chen's ink paintings, Jennifer has a few works by other Singapore artists such as Ong Kim Seng and Tan Swie Hian in her collection.

For Jennifer, it was her love for Chen Wen Hsi's ink works that led her to meet Johnny Quek, the veteran collector who would have been the best person to point her in the right direction. With him, Jennifer feels much more reassured in her choices she made purely by instinct based on the emotions she and her sister felt about the pieces they collected. This should also come through in the exhibition in the way works from both collections juxtaposed.

In distinct contrast, as Singapore's foremost collector of Chen Wen Hsi's ink paintings, Johnny has a very different trajectory in the journey of his art collection. Since young, Johnny has been immersed in an environment in which Chinese calligraphy was very much a part of school and everyday life. At Tuan Mong School, which he attended, he learnt to do calligraphy under Chen Jen Hao, one of Singapore's many calligraphers among Chinese school teachers during the hey-day of Chinese education here. His abiding love for the art of the brush grew and became his life-long passion that saw him through his *Nantah* years as a physics undergraduate, his later career as a police officer and eventually a successful businessman dealing in art, art materials as well as providing an authentication service.

In the late 1970s, when Johnny was a young police officer at the Orchard Road police station, Chen Wen Hsi was running an art gallery only a few blocks down the road where the former Singapore Handicraft Centre used to be. The artist would usually have finger-painting demonstration for visitors to the centre. Later, Chen moved his gallery to Tanglin Shopping Centre. That was when Johnny got to know and became good friends with the artist and thus began his life-long devotion to Chen's ink art. Especially after he left the force to be a businessman he began to have greater financial means to collect art enthusiastically. Given his own background in Chinese calligraphy he was exclusively focused on ink work of



Johnny Quek (right) and Teo Han Wue (left) in conversation

the master because he appreciated how deeply Chen’s painting is rooted in calligraphy such as the work of Huai Su (737-799), Xu Wei (1521-1593) and Huang Shen (1687-c.1772) both artists of Yangzhou’s Eight Eccentrics of Qing Dynasty, known for their highly expressive style.

“Though he seldom mentioned it, he drew huge inspiration from the cursive style of Huai Su,” says Johnny on Chen Wen Hsi’s ink painting, which he thinks betrays an enormous debt to the Tang Dynasty Buddhist monk known for his wildly cursive calligraphy.

Despite the various sources Chen drew from, Johnny finds Chen most heavily influenced by Huai Su’s calligraphic style, which he thinks may not be readily discernible when one views the whole painting but identifiable in every detail stroke on closer scrutiny. Otherwise, Chen is the kind of artist who projects a very strong individual character so that what ultimately shows through, he says, will be distinctive of the artist himself coming very much into his own.

In the course of their association, Johnny became a close friend of the master who would even confide in his young admirer at times. “Late in his life, Mr Chen surprisingly told me that his greatest regret in life was that his calligraphy was not as good as he would like it to be. To me, his mastery was nothing but extraordinary and I simply failed to see where he had fallen short,” recalls Johnny who has over the years admired his idol because of his calligraphic prowess to begin with.

Despite their contrasting backgrounds, there are both obvious differences as well as similarities between the two collectors in terms of the connoisseurship as reflected in the works chosen for the exhibition.

In *Egrets*, 1970 (p. 45), for instance, Jennifer is more taken by the way the artist painted the shape and form of the bird in just one swift stroke while Johnny seeks aesthetic significance in the gestures and ink tones the brush created even in details such as the scattered twigs and branches. Both of them are equally drawn to this work perhaps because of the special appeal in the birds which should be white now appear in almost solid black. “Almost without ‘bones’” as Johnny puts it referring to the risk that the artist seems to have taken to stretch the viewer’s credulity by glossing over the grains or texture. While Johnny finds ink-black herons rare and mysterious among Chen’s many paintings of these birds, he is just as fascinated by the strokes of twigs between them.

Johnny’s series of paintings of herons in this exhibition is particularly interesting in terms of their small size and number because most people are familiar with Chen’s highly characteristic rendering of these birds – usually in a huge flock taking up the pictorial space of a large format painting. Even in these small pieces one can discern the cubist and expressionist influence which Chen had absorbed and applied to great effect especially in his ink paintings on a larger scale. Being fully preoccupied with Chen’s ink art, Johnny is, however, more inclined to view them from the perspective of calligraphic brushstroke than that of modern western painting.

*Blue Lotus with Red Fishes*, 1980-1986 (p. 33), from Jennifer’s collection is a tightly compact painting of a few stalks of lotus comprising about equal halves divided right at centre of the painted surface. The engaging juxtaposition of leaves, stalks, blooms and fish contrasted by colour and density with some oblique strokes holding the halves together. Jennifer is especially taken by the suggestion of movement where she sees the stillness of the lotus contrasted with the darting fish. On encountering this painting, Johnny realises what an excellent piece of Chen’s work he has missed despite his longstanding experience. He says somewhat with a tinge of envy in the



Johnny Quek (right) and Aaron Teo (left) in conversation

commentary he has written for the painting, “If I had seen this work earlier I would have asked Mr Chen to paint another one for my collection.” He praises its great artistry as “exceeding expectations” and “exquisite beyond words”. This is one piece Johnny specifically recommends the viewer at the exhibition to take time to savour its beauty.

*Sparrows, Chrysanthemums*, 1976 (p. 31), is another of Jennifer’s flower-and-bird pieces. The branches seem to grow downwards with wilting leaves while the birds look startled and desperate to perch. Johnny notes, “It struck me as a little messy when I first saw it and I didn’t think much of it.” Perhaps in his preoccupation with brush strokes that are bolder and more robust as one would expect good calligraphy to be, Johnny might have missed the subtler and intimately nuanced sentiments that Jennifer with her feminine intuition could feel more acutely. “It now belongs to Jennifer who readily saw the depth of this painting,” says Johnny as though conceding.

This exhibition is a rare celebration of master Chen Wen Hsi’s ink art that transcends its physical size where its exquisiteness is not diminished within the small frame. It shows that the collectors would not overlook artistic excellence despite the smallness of the work. Generally, collectors much prefer to collect larger pieces of Chen Wen Hsi’s painting, resulting in the smaller ones being easily neglected much less exhibited.

Chen’s smaller works may lead us to a better appreciation of the more intricate and finer points of his ink art. Besides, as Johnny says, people who collect his miniatures do so out of genuine love for his art rather than any consideration of its prices in the market.

We are truly grateful to Johnny Quek and the Lewis Sisters for their great generosity to let us share these wonderful gems of their love.

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**TEO Han Wue** is an independent curator and art writer. He was formerly executive director of Art Retreat incorporating Wu Guanzhong Gallery. He has curated some important exhibitions of works by artists such as Wu Guanzhong, Siew Hock Meng, Lim Tze Peng, Shen Xiaotong and Mao Tongqiang. He has also advised the National Gallery Singapore on special exhibitions, acquisitions and the Istana art collection.

## 不因小失大的藏家

陈文希水墨小品

张夏樟

新加坡美术界正掀起一阵陈文希艺术热潮的当儿，《笔笔生辉》为我们带来郭嘉宝与柳易斯姐妹（Lewis Sisters）珍藏的陈文希水墨小品，展现了两方藏家之间有趣的对比。

紧跟着四月间众所瞩目在大师曾住过的老房子里举行的《陈文希故居展》，这个新的小型展览呈现了陈文希鲜为人知的水墨小品，让我们对陈文希的创作有进一步的了解。原来最近一系列有关这位南洋画坛先驱的活动背后，最大力的推手就是新加坡超级藏家郭嘉宝先生，一个一提及陈文希的水墨画就绕不过去的名字。

美术爱好者一定记得郭先生经营的美伦画廊不久前频频展出陈文希的作品。嘉宝专收陈文希水墨，只买不卖，坚持多年，收藏甚丰，据说总数逾六百件。自从他去年主办了《相映：陈文希与蔡斯民》之后，摄制了一系列的视频，由他自己来主讲有关陈文希的生平与艺术，然后发表于社交网上，让更多人分享。可见陈文希的画作在近期的几个月内保持在一个极高的能见度。



郭嘉宝分享有关陈文希的回忆

如今，新加坡私人美术馆 (The Private Museum, Singapore) 积极地集合了一批由两位背景迥然相异的收藏家所藏平时被人忽略的陈文希尺寸偏小的作品，令欣赏者耳目一新。虽然郭嘉宝与柳真霓（Jennifer Lewis）两人都一样热爱兼通中西绘画的陈文希水墨画里精妙的笔墨与指墨，所展出的作品表现出各自对作品的态度与反应。

收藏经验丰富的郭嘉宝经验与出道不久、并且不愿意跟嘉宝一样被称为藏家的企业高级公关职员柳真霓携手合作，将珍藏借出来展览。“称我为收藏家让我觉得不安，因为我一开始接近陈文希的艺术时，纯粹出自一种感性的触动，而不是后来对艺术家的才情的认知。我远不如郭嘉宝那样有学问！”

这次展览因此呈现了两人不同审美经历而形成品味与偏爱的对比，对陈文希作品产生高度个人化的感应，虽说是大异其趣，却也有各自深刻的体会及道理。

陈文希的画尤其如这次展出的三幅以麻雀为题材的作品，对柳易斯姐妹来说，曾勾起一段跟她们天主教信仰有强烈共鸣的特别回忆。柳真霓觉得这些画会启发我们去珍惜生命中容易被视为理所当然的小事物。

真霓欣赏陈文希的画虽从麻雀开始，她接下来很自然地也进一步去观赏陈文希的其他花鸟画如鹭鸶、荷花等题材。她举收藏中的小品《白鹭, 1970, p. 45》为例，觉得画家似乎只需将蘸满墨的笔一挥即就，完成了一只全身黑黝黝的鹭。

真霓本来是修文学的，自认对中国画认识不够，但深受水墨画所吸引，特别是水与墨在宣纸上产生的那种变幻莫测，让她惊叹大师驾驭与掌控各种元素变化多端的本领。对于水与墨的流动性、能量与力度所产生的可能性尤其神往。除了陈文希的水墨画以外，真霓还收藏了其他新加坡画家如王金城与陈瑞献的作品。



真霓柳易斯（右），张夏樟（中），与张伟杰（左）交谈

对陈文希的画的喜爱让真霓结识了收藏经验丰富的郭嘉宝，一位能为她指点迷津的好导师。有了嘉宝的协助，真霓对自己和妹妹全凭直觉与冲动，在收藏上所做出的选择和决定获得肯定而感到放心。这从所展出的两组作品对比之下可略见端倪。

郭嘉宝的收藏历程却很不一样。打从少年时代他就浸淫于富有中国书法风气的社会环境与学校氛围里。他就读于端

蒙学校时跟陈人浩学书法，那个年头新加坡的华文教育体系里有许多像陈人浩那样的书法老师。他因此培养成那股对毛笔艺术的热忱，也成为他终身的爱好，陪他度过念南洋大学物理系的岁月、毕业后服务于警察部队的日子，一直到他后来经营画廊、文房四宝、以及鉴定书画服务成功的企业。

当嘉宝于1970年代在乌节路警署当警官时，陈文希的画廊就在距离不远的新加坡手工艺中心里；画家常在那里为游客做指画示范，后来他的画廊搬迁到东陵购物中心。嘉宝就在那期间跟大师过从甚密，结成忘年之交，成为他水墨艺术终身的追随者，尤其是在他离开警察部队下海之后，更具备经济条件去购买他心爱的作品。由于他自己比较倾向于书法的背景，集中注意力专收藏陈文希的水墨画，这也是因为他了解陈文希的绘画是深深根植于书法的基础上，比如怀素（738-799）、徐渭（1521-1593）与黄慎（1687-c.1770）的草书。

“虽然陈文希自己很少提及这一点，他从怀素的狂草书法那里深获启发，”嘉宝谈到陈文希的绘画时这么说。他认为陈文希的笔墨里带有很浓厚唐代僧人书法家怀素的狂草的味道，“但看整幅画也许怀素的痕迹并不明显，仔细端详下每一撇、每一勾、每一横都有怀素的成分。”尽管陈文希的笔墨中兼收并蓄了各家的影响，他作品中表现出来的始终还是陈文希自己鲜明独特的个性。

通过长期的交往，陈文希把郭嘉宝看成要好的朋友，有时还对他吐露了心里话。“陈文希晚年时，曾经对我说他最



郭嘉宝（右）与张伟杰（左）交谈

后悔的事是字写得不好，但是我们都觉得他的字已经写得不得了啦。” 郭嘉宝多年来对画家的书法推崇备至，因此感觉纳闷，不知画家所谓的不好指的是哪方面。

即使两位藏家的背景各异，对这次选出来展览的作品鉴赏角度虽有不同，但也些有不谋而合的地方。比如说对《白鹭, 1970, p. 45》这幅画，柳真霓非常赞赏画家快笔一挥，即完成一只鹭鸶的本领，郭嘉宝却注重其中笔法、墨韵在绘画美学上的分量，甚至那些画面上令人看不起眼、疏落的枯枝杂草那寥寥几笔。两人对这两只鸟是那么的倾倒也许就因为本来应该是白色的鹭鸶如今却整个一片乌黑，犹如郭嘉宝用“几乎没有骨头”来形容画家无视于观者难以置信的可能结果，似乎一笔带过以掩饰细则与肌理的存在。郭嘉宝认为黑鹭鸶在许多陈文希的鸟禽画当中诚属罕见，觉得神秘极了，对他画断草枯枝的笔触尤其神往。

展出的郭嘉宝所藏的鹭鸶系列在作品的尺寸与鹭鸶的数量上特别有意思，因为人们所熟悉的陈文希深具特色的鹭鸶画多属大篇幅，并以鹭鸶众多甚至占据整个画面者最为常见。这些小品鹭鸶当中还是很明显体现出立体派主义与表现主义的影响，陈文希将这些成分吸收后加以消化融汇，

然后发挥得淋漓尽致。由于嘉宝偏向钻研水墨，对陈文希的这一系列纯粹从笔墨以及书法，更甚于从西方现代主义绘画的角度去欣赏。

柳易斯姐妹收藏的《绿荷红鱼, 1980-1986, p. 33》是一幅结构严谨的画，几支荷茎占据从正中央划开各分两半的画面。叶子、枝茎、花朵与鱼儿布局、色调、疏密的对比形成恰到好处的呼应，正巧有几根倾斜的线条将两个并排的部分连接成为一体。真霓特别注意画里荷花的静止状态与水中游鱼对比而产生的动感。以他丰富的收藏经验，嘉宝见到这幅画时马上意识到自己错过了一幅非常好的作品。他略带羡慕的口吻说，“我如果当初让看到这幅画，必定会请文希先生另作一幅给我收藏。” 他极赞赏画家在作品中表现的艺术造诣 “超乎意想之外”，并且“精巧得非文字可形容”。他希望欣赏者多花点时间凭感觉去发现它的美。

《麻雀与菊, 1976, p. 31》是柳真霓收藏的花鸟画之一，花茎似乎倒长，叶子纷乱，鸟儿看似受惊，急于栖枝歇足。嘉宝说，“此画乍看显得杂乱，我初见时对它不以为然。”也许，他觉得画中没有水墨佳作应有的苍劲书法笔触线条，而错过真霓以其女人的敏锐天性，更能感受到里头的细致含蓄。“如今却获真霓赏识作品的深度而珍惜它，也算是个好归宿，” 嘉宝这语气似乎承认自己走眼。

这是个难得一见的陈文希作品展，所展示的水墨画艺术超越了作品的小型框架，精致的不会因小而减其艺术性，显示藏家不因小失大。一般藏家更愿意收藏和展示陈文希大幅的作品，这类小品就很容易被忽略，更别提展览了。正如嘉宝所说，小品能让人更深入去欣赏陈文希水墨细微的奥妙，而且买小品来收藏的人是出自真心的爱好，与价钱没什么关系。

我们确实很感激郭嘉宝与柳易斯姐妹两藏家以及新加坡私人美术馆的慷慨，让我们有机会欣赏藏家们心爱的瑰宝。



郭嘉宝（中），张夏樟（左），和张伟杰（右）在美倫

张夏樟是独立策展人兼美术评论员，曾经策展过吴冠中、萧学民、林子平、沈小彤、毛同强等画家的重要展览，也曾参与新加坡国家美术馆各别展览、添置典藏以及总统府美术收藏的顾问与咨询工作。

# PAIR OF HERONS

## 双鹭

To date, collector Johnny Quek has seen more than three to four hundred paintings of herons by Chen Wen Hsi. Typically, the herons painted by Chen have elongated and agile bodies, slender and flexible necks, and long thin feet with wiry claws. Since 1986, the artist devoted his energy towards creating larger abstract paintings of herons. These works are characterised by the use of striking orange and red colour, and the large number of herons.

“Although I find the larger paintings of herons produced after 1986 to be distinctive, I personally prefer his smaller, and more traditional, heron paintings which he produced before 1986.”

*Commentary by collector Johnny Quek, 2019*

郭嘉宝先生曾看过三、四百幅陈文希画的鹭。一般上陈所画的鹭身体修长敏捷、颈项纤细灵活、足高瘦、爪坚硬。画家自1986年起就倾力创作大幅的鹭。这些作品的特点是用了鲜亮的橙、红色来画数量较多的鹭群。

“虽然我觉得1986年后大幅的鹭具有特色，我个人却偏爱他1986年前所作的小幅、风格较传统的鹭。”

*说明由藏家郭嘉宝提供，2019*



***Hérons***

1979

33 x 44 cm

Chinese ink and colour on rice paper



***Hérons***  
 1980  
 33 x 34 cm  
 Chinese ink and colour on rice paper



***Hérons***  
 1980  
 33 x 44 cm  
 Chinese ink and colour on rice paper

# PAIR OF FARM CHICKENS 农鸡一对

Since his childhood in Guangdong, China, Chen Wen Hsi grew up with animals, such as chickens, sparrows and fish. After moving to Singapore in 1948, he continued to keep chickens and ducks in his villa for the next two decades. Naturally, the painter became very familiar with their forms and behaviour, often featuring them as subjects for his paintings.

“With Wen Hsi’s exceptional life drawing skills, the fowls he painted were undoubtedly impeccable [...] Small-scale works like these are often overlooked by art collectors.”

*Commentary by collector Johnny Quek, 2019*

陈文希自幼生长于中国广东，常与鸡、麻雀、鱼为伍。1948年来新加坡之后的20年里爱在家里饲养鸡鸭，因此对于这些动物的形体、习性非常熟悉。作画时经常以所饲养的动物为题材。

“以文希卓越的写生技巧，所画飞禽必然无懈可击[...]这种小品，藏家往往不重视。”

*说明由藏家郭嘉宝提供，2019*



**Chickens**  
1980  
33 x 44 cm  
Chinese ink and  
colour on rice paper



**Chickens**  
1982  
33 x 44 cm  
Chinese ink and  
colour on rice paper

# KOI

## 日本鲤鱼

Chen Wen Hsi had never seen the variegated Japanese carps until he arrived in Southeast Asia, where he became interested to paint them in his works. To study the carps, the painter kept koi fish in his backyard. In the artist's larger paintings, the number of koi fish can range from tens to a hundred, each in a unique and dynamic pose. His paintings would occasionally include orange, black and other variegated carps.

“The artist's eyesight was deteriorating when he turned 70; he began painting goldfish instead of carps. Small paintings of carps, like this, are now hard to come by [...] The work I remember most fondly is a large-scale painting with 70 carps; it was acquired by a Belgian collector — through Poly International Auction House — to display in his home.”

*Commentary by collector Johnny Quek, 2019*

陈文希抵达南洋之前未曾见过多彩的日本鲤鱼。他在新加坡开始对画鲤鱼产生兴趣，为了详细观察，便在住家后面养了鲤鱼。画家所作大幅鲤鱼，数目数十至百之间，姿态各异，鱼群中有橙色、黑色以及色彩斑驳的彩鲤。

“画家七十岁时视力减弱，便转向多画金鱼而渐少作鲤鱼。像这样的小幅鲤鱼难得多见 [...] 我印象最深刻的是一幅含有七十多鲤鱼的图画。那幅画给一位比利时藏家在保利拍卖行那里买得后挂在家里。”

*说明由藏家郭嘉宝提供，2019*



**Carp**

1973

35 x 45 cm

Chinese ink and colour on rice paper



**Carp**  
 1981  
 36 x 46 cm  
 Chinese ink and colour on rice paper



**Carp**  
 1979  
 33 x 44 cm  
 Chinese ink and colour on rice paper

# FRESHWATER PRAWNS

## 淡水蝦

"I believe Wen Hsi came across this species of prawn in Malaysia. They are commonly sold in restaurants there as they were cheap and a common catch in Malaysian waters. These freshwater prawns possess a large carapace and a pair of long claws used for self-defence. They usually hide among water plants yet Wen Hsi was able to capture their habitat and movements vividly in these paintings."

*Commentary by collector Johnny Quek, 2019*

“我相信文希是在马来西亚看到这种虾。它常在餐馆里可买到，价钱便宜，是马来西亚河里普遍的品种。这些淡水虾背甲较大，有一双用来自卫的长爪子。它们埋没于水草之间，文希却能在作品里生动地描绘到它的动态与环境。”

*说明由藏家郭嘉宝提供，2019*

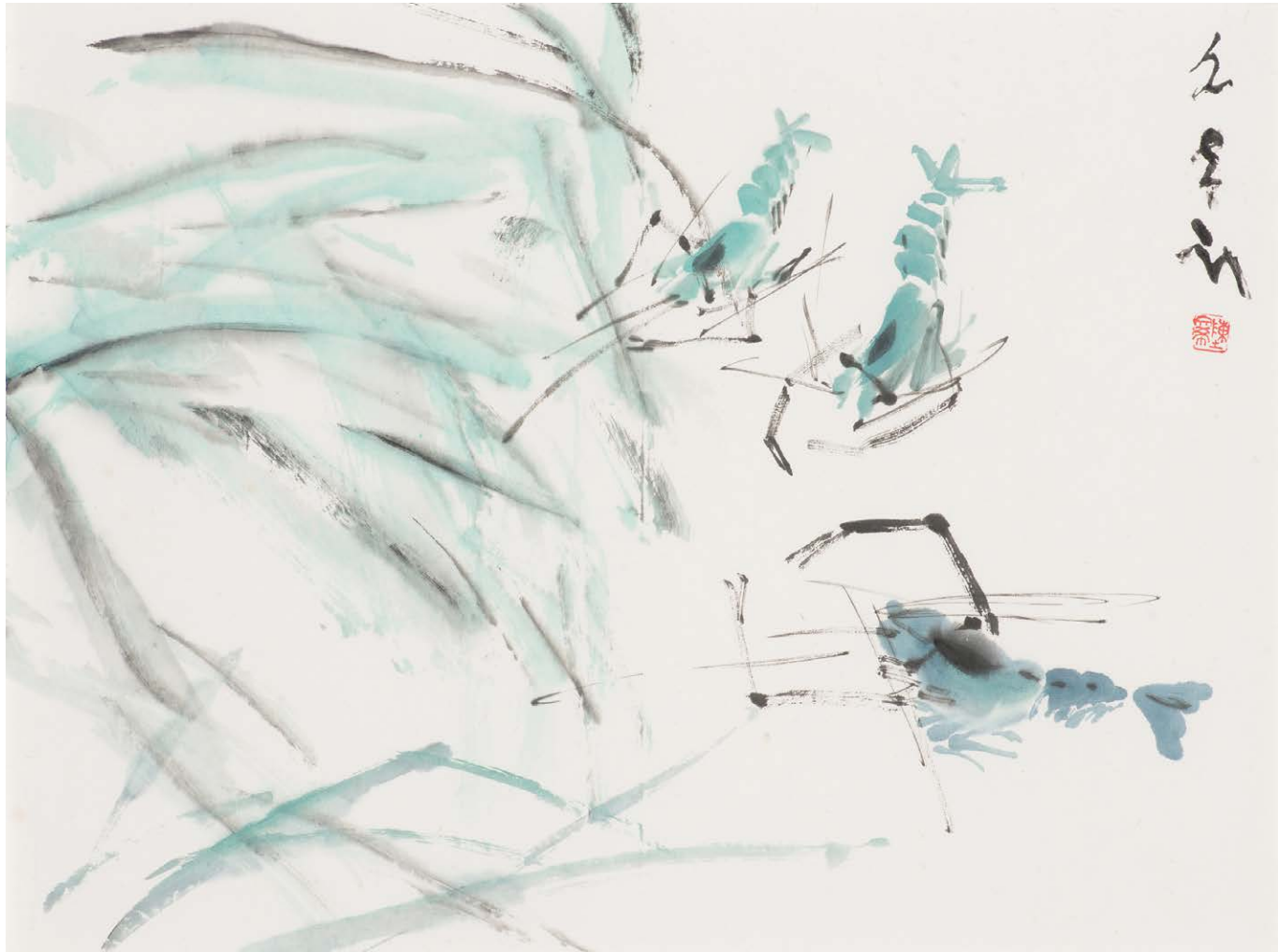


**Prawns**

1972

33 x 44 cm

Chinese ink and colour on rice paper



**Prawns**  
 1978  
 34 x 45 cm  
 Chinese ink and colour on rice paper



**Prawns**  
 1979  
 34 x 46 cm  
 Chinese ink and colour on rice paper

# BIRDS

## 飞禽

“Although they were created in different styles, both paintings were created in the late 1970s. This was the time when Wen Hsi’s eyesight had not deteriorated yet, and could capture the details of the tiny flowers and the position of the birds’ eyes accurately [...] It is a pity that only a few realise that Wen Hsi’s freehand bird studies are even better than those by great painters in China!”

*Commentary by collector Johnny Quek, 2019*

“这两幅画虽风格不同，但都是1970年代末所作。文希视力还未退化，画小花细处、鸟目位置皆准确无误。可惜的是，很少人看得出文希的写意鸟禽，画得比中国大画家还好！”

*说明由藏家郭嘉宝提供，2019*



**Pigeons**

1969

33 x 44 cm

Chinese ink and  
colour on rice paper



**Sparrows**

1972

33 x 44 cm

Chinese ink and  
colour on rice paper

# PAIR OF DUCKS 双鸭

Chen Wen Hsi painted the ducks with a brush [top], while the other pair is done by the artist with his fingers [bottom]. According to collector Johnny Quek, these paintings were characteristic of works produced by Chen Wen Hsi in the 1970s. The works featured the water plants that the artist commonly painted in the late 1970s. Chen was also able to paint the ducks in precise detail, in particular their eyes, something rarely seen in his later works after his eyesight began to deteriorate in the 1980s.

以上的鸭子是陈文希用画笔绘画；以下是艺术家用手指描绘出的鸭子。根据郭嘉宝先生，这些作品展示陈文希在1970年代的画作风格。在这两幅作品里，有陈文希1970年代常描绘的水草。两对鸭子的细节也非常精巧，尤其在画鸭子的眼睛的时候。当陈文希的视力在1980年代衰退的时候，作品的细节与70年代相比也显然有很大的差异。



***Ducks***  
1972  
34 x 45 cm  
Chinese ink and  
colour on rice paper



***Ducks***  
1980  
34 x 45 cm  
Chinese ink and  
colour on rice paper

# CHRYSANTHEMUMS AND SPARROWS

## 菊花与雀

“Wen Hsi took a risk when creating this work because at first glance, the painting appears disorderly: stems growing in opposite directions; two sparrows darting around the flowers, unable to perch; cluttered flowers and leaves sprawling across the painting. Although this is a realistic depiction of how chrysanthemums grow in nature, many collectors have overlooked this work because of its composition. [...] It now belongs to the Lewis sisters who appreciate it for its depth. They have often shared with me that sparrows are a symbol of protection by the divine.”

*Commentary by collector Johnny Quek, 2019*

“文希创作这幅画时冒了个险。此画乍见显得杂乱：花枝倒长、麻雀乱飞、似难歇脚；花叶枝茎纷陈。虽说此原乃菊花自然生态，许多藏家因其构图而错过。如今却获柳伊斯姐妹赏识其深度而珍藏之，算是有个好归宿。她们常告诉我：麻雀是神灵保佑我们的象征。”

*说明由藏家郭嘉宝提供，2019*



***Sparrows, Chrysanthemums***

1976

46 x 59 cm

Chinese ink and colour on rice paper

# UNUSUAL LOTUS 异荷

“If I had seen this work earlier I would have certainly asked Wen Hsi to paint another one for my collection. Its composition, brushwork, colour and form exceed my expectations. It is exquisite beyond any description. I hope viewers take their time to closely observe and savour its beauty.”

*Commentary by collector Johnny Quek, 2019*

“如果当时我见到这作品，就一定会要求文希多写一幅供我收藏。这作品创艺水平高。无论是构画、用笔、用色、易形，都超乎意想之外。精巧得非文字可形容。我希望欣赏者多花点时间凭感觉去发现它的美。”

说明由藏家郭嘉宝提供，2019



***Blue Lotus with Red Fishes***

1980-1986

34 x 46 cm

Chinese ink and colour on rice paper

# LOTUS

## 1,2,3

### 荷

### 一，二，三

Chen Wen Hsi painted these three works of lotus in the late 1970s employing differing colours and composition in each. The swift strokes were executed in a single motion: according to collector Johnny Quek, the artist created these paintings by gliding his fingers over the paper without stopping.

"I invite the viewers may try to trace the slender line of the grass following it from left to right or back and forth to get a sense of continuity of the line in the whole picture."

*Commentary by collector Johnny Quek, 2019*

这三幅荷花是陈文希1970年代末所作，每幅用色、构图各异，疾划线条一挥而就。据郭嘉宝说，画家指头作画速度快且很凌厉，手指一落纸就停不下来。

“观者不防眼光跟着画中细草左右，或右左来回，是否也有感觉画是一气呵成的。”

*说明由藏家郭嘉宝提供，2019*



**Crane**  
1978-1980  
60 x 45 cm  
Chinese ink and  
colour on rice paper



***Lotus with Silver Fishes***  
 1974-1978  
 34 x 43 cm  
 Chinese ink and colour on rice paper



***Lotus***  
 1978-1981  
 35 x 44 cm  
 Chinese ink and colour on rice paper

# BAMBOO AND SPARROWS

## 竹雀图

These two paintings were done in the 1970s. The sparrows were painted to appear bigger and the bamboo leaves darker. Though Chen often painted sparrows with the brush at that time, he began to use his fingers more in the 1980s.

“Wen Hsi was fond of painting smaller subjects as he was amazed at how animals as small as sparrows can be as ‘complete’ and filled with life as their larger counterparts. He was especially enamoured by sparrows as they were his childhood playmates. In each of his works, Wen Hsi attempted to capture the ubiquitous vitality and dynamism of his subjects; as such, even after painting hundreds of sparrows, [the viewers] can see that the sparrows in each painting are unique.”

*Commentary by collector Johnny Quek, 2019*

这两幅作于七十年代。麻雀画得较大，竹叶黑密。当时文希多用笔写雀。后期 80 年代多用手指画。

“文希喜欢个儿小的题材，惊叹小动物如麻雀竟也可像大动物同样的完整齐全。麻雀是他儿时的玩伴，所以情有独钟。在每幅作品里，他都尽量将题材的活力、能量捕捉下来，因此即便他曾画过无数的麻雀，每幅作品里的麻雀对观画者来说还是独一无二的。”

*说明由藏家郭嘉宝提供，2019*



**Sparrows**  
1973-1976  
45 x 37 cm  
Chinese ink on rice paper



**Sparrows**  
1973-1976  
33 x 41 cm  
Chinese ink on rice paper

# SKETCH OF FLAMINGOS

## 红鹤草稿

According to collector Johnny Quek, Chen Wen Hsi would create sketches to study the form, behaviour and colour of his subjects. He would only paint them after becoming familiar with the subject matters.

“The first time Wen Hsi saw flamingos was when a few friends and I took him to the zoo. The excitement Wen Hsi felt compelled him to make this sketch.”

*Commentary by collector Johnny Quek, 2019*

郭嘉宝说陈文希作素描为了了解题材的形体、动作与色彩。他常要等到对题材熟悉之后才将之入画。

“文希第一次见到火烈鸟是当我与几位朋友带他去动物园的时候。他兴奋不已，非即刻作此素描不可。”

*说明由藏家郭嘉宝提供，2019*



**Flamingoes**

1986

53 x 74 cm

Ink sketch on paper

# STANDING LOTUS 立荷

“In this painting, you can find nine huge leaves and three smaller ones, two buds and a flower in full bloom, and two fish swimming in the still, clear water. To enjoy this work one should look closely at the fragmented weeds to grasp the genius of the artist’s brushwork. As a calligrapher myself, I really appreciate the precision of Wen Hsi’s strokes. Wen Hsi would usually leave strands of weeds or grass on the bottom left corner, which is often used to determine the authenticity of similar paintings by the artist.”

*Commentary by collector Johnny Quek, 2019*

“画中有九片大叶、三支小叶、两粒花蕊、一朵盛开的荷花。两只小魚正在清水中享受平靜。要欣赏此幅作品，得特别留意画里残缺的草梗，去体会画家用笔之妙。我自己也写书法，尤其欣赏文希笔意的精确。文希平时爱在画面左下角画上些残余的草梗，人们也能凭此以鉴定文希类似作品的真伪。”

*说明由藏家郭嘉宝提供，2019*



## ***Lotus***

1973-1976

67 x 45 cm

Chinese ink and  
colour on rice paper

# BLACK HERONS

## 黑鷺

“This is the most unusual work in the exhibition. Of hundreds of Chen’s paintings of white herons, this work shows a pair of herons painted completely in black with a brush fully soaked with ink. How mysterious! [...] The well-positioned blades of grass bring life and vitality into the picture; I especially admire the two in painted between the pair of herons.”

*Commentary by collector Johnny Quek, 2019*

“这是一幅此次展览中最奇特的作品。文希创作过数百幅白色鹭鸶，这作品用最饱满的笔墨画出全黑鹭鸶的姿态。太神秘了！画中稀落有致的草秧也增添了活力。我最欣赏两鹭中间的两根细草。”

说明由藏家郭嘉宝提供，2019



**Egrets**

1970

66 x 42 cm

Chinese ink on  
rice paper



Friends of Chen Wen Hsi, including young Johnny Quek, observing the artist sketch

**CHEN Wen Hsi (b. 1906, Swatow, China; d. 1991, Singapore)** was one of the first-generation artists of Singapore; he is regarded as one of the pioneers of Singapore's eminent Nanyang art style. The artist is remembered most fondly for his painting of gibbons, a pair of which is featured behind Singapore's fifty-dollar note. Chen began his art career at the age of 21, with his first exhibition in Swatow in 1929. The artist had since taken part in numerous solo and group exhibitions around the world. Chen moved to Singapore in 1948, and proceeded to teach at The Chinese High School and Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts. The artist was awarded the Public Service Star in 1964 and the Meritorious Service Medal (posthumous) in 1992.

**Johnny QUEK** is a close friend of Chen Wen Hsi, and long-time patron of the artist. He met the painter in 1979 and has since collected more than 600 of his works. As the director of Merlin Gallery, Quek exhibited many of Chen Wen Hsi's works from his private collection at his gallery. Having displayed the painter's popular subjects, such as the gibbons, herons and ducks, Quek is now exhibiting the rarer pieces of Chen Wen Hsi. The gallerist also maintains an online repository of the artist's paintings as well as issue certificate of authenticity to collectors of the artist. Before he started as a gallerist, Quek served as a civil servant in Singapore. Quek is also a keen calligrapher; he started practicing since the age of six.

The Lewis Sisters are ardent supporters of the late Chen Wen Hsi, as well as a number of other Singaporean artists including Han Sai Por and Genevieve Chua. **Jennifer LEWIS** works in the communications field and serves as the Chairman of the Singapore International Foundation's Arts for Good Advisory Panel, and **Geraldine LEWIS-PEREIRA** has dedicated much of her life to teaching. Both sisters first met Johnny Quek at one of his exhibitions of Chen Wen Hsi's paintings; Quek has since become a close friend as well as mentor to the sisters. The collection of the Lewis Sisters was also recently featured in *Homecoming: Chen Wen Hsi Exhibition @ Kingsmead*.

We would like to express our sincere appreciation to our collectors, Johnny Quek and the Lewis Sisters – Jennifer Lewis and Geraldine Lewis-Pereira, and the essay writer, Teo Han Wue for their significant contributions towards the success of the exhibition.

A very special thank you to the Guest-of-Honour, Mr Heng Swee Keat, Deputy Prime Minister for gracing the special preview with his presence.

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*Flashes of Brilliance: Selected works of Chen Wen Hsi from the collections of Johnny Quek and the Lewis Sisters.*

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Fuelled by passionate patronage for the arts, the museum aims to establish an alternative platform to bridge the gap between the private and the public. It supports the exchange of ideas across cultures, educational initiatives, artistic and curatorial collaborations with collectors and practitioners of the arts.

With a vision to promote art appreciation, the independent arts space engages local, regional and international audiences from all walks of life. The Private Museum is a registered Charity and Institution of a Public Character (IPC) since 2010 and 2015 respectively.

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