

The background of the cover is an abstract composition of paint splatters and brushstrokes. The top half is dominated by a large, irregular shape of vibrant blue paint, with some white and black speckles interspersed. Below this, the bottom half features a large, textured area of red paint, also with some white and black speckles. The overall effect is one of dynamic, expressive brushwork.


Ian de Souza

# CLEAR LIGHT

Ian de Souza

# CLEAR LIGHT

10 OCT – 08 DEC 2019



To my wife Rosslyn for her absolute  
perseverance and dedication to my  
health and to my work. My sincere  
thanks ... truly, madly, deeply.

Ian de Souza, 2019



# CONTENT

08	Preface
09	Foreword
10	Coming Full Circle: A Look at Clear Light Essay by Natalie Foo
21	In Conversation with Ian de Souza
26	Artist's Timeline
28	Selected Artworks
54	Two Worlds Essay by Jan Teagle Kapetas
62	About the Artist
64	Acknowledgement

# PREFACE

8

The Private Museum (TPM) Singapore is pleased to present *Clear Light* by Australian artist, Ian de Souza. Born in Malaya in 1939, Ian spent his formative years in Malaysia and Singapore under colonial British and Japanese rule, before moving to New South Wales, Australia at the age of 16.

Even at 80, Ian's love for life remains strong and continues to grow. He dedicated most of his life towards the arts, as a musician, an artist, a teacher. In his artistic process of bleeding inks into layered rice paper, he often regards this approach as "encountering happy accidents". In our first survey trip to Fremantle, Perth, where he lives in the iconic *de Souza* residence, a home-studio truly unique to itself, we listened intently to the man as he spoke with vigour about his dreams and passions, his art and philosophy. With the support, dedication and trust

from everyone involved in this project (along with some "happy accidents"), *Clear Light* finally makes it mark at TPM, as Ian de Souza's debut solo showcase in Singapore after many decades of practising art.

We would like to convey our sincere gratitude to the Guest-of-Honour, H.E. Bruce Gosper, High Commissioner of Australia to Singapore; Tourism Western Australia; the close-knit community of Fremantle and the wider Australian communities for all the wonderful support towards the making of this exhibition.

As the year draws to an end, we welcome the return of an artist, a son of Malaya, to share his life and art with our local communities, reuniting old friendships and igniting new ones.

## Daniel & Rachel TEO

Founding Directors

The Private Museum, Singapore

9

# FOREWORD

I would like to begin by congratulating The Private Museum (TPM) Singapore for its 9th anniversary. Over the course of these nine years, the museum has presented artists from Singapore and around the world in its wide-ranging exhibitions. I am excited to see that TPM will be featuring Australian artist Ian de Souza for its latest exhibition.

I invite you to come and discover the dynamism and intimacy of the relations between our two countries through *Ian de Souza: Clear Light*. I believe that the artist personifies the relationship between Australia and Singapore as de Souza grew up in Singapore in the 1940–50s before moving to Australia in 1956. He is also keenly interested in both Western and Eastern art philosophy, incorporating both of them into his paintings.

## H.E. Bruce GOSPER

High Commissioner of Australia to Singapore

High Commission of the Commonwealth Australia to the Republic of Singapore

With an artistic career spanning four decades and extending over several continents, the latest series of paintings by de Souza is inspired by the different experiences and memories he has gained from around the world.

I believe that TPM is the best place to host de Souza's first solo exhibition in Singapore as it is a museum that embraces differences and aims to bridge the gap between different groups. I hope this exhibition will not only deepen the relationship between our countries but also add greater creative diversity to the arts in cosmopolitan Singapore.

# COMING FULL CIRCLE: A LOOK AT CLEAR LIGHT

by Natalie FOO

“Remember the clear light,  
the pure clear white light  
from which everything  
in the universe comes, to which  
everything in the universe returns;  
the original nature of your own  
mind. The natural state of the  
universe unmanifest. Let go into the  
clear light, trust it, merge with it. It  
is your own true nature, it is home.”

— *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* by  
Padmasambhava

10

11

**C**lear Light is a term taken from *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, written in the 8th century by Buddhist teacher Padmasambhava and, in 1992, reinterpreted for the 20th century and beyond by Tibetan Buddhist lama Sogyal Rinpoche with *The Tibetan Book of the Living and Dying*. It is also the title of 80-year-old Malaya-born, Australian contemporary artist Ian de Souza's latest exhibition, one which introduces us to a practitioner who has come full circle in his life and his work in several ways.

## The early years: Malaysia and Singapore



Ian de Souza and family, c.1940s

Ian's life story is a colourful and compelling one. Born in 1939 during World War 2 to a Portuguese-Goan-Chinese civil engineer and a Portuguese-Indonesian-Indian-Dutch primary school teacher in Muar, West Malaysia, Ian was the youngest of six children. While he was a baby, the de Souzas, to escape the invading Japanese who were advancing south through Malaysia, fled to Singapore, and

only returned to Muar in 1945 when the war ended. Four years later, the family moved to Johor, and in 1950 resettled in Singapore where Ian's father found work as a water power station engineer and his mother as a teacher.



The Conversation, c.1948

In Singapore, the de Souzas lived in Upper Serangoon. The de Souza children had a strict Catholic upbringing, and Ian and his brother Ivan attended the Holy Innocents Catholic School in Punggol, run by the Canadian Order of Gabriel Brothers. For them, life post-war was simple but relatively pleasant. The children were raised by an *amah*,<sup>1</sup> and enjoyed singing around the family piano, playing the guitar and violin, and dancing. Ian grew up immersed in music and, by the age of eight, had also picked up art, winning school prizes and painting with a maturity beyond his years.

At the time, Ian already had his future mapped out for him. His mother had decided upon his birth that her youngest child would serve the Church. So, when in the 1950s, the Redemptorist missionaries came to Singapore to conduct novenas and Ian found himself enraptured by their charismatic preaching and singing, he offered to enrol in Theological Studies

<sup>1</sup> *Amahs* were women who migrated from Guangdong, China, to seek employment in Malaya in the 1930s and found paid work as domestic servants in affluent Chinese and European households.



at the Minor Seminary of the Redemptorist Missionaries in Galong, New South Wales, Australia.

### Go West, young man

In 1956, at the age of 16, Ian embarked on his first journey overseas alone. It was a gruelling trip that introduced him to the Australian desert and bush. Galong was an isolated farming town then and the seminary itself was located “in the middle of nowhere”. It would have seemed to him a jolting contrast to Singapore, and being the only Asian in the seminary intensified his sense of alienation.

Fortunately, a kind, young priest who ran the minor seminary, Father Tom Cruise, recognised both Ian’s isolation and his creative talent. He encouraged Ian to pour his energy into musical performances as well as artwork for theatrical backdrops, the church’s processions, and religious pictures. Ian made countless large-scale reproductions of pocket-sized holy pictures, learning to paint with gradation of colour and tone by copying, much like artists of centuries past.

In 1959, after Ian had completed his three years of Juvenate training, Father Tom, recognising that Ian might not be suited for the priesthood, encouraged him to take a year’s break before committing himself further. Ian went home to Singapore and, in 1960, returned to Australia, but this time to Perth as a student of art at the Perth Technical College.

On the way to Perth, Ian befriended three young Malayan men and together they formed a band, the Malayanares. Performing with the Malayanares proved rewarding. But in 1963, after graduating, Ian went solo, appearing on Australia’s popular national TV talent show, Bandstand, the platform that first launched the Bee Gees, and becoming runner-up in the 1964 Bandstand Star Flight singing competition. For the next six years, Ian performed on television and in hotels throughout Australia. Then in 1969, he left to form half of a travelling musical duo. He performed his first gig at the Hotel Malaysia in Singapore, and spent the next 10 years touring the world, performing in the Middle East, India, Pakistan, Europe and Africa.



Ian de Souza (right) and Father Tom Cruise (left)



Mary and Jesus, 1955

During this time, Ian based himself in the south of France, having fallen in love with and purchased a 16th-century farmhouse in the village of Mas d’Alary. In between gigs overseas, he spent his time painting the landscape and restoring the building. In 1979, when the French government discovered uranium in his backyard and acquired his home to set up a mine, he was devastated.

Ian returned to Perth in 1980, stopping by Singapore again, this time to perform his last gig on local television. It was fortuitous. In Singapore, Ian visited a bank and saw a watercolour exhibition by a well-known Chinese watercolourist. He was captivated and, on returning to Perth where he settled in picturesque Fremantle, made the decision to retire from the music profession and plunge into art.

### Rebirth: an artist searching for self

At the age of 43, Ian became a full-time artist. Watercolour was difficult to master and, for eight to ten hours each day, he painted the landscapes and people of Fremantle “en plein air”.<sup>2</sup> He focused on classical Western styles and was particularly interested in 19th and 20th-century French impressionists Monet and Manet from whom he learnt to paint ordinary scenes’ extraordinary light, as well as French post-impressionist Matisse with his vividly expressive colours. He was also greatly inspired by 19th-century British watercolourist Turner whose evocative landscapes influenced Ian’s own early light-filled works which competently captured atmosphere through sensitive application of chiaroscuro (light-dark) effects.

Ian made his debut in 1983 at a watercolour exhibition in Subiaco, Perth to warm reception. For the next 20 years, he devotedly painted the environment in which he lived. His external world was a source of continual fascination for him and made an absorbing subject. He painted countless landscapes, created works with an ecclesiastical theme, made numerous line brush drawings and myriad life paintings. He explored various media including oils, acrylic, gouache, charcoal, ink, collage, wire and ceramics, although he always returned to watercolour. He made great strides in his practice – moving from detailed representation, to letting his personality, thoughts and emotions emerge between his

<sup>2</sup> In the open air. Plein-air painting of landscapes is a predominantly Western discipline, popularised by 19th-century Romantic artists who advocated engaging with nature and everyday life outdoors.

subject and his painting, to expressing himself more. He became one of Western Australia’s most prolific and respected artists, with works shown in solo and group exhibitions, and displayed at corporate institutions as well as in private collections.

Yet, for a long time, Ian struggled with an identity crisis. His complex personal history and migratory experience had resulted in an abiding sense of displacement. Restlessly searching for clarity, he began turning to his heritage and past.

### Rediscovering his roots

In the early 2000s, Ian made several religious paintings, returning to the imagery that had inspired him as a boy. He also began exploring with Asian themes, media and techniques in works such as line brush painting on rice paper *Mother and Child* (2004), line brush drawing collage *Contiguity, Tableau of Compassion* (2005) and the oil on canvas *Butoh* series (2005).

In 2007, Ian made his first attempt at painting with ink on stacked layers of rice paper, revisiting a painting he had made as a 16-year-old in the seminary. On the topmost layer, using monochromatic tones, he painted the face of Jesus turned skyward in the face of death upon crucifixion. He allowed the ink to bleed down into the five under layers, and then carefully peeled each layer off before it dried to reveal increasingly abstracted images. The result, titled *The Transformation: The Passion of Christ, His Crucifixion, Death and Resurrection* (2007), comprised four separated layers successively fading from representation into abstraction to poignant effect.

At the time, Ian had been seeking answers to existentialist questions in the writings of Joseph Campbell<sup>3</sup> as well as *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*. With *The Passion of Christ*, he felt that he had made a revelatory breakthrough. He explains:

“As each layer was removed, it revealed to me the journey of Christ from man to God (from the manifest to the unmanifest). It also gave me the connection to the awareness and philosophy of Buddhism which talks about the journey of life from the positive

<sup>3</sup> Joseph Campbell (1904-1987) was an American professor of English Literature and the author of several best-selling books, including *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949) and *The Power of Myth* (1988). His most famous quote is “follow your bliss”.



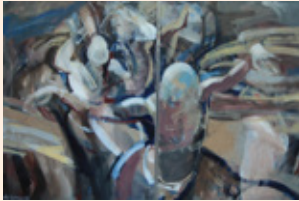
*Mother and Child*, 2004



*Contiguity, Tableau of Compassion*, 2005



*Butoh 2*, 2005



*Butoh 4*, 2005



*The Transformation: The Passion of Christ, His Crucifixion, Death and Resurrection*, 2007

areas into the empty spaces which become more powerful and end up revealing clear light, which some masters refer to as a state of minimum distraction. It revealed to me my pathway from the Western influence to the Eastern.”

With this work, he had discovered the transformative possibilities of his art-making. He had also found an exciting new way to articulate how he thought and felt at this point in his life, as well as to integrate his Asian heritage with his practice. He was finally coming closer to finding himself.

In 2008, a trip to Shanghai, China, further galvanised Ian in his new phase of personal and artistic growth. There, he met with an artist acquaintance who introduced him to his friends, fellow Chinese ink artists. Ian expressed his interest in ink and rice paper, and was introduced to traditional Chinese ink painting, its techniques, principles and philosophy. The differences between that and the Western styles Ian was familiar with were stark.

He learnt that traditional Chinese paintings were composed to achieve a balance between positive (ink-filled) and negative (blank) space; yet the negative spaces were not void of meaning but filled with significance, judiciously left blank to allow the viewer’s mind the space to wander.<sup>4</sup> Chinese painting also emphasised the rhythms of the artist; as Chinese painting was based on the painting of the line, the vitality and skilful movement of the artist as seen in his/her lines were what determined the character and rhythm of a painting. Colour too was important, but used sparingly if at all; often, black ink in five tones was applied to convey spirit and emotion. This monochromatic scheme was based on the Chinese belief in reality’s dual nature, and the need for harmony between the all-encompassing whiteness of a void and the five-toned black of marks made in ink.

Returning home, Ian began exploring some of these principles and techniques in painting with Chinese ink on stacked rice paper. Additionally, he learnt about surrender in the creative process when, a few years later in 2011, while drawing with a model one day, he ran out of paper, grabbed a magazine and

<sup>4</sup> Zhang Anzhi, *A History of Chinese Painting* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2002).



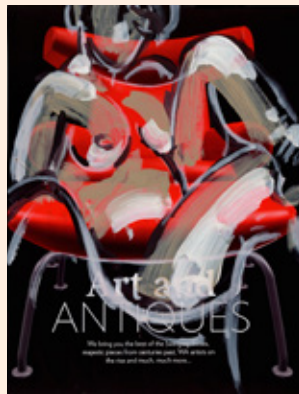
started painting over its pages. Suddenly, he saw the accidental harmony his over-painting made. He liked the feeling of accident and freedom and, in the years that followed, added this “happy accidents” approach to his layered ink on rice paper as can be seen in *Greek Harbour Sunset* (2000), *Best Friend* (2015) and *Simply Horses* (2015).

At the time, these earlier experiments with ink on rice paper were still a far cry from *Clear Light*. Some were representational to varying extents, depicting subjects from the external world such as people, horses and dancers’ movements. Others were reworked by overpainting and/or collage, employing a cognitive approach that Ian would later eschew.

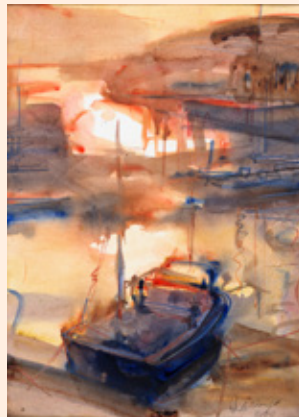
### Turning inward, expressing the unconscious

In the 50s, when Ian was a young seminarian in Australia, over in post-war America, young artists Willem de Kooning, Mark Rothko and Jackson Pollock had been making waves in the Western art world with revolutionary works that sought to express society’s collective unconscious. It would have been difficult for an art lover to miss these works – dubbed “abstract expressionism” – and, although Ian was largely self-taught, he certainly did not work in a vacuum; his body of work was enriched by constant learning. At the same time, Ian’s lack of formal training enabled him a certain freedom from the conventions of standard art education and studio practice. Abstract expressionism would have made an impact on Ian, though perhaps not overtly. Fifty years after its rise, separate from the politics of its birth, its influence emerged in Ian’s practice through a natural progression of his artistic growth, a maturing of perspective and a turning inward of the gaze.

Thus, as Ian progressed with his ink on rice paper works, inspired by Campbell, Tibetan Buddhism and traditional Chinese painting, he began creating as the abstract expressionists did, making art as an expression of the inner states. Ian focused on expressing energy and emotion rather than capturing detail or atmosphere. He started painting life models in a darkened home studio, immersed in a soundscape of loud music, painting with the energy of his whole body, seeking out movement and shadows, and painting not his subjects but the emotions which



Ian's sketch on magazine, c. 2010



Greek Harbour Sunset, 2000



Best Friend, 2015



Simply Horses, 2015

emerged from impressions. He started working quickly and intensely, completing each painting in one go, so as to harness the flow of spontaneous, creative energy without too much cognitive interference. When the inks had permeated his rice paper layers, he peeled each still-wet layer off and looked at it from different angles until he could see the rhythms and patterns emerging from within.

Today, this artistic process is his new norm. While the creative process for some artists produces an agony akin to birthing pains, for Ian, it is a cathartic coupling of the conscious and the unconscious that entails a surrender to open, immediate expression. With each painting, he feels he moves closer to a revelation for his art-making has evolved such that his creative process is now both the expressive and the transformative process. Says Ian:

*“In my art I seek to express myself by saying more with less and seeking the perfect line that captures the essence of the subject. This is a very simplistic way of analysing life and recognising and seeing the wholeness of life through flowing movement.”*

### Transformation: moving to Clear Light

*Clear Light* – Ian’s latest solo exhibition and his first in Singapore after decades abroad – is the culmination of a lifetime of learning, practice, experimentation, relearning and discovery. Pollock famously said that “Painting is self-discovery. Every good artist paints what he is.” Now at this point in his life, after a bout with cancer two years ago and going through a heart bypass barely three months before this exhibition, Ian has finally arrived at the truth in Pollock’s statement. “At the age of 80, I feel like I’ve finally found myself”, he says. “Yet I’m just beginning.”

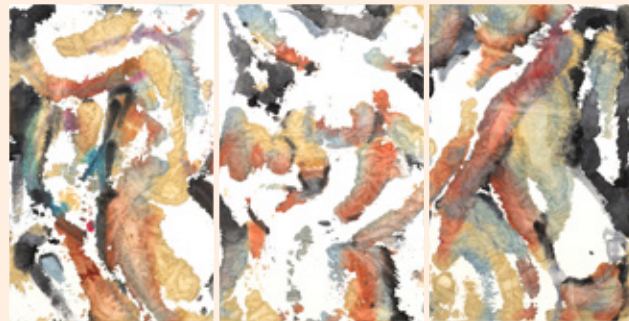
Viewed individually and as a whole, *Clear Light*, entirely featuring ink on rice paper, is a study in contrasts – coloured marks vs. white paper, dark tones vs. light, boundaries vs. free space, primal expression vs. abstracted images, robust strokes vs. light washes, intent vs. accident. The resulting binary oppositions lend themselves well to both Buddhistic and Chinese philosophical interpretation. With the former, *Clear*

*Light* suggests a movement from what Padmasambhava terms “the swamp of cyclic existence” to an enlightened state free of the taint of the mind. Viewed in the context of Chinese dualism, it alludes to an evolution from a comprehension of the world merely through phenomena to a transcendental glimpse of the ultimate reality that lies beyond.

The collection’s earlier works are spirited and dense. They are packed with the bold gestural brushstrokes that Ian is known for. In a few works – most notably, the triptych *Landscape of the Human Form* (2019) – the vitality, form and movement of the living body (and perhaps the polyphonic rhythms of music) are suggested by dynamic lines rendered with rhythm and vigour. In several, the viewer might see impressions of waves and water evoked by repetitive swirls of the brush and washes of blue and grey. In others, varied brushstroke textures evoke a spectrum of emotions. Tonal contrasts and dashes of vibrant colour provide drama. The mirroring of layers within a triptych arouses curiosity. Monochromatic swirls in a diptych conjure lines of cursive calligraphic script.

Moving on to the later works, the viewer feels an ebb in energy and temperament. Polyphony gives way to singular strains. Strong brushstrokes cede to tonal washes laid down quietly, applied at points in light veils of colour. In a few works, the forceful presence of a singular swathe of vivid colour in a largely white void calls to mind the solitude that is the creative process. Overall, there is space, with the voids as expressive as the marks.

The triptych *When Breath Becomes Air* (2019) – featuring three increasingly abstracted layers of the same painting – is a particularly effective and affective metaphor for the theme. Looked at from left to right, it pulls the viewer into a vortex of colour, then releases its hold, leading the viewer into a quiet, light-filled space framed by



*Landscape of the Human Form*, 2019



*When Breath Becomes Air*, 2019

lapping waves of faint colour. There is no discordant note, no atonal break. It feels composed yet accidental, robust yet ephemeral. As with traditional Chinese ink painting, this movement from colour to large expanses of white evokes a shift from the phenomenal to the spiritual. Implicit in the painting is the sense of something invisible being made visible.

## Coming home to the self

With *Clear Light*, Ian does not offer us a narrative. While the body of work is certainly a coherent and intimate response to a lifetime’s search for answers to such existentialist questions as “Who am I?”, “What am I?”, “Why do I exist?”, it presents neither a personal story nor intrinsic truths.

Instead, it encourages a suspension of “ordinary” ways of perception as one journeys through the exhibition. Each work draws the viewer in, not to see but to feel, not to infer but to experience, in order to connect with and reveal the “invisible” self and its inner states. According to 12th-century French phenomenologist Michel Henry (in his discussion of the abstract paintings of Wassily Kandinsky): “To paint is to show, but this showing has the aim of letting us see what is not seen and what cannot be seen. The means of painting are the resources used for this showing and are employed in order to give us access to the invisible.”<sup>6</sup>

*Clear Light* acts to still “the fickleness of our mind”.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, it embodies the artist’s own transformative experience. In the making of his art – layering, expressing, unlayering, revealing, distilling – he embarks on an act of meditation that attempts to purify the mind, exposing and stripping away its illusions so as to arrive at his true self. As *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* states:

“When you realize the nature of mind, layers of confusion peel away. You don’t actually “become” a Buddha, you simply cease, slowly, to be deluded. And being a Buddha is not being some omnipotent spiritual superman, but becoming at last a true human being.”<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> The ancient Chinese philosophy of dualism posits that reality consists of pairs of opposing elements, and that balance in the world rests on their harmonious co-existence. Examples of opposites are dark-light, female-male (*yin-yang*), hot-cold, mind-matter. Dualism guides Taoist metaphysics, Confucian ethics, Chinese martial arts, and even traditional Chinese medicine.

<sup>6</sup> Michel Henry, *Seeing the Invisible: On Kandinsky* (London: Continuum, 2009).

<sup>7</sup> “Just look at your mind for a few minutes. You will see that it is like a flea, constantly hopping to and fro. You will see that thoughts arise without any reason, without any connection. Swept along by the chaos of every moment, we are the victims of the fickleness of our mind.” Sogyal Rinpoche, *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* (USA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

*Clear Light* is an exhibition that, on one level, spotlights an artist returning to his land and heritage. On another level, it embodies a man coming home to his self. Considering that all visual experiences start with light, *Clear Light* offers an experience of a new beginning marked by clarity. Says Ian, “Just let it be and feel it.”

About the writer

Natalie FOO Mei-Yi is a professional research and ghost writer with many obsessions. She studied literature, film and philosophy at university and art at art school, and has since been a police analyst, a film journalist, a creative copywriter, an architectural magazine editor, a literary reviewer, and the writer-editor of arts writing at Esplanade-Theatres by the Bay. Today, she continues to craft essays, reviews, narratives and other works of creative nonfiction in the realms of architecture, music, literature and the visual arts in an eternal quest for depth, authenticity and discovery. Her work for the visual arts may be found in the in-depth and TributeSG sections of esplanade.com and in the National Gallery Singapore.

IN CONVERSATION  
WITH IAN  
DE SOUZA

featuring **Debra PERKINS (DP)** (assistant to Ian DE SOUZA), **Aaron TEO (AT)** (museum manager), **Jan TEAGLE KAPETAS (JTK)** (writer) and **Natalie FOO (NF)** (writer)

The following is a transcript of an interview by the above-mentioned with **Ian DE SOUZA (IDS)** conducted in Fremantle, Perth, Australia. The transcript has been condensed for brevity and edited for clarity.



Discussion at the de Souza studio with JTK (left) IDS (centre-left), NF (centre-right) and AT (right)

**IDS:** It’s been amazing. I keep talking about the importance of opposites – to get to the light from the dark, the internal from the external – and I think it’s more important to concentrate on the internal. I had to go through a really tough internal journey that’s taken me 80 years, starting from Singapore, doing what I’ve done with my life... I used to love the spotlight. All my life, it’s been about the external. That’s why the journey to this exhibition to me is the key.

**NF:** Were you looking to come back to Singapore?

**IDS:** I’d longed to come back to Singapore, and we’d been looking at Singapore now for about 10 years but we hadn’t found the right place, and the time wasn’t right. I wasn’t particularly interested in the commercial side because I felt that I had a deeper message to pass on. I’d always ignored the east. Not being Chinese, not being Indian, not being Malay, I felt out of place. Even when I came to Australia, I still felt I didn’t belong. I’ve lived here (Australia) all my life but I don’t feel Australian at all. And with regards to my work, I’d always been inspired by

the west, by Monet, Picasso, Matisse. It has taken me that long journey to discover the heart of the matter, which is my Eastern roots.

**NF:** When did the yearning to go back to your roots start? Was it after your bout with cancer?

**IDS:** Before. The funny thing is that every time I go back to Singapore, I feel totally at home. I get in a cab and straightaway I start talking Malay. I’d lived there (in Singapore) for a long time.

**DP:** There’s been a bit of growth since you started painting on rice paper, hasn’t there?

**IDS:** I wanted to tap into my eastern heritage but I did not know how. I went to China on the invitation of an artist friend, Gao Xu Yong, and met a lot of artists there. This is going back 10 to 12 years. He was here (in Fremantle) for a year and I met him by chance and we became close. He invited me to Shanghai to see his studio and I met other artists. I explained to them how I was interested in rice paper and how I wanted to work with rice paper. They laughed at me and said “This is not how we do it”. But I wanted to do it my way. I was more interested in the actual method or the execution, not the subject.

**NF:** Were you inspired by traditional Chinese painting or was it the medium that inspired you?

**IDS:** I was inspired by the beautiful simplicity of the line and the bleeding of inks.

**NF:** Were you painting when you were in Malaysia?

**IDS:** Funny thing is that my son, who is 57 now, was given a painting I did when I was 8 years old, and all the things I am involved with now at 80 are in that little painting. I was always good at art in school. I used to win prizes in art.

**NF:** Did you have a teacher?

**IDS:** No. We just followed the path that we are given. That’s our only role in life, to be true to ourselves and to our paths,



no pretence. Whatever we choose to do, we can do if we have passion and self-discipline. So when I decided to be an artist, fulltime, I worked seven days a week, ten hours a day. I'd pack my little jeep at night with all my paints and wait for the sun to rise, and I'd just drive around and find something to paint.



Examining artworks at the de Souza studio

**NF:** When you painted as a child, were you captured by landscape then?

**IDS:** I don't know. I think light has always been my main attraction. Light is God, and the Buddhists talk about "clear light". So we go through that journey until we come to that light.

**DP:** Even in Baroque paintings, the light was God.

**IDS:** Yeah! When I look back at all my early works in the 60s, the strongest factor is light.

**JTK:** Most watercolourists would say that as well, and you were doing watercolours.

**IDS:** Yes, because the light is white paper, so to capture the strength of the light, you just leave the white paper. I chose watercolour because I realised it's the most difficult medium. I thought if I could master watercolour, I could do anything. That's why I moved into inks. I could not do what I've done this past year if I hadn't had 18 years of experience with watercolour. That's how long it takes to master beautiful, clear washes.

**NF:** Who was your most important role model?

**IDS:** Most likely, Turner from England because his work is based on light. I used to buy his books and repaint every one of his paintings just to see how he did it.

**NF:** But you have moved very far away from Turner since. What influences helped evolve your art-making?

**IDS:** I am very inspired by Eastern art, looking at all the masters' beautiful works. I used to analyse their works to see how they approached them. I was trying to find my path by trying to do everything, until I found something that was my own, which is what I am doing now in bleeding the inks through layers. I am trying to get the ultimate simplicity of the work, and the only way to do it is to bleed it through the layers.

**NF:** Are all the works in *Clear Light* made with that approach?

**IDS:** Yes, they all go through three or four layers.

**NF:** What inspired you to do that? Was it accidental?

**IDS:** Yes. Did you see the (painting of the) face of Christ? That was my first one. Every two years in Western Australia, there is an acquisitive contemporary religious art award. That year, ten years ago now, they chose the theme of "The Passion of Christ", which I did (from my first image of the face of Christ with the crown of thorns) when I was 16. I found that and I thought I'd try something different, so I put six layers of rice paper, one on top of each other, and painted the face of Christ with the crown of thorns. When I peeled off each layer, the hair on my neck stood on end. It was really eerie, to go all the way back, to go full circle back to empty space. Then, seeing the actual combination of Buddhism and Christianity, it was fascinating, very powerful because you've got the journey of Christ from man to God and from the major areas to the light areas. So the journey is the same.

**JTK:** From dark to light?

**IDS:** Yes!

**NF:** Was that the turning point that inspired you to start this whole series?

**IDS:** Absolutely. All through our lives we tend to place more importance on the positive parts of our lives, such as marriage and children and all that. But as we go through life and all that falls away, we start to realise there's more than what's on the surface, and that's when we start to go deeper into the empty spaces, which will end up in clear light.

## 22

## 23

**NF:** That's the idea behind Chinese ink painting where the white spaces...play an important role

**IDS:** ...say more with less

**NF:** ...and suggest form, theme and movement. It's the negative spaces, the white spaces that are actually just as important as the black or perhaps even more...

**IDS:** Yes! You cannot get one without the other. I just wanted that simplicity of shape and pattern in light, even with my lines, so that one movement can capture the whole essence of the story.

**NF:** How do you usually start each painting? Does it begin as a life painting?

**IDS:** I see life through the human body; that's why I work with a figure. I turn it (my painting) around, upside down and play with it. You can see the female form...in all of my work. A lot of artists, like Picasso, went down that path – they all looked at the human body. I just took it further and I thrive on "happy accidents". That's one of the reasons I work very fast and usually in a very dark room. Because I am looking for something deeper...into my subconscious. Something here (pointing to heart), not here (pointing to head). Because when there is light, one sees everything! But this again is about opposites. When I teach, I always tell my class not to put any detail in the light areas, but to put all the detail in the shadows. Even with gemstones; in the dark, that's when you see them best. It's fascinating isn't it? The opposites.



Rosslyn de Souza (right) sharing Ian's past works

**AT:** I think we talked about that, the duality of all things. In this case, the body of work focuses on the inward. At the beginning of the conversation you were talking about how

your life has always been driven by outward forces—as a performer playing to an audience, as an artist studying landscapes, the human form to social concerns like the struggle of refugees, Australian aboriginal culture... It's always been about the external experience. But for *Clear Light*...

**IDS:** ...I've gone the other way. It's more internal.

**AT:** The experience within. The abstract works that you have now are a manifestation of these thoughts, these reflections, these experiences, especially in these (past) years.

**IDS:** Funny about life, it's always finding that balance in the *yin* and *yang*. It's always been about trying to achieve a fine balance between the two, which isn't easy. This is why I trust my heart more than my head. This is why I work in semi-darkness. I'm trying to dig deeper.

**DP:** Which is why you use music too...to block out the thought.

**JTK:** Like white noise, only it's very loud...

**AT:** I'd like to bring us back to your painting technique – bleeding ink into 4-6 layers of rice papers. There seems to be a lack of control in your process, so to speak.

**IDS:** I wouldn't say it's a lack of control. It takes a lot more control. With rice papers, you put a mark, a wash, and if you want that mark to stop there, you have to know how much water to add to your inks and where to begin. So you will have to know exactly where to put that wash and this only comes with consistent work. All the works that you see were done very quickly!

**DP:** For what you are doing is more internal, isn't it? That's why you've got the noise and lights to take the senses out and it's working from a deep place, with knowledge of what is going to happen in a way, but where chance is still an element.

**IDS:** Yes. But I try not to analyse what I do. I just go with it! But saying that, all the works that I've done for *Clear Light*, I thought about weeks before. However, the actual execution is done quickly. I work everything out in my head before I begin. I know the size, how far from the edge and the colours I'm going to use. And then I go straight into it.



Discussion with JTK (left), AT (centre) and NF (right)

**AT:** But this bleeding technique is quite the opposite of having a full vision of what you want because ultimately you do not know how it will turn out.

**IDS:** Exactly. This is what I love, the happy accidents. I think one has to be strong enough to go with it and not against it, because you are working with water.

**AT:** Why did you choose this technique? Why do you have to leave it to chance, as compared to painting what you want?

**IDS:** Because I love the spontaneity and I am looking for the energy of the work, not so much the actual subject.

**NF:** Did you stop to revisit your works and make changes?

**IDS:** No. Even when I’m working outside in Fremantle or Kimberley, I’ll just do something and leave it. If it works, fine.

**NF:** Do you always finish your works in one go?

**IDS:** Absolutely (with the rice paper works). I think that is the only way to capture energy in whatever you’re doing. I chose that way of working because it has all the elements I am looking for – the surprise, the energy, the chance, the clarity and the simplicity.

**JTK:** Do you wait for the energy to come before you paint?

**IDS:** No, I look at something and I may see something that inspires me, and I go straight into it.

**JTK:** If something inspires you, it’s like an energetic response, like a breath...

**IDS:** Yes! It’s all about the actual composition – balance, wholeness, rhythm and movement. Every time

you throw your hand up one way, it has to come back like a dancer. So I work with that kind of rhythm and the *yin* and *yang*. If you make a mark here, my next mark will be here, and the next one would be here. But before that, one needs to find the essence of what one is trying to say.

**NF:** And for *Clear Light*, the essence...

**IDS:** ...Is clear light. It’s the whiteness. With the works, we all tend to look at the stronger marks. But stand there long enough, blur your vision, and the whites will take over.

**NF:** Do you have favourite pieces in *Clear Light*?

**IDS:** Yes, a few! Every one is so different. I love *When Breath Becomes Air*. If you look at the panel in the middle, you see the heart. The first panel is the tree of life, then the heart, then this beautiful, clear light.

**AT:** You made new works after our conversation in March, where I suggested you could explore more with the negative spaces, the whites/light, the unspoken.

**IDS:** That was so good because, being so close to my works, I couldn’t see that... At times, I turn it (a work) upside down and play around with it until something speaks to me. So everything is about not being too fixed. It is so important to keep it open. When I see this in the dark, it looks different. When I see it in the light, it looks different. When I look at it in the morning, it looks different. It is constantly moving and changing. When I am working sometimes, somebody will come to my studio who knows nothing about the art and he will say “what’s wrong with that”. That means he is feeling it, not thinking about it...and that’s within all of us. It’s learning how to feel more than see and think, how to think in another way, and when you think another way, you will see it differently. This is why I love teaching. I watch the class and often make them dance and move when they working so they are actually drawing as a dancer, using the body to draw (rather) than just the hand.

**JTK:** (Referencing) the *I-Ching* where the creative, the feminine is the receptive, do you think that’s what’s happening?

**IDS:** I feel it more than see it. Everything in life, it’s about opposites, the internal and external journey.

**JTK:** Do you think this is a rhythm that informed you as a small child living in Singapore, Malaysia?

**IDS:** I was the sixth child and when I was born I was offered back to God. So I grew up with that in mind. So, see the journey of life? You start from (a point of) no control, then you take your path. To achieve that, one has to stay open. I always thought I was a drifter because I never had any plan for what I was going to do with my life.

**JTK:** You were receptive.

**IDS:** I kept myself open to... the unconscious.

**NF:** What sticks out most vividly in your mind when you picture your old home in Singapore and/ or Malaysia?

**IDS:** It was a bad time... But I have wonderful memories of my time then because there was no television, no computers, no mobile phones. So what we did after school was play music, learn guitar and sing. My dad played the violin and my mother played the piano and, after dinner, six or four of us would stand around the piano and we’d be singing. Now kids are more external.

**JTK:** And we spoke a lot about self-discipline, that to be an artist, you have to have self-discipline.

**IDS:** But that goes for everything. All it takes is strong will power, to want to do it badly enough, where you are living it, breathing it. I always said I can teach anybody to draw and paint by changing their way of thinking.

**NF:** Has (*Clear Light’s* concept of white spaces) got anything to do with your interest in Buddhism?

**IDS:** Yes, because the philosophy strikes a chord in me. I feel Buddhism has all the answers a lot more clearly than the other religions. Joseph Campbell talked about “finding your bliss”. And he was saying that this young man went to New York and spent three months reading all about Christianity and he said “I couldn’t find any religion in all the books I read; (they) didn’t explain the whole philosophy of life and (it) was all superficial.” That’s one of the reasons Buddhism, to me, has all the answers and it is very clear.

**NF:** Buddhism is certainly different from Catholicism. The Catholic narrative is linear

while Buddhism is about individual moments; there’s no time frame, no fixing a narrative to life. Is that what appeals to you?

**IDS:** The Catholic Bible was written by men so, to me, that’s more the human response. Whereas, with Buddhism, it’s a philosophy, it’s a way of thinking... I try to apply that to almost everything I do, so everything I do is based on instinct. You feel when something is right or wrong and you have to trust the nature of mind.

**AT:** We talked about ‘liberation’. Buddhism provides methods to attain enlightenment... let’s not go into things like *samsara*, *nirvana*... but perhaps, spiritual liberation? Would *Clear Light* refer to...having a sense of liberation, of being free?

**IDS:** I know exactly where you are coming from. It’s the space that you create that makes your garden or your room work. It’s not the objects you put in. It’s the spaces that you create within the four boundaries. With everything in life, you’ve got to have boundaries. You’ve got to be conscious of your four sides, then you find the essence within the four walls, and you go for the yin and yang in your mark making and colours.

**NF:** What would you like your Singaporean audience to come away with from this exhibition?

**IDS:** If I could (I’d like to) make them more aware of themselves internally more than externally... and trust implicitly.



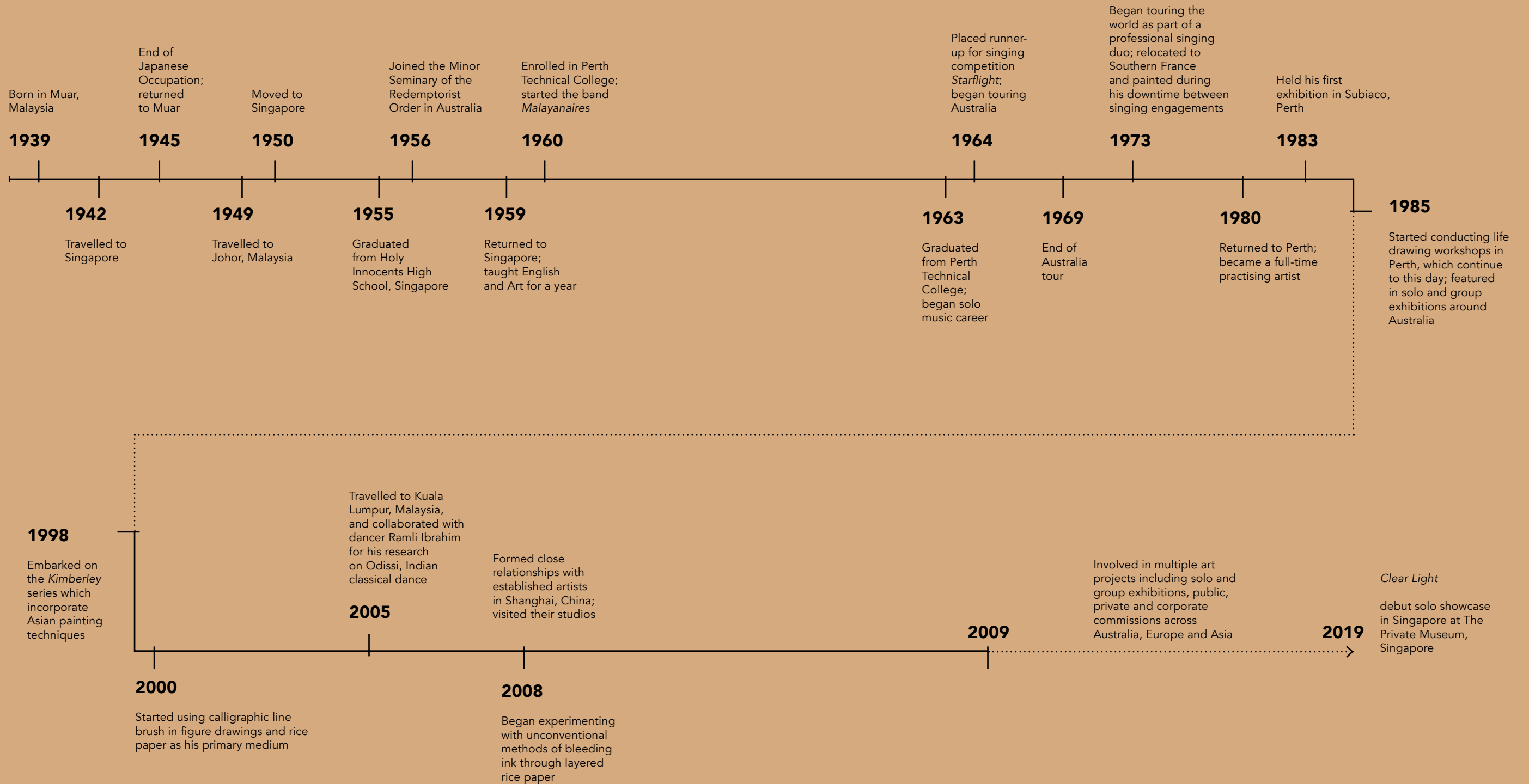
The artist and his wife with the team from The Private Museum, Singapore

# ARTIST'S TIMELINE

## OF DREAMS, PASSION AND LOVE: A JOURNEY OF 80 YEARS AND COUNTING

26

27





# SELECTED ARTWORKS FROM THE CLEAR LIGHT SERIES

28

29

## Artist's Statement

The past 40 years have been dedicated to my art practice and it has taken me that long to arrive at this new stage in my work, exemplified in this exhibition, *Clear Light* – a state of minimum distraction. I consider my earlier work to be derived from an external point of view. This new body of work points to an internal journey of life emphasising the duality of life and the power of empty space – *Clear Light*.

— Ian de Souza, 2019

**In the Shallow Sky — the  
Beauty and Sweetness of it**  
2019  
Ink on rice paper  
140 x 70 cm each, diptych



*The powerful use of empty space  
– clear light – gives the contrasting  
positive marks: balance and harmony  
and emphasizing the duality in life,  
the yin and yang.*



**A Spirited Essence  
of Human Form**  
2019  
Ink on rice paper  
81.5 x 151.5 cm







**Prose of Love  
and Life**  
2019  
Ink on rice paper  
81.5 x 151.5 cm



**Luminosity —  
a State of Minimum  
Distraction**  
2019  
Ink on rice paper  
140 x 69 cm each, triptych





**Landscape of the  
Human Form**

2019

Ink on rice paper

105 x 68 cm each, triptych

*Human knowledge is never contained in one person. It grows from the relationships we create between each other and the world ... and still it is never complete. The inspiration for this painting came from a sculpture in the Palazzo della Signoria, Florence, Italy by the 15th-century Italo-Flemish sculpture, Giambologna, based on the mythical story "The Rape of Sabine Women". Using the process of bleeding ink through successive layers of rice paper, the result symbolises an aerial view of the rawness, power and the vulnerability of the Australian landscape.*







**A Light Tinge of Day Blue I**  
 2019  
 Ink on rice paper  
 140 x 70 cm



**A Light Tinge of Day Blue II**  
 2019  
 Ink on rice paper  
 140 x 70 cm

**Calligraphic  
Conversations**  
2019  
Ink on rice paper  
81.5 x 151.5 cm



**If You Love — Love Openly**  
2019  
Ink on rice paper  
81.5 x 151.5 cm





**Entanglement  
of Space**  
2019  
Ink on rice paper  
111 x 75 cm each, diptych



**The Resonance of  
Energy**  
2019  
Ink on rice paper  
70 x 140 cm



**This Silence We Have  
Between us Speaks of Love**  
2019  
Ink on rice paper  
140 x 70 cm



**Language of Life —  
in the Heart Beat  
of Thoughts**  
2019  
Ink on rice paper  
151.5 x 81.5 cm each,  
diptych





**When Breath  
Becomes Air**  
2019  
Ink on rice paper  
140 x 70 cm each, triptych



*The title of this work is drawn from the heart breaking and beautiful book When breath becomes air by the late Dr Paul Kalanithi. My recent foray into heart surgery presented the most challenging and direct confrontation with meaning, identity and death, giving this painting special relevance.*



**Unbroken Wholeness  
in Flowing Movement**  
2019  
Ink on rice paper  
140 x 70 cm each, triptych



*"... Reality is unbroken wholeness in flowing movement. What we, in our ignorance, call 'Life' and what we in our ignorance call 'Death' are merely different aspects of that wholeness and that movement." This is the vast and transforming vision opened up to us by the Bardo Teachings — from The Tibetan Book of the Dead by Padmasambhava*

# TWO WORLDS

by Jan TEAGLE KEPATAS

“ You will find different lands,  
other cities, But you will find  
no other soul like your own.”

— *Arabian Nights*, by J.C. Mardrus

## First Light

Ian de Souza is a son of Malaya who left Singapore alone in 1956 as a boy of 16 seeking the light of the spirit and a life of service to his Christian faith. Inspired by Redemptorist Fathers who preached and carried out communal novena rituals at Singapore’s St Alphonsus Catholic Church in the 1950s. The boy travelled 4,000 kilometres south across the Indian Ocean, and then 4,000 kilometres eastward by train across the Australian continent and the vast Nullabor desert unaccompanied to enter a Redemptorist Seminary.

This journey and his years in the Seminary are seminal to Ian de Souza’s art practice.

A desert of endless light, storms, darkness. A new world. Outside the train is a landscape uninhabited except for long-shadowed moving figures at desolate, lonely railways sidings. He sees only endless low grey shrubs, dry bleached grass, spinifex, red earth, a huge sky where soft pink washed dawns became brilliant red as the sun lifts from the distant horizon. Day after day the endless space beyond his window was bleached by brilliant light or sombre beneath never-ending blanketing clouds. The boy’s memory absorbs the shifting shadows, the light, the colours, the chill of winter. Fragments, images: fear replaces hope. This is a world the boy entered into.

54

55

We see the light, the glorious colours, the open space in *When Breath Becomes Air* (2019).

In the Seminary the boy taught himself the disciplined rituals of close observation, of carefully painting what he saw, capturing the light of Christ.

The artist carried out the same disciplined practices and rituals when he took up his artistic vocation in Fremantle 20 years later. He chose water colours as his medium, he says, because it is the most difficult, and painted for hours every day as he taught himself to capture the 19th-century buildings, the river and port, the people, the weather, colour and light of his chosen destination.

A desire to capture the spirit of place through light is a continuing theme in Ian de Souza’s art.



*The Invisible supporting the Visible, 2019*

We see his Southeast Asian heritage in this exhibition too. Each of artworks are drawn from layers of memory and belief, laid down upon three to six layers of rice paper, delicately lifted while still damp, and allowed their own space.

Their creation extends his lifelong focus on the human figure as the source of spirit that animates human experience, our need for knowledge, our lives and memories, and the shadows that come. In his many years as an artist, Ian de Souza has crossed many thresholds. Now, in his mature years, he draws on a life fully lived, a rich gathering artistic practice and continually reflected memories.

While the works were born in Australia, they are most definitely, the creation of an artist who has evolved from two different worlds.

Speaking of his *Clear Light* images that are both calligraphic and luminous, Ian talks of having come

to the point of complement: of celebrating both his Eurasian cultural heritage, and his 40 intensive years as a Eurasian artist living in Australia.



# New World

To choose for oneself, one’s life, and to go on doing so, is a quality of courage. He did not follow a religious career but has sustained a spiritual life. His first choice was an artistic life, but he became a singer musician. It was not until 1980, in mid-life that he took up his desired vocation as an artist and sought to teach himself the secrets and techniques of water colour.

“But nothing is wasted,” he says. “From music, I learned the importance of rest, of understanding time must be taken before return, before response.”

Returning to a place he knew, a provincial Australian city, Ian de Souza began to build a walled Singaporean sanctuary, a kampong house, a garden and studio; a walled Eurasian refuge.

Like Carl Jung building his tower, the artist built his kampong sanctuary himself - the limestone walls, the rooms open to the air and light, places for sleeping out of doors, the paved courtyards. He planted trees that dapple shade, built pooling water ponds, spaces that hold his collections of his most significant artworks and sculptures. “Re-evaluation of earlier work and my memories are important to inspiration,” he says. From the desert journey, he crafted his artist’s studio from an old railway carriage, his dining table runs from indoors into his garden on railway lines embedded in the paved courtyard.

And all the while, he painted, perfecting his skills as an artist, a painter.

He tells me, “Art requires a state of minimal distraction. The physical work of building creates balance between the body and the mind.”

The artist’s house and studio garden is a Eurasian compound in an Australian port city: a place for cooking, conversations, artistic exploration; an enclave where art lovers are welcomed for the annual Fremantle Open Studio Art Walks, and where he has held studio art workshops for almost 30 years.

Within the compound, two worlds are quietly balanced. Throughout each day and night, the trees he planted



Nature Provides Everything without Requiring Payment, 2019



Entrance to the de Souza residence

throw reflected shadows into his open rooms tracing time passing.

Ebb and Flow: Light and shadow are integral to his artist’s vision.

# The Space Between

Australian art in the 1980s, had turned from Europe to America for inspiration/ had turned from water colour as a medium/ was no longer interested in painting the human figure/ was not yet interested in Asia/ had not yet made room for immigrant Asian artists.

It is only in the past 25 years, that Australia has become excited by new art from Asia, and the art being made by recently arriving Asian immigrant artists and the flowering of local young second generation Asian contemporary artists. The diaspora of globalisation and communication technologies have escalated everywhere, our appreciation of artists from every part of the world.

No longer is there an expectation of assimilation that caused a Eurasian artist arriving in another era to build his home studio garden, and explore Western art practices and subjects. There is an expectation that what an artist makes and how he makes it, is born from place and time, and the artist’s collective cultural and political experiences.

As a Eurasian artist living in a city that Australia takes for granted, Ian brought a keener seeing to his habitat; recording a place of his own knowing, and capturing the world he saw. Over time, he increasingly focused upon what he saw expressed by human gesture - in the turn of a head, the flounce of a costume – the cultural anticipations and submissions we are all part of.

...

*Through all the years, permanent impressions follow you. Hook you back to the Monastery, the rich hotels you filled with song, the south of France, Singapore and the war. Years spent hiding in a*



Communion of Thoughts in the Language of Love , 2019



cupboard. Family, siblings, the lush humidity, the joyful rituals of the novenas and hope. But you remain firmly, a Eurasian artist, follow your own paths - painting in Australia, you show Australia what you see with your Eurasian eyes.

The Allure of Light

Light in its many dimensions has been foundational in Ian de Souza’s work. He sought it making his water colours. He sought it in the human figures he created with washes and guaches and every painting medium. Assumed he needed to capture it, apply it to his work. Now, his approach is different. He says, “I learned that chance reveals the light I have been seeking.”

A Response to the Windjana Gorge series<sup>1</sup>

There is something haunting about the Kimberley.

The tour. The music lifting from the Tura musicians, the campfires under the overarching night skies where the stars are brilliant. At dawn, the rising sun wakes the endless desert, encircling horizons and emptiness. Ian has returned to the desert, not by train, but via an artists’ tour.

...

Despite the rich red and purple ochre colours of rock and earth, the deep permanent pools flashing tiny fish, the wide smiles of excited Aboriginal children, he could not find a way to paint. Sitting among the white trunked eucalypts, the dawn chorusing of strange birds, in a world of light – could not find his artist self.

...

This is a sacred land created by song, rich in story, sustained by culture and spirits. In the distance, as far as the horizon, the absolute solitude of the ancient lake. White salt, pastel colours. You imagine the emptiness of time but cannot conceive that the ancestors of the campfire’s Aboriginal children thrived on these desert lands the 60,000 years.

Translucency is so potent, you try to adjust your senses to absorb



Windjana Gorge series #1, 2015



Windjana Gorge series #2, 2015



Windjana Gorge series #3, 2015

<sup>1</sup> The Windjana Gorge is a gorge in the Kimberley region of Western Australia. The Windjana Gorge series is a pivotal point in Ian’s artistic practice in the 2000s.



Waiting for the music ii, 2015



Didges at dusk, 2015



Waiting for the music i, 2015

the light gently, lest the daylight brilliance maddens or stupefies you. This is the clearest light. Flawless, Transparent. Luminous and Flat. It steals the mind, reduces the human to just this moment in light and space – in a world quite different, continually returning in cyclic endless sense of time.

In the desert, one can see the curve of the earth’s surface, horizons that surround you, remind you of fear, the boy travelling. Perhaps this is a sorcery of memory?

The earth sends up its heat.  
The shadows have begun.  
And you sit alone.

A cliff becomes a woman combing her hair.

Bodies of lovers are turned to light.

You hear the ancestors’ voices quietly singing out.  
When they leave in the sunset darkness, there will be so much desolation. In the last light, the crags of the Gorge reared up like the mountains in Chinese scrolls and water colours.

...

Before dawn, the artist entered the Gorge.

On the final day, of the tour, he decided to begin before dawn, take his water colours, and hour by hour as the sun lit the red and violet earth and slowly threw shadows across the slopes, record the drama of the landscape in washes. “It was a breakthrough”, he remembers. “Suddenly, I understood that the light will speak.”

Clear Light

“When all is said and done, this remains: that nothing else exists but light – life, nothing else... You can discard the gods sometimes, but the rituals of worship do not go away easily. Instead they are the rituals of the artist.”<sup>2</sup>

Looking through his huge body of work created over 40 years, Ian de Souza has found continuing meaning in what it means to be human - in the energies and release, the life spirit expressed in the meaning of the curve, the balance of

<sup>2</sup> George Seferis, A Poet’s Journal of Days 1945–1951 (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1974).

spine and shoulder, the eloquence of a hand, a naked torso, a mother with child, a circus performing, dancers in the dark lit by torch light, a horse tumbling.

Evolved from the artist's creative and philosophical reflections upon human existence in this world of unending sequences of living and dying, Ian de Souza has developed a clarity of vision.

In the works he shows in *Clear Light*, we see the body as the expressive source of the spirit.

Each work is an invitation to find meaning and reflect upon the unspoken nuances of memory in our own lives; the horizons we occupy. If we are still, we will find our own responses to this instinctively developed mark making that distils natural forces and light; fractals seen in oceanic shifts, ancient lakes and waterways in the light and luminosity of dawn and sunset in Australia's deserts; the energetic realisation of human connectedness and revelations.

These new works are both symbolic and expressive of the sensual and the spiritual, hold intimacy and playful ambiguity, bringing to light the artist's philosophy that we experience our lives not merely in our body, heart and mind but also through memory, place and light. The body is life expressing spirit. Colour is active: enlivens the captured moving figures. The white is the clear light we search for.

The years of intense observation and reflection underlie this freedom and intention and the immediacy of physical energies and the ebb and flow the artist brings to putting down each mark that holds the light between the bodies of the figures from which the continuity evolves.

As images reveal themselves, materialised one by one as each layered of rice paper is lifted; each one reveals unanticipated dimensions: gifts that are prescient.

"I am making light", the artist says. "It is the light, I am seeking."

*Clear Light* is a culmination of the life of the artist who has surrendered his art to a vision of light. He offers us his gift of mirroring and we find ourselves reflected in the work.

It is not the desert, or his many years in Australia that have



*It's the space within that makes it useful, 2019*



*Yearning for Light I Find the Ocean, 2019*

evolved these works. Buddhism has increasingly called Ian de Souza both in terms of the philosophy, content and the technique he has created. If I recall the Artist's Studio, the light, the rippling shadows of trees, I suspect it his kampong style house, garden and studio sanctuary - this place of peace and reflection that is the source of his artistic life work that contains two worlds. The importance of a sanctuary of light and shadow has long been recorded. A great many centuries ago, in another World, a Korean poet, Tsoi Tsung wrote, in the 2nd century.<sup>3</sup>

*In the Night,*

*...The pine tree on my wall is a shadow, growing.  
On my window's blank paper  
the brush is a shadow drawing the shadow of a hill.  
In my room, tonight, life is a shadow.  
I know not if I am awake or still asleep: the breath of music  
in the silence may be the wind  
playing with the pine's ghost, or is it a song  
issuing from a hidden stringless lyre?*

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

**About the writer**

Dr. Jan TEAGLE KAPETAS is a writer, researcher, playwright, poet and arts programs and projects catalyst, initiator and facilitator. For more than 40 years, she has taught creative writing, and Indigenous Australian studies and community development practices, and coordinated international guest artist residencies across Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory, and been an invited speaker at national and international arts conferences.



# ABOUT THE ARTIST

62

63



**Ian DE SOUZA** (b. 1939, Muar, Malaysia) is an Australian artist whose artistic practice spans more than four decades. He is experienced in a wide range of mediums and styles, with water-based colours and inks being his favourites. Ian’s most recent works involve a process of bleeding inks through layers of rice paper, and were inspired by his recent travels to India, China and Southeast Asia. In these works, Ian seeks the fundamental and ethereal images of the human form through the discovery of ‘accidental’ strokes. His many years of classical training as an artist, focusing on the human form, enable him to achieve this. Yet in many ways, these works mark a departure from his previous works, in that they derive from the classical techniques of Chinese calligraphy and painting, yet remain thoroughly contemporary.

His works were exhibited in several solo and group exhibitions, and are part of private and corporate collections around the world, including Singapore, Australia, and France.

## EDUCATION

### 1967

- Western Australian Institute of Technology (Curtin University) Associate Diploma in Art Teaching

### 1963

- Graduated Perth Technical College (Perth Central College of Art and Design) Certificate in Commercial Art

## EXHIBITIONS

### 2018

- Celebrating Circus – a community project in partnership with Circus WA & the WA Circus School

### 2016

- Mastering Movement – Linton and Kay Galleries Perth Western Australia

### 2015

- Tales of a Tura Traveler – A Creative Collaboration with Tura New Music – Freight Gallery

### 2013

- Introspection – Linton and Kay Galleries Perth Western Australia

### 2010

- Drawn Together: the Art of life in Fremantle – Moores Contemporary Art Gallery, Fremantle.
- Wilds of Western Australia – Wills Domain Gallery, Yallingup.

### 2009

- Thematic Partnership – a shared exhibition with Garry Zeck Staffords Studio Gallery
- Resonance – Galerie O Marche du Palais France
- Silk + Saris – Moores Contemporary Art Gallery Fremantle

### 2007

- Body of Dance 2 – Stafford Studio Gallery Cottesloe
- Dancing in the Street – La Tropicana Cafe Fremantle
- Body of Dance – Lynne Wilton Gallery Armadale Victoria

### 2005

- Passion – Lynne Wilton Gallery Armadale Victoria
- Journey: a retrospective – Mandurah Art Gallery

### 2004

- Successions of a Variation – Freight Gallery Fremantle

### 2003

- Selection of recent Works by Ian de Souza – Goldfields Art Centre Kalgoorlie

### 2002

- Lyrics of the Landscape – Gallows Gallery Mosman Park Perth

### 2001

- The Kimberley Thru’ My Eyes – Michael Commerford Gallery Sydney
- The Essensual Line – Gallows Gallery Mosman Park Perth

### 2000

- Reflective Impressions Pt 1 and Pt 2 – Moores Contemporary Gallery Fremantle

### 1999

- Forme de la femme #2 – Michael Commerford Gallery Sydney

### 1998

- Ian de Souza Selection of Works – Michael Commerford Gallery Sydney

### 1997

- Floriade – University of Canberra at Old Parliament House Canberra

### 1995

- Spring Exhibition – Barry Newton Gallery Adelaide

### 1995

- Of Light and Life – Ian de Souza Solo – Moores Gallery Fremantle WA

### 1993

- Ian de Souza Solo Exhibition – Gallery Mack Seattle USA

### 1990

- San Francisco – mixed exhibition of 6 Australian artists

### 1989

- The Magic of Greece – Moores Gallery - Fremantle

### 1987

- Summery Impressions – Matilda Bay Crawley WA

### 1983

- Ian de Souza – Fremantle Watercolours – Fremantle Art Centre

- Ian de Souza – Churchill Galleries Subiaco WA

## PROJECTS

### 2017

- ARTWALK FREO – Established Creatives’ Collective – Community Project

### 2015

- DRAWNTOGETHER Australia – an Arts in Health Pilot Project UNAIDS Bangladesh – A creative Collaboration with DADAA and DRAWNTOGETHER Australia

- ARTWALK FREO – Established Creatives’ Collective – Community Project

### 2014

- ARTWALK FREO – Inaugural Creatives’ Collective – Community Project

- FORM Artist in Residence – a six-week project with residents @ 100 Hampton Road

## PUBLICATIONS

### 2016

- WILD FLORAL FORM OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA – ink on rice paper – Ian de Souza Book V
- MASTERING MOVEMENT Book IV

### 2015

- Tales of a Tura Traveler – Ian de Souza in conversation with Robyn Johnston

### 2013

- Ian de Souza – Introspection – Curatorial Essay – Catherine Cwerz

### 2009

- Exposition les Résonances de Ian de Souza en Lodévois – Midi Libri Journal, France

- Silk + Saris: Paintings by Ian de Souza. Curatorial essay Jody Fitzhardinge

### 2008

- RESONANCE: Book III paintings + drawings by Ian de Souza (French/ English text)

### 2006

- Hybrid Hues – The Monty, Singapore

### 2005

- PASSION: a reflective impression Book II. Essay by Ro Hunter; Review J McGrath

### 2003

- Film and Television Institute WA – Fremantle Outdoor Film Festival Short film entry Ian de Souza – An Australian Artist

### 2001

- Artist’s Palette No. 19 Guest w/c demonstrator and Profile artist

- The Gift of Peace – Illustrated by Ian de Souza.

### 2000

- Reflective Impressions Fremantle 1980 – 2000 – Ian de Souza Book I

### 1988

- The Australian Artist. December Issue “Spotlight on Figure Drawing”

## CORPORATE COMMISSIONS & AWARDS

### 2018

- Societe Academique Arts – Sciences – Lettres, Paris
- Invited member and recipient of Diplome de Medaille de Bronze

### 2017

- WA Turf Club Summer Carnival

### 2011

- Fremantle Ports
- Fremantle Festival Invited Artist

### 2007

- Cossack Acquisitive Art Award: Winner Invited Artists category

- Mandorla Contemporary Religious Art Award: Finalist

### 2005

- Cossack Acquisitive Art Award: Winner Invited Artists category

### 2004

- Cossack Acquisitive Art Award: Winner Landscape in oil or acrylic

- Mandorla Contemporary Religious Art Award: Finalist

### 2003

- Cooperative Bulk Handling Ltd: Art work commissioned

- Port Bouvard Ltd – 5 artworks commissioned for the Company’s corporate collection

### 1997

- WA Turf Club 1997 Summer Carnival

## AUSTRALIAN COLLECTIONS & COMMISSIONS

- ANZ Banking Group
- Australian Broadcasting Commission Bunbury Shire Council
- Cathay Corporation Pty Ltd Singapore

- City of Fremantle
- Challenge Bank
- Cooperative Bulk Handling Ltd
- Department of Culture and the Arts
- Evans and Tate

- Fremantle Ports
- Geraldton Shire Council
- Gloucester Park Trotting Assoc
- Murdoch University Veterinary Trust
- Pentek Holdings Pty Ltd

- Pilbara Iron
- Port Bouvard Limited
- SGIO Collection
- Shenton College Art Collection
- Town of East Fremantle
- Voyager Estate Winery
- Wesfarmers Limited

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

64

We would like to express our sincere appreciation to our artist Ian de Souza, and his wife Rosslyn de Souza, the essay writers Natalie Foo Mei-Yi and Dr Jan Teagle Kepatas for their significant contributions towards the success of the exhibition.

Our warmest thanks to the Guest-of-Honour H.E. Bruce Gosper, High Commissioner of Australia to Singapore, High Commission of the Commonwealth Australia to the Republic of Singapore, for officiating the opening of the exhibition and taking time to write the foreword.

## THE PRIVATE MUSEUM BOARD OF DIRECTORS AND COMMITTEE

Daniel Teo	Bill Liu	Tan Suan Wee
Goh Soo Khim	Ng Siong Tee	Claire Teo
Rachel Teo	Tan Kai Seng	Danton Teo
Dr Dana Magnus	Tan Siew Ching	Aaron Teo

## SPECIAL THANKS

We would like to say a special thank you to everyone in Singapore and Australia who supported the making of the exhibition. Our heartfelt gratitude also to all our museum's donors and patrons for their continued dedication and trust in our mission in supporting the arts.

A COLLATERAL EVENT OF

22 Nov 2019 – 22 Mar 2020  
**SINGAPORE  
BIENNALE  
2019**  
EVERY  
STEP IN THE  
RIGHT DIRECTION

SUPPORTING PARTNERS



65

*Ian de Souza: Clear Light*  
©2019, The Private Museum Ltd  
ISBN No. 978-981-14-3439-6  
Printed in Singapore

All rights reserved. Copyrights in images and texts herein reside with The Private Museum Ltd and individual copyright holders. No part of this publication in its entirety or in parts may be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means, and may not be electronically uploaded to any server or website without the express written permission of the publisher. The Private Museum has undertaken reasonable and good faith efforts to identify, locate and contact the authorised copyright owners of the art works and material published in this exhibition catalogue, *Ian de Souza: Clear Light*. The views expressed in this publication are solely those of the interviewees and writers and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Private Museum, and The Private Museum hereby disclaims any liability for them. Interested parties are invited to contact the publisher in the event that any material was reproduced without identification, required permission and/or accreditation. Any omission brought to the attention of The Private Museum and accepted by The Private Museum as a legitimate claim from a lawful, authorised copyright holder will be remedied in future editions. Enquires may be sent to the publisher at [mail@theprivatemuseum.org](mailto:mail@theprivatemuseum.org).

**PUBLISHED BY**  
The Private Museum Ltd  
51 Waterloo Street #02-06  
Singapore 187969

**EDITED BY**  
Aaron Teo

**EDITORIAL SUPPORT**  
Tessa Sam  
Rosslyn de Souza

**EXHIBITION SUPPORT**  
Aaron Teo  
Tessa Sam  
Goh Wei Hao  
Samantha Monsalve  
Boey Mao Juan  
Clara Chong  
Priscilla Wee  
Nhung Nguyen

**ESSAY WRITERS**  
Natalie Foo Mei-Yi  
Dr Jan Teagle Kepatas

**PRINTED BY**  
Allegro Print

**DESIGNED BY**  
Crop.sg

**ARTWORK  
PHOTOGRAPHY**  
Studio W Photography  
p.18, pp.30–53

Simon Cowling  
pp.12–16, p.55, pp.57–61,

**IMAGE COURTESY  
OF THE ARTIST**  
pp.11–12, p.62





The Private Museum Ltd  
51 Waterloo Street #02-06  
Singapore 187969  
O: (65) 6738 2872  
E: [mail@theprivatemuseum.org](mailto:mail@theprivatemuseum.org)

  @theprivatemuseum  
[www.theprivatemuseum.org](http://www.theprivatemuseum.org)

The Private Museum is a non-profit private museum in Singapore founded by Singaporean philanthropist, art collector and real estate developer, Daniel Teo, together with his daughter Rachel Teo in 2010.

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

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.

