

PASSAGES

featuring Alvin Ong and Esmond Loh
19 August - 28 September 2015

INTRODUCTION FROM CHAN HAMPE GALLERIES

Before we opened Chan Hampe Galleries in 2010, we imbedded into our gallery mission a commitment to Singapore's artists and the developing Singaporean arts sector. To date we have exhibited over 100 artists, 70 percent of those have been Singaporeans. Chan Hampe Galleries has built a solid reputation for spotting emerging talent and creating platforms to profile their practice, all the while building value into their artworks. Our gallery roster is fortunate to include the most exciting and accomplished contemporary artists working in Singapore today, Alvin Ong and Esmond Loh among them.

Both artists have proven their technical abilities and consequently have been recognised by their industry peers. Being the youngest pair of winners of the UOB Painting of the Year stands as testament to their natural talents. As a result of their determination, ambition, and professionalism, they have since established reputations for producing high quality artworks. As they continue to develop their unique perspective and appreciative audiences, continued critical and commercial success is certain to follow.

Chan Hampe Galleries is proud to support these two fine Singaporean artists and to be a part of this special presentation of works at UOB Gallery. We also sincerely thank UOB for their unwavering support for arts and culture in the region through the UOB Painting of the Year, the longest-running art competition in Singapore. Please enjoy *Passages* featuring Alvin Ong and Esmond Loh.

Benjamin Milton Hampe
Chan Hampe Galleries

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ALVIN ONG

(B. 1988, Singapore)

Alvin is a contemporary artist who works with historical and cinematic material, fluidly recombining these pictorial sources in his painting practice as explorations of memory, loss and nostalgia. At the age of 16, he was the youngest winner of Singapore's prestigious art prize, the United Overseas Bank (UOB) Painting of the Year award, and a year later, he had his first solo exhibition in the presence of his excellency President S. R. Nathan at Jendala, Esplanade. He has since exhibited in group shows at Singapore Art Museum (2007, 2012 and 2013), Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (2007), *ARTSingapore: The Contemporary Asian Art Fair* at Suntec City (2010), *Altering Alvar Aalto* (2010) at Asian Civilisations Museum, and *Great Peranakans: 50 Remarkable Lives* (2015) at the Peranakan Museum. A former architecture student at National University of Singapore, he is now reading Fine Art in the Ruskin School of Art, University of Oxford.

ARTIST STATEMENT

It takes one leaving home to think about it from a distance, to adjust to a new environment, and then look at home again. Painted in my studio in the UK, this series is a journal about Singapore. A summation of memories of what constitutes home—or simultaneously—the lack thereof.

At rush hour, to join the crowd of faces and bodies in transit. At the passing of Lee Kuan Yew, to line the streets, snaking queues, a nation in mourning. In a moment of fervor borne out of SG50 overdose, recalling the moment of separation, a nation born out of circumstance.

And there are those times one dreams up a refashioned childhood—rural kampung, attap roof, rattan chair, five stones and a kettle gently whistling at the back.

The event always unfolds somewhere beyond the canvas, and we, the viewers are participants—witnesses to this pregnant moment. This is my engagement with the tradition of history painting. I interrogate what more can be added to what has already been done. My paintings are never exercises in simply replicating photographs in paint. Rather, they are fluid reconstructions of various archival sources on canvas, improvising the composition as I go along.

Anak (2015), for example, is a work that explores a moment lost in time—an assembly of characters from different periods. A *bibik* (fig. 1) mourns in her *baju panjang*. Next to her, a mother in *kebaya* (fig. 2) placates her crying child. Turning their backs to us, my uncles (fig. 3) burn joss paper and candles. A Catholic priest watches on. The SG50 logo makes its appearance on an umbrella. This is the meeting point of ritual, culture and time. "Anak," Malay for child, begs the question, "Who am I?" This is a dialogue my practice enters with memory and identity. Hopefully, my paintings shed light on the saying, "To know your future is to know the past."



When we get to the other side
2015 | Oil on canvas | 170 x 115cm

Still Life

by Jerrold Yam

After Alvin Ong's "When we get to the other side" (2015)

Where can we go in this roomful
of averted gazes
but away from ourselves, light
ushered from an operating table
to interrogate these specimens: schoolboys
drowning in sleep, nameless
professionals handcuffed by briefcases,
a couple in languid embrace
as if slowed
through formaldehyde,
whether out of choice
or circumstance. This says: all we can do
is our best, a surgery of black walls
and advertisements is beautiful,
our best can be everything
but enough. On this table
are sutured
pieces of ourselves, shadow
only light's dormant cousin,
sleeping and not sleeping,
love and not love, not moving
yet bringing us closer to home.

ESMOND LOH

(B. 1995, Singapore)

Esmond is an artist working primarily in painting. He is currently in the process of exploring various painting styles and other artistic media. He had his first solo show, *Generations* at Chan Hampe Galleries in 2014. He was the winner of the 31st UOB Painting of the Year Competition and has exhibited in the 31st and 32nd UOB Painting of the Year exhibitions. Other group shows include *Creation - An Exhibition* by Saint Joseph's Institution Old Boys 2013, Spectrum Art Elective Programme Exhibition 2013, and the Singapore Youth Festival Arts and Craft Exhibition 2012.

ARTIST STATEMENT

A film is not just a single thing; it is a progression of many individual frames with the passage of time. Life is somewhat similar, a long unbroken string of continuous existence. In this new body of work, I continued exploring ideas concerning existentialism by examining the beauty and significance of moments in life, which essentially make up an individual's existence.

In my paintings, the subjects are taken out of context and transposed into a timeless, infinite void. I aimed to capture each individual in a particular moment which is lost forever to time and remains only as a fragment of memory. What is expressed is not just the significance of a moment in time, but also the individual's significance in a vast and unfathomable universe.

While most of my subjects are family members—people who have a strong presence in my life, I have also created a portrait of the late Mr. Lee Kuan Yew. Based on archival images from a 1980 election rally, the painting captures the energy and conviction of the man. Painted in black and white, it connotes a kind of loss, of a moment that can never be relived again.

The whole experience of painting also possesses a timeless quality. When I paint, I become somewhat detached from reality, unaware of the passage of time. The self-portrait, *Timeless* (2015), which depicts a painter in the midst of contemplation, is a manifestation of this experience. Perhaps it can be seen as a conclusion to this series of paintings.



Detached
2015 | Oil and Acrylic on canvas | 152 x 122cm

Portraiture

by Jerrold Yam

After Esmond Loh's "Detached" (2015)

The ways to know another are the ways
we cannot know ourselves. To stand,
head sinking towards a phone. To breathe

under its veil of secrets: unread messages,
gratuitous self-promotion, profile visits.
To have weight on a shoulder, but not

more than any boy can bear. To observe
the observer, his gaze drenching the world
but you. To treat him like water,

something in which you see yourself.
A face bears its windswept lake.
A lake is not unbreakable.

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UOB Art Gallery
80 Raffles Place, UOB Plaza 1 Lobby Singapore 049513

Operating Hours:
Mon to Fri: 9am to 6.30pm
Sat: 9am to 2pm
Sun and Public Holidays: Closed

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The exhibition is presented by UOB Art Gallery and organised by Chan Hampe Galleries.