

For Review Only



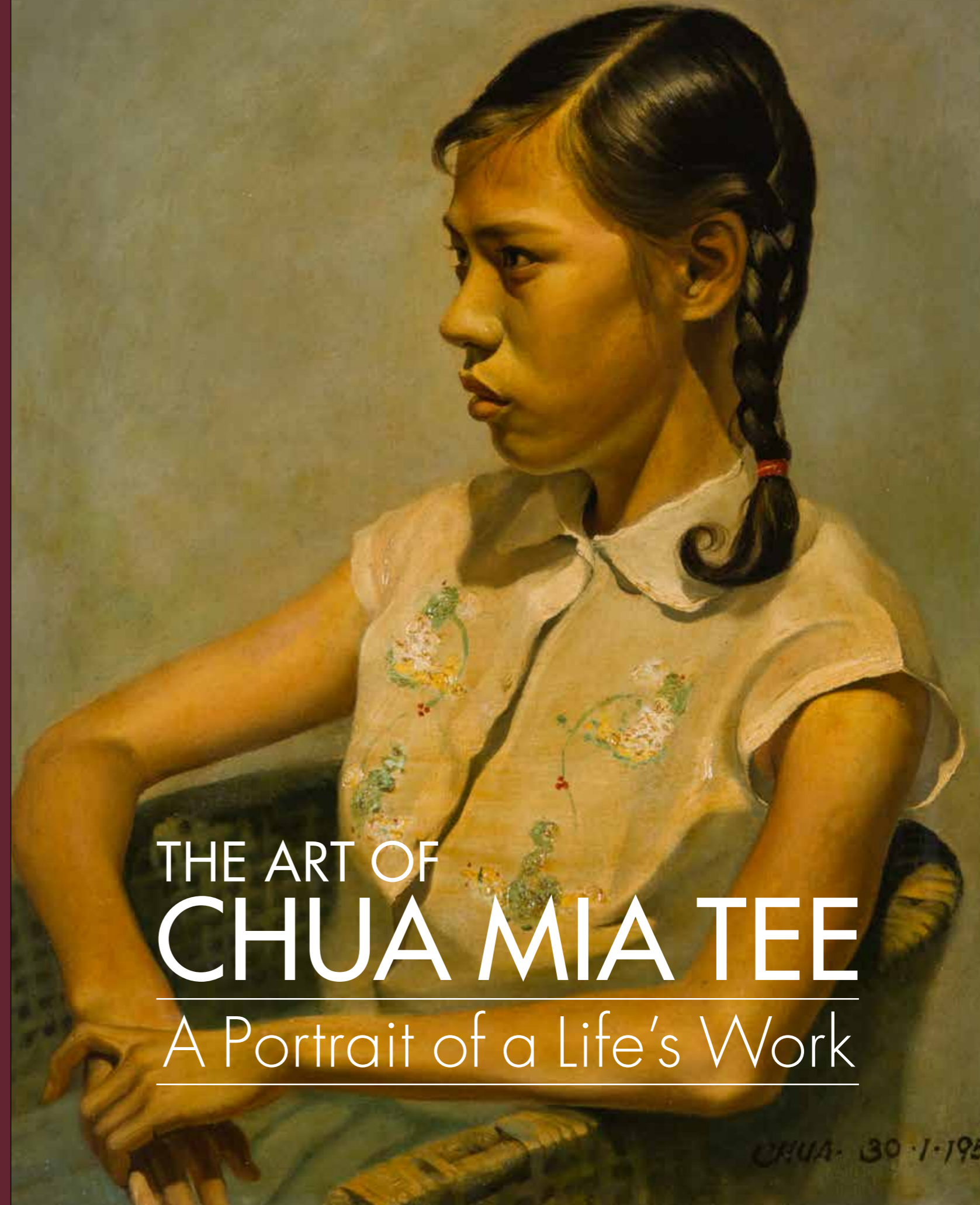
The Art of Chua Mia Tee: A Portrait of a Life's Work is the first significant monograph on the artist Chua Mia Tee, marking his conferment of the Cultural Medallion in 2015. This ambitious undertaking brings together for the first time in a single volume, more than 300 works of art that have anchored Chua's reputation as one of Asia's foremost Realist artists.

It pays tribute to the artist's celebrated paintings *Epic Poem of Malaya* (1955), *Portrait of Lee Boon Ngan* (1957) and *National Language Class* (1959), and gathers works, including Chua's sculptures and murals from over 40 public, corporate and private collections. Many of these works have not been published and have rarely, if ever, been seen by the public.

Special features in this book include over 30 of Chua's Parliamentary sketches of 1978-79, and portraits of almost every single Singapore President sworn-to-office and nearly every Chief Justice appointed. Chua's stellar list of luminaries in Singapore throw light on the breadth and scope of his commissioned works. This publication also traces how his depictions of the working-class and "vanishing scenes" of a rapidly changing city have captured the hearts and imagination of the larger community.

With essays and contributions from prominent writers and museum curators, this monograph illuminates the life, thought and work of one of Singapore's most influential artists. This definitive artist monograph, spanning almost seven decades of Chua's practice since the 1950s, is an invaluable resource and addition to the canon of works in Singapore art research and development.

The Art of Chua Mia Tee: A Portrait of a Life's Work



THE ART OF CHUA MIA TEE

A Portrait of a Life's Work

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CHUA-30-1-1957

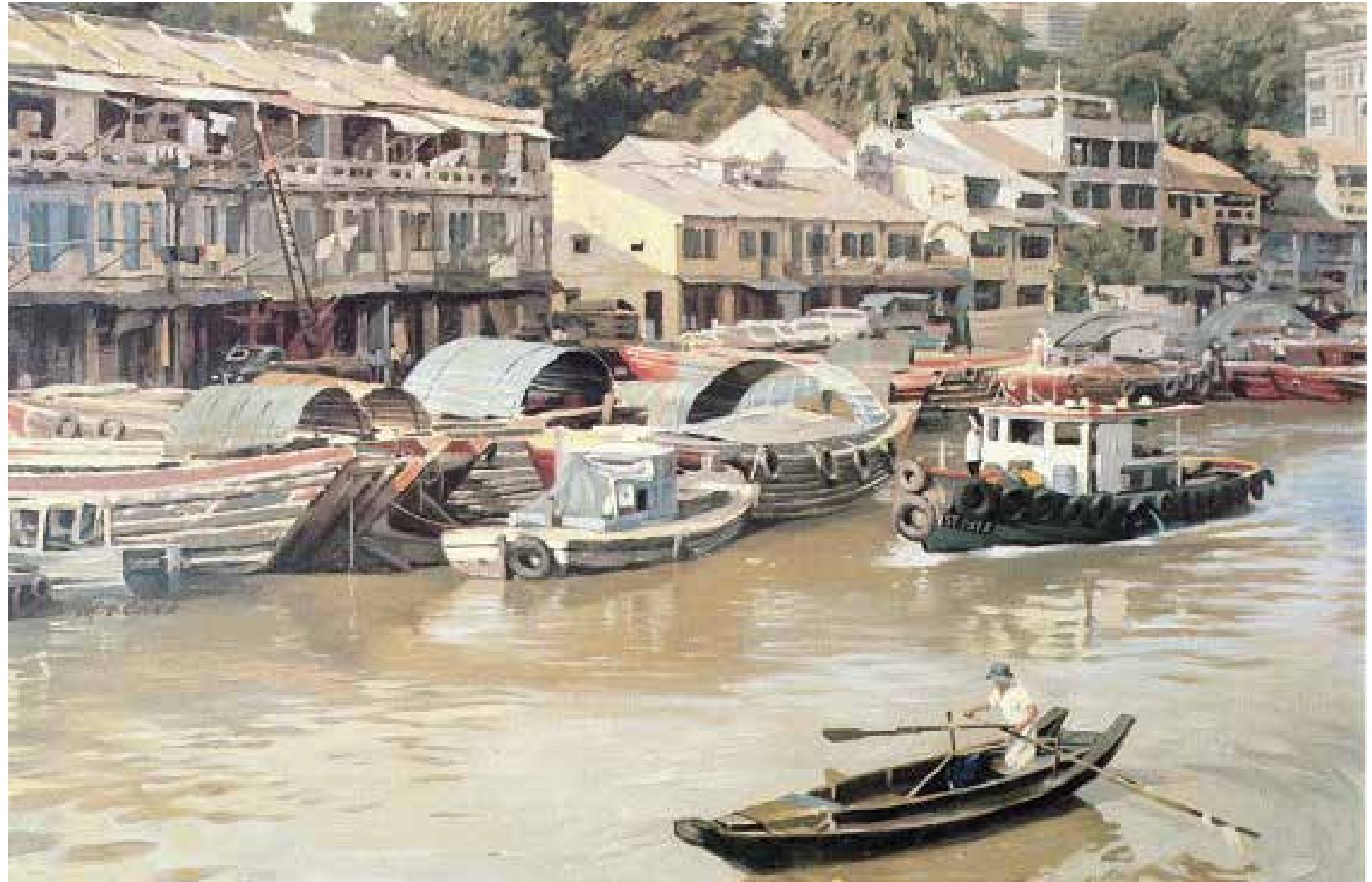
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THE ART OF
CHUA MIA TEE

A Portrait of a Life's Work

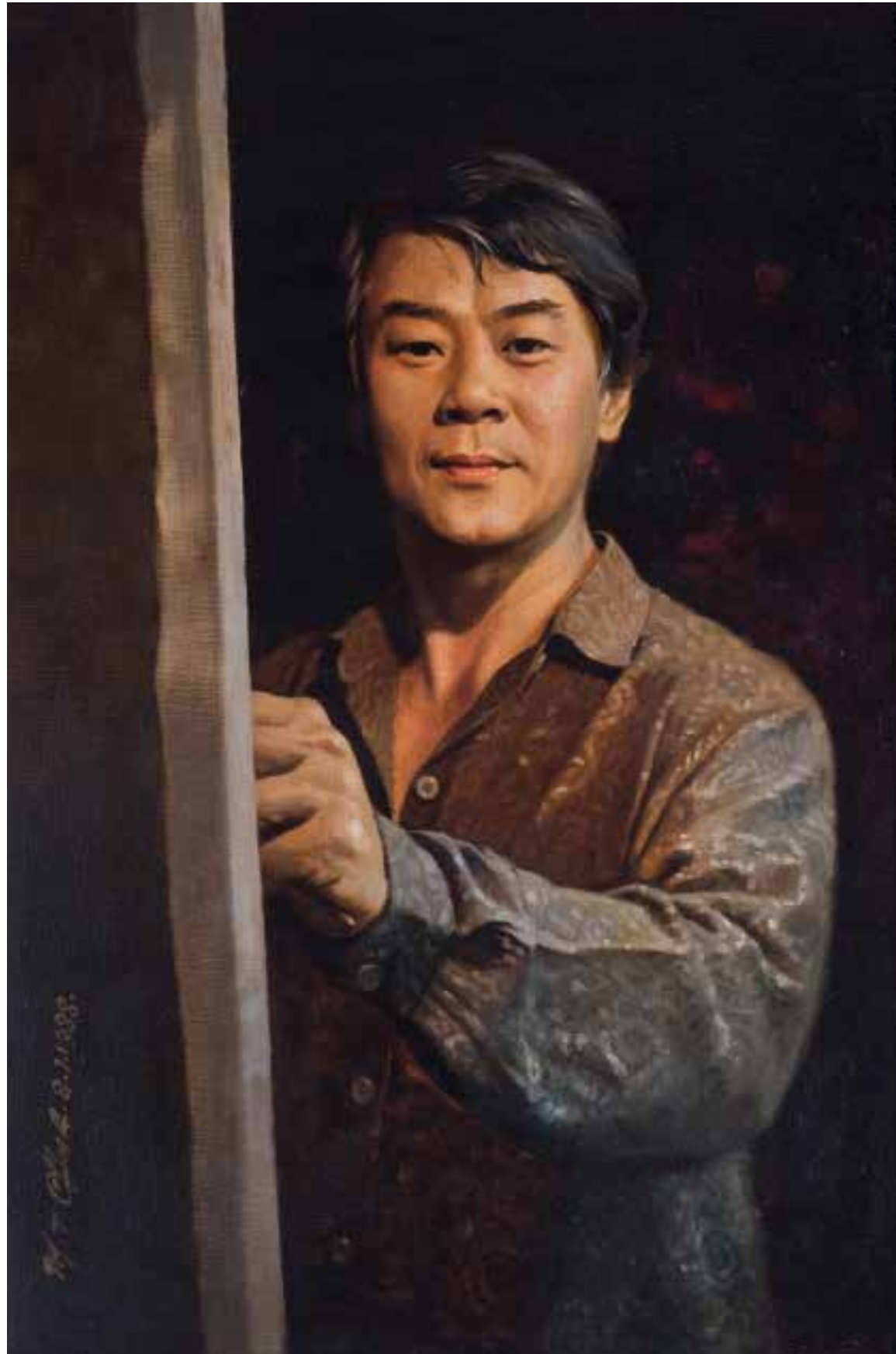


A Sampan on Singapore River | 1978
Oil on canvas | 91 x 61 cm
Private Collection



▶
Morning at Botanic Gardens | 1983
Oil on canvas | 61 x 91 cm
Private Collection





Self-portrait | 1988
Oil on canvas | 90 x 60 cm
Artist's Collection

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Message



▲
Painting of The Istana | 1986

Oil on canvas | 76 x 106 cm

Collection of National Museum of Singapore

The Art of Chua Mia Tee: A Portrait of a Life's Work is more than just a showcase of Mr Chua's commissioned portraits. These portraits remind us of Singapore's identity in today's world, and offer a unique and invaluable perspective of our journey as a nation.

Reading this book is akin to perusing an album of the most inspiring figures in Singapore's history — from founding fathers to celebrated individuals in our political, social and cultural arenas. Not only do the portraits capture the remarkable physical likeness of his subjects, they also depict the more elusive qualities of personality traits, dispositions and emotions.

As a celebrated Cultural Medallion recipient, Mr Chua has proven to be an outstanding portrait artist. He has painted portraits of almost every Singapore President sworn-to-office since 1965. And Mr Chua's depiction of subjects from his childhood growing up in Chinatown and along the Singapore River are beloved by many.

Mr Chua's earliest works date as far back as the 1950s when he captured traditional scenes of life

in Singapore which he felt were fast disappearing. He also featured workers who toiled ceaselessly in Singapore's early years. From boatmen to construction workers, blacksmiths to samsui women, these paintings are a reminder of the unsung heroes who helped bring about the development and progress we enjoy today. They honour the labour, sacrifices, hopes and dreams of those who contributed to Singapore's development.

I congratulate Mr Chua and his family for putting together such a beautiful publication chronicling a lifetime of inspiring paintings, which, in doing so, gives us an evocative documentation of our nation's story.

MADAM HALIMAH YACOB

President of the Republic of Singapore

In 2015, Mr Chua Mia Tee was conferred the Cultural Medallion, Singapore's highest national award for artistic excellence. A distinguished artist, Mr Chua's works span almost 70 years and he is widely recognised as one of Singapore's foremost Realist artists.

His life's work has shaped the course and development of portraiture as a genre in Singapore's unique canon of works. Chua Mia Tee has painted Singapore and her people for over 65 years, and today, many of his works reside in the National Collection.

The National Arts Council is pleased to acknowledge his contributions to Singapore's visual arts in this publication, *The Art of Chua Mia Tee: A Portrait of a Life's Work*. As the first in-depth monograph of the artist, this publication is a timely and resonant effort to capture a significant part of the artist's life and practice.

Many of Chua's works have become iconic images that have gone on to inspire other artists as well as writers, playwrights and filmmakers. He is celebrated as an outstanding portraitist with a wide-ranging portfolio of "sitter-subjects" that encompass Presidents, judges, bankers and businessmen. He also stands as the portrait artist of "the worker" and "man-in-the-street".

Those in the cultural field regard Mr Chua as a sensitive observer of social realities at different times in our nation's history. He has depicted the realities of the post-war period in 1950s Singapore, as well as the sweeping transformations throughout the city-state during the 1970s and 1980s. He continues to interpret his surroundings on canvas and paper even today at the age of 87. Through this publication, we appreciate how Mr Chua has captured the moments, scenarios and stories of a generation of people in Singapore.

The Council extends heartiest congratulations to Mr Chua for the launch of this publication, and deepest appreciation for his contribution to Singapore's arts landscape over the years. We believe that current and future audiences will continue to appreciate his practice, be inspired by his work, and come to learn more about him through this publication.

MRS ROSA DANIEL
Chief Executive Officer
National Arts Council

The Art of Chua Mia Tee: A Portrait of a Life's Work had unassuming beginnings. Upon his conferment of the Cultural Medallion (CM) in 2015, Mr Chua Mia Tee expressed his wish to have the CM grant applied to producing "a simple album" of his artworks. There was mostly surprise that a significant artist's monograph or *catalogue raisonné* had not already been published.

The book team, brought together by the artist's daughter Dr Chua Yang, comprised parties that had past affiliations with the artist. The publisher had a corporate history as the artist's former employer — producing art calendars and children's books, with Chua as the principal illustrator during the 1970s. The publisher had also made a notable donation of their collection of Mr Chua's paintings to the Singapore Art Museum in 2005.

The support team came from a former museum curator and her firm that had previously researched and written on the artist's practice. Similarly, the contributors are highly regarded in their fields of expertise and have had significant scholarship, exhibitions and curating experience in the areas of Realism, post-war art and specifically with Mr Chua's works. The structure and chapters of the book were developed for coherence and to suggest certain perspectives, without over-simplifying the breadth and diversity of Chua's *oeuvre*.

As the project progressed, it became increasingly clear that it was an endeavour that could not be

exhaustive. Challenges abounded: artworks that had left the artist's hands were not easily traced, some due to the limits of time and resources, others were irretrievably lost or damaged. Yet others were in the holdings of collections that were not easily assessable, even for photographic documentation.

This book is a watershed in many ways — it marks the first time Chua Mia Tee's significant commissions from the collections of The Istana, Supreme Court and Parliament of Singapore are published in a single volume; it is also the first extensive profile of Chua's sculptural practice as well as of his work as a designer and illustrator. Further, it is the first instance that images of Chua's early works and family photographs have been published in the context of a dedicated art publication.

The book team is gratified and appreciative of the support of more than 40 public, corporate and private collections and countless individuals who have extended their invaluable assistance in this project.

Section 1

The Right Path: Chua Mia Tee's Artistic Journey

by Zou Lu

这条路，走对了 ——蔡名智艺术生涯回顾

邹璐

It was an extraordinary year for Singapore in 2015 as the nation celebrated its 50th birthday. It was a time of festivity and jubilation with nationwide events and celebrations throughout the year.

The year also marked an important milestone in the Singapore art scene. The grand opening of the National Gallery Singapore took place in November 2015, after four years of construction at a cost of S\$532 million. This was also considered a major event on the international art scene.

The year was also a time for Chua Mia Tee to celebrate as he was awarded the Cultural Medallion in October 2015. The Cultural Medallion is the highest honour that can be accorded to local artists and practitioners who contribute to the development of the arts in Singapore. With his accomplishments in the visual arts, Chua Mia Tee found himself in the limelight as well as on the covers of newspapers and magazines.

2015年，对新加坡来说，是非凡的一年，是举国欢庆的一年，这一年是新加坡建国50周年，纪念和庆典活动此起彼伏。

2015年，对新加坡美术界来说，同样也是值得庆祝的一年，耗资5.32亿新币，耗时四年之久打造的国家美术馆11月隆重开幕，成为全球艺术界年度盛事之一。

2015年，对蔡名智来说，同样也是值得纪念的，更是值得庆祝的。2015年10月，代表本地文化艺术界最高成就的年度文化奖，公布得奖人名单，蔡名智以视觉艺术领域得奖人身份站在了聚光灯下，也登上了报章杂志的显著位置。

Chua Mia Tee's *Portrait of Lee Boon Ngan* (1957) in a special installation with "giant frame", National Gallery Singapore Grand Opening Celebrations, 2015. (Image courtesy of National Gallery Singapore.)

As part of the opening celebrations of the National Gallery Singapore in November 2015, a gigantic version of a Chua Mia Tee oil painting was displayed as an art installation on the steps leading to the gallery entrance. The selected work was a portrait of a teenage girl, Lee Boon Ngan, painted in 1957. Lee would later become Chua Mia Tee's wife. The large-scale projection of this young girl with a hint of defiance, rapidly gained an international audience especially within social media communities.

Chua Mia Tee appeared in a number of publicity videos made in conjunction with the opening of the National Gallery Singapore. This appearance of the refined silver-haired artist on public media platforms brought him into the public eye. As a representative of the local arts scene, Chua met with Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong at the opening of the National Gallery Singapore, where the Prime Minister shook his hand warmly and congratulated him on his achievements.

Despite being showered with praise and accolades, this poised 84-year-old gentleman never once lost his calm demeanour. He attended events the way he always did, holding his wife's hand, arriving and leaving quietly, unaffected by his newfound fame. In his words, Chua viewed receiving national recognition in the form of the Cultural Medallion as a "joy in his late stage of life". His sophistication and composure are admirable. Even during media interviews, he merely reiterated what he had previously proclaimed, that his pursuit of Realist art was indeed "the right path" to have taken.

11月，国家美术馆开幕，根据他的油画制作的巨型装置艺术作品就安放在国家美术馆门前高高的台阶上，那是他在1957年为那时还是邻家女孩，后来成为他的妻子的李文彦画的肖像画。这件装置艺术，以及画面上那个看上去有些倔强的女孩形象，随着国家美术馆的开幕，借助互联网的传播威力，迅速传遍全球。

配合国家美术馆开幕，他也在多个宣传短片中亮相，忽然之间，这位满头银发，风度翩翩的老艺术家，明星一样不断出现在宣传媒体上。美术馆开幕，他作为艺术界代表，受到李显龙总理的接见，总理亲切与他握手，向他表示祝贺。

这一年，蔡名智84岁，荣誉接踵而来，显得如此迅猛热烈，然而气质儒雅的他并没有过度兴奋，他依然牵着夫人的手，出席各类活动，静悄悄地来，静悄悄地离开，生活并未受到任何打扰，他说，能够得奖获得国家的承认是“晚年生活的乐趣”。他的那份优雅和从容是令人羡慕的，即使在接受媒体访问时，他也只是重复他曾经说过的话，他觉得他的“现实主义”这条路，走对了！

“A Belated Honour” and “Maestro of Realism”

Two important essays were published in the *Lianhe Zaobao* shortly after Chua Mia Tee received the Cultural Medallion. Dr Ho Kah Leong, a former principal of the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA) who is known as an “artist politician”, penned an essay titled “A Belated Honour”, in which he pointed out, “Mr Chua should have received national awards in recognition of his artistic achievements long ago. Now, he has finally received this prestigious award. This recognition might have come a tad late but it is still an affirmation and recognition of his life-long dedication to the arts as well as a gesture of thanks from the nation to him for the numerous cultural assets that he has created over his lifetime.”

Dr Ho added candidly, “On 17th March 1986, in the foreword of Mr Chua's first catalogue of his works, I wrote that ‘among the many painters of his generation, Chua Mia Tee is undoubtedly the leader of the Realist School of painters. In a time when generations of artists were born in unbroken succession, the art scene resembled a vibrant garden with colourful and varied blooms, each representing a different artist dabbling in a different school of artistic pursuit. However, painters specialising in Realism were few and those who made a name for themselves were even rarer. Hence, Mr Chua is fully deserving of the title of ‘Maestro of Realism’”.

This was not the only instance Dr Ho Kah Leong had expressed admiration for Chua Mia Tee's work. Chua was Ho Kah Leong's teacher when Ho was a NAFA student in 1955. In subsequent decades, Ho himself was seen constantly honing his fundamentals through painting *en plein air*. Indeed, Ho Kah Leong deeply believed that a strong foundation was important to the growth and eventual success of an artist.

“迟来的荣誉”和“写实艺术大师”

关于蔡名智获得文化奖，我们很快在《联合早报》上看到两篇重要文章。曾担任南洋艺术学院院长，有“政坛艺术家”美誉的何家良博士，在他的文章《迟来的荣誉》中指出，“蔡老师的艺术成就老早就应该被国家承认并授予应得的奖项，所以，到今天蔡老师才捧走这个文化大奖，虽然迟来了一些，但还是对蔡老师毕生对艺术的执着，并为国家留下许多珍贵的艺术资产的一种肯定和褒扬。”（何家良《迟来的荣誉》，《联合早报》2015年10月20日）。

他更坦言，“我曾在1986年3月17日，在蔡老师第一本画册序言上写道，“在众多画家，执写实派牛耳的，非蔡名智莫属。”当下画家辈出，各家各派都有，本地画坛亦呈百花齐放之势，但追随写实派且出人头地，的确是凤毛麟角，如此看来称蔡老师为新加坡写实艺术大师，他是当之无愧的。”

何家良博士不止一次公开表示对于蔡名智作品的欣赏，早在1955年在南洋美专求学期间，他曾师从蔡名智，数十年来他坚持以户外写生的方式延续自己的艺术创作，走的也是基本功路线，他深谙扎实的基本功对于一个艺术家提升成长，有所成就的重要性。



▲
Festive Air in Chinatown | 1983
Oil on canvas | 61 x 91 cm
Private Collection



▲
A Crowded Marketplace | 1983
Oil on canvas | 122 x 163 cm
Private Collection



▲
Snatching a Little Leisure | 1982
Oil on canvas | 61 x 91 cm
Private Collection



▲
Marketplace (Beside K K Market) | 1977
Oil on canvas | 61 x 91 cm
Private Collection

Another person who wrote a dedicated essay for Chua Mia Tee is Han Tan Juan, a familiar name in the local media scene. Han had always been known for his candid and forthright writing style. In his essay, he wrote that this “belated honour” was better late than never. He also reminded readers that “Chua Mia Tee was already a household name in the 1950s art scene. Back then, his painting titled *Epic Poem of Malaya* was regarded as a true masterpiece of Realist painting, attaining a level that no other local painter could achieve.”

Han also recalled that “between the 1950s and the 1960s, the Singapore art scene saw a strong pool of extremely talented Realist painters. Other than Chua Mia Tee, other outstanding painters included Lee Boon Wang (Chua’s brother-in-law) and Tay Kok Wee. Their works are rooted in the lives of the working class and reflected their realities truthfully. Looking at their paintings, one could feel the pulse of the era. The leader of this community of artists was Chua Mia Tee himself. The group operated out of the Equator Art Society (EAS), which was founded by Chua and other artists.”

Equator Art Society

A well-established professional artist whose works have received countless accolades over the years, Chua was unlike many others as his fame was not a recent phenomenon. Over the years, he had been steadily producing paintings that excelled in quantity and quality. Why then, was this honour so belated?

Some have speculated that his role as a founding member of the Equator Art Society resulted in the delay. The Equator Art Society, founded in 1956, was a highly influential art society in Singapore but was dogged by allegations of leftist affiliations. The society was de-registered in 1972, purportedly for non-compliance with regulations. And for many years after, the EAS became something of a taboo. So, did Chua’s EAS involvement really affect him being officially recognised by the state?

另一位专门撰文的是本地著名报人韩山元先生（已故），韩先生的文风向来坦率真诚，他说，这份“迟来的荣誉”，迟来总好过不来。他并且指出，“蔡名智早在上世纪50年代已经是誉满艺坛，那时，他的名画《马来亚史诗》是那个时代本地写实派美术的巅峰之作。”

他并且回忆到，“从50年代到60年代，新加坡美术界有一支强大的写实派队伍，人才济济，才华出众。写实功力深厚的，除名智外，还有李文苑（名智的妻舅）、郑国伟等，他们的作品扎根社会底层，反映现实生活，看他们的作品，让人感受到时代的脉搏。这个队伍的领军就是蔡名智，有个坚强的阵地，那就是蔡名智等人发起的赤道艺术研究会。”

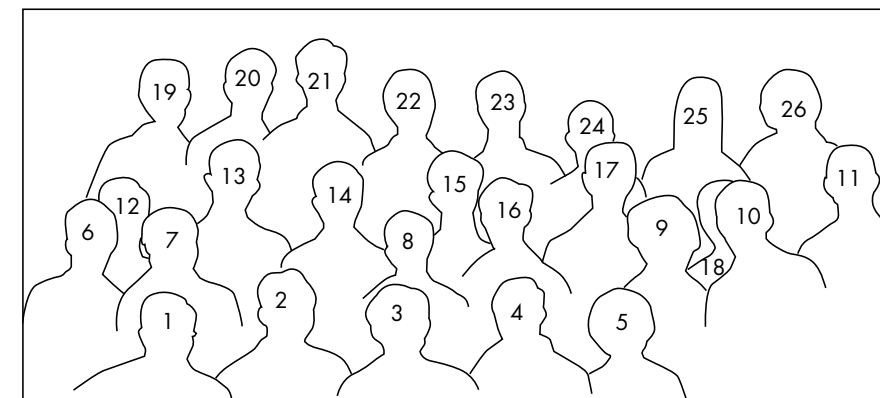
赤道艺术研究会

“迟来的荣誉”和“写实艺术大师”等说法，因此引发人们的思考，作为一名资深的专业画家，蔡名智的艺术成就有目共睹，并且他的情形与其他人很不一样，他其实成名很早，一路走来，他的作品数量惊人，并且始终保持高水准创作，那么，这份荣誉迟来的原因是什么？

有人说，是由于他是赤道艺术研究会的发起人。赤道艺术研究会（以下简称“赤道”）1956年成立，曾经是本地很有影响力的艺术团体，但传闻团体内有左派势力，在1972年受到政府管制被解散(FN)。因此，相当长一段时间，赤道艺术研究会就成为一种禁忌，“赤道”真的是蔡名智的禁忌吗？



Members of the Equator Art Society. Chua Mia Tee is seated in the front row, fourth from left.



Key to members in the photo:

- | | | | | | |
|---------------|---------|---------------------|----------------|----------------|---------|
| 1. 李文苑 | 2. 郭建光 | 3. Basoeki Abdullah | 4. 蔡名智 | 5. 李燕琴 | 6. 余克勤 |
| 7. 会员(Member) | 8. 赖桂芳 | 9. 会员(Member) | 10. 许锡勇 | 11. 会员(Member) | 12. 赖荣芳 |
| 13. 王文生 | 14. 何志才 | 15. 张金龙 | 16. 王天锡 | 17. 会员(Member) | 18. 陈旭光 |
| 19. 吴汉图 | 20. 宗国民 | 21. 张文奎 | 22. 会员(Member) | 23. 郑松川 | 24. 赖均芳 |
| 25. 李仰卿 | 26. 庄宝妹 | | | | |

Chua Mia Tee's recollections of the EAS are less dramatic and fervent than what many may imagine. There is no bitterness, not because of a mellowing over time, but rather what he remembers are mainly the sentiments when the EAS was first founded.

In 1956, at the behest of Lim Hak Tai, the then-Principal of NAFA, Chua Mia Tee returned as a lecturer to his alma mater, where he became a colleague to his former teacher Cheong Soo Pieng. Chua Mia Tee was in his early 20s then, while Cheong Soo Pieng (1917-1983) was about 40 years old. A bold advocate of Realism in art, Chua Mia Tee placed great emphasis on honing the basic painting skills of a budding painter while Cheong was inclined towards Abstract art and encouraged his students to innovate.

Their contrasting approaches pointed to two divergent paths in artistic pursuits. On hindsight, Chua Mia Tee conceded that he was once young and arrogant. With his youthful pride and charm, Chua gradually amassed a following of young painters, mostly his students, who believed in his chosen course of Realism.

The EAS was founded upon the foundations of an art research society, set up by the graduate classes of 1953 from various Chinese secondary schools. Chua Mia Tee was invited to be the art director of this earlier organisation, which was later dissolved in September 1956. Chua, with a few like-minded friends as well as some younger NAFA students, then grouped themselves together to set up the EAS. Being one of its pioneer founders, Chua Mia Tee became the first president of EAS.

蔡名智对于“赤道”的回忆并没有像人们想象中那么热血、激动，也没有遗憾，不是因为时过境迁，风轻云淡，其实还是在于“赤道”创办的缘起。

1956年，蔡名智接受林学大校长的邀请，再次回到南洋美专任教，与钟泗滨老师从师生关系变成了同事。蔡名智当时20岁出头，钟泗滨(1917-1983)先生年龄约40岁，蔡名智明确提出走现实主义路线的艺术主张，强调扎实的绘画基本功，钟泗滨老师主张抽象艺术，鼓励学生要敢于创新。

这是艺术道路的两种截然不同的选择，蔡名智坦言，那时候年轻气盛，带着年轻人的锐气和骄傲，于是，在他身边慢慢聚集了好多坚持走现实主义艺术路线的年轻人，他们中绝大多数都是他的学生。

赤道艺术研究会的前身是附属于1953年全新加坡华文中学毕业班同学会的“艺术研究会”，简称“艺研会”，蔡名智当时受邀担任“艺研会”美术指导。1956年9月“艺研会”解散，于是在蔡名智以及



Chua Mia Tee with Indonesia's leading Realist artist Basoeki Abdullah, c.1988.

Artists who had relatively weaker foundations or pursued Abstraction seemed to have automatically become opponents of the EAS. Cheong Soo Pieng had once jokingly called Chua Mia Tee a "traitor". In the long history of art, there have been many artists who have had different artistic aspirations and held different ideals, many of whom have similarly earned the title of "artistic traitors".

Now, six decades later, Chua recalls that he merely wanted to uphold his ideals of pursuing Realism in art. Despite their differences, Chua still held Cheong Soo Pieng in high regard as his teacher. As Chua was at one point posted to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, by his employer, he was less involved in the subsequent developments of the EAS. Catalogues from EAS exhibitions over the years also tell a similar tale. Chua Mia Tee was much involved in EAS's inaugural exhibition, even penning essays on top of contributing his paintings to the event, but in the following years, his involvement was limited to contributing paintings to joint exhibitions.

In fact, if we delve into the history of EAS, we would see that it was a society of professionals, with twin goals of providing art education and contributing to the development of art in Singapore. In its heyday, EAS had professional artists conducting classes in oil painting, portraits, charcoal drawing and watercolours. These classes, held once or twice weekly, attracted a spectrum of students, ranging from budding novice painters to experienced artists, who signed up for the classes because of the reputation of EAS and its members. Besides learning the basics of drawing and painting, students were also taught art theory. They too had the chance to appreciate outstanding works by foreign artists, especially those by Russian Realist painters, including but not limited to works by Peredvizhnik artist Ilya Yefimovich Repin. Group activities such as film screenings and picnics were also organised for the students.

几位志同道合的伙伴的共同推动之下，和那些普遍年龄比他小的学弟学妹们，团结在一起，创办了赤道艺术研究会。蔡名智是主要发起人之一，并担任首届研究会主席。

而一些美术基础较差，或者以抽象艺术为追求的，就似乎成了赤道艺术研究会的对立面。钟泗滨老师曾笑言蔡名智是“叛徒”，在古往今来艺术史上，试图走向不同艺术理想，坚持不同艺术理念的人似乎并不鲜见，相反，被称作是“艺术叛徒”的例子还不少呢。

经过一甲子，在回忆往事时，蔡名智说，当年他只是要坚持他的现实主义艺术理念，他还是尊重钟泗滨先生是他的老师。“赤道”后来的发展，其实他参与不多，原因是他曾一度被任职的公司外派在马来亚吉隆坡工作，从“赤道”的历届美术展特刊上也可以看到，除了第一届他有较多参与，提交创作并撰写文章，以后的特刊上仅有参加联展的作品。

事实上，细致梳理赤道艺术研究会的发展历史，就会发现，尽管很多人不明就里跟着把“赤道”列为意识形态的禁忌，访问多位“赤道”曾经的理事，他们对于当年“赤道”被解散的原因所知甚少，相反，当年的“赤道”有专业的油画、肖像画、水彩画等绘画基础训练，有专业的指导老师，每周两次的美术班吸引了不少慕名而来的美术爱好者，也有一些是有基础的画家，是名副其实兼具美术教学和美术事务发展的专业团体。会员们除了锻炼绘画基础，也学习美术理论，欣赏国外艺术家的优秀作品，尤其是俄罗斯现实主义画家，巡回画派艺术大师列宾等人的创作，此外还有电影放映会、野餐会等丰富多彩的集体活动。



▲
Untitled (Man) | 1959
 Oil on canvas | Dimensions not available
 Signed Chai with date 15.12.59

Chua Mia Tee was exhibiting his works as early as 1951, with his woodcuts reproduced in newspapers in the early 1950s. Chua was one of the founding members of the Equator Art Society (founded 1956) that emphasised Realism as a painting style as well as an aesthetic philosophy.



▲
In the Bus Returning Home from Work | 1953
 Woodcut on paper | Dimensions not available



◀
Untitled (Boy with Cigarette) | c.1950s
 Oil on canvas | Dimensions not available



Covers of the Equator Art Society art exhibition catalogues for 1960 and 1965.

The 1960 cover features the plaster version of Lee Boon Wang's sculpture of Chua Mia Tee, immersed in thought (*Before the Moment of Painting*, 1959). The 1965 EAS cover features Auguste Rodin's sculpture *Le Penseur* (*The Thinker*) that was the central figure of Rodin's composition *Gates of Hell* after Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Originally called *Le Poète* (*The Poet*), this figure was famous in the art world for representing both intellect and poetic imagination. The EAS selected this figure as their emblem but instead of alluding to the *Gates of Hell*, incorporated the image of the globe of the world.

Unfortunately, following EAS's official disbandment, it was perceived as something of a taboo in opposition to the nation's ideology. Interviews with several ex-directors of EAS reveal that they knew very little about the actual reasons for the society's demise.

It is not hard to see how the nationalist and anti-colonialist stance adopted by the EAS was in tune with the zeitgeist of their time. They put forth the idea that art should serve the masses by employing art as a means to reflect the everyday realities faced by the common folk. This approach won widespread support and praise at that time. If NAFA was the cradle in which artists found their calling and built strong art foundations, EAS could be said to be the site where they further honed their skills and refined their techniques as well as attained greater heights and accomplishments in their artistic careers. Ms Georgette Chen, a NAFA teacher then, took a personal interest in the growth of her students as artists after graduation. She attended every exhibition organised by the EAS to show her support and witness her students' maturing skills.

The EAS might have had a short history but its historical impact and influence has long been neglected. Kwok Kian Chow, the former director of the Singapore Art Museum, wrote in his book *Channels and Confluences* that the maturation of Realism as a painting style in Singapore was a result of EAS' work. From the time of its inception, many prominent local artists have directly or indirectly been associated with or influenced by the EAS. Many EAS members went on to become remarkable and widely-acclaimed "second-generation" artists, including Chua Mia Tee, Lee Boon Wang, Koeh Sia Yong, Tay Boon Pin, Tan Choh Tee, Siew Hock Meng, Lim Yew Kuan and Ong Kim Seng, among others.

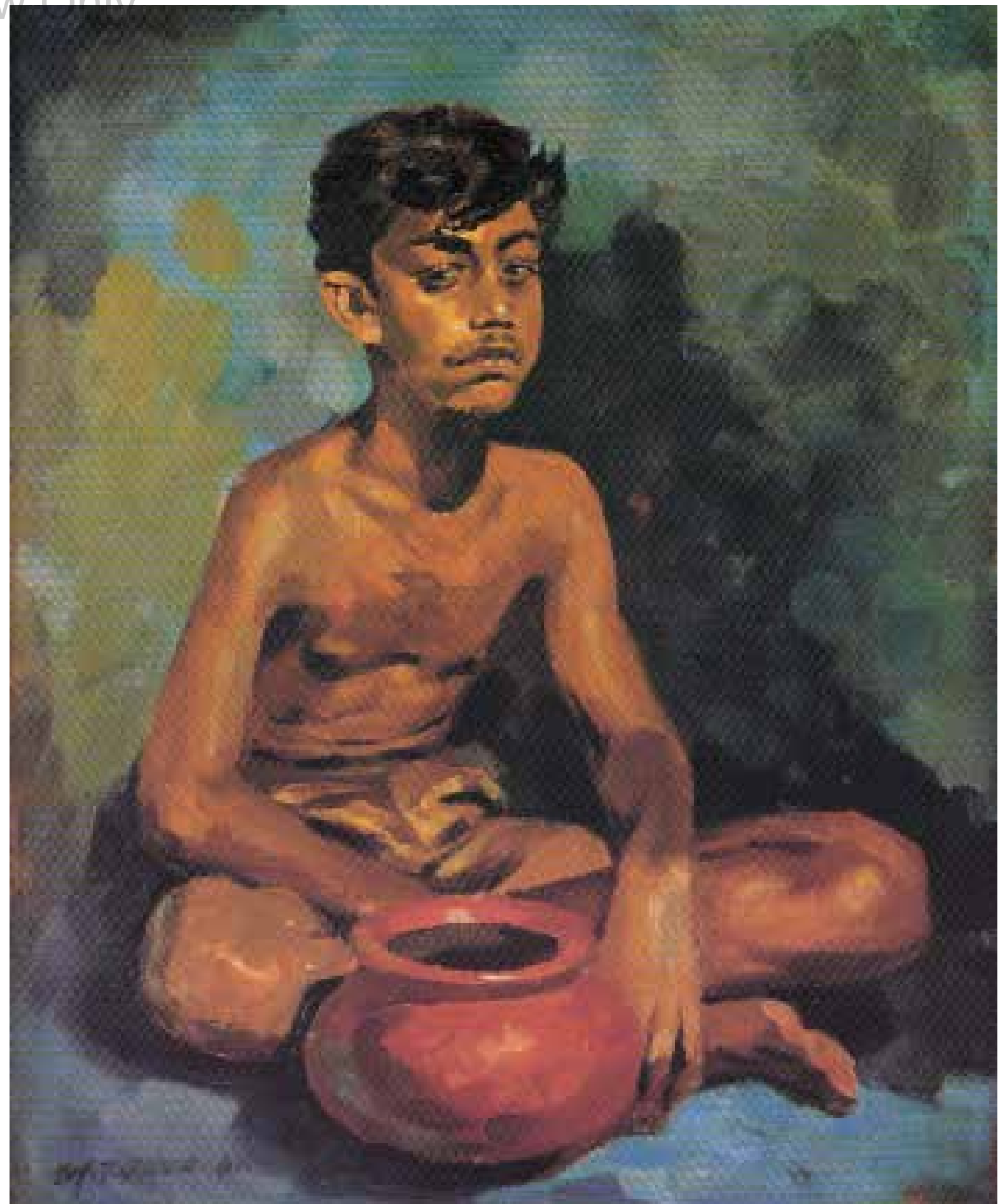
赤道艺术研究会在当时轰轰烈烈反殖民爱国运动中，他们的现实主义艺术思想符合那个时代的潮流，是可以理解的，他们提出“艺术为人民服务”的观点，认为艺术要表现社会现实，反映普通民众的现实生活，在当时受到热烈响应和社会的赞誉。如果说南洋美专，给一些人以艺术的启蒙，打下艺术的基础，但真正让一代人打磨艺术技巧，磨练艺术基本功，在艺术发展的道路上更进一步，有所成就的，就是赤道艺术研究会了。当时任教美专的张荔英老师也非常关心学生毕业后的艺术成长，每届赤道艺术研究会美展，她都亲自到场观赏作品，表示支持。

“赤道”的历史虽然短暂，但“赤道”的历史作为和时代影响一直以来被低估，甚至被埋没，新加坡国家美术馆前馆长郭建超在其学术著作“Channels and Confluences”中将新加坡现实主义画风的发展归功于赤道艺术研究会（简称“赤艺”）的努力。那时至今，新加坡很多活跃艺术家多多少少都与赤道艺术研究会有些关系，“赤艺”的很多人后来成为公认的卓有成就的新加坡第二代艺术家，如蔡名智、李文苑、许锡勇、郑文斌、陈楚智、萧学民、林友权、王金成等。

Indian Boy with Pot | 1961

Oil on canvas | 60 x 48 cm

Private Collection



| Selected Equator Art Society Exhibitions | | | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|---|---|---|
| No | Date | Venue | Guest-of-Honour | Media Coverage |
| 1 | 13th–15th June 1958 (3 days) | Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce & Industry | Dr Lin Wo Chiang (Professor of Economics, Head of Politics and Economics, Nanyang University), Member of Singapore Cultural Committee | Equator Art Society to hold art exhibition (8th June 1958, <i>Nanyang Siang Pau</i>) |
| 2 | 5th–7th February 1960 (3 days) | Victoria Memorial Hall | Minister for Culture, S. Rajaratnam | Equator Art Society to hold its second art exhibition next month, with the Minister for Culture gracing its opening ceremony (19th January 1960, <i>Nanyang Siang Pau</i>) |
| 3 | 28th February–3rd March 1963 (4 days) | Victoria Memorial Hall | | Opening ceremony of Equator Art Society's 3rd exhibition to be held on the 28th (18th February 1963, <i>Nanyang Siang Pau</i>) |
| 4 | 2nd–6th January 1965 (5 days) | Victoria Memorial Hall | President of Equator Art Society, Feng Jun Shui | A showcase of "truth, goodness and beauty" for public inspection — Equator Art Society's exhibition held over the 5-day holiday at Victoria Memorial Hall (3rd January 1965, <i>Nanyang Siang Pau</i>) |
| 5 | 27th–30th October 1966 (4 days) | Victoria Memorial Hall | | Equator Art Society to hold exhibition at the end of this month (9th October 1966, <i>Nanyang Siang Pau</i>) |
| 6 | 25th–27th October 1968 (3 days) | Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce (Clubhouse) | | Equator Art Society celebrates its 12th birthday by holding an art exhibition on the 25th (14th October 1968, <i>Nanyang Siang Pau</i>) |

| 赤道艺术研究会历届美术展 | | | | |
|--------------|---------------------|----------|--|--|
| | 日期展览 | 展览地点 | 开幕主宾 | 媒体报道记录 |
| 第一届 | 1958年6月13-15日 (三天) | 中华总商会 | 林我蒋博士/教授 (南洋大学政治经济系主任、经济系教授), 新加坡文化咨询委员会委员 | 《赤道艺术研究会将举行作品展览》(《南洋商报》1958年6月8日) |
| 第二届 | 1960年2月5-7日 (三天) | 维多利亚纪念堂 | 文化部长拉惹勒南 | 《赤道艺术研究会下月五日举行第二届美术展览会请文化部长开幕》(《南洋商报》1960年1月19日) |
| 第三届 | 1963年2月28日 3月3日(四天) | 维多利亚纪念堂 | | 《赤道艺术研究会第三届常年美展定廿八日举行开幕礼》(《南洋商报》1963年2月18日) |
| 第四届 | 1965年1月2-6日 (五天) | 维多利亚纪念堂 | 赤道艺术研究会主席冯俊水 | 《总结真善美成绩让社会人士检阅赤道艺术研究会美术展览一连五天假纪念堂举行》(《南洋商报》1965年1月3日) |
| 第五届 | 1966年10月27-30日(四天) | 维多利亚纪念堂 | | 《赤道艺术研究会本月底举行美术展览》(《南洋商报》1966年10月9日) |
| 第六届 | 1968年10月25-27日(三天) | 中华总商会/会所 | | 《赤道艺术研究会庆十二周年订廿五日举行美术展览会》(《南洋商报》1968年10月14日) |

Art, His True Passion

Chua Mia Tee had no interest in politics and his true passion was in art. In secondary two, he decided to quit school to enroll in NAFA to receive proper guidance in art education and develop himself. According to Chua, he achieved good results in the cultural lessons in Chung Cheng High School, but his heart was already not in his studies. He had only one single thought, which was to learn to paint. Consequently, he made his own personal decision to enroll himself in NAFA. As a boarder, he lodged in the school and devoted all his days and nights to painting.

Chua Mia Tee said that life was simple back then and his thoughts were as simple as his life. As a boarder at NAFA, he lived in the school and had all his meals on campus. Every morning he would go to the art studio and paint. One could often find him painting in the studio even before other students arrived for their first class of the day at 9am. During their morning break, when the rest of the class enjoyed their coffee and interacted with each other, Chua Mia Tee would be in front of his easel. In those days, NAFA had both a morning and an afternoon session. When the students in the afternoon session took the place of those in the morning session, Chua Mia Tee would still be painting. During his time in NAFA, Chua spent twice or thrice the amount of time and effort in learning and practising his craft as compared to other students. He hardly left the studio and would only stop and rest when the Principal's help called him to the dining table. Chua Mia Tee built a very strong foundation in this manner. His diligence and outstanding performance left a deep impression on Principal Lim Hak Tai, so much so that Lim hired Chua as a Western Art teacher for the afternoon sessions, even before Chua had completed his third year of studies at NAFA.

真正的爱好是艺术

蔡名智坦言，他对政治没有兴趣，他真正的爱好和追求是艺术。早在中二那年，他自主主张弃学进入南洋美专，就是希望通过正规的艺术教育和训练，在自己喜爱的绘画领域获得教益和成长。他说，他在中二的文化课成绩不错，但他已经无心向学，心里只有一个念头就是想去学画画，所以，他就一意孤行放弃中学教育进入南洋美专，并以寄宿的方式，晨昏日夜地埋头绘画。

蔡名智说，那时候生活很简单，想法也很简单，当时寄宿在南洋美专，吃住都在学校，每天睁开眼睛的第一件事就是钻进画室，起稿画画。每天早上九点钟上课，其他同学还没到校，他已经早早进入课室开始画画；早上茶点时间，人们聚集在一起喝咖啡、休息、聊天，他还在画画；美专上课分上、下午班，上午班同学回家了，下午班的另一批学生来上课，他还是在画画，如此一来，在美专求学期间，他比别人多学多练的时间超过两三倍之多，常常钻进画室就不出来，直到校长的女佣喊吃饭才停下来休息。蔡名智因此打下十分坚实深厚的基础，并且由于学习非常勤奋，有极突出表现，深得林学大先生赏识，三年级肄业时，他已被委任为下午班西洋画老师。

Chua Mia Tee stated that, even as he first started painting, he was very clear about his aspiration to “become a good painter”. During his boarding years in NAFA, an oil painting by Xu Beihong entitled *Portrait of Mr Gao Peize* influenced him greatly and inspired him to decide on pursuing Realism in his own art. Chua Mia Tee has always believed that Realism was the best way to represent an objective reality, as this approach allowed viewers to understand a painting instantly. There were two aspects to this understanding. An intuitive understanding referred to a judgement on whether a painting resembles what it is supposed to depict and whether the representation is correct; an intellectual understanding referred to how an observer critiques and judges a painting based on how the subject of the painting is treated, the theme of the painting, its subject matter, concept, composition and mode of expression, among other criteria. Thus, Realism allowed an artist to hold deep conversations with his viewers and to establish a resonance with them. For Chua, this journey of Realism “was not one whereby I had to feel my way forward in the dark blindly. It was one in which I had a clear goal which I worked towards, wholeheartedly and relentlessly, all the while hoping to better my craft.”

Many would intuitively comment, “Oh, you’ve really put in a lot of hard labour.” To that, Chua would always correct them with a smile, “It is not hard work. I derive joy from painting. When I paint, I don’t feel tired; the only thing I feel is joy, both spiritually and physically. This is especially so when I complete a painting. That sense of euphoria and bliss is difficult to put in words. I always feel so ecstatic, and so blessed!” Paraphrasing the words of Zhuangzi, “We are not fish, and therefore cannot experience the joy felt by fish.” Chua Mia Tee lives fully in the world of art, a world which he dove headlong into so many years ago. In the blink of an eye, six decades have passed, yet he is still as fully immersed in art now as he was in the days of his youth.

蔡名智说，他在学画之初就明确了“要成为一个好画家”的志向，早年寄宿在南洋美专，一幅徐悲鸿的油画作品《高沛泽老师的肖像》对他产生深刻影响，让他立志以写实作为努力的方向。他认为写实能够最大程度反映客观现实，观众一看就能懂得，直觉的懂得包括像或不像，对或不对的直觉判断，理性的懂得还包括对于作品题材处理、主题、内容、意境、构图、表现手法等的理解、品评和判断，因此可与观众进行深度交流和产生共鸣。这条写实的道路“并不是在黑暗中摸索着尝试，而是朝向明确的目标，全心全意投入，不断努力钻研。”

于是，人们很自然会说，哦，你是下了一番苦功的，那一定很辛苦吧。他总是笑着纠正说，“不辛苦，我是乐在其中。画画我完全不感到苦，只感到身心愉快。尤其当一幅作品完成，那份欣喜和快乐，简直难以用语言来表达。感觉自己太快乐！太幸福了！”子非鱼，焉知鱼之乐。蔡名智就沉浸在他所热衷追求的艺术世界，并且一直沉浸其中，一晃60多年过去了。

Important Milestones

Chua's works are numerous and his representative works manifold. As most were commissioned works or have already been sold, a complete catalogue-inventory as to the actual number of his works would be no easy feat. Chua said that when he was young, he could complete a painting very quickly. When the work was finished, people would heap praises on it and in his delight, he would give away the painting as a gift. Who knows how many such "gifts" were actually out there? Chua had no concept of the market then, and was simply overjoyed when someone admired his work, hence his frequent giving away of his paintings. A look back at his artistic career would find piece after piece of artwork born as the labour of his long art journey, each symbolising a milestone where he rose to a greater height.

Chua's most iconic oil painting from his early days, *Epic Poem of Malaya*, was first published on 14th August 1956 in the Chinese daily, the *Nanyang Siang Pau*. The 1950s and 1960s saw vigorous anti-colonial movements in Singapore and Malaya in which students from Chinese schools were the agents and participants. The British colonial government required compulsory military service but there were youths who felt that Singapore and Malaya did not belong to them and wanted to return to China to help build a new China. Some of them left without a backward glance or any notice, resulting in many emotional scenes at Clifford Pier, where desperate parents tried to keep their determined children from leaving.

On the other hand, youths who chose to stay and fight for self-rule and independence were conscientiously studying Malayan history, language and culture in order to establish a sense of rootedness. *Epic Poem of Malaya* (1955, p.48-49) was a product of that era. The painting depicts a group of young people at a picnic listening attentively to a young man. These youth were portrayed

艺术道路上的重要里程碑

蔡名智的作品很多，数量惊人，并且代表作也很多，因为很多作品都是委约创作，或已经卖出，想完整统计他的作品数量不是一件容易的事情，他说，年轻时出手动作很快，画画速度惊人，作品完成，旁边的人总是赞不绝口，他一高兴就把画送给别人，不知送出去多少张，那时候也没有市场概念，觉得有人欣赏，有人喜欢，已经很高兴了，所以送画是常有的事。回顾他的艺术生涯，是一个又一个作品的诞生，好像是不断攀登的阶梯，又像是漫长路上的一个个里程碑。

蔡名智早期最著名油画作品《马来亚史诗》最早公开发表在1956年8月14日的《南洋商报》。上世纪50至60年代，新马社会轰轰烈烈反殖民运动中，华校生是其中的推动者和参与者。当时英殖民地政府实行服役制度，年轻人中有人认为新加坡、马来亚不属于他们，要回中国参加新中国建设，他们中有些人选择义无反顾、不告而别，于是红灯码头时常上演心急如焚的父母为阻拦去意已定的孩子，双方陷于情绪激动的告别一幕。

而留在新马的年轻人则为了争取自治和独立，努力学习马来亚历史、语言、文化等，建立扎根意识和本土观念。《马来亚史诗》(1955年)就是那个时代的作品。出现在画面上的是一群参加野餐会的年轻人，他们围坐在一起，神情专注地聆听一名充满激情的青年的朗诵，这群情绪激昂、全神贯注的年轻人，每一位形象鲜明、表情庄重、气息生动，画面上群体和个体，大背景和小细节的处理，使到画面充满剧情张力，观赏者也仿佛置身画中，情不自禁神情变得专注起来。作品是时代的印记，更有时代的声音，

in a passionate and attentive manner with serious expressions. The individual elements, the execution of the background as well as the attention to detail all contribute to this dramatic piece, drawing viewers into the scene, capturing their attention. The painting is a mark of its era and contains the voices then — one can almost hear the wind sweeping from the mountains and the waves roaring in the distance, thereby feeling the same passions burning in one's blood.

The painting was first publicly exhibited at the Chinese Chamber of Commerce, where there was an endless stream of visitors, many of whom viewed the painting more than once. What was interesting was that visitors could not resist waving away the fly on one of the listener's shoulders, not realising it was painted and not real. This bit of detail constitutes an interesting aspect of the painting.

National Language Class (1959, p.130-131) is another important work. In 1959, the People's Action Party took power and sought merger with Malaya. Malay language classes were common as there was a growing interest in learning the language. An educational board was established on Fort Canning Hill, and one of its duties was to provide Malay Language classes. The *Bahasa Kebangsaan* (National Language) classes reflected the eagerness of the masses to learn the language. *National Language Class* demonstrated a strong sense of the times in its depiction of a classroom scene of nine students learning Malay from a teacher. The teacher in the painting was modelled on Ali, an Indonesian who taught Malay at the Equator Art Society. At that time, there were indeed many who learnt Malay from Ali.

不仅有朗诵者的慷慨激昂，仿佛还听到山野刮来的风，远处海浪的轰鸣，让人热血沸腾，激动莫名。

作品最早的公开展出在中华总商会，每天来观赏画作的人络绎不绝，很多人看了不止一遍。有趣的是很多认真观画的观众都忍不住伸手要弹画面上落在年轻听众肩膀上的那只以假乱真的苍蝇，这个微妙的细节处理也成为这幅作品的一处“妙笔”。

《国语课》(National Language Class, 1959)是蔡名智的另一幅重要作品。1959年人民行动党上台，新加坡自治邦争取和马来亚合并，到处有马来文班，社会上开始流行学习马来语，福康宁山的戏剧中心成立教育局，重要工作之一就是开设马来文班，“巴哈沙，肯巴沙汉”(马来语，国语)，反映了当时民众学习马来语的热潮。《国语课》从主题到内容都有强烈时代感，描绘了九位学生向一位老师学习马来语的课堂情景，画面上的老师原型，就是当年在赤道艺术研究会教导马来语的印尼人阿里(Ali)，当时的确有不少人曾跟阿里学习马来语。



◀
Epic Poem of Malaya | 1955
Oil on canvas | 107 x 125.5 cm
Collection of National Gallery Singapore

The Equator Art Society held its second art exhibition at the Victoria Memorial Hall, where *National Language Class* occupied a prominent position. Then Minister for Culture, S Rajaratnam, was the Guest-of-Honour at the opening and expressed strong interest in the painting when he was invited, praising the piece when he finally saw it. Chua was greatly encouraged by the minister's compliments and immediately stated that he would give Rajaratnam the painting. Hence, it became part of the national collection.

Chua not only painted many iconic oil paintings back then, but also set up a magazine of political cartoons, where he published his own cartoons and propaganda posters that became a force leading the times. His creations also included wood carvings and sculptures, which trained his keen sense of observation, fast reaction, work speed, as well as deft but accurate techniques. In addition, he was invited to do sculptures for several prominent businessmen, politicians and public figures.

不久，赤道艺术研究会在维多利亚纪念堂举办第二届美展，《国语课》作为参展作品，放在展览现场的显要位置。画展开幕主宾是时任文化部长拉惹勒南（S.Rajaratnam），当他受邀出席画展，立刻对这幅作品产生浓厚兴趣，并当场给予高度评价和赞赏，蔡名智说他听了部长的赞赏和鼓励，深受鼓舞，当即表示赠送此画给拉惹勒南，于是，这幅画就作为赤道艺术研究会的赠品，后来成为国家美术馆的收藏。

蔡名智在那个时期不仅有今天堪称经典的多幅油画代表作，他同时也曾创办政治漫画《时代报》，亲自动手画漫画和宣传画，成为一股宣传力量，走在时代前头。此外他的创作还包括木刻、雕塑等，训练了他观察敏锐、反应迅速，创作速度快，手法迅速而准确的特点。后来他也受邀为许多国内外重要政商界人士、社会名流塑像。



Chua Mia Tee working on the plaster bust of Mr Soetopo Jananto, 1984.



▲
Bust of Mr Soetopo Jananto | 1984
Bronze | Ht 68 cm
Collection of the family of the late Mr Soetopo Jananto



▼
Bust of Mrs Soetopo Jananto | 1984
Bronze | Ht 68 cm
Collection of the family of the late Mrs Soetopo Jananto



Chua Mia Tee with bust of Tjioe Ji Nan in plaster before bronze casting, 1984.



▶
Bust of Tjioe Ji Nan | 1984
Bronze | 59 x 60 x 35 cm
Collection of the family of the late Tjioe Ji Nan

Chua's skilfulness and exemplary Realist techniques have won the affections of government and community leaders, allowing him to complete many iconic and influential pieces. Chua was invited to do sketches during a parliamentary session, where the solemn setting generally forbade even the scratching sounds of a pencil moving across a sheet of paper. Yet Chua was granted special permission to not only move around freely, but also to snap photos of the decorous members of parliament. The resulting dozens of sketches and multiple large-scale oil paintings are now in the collections of the Parliament House and some politicians.

蔡名智纯熟的写实风格和炉火纯青的写实技法幸运地受到政府及社会贤达的钟爱，完成了许多具有深远影响的重大题材创作。他曾受邀在国会开会现场进行写生，在这个庄严肃穆的地方，没有人敢有一丝一毫轻举妄动，连笔尖在纸上书写发出的细细簌簌的声音都是被禁止的，他却获得特别授权，不仅可以自由走动，还可以随时随地“咔嚓咔嚓”面对正襟危坐的议员们拍照，最终完成多达数十幅的素描以及多幅巨型油画作品，这些作品目前被国会大厦以及一些政要收藏。



Chua Mia Tee putting the finishing touches on his oil painting *Opening of the First Session of the Eighth Parliament, 1992*.

In addition, Chua was commissioned to design commemorative currency notes for Singapore's 25th anniversary and Golden Jubilee. He also completed large themed pieces for Ngee Ann Polytechnic, the Ministry of Labour (now the Ministry of Manpower), the National Trades Union Congress and other governmental departments. He has also painted portraits of Singapore presidents, prime ministers and ministers. Another prestigious event, the Singapore Businessman of the Year Award, jointly organised by DHL and *The Business Times*, is held annually in recognition of individuals who have contributed to the business community; a highlight of the awards ceremony is the presentation of an individual oil portrait to the awardee which is personally unveiled by the artist. The event is significant and driven by a strong sense of mission, hence establishing the stature of the artist.

People have always loved Chua's works. Apart from commissions, Chua also creates as he likes, yet almost all his creations are highly sought after by collectors and art lovers alike. The characters he paints are lively with delicate brush strokes and filled with warmth and gentleness. Even portraits of political figures, while solemn and dignified, are infused with an unaffected simplicity, drawing the viewer's attention and forming a favourable impression. This effect probably has much to do with Chua's upright and friendly personality.

A general observation of Chua's artistic career reveals that he is a skilful painter and a serious artist possessing theoretical depth. He was not only diligent in creating his art, but also in writing a large number of essays on art theory and criticism, accumulating and contributing much to theory and practice. From the year 2000, he took on a spiritualistic air, preferring to live a private life and spend more time on improving his artistic techniques in pursuit of excellence.

此外，他也受委为新加坡建国25周年、建国50周年设计纪念钞票，为新加坡义安理工学院、新加坡劳工部（现称人力部）以及新加坡职工总会等政府部门完成巨型主题作品，新加坡历届总统、总理以及多位部长都曾邀请他画肖像画，此外一项本地颇具标杆意义的“杰出商人奖”颁奖活动，是由DHL公司和《商业时报》联合举办，对有杰出社会贡献的企业家给予奖励，颁奖礼上一个隆重仪式就是由主办方赠送给得奖人一幅个人肖像油画，并由画家亲自揭幕，这项意义非凡，富有使命感的活动，奠定了画家的崇高社会地位。

一直以来，人们都非常喜欢他的作品，除了接受订单，他也根据自己的意愿进行创作，几乎他的所有作品都受到收藏家、艺术爱好者的追捧。他笔下的人物，笔触细腻，气息生动，栩栩如生，并且带着富有感情色彩的温暖柔和色调，即使是画一些著名政治人物的肖像，画面上除了庄重气势和令人肃然起敬的威仪，还有一种温和质朴的感觉，立刻吸引了观众的注意力，并且让人顿生好感，这很有可能跟画家性格中的正直、友善有关。

纵观蔡名智的艺术生涯，不难发现他是一位技法纯熟的画家，同时也是一位具有理论深度的严肃艺术家，他不仅勤于创作也写下大量艺术理论及评论文章，从实践到理论都颇有建树和积累，而在2000年后，他则表现出一副闲云野鹤的名士做派，不追名逐利，常深居简出，花更多时间在个人创作技巧方面提出更大挑战，到了精益求精程度。



▲
 Portrait of President Yusof Ishak | 1995
 Oil on canvas | 59 x 46 cm
 Collection of Monetary Authority of Singapore



Chua Mia Tee's oil painting of Singapore's first president, *Portrait of President Yusof Ishak* (1995), appears on the Singapore Portrait series of currency notes that was first launched on 9 September 1999.



Chua Mia Tee's illustration of various ethnic groups participating in a Chingay procession was used for the Ships series of currency notes on a \$2 denomination released in 1991.



Chua Mia Tee's sketch of Singapore's first Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew (top right) depicts the rousing gesture of Lee's raised arm with his rallying call of "Merdeka!" ("Independence" in Malay). This iconic image marks the historic moment in 1959 when Singapore achieved internal self-government and is a milestone in the country's journey to independence in 1965.

Chua's sketch is reproduced on this Singapore \$50 polymer note, as part of a set of six commemorative currency notes issued by the Monetary Authority to mark SG50 — Singapore's 50 years of nation-building — launched by PM Lee Hsien Loong on 18 August 2015.

Chua Mia Tee, Lee Boon Ngan and Dr Chua Yang at the unveiling of the SG50 Commemorative Note.

Chua Mia Tee's depiction of a multi-cultural nation was produced for the first numismatic note issued by the Monetary Authority of Singapore. His illustration appears on the folder as well as on the \$50 polymer note itself, which was launched on 24 July 1990 to commemorate Singapore's 25th year of independence.



▲ Singapore River | 1980
Oil on canvas | 60 x 90 cm
Private Collection



▲ Old Singapore Scene – Busy Trade of Singapore | 1976
Oil on canvas | 86 x 118 cm
Collection of National Gallery Singapore

Singapore Presidents and their
 Cabinets (I – V) | 1996
 Oil on canvas | 182 x 379 cm (5 panels)
 Commissioned by President Ong Teng Cheong
 Collection of The Istana Singapore



Chua Mia Tee with the
 works before installation.





▲
Benjamin Sheares Bridge — The Viaduct | 1981

Oil on canvas | 122 x 244 cm

Gift of the Artist

Collection of National Gallery Singapore



▲
Playing Chess | 1979

Oil on canvas | 69 x 81 cm

Collection of Singapore Press Holdings



▲
Tai-chi Practice at Community Centre | 1979

Oil on canvas | 81 x 94 cm

Gift of Times Publishing Limited
Collection of National Heritage Board

Young Balinese Dancers | 1992
Oil on canvas | 61 x 91 cm
Gift of Lee Choi Seng
Collection of Singapore Art Museum

