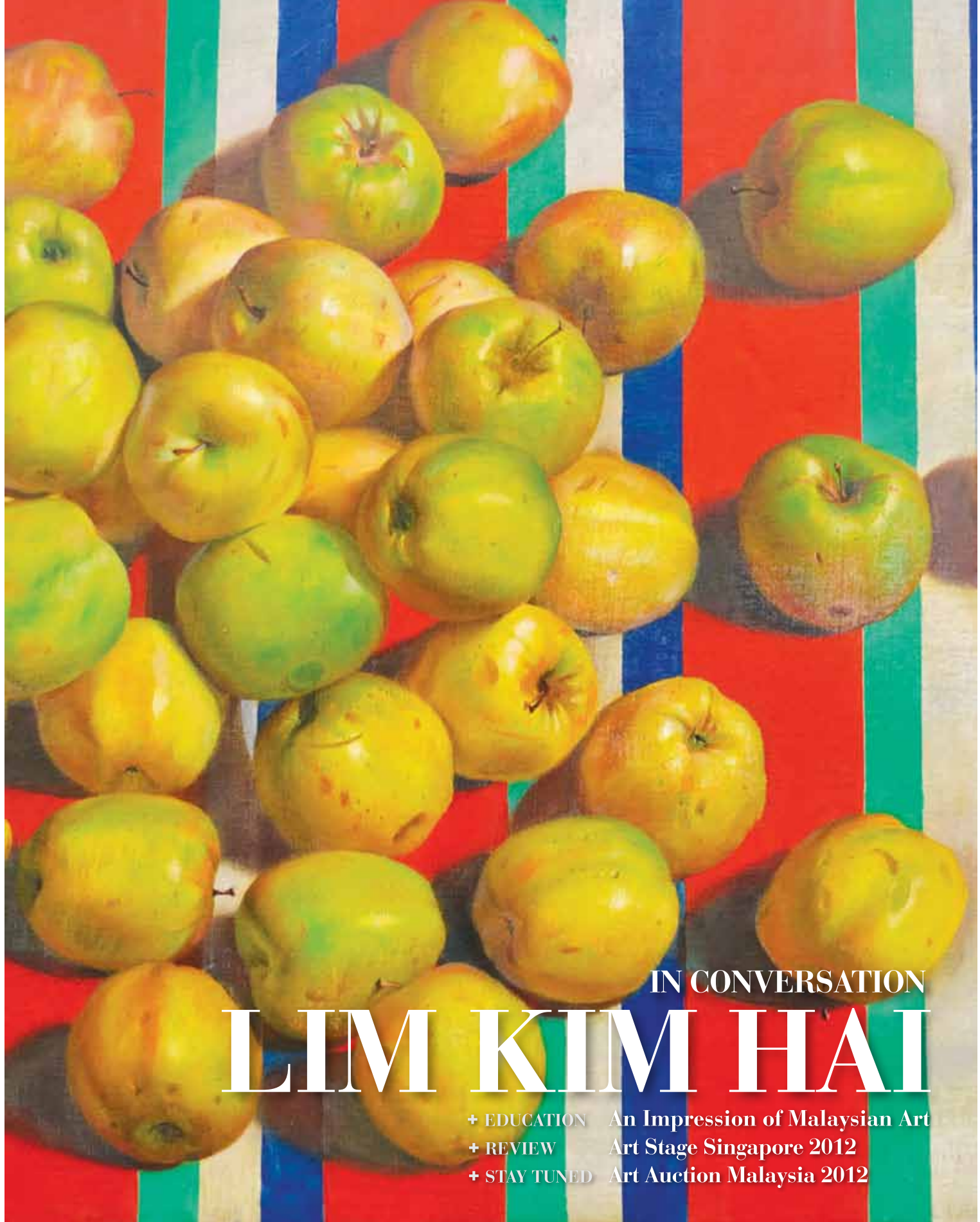


FEBRUARY - MARCH 2012

# HB NEWS

THE NEWSLETTER FROM HENRY BUTCHER ART AUCTIONEERS



IN CONVERSATION

## LIM KIM HAI

- + EDUCATION An Impression of Malaysian Art
- + REVIEW Art Stage Singapore 2012
- + STAY TUNED Art Auction Malaysia 2012





In light of the feature of Lim Kim Hai's work titled *Unity* (illustrated on cover of newsletter) in the forthcoming Art Auction Malaysia in May 2012, the HBArt team recently made a trip to Malacca to visit the artist at his studio, in the hopes of getting to know more about the ever intriguing omnipresent apples in his paintings. Here's our conversation with the artist:

**When was your first exposure to art?**

It was during my high school days at the Confusion Independent High School, where I joined the Art Club and all members will gather every weekend to sketch and draw. The art teacher is skillful in both Western painting and traditional Chinese ink.

**How about your education at Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA) in Singapore?**

We did lots of still life drawing. We did figure life drawing once in a while, though it was still a fairly conservative time and models were dressed during life drawing sessions.

**What made you decide to forgo everything and leave for Paris? Why Paris?**

I wanted to learn the traditional methodologies of painting and drawing. Paris was then the centre of classical and representational art and I knew I had to go there.

**Why the change from Impressionism to Realism?**

NAFA emphasised on Impressionism while in Paris my lecturer who was great in teaching Classicism inspired me to pursue it further: It wasn't until 1988 that I decided to challenge myself further, ultimately stepping into Realism, Hyperrealism and Surrealism that are technically demanding. It's all part of my journey in art of constant search for fresh and new approaches, techniques, and ideas.

**This is perhaps the most common question you get – Why apples?**

When I left art school in Paris, I couldn't afford to hire models. The readily available fruit of apples are cheap, enduring, and they come in many different types. Apple, the forbidden fruit, the fruit of knowledge, also personifies us human.

**How about the colours of the apples?**

That, for me, is not the main concern. The colours of the apples depend on the type of apples I use. There are more than 100 types of apples. Those in *Unity* are Golden apples, which are very rare in Malaysia. The

lighting on the apples and how they are painted also reflect the surrounding environment. My early works while I was in Paris show soft and dimly lit apples, and the sharp, saturated, and highly polished apples in my later works reflect the tropical weather here in Southeast Asia. It's a natural evolution where as an artist I'm influenced by my surroundings.

**Are your apples painted from photographs, memory, imagination or life?**

I only paint by looking at real apples. I get to touch and feel them physically, observe them from multiple angles, and arrange them in different configurations.

**Then do you eat your 'models'?**

Yes of course! They have helped me survived my days in Paris.

**Do you remember your first ever apple painting?**

(Flipped through the book) *Alignment I*, bought by a doctor from Hong Kong at my first solo in Paris. The exhibition went really well, with over 30 out of 40 works sold. Whereas my first ever coloured apples painting, titled *My First Coloured Apples*, is now with a Swiss collector.

**The ground which your apples are placed on slowly evolved over the years: from the conventional still life configuration of objects on white cloth, to abstract forms of various shapes and vibrant hues. Why so?**

An artist has to constantly challenge himself, whether it's technically, theoretically, or conceptually. My classical paintings of conventional view of fruits placed on tables are highly sought after in the galleries. But do artists do



what we are told to? Should we paint only what is sought after? In order to break out of the norm, I decided to transform the background to depict surreal landscapes – appropriating aerial view of colourful plantations and landscapes of the four seasoned terrain.

**What about the blue-green-red alternating bands in the work Unity?**

It was inspired by the alternating black-and-white piano keys, suggesting a visual rhythm that serves as metaphor for ups and downs in life.

**In 1995, your painting Women & Apples was auctioned in Christies. How did it go?**

Yes this painting is very special as it is one of my few paintings with a figure motif. I attended the auction and saw that many collectors were bidding for it! It was rumoured that the painting was bought by the owner of a Rolex shop in Ngee Ann City, Singapore where the auction was held.

**It is rumoured that the price of your paintings depends on the number of apples in the painting, how true is that?**

No no no... that's not true. The painting *Singular Compo* has only one apple, and was sold to a Arabian collector for more than RM20,000 many years ago. It is now worth a lot more.

**Do you foresee painting more apples in the near future?**

This connection I have with apples is a lifelong one and I think I will be painting them for the rest of my life. There is still so much to explore in apples. People say there is no creativity in my work as there has only been one subject matter. In fact it's not easy to paint apples well. It doesn't mean that today if you paint chickens, tomorrow you paint ducks you are innovative, and day after if you paint horses it's groundbreaking. This perception of innovation is wrong. An artist should constantly improve and explore a subject matter from all possible angles.

**What is your principal as an artist?**

I believe with every painting I create, there must be something fresh or new presented. I seek improvement from painting to painting, and I hope my next painting will always be better than my previous one. Art is an endless journey to search for perfection. I hope my paintings can remain in this world till the end of time as my legacy.

**COVER**

*Unity*, 1988, oil on canvas, 65cm x 81cm  
Estimate RM60,000 - RM80,000

# AN IMPRESSION OF MALAYSIAN ART

## A summary of Public Art Programme #1

**Establishment of NAG**

Formed in 1968 in Dewan Tunku Abdul Rahman, Jalan Ampang, the National Art Gallery was given it's own building in 1988, which housed retrospectives for Dato' Mohd. Hoessein Enas, Cheong Soo Pieng, Dato' Tay Hooi Keat, Dato' Ibrahim Hussein, Datuk Syed Ahmad Jamal and Abdul Latiff Mohidin.

**Pioneers**

Malaysian Art began heavily with paper works, for instance watercolor sceneries by Abdullah Ariff and Yong Mun Sen. There was strong Western influence on works on canvas including those by Dato' Mohd. Hoessein Enas and Lee Cheng Yong. Photography and Batik were explored by artists like Eric Peris, Ismail Hashim and Dato' Chuah Thean Teng.

**Frank Sullivan**

Art educator and art advocator who fell in love with Malaysian Art. He served as the secretary of the National Art Gallery in the late 1960s. Established Salon Malaysia and drafted proposals for UiTM with Datuk Syed Ahmad Jamal and Yeoh Jin Leng. He also discovered Dato' Mohd. Hoessein Enas in Penang, 1949.

**Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts**

Founded by Lim Hak Tai in Geylang, Singapore, 1938. Among the Nanyang pioneers were Chen Wen Hsi, Liu Kang, Cheong Soo Pieng and Chen Chong Swee. Parisian Georgette Chen and Lai Foong Mooi were also lecturers at the academy. Trained there were Malaysian Art Educators Chung Chen Sun, Cheah Yew Saik and Dato' Chuah Kooi Yong.

**Art Schools**

Earliest formal art school established locally by Datuk Syed Ahmad Jamal, Anthony Lau, Yeoh Jin Leng, Jolly Koh and Cheong Lai Tong was the Specialist Teacher's Training Institute. Among the others that were established since late 1960s were the Malaysian Institute of Art, Kuala Lumpur College of Art, UiTM Art Department, USM Art Department and the recent Saito and Dasein.

**Art Society**

Society of Chinese Artist Singapore / Salon Art Society (1935), Penang Chinese Art Club / Yin Yang Art Society (1936), Wednesday Art Group (1952), Penang Art Teachers council (1952), Penang Art



Above: Ph. Zanita Anuar (left), Director of Museum Innovation from the Museum Department Malaysia, and Mr. Ooi Kok Chuen (right), art journalist, speaking at the Public Art Programme on 7 January 2012.

Society (1953), Penang Art Council / Penang Art Club (1953), Selangor Art Society (1954), Majlis Kesenian Melayu / Angkatan Pelukis Semalaysia (1956), Thursday Art Group (1957), Angkatan Pelukis Kuala Lumpur (1977), Anak Alam (1977), Utara Group (1980), Commission of Asian Artist Association (1980), Malaysian Watercolor Association / Society (1982) Penang Watercolor Society (1989).

**Art Venues and Galleries**

Coffee houses acted as galleries in the early days, with the Australian and British High Commissions also holding regular art shows. Among the earliest galleries were The Art Gallery, Penang (1979), Rahime Harun Gallery (1983) and Galeri Citra (1987). Early artist galleries are Saujana Fine Art, Mun Sen Gallery and Oriental Art Gallery.

**Golden Sixties**

Most defining Malaysian Art moment with local celebrity artists returning from overseas like Dzulkifli Buyong, Datuk Ibrahim Hussein, Datuk Syed Ahmad Jamal, Dr. Jolly Koh, Cheong Lai Tong, Anthony Lau and Zulkifli Dahalan. Their artworks carry a blend of Malaysian culture meets West.

**Batik Art**

Dato' Chuah Thean Teng, the first to create art using batik in the early 1950s and Dato' Tay Mo Leong, who began painting with batik in the early 1960s, are the pioneers of Batik Art. Among the others who create art with batik are Khalil Ibrahim, Lee Kian Seng,

Fatimah Chik and Ismail Mat Hussin.

**Malaysian Chinese Art**

With prominent Chinese ink artists like Huang Yao, Chung Chen Sun, Lee Kah Yeow, Chuk Mor, Cheng Haw Chien, and Wong Nai Chin, Malaysian Chinese Art developed from traditional Chinese Art to be filled with diverse Malaysian identity as it is today with immense contribution from artist Tan Wei Sin in its early days.

**Photography**

Early contemporary photography artists, Eric Peris and Ismail Hashim would hand-tint their works, combining painterly and photography aesthetics. Social commentary artist Nirmala Dutt Shanmughalingham too incorporates photography into her work.

**Islamisation**

Islamisation program in 1982 began to instill Islamic values into everyday lives of artists who produced meditational works heavy on religion. Its influence evidently seen in Sharifah Fatimah's Khat Calligraphy, and works by Datuk Syed Ahmad Jamal, Ahmad Khalid Yusof and Nik Zainal Abidin.

**New Media**

Evolving from two to three dimensional, artists like Ismail Zain, Lee Kian Seng and Yeoh Jin Leng were the new media pioneers to put together installations and sculptures. These experimental mediums include digital collage, video art, and other miscellaneous new medium used in art creation.

**Institutional Roles**

Art awards played an important role to encourage art collection, art creation and art awareness in the 1990s. Among the more established awards are the Phillip Morris Art Award and Nokia Art Awards. Its role taken over by Malaysian Emerging Artist's Award and Malaysian Open held by House of Matahati and National Visual Art Gallery annually. Residency programs organised by House of Matahati, Hotel Penaga and Rimbun Dahan have discovered many young talents and cultivated cultural exchange among artists. Recent establishment of Art Expo Malaysia and Henry Butcher Art Auctioneers have propelled significant growth in the art industry.





## REVIEW

# ART STAGE SINGAPORE 2012

Government backed Art Stage Singapore fair with its tagline "We are Asia" was back for its second edition from 12th to 15th January 2012. Attracting 133 galleries from 90 countries with over 50 projects and special presentations, the fair certainly attempts to offer the best from around the Asia Pacific region all the while retaining its Southeast Asian identity.

Gallery 12 and Richard Koh Fine Art were the only participating Malaysian galleries, among the artists represented were Shooshie Sulaiman, Ismail Hashim, Ahmad Fuad Osman, Puah Chin Kok, Chang Yoong Chia and Wong Perng Fey. Ahmad Zakii Anwar and Wong Hoy Cheong were represented by Gajah Gallery, Singapore and Eslite Gallery, Taipei respectively.

Unlike last year, the hype surrounding visiting glamorous art world names was omitted in favour of low key but well established Asian artists such as Vasan Sitthikhet and Mani Sriwanichpoom representing Thailand, Geraldine Javier and Manuel Ocampo from the Philippines and curators Alia Swastika and Agung Jenong from Indonesia who all came to discuss key issues concerning art practice around the region. Big international gallery names such as White Cube, Lehman Maupin, Haunch of Venison, Ben Brown Fine Arts and Victoria Miro among others raised the profile of the fair and the quality felt better all in all. Tushar Jiwarajka of Mumbai's Volte Gallery even went so far as to comment that this art fair was "definitely going to grow from strength to strength". But despite the general consensus that a top quality fair such as Art



Left: Art Stage Singapore 2012's tagline 'We Are Asia'. Right: A photo shop called 'Sykt. Foto Goldie' from Gallery 12 run by Shooshie Sulaiman.



Stage is just what Singapore needs to land itself as a prime destination on the Art world's map, something was amiss...

On most days the fair ground just felt empty and quiet unlike our visit the previous year where there was a good crowd even on a normal day. One only had to look at the gallerists' faces to gauge the impact and success of the fair. Sure, numerous sales were reported with an upbeat optimism:

- Michael Schultz Gallery sold an "Abstraktes Bild (Abstract Painting)" by Gerhard Richter for US\$1.52 million (S\$2 million)
- Haunch of Venison sold a number of Gonkar Gyatso works including the "Dissected Buddha", for US\$200,000 (S\$260,000), as well as an undisclosed piece for US\$400,000 (S\$518,000)
- Gajah Gallery sold two paintings by I Nyoman Masriadi for US\$350,000 (S\$453,000)
- ESLITE Gallery sold a Wong Hoy Cheong work for US\$88,500 (S\$115,000) among others

Keeping in mind the lack of visitors, the sales and the general congregation of international art professionals,

all of which make for a very exciting connection point, the vibe were simply missing. Apart from the possibility that collectors were holding onto their purse strings in order to find a bargain in Indonesia, the Larasati-Borobudur auction held on the first day of Art Stage at the very same venue definitely diverted the cash flow of numerous collectors. And where were the rest of the buyers? They were attending Sotheby's Elephant Parade Auction also on the first day of the fair, the 12th and 14th of January which raised a total of USD 1,781,000.

On the plus side, Art Stage Singapore is being viewed as an accessible entry point into the Southeast Asian Art market as opposed to the uber-competitive Art Basel acquired Hong Kong Art Fair. The Singapore government has also taken herculean initiatives to launch the Goodman Arts Centre and Gillman Village - a colonial military barracks converted to house thirteen international (and one Singaporean) galleries, not to mention Singapore museums running high calibre exhibitions. So where does this leave Singapore's 'premier' fair, the local art scene and the Asian art market? Only time will tell.



YUSOF GHANI | Siri Tari VII, 1984, oil on canvas, 162.8cm x 236.5cm

## ART AUCTION MALAYSIA 2012

6 MAY 2012  
WHITE BOX, MAP

Penang Preview  
5 - 8 April 2012  
Galeri Seni Mutiara

Singapore Preview  
12 - 15 April 2012  
Helutrans Artspace

KL Full Viewing  
21 April - 5 May 2012  
White Box, MAP

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