



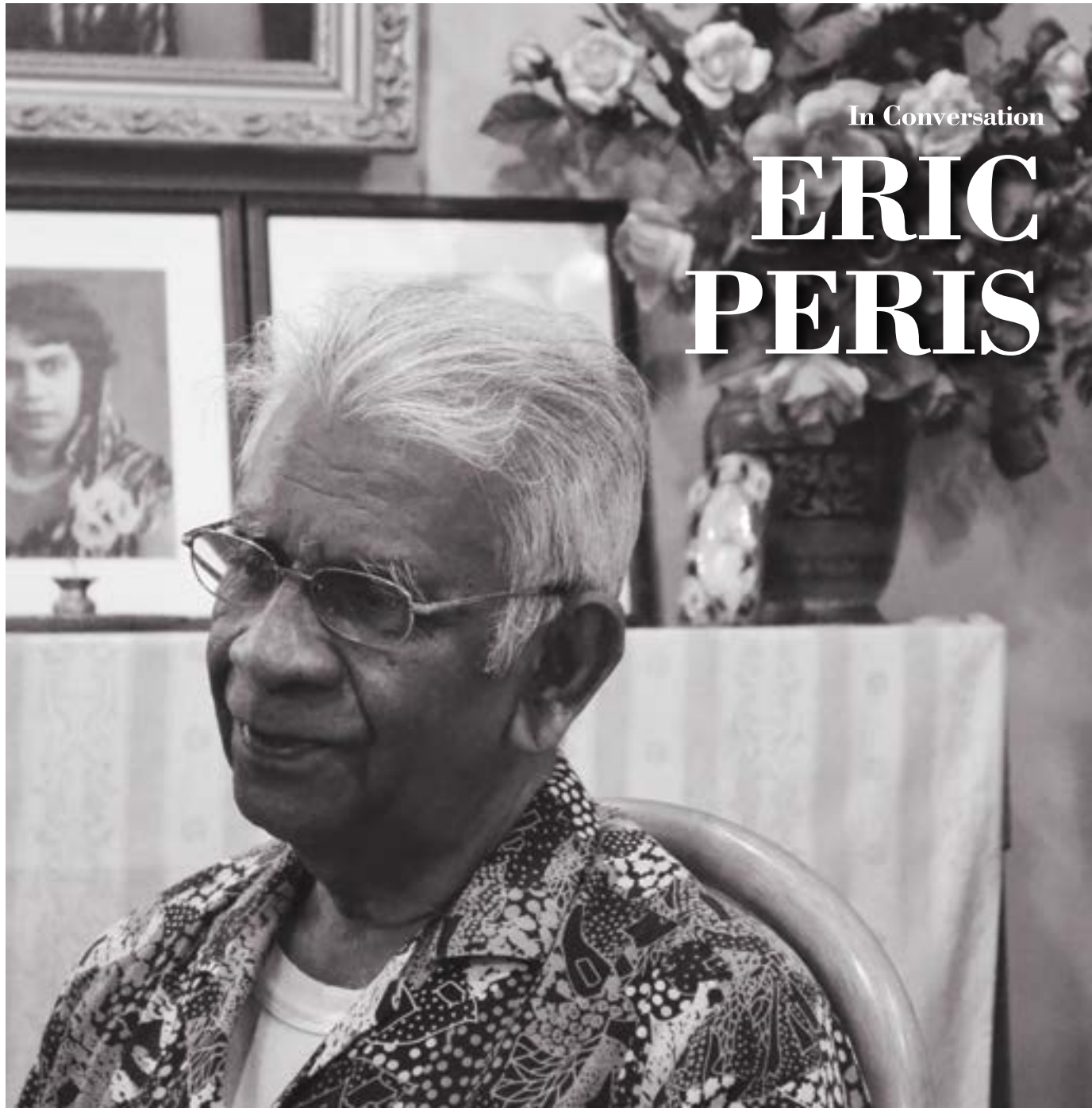
In Conversation

ERIC PERIS

+ REVIEW Art Stage Singapore 2013

+ HAPPENINGS Singapore Art Week 2013

+ STAY TUNED Henry Butcher Art Auction April 2013



The Henry Butcher Art Auctioneers' (HBArt) team recently had the pleasure of spending some time with one of Asia's finest photographers, Eric Peris, to talk about his thoughts on capturing pictures, his life experience, and Beca - a historically charming photograph taken in 1985 that comes with multiple layering of cultural and social connotations.

Eric Peris' first exposure in photography began by chance in 1960s when he was working at a magazine publication company in Singapore, and Eric's superior had thrown a challenge at him to capture photographs aside from writing. He then later joined The Straits Times as a photojournalist. At the time of the formation of Singapore, Eric decided to return to Malaysia and continued working at New Straits Times for the next 24 years until his retirement as a photo editor in 1994.

HBArt: What was your first exposure to photography?

Eric: I was first introduced to art by my father, O'Don Peris, who taught me the fundamentals of art including colour, form, composition and perspective. He would then leave me to explore on my own. I am a self-taught photographer; my interest in photography grew during my first job as a photojournalist with Fanfare magazine in Singapore. One thing to note is the differences in press photography and general photography. In press photography, you are the eyes of the society. Certain principles need to be maintained particularly social and human values. Other important principles in photography are respecting the cultural, traditional, and religious norms. We are rich in cultural diversity and it is the responsibility of each society to understand each other's cultural backgrounds. I apply these norms into my work and I am interested in the Asian tradition which is relevant to my background.

COVER Beca, 1985, silver gelatin print on fibre based paper, edition 1 of 5, 49cm x60cm, estimate RM5,000 - RM8,000



Through Thai Windows and Doorways, 1982
silver gelatin print on fibre based paper (study print)



Portrait of Defiance, 1972
digital print on Fuji photographic paper

HBArt: Why do you choose to capture images in monochrome?

Eric: When my father painted *Portrait of My Wife in Her Wedding Dress* in 1933, it was based on a black and white photo. I was amazed by the rendition of his colours. I was taught the importance of understanding colours by my father. My mother also painted. I read about colour theory and the Impressionists. Nature offers the most beautiful colours. In my work, I personally feel that by desaturating the image, viewers get to reconstruct the image with colours of their imagination.

HBArt: How do you decide on a theme?

Eric: I come from a Sinhalese background, my parents immigrated to Malaya from Sri Lanka in 1920. My faith is Buddhism and I practice detachment in my approach towards life, and even my work. For instance, if an image has been captured (either by myself or others), I will refrain from taking the same photograph again. It is important for me to constantly find new subjects, to keep things fresh and different. I appreciate the Asian culture – there is so much to learn from: the Ramayana history, the doctrines of Buddha, Rabindranath Tagore's and Lao Tzu's literatures, Japanese Haiku poetry... Reading is just as essential as travelling. I enjoy roaming the streets to explore the wonders of life, to see things differently. I do not drive so whenever I ride the train or the bus, I will always be on the look out. On the train especially, if I see something that intrigues me, I will take note of the kilometer indication, get off the next station, hail a taxi and go to that exact spot to explore. If the moment is not right, I will return at a different day. Sometimes, I would visit the same spot more than once.

HBArt: Tell us more about your work titled Beca which will be on offer at our next auction in April 2013.

Eric: *Beca* tells us about our cultural background. When I first encountered the beca, the bicycle, the old door and the wall after a long walkabout in Penang, instantaneously I recognise culture in front of me. All these archaic elements remind us of our history. In the past, beca and bicycle are luxurious modes of transportations for those who can afford them. It is interesting to know that beca peddlers at the time pay a daily rental of RM1. If they manage to make RM2, they will rest under a tree, or even go home like this particular peddler. This picture not only has an element of surprise, it truly captures the juxtaposition of time and place. If we revisit the lane today, the door may have been removed. There is a sense of nostalgia in it.

HBArt: What are the tools of your trade?

Eric: I work with both analogue and digital cameras. I believe in the importance of technology and how it helps improve our lives. In fact, I prefer the black and white effect from digital photography as the contrasting result is more appealing and not as stark. I am happy with a 16 by 20 inches sized print and I like to use semi gloss photographic paper. I keep record of all my negative films from the past and I am in the midst of having them scanned. I usually have an edition of 10 for each image that I print. Besides printing in monochrome, I have also experimented with hand-coloured technique. A few years ago, I have produced a number of works in colour using digital system in an exhibition titled *Etana Tiyanava*, or "It is There" in Sinhalese, in memory of

my late sister. Those are the very words by my sister who had encouraged me to keep looking whenever I am dissatisfied with the photographs I have captured.

HBArt: What are you working on right now?

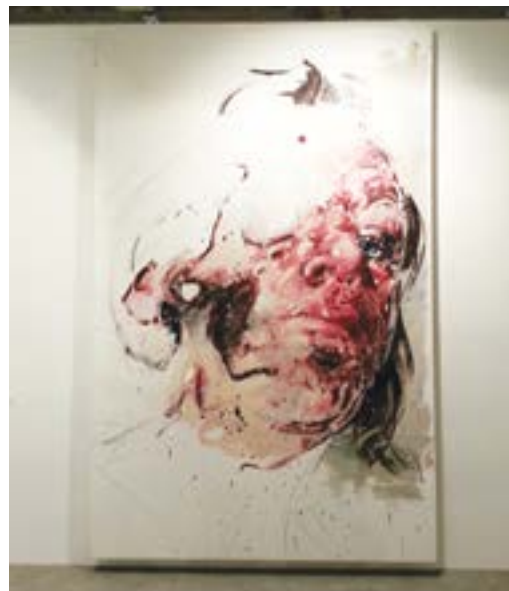
Eric: I am currently working on my upcoming exhibition in July which will showcase my perspective of forgotten Malaysian landscapes. These are photographs taken from various places locally, seen through my lens. To me, the exhibits of my works are meant to be shared with others. It gives me a rewarding experience to make good pictures. My exhibitions usually consist of a maximum of 18 photographs. That way, viewers can spend more time to appreciate each captured moment.

HBArt: How would you encourage younger photographers to pursue their ambition?

Eric: There are two rules that I always comply in photography, have faith and no regrets. One also needs to be inquisitive and abide by the norms mentioned earlier (respecting cultural, traditional, religious and social norms) and question yourself: "What am I doing and why?" "Have I been sincere with my work?" One also needs to be experimental and avoid taking the same photographs. I feel that anything can be a subject of interest: be it the floor or even windows, as long as there are elements of form, colour and composition. Read and walk more, be observant and cultivate your strength by believing in all things new. Ideas will never be exhausted. Just as what my sister once said, "it is there." ■



Clockwise from left: Art Stage VIP Vernissage, a monumental work on canvas by French artist Philippe Pasqua, Japanese artist Shinji Ohmaki's experimental installation work *Liminal Air - Space - Time* (2012).



Samsudin Wahab's *Spectacular* (2012) at Richard Koh Fine Art's booth



Close-up of Jake & Dinos Chapman's captivating sculpture

Another international gallery that promotes well-established masters such as Pablo Picasso, Joan Miro and Marc Chagall is Opera Gallery, which is currently present in ten major cities worldwide.

Some of the works that caught HBArt's attention was an installation piece by Japanese artist Shinji Ohmaki (Art Front Gallery, Tokyo) and Philippe Pasqua (France) of Zemack Contemporary Art based in Tel-Aviv.

Shinji's experimental work challenges the transitional state of space and time through effective mediums. Elements brought into his work such as air, light, shadow and the delicate undulating transparent fabric laid on the floor remind the viewers of the waves of the ocean. Shinji has achieved the ephemeral experience in a constructed circumstance in his installation piece entitled *Liminal Air - Space - Time* (2012).

Philippe Pasqua on the other hand captures the awkwardness of his viewers with the larger-than-life sized canvases of human portraits reminiscent of Jenny Saville's style of painting that depicts the realities of human flesh. Although beautifully painted, the viewer is left with a sense of discomfort due to its intimidating dimension, as well as the rawness of flesh depicted.

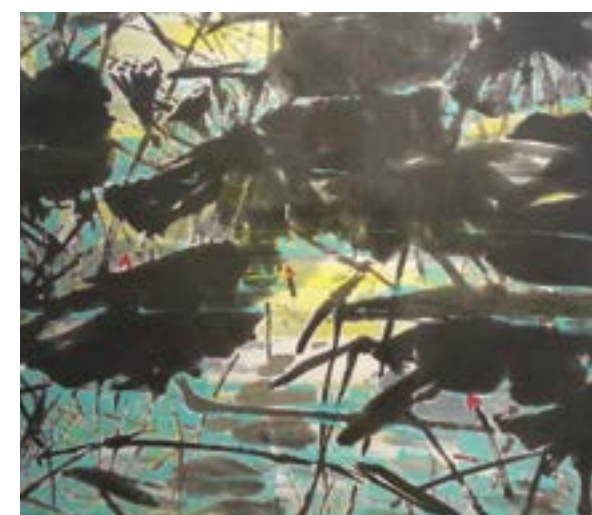
Richard Koh Fine Art, which has galleries in Kuala Lumpur and Singapore, represented Malaysian artists Nadiah Bamadhaj, Samsudin Wahab, Wong Perng Fey and Justin

Lim. With most of their works sold out at the fair, these young contemporary artists are the names to look out for in the near future for the stimulating works that they produce.

There was a special section on renowned Chinese ink painter Chen Wen Hsi by Museum of Art & Design (MAD) which featured a selection of his effortless Chinese ink paintings. Rumour had it some of the pieces on sale were labelled at as high as SGD 1.2 mill!

T.H.E.O. Arts Professionals - an art body based in Singapore that creates programmes to support visual art practitioners through sustainable art events within the public, corporate and education arenas with the aim to bring growth to the regional art ecosystems - represented homegrown artist Zulkifli Yusoff. The works exhibited were installation pieces *Rukunegara 2 "The Voice 1"* and *Rukunegara 2 "The Voice 4"* (2012).

Fair Director Lorenzo Rudolf commented after the fair: "Our key focus on Southeast Asia is absolutely right - we have created an internationally competitive platform to promote emerging and established artists from the region." ■



Works from Chen Wen Hsi's special feature section by Museum of Art & Design (MAD)

ART STAGE SINGAPORE 2013

The highly anticipated Art Stage Singapore drew the attention of many with the participation of 131 galleries from 25 countries. The five-day fair welcomed 450,000 visitors, which consist of first-time fairgoers, artists, collectors, curators and members of the media. A melting pot for the art industry in this region, Art Stage Singapore aims to be the leading international art fair in Asia focusing on Southeast Asian art.

One of the largest international showcases at the fair was the Indonesian Pavilion that was represented by 36 Indonesian artists. Indonesia continues to dominate the Southeast Asian market as exemplified in the results of the art auctions at all international

and regional auction houses selling Asian Art, where Indonesian Art came second after Chinese Art. However, an absence of Indonesian galleries representation is evident at this year's fair.

One of the artworks featured at the Indonesian Pavilion is Galam Zulkifli's large-scale piece entitled *History Series: The Illusion of Indonesian Visual Arts* - a 10 meter long painting painted in 8 layers to give different effects in various circumstances such as under normal lighting, UV lighting and in the dark. It is truly a magnificent craftsmanship that has challenged his observers visually.

The Henry Butcher Art Auctioneers'

(HBArt) team attended the VIP Vernissage on Wednesday 23 January 2013 and brought home valuable insights and information on various art activities pursued by major players within the art circle in this region.

One will come to face to face with one of the world's leading galleries for contemporary art, White Cube, that occupied the front booth facing the main entrance to the fair. With presence in 3 major cities - London, Hong Kong and Sao Paulo - White Cube represents works by highly acclaimed artists namely Jake & Dinos Chapman, Antony Gormley, Gilbert & George, Damien Hirst, Gary Hume, Rachel Kneebone and Marc Quinn, all of whose works were displayed at the fair.

SINGAPORE ART WEEK 22-27 JAN 2013



Zulkifli Yusoff's iconic installation *Pendita* showcased at *The Collectors' Show* at Singapore Art Museum

The week of Art Stage Singapore had attracted many art enthusiasts and visitors alike to attend other cultured happenings around the city-state.

Of the many private openings that took place during the week, the HBArt team was present at solo exhibition by French artist Fabienne Verdier at Art Plural Gallery. Officiated by Swiss art dealer Frédéric de Senarclens, who is also the gallery owner, the show explores the theme of abstract landscapes inspired by the artist's journey along the coastline of Norway. As Verdier describes her latest series, "most recently, I have been impelled to explore the genesis of living matter; the spontaneous emergence of structures, movements, folds, the natural dynamics of the birth of land forms. With my brush as my companion the flow of matter becomes a landscape, the canvas a physical map, a kind of geography of the spirit which brings us to perceive the hidden framework of the world." Interestingly, Verdier had studied painting, aesthetics, and philosophy at the Sichuan Fine Arts Institute, China with some of the great traditional masters including Master Huang Yuan. The solo show ends on the 9th of March 2013.

We were also invited to the launching of a much talked about show at Singapore Art Museum showcasing compelling

contemporary art from renowned private collections in Asia - The Collectors' Show - Weight of History. Iconic installation piece by Zulkifli entitled *Pendita* (2011) is on display here. The exhibition also features a spectrum of over 20 works that show how artists perceive, and re-conceive the multiple facets of history in the Asia-Pacific region.

Of course we took the opportunity to visit another new art venue which much hype surrounds - Gillman Barracks (GB). GB was once a stronghold to the First Battalion of the Middlesex Regiment now housing the latest arts cluster of 14 international galleries.

Our first stop was The Drawing Room, a gallery founded in Manila by director Cesar Villalon Jr. in 1998, which presented *Prototypes* - an exhibition by artist-collaborative husband and wife Alfredo and Isabel Aquilizan. The Australian-based Filipino artists addressed cultural issues of migration and the human sense of belonging through their works.

We then enjoyed our stroll to Block 47, to visit Equator Art Projects, a gallery set up by art connoisseur Deddy Irianto and co-directed by Tony Godfrey, Director of Research at Sotheby's Institute in London. The works on display were by Indonesian artists Arahmaiani, Dadang Christanto, Heri Dono, Arin Dwiartanto,

Eddie Hara, FX Harsono, M Irfan, J Ariadhiya Pramuhendra and Agus Suwage.

We then braved the mid-day sun to Mizuma Gallery which was located on the tip of the map, at Block 22. The Art of Cleto Munari displayed works by artist-designer Cleto Munari - in collaboration with leaders of the transavangarde movement: Mimmo Paladino, Sandro Chia, as well as world-known architects Alessandro Mendini and Marcello Morandini. The show highlighted the development of "disegnoitaliano" which featured unique handmade art furniture and objects, exploring liberal theories between modernism and post-modernism.

The lush landscape of GB did not hinder us from breaking a sweat. We took refuge at Michael Janssen Gallery to see a body of refreshing works by renowned American artists John Baldessari and Meg Cranston. *Keep it Simple. Keep it Fresh* features collaboration between the two artists and consist of a text by Baldessari, handwritten on a coloured canvas by Cranston.

The text is an excerpt from one of Baldessari's writings entitled *Advice to Young Artists* which states: Whatever you decide to do, remember to keep it simple, keep it fresh, and have some idea of what you are going to do. Baldessari



French artist Fabienne Verdier's solo exhibition at Art Plural Gallery

says, "I wrote the text in 1968 but I think it still holds true today. It has always been a touchstone for me – to keep it simple but with luck, of course, to create some profundity too. I stand by the text. It still seems like a good idea".

The colours determined by Cranston are based on Pantone Corporation's Spring-Summer 2013 fashion and home design industry. In her most recent series, she has applied the idea of reinvigorating colour theory by investigating the business of colour forecasting. In response to the grounds behind her thoughts on colour, Cranston says, "I have always been interested in why some colours seem to dominate at certain times. I have learned that the reason is that they are largely programmed – determined, if you will, by organised forces, namely the Pantone Corporation. Pantone releases a colour forecast every season that most manufacturers follow to determine the colours of their products. I used the same colours because I wanted the paintings to be realistic – to reflect the current conditions." The exhibition runs till 10th of March 2013.

Our walkabout ended at Sundaram Tagore Gallery, a space that focuses on the exchange of ideas between Western and non-Western



Gilman Barracks

cultures and is currently present in New York and Hong Kong. We were greeted by the soothing sound of traditional Balinese gamelan orchestrated by the conceptual sound installation artist, Taylor Kuffner. His installations comprise of an ensemble of handcrafted percussion instruments displayed inside and outside of the gallery, mechanically engineered to produce synchronised sounds. Kuffner had studied ancient Balinese music while living in Indonesia and he intends to preserve and reinterpret the Indonesian tradition in his series.

Part of the group exhibition *Home and the World*, other works by Fernando Botero, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Edward Burtynsky, Kim Joon, Nathan Slate Joseph, Annie Leibovitz, Vittorio Martino, Ricardo Mazal, Sohan Qadri, Sebastião Salgado, Hiroshi Senju and Susan Weil are also featured. The show ends on the 10th of March 2013.

The government of Singapore endeavours to develop the Renaissance City Project as part of their major cultural policy, initiated by the Advisory Council for Culture and the Arts in 1989. Its vision is "to develop distinctive arts and culture institutions and content, nurture a



Lee Waisler's *Kafka* (2012) and Taylor Kuffner's installation at Sundaram Tagore Gallery



Chang Fee Ming works featured at Larasati Auction, where *Mandalay* (left) broke world record for artist at auction achieving SGD103,700

dynamic arts and culture ecosystem, and cultivate loving audiences, supporters, patrons and partners." With an ambitious effort "to establish Singapore as a global arts city", there will soon be a Renaissance of the 21st century across the causeway.

Auction houses also took the opportunity to hold concurrent sales during the Singapore Art Week. Art collectors were spoilt for choice with all the pieces offered by 33 Auction, Borobudur Auction and Larasati Auctioneers.

33 Auction Modern and Contemporary Art Evening Sale on 25 January 2013 were well attended with the sale room packed with an enthusiastic crowd of over 250 people. Chen Wen Hsi's finger painting *Two Sparrows and Plum Blossoms* was sold for SGD141,600 against a presale estimate of SGD40,000 - 60,000 which set a world record price for a Wen Hsi's work on paper at auction achieved in Singapore.

Meanwhile, Borobudur Auction offered an eclectic mix of artworks by Indonesian pioneers like Arie Smit and Popo Iskandar, contemporary artists Erica Hestu Wahyuni, Takashi Murakami, Damien Hirst as well as Nanyang artists Chen Wen Hsi and Cheong Soo Pieng. The highest priced lot was hammered off at SGD707,600 - an oil painting by Theo Meier titled *Purifications of the Gods and Votive Offering by the Sea on Sanur Beach*.

Larasati Auctioneers had their sale at a new venue at Marina Bay Financial Centre on 26 January 2013 coinciding with its 10th year anniversary. Iconic watercolourist Chang Fee Ming's *Mandalay* (1993) exceeded all expectations with its final hammer price of SGD103,700, making it the highest record of Fee Ming's work to date at auction. ■



Lots on display at Borobudur Auction



TAN CHOON GHEE *Temple*, 1989, watercolour on paper, 52.5 x 62.5cm, estimate RM8,000 - 12,000

MALAYSIAN & SOUTHEAST ASIAN ART AUCTION

SUN 21 APRIL 2013, 1PM

**SIME DARBY CONVENTION CENTRE,
KUALA LUMPUR**

Ballroom 3, 1A, Jalan Bukit Kiara 1,
60000 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

PENANG PREVIEW

28 - 31 March 2013, 11am - 7pm

a2 Gallery

27 Lorong Bangkok,
10250 Penang, Malaysia.

SINGAPORE PREVIEW

4 - 7 April 2013, 11am - 7pm

Helutrans Artspace

39 Keppel Road #01-05, Tanjung Pagar
Distripark, Singapore 089065.

KUALA LUMPUR FULL VIEWING

11 - 20 April 2013, 11am - 7pm

White Box, MAP@Publika

Level G2-01, Block A5, Dutamas, 1 Jalan
Dutamas 1, 50480 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.