



artcommune
gallery

231 Bain Street Bras Basah Complex #03-39 Singapore 180231 | +65 63364240 | +65 9747 9046
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The Painting Speaks: Paintings by Tong Chin Sye and Poems by Tan Chee Lay

Exhibition Opening & Book Launch

artcommune is pleased to present *The Painting Speaks: Paintings by Tong Chin Sye and Poems by Tan Chee Lay* at The Arts House from 4 – 15 April 2018. Featuring 16 sets of ekphrastic Chinese poetry (accompanied by English translated text) by award-winning scholar, poet and educator Dr. Tan Chee Lay and over 20 paintings by veteran painter Tong Chin Sye, this exhibition brings together the creative outputs of 2 important local talents and provides new angles through which audience can connect meaningfully with both the visual and literary art forms.

A hardback publication sharing the same title will be launched during the exhibition opening on 6 April 2018. The book features a new collection of almost 40 poems by Dr. Tan Chee Lay, each composed in relation to a different painting by Tong Chin Sye (out of which 16 pairs have been selected for showcase). Both the exhibition and publication are supported by bilingual text – Chinese and English – in the hope of engaging members of the public from different backgrounds and walks of life.

The exhibition and book launch will be officially opened by Guest-of-Honour, Mr. Baey Yam Keng (Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth) on Friday, 6 April 2018, 7pm at The Arts House.

Following the opening and book launch, there will be a dialogue session, “Poetry in Painting” with Poet Dr. Tan Chee Lay, Artist Mr. Tong Chin Sye and Gallerist, Mr. Ho Sou Ping, from 7.45 – 8.30pm.

Dr. Tan Chee Lay has lived in Singapore, Taiwan and the UK, and has studied Chinese Literature, English Studies and Business Administration. He completed his doctorate in Oriental Studies (Chinese literature) at St John’s College, Cambridge University, specializing in Chinese poetry and exile poets. Dr. Tan was awarded the coveted Young Artist Award by the National Arts Council in 2004 and the Singapore Youth Award (Culture and the Arts), the highest accolade for youth, in 2006. A former tutor of the Chinese Language Elective Programme, he is currently an Associate Professor in Chinese in Nanyang Technological University (NTU), and is the Executive Director (Research & Development) of the Singapore Centre for Chinese Language, NTU. Dr. Tan has published and edited over 20 creative writing and academic books.

Tong Chin Sye (b. 1939, Singapore -) is a multi-media artist trained in both Western and Chinese art. His dynamic oeuvre includes watercolour, oil, Chinese ink and mixed media paintings. Tong was previously a part-time lecturer in Western Art at the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts and has participated in numerous local and overseas



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exhibitions over the years. He clinched the first prize in the Port of Singapore Authority Open Art Competition in 1987 and represented Singapore at the Flemish Watercolour Days held at Zaventem, Belgium in 1988. An avid traveler, Tong has journeyed across continents in his painterly quest for fresh scenes and cultural understanding. Be it a bustling town scene or a quiet backyard in a provincial village; labourers by the seaside or folks going about their daily routines, Tong's paintings absorb us through the curious, reflective lens of a traveler who explores the life and customs of others through the graininess of everyday life. The assiduous combination of East-West techniques also reflects his multifaceted art training.

The ekphrastic poetry by Dr. Tan Chee Lay in *The Painting Speaks* relates an interesting literary dimension to appreciating Tong Chin Sye's oil and mixed media paintings (completed mostly between the 1980s – 2012). Several paintings capture the street scenes and character of Old Singapore as experienced by Tong Chin Sye, before the rapid onslaught of urbanisation redefined the island. Dr. Tan Chee Lay, born in 1973, had frequented some of these old street scenes and landmarks when he was young. His personal cherished memories had undoubtedly shaped his interpretations of Tong Chin Sye's paintings, illuminating through his poetry the shared nostalgia and ineffaceable heritage behind the depicted scenes and activities. Also on showcase are Tong Chin Sye's paintings of portraits and overseas landscapes, similarly enriched by Dr. Tan Chee Lay's poetry, as well as two new oil paintings recently completed by the artist.

In collaboration with Poetry Festival Singapore, the following poetry-related activities will also take place during the exhibition:

**Multilingual Poetry Recital (by participating Poets in Chinese, English, Malay, Tamil):
7 April 2018, Saturday, 1.30 – 3pm**

Student Poetry Competition: 14 April 2018, Saturday, 1.30 – 3pm

Supported by:



Exhibition Opening & Book Launch: 6 April 2018 (Friday), 7pm

Guest-of-Honour: Mr. Baey Yam Keng, Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth

Dialogue Session "Poetry in Painting": 6 April 2018 (Friday), 7.45 – 8.30pm

Exhibition Period: 4 – 15 April 2018

Time: 10am – 10pm (daily)

Venue: Gallery One, The Arts House, 1 Old Parliament Lane, Singapore 179429



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Contact Information

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For media enquiries or high-resolution image requests, please contact:

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Here are the images to some of the exhibits.

* All paintings are by Tong Chin Sye and all poems are by Dr. Tan Chee Lay



Chinatown Trengganu Street, 1963, Oil on canvas, 94 x 137 cm

牛车刚过

彼时无光
叱喝声刚醒
牛车刚过
水洒了一地
菜篮未满
晚餐
还煮什么

The Oxcart Just Passed

*that time there was no light
the sound of yells had stirred
the oxcart had passed
water splashed upon the floor
the shopping basket wanting
that night for food
what were we to cook*



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Sam Swee Woman, 1985, Oil on canvas, 88 x 62 cm

红头巾

就坐不下来
闲不下
头顶的巾
注定劳困一世人
额纹深了
鬓角灰了
眼袋垂了
指肤皱了
就那红
未褪未浅未卸



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Red Headscarf

and so unable to sit

unable to rest

the scarf on the head

a generation destined to poverty

forehead wrinkles deepen

hair on temples whiten

bags beneath eyes sink

skin on fingers creases

only that red is yet to

pale or fade or offload



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Opera Show, 1994, Mixed media on canvas, 75 x 110 cm

一世人

一世人都被老去弯曲的十指牵扯

还有哪一只手还舞动得了我

让我发怒发狂任我飞舞

让我为我

还有太多的冤情未申太多的恩怨未报

就这么一世人

A Lifetime

a lifetime dragged by ten long-gone curled fingers

but which finger will be able to shift me

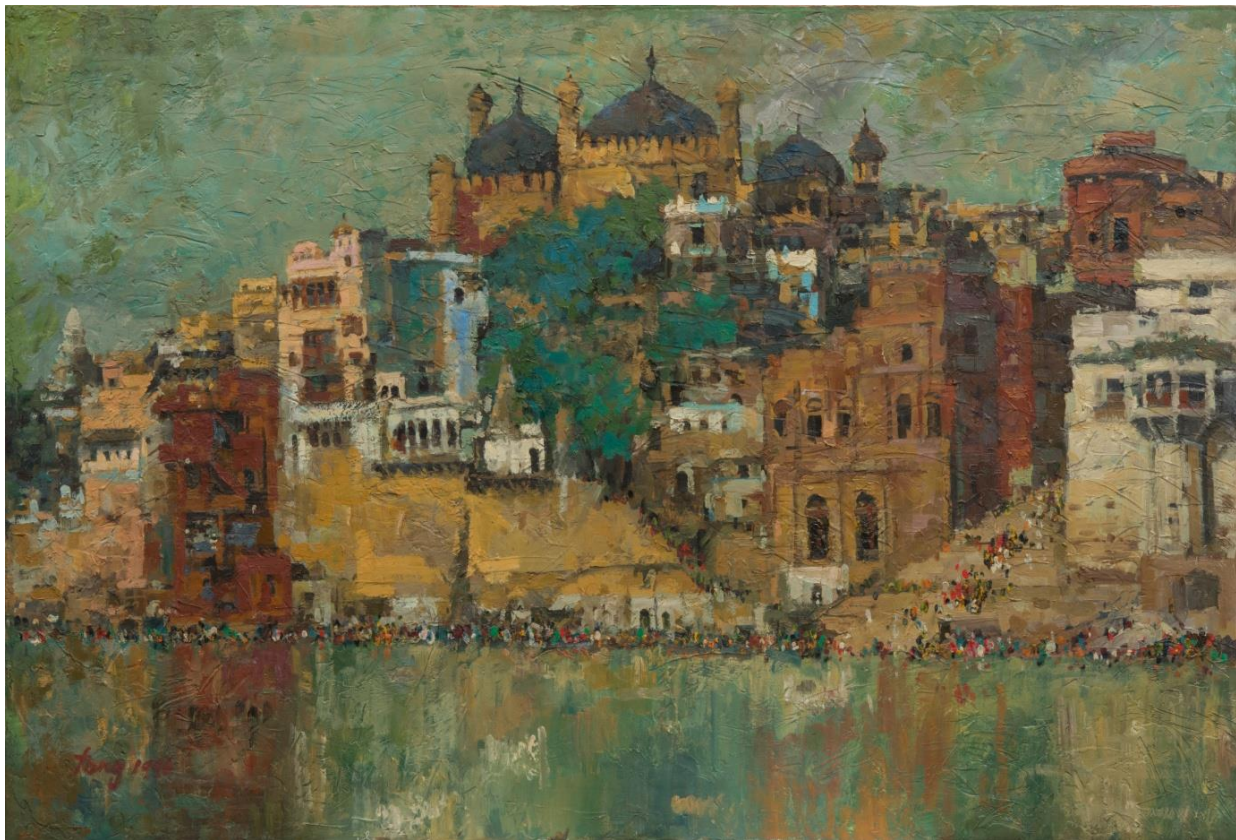
make me angry crazy let me flutter

let me be for me

and there are too many unresolved injustices

too many grievances unsettled

and so a lifetime like this



India Varanasi, 1996, Oil on canvas, 75 x 110 cm

恒河，沙数着

层叠日子

架构岁月

每一个瞬间加起来就成了永恒
如每一幢门户加起来就是历史
每一粒沙子加起来就成了黄色
砖砖石石嵌满了侵略者的足印
波波滔滔溶化了战乱的棱角
所有虔诚的眼睛都望向恒河

阳光下不住闪烁的
竟是时间的背影



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The Ganges, Counting Sand

the days pile up

the years form

each moment adds up to forever

just as the sum of every home's door is history

each grain of sand adds up to yellow

the bricks and rocks are stamped all over with invaders' footprints

the waves and torrents melt the battle's edges

all pious eyes look to the Ganges

what cannot but sparkle beneath the sun

is after all the outline of departing time



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Exhibition, 1989, Oil on canvas, 75 x 110 cm

画中画

在最保守的画框里

赤裸裸发狠

脱下头巾脱下纱丽

我要大刺刺地在画中看个够

Painting In A Painting

in the most conservative of frames

*be naked go wild
take off the headscarf and sari*

I am brash in the painting I want to see plenty



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Japanese Occupation War, 2017, Oil on canvas, 150 x 186 cm