

Lim Cheng Hoe (b. 1912, Amoy, China - d. 1979, Singapore) was a self-taught artist



Lim Cheng Hoe in his artistic environment

best known for his vibrant, atmospheric renditions of local landscapes in watercolour. He was a pioneering watercolourist and mentor to younger local watercolourists, and among the first of Singapore artists to capture the Malayan landscapes in painting.

Lim Cheng Hoe was born in Amoy but moved to Singapore at the age of 7. He cultivated a strong interest in art during his education at the Raffles Institution and received guidance under Sir Richard Walker, the then Art Superintendent of Singapore Schools. Impressed by his talent, Walker proposed to draft a reference letter for Lim to further his art education at the Royal College of Art in London. However, Lim declined the offer as the venture was beyond the means of his family. He eventually embarked on a stable profession at the Public Utilities Board.

Despite choosing a civil occupation, Lim remained an avid watercolourist and continued to receive art instructions from Walker over the weekends for several years, often embarking on plein-air painting trips with Walker and a few other like-minded colonial artists. Throughout this period, Lim devoted most of his free time to painting and furthering his techniques. With the outbreak of 2nd World War in 1940s, these outdoor painting trips came to a halt. After the war, Lim Cheng Hoe resumed his routine as a Sunday painter and the sessions gradually developed to include a growing handful of artists and amateurs from different backgrounds sharing a common passion for watercolour.

This informal group, which came to be known as the Sunday Group, was principally led by Lim Cheng Hoe and included artists like Chen Chong Swee, Chia Wai Hon, T. Y. Choy, Choy Weng Yang, Ong Chye Cho, Thomas Yeo, Gog Sing Hooi, Ong Kim Seng and Loy Chye Chuan. Among the Group's favourite haunts for painting were the Singapore River, Merdeka Bridge, Chinatown shophouses and Bedok Malay Kampongs. They were also fond of capturing kampongs on stilts as well as scenes of the Changi Beach during low tides. In 1969, Lim Cheng Hoe founded the Singapore Watercolour Society with Gog Sing Hooi, Khor Ean Ghee, Leng Joon Wong, Chen Chong Swee and eight other artists.

“Cheng Hoe was an ardent admirer of the Penang artist, Yong Mun Sen and the English academic painter, Russell Flint. He was enamoured of Mun Seng’s swift, bold brush strokes just as he admired Flint’s attention to details especially in his handling of human form. Perhaps the greatest influence on Cheng Hoe was the 19th century English master, J. M. W. Turner whose wizardry in creating atmospheric conditions suffused with magical lights enthralled him no end. Cheng Hoe’s ambition was to do a Turner all over again, using Singaporean subject-matter. He did not succeed in his ambition but in the process of trying he came up with something that was unique. The distillation of techniques garnered from Turner, Mun Sen and Russell Flint had produced in Cheng Hoe’s work a distinctive quality all his own.”

Chia Wai Hon, *Lim Cheng Hoe, Retrospective*,
National Museum, Singapore, 1986.



Yong Mun Sen (b. 1896, Kuching, Malaysia - d. 1962, Penang, Malaysia), *Figures by a Beach House*, 1946, Watercolour



Sir William Russell Flint (b. 1880, Edinburgh, UK - d. 1969 London, UK), *Moorland Pools*, Watercolour