Chua Ek Kay
Low, Sze Wee

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Chua Ek Kay: After the Rain.

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FOREWORD

This exhibition celebrates the achievements of one of Singapore’s leading ink practitioners, Chua Ek Kay. Chua Ek Kay: After the Rain aims to provide a comprehensive overview of Chua’s artistic development as well as pivotal milestones in his career. It features key works, ranging from 1975 to 2007, including some of his final works produced just before his untimely demise in 2008. This is the first time that such a comprehensive survey has been carried out and it has been made possible by a significant donation of his works by his family in 2010. Distinct from previous exhibitions on Chua’s art, which have tended to focus on individual, thematic series of works, this exhibition draws from a variety of sources including the national collection, the collection of the artist’s family, private collections as well as major institutional collections.

Chua Ek Kay’s significance in art in Singapore cannot be overstated. His approach of synthesising and bridging the distinctions between Chinese ink and Euro-American aesthetics resulted in a highly distinctive aesthetic and visual vocabulary. Chua’s approach strongly resonates with the spirit of the Nanyang artists – Singapore’s first modernist artists, who integrated Chinese traditional art forms with European traditions to depict their then new environments of Singapore and Southeast Asia, and whom Chua personally identified with. It is this spirit of innovation based on tradition and synthesis that underpins the significance of Chua’s work.

No single exhibition can hope to be truly complete or exhaustive. Chua had a prolific career, and there are many more pertinent areas for future research. These include his literary achievements as seen through his poems and calligraphy, as well as his own curatorial writings. Hence, we hope that future researchers will join the Gallery in furthering this research and in promoting remarkable artists like Chua who played critical roles in the development of the history of Singapore art. This exhibition demonstrates National Gallery Singapore’s mission to advance the research and scholarship of Singapore art through our exhibitions, in particular, of the works of significant artists who have made notable contributions to the development of art in Singapore.

This publication serves several purposes. Firstly, it documents the artist family’s generous donation to the national collection. It also provides an overview of Chua’s career through his key works and major thematic series. In addition, it contains newly commissioned essays, together with Chua’s last interview and Mrs Chua Ek Kay’s reminiscences; both of which have not been published before. Lastly, the catalogue also provides a detailed biographical timeline of the artist, produced in consultation with his family.

The exhibition title After the Rain is derived from the title of one of Chua’s paintings of water villages, completed in 2004. Chua had a clear affinity with water. Apart from having the character xi (meaning stream or river) in his name, he also often referred to watery reflections, lotus ponds, or rain in his paintings. As an exhibition title, After the Rain alludes to the potential for growth and renewal after adversity, which is a reflection of Chua’s artistic journey. It also reminds us that although Chua’s practice has come to an end, his paintings continue to have an afterlife, inspiring and captivating both present and future audiences.
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前言

蔡逸溪是新加坡顶尖的水墨画家之一。‘蔡逸溪：雨后’旨在一窥蔡逸溪的创作发展路径以及他艺术生涯中的重要里程碑，同时对他的卓越成就致敬。本展览展出他1975至2007年间的主要作品，包括他于2008年敌才草蛇之前的一些最后遗作。蔡逸溪的家人于2010年捐出他的大量作品，使得本馆有幸促成此展。过去的蔡逸溪作品展常以个别的、特定主题的画作系列为焦点，本展览的展品则来源较广，包括了国家典藏、一些大型机构的收藏、蔡逸溪的家人和其他私人收藏家的珍藏。

蔡逸溪之于新加坡美术的重要性、高至显。他那交融并超越中华水墨与欧美美学特色的画法，开创了一套极具鲜明特色的美学与视觉语汇。蔡逸溪的创作过程与南洋画家的精神有着强烈的共鸣。南洋画家是新加坡最早的一批现代主义画家，他们结合了中华传统艺术形式与欧洲的艺术传统，用以描绘自己所处的新环境（即新加坡与东南亚地区的环境），与蔡逸溪的个人创作理念和认同感不谋而合，而这种立足于传统上的创新精神，正是蔡逸溪的创作如此举足轻重的原因。

当然，任何展览都绝对无法做到真正圆满，毫无遗漏。蔡逸溪在创作上极为丰富多元，因此未来仍有很大的研究空间。包括他书法与文学上的成就，例如他的诗作和他的作的一些为了展览而撰的文字，我们希望将来研究员能够与国家美术馆携手研究，多注意蔡逸溪这样在新加坡美术发展史上扮演过角色的艺坛俊杰，传承他们的光辉。新加坡国家美术馆的使命一如本展所示，正是要通过展览，推动新加坡美术的研究，像蔡逸溪这样的重要画家，对我国美术的发展做出了非凡的贡献，自是我们所特别注重的。

本刊物的目的有几个：其一是记录蔡逸溪的家人对国家典藏的慷慨捐赠；其二是在蔡逸溪重要的作品和主题系列，一览其艺术生涯的全貌；其三是收录一些新的相关文章，连同蔡逸溪最后的访谈和蔡逸溪的回忆录（两部皆未发表过的文章），合刊为一册。我们也特别向画家的家人咨询，编写了他详细的生平年表，列于本刊中。

本展览名为‘雨后’，乃是借用蔡逸溪2004年完成的一幅水乡画作的名称。蔡逸溪与水之间，显然颇为有缘。除了姓名中有一个‘溪’字以外，他在自己的画中也经常将涉水画的倒影、荷塘或半雨水。作为展览的名称，‘雨后’暗示雨过天晴后茁壮生长及自我更新的潜能，足以反映蔡逸溪本身艺术历程的亮点。同时，它也提醒我们：虽然蔡逸溪的创作已随着他的辞世而画下了句号，他的画作却将长青不凋，持续给后世带来启发，散发魅力。
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History is an ocean for art. Tradition is water. In streams and mists, we build our return to the seas in due course. But still we carry hope to create our own oceans. From this we understand why artists persevere and plunge on to carve an artistic world of their own.

-- Essays