A DREAMER IN SEARCH OF HIS PATH

REMINISCENCES OF CHUA EK KAY'S LIFE

Ek Kay might not have experienced the kind of titanic upheavals that occur in extraordinary histories but nonetheless, he had weathered his fair share of ups and downs along the journey of life. And he had come to understand this as the true nature of life.

Born into a large family, Ek Kay, who was deeply rooted in traditional Chinese culture, realised at a young age that an eldest son like him would have to bear heavy responsibility. After graduating from high school, he decided to enter the workforce and began to experience the risks and challenges that a commercial society entailed. It greatly enriched his experience of life.

The hard knocks of life helped to strengthen Ek Kay's character. However, there were moments when he searched deep into his heart and felt lost as he struggled to come to terms with life. He once lamented to me, "What is the meaning of life? Do we give up our hopes and dreams, just to put food on the table? Is this the kind of mundane life that I will lead till I die?"

In his life, he experienced the ordinary and the extraordinary, the joy and the sorrow. But through it all, he remained true to his ideals, his dreams, and his passion. And in the end, he found that life, even in its most mundane moments, was worth living.
这一生，直到老死！难道我就这么活着？”他曾经伤感地告诉我。

不，逸溪有着年轻人的理想！无奈命运的安排，使他远离了梦想。他当时的处境，理想就是梦想，现实却是残酷的，当理想与现实起冲突的时候，逸溪为了他的家人，只好屈服于现实。

在一次偶然的机会，一位在美国半工半读的同学来信，告诉逸溪，他已经成为逸溪觅得一职，问他是否决定到美国去半工半读。那时，我们还没结婚。两人商量之后，决定效法美国的那些朋友，我们也一起去，找一份工作维持部分生活和学费。于是，我们决定放弃传统的婚礼，把费用省下来，当成去美国的旅费。我们充满着理想与憧憬，计划实现理想的第一步。

我第一次看到逸溪笑得那么灿烂！

可是，第二天早上，逸溪的脸上，愁容取代了笑容。“我当时心灰意冷，再三思考，弟弟还在求学，我一走，父亲的担子加重，况且他年纪也大了。”逸溪沮丧地对我说。的确，他的弟弟有些还在小学念书。传统的包袱和责任感再次将逸溪拉回了残酷的现实，理想再次成为了现实，他只能把深深地埋藏在心里。

工作，逸溪辛勤劳作过着平凡的生活。本来他就少开口的他，现在变得更加沉默寡言了。

逸溪喜爱绘画、文学和音乐。工作之余，他以阅读和听音乐自娱，也许，这种种的爱好，牵引他在后半生走上了艺术的道路。

在生活中，逸溪冲不出命运之网。然而在学习的过程中，特殊的际遇却不时眷顾着他。1975年，幸运之神开始使他招手，逸溪遇到了数位不吝施教的老师和画友。基于对艺术的一股热忱与爱好，逸溪认真、虚心地向师友学习，获益不少。记得逸溪刚开始画时，一下班回家，他便立刻拿起画笔，不停地画，不到深夜不停笔；第二天，天一亮，又见到他的身影在画案上，随后又匆匆忙忙赶着去上班。

自此以后，逸溪走上了传奇性的艺术道路。

在机缘巧合下，他认识了书法家柳明诚老师。

Surely not, as Ek Kay was a young man full of dreams! Unfortunately, given his circumstances at that time, his ambition remained an unattainable one. Reality is harsh. When his dreams clashed with reality, he chose to sacrifice the former for the sake of his family.

One day, Ek Kay's former classmate who had been studying while working part-time in the United States, wrote to say that he had secured a job for Ek Kay and asked if he would like to join him. At that time, we were yet to be married.

After some discussion, we decided to follow in his friend's footsteps. I would move there too with Ek Kay and find a job to help to defray part of the living expenses and school fees. We had also decided to do away with a traditional wedding, and to use the money instead to pay for our trip. We were full of hope and joy as we were about to take the first step towards realising our dream.

I had never seen Ek Kay smile so brilliantly before!

However, that smile vanished from his face the next day. He said dejectedly, "I could not sleep last night. I kept thinking about this matter. My younger siblings are still in school. If I go, it would mean a heavier burden on my dad. He is already an old man." Indeed, some of his younger siblings were still in primary school at that time. The burden and responsibility of family and tradition brought Ek Kay back to harsh reality once again. His ambition remained a dream, one that he could only bury deep in his heart.

He immersed himself in his work and led an ordinary life. A man of few words, he became even more withdrawn in those days.

Ek Kay loved art, literature and music. After work, he would unwind by reading and listening to music. Perhaps such hobbies eventually prompted him to embark on art as a career in the second half of his life.

Ek Kay might not have been able to free himself from the workings of fate, but in his process of learning, he was blessed with unique encounters instrumental to his development. In 1975, by a stroke of luck, Ek Kay met several art teachers and fellow painters who were willing to teach and share all that they knew with him. His passion for art spurred him on, as he earnestly and humbly sought to learn from them. He gained tremendously from his experiences with them. In those days when he first started to learn to paint, he would pick up his brushes upon reaching home after work and refuse to set them down till late at night. At dawn the next day, he would continue with his art before he had to rush off to work.

From then on, Ek Kay embarked upon his extraordinary path of art-making. One day, by sheer coincidence, he became acquainted with Mr Liu Ming Chen, a calligrapher.

It was a Saturday afternoon, when Ek Kay and I were shopping in a local mall. An antique shop had caught Ek Kay's attention, and we walked in to browse. Before long, the shop owner, Mr Liu Ming Chen, struck up a conversation with Ek Kay.

“You are interested in calligraphy too? Come, write a few characters and let me have a look at them.”
“When I was young, my father taught me calligraphy and wanted me to practise it every day,” Ek Kay told Mr Liu as he picked up a brush and began writing some characters. Mr Liu nodded as he looked at the finished work, saying, “You should pick it up again. Come here every Saturday afternoon and I will teach you.”

Mr Liu was a forthright and sincere person whose manner resembled one of the literati rather than a businessman. We found out later that he was a retired teacher.

For more than a year, Ek Kay would go to his shop to practise calligraphy without fail every Saturday after work. He stopped only after Mr Liu migrated to the United States.

During these lessons, Ek Kay was taught the essence of calligraphy. Mr Liu would use the martial arts as metaphors for various calligraphic expressions, so as to help Ek Kay understand the vibrancy and vigour behind the different styles. He taught in a lively and interesting fashion that helped Ek Kay to understand his unique insights on calligraphy.

Calligraphy is a form of refined art. Ek Kay would practise and study it tirelessly. With a humble heart he studied under Mr Liu. In no time at all, he made rapid progress. He began to realise that calligraphy and painting share the same roots. The solid foundation he built in calligraphy was to benefit him tremendously when he embarked on Chinese ink painting later in life.

It was the artist Fan Chang Tien who introduced Ek Kay to Chinese ink painting. Ek Kay attended Fan’s classes at the Teo Ann Lian Ngee Seah and was taught in accordance to the principles of the Shanghai School of painting. A kind and affable gentleman, Fan was ever willing to nurture young talents even after his courses had come to an end.

Ek Kay was ecstatic when Fan told him, “Practise your art at home and bring the works to my house to show me.”

It was in this manner that Ek Kay continued to learn from Fan for the next few years.

Ek Kay devoted himself to the study of art. Though his work frequently left him exhausted, he would still read up on the subject or visit the Chung Hwa bookshop to study the paintings of the masters whenever he could spare the time. His passion and willpower motivated him to overcome his fatigue. In those days, he was a happy man, having found his purpose in life at last.

Upon the recommendation of Mr Fan, Ek Kay became a member of the Hwa Hun Art Society. The members of the Society were made up of Mr Fan’s students. There was a rapport among them, as they were like-minded in their approach towards art and shared the same training. Every weekend or public holiday, some would gather at our home. They would collaborate to create a painting, on which Ek Kay would then pen a colophon. On such occasions, laughter would fill the sitting room. Ek Kay was one of the latecomers to the group.

一个星期六下午，我与逸溪到一间购物中心购物。中心里一间古董店吸引了逸溪，我们便走了进去。很快，店主人柳明诚先生与逸溪攀谈起来。

“你也喜欢书法？来，你写几个字让我看看。”

“小时候，爸爸教我书法，他要我每天练习。”逸溪爽快地拿起毛笔写了几个字。柳先生看完后，点点头，说：“你可以学。好，每个星期六下午，你来这儿，我教你。”

这位柳先生是位性情中人。他不像商人，更像文人。原来，他是位退休教师。

逸溪每个星期六下班后都坚持去学习，直到柳老师移民美国为止，持续了一年多。

柳老师指导逸溪书法，对他讲解了书法的精髓所在。老师常以由武功的比喻书法字体的展现，引导逸溪体悟书法的灵活性与功力。老师教学生动，有趣。逸溪学到了柳先生对书法的独特见解。

书法是一门高层次的艺术，逸溪不懈地练习与探讨，并虚心向柳先生学习。逸溪的书法进步得很快。在学习书法的过程中，逸溪体验到书画同源的道理。而书法之用笔、结构、成篇的匠心，为他后来学习水墨画奠定了坚实的基础。

一个偶然的机遇，逸溪认识了画家范昌乾先生，开始步入习画的道路。逸溪在潮安联谊社向范老师学习海派水墨画。过了一段时间，绘画班圆满结业。

范老师为人和蔼可亲，乐于提携后进。他对逸溪说：“你在家里自己画，然后拿给我家让我看。” 逸溪欣喜不已，这样，一晃就是数年。

逸溪对学习绘画非常认真与投入。上班族繁忙的工作虽然常常把他累得精疲力竭，但只要一有时间，他便如饥似渴地阅读有关书籍，或到中华书局观赏名家作品，吸取养分。兴趣增添了疲劳，热忱驱着毅力，数年如一日。这时，逸溪的心情变得开朗起来，他似乎找到了人生目标。

爱好绘画，乐此不疲。逸溪经范老师介绍，参加了华翰书画研究会。
当时，画会里的会员都是范老师的学生。同门同派，做起事来比较有默契。每逢周末或假期，一些会员常常在我们家里，大家一起作画。然后由逸溪题目。乐此不疲，欢乐之声充满整个客厅。许多会员当中，逸溪入画门较早。老师见她勤于向大家请教，也很乐意并尽心指导，这使逸溪的绘画进步神速。

“哦，不，不，不，你进步得太快，都被你吸收过去了，没有了！” 会员周国培笑着，说他把老师教他的东西都传授给逸溪。画者陈绍易也常常指点逸溪。他们对逸溪，可说是亦师亦友。

以艺术为娱乐，快乐的时光在画中飞逝，然而，随着生活环境的变迁，多数朋友后来风流云散，各奔前程。留下那往过的欢乐岁月，常常引发我们的追忆。

中国水墨画特别之处，就是需要在画面上题写诗句，加盖印章。超学写不开书法。逸溪的书法原有基础，可以得心应手。可是，写诗还需要认真学习。

于是逸溪参加了新声诗社，学习作诗。他拜公教中学老师马宗宽先生为师。诗兴灵感第一次探访逸溪时，他作了古体诗数首，刊登在当时的《星洲日报》。

有一天，诗人兼书法家潘当先生，在当时的中华书局向他打听是谁是蔡逸溪。后来，潘当先生每个月星期天早上，到我们家来教逸溪作诗。逸溪之缘再次眷顾逸溪，逸溪的诗作水平与日俱增。

逸溪作品虽然曾即慢过逸溪，但好的习艺生涯，却一直围绕在他的身边。

正当逸溪沉浸在艺术带给他的快乐和满足感的当儿，现实再次打击他。

1985年，经济不景气冲击新加坡，逸溪工作的公司面临困境。何去何从，一直困扰着他这时，香港的外甥刚要离开公司出来创业。他从事塑料花出入境生意，希望逸溪能够加入以扩充资金。于是，逸溪变卖了车子，掏出仅有的一些积蓄，转到香港发展。新的环境以

However, he was an avid learner and would often ask the others for advice and guidance. This helped Ek Kay to make great strides in art over time.

“Oh my goodness! You have improved so quickly that I have nothing left to teach you!” Wang Guobo, a fellow member, once said in jest. He had passed on whatever he had learnt from the teacher to Ek Kay, who also benefited from the guidance of fellow artists Tan Siow Aik and Wong Pik Wan. To Ek Kay, these friends were also his teachers.

Art was something Ek Kay truly relished, and time seemed to fly quickly as he spent hours honing his skills. However, due to changing circumstances, his friends left the society one after another to pursue their own goals in life. We often recall those happy times with much fondness.

A unique feature of Chinese ink painting is the integration of calligraphic inscriptions and seals with the actual painting itself. In order to pen a colophon or poem, it is necessary for the artist to acquire a certain level of proficiency in calligraphy as well as poetry writing. Ek Kay was already trained in calligraphy but he would have needed to work on his poetry.

To this end Ek Kay joined the Xin Sheng Poets Society and studied poetry under Mr Bay Chong Hiang, a teacher from Catholic High School. When inspiration struck for the first time, he composed several classical poems, which were eventually published in the Sin Chew Jit Poh, a now-defunct Chinese newspaper.

One day, the eminent poet and calligrapher Pan Shou visited Chung Hwa Book Company and enquired who Ek Kay was. Later, Pan Shou would come to our house and instruct Ek Kay in the art of poetry every Sunday morning. Once again, luck was in his favour, and Ek Kay’s poetry skills improved rapidly. Although fate was not always kind to Ek Kay, good learning opportunities had never failed to come his way.

Ek Kay’s learning path had always been extremely smooth and often aided by good teachers and kind friends. Such acquaintances often go a long way in inspiring and guiding apprentices of art.

Just as Ek Kay was immersed in the sense of satisfaction and joy that art was bringing him, reality dealt him yet another blow.

The year was 1985 and Singapore was badly affected by the worldwide economic recession. The company that Ek Kay was working for was in dire straits. The uncertainty of his immediate future troubled him. At that time, his nephew from Hong Kong was about to leave his job to start his own business in importing and exporting plastic flowers. He hoped that Ek Kay could join him and invest in his new company. And so Ek Kay sold his car, withdrew his savings and left for Hong Kong. The new environment and uncertain future were challenges he had to cope with. He did not have a flair for business, and his career in Hong Kong was not smooth sailing. Unavoidably, he was often troubled. This continued for more than a year before he decided to return to Singapore after a group of friends persuaded him to do so.
Once he returned home, the first thing he had to do was to find means to make a living. A group of friends rallied around him, providing him with much needed support and encouragement and arranged for him to teach Chinese ink painting and calligraphy part-time at the National University of Singapore (NUS) Department of Extramural Studies. At his friends’ encouragement, particularly that of Mr Lim Xianxiong, Ah Xi and Mr Huang Jianbang, who was then head of the Department of Extramural Studies, Ek Kay decided to make a change in his career path. “I want to become a professional artist and use a year’s time to prepare for an art exhibition. If this first exhibition is successful, and my works are recognised by the art world, I will continue with my dream career. Can you give me a year’s time?” Ek Kay asked.

Frankly speaking, I have loved painting and art since young and I know that this is a difficult path to embark on. But as Ek Kay was a quiet person by nature with a vivid imagination, I felt that a career in art would certainly suit him. Anyway, the “trial period” was only one year, so despite some initial hesitation on my part, I decided in the end to give him my full support.

While preparing for the exhibition, finding the means to make a living was of the utmost importance. At that time, Ek Kay had no other choice except to teach for a fee. And for a relatively unknown artist like him, it was very tough in the beginning. Fortunately, the head of the NUS Department of Extramural Studies arranged for Ek Kay to teach two classes each week. Classes were held at our house so that we could save on venue rental. In those days, his income was barely enough for basic subsistence. Ek Kay had his first taste of the struggles and difficulties that an artist would face. But Ek Kay would console himself by saying, “The happiest thing in life is to pursue a career of your interest.”

Right about that time, our son Zheng Nan was born. That brought a lot of joy into our lives. Although we now had a heavier financial burden, the child became Ek Kay’s motivation to pursue his dreams. He was striving for the sake of his family and his dreams and he began to feel a true sense of self worth. Ek Kay was already 39 years of age at that time.

In 1988, he held his first solo exhibition at the exhibition hall on the second floor of the Chinese Chamber of Commerce. It was organised by the NUS Department of Extramural Studies. Notwithstanding that it was the first solo show of an unknown artist, it was considered a fairly successful endeavour. Undoubtedly, it greatly boosted Ek Kay’s confidence in his artistic career.

The subjects of Ek Kay’s works included old street scenes, and he also dabbled in traditional genres of flower-and-bird painting and calligraphy. His old street scenes, painted with contrasting dark and light blotches of ink, captured the elegant charm of Chinese painting whilst rendering the works in an innovative manner. He also applied calligraphic strokes in delineating the outlines of subjects as well as old street scenes. By marking the surface with the brush and ink, he had wanted to highlight the traditional characteristics unique to Chinese ink painting. However, his bold use of new subject matter and a new style was criticised by traditionalists of ink painting, who questioned, “Is this really Chinese painting?”

及未卜的前途，煎熬着逸溪，心情忐忑，在所难免。这样前后有一年多时间。毕竟，逸溪不是商业人才，在香港的事业并不一帆风顺。终于，在一群朋友的怂恿下，他返回新加坡。

回来后的第一件事，他必须解决生活问题。朋友鼓励并安排他到国大校外进修系兼任教职，教授中国水墨画与书法。朋友的热诚，尤其是林宪雄先生、阿喜及当时校外进修系主任黄建邦先生等人的支持与鼓励，逸溪决定改弦更张。从“我想成为专业画家，准备好一年的时间筹备画展。如果第一次画展成功，作品受艺术界肯定，我便按照我的理想走。你能给我一年的时间吗？”逸溪问我。

说实在的，我自小喜欢绘画，喜欢艺术，而且深知这条路充满荆棘，不容易走。不过我想，逸溪个性沉静，想象力丰富，的确适合搞艺术。反正，只是试探期，我虽然有所犹豫，但最后还是决定支持他。

筹备画展期间，解决生活问题就是燃眉之急。当时，除了授课收费，别无他法。由于缺乏知名度，教导学生，开始时并不容易。幸亏当时国大校外进修系主任安排逸溪，每星期授课两班。我们的住所，可以充当课室，让学生画画，省下一笔租金。当时收入只够糊口。逸溪初尝画家的艰苦。“人的一生能从事自己喜欢的工作是最幸福的。”逸溪总是这样安慰自己。

这时，儿子政楠出世，为我们增添了不少生活乐趣。虽然，生活负担加重，但孩子却成了逸溪追求理想的酵素和推动力。逸溪开始为自己在，为理想而奋斗，开始真正感觉到自我存在的价值。这时候，逸溪已经39岁了。

1988年，逸溪第一次个人画展在中华总商会二楼展览厅举行，由新加坡国大校外进修系主办。一个没有任何知名度的画家举办第一次个展，以当时的情况，算是相当圆满。无可否认，它为逸溪艺术生涯注入了一支强心针。

逸溪的作品以旧街景、花鸟和书法为题材。其中旧街景已略立新意，由浓淡墨墨交融而成，呈现雅致的墨韵；又运用书法的笔意勾勒物体及旧街景的架构，让笔墨贯彻画面，求体现中国水墨画固有的传统特色。逸溪大胆地采用新题材、新风格，却因此招惹了一些尊崇传统风格水墨书画者的批评与指责：“这是中国画吗？”
当逸溪正满怀壮志要成为全职画家时，此等评语的确戳伤了他的人格。他颇感迷惑，绘画热忱陷入谷底。这一阵子的折腾，让逸溪反思。他回溯八大山人、潘天寿和刘海粟等人的画作，他认为他们独创一格，背离旧有的面貌与风格，当时的画坛又如何看待它们？

逸溪再三思考，认为中国水墨画发展到今天，各家各派画系的技术已发挥至登峰造极、炉火纯青的地步，成绩斐然。身为现代人，如果仅仅在绘画讲究上求进步，已经难以超越古人；历代历代的画家之所以能够各领风骚，百花争艳，除了绘画技巧的创新之外，更在于各个地域环境各异，各个时代传世相殊，加上画家本身修养和思想观念的不同，对艺术的理解不同；所以一位画家要想将自己的艺术上的成功，既要有善于继承传统的长处，又不能过于大胆独创，同中求异。有鉴于此，他坚信画家应该在传统的基础上，寻求突破，也就是继承传统水墨画的笔墨技法，表达新的意象，使作品富有时代感，符合现代人的思想，创立艺术家独有的个性风格。这个理论支撑着逸溪，他决定摆脱传统的枷锁，像新加坡第一代画家看齐，学习陈文希先生、钟文英先生等前辈，创立自己的水墨画体系。为了丰富自己水墨画的内涵，逸溪钻研其他画派的技法，增强创新的动力，以达至更高一层的收效。理念定立之后，逸溪迈开大步，信心满满，朝新加坡艺坛前进。

他挥洒笔墨，画出自己想画的东西，然而，挑战传统，却非易事。他又一次陷入孤独当中。

风吹星月动
浪击海涛深
山海此时寂
空亭坐五更
饮风吟啸壑
始信在沧浪
松子延秋落
泉流一静听
一觉荷香晚
溪塘荷叶香

这首诗反映逸溪当时的心境。他在诗中自我坚定信念：我不再背着太多的包袱，是新是旧，是东是西，已经不重要，什么是永恒？

艺术超越时空，创作来自生活，而绘画更是无界的言语。三千里水，能得一瓢就够了，夫复何求。1

Such comments, which certainly hurt him, came at a time when he was about to embark on his career as a full-time artist. Perplexed and confused, his passion for art waned and he began to ponder over certain issues. He had admired ink masters such as Bada Shanren, Pan Tianshou and Shi Tao for their unique artistic expressions that rebelled against conventional formats and styles. How did the art world assess them during their times? Ek Kay thought long and hard. He realised that Chinese ink painting had already reached an advanced stage of development, with the various schools of painting reaching the apogee of technical brilliance. As a person in modern times, Ek Kay felt that it would be almost impossible to surpass past masters in painting techniques even if one were to focus all efforts in this area. Past masters were able to establish themselves as artists with unique styles not only because of the innovations they made in painting techniques but also due to their ability to pass down their skills in different geographical environments and historic periods. In addition, these artists were able to offer individual interpretations of art, given their different backgrounds in education, cultural bearings, thinking and mindsets. If an artist wants to achieve success in art, he must know how to learn from the past. He must be bold enough to be innovative in his creations and yet seek common ground with tradition. Hence, Ek Kay firmly believed that the modern artist must strive for breakthroughs while making tradition his foundation. In other words, one should inherit the ink and brush techniques of traditional painting to create new imagery, and infuse one’s works with a sense of modernity that speaks to the minds of modern men. Ek Kay felt that in this way, an artist could create an original style. Inspired by this new vision, Ek Kay decided to free himself from the shackles of tradition. He began studying the works of Chen Wen Hsi, Cheong Soo Pieng and other first-generation Singapore artists in his quest to create his own ink and brush vocabulary. In order to enrich his style, Ek Kay began to review the techniques of other schools of painting. He had hoped that this would add to his innovative efforts and enhance the outcome of his endeavours. Once he established his vision, he began to strike confidently ahead, making inroads into the Singapore art scene.

He would wield his brush to paint the things he had wanted to paint. However, it was not easy to find a fellow artist who would appreciate his attempts at challenging tradition. Once again, he was engulfed by loneliness and despair.

The wind drives the moon and stars,
The waves dash the ocean tides.
With the mountain and the sea now so silent,
I sit in this empty gazebo till dawn is near.
Standing tall before the mountains and canyons,
Guiding down the wind,
I realise the waves of destiny I have to withstand.
Pine nuts ripen and fall in autumn.
In silence, one can hear the flowing stream.
Awake to the fragrance of the late lotus,
The pond is green with lotus leaves.

This poem captures Ek Kay’s thoughts and feelings at that time. He continued to express his resolve, “I shall not burden myself further. Be it new or old, East or West, it is now irrelevant. What is eternity? [The] arts transcend time and space.
Creations come from daily life. At infinity, painting is the message from within. From this vast ocean of arts, a dipper of water is more than what I long for.”

Taking the loneliness in his stride, Ek Kay applied himself diligently to his craft. In 1991, he won the United Overseas Bank Painting of the Year Award, and was the first from the Chinese ink painting category to do so. Winning the prize was undoubtedly a form of recognition for him and a great boost to his confidence. In the course of his practice and study of art, Ek Kay strongly felt that his knowledge of the subject was inadequate. This prompted him to enrol at the LASALLE-SIA College of the Arts to study Western painting. After graduating with an advanced diploma, he continued on the path of learning. He had recognised the importance of broadening his vision in art. In this age where art is also influenced by globalisation, elements in Western modern art are being assimilated into Chinese ink painting. Ek Kay strongly believed that in order to integrate Chinese and Western painting, he himself must have a deep understanding of Western painting and be able to absorb the essence of Western art. This conviction compelled him to leave behind whatever he had achieved thus far to pursue a Bachelor of Arts degree at the University of Tasmania, Australia. A month later, he returned to Singapore to receive the scholarship from the National Arts Council. The scholarship helped to relieve him of part of his financial strain while overseas, and would allow him to concentrate on his studies. Fortunately, Art Forum gallery was able to sell some of the works that Ek Kay deposited with them periodically. The income helped to meet his financial needs both at home and abroad, freeing him from worries that might have distracted him from his studies.

Ek Kay’s life was beset by countless challenges that washed into his life like the incessant waves of the great ocean. Strengthened by life’s adversities, he rode on the crests of these challenges moving closer to fulfilling his dreams.

After receiving his Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from the University of Tasmania, Australia, Ek Kay entered the University of Western Sydney to pursue his Master of Arts degree. The artistically vibrant environment of the university inspired him to explore Western modern art holistically, assimilating its elements into his practice and mastering the subject. He infused Chinese painting with the essence of Western modern art, and imbued his works with emotions and artistic vision to create something new. With Chinese culture as his compass, he hoped to create a brand new style of Chinese ink painting and to make it his signature. His strong adherence to Chinese culture was apparent even in the oil paintings produced during the time he spent in Australia which were evocative of an Eastern character (figs. 1 and 2).

Ek Kay returned home upon graduation in 1995, and was once again faced with a future of uncertainty. Before he left Singapore, his main source of income came from giving art lessons at home. Fortunately, most of his students resumed lessons with him after he returned.

Although prospects in his artistic career looked somewhat brighter when he returned home, he would still have needed to work hard if he wanted to attain his artistic ideals.

走出孤寂，逸溪默默耕耘。1991年，他获得大华银行主办的全国绘画比赛，第一个中国水墨画组第一名。这奖项对他是一个肯定，增强了他的信心。

在实践与钻研绘画过程中，逸溪深深感觉到他对艺术视野的狭隘，便进入本地拉萨尔艺术学院进修西洋画，完成高级文凭课程。毕业后，他仍然认为艺术无止境，眼界的开拓十分重要；同时，在当今艺术全球化的浪潮中，把西方现代艺术元素融入中国水墨画中，是一项重要的抉择。他坚信若要把中西画熔于一炉，本身必须深入了解西画，画西画的精髓加以吸收。于是，他乘兴追击，放下刚建立起来的一点成绩，毅然远渡澳洲的塔斯马尼亚，修读学士课程。一个月后，他回来领取国家艺术理事会颁发给他的奖学金。奖学金解决了他在国外的部分经济问题，可以专心求学。庆幸的是Art Forum画廊，时而卖出逸溪寄卖的画作，收入充作家庭和他在国外的一些经济来源，减少了他的一些后顾之忧。

逸溪的一生犹如生活在大海中，大风吹起的浪涛，一波又一波。生活的磨练，让他在波尖上轻轻越过，理想的期待却越来越接近。

逸溪最先获得塔斯马尼亚大学荣誉学士学位，再到悉尼大学完成硕士学位。期间，他身处艺术气息浓厚的大学环境，专心一致的探索西方现代艺术，吸收并加以融会贯通。他尝试把西方现代艺术元素注入中国画中，融合个人的情感和创作意念，加以创新。在东方文化的引领下，他希望全新的水墨画形成个人的风格。在澳求学期间，即使他所画的油画，也流露着强烈的东方情愫色彩。（图1和图2）

1995年逸溪毕业回国，出国前，他在家里收生授课的收入是主要的经济来源。还好，他一回国，大部分的学生又回来继续上课。

毕业后回来，艺术道路看似康庄一些，可是，艺术创作能否达臻理想，还需要自己的努力。

（二）
艺术道路崎岖 探寻精神家园

自古以来，艺术家的道路充满荆棘，艺术家要披荆斩棘，非有坚定的韧忍个性和坚强的毅力不可。
A Difficult Artistic Career and the Exploration of a Spiritual Abode

Since time immemorial, the career paths of artists have been fraught with difficulties. To overcome the hurdles they face, they need to be steadfast, extremely resilient and perseverant.

Inspiration is behind the conceptualisation and creation of an artwork. However, inspiration, something that is sensed by the spirit and felt by the soul, is elusive and not easily captured. The quality of an artwork is determined by the artist’s thoughts, talent, sense of aesthetics and so forth. All these take time to develop.

The creation of an artwork begins with inspiration and concept, expressed through the artist’s hand. The process is more difficult than it sounds. The ideological and lyrical realms manifested in the completed work are complexities that are not easy to comprehend.

Being a man of strength and fortitude, once Ek Kay had decided upon his life goals, his resolve to achieve them would grow stronger over time.

His quest for inspiration made him a man of even fewer words as he would often confine himself in the studio to read or contemplate, engrossed in a world of his own.

“What are you thinking of?” I was very curious at first.

“Be quiet. I am exploring some ideas.”

To a large extent, the lyrical realm or state of poetic nuance that a Chinese artist seeks to conjure in his work is often determined by the quality of his artwork. It is not easy to find a soulmate in the realm of art, someone who understands
you and shares similar aspirations and beliefs. This is something that would
sadden an artist most; Ek Kay was no exception, as he cut a solitary figure.

Living in a commercial society, Ek Kay eschewed the pragmatic realities of life
when he chose to practise art. The path of an artist is fraught with difficulties
and challenges, particularly for those in Singapore during the 1980s.

To switch paths midway in life and embrace a drastically different lifestyle
requires exceptional courage and resilience. The reality of life is such that one
needs a source of income for sustenance. But if an artist’s work were to become
regarded as a commodity, it would deeply dishearten him. Nonetheless, an
artist needs to support himself; for that he has to use his skills to feed his
passion. When at the crossroads of pure art or commercial art, he would have
to deliberate over his direction. Pure art may be an intellectual and cultured
pursuit to most people whereas commercial art caters to popular taste.

This put Ek Kay in a dilemma. It was not, and still is not, easy for an artist to
balance the two.

An established artist once told Ek Kay, “Once the painting is displayed in a
gallery with a price tag affixed, it immediately becomes a commodity.”

As Ek Kay endeavoured to strike a balance between his dreams and reality, he
struggled along the difficult path of an artist, embracing this nonconformist
lifestyle.

Having made a decision to take up painting midway in his life, it is regrettable
that he lacked the holistic training in a formal academy. When he decided
to become a full-time artist, he was aware of his inadequacies in this area.
He knew that to become a truly mature artist, he needed to learn fast by
studying art catalogues and theories of past masters and different styles or

生活转换跑道，进入两个完全不同世界的生活方式，非要去学一点草鸡的勇气不可。现实
生活里，经济来源是现实生活的主要条件。绘画作品、创作沦为商品，是画家深感痛心
的事。画家也需要生活，必须以技养艺。画家
须要考量的是走纯艺术的创作抑或是商品
创作。纯艺术创作会是曲高和寡，商品艺术
创作却是要大众化，迎合群众。

逸溪矛盾了，身为画家要从两者间取得平衡，
并不是一件容易的事。

“作品摆到展览厅里，贴上标签，便是商品
了。”有资深画家朋友告诉逸溪。

逸溪在理想与现实生活中挣扎求存，颠簸在画
家艰辛的道路上，过着另一种人生。

逸溪半路“出家”，初出道时，缺乏学院派
的全套完整训练，确实是件憾事。他选择成为
全职画家后，自知“先天”条件不足，如
果要成为一个丰实的画家，必须抓紧时间阅
读前人名画册和画论，以充实自己，他踏
遍各处书画展，实地学习各派画家作品，以提高
眼界。当时，中华书局是名画展卖场所，是
逸溪每个周末必到之地。在实践方面，他临
习八大山人、石涛、黄宾虹等名画，模拟前
人画技与画法，他理解到，眼高手低者也不
一定能看得好，即使临画得形似，也未
必神似。临习倒是容易，吸取前人创作经验，
加以归纳，融会贯通，再创立自己的风格、
精神面貌及艺术境界，的确是棘手的一件事。

“中国画向来重视意、重意境、重格调，同中国的诗一样，靠的是胸襟、学问、修养。”

中国文化精深博大，表现在绘画艺术上，一气呵成。

逸溪深知这一点，在艺术道路上，他同其他画家一样，走得非常艰苦，直到两鬓斑白。

在人类物质文明高度发展的今天，追求精神生活是一种需求，艺术创作是人类精神的泉源。逸溪爱好文艺、音乐、古典诗词；追求真、善、美，是个理想主义者。他希望以美学提高自己的精神境界，逸溪以美学创作，探索精神家园，完成愿望与理想。

画家的人生道路崎岖不平，我知道，逸溪甘之如饴，至少，他确确实实走着自己的人生道路，人生至此，夫复何求！

(三)
耕耙笔墨韵追求中西合壁

中国传统的艺术特色，笔法和墨韵是构成画面的主要部分，体现在作品中的物体形状，即形相。笔法的表现形式分成点、线、面三者，以线为主体，是画面上的主要架构，体现骨气，表征画家的个性。在中国画中占有非常重要的地位。

笔法强调线条美，讲求个性化，而书法的各种书体，线条的高度艺术美是主体，体现书法家的个性与民族性，呈现书家独有的风格。在一幅画里，笔与墨两者的审美标准与要求一致。“书画同源”也就是这个道理。

逸溪感悟“书法不强，阐释线条”，他花很长的时间在探索和临习各种书体，如篆隶魏碑、竹简及草书等；也临写各名家的法体，主要是想借鉴书法的用笔和笔意，突显画面上物象的精神状态。

笔沾墨渍染宣纸作画，形成物体的面。墨之浓淡产生变化成墨韵。墨的韵味趣味高深，提升作品的整体艺术精神风貌，增添艺术感染力。学问颇深，对画家是一种考验。逸溪在笔墨上力求尽善尽美，达臻个人对艺术的要求。

学校里的艺术。他也会参观各地的画展，观览不同风格的作品。那时，他常与朋友一起，到艺术馆和画廊去，欣赏那些世界名画。他了解到，艺术是一种精神的追求，是人类文明的体现。他更加坚定了自己的艺术道路，努力追求自己独特的艺术风格。

“在艺术创作中，重精神追求，重个人风格，重艺术表现。艺术是一种精神的追求，是人类文明的体现。他更加坚定了自己的艺术道路，努力追求自己独特的艺术风格。"
ethnic identity in his unique style. The aesthetic standards and requirements imposed on both brush and ink are the same for a painting. As the saying goes, “Calligraphy and painting share the same roots.”

Ek Kay agreed, stating “If one’s skill in calligraphy is weak, how can one be good at drawing the line?” He spent great time and effort exploring and practising different calligraphic styles such as those found on Wei Dynasty stele and ancient bamboo strips, as well as cursive script, and copying the writing of past masters. He hoped that by studying and assimilating calligraphic brushstrokes and their stylistic expressions into his own work, he could better enhance the spirit and essence of the imagery in his painting.

The construction of form in an artwork is created by wielding a brush drenched with ink on paper. The lyrical charm of ink is conjured by the clever application of different shades of ink. The elegant charm of the ink can greatly enhance the spirit of the painting and boost its artistic appeal. This is a profound subject that poses a challenge for the artist. Ek Kay strove for perfection in his use of the brush and ink, as he sought to realise his personal goals in art.

Towards the later part of his career, Ek Kay preferred producing large-scale artworks of the water villages in Jiangnan and depicted scenes of old rural houses by using the splashed ink technique and vigorous, robust brushstrokes to create works of exceptional heroic vision and lyrical charm. They reflect his beliefs and ideals of Chinese art and his adoption of the spirit of traditional Chinese ink painting.

Having received his initial training in the Shanghai School tradition, Ek Kay was well versed in the Shanghai style of traditional painting. He started off with painting plum blossoms, orchids, chrysanthemums and bamboo groves before progressing to landscape painting. He acquired traditional painting skills and techniques. The time Ek Kay spent in learning Chinese painting may not have been very long but as he was a diligent student who actively sought to imbibe the essence of the brush, line and ink, he could more than compensate for what he lacked.

The brush, ink and line that define Chinese art are absent in Western art which has a different set of artistic theory and philosophy. Westerners are open-minded people, and advocates of liberalism and democracy. When such values are manifested in painting, new vistas are pioneered, resulting in the proliferation of different schools of painting such as realism, expressionism, abstraction, minimalism and postmodernism. Different artistic phenomena are created; different artistic forms of expressions interpreted. There is a tendency for Western artists to make form the basis of art. They believe that there is structure of form in art, as seen in the harmony of colours (in painting), which transforms ordinary reality into a vision of beauty. But within this form is something which greatly inspires spiritual significance, the realm of life and the contemplative state of the soul.

There is no way to compare Western and Chinese art as they are unique and brilliant in their own way.
逸士在了解西方绘画艺术精髓之后，视野豁然开阔。于是，他创作《蝶歌》和《黄门一和二》。这两幅画有西方绘画的表现形式，也有中国画的笔意与精神。《蝶歌》（图1）表达东方空灵感和音乐感的美学境界，而《黄门一和二》（图3）则突出东方宗教色彩，也表征新加坡的文化特色。

这两张画作可说是逸士的代表作。

（四）
锐意创新 形成独特风格

逸士作画，从开始的摹临，到创立自己的绘画风格，走过了一段艰辛的道路，也作过思想、理念上的挣扎。逸士从前人的经验，首先理解到，画家开始作画，从摹临前人作品，到能够挥洒自如，独创自己的绘画风格，不是一件容易的事。其实，画过画的人一定知道这道理。至于，作品具有独特的风格，并且受到后人的肯定，更是一个难题。第二，个人风格的形成，画家本身必须肩负各种条件。深厚的中国传统基础，个人的修持、学养和智慧，以及灵活的头脑和创新的大胆理念，才能够独创一格。

第三，创新贵在作品具备画家本身的民族文化和区域性人文精神，这又使逸士大伤脑筋。

逸士师承海派绘画体系，学刻印，勤练硬笔。他同时模拟各派书法，以丰富创新的基石。逸士中学和高中在公教中学受教育，当年，这是一间早期的华英双语学校，因此，他与其他华校生有更多机会接触西方文明。也因为这缘故，逸士成年后的思想上，易于接受西方文化，当他深入研究西方绘画的强势面之后，大胆地采用中西画法，注入东方情愫和现代艺术理念。从中国传统水墨画基础上建构个人风格，展示民族精神。在作品中体现区域性文化面貌，又是一个需要思考的问题。

有一段时间，逸士深人研究早期南洋画派，并向陈文光先生讨教。逸士六岁时南来，在新加坡成长和受教育，早已融入南洋岛屿社会。他熟悉这里的人文和文化精神内蕴，在二十多年的绘画生涯里，他创作了一系列不同题材的作品。

新街景

艺术作品在现实生活中孕育。逸士生长的年代，

There is a trend toward globalisation in the world’s economy, art and culture. There is an emphasis on modernity in art; art is an embodiment of the artist’s creative inspiration and spirit. As the modern man possesses a spiritual world of his own, his aesthetic views and standards also differ from the past.

It is only natural that an artist would inherit tradition and promote it. But the modern artist’s mission lies in generating the new from the old. This is the path that art must take today. The modern artist needs to seek a breakthrough in terms of brushwork and ink play which have already reached high standards in the past, so as to depict new imageries that evoke a modern feel and meet the aesthetic standards of modern man. For the modern artist to create new ideas and a unique style, passion is vital.

Ek Kay would sit in solitary contemplation as all sorts of ideas and thoughts appeared in his mind, colliding with one another.

The desire for change took root in Ek Kay’s heart and would sprout forth at the appropriate juncture.

Ek Kay’s approach was to adopt both traditional Chinese painting techniques and forms of expression in Western art. His fusion of the East and the West can be seen in his portrayal of lotus ponds, in which soft, delicate tones were used to depict the lotus leaves and flowers. The captivating beauty and poetic charm encapsulated in the latter as they sway in the wind or stand elegantly in the middle of the pond illustrates the kind of aesthetic that Ek Kay had been pursuing in his heart.

His artistic vision broadened after he began to understand the essence of Western painting. His paintings, Song of Cicada and Yellow Door 1 & 2, combine Western expressions with the brushwork and spirit of Chinese painting. Song of Cicada (fig. 1) embodies the ethereal void and musical sense of the Chinese aesthetic realm while Yellow Door 1 & 2 (fig. 3) is infused with an Eastern religious flavour and symbolises the cultural uniqueness of Singapore.

These two paintings are considered Ek Kay’s representative works.

(4)
Creating a Unique Style through Creativity

In his artistic practice, Ek Kay began by copying the masters before formulating his own style eventually. The process was challenging and he faced numerous mental and ideological struggles. Learning from the experience of past artists, he gathered that firstly, the whole process from copying past works to creating one’s own style with great skill would not be an easy one. Those who have taken up painting would understand the fact that it is no easy feat to create a unique style that is recognised by later generations. Secondly, various conditions must exist before the artist can create his own style. These include a thorough grasp of traditional fundamentals, as well as personal cultivation, knowledge, wisdom, flexibility in conception and a bold and creative mind.

Thirdly, the value of innovation lies in ensuring that the ethnic and cultural
heritage of the artist as well as the humanistic spirit of the region are also captured in his work. This was indeed a great problem for Ek Kay.

Trained in the Shanghai School of painting, Ek Kay learnt the art of seal carving and diligently practised calligraphy. He would also copy the calligraphy and paintings of various schools in a bid to lay the groundwork for his experiments. Ek Kay received his secondary and high school education at Catholic High School, which was a school that advocated bilingualism in the early days. Hence, he was exposed to Western civilisation more often than other Chinese school students and he readily accepted Western culture in his thinking when he grew up. Once he began to understand the strengths of Western painting, he boldly adopted both Chinese and Western methods and incorporated Chinese sensibilities and modern artistic concepts in his works. His own style was built upon a foundation of traditional Chinese ink painting and displayed both ethnic and cultural characteristics. At the same time, the expression of the cultural identity of the region in his works was another issue that required much thought.

There was a point in time when Ek Kay was conducting extensive research into the early Nanyang style of painting and approached Mr Chen Wen Hsi for guidance. Ek Kay came to Singapore when he was six. As he had grown up and had been educated here, he had assimilated into the local society a long time ago. He was familiar with the local humanistic and cultural spirit.

即上世纪50、60年代，旧屋是民居的一部分。屋子一般都有两层楼或三层楼。住宅区在楼上，楼下是店铺。屋子多数陈旧不堪，墙壁斑驳，书写着历史痕迹，诉说着岁月沧桑。

逸湖小时候曾经生活在这种旧居里，对于它们有着特殊的情感。绘画贵在写生，这些朴实的旧居街景牵动逸湖的思绪。以旧居为写生物象，通过生动形象的线条，淋漓酣畅的墨色，结合西方绘画形式，刻画旧居斑驳的悲凉形象，抒发对逸湖童年的生活之情，凭吊那些将走入历史的战前旧居。逸湖的旧街景画作呈现出凄美的艺术风韵。

新加坡战前旧居启发逸湖，引起他对老屋的怀旧之情。在一次游览江南水乡的民居之后，千年古文化建筑物深深地震撼着逸湖。他带着浓厚的中华文化情结，藉着酣畅的水墨和粗犷、泼辣的线条，勾勒旧居老瓦，表达心中的思慕情结，体现着雍容大气、古朴苍凉的凄美之境。

**荷花系列**

荷花是中国画家喜爱表现的一种题材。此类画作多呈现雍容气度，或者欣欣向荣的气象。

外表平实、拙于言辞的逸湖，内心的艺术火花却燃烧得异常炽热。他以细腻的笔触描绘心中的荷塘景色，有的荷花亭亭玉立，意气爽朗；有的则枯枝越叶，神态苍凉，似在诉说生命短暂的凄凉。逸湖善于把刹那化成永恒，借以表现人生。

**舞者系列**

逸湖运用丰富想象力，通过灵动的细嫩线条，描绘着梦幻般的翩翩舞姿，在风中，在月下，融合在荷塘之中。感觉中，似乎是一群舞者在观赏者面前飞舞，呈现音乐节奏感的旋律美，扣人心弦，令人如梦如醉，浪漫色彩浓郁得化不开，试图达到遐思逸动的美学境界。

**婆罗佛图系列**

印尼爪哇岛的婆罗佛图，是古印度佛教文化及神秘的传说震撼逸湖。他去了三趟。古佛教色彩触动了逸湖的艺术感受，驱使他的创作灵感。他以焦墨拂拭及细碎的线条，结合西洋画的素描艺术技法，表达印度原始佛教和印尼文化色彩。作品寄寓逸湖对另一种绘画艺术风格的追求和尝试。
传统花鸟与山水画

逸溪以传统的水墨技法画出传统题材，如花鸟与山水，传统绘画是逸溪学画的起步。这情趣深藏在她的心里，她在水墨画中表现出神情，表达诗情画卷的审美观。她也许是逸溪心中所要展现的传统画精神气韵，空灵禅画境界。

逸溪把现实生活里的物象，跃动于内心的情思，融为一体，通过笔墨画出他心中的意象，展现形神并重的艺术作品。

通过绘画，逸溪释放了他心中的艺术情感，完成了他对真，善，美的追求。

（五）
壮志未酬 留下遗憾

艺术生命在逸溪心里奔跑，宛如烈火，越烧越烈。二十多年的绘画经历，让她知道在艺术的创作道路上，要的是什么，信心已经确立。“书法不强，画来线条；诗书不读，画来意境。学养不良，画来内涵；不涉西学，画来新意。”这是逸溪坚持的创作前提，且循着自己的创作意愿付诸实践，这个理念让逸溪创立了自己独有的绘画风格。

逸溪满怀壮志。

“政绩越大了，我们可以到处走走，去中国，欧等地参观各国的美术馆，潜心深研，把中西画的艺术精华元素进一步融会贯通，丰富自己的绘画风格。我们一起走吧！” 逸溪眉间之间充满喜悦，眼神闪烁，信心写在脸上。逸溪望着前方，面容似乎呈现一道雨后的彩虹。

然而正当他对未来充满憧憬的时候，厄运却袭向逸溪。2004年，他的健康出现了问题。那天晚上，逸溪吃一块鱼头时，喉咙被小鱼骨鲠住，第二天，他还是觉得不舒服。为了慎重起见，他立刻驱车去找耳鼻喉专科医生，在科学仪器检验下，医生告知鱼骨不见踪影，但却被证实得了初期鼻咽癌。真是晴天霹雳！我们不愿正视这个事实，又跑到另一家私人专科医院里的诊所，做第二次扫描。鼻咽癌找上逸溪是不争的事实。

癌症是一个残酷的杀手，专与人类为敌。恐惧、焦虑、无助是癌症患者的心里写照。逸溪

He produced a series of works with different themes throughout a career that spanned more than twenty years.

**Old Street Scenes**

Art is borne out of the reality of everyday life. Ek Kay grew up in the 1950s and 1960s in a time when old shophouses were very much a part of urban living. These houses were often two to three stories high. The upper floors were occupied by residents while the ground level was the shop space. These houses were often old and dilapidated, with the mottled walls lined with the marks of time. Ek Kay had lived in this type of old houses when he was young, and therefore harboured special feelings for them. Sketching is an important part of art. These rustic old houses and street scenes were very much on Ek Kay’s mind. He would make them the subject of his sketches, and through lively and vivid calligraphic lines, rich and expressive ink application, and the usage of Western art forms, he captured the pensive sadness and dreary images of these old buildings. It was also his way of remembering his childhood and respecting these pre-war houses that were soon to become part of history. Ek Kay’s renditions of old street scenes possess a melancholy but elegant artistic flavour.

The pre-war old shophouses of Singapore inspired Ek Kay and triggered feelings of nostalgia. After his visit to the vernacular houses in the water villages of Jiangnan, Ek Kay was deeply awed by the ancient culture and architecture that had originated more than a thousand years ago. With his strong affinity to Chinese culture and his skilful deployment of the ink and brush to create vibrant and thick lines, he delineated old walls and tiles, expressing the admiration and longing in his heart and conjuring melancholy and a rustic and forlorn aesthetic.

**Lotus Series**

The lotus is a popular subject in Chinese art. It is often depicted with grace and poise, and imbues the composition with a vibrant sense of life.

Though he was an ordinary-looking man of few words, the passion for art burned brightly in Ek Kay’s heart, igniting his myriad feelings and sentiments. With sensitivity, he painted scenes of lotus ponds from his heart. Some of them showed beautiful blossoms swaying gracefully in the wind, capturing the sight of lotus flourishing in summer, while others portrayed the desolate state of the lotus in mid-autumn with its withering leaves and limp stalk. The wretched pod seemed to lament the transience and vicissitudes of life. Ek Kay had turned a fleeting moment into eternity – a metaphor for life.

**Dancers Series**

With his rich imagination and fine brushwork, Ek Kay captured dreamlike dancing postures in the wind or under the moon in his lotus paintings. To the viewers, it would seem as though the dancers are performing in front of them. They manifest the allure of music that captivates the heart of viewers with its romantic appeal, and they seek to reach an aesthetic realm of ethereal brilliance.
Ek Kay had visited Borobudur in Java, Indonesia thrice. The ancient Buddhist cultural site and its mysterious legends became a source of inspiration in his work. Using a dry brush technique to produce fine, broken lines, while also incorporating the Western art practice of sketching, he captured the Hindu-Buddhist religion and culture of Indonesia on paper. The series of works represents Ek Kay’s experiment with another style of painting.

Traditional Flower-and-Bird and Mountain-and-River Landscape Paintings

Ek Kay used traditional ink and brush techniques to illustrate traditional themes such as flowers-and-birds and mountains-and-rivers. Chinese traditional painting, the first type of painting that he had been exposed to when he first started learning art, held a special place in his heart. He was able to express himself freely in this media and his works fully capture the unique characteristics of Chinese traditional ink paintings. His paintings show the clever use of contrasting elements and creatively conceived compositions, combining to express a lyrical, aesthetic sense. Perhaps this was the kind of spiritual resonance and ethereal, Zen-like realm that Ek Kay sought to express in traditional ink paintings.

Ek Kay would integrate scenes of everyday life with his thoughts and feelings, and express these images in his mind’s eye with his brush to produce a work that would capture both form and spirit with equal measure.

It is through art that Ek Kay would express his artistic sentiments and engage in his personal pursuit of the ideals of truth, goodness and beauty.

(5)
Departing with Regrets as Ambition Remained Unfulfilled

Art was at the very heart of his life, a passion that burned with increasing intensity over time. After more than two decades of painting, he knew what he wanted to achieve in his art making and he was confident in doing it.

"Without a foundation in calligraphy, how will one be able to create lines; without reading poetry and books, how can one create meaningful expressions; without knowledge, one cannot become a person of cultivation; if one does not learn from the West, how will one create something new." With this as his mantra in art making, Ek Kay sought to put his creative vision into practice, which culminated in the creation of a unique style.

Ek Kay was full of ideals and great aspirations.

"Zheng Nan is all grown up now. Let’s travel abroad and visit art museums in China, Europe and America. I want to do in-depth research and gain a deeper understanding of the essence of Chinese and Western art. In this way I can enrich my painting style. Let’s go together!" With eyes shining with happiness and a face beaming with confidence, Ek Kay looked ahead...

毕竟也是常人，我知道，他也不能例外。急于发脾气，那是患者的一种心理抒发方式。我们家里似乎埋藏着一颗无形的地雷。

还好，也许逸溪走过了太多曲折人生。渐渐地，他接受癌病的事实，走上抗癌之路，面对另一段人生。

在他的日记里，这么写着：“在超过半年的时间，受尽疼痛痛苦的煎熬……”

“没癌的人这样的生活，有癌的人，也是这样的生活；没癌的人快乐，有癌的人也是一样，可以寻求快乐，有了癌，可以很放心地生活。癌有了，还恐惧什么其他的；有了癌，你会全心全力地去寻求治疗的途径。这就是人生坎坷的开始。你求医、求神、求助，你会面对一个陌生的世界。”

“癌症的入侵，不再仅仅是一种世人眼中的疾病。这病给人一个自省的机会。自省、去悟、自证，明确地认识一个生活的本质。”

“我该感激上苍给我的磨练，所有的病痛，在时空中，不是永恒，多苦的痛，都过了，真的是空中无色，无受想行识，无眼耳鼻舌身意，无色声香味触法。目前不痛，这不是愈，也不是痛。等会儿，下一秒，痛，也不住常在，生活中一波一波，一起一落，一悲一喜，一痛一不痛，这些都不是无常，其实，这就是婆娑世界的本质。重要的是要如何修持，如何得三昧三菩提，如何去发掘生命宇宙的本质，给予我的一个定位，生命的定位和方向。”

逸溪积极、勇敢地面对更严峻的人生。

逸溪积极上医院接受三十五次的电疗，每星期五天，每天一次。这时，逸溪的体重直线下降。

经过漫长的七个星期之后，厄运总算离去。可不是，癌病的阴影还是隐藏在逸溪的内心深处。家人除了在精神上支持和照顾之外，别无他策。

这段时间，绘画创作被逸溪搁置一旁，大专及艺术学校的兼职教学还是继续，新屋子每月的房贷还得偿还。收入少了，医药费用庞大。当时，正值经济不景气，房地产市场异常沉滞，旧屋子卖不出去，逸溪忧心忡忡。

这时，他父亲不幸过世，另一层打击使逸溪穷于应付。父亲的离世增加他对死亡的恐惧感。这对病人不是好现象。
with an expression of optimism; a rainbow that had appeared after the rain.

However, just as he was looking forward to the future, fate dealt him a cruel blow. In 2004, he discovered that there was something wrong with his health. I still vividly remember that fateful night when a small fish bone was lodged in EK Kay’s throat while he was having fish head for dinner. He still feeling unwell the next day, he drove to the clinic to see an otolaryngologist. Upon examination, the doctor was unable to detect the bone, but discovered instead that EK Kay was suffering from an early stage of nose and throat cancer. What a shock it was to us! Unable to accept the devastating news, we went to another specialist clinic at a different hospital to undergo a second scan, which only confirmed that EK Kay was suffering from cancer.

Cancer is a cruel killer, an enemy of humanity. A cancer sufferer’s psychological state is marked by fear, anxiety and helplessness. EK Kay was an ordinary human being after all, and I knew that he was not exempt from the ills that cancer would bring. He was prone to temper flare-ups - that was a way for cancer patients to vent their pent up emotions. It was as if an invisible landmine was hidden somewhere in the house, waiting to explode at any time.

Perhaps as EK Kay had experienced so many ups and downs in life, he gradually came to accept the reality of having cancer. He embarked on his fight against cancer and embraced a new chapter of his life.

He wrote in his diary, “I have been suffering from pain for more than half a year.”

“Those not afflicted by cancer carry on with their lives; the same goes for those suffering from cancer. Those without cancer can seek happiness; so can those hit by cancer. Once you have cancer, you can live without worry. What else is there to fear once you have cancer? Once you have cancer, you will do all you can to find the best possible form of treatment, and that is the beginning of a difficult life. You seek medical help, divine help and other people’s help, and you will face an unfamiliar world.

The invasion of cancer is not merely a kind of disease as understood by ordinary people. This illness allows the patient a chance for introspection. Introspection, self-enlightenment, self-validation – you will gain a clear understanding of the essence of life.”

“I am grateful to Heaven for putting me through these trials. All sickness and pain is not eternal in the scheme of space and time. No matter how bad the pain and suffering, they will all come to pass. Truly, there is no form in space, no feeling, thought, action and knowledge; no eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and consciousness; no colour, sound, smell, taste, touch and order. At the moment, I do not feel the pain, but this doesn’t mean that I have recovered. After a while, after a second or so, the pain will come. This is not unpredictable; in life, there are ups and downs, sadness and joy, pain and painlessness. These are not unpredictable, but in fact, are the essence of the Saha world. The important thing is how to cultivate oneself, how to attain enlightenment, and how to discover the essence of life and the universe. I need to position myself, position my life and set the direction of my life.”
Ek Kay was able to face a harder life positively and courageously.

He underwent a total of thirty-five radiotherapy sessions and visited the hospital once a day, for five days each week. During that period, his weight plummeted.

After a long period of seven weeks, the worst was over. But cancer continued to cast a long shadow in Ek Kay’s heart. Apart from giving him support and care, there was nothing else his family members could do.

During this time, Ek Kay had put aside his practice, but continued to teach part-time at the university and at art school. The monthly loan payment for the new house still remained to be settled. As his income declined, his medical bills ballooned. There was an economic slump at that time and the real estate market was in the doldrums. Ek Kay was very worried as there was no buyer for the old house. He was faced with a double blow when his father passed away during the same period. His father’s passing intensified his fear of death. This was not a good thing for a cancer patient.

Fate had quite a sense of humour.

Unexpectedly, a date was scheduled for an exhibition of Ek Kay’s works, a show that the Singapore Art Museum and the Shanghai Art Museum had been working on for more than two years.

“I have done some calculations. The cost of holding this exhibition in Shanghai is quite high.” Ek Kay had put all his savings into the purchase of the new house. “What should we do?” We panicked – how was it that the rain would always come when we were least prepared?

Although life was unfair to Ek Kay, as luck would have it, two art collectors, Mr Ong Yew Huat and Mr Wong Thai Fong purchased two monumental paintings from his Water Village series. When coupled with the enthusiastic support from various quarters, as well as the $50,000 that had been awarded to him when he won the Cultural Medallion in 1999, Ek Kay managed to overcome his monetary woes.

The joint exhibition by the Singapore Art Museum and the Shanghai Art Museum, was held in 2005 as planned. Apart from Mr Kwok Kian Chow, then Director of the Singapore Art Museum, and his colleagues who flew to Shanghai, some of Ek Kay’s friends also travelled to the Chinese city to lend their support. The Singapore consul in Shanghai was also invited to the opening ceremony which was very well attended.

The theme of the exhibition was the Water Village series which had garnered good reviews. In this metropolitan city where there were numerous accomplished artists, it was indeed quite a feat to garner such positive responses. To an artist, especially one who was suffering from cancer, the appreciation of his work was an encouragement to strive forward. His upbeat mood proved to be an effective antidote that would save his life. Indeed, Ek Kay’s condition improved. His lifelong persistence and passion for art bore fruit, and his artistic aspirations were becoming a reality at last.

天啊！逸溪又要准备向抗癌之途前进。

我知道他的感受如何，他又沉默了。沉默中带着忧郁，这正是他心事纠结的时候。

这回只是一次电疗，可想而知，这次的电疗，威力应该不比寻常。

命运看来已难以改变，逸溪开始为我和政楠担心，担心我们以后的生活问题。逸溪逝世后，他俩好友告诉我。

“少瑜和政楠的生活可能会面临问题，我非常担心……”逸溪数次向他好友提起这件事。

命运再次捉弄逸溪，我们又能做什么呢？接受命运的安排，或是与命运抗争？自然，逸溪选择了抗癌。他希望藉先进医学根除癌症的凌虐。

治疗期间，逸溪抵抗力受损，身体再次变得瘦弱。我和他的朋友劝他退休，休养身体，以健康为重。可是，责任感和对艺术的执着，叫他难以停止工作。

逸溪感冒了。鼻咽癌患者不能感冒，否则对病者不利。

戊子年除夕晚上，逸溪动完手术回家第八天，本来应该休息。但除夕夜他坚持象往年一样，邀请他的母亲及弟妹等来家里吃晚餐，俗称“团年”。

他当晚显得特别兴奋，似乎有感应：这是“最后的晚餐”。

年初一、初二有亲戚朋友来拜年，并无异样。初二晚上，死神来到他的身边。大概八点钟左右，蓝元荣先生及夫人来我们家。他非常高兴，坚持要起来与他们谈话。大约十分钟左右，逸溪鼻子突然流血。他快步走进浴室，血流不停，我们措手不及。刚要拨电救伤车时，逸溪倒在蓝先生身上。救护员来到，证实逸溪已经“不辞而别”。

逸溪把蓝先生吓坏了。我想他在意识未完全丧失时，似乎是想请蓝先生夫妇在“走后”，协助我和孩子渡过难关。所以，这数年来，他们在关键时刻，是我精神上的支柱。

逸溪总是为别人。
Three years later, the doctor examined Ek Kay and pronounced that his cancer was in remission. Thanks to the early discovery of his nose and throat cancer, his chances of a complete recovery were very high. Upon hearing the good news, Ek Kay took me out for a celebration and also called our son Zheng Nan who was undergoing his army training in Australia at that time. Ek Kay was indeed overjoyed.

Ek Kay’s condition gradually improved over time. He gained weight and looked healthy.

Friends and relatives were very happy for him.

“Ek Kay, which god did you pray to? How did you come to recover so quickly? Congratulations!” His friends would say in jest while congratulating him. Whenever he returned home, he would often remark that he thought his recovery was swift too.

However, our happiness was short-lived. A few months later, Ek Kay’s cancer had returned. At the clinic, the doctor told him gravely that the “monster” had “resurrected” and had reared its ugly head once again on the same spot.

Ek Kay had to fight yet another battle against cancer.

I knew how he felt as he fell silent once again. That melancholic silence meant that he was deeply troubled.

One could easily imagine that the radiotherapy treatment he received this time round would be more intensive.

There was nothing we could do to change the course of events. Inevitably, Ek Kay worried for Zheng Nan and myself. In fact a good friend of his told us after his death that Ek Kay had been worried about how we were going to cope financially.

“I am really worried that Tshiau Yi and Zheng Nan may face financial difficulties...” Ek Kay had repeatedly told his childhood friend.

But what could we do, when fate seemed to mock Ek Kay? Do we resign to fate, or fight against it? Naturally, Ek Kay chose to fight cancer. He hoped to get rid of cancer through advanced medical treatment.

During the course of his treatment, Ek Kay’s immune system was damaged and his health deteriorated once again. His friends and I advised him to retire so that he could rest at home and make his health his priority. But his sense of responsibility and his passion for art weighed heavily on his shoulders, as they had done throughout his life.

Ek Kay caught the flu. A nose cancer patient must not catch the flu, because that would be detrimental to his condition.

It was the eve of Chinese New Year in 2008. Ek Kay had returned home, eight
days after his surgery, and should have been resting.

But he insisted on inviting his mother and siblings over to our home for a reunion dinner which was a tradition that he had been following over the years. He was unusually excited that night, as if sensing that it would be his “last supper.”

Nothing unusual happened when relatives and friends visited us on the first and second day of Chinese New Year. On the night of the second day, death came for him. It was about eight at night when Mr Lam Ngian Yong and his wife came to our house. Ek Kay was delighted to see them, and insisted on getting up to talk to them. About ten minutes later, his nose started bleeding suddenly. He dashed into the bathroom. The bleeding would not stop and we were caught off guard. Just as we were about to call for an ambulance, Ek Kay collapsed in Mr Lam’s arms. When the paramedics arrived, they pronounced him dead. He had gone without saying goodbye.

Mr Lam was stunned by the turn of events. Perhaps before he fully lost consciousness, Ek Kay had wanted Mr Lam and his wife to help my son and me tide over the difficult period after his departure. Indeed, over the past three years, they had given me moral support during many crucial moments. Ek Kay was always thinking of others.

“Tshiau Yi, I am really worried about our family’s future financial situation!” Ek Kay had said an hour before his death, as he looked at me anxiously.

“Don’t let your thoughts run wild! Don’t worry; the most important thing now is to focus on your recovery.” I replied, though I had been suddenly seized with an ominous sense of foreboding.

Ek Kay did not know much about financial matters, especially during that period. I knew that he was always worried about our financial needs and Zheng Nan’s university fees. He was a man who loved his family.

With a grave but confident voice, he regarded me and said, “Since taking ill recently, I have been practicing calligraphy daily at home. I am inspired to create another style of painting. If I could recover, I would definitely create a new series of work.”

Recounting such moments deeply saddens me. A quiet person by nature, Ek Kay seemed to have a lot to say before he passed away. He was thinking of his family, his art. Throughout his life, he remained devoted and responsible to his family and gave himself wholeheartedly to his art. His life revolved around family and art. Even in the final moments of his life, family and art continued to weigh heavily on his mind. It is a pity that he had passed on without fulfilling his ambition, leaving behind many regrets.
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