Liu Kang

Siew, Sara, Liu, Kang

Published by National Gallery Singapore

Siew, Sara and Kang Liu.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/110043

For content related to this chapter
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=3343949
The State of Art in Singapore and Its Future Development

Art in our country does not have sufficient depth to compare with that of developed countries. However, compared to its former self, it has improved tremendously. For a better understanding, it is best to use concrete examples as evidence by elaborating on the status of art in our country.

Fine arts groups

(1) The Society of Chinese Artists (中华美术研究会) has been established for 35 years. It is the big brother of all local arts groups, with more than a hundred members who are mainly Chinese. Half of its members practise Chinese art and the other half, Western art. It holds an exhibition annually. Before the war, the presidents were Tchang Ju Chi (张汝器) and Ho Kwong Yew (何光耀). After the Japanese surrendered, I was its president for 12 years. Initially, it celebrated the fine arts festival every 25 March, which was warmly received. Successive presidents were Chen Chong Swee (陈宗瑞), Huang Pao-Fang (黄葆芳), Yeh Chi Wei (叶之威), Chen Jen Hao (陈人浩) and others, all of them talents in the Singapore art community. Apart from the annual fine arts exhibition, it once held exhibitions in memory of Xu Beihong (徐悲鸿) and Huang Binhong (黄宾虹), an exhibition of Chang Dai-Chien’s (张大千) works, and exhibitions showcasing other renowned artists. Monthly meetings were held to fraternise, discuss and learn more about art. However, in recent years, the meetings have stopped because many members are busy with work, lead hectic lives and have not been able to participate.

(2) The Singapore Art Society has been established for 21 years. I am one of its nine founders and have been its president since 1968. The current President of Singapore, Yusof Ishak, is its honorary president. The late movie mogul Loke Wan Tho (陆运涛), current Speaker of Parliament Yeoh Ghim Seng (杨锦成), industrialist Aw Cheng Chye (胡清才) and the renowned collector Tan Tsze Chor (陈之初) were sponsors. The first president was the former curator of Raffles Library and Museum, Carl Gibson-Hill. The second president was the architect Ho Kok Hoe (何国豪). Total membership is more than 200. Anyone interested in art, regardless of race and nationality, can become a member. Thus, it is a multi-dimensional group. A larger portion of its members study Western painting. Although they have developed individual styles, most of them belong to the modern art movement. To do their part in promoting art in Singapore, members hold an annual open fine arts exhibition between spring and summer. In previous years, the society organised exhibitions of ancient Chinese ceramic and metal ware, Eastern and Western musical instruments, Vietnamese lacquer paintings, modern Indonesian paintings, and solo exhibitions for local and foreign artists. Last year, to celebrate the 150th year of Singapore’s founding and its 20th anniversary, the society specially organised a large-scale exhibition and produced an exquisite publication.

(3) The Modern Art Society (现代画会) was formed in 1963 by a group of young modern art enthusiasts. It has been in existence for seven years. Its membership, apparently, is not more than 20. Perhaps owing to relatively similar objectives among its members, the society is easier to manage and, as a result, makes swift progress. It has organised many exhibitions and has in successive years received good responses from the public. In a society where old traditions prevail, the ability to boldly move forward regardless of all resistance, to sacrifice and fight purely for the creation of modern art, is hard to come by. The brains behind the society are Ho Ho Ying (何和应), Wee Beng Chong (黄明宗) and Ng Yat Chuan (黄奕筌), among others.

(4) The Molan Art Society (墨澜社), as its name implies, is associated with the immersion of one’s life in waves of black ink. In other words, it is guided by the excellent achievements, accumulated over thousands of years, of Chinese ink calligraphy and painting, dedicating itself wholeheartedly to exploration and creation. The society has held many exhibitions in the five to six years that it has been established and has earned excellent reviews.

(5) The Equator Art Society (赤道美术研究会), despite the rapid rise of modern art today, is the only organisation that persists with Realist styles as its medium of expression. The size of its membership is unmatched by the other groups, and it has its own office for study and various activities. The society has been established for more than ten years.

(6) The Association of Artists of Various Resources (Angkatan Pelukis Aneka Daya) is...
The State of Art in Singapore and Its Future Development

Art in our country does not have sufficient depth to compare with that of developed countries. However, compared to its former self, it has improved tremendously. For a better understanding, it is best to use concrete examples as evidence by elaborating on the status of art in our country.

Fine arts groups

(1) The Society of Chinese Artists (中华美术研究会) has been established for 35 years. It is the big brother of all local arts groups, with more than a hundred members who are mainly Chinese. Half of its members practise Chinese art and the other half, Western art. It holds an exhibition annually. Before the war, the presidents were Tchang Ju Chi (张汝器) and Ho Kwong Yew (何光耀). After the Japanese surrendered, I was its president for 12 years. Initially, it celebrated the fine arts festival every 25 March, which was warmly received. Successive presidents were Chen Chong Swee (陈宗瑞), Huang Pao-Fang (黄葆芳), Yeh Chi Wei (叶之威), Chen Jen Hao (陈人浩) and others, all of them talents in the Singapore art community. Apart from the annual fine arts exhibition, it once held exhibitions in memory of Xu Beihong (徐悲鸿) and Huang Binhong (黄宾虹), an exhibition of Chang Dai-Chien’s (张大千) works, and exhibitions showcasing other renowned artists. Monthly meetings were held to fraternise, discuss and learn more about art. However, in recent years, the meetings have stopped because many members are busy with work, lead hectic lives and have not been able to participate.

(2) The Singapore Art Society has been established for 21 years. I am one of its nine founders and have been its president since 1968. The current President of Singapore, Yusof Ishak, is its honorary president. The late movie mogul Loke Wan Tho (陆运涛), current Speaker of Parliament Yeoh Ghim Seng (杨锦成), industrialist Aw Cheng Chye (胡清才) and the renowned collector Tan Tsze Chor (陈之初) were sponsors. The first president was the former curator of Raffles Library and Museum, Carl Gibson-Hill. The second president was the architect Ho Kok Hoe (何国銮). Total membership is more than 200. Anyone interested in art, regardless of race and nationality, can become a member. Thus, it is a multi-dimensional group. A larger portion of its members study Western painting. Although they have developed individual styles, most of them belong to the modern art movement. To do their part in promoting art in Singapore, members hold an annual open fine arts exhibition between spring and summer. In previous years, the society organised exhibitions of ancient Chinese ceramic and metal ware, Eastern and Western musical instruments, Vietnamese lacquer paintings, modern Indonesian paintings, and solo exhibitions for local and foreign artists. Last year, to celebrate the 150th year of Singapore’s founding and its 20th anniversary, the society specially organised a large-scale exhibition and produced an exquisite publication.

(3) The Modern Art Society (现代画会) was formed in 1963 by a group of young modern art enthusiasts. It has been in existence for seven years. Its membership, apparently, is not more than 20. Perhaps owing to relatively similar objectives among its members, the society is easier to manage and, as a result, makes swift progress. It has organised many exhibitions and has in successive years received good responses from the public. In a society where old traditions prevail, the ability to boldly move forward regardless of all resistance, to sacrifice and fight purely for the creation of modern art, is hard to come by. The brains behind the society are Ho Ho Ying (何和应), Wee Beng Chong (黄明宗) and Ng Yat Chuan (黄奕筌), among others.

(4) The Molan Art Society (墨澜社), as its name implies, is associated with the immersion of one’s life in waves of black ink. In other words, it is guided by the excellent achievements, accumulated over thousands of years, of Chinese ink calligraphy and painting, dedicating itself wholeheartedly to exploration and creation. The society has held many exhibitions in the five to six years that it has been established and has earned excellent reviews.

(5) The Equator Art Society (赤道美术研究会), despite the rapid rise of modern art today, is the only organisation that persists with Realist styles as its medium of expression. The size of its membership is unmatched by the other groups, and it has its own office for study and various activities. The society has been established for more than ten years.

(6) The Association of Artists of Various Resources (Angkatan Pelukis Aneka Daya) is
a fine arts group formed by Malay artists. Although it does not have many members, it is rather active and has held many exhibitions. A few of its members are graduates of overseas institutes.

(7) The Singapore Commercial Art Society (新加坡美术广告协会) has 33 years of history, making it the oldest society after the Society of Chinese Artists. In terms of its nature, however, its members are largely professionals in the advertising industry, and its membership of over 200 is quite sizeable. Among them are many capable artists who often showcase their works at various important exhibitions. The society has set up an office and also organises art study classes for its members. It often invites renowned art personalities to give lectures. Last year, it organised an exhibition of applied arts advertisements, Singapore’s first exhibition of such works. The exhibition was fairly successful. It has recently started official classes for the study of applied arts advertisements. The substantial curriculum and excellent teachers are in line with the government’s objective of promoting industrialisation and commercialism. In time to come, there will be rapid progress.

(8) The Chinese Calligraphy and Art Research Society (中华书画研究会) was established in 1969 and has a membership of about 40. It focuses on calligraphy and Chinese ink painting.

(9) The Singapore Watercolour Society (新加坡水彩画会) was also formed in 1969. Its leaders are Chen Chong Swee and Sim Kwang Teck (沈观德). It aims to popularise and raise the standards of watercolour painting.

(10) The Pachui Art Society (新加坡拔萃画会) was established in 1969. Apart from studying fine art, it also produces related publications to encourage the public to develop an interest in art theory.

Institutions of fine arts education

(1) The Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (南洋美术专科学校) was founded in 1937 by the late Mr Lim Hak Tai (林学大). For the past 33 years, it has produced many talented young artists and has contributed significantly to art in Singapore. The current principal, Mr Lim Yew Kuan (林有权), inherited his father’s ambition. He works hard in managing the academy and has greatly improved the quality of its teachers and courses. Unfortunately, owing to limited financial resources, the campus and its facilities cannot be expanded. This has affected the student intake. With the national population at two million, its student population of over 200 means that there is only one fine arts student in every 10,000 people. This small ratio is truly lamentable.

(2) The Singapore Art Academy (新加坡艺术学院) was founded by the China Society. Madam Sunyee (沈雁) has been entrusted to manage its affairs and set up faculties for Eastern and Western painting. Among the graduates of each cohort, a large number proceeds to study overseas or serve the public. However, as the academy does not have fixed premises, it is difficult to expect it to be perfectly managed.

(3) The Teachers’ Training College has 5,000–6,000 students in its Arts and Crafts department. Its objective is to equip every teacher with the basic ability to teach fine arts and to widely propagate seeds of fine arts in the next generation. However, its lessons are only held for two to three hours each week. I dare not yet comment on their effectiveness.

(4) The People’s Association conducts fine arts classes at community centres and can reach out more easily to the public. Its fees are slightly lower than that of art classes conducted elsewhere, and many have registered. However, the students’ varying standards are a thorny problem for the instructors. Besides, without dedicated facilities, it is difficult to see results when lessons are constantly changing locations. Typically, only half the class remains at the end of the course. The People’s Association’s immediate task is to solve this problem so that it can popularise art.

(5) Just as there is private tuition for piano and violin lessons, a few local art studios also provide tuition in drawing techniques. They have groomed quite a number of talents.

(6) The Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) and the Singapore Women’s
a fine arts group formed by Malay artists. Although it does not have many members, it is rather active and has held many exhibitions. A few of its members are graduates of overseas institutes.

(7) The Singapore Commercial Art Society (新加坡美术广告协会) has 33 years of history, making it the oldest society after the Society of Chinese Artists. In terms of its nature, however, its members are largely professionals in the advertising industry, and its membership of over 200 is quite sizeable. Among them are many capable artists who often showcase their works at various important exhibitions. The society has set up an office and also organises art study classes for its members. It often invites renowned art personalities to give lectures. Last year, it organised an exhibition of applied arts advertisements, Singapore’s first exhibition of such works. The exhibition was fairly successful. It has recently started official classes for the study of applied arts advertisements. The substantial curriculum and excellent teachers are in line with the government’s objective of promoting industrialisation and commercialism. In time to come, there will be rapid progress.

(8) The Chinese Calligraphy and Art Research Society (中华书画研究会) was established in 1969 and has a membership of about 40. It focuses on calligraphy and Chinese ink painting.

(9) The Singapore Watercolour Society (新加坡水彩画会) was also formed in 1969. Its leaders are Chen Chong Swee and Sim Kwang Teck (沈观德). It aims to popularise and raise the standards of watercolour painting.

(10) The Pachui Art Society (新加坡拔萃画会) was established in 1969. Apart from studying fine art, it also produces related publications to encourage the public to develop an interest in art theory.

Institutions of fine arts education

(1) The Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (南洋美术专科学校) was founded in 1937 by the late Mr Lim Hak Tai (林学大). For the past 33 years, it has produced many talented young artists and has contributed significantly to art in Singapore. The current principal, Mr Lim Yew Kuan (林有权), inherited his father’s ambition. He works hard in managing the academy and has greatly improved the quality of its teachers and courses. Unfortunately, owing to limited financial resources, the campus and its facilities cannot be expanded. This has affected the student intake. With the national population at two million, its student population of over 200 means that there is only one fine arts student in every 10,000 people. This small ratio is truly lamentable.

(2) The Singapore Art Academy (新加坡艺术学院) was founded by the China Society. Madam Sunyee (沈雁) has been entrusted to manage its affairs and set up faculties for Eastern and Western painting. Among the graduates of each cohort, a large number proceeds to study overseas or serve the public. However, as the academy does not have fixed premises, it is difficult to expect it to be perfectly managed.

(3) The Teachers’ Training College has 5,000–6,000 students in its Arts and Crafts department. Its objective is to equip every teacher with the basic ability to teach fine arts and to widely propagate seeds of fine arts in the next generation. However, its lessons are only held for two to three hours each week. I dare not yet comment on their effectiveness.

(4) The People’s Association conducts fine arts classes at community centres and can reach out more easily to the public. Its fees are slightly lower than that of art classes conducted elsewhere, and many have registered. However, the students’ varying standards are a thorny problem for the instructors. Besides, without dedicated facilities, it is difficult to see results when lessons are constantly changing locations. Typically, only half the class remains at the end of the course. The People’s Association’s immediate task is to solve this problem so that it can popularise art.

(5) Just as there is private tuition for piano and violin lessons, a few local art studios also provide tuition in drawing techniques. They have groomed quite a number of talents.

(6) The Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) and the Singapore Women’s
Singapore Art Society have been held between spring and summer, while the exhibition by the Society of Chinese Artists is usually held between autumn and winter. This has become an unwritten convention because the two groups have overlapping membership. Allowing for sufficient time prevents the hasty creation of art works. The exhibitions are of mainly Eastern and Western paintings; sculpture, seal carving, calligraphy and pottery do not constitute a large component. For every batch of graduating students, the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts and the Singapore Art Academy hold exhibitions of their works to commemorate the occasion and for self-reflection. Various community centres use the opportunity of open competitions to exhibit their winning works and attract public interest.

(2) Group exhibitions: This occurs when a few artist friends with similar artistic objectives get together for the purpose of holding an exhibition. There are no fixed organisations and no regular dates. As I remember, Chen Wen Hsi (陈文希), Cheong Soo Pieng (钟泗滨), Chong Swee and I toured Java and Bali in 1953. Upon our return, we arranged our works for a joint exhibition. That could be considered the beginning of such group exhibitions. Subsequently, there was a Ten Man Art Group (十人画展) exhibition of the East Coast [of Malaysia], Five Man exhibition of North Malaysia (五友画展), Three Man exhibition of Bangkok (三家联展), and others. These have contributed to a bustling atmosphere in the world of art and made it more interesting. Such group exhibitions have the following advantages: the number of participants is small, making it easy for members to accommodate each other’s personality. Also, there are frequent gatherings which enable frank study and discussion to truly attain the goal of raising the standard of art. The small group behind the Ten Man Art Group exhibition is an example.

(3) Solo exhibitions: This is the most popular everywhere. Singapore is no exception. Ten years ago, there was only one exhibition every two months. Three to four years ago, there was one exhibition every month. In the past two years, there have been at least two exhibitions every month. This can be said to be an improvement. In terms of age, the older generation of artists holds fewer solo exhibitions. In fact, some of them have never held solo exhibitions. This could be for the following reasons. Firstly, older artists are bound by a tradition which values repose over bustle — being more self-restrained,
Singapore Art Society have been held between spring and summer, while the exhibition by the Society of Chinese Artists is usually held between autumn and winter. This has become an unwritten convention because the two groups have overlapping membership. Allowing for sufficient time prevents the hasty creation of art works. The exhibitions are of mainly Eastern and Western paintings; sculpture, seal carving, calligraphy and pottery do not constitute a large component. For every batch of graduating students, the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts and the Singapore Art Academy hold exhibitions of their works to commemorate the occasion and for self-reflection. Various community centres use the opportunity of open competitions to exhibit their winning works and attract public interest.

(2) Group exhibitions: This occurs when a few artist friends with similar artistic objectives get together for the purpose of holding an exhibition. There are no fixed organisations and no regular dates. As I remember, Chen Wen Hsi (陈文希), Cheong Soo Pieng (钟泗滨), Chong Swee and I toured Java and Bali in 1953. Upon our return, we arranged our works for a joint exhibition. That could be considered the beginning of such group exhibitions. Subsequently, there was a Ten Man Art Group (十人画展) exhibition of the East Coast [of Malaysia], Five Man exhibition of North Malaysia (五友画展), Three Man exhibition of Bangkok (三家联展), and others. These have contributed to a bustling atmosphere in the world of art and made it more interesting. Such group exhibitions have the following advantages: the number of participants is small, making it easy for members to accommodate each other’s personality. Also, there are frequent gatherings which enable frank study and discussion to truly attain the goal of raising the standard of art. The small group behind the Ten Man Art Group exhibition is an example.

(3) Solo exhibitions are the most popular everywhere. Singapore is no exception. Ten years ago, there was only one exhibition every two months. Three to four years ago, there was one exhibition every month. In the past two years, there have been at least two exhibitions every month. This can be said to be an improvement. In terms of age, the older generation of artists holds fewer solo exhibitions. In fact, some of them have never held solo exhibitions. This could be for the following reasons. Firstly, older artists are bound by a tradition which values repose over bustle — being more self-restrained,
First, there were some subpar art dealers who exploited the event by peddling cheap wholesale art from Indonesia at five or eight dollars apiece. These inferior works, which cannot be considered art, sullied the elegant atmosphere of the event. Second, participants travelled from afar and went to so much trouble only to display their paintings for a mere three-hour exhibition. On a clear day, the heat was oppressive; on a wet day, the artists’ hearts ached to see water droplets on their works! As time passed, the artists inevitably grew weary of this situation, and their interest in participating diminished. Seeing this, the organisers decided to discontinue the exhibitions and regroup. Hopefully, the promotion of such exhibitions will resume.

Exhibition venues

Venues in our country that could be used for exhibitions include the Victoria Memorial Hall, Singapore Conference Hall, Chinese Chamber of Commerce, National Library, British Council, Australian High Commission, Alliance Française, Art Museum of the University of Singapore, Art Gallery of Ming Court Hotel, Lim Bo Seng Memorial, Gay World Stadium, and Singapore Badminton Hall. While there are many venues, the appropriate ones are restricted to the first four listed. The remaining ones would be of use only in special circumstances. Among the four venues, the Victoria Memorial Hall and Singapore Conference Hall are more spacious and can hold group or large-scale solo exhibitions. The National Library and Chinese Chamber of Commerce are only suitable for solo exhibitions and are not really ideal exhibition venues.

Venue rental

The rate for daily rental of the Victoria Memorial Hall is $220, $160 for the Conference Hall, $80 for the Chinese Chamber of Commerce and $50 for the National Library. The other venues do not have fixed rental rates as location renting is not their key business. Usually, exhibitions are held according to arising needs, as in the Space Art Exhibition organised by the University of Singapore, or the Rodin exhibition. The British Council once organised a Henry Moore Sculpture and Photography Exhibition, while
they believe that their works should not be exhibited unless their quality and quantity are substantial; as such, they are satisfied if their works for that year have already been featured in group exhibitions. The other reason is that the success of an exhibition is commonly considered to be based on the number of paintings sold, and sales are often dependent on one’s public relations and socialising skills. Some artists, unwilling to play to profit, simply do not bother to hold exhibitions at all.

As for the young, they neither fear obstacles nor care about fame or gain. They see themselves as mere artists and believe that since they have produced artworks, these should be shown to the world. They look forward to both criticism and encouragement from society. If their works sell, the money made will be used to buy more materials; if they do not, the artists simply turn to other means to make a living, and continue to paint. In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of art collectors. This shows that social attitudes are quietly changing. This is a great encouragement to artists.

(4) Exhibitions by foreigners consist mainly of works by artists from Hong Kong and Taiwan. The main focus is in exhibiting Chinese ink paintings. Except for a small number of artists with good works, a large number of them come with the motive of making money and their works are tawdry. Artists from Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, India, England, France, Germany, Australia, New Zealand, and North and South Korea organise exhibitions to introduce their art, which includes oil paintings, sculptures, prints, lacquer paintings, carpets, replicas and others. Unfortunately, they produce few outstanding works and do not leave lasting impressions.

(5) The Outdoor Art Exhibition is co-organised by the National Theatre Trust and art groups such as the Singapore Art Society, Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, the Modern Art Society, the Angkatan Pelukis Aneka Daya, and others. It is held on the first Sunday of every month, from three to half past six in the afternoon, on the open grounds surrounding the Lim Bo Seng Memorial. The first few exhibitions were quite successful. There were several participating artists and more than 200 works. Standards were high. Some artists gave life drawing demonstrations to heighten the interest of the audience. This is in line with the principle of cultivating in the general public an interest in art. Unfortunately, responses to subsequent events gradually cooled and the situation began to deteriorate. Let us analyse the reasons for this.

First, there were some subpar art dealers who exploited the event by peddling cheap wholesale art from Indonesia at five or eight dollars apiece. These inferior works, which cannot be considered art, sullied the elegant atmosphere of the event. Second, participants travelled from afar and went to so much trouble only to display their paintings for a mere three-hour exhibition. On a clear day, the heat was oppressive; on a wet day, the artists’ hearts ached to see water droplets on their works! As time passed, the artists inevitably grew weary of this situation, and their interest in participating diminished. Seeing this, the organisers decided to discontinue the exhibitions and regroup. Hopefully, the promotion of such exhibitions will resume.

Exhibition venues

Venues in our country that could be used for exhibitions include the Victoria Memorial Hall, Singapore Conference Hall, Chinese Chamber of Commerce, National Library, British Council, Australian High Commission, Alliance Française, Art Museum of the University of Singapore, Art Gallery of Ming Court Hotel, Lim Bo Seng Memorial, Gay World Stadium, and Singapore Badminton Hall. While there are many venues, the appropriate ones are restricted to the first four listed. The remaining ones would be of use only in special circumstances. Among the four venues, the Victoria Memorial Hall and Singapore Conference Hall are more spacious and can hold group or large-scale solo exhibitions. The National Library and Chinese Chamber of Commerce are only suitable for solo exhibitions and are not really ideal exhibition venues.

Venue rental

The rate for daily rental of the Victoria Memorial Hall is $220, $160 for the Conference Hall, $80 for the Chinese Chamber of Commerce and $50 for the National Library. The other venues do not have fixed rental rates as location renting is not their key business. Usually, exhibitions are held according to arising needs, as in the Space Art Exhibition organised by the University of Singapore, or the Rodin exhibition. The British Council once organised a Henry Moore Sculpture and Photography Exhibition, while
the Australian High Commission introduced contemporary Australian fine arts.

**Number of visitors**

On the opening day of an exhibition, the number of guests present can be used to gauge the success of the exhibition. As an estimate, the minimum attendance at an exhibition is about 1,000 to 2,000, with a maximum of about 3,000 to 4,000. Based on the rent for Victoria Memorial Hall, a four-day exhibition would require $880; a week-long exhibition would cost $1,540. Including the catalogue, invitation cards and miscellaneous expenses, the total cost would amount to $2,000 or $3,000. Entrance fees have never been collected for exhibitions in Singapore. This shows the generosity of artists. Based on the attendance rate and the costs involved, the artists would have to bear the cost of a dollar or more for each guest. From a business point of view, this is an unprofitable venture which should have long been wound up. For the artists, however, economic gains and losses are set aside. Their intention is purely to create good artworks for everyone and promote art.

**A fine arts museum**

Everyone knows that there is the Musée du Louvre in Paris, the Tate Gallery in London, the Prado Museum in Madrid, the Metropolitan Museum in New York, and the Palace Museum (故宫博物院) in both Beijing and Taiwan. These museums collect many historic art treasures from domestic and foreign cultures for the public to appreciate and professionals to study. This is a very effective means of promoting and popularising art, and educating the public. Beyond this, an art museum could represent a nation’s dignity, revise its norms and demonstrate its cultural standards. It can also attract foreigners and, as a secondary outcome, earn tourist dollars. Thus, it is clear that Singapore needs to build a sizeable art museum. It is hoped that the relevant authorities will act quickly. Currently, the University of Singapore and Nanyang University have a fine arts museum and a cultural museum respectively for displaying art and historical exhibits from all over Southeast Asia. However, they are not magnificent enough and can only be considered as playing a secondary, if cosmetic, role in these institutions of learning.

**Art galleries**

The main objective of an art gallery, on one hand, is to promote a deeper public understanding of art; on the other hand, it is to earn a profit from commercial operations. This has long been the practice in Europe, the United States and Japan where art galleries act as middlemen for artists and collectors. As art galleries are well organised, almost every cosmopolitan city will have this indispensable profession. In recent years, a few galleries have appeared in Singapore. Some are located in new hotels while others are independently located in the Central Business District. This development is closely related to improvements in local cultural standards and the tourism industry.

**Collectors**

Tan Tsze Chor, with his exquisite discernment and bold vision, is the premiere collector in Singapore. Apart from calligraphy, paintings, ceramics, bronzes, ink stones and seals, his collection encompasses the gems of the hard work and toil of Chinese artists throughout history. Its size may well make his the leading collection in Southeast Asia. We would not be ashamed to say that it is among the best on an international scale. Tsze Chor has twice displayed pieces from his prized collection for exhibition, allowing the superior quality of Oriental art to be more widely appreciated by the public. In addition to this, he has also published *Paintings from the Xiang Xue Zhuang Collection* (香雪庄藏画), the *Ren Bonian Painting Catalogue* (任伯年画册), and *Seals from the Xiang Xue Zhuang Collection* (香雪庄印存) for distribution.

Teo Chin Thong (张振通) has an impressively large collection. Recently, he made a generous donation of more than 300 pieces of ceramics to Nanyang University’s Lee Kong Chian Art Museum (李光前文物馆). This is ample statement of the size of his collection. It would be valuable for the study of cultural artefacts, commerce and life in Southeast Asia.

Guo Musong (郭木松) is a collector who cares more for quality than quantity. It is known that he has some priceless calligraphy, paintings and ceramics. Yeo Khee Lim (杨启霖) is a magnanimous person who buys artworks, regardless of the price, as long as they are produced by renowned artists; hence, his collection is very significant. Loh Chak Tiew (刘作筹) spends a lot of time in Hong Kong — such proximity to China makes it easier for him to build a collection that is impressive in quality and quantity.
the Australian High Commission introduced contemporary Australian fine arts.

Number of visitors

On the opening day of an exhibition, the number of guests present can be used to gauge the success of the exhibition. As an estimate, the minimum attendance at an exhibition is about 1,000 to 2,000, with a maximum of about 3,000 to 4,000. Based on the rent for Victoria Memorial Hall, a four-day exhibition would require $880; a week-long exhibition would cost $1,540. Including the catalogue, invitation cards and miscellaneous expenses, the total cost would amount to $2,000 or $3,000. Entrance fees have never been collected for exhibitions in Singapore. This shows the generosity of artists. Based on the attendance rate and the costs involved, the artists would have to bear the cost of a dollar or more for each guest. From a business point of view, this is an unprofitable venture which should have long been wound up. For the artists, however, economic gains and losses are set aside. Their intention is purely to create good artworks for everyone and promote art.

A fine arts museum

Everyone knows that there is the Musée du Louvre in Paris, the Tate Gallery in London, the Prado Museum in Madrid, the Metropolitan Museum in New York, and the Palace Museum (故宫博物院) in both Beijing and Taiwan. These museums collect many historic art treasures from domestic and foreign cultures for the public to appreciate and professionals to study. This is a very effective means of promoting and popularising art, and educating the public. Beyond this, an art museum could represent a nation’s dignity, revise its norms and demonstrate its cultural standards. It can also attract foreigners and, as a secondary outcome, earn tourist dollars. Thus, it is clear that Singapore needs to build a sizeable art museum. It is hoped that the relevant authorities will act quickly. Currently, the University of Singapore and Nanyang University have a fine arts museum and a cultural museum respectively for displaying art and historical exhibits from all over Southeast Asia. However, they are not magnificent enough and can only be considered as playing a secondary, if cosmetic, role in these institutions of learning.

Art galleries

The main objective of an art gallery, on one hand, is to promote a deeper public understanding of art; on the other hand, it is to earn a profit from commercial operations. This has long been the practice in Europe, the United States and Japan where art galleries act as middlemen for artists and collectors. As art galleries are well organised, almost every cosmopolitan city will have this indispensable profession. In recent years, a few galleries have appeared in Singapore. Some are located in new hotels while others are independently located in the Central Business District. This development is closely related to improvements in local cultural standards and the tourism industry.

Collectors

Tan Tsze Chor, with his exquisite discernment and bold vision, is the premiere collector in Singapore. Apart from calligraphy, paintings, ceramics, bronzes, ink stones and seals, his collection encompasses the gems of the hard work and toil of Chinese artists throughout history. Its size may well make his the leading collection in Southeast Asia. We would not be ashamed to say that it is among the best on an international scale. Tsze Chor has twice displayed pieces from his prized collection for exhibition, allowing the superior quality of Oriental art to be more widely appreciated by the public. In addition to this, he has also published Paintings from the Xiang Xue Zhuang Collection (香雪庄藏画), the Ren Bonian Painting Catalogue (任伯年画册), and Seals from the Xiang Xue Zhuang Collection (香雪庄印存) for distribution.

Teo Chin Thong (张振通) has an impressively large collection. Recently, he made a generous donation of more than 300 pieces of ceramics to Nanyang University's Lee Kong Chian Art Museum (李光前文物馆). This is ample statement of the size of his collection. It would be valuable for the study of cultural artefacts, commerce and life in Southeast Asia.

Guo Musong (郭木松) is a collector who cares more for quality than quantity. It is known that he has some priceless calligraphy, paintings and ceramics. Yeo Khee Lim (杨启霖) is a magnanimous person who buys artworks, regardless of the price, as long as they are produced by renowned artists; hence, his collection is very significant. Loh Chak Tiew (刘作筹) spends a lot of time in Hong Kong — such proximity to China makes it easier for him to build a collection that is impressive in quality and quantity.
A student of Huang Binhong, Tan Keng Cheow (陈景昭) has about 100 pieces of Huang’s best works, both early and late. Wang Meichi (王梅痴) collects only rare classic ceramic tea sets. Local artists each have their own treasured collections, but these are invariably small and cannot compare. In summary, in the absence of a proper fine arts museum, the treasures amassed by collectors will serve to satisfy art lovers and help scholars who have problems gaining access to artworks for study.

Fine arts publications
The fine arts publications mentioned here refer to those that are regularly published. The Singapore Art Society once published Yishu Yuekan (艺术月刊). It included a topical commentary, introduction of artists, and developments in the arts, among others, supplemented with illustrations. It was a readable publication. However, it was discontinued just after three issues, which is truly regrettable! Previously, Nanfang Evening Post (南方晚报) also produced a weekly publication on fine arts. Unfortunately, that ceased with the discontinuation of the newspaper. Recently, a weekly publication, Fine Arts (美术) by Nanyang Siang Pau (南洋商报), made its debut. It is rich in content with a vibrant layout, and is thus a great platform for the fine arts community. In truth, now is not the right time to publish a regular art magazine because of insufficient funds, submissions and readership. Needless to say, such an endeavour will not be sustainable. Thus, a publication that acts as a supplement to newspapers is the best arrangement. Some periodic publications, such as exhibition catalogues and anniversary publications by fine arts groups, are really quite good.

Art criticism
It is not an easy job to critique art. One needs to be alert, objective and impartial, and avoid making perfunctory praise. One must give honest criticism, for only then can one truly help to raise the standard of art. However, local artists lack magnanimity, and frank criticism often results in unpleasantness. Hence, our newspapers and magazines, with their polite commentaries, do not make for useful reading at all.

Art studies
Apart from foundational courses like clay modelling and still-life classes, one would have little recourse in one’s study of the human figure. This is because an Oriental is restricted by Confucian philosophy and is, as yet, not open-minded towards the naked human body. It is nearly impossible for local artists to have an opportunity to draw nudes. In fact, nudes are by far the best subject when learning to draw. Their form, complexion, movement, texture and appeal all exhibit a high degree of variation and flavour. Coupled with complex structure and symmetrical proportion, the nude makes any viewer feel passionate admiration for the human subject. If one could express such a complex and delicate subject at will, then doing the same for all other things would be easy. Moreover, art cannot be dissociated from society. If a painting is required to portray varied human behaviour, it is inevitable for the human subject to be its mainstay. Many great artists, regardless of their eventual artistic styles, spent a significant amount of time drawing nudes in the early stage of their artistic careers. Artists who have drawn nudes will produce works which have a sense of precision and firmness, and a quality of dynamic liveliness. One of the reasons why works by many Singapore artists lack depth and realism is that they have not drawn nudes. Therefore, now is the time to encourage everyone to focus on doing so.

The self-cultivation of the artist
The most important factor that affects the depth of an artwork is how learned and cultivated its artist is. In creating art, one should first have an idea, followed by technique. Technique is controlled by the idea, which in turn guides the progress of technique. To merely focus on technique is like having a body devoid of a soul. When technique is merged with the idea, it becomes a tiger with wings. The formation of a style or the exploration of a new theory in a particular period depends on the thoughts of its people. Local artists expend much energy in following others but are incapable of creating their unique paradigms. This is the consequence of a weak foundation in ideas which can be attributed to two causes: first, Singapore’s national culture is too young; second, its tropical climate, which feels like summer all year long, does not change much. Life is rather stable and lacks stimulus and encouragement.

Styles and categories of art
Ink painting, which uses rice paper, the writing brush and ink as tools, originated in
A student of Huang Binhong, Tan Keng Cheow (陈景昭) has about 100 pieces of Huang’s best works, both early and late. Wang Meichi (王梅痴) collects only rare classic ceramic tea sets. Local artists each have their own treasured collections, but these are invariably small and cannot compare. In summary, in the absence of a proper fine arts museum, the treasures amassed by collectors will serve to satisfy art lovers and help scholars who have problems gaining access to artworks for study.

Fine arts publications

The fine arts publications mentioned here refer to those that are regularly published. The Singapore Art Society once published *Yishu Yuekan* (艺术月刊). It included a topical commentary, introduction of artists, and developments in the arts, among others, supplemented with illustrations. It was a readable publication. However, it was discontinued just after three issues, which is truly regrettable! Previously, *Nanfang Evening Post* (南方晚报) also produced a weekly publication on fine arts. Unfortunately, that ceased with the discontinuation of the newspaper. Recently, a weekly publication, *Fine Arts* (美术) by *Nanyang Siang Pau* (南洋商报), made its debut. It is rich in content with a vibrant layout, and is thus a great platform for the fine arts community. In truth, now is not the right time to publish a regular art magazine because of insufficient funds, submissions and readership. Needless to say, such an endeavour will not be sustainable. Thus, a publication that acts as a supplement to newspapers is the best arrangement. Some periodic publications, such as exhibition catalogues and anniversary publications by fine arts groups, are really quite good.

Art criticism

It is not an easy job to critique art. One needs to be alert, objective and impartial, and avoid making perfunctory praise. One must give honest criticism, for only then can one truly help to raise the standard of art. However, local artists lack magnanimity, and frank criticism often results in unpleasantness. Hence, our newspapers and magazines, with their polite commentaries, do not make for useful reading at all.

Art studies

Apart from foundational courses like clay modelling and still-life classes, one would have little recourse in one’s study of the human figure. This is because an Oriental is restricted by Confucian philosophy and is, as yet, not open-minded towards the naked human body. It is nearly impossible for local artists to have an opportunity to draw nudes. In fact, nudes are by far the best subject when learning to draw. Their form, complexion, movement, texture and appeal all exhibit a high degree of variation and flavour. Coupled with complex structure and symmetrical proportion, the nude makes any viewer feel passionate admiration for the human subject. If one could express such a complex and delicate subject at will, then doing the same for all other things would be easy. Moreover, art cannot be dissociated from society. If a painting is required to portray varied human behaviour, it is inevitable for the human subject to be its mainstay. Many great artists, regardless of their eventual artistic styles, spent a significant amount of time drawing nudes in the early stage of their artistic careers. Artists who have drawn nudes will produce works which have a sense of precision and firmness, and a quality of dynamic liveliness. One of the reasons why works by many Singapore artists lack depth and realism is that they have not drawn nudes. Therefore, now is the time to encourage everyone to focus on doing so.

The self-cultivation of the artist

The most important factor that affects the depth of an artwork is how learned and cultivated its artist is. In creating art, one should first have an idea, followed by technique. Technique is controlled by the idea, which in turn guides the progress of technique. To merely focus on technique is like having a body devoid of a soul. When technique is merged with the idea, it becomes a tiger with wings. The formation of a style or the exploration of a new theory in a particular period depends on the thoughts of its people. Local artists expend much energy in following others but are incapable of creating their unique paradigms. This is the consequence of a weak foundation in ideas which can be attributed to two causes: first, Singapore’s national culture is too young; second, its tropical climate, which feels like summer all year long, does not change much. Life is rather stable and lacks stimulus and encouragement.

Styles and categories of art

Ink painting, which uses rice paper, the writing brush and ink as tools, originated in
Western painting includes oil painting, gouache, watercolour and acrylic. It originated in Western Europe, but was brought directly to Singapore and Malaya by a group of graduates from the several famous art academies in China. In the early 1930s, Realism and Impressionism were the popular styles. Gradually, Post-Impressionism and Fauvism appeared. Later, Cubism raged for a period of time. Recently, as a result of the rising number of local young artists furthering their studies in Europe and the United States, abstract art naturally reached our shores. From a historical perspective, Singapore’s Western art is a link in the entire chain of modern art, joining the ranks of many countries around the world. A European art critic once said that since 1945, the art of the world has merged into a great river without any differentiation. This is sufficiently proven by observing our country’s art scene. However, there is an issue that we should note. Some youths in our country, like many in the rest of the world, are overly ambitious — they do not put in the effort but expect results. They view modern art, especially abstract art, as a stepping stone to success. They produce shabby paintings and even boldly overstate their works as great compositions. They do not realise that the birth of every new form of art has a cogent theory and bold technique as its basis, and is not something that can be achieved overnight.

Batik painting uses specialised tools and materials and entails a laborious production process. It has for many years been a kind of modern craft in this country. This is a successful development of a technique that dyes sarong with wax into an art form. Currently, its original unpolished technique has improved to a stage of elegant presentation. Simple subject matter has evolved into magnificent compositions. Those strong and brilliant colours and bold and simple lines are the best medium to portray nature and the lives of the people of the south. It is not inappropriate for me to call it the art of the equator.

The future

Extrapolating from the above commentary, we may envision and predict how the future will be like. There is little need for verbosity. Everyone knows, from frequent reports in the newspapers, that the government is spending a few hundred million dollars to build a sports centre in Kallang. It includes a huge sports venue with an audience capacity of 50,000–60,000 and an Olympic-size swimming pool. An English language research centre and a centre for technical education are being built at a few million dollars each. Although the total cost of these projects may not be paid for from the national treasury,
China. Hence, it is referred to as Chinese ink painting. A student normally begins by copying paintings, hence developing a kind of dependency as well as inferiority. He assumes that ancient artists are all unsurpassable, that they have attained artistic perfection, and that there is no longer a need to expend energy to advance any further — all that is required is to copy their works. As a result, artists today do not know how to or dare not attempt subjects ancient artists have not painted. Although they live on the equator, their paintings are still full of plum blossoms, orchids, bamboo and chrysanthemums. This is simply unimaginable!

Fortunately, there is a group of progressive artists who use established techniques to express practical subject matter, giving a new life to ink painting. Now, we see orchids, huts in coconut forests, monkeys, and women in sarongs. Such content has not been seen before in the category of ink painting, but we dare to paint and are willing to seek the best method of expression. Just this starting point alone is worthy of much praise. If we could take it a step further and synthesise it with contemporary artistic concepts, taking ink painting (which already has distinctive features) and propelling it towards greater heights, that would be a worthy achievement; it is the responsibility of our country's art community.

It is necessary to mention in passing that fountain pens and ball-point pens are frequently used here. Children and youth do not have the habit of writing with brushes and are greatly disadvantaged when they start to learn ink painting. As everyone knows, calligraphy and painting share the same origin. In both, the same brush is used. Holding a brush, transferring energy, and expressing the strength and the boldness of the brush are all intimately related. Hence, the Chinese commonly refer to painting as “writing a painting” (写画), because there is much calligraphy in a painting. When the calligraphic skill is steadfast, the art of painting will naturally be superior and established — this is an undeniable fact.

Western painting includes oil painting, gouache, watercolour and acrylic. It originated in Western Europe, but was brought directly to Singapore and Malaya by a group of graduates from the several famous art academies in China. In the early 1930s, Realism and Impressionism were the popular styles. Gradually, Post-Impressionism and Fauvism appeared. Later, Cubism raged for a period of time. Recently, as a result of the rising number of local young artists furthering their studies in Europe and the United States, abstract art naturally reached our shores. From a historical perspective, Singapore's Western art is a link in the entire chain of modern art, joining the ranks of many countries around the world. A European art critic once said that since 1945, the art of the world has merged into a great river without any differentiation. This is sufficiently proven by observing our country's art scene. However, there is an issue that we should note. Some youths in our country, like many in the rest of the world, are overly ambitious — they do not put in the effort but expect results. They view modern art, especially abstract art, as a stepping stone to success. They produce shabby paintings and even boldly overstate their works as great compositions. They do not realise that the birth of every new form of art has a cogent theory and bold technique as its basis, and is not something that can be achieved overnight.

Batik painting uses specialised tools and materials and entails a laborious production process. It has for many years been a kind of modern craft in this country. This is a successful development of a technique that dyes sarong with wax into an art form. Currently, its original unpolished technique has improved to a stage of elegant presentation. Simple subject matter has evolved into magnificent compositions. Those strong and brilliant colours and bold and simple lines are the best medium to portray nature and the lives of the people of the south. It is not inappropriate for me to call it the art of the equator.

The future
Extrapolating from the above commentary, we may envision and predict how the future will be like. There is little need for verbosity. Everyone knows, from frequent reports in the newspapers, that the government is spending a few hundred million dollars to build a sports centre in Kallang. It includes a huge sports venue with an audience capacity of 50,000–60,000 and an Olympic-size swimming pool. An English language research centre and a centre for technical education are being built at a few million dollars each. Although the total cost of these projects may not be paid for from the national treasury,
at least the different government departments are overseeing each project. Hence, we sincerely wish that the relevant authorities will examine the needs of our situation and also build an arts centre that would consist of an art museum for people to visit and an arts institution to develop talents. In the past couple of years, Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew and the various ministers have often spoken at public forums about promoting a civilised society. They have spoken on the many ways to broaden the effects of fine arts on society and life, and have greatly raised the public’s appreciation of and interest in the arts. In terms of concrete action, the Garden City Plan has been implemented. Be it in public squares or streets, there is a profusion of vibrant colours everywhere, soothing our souls and relaxing our minds. We hope to progress a step further and develop Singapore into an arts city, such that roundabouts and gardens are decorated with marble or bronze sculptures, and outstanding local paintings hang in the interiors of the City Hall building and the lobby of each commercial building. Only then can it be said that this country has a cultured and noble character.

If Pablo Picasso had, at his prime, switched from painting to doing other work, people would not have been able to witness his outstanding artistic achievements. This is to say that for an artist to show his artistic ability, he would invariably have to undertake a long journey. If he changes his profession along the way, his opportunity for success would be greatly reduced.

Jen Hao (陈人浩) possesses strong artistic talent but was not fated to peak artistically because he took on the responsibility of educating the next generation immediately upon completing his professional training as an artist. Initially, he taught at his alma mater, the Shanghai College of Fine Arts (上海美术专科学校). It was fortuitous that the college was enveloped in an artistic atmosphere and that the students he taught all had a considerable foundation in art. Hence, Jen Hao was teaching and being taught at the same time, and his artistic creativity did not stagnate. When the Sino-Japanese War broke out, Jen Hao left Shanghai for Malaya and worked in different secondary schools. Most of the time, he took on the role of principal and was responsible for the administration of the school. His 14 years at Chung Hwa Secondary School (中化中学) in Muar and 13 years at Dunman High School (德明中学) in Singapore seriously depleted his precious time and creative energy, almost causing him to give up his art.

Jen Hao has been successful in the field of education. He has managed the schools diligently and carefully, created a pure and honest school spirit, and produced excellent results. Cohort after cohort has been accepted into higher institutions of learning in the country, some of the students have continued their education overseas, while many more have joined the work force to serve society. His is truly a rich harvest and a great contribution to the country and the people.

However, from the viewpoint of art, this is too much of a sacrifice. In educating the next generation, Jen Hao actually let the prime of his life quietly slip away. This is indeed lamentable! I dare say that had he held on to his art after returning from France and continued to ponder, paint and completely immerse himself in ink and paint, Jen Hao, as we see him today, would undoubtedly be commanding the Far East, if not the world.

ENDNOTES
1 This is not to be confused with the School of the Arts (SOTA), which is also known in Chinese as 新加坡艺术学院.