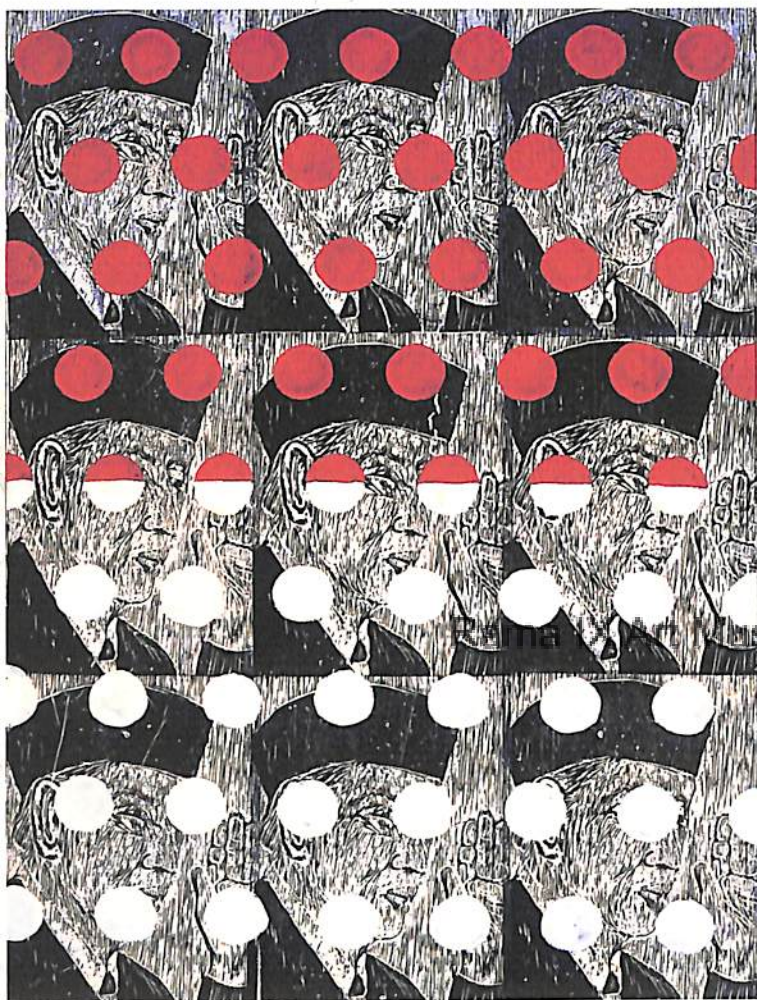
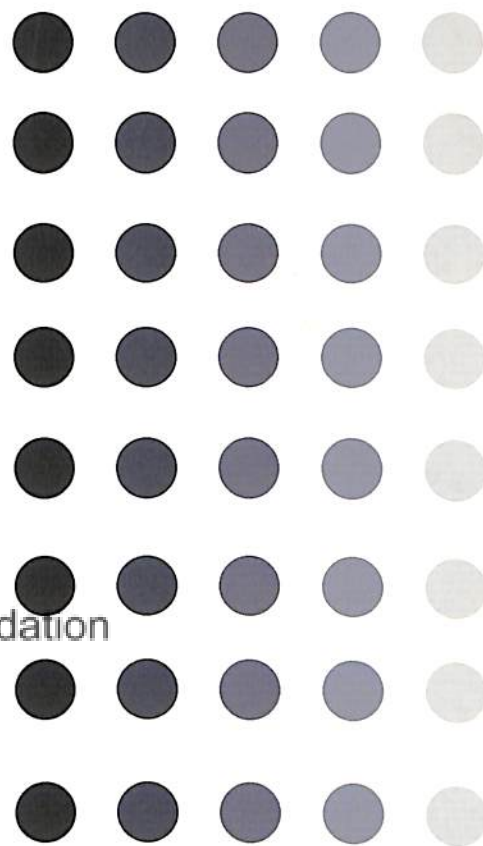




Four Eyes, Cloudy Skies



Vincent Leow

Rama IX Art Museum Foundation



Four Eyes, Cloudy Skies

Vincent Leow

Distant Neighbours

Over the later half of the 20th century, the cultural wind of Thailand (like several other Asian countries) headed westward. We looked towards Euro-American arts and cultures, which we regarded as "modern civilisations", as role models. There was also a great sense of anticipation on the part of Asian countries to be recognized by the western world.

However, the more we try to mimic the west, the more we realize that we are only at our best when we are ourselves. We have studied the cultures, philosophies and art of the west with great interest, sometimes at the expense of learning about our very own cultures and that of our close neighbours. Would it have not been possible to develop our interest in both Asia and the West at the same time?

This is a question that has been frequently asked at both the individual as well as the state level. With the impact of globalization, we have begun to think locally and regionally in order to secure our foothold in the new global and economic era.

It takes only two and a half hours to fly between Bangkok and Singapore. Yet, we know little about each other's arts and cultures, despite the flourishing trade and business partnerships between the two countries. As commonly observed, trade always takes precedence over culture.

I first encountered the works of Vincent Leow in 1993 at the 1st Asia Pacific Triennale in Brisbane, Australia. However, it was only recently that I have had the opportunity to learn more about Vincent's works and his other projects. Vincent visited Tadu briefly back in 1999 but it was only in the following year that contact between us was firmly established.

Through Plastique Kinetic Worms (PKW), an artist-run space in Singapore, founded by Vincent and his friends, we made arrangements to start the travelling show 'Keep Your Distance' which featured 8 young European and Asian artists in Bangkok in 2000. At the time, we had also discussed other issues concerning the development of contemporary art in Southeast Asia, which was still very much a myth to many of us, even those working in the field. I also remember telling Vincent that though I had read reports about Singapore's multi-racial society, I hardly realized the fact until on my first visit, I saw signs in all four languages above the door of an underground train.

In subsequent meetings with Vincent, in Singapore and Bangkok, at his studio, at my husband's studio and at restaurants, we exchanged stories and experiences about how we felt like strangers travelling in some Asian countries. There was so much to be learned about each other's history and culture and this learning could have been made more accessible if there had been more Asian art exhibitions and exchange programmes for artists working in various independent art organizations in Asia.

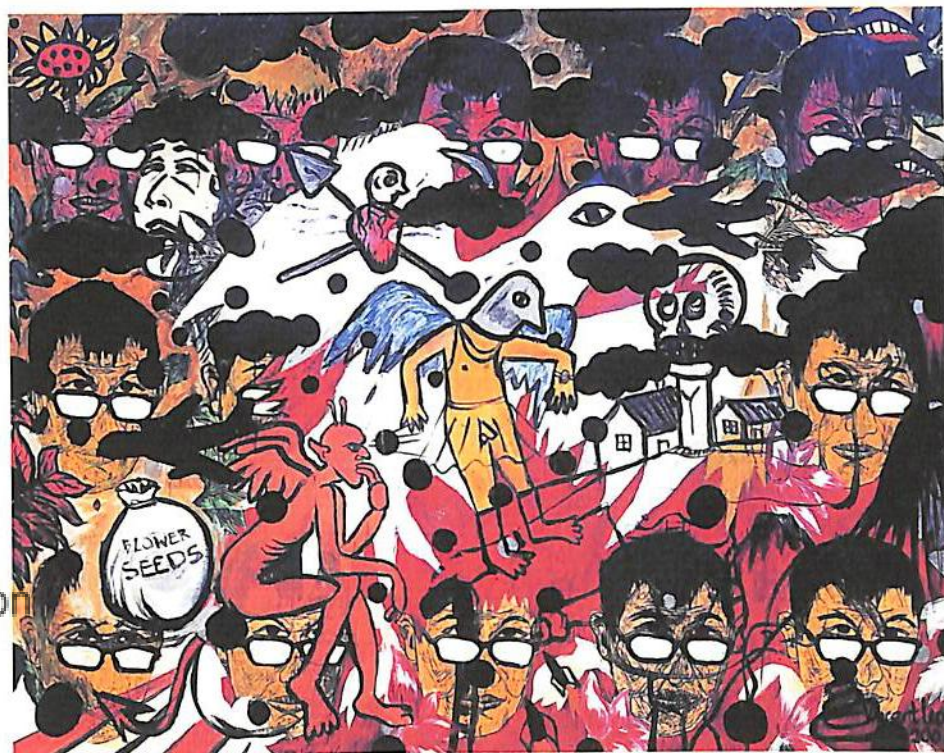
Certainly, this is a good time to start. Art and cultural links have now started to fully enjoy the benefits of joint ASEAN initiatives, resulting in the easing of strict travel regulations, and lower travel costs and import duties. We have also noticed the increasing interest in contemporary Asian art happenings among our Asian counterparts as seen in seminars and exhibitions organized by various organizations. Besides, more contacts have been initiated and developed among Asian artists, curators and art administrators.

'Four Eyes, Cloudy Skies', a painting exhibition by Vincent Leow in Bangkok, is the fruitful outcome of years of contact. However, what we hope to bring forward in organizing this exhibition is not merely to nurture such links, but to understand some of the issues that we as residents of the same region share, such as how our existing cultural values and identities are coming under threat from the overwhelming process of globalization. This is reflected so well in Vincent's paintings, where forms and images are placed layer upon layer. I hope that the Thai audiences as well as other visitors will enjoy peeling off the meanings underlying the surfaces of his paintings, which may trigger us into thinking about our presence in relations to others.

I strongly believe that this is a start to understanding ourselves and our Asian neighbours, with the hope that we will become at least close strangers.

Luckana Kunavichayanont

Tadu Contemporary Art, Bangkok



Flying Jack

(mixed medium on canvas - 120 x 150 cm - 2000)



Cowboy
(mixed medium on canvas - 120 x 150 cm - 2000)

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Dirty Dreams
(mixed medium on canvas - 120 x 150 cm - 2000)



Circus Rabbit
(mixed medium on canvas - 120 x 150 cm - 2000)

Rama IX Art Museum Foundation



Digestion
(mixed medium on canvas - 120 x 150 cm - 2000)

MTV Flash-Frozen: The Crystallization Of The Moving Image

The evolution of Vincent the Painter follows a certain distinct lineage, as individualistic as Vincent the Sculptor, or Vincent the Performance Artist. 'Four Eyes, Cloudy Skies' (2001) marks his fourth solo painting exhibition in Singapore, which commenced with 'Donkeys, Elephants and the Three-Legged Toad' (1992) with Shenn's Fine Arts, 'Chop Suey' (1994) with Art-2 and 'Falling Bones, Hungry Chillies' (1996) at the Substation Gallery.

Vincent began painting with a vengeance during his Masters at the Maryland Institute, USA (1989-1991), after having trained ostensibly as a sculptor at LaSalle (1985-1987). His paintings merrily distort perspective and anatomy, can be garish in their colour and blithely dismiss a staid academicism. In its naïve expressionism, Vincent's paintings find familiar echoes throughout Southeast Asia, such as the work of Heri Dono and Eddie Hara in Indonesia (whom Vincent met when all were students), Vasan Sitthiket in Thailand, perhaps less so with Tan Chin Kuan in Malaysia and Charlie Co in the Philippines. Vincent confesses to having been influenced by folk painting in his travels - Thai temple paintings, Balinese wayang painting and Indian folk art. Quick, simple gestures succinctly capture the human figure, with colour deftly filled in: the idea, the essence is more important than the mode of depiction.

Images from popular culture such as Chinese icons and brand labels were prevalent in his earlier paintings, but are brandished sparingly in the current exhibition where spaceships and dinosaurs make incongruous appearances. Vincent's fondness for animals transmogrified into a series of human-headed creatures in 'Falling Bones, Hungry Chillies', and certainly animals abound in 'Four Eyes, Cloudy Skies' but they are less anthropomorphized now, save for a dextrous horse in *Circus Rabbit*.

Curious images abound in all of Vincent's paintings, and the temptation is to read messages and hidden meanings, as befitting his perceived status as 'angry young man' of Singaporean art. The epithet sits uneasily with him: notwithstanding 5th Passage infamy, he will admit to veiled comment and barbed statements in his earlier work, but these have largely been personal responses, relating to arts issues for instance, not scathing social commentary nor political invective. He confesses that he hates making his statements explicit, as if he is trying too hard to push a message. Nevertheless, Vincent was indeed a significant voice in the new cultural energy that swept through the Singapore art scene in the late '80s and early '90s, which saw the birth of a Singapore theatre, and in the visual arts, the introduction of installation and performance art. As a key member of the Artists Village, Head of Sculpture at the early LaSalle-SIA College of the Arts, and a founder of artist-run spaces such as Utopia and Plastique Kinetic Worms, his neo-expressionist influences live on in younger artists as Lam Hoi Lit, Chua Chye Teck and Benjamin Puah.

Whither painting in the new millennium? Vincent bemoans the relative lack of inspiration in Singapore for the dearth of exciting painting, but admits it is the price we pay for prosperity and a stable political climate. Having just spent a residency in Yogyakarta, Vincent has observed that political turmoil in Indonesia has thrown up strong narrative work, extensive social commentary where figuration seems obligatory. "It's as if the minute you paint social commentary, it sells," he expatriates, or Western-educated locals. Socio-political images are now easily used as a selling point, he opines, citing the recently exhibited revolutionary images of Chinese artist Wang Guangyi or the peasant-poverty issues of Filipino Alvarado at Atelier Frank & Lee. What however can the Singaporean painter use as narrative? Can the ennui be relooked, examined, interpreted and dealt with in a uniquely Singaporean way? Vincent realizes that is incumbent upon the Singaporean artist now to create his own opportunities, rather than to let the situation dictate the artist. Abstraction is one solution: the recent Singapore leg of the Philip Morris competition in which Vincent was a judge turned up a proportionately greater amount of abstract work, in contrast to other work from the region, where figuration was prevalent.

In his recent paintings of 2000-2001, Vincent has been consciously seeking to create paintings which give the visual 'experience' for the viewer. Independent of medium, style or content, a successful painting speaks to its audience and evokes a visual sensation which speaks of the artist, his feelings and of the painting itself. Until viewing an actual painting of Jackson Pollock for instance, Vincent could not honestly understand the attractions of drip painting and abstract expressionism. Unlike several artists who manage to latch onto a successful individualistic trait for recognition or commercialism, Vincent has always eschewed painting according to theme, series or formula. What he now knows he wants is to provide the 'experience', not, he admits, that he necessarily knows how. With this realization, it becomes difficult to paint, as he never knows what the eventual outcome may be, although there is painful deliberation in the painting process. A painting

for Vincent is finished only when he senses completion between himself and the painting, and he only hopes that he can create a similar relationship between the viewer and the exhibited product.

'Four Eyes, Cloudy Skies' functions as a sort of stock-taking for the painter for the last year or so. The paintings are replete with objects and discrete images, for Vincent cannot avoid figuration as a means of expressing himself on canvas. There is however a much heavier density of disparate images which are essentially unrelated to each other, and this in itself may function as a form of abstraction, rather than non-objective expression which Vincent has no affinity for. Using film as an analogy, he asks: is it possible to develop characters without actually telling a story between figures, to avoid using the painting as a freeze-frame of a narrative? Vincent intends for each image to lead the viewer from one to another on a personal voyage of discovery of the painter's intentions (or lack of them). For his current work, inevitable links are created in one's mind in one's attempted comprehension of each juxtaposed image, and this forces the relationship with the painting to be more involved, more participatory for the viewer. The emphasis is on the paintings, the process of painting, the layering of images, the spatial relationships of objects and the connectivity of images, real or imagined. Optical effects such as the interweaving of hoops and lines, or the dinosaur and lines in *Lucky Number*, or the concentric circles in *Digestion* are given prominence, and the viewer has to develop his own points of reference in ordering his perception of the images. Foreground: background. Focal point: counterpoint. Subject: leitmotif.

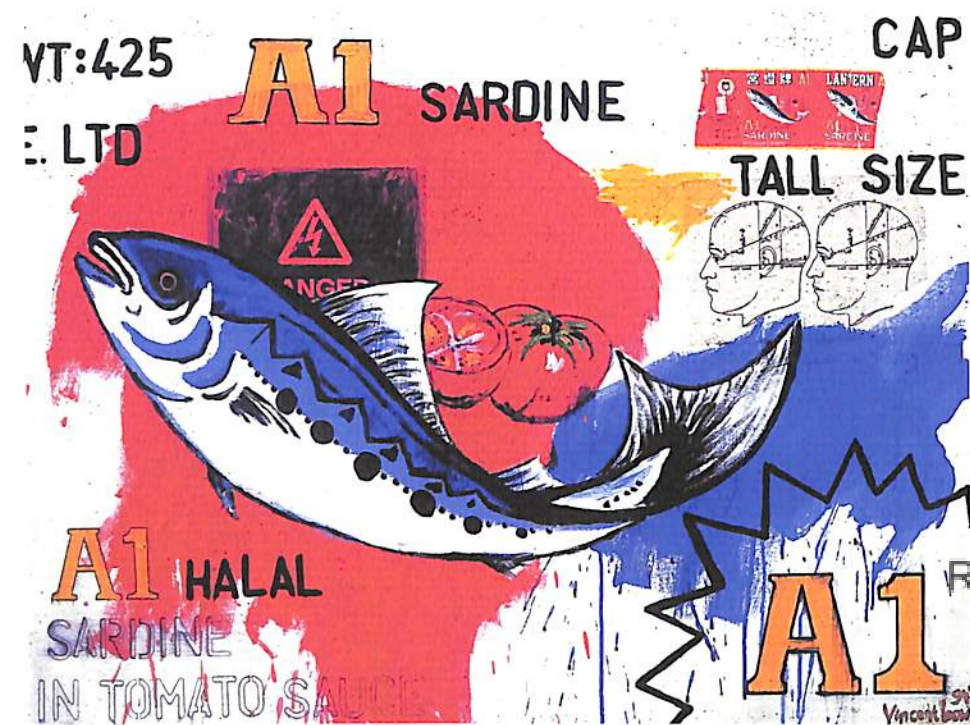
A number of commonalities abound: repeated images and motifs are used to pattern the canvases, alternately superposed or as background to the more individual images. The woodcut of a bespectacled man (no, it is not meant as a self-portrait!) glances somewhat disapprovingly from *Flying Jack* and returns in other canvases; clouds, dots and hoops alternately disrupt image connectivity, yet hold individual paintings together. In *Dirty Dreams*, a central whitening gives an unexpected prophylactic appearance to the hoops, irreverent, yet appropriate! The rural setting of the artist's home in Seletar camp provides much source material for several paintings - insects, animals and plants are found in *Cowboy*, *Digestion* and *Circus Rabbit*, as if to fictionalize the ordinary organism and raise the images to mythological status (a familiar theme of 'Falling Bones, Hungry Chillies'). Oblique references to the environment are observed in the image of Senoko Power Station in *Circus Rabbit* and pipes discharging effluent in *Dirty Dreams*. In a separate series of smaller canvases, quotations culled from the newspaper and media are overlain upon the paintings, inviting again queries of connectivity between words and pictures. It behooves us to remind ourselves however that while Vincent has a criterion for the images he chooses, he has, like MTV, selected for visual impact rather than as a reference to the song he sings.

In Southeast Asia, history has always been told through drawings and pictures. For a modern day scribe such as Vincent, the personal history told in 'Four Eyes, Cloudy Skies' is reflective of the struggle for a Singaporean voice in painting, amidst the powerful, unbridled expression in our region. Singaporeans flit from event to event, image to image, moment to moment in a runaround struggle that we call our life. Looking back a millennium later, what history of Singapore will Vincent's paintings have foretold?

Pwee Keng Hock

Consultant, eAsiaArt.com

16th March 2001, based on a conversation with Vincent on 11th March 2001



Sardine A1
(mixed medium on canvas - 91.5 x 122 cm - 1994)



Bombs Away
(oil on canvas - 120 x 150 cm - 1996)

Rama IX Art Museum Foundation

VINCENT LEOW KONG YAM

BORN : Singapore, 1961

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2001 "FOUR EYES, CLOUDY SKIES", Atelier Frank & Lee, Singapore
- 1998 "Mountain Cow Milk Factory", Installation (complete series), Telok Kurau Studios Gallery, Singapore
- 1997-98 "Mountain Cow Milk Factory", various venues, Singapore
- 1996 "Falling Bones, Hungry Chillies", Substation Gallery, Singapore
- 1994 "CHOP SUEY", Substation Gallery, Singapore
- 1992 "Donkeys, Elephants & The Three Legged Toad", Shenns Gallery, Singapore
- 1991 "Vincent Leow: Recent Paintings", School 33 Art Centre, Baltimore, MD, USA

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

- 2001 "ParallelWORLD Phase III", Plastique Kinetic Worms, Singapore
- "Caged Feet, Time Stall", two-person exhibition, Plastique Kinetic Worms, Singapore
- 2000 "BOXED 26x26", Plastique Kinetic Worms, Singapore
- "ParallelWorld", Project 304 Bangkok, Thailand
- "Feast" group exhibition, Singapore Art Museum, Singapore
- "CONFIGURATION", Atelier Frank & Lee, Singapore
- 1999 "Provocative Things", Sculpture Square, Singapore
- "NOKIA Art 99", Plastique Kinetic Worms & Singapore Art Museum, Singapore
- "ParallelWORLD", a group exhibition involving 3 exhibition sites
- "MIXAGE", collective project with Singapore & French artists, Singapore
- "Chair", group exhibition, Plastique Kinetic Worms, Singapore
- "CRISP", Singapore Art Museum, Singapore
- "Jotterbook", Plastique Kinetic Worms, Singapore
- 3 Singaporean & 3 French Artists, Alliance Francaise de Singapour
- "Art et Politique", Alliance Francaise de Singapour
- "Art et Politique", Sarcelles, France
- "Move", group exhibition, Plastique Kinetic Worms, Singapore
- "Brave New World", Soobin Gallery, Singapore
- "Part II", group exhibition, Plastique Kinetic Worms, Singapore
- 1998 "Censorship", group exhibition, Plastique Kinetic Worms, Singapore
- "Bangkok Art Project", Bangkok
- "Second Nature: Cityscapes of Singapore", exhibition of Singapore Contemporary Art, Central Plaza, Hong Kong
- "Launch", group exhibition, Plastique Kinetic Worms, Singapore
- 6x6x6, group exhibition, Plastique Kinetic Worms, Singapore
- "A Common Wealth of Art", National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- "An Arts Experience", UE Square, Singapore
- "500 & Below", group exhibition, Plastique Kinetic Worms, Singapore
- "Recent Works", 3 person exhibition at Plastique Kinetic Worms, Singapore
- "Imagining Self", an exhibition of permanent collection at the Singapore Art Museum, Singapore
- 1997 "9th Indian Triennale", New Delhi, India
- "Singapore Art 97", Suntec City, Singapore
- "Jewels of Asia", Suntec City, Singapore
- "Art Power", organized by The Substation, CHIJMES Gallery, Singapore

- 1996 "Shell Grand Discovery Art Exhibition", River House Restaurant, Singapore
- "Moon & Star" Show, UTOPIA Gallery, Singapore
- "Expressions", Millennia Walk, Singapore
- "Selections", UTOPIA Gallery, Singapore
- "\$300" Show, UTOPIA Gallery, Singapore
- "TOUR de ART LAH !", Art Bus Sculpture Installation, Singapore Festival of the Arts, Fringe Event, Singapore
- 1995 "Chiang Mai Social Installation", Sculpture Installation & performance, Wat U-Mong Temple, Chiang Mai, Thailand
- "Shift of Time", Sculpture Installation, German School, Singapore
- "Fighting The Universal Spider", Sculpture Installation & performance in collaboration, A & O Gallery, Berlin, Germany
- "Singapore Art 95", Sculpture Installation, Suntec City, Singapore
- "The Great Singapore Kitsch Show", LaSalle Gallery, Singapore
- "A FLOG OF BIRDIES", Sculpture Installation in collaboration Black Box, TheatreWorks, Singapore
- 1994 "Para Values", Site specific installation in collaboration, Fort Canning Park, Singapore
- "Window on Singapore Art", travelling exhibition to China & Hong Kong, National Museum Gallery, Singapore
- 1993 "International Sculpture & Painting Symposium", Gulbarga, India
- "Art In Asia" Singapore Art Fair 93, World Trade Centre, Singapore
- "SeptFest" Substation Gallery, Singapore
- "5th Fukui International Biennale", Tawara, Fukui City, Japan
- "2nd Sculpture Seminar", NAFA Gallery, Singapore
- "Asia Pacific Triennale of Contemporary Art", Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, Australia
- "ESPACE 3356", French Festival Art Exhibition, Singapore
- 1992 "Performance Art Week", Gallery 21, Singapore
- "HOPE" Visual Art Exhibition, 5th Passage Gallery, Singapore
- 1991 "Many in One: Twenty-five Years of Art From Singapore", travelling art exhibition in Washington DC, USA
- "Gateway to Malaysia", Bangunan Data Jaafar, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- "Vincent Leow & Rudy Nadler", thesis exhibition, Maryland Institute, Baltimore, USA
- "Urban Artists in Singapore", National Museum Art Gallery, Singapore
- 1990 "ARTSCAPE 90", Decker Gallery, Maryland Institute, Baltimore, USA
- "EYE 21", ART Base Gallery, Singapore Festival of Arts, Festival Fringe, Singapore
- 1989 "The Drawing Show", open studio show, Artists Village, Singapore
- "QU ArtSupport II", Artists Village Group Show, QU Art Space, Hong Kong
- "Contemporary Art In Singapore: Where East Meets West", travelling exhibition to the Netherlands & the Federal Republic of Germany
- "Two with a Cause", painting exhibition in collaboration with Wong Shih Yaw, National Art Gallery, Singapore
- "The Happenings", visual arts, installations & performances, National Technological Institute, Singapore
- "Man, Objects & Images 89", National Museum Art Gallery, Singapore
- 1988 "The Artists Village Show", open studio show, Artists Village, Singapore
- "7th Discovery Arts Exhibition", sculpture exhibition, Shell Tower, Singapore
- "Genesis", installation, drawings & print exhibition, Singapore Festival of Arts, Festival Fringe, Singapore
- 1987 "Ying & Yang Art Festival", visual arts, installations & performances, National University, Singapore
- "National Museum Centenary Exhibition", curated by the National Museum Art Gallery, Singapore
- 1986 "Australian Art Award for Young Artists", National Museum Art Gallery, Singapore
- "3rd Sculpture Workshop & Exhibition", LaSalle College of Arts, Singapore
- 1985 "3rd ASEAN Young Painting Workshop & Exhibition", organized by the ASEAN Cultural Committee, Yogyakarta, Indonesia
- "2nd Sculpture Workshop & Exhibition", National Museum Art Gallery, Singapore

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ART PERFORMANCES

- 1995 "The Chickens Are Like The Teak Trees In The Forest", Chiang Mai Social Art Installation, Chiang Mai, Thailand
"Party & Party", collaboration with Jason Lim, NIE Art Festival, Singapore
"Some Spiders Just Wanna Have Fun", collaboration with Jason Lim, A & O Gallery, Berlin, Germany
- 1994 "I,O,Bing Bong Bang", National Museum Theatre, Singapore
- 1993 "I'll Do, Will You?", 2nd Sculpture Seminar, NAFA Gallery, Singapore
"Coffee Talk", 5th Passage Art Gallery, Singapore
- 1992 "Lifestyles of the Rich & Famous: The Three Legged Toad", Arts Festival Fringe, Singapore
"1000 Ways To Walk A Plank", Space, Arts Festival Fringe, Singapore
- 1992 "Cover Up", joint performance with Jailani Kuning, Arts Festival Fringe, Singapore
"Shit Happens", joint performance with Jailani Kuning, Arts Festival Fringe, Singapore
"Space: Between The Teeth", LaSalle College of Arts, Singapore
- 1991 "5 Bananas", National Museum Art Gallery, Singapore
- 1990 "Ambassador from the Woods", joint performance with Canadian performance artist Peter Chin & others, Singapore Festival of Arts, Festival Fringe, Singapore
"Serious Conversation", joint performance with artists Tang Da Wu & Lee Wen, Singapore Festival of Arts, Festival Fringe, Singapore
- 1989 "Friendship", joint performance with Wong Shih Yaw, National Technological Institute, Singapore
"HELP", joint performance with Wong Shih Yaw, National Technological Institute, Singapore
"Michelle", National Technological Institute, Singapore
- 1988 "Art Commandoes", group performances, Singapore Festival of Arts, Festival Fringe, Singapore

AWARDS

- 2000 UNESCO-ASCHBERG Bursaries for Artists Yogyakarta, Indonesia
- 1991 Mount Royal Scholarship, Maryland Institute, Baltimore, USA
- 1990 Scholarship, Lee Foundation, Singapore
Singapore Cultural Arts Grant, Singapore
Mount Royal Scholarship, Maryland Institute, Baltimore, USA
- 1989 Scholarship, Lee Foundation, Singapore
Singapore Cultural Arts Grant, Singapore
- 1988 Exhibition Grant, Lee Foundation, Singapore
- 1987 First prize award, Sentosa Sculpture Design Competition organised by Sentosa Development Corporation, Singapore

EDUCATION

- 1989-91 Masters in Fine Art 1991, Maryland Institute, Mount Royal Graduate School of Art, Baltimore, USA
1985-87 Diploma in Fine Art & Design, Sculpture Major with Merit, LaSalle College of Art, Singapore
1979-80 National Trade Certificate in Building Drafting, Ponggol Vocational Institute, Singapore

COLLECTIONS

Singapore Art Museum, Singapore Turf Club, Sentosa Development Corporations, Deutsche Bank Singapore, National Arts Council, Katong Convent Secondary School, and Private Collectors.

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