

Puan Wairah Marzuki

Director General, Balai Seni Lukis Negara

National Art Gallery Malaysia

Jalan Temerloh, Off Jalan Tun Razak, 53200 Kuala Lumpur.

Tel: 40254989 E-mail: admin@bsln.po.my October 13, 2003

Dear Puan Wairah

Factual Inaccuracies in "Masterpieces from the National Art Gallery of Malaysia"

I came across very recently the publication "Masterpieces from the National Art Gallery of Malaysia" (2002) in which my work "Mankind" (1972) and the work Of "Image, Object, Illusion" Off series Mechanism (1977) were introduced by the author Encik Redza Piyadasa on Page 186 in the publication of which I have the following comments:

1. It is printed on Page 186 of the aforesaid publication that the work "Mankind" (Yin Yang created Mankind on Earth) was created in 1992, which is incorrect. The work was actually created in 1972.
2. On Page 186 (first paragraph, fourth sentence, sixth line), the chronology of content is inaccurate because "Mankind" was first exhibited at the National Art Gallery in 1973. "Mankind" comprises steel plate structures, a chain and lock atop an area of grassy earth (cow-grass). Of "Image, Object, Illusion" Off series Mechanism was exhibited in 1977 at the National Art Gallery Malaysia.

On Page 186, (first paragraph, fifth sentence, eight line), the writer's (Mr. Redza Piyadasa) interpretation about having the audience "step on to" and "the viewer had to climb up the steps and salute the image of the painted images of the Malaysian flag" is incorrect. In truth, I have had no such intention for the audience to do as such. I wish to point out that the painted canvas; flag and podium installation is the result of intuitive creation. Sociological factors will inevitably shape the writer's understanding of the artwork.

The writer should consider the work's context and the artist's intention before bestowing judgement, because he/she is responsible for bringing the artist's message to an audience via print media.

Written misinterpretation of the artwork without first consulting the artist puts into question the writer's integrity, objectivity and legitimate argument while judging a work of art. Clearly, a professional writer wishes to be thoroughly accurate, objective and consistent at all times when it comes to upholding literary integrity.

I wish to put forward a request that a small photo of the work "Mankind" be inserted into the title list (when the work is to be exhibited in public), in order to illustrate the original installation of "Mankind" which comes with the grassy earth. The earth is an integral part of the installation.

3. Referring to the work Of 'Image, Object, Illusion' - Off Series Mechanism, I wish to bring to your attention that the image printed on Page 162 in the book "Vision and Idea-Relooking Modern Malaysian Art" published by the National Art Gallery Malaysia (1994) is inaccurate on several points.  
Firstly, the title is incorrect.  
Secondly, "the black-carpeted wooden steps" unit was never part of my installation. The original installation (1977) had a white podium.  
Thirdly, I wish to point out that the image of the cockroach on the painting is missing. I would like an explanation for its disappearance because the artwork is incomplete without it.

As much as I respect the freedom of intellectual discourse in such a historical publication as "Masterpieces from the National Art Gallery of Malaysia", however, I do stress the importance of thorough research and factual accuracy.

It is only fair that writers should double-check facts with the artists themselves in order to prevent blatant inaccuracies.

(Special notes: When I inspected the condition of the work Of "Image, Object, Illusion" Off series Mechanism at the NAG on the 16<sup>th</sup> of July, 2003, I discovered several cuts on the reverse side of the painting that created obvious cracks on the painting surface.

Furthermore, the original white podium was missing for a while and so I put forth a request to your Mr. Ameruddin Ahmad that a new podium be made. The dimensions were as follows (plan 12" + 12" x 18" ) and (section 12" x 24" x 8 + 10" ). It is hardly an impossible request and I have yet to see it followed through.

4. I would like to emphasise that I am a **self-trained** artist and have been so throughout my career. Therefore, I wish to point out a factual inaccuracy on Page 186 under the editing format "**Education**" which currently associates my status as an artist with various art institutions. I would like to be referred to as a "self-trained artist" in your future publications with immediate effect.

[1966-1969 was a period of intensive self-training from which I devised a process for life-long creative work]. Every established artist would have worked with various reputable art institutions within the domain of cultural exchange and fraternity, having left the league of training/education (be it a period of self-education or collective formal training at an institution), which distinguishes the amateur from the professional.

As my curriculum vitae suggests, I am an established artist. In my case, however, I wish to stress that I have never received any formal art training from the Japanese Institution. Updated details in this aspect can also be sourced from my personal website [www.leekianseng.com](http://www.leekianseng.com)

5 I have also enclosed herein my **written notes** (in English and Mandarin) on "Mankind" to be kept with the research department of the National Art Gallery that I hope may be useful for future reference.

6 I take great pleasure to inform that my wife, Shoko LEE, whose paintings are among the Permanent Collection of the National Art Gallery Malaysia, is now a Malaysian citizen from the 23 July 2001. I enclosed herein photocopy of her Malaysian citizenship and Identity card for your record.

Please take action on the above where appropriate.

Thank you.

Sincerely yours,



Lee Kian Seng  
57, Jalan Rajawali, Taman Bukit Raja, Klang, 41150 Selangor, Malaysia. Tel:603-3372-3351

- c.c. *Y.Bhg. Tan Sri Kamarul Ariffin, Chairman of the Board of Trustee, National Art Gallery, Malaysia. 46M, Jalan Lima, off Jalan Chan Sow Lin, 55200 Kuala Lumpur.*
- c.c. *Encik.Mohamad Redza Piyadasa, author of "Masterpieces from the National Art Gallery of Malaysia" . 7, Jalan SS 18 / 3B, 46200 Subabng Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia*



1972 < **Mankind** > (Yin-Yang created Mankind on Earth) *Lee Kian Seng*

"Mankind" was conceived from the elements of "Yin" and "Yang". Measuring 160 x 220 x 140cm, it was completed in July 1972 and exhibited at the National Art Gallery Malaysia on the 16<sup>th</sup> of November 1973 at the "Man and His World" national art competition in 1973. The installation won the Minor Award and is part of the permanent collection of the National Art Gallery Malaysia

The aforesaid installation comprises the juxtaposition of two abstracted metal chair-like structures (symbolising male and female), which are chained and locked together atop an area of grassy earth (cow-grass).

The work is inspired by the ingenuity and originality of the Pictograph (Primitive stage) representing the 'female' and 'male' in the Chinese script. These two representations, suggested by the two 3-D chairs, are thus chained and locked to symbolise "Mankind" (on Earth). The original pictograph for woman (女 nu) depicts her in a bowing position. A field (田 tian), where strength (力 li) is exerted, is the symbol for 'masculine' man (男 nan), the male of the human species. (Note 1)

I was technically and aesthetically enthused by the Chinese art of paper cutting. This art motivated me to create my work in a manner whereby manipulation takes place rather than addition or subtraction. Instead of adding or taking away elements on the plane, I manipulated and dissected the plane, turning it or bending it to reveal the intended form. No welding is employed in this process of the interplay between form and space that is developed from the two-dimensional sheet of steel. Each abstracted form depicts the synergy of positive and negative elements. The remaining sheet on the ground brings together the interaction of the composition as a whole.

*Note 1: Each part of a Chinese script character has its own original meaning; the combination or the juxtaposition of interchangeable elements and combination gives birth to new meaning, such as the combination of the pictograph Sun (日 ri) and Moon (月 yue) creates the word "明 Ming" which literally means "light".*

*Special Note: The work "Mankind" is not a mere sculpture but an installation in its own right. When "Mankind" was incorrectly installed, it was understandably misinterpreted as a "sculpture" because of the absence of the flat plane of grassy earth, which is actually part of the installation. This was such the case at the national exhibition "Rupa" in 2000.*

*Thus, I put forth a request to the National Art Gallery and the guest curator Encik Mohamad Redza Piyadasa to see to the problem in a letter dated November 16, 2000 to ensure that "Mankind" be installed as originally intended by the artist for public viewing.*

*By Lee Kian Seng*



*3/4*

## 《 人类 》 (Mankind 1972)

华人新年拜天公的年羔上或佳节贴在礼品上用的红色剪纸(艺术)，自小给我留下神秘的印像。日后继续在我心里燃烧，驱使我向新创作媒介技巧上的挑战。

平面(2-D)的中文字体发源自立体(3-D)的象形。象形文字(Pictograph)的独创性与发源过程激发我重新组织与安顿我视觉艺术的思维。

“Mankind”这件作品包含了两座并置，以铁片制成，象征男女造型的抽象椅子；再以铁链加锁联成一体，象征人类；一片泥草地代表地球（牛草）；剪裁余留的铁片存在组织作品的构图。整体装置描述现代人类。

类似剪纸艺术的技巧，我以铁（金属）片进行创作。椅子的造型，从平面（2-D）开始。我解剖平面，运用转弯，经过转折去构成立体。立体造型在空间里呈显的张力描画了正负元素（阴阳 Yin Yang）的共同与相互作用，阳与阴性的流线是抽象自象形文字的男与女。

我的装置艺术系列包括“Unity” 1969/1970, “自天空” (“From the sky” 1971/1972,) “来自红色的窗口” (“From the window of red” 1972) 等，就是在这种游戏过程与冲激间中足渐诞生；同时挑战传统三次元(3-D)雕塑，二次元(2-D)绘画等各视觉艺术媒介的含量，制作过程，极限，与理念。

这作品是以人道主义的分母描述，结果形成装置“阴阳创造人类在地球”分子（Yin-Yang created mankind on Earth）。

Note: “Mankind”是在1972年7月底完成，1973年11月在国家艺术馆“Man and His World”展展出，获得第二奖。当时我把一片泥味熏天的牛草地搬入国家艺术馆内。那片牛草地是我装置艺术“Mankind”作品的组成部分。

By Lee Kian Seng