

《马来西亚装置艺术之父—李健省》一书的

前言

LEE Kian Seng - The Progenitor of Malaysia Installation Art

Preface



(左) 欧阳文风与李健省 2004-08-18



马来西亚南洋商报 Nanyang Siang Pau Malaysia 2008-04-28

欧阳文风牧师 (Rev. Dr. Ngeo, Boon Lin or O. Young, 神学博士, 社会学博士候选人。

现居纽约。1992年毕业于马来西亚中央艺术学院新闻系，曾获多项新闻评论与报导文学奖，包括1996年全国华文报最佳新闻从业员奖。1999年毕业于威斯康辛大学，主修社会学，副修宗教研究。2001年获明尼苏达州立大学社会学硕士学位。波士顿大学神学博士，主修基督教神学，副修新约圣经。目前在新泽西州圣彼得大学执教社会学，同时亦是纽约大都会社区教会牧师。出版著作包括：《退稿精选》、《歪论精选》、《谬论精选》、《神爱同志》、《同志爱神》、《身体社会学》、《现在是以后了吗？》、与《同根生》、《思考思考》与《批判美国》等30本。2011年：欧阳文风膺激励人心LGBT宗教领袖 <http://www.sinchew.com.my/node/224711?tid=1>

(English translation by Felix Liew)

Preface of the book 《LEE Kian Seng - The Progenitor of Malaysia Installation Art 》 by Rev.Dr Ngeo,Boon Lin (O.Young) *The original text in Chinese of the Preface of the book "LEE Kian Seng-The Progenitor of Malaysian Installation Art" except footnotes 2 to 4, was published in Nanyang Siang Pao Malaysia on the 28 of April 2008*

Rev. Dr Ngeo, Boon Lin (O.Young 欧阳文风牧师, 神学博士,社会学博士候选人) is Chinese Malaysian. He was an award-winning journalist before he came to the United States in 1997. He has published extensively in the Chinese language since 1999, and is the author of more than 30 books and numerous bestsellers in Malaysia. He holds a BA degree in sociology from university of Wisconsin, a MA degree in sociology from Minnesota State University, a Master of Theological Studies from Episcopal Divinity School, and a doctoral degree in theology from Boston University. He is also a doctoral candidate in sociology. Dr Ngeo is a staff pastor of MCC New York, and the first openly gay minister in his native country Malaysia, and the first openly gay minister who holds a doctoral degree in theology in Asia. He is one of the most sought after speakers in LGBTI Chinese communities in Asia, such as China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Malaysia. His activism in Asia has been reported by CNN and the New York Times. He also has been named as one of the most inspiring LGBT religious leaders in the world by Huffington Post. <http://www.sinchew.com.my/node/224711?tid=1>

What made me write about Lee Kian Seng?

I have asked myself this same question over and over again in my head. The reason I write about Lee Kian Seng is not because he is a legend, but quite the opposite. Precisely because he is not as well-known as he should be, I see the need to introduce him to a larger audience. As I mulled over the notion of writing a book about him, I raised the subject among several of my friends who went through art school. To my surprise, they reacted blankly with this question, "The name sounds familiar, but who is he?"

For a Malaysian artist who already has eleven national and two international awards under his belt, it would be unthinkable for any graduate of an art institute to not know who this person is. If even art graduates could not be certain who this man is, how could I expect the layperson to know who Lee Kian Seng is?

As an adolescent of 15, Lee Kian Seng started exhibiting his art works in 1962. Four years later, the National Art Gallery Malaysia offered a high price to acquire his oil painting which he completed at 17. The painting was entitled "The Beggar and the Bird", dated 1964. His works have since joined the ranks of other accomplished artists in the exhibition halls of the Gallery. And he has since been invited to represent Malaysia in many international art exhibitions on numerous occasions. The first Salon Malaysia competition in 1969 saw some 495 Malaysian and Singaporean artists vying for twenty five awards, three of which were won by Lee alone. That is how astounding he was! In early 2001, at a speech delivered on the occasion of the Young Contemporaries Art Awards 2000 organized by the National Art Gallery Malaysia, Dato' (Ms) P. G. Lim , the first Deputy Chairperson of the Gallery's Board of Trustees and the first Chairperson of the Exhibitions Committee, openly hailed Lee as the progenitor of installation art in Malaysia. Let's face it. How many artists in the past or present had so excelled in art as a solo trailblazer? But surprisingly, there is still more than a handful art school graduates who have no

clue who Lee Kian Seng is. Lee is definitely not to be blamed for that. I believe art education in Malaysia should take the blame, if there is anything that still resembles art education in this country.

However, there is yet another reason that prompted me to write about Lee Kian Seng.

Lee Kian Seng created a series of artwork in 1977, which comprises eight pieces known as the Hammer and Nail Series. These art pieces which were cosmological in their setting had been described by Datuk Syed Ahmad Jamal, the then director of the National Art Gallery Malaysia, as a highly soul-stirring work of art. It was a social statement expressing the contemporary conscious and subconscious elements deep in the recesses of the human mind. Moreover, it reflected the different mentalities of modern people with a play of humor. The series was first exhibited at the 2nd Salon Malaysia in 1979. However, only ten years later did the National Art Gallery pick up on these highly acclaimed pieces and exhibited it. Interestingly, of the eight pieces of work loaned to the Gallery, only six were returned. The remaining two were unaccounted for in a shroud of mystery. What is disturbing is that the Gallery insisted they had borrowed only six pieces for the exhibition. However, at the time of the loan, the Gallery had in fact indicated that they would have the artwork insured for RM2,000 per piece, which amounted to a total of RM16,000. Now if there had only been six pieces loaned, then how do you account for the RM16,000 worth of insurance? Following the mysterious disappearance of the art pieces, Lee had received no compensation from either the Gallery or the insurance company. And more interestingly, two months after they had firmly maintained their story of borrowing only six pieces of his work, Lee received word from the Gallery that one of the missing pieces had made an “unexpected appearance” in its store room! The fact that an imposing art gallery could be so unprofessional and well below par in its handling of artworks is incredible enough to make anyone wonder. What kind of a culture and ethics is that?

But that was not all. The most heart-rending part of the story came in the wake of that incident. Lee had lodged a police report regarding the missing pieces. When I discussed the matter with local artists and art workers, to my surprise, one of them went so far as to say in utter disdain for Lee, “What’s the big deal? Kian Seng loves to be in the limelight. The way I see it, he’s just making a mountain out of a molehill.” Hearing this, I could hardly believe my ears. How could such a culture of contempt for art even exist? Moreover, the person who made that remark had the audacity to crack himself up to be a self-styled art worker.

That said, I could find no grounds not to write about Lee Kian Seng. But the most important reason is still to follow.

The creation of installation art was pioneered by Lee in 1969. But it was yet to be termed as such the year he started experimenting with Unity (1969), which was exhibited in the Malaysian Pavilion at the World Exposition 1970. Back then the term was something totally unheard of. Even Lee himself had no clue what it was.

*At the time, he was not even thinking about creating an installation art, but merely extending the concept expressed in his painting/graphic art and three-dimensional art freehand. His work was termed mixed media by his contemporaries in the art world, though it has come to be known as multimedia today. And his best known installation work at the time was perhaps his 1972 creation of **Mankind**, which was to firmly establish his pioneering status in installation art in the contemporary Malaysian art scene.*

A collection of artworks in print, Masterpieces of the National Art Gallery Malaysia, authored by Malaysian artist (Mohamed) Redza Piyadasa, was published by the National Art Gallery Malaysia in 2002. Found in the book on page 32 was a reproduction of the author’s original work May 13, 1969

(dated 1970), which was described as an “acrylic paint on wooden construction and mirror installation.” The mirror installation was in fact more recently added by Piyadasa in 2000 but had strangely been re-dated 1969 to make it look as if it was the earliest installation work. The said replica produced in 2000 was found factually inconsistent with the original piece dated 1970 as illustrated on page 70 of the book *Vision and Idea: Relooking Modern Malaysian Art* (1994), which expressly has no mirror installation under the woodwork.²

The following year saw the opening of an installation art exhibition entitled *Thinking ><Space* organized by the Soka Gakkai Malaysia and supported by SAL2-Culturium, which ran from 6-20 April 2003 in Kuala Lumpur. Weirdly, in the Introduction of the exhibition catalogue, Mohamed Redza Piyadasa and Sulaiman Esa stole the limelight as the duo were named progenitors of installation art following the exhibition of their work “Mystical Reality” done in 1974. It is a very subjective construct of their so-called history of Malaysian art. However, the Introduction of the catalogue did mention Lee’s 1974 work *Process of Poker Game*, but it totally ignored Lee’s earlier installation works. Was this blunder a result of ignorance on the part of the organizers? Hardly, as we know that Lee has started his personal website since 1999—www.leekianseng.com—which is a collection of the bulk of his major works. Among his most prominent masterpieces that resonated through the realm of Malaysian art have been *The Pair* (1968), *From the Window of Red* (1972), and especially *Mankind* (1972) which stood majestically at the entrance of the National Art Gallery Malaysia from 1973 through 1999. How could the organizers be so blind to the facts? Should they plead ignorance, they would then be the most pitiful and inexcusable of all people!³

Numerous are the cases in which Lee’s installation works have been altered or mishandled. Many of them even occurred in the publications put out by and within the walls of the National Art Gallery Malaysia itself. To cite an example, on page 162 of the printed art collection *Vision and Idea: Relooking Modern Malaysian Art* published by the Gallery in 1994, Lee’s work—*Of ‘Image, Object, Illusion’-Off Series Mechanism* (1977)—have apparently been tampered with. The white podium has been replaced by a black object. The cockroach designed to make its way across the wall has vanished from the painting. The original construct, installation and spatial relationship pioneered by Lee have all but disintegrated. As a serious artist, Lee could not turn a blind eye to blunders such as these, but his complaints via “proper channels” including telephone calls and mails had fallen on deaf ears. This is a sign of gross disrespect for artists and their works to say the least. The series of blunders and the questionable silence in the aftermath makes one wonder if these errors have indeed been unintentional.

It is about time I told the story of Lee Kian Seng

This book attempts to agitate the mainstream authority’s control and manipulation over the historical knowledge structure of Malaysian art. It challenges the official version of historical narrative constructed purely on the basis of the government’s vested interests. Bear in mind that social oppression and manipulation of speech are two sides of the same coin. The former often exploits the latter for its own ends. Given this fact, nothing is more important at this time for a social critic than to write about historical facts with a sense of intellectual agitation against the propagation of misinformation as in the case of Lee Kian Seng.

The most frightening type of social oppression in the 21st century is no longer bloody crackdowns, as these are considered excessively violent and blatant as befitted a tyrannical regime. A more delicate form of oppression has emerged to invade culture, monopolize public opinion, dictate the information being transmitted, create a single unchallengeable system of historical knowledge, and construct an imperialistic structure of grand and heroic accounts. For this reason, the writing of this book can be

regarded as a battle for the right to recount the history of Malaysian art in its proper light as well as a critique of cultural politics.

The text production of the powers that be or the mainstream media is not only inseparable from political power and imperialism or even racism. They may even conspire with each other to revise “history” as a mechanism for social governance. The authority could “revise” historical facts by altering or deleting bits and pieces of the whole. Such minute alterations may appear harmless to the casual reader, but in effect they are taking the liberty of revising historical documentation. The act in its entirety is nothing but a means of strategic domination and suppression for a hegemonic power.

As a scholar of sociology and a commentator of current affairs, I cannot help but reflect high sensitivity and fastidiousness in my choice of language and style of writing in this discourse. I can no longer stand idly by and pass it off as an “oversight” when the mainstream made too many “minor” mistakes in their “minute” alteration of historical facts. I cannot help but question the strategy of their articulation and scrutinize the cultural yardstick by which they write history, when the so-called “unintentional blunders” have repeatedly occurred in a fixed direction. Therefore, writing about history as I know it has become an inescapable obligation on a personal level. Perhaps my capability is too inadequate and my knowledge and training leave too much to be desired to completely unmask and erode the foundation on which the domination of historical facts by the mainstream is based, but at least I get to develop my own strategy of articulation in an attempt to consume the prejudice of the mainstream.

“History” can be exploited as a mechanism for social governance. Through premeditated alterations, what was once history can no longer be accepted as facts. Behind the rhetoric of the so-called “sheer facts” is an entirely different kind of knowledge production. Apparently in a desperate attempt to erase the history of the Rape of Nanking, Japanese authorities kept revising the compilation of their history textbooks with reference to the “historical facts” regarding the Japanese military’s infamous war crime committed during World War II. This move has sparked public outrage from the international community. Japanese right-wing activists were no doubt bent on covering up their war crime and whitewashing the notorious Japanese imperialism. By doing so, they have indirectly rationalized Japan’s superiority. Given such blatant tampering of historical facts and knowledge, the imperative to put up a resistance is not only warranted. It is absolutely urgent.

I am afraid the most dreadful form of social control is not the aggressive in-your-face measures, raw force or torture against dissenting voices. It is rather a narrative strategy craftily designed to create a parameter and order of knowledge structure by drowning and distorting the facts of history. This would pave the way for all future speech and narrative to fall within the standard and disciplinary framework established by the authorities. Under such circumstances, any resistance would have very little or no effect at all; simply because the very thing we are opposing is now the absolute standard by which the value of our resistance is to be assessed and commented on.

Why am I writing this book?

I am writing it because I believe the right of the articulation of historical narratives is not confined to the powers that be. Besides, the author of the artworks is still living. How could he possibly allow anyone to tamper with the historical facts regarding his works? In this new century, I strongly believe we need to create a more subversive and revolutionary domain of articulation in order to expose and condemn the racist and political undertones that are too often veiled under the guise of cultural policies. Autocratic and high-handed historical accounts must not be allowed to go unchecked.

Lee Kian Seng's place in the history of Malaysian art is something to be reckoned with. His artistic accomplishment goes far beyond the domain of installation art. His prominent works of sculpture, worthy of mention is his 1984 masterpiece Peace, Harmony and One, which is in the Permanent Collection of the government of Indonesia and displayed in Taman Suropati in Jakarta. Besides, another one of his well-known works, Millennium (2000), has in recent years been collected by JF APEX Securities Berhad Malaysia and installed in their Menara APEX in Kajang, Malaysia. His lithographs are the pride of the nation, be they from an artistic or technical point of view. His artistic achievements and interdisciplinary research accomplishments in batik art or resist-dyeing innovations have not only been accorded national recognition and affirmation. They also enjoy a high degree of international acclaim. With his innovative creativity in batik dye techniques, Lee won the prestigious Tokyo Creation Award Overseas Prize in 1993. His research and innovations in dyeing art/resist technique within the contemporary art circles were undisputedly years ahead of his Japanese counterparts.

Apart from recounting Lee's journey of life as an artist, this book focuses on a brief introduction to his series of installation artwork exclusively. Unfortunately, most of the information concerning Lee's works in circulation today has never been pre-examined and verified by the original artist. This contributes to the abundance of distorted facts, misunderstandings and misplacement of art pieces, whether they are done deliberately or inadvertently. Even some of the printed collections and works published by the National Art Gallery Malaysia are not spared from these same errors. The content of this book is basically the result of over twenty recorded interviews with Lee, each lasting at least an hour. The introductory content to the artist's works has been verified personally by Lee, and all the photographs of his installation works published in this book are kindly loaned by the artist himself. It is the intent of the author to remain faithful to the original features of these works and to present them as such to the audience. It is done to rectify the current misreport and misrepresentation of Lee's works, whether they are done with or without intention, be it the official or the unofficial version. That said, this book represents an attempt to rediscover a more appropriate and historically accurate position for Lee Kian Seng in the historiography of Malaysian art.⁴

^[1] *The National Art Gallery Malaysia was established in 1958. Dato' (Ms) P.G. Lim was then the first deputy chairperson of the Board of Trustees as well as the chairperson of the Exhibitions Committee. Apart from being the convener of the first Salon Malaysia art exhibition, she had been the first permanent representative of Malaysia to the United Nations, and a Malaysian ambassador to Yugoslavia, Belgium and Austria respectively. She had also been a former chairperson of the UN General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, a member of the National Advisory Council, the secretary of the Malaysian Bar Council, an attorney for the Malaysian Trade Union Congress, and the former director of the Kuala Lumpur Regional Arbitration Center, Malaysia. She is currently a member of the Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS). Dato' (Ms) P.G. Lim knows the origin and development of the Malaysian art scene like the back of her hand. She wrote about the development of Malaysian installation art as she witnessed it on the basis of her artistic conscience and knowledge of basic law.*

^[2] *With reference to the text and picture on page 70 of the book Vision and Idea: ReLooking Modern Malaysian Art, editor T.K Sabapathy described, "... (In 1970) Piyadasa constructed a coffin and painted on its surface the Malaysian flag which, in places, was erased from view by a band or belt of black colour; titled May 13, 1969, it has since been destroyed." The book was published by the National Art Gallery Malaysia in 1994, of which (Redza) Piyadasa was among the co-authors.*

^[3] *On 30 January 2001, at a speech delivered on the occasion of the Young Contemporary Malaysian Art Award 2000 organized by the National Art Gallery , Dato' (Ms) P. G. Lim told of the development of installation art in Malaysia as she witnessed it, and openly hailed Lee Kian Seng as the Progenitor of*

Malaysia's Installation Art. Her remarks were so powerful that they shook the very foundation of the official mechanism and narrative version controlled by the corridors of power.

On 18 March 2002, the Soka Gakkai Malaysia (SGM) organized a talk by (Mohamed) Redza Piyadasa titled " Building Cultural Characteristics: Issues of Contemporary Malaysian art " which was chaired by Teoh Boon Teck in the culture hall of SGM. Piyadasa briefed the audience on the history of Malaysian art in a chronological order beginning with 1920 up until the present. Invited guests to the talk included representatives from the Malay Writers' Association and the National Art Gallery Malaysia, academia, art circle and members of Soka Gakkai Malaysia among others (for details refer Nanyang Siang pau, 24 March 2002 edition).

From 6 - 20 April 2003, The Soka Gakkai Malaysia, supported by SAL2-Culturium, organized an (Malaysian) installation art exhibition in Kuala Lumpur entitled Thinking ><Space>. Only five young artists responded. The Introduction of the exhibition catalogue, in narrating the development of Malaysia's installation art, seemed to have deliberately left out Lee's installation works prior to 1974. SAL2-Culturium was a special unit closely associated to Universiti Institut Teknologi Mara Malaysia (UiTM).

In 2007, an art book Between Generations—50 years across Modern Art in Malaysia was jointly published by University Malaya, Valentine Willie Fine Art, University Science Malaysia and Penjana Bebas Malaysia. It is noted that the book's preface, as well as many current academia, art and cultural circles in this region, had begun to question the credibility of the official version (Malaysian art) narrated by the mainstream.

^[4] *Examples of these errors include the following:*

2008: *On page 232 of the book Timelines—Malaysian Art 1958-2008 (English version) published by the National Art Gallery Malaysia, the photographic documentation (produced by the National Art Gallery Malaysia) of Lee's work Of 'Image, Object, Illusion'-Off Series Mechanism (1977) contains factual inaccuracies. The work had been heavily altered. Firstly, the "black wooden steps" unit was never a part of Lee's installation. The original work had a white podium. Secondly, the actual flag was incorrectly installed. Thirdly, the white plywood on the floor was missing. Consequently, the composition of the installation was distorted to the point that the work had been significantly altered (The letters of Lee addressed to the National Art Gallery Malaysia dated 31 December 2008, 26 Mar 2007, 13 Oct 2003, 6 Nov 2000, 17 Nov 2005, 19 Feb 2004, 5 Apr 2004, 20 Mar 1996, 12 Dec 1991 are referred.*

(note: The original installation of the work Of 'Image, Object, Illusion'-Off Series Mechanism comprises a painting on canvas, flag, white Podium (measuring 12"x20"x24" made of 6mm plywood), one piece of 16' x 8' plywood (6mm in thickness painted white)/ canvas on floor extended from the wall to the podium, lights set to cast shadows of the flag on the floor and in the space. It was first installed at the National Art Gallery Malaysia in 1977 and won the Major Award in the "National Open Competition of Painting and Graphic" in the same year).

2007: *The 45@45 Exhibition in conjunction with the 45th anniversary of the National Art gallery Malaysia, was held at the National Art Gallery in 2003. Its publication on the event only came out in 2007. However, it contains numerous factual inaccuracies. The write-up that Dato' (Ms) P.G. Lim did on the work of Lee Kian Seng on page 95 of the book was inexplicably messed up as well. The publication unit of the National Art Gallery (at that time) is held accountable for these errors. Hence this book is republishing Dato' (Ms) P.G. Lim's original script written in 2003 in appendix 2. It is also available on Lee's website: www.leekianseng.com (The letter of Lee addressed to the National Art Gallery dated 26 Mar 2007 is referred).*

2003: *In the Art Corridor (Malaysia) Issue 11, 2003 cover story on page 10, the author committed errors based on the misinformation provided by the National Art Gallery Malaysia.*

2002: *Page 186 of Masterpieces of the National Art Gallery Malaysia (National Art Gallery Malaysia, 2002) contains several factual inaccuracies, among them are:*

1. *It is printed that the work Mankind was created in 1992 which is far from the truth. The correct date should have been 1972.*

2. *In the first paragraph, the sixth line and the fourth sentence, the chronological order of the exhibitions is inaccurately rendered. The truth is that Mankind was first exhibited at the National Art Gallery Malaysia in 1973, while Of 'Image, Object, Illusion'-Off Series Mechanism was exhibited in 1977 at the same gallery.*

3. *In the first paragraph, the eighth line and the fifth sentence, the writer's interpretation about having the audience "step on to" and that "the viewer had to climb up the steps and salute the painted image of the Malaysian flag" is incorrect. In fact, Lee has had no intention for the viewers to do as such (The letters of Lee addressed to the National Art Gallery Malaysia and Mr.Redza Piyadasa dated 13 Oct 2003 are referred).*

2000: *At the Rupa Malaysia—The Face of Malaysia: A Survey of Malaysia's Modern Art (Meninjau Seni Lukis Malaysia) exhibition in conjunction with the Opening of its new building, Lee's work Mankind (1972) had been unethically modified. The List of Exhibits in the book that was compiled and written by Mohamed Redza Piyadasa and published by the National Art Gallery Malaysia in 2000 had left out the record for this work (The letters of Lee addressed to the National Art Gallery Malaysia and Mohamed Redza Piyadasa dated 6 Nov 2000 are referred).*

1997: *The Malaysian national type secondary school Art text book Perintis Pendidikan Seni KBSM Tingkatan 4 & 5, published by Pustaka Delta Pelajaran Sdn Bhd, the name of the artist is inaccurate on page 30.*

1994: *On page 162 of Vision and Idea: Relooking Modern Malaysian Art published by the National Art Gallery Malaysia in 1994, the photographic documentation(produced by the National Art Gallery) of Lee's work Of 'Image, Object, Illusion'-Off Series Mechanism (1977) contains factual inaccuracies. The work had been substantially altered. Firstly, the title printed in the book was incorrect. The correct title should have been Of 'Image, Object, Illusion' – Off Series Mechanism. Secondly, the "black-carpeted wooden steps" unit was never a part of the installation. The original work (in 1977) had a white podium. Thirdly, the image of the cockroach on the painting was missing. Consequently, the composition of the installation was distorted to the point of significant alteration. The book was edited by Mr. T.K. Sabapathy with contributions made by Krishen Jit, (Mohamed) Redza Piyadasa, .T.K. Sabapathy, and Zainol Shariff (The letters of Lee addressed to the National Art Gallery Malaysia and Mr.Redza Piyadasa dated 13 Oct 2003 are referred).*

1991: *The Japanese newspaper published in Singapore by Asahi Shimbun International Pte Ltd., in its August 2, 1991 issue, page 12 (16) "Crown Town Information," had misreported facts about Lee Kian Seng and Shoko Lee (The letter of Lee addressed to Asahi Shimbun International Pte Ltd in Singapore dated 29 August 1991 is referred).*

1991: *On page 42, The ASEAN Sculpture—A Photographic Folio, published in Manila in 1991, had misreported facts on Lee's biographical data without prior proofreading by the artist. The write-ups of*

the book were provided by the National COCIs of the respective ASEAN member countries (The letter of Lee addressed to the National Art Gallery Malaysia dated 20 March 1996 is referred).



2008-05-27

- **Postscript** (of the book "*Lee Kian Seng-- The Progenitor of Malaysia Installation Art*")---- by Rev.Dr Ngeo,Boon Lin (O.Young)

It was August 2006. I was on furlough in Malaysia tying up a few loose ends. While there, I made it a point to call up Lee Kian Seng several times to discuss issues relating to the publication of this book. His voice on the other end of the phone sounded hoarser and huskier with each call.

As soon as I got back to New York, I gave him a call. His daughter answered the phone and broke the news. Lee was undergoing treatments in Singapore¹ for Squamous Cell Carcinoma of the larynx. My heart sank. There was no surprise there knowing his history as a heavy smoker. But still I was saddened by the news.

Looking back, I first met Lee on a midsummer day in 2001. I had just arrived in New York, and 9/11 was just weeks away.

That year, Lee came to New York along with his daughter Hui Ling LEE who had enrolled at Sarah Lawrence College in New York. Having obtained my email address from the editor of Sin Chew Daily (Malaysia), he contacted me as soon as he got there. He told me that he had been reading my newspaper column Beneath the Statue of Liberty Series (1998-2001 Sin Chew Daily Malaysia). In my life, he had caught glimpses of himself. Knowing me, I know I am no match for him. I admire his deep humility and the gentle way he is supporting the younger artists who come behind him.

I showed him around the Big Apple, and for several days we visited every art gallery and museum in town. In the process, he loved to dominate the conversation. I noticed there was no particular order to his

utterance, or should I say, he was merely following the order of his spontaneous flow of thoughts. The pronouns in the same sentence he uttered might not uniformly refer to the same person. I found myself interrupting him multiple times, “Who do you mean by he?” “Who is they?” and so forth.

His life may have been fraught with sorrow and hardship, but there was no sign of waning. He was such an inspiration that I had entertained the notion of writing a book about him at the time. Subsequently when I interviewed him for my book on the story of his life and works, I discovered there were a lot of personal matters from his past that he was quite reluctant to bring to light. I thought those could well be the chief factors that shaped his character. He seemed to be deliberately evading the issues. Granted, the life of an artist is a lonely one. It can hardly be expressed verbally. Rather, precious glimpses of it may be caught in a fleeting moment if we could but hold our breath and ponder it.

I have been mulling over the notion of writing this book for quite some time. After sifting through a multitude of subjects that ran through my mind, I eventually settled on the theme of Lee’s installation art. An artist’s work is an adventure, an experiment, a process of soul searching, and a lifestyle. Lee not only produced art, but his very life is in effect an art that speaks volumes about humanity’s universal quest for freedom.

To some, life may appear to be an illusion. To others, life is nothing but a scam. As the result, they do not hesitate to deceive themselves as well as others. But for Lee, life is an art, and art is also his life. Sixty years on in his life, he is still crying out whenever the truth has been twisted and turned upside down. He is still fighting the battle for truth to triumph over falsehood. When high-handed racism threatens to wax high and nothing seems to be able to stop it, he does not retreat into his comfort zone. If anything, he moved boldly forward without hesitation, straightening history out with the witness of his own life. History is often an account of the power to sustain and dispose a given system. It may be set against the truth to ally itself with error. The voice of the less powerful is often treated as cacophony, a nonsensical noise. Through it all, however, Lee refused to remain silent. In his own way, he was trying to put a stop to the systematic obscuring and wiping out of the truth 2.

I write this book not only for the sake of the artist, but more importantly, for the sake of our future generations. After all, Lee Kian Seng is no doubt a cultural asset to this country in his own right.

¹ *The medical team treating Lee’s squamous cell carcinoma of the larynx included Dr Tan Yew Oo of the Medical Oncology Center, Gleneagles Hospital Singapore(www.gleneagles.com.sg) ; A/professor Dr Luke Tan of the National University Hospital of Singapore , www.thyroidsurgery.com.sg); and Dr Yang Tuck Loong Edward (Radiation Oncologist) of Gleneagles Hospital Singapore It is through the arrangement of Dr.Zachariah Verghese (Consultant physician and Gastroenterologist), family doctor of Lee Kian Seng. Presently, his condition has taken a turn for the better, and once again he is back in full swing. After pilgrimage to 4 Holy places Lumbini(Nepal), Bodhgaya,Sarnath and Kushinagar (India) in early 2008, LEE Kian Seng at the moment ,is inspired to start a new series which is set to propel his artistic career to a new height.*

Manuscript completed on 19 December 2007, New York by O.Young

(English translation by Felix Liew)

- [More details about factual Inaccuracies in the publications of Malaysian Art](http://www.leekianseng.com/lee_FactualInaccuracy.pdf)
http://www.leekianseng.com/lee_FactualInaccuracy.pdf
- <Protect our art to preserve history>
The Star/ Malaysia/ 8 October 2005 reported by Devid Rajah. <http://www.thestar.com.my/story.aspx/?file=%2f2005%2f10%2f8%2fnation%2f12251249&sec=nation>



2001 Oyoung @MOMA New York

- 装置艺术之父真假? 作者: 欧阳文风 (Rev. Dr Ngeo, Boon Lin Phd) 图: 李健省提供

欧阳文风与李健省两人之间的访谈超过二十余次，每次至少一小时的正式录音访问后完成了《马来西亚装置艺术之父—李健省》（*LEE Kian Seng - The Progenitor of Malaysia Installation Art*）一书。所有有关艺术家作品的简介经由李健省审核，以求呈现作品原始与忠实面貌，纠正时下无论是官方或非官方，有意或无意对李健省作品的错误报道与呈现，重新为其在大马艺术史上寻找一更恰当与符合史实的定位。下文取自欧阳文风的著作《马来西亚装置艺术之父—李健省》一书的前言。除了文本的脚注2~4外，该前言曾于2008年4月28日在马来西亚南洋商报发表。（*Nanyang Siang Pau Malaysia*）

前言

为什么我要写李健省 (LEE Kian Seng) ?

这问题我曾多次反复问自己。我写李健省，不是因为他是著名艺术家，恰恰相反，因为他不够“出名”。我考虑是否要写一本关于他的书时，曾与多位毕业于艺术学院的朋友谈起他，他们竟然有点茫然地问我：“这名字很熟，他是谁？”

一个曾获11项国家级奖及两项国际奖的大马艺术家，竟然还有艺术学院的毕业生觉得“这名字很熟”却不知道是谁。如果连艺术学院的毕业生都不能肯定知道他是谁，我敢奢望一般人认识李健省吗？

李健省从1962年，年仅15岁就开始参加画展。1966年，马来西亚国家艺术馆以高价向李健省购买他17岁时完成的油画〈三轮车夫与鸟〉(The Beggar and the Bird)，从此被列入国家艺术馆成名画家行列中，作品曾受邀代表马来西亚在世界许多国家展出。1969年大马第一届沙龙展(Salon Malaysia)，495名马新艺术家竞争25个奖项，李健省一人独获三个奖项，轰动一时。2000年，曾经是大马国家艺术馆第一届信托委员会副主席的林碧颜(拿督/Dato' Ms P.G.Lim **注:1**) 兼当年国家艺术馆画展委员会主席，在为国家艺术馆主办的国家新秀奖(Young Contemporaries Art Awards 2000)致词时，公开指李健省是大马装置艺术之父。古今中外，能在艺坛独辟蹊径的，有几人？可是竟还有不少艺术学院的毕业生不知道谁是李健省。这不是李健省的失败，而是我国艺术教育的失败，如果我国还有艺术教育。

但，我决定写李健省，还有另外一个理由。

李健省在1977年创作了一系列作品，共有八件，命名为〈铁锤与铁钉〉系列(Hammer and Nail Series)。当时，这以宇宙观方式处理的艺术作品，被当时的国家艺术馆馆长拿督赛阿末佳马尔(Dato' Syed Ahmad Jamal)喻为强烈震撼人心的艺术创作，展示了当代人性深处的知觉与潜在元素，情趣横生地表现了现代人的多种心态。〈铁锤与铁钉〉系列于1979年假大马第二届沙龙展首次亮相。十年后，国家艺术馆向他借贷作品展览，他借出的有八件作品，然而只取回六件，其中二件不翼而飞。但国家艺术馆坚持当时只借六件。不过在作品借出时，国家艺术馆表示为其艺术作品购买每件2千元，共计1万6千元的保险。如果只有六件作品，1万6千元从何谈起？可是，在作品失踪后，他竟然没有收到国家艺术馆或保险公司的任何赔偿。但，更有趣的还是，在国家艺术馆坚持只向李健省借六件作品之后的两个月左右，国家艺术馆竟通知他其中丢失的一件作品“突然”在国家艺术馆的贮藏室“出现”！堂堂一家艺术馆，在处理艺术作品时，可以如此不专业又欠缺水准，实在叫人惊叹。这是一种怎样的艺术文化？

不过，最叫人痛心的不止于此。作品失窃，艺术家报警。我与本地一些画家与艺术工作者谈起此事，有人竟然十分不屑地说“李健省爱出风头，小题大作。”我一听，呆在那里。这到底是一种甚么文化，如此轻蔑艺术？而且说话的人竟然还自诩为艺术工作者。

我找不到理由不写李健省。不过，上述还不是最重要的理由。

李健省的装置艺术创作始于1969年。不过当年他开始实验〈团结〉(Unity)时，并不叫装置艺术。盖当时没有人懂何谓“装置艺术”，甚至连李健省自己也不懂。〈团结〉(Unity)翌年在日本大阪举行的世界博览会上展出。

他当时不是为创作装置艺术而创作，而是随心所欲展延他在平面创作与三次元领域所要表达的理念。当时艺术界只管称他的作品为混合媒介 (mixed media)，尽管今天已被公认为多媒体创作。他当时最著名的装置艺术作品是1972年创作的〈人类〉(Mankind)，奠定了其在装置艺术领域的开锋地位。

2002年，国家艺术馆出版由大马艺术家莫哈末毕雅达沙(Mohamad Redza Piyadasa)撰写的〈马来西亚国家艺术馆杰出作品〉(Masterpieces from the National Art Gallery of Malaysia)。书中的第32页有一幅莫哈末毕雅达沙的复制作品〈五月十三日，1969〉。画面上以丙烯酸(压克力)颜料涂成的木制作品底下放置了一面镜子。该作品虽志明1969年创作，其实是莫哈末毕雅达沙于2000年间创作的。令人费解的是，该复制品与当年的原著不符。在国家艺术馆1994年出版的〈远见和理念: 再看大马当代美术〉(Vision and Idea: Relooking Modern Malaysian Art)第70页所刊载的原著作品中，木制作品下明显没有镜子装置。(注:2)

次年4月6日至20日，马来西亚创价学会(Soka Gakkai Malaysia)在吉隆坡主办〈思想〉〈空间〉(Thinking〉〈Space)装置艺术展，由SAL2-Culturium协办。其展览小册子的导言中竟然指莫哈末毕雅达沙(Mohamad Redza Piyadasa)和苏来曼依沙(Sulaiman Esa)在1974年的〈神秘现实〉展(Mystical Reality)最早合作开创装置艺术，主观地构思与建造他们所谓的马来西亚艺术史。此册子序言只提及李健省1974年的作品〈扑克牌游戏过程〉(Process of Poker Game)，但是对于李健省更早的装置艺术只字不题。这是主办当局的无心之过吗？

李健省自1999年就已有其私人网站(www.leekianseng.com)，收集其绝大多数重要艺术创作，而且其1968年的作品〈一对〉(The Pair)、及1972年的其中两件作品〈红色的窗〉(From the Windows of Red)和〈人类〉(Mankind)均是大马艺术界响当当的杰作，尤其是〈人类〉，更于1973年至1999年屹立于马来西亚国家艺术馆入口处。主办当局可能不懂吗？如果真不懂，这种无知也太叫人同情与难以原谅了。(注:3)

李健省的装置艺术作品被人改头换面或错置的例子，举不胜举，而且有好些还是在国家艺术馆内以及在其出版的刊物里发生。譬如，在国家艺术馆1994年出版的〈远见和理念: 再看大马当代美术〉(Vision and Idea: Relooking Modern Malaysian Art)的画册里第162页，在李健省创作于1977年的〈形象，物体，假象〉(Of 'Image, Object, Illusion'-Off Series Mechanism)中，黑色物体代替了白色讲台、画面上的蟑螂不见了、原来由李健省开拓的原始构图、装置、与空间被解体了。李健省作为严肃的艺术工作者，不可能对诸如此类的失误视若无睹，但他遵循“正常管

道"所做的种种投诉,包括电话、信件,均如石沉大海。这是对艺术工作者与艺术作品的极度不尊重,种种的失误与失误后的沉默,难以叫人相信这纯粹是"无心之过"。

我决定写李健省。

这本书旨在干扰掌权者/主流对大马艺术史知识系统的控制与操纵,挑战一种依照当权者利益轨道而建制的历史叙事。社会压制与论述控制是一体两面的,前者往往靠后者而达致目标,职是之故,对一名评论者而言,在这时候,没有什么比采取一种知识骚动的态度书写历史以干扰其对知识的生产更重要了。

在 21 世纪,最可怕的社会压迫已不再是血腥镇压,因为这太粗野暴力,罪行太明显。精致的压迫是一种文化的侵略,垄断言论,主宰论述,创造一种单一不容挑战的历史与知识系统,建构一种帝国式的宏大论述结构。职是之故,这本书的写作,可视为一场对大马艺术史叙事权的争夺,是一种文化政治的批判。

掌权者/主流的文本生产与政治权威和帝国统治或甚至种族主义不但密不可分,它们之间更可能具有共谋关系"历史"可以被创作以作为一种社会宰制机制。掌权的可以在事实上"重修",这里改一点,那里修一些,个别与轻微的改动,看似不重要,但却具有重写历史的果效,整体而言是一种霸权策略性的统治与压制手段。

作为一名社会学学者和时评作家,我对文本的论述与文字的书写不可能不敏感,不可能不挑剔。正当主流在书写历史时犯上太多"轻微"改动史实的"小"问题,我不可能再以为是一种"无心之过"。当所谓的"无心之过"总朝一固定方向犯错,我亦不可能不质疑主流的论述策略、不审视他们书写历史的文化符码。职是之故,书写我的文字与所认识的历史,成了一种不可能逃避的任务。我或许个人能力有限,学养不足,难以全面揭露和腐蚀主流霸权主导论述的基础,但至少我可以发展自己的文本策略以消耗主流论述的偏见。

"历史"可以成为一种社会宰制机制,经由精心策划的修动,它已不再是史实的再现,在所谓的"纯粹事实"的说法背后,是另一种知识的生产。日本教科书一再编纂日本的第二次世界大战"史实",企图取消南京大屠杀的历史,引起世界公忿。日本右翼份子的意图明显不过,为自己的罪恶进行漂白,美化日本帝国主义,间接合理化日本的优越性。由是观之,对这种知识与历史创作的反抗必要,且迫不及待。

最可怕的社会压制恐怕不是赤裸裸的打压与对异议份子的虐待,而是一种将历史淹没与变形的论述策略,制造一种知识系统的规范与秩序,使以后所有的言论叙说,都必须在其既定的准则和戒律框架中进行。在那种情况之下,恐怕任何的反抗都难以发挥真实作用,因为我们所反抗的事物已成了检视、评述我们反抗的价值之绝对标准。

为什么我要撰写此书?

因为我深信历史的叙述权不由掌权者所垄断,更何况艺术作品的创作者还健在,怎么可能任由他人毫不顾忌地窜改他的创作史实?我始终相信在这新的世纪,我们需要创造一个更具颠覆能量与革命书写的论述领地,揭露与批判种族主义与统治权力如何隐蔽在文化政策,从而驱逐独裁与霸道的历史叙事。

李健省在大马艺术史上的地位不容否定与轻视，他的艺术造诣与成就，不只限于装置艺术，他的雕塑作品1984年之名作〈和平、和谐、一体〉(Peace, Harmony and One)则被印尼政府永久收藏及陈列在雅加达的苏罗巴迪公园(Taman Suropati, Jakarta)内。此外,其2000年的名作〈千禧年〉(Millennium)则于近年卖给 JF APEX Securities Berhad 收藏,并装置在其雪州加影的 Menara APEX 大厦内。他的石版画,无论在艺术或技术方面,均有傲人表现。他在巴迪 / 染色创作的艺术造诣与跨领域研究的成就,不只受国家承认与肯定,在国际上亦享有盛名。李健省在1993年因巴迪与染色手法创新(Dye and resist technique),荣获东京创作大奖海外奖(Tokyo Creation Award Overseas Prize)。他在此领域领先日本很多年。

本书除记述李健省的艺术生命历程,将集中简介其一系列的装置艺术创作。坊间有关李健省艺术作品的诠释与简介,多不经由原创者阅读审核,有心无意的歪曲、误解、错置,不乏其例,甚至连马来西亚国家艺术馆出版的一些画册与著作,亦犯上同样错误(注4)。本书写作材料基本上来自笔者与李健省超过二十余次,每次至少一小时的正式录音访问。所有有关艺术家作品的简介经由原创者审核,本书所有装置艺术作品的照片均由原创者借出,以求呈现作品原始与忠实面貌,纠正时下无论是官方或非官方,有意或无意对李健省作品的错误报道与呈现,重新为其在大马艺术史上寻找一更恰当与符合史实的定位。

(注1)马来西亚国家艺术馆1958年成立。林碧颜律师[Tan Sri (Ms) P.G.Lim]是当时第一届国家艺术馆信托委员会的副主席兼画展委员会主席,第一届马来西亚沙龙画展会召集人,曾任大马驻联合国第一位常任代表,大马驻南斯拉夫、比利时、奥地利大使,联合国主会与经济委员会主席,国家咨询理事成员,律师公会秘书,职工会律师、国家区域仲裁中心主席。曾任策略及马来西亚国际研究院(ISIS)成员。林碧颜对马来西亚艺术界的来龙去脉,了如指掌。她凭艺术良知,基础法律,写出她所见证的马来西亚装置艺术的发展。她2013年在澳洲去世。

(注2)关于〈远见和理念:再看大马当代美术〉(Vision and Idea: Relooking Modern Malaysian Art)第70页所刊载的文字和图像,主辑T.K Sabapathy写道:(1970年莫哈末毕雅达沙制作了一副棺木并在其上描绘了一张马来西亚国旗,部分棺木被一带黑色条纹蒙蔽,作品题名为〈五月十三日,1969〉,之后毁灭。(Piyadasa constructed a coffin and painted on its surface the Malaysian flag which, in places, was erased from view by a band or belt of black colour; titled May 13, 1969, it has since been destroyed.)。该书由国家艺术馆于1994年出版,莫哈末毕雅达沙亦是其作者之一。

(注3)拿督林碧颜(Dato' Ms P.G.Lim)于2001年1月30日在国家艺术馆为所主办的国家艺术新秀奖颁奖典礼上《Young Contemporary Malaysia 2000》致词时,论述她所见证的马来西亚装置艺术的发展,并公开指李健省为马来西亚装置艺术之父(Father of Installation Art Malaysia)。她的论点也大力震荡了掌权谋私者所主宰的机制与论述。

2002年3月18日马来西亚创价学会文化中心主办由毕雅达沙Mohamed Redza Piyadasa主讲的"建设文化特征---现代马来西亚艺术课题"讲座,从1920年至现代,他按年代先后顺序介绍了马来西亚艺术。(大会由张文德主持)。被邀请出席该讲座者包括马来作家协会与马来西亚国家画廊代表,艺术界人士与创价学会会员等。(见南洋商报2002年3月24日版)。

2003年4月6日马来西亚创价学会 (Soka Gakkai Malaysia) 在吉隆坡主办〈思想〉〈空间〉马来西亚装置艺术展, 有5位年轻艺术工作者回应。该展小册子的序言在描述马国装置艺术发展时, 只字不提李健省1974年之前的装置艺术作品。协办SAL2-Culturium是一个与马来西亚玛拉大学 (UiTM) 关系密切的特别单位。(Thinking〉〈Space 6-20 April 2003, Organised by Soka Gakkai Malaysia and supported by SAL2-Culturium)

(注4) 其中错误例子包括:

2008年: 马来西亚国家艺术馆主办之〈历史时间线 (Timelines)-- 马来西亚艺术 1958—2008 展〉的英语版画册第232页中, 艺术馆为李健省的1977年作品〈形象, 物体, 假象〉所制作的相片记录不正确, 作品被严重修改(注: 该画册也有马来文版, 但没刊登此作品)。首先, 那黑色的木制台阶从来不属于李健省作品的一部分, 1977年的原著有个白色的讲台。第二, 真实的国旗被错误装置。第三, 地面上装置的白色三夹板不翼而飞, 结果整件装置作品被严重扭曲, 毁不成形。(参考2008年12月31日, 2007年3月26日, 2003年10月13日, 2000年11月6日, 2005年11月17日, 2004年2月19日, 2004年4月5日, 1996年3月20日, 1991年12月12日等李健省致马来西亚国家艺术馆的信件)。

2007年: 早在2003年国家艺术馆主办的45@45画展的画册却在2007年出炉, 但是依然错误百出。拿督林碧颜 (Dato^j (Ms) P.G.Lim) 在该画册所写有关李健省作品的文章也被搞得支离破碎(看该画册第95页), 为此国家艺术馆的出版单位必须负责。所以本书也刊登拿督林碧颜于2003年8月间所写的原文, 此文也可在 www.leekianseng.com 网站获得。(参考2007年3月26日李健省致马来西亚国家艺术馆的信件)。

2003年: 在马来西亚版艺术走廊 (Art Corridor) 2003年第11期第10页的封面故事里, 文章的作者根据马来西亚国家艺术馆的资料而犯错。

2002年: 在马来西亚国家艺术馆出版的〈马来西亚国家艺术馆杰出作品〉 (Masterpieces from the National Art Gallery of Malaysia) 第186页内, 错误百出, 其中包括以下几点:

1. 根据该页的介绍, 〈人类〉创作于1992年, 不符史实。正确的创作日期应该是1972年。
2. 该页的第一段, 第六行, 第四句所记录的作品年代不正确。其实〈人类〉于1973年首次假马来西亚国家艺术馆展出, 而〈形象, 物体, 假象〉则于1977年假该馆展出。该文章本没倒置论述作品的历史。
3. 该页的第一段, 第八行, 第五句作者所描写有关观众必须"登上台阶向国旗的画像敬礼"的诠释不正确。实际上, 李健省压根没有如是意图。(参考2003年10月13日李健省致马来西亚国家艺术馆的信件)。

2000年：在马来西亚国家艺术馆的新馆开幕展之际，李健省的1972作品〈人类〉(Mankind)被错置改装。此展由莫哈末皮雅达沙编撰的画册〈马来西亚风貌：马来西亚当代艺术概述〉(The Face of Malaysia: A Survey of Malaysia's Modern Art)上的展览品目录，也遗漏了该作品的记录。该册由国家艺术馆于2000年出版。(参考2000年11月6日李健省致马来西亚国家艺术馆的信件)

1997年：Pustaka Delta Pelajaran Sdn Bhd出版的马来西亚国民型中学艺术科课本(Perintis Pendidikan Seni KBSM Tingkatan 4 & 5)第30页艺术家的名字不正确。

1994年：在马来西亚国家艺术馆出版的〈远见和理念：再看大马现代艺术〉(Vision and Idea: Relooking Modern Malaysian Art)画册第162页，国家艺术馆为李健省的1977年作品〈形象，物体，假象〉所制作的相片记录不正确，作品被严重修改。首先，作品题目有误，原来的题目是Of "Image, Object, Illusion"- Off Series Mechanism。其次，黑色地毯包装的木制台阶根本不是原著的一部分。1977年的原著有个白色的讲台。第三，画面上的蟑螂已不翼而飞，地面上装置的白色三夹板也不见了，结果整件装置作品被严重扭曲，面目全非。该册的主编是T.K. Sabapathy，由Krishen Jit, (Mohamad) Redza Piyadasa, T.K. Sabapathy, Zainol Shariff等人撰稿。(参考2003年10月13日李健省致马来西亚国家艺术馆的信件)

1991年：8月2日，新加坡出版的日本朝日新闻(Asahi Shimbun International Pte. Ltd)第12版(16) Crown Town Information 错误报导有关李健省与李正子的事实。(参考1991年8月29日李健省致日本朝日新闻的信件)

1991年：菲律宾马尼拉出版的〈东盟雕塑照片集〉(The ASEAN Sculpture -A photographic Folio)第42页的生平介绍与内容不正确，事先没有得到李健省的阅读审核。内容是由东协各成员国的委员会COCI提供。(参考1996年3月20日李健省致马来西亚国家艺术馆的信件)。

(特注)：自70年代开始，有关马来西亚艺术，大部份由毕雅达沙Mohamed Redza Piyadasa与沙巴帕提T.K. Sabapathy论述。2007年，马来亚大学，Valentine Willie Fine Art，马来西亚理工大学与Penjana Bebas Malaysia合作出版画册〈Between Generations---50 years across Modern Art in Malaysia〉。该画册的序言，以及目前本区域许多学术与艺术文化界人士，也开始质疑主流论述的完整性。

《马来西亚装置艺术之父---李健省》一书的后语 作者：欧阳文风 (Dr Ngeo, Boon Lin Phd)

2006年8月回国，忙得天昏地暗，通过电话和李健省聊了几次，好象都是谈有关出版这本书的事。他的声音越来越沙哑。

飞抵纽约，我再给他电话。他女儿接听，说他在新加坡医治咽喉癌！我的心一下沉了下来。他抽烟抽得那么凶，我不会太过意外，只是还是难过。

认识李健省，是2001年的事。那时我刚到纽约，911还未发生。仲夏。

那年，他女儿李慧玲来纽约Sarah Lawrence大学念书，李健省陪同她过来。他向〈星洲日报〉编辑拿了我的电邮，主动联络我。他说他一直在读我的"自由女神下系列"(1998--2001)文章，在我的生命看见自己的影子。我有自知之明，我是比不上他的，我看见的是他的谦和与对后进的提携。

我们在纽约逛了好几天，不断走画廊与博物院，总是他说话多。他说话没有什么秩序，或者应说只是遵循他自己思路的秩序，天马行空，同一句子的代名词可以是不统一的对象，有多次我不得不打断他问“谁是他？”、“他们是指谁？”，诸如此类。

他的生命饱经忧患，却无枯竭迹象。那时我就想写他。后来为了撰写此书访问他，发现过去有许多私人的事，他不想多谈，我倒以为那是铸成他性格的主要缘由，他似乎有心逃避。艺术家的生命，有一种孤寂，不能呢喃传播，只能屏息沉思，或许一刹那间，可能窥见什么。

这本书在我思想成孕好久，许多思绪团团围箍，最后还是决定写他的装置艺术。艺术家的创作，是一种冒险，一种试验，一种探究灵魂的过程，一种生活。李健省不只是创作艺术，他的生命就是追求自由的艺术。

对一些人，生命是幻觉。对某些人，生命是骗局，可以自欺，可以欺人。对他，生命是艺术，艺术也是他的生命。活了六十年，他还是看不惯有人颠倒是非，他还是执意与人竞争创造现实。当种族主义居高临下，所向披靡，他没有因此退缩却步。他还是要用他的生命整理历史。历史，往往是体制支撑和配置的权力之一种论述，可以和真相对立，可能与谬误为伍。弱势者的声音被视为噪音，是没有意义的声音。可是李健省始终拒绝沉默。他用他的方式阻止真相模糊与消灭。

写这本书，不只是为了他，也是为了我们的未来。李健省是我国的文化资产。

¹主治咽喉癌的医生包括新加坡肿瘤中心（Medical Oncology Center）的陈有禹医生（Dr Tan Yew Oo），新加坡国立大学医院的陈金沁医生副教授（A/professor Dr Luke Tan）和新加坡Gleneagles医院的杨德龙医生（Dr Yang Tuck Loong Edward）。

欧阳文凤完稿于2007年12月19日

Other

- [More details about factual Inaccuracies in the publications of Malaysian Art 马来西亚国家画廊篡改李健省作品的记录](http://www.leekianseng.com/lee_FactualInaccuracy.pdf) http://www.leekianseng.com/lee_FactualInaccuracy.pdf
- <Protect our art to preserve history> Lee Kian Seng was commenting on the Auditor-General's 2004 Report that 127 pieces of art from the National Art Gallery Malaysia could not be traced. The Star/ Malaysia/ 8 October 2005 reported by Devid Rajah. <http://www.thestar.com.my/story.aspx/?file=%2f2005%2f10%2f8%2fnation%2f12251249&sec=nation>

On the edge of innovation

By VERONICA SHUNMUGAM

A strange-looking steel contraption sits among the many exhibits at the National Art Gallery (NAG). At first glance, it may pass off as one of the installation art pieces that are so much in vogue now.

But then, its inscription bears the year 1972, and therein lay the contraption's value as well as the significance of its creator — veteran full-time artist Lee Kian Seng.

In the year that Lee created the piece, entitled *Mankind*, the art world had yet to acknowledge installation art. Back then, Malaysian art had not yet gone through the revolution effected by Lee's peers, Redza Piyadasa and Anthony Lau.

Despite this, a few people in the higher echelons realised that Lee's works marked the shape of art to come and thus supported him.

One was Frank Sullivan, a former secretary of the NAG's Board of Trustees. Sullivan first became impressed when he saw *The Beggar and the Bird*, a large oil painting submitted by Lee for the Seventh National Art Exhibition held at the NAG in 1964.

"It was my first exhibition and I was 18 years old, having just completed high school. I remember Mr Sullivan and Dr R.S. McCoy showing an interest and asking me to explain my painting to them. At that time, I couldn't speak English well, and I remember having trouble trying to explain that my painting was mistakenly titled. It was not a beggar, but actually a poor man on a trishaw," Lee recalls.

The NAG bought the painting for its permanent collection and later shortlisted it for the first exhibition of Malaysian art held in Australia in 1965.

"With the proceeds from a few sales, I bought a wooden house which I also used as a studio for the next three years. This was all new to me as I did not know about exhibitions where you could sell paintings for money. All the while, I had been painting just to express myself. As a boy, I went through a lot of hardship, but had to suppress my feelings so much that I enjoyed the freedom of expression that painting allowed me," says Lee.

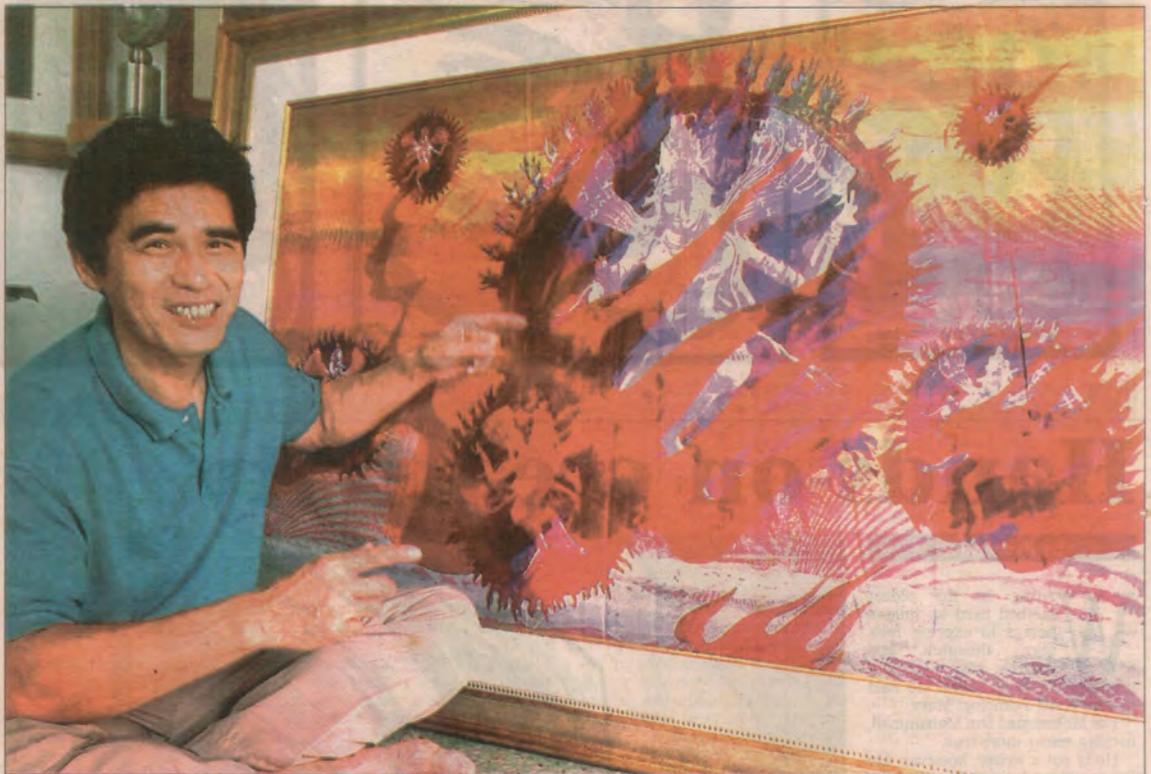
From here, Lee unravels tales of his childhood. Born in 1948 in Kimmon, a small island off mainland China, Lee journeyed with his parents to Singapore in 1952. A year later, the family moved to Klang, where he began schooling at a nearby Chinese-medium school.

"I couldn't afford membership fees for the school's art club so I painted on my own. However, this did not stop me from entering school art competitions where I won many awards," he remembers with pride.

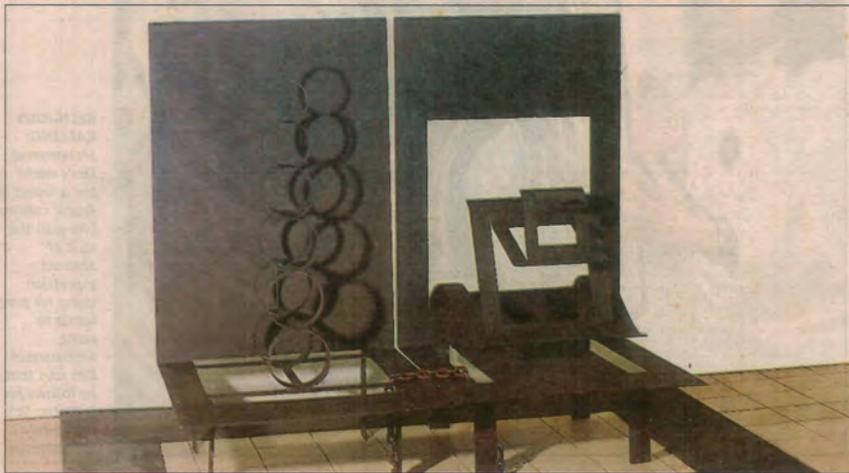
Among Lee's boyhood paintings was the 1959 watercolour *Klang River*, which depicted fishing boats on Klang's riverbanks. Critics have praised his eye for detail and judgment of space, skills that were considered advanced for a boy of 11.

"I was a science stream student — good in mathematics and geometry," Lee says. He feels his sound knowledge of science enables him to effortlessly switch from one-dimensional paintings to towering metal sculptures.

"To me, an artist should be able to work with many types of media. Art is about discovering the un-



ARTISTIC VISION: Lee explained that his batik and dye creations have many layers of images, representing the many layers of Malaysian society. 'Mankind' (below), Lee's steel installation created in 1972, graced the entrance of the former National Art Gallery.



known. I change my media every three years, which is why I now prefer multi-media art," Lee says.

Indeed, this was the same attitude that produced *From the Windows of Red*, another pioneering installation piece that is a double-sided painting hanging from a ceiling.

"I wanted to explore the limits and dimensions of a canvas painting. At the time I created it, I didn't know what to categorise the piece as. I only knew that I wanted to create something new," he remembers.

Some would say that he has artisan hands, while others, like Sullivan, put it to "qualities essential for success in art — dedication and industriousness."

Gift and guts certainly saw Lee through in coming years. Despite not having attended formal art school, he participated in many national and international exhibitions

and competitions, where he was honoured with awards and fellowships.

Examples of local wins are the 1975 Major Award at the NAG's second Young Contemporaries Competition, and the commission for the Vision 2020 sculpture at Taman Wawasan at the Public Bank Berhad building in Kuala Lumpur. Recognition from the international arts community came from honours such as the 1993 Tokyo Creation Award Overseas Prize.

"The best thing about overseas exposure was that it allowed me to pit my works against the best of the world's contemporary art. I began to better understand the developments that were going on in our country, and I tried to reflect this in my works.

"For instance, I do a lot of batik and dye works which have more than one layer of images in them. This reflects our Malaysian soci-

ety which is multi-layered," rationalises Lee of his sought-after contemporary batik and dyes pieces, an example of which is *Soul and Form 8* from his Yin Yang Series.

Apart from aesthetic qualities, his works are in demand because they are a visual record of Malaysian art history and a valuable example of intertextuality of varied art genres.

"At one stage, I liked Usman Awang's poetry and was influenced by his literary grouping, *Anak Alam*. He inspired me to travel to the east coast where I painted older works such as *Anak Laut*."

Lee's forward-looking approach also began to draw attention from local academia, who offered him part-time tutorships at visual art academies like Shah Alam's Institut Teknologi Mara (now UiTM). His students included prominent

"third generation" artists. The newer generation of artists would recognise Lee's name (albeit spelt as LIM Kian Seng) from Malaysian art history textbooks.

Curators like Syed Ahmad Jamal acknowledged him by placing *Mankind*, his steel contraption, at the entrance of the former NAG premises (at the old Majestic Hotel).

Still, Lee has plans to move on: "I have set up my own website which contains my biodata, pictures of my artworks, and essays or news articles about my work. Now, with this website, I don't have to depend on galleries and go through red tape to exhibit my pieces. The public can view all my works, including those which have not been displayed so far.

"It is true what other multi-media artists like Niranjan Rajah and Hasnul Jamal Saidon are saying: that artists can now transmit images through the Internet and that they will have more freedom of expression. Besides displaying the end-product, which is the artwork, the Internet can also store documentation explaining how the artwork was created.

"Like Niranjan's and Hasnul's *E-Art Asean Online* website, which has an online art forum. I am also inviting people to exchange opinions with me through e-mail. I would like to hear from artists who face various problems in getting their works exhibited," says Lee determinedly.

It would seem that things have come full circle, for it is now Lee who has the clout to lend credible support for younger artists with new visions and directions. Short of heralding yet another art movement, this effort will only expand the legacy of Lee Kian Seng.

□ Lee Kian Seng's website is www.leekianseng.com



National Art Gallery Malaysia (1958-1984) @109,Jalan Ampang, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

National Art Gallery Malaysia ©1979 January

