



Kayleigh Goh's 'Walking Home Through Lighted Stair' (cement, acrylic paint on wood, 2018). Photos: Gajah Gallery

## Malaysian artist builds foundation in Singapore with cement paintings

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By ROUWEN LIN

Emerging artist Kayleigh Goh uses the word “emotions” a lot when talking about her work, ahead of her first solo exhibition in Singapore, which opened on Friday. No surprise there, especially when she describes her state of mind as “an emotional roller coaster” when creating this series.

But this body of work is hardly the typical expression of a mind that switches from fear to frantic need, and everything in between. It is all muted, grey and still, all straight lines and right angles, and very, very quiet.

“The element of space in my work is a vessel to communicate a certain set of moods, feelings and experiences. I am interested in the idea of how being physically in a

different space and place affect how we feel and think. So instead of expressing and describing my feelings directly on canvas, I see my process as steps to retame, to reorganise, and to rebalance the emotions that run loose,” says Goh, 25.

*And Yet, If Only*, at Gajah Gallery in Singapore, presents 14 cement and wood works that suggest architectural illusions in a world suspended between reality and what you feel but cannot see. They are portals for escape from the chatter of our surroundings, a private space for one to sit back and contemplate on whatever strikes your fancy.

“Through *And Yet, If Only*, I am trying to pull out a subtle sense of cathartic mood. I hope to open up an imagined reality, to reignite lost hope, lost possibilities that we keep hidden. I see these paintings as a safe ground to slowly unpack unresolved emotions of despair. The process may initially be bitter, but I hope it will eventually have hints of sweetness by the end of the journey,” she says.



‘The appreciation of silence came to me, ironically, when I was in fear of loneliness,’ says Goh.

Photo: Kayleigh Goh

Since graduating from the Lasalle College of the Arts in Singapore in 2016, Goh has participated in Gajah Gallery's group exhibitions *Power, Play And Perception* in KL earlier this year, *The New Now* last year, and a month-long artist residency in Studio Kura in Fukuoka, Japan, last year as well.

It is a long list of firsts for Goh, and the Japan residency is no different.

"It was my first solo travel to a place where language communication was limited, as I did not successfully pick up Japanese in time for the trip. It felt like I was living in my own bubble throughout my stay in the slow-paced outskirts town of Itoshima. This time alone opened up my senses, from sight to audio. It was here that I truly realised the importance of rest and pause, a slower pace, and the "empty spaces" we discard so easily when something we deem important crops up," she muses.

In October, Goh will be showing at Art Expo Malaysia 2018 in Kuala Lumpur under the Gajah Gallery banner. Two paintings will be exhibited *And The Flowers Were Grey*, and *The Joy Of Mindless Chatter*.

"Both are inspired by simple, everyday experiences. I like to focus on the little things that matter, because I feel these raw experiences are what shape our lives and make us who we genuinely are. It will be my first time showing at Art Expo Malaysia and I am really thrilled with the opportunity to show beside Sabri Idrus," she shares.



*Replaying Days In The Lullaby I* (cement, acrylic paint on wood, 2018).

Does she feel like an outsider to the Malaysian art scene?

“For myself, I graduated in 2016 from Singapore’s Lasalle College of the Arts and have been developing my practice based in Johor Baru and Singapore ever since. I have the impression that the Malaysian art scene is referring more towards the art scenes in Kuala Lumpur and Penang. I do feel they are much more vibrant compared to Johor Baru,” she mentions.

In any case, Goh seems to be still drawing on the contemplative quiet of her residency in *And Yet, If Only*, bringing it into her life back in Malaysia, where she works from her home studio in Johor Baru.

She talks candidly about regrets and a fear of loneliness, an almost desperate clutching at straws that is more often than not, a downward spiral. But her stories come with talk

of hope as well, of not just scraping by or making do, but of acceptance and contentment.

“The appreciation of silence came to me, ironically, when I was in fear of loneliness. As I was studying the fear of being alone, I chanced upon texts that talk about the appreciation of solitude. I learned that to conquer this fear, we must first learn to be at peace with ourselves and our own company, without being overly attached to another. We are, at the end of the day, separate individuals, and that fact should not stress us out,” she says.



Goh's *And the Flowers Were Grey* (cement and acrylic paint on wood, 2018), a work that will be exhibited at Art Expo Malaysia 2018 in KL this month.

Her choice of cement and wood – what she describes as being cold and warmth placed side by side – complement each other, despite their different nature.

Over time, Goh started to appreciate that it is hardly necessary to be constantly connected with other people, in order to feel safe.

“And it is when we are in these personal, quiet, undisturbed spaces, be it physically or mentally, that we are able to focus on reflecting, thinking and sensing without distractions. Slowly drawn into the beauty of these psychological states, I used these spaces as a vessel to communicate and to encourage this quiet, grounded mental state of mind,” she says.

What can you expect from the experience of this exhibition? Ask Goh and she will give you a list: “A chance to let go, to allow yourself to be vulnerable in a safe space; a space to resolve complicated emotions; and to be pure like a child again, and take a step closer to a lighter heart.”

*And Yet, If Only* is a window into Goh’s world. If you are right there with her, but somehow still alone in the space she has created, then perhaps she has done something right.

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*‘And Yet, If Only’ is at Gajah Gallery, Singapore, until Oct 15. Open Mon-Fri 11am-7pm; 12nn-6pm on weekends and holidays. Go to [www.gajahgallery.com](http://www.gajahgallery.com) or [kayleighgoh.weebly.com](http://kayleighgoh.weebly.com) for details.*

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