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## Chua Ek Kay: Re-Visiting Chua Ek Kay: A Tribute to the Ink Master

The act of ‘re-visiting’ offers fresh and challenging perspectives on the legacy an artist builds over a lifetime, one which can be re-experienced with renewed vigour and thought.

This tribute exhibition for the late Cultural Medallion Winner and two time STPI collaboration artist, Chua Ek Kay, comprises of 26 artworks featuring the artist’s best loved themes – *Singapore Street Scenes*, *Lotuses*, *Water Village* and *Archipelago* series, and the remarkable hand-coloured, paper pulp works produced in collaboration with STPI. This showcase is a celebration of his artistic journey that stretches the parameters of Chinese ink paintings in unusual and engaging ways and re-discovers his sources of inspiration, processes and thoughts that continue to provoke new interest in the tradition.

Chua’s daring attitude of thrusting traditional Chinese ink painting landscapes with contemporary Western art elements, redefined the contemporary Chinese ink practice in Singapore. Tutored by pioneer artists, Fan Chang Tien, Chua adopted the Shanghai School of painting principles such as *xieyi* (“write ideas”) that prefigures his spontaneous brushwork. He sought new inspirations during further studies in Australia, from artists such as Willem de Kooning, Robert Motherwell and Franz Kline, citing that “they were very individualistic, forceful and vigorous in their use of paint.”

Chua’s most iconic series, *Singapore Street Scenes* is, “Chua’s portrayal of uniquely Singaporean scenes where the subjects in his artworks reveal his deeply rooted sense of pride and belonging to this island nation,” recalled fondly by Chua Zhen Nan, the late artist’s son.

Chua’s radical approach can be seen in the poetic *Lotuses* series, as they are not typically elegant or romantic but possess a raspy, wiry quality in a riotous mass of creased leaves, splintered stalks and bent stems, as in the midst of, or, an aftermath of a storm, pulsating with palpable life.

Chua’s keen senses to his environment propelled him to depict Asian landscapes in a brave, new light – the *Water Village* series are sensory sketches of quaint river settlements encountered during his travels in China. In contrast, the *Archipelago* landscapes are rendered flat and in aerial perspective, these symbolic terrains stimulate the imagination of envisioning ancient mariners crossing Southeast Asian seas.

This maverick spirit of contesting limits and enlarging borders mark Chua’s collaborations with STPI, which had produced groundbreaking creations. It is clearly without a doubt, the virtuosity of Chua Ek Kay can be seen in his awe inspiring oeuvre that is paradoxical to the artist’s quiet wisdom and philosophy.