

Tan Oe Pang was a very talented artist from young. He started painting at a tender age of four, independently with no supervision at all. By the age of seven, the animals, flowers and static objects he drew looked real as though drawn by adults.

In 1963, he switched from Catholic High Primary School to Whampoa Secondary School for his secondary education. In the same year he formally became a pupil of art teacher Fan Chang Tien to learn Chinese ink painting.

Fan Chang Tien was the successor of “Hai Pai” (Shanghai School). Oe Pang studied art under Fan for many years till the demise of the latter.

Fan taught him the proper way of Chinese ink painting and having found Fan was the most important and fortunate thing in his life.

His teacher Fan was the student of Wang Geyi of “Hai Pai” (Shanghai School). Wang Geyi was the best student of Wu Changshou who was one of the grand masters of Chinese ink painting of modern times.

Fan Chang Tien inherited “Hai Pai” (Shanghai School) which advocated freedom of thinking and emphasised the importance of the art elements. He had a very strong foundation in this field and his style was candid and pure, similar to his character and personality.

Fan was a responsible teacher. Under his coaching and supervision, coupled with sensitivity and natural talent Oe Pang was able to comprehend the secret of Chinese ink painting. It is to use the formal representation in accordance with the subject to ‘write’ instead of to ‘draw’. As a result the image would become lively and vivid. If the subject is drawn then it is an imitation and the result would be sluggish and not lively.

The art elements of Chinese ink painting are derived from using the centred-tip stroke of a brush. If the quality of the art elements in the line is abundant, the image turnout would be full of life and vivid. The beauty of Chinese ink painting is seen from the image between the totally look-alike with the subject painted and the opposite. There should be the harmony of spirit and form. In other words the subject performance and object reproduction should be in harmony. To achieve this, both entities should not be only put together or drawn closer, but rather, phased. Deformation, simplicity and exaggeration of the image is not to portray unconventional manifestation but rather to produce the aesthetic effect in the painting. The artist must have the grasp of the structural line drawing skills and fully understand the space structure. The combination of the structural line drawing skills and art elements produce a painting. The basic foundation of the artistic skills and his overall interpretation of the world and philosophy will determine the standard and grade of the painting. For Chinese painting, its theoretical base rests on the philosophical foundation of the harmony of “yin” and “yang”, giving rise to the creation of numerous lives. An artist pursues the rhythm of the innermost soul of his own self in order to seek combination with the rhythm of life in the universe and this is the state of union of heaven and man, which is metaphysical. A painting which contains the overall vigour but no details would result in roughness, whereas a painting with details but lack overall vigour would become trivial.

Oe Pang has already had this foresight that in painting there is no theory but only skills and principles. In Chinese painting, artists learn by word of mouth and there is no proper art



Chameleon



Passenger In The Desolate Universe



The Snail And A Stem



Homeland

curriculum. Until today there is no art master trained by any art college. None of the art masters was produced from any art academy.

Tan Oe Pang was born and bred in Singapore. Being situated near the equator, our nature environment is magnificent and majestic, mottled and breeding, and life is full of exuberant vitality, thus forming a unique characteristic of this region. It is enriched with different races and people of different cultures and religions merged to form a unique and harmonious Singapore culture. The uniqueness of this Singapore culture has earned us a place in the first world country league.

Oe Pang was able to tap on this country's abundance in natural environment and rich cultures. From here he managed to detach from the inappropriate habits of the later stage of "Hai Pai" (Shanghai School) which were pedantic, vulgar, coarse and lack of connotation, to form his own "Singapore Style". This "Singapore Style" encompassed the many characteristics of the Tropical Rainforest.

The first harvesting period for Oe Pang was in the 80s of the last century.

In 1983 Oe Pang published an album of his paintings. In the preface of this album the great master Qian Songyan wrote:

"Looking at my friend Oe Pang's painting, it is magical and has secluded taste. Although he is living overseas and easily accessible and influenced by Western culture and new ideas, from his strokes I still could detect the influence of Bada, Qing Xiang, Dong Xin and Xugu and with continuation of excellent tradition and Chinese culture."

At that time Oe Pang was only 36 years old and being highly praised by the great master was a great honour.

Oe Pang's oil painting is self-learned. In the 80s having to plan a curriculum for the Ministry of



Education, Singapore, he went into a comprehensive and thorough research of oil paintings by the Western masters. He painted a series of high standard oil painting such as "Chameleon", "Passenger In The Desolate Universe", "Homeland" and "The Snail And A Stem". From these paintings we could see the influence of Western Surrealism. At that moment, he realised the essence of oil painting depended on the coagulation of oil which is the soul of oil painting. Just like the Chinese painting where a work without the skill of brush work and ink application is a Chinese picture, not a Chinese painting; in oil painting, a work without the coagulation of oil is just a western picture, not an oil painting.

In 1985 Wang Geyi and his student Cao Jianlou came from Shanghai to visit his student Fan. Having seen Oe Pang's artwork "Lotus and Fish" he commented that his work was different in approach, but equally satisfactory in result. This positive comment from Wang had proven that Oe Pang had been doing his work correctly and had fore-sight.

In 1985, Oe Pang in his personal capacity participated in the Sao Paulo Art Biennial. His artwork "Insect of Ice" received the highest critical acclaim. The committee thought that he had a good chance to get the highest award. Ministry of Culture Singapore had recommended a few artists to participate, but none was selected. The organisation wanted Oe Pang to get a certificate to prove that he was a representative of Singapore. The requirement of the Art Biennial was that the participants must be recommended by their respective governments. Even though a participant is allowed to participate in his own capacity he still had to get a certificate of country of origin if and when his artwork was selected. Oe Pang applied but was rejected. The reason given was he did not get approval from the government prior to the participation. Finally he was unable to receive the award. Singapore had missed the chance to be proven worthy in the art circle. This misfortune turned out to be a blessing in disguise for Oe Pang. As a result, he slacked in the pursuit of fame and fortune. Instead he focused more on the arts, exploring new skills, techniques, approach and philosophical perception. The bureaucracy of our government led to the lost of world fame. On the contrary this helped Oe Pang. God's will is unpredictable! In 2016 Oe Pang's painting "Insect of Ice" was on loan to the newly inaugurated National Gallery Singapore.

In 1987 Oe Pang was invited by The Academy of Chinese Paintings, Beijing, to be the guest lecturer and held a solo exhibition on calligraphy and painting. The Dean of this academy Mr. Li Keran inaugurated the opening ceremony. After he had seen all the paintings in the exhibition, he commented a meaningful critic as such:

"A brilliant dawn in the East" Mr. Li was a grand master of Chinese painting with no prejudice or bias with nationality or successor of any painting style. He was very touched to know there was a young talented artist from overseas. From there he realised that the Chinese culture was full of vital energy and there might be a turning point for Chinese ink painting to be world renown.



Insect of Ice



Woman in Struggle

The Deputy Dean Mr. Liu Boshu commented:

"Oe Pang ingeniously combined Western arts and Chinese ink bold strokes. The Chinese ink painting fundamentals are retained at the same time bringing new ideas. He dared to innovate and develop a style which has a contemporary feel yet representing the modern era with a strong personal characteristic."

The trip to Beijing was an eye-opener for Oe Pang. His interaction with the Chinese artists made him realise that the Chinese culture was so profound and felt his own inadequacy. He realised to mix Western with Eastern culture, he needed to have a strong foundation in the Chinese culture first. Without this strong foundation in Chinese culture he would not be able to succeed.

Real gold will shine anywhere. Same goes with a talented person. In 1989 because of his outstanding performance in the Sao Paulo Art Biennial he was invited to participate in the International Biennial of Arts Vaiparaiso, Chile. He was the first artist specialising in Chinese art painting ever to be invited and featured. His artwork "Woman in Struggle" was the only exhibit from Asia. This brought honour to Singapore.

In the 90s of the last century, Oe Pang rejected all common custom activities. He also kept away from the problematic art circle to focus on the elevation of painting skills and self-cultivation. He realised without full concentration and focus, there would not be any success at the end of the day.

In 1996, thus, he left his highly paid position to become a full-time art practitioner. He taught a few students for livelihood and led a life of a recluse. He forsook the monetary gain in pursuit of the illusionary art dreams. This move was a great bewilderment to many. After more than ten years of practise and self-cultivation he became serene and his vision broadened in perspective. He then understood his role in the field of arts. He sincerely and wholeheartedly combined life and art as one.



Arhat

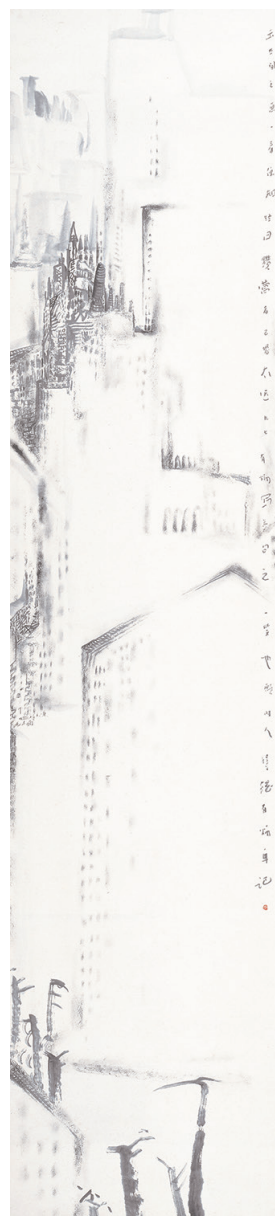


In 1992, he started to practice "Fa Lun Da Fa". His outlook of the universe heightened and understanding of space structure deepened. His paintings changed from brilliant to simple. This simplicity contained vitality, is ordinary, yet profound. His painting returned to original purity and simplicity. During these ten years he perfected all the traditional painting skills.

In the same year, Oe Pang completed his structural line drawing of a long scroll, "Arhat". This structural line drawing was not only a skill of visual art, but also a complete world of art. The lines were full of wrestling strength and pulling force. As for the sense of form he was using the rhythm and contrast to present. The figures and auspicious animals were formed by different characteristic of lines. The characteristics were derived from the speed, direction, thick and dense of the stroke. Due to the fact that different types of line characteristics were being applied, the contradiction was tremendous. At the end of the day both partial and overall turned out harmonious rendering the art elements working to soul stunning aesthetic heights! In the history of Chinese art, only Wu Daozi and Chen Laolian were able to achieve this standard of quality of line and sense of form.

For the last ten years Oe Pang concentrated and focused on the improvement of the overall skills in painting. His "Ke Bi" (dry brush) technique reaped rewards. The effect of "Ke Bi" must be cool and not cold. It should be moist and gentle and the colour must be very light, which looks like a type of white jade of which texture much like mutton lard. In the history of Chinese painting, Ni Yunlin's dry brush painting had the highest standard. His painting was succinct, simple, applied minimum ink, pale and naïve and stood aloof from worldly affairs. In Oe Pang's masterpiece namely "View of Magnificent Buildings" he visually gathered city scenes. He memorised and digested his vision to present his own perception and feel in his painting. He applied minimum crystal clear light ink, the form simple and concise, to attain the moist, season maturity, rustic and simple artistic effect. When the movements of the strokes were fast, the lines were still concise and concentrated, not floating, and not flat. When the movements of the strokes were slow, the lines were not stagnant, sluggish, bloated and not overflowing. The painting looked ordinary but gave one a cool and easy style of simplicity, also lofty and rational beauty. The "View of Magnificent Buildings" is comparable to Ni Yunlin's painting.

In order to paint on the Tropical Rainforest theme, Oe Pang went into serious research to discover its hidden spiritual level. From this geographical status of the Tropical Rainforest, he expanded his theme to a cultural space concept. He felt that the Tropical Rainforest



View of Magnificent Buildings



was the origin of life and the coordination and integrity of it, unimaginable. He also felt that for the Tropical Rainforest, the exuberant vitality was the most basic and essential element. His painting was to reflect on the continuous energy of the Tropical Rainforest. In 2001, Beijing's "Rong Bao Zhai" published an album of Oe Pang's paintings entitled "Tropical Rainforest Artist Tan Oe Pang". The paintings collected in this album embodied dripping, vigorous, psychedelic, primitive and mottled, full of life and energy, exhibiting the characteristics of the Tropical Rainforest. This album was very popular among the ardent art readers in mainland China.



Trail of Dragon

After the ten years of living in seclusion, Oe Pang became more self-cultivated and his skill and outlook of the universe elevated to a higher level.

In 2004, Xin Hua Gallery and Singapore Din Tai Fung joined to hold a solo exhibition for Oe Pang. Most of the exhibits selected for this said exhibition was created between 1995 and 2004. Oe Pang kept a low profile for a long time, as such this exhibition aroused the curiosity and anticipation among the art lovers. As usual he did not accept any media exposure and interview. He felt that the exhibition was not to show off his achievements in art, but rather to set forth a righteous path for the future. He hoped through this exhibition, with interaction with art lovers, to bring about a serious and sincere attitude and approach towards appreciating art.

There were a total fifty pieces of art which included oil painting, Chinese ink painting and calligraphy. This exhibition consisted of different techniques, styles and subject matters which was stunning! A visitor from Hong Kong who was the daughter of the world renowned late artist Yang Shanchen of "Ling Nan School" commented, "This is the most brilliant and spectacular exhibition I have ever seen in recent years. Be it technique or connotation it is most touching! Honestly speaking, initially I was sceptical about the standard of Chinese ink painting in Singapore. This exhibition changed my perception totally". Once again Oe Pang proved that a highly skilled artist is able to change the image of a country !

In 2005, he published another new album namely "Tan Oe Pang Homeland", this album mainly focused on urban ink painting. They contained images of cities, structural line drawing, landscape and calligraphy. Due to miscellaneous trifles in the subject it was very difficult to advocate this in urban ink painting.

He needed to decide what were the details to add on or to discard. Some important details needed to be exaggerated or deformed and the secondary details needed to be discarded or shrunken. Using simplicity to depict abundance, virtue to represent reality, little to portray much and less details to represent more details, in order to achieve this he must understand the concept of concave and convex well. The structural relationships between objects were important. An artist who does not master the structural line drawing skill would not be able to produce the aesthetic effect of urban ink painting. Urban Chinese ink painting had



always been the weakest link of the Chinese ink painting. A few great masters of the modern era, like Wu Changshuo, Huang Binhong, Qi Baishi and Guang Liang had never touched on this area of urban Chinese ink painting. They missed a chance to prove the ductility and adaptability of Chinese ink painting. For Oe Pang's urban Chinese ink painting series, be it vigorous, magnificent, thick and dense ink and gorgeous in colour such as "Trail of Dragon", or secluded, simple and elegant, light ink and dry brush such as "View of Magnificent Buildings", they made up for the insufficiency of urban Chinese ink painting.

In the same year, Oe Pang completed two twelve feet landscape paintings. The name of which was "Revival Of The Tang Period". Landscape painting is the main stream of Chinese ink painting. Tens of thousands of miles of rivers and mountains could be unfolded within an inch on a piece of paper. Landscape painting has been the quintessence of Chinese Art that showcases Chinese's world perspective. Objects are observed from numerous perspective and interpreted on the same painting. The scenes from different locations could all be placed on the same platform, or events which happened at different times. Different imaginary scenes could also be depicted together in one painting. Top views, bottom views and front views are used to present in a landscape painting. These two paintings with brush art elements, layout and artistic conception at its best could be considered as one of the best landscape Chinese ink painting in history. The strokes were fluent, but the lines forceful and full of art elements. The highest standard achieved for the traditional Chinese painting was rustic and simple, forthright and sincere. Oe Pang managed to achieve a standard higher than stated earlier to attain guilelessness and coagulation, naivety, childlike and simplicity. He used this method which was the formal representation in accordance with the subject. So the layout had proficient accuracy and was not sluggish, there was contrast yet harmony, balance but with variation, lavishness yet well coordinated. It is difficult to find a landscape painting which consists of the three types of perspective. In these two paintings "San Yuan" was seen from all over. "San Yuan" means "Ping Yuan", "Gao Yuan" and



Revival Of The Tang Period



"Shen Yuan" put together. "Ping Yuan" is view from the nearby mountains with horizon gradually extending towards the further mountains - this is top view. "Gao Yuan" is standing at the bottom of the mountains looking up at the peaks - this is the bottom view. "Shen Yuan" is Gazing at the back of the mountain from his front - this is front view. "San Yuan" is the yardstick to measure and to decide the artistic level of the landscape painting. Normally "San Yuan" appears individually in a painting and very seldom these three types of viewpoints appear altogether in one painting. "San Yuan" was spotted on many parts of these two paintings. This showed that his landscape paintings had enriched the skills and connotation of Chinese landscape painting thus bringing new life. The paintings showed seasoned maturity, all wholesomeness, rich and gaudy and recondite intricacy. The lines were implicit, pliable and tough, varied and vigorous, full of tolerance. They returned to original purity and simplicity. He used structural line drawing to depict the mystical divine creatures circling around the mountains, using strong and full outlines and added an ineffable primitive sense. The lines were full of tension and the whole painting showed primitive and profound mystery. These paintings portrayed of the artist's inner spirit as well as his profound feelings towards the beauty of nature. The expression was of great beauty, integrating contemporary spirit that was ahead of time. In 2009, these two paintings were exhibited in Taiwan and received tremendous praise from art lovers.

In 2007, he published another album entitled: "Tan Oe Pang Perfect Dimension". This album focused on oil paintings and other of his artworks such as Chinese ink painting, calligraphy, sculpture and engraving. A complete presentation of his artwork, comprehensive indeed!

Artists of oil painting in the West traditionally used the horizontal lines to denote space, and for some who used scattered perspective in the later stage to show space, its theoretical concept still rested upon the three dimensions. However, in Chinese ink painting, the voids were intentionally left behind by the artist to denote space. The blank parts embraced unlimited void, the beginning of unlimited primeval nature, the beginning of time and the beginning of shapes. Due to the fact that they do not have the void concept, they could not attend to one thing without neglecting the other, eg. they could not attend to the same natures of time, space and shapes altogether on canvas.

In 2002, in Oe Pang's artwork "White Organism", he combined the primeval and primitive natures of time and space together with biological organism and social nature in a way that it showed convergence of purity. The shape was simple but full and lavish and it possessed an image without shapes, its colour looked ordinary, but it was the kind of ordinary colour which was tasteful like the fermentation of exuberant vitality of life. In this painting, Oe Pang not only employed freehand brush skill, he also used dry brush skill of Chinese ink painting, by applying an extremely thin oil to paint on the canvas. The coagulation of oil was moist and it was full of wrestling strength and pulling force, and the mood was so aloof. The lines were steady and firm and they possessed the beauty of lofty rationality like keeping detached from the worldly affairs. The void concept of Chinese ink painting when applied to oil painting, was able to complement the insufficiency of the latter. In the same year Oe Pang created a series of simple stroke oil painting, namely "Q Bird", "Contemporary Lotus and Bird", "The Melon" and more. He used neutral grey as the base. He did not use the palette to mix the colours, instead he let the tubes of different colours direct mixed onto the brush. He then used the freehand brush skill employed in Chinese ink painting to 'write' on the canvas. While doing this, Oe Pang had to control the brush when 'writing' on the canvas, to appear in even a tiny space, hence creating the sense of shape, and at the same time taking care of the harmony of the texture, volume and colour senses by carrying it through non-stopping. The spiritual charm emerged when the painting was completed.



In 2006, Oe Pang completed the oil painting “Re-Appearing Of The Tang Dynasty” by using the structural line drawing skill to paint on the canvas. The lines showed full and rich artistic elements and they were unique in that the brush style constructing them showed the movement of exchanging strokes by leading, pushing, lifting and pressing, so that the paints were delivered with the intended shape. The “yin” and “yang” effects were clearly demonstrated with apparent contrasts. The strokes gave the viewers an impression that they appeared broken in between, but in fact there was continuous flow. The shape was constructed with strokes some shown in such a way that there were backward reactions, yet a simple and natural expression emerged as a result of this. This oil painting made use of the Chinese ink painting’s concept and skills. As such the painting was different from the Western oil painting. We may ‘identify’ or ‘consider’ this as the Chinese oil painting.

After so many years of accumulation, precipitation and refining of his skill, in 2010 there was a tremendous change in Oe Pang’s Chinese ink painting, calligraphy, and oil painting. These changes were the qualitative leaps which he achieved and he had entered into a new human era of arts.

In 2015, Oe Pang, using reincarnation as a motif, created a series of oil paintings. He used only black and white to depict his understanding and feeling about reincarnation. Black and white are extreme colours and representing the “yin” and “yang”. His oil painting, “The Reincarnation Crab” made use of Western oil painting tools and materials which blended into the Chinese ink painting concept and skill. The lines were



White Organism



Q Bird



The Melon



Contemporary Lotus and Bird





Re-Appearing Of The Tang Dynasty



The Reincarnation Crab

concise and each and every stroke depicted change of shape. In the normal oil painting, the lines are jagged and sometimes need repairing and filling. Some need to be scraped and covered. In "Reincarnation Crab" the layout was simple and the shape of the crab, huge and primitive looking. The organism shape was simple, light colours amidst the dark, white amidst the black. The oil was moist, full of tension, and rich in volume. Layout was simple and the shape of the crab, huge and primitive looking. The organism shape was simple, light colours amidst the dark, white amidst the black. The oil was moist, full of tension, and rich in volume. The other deformed organism was very light grey colour with texture. The spots on the shell of the crab was in basic form and the black, grey and white merged and interfaced with each other. It was full of vitality and looking at it felt like the beginning of the universe. At this primeval stage, this painting revealed the beauty of loftiness and softness, solemn and vitality changes giving rise to a new life of airy inspiration, primitive and vast, rustic and simple, bizarre and contrast. It gave rise to profound mystery, primitive, purity, simplicity and honesty. Time, space, quality and volume returned to the beginning of life. This painting



accessed to the standard of the new era of human arts. A normal Western painting, when speaking about the origin, refers to only the shape, but this painting was about the life which was closer to the nature of the origin. Another difference between the Western painting and this painting was, for the Western painting there was only one specific field even for the grand master, whereas this painting contained many fields in respect to the return of the origin.

During this period Oe Pang's understanding of the ability of perception, creativity, artistic conception and structure of space saw a tremendous improvement. From return to the simple and purity stage he elevated to return to the beginning of origin. His strokes went from seasoned maturity, full of strength and extravagance to collagen-like primeval stage, the lines being implicit. His handling of the structural space was more matured and effective. The "Bengawan Solo" series fully represented this modern era. This series of paintings embodied the firmness and strength of the mountains, the tenacity of water, the perseverance of earth, the gracefulness of the river and the vitality of the Tropical Rainforest. It illustrated the primitive majesty as well as the simple and natural lifestyle. Each painting had its own unique feature, showcasing the charm of "Bengawan Solo" and the inner message which Oe Pang hoped to convey from this theme. He wished to express that all experiences, matters and life in the Universe began with a source, that was everything was pure and in harmony in the initial stage. After viewing this series of paintings, readers will also feel like having gone through tens of thousands of different experiences, thus enriching their understanding about the origin of life. The scenes were broadly generalised excluding the complex components of shapes and forms, without losing details. The subjects were simplified, everything was condensed within simple form, bringing about unadorned, plain and down to earth feelings. The ink colours were mild and warm, just like the aged mud, or the sticky protoplasm that breeds countless lives. The boats, bridges, vehicles and the human figures portrayed are simple and pure, yet full of vitality and spirit, representing the returning to the true essences of life. The plants rendered are primitive and straightforward, symbolising returning to the beginning of time and to the origin of all lives. Simple brushworks were used to delineate the mountains, it was concise and pristine, it unleashed the flowing spirit of vitality, depicting the primeval, the chaotic and vastness, alluding to the beginning of heaven and earth. Oe Pang accentuated the height and steepness of the faraway mountains by leaving appropriate voids and a certain degree of blurriness in the painting. Water and sky merged, images crystal clear, layout candid. Through his understanding of the ideal beauty of Bengawan Solo, the painting interpreted a more profound and richer Bengawan Solo. It also inspired the readers' connotation of beauty. This series of paintings combined more art elements, in all aspects, in harmony. Simple yet deep, solitary but not dull, clear but not wane, faint but not superficial, all of which are a result of the artist's serendipitous intent. It revealed free-spirited and unpretentious personality, showcasing a broad realm of thought, which conveyed the deep meanings naturally. It juxtaposed softness with toughness, darkness with brightness, thinness with thickness in the lines, to illustrate the various shapes of the distant mountains, using the three atmospheric perspective (perceptions of distance, depth and breadth of space) on the top of the little space where he drew the remote mountains. This series of paintings had achieved expressing the idea of returning to our origin, true inner nature, the beginning of time and the beginning of all lives. It represented the quintessence of Chinese ink painting of the current era.

Oe Pang feels that the Bengawan Solo is the mother river of South East Asia. This river cultivates the ancient culture of this region. It is pliable and has a strong vitality giving life to the whole region. He acknowledges this fact and he feels himself a reincarnation of the Bengawan Solo. He could feel the heartbeat and the rhythm of this river. The art elements and connotations of this series of paintings are above races, cultures and religions. The feelings derived from the Bengawan Solo were harmony, universal, origin and ideals. His above sentiments of the river and depictions of his paintings are one.

*~ Goh Huck Heng*