

“Everything You Ever Wanted To Know”, the Teng Collection at Art Stage 2018 | COBO Social

cobosocial.com Updated Feb 16th, 2018

“Everything You Ever Wanted To Know”, the Teng Collection at Art Stage 2018





Lee Wen Strange Fruit 2003 Performance relic and documentation 150 x 150 x 150 cm (relic) Video duration: 7:57 min



Teng Yen Lin, The Black Line Project (2013-2014) Exit Portal at Marshall Road, SG, 2013. Black vinyl tape. Dimensions variable





Portrait of Teng Jee Hum and June Ong

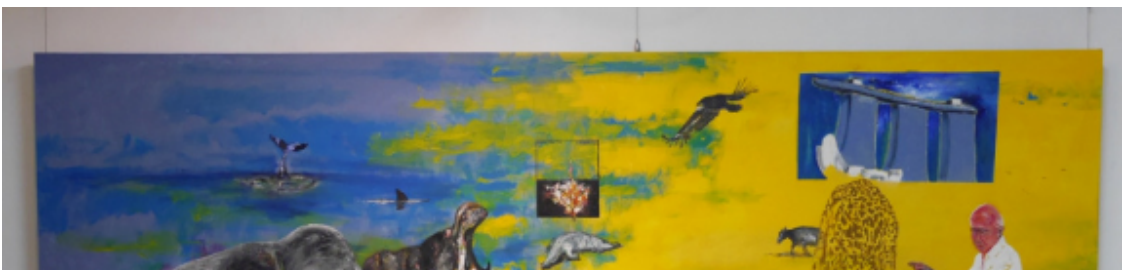




Chun Kai Feng, Everything You Ever Wanted to Know (installation view), 2015. Stainless steel with LED floodlights, 260 x 320 x 5 cm.



Lee Wen, Strange Fruit, 2003. Performance relic and documentation 150 x 150 x 150 cm (relic) Video duration: 7:57 min.





Teng Jee Hum, Noah's Ark, 2015. Oil and acrylic on canvas 150 x 300 cm.



Ugo Untoro, Untitled (Self-portrait). 2012. Bronze, 190 x 100 x 45 cm.





Semsar Siahaan, *Untitled*, 1986. Oil on canvas, 100 x 75 cm. Courtesy of Gajah Gallery.





Michael Shaowanasai, Good and Bad. Clog high heels, red and black, size 38
Dimensions variable.





Justin Lee, Godalisation, 2008. Fluorescent lights. Dimensions variable.



Han Sai Por, Black Forest 2016 (detail), 2016, 2017. Wood and charcoal. Dimensions variable.





Geraldine Javier, Black Tree, 2011. Mixed media, 193 x 93 x 74 cm.

9

Feb

[Naima Morelli](#)

[40](#)

118569

1992

Naima Morelli is an art writer and curator with a focus on contemporary art from the Asia Pacific region. She has written...

[View Profile](#)

VIDEO●ARTASIA
by COBOSocial.com

Asia's first digital archive of
video art works produced in Asia
from the 1980s to the present

A highlight of the Singapore art week has been the showcase of part of the Teng Collection, which opened in an unusual space with a homey feeling.

TEXT: Naima Morelli

IMAGES: Courtesy of the Teng Collection

“When everything is aligned, space becomes a portal,” said collector Teng Jee Hum pointing out to an artwork on the stairs. “So if you move to the side...” he

told to us bunch of standing reporters, “...you will see all those black lines printed on the stairs and wall forming a circle.”

Mr. Teng was referring to an artwork called “*The Black Line Project*”, by young Singaporean artist Teng Yen Lin, which consisted of an optical illusion, an anamorphic work which appeared to the viewer only if seen from a particular perspective. And who can’t relate to this powerful visual metaphor? Certainly the Tengs – Teng Jee Hum and June Ong – whose ethos for collecting has never been compulsive, but rather based on a deep inner resonance; they waited for this show until things felt really aligned.

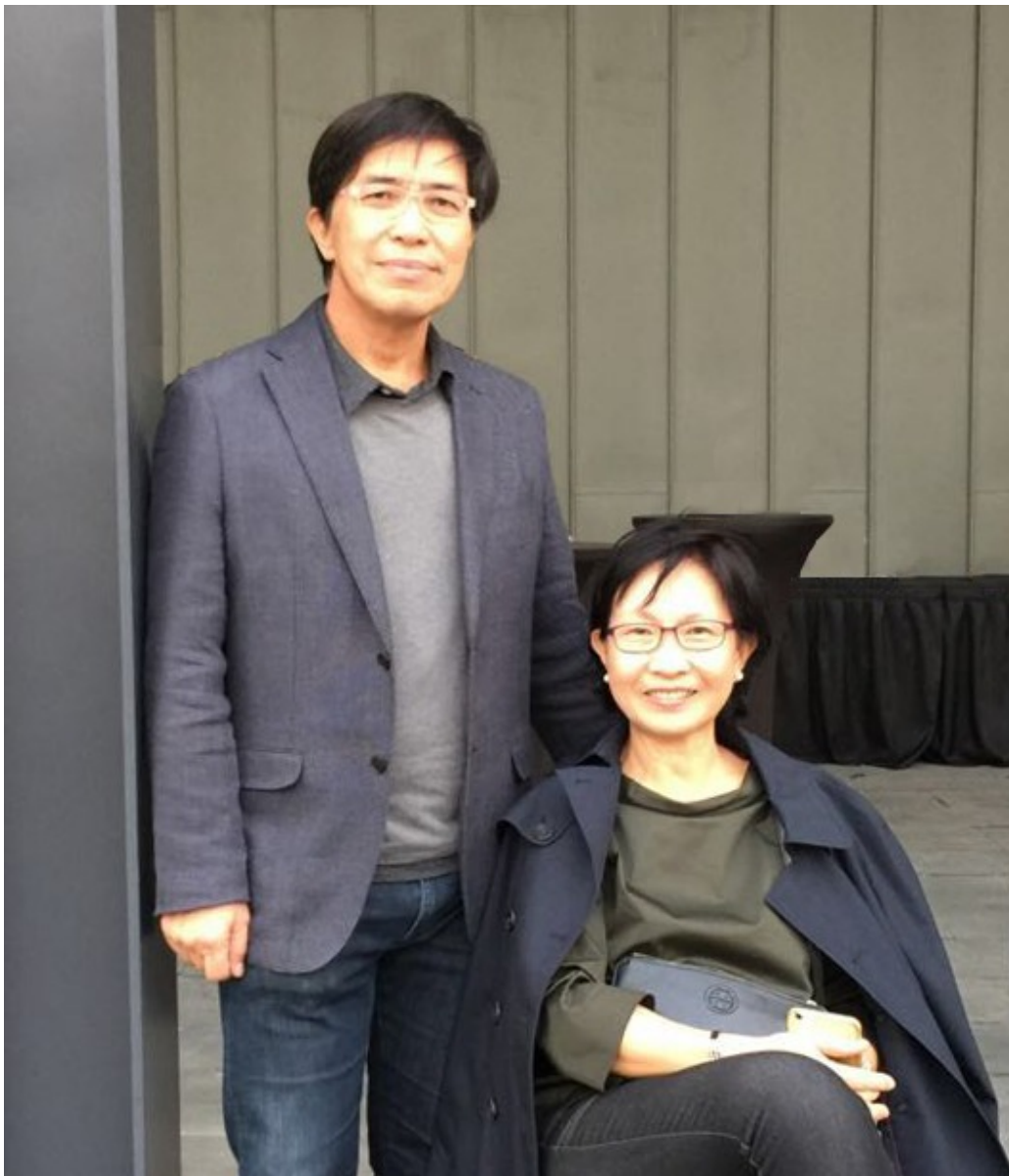


Teng Teng Lim, *The Black Line Project* (2010-2011), Exit Project at Orchard Road, SG, 2013. Black vinyl tape. Dimensions variable

But let's back it up a little bit. Until this January, the Teng collection was something which had a rather mysterious aura. It was the collection that everybody wanted to see, but only few could access – preferably through uniting the two halves of a Golden Scarab Beetle and walking into the panther head that would appear from the dust, like the Cave of Wonders or something.

Only pronouncing the name of the Teng Collection would conjure up images of great masters, as well as the best contemporary artists in Southeast Asia. What's more is that the Tengs were famed to not simply be art lovers with the contemporary art vice, but also people who would take at heart the evolution of Singaporean contemporary art, giving their inputs in constructing the nation's artistic narrative.

But of course, as most of Singaporean collectors, the Tengs were keeping low profile, not seeking any publicity. To get an interview with them was a nearly impossible task. While they would love to talk about the reason while they decided to acquire this or that piece, as well as their collecting ethos, they didn't want to have their words recorded. Their love for art was labourious and discreet.





Portrait of Teng Jee Hum and June Ong

All of the above is still true. But with this January something opened up. I guess somewhat of a portal started appearing. The name of the show was *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know* and was drawn from the opening artwork by Chun Kai Feng. It was also on point with the curiosity that the show elicited. Tied to this year's Art Stage, although placed in another location, it was finally possible to peer through a small but significant part of the Teng's collection.

"We wanted to show our collection little by little. Think about it as the Thousand and One Nights," they said when I encountered them at Art Stage, to which the exhibition is associated as a Collector's show. "Each part of the collection tells a story; and we wanted to reveal it bit by bit."



Chun Kai Feng, *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know* (installation view), 2015.
Stainless steel with LED floodlights, 260 x 320 x 5 cm.

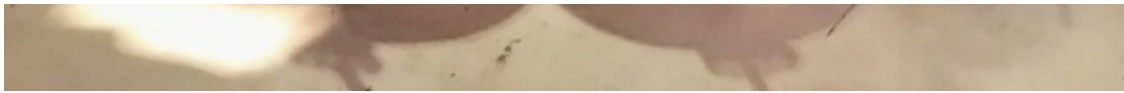
Instead of a big flashy space to tell their first tale of the Arabian Nights, the Tengs decided to exhibit a selection of their work in a traditional Peranakan house at Marshall Road, in the Katong area of Singapore. Indeed, the feeling was homely, and Mr. Teng's passionate recount of the narratives surrounding the works – including their own in relation to the work and that of the artists,

conveyed the idea that each one of the pieces operated on multiple levels.

The curatorial idea for the show was thought with the three-storey house in mind: each floor represented the trinity-based concept of Earth Man and Heaven. While this wasn't immediately apparent, what emerged instead were the varied thematic trails that inform the Teng collection.

The first is certainly the Singapore Story, in pieces like the seminal recording of Lee Wen's performance as the yellow man (*Strange Fruit*), with the reconstruction of the installation of red lanterns. This theme was to find also in a piece by the Indonesian group Indiegue Guerrillas, which looked like a huge cluster of bird houses or a presepio – translated by the collectors in their own Singaporean context as being about real estate. A canvas from 2015 by Mr Teng himself, called *Noah's Ark* represented through symbolism what being a Singaporean means for those who have been through the making of the nation-state.





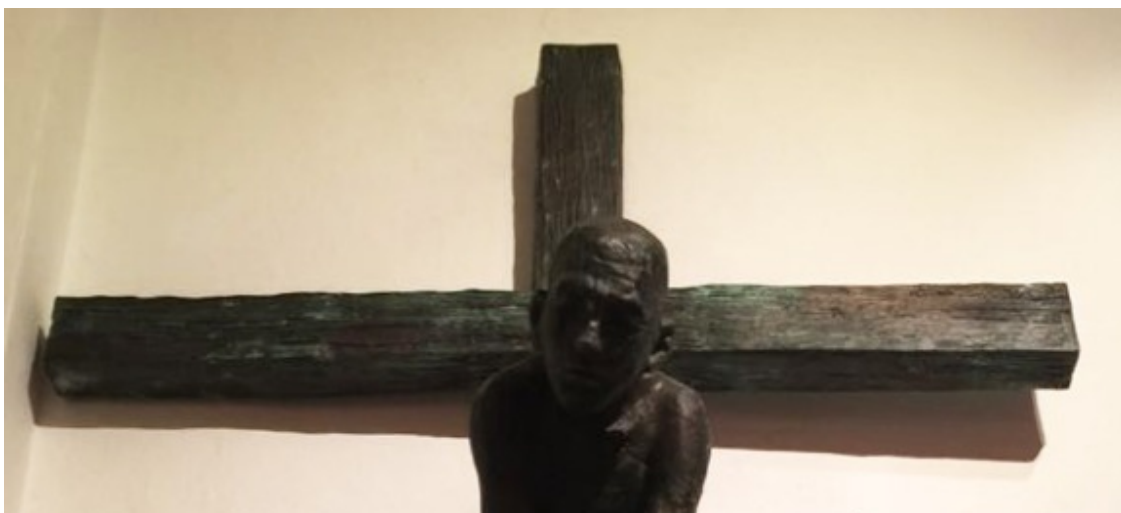
Lee Wen, *Strange Fruit*, 2003. Performance relic and documentation 150 x 150 x 150 cm (relic)

Video duration: 7:57 min.



Teng Jee Hum, *Noah's Ark*, 2015. Oil and acrylic on canvas 150 x 300 cm.

Another theme was rule and exception to the rule – or perhaps constriction versus freedom, or even rule versus spirit. This what emerges the works of Semsar Siahaan and Ugo Untoro. They both, in different way, confronted the symbol of the cross by representing an attempt to escape it. Ugo Untoro's Christ was taking his nail off his feet with a dramatic gesture, while Semsar Siahaan's crucifixes were frozen inside transparent cross boxes, and screamed rebelliously to get out. "If these were be Filipino artists, I wouldn't be so interested in these work," noted Mr. Teng. "But the fact that they are Indonesians stroke me." And probably that is because, coming from a culture where Christianity is not the main one, they were deliberate in using the cross in all its symbolic power.





Ugo Untoro, Untitled (Self-portrait). 2012. Bronze, 190 x 100 x 45 cm.





Semsar Siahaan, *Untitled*, 1986. Oil on canvas, 100 x 75 cm. Courtesy of Gajah Gallery.

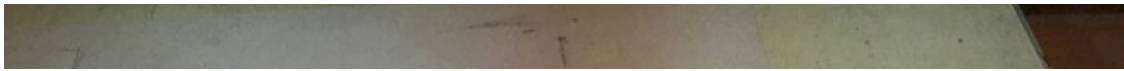
Then there were pieces of great impact like *Torso to Face*, who depicted how we tied identity so strongly to the body. The discourse of body and gender continued in piece where the physical was just evoked, like in installation composed by a pair of women shoes by Thai artist Michael Shaowanasai and *Double Happiness* by Justin Lee. In these work we see the interest for breaking a heteronormative perspective prevalent in Singapore. In artist challenging gender norms, Mr. Teng sees an important surge of creativity, similar to what happened in the western art world in the '80s.





Michael Shaowanasai, Good and Bad. Clog high heels, red and black, size 38
Dimensions variable.

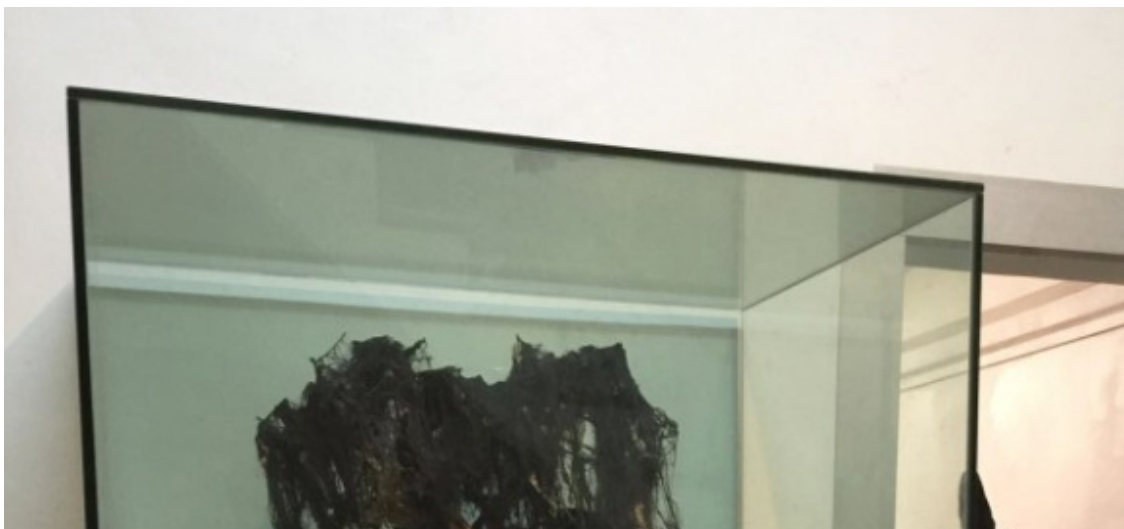




Justin Lee, *Godalisation*, 2008. Fluorescent lights. Dimensions variable.
The collecting roots of the Tengs came up in different installations reminiscent of Chinese Ink painting; to Mr Teng, they looked like the three dimensional 21st century version of it. One was *The Black Forest* by Han Sai Por, $\frac{1}{4}$ the size of the original charcoal installation from last year's Singapore Biennale, adapted to fit the room of the Peranakan house. Another was Geraldine Javier's *The Black Tree*, an intricate tangle of banana fibre – resembling hair but also delicate brushstrokes, in which bird's bones were captured.



Han Sai Por, *Black Forest* 2016 (detail), 2016, 2017. Wood and charcoal. Dimensions variable.





Geraldine Javier, Black Tree, 2011. Mixed media, 193 x 93 x 74 cm.

So was this Everything We Ever Wanted To Know? Of course this is only the first tale of the hundred and one. Now we know that a portal appeared in Marshall road, and we will patiently wait for the next alignment.

Naima Morelli is an art writer and curator with a focus on contemporary art from the Asia Pacific region. She has written for ArtsHub, Art Monthly Australia, Art to Part of Culture and Escape Magazine, among others, and she is the author of “Arte Contemporanea in Indonesia, un’introduzione” a book focused on the development of contemporary art in Indonesia. As a curator, her practice revolves around creating meaningful connections between Asia, Europe and Australia.

[#Geraldine Javier#Han Sai Por#June Ong#Justin Lee#Lee Wen#Michael Shaowanasai#Naima Morelli#Semsar Siahaan#Teng Collection#Teng Jee Hum#Ugo Untoro](#)

Leave a Comment

You must be [logged in](#) to post a comment.