

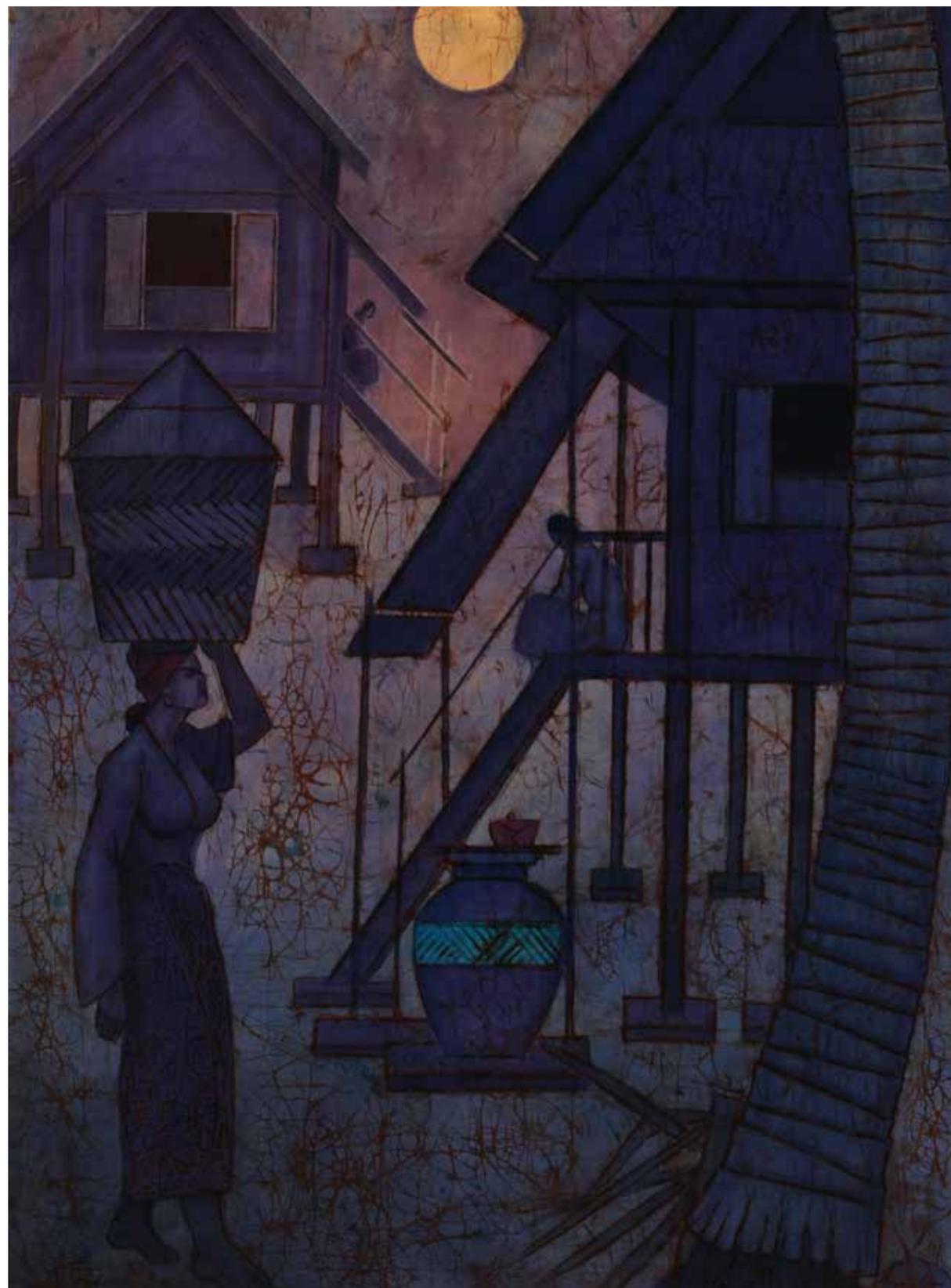
Painting the Southern seas

The 'Nanyang' style, one of the genres that characterises Southeast Asian aesthetics, goes beyond literature and is popular among art collectors in the region. The style is still practised among artists of the current generation. **BY Sarah Abu Bakar**

The history of Nanyang art in Malaysia can be traced to the late 19th and early 20th centuries. At the time, there was an increasing number of Chinese arrivals in Malaya, especially in Singapore and Penang, due to the New Culture Movement of the mid-1910s and 1920s, the May Fourth Movement in 1919 and the Sino-Japanese War in China. Encouraged by the "literary intelligentsia" of the time to visualise the words that describe the fertile soil and beautiful people, artists began depicting their newfound home in the style they knew best — by combining Eastern sensibilities and Western techniques — to produce a unique genre known as "Nanyang".

The term, which means "Southern seas", was coined in the late 1920s by writers to describe contemporary Chinese narratives based on local subjects. Many of the genre's artists were art educators and graduates of the Xinhua Academy of Fine Art in Shanghai, Xiamen Academy of Fine Art or Fuzhou Provincial Art Teacher's Training College. Graduates of the Xinhua Academy of Fine Art included Khaw Sia and Lee Cheng Yong.

The Fuzhou Provincial Art Teacher's Training College was the alma mater of Lim Hak Tai (1893-1963), founder and principal of the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (Nafa) in Singapore. Established in 1938 as Singapore's pioneer art institution, Nafa has produced many notable creative professionals and artists over the years, including Kuo Ju Ping (1913-1966), Tan



Top: Datuk Chuah Thean Teng's *Kampung Scene* batik work (circa 1960s, 87.5cm by 59.5cm) depicts the simple life of rural Malaysia. It has an estimated price of RM30,000 to RM40,000.

Left: Khaw Sia's *Orchids* watercolour on paper (1983, 62cm by 26cm) is priced between RM8,000 and RM10,000

Choon Ghee (1930-2010), Tew Nai Tong (1936-2013), Khoo Sui Hoe, 78, and Seah Kim Joo, 78.

Nanyang art

While Nafa's categorisation of "Nanyang artists" is debatable, some scholars such as Emelia Ong, programme coordinator of Universiti Malaya's visual art department, refer to them as "those who taught at Nafa, those who graduated from the academy, and those who shared close relationships with them and played important roles in the shaping of an eclectic approach to art-making".

Going under the hammer at The Edge Auction on March 5 are rare works of art in the Nanyang style as well as paintings influenced by the genre. Priced from RM1,100 to RM5,000 are works by Chee Eng Heng, Loo Hooi Nam, Tan Peng Hooi, Cheung Pooi Yip, Tan Choon

Ghee, Yong Look Lam, Choo Beng Teong, Teh Siew Joo, Alex Leong, Ng Woon Lam, Fung Yow Chork, Koh Teng Huat, Tew Nai Tong, Lee Choon Kee, Kuo Ju Ping, Lee Long Looi and Eng Tay.

Paintings in the Nanyang style include picturesque seascapes or landscapes, drawn in the style of Chinese ink paintings or French Impressionism by using either watercolours on paper, oil on canvas or batik techniques.

Tew Nai Tong's *Landscape*, which depicts stilt houses, is dated 1988 and measures 37cm by 45cm. Executed in watercolour on paper, its estimated price is between RM4,000 and RM6,000. A similar river scene with stilt houses created in the same medium by Yong Look Lam, dated 1994 and measuring 106cm by 76cm, is estimated at RM8,000 to RM10,000.

Some art in the genre capture the vibrant at-



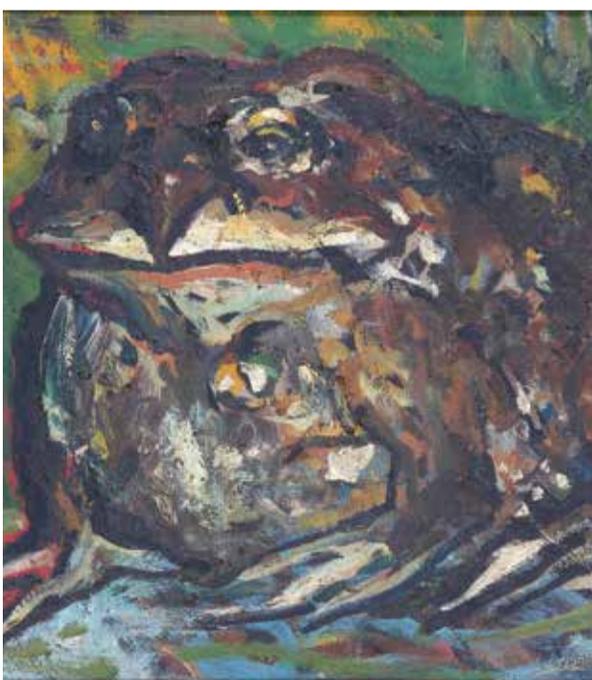
Tan Choon Ghee's *Malay Satay Sellers, Penang* (1998, 9cm by 15cm), one of three artworks that were painted for the current owner as a greeting card, is estimated at RM1,000 to RM2,000



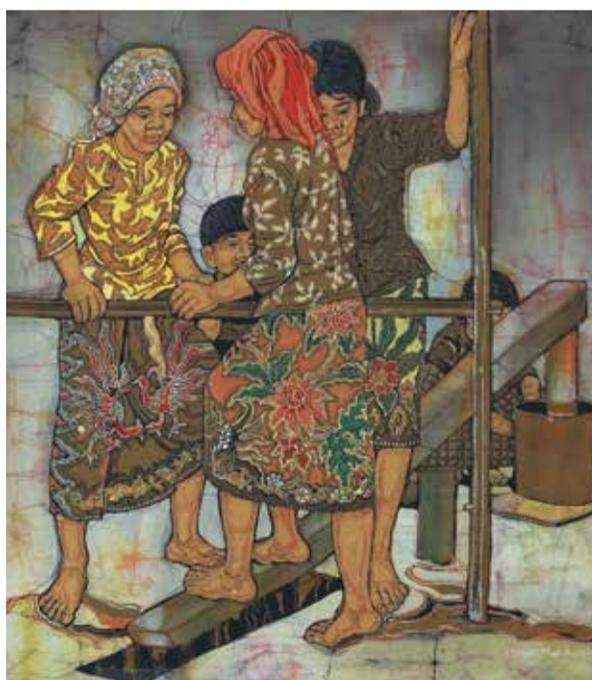
Estimated at RM10,000 to RM15,000, Chia Yu Chian's *Bukit Tinggi* oil on canvas (1972, 45cm by 32cm) comes from a private collection in Penang



Khoo Sui Hoe's *Over the Red River* oil on canvas work laid on board (1990, 89cm by 101cm) has an auction estimate between RM35,000 and RM45,000.



Lee Cheng Yong's *Lucky Toad* oil on canvas painting (circa 1950s, 30cm by 42cm) has an estimated price of RM15,000 to RM25,000



Ismail Mat Hussin's *Farming* batik work (circa 2000s, 71cm by 71cm) has an estimated price of between RM15,000 and RM18,000

mosphere in markets or on the street, showing shoppers and vendors in their traditional attire. Tan Choon Ghee's *Malay Satay Sellers, Penang* (1998; 9cm by 15cm) is estimated at RM1,000 to RM2,000. The artwork is one of three created by the artist for the current owner.

Alex Leong's *Campbell Street, Tong Chit Tang* (2015; 39cm by 74cm) will go under the hammer at RM4,000 onwards. Cheung Pooi Yip's *Penang Scene* (2011; 47cm by 35cm), executed in ink on paper, is estimated at RM1,100 to RM2,100.

In the mid-range segment and estimated at RM6,000 to RM15,000 are artworks by Wan Soon Kam, Khaw Sia, Zhong Pai Mu, Lee Cheng Yong, Tang Juey Lee, Tay Hooi Keat and Chia Yu Chian.

A selection of Lee Cheng Yong's artworks, including two oil paintings entitled *Lucky Toad* (circa 1950s; 30cm by 42cm) and *Landscape (Banana Tree)* — dated 1952 and measuring 44.5cm by 59.5cm — are estimated at between RM15,000 and RM25,000.

A bust sculpture of a man — believed to portray Lee Cheng Yong's father — made of plaster of Paris, will also be going under the hammer. It is estimated at RM5,000 to RM8,000. According to the current owner, the sculpture is one of a pair — the other, perhaps, depicts the artist's mother and is said to be in the collection of an institution.

Batik painting

Known as the "father of batik painting", Datuk Chuah Thean Teng (1914-2008) first incorporated the technique into his artistic endeavours after World War Two, when the batik factory he was operating closed down. On offer at The Edge Auction is a romantic artwork entitled *Kampung Scene* (circa 1960s; 87.5cm by 59.5cm). It is estimated at RM30,000 to RM40,000.

His grandson, Chuah Seong Hooi, 43, is continuing his legacy. The eldest son of Chuah Siew Teng, Seong Hooi painted *Mother and Son*, dated 2011 and measuring 85cm by 59.5cm. It is estimated at RM15,000 to RM19,000.

Patrick Ng Kah Onn (1932-1989) first attracted attention when his *Batek Malaya*, dated 1957, which illustrates a group of Malay womenfolk hanging their sarongs on a wash line, was awarded first prize at the First Southeast Asian Art Conference and Competition 1957 in Manila. On offer at the sale is a mixed media on fabric executed by him in batik technique, entitled *Nude Female* (circa 1960s; 42cm by 90cm). It is estimated at RM28,000 to RM30,000.

Another batik artist who championed the dry brush and pointillism technique is Toya Lim Khoon Hock, 74. *Sunrise* (2005; 63.5cm by 102cm) and *Gathering* (2006; 104cm by 51cm) — two batik paintings mounted on silk scroll — are priced between RM24,000 and RM26,000.

Born in Singapore in 1939 and raised in Terengganu, Seah Kim Joo is recognised for the use of the dye-and-resist batik technique. He won the first prize for two consecutive years at the Malayan Federation Open Art Competition. On offer is an abstract batik work by him entitled *Disintegration* (circa 1980s; 58cm by 43cm) that is estimated at RM3,500 to RM5,000.

Datuk Tay Mo Leong, 79, learnt the wax-fixing technique in Japan and created a breakthrough in the traditional method of "double dye". He is also known for his Balinese-inspired artwork, one of which is on offer. Entitled *Offering Girl*, the batik painting (2005; 91cm by 60cm) is estimated at RM8,000 to RM10,000.

A unique batik painting by Ismail Mat Hussin (1938-2015) entitled *Farming* (circa 2000s; 71cm by 71cm) is estimated at RM15,000 to RM18,000. **E**

The Edge Auction will be held at Hilton Kuala Lumpur on March 5. A preview of the 118 lots on offer will be held at The Edge Galerie in Mont'Kiara, Kuala Lumpur, from Feb 23 to March 4 from 11am to 7pm (Tuesdays to Sundays). Log on to www.theedgegalerie.com for updates.

Sarah Abu Bakar is assistant manager of The Edge Galerie