

Media Release

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An ode to Singapore through the eyes of *plein-air* artist Lim Cheng Hoe at National Gallery Singapore

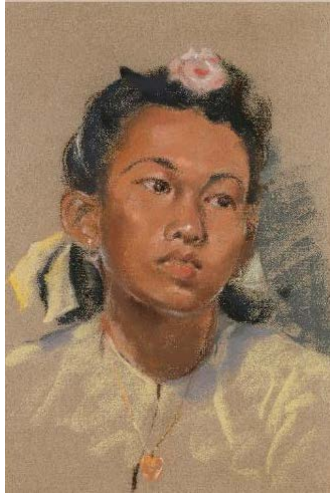
*The exhibition which features works by one of our finest watercolourists
will open from 2 August 2018*

Singapore, 26 July 2018 – Reminisce the 1930s to the 1970s with National Gallery Singapore as it presents its latest exhibition, ***Lim Cheng Hoe: Painting Singapore***. This survey showcases Lim's inspiring journey towards becoming Singapore's leading *plein-air* (the practice of painting outdoors) watercolour artist, as he captured the country's evolving landscapes and people across four decades.

Dr. Eugene Tan, Director of National Gallery Singapore, said, "We are committed to continue expanding upon the current available scholarship and documentation of our Singapore artists and their practice. Special exhibitions such as *Lim Cheng Hoe: Painting Singapore* complement our permanent gallery displays to build greater understanding towards our art history and the local artistic figures we have such as Lim Cheng Hoe. Through the exhibition, we hope to inspire visitors with both his artistic talent and the influential role he played towards the subsequent development of watercolour in Singapore."

A unique eye for the local, distinct, and natural

Comprising over 60 definitive works of Lim Cheng Hoe (1912 – 1979), the exhibition brings visitors into the mind of the artist through the lens of his diaries, to understand his thoughts that inform his paintings. Acknowledged as one of the finest watercolour artists of his generation in Singapore, Lim was dedicated to portraying his subjects in their natural selves and mood. Many of Lim's works were preoccupied with depicting the transient effects of light and weather on landscapes of Singapore.



(from left to right) *The Pink Rose*. c. 1955–1960; and *Singapore River*. 1962.

Lim's dedication towards *plein-air* painting imbued in his landscape paintings a sense of place and local identity for Singapore – a Singapore that was in the throes of urbanisation and industrialisation. Lim documented these subjects around him through motifs such as *kampongs* (villages), boat traffic on the Singapore River, hilltop views, fishing villages, land reclamation and construction sites, as the country moved towards modernisation during a period of decolonisation, self-governance and independence.

Presenting a comprehensive outlook of Lim's practice, the exhibition draws works and artefacts from an expanded range of sources, including the artist's family, private lenders and various public and institutional collections. It would also reveal the lesser-known aspects of his practice including his experiments with a range of subjects and mediums, from oil, ink and still life, to portraits in pastel and chalk, and even exploratory works with unusual brushwork and colours.

Casting spotlight on self-taught artists in Singapore

Though without formal tertiary art education, Lim was undeterred in cultivating his keen interest in art. He went on to master the craft by himself by reading publications such as *Artist*, *International Studio* and through social interactions with other watercolour artists; which gave rise to the emergence of the 'Sunday painters' in the 1950s. Together with these artists, Lim would travel to multiple locations around Singapore every Sunday in search of suitable sites to paint before critiquing each others' works in hopes of helping each other explore different approaches

towards art. Lim was also known to join a group of artists at the Wesley Church on weekends for indoor studio sessions with live models. All these activities would lead to the discerning construction of his paintings, and a rich and enduring legacy in providing mentorship to the next generation of artists through groups such as the Singapore Watercolour Society.

“This exhibition is a celebration of the life, dedication and practice of Lim Cheng Hoe as a largely self-taught artist. In the exhibition, we draw deeply from his diaries as a way of providing an entry point for visitors to engage with the artistic language that he learnt and experimented through his time under Richard Walker and subsequent informal education.” said Qinyi Lim, curator of the exhibition.

Lim Cheng Hoe: Painting Singapore will be held at the City Hall Wing, Level 4 from 2 August 2018 to 9 June 2019. It will open from Saturday to Thursday from 10am to 7pm and on Fridays from 10am to 9pm.

This exhibition is co-curated by Qinyi Lim, Goh Sze Ying, Teo Hui Min and Zulfadhli Hilmi, together with guest curator Low Sze Wee, Chief Executive Officer of the Singapore Chinese Cultural Centre and former Director of Curatorial, Collections & Education, National Gallery Singapore.

For more information about the exhibition, please visit:

<https://www.nationalgallery.sg/exhibitions/lim-cheng-hoe-painting-singapore>

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Annex A: Exhibition Highlights

Annex B: *Lim Cheng Hoe: A Biographical Timeline and Painting Singapore: A Map*

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About National Gallery Singapore

National Gallery Singapore is a visual arts institution which oversees the largest public collection of modern art in Singapore and Southeast Asia. Situated in the heart of the Civic District, the Gallery is housed in two national monuments—City Hall and former Supreme Court—that have been beautifully restored and transformed into this exciting venue. Reflecting Singapore’s unique heritage and geographical location, the Gallery features Singapore and Southeast Asian art from Singapore’s National Collection in its long-term and special exhibitions. The Gallery also works with international museums to jointly present Southeast Asian art in the global context, positioning Singapore as a regional and international hub for the visual arts.

In 2016, the Gallery won the awards for “Best Attraction Experience”, “Breakthrough Contribution to Tourism” and “Best Customer Service (Attractions)” at the prestigious Singapore Tourism Awards for its role in adding to the vibrancy of Singapore’s tourism landscape.

Annex A: Exhibition Highlights

	<p>Lim Cheng Hoe. <i>Boats by the Waterfront</i>. c. 1965. Watercolour on paper. 71.5 x 25 cm. Collection of Fermin Diez and Su-Yen Wong. © Family of Lim Cheng Hoe</p> <p>This work presents a fresh perspective of a familiar landscape: the Singapore River. The unusual composition draws our attention to the river itself, which occupies more than half of the painting.</p> <p>The artwork's vertical format recalls Chinese hanging scrolls where depth is conveyed within an elongated picture plane. Lim deftly suggests the width of the river through a series of parallel axes created by the vertical sail masts, boat helms and the gradation of blue shadows on the water surface.</p>
	<p>Lim Cheng Hoe. <i>Singapore River</i>. 1962. Watercolour on paper. 33 x 43 cm. Collection of National Gallery Singapore. © Family of Lim Cheng Hoe</p> <p>Lim carefully observed the effects of light at different times of day, masterfully recreating the mood of the surroundings in his art. In <i>Singapore River</i>, outlines bleed into one another to evoke the soft and glowing light of a calm evening by the river.</p> <p>In this work, Lim's fluid washes are balanced by his precise linework, as seen in the three figures on a boat expertly rendered with quick, confident strokes. Lim also uses the translucency of watercolour to depict subtle reflections across the river's surface.</p>



Lim Cheng Hoe. **[Not titled] (*Kampong House with Two Figures*)**. 1957. Watercolour on paper. 36 x 44 cm. Collection of Fermin Diez and Su-Yen Wong. © Family of Lim Cheng Hoe

This work depicts a quintessential view of a rustic *kampong* (village) hut. Subtle gradations of colour give depth to the lush forest in the background and the delicately defined foliage in the foreground frames the hut's distinctive gabled roof. Lim renders the hut in soft lines so that it blends into the natural environment, while the bright red and yellow clothing of the two figures are echoed by the coloured accents on the hut.



By the 1960s, picturesque local villages had begun to make way for urban development. These developments fuelled Lim's nostalgia and attraction towards the rustic *kampong* as a subject.





Lim Cheng Hoe. ***Attap and Nets At Kukup***. 1972. Watercolour on paper. 40 x 53 cm. Collection of Howie Lau and Teresa Koh. © Family of Lim Cheng Hoe

This work was painted during a trip to Kukup, a fishing village in Johor.

Lim uses an unusual perspective: the foreground extends from the bottom right corner into the background at an angle. This is a departure from the conventional frontal compositions in Lim's other *kampong* (village) works. Hanging fishing nets, confidently rendered in thick, single brush strokes, stretch into an open sky that is rhythmically punctuated by the pointed roofs of the surrounding *attap* (thatched) huts.

	<p>Lim occasionally ventured to nearby Malaysia with several of his regular Sunday painting companions in search of new inspiration and environments for his <i>plein-air</i> (outdoor) practice.</p>
	<p>Lim Cheng Hoe. <i>The Pink Rose</i>. c. 1955–1960. Pastel on paper. 46 x 30.5 cm. Collection of the artist's family. © Family of Lim Cheng Hoe</p> <p>The subject's tilted head, supported by her sloping shoulders, gives her a sculptural quality. Lim uses different shades of ochre to highlight her facial features and create texture. He applies a similar technique from his watercolour practice in rendering her clothing. He lightly adds black shading as shadows on her white blouse, and accentuates these with precise strokes of white against grey.</p> <p>This work reflects Lim's proficiency in portraiture. This was based on his keen observation skills and participation in weekend painting sessions at the Wesley Church Hall with his friends.</p>
	<p>Lim Cheng Hoe. <i>The Estuary</i>. c. 1970. Watercolour on paper. 37.5 x 51 cm. Gift of Michael Lim Hock Ann. Collection of National Gallery Singapore. © Family of Lim Cheng Hoe</p> <p>In <i>The Estuary</i>, dramatic rain clouds signal the arrival of a distant storm. Strong colours along the horizon and river punctuate the grey landscape and river banks, expressing a sense of stillness and harmony amidst the imminent change of weather. The atmospheric effects in the sky were achieved by allowing wet colours to mingle on a soaked paper.</p> <p>This work shows the change in Lim's style from the 1960s. He wanted to</p>

	<p>capture the mood of a scene, in addition to representing form and texture.</p>
	<p>Lim Cheng Hoe. Nocturne. 1960. Watercolour on paper. 39 x 52 cm. Collection of National Gallery Singapore. © Family of Lim Cheng Hoe</p> <p>Lim uses contrasting warm and cool tones to achieve a boldness here that is not often found in his other paintings. The blank unpainted background, often seen in Chinese ink painting, brings out the prominence of the buildings in the foreground.</p> <p><i>Nocturne</i> reveals Lim's move away from figurative painting. The strokes and washes in his works became more economical and suggestive from the 1960s.</p>
	<p>Lim Cheng Hoe. [Not titled] (Pulau Saigon with a view of Supreme Court). 1971. Watercolour on paper. 36 x 48 cm. Gift of Low Cheng Hock. Collection of National Gallery Singapore. © Family of Lim Cheng Hoe</p> <p>Pulau Saigon was an island between the banks of Robertson Quay. It became an extension of the mainland when the western arm of the Singapore River was drained in 1972, and merged with Magazine Road when the eastern arm was drained in 1991.</p> <p>The diagonal line of boats that reaches from the lower left corner towards the arch of Read Bridge gives the composition depth. The modern high-rise buildings dwarfing the surrounding shophouses and the then-Supreme Court in the distance capture the changing landscape along the Singapore River.</p>

	Lim gifted this work to his doctor who treated him during his last illness.
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