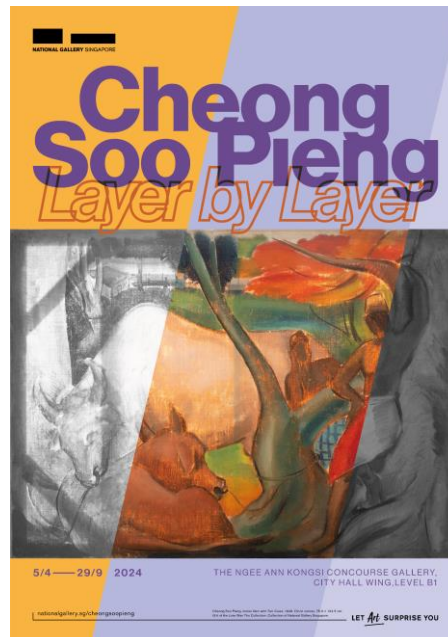


## MEDIA RELEASE

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## Encounter art in new ways and rediscover one of Singapore's leading artists at National Gallery Singapore's *Cheong Soo Pieng: Layer by Layer*

*Delve beneath the surface of over 30 works by artist Cheong Soo Pieng and uncover the process of artistic creation with Southeast Asia's first exhibition to showcase the science of material analysis.*



**SINGAPORE, 26 March 2024** – Step into a fascinating world of stories within leading Singaporean artist Cheong Soo Pieng's artworks with National Gallery Singapore's new exhibition *Cheong Soo Pieng: Layer by Layer*. Opening on 5 April, this free exhibition is Southeast Asia's first to use in-depth material analysis, through tools such as x-ray scans and infrared photography to reveal fresh insights into Cheong's artistic processes and innovative use of materials. *Layer by Layer* breaks down Cheong's practice for visitors of all ages through an engaging exhibition experience. Through a series of interactive stations that bring the science of studying paintings to life, visitors will gain a deeper understanding of Cheong's trailblazing practice through discovery, investigation, and play.

*Cheong Soo Pieng: Layer by Layer* is the first in the Singapore Artist series, comprising four special solo exhibitions spotlighting Singaporean artists namely Teo Eng Seng, Kim Lim, and Lim Tze Peng at National Gallery Singapore in 2024. Together they set the stage for the Gallery to build upon its longstanding commitment to Singaporean artists and create new experiences for its visitors while advancing and enriching appreciation of our local arts and cultural heritage.

*Layer by Layer* presents over 30 paintings by Cheong from the 1950s to the 1980s. The exhibition extends across three sections that explore fundamental questions about the creative process: “*What makes a painting?*”, “*When is a painting complete?*”, and “*What is painting?*”. Exhibition curator Teo Hui Min collaborated with Dr Diana Tay, conservator and founder of BARC Labs who provided her expertise on material analysis and worked with conservators from the Heritage Conservation Centre to conduct the analyses presented in this unique exhibition. The team also worked with radiographers from the Singapore General Hospital who provided access to the hospital’s equipment for the X-ray scanning of selected artworks.

Dr. Patrick Flores, Deputy Director at National Gallery Singapore, says, “*Cheong Soo Pieng: Layer by Layer* draws the arts and sciences together to uncover the stories hidden within the works and delve deeper into the artistic practice of one of Singapore’s leading artists. As part of the Gallery’s commitment to art education, we hope for the interactive elements in this exhibition to bring to light the unseen process of art creation and conservation and foster art appreciation. We hope that visitors of all ages gain a fresh understanding of Singapore’s modern art and of Cheong as one of the nation’s leading artists, spark a deeper appreciation for painting and rethink art histories.”

### **Cheong Soo Pieng, artist, and innovator**

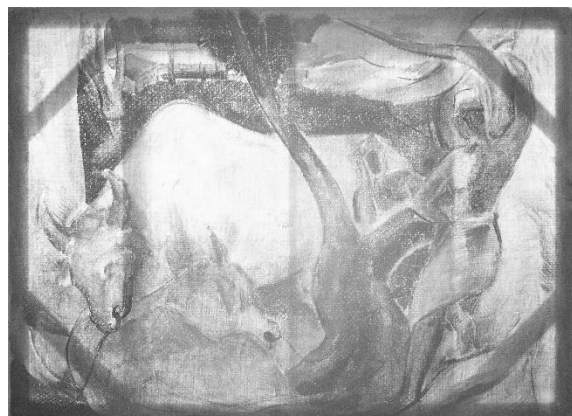
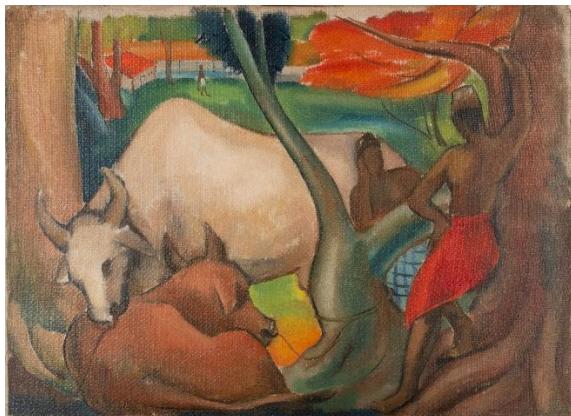
Cheong Soo Pieng boasts a mastery over a wide range of mediums and his work is underscored by his unwavering spirit of continual innovation and imagination. Exhibiting widely throughout his life, Cheong worked tirelessly across painting, sculpture, batik, and printmaking, reworking, and translating favoured motifs across mediums. Even seemingly conventional paintings like Cheong’s *Drying Salted Fish* (1978) – which is featured on the back of Singapore’s 50-dollar banknote – demonstrate the dynamism inherent in Cheong’s practice as research uncovered his integration of different types of liquid ink within this iconic painting on silk.



Cheong Soo Pieng painting in his studio at the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, c. 1950. Digitised by National Gallery Singapore Library & Archive with kind permission from Cheong Leng Guat.

### Unveiling the foundations of “What makes a painting?”

Visitors will have the opportunity to understand the process behind creating an artwork with the exhibition’s first section, which revolves around the question “*What makes a painting?*”. Visitors can expect to be treated to an engaging introduction to Cheong’s artistic process through a step-by-step journey from sketching, his choice of materials, to the application of paint.



(Right) Cheong Soo Pieng. *Indian Men with Two Cows*. 1949. Oil on canvas, 75.3 × 104.5 cm. Gift of the Loke Wan Tho Collection. Collection of National Gallery Singapore

(Left) Transmitted infrared image of *Indian Men with Two Cows*. Image courtesy of BARC Labs, the Heritage Conservation Centre (a division of the National Heritage Board, Singapore) and National Gallery Singapore.

An early work, *Indian Men with Two Cows* (1949) offers an exciting example of how material analysis uncovered Cheong's process. Infrared photography revealed Cheong's confident application of paint without the use of preliminary sketching. This section also highlights Cheong's approach of layering, known as marouflage. This practice of affixing flexible supports (such as paper or canvas) to another (such as wood hardboard) allowed Cheong to transform finished works into formats that could be more easily stored and framed while enabling him to achieve a wide range of textures and effects in his paintings depending on his choice of support.



Installation view, Cheong Soo Pieng: Layer by Layer, National Gallery Singapore, 2024.

Visitors will also encounter artworks suspended on a freestanding structure, providing a unique opportunity to discover fascinating details located on the back of a painting. From a close appreciation of Cheong's choice of canvas to exhibition labels, the artist's signature, and clues about an artwork's past owner, visitors are encouraged to see beyond the painted image.

## Questioning “When is a painting complete?”



Installation view, Cheong Soo Pieng: Layer by Layer, National Gallery Singapore, 2024.

Centering on the question of composition – or how an artist organises elements in an artwork – the next section asks, “When is a painting complete?” Follow the investigative work that curators and conservators undertook to understand how two seemingly different versions of the monumental painting *In a Balinese Village* were exhibited at different points in time. Cheong reworked the initial version of the painting, which was completed in 1953, a decade later in 1964. Visitors will be able to travel back in time to unravel the painting’s journey, tracing archival material complemented by technical tools like infrared photography and x-ray scans.



(Right) Cheong Soo Pieng. *In a Balinese Village*. 1953, 1952–64. Oil on canvas, marouflaged on hardboard, 195 × 131 cm. Private Collection. © Family of Cheong Soo Pieng.

(Left) *In a Balinese Village* featured in the Bali exhibition catalogue, which also includes works by Liu Kang, Chen Wen Hsi, Chen Chong Swee and Cheong Soo Pieng., 1953. Digitised by National Gallery Singapore Library & Archive with kind permission from Chen Chi Sing @ Tan Chay Lee.

## Redefining “What is painting?”



Installation view, Cheong Soo Pieng: Layer by Layer, National Gallery Singapore, 2024.

Finally, visitors are invited to consider the broader question “What is painting?” in the exhibition’s concluding section. This section focuses on Cheong’s integration of a wide range

of materials into his art from the 1960s onwards, including everyday and industrial materials – from metal wires and resin to rattan and straw. Laboratory analysis and close observation allowed for the precise identification of materials in artworks formerly described as “mixed media” such as the copper strips and epoxy resin used in *Singapore Scenery* (1970). The meticulous process Cheong used to compose this detailed work followed the step-by-step approach of composing his paintings – from the preparation of the wooden support to the outlines made of copper strips, and the infilling of epoxy for the surface of the artwork.

Cheong’s fascinating use of unconventional materials such as jute, gunny sack, and straw is another highlight within this section, demonstrating how his consistent engagement with distinctively Southeast Asian subject matter extended to a desire to overlay various cultural sources within his art. In this way, visitors are invited to expand their conception of painting as a medium, and the notion that a painting is solely limited to the application of colour onto a two-dimensional surface.

### Interactive experiences for all



Installation view, Cheong Soo Pieng: *Layer by Layer*, National Gallery Singapore, 2024.

The exhibition includes hands-on experiences that will incite curiosity for all ages. Ranging from opportunities to encounter the different types of materials Cheong incorporated in his art, to microscope stations that will allow visitors to identify the difference between cotton and linen canvases and even explore the shifts in Cheong’s style and material choices over time.



Melding the exhibition's dual emphases on learning through discovery and play, the Gallery has developed a game available both on-site and online that invites visitors to explore Cheong's painting techniques while matching cross-sections (a minuscule sample that provides a layered view of a painting's structure) with paintings featured in the exhibition. Visitors will be able to download exclusive wallpapers that showcase the aesthetic dimension of scientific research while consolidating their learning.

The exhibition also introduces the latest edition of *At the Conservator's Bench | Cheong Soo Pieng: Layer by Layer*, delving into an enriching material analysis of the artist's renowned works. Through conservation science, the video series offers insights into Cheong Soo Pieng's versatile practice and innovative techniques. Please view the trailer [here](#).

*Cheong Soo Pieng: Layer by Layer* runs from 5 April to 29 September 2024 at the Ngee Ann Kongsi Concourse Gallery, National Gallery Singapore. More information can be found in the following annex, or you may visit [nationalgallery.sg/cheongsoopieng](http://nationalgallery.sg/cheongsoopieng). Media assets are available via this [link](#).

- [Annex A](#): *Layer by Layer* Exhibition Highlights
- [Annex B](#): *Layer by Layer* Exhibition Programmes

- END -

For more information, please contact:

**Tate Anzur**  
Soon En-Rei

**National Gallery Singapore**  
Ling Ying Shing  
[yingshing.ling@nationalgallery.sg](mailto:yingshing.ling@nationalgallery.sg)





[NGSteam@tateanzur.com](mailto:NGSteam@tateanzur.com)

+65 9643 9359




## **About National Gallery Singapore**

National Gallery Singapore is a leading visual arts institution that oversees the world's largest public collection of Singapore and Southeast Asian modern art. Situated at the birthplace of modern Singapore, 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 64,000 square metre venue. Reflecting Singapore's unique heritage and geographical location, the Gallery aims to be a progressive museum that creates dialogues between the art of Singapore, Southeast Asia and the world to foster and inspire a creative and inclusive society. This is reflected in our collaborative research, education, long-term and special exhibitions, and innovative programming. The Gallery also works with international museums such as Centre Pompidou, Musée d'Orsay, Tate Britain, National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo (MOMAT) and National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea (MMCA), to jointly present Southeast Asian art in the global context, positioning Singapore as a key node in the global visual arts scene.

In 2020, the Gallery was the only museum in Southeast Asia that received a ranking in The Art Newspaper's annual global survey of attendance at art museums, taking 20<sup>th</sup> place. It was the first museum in Asia to receive the Children in Museums Award by the European Museum Academy and Hands On! International Association of Children in Museums in 2018. The Gallery also won the awards for "Best Theme Attraction" at TTG Travel Awards 2017, "Best Attraction Experience", "Breakthrough Contribution to Tourism" and "Best Customer Service (Attractions)" at the prestigious Singapore Tourism Awards in 2016 for its role in adding to the vibrancy of Singapore's tourism landscape.

## Annex A: Layer by Layer Exhibition Highlights

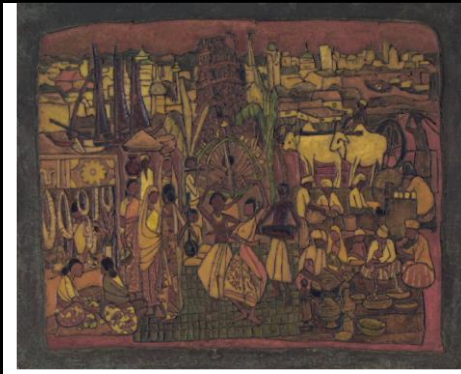

### Section 1: What makes a painting

	<p>Cheong Soo Pieng. <i>Indian Men with Two Cows</i>. 1948. Oil on canvas, 75.3 x 104.5 cm. Gift of the Loke Wan Tho Collection . Collection of National Gallery Singapore.</p>
	<p>Cheong Soo Pieng. <i>Balinese Selling Toddy</i>. 1954. Gouache and ink on Chinese paper, marouflaged on paper, 46 x 37.5 cm. Gift of the Loke Wan Tho Collection. Collection of National Gallery Singapore.</p>
	<p>Cheong Soo Pieng. <i>Young Girl</i>. 1948. Oil on plywood, 55 x 65.5 x 2.5 cm. Gift of Singapore Totalisator Board. Collection of National Gallery Singapore.</p>
	<p>Cheong Soo Pieng. <i>A Vision</i>. 1962. Oil on canvas, 60.7 x 81.2 cm. Collection of National Gallery Singapore.</p>

## Section 2: When is a painting complete?

	<p>In a Balinese Village featured in the Bali exhibition catalogue, which also included works by Liu Kang, Chen Wen Hsi, Chen Chong Swee and Cheong Soo Pieng, 1953. Digitised by National Gallery Singapore Library &amp; Archive with kind permission from Chen Chi Sing @ Tan Chay Lee.</p>
	<p>Cheong Soo Pieng. <i>Construction</i>. 1956. Oil on hardboard, 53.7 x 64.7 x 4 cm. Collection of Ravel Lee and Denise Chiam. © Family of Cheong Soo Pieng.</p>
	<p>Cheong Soo Pieng. <i>Life in Longhouse</i>. 1978. Oil on canvas, 93 x 122 x 3 cm. Collection of National Gallery Singapore.</p>
	<p>Cheong Soo Pieng. <i>At the Market</i>. 1964. Oil on canvas, 122 x 179 cm. Collection of National Gallery Singapore.</p>

## Section 3: What is painting

 <p>A traditional Chinese ink and wash painting depicting a rural scene. Several figures are shown in a courtyard or outdoor area, engaged in the process of drying salted fish. A pig is visible in the foreground, and the background shows a simple structure with hanging racks.</p>	<p>Cheong Soo Pieng. <i>Drying Salted Fish</i>. 1978. Chinese ink, liquid ink and watercolour on silk, 55.5 × 88.5 cm. Gift of Trans Island Bus Services Ltd. Collection of National Gallery Singapore.</p>
 <p>A vibrant, multi-colored artwork depicting a busy street scene in Singapore. The composition is filled with figures, buildings, and various objects, rendered in a style that combines traditional Chinese techniques with modern materials like epoxy and copper strips.</p>	<p>Cheong Soo Pieng. <i>Singapore Scenery</i>. 1970. Coloured epoxy and copper strips on wood panel, 110.9 × 90.3 cm. Collection of National Gallery Singapore.</p>
 <p>An abstract artwork featuring a central oval shape containing various materials. The materials include painted and shaped aluminium sheets, zinc plated iron rods, tin plated copper rods, metal tacks, and jute, all mounted on a synthetic fibre base.</p>	<p>Cheong Soo Pieng. <i>Abstract II</i>. 1969. Painted and shaped aluminium sheets, zinc plated iron rods, tin plated copper rods, metal tacks and jute, mounted on synthetic fibre laid on board, 89 × 109 cm. Gift of the artist. Collection of National Gallery Singapore.</p>
 <p>A landscape painting in oil on jute, marouflaged on canvas. It depicts a large, dark, textured mountain peak. A small, traditional Chinese-style building is nestled on a slope. In the foreground, a figure stands in a field of tall grass, looking towards the mountain.</p>	<p>Cheong Soo Pieng. <i>Landscape</i>. 1977. Oil on jute, marouflaged on canvas, 100.5 × 80.5 cm. Collection of National Gallery Singapore.</p>

## Annex B: Layer by Layer Exhibition Programmes

For an updated listing of programmes, please visit [nationalgallery.sg/cheongsoopieng](http://nationalgallery.sg/cheongsoopieng)

Programmes	
Family programmes	
<b>School Program</b>	
Date and Time:	Subjected to availability
Venue:	National Gallery Singapore, City Hall Wing, Level 1, Keppel Centre for Art Education
Admission Details:	Paid program. Email <a href="mailto:outreach@nationalgallery.sg">outreach@nationalgallery.sg</a> to find out more.
Description:	In conjunction with the exhibition featuring artist Cheong Soo Pieng, this is a two-hour workshop by art conservator Dr. Diana Tay titled 'Discovering Secrets of Paintings' for students. Participants will delve into Cheong Soo Pieng's artistic process and discover how conservators study his artworks to uncover hidden stories. The session will include hands-on experiences and a showcase of the technology used in conservation. This program is available for Primary and Secondary school groups on a first-come, first-served basis. Please email <a href="mailto:outreach@nationalgallery.sg">outreach@nationalgallery.sg</a> to learn more.
Programmes	
<b>At the Conservator's Bench   Cheong Soo Pieng: Layer by Layer</b>	
Date and Time:	
Venue:	Online on the Gallery's Facebook and YouTube channels
Description:	Did you know that Cheong Soo Pieng's renowned artwork Drying Salted Fish was made using different types of ink?  This edition of At the Conservator's Bench introduces the artist's innovative techniques and versatile practice through the unique perspective of material analysis in art conservation. Visit the exhibition to watch and learn more!  Watch the trailer here: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UNND8XKuXYI">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UNND8XKuXYI</a>
<b>Kwok Kian Chow in Dialogue with Teo Hui Min</b>	
Date and Time:	13 April, Saturday   2pm
Venue:	Padang Atrium, Level B1, City Hall Wing, National Gallery Singapore

Admission Details:	Free, registration required. Register online at <a href="https://web.nationalgallery.sg/#/gallery-passes">https://web.nationalgallery.sg/#/gallery-passes</a> . Tickets will be available soon.
Description:	Former senior curator (1992-1994) of the National Museum of Singapore, director (1994-2009) of the Singapore Art Museum, and director (2009-2011) and senior advisor (2011-2015) of the National Gallery Singapore, Mr Kwok Kian Chow will delve into the exhibition's framework and key questions in this dialogue with Curator Teo Hui Min.

Tours	
<b>Docent-led Tours</b>	
Date and Time:	From 19 April 2024, Friday  English   Thursday - Sunday   11am Mandarin   Saturday - Sunday   2pm
Venue:	National Gallery Singapore, City Hall Wing, Level B1, Ngee Ann Kongsi Concourse Gallery
Admission Details:	Free, registration is required. Register at National Gallery Singapore, Level 1, Padang Atrium, Visitor Services Counter
<b>Special Tours</b>	
Date and Time:	18 May 2024, Saturday & 14 September 2024, Saturday   3pm
Venue:	National Gallery Singapore, City Hall Wing, Level B1, Ngee Ann Kongsi Concourse Gallery
Admission Details:	Free, registration is required. Register online at <a href="https://web.nationalgallery.sg/#/gallery-passes">https://web.nationalgallery.sg/#/gallery-passes</a> . Tickets will be available soon.
Description:	Enjoyed <i>At the Conservator's Bench</i> ? Meet the people behind <i>Cheong Soo Pieng: Layer by Layer</i> as they delve into the key themes of the exhibition in these specially curated tours.