

Media Release

For immediate release

Journey through Wu Guanzhong's art and literature as National Gallery Singapore commemorates his centennial year

Wu Guanzhong: Expressions of Pen & Palette opens from 31 August 2018

Singapore, 27 August 2018 – To commemorate the centennial year of artist Wu Guanzhong's birth in 1919, National Gallery Singapore presents ***Wu Guanzhong: Expressions of Pen & Palette***, opening 31 August 2018. For the first time, the artist's use of art and literature will be explored in this exhibition through a selection of key works from the Gallery's collection and major private collections. The exhibition reveals the recurring themes and symbolism that run through his work, including depictions of his hometown and landscapes of Jiangnan (south of Yangtze River), the bridging of figuration with abstraction and traditional ink aesthetics with oil.

Featuring close to 50 works in seven thematic sections, the exhibition will span five decades of Wu's career. Quotes extracted from his literature will be presented on the walls, each selected in dialogue with his paintings, offering insights into the artist's thoughts and visual expressions that shaped his momentous practice.

Dr Eugene Tan, Director of National Gallery Singapore, said, "This exhibition is a continuation of National Gallery Singapore's effort to highlight visionary artists of the 20th century and their contribution to the development of the region's modern art. Having the privilege to oversee one of the world's largest public collections of Wu Guanzhong's artworks, the Gallery aims to provide fresh perspectives towards appreciating Wu's art within the wider context of ink aesthetics. Wu's paintings and writings open up new possibilities for modern Chinese art, paving the way for younger generations of artists to break new ground. They continue to inspire many to this day."

An artistic journey of aesthetic sensitivities, creativity, and contemplation

“I pursue the expression of one’s innermost feelings and spiritual realm. Painting and writing are merely different methods employed to express these sensations.”

“Mystical Beauty of Spiritual Realms,” 1985
A Collection of Essays by Wu Guanzhong Vol.1, pages 210, 211

“我追求表达内心的感受与意境，画与文都只是表达这种感受与意境的不同手段。”

《扑朔迷离意境美》，1985年

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Wu Guanzhong is one of the most significant Chinese artists of the 20th century. He is renowned for his distinctive style of integrating Western and Chinese art traditions, in part due to the wide range of influences he was exposed to during his studies at the Hangzhou National Academy of Art in China and the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris. His oeuvre reflected his belief in both indigenising oil painting and modernising ink painting.



Running Stream. 1988. Chinese ink and colour on paper. 69 x 138.2 cm.
Gift of Dr and Mrs Ho Kee Hang. Collection of National Gallery Singapore.
奔流. 1988. 水墨设色纸本. 69 x 138.2 厘米.
何其铿医生与夫人捐赠. 新加坡国家美术馆收藏.

Throughout his art practice, Wu valued innovation over tradition. He was indefatigable in experimenting with the form and style of his paintings, transitioning seamlessly from figurative to abstract, while staying rooted in Chinese artistic sensibilities. Despite facing challenges such as the Chinese state-sanctioned art system at that time, which prohibited representation of Western bourgeois values, he was determined to carve out a space for his own expressions.



Riverside Households. 1985. Oil on canvas.
43 x 51 cm. Collection of Liu Gang and
Chen Yu, China
水乡人家. 1985. 油画画布. 43 x 51 厘米. 中国大陆刘钢/
陈育收藏.



Five Oxen (Renewals of Ancient Flavours). 1996. Oil on
canvas. 72 x 90.5 cm. Gift of the artist. Collection of
National Gallery Singapore. Image courtesy of National
Heritage Board.
五牛图 (古韵新腔系列). 1996. 油画画布. 72 x 90.5 厘米. 画
家捐赠. 新加坡国家美术馆收藏.

From his *plein-air* paintings of the river towns of Jiangnan where he grew up, to the countryside where he was sent to labour during the Cultural Revolution, as well as Beijing and its suburban environment, Wu's works convey both the vitality and the tranquility of life seen through his eyes.

Dr Cai Heng, co-curator of the exhibition, shared, "There is a strong connection between Wu's art and literature. As he pursued art creation grounded by his life experience and artistic belief, he expressed them not only through his paintings, but also in his writings. This allowed us to gain insights into Wu's paintings and writings and a deeper, more intimate understanding of his art and life."

Held at the Wu Guanzhong Gallery of National Gallery Singapore, *Wu Guanzhong: Expressions of Pen & Palette* opens from 31 August 2018 to 29 September 2019, 10am to 7pm from Saturday to Thursday, and 10am to 9pm on Fridays. This exhibition is co-curated by National Gallery Singapore curators, Dr Cai Heng and Jennifer K. Y. Lam.

General Admission fees apply. General Admission is free for Singaporeans and Permanent Residents and priced at \$20 for foreigners. For more information about the exhibition, please visit:

www.nationalgallery.sg/wuguanzhong

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For media enquiries,

Tate Anzur

Khew Shu Ping
DID: 6568 9156
Mobile: 9012 6194
Email: shuping.khew@tateanzur.com

Ho Xiu Xian
DID: 6568 9151
Mobile: 9732 3205
Email: xiuxian.ho@tateanzur.com

National Gallery Singapore

Melissa Chow
DID: 6697 9138
Email: melissa.chow@nationalgallery.sg

Susie Lim-Kannan
DID: 6697 9207
Email: susie.lim-kannan@nationalgallery.sg

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

01 My Land 乡土



A Harvest of Black Carps (II). 1976.
Watercolour on paper. 38 x 53 cm. Private collection, Indonesia.

青鱼丰收 (二). 1976 年. 水彩纸本 38 x 53 厘米. 印尼私人珍藏.

Wu was captivated by the hustle and bustle of fishing villages. He saw a microcosm of life in the myriad colours, sounds and movements of vibrant scenes such as fresh catch being brought to shore and sold. Here, he depicts a school of skipping black carps using diverse shades of blue against a pearly white background.

对吴冠中而言，大海之滨的渔村，色彩缤纷，气氛诱人，是生活的缩影，从中能够提炼出众多线条与美感。此画采用了不同青蓝色调，在珠白色的纸本上绘画了一群活泼蹦跳的青鱼。



Pumpkins. 1972. Oil on board. 58.5 x 43.8 cm. Private Collection, Indonesia

南瓜. 1972. 油彩画板. 58.5 x 43.8 厘米. 印尼私人珍藏.

The Cultural Revolution broke out. [...] Approximately two years later, the stringent atmosphere permeating our team loosened up and we were allowed to paint during festivals and holidays. I couldn't recover from hepatitis and didn't seek further treatment, [...] in utter hopelessness, I threw myself into painting to escape reality and suicidal thoughts. I bought the little blackboard used for writing Chairman Mao's quotes, converted it into a base for painting, and used a manure basket as an easel. My teammates teased me and called me "the manure-basket artist." More and more people followed me and the "manure-basket painting school" was born. This school depicted mainly corn, sorghum, cotton, wild flower, winter melon, pumpkin...

——“Harsh Winter, Fiery Summer, Earth,” 2003

Collected Writings, Vol. 1, page 40–2

文化大革命”爆发了。[.....]大约过了两年，连队里严峻的气氛松弛下来，节假日也允许作画了。我的肝炎一直没有痊愈，只是不治而已，[.....]绝望中我索性投入作画中逃避或自杀。我买地头写毛主席语录的小黑板制作画板，用老乡的高把粪筐作画架，同学们笑称粪筐画家，仿的人多起来，诞生了粪筐画派。粪筐画派主要画玉米、高粱、棉花、野花、冬瓜、南瓜.....

——〈严寒·酷暑·土地〉，2003

02 Jiangnan 江南



Riverside Households. 1985. Oil on canvas. 43 x 51 cm. Collection of Liu Gang and Chen Yu, China. Image courtesy of Liu Gang and Chen Yu.

水乡人家. 1985. 油画画布. 43 x 51 厘米. 中国大陆刘钢/陈育收藏. 图片由刘钢与陈育所提供.

White walls and black roof tiles, little bridges and flowing rivers, lakes and ponds. Water villages, lush with sparkling water. Black, white and grey are the main hues of Jiangnan, and the key colours in my paintings. They mark the first step in my artistic journey, even though a Russian art expert once said that Jiangnan was not a suitable subject for oil painting. The combination of silver and grey hues best reflects a cloudy day. I love the gloom of early spring and reject the depiction of light and shadow. When I paint a sunny day, the work seems to reflect the instant when a cloud has just passed in front of the sun.

——“Hometown. Hell. Wooden Bridge,” 2003
Collected Writings, Vol. 1, page 31

白墙黛瓦、小桥流水、湖泊池塘，水乡水乡，白亮亮的水多。黑、白、灰是江南主调，也是我自己作品银灰主调的基石，我艺术道路的起步。而苏联专家说，江南不适宜作油画。银灰调多呈现于阴天，我最爱江南的春阴，我画面中基本排斥阳光于投影，若表现晴日的光亮，也像是朵云遮日那瞬间。

——<故园·炼狱·独木桥>，2003
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03 The Journey 画途



Running Stream. 1988. Chinese ink and colour on paper. 69 x 138.2 cm. Gift of Dr and Mrs Ho Kee Hang. Collection of National Gallery Singapore. Image courtesy of National Heritage Board.

奔流. 1988. 水墨设色纸本. 69 x 138.2 厘米. 何其铿医生与夫人捐赠. 新加坡国家美术馆收藏.

Rain poured down day after day, the mist obscuring the face of Yulong Mountain. [...] Every day I walked around the mountain with an umbrella to view the rainy scenes. My teacher, Pan Tianshou, carved an inscription on one of his dry-ink paintings: “After rain, a thousand mountains turn into steel.” Wet tree trunks look even more like steel; the flying waterfall among the trees resembles white silk. The contrast between the black steel and white silk creates a strong impact, producing an impression of fortitude and sharpness.

——“The Waterfall after Rain,” 1980s
Collected Writings, Vol. 2, page 78

天天阴雨迷蒙，玉龙山不肯露面，我天天打着雨伞在山间观雨景。[.....] 潘天寿老师常题他的焦墨山水：雨后千山铁铸

成。湿的树干更加铁铸，树间飞泉恰似一道白练，黑铁与白练之对照效果强烈，予人坚硬与尖锐之感。

——<雨后飞瀑>，80年代

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04 Beyond the Image 树非树



Falling Flowers. 2007. Chinese ink and colour on paper. 94.8 x 176 cm. Gift of the artist. Collection of National Gallery Singapore. Image courtesy of National Heritage Board.

落红. 2007. 水墨设色纸本. 94.8 x 176 厘米. 画家捐赠. 新加坡国家美术馆收藏.

To capture a multitude of forms in constant flux I wield the brush like a knife, filling the space with various straight and curved lines. Consciously and unconsciously, the thousand images fall between likeness and unlikeness, [...] today, the red flowers that have lost their hue and leaves frosted with blood are falling. The fallen leaves embellish the overwhelming darkness and gloom, exposing the truth of life.

——“Falling Flowers,” 2007

Collected Writings, Vol. 2, page 68

欲捕瞬息万变种种形相，挥刀笔，线多曲直，有意栽花，无心插柳，千般形象皆不似。不似不似，曾似曾似，[.....] 今日落红已卸红装，纷纷是吐血霜叶，落红装饰了遍野阴暗，却暴露了生命之真实。

——<落红>，2007

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05 Nudes in Twilight 夕照人体



Reposing (Figure). 1990. Oil on canvas. 99.5 x 99.5 cm. Gift of the artist. Collection of National Gallery Singapore.

What I see in paintings of nudes are mountains set against mountains, and rushing streams—the flow of natural life.

——“Mending the Sky (1),” 1992

Collected Writings, Vol. 2, page 4

我在人体中看到是山脉对峙，江河奔流，是大自然生命之流畅了。

——<补天（一）>，1992

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伏. 1990. 油画画布. 99.5 x 99.5 厘米. 画家捐赠. 新加坡国家美术馆收藏.

06 New Rhythms of Tradition 古韵新腔



Five Oxen (Renewals of Ancient Flavours). 1996. Oil on canvas. 72 x 90.5 cm. Gift of the artist. Collection of National Gallery Singapore. Image courtesy of National Heritage Board.

五牛图 (古韵新腔系列). 1996. 油画画布. 72 x 90.5 厘米. 画家捐赠. 新加坡国家美术馆收藏.

I have merely recomposed the original grouping of the oxen in Han Huang's Five Oxen, without altering the image of each animal. I hope future artists make more changes and develop the form, otherwise the oxen will have no offspring. This leads us to the issue: who will nurture the five oxen of Han Huang?

——“Who Will Nurture the Five Oxen of Han Huang: New Rhythms of Tradition,” 1997

Collected Writings, Vol. 2, 158

那幅韩滉五牛图只是调整了原组合关系，将五条牛的单独之图像织入绘画的构图复合中，而牛的形象基本未变。但我希望后人来进一步改变，发展其造型，否则这些牛会断了后代，故题外话：韩滉五牛谁保养。

——<韩滉五牛谁保养：古韵新腔系列>，1997

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07 生命风景 Landscape of Life



Company. 1989. Chinese ink and colour on paper. 65.5 x 65.8 cm. Gift of the artist. Collection of National Gallery Singapore.

Oh loneliness! Silent and nebulous, it allows one to ruminate and savour the true flavours of life. [...] In the dimming universe, amidst fading lines in variable forms, a couple suddenly appears. A pair in red and green, deeply in love, shuttle across the universe. They forget about loneliness for a moment; they are the broad-leaved epiphyllum born out of loneliness.

——“Couple,” 1998

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寂寞呵，寂寞无声，寂寞无形，寂寞留给人们细细咀嚼，品味，那是人生的真味。[……] 朦胧的太空，无定形的线之流

<p>伴侣. 1989. 水墨设色纸本. 65.5 x 65.8 厘米. 画家捐赠. 新加坡国家美术馆收藏.</p>	<p>逝，忽然出现了伴侣，是红与绿的相伴，相恋，她们在太空穿行，她们暂时忘却了寂寞，她们是寂寞滋生的昙花。</p> <p>——<伴侣>，1998</p> <p>《吴冠中文丛》2，页 33</p>
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Annex B: Programmes

INK WEEKENDS

Date: Saturday 1 September and Saturday 8 September 2018

Time: 1.30pm – 5pm

Venue: National Gallery Singapore

Over two weekends, explore the development of modern ink painting in Singapore and Taiwan through encounters with leading local ink artists Zhuang Shengtao and Hong Sek Chern, and renowned Taiwanese ink master, Liu Guosong. Some programmes will be conducted in Mandarin with simultaneous English translation. These events are held in conjunction with *Wu Guanzhong: Expressions of Pen & Palette*.

Week 1 (Sat, 1 Sep 2018)			
Time	Event/Topic/Venue	Led by	Remarks
1.30pm – 2.30pm	Curator Tour	Jennifer Lam	Conducted in English
2.30pm – 3.30pm	Artist Talk by Zhuang Shengtao / Dialogue with artist and curator	Zhuang Shengtao Cai Heng	Focus on his artistic practice; modern ink art in Singapore
4pm – 5pm	Artist Talk by Hong Sek Chern	Hong Sek Chern	Focus on her artistic practice in relation to modern ink art in Singapore
Week 2 (Sat, 8 Sep 2018)			
Time	Event/Topic/Venue	Led by	Remarks
1.30pm – 2.30pm	Curator Tour	Jennifer Lam	Conducted in Mandarin
3pm – 4pm	Artist Talk by Liu Guosong/ Dialogue with artist and curator	Liu Guosong Cai Heng	Focus on Modern ink art in Taiwan, personal stories

ARTIST DIALOGUE: ZHUANG SHENG TAO

Date: Saturday 1 September 2018

Time: 2.30 – 3.30pm

Venue: National Gallery Singapore, The Ngee Ann Kong Si Auditorium

Modernism in Chinese Ink (Singapore)

Singaporean artist and ink master Zhuang Shengtao, in conversation with National Gallery curator Cai Heng, will provide insights into the beginnings of Modern ink painting in Singapore. The dialogue will map the broad beginnings and schools of thought, that culminated in two prevalent approaches in Modern ink – one that is a reflective progression from classical ink traditions, and the latter, as interpretative response to western Modernism in art. This session will also touch on the unique positioning that multiculturalism in Singapore has attributed to the works of local modern ink artists.

Note: This talk will be conducted in Mandarin with simultaneous translation in English.

About the artist

Zhuang Shengtao (born in Chaozhou, China), moved to Singapore in 1955 where he enrolled in the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts. Zhuang also studied Chinese painting and calligraphy under the tutelage of renowned Singaporean calligrapher, See Hiang To. Being exposed to many years of education in the Chinese classics gave him a steadfast grounding in Chinese literature, brushwork and the philosophy of Taoism. Zhuang's years of study in Europe and the United States, along with his extensive travels, broadened his perspectives and inspired him to seek new ways to contemporise traditional Chinese calligraphy and ink painting.

Zhuang has participated in solo and group exhibitions in Singapore and other countries, including 'Journey of Ink', (1993, Singapore National Museum Art Gallery), 'Power and Poetry – Monuments and Meditations in Chinese Contemporary Ink Paintings' (1998, Singapore Art Museum), '5th International Ink Painting Biennial of Shenzhen' (1999, Shenzhen, China) BenSe Art Museum, (2009, Suzhou, China) and 'The Ink Art of Zhuang Shengtao' (2017, iPreciation Gallery, Singapore).

Proposed Schedule

45 min	Zhuang Shengtao in conversation with Cai Heng
15 min	Q&A with audience

ARTIST TALK: HONG SEK CHERN

Date: Saturday 1 September 2018

Time: 4 – 5pm

Venue: National Gallery Singapore, Glass Room

Join leading local artist Hong Sek Chern as she explores different aspects of the Singaporean identity through her works. Inspired and influenced by the multiculturalism that makes this nation distinct, her multi-point perspective creations explore pluralistic ways of looking at the human condition, while at the same time enable her own continued exploration of the world, its people and of herself between the past and the present.

Note: This talk will be conducted in English. No translation will be provided.

About the artist

Hong Sek Chern is an artist based in Singapore. Previously the Head of the Fine Art department in the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA) Singapore, she holds a Master of Arts in Southeast Asian Studies from the National University of Singapore and a Masters of Fine Art from Goldsmiths College, University of London. She was the recipient of the National Arts Council

Young Artist Award Visual Arts 2000, the President's Young Talent Award 2001 and won the 26th UOB Painting of The Year (POY) Competition in 2007. She was also named Singapore's representative in the 25th Sao Paulo Biennale, held in Brazil. Hong is well-known for her stylistic interpretations of Singapore urban landscapes, painted using Chinese ink. She has held many solo exhibitions in Singapore and participated in group exhibitions held locally and overseas.

ARTIST DIALOGUE: LIU GUOSONG

Date: Saturday 8 September 2018

Time: 3 – 4pm

Venue: The Ngee Ann Kong Si Auditorium

Explore the master ink painter Liu Guosong's practice and distinctive methods, including the use of his trademark 'Liu Guosong paper', in this conversation with National Gallery Curator, Cai Heng. Trace the development of modern ink painting with the Fifth Moon Group, co-founded by Liu in Taiwan in the 1950s. Discover the artist's personal relationship with his ink painting contemporary, Wu Guanzhong, in relation to the new exhibition, *Wu Guanzhong: Expressions of Pen & Paper*, at National Gallery Singapore.

Note: This talk will be conducted in Mandarin with simultaneous translation in English.