

### For immediate release

# **Media Release**

# Rare Chinese Ink Masterpieces Unveiled at National Gallery Singapore

A magnificent showcase of Chinese ink art in Southeast Asia

**3 March 2017 –** Chinese ink takes centre stage at National Gallery Singapore with the launch of three new special exhibitions. Featuring more than 200 works of prominent 20<sup>th</sup> century artists, the complementary exhibitions will examine the evolution of Chinese ink painting and its impact on Singapore art history.

Visitors may explore the history of Chinese ink painting through *Rediscovering Treasures: Ink Art from the Xiu Hai Lou Collection,* which presents rare masterpieces from a renowned Singapore collection. The journey continues with *Wu Guanzhong: A Walk Through Nature,* a showcase of the mastery of Wu Guanzhong, one of the most influential artists in modern Chinese painting. The narrative then extends to *Strokes of Life: The Art of Chen Chong Swee,* which looks at the pioneering works of Singaporean artist Chen Chong Swee and his interpretations of local landscapes through the ink medium.

"Based on the encouraging reception for our last two Chinese ink exhibitions, we are excited to announce the launch of three special exhibitions which further examines the development of modern ink painting, and its relevance to Singapore," said Dr Eugene Tan, Director, National Gallery Singapore.

"Many of these masterpieces are rarely seen in public. In these exhibitions, visitors can look forward to a visual feast of masterful brushwork, inventive approaches and distinctive styles," added Mr Low Sze Wee, Director (Curatorial, Collections & Education), National Gallery Singapore.

To encourage greater appreciation of ink art, the Gallery will be organising a series of complementary programmes, including lectures by respected academics and practitioners, and hands-on activities for visitors of all ages (Annex B).

# Rediscovering Treasures: Ink Art from the Xiu Hai Lou Collection



Xu Beihong 徐悲鸿, Zhong Kui 钟馗 1939, Ink and colour on paper, 152 x 83 cm

Rediscovering Treasures: Ink Art from the Xiu Hai Lou Collection is the first comprehensive survey of the famed Xiu Hai Lou collection by a national museum. It examines the evolution of modern Chinese painting, and offers visitors the opportunity to see rare masterpieces by prominent artists such as Chen Hongshou, Ren Yi, Qi Baishi, Xu Beihong, Zhang Daqian and Chen Chong Swee.

Regarded as one of the most important ink collections in Singapore, Xiu Hai Lou was assembled across four decades by well-known local Teochew businessman Yeo Khee Lim (1917 – 1998). The exhibition offers important insights into how art collecting and patronage developed in Singapore during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

# Wu Guanzhong: A Walk Through Nature



Wu Guanzhong 吳冠中, The Yulong Mountains at Sunset 夕阳玉龙, 2006, Ink and colour on paper, 123.8 X 245.6cm, Gift of the artist and family, Collection of National Gallery Singapore

Wu Guanzhong: A Walk Through Nature explores Wu Guanzhong's travels in search of artistic inspiration. The exhibition is a vivid account of Wu's journeys across China to find inspiration in its mountains, rivers and villages. Such trips formed a strong foundation for his five-decade long practice. As one of the most influential artists in modern Chinese painting, Wu was a major advocate of integrating Chinese art with Western modernism.

# Strokes of Life: The Art of Chen Chong Swee



After Bath, 1952, Chinese ink and colour on paper, 76 x 119 cm, Gift of the family of the late Chen Chong Swee, Collection of National Gallery Singapore

Chen Chong Swee was one of the first artists in Singapore to use Chinese ink painting techniques to depict local landscapes. *Strokes of Life: The Art of Chen Chong Swee* is a major retrospective survey of Chen's artistic career spanning six decades. The exhibition focuses on his key contributions to artistic developments in Singapore from the 1950s to the 1980s.

Rediscovering Treasures: Ink Art from the Xiu Hai Lou Collection and Strokes of Life: The Art of Chen Chong Swee opens 11 March 2017, while Wu Guanzhong: A Walk Through Nature has opened in December 2016. All three exhibitions will run till 4 December 2017 at the Wu Guanzhong Gallery and Level 4 Gallery, City Hall Wing.

For more details about the exhibitions, visit www.nationalgallery.sg.

# **ANNEX A: Artwork highlights**

### Rediscovering Treasures: Ink Art from Xiu Hai Lou Collection



Ren Yi
Bestowal of Title and Wealth (1884)
Chinese ink and colour on paper
Xiu Hai Lou Collection

In Chinese folk culture, the spread of the peacock's tail was likened to the shape of an official's headdress. This was also a play on the word "guan" which means both "officialdom" and "crown" in Mandarin. Similarly, "lu" is a homonym for "deer" and "wages". Such paintings were probably bought as congratulatory gifts on a promotion, or as an expression of gratitude and acceptance of the post as a new office-bearer. Ren Yi painted this work in the later years of his career. It illustrates the use of his signature boneless (mogu) technique where forms are made using ink and colour washes rather than outlines. Ren Yi (also known as Ren Bonian) was born in Shanyin, Zhejiang province. He was the most outstanding artist of the early Shanghai School and esteemed as one of the "Four Rens" alongside his uncles (Ren Xiong and Ren Xun) and cousin (Ren Yu).



### Qi Baishi, Qi Liangchi, Qi Liangkun, Qi Liangyi

One Happy Family (1946)
Chinese ink and colour on paper
Xiu Hai Lou Collection

The insects and plants depicted in this work were painted by three of Qi Baishi's sons. His third son Ziru (Liangkun), who had long helped his father to paint, composed the insects using fine brush (gongbi) strokes. The tampala, a tropical plant, was painted by his fifth son Liangyi; and the brownish leaves were added by his fourth son Liangchi. The long inscription at the top was written by Qi Baishi himself and lends gravitas to the work. The expressions and rhythms of the ink characters indicate that Qi had, in the words of Confucius, reached the stage of "being able to express the heart's desires without transgressing." Through this painting, the father and sons of the Qi family collaborated to create "One Happy Family". Qi Baishi (also known as Qi Huang) was born in Xiangtan, Hunan province. He was an acclaimed master of modern Chinese painting.



### Xu Beihong

The Two Cats (1938)
Chinese ink and colour on paper
Xiu Hai Lou Collection

Xu Beihong was a cat lover and cared for over 30 stray cats in his former home in Nanjing before the Anti-Japanese War. The cat paintings that he produced in later years often expressed a sense of nostalgia and homesickness. Xu considered himself a more skilful painter of cats than horses. Here, Xu captured the anatomy of the cats with great accuracy, even giving a sense of their mass and size. The cats' claws are emphasised with vivid details and one of the tails is depicted standing straight up. The tail was deftly painted in varying shades of black; while the brushstrokes with unpainted spaces between the black ink (feibai) bring out the firm skeleton beneath the soft furry skin. The realistic details illustrate Xu's mastery of Western drawing techniques. Xu also personified the cats' facial expressions, giving them a human-like form and spirit. His cat paintings convey a sense of warmth seldom found in his other works.

# Wu Guanzhong: A Walk Through Nature

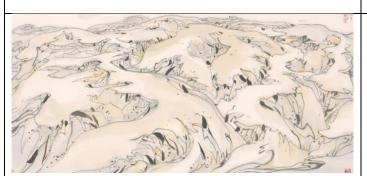


### The Yulong Mountains at Sunset

2006

Ink and colour on paper H123.8 x W245.6cm Gift of the artist and family Collection of National Gallery Singapore

After the artist saw Mount Yulong in person in 1978, his Yulong-themed works never ceased. Renditions of these works ranged from realistic life paintings to semi-abstract and eventually to the fully abstract as seen in this painting.



### The Yellow Earth Plateau

1989

Ink and colour on paper
H67.9 x W137.4cm
Gift of the artist and family
Collection of National Gallery Singapore

1989 was a hectic year for Wu Guanzhong with his intense travelling schedule. He visited the Yellow River in northern Shanxi which reminded him of a work by Shi Lu that inspired him. Wu Guanzhong said, "These boundless mountain ranges of yellow earth are granaries that feed the Chinese race, and a gold mine yet to be tapped."

In this work, he used various techniques ranging from sketching to ink-and-colour.

# Strokes of Life: The Art of Chen Chong Swee



### After Bath

1952

Chinese ink and colour on paper 76 x 119 cm

Gift of the Family of the late Chen Chong Swee Collection of National Gallery Singapore

After Bath is a classic example of Chen's work. It reflects his interest in depicting local subject matter, inspired by real life, using Chinese ink techniques. The Malay women are portrayed in relaxed postures going about their daily lives using a traditional fine line figure painting technique. The lines not only captured the form and expressions of the women vividly but also conveyed a sense of rhythm. The images of the women are localised through their traditional Malay blouses (kebayas). Chen also carefully incorporated intricate batik patterns on the wrapped skirts (sarongs) worn by the two central figures. Painted in brighter tones, they stand out from the rest of the work which is imbued with shades of muted grey.



# Landscape (Today's Paradise)

1980

Ink and colour on Chinese paper Collection of National Gallery Singapore

Landscape reflects Chen's skill in integrating the composition and techniques of traditional Chinese painting with local scenery. Here, Chen employs the deep-distance (shenyuan) and level-distance (pingyuan) perspectives of Chinese landscape paintings. The traditional Southeast Asian thatched (attap) houses and tropical trees are placed strategically along the road, drawing the viewer's eye from the foreground to the mountains in the distance. Chen expresses his love for the Nanyang region and its people in the inscription. Entitled "Today's Paradise", he describes it as a paradise blessed with a beautiful landscape as well as peace and stability.



# Returning from the Sea 1972 Watercolour on paper

90.7 x 128.2 cm Gift of Kuok Khoon Hong

Collection of National Gallery Singapore

This work depicts a scene of fishermen hastily returning from sea, in anticipation of a storm. The dynamism in the work is emphasised by the use of vibrant colours and short brush strokes. Watercolour was one of Chen's preferred mediums. Influenced by the British watercolour tradition, the medium gained popularity in Singapore in the 1960s. Chen was a founding member of the Singapore Watercolour Society and is regarded as an influential early Singapore watercolourist along with artists such as Lim Cheng Hoe.

# **ANNEX B: Programmes and Activities**

Gallery Cart	
11 March – 4 December	
Free	At the Gallery Cart, visitors will have fun exploring endless calligraphy strokes on a magic paper where their work will vanish with time.
I am an Art Collector!	
11 March – 4 December  Free	Look for these artworks in these three exhibitions. Draw a smiley face © next to the ones that you would like to add to your collection.
	deeper engagement with the artworks.
Resonates With	Join us at Padang Atrium Concourse during the month of April and
Saturdays and Sundays in	catch performances with the theme of 'East Meet West' that is inspired by <i>Strokes of Life: The Art of Chen Chong Swee</i> .
April	Inspired by Grones of Life. The Art of Orien Oriong Swee.
Free	
International Museum Day	Join us in re-creating elements inspired from <i>Strokes of Life: The</i>
Drop-in Craft	Art of Chen Chong Swee with paper origami. The exhibition is a
	major retrospective survey of Chen's artistic career spanning six
18 May	decades.
Free	decades.

# Living in the Stillness

Date TBC

NUS Chinese Dance, a member of NUS Centre For the Arts, will perform a new piece in support of *Strokes of Life: The Art of Chen Chong Swee* at National Gallery Singapore. The vividness of Chen Chong Swee's visual style will be captured through movement in a performance that captures the essence of his emotional and inspiring art.

Free

### For Families

# **Art Explorers**

(part of Family Weekends)

# 8 & 9 April

### Free

30 minutes, docent-led session Families with children aged 5 and up



Gain a new perspective on an artwork in the Gallery's collection. Learn more about artists and the art-making process through close-looking and hands-on exploration.

### Stories in Art

(part of Family Weekends)

### 10 & 11 June

11 & 12 November

### Free

30 minutes

Families with children aged 4 and up



Dive into a world of stories that bring artworks to life! Follow a storyteller on a journey through the treasure trove of art in the galleries.

### **Family Art Workshops**

(part of Family Weekends)

Workshop 1 – 10 September Workshop 2 – 15 October



	Workshop 1
\$20/ adult-child pair or \$30/ adult-	Families will create art on fans and albums using ink pens. They
child trio	will learn about the different compositions of Chinese ink painting.
90 minutes, artist-led workshops	,
Families with children aged 7 and	Workshop 2
ир	Families will create a painting of contemporary life using traditional
,	Chinese ink techniques.
For Knowledge Seekers	
Ink Masters Lectures Series	Held in conjunction with Strokes of Life: The Art of Chen Chong
	Swee and Rediscovering Treasures: Ink Art from the Xiu Hai Lou
2, 9, 16, 23 Apr	Collection at National Gallery Singapore, the second edition of the
3–5pm	Ink Masters Series explores ink as a medium and form of
1	expression. Featuring renowned local scholars and experts in the
	field, this four-part lecture series will help participants develop
	basic skills in observing and appreciating ink calligraphy and
\$20 per session	painting, including contemporary art.
Lectures will be conducted in	panang, moraang comomporary art
Mandarin, with simultaneous	O   -     -   -     -   -   -   -   -   -   -   -   -   -   -   -   -   -   -
translation in English.	Speakers include veteran journalist, Toh Lam Huat (杜南发), artist,
translation in English.	Grace Chen Liang (陈亮), curator Cai Heng (蔡珩), and renowned
	art critic Yin Shuangxi (殷双喜).
Art Talks   Chen Chong Swee,	Join Grace Tng (Assistant Curator, National Gallery Singapore) as
His Life and Artistic Practices	she shares new perspectives and insights on the artist and
	artworks in Strokes of Life: The Art of Chen Chong Swee.
6 May	
3-4pm	
, p	
Free	
Art Talks   *Rediscovering	Join Jennifer Lam (Assistant Curator, National Gallery Singapore)
Treasures: Ink Art from the Xiu	as she shares new perspectives and insights on the artists and
Hai Lou Collection	artworks in Rediscovering Treasures: Ink Art from the Xiu Hai Lou
(Title subject to change)	Collection.
2 September	
3-4pm	
Free	

For Story Lovers		
Special Tours   Rediscovering Treasures: Ink Art from the Xiu Hai Lou Collection	Gain deeper insights into the artworks and narratives of the exhibitions through special tours led by Dr Cai Heng (Curator) and Jennifer Lam (Assistant Curator).	
21 April (English) 12 May (Mandarin) 7.30-8.45pm \$25 per session		
Special Tours   Strokes of Life: The Art of Chen Chong Swee  8 September (English) 12 October (Mandarin) 7.30-8.45pm	Led by Dr Cai Heng (Curator) and Grace Tng (Assistant Curator), gain deeper insights into the artworks and narratives of the exhibitions.	
\$25 per session  Guided Tours   Highlights of Chen Chong Swee, Xiu Hai Lou and Wu Guanzhong Exhibitions  From 24 March English: Daily 12pm Mandarin: Sat & Sun 4.30pm	Featuring more than 200 works of prominent 20th century artists, the three complementary exhibitions will examine the evolution of Chinese ink painting and its impact on Singapore art history. Join a tour to explore the history of Chinese ink painting through Rediscovering Treasures: Ink Art from the Xiu Hai Lou Collection, a showcase of the mastery of Wu Guanzhong: A Walk Through Nature, and the pioneering works of Singaporean artist Chen Chong Swee in Strokes of Life: The Art of Chen Chong Swee.	
Tours are free but admission fees to exhibitions may apply.		

### ABOUT NATIONAL GALLERY SINGAPORE

# UNVEILING MODERN SINGAPORE AND SOUTHEAST ASIAN ART

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.

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