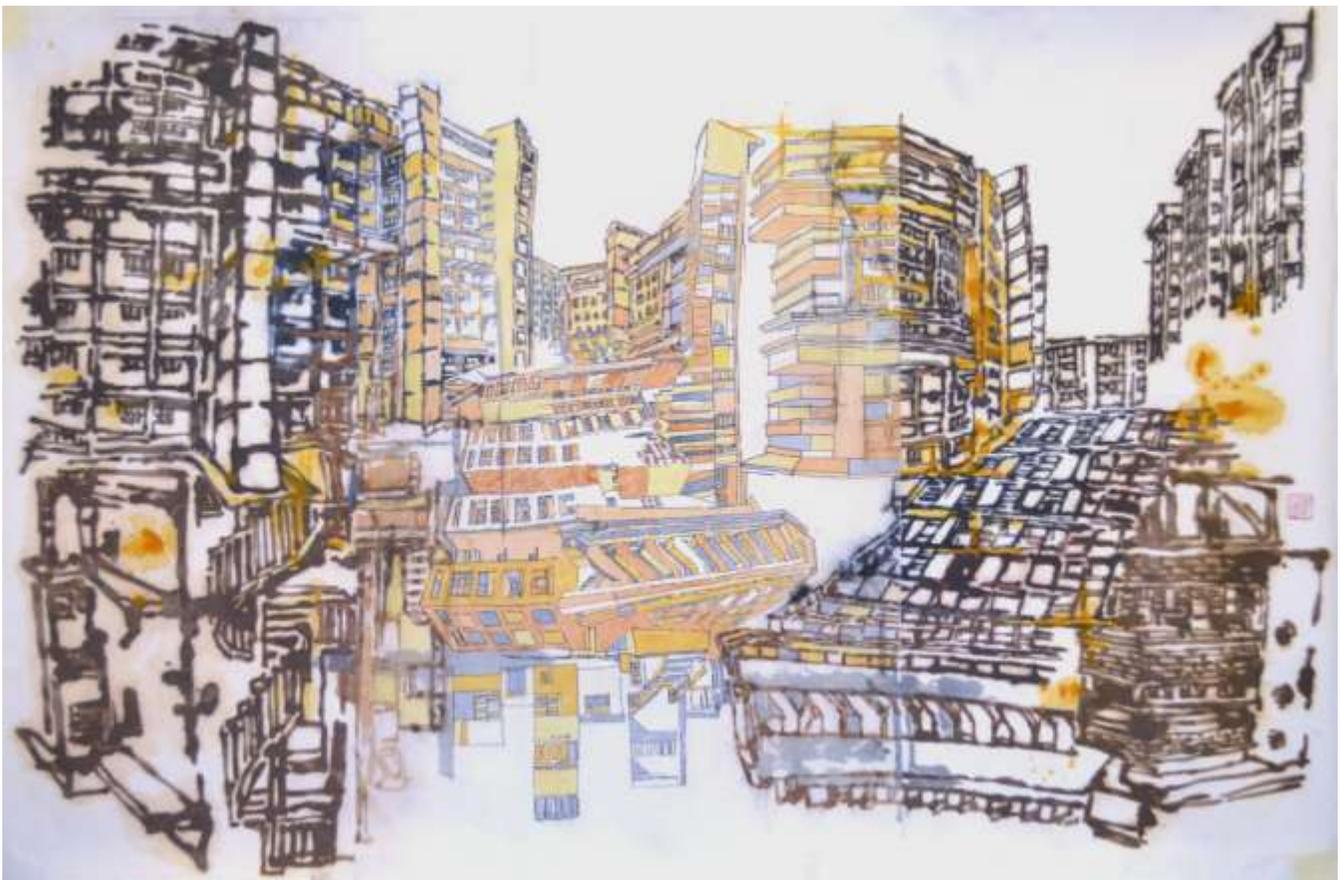


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Home and Beyond: Recent Ink Works of Chua Say Hua & Hong Sek Chern

Exhibition Reading Material

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Home and Beyond

Recent Ink Works of Chua Say Hua and Hong Sek Chern

artcommune brings you a selection of recent ink works by two of Singapore's most prolific contemporary artists, **Anthony Chua Say Hua** and **Hong Sek Chern**. Titled 'Home and Beyond', this husband-and-wife show comprises a stylised series of urban landmarks and old buildings that make up the different faces of our island. Not only do the featured inkscapes reflect familiar towns and earthly structures imbued with personal memories and interpretations, they stretch the expressive potential of landscape painting as a genre and compel us to ponder on the spatial collisions and interactions we inhabit as a society.

Both **Anthony** and **Sek Chern** are former winners of the prestigious 'Young Artist Award', handed out by the National Arts Council of Singapore. While they are both third-generation artists whose creative endeavours are informed by the traditional Chinese ink as well as modern Western aesthetics, each has come to establish a highly sophisticated and unique pictorial style peculiar to their respective oeuvre.

The works on exhibit showcase the distinct approach undertaken by each artist in the contemporary handling of a traditional ink medium, as well as the eclectic treatment of the modern urban landscape in Singapore.

A full-time artist since 1996, **Anthony** has amassed many awards and accolades under his belt. Apart from abstract compositions, he is constantly pushing the envelope in his experiment with the Chinese ink medium. As underlined by the artist himself, "My paintings' strength lies in the bold use of brush strokes with various effects created by different types of brushes such as the less conventional feather brushes. My creative processes are informed by both traditional Chinese ink and Modern Western strategies such as mark-making. The objective is to enable new artistic surfaces to be created and expressiveness articulated."



Fig. 1 Warehouse Along The River. Anthony Chua, 2011

Indeed, Anthony's semi-abstract ink compositions of urban spaces and old buildings offer refreshing visions that transcend common perspectives. The objects in his paintings are expressed through decisive and elegant brushstrokes, and at times, delineated by opaque circles and squares. Fig. 1 is a fine example of how the artist seeks to create vibrant forms and structures by engaging different types of brush work, including basic mark making. For instance, to mark out the windows, the high-rise buildings in the backdrop are lined with blocks of dots which juxtapose dramatically against the elongated strokes and angular forms of the shophouses in the foreground. The delicate layering of ink washes further enhances the atmospheric style of the piece, giving it a nostalgic and ethereal quality.



Fig. 2 Old Colonial Houses. Anthony Chua, 2011.

In Fig. 2, the landscape is realised through a spontaneous process of mark making. The artist focuses on the use of bold and expressive brush strokes to create an intriguing visual pattern on the paper. Denoted in shapes and calligraphic scrawls, we are invited into a world that is both raw and whimsical to behold.

Similarly a multi-award winning artist, **Sek Chern** is most well known for her groundbreaking depictions of cityscapes and buildings in traditional Chinese ink. In 2007, her ink composition, *Aspects Of The City II* was crowned 'Painting of the Year' at the 26th UOB Painting of the Year (POY) Competition. Over the years, her works have been collected by the Singapore Art Museum, Taipei Fine Art Museum, National Arts Council (Singapore) and several other institutions and private collectors.

Sek Chern's works usually reflect a masterful interplay of architectural blocks and lines, and are infused with a multi-point perspective of interior and exterior spaces that sometimes collapse into one another. Many of her paintings also explore the tension between the old and the new, and notions relating to space and time are sometimes destabilised through the merging and juxtaposition of urban structures that belong to different times and places.



Fig. 3 Mixed CBD and Potong Pasir. Hong Sek Chern, 2012.

In Fig. 3, the artist shows her sensitivity to painterly surfaces by inserting a collage of stark contrast into the original ink composition. The result is an almost topsy-turvy world where tall, imposing structures of banks and offices along the Central Business District collide with rows of older HDB blocks in Potong Pasir. In this painting, the heartland estate is transformed into a living space that has somewhat been invaded by urban landmarks signifying work and economy. The dynamic yet densely compressed architectural layout of this piece certainly draws us to contemplate on the modern life and landscape of this tiny island that we call home.



Fig. 4 Bukit Merah. Hong Sek Chern, 2012.

Fig. 4 is another mixed-media work that plays on the spatial collisions of different architectural forms that define the face of our modern landscape. The work brings together a string of objects derived from a combination of observations and memories, almost as if the artist is trying to capture an imagined landscape through her mind's eye. In the composition, old and new HDB estates overlap with distinctive cultural landmarks in Bukit Merah, which is one of the oldest standing estates in Singapore. This fascinating mixture of traditional and modern elements is accentuated by the incorporation of varying layers and colours into the work. In addition, the effect generated by the multi-point perspective proves to be both captivating and unsettling; as one's focus shifts around, the sense of space also feels increasingly illusory.

Therefore, the inksapes on exhibit essentially reflect the distinct visions and sentiments that belie each artist's approach in capturing the modern urban landscape of Singapore. Looking through these stylized images, it is also evident that although similar in their artistic leanings, Anthony and Sek Chern are two contemporary artists who are exceptionally gifted and unique in their own right.