

artcommune gallery proudly presents

Moments in Spaces:

Watercolour Works by Tam Kwan Yuen

Exhibition Reading Material

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ION-izing Effect, 56x76 cm, 2013

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About the Artist

Moments in Spaces is the first solo exhibition by young, emerging local talent Tam Kwan Yuen. Currently a full-time artist, Kwan Yuen holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree from the Nanyang Technological University and is a signature member of the Singapore Watercolour Society.

Although only twenty-six years of age, Kwan Yuen's watercolour paintings display a remarkable synthesis of sharp observations and refined techniques. His talent has not gone unnoticed in the international art scene either. In recent years, his works have been juried into the Grand Harvest Exhibition at the Williamsburg Art and Historical Center in Brooklyn, New York (2012); the 36th Annual Exhibition of Watercolor Art Society of Houston (WAS-H) (2013); and the 33rd International Exhibition of San Diego Watercolor Society (2013) in the United States.

Moments in Spaces

"Painting, like any art, comprises a technique, a workmanlike handling of material, but the accuracy of a tone and the fictitious combination of effects depend entirely on the choice made by the artist."

- Henri Matisse

Through *Moments in Spaces*, Kwan Yuen presents the spatial-temporal pulse of our urban city life from the perspective of a quiet, whimsical observer.

Be it the interior of a crowded café, the display window fronting a high-end designer store, or the entrance to a heartland grocery shop, these watercolour works capture people immersed in the midst of ordinary routines and social interactions, where unfolding events become immortalised within a specific setting and passage of time.

This series of watercolour works by Kwan Yuen is no doubt a notable statement of his undeterred spirit and aesthetic ambition. For one, the young artist proves that he is unafraid to cover new grounds with a traditional medium. His choice of subject matter – local hangouts, urban interior spaces and city night scenes – stands as a breath of fresh air as no other watercolour artist in our local art scene has experimented with this range of subject matter and execution.

As underlined by the artist himself, "I endeavour to bring to the audience a different side of the country, with bars, cafés, and shopping centre scenes forming the bulk of my images. I believe these inject a new life into a traditional medium that is unexplored in many ways. These works aim to bring across to the audience that there isn't a lack of subject matter to be painted, you just have to look for them in the right places, and new ones, of course!"

Armed with a camera, the artist usually travels around Singapore to capture scenes that interest him and the photographed images are subsequently

transformed by his painterly interpretations into watercolour works that explore the richness of forms and colours.

Despite the difficulty in manipulating a medium that relies heavily on the fluidity of water, Kwan Yuen's works comprise painstaking attention to moods and details, as well as complex experimentations with the colour palettes. In particular, several of his urban night scenes thrive on the unique combination of transition browns and grays, as well as the juxtaposition involving different tones such as blues, oranges, yellows and browns (ref. to Fig. 1 & 2).



Fig. 1 Chilling at Boat Quay, 56x76cm, 2013



Fig. 2 The Coffee Bean at Night, 38x56cm, 2013

The artist's meticulous treatment when it comes to establishing tonal shifts and juxtapositions between light and dark is certainly evident in these paintings. Kwan Yuen is fond of pressing dark tones (and this sometimes includes the filling of certain compositional elements entirely in black) against bright, warm colours like yellows, oranges and reds, in order to create stark contrasts and to capture the warm, vibrant atmosphere of the bars and cafés in his paintings.



Fig. 3 Fashion Sense, 38x56cm, 2013

Fig. 3 is another interesting composition that relies extensively on the play between light and dark. The reflections on the glass doors and windows, as well as the polished ground of the corridor are intricately detailed through the artist's acute perspectival grasp and gradation of tones. Framed by the display windows and the silhouettes of the doormen, this depiction of the Chanel store in the Ngee Ann City Shopping Centre along Orchard Road is captivating in an almost voyeuristic manner. As the viewer's eye recedes and is led through the interiors of the store, the mannequins and humans appear barely distinguishable. Furthermore, a sense of otherliness and exclusivity arises even as one becomes increasingly absorbed by the interiors. The composition is intelligently framed in such a way that the viewer must necessarily be made aware of his position as a spectator, caught in the process of looking on intently from the outside.



Fig. 4 Old Men and Spices, 38x56cm, 2013

In addition to shopping malls, restaurants and cafes, Kwan Yuen has also produced images inspired by heartlands and streetscapes experienced both locally and abroad. One such example is Fig. 4, which portrays a day scene in Little India. The use of rich gradation in tones is again an evident feature in this painting. Rather than a mere depiction of the shophouse, the artist has injected a sense of anticipation and wonder by including in the middle of the composition two elderly men who appear to be in the midst of deciding on their purchase. The piece encapsulates the moment in which this 'narrative' unfolds and the viewer is left to contemplate the scenario -- What exactly are the characters looking at? Will they eventually buy the items at the spice shop?

All in all, Kwan Yuen's watercolour paintings are sophisticated and spirited reflections of our contemporary urban environment. We discover in his art, familiar aspects of city life decked out in rich, harmonious blends of forms and colours.



Artist's Biography

1986 Born in Singapore

Education

2002 Graduated from River Valley High School, Singapore

2004 Graduated from Hwa Chong Junior College, Singapore

2012 Graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts with Honours, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

Solo Exhibition

2013 Moments in Spaces, Watercolour Works by Tam Kwan Yuen, artcommune gallery, Singapore

Selected Group Exhibitions

2012 *A Reflective Dialogue*, School of Art, Design and Media Final Year Project Show at Old School, Mount Sophia, Singapore

2012 Juried into Grand Harvest Exhibition at Williamsburg Art and Historical Center, Brooklyn, New York, U.S.A.

2012 *Urban Sketches: Scenes Seen*, Galeri Utama, Singapore

2012 Affordable Art Fair, F1 Pit Building, Singapore

2012 Member of Singapore Watercolour Society

2013 Painting juried into 36th Annual Exhibition of Watercolor Art Society of Houston (WAS-H), Texas, U.S.A.

2013 *Unity in Diversity*, National Library, Singapore

2013 44th Singapore Watercolour Society Annual Exhibition, ARTrium@MICA Building, Singapore

2013 Selected for the 33rd International Exhibition of San Diego Watercolor Society, U.S.A.