

OCTOBER 2011

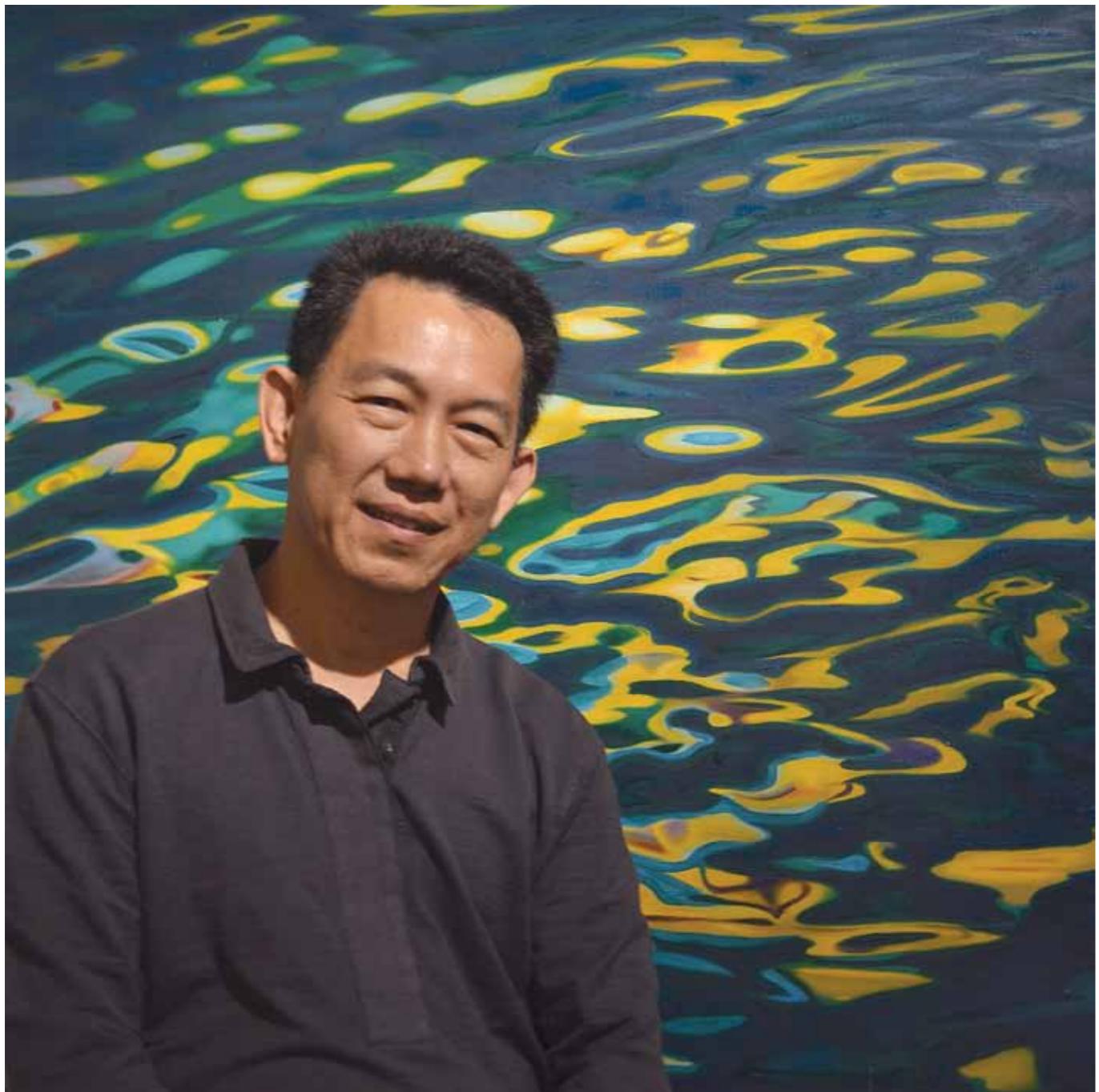


THE NEWSLETTER FROM HENRY BUTCHER ART AUCTIONEERS

In Conversation

# HOE SAY YONG

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- + EDUCATION The Potential of Malaysian Art



## In Conversation

# HOE SAY YONG

Hoe Say Yong is no stranger to many in the art community as an art consultant and gallery manager for his success of developing Artfolio and Pipal Fine Art, with the relentless effort and support of his wife, into the most well known galleries in the country. Unknown to many is his passion for painting, often kept humbly away from conversations. As he had once said during an interview he had done previously: "It's like what they say about chefs — they cook for everyone but themselves! Personally, I just enjoy the painting".

Hoe Say Yong, 55, has participated in over 50 group shows around the world but said to dislike putting up solo exhibitions for himself, in which only amounted to 6 exhibitions since his very first solo in 1982. Having had a successful solo in October and awarded the Grand Prize of "Asia Art Award" by the Korea Culture Art Research Institute, we approach him to talk about his art.

COVER: *Gather II* (集聚 II), 2011, oil on canvas, 120cm x 120cm

**"Reflection to me is only a subject, a theme. It is what is behind the reflection that matters. It is a projection of my mind, or an impression of surrounding issues that concern me."**



*The Mind Song II* (心曲 II), 2010, oil on canvas, 100cm x140cm



*Night* (夜色), 2011, oil on canvas, 100cm x141cm

### 1. Why are you an artist, and when did you become one?

Why am I an artist? I've never thought of myself as anything else. I loved to draw since I could remember. It only seemed natural for me to enroll myself into an art school to be trained as an artist. My passion to draw kept me going through ups and downs; I had to go into advertising, interior design, and even teaching art to sustain. Subsequently, I setup a gallery in town in 1990 and was finally able to paint professionally in 1993 with my wife, Angie, stepping in to assist with managing the business.

### 2. What is your philosophy as an artist?

Paint what you love, not what sells. It's important to pour your heart into everything that you do.

### 3. Tell us about your art.

I get this question a lot. My art is very much a reflection of my life. I've had the privilege of having things falling into place and working out for me. Nothing too radical happened to me, which in a way, had propelled me to search for beauty and perfection in a different direction. My thoughts and my being is integral to my art.

### 4. Why did you choose to paint water ripples? Are these drawn from actual references or painted from your imagination?

My art has evolved over the years from

when I first began painting sceneries with watercolor. I started painting real scenes and using references of actual places that exist. I moved on to reflection and water ripples, stripping it of the houses, trees and village scenes, to discover the world beyond the reflections. I allowed myself to paint freely, to not be in charge of the next move but to allow my senses to guide me. Reflection to me is only a subject, a theme. It is what is behind the reflection that matters. It is a projection of my mind, or an impression of surrounding issues that concern me.

Looking back, the reflections serve as a mirror to my mind. Through my art, I moved from exploring the world and to self-discovery. It is an unnoticeable evolution, which causes me to wonder what may be next.

### 5. Many of your works come close to abstractions, do you try to keep something figurative in them?

I do not see the need to, as art is a free expression of our emotions. Just like how Beethoven managed to communicate his emotions with just the first 4 notes in the Fifth Symphony, I use a variety of forms and colors in my reflections to achieve this.

### 6. Who are some of the artists that have influenced you, and how?

I would say that I am very much influenced by the Impressionists. Perhaps it was due to my art education that had begun with the masters, Van Gogh, Gauguin, and Cezanne

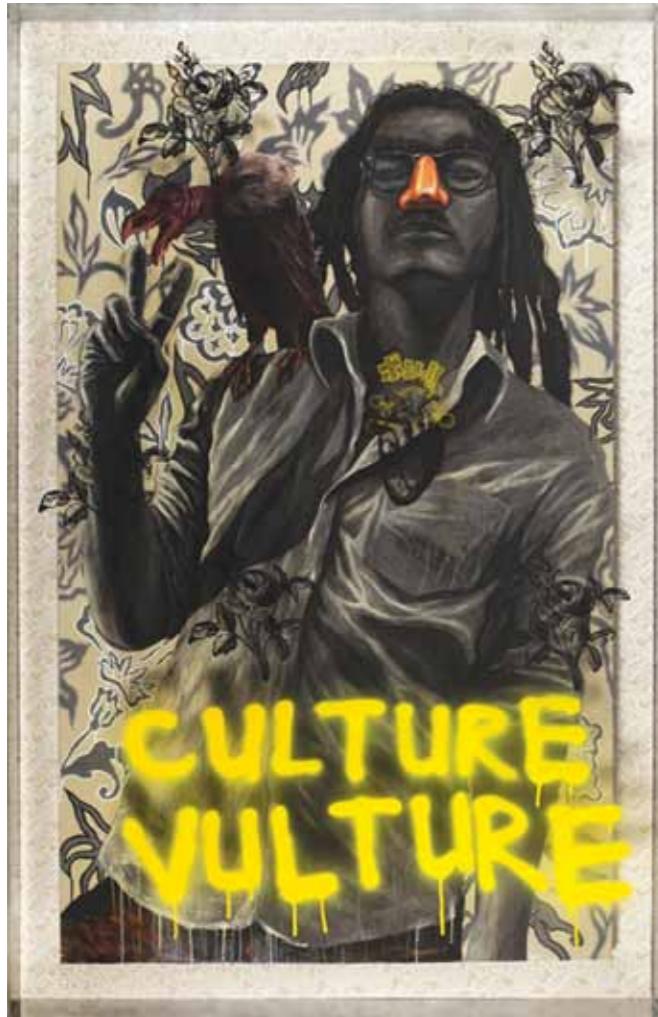
etcetera, I've made trips to Europe to view and study the actual works. I see the influence of the Impressionists especially in my painting technique. There are many other artist by different movements that I admire too, they inspire me for various technical or aesthetical reasons.

### 7. We understand that you are also the owner of a successful gallery, Pipal Fine Art. How do you juggle business and art?

When Pipal Fine Art is concerned, I have to give the credit to my wife, Angie. The tip is to have someone reliable whom you can entrust the business to. I am fortunate to have Angie handle most of the management, thus allowing me to step in only during the selection process to ensure the consistency in the quality of works delivered by Pipal Fine Art. We are very strict when it comes to selecting works. Having good help in the gallery helps me lighten my load to focus on creating art.

### 8. From your experience and role as an art promoter in Malaysia, where is Malaysian Art now? Where do you see Malaysian Art in 5 years?

The art market has been good. Considering the establishment of Henry Butcher Art Auctioneers, Art Expo Malaysia and the new galleries in town recently being well received and accepted, I believe that it would be even better in the next 5 years.



clockwise from left: JUSTIN LIM, Culture Vulture, 2011, acrylic on canvas, fabric & mixed media on perspex, 218cm x 142cm | Bad Boys, 2011, acrylic on canvas, fabric & mixed media on perspex, 156cm x 133cm | Bad Girls, 2011, acrylic on canvas, fabric & mixed media on perspex, 156cm x 133cm.



## PAINTING METAPHORS

A review of *Culture Vulture* at Taksu Singapore

Young Malaysian artists **Justin Lim** and **Samsudin Wahab** are the focus of an exhibition curated by Taksu this month. Titled *Culture Vulture*, the two artists, quickly establishing themselves on the Malaysian art scene, present their take on socio-political issues while incorporating pop culture references on their striking canvases which at once arrest the viewer's gaze.

Justin Lim, having just completed a residency in Vermont followed by a tour of the States, brought his experiences to his latest body of works which were executed prior to and during his sojourn overseas. In his larger than life canvases *Bad Girls* and *Bad Boys* he tackles social labels associated with gender. The "girls" dressed in sinister halloween costumes innocently smile on, returning

the gaze of the viewer. The "boys", one of whom looks upon the viewer dressed in a straight jacket while the other tries to swallow a whole, live, struggling frog, are clearly upto no good!

These canvases are unusually bordered by a rose patterned wall paper while the piece in its entirety is encased within a clear plexiglas box frame over which *Bad Girls* and *Bad Boys* are sprayed on. Similarly, the piece *Culture Vulture* exhibits a self portrait of the artist holding up a "V" for victory sign, wearing the classic gag moustach, nose and glasses disguise while a vulture perches on his shoulders.

Perhaps the cool pose suggests that Justin, using the guise of an artist, sees himself as society's lowly undertaker, not unlike the often misunderstood and distanced vulture, who picks up on what human beings would rather ignore and leave behind.

These works share a thread of continuity from his previous show at Taksu KL in late 2010 where a similar body of work demonstrated several portraits juxtaposed with spray painted tags such as *Guilty*, *American Idle* or *Repent* almost defiling the paintings within the perspex in the same vein as graffiti or street art.

Most poignant, however, is an understated and simply laid out tryptich and a departure from the aforementioned style titled *The Everlasting Gaze*, *Death and All His Friends* and *The Butcher*. In *The Everlasting Gaze* Justin depicts a row of traditionally dressed

and "appropriately" covered up women in the background turn to gaze at two seemingly outcast or even emancipated women (judging by the wings tattooed on one of the subject's back).

According to the artist, this piece was inspired by the recent shocking and controversial Obedient Wives Club of Malaysia which established itself in June this year. The "club" urges women to avoid marital problems by serving their husbands better than prostitutes. With such views being openly expressed, the club promptly drew widespread international criticism. Justin confronts this head-on within the context of social and religious dogmas and expectations for a woman within a particular culture. He takes this rhetoric further in *Death and All His Friends* and *The Butcher* which combines religious symbolism, iconography and popular culture questioning our society's materialism and its orthodox belief systems.

Samsudin Wahab on the other hand presents deep, sumptuous, richly painted but foreboding canvases which suggest a doomed future to Justin's contemporary societal critiques. Here, his hellish visions, rather ornately framed, are pure spectacle. In "Floating Cheese Burger", the viewer is confounded by a larger than life size "cheese burger" which the artist recounts as a personal nightmare where he is trapped under the weight of the tomatoes, lettuce,

cheese, ketchup, mayonnaise and bread while a fantastically thunderous red storm approaches his as yet undetermined fate.

Two other canvases, titled *10th Anniversary In Red* and *Nightmare In Red*, make obvious references to George Bush and the ten year anniversary of the 9/11 tragedy. Samsudin is clearly a political artist-activist whose practice comfortably encompasses comic subculture, desktop graphics and graffiti which can easily appeal to a global audience. Using oil paint, bitumen, linocut and stencils, Samsudin creates richly layered dark and dramatic narratives which are at once comic and tragic and perfectly compliment rather than overwhelm Justin Lim's canvases in the same space.

There is an uneasiness in the art here which transcends to the viewer's consciousness; the subjects portrayed are somewhat uncomfortable in their posturing, maybe even out of step with their own conformed roles. This exhibition provokes a discussion on contemporary society, its commercial values and our own status quo within our cultural frameworks. *Culture Vulture* does not seek to cushion its audience with optimistic upbeat visuals but rather seeks to challenge our conventions and norms which we may find comfortable to fall back on time and again.

*Culture Vulture* runs from 13 - 31 October 2011 at Taksu Singapore.



JUSTIN LIM, *The Everlasting Gaze*, 2011, acrylic & graphite on paper, screen print on perspex, 183cm x 152.4cm.



SAMSUDIN WAHAB, *10th Anniversary In Red*, 2011, acrylic and bitumen on canvas, 201cm x 138cm.



SAMSUDIN WAHAB, *Floating Cheese Burger*, 2011, acrylic and bitumen on canvas, 172cm x 200cm



SAMSUDIN WAHAB, *Nightmare In Red*, 2011, acrylic and bitumen on canvas, 120cm x 94cm.

## EDUCATION

# THE POTENTIAL OF MALAYSIAN ART

A reflection on Public Art Programmes 2011 jointly organised by Galeri Petronas and Henry Butcher Art Auctioneers.

// Article extracted from Malaysian Art Gallery Guide (MAGG) November issue.

Flipping through the MAGG you have probably realised the frenzy of back-to-back art openings, exhibitions and happenings in Malaysia is hard to keep up with and your calendar is perhaps booked out every other day for these events. It had me wondering: with an increasingly dynamic art scene, why is Malaysian Art still under-appreciated – artistically and commercially – within the region, and what can be done to better fulfil the potential of Malaysian Art?

'Works of art which represent the highest level of spiritual production will find favour in the eyes of the bourgeois only if they are presented as being reliable to directly generate material wealth,' quoted philosopher Karl Marx. Looking at the art produced by artists from our neighbouring countries such as Indonesia, Singapore and the Philippines, auction records are repeatedly set and the prices for works by old masters like Gunawan and contemporary superstars like Ventura increase by the million.

In Malaysia, however, the idea of investing in art is still new as the general level of appreciation towards art is low. This does not



necessarily mean the art produced locally is not of equivalent, if not better standards and skills to those regionally or internationally. With the subjective nature of art, and the intricately rich culture in Malaysia, local artists are equally able to create art of great substance and value.

Throw the what-is-art question to the common Malaysian and you will probably get answers like 'something pretty to hang on the wall', 'something too expensive to afford' or better still, you will get a silent stare. Now,

with the establishment of an auction house and a growing secondary market, coupled with the rising affluence of upper and middle classes, there are greater opportunities for Malaysians to appreciate and collect art. But blindly investing in art without understanding it can be dangerous, as a speculative art market does not last and the bubble will eventually burst.

In light of this, a three-part seminar series titled Public Art Programmes was jointly organised by Galeri Petronas and Henry Butcher Art Auctioneers from April to June 2011. The seminars focused on three essential areas

of Malaysian Art: appreciation and critique, collecting and investing, as well as conservation and restoration. The presentations and discussions are summarised and the top ten key points from each talk are listed here. The significance of these seminars, much like the role of an artist, is to spark discourse. As a member of the Malaysian art community, you ought to fulfil your role in making art more accessible to a wider public, and to redefine Malaysians' perception towards art.

Many tend to underestimate the potential of art but it can be as powerful as you want. In his TED Prize speech, artist JR said: 'Art itself cannot change the world. It changes the way we see the world. The fact that art cannot alter things physically and directly makes it a neutral place for exchanges and discussions.' It is futile for the art community to pour their heart and soul in order to energise the art scene and market if the public is left behind with little or no understanding, appreciation and involvement in art. Art is more than just a collectable. It has the potential to evolve people's way of thinking, acts as a catalyst for change, and ultimately creates a sophisticated and innovative society.

## Malaysian Art: Appreciation & Critique Top 10 Key Points

1. There is no such thing as 'I don't know art'. If you can appreciate a handsome man or a beautiful woman, you can appreciate art.
2. In art, there must be an intrinsic value that clings to your heart before addressing its cultural or commercial values.
3. Some may argue that there is always bias for personal preferences in appreciating and collecting art in Malaysia, especially on the race, religion, or gender of the artist. But an art piece should speak for itself and a connection with the viewer would emerge out of these differences. Ultimately, it is the art that we are looking at, not the artists who created them.
4. The art needs to speak to you first, before the investment part comes.
5. Do not follow the herd, lead the herd. Buying the trendiest and most popular art at the time only promises a collection as good as everyone else, not better.
6. Keep in mind that not all pieces, even if created by the same artist, are of equal quality. Just because it is from a reputable artist does not necessarily mean it will be valuable.
7. An entry-level price for new contemporary Asian Art is USD 20,000-30,000 and USD 5,000-10,000 for contemporary Southeast Asian Art.
8. There is always something for everyone. You may be attracted by the colours, subject matter or concept of the artwork; or may experience that innate sensation that strikes you when you fall in love with a painting.
9. Contemporary art is the art that is made by your own generation. In Southeast Asia, contemporary art can be attributed to the impact of conceptual art where people begin to question the definition of art.
10. As you go through the process of collecting art, you will go through a progression of what you like. It takes time to train your aesthetic eye. The more art you see, the better trained it is. Give yourself the most exposure you can afford. Eventually you can spot good art from a mile, and tune your collection to a focused and iconic one.
11. Art education in the primary and secondary levels is of paramount importance in nurturing an art-savvy community. Currently, there is a great disparity between the art teaching methods taught at universities and what actually happens in local primary and secondary art classes in Malaysia.
12. Biennales and art fairs are especially important because a strongly developed network of museums is lacking. Hence, it tends to serve as a canon of which artists are important and which are not.
13. The identity of Malaysian Art is ambiguous and debatable. One's identity can only be defined by an outsider. Hence, only by creating and viewing Malaysian Art in a regional context can the identity of a nation's art be realised and strengthened, and only by involving yourself and others in an active discourse about Malaysian Art can its profile be heightened.

## Art - The New Asset Class in Malaysia Top 10 Key Points

1. You do not need to be the richest man to collect art, but only buy what you can afford. A budget should be set before you begin your hunt to avoid falling in love with something you cannot pay for.
2. Collecting art is not about quantity, it is about quality. Rather than buying multiple little pieces, buy the single best piece you can afford.
3. You need to understand your art and your artists. It is important to understand where the artist came from, where he is going, who is representing him, what sort of shows he is doing, and where he stands regionally.
4. The art needs to speak to you first, before the investment part comes.
5. Books provide a wealth of knowledge on art. The earliest books published on Malaysian Art are *The Arts of Malaya* by Tony Beamish and *Contemporary Artists of Malaysia: A Biographic Survey* by Dolores D. Wharton.
6. Rotate the display of your collection (including those in storage) every few months. Check the condition and clean your stored artworks periodically.
7. Cracking of paint on works on canvas and foxing (tiny brown spots) on works on papers – besides signifying poor condition – can indicate age and authenticity of an old masterpiece.
8. The frame is pivotal to the conservation of your artwork. Artworks should be mounted, framed, and packed with acid-free and neutral materials.
9. Frames should be serviced every 5 years. Even if the artwork may appear in good condition from the front, moulding and insect infestation may occur at the back of the mounting and backing boards. The inner surface of the glass should also be cleaned every few years.
10. Consult a professional art conservator if you need specific advice on how to display or store your collection in the best possible condition and environment.



## Caring For Your Art Collection Top 10 Key Points

1. Artworks are not just pretty things hanging on the wall. Treat them as living, breathing organic objects that are in constant flux with the environment and are very fragile.
2. Minimise fluctuations of the conditions surrounding your artworks – be it light, temperature or humidity.
3. Keep artworks away from direct sunlight. Long-term UV exposure causes pigment to fade.
4. Light your works to what the eye can see and not more. Keep the level of external lighting low but bright enough to enjoy appreciating your artworks. Excessive lighting does not necessarily mean better display.
5. Use a fan, air-conditioning, dehumidifier or take other appropriate actions to stabilise and moderate temperature and humidity of the environment where your artworks are displayed.
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# in the scene



'OLD MASKS, MODERN MAN' BY KELVIN CHAP  
@ MAISON OF  
MALAYSIAN ART  
(MoMA)

*left to right*

Collector En. Pakhruddin Sulaiman,  
artist Soh Boon Kiong,  
collectors Mr. Kwan Kee Peng,  
Mr. Yee Tak Hong and  
Prof. Dr. Krishna Gopal,  
Mr. Lim Eng Chong from HBArt  
and writer Mr. Ooi Kok Chuen.



UTARA AFTER  
3 DECADES  
@ PIPAL FINE ART

*left to right*

Artist Mr. Khoo Sui Hoe,  
and Linda Leoni from HBArt.

PUBLIC ART  
PROGRAMMES  
NOV/DEC 2011

Stay tuned.