

**AFTERIMAGES:  
STRANDS OF MODERN ART IN SINGAPORE**

**HO TZU NYEN  
(B.C. A. University of Melbourne)**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED  
FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTERS OF ARTS  
SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES PROGRAMME  
NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE  
2007**

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank my co-supervisor Professor Chua Beng-Huat for helping to get me this gig, and my supervisor Professor Reynaldo C. Ileto for helping me to get out of it.

Next, I must thank the following individuals for helping to make talking, thinking and writing about art in Singapore a little more tolerable for me. They are Ahmad Mashadi, Cheo Chai Hiang, Eugene Tan, Jason Soo, John Low, June Yap, Kevin Chua, Lee Weng Choy, Lucy Davis, Paul Rae, Ray Langenbach, Santiago Ho and T.K. Sabapathy.

Last but not least, I must acknowledge my wife Stephanie Goh, who has lost much sleep over this dissertation, and who makes life in general much more tolerable for me.

Ho Tzu Nyen

Feb 2007

# CONTENTS

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	ii
<i>Table of Contents</i>	iii
<i>Summary</i>	iv
PROLOGUE: IDENTITIES	7
CHAPTER ONE: ONE BALI	20
Section One: Bali, 2001	
Section Two: Bali, 1952	
Section Three: Bali, 1932	
CHAPTER TWO: TWO SOUTH SEAS	113
Section One: South Seas, 1892	
Section Two: South Seas, 1952	
EPILOGUE: THREE OR MORE SUITS	252
Section One: Suit, 1970	
Section Two: Suit, 1992	
Section Three: Suit, 1995	
Section Four: More Suits, 1992 to 2003	
<i>Bibliography</i>	295
<i>Image Sources</i>	303

## SUMMARY

In 2001, four Singaporean artists returned from Bali with a series of rather shoddy-looking snapshots. These pictures could be described as self-portraits, as they had featured the artists themselves, in a series of different poses and disguises.

For anyone familiar with the history of Singapore, the poses, setting and themes of the snapshots would instantly evoke another earlier visit to Bali – one that was undertaken by four artists of an earlier generation. These four artists were, by the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, often referred to as the ‘pioneers’ of Singaporean Modern Art and their visit to Bali in 1952, spoken of with the reverence due to a moment of genesis.

The snapshots of the four younger artists can be considered to be rather bad – or farcical – copies of one of the four ‘pioneer’ painters’ works. Through this repetition that the four later artists perform upon their artistic precursor, the very outline circumscribing the ‘pioneering’ status of these four earlier painters becomes blurred, indistinct and hence subject to doubt.

In the light of the four younger artists’ repetition, we become alerted to how the four ‘pioneers’ may themselves be seen as repetitions of some other earlier artistic figures – figures hailing from Belgium, from Shanghai,

from Paris. And with this, the very notions of 'identity', 'origins', 'founding', and 'pioneers' attached to these four older artists become suspect. And equally suspect are the intentions and ideologies of those who had championed these readings, these causes.

The play of repetition unravels the foundations upon which these essentialistic notions of identities are built upon. But it is crucial too to remember that repetition is paradoxically also the engine of differentiation. For nothing in the world can be repeated – except difference itself.

Hence, in sketching out the repetition between the four younger artists, the four 'pioneers', and other earlier, non-Singaporean artistic figures, we are at the same time also producing a map of their differences. The analysis of this play of repetition and difference becomes a unique way by which we may grasp the specificities of each of these artists. And in the systematic articulation of these specificities, we approach a way with which we can tell the story of Singapore's modern art.

In this sense, this dissertation is a work of art historiography. However, it does not unfold by treating the object of its study – Singapore art – as a singular unity with fixed contours. Instead it proceeds first by identifying fragments. It is set into motion by picking up strands. In such a process, any notion of a monolithic Singaporean modern art unravels, but

if we follow where these threads lead to, we may arrive at an understanding of art and art history beyond the narrow confines of Singapore. As such, this dissertation is as much about Singapore art, as it is an attempt to propose a new concept with which we may understand art – the concept of the ‘afterimage’.

# **Prologue: Identities**

## Prologue – Afterimages: Strands of Modern Art in Singapore

**‘Who are you?’ said the Caterpillar.**

**This was not an encouraging opening for a conversation. Alice replied, rather shyly, ‘I – I hardly know, sir, just at present – at least I know who I was when I got up this morning, but I think I must have changed several times since then.’**

**‘What do you mean by that?’ said the Caterpillar sternly. ‘Explain yourself!’  
‘I can’t explain myself, I’m afraid, sir,’ said Alice, ‘because I’m not myself, you see.’<sup>1</sup>**

**Lewis Carroll**

### Identity

This little exchange between Alice and the Caterpillar contains within it a succinct account of the difficulties one faces in an inquiry into the identity of modern art in Singapore.

---

<sup>1</sup> Lewis Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland & Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There* (London: Orion Publishing Group, 1993), p. 39.



Any inquiry into identity is as Alice puts it, not an “*encouraging opening for conversation.*” Her reflexive reply that she “*hardly knows*” in turn marks the beginning for a process for thinking, for thought begins from the realm of uncertainty just as things rush in to fill a void. Her subsequent answer that she knew who she was when she first woke up, but not any longer because she has since changed, points to the impossibility of self-identification, because the self is experienced in time, and subject to change.

The Caterpillar’s rather nasty follow up: “*What do you mean by that?*” is spoken in a tone rather reminiscent of one of those servants of certainty – the police, the judge, the inquisitor.

And poor Alice, can do no more than to apologise and rephrase her answer in a more reconciliatory tone. The result: “*I’m not myself, you see*” in turn serves as the keynote to this dissertation. In many ways, this dissertation’s attempt to identify the nature of Singaporean art can be understood as a sustained elaboration of Alice’s most profound statement.

## Summary

In this prologue, I hope to be able to map out the structure of the dissertation.

We begin with Chapter One – One Bali, whereupon a series of photographs taken by a group of four young artists in Bali in 2001, opens up a kind of tunnel – like the ‘rabbit-hole’ that leads Alice to Wonderland – taking us back to a painting produced in the year 1953. The painting, *Mask (Bali)*, is by one of Singapore’s four ‘pioneers’ of modern art – Liu Kang – who, by the frequency of his mention in this dissertation, qualifies him in some sense as its main ‘human’ protagonist. Liu’s painting was produced in the aftermath of the four ‘pioneer’ artists’ visit to Bali in 1952, and this visit was in turn, viewed by many subsequent commentators as a kind of originary moment for Singaporean modern art.

In the course of this chapter, we will, through the lens of the four young artists’ photographs, review – in the sense of re-looking – the artistic corpus of Liu. In this process, we uncover an intricate web of relationships between the paintings that are traditionally considered his ‘work’ and his photographs that occupy a curious, supplementary position between private snapshots and strategic efforts at the construction of a public image.

At the same time, this chapter is dedicated to the formulation of the concept of the afterimage. I should add here that I consider the concept of the afterimage the true protagonist in this dissertation. The phenomenon of the afterimage refers to the imprint of light upon a cornea, and the persistence of this imprint in the aftermath of the withdrawal of its source. Yet this very persistence of the afterimage over time is also what opens it up to a process of modulation. The 2001 snapshots in Bali are thus, in a sense, afterimages of Liu's paintings, which are the source. The main task of this first chapter would be to show, first of all, how afterimages can be used to clarify our understanding of the source. In the process of such a clarification, however, Liu's paintings will themselves begin to appear as afterimages of yet another source.

This leads us to the second chapter, *Two South Seas*, where we find that behind Liu's paintings – so often described as embodiments of the 'Nanyang' or 'South Seas' style invented by the four 'pioneers' – lies a veritable labyrinth of tunnels that will take us to many different places and many different points in time. One of these tunnels leads us to the Shanghai of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century; another, to a second South Seas – the South Seas of the French painter Paul Gauguin, whose fame was made with his sojourn to Tahiti in 1891, just as the 'Nanyang pioneers' came to prominence after their visit to Bali in 1952.

Chapter Two extends upon the concept of the afterimage by connecting it to a frequently used, but oft-denigrated art historical term – influence. Influence is most often understood as a kind of transmission across generations, and thus seen to be reliant upon a hierarchy of priority. This usually brings about in the ‘influenced’ a certain amount of anxiety, a fear of belatedness and a perceived lack of originality. But just as Chapter One performs a reversal of chronology by using afterimages to clarify the sources, Chapter Two will performatively reverse the commonplace hierarchy between the source of influence and the influenced. Along the way, I will attempt to show how the concept of the afterimage is founded upon a paradoxical notion of time, and grasped as a play of repetition and difference. At the same time, in this chapter, the concept of the afterimage will be shown to relate productively to queries that we usually associate with the ‘postcolonial’ and the ‘postmodern’. The chapter will then conclude on a note that proposes how human identities can themselves be understood in the light of afterimages.

Finally we will end the dissertation with an epilogue. Here, through the story of four different suits that have surfaced in the lives of four different artists from Europe to Singapore, the concept of the afterimage will be expanded by analogies drawn from recent advances in evolutionary theories. Next, we will uncover the relationship between these four ‘suited’ artists, and the four young Singaporean artists that we began the

dissertation with. And with this, we can produce a map of the complex weave of relationships binding the previous chapters of the dissertation. This exercise in topography renders the shape of an art historical methodology visible. It should be clear that the conceptual schema of the afterimage is an attempt to grasp the story of art's unfolding through time beyond the humanistic foundation inherent within this discipline from its conception. In the place of an art history so often seen as the drama of the human subject, what I will attempt to tell is a story where the main protagonists are motifs, and the drama of art history played out by the migration and mutations of these motifs. The epilogue and essay concludes with a brief but necessary re-evaluation of what it means to be a subject of art history in Singapore.

### **Tools, Concepts and Authors**

Before we begin, it is necessary to state the agenda, and clarify the modus operandi of this dissertation. It is my opinion that the account of Singaporean art that I provide in the following pages is art historical – though maybe not conventionally so. However it is important to note that it is certainly not without its precedents. In art history, it is, I believe, related in a distant form to the work of Aby Warburg in his investigations of art history as the history of migration of motifs. Although I do not reference his

work directly, this dissertation is in many ways indebted to his projects, especially his last and arguably grandest one. In his late years, Warburg had a vision of a practice of art history that could be undertaken solely through an arrangement of images and without the mediation of words. This took the form of a library of reproduced images, known as the *Mnemosyne*. It was “a knowledge movement of images, a knowledge in extensions, in associative relationships, in ever renewed montages, and no longer knowledge in straight lines, in a confined corpus, in stabilized typologies.”<sup>2</sup> This iconographic archive and its extraordinary play of montages makes manifest an attention to the paths of motion an image is always plugged into, but above all it is the embodiment of a world view founded upon the dynamic principles of change and transformation.



Figure 1. Aby Warburg, *Mnemosyne - Atlas*.

---

<sup>2</sup> Georges Didi-Huberman, 'Knowledge: Movement – The Man Who Spoke to Butterflies', Foreword to Philippe-Alain Michaud, *Aby Warburg and the Image in Motion*, (New York: Zone Books, 2004), p. 553.

Although I have not gone as far as Warburg in this aspect of restricting my dissertation strictly to the play of images, the belief that the dynamic history of images is best relayed through images is one that I share. In a way, this has been one of the fundamental constants in the writing of this dissertation, which is an attempt at a relational practice of art historiography, built upon the belief that an essential dimension of the image can be grasped through its mediation by other images. For me, Warburg's *Mnemosyne* is a constant reminder against art history's habitual silencing of images through its privileging of words. And on this note, I would like to prepare the reader for the unusually large amount of images in the following text. At times, the image serves a directly referential relationship to the text that precede or follow it. At other times, images appear or reappear without direct textual references, and I would like to assure the reader that there has been no carelessness involved in such occurrences. Rather the repetitions form a kind of rhythmic structure expressing the cadence of my thought patterns.

In my thinking through of the problem of influence, I have relied upon the work of the literary critic Harold Bloom. His revision of the way in which influence has been commonly understood remains controversial to many, though it has been invaluable to my own construction of the concept of the afterimage. His theories have permeated the field of visual arts studies at a rate that is slow but steady. Amongst art historians,

Norman Bryson has been the only one who has, to my knowledge, systematically made use of Bloom's theories in a full-length art historical treatise, *Tradition and Desire - From David to Delacroix*, which of which I have made substantial use of in the course of this dissertation. As the Freudian schema is crucial to Bloom's approach, I should mention that my analysis is inevitably peppered with terminologies drawn from Sigmund Freud, and to a lesser extent, that of Jacques Lacan. Where I have seen necessary, I have sought to provide short definitions of these terminologies in the space of the footnotes. For reasons of conciseness, I have often made use of the definitions supplied by J. Laplanche and J.B. Pontalis' excellent *The Language of Psychoanalysis*. On this note, I would also like to mention the work of the art historian Michael Fried, whose writings about the modes of absorption and theatricality in the self-consciousness of paintings also permeate the way I understand images. His work is a blend of sheer genius and imagination, as well as Freudian psychoanalysis and a unique use of phenomenology. I often have an intuition that the theoretical universes of Bloom and Fried, which seem on the surface so far apart, can be brought together in a most productive synthesis. It was not possible to develop this fully in the space of my dissertation, though I hope hints of such a secret dialogue between Bloom's theory of influence, and Fried's analysis of the forms of self-consciousness in painting, can be found in the following pages.



I would like to add here that an interest of mine in the writing of this extended essay has been the creation of new and unexpected connections. On this note, I would like to mention in particular the work of the rather neglected art historian George Kubler, especially his book '*The Shape of Time – Remarks on the History of Things*', which is surely one of the most profound, beautiful yet succinct books ever written. In this book, the idea of a history of art beyond the world of human intentions and biography can be glimpsed. Another source which has been important to me are the writings on imitation and invention by the largely forgotten 19<sup>th</sup> Century French sociologist Gabriel Tarde, whose writings were ahead of his time, and remain in some sense, ahead of ours. I have employed some of the intelligences gathered in these texts in ways I hope will be able to resonate productively with the methodologies of Bloom. Indeed, one of Bloom's most interesting theories is that a poet can be influenced by a poem he has never read, and I like to imagine the deployment of these disparate groups of writers as my own minor attempt to create a map of influence between theorists of influence.

Next, another author from whom I have drawn substantially is Gilles Deleuze, with regard to his writings on time, seriality, difference and repetition. However, more important than my actual citations of his writings is the actual influence his practices have on the general way in which I consider notions of history, and my relationship to concepts.

Concepts, Deleuze once said, are like tools with which to build. This spirit of constructivism is something I hope this dissertation embodies.

Then, there is the work of the Darwinian zoologist Richard Dawkins – in particular his concept of memes, which has been important to me for many years. Memetics remains a highly controversial field, but I have found it to be an immensely useful way by which I can extend the concept of the afterimage.

Last but not least, it should become apparent to the reader that this dissertation is as much an engagement with art as an analysis of the way in which art has been written about in Singapore. Hence, it is often necessary for me to cite certain passages of substantial length in order to show the tenor and tone infused in these writings. I have drawn upon a number of Singaporean writers, but the one local writer whose work I feel has a real conceptual impact upon the shaping of this dissertation is that of T.K. Sabapathy's. If I frequently pick quarrels with his writings, it is only because it represents by far the most cogent and complex oeuvre in the field of Singaporean art historiography. One should bother engaging only with the best.

In ending the prologue, I would like to make some brief remarks about another characteristic of this dissertation – the substantial length of

its footnotes. It is a conscious stylistic choice for me to charge the space of the footnotes with a burden heavier than what the normal dissertation is accustomed to. The space of the footnotes is the site where I have attempted to construct a series of connections between the various authors and concepts I have deployed in the main text. It is also the space where I sometimes make comments, compare and contrast these concepts or pursue a line of thought not directly related to the drift of the main text. As such, these footnotes are like little portals that the reader can choose to 'plug into'. They are little tunnels that have the possibilities of leading us somewhere else, places where we may experience different forms of intensities – like Alice, in Wonderland.

# **Chapter One: One Bali**

[Section One: Bali, 2001]

**“*Proof that objects reach the eye.* If you look at the sun or some other luminous body and then shut your eyes you will see it again inside your eye for a long time. This is evidence that images enter the eye.”<sup>3</sup>**

**Leonardo da Vinci**

**“An afterimage is a sensory experience, typically produced by staring at a bright light and looking away, that represents that something is present with a certain two-dimensional shape and color, something that is usually somewhat dim and fuzzy. Since there really is no such item, an afterimage is a misrepresentation: the subject of such an experience is undergoing a sort of illusion. The illusion is created by the abnormal state of the person’s sensory apparatus induced by the bright light.”<sup>4</sup>**

**Michael Tye**

**The Event of the Afterimage**

Blinded by the sun, you turn away and shut your eyes.

---

<sup>3</sup> Leonardo da Vinci, *The Literary Works of Leonardo da Vinci*, Volume 1, ed. Jean Paul Richter (London: Phaidon, 1970), p. 132.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Tye, *Ten Problems of Consciousness – A Representational Theory of the Phenomenal Mind* (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1995), p.108 – 109.

Yet behind the closed shutters of your lids, a ghostly afterimage of the solar disc continues to haunt your vision, as though it had been burnt onto the cones and rods of your eyes, branded into the mnemonic plates of your mind.

The experience of having such an afterimage is not the same as the experience of staring directly into the sun, rather, it is a kind of mental event which happens, after the fact.<sup>5</sup>

### **Pictures From Bali**

In an analogous way, a photograph, too, is an afterimage: an imprint of light seared onto film, an image that persists long after the moment of exposure – a trace of old light lingering on in the aftermath of the event, a ghostly presence of that which is now absent.

In 2001, four Singaporean artists – Agnes Yit, Lam Hoi Lit, Jeremy Hiah and Woon Tien Wei, set out on a two-week journey to Bali, Indonesia. Like any typical tourist visiting the tropical paradise, they too returned with snapshots, in which slices of Balinese light were ensnared.

---

<sup>5</sup> As Tye remarked, to “have an afterimage is to undergo a mental event of a particular type. Afterimages are what people sometimes experience, just as deaths are what people die and laughs are what people laugh.” Tye, *Ten Problems of Consciousness – A Representational Theory of the Phenomenal Mind*, p. 109.



Figure 2. Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon, *Bali Project: Masks (Bali)*, 2001.

In one such snapshot, *Bali Project: Masks (Bali)*, 2001, we see two of the artists, namely Hiah in the blue headdress and Lam standing on the right, disguised in the garb of the traditional Balinese female. It is obvious that they are posing, and that the sole reason for their being there is to be seen by a presence on the other side of the scene, on the outside of the picture – a presence behind a camera's viewfinder, whose place, we, by the very act of looking in, are assuming.



Figure 3. Detail from Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon, *Bali Project: Masks (Bali)*, 2001

And with the seeming inevitability of moths crashing into flames, we are drawn into the blue mask positioned in the center of this photograph.



Figure 4. Detail from Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon, *Bali Project: Masks (Bali)*, 2001

It is the center of attention upon which our gaze, as well as Hiah's and Lam's, converge. Yet this blue mask is also a black hole in which we 'lose' sight. In a photograph where almost everything seems oriented to face us – displayed in a way open to our perusal – the face of the mask is the one surface turned away from our eyes, a face visible only to Hiah and Lam. In this way, by the mere act of our looking into the picture, we also face into the hollow of the mask. The mask functions as a device that is there, "to be looked at... to catch in its trap, the observer, that is to say



us... we are literally called into the picture, and represented here as caught.”<sup>6</sup> In other words, the mask catches us on our face, and by staring at the mask, Hiah and Lam are in fact, staring down at us.



Figure 5. Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon, *Bali Project: Two by the Waterfall*, 2001

This split structure of looking and being looked at, is manifested once again in *Bali Project: Masks (Bali)* and *Bali Project: Two by the Waterfall*, 2001. The male figure on the right stares out to the right of the picture's frame, seemingly oblivious to our gaze. While on the left, his companion turns towards us and acknowledges us in a knowing smile.

Behind this game of seeing and being seen, there remains something undeniably incomplete, or deficient about both *Bali Project:*

---

<sup>6</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York : W.W. Norton, 1998), p. 88 – 89.

*Masks (Bali)* and *Bali Project: Two by the Waterfall*. We cannot apprehend the meaning of the half-hearted 'drag', for the image is in itself emptied of a narrative. Nothing in the picture explains the intentions of the disguise. What seems discernible, however, is the uncomfortable self-consciousness of the 'models', exemplified most clearly in *Bali Project: Masks (Bali)*. Note the conspicuous stiffness of the arm that Hiah throws awkwardly around Lam's shoulder, as though unaccustomed to the intimacy of this skin-to-skin contact. This is in turn reciprocated by the sense of unease evoked in Lam's rigid smile: his visage is stiff as a mask – doubling the one he holds in his hands. A mask that they both pretend, not very convincingly, to be absorbed in.

Filled with figures in poses seemingly without content, the photograph lacks interiority, as though it is there simply for us to look at. The figures in the photograph seem to stare back at us with hollow eyes, for the photograph is itself a mask, possessing no body of meaning of its own.

In a joint statement by the four artists, we are told that the photographs they had taken in Bali were "an 'appropriation to (sic) the great modernist works' of the great pioneers."<sup>7</sup> What this means is that

---

<sup>7</sup> The Artists Village, *TAV Newsletter* (undated), <http://tav.org.sg/>. (accessed 3 July 2005). This trip to Bali in 2001 was a project presented by The Artists Village (TAV) - a Singaporean arts collective that the four artists were associated with. By the term 'appropriation', Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon seem keen to consciously

*Bali Project: Masks (Bali)*, like *Bali Project: Two by the Waterfall*, is an afterimage in a double sense. It is not only a photographic film that requires exposure to light: its very emergence is itself subjected to prior exposure to another image – a source-image. These photographs are membranes porous on both sides, imprinted through a process of ‘double-exposure’. On one side is the physical process of exposure, where a photographic slate – a surface open to the ‘outside’ – awaits the imprint of light. On the other side is the psychological process of exposure, where the mnemonic slate of the photograph’s makers – a depth punctured on the ‘inside’ – repeats a set of prior images embedded within their minds.

In other words, Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon’s photographs are also repetitions of other images. As such, they can only be grasped in the light of what they repeat. They do have a body of meaning. That body is merely somebody else’s, and it emanates from almost 50 years ago: it is old light.

---

align this project to strands of art practices that have dominated critical art discourses from the 1980s to the early 1990s. One of the key critics in defining the usage of this term was Craig Owens, for whom appropriation is understood as a form of allegory. For Owens, “allegorical imagery is appropriated imagery.” Thus, he continued: “The allegorist does not invent images but confiscates them. He lays claim to the culturally significant, and poses as its interpreter. And in his hands the image becomes something other (*allos* = other + *agoreuei* = to speak). He does not restore an original meaning that may have been lost or obscured: allegory is not hermeneutics. Rather he adds another meaning to the image. If he adds, however, he does so only to replace: the allegorical meaning supplants an antecedent one; it is a supplement.” Craig Owens, ‘The Allegorical Impulse’ in *Beyond Recognition – Representation, Power, and Culture*, ed. Scott Bryson, Barbara Kruger, Lynne Tillman, and Jane Weinstock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), p. 54.

## Pictures From Bali, Again

By the “great pioneers”, the four artists – Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon – were referring to another four artists, namely Chen Chong Swee, Chen Wen Hsi, Cheong Soo Pieng and Liu Kang. The latter four, too, had traveled to Bali – in 1952.



**Figure 6. With the Le Mayeurs, 1952 (from left: Liu Kang, Cheong Soo Pieng, an unidentified man, Ni Pollok, Jean Le Mayeur, Chen Wen Hsi, Chen Chong Swee)**

In 1953, the four ‘pioneers’ held a joint exhibition, *Pictures from Bali*, which has since been regarded as the first coherent expression of a distinctly ‘local’ style of painting – the ‘Nanyang Style’.<sup>8</sup> A Chinese term, ‘Nanyang’, when translated, literally means the ‘South Seas’. It is used by mainland Chinese to refer to their “neighboring countries such as Vietnam,

---

<sup>8</sup> Throughout this text, I will refer to Chen Chong Swee, Chen Wen Hsi, Cheong Soo Pieng and Liu Kang as the ‘pioneers’. This term is suspended within quote marks, both to retain the status that is commonly attributed to them, while signaling my intention to put the term to questioning.

Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia.”<sup>9</sup> Moreover, ‘Nanyang’ is a recognized term only among the Chinese population of Singapore and Malaysia. It does not exist in the vocabulary of the Malays or Indians. Beginning as a broad geographical reference, the term has slowly been narrowed to refer to Malaya (by which I refer to both Singapore and Malaysia). At the same time, the term ‘Nanyang’ was also expanded in its field of usage, becoming a label for the cultural aspirations of the Chinese Malayan literary circles to produce work that would be rooted in their new home.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> Tan Tee Chie, ‘The Definition of Nanyang Style’ in *Nanyang-ism 2003*, ed. Yau Tian Yau, (Singapore: The Society of Chinese Artists, 2003), p. 14.

<sup>10</sup> According to Wong Yoon Wah, when “a greater sense of belonging had developed in the mid 1930s, writers began to define the concept of Nanyang as to mean the Malay Peninsula and Singapore only.” Wong Yoon Wah, *Post-colonial Chinese literatures in Singapore and Malaysia* (Singapore: Global Publishing, 2002), p. 13.

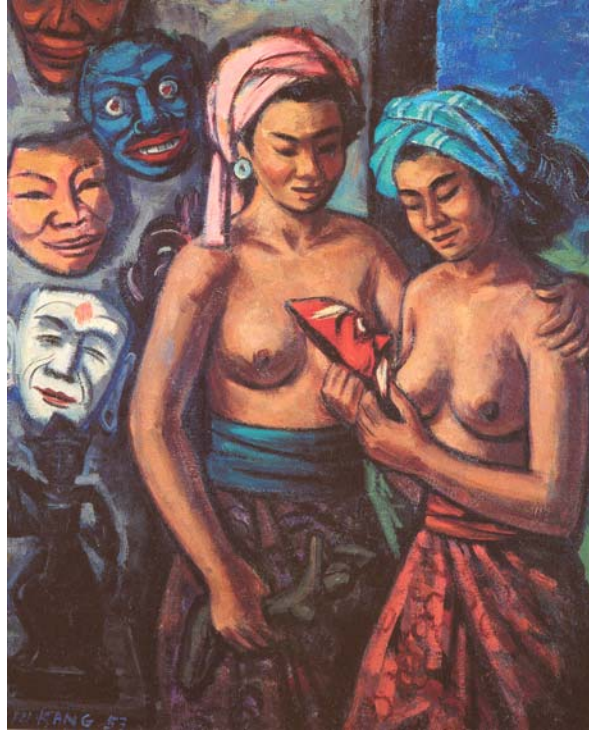


Figure 7. Liu Kang, *Mask (Bali)*, 1953

The emergence of the ‘Nanyang Style’ in the practice of visual arts is often described in art historical accounts as having crystallized in the aftermath of the 1952 Bali sojourn. In fact, today, this moment has become synonymous with the founding moment of modern art in Singapore. According to T.K. Sabapathy, the ‘pioneers’ were “Singapore’s first modern artists”.<sup>11</sup> They embodied the artistic need to express “the

---

<sup>11</sup> T.K. Sabapathy, ‘Scroll met Easel’ in *Straits Times Annual ’82* (Singapore: Times Printers, 1982), p. 114. There exists a proliferation of texts from which we can cite as examples of this privileging of the four ‘pioneers’ as originators of modern art in Singapore. For example, according to Marco Hsu, after “the war, there seemed to be a common strive in the Malayan art scene towards a true understanding of Nanyang landscapes and objects and to create characteristically local styles. This awakening can perhaps be seen as a prelude to the establishment of our independent culture. Hence, Bali, an island which best exemplifies the beauty of Nanyang, became the much sought-after travel destination for Malayan painters after the war. The artists who have achieved most from this exercise are Liu Kang, Chen Chong Swee, Cheong Soo Pieng

reality of the Southern Seas...[and the] localness of the place we all live in...They are the Nanyang Artists and their creation, the Nanyang Style...a vital, vibrant legacy to local art.”<sup>12</sup>

And it is this founding moment – like delayed rays of distant stars, which illuminates and gives meaning to Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon’s own pilgrimage to Bali in 2001, the purpose of which was to research on their “cultural predecessors and the local modern art history’s current influence on the contemporary art scene here in Singapore”.<sup>13</sup>

### **The Afterimage and the Source-image**

Here, I would like to briefly discuss the phenomenon of the afterimage, a topic that has lingered on in ‘Western’ philosophical constructions of vision – traditionally regarded as the noblest of the

---

and Chen Wen Hsi. They visited Bali together in 1952, traveling and painting for two months there. When they returned to Singapore, they held a joint exhibition of these Bali paintings at the British Council at Stamford Road. This can be said to be an exhibition that directed the focus of the art community towards local themes, and one which has brought the four artists to new realms in their art. As such it was truly a momentous event in the Malayan art scene.” Marco Hsü, *A Brief History of Malayan Art*, trans. Lai Chee Kien (Singapore: Millennium Books, 1999) p. 72-73.

<sup>12</sup> Sabapathy, ‘Scroll met Easel’, p. 114.

<sup>13</sup> The Artists Village, *TAV Newsletter* (undated), <http://tav.org.sg/>. (accessed 3 July 2005)

senses.<sup>14</sup> As Hans Jonas remarked, Greek orthodox philosophy which tends to “elevate static Being over dynamic Becoming, fixed essences over ephemeral appearances”,<sup>15</sup> privileges sight because it was “preeminently the sense of simultaneity, capable of surveying a wide visual field at one moment.”<sup>16</sup> In other words, sight was the noblest of the senses because it was deemed to be “intrinsically less temporal than other senses such as hearing or touch”.<sup>17</sup>

It is in such a context that the phenomenon of the afterimage proved to be a troubling presence within orthodox Western philosophy. The afterimage, which is the presence of sensation in the absence of an immediate stimuli, constituted a “theoretical and empirical demonstration of autonomous vision, of an optical experience that was produced by and within the subject”.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> A comprehensive survey of the ‘visual bias’ of ‘Western’ philosophy is far beyond the framework of this dissertation. For a functional introduction, and a valuable reference for other more in-depth discussions, please refer to Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes – The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

<sup>15</sup> Hans Jonas, ‘The Nobility of Sight: A Study in the Phenomenology of the Senses’ in *The Phenomenology of Life: Towards a Philosophical Biology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 2001) p. 145.

<sup>16</sup> Jonas, ‘The Nobility of Sight: A Study in the Phenomenology of the Senses’, p.145.

<sup>17</sup> Jonas, ‘The Nobility of Sight: A Study in the Phenomenology of the Senses’, p.145.

<sup>18</sup> Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer* (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1992) p. 98. [italics mine]. This text, especially the third chapter ‘Subjective



In other words, the afterimage which exists in a relationship of delay to its reference is a kind of ‘ephemeral appearance’. As a vision that exists in a temporal realm, it is open to the instabilities inherent in the dynamic becoming of time. Just as disturbingly, it seems to belong, literally, to the eye of the beholder. Therefore it is subject to all the vagaries, contingencies and imperfections of the subject/ beholder. More importantly, the afterimage is in itself a phenomenon that takes place beyond the regime of this subject’s conscious mastery. This aspect of the afterimage was precisely what interested Johann Wolfgang von Goethe when he described the following: “Let the observer look steadfastly on a small colored object and let it be taken away after a time while his eyes remain unmoved; the spectrum of another color will then be visible on the white plane...*it rises from an image which now belongs to the eye.*”<sup>19</sup>

If we take the term afterimage to refer to the persistence of sensation in the absence of stimuli, then I would like to propose that the stimuli itself be referred to as the source-image. The word ‘source’ carries with it the connotations of priority, presence and plenitude, and in the realm of art historical discourses, it has often been employed in just such a sense.

---

Vision and the Separation of the Senses’ is a succinct summary of the ‘stakes’ involved in the study of afterimages.

<sup>19</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Theory of Colors*, trans. Charles Eastlake, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1970), p. 17. [*italics mine*].

However, it is crucial to suspend this very sense of plenitude attributed to the source. For a source-image is at its own moment of emergence, an afterimage of another 'source'. In art-historical discourses, the habitual ossification of precursive source as an essence untouched by time parallels our blindness to the fact that vision is itself never immediate.

Drowned as we are by the light of the unrelenting sun, it is easy to forget that this light is always a little late, that it takes approximately eight minutes for light to traverse the solar sphere to the watery globe of the earth, to the spheres of our eyes. We live without regard for the infinitesimal delay of light's speed, just as we sometimes forget the history of things in the seeming fullness of their presence before us.

## [Section Two: Bali, 1952]

**“Of arts and stars. Knowing the past is as astonishing a performance as knowing the stars. Astronomers look only at old light. There is no other light for them to look at. This old light of dead or distant stars was emitted long ago and it reaches us only in the present. Many historical events, like astronomical bodies, also occur long before they appear.... However fragmentary its condition, any work of art is actually a portion of arrested happening, or an emanation of past time. It is a graph of an activity now stilled, but a graph made visible like an astronomical body, by a light that originated with the activity. When an important work of art has utterly disappeared by demolition and dispersal, we can still detect its perturbations upon other bodies in the field of influence”<sup>20</sup>**

**George Kubler**

### **Liu Kang, the ‘Pioneer’**

Of the four ‘pioneers’, only the paintings of Liu Kang have served as material for ‘Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon’s ‘appropriation’ of the ‘Bali paintings’. When questioned about the choice, Lam replied: “I think it was not a conscious thought... he was very much promoted officially then as a ‘living master’ and pioneer of modern art in Singapore.” He added that of

---

<sup>20</sup> George Kubler, *The Shape of Time – Remarks on the History of Things* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1962) p. 19.

the four 'pioneers', Liu's works were the most "easily accessible", and "visible".<sup>21</sup>



**Figure 8. At 16 Years Old (Caption translated from Chinese)**

Liu Kang was born in Fujian, China, in 1911. His family moved to the 'Nanyang' in 1917 and lived in Muar, Malaysia. In 1926, Liu went back to China to study at the Sing Hwa Arts Academy in Shanghai. Graduating in 1928, Liu left for Paris, where he was to spend six years, before returning to Shanghai to lecture in Western Art at the Shanghai College of Fine Arts in China. He landed the position through the invitation of his former mentor, the famous Chinese modern painter Liu Haisu. After his teaching stint there, the younger Liu returned to Malaysia in 1937, before finally moving to Singapore in 1942.

---

<sup>21</sup> Lam Hoi Lit, in an email interview conducted by the author on 17<sup>th</sup> February 2005. It should be noted that by 2001, Liu Kang was the only living 'pioneer' painter, and was thus subject to the most intense efforts at 'canonisation' by the Singaporean State.

When Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon undertook their trip to Bali in 2001, Liu was the only living artist amongst the four 'pioneers'. Liu's work was also deemed the most accessible and visible, no doubt greatly aided by the numerous published catalogues and monographs dedicated to him which incessantly, and regularly flooded the Singaporean art scene with reproductions of his paintings.

### **Two Way Street**

As we compare Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon's *Bali Project: Two by the Waterfall* and Liu's earlier *Two By the Waterfall*, 1996, what we observe at once is the play of repetition, and the differences between the source-image and its afterimage.



Figure 9. Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon, *Bali Project: Two by the Waterfall*, 2001



**Figure 10. Liu Kang, *Two By the Waterfall*, 1996**

First and foremost, there is the obvious replacement of the female subjects in Liu's *Two By the Waterfall*, with Lam and Hiah in the later snapshot. This bad 'drag' forms part and parcel of the failure of disguise which is explicit in the snapshot. One sees it in the bad make-up, cheap costumes and the disjunctive introduction of bottled mineral water into what should be an idyllic image of tropical life.

This failure of adequate representation pervading the 'bad copy' has the strange effect of tainting our relationship to the original painting. Once we have laid eyes on the afterimage, the conditions by which we perceive the source-image seem irrevocably altered. For instance, the way the waterfall is captured in the photograph leads us to cast doubts about the veracity of Liu's representation of the scene: Liu's hand seemed to have tamed its outpour – streamlined it – just as he had softened the

harshness of the rocks with vegetation. Similarly, the apparent awkwardness and absurdity of Lam and Hiah's posture heightens our perception of the unnatural poses of their female counterparts in the painting. These anomalies in Liu's painting are imperceptible, if it is viewed on its own, as though dissolved by the aqueous work of the oil paint. But, when seen through the lenses of Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon's afterimage, they are amplified, and magnified.

Hence the temporal delay between source-image and afterimage must be understood as a kind of two-way process. Just as the afterimage is seen to be an emanation of the source-image, it is crucial to recognize that the source-image is itself irrevocably transformed by the afterimage. Neither source nor afterimage can emerge from this relationship unchanged, and each is defined only in relation to the other. In a passage worth quoting at length, Norman Bryson explains: "Recognition is this activity of referral to the sets of past cognition, and when it comes to the uniqueness of the present image, this is perceived not in the presence and plenitude of the image the viewer sees before him now, but in the distance of the image from those whose recollection it activates. The unfolding of recognition is not so much a discovery of identity as of difference between present and past configurations."<sup>22</sup> In other words, the identity of the image "is the gap between 'itself' and the repertoire of images in play;

---

<sup>22</sup> Norman Bryson, *Tradition and Desire – From David to Delacroix* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 24.

though we now must hesitate in assigning clear outlines to the image 'itself', since its 'self' is not something it possesses in any absolute way".<sup>23</sup>

### **Repetition and Farce**

In 1851, Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte attempted a coup and declared himself as Emperor a year later, thus setting himself up as a replication of his great uncle, the 'real' Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte. About this event, Marx famously wrote: "Hegel observes somewhere that all the great events and characters of world history occur twice, so to speak. He forgot to add: the first time as high tragedy, the second time as low farce."<sup>24</sup>

And if the 'pioneer' artists' journey to Bali in 1952 is usually discussed by commentators with the gravity due to a moment of genesis, the four younger artists' repetition in 2001 is at best, a mere 'research' trip, and at worst, a farce. This 'fall' in importance, this dilution of ambition

---

<sup>23</sup> Bryson, *Tradition and Desire – From David to Delacroix*, p. 24. Such a blurring of outlines is also what occurs in the phenomenon of afterimages. As Crary noted, research on afterimages "had suggested that some form of blending or fusion occurred when sensations were perceived in quick successions, and thus the duration involved in seeing allowed its modification and control." Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, p. 104 – 105. This 'blending or fusion' in the afterimage corresponds to the process of seepage of meanings between the source and afterimage that I have been describing.

<sup>24</sup> Karl Marx, 'The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte' in *Marx's Eighteenth Brumaire: (Post)Modern Interpretations*, ed. Mark Cowling and James Martin (London: Pluto Press, 2002), p. 19.



between the first and the subsequent journeys finds its pictorial expression in the deflated chests of *Bali Project: Masks (Bali)*, when set in relief against the confidently swelling breasts of its source, Liu's *Masks (Bali)*. This entropic flattening is in turn reiterated by the lackadaisical flatness of the photograph itself, when placed in contrast against the worked surface of the 'original' oil painting. Even the details in the background of the original – the troupe of masks hung on the wall on the left, and the fragment of landscape on the right (opening the picture up to a faint suggestion of depth) – are shoddily replaced by an airless slab of a decorated door in the 2001 copy.

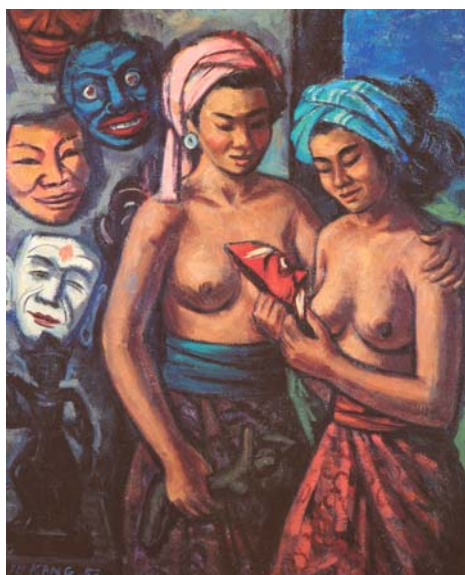


Figure 11. Liu Kang, *Masks (Bali)*, 1953



Figure 12. Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon, *Bali Project: Masks (Bali)*, 2001.

Yet, by virtue of its incompleteness, or if you like, 'incompetence', the copy – by way of distorted reflection – forces us to see the original in a different light. According to T.S. Eliot, "what happens when a new work of

art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works that preceded it".<sup>25</sup> Thus, when we examine Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon's version of *Masks (Bali)* in relation to Liu's source, it is not only the farce of the afterimage which becomes obvious. Rather more intriguingly, the farcical dimension inherent within the source-image is also raised to the surface.

This contagion of the source-image via the afterimage is embodied most clearly by the displacement of the blue mask across the two images. Located at the center of the snapshot, it is 'dislocated' onto the background wall in the painting, and placed to the left of the two female figures.

---

<sup>25</sup> T.S. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' in *Selected Essays* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1968), pp. 15. I would like to add that Eliot considered this power of an artwork to transform its precursor was solely the attribute of the new 'masterpiece'. For him "existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them." Therefore, he added: "The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the *whole* existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new." However in Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon's snapshots, what seems suspended along with their refusal of mastery, is also any ambition towards the production of the 'masterpiece'.



**Figure 13. Details from *Bali Project: Masks (Bali)*, 2001**

With its face now turned towards us, we are struck by its smile – a grotesque, farcical smile with lips painted thick in red. Placed beyond the two women’s field of vision, it no longer serves – as it did in the photograph – to ensnare our gaze. Instead, it now faces off with us: it confronts us with a smile bordering upon a leer, as though gloating at the pathetic nature of our merely ocular and castrated relationship to these two voluptuous women whom we see but cannot touch. The gloat is Liu’s, for he alone was there in Bali, before the women; he alone was there in

flesh and blood. It seems as though the very exuberance that he felt in the presence of the women had somehow lingered on.<sup>26</sup>

### **Pictures from Sabah**

Once alerted to the dimension of farce within Liu's painting, one begins to detect it almost everywhere. Nowhere is it more apparent than in a series of snapshots gleaned from his journey to Sabah, probably taken in 1969. In these snapshots, Liu carries out a performance of sorts, uncannily anticipating Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon's series of 'performative' snapshots in 2001.

---

<sup>26</sup> This strange persistence of Liu's exuberance brings to mind the phenomenon of the Cheshire Cat that Lewis Carroll had described. The Cheshire Cat was "grinning from ear to ear" and this grin persisted even when the cat itself had disappeared. Here I would like to cite Carroll's fabulous passage:

" 'All right,' said the Cat; and this time it vanished quite slowly, beginning with the end of the tail, and ending with the grin, which remained some time after the rest of it was gone.

'Well! I've often seen a cat without a grin,' thought Alice; 'but a grin without a cat! It's the most curious thing I ever saw in all my life!' " *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland & Through the Looking Glass and What She Found There*, p. 53 - 58.

Perhaps such "a grin without a cat" is an afterimage.



**Figure 14. On the Exterior of the 'Long House' of Sabah in 1969  
(original caption, translated from Chinese)**

Accompanied by a page heading that reads: “Like my paintings, my life has been very colorful (sic) There were many enriching expedition (sic)”,<sup>27</sup> these photographs show a smiling Liu repeatedly positioned either at the periphery of the local women’s field of vision, or beyond – similar to the position of the blue mask in *Masks (Bali)*. He seemed to be presenting the rows of bare breasts to the camera – and thus to the imagined beholder who would be looking at these photographs. His sense of elation is palpable: this unbridled pleasure climaxes in the triumphantly raised hat

---

<sup>27</sup> Liu Kang, *World of Liu Kang* (Singapore: National Arts Council and the National Museum, 1993), p. 12.

of the photograph captioned '*On the Exterior of the 'Long House' of Sabah, 1969.*



**Figure 15. My Girl Friend at the 'Long House' (original caption, translated from Chinese)**

In these snapshots, his persistent bodily contact with the women once again arouses the envy of our bodiless gaze. In the photograph captioned '*My Girl Friend at the 'Long House'*' (1969?), he wraps one arm around the shoulder of his bare-breasted 'girl friend' while the other holds up a baby – a device suggesting a prior physical possession of the woman, whilst also eliciting an unconscious fantasy of oral contact with the woman's breast. The baby's proper place, as the image compels us to imagine, is to suckle at the mother's breast.



This in turn brings us back to the red mask that occupies the center of the painting, *Masks (Bali)*. This mask – with its left cheek nestled on the breast of one woman and its (open?) mouth at the breast of the other – thus functions as a receptacle for sexual and tactile projection that is similar to the role of the baby in ‘*My Girl Friend at the ‘Long House*’.



Figure 16. Detail from Liu Kang, *Masks (Bali)*, 1953



Figure 17. Detail from Liu Kang, *Masks (Bali)*, 1953

The passionate redness of the mask suggests a face flushed with desire, a desire seemingly reciprocated by the women's blushes. The blood rushes – a fantasy of physical stimulation.



Figure 18. Detail from Liu Kang, *Masks (Bali)*, 1953



Figure 19. Detail from Liu Kang, *Masks (Bali)*, 1953

From what we can see of its profile, the red mask seems cast from the same mould as the blue one, for not only do they seem to share a similar 'face', they are also distinguished from the rest of the troupe as being the only ones with open eyes. Together then, they constitute the double faces of Liu. As the red one plunges inwards, literally into the bosoms of the women, the blue one is turned outwards and faces off with us. With thick red lips, it smiles down at us – we, who are exiled from the scene of the action.



## Downcast Eyes and Ocular Breasts

The bulging roundness of the blue mask's eyes and the reddish color of its (blood-rushed?) pupils, are in turn visually doubled by the pair of unconcealed breasts – made up of the right breast of one woman, and the left breast of the other. Their breasts, in their alert pertness and unabashed frontality, therefore come together to form a pair of eyes, which in turn stares back at us. These breasts do not just resemble eyes but they also have the power to behold and bedevil us. Spellbound for a moment by the abundance of available flesh in the painting, we are also momentarily frozen on the spot by the returning gaze of those ripe, bulbous breasts.

These are breasts that seem deliberately oriented to the full frontality of the picture plane, pushed into our faces by the painter for the purpose of captivating, and capturing us. The two women's presence in the painting constitutes a kind of face, before which the beholder is suspended, as though caught by Medusa's gaze. This is a face that is produced by the bodies' 'facing off' with the spectator – a face that has the power to command our attention.<sup>28</sup> It is the painter's preemptory

---

<sup>28</sup> In the words of Deleuze and Guattari, such a 'face' is "produced only when the head ceases to be a part of the body, when it ceases to be coded by the body, when it ceases to have a multidimensional, polyvocal corporeal code, when the body, head included has been decoded and has to be overcoded by something we shall call the Face." Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*

consciousness of our being before his painting – it is his attempt to strike out at us, to hold and behold us, even before we lay eyes upon his painting. Thus the painting sees us before we even lay eyes on it, just as laws regulate our existence before we are born. These ‘ocular breasts’ function as “metaphors of vision’s rhythmic exchange between inside and outside”:<sup>29</sup> they structure a relationship that defines the situation of the image-maker (on the inside) and that of the viewing subject (on the outside). Hence, the ‘ocular breasts’ serve a functional equivalent to the blue mask. They are a manifestation of Liu’s attempt to capture the beholder’s attention, to put the latter in his place: they represent Liu’s anterior anticipation of the beholder.

Therefore the seeming oblivion of the two women to their being looked at is nothing but a guise, their seeming absorption in the red mask is but an act of dissimulation. For their subdued, downcast gaze is a stratagem to draw in our hungry eyes, allowing us to stare in anonymity without the embarrassment of their returning gaze, as one does in peepshows, hidden behind walls while watching the striptease – a

---

– *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 170 – 171.

<sup>29</sup> Ronald Bogue, *Deleuze on Music, Painting and the Arts* ( New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 100. Ocular breasts do in fact have a long and distinguished tradition in the history of art. As Bogue comments: “[Jean] Paris also links the gaze to breath, the common figure of ocular breasts (Bosch, Bouts, Huys, Brueghel, Redon, Picasso, and Dali, among others) indicating that the eye absorbs the landscape in the same manner that the lungs take in the air.” Bogue, *Deleuze on Music, Painting and the Arts*, p. 97.

striptease performed by girls fully aware of being watched. And at the same time, we are everywhere subject to surveillance, we are everywhere always already anticipated – seen before we are seen, as the sneer of the blue mask never ceases to remind us.

This game of seeing and being seen is almost repeated in another of Liu's 'Bali' paintings, titled *Siesta in Bali*, 1957. In the picture, the woman's gaze is again averted from any potential confrontation with ours, although here her passivity is pushed to the extreme point of having her consciousness completely extinguished – in a 'siesta'.



**Figure 20. Liu Kang, *Siesta in Bali*, 1957**

At the same time, her entire body is orientated to face us frontally once again. Half concealed by the vertical bars of the rattan chair, we are

made to play a game of peek-a-boo with those ocular breasts. Liu's intentionality in the construction of this 'faciality' emerges as we uncover the 'sources' of *Siesta in Bali* – two sketches of the same title made five years earlier in 1952. Comparing the sketches to the finished painting, Chia Wai Hon noted that “modifications” had been made to the rattan chair, describing the changes as a “big improvement”.

He added that: “In the sketch, the chair is obtrusive as the tight weave of its back rest hides most of the woman's upper torso. In the finished painting, the back rest is a frame of evenly spaced vertical strips that allow a seen (sic – us to see) through to the woman's well-endowed figure.”<sup>30</sup>

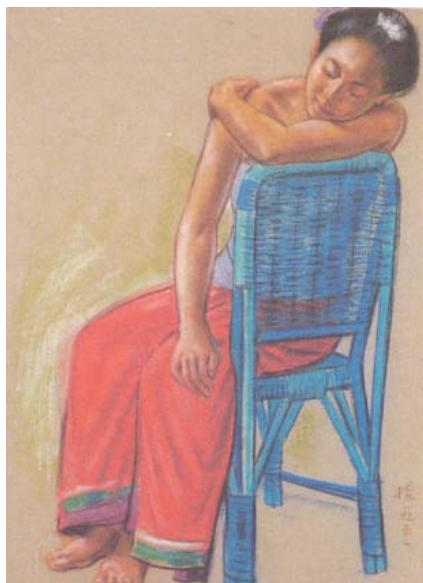


Figure 21. Liu Kang, *Siesta in Bali*(Sketch 1), 1952

---

<sup>30</sup> Chia Wai Hon, 'Liu Kang...There is no End to Drawing' in *Liu Kang: Drawn from Life* (Singapore : Singapore Art Museum, 2002), p.20.



Figure 22. Liu Kang, *Siesta in Bali (Sketch 2)*, 1952

Indeed, the female subject in *Siesta in Bali (Sketch 1)*, was initially sketched fully dressed. The eventual stripping of the opaque rattan weave from the back of the chair was therefore accompanied by Liu's stripping the model of her lavender top. To put it plainly – or if you like, crudely – Liu was simply bent on exposing the woman's breasts to the beholder. More importantly, the 'ideality', or rather, the 'irreality' of the breasts – their firmness, symmetry and pertness – is as much a product of his imagination as the artificial insemination of the woman into the backdrop of the courtyard in the final painting. This courtyard is itself interpolated from another sketch, *Chair in the Backyard*.<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> If we are to view the sketches, *Siesta in Bali (Sketch 1)*, *Chair in the Backyard*, followed by *Siesta in Bali (Sketch 2)* in this order, what seems obvious to me is the process of how Liu gradually transferred the woman from an interior space onto the outdoors. Of course, all three sketches are dated 1952, and my establishment of this sequential order is hypothetical. Yet at the same time, I



Figure 23. Liu Kang, *Chair in the backyard*, 1952

### Substitutions and Penetrations

Chia had observed from the series of sketches leading up to *Siesta in Bali* that the “bunch of flowers” inserted in the model’s right hand was a late addition into the painting. It is perhaps more accurate, however, to describe the flowers not so much as a “bunch” but rather a single stalk from which four flowers bloom.

---

would like to suggest that the relatively finished and detailed state of the colored sketch *Siesta in Bali (Sketch 1)* and *Chair in the Backyard* suggest that both of these sketches were completed not only with greater care, but were also the primary reference for the figure and the background that eventually made up the painting *Siesta in Bali*. *Siesta in Bali (Sketch 2)* was in turn a ‘sketchier’ attempt to reconfigure the two elements into a single image – an experiment to bring the ‘nude’ outdoors. Looking at *Siesta in Bali (Sketch 2)*, what strikes us in the rough sketch is the conspicuous blankness of the region around the chair’s backing and the breasts. It seems as though Liu was at this stage undecided about whether to conceal or expose the subject’s breasts.



Figure 24. Liu Kang, Detail from *Siesta in Bali*, 1957

Chia read the flowers as a symbol of the “feminine touch”: however, such a reading can also be reversed so that the flowers emerging from the single stalk structure can be understood as receptacles for a phallic projection, embodying an inward thrust into the woman.<sup>32</sup> This reading of the flower as a vehicle for some form of psychic projection is underscored by *Siesta in Bali* (*Sketch 3*). Here the flower is literally (or shall we say, surrealistically) transformed into a head, and the Chinese words ‘Ni Hao Ma?’ (How are you?) are scribbled beside it. The flower-head has a life of its own. It is the embodiment of an external consciousness that seems to be gleefully greeting the passive woman.

---

<sup>32</sup> The term ‘phallic’ is employed psychoanalytically. “In psycho-analysis, the use of this term underlines the symbolic function taken on by the penis in the intra- and inter-subjective dialectic, the term ‘penis’ itself tending to be reserved for the organ in its anatomical reality.” J. Laplanche and J.B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (London: The Hogarth Press, 1973), p. 312. The process of ‘substitution’ is also Freudian in sense. In the Freudian theoretical universe, substitute-formation designates “symptoms – or equivalent formations such as parapraxes, jokes, etc. – in so far as they stand for unconscious contents... This substitution is to be understood in two senses: economically, the symptom furnishes the unconscious wish with replacement satisfaction; symbolically, one content of the unconscious is supplanted by another according to certain chains of association.” Laplanche and Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*. 434.



**Figure 25. Siesta in Bali (Sketch 3), 1952**



**Figure 26. Siesta in Bali (Sketch 4), 1952**

The somewhat uncanny quality of the flower-head is matched by the strangeness of the flowers' eventual insertion into the hand of the



sleeping woman in *Siesta in Bali*. The rendering of her hand does not evoke a sense of the muscular pressure necessary for her to hold on to the flower. Rather it floats there of its own accord. Perhaps for Liu, however, there could have been no solution. For the very notion of a slumbering woman holding onto a flower in this position is contradictory. The woman, who is sleeping, or at rest, has her consciousness extinguished, while the force required to hold onto the flower must be consciously exerted – exerted by another party from the outside.



**Figure 27. Detail from *Siesta in Bali*, 1952**

This insertion of the flower disrupts the 'reality effect' of the entire picture, causing us to question the general plausibility of the scene.<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>33</sup> Although I use the term 'reality effect' in a way that I think is self-sufficient, it is probably useful for me to refer here to Roland Barthes, who uses the term in his description of how realism functioned in literature to evoke a sense of "having been there". In Barthes' words: "Our entire civilization has a taste for the reality effect, attested to by the development of specific genres such as the realistic novel, the private diary, documentary literature, the news item, the historical museum, the exhibition of ancient objects, and above all, the massive development of photography, whose sole pertinent feature (in relation to drawing)

Hence, even the bend of her right arm (the same arm holding the flower), now looks to be in an unnatural state of exertion, in manifest contradiction for someone in a state of 'siesta'.



Figure 28. Detail from Liu Kang, *Masks (Bali)*, 1953

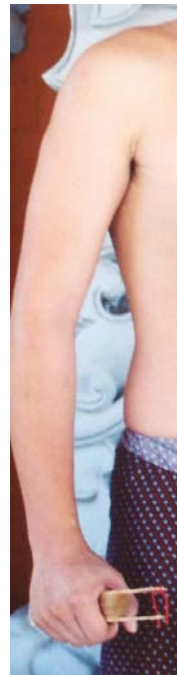


Figure 29. Detail from *Bali Project: Masks (Bali)*, 2001

This awkward tension of the right arm gripping a phallic substitute is present also in *Masks (Bali)*. Here the phallic substitute is a small primitive sculpture of a female – with the rotund head a formal multiplication of its bulging breasts and full buttocks. Thus this small sculpture functions almost as a miniature amplification of the full curves that characterize the two female figures of Liu's painting. The hands of the sculpture are tucked

---

is precisely to signify that the event represented has really taken place.” Roland Barthes, 'The Discourse of History' in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986), p. 139.

behind its head, at once a posture of 'surrender', as well as a strategic way to 'push out' its bust. Needless to say, the brown rod-like torso and the woman's grip of this rod-like sculpture creates a highly sexualized, almost pornographic image. In Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon's snapshot, Hiah too repeats the stiff and uneasy 'hang' of the arm, although he has replaced the phallic sculpture with what looks to be a fan.

The phallic substitutes of the sculpture in *Masks (Bali)* and the flower in *Siesta in Bali* disrupt the reality of these images by the sheer sense of violence they embody. They seem to be inserted by a force from the 'outside' of the painting's fabric of reality – manifestations of the painter's desire, a desire rammed into the image from without.<sup>34</sup>

### **The Disjunctions of the Body**

In *Siesta*, the subjection of the sleeping woman to an external force can once again be discerned in the awkward way she grips her right shoulder. This reinforces the artifice of her pretended sleep, her false 'siesta'. There can be no rest for a model to keep this pose.

---

<sup>34</sup> At this point, I would like to add that such a desire could be regarded as either conscious or unconscious. In any case, conscious intentionality, in the context of this essay, is constantly bracketed as in a Freudian framework, by which the conscious and the unconscious are in a relationship of constant resonance and 'seepage'. This point will be gradually developed and fleshed out in the remaining parts of this chapter.



Figure 30. Detail from *Siesta in Bali*, 1952

The disjunctive elements – the unreal breasts, the false ‘siesta’, the awkward arms – are in turn forcibly sutured together and worked over in the painting. Upon this process of working over is staked the unity of the painting, a sense of unity directly correlating to the painting’s ability to evoke a powerful cliché – the idealised image of Balinese lifestyle that is pre-modern, idyllic and unself-conscious. This is a cliché that draws its power from the withdrawal of agency from the painted women. They are put to sleep, their breasts are bared and they do not return our gaze. In the seductions that they offer, we are also momentarily blinded from the contradictions and disjunctions inherent within the construction of the paintings.<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> These ocular breasts function as a gaze before which the beholder is spellbound, and hence blinded to the inherent contradictions and tensions within the painting. This constitutes what Felix Guattari calls the faciality of the painting. For him, “faciality always exists to serve a signifying formula; it is the means whereby the signifier takes control, the way it organizes a certain mode of individuated subjectivation and the collective madness of a machine without content.” Félix Guattari, *Molecular Revolution* (untranslated), quoted from Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, p. 92.

Yet this sense of disjunctive unnaturalness is clearly foregrounded for us by the evident discomfort of the models in Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon's snapshots of *Bali Project: Masks (Bali)* and *Bali Project: Two by the Waterfall*. It seems as though these snapshots bring to the surface the subterranean unease that has been worked over in the painting. This is due on the one hand, to the absence of the blinding ocular breasts of Liu's subjects. On the other hand, it has to do with the very medium of photography. A photograph is after all, literally an emanation of the referent. As Roland Barthes puts it: "From a real body, which was there, proceeds radiations which will touch me, who am here...The photograph of the missing being...will touch me like the delayed rays of a star. A sort of umbilical cord links the body of the photographed thing to my gaze."<sup>36</sup> In other words, the indexical mode of photographic capture is capable of retaining the discomfort of the models that the activity of painting may conceal.

---

<sup>36</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), p. 80-81. Barthes' description of the 'indexical' in relation to photography resonates with the conceptual framework of the afterimage. For Barthes, photography is a chemical 'fixing' of an actual event that has past. As Barthes comments: "The *noème* 'That-has-been' was possible only on the day when a scientific circumstance (the discovery that silver halogens were sensitive to light) made it possible to recover and print directly the luminous rays emitted by a variously lighted object" Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, p. 80. Therefore, the photograph, for Barthes, carries with it a melancholic disjunction of time. As Barthes writes: "By giving me the absolute past of the pose (aorist), the photograph tells me death in the future. . . . I shudder . . . over a catastrophe which has already occurred." *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, p. 96. The "catastrophe which has already occurred" is one way we can describe the melancholic condition of artistic belated-ness that seems to emanate from beneath the farcical surface of Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon's 2001 snapshots.



Figure 31. Detail from *Masks (Bali)*, 1953

This brings us back to Liu's *Masks (Bali)*. Here, the awkwardness of Liu's painted limbs recurs in the strangely disembodied hand gripping the shoulder of the woman in the blue headdress. The hand does not seem attached to her companion. It has a life of its own.



Figure 32. Detail from *My Girlfriend at the 'Long House'*

This 'motif' is repeated again by Liu's tentative touching of the native subject from Sabah in his snapshot, *My Girlfriend at the 'Long House'*. Here the awkwardness of contact, once perceived, spreads like an epidemic – enabling us to sense the underlying unease simmering beneath the skin of the female native models in both the images.



Figure 33. Liu Kang, *Balinese Beauty with Tropical Fruits*, 1987

In fact, an interesting quality possessed by some of Liu's paintings (and sketches) is precisely that they possess something of the violence of being subjected to an abrupt photographic capture. This is accompanied by their ability to retain something of the unease that his models suffer at the moment of their capture. We can see this in the uneasy pose of the model in *Siesta in Bali* as well as in the embarrassment of the models in *Masks (Bali)*, so clearly branded onto their flushed cheeks. These qualities are discernible again in the sketch *Balinese Beauty with Tropical Fruits*, 1987, where the model seems to have been rendered in a pose impossible to sustain beyond the instant of a photographic capture. Her left elbow seems on the point of crumbling beneath the weight of her body as her feet dangle without support beyond the edge of the bed. Yet her pert (ocular) breasts defy gravity as they stare out at the beholder, the first



of whom is Liu himself. And Liu too has left his mark upon the scene, in the shape of the most phallic of fruits –bananas impossibly erect in their suspension of the downward pull of gravity.



Pioneer artists with Rudolf Bonner in Bali, 1953.

**Figure 34. *The Pioneers with Rudolf Bonner in Bali, 1953***

Here, I would like to put forth the hypothesis that the original, generative ‘source’ of many of these paintings was in fact snapshots, meaning that it was from photographs that Liu subsequently developed his sketches and paintings. A survey of the photographs of Liu’s visits to Bali in 1952 shows that he is always ‘accompanied’ by his camera. [For example, in *With the Le Mayeurs*, and *The Pioneers with Rudolf Bonner in Bali* (figure 32) where he is seated second from the left.]



## Liu Kang and His Camera

Once again, the discomfort of his bare-breasted native subjects seems apparent from the stiff body language and distracted facial expression of the woman in another of Liu's Sabah snapshots, *My Dream Lover*.



**Figure 35. Liu Kang, *My Dream Lover*  
(original caption, translated from Chinese)**

Looking at these snapshots from Sabah, a larger, recurrent pattern can be discerned. Liu is perpetually stationed behind and beyond the view of the women he parades. These women cannot 'perceive' him, instead they are caught between Liu and the beholder of the scene, and the first beholder of the scene is he who is standing behind the camera.

The camera, as an apparatus of capture so often at the service of scopophilia – the pleasure derived from looking at the bodies of others as erotic objects – can itself be understood as a phallic substitute.<sup>37</sup> Scopophilic pleasure also implies a relationship of power between the subject who watches (and is empowered) and the passive individual who is being watched. Here, I would like to cite a passage from Freud about touching and looking, and which addresses the concerns we have been pursuing with regards to Liu's images. According to Freud: "...everyone knows what a source of pleasure on the one hand and what an influx of fresh excitation on the other is afforded by tactile sensations of the skin of the sexual object."<sup>38</sup> Hence touching is not a perversion if the sexual act is ultimately carried further. For Freud, the same holds true for seeing. He adds: "Visual impressions remain the most frequent pathway along which libidinal excitation is aroused...The progressive concealment of the body which goes along with civilization keeps sexual curiosity awake. This curiosity seeks to complete the sexual object by revealing its hidden parts."<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup> The term scopophilia is Freudian in origin. See Sigmund Freud, *On Sexuality – Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality and Other Works*, trans. James Strachey (London: Penguin Books, 1987), p. 69 – 70.

<sup>38</sup> Freud, *On Sexuality – Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality and Other Works*, p. 69.

<sup>39</sup> Freud, *On Sexuality – Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality and Other Works*, p. 69.

Hence, the discomfort of the women in *My Girlfriend at the 'Long House'* and *My Dream Lover* emanates from a kind of double violence inflicted upon them. First a violence of touch that occurs from within the scene (Liu's physical contact with them) and second, the violence of their being seen from without (their being subject to the capture of the camera). About this connection between touching and seeing, Freud added, in a sentence which is of great pertinence to our analysis of Liu's pictures, that sexual curiosity can "be diverted ('sublimated') in the direction of art, if its interest can be shifted away from the genitals on to the shape of the body as a whole."<sup>40</sup>

In contrast to the rather stiff and unnatural appearances of the native models, Liu's excitement in these snapshots is always rather palpable, even barely containable, as most clearly discerned from the climactically raised hat of '*On the Exterior of the 'Long House' of Sabah*, 1969. In *My Dream Lover*, his excitement seems embodied in his tugging of his camera, a gesture which at the same time reflexively acknowledges the very act of this image's production – via photography. This reflexive need to touch his own camera while being photographed is again visible in the two versions of the group portrait *With the Le Mayeurs*, probably taken

---

<sup>40</sup> Freud, *On Sexuality – Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality and Other Works*, p.69.

seconds apart. Here, Liu's preoccupation with his own camera before another camera is apparent.<sup>41</sup>



Figure 36. Detail from  
*With the Le Mayeurs*, 1952



Figure 37. Detail from 1952  
*With the Le With Mayeurs 2*, 1952

### The Waning of Desire

In the contrast between the exuberance exuded by Liu and the self-conscious paralysis of Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon, one can sense a process of entropy that seems to have occurred between source and afterimages. For example, when comparing Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon's *Bali Project: Siesta in Bali* with Liu's *Siesta in Bali*, one is immediately struck by the

---

<sup>41</sup> It may be interesting to note that such a psychic economy corresponds to that which Freud has termed 'exhibitionism'. For Freud, exhibitionists "exhibit their own genitals in order to obtain a reciprocal view of the genitals of the other person." Freud, *On Sexuality – Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality and Other Works*, p. 70.

deflation of the breasts in the photo-copy, which is also accompanied by a muting of colors.



**Figure 38. Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon**  
*Bali Project: Siesta in Bali, 2001*



**Figure 39. Liu Kang,**  
*Siesta in Bali, 1957*

The photo-copies almost always feel sadly pale in comparison, as though there was something missing in them, something inadequate about them. Just as we can only gawk at the physically inaccessible female subjects of Liu's paintings, Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon's Bali snapshots are images of a Bali no longer accessible to them. They seem to have arrived at the scene of the action much too late, as though all the bounties of the tropical paradise – like the potential of artistic freshness and first-ness that Bali once promised – had already been exhausted by their precursors or founding fathers almost half a century ago.

Like us, Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon's relationship to the scene was primarily that of the spectator. Relegated to the sidelines, we cannot participate but only watch the primal scene, the birth of modern art in Singapore.<sup>42</sup> All that is left for the latecomer is simply the dryness of "research" and the farce of repetition; all the four latecomers are left with in the aftermath of the event are but ghostly afterimages. The feast has long been over – and Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon know it. Why then did they still do it? What was it that compelled them to undergo the ignominy of this barren repetition? They had already answered – "research ". But what was it in the founding moment that demanded it to be re-searched – to be found again, some 48 years after the fact?

Jacques Derrida tells us that if "the original calls for a complement, it is because at the origin it was not there without fault, full, complete, total, identical to itself."<sup>43</sup> So if the founding moment of Singaporean modern art gave birth to its own repetition, then perhaps it had never been "there without fault" nor was it "identical to itself".

---

<sup>42</sup> I refer to the primal scene here in the Freudian sense. It is the "scene of sexual intercourse between the parents which the child observes, or infers on the basis of certain indications, and phantasies." Laplanche and Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, p. 335. This term will be more fully elaborated in the next chapter.

<sup>43</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel' in *Difference in Translation*, ed. Joseph, F. Graham (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 188.

In the beginning then, the founding moment of the 'pioneers' might always already have been identical to something else – as though the very tropical light under which the 'pioneers' painted, was always already old light.

### [Section Three: Bali, 1932]

“There is a very important experience here for the painter: an entire category of things one can call clichés already occupies the canvas, before the beginning”<sup>44</sup>

Gilles Deleuze

#### Pictures From Bali, Yet Again

Between 1933 and 1941, the Belgian-born, Bali-based painter Adrien-Jean Le Mayeur de Merpres held three exhibitions at the YWCA in Singapore – in 1933, 1937 and 1941. These exhibitions created a significant impression amongst the ‘pioneering’ generation of Singapore artists in terms of visual expression and the perception of Bali as an artistic haven.<sup>45</sup>

---

<sup>44</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon - The Logic of Sensation*, trans. Daniel W. Smith (New York: Continuum, 2003), p. 112.

<sup>45</sup> For example, Kwok Kian Chow remarked that the “images of Bali captured on the canvases of Jean Le Mayeur (1880 – 1958) ...must have impressed Chen Chong Swee, Liu Kang and other Singapore artists, and may have contributed to a large extent towards their perceptions of Bali.” Kwok Kian Chow, ‘Images of the South Seas – Bali as a Visual Source in Singapore Art’ in *From Ritual to Romance – Paintings Inspired by Bali* (Singapore: Singapore Art Museum, 1994), p. 40. Please note that in this article, Kwok Kian Chow states that Adrien-Jean Le Mayeur held two exhibitions in 1933 and 1941, although he later states in a website article, that the painter had in fact visited Singapore three times. See Kwok Kian Chow, ‘Richard Walker, Colonial Art Education and visiting European artists before World War’, <http://www.thecore.nus.edu.sg/landow/post/singapore/arts/painters/channel/9.html> (accessed 3rd July 2006)





**Figure 40. With the Le Mayeurs in Bali, 1952**

However, it was not only Le Mayeur's paintings that had made a deep impression upon the 'pioneers'. For he had brought along a famous (and beautiful) Legong dancer by the name of Ni Pollok, who was first his model, then painting partner, and finally his wife. As Chen Chong Swee noted: "The painting partner (who later became his wife) he brought along, attired in traditional Balinese costume, was on hand to receive guests.

She offered herself for photographs bare-breasted. This caused quite a stir in Singapore.”<sup>46</sup>

In the two versions of the group photograph that the ‘pioneers’ took with the Le Mayeurs, Ni Pollok, although covered up, was undoubtedly the center of attention. Positioned at the central focal point of the image, she was flanked on both sides by the male painters.

I would like to suggest that the exposure of the ‘pioneers’ to Ni Pollok’s ‘flashing’ of her breasts reinforced a web of associations which connected the tropics, traveling, bare breasts, painting and photography. These were connections that had at least a decade to congeal before the ‘pioneers’ eventually made their trip to Bali in 1952, where they would seek out the Le Mayeurs. And as we have earlier seen, such an association was itself replayed in Liu’s Balinese paintings and his subsequent photographs of the women from Sabah.

---

<sup>46</sup> Quoted from T. K. Sabapathy, ‘Bali, Almost Re-Visited’ in *Reminiscence of Singapore’s Pioneer Art Masters*, (Singapore: The Singapore Mint, 1994), unpaginated.



**Figure 41. Jean Le Mayeur, *Terrace Affording A View of The Sea with Pollok Under An Umbrella and Several Figures*, undated**

This obsession with Ni Pollok – and bare breasts – exploded with a mad exuberance in Le Mayeur’s luxuriant *Terrace Affording A View Of The Sea With Pollok Under An Umbrella And Several Figures*, undated. In this almost ‘surreal’ image of Le Mayeur’s favorite model in Bali, the trees burst into a frenzy of uncontrollable bloom, as eight topless versions of Ni Pollok writhe around without any seeming narrative motivation. They are there simply on display, an unadulterated feast for hungry eyes. This was one of Le Mayeur’s most famous paintings, and there is little doubt that Liu must have seen it.<sup>47</sup>

---

<sup>47</sup> To attest to the fame of this painting, I would like to add that at a Christies’ auction held in Singapore, this painting had attracted the second-highest price ever paid for a Southeast Asian work of art at an auction, fetching S\$1.54 million in a fierce bidding war. Alexandra A. Seno, ‘CRISIS, WHAT CRISIS? Eyes pop



The above painting epitomizes the promise of Bali. For the 'pioneers', Bali must have been a haven, and the trip there nothing less than a dream. Listen to Chia Wai Hon as he rhapsodizes: "This group of Singapore artists spent over one month soaking in the invigorating and enchanting atmosphere of a fascinating island that, for many artists at the

---

in Singapore as two auctions of Southeast Asian works fetch record prices', <http://www.cgi.cnn.com/ASIANOW/asiaweek/99/0423/feat2.html> (assessed 3rd July 2005).

However, I would also like to argue that whether Liu has actually seen this painting (which is factually unascertainable) is not crucial to the theoretical model of the afterimage I am constructing. The reason for this will be elaborated in the following chapter. In any case, this painting by Le Mayeur should be considered as originating from a lineage of Western paintings revolving around the motif of the bath - which provides a convenient context in which the female body can be displayed. The connection between the bath, female bodies and native women is embodied in many of the paintings by the French painter Paul Gauguin, whom we will also examine in greater detail in the next chapter.



**Figure 42. Paul Gauguin, The Bathers, 1898**

time, existed only in their dreams.”<sup>48</sup> The Le Mayeurs inducted the group into Balinese culture and its way of life, even providing them with costumed Balinese dancers in classical poses for daily painting sessions. Chia added: “It was from these studies that the four artists formulated their own image of the female form... Liu Kang evolved his figure type, alternating between a realistic three-dimensional and a decorative two-dimensional reading. He placed her in a romanticized setting that carried hints of Delacroix and Gauguin.”<sup>49</sup>



Figure 43. Liu Kang, *Bathers*, 1997

---

<sup>48</sup> Chia Wai Hon, 'Liu Kang at 87' in *Bits and Pieces – Writings on Art* (Singapore: Contemporary Asian Arts Centre, 2002), p. 194.

<sup>49</sup> Chia, 'Liu Kang at 87', p. 194.

The romantic setting of Liu's *Bathers*, 1997, is populated by a proliferation of bare bodies similar to Le Mayeurs' *Terrace Affording A View of The Sea with Pollok Under An Umbrella and Several Figures*. In Liu's painting, however, the 'surreal' exhibitionism of Le Mayeur's source-image is drained out, and he inserts the nudes into the context of a bath. Through the inclusion of a few bathing children, Liu further tones down the unabashed eroticism of the source-image, rendering it into a 'family affair'. Yet at the same time, beneath the 'cover' of the bath, he uncovers some of the women more completely. In Le Mayeur's painting, Ni Pollok is only topless; in Liu's painting, however, the two adult women standing (and two children being scrubbed in the foreground) are depicted fully naked. These two totally nude women form an interesting pair. The woman on the left edge of the frame bends both arms back to wash her hair, hence conveniently pushing her breasts fully forward, a posture that repeats the phallic sculpture held by the woman in *Masks (Bali)*. Meanwhile, the other fully naked woman, located nearest to the upper edge of the frame, sticks out her ample posterior towards the viewer.

This play of repetition and difference between Le Mayeur's and Liu's paintings is crucial to the model of the afterimage that I am constructing here. The afterimage can be characterized as a paradoxical derivation and deviation from its source-image. To put it another way, the temporal disjuncture between the two images – the 'after' – is a caesura

where the derivative image is also inevitably modulated and thus differentiated from the source. In this way, we are able to grasp the specificity of an image under analysis, in the precise dimensions of its swerve from its precursor.<sup>50</sup>



Figure 44. Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon, *Bali Project: Bathers*, 2001

The swerve of Liu's *Bathers* from Le Mayeur's *Terrace Affording A View Of Terrace Of The Sea With Pollok Under An Umbrella And Several Figures* can be characterized by a process of waning, as though a process

---

<sup>50</sup> I use the term 'swerve' in the way conceived by Lucretius - as the precondition for creation. "When the atoms are traveling straight down through empty space by their own weight, at quite indeterminate times and places they swerve ever so little from their course, just so much that you can call it a change of direction. If it were not for this swerve, everything would fall downwards like raindrops through the abyss of space. No collision would take place and no impact of atom upon atom would be created. Thus nature would never have created anything" Lucretius, *On the Nature of the Universe*, trans. R.E. Latham (London: Penguin Books, 1994), p. 43.



of entropy had occurred between the source-image and the afterimage. And this same sense of entropic weakening is in turn amplified immensely by yet another subsequent afterimage – Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon’s *Bali Project: Bathers*, 2001. This photo-copy is truly an exhausted parody of its sources – it is a bath scene devoid of women, just as the ‘natural’ and ‘idyllic’ setting of Liu’s *Bathers* is replaced by an artificial, touristic one. There is no longer full nudity – a sign perhaps of the four younger artists’ self-consciousness, in comparison to the bare confidence of their precursors.

### **Liu Kang and the Return to Nature**

In the book, *The World of Liu Kang*, we find three photographs of Liu completely nude and in seeming communion with nature – without a trace of self-consciousness discernible in them.



**Figure 45. God’s perfect sculpture...in tune of nature (Original caption)**



Accompanied by a collective heading that reads “God’s perfect sculpture...in tune of (sic) nature”<sup>51</sup>, the publication of these photographs seem designed for Liu to performatively construct for himself an image of the uninhibited artist returning to the bosom of nature.



**Figure 46. God’s perfect sculpture...in tune of nature (image 2) (Original caption)**

---

<sup>51</sup> Authorship not indicated, *The World of Liu Kang*, 1993, p. 14.

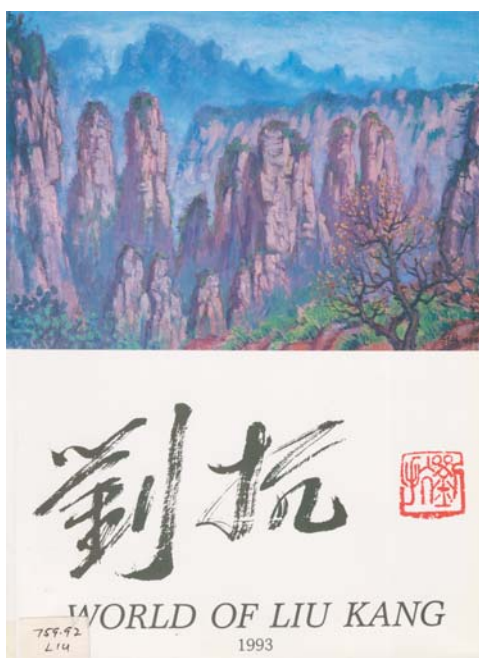
We have earlier seen how the 'photographic' permeates Liu's production of paintings. Here I would like to point out how the medium of photography has been systematically exploited by Liu to construct an artistic persona for himself. This was consciously disseminated to the public through the vehicle of reproducible media – catalogues and monographs that were far more easily circulated than paintings.



**Figure 47. God's perfect sculpture...in tune of nature (Image 3) (Original caption)**

Amongst the four 'pioneer' artists, Liu has produced the greatest number of catalogues and monographs. And in this landslide of literature, we find an unusually large number of photographic self-portraits. For example, *The World of Liu Kang* is remarkable in itself for comprising far

more snapshots of Liu than images of his paintings – the latter are attached somewhat unceremoniously at the end of the book, like footnotes to his photo-biography. In this book, Liu's performative usage of the photographic medium reaches a climax, with a total of 47 photographs printed on 15 pages preceding 23 pages carrying 28 reproduced images of his paintings. These photographs, arranged thematically, not only presented a montage of Liu's 'life-story', but were designed to propagate a certain image of Liu as an artist. This image in turn codifies our very access to his paintings proper. Photography is a form of supplement to Liu's main 'activity', which is presumably that of painting. And this supplement is constantly (and consciously?) deployed to secrete an aura or a myth which can subsequently be carried over into our readings of his paintings.



**Figure 48. Cover of *World of Liu Kang***

In reply to my question about the four young artists' specific choice of Liu's paintings for 'appropriation' in the *Bali Project*, Lam had answered: "I think it was not a conscious thought... he was promoted officially then as a 'living master / pioneer of modern art in Singapore'. His works are more easily accessible and his Bali paintings the most visible among the four pioneers."<sup>52</sup>

Indeed, Liu's manipulation of the photographic and his mastery of mass dissemination through the circuits of reproducible media seem to have borne fruit. He has – in the absence of the other three 'pioneers' whom he outlived – established himself as the dominant face of the journey to Bali.

### **Artist and/as Models**

In the numerous catalogues published under his name, a particular genre of photographic self-portraiture recurred with some frequency.

---

<sup>52</sup> Lam Hoi Lit, in email interview conducted by the author on 17<sup>th</sup> February 2005. [*Italics mine*]. By 2001, Liu Kang was the only one of the four of the painters still alive, and thus subject to the most intense efforts at 'canonization' by the Singapore Art Museum.



Figure 49. *Liu Kang with his Students*, undated, (Original caption)

These were the self-portraits of Liu as an artist, who was almost always depicted as being well-dressed, poised with palette and paint brush in hand, and caught in the act of painting. And it was almost always true that what was actually painted onto the canvases seemed to be of no consequence.



Figure 50. *Liu Kang Sketching*, undated, (Original caption)

If the snapshot *Liu Kang with his Students* was a portrait of the young Liu as an artist in the ‘Western’ style, *Liu Kang Sketching* shows Liu, many years later in a Batik shirt – the symbolic attire of the ‘Nanyang’



style. Here, he not only acknowledges the presence of the camera directly but attempts to 'face off' photography with drawing, as though attempting to capture the image of the photographer. And in this symmetrical exchange between drawing and photography as modes of image-making, we are reminded once again of Liu's endemic self-consciousness with regards to his tools of representation.

### Art as Art

These self-portraits of Liu as artist re-emerge in a number of paintings that he had produced, the most successful and popular of which was *Artist and Model*, 1954.



Figure 51. Liu Kang, *Artist and Model*, 1954

I shall now cite at length T.K. Sabapathy's insights into the painting as expressed in an essay titled 'Liu Kang's *Artist and Model: Thoughts on Art About Art*'. First and foremost, he tells us that the painter being depicted is 'pioneer' artist Chen Wen Hsi; the identity of the female figure is unknown.<sup>53</sup>

Sabapathy then tells us that this "is a painting about the art of painting; it is simultaneously a work and calls forth a work."<sup>54</sup> For Sabapathy, this painting entails three principal players – the female model, the depicted painter and the artist who created the painting, each of whom had distinct interests. Therefore, "in regarding the multiple, varying issues, the beholder and the picture are locked in ceaselessly yielding yet shifting relationships."<sup>55</sup>

According to Sabapathy, these subject positions are not equal, but manifest a hierarchical position, discernible from the positioning of the cups and saucers which "signals differentiation of rank; the containers are clustered towards one side of the teapot, suggesting they are for the depicted painter and the artist of the picture (and implicitly for the viewer,

---

<sup>53</sup> T.K. Sabapathy, 'Liu Kang's *Artist and Model: Thoughts on Art About Art*' in *Postmodern Singapore*, ed. William S.W. Lim (Singapore : Select Publishing, 2002), p. 137.

<sup>54</sup> Sabapathy, 'Liu Kang's *Artist and Model: Thoughts on Art About Art*', p. 140.

<sup>55</sup> Sabapathy, 'Liu Kang's *Artist and Model: Thoughts on Art About Art*', p. 137.

as well).<sup>56</sup> Thus, the “model is excluded from social interaction, which is possible amongst equals; the stool she sits on underlines her social rank while her demeanor embodies the professional capacities, stations and power of the respective figures depicted in the picture.”<sup>57</sup>

In a refreshing bid to prevent his reading of the picture from collapsing into a reductive account of dominant male artist and passive female model relationship, Sabapathy then begins to tease out a subterranean play of resistance from within the image. He notes that the “indeterminate status of the prospect is underlined by the downcast eyes of the model; it is as if she has the capacity to forestall the process of representation by removing herself from the field of visualization; her downcast eyes deny her sight and signal her withdrawal as an active participant in consolidating the field of visualization.”<sup>58</sup> For Sabapathy, the denial and withdrawal are deliberate. And hence, he declared: “Resistance is registered against forwarding or claiming the model as a completely yielding subject; even so, the model cannot avoid being cast as an object to be seen, both by the depicted painter and the beholder of

---

<sup>56</sup> Sabapathy, ‘Liu Kang’s *Artist and Model*: Thoughts on Art About Art’, p. 140.

<sup>57</sup> Sabapathy, ‘Liu Kang’s *Artist and Model*: Thoughts on Art About Art’, p. 140.

<sup>58</sup> Sabapathy, ‘Liu Kang’s *Artist and Model*: Thoughts on Art About Art’, p. 135.



the picture. The paradox impresses her with a marked degree of discomfort or unease.”<sup>59</sup>

Hence, many of Sabapathy’s comments on this painting coincide with the general drift of our analysis of Liu’s artistic practice. First, the heightened self-consciousness of Liu with regards to the means of representation, as well as his fascination with the vocation of the artist. Second, the inherent sense of violence that persists in his depiction of women produces a sense of “discomfort or unease” endemic to his other paintings that we have looked at. However, I hope to extend Sabapathy’s close reading of *Artist and Model* here by commenting first of all, upon the central compositional feature of the painting – its *almost* symmetrical balance between the placement of the artist/Chen and the model. For this sense of symmetry is an illusion, as it seems to me that the right side of this painting exercises an unbalanced pull on our vision. This disruption to balance is due to a variety of factors. For example, by being planted further away from the right edge of the canvas, the figure of the artist/Chen is fitted more securely within the painting than the model, who veers – almost too closely for comfort – towards the left edge of the canvas. Moreover the figure of the artist/Chen is also depicted as being erect, purposeful and charged with activity, in contrast to the passivity of the woman model. Such an imbalance is that of the inequality between the act of representation and the object of representation. An inequality, as

---

<sup>59</sup> Sabapathy, ‘Liu Kang’s *Artist and Model*: Thoughts on Art About Art’, p. 135.

Sabapathy suggested, that is discernible in the configuration of teapot and cups on the small table.

However, in addition to the binary poles of power between the artist/Chen and the model, I would now like to examine the power that the third presence – the presence of what Sabapathy described as “the artist who created the painting” – exercises on this image. For the *almost* symmetrical balance between the placement of the artist/Chen and the model constitutes a base for a triangular relationship ultimately dominated by this third presence – Liu himself, firmly anchored on the apex, on the outside of the picture. Put another way, the almost symmetrical balance between the placement of the artist/Chen and the model must ultimately refer us back to the painting’s ‘center’ – a center occupied by Liu himself.

Therefore, we can begin to understand how the privileging of the artist/Chen over the model, which is a privileging of the act of representation, serves only to refer us back to another, even more primary act of representation – Liu’s very own act of producing this painting. Understood in this way, the painted scene is merely a trope for Liu’s own act of painting, just as the painted artist/Chen must ultimately be understood as a mere decoy for Liu himself. This decoy does not have a face, or anything resembling a sense of individuality. To name him as ‘Chen Wen Hsi’ requires us to subjugate the materiality of the painting to

the naming authority of Liu, a continuation of the tyranny of textual commentary over the factuality of images, which Sabapathy somewhat continues.



**Figure 52. Liu Kang at Live Figure Drawing Class, (Original caption)**



**Figure 53. Detail from Artist and Model**

If 'Chen Wen Hsi' is understood as being nothing more than a surrogate for Liu, the imbalance between the right and left sides of the painting begins to make sense, for Liu – as the many photographs of him at work testify to – is right handed. In other words, if we understand the depicted scene of painting in *Artist and Model* as nothing more than a trope for Liu's own activity of painting, it is perhaps not unreasonable to assume that the relative weight given to the right end of the picture is the result of his self-consciousness manifesting itself into the process of the painting.

This sense of egocentrism is likewise discernible in the picture within the picture: the sketch that the artist/Chen is producing is one of the

model in profile, a point of view physically impossible for the artist/Chen – who is sitting opposite her – to produce. It is a view of the model available only to Liu, situated on the outside of the painting. All roads lead back to him.



**Figure 54. Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon, *Bali Project: Artist and Model*, 2001**

This sense of egocentricity in image-making erupt full force in Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon's, *Bali Project: Artist and Model*. In this photo-copy, the represented artist – now displaced onto the left and played out by Woon – and the model (Lam) are themselves joint authors of the image. These are artists openly producing an image of themselves at work. It is 'art about art' in a way that Liu's *Artist and Model* can never be. With its recourse to the sloppy automatism of a snapshot aesthetic, it no longer draws upon the rhetoric of manual mastery and celebration of artistic

authority that infuses Liu's paintings. It does not hide its lack of ambition – it is a parody of art.



**Figure 55. Uncaptioned Photograph (of Liu Kang Surrounded by Students)**

*Artist and Model* was but one of three paintings by Liu depicting the artist at work in 1954. The date of these paintings' execution – just one year after the exhibition *Pictures from Bali* – is surely significant. This was an exhibition which, as Liu noted “created much furor in the local art world.”<sup>60</sup> Its reception was “like Champagne corks popping”<sup>61</sup>: it was the event that had exposed the immensely self-conscious Liu – as an artist – to the public eye.

---

<sup>60</sup> T.K. Sabapathy 'Harmonics of Painting' in *Sources of Modern Art* (Singapore: Ministry of Education, 1984), p. 160.

<sup>61</sup> Sabapathy 'Harmonics of Painting', p. 160.

## **Allegories of the Act of Painting**

The other two paintings of the artist at work produced in 1954 were *Outdoor Painting* and *Outdoor Class*. All three works are characterized by their caricatured landscapes which function as theatrical backdrops, against which the act of painting and the image of the painter can be foregrounded and celebrated. In another essay, Sabapathy had remarked: “Artist and model pictures elevate creativity as a process and method onto acute, self-conscious levels; in such pictures, creativity is rendered palpable, experiential, therefore public and a spectacle.”<sup>62</sup> Yet this very rendering of the creative act as spectacle can also cripple creation itself, for self-consciousness can be a disease. As Friedrich Nietzsche noted: “Experience as the wish to experience does not succeed. One must not eye oneself while having an experience; else the eye becomes ‘an evil eye’.”<sup>63</sup> The eyeing of oneself in the act of seeing can blind one from truly seeing all that is laid out before one.

---

<sup>62</sup> Sabapathy, ‘Liu Kang’s *Artist and Model: Thoughts on Art About Art*’, p. 135.

<sup>63</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, ‘The Twilight of the Gods,’ in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed, & trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: The Viking Press, 1954), p. 517.



Figure 56. Liu Kang, *Outdoor Painting*, 1954

This curse of the “evil eye”, which is the curse of self-consciousness, is most painfully expressed in *Outdoor Painting*, where the painter is besieged by an adoring crowd – young and old, male and female, near and far (a beholder can be spotted in the window of the kampong to the right edge of the picture). And by looking in at the painting, we complete this circle of adoration – which is also a vicious circle. The painter in this picture has once again been identified by Liu as another painter – the female artist Sunyee, a one-time student of Liu’s.<sup>64</sup>

---

<sup>64</sup> “Liu Kang has disclosed that the figure wearing the broad-rimmed hat is Sunyee”, Liu Kang and Ho Ho Ying, *Re-connecting – Selected Writings on Singapore Art and Criticism*, ed. by T.K. Sabapathy, Interjections and Trans. Cheo Chai Hiang, Singapore: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 2005, p. 116



Yet again this assertion relies on a suppression of the factuality of the painting, where the painted painter does not at all possess a face, much less an identity. Like the 'Chen Wen Hsi' of *Artist and Model*, 'she' is nothing more than a surrogate for Liu himself – the Liu who now finds himself at the center of attention and cut off from the task of painting. As though paralyzed by self-consciousness, his canvas seems to be left in a state of blankness.



Figure 57. Details from Liu Kang, *Outdoor Painting*, 1954

Now, much of what I have been discussing in relation to these paintings of the act of painting hinges on that small but definitive difference between self-consciousness as heightened awareness, and that very awareness in a state of crippling hypertrophy. To further elaborate upon how the thin line between these two forms of self-consciousness can make the difference between quality and superficiality, I will turn to one of the most well-known examples of painting about painting – Courbet's *The Painter's Studio; A Real Allegory*, 1855. The choice of this painting as comparison is not entirely random – hung at the



Musee D'Orsay in Paris, it is a 'canonical' painting that Liu would probably have seen during his sojourn to Paris.



Figure 58. Gustave Courbet, *The Painter's Studio; A Real Allegory*, 1855

In any case, the parallels between *The Painter's Studio* and *Outdoor Painting* are interesting, just as the divergence is illuminating. Like *Outdoor Painting*, the painter of *The Painter's Studio* works in the middle of a crowd – in the case of the latter, it is a crowd of some thirty figures. In contrast to the featureless adoring crowd that is centered solely upon the figure in *Outdoor Painting*, Courbet's crowd is a divided one, where almost all the figures are sharply individuated. On the right is a group that Courbet himself had described as “all the shareholders, that is friends, workers and art lovers”<sup>65</sup>, including a carefully painted Charles

---

<sup>65</sup> Gustave Courbet in a letter to Champfleury, quoted from Michael Fried, *Courbet's Realism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 157. My own reading of this painting is fragmentary, and is undertaken only as a contrast

Baudelaire seated on the far right, absorbed in his book. On the left, “the other world of ordinary life, the people, misery, poverty, riches, the exploited, the exploiters, those who live on death.”<sup>66</sup> In the middle is Courbet himself, unmistakably rendered and clearly identifiable, in contrast to Liu’s faceless replaceable surrogate selves.

This leads us to the other major difference between *The Painter’s Studio* and *Outdoor Painting*. In Courbet’s painting, the crowd is not only individuated but also endowed with a sense of inner autonomy. The people are depicted as being absorbed in their own activities, oblivious to the painter working away, in contrast to the lifeless automatons gawking at the painter at work in *Outdoor Painting*. At the same time, Courbet’s picture, subtitled *A Real Allegory*, hints at the complex and self-conscious thinking through of what the act of representation involved. The landscape painted in great detail is undertaken in a studio, hence performing as a kind of meta-commentary on the artificiality of the many remarkable landscapes that had formed a substantial part of his oeuvre. Sheltered within his studio, Courbet had depicted himself as further enclosed, and compressed towards the painting he was working on, as though in full awareness that the concentration required to paint requires a shutting out of the exterior world and a plunging ‘into’ the painting. This immersion into

---

to Liu’s paintings. For a fuller interpretation of the painting, please refer to Fried’s masterly account.

<sup>66</sup> Quoted from Fried, *Courbet’s Realism*, p. 157.

the painting is itself made manifest by the painted Courbet's right leg literally submerging into the painted landscape. At the same time, the painted waterfall seems to flow outward from the landscape – a movement extended by the “falling white folds of the white sheet that the standing model holds to her breast, the seething pinkish whirlpool described by her discarded dress, and finally, the minor rapid or cascade suggested by the white cat playing at the painter's feet.”<sup>67</sup> This outward flow encircles the painted Courbet, further shielding him from any distractions of the world. The nude woman on his right – a symbol of nature and/or the muse – completes this embrace.

On the other hand, Liu's painter-substitute in *Outdoor Painting*, inserted into an outdoor scene painted with the conviction of a theatrical backdrop, can only produce a blank. If Courbet seeks a kind of immersion in painting through disciplined isolation, Liu seems to abandon the painting altogether in his exhibition and celebration of the painter as image.<sup>68</sup>

---

<sup>67</sup> Fried, *Courbet's Realism*, pp. 161.

<sup>68</sup> This above discussion of Courbet's painting in relation to that of Liu's has relied extensively on Michael Fried's investigation of the notion of realism in French painting from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. My adoption of some of his insights in a reading of Liu is not entirely removed from historical contextualization, for Liu – like many early 20<sup>th</sup> century Chinese modern painters, was immensely influenced by the French paintings of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The two forms of self-consciousness I have been describing have been characterized by Fried as the difference between absorption and theatricality. In a passage worth quoting here, Fried described that the crucial point was that “the personages on the stage or within a painting should appear wholly unaware of the existence of their audience.” Then he added: “More precisely, they were to be depicted as entirely caught up or absorbed in what they were doing, thinking, and

## The Two Sources of Art

Here I would like to return once again to the art historical writings of Sabapathy, which form the backbone of Singaporean art historical discourse, and constitute the most important readings of the ‘pioneer’ or ‘Nanyang’ artist to date. In the essay, *The Nanyang Artists: Some General Remarks*, he expresses that the “accomplishments of the Nanyang artists can be attributed to the adoption of an eclectic attitude which induced them to turn to a variety of pictorial schemas from different cultures and historical periods in order to produce a new art.”<sup>69</sup> He continued: “In establishing their respective styles these artists, *in addition to viewing their immediate surroundings as a source for motifs, also looked at art as a source for models.* In these and other respects, their approach can be

---

feeling, and by virtue of that absorption as oblivious to anything else, crucially including the fact of being beheld; only if that illusion of absorption-hence-obliviousness were sustained, an illusion Diderot also describes as one of seeming as if alone relative to the beholder, would the actual beholder be stopped and transfixed before the representation. (The externality to the action of the dramatic tableau was instrumental to that effect.) Such a conception of drama and painting, as I have argued, was essentially, indeed programmatically antitheatrical; thus Diderot drew a sharp antithesis between drama, expression, and action (all good) and theater, grimace, and attitude or pose (all bad): the task of both dramatist and painter was to achieve the first by defeating the second”. Michael Fried, *Menzel’s Realism – Art and Embodiment in Nineteenth-Century Berlin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), p. 104. For more on this complex argument, please refer to Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality – Painting and Beholder in the age of Diderot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).

<sup>69</sup>T.K. Sabapathy, ‘The Nanyang Artists: Some General Remarks’ in *Pameran Retrospektif Pelukis – Pelukis Nanyang*, (Kuala Lumpur: Muzium Seni Negara Malaysia, 1979), p. 46.

identified with the principal directions of modern art.”<sup>70</sup> Here, Sabapathy identified the two sources from which Liu and the ‘pioneers’ had drawn upon. First, ‘nature’ as a source, or what he referred to as the “immediate surroundings”. Second, what he called the “variety of pictorial schemas from different cultures and historical periods” – art itself, or in the context of this essay, the source-image. What Sabapathy does not elaborate upon, however, is the specificity of the relationship between these two kinds of sources, which is an antithetical and antagonistic one.<sup>71</sup>

At this point, it is worth quoting at length some passages from Norman Bryson. For Bryson, the artist, who directly engages with nature drinks “at the source” and by “contemplating with Adamic gaze the phenomenon which so interested him, then perhaps he had gone beyond his precursors in discovering the thing each of them had missed”<sup>72</sup>.

---

<sup>70</sup> Sabapathy, ‘The Nanyang Artists: Some General Remarks’, p. 46.

<sup>71</sup> I will like to suggest that Sabapathy’s conception of the two sources of art as existing in a relatively pacific relationship to each other is indebted to T.S. Eliot’s rather idealistic vision of tradition. This can be affirmed by Sabapathy’s citation of Eliot’s dictum that “what happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works that preceded it” at the beginning of T.K. Sabapathy, ‘Forty Years and After: The Nanyang Artists. Remarks on Art And History’ in *New Directions 1980 – 1987: Modern Paintings in Singapore*, (Singapore: Horizon Publishing, 1987), unpaginated. For a general review of Eliot’s conception of the relationship between tradition and the individual, in contrast to more sophisticated and more agonistic accounts, please refer to Lars Ole Sauerberg, *Versions of the Past – Visions of the Future – The Canonical in the Criticism of T.S. Eliot, F.R. Leavis, Northrop Fyre and Harold Bloom* (London: Macmillan Press, 1997), p. 160 – 163, 170 – 172.

<sup>72</sup> Bryson, *Tradition and Desire – From David to Delacroix*, p. 22 – 23.

However, at the “moment he begins to articulate his sensation or his vision into painting, he enters a domain of symbolic relations which is, from the first, communal. The criterion of right recognition involves always more than one observer: only across individuals and in an arc of recognition.”<sup>73</sup> He continued: “For his private sensation to be recognized, it must be passed into a symbolic register of painting where it ceases to be his alone.”<sup>74</sup> In other words, that which prevents a painter from unmediated access to ‘nature’ as source is the very activity of painting – for painting, as a discursive domain, is a field that is profoundly mediated by its own canonical history, a museum-without-walls that is perpetually modulated by all the paintings that had come before.

Should a painter perceive something new from ‘nature’, the very activity of his rendering of this perception upon canvas would paradoxically render it belated, for his rendering is haunted by an inevitable reference to what has come before. Moreover, the very notion of the “Adamic gaze” – an unmediated perception of ‘nature’, was itself a highly problematic one, for vision is itself always already haunted by “the presence of the other in vision which makes of human visuality...a divided visuality, divided because the subject is not alone in his perceptual horizon, but surrounded by the visualities of others with which it must

---

<sup>73</sup> Bryson, *Tradition and Desire – From David to Delacroix*, p. 23.

<sup>74</sup> Bryson, *Tradition and Desire – From David to Delacroix*, p. 23.

interact; and secondly (a corollary of this) the permanent division of visual subjectivity in the visual sign.”<sup>75</sup>

Thus, for Bryson, vision – like the activity of painting, is itself a field that is always mediated by the presence of the ‘others’, and here I would like to propose that this otherness can be designated by the field of ‘culture’. Hence, if we reformulate the two sources of art that Sabapathy had formulated for the ‘pioneers’ – namely ‘nature’ and ‘art’, as the terms ‘nature’ and ‘culture’, we see that the divide between these two spheres is never clean. The very idea of nature, like the field of possibilities open to the human eye at any one historical period, is always mediated by the boundaries of culture. There can be no perception untainted by old light – a subject can never see with completely fresh eyes.



Figure 59. Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon, *Bali Project: Masks (Bali)*, 2001.



Figure 60. Liu Kang, *Masks, (Bali)*, 1953

---

<sup>75</sup> Bryson, *Tradition and Desire – From David to Delacroix*, p. 46.

And in this light, I shall now return to the first pair of source and afterimages I had begun this chapter with – Liu’s version of *Masks, (Bali)*, and Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon’s photo-copy. If the earlier work, like Sabapathy’s identification of the two sources of art, still manifested something of the illusion of being able to lay claim an unmediated access to nature, all such ambitions are emphatically renounced in the latter. Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon’s image is one which is squarely located within the realm of the cultural. It no longer pretends to have access to nature, and sets itself up, as I have mentioned previously, as a parody of art.

### **The Search for the New on Old Trails**

Let us look at one last photograph of Liu. In an undated photograph captioned ‘*Liu Kang with painted canvas*’, we see the young Liu immaculately dressed in the fashion of the ‘West’. He is positioned behind a bicycle, which is somewhat awkwardly supporting two paintings deliberately orientated towards us. The paintings, as is typical of photographs of Liu as an artist, remain obscured from our sight – the painting propped against the wheel has not even been unwrapped. The paintings are little more than props in this poignant portrait of the artist as a young man.





**Figure 61. Liu Kang with painted canvas, (Original caption)**

The presence of the bicycle is also a premonition of Liu's many future journeys ahead, journeys in search of fresh pictorial inspirations – the most important of which is of course the trip to Bali in 1952. Yet this very practice of sojourning to sites that promised untouched nature, this quest for artistic originality was by the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, already – and I should add, ironically – a well-trodden path. In the case of the 'pioneers', their very pilgrimage to discover fresh motifs in Bali was always already on the trail of Adrien-Jean Le Mayeur de Merpres.

Le Mayeur was himself never a point of origin, or a source that was "there without fault, full, complete, total, identical to itself"<sup>76</sup> – for his Balinese trajectory was itself undertaken in the search of another earlier trail. As the 'pioneer' artists had understood, "Le Mayeur originally planned to go to Tahiti but had stayed on in Bali after his arrival in 1906.

---

<sup>76</sup> Derrida, 'Des Tours de Babel', p. 188.

The Singapore artists associated Le Mayeur with Gauguin (and Le Mayeur's wife Ni Pollok with Gauguin's Teha'amanan) as seen in the writings of Chen Chong Swee and Liu Kang."<sup>77</sup>



**Figure 62. Gauguin in his Studio, late 1893 or 1894, photograph, Larousse Archives, Paris**

In other words, the dream of the South Seas, of 'Nanyang', was one always already impregnated, not only by the earlier exploits of Le Mayeur, but also haunted by another earlier 'proverbial' South Seas – the Polynesia of Paul Gauguin.

If the shoddy snapshots that Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon gleaned from Bali should have no aesthetic value in themselves, they would by their openly derivative nature, at least serve the function of alerting us to a history of repetition that can be uncovered in their source-images. And for

---

<sup>77</sup> Kwok, 'Images of the South Seas – Bali as a Visual Source in Singapore Art', p. 40.

all of Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon's cheerful acceptance of their impotence and failure to be original, they have – unwittingly perhaps – made it possible for us to recast as a comedy of errors the tragic search for originality and origins that plagues so much of art history.

For now, I think it is pertinent to make the point that much of the work of the 'Nanyang pioneers', like the existing corpus of writings about them, involves a systemic refusal to recognize the true nature of their relationship with past art. This is most often manifested in a persistent rhetorical appeal to some notion of 'nature' – as it abounds in the recourse to the 'primitivism' of Balinese landscapes and the full breasts of Balinese women. And this appeal to nature is precisely what the snapshots of Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon – with their flat-chested models and half-baked photography – refuse. But this refusal was also in a sense a relinquishment of the ambition, or – depending on how you look at it – illusion towards artistic originality.

Here, I will ask the reader's forgiveness for citing this lengthy quotation by Leo Steinberg. He wrote: "I do not believe that each esoteric source for each work must be known to permit an insider's approach; but rather that the genetic principle underlying the operation should be assumed and welcomed in each confirmation; the purpose being not merely to inventory the loot, but to isolate the new from the antecedent

that's being modified. For the difference between the outsider's and the insider's perception of art comes down to that: that the insider recognizes an image as being first of all, in one way or another, a modification of foregone art; whereas you tell the outsider from his anxiety to relate art at once to the phenomenal world and the realm of experience, to see the image as an immediate response to its ostensible subject ... But don't blame the outsider; he is merely following alternative clues. The blame lies on the artists. *It is they who traditionally – before the catastrophic unmasking performed by twentieth century art – covered up what they were doing. It was their thing to deliver quotations as if they were improvised, to incorporate borrowed goods with their own, to naturalize every immigrant presence as if it were native, making the most studied rehearsal of previous art emerge like a novelty, a first glimpse.*"<sup>78</sup>

Thus, the claim of unmediated access to nature, or what Steinberg called the "phenomenal world" is corollary to the claim for originality. And such a claim is in turn manifested as a process of covering up. But as detective films never cease to remind us, no amount of covering up can erase the crime, and substantial portions of this chapter have been dedicated to just these imperfections of covering-up. It is in this sense that the afterimage of *Bali Project: Masks (Bali)* is employed as a means of unmasking its source-image *Masks (Bali)*.

---

<sup>78</sup> Leo Steinberg, 'The Glorious Company' in *Art about Art* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1978), p. 14 – 15. [italics mine]

The reasons for the cover-up of sources extend beyond the hankering for the mantle of artistic originality to a desire for the stability of identity. This is a process tinged with a certain degree of romantic heroism, accompanied inevitably by an attendant sense of pathos. This is amply demonstrated by the artist Pan Shou's eulogy on Liu in one of the latter's many catalogues. According to Pan: "From Van Gogh, Gauguin, Matisse and Cézanne whose names he (Liu) must have called even in his dreams, he would have received invaluable enlightenment. What else are his needs?"<sup>79</sup> Next describing Liu's project as a fusion of the 'East' and the 'West', he remarked that Liu "has faithfully and consistently been searching for the appropriate expressions for the enhancement of these two fundamental forces."<sup>80</sup>

About the specter of tradition, Marx had once said: "Tradition from all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living."<sup>81</sup> Hence we need to ask if the somnambulistic invocation of the names of Van Gogh, Gauguin, Matisse and Cézanne sounds more like the stuff of troubled sleep, of nightmares, rather than the "enlightenment" that Pan had said it was.

---

<sup>79</sup> Pan Shou, 'Preface II' in *The Paintings of Liu Kang* (Singapore: National Museum, 1981), unpaginated.

<sup>80</sup> Pan, 'Preface II' in *The Paintings of Liu Kang*, unpaginated.

<sup>81</sup> Marx, 'The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte', p. 19.

And here I would like to turn the rest of Pan's eulogy on its head, by pointing out that beneath his clichéd description of Liu's painterly project as the 'fusion' of the 'East' and 'West', lies a subterranean stream of confusion, tension, and anxiety. For this clash of "two fundamental forces" was no laughing matter, as Michael Sullivan so gravely noted in his book on 20<sup>th</sup> century Chinese art. For him: "The struggle between East and West, between one tradition and the other, which is taking place within Asian society can now be seen as a generative process; but, until it is resolved, there can be no rest for the man of feeling and imagination. Something of this tension, this sense of being cut adrift from one tradition and yet not fully masters of the other, must appear in the work of artists discussed in this book."<sup>82</sup>

In sharp contrast to the sober gravity and elevated rhetoric of the preceding citations, we find in Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon's farcical enterprise, no traces of any desire for the grounding of an identity – it was nothing but bathos to begin with. With Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon, all that was tragic in Liu returns as comedy.

It is therefore one Bali at the heart of this chapter, yet this Bali is not one and the same. It may have been the same geographical spot – the

---

<sup>82</sup> Michael Sullivan, *Chinese Art in the Twentieth Century* (London: Faber and Faber, 1959), p. 19.

same Bali that Yit, Lam, Hiah, and Woon; the ‘pioneers’; and Le Mayeur had visited, in the years 2001, 1952 and 1932 respectively. Yet each visit, in the very act of repeating the prior one also modulated its meaning. F.W.J. Schelling once wrote: “We do not live in vision; our knowledge is piecework, that is, it must be produced piece by piece in a fragmentary way, with divisions and gradations... In order to complete itself, each thing runs through certain moments – a series of processes following one another, in which the later always involves the earlier, brings each thing to maturity.”<sup>83</sup> Hence, it is the afterimage which clarifies the source, youth which paradoxically teaches us how best to look at the old. Perhaps the laughter of Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon is that which brings the troubled adolescence of the ‘pioneers’ search for originality to some kind of maturity.

Let us end this chapter on a somewhat paradoxical note by borrowing the words of Sabapathy: “In terms of a quest for art forms in a South-east Asian context, it [the visit to Bali] has few if any parallels or sequels”.<sup>84</sup> Yet Sabapathy’s confident assertion of the priority of the ‘pioneers’ is almost immediately mediated – “But it is reminiscent of a journey made by an artist who left Paris in 1890 for the proverbial South Sea island, Tahiti, in order to reinvigorate his strength, intensity of feeling,

---

<sup>83</sup> F.W.J. Schelling, *The Ages of the World*, trans. Frederick de Wolfe (New York: Bolman, 1942), p. 88 – 89.

<sup>84</sup> Sabapathy, ‘Scroll met Easel’, p. 126.

and a direct manner of expression: Paul Gauguin!...Indeed, Gauguin's Tahitian paintings are of crucial importance for many artists in Asia who were seeking for a new art, and that is another chapter yet to be told and written!"<sup>85</sup>

Let us indeed continue this story of repetition and difference, as well as Gauguin's role in it – in the next chapter.

---

<sup>85</sup> Sabapathy, 'Scroll met Easel', p. 126.



## **Chapter Two: Two South Seas**

## [Section One: South Seas, 1892]

“The challenge is in fact to create new intellectual tools that can perhaps go beyond the terms ‘syncretic’, or even perhaps ‘hybrid’, *and certainly beyond that sad word ‘influences’*, into terminology that can nuance the level of co-optation by the modern vis-à-vis the levels that some other systems of meaning have been able to insist upon through its tenacity. A calibrated terminology, therefore, that allows for cultures that structured the absorption of things from outside, with a system of meaning that managed to grow and survive violent encounters with global hegemonies – though they may do so invisibly, or beyond the adequacy of dominant systems of representation to register.”<sup>86</sup>

Marian Pastor Roces

### Sources of Influence

Influence, “that sad word” as Marian Pastor Roces called it, has indeed been generally understood and used in an extremely impoverished manner. It seems to evoke a relationship between two terms strictly

---

<sup>86</sup> Marian Pastor Roces, ‘words’ in *Eyeline*, 22/23, summer (1993), p. 47 – 48. [Italics mine].

bounded within a linear and hierarchical framework, characterized by a top-down flow from an active source to a passive receiver. As Leo Steinberg also comments, the “metaphor latent in all these terms” such as influence, “is that of a reflex, an involuntary response to a stimulus, as in a linkage of cause of effect...even the innocuous metaphor of the ‘source’ is insidious in that it suppresses the possibility of deliberateness. Things that spring from a source – such as rivers or rumors – have no power to choose from which source to flow.”<sup>87</sup>

For Roces, the stakes involved in inventing a more “calibrated terminology” in the place of influence, is nothing short of an attempt to reverse such a hierarchy, by imbuing the receiving culture with a degree of agency. And with this comes the possibility of opening up our understanding of the process of reception to include acts of active selection, resistance, subversion, and creative transformation.

In the age of post-colonial self-consciousness, the continued myopia to intricacies of reception is rightly opened to interrogation – especially when, to use Steinberg’s “insidious” word, the ‘sources’ of influence upon a country newly freed from colonial imperialism is largely perceived to be ‘Western’. The equation here is as such – for an ex-colony

---

<sup>87</sup> Leo Steinberg, ‘The Glorious Company’ in *Art about Art* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1978), p. 20 – 21.

to continue to be seen as influenced, is to remain somewhat subjugated culturally under the project of 19<sup>th</sup> Century European imperialism.<sup>88</sup>

The “sad word” influence had itself first taken hold in discussions in the ‘West’ as part of the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century interest in originality and genius. According to W. Jackson Bate, this was the period of transition from the Renaissance to the modern. And in “the process it [the ‘West’] discovered the costs as well as the gains of a self-consciousness unparalleled in degree at any time before.”<sup>89</sup> In other words, the very concern with influence arose from a kind of self-conscious inadequacy felt by the present when faced with a past that was deemed too rich. Influence is a terrain charged by a niggling sense of lack, and with this arises a

---

<sup>88</sup> My usage of the binaries of the ‘east’ and the ‘west’, as well as my equivalence between the ‘modern’ and the ‘western’ bears some explaining. Here it is necessary for me to cite Lydia H. Liu, who in explaining her usage of similar terms, wrote: “The binary of the East and the West has been much contested and rightly so. But is it enough to dismiss the binary on the grounds of fictitious invention or construction? My own view is that a more effective way of deconstructing the East-West binary would be to pinpoint, whenever possible, those historical moments in which the usage of this idea becomes contextually meaningful and acquires legitimacy in a given language...In other words, I am concerned with the rhetorical strategies, translations, discursive formations, naming practices, legitimizing processes, tropes, and narrative models that bear upon the historical conditions of the Chinese experience of the modern since the latter half of the nineteenth century.” Lydia H. Liu, ‘Preface’ in *Translingual Practice – Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity – China, 1900 – 1937* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), p. xviii.

<sup>89</sup> W. Jackson Bate, *The Burden of the Past and the English Poet* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1971), p. vii. Bate is a pioneering figure in the study of literary influence, and is one of Bloom’s immediate precursors. See also Jay Clayton & Eric Rothstein, ‘Figures in the Corpus: Theories of Influence and Intertextuality’ in *Influence and Intertextuality in Literary History* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), for a succinct introduction to the development of theories of influence.

defensive and compensatory desire to overcome this lack. Therefore a discursive move such as Roces' – the renunciation of the very term of influence, and a call for a new terminological replacement comes not only as no surprise, but should in fact be regarded as a new permutation of an anxiety with an old and long lineage. Thus Roces' call is a manifestation of the anxieties that the “sad word” continues to evoke, to provoke – especially when compounded with the postcolonial anxieties that so often slip into a writer of the ‘non-Western’ world.

However, there also exists a different camp dealing very differently with the concept of influence, and its mode of operation can be described as being a revisionary one. These are theorists who seek to revise the very way influence can be understood without giving up on the term. Namely, by recasting the process of influence as a revisionary activity. In their hands, influence is opened up into a complex, nuanced and dialectical activity which cannot be contained within a linear, top-down framework. Just as importantly, a revisionary account of influence has the advantage of retaining the human, all too human anxieties the “sad word” evoked, and continues to evoke. These anxieties have a certain, undeniable historical reality, and to abandon thinking about the word influence would be to relinquish a prospective way to understand a facet of human experience.

No one has written more eloquently about this revisionistic form of anxiety than Harold Bloom. For Bloom, a poet begins to write poetry only when he has encountered a prior poem (or poet) that has affected him intensely. Thus the terrain of influence is one fraught with anxiety “for the poet is condemned to learn his profoundest yearnings through an awareness of other selves.”<sup>90</sup> He continued: “The poem is within him, yet he experiences the shame and splendor of being found by poems – great poems – outside him. To lose freedom in this center is never to forgive, and to learn the dread of threatened autonomy forever.”<sup>91</sup> In other words, what is at stake in the field of influence goes beyond the pride of artistic priority, but concerns rather the fundamental humanistic notions of autonomy and self-determination. As Bloom puts it, “poetic influence is ...a disease of self-consciousness”.<sup>92</sup> The stakes involved in the game of influence, when raised to the very highest, involves the very possibility of saying ‘I’.

A fecund dimension of Bloom’s project is its revisionary turning of the notion of active source and passive reception on its head. In Bloom’s words, poetic influence “always proceeds by a misreading of the prior poet, an act of creative correction that is actually and necessarily a

---

<sup>90</sup> Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence – A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973) p. 26.

<sup>91</sup> Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence – A Theory of Poetry*, p 26.

<sup>92</sup> Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence – A Theory of Poetry*, p. 29.

misinterpretation.<sup>93</sup> Therefore, for Bloom: “The history of fruitful poetic influence, which is to say the main tradition of Western poetry since the Renaissance, is a history of anxiety and self-saving caricature, of distortion, of perverse, willful revisionism without which modern poetry as such could not exist.”<sup>94</sup> In the terms that we have been using in the previous chapter, it is the afterimage, which not only selects its source, but creatively and perversely transforms it, as our study of Liu Kang’s *Bali (Masks)* and its 2001 afterimage by Agnes Yit, Lam Hoi Lit, Jeremy Hiah and Woon Tien Wei bear testament to.

The effect of Bloom’s writings upon the study of the visual arts in general has been an interesting phenomenon. Certain ‘Bloomian’ terminologies – such as “belatedness” and the “anxieties of influence” have become familiar keywords in some of the best writings produced within the field, although Bloom is seldom directly referenced. A notable exception is Norman Bryson’s *Tradition and Desire – From David to*

---

<sup>93</sup> Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence – A Theory of Poetry*, p. 30.

<sup>94</sup> Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence – A Theory of Poetry*, p. 30. For sure, a usage of Bloom’s framework within this essay must constantly be mediated by an additional layer of anxiety, which I have described as that of the postcolonial. On this note, it should also be noted that Bloom’s theory of influence must itself be contextualized by his investment in American poetry, and its own ‘postcolonial’ anxiety in relation to the tradition of European or Old World poetry. This is especially apparent in Harold Bloom, *The Breaking of Vessels* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), where he deals with the anxiety of influence between the American poets such as Emerson and Whitman in relation to the European Canon. There, the strife for an authentic poetic self is always linked not only to a struggle for an autonomous identity, but is always tied in with a nascent project of construction of a post colonial America, imagined poetically.

*Delacroix*, which systematically adapts Bloom's findings to the field of visual culture.

As Wolfgang Kemp – in a passage which usefully sums up my arguments thus far – observed: “In the history of reception, there is a school of thought that pursues the migration and transformation of artistic formulas through different artistic contexts and historical periods. In its positivist applications, it procures data and establishes earlier influences. It researches the reasons that were decisive in the selection of certain motifs, and it analyzes the differences that inevitably come to exist between the “original” and its later “after-images.” Derived from the recognition of how artists work every day, inheriting traditions that they then make their own, Bloom (1973) in the arena of literary studies and, following him, Bryson (1984) in the realm of visual arts developed the idea of the drama of succeeding generations who labor under “an anxiety of influence.”<sup>95</sup>

Next, Kemp added: “According to this branch of reception history, *creative misunderstanding does not simply occur; given specific historical circumstances, it is both a deliberate and a necessary attitude.*”<sup>96</sup> Thus,

---

<sup>95</sup> Wolfgang Kemp, 'The Work of Art and Its Beholders' in *The Subjects of Art History*, ed. Mark A. Cheetham, Michael Ann Holly, and Keith Moxey (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p 180. [Italics mine].

<sup>96</sup> Kemp, 'The Work of Art and Its Beholders' p 180. [Italics mine].



Kemp usefully points out that the specific way in which such an anxiety is manifested in different places and times is historically determined, and hence a study of its specific travails opens up the possibility of a different kind of historical perspective.

Last but not least – I believe that beneath Bloom's theoretical armature, lies a radical potential that can be productively tapped for the 'post-colonialist' project of re-imagining the relationships between the 'West' and the 'East', the colonizer and the colonized. As an effect, the anxiety of influence is 'real', it constituted part of the 'Eastern' artist's historical experience of his relationship to his 'Western' sources. But the crux is to recognise that a certain form of anxiety was also characteristic of the 'Western' artist's own relationship to his tradition. To acknowledge this is already to prepare the grounds for a lateral, that is to say, level playing field upon which artists, both 'Eastern' and 'Western', can be relationally understood. It is in the throes of anxiety that artists and writers, stand equally before.

Such a radical potentiality often remains untapped by Bloom who continues to operate upon a romantic and humanistic framework – and it is this untapped reservoir that I will attempt to unearth through this chapter, a reservoir that opens up a labyrinth of tunnels leading us to a

host of unexpected concepts and theories, and ultimately beyond the confines of what we understand to be the 'human'.

### **Becoming Other**

The feeling of anxiety that one feels before a tradition perceived as unsurpassable, was in many ways doubled, or even tripled, for an artist like Liu Kang. Born in China, Liu migrated to Malaysia, then studied in the Francophilic Shanghai art academies of the 1930s, before settling in Singapore. Not only did he bear upon his shoulders the burden of a canonical 'Western' art on the one hand, Liu had to also deal with the considerable weight of the Chinese painterly tradition. Furthermore, as an artist dislocated into the migrant community of the Chinese in Southeast Asia, he needed to discover an art that could speak to the imagined community of his own adopted country. As such, he was like a permanent lodger in many inns, a tourist perpetually stammering in a foreign tongue.

This uncertainty of place manifests itself clearly in the painting *Outdoor Class*, one of the paintings along the theme of 'artist and model' he had executed in 1954 that we had examined in the previous chapter. Like *Artist and Model* and *Outdoor Painting* – the faceless automatons populating the scene, the painted paintings and the specific quality of the

landscape, are customarily dealt with in his characteristic blankness. All that is important is the highly theatrical display of the activity of painting at a public site. In *Outdoor Painting*, the drone-like painted painters-at-work can be understood as Liu's surrogates, and they proliferate with a certain mad, schizophrenic multiplicity, as though in defensive overcompensation of his need to assert himself as painter.



Figure 63. Liu Kang, *Outdoor Class*, 1954

If every painting can be understood as being, on some level, a manifestation of the painter's desire for self-assertion before the oblivion of time, such a desire can be seen as being crystallized in the device of the signature. Not only does the signature declare the name of the 'author' but it also functions as a gestural imprint of his own unique nervous system.



Figure 64. Detail from *Outdoor Class*



Figure 65. Detail from *Outdoor Class*

In *Outdoor Class*, the act of signing is itself doubled. The first signature was in Chinese and inserted into the painted painting on the far right. The second signature, in English, was inserted into another painted painting third from the right edge of the frame.<sup>97</sup> On the one hand, this doubling of names in the two languages poignantly evoked the painter's split allegiance between two traditions. On the other hand, it expressed Liu's desire to appeal to an imaginary public, then perceived as divided between the Chinese and English-speaking communities in Singapore.<sup>98</sup>

In this light, it is interesting to compare *Outdoor Painting, Artist and Model* and especially *Outdoor Class* to *Batik Workers*, painted also in

---

<sup>97</sup> I'd like to thank T.K. Sabapathy for bringing this issue of the signature to my attention.

<sup>98</sup> See for example, Marco Hsu, *A Brief History of Malayan Art*, trans. Lai Chee Kien (Singapore: Millennium Books, 1999), p.63 - 63. As Hsu stated: "Malaya has no painting traditions. She does not have abundant and rich traditions such as the Buddhist wall murals found in Siam or India. Patterns on batik sarongs can be said to be the most Malayanised, but they are considered an applied art and not an accepted painting tradition. Local Indian paintings are simple and ordinary as they do not relate to or continue from art trends in the mother country. Chinese painting, though important in the realm of art, is only limited to interests of the Chinese community. The only art form which can be appreciated by all races in Malaya thus far is western painting, and this has become the main medium for art instruction in her schools."

1954. I would like to suggest that *Batik Workers*, despite its surface anomalies with respect to the more obvious examples of the 'artist and model' types, deserves not only to be considered as a 'member' of such a group, but is also the most accomplished piece of work in this series.

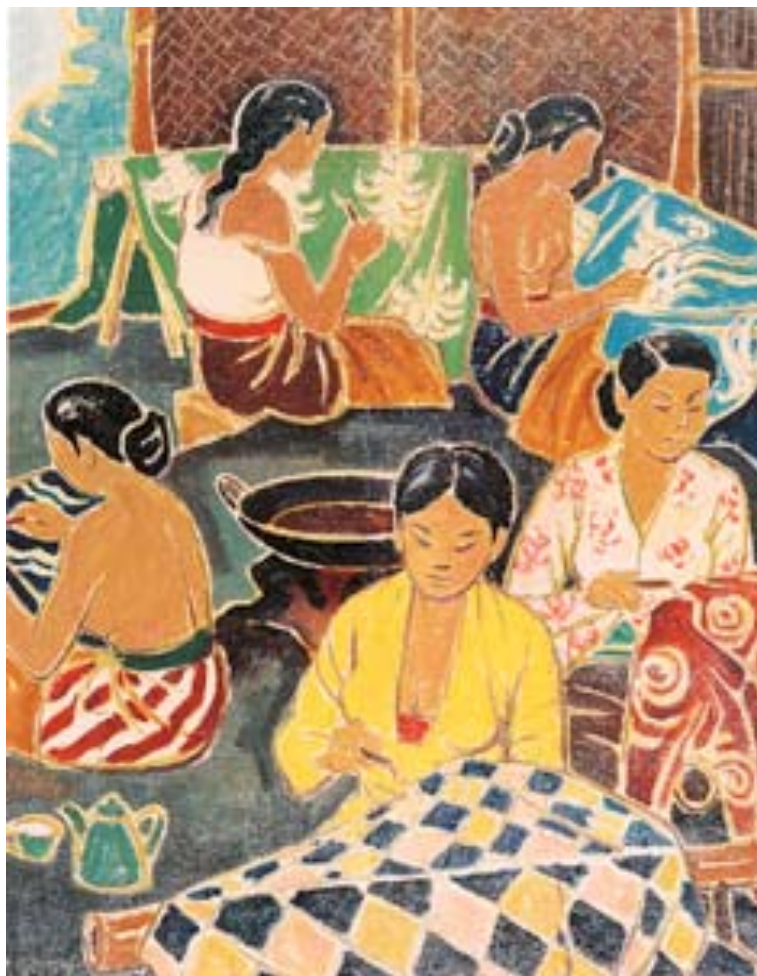


Figure 66. Liu Kang, *Batik Workers*, 1954

*Batik Workers* depicts a group of women deep in absorption within the activity of batik 'painting'. According to Marco Hsu, patterns on batik sarongs can be considered "to be the most Malayanised, but they are

considered an applied art and not as a painting tradition.”<sup>99</sup> Hence, what occurs in this image is a complex troping between oil and batik, art and craft.<sup>100</sup> The differences between the major painterly traditions of the ‘East’, the ‘West’ and the ‘minor’ craft tradition of ‘Southeast Asia’ are played out fully against each other, without any recourse to the process of covering-up so often implied by the ruthless synthesis of ‘fusion’.

In *Batik Workers*, there are no more spectators gawking at ‘artists’ at work. Instead all the ‘workers’ are deeply immersed in each of their own activities, freed from the gaze of the other. The women are ‘conventionally’ dressed or if topless, obliquely turned away from the eyes of the beholder. No longer objects of display, we can sense that Liu’s depiction of these women producing images in batik is carried out with a sense of empathy not found in his paintings of painters at work. Like Liu, each woman works with her right hand, but in the calm and amiable silence that permeates the scene, we can feel the air of concentration in the room, in contrast to the flashy exhibitionism of *Outdoor Class*, *Outdoor Painting* and *Artist and*

---

<sup>99</sup> Hsu, *A Brief History of Malayan Art*, p. 63.

<sup>100</sup> Trope and troping are terms which recur frequently in this chapter. My usage of these terms is close to that of Bloom’s, which resonates heavily with the psychoanalytical process of substitution. (see footnote 32). Here I will define these terms by borrowing the words of Hayden White: “If as Harold Bloom has suggested, a trope can be seen as the linguistic equivalent of a psychological mechanism of defense (a defense against literal meaning in discourse, in the way that repression, regression, projection, and so forth are defenses against the apprehension of death in the psyche), it is always not only a deviation from one possible, proper meaning, but also a deviation towards another meaning, conception, or ideal of what is right and proper and true ‘in reality.’” Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1978), p. 2.

*Model*. And thus, it is in *Batik Workers* that we feel the full possibility of Liu's formal abilities. The round pot of wax in the center of the painting is doubled by the circular dispersion of the women, and this sense of dynamic circulation is further emphasized by the centrifugal spread of colors and patterns distributed across the painting.

If the painting figures in *Outdoor Class* are doubles of Liu, in *Batik Workers*, this process of multiple psychic projection is markedly different. In *Outdoor Class*, the faceless surrogates are simply manifestations of Liu – they are all roads leading back to him (even as the signature unwittingly hints at a split within himself). Conversely, the Batik workers are like so many roads opening out from Liu, who is now plugged into a constant process of becoming 'other', becoming woman, becoming worker and becoming 'indigenous'.

The painting evoked (without dissolving or resolving) the deep contradictions that were felt by the modern painter in Singapore at that historical moment, caught simultaneously between identification and displacement, locality and rootlessness. These were the contradictions of what it meant to be a 'modern' painter, schooled in China, influenced by Paris, and invested in the project of painting the tropics.<sup>101</sup>

---

<sup>101</sup> The contradictions of such a position, is sometimes hinted at, but never fully explored in the vagaries inherent in defining the style of the 'Nanyang'. For example, Sabapathy wrote: "The idea of modernism, the relationship with artistic traditions and the conscious urge to crystallize contemporary sensibilities were



## The Armor of Fashion

Let us return to an examination of the photographs of Liu that we had begun in the previous chapter by recalling a comment that his son, Liu Thai Ker had made: “He (Liu Kang) has his normal share of vanity as a man. In my childhood I could not help marveling at some of his photo portraits taken in Shanghai or Paris. Dressed in the fashionable attires of the time and in carefully studied poses, he looked wonderfully at home for a small-time rubber merchant’s son.”<sup>102</sup>

---

abiding impulses for the Nanyang artists; they were impulses which were deeply felt and thought out; they were impulses which constituted part of the constructive basis for the production of paintings. The Nanyang artists did not formulate or declare these impulses in any overtly theoretical frame. They were not, however, completely averse to making their positions known.” T.K. Sabapathy, ‘Forty Years and After: The Nanyang Artists. Remarks on Art And History’ in *New Directions 1980 – 1987: Modern Paintings in Singapore*, (Singapore: Horizon Publishing, 1987), unpaginated.

This synthetic impulse within the writings of T.K. Sabapathy will be examined in greater detail in a later part of this chapter, but here it is apparent that a certain contradiction can be discerned within his description of the ‘Nanyang Style’ as one lacking a coherent framework, but at the same time, possessing positions that could be expressed. In a sense, this contradiction is more apparent in Long Thien-Shih’s account: “I would like to reiterate that the ‘Nanyang Style’ was not bred out of a concerted effort or orchestrated movement. This particular style evolved out of the sensitivities of artists, and their individual reflection of the prevailing social conditions. The part played by Singapore and Malaysian artists who studied in France, was pivotal in coursing the development, or decline even, of what we understand is meant by ‘Nanyang Style’. The variety of styles and the heralding of individualism that we see in the local art arena today, in many ways attests to the demise of the Nanyang spirit, and therefore the ‘Nanyang Style’.” Long Thien-Shih, ‘Nanyang Style and the French Influence’ in *Pont des Arts – Nanyang Artists in Paris 1925 – 1970* (Singapore: National Museum Art Gallery, 1994), p. 36. Definitions of the multiple sources of influence that the ‘Nanyang’ artist worked under is often smoothed over by a pacifist, and even politically correct invocation of multi-culturalism, so often expressed in the word ‘fusion’.

<sup>102</sup> Liu Thai Ker, ‘Preface III’ in *The Paintings of Liu Kang* (Singapore: National Museum, 1981), unpaginated.





Figure 67. *Liu Kang in Fuzhou, China* (original image caption, undated)

Liu's self-conscious performance before the camera, is thus carefully complemented by the apparent care he takes in his dressing, and as remarked upon in the previous chapter, often accompanied by the recurrence of certain painterly props.



**Figure 68. Liu Kang in China before his Paris Sojourn**  
(original image caption, undated)

Just as the young Liu was almost always immaculately dressed in the “fashionable attires of the time” – the styles of the ‘West’, he was also depicted repeatedly with the tools of his painting trade. The easel, canvas, painting brush and palette set-up emphatically identified his preferred painting style – that of the ‘West’. This is significant, for at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, a Chinese painter who embraced the ‘Western’ style was also simultaneously declaring his acceptance of an entire constellation of ideas, which revolved around the keyword of ‘modernity’. As Michael Sullivan noted, when “we speak of the influence of Monet on a modern Chinese painter...we are speaking not of a stimulus that the artist can accept or reject in the pursuit of his aims (as Monet could accept or reject that of Hokusai), but of a challenge to him to declare himself on

fundamental issues that affect his culture as a whole.”<sup>103</sup> Then Sullivan continued: “For Western art reached Chinese in the 20<sup>th</sup> century no longer in isolation, but as one element in a package that included social and economic theory, philosophy and literature, science and technology.”<sup>104</sup>



**Figure 69. *Liu Kang with his Students* (original caption)**

In other words, these photographs not only signify the strength of Liu’s desire to paint, but must also be understood performatively as fashion statements of a young man who wanted to be perceived as being not just any painter – but a painter of the ‘Western’ style. Which is to say, a painter of the ‘modern’ style.

What is interesting in both *Liu Kang in China before his Paris Sojourn* and *Liu Kang with his Students* is that nowhere do we perceive

---

<sup>103</sup> Michael Sullivan, *Symbols of Eternity – The Art of Landscape Painting in China* (California: Stanford University Press, 1979), p. 167.

<sup>104</sup> Sullivan, *Symbols of Eternity – The Art of Landscape Painting in China*, p. 167.

the labor, the sweat, the grime of painting. The only traces of exertion to be discerned are those required to maintain the poses. In both of the above snapshots, Liu holds a brush and palette in each hand, with a posture that is ramrod straight, a turgid erectness that emanates from the alert attention of a self-conscious body before the camera. In particular, *Liu Kang with his Students* depicts very vividly the exertions of a body straining against both the downward pull of gravity, and the stiffness of Liu's overcoat. One should also wonder if the weather was so cold that it required this impressive coat, for the lady companion sitting beside him does not seem to be wearing anything quite as thick.

About fashion, Jonathan Crary remarks that it can be understood as “a protective shield of signifiers, a reflective armor carefully assembled to mask a core of social and psychic vulnerabilities” and this “double-sidedness of fashion...corresponds to a split between a normative attentiveness to a public exteriority and a subjective withdrawal”.<sup>105</sup> This psychic split that Crary discerns in the double-sidedness of fashion corresponds structurally to the economy of the gaze that I have earlier described as a prevalent characteristic of many of Liu's paintings in the 1950s. These were paintings characterized on the one hand by a theatricality of display self-consciously addressing ‘*exterior*’ beholders,

---

<sup>105</sup> Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception – Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture*, (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2001), p. 118.

and on the other hand, by a proliferation of tropes that lent themselves to 'interior' fantasies of the possession and penetration of painted female subjects.

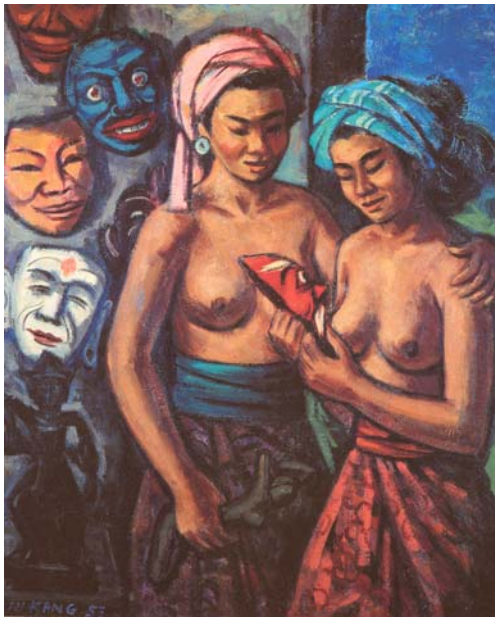


Figure 70, Liu Kang, *Masks (Bali)*, 1953

Earlier, I characterized this inward pull in a painting such as *Masks (Bali)*, as the manifestation of Liu's desire for unmediated access to the source-image of nature as manifested in the trope of the women. I had also described the perpetual thwarting of such a consummation by the 'corrupting' mediation of prior art – of tradition. What is required now is an elaboration of the psychic effects of this 'corruption' by a careful analysis of its pictorial manifestation. This will enable us to better grasp the anxieties, uncertainties and vulnerabilities hidden behind the extravagant armor of Liu's handsome coat and his shield of painterly props.

## Paris, Shanghai

Liu's taste in fashion was intricately linked to two places – Paris and Shanghai. These were crucial stopovers in the trajectory of Liu's development as an artist. At the age of 15, he left Malaysia for Shanghai to study at the Sing Hwa Arts Academy. After graduating in 1928, Liu spent six years in Paris, before returning to Shanghai as a lecturer in Western Art at the Shanghai College of Fine Arts. In the larger context of artistic fermentations in China in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Shanghai (together with Beijing) was an important portal to the 'West'.

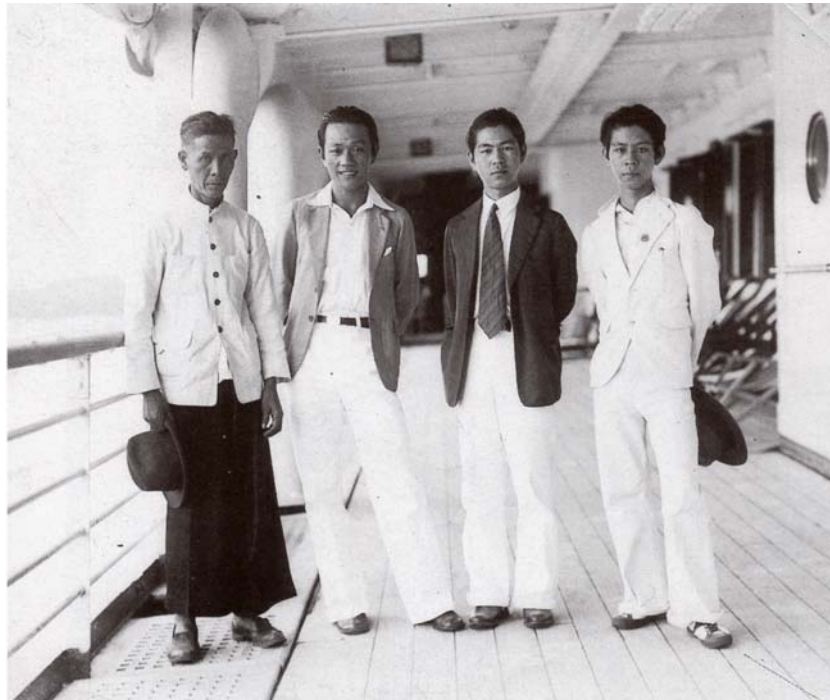


Figure 71. *Father's blessing (sic) for Paris - on board the ship to Paris in 1928*  
(Original caption)



Amongst influences of ‘Western’ countries upon China, the predominance of the French was unrivalled. As Chow Tse-tsung commented: “France’s influence upon China in this period can hardly be exaggerated. From the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the political thought of the French Revolution had an almost unrivalled vogue among young Chinese revolutionaries and reformers.”<sup>106</sup> Shanghai was then a hotbed for translations and publications of ‘Western’ literary texts; it was also one of the main channels for the spread of ‘Western’, ‘modern’ ideas in the field of visual arts.



Figure 72. 1927, *Me and Ren Hao at Shanghai Sing Hwa Arts Academy Studio* (original caption)

---

<sup>106</sup> Chow Tse-Tsung, *The May 4<sup>th</sup> Movement – Intellectual Revolution in Modern China* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard university Press, 1960), p. 35. Shanghai in particular was crucial in the development of Chinese modern literature, a tradition which began, as Lydia H. Liu commented, “with translation, adaptation, appropriation, and other interlingual practices related to the West”. Lydia Liu, *Translingual Practice – Literature, National Culture and Translated Modernity – China, 1900 – 1937* (California: Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 25.

For the artist, or the student of art, Shanghai was at the very forefront of the encounter between traditional Chinese culture and the 'modernity' represented by the 'West'. The violence of such an encounter cannot be underestimated, as Michael Sullivan so vividly evoked: "To the tensions that enlivened painting in the Ming and Ch'ing dynasties the 20<sup>th</sup> century has added far greater tension of its own".<sup>107</sup> Then he elaborated: "They [the tensions] have been present, in some form, for instance, after the Revolution of 1911 when the first private academies of art opened in Shanghai and Canton and young students laid down their brushes and began obediently to learn to draw from casts in the Beaux Arts manner; they were present when in the 1920s the use of nude models in Shanghai caused a public scandal; they were present in the minds of the artists who returned from Paris to find that the oil painting of the salons was meaningless to all but the small cosmopolitan set in the French concession of Shanghai, and that beyond its confines they were strangers among their own people."<sup>108</sup>

---

<sup>107</sup> Sullivan, *Symbols of Eternity – The Art of Landscape Painting in China*, p. 166.

<sup>108</sup> Sullivan, *Symbols of Eternity – The Art of Landscape Painting in China*, p. 166.



These tensions affected “all the artists who came into contact with Western culture and who were faced with the choice of being ‘foreign,’ and progressive, or Chinese and reactionary.”<sup>109</sup>

Surely the tensions generated out of this ‘clash’ of civilizations, where notions of self-hood and identity were in a period of great transition, must have – to a certain extent – simmered beneath Liu’s armory of “Western attires”. Just as the explosive scandal of using nude models must have found its own resurgence or release in the excitement of the ‘Nanyang pioneers’ before the bared breasts of Ni Pollok, and the topless women of Bali.

On another note, the artistic milieu of Shanghai that Liu was plunged into was also one that came face to face with the evaporation of ready reception by the public – a public which was increasingly alienated from the increasingly hermetic nature of modern art. These confusions would no doubt have been magnified by Liu’s perpetual spatial displacements between the Fujian province where he grew up, Muar in Malaysia where his family moved to, Shanghai where he studied, Paris where he sojourned, Shanghai again where he taught, and finally Singapore where he lived. Plunged into this existence of constant drifting, it seems as though Liu was destined for a life of perpetual traveling. For

---

<sup>109</sup> Sullivan, *Symbols of Eternity – The Art of Landscape Painting in China*, p. 166.

he would be incessantly propelled on his numerous travels – even after he had ‘settled’ in Singapore – to a myriad of different locations in search of painterly inspirations, the most important (to his career) of which was his travel to Bali in 1952.

### **Chinese Whispers**

For sure, the idea of an artist wandering in search of inspiration had long taken root in China even before A.D. 600, with the complete permeation of Taoist principles into the ideology of Chinese paintings. As Sullivan commented: “The message of the nature poets of those restless years is both Buddhist and Taoist. Their belief that the truth was to be sought in the mountains inspired many poets and painters to go wandering.”<sup>110</sup> By the time of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, for the Francophilic ‘modern’ Chinese painter, the notion of traveling and painting had become less Taoist in inspiration than an emulation of the French painter Paul Gauguin – the same man whose name Liu was said to have called out even in his dreams.<sup>111</sup>

---

<sup>110</sup> Sullivan, *Symbols of Eternity – The Art of Landscape Painting in China*, p. 26.

<sup>111</sup> Pan Shou, ‘Preface II’ in *The Paintings of Liu Kang* (Singapore: National Museum, 1981), unpaginated. [Already cited in Chapter One].



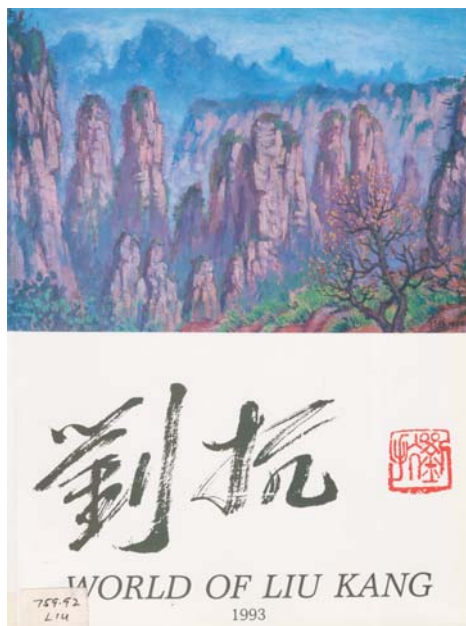
**Figure 73. Paul Gauguin**

Born in 1848, Gauguin worked as a stockbroker before gradually becoming interested in French Impressionist paintings. One of the pioneers of French impressionism, Camille Pissarro, took a special interest in Gauguin's attempts at painting, and in 1876 Gauguin had a landscape in the style of Pissarro accepted at the Salon. When the bank that he worked for bankrupted in 1884, Gauguin, at the age of 35, abandoned his trade to become a painter.



**Figure 74. Camille Pissarro**

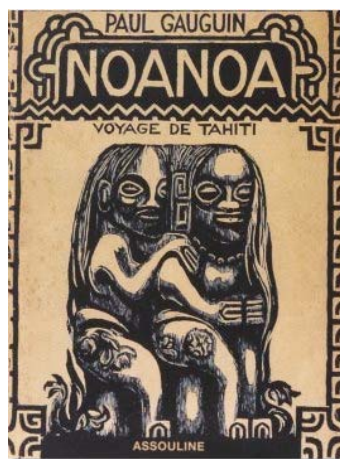
What followed was a series of sojourns away from the center of Paris: first to the 'south' of France, then to Pont-Aven in Brittany in 1886, followed by a trip to Panama in 1886/87 and to the island of Martinique in the Antilles in 1887. In 1891, he finally decided to set sail for Tahiti – a journey away from 'civilization' and into the South Seas, in order to found a style of painting never seen before. This was a journey that was to become the stuff of art world legends, and the source-image from which the 1952 voyage to Bali by the 'Nanyang' – or 'South Seas' – 'pioneers' would spring forth from.



**Figure 75. Cover of *The World of Liu Kang***

In the previous chapter, I mentioned how Liu's frequent publications, such as *The World of Liu Kang*, were strategic employments of reproducible and mass media to disseminate a carefully constructed persona. This self-image would in turn mediate, or encode the public's

access to his paintings. This same mixture of self-mythologization and cunning deployment of mass media was in fact a trademark of Gauguin's career. Even his legendary voyage to the South Seas was borne as much out of romantic aspirations as from practical considerations. His paintings were not selling well in Paris and by leaving Paris Gauguin hoped to "put an end to a long series of failed attempts to gain recognition as a painter and secure a decent living from the sale of his pictures."<sup>112</sup> Thus, upon his return from his two-year Tahiti sojourn back to Paris in 1893, he had to milk the voyage for what it was worth. He would spend the next 22 months completing very few paintings. Instead he became "concerned with other matters. He needed to publicize his paintings in Paris by making preparations for exhibitions..."<sup>113</sup>



**Figure 76. Cover of *Noa Noa* by Paul Gauguin**

---

<sup>112</sup> Dina Sonntag, 'Prelude to Tahiti: Gauguin in Paris, Brittany and Martinique' in *Paul Gauguin: Tahiti*, ed. Christoph Becker, (Ostfildern-Ruit : Verlag Gerd Hatje, 1998), p. 85.

<sup>113</sup> Christoph Becker, 'Gauguin and Tahiti' in *Paul Gauguin: Tahiti*, ed. Christoph Becker, (Ostfildern-Ruit : Verlag Gerd Hatje, 1998), p. 62.

These preparations included intensive publicity blitz campaigns, climaxing in the publication of his book entitled *Noa Noa*, which Gauguin considered to be “very useful in helping people to understand my painting.”<sup>114</sup> The text contained many oversimplifications of the Tahitian culture, and was not useful as a guide for enabling the Parisian public to better understand the Tahitian culture. It nevertheless had the effect of raising Gauguin “to the rank of a founder and a representative of a ‘religion of joy’.”<sup>115</sup> Subsequently, the exhibition of his Tahitian paintings, although not a financial success, brought Gauguin “the most important public relations success of his career.”<sup>116</sup>



**Figure 77. Gauguin in his Studio, late 1893 or 1894, photograph, Larousse Archives, Paris**

---

<sup>114</sup> Paul Gauguin, quoted from Becker, ‘Gauguin and Tahiti’, p. 62.

<sup>115</sup> Becker, ‘Gauguin and Tahiti’, p. 65. *Noa Noa*, for example, “contained many oversimplifications with regard to matters of mythology, such as the world of Tahitian gods, which Gauguin reduced to a very few prominent divinities” Becker, ‘Gauguin and Tahiti’, p. 63.

<sup>116</sup> Becker, ‘Gauguin and Tahiti’, p.79.

In the hyper competitive artistic milieu of late 19<sup>th</sup> Century Paris, Gauguin was "clearly aware that he needed to exploit the attention being given to his art in the interest of his own individual position among the many artists of Paris"<sup>117</sup>. There is no doubt that Gauguin was a master at this game of media manipulation. Intent on prolonging and promoting the debate about his art, he began preparations for a studio exhibition scheduled for December 1894, which again brought him much public attention. For Griselda Pollock, such strategies were "typical of their political moment but also symptomatic of the economic modernization of artistic practice by capitalist forms of production which are based on private producers making commodities for exchange on a market."<sup>118</sup>

Furthermore, in the case of art industry understood as cultural practice, "product identification and validation took place through the expansion of circulation and publicity systems."<sup>119</sup> Therefore, in a passage worth quoting in full, Pollock commented: "To become cultural capital and make cultural profit, the art work as product must be incorporated into a public discourse through recognition by a critical framework within which both the particular character of the product (the difference achieved by this

---

<sup>117</sup> Becker, 'Gauguin and Tahiti', p. 79.

<sup>118</sup> Griselda Pollock, *Avant-Garde Gambits 1888 – 1892: Gender and the Color of Art History* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1992), p. 16.

<sup>119</sup> Pollock, *Avant-Garde Gambits 1888 – 1892: Gender and the Color of Art History*, p.16.

gambit) can be named and its relation to an already valorized context of meanings can be identified (its reference). This complex process increasingly involved the manufacture of a public identity for the artist/producer which would stabilize and secure additional value for the producer/art. The promotion of the self – the artist as author – was a specific effect of the processes of commodification which this stress and individuality might seem to belie.”<sup>120</sup>

And it is in this light that we can understand why Gauguin took enormous care in the way he dressed himself in public. He was unforgettable, as the dealer Ambroise Vollard recalled: “...a fur cap on his head, his coat thrown over his shoulders and followed by a small, half-Javanese woman in brightly colored garments, one might have mistaken Gauguin for an oriental prince.”<sup>121</sup>

---

<sup>120</sup> Pollock, *Avant-Garde Gambits 1888 – 1892: Gender and the Color of Art History*, p.16.

<sup>121</sup> Becker, ‘Gauguin and Tahiti’, p. 79. Gauguin’s attention to fashion was also corollary to his mania for a kind of self-invention in general, as Becker quoting Séguin, reported, “he (Gauguin) invented everything: his easel was his own invention... his method of preparing his canvas – even his strange way of dressing... This consisted of an astrakhan hat and an enormous dark blue overcoat with gold buttons, in which he appeared to the Parisians like a sumptuous, gigantic Magyar; or like Rembrandt in 1635. As he made his stately way along the street, he leaned with one white-gloved, silver-ringed hand on a cane that he himself carved.” Becker, ‘Gauguin and Tahiti’, p.18.

In his book about Charles Baudelaire, one of the greatest Parisian self-inventors of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Eugene Holland remarked, “the perpetual self-invention of ‘free subjectivity’ defining modernity is played out in the form of alternating cycles of decoding and recoding, of daring innovation followed by hyperanxious self-consolidation, followed by renewed innovation, and so on.” Eugene W. Holland,



Therefore, a curious process of repetition and reversal is discernible between Liu and Gauguin. Whilst Gauguin, the one-time bourgeois stock-broker was often to be found ‘armored’ in the exotic garments of the ‘East’; Liu, the China-born “small-time rubber merchant’s son” would take care to be seen in the fashionable, bourgeois clothes of the ‘West’. Similarly, if Gauguin’s repeated sojourns culminating in his journey to the South Seas were escapes away from the center of Paris, Liu’s early search for modern art would bring him ever closer to the ‘center’ – first Shanghai, then Paris, before eventually settling for the South Seas, albeit a different South Seas from Gauguin’s.



**Figure 78. Paul Gauguin**

---

*Baudelaire and Schizoanalysis: The Sociopoetics of Modernism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 274.

Gauguin's peculiar fashion sense had first begun in 1886, when he took to wearing the traditional costume of the provincial Bretons. For Richard Brettel, these were "the first signs of Gauguin's determination...to treat his personal appearance as part of his work".<sup>122</sup> Brettel elaborated: "This was a stage in the development of his individuality, a step toward the persona he needed to create before he could properly distance himself from Pissarro and the world of impressionism in general".<sup>123</sup> In Paris, then the capital of modern art as well as fashion, dressing like a provincial 'Breton' not only helped to make him stand out, but also allowed him to wear on his sleeves an artistic manifesto, a new identity.



**Figure 79. Camille Pissarro, *Self-Portrait*, 1903**

---

<sup>122</sup> Richard Brettell, *The Art of Paul Gauguin* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, Washington & The Art institute of Chicago, 1988), p. XVIII.

<sup>123</sup> Brettell, *The Art of Paul Gauguin*, p. XVIII.

In fact, this fashion statement was nothing short of publicly performing a unique form of exorcism, carried out to dispel his artistic precursors. Namely, “the world of impressionism in general” and his one-time mentor Pissarro in particular – Pissarro, who was always rather conventionally and humbly dressed.

### **The Longing for the Eclipse**

That Gauguin’s fashion choices were a result of his attempt to escape from the light of “impressionism in general” seems equally applicable as a reason for his escape to the South Seas – virgin lands untouched and unpainted by any of his great precursors. There, Gauguin, who had only started painting at the age of 35, would no longer be a second-hand Impressionist seeing with old light. There, he would be able to emerge from the shadows of Impressionism as the first to paint the bounties of the South Seas, under the plenitude of tropical light.



**Figure 80. Photograph of Paul Cézanne, 1873**

Yet perhaps this journey to the south was itself always already a (willing or unwitting?) repetition of another. Listen to Gauguin as he raves: “Look at Cézanne, understood by no one, a profoundly mystical nature from the Orient (his face resembles that of an old man from the East)...a man of the South, who spends entire days on a mountain top reading Virgil and observing the heavens, which is why his horizons are so high, his blues so intense and his red so astonishingly vibrant”.<sup>124</sup>

Perhaps it was the fear that his colors would forever pale in comparison with those of the “man of the South” that had driven him to travel further South than Cézanne’s famous self-exile to the Southern French province of Aix-en-Provence.



**Figure 81. Photograph of Paul Cézanne**

---

<sup>124</sup> Becker, ‘Gauguin and Tahiti’, p. 90.

This was the same erudite Cézanne, who was always to be seen – in dress and behavior – to be like a provincial when he was in Paris.<sup>125</sup> Both Gauguin and Cézanne had been apprentices of Pissaro himself, and the two had worked together, shared ideas and methods (most intensely in the summer of 1881), so much so that motifs from Cézanne appear in Gauguin’s studies; he effectively appropriated aspects of the ‘isolated’ master’s techniques for his own purposes. By all accounts, this did not sit well with Cézanne, especially as it seems that Gauguin may have teased him about stealing the secrets of his art – Cézanne was, after all, not only suspicious and paranoid, but attempting to be a painter of ‘originality’.”<sup>126</sup> Such a perception of Gauguin as thief would in fact also be expressed by Pissaro, who on hindsight commented: “Gauguin is always poaching on someone’s land; nowadays, he’s pillaging the savages of Oceania.”<sup>127</sup>

---

<sup>125</sup> In *Photograph of Paul Cézanne*, we see an aged Cézanne, photographed in his studio, in an intermission between his work on *The Large Bathers*, 1906 – where traces of painterly labor are everywhere still visible upon his paint stained trousers, quite unlike Liu and Gauguin, who were always captured impeccably clean.

<sup>126</sup> Richard Shiff, *Cézanne and the End of Impressionism – A Study of the Theory, Technique, and Critical Evaluation of Modern Art* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), p.163.

<sup>127</sup> Abigail Solomon-Godeau, ‘Going Native’ in *The Expanding Discourse – Feminism and Art History*, ed. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992), p. 324.



Figure 82. Camille Pissaro, *Portrait of Paul Cézanne*, 1874



Figure 83. Photograph of Gustave Courbet

Yet, behind Cézanne, too, we can perhaps discern the presence of Gustave Courbet – a presence literally manifested in Pissaro's *Portrait of*

*Paul Cézanne*, 1874. Here we see Cézanne, predictably attired like a peasant. Attached onto the wall behind him is a sketch, or rather, a caricature of Courbet, depicted with the characteristic tools of his painterly trade. This painting was simultaneously a homage and parody of Cézanne, as it was a homage and a parody of Courbet.

Hence, the relationship of reversal between precursor and latecomer had a recursive rhythm. It had played out too in the relationship between Gauguin and Liu. It is a pendulum that swings between quotation and parody, and homage and irony. Bryson describes the complex dialectics well, when he wrote: “In rhetorical or discursive terms, the painting’s apprehension of its precursors unfolds through a figure of irony, by which one does not necessarily mean that the precursors are mocked; only that their productions are suspended within a logically higher set, within an image which presents itself as container of other images, rather than as an independent content.”<sup>128</sup>

This sense of irony is precisely what is at work in the *Portrait of Paul Cézanne*. To the left of Courbet’s sketch, we find what looks to be a newspaper cutting, entitled *L’Eclipse*. The implication of this inclusion is obvious. Courbet, whose influence upon Cézanne and Pissaro is immense, is like the pure, inexhaustible light of the sun that illuminates all.

---

<sup>128</sup> Norman Bryson, *Tradition and Desire – From David to Delacroix* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 35.



Cézanne is the moon which shines only by way of borrowed light – reflected, old light. And just as the desire of the latecomer is to overcome his precursor, the moon too, awaits the moment of eclipse when the sun will be ‘overshadowed’.



Figure 84. Gustave Courbet, *Bonjour, Monsieur Courbet*, 1854



Figure 85. Paul Gauguin, *Bonjour, Monsieur Gauguin*, 1889



But it was not only Cézanne who struggled under the shadow of Courbet. Gauguin too, whose *Bonjour, Monsieur Gauguin*, 1889 is a paraphrase of Courbet's *Bonjour, Monsieur Courbet*, 1854 at once refers, defers and differs from the master.<sup>129</sup> In place of the earthy 'realism' of Courbet's was Gauguin's hallucinatory colors; in the place of the peasant-like Courbet on the far right of *Bonjour, Monsieur Courbet* was the hyperbolic extravagance of Gauguin on the left of *Bonjour, Monsieur Gauguin*.

For Griselda Pollock, *Bonjour, Monsieur Gauguin* manifested the avant-garde painters' "need to insert themselves into their own work,

---

<sup>129</sup> This trilogy of terms - 'referring, deferring and differing' is borrowed from Griselda Pollock. For her, the "decisive character of avant-gardism", which she identifies as emerging most strongly in the Parisian milieu in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century was precisely this "play of reference, deference and difference". She explains: "The trilogy proposes a specific way of understanding avant-gardism as a kind of game-play. In contrast to conventional histories of modern art, which tell its story through heroic individuals, each 'inventing' his own (usually) novel style as an expression of individual genius, I propose my three terms. To make your mark in the avant-garde community, you had to relate your work to what was going on: *reference*. Then you had to defer to the existing leader, to the work of project which represented the latest move, the last word, or what was considered the definitive statement of shared concerns: *deference*. Finally your own move involved establishing a *difference* which had to be both legible in terms of current aesthetics and criticism, and also a definitive advance on that current position. Reference ensured recognition that what you were doing was part of the avant-garde project. Deference and difference had to be finely calibrated so that the ambition and claim of your work was measured by its difference from the artist and artistic statement whose status you both acknowledged (deference) *and* displaced." Pollock, *Avant-Garde Gambits 1888 – 1892 – Gender and the Color of Art History*, p. 14. This paradox of constructing something that is at once 'old' and 'new' as explained by Pollock is a useful and interesting derivation from the work of Harold Bloom. As mentioned previously, an interesting web of influence can be drawn up regarding the diffusion of Bloom's ideas in various reaches of art historiography.

either through the self-portraits in such paintings...the idiosyncratic stylizations which served as self-advertisement. The artist's own work (meaning both object and the labor which produced it) itself becomes a signifier of the artistic subject who produced it".<sup>130</sup> Such an anxiety for self-manifestation was what we have examined as operative within Liu's practice, and embodied most directly by his numerous photographic self-portraits. This was also embodied just as strongly, albeit with a series of displacements and concealments, in his paintings that we have been looking at.<sup>131</sup>

---

<sup>130</sup> Pollock, *Avant-Garde Gambits 1888 – 1892 – Gender and the Color of Art History*, p. 47.

<sup>131</sup> The term 'displacement' has been used with my full awareness of its Freudian associations. According to Laplanche and Pontalis, displacement in the Freudian framework was related to the "fact that an idea's emphasis, interest or intensity is liable to be detached from it and to pass on to other ideas, which were originally of little intensity but which are related to the first idea by a chain of associations.... This phenomenon, though particularly noticeable in the analysis of dreams, is also to be observed in the formation of psychoneurotic symptoms and, in a general way, in every unconscious formation...The psycho-analytic theory of displacement depends upon the economic hypothesis of a Cathetic energy able to detach itself from ideas and to run along associative pathways...." And they added, in a statement that is useful both for reading the phallic substitutes that repeatedly protrude from Liu's painting, and the general drift of our argument relating agonistic artistic struggles to anxiety, that displacement is "a clearly defensive function in the various formations in which the analyst encounters it; in a phobia...displacement on to the phobic object permits the objectivation, localization and containment of anxiety." Laplanche and J.B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (London: The Hogarth Press, 1973), p.121 – 123.



**Figure 86. Photograph of Gustave Courbet**

Gustave Courbet's intractable personality was also a well publicized one. He had in 1850, chosen to live the 'life of a savage', in a commune away from Paris, thus foreshadowing Gauguin's own journey to the savage land of Tahiti. Yet T.J. Clark had judged that such a life was in fact, "a disguise which was necessary ...but bought at some considerable cost."<sup>132</sup> Clark then asked: "The question must be: what was the advantage in the elaborate disguise and what did it enable Courbet to do? I think the answer is this: the mask let Courbet remain inside Paris – at the very center of the world of art...without becoming part of it. He acted the part of the invader, outside, vulgarian, in order to stay in the middle of

---

<sup>132</sup> T.J. Clark, *Image of the People : Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution* (Princeton, N.J. : Princeton University Press, 1982), p. 29.

things, but keep his own distance from them...he played the rustic – believing in the role of course”.<sup>133</sup>

### **The Two-Way Street**

Now this sense of “acting the part” and “believing in the role”, like the strategy of situating oneself simultaneously “outside” yet “inside” of Paris is precisely what was played out in one guise or another in Cézanne, Pissaro, Gauguin, Liu – complete with the prerequisite ironical reversals and antithetical completions.<sup>134</sup>

Here it must be mentioned that this sequence of names that we have interpolated into a lineage is not the only strand that we can draw out from the complex web of influence, which must be understood as a web without a center.<sup>135</sup> This single strand of influence that we have been

---

<sup>133</sup> Clark, *Image of the People : Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution*, p. 29.

<sup>134</sup> This strategy of traveling, or more precisely, of departure away from Paris was not at all unique to Gauguin, for as Pollock noted, during “1888, Gauguin, Bernard and Van Gogh all left Paris. It was a curious move to make at that time, given the avant-garde’s strong identification with urban and suburban locations. They placed themselves at a geographical distance from the metropolitan avant-garde culture. But ideologically they remained part of it and identified by it. This dialectic of distance and identification has to be grasped as the founding condition of what avant-gardists do.” Pollock, *Avant-Garde Gambits 1888 – 1892 – Gender and the Color of Art History*, p. 49.

<sup>135</sup> There are numerous other persons which we may connect to the artistic enterprise of Gauguin, and which I have omitted here, the most obvious of whom would be Vincent Van Gogh – who had a tumultuous relationship with Gauguin

constructing here is not determined by the biographical, for as George Kubler comments: “The life of an artist is rightly a unit of study in any biographical series. But to make it the main unit of study in the history of art is like discussing railroads of a country in terms of the experiences of a single traveler on several of them.”<sup>136</sup> Instead, to describe railroads accurately, we are obliged as Kubler recommended, “to disregard persons and states, for the railroads themselves are the elements of continuity, and not the travelers or the functionaries thereon.”<sup>137</sup> Neither is the study of influence the work of an archival librarian hunting down the declaration of statements and intentions of the artists involved. For influence is a terrain so often charged with so much defensive ambivalence and played for with such high stakes, that most of its tracks are hidden – sometimes even from the protagonists themselves.

Most profoundly, the proper study of influence is not set into motion by a desire to sniff out a singular source at the beginning. It is not a religious practice, even less a monotheistic one. Rather, a strand of

---

and who was, it seems, the first to have mentioned the possibility of a “studio of the Tropics”. See Pollock, *Avant-Garde Gambits 1888 – 1892 – Gender and the Color of Art History*, p. 74, n. 3. The other key figure was Georges Seurat. As noted by Pollock, “Félix Fénéon, Seurat’s anarchist apologist, acknowledged Gauguin’s competition with Seurat for leadership of the new generation” See Pollock, *Avant-Garde Gambits 1888 – 1892 – Gender and the Color of Art History*, p. 31.

<sup>136</sup> George Kubler, *The Shape of Time – Remarks on the History of Things* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1962), p. 6.

<sup>137</sup> Kubler, *The Shape of Time – Remarks on the History of Things*, p. 6.

influence is always constructed retroactively by the final term in the series. As Bryson declares: “The ‘first’ image, or the ‘first’ form, is the first one to be referred back to a previous instance in the way consensually defined by recognition’s codes... The previous only becomes prior when appropriated by the future as recollection: it can only be a source retroactively.”<sup>138</sup>



**Figure 87. Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon, *Bali Project: Artist and Model*, 2001**

In the context of this dissertation, it is the unabashed self-display in Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon’s photo-copies of Liu’s paintings that first opens our perception to Liu’s anxiety for self-manifestation. This in turn produces a strand of reference which leads us to the names of Gauguin, Cézanne, Pissaro, and Courbet. This is a lineage generated retroactively. To put this in another, more prosaic way – in Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon’s sloppy

---

<sup>138</sup> Bryson, *Tradition and Desire – From David to Delacroix*, p. 25.

snapshots, the desire for self-manifestation is so brutally literalized, and stripped so thoroughly of any mediating claims (such as that of 'genius', 'originality' or mastery), that they compel us to perceive these same tendencies buried within the works of their artistic ancestors.

Hence, the analysis of influence is a two-way street – and it is the precursive “source” that is appropriated retroactively and transformed by the later work of art. And it is thus, that every work of art contains the potential to transform the way in which the history of art can be understood.<sup>139</sup>

---

<sup>139</sup> According to Kubler, because “history is unfinished business, the boundaries of its divisions continually move, and will continue to move for as long as men make history. T.S. Eliot was perhaps the first to note this relationship when he observed that every major work of art forces upon us reassessments of all previous works. Thus the advent of Rodin alters the transmitted identity of Michelangelo by enlarging our understanding of sculpture and permitting us a new objective vision of the work.” Kubler, *The Shape of Time – Remarks on the History of Things* 1962, p. 34 – 35.

The relationship between relays along the flow of transmission is not that of a simplistic top-down flow (of influence), but is more akin to what Gilles Deleuze described as the “most profound paradox of memory”, where the “past is ‘contemporaneous’ with the present. If the past had to wait in order to be no longer, if it was not immediately the now that it had passed, the ‘past in general,’ it could never become what it is, it would never be that past... The past and the present do not coexist with the present whose past it is. The past and the present do not denote two successive moments, but two elements which coexist: One is the present, which does not cease to pass, and the other is the past, which does not cease to be but put through all presents pass.” Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (New York: Zone Books, 1991), p. 59. This usage of Henri Bergson (albeit one filtered through Deleuze) to explain Kubler is not random, for Bergson’s work was of great importance to the French art historian Henri Focillon – Kubler’s teacher.

The study of influence that I have been proposing here should be grasped in its twin functions. First and foremost, the common misperception, that the study of influence is the police work of sniffing out the originals from imitators, the true from the pretenders must be dispelled. And neither is it dedicated to the establishment of a hierarchy between source-image and afterimages. Instead, this very notion of plenitude, priority and presence of the origin is one that is most fully dispelled.

Next, I would like to suggest that along with the schema of “Western” art Liu inherited, is also this particular anxiety of the present before the past. In this sense, the anxiety of influence that the colonial or postcolonial cultural producer might experience, can itself be productively projected back into the ‘Western’ source-image. In other words, to recognise that the ‘source’ is itself haunted by this anxiety, and hence, to acknowledge that the very notion of the ‘source’ is void of illusionary unity. It “is the very idea of a first time which becomes enigmatic,” as Derrida writes, and it “is thus the delay which is in the beginning.”<sup>140</sup>

---

<sup>140</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘Freud and the Scene of Writing’ in *Writing and Difference* (Chicago : University of Chicago, 1978), p. 203.



## Tradition and Desire

We have, in the previous chapter seen how the red and blue masks of Liu's *Masks (Bali)*, constitute the 'double-faces' of Liu. The red mask plunging into the bosom of the woman is an embodiment of his desire for contact with the Balinese woman – understood as trope for nature. The blue mask turning outwards to repel the beholder (the first of whom is the artist), can in turn be understood as a trope for the weight of tradition.<sup>141</sup>

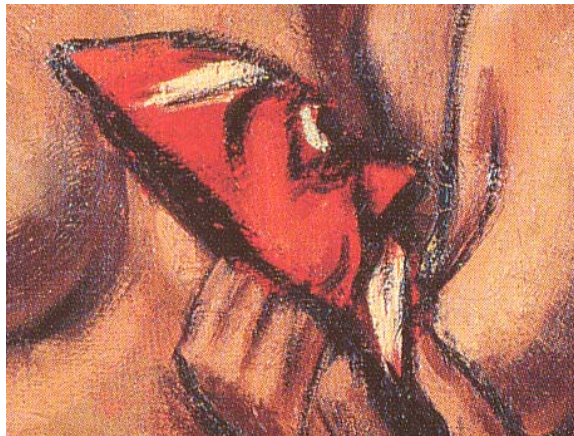


Figure 88. Details from Liu Kang, *Masks (Bali)*, 1953

---

<sup>141</sup> The unbearable tensions of this position is described beautifully by Bryson: "...the perspective of the viewer is not the only one available, nor is it the only perspective within painting itself; for although to the viewer the art of the past may appear a treasure-house where all the riches are available for simultaneous inspection, to the painter it may well seem that the tradition has grown too wealthy to need anything further. Where the viewer's activity takes place in the essentially timeless zone of the gallery or study, and collapses the long process of tradition into a presence that seems to stand outside of history, the painter is condemned to work within time, within history, and within a tradition which may already have said everything he has to say. And although the viewer who loves painting will properly seek to be flooded by the images of the past, if the painter yields to the same desire he risks disaster, for in that flood his own images may drown: if he yields to that invasion he will cease to be who and what he is, a painter, and become the being he must always fight to overcome, that is, only a viewer." Bryson, *Tradition and Desire – From David to Delacroix*, p.5.



Figure 89. Details from Liu Kang, *Masks (Bali)*, 1953

This fantasy of artistic primacy and the nagging fear of artistic belatedness is played out as a metonymy of sexual possession and sexual impotence. With this in mind, we can now approach Gauguin's *Words of the Devil*, 1892, executed during his sojourn in Tahiti. Here, in the setting of a small clearing in the wilderness, is a woman placed in the foreground. Like the Balinese women in *Masks (Bali)*, I would like to suggest that she is a trope for the virgin (artistic and geographical) territory that Gauguin wants to claim as his.

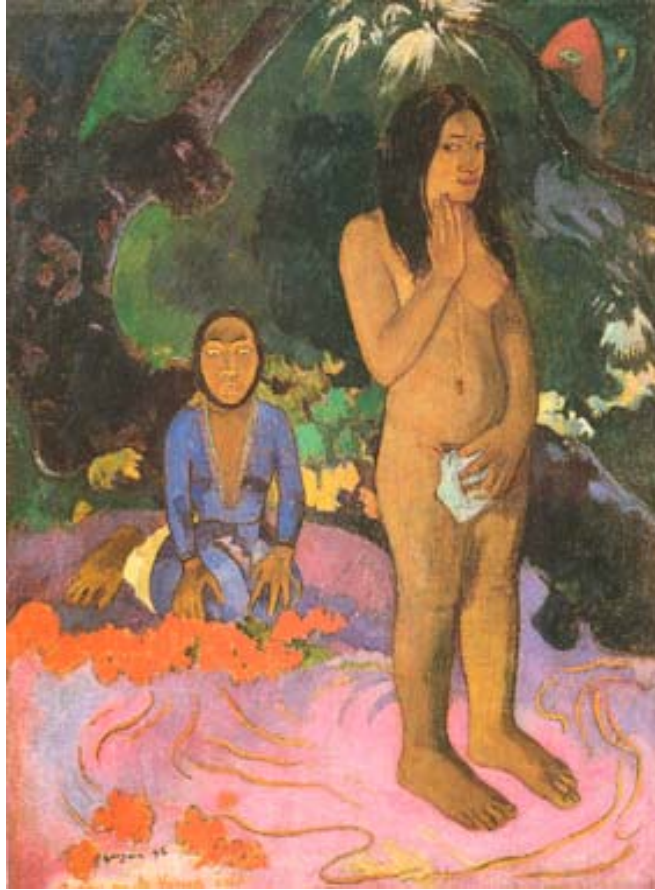


Figure 90. Paul Gauguin, *Words of the Devil*, 1892

Liu's red mask finds itself displaced onto *Words of the Devil* as a small piece of cloth the standing woman holds against her pubic area, near the center of the image. The self-consciousness of the 'touched' woman in *Mask (Bali)* – expressed through the flush of her face and the awkwardness of her body – is in *Words of the Devil* explicitly marked through the sense of recoil that is registered on the woman's face. As though feeling the force of an aggressive gaze, she covers up her genitals defensively.



Figure 91. Detail from *Words of the Devil*, 1892

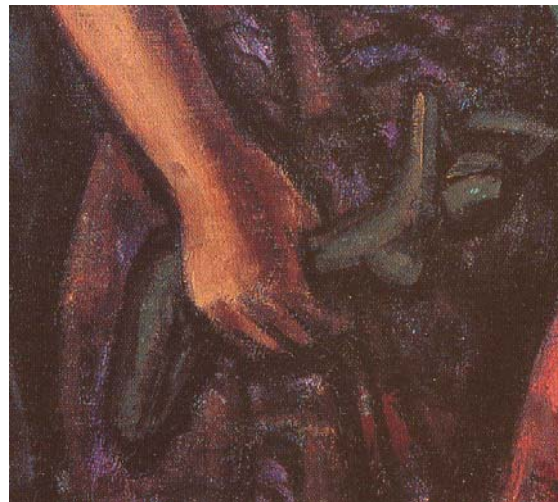


Figure 92. Details from *Masks (Bali)*, 1953

However, the piece of cloth, which on first reading plays a protective, shielding function, can, by a dialectical twist, be perceived as its opposite. By virtue of the force with which it is pressed into direct contact with the woman's genitals, it takes on a possessive, if not aggressive function like Liu's red mask – a receptacle for the projective phallic play of contact with a female body.<sup>142</sup>

---

<sup>142</sup> This multiplicity of meanings attached to a sign or a symptom is in line with the Freudian conception of the unconscious. As Laplanche and Pontalis remarked, "Freud notes that the symbolic relation linking symptom and meaning is such that a single symptom may express several meanings, not only at once but also one



In other words, the cloth can just as easily be understood as a manifestation of Gauguin's scopophilic desire, a displaced substitute for the phallus, akin to the (undeniably phallic) brown sculpture grasped tantalizingly near the crouch of the woman on the left in *Masks (Bali)*. Or perhaps the act of aggressive penetration might already have taken place in *Words of the Devil*, and the cloth is held at the genitals to stop the bleeding.<sup>143</sup> If Liu's desire for the woman/nature/originality in *Masks (Bali)* is manifested as a teasing fondling and sucking of the breasts, Gauguin's corollary desire in *Words of the Devil* is manifested overtly as forceful penetration.



Figure 93. Detail from Paul Gauguin, *Words of the Devil*, 1892

---

after another..." Laplanche and Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, p. 91.

<sup>143</sup> The psychic connection between rape and primitivist painting has been remarked upon by Solomon-Godeau, for whom there is "a darker side to primitivist desire, one implicated in fantasies of imaginary knowledge, power and rape and these fantasies, moreover, are sometimes underpinned by real power, by real rape. When Gauguin writes in the margin of the *Noa Noa* manuscript, 'I saw plenty of calm-eyed women, I wanted them to be willing to be taken without a word, brutally. In a way (it was a) longing to rape.'" Solomon-Godeau, 'Going Native', p. 324.

Meanwhile, Liu's blue mask sneering at the beholder resurfaces in *Words of the Devil* as a fully diabolical presence, a Devil with a mask-like face. It should be noted that the blue mask and this Devil are located in a similar spatial configuration in relation to the female figures on display – they are both tucked to the left, behind and beyond the women's sphere of vision. But in the place of Liu's secular, mocking returning gaze is the hyperbolic, supernatural evil of Gauguin's specter. A certain principle seems to be at work – the more forcefully manifested the possessive inward gaze, the greater the repelling force.

However, the gaze in *Masks (Bali)* is one that is clearly disembodied. Detached from a body, it comes 'alive' only if the beholder activates it by projecting an agency into it. And this quality is one shared by the Devil – it is impossible to ascertain if those eyes are really staring back out at us. Like a guilty conscience, the Devil is there – if the beholder thinks it is.<sup>144</sup>

---

<sup>144</sup> The double structure of seeing and being seen, is repeated with variation in another of Gauguin's Tahitian paintings, *Where are You going*, painted also in 1892. Here, the topless woman seems unaware of her being looked at. But Gauguin's gaze at her does not escape the attention of the pair of gossiping women, situated at a location similar to that of the blue mask in *Masks (Bali)* and the Devil in *Words of the Devil*. The phallic sculpture of *Masks (Bali)* is in turn replaced by what looks like a rolled up bundle of brown cloth, held and stroked by the woman, and placed near her genitals, like the cloth in *Words of the Devil*.

## The Devil, Probably

The ideal of Tahiti as a land of plenitude, priority and purity is evoked once again by Gauguin's *The Delightful Land*, where a woman is again displayed on the right of the picture. She stands in the midst of a wild land of plenty.



Figure 94. Paul Gauguin, *The Delightful Land*, 1892



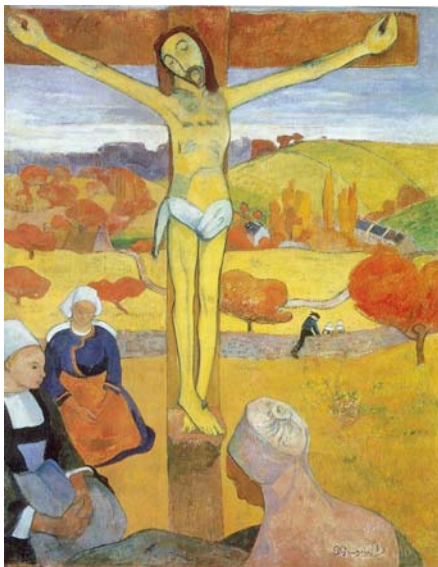
Figure 95. Paul Gauguin, *Where are you going*, 1892

In *Where are You Going*, these gossiping women embody the paranoia that Gauguin must have felt about the 'wagging tongues' in the art world of Paris, judgments of the 'other' that he cannot escape even in far flung Tahiti. They cannot be avoided, because like the words of the Devil – they are heard in the head – in his own mind, from which there is no escape. And it is in this pool of nagging suspicion, guilt, and uncertainty, that the anxiety of influence is lodged.

However this very idea of an untouched virgin territory that can be evoked only via its reference to a set of iconography is as old as Catholicism – the freshness of Tahiti can only ever be depicted by Gauguin under the clichéd, old light of Eden.<sup>145</sup> And the naked woman, in turn, a trope for the possibility of an Adamic artistic originality, presented

---

<sup>145</sup> This paradox was noted also by Pollock who in analyzing a passage from Gauguin's *Noa Noa*, commented: "This reads like Eden regained, and the absence of good and evil refers explicitly to the prelapsarian moment, which paradoxically inscribes its opposite, the Fall, and a specifically Catholic consciousness of its meaning. However much Gauguin wanted to escape, his Utopia was embedded in a structure of Western meanings – and his sexuality only operated through reference to it." Pollock, *Avant-Garde Gambits 1888 – 1892 – Gender and the Color of Art History*, p. 75, n. 29. This deep-seated reliance on Catholic iconography is in fact a recurrent trait in Gauguin's painterly modus operandi, apparent for example in the series of paintings he produced from his sojourn in Pont Aven.



**Figure 96. Paul Gauguin, *The Yellow Christ*, 1889**

In *The Yellow Christ*, the Breton women are painted in their Sunday costumes, in postures that so strongly evoked Gauguin's fascination with their "rustic and superstitious piety", which is, as Griselda Pollock commented, a "tableau *religieux* only because of the hidden assumption on the presumed viewer's part of the religiosity of the priest-ridden, gullible peasants, that is simple-minded women who belong to a bygone age." *Avant-Garde Gambits 1888 – 1892 – Gender and the Color of Art History*, p. 56.



under the cloak of Eve.<sup>146</sup> Hence despite clocking in so many miles on his journey to see with fresh eyes, Tahiti was never perceived in its own light, for it was always already an afterimage of the Catholic paradise – a paradise always already lost, for there can be no Eden without the

---

<sup>146</sup> Gauguin himself was not unaware of this paradox, for he had sought to deflect this baggage of Catholic iconography by constructing this figure of Eve with a variety of non-Christian sources, as noted by Stephen Eisenman. According to Eisenman: “She is also a prophet, her posture inspired by a sculpted figure of the Buddha from the façade of a Javanese temple of Borobudur. (Gauguin owned a photograph of the relief).” Stephen F. Eisenman, *Gauguin’s Skirt* (London, Thames and Hudson, 1997), p. 66.

Peter Brooks provides an interesting argument whereby Gauguin’s disguise of Eve as the Tahitian woman is understood as a productive strategy by which he could overcome the repetitiveness of Academic treatments of the nude. For Brooks, Gauguin “takes on the almost impossible task of revisiting Eve, of creating a nude in Paradise whose nakedness is meant to be looked at in joy and erotic pleasure without the sense that her evident sexuality is connected to evil and pain. His success in this revision is of course dependent on a certain depersonalization of his Eve in praising her ‘animality,’ he removes her from traditional cultural constraints and brackets her own subjectivity...If one views...Gauguin’s Tahitian painting with sympathy – as marking a decisive break from current European representations of the nude – one may want to counter with the argument that Gauguin produced new and compelling art even while his discourse remained hostage to primitivist myths because he turned his discourse to other uses, made his objects of representation call into question traditional kinds of looking...His construction of ‘the natural,’ in *Te Nave Nave Feuna* (The Delightful Land), for instance, is a matter of the utmost artifice, aimed at disarming our traditional view of the nude and of the primitive, revising the space of our observation and the context of our looking. Gauguin’s ‘exotic’ continually refers us back – and is meant to refer us back – to the problem of the nude in Western art. In this sense, his flight to Oceania is less escapist than might first appear, and the art created there constantly antithetical, using the Tahitian body as a commentary on the civilization that produces Eve.” Peter Brooks, ‘Gauguin’s Tahitian Body’ in *The Expanding Discourse – Feminism and Art History*, ed. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (New York: HarperCollins Publishers), p. 336 – 337.

Brooks’ reading is valid and interesting, and although we defer in our degrees of appreciation for the work of Gauguin, his reading is in no serious way contradictory to my basic point here - which is that *The Delightful Land* can only be understood in the light of the tradition of European painting. Thus Tahiti – despite all of Gauguin’s rhetoric, was never, and could never be truly ‘fresh’. And it is this contradiction that I am interested in.

corrupting serpent, no paradise without the Devil, no grace without the fall.<sup>147</sup>



Figure 97. Details from *The Delightful Land*, 1892

This Devil thus slithers back into *The Delightful Land*. Here, it raises its head in the shape of the strange peacock feather-like plants located, like the Devil in *Words of the Devil*, on the left side of the picture – like so many eyes staring back at the beholder. And the Devil, as Bloom remarked, was the proper emblem of the modern poet, the embodiment of the very desire to swerve from the aegis of a Godlike Tradition, in his

---

<sup>147</sup> In other words, Tahiti is doomed to be locked in a binary from which Gauguin or other French fantasies about it, cannot escape. Tahiti can never be seen under the plenitude of its own light, but is always defined as the 'other'. For example, Denis Diderot had once remarked that "the Tahitian borders on the origin of the world, and the European on its old age." Cited from Brooks, 'Gauguin's Tahitian Body', p.332.

satanic search for autonomy. The alternative, as Bloom described, “is to repent, to accept a God altogether other than the self, wholly external to the possible. This God is cultural history, the dead poets, the embarrassments of a tradition too wealthy to need anything more.”<sup>148</sup>

### **The Persistence of the Dead**

Let us now examine one last Tahitian painting by Gauguin – *Spirit of the Dead Watching*, 1892. This was a painting that Gauguin considered to be the manifesto of his Tahitian period. He had hoped that this painting “would convey his savage identity to the Old World”<sup>149</sup> Here, the fecund possibilities of Tahiti as a site for the founding of a new style, are embodied in the girl-woman who lays prostrate, awaiting the beholder’s taking.<sup>150</sup> Yet this consummation can never be completely unself-

---

<sup>148</sup> Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence – A Theory of Poetry*, p. 21.

<sup>149</sup> Hal Foster, ‘Primitive Scenes’ in *Prosthetic Gods* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2004), pp. 5.

<sup>150</sup> For this painting, Gauguin had established a narrative context that appears in *Noa Noa*: “Tehura [Teha’amana] lay motionless, naked, belly down on the bed: she stared up at me, her eyes wide with fear, and she seemed not to know who I was. For a moment I too felt a strange uncertainty. Tehura’s dread was contagious; it seemed to me that a phosphorescent light poured from her staring eyes. I had never seen her so lovely; above all I had never seen her beauty so moving...Perhaps she took me, with my anguished face, for one of those legendary demons or specters, the *tupapaus* that filled the sleepless nights of her people.” Pollock, *Avant-Garde Gambits 1888 – 1892 – Gender and the Color of Art History*, p. 26. This narrative can be read without any contradiction to my own interpretation of the picture.

conscious, for hovering at the back, is always the spirit of the dead – watching.



Figure 98. Paul Gauguin, *Spirit of the Dead Watching*, 1892

Yet this spirit had a name – it was *Olympia*. As Peter Brook commented, "The triumphant nude of Gauguin's time was of course Manet's *Olympia*, a painting that Gauguin worshipped: he took the trouble to copy it, and he has a photograph of it with him in Tahiti".<sup>151</sup> And *Spirit of the Dead Watching* was, as "a number of commentators have subsequently noted...Gauguin's evident ambition to rephrase Manet's painting – a photograph of which was tacked on the wall of Gauguin's hut

---

<sup>151</sup> Brooks, 'Gauguin's Tahitian Body', p. 336

– in Tahitian terms.”<sup>152</sup> Like the body of *Olympia*, the body in *Spirit of the Dead Watching* is offered to the spectator’s gaze, although as Brook noted, “not frontally this time – rather a pose that refuses to be a pose, refuses the sense of self-display that one finds in *Olympia* and the distinct impression given by Manet’s girl that she is available, for a price. Gauguin’s nude is also available, but in a more unself-conscious way, and without connotations of venality.”<sup>153</sup>

Yet this turning away of the figure in *Spirit of the Dead Watching*, in itself a trope for Gauguin’s very own swerve away from the aegis of Manet, is also a turning away from a certain sense of modernity that marked the true power of *Olympia*.

---

<sup>152</sup> Brooks, ‘Gauguin’s Tahitian Body’, p. 340.

<sup>153</sup> Brooks, ‘Gauguin’s Tahitian Body’, p.340. Pollock’s comments about this painting are especially pertinent: “Giving a form to the spirit, he creates a surrogate spectator in the painting, which then contains and relocates the young Tahitian’s fear and misrecognition of him, the intruder. It displaces his voyeurism onto her paranoia. The anthropological narrative veils the desires aroused in him by the scene by insisting that what he shows is merely a representation of her, Tahitian, superstition. Then, by formal reference to Manet’s *Olympia* – the avant-garde treatment of the nude – Gauguin reintroduces himself, claiming a place in that avant-garde in another, less vulnerable position, as artist, as owner, as European man outside the painting.” Pollock, *Avant-Garde Gambits 1888 – 1892 – Gender and the Color of Art History*, p. 26

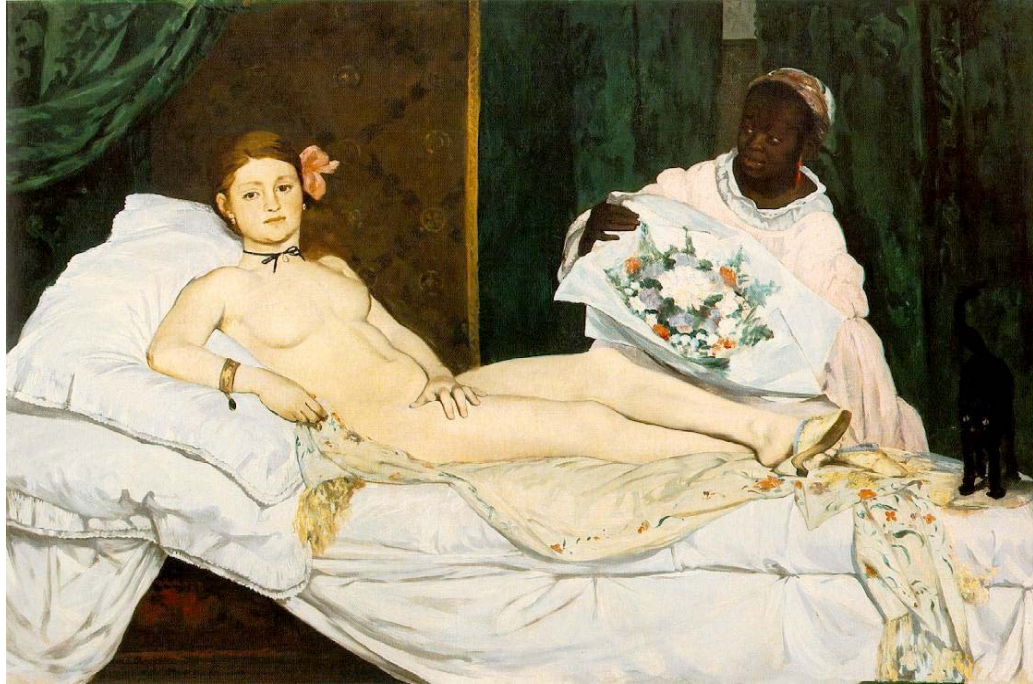


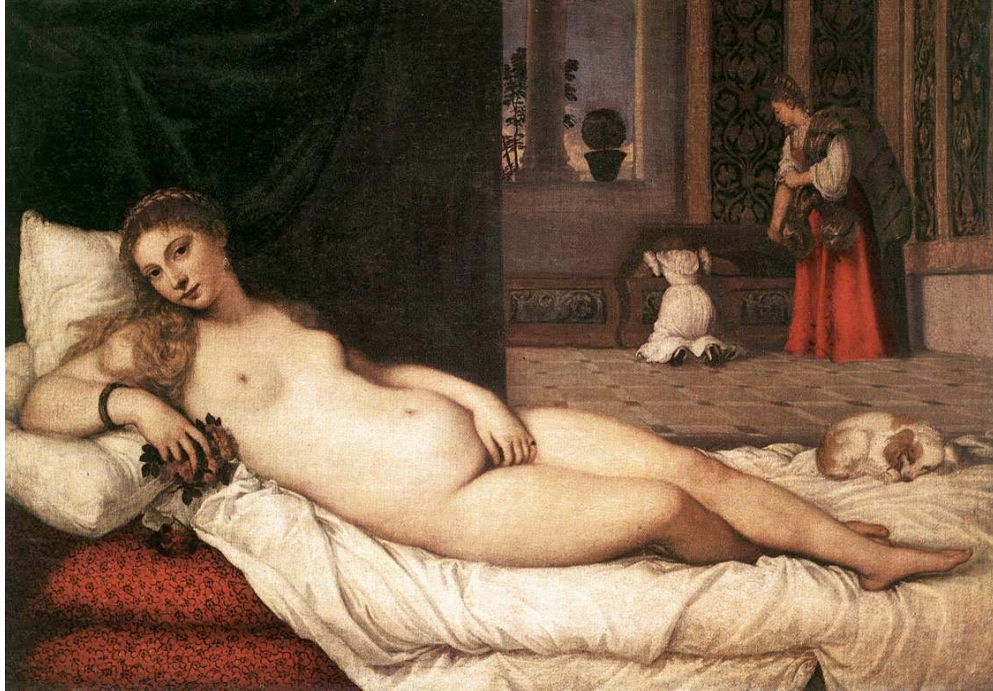
Figure 99. Edouard Manet, *Olympia*, 1863

For the power of *Olympia* – and its scandal, lay in the way in which it laid bare a number of conventions that had constituted the practice of painting in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. For one, *Olympia* was “at pains to disclose its relationship to the great art tradition of European art...Olympia derived – and stated its derivation – from Titian’s *Venus of Urbino*”.<sup>154</sup>

---

<sup>154</sup> TJ Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life – Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 94. About the full implications of this play of reference in *Olympia* in relation to its anxiety of influence, particularly with respect to the possibility of a French painting before the weight of the Italian Tradition, please refer to Michael Fried, ‘Manet’s Sources, 1859 – 1869’ in *Manet’s Modernism – or The Face of Painting in the 1860s* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996).





**Figure 100. Titian, *The Venus of Urbino*, 1538**

Titian's painting was originally commissioned for the wedding of Guidobaldo II della Rovere to a ten-year old girl, Giulia Varano. Hence the voluptuous female body of *The Venus of Urbino* – from which Manet literally copied the position of the reclining nude – was meant as a symbolic promise. It was a promise of female sensuality, but one which was also domesticated. She was Venus, but a Venus lodged emphatically within a domestic setting. The actual model for this painting was believed to be a courtesan. When it came to Manet's *Olympia*, however, what was declared was not only its own status as afterimage in relation to Titian's source-image, but also a frank, even brazen announcement that the model we were looking at was no Goddess of Love, but love paid by the hour.

Gauguin had hoped that his version of the nude in *Spirit of the Dead Watching* would pack a similar scandalous impact. In other words, no matter how far he had traveled physically, Gauguin, in a sense had never left Paris.<sup>155</sup> The art of Paris, was in a sense the 'Spirit of the Dead' that Gauguin could feel, even in his hut in Tahiti, to be 'watching' him – a ghostly presence could follow him to the ends of the world, in the shape of a photograph, an afterimage burnt too deeply into his mind's eye. There is no shaking off, no escape from the anxiety of influence.

And if Manet had sought so desperately for his 'modern' painting to be seen, as an afterimage of Titian's masterpiece, and as a result belonging squarely to the tradition of European art, Gauguin sought, by a desperate rhetoric, to claim for himself an originality that would free him from this tradition. Such an escape was to be carried out by a voluntary geographical dislocation that was at the same time an attempt to bypass the laws of time's arrow. The road to Tahiti was also a flight back in time to

---

<sup>155</sup> And as though anticipating – both in excitement and fear of how the painting would be received back in Paris, Gauguin wrote a letter to his Danish wife that was both an apology and an attempt to arm her against possible criticism and scandal. He wrote: "I have painted a young girl in the nude. In this position, a trifle more, and she becomes indecent. However, I want it in this way as the lines and movement interests me. So I make her look a little frightened. This fright must be excused if not explained in the character of the person, a Maorie [sic]. This people have by tradition a great fear of the spirit of the dead. One of our young girls would have startled if surprised in such a posture. Not so a woman here...Here endeth the little sermon, which will arm you against the critics when they bombard you with their malicious questions. To end up [sic], the painting has to be done quite simply, the motif being savage and childlike." Quoted from Pollock, *Avant-Garde Gambits 1888 – 1892 – Gender and the Color of Art History*, p. 68.



a pre-modern world whereby artistic priority, like 'nature' could be won. As Gauguin fantasized: "To do something new, you have to go back to the beginning, to the childhood of humanity. My chosen Eve is almost an animal: that's why she is chaste, although naked. All those Venuses exhibited at the Salon are indecent, odiously hideous..."<sup>156</sup>

### **The Return to Origins**

This search for a new art via a return to time past, or 'primitivism', has often been productively understood through the Freudian account of the 'primal scene'. For example, Hal Foster wrote that Gauguin intended "primitive scenes here to resonate with 'primal scenes' in Freudian psychoanalysis – that is, scenes, in which the child witnesses or imagines sex between his or her parents, or, more generally, scenes in which the subject riddles out its origins.... Such pondering of origins is frequent in Gauguin".<sup>157</sup> There is an important aspect of the 'primal scene' which Foster does not describe here: it is also "generally interpreted by the child as an act of violence on the part of the father."<sup>158</sup>

---

<sup>156</sup> Paul Gauguin quoted from Brooks, 'Gauguin's Tahitian Body' p.336.

<sup>157</sup> Foster, 'Primitive Scenes', p.5.

<sup>158</sup> Laplanche and Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, p. 335

This violence at the heart of one's origin is in the Freudian theoretical universe intimately linked to the formation of what Freud called the Oedipus Complex, which is the “organized body of loving and hostile wishes which the child experiences towards its parents. In its so-called positive form, the complex appears as in the story of Oedipus Rex: a desire for the *death of the rival – the parent of the same sex* – and a sexual desire for the parent of the opposite sex.”<sup>159</sup>



Figure 101. Liu Kang, *Balinese Beauty with Tropical Fruits*, 1987.

To come into one's own – to arrive, is to eliminate the rival figure of the father. In this sense, we can understand Manet's brutal *Olympia* to be simultaneously a quotation of the *Venus of Urbino*, as well as a ruthless alteration of it. In turn, Gauguin's *Spirit of the Dead Watching*, by betraying everything that was modern in *Olympia*, was his own powerful attempt to

---

<sup>159</sup> Laplanche and Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, p.286. [*italics mine*]

supersede the aegis of Manet. It was a betrayal that was at least equal in intensity to the one *Olympia* had performed upon the *Venus of Urbino*. It is this intensity of betrayal which irrevocably weakens when we arrive at the juncture of Liu.



Figure 102. Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon, *Bali Project: Masks (Bali)*, 2001.

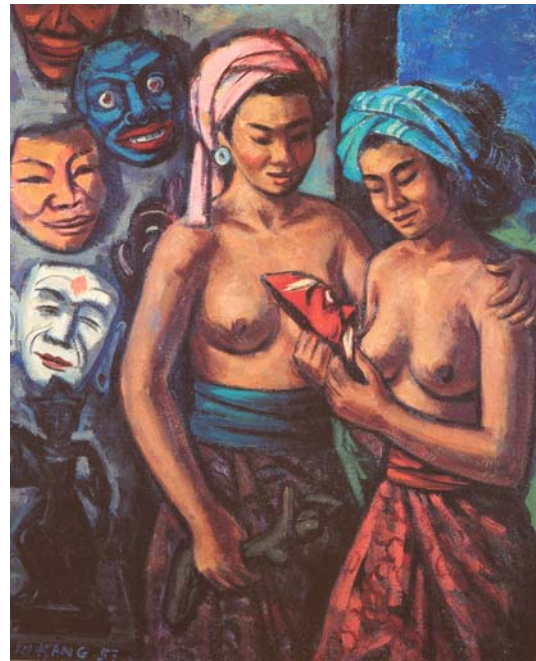


Figure 103. Liu Kang, *Masks, (Bali)*, 1953

Here, I would like to cast the beholder's relationship to the models in the painting – and it is crucial that the primary beholder of any painting is the painter – as a trope for the strength of the painter's ambition for primacy. Thus, Gauguin's desire for penetration and absolute possession of the other, was in Liu diluted to a bare-chested tease. Surely it was a sign of the strength of their respective determination for artistic supremacy that Gauguin was prepared to travel the globe from Paris to Tahiti, where he was to stay for two years, while Liu and the 'pioneers' were only to visit Bali for two months? How then are we to understand Yit, Lam, Hiah and

Woon's two-week visit to Bali, from which they were to return with a series of snapshots – devoid of mastery, emptied of women, and marked by deflated breasts?

How then can we understand this gradual waning of intensity, this process of entropy through extension? Bryson writes: "The apprentice sets out to record on canvas the visual field before him: the scene contains an infinity of aspects, any number of which he may wish to set down; yet the moment he takes up his brush, the dead hand of the schema lays itself across his own, binding his fingers to the repetition of the ways things have been done in the past."<sup>160</sup> Therefore for Bryson: "Tradition here behaves as a kind of manual paralysis, an ebbing of the hand's natural vitality, forcing it back into tracks or furrows which its own energies will cut still deeper. *The failure of the present to overcome the past does not end with its immediate defeat in local time, but passes into the future as additional entropy; not the sins, but the obediences of the fathers are visited on their sons.*"<sup>161</sup>

However, if this form of entropic inheritance does in fact adequately describe the process of waning between the primitivism of Gauguin and Liu, it does not seem adequate as an explanation of the

---

<sup>160</sup> Bryson, *Tradition and Desire – From David to Delacroix*, p. 19.

<sup>161</sup> Bryson, *Tradition and Desire – From David to Delacroix*, p. 19. [*italics mine*]

snapshots of Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon's in relation to the Singaporean 'pioneer' – a kind of doubling, that has nothing obedient about it. One way by which I hope to answer this is to point to a rather interesting fact. In the literature that discusses the sources of influence upon Liu or the other 'pioneers', Manet – despite his profound importance for the 'School of Paris' – is never mentioned.<sup>162</sup> I would like to propose as a hypothesis, that this was because Manet's project was in one way or another simply incomprehensible to the 'pioneers'. Conversely, while it is impossible to imagine Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon as followers of Manet in any sense, the four younger Singaporean artists, in the odd, brutal and unmediated manner with which they at once openly repeated and negated the works of the past, somewhat approach the path that Manet had opened up.

Lastly, this leads me to a conclusion that must strike the reader on first sight as being somewhat bizarre – as much as Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon's snapshots are afterimages of Liu's paintings, they can in no unequivocal sense be described as being influenced by them. Therefore instead of viewing the relationship between the four younger artists and Liu as an Oedipal one, it may perhaps be more accurate to see it as

---

<sup>162</sup> One can refer once again to Pan Shou's eulogy on Liu: "... From Van Gogh, Gauguin, Matisse and Cézanne whose names he must have called even in his dreams...." Pan, 'Preface II', unpaginated. Alternatively one can refer to Liu's own attempt at art historiography and the declaration of his influences in Liu Kang, 'The Cultures of East and West and the Art of Singapore' in Liu Kang and Ho Ho Ying, *Re-connecting – Selected Writings on Singapore Art and Criticism*, ed. by T.K. Sabapathy, Interjections and Trans. Cheo Chai Hiang, Singapore: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 2005), p. 101

closer to a form of mocking, lateral relationship, one that is characterized by a diminished sense of authority and respect. It is, in other words, a kind of ‘sibling rivalry’.

### **Sibling Seriality**

The Freudian obsession with the hierarchical and vertical Oedipus complex has already been the subject of much critical discussion.<sup>163</sup> Here, I would like to draw upon Juliet Mitchell’s revision of this Freudian framework in her work on ‘sibling rivalry’, a proposition for a horizontal, lateral, and serial relationship alternative to that of the patrilineal Oedipal complex. Commenting on the clinical work of another analyst, Mitchell writes: “Ricardo Steiner proposes that the creative artist uses his predecessors (other artists) as internal models (Steiner 1999). What, from my point of view, is interesting about this claim is that *these models – though long dead and buried – are imaginatively experienced as the same age as the subject.*”<sup>164</sup> In other words, for Mitchell: “...these artistic

---

<sup>163</sup> One of the most important of which was Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus – Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987). For Bloom’s complex relationship to Freud and the Oedipal framework of the Family Romance, please read Graham Allen, *Harold Bloom – A Poetics of Conflict* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), p. 17 – 23.

<sup>164</sup> Juliet Mitchell, *Siblings – Sex and Violence* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), p. 16 – 17. [*italics mine*]

ancestors are 'laterized'. However, before Steiner's patient could use them as fully creative and not just rivalrous/ imitative models, he had to learn to differentiate himself from these former artists – he had to discover that they were generically the same as him (all were artists) but individually diverse. Before he was able to do this, he imagined they were the same as him and the only way he could conceive of going forward artistically was to eradicate each self-same rival who threatened his uniqueness. Because of this murderous rivalry, he wanted to rid the world of all the great masters."<sup>165</sup>

This account is useful for us, because it introduces the lateral while retaining the vertical, showing the two axes as being entwined in a complex mesh, rather than a simplistic binary opposition. First and foremost, the "predecessor" is internalized by the younger artist through a process of empathetic identification – and hence "imaginatively experienced as the same age". What unfolds next is a struggle between sameness and difference. To comprehend that the "great masters" were individually diverse from himself opens the path to creativity; the failure to do this, leads him back into murderous desire to eliminate all those who threatened his uniqueness. In other words, back to the Oedipal terrain of violence.

---

<sup>165</sup> Mitchell, *Siblings – Sex and Violence*, p. 16 – 17.



**Figure 104.** Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon, *Bali Project: Siesta in Bali*, 2001



**Figure 105.** Liu Kang, *Siesta in Bali*, 1957

For Mitchell such an assurance of difference was the horizontal domain of sibling seriality, and she regards this awareness as ‘postmodern’: “sibling and peer cohorts are the personnel of postmodernism with its focus on sameness and difference, its concern with ‘time present’ rather than ‘time past’”.<sup>166</sup> And it is perhaps in such a sense that Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon were always already assured in that they were “individually diverse”, and hence saw no need to struggle with their artistic predecessors for the mantle of artistic priority, possessing neither the desire to eliminate the father nor to return to the originary womb of the mother.

---

<sup>166</sup> Mitchell, *Siblings – Sex and Violence*, p. 31.



## The Two Sources of Art

In an interview with Mitchell, Mignon Nixon comments: “And in *Siblings*, through the model of seriality, you suggest that postmodernism activates a lateral dimension of social experience, which is obscured in modernism by the vertical axis of Oedipal.”<sup>167</sup>

This recurrent identification of the lateral, the serial and the sibling with the term ‘postmodern’ requires some clarification at this point. To enter fully into this complex terrain is obviously beyond the scope of this dissertation. Here, I will simply cite what is for me the most convincing account of postmodernism so far. Jean-Francois Lyotard asks: “What, then, is the postmodern ...It is undoubtedly a part of the modern. All that has been received, if only yesterday...must be suspected. What space does Cézanne challenge? The Impressionists. What object do Picasso and Braque attack? Cézanne’s. What presupposition does Duchamp break with in 1912? That which says one must make a painting, be it cubist...In an amazing acceleration, the generations precipitate themselves. A work can become modern only if it is first postmodern.

---

<sup>167</sup> Tamar Garb and Mignon Nixon, ‘A Conversation with Juliet Mitchell’ in *October 113*, (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2005), p. 20.

*Postmodernism thus understood is not modernism at its end but in the nascent state, and this state is constant.*<sup>168</sup>

In other words, what is performed in this above definition is a reversal of the order that we usually take for granted between modernism and postmodernism. Instead of modernism being regarded as giving birth to the postmodern, postmodernism is to be defined not only as that which is always already latent within modernism, but also the condition of possibility for the modern. The paradoxical logic of this reversal is that of retroactivity, where it is the later term, the 'post' that produces the 'prior'. And this mode of reasoning is itself operative within Bloom, for whom "a poem is a deep misprision of a previous poem when we recognize the later poem as being absent rather than present in the earlier poem, and yet still being in the earlier poem, implicit or hidden *in* it, not yet manifest, and *yet there*."<sup>169</sup> It is, in the terms of my argument so far, the afterimage that produces the source-image.<sup>170</sup>

---

<sup>168</sup> Jean Francois Lyotard. 'What is Postmodernism' in *The Postmodern Condition*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p.79. [*italics mine*]

<sup>169</sup> Harold Bloom, *Kabbalah and Criticism* (New York : Seabury Press,1975), p. 66- 67. Misprision, is an old French word – *mesprison*, which means error, and is now employed in the English legal language with the sense of a judicial misdemeanor. See Lars Ole Sauerberg, *Versions of the Past – Visions of the Future – The Canonical in the Criticism of T.S. Eliot, F.R. Leavis, Northrop Fyre and Harold Bloom* (London: Macmillan Press, 1997), p. 133.

<sup>170</sup> As Fredric Jameson explained, the "philosophical paradox of repetition – formulated by Kierkegaard, Freud and others – can be grasped in this, that it can as it were only take place 'a second time'. The first-time event is by definition not a repetition of anything; it is then reconverted into repetition the second time

One of the earliest applications of the term postmodernism to the visual arts occurs in Leo Steinberg's 'Other Criteria'.<sup>171</sup> Steinberg's text centered upon an analysis of American artist Robert Rauschenberg's transformation of the traditional verticality of painting into what he refers to as the flatbed picture plane, a term that he borrowed "from the flatbed printing press – 'a horizontal bed on which a horizontal printing surface rests'.<sup>172</sup> This opens up the surface of the painting to the axis of laterality which is conducive to a flood of heterogeneous elements such as mass-produced images and silk-screening, of which Rauschenberg was the first to actively employ and use in painting. For Steinberg, "the flatbed picture plane lends itself to any content that does not evoke a prior optical event"<sup>173</sup> and this "tilt of the picture plane from vertical to horizontal is the most radical shift in the subject matter of art, the shift from nature to culture."<sup>174</sup>

---

round, by the peculiar action of what Freud called "retroactivity" [*Nachträglichkeit*]." Fredric Jameson, "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture," in *Signatures of the Visible* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 19.

<sup>171</sup> For support of this claim, see Douglas Crimp, *On the Museum's Ruins* (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1993), pp. 47.

<sup>172</sup> Leo Steinberg, *Other Criteria – Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 82.

<sup>173</sup> Steinberg, *Other Criteria – Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art*, p. 90.

<sup>174</sup> Steinberg, *Other Criteria – Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art*, p. 84.



Figure 106. Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon, *Bali Project: Bathers*, 2001

The snapshots of Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon must be understood as examples of artworks produced through such a shift.<sup>175</sup> These images were no longer drawn from nature, nor a “prior optical event”. Instead, they were based on reproductions of Liu’s paintings, examples of the “picture conceived as the image of an image”.<sup>176</sup> They were afterimages drawn from the existing repository of culture, or more specifically, from the domain of art history.

---

<sup>175</sup> It is useful to keep in mind that Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon’s *The Bali Project* was undertaken in 2001, and the discourses about postmodernism and art had peaked by the 1980s.

<sup>176</sup> Steinberg, *Other Criteria – Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art*, p. 91.



Figure 107. Liu Kang, *Bathers*, 1997

Here it is pertinent to return once again to T.K. Sabapathy's comment about the 'Nanyang pioneers'. For him, the 'pioneers', "*in addition to viewing their immediate surroundings as a source for motifs, also looked at art as a source for models*. In these and other respects, their approach can be identified with the principal directions of modern art."<sup>177</sup>

In the previous chapter, I had earlier argued that these two sources identified by Sabapathy corresponded to a binary division between nature and culture which is to a large extent mythical, and ideological. And thus, it is in this sense that we will once again recast the relationship between the photographic activity of Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon, and Liu's painting. The

---

<sup>177</sup> T.K. Sabapathy, 'The Nanyang Artists: Some General Remarks' in *Pameran Retrospektif Pelukis – Pelukis Nanyang*, (Kuala Lumpur: Muzium Seni Negara Malaysia, 1979), p. 46. [*italics mine*]

mode of cultural appropriation practiced by the former is itself latent within the relationship between Liu's paintings and their source-images. The difference is that the mode of appropriation in Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon is openly declared and constitutes the horizon of their meaning. Whereas in the work of Liu, appropriation is something that must consistently be suppressed, or at best left in a state of unresolved tension.



**Figure 108. Uncaptioned, on page with heading, “God’s perfect sculpture...in (sic) tune of nature”**

In discussing the work of a group of postmodern American artists, the art critic Douglas Crimp described that: “Their images are purloined, confiscated, appropriated, stolen. In their work, the original cannot be located, is always deferred; even the self that might have generated an original is shown to be itself a copy.”<sup>178</sup> For Crimp, the stakes of

---

<sup>178</sup> Crimp, *On the Museum’s Ruins*, p. 118 – 119. It is worth recalling that Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon’s had themselves described the snapshots as an ‘appropriation to (sic) the great modernist works’ of the great pioneers.” The

postmodern appropriation was not only the impossibility of artistic 'originality', but more profoundly, the impossibility of an autonomous self. And this is clear if we compare Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon's *Bali Project: Bathers*, with Liu's photograph of himself bathing, displayed under a group heading of "God's perfect sculpture...in (sic) tune of nature". Nowhere do we sense this appeal to nature, this bravado of liberated individualism in the snapshot of the four younger artists. As we have previously discussed, the appeal to unmediated nature was implicated in the ideology of the autonomous subject and the possibility of originality. Here, we can recast the crucial difference between Liu and the four younger artists as such – the latter were free from this desire for originality, because they were always already confidently assured of their difference. And in the process, they also emptied themselves of "the nostalgia for presence felt by the human subject, on the obscure and futile will which inhabits him in spite of everything."<sup>179</sup> Instead, the emphasis can be placed, rather on "the power of the faculty to conceive, on its 'inhumanity'."<sup>180</sup>

---

Artists Village, *TAV Newsletter* (undated), <http://tav.org.sg/>. (accessed 3 July 2005).

<sup>179</sup> Lyotard. 'What is Postmodernism', p. 79 – 80.

<sup>180</sup> Lyotard. 'What is Postmodernism', p. 79 – 80.

## Colonial Exhibitions

For now, I would like to extend the theoretical advances made so far in the discussion of the relationship between Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon and Liu, into yet another reading of Gauguin. In his *Tehamana has Many Ancestors*, 1893, the relationship between the foreground figure and the background repeats the internal economy of his other paintings that we have looked at so far. Tehamana is an object of desire and display, while an inanimate malicious force emanates from the background away from her field of vision. According to Christoph Becker, this painting was: “a pastiche of motifs from different cultures.”<sup>181</sup> Then Becker added: “One could dismiss the whole composition as a random decorative arrangement, but it must be remembered that, although Gauguin painted the picture in Tahiti it was not intended for Tahiti. Expressed more precisely, it did not “work” as art until it was presented to the broad public in Paris.”<sup>182</sup>

---

<sup>181</sup> Becker, ‘Gauguin and Tahiti’, p. 58. Moreover, “Gauguin’s knowledge of exotic cultures was quite fragmentary and unsystematic at this stage. Contemporary ethnography only occasionally made pure factual information available. Colorful travel accounts provided reading material for the public of the day, and the most recent, highly fashionable products of fantasy and reality consistently attracted the greatest attention.” Becker, ‘Gauguin and Tahiti’, pp. 3.

<sup>182</sup> Becker, ‘Gauguin and Tahiti’, p. 58.



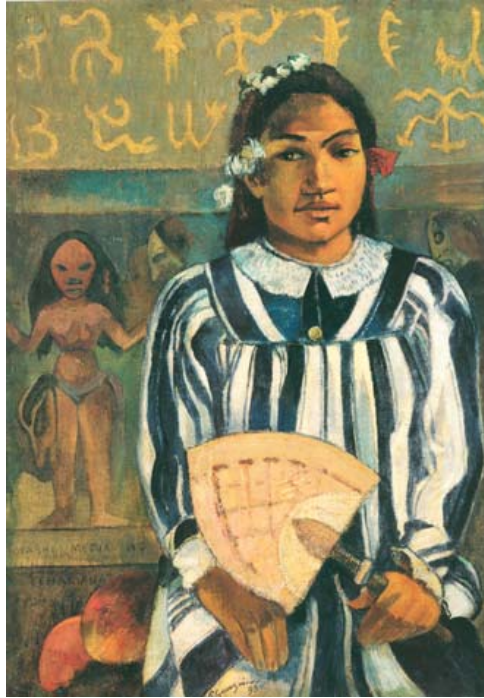


Figure 109. Paul Gauguin, *Tehamana has Many Ancestors*, 1893

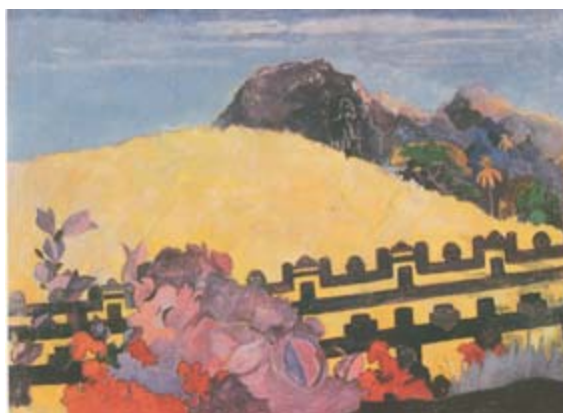
In other words, the force of unity that interpolates the Tahiti paintings of Gauguin was an evocation of otherness to a Parisian imagination. The paintings had the fragmentary quality of a dream, and its hallucinatory unity was soldered together by the intoxicating opiate of exoticism.<sup>183</sup>

---

<sup>183</sup> The resonance of Gauguin's pictorial forms with the Freudian dream-work has been noted by Hal Foster. As Foster comments, "...his ambivalence is never resolved in his art, thematically or formally: with its different cultural references, discordant color schemes, and bizarre spatial constructions, it remains conflicted to the end. As Gauguin said of his writing, his paintings are, 'like dreams, as like everything else in life, made of pieces.'" Foster, 'Primitive Scenes', p. 27.

Gauguin's paintings were fodder for a Parisian public ripe for such a dream, as they were prepared by the multitude of exotic travel literature and photographic images that followed in the trail of actual colonial expansions. This nexus between photography, literature and colonialism coagulated in the *Exposition Universelle*, held in Paris in 1889, where the "greatest attraction of the colonial [component of the] Exhibition was the participation of natives from the French colonies who had been brought to Paris." There, these natives sold their hand-made products whilst living in reconstructed villages of huts.<sup>184</sup>

Gauguin was an avid fan of the Colonial Exhibition in 1889, and it was there he would encounter 'first-hand' replicas of the many non-



**Figure 110. Paul Gauguin, *There Lies the Temple*, 1892**

Such a quality was also apparent in Gauguin's *There Lies the Temple*. About this painting, Ingrid Heermann observes: "Gauguin used an element of Tahitian religion as a prop, without regard to its more concrete meaning, in order to increase the likelihood of acceptance of daring pictorial themes in the Parisian public by casting an exotic veil over them." Ingrid Heermann, 'Gauguin's Tahiti – Ethnological Considerations' in *Paul Gauguin: Tahiti*, ed. Christoph Becker (Ostfildern-Ruit : Verlag Gerd Hatje, 1998), pp. 162.

<sup>184</sup> Heermann, 'Gauguin's Tahiti – Ethnological Considerations', p. 97.

European monuments which eventually found their way into his paintings. This is documented in a note written to Emile Bernard, in which he expressed his great enthusiasm for the performances of Javanese dancers of the so-called Kampong: “Hindu dances can be seen in the Javanese village. All of the art of India is on display there, and the photographs I have from Cambodia literally come alive there. I am going back there on Thursday, as I have a rendezvous with a mulatto girl.”



**Figure 111. *Encounter with woman from Congo*, Bibliotech**

To a Parisian public, or indeed to Gauguin, the individual specificities and differences of non-European cultures were glossed over, and blended into a general air of exoticism. Something of this imprecise generalized vision of the exotic ‘other’ would in turn permeate Gauguin’s relationship with Tahiti. It was “clear that his move to Tahiti in 1891 was motivated less by an attraction to the specific destination, which remained

uncertain for some time.”<sup>185</sup> Thus, as Heermann noted: “The real driving impulse was his hope of finding – somewhere in this world – a paradise that would provide sufficient nourishment for his creative inspiration... His intention was to develop his art, not to interpret or comprehend Tahitian culture, and he seems to have intended for his “new family” to preserve its mysterious quality.”<sup>186</sup>

And this lack of concern for the specificity of Tahiti seems to be proven in the contingent manner that Gauguin had settled upon his eventual destination. His initial choice of destination was Tonkin, which was replaced by Madagascar in 1890, before he settled upon Tahiti in 1891. In other words, Gauguin’s journey to Tahiti cannot be understood simply in terms of the allure of Tahiti in itself, but rather, as an escape from Western society. Moreover such an escape was not simply spatial but also temporal. To flee from Western society, was also to flee back in time, and to undergo a voluntary regression into the infantile. In Gauguin’s words: “No more Pegasus, no more Parthenon horses! One has to go back, far back...as far as the dada from my childhood, the good old wooden horse.”<sup>187</sup> Therefore, long before his departure he was able to

---

<sup>185</sup> Heermann, ‘Gauguin’s Tahiti – Ethnological Considerations’, p. 103

<sup>186</sup> Heermann, ‘Gauguin’s Tahiti – Ethnological Considerations’, p. 103

<sup>187</sup> Cited in Robert Goldwater, *Primitivism in Modern Painting* (New York: Harper, 1943), p. 60.

announce: “I have a finished painting in my head.”<sup>188</sup> The paintings that he was to produce in Tahiti were therefore, in a sense, afterimages of all the images of exotic otherness he had already received.

When Gauguin returned to Paris in 1893, he would set off in 1895 on his final journey to the island of Hiva Oa in the Marquesas, where he would pass away in 1903.

### **Museum Without Walls**

Gauguin’s ‘footlooseness’ with regards to time and space embodied with some extremity a new kind of mnemonic relationship to the world – one that was irrevocably mediated by the onset of the industrial revolution in the mass production of images. André Malraux referred to such a condition as the ‘Museum without Walls’. For him: “Reproduction has disclosed the whole world’s sculpture. It has multiplied accepted masterpieces, promoted other works to their due rank and launched some minor styles – in some cases, one might say, invented them... in our Museum without Walls picture, fresco, miniature and stained glass window seem of one and the same family.”<sup>189</sup> For Malraux, miniature, frescoes,

---

<sup>188</sup> Goldwater, *Primitivism in Modern Painting*, p. 60.

<sup>189</sup> André Malraux, *The Voices of Silence*, Trans: Stuart Gilbert (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 45. The growth of this pervasive, all-

stained glass, tapestries, Scythian plaques, pictures, Greek vase paintings, 'details' and even statuary – have all become “color plates”.<sup>190</sup> Malraux adds: “Alongside the museum a new field of art experience, vaster than any so far known (and standing in the same relation to art museums as does the reading of a play to its performance, or hearing a phonograph record to a concert audition), is now, thanks to reproduction, being intellectualized as stock-taking and as its diffusion proceeds and methods of reproduction come nearer to fidelity – it is for the first time the common heritage of all mankind.”<sup>191</sup>

Gauguin was very much a creature of this Museum without Walls, an avid consumer of the photographs: he was said to have “possessed an extensive collection of ethnological photos...including portraits and architectural pictures as well as details of interest from the standpoint of

---

reaching archive, and its effect on the pressure of influence for the visual arts is without doubt compounded by the fact that the spread of imagery across cultural boundaries had required far less amounts of translation than text. As Bryson commented: “Since the ubiquity and social pervasiveness of the Word is exactly lacking to the image, the latter cannot directly renew itself, as literature can, by seeking or permitting an inflow into tradition from the outside. Moreover, for images the barriers which mutually divide the national languages do not exist; and while this ensures an immeasurably greater accessibility of images to the viewer and from his viewpoint must represent a total gain, for the painter it entails also that the field of pressure from the precursor is much greater. Mobile in its internationalism, painting is by the same token exposed to the tradition’s physical mass and gravity.” Bryson, *Tradition and Desire – From David to Delacroix*, p. 20.

<sup>190</sup> Malraux, *The Voices of Silence*, p. 45.

<sup>191</sup> Malraux, *The Voices of Silence*, p. 45 – 46.

art history and from various cultures”.<sup>192</sup> As Gauguin, in a letter to Odilon Redon, declared: “I have a complete little world of friends on photographs and drawings with me, and they talk with me everyday.”<sup>193</sup> And thus, many of the motifs from Gauguin’s photographs were incorporated into his compositions. In fact, as Becker observed: “Specific photographic originals can be identified for about a dozen of the paintings completed between 1890 and 1893”.<sup>194</sup> It is within the flattened horizontal space of an imagination conditioned by photography that he would bring about his own confluence of cultures into his paintings.

But it was not only in the production of the paintings that Gauguin was to prove an exemplary denizen of this ‘Museum Without Walls’. He was also one of the first to have manipulated the means of this new world in the dissemination of his paintings, while preparing the ground for their reception through a series of media games and publicity blitz. As Becker concurred: “Gauguin gained fame through his South Seas paintings, of which some have been reproduced so frequently that one might ask whether they were not created specifically for that purpose – luminous, colorful landscapes, exotic young women, palm-lined beaches, works of art whose formal integrity and richness of color exude strength and

---

<sup>192</sup> Becker, ‘Gauguin and Tahiti’, p. 25.

<sup>193</sup> Cited from Becker, ‘Gauguin and Tahiti’, p. 25

<sup>194</sup> Becker, ‘Gauguin and Tahiti’, p. 25.

serenity. *To think of the South Seas is to call to mind paintings by Gauguin.* It appears his art fulfilled a dream that was informed by collective pre-conceptions and wish images as long as a hundred years ago and has since become a widely accepted cliché. <sup>195</sup>

Liu, like Gauguin, was a child of this 'Museum Without Walls'. Consider Chia Wai Hon's account of Liu's 'primal scene', or narrative of origination as an artist: "At school, his teacher discovered his talent and inclination towards art. To encourage him in his interest, the teacher presented him one day with a book on Western art and paintings. The young Liu Kang was so happy that he spent much time thereafter *copying the pictures*. That was to have formed the foundation of his interest in Western art."<sup>196</sup> If Gauguin's reference to childhood evoked a desire for a kind of originary plenitude through regression, Liu's narrative of origin begins with copying; he was, at the beginning of his artistic career, an afterimage.

---

<sup>195</sup> Becker, 'Gauguin and Tahiti', pp. 1. [*Italics mine*]

<sup>196</sup> Chia Wai Hon, *Liu Kang at 88*, ed. Tan Gek Noi, and others (Singapore : Singapore Soka Association, 1998), pp. 4. [*Italics mine*]



## The Chinese Anxiety

This relationship of paintings to reproduction and photography was at the very heart of the Chinese experience of 'modern', 'Western' paintings. As early as 1930 the painter Feng Tzu-k'ai was telling his students: "If anyone is found still painting a hermit playing a lute under a pine tree by waterfall, I shall expel him."<sup>197</sup> And thus the student's problems began. As Sullivan commented: "Tradition had not taught him to draw from life, and there were no models for trousered schoolteachers and diesel buses in the painting manuals. Students set to draw such subjects would sometimes ask their teachers for photographs of street scenes that they could copy; that way the camera would have already done the work of transforming the object into a two-dimensional, so that the student did not have to perform the miracle himself."<sup>198</sup>

In this flat space of the photographic, things would be received by the painter on a plane of equivalence. In an analogous manner, style would no longer solely be transmitted via the vertical and hierarchical schema of tradition, but would instead be viewed by a synchronicity. Styles were now laid upon the table – a buffet stable, surveyed all at once,

---

<sup>197</sup> Cited from Sullivan, *Symbols of Eternity – The Art of Landscape Painting in China*, p. 169.

<sup>198</sup> Sullivan, *Symbols of Eternity – The Art of Landscape Painting in China*, p. 169.

and available for the taking. Yet something of this horizontality of the relationship to past art could be discerned within the tradition of Chinese painting as early as the fifteenth century. As Michael Sullivan commented, “It is impossible to imagine a European painter stopping to consider whether to paint his next landscape in the manner of Salvator Rosa, Claude, or Ruysdael. But by the fifteenth century such a choice of the Chinese painter had become not only possible but unavoidable. For the sources of his inspiration had changed, and it was now more and more often the case that he had far more experience of looking at pictures than he had of looking at nature.”<sup>199</sup>

With this self-referentiality of Chinese painting, came its own experience of the relationship of the present to the past, individual before the Canon. As the Ming Dynasty official Tung Chi'i-ch'ang had said:” it was easy to copy an old master, difficult to transmit his spirit. Above all...be yourself, and whether to start from nature or from the old masters, you will be truly creative. When Chu-jan studies Tung Yuan, Mi Fu studies

---

<sup>199</sup> Sullivan, *Symbols of Eternity – The Art of Landscape Painting in China*, p. 108. In other words, the eclecticism that we have been describing in Gauguin, was already a dominant mode of working within Chinese painting in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century, due to the specific way in which its internal history unfolded. As Sullivan commented, “I would not like to suggest that the Ming scholar-painters were mere pedants or pasticheurs, shopping around for styles. But if they were industrious and persistent, they did acquire an encyclopedic knowledge of the history of painting. When it came to choosing a style, much depended upon your position in society, how educated you were, whom you knew, where you lived....Around the year 1500 the range of styles the artist could draw upon was as wide as that of the tradition itself.” Sullivan, *Symbols of Eternity – The Art of Landscape Painting in China*, p. 111.

Tung Yuan, Huang Kung-Wang studies Tung Yuan... they all followed the same model. Yet they were not like one another.”<sup>200</sup> This paradoxical relationship of difference and repetition was in itself a manifestation of the dialectics of Taoism so deeply embedded within the tradition of Chinese painting as early as third century B.C.<sup>201</sup>

As Lao-Tzu declared: “Yield to remain whole; bend to remain straight; empty for fullness; wither for renewal. With less, one finds oneself; with too much, one loses oneself.”<sup>202</sup> The Taoist system was one

---

<sup>200</sup> Sullivan, *Symbols of Eternity – The Art of Landscape Painting in China*, p. 134. The perception of the past, for Sullivan was a recurring problem in Chinese painting: “the Chinese painter is himself so steeped in history that it is difficult to write of Chinese painting effectively except from a historical point of view. For to him the history of his art became, in the course of time, as rich a source of inspiration as nature itself – in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, alas, an even richer source.” Sullivan, *Symbols of Eternity – The Art of Landscape Painting in China*, p.3.

<sup>201</sup> As Sullivan noted, this concept was intricately rooted to the idea of how the Chinese painter engaged with the past. He writes: “Ever since the ying-yang dualism was first set down in the third century B.C., the Chinese have been fascinated by the dialectical process. The conflict between the claims of the present and those of the past is but one of many dialectics at work in the mind of the educated man: between the Confucian in him and the Taoist; between orthodoxy and individualism; between the past as inspiration and the past as burden; between the demands of society and the demands of the self; between stability and change, between objective study and inner illumination. For the artist especially, there were the tensions between art as representation and art as expression; between craftsmanship and spontaneity; between the universal and the particular statement; between nature as seen by the old masters and nature as seen by the artist himself. In the psyche of each individual painter these opposing ideals, impulses, loyalties were constantly struggling with each other, keeping his mind and his imagination alive. It was not a matter of absolute choice, for surrender in one direction would lead to a deadening of the artist's spirit, in the other to anarchy”. Sullivan, *Symbols of Eternity – The Art of Landscape Painting in China*, p. 144 – 145.

<sup>202</sup> Quoted from Francois Cheng, *Empty and Full – The Language of Chinese Painting*, Massachusetts: Shambhala Publications, 1991), p. 53.

which had always been antithetical to the discourse of originary presence and plentitude. Rather the “Tao has emptiness as its origin. From emptiness is born the cosmos, from which the vital breaths emanate.”<sup>203</sup> In other words, the origin is comprehended as emptiness, which is at the same time, pure potentiality. What is crucial is precisely this sense of ceaseless circulation of the “vital breath”, and not the synthesis of the opposites into a stable higher form that is characteristic of Hegelian synthesis. In a traditional Chinese painting, this form of dialectics without resolution is to be played out in the circulation of black ink upon the white surface of the parchment: a restless interplay between the empty and the full, just as the most profound difference can be generated from within the copying of an old master.

For a modern Chinese painter in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, it seemed as though the encounter with the art historical archive of the ‘Western’ world was inseparable from a transformation of his experience with the past and his conception of what artistic renewal meant. Now, he began to see the past as a burden, and his tragedy was that he was subject to an experience of belatedness in relation to not one, but the two traditions of ‘Chinese’ and ‘Western’ paintings. And it is within the throes of this new experience of the doubled anxiety of influence that the modern Chinese painter surveyed his historical mission – a search for artistic originality

---

<sup>203</sup> Huai Nan-Tzu’s ‘The Laws of Heaven’, quoted from Cheng, *Empty and Full – The Language of Chinese Painting*, p. 44.

through the integration of the 'East' and the 'West'. But this was a dream of fusion antithetical to the "vital breaths" of the restless synthesis of Taoism which privileged dynamism of movement over and above the formation of fixed entities. Furthermore, the modern Chinese ideology of fusion was enacted as a more ruthless logic of synthesis, one that sought to interpolate opposites into a higher and singular unity.

For someone like Liu, however, this anxiety with regards to tradition, and the dream of synthesis was substantially intensified with his relocation in 1937 to Malaya and finally to Singapore in 1942. This exile from direct contact with the Chinese, the 'Western', and the particular discourse of the Chinese Modern, would in turn bring about its own set of artistic possibilities. According to Kwok Kian Chow, Liu had in a radio talk that was given in 1938, described how the Renaissance, the French Revolution and 19<sup>th</sup> Century's technological developments had brought about a liberalization of the individual and the multiplicity of art movements. Kwok then commented: "While taking a universalist outlook on art history, he also felt that there should be an ethnic heritage foundation to art and again saw no contradiction in Post-Impressionism as a Chinese expression. The aesthetic basis for this was that like Chinese art, Post-Impressionism was predicated on subjectivity and the rejection of pictorial illusionism. In an article published in 1949, Liu Kang even called

Paul Cézanne, Vincent Van Gogh, Paul Gauguin and Henri Matisse the  
'Chinese artists: in Western art history.'"<sup>204</sup>

Through Liu's analysis, one can sense an eagerness to display his knowledge not only of Chinese art but also the tradition of Western art, dating from the Renaissance to Post-Impressionism. And with this performative assertion of encyclopedic mastery, follows the extraordinary move of reversing his position of being a foreigner and latecomer to the tradition of 'Western' Post-Impressionism by turning this lineage on its head – through the claim that Cézanne, Van Gogh, Gauguin and Matisse were spiritually linked to the Chinese tradition. Hence his 'Western' influences were identified, in an 'ironic reversal', as late-coming guests in a tradition to which Liu himself was heir to.<sup>205</sup>

---

<sup>204</sup> Kwok Kian Chow, 'Liu Kang and Singapore Art' in *Journeys: Liu Kang and his Art* (Singapore: Singapore Art Museum and National Arts Council, 2000), pp. 14

<sup>205</sup> This can also be read as a manifestation of Sinocentrism, or even Chinese chauvinism that was operative in much of the Chinese encounter with the West. For example, Sullivan in speaking about this Chinese habit of re-absorbing the 'West' and 'Modern' through Chinese ancestry, wrote: "At every point we see China's new masters seeking, and finding, sanction for their policies and acts in history, as did her rulers since the time of Confucius. Ai Ssu-ch'i, for instance, calls for a search for evidence of dialectical materialism in traditional Chinese philosophy, and, as is well known, Kuo Mo-jo has been the spearhead of a movement proclaiming ancient Taoism as a revolutionary protest against reactionary, feudal Confucianism. There is in this certainly an element of chauvinism, an instinctive tendency to reject any foreign ideas, even Marxism, unless they can be found in Chinese ideas also." Michael Sullivan, *Chinese Art in the Twentieth Century* (London: Faber and Faber, 1959), p. 82.

But the Chinese Modern ideology of fusion was also one which was insufficient for Liu, when he was to find himself exiled onto the far-flung island of Singapore in Southeast Asia. And here, Liu would similarly seek to reverse isolation into an advantage, through a notion of synthesis hungrier and more ruthless than that played out in Shanghai. Now, it was not only the respective heterogeneities of the 'East' and the 'West' that were to be brought together, but also the 'Southeast Asian'.

### **The Ruthless Synthesis**

The dream of such a synthesis was in many ways, most clearly and strongly articulated through the writings of Sabapathy. He had sensed in the construction of 'Southeast Asia' a way out of the dichotomy of the 'East' and the 'West', and hence beyond the 'clash of the civilizations' discourse that runs through the writings of his one-time teacher, Michael Sullivan.<sup>206</sup>

---

<sup>206</sup> "The struggle between East and West, between one tradition and the other, which is taking place within Asian society can now be seen as a generative process; but, until it is resolved, there can be no rest for the man of feeling and imagination. Something of this tension, this sense of being cut adrift from one tradition and yet not fully masters of the other, must appear in the work of artists discussed in this book." Sullivan, *Chinese Art in the Twentieth Century*, p. 19. [Cited in previous chapter].

About such a dichotomy, Sabapathy once wrote: "...it is the case that the development of the Nanyang artists is usually explained in terms of two contending traditions: one, whose sources are in the East (especially China), and the other, in the West."<sup>207</sup> For Sabapathy, the crucial question was this: "Are such efforts to be viewed as being merely derivative? Are they to be characterized as pale, watered-down imitations of *Western models*; models which are not clearly understood and completely digested?"<sup>208</sup>

And what follows is a theoretical move with which Sabapathy attempts to produce a discourse for artistic originality founded upon the ideology of artistic synthesis we have described. What is remarkable about Sabapathy's move is how he locates such a synthetical matrix within the cultural history of the region itself. In Sabapathy's words: "It may help to recall a phase in Southeast Asia's cultural history when impact of ideas, imagery and art forms stemming from India had to be locally digested, adapted and transformed into Burmese, Cambodian, Thai and Indonesian art.....The creativity that goes on in the process of learning and assimilation should not be underestimated...."<sup>209</sup> What Sabapathy

---

<sup>207</sup> Sabapathy, 'Forty Years and After: The Nanyang Artists. Remarks on Art and History' unpaginated.

<sup>208</sup> T.K. Sabapathy, 'Focus on Asia's Modern Art' in *Sources of Modern Art* (Singapore: Ministry of Education, 1986), p. 146. [*Italics Mine*]

<sup>209</sup> Sabapathy, 'Focus on Asia's Modern Art', p. 146.



effectively proposes is that the sheer multiplicity of the Southeast Asian transformative matrix has the capacity to dislodge the 'pioneers' from both the major traditions of the 'West' and the 'Chinese'.

At stake in Sabapathy's discourses is more than the mantle of artistic originality. In it lay the very possibility for a cultural autonomy defined in difference not only from the 'East', but also the 'West'. It was the very possibility of the formation of a new Southeast Asian identity, the dream of a new autonomous self. And in this light, Malaysian writer and a close ally of Sabapathy's – Redza Piyadasa – could claim: "... the Nanyang artists were the first to have consciously worked toward the establishment of a distinctive Malayan and even regional identity in art by bringing together multiple influences and approaches through their unique experimentations. And that they did so at a time when questions about national, cultural identity had yet to surface is a mark of their artistic ingenuity."<sup>210</sup>

For Sabapathy, the creation of such a new form of identity was also a resolutely modern one. To lay claim to this, he had first needed to

---

<sup>210</sup> The quote continues: "In any case, the influence of the first generation Nanyang Artists was especially important in the search for artistic solutions. In order to concretize their interest and commitment to South-east Asia, four of these artists visited Bali in 1952 and later borrowed from the typological art forms and shapes of the tribal cultures of the region in their quest for authenticity." Redza Piyadasa, 'On Origins and Beginnings' in *Vision and Idea – ReLooking Modern Malaysian Art*, ed. T.K Sabapathy (Kuala Lumpur: National Art Gallery, 1994), p. 31

produce a definition of modernism. For Sabapathy: “It has been stated that in the search for new visual languages, the modern artist assumes a critical, eclectic and self-conscious attitude towards pictorial traditions. Thus, the relationship between tradition and individual pursuits attains a degree of critical urgency.”<sup>211</sup> In other words, in light of his intensified eclecticism and self-consciousness towards tradition, the Southeast Asian artist could lay a unique claim to being modern. Thus the very burden of tradition could be reversed into a claim of strength – the Southeast Asian could be more modern than artists of the ‘West’ and China.

Yet it is a testament to Sabapathy’s theoretical acumen that he perceived the schizophrenia perpetually threatening such an eclectic and footloose approach to style. For his purposes of constructing a new and stable ground of identity, this was intolerable and had to be countered. This was to be done by his careful invocation of an idealized notion of nature as source-image. It was as though the very ground upon which the immigrant ‘Nanyang’ artists had stood on could be invoked as an anchor from which the dizzy kaleidoscope of styles could be digested. Thus, in describing the 1952 visit to Bali, Sabapathy claimed: “... in turning to the physical environment for visual images, *these artists by-passed the weight, burden and obligation of having to depict traditional iconographies.*

---

<sup>211</sup> Sabapathy, ‘Focus on Asia’s Modern Art’, p. 146.

They sought a world of visible sensibility which was immediate and contemporary. In doing so they indicated their stance regarding the function of art”.<sup>212</sup>

In other words, he had to resort to an emphasis on the role of direct observation, and hence of immediate access to ‘nature’ as source. This was the means by which the ‘pioneers’ could be freed from the danger of an excessive fixation on artistic source-images. ‘Nature’ held the promise of freeing them from the chains of tradition. As Sabapathy wrote: “It was apparent that the search for fresh pictorial techniques attained resolution and coherence in Bali.... Their achievements were to be invigorating both for their development as well as for younger artists who were to emerge in the 60s. It was equally apparent that the search for new subject matter attained fruition in Bali. The choice of figures, objects and settings were no less bound to the consciously directed lives of these artists than to an unconscious symbolism; the choice of subject matter also had vital roots in social experience.”<sup>213</sup>

---

<sup>212</sup> Sabapathy, ‘Forty Years and After: The Nanyang Artists. Remarks on Art and History’ unpaginated. [*Italics mine*]

<sup>213</sup> Sabapathy, ‘Forty Years and After: The Nanyang Artists. Remarks on Art And History’ unpaginated. Such an approach is extended by Chi Ching I, who claims that the choice of Bali was due to its Chinese and Indian ‘roots’, because it was borne of the ‘pioneers’ interest in “the synthesis of elements of Chinese and Indian art that formed the unique Balinese style of painting in their own work.” Chi Ching-I. ‘Nanyang Artists in Paris’ *Pont des Arts – Nanyang Artists in Paris 1925 – 1970* (Singapore: National Museum Art Gallery, 1994), pp. 14

The strength of Sabapathy's conceptual framework was that it had operated simultaneously on both the levels of form and content. A new form could be arrived at through the most eclectic synthesis. Yet this eclecticism would also be grounded in content – the observation and depiction of local motifs. In his own words: "The accomplishments of the Nanyang artists can be attributed to the adoption of an eclectic attitude which induced them to turn to a variety of pictorial schemas from different cultures and historical periods in order to produce a new art. In establishing their respective styles these artists, *in addition to viewing their immediate surroundings as a source for motifs, also looked at art as a source for models.*"<sup>214</sup>

Yet it is precisely from this binary of form and content that Sabapathy's schema must be countered. First, at the level of form, it is debatable if eclecticism constitutes a sufficient criterion whereby difference from the 'West' can be founded. For, as we have seen, eclecticism of the 'East' and the 'West' was itself already the *modus operandi* of a painter like Gauguin. Eclecticism and fusion, when it is employed by Sabapathy, is seldom precisely defined or specifically examined through the close reading of actual paintings.<sup>215</sup> As a result,

---

<sup>214</sup> Sabapathy, 'The Nanyang Artists: Some General Remarks', p. 46 [*Italics mine*]

<sup>215</sup> An important exception to this was Sabapathy's extremely productive reading of how the Chinese tradition of the hanging scroll and the hand-scroll, when integrated within the easel painting, introduced "new formal considerations

eclecticism veers close to a practice of pastiche where difference is subsumed to a kind of entropic cooling. Eclecticism understood as such, is that which collapses the specificity and historicity of stylistic schemas. It is a lax display of difference – that which paradoxically puts difference out of play.

With regards to the level of content, I have already, in the previous chapter, argued that just as unmediated access is a myth, the notion of unmediated observation is an impossibility. The very act of seeing is always inhibited by afterimages, just as the choice of what one sees and what one chooses to depict is inevitably conditioned by past art. The operative binary between form and content at the heart of Sabapathy's conceptual schema is intricately related to his problematic separation of the 'two sources' of art as tradition, and nature as a promise of plenitude and presence.

---

regarding the structure of space, the function of color, the distortion of forms, and the sequence of time." Sabapathy, 'Focus on Asia's Modern Art' in *Sources of Modern Art*, p. 146. But analysis such as this was relevant only to some of the more interesting works of painters like Cheong Soo Pieng and Lai Foong Moi's *Morning in the Kampung*, 1959 – which we will examine later. It should also be noted that with regards to Liu Kang, this formal invention was largely irrelevant to his painterly practice.

## The Specter of Comparison

Just as access to nature could never be unmediated, Bali was never for the 'pioneers' a place in itself, on its own. It was, on the contrary always already seen under old light – the light of Le Mayeur, of Gauguin. A place perpetually haunted by a specter of comparison.<sup>216</sup> This contradiction is something that we can sometimes pick out from beneath the grain of Sabapathy's rhetoric. For example, he wrote: "The sojourn in Bali throws into relief a third: intra-Southeast Asian connections. It is a phenomena which has not received any attention. The journey to Bali secured a milieu in Southeast Asia which was claimed to be *comparable to any in Europe*. Writing in the catalogue of the exhibition of 1953, Liu Kang declared, 'Working in Bali *is as good as working in Paris*.'"<sup>217</sup>

In other words, Bali continued to exist as a comparison to Europe. It was – *as good as working in Paris*. Sabah, Malang in East Java or Bali –

---

<sup>216</sup> This phrase is borrowed from Benedict Anderson's book of the same name. He had in turned borrowed it from José Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere*. "There is a dizzying moment early on in the narrative when the young mestizo hero, recently returned to the colonial Manila of the 1880s from a long sojourn in Europe, looks out of his carriage window at the municipal botanical gardens...These gardens are shadowed automatically...and inescapably by images of their sister gardens in Europe. He can no longer matter-of-factly experience them, but sees them simultaneously close up and from afar. The novelist arrestingly names the agent of this incurable doubled vision *el demonio de las comparaciones*." Benedict Anderson, *The Specter of Comparisons – Nationalism, Southeast Asia and the World* (London: Verso, 1998), p. 2. The young mestizo hero had, in other words, had a particularly strong experience of an afterimage.

<sup>217</sup> Sabapathy, 'Forty Years and After: The Nanyang Artists. Remarks on Art and History' unpaginated. [*Italics mine*]

these were spaces that always brought Liu back to the center of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the School of Paris. In a similar way, the names of the ‘pioneers’ and their exploits could never be uttered without the ghostly echoes of their precursors. Listen to Long Thien-Shih: “Paintings depicting the life of the Malay kampung folk are to a certain extent emulating the romanticism of a Gauguinesque lost paradise; an escape from the harsh realities of being colonized. Thus, the trip to Bali by the four ‘giants’: Cheong Soo Pieng, Chen Wen Hsi, Chen Chong Swee and Liu Kang, was similarly, an equivalent of Gauguin’s sojourn in the paradisaical escape of Tahiti.”<sup>218</sup>

And this paradoxical act of geographical displacement that could bring one back, ever closer to the center was itself inherited from Gauguin – where the art made in the South Seas was never meant for the South Seas. These were simply places he could raid for images, and meant for consumption back in the center, in Paris, “the true hub of his existence.”<sup>219</sup> Tahiti, Marquesas, these were never places in themselves – the South Seas was defined perpetually only as a paradise south to the center of Paris, just as the South Seas of Nanyang was named in its relation to the Middle Kingdom of China. In the same way the experience of Bali by the ‘pioneers’ was one always mediated through the experience

---

<sup>218</sup> Long Thien-Shih, ‘Nanyang Style and the French Influence’ in *Pont des Arts – Nanyang Artists in Paris 1925 – 1970* (Singapore: National Museum Art Gallery, 1994), pp. 33

<sup>219</sup> Dina Sonntag, ‘Prelude to Tahiti: Gauguin in Paris, Brittany and Martinique’, p. 86

of modern art in China, and always evaluated through the schemas that they had inherited from Paris.

### **The Judgment of Paris**

Let us now return once again to the writings of Sabapathy. In them, one can see in play a system of *reference*, *deference* and *difference*. He is able to *refer* the 'pioneers' to the 'West' and *defer* to a notion of modernism, while at the same time *differentiating* them from these sources.

But to do so effectively, he must first take it upon himself to attempt a definition, and hence circumscription of the 'West'. Again, his theoretical moves here display much strategic cunning. According to Sabapathy, "In the context of Western art, the School of Paris effectively marks the watershed between traditional art values and those of the modern..."<sup>220</sup> For him, traditional art practices were characterized as being "generally concerned with the creation of narratives, symbols and icons... which portray themes and support meanings, prescribed by religion, mythology, history and philosophy".<sup>221</sup>

---

<sup>220</sup> T.K. Sabapathy, 'Scroll Meets Easel' in *Straits Times Annual 1982* (Singapore: The Straits Times, 1982), p. 119.

<sup>221</sup> Sabapathy, 'Scroll Meets Easel', p. 119.



The new purpose of the School of Paris, on the other hand, “is to explore ways of seeing (the mechanics of vision and perception), and to create a visual language that will adequately and effectively structure and express these ways.”<sup>222</sup> In order to achieve this: “... the artist turns towards the everyday environment for visual stimulus and subject matter, focusing on aspects such as the nature of color and light, the structure of space and forms, movement and the expressive properties of paint and brush.”<sup>223</sup> Therefore, Sabapathy concluded: “In pursuing these objectives, the artist avoids any suggestion of the kinds of symbolic values present in traditional art... In all these respects, the School of Paris must have been an attractive and compelling model. In the absence of a comparable or an alternate one, in which the notion of the modern is so vividly fleshed out, those artists in China – and indeed in other countries in Asia, who were seeking “a new art” – turned towards the French example.”<sup>224</sup>

Hence, Sabapathy had taken great care to depict the ‘School of Paris’ as the moment whereby ‘Western’ art was itself dislocated from its Canonical Tradition. Thus, if the ‘pioneers’ had inherited the pictorial schemas of the ‘School of Paris’, they would have come into possession

---

<sup>222</sup> Sabapathy, ‘Scroll Meets Easel’, p. 119.

<sup>223</sup> Sabapathy, ‘Scroll Meets Easel’, p. 119.

<sup>224</sup> Sabapathy, ‘Scroll Meets Easel’, p. 119.

of just this dislocation. And the attraction of this lay in the superceding of tradition as source-image by an idealized notion of immediate access to 'nature' as 'source'. To put this in another way, such a dislocation held the tantalizing promise of opening up the activity of painting to a "pictorial form with a sense of immediacy and directness."<sup>225</sup> The purpose of which was "to transform visual phenomenon as seen, felt and thought by the artist".<sup>226</sup>

But such a circumscription of the 'School of Paris' can only be achieved through a ruthless process of marginalization. In its wake, Manet – a figure as central to 19<sup>th</sup> century Parisian painting as any – must necessarily be left unmentioned. For Manet's work, as we have seen, was profoundly engaged with the art of the past. Hence, this illusionary construction of a unitary whole – where there was only unruly heterogeneity – serves a particular performative function within the conceptual schema of Sabapathy. It was needed to create a unified 'School of Paris' – a monolithic Father – from which the 'Nanyang pioneers' could be differentiated.

---

<sup>225</sup> T. K. Sabapathy, 'Modern Art in Singapore: Pioneers and Premises' in *Sources of Modern Art* (Singapore: Ministry of Education, 1986), p. 130.

<sup>226</sup> T. K. Sabapathy, 'Modern Art in Singapore: Pioneers and Premises', p. 130.

## The Symmetry of Violence

In the throes of the anxiety of influence, a monolithic 'Western' Father must be built and subsequently annihilated. Gabriel Tarde tells us: "Invention and imitation are, as we know, the elementary social acts. But what is the social substance or force through which this act is accomplished and of which it is merely the form? In other words, what is invented or imitated? The *thing* which is invented, the thing which is imitated, is always an idea or a volition, a judgment or a purpose, which embodies a certain amount of *belief* and *desire*."<sup>227</sup> In this sense I will claim that the inheritance of the 'pictorial schemas' of the 'West' by the 'pioneers' and their commentators brings about a corollary investment in a new form of *belief* and *desire*: the belief in and desire for a fantasy of origins and originality, a Freudian dream of the Family Romance – its Oedipal complex.

This formulation of a Father Figure is thus always accompanied by a form of symmetrical violence. For the violent interpolation of the sheer multiplicity of 'otherness' into a single identifiable 'Other' is corollary to the ruthlessness of the synthesis needed for the construction of a stable, grounded identity.

---

<sup>227</sup> Gabriel Tarde, 'Logical Laws of Imitation' in *On Communication and Social Influence - Selected Papers*, ed. Terry N. Clark (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1969), pp. 178

Such a process is operative, for example, in Kwok's attempt to defend the 'pioneers' against the charge of Orientalism. He claims: "Unlike Gauguin's relationship with Tahiti, and perhaps even Le Mayeur's with Bali, the Singapore artists regarded Bali as Self and not the Other within the context of their regionalist consciousness."<sup>228</sup> Thus, in his anxiety to separate the 'pioneers' from their 'Western' precursors, Kwok – like the 'pioneers' and Sabapathy, must conflate all the heterogeneity of the 'region' of Southeast Asia into a unified self.<sup>229</sup>

Such was the ruthlessness and the violence required in the very effort to pronounce "I".

---

<sup>228</sup> Kwok Kian Chow, 'Images of the South Seas – Bali as a Visual Source in Singapore Art' in *From Ritual to Romance – paintings inspired by Bali*, (Singapore: Singapore Art Museum, 1994), p. 40.

<sup>229</sup> To be fair, this ideology of regionalism provided an alternative to the narrower confines of Nationalism. Nowhere was this more cogently expressed than in the work of Sabapathy. For him, "modern art historical discourses have tended to stay within boundaries circumscribing post-colonial national states. The principal aims have been to develop histories of art along national, domestic turfs. Rarely do writers step outside them to look at and ascertain the going-ons across boundaries. Consequently, comparative studies on a regional basis are underdeveloped; perceptions of the emergence and development of modernism in terms of regional dynamics or in terms of historical processes particular to South-East Asia as a region have not been advanced." T. K. Sabapathy, 'Developing Regionalist Perspectives in South-East Asian Art Historiography' in *Second Asia Pacific Triennale*. (Brisbane: Queensland Art Gallery, 1996), p. 17.

## I is Another

In the human, all too human fear of facing the legion of otherness within the self, we can locate the historical experience of the anxiety of influence. It is an unwillingness to affirm difference in the light of its positivity, an incapacity to perceive that differentiation is a process that always already occurs from within.

Instead, the human need for self-definition so often proceeds through the work of the negative – of coming to oneself by the elimination of the other. This is the refusal to see that the self can be formulated only as futurity, in time, as becoming. It is, to borrow Bloom's description of a poem, "a relational event, a concept of happening and not a concept of being."<sup>230</sup> And it is in this sense, that the afterimage is a relational event, and the self located in a process of happening. Or as Arthur Rimbaud once declared so succinctly, "I is another".<sup>231</sup>

In the work of Bloom, we can discern the radicality of understanding the flow of influence without the crutches of the human. As he wrote: "We need to stop thinking of any poet as an autonomous ego... Every poet is a

---

<sup>230</sup> Harold Bloom, *The Breaking of the Vessels* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 32.

<sup>231</sup> Arthur Rimbaud, *Complete Works*, trans. Paul Schmidt (New York: Harper & Row, 1975) pp. 101.

being caught up in a dialectical relationship (transference, repetition, error, communication) with another poem or poets.”<sup>232</sup> Yet something in his persistent fixation on the drama of the Oedipalized human ties him back from the radical potential of this thought. As Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein commented: “Bloom’s unyielding insistence on the centrality of the author in criticism distances him from those theories of intertextuality”.<sup>233</sup> Clayton and Rothstein proceeded to cite Bloom: “We sustain a terrible ‘humanistic loss... if we yield to those like Derrida and Foucault who imply...that language by itself writes the poems and thinks.”<sup>234</sup> In other words, Bloom’s conception of influence – in its residual humanistic nostalgia for a subject-centered universe – is in the last instance invested in the mode of person-to-person relationship, and thus inherently contradictory to a fully relational definition of the subject.

Where Bloom stops, Gilles Deleuze can be seen to begin. For Deleuze: “(The) Self is in time and is constantly changing: it is a passive,

---

<sup>232</sup> Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence – A Theory of Poetry*, p. 91.

<sup>233</sup> Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein, ‘Figures in the Corpus: Theories of Influence and Intertextuality’ in *Influence and Intertextuality in Literary History* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), p. 9.

<sup>234</sup> Clayton and Rothstein, ‘Figures in the Corpus: Theories of Influence and Intertextuality’, p. 9. Clayton and Rothstein are useful in establishing the difference between Bloom’s conception of influence with regard to Roland Barthes and Julia Kristeva’s conceptions of intertextuality, and to a certain extent, to that of Jacques Derrida’s. Although aspects of Deleuze’s work resonate with the work of these figures, his has never focused on the issue of the intertextuality, but rather on a physics or diagrammatics of forces between texts. And it is this focus of relationality that brings him strangely close to Bloom.

or rather receptive, 'self' that experiences changes in time. The / is an act (I think) that actively determines my existence (I am), but can only determine it in time, as the existence of a passive, receptive, and changing *self*, which only represents to itself the activity of its own thought."<sup>235</sup> Therefore: "The / and the self, are thus separated by the line of time, which relates them to each other only under the condition of a fundamental difference. My existence can never be determined as that of an active and spontaneous being, but as a passive 'self' that represents to itself the 'I' – that is, the spontaneity of the determination – as an 'Other' that affects it..."<sup>236</sup> Hence 'I' is always just a representation, separated by the caesura of temporal delay from the 'self'. To recast Deleuze's terms in the terms of my discussion, the afterimage is the recognition that an image is always split on the inside, haunted by traces of the source-image lodged within. Yet this very interstitial is also the hole in the wall that lets the air in, the opening that makes possible the swerve. In other words, the afterimage is the image experienced in time, and time is difference-in-process.<sup>237</sup>

---

<sup>235</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 29.

<sup>236</sup> Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, p. 29.

<sup>237</sup> For a definition of time as difference-in-process, and the interesting theoretical prospects it brings into the understanding of visual arts, I will like to cite Ian Heywood in his discussions of Deleuze's commentary on the paintings of Francis Bacon. Heywood writes: "We have seen how Deleuze's interpretation of Bacon's uncompromising paintings forces us to confront their radically unsettling challenge. Yet what ordinary experience, works of art, and aesthetic, scientific and philosophical practices, all 'express' or testify to is finally the invisible, the unrepresentable, the difference-process itself, or rather, interpretative or

And with this, I would like to return once again to the relationship which binds Liu and Gauguin together. And the glue of such a binding goes over and beyond the question of influence and derivation. It lies in a shared attitude towards time. Both had sought a ground – in their respective voyages to the South Seas – from which originality could be found. Both believed that such an act of spatial dislocation onto primitive paradises could bring forth the new. However, these voyages were always a kind of flight from time, from modernity – “a voyage back, to a time before.”<sup>238</sup> These were searches for the Primary Scene, a voyage to the South Seas. In this respect, it was the symptom of a certain crisis of representation. Not simply a crisis in knowing what could be represented and how it could be represented, but more profoundly a crisis in representing the self. In this way, the primitivism inherent within Gauguin and Liu is that recuperative move of turning back time to discover that Edenic self, far away from the chaos of modernity, urbanity and the social relations of capitalism.<sup>239</sup>

---

perspectival responses to this process, forms of active or passive force which ultimately cannot be distinguished from the process itself. There is then an inevitable and unmistakable pressure to find the ultimate meaning of works of art not in the human significance of their sensuous particularity but in their abstract, formal identity as self-dissolving instances of the difference-in-process.” Ian Heywood, ‘Deleuze on Francis Bacon’ in *A Companion to Art Theory*, ed. Paul Smith and Carolyn Wilde (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), p.378.

<sup>238</sup> Brooks, ‘Gauguin’s Tahitian Body’, p.332.

<sup>239</sup> Here I have paraphrased Abigail Solomon-Godeau, who wrote: Synthetism, cloisonnisme, primitivism and the larger framework of Symbolism all represent diverse attempts to negotiate what [Griselda] Pollock and others have termed a crisis in representation – a ‘crisis;’ whose manifestation is linked to a widespread



The irony, or dialectical reversal, is of course that this flight from modernity was itself made possible by the modernity of industrial reproduction and the photographic proliferation of images. The flight from modernity was itself a monstrous child of modernity, born in contradiction, soaked in its own Oedipal revulsion. As Pissaro spoke about his one-time protégé and collaborator Gauguin: “I hold it against him that he failed to apply his synthesis to our modern philosophy, which is absolutely social, anti-authoritarian and anti-mystical. That’s how serious the question is. It is a turn to the past. Gauguin is no visionary, he is a trickster”.<sup>240</sup>

And it is this turn to the past, this flight away from modernity – as played out in the paintings of Liu – that we will now proceed to.

---

flight from modernity, urbanity and the social relations of advanced capitalism.” Solomon-Godeau, ‘Going Native’, p. 316

<sup>240</sup> Quoted from T.J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea – Episodes from a History of Modernism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 80.

## [Section Two: South Seas, 1952]

“...the primitivist painting is always a working over of multiple encounters – artistic precedents, prior schemes, imaginary scenes, actual events. Crucial here is that the artists were compelled to contrive such origin myths in the first place, and to do so in a melodramatic idiom of desire and fear. More is at stake, then, than the usual portrait of the artist or legend of the avant-gardist, for *the primitive scene is a performative act of a special sort, often a staging of rebirth sited in the field of the other* (again, in a way that speaks to the popular imagination of imperial subjects at home).<sup>241</sup>

Hal Foster

### Modern Life

In an essay titled ‘Modern Art in Singapore: Pioneers and Premises’, Sabapathy would declare: “It may well be the case that critics and historians inspired by mythical visions are able to dramatize the beginnings of modern art in Singapore *by identifying a single production or event with the intention of personifying its parentage*. In general, this history of art is enlivened by such dramatizations. In particular, the discussion of modern art *aspires to such mythical conditions*.”<sup>242</sup> In other

---

<sup>241</sup> Foster, ‘Primitive Scenes’, p. 21.

<sup>242</sup> Sabapathy, ‘Modern Art in Singapore: Pioneers and Premises’, pp. 129. [*Italics mine*]

words, for Sabapathy, the formulation of the ‘primal scene’ of modern Singaporean art involved first of all, a process of selection, from which only one – “a single production or event” – can emerge. The rest must be deemed pretenders and hence eliminated. Next, followed the business of mythologizing, where the selected one would then be elevated to the Throne of the Father.<sup>243</sup>

Nobody has been more eloquent or forceful than Sabapathy in writing the genesis of modern art in Singapore through the canonization of the ‘pioneers’. It was a dramatization that needed its Homer to produce its heroes: a performative act that had to be “sited in the field of the other” in order for the subjects to clear a ground under their own feet, in order to be able to say “I”.

---

<sup>243</sup> In a book about modern Malaysian art, Sabapathy had written: “It may well be the case that in the future, critics and historians motivated by visionary ideals will be able to dramatise the beginnings of modern art in Malaysia *by identifying a particular event of production with the intention of personifying its parentage*. This history of art is enlivened by such dramatisations, and the discussion of modern art revolves around such heroic moments.” T.K. Sabapathy, ‘Introduction’ in Sabapathy and Redza Piyadasa, *Modern Artists of Malaysia*, (Kuala Lumpur: Ministry of Education Malaysia, 1983), p. vii. One can perhaps infer from this blanket formula for “visionary” invocations (of the primal scenes of modern art) that such discourses are by nature antithetical to historical, or geographical specificities. Such a form of ahistoricism or denials of history is a symptomatic characteristic of many discourses of originary plenitude. However, in the case of Sabapathy, the conflation of the ‘primal scene’ of Singaporean and Malaysian art can be understood in a more nuanced way. It is on the hand, intricately tied to the dream of Singapore-Malaysian unity that was dispelled by the 60s, and on the other hand, a result of the synthetic, regionalist world-view that lies at the root of his conceptual armature.

This 'field of the other' was of course Bali. Bali was not merely another space and culture, but also represented to the urbane 'pioneers' another 'time' – a time other than modernity, a time other than what was perceived to be the unbearable nature of the present. Thus, the subject matter of the 'Nanyang' painting was to be selected from the region, but restricted to "only its natural landscapes and social activities."<sup>244</sup> According to Cai Baolong: "Liu Kang rejects the inclusion of scenes of modern industrial areas and commercial areas in the works of the Nanyang Style. These scenes are not representative of the subjects of the Nanyang region."<sup>245</sup>



Figure 112. Liu Kang, *The Padang*, 1952

---

<sup>244</sup> Cai Baolong, 'Interview with Singapore's Pioneer Artist Liu Kang' in *Nanyang Arts Magazine*, No. 3, (2001), p.11.

<sup>245</sup> Cai, 'Interview with Singapore's Pioneer Artist Liu Kang', p.11.

In other words, the ‘Nanyang Style’ was a ‘modern’ art style that rejected the face of modernity itself. There is indeed something unbearable about the few paintings by Liu that were “scenes of modern industrial areas and commercial areas.” The broad brush strokes characteristic of Liu’s outlines take on an extreme clumsiness when applied to the geometry of modern day architecture. *The Padang* depicted the seat of power of the Colonial State, and the twin giant phalluses – the City Hall of the Parliament and the Supreme Court; it repulses the viewer in a way that only the vulgarity of unsheathed power can. Nothing in it seduces, and nothing in it can evoke the idyllic that was Liu’s typical painterly domain. Nothing in the painting can ameliorate the representation of labor that sticks out like a sore thumb in the foreground of *The Padang*. A lone Indian man, presumably sweating under the extreme heat of Singapore, has removed his top as he mows the lawn alone. There was no way Liu could have painted modern life without the signs of labor. And there was no way labor could have been depicted as idyllic.



Figure 113. Dai Yunlang, *Street Cleaner*, Wenman Gie, 16 Aug 1936

Liu's Indian lawnmower makes a 'return' in *Street Cleaner*, 1936, produced by Dai Yunlang some 20 years before Liu's painting. Dai was a highly accomplished cartoonist who had his works published in Chinese newspapers regularly. In *Street Cleaner*, all the filth of the job at hand for the minority laborer is powerfully evoked, in absolute contrast with Liu's evaporation of labor in *The Padang*.

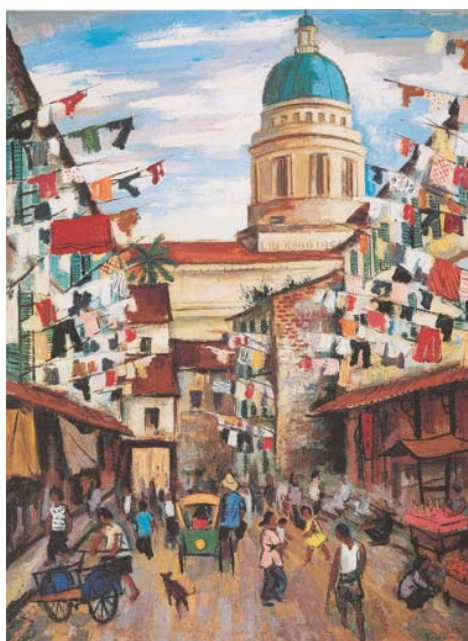


Figure 114. Liu Kang, *Chin Nam Street*, 1951

In *Chin Nam Street*, Liu attempts to liven up the picture with the rhythmic play of clothes hanging out from the two parallel rows of residences. Yet he could not avoid depicting the misery of labor. In the left foreground is a man pushing a cart, and in the center, a trishaw moving away. Meanwhile, on the left, a handicapped man (something you would

never find in his Bali paintings) hobbles along. Reality was simply not pretty.

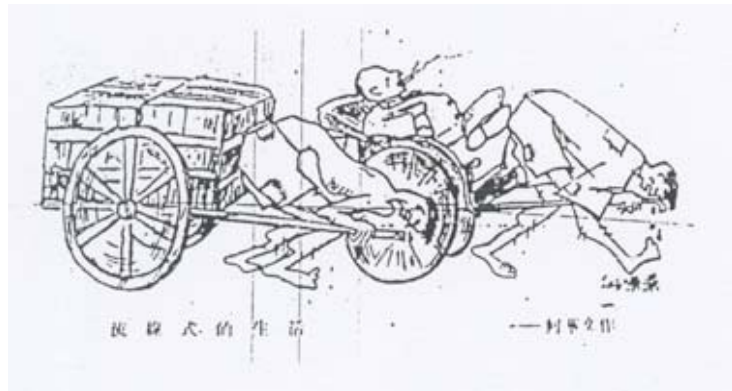


Figure 115. Dai Yunlang, *Hard Life*, Wenman Gie, 13 Sept 1936

The reality of the modern apparently did not sit well with Liu. He seemed unable to depict the experience of labor, or physical effort in his paintings. Pushcarts, lawn-mowers, cripples – they glided along in a dreamlike irreality, in contrast with the cartoon of Dai Yunlang, *Hard Life*, 1936. In this image which again preceded Liu's painting by more than two decades, we are presented with an excess of this reality. In the direct, emphatic strokes of the cartoon, Dai empties the scene of all unnecessary background, depicting only what really counts for him – the pure intensity of human labor, the parasitic stupor of the 'customer' sitting atop the rickshaw on the right of the picture, and the mastery of commodity over the human on the left.

In a dissertation written about the 'Nanyang Style', Low Jiat Leng claims that nostalgia was a characteristic of early visual art production in



Singapore. For her, the word 'nostalgia' denotes a "fondness for something known or for some period in the past."<sup>246</sup> And nostalgia occurs: "when people deem the present inadequate when compared to the past or when they feel anxieties regarding present times."<sup>247</sup> Thus the past concerned then "is a malleable one that is imbued with only positive qualities... The past is also a 'personally experienced past' which could only have been lived by the nostalgic person and not derived from external sources such as historical writings."<sup>248</sup> In other words, nostalgia was both a kind of turning away from the present, and an ahistorical quotation of the past.



Figure 116. Liu Kang, *Life by the River* by Liu Kang, 1975.

---

<sup>246</sup> Low Jiat Leng, *Nostalgia in Singapore Visual Arts*, (M.A. diss., National University of Singapore, 2001), p. 21-22.

<sup>247</sup> Low, *Nostalgia in Singapore Visual Arts*, p. 21-22.

<sup>248</sup> Low, *Nostalgia in Singapore Visual Arts*, p. 21-22.



Something of the dream-like irreality and selectivity of nostalgia is present in Liu's *Life by the River*. Here, Liu is in his element. None of the negativities of modern life seems to permeate his frozen world of faceless automatons petrified into stereotypical 'idyllic' poses. Nobody seems to be working, or sweating – not even the women at the river, who are washing clothes, for labor is dispelled in the magical spell of the idyllic. Even Liu's style of painting, with its thin washes and broad patches of color evoke a kind of effortlessness that renders invisible the labor of painting.

With its dark and gloomy colors, Lee Boon Wang's *Road Workers* is the perfect foil to Liu's *Life by the River*. The encroachment of the dirt, grime, and sweat of modern life explodes in this painting with a vengeance. The harsh realities of modern life that Liu's *Life by the River* escaped from returns with dizzying madness in Lee's scene of road construction. The very act of drilling the ground, by its very noise and bone-shaking vibrations seems to have put everyone present at the scene into a death-like trance. Liu's faceless idyllic automatons, find their antipodes in these workers. The latter laborers each possess carefully individuated features, yet they are in every way still automatons produced by the machines of modernity. These workers are 'blank' – for they are shell-shocked by modernity.

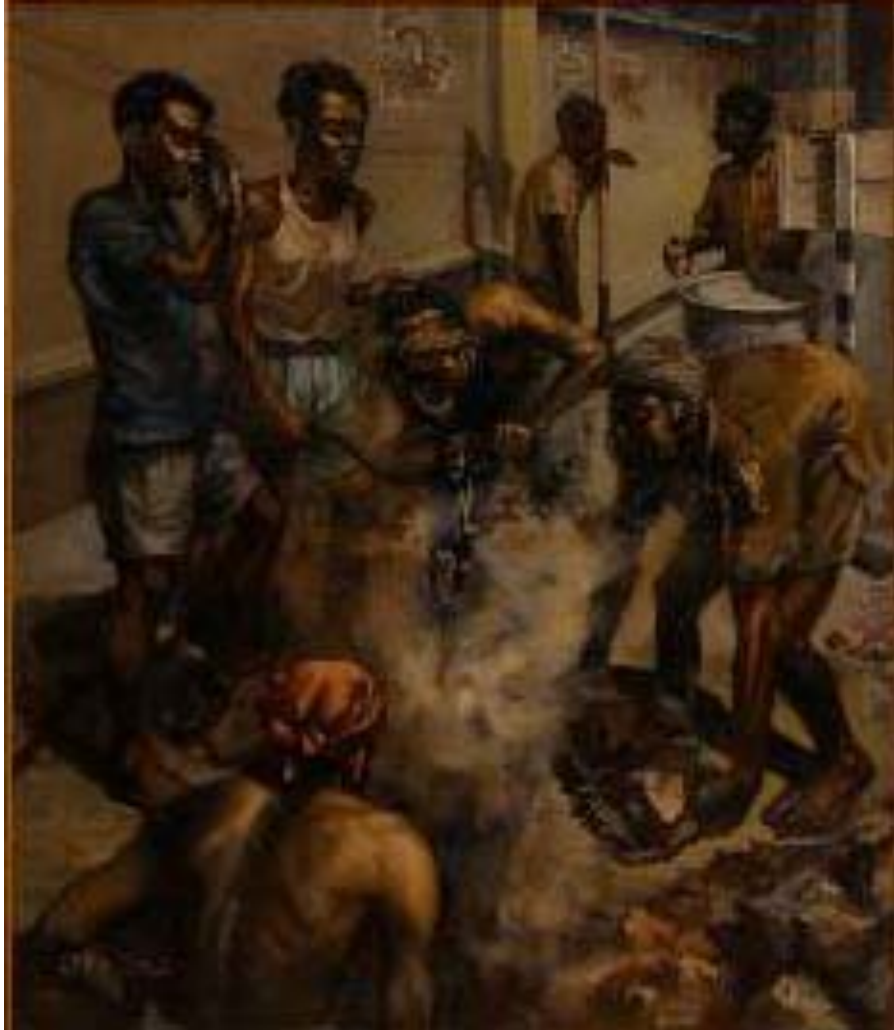


Figure 117. Lee Boon Wang, *Road Workers*, 1955

Looking at the painting, we find ourselves suspended, along with its frozen cloud of rising dust, in the present of the scene it depicts. We hold our breaths, as we watch the droplet of sweat frozen in its track down the bare back of the squatting figure in the foreground. *Road Workers* bring us into the thickness of the moment it depicts, and it compels our attention by the extremity of the bodily states that it portrays and the intensity of empathetic identification it arouses. Looking at it, we feel that we are at the scene – at that place. We are present.

A very different sense of presence was to be evoked in the paintings of the 'pioneers'. About their representational choices, Piyadasa had written: "Their subject-matter, nearly always rendered via the representational mode, included various aspects of the local cultural milieu."<sup>249</sup> Next he commented: "These idealized depictions were motivated by romantic attitudes. The general tendency among artists of the period to project a picture of a peaceful and idyllic British Malaya belied actual complexities and tensions that epitomized that eventful decade. We may be reminded that the 1950s witnessed on-going communist insurgency that was bloody and violent."<sup>250</sup> In other words, place-ness, or "aspects of the local cultural milieu" rendered in the romantic idyll of the 'pioneers' was becoming, in the 1950s, increasingly contradictory to the social landscape and reality.

---

<sup>249</sup> Redza Piyadasa, 'On Origins and Beginnings' in *Vision and Idea – ReLooking Modern Malaysian Art*, ed. T.K Sabapathy, Kuala Lumpur: National Art Gallery, 1994), pp. 31.

<sup>250</sup> Piyadasa, 'On Origins and Beginnings', p. 38.



Figure 118. Chen Chong Swee, *Washing by the River*, 1950



Figure 119. Chen Chong Swee, *Village Scene*, 1980

Writing about Chen Chong Swee, who was along with Liu, one of the four ‘pioneers’, Sullivan commented that Chen “is the only one of the Malayan Chinese who has attempted at all successfully to translate into the traditional medium the beauty of Malaya with its endless vistas of attap villages and palm-trees bending over long white beaches.”<sup>251</sup> His best works in this style, according to Sullivan, “were painted soon after his

---

<sup>251</sup> Sullivan, *Chinese Art in the Twentieth Century*, p. 60 [Italics mine]

arrival in Malaya *before the romantic and yet cloying beauty of the tropics had begun to pall*.<sup>252</sup> Perhaps, for Sullivan, the romance of these idyllic scenes was precisely predicated by the very fact they were palling – on the brink of disappearance, about to fade. For the dream of idyllic romanticism was above all one that feeds upon the nostalgia of time past, and antithetical to the relentless flux, chaos and uncertainties of modern life.



**Figure 120. Lai Foong Moi, Morning in the Kampong, 1959**

---

<sup>252</sup> Sullivan, *Chinese Art in the Twentieth Century*, p. 60 [Italics mine]

As a foil to the idyllic nostalgia of the ‘pioneers’, I would like to look at Lai Foong Moi’s *Morning in the Kampong*. Lai was a painter who was often considered to be second-generation ‘Nanyang’. About this painting, Piyadasa remarked that it “owes its format to the hanging scroll and its colors and painterly treatment to Post-Impressionism...”<sup>253</sup> This was for Piyadasa, an example of the approaches and solutions that “reflect particularities identified with Chinese artists attempting to arrive at modern art practices that also affirmed their sense of affiliation to the cultures of the region.”<sup>254</sup> Yet Piyadasa, who had noted the contradiction inherent in the romanticized vision of the ‘Nanyang’ idyll at a time of social turmoil, could not perceive in Lai’s picture, a painterly embodiment of this very contradiction.

On the one hand, the verticality of the format, as well as its compositional schema, invites the beholder to imaginatively project himself into the pictorial space – as marked by the inviting width of the passage that runs diagonally from the bottom frame inwards into the depths of the painting. Such a schema, which was also utilized by Chen’s *Washing by the River* and *Village Scene* is indeed the drawn format of Chinese landscape painting. Yet in contrast to the welcoming, misty, and mystified landscape of Chen’s *Washing*, there is nothing very attractive about the barren and brazen brown of Lai’s village. The evaporation of any

---

<sup>253</sup> Piyadasa, ‘On Origins and Beginnings’, p. 32.

<sup>254</sup> Piyadasa, ‘On Origins and Beginnings’, p. 32.

sense of the idyllic is embodied most forcefully in the lamp-post planted in the right foreground of the image. This is the sign of modernity par-excellence. It is electricity, and the advance-guard of the long reach of systematic urban planning encroaching into the sanctity of romanticized village life. With the lamp-post would soon follow the next step of urban renewal in Singapore – the obsolescence of all such kampungs. Such was the true face of modernity that the ‘Nanyang’ had to turn away from.

Moreover one should add that the verticality of the lamp-post in Lai’s painting co-relates structurally to the verticality of the coconut palms – emblems of the untouched nature of the tropics, which also function as an iconic reference to the status of the Chinese immigrant, dispersed like coconut husks over water. Therefore, embedded within this picture, is a powerful evocation of the contradiction between wish and reality, past and future – in short, the uncertainties of modern life.

### **The Landscape and Anxiety**

The contradictions of modern life were consistently worked over by the imageries of the ‘Nanyang’ idyll produced *en masse* by the ‘pioneers’. Here I will look at a different variation of this flight into the past.





Figure 121. Liu Kang, *Tenth Trip Up to Huangshan*, 1989

In Liu's *Tenth Trip Up to Huangshan*, 1989, the artist depicted is granted relatively individuated and identifiable features – rare for a Liu Kang painting. The 'painted artist' was Liu's teacher in Shanghai – his lifelong mentor and friend, Liu Haisu. An artist of considerable standing, Liu Haisu was widely considered to be an "influential figure in the modernization of Chinese art."<sup>255</sup> As Kao Mayching noted: "As one of the founders, in 1912, of the first modern art academy in China, the Shanghai Academy of Art, of which he was Director for the subsequent decades, and a prolific writer on Western and Chinese art, he (Liu Haisu) attracted a large following, the public being fascinated by the image he reflected of a romantic revolutionary hero."<sup>256</sup>

---

<sup>255</sup> Kao Mayching, 'The Quest of New Art' in *Twentieth Century Chinese-Painting* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 142.

<sup>256</sup> Kao, 'The Quest of New Art', p. 142.





**Figure 122. Liu Haisu**

Much of this perception of Liu as revolutionary hero was due to the fact that he had in his atelier, begun to use draped models in the European fashion. This was followed by his championing of the nude model, which provoked a huge outcry – one serious enough to warrant the attention of General Sun Ch'üan-fang, the Warlord of the 'Five Provinces'. Sun threatened to arrest Liu and close the school if the practice did not cease. But Liu instead immediately declared 'war' in the pages of a Shanghai weekly. As Sullivan described: "After a short and bitter controversy, General Sun was mercifully removed from power by the arrival of Chiang Kai-shek in Shanghai, and disaster was averted. As a result of Liu's moral victory, the use of nude models rapidly spread to other schools which had hitherto been too timid to use them."<sup>257</sup>

---

<sup>257</sup> Sullivan, *Chinese Art in the Twentieth Century*, p. 49.



Figure 123. Liu Haisu

In this skirmish revolving around nudity and painting, we can perhaps already catch a glimpse of the relationship of emulation that existed between the younger and elder Liu. For Liu himself had, with his fellow ‘pioneers’, unleashed the bare breasts of his Balinese models onto the conservative prudent population of the Singaporean Chinese milieu in the 1950s. The journey to Bali was undertaken in 1952, right after the years of the Japanese Occupation in the midst of an ‘anti-yellow movement’ in Singapore, where the Chinese community was especially zealous about eradicating all traces of pornography. It is in such an environment, that we can perhaps better appreciate the sense of freedom, in their access to female bodies that Liu and the ‘pioneers’ had felt when they stepped onto Bali.<sup>258</sup>

---

<sup>258</sup> At this point, it may also be pertinent to add that while the ‘Balinese paintings’ of Liu’s and the other ‘pioneers’ seem to be almost too perfectly set up as a ripe (and potentially productive) target for feminist critique, it is also important to situate this celebration of the beautiful, and bountiful Bali so lustily captured in Liu’s painting in a historical context specific to Singapore.



Figure 124. Ong Shih Cheng, *Anti-Yellow Movement*, Cartoon, 1955

### Symbols of Eternity

For the younger Liu to paint his master at work on a landscape is a fitting tribute, as the genre of landscape painting takes pride of place in the hierarchy of Chinese painting. More importantly, the elder Liu was himself famed for his landscapes which were seen to embody the new synthesis between Eastern and Western art as a sign of artistic modernity.<sup>259</sup>

The elder Liu had studied traditional painting, and also spent a few years sojourning in Paris. When he returned to Shanghai, “he developed a

---

<sup>259</sup> As Sullivan noted, next “to the supremely difficult art of calligraphy, the Chinese have for centuries looked on landscape painting as the highest form of visual art.” Sullivan, *Symbols of Eternity – The Art of Landscape Painting in China*, p. 6.

style where a vigorous brush technique was combined with certain European elements.” He was, as Sullivan noted: “An ardent admirer of Van Gogh and Cézanne, (and) the influence of the former can be seen in his stiffly articulated brush-strokes, and of the latter in the background of the landscape”.<sup>260</sup>



Figure 125. Liu Haisu, *Landscape, Mt. Huang*, 1988.

According to Sullivan, the elder Liu’s landscapes were examples of how “unlike the Western artist, the Chinese is not trying to create the illusion that he is standing at a particular spot, at a particular moment in the day, and looking at a particular view .... Rather he is making a general statement about nature.”<sup>261</sup> Here it is important to specify that ‘nature’ in the traditional Chinese painterly schema, is never grasped perceptually or optically, but philosophically. The landscape “was not just a symbol of the

---

<sup>260</sup> Sullivan, *Chinese Art in the Twentieth Century*, p. 42.

<sup>261</sup> Sullivan, *Symbols of Eternity – The Art of Landscape Painting in China*, p. 8.

Tao, it was the very substance of the Tao itself."<sup>262</sup> In this way, the absence of a single perceptual point, and the disappearance of the viewing subject which it implies, evoked the ephemeral and flux-like conception of existence and nature that Taoism implied. In other words, the Taoist conception of 'nature' is not that of a primordial plenitude, but one of the dialectical interplay between ying and yang, emptiness and fullness.



Figure 126. Detail from *Tenth Trip Up to Huangshan*, 1989

In this light, the younger Liu's *Tenth Trip Up to Huangshan* begins to take on a new point of interest for us. Like the rest of Liu's 'artist and model' pictures, it can, on the one hand, be seen as a failure to produce an unmediated image of nature – a failure wrought by Liu's recurrent self-consciousness of the very act of representation. It is a result of his attention diverted from what is to be represented ('nature' as source) to the very act of representation (art as source). However this painting is also different from *Artist and Model*, *Outdoor Painting* and *Outdoor Class*, as the painted painter is no longer a faceless shell, but takes on some degree

---

<sup>262</sup> Sullivan, *Symbols of Eternity – The Art of Landscape Painting in China*, p. 27.

of verisimilitude to his master's image. In other words, the function of the painted painter as a receptacle for Liu's projection, which in the three earlier paintings lies hidden, is here brought out into the open. The younger Liu's psychic possession and dominance over the lifeless surrogates is here reversed into a public display of emulation. It is no longer a case of the painted painters functioning as secret ciphers that refer the beholder back to Liu. Liu in *Tenth Trip Up to Huangshan* seeks instead to manifest himself as someone else – to become another.

Just as interesting is the failure of this attempt to become this idealized figure of Liu Haisu, who is in the painting defined by his direct and unmediated access to the mountains. Without distraction, or any self-conscious awareness of Liu's presence, he paints this emblem of the essence of Chinese painterly tradition. Thus Liu's relationship to the mountains is blocked and mediated by the presence of his master. Relegated to the ranks of being a latecomer feeding upon "old light", the younger Liu is exiled onto the outside of painting – as a viewer, a beholder, a spectator. This, as Bryson puts it, is disaster: "...although the viewer who loves painting will properly seek to be flooded by the images of the past, if the painter yields to the same desire he risks disaster, for in that flood his own images may drown: if he yields to that invasion he will

cease to be who and what he is, a painter, and become the being he must always fight to overcome, that is, only a viewer.”<sup>263</sup>



Figure 127. Details from Liu Kang, *Outdoor Painting*, 1954

In *Tenth Trip Up to Huangshan*, Liu was precisely just a viewer looking in on the ‘real’ scene of the painting – the elder Liu at work. The value of *Tenth Trip Up to Huangshan* lay precisely in its own acceptance of belatedness, its recognition of failure. In it, painting is no longer suspended in self-conscious paralysis, for the painted painting, unlike that of *Outdoor Painting* is no longer left in pathetic blankness. Neither is the activity of painting hysterically celebrated like in *Outdoor Class*. Instead, in

---

<sup>263</sup> Bryson, *Tradition and Desire – From David to Delacroix*, p. 5.

Here, I will like to cite a passage from Bryson which draws an interesting analogy between the perception of landscape and the anxieties of influence. According to Bryson: “Whereas the painter’s struggle with the inheritance of the schema was his alone – a kind of solo combat against the ancestors – the bitter jolt from cognition to recognition is shared equally by the painter and by the viewer. In its root form the word ‘anxiety’ refers to the Latin *angustiaem* the narrowing of a road between cliff-sides, the traveler’s transit from a landscape of panorama to the enclosure of the mountain-pass; and it is in this sense also that we should understand the anxiety of influence in art, since each stage of painting and of viewing is marked by the same loss of a lived horizon and by the same passage from a vista of continuity – without-limit through the narrow defiles of the signifier.” Bryson, *Tradition and Desire – From David to Delacroix*, p. 26.

the *Tenth Trip Up to Huangshan*, painting takes place in the relative calm and solitude of labor. And it is this absence of the self-conscious display of the painterly ego that brings the painting close to the ideology of Taoism, which constituted the foundation of the landscape in traditional Chinese painting.

As Sullivan once declared: “For the Chinese painter, creation is the result not so much of a momentary reaction to a particular scene, as of a total cumulative experience – visual, psychic, imaginative, which becomes richer as his understandings of nature deepens with years of wandering among the hills and streams.”<sup>264</sup> Perhaps *Tenth Trip Up to Huangshan*, painted in the twilight of Liu’s years, was just such an accumulation of his experience, and its humility and absence of egoistic assertions make it one of his most successful paintings.

### **Realism and Being Present**

*Tenth Trip Up to Huangshan* makes an interesting companion to *Batik Workers*, executed some 35 years earlier. Both paintings were instances of Liu plugged into a process of becoming other, enacted in very different ways. *Batik Workers* was a convincing manifestation of the desire

---

<sup>264</sup> Sullivan, *Chinese Art in the Twentieth Century*, p. 32.



for a painting of the 'South Seas' – one in which the painter would open himself up to a process of empathetic transformation and identification with the specific cultural practices of others. *Tenth Trip Up to Huangshan*, on the other hand, is characterized almost by an abandonment of that ambition, or an acknowledgement of its failure. And its strength lies precisely in this acknowledgement, conferring upon it a sense of realism far more intense than the illusions of the 'Nanyang' idyll Liu had so often churned out.

Realism in painting, as I have been using it, does not refer to the degree of likeness a painting possesses. Rather realism is for me, the quality of the work of art which is capable of evoking an acknowledgement of its own conditions of production. This concept of realism comes close to Roland Barthes', when he wrote that the 'realistic' artist never places 'reality' at the origin of his discourse, but only and always, as far back as can be traced, an already written real, a prospective code, along which we discern, as far as the eye can see, only a succession of copies."<sup>265</sup>

And here, I would like to refer to yet another interesting revisionary definition of the term 'realism'. Stanley Cavell once asked: "...are we sure that the final denial of objective reference amounts to a complete yielding

---

<sup>265</sup> Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (New York : Hill and Wang, 1974), p. 167.

of connection with reality – once, that is, we have given up the idea that ‘connection with reality’ is to be understood as ‘provision of likeness’?”<sup>266</sup>

For Cavell, what needed to be expanded was our own understanding of what ‘reality’ and ‘painting’ meant. He continued: “We can say, painting and reality no longer assure one another... It could be said further that what painting wanted, in wanting connection with reality, was a sense of presentness – not exactly a conviction of the world’s presence to us, but of our presence to it.”<sup>267</sup>

And this desire for connection was the result of “the unhinging of our consciousness from the world”<sup>268</sup> which in turn, “interposed our subjectivity between us and our presentness to the world.”<sup>269</sup> Hence our subjectivity “became what is present to us, individuality became isolation.”<sup>270</sup> For Cavell: “The route to conviction in reality was through the acknowledgement of threats to the endless presence of self... Apart from the wish for selfhood (hence the always simultaneously granting of

---

<sup>266</sup> Stanley Cavell, *Must we mean what we say?* (Cambridge, New York : Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 22.

<sup>267</sup> Cavell, *Must we mean what we say?*, p. 22.

<sup>268</sup> Cavell, *Must we mean what we say?*, p. 22.

<sup>269</sup> Cavell, *Must we mean what we say?*, p. 22.

<sup>270</sup> Cavell, *Must we mean what we say?*, p. 22.

otherness as well), I do not understand the value of art. Apart from this wish and its achievement, art is exhibition.”<sup>271</sup>

In other words, the value of a work of art lies in its sense of presentness – a kind of being present unhindered by our “subjectivity”, unmarked by a sense of self-consciousness of individuality experienced as alienated isolation. Put another way, it is a form of subjectivity not felt as interposed or imposed, but is there, in the form of a wish (of self-hood) and expressed as a latent futurity. Its ultimate utterance is that of “I is another”.

To return once again to the terms of our essay, the value of a work of art lies in its openness – in the acceptance of its own relational status as an afterimage. The inability of a work of art to achieve this will mean that it is simply exhibition, or theatrical display.

---

<sup>271</sup> Cavell, *Must we mean what we say?*, p. 22.

## **Epilogue: Three, or More Suits**

[Section One: Suit, 1970]

“The category of the root, the origin, is the category of dominion”<sup>272</sup>

Theodor Adorno

**The Felt Suit**

I would like to tell one last story as a way of concluding this dissertation. It is, as the title suggests, a story of three, or more suits.

In the beginning, was the *Felt Suit*, 1970, by Joseph Beuys.



Figure 128. Joseph Beuys , *Felt Suit*, 1970

---

<sup>272</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. EB. Ashton (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), p. 155.

I begin with this suit, not only because it is chronologically the first, but also because this is a suit that has everything to do with beginnings, everything to do with origins.



**Figure 129. Joseph Beuys, Photograph from 'The 20 July Aachen 1964'. 1964**

A German fighter pilot during the second War World, Beuys was engaged in battle at the Crimea when his plane was shot down. According to him – and in an account that has by now ossified into art-world folklore, he was rescued from near death by the nomadic Tartars who roamed the Crimean lands. For the next twelve days, Beuys was in a state of semi-consciousness where he was nursed by the Tartars and kept warm with fats as well as felt. But Beuys the soldier had died. In his place was the new Beuys – self-proclaimed shaman, healer and artist. Henceforth, felt, along with fat, would come to have a special significance in his artistic practice.



**Figure 130. Joseph Beuys, *On the Way to America*, 1974**

For example, in *Coyote- I Like America and America Likes Me*, 1974, Beuys arrives at the Kennedy Airport wrapped in felt. Delivered in an ambulance to the gallery, he proceeds to interact with a Coyote, introducing it to a variety of materials like felt.



**Figure 131. Joseph Beuys, *Coyote- I Like America and America Likes Me*, 1974**

To understand Beuys' many performances and installations, and his obsessive use of fat and felt, it is necessary for the spectator to have access to a highly personalized network of symbolic significances – a network intricately enmeshed within his biography, or more specifically his artistic myth of origin.

Hence the key to understanding the *Felt Suit*, 1970 – one of his most iconic works – is prior knowledge to the entire constellation of myth surrounding the man. To understand the symbolism of the *Felt Suit*, is to understand how Beuys the man, the artist was made in the Crimea, emerging as he did from the felt of the Tartar as a butterfly from its chrysalis.



**Figure 132. Secondo Pia, *First Photo of the Shroud of Turin*, 1898**

When one looks at Beuys' *Felt Suit*, one feels the power of personality, the presence of his missing body. What emanates from it is



the spell of aura invoked by the name of Joseph Beuys, in the same way that one is made to feel the presence of Christ into the *Shroud of Turin*.

The *Felt Suit*, 1970 is an auratic object of ritual: it is like the sacrament marking the resurrection of Beuys – from killer to healer, man to Shaman.

## [Section 2: Suit, 1992]

“Because of their multiplying repetitions, repeating harmonies can occasionally harmonize directly with one another simply by meeting and can thus form higher adaptations. But more often they are in some way opposed, and through clashes and mutual corrections they prepare the way for higher harmonizations, which these conflicts and clashes condition and provoke rather than cause. Everywhere in the social and biological worlds and even the physical world we see harmonious things which, by multiplying, come into conflict with one another; we see adaptations which oppose each other... And everywhere, because of this crisis, we see oppositions which adapt: phenomena of commensalism and acclimatization, fecundations, treaties of alliance, chemical combinations.”<sup>273</sup>

Gabriel Tarde

### The Money Suit

I would like to move on to the second suit of the story, one that had appeared in Singapore some 22 years after Beuys' suit – the *Money Suit*, 1992, by Singaporean artist Vincent Leow.

---

<sup>273</sup> Gabriel Tarde, *On Communication and Social Influence* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1969), p. 144.



**Figure 133. Vincent Leow, *Money Suit*, 1992.**

This suit was originally part of a performance entitled *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous: The Three Legged Toad*. Executed by Leow in 1992, the performance took place at the Hong Bee Warehouse Space during his summer break from his studies in the United States.



**Figure 134. Vincent Leow, *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous: The Three Legged Toad*, Hong Bee Warehouse Space 1992**

The three-legged toad in the title referred to an artifact rather popular with some segments of the Singaporean Chinese population at that time: it was believed to bring good fortune to whoever possessed one. In an interview conducted with Leow in 2004, he said: "I wanted to play around with the idea of how you can build a myth around a toad and how all of a sudden, everybody starts wanting to buy one of these."<sup>274</sup> When asked more specifically about the performance, he replied: "The idea is basically, "If you wore a suit of money will people believe that you'll bring good fortune to them?" The performance sort of centered around the idea of hopping around on one foot, and throwing around Monopoly money. The performance was... to try to make fun of money itself."<sup>275</sup>

Here the Beuysian *Felt Suit* returns. But as with all forms of resurrection, things come back from the grave a little different. Here the *Felt Suit* returns as parody. In the place of warm felt are fake, lacquered US dollar notes. In the place of Beuysian performance as rituals of healing, is performance as a parody of rituals itself. More specifically, a parody of rituals of superstition and pursuits of wealth. If the Beuysian *Felt Suit* evoked a mystical encounter of spiritual awakening in the past, Leow's *Money Suit* was resolutely a deflation of myths that have persisted into the present. If Beuys' suit was an obsessive return to the originary

---

<sup>274</sup> Interview with Vincent Leow, conducted on 24<sup>th</sup> May 2004.

<sup>275</sup> Interview with Vincent Leow, conducted on 24<sup>th</sup> May 2004.

moment of his birth as a messianic artist, Leow's clownish repetition was one that was free from any such aspirations.

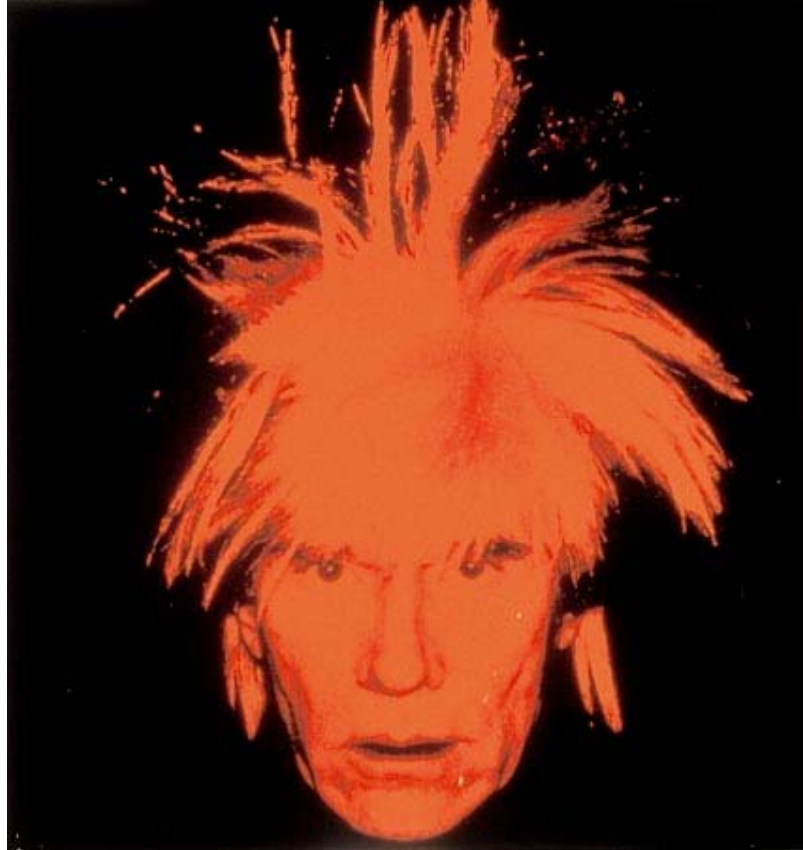


Figure 135. Andy Warhol, *Self-Portrait*, 1986

When asked if he thought about Beuys during the making of the suit, Leow replied: "I never thought about his *Felt Suit*...at that time if I was to think about an artist I would probably think of Andy Warhol more than Joseph Beuys. But I guess that when I presented it as a sculpture, it reminded me of an association with Joseph Beuys."<sup>276</sup>

---

<sup>276</sup> Interview with Vincent Leow, conducted on 24<sup>th</sup> May 2004.



**Figure 136. Andy Warhol, 192 One Dollar Bills, 1962**

Perhaps it was *192 Dollar Bills*, 1962, or the many other silk-screened paintings of money that Warhol had produced that Leow was thinking of, when he brought about this strange coupling of Beuys and Warhol. In any case, Warhol was a figure whose stature in the art world was just as mythical, though in a way diametrically opposed towards Beuys. On one side, we have Beuys the ecological shaman, while on the other we have Warhol who had once stated his ambition was to become a machine.<sup>277</sup> On the one hand, we have Beuys whose works are to be read

---

<sup>277</sup> In his own words in a 1963 interview, "*Paintings are too hard. The things I want to show are mechanical. Machines have less problems. I'd like to be a*

via a private realm of signs, while on the other we have Warhol whose works are enmeshed with the signs of the public sphere of consumption. But it must also be remembered that chief amongst all the artists associated with Pop Art, Warhol was by far the greatest and most successful manipulator of the mass media.

By the 1960s, Warhol was a public celebrity, whose reach on the public consciousness far outstripped that public's actual knowledge of his work. In this sense, Warhol was an intensified version of that media manipulator par excellence of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Gauguin. Just as Beuys, in the elevated rhetoric of his messianism, too, was a 20<sup>th</sup> Century version of Gauguin, the prophet of Primitivism.



**Figure 137. Joseph Beuys with Andy Warhol in Munich, 1980.**

---

*machine, wouldn't you?"* Cited from Cybremuse Artist's Page, 'Biography – Andy Warhol' [http://cybremuse.gallery.ca/cybremuse/docs/bio\\_artistid5780\\_e.jsp](http://cybremuse.gallery.ca/cybremuse/docs/bio_artistid5780_e.jsp) (accessed 3rd July 2005).

However, what was fascinating about the work of Warhol was that his intense reliance and fascination with the media was itself folded into the surface of his artwork, in both content and form. Using a technique of silk-screening, his paintings were reproduced images. And very often the images that he reproduced were those of common commodities and celebrities – images that were not only easily recognizable, but always profusely circulated. If Warhol's work dealt with myths, they were of the order of the cult of celebrities and commodities, driven by the madness of the market and capitalism; altogether different from the cult of Beuys, which was one fired by the romantic rhetoric of a pre-capitalist mysticism.



**Figure 138. Andy Warhol, *Marilyn Monroe Diptych*, 1962**

If Leow's immersion in Warhol and Pop Art can be traced to his studies then in America, his exposure to Beuys came through the figure of one Tang Da Wu.





**Figure 139. Tang Dawu, *No! I Don't want Any Black Monsoon*, Hiroshima Museum of Contemporary Art, 1994**

About eighteen years Leow's senior, Tang founded the Artist Village in 1988 – an artist collective that Leow was very much involved with before he had left for the United States. As Leow expressed: "(Tang) Dawu shared with us a knowledge that wasn't available in Singapore, having come back from (the) UK... At that time, I (had) heard of Joseph Beuys but it wasn't taught in school. Da Wu, when he came, had some kind of Joseph Beuys influence (sic). Da Wu did a...workshop about Joseph Beuys."<sup>278</sup>

Here, within the scope of this essay, I would like to look at Tang not so much as a man, but more as a kind of vessel – a carrier of certain strands of artistic practices, which he brought back from the UK to be disseminated in Singapore – like infectious strains of viruses.

---

<sup>278</sup> Interview with Vincent Leow, conducted on 24<sup>th</sup> May 2004.



**Figure 140. Tang Da Wu, *Serious Conversations*, 1990.**

The proper art historical term for this infection is influence. But here I would like to expand the notion of influence by recasting it as a biological term – more specifically, as what the Neo-Darwinist Richard Dawkins referred to as a meme. In his groundbreaking book ‘The Selfish Gene’, Dawkins explained: “Examples of memes are tunes, ideas, catch-phrases, clothes fashions, ways of making pots or of building arches. Just as genes propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperms or eggs, so memes propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation.”<sup>279</sup> Then Dawkins proceeded to furnish some examples: “If a scientist hears, or reads about, a good idea, he passes it on to his

---

<sup>279</sup> Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 192. It is perhaps of interest to note that Bloom himself “justifies this radical analogue between human and poetic birth, between biological and creative anxiety...” Harold, Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence – A Theory of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, New York, 1973), p. 58.

colleagues and students. He mentions it in his articles and his lectures. If the idea catches on, it can be said to propagate itself, spreading from brain to brain...thus memes should be regarded as living structures, not just metaphorically but technically. When you plant a fertile meme in my mind, you literally parasitise my brain, turning it into a vehicle for the meme's propagation in just the way that a virus may parasitise the genetic mechanism of a host cell."<sup>280</sup>

If we see the idea of the suit itself as a concrete manifestation of a meme, Leow's *Money Suit* can then be understood as being a direct descendent of Beuys' *Felt Suit*. However, in the field of artistic production where originality is valued, Beuys' suit, if it is to be repeated, must necessarily be repeated with a difference. Hence the contamination of the sign of Beuys with that of Warhol was a logical choice, not only because Warhol had a stature in the art world that was equivalent to Beuys, but also because Warhol seemed to stand for a mode of artistic practice that was antithetical to that of Beuys. In this way, the solemn ritualistic dimension of Beuys' is repeated as parody.

It is appropriate thus to remember how Bloom had described 'poetic influence'. In Bloom's words: "When it involves two strong, authentic poets, poetic influence always proceeds by a misreading of the prior poet,

---

<sup>280</sup> Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, p. 192.

an act of creative correction that is actually and necessarily a misinterpretation. This history of fruitful poetic influence...is a history of anxiety and self-saving caricature, of distortion, of perverse, willful revisionism without which modern poetry cannot exist."<sup>281</sup>

---

<sup>281</sup> Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence – A Theory of Poetry*, p. 30.

### [Section Three: Suit, 1995]

“Repetition is never a historical fact, but rather the historical condition under which something new is effectively produced.”<sup>282</sup>

Gilles Deleuze

#### Don't Give Money to the Arts Suit

Now I would like to proceed to the third suit of this story – a suit that belonged to Tang Dawu himself. In 1995, in the wake of the withdrawal of official funding for Performance Art in Singapore by the National Arts Council, Tang carried out a performance entitled *Don't Give Money to the Arts* at the gala opening ceremonies of two different art exhibitions.

---

<sup>282</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (London: Athlone Press, 1994), p. 90.



**Figure 141. Tang Da Wu, *Don't Give Money to the Arts Suit*, 1995**

The first took place at the Modern Art Society Exhibition at the National Museum Art Gallery, and the second at the Singapore Art Fair held at Suntec City, which was opened by the then-President Ong Teng Cheong. Tang had Brother Joseph McNally and Ong Kim Seng, both artists themselves, to introduce him to the President.

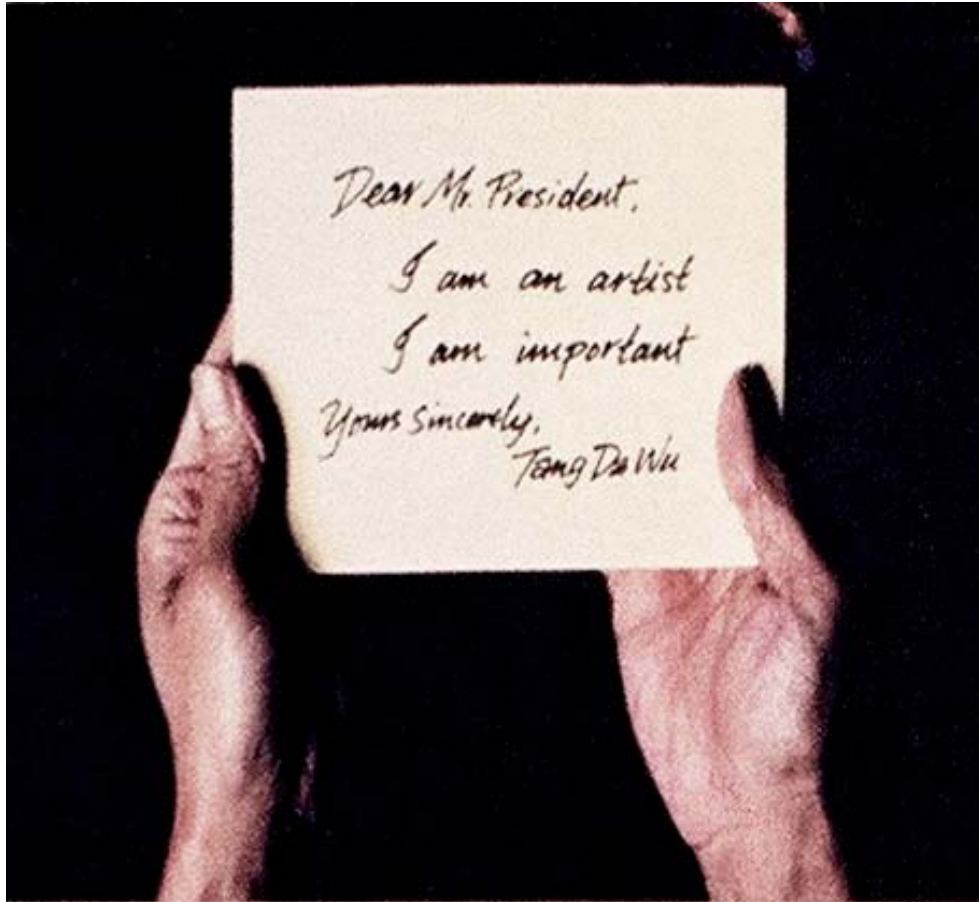


Figure 142. Tang Da Wu, card handed to President Ong Teng Cheong, in *Don't Give Money to the Arts*, Singapore Art '95, Suntec City, 1995

In the second of these exhibitions, Tang first handed to the President a card with the message: "I am an artist. I am important". He then asked the President for permission to put on his jacket, with the words *Don't Give Money to the Arts* emblazoned on the back. As Ray Langenbach described: "Tang proved that the government officials, having no theoretical framework by which to distinguish performance art from the ground of social rituals, couldn't identify a performance art work even if it hit them in the face. Tang's performance thereby clarified exactly why the

government saw performance art to be such a threat to their organs of regulation and control.”<sup>283</sup>



Figure 143. Tang Dawu, with President Ong Teng Cheong, *Don't Give Money to the Arts*, Singapore Art '95, Suntec City, 1995

Looking at the newspapers published the following day, we see Tang's performance successfully inseminating itself into the public sphere through its mention in *The Straits Times*, Singapore's 'official' daily newspaper.

---

<sup>283</sup> Ray William Langenbach, *Performing the Singapore state 1988-1995*, (Ph.D. Diss., Sydney: University of Western Sydney, 2003), p. 92 – 94. Available online <http://library.uws.edu.au/adt-NUWS/public/adt-NUWS20041027.174118/index.html> (accessed 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2006).

See also Chapter IV – 'State Fatherhood and the Body Politic: The Taxonomy of Progress' of this dissertation for an interesting account of the struggle over the originary position with regards to performance art in Singapore. This struggle took place between the artist collective known as Trimurti and Tang Da Wu (while also involving, to a certain extent, T.K. Sabapathy). In Langenbach's account, this struggle for artistic priority was foregrounded against the context of the Asian Values rhetoric that surfaced in Singapore in the 1980s.





STRAITS TIMES

12 AUG 1995

## Pay more attention to the arts: President

A-1-v p.3

PRESIDENT Ong Teng Cheong opened the Singapore Art '95 exhibition last night with a call to pay more attention to the arts now that the country had arrived economically.

"Perhaps because of our preoccupation with economic growth, the arts have lagged behind," he said in his opening speech at the Singapore International Convention and Exhibition Centre.

"With greater affluence, we can now afford to pay more attention to improving the spiritual and cultural quality of life," he added.

Singapore Art '95 is an exhibition-cum-sale featuring 483 paintings, sculptures and photographs by 293 Singapore artists. The event, sponsored by OCBC Bank, is organised jointly by the National Arts Council (NAC) and the National Heritage Board, to celebrate Singapore's 30th anniversary and the United Nations' 50th anniversary.

As President Ong toured the exhibits, Singapore painter and performance artist Tang Da Wu weaved his way past the bodyguards and handed him a note.

Mr Tang was wearing a black jacket with the words: "Don't give money to the arts" embroidered in

bright yellow on the back.

President Ong accepted the note and continued his tour.

Mr Tang, whose work is not represented in the show, told The Straits Times that he wanted to tell the President that artists were important and that he thought money was being given to the "wrong kind of art" which is very commercial and without taste.

Permission to speak to the President was denied by the aide-de-camp.

Singapore Art '95 marks the rebirth of two events: the National Day Art Exhibition, which was held from 1969 to 1985, and the Singapore Art Fair which followed from 1986 to 1993.

The NAC, the organiser of the Art Fair, discontinued the event last year after a specially curated section featuring some of Singapore's top painters was included in the Tresors fair, an international exhibition-cum-sale held for the second year at the World Trade Centre in October.

But the council changed its mind and decided to re-launch the event after an appeal by Singapore artists who wanted a show to call their own.

Singapore Art '95 is on at Suntec City until Wednesday from 11 am to 9 pm daily. Admission is free.

Figure 144. The Straits Times, 12 August 1995.

Just eight days later, the President released a statement urging more monetary support of the arts – perhaps the President, contrary to Langenbach's opinion, had understood Tang's performance, and had even played along with it.

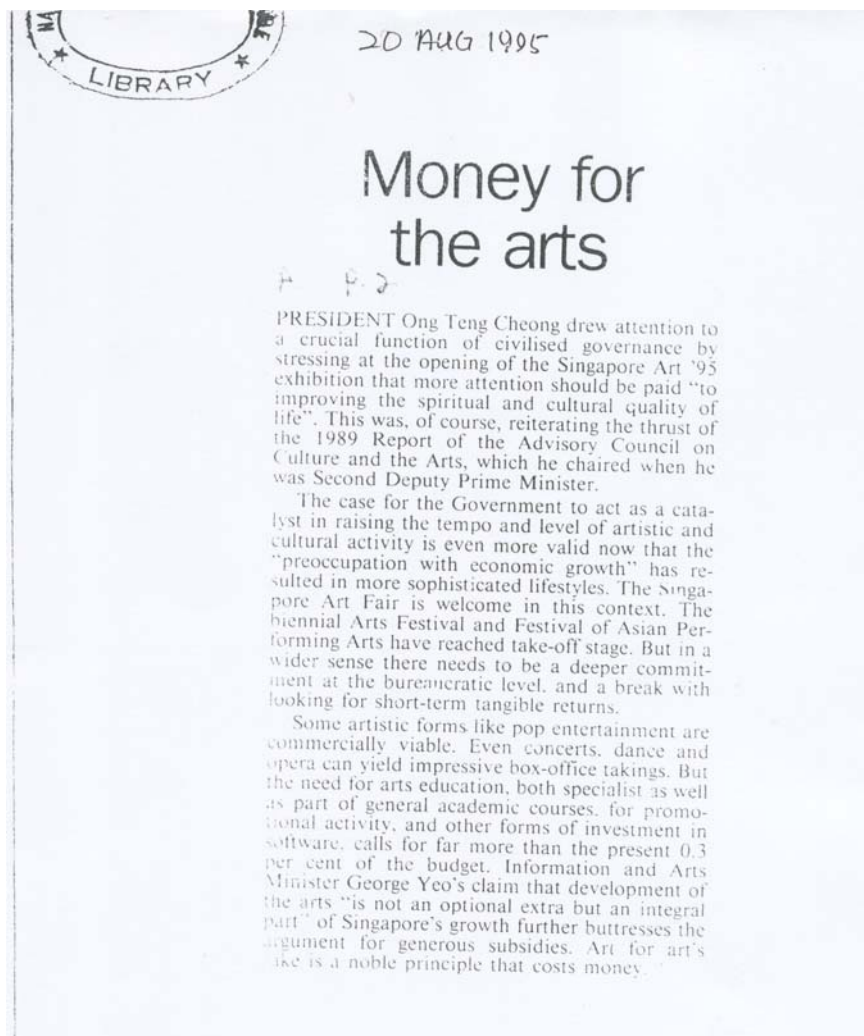


Figure 145. The Straits Times, 20 August 1995

Here I would like to suggest looking at Tang's suit as a coming together of the two earlier suits that we had discussed – Beuys' *Felt Suit* and Leow's *Money Suit*. Influence, or the replication of memes, should be understood as occurring in a two-way street. The Beuysian meme, disseminated via Tang to Leow, is itself transmitted back to Tang – in an altered form. And Tang's repetition of the two prior suits, like all repetitions, carries within it the seed of differentiation.

If Leow's *Money Suit* deflated the messianic overtones of the *Felt Suit* and the artistic cult of personality, Tang's *Don't Give Money to the Arts Suit* further emptied the suit of any mystical content. Moreover, Tang's usage of the suit differed from that of Leow's rather arbitrary critique of a social trend performed on an arbitrary site – the Hong Bee Warehouse Space. Instead, Tang employed the suit in a highly specific tactical act by addressing a concrete issue of governmental policy and policing with regards to art itself, and this performance took place specifically on the occasions of two state-sponsored arts events. In fact, this specificity is further extended by Tang's delivery of the critique straight into the heart, or the top of the state bureaucracy, for he had taken some pains to select a number of individuals on whom the 'action' was performed. This included not only the President, but also, for example, Kwok Kian Chow, Director of the Singapore Art Museum.

On a different note, it is crucial for us to understand how Tang's action seemed strategically constructed to tap into the publicity that it was bound to generate, and thus absorb media coverage as a vehicle for its own dissemination. The contradiction between the formal suit and its bright yellow words are, as its documentations show, picture perfect. They seem made for photography – as the documentations produced by photographers Tang had specifically planted on the site of action prove.



Figure 146. Tang Da Wu, with Kwok Kian Chow, Director, Singapore Art Museum, in *Don't Give Money to the Arts*, Singapore Art '95, Suntec City, 1995

With regard to the study of influence, Bloom declared: “Source study is wholly irrelevant here; we are dealing with primal words, but antithetical meanings, and an ephebe’s best misinterpretations may well be of poems he has never read.”<sup>284</sup> This sentence is highly suggestive for two reasons. First by claiming that one can be influenced by something one has never seen, he opens up the study of influence beyond conscious ‘authorial’ intent, and thus, also beyond what he called “source study” - the detective work of hunting for written proofs.

---

<sup>284</sup> Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence – A Theory of Poetry*, p. 70.

Second, Bloom's criterion for assessing a late-coming poet, which he called the "ephebe", is how productively he misinterprets an earlier poem through the vessel of a new poem. Here, I would like to bring us back to the concept of the afterimage that I have been constructing throughout this dissertation.

According to Jonathan Crary, the autonomy of vision that the physical phenomenon of retinal afterimages hinted at, would be pushed by Johannes Müller – working in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century field of physiological optics – to "a scandalous conclusion". Müller's theory "was based on the discovery that the nerves of the different senses were physiologically distinct, that is, capable of one determinant kind of sensation only, and not of those proper to the other organs of sense."<sup>285</sup> Hence, It "asserted quite simply – and this is what marks its epistemological scandal – that a uniform cause (for example, electricity) generates utterly different sensations from one kind of nerve to another."<sup>286</sup> Crary then elaborated: "Electricity applied to the optic nerve produces the experience of light, applied to the skin the sensation of touch. Conversely Müller showed that a variety of different causes would produce the same sensation in a given

---

<sup>285</sup> Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception – Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture*, (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2001), p. 90.

<sup>286</sup> Crary, *Suspensions of Perception – Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture*, p. 90.

sensory nerve.”<sup>287</sup> In other words, Muller was “describing a fundamentally arbitrary relation between stimulus and sensation. *It is an account of a body with an innate capacity, one might even say a transcendental faculty, to misperceive* – of an eye that renders differences equivalent.”<sup>288</sup> The “transcendental faculty, to misperceive”, the differentiating power of repetition is the inevitability of the swerve between source-image and the afterimage.

This differentiation, this swerve must in turn be grasped as a force of becoming that lies beyond the purview of human consciousness and intention, and it is in this sense non-anthropomorphic. And in Dawkins’ field of memetics, we have available a conceptual model that resonates productively with that of the afterimage. For Dawkins, cultural transmission “is not unique to man. The best non-human example that I know has recently been described by P.F Jenkins in the song of a bird called the saddleback which lives on islands off New Zealand...”<sup>289</sup>

Here I will cite at some length Dawkins’ description of this intriguing research: “By comparing the songs of fathers and sons, Jenkins showed

---

<sup>287</sup> Crary, *Suspensions of Perception – Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture*, p. 90.

<sup>288</sup> Crary, *Suspensions of Perception – Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture*, p. 90.

<sup>289</sup> Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, p. 189.

that song patterns were not inherited genetically. Each young male was likely to adopt songs from his territorial neighbors by imitation, in an analogous way to human language. During most of the time Jenkins was there, there was a fixed number of songs on the island, a kind of 'song pool' from which each young male drew his own small repertoire. But occasionally Jenkins was privileged to witness the 'invention' of a new song, which occurred by a mistake in the imitation of the old one... New song forms have been shown to arise variously by change of pitch of a note, repetition of a note, the elision of notes and the combination of parts of other existing songs... The appearance of the new form was an abrupt event and the product was quite stable over a period of years. Further, in a number of cases the variant was transmitted accurately in its new form to younger recruits so that a recognizably coherent groups of like singers developed... Jenkins refers to the origins of new songs as 'cultural mutations'.<sup>290</sup>

A successful mutation is also known by the name of evolution. If we understand the history of evolution as the history of the modification of organic bodies to better protect and serve the genes it carries, then likewise the names of artists who have appeared in these pages – Gauguin, Beuys, Warhol, Leow, Tang – can be recast as modified

---

<sup>290</sup> Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, p. 189 – 190.

vehicles for the perpetuation of the memes. And if the selection pressures upon evolution are exerted by the specific milieu that a species inhabits, then likewise, a migrating meme replicates by adapting itself to specificities of the local condition. Thus by tracking the specific modulation of the suit meme through Beuys, Leow and Tang, we arrive at one way to grasp the specificities of each of the milieus these three artists were situated in. This opens up the way to a conception of art history beyond the humanistic lens of subject intentionalities and biographies, which George Kubler had intuited as early as 1962. Referring to the transmission of art across generations, Kubler wrote: "Each relay is the occasion of some deformation in the original signal. Certain details seem insignificant and they are dropped in the relay; others have an importance conferred by their relationship to events occurring in the moment of the relay, and so they are exaggerated... Each relay *willingly* or *unwittingly* deforms the signal according to his own historical position."<sup>291</sup> In other words, the history of art can be grasped as a history of deformation occurring in the caesura between the relay points of artists.

To go back to our story of the suits, it is the messianic and originary overtones of the Beuysian *Felt Suit* that had to be emptied out before the suit could resurface in the Singaporean milieu. Insofar as the suit was to

---

<sup>291</sup> George Kubler, *The Shape of Time – Remarks on the History of Things* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1962), p. 21 – 22.



resurface in Leow, it had to be mediated through the self-conscious repetition and parodic possibilities of Pop Art, as embodied by Warhol. In Tang, the repetition of the suit had to, in turn, be justified by the timely nature of its critical activism and thus exempted once again from Beuys' elevated rhetoric of spiritual power – in its place was the base materialism of money. Thus “to imitate...is to become aware of one's own originality in the relationship that links it to the other, to find in oneself the means of creation with an example before one's eyes, to assume its intimate nature through a sort of looking into oneself.”<sup>292</sup>

---

<sup>292</sup> Philippe-Alain Michaud, *Aby Warburg and the Image in Motion* (New York: Zone Books, 2004), p. 68.

#### [Section Four: More Suits, 1992 to 2003]

“By suspending aesthetic values such as those of inwardness, timelessness, and profundity, fashion makes it possible to recognize the degree to which the relation of art to these qualities, which are by no means above suspicion, has become a pretext. Fashion is art’s permanent confession that it is not what it claims to be.”<sup>293</sup>

Theodor Adorno

#### The ‘Birthday’ Suit

The next ‘suit’ in our story is one that has swerved so far away from the three other ‘suits’ we have looked at, that it barely figures as one, except as a ‘birthday suit’ of sorts.

---

<sup>293</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. & trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London : Athlone, 1999), p. 316.



**Figure 147. Lee Wen, *Journey of a Yellow Man No.4: LIBIDO*, Concrete House, Nontburi and Thammasat University, Bangkok, 9-15 Oct. 1993**

I am referring to the Singaporean artist Lee Wen's series of *Yellow Man* performances. Wearing just a pair of yellow briefs – the suit is now replaced with a full body of yellow paint. But as Lee said: "Painting oneself yellow is a kind of putting on another layer of 'clothing' or putting on a 'full body mask'".<sup>294</sup>

Like Leow, Lee was also an artist whose formative period was spent at the Artist Village founded by Tang. Speaking about that period, Lee recalled: "Da Wu gave quite a lot of talks with slides, sometimes comparing new international art with local artworks. We took the occasion

---

<sup>294</sup> Lee Wen, Email interview with Author (27 Sept 2004)

to follow up with casual discussions after the talks. At that time, we all looked up to Da Wu, although he always denies it, as a kind of leading and more experienced artist."<sup>295</sup> However, when asked, Lee took care to distance himself from any influence quite emphatically. He said: "Beuys was very much a 'major' artist of discussion during the early days of AV [Artist Village]. I think Da Wu is strongly drawn towards that "social sculpture" philosophy. Being a cynically inclined person I hold nearly every artist in equal suspicion...but I think he has his place in art but is perhaps a bit over-rated, especially in performance art history books and in Germany."<sup>296</sup>

The *Yellow Man* can be read as an absurdly literal manifestation of the "yellow" Chinese – a comment on how individuality can be annihilated in the fold of cultural identity. In his solo exhibition, titled *Strange Fruit*, in Singapore 2003, Lee presented amongst other works, a video projection of himself across a yellow corridor. With his back against the wall – like a condemned man facing the firing squad, splashes of yellow paint were repeatedly hurled onto his face, staining him yellow. What was enacted here was the violence inherent in the politics of identity, the prison-house of being. Dialectically, what was en-acted was also the collapse of the

---

<sup>295</sup> Lee Wen and Woon Tien Wei, 'Between Journeys: an Interview with Lee Wen and Woon Tien Wei' in *Performance Research* 6(1), (Taylor & Francis Ltd 2001), p. 3-7.

<sup>296</sup> Lee Wen, Email interview with Author (27 Sept 2004)

prison-house of being for just as the suit was splashed on, it was also always in the process of falling apart.



**Figure 148, Lee Wen, Video-Stills from Video, *Strange Fruit*, 2003**

In the same exhibition, Lee also displayed a series of photographic stills that broke up this violent hurling of yellow paint by analytically slowing down the yellowing of a man, and thus breaking apart the process of identity formation for the spectator.



**Figure 149, Lee Wen, 3 photographs from *Strange Fruit*, 2003**

In the pregnant moments offered in these still-images, clothing, identity and being seem to be captured in a state of absolute fluidity. These are images of the meme in action, captured in a freeze frame – in the process of marking the man.



**Figure 150, Journey of a Yellow Man No.11: Multi-Culturalism, The Substation, September, 1997**

Looking at Lee's *Yellow Man* series of works, the self is present as a permeable membrane. And artistic practices, like ideas, like identities, like ideologies, are fluid and constantly slipping across bodies – slipping from artist to artist.



**Figure 151, Lee Wen, *I am not a performance artist, this is not a work of art*, 1999**



Figure 152, Tang Da Wu, *Dancing Ultra Violet*, 1990

But this process of transmission, like the imitation of birdsongs that I had mentioned earlier, is one perpetually open to error. And this failure in replication is the mother of invention.

And so it is that an artist can be defined in relation to another artist – in a relationship of emulation and competition, repetition and differentiation, just as Bloom had declared that the “meaning of a poem is poem – but always another poem, a poem not itself”.<sup>297</sup>

### **Other Suits**

I would like to bring this epilogue to a close by tying up the major strands spun out of this dissertation so far. And the best way, perhaps is to return to the very first afterimage we had looked at in Chapter One – the snapshot *Bali Project: Masks*, 2001.

---

<sup>297</sup> Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence – A Theory of Poetry*, p. 70.





Figure 153, Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon, *Bali Project: Masks (Bali)*, 2001.

The four artists responsible for it - namely Agnes Yit, Lam Hoi Lit, Jeremy Hiah and Woon Tien Wei, are in fact a younger generation of practitioners currently associated with The Artist Village. Therefore figures such as Leow, Lee and Tang, all of whom are pioneers in performance art practices in Singapore were teachers, mentors or figures of emulation to



these younger artists, whose practices revolved around performances and photographic documentations.

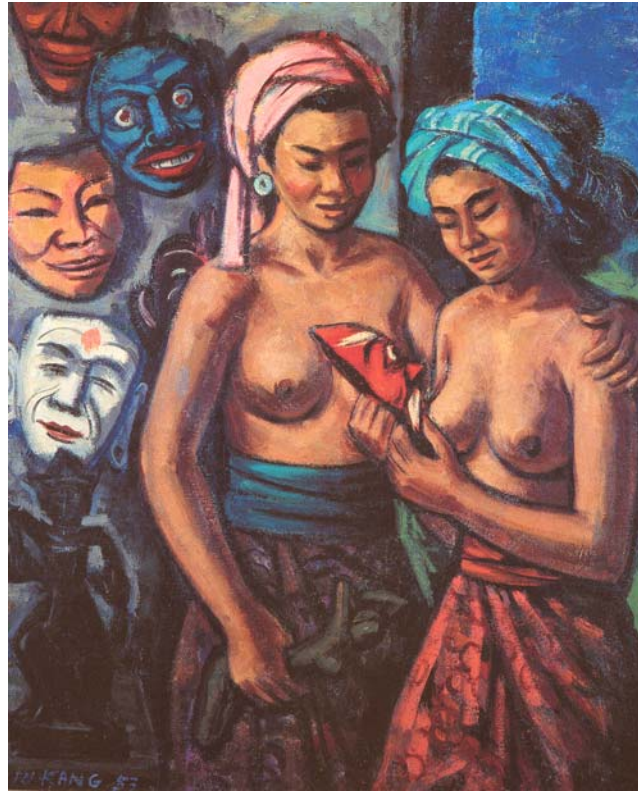


Figure 154, Liu Kang, *Mask (Bali)*, 1953

But if *Bali Project: Masks*, 2001 was a conscious repetition of a prior painting by Liu Kang – the ‘pioneer’ of modern Singapore art, we must retroactively recognize that the seeds for such a repetition was always already latent within Liu himself. To put this in another way, the nexus between performance, photography and art enacted by the four younger artists’ snapshots is already inherent within the practice of the Liu. This is apparent both in the photographic impulse of Liu’s paintings, as well as his strategic dissemination of photographs for the purposes of constructing his artistic persona.



**Figure 155. *Liu Kang, My Girl Friend at the 'Long House'* (original caption, translated from Chinese)**

And with Liu's obsession with self-fashioning, and his taste for the fashionable, bourgeois suits of the 'West', we must hereby recollect yet another, prior suit.



**Figure 156. *Liu Kang in Fuzhou, China* (original image caption, undated)**

We are referring of course to the Parisian who dressed like a prince of the Orient, Gauguin of the South Seas.



**Figure 157. Paul Gauguin**

Gauguin, the master of self-publicity, was of course also an imaginative user of technologies of mass media. And it is in this sense that not only Liu, but Beuys and Warhol, Tang as well as Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon can be understood to have arrived in his wake. We could continue upon such a course of retroactive analysis to map out an ever expanding web of source-images and afterimages. This can take us back to the names of Cézanne, to Pissaro, to Manet, and also to Liu Haisu, and a thousand other names that have not yet been mentioned in this dissertation.

However, it is time for us now to ask a question of great significance in the context of this dissertation. What then is the role of the artist in the ceaseless drive of the meme's non-human replication? Or to phrase this question more precisely, what is the role of the subject in the process of creation? According to Keith Ansell Pearson: "Organisms cannot be treated as closed systems simply subjected to external forces and determinations; rather, they have to be understood in more dynamic terms as open systems that undergo continual flux."<sup>298</sup> In other words, the subject is never simply a passive automaton produced as an after-effect in the fields of forces played out in his external world.<sup>299</sup> Rather the truly creative subject is plugged into a process of creative co-evolution, or as Pearson puts it: "The process of 'adapting' involves... not a mere 'repeating' but an active 'replying' [*répliquer*]."<sup>300</sup>

What is needed is a way by which the relation of the interior to the exterior must be rethought. Yet again, Deleuze points the way forward. For him, the "interior is only a selected exterior, and the exterior, a

---

<sup>298</sup> Keith Ansell Pearson, *Germinal Life – The Difference and Repetition of Deleuze* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 146.

<sup>299</sup> And it is here, that we need to part ways with Dawkins, whose theoretical framework perpetually threatens to subjugate the question of the subject under the over-determination of selective pressures, and hence makes it entirely subservient to the agency of its genes and memes.

<sup>300</sup> Pearson, *Germinal Life – The Difference and Repetition of Deleuze*, p. 146.

projected interior.”<sup>301</sup> Therefore evolution is not be understood as an external force instantiated by the subject; rather it is the subject’s activities that provide the conditions of possibility for evolution to unfold.

Thus, the subject is not a passive automaton, but neither can the subject be predicated upon its possession of a particular essence – like ‘humanity’. Instead the subject can only be found in an act, the act of active reply which actualizes the creative forces of evolution.<sup>302</sup> And Bloom, at his most ‘vitalist’, comes close to this. For him: “what concerns me in a strong poem is neither self nor language but the utterance, within a tradition of uttering, of the image or lie of voice, where ‘voice’ is neither self nor language, but rather spark... A poem is spark and act, or else we need not read it a second time. Criticism is spark and act, or else we need not read it at all.”<sup>303</sup>

In the process of this folding of exterior and interior, the subject who experiences an anxiety over the porosity of its outlines is one that

---

<sup>301</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, trans. R. Hurley (San Francisco: City Lights Books), p. 125.

<sup>302</sup> As Pearson puts it: “Deleuze and Guattari stress that the ‘body without organs’, the immanent field that is ‘desire’ producing and distributing intensities, does not simply come ‘before’ the organism, as if it were some kind of preorganic, amorphous soup; rather, it has to be thought as adjacent to the organism and as ‘continually in the process of constructing itself.” Pearson, *Germinal Life – The Difference and Repetition of Deleuze*, p. 153.

<sup>303</sup> Harold Bloom, *The Breaking of Vessels* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 4.

continues to remain under the great spell of humanism – the illusion of the autonomous ego. And this illusion is one which is tragic at the same time as it is comic. Tragic because it is the very stuff of the drama of Man's search for himself through his difference from the 'Other'. But it is comic, because that difference is always already there, always already happening. The tragedy and the comedy of this anxiety of influence is real, for it was experienced historically, and nightmarishly by those who were under the spell of Humanism – the fantasy of a human subject fully in possession of itself, the dream of self-presence and originary plenitude.

Freed of such a spell, and thus free to explore inhuman forms of subjectivities, we can perhaps fully affirm the power of the afterimage, one that by internalising source-images, folds the entire evolutionary process of art into itself, in order to really produce art – and thus, make art history.

## **Bibliography**

- Adorno, Theodor W.. *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. & trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor. London : Athlone, 1999.
- Adorno, Theodor W..*Negative Dialectics*, trans. EB. Ashton. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972.
- Allen, Graham. *Harold Bloom – A Poetics of Conflict*. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993.
- Anderson, Benedict. *The Specter of Comparisons – Nationalism, Southeast Asia and the World*. London: Verso, 1998.
- Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang, 1981.
- Barthes, Roland. *S/Z* , trans. Richard Miller. New York : Hill and Wang, 1974.
- Barthes, Roland. *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang, 1986.
- Bate, W. Jackson. *The Burden of the Past and the English Poet*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1971.
- Becker, Christoph. 'Gauguin and Tahiti' in *Paul Gauguin: Tahiti*, ed. Christoph Becker. Ostfildern-Ruit : Verlag Gerd Hatje, 1998.
- Bloom, Harold. *The Anxiety of Influence – A Theory of Poetry*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1973.
- Bloom, Harold. *The Breaking of the Vessels*. Chicago : University of Chicago Press , 1982.
- Bloom, Harold *Kabbalah and Criticism*, New York : Seabury Press,1975.
- Bogue, Ronald. *Deleuze on Music, Painting and the Arts*. New York: Routledge, 2003.
- Brettell, Richard. *The Art of Paul Gauguin*. Washington: National Gallery of Art, Washington & The Art institute of Chicago, 1988.
- Brooks, Peter. 'Gauguin's Tahitian Body' in *The Expanding Discourse – Feminism and Art History*, ed. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.
- Bryson, Norman. *Tradition and Desire – From David to Delacroix*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.
- Cai Baolong, 'Interview with Singapore's Pioneer Artist Liu Kang' in *Nanyang Arts Magazine*, No. 3, 2001.

- Carroll, Lewis. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland & Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There*. London: Orion Publishing Group, 1993.
- Cavell, Stanley. *Must we mean what we say?* Cambridge, New York : Cambridge University Press, 1976.
- Cheng, Francois. *Empty and Full – The Language of Chinese Painting*. Massachusetts: Shambhala Publications, 1991.
- Chia Wai Hon. 'Liu Kang at 87' in *Bits and Pieces – Writings on Art*, Singapore: Contemporary Asian Arts Centre, 2002.
- Chia Wai Hon. *Liu Kang at 88*, ed. Tan Gek Noi, and others. Singapore: Singapore Soka Association, 1998.
- Chia Wai Hon, 'Liu Kang...There is no End to Drawing' in *Liu Kang: Drawn from Life*. Singapore : Singapore Art Museum, 2002.
- Chow Tse-Tsung, *The May 4<sup>th</sup> Movement – Intellectual Revolution in Modern China*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard university Press, 1960.
- Clark, T.J. . *Farewell to an Idea – Episodes from a History of Modernism*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999.
- Clark, T.J.. *Image of the People : Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1982.
- Clark, T.J.. *The Painting of Modern Life – Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984.
- Clayton, Jay and Rothstein, Eric. 'Figures in the Corpus: Theories of Influence and Intertextuality' in *Influence and Intertextuality in Literary History*. Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991.
- Crary, Jonathan. *Suspensions of Perception – Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture*. Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2001.
- Crary, Jonathan. *Techniques of the Observer*. Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1992.
- Crimp, Douglas. *On the Museum's Ruins*. Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1993.
- Cybermuse Artist's Page, 'Biography – Andy Warhol'  
[http://cybermuse.gallery.ca/cybermuse/docs/bio\\_artistid5780\\_e.jsp](http://cybermuse.gallery.ca/cybermuse/docs/bio_artistid5780_e.jsp)  
 (accessed 3rd July 2005)
- Da Vinci, Leonardo. *The Literary Works of Leonardo da Vinci*, Volume 1, ed. Jean Paul Richter. London: Phaidon, 1970.
- Dawkins, Richard. *The Selfish Gene*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976.



- Deleuze, Gilles. *Bergsonism*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam. New York: Zone Books, 1991.
- Deleuze, Gilles *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton. London: Athlone Press, 1994.
- Deleuze, Gilles. *Essays Critical and Clinical*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.
- Deleuze, Gilles. *Francis Bacon - The Logic of Sensation*, trans. Daniel W. Smith. New York: Continuum, 2003.
- Deleuze, Gilles., *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, trans. R. Hurley. San Francisco: City Lights Books
- Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Félix. *Anti-Oedipus – Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Félix. *A Thousand Plateaus – Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.
- Derrida, Jacques. 'Des Tours de Babel' in *Difference in Translation*, ed. Joseph, F. Graham. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985.
- Derrida, Jacques, 'Freud and the Scene of Writing' in *Writing and Difference*. Chicago : University of Chicago, 1978.
- Eliot, T.S.. *Selected Essays*. London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1968.
- Eisenman, Stephen F.. *Gauguin's Skirt*. London, Thames and Hudson, 1997.
- Foster, Hal. *Prosthetic Gods*. Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2004.
- Freud, Sigmund. *On Sexuality – Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality and Other Works*, trans. James Strachey. London: Penguin Books, 1987.
- Fried, Michael. *Absorption and Theatricality – Painting and Beholder in the age of Diderot*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980.
- Fried, Michael. *Courbet's Realism*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990.
- Fried, Michael. *Manet's Modernism – or The Face of Painting in the 1860s*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996.
- Fried, Michael *Menzel's Realism – Art and Embodiment in Nineteenth-Century Berlin*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002.
- Garb, Tamar and Nixon, Mignon, 'A Conversation with Juliet Mitchell' in *October 113*. Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2005.

- Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von. *Theory of Colors*, trans. Charles Eastlake. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1970.
- Goldwater, Robert. *Primitivism in Modern Painting*, New York: Harper, 1943.
- Heermann, Ingrid. 'Gauguin's Tahiti – Ethnological Considerations' in Paul Gauguin: Tahiti, ed. Christoph Becker. Ostfildern-Ruit : Verlag Gerd Hatje, 1998.
- Heywood, Ian. 'Deleuze on Francis Bacon' in *A Companion to Art Theory*, ed. Paul Smith and Carolyn Wilde. Oxford: Blackwell, 2002.
- Holland, Eugene W. *Baudelaire and Schizoanalysis: The Sociopoetics of Modernism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993
- Hsü, Marco. *A Brief History of Malayan Art*, trans. Lai Chee Kien. Singapore: Millennium Books, 1999.
- Jameson, Fredric. 'Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture' in *Signatures of the Visible*. London: Routledge, 1992.
- Jay, Martin. *Downcast Eyes – The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.
- Jonas, Hans and Jonas, Eleonore. *The Phenomenology of Life: Towards a Philosophical Biology*. Chicago: The University of Chicago, 2001.
- Kao Mayching. 'The Quest of New Art' in *Twentieth Century Chinese-Painting*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.
- Kemp, Wolfgang, 'The Work of Art and Its Beholders' in *The Subjects of Art History*, ed. Mark A. Cheetham, Michael Ann Holly, and Keith Moxey. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Kubler, George. *The Shape of Time – Remarks on the History of Things*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1962.
- Kwok Kian Chow. 'Images of the South Seas – Bali as a Visual Source in Singapore Art' in *From Ritual to Romance – Paintings Inspired by Bali*. Singapore: Singapore Art Museum, 1994.
- Kwok Kian Chow. 'Liu Kang and Singapore Art' in *Journeys: Liu Kang and his Art*. Singapore: Singapore Art Museum and National Arts Council, 2000.
- Kwok Kian Chow, 'Richard Walker, Colonial Art Education and visiting European artists before World War',  
<http://www.thecore.nus.edu.sg/landow/post/singapore/arts/painters/channel/9.html> (accessed 3rd July 2006)

- Lacan, Jacques. *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan. New York : W.W. Norton, 1998.
- Langenbach, Ray William. *Performing the Singapore state 1988-1995*, Ph.D. Diss., Sydney: University of Western Sydney, 2003.
- Laplanche, J. and Pontalis, J.B. *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith, London: The Hogarth Press, 1973.
- Lee Wen and Woon Tien Wei, 'Between Journeys: an Interview with Lee Wen Woon Tien Wei' in *Performance Research* 6(1), London: Taylor & Francis Ltd, 2001.
- Liu Kang, 'The Cultures of East and West and the Art of Singapore' in Liu Kang and Ho Ho Ying, *Re-connecting – Selected Writings on Singapore Art and Criticism*, ed. by T.K. Sabapathy, Interjections and Trans. Cheo Chai Hiang, Singapore: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 2005), p. 101
- Liu Kang, *World of Liu Kang*. Singapore: National Arts Council and the National Museum, 1993.
- Liu, Lydia H.. *Translingual Practice – Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity – China, 1900 – 1937*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995.
- Liu Thai Ker, 'Preface III' in *The Paintings of Liu Kang*. Singapore: National Museum, 1981.
- Long Thien-Shih. 'Nanyang Style and the French Influence' in *Pont des Arts – Nanyang Artists in Paris 1925 – 1970*, Singapore: National Museum Art Gallery, 1994.
- Low Jiat Leng. *Nostalgia in Singapore Visual Arts*, M.A. diss., National University of Singapore, 2001.
- Lucretius, *On the Nature of the Universe*, trans. R.E. Latham. London: Penguin Books, 1994.
- Lyotard, Jean Francois. 'What is Postmodernism' in *The Postmodern Condition*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1984.
- Malraux, André. *The Voices of Silence*, trans. Stuart Gilbert. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1978.
- Marx, Karl. 'The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte' in *Marx's Eighteenth Brumaire: (Post)Modern Interpretations*, ed. Mark Cowling and James Martin. London: Pluto Press, 2002.

- Michaud, Philippe-Alain. *Aby Warburg and the Image in Motion*. New York: Zone Books, 2004.
- Mitchell, Juliet. *Siblings – Sex and Violence*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. 'The Twilight of the Gods,' in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. & trans. Walter Kaufman. New York: The Viking Press, 1954.
- Owens, Craig. *Beyond Recognition – Representation, Power, and Culture*, ed. Scott Bryson, Barbara Kruger, Lynne Tillman, and Jane Weinstock. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.
- Pan Shou. 'Preface II' in *The Paintings of Liu Kang*. Singapore: National Museum, 1981.
- Pearson, Keith Ansell. *Germinal Life – The Difference and Repetition of Deleuze*. London: Routledge, 1999.
- Piyadasa, Redza. 'On Origins and Beginnings' in *Vision and Idea – ReLooking Modern Malaysian Art*, ed. T.K Sabapathy. Kuala Lumpur: National Art Gallery, 1994.
- Pollock, Griselda. *Avant-Garde Gambits 1888 – 1892: Gender and the Color of Art History*, New York: Thames and Hudson, 1992.
- Rimbaud, Arthur. *Complete Works*, trans. Paul Schmidt. New York: Harper & Row, 1975.
- Roces, Marian Pastor. 'words' in *Eyeline*, 22/23, summer (1993).
- Sabapathy, T. K.. 'Bali, Almost Re-Visited' in *Reminiscence of Singapore's Pioneer Art Masters*, Singapore: The Singapore Mint, 1994.
- Sabapathy, T. K.. 'Focus on Asia's Modern Art' in *Sources of Modern Art*. Singapore: Ministry of Education, 1986.
- Sabapathy, T.K.. 'Forty Years and After: The Nanyang Artists. Remarks on Art And History' in *New Directions 1980 – 1987: Modern Paintings in Singapore*, Singapore: Horizon Publishing, 1987.
- Sabapathy, T.K.. 'Harmonics of Painting' in *Sources of Modern Arts*, Singapore: Ministry of Education, 1984.
- Sabapathy, T.K.. 'Introduction' in Sabapathy and Redza Piyadasa, *Modern Artists of Malaysia*. Kuala Lumpur: Ministry of Education Malaysia, 1983.
- Sabapathy, T.K.. 'Liu Kang's *Artist and Model*: Thoughts on Art About Art' in *Postmodern Singapore*, ed. William S.W. Lim. Singapore : Select Publishing, 2002.

- Sabapathy, T.K.. 'Modern Art in Singapore: Pioneers and Premises', in *Sources of Modern Art*. Singapore: Ministry of Education, 1986.
- Sabapathy, T. K. 'Developing Regionalist Perspectives in South-East Asian Art Historiography' in *Second Asia Pacific Triennale*. Brisbane: Queensland Art Gallery, 1996.
- Sabapathy, T.K.. 'Scroll met Easel' in *Straits Times Annual '82*, Singapore: Times Printers, 1982.
- Sabapathy, T.K., 'The Nanyang Artists: Some General Remarks' in *Pameran Retrospektif Pelukis – Pelukis Nanyang*, Kuala Lumpur: Muzium Seni Negara Malaysia, 1979.
- Sabapathy, T.K.. 'The Nanyang Artists: Some General Remarks' in *Pameran Retrospektif Pelukis – Pelukis Nanyang*. Kuala Lumpur: Muzium Seni Negara Malaysia, 1979.
- Sauerberg, Lars Ole. *Versions of the Past – Visions of the Future – The Canonical in the Criticism of T.S. Eliot, F.R. Leavis, Northrop Fyre and Harold Bloom*. London: Macmillan Press, 1997.
- Schelling, F.W.J.. *The Ages of the World*, trans. Frederick de Wolfe, New York: Bolman, 1942.
- Shiff, Richard. *Cézanne and the End of Impressionism – A Study of the Theory, Technique, and Critical Evaluation of Modern Art*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984.
- Seno, Alexandra A.. 'CRISIS, WHAT CRISIS? Eyes pop in Singapore as two auctions of Southeast Asian works fetch record prices', <http://www.cgi.cnn.com/ASIANOW/asiaweek/99/0423/feat2.html> (accessed 3rd July 2005).
- Solomon-Godeau, Abigail. 'Going Native' in *The Expanding Discourse – Feminism and Art History*, ed. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992.
- Sonntag, Dina. 'Prelude to Tahiti: Gauguin in Paris, Brittany and Martinique' in *Paul Gauguin: Tahiti*, ed. Christoph Becker. Ostfildern-Ruit : Verlag Gerd Hatje, 1998.
- Steinberg, Leo. *Other Criteria – Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1972.
- Steinberg, Leo. 'The Glorious Company' in *Art about Art*, New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1978.
- Sullivan, Michael, *Chinese Art in the Twentieth Century*. London: Faber and Faber, 1959.

- Sullivan, Michael. *Symbols of Eternity – The Art of Landscape Painting in China*. California: Stanford University Press, 1979.
- Tan Tee Chie, 'The Definition of Nanyang Style' in *Nanyang-ism 2003*, ed. Yau Tian Yau, p. 14 – 18. Singapore: The Society of Chinese Artists, 2003.
- Tarde, Gabriel. *On Communication and Social Influence - Selected Papers*, ed. Terry N. Clark. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1969.
- The Artists Village. *TAV Newsletter* (undated), <http://tav.org.sg/>. (accessed 3 July 2005).
- Tye, Michael. *Ten Problems of Consciousness – A Representational Theory of the Phenomenal Mind*. Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1995.
- White, Hayden. *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1978.
- Wong Yoon Wah. *Post-colonial Chinese literatures in Singapore and Malaysia*. Singapore: Global Publishing, 2002.

## **Image Sources**

Figure 1. Aby Warburg, *Mnemosyne – Atlas*

Image from <http://www.chart.ac.uk/chart2003/papers/pics/kwastek-fig2.jpg>

Figure 2. Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon, *Bali Project: Masks (Bali)*, 2001.

Image courtesy of the artists.

Figure 3. Detail from Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon, *Bali Project: Masks (Bali)*, 2001.

See Above.

Figure 4. Detail from Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon, *Bali Project: Masks (Bali)*, 2001.

See Above.

Figure 5. Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon, *Bali Project: Two by the Waterfall*, 2001.

Image courtesy of the artists.

Figure 6. *With the Le Mayeurs*, 1952.

Image from Liu Kang, *World of Liu Kang*. Singapore: National Arts Council and the National Museum, 1993.

Figure 7. Liu Kang, *Mask (Bali)*, 1953.

Image from *Liu Kang at 87*. Singapore: National Arts Council & National Heritage Board, 1997.

Figure 8. *At 16 Years Old*. Photograph.

Image from Liu Kang, *World of Liu Kang*. Singapore: National Arts Council and the National Museum, 1993.

Figure 9. Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon, *Bali Project: Two by the Waterfall*, 2001.

Image courtesy of the artists.

Figure 10. Liu Kang, *Two By the Waterfall*, 1996.

Image from *Liu Kang at 87*. Singapore: National Arts Council & National Heritage Board, 1997.

Figure 11. Liu Kang, *Mask (Bali)*, 1953.

See Above.

Figure 12. Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon, *Bali Project: Masks (Bali)*, 2001.

Image courtesy of the artists.

Figure 13. Detail from *Bali Project: Masks (Bali)*, 2001.

See Above.

Figure 14. *On the Exterior of the 'Long House' of Sabah in 1969*. Photograph.

Image from Liu Kang, *World of Liu Kang*. Singapore: National Arts Council and the National Museum, 1993.

Figure 15. *My Girl Friend at the 'Long House'*. Photograph.  
Image from Liu Kang, *World of Liu Kang*. Singapore: National Arts Council and the National Museum, 1993.

Figure 16. Detail from Liu Kang, *Masks (Bali)*, 1953.  
See Above.

Figure 17. Detail from Liu Kang, *Masks (Bali)*, 1953.  
See Above.

Figure 18. Detail from Liu Kang, *Masks (Bali)*, 1953.  
See Above.

Figure 19. Detail from Liu Kang, *Masks (Bali)*, 1953.  
See Above.

Figure 20. Liu Kang, *Siesta in Bali*, 1957.  
Image from *Liu Kang: Drawn from Life* (Singapore: Singapore Art Museum, 2002).

Figure 21. Liu Kang, *Siesta in Bali*, 1952. (Sketch 1).  
Image from *Liu Kang: Drawn from Life* (Singapore: Singapore Art Museum, 2002).

Figure 22. Liu Kang, *Siesta in Bali*, 1952. (Sketch 2).  
Image from *Liu Kang: Drawn from Life* (Singapore: Singapore Art Museum, 2002).

Figure 23. Liu Kang, *Chair in the backyard*, 1952.  
Image from *Liu Kang: Drawn from Life* (Singapore: Singapore Art Museum, 2002).

Figure 24. Detail from Liu Kang, *Siesta in Bali*, 1957.  
See Above.

Figure 25. *Siesta in Bali*, 1952. (Sketch 3).  
Image from *Liu Kang: Drawn from Life* (Singapore: Singapore Art Museum, 2002).

Figure 26. Liu Kang, *Siesta in Bali*, 1952. (Sketch 2).  
See Above.

Figure 27. Detail from Liu Kang, *Siesta in Bali*, 1952.  
See Above.

Figure 28. Detail from Liu Kang, *Masks (Bali)*, 1953.  
See Above.

Figure 29. Detail from Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon, *Bali Project: Masks (Bali)*, 2001.  
See Above.



Figure 30. Detail from Liu Kang, *Siesta in Bali*, 1952.  
See Above.

Figure 31. Detail from Liu Kang, *Masks (Bali)*, 1953.  
See Above.

Figure 32. Detail from *My Girl Friend at the 'Long House'*.  
See Above.

Figure 33. Liu Kang, *Balinese Beauty with Tropical Fruits*, 1987.  
Image from *Liu Kang at 90*. Singapore: Singapore Soka Association, 2000.

Figure 34. *The Pioneers with Rudolf Bonner in Bali*, 1953.  
Image from Liu Kang at 88. Singapore: Singapore Soka Association, 1998.

Figure 35. *My Dream Lover*. Photograph.  
Image from Liu Kang, *World of Liu Kang*. Singapore: National Arts Council and the National Museum, 1993.

Figure 36. Detail from *With the Le Mayeurs*, 1952.  
See Above.

Figure 37. Detail from *With the Le Mayeurs*, 1952. Photograph 2.  
See Above.

Figure 38. Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon, *Bali Project: Siesta in Bali*, 2001.  
Image courtesy of the artists.

Figure 39. Liu Kang, *Siesta in Bali*, 1957.  
See Above.

Figure 40. *With the Le Mayeurs in Bali*, 1952.  
See Above.

Figure 41. Jean Le Mayeur, *Terrace Affording A View of The Sea with Pollok Under An Umbrella and Several Figures*, undated.  
Image from  
[http://images.artnet.com/images\\_US/magazine/news/artmarketwatch/artmarketwatch6-1-7s.jpg](http://images.artnet.com/images_US/magazine/news/artmarketwatch/artmarketwatch6-1-7s.jpg).

Figure 42. Paul Gauguin, *The Bathers*, 1898.  
Image from [http://www.globalgallery.com/prod\\_images/hd-7618.jpg](http://www.globalgallery.com/prod_images/hd-7618.jpg).

Figure 43. Liu Kang, *Bathers*, 1997.  
See Above.

Figure 44. Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon, *Bali Project: Bathers*, 2001.  
Image courtesy of the artists.

Figure 45. *God's perfect sculpture...in tune of nature*. Photograph 1.  
Image from Liu Kang, *World of Liu Kang*. Singapore: National Arts Council and the National Museum, 1993.

Figure 46. *God's perfect sculpture...in tune of nature*. Photograph 2.  
Image from Liu Kang, *World of Liu Kang*. Singapore: National Arts Council and the National Museum, 1993.

Figure 47. *God's perfect sculpture...in tune of nature*. Photograph 3.  
Image from Liu Kang, *World of Liu Kang*. Singapore: National Arts Council and the National Museum, 1993.

Figure 48. *World of Liu Kang*. Cover.  
Image from Liu Kang, *World of Liu Kang*. Singapore: National Arts Council and the National Museum, 1993.

Figure 49. *Liu Kang with his Students*. Photograph.  
Image from *Liu Kang at 87*. Singapore: National Arts Council & National Heritage Board, 1997.

Figure 50. *Liu Kang Sketching*. Photograph.  
Image from *Liu Kang at 87*. Singapore: National Arts Council & National Heritage Board, 1997.

Figure 51. Liu Kang, *Artist and Model*, 1954.  
Image from *Liu Kang at 87*. Singapore: National Arts Council & National Heritage Board, 1997.

Figure 52. *Liu Kang at Live-Figure Drawing Classes*. Photograph.  
Image from *Liu Kang at 87*. Singapore: National Arts Council & National Heritage Board, 1997.

Figure 53. Detail from Liu Kang, *Artist and Model*.  
See Above.

Figure 54. Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon, *Bali Project: Artist and Model*, 2001.  
Image courtesy of the artists.

Figure 55. *A Painting Demonstration at the Victoria Memorial Hall*. Photograph.  
Image from Liu Kang at 88. Singapore: Singapore Soka Association, 1998.

Figure 56. Liu Kang, *Outdoor Painting*, 1954.  
Image from *Liu Kang at 87*. Singapore: National Arts Council & National Heritage Board, 1997.

Figure 57. Detail from Liu Kang, *Outdoor Painting*, 1954.  
See Above.

Figure 58. Gustave Courbet, *The Painter's Studio; A Real Allegory*, 1855.  
Image from <http://www.ibiblio.org/wm/paint/auth/courbet/allegory.jpg>.

Figure 59. Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon, *Bali Project: Masks (Bali)*, 2001.  
See Above.

Figure 60. Liu Kang, *Masks, (Bali)*, 1953.  
See Above.

Figure 61. *Liu Kang with painted canvas*. Photograph.  
Image from Liu Kang, *World of Liu Kang*. Singapore: National Arts Council and the National Museum, 1993.

Figure 62. *Gauguin in his Studio, late 1893 or 1894*. Photograph  
Image from Becker, Christoph. 'Gauguin and Tahiti' in *Paul Gauguin: Tahiti*, ed. Christoph Becker. Ostfildern-Ruit : Verlag Gerd Hatje, 1998.

Figure 63. Liu Kang, *Outdoor Class*, 1954.  
Image from *Liu Kang at 87*. Singapore: National Arts Council & National Heritage Board, 1997

Figure 64. Detail from Liu Kang, *Outdoor Class*, 1954.  
See Above.

Figure 65. Detail from Liu Kang, *Outdoor Class*, 1954.  
See Above.

Figure 66. Liu Kang, *Batik Workers*, 1954.  
See Above.

Figure 67. *Liu Kang in Fuzhou, China*. Photograph.  
Image from *Liu Kang at 87*. Singapore: National Arts Council & National Heritage Board, 1997

Figure 68. *Liu Kang in China before his Paris Sojourn*. Photograph.  
Image from Liu Kang, *World of Liu Kang*. Singapore: National Arts Council and the National Museum, 1993.

Figure 69. *Liu Kang with his Students*. Photograph.  
See Above.

Figure 70. Liu Kang, *Masks (Bali)*, 1953.  
See Above.

Figure 71. *Father's blessing for Paris - on board the ship to Paris in 1928*.  
Photograph.  
Image from Liu Kang, *World of Liu Kang*. Singapore: National Arts Council and the National Museum, 1993.

Figure 72. *1927, Me and Ren Hao at Shanghai Sing Hwa Arts Academy Studio*.  
Photograph.  
Image from Liu Kang, *World of Liu Kang*. Singapore: National Arts Council and the National Museum, 1993.

Figure 73. Paul Gauguin. Photograph.

Image from

[http://communitas.princeton.edu/blogs/writingart18/images/gauguin\\_photograph.jpg](http://communitas.princeton.edu/blogs/writingart18/images/gauguin_photograph.jpg)

Figure 74. Camille Pissaro. Photograph.

Image from

<http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/sub/pissarro/IMAGES/IMAGE415/fullPortrait1.jpg>

Figure 75. Cover of *The World of Liu Kang*.

Image from Liu Kang, *World of Liu Kang*. Singapore: National Arts Council and the National Museum, 1993.

Figure 76. Cover of *Noa Noa* by Paul Gauguin.

Image from <http://www.assoulineusa.com/gauguinnoa00102.jpg>

Figure 77. *Gauguin in his Studio, late 1893 or 1894*. Photograph

Image from *Paul Gauguin: Tahiti*, ed. Christoph Becker. Ostfildern-Ruit : Verlag Gerd Hatje, 1998.

Figure 78. *Paul Gauguin, circa 1890*. Photograph

Image from Becker, Christoph. 'Gauguin and Tahiti' in *Paul Gauguin: Tahiti*, ed. Christoph Becker. Ostfildern-Ruit : Verlag Gerd Hatje, 1998.

Figure 79. Camille Pissarro, *Self-Portrait*, 1903.

Image from [http://www.tate.org.uk/collection/N/N04/N04592\\_9.jpg](http://www.tate.org.uk/collection/N/N04/N04592_9.jpg)

Figure 80. Paul Cézanne, 1873. Photograph.

Image from

<http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/sub/pissarro/IMAGES/IMAGES200/fullCezanne.gif>

Figure 81. Paul Cézanne. Photograph.

Image from Clark, T.J. . *Farewell to an Idea – Episodes from a History of Modernism*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999.

Figure 82. Camille Pissaro, *Portrait of Paul Cézanne, 1874*.

Image from

<http://www.artnet.com/magazine/reviews/saltz/Images/saltz6-27-9s.jpg>

Figure 83. Gustave Courbet. Photograph.

Image from

[http://www.wetcanvas.com/Museum/Artists/c/Gustave\\_Courbet/OtherImages/photo.gif](http://www.wetcanvas.com/Museum/Artists/c/Gustave_Courbet/OtherImages/photo.gif)

Figure 84. Gustave Courbet, *Bonjour, Monsieur Courbet*, 1854.

Image from

[http://www.latribunedelart.com/Expositions/Expositions\\_2006/Courbet\\_Bonjour.JPG](http://www.latribunedelart.com/Expositions/Expositions_2006/Courbet_Bonjour.JPG)

Figure 85. Paul Gauguin, *Bonjour, Monsieur Gauguin*, 1889.  
Image from [http://www.odaha.com/Images/Gauguin/DobryDenPaneGauguine\\_big.jpg](http://www.odaha.com/Images/Gauguin/DobryDenPaneGauguine_big.jpg)

Figure 86. Gustave Courbet. Photograph.  
Image from [http://www.chess-theory.com/images1/07416\\_felix\\_nadar.jpg](http://www.chess-theory.com/images1/07416_felix_nadar.jpg)

Figure 87. Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon, *Bali Project: Artist and Model*, 2001.  
See Above.

Figure 88. Detail from Liu Kang, *Masks (Bali)*, 1953.  
See Above.

Figure 89. Detail from Liu Kang, *Masks (Bali)*, 1953.  
See Above.

Figure 90. Paul Gauguin, *Words of the Devil*, 1892.  
Image from Becker, Christoph. 'Gauguin and Tahiti' in *Paul Gauguin: Tahiti*, ed. Christoph Becker. Ostfildern-Ruit : Verlag Gerd Hatje, 1998.

Figure 91. Detail from *Words of the Devil*, 1892.  
See Above.

Figure 92. Detail from *Masks (Bali)*, 1953.  
See Above.

Figure 93. Detail from Paul Gauguin, *Words of the Devil*, 1892.  
See Above.

Figure 94. Paul Gauguin, *The Delightful Land*, 1892.  
Image from Wildenstein, Daniel. *Gauguin – A Savage in the Making*, Catalogue Raisonné of the Paintings, Milan: Skira Editore S.p.A, 2002

Figure 95. Paul Gauguin, *Where are you going*, 1892.  
Image from Becker, Christoph. 'Gauguin and Tahiti' in *Paul Gauguin: Tahiti*, ed. Christoph Becker. Ostfildern-Ruit : Verlag Gerd Hatje, 1998.

Figure 96. Paul Gauguin, *The Yellow Christ*, 1889.  
Image from <http://www.sai.msu.su/wm/paint/auth/gauguin/gauguin.christ-jaune.jpg>

Figure 97. Detail from *The Delightful Land*, 1892.  
See Above.

Figure 98. Paul Gauguin, *Spirit of the Dead Watching*, 1892.  
Image from <http://www.sai.msu.su/wm/paint/auth/gauguin/gauguin.spirit-dead-watching.jpg>

Figure 99. Edouard Manet, *Olympia*, 1863.  
Image from Clark, T.J.. *The Painting of Modern Life – Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984.

- Figure 100. Titian, *The Venus of Urbino*, 1538.  
Image from Clark, T.J.. *The Painting of Modern Life – Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984.
- Figure 101. Liu Kang, *Balinese Beauty with Tropical Fruits*, 1982.  
See Above.
- Figure 102. Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon, *Bali Project: Masks (Bali)*, 2001.  
See Above.
- Figure 103. Liu Kang, *Masks, (Bali)*, 1953.  
See Above.
- Figure 104. Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon, *Bali Project: Siesta in Bali*, 2001.  
See Above.
- Figure 105. Liu Kang, *Siesta in Bali*, 1957.  
See Above.
- Figure 106. Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon, *Bali Project: Bathers*, 2001.  
See Above.
- Figure 107. Liu Kang, *Bathers*, 1997.  
See Above.
- Figure 108. God's perfect sculpture...in (sic) tune of nature. Photograph  
See Above.
- Figure 109. Paul Gauguin, *Tehamana has Many Ancestors*, 1893.  
Image from *Paul Gauguin: Tahiti*, ed. Christoph Becker. Ostfildern-Ruit : Verlag Gerd Hatje, 1998.
- Figure 110. Paul Gauguin, *There Lies the Temple*, 1892  
Image from *Paul Gauguin: Tahiti*, ed. Christoph Becker. Ostfildern-Ruit : Verlag Gerd Hatje, 1998.
- Figure 111. Encounter with woman from Congo.  
Image from *Paul Gauguin: Tahiti*, ed. Christoph Becker. Ostfildern-Ruit : Verlag Gerd Hatje, 1998.
- Figure 112. Liu Kang, *The Padang*, 1952.  
Image from *Liu Kang at 87*. Singapore: National Arts Council & National Heritage Board, 1997.
- Figure 113. Dai Yunlang, *Street Cleaner*.  
Image from *Wenman Gie*, 16 Aug 1936.
- Figure 114. Liu Kang, *Hock Lam Street*, 1951.  
Image from *Liu Kang at 88*. Singapore: Singapore Soka Association, 1998.
- Figure 115. Dai Yunlang, *Hard Life*.

Image from *Wenman Gie*, 13 Sept 1936.

Figure 116. Liu Kang, *Life by the River* by Liu Kang, 1975.  
Image from *Liu Kang at 88*, ed. Tan Gek Noi, and others. Singapore: Singapore Soka Association, 1998.

Figure 117. Lee Boon Wang, *Road Workers*, 1955.  
Image courtesy of the National Gallery of Kuala Lumpur.

Figure 118. Chen Chong Swee, *Washing by the River*, 1950.  
Image from Kwok Kian Chow, *Channels & Confluences: A History of Singapore Art*, Singapore : Singapore Art Museum, 1996.

Figure 119. Chen Chong Swee, *Village Scene*, 1980.  
Image from <http://kifo.blogs.com/artmgs/images/4.jpg>

Figure 120. Lai Foong Moi, *Morning in the Kampong*, 1959.  
Image courtesy of the National Gallery of Kuala Lumpur.

Figure 121. Liu Kang, *Tenth Trip Up to Huangshan*, 1989.  
Image from *Liu Kang at 88*, ed. Tan Gek Noi, and others, Singapore : Singapore Soka Association, 1998.

Figure 122. Liu Haisu. Photograph  
Image from <http://images.china.cn/images1/200603/278026.jpg>

Figure 123. Liu Haisu. Photograph  
Image from <http://sacu.org/gallery/partist.jpg>

Figure 124. Ong Shih Cheng, *Anti-Yellow Movement*, Cartoon, 1955.  
Image from Ho Kah Leong and Ong, Yid eds, *Selection of Woodcuts and Cartoons by Singapore and Malayan Artists*, Singapore: Life Society Publishers, 1955.

Figure 125. Liu Haisu, *Landscape, Mt. Huang*, 1988.  
Image from  
[http://www.guildfordarts.org.uk/images/china/tall\\_with\\_mountains2.jpg](http://www.guildfordarts.org.uk/images/china/tall_with_mountains2.jpg)

Figure 126. Detail from *Tenth Trip Up to Huangshan*, 1989.  
See Above.

Figure 127. Details from Liu Kang, *Outdoor Painting*, 1954.  
See Above.

Figure 128. Joseph Beuys , *Felt Suit*, 1970.  
Image from <http://www.currenticalamo.com/CURRENTICALAMO/J-BEUYS-FELT-SUIT-1970.jpg>

Figure 129. Joseph Beuys, Photograph from '*The 20 July Aachen 1964*'. 1964.  
Image from Caroline Tisdall, *Joseph Beuys: We Go This Way*, London: Violette Editions, 2000.

Figure 130. Joseph Beuys, *On the Way to America*, 1974.  
Image from Caroline Tisdall, *Joseph Beuys: We Go This Way*, London: Violette Editions, 2000.

Figure 131. Joseph Beuys, *Coyote- I Like America and America Likes Me*, 1974.  
Image from Caroline Tisdall, *Joseph Beuys: We Go This Way*, London: Violette Editions, 2000.

Figure 132. Secondo Pia, *First Photo of the Shroud of Turin*, 1898.  
Image from Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel, *Iconoclasm – Beyond the Image Wars in Science, Religion and Art*, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2002.

Figure 133. Vincent Leow, *Money Suit*, 1992.  
Image courtesy of the Artist.

Figure 134. Vincent Leow, *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous: The Three Legged Toad*.  
Image courtesy of the Artist

Figure 135. Andy Warhol, *Self-Portrait*, 1986.  
Image from <http://www.chrysler.org/warhol/images/SelfPortrait.jpg>

Figure 136. Andy Warhol, *192 One Dollar Bills*, 1962.  
Image from [http://time-blog.com/looking\\_around/dollar.jpg](http://time-blog.com/looking_around/dollar.jpg)

Figure 137. Joseph Beuys with Andy Warhol in Munich, 1980.  
Image from Caroline Tisdall, *Joseph Beuys: We Go This Way*, London: Violette Editions, 2000.

Figure 138. Andy Warhol, *Marilyn Monroe Diptych*, 1962.  
Image from [http://www.tate.org.uk/collection/T/T03/T03093\\_8.jpg](http://www.tate.org.uk/collection/T/T03/T03093_8.jpg)

Figure 139. Tang Dawu, *No! I Don't want Any Black Monsoon*, Hiroshima Museum of Contemporary Art, 1994.  
Image courtesy of the Artist and Koh Nguang How.

Figure 140. Tang Da Wu, *Serious Conversations*, 1990.  
Image courtesy of the Artist and Koh Nguang How.

Figure 141. Tang Da Wu, *Don't Give Money to the Arts Suit*, 1995.  
Image courtesy of the Artist and Koh Nguang How.

Figure 142. Tang Da Wu, card handed to President Ong Teng Cheong, in *Don't Give Money to the Arts*, Singapore Art '95, Suntec City, 1995.  
Image courtesy of the Artist and Koh Nguang How.

Figure 143. Tang Dawu, with President Ong Teng Cheong, *Don't Give Money to the Arts*, Singapore Art '95, Suntec City, 1995.  
Image courtesy of the Artist and Koh Nguang How.

Figure 144. The Straits Times, 12 August 1995.



Figure 145. The Straits Times, 20 August 1995.

Figure 146. Tang Da Wu, with Kwok Kian Chow, Director, Singapore Art Museum, in *Don't Give Money to the Arts*, Singapore Art '95, Suntec City, 1995. Image courtesy of the Artist and Koh Nguang How.

Figure 147. Lee Wen, *Journey of a Yellow Man No.4: LIBIDO*, Concrete House, Nontburi and Thammasat University, Bangkok, 9-15 Oct. 1993. Image courtesy of the Artist.

Figure 148, Lee Wen, Video-Stills from Video, *Strange Fruit*, 2003. Image courtesy of the Artist.

Figure 149, Lee Wen, 3 photographs from *Strange Fruit*, 2003. Images courtesy of the Artist.

Figure 150, *Journey of a Yellow Man No.11: Multi-Culturalism*, The Substation, September, 1997. Image courtesy of the Artist.

Figure 151, Lee Wen, *I am not a performance artist, this is not a work of art*, 1999. Image courtesy of the Artist.

Figure 152, Tang Da Wu, *Dancing Ultra Violet*, 1990. Image courtesy of the Artist.

Figure 153, Yit, Lam, Hiah and Woon, *Bali Project: Masks (Bali)*, 2001. See Above.

Figure 154, Liu Kang, *Mask (Bali)*, 1953. See Above.

Figure 155. *My Girl Friend at the 'Long House'*. Photograph. See Above.

Figure 156. *Liu Kang in Fuzhou, China*. See Above.

Figure 157. Paul Gauguin. Photograph. See Above.