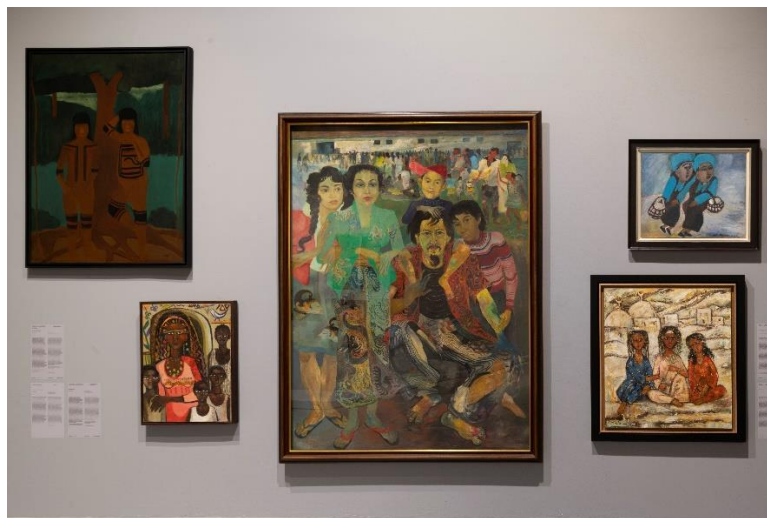


## MEDIA RELEASE

### National Gallery Singapore announces the participation of artists from its collection at the 60th International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia curated by Adriano Pedrosa



*My Family* (1968) by Hendra Gunawan (pictured in the middle). Exhibition view of “Nucleo Storico” section in the Main Exhibition of Venice Biennale 2024. Image credit: National Gallery Singapore

**Venice, Italy, 17 April 2024** – National Gallery Singapore is delighted to announce that for the first time in the country’s history, artists from the Gallery’s collection have been invited to participate in the Main Exhibition of the 60th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia (Biennale Arte 2024), entitled *Stranieri Ovunque – Foreigners Everywhere*, curated by Adriano Pedrosa.

The artworks will be featured in the “Nucleo Storico” section in the Main Exhibition, in a subsection entitled “Portraits”, which expands the history of modernism beyond Europe and North America by focusing on stories from the Global South, including artists whose trajectories took them across continents and contexts over the tumultuous course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

With more than 8,000 works, the National Gallery Singapore holds the largest public collection of modern art from Southeast Asia, offering a unique point of departure for transnational curatorial and research efforts that seek to position art from Singapore and Southeast Asia as integral to global art histories.

Ranging from self-portraits to representations of working class and indigenous persons, the eight artworks by Southeast Asian artists from the Gallery’s collection are as follows (details of the artworks and artist biographies are included in the Annex):

- ***Jeune fille en blanc (Young Girl in White) (1931)*** by **Lê Phở** (Vietnam/France);
- ***Self Portrait (c. 1946)*** by **Georgette Chen** (China/Singapore);
- ***Orang Irian dengan burung tjenderawasih (Irian Man with Bird of Paradise) (1948)*** by **Emiria Sunassa** (Indonesia);
- ***Road Construction Worker (1955)*** by **Chua Mia Tee** (China/Singapore);
- ***Self-Expression (c.1957/1963)*** by **Lim Mu Hue** (Singapore);
- ***Labourer (Lunch Break) (1965)*** by **Lai Foong Moi** (Malaysia/Singapore);
- ***My Family (1968)*** by **Hendra Gunawan** (Indonesia);
- ***Self-Portrait (1975)*** by **Affandi** (Indonesia).

**Eugene Tan**, Chief Executive Officer of National Gallery Singapore says: *“National Gallery Singapore is proud to present works from its collection in the 60th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia. Together with artists largely from the Global South, these eight portraits will deepen the understanding of modern art in Southeast Asia within a global context. The Gallery’s participation in the Biennale Arte 2024 will highlight the art and artists from Singapore and Southeast Asia and facilitate crucial dialogues with art from around the world.”*

Creating opportunities to build new connections and to share the stories of artists from Southeast Asia is an important part of the mission and vision of National Gallery Singapore. The Gallery’s presentation of these works alongside those by many other prominent artists from the Global South is significant as it brings long-overdue recognition to the artists and their artworks, and inspires further research.

In addition to those presented at the Biennale Arte 2024, works from the collection of National Gallery Singapore have also been loaned to numerous other international platforms, most recently the 11th Taipei Biennial (2018), the 58th Carnegie International (2022–2023), and the 15th Sharjah Biennial (2023). The Gallery has also collaborated with institutions such as Centre Pompidou, Musée d’Orsay, Tate Britain, National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo (MOMAT), and National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea (MMCA) to present Southeast Asian art in an international context.

### **“Other” Modernisms, Migration and Colonialism at Biennale Arte 2024**

In his curatorial statement for *Stranieri Ovunque – Foreigners Everywhere*, Adriano Pedrosa describes the movement of European modernism and its ideas beyond Europe, and the movement of artists from the Global South in the reverse, declaring one of the key themes of Biennale Arte 2024 to be migration, and that its primary focus is “artists who are themselves foreigners, immigrants, expatriates, diasporic, émigrés, exiled, or refugee.”

This perspective is reflected in the works selected from the National Gallery Singapore collection, as many of the Southeast Asian artists presented spent considerable periods in the cosmopolitan centres of Europe and the United States, and beyond.

**Horikawa Lisa**, Senior Curator and Director (Curatorial & Collections) at the National Gallery Singapore, notes: *“In his curatorial statement for Biennale Arte 2024, Adriano Pedrosa calls for a recognition of the modernisms beyond that of Europe and America, underscoring the importance of learning about and from these histories. The inclusion of these eight works in “Nucleo Storico” is thus exemplary: through these portraits, the divergent paths to modernisms*

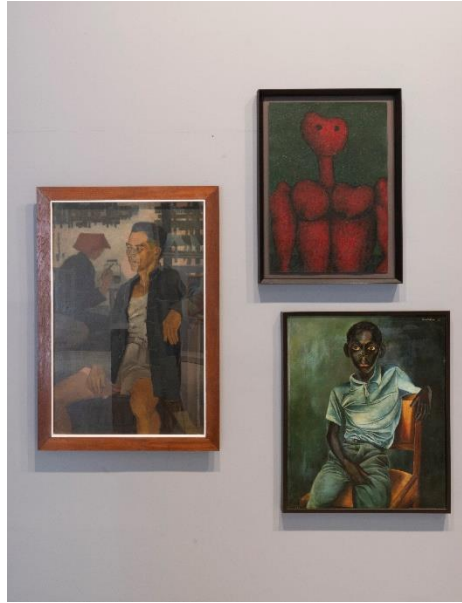
*taken by artists from Southeast Asia are illuminated.”*

Artists who were prominent in their time often faded into relative obscurity over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and three of the eight works from the Gallery’s collection are by women artists whose practices and biographies suggest the critical gains that can be made when efforts are made to recover them for wider recognition.



*Self Portrait* (c.1946) by Georgette Chen (pictured at the bottom left). Exhibition view of “Nucleo Storico” section in the Main Exhibition of Venice Biennale 2024. Image credit: National Gallery Singapore

- One such artist is **Georgette Chen** (China/Singapore), who was born to a life of privilege and spent formative years in Shanghai, New York and Paris — all cities in which she received formal art training and later held solo exhibitions — before settling permanently in Singapore. Despite being one of the most well-exhibited Chinese artists in Paris during the inter-war period, Chen’s significance has been overlooked in Chinese art history, with the most comprehensive retrospective of Chen only taking place in 2020 at National Gallery Singapore. Visitors to the “Nucleo Storico” will see her ***Self-Portrait*** from 1946, in which Chen confronts the viewer with her assured and confident gaze as an artist.



*Labourer (Lunch Break)* (1965) by Lai Foong Moi (pictured on the left). Exhibition view of “Nucleo Storico” section in the Main Exhibition of Venice Biennale 2024. Image credit: National Gallery Singapore

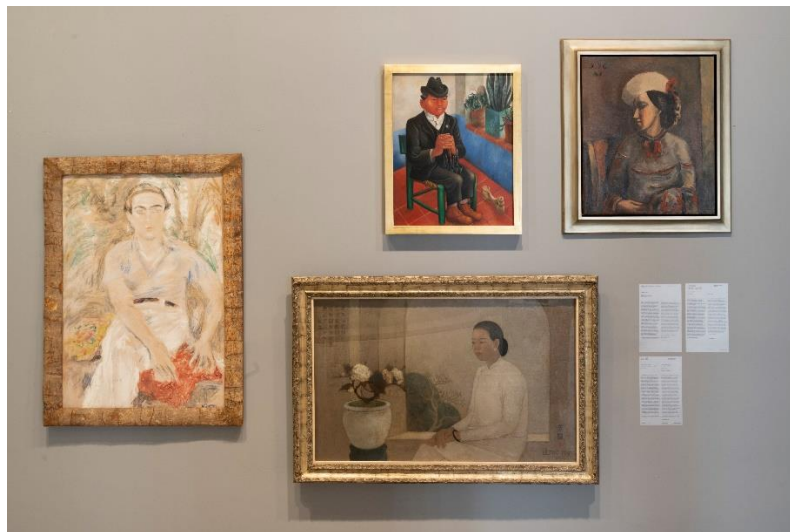
- Pioneer artists like Chen offer a window into the experiences of women artists in Singapore at the time. **Lai Foong Moi** (Malaysia/Singapore) was the first graduate from the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts Singapore to further her education in France, enrolling at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris on a French government scholarship. Well-known for landscapes and for portraits, in paintings such ***Labourer (Lunch Break)*** from 1965 presented in “Nucleo Storico”, Lai brought together realist and modernist techniques to examine the intersectionality of gender and class. Lai was once lauded as the first Malaya-born woman to hold a solo exhibition in Singapore but this early success did not translate to posterity. It is only in recent years that her works have gained greater recognition and can today be seen in the DBS Singapore Gallery, National Gallery Singapore’s permanent exhibition of Singapore art.



*Orang Irian dengan burung tjenderawasih (Irian Man with Bird of Paradise)* (1948) by Emiria Sunassa (pictured on the lower left). Exhibition view of “Nucleo Storico” section in the Main Exhibition of Venice Biennale 2024. Image credit: National Gallery Singapore

- Another woman artist who experienced considerable success in her time before virtually disappearing from view is **Emiria Sunassa** (Indonesia). At the same time, gender does not account for Emiria’s singularity, which takes on almost mythical proportions. She appears in art and archival records across the vast Indonesian archipelago, variously as a nurse, plantation administrator and cabaret singer, before joining PERSAGI, a progressive group of artists in 1930s and 1940s working in Batavia (now Jakarta) that advocated for modern painting to reflect the realities of life in the Dutch East Indies. Emiria also claimed to be a princess of the Tidore sultanate in eastern Indonesia and was active in the struggle for West Papuan independence. Her work was often preoccupied with depicting those at the margins — women as well as Indigenous groups from the eastern part of Indonesia. Recent research has been undertaken on artworks by Emiria, including ***Orang Irian dengan burung tjenderawasih (Irian Man with Bird of Paradise)*** from 1948 presented in “Nucleo Storico”, which can be understood in terms of a complex matrix of advocacy and exoticisation.

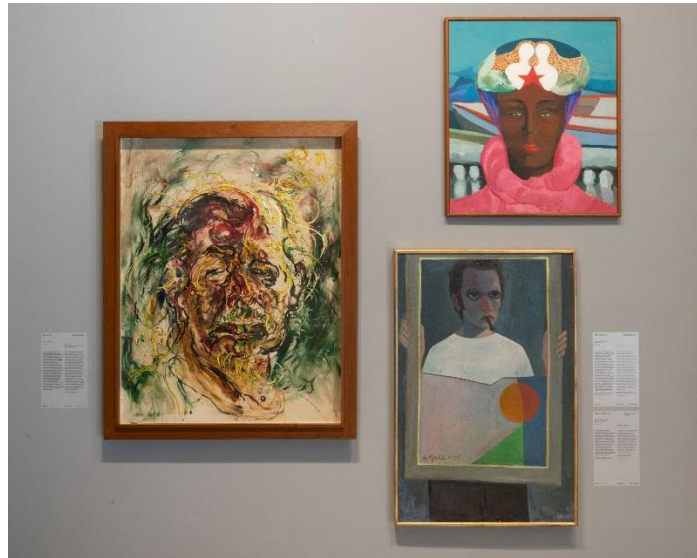
The “Nucleo Storico” section of the Main Exhibition attempts to problematise the boundaries and definitions of modernism, bringing the issue of “canon” to the fore. Like many of the artists in this exhibition, those from the Gallery’s collection have each achieved significant status in Southeast Asia, particularly in the art histories of Indonesia, Singapore and Vietnam.



*Jeune fille en blanc (Young Girl in White)* (1931) by Lê Phổ (pictured in the lower middle). Exhibition view of “Nucleo Storico” section in the Main Exhibition of Venice Biennale 2024. Image credit: National Gallery Singapore

- A leading 20<sup>th</sup>-century artist, **Lê Phổ** (Vietnam/France) demonstrates the dynamic of artists from the periphery who travelled to and settled in colonial metropolitan centres. After attending the art school set up by the French in Hanoi, he migrated to Paris in 1937, where he lived until his death in 2001. Lê forged his own path towards modernism, developing a distinctive aesthetic of highly stylised images in a linear manner. His work in “Nucleo Storico”, ***Jeune fille en blanc (Young Girl in White)*** from 1931, is a portrait of a woman with a colophon from a Vietnamese poem — here the restrained harmony of pale tones conveying a more traditional image of loyalty and duty. This major acquisition was recently unveiled at the UOB Southeast Asia Gallery,

National Gallery Singapore's permanent exhibition of art from the region, and travels to the Biennale Arte 2024 to be generously shared with international audiences.

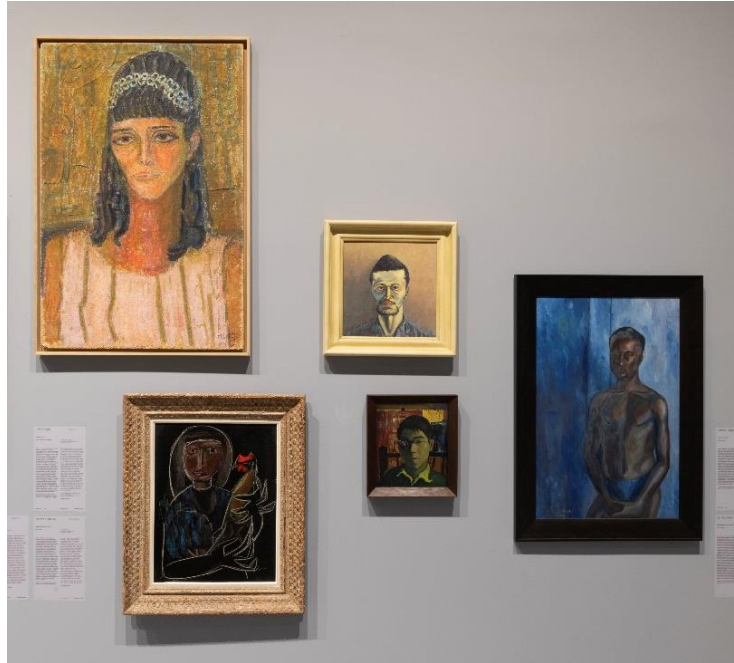


*Self-Portrait* (1975) by Affandi (pictured on the left). Exhibition view of “Nucleo Storico” section in the Main Exhibition of Venice Biennale 2024. Image credit: National Gallery Singapore

- Biographical recounting of the trajectories of modernists from the 20<sup>th</sup> century can belie their ambitions and achievements, which so often exceeded the expectations and limitations imposed by the colonial milieu. This is the case for Lê Phở and also for **Affandi** (Indonesia), an auto-didact who started painting in his twenties and further honed his craft in artist-led communities during the Indonesian National Revolution. Following his invitation to Santiniketan on a scholarship sponsored by the Indian government from 1949 to 1951, he travelled and exhibited extensively across Asia, Europe and the Americas, synthesising influences and inspiration. Affandi participates in the “Nucleo Storico” with ***Self-Portrait*** from 1975, his face powerfully and hauntingly rendered by green, red and ochre paint squeezed directly onto the canvas. Affandi stands out for having been well-exhibited on international platforms such as in the São Paulo Biennale in 1953 and the Venice Biennale in 1954, and is a reminder of the South-South connections that animated many artists in the mid-to-late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

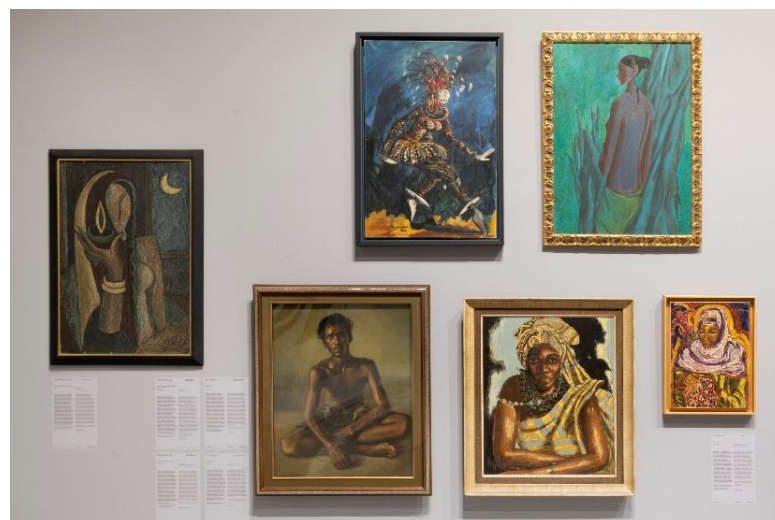
Horikawa Lisa adds: *“Through its research and exhibitions, National Gallery Singapore articulates an approach to Southeast Asia art history that seeks not to add the region’s artists to a so-called ‘global canon’, but instead to inflect and infect the very concept. I am excited to see what can happen now that works from our collection take their place alongside artists from the Global South in this historic congregation.”*

Another key theme stated by Pedrosa in his curatorial statement for *Stranieri Ovunque – Foreigners Everywhere* is decolonisation. It is therefore apt that artists concerned with realism and the realities of struggles for independence and the shaping of political and cultural identity in the postcolonial nation state are among those chosen from the Gallery’s collection. Pedrosa has also highlighted the exceptional inclusion of artists from Singapore: while no longer considered to be part of the Global South, these works were created when the country was part of the Third World.



*Self-Expression* (c.1957/1963) by Lim Mu Hue (pictured in the bottom middle). Exhibition view of “Nucleo Storico” section in the Main Exhibition of Venice Biennale 2024. Image credit: National Gallery Singapore

- In some ways the work by **Lim Mu Hue** (Singapore), which spanned printmaking to painting to relief sculpture, indexes the change in Singapore before and after its independence as a city state in 1965. ***Self-Expression* (c.1957/1963)** in the “Nucleo Storico” reveals a personal artistic ambition and anxiety that echoed Singapore’s nation-building sentiments and challenges: in this realist self-portrait Lim looks out the viewer with his left eye, while his studio and the abstract artworks within are reflected in the lens of the eyeglass he wears over the other. Here the artist confidently experiments with modern Western art styles while maintaining an unflinching realist gaze on conditions in Singapore.



*Road Construction Worker* (1955) by Chua Mia Tee (pictured at the bottom left). Exhibition view of “Nucleo Storico” section in the Main Exhibition of Venice Biennale 2024. Image credit: National Gallery Singapore

- Another Singapore artist who paid keen attention to nation building in Singapore is **Chua Mia Tee** (China/Singapore), a realist painter who created some of the most iconic artworks in Singapore’s history and who was a core member of the Equator Arts Society, a group that promulgated social realist art, believing in its role for depicting everyday life in Singapore and uplifting society. In ***Road Construction Worker (1955)*** in “Nucleo Storico”, we see Chua’s insistence on high realism against the trend towards abstraction in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century: he paints an unnamed labourer, paying attention to his scraggy build, sweat, and arms veined by manual labour. The wistful eye contact he makes with the viewer suggests that the painting is a reminder of the hardship experienced by migrant workers who were key to Singapore’s infrastructural development and is a tribute to their contributions.
- The intersection of art, postcolonial politics and the personal in Southeast Asia continues with the inclusion of **Hendra Gunawan** (Indonesia), who like Affandi is amongst the most prolific and renowned painters of the country. Also largely self-taught, his practice espoused socialist principles of communal living and cooperative work, and he founded several key artist groups in Indonesia. Gunawan was imprisoned in 1965 due to his associations with an alleged communist faction in Indonesia, which was likely when ***My Family (1968)***, presented in “Nucleo Storico”, was painted. In this portrait of the artist and his family we see the bold colours, textile-like patterns and sinuous brushstrokes the artist is known for, as well as his lyrical and even dream-like weaving of quotidian existence and the political — in the background is a crowd and a nondescript building, possibly the prison in Bandung in which he was detained.

The 60th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia opens 20 April and runs until 24 November 2024. Details of the artworks and artist biographies are included in the Annex. Press images and media assets can be accessed via <https://bit.ly/NationalGallerySGVenice2024>.

### **Pavilion of Singapore features *Seeing Forest* by Robert Zhao Renhui**

In addition to the Main Exhibition, Singapore is also officially represented in Venice by way of the **Pavilion of Singapore** with ***Seeing Forest***, an exhibition by Singaporean artist **Robert Zhao Renhui** in collaboration with curator **Haeju Kim**, presented at the Arsenale’s Sale d’Armi building. This is commissioned by the National Arts Council, Singapore, supported by the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth and organised by Singapore Art Museum (SAM). For more information, visit <http://bit.ly/SGPavilionVenice2024>.

–End–

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## Editors' notes

### About National Gallery Singapore

National Gallery Singapore is a leading visual arts institution that oversees the world's largest public collection of Singapore and Southeast Asian modern art. Situated at the birthplace of modern Singapore, in the heart of the Civic District, the Gallery is housed in two national monuments – City Hall and former Supreme Court – that have been beautifully restored and transformed into a 64,000 square-metre venue.

Reflecting Singapore's unique heritage and geographical location, the Gallery aims to be a progressive museum that creates dialogues between the art of Singapore, Southeast Asia and the world to foster and inspire a creative and inclusive society. This is reflected in its collaborative research, education, long-term and special exhibitions, and innovative programming. The Gallery also works with international museums such as Centre Pompidou, Musée d'Orsay, Tate Britain, National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo (MOMAT) and National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea (MMCA), to jointly present Southeast Asian art in the global context, positioning Singapore as a key institution within the global visual arts scene.

### Annex: About the eight artworks and artists

Artwork	Description
 <p><b>Lê Phổ</b> (Hanoi, Vietnam, 1907–2001, Paris, France) <i>Jeune fille en blanc</i> (<i>Young Girl in White</i>), 1931 Oil on canvas 81 × 130 cm Collection of National Gallery Singapore</p> <p>[Recent Acquisition]</p>	<p>In a subtle harmony of pale, silvery tones, a woman is depicted to be lost in thought. The colophon in the upper left corner of the composition suggests the reason for her preoccupation; this extract from an 18th-century Vietnamese poem is the lament of the wife whose husband is away at war. While “modern women” were a popular subject in Vietnamese art and literature of the 1930s, Lê Phổ chose a more traditional image of female loyalty and duty. The work's flat, pared-down style suggests his interest in European modern art, especially Post-Impressionism. However, the restricted colour palette, the inclusion of the calligraphic colophon and the celadon vase in the foreground all establish a link to Vietnam's past and, more broadly, Asian aesthetics. This work was planned for exhibition in the Prima Mostra Internazionale d'Arte Coloniale in Rome (1931), as part of a policy for sending Vietnamese art abroad for sales and colonial propaganda. Works like Lê Phổ's, however, exceeded narrow colonial ambitions and are seen as achievements within the history of modernism in Vietnam.</p> <p><b><u>About Lê Phổ</u></b> One of the first Vietnamese artists to graduate from the École des Beaux Arts de l'Indochine (Indochina School of Fine Arts) in Hanoi, the work of <b>Lê Phổ</b> represents the ambitious artistic experiments of his generation. The School, founded by French painter Victor Tardieu (1870–1937) and his</p>

Vietnamese collaborator Nam Sơn (1890–1973), aimed to modernise Vietnamese art, with reference to local practices as well as a European-style academic curriculum. Lê Phổ became especially proficient in oil painting, which he approached with a restrained sensibility. Artworks from the Indochina School were shown in Paris: Lê Phổ's works appeared in salon exhibitions as well as the Exposition Coloniale Internationale (1931). In 1937, he migrated to Paris, where he spent the rest of his life. In France, he developed a new aesthetic, painting on silk in an elegant, linear manner, creating highly stylised images of Vietnamese women, family groups, pietà and still life.



**Georgette Chen**  
 (likely Zhejiang, China,  
 1906–1993, Singapore)  
*Self Portrait*, c. 1946  
 Oil on canvas  
 22.5 x 17.5 cm  
 Gift of Lee Foundation  
 Collection of National  
 Gallery Singapore

*Self Portrait* demonstrates Chen's lifelong commitment to her art. Chen confronts the viewer with her assured gaze and her face occupies the entire canvas. The pastel colours used for her complexion are set in contrast to the muted grey and brown background, imbuing the painting with a sense of austerity. When this painting was made, Chen had just lost her husband Eugene Chen and was in search of a quiet place to settle down where she could rehabilitate and paint. Despite her personal tragedy, Chen remained steadfast in her aspiration to be a successful artist.

**About Georgette Chen**

**Georgette Chen's** life can be marked by two phases—the first, a period of incessant travel between China, USA and Europe, during which the tumultuous events of the two world wars and the Chinese Civil War unfolded around her as she pursued her art; and the second, a period in which she found a new home in Singapore and generously passed her artistic knowledge and skills to the next generation of artists through teaching. What remained consistent throughout her life was her ability to find inspiration in the plurality of cultures that she encountered. Born to the wealthy Zhang Jingjiang family in China, Chen had the means to undergo formal art training. She trained under the Russian artist Viktor Podgursky in Shanghai, and later at art academies such as Art Students League of New York and Académie Colarossi in Paris. Her marriage to prominent Trinidad-born Chinese diplomat Eugene Chen in 1930 enabled her to continue her artistic practice in France and China. Following World War II, she relocated to Malaya in 1951 and settled in Singapore in 1953 where she became an influential figure in the arts. Between 1945 to 1947, she travelled around China, making works in preparation for her subsequent solo exhibitions in Shanghai (1947), New York (1949), Paris (1950) and Singapore (1953).



**Emiria Sunassa**  
 (Tanah Wangko,  
 Indonesia, 1894–1964,  
 Lampung, Indonesia)  
*Orang Irian dengan  
 burung tjenderawasih*  
 (Irian Man with Bird of  
 Paradise), 1948  
 Oil on canvas  
 67.2 x 54.5cm  
 Collection of National  
 Gallery Singapore

Consistent with the raw, expressive quality of Emiria’s body of work, the figure in this painting is rendered in bold, sweeping lines, while the face is mask-like, highlighted in a startling green against a darkened ground. In the image, an Irian (Papuan) man is shown holding birds-of-paradise to his chest. Birds-of-paradise are sacred to the Indigenous people in Papua, but their feathers were also a prized commodity among foreign hunters and traders. Thus, they can be seen as a symbol of the exploitation of Papua’s natural resources. Emiria claimed descent from the Sultan of Tidore, an island in the Maluku archipelago, which had historically ruled parts of West Papua. As a result, at a crucial time when both Indonesia and West Papua were struggling for their independence (late 1940s to early 1960s), Emiria claimed to be the rightful ruler of the region. Her status was never officially accepted but has complex implications for her paintings of Papuan scenes.

**About Emiria Sunassa**

Ambiguity surrounds the colourful life of painter **Emiria Sunassa**. She lived in many places across the Indonesian archipelago, working in various roles, which reportedly include nurse, plantation administrator and cabaret singer. With no formal training in painting, she nonetheless became part of the landmark artist group PERSAGI (Persatuan Ahli-Ahli Gambar Indonesia, or Association of Indonesian Draughtsmen), active in Batavia (present-day Jakarta) in the 1930s to 1940s. This progressive group advocated for modern painting that is tied to the realities of life in Indonesia, and criticised the hackneyed, picturesque works that dominated the market. Emiria’s works tend to concentrate on the diverse peoples of the Indonesian archipelago, whom she brought into view for the Javanese audience in Batavia. In the post-independence period, she continued to exhibit her artworks, holding solo exhibitions and participating in group presentations of Indonesian art in Amsterdam and New York.




**Chua Mia Tee**  
 (Shantou, China, 1931,  
 lives in Singapore)  
*Road Construction  
 Worker*, 1955

*Road Construction Worker* is Chua’s portrait of an unnamed labourer. The subject sits on the floor, shirtless and barefoot. Veins protrude from his arms and hands, and sweat trickles from his neck and armpit, conveying the physical strain of his work. He is unshaven and his dark hair is tousled and unkempt. He furrows his brow and directs his haunting gaze at the viewer, seemingly pleading for compassion. Chua believes in not only capturing the physical likeness of his subjects but also their spirit, as he subscribes to the principles of “truth, virtue and beauty” in his art. By painting this individual, Chua pays tribute to Singapore’s construction workers, many of whom were migrants, who were key to the country’s infrastructural expansion.

**About Chua Mia Tee**

<p>Oil on canvas 96 x 66 cm Collection of National Gallery Singapore</p> <p>This work has been adopted by Seah and Siak</p>	<p>One of the leading realist artists in Singapore, <b>Chua Mia Tee</b> painted some of the most iconic artworks on Singapore's history, such as <i>Epic Poem of Malaya</i> (1955) and <i>National Language Class</i> (1959). Chua migrated to Singapore from China in 1937 after fleeing the Sino-Japanese war. He showed early artistic inclinations and studied art under Chen Chong Swee, another Chinese émigré who moved to Singapore, at the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, where he eventually also taught. Chua was a core member of two art organisations founded in Singapore in the 1950s, which espoused art for the masses: the Singapore Chinese High Schools' Graduates of 1953 Arts Research Group and the Equator Art Society. These groups, comprising practitioners from various art disciplines, believed in portraying the reality of everyday life and creating art that uplifts society. Equator Art Society in particular developed social realist art in Singapore.</p>
 <p><b>Lim Mu Hue</b> (Singapore, 1936–2008) <i>Self-Expression</i>, c.1957/1963 Oil on board 34.3 x 30 cm Gift of Koh Seow Chuan Collection of National Gallery Singapore</p>	<p>This diminutive self-portrait, painted in his twenties, reveals both his personal ambition and anxiety, which echo Singapore's nation-building sentiments and challenges. As a representation of Lim's coming of age, this painting graced the catalogue cover of his first solo exhibition in 1970 at the Chinese Chamber of Commerce. In the painting, Lim appears to be seated in a studio with boldly coloured abstract paintings on easels in the background. He stares out at the viewer with one eye. On the broken half of his eyeglasses, worn in front of his other eye, a reflection of surrounding abstract paintings may be seen. Compared to his earlier self-portrait from 1955, which depicts his youthful diffidence as a fresh art school graduate, <i>Self-Expression</i> is a more mature and self-confident statement about embracing experimentation with modern Western art styles while maintaining an unflinchingly realist gaze on the conditions in Singapore.</p> <p><b><u>About Lim Mu Hue</u></b> Trained in Western painting methods at the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts in Singapore in the 1950s but also steeped in Chinese cultural traditions, <b>Lim Mu Hue</b> is one of Singapore's leading woodblock printmakers, whose erudite artistic output also includes paintings in various mediums as well as sculptural relief. From panoramic landscapes to intimate views of bygone ways of life, his works bear witness to the pre- and post-independence changes taking place in Singapore. In the 1960s, Lim taught art at his alma mater before taking on an art editorial role with the Nanyang Siang Pau, or Nanyang Business Daily, creating cartoons and illustrations for the newspaper's art supplement, which often included his acute observations and wry social commentary. In the subsequent decades, Lim exhibited actively both locally and abroad, serving also as an honorary museum</p>

	<p>consultant at Nanyang University (Singapore) and with stints as a senior researcher and visiting professor in China.</p>
 <p><b>Lai Foong Moi</b>  (Negeri Sembilan,  Malaysia, 1931–1995,  Singapore)  <i>Labourer (Lunch Break)</i>,  1965  Oil on canvas  104 x 67 cm  Collection of National  Gallery Singapore</p>	<p><i>Labourer (Lunch Break)</i> is an introspective portrait that exemplifies Lai’s commitment to the internal world of her subjects. The figure at the centre of the composition is presented in a moment of rest and contemplation as he gazes beyond the frame. Lai discloses his identity as a labourer by his blue outer shirt, a distinctive identifier of Chinese migrant workers, referred to as coolies, who had travelled to Malaya since the 19th century to work on plantations, in construction and other manual occupations. Carefully rendering the worn lines and expression of his facial features, Lai attends to his individual experience of labour. Behind him, a woman is having her meal, her back turned and features comparatively obscured. Her red headscarf, which stands out as a moment of differentiated colour in the painting signifies her identity as a <i>Samsui</i> woman—a female immigrant manual labourer. Although both figures occupy the same sightline within the composition, their diverging postures allow Lai to suggest a hierarchy of anonymity even within this overlooked segment of society.</p> <p><b><u>About Lai Foong Moi</u></b>  Lauded as the first Malaya-born woman to hold a solo exhibition in Singapore, <b>Lai Foong Moi</b>’s story is one that encapsulates how the development of artistic style was intertwined with considerations of nationhood and identity within the context of post-war, post-colonial Malaya. The first graduate from the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts in Singapore to further her education at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, Lai garnered early acclaim for her paintings, which display her unique sensitivity towards colour and composition underpinned by the modernist principles of her training. Demonstrating an initial proclivity for the empathetic portrayal of female nudes and moody renderings of cityscapes, Lai would continue to develop her interest in everyday people and landscapes following her return to Malaya in 1959. Compared to her peers, who received broad recognition for their representations of Southeast Asian subjects through similar experimentation within the framework of modern painting, Lai’s legacy has been one of relative obscurity despite her early success.</p>

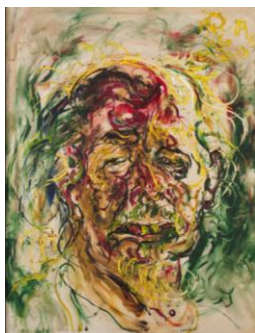


**Hendra Gunawan**  
 (Bandung, Indonesia, 1918–1983, Bali, Indonesia)  
*My Family*  
 1968  
 Oil on canvas  
 197.5 x 145.5cm  
 Collection of National Gallery Singapore

*My Family* was likely painted when Gunawan was imprisoned in 1965 due to his association with an alleged communist faction in Indonesia. In the same year, the Cold War contestation in Indonesia concluded with the suppression and annihilation of communist forces and the rise of a new dictatorial regime backed by the United States. Painted more realistically than Gunawan's earlier works from the 1940s and 1950s, *My Family* depicts the artist sitting down in tattered pants with his wife and three children. In the backdrop, a crowd gathers in front of a nondescript building—perhaps the prison in Bandung where he was detained. After his release from prison in 1978, Gunawan moved to Bali and continued to paint until his final days, inspired by scenes of daily lives and people.

**About Hendra Gunawan**

One of Indonesia's most prolific and renowned painters, **Hendra Gunawan's** practice began in the 1930s and spanned the period of the Indonesian Revolution to the dictatorial New Order regime. Like many other artists who emerged in this period, such as Affandi, S. Sudjojono and Emiria Sunassa, Gunawan was largely self-taught. His practice espoused socialist principles of communal living and cooperative work. He also founded and was active in several artists groups and cultural organisations from the 1940s to 1960s, including Seniman Indonesia Muda (Young Indonesian Painters), Pelukis Rakyat (People's Painters), and Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat (LEKRA – People's Culture Association). Many of his paintings foreground the people's daily lives in an expressive yet delicate manner, typically by focusing on the mundane activities of a tightly knit group in a tilted space. His works are often characterised by textile-like patterns, bold colours and flowing, sinuous brushstrokes.



**Affandi**  
 (Cirebon, Indonesia, 1907—1990, Yogyakarta, Indonesia),  
*Self-Portrait*  
 1975  
 Oil on canvas  
 130 x 100.5 cm

Affandi produced many self-portraits in different media, including ink, oil and clay. *Self-Portrait* was one of the works presented in his solo exhibition in Singapore in 1975, held when he was conferred an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Singapore. A photograph from the event shows the artist creating this work on-site in front of an audience. Affandi donated two paintings, including this one, to the National Museum Art Gallery collection in Singapore after its establishment in 1976, which were subsequently incorporated into the present Gallery's collection. The painting shows Affandi's mature style: winding threads of bold yellow, red, and green form his facial features, and areas of ochre and green painted using his palm or fingers resemble a brushed wash.

**About Affandi**

One of the most celebrated self-taught painters, who began painting in the 1930s, Affandi was active in a guerilla

<p>Gift of the artist Collection of National Gallery Singapore</p>	<p>movement and artists' sanggars, artist-run community spaces and studios, during the Indonesian revolutionary period (1945–1950) in Yogyakarta, Central Java. Along with other Indonesian artists of his generation, such as S. Sudjojono and Hendra Gunawan, Affandi joined Seniman Indonesia Muda (Young Indonesian Artists) in 1946. Sponsored by the Indian government, Affandi studied painting at Santiniketan from 1949 to 1951 before travelling and exhibiting his works in Europe. He was the Indonesian representative at the São Paulo Biennale in 1953 and the Venice Biennale in 1954. Affandi is known for painting his subject matter without sketching it beforehand; he squeezes paint from their tubes directly onto his canvases, layering them spontaneously to express strong linear movement and tension.</p>
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