

Lai Foong Moi



「dalam
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Crossings

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Dalam Singapore presents a series of focused exhibitions that seek to reinvigorate and deepen understanding of Singapore's artists and art through new research, insightful curation and engaging programming.



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PL . 1

Crossing (Home Coming), 1964.

Oil on canvas, 77 × 65 cm.

Collection of Singapore Airlines Limited.



PL. 2

Crossing. c. 1965.

Oil on canvas, 100 × 81 cm.

Private collection.

• Teo Hui Min •

In April 1965, Lai Foong Moi presented a painting titled *Crossing* in the Singapore Art Society's annual group exhibition. The next month, the same work was featured in an exhibition held at the National Art Gallery Malaysia, *Seni Lukis Singapura Se-zaman* (Contemporary Art of Singapore). In August, a different painting with a similar composition and bearing the same title was shown in the Society of Chinese Artists' *30th Anniversary Exhibition* in Singapore.¹ Depicting subtle yet significant variations of a group of figures undertaking a journey by boat, the paintings demonstrate Lai's careful study of posture and dress. They also invite us to consider why Lai might have returned to the same composition twice and what the differences between the two versions can tell us. Painted and exhibited across Singapore and Malaysia in the year of separation and independence, the paintings and the figures at their centre might allude to this symbolic moment of transition. After all, Lai's practice emerged at a moment when the ideas of the "Malayan artist" and aspirations towards a "Malayan art" were at the height of cultural currency and active negotiation. Considering Lai's trajectory, particularly in the absence of a personal archive and with little evidence that she spoke or wrote directly about questions of identity or style, it is her works that reveal and construct conditions of liminality that also extend to her place within art history. The notion of "crossing," as a state of transition, liminality and becoming, finds fitting resonance across the thresholds visualised in many of Lai's works, and in the contrast between the early promise and subsequent obscurity of her career.

¹ Singapore Art Society, *16th Annual Exhibition* (Singapore, 3–9 April 1965); National Art Gallery Malaysia, *Seni Lukis Singapura Se-zaman* (Kuala Lumpur, May 1965); Society of Chinese Artists, *30th Anniversary Exhibition* (Singapore, 21–24 August 1965). The exhibition catalogues include black-and-white reproductions of both versions of *Crossing*.

In setting out to understand Lai's practice, it is first necessary to acknowledge the frameworks within which her work has been discussed—as a Malayan artist, as a Nanyang artist and

as an artist trained within the formal lineage of the School of Paris. While these categories are important historiographic and biographical points of reference, they also tend to limit the ways in which her work has been understood. This essay instead engages directly with Lai's works, focusing explicitly on the compositional, formal and thematic strategies she deployed. In doing so, it reveals how her works consistently articulate states of transition and reflect the experience of identity in a rapidly changing postcolonial context. Such an approach opens alternative ways of situating Lai's practice, moving beyond existing categories where she has been largely cast in a supporting, rather than central, role.

Writing about the framework of Malayan art in 1963, the art critic Ma Ge highlighted the deep history of commingling and exchange between the Malay Peninsula and global civilisations. He proposed that this led to the emergence of "indigenous Malayan characteristics," most keenly observed in paintings after the end of colonial rule.² Lai's practice was discussed in a section on artists seeking to synthesise "different imported styles, through which local subject matter is depicted with colours, temperaments and flavours of Malaya."³ In appraising the artistic trajectories of his selected artists, Ma pointed out achievements in colour ("brilliant"; "bright"), atmosphere ("expressive"; "refreshing"), and stylistic innovation ("unique"; "assimilating eastern and western cultures"). By contrast, his paragraph on Lai was critical, stating that "since her return to Malaya, the nature of her works has taken a turn and the strong atmospheric components somehow disappeared. Her preference for the use of black and white has also caused the painted surface to wane in colour vibrancy."⁴ This curt description seemed to frame her work in a state of stylistic decline. Four years earlier, Ma Ge had penned a more complimentary endorsement of Lai's works, noting how "undoubtedly, she has come to understand her mission as a Malayan painter."⁵ What we can glean from this is a seeming disjuncture between Lai's stylistic approach and that of her peers, as well as the suggestion of an apparent shift in her work by the mid-1960s.

Parallel to this discourse on Malayan art, Lai was considered within the category of the Nanyang artist. This was partly due to her association with the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA) in Singapore, where she graduated in Western Painting in 1954 and was employed as a teacher from 1959 until her retirement. This brought her into proximity with Lim Hak Tai, the academy's founding principal. During Lai's time as a student, Lim espoused the need for artists in Malaya to reflect the spirit and aspirations of a diverse society by drawing on different artistic sources.⁶ At NAFA,

² Ma Ge, *Ma Lai Ya Yi Shu Jian Shi* (A Brief History of Malayan Art), trans. Lai Chee Kian (Millenium Books, 1999), 1.

³ Lai, *A Brief History of Malayan Art*, 89–97.

⁴ Lai, *A Brief History of Malayan Art*, 90.

⁵ Ma Ge, "Lai feng mei hua ji xu," in *Lai Foong Moi* (Self-published catalogue, 1960), unpaginated. Translated by Teo Hui Min.

⁶ Lim Hak Tai, "Preface to The Art of Young Malaysians," in *The Art of Young Malaysians*, trans. Ng Kum Hoon and Chan Chiu Ming, in *The Modern in Southeast Asian Art: A Reader, Volume I*, eds. T.K. Sabapathy and Patrick Flores (National Gallery Singapore, 2023), 423–425.

Lai studied under teachers such as Cheong Soo Pieng, whose integration of Chinese ink aesthetics with styles of Cubism and Abstraction later became synonymous with an expression of Lim's ideals. Although her education and teaching position afforded her an adjacency with those identified as Nanyang artists, Lai's inclusion within the category was rarely reflected in a sustained critical engagement with her work. Whether or not her work can claim the visual and stylistic markers most frequently used to define the category remains an open and productive future field for discussion.

Nevertheless, alongside Lim and Cheong, Lai would be featured in *Pameran Retrospektif Pelukis-Pelukis Nanyang* (Nanyang Painters Retrospective Exhibition) curated by Redza Piyadasa and held at the National Art Gallery in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in 1979.⁷ Although she contributed nine works to the exhibition, art historian T.K. Sabapathy's catalogue essay devoted but a brief sentence to a nude painting by Lai.⁸ Meanwhile, artists such as Cheong received more detailed accounts. A shared history of migration to the region from China and the formal melding of Chinese painting techniques with those of oil painting were emphasised as markers that qualified inclusion into the category. Lai tended to sit outside these criteria, having been born in Malaysia and her work not obviously displaying such formal experiments. Many of the artists featured in that historic exhibition have had their practices be the subject of extensive solo exhibitions. However, authoritative catalogues, critical reappraisals and any in-depth analysis of Lai's stylistic and artistic strategies have yet to be undertaken.

Nevertheless, Piyadasa and Sabapathy would later give Lai pride of place as the first artist in their compilation *Modern Artists of Malaysia* in 1983. Although she had taken up Singaporean citizenship and was primarily residing there at the time, Piyadasa claimed her as "one of the most important woman artists that this country has produced so far," and "one of the most important of the Nanyang artists."⁹ He supported this by praising in particular her paintings of rural Sarawak, which he identified as having the sensitivity of an artist-turned-anthropologist. Coming after the fading relevance of the category of the Malayan artist, this gesture towards inclusion in the Malaysian canon reveals yet another aspect of instability in her framing during her lifetime. Despite Piyadasa's endorsement, her absorption into the narrative of Malaysian art never fully manifested in the sustained acclaim that her contemporaries received. This could have been due to her strong ties to Singapore, just as her position in Singapore could have been complicated due to the simple fact of her birth in Malaysia.

⁷ *Pameran Retrospektif Pelukis-Pelukis Nanyang*, National Art Gallery Malaysia, 26 October–23 December 1979 (National Art Gallery Malaysia, 1979).

⁸ T.K. Sabapathy, "The Nanyang Artists: Some General Remarks," in *Pameran Retrospektif Pelukis-Pelukis Nanyang*, 46.

⁹ T.K. Sabapathy and Redza Piyadasa. *Modern Artists of Malaysia*. (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 1983).

Following Lai's passing in 1995, her work was featured in thematic exhibitions variously reiterating her position within the category of the Nanyang artist or as one of several artists from Singapore who had received formal academic training in France.¹⁰ While such posthumous framings of Lai have served to affirm her presence within the development of modern art in Singapore and the region, they have largely amounted to a recirculation of biographical information without sustained engagement with Lai's work itself. Speaking to this dearth of discourse, art historian Yvonne Low offers a reading of Lai's practice that intersects questions of gender with her positioning as a Malayan artist.¹¹ Low examines how Lai's return to Singapore and her first solo exhibition held in 1959 came to be cast in local news coverage as the achievement of "the first Malayan-born woman to hold 'one-man' exhibitions of her work in Singapore and the Federation."¹² Lai's achievements were seemingly mobilised within a nationalist narrative, one in which a woman's success became proof of a nation's progress toward social parity in the postcolonial period. Low's analysis provides a crucial consideration of how Lai's identity as a Malayan briefly aligned within the concerns of the immediate postcolonial period. By foregrounding gender, she draws attention to its latent yet determining condition within earlier accounts of Lai's practice. This contribution is instructive not only for questioning the terms through which Lai's success was framed but also in suggesting how Lai's unique positionality (as female, as between Singaporean and Malaysian) may have allowed for particular attention to the way her subjects might be read within broader narratives of the time.

In Lai's paintings, figures pause in boats, wait at piers, rest or sit absorbed within interior spaces that suggest both enclosure and possibility. Victor Turner's concept of liminality, first articulated in relation to ritual subjects in transitional states between more fixed social categories, offers a framework for reading this preoccupation.¹³ Adapted to a reading of Lai's practice, it can be argued that liminality is visualised both through her compositional strategies as well as in the portrayal of her subjects. Her paintings do not simply depict transition as subject matter. They construct its phenomenological experience formally through the use of contrasts, ambiguous spaces, withheld gazes and the tensions between the particularity of her sitters and the symbolic demands mapped upon them. Liminality thus becomes a productive lens through which to read Lai's work, illuminating how she registered identity not as fixed or fully knowable, but as something continuously negotiated within the social conditions of postcolonial modernity.

¹⁰ Posthumous exhibitions featuring Lai's work include: *Salon Pont des Arts*, Petronas Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, 1997; *Birth of Modern Art in Southeast Asia: Artists and Movements*, Fukuoka Art Museum, 1997; *Imprints on Singapore Art: Works of 40 NAFA Artists*, Singapore Art Museum, 1998; *Visions and Enchantment: Southeast Asian Paintings*, Singapore Art Museum, 2000; *Nanyang 1950–65: Passage to Singaporean Art*, Fukuoka Art Museum, 2002; *Realism in Asian Art*, National Gallery Singapore & The National Museum of Contemporary Art, 2010; *A Changed World*, National Museum of Singapore, 2013; *Siapa Nama Kamu?: Art in Singapore Since the 19th Century*, National Gallery Singapore, 2015–2025.

¹¹ Yvonne Low, "Painting Malaya Professionally: Re-evaluating the role of Lai Foong Moi and the 'Colony Artists,'" in *Perspectives: Narratives in Malaysian Art Volume 4*, eds. Nur Hanim Khairuddin, Beverly Yong, Yap Sau Bin, Simon Soon (RogueArt, 2019), 253–265.

¹² "2 paintings by woman for show," *The Straits Times*, May 22, 1960, 11.

¹³ Victor Turner, *Forest of Symbols* (Cornell University Press, 1967), 93–111.

¹⁴ “Qin nian nu hua jia lai feng mei liu fa xue cheng ding nian yiran fan xing,” *Nanyang Shang Bao*, July 20, 1958, 7. Translated by Teo Hui Min.

¹⁵ Lai kept receipts of her salon entries which she reproduced in *Lai Foong Moi* (Self-published catalogue, 1960). These were cross-referenced against Phoebe Scott and Horikawa Lisa, “Artists from Southeast Asia in Paris, 1880–1960: Index of Art Schools and Exhibitions,” unpublished research report (National Gallery Singapore, 2017). Lai was reported to have held solo exhibitions in Paris and Athens in “Paris-trained Foong Moi to hold her own art show,” *The Straits Times*, March 17, 1963, 4. It has not been possible to independently verify this through primary sources at this time but is corroborated partially by the 1958 news report (see footnote 14).

In adopting this framework of liminality to read Lai’s paintings, this essay also seeks to trace Lai’s trajectory from early success to gradual decline in public exhibition in her later years. Personal circumstances, a deepening commitment to teaching and the changing conditions of the post-independence period, which may have rendered the qualifiers of “Malayan-born woman” less legible than they had been, likely all played their part. Such an interpretation, as this essay will propose, must remain provisional. Many aspects of Lai’s life and practice remain unknown at the time of writing, including finer details about her years in Europe (the artists she may have met, the exhibitions she may have seen) as well as any clear record of her thoughts on the artistic developments of her time, whether in Singapore, Malaysia or among her contemporaries. Should such details emerge, they could shift and deepen our understanding considerably. For now, attention to her surviving paintings held in both institutional and private collections and to the images preserved in the archive, nevertheless allow us to identify certain consistencies across Lai’s practice. Working within a time of profound social and economic transformation, and at a moment when the boundaries of national art were being newly defined, Lai’s distinctive observations of gender, labour and the urban environment were not simply representational subjects drawn from postcolonial Malaya. They offer a perspective into the often unstable experience of identity in transition. In reading these paintings, we too might come closer to a sense of Lai’s own experience of that time.

Becoming

A newspaper article from *Nanyang Shang Bao* announced in July 1958: “Miss Lai Fengmei [Lai Foong Moi], a young woman artist who three years ago graduated with distinction from the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, has completed three years of advanced study in France and will be returning to Singapore by ship on the 21st. During her time in France, Miss Lai was awarded a French Government scholarship and held a solo exhibition in Paris, achieving excellent results and receiving widespread praise.”¹⁴

It was hence with great attention that the twenty-seven-year-old Lai returned to Singapore, fresh from study at the École des Beaux-Arts (National School of Fine Arts) in Paris. She had established herself as a professional artist—her work selected for prestigious Salon exhibitions and she was reported to have organised solo exhibitions of her work in Paris and Athens.¹⁵ Within a year of her return, the Singapore Art Society (SAS) sponsored a solo exhibition presented at the Victoria Memorial Concert Hall. The exhibition comprised 86 works, including eight nude drawings, with the rest being

oil paintings that demonstrated Lai's interest in the academic genres of still life, landscape and portraits. It featured works produced during her extensive travels in Europe ● FIG. 1 ● and also those painted following her return, observing subjects from Singapore and Malaysia.¹⁶

Born in Seremban, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia, in 1931, Lai's designation as Malayan-born supported her circulation in both Singapore and Malaysia, permitting her to be claimed within these overlapping cultural and national narratives. The category of Malaya bridged the multiple facets of her identity, which encompassed the place of her birth, her education at NAFA in Singapore between 1950 and 1954, and her subsequent employment at NAFA—where she held a teaching position from 1959 until her retirement in 1995. In his foreword to the exhibition brochure, President of the SAS Ho Kok Hoe introduced her as “the first one-man show to be given by a Malayan-born lady artist.”¹⁷ Minister for Culture S. Rajaratnam, who inaugurated the exhibition, framed his remarks around the government's duty to encourage more of “such exhibitions,” likely an implicit reference to state-level interest in forging a unifying Malayan identity at the time.¹⁸ These, and other endorsements circulated in news reports, captured the attention of a broad public.¹⁹ The exhibition, originally planned to run for two days, was extended by an additional day in response to the strong interest from female visitors.²⁰

¹⁶ Singapore Art Society, *Lai Foong Moi* (Victoria Memorial Hall, 1959).

¹⁷ Ho Kok Hoe, “Foreword,” in *Lai Foong Moi* (Victoria Memorial Hall, 1959).

¹⁸ “Minister Opens Exhibition By Artist,” *The Straits Times*, July 17, 1959, 4.

¹⁹ “Ma lai ya nu hua jia,” *Xing Zhou Ri Bao*, July 13, 1959, 5. “Qing nian nu hua jia lai feng mei,” *Nanyang Shang Bao*, July 14, 1959, 6. “Yi xie zhu ban. Wen hua bu zhang qin lin zhu chi lai feng mei nu shi hua zhan kai mu,” *Nanyang Shang Bao*, July 17, 1959, 7.

²⁰ “Women keen over art show,” *Singapore Standard*, July 20, 1959, 4.

FIG. 1
Street Corner in Paris, c. 1950s.
Oil on canvas, 61 × 46 cm.
Gift of the Loke Wan Tho Collection.



²¹ Goh Teck Sian (Wu Dexian) (1893–1962) was a calligrapher and seal carver who taught Lai while she was a student at NAFA. He contributed a foreword to her self-published catalogue in 1960, demonstrating the closeness of their relationship. See *Lai Foong Moi* (Self-published catalogue, 1960).

Through these accounts, Lai's exhibition was positioned not only as a significant individual milestone but as evidence of a modern, progressive Malayan society. Her identity as a "Malayan-born woman artist" thus became a site through which artistic achievement, gender and nation might be symbolically aligned.

While Lai's public reception emphasised her identity as a "Malayan-born woman artist," her paintings suggest a more complex engagement with the conditions through which such identities were constructed and understood. They reflect her conscious negotiation with the lineages of her artistic formation, shaped by her training in Singapore and Paris and revealed through her interest in playing with the boundaries of established painting genres. Above all, her works demonstrate her capacity to render a plurality of experiences in the subjects she chose to paint.

The title of *Still Life* (1957) ●PL.5● indicates a straightforward adherence to the compositional study of objects in drawing or painting. However, Lai also enfolds the genres of landscape and portraiture into the work. Centred in the composition is a neoclassical male torso—a plaster cast used to teach anatomical precision for portraiture in the absence of a live model. To the right, a wrought iron chair holds three lemons in a loose arrangement that contrasts with the formality of the torso. Behind the torso, Lai renders a Chinese scroll painting of plum blossoms within a landscape, with illegible black lines running vertically down the right edge of the "scroll" suggestive of a colophon. In doing so, Lai embeds her knowledge of Chinese classical painting, which she encountered under teachers such as Goh Teck Sian at NAFA.²¹ The torso is placed between the scroll and the still life, suspended between two distinct visual and cultural traditions. An easel, conspicuously empty, signals the hand of the artist who is constructing the scene and draws attention to the studio itself as a liminal space. Returning to Turner's formulation, the liminal can be identified in this precise condition of betweenness, or a transitional state of becoming in which the moment of suspension is essential for the generation of new states. The studio, as Lai has staged for the viewer here, is one where the neoclassical torso, the Chinese scroll and the genre of still life can be held within a single view. The empty easel reveals the canvas as the site for this mediation, where these different sources and approaches can be brought into relation.

This reflexive quality extended to her paintings of nude models as well. Rather than treating the genre of the nude as purely exercises in anatomical observation, Lai chooses to embed her subjects in relation to the environment of the life drawing session, foregrounding the site of their formation.

In one example, an otherwise classically posed model stands in contrapposto, with one hand resting on her hip ● FIG. 2 ●. The model's raised elbow frames the back view of a female student who is in the act of drawing. This fellow student mirrors Lai's own act of creation and sets up a contrast with the loose stack of painted canvases leaning against the back wall. The studio is once again identified as a site of formation. While *Still Life* presents this transitional state through different genres and styles of painting, in this instance, it is the model herself that is suspended between the state of being painted and becoming a completed image. It is here that a second register of liminality beyond compositional arrangement becomes legible. Through the model's contemplative gaze which slides beyond the left edge of the canvas, Lai draws attention to the subjectivity of the figure herself. The model not only occupies a liminal space but also inhabits a liminal condition within the composition. Her averted gaze registers an inner life that is neither fully offered to the viewer nor concealed but held somewhere between the two. This resists more voyeuristic conventions of the academic female nude while simultaneously drawing attention to the role of the artist in constructing the painting.²² Such examples prefigure the attention that Lai would afford to her later subjects, female or otherwise.

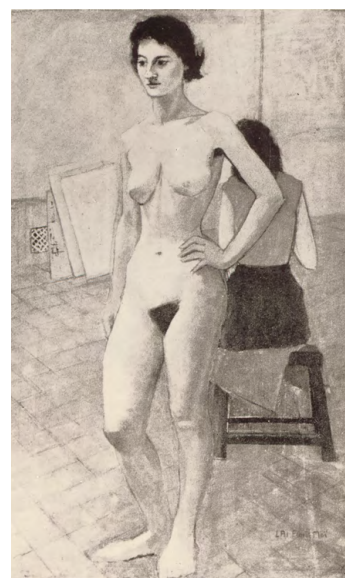


FIG. 2
Model, c. 1955–1958, Oil on canvas,
129.5 × 79 cm. Reproduced from
Lai Foong Moi (Self-published
catalogue, 1960), unpaginated.

These examples from Lai's time in Europe were among those exhibited in her 1959 exhibition and in subsequent solo exhibitions in 1960 and 1963.²³ Although no illustrated records of the works shown in these exhibitions survive, Lai published a compilation of 66 works, including black-and-white and selected colour plates, in 1960 to commemorate her return to Singapore. Cross referenced against the list of works from her 1959 exhibition, the publication provides our most reliable guide to her artistic practice up to this point.²⁴ From these images, a consistency can be observed across the genres she painted (still lifes, landscapes, portraits). However, key distinctions between certain genres also become apparent. The realist tendencies of her still life and portrait paintings give way in her landscapes to a post-Impressionist expressiveness—possibly a function of a *plein-air* approach more attuned to the contingencies of travel. This can be seen in works such as *Athens* (c. 1955–1958) and *Lambili, Greece* (c. 1955–1958) where loose, atmospheric brushstrokes contribute to a sketch-like quality ● FIGS. 3–4 ●. Above all, however, Lai's preoccupation with the figure remained central and would continue to be the defining strength of her practice even after her return to Malaya. Even within her landscape paintings, her varying treatment of figures, where present, provides an indication of Lai's differing relationship to her subjects: at times stylised as types and at others depicted as comparatively realist renderings.

²² For a commentary on the historical representation and perception of the female nude in painting, see Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* (Pandora Press, 1981).

²³ Lai held a solo exhibition of 80 works in 1960 organised by the Federation of Malaya Arts Council, held at the British Council, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 30 April–5 May, and a solo exhibition of an unknown number of works in 1963 held at Penang City Hall in March, 1963.

²⁴ *Lai Foong Moi* (Self-published catalogue, 1960).

FIG. 3

Athens. c. 1955–1958. Oil on canvas, 45.8 × 61 cm. Reproduced from *Lai Foong Moi* (Self-published, 1960), unpaginated.



FIG. 4

Lambili, Greece. c. 1955–1958. Oil on canvas, 45.8 × 61 cm. Reproduced from *Lai Foong Moi* (Self-published, 1960), unpaginated.



In *Malaya New Year* (1959) ● FIG. 5 ●, Lai presents a clearing in a *kampong* framed neatly by attap huts, where villagers gather for festivities amongst tall coconut trees. The scene is perceived from a distance and the central figure is rendered without distinct facial features, her form composed of outlined blocks of colour. A child at her side and figures further into the background are portrayed with the same economy of detail, their bodies and heads evoked through daubs of paint. Another work, *Pounding Rice* (originally published as *Indian Curry Workers*) (1959) ● FIG. 6 ●, offers a closer perspective of a group of women at work.²⁵ Here too, despite proximity, facial features are denoted by simple lines, emphasising the communal focus of the scene over individual differentiation. Attention, however, is given to the patterned details and bright colours of their saris, further privileging pattern and stylisation in this composition.

²⁵ This painting, the largest-known work to have been completed by Lai, has been published as *Pounding Rice* and *Pounding Spices*. The work was originally published as *Indian Curry Workers* in *Lai Foong Moi* (Self-published catalogue, 1960) and in her solo exhibition organised by the Singapore Art Society (1959).

Lai's approach to these subjects of rural Malaya resonates with strategies employed by other artists engaged within discourses surrounding Malayan and Nanyang art. Working from Malaysia, Patrick Ng, for instance, distilled his sustained engagement with batik into complex compositions, deploying its patterns as a shorthand for the ideals of nationalism and regionalism that were being actively constructed in this period.²⁶ In parallel, artists such as Cheong Soo Pieng and Liu Kang had, by the time of Lai's return to Singapore, been similarly invested in vernacular subjects as a source for their development of stylised visual languages. Emphasis on stylisation and the referencing of local sources were hence important markers of these emerging visual languages over

²⁶ Simon Soon, "Fabric and the Fabrication of a Queer Narrative: The Batik Paintings of Patrick Ng Kah Onn," *Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific*, 38 (2015); Emelia Ong Ian Li and Izmer Ahmad, "Expressions of Hybridity as Strategy for Malayan Nationalism: Selected Artworks in Modern Malayan Art," *Journal of Arts Discourse*, 14 (2015).

FIG. 5
Malaya New Year. 1959. Oil on canvas, 35.5 × 45.7 cm. Reproduced from *Lai Foong Moi* (Self-published catalogue, 1960), unpaginated.



FIG. 6
Pounding Rice (originally published as *Indian Curry Workers*). 1959. Oil on canvas, 201 × 250 cm. Collection of NUS Museum, National University of Singapore.



an adherence to realism in both colour and subject. In this light, works such as *Malaya New Year* and *Pounding Rice* can be framed within the expectations placed upon Lai as a “Malayan-born” artist, for whom the depiction of vernacular life functioned as a marker of artistic and national belonging. They can also be read as a possible response to the ongoing discourse advanced by figures such as Ma Ge and Lim Hak Tai at the time.

Lai’s engagement with this model of representation somewhat continued in works produced during her travels across the region, such as those painted during the Ten Men Group to the East Coast of Malaysia in 1963 ●FIG. 7●, as well as her own journeys to Bali and Borneo. However, the mid-1960s also saw Lai develop a more sombre palette and a return to her attentive approach to figuration aligned with her academic training in France. This seeming contradiction in Lai’s practice at the time, between more impressionistic and expressive visions of a bright and idyllic Malaya and more sobering and ambiguous representations of identity, returns us to Ma Ge’s criticism of the waning vibrancy of her works in the mid-1960s. In this way, it is possible that Lai’s penchant for figuration and its attendant concerns placed her outside the prevailing expectations of Malayan and Nanyang art.

It is precisely this instability within stylistic and categorical frameworks that becomes most apparent upon closer attention to the stylistic variation in works produced in this period. In 1960, Lai received a commission to paint the portrait of Sharifah Rodziah (wife of Tunku Abdul Rahman, first Prime Minister of Malaysia) ●PL. 11●. Lai paints the gold embroidery of her sitter’s *kebaya* with great care, while choosing to resolve the background into two planes

FIG. 7
[Not titled] *Pulling Fishing Nets*. 1963.
Oil on canvas, 39.5 × 54.7 cm.



of colour—using their meeting to suggest the corner of the room without further detail. The facial features of her sitter, while more defined than the suggestion of lines seen in *Pounding Rice*, do not approach the realism of her earlier portraits completed in Europe. Yet there is a sense, in her outward gaze and in the deliberate placement of the figure at the exact threshold where the two background colours meet, that aspects of Lai's earlier approach to imbuing her subjects with agency and context, sustain. A second work painted in the same year, *Perempuan Melayu* (1960) appears as a companion to the commissioned portrait.²⁷ It shares similar compositional logic, using a two-toned background to delineate space and ground the subject who also gazes beyond the confines of the canvas. Yet where the commissioned portrait bears the sitter's name and shows her seated upon a chair, *Perempuan Melayu* identifies her as a type rather than an individual, also placing her in a more deferential posture on the floor. Considered alongside the work's title, it leans toward the construction of a general and idealised representation of the Malayan girl, emphasised through her dress and comportment. Indeed, the *sarong kebaya* and its many iterations had by this time become an important symbol of cultural identity and nationhood in Malaya, a sort of national dress worn on both significant and everyday occasions and prominently featured in new styles and designs in popular fashion magazines.²⁸ In both works, Lai appears to negotiate, to different degrees, the tension between the depiction of her subject as a symbol and as an individual, perhaps echoing the very terms through which Lai herself had been framed in public discourse. These works can also be seen as markers of a transitional moment in which her exploration of the symbolic power of more stylised modes of representation would come to meet the realism and agency that so animated the irreducible particularity of her subjects.

Budak India (Indian Boy) (1960) ● ARCHIVAL PLATE, P. 64 ● proposes an integration of these two registers, in which Lai confidently returns to earlier-established strategies of liminality applied to both composition and subject. Displayed in the context of the Third National Exhibition held at the National Art Gallery of Malaysia, the painting exemplifies the realist techniques that defined Lai's European period while being simultaneously inflected with the symbolism of national frameworks.²⁹ As in her European studio works, Lai positions her subject surrounded by the tools of painting, making the construction of the scene evident. This time, however, the subject himself holds a charcoal stick loosely in his left hand. Behind him is a sketch-like drawing of figures and indecipherable motifs in a somewhat naïve style (a glimpse perhaps of a work in progress), and under him, a stack of canvases whose contents are concealed from us.

²⁷ The work is currently in the collection of the National Art Gallery Malaysia. Low discusses the work in "Painting Malaya Professionally," 260.

²⁸ Lee Chor Lin, "The Sarong Kebaya of Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia," in *South Asia and Southeast Asia*, ed. Jasleen Dhamija (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2011), 373–380.

²⁹ *Pameran Lukisan Negara Yang Ketiga* (Third National Exhibition), National Art Gallery, Malaysia. August–November 1960.

³⁰ Nadya Wang, *Fashioning Multiracialism: (Ad)Dressing the Modern Singapore Woman in Her World in the 1960s*, unpublished thesis, 2013. Lai was attuned to the specificities of dress, even once providing commentary for a newspaper article on the newest trends and colour styles in Malayan fashion. See Esme Baptista, "Red and Gold set the style," *The Straits Times*, March 12, 1961, 5.

Further activated through a reading of liminality, his position becomes one of potential, between what is in the process of making and what has yet to be made. At the same time, he is also the subject of Lai's observation as seen in his clearly defined features and pensive countenance rendered with a distinct realism. She allows him to withhold something as he looks away from both her as a painter and us as viewers. This assertion of his individuality challenges the period's frequent depictions of Malay, Indian and Indigenous communities as visual markers of cultural diversity within an ideal Malayan identity while continuing to designate him within those very categories as a nameless "Indian Boy." The work presents a complex amalgamation of individual identity and symbolic potential with Lai herself at its centre. It was this ability to hold the possibility of her subject's interior worlds while attending to the negotiations of their social realities that came to distinguish Lai's practice in the years to come.

Crossing

Already in motion and with little indication of their surroundings, the passengers in the first version of *Crossing (Home Coming)* (1964) ●PL.1● are depicted in a state of transition between arrival and departure: the focus of their disparate gazes remains unclear. We are drawn most immediately to the leftmost figure whose bright red and orange attire stands out amid the predominantly cooler tones of the composition. She is the only one whose body is positioned frontally, allowing a view of her precisely folded hands and upright posture with her legs tucked neatly under. The broad collar and structured silhouette of the figure's red tunic-jacket reflect the newer styles of the *sarong kebaya*, incorporating so-called "Western" fashion elements such as tailored suits for women that had become increasingly popular by the 1960s in Malaya.³⁰ The woman seated across from her wears another style of *kebaya* accessorised with a draped *selendang* and sits with her back to us, a white flower visible behind her ear. Through the contrasts between them, Lai presents the choices of self-fashioning, presentation and agency that were accessible in the period ●FIG.8●. In some ways, the leftmost figure appears to embody an ideal image of the modern Malayan woman through her choice of attire and her confident posture, which evokes the emergence of newer forms of self-expression and opportunities for self-determination. And yet, her sober expression and sideways glance convey a complex inner world. Between them, a young boy looks outward—the difference in his age and gender raising questions about the nature of the relationship between the three figures. Despite their physical proximity and shared status as passengers, they appear to be strangers. The tight framing of the composition offers us no clues as to where



FIG. 8
Fashion, 6 December 1959, issue 304.
Published by R.M. Yusoff on behalf of
HARMY and printed by Al-Ahmadiyah
Press.

they have come from or where they might be going. They are in the midst of crossing—a liminal state of suspension—but one which Lai depicts not through motion or activity. Around them, the water is still. There is a crossing presented through the anticipation of the journey rather than a moment of departure or arrival.

A second version of the painting, *Crossing* (c. 1965) ●PL.2●, offers a variation on the scene. A woman is positioned as the central subject of the painting between two figures with their backs turned. She is clothed in another style of *kebaya*, this time loose-fitting and with a bold geometric pattern. The detailed attention afforded to her fashion and facial features is distinguished against the comparative obscurity of her companions. Their forms rendered with rougher brushstrokes, their *sarongs* lacking attention to material and pattern. They are also shown bare-chested—Lai seemingly aligning them with an almost primitive and stereotyped notion of tradition to emphasise the modernity of the central figure. This more binary presentation contrasts with the first version of the painting, which allows for a more equal distribution of subjecthood across the three figures.

As her self-published catalogue and exhibition history reveal, Lai rarely provided titles for her works beyond describing their genre or subject. That these two works shared a title, *Crossing*, then, bears a particular significance that is worth considering in relation to Lai's artistic production and the historical moment of their creation. It is evident that Lai was actively engaging with questions of style, representation and symbolism. The first version of the painting was exhibited in both Singapore and Malaysia, its circulation across these two countries enacting the very negotiation of identity explored in the paintings and resonating with the experience of transition in a moment of social and historical transformation. The liminal nature of their crossing, betwixt and between arrival and departure, combined with the socio-political timing of their production could have been mere coincidence. And yet, their pointed observations of gender, self-presentation and modernity are tantalising in what they suggest about Lai's own response to a moment where ambiguities and uncertainties were ones she experienced as much as she observed.

These two versions of *Crossing* marked not only a culmination of Lai's success as an artist but also, as it would transpire, the beginning of a decline in her previously regular exhibitions and a gradual withdrawal from the more public dimensions of artistic life. Within the five years since her first solo exhibition in Singapore, she had staged another two in 1960 in Kuala Lumpur and in 1963 in Penang. She had been included in at least ten group exhibitions organised by local

³¹ See artist timeline in this catalogue (p. 82) for a complete listing of Lai's exhibition history.

³² "Campuran anikaliran karya berpadu di 'Contemporary '73,'" *Berita Harian*, December 9, 1973, 5.

³³ Salleh Japar, interviewed by Teo Hui Min, October 30, 2025; Yeo Hoe Koon, interviewed by Teo Hui Min, October 28, 2025; Loh T.S., Tan Teo Kwang and Yeo Hoe Koon, interviewed by Teo Hui Min, March 22, 2022. See Karen Lim, *Imprints on Singapore Art: Works of 40 NAFA Artists* (Singapore Art Museum, 1998), 21–25.

art societies in Singapore, and a further six organised by the National Art Gallery of Malaysia, including their annual National Exhibition series.³¹ However, over the next three decades until her passing in 1995, Lai's work would be featured in group exhibitions fewer than ten times and she would not stage another solo exhibition—a stark contrast to the intensity that had come before. Lai could not have known that *Contemplation* (1966) ●PL.13●, a poignant portrait of a young woman with a modish haircut seated at a writing desk and posed against an overflowing bookcase, would be one of the last works she would publicly exhibit until 1973. When that moment came in a group exhibition organised by the art society Angkatan Pelukis Aneka Daya (APAD), a reviewer remarked upon Lai's painting of a scene of Singapore as an opportunity to see the artist's work after an absence of over five years.³² Lai's apparent retreat saw her dedicating her time to her role as a teacher at NAFA. Recollections from former students and peers recall a quiet and dedicated teacher whose fluency in Malay and limited English particularly endeared her to her non-Chinese students.³³ Her overwhelming legacy at the time of her passing focused on her dedication as an educator, alongside lamentations about a career whose public trajectory seemed to fall short of the promise with which it had begun.

Nevertheless, Lai had in fact continued to paint, and her extant works together with her continued, if sporadic, presence at exhibitions allow us to trace the strategies that persisted and developed throughout her practice.



FIG. 9
Different Thoughts. c.1960s.
Oil on board, 104 × 67 cm.
Collection of Francis Choo.

Across Lai's portraits from 1965 onward, certain formal consistencies become evident, including her sustained attention to fashion and dress, and the recurrence of postures in her sitters: raised elbows, angled bodies and averted gazes. As with the charcoal stick held by the sitter in *Indian Boy*, her female subjects were often depicted with instruments of knowledge and agency, from books to a paintbrush. Many of these portraits also continue Lai's use of carefully staged contrasts to convey nuances in identity, perspective and personhood ●FIG.9●.

These strategies also extended to her portrayal of labourers—another category of individuals within society that held her attention. *Trishaw Rider* (1961) ●PL.17● depicts a trishaw puller playing a nose flute. Lai animates a moment of rest rather than productivity, foregrounding an aspect of his individuality beyond his occupation. This insistence on the particular and personal within the context of a rapidly urbanising Singapore runs across her depictions of working life. In *Labourer (Lunch Break)* (1965) ●PL.16●, the worn lines and expression of the central male figure are carefully

rendered in contrast to the flatter depiction of a samsui worker whose back view and featureless side profile refuse access to any part of her individuality. Although both figures occupy the same eyeline within the composition, their diverging postures allow Lai to suggest a hierarchy of anonymity within a marginal segment of society.

³⁴ The work was displayed as *Pekerja-Pekerja Sun Sui* (Samsui Woman) in the Nanyang Painters Retrospective Exhibition in 1979. The work was published as *Rest* in *Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts 29th Graduation Magazine* (Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, 1969).

Lai gives her full focus to the samsui worker in the painting *Pekerja-Pekerja Sun Sui* (1967), also published as *Rest*.

● FIG. 10 ● —the close detail given to the sitter's gnarled hands and weathered features provides evidence of her life of labour even as she is pictured in a moment of reprieve and contemplation.³⁴ The figure takes on a monumental presence within the proportions of the foreground, Lai seeming to offer a tribute through scale, attention and dignity found through stillness. The robust bamboo shoots in the background evoke, as in classical Chinese painting, associations of strength and resilience, as Lai places her sitter within an imagined landscape of ancestral memory far removed from the place of her work. A version of the painting, *Samsui Woman* ● FIG. 11 ●, places what appears to be the same sitter against that very landscape of her labour through a recognisable view of the Singapore waterfront. Through these two iterations of the composition, Lai could have been considering two different ways of honouring her subject: representing her through the product of her labour or within a more introspective manifestation of what home could mean for her. From the mid-1960s, such figures were themselves becoming increasingly marginal within newly independent Singapore, as the forms of manual labour embodied by samsui women were being phased out with the introduction of new labour regulations, changing

[FROM LEFT TO RIGHT]

FIG. 10
Pekerja-Pekerja Sun Sui (Samsui Worker) (1967) also published as *Rest*. Oil on canvas. 90 × 69.5 cm. Collection of National Art Gallery Malaysia. Reproduced from *Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts 29th Graduation Magazine*.

FIG. 11
Samsui Woman. c. 1960s. Oil on canvas, 103 × 64.5 cm. Private collection. Reproduced from *Nanyang 1950–65: Passage to Singaporean Art* (Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, 2002), 14.



FIG. 12

Chua Mia Tee. *Samsui Women*. 1977. Oil on canvas, 78.2 × 79.6 cm. Gift of Times Publishing Limited.



work conditions and new industrial practices. Rather than depicting labour and labourers as a symbol of collective progress, she reflects on the uncertain place of the individual within societal change.

Such representations ran counter to the prevailing approach of artists such as Chua Mia Tee, whose work as part of the Equator Art Society foregrounded the act of labour as a way to attend to the social conditions of working life

● FIG. 12 ● .³⁵ Where those works made visible the collective circumstances of the labouring class, Lai's depictions maintain an ability to focus on the interior worlds of her subjects while considering their place as individuals within larger society.

This attentiveness to the differentiated experiences of her subjects, even as she sought to convey something symbolic about their role in society, can be seen in the complex spatial and social configurations realised in *Clifford Pier* (c. 1960s)

● FIG. 13 ● . Using the building's distinctive arched trusses to create successive frames for observation, Lai constructs a scene of workers waiting for their day of work to begin. Three figures occupy a bench in the foreground, their hunched, curled, leaning forms bear varying expressions of exhaustion as Lai allows them a reprieve from the comparatively posed postures of her other portraits. Further back, figures lean against the pier's balustrade, their forms handled with greater economy as they observe the landscape that recedes into the middle distance. Here, it is not only their state of rest which is presented as a space for attention. The urban

³⁵ Clarissa Chikiamco and Lim Shujuan, *Chua Mia Tee: Directing the Real*, exh. cat. (National Gallery Singapore, 2022).

environment itself—the pier as a site of arrival and departure, and the framed view of the waterfront—is presented as a liminal space within which these individual lives unfold.

³⁶ Hazel Andrews and Les Roberts, "Introduction: Re-mapping liminality," in *Liminal Landscapes: Travel, Experience and Spaces In-between* (Routledge, 2012), 1–17.

In this way, Lai's attention to the liminal as a compositional strategy and as an assertion of individuality in her subjects also extended to the environments they inhabited. Her urban landscapes, through contrasts and angled perspectives, present liminal spaces and generate a palpable ambiguity about the unfolding development of the modern city.

In *A View of Lion City Singapore* (c. 1970s) ●PL. 23●, an aerial view traces a progression from low-rise shophouses to new concrete constructions rising in the distance. And yet, Lai includes on the left side of the composition an expanse of forest whose exaggerated proportions exceed the height of the tallest building in the painting, pressing insistently against the sides of the buildings without relief. Presenting a tension between the natural and built environment, Lai's forest crowds into the city and cannot be neatly contained. In contrast to more conventional images of Singapore's cityscape that the immediate post-independence period typically evokes—bustling street scenes, a lively Singapore River—Lai articulates an almost unsettling atmosphere of absence. Her city is almost devoid of life and scenes from across Singapore and Malaysia portray pronounced emptiness. Even paintings of religious sites such as temples and mosques suggest a stillness that is more unsettling than devotional, and where collective experience can equally translate anonymity as it does community. One might understand Lai's expression of moving through a rapidly changing landscape as one that comprises solitude and even alienation.³⁶

FIG. 13
Early Morning Clifford Pier (Hong Deng Jetty). c. 1960s. Oil on canvas, 107 × 67 cm. Private collection. Reproduced from *Six Artists* (Six Artists, 1994), 67.



When read alongside her representation of labourers and her intimate portraits of female sitters, these distant views of the city indicate Lai's attunement to how marginal identities at the intersection of gender and labour might be experienced and negotiated within broader social narratives of progress and development. If the passengers in *Crossing* inhabit a moment of anticipation in the face of ossifying national boundaries, the samsui worker is caught between the place of her labour and the ancestral home of her memory. Lai's carefully staged scenes produce spaces within which the questions raised by these complex positions can be held and untangled, if not resolved.

Belonging

Lai Foong Moi's withdrawal from the art world after 1965 is often interpreted as a decline. Yet such readings largely depend on the frameworks that initially enabled her visibility. For instance, the privileging of the figure of the "Malayan-born woman artist" after the term lost relevance, the conditions of a newly independent Singapore and when her circulation, as a "woman" artist or as a professional artist more generally, would have required the cultivation of networks and relationships that she may not have been inclined towards. Although her work was collected in her lifetime by national institutions across Singapore and Malaysia, she was not inducted into the canon of "Pioneer Artists" in the same way as many of her peers despite taking on Singaporean citizenship after the country's independence.³⁷

While it is difficult to truly pinpoint a reason for Lai's withdrawal from public life, a moving tribute from a NAFA colleague, Tan Tee Chie, suggested her focus on teaching as a main reason, but also Lai's apparent lack of interest in following the perceived markers for artistic success: "Sacrificing personal fame, gain and much of her own creative time, she painted less so that she could teach more. Withdrawing from the public eye within the art world, she channelled her entire focus into instruction and quiet creation... Onlookers unaware of the reality misconstrued her retreat from public exhibitions as a total abandonment of her brush. She merely scoffed at such superficial gossip, deeming it unworthy of investigation or response, for she truly had no time to waste on idle chatter."³⁸

³⁷ Lai's citizenship status was verified through personal correspondence between Teo Hui Min and Lai's family, April 2, 2026.

³⁸ Chen Zhuang (pen name of Tan Tee Chie, fellow artist and teacher at NAFA), "Dao nian lai feng mei," *Lianhe Zaobao*, August 30, 1995, 37. Translated by Verztec Consulting Pte. Ltd.

Rather than fixating on the relative success of her artistic career and the categories that have defined her, this essay proposes how Lai's practice and biography can be more productively understood through the lens of liminality. Across her paintings, these figures, spaces and compositional structures are held in states of suspension, resisting resolution and refusing stable categorisation.

In doing so, Lai's works complicate the very terms through which her practice has been historically interpreted, unsettling the categories of Malayan, Nanyang and School of Paris that have sought to contain it. Her sustained attention to her subjects offers a distinctive perspective on the formation of identity during the uncertain and transformative postcolonial and pre-independence period in Singapore and Malaya. The thresholds and moments of crossing in her paintings register how identity is shaped not only by shifting borders and official designations but also through the continuous negotiation of belonging. In constructing visual representations of liminality, Lai's paintings provide space for the exploration of identity, reflecting the broader social and historical conditions of her time.

Artworks



PL. 3

Three Apples on a Table. 1951.

Oil on canvas, 100 × 74 cm.

Collection of National Library, Singapore.



PL . 4

Still Life. c. 1955–1958.

Oil on canvas, 130 × 97 cm.

Gift of the Loke Wan Tho Collection.



PL. 5

Still Life. 1957.

Oil on canvas, 130 × 96.8 cm.



PL . 6
Nude. 1958.
Oil on canvas, 115 × 80.5 cm.



PL . 7

Nude. 1956.

Oil on canvas, 100 × 72 cm.

Private collection.



PL . 8

Nude. 1956.

Oil on canvas, 100 × 50 cm.

Collection of Francis Choo.



PL . 9

Lady. 1966.

Oil on canvas, 100 × 54 cm.

Collection of Dr. and Mrs. Tan Chong Guan.



PL . 10

Painting Class. 1967.

Oil on canvas, 90 × 60 cm.

Private collection.



PL .11

Portrait of YTM Tun Sharifah (Sharifah Rodziah). 1960.

Oil on canvas, 88 × 64.4 cm.



PL . 12

Young Girl. 1969.

Oil on canvas, 111 × 81 cm.

Private collection.



PL . 13

Contemplation. 1966.

Oil on canvas, 76 × 65.5 cm.

Collection of Dr. and Mrs. Tan Chong Guan.



PL . 14

Woman and Child. 1966.

Oil on canvas, 83 × 66 cm.

Private collection.



PL . 15

Still Life. 1968.

Oil on canvas, 106 × 75 cm.

Private collection.



PL . 16

Labourer (Lunch Break). 1965.

Oil on canvas, 104 × 67 cm.

This work has been collectively adopted by [Adopt Now] supporters.



PL. 17

Trishaw Rider. 1961.

Oil on canvas, 75.3 × 48 cm.

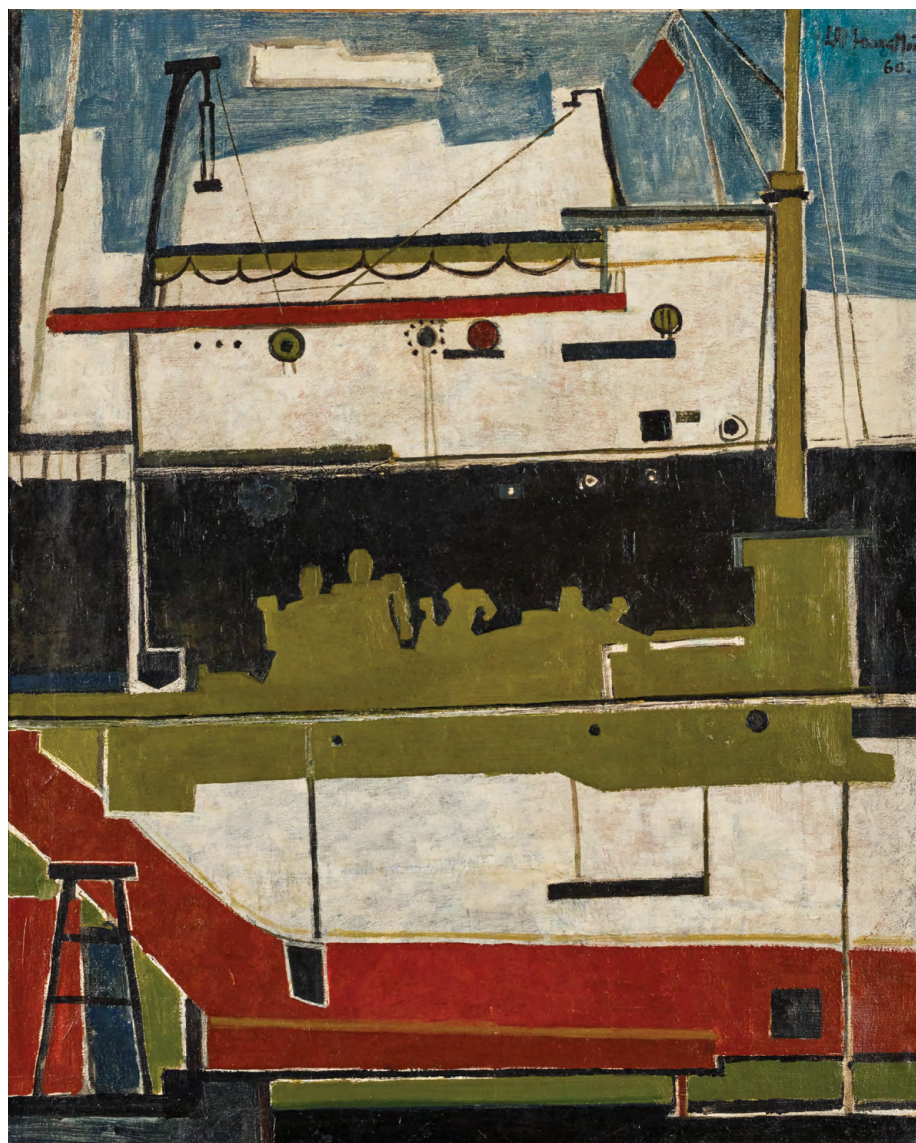


PL . 18

Shipyards Workers Taking a Break. 1959.

Oil on canvas, 76 × 56 cm.

Collection of Linda Neo and Albert Lim.



PL.19

Repairing. 1960.

Oil on canvas, 81.5 × 65 cm.



PL . 20

Prayer. c. 1970s.

Oil on canvas, 67.5 × 112 cm.

Private collection.



PL . 21

Mha Zhe Temple. 1970.

Oil on canvas, 77×105 cm.



PL . 22

Singapore Street Scene (Looking along Victoria Street with the Convent Chapel in the Corner). 1958.

Oil on canvas, 65 × 89.5 cm.

Collection of National Library, Singapore.



PL . 23

A View of Lion City Singapore (Aerial View). 1974.

Oil on canvas, 80 × 110 cm.

Private collection.



PL . 24

Musicians. c. 1960s.

Oil on canvas, 53 × 99 cm.

Private collection.



PL . 25

Morning Street, Malacca. 1959.

Oil on canvas, 52 × 99 cm.

Private collection.

Selected Archives





● ●
Lai with her graduating class. Back row (left to right): 吳如柏 (Wu Rubo)、
李顯啟 (Li Xianqi)、許朝泉 (Xu Chaoquan)、方俊榮 (Fang Junrong)、
吳永平 (Wu Yongping)、方質偉 (Fang Zhiwei)。

Front row (left to right): 何遠鋒 (He Yuanfeng)、陳翼如 (Chen Yiru)、
蔡加忠 (Cai Jiazhong)、賴鳳美 (Lai Foong Moi)、柯世實 (Ke Shishi)。

Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts Graduation Magazine, 1954.

Reproduction, 2026. Image courtesy of Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts,
University of the Arts Singapore.



Lai with her classmates.

Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts Graduation Magazine, 1954. Reproduction, 2026. Images courtesy of Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, University of the Arts Singapore.







● ●

[TOP]

Lai left Singapore by ship on 5 May 1955 to further her education at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris. As detailed in this article, NAFA hosted a tea party to bid her farewell.

Source: *Nanyang Shang Bao*, May 6, 1955.
© SPH Media Limited. Permission required for reproduction.

[RIGHT]

Lai in Paris, 1955.

Digitised by National Gallery Singapore Library & Archive with kind permission from the artist's family.





While in Paris, Lai contributed works to salons including that of the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts, Société des Artistes Français and the Société des Artistes Indépendants. The works she submitted included nudes, landscapes from her travels and still life compositions.

Reproduced from *Lai Foong Moi* (Self-published, 1960).



Lai painting in Germany, 1955. She also travelled to England, Netherlands, Spain, Italy and Greece.

Digitised by National Gallery Singapore Library & Archive with kind permission from the artist's family.

Il y a quelques années, arrivait à PARIS,
dans mon atelier de l'Ecole des Beaux Arts,
une jeune fille timide et charmante qui
venait de très loin. Elle avait la passion
de la Peinture, des dons exceptionnels et une
gentillesse qui lui valait d'être acceptée
tout de suite, avec une vive sympathie, par
tous les "anciens" de l'atelier.

Elle s'appelait Laila. Tout moi et
devenait simplement moi pour tout le monde.
— Courageuse, assidue, volontaire, elle
surpassait vite tous mes élèves et étrangers,
rejoignant les meilleures récompenses,
sans discussion possible.

Pendant trois ans, je suivis ses
efforts et ses luttas, j'assistais à ses
progrès constants et je voyais, avec
quelle satisfaction et quel plaisir,
se développer son intelligence des problèmes
de la peinture, son esprit s'élever à les comprendre
à les vaincre. Ses réussites se succédaient
de plus en plus nombreuses et elle
avait acquis, sa force de travail, l'estime
et la sincère admiration de tous
ses camarades.

Et voici que notre petite moi
est repartie vers sa ~~maison natale~~
merveilleuse Malaisie loin des douces
brumes de la Seine loin du tendre
ciel de l'Ile-de-France. Voici que sa
véritable carrière de peintre commence.

Je sais qu'elle sera brillante, car
je sais ses dons, son tempérament, son
œil de peintre, son courage et son
intelligence. Elle peut tout
aborder avec un égal bonheur. Elle
excellera dans la figure humaine où
elle sait introduire un style, qui est
très à elle, à la fois nerveux, simple
et sensible et j'ai le souvenir de
magnifiques natures-mortes, solides
et pures qui sont des œuvres de
grande qualité.

Je souhaite que votre beau
et sympathique pays, ma chère
Moi, accueille comme il le
mérite, votre talent qui a su
s'élancer profondément à Paris
sans perdre son caractère
national et la marque de sa race.
C'est une grande et officielle
qualité et c'est ce qui me donne
la plus absolue confiance dans
votre réussite.

(Lapetain Muriel)



A few years ago, in my studio at École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, a shy and charming young girl arrived from very far away. She had a passion for painting, exceptional gifts and a kindness that made her be accepted immediately with great sympathy by all the “old timers” of the studio.

Her name was Lai Foong Moi and simply became Moi for everyone. Courageous, diligent, willing, she quickly surpassed all my foreign students, winning the best awards, without a doubt.

For three years, I followed her efforts and struggles; I watched her constant progress and I saw, with such satisfaction and pleasure, the development of her understanding of the complexities of painting, her tenacity to understand them, to overcome them. The successes followed one after another until she had acquired, through her relentless hard work, the esteem and the sincere admiration of all her classmates. And our small Moi left again towards her marvellous Malaysia, far from the soft mists of the Seine, far from the tender sky of ‘Île-de-France.’ That is when her true career as a painter began. I know that she will be brilliant, because I know her gifts, her temperament, her painterly eye, her courage and her intelligence. She can approach everything with equal happiness. She excels in the human figure where she knows how to introduce a style, which is very unique, at the same time lively, simple and sensitive and I have the memory of her magnificent still life, solid and pure, works of great quality.

I wish that your beautiful and warm country, my dear Moi, welcomes you, as it deserves your talent that has been able to enrich itself deeply in Paris without losing its national character, and the distinctive essence of your cultural heritage. It is what gives me the absolute confidence in your success.

Roger Chapelain-Midy, Lai's teacher at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris.
Translated from French by Verztec Consulting Pte. Ltd. and reproduced from *Lai Foong Moi* (Self-published, 1960).

MINISTER OPENS EXHIBITION BY ARTIST

SINGAPORE, Thurs. — The first exhibition of a woman artist, Miss Lai Foong Moi, was today declared open by the Minister of Culture, Mr. S. Rajaratnam, at the Victoria Memorial Hall.

In his speech, Mr. Rajaratnam said that it was the duty of the Government, and especially the Ministry of Culture, to encourage such exhibitions.

He also said that the Ministry would make "a more positive gesture" in this direction.

Earlier, the President of the Singapore Art Society, Mr. Ho Kok Hoe, said Miss Lai's works reflected her "innate ability and also her sense of poetry."

The exhibition will be open daily from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. until July 19.

[TOP]

Source: "Minister Opens Exhibitions By Artist," *The Straits Times*, July 17, 1959,
© SPH Media Limited. Permission required for reproduction.

[RIGHT AND NEXT SPREAD]

Lai held her first solo exhibition featuring 86 works in Malaya in 1959.
The exhibition was sponsored by the Singapore Art Society.

Collection of National Museum of Singapore.

新加坡藝術協會主辦



賴鳳美女士個展

SINGAPORE ART SOCIETY
PRESENTS AN EXHIBITION
OF PAINTINGS BY

Lai Foong Moi



TO BE OPENED BY THE
MINISTER FOR CULTURE,
MR. S. RAJARATNAM,
AT 5.30 P.M. ON THURSDAY,
16TH JULY 1959,
AT THE
VICTORIA MEMORIAL HALL
SINGAPORE, 6.

Kata Pendahuluan

Kesatuan Kesenian Singapura akan menganjorkan satu pertunjukan seni lukis chiptaan Miss Lai Foong Moi, sa-orang wanita peranakan Malaya yang jolong2 kali menunjukan semua sakali gambar2 lukisan-nya dalam satu pertunjukan khas.

Dipandang dari lukisan2 Miss Lai ini dengan saksama, maka ada-lah menunjukan jika ada kesungguhan dan keyakinan yang mendalam pada diri wanita2 yang mempelajari seni lukis, maka ada harapan untok mereka mendapat kejayaan yang gemilang bagi lukisan2 chiptaan-nya.

Kebolehan-nya melukis dalam segala bentuk rupa pemandangan yang bermutu sungguh mengagumkan. Warna2 yang di-padankan dalam lukisan-nya juga amat menarik hati. Kebolehan-nya yang luar biasa ini jarang2 boleh kita dapati di-kalangan pelukis2 di-Singapura ini.

Sa-orang wanita yang kerap mempamirkan lukisan2-nya di-pertunjukan lukisan di Paris, maka kita ada-lah mengalu2 kan, dan menyambut dengan hati yang tulus dan berbangga, akan ke-datangan Miss Lai masuk ka-dalam kumpulan Seni Lukis Singapura, yang sekarang sedang giat berusaha untok meninggikan darjah perlukis2 Singapura di-dalam dunia ka-senian.

HO KOK HOE

President, Singapore Art Society.

Foreword

The Singapore Art Society sponsors with pride and pleasure this exhibition of works by Lai Foong Moi — the first one-man show to be given by a Malayan-born lady artist.

Miss Lai demonstrates very convincingly that Malayan women can, with training, attain the apex of artistic greatness.

Her works show an all-round technical competence of a very high standard. Her bold yet sensitive brush, combined with a keen sense of colour harmony, imparts a distinction to her canvasses which set them apart from the general run of paintings we see in Singapore.

A well-known exhibitor in the finest salons of Pairs, Miss Lai is a welcome addition to the nucleus of better artists who are placing Singapore on the world map of painting.

HO KOK HOE,

President, Singapore Art Society.

前 序

星架坡藝術協會主席

何 國 豪

星架坡藝術協會覺得驕傲和愉快能夠主辦第一次本地出生的女畫家——賴鳳美女士——的畫展。

從賴女士的作品，可以證明本地有才能的女子，假如能夠得到適當的訓練，可以爬上藝術之塔之最高峯。

她的作品，表現出完美，到家，水準很高的藝術技巧，她的大胆和充溢了感情的筆法，加以顏色的和諧，是在星加坡藝壇上不大常見的。

她的作品，曾在巴黎著名的沙龍展出，賴女士將在星加坡畫壇上之重要人才——將星加坡藝術刻在世界藝術地圖上。

目錄

Catalogue

NO.	名稱 TITLE	價目 PRICE	NO.	名稱 TITLE	價目 PRICE
1	Athens (Oil) 雅典城 油畫	Not for Sale	41	Merdeka Bridge, Singapore (Oil) 獨立橋 油畫	\$ 250
2	Fishing Village, Penang (Oil) 檳城魚村 油畫	\$ 300	42	Malay Kampong, Penang (Oil) 馬來甘榜 油畫	300
3	Tongkang (Oil) 帆船 油畫	350	43	Malay New Year (Oil) 馬來新年 油畫	180
4	Village of Mykonos, Greece (Oil) 米克諾斯村 (希臘) 油畫	350	44	Nets (Oil) 網 (油畫)	160
5	San Sebastian (Oil) 西班牙海景 油畫	400	45	Behind the Fence (Oil) 籬笆後 油畫	185
6	Portrait (Oil) 人像 油畫	Not for Sale	46	Aden (Oil) 亞丁 油畫	350
7	Indian Curry workers (Oil) 檳咖哩之印婦工人 油畫	3500	47	Street of Singapore (Oil) 新加坡街景 油畫	400
8	Sea side, Greece (Oil) 海景 (希臘) 油畫	400	48	Lonely Hut (Oil) 孤寂的茅舍 油畫	150
9	Moulin of Mykonos, Greece (Oil) 希臘 油畫	400	49	Padi field (Oil) 稻田 油畫	150
10	Nets at Batomow, Penang 網 油畫	1300	50	Sunset (Oil) 夕陽 油畫	150
11	Air View from Village of Mykonos Greece 俯瞰米克諾斯村 油畫	350	51	Tongkang (Oil) 船 油畫	450
12	Still Life (Oil) 靜物 油畫	1000	52	Siong Lim Temple 雙林寺	150
13	Still Life (Oil) 紅毛丹	300	53	Interior 室內	150
14	Still Life (Oil) 石膏人	1200	54	Through the Car 車廂	150
15	Still Life (Oil) 瓶與壺	1400	55	Dawn 日出	150
16	Still Life (Oil) 瓶與菓	600	56	Sunset 黃昏	150
17	Still Life (Oil) 窗前	600	57	By the Stream 河畔	150
18	Still Life (Oil) 瓶與桔花	600	58	Shipyards, Singapore 船塢	350
19	Still Life (Oil) 靜物	1000	59	Ancient Town of Greece 古達薩 (希臘)	350
20	Flowers (Oil) 花	400	60	Temple, Singapore 廟 (新加坡)	300
21	Models (Oil) 1. 模特兒 油畫	1300	61	Junks 帆船 (新加坡)	250
22	Models (Oil) 2. 模特兒	400	62	Flowers 花	400
23	Models (Oil) 3. 模特兒	1300	63	Still Life with Prawn 龍蝦	400
24	Models (Oil) 4. 模特兒	1300	64	Indian Curry Workers (Oil) 檳加厘之印婦工人 原稿	Not for Sale
25	Models (Oil) 5. 模特兒	1300	65	Tongkang (Oil) 船 油畫	300
26	Madrid, Spain (Oil) 西班牙首府 油畫	300	66	Still Life (Oil) 靜物 油畫	180
27	Lambili, Greece (Oil) 希臘 油畫	400	67	Landscape (Oil) 風景 油畫	200
28	Florence, Italy (Oil) 意大利 油畫	1200	68	Attap house (Oil) 亞答屋 油畫	200
29	Street Corner, Paris (Oil) 巴黎的一角 油畫	300	69	Still Life (Oil) 靜物 油畫	200
30	Geylang, Singapore (Oil) 芽籠 油畫	280	70	Scenery, Port Said (Oil) 風景	250
31	Picking Betel Nut Penang (Oil) 選檳榔 油畫	350	71	Malay Mosque (Oil) 馬來廟	250
32	"Little Peninsula of Mykonos" Greece (Oil) "小半島" (希臘) 油畫	400	72	Paya Lebar (Oil) 峇雅利峇村	250
33	Hut Penang (Oil) 水上人家 油畫	350	73	Sea side, Penang (Oil) 檳城海邊	300
34	Athens (Oil) 雅典希臘首都 油畫	400	74	Bridge, Penang (Oil) 拉林橋	300
35	Changi Village, Singapore (Oil) 章宜村 油畫	250	75	Repairing Junks (Oil) 修理船 油畫	200
36	Old Church, Greece (Oil) 希臘古教堂 油畫	300	76	Water Front (Oil) 岸	180
37	Lambili Sea side Greece (Oil) 希臘之海景 油畫	350	77	Portrait 肖像	Not for Sale
38	Chinese Temple, Penang (Oil) 極樂寺 (檳城) 油畫	400	78	Landscape (Oil) 風景	250
39	Drying Nets, Penang (Oil) 晒網 (檳城) 油畫	250	79	Sketch (The Nude) 速寫 模特兒	Not for Sale
40	Singapore River (Oil) 新加坡河 油畫	250	80	Sketch (The Nude) 速寫 模特兒	"
			81	Sketch (The Nude) " " "	"
			82	Sketch (The Nude) " " "	"
			83	Sketch (The Nude) " " "	"
			84	Sketch (The Nude) " " "	"
			85	Sketch (The Nude) " " "	"
			86	Sketch (The Nude) " " "	"

Reporting on Lai's first solo exhibition in Malaya, this article details Lai's achievements in Europe and praises the works displayed in the exhibition, stating, "among these many works executed with meticulous attention to detail, one will find it not difficult to discern the emergence of a distinct and mature artistic voice."

An appraisal of Lai's artistic philosophy is also recorded: "Just as in her personal character, she is sincere, earnest and thoroughly grounded, neither aiming for the unattainable nor seeking novelty for its own sake. She strives solely with realism and dedication, never squandering her energy or talent. She approaches her creations with the same seriousness that she applies to her work and daily life. Never conceited despite her gifts, she refuses to indulge in the decadence, romanticism, opportunism or pursuit of unearned fame so frequently seen among beginners who have yet to cross the threshold of the temple of art... In this exhibition, viewers will appreciate that none of the displayed works was executed in a casual or careless manner; rather, every single canvas is the fruit of painstaking composition and devotion."

Source: *Nanyang Shang Bao*, July 14, 1959.

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藝協主辦·文化部長親臨主持

賴鳳美女士畫展開幕

拉惹勒南強調畫家可協助建立馬來亞意識

即日起公開展覽至十九日止

本坡文化部長拉惹勒南，昨(廿二)日親臨主持賴鳳美女士畫展開幕禮。拉氏在致詞時，強調畫家可協助建立馬來亞意識，並對畫家之貢獻表示欽佩。拉氏指出，畫家不僅是藝術的創造者，更是社會的觀察者。他們的作品能反映社會的真實面貌，並喚起公眾對社會問題的關注。拉氏表示，政府將繼續支持藝術發展，並為藝術家提供展示作品的平台。賴鳳美女士在致詞時，感謝文化部長及藝協的邀請，並表示此次展覽是她多年藝術創作的結晶。她希望透過此次展覽，能與觀眾分享她的創作心得，並激發大眾對藝術的興趣。展覽將展出賴女士的多幅作品，包括風景畫、人物畫及抽象畫等。展覽地點為拉惹勒南畫廊，歡迎各界人士前往參觀。

文化部長致開幕詞

拉惹勒南文化部長在開幕禮上致詞，強調畫家可協助建立馬來亞意識。他指出，藝術是文化的重要組成部分，而畫家則是文化的傳承者和創造者。在致詞中，拉氏提到，此次展覽不僅是賴鳳美女士個人藝術成就的展示，更是馬來亞藝術發展的一個縮影。他呼籲社會大眾給予藝術家更多的支持和鼓勵，共同推動馬來亞藝術事業的發展。拉氏還提到，政府將致力於營造一個良好的藝術生態，為藝術家提供創作和展示的空間。他相信，透過政府、藝協和社會各界的共同努力，馬來亞的藝術事業一定能取得長足的進步。

賴鳳美女士在致詞時，感謝文化部長及藝協的邀請，並表示此次展覽是她多年藝術創作的結晶。她希望透過此次展覽，能與觀眾分享她的創作心得，並激發大眾對藝術的興趣。展覽將展出賴女士的多幅作品，包括風景畫、人物畫及抽象畫等。展覽地點為拉惹勒南畫廊，歡迎各界人士前往參觀。



文化部長拉惹勒南(右)為賴鳳美女士個展主持開幕禮後，由藝協主席何國豪(中)與賴女士(左)陪同參觀展覽會作品。

Reporting on the opening ceremony for Lai's 1959 exhibition, the article provides details on Minister for Culture, S. Rajaratnam's speech: "the Minister for Culture, Mr S. Rajaratnam, stated that according to the exhibition catalogue, this showcase by Ms Lai Foong Moi marked the very first solo exhibition held by a locally born woman artist. He noted that it was also the first exhibition to be officially opened by the Ministry of Culture... Mr Rajaratnam stated that the mission of the Ministry of Culture was to encourage local artists, enabling them to deepen their understanding of our great, vibrant city and strengthen their shared identity with our nation. He pointed out that painters, in particular, were uniquely positioned to help foster what is commonly termed a "Malayan Consciousness." Unlike writers, an artist employs a visual language and medium that can be comprehended by anyone with sight and a modicum of awareness. For this reason, he expressed great pleasure in introducing Ms Lai to a public audience far broader than her immediate circle of friends and academy students."

Source: *Nanyang Shang Bao*, July 17, 1959.

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Between 1959 and 1966, Lai contributed her work to over ten exhibitions across Singapore and Malaysia.

Pameran Lukisan Negara Yang Ketiga (Third National Exhibition), National Art Gallery, Malaysia, 1960. Digitised by National Gallery Singapore Library & Archive.



*Miss
LAI FOONG
MOI
dari
Seremban*

“Budak India”

“Indian Boy”



聯合邦藝術協會主辦的賴鳳美女士個人西洋畫展覽會，昨日下午在吉隆坡英國文化協會由荷蘭駐馬公使高羅佩博士主持開幕。圖為賴女士和她的作品之一「少女」。

(趙蘭英攝)



荷駐馬公使高羅佩博士主持 賴鳳美畫展開幕禮

〔吉隆坡廿七日訊〕荷蘭駐馬公使高羅佩博士，於今日下午五時半，在本坡英國文化協會主持馬來亞女畫家賴鳳美西洋畫展的開幕典禮，蒞場觀禮的藝術界人士極為踴躍。賴女士畫展是由聯合邦藝術協會所主辦，總數五十七幅，都是反映現實，充滿熱帶風光的寫實作品，椰風蕉雨的景緻在畫幅上流露，多情少女的青春氣息，也流露無遺。她的作品表現出優美的造詣，是一名極有前途的女畫家。

賴女士畫展會將一連開放九天，歡迎公衆人士參觀。

This article reports on Lai's solo exhibition organised by Federation of Malaya Arts Council and held at the British Council, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Robert van Gulik, Netherlands Ambassador to the Federation of Malaya, opened the exhibition.

Source: *Nanyang Shang Bao*, April 28, 1960.

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Preface to Lai Foong Moi's Painting Collection

Lee Singko

April 1959, Singapore

Critics and commentators on Western painting, captivated by fleeting trends, frequently delight in seeking novelty for its own sake. They seldom delve deeply into the intrinsic artistic value of a work; instead, their appraisal invariably begins by categorising it into schools. Those adhering more closely to realism are dismissed as conventional or vulgar, whilst those verging on abstraction are lauded as the “new school.” Under the influence of this prevailing climate, the art world is awash with grand claims of Futurism, Cubism, Fauvism and Expressionism—empty rhetoric that flows without regard for practical reality. Even young beginners, whose foundational training in sketching plaster casts remain incomplete, frequently preen themselves on what they boastfully term “bold experimentation.” Works masquerading as abstraction flood the art world, populated by opportunistic individuals seeking nothing but empty renown. To an objective onlooker, this is precisely a fin-de-siècle phenomenon within the art community—utterly devoid of merit.

Ms Lai Foong Moi graduated from the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts in our city and subsequently went to France for advanced studies. Prior to her departure, when she was preparing to travel widely, I apprised her of the true conditions faced by foreign artists studying in Paris. Deeply moved by this, Ms Lai, upon her arrival in France, resolutely went against the vulgar trends of the day. Refusing to indulge in a superficial, whirlwind tour as a mere casual observer, she formally enrolled in an academy, devoted herself heart and soul to her practice and endured three years of rigorous study. Her achievements are considerable and the works compiled in this collection serve as a stellar testament to her success.

Regarding the art of painting, I must humbly confess to being a mere layman. Yet, in admiring the lady's works, I am profoundly struck by her natural brilliance and consummate craftsmanship. Spurning fashionable preferences, she has forged her own distinctive style, achieving a distinction that is truly remarkable. It is my earnest hope and expectation for her. Might the Nanyang art world usher in a completely fresh style because of her? I shall watch for it with eager anticipation.

As Ms Lai's art collection is about to go to print, she requested a preface from me. Amid my countless obligations, I could scarcely find the time to do her justice, and have thus merely set down these few brief words.

Translated from Mandarin by Verztec Consulting Pte. Ltd. and reproduced from *Lai Foong Moi* (Self-published, 1960).

2 paintings by woman for show

SINGAPORE, Sat. — A large (9ft. by 3½ft.) oil painting of the Singapore waterfront as seen from Tanjong Rhu has been accepted for exhibition during the National Day celebrations next month.

It is the work of Miss Lai Foong Moi, a promising young artist who was born in Seremban.

Another of her paintings — "Hari Raya" — has also been accepted for the National Day exhibition.

Miss Lai is the first Malayan-born woman artist to hold "one-man" exhibitions of her work in Singapore and the Federation.

From age of ten

She has held similar exhibitions in European cities, including Paris and Athens.

She started painting at the age of ten, and is very grateful for the assistance and encouragement her parents gave her.

"They were very understanding; without their help I would never have made it," she said.

She had her early training at the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts in Singapore. In 1955 she went to Paris and studied at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux Arts for three years.

She was awarded the French Government art scholarship, and her paintings were regularly exhibited at the Société Nationale des Beaux Arts, the Société des Artistes Français, and the Salon des Indépendants.

She travelled extensively in England, the Low Countries, Germany, Spain, Italy and Greece, painting where ever she went.

Miss Lai is now teaching



Miss Lai Foong Moi

at the school from which she graduated five years ago — the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts.

On her return from Europe last year, she held an exhibition sponsored by the Singapore Art Society.

She has gone on tours of Malaya, Sarawak and North Borneo to paint landscapes and people.

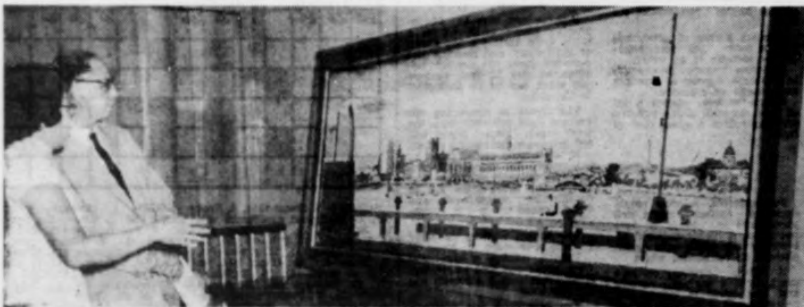
After her exhibition at the British Council Hall in Kuala Lumpur early this month, she was commissioned to paint a portrait of Puan Sharifah Rodziah, wife of the Federation Prime Minister, Tengku Abdul Rahman.

Three sittings

The painting, done in three sittings, now hangs at the sixth annual Malayan artists' exhibition at the British Council Hall in Kuala Lumpur. The exhibition is sponsored by the Arts Council.

In August she will begin on a portrait of Puan Rahmah binti Haji Mohamed Noh, wife of the Deputy Prime Minister, Tun Abdul Razak bin Hussein.

One of her paintings — a portrait of a "Malayan Girl" — has been bought by the Arts Council for the Federation National Gallery of Art.



Miss Lai Foong Moi with one of her paintings "The Singapore Waterfront."

Source: "2 paintings by woman for show,"
The Straits Times, May 22, 1960.

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Paris-trained Foong Moi to hold her own art show



PENANG, Sat. — One of Malaya's most promising women artists, Miss Lal Foong Moi, 31, will hold an exhibition of her paintings, done in Europe and South-East Asia, at the City Hall here tomorrow.

The exhibition will be opened by the Governor, Raja Tun Uda, at 11 a.m.

Seremban-born Miss Lal is a graduate of the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris where she studied for three years for her special diploma in oil painting.

She was awarded the French Government Art Scholarship and also received honourable mention in the French Society of Arts 1957 Salon exhibition.

Miss Lal's paintings reflect her love of nature and the simple things in life.

The first

She was the first woman artist to hold her own show in Singapore and the Federation. She has also staged similar exhibitions in Paris and Athens.

During her stay in Paris, Miss Lal was a regular exhibitor at the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts, the Société des Artistes Français and the Salon des Indépendants.

She has travelled extensively in Europe. Wherever she went, she recorded her visits in oil.

Miss Lal started to draw at the age of 10 when she was studying in the Chi Hwa School in Seremban. She left for Europe in 1954 to study in Paris and returned to Malaya in 1958.

She hopes to be able to visit the United States to paint and to exhibit.

Source: "Paris-trained Foong Moi to hold tier own art show,"
The Straits Times, March 17, 1963.

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Crossing featured in Singapore Art Society's 16th Annual Exhibition, Victoria Memorial Hall, Singapore, 1965.

Gift of Chen Chi Sing @ Tan Chay Lee.
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PAMERAN KARYA SENI YANG KE-16 OLEH PELUKIS* TEMPATAN
新加坡藝術協會主辦第十六屆美展

SINGAPORE
ART
SOCIETY

16th
exhibition
of
works
by
local
artists

VICTORIA MEMORIAL HALL,
SINGAPORE,
APRIL 3 TO 9, 1965

OFFICIALLY OPENED BY
THE MINISTER FOR CULTURE,
THE HONORABLE,
MR. S. RAJARATNAM

SELECTION COMMITTEE
HO KOK HOE CHIRION
CHEN CHONG SWEE
CHEN WEN HSI
CHIA WAI HON
CHEONG SOO PIENG
KWAN SAI KHEONG
LIM YEW KUAN

EXHIBITION ORGANISER
CHOY WENG YANG

HOONG, W. S.
79. Seal-Carving
KAM ZIN-CHHOON
80. The Pianist
81. The Artist
KAW, J. H.
82. Urban Shower
KENG BENG CHING
83. Young Girl
84. View
85. Catching Lice
86. Birds and Flowers
87. Frow
KHOO BOON SENG
88. Strife
KO WAN WONG
89. Landscape
KOH HONG YANG
90. Meditation
KOH LEE LEE
91. Two Sisters
92. Bullock Cart and Goats
KONG YEW CHEONG
93. Singapore River 1
94. Singapore River 2
95. Junks
KWAN SAI KHEONG
96. Dato Lee Kong Chian
LAI FOONG HOI
97. Crossing
98. Zaina
LAING MANSZE
99. Rambutan
100. Lotus
LE CHEK WEN
101. After the Rain
102. Fishing Corner
LEE CHOON KEE
103. Chinese Temple



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SIM CHOONG SENG

- 181. Ruins
- 182. Fishing Village
- 183. Kelong in Trengganu

SIM KERN TECK

- S 184. Black Cats
- 185. Cats
- 186. Malay Kampong

SIM PANG LIANG

- 187. Market

SING MENG PONG

- 188. Fishing Ground

SWEETMAN, NELMORE

- 189. Dyak Longhouse

TAN ANG CHO

- 190. People

TAN CHOO KUAN

- 191. Landscape
- 192. Singapore River Bank

TAN CHOON GHEE

- 193. Dusk

TAN, G. K.

- 194. Freedom
- 195. Red Sun

TAN KOK KEW

- 196. Landscape I
- 197. Landscape II

TAN, Dr. NALLA

- 198. Skyline at Dusk

TAN PEK CHENG

- 199. Carrying Water
- 200. Walking
- S 201. Serenity
- 202. Boats

TAN PING CHIANG

- 203. Morning
- 204. Afternoon
- 205. Kite

TAN SIEW HONG

- 206. House on Water

TAN TEE CHIE

- S 207. Birds
- 208. Playing
- 209. The Silent Sky

TAN SOO THIAM

- 210. Landscape

TAN TONG

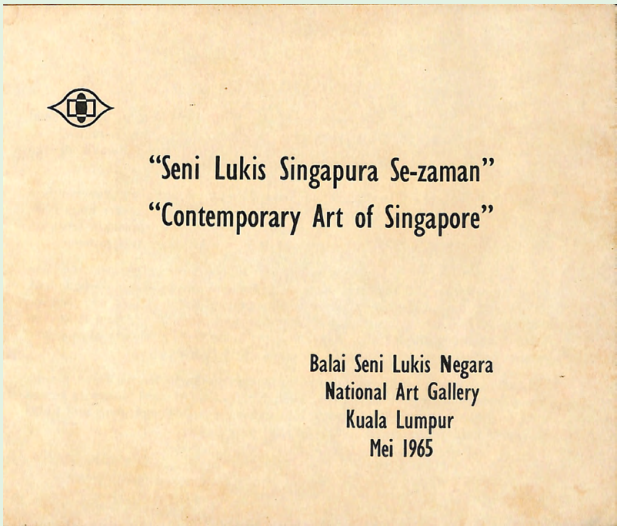
- 211. Crabs
- 212. Portrait

TAN THEAN SONG

- 213. Digging for Shellfish
- 214. Malay Kampong
- 215. Catching Fish
- 216. River Mouth
- 217. Bamboo



“Seni Lukis Singapura Se-zaman”
“Contemporary Art of Singapore”



“Seni Lukis Singapura Se-zaman”
“Contemporary Art of Singapore”

Balai Seni Lukis Negara
National Art Gallery
Kuala Lumpur
Mei 1965

40.	“Menchari Kutu” “Catching Lice”	Bahan Champoran Mixed Media	\$120.00
KHOO BOON SENG			
41.	“Perselisihan” “Strife”	Chat Ayer Water-colour	\$90.00
KO WAN WONG			
42.	“Pemandangan” “Landscape”	Chat Minyak Oil	\$300.00
Miss KOH LEE LEE			
43.	“Kereta Lembu dan Kambing” “Bullock Cart and Goats”	Chat Minyak Oil	N.F.S.
KONG YEW CHEONG			
44.	“Sungai Singapura I” “Singapore River I”	Chat Ayer Water-colour	\$75.00
KWAN SAI KHEONG			
45.	“Dato’ Lee Kong Chian”	Chat Minyak Oil	N.F.S.
Miss LAI FOONG MOI			
46.	“Menyeberang” “Crossing”	Chat Minyak Oil	N.F.S.
47.	“Zaina”	Chat Minyak Oil	N.F.S.
6			



“Menyeberang”
“Crossing”

Miss LAI FOONG MOI

Chat Minyak
Oil



Crossing featured in *Seni Lukis Singapura Se-zaman*
(Contemporary Art of Singapore) National Art Gallery, Malaysia.

Digitised by National Gallery Singapore Library & Archive.

中國美術家協會
三十周年紀念刊



THE SOCIETY OF CHINESE ARTISTS 30th ANNIVERSARY SOUVENIR MAGAZINE 1965



Crossing featured in the Society of Chinese Artists
30th Anniversary Exhibition, Singapore.

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● ●

[LEFT]

Lai teaching at NAFA.

Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts Graduation Magazine,
1962. Reproduction, 2026. Image courtesy of
Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, University of the
Arts Singapore.

[BOTTOM]

Lai (first row, third from left) with teachers and
students at NAFA, 1967.

Digitised by National Gallery Singapore Library &
Archive with kind permission from Chen Chi Sing
@ Tan Chay Lee.



南洋美術學院廿七屆畢業生

Campuran anikaliran karya berpadu di "Contemporary '73"

SENILUKIS

SUMBANGAN dari pelukis-pelukis undangan khusus untuk "Contemporary '73" anjuran Angkatan Pelukis Aneka Daya akan memberikan satu koleksi karyaseni sezaman disamping karya-karya dari anggota persatuan itu sendiri bila ia diadakan selama empat hari mulai 15hb Disember 1973 di Dewan pameran, Dewan Perniagaan Cina Singapura.

Pelukis-pelukis seperti Puan Chen, Ho Ho Ying, Wee Beng-Chong, Morena Longbow, Tan Teng Kee, Lai Foong Moi, Khoo Sui-Hoe, A. Majid Alias dan Syed Hood Alhabshi adalah memang tidak asing di kalangan pelukis-pelukis dan di lapangan senilukis tempatan.

Penyeritaan mereka ini juga merupakan hubungan erat di kalangan pelukis-pelukis Singapura dari berbagai-bagai aliran dan persatuan.

Dengan gaya yang stabil dan tersendiri pelukis wanita, Puan Georgette Liying-Chen, akan mengemukakan sebuah lukisan cat minyaknya yang berjudul "Potret".

Lukisan seperti ini memang merupakan sejenis isicipta yang digemari oleh Puan Chen; terutama apabila inspirasinya itu mempunyai jalinan dengan air-muka manusia dan pemandangan.

Pelukis muda Tan Teng Kee mengemukakan sebuah karya konstraksi sederhana yang bukan saja memperjelaskan keindahan

konstraksinya tetapi memberikan satu posisi yang bergantung dengan 'imbangan' yang teliti.

Sementara pelukis Lai Foong Moi, seorang pelukis wanita yang juga bertugas sebagai seorang guru di Akademi Seni Rupa Nanyang seperti Puan Chen, mengemukakan sebuah lukisan cat minyaknya yang terbit yang diberi judul "Singapore City", satu pemandangan sebahagian bandaraya Singapura.

Pemandangan yang di gambarkan oleh Foong Moi ini mungkin tidak merupakan satu 'pemandangan' yang luarbiasa. Ini benar tetapi karya ini sebenarnya satu ciptaan terbaru yang saya dapat ambil sebagai contoh 'perubahan' yang telah dilakukan oleh pelukis ini sejak kurang lebih lima tahun sudah.

Lukisannya yang terbaru ini 'mengubah' tanggapan mata Foong Moi terhadap apa yang dilihatnya. Foong Moi begitu teliti dengan bentuk-bentuk bangunan yang kerap memberikan getaran pada penglihatan.

Kemudian, kita tersua pula dengan sebuah lukisan yang gayaciptanya tidak asing kepada ramai pelukis-pelukis dan peminat-peminat senilukis moden.

Karya abstrak yang dikemukakan oleh Ho Ho Ying ini tetap merupakan sejenis karyanya yang biasa kita temui dalam pameran-pameran yang pernah diadakan.

Untuk lukisannya yang berjudul "The Flying Object" Ho Ho Ying memperlihatkan sedikit perubahan dari apa yang biasa di



Wee Beng-Chong

lakukan untuk lukisan-lukisan seperti ini.

Ho Ho Ying pada kebelakangan ini, melakukan 'kawalan' yang menetapkan bentuk-bentuk kelompok tidak bebas lepas mengisi seluruh bidang lukisan.

Dengan demikian, pelukis ini cuba menarik kembali dan mengamalkan gerakan berus yang berdisiplin.

Saya kira, setelah meninjau karya-karyanya seperti ini, pelukis ini inginkan ekspresi yang berhati-hati dan yang lebih berhasil mengikut pandangan nya.

Nama pelukis-pengarca Wee Beng-Chong memang tidak asing kepada kita. Namanya selalu dikaitkan dengan karya-karya arca moden yang berukuran besar dan lukisan-lukisan abstrak yang berani.

Selain dari Ho Ho Ying, Beng-Chong adalah merupakan salah seorang anggota cergas dari "Modern Art Society". Dan untuk "Contemporary '73" ini, Beng-Chong bermurahati mengemukakan sebuah lukisan



Lai Foong Moi

abstraknya yang diberi nama "Painting 1973".

Kesederhanaannya membentuk kelompok untuk lukisannya menarik kita kepada warna yang digunakannya; dan ini sesuai dengannya manifestasi umum untuk lukisan abstrak bahawa komposisi itu

sendiri adalah satu isicipta yang lengkap.

Bentuk-bentuk kelompok dalam lukisan ini adalah satu isicipta lengkap.

Sebuah karya moden dari Morena Longbow juga akan menambahkan sebahagian koleksi karya-karya moden terbaru yang mudah memperjelaskan



Ho Ho Ying

suasana sezaman di kalangan pelukis-pelukis moden dan abstrak.

Penyeritaan pelukis-pelukis ini adalah sambutan kepada undangan pihak penganjurannya. Angkatan Pelukis Aneka Daya, yang sebelum ini kerap menerima kerjasama dalam beberapa kecergasan di bidang senilukis.

Di samping pelukis-pelukis undangan, terdiri dari pelukis-pelukis bukan Melayu, pameran karyaseni "Contemporary '73" ini juga akan mengemukakan karya-karya terbaru yang dihasilkan oleh duapuluh tiga anggota persatuan tersebut.

—A. Ghani Hamid

Artist, poet and writer Abdul Ghani Hamid reviews the Contemporary '73 exhibition organised by the Malay art society Angkatan Pelukis Aneka Daya (APAD). The exhibition displayed works by its members alongside works by artists including Georgette Chen, Ho Ho Ying, Wee Beng Chong and Lai Foong Moi. On Lai, he writes: "Meanwhile, artist Lai Foong Moi—a female painter who, like Madam Chen, also served as a teacher at the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts—presented her latest oil painting titled *Singapore City*, a view of part of the city of Singapore. The scene depicted by Foong Moi here might not be an extraordinary view. This is true, but this work is actually a recent creation that I can take as an example of the 'change' this artist has undergone over the last five years or so. Foong Moi alters the visual perception in this latest painting. Foong Moi is so meticulous with the architectural forms, which frequently impart a vibrant resonance to the viewer's sight."

Source: A. Ghani Hamid, "Campuran anikaliran karya berpadu di 'Contemporary '73,'" *Berita Harian*, December 9, 1973.

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In Memory of Lai Foong Moi: Thirty-Six Years of Unwavering Dedication to Art Education

Chen Zhuang (Tan Tee Chie)



The Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts has lost two of its most outstanding women educators. The first, Zhang Liying [Georgette Chen], passed away in 1993 to the profound regret of all who knew her. The second, Lai Foong Moi, succumbed to illness on the morning of 23 August 1995 at the age of 65. In a shared expression of grief and tribute, the local art community—comprising the Singapore Art Society, the Singapore Society of Chinese Artists and the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts Alumni Association—jointly published an obituary in *Lianhe Zaobao* bearing the elegiac phrase, “An Enduring Fragrance in the Garden of Art.”

Throughout her thirty-six years of steadfast devotion to art education, Lai Foong Moi never once entertained the thought of changing professions. Enduring long periods of modest remuneration, she persevered with quiet fortitude to serve the cause of art education. She willingly sacrificed many of the material comforts she might have otherwise enjoyed, allowing her strength of spirit to triumph over material constraints. Walking this long, thirty-six-year pedagogical journey with utmost self-discipline and self-respect, she achieved what few ordinary individuals could ever sustain.

Originally named Fengdi, she was given the name “Fengmei” by her teacher Wu Dexian, during her studies at the Academy. She enrolled in NAFA in 1950, graduating from the Western Painting Department in 1953. In 1954, she journeyed to France to study oil painting at the *École des Beaux-Arts* in Paris for four years. Upon her return to Singapore in 1958, her imported body of work earned the high praise of the Academy’s principal, Lim Hak Tai, who assisted her in organising three exhibitions across Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and Penang. Her exhibited works—spanning still lifes, figures and landscapes—were widely acquired and treasured by regional collectors and art enthusiasts.

In 1959, she was invited by Lim Hak Tai to join the faculty of her alma mater. From that moment on, Lai Foong Moi remained resolutely committed to her teaching post, utilising her immense expertise to nurture younger generations and sow the seeds of art for the nation. Sacrificing personal fame, gain and much of her own creative time, she painted less so that she could teach more. Withdrawing from the public eye within the art world, she channelled her entire focus into instruction and quiet creation. Finding profound joy in her vocation, she approached art with the meticulous conscientiousness of a master artisan, pouring her heart and soul into art education with devout sincerity.

Onlookers unaware of the reality misconstrued her retreat from public exhibitions as a total abandonment of her brush. She merely scoffed at such superficial gossip, deeming it unworthy of investigation or response, for she truly had no time to waste on idle chatter.

In January 1995, Lai Foong Moi retired from NAFA. She found it difficult to comprehend why an artist, at the very peak of their creative and intellectual powers, should be compelled to retire. Though it went entirely against her wishes, she was bound by administrative regulations, leaving her with no choice but to comply mechanically, step down from her post and live out her remaining days in quiet retirement. Yet, possessed of a nature that deeply resented injustice, the resulting despondency and accumulated sorrows brought on a sudden, fatal illness. She passed away before reaching her seventieth year. She has gone on a journey from which she will not return, but her artistic legacy is destined to endure for generations to come.

Source: *Nanyang Shang Bao*, August 30, 1995.

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Front row (left to right): Wee Beng Chong,
Lai Foong Moi, Tan Tee Chie
Back row (left to right): Yeo Hoe Koon,
Foo Chee San, Lim Yew Kuan

The six artists organised an exhibition of their work in Singapore in 1994 including ten works by Lai. This first major showing of her work since 1963 would be her last. Lai would pass away the next year.

Source: *Nanyang Shang Bao*, August 27, 1994.

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Lai Foong Moi

(b. Malaysia, 1931; d. Singapore, 1995)

1931

Born in Seremban, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia.
Eldest of three siblings (one younger sister and one younger brother).

1940s

Begins drawing as a student at Chi Hwa School, Seremban.

1950–1953

Enrols at the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA) in the Western Painting department where she studies under Cheong Soo Pieng, Chen Wen Hsi and Goh Teck Sian.

1954–1958

[MAY] Leaves for Paris from Singapore to enrol at École des Beaux-Arts, Paris, France, under the painter Roger Chapelain-Midy.

Records her address at a youth hostel at 44 rue Bernardins, Paris.

Travels and paints in England, Netherlands, Germany, Spain and Italy. Holds solo exhibitions in Paris (possibly in 1958) and Athens.

1956

Contributes works to the Salon of the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris.

1957

Receives a French Government Art Scholarship to support her education.

Contributes three works to the Société des Artistes Français, Grand Palais des Champs-Élysées, where she receives an honourable mention for participation.

- *Paysage (Acropole)*, *Paysage (Agora)*, *Paysage (Lambili)* •

1958

Contributes works to the Salon of the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris.

Contributes two works to the Salon of the Société des Artistes Français, Grand Palais des Champs-Élysées.

- *Nue, Nature morte* ●

Contributes two works to the Salon of the Société des Artistes Indépendants, Grand Palais des Champs-Élysées.

- *Inspiration musicale, Village de Mykonos* ●

[JULY] Returns to Singapore.

1959

Accepts invitation from Lim Hak Tai to become a full-time teacher at NAFA. Teaches drawing until her retirement.

[APRIL 1-8] Contributes five works to the Singapore Art Society's 10th Open Exhibition of Work by Local Artists, Victoria Memorial Hall, Singapore.

- *Nude, The Windmill at Mykonos Greece, Athens, City of Aden, Sorting Betlenuts* ●

[JULY 16-20] Holds solo exhibition (86 works), *Lai Foong Moi*, organised by the Singapore Art Society and held at the Victoria Memorial Hall, Singapore. S. Rajaratnam, Minister for Culture, opens the exhibition.

[AUGUST-OCTOBER] Contributes one work to the *Pameran Lukisan Negara Yang Kedua* (Second National Exhibition), National Art Gallery, Malaysia.

- *Pengkalan Kapal (Shipyard)* ●

1960

Publishes a catalogue of 66 works (63 in black and white and 3 colour plates) to commemorate her return to Singapore. Catalogue includes works painted in Europe and after her return to Malaya. Invites prominent figures in the art world to write testimonials in the foreword, including Michael Sullivan (Curator, University of Malaya Art Museum), Roger Chapelain-Midy (her teacher at École des Beaux-Arts), Goh Teck Sian (her teacher at NAFA), Marco Hsu (artist and critic), Lee Singko (journalist) as well as a calligraphic inscription by Lim Hak Tai (Founding Principal of NAFA).

[APRIL 5-17] Contributes six works to the Singapore Art Society's 11th *Exhibition of Work by Local Artists*, Singapore Polytechnic, Singapore.

- *Sago Making Sarawak, Mosque Kuala Lumpur, Long House Sarawak, Ferry Kuching, Milling Rice Sarawak, Harvest* •

[APRIL 30-MAY 5] Holds solo exhibition (80 works), organised by the Federation of Malaya Arts Council and held at the British Council, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Robert van Gulik, Netherlands Ambassador to the Federation of Malaya, opens the exhibition.

[JUNE] Contributes two works to the *Pameran Lukisan Hari Kebangsaan* (Exhibition of Works by Local Artists in Celebration of National Day), Victoria Memorial Hall, Singapore.

- *Singapore Waterfront, Hari Raya* •

[AUGUST-NOVEMBER] Contributes one work to the *Pameran Lukisan Negara Yang Ketiga* (Third National Exhibition), National Art Gallery, Malaysia.

- *Budak Indian (Indian Boy)* •

1961

[MAY 16-24] Contributes two works to the 7th *Malayan Artists Exhibition*, British Council Hall, Singapore.

- *Ironing, Bersarah Boats* •

[AUGUST] Travels with the Ten Men Group on its first painting trip to the east coast of Malaysia by car. The group includes Yeh Chi Wei, Chen Cheng Mei, Lim Tze Peng, Choo Keng Kwang, Cheah Phee Chye, Seah Kim Joo, Lee Sik Khoon, Yeo Tiong Wah and Tan Miow Kheng.

Does not participate in subsequent trips or exhibitions.

[DECEMBER 28] Contributes three works to the *Ten Men Art Exhibition*, Singapore.

- *Malay Kampong, Sorting Out the Fish, Morning Market* •

[DECEMBER–JANUARY] Contributes one work to the *Pameran Lukisan Negara 4* (Fourth National Exhibition), National Art Gallery, Malaysia.

- *Menarek Jala* (Pulling Nets) •

1962

[JUNE 8–13] Contributes four works to the *Pameran Lukisan Hari Kebangsaan* (Exhibition of Works by Local Artists in Celebration of National Day), Victoria Memorial Hall, Singapore.

- *Fish Drying, Selecting Fish, Fishing Boats, Still Life* •

[AUGUST–OCTOBER] Contributes one work to the *Pameran Lukisan Negara 5* (Fifth National Exhibition), National Art Gallery, Malaysia.

- *Still Life* •

[DECEMBER 20–23] Contributes three works to the Society of Chinese Artists Annual Art Exhibition, Victoria Memorial Hall, Singapore.

- *Cheng Bo Swimming Pool, Portrait, Landscape* •

1963

[MARCH] Holds solo exhibition in City Hall, Penang, Malaysia. Raja Tun Uda Al-Haj bin Raja Muhammad, Governor of Penang, opens the exhibition.

[AUGUST–NOVEMBER] Contributes one work to the *Pameran Lukisan Negara 6* (Sixth National Exhibition), National Art Gallery, Malaysia.

- *Berhala Di-Bali* (Temple in Bali) •

1964

[APRIL 23–30] Contributes three works to the Singapore Art Society's *15th Annual Exhibition*, Victoria Memorial Hall, Singapore.

- *Batu Cave, George City From the Hills, Dyak Musicians* •

1965

[APRIL 3-9] Contributes two works to the Singapore Art Society's 16th Annual Exhibition, Victoria Memorial Hall, Singapore.

- *Crossing, Zaina* •

[MAY] Contributes two works to the *Seni Lukis Singapura Se-zaman* (Contemporary Art of Singapore), National Art Gallery, Malaysia.

- *Crossing, Zaina* •

[AUGUST 21-24] Contributes one work to the Society of Chinese Artists 30th Anniversary Exhibition, Singapore.

- *Crossing* •

[OCTOBER 15-25] Contributes two works to the Singapore Conference Hall Inaugural Exhibition, Singapore.

- *Boats Bali, Malacca Fortress* •

1966

[JULY 22-24] Contributes one work to the Society of Chinese Artists Annual Art Exhibition, Victoria Memorial Hall, Singapore.

- *Contemplation* •

1967

[JUNE] Participates in charity exhibition held by Singapore Middle School Chinese Teachers' Association to raise funds for a new building.

1973

[DECEMBER 15-18] Contributes one work to the Angkatan Pelukis Aneka Daya, *Contemporary '73* exhibition, Singapore.

- *Singapore City* •

1975

[JUNE] Contributes works to the *International Women's Year Exhibition*, Singapore. The exhibition of 81 works features 41 artists including Georgette Chen, Chern Yet Siew, Sun Yee, Rohani Ismail and Anaratnam Gunaratnam.

[OCTOBER 2-4] Contributes one work to Singapore Art Society's 26th Annual Exhibition, Victoria Memorial Hall, Singapore.

- *A View of Lion City Singapore* •

1976

[JULY–AUGUST] Contributes one work to *Paintings by Contemporary Artists of Malaysia, Singapore & Indonesia* from the collection of Lim Chong Keat, Penang Museum, Malaysia.

- *Musicians* ●

1979

[OCTOBER 26–DECEMBER 23] Contributes nine works to the *Pameran Retrospektif Pelukis-Pelukis Nanyang* (Nanyang Painters Retrospective Exhibition), National Art Gallery, Malaysia. The exhibition curated by Redza Piyadasa, marks the first time the category of the “Nanyang painter” is explored in the context of a museum exhibition.

- *Chinese Temple, Long House, Waterside Village, Dyak Musicians, Portrait of Paris Model, Iban Dance, Still Life, Still Life with Orange, San Sui Worker* ●

1983

[APRIL] Contributes one work to the *ASEAN Exhibition of Paintings and Photographs*, National Art Gallery, Malaysia.

1985

[AUGUST 11–17] Contributes one work to the *ASPACAE '85 Asian Pacific Conference on Art Education: Nanyang Art Exhibition*, RELC Centre, Singapore.

- *Temple* ●

1988

[NOVEMBER 16–20] Contributes works to the *NAFA Lecturers Arts Exhibition '88*, National Museum Art Gallery, Singapore.

1994

[FEBRUARY 24–MARCH 13] Works by Lai in Singapore's National Collection are shown in *Pont des Arts: Nanyang Artists in Paris 1925–1970*, Singapore Art Museum, Singapore.

[SEPTEMBER 1–7] Participates in the exhibition *Six Artists Singapore*, Orchard Road Exhibition Hall, Singapore. Exhibition also features Lim Yew Kuan, Tan Tee Chie, Foo Chee San, Wee Beng Chong and Yeo Hoe Koon.

1995

[JANUARY] Retires from NAFA.

[AUGUST 23] Passes away from cancer.

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Lai Foong Moi. Crossing (Home Coming). 1964.
Oil on canvas, 77 × 65 cm. Collection of Singapore Airlines Limited.

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[LEFT]

Lai in Paris, 1955.

Digitised by National Gallery Singapore Library & Archive
with kind permission from the artist's family.

Hailed as the “first Malayan-born woman to hold ‘one-man’ exhibitions of her work in Singapore and the Federation,” Lai Foong Moi is the latest artist to be included in the Dalam Singapore series. Featuring a curatorial essay alongside archival and visual materials, this publication provides a rare glimpse into Lai’s life and artistic practice within the social and political context of post-independence Malaya. Intended for readers interested in Singapore and Southeast Asian art, this catalogue sheds new light on Lai and reconsiders her place within the region’s art history.