

MEDIA RELEASE

National Gallery Singapore presents first major exhibition offering fresh perspectives on Singapore's influential ink master Fan Chang Tien

Featuring over 80 works and archival materials, the exhibition looks beyond Fan's well-known legacy as the "Gardener" to reveal a multifaceted scholar-artist whose art, values, and dedication to community left an enduring mark on ink art in Singapore.



Installation view, *Fan Chang Tien: Rhythm of the Southern Brush*, National Gallery Singapore, 2026.

SINGAPORE, 13 October 2026 – National Gallery Singapore presents *Fan Chang Tien: Rhythm of the Southern Brush*, the first major exhibition to offer a holistic perspective on the life, values, and enduring legacy of one of Singapore's most influential ink artists. Opening on 16 October 2026, the exhibition features over 80 works and archival materials spanning painting, calligraphy, poetry, and seals, bringing into focus Fan's artistic and intellectual pursuits and how values of self-cultivation, integrity, and generosity shaped a life dedicated to art, learning, and community.

Expanding the story of Fan beyond his years in Singapore, the exhibition traces his artistic development across Guangdong, Shanghai, Bangkok, and Singapore, exploring how his

movement across these different cultural contexts informed his artistic practice and identity. Throughout his life, Fan remained dedicated to both his artistic practice and to education, nurturing a generation of Singapore artists, including Ling Cher Eng, Nai Swee Leng, Tan Oe Pang, Chen KeZhan, and Chua Ek Kay.

The “Southern Brush” reflects Fan’s movement southwards, as well as the circulation of ideas and practices across Asia. His artistic foundations lay in the Shanghai School tradition, known for its expressive brushwork grounded in traditional Chinese ink practice. Across five thematic sections, **Moving South**, **Nurturing the Self**, **Rejoicing in the Everyday**, **Wandering through Nature**, and **Tending the Garden**, the exhibition brings together Fan’s artistic practice, intellectual pursuits, personal philosophy, and legacy as an educator.



Fan Chang Tien. *The Gathering of Poets*. 1971. Chinese ink and colour on paper, 59.6 × 119.8 cm. Private collection. Installation view, *Fan Chang Tien: Rhythm of the Southern Brush*, National Gallery Singapore, 2026.



Installation view, *Fan Chang Tien: Rhythm of the Southern Brush*, National Gallery Singapore, 2026.

Dr Cai Heng, Project Director and Senior Curator, National Gallery Singapore, says, “The values of self-cultivation, integrity, and generosity shaped Fan’s artistic practice, and offer an important lens through which to understand his work. By bringing together different facets of his practice, the exhibition reveals the breadth of his artistic achievements and the enduring legacy he left through both his work and the students he nurtured. The exhibition also reflects the Gallery’s ongoing commitment to deepening understanding of ink art in Singapore and Southeast Asia, and the artists, networks and exchanges that shaped its development.”

Tracing the many facets of Fan's life and legacy

The exhibition opens with **Moving South**, which explores Fan's artistic training at Shanghai's prominent schools in the 1920s and his early recognition as a promising young artist. He trained under Zhu Wenyun and Wang Geyi, both disciples of Wu Changshuo, a leading figure of the Shanghai School. The works in this section trace the foundations of Fan's artistic practice and his subsequent journey southwards across Asia, including his years in Bangkok before he settled in Singapore in 1956.

Nurturing the Self examines how Fan's commitment to artistic discipline and self-cultivation shaped his identity as a scholar-artist. It focuses on Fan's most favoured subject, bamboo, which is associated with Confucian virtues such as integrity, humility, and resilience. Inscriptions accompanying his works further illuminate the values that guided both his art and way of life.

Rejoicing in the Everyday celebrates Fan's growing connection to Singapore and its surroundings through paintings of local flora and fauna. Mynahs, sparrows, and ducks appear amid lush tropical landscapes and palm trees, alongside rare depictions of kampong life that offer glimpses of the community around him. Inscriptions accompanying these works offer poetic observations on the human experience, further conveying Fan's appreciation of everyday life.

Wandering through Nature shows how Fan's *shanshui* (landscape) paintings became spaces for contemplation and imaginative escape beyond his immediate surroundings. Rooted in traditional Chinese ink practices, these landscapes offered Fan a source of reflection and inspiration. His poetry adds another dimension to the works, evoking seasons, rain, flowing waters, and greenery while expressing a deep respect for nature and the traditional ideal of harmony between humanity and its surroundings.



Installation view of scholar-artist room, *Fan Chang Tien: Rhythm of the Southern Brush*, National Gallery Singapore, 2026.

Visitors can also step into a dedicated scholar-artist room that offers insight into the contemplative world of the literati and the practice of self-cultivation. The space also features a stamp station with a contemporary twist, where visitors can create their own composition using seals inspired by motifs from Fan's works, including mynahs, ducks, cockerels, and a coffee flask, and take home their creation.

The exhibition's concluding section, **Tending the Garden**, explores Fan's lifelong commitment to nurturing a generation of artists through his teaching, as well as philanthropic work and contributions to the community. The section features works by Fan's students, including Cultural Medallion recipient Nai Swee Leng, alongside video interviews with Nai and Tan Oe Pang that offer insights into Fan's legacy as an educator and mentor. The students' works show how they built on a shared foundation in traditional Chinese ink painting to develop distinct artistic approaches.



Fan Chang Tien: Rhythm of the Southern Brush at National Gallery Singapore

Fan Chang Tien: Rhythm of the Southern Brush runs from 16 October 2026 to 31 January 2027 at the Wu Guanzhong Gallery at National Gallery Singapore. A General Admission pass is required, and entry is free for Singaporeans and Permanent Residents. For more information, please refer to the attached annexes or visit <https://www.nationalgallery.sg/FanChangTien>.

Media assets are available through this [link](#).

- [Annex A](#): *Fan Chang Tien: Rhythm of the Southern Brush* Sections and Key Artworks
- [Annex B](#): *Fan Chang Tien: Rhythm of the Southern Brush* Curatorial Programmes

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About National Gallery Singapore

National Gallery Singapore is a leading visual arts institution and the largest modern and contemporary art museum in Southeast Asia. Dedicated to making art accessible to all, the Gallery engages audiences of all ages through its exhibitions, educational programmes, and public festivals.

Home to the world's largest public collection of Singapore and Southeast Asian art, the Gallery is redefining the region's art history through pioneering research, strategic acquisitions, and thoughtfully curated exhibitions. By offering new perspectives, it recontextualises the region's artistic contributions within global narratives.

Located in the heart of the Civic District, the Gallery is housed in two national monuments – the City Hall and former Supreme Court – making it an iconic cultural landmark where architectural grandeur meets deep historical significance.

A vibrant cultural destination, the Gallery has been ranked among Asia's Top 10 most visited museums by The Art Newspaper since 2019. It has also received accolades at the Singapore Tourism Awards, including "Best Leisure Event" for Light to Night Festival 2020 and "Outstanding Leisure Event" for Gallery Children's Biennale 2021.

As a registered Charity and an Institute of Public Character, the Gallery relies on public support to expand its collection, advance research, and bring art to more people, shaping cultural discourse and inspiring creativity for generations to come.

Annex A: *Fan Chang Tien: Rhythm of the Southern Brush* Sections and Key Artworks

Moving South (艺履南渡)

The exhibition opens with **Moving South**, a prelude that traces the artistic lineage and training that shaped Fan's practice. Fan trained in Shanghai in the 1920s under Zhu Wenyun and Wang Geyi, both disciples of Wu Changshuo, a leading figure of the Shanghai School. From Zhu, he developed a sharply articulated and lyrical approach to brushwork, while Wang's quick and decisive strokes further shaped his command of brush and ink.



Fan Chang Tien. *Bamboo*. c. 1953. Chinese ink and colour on paper, 133 × 33.5 cm. Private collection.



Fan Chang Tien. *Scholar Admiring the Landscape*. 1954. Chinese ink and colour on paper, 143 × 34 cm. Private collection.

As Fan moved south, he carried these artistic foundations with him, continuing to paint and teach while developing his practice through new encounters. He spent nearly nine years in Bangkok, a pivotal period in his artistic development beyond China. *Bamboo* (c. 1953) offers a direct connection to this period, bearing an inscription by renowned Chinese artist Zhang Daqian that praised Fan's talent: "With nature's own creative power truly in his hand...". The work was also shown at Fan's 1956 exhibition in Bangkok, offering a glimpse of the recognition he had gained by this stage of his career. *Scholar Admiring the Landscape* (1954) further reflects his continued engagement with the landscape tradition during his time in Bangkok. Together, these works reveal how Fan built on his training and gained recognition beyond China, setting the stage for his later contribution to Singapore's ink art scene.

Nurturing the Self (修己如竹)

The exhibition's next section delves into Fan's commitment to the scholar-artist ideal of self-cultivation through art. For Fan, being a scholar-artist meant cultivating moral character alongside learning, artistic skill, and intellectual depth, evident in both his life and practice. This philosophy is expressed through traditional literati subjects such as bamboo, plum blossoms, orchids, and chrysanthemums, known as the 'Four Gentlemen' (四君子), which are associated with qualities of righteousness, integrity, resilience, purity, and humility.



Fan Chang Tien. *Four Hanging Scrolls of Ink Bamboo*. 1979. Chinese ink on paper, 138 × 34 cm each. Collection of Yang Jia Yuan.



Fan Chang Tien. *Young Bamboo and Rock*. 1973. Chinese ink on paper, 135.4 × 34 cm. Collection of National Gallery Singapore.

Among them, bamboo was a particularly important subject for Fan and a means through which he expressed the values he sought to uphold. In *Four Hanging Scrolls of Ink Bamboo* (1979), Fan's inscription expresses his preference for painting bamboo over pursuing wealth or status, while also referring to his place in the "southern land". The work connects his scholar-artist identity and values with the new cultural environment in which he lived and worked. *Young Bamboo and Rock* (1973) brings together two traditional literati subjects, with the rock symbolising strength and bamboo embodying unwavering moral principle. Together, the works show how painting became a means for Fan to both express and cultivate the principles that guided his art and life.



Fan Chang Tien. *Red Bamboo with Banana Leaf*. 1982. Chinese ink and colour on paper, 70 × 50 cm. Private collection.

While deeply grounded in tradition, Fan also experimented with established subjects in response to the environment around him. *Red Bamboo with Banana Leaf* (1982) offers a visually distinctive counterpoint to his more traditional ink works. His use of red and inclusion of the tropical plantain demonstrate Fan's experimentation with traditional subject matter and engagement with his local environment.

Rejoicing in the Everyday (即景生趣)



Fan Chang Tien. *Coconut Palm and Mynahs*. 1973. Chinese ink and colour on paper, 121 × 60.5 cm. Gift of Chan Kok Hua, from Qiu Zhai's Collection. Collection of National Gallery Singapore.



Fan Chang Tien. *Kampong Scene with Cyclist*. 1964. Chinese ink and colour on paper, 140 × 32 cm. Collection of Yeo Eng Koon. Promised gift.

This section explores how Fan found vitality and inspiration through his observations of nature and everyday life in Singapore. In *Coconut Palm and Mynahs* (1973), familiar local flora and fauna reflect his growing rootedness in Singapore and how his established ink practice expanded to encompass the sights of his new home. Singapore's everyday landscape is also featured in *Kampong Scene with Cyclist* (1964), one of only two known works by Fan depicting local landscapes and scenery. Together with an inscription referencing the south, the work offers a glimpse of how his immediate surroundings became part of his artistic world.



Fan Chang Tien. *Untitled (Geese)*. 1964. Chinese ink and colour on paper, 140 × 35 cm. Gift of Paul Yao Swee Yui. Collection of National Gallery Singapore.

Fan's observations of nature also became a means of reflecting on human experience. In *Untitled (Geese)* (1964), birds appear amid reeds and coconut palms, their overlapping forms creating a more abstracted composition that reveals Fan's brief experimentation with abstraction during this period. Through the pairing of image and poetry, Fan drew parallels between animal behaviour and human experience, using his observations of the natural world to explore everyday life and emotion.

Wandering through Nature (心游丘壑)



Fan Chang Tien. *Watching the Waterfall*. 1956. Chinese ink and colour on paper, 143 × 69 cm. Private collection.



Fan Chang Tien. *Four Hanging Scrolls of Landscape*. 1978. Chinese ink on paper, 137 × 35 cm. Collection of Yang Jia Yuan.

Fan's *shanshui* (landscape) paintings allowed him to journey imaginatively beyond his immediate time and place, finding contemplation and inspiration in the natural world. *Watching the Waterfall* (1956), an early work associated with Fan's time in Bangkok, connects his physical journey southwards with the imaginative possibilities of *shanshui*. Its inscription captures his poetic response to the natural world, describing a cascading waterfall that “roars in the mountain forests regardless of season”. *Four Hanging Scrolls of Landscape* (1978), one of Fan's rare sets of hanging landscape scrolls, similarly evokes the vastness of the natural world as a space for contemplation and retreat.



Fan Chang Tien. *The Gathering of Poets*. 1971. Chinese ink and colour on paper, 59.6 × 119.8 cm. Private collection.

Fan also reinterpreted traditional literati conventions through the world around him. In *The Gathering of Poets* (1971), the traditional motif of a literati gathering is reimagined with contemporary details, including figures drinking coffee and reading newspapers. These details bring ideas of learning, intellectual exchange, and community into a modern setting, showing how Fan brought tradition into dialogue with contemporary life.

Tending the Garden (艺圃耕耘)

The exhibition's final section explores Fan's lifelong commitment to education and mentorship, alongside his wider philanthropic and community contributions. Like a "gardener", Fan nurtured a generation of artists, grounding them in traditional Chinese ink painting while encouraging them to develop their own artistic voices. This section brings together works by some of his students, including Ling Cher Eng, Low Eng, Nai Swee Leng, Tan Oe Pang, Lim Kay Hiong, Lee Soo Chee, Chen KeZhan, and Chua Ek Kay.



Nai Swee Leng. *Durians and Sparrows*. 2009. Chinese ink and colour on paper, 135.2 × 72 cm. Collection of the artist.



Tan Oe Pang. *Fish and Lotus*. 2000. Chinese ink and colour on paper, 155.2 × 58.5 cm. Gift of George Quek Meng Tong. Collection of National Gallery Singapore.

Among them are 2025 Cultural Medallion recipient Nai Swee Leng and Tan Oe Pang, who studied under Fan at Whampoa Secondary School and later at his private Su Lan Studio. Nai's *Durians and Sparrows* (2009) and Tan's *Fish and Lotus* (2000) show how their shared foundations in traditional Chinese ink painting developed in different directions, with Nai continuing in the tradition and Tan taking a more modernist approach. Together, their works illustrate how Fan's

teachings were carried forward and reinterpreted by his students, contributing to the development of ink art in Singapore. The section also features video interviews with both artists, offering personal insights into their experiences as Fan's students and his legacy as an educator.



Fan Chang Tien. *Bird under the Banana Leaf*. 1987. Chinese ink on paper, 34 × 45 cm. Private collection.

The exhibition then concludes with *Bird under the Banana Leaf* (1987), one of Fan's final works, made while he was in hospital just days before his passing. Its depiction of a familiar local subject with loose brush strokes, accompanied by an inscription reflecting his circumstances, speaks to Fan's steadfast dedication to his artistic practice. A detailed timeline tracing his journey down southward brings the exhibition to a close, situating his life and practice within the broader journey explored throughout the exhibition.

Annex B: *Fan Chang Tien: Rhythm of the Southern Brush* Curatorial Programmes

Exhibition Programmes	
Tour and Opening Programme	
Curator Tours	
Date & Time:	Mandarin: 16 October 2026, Friday English: 20 November 2026, Friday 7.30pm – 8.30pm
Venue:	Entrance of Exhibition, City Hall Wing, Level 4, Wu Guanzhong Gallery (near Lift Lobby A)
Admission Details:	Standard: S\$45 Concession: S\$40
Description:	Explore <i>Fan Chang Tien: Rhythm of the Southern Brush</i> with the exhibition curators, Lim Shujuan and Chee Jin Ming. Through selected works and curatorial insights, discover how one of Singapore's most influential ink masters sustained and reimagined the Chinese ink tradition within a multicultural, modern society. The tour explores Fan Chang Tien's legacy as both artist and mentor, while examining broader themes of artistic transmission, cultural mobility, and cross-regional exchange that lie at the heart of the exhibition. <i>** Please note that the curator tours will be delivered in English and Mandarin respectively and take place after exhibition opening hours.</i> <i>**In addition to the tour, you will also receive two all-access passes valid for 3 months (worth \$30 for Singaporeans/PRs, \$60 for Other Nationalities)</i>
Opening Lecture: Fan Chang Tien and the 20th Century Artists of Eastern Guangdong	
Date & Time:	17 October 2026, Saturday 2.00pm – 3.00pm
Venue:	City Hall Wing, Level B1, The Ngee Ann Kongsi Auditorium
Admission Details:	Free admission, registration required here
Description:	Chinese art historian Dr. Wang Ai traces how modern Chinese art developed across regions through artists from the Chaoshan area. Following their movements from Guangdong to Shanghai and onward to Southeast Asia, he explores how migration shaped artistic

	practice, identity, and the formation of cross-border modern art networks in the twentieth century. He also considers how shifting cultural environments influenced the evolution of ink traditions beyond China. Within this context, artist Fan Chang Tien can be understood as part of a vibrant diasporic ink tradition shaped by mobility, exchange, and evolving cultural landscapes across Asia. Responding to Wang's research, exhibition curator Lim Shujuan will discuss Fan Chang Tien and ink artists in Singapore, situating their work within local art history while highlighting wider regional connections.
Performances	
Echoes of Ink: Performance Response to Fan Chang Tien	
Date & Time:	17 October 2026, Saturday 2.30pm – 3.00pm 4.00pm – 4.30pm
Venue:	City Hall Wing, Level 2, Singapore Courtyard
Admission Details:	Free Admission
Description:	Enjoy a live encounter between erhu and dance inspired by the artistic legacy of Fan Chang Tien. Moving through the Gallery, the performance explores the elegance, rhythm, composition, and individuality of his ink painting – tracing how an artistic language is received, shared, and transformed across generations. About Michelle Ang: Michelle Ang aka Mishka / Sista Beast is a Singapore-based interdisciplinary artist, Krump dancer, choreographer, and community builder exploring identity, tension, memory, and transformation through movement and performance. With over 14 years dedicated to Krump culture and a foundation in Ballet and street dance, her practice bridges raw street expression with theatre, sound, improvisation, and experimental performance. Rooted in cultural reflection and emotional honesty, Michelle explores how movement can carry identity, memory, and lived experience across different contexts. She is the founder of Roar City Grounds, where she has spent over a decade developing Singapore's Krump community through mentorship, training, and artistic collaboration, while expanding Krump into interdisciplinary

	and immersive performance. About Koh Yu Jie (SNYCO): Born and bred in Singapore, Koh Yu Jie is an award-winning huqin musician whose journey began at the age of 9 under the tutelage of renowned erhu master Zhang Yu Ming. Supported by multiple scholarships, she pursued a Bachelor of Music (Honours) at the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (University of the Arts Singapore), graduating at the top of her cohort in 2025 and receiving the prestigious Ngee Ann Kongsı Gold Medal. Yu Jie currently serves as the co-concertmaster of the Singapore National Youth Chinese Orchestra (SNYCO), an appointment she has held since 2019. In 2026, she joined Ding Yi Music Company as a part-time huqin musician and continues to perform regularly with groups such as the TENG Ensemble. Driven by a desire to explore and deepen her mastery of the instruments in the huqin family, Yu Jie approaches each performance with sensitivity and musicality. Her refined, expressive style brings music to life with emotional depth, allowing her to forge a meaningful connection with audiences.
Exhibition Booklet	
Fan Chang Tien: Rhythm of the Southern Brush Approx. 76 pages Available at The Gallery Store by ABRY, City Hall Wing, Level 1	This booklet accompanies <i>Fan Chang Tien: Rhythm of the Southern Brush</i>, the first retrospective of the artist's work presented by National Gallery Singapore. Through a short exhibition overview and selected image plates, it considers Fan's journey from China to Bangkok and Singapore, his commitment to the scholar-artist tradition and teaching, and his contribution to the development of ink painting in Singapore.