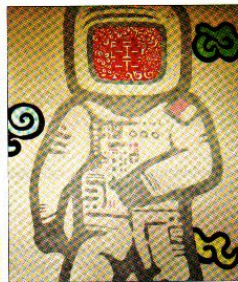
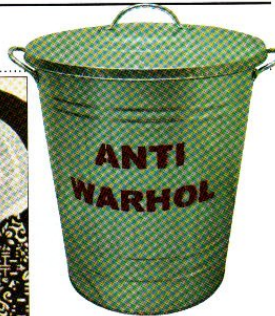


Artist Interview: Justin Lee (Singapore)
 Source: The Big Picture, Timeout Singapore, Jan 2008, Page 55

Art

The big picture

Justin Lee



Pop goes the easel Lee's art blends East with West, traditional with avant-garde

Pop-mania has gripped Singapore. 'A is for Andy' at 72-13 last November had crowds queuing around the block; meanwhile, two Singaporean collectors opened a gallery, Collectors Contemporary, to show off their impressive stash of Warhols and Lichtensteins. (Their first exhibition, 'POP!', opened on 27 December.)

Yet ten years ago, most Singaporeans had never even heard of pop art. Justin Lee helped to change that. His witty, thoughtful work blends traditional Eastern imagery and techniques with twenty-first-century consumerism and Western icons. His impact on the local arts scene is why we've chosen him as the first artist profiled in 'The big picture', a new series in *Time Out Singapore's* Art section that'll highlight movers and shakers in the arts circuit.

Lee had his first solo show in 2003, at the age of 40. Now, four years on, he's held numerous exhibitions, represented Singapore at the Venice Biennale and been commissioned by commercial clients, the Esplanade and the Singapore Art Museum among them. His works currently adorn the entrance of SAM, and will be at Forth Gallery in a group exhibition next month.

Describe your work in five words. Humour, naughty, pop, East-meets-West, playful.

Who's your favourite artist? Dead? René Magritte, the Belgian surrealist. Alive? Tan Pin Pin and Tang Dang Wu, Singaporean multimedia and performance artists.

Would you describe yourself as a pop artist?

Yes, although it was a label given to me by someone else. Labels are disturbing, in a way – they describe something that happened in the past. My work is about now, so it feels slightly strange to give it a label from the past.

Warhol said: 'Why do people think artists are special? It's just another job.' Do you agree?

I agree. The difference between artists and people with other jobs is that we are more observant. People often neglect to look around and consider their environment. The artist's job is to give people the opportunity to stop and think about their surroundings. In the end, we are all the same. We all make money.

What more could be done to help young artists here?

Those with the power to help young artists need to reach out and support them. This reminds me of an experience I had in Paris at the Pompidou Centre. I had been looking at the works of all the dead French masters. However, my favourite image was something I saw on a wall outside the Pompidou: a small, spray-painted image of a man holding an axe. Beneath the image it said, 'Kill the young'. This summed up the problem for me. If all of the art spaces only show dead artists, it kills the younger generation, as they have no room to breathe. Tolla Duke See Listings for information on Forth Gallery. For the full Q & A, visit www.timeoutssingapore.com.

Exhibitions

How to use the listings

This section consists of the month's exhibitions at fine-art museums and galleries, listed on a rotating basis. For historical, cultural and science museums, see **Around Town, Museums**. **FREE** All venues and exhibitions are free unless otherwise indicated. * Denotes an event we particularly recommend.

► Before a day denotes a closing date; after a day denotes a starting date.

How to be listed

Listings must arrive in writing by the **Monday five weeks** before publication. We need the following details: address, phone number, nearest MRT, dates, times, prices and details of the event. Listings can be sent by post or emailed to listings@timeoutsingapore.com. Listings are free but, as space is limited, inclusion is not guaranteed.

Major spaces

National Museum of Singapore

See **Around Town, Museums**.

NUS Museum

University Cultural Centre, 50 Kent Ridge Crescent (65 16 4617, www.nus.edu.sg/museum). **█** Clementi, Mon-Sat 10am-5pm.

NUS Museum South Asian Art Collection A spin-off from the Highlights of South-East Asian Collection, this series pushes its regional boundaries further, assembling a collection of classical Indian paintings and sculptures to offer perspective on some of the earliest 'architectural forms and iconography'. ► 6 Apr.

Reconfigurations: Chinese Contemporary Art View the exclusive works on show by contemporary Chinese artists such as Hai Bo, Xu Xiping and Yue Minjun, spanning from the 1980s to the early 2000s. ► 6 Apr.

Highlights of South-East Asian Collection A wealth of South-East Asian treasures sectioned into seven thematic collections – Genesis: Art & Art Collecting, Vision & Place-Making, Picturing Nanyang, Social Realism & Lyricism, Encountering South-East Asia, Contemporary Trajectories and Singapore Abstraction – will be on show. These prized pieces are borrowed items from institutional and private collectors from far and wide. ► 31 May.

Ways of Seeing Chinese Art The museum's permanent exhibition is a study of various expressions of Chinese culture that's recently been 'refreshed'. Comprising more than 100 ceramic objects dating from the most ancient eras to as recent as the early 20th century, the showcase is a mesmerising maze of majestic items, including jade and bronzes from the Lee Kong Chian collection.

red dot design museum

See **Around Town, Museums**.

Singapore Art Museum

71 Bras Basah Rd (6332 3222, www.nhb.gov.sg/sam). **█** City Hall, Mon-Thu, Sat & Sun 10am-7pm; Fri 10am-9pm. \$5; concession \$2.50; Mon-Fri noon-2pm and Fri 6-9pm free.

From the Everyday to the Imagined:

An Exhibition of Indian Art Lately, India has been carving out its own niche as a leader in Asian art and is fast gaining popularity among aficionados. The Singapore Art Museum catches up by presenting this exhibition that studies modern Indian art as it develops, featuring the works of A Ramachandran, Arpana Caur and KG Subramanyan. ► 16 Jan.

Re-Woven: Featuring the Works of Benny Ong In sync with the National Museum's exhibition of acclaimed Singaporean Benny Ong, 'Re-Woven' approaches the fashion designer's flair from an alternative angle – Ong's use of South-East Asian textiles, paying particular attention to Laotian weaving. Here, Ong collaborates with the museum, as well as native Lao weavers and craftsmen, to amalgamate contemporary design, art and craft as well as incorporating Buddhist themes into a single form. ► 22 Feb.

The Big Picture Show Sometimes size does matter, and in the case of *The Big Picture Show*, it's an understatement. Gawk at some of the most breathtaking pieces of art ever produced, collected from all around Asia with a separate presentation on South-East Asian art. As a taster, check out Ferdinand Montemayor's artwork sprawled across 13 metres. ► 23 Mar.

WS Hoong's Art of Seal Carving – An Exhibition in Commemoration of a Kong Chow Wui Koon Donation Chinese seal-carving is perhaps one of the first artistic disciplines to exist as a combination of art forms rather than a singular kind. Such art forms include engraving, calligraphy and painting – a skill that Singaporean seal-carver WS Hoong acquired and employed for the seals of prominent leaders, such as former president Yusof bin Ishak, Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew and even the late Pope John Paul II. ► 6 Apr.

Art of Our Time Art is now enjoying a positive response in Singapore. This exhibition features some 50 pieces from the museum's permanent collection, including installations, Chinese ink scriptures, sculptures and watercolours. ► 31 Dec 2009.

Singapore Philatelic Museum

See **Around Town, Museums**.

Galleries

Artfolio Gallery

#02-25 Raffles Hotel Arcade, 328 North Bridge Rd (6338 4677, www.artfoliogallery.com.sg). **█** City Hall, Mon-Sat 11am-7pm; Sun noon-5pm. This visual art space seeks to raise awareness toward Asian art in Singapore and the region. While one of their main objectives is to groom and cultivate new generations of artists, they also aim to showcase some of the already accomplished talents in the industry with a collection of modern masterpieces, sculptures, ceramics and etchings.

Art Retreat

10 Ubi Crescent Lobby C, #01-45/46/47 Ubi Technopark (6749 0880, www.artretreatmuseum.com). **█** Eunos or Paya Lebar, Tue-Sat 11am-6pm. Art Retreat is an art gallery and a private museum, home to more than 1,500 modern Asian and European artworks. Its permanent exhibition is *Ink and Oil Painting* by Wu Guanzhong, boasting a collection of exclusive and distinctive masterpieces by one of China's greatest artists of today.

Paintings from the Kwee Swie Teng Collection The founder of Art Retreat

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