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| **Chen Li Ying Georgette (1906-1993)** |
| **[Enter any *variant forms* of your headword – OPTIONAL]** |
| Georgette Chen was a Chinese émigré artist who settled in Singapore in 1953 and taught at the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA) until 1981. Described as the most influential, pioneering female artist in Singapore, Chen brought modernist ideas to the nascent Malayan art world and was instrumental in fostering modernism in local art practice. Her oil paintings, her strongest and most proficient artform, were initially influenced by the Realist and Barbizon Schools. Later her paintings became informed by French Post-Impressionism — especially Fauvism — most notably in their approach toward colour. Her mastery of modernism culminated in a synthesis of Western and Eastern philosophies, which was best represented by her portraits, tropical still lives and *plein air* paintings of everyday scenes in the Malayan landscape – all of which conveyed a distinct local flavour. Chen was known as the first generation of ‘Nanyang artists’, most of whom were affiliated to NAFA as teachers, and who were responsible for bringing to Malaya a sophistication and cosmopolitanism that was deemed missing from the local art scene. |
| Georgette Chen was a Chinese émigré artist who settled in Singapore in 1953 and taught at the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA) until 1981. Described as the most influential, pioneering female artist in Singapore, Chen brought modernist ideas to the nascent Malayan art world and was instrumental in fostering modernism in local art practice. Her oil paintings, her strongest and most proficient artform, were initially influenced by the Realist and Barbizon Schools. Later her paintings became informed by French Post-Impressionism — especially Fauvism — most notably in their approach toward colour. Her mastery of modernism culminated in a synthesis of Western and Eastern philosophies, which was best represented by her portraits, tropical still lives and *plein air* paintings of everyday scenes in the Malayan landscape – all of which conveyed a distinct local flavour. Chen was known as the first generation of ‘Nanyang artists’, most of whom were affiliated to NAFA as teachers, and who were responsible for bringing to Malaya a sophistication and cosmopolitanism that was deemed missing from the local art scene.  Fig: Durians and Mangosteens Image taken from SG Cool, NHB Collections. Permissions to be obtained.) N.B. image downladed from <http://www.sgcool.sg/eMP/eMuseumPlus?service=RedirectService&sp=Scollection&sp=SfieldValue&sp=2&sp=0&sp=3&sp=Slightbox_4x5&sp=0&sp=Sdetail&sp=0&sp=F>  Chen was already an accomplished artist when she arrived in Malaya. Her works were exhibited in numerous prestigious group exhibitions in Paris, at *Salon des Tuileries* and *Salon des Independents,* and collected by *Musee du Jeu de Paume*. Chen’s birthplace and date remain ambiguous. Though Chen herself said she was born in Paris in 1907, her marriage certificate stated her birthplace to be Zhejiang Province, China in 1906. Born to an affluent family with worldwide businesses and extensive political connections, regardless, Chen received private art training from fourteen and was educated in several cosmopolitan centres: Shanghai, Paris (Academie Colarossi and Academie Biloul), and New York (Art Students’ League). Her art career was further supported by her husband, Chen Youren; the first foreign minister of the Republic of China. He was a favourite subject of her portraits until his death at the end of World War Two.  Chen’s second marriage to Ho Yung Chi was an unhappy one. They settled briefly in Penang where she taught at Han Chiang School for two years before relocating to Singapore, shortly after her separation from Ho. She accepted Lim Hak Tai’s invitation to teach at NAFA, a ‘charming’ art school that reminded her of Parisan studios. Chen’s commitment to the Academy was instrumental to realising the institution’s goals; through her connections with Chapelain-Midy, her students studied at *Ecole Nationale Superieure des Beaux Arts.* Chen is the only female artist honoured with two retrospective shows in Singapore and Kuala Lumpur in 1985 and 1986 respectively. She was formally recognised as a Pioneer Artist in 1982. Chen died in March 1993 at the age of eighty-six, after a long series of illnesses which kept her bed-ridden for the last eleven years of her life. |
| Further reading:  (Chia)  (National Museum Art Gallery)  (Sabapathy) |