

YOUNG ARTIST
AWARD
— 2012 —

TAN WEE LIT

VISUAL ARTS



Born in Singapore, Tan Wee Lit graduated from the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology-LASALLE College of the Arts, Singapore programme with a Bachelor of Arts in Fine Arts in 2003. In 2005, Wee Lit received an Overseas Scholarship Grant from the Media Development Authority and pursued his Masters in Fine Arts at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago (2006-2008). In 2007, he received the Skeeter Merit Scholarship from SAIC and was nominated for the International Sculpture Community Outstanding Student Award. Upon graduation from SAIC in 2008, he was also awarded the Graduate Fellowship Award.

Wee Lit staged his first solo exhibition in 2008 at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago in Chicago, Illinois, USA as part of the *12X12 New Artists/New Work* exhibition. He has also participated in other exhibitions abroad including

Identities vs. Globalisation (Chiangmai Art Museum, Chiangmai; National Gallery, Bangkok, Thailand and Dahlem Museum, Berlin, Germany, 2004), *Emerging Illinois Artists* (McLean County Arts Center, Bloomington, Illinois, USA, 2007), the *5th Evergreen Outdoor Sculpture Biennial* (Evergreen Museum-Johns Hopkins University, Maryland, USA, 2008), *Contemporary Urban Asian Art Trail* (Blackburn Museum and Gallery, Blackburn with Darwen, UK, 2008) and *The Same Rain, The Same Wind* (Chiangmai University, Thailand, 2012).

Locally, Wee Lit has also participated in various local exhibitions and his works are in many private collections locally and overseas. His public works include *Eroclamation* (Haw Par Villa MRT) and *All the Essentially Essential* (Raffles Place).



The "Missed" Series (2011)



Tan Wee Lit (2008) (2008)



0806 - 6508 (2008)

A CONVERSATION WITH TAN WEE LIT

How did you first get into visual arts?

I went into Art school wanting to pursue Graphic Design and changed my mind after my Foundation course at LASALLE when I got to do a bit of everything. I recall spending so much time in the studio making my works even after class ended and it was an epiphany of sorts for me to discover what being passionate about something is all about. Fortunately my parents allowed me to switch my Major, for which I lied about taking Graphic Design as an elective (so that I have something to fall back on).

What are the biggest challenges you face as an artist?

The whole sustainability of maintaining an art practice is always challenging. As with the adage about 10 years of slogging off stage for that one minute on-stage. The amount of work you put in the confines of a studio may not always reflect what one sees in the gallery. It can be demoralising and discouraging at times definitely. What doesn't kill you... may actually paralyse you sometimes. It always boils back down to the belief I have in my works and the desire for it to manifest. The conversations the works solicit provide a little impetus each time, as with the occasional acknowledgements that come along.

What motivates you to continue?

I was never the best student in class because I had all these ambitious (and delusional) ideas that I wanted to materialise with my limited experience and skills. Most of them failed and they were either unresolved or become spectacular failures. Strange enough, I discovered I actually enjoyed the process of creating so much more than the final outcome. I remembered there was once I made the biggest clay work ever attempted only for it to collapse when it was about to be completed. There was hardly a slightest tinge of despair. It is like enjoying the sights, sounds and experience on the bus more than arriving at the destination. I felt all the failures were worthwhile on hindsight. Every work was a lesson in retrospect. I think it's a form of catharsis, some sort of respite. Have you ever heard of artists retiring?

When you set about creating a new work, what inspires you?

They are usually issues that stirred in me, be it societal or personal. It's like the journalist who wants to bring to light an issue, the scientist who sets out to resolve a problem or the activist who wants to give a voice to the overlooked all rolled in one. Then again you can argue that the impact of an artist is less direct, with its outcomes less immediate or straightforward. These issues are incubated and before being possibly materialised at some point when the mode of execution feels right — what form it will take, at what scale, what medium and all these considerations. Or sometimes, they may just continue to remain as that figment of imagination.

What are your hopes for Singapore's visual arts/arts scene in Singapore?

Visual Arts will always be challenged in an economy-driven society that wants to see revenue and monetary return of investments. The impact of the Visual Arts should not always equate to dollars and cents every time, but for the cultural capital that it is able to contribute. Some of the things I wish for the arts scene in Singapore:

- The cultural and arts literacy of the general public. We always want to make art easily accessible and understandable to the majority so that it justifies the costs. It is like making exams easier so that people can be encouraged to study. I hope we can progressively challenge the majority of the patrons and audience to take it upon themselves to question and understand, not the cost, but the issues and relevance behind each work before dismissing them. Art does not have to be sensational or controversial every time in order for people to sit up and take interest.
- Of more spaces to be made available to young emerging artists to be showcased. There used to be places like the now-defunct Post-Museum, Plastique Kinetic Works etc where young emerging artists can propose for exhibitions to show more cutting-edge and experimental works that are less likely to be picked up by the market. Currently there is a dearth of such spaces other than The Substation. I always wish for more of such spaces, or even for the Singapore Art Museum to offer one of its galleries to these young artists for them to propose. It can exist like a small showcase of sorts that will allow foreign visitors to see not just blockbuster exhibitions, but also a sampling of what young emerging Singaporean artists are capable of.

What does the Young Artist Award mean to you?

It means that I am still young? It is an honour to be awarded this milestone achievement — before I become too old for it (tongue-in-cheek). To be honest, much as the award does not make me a better or more qualified artist, it is a shot in the arm that will keep me on my toes to persevere and sustain the discipline to practice. It is like running out of excuses not to run now after being given a new pair of running shoes. The acknowledgement is also testament to the many who had believed in my work and in me. It has to also go out to my parents, who took a chance with me then in going against the norm of a mainstream education to do what was considered something unconventional.



A Living Legacy (2006)

WORDS OF APPRECIATION

“ I am grateful for the support from my family and parents, Mr Tan Yeok Teck and Mdm Thong Khwai Yeow, who then allowed me to pursue what was an unconventional route. I was given the chance to be accountable on what I wanted to do and was given the assurance that they will give me all the support they can afford. The award is not an acknowledgement of my achievements, but an acknowledgement to all those who had believed in me and gave me opportunities; and for all the doors that opened along the way, spurring me on with a gentle push each time. ”

Tan Wee Lit