

Jobs in the Past

Singapore painter Chua Mia Tee believes that art should not just capture the likeness of subjects like people, daily life and landscapes, but also breathe life into and showcase the beauty within them by emphasising certain details.

Chua is known for painting local scenes of Singapore, which help us to understand more about our history.

Let's take a look at how Chua depicted people carrying out their work in the past.



From the 1920s to 1980s, Samsui women, a group of Chinese women who moved to Singapore in search of jobs and better lives, were commonly seen working in construction sites. This painting shows us how tough and determined the Samsui women were. We see them hard at work, digging soil and carrying heavy building materials using shoulder poles.

- What do you think were some of the challenges they faced?
- Can you spot the Samsui woman in the clip currently playing at the Portable Cinema, titled *Streets of Vigour*?

Chua Mia Tee. *Samsui Women*. 1977. Oil on canvas, 76.9 x 78 cm. Gift of Times Publishing Limited. Collection of National Heritage Board, Singapore.



Chua Mia Tee. *Road Construction Worker*. 1955. Oil on canvas, 86 x 66 cm. Collection of National Gallery Singapore. This work has been adopted by Seah and Siak.

In this portrait, Chua portrays a road construction worker who seems to be having a moment of rest from work.

Chua admired the workers whose hard labour was key to Singapore's development.

- Let your eyes travel around this portrait. What do you find most interesting about it?
- What do you think the worker is feeling? Why do you think so?

The clip currently playing at the Portable Cinema, titled *The City Awakens*, shows many areas in Singapore that have been redeveloped today. What are the differences between then and now?



If you could give some words of encouragement to the worker, what would you say to him? Write it in the space above!