

HARIDAS CONTEMPORARY

Haridas Contemporary is a gallery founded by Christiaan Haridas that aims to support and grow alongside Singapore's burgeoning contemporary art scene. The gallery endeavors to create a home for emerging and mid-career Singapore and Singaporebased artists, while maintaining a satellite program with regional artists.

With 15 years of experience in the Southeast Asian art market, Christiaan hopes to advocate for promising art practices that are sensitively crafted and offer interesting entry-points into the stories and concerns of contemporary life.

The gallery is committed to supporting artists throughout their artistic careers by seeding opportunities for exhibition, dialogue, and professional counsel. Haridas Contemporary will rally for exciting local practices to be recognised across regional and international platforms.

In Search of Havens

By Tiffanie Tseng

Traversing landscapes both physical and imagined, *Another Day in Paradise* captures the confluence of personal memory, fantasy, and existential contemplation that defines Esmond Loh's art. Grounded in Loh's present realities yet imbued with nostalgia and dreamlike qualities, the exhibition revisits familiar themes while weaving in new narratives. His works are both surreal and intimate, depicting protagonists exploring lush terrains, often accompanied by playful and enigmatic creatures.

Through vivid storytelling and a deft balance of figuration and abstraction, Loh challenges traditional notions of paradise, inviting viewers to reflect on its many facets – be it escapism, freedom, or resilience. This essay examines Loh's nuanced depictions of paradise, followed by an exploration of his stylistic evolution, process, and technique.

Paradise: A Multifaceted Lens

The idea of paradise evokes a wide range of emotions, from longing and hope to irony and doubt. Popularised by Phil Collins' 1989 hit *Another Day in Paradise*, the phrase carries a bittersweet resonance, contrasting the struggles of homelessness with the trappings of material wealth. Over time, it has also taken on a sarcastic edge, often used to describe situations that appear ideal but are far from perfect. In art and literature, paradise often symbolises an elusive ideal, expressing our eternal quest for something flawless that remains just out of reach.

Esmond Loh's exploration of paradise transcends picturesque landscapes, delving into the complexities of human experience. Weaving together treasured memories, moments of longing, and flashes of excitement, Loh blurs the boundaries between foreign fantasies and familiar realities.

Through these juxtapositions, Loh invites viewers to rethink their perceptions of paradise and the personal narratives they build around it.

The exhibition's title, *Another Day in Paradise*, hints at a dichotomy – paradise as both a lofty aspiration and an overlooked reality. His paintings probe the tension between the paradises we seek and those we inhabit unknowingly. By combining figuration and fiction, Loh raises compelling questions: How do we define paradise, and what do we sacrifice in its pursuit?

To gain a deeper appreciation of Loh's works, one must consider his perspective as a Singaporean artist navigating a city-state often described as a utopian "Garden City", but where notions of freedom and space are tightly negotiated.

The Beauty of Slowing Down

Loh's exploration of paradise often evokes a deep yearning for a slower, more intentional way of life. In *Big Catch* and *The Waiting Game*, he draws on fond childhood memories of fishing at Singapore's reservoirs and recent visits to a durian farm in Penang, Malaysia. Capturing instances of quiet anticipation, such as a yabby's tentative nibble at a breadstick or the suspense of a durian's fall, these works highlight tender moments of calm and tranquility amid a frenetic urban existence in Singapore.

Through these poignant visual cues, Loh captures the rhythm of life governed not by deadlines but by nature's cycles. These scenes underscore a profound desire for connection with nature and a slower, more reflective rhythm of life. Loh describes, "The places in my paintings are where I often wish I could be – vast, barren spaces with few people. The opportunity to be alone, to do nothing, and to simply slow down is rare and precious, especially in Singapore." This sentiment resonates deeply in a city-state where rapid urbanisation often leaves little room for solitude or unhurried contemplation. His works encourage viewers to pause and embrace the richness of small, unhurried

moments, reminding us that paradise can be found in the simple act of waiting.

Escapism and Longing

Themes of escapism and longing have long been central to Loh's artistic journey. The paintings in *Another Day in Paradise* echo an earlier phase in his oeuvre, marked by blurred, muted scenes inhabited by solitary figures. These elements resurface in works like *Parking Lot*, where a lone individual leans against his car, absorbed in his phone – a quiet yet poignant representation of urban alienation and existential unease. Similarly, in *The River* and *White Easter*, figures occupy shared spaces but remain disconnected, their postures and gazes conveying an unspoken yearning to be elsewhere. Through his evocative vignettes, Loh not only expresses his personal longing but also invites viewers to reflect on their own relationship with time and space.

Joy in the Unexpected

In *Crossing*, Loh celebrates the serendipitous joy of encountering the unexpected. A family of otters crossing a park footpath, while a man restrains his excited dog, create a moment of delightful whimsy. Inspired by Singapore's urban landscapes, this painting blurs the boundary between the built and natural environments, portraying a rare coexistence that disrupts routine monotony. This fleeting interaction invites viewers to reflect on the small, spontaneous pleasures that make life extraordinary. Loh's paradise is not confined to grand utopias but emerges in unpredictable moments that spark wonder and connection.

Freedom and Indulgence

In works like *Harvest Party* and *Youth Day*, Loh frames paradise as the freedom to indulge in life's simple pleasures, portraying moments through a youthful and carefree lens. *Harvest Party*, inspired by his long-term fascination with the durian fruit, portrays a young boy's first encounter with the

'king of all fruits', captivated by its pungency and fleshy appearance on a rustic terrace overlooking lush greenery. Similarly, *Youth Day* portrays teenagers reveling in a canal, liberated from societal constraints and simply enjoying an uncontrived, spontaneous moment together. These scenes suggest that paradise lies in the privilege of unhurried leisure and the ability to exist fully in the present, inviting us to see luxury not as material excess but as a form of freedom to indulge in.

Redefining Comfort

In Singapore, a city often perceived to be meticulously planned and highly curated, Loh challenges the idealised image of paradise by portraying improvised moments in wild and rugged terrains. Works like *Campsite* and *Paradise* depict make-shift sanctuaries – a battered tent, a dug-out coal pit, or a nylon tarp strung amongst thin stilts, pushing us to reconsider how moments of imperfection can also bring us comfort, allowing us to seek refuge in the ordinary and the transient. These works argue that paradise can be found in imperfection, resilience, and resourcefulness, pushing us to consider comfort and beauty as products of adaptability.

Blending Fantasy and Reality

A hallmark of Loh's work is his seamless blending of the real and the imaginary. His paintings, reminiscent of magical realism, depict familiar settings infused with surreal elements that challenge our perceptions and create a captivating visual dialogue. For instance, the *kelong*-inspired structure in the titular painting *Paradise* is surrounded by mysterious forms – a floating dome and pink fins – evoking a sense of wonder and disorientation.

Other works, like *Big Catch* and *Youth Day*, inject elements of whimsy and tension, such as a yabby scaling a peculiar breadstick or a mysterious form emerging from a canal. In *White Easter* and *The River*, seemingly ordinary settings are punctuated by extraordinary happenings, with perplexing marine creatures being the focal point of both paintings. Loh toys with theatricality and curiosity,

inviting viewers to navigate the blurred boundary between memory, dream, and experience.

The Role of Memory and Place

Loh's works are deeply rooted in the cultural and ecological milieu of Southeast Asia. From the longkang (drain) to the kelong (offshore fishing platform), his use of local semiotics imbues his paintings with a distinct tropical sensibility. At the same time, Loh explores universal themes like longing and transformation, skillfully employing emotive language that transcends geographic boundaries. This universal resonance situates his art within broader artistic dialogues, bringing life to the worlds that he imagines.

Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* and Victor Turner's *The Liminal Space* offer compelling lenses through which to understand the layered dimensions of Esmond Loh's paintings. Bachelard's exploration of intimate spaces imbued with memory is particularly relevant to Loh's works such as *Parking Lot* and *Campsite*. These paintings transform ordinary settings into spaces charged with emotion and resonance, recalling Bachelard's notion of the home or corner as a vessel for lived experiences. For Loh, memory becomes a powerful tool for grounding his imagined realities in the familiarity of Southeast Asia, blending scenes like a HDB carpark under raintrees or a durian farm into evocative yet universal representations of nostalgia and belonging.

Victor Turner's concept of liminality – the threshold between two states – resonates in Loh's paintings, which traverse reality and imagination. Works like *The River* and *Paradise* embody this essence, depicting suspended spaces and moments. The kelong-like structure in Paradise merges Southeast Asian traditions with surreal elements, illustrating Turner's idea of the "betwixt and between" and creating a world that exists on the edge of the tangible.

In both perspectives, memory and identity are key to Loh's artistic exploration. By anchoring his imagined universes mainly in Southeast Asia, he connects alternate realities to lived cultural

and environmental contexts. His paintings resonate with viewers through shared memories and collective identities, while challenging conventional notions of place and time. This duality highlights the liminal nature of Loh's art; grounded in reality yet constantly striving to transcend it.

Creating an Adventure

Loh's creative process begins with a spark – an image, memory, or dream that ignites his imagination. He translates these fragments into sketches, experimenting with compositions, light, and shadow to develop his ideas. Guided by his muses, including Neo Rauch, Zhang Yingnan, and Serban Savu, Loh refines his visual language, combining bold colors with meticulous detail.

When asked what he hopes his audiences get out of his work, Loh emphasises that the only audience he ever considers is himself. While Loh's work is undeniably sophisticated, he emphasises the childlike joy that fuels his artistic journey. "I want every painting to transport me to another place and bring me on an adventure," he says. This playful approach imbues his works with a sense of discovery, encouraging viewers to embark on their own imaginative journeys.

Loh's paintings not only depict alternate realities but also construct an interconnected universe where scenes subtly reference one another. Inspired by film and worldbuilding, particularly the narrative continuity seen in the Marvel Cinematic Universe and the suggestive links in *Black Mirror*, Loh weaves visual and thematic connections into his works, drawing viewers into a cohesive, immersive world.

This approach was first explored in his previous solo exhibition, *Cliffhanger*, where recurring motifs, objects, and figures hinted at a shared narrative across different scenes. In *Another Day in Paradise*, this technique is further refined. For instance, the lone otter in *Youth Day* is intentionally separated from the family of otters crossing the path in *Crossing*, suggesting a poignant narrative thread about loss and reconnection. Similarly, the billowing smoke visible in the background of both

Harvest Party and The Waiting Game reveals that these scenes occur on the same durian farm, captured at different times of day and locations.

These subtle links encourage viewers to explore and uncover hidden stories within the exhibition. By embedding Easter eggs and connecting threads, Loh crafts a world that reflects the interconnectedness of memory and experience. This shared universe enhances the layered realities of life, amplifying the theatricality and intrigue that characterise his work.

Esmond Loh's *Another Day in Paradise* invites us to reconsider what paradise means in a world defined by rapid urbanisation and fleeting connections. Through richly textured worlds and evocative storytelling by blending personal memories, local realities, and surreal abstractions, Loh creates works that resonate on both a personal and universal level. His art challenges us to find beauty in the mundane, joy in the unexpected, and resilience in the face of imperfection – reminding us that paradise may not be an elusive ideal but a layered reality waiting to be rediscovered.

About the Writer

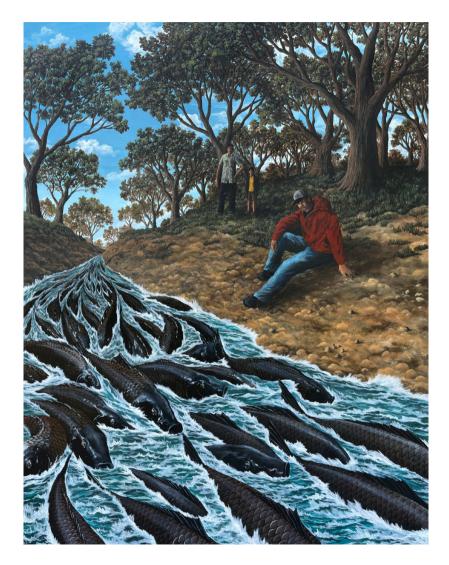


Tiffanie Tseng (b. 1997, Hong Kong) is an architectural designer and curator based in Hong Kong. She writes and conducts research at the intersection of architecture, art, and urban design. Informed by her diverse international background and multidisciplinary perspective, she is interested in the complex interplay between multicultural narratives and geographies that shape our identities and influence how we perceive the environment.

Tseng has engaged with the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) and the National University of Singapore (NUS), running architectural design workshops for ArchiFest 2022 hosted by the Singapore Institute of Architects (SIA), and teaching students from the NUS College of Design and Engineering (CDE) on approaching and dissecting complex urban systems.

Beyond the field of architecture, Tseng is passionate about landscape and architectural photography, with her photographic work featured in a group exhibition at the URA. Her artistic endeavors culminated in her role as curator for the group exhibition "Vita in Movimento" (2023), where she designed an outdoor installation in Hong Kong that focuses on transforming public spaces into interactive and dynamic hubs within the city.

ESMOND LOHThe River, 2024, Acrylic on Canvas, 170 x 130 cm



ARTIST STATEMENT THE RIVER. 2024

This painting captures a tranquil yet dynamic moment in nature, as a river teeming with carp flows energetically toward the viewer. It is unclear if the fish are surging downstream or swimming upstream, but nonetheless, they evoke a sense of movement and vitality. The scene hints at a few possibilities: the fish could be exploring new waters, attempting to escape certain danger, or simply going with the flow. On the right, a solitary man sits in quiet contemplation by the riverbank, his posture suggesting deep reflection as he gazes at the water. Another man and a girl observe the scene from a distance.

ESMOND LOHBig Catch, 2024, Acrylic on Canvas, 170 x 130 cm



ARTIST STATEMENT BIG CATCH 2024

'Big Catch' is a whimsical and surreal interpretation of my childhood memories of fishing at Lower Peirce Reservoir in Singapore with my family and friends. The painting depicts three men engaged in a curious scene by the water's edge. One man, seated on the rocks, lifts a large stone while another scoops up a catfish with a net, echoing a memory of a night when teamwork led to a successful catch. The third man kneels nearby, holding a long pole with a chunk of bread attached to the top – an exaggerated depiction of our unique technique for luring yabbies. A yabby crawls along the pole, while on the grass, a macaque sneaks up to steal from a nearby bucket.

Set against a calm reservoir with distant forests and a lone cloud drifting in the evening sky, the scene combines tranquility with playful chaos. Mysterious blobs of snail eggs on the rocks add to the surreal atmosphere, capturing the adventurous spirit of my fishing trips.

ESMOND LOHParadise, 2024, Acrylic on Canvas, 180 x 120 cm



ARTIST STATEMENT PARADISE. 2024

Paradise presents an imagined sanctuary afloat in the open sea, a fragile haven amidst choppy waters and cloudy skies. Inspired by Southeast Asian "kelong" structures, this painting depicts a multi-layered, makeshift home constructed from poles, tarpaulins, and metal sheets, hinting at a self-sustained lifestyle.

Everyday items – beds, couches, barrels, even a washing machine – add touches of practicality and resilience. A lone man, fishing rod in hand, sits calmly at the edge, embodying quiet solitude against the vast sea. To his right, a diving board suggests small escapes and moments of joy in this isolated world. Adding intrigue, a hollow dome levitates above the structure while three pink fins circle below. At first glance, the fins are reminiscent of sharks, but on closer inspection resemble pink dolphins, blending whimsy with tension.

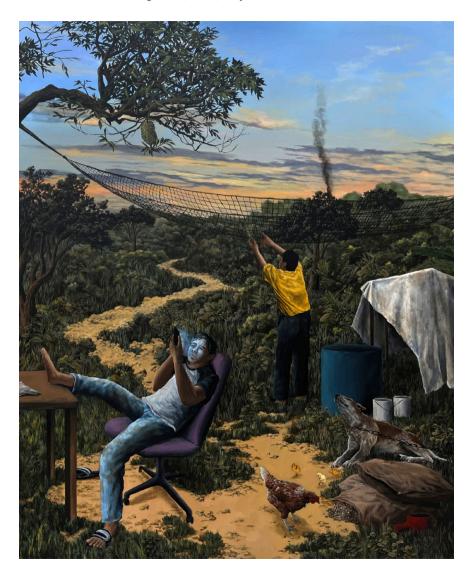
ESMOND LOHWhite Easter, 2024, Acrylic on Canvas, 152 x 122 cm



ARTIST STATEMENT WHITE EASTER. 2024

'White Easter' captures a serene coastal moment between two figures by a pool at the sea's edge: a man reflecting on his own image and a woman gazing outward, poised against the backdrop of massive coastal rocks. Inspired by sights on a trip to Malta in 2019, the painting depicts a scene bathed in the clarity of a perfect day, with the blue sea stretching into the distance. The focal point of the composition is a whale emerging gracefully from the water, its presence subtly punctuating the scene with a touch of majesty and wonder.

ESMOND LOHThe Waiting Game, 2024, Acrylic on Canvas, 152 x 122 cm

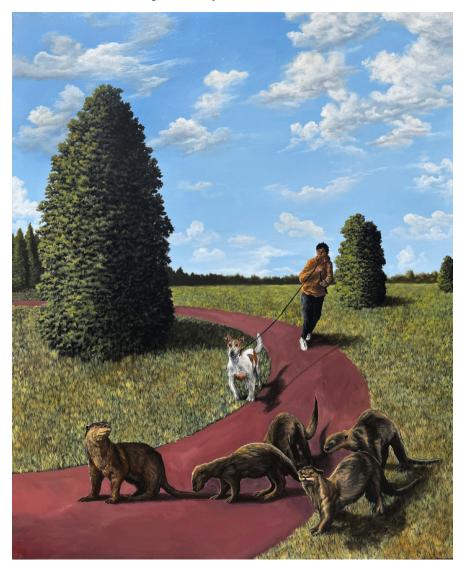


ARTIST STATEMENT **THE WAITING GAME**, 2024

'The Waiting Game' captures the quiet anticipation and subtle tension of harvesting durian, inspired by my stay at a durian farm in Penang. Set at the foot of a hill in the evening, the scene centers around a man slouched in an office chair, scrolling through his phone, his face illuminated by its blue glow. Above him, a large net stretches across durian trees, holding a single durian, while another man below reaches for it. The scattered tents, buckets, and animal feed speak to the daily routines of a farm, while a hen, her chicks, and a chained dog add a touch of rural stillness.

In the distance, black smoke rises from the forest, subtly hinting at the passage of time and activity beyond the farm, and adding a sense of mystery and unease. The title 'The Waiting Game' reflects the patience and expectation right before the moment when the prized durians finally fall.

ESMOND LOHCrossing, 2024, Acrylic on Canvas, 152 x 122 cm



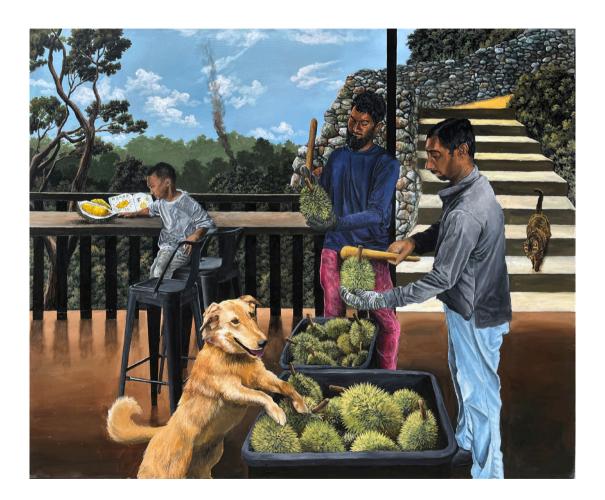
ARTIST STATEMENT **CROSSING**. 2024

This painting captures the charm of unexpected encounters with nature. Against a blue sky dotted with clouds, a winding path cuts through an open field where a man holds back his dog, which stands riveted by a family of otters crossing the path. The otters bring a lively energy to the scene, reminding us of the ways wildlife intersects with everyday life in urban Singapore. A large tree anchors the composition, with more trees scattered across the distant landscape, framing the interaction.

The otter family here connects meaningfully to another painting, 'Youth Day', where a lone otter appears, seemingly separated from this group. This subtle link between paintings underscores themes of kinship and resilience, as otters have become symbols of adaptation within Singapore's urban fabric. The work expresses both the spontaneity and interconnection of city life and its natural inhabitants.

ESMOND LOH

Harvest Party, 2024, Acrylic on Canvas, 122 x 152 cm



ARTIST STATEMENT HARVEST PARTY 2024

'Harvest Party' captures a vivid memory from my stay on a durian farm in Penang. The scene unfolds on a wooden terrace that overlooks lush forests. In the foreground, two workers strike durians with sticks, while an eager dog perches over a crate of durians, its playful energy contrasting with the workers' focus.

In the middle ground, a boy sits at a table with an open durian, engrossed in its scent and texture. Next to him, a children's storybook about durians adds a sense of wonder, connecting the setting to the storytelling traditions of childhood. On the right, a cat curiously descends the short flight of stairs leading to a hill. The natural setting and the black smoke rising in the distance hints that this scene could be taking place not far from the scene in another painting depicting a durian farm, 'The Waiting Game'.

This painting expresses the rustic charm and small, lively moments of life on a farm, highlighting the vibrant atmosphere that revolves around the durian harvest season.

ESMOND LOH

Parking Lot, 2024, Acrylic on Canvas, 100 x 140 cm



ARTIST STATEMENT PARKING LOT. 2024

Parking Lot' reflects a quiet moment of nostalgia, inspired by memories of my family's old neighbourhood in Singapore. This open-air carpark, framed by towering raintrees casting dappled shadows, captures a scene both ordinary and familiar. In the foreground, a man leans against his car, cigarette in hand, absorbed in his phone. His solitary presence contrasts with the flock of pigeons nearby, pecking at the ground, adding a touch of life to the otherwise still scene. The composition, with old HDB blocks in the background, and a path leading to an elevated field, reflects a landscape shaped by time and change.

ESMOND LOH
Youth Day, 2024, Acrylic on Canvas, 131 x 101 cm



ARTIST STATEMENT YOUTH DAY: 2024

In 'Youth Day', a whimsical and surreal adventure unfolds within the confines of a canal. The painting captures the boundless curiosity and risk-taking spirit of youth, where ordinary spaces become landscapes for exploration. On the left, a boy dangles precariously from the edge of the canal, embodying the thrill and danger that often accompanies youthful bravado. On the right, two boys lie side by side, with one pointing toward something unseen beyond the frame. Their gesture hints at the infinite possibilities and unseen wonders that lie just out of view. At the center, a girl kneels before a lone otter which appears to be separated from its family, mirroring the children's journey of discovery. An abstract form emerges from a hole in the wall, heightening the sense of surrealism and mystery in the scene.

'Youth Day' explores similar themes as an earlier painting titled 'Children's Day' - curiosity, risk, and the adventurous spirit of childhood.

ESMOND LOHCampsite, 2024, Acrylic on Canvas, 101 x 120 cm



ARTIST STATEMENT CAMPSITE. 2024

The painting captures a moment of quiet contemplation in a setting that embodies the rugged beauty and serenity of the American mid-west. A solitary figure stands by a river, deeply engaged in thought, set against a backdrop of rugged natural elements and a serene landscape. The scene is anchored by a simple yet evocative campsite – a tent and a coal hole – symbolising both the presence of human life and its fleeting connection with the vast wilderness. The grassy foreground and rocky riverbank contrast with the pine trees that frame the composition, guiding the eye towards the distant, ice-capped mountain. This juxtaposition highlights human solitude amidst nature's grandeur.

ARTIST BIOGRAPHY & CV



Esmond Loh (b. 1995, Singapore) paints dramatic and ambiguous scenes based on personal experience and imagination. Melding figuration and fiction, Loh explores the theatrical and themes such as longing, nostalgia, existentialism, and humans' relationship with nature. Loh graduated in 2019, with a Bachelor of Fine Arts (First Class Honours) from the Slade School of Fine Art in London, United Kingdom. He won the prestigious UOB Painting of the Year Award in Singapore in 2012 when he was 17 years old, for his first attempt at oil painting titled *Just Let Me Sleep*. He also won awards in the same competition in 2018 and 2020. To date, he has had four solo exhibitions, the most recent being *Cliffhanger* at Haridas Contemporary in Singapore in 2024. His works are part of private collections in Singapore, Malaysia and the UK.

EDUCATION

2021 Post Graduate Diploma in Education, National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University

2019 Bachelor of Fine Arts (First Class Honours), Slade School of Fine Art, University College London

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2025 Another Day in Paradise, Haridas Contemporary, Singapore

2024 Cliffhanger, Haridas Contemporary, Singapore

2018 Screen Dream, An Artsy Online Exclusive, Chan + Hori Contemporary, Singapore

2016 States of Being, Chan Hampe Galleries, Singapore

2014 Generations, Chan Hampe Galleries, Singapore

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2025 Art SG, Haridas Contemporary Booth, Singapore

2024 AEDGE 2024, School of the Arts, Singapore

2023 Haridas Contemporary Inaugural Exhibition, Haridas Contemporary, Singapore

2022 AEDGE 2022 Exhibition, School of the Arts, Singapore

2022 Painting Today, Modern Art Society Singapore Group Exhibition, Singapore Chinese

Cultural Centre, Singapore

2021 29th Asian International Art Exhibition, Kyushu Geibun-Kan Art and Cultural Center,

Fukuoka

2020 39th UOB Painting of the Year Exhibition, UOB Art Gallery, Singapore

2019 Intersections, Modern Art Society Singapore Group Exhibition, Singapore Chinese Cultural

Centre, Singapore

2019 Slade Degree Show, Slade School of Fine Art, London

2019 Slade Students Exhibition, Russell & Chapple Store Street Spring Market, London

2018 37th UOB Painting of the Year Exhibition, UOB Art Gallery, Singapore

2018 SIZE MATTERS: A Question of Scale, Chan + Hori Contemporary, Singapore

2016 Slade Print Fair, UCL North Lodge and Cloisters, London

2015 Noise Singapore 2015 Festival Exhibition, Ion Orchard, Singapore

2015 Passages, UOB Art Gallery, Singapore

2015 Common Ground, Shophouse 5, Singapore

2015 Fresh Takes, Chan Hampe Galleries, Singapore

2014 Singapore Youth Festival Art Exhibition, Institute of Contemporary Arts, Singapore

2013 32nd UOB Painting of the Year Exhibition, 72-13 Gallery, Singapore

2013 UOB Painting of the Year Reimagined, Utopia Festival, Singapore

2013 Creation - Exhibition by SJI Old Boys, Singapore Art Museum, Singapore

2013 Spectrum MOE Art Elective Programme Exhibition, Institute of Contemporary Arts, Singapore

2012 31st UOB Painting of the Year Exhibition, Singapore Art Museum, Singapore

2012 Singapore Youth Festival Arts and Craft Exhibition, Institute of Contemporary Arts,

Singapore

PRIZES, AWARDS & RESIDENCIES

2020 39th UOB Painting of the Year Award (Silver)

2019 Liberty Art Award 2019 (Shortlisted)

2019 Jackson's Open Painting Prize (Shortlisted)

2018 37th UOB Painting of the Year Award (Highly Commended)

2014 Singapore Youth Festival Art Certificate of Appreciation (Special Mention)

2012 31st UOB Painting of the Year Award (1st Prize)

2012 Singapore Youth Festival Arts and Craft Award (Gold with Honours)

2011 St. Joseph's Institution Brother Joseph McNally Creativity Award

HARIDAS CONTEMPORARY

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Opening Hours

Thursday to Saturday: 12 noon – 7 pm Sunday: 12 noon – 5 pm Wednesday by appointment only Monday, Tuesdays & Public Holidays: Closed

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