

A painting of a beach scene. In the foreground, a man in a black t-shirt and grey trousers stands with his back to the viewer, looking out at the ocean. To his left, two children are playing in the shallow water. One child, wearing a pink shirt and black pants, is crouched down. The other child, wearing a yellow and white shirt and black shorts, is standing and looking towards the water. The ocean is a deep blue-green color with white foam from the waves. The sky is a clear blue with a few wispy clouds. A bright, white, curved streak, resembling a comet or a meteor, is visible in the upper left portion of the sky.

INTERMISSION

HARIDAS
CONTEMPORARY

ESMOND LOH

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 Singapore-based artists, while maintaining a satellite program with regional artists.

With 17 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.

Between Acts

by Gwyneth Poh

When the curtains fall for an intermission, performers and spectators alike step out of the realm of fiction and facades, returning to reality for a moment of rest. Though brief, this pause is necessary: without it, actors tire and audiences grow restless.

What makes this premise exciting, in Esmond's case, is that the return never quite happens. His works are fictional: vague, dream-like, populated by scenes that never existed exactly as painted. Yet each carries a measure of truth, drawn from his personal experiences. Unlike the theatre, here the boundary between the stage and reality is blurred and nearly nonexistent. Instead, people find glimpses of themselves in these uncertain scenes, formed at the convergence of memory, imagination, and reality. Here, they are untethered from the stifling clarity of everyday life, where everything, increasingly, is scheduled, productive, and accounted for.

Intermission takes this tension between fiction and lived truth, performance and rest, as its premise, using the theatrical as a lens to explore diverse notions of rest and self-care in a fast-paced society that prioritises efficiency over all else. Loh's third solo exhibition with Haridas Contemporary presents 17 imagined figurative scenes in which individuals are caught between roles during moments of rest, waiting, or escape. This essay follows that suspension across three movements: the roles we play even during our breaks, the discomfort of waiting when nothing is in our control, and the small escapes we build for ourselves.

The Briefest of Breaks

First sighted in *Office*, during his first solo exhibition, *Cliffhanger*, Loh reprises the figure of an office worker in *Adrift*, *Turn*, *Commute*, *Void Deck*, and *After the Bell*. Dressed in plain black slacks and a stark white shirt with sleeves rolled to the elbow, the worker (hereby unofficially the Salaryman) becomes a recurring character throughout *Intermission*.

The *Dictionary of Theatre Terms and Concepts* quotes French historian Marmontel, who theorised that during an intermission, while the audience rested, the action continued, characters “deemed to continue acting during the interval from one act to another.” The idea isn’t far removed from how we behave at work, extending the exhibition’s theatre metaphor to the Salaryman: much like clients, coworkers, and bosses who expect responses after hours or on weekends, we’re perceived as characters expected to continue acting out our roles even during a break. Living in a well-connected world with increasingly blurred lines between work and personal life can leave one feeling overwhelmed, like an actor unable to move on from a character they’ve played for years.

This is felt keenly in *After the Bell*. While Loh typically avoids associating his works with specific locations, preferring ambiguous, dream-like landscapes, this is one of the few exceptions: the national flag flying over the parade square of a three-storey school building with a red brick lattice typical of older buildings, now a rare sight, many being torn down or renovated to keep pace with the country’s growth. Most remarkable, given that Loh paints from memory, is how he captures the school’s minute details, evoking memories of recess from childhood. He laces the work with elements of nostalgia: schoolbags, wallets, and water bottles strewn on the floor, children playing in the courtyard, shirts messy and untucked, waiting outside the staff room and reaching for the landline.

While the children wear uniforms that echo the Salaryman's shirt and slacks, Loh paints them as lively and distinct. The moment the bell rings, they shed their roles as students to roughhouse and socialise with each other freely on the first and second floors. Interactions grow sparser towards the highest floor of the building, where the Salaryman, now in the role of a teacher, leans listlessly against the parapet. What is a teacher, if not another kind of Salaryman? One who perhaps knows better than any other how a job can consume a life? Held to higher moral standards than most workers, mindful of their conduct even off the clock, teachers work long hours while remaining accountable for numerous young lives. Placing him above everyone else, yet completely devoid of superiority, triumph or even satisfaction, Loh alludes to the struggle in truly stepping away from responsibility in adulthood, evoking a longing for the carefree days of childhood.

Adrift also places the Salaryman at a height to explore the gap between childhood and adulthood. Standing alone on a bridge with his hands on the railing, he looks down at a red ball floating along the surface of a canal. While it is unclear which way either man or ball is headed, the way he leans forward suggests it had caught his eye mid-journey, and he stopped to stare. Although Loh has mentioned that the ball holds no specific meaning, it bears a striking resemblance to the large floating red orb that loomed over the children in *Children's Day*.

This detail draws connections to *Children's Day* and *Youth Day*, which explored similar themes of childhood and adventure. Now however, we see how things have changed in adulthood. The once-massive orb is now small and powerless to the current, and the dried-out canal from *Youth Day* — where plucky teenagers once gathered—is now flooded and inaccessible. The Salaryman stands far above both, with his arms tucked in. The railing comes up to his chest like a barricade, as if he's been fenced out from his own days of wonder.

And yet, this exile is not absolute. While *Children's Day* implied that only children could see the orb, the Salaryman still notices it here, staring down longingly. Loh suggests that even in brief, unplanned pauses, we retain the capacity for introspection and reconnection. Similarly, in *Turn*,

cycling beneath a highway with cars rushing past, the Salaryman glances back at a beam of light breaking through the dark, enraptured.

Caught in private moments of rest, the Salaryman reveals glimpses of his inner world and the revitalising potential of the daily commute: in *Commute*, he sits on a row of bright orange train seats, and in *Void Deck*, where stripes of colour on each pillar line up in an arc trailing behind him. As the only pop of colour in otherwise grey scenes, these works capture the daily commute as a rare time outside our obligations to others, work-related or otherwise. The mundane moments we may tire of in routine are opportunities to rest, or delight in the presence of a cat.

Despite the Salaryman's archetypal, everyman quality, catching him in these private moments brings him to life. In doing so, Loh counters the notion that we become inseparable from the roles we play, affirming that one's true self can resurface at any point.

Waiting in the Wings

In the theatre, intermissions are carefully planned around natural pauses in a script, minimising disruption. In real life we have far less control. When nature interferes, we have no choice but to simply wait until it runs its course.

In the title work, *Intermission*, a bus stop's fluorescent light shines like a beacon in the dark, illuminating a wild spray of raindrops against an impossibly dark and indiscernible backdrop. With no clear sign of when the rain might stop, two strangers are left stranded together in the middle of nowhere. As the woman shakes her umbrella and the man checks the bus schedule, their plans remain at the mercy of the elements.

In contrast with *Intermission's* dark, stormy urban scene, a man fishes at the edge of a pond in the rural countryside in *Pondering*. The greenery stretches endlessly into the background beneath

gently sloping mountains, the entire scene awash with the warm glow of the evening sun in the distance. Even as the water buffaloes in the pond move closer to where he has cast his now-taut line, his posture remains relaxed, seemingly lost in thought, unworried about his catch. Marvelling at the slower pace of living in the countryside, Loh positions it in harmony with nature.

Some intermissions stretch across space and time rather than a single moment. *Yellow Sugar* exemplifies Loh's mastery of surreal scenes that appear true to life at first glance, seamlessly weaving elements of the imaginary into the real. In the words of writer Tiffanie Tseng, Loh's works are "grounded in reality yet constantly striving to transcend it.", granting them a liminal quality that inexplicably draws one in. Given the work's unbelievable level of detail, those unfamiliar with the Kung Wo Beancurd Factory might never realise that the hawker stall is another dream-like scene conjured by Loh. Reimagining a popular beancurd shop from Hong Kong as a Singaporean hawker stall, he collapses the vast geographical distance between the two cities. Beyond his well-known love for good food, for the artist who has loved ones in Hong Kong, the work could be read as a longing for reunion.

While *Intermission* and *Pondering* describe an acceptance of waiting, and *Yellow Sugar* shows how imagination makes it bearable, *Last Man Standing* presents waiting as a wind-up for action. It feels dramatically different from *Pondering* despite implicitly sharing the same world, perhaps only hours later, under similar skies and foliage. The courtyard is enclosed by towering walls, lighting concentrated at its centre, shadows creating a partial vignette effect that draws the eye first to the arc of the house, then to the lone figure at the dining table, cast in dramatic shadow among half-eaten dishes from a feast he alone remains to see through. Rather than loneliness, the work relishes in the joy of being left to your own devices: the freedom, in solitude, to contemplate the limits of your own stomach, unhindered by competition. A longstanding theme in his work, Loh uses lighting and humour to dramatise the mundane, encouraging us to find value and delight in an ordinary life.

Making an Exit

If waiting is one way of enduring pressure, seeking escape is another. In this final section, Loh explores the desire to slip away. To reclaim a sense of control over the pressures of everyday life, we seek out temporarily releases like exercise, cigarettes or a holiday. This pull towards Escapism has been a recurring theme in Loh's practice, often emerging as a natural reaction to mounting unease or discomfort within contemporary life.

Singapore's rapidly growing number of run clubs and gyms might not simply be the result of a growing interest in health. In a society that views productivity as a measure of competence and success, exercise becomes a form of acceptable escape. The physical exhaustion from playing street soccer with friends in *Half Time* or lifting dumbbells in *Wait/Weight* lead to breaks that feel satisfying and earned because they involve visible effort. The sense that we're working toward better fitness offers a comforting distraction from insecurity, health anxieties, and loneliness.

A more literal, solitary form of escapism appears in *On My Way*. For those working long hours in sedentary jobs, the feeling of being stifled or confined to a single place might be overcome with a strong, desperate sprint to freedom, until they're winded and satisfied.

Nightclubbing and smoking, meanwhile, tend to be frowned-upon vices. Yet in *1314* and *Smoke Break*, figures who appear enclosed in inescapable spaces, reveal, on closer look, relaxation rather than exhaustion. Having found a balm for their problems, their relief is tangible: for a moment, they've made their escape.

Blue, *Day at the Beach*, and *Nonchalance* explore holidays as a flight from the responsibilities and overstimulation of home. In a small, dense city-state where high-rises grow taller by the year and rooms shrink by the day, it's easy to yearn for wide, open space and tranquility. *Blue* presents travel as a necessary escape, the woman simply enjoying the expanse of open sea and sky, a

rarity back home. In *Day at the Beach*, the ocean laps at the shore as children play, waves far livelier than the dead calm waters in *Blue*. A rocket launches in the distance, though it's no cause for concern; it's just a spectacle to marvel at. Finally, at the pool in *Nonchalance*, poolgoers take breaks on their own terms, unconcerned with each other and fully engrossed in self-care. It's here that we close the arc of the Salaryman in this exhibition: his shirt and slacks lie tossed poolside, having finally made time for himself.

About the Writer



Gwyneth Poh (b.2003) is an arts manager and curator based in Singapore. In her professional practice, she supports early-career artists in developing their practice towards their creative goals. Beyond this, she is interested in projects that explore unconventional ways of connecting art with audiences and bridging personal experiences with universal ones.

ESMOND LOH

Intermission, 2026, Acrylic on Canvas, 60 x 80 cm



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On My Way, 2025, Acrylic on Canvas, 61 x 45 cm



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Blue, 2026, Acrylic on Canvas, 80 x 60 cm



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Yellow Sugar, 2026, Acrylic on Canvas, 90 x 120 cm



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Last Man Standing, 2026, Acrylic on Canvas, 150 x 120 cm



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Ponder, 2026, Acrylic on Canvas, 60 x 80 cm



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Day at the Beach, 2026, Acrylic on Canvas, 80 x 60 cm



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After the Bell, 2026, Acrylic on Canvas, 120 x 150 cm



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Adrift, 2026, Acrylic on Canvas, 80 x 60 cm



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Turn, 2026, Acrylic on Canvas, 80 x 60 cm



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Commute, 2026, Acrylic on Canvas, 60 x 80 cm



ESMOND LOH

Void Deck, 2026, Acrylic on Canvas, 60 x 80 cm



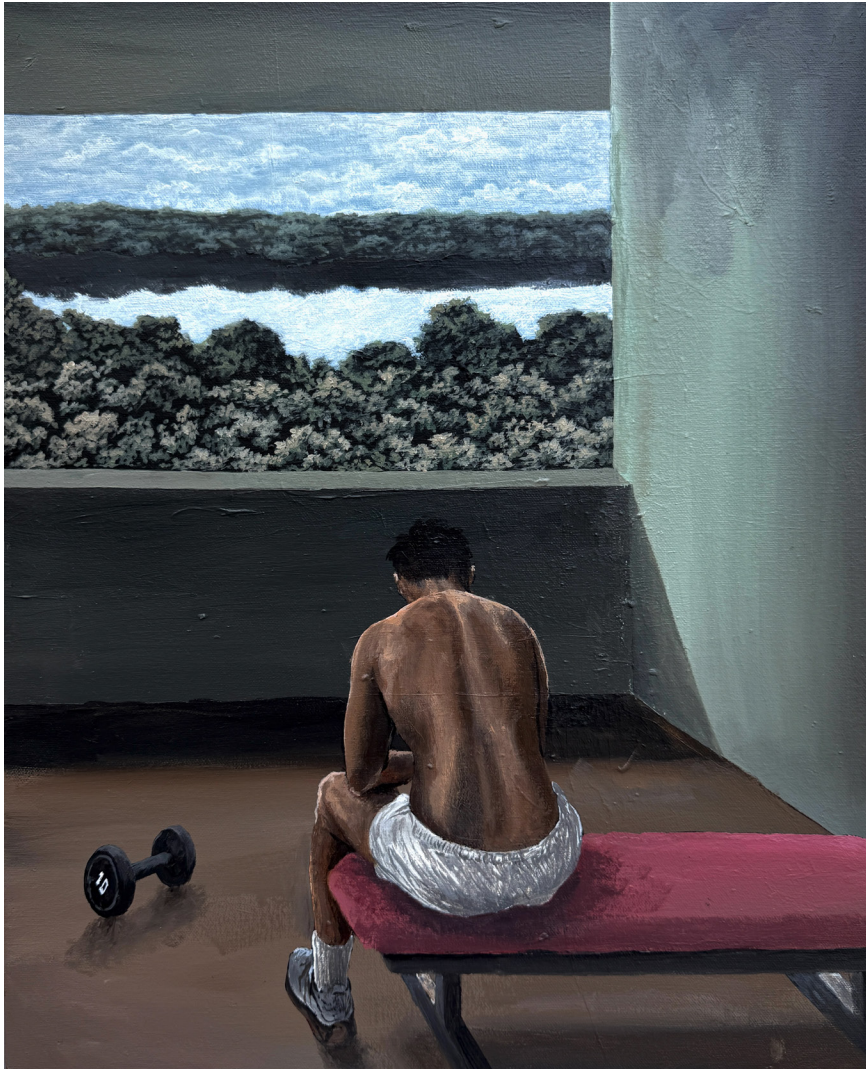
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Nonchalance, 2026, Acrylic on Canvas, 90 x 120 cm



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Wait/Weight, 2026, Acrylic on Canvas, 50 x 40 cm



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Half Time, 2026, Acrylic on Canvas, 102 x 76 cm



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Smoke Break, 2026, Acrylic on Canvas, 80 x 60 cm



ESMOND LOH

1314, 2026, Acrylic on Canvas, 120 x 90 cm



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ABOUT THE ARTIST



Esmond Loh (b. 1995, Singapore) paints dramatic and ambiguous scenes based on personal experience and imagination. Merging figuration and fiction, Loh explores the theatrical and themes such as longing, nostalgia, and existentialism. 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 at the age of 17, for his first oil painting, *Just Let Me Sleep*. He also won awards in the same competition in 2018 and 2020. To date, he has had five solo exhibitions, the most recent being *Another Day in Paradise* at Haridas Contemporary in Singapore in 2025. 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

2026	Intermission, Haridas Contemporary, Singapore
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

2026	Art SG, Haridas Contemporary Booth, Singapore
2025	UOB Painting of the Year Group Exhibition, Jakarta, Indonesia
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

HARIDAS
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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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