

Pastel Art in Singapore

The National Library Board of Singapore, host of a November 2011 exhibition “Singapore Pastel Art: Impression & Expression” at the Singapore National Library, is the publisher of the newly released anthology *Pastel Art in Singapore* available at <http://www.selectbooks.com.sg> for \$19. This is the first time that an art exhibition and book were launched together under the National Library Board sponsorship. How fitting that pastel, whose art history begins in the 18th century maritime city-state of Venice, should drop anchor in the 21st century cultural life of the great port and city-state of Singapore.

This handsome publication is a landmark as the first of its kind on pastel published in South East Asia. The book will serve as an excellent introduction to the medium of pastel among the Singapore public and within Southeast Asian countries. It will also serve as an introduction of Singapore pastel artists to a Western audience.

In the forward Gene Tan, the director of the *Singapore Memory Project*, a national initiative to “collect, preserve and provide access to the memories” of a nation, acknowledges Singapore pastel artists for taking first steps toward “achieving greater awareness and recognition from the general public.”

Yow Siew Kah, an educator and art writer with a special interest in Singapore art history, astutely observes in the essay “Commentary: Pastel Painting and Community Building” the role art exhibitions play in the community-building work of art groups.

Cheong Kah Kit, arts librarian at the National Library, authored the scholarly introduction, “Sketches: A Brief Introduction to the History of Pastel Art in Singapore” and a brief essay “About Pastels” on the medium. The introduction is a historical survey richly illustrated with examples of pastels created in Singapore from as early as 1945 through the 1970’s. The variety of the art mirrors the rich cultural heritage of Singapore.

With many color reproductions, *Pastel Art in Singapore* is an excellent introduction to a diverse community of twenty-two artists from Singapore working primarily in pastel. The art is organized in traditional categories by portrait, still life and landscape with each artist receiving two pages, one for a generous full-page reproduction and a second for two images with an introduction to the artist.

The Artist’s Index presents a photograph and biography of each artist. Included in the index is Pastel Society of America Signature member Isabelle Lim. Though now a resident of Hong Kong, Isabelle Lim is recognized as a Singapore Artist for having exhibited for many years in the city and being a loyal friend to the local pastel community.

Singapore artist and Pastel Society of America Signature member, John A. Wang and Eric Tay, artist and director of Straits Art, the only professional art supply store in Singapore, proposed the idea of a local pastel exhibition to the National Library Board, enthusiastically embraced the project by providing management, administration, manpower and full financial sponsorship of the exhibition.

Pastel Art in Singapore, launched with the opening of the exhibition, was produced under the management and guidance of the NLB and the key staff members, Wan Wee Pin and Wong Siok Muoi.

Before the exhibition opened, NLB sponsored two pastel workshops at the library without any charge to selected participants. Siew Hock Meng, a respected Singapore pastel artist and Janice Chin, associate member of PSA, conducted the two workshops.

The National Library Board of Singapore is to be congratulated for their educational and cultural initiative to produce such a professional and innovative pastel exhibition and publication. In our shrinking multi-cultural world, it is exciting to recognize PSA members in Southeast Asia who are the catalyst in their community for the introduction of the art of pastel to a wider audience.