

# “Dear Painter” at Sundaram Tagore Gallery

BY DARRYL WEE | AUGUST 31, 2015



Shubigi Rao, Fictioneering for Jonah, 2015, ink on Tlepolo paper, 70 x 100 cm  
(Image courtesy Sundaram Tagore Gallery)

Amid the many visual arts exhibitions and events this year commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of Singapore’s independence, an upcoming exhibition at Sundaram Tagore Gallery at Gillman Barracks seeks to explore the more abstract notion of artistic and creative autonomy in the city-state at this momentous juncture in its history.

Opening September 4 and running through October 25, 2015, “[Dear Painter](#)” presents a selection of new commissions by nine Singaporean artists, curated by June Yap. The artists are Chun Kaifeng, Chun Kai Qun, Martin Constable, Warren Khong, Kai Lam, Jane Lee, Francis Ng, Shubigi Rao, and Jeremy Sharma.

Inspired by the title of [Martin Kippenberger](#)’s 1981 series “Lieber Maler, male mir (Dear painter, paint for me),” which the artist commissioned a professional billboard painter to make, the exhibition explores the diversity of practice in

contemporary Singapore while hearkening back to some of the valiantly fought battles concerning Modernism and the (false) demise of painting.

BLOUIN ARTINFO caught up with June Yap to discuss some of the thematic and curatorial premises of the exhibition.

**There's been a rash of other art exhibitions and events this year tied to the SG50 campaign, some of which have been rather didactic and social documentary in nature. Yet this exhibition seems to be devoted to purely formal concerns, and Singapore's "modernist turn". What do the works of these 9 artists reflect in terms of artistic production in Singapore at the present moment?**

Yap: As a momentous year for Singapore, the subject of the nation in celebration is perhaps inevitable, even in exhibitions. Painting has historical significance for the nation, such as in its modernist turn. As painting too has been the subject and source of considerable experimentation by artists over the years, *Dear Painter* is not solely about formal concerns.

The exhibition is an exploration of the contemporary aesthetic horizon via painting, where the artworks may be read in relation to legacies of painting as responses or effects. The title of the exhibition draws from the 1981 series by [Martin Kippenberger](#), *Lieber Maler, male mir* (Dear painter, paint for me), in a reference to how painting is both produced in and presents a convergence of circumstances — including the historical event.

**Several of these artists are not "painters" per se, but perhaps, as you suggest, recall the practice of a painter in what you call "its guises of mark, craft, concept and objectification." What exactly would you call "painterly" in the works of sculptors like Chun Kaifeng or installation makers and multidisciplinarians like Francis Ng?**

The term 'painter' is not often used these days, and the exhibition is not an assignment of this label to these artists, except in the broadest of senses. The subject of the exhibition is painting, and the exhibition encompasses artworks that reference, appropriate, or challenge painting.

Accordingly, what is interesting here is less painting in terms of its conventions of frame, canvas, and paint, and more in terms of how artworks take off *from* the form, concept, and ideas of painting. The artists are producing artworks based on their practices, which may or may not have been 'painterly.' Though, having been told that the exhibition is a reflection on relations to paint and painting, the artworks have been produced to be somewhat receptive to these interpretations.

**Is there anything among the diverse practices of these artists that might be chalked up to a "Singaporean" sense of the contemporary**

**(not in terms of identity or nationality, but a certain cultural slant or political stance)?**

The approach in putting together the exhibition has been to cast a wide curatorial framework, so as to be able to observe a range of practices in Singapore, and not necessarily to derive particular characteristics or features beyond a discussion of the relevance of painting and the relationships that can be drawn from the subject. That said, each artwork individually expresses specific cultural, social, and even political sentiments and dispositions, which in arising from within the context of Singapore, would make them without doubt 'Singaporean'.

*"Dear Painter" runs at Sundaram Tagore Gallery from September 4 through October 25, 2015.*