

News Release

Co. Reg. No. 193500026Z

Thai artist's striking depiction of man's ecological footprint using microplastics wins 2023 UOB Southeast Asian Painting of the Year award

2023 competition drew record number of entries across the region. Artworks portraying global social commentaries win top awards in 42nd UOB POY (Singapore) competition.



2023 UOB Southeast Asian Painting of the Year, *Chumphon Estuary* by Pratchaya Charemsook

Singapore, 8 November 2023 – Thai artist Ms Pratchaya Charernsook's artwork "*Chumphon Estuary*", which poignantly depicts the environmental devastation wrought by microplastics, won the 2023 UOB Southeast Asian Painting of the Year (SEA POY) award. Ms Pratchaya's masterpiece rose above the outstanding winning pieces from the 2023 UOB POY competitions held in Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, and for the first time, Vietnam.

Crafted over the span of two months, "*Chumphon Estuary*" conveys a harrowing warning about the grim consequences of unchecked microplastics use and irresponsible disposal. The message is further driven home by the actual microplastics fragments used to create the artwork, which were collected by Ms Pratchaya from the beaches of her hometown.





“Environmental pollution is an issue that hits very close to home, not just for me, but for everyone. I sincerely hope that my artwork will inspire audiences to take action, to ensure that what I have depicted stays in the realm of art instead of becoming reality.”

The 2023 Southeast Asian and Singapore winners were announced this evening at the 42nd UOB POY Awards Ceremony, held at the Victoria Theatre and livestreamed on UOB YouTube. Graced by Minister for Education Mr Chan Chun Sing, the winning artists from Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam attended the ceremony alongside past winners, distinguished guests and the arts community.

Mr Wee Ee Cheong, Deputy Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, UOB, said, “My heartiest congratulations to Ms Pratchaya for spotlighting this important environmental issue through her artwork. It is a stark reminder of everyone’s responsibility to the environment.

“Art is a powerful source of inspiration and connection. The expansion of our flagship UOB POY competition to Vietnam reinforces our long-term commitment to supporting visual art in Southeast Asia. At UOB, we are steadfast in doing right by our community through our various corporate social responsibility programmes. In the area of art, we aim to uncover and nurture talents across the region, and to build a thriving ecosystem to enable regional artists to scale greater heights.”

The judging panel for the 2023 UOB Southeast Asian POY comprised the Chief Judges from each of the five participating countries: Dr Bridget Tracy Tan (Regional and Singapore Chief Judge), Ms Melati Suryodarmo (Indonesia Chief Judge), Ms Bibi Chew (Malaysia Chief Judge), Mr Amrit Chusuwan (Thailand Chief Judge) and Mr Luong Xuan Doan (Vietnam Chief Judge).

A powerful fantasy-inspired artwork wins top award for 2023 UOB POY (Singapore), Established Artist Category

The 2023 winning entries from Singapore showcase local artists’ creative prowess and tenacity as they coloured captivating narratives and social commentary on canvas.





2023 UOB Painting of the Year (Singapore), Established Artist Category – Top winner
Gulliver's Travels by Jeremy Hiah

Singaporean artist Jeremy Hiah was awarded the Top Winner in the Established Artist Category (Singapore) for his mixed media piece “*Gulliver's Travels*”. This is Mr Hiah's first UOB POY award.

Inspired by the adventure story of *Gulliver's Travels*, one's attention is immediately drawn to the colourful figures of little viruses, animals and machineries plaguing a human body. Drawn in pen ink, the human silhouette remains barely visible, made prominent only by the ropes tying him down. Mr Hiah shared, “*Gulliver's Travels* is a familiar story to most. I wanted to use this iconic scene to portray a haunting yet fairytale-like scene of a lockdown, akin to the restraints and helplessness felt by humankind during the pandemic.”

Mr Hiah, together with five other artists in the Established Artist Category and nine aspiring artists in the Emerging Artist Category, was recognised at the 42nd UOB POY (Singapore) competition. He will also compete with the four other UOB POY country winners for a coveted one-month residency at the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum in Japan.

Artwork depicting cross-border interwoven stories wins Most Promising Artist of the Year (Singapore) award



2023 UOB Painting of the Year (Singapore), Emerging Artist Category – Top winner
Most Promising Artist of the Year, *Commuting* by Stephy Chien

Ms Stephy Chien bagged the Most Promising Artist of the Year (Singapore) award. Her artwork, “*Commuting*”, presents a vibrant tapestry of numerous parked motorcycles, marking the symbiotic relationship between Singaporean and Malaysian commuters and their connected journeys across the Straits. Ms Chien shared, “Motorcycles are icons of freedom, individuality and cultural fusion. They have woven themselves into the fabric of our daily life and become an intrinsic part of both Singapore and Malaysia’s cultural identities. This artwork also prompts us to balance between preserving the rich cultural heritage of these communities and exploring more sustainable transport solutions.”

UOB’s continued contribution to the wider community

In our efforts to champion Southeast Asian art, UOB continues to give back to the community through a diverse range of visual art programmes, partnerships and community outreach. These include our Artist’s Conversations programme, where UOB POY alumni share their artistic journeys and techniques with secondary school and junior college students. This programme has reached over 2,000 students since it started in 2017, inspiring more aspiring artists to enter the UOB POY competition. Over 40 per cent of Emerging Artist Category entries came from students this year, compared to about 20 per cent in 2022.



UOB POY's expansion into Vietnam this year, coupled with the Bank's ongoing partnerships and programmes to make art more accessible across the region, fosters a deeper connection across the communities and markets UOB operates in. This aligns with UOB's Purpose to build the future of ASEAN.

The 42nd UOB POY Regional Winners' Showcase will be held at National Gallery Singapore from 23 November 2023 to 30 January 2024, open from 10am to 7pm daily, and on UOBandArt.com.

- Ends -

About UOB and Art

UOB's involvement in art started in the 1970s with its collection of paintings by Singapore artists. Today, the UOB Art Collection has more than 2,600 artworks, made up primarily of paintings from established and emerging Southeast Asian artists.

UOB plays an active role in communities across the region, most notably through its long-term commitment to art. As the leading patron of the arts in Asia, the Bank continues to make art accessible to a wider audience through a diverse range of visual art programmes, partnerships and community outreach across the region.

The Bank's flagship art programme is the UOB Painting of the Year competition, which was started in 1982 to recognise Southeast Asian artists and to offer them the opportunity to showcase their works to the wider community. The competition was extended to Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and in 2023, to Vietnam. It is now the longest running art competition in Singapore and one of the most prestigious in Southeast Asia.

Together with the UOB POY winning artists, UOB also runs art workshops for underprivileged and special needs children regularly. At these workshops, the young learn art techniques from art professionals and award-winning artists.

In recognition of the Bank's long-term commitment to art, UOB was presented with the National Arts Council's Distinguished Patron of the Arts Award for the 20th consecutive year in 2023 and the Honorary Patron of the Arts Award, a life-time recognition.

About UOB

UOB is a leading bank in Asia. Operating through its head office in Singapore and banking subsidiaries in China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam, UOB has a global network of around 500 offices in 19 countries and territories in Asia Pacific, Europe and North America. Since its incorporation in 1935, UOB has grown organically and through a series of strategic acquisitions. Today, UOB is rated among the world's top banks: Aa1 by Moody's Investors Service and AA- by both S&P Global Ratings and Fitch Ratings.





For nearly nine decades, UOB has adopted a customer-centric approach to create long-term value by staying relevant through its enterprising spirit and doing right by its customers. UOB is focused on building the future of ASEAN – for the people and businesses within, and connecting with, ASEAN.

The Bank connects businesses to opportunities in the region with its unparalleled regional footprint and leverages data and insights to innovate and create personalised banking experiences and solutions catering to each customer's unique needs and evolving preferences. UOB is also committed to help businesses forge a sustainable future, by fostering social inclusiveness, creating positive environmental impact and pursuing economic progress. UOB believes in being a responsible financial services provider and is steadfast in its support of art, social development of children and education, doing right by its communities and stakeholders.

For media queries, please contact:

Hilary Tan

Group Strategic Communications and Brand

Email: Hilary.Tan@uobgroup.com

Tel: 8727 4845



APPENDIX A: Winners of the 2023 UOB POY competition (Regional)

Established Artist Category (Regional) – UOB POY Award

2023 UOB Southeast Asian Painting of the Year & 2023 UOB Painting of the Year (Thailand)	Pratchaya Charernsook , <i>Chumphon Estuary</i>
2023 UOB Painting of the Year (Indonesia)	Ni Nyoman Sani , <i>Tranquility</i>
2023 UOB Painting of the Year (Malaysia)	Chong Kim Chiew , <i>Malaya and British Borneo One Dollar 1953 (We look at the past, we look at the present)</i>
2023 UOB Painting of the Year (Singapore)	Jeremy Hiah , <i>Gulliver's Travels</i>
2023 UOB Painting of the Year (Vietnam)	Trinh Minh Tien , <i>Thủy Phủ (Water Palace)</i>

Emerging Artist Category (Regional) – Most Promising Artist of the Year Award

2023 Most Promising Artist of the Year (Indonesia)	Begok Oner , <i>7°49'03.3"S 110°21'00.2"E</i>
2023 Most Promising Artist of the Year (Malaysia)	Mairul Nisa Binti Malek , <i>Malek and Mariana</i>
2023 Most Promising Artist of the Year (Singapore)	Stephy Chien , <i>Commuting</i>
2023 Most Promising Artist of the Year (Thailand)	Santiphap Phengsuay , <i>Joy</i>

APPENDIX B: Winners of the 2023 UOB POY competition (Singapore)

Established Artist Category (Singapore)

<p>2023 UOB Painting of the Year (Singapore)</p>	<p>Jeremy Hiah, <i>Gulliver’s Travels</i></p> <p><i>Gulliver’s Travels</i> is inspired by the adventure story of Lemuel Gulliver, who was washed ashore as the sole survivor of a shipwreck during his travel to remote regions and held captive by a race of tiny people.</p> <p>The artwork represents the concept of a lockdown seen in the form of a restricted human body surrounded and plagued by tiny viruses, animals and machineries, creating a vivid scene of confinement during a haunting night.</p> <p>About the Artist Jeremy Hiah is an interdisciplinary artist and curator whose works question the social systems we live in, using satire and an ironic sense of humor. Following his graduation from LASALLE College of the Arts/RMIT University in Singapore, he continued to focus on paintings, and explore different medias such as sculpture, installations, and performance.</p> <p>He has held numerous solo and group exhibitions at the Museum of Something, Thailand; Singapore Art Museum (SAM), Sydney Museum of Contemporary Art, Australia; and Kedai Kebun Forum in Indonesia. Jeremy’s works have been collected by the SAM; National Gallery Singapore, ASIATOPIA Foundation Thailand, AIR 3331 as well as many private collectors.</p>
<p>Gold Award</p>	<p>Hong Sek Chern, <i>Accretion/Dissolution</i></p> <p><i>Accretion/Dissolution</i> is part of a series of paintings inspired by fire and water which engulfed the artist’s studio 10 years ago – with the ceiling charred from the fire and floors flooded by the firefighters’ water. However, the main motivation to create the series was the frequent forest fires that raged in mainland Southeast Asia and Canada in early 2023, as well as torrential rains flooding homes in California and Uganda, affecting millions of lives.</p> <p>The ink used in her artwork is made from fire and water as well – soot from burnt barks of trees mixed in water for activation. The spaces depicted in the artwork were created by appropriating photographs uploaded by the public on apps such as Google Maps, using paper mounting to create a doubling of painted layers. The ambivalent gap can imply either an opening or closing strata of space which are intended to suggest a liminality of ambiguous outcomes.</p> <p>About the Artist</p>

	<p>Hong Sek Chern enjoys exploring various themes within urban settings in her paintings. She focuses on traditional Chinese ink, applying contemporary strategies to push the possibilities of the traditional medium. Sek Chern is a graduate from the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, Singapore and Goldsmiths College, University of London, United Kingdom.</p> <p>A multiple UOB Painting of the Year award winner, Sek Chern has held seven solo exhibitions in Singapore and participated in group exhibitions held locally and overseas. She was selected to participate in the President Young Artist Show organised by the Singapore Art Museum in 2001. In 2002, she represented Singapore at the <i>25th Sao Paolo Biennale</i> and the <i>5th International Ink Painting Biennial of Shenzhen</i> in 2006. She was also the recipient of the Young Artist Award conferred by the National Arts Council Singapore in 2000.</p>
Silver Award	<p>Ho Seok Kee, <i>Preserving Peaks - Brushstrokes Unbound</i></p> <p><i>Preserving Peaks – Brushstrokes Unbound</i> depicts a harmonious co-existence of tradition and innovation, past and future. This artwork is inspired by the Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting and the brushstrokes of Mifu, a Song dynasty Chinese painter and poet who invented the "Mi" (米) or rice dots to paint his famous misty landscapes.</p> <p>It explores the possibilities of a future between nature and technology, ancient wisdom and modern advancements seen in futuristic human carrying drones, collapsible solar-powered houses, portable satellites, and wind turbines against the natural landscape of towering mountains. Viewers are also invited to appreciate the balance of responsible human activities and the conservation of our natural world.</p> <p>About the Artist Ho Seok Kee won the Silver Award, Established Artist Category in the 2018 UOB Painting of the Year (Singapore) and Third prize in the 2023 Saranggong Art Prize, organised by One Farrer Hotel. She held her first solo exhibition in 2020, and participated in various group shows locally as well as in China.</p> <p>Besides her art practice, she conducts Art and Wellness programmes for seniors. As a wellness coach and advocate, Seok Kee is also passionate about working with institutions on programmes to support and empower persons in recovery from mental health conditions to live with dignity in a caring and inclusive society.</p>
Bronze Award	<p>Om Mee Ai, <i>R152-QUF</i></p> <p><i>R152-QUF</i> is inspired by Beethoven’s piano composition, <i>Moonlight Sonata</i> and conveys a visual interpretation of a complex emotional scape. The underlying narratives of tenderness, desperation, sorrow, happiness and melancholy are</p>

	<p>portrayed in the form of a geometric abstract visual through a meticulous and repetitive technique of “taping, layering and wiping”.</p> <p>Art is a reflection of an internal reality and should intrigue and hopefully uplift the spirit, emotions, and mind. The artist tries to achieve this through an abstract painting technique that displays the mixture of multiplied grids and translucent layers of colours. She sees abstract paintings as an open-ended dialogue between the artist, artwork, and audience.</p> <p>About the Artist Om Mee Ai is a veteran artist known for her meticulously executed geometric abstract paintings that demonstrate a painstaking dedication to layers and details. She is a multiple-award winner of the UOB Painting of the Year competition, with her latest in 2014 as the Top Winner and in 2019, Highly Commended in the Established Artist Category.</p> <p>She has participated in numerous group and solo exhibitions and received several recognitions, including the ASEAN Art Awards by Philip Morris. Her artworks are collected by Singapore Art Museum, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Singapore, Ministry of Manpower Singapore, Philip Morris Singapore, European Financial Group and INSEAD Business School. Her public art murals are also permanently on display at Stevens MRT Station in Singapore and at West Kowloon Station in Hong Kong.</p>
Highly Commended	<p>William Goh, <i>Everyday Tapestry</i></p> <p><i>Everyday Tapestry</i> investigates the luminal space of the common void decks (open spaces on ground floors of public housings buildings in Singapore) and the mundane. Intendedly left empty, the artwork is an open void deck inviting the audience to think beyond the tangible elements and imagine activities within the space. The artwork is produced on recycled sandpaper with pigments sanded off objects collected by the artist around places of interest. The process of creating this artwork recognises the beauty of common spaces and the shared interactions.</p> <p>About the Artist William Goh is actively involved in the arts scene. In 2020, he obtained his Bachelor in Arts (Education) from Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. The artist is keen in exploring the process and materiality of art-making as well as creating artworks using both conventional and unconventional techniques.</p>
Highly Commended	<p>Wong Yee Heng, <i>Beyond The Dancing Leaves</i></p> <p><i>Beyond the Dancing Leaves</i> depicts a small beautiful city built on the strong foundation of harmony, tolerance, respect and</p>

	<p>love. Here, joyful little creatures in the artwork resemble happy ballerinas dancing, the fluttering leaves are like golden fireflies bringing well wishes, with animals running and birds flying freely among grasses swaying with the wind.</p> <p>The bronze antique background bears a reminder to preserve nature for our future generations as the artwork depicts a luscious mix of greenery, nature and modern architecture transforming into a vibrant land of peace and harmony.</p> <p>About the Artist Wong Yee Heng is an interior designer and has always enjoyed artmaking. He has been participating in art competitions, specialising in Chinese ink, with his subject matters revolving around nature, reality and fantasy.</p> <p>Yee Heng was awarded the Silver Award, Emerging Artist Category of the 2021 UOB Painting of the Year (Singapore), and had his winning artwork selected as the cover of the 2021 UOB Annual Report. His artworks are also exhibited in China.</p>
--	---

Emerging Artist Category (Singapore)

<p>2023 Most Promising Artist of the Year (Singapore)</p>	<p>Stephy Chien, <i>Commuting</i></p> <p><i>Commuting</i> depicts the symbiotic relationship between Singapore and Malaysia commuters and their connected journey across the Straits. Motorcycles have been woven into the fabric of daily life and its interweaving threads against bustling cityscapes form a vibrant tapestry that binds the two nations within close proximity together. The vivid picture of motorcycles represents freedom, individuality and cultural fusion. This artwork invites viewers to consider their paths ahead towards sustainable transportation solutions while preserving the rich cultural heritage of our communities.</p> <p>About the Artist Stephy Chien is a budding artist who works with images from her surroundings. Her keen observations have led her to look deeper into the subtle symbolisms around her. She is an avid artist who specializes in oil paintings.</p>
<p>Gold Award</p>	<p>Nurul Afiqah Binte Mohamad Suhaimi, <i>Just Here and Counting</i></p> <p><i>Just Here and Counting</i> is a working series that correlates time and memory through spaces. It serves as a reminiscing of the artist's growing years with her family. Using linear forms, this work presents an overlapped imagery of nature through time.</p>

	<p>About the Artist Nurul Afiqah Binte Mohamad Suhaimi graduated with a Diploma in Western Painting at the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, Singapore and a Bachelor’s Degree in Fine Arts at the School of Creative Arts and Media, University of Tasmania, Australia. She is an atelierista (art teacher) and an art specialist at an international preschool in Singapore. Majored in painting, Afiqah's works play around with the subtlety of lines that constitutes the notion of temporality – the existence and perception of self and space in real time, capturing the memory and intimacy within the temporary.</p>
Silver Award	<p>Bong Chai Lee, <i>Home</i></p> <p><i>Home</i> is inspired by an olive-backed sunbird’s nest that was built outside a massive ongoing construction. Despite its size, the small fragile nest attracted the artist’s attention, reflecting home and beauty in nature.</p> <p>The artist likens sunbird to human – despite our differences, we share the same intention and hope in building our homes.</p> <p>Using a combination of blue pea flowers (a vine plant commonly found in Singapore) and sunbird to authenticate <i>Home</i>, the artist also added typical materials of the nest like dried leaves, seed pots, and tree bark to illustrate construction and build the relation between her subjects.</p> <p>About the Artist Bong Chai Lee graduated in 1995 with a Diploma in Graphic Design. Her strong passion for art prompted her to pursue a Bachelor in Fine Arts at the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, Singapore.</p>
Bronze Award	<p>Choo Weilin, <i>Balancing Act</i></p> <p><i>Balancing Act</i> reflects mounds of stones placed and stacked by hikers along a walking trail.</p> <p>The act of stacking requires great patience and effort as a weight as light as a bird or small as an eraser can threaten it with collapse or change its shape. The artist uses a pencil to laboriously and meditatively illustrate the stacking structure physically, one stone on top of one another, while showing unease and tension experienced with our environment in the process.</p> <p>About the Artist Choo Weilin is currently an art teacher in a local secondary school. She pursued an illustration course in Ecole Superieure des Arts – Epinal and a foundation course at the Imperial Academy of Art in St Petersburg, Russia to establish a stronger foundation in academic art.</p>

	<p>Weilin has previously held a solo exhibition <i>In Plein Sight (2021)</i> featuring scenes from Singapore and St Petersburg, Russia. The exhibited works were completed on site in Russia and Singapore.</p>
Highly Commended	<p>Andrew Huang, <i>Garden City #6</i></p> <p><i>Garden City #6</i> illustrates the complexities of life in a city and constraints that city dwellers are subjected to in their dispositions.</p> <p>With rampant consumerism and popular materialistic beliefs, life in a bustling city may lead to individuals' depreciating focus on the important human condition (life, death, emotion, morality etc). The intertwined figures and closely stacked structures symbolise our need for space within cluttered buildings while in search of purpose and direction.</p> <p>About the Artist Andrew Huang graduated from School of the Arts, Singapore in 2022 and has works exhibited in both the Eastern and Western spheres. He won the Highly Commended, Emerging Artist Category in the 2022 UOB Painting of the Year (Singapore) and is also a strong advocate in championing social causes through his art with funds raised for local charities like the National Kidney Foundation, Tad Charity, and The Business Times Budding Artists Fund.</p> <p>Andrew's works extend beyond traditional Chinese art-making. His paintings contextualise concepts of phenomenology and intentionality in Chinese ink painting into contemporary times, in search for meanings in everyday objects that revitalise lived human experiences.</p> <p>His works encapsulate the inseparable relationship between Singaporeans and our urban environment, exploring how our surroundings may impact our subconscious mannerisms.</p>
Highly Commended	<p>Ng Swee Hua, <i>Hanging Memories</i></p> <p><i>Hanging Memories</i> depicts a nostalgic childhood memory of the artist's grandmother religiously and meticulously hanging out fresh laundry in her backyard. A metaphor for preserving and cherishing memories, the simple and warm act of hanging laundry serves as a nostalgic reminder on the passage of time and stories woven into the fabric of our lives. Here, each piece of clothing represents a different memory and a unique moment frozen in time.</p> <p>While celebrating the ordinary moments that make up the tapestry of our lives, the artist hopes viewers could reconnect</p>

	<p>with their own memories and experiences to find beauty in the simplicity of everyday life.</p> <p>About the Artist Ng Swee Hua is an art director by profession with 30 years of experience in the advertising and design industries. He has participated and won the Chingay Float Design, amidst other renowned design awards such as the Apple Design Award.</p>
Highly Commended	<p>Kong Kai Keet, <i>Then and Now</i></p> <p><i>Then and Now</i> illustrates the dynamic environment that is subjected to constant destruction and construction of new buildings in Singapore. The artist hopes to preserve the ethereal beauty of this process in his core memory.</p> <p>About the Artist Kong Kai Keet graduated from Pathlight School, Singapore, and is currently undergoing training with the Employability and Employment Centre under Autism Resource Centre. Frequently spotted diligently drawing in his sketchbook, Kai Keet creates animal and cartoon figures and portraits with a very unique treatment. His signature style is to apply complex layers of texture and generous detailing. He enjoys drawing line art of Singapore scenes in pencil too.</p>
Highly Commended	<p>Cindy Wong, <i>The Stable</i></p> <p><i>The Stable</i> depicts a common sight in the early years of the artist's hometown in Malaysia. Wanting to preserve her childhood to reminisce and to share with future generations, she captures great details of the smell of metal and grease in the good old days.</p> <p>About the Artist Cindy Wong is an artist in training. She hopes to preserve memories and disappearing moments for future generations through her works.</p>
Highly Commended	<p>Amanda Ye, <i>Idle Hours</i></p> <p><i>Idle Hours</i> is a self-portrait of the artist in her free time as she relishes in a cup of coffee, bread and Teochew png kueh (pink glutinous rice dumplings). While spending a carefree afternoon with her favourite kitten, she savours the warm breeze.</p> <p>About the Artist Amanda Ye graduated with a Bachelor of Arts from the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts, China in 1992. She won the First prize in the World Children's International Competition in Nibo, China when she was 12.</p>