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PLUSH art



Chen Wei Meng

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# LIFE UNLIMITED

Landscape artist Chen Wei Meng finds inspiration in open and

IT'S a scene worthy of a postcard. The expansive land is devoid of any building. The sea of emerald green stalks of paddy is about to turn gold as harvest season begins soon. Birds fly in a sky full of fluffy cumulus clouds.

A 50-year-old man whips out his new, first ever smartphone. He turns his back on this stunning scene. Instead, Chen Wei Meng uses his smartphone to capture images of a patch of mud in one barren square of paddy land that a tractor displaced a moment ago and mutters: "Oh my God. This is so beautiful."

Registering our bemused looks, he explains: "It's like jazz music. Every time you listen to the music, it's a different story. Same here. There is so much movement and character in mud and dirt."

He has just completed his latest solo exhibition called *Sekinchan: Land Of Fertility* at Wei-Ling Gallery. We're at the tail-end of a road trip to Kuala Selangor to view the vistas that inspired his hyper-real depictions of the landscape of this area. Sniggering, Wei Meng says: "When I was working on this series, I was like a scarecrow, standing here in the hot sun, facing the *sawah padi* (paddy fields) every day."

Waving his hand dismissively at the scene behind him, he adds: "I know... that green paddy colour is pretty. There's a happy ending. But to me, it's boring. It has a limit." As he continues to speak, it becomes obvious that it's this need to experience life without limits is the main thrust of his life's story.

#### STREET ARTIST

Born in Kuala Dungun, Terengganu, Wei Meng stayed with his grandparents as they lived closer to his school. "But it was in the *pekan* (town)," he laments. "My elder sister and I would be scolded if we played by the river. The only time we went to the beach was before Chinese New Year, to collect bamboo or something. I was so excited then."

When he finished schooling, the con-

firmed bachelor moved to Kuala Lumpur and worked as a freelance illustrator for various publishing houses before he decided to venture further afield. In his mid-20s, Wei Meng spent two years in the UK, during which his primary purpose was to see what art and culture looks like in a Western country. He made ends meet by becoming a street artist.

Giving a slow smile, he says: "I never knew if I was going to make money or not." This was because, as a street artist, everything boiled down to whether or not people wanted him to create a caricature for them. Together with other street artists, he set up his "office" behind a gallery in Piccadilly. "Night time," he adds, "was the best. You could see homeless people sitting and lying around; you could see drunk people walking around. There was so much character."

When it was too cold and there were no tourists who wanted his caricatures, Wei Meng was disgusted to have to resort to working in a closed space such as a restaurant. Still, when his sojourn to "experience real life as a street artist" came to an end, he was glad to return home to his ailing mother when his visa ended. "At least here, it's my own country. My place," he adds for emphasis.

#### ME, MYSELF, MY PLACE

Before he turned 30, Wei Meng had an epiphany. He confides: "I decided to become a full-time artist. There was no time to delay." At about the same time, he made an overnight decision to move back to Terengganu. The next 10 years or so, after his mother's demise, he spent his time rediscovering his hometown. His first mode of transport for discovering nearby villages was the bicycle. Once he bought a car, he was able to travel outstation. Saying, "My GPS was my feelings", Wei Meng had no timetable or schedule to his travels during this time.

Perhaps, one of his most interesting discoveries during this period occurred on a trip to Pulau Langkawi. Having grown

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Form



Basking in the beauty of Sekinchan's paddy fields.

# LIMITED

limitless spaces, writes **Aneeta Sundararaj**



Making of Impermanence.

On the east coast of the Peninsula, Wei Meng was used to views of the rising sun when he went to the beach. Here, on the west coast, when he went to the beach, there were no views of the rising sun. Instead, he had to learn to appreciate the views of the setting sun.

All the artwork created during this time, he says, reflects his sense of isolation. He shares: "It was a time of me, myself and the place." Even with very little money for subsistence, he was immensely content.

### THINGS HAPPEN FOR A PURPOSE

Nowhere in his 40s, Wei Meng decided he could no longer take life for granted. He needed a purpose and that everything, including his period of isolation, had a limit. Eager to achieve more in life, in 2007, he was poised for his first solo exhibition. He moved back to the capital, though he often visits his father who still lives in Terengganu.

On the last day of 2007, he was traveling along the coastal towns of Selangor when he chanced upon a fork in the road.

On a whim, he took the road that would lead him to Sekinchan. Although he was completely exhausted, within moments of seeing wide open spaces of land, he was reminded of being by the sea in Terengganu. Today, whenever he feels homesick, he takes a trip from the capital to Sekinchan for a quick break.

The works he's created for Sekinchan: Land Of Fertility are a tribute to this area. Indeed, upon our return to the city, as we view the painting titled Impermanence 6, he says: "We visual artists, we follow our inner feelings. But doing these interviews forces us to put it out there. To examine our emotions and everything in life."

Having reflected on all the other paintings in the series, he comes to the conclusion that there is meaning in all that has happened in his life thus far. He says: "Things happen for a purpose."

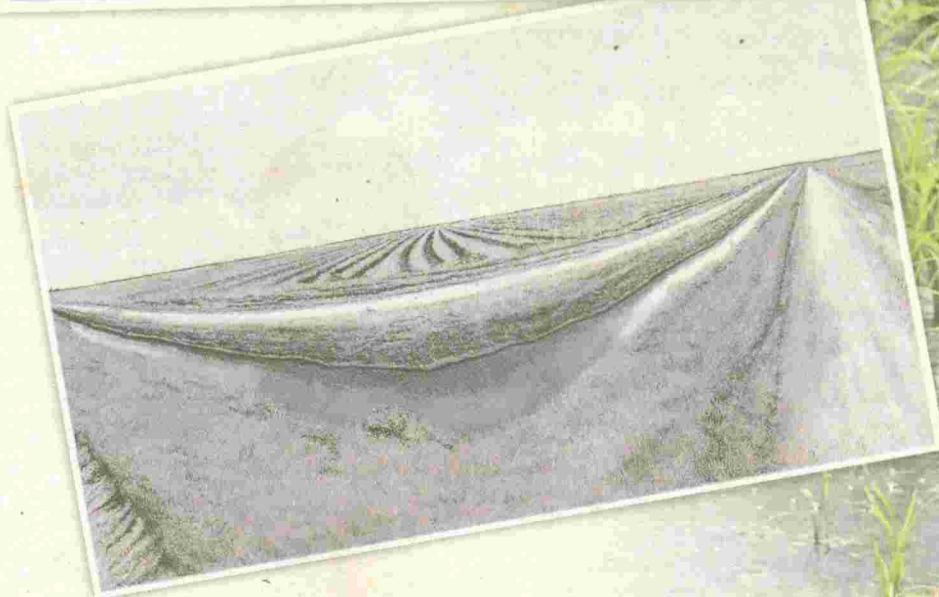
He shakes his head, as though to clear his thoughts before adding: "I need freedom. I cannot be restricted by..." and then he pauses, searching for the correct word. Finally, the artist continues: "I cannot be restricted by anything."



Harvest Forms.



Impermanence



Shape and Rhythm.