



1a) Evaluate the ideas and subject matter in this painting

**Subject Matter:** A bald, human figure lies horizontally across the top of 'The Reckless Sleeper', in a wooden, coffin-like alcove above a dark cloudy sky. The figure is nestled under a large brown blanket, with his face partially covered, and appears to be in deep sleep with his head resting on a white pillow. The way into the rest of the painting space below the alcove, is obstructed by a huge, grey molten lead tablet which resembles a giant tombstone with irregular edges. Instead of words, the stone is embedded with a relief- a constellation of everyday objects, placed against a background of a bluish night sky.

Overall, the work appears to be displayed like a page in a children's book. The page segmentation could refer to the passage of time, between the physical state (the sleeping figure) and the dream state (the molten lead tablet). The work has an atmosphere of a floating dream created masterfully with an inventory of small objects: a glided hand mirror, a gray bird, a black bowler hat, a red apple, a blue bow, and a lit candle.

**Ideas:**

Personal Experience As a child, Magritte loved to play in graveyards, and this allowed him to nurture a keen interest in the morbid. Hence, wooden caskets and molten lead

tombstones, as evident in the painting, recur in many of his paintings.

His rendering of realistic figuration is in line with his philosophy of imitating the three-dimensional world. For this work, he did not value personal artistic expression. His appropriation of children's books for what he termed "neutral or indifferent" images and copied them in his painting. He regarded his painting as an activity conceived in the spirit of scientific inquiry, an experiment which other minds and views from the audience were welcome

Freudian Symbolism: As Magritte knew, some or all of them could also be read as Freudian symbols. This combination of different possible interpretations adds to the painting's suggestion of unease and disorientation. It was painted when Magritte was closest to the French Surrealist group, having moved temporarily to Paris from Brussels. Influenced by Sigmund Freud, he searched his own dreams and childhood memories for understanding. Thus, the scene portrayed is unreal, but the faithful reproductions (evident details with which they are painted) give the scene the appearance of reality.

Dislocation: Creating odd and often thought-provoking juxtapositions was another core Surrealist technique, combining fragments in unconventional contexts. Based on the interior space of coffin-like alcove, contrasting against the molten lead gravestone placed outdoors, one can surmise that it is a work about life and death. However, a mystery is set in motion with the rendering of the embedded objects that replace the traditional carving of words (e.g. the deceased name, birth and death date, and a short prayer or quote) which one would find on a real tombstone. This method of juxtaposing elements that don't generally go together challenges our understanding of the relationship between words and images. This also relates to the word "surreal" itself, which was meant to express the idea that Surrealism goes above and beyond mundane reality, that it reforms and transcends it. It also relates to the wordplay often found in many of Magritte's work.

Creation of icons or symbols: The black bowler hat, mirror, bird, candle and lit candle appear iconically in many of Magritte's works. Iconology means thinking through images. By introducing these icons in various settings Magritte created mystery. The mystery of the image was an important concept for Magritte. What does the image/object/icon mean? Is it real? Can we really understand the unknowable? By repeating these icons throughout his art he gives power to certain images that are normally quite ordinary. Repeating icons in art is a form of obsessive behaviour.

E.g. The embedded bowler hat represents a common men's accessory worn in Europe in early 1900s by middle-class men and has become indicative of the everyday gentleman, an ubiquitous sign.

The motif of the Bowler Hat man appears to be taken from Fantomas, where the lead character is typically adorned with a top hat.

The symbol of the bowler hat can also be linked as a self-portrait of the artist himself, as he is often seen wearing a bowler hat. Which may allude to the dominance of the bourgeois and a critique of conformity, as well as Magritte poking fun at himself.

b) Analyse the use of brushwork, colour and composition in this work.

### **Brushwork**

For Magritte, some rough brushstrokes can be seen on the molten lead tablet. He uses generally simplified brushwork and blends his tones. The paint is applied with a brush and the brush strokes are clearly visible. It appears that the icons have been painted into the composition and the background then laid in around them. It seems to have been painted in one or two simple layers, working wet in wet. The brush strokes are used to describe the shapes and provide clear contours.

He carefully renders the contours of the forms within the work with sensitivity, as seen in the wood grains on the alcove, and the delineated edges of all the forms, to successfully depict familiar, easily recognisable objects.

He tries to avoid stylistic textural effects so that the act of painting is hidden in his work, and the focus for the viewer will be on the idea he is trying to express. Magritte relied on the illusion of space and clarity of contours to create tactile forms that appear familiar and lifelike, supported by the technical skills Magritte learnt in the Academy, and his background as a graphic artist.

### **Colours, Contrast**

Magritte uses a variety of colours, to create the realistic effect of tones. Our focus rests on the lying figure as he uses light tones of beige on the figure's face and on the wooden box. Darker tones are used to create shadows on the back of the box, creating a sense of depth and contrasting against the figure, which helps illuminate the man. He also successfully created a three-dimensional feel by blending his tones to create the illusion of light and shadow.

### **Compositional Elements: Space, Balance, Contrast, Proportion**

Magritte wished to cultivate an approach that avoided the stylistic distractions of most modern painting. While some French Surrealists experimented with new techniques of manipulating , Magritte settled on a deadpan, illustrative technique that clearly articulated the content of his pictures. As such, he chooses to arrange his subjects with symmetrical balance within the canvas, resulting in straightforward imagery that is beautiful in its clarity and simplicity, but which also provoke unsettling thoughts. They seem to declare that they hide no mystery, and yet they are also marvelously strange.

Space: However in terms of space, a major part of the painting seems shallow and flat, with not much depth depicted behind the tombstone.

Unlike his fellow Surrealist artists like Salvador Dali, who espoused the “automatic” approach and created three-dimensional and figurative art, Magritte kept rigidly to his canon of flat dimensions and frozen images.

In contrast to Giorgio de Chirico, whom he adopted many stylistic techniques from, who consistently gravitated towards spectacular perspectives, Magritte favoured a

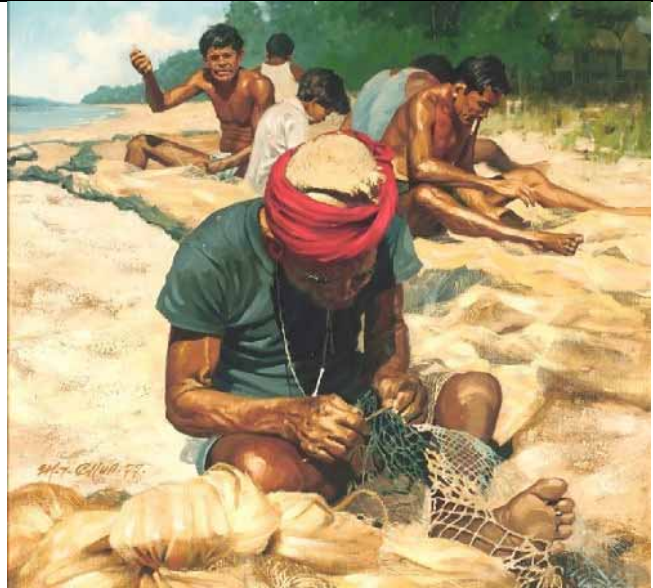
straightforward viewpoint: symmetrical, with receding planes placed parallel to the picture plane e.g. in the coffin, in a shallow, clearly delineated space e.g. overall structured layout and boundary between the human figure, the coffin and the tombstone.

He also switches the positions of what we normally associate with a gravesite- where the gravestone is above the earth, and the coffin is to be placed underground. However in this work, their positions are switched, bridging a connection that bind objects in the real world, yet introduces incompatible elements of reality.

Size & Proportion: Magritte was also fascinated with many stylistic techniques used by de Chirico, one of which is the use of close up frontality of objects in his paintings, because of its directness and gravity. This is evident in his choice of scale and proportion of the gigantic gravestone that is larger than the coffin, which takes up most of the space in the canvas, confronting the viewer with its appearance.

c) Compare this work with another work by Chua Mia Tee, and explain why naturalism is selected as a means of expression for the artists.

Comparison with Chua Mia Tee's *Malay Fisherman at Changi*:



**Malay Fisherman at Changi Beach**  
**Creator:** Chua Mia Tee  
**Date Created:** 1977  
**Physical Dimensions:** w880 x h868 cm  
**Oil on Canvas, National Heritage Board**

<p>Define how Rene Magritte uses naturalism, analyse his intentions, and the effect the use of naturalism has on the viewer. E.g.</p> <p>Artwork presents recognisable, familiar imagery that is figurative, but introduced in unfamiliar context.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Familiar patterns of understanding objects, paintings, and meaning in general are disrupted; e.g. the combination of recognizable forms of the sleeping human, juxtaposed in a coffin, above a giant molten lead tablet against a night sky, introduces a sense of mystery.</li> </ul> <p>The precision in which the objects in 'The Reckless Sleeper' are painted gives them the appearance of reality. E.g. he depicts his subjects figuratively, without distorting them drastically in form or shape like how his fellow Surrealist such as Salvador Dali would, as seen in The Burning Giraffe (1937). Neither does he depicts them highly realistically and true to life, as compared to Chua's Fisherman in Changi.</p> <p>He places the human figure in a box-like space, that resemble a theatrical set or puppet theatre.</p> <p>However, he contrasts the use of naturalism by evoking the idea of sound and time through associative means: such as references in title 'The Reckless Sleeper' and compositional divisions, similar to comic strip registers, within the picture frame.</p> <p><u>Intentions in using Naturalism:</u> Unlike other Surrealists, Magritte regards this world a more than adequate source of lucid revelations, so that he did not need to draw on dreams, hallucinations,</p>	<p>- Compare with how Chua Mia Tee uses naturalism, his intentions and the effect the use of naturalism has on the viewer. E.g.</p> <p>Chua draws his inspiration and subjects from the world around him (e.g. the seaside activities along Changi Coast...)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Maintain fidelity to appearance.</li> <li>•Chua paints in a highly realistic style</li> <li>•His works display his keen eye for details and an understanding of light</li> <li>•<b>He believes that art should be realistic because art reflects life.</b></li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Hence, many of his early works depict the traditional landscapes and life in Singapore that are disappearing under urban redevelopment</li> <li>•Scenes which he has drawn depicted the realism of life, capturing the places and the indomitable spirit of the people living and working there.</li> </ul> <p>For 'Malay Fisherman', composition feels like a photographic snapshot as the scene is cropped off, capturing the daily routine of the working class. Artist makes use of depth using size, proportion (e.g. the fishermen that are further in the background are scaled smaller). Strong, fine details are rendered to achieve a highly realistic effect.</p> <p>Use of contrasting tones and highlights on the subjects' skin to give a sense of depth, with light and shadow to create areas of sharp tonal contrast. Adds to the realistic atmospheric effect of a blazing hot, sunny day at the beach, which heightens the uncomfortable conditions that the fishermen are exposed to while working, captured in their suntanned skin and squinting eyes.</p> <p>The capturing of light contrasting against shadow, and saturation of colours, as well as a bigger scale, centres the eye on the darker toned, highly detailed central figure of the fisherman with his face turned towards his nets, and tones lighten towards the edges of the painting, a strategy to keep audience</p>
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<p>occult phenomena, cabalism.</p> <p>In contrast to the other surrealists, he attempted to find connections that bind objects in the real world, as opposed to chance encounters staged in an imaginary world.</p> <p>Preconsciousness - that is, the state before and during waking up - always played an important role in his work. Perhaps the title 'The Reckless Sleeper' suggests the struggle between dream and consciousness that one would experience while on the verge of waking up.</p>	<p>engaged in the work.</p> <p><u>Intentions in using Naturalism</u>: Chua uses naturalism extensively in his work as a Reflection of everyday social realities of a particular time and place, in the vein of Social Realism.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Often highlighting the injustices faced by the <b>working class</b> and valourising them as heroes.</li> <li>•<b>Ideologically-driven</b> (eg. championing rights of working class, anti-colonialism, nationalism)</li> <li>•Situating the individual against a <b>wider social background</b> – individual used to embody the circumstances faced by the larger collective.</li> <li>•Chua once said that as an artist, he saw the urgency to document these scenes before they vanished from Singapore's cityscape <b>"When I look at a particular scene it must be representative of the experiences or lifestyle of this particular community."</b></li> </ul>
<p><u>Effect on Audience:</u></p> <p>For Magritte, by applying the method of 'elective affinities' using naturalism, e.g. Believable presentation of common iconic objects in new configurations, it perpetuates momentary disorientation. The fascinating and challenging images in Magritte's works stem from revelations of the mystery of the visible world.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Viewer's conventional vision is liberated from its obscurity through shock and surprise. Rather than providing answers, Magritte chooses to allow the viewer to be affected by the images, as they perceive and extrapolate the meaning themselves.</li> <li>• In contrast to Magritte's use of naturalism to alter the familiar, create mystery and to generate differing viewpoints of what the audience perceives as reality, Chua's approach to realistic art allows audiences to more easily understand and identify with the work, hence allowing art to fulfil its purpose of instruction, and preserving the cultural memory of the nation for its people.</li> </ul>	





2. ***The Massacre at Chios (Diptych)*** by Yue Min Jun, 1994 [Fig. 2]  
Oil on Canvas

250 × 364 cm

Private Collection

(a) Assess the subject matter and composition of this work. [10]

The Massacre at Chios depicts 11 repeated motifs of Yue Min Jun's self-image, one riding on a rearing horse, another carrying a baton while the rest are seated on the floor, laughing with their wide-mouthed cynic grins. All of them are dressed in simple funerary white shirt and black pants. It leaves the audience wondering whether this is an occasion for celebration or mourning. Behind the laughing men and horse, are eight black-white cranes that are either standing or flying in mid-air. The cranes could symbolise longevity and prosperity as seen in Chinese culture or they could also represent the first-rank crest of Civil Officers in China.

The faces are bright pink as if to suggest the exertion of laughing too much, or to allude to the bright red rosy cheeks of proletariats in typical Chinese propagandistic posters. They could also suggest the sun-burnt state or Yue's occupation hazard of working in oil fields in his early years as an artist.



The sky and ground are depicted in a flat shade of blue and grey. They are relatively simplistic and lacking in details, except for the depiction of the shadows of the sitting figures. They foreground the main characters and echoes the caricaturistic style of the painting.

The dominant arrangement of the figures are from front to back and from right to left in an orderly manner. Figures are all clustered close together to suggest a shallow depth of field despite the depiction of the blue sky in the background. Yue hence did not exploit the depth of field but instead give us a close-up view of this scene so that the wide grins are the main focus.

Yue's cartoon-like figure is not only repeated but so is his expression to further emphasise the attitude and atmosphere of mockery and cynicism.

(b) Analyse the ideas and intentions in this work. [10]

Yue's 'Massacre at Chios' with his exaggerated wide grins, portrays the ironic, cynical psychological and artistic response towards censorship and towards a post-1989 Tiananmen incident government back then, where any overt negative responses could lead to possible imprisonment. Artists sought to rise above the collective attitudes of propagandistic post-cultural revolution artworks to express individual emotions in a state-controlled artistic landscape. Here, the loss of hope and trust of the state and the disillusionment towards people in power, led to the expression of cynical attitude via mocking grins which read by layman, could simply just suggest a celebratory optimism in the vein of propagandistic posters.

The eight flying and standing cranes in the background could either symbolise longevity and prosperity in Chinese Culture or the first rank insignia badges of Civil Officers. If it signifies the former, the cranes hence complements the celebratory optimistic front that Yue painted to incorporate Chinese Culture into a western art inspired-painting of Eugene Delacroix's 'Massacre at Chios'.

However, if it signifies the latter, the painting pays homage to the state and its meritocratic system which gels unsettling with the chaos and violence in the foreground. Yue could perhaps suggest that peace, rationality and intelligence sometimes co-exist with violence and chaos when mankind aims to dominate over another, leading to conflict. This philosophy echoes the dadaists who responded to the irrationality of world war I created from rational people in power.

(c) Discuss the influences that are evident in this work.

[10]

### **Eugene Delacroix's 'Massacre at Chios'**

Eugene Delacroix's 'Massacre at Chios' influenced the content and composition of Yue Min Jun's painting of the same name.

### **Describe**

In Delacroix's work, he portrayed the tragic 1824 Greek War of Independence where thousands of innocent Greek Christians on the island of Chios were massacred by the ruling Ottoman Turks in reaction to a Greek revolt for independence. In this western painting, the Turks were dressed in royal regalia as they trample and tower over the naked, dead and injured Greek civilians. One of them riding atop a rearing horse, turned away in indifference, as a dying civilian pleaded for her life.

### **Compare**

Similarly, in Yue's painting, we see the similar iconography and composition of a man in power on a rearing horse and another with a baton, with fallen civilians sitting in the foreground. However, the difference is that the men in power and the seated people are not Ottoman Turks or Greeks but are instead Yue, himself, repeated across the canvas. Instead, of being dead or naked, the Yue figures are very much alive and laughing, and dressed in simple black and white garments. The figures could hence be laughing at *both* the oppressed and the oppressor, and the whole idea of war and conflict as one big joke, in the typically satirical style of cynical realism.

### **Other Influences:**

#### **Communism**

The rosy pink faces and the many repeated orderly figures in Yue's painting, are characteristic iconography of Chinese propagandistic paintings where proletariats gather together as one people. This unity is seen in Yue's orderly arrangement of the figures despite the theme of chaos and violence in the painting.

#### **Social Realism**

Yue Min Jun was also influenced by social realism as seen in the political subject matter of the repressed civilians (represented by himself) within a system and the accurate proportion and perspective of his figures.

#### **Geng Jianyi**

Yue Min Jun's laughing figures were also first inspired by Geng Jianyi's, a fellow Chinese painter's laughing head which led Yue to expand this into his laughing figures.

#### **Pop-Art**

Yue's simple flat colours as seen in the blue sky and grey ground, alludes to his pop art's influence of flat colours that lack tonal values. This echoes Yue's desire to 'simplify things' without painterly texture or details so that the message of the work is directly perceptible to viewers and candid and honest. According to Yue, the bright colours, reminiscent of pop art, also attracts the immediate attention of viewers.

3. **Several Circles** by Vasily Kandinsky, 1926 [Fig. 3a]

Oil on canvas

140.3 x 140.7 cm

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Solomon R. Guggenheim Founding Collection,

By gift

**Untitled (Pink with Circles)** by Fiona Rae, 1996 [Fig. 3b]

Oil, pencil and charcoal on canvas

213.4 x 198.1 cm

Fiona Rae Collection

3a



3b



a) Describe the formal qualities of the two paintings. [10]	
<p><i>Formal qualities refer to the observable EOA &amp; POD in the paintings. Candidates are required to describe and may offer comparative discussion on the formal qualities of the two paintings.</i></p> <p><i>Key points: Use of shape (geometric circles), colour, contrast, focal point</i></p>	
<p><b>AP&amp;I</b> Highly informed judgements about the use of visual elements. Critically appraise significant details, illustrated by ample accurate and precise references</p> <p><b>PR</b> Demonstrate highly personal opinions and creative responses</p> <p>Use of subject language and terminology is mature.</p>	<p>The two paintings are abstract paintings. Kandinsky's is largely a geometric abstract work while Rae's painting is more abstract expressionist in nature.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The two painting both make use of one particular geometric shape, the circle.</li> <li>• While Kandinsky's painting focuses largely on the circle, Rae makes use of a wider array of line and colour in her painting.</li> <li>• Kandinsky's circles are painted against a black background and appear translucent because of the opacity of the colours used against such a dark background. The circles also overlap one another and this is evident in how the colours are visible through the circles because of their low opacity.</li> <li>• His choice of colours therefore gives the painting a rather melancholic tone.</li> <li>• However, there is a sense of movement in Kandinsky's painting. Due to his use of black as a background, it appears as if the circles are floating in space.</li> <li>• Moreover, Kandinsky's painting makes use of scale to create movement in the painting. The smaller circles vary in size and are painted in a seemingly random manner. The smaller circles</li> </ul>

	<p>also seem to be gathering around a large circle, which serve as the focal point of the painting, due to its scale in relation to the smaller circles. This focal point is also due to the ring of white around the larger circle, which contrasts against the black background.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Similar to Kandinsky's painting, Rae makes use of geometric circles in her work. Unlike Kandinsky, however, Rae makes use of lines and colour that are painted in a gestural manner around the circles. For instance, there are curved thin lines created by colour, as well as brushwork that created straight vertical strokes, and sinuous lines of mixed colours.</li> <li>• Rae's use of colours range from pinks, beige, and pale oranges to vivid pale yellow and black. The colours she uses also range from solid colours to a mix in of colours in her brushstrokes, paint dribbles, smudges and gestural streaks.</li> <li>• Rae's uncontrollable paint streaks are in great contrast to the geometric circular forms in her painting: perfect circular forms that are painted in pale purple and vivid pale yellow and encased in thick black, which contrast against the colourful cacophony of lines and colours around the canvas, some overlapping the circular forms.</li> <li>• The lack of focal point in Rae's painting allows the viewers' eyes to move all over the painting while resting at points where the circle reside.</li> </ul>
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<b>b) Compare the painting techniques and compositions of the two works. [10]</b>			
<p><i>Candidates are required to compare and contrast painting techniques used by the two artists and how these techniques contribute to the composition of both paintings. Key points include:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Type of abstraction</li> <li>- Compositional choice</li> <li>- Use and control of medium</li> </ul> <p><i>Candidate need to make a comparison and should go beyond listing of painting techniques and compositions.</i></p> <p><i>Definition: Abstract paintings break away from traditional representation of real objects in the exploration of forms and colours.</i></p>			
<p><b>AP&amp;I</b></p> <p>Highly informed judgements about the use of visual elements.</p> <p>Critically appraise significant details, illustrated by ample accurate and precise references</p> <p>Exhibit deeply insightful knowledge</p>	<p><b>Abstraction</b></p> <p>Both artists make use of pure abstraction in their painting, leading to compositions that are dynamic.</p>	<p><b>Kandinsky</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kandinsky's painting is a complete abstraction through his use of only circular forms that do not allude to any objects in real life.</li> <li>• Kandinsky made use of overlapping flat</li> </ul>	<p><b>Rae</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Similarly, Rae makes use of complete abstraction through her use of circular forms, gestural brushstrokes and use of colour.</li> <li>• However, where Kandinsky's</li> </ul>

<p>of the artist/artwork and techniques employed</p> <p><b>C&amp;AA</b> Show a broad familiarity with relevant artworks/artists/movements, and social and cultural backgrounds</p> <p><b>PR</b> Demonstrate highly personal opinions and creative responses</p> <p>Use of subject language and terminology is mature.</p>	<p><i>Define Abstraction</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>How do both artists use abstraction?</i></li> <li>- <i>What are the compositional techniques linked to abstraction used by both artists?</i></li> <li>- <i>How are they similar and/or different?</i></li> </ul>	<p>planes and clearly delineated shapes. This is evident in the overlapping colours of the circular forms, where the colours meet to form different tones or hues altogether.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kandinsky's painting reflects a more controlled form of abstraction in his composition of the circular forms. The placement of the circles appears deliberate, culminating into the largest band. The density of the smaller circles appears higher towards the largest circle, thus drawing the viewer's eyes into the largest and darkest circular area on the painting.</li> </ul>	<p>abstraction appears calculated and planned (influenced by the Bauhaus aesthetic, and reflecting Constructivist concerns and styles, which by the mid-1920s had become international in scope), Rae's abstraction reflect a more expressionistic approach in her gestural brush strokes and impression of spontaneity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unlike Kandinsky however, Rae's painting has an all-over composition, whereby there is no single point of focus. This painting technique is characteristic of abstract expressionist styles of painting. Coupled with her gestural brush strokes (that are at time loaded with multiple colours at once), mass of lines, dripping paint and splotches of colour that go in all directions, the viewers' eyes are led to explore all over the canvas and to examine every part of it.</li> </ul>
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<b>c) In your opinion, which work is more effective in the use of abstraction to convey ideas?</b> <b>[10]</b>	
<p><i>Candidates should form an opinion of which work they find more effective.</i></p> <p><i>Candidates need to provide a definition of abstraction and frame their criteria for effectiveness.</i></p> <p><i>Criteria for effectiveness:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Clarity of artist's ideas/message/intention (how and why)</li> <li>- Ability to make visual/emotional impact on viewers</li> </ul>	
<p><b>AP&amp;I</b> Highly informed judgements about the use of visual elements. Critically appraise significant details, illustrated by ample accurate and precise references Exhibit deeply insightful knowledge of the artist/artwork and techniques employed</p> <p><b>C&amp;AA</b> Show a broad familiarity with relevant artworks/artists/movements, and social and cultural backgrounds</p> <p><b>PR</b> Demonstrate highly personal opinions and creative responses</p> <p>Use of subject language and terminology is mature.</p>	<p><b>Suggested answers</b></p> <p><b>1. Kandinsky's painting is more effective in his use of abstraction to convey his ideas.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Kandinsky's use of abstraction makes use of visual impact on the viewers to express, at the same time, his influences and ideas on abstract art-making.</li> <li>- In 1922 Kandinsky joined the faculty of the Weimar Bauhaus, where he discovered a more sympathetic environment in which to pursue his art. Originally premised on a Germanic, expressionistic approach to art-making, the Bauhaus aesthetic came to reflect Constructivist concerns and styles, which by the mid-1920s had become international in scope.</li> <li>- While there, Kandinsky furthered his investigations into the correspondence between colours and forms and their psychological and spiritual effects, which reflects the spirit of his use of geometric abstraction.</li> <li>- In the early 1920s, after Kandinsky's return from Russia to Germany, his works got a characteristic geometricity, more space started to appear on the canvas, and the spontaneity gave way to the order. Fascinated by the educational process and the theoretical work in Bauhaus, the painter continued his research on the interaction and the influence of the main elements of the canvas, the colours and forms.</li> <li>- In "Several Circles", the colourful, interactive geometric forms create a pulsating effect against the black background that is alternately dynamic and calm, aggressive and quiet.</li> <li>- "Several Circles" also highlights the importance of circles in his paintings. As the painting is only dominated by the presence of the circle, it effectively highlights the status of this geometric shape and the dominant role it plays.</li> <li>- This painting elevates circles to cosmic importance. The idea of the cosmos is evident in the association that can be made to planetary forms, which are also circular (spherical) in nature. This, coupled with the black background of the work, highlights Kandinsky's idea that this painting "is the synthesis of the greatest oppositions. It combines the concentric and the eccentric in a single form and in equilibrium. Of the three primary forms, it points most clearly to the fourth dimension."</li> </ul> <p><b>2. Rae's painting is more effective in her use of abstraction to convey her ideas.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Fiona Rae's abstraction is very reminiscent of abstract expressionist styles of painting, whereby the process is more important than the product.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The painting embodies a series of thought and feeling process in her use of abstract expressionism. The perceived spontaneity of her brush strokes on the painting acts as a record, on which she makes a mark on the canvas, considers it, adjusts in, removes it, replaces it, conceals it, reveals it, destroys it and repairs it. Rae's improvisational process of painting is clearly expressed in the way the marks are layered over one another, such as how the vertical dry brush stroke is overlapped by the large area of paint. Spontaneity in process is also suggested by the different direction of dripping paint, such as the different direction of drips at the bottom left corner of the painting.</li> <li>- Furthermore, the intensity of movement on the canvas surface enhances Rae's idea of abstract expressionism in the effect it has on viewers, as though watching the painting remake itself in front of their eyes.</li> <li>- Rae's expressionistic ideas also come across in how she uses a variety of techniques. In this work, Rae employs different mark-making processes such as a with loaded brush, drip painting, and the incorporation of geometric shapes amidst more organic brush work, to create complex imagery and a range of surface effects.</li> </ul>
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***TV Garden*** by Nam June Paik, 1974 [Fig. 4a (i – ii)]  
Video installation with color television sets and live plants  
Dimensions vary  
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York



***Corps Étranger*** by Mona Hatoum, 1994 [Fig. 4b (i –ii)]  
video installation, with cylindrical wooden structure, video projector, amplifier, four speakers,  
350 x 300 x 350 cm  
Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris



<p>4a. Discuss the subject matter in these works. [10]</p>
<p>Nam June Paik's 'TV Garden' installation is made up of 30 television monitors half-hidden amidst an undergrowth of plants within a museum.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On the monitors are footages of 'Global Groove', Paik's video collaboration with John Godfrey.</li> <li>• It is a video montage of fragmented sequences showcasing beat-generation poet Allen Ginsberg reading his work, female tap dancers, performance by Fluxus artist and cellist Charlotte Moorman using a man's back as her instrument, appropriated pepsi commercials from Japanese television, and Korean drummers.</li> <li>• Audio-wise, it includes interviews, voiceovers, pop music and broadcast breaks.</li> <li>• The sound and visual from the montages also serve as counterpoints to the monitors' flickering lights.</li> <li>• Paik's installation is an uncanny juxtaposition of nature and technology and his installation of multiple monitors foreground the advent of a broadcast jungle of multiple channels and stations streamed live simultaneously.</li> </ul>
<p>Mona Hatoum's '<i>Corps étranger</i>' depicts a cylindrical installation with a video projection of an endoscopic journey into her own body in the interior.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stepping into the almost claustrophobic narrowness of the cylinder, the visitor first hears indefinable sounds and is confronted with close-up shots from the inside of a human body: mucous membranes, hair, teeth</li> <li>• The sound of breathing, heartbeat, and the gurgling of the internal organs intensify the multi-sensorial experience and the unease of being inside the body represented by the cylindrical cell.</li> <li>• At the same time, <i>Corps étranger</i> allows a voyeuristic experience through the notion of surveillance. The encounter within the architectural space, between the artist's body and the onlooker's gaze standing in for the medical eye, portrays the power wielded, within the medical institution, by the scientific eye over the patient's vulnerable body.</li> </ul>
<p>b) Analyse the artists' techniques and approaches in both works. [10]</p> <p><i>The answer is non-exhaustive. Candidates need to analyse the techniques and approaches and not merely identify or list them.</i></p>
<p>In Paik's 'TV Garden', television's materiality is explored. He uses multiple television monitors to play video tapes of 'Global Groove' which is a audiovisual feast of colours, performances and sound created from the Paik-Abe customised video synthesiser that alters the original digital footages, causing the image to stretch, shrink and break up or allowing the artist to layer various images as seen in the performance of Charlotte Moorman in the foreground while abstract moving images played in the background.</p> <p>Here, Paik replaced traditional paint and easel with new modes of representation through television, video recorders, signals and the notion of time and sound visualised.</p> <p>The use of video recorders and synthesisers also allow Paik a greater degree of editing freedom and</p>

manipulation of reel-time as multiple edits could be made with multiple digital copies. This is unlike film reels where once a cut is made, it is permanent and can only be done once for the same original footage.

‘TV Garden’ also depicted Paik’s exploration of the intimate relationship between visual and sound. The element of movement or the burst of abstract colours onscreen, is synced in audiovisual rhythm with the collage of sound and music to show that both elements complement each other.

Through the manipulation of the video synthesiser, he incorporates ‘painterly images’ in the continuum of time such that the platform for reproductive one-way broadcast from television stations, become a personalised, productive tool for artists. He reconfigured existing parts of the console into a seven-channel mixer and coloriser. It is no coincidence that seven is the number of channels as there are seven colour bars for accurate calibration.

The moving abstract images and altered colours also depicts Paik’s desire to visualise music and the importance that he placed on movement and performances through his curation of tap dancing pieces, Moorman’s performance and performance of Korean drummers.

Painters mixed paint on palette which resulted in static final compositions on canvases. On the other hand, in Paik’s ‘TV Garden’, the shift of electrons on phosphorescent screen visualises the continuum of reel time in ‘Global Groove’ and real time in the space of the museum.

Here, Paik was also investigating colour and surface that are unique to video as the multiple screens in a darkened space produces colours that are uniquely televisual- luminous and highly saturated.

According to Paik, the synthesiser will be able to ‘shape the TV screen canvas as precisely as Leonardo, as freely as Picasso, as colourfully as Renoir, as profoundly as Mondrian, as violently as Pollock’. Paik was hence trying to legitimise the moving images as an art form worthy to be compared with other significant artists in art history. In addition, he was also creating a new culture of the multiplicity of sound and moving visual where the media is highly accessible and connected anywhere, perhaps even in a jungle.

In Hatoum’s installation, it consists of a cylindrical wooden structure and a projector on the ceiling of the interior so as to project the endoscopic video on the ground.

The video is shot with an endoscopic camera that alternately explores the surface and the interior of Hatoum’s body as she remains conscious throughout the operation cum performance. Here, the performance took place both outside and within the artist’s body – when she is giving directions to the ‘medical examiner’ and when the camera and the body are responding to each other.

*The video hence* offers an intrusion into the utmost privacy of the artist’s body or inner organs. This intrusion is further emphasised as the viewer enters through one of the two narrow doors of the small cylindrical structure that could metaphorically suggests the interior of the human body.

Upon entry, viewer is greeted by the circular projection of the interior of the body. The onlooker’s position within the installation’s arrangement further exemplifies the concept of ‘foreign body’. The onlooker who becomes involved in the structure enclosing the endoscopic video enters into an unknown body which he, or she, is invited to probe through images of the interior of the body, that is blown up larger-than-life, thus magnifying the hyper-realistic effect of immersion in a confined space, delimited by the circular architecture.

A soundtrack broadcasting heartbeats accompanies these moving visuals. This enhances the hyper-realism of the scene and experience of heartbeats heard from different parts of the body as it is being examined by the endoscopic camera and the eye of the doctor.

For some ten minutes the camera, favouring back-and-forth movements, travels swiftly round the interior of the artist's body, venturing turn by turn into its various orifices. Mona Hatoum, who took part in the making of the video, as both director and performer, becomes the artwork herself as space is not just revealed via the movements that the artist makes but also revealed through an external medium inserted into the artist's body- the endoscopic camera.

The camera is an extension of the scientific eye, an external element penetrating the patient's body, appropriating it and then retrieving deconstructed images of it such that the images are both hyper-realistic, repulsive and abstract concurrently.

Whether the onlooker walks round the image by moving about on the inner periphery of the structure encircling the video, or whether he obliquely crosses the projection surface, he cannot avoid the confrontation with the body revealed in its biological aspects.

The relatively closed structure of the cylinder – just two narrow doors afford entry to it – suggests a private space, with reserved access. This feeling is reinforced by the almost total darkness of the surroundings (the video images are the sole light source for the installation). Then, once the door is passed through, the extremely intimate nature of the images projected confirms the feeling aroused by the structure, inevitably inflicting upon the onlooker a status of voyeur.

c) Compare the use of time and space in both works.

[10]

*Candidates would need to respond in relations to both time and space for the two works.*

Nam June Paik's 'TV Garden'	Comparative Feature	Mona Hatoum's 'Corps Etranger'
<p>An open-concept installation where viewers walk around the work (plants and television sets) without fully entering the space by crossing or stepping into the media jungle.</p> <p>Viewers see the multiplicity of the 'Global Groove' videos with the sound reverberating across the museum's space but there is a sense of detachment as compared to the confined immersiveness in 'Corps Etranger' due to the structure of the installation.</p>	<p><b>Space</b></p>	<p>Cylindrical Structural installation where viewers are invited to enter into a designated narrow interior space.</p> <p>The use of space is small but immersive and aims to envelope the viewer into its subject matter and experience of being inside a 'foreign body' complete with intrusive projections of inner organs and sound of heartbeats.</p>

<p>Viewers see a video-recording of 'Global Groove', an audiovisual montage, beamed from multiple television screens.</p> <p>The reel-time space is increasingly deconstructed and abstracted from realistic moving images of tap dancers to just animated outlines of them, as the frequency of the video-synthesiser controls are adjusted in reel-time.</p>	<p><b>Space</b></p>	<p>Viewers see a circular projection of endoscopic scenes within a body.</p> <p>The reel-time space is not digitally edited to such a large extent as 'TV Garden's Global Groove' as the endoscopic camera portrays the truths of the internal state of the organs from a voyeuristic eye of the medical examiner.</p>
<p>Both demonstrated the use of reel time digital recording where a segment of time could be preserved, replayed any moment for any number of times unlike undocumented live performances.</p>	<p><b>Time</b></p>	<p>Both demonstrated the use of reel time digital recording where a segment of time could be preserved, replayed any moment for any number of times unlike undocumented live performances.</p>
<p>'Global Groove' in 'TV Garden' demonstrated reel time that is cut and edited into various segments and re-arranged to form a new vision of audio and moving visuals.</p> <p>Here the element of rhythm of moving visuals with sound is closely connected to form the audiovisual kaleidoscope of abstract burst of colours and montages of recorded performances.</p>	<p><b>Time</b></p>	<p>'Corps Etranger' on the other hand demonstrated a continuum of reel time that is shot in one continuous take as the endoscopic camera travels from one organ's opening to another. Similarly, sound plays a huge role as they enhances the hyper-realistic and multi-sensorial experience of being inside a body.</p>

5. In your opinion, how did the paintings of 'The Singapore Pioneers' explore influences of both Western and Eastern Art?

Analyse the work of **two** artists in your answer.

Introduction:

Briefly establish context e.g.

- What is Nanyang Style about?
- What are the concerns and themes involved?
- How does it show from the selection and treatment of the subject matter?
- What makes Nanyang Style unique formally and technically?

Essential Points

- Innovation: Looking for a new visual language
- Fusion of traditional and modern, east and west.
- Local and regional icons. Tributes to pioneers. Scenes of Daily life. Colourful and exotic culture, Landscape and still-life.
- Elements of local crafts & techniques: Chinese ink.
- Asian and regional aesthetics. Chinese painting composition, batik influences on treatment of form and space.
- Western aesthetics, mediums, techniques: oil painting, cubism, fauvism, post-impressionism.

**Body: Minimum of 2-3 works per artist.**

**Suggested Body Structure A**

E.g. Introduce Artist Briefly, and list Artwork, Year.

E.g. Chen Wen Hsi, The Ferry, c. 1952

- Elaborate on combination of western techniques applied onto local subject matters.
- Subject matter: Why choose this subject matter, links to interests/concerns of Nanyang Artist. Mention Bali Trip
- Style: Post-Impressionism and evidence, yet what is unique and original about Nanyang Style.
- Compare with another Chen Wen Hsi's work (List Artwork, Year) and evaluate if this is his mature style. Use this to judge the extent.

E.g. ...”This work was completed during/after Chen’s trip to Bali in 1952, it marks Chen’s transitional style from Classical Chinese paintings to his later, matured cubist-influenced style. The trip to Bali and fascination with depicting uniquely SEA subject matter was an attempt to establish a new visual language for Chen and the others, most of whom came from China with formal trainings and exposure to both Chinese and Western Art. The tropical climate, vivid colours and exotic cultural traditions of Bali was a stark contrast with Singapore, this served as inspirations and platforms to combine SEA subject matters with Western Art Styles and Mediums, which eventually evolved into Nanyang Style...”

“Compared with one of his last works, Herons, 1991...” You may list down similarities, differences and development in stylistic approaches, choice of subject matter and how these link with the context of Eastern/Western art.

**OR**

### **Suggested Body Structure B**

Comparison between two Nanyang Artists who chose similar subject matter, but use varying stylistic approaches.

**E.g. Singapore River**



**Life by the River, 1975, Liu Kang, Oil on Canvas**



**Untitled (Singapore River Scene) 1960, Chen Wen Hsi, Oil on Canvas**

### Body:

“...While both paintings depict with similar subject matter, they are stylistically distinctive: As opposed to Chen’s incorporation of cubist visual elements, Liu has chosen to paint in a realist manner. Yet even though the treatment of figures, colour scheme, composition and brushwork differs drastically, both pay tribute to the spirit and identity of the nation encapsulated in the centrality of the Singapore River. Despite the changes of people and places, bustling scenes and a mosaic of ethnicities, the capturing of the iconic river represents a deliberate construction of a national consciousness in the post-independence period...

As compared to Liu’s detailed realism, Chen has chosen to omit many details, yet still effectively communicate the essential quality of the subject matter. Partial abstraction and distortion of the environment using angular lines and elongated forms injects a sense of grace and aesthetics only possible through calculated artistic manipulation akin to mannerism...”

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### Conclusion:

- Appreciate what the strengths of the Nanyang Style, the contributions of each artist is, and how their works connect with the viewer and support artistic development in Singapore.

**6) Discuss and analyse how Singapore Modern Artists influence the culture and development of art in Singapore. Refer to the works of at least two Singapore Modern Artists in your discussion. [30]**

*Candidates should discuss and analyse the ways in which Singapore Modern Artists (SMAs) influence the culture and development of art in Singapore. They may refer to works by the following list of artists:*

*Tang Da Wu, Anthony Poon, Han Sai Por and Chua Ek Kay*

*Candidates may also refer to the works of other Singapore Modern Artists as well as contemporary Singapore artists to justify their points.*

*Some key points may include:*

- *How SMAs are influenced by and influence the culture and development of art in Singapore*
- *In what ways has art developed in Singapore since the SMAs*
- *Analyse how their influences are evident in Singapore art today*
- *Introduction of different art styles and techniques influenced from the US (e.g abstraction of painting/sculpture)*
- *Use of new media(non-traditional materials in sculpture, installation, performance art)*



### **Introduction**

#### *Define modern art and introduction to Singapore Modern Artists*

Modern Art or Modernism is the loose term given to the succession of styles and movements in art and architecture which dominated Western culture from 19th Century up until the 1960's. Movements associated with Modern art include Impressionism, Cubism, Bauhaus, Surrealism, Futurism, Pop Art and Op Art. The term "modern" in the sense of the contemporaneous refers to works of art which a viewer considers to represent a departure from the past.

#### *Definitions of the term "modern"*

- The sense of the emergence of art as an independent and individualistic practice. It is a departure from the earlier monumental religious and public sculpture and architecture, as well as craft traditions
- Can be defined as an identifiable high point in the course of the entire twentieth century development. This height for Singapore comes neatly at the mid-point of the century -- the 1950s. Here, "modern art" takes on the meaning of a point of maturity in the half-century when the environment, stimulations and innovative efforts came into a right mix to bring forth a distinct flourishing of artistic innovation in Singapore. An earlier tension between Chinese nationalism and Nanyang regionalism had been resolved after the Second World War making way for new impetus for innovation. Many seminal works by important Singapore pioneer artists such as Chen Wen Hsi and Cheong Soo Pieng were created during this period.

#### *Modern Art in Singapore*

"Modern" as used by the Modern Art Society in the 1960s referred to a departure from the mainstream Chinese migrant art which, by then, had developed into a convention known by the term "Nanyang School".

A related meaning of "modern" became popular in the 1970s to indicate the formalistic aspects of art or "abstract art" which was then being discussed in relation to internationalism and multiculturalism.

In terms of a "modern" infrastructure for the visual arts, it is revealing that before the 1950s, there was no art gallery in Singapore which functioned as a focus for art activities and the art market. Some art works were bought and sold prior to 1950, but the physical manifestations of an art market -- commercial galleries, exhibitions with works for sale, art promoters, art patrons and art events linked to a relatively constant venue - were absent until then. Unlike the West therefore (where the lack of support to artists from the church, the state and the elite forced artists to be independent in the emerging capitalist market), the main forces that drove the culture and development of art in Singapore is not derivative of any international art trends. Thus, the history of Singapore art can be viewed as interplay between art practice and the evolution of an infrastructure for the visual arts.

With reference to works by [selected artists, *candidates may also bring in knowledge of artists not in the syllabus*], this essay therefore seeks to discuss and analyse the ways in which the Singapore Modern Artists influenced and shaped the culture and development of visual art in Singapore, predominantly through painting techniques of combining Western Techniques & Southeast Asian subject matter and abstraction, and the use of new media.

### **Painting Techniques**

With the opening of international borders, SMAs were presented with the opportunity to learn formal techniques of art-making overseas in institutions such as Byam Shaw School of Art in London. They were also influenced by Western artists and their painting techniques in 1970s, which included abstract art. These influences paved the way for the development of a new technique of painting in the Singapore visual art scene, when previously it was dominated by the realistic representation of

subject matter.

### **Western Techniques and SEAsian subject matter**

Realistic forms of representation dominated Singapore art during the period of the Nanyang artists. Painters like Liu Kang and Georgette Chen were painting still life and landscapes in a representational manner. However, they were already making use of Western painting techniques such as flat planes, flat areas of colour, cloissonism, and simplification of figures. This, for example, is evident in Liu Kang's "Artist and Model".



Liu Kang, *Artist and Model*, 1954, oil on canvas

However, the use of Western painting techniques and SEAsian subject matter became more prevalent in the art of the SMAs. This changing art landscape has its beginning in Nanyang artists such as Chen Wen His, whose "Herons" mark the root of abstraction in modern art in Singapore.



Herons by Chen Wen Hsi. c.1990. Chinese ink and colour. Size: 157 x 297 cm.

### **Abstraction**

Second-generation modern artists were active in the Singapore art scenes from the 1950s to 70s, and were instrumental in shaping the culture and development of art in Singapore. Artists of that generation include Chua Ek Kay and Anthony Poon, both of whom explored medium and thought in innovative and meaningful ways. They were among the artists who went abroad to further their studies and returned to Singapore in the late 1960s, filled with new ideas. They ushered in the 1970s, making it an era that is the most vibrant decade for visual art in Singapore, marked by experimentation in which new styles are developed and old aesthetics are reinterpreted.

As artists explored new expressions in art, they found similarities between the Shanghai School style and the works of Western artists in terms of artistic spontaneity and abstraction.

The experimentation of new styles, particularly the combination of painting techniques & medium,

as well as the abstraction of subject matter, is evident in the works of Chua Ek Kay, who explored and experimented with Chinese Ink, painting local subject matter, in abstract, almost non-representational form. Here, there are similarities between the Shanghai School style and the works of Western artists like Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso and Jackson Pollock. For example, his abstract expressionist style of painting can clearly be seen in his Lotus Series, one of which is in “Dance of the Lotus”. The gestural brushstrokes using dry brush and thick lines all come together in a seemingly random fashion, reminiscent of Pollock’s gestural action paintings. The painting exudes movement and dynamism in the various directions of brushstrokes and yet, it conveys the essence of the lotus plant dancing in the wind.

*[Candidates should reference at least 2 works]*



**Dance of the Lotus**  
97 x 91 cm (UF)  
122.5 x 116.5 cm (F)  
2007  
Chinese ink on rice paper

Another SMA who brought about and developed the abstract style of painting made use of geometric abstraction. Anthony Poon developed a style of painting that displayed the influences of Maurice de Sausmarez, whom he studied under at the Byam Shaw School of Art. Poon’s works reflect Sausmarez’s theories of line, form, colour and spatial dynamics, and as Singapore was in a time of advancement, he drew not only from the natural world but from the functional logic of machinery and man-made forms. Poon developed a unique style, centered on his interest in the spatial relationship between line and colour. He was also influenced by art from the US, Bauhaus and aesthetic theories, where the Bauhaus firmly established industrial design. It stripped away the decoration and left clean lines of function, ushering the modern era of design.

This was evident in Poon’s Kite series of geometric abstractions and aerodynamic shapes on shaped canvas, developed just before his return to Singapore.



Anthony Poon, Untitled, c. early 1970s. Courtesy of the artist and Sundaram

In one of his “Untitled” (early 1970s) paintings, the canvas is shaped to resemble that of a kite. It’s pointed top and winged bottoms give it an aerodynamic edge. This serves to strengthen his ideas on

the development of technology in Singapore, together with his methods of painting. Poon's flawless, straight-edged lines and meticulous technique of painting layer by layer eliminates evidence of the artist's hand. Repetition of lines and constant gradients of greens and blues in the painting give it a mechanically reproduced feel, thus strengthening the idea of a technologically advancing Singapore.

*[Candidates should reference at least 2 works]*

The abstraction of Chua and Poon therefore played an important part in influencing and paving the way for abstraction in the Singapore art scene.

### **Culture and development of art in Singapore**

The Modern Art Society Singapore (registered on June 4<sup>th</sup> 1964), was the first testament of that. Seven artists were in the group, namely Ho Ho Ying, Wee Beng Chong, Tong Siang Eng, Tay Chee Toh, Tan Yee Hong, Goh Tuck Hai Johnda and Ng Yat Chuang then, founded the Modern Art Society (registered on June 4<sup>th</sup> 1964). Its mission was to challenge and encourage artists to reinterpret nature with a new vision and in 1963, they held the First Modern Art Exhibition at the National Library.

These challenges and reinterpretations of subject matter are clearly seen today in the contemporary art of artists like Ruben Pang.



The Pharmacy  
Ruben Pang, 2013, Oil and alkyd on aluminum panel, 145 x 99 cm

Pang's abstract paintings, such as "The Pharmacy", true to abstract form, captures the essence of the subject matter through his use of colour, primarily deep yellows that almost glow gold in the centre. His brushwork is gestural and colours are mixed with tones of greens and orange.

### **Conclusion**

As seen by the body of works in the art scene of Singapore today, therefore, Singapore Modern Artists have influenced the culture and development of art in Singapore, not only in the products but in art-making. Through the introduction of Western painting techniques with local subject matter and abstraction in painting, SMAs such as Chua and Poon have no doubt impacted art in Singapore in an innovative manner.

