

## Chapter 7

# Peranakan Imageries in Malaysian and Singaporean Modern Art, 1980s–2017: Between Gendered Representations and Modern Expressions

**Sarena Abdullah**

The revival of interest in the Peranakan community in the past few decades has largely concentrated on the cultural imagery of the Nyonya lifestyle rather than political narratives of the Straits Chinese of the early twentieth century. In particular, the hybrid elements of Nyonya culture, including Peranakan *kebaya*, jewellery, porcelain, embroidery, cuisine and lavish weddings, have been portrayed in books, museum exhibits, tourism brochures and the popular media as unique examples of cultural mixing that promote multiethnic harmony and can attract tourists to the region (Worden 2003; Hardwick 2008; Teoh 2015). A similar phenomenon can be seen in the modern art world. Visual art showcasing the Nyonya in her traditional costumes and engaging in domestic activities has been exhibited in established art institutions and commercial galleries and sold commercially. Some examples include Redza Piyadasa's Malaysian series produced in the 1980s, Martin Loh's *Naive Images of Days Gone By* in 1992 and other exhibitions at the Substation Gallery in Singapore in the 1990s. In 1998 Sylvia Lee Goh had her first solo exhibition at the Malaysian National Art Gallery entitled *Two Decades of Art 'From the Heart' 1978–1998*.

This chapter examines Peranakan imagery in the art of Malaysian artists, including Sylvia Lee Goh, Tan Gaik Hoon, Kuen Stephanie and Redza Piyadasa, and Singaporean artists such as Martin Loh, Carolyn Law and Desmond Sim. Although the imagery, motifs and themes used are

representations of a gendered and historical Peranakan from a nostalgic past, I argue that as modern art they are also expressions and personal views of the artists about Peranakan society; some are contesting certain norms of the past through their paintings. The work of women artists contrasts with the lack of the Nyonya's perspectives in written history. The selection of work for analysis is based on the Peranakan subject matter illustrated in the artwork rather than the ancestry of the artist. It should be noted that not all Peranakan artists turn to their lineage for artistic inspiration. Yeoh Jin Leng, for instance, is of Peranakan descent, but is known for his abstract expressionist works. He developed his practice based on the abstraction of form, space and expression, which form the foundations of the early tenets and concerns of modern art (Sabapathy 1995). Other Straits Chinese artists like Low Kway Song and Tay Hooi Keat also did not portray traditional Peranakan themes in their paintings (see Chapter 6). Conversely, some non-Peranakan artists have taken to using Peranakan culture as the subject matter for their art. In this chapter, the Peranakan artists discussed are Sylvia Lee Goh (b. 1940), Martin Loh (b. 1952) and Desmond Sim (b. 1961). Carolyn Law (b. 1982) has partial Peranakan lineage, but Tan Gaik Hoon (b. 1970), Kuen Stephanie (b. 1967) and Redza Piyadasa (1939–2007) are or were not Peranakan themselves.

## Gendered and Frozen Representations of the Nyonya in Modern Artwork

### The Nyonya in *Kebaya*

What are the gendered Peranakan representations that have become the shared subject matter of many artists in Malaysia and Singapore? In many modern Peranakan-themed works the Nyonya is depicted in her colourful *kebaya* and sarong with her hair tied up in a *sanggul* (bun) and wearing a *kerosang* (brooch) and other Peranakan-style jewellery. The Nyonya in Sylvia Lee Goh's *The Red Sarong* (1992) wears a red *kebaya* and is seated on a chair or bench outdoors (see Figure 7.1). Her *kebaya* is made of voile fabric with embroidery along the neckline and on the sleeves. The garden in the background has lush tropical plants with white frangipani flowers as a contrasting element. Similarly, Tan Gaik Hoon illustrates a female figure dressed in a red *kebaya* in *Nyonya in Red* (2008) who seems to be gazing at a table mirror that is not in the painting (see Figure 7.2). Her red *kebaya* is ornate and has intricate red,

yellow and green embroidery that matches her red-green batik sarong. The Nyonya is fixing her *sanggul* with a red hibiscus.

Like Sylvia Lee Goh and Tan Gaik Hoon, Desmond Sim also utilises the colour red in his work *Mama's Surprise* (2011); though the Nyonya in this work is not dressed in red, the background is red. She wears a dark *kebaya* with purple embroidery on the neckline; the *kebaya* and sarong are both decorated with flower motifs. Although Sim's approach is stylised and presented in a naive manner, which is different from the two previous works, it still portrays some typical Nyonya cultural markers.<sup>1</sup>

As shown in these paintings, the *kebaya*-clad Nyonya is a popular subject matter and can be classified as a stereotypical visual marker of Peranakan-themed art. It appears that artists often use the modern *kebaya* rather than the *baju panjang* (long dress) as the *kebaya* represented modernity in the 1920s and 1930s (see Chapter 5 for a further discussion of Peranakan costumes and clothing).

Rather, the *baju panjang* is used to show older matriarchs, specifically in portraits of traditional Baba families. In *Nyonya Maternal* (1994–1995, Figure 7.3), the third work in Sylvia Lee Goh's Nyonya Nostalgia series, several generations of a Peranakan family are presented in a portrait-style painting; the Nyonya matriarch is dressed in a *baju panjang* while the younger Nyonya are dressed in a *kebaya*. As Lee Goh herself says,



Fig. 7.1 Sylvia Lee Goh, *The Red Sarong*, 1992, oil on canvas board, 71 cm × 122 cm

Source: Image courtesy of the artist

<sup>1</sup> See Desmond Sim's artwork at <https://www.facebook.com/desmondsworld/>.





Fig. 7.2 Tan Gaik Hoon, *Nyonya in Red*, 2008, acrylic on canvas, 61 cm × 40 cm  
Source: Image courtesy of the artist

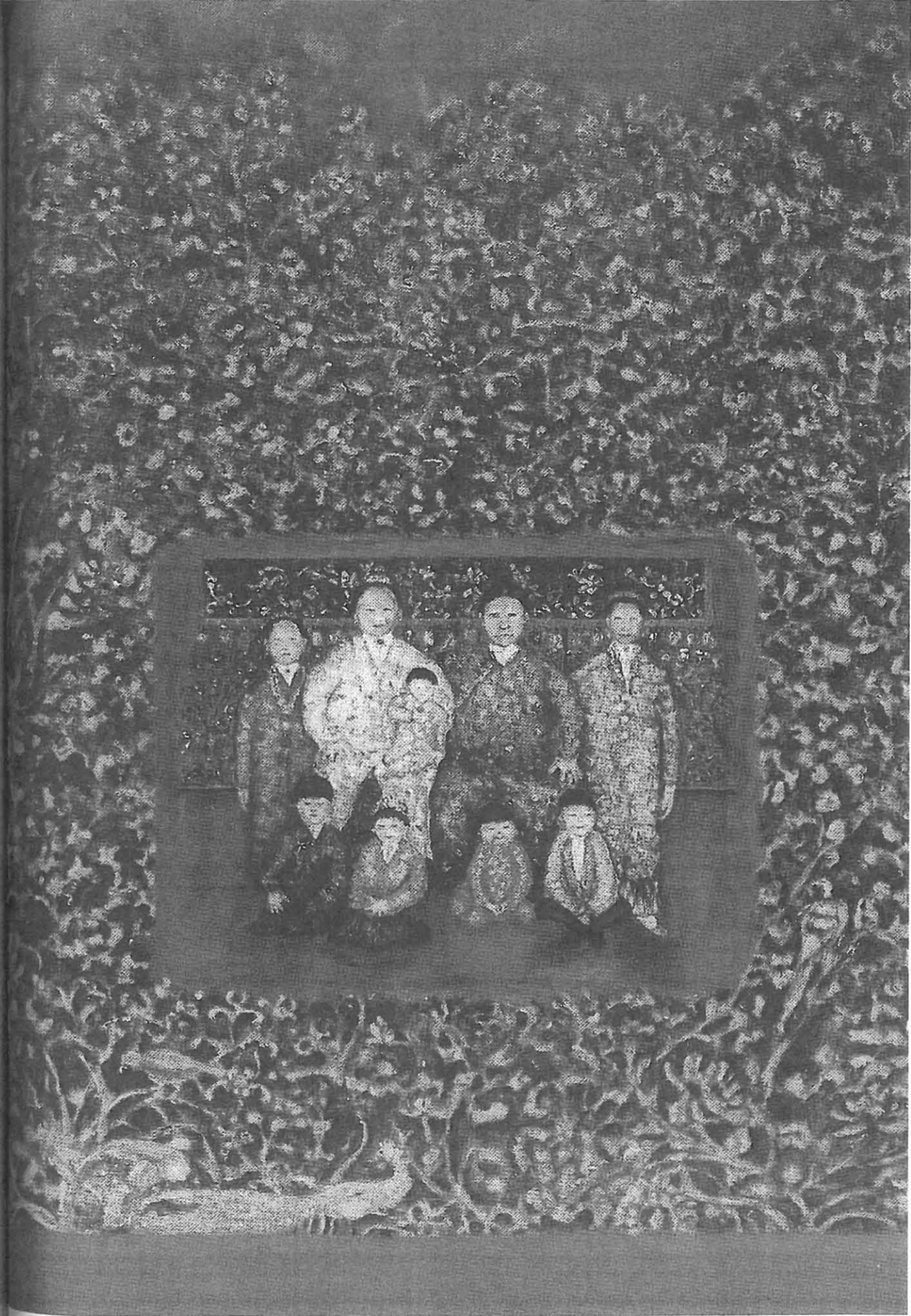


Fig. 7.3 Sylvia Lee Goh, *Nyonya Maternal*, 1994–1995, 86 cm × 117 cm  
Source: Image courtesy of the artist



the many visits to my paternal grandparent's home, which was filled with Peranakan culture as a child left deep impressions that somehow surfaced naturally when I decided to paint. Besides romanticising the tradition and cultural practices, I paint my Peranakan heritage as a form of remembrance and as a reminder of my roots. It is my cultural identity that defines me socially. (Tan 2015: 32–33)

### The Peranakan Wedding

Peranakan rituals and customs, such as elaborate wedding ceremonies, are also popular images in Peranakan paintings. For example, Sylvia Lee Goh's *The Red Bride* (1995) portrays a bride dressed in a red wedding costume applying lipstick in preparation for a big moment in her life (Figure 7.4). This work exploits the visual representation of the mirror, allowing the viewer to observe the bride and her wedding costume from the image reflected in it. From this reflection, the bride is seen to be wearing traditional wedding headgear decorated with gilded flowers, auspicious motifs, pom-poms and other ornaments while the table has accessories and other Nyonya crockery.

Similarly, in Tan Gaik Hoon's *Bridal* (2013) the main subject is a female figure in a wedding costume with the groom next to her (Figure 7.5). This artwork captures an intimate moment as the groom leans over the bride and he looks at her reflection in a small handheld mirror. The bride is wearing a traditional phoenix cape, which is designed to represent the neck feathers of a phoenix. On a table behind them are a porcelain teapot and a bowl of *kuih ee* (glutinous rice balls in sweet syrup). The use of colours in the painting emits a strong Peranakan style while the decorative designs and auspicious elements (such as peonies, butterflies and the phoenix) give the bride a strong yet feminine Chinese character.

By contrast, presented in a more graphic style with bright colours, Carolyn Law's *Wedding Couple (Peranakan)* (2015) resembles a more modern take on a Peranakan newlywed couple (Figure 7.6). As with Tan's *Bridal*, the bride here is also wearing a phoenix cape and a headdress, though her wedding dress is much more vividly coloured. Meanwhile, the groom is wearing a navy blue silk top with intricate designs, big sleeves and a broad circular embroidered collar, much like a garment from the Qing dynasty. The groom also wears a Manchu-style short jacket, worn over an ankle-length gown. The jacket and gown are delicately embroidered with golden thread and have auspicious motifs such as peonies, cranes, mandarin ducks and phoenixes (Wee 2009: 27).



Fig. 7.4 Sylvia Lee Goh, *The Red Bride*, 1995, oil on canvas board, 91 cm × 122 cm  
Source: Image courtesy of the artist



Fig. 7.5 Tan Gaik Hoon, *Bridal*, 2013, acrylic on canvas, 91 cm × 61 cm  
Source: Image courtesy of the artist





Fig. 7.6 Carolyn Law, *Wedding Couple (Peranakan)*, 2015, oil on canvas, two pieces, each 46 cm × 122 cm  
Source: Image courtesy of the artist

## The Nyonya's Skills

Other common aspects of Peranakan life that have been appropriated as subject matter for visual art include the Nyonya's daily activities such as cooking and sewing, two skills that were considered vital to being a respectable Nyonya. As Lee Su Kim (2008: 167) observes, 'a good Nyonya was one who had excellent culinary skills, could sew and managed the household well and who would make a good wife and mother'.

Tan Gaik Hoon's *Sewing* (2015) portrays a Nyonya sitting immersed in her embroidery work, wearing a pink *kebaya* (Figure 7.7). On the table next to her are several types of *kuih* and a teapot, suggesting that embroidery was a hobby that was done in the morning or at teatime. The wooden chair (probably made of blackwood) is decorated with carvings and inlaid with mother-of-pearl; such items were significant furnishings in Peranakan households.

Employing a different stylistic approach, Kuen Stephanie's *Colourful Handiworks* (2009) also shows that embroidery was a popular leisure activity (Figure 7.8). In this painting, two elderly Nyonya are doing embroidery while a young Nyonya girl is learning from them. The motifs that are being embroidered by the elders are more complicated and intricate compared to those done by the young girl. In the background, there is a standing mother-of-pearl partition and a porcelain baluster-shaped vase. There is a teapot set as well as several plates of *kuih*, again suggesting that the Nyonya engaged in this activity during their free time.

Similarly, Martin Loh's *Victoria Wee* (1992) portrays a fictional character, Victoria Wee, who is leisurely watering her plants in front of her kitchen (Figure 7.9). The presence of a wok and other kitchen utensils evokes a sense of domesticity even though Singapore's Victoria Memorial Hall is featured in the background. Though the artwork falls into a naive art approach, it still reflects the early twentieth-century lifestyle of the Peranakan.

Kuen Stephanie's *Out in the Garden II* (2009) also portrays the Nyonya in a relaxing and blissful scene (Figure 7.10). In a colourful, semi-realistic and light-hearted manner, the artist depicts two elderly Nyonya spending their time in a garden, with a little girl next to them and accompanied by a dog; in their tranquil garden, they are serenely watching fish in a porcelain basin, cocooned in their own domesticity.



**Fig. 7.7** Tan Gaik Hoon, *Sewing*, 2015, acrylic on canvas, 76 cm × 61 cm

Source: Image courtesy of the artist





**Fig. 7.8** Kuen Stephanie, *Colourful Handiworks*, 2009, acrylic on canvas, 76 cm × 61 cm

Source: Image courtesy of the artist



Fig. 7.9 Martin Loh, *Victoria Wee*, 1992, watercolour on paper, 30 cm × 41 cm  
Source: Image courtesy of the artist





**Fig. 7.10** Kuen Stephanie, *Out in the Garden II*, 2009, acrylic on canvas, 76 cm × 76 cm  
Source: Image courtesy of the artist



## Nyonya Cooking

Nyonya cooking activities and utensils are often highlighted as unique to the Peranakan communities. Sylvia Lee Goh's *Nyonya's Secret Recipe* (1990) depicts a Nyonya in a *baju panjang* who is preparing a meal using fresh ingredients such as fish, crab, lime, red and green chillies, onions, pineapples and other vegetables that are widely used in Peranakan cooking (Figure 7.11). A large mortar and pestle are on the left; these are important utensils for grinding ingredients that most Peranakan families had in their homes.

Both Tan Gaik Hoon's *Tea-time Moment I* (2017, Figure 7.12) and Sylvia Lee Goh's *Nyonya Koay (Kueh Muih)* (1990, Figure 7.13) depict a variety of *kuih* and colourful Nyonya ware. *Tea-time Moment I* shows the *kuih* served on banana leaves on a large tray. The painting also highlights a pink-green covered jar (*kamcheng*), a Chinese-style pot and a two-tiered lacquered basket (*bakul sia*) placed on top of a blackwood or rosewood table inlaid with mother-of-pearl. As Tan explains: 'The Straits Chinese cultural history books inspired me whenever I saw the photos of antique "Nyonya ware". I came to be fascinated by the Nyonyas and the rich history and unique heritage that they hold here in Malaysia' (Ramey 2012: 33). For her part, Lee Goh presents a wide selection of *kuih* on modern plates placed on a highly ornate metal table in a garden (Figure 7.13).

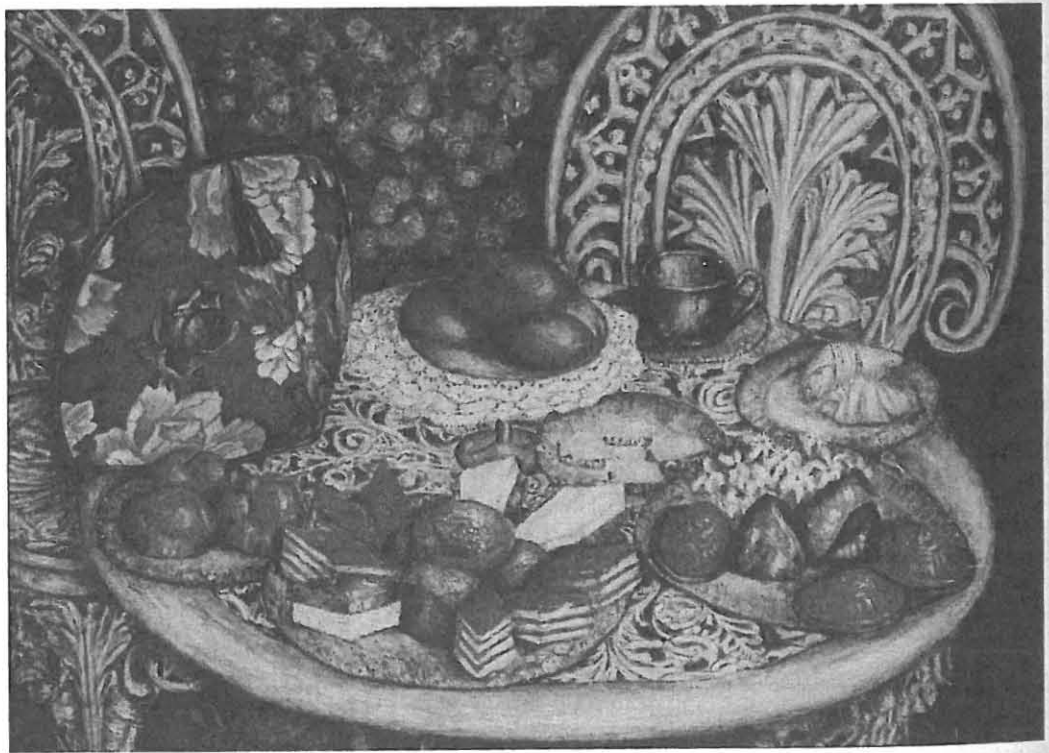


**Fig. 7.11** Sylvia Lee Goh, *Nyonya's Secret Recipe*, 1990, oil on canvas board, 127 cm × 96 cm

Source: Image courtesy of the artist



**Fig. 7.12** Tan Gaik Hoon, *Tea-time Moment I*, 2017, acrylic on canvas, 76 cm × 76 cm  
 Source: Image courtesy of the artist



**Fig. 7.13** Sylvia Lee Goh, *Nyonya Koay (Kueh Muih)*, 1990, oil on canvas board, 127 cm × 96 cm  
 Source: Image courtesy of the artist

### Chinese Prayer Customs

While the Peranakan adopted Malay elements in their cuisine, they maintained many of their Chinese customs and rites. Filial piety and ancestor worship remained important aspects of their lives. Similarly, prayer altars and prayer objects have become key subject matter in modern Peranakan artwork. For example, Sylvia Lee Goh's *The Nyonya Altar* (1995) portrays a Peranakan altar with various paraphernalia and objects for worship: incense and an incense stand, bowls of fruits, candles, flowers, huge vases and other items, with a dark background of a curtain (Figure 7.14).

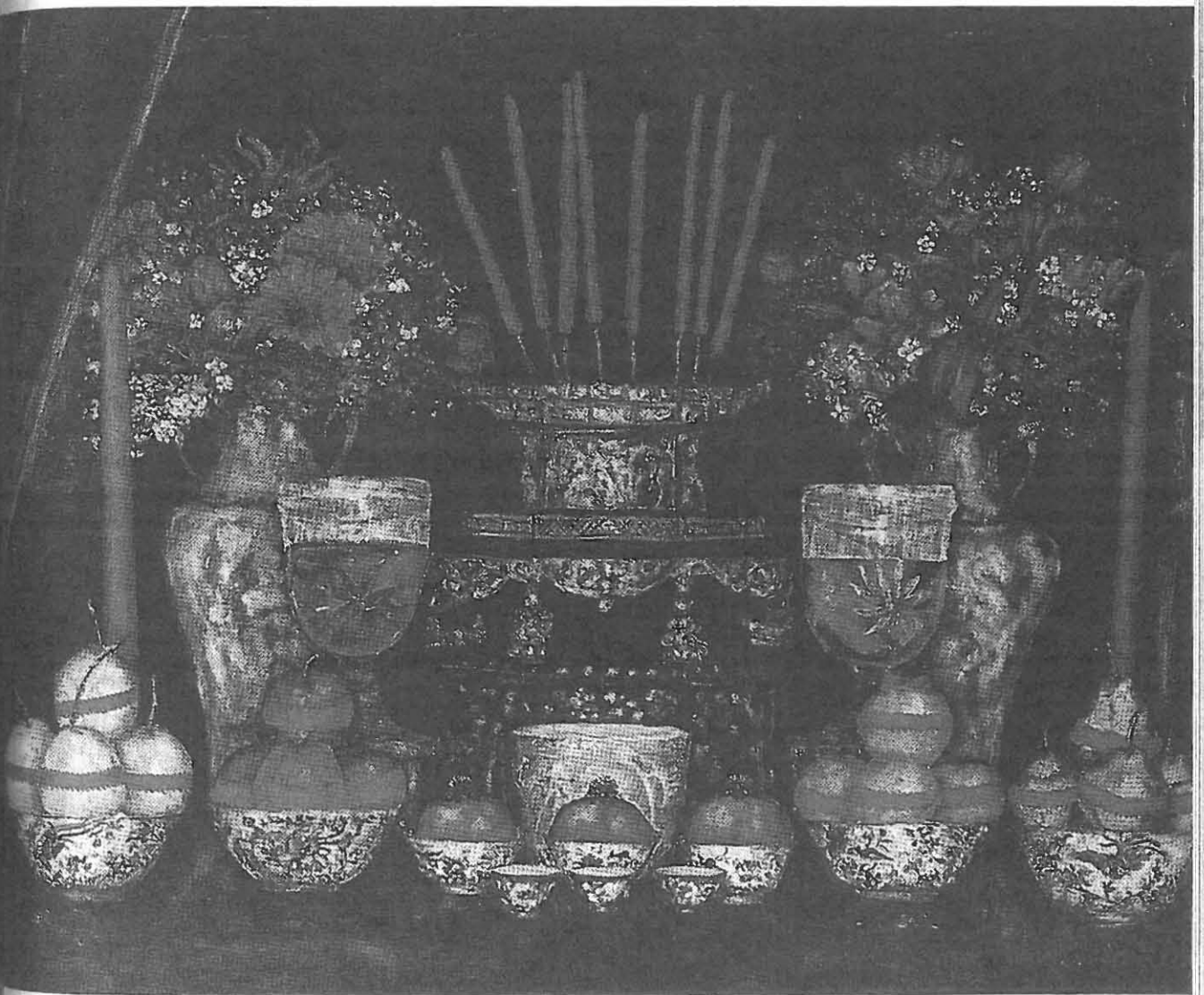


Fig. 7.14 Sylvia Lee Goh, *The Nyonya Altar*, 1995, oil on canvas board, 122 cm × 91 cm

Source: Image courtesy of the artist



## Peranakan Imagery as Modern Expressions

Modern art is the expression or application of human creative skill and imagination, typically in visual form such as a painting or a sculpture; it produces works to be appreciated primarily for their beauty or emotional power. The Peranakan gendered and historical themes described above should be understood within the larger context of modern artistic practice. They are modern expressions produced by living artists informed by modern visual artistic practices. The purpose of producing these Peranakan images, then, must be read in relation to the artists' exploration of styles, media and subject matter.

Tan Gaik Hoon's and Sylvia Lee Goh's works are realistic in terms of their stylistic approach but they are infused with a strong sense of nostalgia of the past. This style itself reinforces the conventional Peranakan imagery and its settings that are similar to those projected in the recent revival. On the other hand, Desmond Sim, Kuen Stephanie, Martin Loh and Carolyn Law adopt a more naive approach and illustration-like projections of the Peranakan in their material culture. The absence of scale and perspective and the use of saturated colours instead of subtle mixtures and tones can be seen in their art. Most of these works do not conform to compositional rules and disregard artistic elements and principles. Indeed, these works allow a complete form of self-expression that tends to reflect the brighter side of life, making it easy for the audience to recognise the scenes, which depict everyday events, celebrations and festivals. The bright colours, child-like perspectives and idiosyncratic scales capture the innocence of the child's visual comprehension of the world. Such representations of the Peranakan are ideal for freezing the moment and taking glimpses into the past.

Beyond these kinds of representation, younger artists such as Carolyn Law are portraying the Peranakan in novel ways. In terms of style, Law seems to present these Peranakan motifs in a fresh manner, denoting the artist's willingness to represent the Peranakan culture as one that is constantly adapting and evolving to the current times. Unlike in *Tea-time Moment I* by Tan Gaik Hoon (Figure 7.12), Law's interpretation of a *kamcheng* adapts modern and simplified motifs from other sources. In *Kamcheng (Red)* (2016), Law reduces the *kamcheng* from a three-dimensional object to a flat, two-dimensional form, emphasising the phoenix motif and floral motifs in batik-like form (Figure 7.15). In this work, instead of presenting the *kamcheng* in the traditional pink and green colour scheme, she paints it in bright red, blue

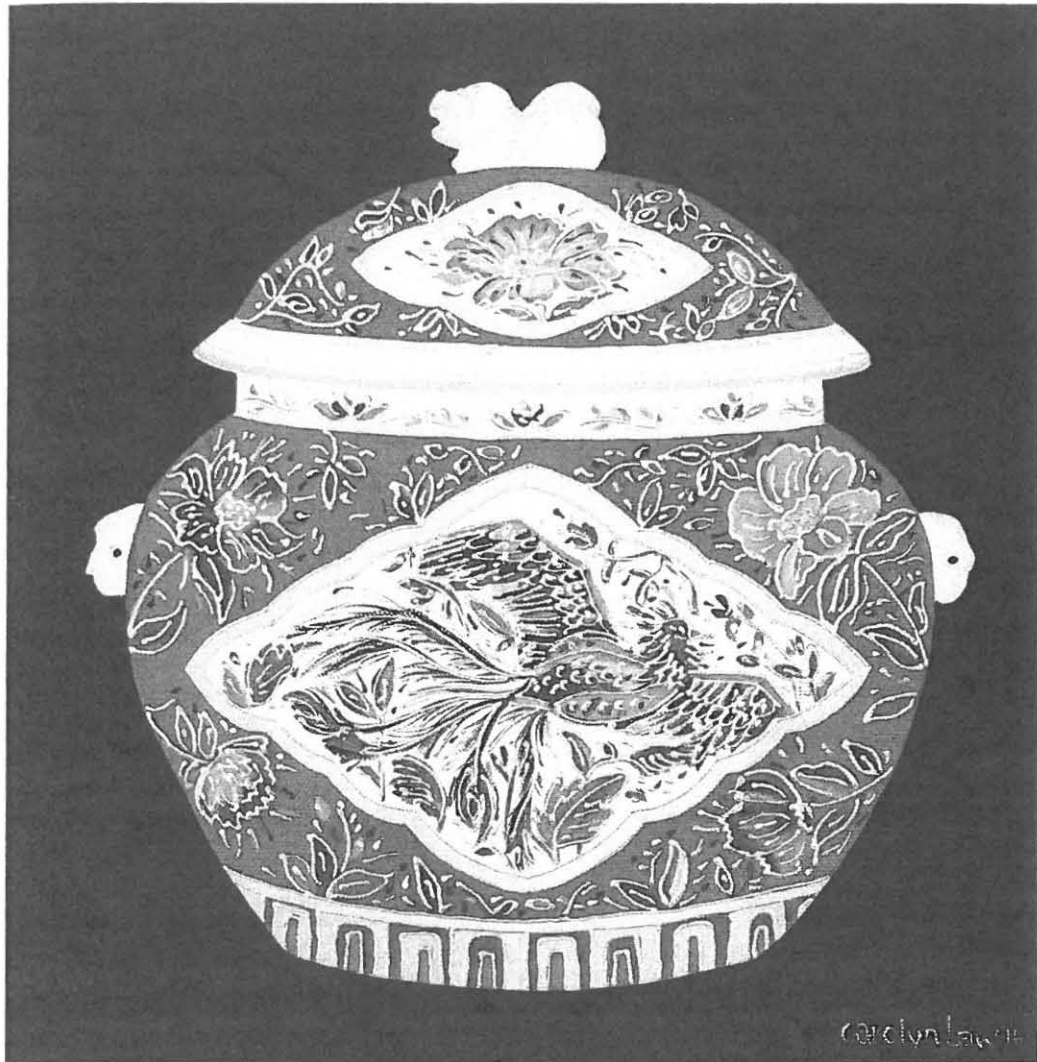


Fig. 7.15 Carolyn Law, *Kamcheng (Red)*, 2016, oil on canvas, 30 cm × 30 cm

Source: Image courtesy of the artist

and yellow with a batik element that is influenced by Malay culture. It can be argued that the artist has taken a more contemporary approach to elucidate the present identity of the Peranakan. Her rendering of the Peranakan is thus more nonconformist and better attuned to contemporary times.

Carolyn Law's *Kebaya Selfies* series (2016) is even more assertive in terms of her articulation of the contemporary and evolving Peranakan identity. In these three pieces, the artist looks at herself mediating the 'old' and 'new' cultures: a female figure is half-dressed in a *kebaya*, and she is holding up a smartphone, capturing a selfie of herself (Figure 7.16). The smartphone selfie represents the modern age of instant connectivity and contemporary notions

while the *kebaya* represents tradition, heritage and customary roots. The semi-nude image of the woman also defies the portrayal of a 'proper' Nyonya. Together, these elements create an image of old meets new.



Fig. 7.16 Carolyn Law, *Kebaya Selfie 3*, 2016, oil on canvas, 76 cm × 101 cm

Source: Image courtesy of the artist





Fig. 7.17 Carolyn Law, *Smoking Bride*, 2016, oil on canvas, 101 cm × 76 cm

Source: Image courtesy of the artist

The *Kebaya Selfie* series and *Smoking Bride* (2016) show the complexities of an evolving and changing Nyonya identity. *Smoking Bride* further contests the gender stereotype of a Nyonya. In the painting, the Nyonya is presented wearing the traditional colourful phoenix cape and golden headgear but she has ruffled and unkempt hair (Figure 7.17). In stark contrast to the docile and subservient brides presented in Lee Goh's and Tan's works described earlier, the bride in this work confronts the viewer as she smokes a cigarette.

In *Wedding Couple (Peranakan)* Law's Nyonya is a figure of strong character who stands equal with her partner (Figure 7.6). The equally distributed composition of the frame between the bride and groom insinuates a strong sense of equality between the two genders, challenging the typical patriarchy found in Peranakan culture. Another apparent characteristic is that Law's Nyonya looks directly at the viewer. This is radical departure from the demure gaze of the Nyonya in other artwork, which often portrays her as a shy and well-mannered woman who always avoids the gaze of the other. Law's delivery of a female gaze rather than a male gaze challenges male dominance

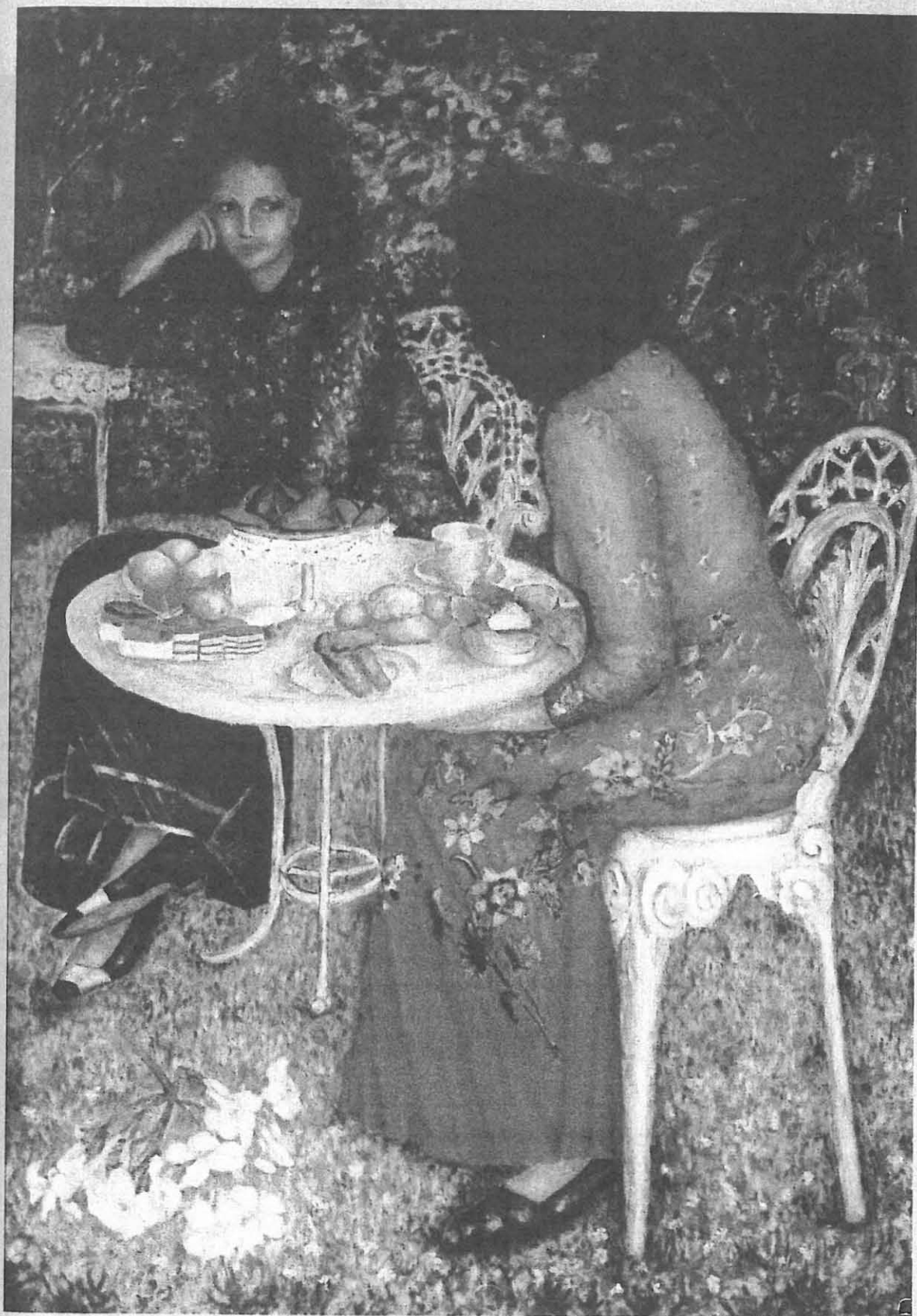
in Peranakan culture. Her portrayal of a deviant and defiant Nyonya offers a reading of the attitude of the new generation living in the modern world who are perceived to be rebellious in nature and breaking away from cultural traditions and customs by the older generation.

If Law's works reflect the new generation's adaptation or reinterpretation of Peranakan identity, Sylvia Lee Goh's paintings can be seen as a visual autobiography of her own personal experiences (Sarena 2015). Most of the subject matter in Lee Goh's works is inspired by personal memories and reflections of her relationships with her friends. Self-portraits, friendship and sisterhood are the most common underlying subjects expressed by the artist. In the *Woman Oh! Woman* series produced in 1988–1991, Lee Goh reminisces about her friendship with and the death of her very good friend Maimun Din. Three of the four works in the series portray Peranakan themes, where two female friends talk with and confide in each other in an enclosed garden or an indoor setting. In *Woman, Oh! Woman II* (1988–1991) these two women are dressed in *baju kurung* or *kebaya* with an array of Nyonya *kuih* served beside them (Figure 7.18). Despite the Peranakan imagery presented as the main subject matter of the series, Lee Goh has described the series as 'a tribute of sorts to a very special woman, strong and resilient, a bureaucrat, a wife, mother and friend' (Tan 2015: 39). Personal feelings of anguish about death have also been a source of inspiration for Lee Goh's art. In *If Dreams Come True* (1987–1990) a Peranakan Nyonya in a blue *kebaya* is lying on a bed that is covered with an intricately embroidered sheet; she is surrounded by vases, plants and tropical flowers and has a large umbrella shielding her with a *bakul sia* (two-tiered lacquered basket) near the foot of the bed (Figure 7.19). For Lee Goh, the concept of death is likened to a rite of passage that one should not fear and that life is about making the right choice that eventually leads to a deserving afterlife (Tan 2015). *If Dreams Come True* is thus reflective of the artist's personal view about death and is presented through forms of Peranakan culture and heritage.

As noted earlier, Peranakan imagery has inspired some non-Peranakan artists to comment on the political, social and cultural events in the country. Redza Piyadasa's Malaysian series is a case in point. This series consists of silkscreened and painted period photographs from old albums of friends and families, replicated over and over, either singly or in groups. The main differences in the series are the colour schemes used, the variation of picture planes, the manipulation of ornamentation and the figures that have been

fers  
orld  
ural  
  
ion  
sual  
the  
and  
and  
tist.  
sces  
Din.  
two  
r or  
nen  
ved  
the  
oute  
wife,  
eath  
ome  
that  
ises,  
akul  
For  
ould  
s to  
the  
kan

kan  
try.  
s of  
nds  
rain  
ture  
een



**Fig. 7.18** Sylvia Lee Goh, *Woman, Oh! Woman II*, 1988–1991, oil on canvas board, 99 cm × 127 cm  
Source: Image courtesy of the artist



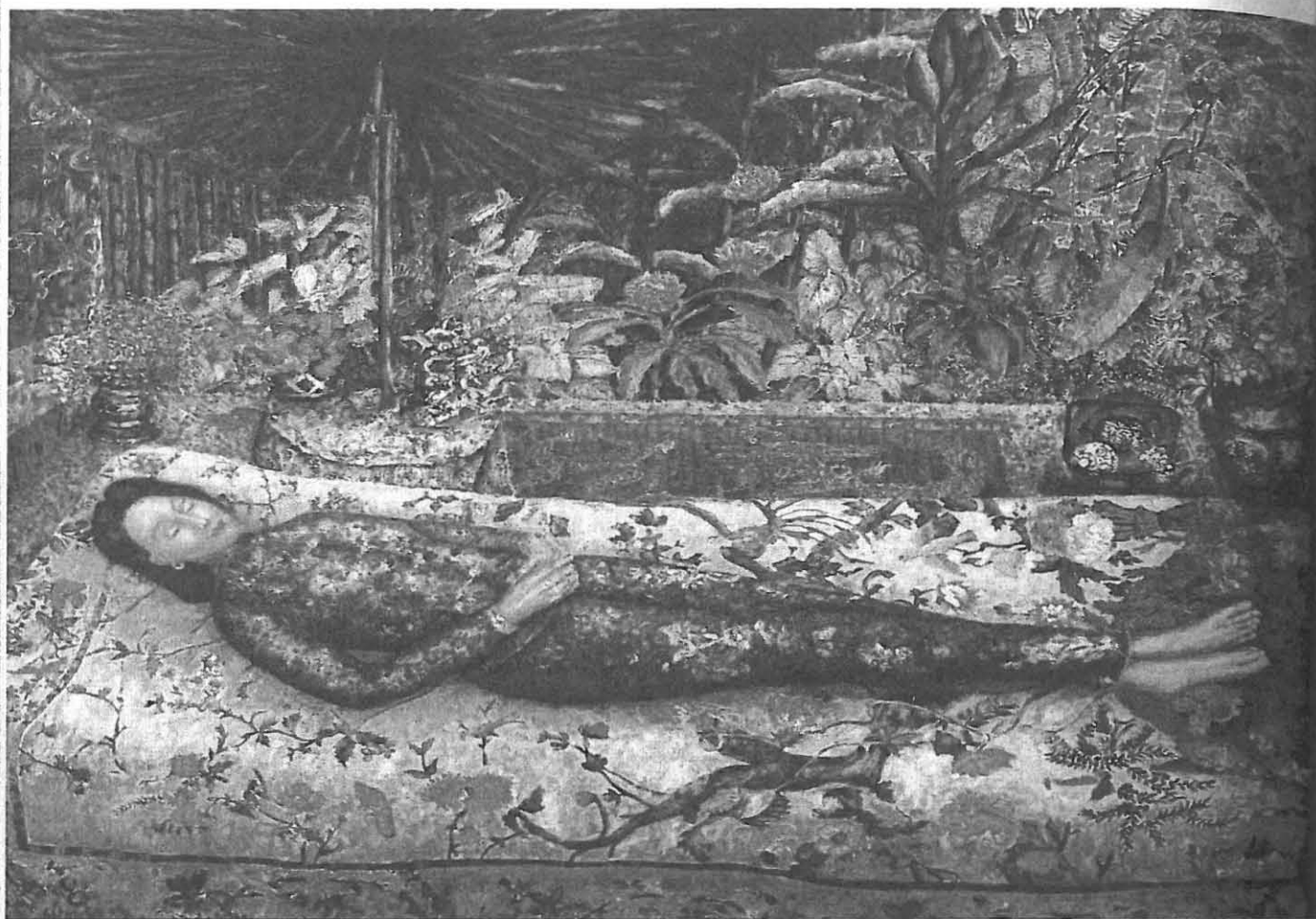


Fig. 7.19 Sylvia Lee Goh, *If Dreams Come True*, 1987–1990, oil on canvas board, 142 cm × 127 cm  
Source: Image courtesy of the artist

fragmented. Photographs of the Straits Chinese or Peranakan families are among the images used by the artist in the series. In *Baba Family* (1982), the portrait of a Baba family whose members are dressed in traditional attire is used (Figure 7.20). The *bibik* (Nyonya matriarch) who is dressed in *baju panjang* and *kerongsang hati-hati* in the image is probably the Baba's wife; they are surrounded by their children in what could be a typical Peranakan house. The title of the work signifies the adherence of the family to traditional Asian values that emphasise familial ties and filial piety, portrayed in the figure of the Peranakan matriarch standing next to her husband. The use of mixed media combining acrylic silkscreens and collage based on an image by an unknown photographer, accompanied with various colours, lines and layers, creates a harmonious yet diverse effect. The composition of these pieces that

comprise the Malaysian series often resembles that of commercial photography studios but with modern flair (Sabapathy and Piyadasa 2007). Piyadasa's inspiration from the Peranakan can also be seen in his Nyonya series (1995) and *Malaysian Story No. 1* (1999).

Redza Piyadasa himself was not a Chinese Peranakan. He was of Sinhalese ancestry and the selection of these images, according to the artist, 'exuded a mixture of nostalgia, quaintness and, more significantly, an overwhelming evocation of social history that only reaffirmed the [multicultural] matrix of modern Malaysia' (Sabapathy and Piyadasa 2007). Thus the Peranakan imagery must be read in the context of Piyadasa's Malaysia series as a whole. He worked on the series from the early 1980s until his death in 2007. He noted that by 1982 his interests coalesced 'around the possibilities of projecting a more complex, composite picture of the "Malaysian" reality – its [multiracial] and [multicultural] overtones' as he 'sought to transcend self-conscious, ethno-centric prejudices and divisive racist attitudes' (Sabapathy and Piyadasa 2007).



Fig. 7.20 Redza Piyadasa, *Baba Family*, 1982, mixed media and collage on board, 40 cm × 62 cm  
Source: Image courtesy of the Tuanku Fauziah Museum and Gallery, Universiti Sains Malaysia

The Peranakan imagery portrayed by Piyadasa addresses questions about Malaysian identities of multicultural heritage, as the Peranakan had to navigate their own complexities of race, religion and culture throughout their history.

## Conclusion

This chapter has discussed Peranakan imagery and subject matter within the context of modern art. Traditional Peranakan cultural elements and prosperity are portrayed via the use of images of domestic furnishings, fine porcelain, intricate embroidery, jewellery and ornaments. Peranakan culture portrayed in modern art seems to be focused on images of the Nyonya in their *kebaya*, their leisure activities (such as embroidery), Nyonya ware, Peranakan food, the prayer altar and weddings. Activities that had a more contentious history, such as playing *cherki* (a card game) or gambling, are omitted from these representations. The Western aspects of the English-educated Straits Chinese men who held significant power in society as colonial middlemen are also not represented in modern artwork.

Nevertheless, these works should not just be read as exoticising the life of the Nyonya but as creative pieces that express the views of the artists as they construct their national and transnational identities in the present day. The artwork by Sylvia Lee Goh, Carolyn Law and Redza Piyadasa uses Peranakan themes to project binary complexities such as modernity versus tradition and death versus life. Modern art has not only raised interest in the eclectic culture of the Peranakan but has also been used by the younger generation to question and challenge existing views about Peranakan traditions, particularly the role and contributions of the Nyonya in society. It is evident that Peranakan visuals have been employed by both Peranakan and non-Peranakan artists to illustrate a world and a people who have transcended racial prejudices and the notion of fixed identities.

## References

- Hardwick, Patricia Ann. 2008. 'Neither fish nor fowl': constructing Peranakan identity in colonial and post-colonial Singapore. *Folklore Forum* 38(1):36–55.
- Lee Su Kim. 2008. The Peranakan Baba Nyonya culture: resurgence or disappearance? *SARI: Jurnal Alam dan Tamadun Melayu* 26:161–170.
- Ramey, Marybeth. 2012. The artist profile of Tan Gaik Hoon. *The Expat*, January.



- Sabapathy, T.K. 1995. *Yeoh Jin Leng: Art and Thoughts, 1952–1995*. Kuala Lumpur: National Art Gallery.
- Sabapathy, T.K. and Redza Piyadasa. 2007. A dialogue: T.K. Sabapathy and Redza Piyadasa. In Piyadasa: *The Malaysian Series*, ed. T.K. Sabapathy, 15–36. Kuala Lumpur: Galeri Petronas.
- Sarena Abdullah. 2015. Reading painting as visual autobiography: Peranakan paintings by Sylvia Lee Goh. In *Integrating Southeast Asia: Proceedings of the Sixth International Conference on Southeast Asia*, 164–175. Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya.
- Tan Sei Hon. 2015. An interview with the artist. In *Sylvia Lee Goh – Dulu dan Kini: Jiwa Abadi = Then and Now: The Enduring Heart*, ed. Hanad Masjak. Kuala Lumpur: Balai Seni Visual Art Negara.
- Teoh, Karen M. 2015. Domesticating hybridity: Straits Chinese cultural heritage projects in Malaysia and Singapore. *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review* 17: 58–85.
- Wee, Peter. 2009. *A Peranakan Legacy: The Heritage of the Straits Chinese*. Singapore: Marshall Cavendish.
- Worden, Nigel. 2003. National identity and heritage tourism in Melaka. *Indonesia and the Malay World* 31(89):31–43.








# **ECLECTIC CULTURES FOR ALL**

**The Development of the Peranakan Performing,  
Visual and Material Arts in Penang**

*Edited by*  
**Tan Sooi Beng**

Buy at [www.karyausm.my](http://www.karyausm.my)

 [www.penerbit.usm.my](http://www.penerbit.usm.my)  
 [penerbit@usm.my](mailto:penerbit@usm.my)  
 PenerbitUSM  
 PenerbitUSM  
 penerbit\_usm

© Penerbit Universiti Sains Malaysia, 2019

Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia

Cataloguing in Publication Data

*Eclectic Cultures for All : The Development of the Peranakan Performing,  
Visual and Material Arts in Penang / Edited by: Tan Sooi Beng.*

ISBN 978-967-461-406-5

e-ISBN 978-967-461-407-2

1. Arts-Malaysia-Pulau Pinang.
  2. Peranakan (Asian people)-Malaysia-Pulau Pinang-Social life and customs.
  3. Eclecticism in art-Malaysia-Pulau Pinang.
  4. Government publications-Malaysia.
- I. Tan, Sooi Beng. 1955-  
700.9595113 NX28.M4

Typeset in Minion Pro

Copy Editors: Alimie Liman and Gareth Richards

Cover Designer: Nur Azreen Chee Pi

Proofreader: Rosni Habib and Helena Dodge-Wan

Typesetter: Janice Cheong

Published by Penerbit Universiti Sains Malaysia, 11800 USM Pulau Pinang, Malaysia.  
A member of the Malaysian Scholarly Publishing Council (MAPIM).

Printed by Percetakan Mesbah Sdn. Bhd., No. 11 Jalan Tun Perak 6, Taman Tun Perak,  
43200 Cheras, Selangor, Malaysia.



For the Baba and Nyonya of Penang

<b>Chapter Six</b>	Cosmopolitanism in the Works of Straits Chinese Artists: Low Kway Song, Yong Mun Sen and Tay Hooi Keat Sarena Abdullah	215
<b>Chapter Seven</b>	Peranakan Imageries in Malaysian and Singaporean Modern Art, 1980s–2017: Between Gendered Representation and Modern Expressions Sarena Abdullah	241
	<i>Contributors</i>	269
	<i>Index</i>	271