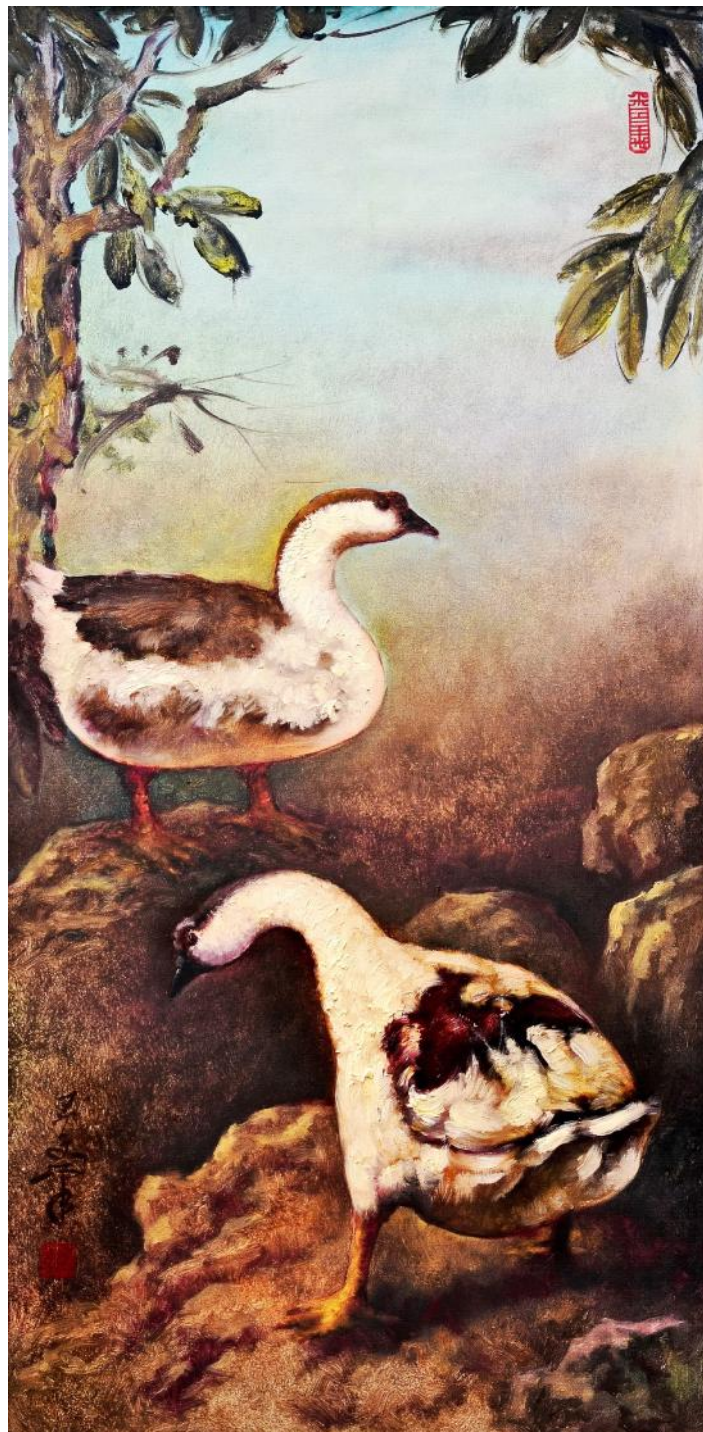


Research & Essay Report

Artist : Lee Man Fong (1913 – 1988)
Medium : Oil on Canvas
Signature : Signed at the left side
Height : +/- 99 cm

Width : +/- 49 cm
Period/Date : 20th Century
Country : Indonesia
Condition : Good

TITLE:
A Pair of Duck





RESEARCH & ESSAY

In modern era, there were numerous talented watercolor artists in Indonesia, and they increased on daily basis in the post-war II eras. However, there was a unique style of painting that combines the European art techniques with Chinese art format, like what a Chinese-born artist, Lee Man Fong, painting the present work. Entitled 'A Pair of Duck', Lee Man Fong executed the present work with a pair of duck repose in the spring tide. The ducks are meticulously painted in thickly white layered with black and red stripes resting in romantic nuance on greenish beige rock under the grayish green old leafy tree. With grayish sky-blue background, black Chinese inscription and a red square seal mark are visibly written on the lower right, and a red rectangle seal mark on the upper left.

Born in Guangzhou, China, in 14th November 1913, Lee Man Fong trained both in China and in Western Europe. He lived much of his life in Indonesia, and developed a principally style that blends together a variety of sources for his quite yet passionate vision. Like the present work, the artist frequently turned Chinese

brushwork and technique in Nanyang style, but he depended on Western visual practices. The present work certainly was completed after the artist studied the



Fig. 1

original works of European masters such as Rembrandt van Rijn and Vincent van Gogh when he received the Malino scholarship to Netherlands. Like the present work, Man Fong blended Western art technique with Chinese painting art format expressing a tendency to create the atmospheric effect prevalent in Chinese style ink on paper paintings. To show characteristic taste of Chinese arts, Man Fong embellishes the flavor of tastes by applying the *xieyi* free-hand style to the twigs of the trees, emitting natural result of the beauty. The artist then combines it with a careful realist style or *Gongbi* style on the animal figures that represent the beauty of art in Western technique of oil on canvas.

Dexterously placed and well-executed brushstroke in “*gongbi*” (工笔), each duck is a mark of the idealized realist quality of the Chinese skillfully rendered by the painter in oil applying meticulous brush technique. As a Chinese-born artist, Lee Man

Fong who received Western training in painting art, his technique is always Western in conceiving the light and shadow, artfully executing his exquisitely brushstroke, albeit his sensibility constantly rooted in the Chinese painting art format. This work, unlike his artworks of the same objects from the 1960s onwards, is a part of the primary commercial work that he produced as a full-time practicing artist in his later years when he had devoted himself as a Presidential Palace artist during the President Soekarno’s throne.

Man Fong was accustomed to produce artwork painting on board and paper, but he infrequently painted the objects on canvas for commercial purpose like this piece. Applying a rendering technique painted oil on canvas, Man Fong is highly skilled in maneuvering the combination of painting techniques between “*gongbi*” (工笔) technique on animal objects and *xieyi* (写意) free-hand style for tree and foliage objects, so complex that it exudes objects seemingly life like Western arts technique without leaving a trace of Chinese art traditions. In East Asia Countries, these animal objects are from such swans of *Anser cygnoides* generally known as Chinese geese. Lee Man Fong perpetuates the Chinese legend, the harmony life of the harmony on the life of the geese to his magnificent work as the result of catches on his eyes.

'A Pair of Duck' subject painted to oil on canvas is a rare and exceptional expression of one of Lee's favorite subjects. In addition, it is rare for its medium of oil and canvas, as opposed to Lee's more common working in oil on Masonite board. Compare with similar style and composition, but without tree image, entitled 'Ducks' (50 x 104), painted to oil on board, sold at Borobudur Singapore, 25th January 2013, Lot. 48, for S\$39,040, initially estimated between S\$30,000 – S\$50,000 (See fig. 1).