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PRESS RELEASE

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Mother Flippin' Heavens! 翻天印 (fān tiān yìn) Wong Lip Chin

6 Aug - 11 Sep 2022

Opening day: Sat 6 Aug, 11am - 7pm

Yeo Workshop is pleased to present *Mother Flippin' Heavens! 翻天印 (fān tiān yìn)* by Wong Lip Chin, the artist's second solo exhibition at the gallery. The title 翻天印 (fān tiān yìn) bears a multitude of connotations, ranging from the Buddha mudras (hand-seals) in Buddhism and Taoism to celestial weapons in Chinese mythology such as the 16th century classical novels *The Creation of the Gods* 封神演義 (fēng shén yǎn yì) and *Journey to the West* 西遊記 (xī yóu jì); it has become synonymous with the subversive act of overturning the heavens through passivity. The deliberate irreverence in its mistranslation from Mandarin to English is echoed throughout the exhibition, as Wong turns what may seem arcane or trite on its head with humorous cadence, allowing one to take what they will from the manifold symbolisms that his paintings are suffused with.



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Chinese poet 陶淵明 Tao Yuanming's *The Peach Blossom Spring* 桃花源記 (táo huā yuán jì) from the Jin Dynasty forms a critical point of departure for the exhibition. Written during the period of the early Warring States (500-200 BC) in ancient Chinese history, the prose depicts a mythical journey of a fisherman who wanders into an ethereal paradise unbeknownst to the outside 'real' world. When he returned to reality and went in search to find this paradise again, his attempts were futile. Reframing the rhetoric of utopia as a self-inflicted ideology, Wong calls to question the endless pursuit of our own desires in modern society, reflecting the hedonic search for utopia as a mirror image to a self-constructed prison of suffering and emptiness. Giving equal resonance to the exhibition is *Tao Te Ching* 道德經 (dào dé jīng), an ancient Chinese classic text written around the 400 BC by sage Laozi, whose philosophical ingenuity around the paradoxes inherent in life has in part influenced Wong's work. Its teachings course through the exhibition, emanating through the idiosyncratic and uncanny stories told through the varied motifs and characters in his paintings.

This new body of paintings by the artist continue to feature his fictional characters—Lilou, Oomoo and Gemunggal—three playful alter egos bringing levity and contradiction to otherwise serious and ineffable subject matters of the human condition. Where leisure and respite are often regarded with much disdain, Wong reframes what it means to be present in the moment for oneself through the narratives these characters tell. His manga-like personas are born from a lifelong fascination with imagery and pictorial language from film to comics and design, as informed by Chinese calligraphy, totems, Japanese kyōga (comic pictures; 狂画 kuáng huà) and the Literati movement in East Asia. In the artist's words, "I found some of these *obiang*¹ icons quite modern." By borrowing such traditional iconography in East Asia and emulating the style of old masters, Wong approaches pastiche in a lighthearted and jesting manner, at once paying homage while transforming them to his own understanding and contemporary relevance. The seemingly wilful impudence afforded to this exhibition becomes a means to which one is able to consider these various icons, both familiar and foreign, as pretexts for digging deeper into the philosophical, cosmological and historical underpinnings of each work and develop their own interpretations from these network of associations.

¹ *Adj.* [informal] Slang used in Singapore to describe out of fashion; in a bad or dubious style or taste, often ostentatiously so.



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Artist Biography

WONG LIP CHIN (b. 1987, Singapore) is an interdisciplinary artist whose practice spans painting, installation, and performance. His distinct painterly style crosses pop culture and Chinese classical art, at once paying homage to and overturning their aesthetic lineage. His works have addressed themes concerning speculative or vernacular histories pertinent to the folkloric traditions of the Sinosphere, often grounded in relational aesthetics. He came to broader public notice with his installation *Exquisite Paradox* (2013): a repurposed, vintage bus stop that was first presented as readymade sculpture in an indoor gallery space and was later displayed on the front lawn of the Singapore Art Museum. Most recently, he presented *The Gathering: 千岁宫 (Qiānsuì gōng)*, an oasis of greenery within the iconic heritage site of Chinatown inspired by the leisure activity of Chinese literati from 1600 years ago, where members of the public could sit down for a tea ceremony with the artist.

About the gallery

Yeo Workshop is a gallery committed to contemporary art in Singapore. This year, the gallery is focused on bringing greater prominence to local artists with several Singaporean artists joining the roster.

Opening Hours:

Tue – Sat, 11am – 7pm

Sun, 12pm - 6pm*

Closed Mon.

*Gallery is open on Sundays during the exhibition period

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