

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Inside of Painting

A solo exhibition by Melbourne-based artist Jonathan Nichols

Opening Sat 24 June 2023

Artist Talk With Michelle Ho Sun 25 June 2023 2PM

Exhibition Runs until 23 July 2023

Yeo Workshop is pleased to present the first solo exhibition in Singapore of the senior Melbourne-based artist and curator Jonathan Nichols. Nichols was resident in Singapore for six years between 2014 to 2019, and lived in Kuala Lumpur prior to this through 2013. Nichols is well known to a number of local artists, and continues to maintain strong networks of relations with local painters in the Singaporean and Malaysian art scene.



Image caption: Jonathan Nichols, *Three Figures*, 2022, Oil on xuan paper mounted on linen, 71 x 82.5 cm

Initially programmed for June 2020, the exhibition was necessarily deferred in the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic. We are therefore very pleased and fortunate that Nichols is able to return to Singapore and Yeo Workshop can now present his inaugural exhibition.

While living in Singapore in 2018, Jonathan commenced a PHD as an external candidate attached with Monash University and subsequently the Victorian College of the Arts, University of Melbourne. His research titled *“Walking with Ghosts —The Utility of Independence in Painting”* drew extensively upon the direct experience of painters in studio contexts including Singaporean artists Boedi Widjaja and Ng Joon Kiat and Malaysia painter Noor Mahnun Mohamed. An admirable and distinct quality of Nichols’ artist practice over the years is his deep engagement with fellow artists and his willingness to delve into painting knowledges across diverse cultural contexts. This is exemplified in his recent publication of a book of interviews with artists also titled *“Walking with Ghosts — Six Conversations about Painting”* (including again Boedi Widjaja and Noor Mahnun Mohamed) which will be available as part of the exhibition.

The exhibition catalogue will include an introductory essay by the senior Australian art writer Quentin Sprague, whose book *“The Stranger Artist”* won the AU Prime Minister's Award for Non-fiction in 2022.

Regarding the paintings, Nichols is interested in the idea that paintings have a character and temper like people do. They are more like a living thing than the inanimate object that they are usually assumed to be. He is interested in how this works conceptually and questions such as *what do we expect paintings to do in the world?* and *how do they interconnect across time and across different cultural settings?*

For example, while living in Singapore, Nichols often visited the galleries at the National Gallery dedicated to the work of Wu Guanzhong. Wu’s work was a revelation to him. Nichols was able to trace Wu painterly processes very closely from earlier works to those in later years. He was especially interested in Wu’s western-style oil painting and suggests that these were painted quite differently from the work on paper. The brush marks of Wu’s oil painting even showed aspects that Nichols identified in his own oil painting. By tracing backwards and forwards across individual paintings, from the oil painting to the larger groups of works on paper, it gave him a detailed analytical way to view Wu Guanzhong’s practice and these influences replay now in his own paintings exhibited at Yeo Workshop.

As he explains, “I felt I could adapt my own practice similarly but reverse the approach of Wu Guanzhong by applying my own understanding of painting using the Chinese paper that I was able to source from Guan Yun Zhai’s paper supplies at Bras Basah. There are clearly differences in painterly knowledge between Chinese paper traditions and western oil painting but there are equivalences between them too. In the western tradition the psychic process itself is the central object of painting but I imagine it’s also a reasonable basis to understand Wu’s work. In my mind the heightened expectations of one tradition can be turned to accentuate what is possibly dormant in the other. In the studio I’m continuing to use the Chinese paper inspired by the character and painterly methods of Wu Guanzhong.”

ARTIST BIOGRAPHY



Jonathan Nichols is an artist, independent curator and writer born and raised in Canberra and based in Melbourne. He began painting in the early 1990s after studying sculpture at the ANU and the University of NSW. In 2022, he published a book of interviews with six artists (including Boedi Widjaja from Singapore and Noor Mahnun Mohamed from Malaysia) titled *Walking with Ghosts: Six Conversations about Painting*. Nichols has participated in group exhibitions in Australia at the National Gallery of Victoria, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Canberra Contemporary Art Space, National Portrait Gallery, Ian Potter Museum of Art, Karen Woodbury Gallery, Geelong Gallery and Bendigo Art Gallery, among others. He has held solo exhibitions in Kuala Lumpur, Melbourne, Canberra and Sydney.

>> [Full Artist Bio](#) >> [Checklist of Works](#)

ABOUT THE GALLERY

Yeo Workshop is a leading art gallery based in Gillman Barracks, Singapore since 2013. It shows innovative practices of contemporary artists. Covering a multi-disciplinary approach, the gallery defines itself by its progressive engagements.

Opening Hours:

Tue – Sat, 11am – 7pm; Sun, 12pm - 6pm; Closed Mon and Public Holidays.

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