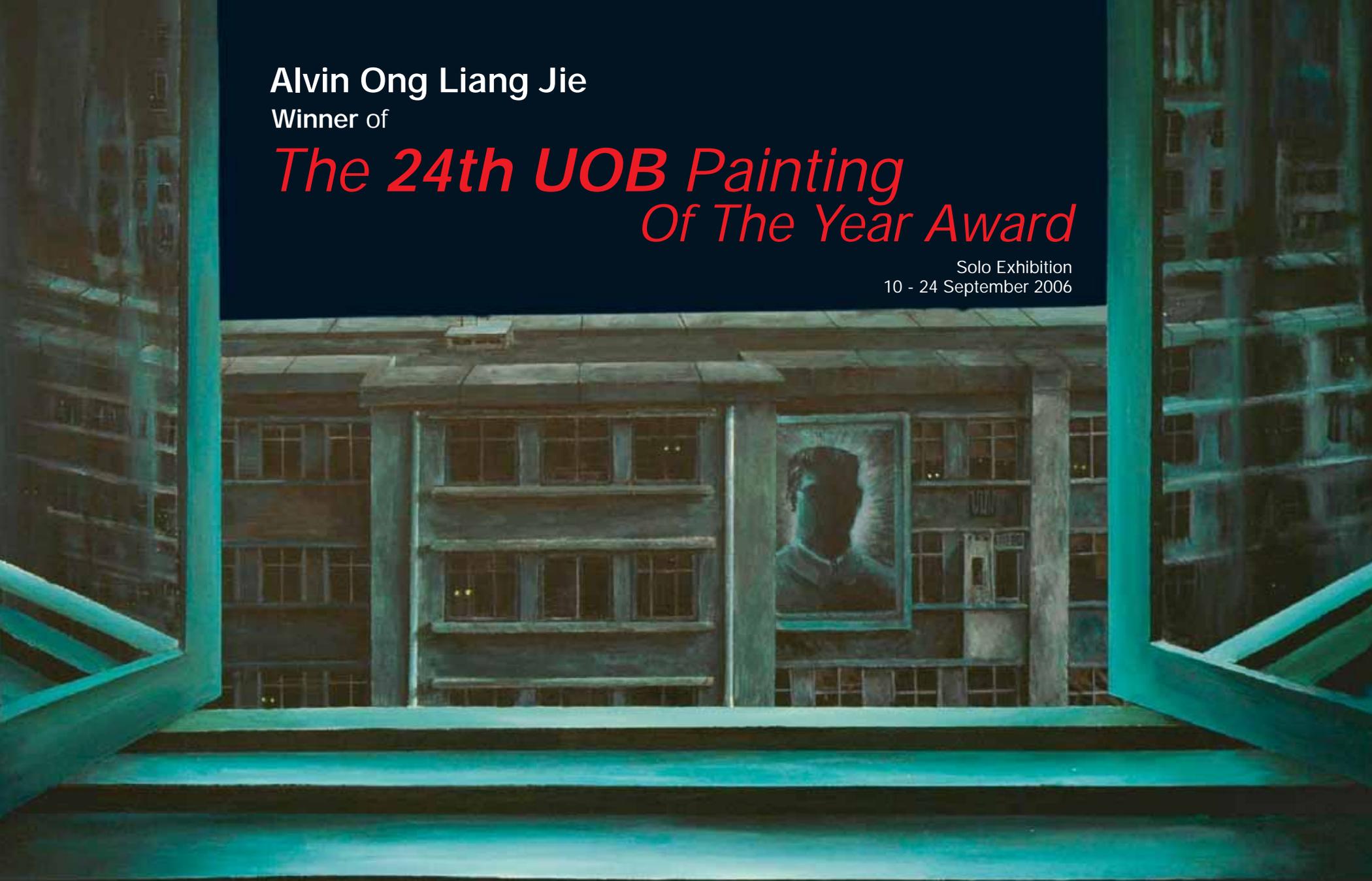


Alvin Ong Liang Jie

Winner of

*The 24th UOB Painting
Of The Year Award*

Solo Exhibition
10 - 24 September 2006



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The first surrealist painting I remember seeing was de Chirico's "The Soothsayer's Recompense". I was struck by his surrealistic configuration - in particular, the presence of intense, vibrant colours and hallucinatory forms set in a weird and silent landscape. The overall effect was timeless and dreamlike.

At the end of Secondary Four, moving on to Junior College. I experienced an intense reluctance to leave behind all the faces, places and spaces of my secondary school, Saint Joseph's Institution (SJI). Having spent four years of my life there, it was only fitting that I should dedicate a work to it. Whilst looking back, I felt an intense desire to resist the changes around me; that I may return to the past instead. It was my first intense experience of nostalgia, and it was surreal, reminding me of the works of Dali, de Chirico, Kahlo and Rene Magritte.

In this exhibition, each painting functions as a part that make up a whole. Though I have infused specific symbolism and messages in my works, you are welcome to draw your own conclusions and immerse yourself in a world of infinite space, fantasy and hallucination.

Do enjoy the paintings.

Alvin Ong
December 2005



Title | Preludes

Medium | Acrylic

Size | 61 x 92 cm

Serving as a preface to the series, the artist reconstructed architectural motifs of his school into an entirely new structure, reflecting his interpretations of his personal experiences. There is a recurrent architectural motif throughout the series that frames a staircase leading to a platform; a dreamlike world within another world. In addition, there is also an apparition of a distorted clothed figure transfixed in space, legless, engaged in an act of self-strangulation. The allusion to the elusive and suffocating nature of nostalgia is a kind of fantasy that has no bearing at all on reality.



Title | The Lighting of the Lamps

Medium | Acrylic

Size | 120 x 180 cm

Time past and time future. What might have been and what has been.

The earliest of the series, this work explores feelings of uncertainty for what the future holds. Here is a vision that gives one the strength to face the future with confidence. In the words of T.S. Elliot, "If all time is eternally present, all time is unredeemable."



Title | Signs of Evening

Medium | Acrylic

Size | 92 x 61 cm

Places evoke reality. They do not embody it. A place is nothing without a person. Places on their own, however beautiful, have no human significance. They may astound you with their natural significance, touch you with their uniqueness, even remind you of other places you have been to, bringing into play a dance of memories, a whirling dream of suggestions.

But, any place is memorable because of what it suggests and means to us, what it contains, or for the memories evoked of friends or enemies, of lovers, siblings or people who in some way or other have helped to shape our lives.



Title | The Hours

Medium | Acrylic

Size | 153 x 76 cm

A never-ending, almost deserted avenue, "a place of disaffection".

In dim light: neither daylight, investing form with lucid stillness.

Two roads or one? This is uncertain, but if the latter holds true, then are these parallel worlds in which we live? Intense melancholy prevails. The scale and proportion of the objects defy logic. The boy appears to "resist the flow" of the street - the passage of time.

Like memories, the curving colonnade in the foreground appears more distinct, while the receding ones are distant, locked in the obscure recesses of the unconscious mind.

One can also make out people in the structures, who turn their backs to us, thus creating a sense of anonymity. They nevertheless strongly resemble monks, who in their monasteries, practice a routine lifestyle unchanged throughout the ages.

One question remains unanswered. Should we always move on in life? Did the artist move on?

The Artist's Window

Interview with Alvin Ong

By Jonathan Ko
National Junior College



Title | The Window

Medium | Acrylic

Size | 73 x 93 cm

In this painting, the artist explores the issue of dictatorship. Traditionally, the window is a symbol of freedom, but one is instead confronted by foreboding; bleak and cold buildings that leave one feeling oppressed, stifling any hope of escape. One also senses that he or she is being watched, or are we watching them instead?

It's often said that "Art is the window to man's soul". In Alvin Ong's case however, it was his soulful work: a thought-provoking rendition of a window, which opened up a whole new world of possibilities for this budding artist. Ong's work, "The Window" provides new perspectives on dictatorship, and was inspired by political novelist George Orwell's famous work, "Nineteen Eighty-Four". This painting beat some 940 entries to clinch the prestigious title of "The UOB Painting of the Year" in 2005. Initially an entry for the Junior section, "The Window" impressed the competition judges to the extent that it was awarded the competition's highest honour, besting even the entries from participants in the open category. At 16 years old, Alvin is the competition's youngest winner.

In an interview, I met up with this hardworking, unassuming NJCian (National Junior College), ex-Josephian (St. Joseph's Institution), aspiring architect and student in the NJC Art Elective Programme (AEP) and had the chance to discuss his aspirations, academics, and his art.

Q: You've received quite a lot of attention since being given the award. Care to share your feelings on being recognised for your work?

Winning the award came as a surprise to me, and I am indeed honoured to have my work recognised. The publicity has certainly elicited a lot of feedback on my painting and these have been invaluable in pointing out areas I should work on. This has certainly been a learning experience and has also injected a lot of encouragement in pursuing my passion for art. However, I also feel the pressure to perform as many people will be watching me from now on. Nevertheless, I will still strive to do my best.

Q: Your talent and interest in art has certainly brought you where you are today. How did you discover this flair for art?

I don't think art came to me purely through divine illumination. It was a long process where I slowly grew to learn art, and my teachers were the ones who gave me a good foundation in it. One of them is Mrs Tan Lai Kuen, my secondary school art teacher. I grew a lot under her guidance, and she made me realise my potential. I personally feel that she is a very motivated teacher who inspires her classes to do their best. Mr Chia Wei Hou, my art teacher here in NJC, went a step further, and encouraged us students to stretch ourselves to the limit. He also inspired me to paint this particular work. My parents were also very encouraging and provided the moral support, without which, I probably would have given up art. My friends also helped sustain my interest. Taking Art as an examination subject means having to endure long grueling hours of art classes, and my friends livened up these classes and made art-making less painful. Personally I feel that my formal training in my secondary school was very useful in stoking my passion. It was the firm foundation I had there, coupled with what I have been taught here in NJC, that gave me the confidence to express what I wanted to say with paint on paper.

Q: Your award-winning painting “The Window” is a thought-provoking blend of historical and political ideas. We also understand that you were top student in History for the Term 3 Common Test. Do history and politics have a strong effect on the way you look at things?

(Laughs) I guess that I am very much influenced by history and politics. Often, considering the historical and political aspects of issues do make them more interesting to me. I find it fascinating to see how lifestyles, outlooks and trends have changed as time passes, and the many sudden twist and turns in previous centuries have made me realise that the only concern is change.

Q: What, in your opinion, is the significance of your depiction of Orwell’s dystopia in today’s world?

I feel that many of us in Singapore, myself included, do not experience the “Nineteen Eighty-Four” depicted in his book. It is a world entirely different from ours and I felt inspired to do something that at least faintly recreates the feelings the characters in the book experienced. Orwell’s “Nineteen Eighty-Four” was to me, very heavy material, in the sense that it managed to explore so many humongous issues in just one book. Orwell created an oppressive atmosphere in his surreal, bleak, sinister world. His description was so powerful that I could literally form images and visions of that world in my head. I had originally set out to create a surreal painting, but in the end, I guess political issues unconsciously seeped in.

I believe that although “Nineteen Eighty-Four” is set 21 years in the past, such a world of complete control still remains a relevant concern for us today. Orwell probably wrote this book to pen down his disillusionment with the failure of his realisation of an ideal world. What he explores gains relevance today in the absence of a utopia in our time; where the future remains uncertain.

Q: We understand that you plan to become an architect. How will your accomplishments in art affect your aspirations for the future?

I don’t think that such an award will change my outlook. Personally, I still feel that it is very hard to make it as an artist here, and I feel that publicity doesn’t change public perception of your artwork much. I see architecture as a form of art, and you can also call me an artist in that way. I am fascinated by structures as they deal with space, composition and practicality, while at the same time, require a certain sensitivity to the aesthetics. I also feel that architecture is very reflective of a society’s culture, lifestyle, and mindful of this, I try to express it in my work.

Q: Can you describe the type of fulfillment you find in art/drawing?

The greatest fulfillment I get from creating works of art is the sense of accomplishment I get after I complete them. Art has also made me more observant and sensitive to the things I see around me. Looking back on previous works is also a very pleasant experience, as I am able to recall the thoughts and feelings which I had at the time. Looking back also shows me how I have developed over time and is the closest I can get to “stepping back in time”. The award has definitely encouraged me to put more effort into my art as I feel that the solo exhibition is a rare opportunity and I do not want to let the school, my parents, teachers, friends and sponsors down.

Q: What would you attribute your success to: talent or inspiration and hard work?

I must admit that the entire process right from conceptualising to completing the painting was very difficult and painful. Perhaps this is due to the fact that the entire process deals with ideas in the subconscious mind, but the end product deals with something logical and tangible. Hence, I would attribute my success mostly to inspiration, and hard work. Of course, talent helps along the way by making this process of art-making less painful. I would be nowhere without inspiration, which is why I give Orwell so much credit this time round.

