

Corrected page(s)

Lee Kian Seng

“Of ‘Image, Object, Illusion’ - Off Series Mechanism”  
(1977) by Lee Kian Seng

Installation of mixed media comprising a painting on canvas, one genuine flag, one white podium (measuring 12” x 20” x 24” made of 6 mm plywood), one piece of 16’ x 8’ plywood (6 mm in thickness painted white) on the floor extending from the wall to the podium, lights set to cast shadows of the flag on the floor canvas and in the space.

Note: Picture taken at National Art Gallery Malaysia on the 20th December 1977.

My choice is a 1977 installation work “Of ‘Image, Object, Illusion’ -Off series Mechanism” by the multi-talented artist Lee Kian Seng.

This installation comprises a painting on canvas, a site installation of the Malaysian flag fronting it, a white podium and floor canvas extended from the wall. The juxtaposition of the two dimensional painting and three dimensional objects of flag and podium in a spatial relationship with lights set to cast shadows of the flag on the floor canvas, seem to me to create an interplay of positive and negative yin yang elements.

Upon the painting itself which depicts a wall, is cast the shadow of the artist holding up the Malaysian flag which is reflected reversed on the painting (image and illusion). The unexpected appearance of the ubiquitous cockroach (an object?) making its way across the wall in the painting is, to my mind, a clever handling of a painting problem intended to heighten the three dimensional effect of the work. At the same time by its mocking presence the cockroach is making a statement that it is a fact of life in Malaysia. No getting away from that! Dates which appear are of the years 1957-signifying Independence and Nationhood, 1967-the decade after, and 1977-the year of the work. And then, the ruler on top of the painting appears to be a symbol by which we measure the progress made during those years. This completes the picture.

This work described as “Mixed Media” won the top award in an Open Art and Graphic Print Competition. To me, a neutral but interested observer of the art scene, it represents early tentative attempts by the artist to explore the limits and dimensions of painting on canvas which began in 1972 with his “From the Windows of Red (1972)” which won a major award, and “Mankind (1972)” which won a minor award in 1973 followed by *Permainan Poker* or “Process of Playing Poker (1974)” - a major award winner in 1975. Fortunately, three of these works are in the collection of the National Art Gallery (Malaysia). His successes bespeak the perspicacity of the National Art Gallery judges of that period to have recognized creativity and new directions in art development towards three dimensional works, for in the Seventies, works such as these defied categorisation in the art world. In Malaysia they were variously described as mixed media or multi media or simply being variously described as mixed media or multi-media or simply “campuran”. Internationally, Installation Art did not acquire its name as such until the 1980’s.

Pioneering works such as those of Lee Kian Seng are of historical importance. We can take a little pride to discover that our own young artists of the Seventies were already involved in creating, on their own, three-dimensional works which did not fall into the category of painting or sculpture. Lee Kian Seng has said that he did not know how to categorise his pieces. “I only knew I wanted to create something new.”

Interpreted by  
Dato’ (Ms) P.G. Lim  
August 2003, Lawyer, Art Patron

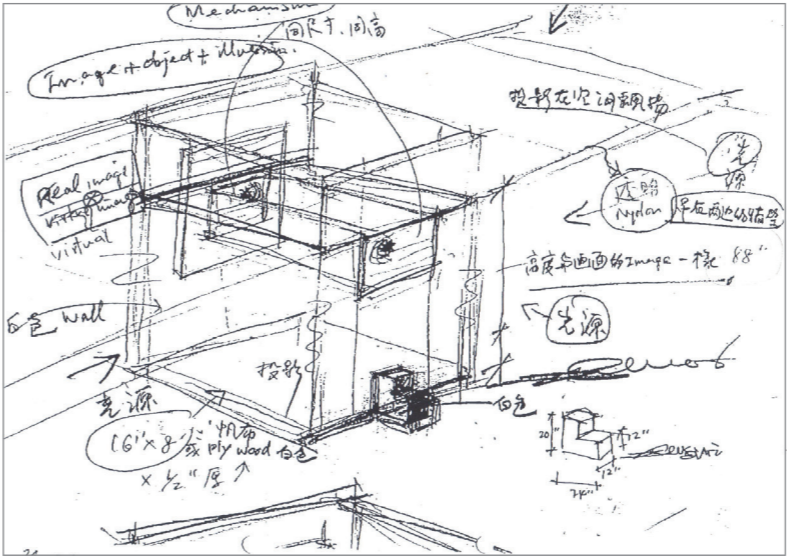
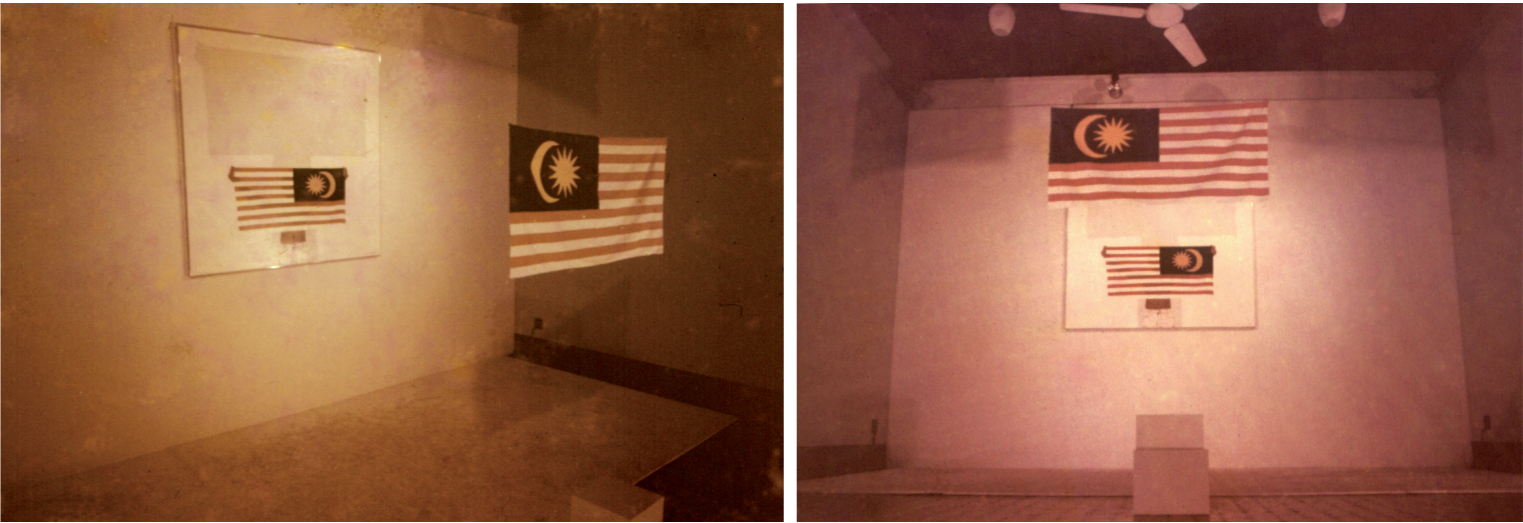


Illustration provided by Lee Kian Seng on 19 February 2004

**Note:** This Errata is based on the content of the Letter of Undertaking signed by the National Visual Art Gallery on 11th March 2015. The image, description and the text of the work “Of ‘Image, Object, Illusion’ - Off Series Mechanism” on page 92~95 of the “45@45” published in 2003 is now replaced by this amended version published by the National Art Gallery on 30th August 2021.