

Error page(s)

Lee Kian Seng

Mankind

1992

Welded and cut steel plates

224cm x 163.5cm x 141cm

Error (1)

Error (6)

Born: 1948

Education:

1969 - Tokyo Research Institute of Cultural Properties

1971 - Tokyo Hanga Kenkyusho

1976 - Tokyo National University of Arts & Music

Error (4)

Error (2) (3)

Mankind by Lee Kian Seng is reflective of the artist's many attempts to produce art works that incorporated elements derived from the actual environment occupied by the viewer. In this case, the use of the grass growing in real time, lends to the sculpture a real time dimension that the viewer also shares. His interest in works that attempted to break the demarcations between art and life had involved his earlier attempts to bring in a participatory dimension as well. This is noticeable in his earlier 1977 work entitled *Of Image, Object, Illusion - Off Series Measurement* which included a small box on the floor containing two steps that the viewer had to step on to. The viewer had to climb up the steps and salute the image of the painted images of the Malaysian flag. Such approaches had revealed his attempts to introduce new approaches within the local art scene when the dominant approaches toward creativity had been confined to more traditional definitions of art founded strictly on the painting /sculpture dichotomy.

The present work shown here is made up of metal sheets that have been welded together to form two large L-shaped abstract forms that are locked together. The two forms are raised above the ground but are, nevertheless, connected to flat metal sheets sited on the ground. The sheets on the ground have been cut up neatly and brought together so that grass can be allowed grow inside this rectangular area that joins both foms. A "real time" dimension, albeit existing within the art context, forces new modes of looking. In this case, the grass has also to be tended and cut regularly. Traditional definitions of sculpture are thus questioned. The artist's attempts to move away from pedestal-oriented sculpture was significant during the Seventies in opening up fresh thinking about artistic practices. Similarly, the cutting up of one of the L-shaped forms to emphasis the negative spaces, as is noticeable here, reveals his interests in "open form" sculpture as well. He was one of the Malaysian artists of the Seventies who had introduced the idea of the "situational" art works within the local art scene.

In respect of the work of “**Mankind**” in the book **Masterpieces from the National Art Gallery Malaysia** (selected and introduced by Redza Piyadasa published by the National Art Gallery Malaysia in 2002), at page 186 and 187 contained the inaccurate depiction/description of the work as follows:

1. The work “Mankind” was created in 1972, not 1992;
2. The chronology of the events is inaccurate as “Mankind” was first exhibited at the National Art Gallery Malaysia in 1973 whereas “Of ‘Image, Object, Illusion’ - Off Series Mechanism” was exhibited at the same Gallery in 1977;
3. It was wrongly described that ‘the audience step on to’ and ‘the viewer had to climb up the steps and salute the image of the painted images of the Malaysian flag’. In fact Lee Kian Seng does not have such intention for the audience to do so. The painting, flag and podium installation are the result of intuitive creation,
4. The description of Education at page 186 is innaccurate. It should be ‘Virtually self-trained. Conducted research at the Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music and Tokyo Print-making Research Studio (1976-1977)’. (More details at http://www.leekianseng.com/lee_Bio.html);
5. The original installation comprises an area of grassy earth (cow grass), not artificial grass at page 187; and
6. The correct description of the work is: “Mankind” (1972) by Lee Kian Seng is an installation of mixed media (160 x 220 x 140cm) comprising the juxtaposition of two abstracted metal chair-like structures (symbolising male and female Yin-Yang created Mankind on Earth), which are chained and locked together atop an area of grassy earth (cow grass).