

# LATIFF MOHIDIN

## Pago Pago (1960-1969)

28 février - 28 mai 2018

«Latiff Mohidin: Pago Pago (1960-1969)» se propose d'introduire une avant-garde artistique régionale à travers l'œuvre de Latiff Mohidin (né en 1941), peintre et poète moderne majeur de Malaisie. L'exposition retrace la période de formation de l'artiste et ses voyages en Europe et en Asie du Sud-Est durant les années 1960. Latiff Mohidin invente alors la formule «Pago-Pago» pour évoquer la conscience née de ces voyages et une manière de penser et de travailler sans souscrire au canon moderne occidental de l'époque. Latiff Mohidin a ainsi développé dans son œuvre une approche conjuguant plusieurs formes et pensées de la région, et en dialogue avec de nombreux intellectuels d'avant-garde en Asie du Sud-Est. L'exposition, la première de cette dimension en Europe, présente plus de soixante-dix peintures, dessins et gravures ainsi que des documents d'archives.

Exposition organisée par la National Gallery Singapore  
et le Centre Pompidou

'Latiff Mohidin: Pago Pago (1960-1969)' operates as a prism through which one may observe the formation of a regional avant-garde, via the microhistory of a major Malaysian modernist painter and poet, Latiff Mohidin (b. 1941). The exhibition traces a formative period in the artist's practice in the 1960s as he journeyed across Europe and Southeast Asia. Latiff Mohidin coined the phrase "Pago Pago" to evoke the consciousness that emerged through these travels. "Pago Pago" offers a way of thinking and working that sought to challenge the dominance of Western modernism in the 1960s. In developing these works, Latiff Mohidin explored a syncretic approach to form and entered dialogues with other avant-garde thinkers in Southeast Asia. Featuring over seventy paintings, drawings and prints, supplemented with archival documents, this project is Latiff Mohidin's first major exhibition in Europe.

Exhibition organized by National Gallery Singapore  
and the Centre Pompidou











# Latiff Mohidin the trailblazer

BY JOHNNI WONG

Artist, poet and writer Latiff Mohidin, 76, is paving the way for other Southeast Asian artists to be noticed in Europe with the staging of a retrospective show of his *Pago Pago* works at the Centre Pompidou in Paris.

Latiff is the first Southeast Asian artist to be honoured with a show at the Centre Pompidou and plans are afoot to feature more of such shows in the ongoing collaboration between the National Gallery Singapore (NGS) and Centre Pompidou, which is under the Musée National d'Art Moderne of France.

Surrounded by throngs of supporters and fans at the preview on Feb 27, he was visibly moved and told journalists covering the event that he was overwhelmed and never dreamt that this could happen.

"I am humbled to be given the honour and to be able to witness this taking place today," said Latiff who was tight-lipped about the whole event during the planning stage of the show entitled *Latiff Mohidin: Pago Pago (1960-1969)*.

The show was decided by Musée National d'Art Moderne deputy director Catherine David, who first noticed Latiff's painting, *Pagoda II*, at the NGS when she visited Singapore some five years ago. Later, when she returned for the opening of NGS-Pompidou collaborative show, *Reframing Modernism*, in 2016, she was further impressed that Latiff's *Pago Pago* series stood out and fulfilled all the

criteria of a modernist artist. Latiff was at the right places in Europe at the right time and has a body of works that exemplify the modern art movement in Southeast Asia.

"This In-Focus exhibition is designed to unravel the complexities of key works that Latiff Mohidin produced in the 1960s, a decade which could be characterised as a moment when Southeast Asia established itself as a locus within the major redraft of Modernism. The exhibition concludes with the 1969 moment of *Neo Pago Pago*, a critical year in the artist's practice as he transitioned from the *Pago Pago* series (1964-68) into a prolific output of literary prose and poetry," said David, who co-curated the show with NGS senior curator Shabbir Hussain Mustafa.

However, long-time collectors and followers of Latiff's *Pago Pago* series felt that the show should have, more appropriately, included the 1968 painting, *Debris*, which signifies the ultimate end of the series.

According to Shabbir, the painting was not included due to "space limitations". The exhibition comprises some 70 works, including major paintings, drawings and "ciment fondu" sculptures as well as news clippings, publications, photographs and other archival material.

Critical to the show's success is NGS director Eugene Tan, who staved off tough questions at home about featuring a Malaysian artist in the context of Singapore's arts programme. But his commitment to embrace a more global approach to showcasing Southeast Asian art has proved to be

in the right direction, given the presence of important figures from Singapore and Malaysia who attended the preview.

"The Gallery's curatorial efforts have sought to actively engage debates of modernism within a global context," said Tan who cited the exhibition as the NGS' first travelling show.

Plans are afoot to bring the show to Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand where the *Pago Pago* series actually commenced.

Present at the event were Malaysian Ambassador to France Datuk Ibrahim Abdullah, Singaporean Ambassador to France Zainal Mantaha, Musée National d'Art Moderne director Bernard Blistene, NGS chairman Hsieh Fu Hua, The Edge Media Group chairman Datuk Tong Kooi Ong and The Edge Media Group publisher and group CEO Ho Kay Tat.

Malaysian and Singaporean collectors and artists who turned up for the preview included Tan Sri Wan Azmi Wan Hamzah, Zain Azahari, Dr Abang Askandar Abang Kamel, Dr Hanizah Aman Hashim, Ismail Mustam, Dr Tan Loke Mun, Pakhrudin Sulaiman, Ahmad Zakii Anwar, Suryani Senja, Jalaini Abu Hassan, Hoe Say Yong, Angie Lee, John Lee and Jimmy Chua.

Latiff was accompanied by his wife, Wan Rahimah Wan Ismail, son Ilham Latiff and daughter Nadiah Latiff. E

***Latiff Mohidin: Pago Pago (1960-1969)* will be held Centre Pompidou on Level 5 until May 28. A 216-page hardcover catalogue is available from NGS.**

