

Introduction

Widely beloved as one of Hong Kong's most original painters, Gaylord Chan (1925-2020) led a fruitful career that traversed cultural epochs and the boundaries of medium. Although he only made his first serious foray into art at the age of 42, Chan quickly garnered attention as a promising painter in the 1970s. Over the span of five subsequent decades, he steadily developed a repertoire of abstract paintings and digital drawings that continues to resonate with the wonders and underside of life throughout the tides of time. Featuring over a hundred invaluable works and other archival materials, this exhibition commemorates the late maverick and his legacy upon the fourth anniversary of his passing in 2020.



I. The Grammar of Painting

While working as a telecommunications engineer by day at Cable & Wireless, Chan enrolled in an extramural certificate course at the University of Hong Kong (HKU) in 1968 to learn art and design. He was greatly inspired by his mentor Tao Ho (1936 – 2019), the well-known local architect who employed a Bauhaus-inspired approach and focused on exploring the expressive potential of line as well as the relativity of color. After retiring from Cable & Wireless, Chan became a full-time artist and founded the Culture Corner Art Academy in 1989 with fellow painter Josephine Chow Suk Fan. He believed that all challenges in graphic visual expression could be boiled down to a succinct “fifteen-word truth: front and back, void and solid, light and dark, form, color, texture”—a grammar of painting outlining the crucial pictorial aspects that Chan both preached and practiced throughout his career.

Artwork highlights



Gaylord Chan and
Josephine Chow Suk Fan
Carnival
1989

Acrylic on canvas
122 x 122 cm
Collection of the artist estate
(Chow Suk Fan)

This collaborative work was created during the opening of Culture Corner Art Academy in Tai Po. Thereafter, this painting was hung in the school and remains today in ccstudio, a painting studio shared by Chan and Chow in Fo Tan.



Sun Bridge Again
1982

Acrylic on canvas
121 x 121 cm
Collection of Wendy Lee

Winner of the Urban Council Fine Arts Award in 1983, this painting is based on an earlier print that Chan had created in 1974 titled *Sun Bridge*.

II. Glyphs of Innocence and Experience

In 1973, Chan once described his style as “phylosym”—a term that he created by combining “philosophical” and “symbolic.” He was fond of using symbolism to express feelings and ideas, and the forms that he relied on often recall indigenous art and ancient artifacts. He took inspiration from ancient Chinese bronzes, festive Cantonese flower plaques, Inuit cultural objects and more. He also had a habit of using the camera to capture inspiration, and unassuming daily objects from stationery to vegetables all became vessels that he channeled his thoughts and feelings into if he saw fit. Whether playful daydreams or visceral nightmares, Chan’s glyphs of innocence and experience speak to a spectrum of emotions coloring the human condition.

Artwork highlights



Heart of Shaman
1984

Acrylic on canvas
121 x 122 cm
Collection of Hong Kong
Museum of Art
AC1985.0018

Chan was always open about his fascination for Inuit cultural objects, and the mask-like form depicted in this painting recalls those used in Inuit shamanic rituals to represent spirits. Many of Chan's recurring motifs, such as circular and elliptical shapes, tines, and spurred lines are also prominent features in Inuit artifacts.



Growing Gold
1993

90 x 121 cm
Acrylic on canvas
Collection of Hong Kong
Heritage Museum
HM1993.46.12

This painting is part of a series that Chan created in 1993 to experiment with metallic paints. Perhaps due to the shimmer of metallic colors, many paintings in this series revolve around the theme of gold, wealth, and alchemy.



Overtoasted
1999

Acrylic on canvas
123 x 92 cm
Collection of the artist estate
(Chow Suk Fan)

In 1999, Chan created a black and white series of paintings that explores the expressive potential of monochrome. He was also triggered by the devastation of the Kosovo War (28 February 1998 – 11 June 1999) to create this series, and many paintings suggest desolation and death.

III. Seeing Between the Colors

By the 1990s, Chan gained a reputation as the “king of acrylic” in the local art circle as he was adept at manipulating the unique qualities of acrylic paint in layers that are very thin and nuanced. Since he was an extramural student at HKU, Chan had already been drawn to acrylic for its versatile range of viscosities and transparencies. As the artist developed his practice, some of his most intriguing works are those that make use of layering to explore the ambiguity of visual perception. These canvases feature a stronger reliance on brushwork and more open and atmospheric compositions that entice our eye to linger and unfold visual meaning between complex layers of color.

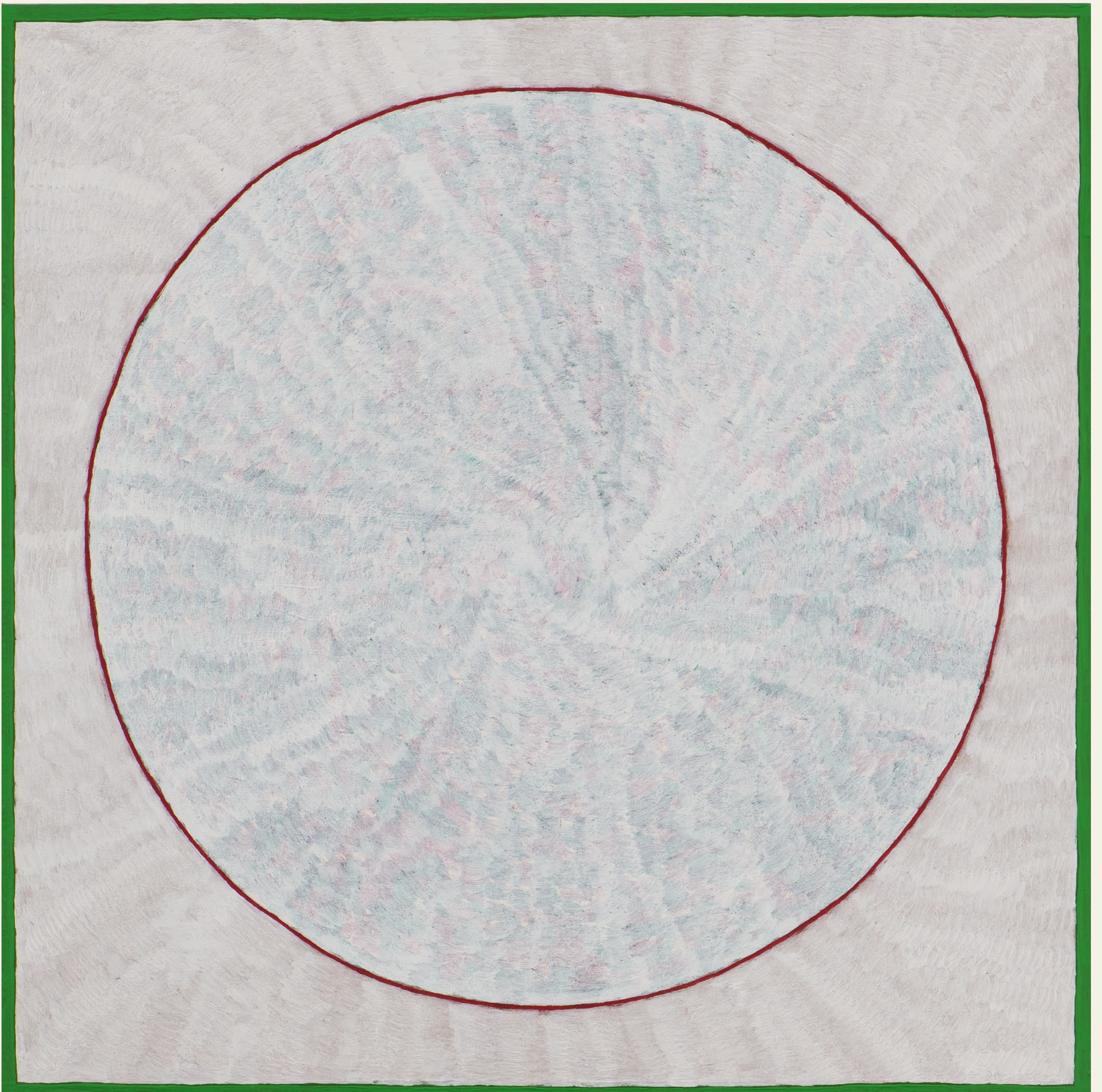
Artwork highlights



Red Green Blades
1992

Acrylic on canvas
123 x 123 cm
Collection of the artist estate
(Chow Suk Fan)

In the summer of 1992, Chan was invited by his friend Bing Lee (b. 1948) to attend a painting studio residency at the New York School of Visual Arts (SVA). The two had been classmates in the HKU extramural art and design certificate course. This painting is one of the few that Chan completed while on cultural exchange in New York.



2022
1992

Acrylic on canvas
76.5 x 76.5 cm
Collection of the artist estate
(Chow Suk Fan)

Commissioned by the Hong Kong Museum of Art, this painting was part of the exhibition *Hong Kong 2022*, which commemorated the 30th anniversary of the City Hall by asking artists to create an artwork that imagines 30 years ahead.

IV. From Canvas to Screen

In April of 1998, Chan suffered a stroke that severely impaired his motor skills. As a form of self-therapy, the artist took to playing Microsoft Solitaire on the computer to retrain his eye-hand coordination. He eventually got so skilled at defeating the program that he grew tired of the game and turned his sights onto another application—Microsoft Paint, a raster graphics editor that processes and generates images in pixels. After Chan became diagnosed with cancer in 2001 and lost a quarter of his lungs, he turned to creating with MS Paint entirely as he could no longer sustain painting on canvas. MS Paint provided new creative possibilities and challenged Chan to reconsider his grammar of painting in digital space.

Artwork highlights



©C-1997

Window X
1997

Microsoft Paint
Collection of the artist estate
(Chow Suk Fan)

This is the first digital drawing created by Chan using MS Paint on Microsoft Windows 95. While the application only offered a basic set of tools at the time, it had evolved to enable a range of over 16 million customizable colors. In this early work, Chan experiments with free drawing and contrasting color fields.



Parallel Universe
2009

Acrylic on canvas
91 x 122 cm
Collection of Chan Kam Yuen

Chan created many “3D” digital drawings that invite us to cross our eyes when viewing to simulate the effect of three-dimensionality. Certain works were turned into paintings as well. This image, however, only exists as acrylic on canvas and is marked “Forever 1st 3D Painting” on the back.

Selected Artist Chronology

- 1925 Born in Hong Kong
- 1940 Teenage political cartoon published by a local Chinese newspaper
- 1968 Enrolled in an extramural art and design certificate course at HKU
- 1970 Led union strikes and negotiations at Cable & Wireless to bargain rights for non-expatriate staff
- 1973 First major solo exhibition *Gaylord Chan Modern Art Painting Exhibition*
- 1974 Co-founded the Hong Kong Visual Art Society
- 1983 Awarded the Urban Council Fine Arts Award
- 1985 Awarded Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (MBE)
- 1989 Founded the Culture Corner Art Academy with Josephine Chow Suk Fan
- 1991 Awarded Painter of the Year 1990 by the Hong Kong Artists' Guild and Urban Council
- 1995 Founded the Artmatch Group with students
- 1998 Suffered a stroke
- 2001 Diagnosed with lung cancer
- 2013 Awarded the Bronze Bauhinia Star (B.B.S.) by the Hong Kong SAR government
- 2019 Awarded an Honorary Fellowship by the HKAC
- 2020 Passed away in Hong Kong

Exhibition Programs

“Salon Chicken Pie”

Capturing Gaylord Chan’s exuberant spirit and wit, this monthly salon series inspired by the late artist’s Cantonese nickname brings together art practitioners, writers, and students and friends of Chan to discuss different aspects of the late painter’s artwork, artistic community, and his lasting impact on local art history.

Opening Salon

Those Days at CCAA

June 22

15:00-16:30

Language:

Cantonese

Guest curator Joyce Hei-ting Wong will be joined by exhibition consultant and artist estate representative Josephine Chow Suk Fan to discuss the process of organizing this exhibition as well as Chan’s art practice and teaching.

Salon 2

Catalogue Book
Launch

July 27

15:00-16:30

Language:

English

Catalogue contributors Anthony Yung, Senior Research, Asia Art Archive and Ian Findlay-Brown, Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts, will be joined by guest curator Joyce Hei-ting Wong to discuss their research on Chan and approaches to understanding the late painter’s artworks.

Salon 3

To Crit or Not To Crit

August 31

15:00-16:30

Language:

Cantonese

Artists Amy Tang, Bouie Choi, and Jeremy Ip will be joined by guest curator Joyce Hei-ting Wong in an unconventional “crit session” to discuss the criteria of art critique once used by Chan and fellow members of the Hong Kong Visual Art Society, as well as the practice of painting in our contemporary context.

Closing Salon

Gaylord & Friends

September 28

15:00-16:30

Language:

Cantonese

Long time friends of the artist Tsong-zung Chang, founder of Hanart TZ Gallery, and Professor Cheng Yin Cheong, Emeritus Professor (Education) of The Education University of Hong Kong will be joined by guest curator Joyce Hei-ting Wong to discuss the friendships that Chan formed with members in the local art circle and the mutual inspiration they offered one another.



Art Workshops

In a series of hands-on workshops led by members of the Artmatch Group, participants of all ages will step into the vibrant world of Chan's abstract wonder. They will learn about the power of bold shapes, vivid colors, and the freedom to express themselves through making flags, painting on canvas, or exploring digital art with Microsoft Paint.

For children : 7 July, 4 August, 17 August; 14:00

For elderly : 24 September; 14:00



AI Interactive Docent Tours

Besides weekly public walk-in tours led by experienced docent guides, three tours will feature a special AI chatbot. Looking at how AI can be used as an art learning tool, this alternative docent tour will encourage visitors to interact with the AI chatbot, ask questions, and share with the group their experiences.

Tours dates

14 July, 18 August, 15 September
(14:30 English; 15:30 Cantonese)



Guided Tours

We provide free regular guided tours in Cantonese and English on a first-come, first-served basis. Guided tours last an hour, inclusive of a viewing of the exhibition.

Weekend Tours

English

Cantonese

Every Saturday

2:30pm

3:30pm

Every Sunday

2:30pm

3:30pm

Last Thursday
of every month

7:00pm

7:00pm

School and Group Tours

Schools, registered charities, and other non-profit organizations are welcome to request tours during exhibition opening hours. Guests planning to visit with a group of 7-14 visitors are welcome to reserve a group tour at least two weeks in advance by emailing outreachhk@asiasociety.org

Project Team

Guest Curator: Joyce Hei-ting Wong

Assistant Curator: Hain Yoon

Exhibition Consultant: Josephine Chow Suk Fan

Graphic Design: Studio TIO

Presented by 主辦：



亞洲協會香港中心

Supported by 資助：



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Center & Asia Society Store Opening Hours

Tuesday– Sunday : 11am–6pm

Last Thursday of the month (during exhibition period only unless otherwise stated) : 11am–8pm

Closed on Mondays

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