

PRESS RELEASE

11 JULY 2025 | FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NUS Museum launches landmark publication on Singapore art pioneer Tan Joo Jong

***“Boundless Spirit: The Art and Writings of Tan Joo Jong”* reveals the untold story of a multi-talented artist-writer who shaped Singapore's cultural landscape.**

SINGAPORE, 11 July 2025 – NUS Museum proudly announces the launch of ***Boundless Spirit: The Art and Writings of Tan Joo Jong*** (有勇无界: 陈有勇的艺术与文论), a comprehensive 300-page bilingual publication that illuminates the brief yet extraordinary career of one of Singapore's most innovative artists of the late 20th century.

A Modern Singaporean Literary Figure

Mr Tan Joo Jong (陈有勇, 1951-1984) was a rare polymath who excelled as both artist and writer; as practitioner and theorist. This landmark publication, **the first comprehensive overview of his work**, reveals how Mr Tan helped cultivate the fertile ground for Singapore's contemporary art scene.

From Oil Paintings to Ink Mastery

The publication traces Mr Tan's artistic evolution from his modern oil paintings of Singapore's changing urban landscape to his mature ink paintings that merged Eastern philosophy with contemporary expression. His works captured everything from bustling Chinatown scenes to serene Balinese landscapes, operatic figures to modernist abstractions.

Key highlights include:

- Over 200 artworks spanning oils, gouache, and Chinese ink
- Previously unpublished diary entries revealing his artistic process
- Complete translations of his writings—the first time these have been rendered into English

The Artist as Cultural Catalyst

Beyond his artistic practice, Mr Tan served as a crucial cultural bridge-builder. As one of the editors of the *Singapore Art* magazine (1975-1979) and arts editor of *Sin Chew Jit Poh* (1979-1983), he provided vital platforms for art discourse in Singapore. He was a member of several art groups in Singapore, and was also instrumental in the founding of the International Contemporary Ink Painting Movement in 1982, connecting Singapore artists to a global network.

"Mr Tan's journalistic writings about ink and art mirrored his artistic development," observed Associate University Curator Madam Chang Yueh Siang. "He sought to address what he saw as a 'crisis' in modern art—mere emulation of aesthetic form and styles—through Eastern philosophical approaches that emphasised the artist's spiritual essence and individual expression over mere technical mastery."

Bilingual Volume

This volume presents a selection of Mr Tan's writings, written originally in Chinese and translated into English, which present Mr Tan's views on ink painting through the perspective of classical Chinese philosophy and art theory, his survey on the state of modern art, and his proposition for ink painting as a medium for contemporary art. It also features Mr Tan's newspaper reviews of artists, including Mr Liu Kang, Mr Zao Wou-ki, and Mr Guan Liang.

Scholarly Contributions and Cultural Legacy

Boundless Spirit: The Art and Writings of Tan Joo Jong (有勇无界: 陈有勇的艺术与文论) also features essays by:

- **Independent writer and former journalist Mr Teo Han Wue:** "Brief but Brilliant Nonetheless: Tan Joo Jong and his Extraordinary Journey"
- **Dr Hwang Yin, Adjunct Senior Lecturer, Chinese Studies Department, NUS:** "Tan Joo Jong: In Search of an Eloquent line"
- **Madam Chang Yueh Siang, Associate University Curator, NUS Museum:** "'Literati Modern': Tan Joo Jong and Art Discourse in Singapore"

Educational Foundations and Continuities

Educated at Nanyang University, Mr Tan was shaped by the intellectually vibrant environment of the Nantah Student Art Society. The publication explores how this institution nurtured a generation of artists and cultural catalysts who would define Singapore's artistic identity. This cultural heritage lives on through Nantah's Lee Kong Chian Collection, transferred to NUS during the 1980 merger and now housed within the NUS Museum's collection.

Exhibition Connection

The publication and its accompanying exhibition *Unfettered Brush: The Art and Writings of Tan Joo Jong* at NUS Museum (1 September 2024 – 31 Dec 2025), is made possible with the support and loan of artworks from collector Mr Tan Guee Pang.

"Mr Tan Joo Jong was a thinking artist who conveyed his thoughtful understanding of life and society through his depiction of the natural world," said Mr Tan Guee Pang. "In this art collection, we have featured Mr Tan's representative works of different subject matter from various periods, showcasing his artistic talent and the proficiency he developed. I believe we will gain much from this collection and discover ourselves in his world of art."

Publication Details

- **Title:** *Boundless Spirit: The Art and Writings of Tan Joo Jong* (有勇无界: 陈有勇的艺术与文论)
- **Publisher:** NUS Museum, National University of Singapore
- **Pages:** 300 pages, fully bilingual (English/Chinese)
- **Features:** Over 200 colour reproductions, scholarly essays, complete writings
- **ISBN:** 978-981-94-3317-9

Availability

The publication will be available for sale at NUS Museum.

For media enquiries, please contact:

Marcus WONG
Associate Director, Marketing Communications
NUS Libraries & NUS Museum
National University of Singapore
DID: +65 6516 1223
Email: marcus.w@nus.edu.sg

High-resolution images and interview opportunities are available upon request.

About National University of Singapore (NUS)

The National University of Singapore (NUS) is Singapore's flagship university, which offers a global approach to education, research and entrepreneurship, with a focus on Asian perspectives and expertise. We have 15 colleges, faculties and schools across three campuses in Singapore, with more than 40,000 students from 100 countries enriching our vibrant and diverse campus community. We have also established more than 20 NUS Overseas Colleges entrepreneurial hubs around the world.

Our multidisciplinary and real-world approach to education, research and entrepreneurship enables us to work closely with industry, governments and academia to address crucial and complex issues relevant to Asia and the world. Researchers in our faculties, research centres of excellence, corporate labs and more than 30 university-level research institutes focus on themes that include energy; environmental and urban sustainability; treatment and prevention of diseases; active ageing; advanced materials; risk management and resilience of financial

systems; Asian studies; and Smart Nation capabilities such as artificial intelligence, data science, operations research and cybersecurity.

For more information on NUS, please visit nus.edu.sg.

About NUS Museum

As a university museum, NUS Museum's mission is to actively facilitate intellectual and cultural life within and beyond the University. With a distinct focus on Asia, the Museum contributes to and facilitates the production, reception, and preservation of knowledge through collections development and curatorial practice.

The Museum is a cultural hub, developing partnerships within NUS, the culture and heritage industry, and the global knowledge community. Located at the [University Cultural Centre](#), NUS Museum comprises nine galleries and additional ancillary spaces which host a wide range of [exhibitions](#), [module collaborations](#) and [supporting programmes](#) that contribute to the cultural and interdisciplinary conversation within NUS and beyond.

For more information about NUS Museum, visit museum.nus.edu.sg