

# YONG MUN SEN

The Father of Malaysian Painting

BY HIRANMAYI AWLI MOHANAN



Harbour Scene, 1948  
Watercolour on paper 25.5 x 35.5 cm  
**RM 8,000 - RM 12,000**  
KLAS Art Auction 30 July 2017  
Sale XXVIII



Beach Hut, 1949  
Watercolour on paper 25.5 x 35.5 cm  
**RM 8,000 - RM 12,000**  
KLAS Art Auction 30 July 2017  
Sale XXVIII

The late Yong Mun Sen, born on Jan 10, 1896 was one of Malaysia's pioneer artists. The country's art scene wouldn't be what it is today if it wasn't for his contributions.

The artist was born in a coconut estate in Kuching, Sarawak with the forename of Yen Lang. In 1901, he travelled to Tai-Pu, in Kwangtung Province, China to attain a formal education in the proper use of brush and calligraphy. He returned to his hometown in 1910.



Portrait of a Nyonya Peranakan, 1943  
Hand-painted photography / portrait 26 x 19 cm  
KLAS Art Auction 12 March 2017  
Edition XXVI



Woodland, 1947  
Watercolour on paper 27.5 x 37.5 cm  
KLAS Art Auction 14 May 2017  
Edition XXVII

Landscape with Bridge, 1953  
Watercolour on paper 36 x 55 cm  
**SOLD RM 12,100.00**  
KLAS Art Auction 7 April 2013  
Edition III

One day, Mun Sen witnessed a Japanese artist painting using watercolours and thenceforth, he became enamoured with that medium. In 1914, Mun Sen went back to China and painted majestic pictures of lions and tigers which were much loved by the warlords of the time. Two years later, he married 16-year-old Lam Sek Foong who bore five children. He returned to Sarawak in 1917. A year later, he started his career at a bookshop in Singapore and served at a school bookshop counter. Living in Singapore sparked a fondness and appreciation for its urban scenes he later illustrated in numerous watercolours.

In 1920, he was transferred to the Penang branch of the bookshop in Carnarvon Street. It was his first time in Penang; he saw the lovely island for what it was and was captivated by its beauty and charm. It was in 1922 when he decided to change his name to Yong Mun Sen and subsequently set up Tai Koon Art Studio in Chulia Street. He took up photography seriously and executed some plaster-of-paris sculptures. Eight years later, he moved his studio from Chulia Street to Penang Road and renamed it Mun Sen Studio. Unfortunately, his career did not gain him any success which later

prompted him to open an additional studio housed at an old mansion in Northam Road. During this time, Mun Sen familiarised himself with the works of prominent European artists through books, particularly those of Van Gogh and Gauguin. Gauguin and his works spoke to Mun Sen, which explains the strong influence on the development of his style, especially in his oil paintings.

Around 1936, several Penang artists happened to meet up and decided to form their brainchild, the Penang Chinese Art Club, with Mun Sen as the vice-president. He became the president the following year.