

## FOREWORD

Maya Gallery is happy to present a solo exhibition by Valerie Ng, a Malaysian artist based in Singapore.

*Terra Incognita*, or unknown lands in Latin, marks Valerie's eighth solo show. When we first knew Valerie in 2012, she was a shy and unassuming person. With a degree in computing, she pursued her art education in London and began a career as an artist for the past 10 years. During this period, she exhibited at various art galleries, the Singapore Art Museum and the National Art Gallery, Malaysia. She also amassed several art awards including the United Overseas Bank (UOB) Painting of the Year 2004 Competition (Singapore) in the Abstracts category. Her accomplishments are not surprising as her paintings are simply beautiful and emit depths, emotions and textures unlike any other.

Valerie's works are inspired by nature, mainly from her experiences at artist residencies in Europe and the United States. Her talent lies in the interpretation of her appreciation for the environment, the ability to see things beyond what they are and expressing this on the canvas. Where would her art be if not for the beauty of the environment she is exposed to and gets lost in? How can we learn if we don't allow ourselves to leave our comfort zones and take risks?

Pamela Ng writes eloquently about the essence of *Terra Incognita*, and the philosophy behind Valerie's recent works. The concept of getting lost in a foreign land, expressing this unconsciously in one's art and perhaps getting lost in the process, is beautifully captured in her writing.

We hope you will enjoy *Terra Incognita* by Valerie Ng as much as we do.

Thank you.

MASTURAH SHA'ARI

JEFFREY WANDLY

Directors

Maya Gallery

### Helios Lake

Oil on canvas  
150 x 122 cm  
2012



## *terra incognita*

### Valerie Ng's Visual Journeys to Unknown Lands

PAMELA NG

Art Writer

Valerie Ng is somewhat of an enigma. She is a quiet person who speaks softly and does not seek out crowds. Her passion only unravels amidst nature, where she immortalises the wonder she sees in tree bark formations, stone ridges and colours in the sky. This personal journey she has with nature is what she is passionate about and shares with audiences through her artworks. As such, emotion and energy are vital elements in her paintings.

Valerie has always been fascinated by these details, the smaller markings that combine to create a larger visual. She seeks them out, through her walks and overseas trips, capturing nature's gifts with her camera and mind's eye.

Second generation Abstract Expressionist Joan Mitchell said: "I paint from remembered landscapes that I carry with me – and remembered feelings of them, which of course become transformed. I could certainly never mirror nature. I would more like to paint what it leaves with me." Similarly, Valerie internalizes her multi-sensory aesthetic experiences before a single mark is made. After studying and recording the minutia of nature, she distills the essence of these encounters and captures in her abstractions the essence of the natural environment and the 'feel' of her experiences.

Helen Frankenthaler's major focus and inspiration for her abstract paintings was nature, evidenced in her pared-down forms informed by her impressions of nature. The body of Valerie's works has been consistently informed by nature as well – from her earthy palette to the titles of her works – they all embody her appreciation for nature. This focus has enabled her to delve deeper into her practice and seek to keep evolving her abstract paintings.

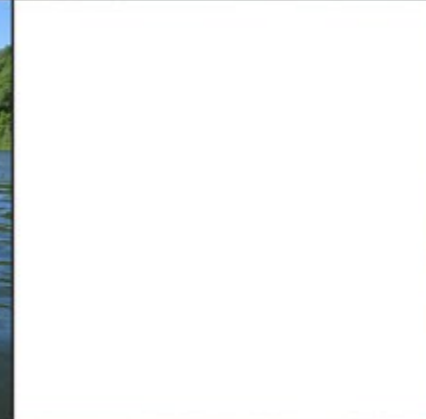
In a 1994 article, defending Cy Twombly, Kirk Varnedoe said: "One could say that any child could make a drawing like Twombly only in the sense that any

fool with a hammer could fragment sculptures as Rodin did, or any house painter could spatter paint as well as Pollock. In none of these cases would it be true. In each case the art lies not so much in the finesse of the individual mark, but in the orchestration of a previously un-codified set of personal rules about where to act and where not, how far to go and when to stop, in such a way as the cumulative courtship of seeming chaos defines an original, hybrid kind of order, which in turn illuminates a complex sense of human experience not voiced or left marginal in previous art."

Working mostly with oils, Valerie makes the visual joys of nature tactile in small scratches that weave and shift fluidly on the canvas to resonate harmoniously. It is that innate understanding within her that knows when a painting begins and finishes and in between, how each stroke sits on its own, its relation to other strokes and the secret language to how they all communicate together to form a larger entity or convey an overall emotion.

Valerie's new exhibition in 2014, *Terra Incognita*, Latin for unknown land, shows at Maya Gallery. The words *Terra Incognita* became the catalyst for her new direction and a source of inspiration to push beyond her own realms of comfort and chart new territories. She came across a book *The Field Guide to Getting Lost* that used the term *Terra Incognita* to highlight the process of getting lost as a necessary way of life. Valerie was further intrigued when she came across this thought by Plato, in his Socratic dialogue *Meno*: "How will you go about finding that thing, the nature of which is totally unknown to you?"

Taking on this question as her personal challenge, Valerie decided to experiment with new methods of creating; from varied styles to forays into composition and employing more vivid hues and high contrast juxtapositions. She shares her experience of travelling as being akin to the adventure of creating something: "Even when you go to a different country and get lost in a city it is unnerving. If you had kept to your safe route, you would not have stumbled upon all these gems tucked away in nondescript alleyways. These discoveries are unplanned but something always interesting comes out of it and it makes your trip worthwhile and memorable. Similarly, when painting, there are moments of frustration, but when you do come across that golden moment, it makes it all worthwhile. I found that when you get lost it doesn't matter if



you find your way or not, it is what you learn along the way, that becomes the important part of life. Sometimes it is good to let go of everything you know, because there is no final result or pre-conceived notion in life or in abstract art. There will be times, when intuitively your body and mind are freed, that is the point to capture on the canvas, that is the moment you try to express."

*Terra Incognita* explores the theme of getting lost, where Valerie shares her discoveries with audiences during these journeys, both internal and external, to unknown lands. Each painting is an encounter with nature where you can experience a multitude of possibilities with your imagination as the only horizon. The audience experiences a further development in her abstraction, a sense of something more experimental trying to break free, a perceptible shift from her previous works.

Valerie's earlier works were expressed through gentler strokes that materialized from intuition. Her palette, partly due to the influence of nature, had a predominant use of earth tonalities, where each painting was strengthened by the focus of a relatively homogeneous colour scheme. This approach resulted in each painting capturing a steadfast emotion.

However, in *Terra Incognita* we see that in each painting, there is increased complexity with the introduction of composition, a heightened tactile quality, new vivaciousness in the palette and a renewed tenacity in her strokes. Her brave new use of composition gives her paintings a heightened three-dimensionality evoked by a sense of a foreground and background. This is not a stark change but a natural evolution. She breaks new ground with her initial explorations and surprising juxtaposition of bright colours, with strokes that are more expressive, longer and imbued with more energy and purpose.

Just as Sam Francis referenced colours to show his inner emotions, Valerie's new works were influenced by her summer painting course in June 2013, held at the Ox-Bow School of Art, USA, affiliated with the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. During the residency, she experienced the vibrant energy of American summer: sunset skies alive with deep oranges and pinks, outdoor concerts, dense forests, the quiet magnificence of the Lake of Michigan, all surrounded by other artists who were also inspired to paint in bright colours.

Joan Mitchell often composed her paintings in ways that used foreground and background, evoking impressions of landscape. In Valerie's own practice, this is coming to fore, as she started to sketch and draft her works three years ago. In the earlier periods of her career, when there were mainly colours and marks to contend with, she could work more on instinct. With the introduction of composition, there still remains an impression of spontaneity in her works, although they are actually carefully planned. She now has to invest more time and thought into each artwork, while still extracting elements of nature, and never being representational. The introduction of composition into her works enables a new vein in her works - an imaginary narrative - as seen in her work *Beyond the Waves*.

Similar to the Impressionists of the 19th Century, Valerie believes in the importance of painting in natural light and also in using short strokes to illuminate the shifts in light. She admires Monet and van Gogh for the way their brushstrokes made paintings move, and Cézanne's energy in his work.

Valerie's own works are increasingly like moving paintings, you can see how she is evolving towards bolder strokes that almost dance off the canvas. Her works now suggest even more vividly the reflection of actual light. In *The Long Journey* and *Summer Clouds* we see swift strokes of vivid colours, almost like extended staccatos of music and light that suggest dancing, live bands, shifting clouds and moving city lights, yet suggesting the spiritual, unconscious and the mind. These free-spirited strokes are spontaneous moments of discovery when Valerie is in the flow - her spirit, mind, hand, palette knife, brush, canvas - are all in perfect synergy and her intuition completes the painting.

Franz Klein was never big on explaining his art or himself and Valerie is similar, rather preferring for her art to speak for itself. Her canvasses are not so much works to comprehend, but works to 'feel'. She taps into something we forget and take for granted, the natural around us and the potential it has to exalt us, uplift us and refresh us. Valerie immortalizes these heady moments when the exhilaration of nature fills us. This 'feel' is devoid of specifics or details that could date it; they are not bound by time or space, as the connection to nature is universal and eternal.

Standing in front of Valerie Ng's works, you are left with emotion and wonder as the mark making ceases and a connection is bridged that blossoms within yourself. The journey within starts here, where the possibilities know no end.

opp page

Air Bark  
Oil on canvas  
30 x 90 cm  
2014



*terra incognita*  
**VALERIE NG**

June 6 - 21, 2014  
Maya Gallery

Maya  
GALLERY