

Henry Lee

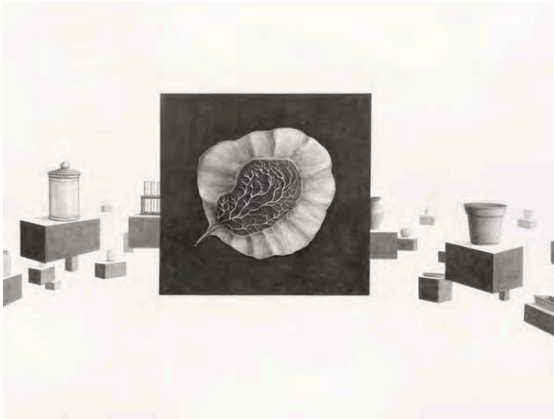
B. 1981, Singapore

Sense and Sensibility

2022

Charcoal, Pencil and Acrylic on Canvas

H 76.2 cm x 101.4 cm



Angsana (Pterocarpus indicus)

A popular, fast-growing deciduous tree with a dense, drooping crown and wide geographical range, the angšana – a Southeast Asia native first introduced to Singapore in the early 19th century that became ubiquitous in parks and along roads as a shade tree – might be a fitting arboreal emblem for the nation of immigrants. Once the most widely planted roadside tree that had helped Singapore become a garden city over the 1970s, the angšana fell out of official favour by the mid-1980s. The need for frequent pruning – due to hitherto prized traits such as its sheer speed of growth, hardiness and dense foliage – as well as the fear of widespread die-offs from fungal disease were the ultimate causes of its downfall. While trees and plants positively augment and complement life in a cultivated environment such as in the concrete jungle, they also often face significant challenges. Possibly the best-known arboreal landmark to be etched in the country's collective memory, "gor zhang chiu kar" ("under the shade of five trees" in Hokkien) was a popular dating spot and gathering place at Esplanade Park between the 1960s and 1980s, so named after the five angšanas on site. From the late 1980s up to 1995, they had progressively succumbed to fusarium wilt fungal disease and were eventually cut down. It was two decades later when, to recreate the once-popular social landmark, diseaseresistant replacements were cultivated and transplanted to the original site. Those original angšanas are memorialised as branching vein-trees on the distinctively disc-like, winged pod fruit in this work, a symbol of renewal, life and hope for the uncertain futures of the country's remaining forests.