

Artist Biography

A self-professed doodler since childhood, Poon Lian's passion for art blossomed under the mentorship of pioneer artist Chen Wen Hsi, his art teacher at The Chinese High School (TCHS). Upon graduating from TCHS's pre-university course, Poon confided in Mr Chen his desire to pursue higher art education. Mr Chen, an advocate of learning both Chinese and Western art while laying the foundation for learning, advised him to enrol in the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA) Western Art diploma course and offered to instruct him personally in Chinese ink painting. During his time at NAFA, Poon received guidance from renowned artists like Chen Chong Swee and Georgette Chen while concurrently receiving private Chinese ink painting lessons from Chen Wen Hsi. By his graduation in 1969, Poon had built a strong foundation in fine art.

Three educators profoundly impacted Poon Lian's artistic journey: Chen Wen Hsi, Chen Chong Swee and Georgette Chen. It was Chen Wen Hsi who ignited Poon's artistic spark. Under his tutelage, Chen imparted brush techniques and instilled in his protégé the principles of "xūshí"(虚实¹), creativity, flexibility, and dynamism. He emphasised individual expression, leaning towards an abstract style influenced by aestheticism and concise, free-flowing brushwork, a style that he is renowned for. Conversely, Chen Chong Swee championed realism. He taught a meticulous and precise style, adhering to proper standards. He rejected abstract art, believing art should reflect life without exaggeration or contrivance, capturing the poetic beauty of nature and everyday life as observed. Sharing the artistic temperaments of his teachers, Poon's works largely retain Chen Chong Swee's simple style while incorporating Chen Wen Hsi's flexibility and versatility. He navigates between these styles, constantly seeking integration and self-positioning.

Georgette Chen's rigorous sketching instruction provided Poon a solid foundation in Western painting. She believed art arises from the fusion of nature and humanity. Her passion and meticulousness deeply influenced Poon's creative approach. The three maestros' reverence for nature became an integral part of Poon's unwavering pursuit of inspiration from nature and his quest for "the true, the good, and the beautiful" (真善美).

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Poon has acquired over 30 years of experience specialising in printing and colour separation starting from the 1970s. His career afforded him opportunities to study the relationship between tonality, colour and an in-depth understanding of colour harmony, a skill that he applied in his paintings. In the 1990s, before becoming a full-time artist, Poon ran a printing and packaging business in Beijing and Hebei. Despite a busy schedule, he dedicated weekends to visiting art galleries, attending exhibitions, interacting with fellow artists, or sketching around Beijing. These activities enriched his artistic life, broadened his horizons and further strengthened his creative experience, building upon his existing painting skills.

Having been nurtured by dedicated educators at NAFA, such as Georgette Chen and Chen Chong Swee, and receiving personal tutelage from Chen Wen Hsi, Poon Lian readily gives back to his alma mater. In the 1970s, when NAFA faced closure due to financial difficulties, Poon returned as a lecturer in the Western Art department from 1972 to 1980 and worked tirelessly with fellow alumni to raise funds for the school's development, serving as Treasurer to steer and revitalise NAFA through the challenging period. By 1980, NAFA was successfully restructured and financially stable. In January 1981, Poon left his teaching position and returned to focus on his business ventures.

In 1993, NAFA underwent restructuring with plans to raise funds for a new campus, Poon was once again, invited to serve his alma mater, a position that he remained as NAFA's board member, Nanyang Arts Foundation and Management Committee member for 15 years, witnessing NAFA's transformation into a well-equipped and top tier art institution under the collective support and efforts of many. In 2008, Poon stepped down from the Board and Management Committee but continued as secretary of the Club NAFA until 2017. During this time, he collaborated with NAFA colleagues and West Malaysian alumni on activities aimed at strengthening the school's connection with its graduates.

In 2018, at 70, Poon officially retired from all his duties at NAFA, concluding over 50 years of dedicated service with his alma mater. Poon is also a lifetime member of The Society of Chinese Artists, where he has served multiple terms on the management committee and was president from 2002 to 2005.