

Therefore I Am:

# The Making of A Portrait



A Solo Presentation  
by Denise Jillian Tan

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## A Solo Presentation by Denise Jillian Tan

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*Therefore I Am: The Making of a Portrait*

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*Wonderself*

Denise Jillian Tan

Acrylic on canvas

42cm x 29.7cm

2009

## F o r e w o r d

Despite eight years in the art business, Artesan is relentless in its search across all corners of the pan-Asian market for genuine talent. This time around, we are delighted to present a young budding talent, our very own homegrown Singaporean: Denise Jillian Tan.

Here is an artist who is not only a cheerful soul, but one that exudes vim, vigour and vitality. (She would actually do well in a Vitamin advert!) Denise Jillian has a unique “can do lah” attitude – and I am very delighted to have met her; and now excited to work with her.

In order to instill art appreciation in the general public, Artesan has always believed it has to start with art education. The evolution of most aspiring artists can be a long, arduous journey. It takes industry and determination. Aside from art education, the artists have to draw inspiration from their own familiar environment. The more experimental they are, and the more they practice their art, the more they are likely to find their own artistic style and identity. Therefore, the show not only aims to present the artist and her works, but to present her in a personal setting, showcasing a survey of more than thirty of her works. The presentation style hopes to raise public awareness on the challenges and developmental stages involved in the evolution of a visual artist.

Artesan Gallery + Studio opened its gallery doors in 2005, and to date has held over fifty exhibitions, and residency programs. It runs a professional artist programme at the gallery. From conceptualization, to actual realization – all its exhibitions have been created to engage public awareness for art appreciation. By professionally managing young artists at the start of their early career, the gallery hopes to instill professionalism in the individual, as well as assist, motivate and support budding talents in the development of their artistic career.

### Roberta Dans

Director

Artesan Gallery + Studio



*Mary Mary Quite  
Contrary*  
Denise Jillian Tan  
Mixed media on linen  
122cm x 154cm  
2012

# The Making of a Portrait

CaiQinyi

There are apparently over a hundred points on the face that can be analyzed. For centuries, people have tried to understand aspects of a person's character just by looking at their face. The ancient Chinese believed that your face was a reflection of your inner spirit. In Medieval Europe, beauty was considered to be synonymous with virtue, and ugliness was sometimes considered a sign of evil. And in 18th century phrenology – the study of the skull's morphology and human character was used erroneously to identify the guilt of suspected criminals!

Throughout history, artists have made their self-portraits, as well as those of family and friends as their primary subject of portraiture. These intimate renderings continue among many artists working in portraiture today. What do we actually desire from portraiture? Is it the recognizable image of a loved one, a revered figure – or a compelling personality? And yet, the encounter must also be one of surprise. We want more than “likeness,” and we rely on the artist's imagination to help us see beyond the subject's outward appearance towards a larger reality or fantasy.

In effect, our critical experiences reinforce our constant efforts to understand ourselves in relation to others. The artist's challenge is to merely apply his or her ingenuity and empathic insight towards a series of revelations that illuminate not just a subject's outward appearance, but also suggest a good grasp of character within. Portrait artists frequently consider their efforts as “collaborative,” recognizing that the process requires both the resemblance of the sitter – and the necessary presence of the artist.



*“ ... people, their faces and bodies intrigue me... from postures to expressions to actions, the human body and face is able to emanate little hints of identity, which may either entice or repulse – I find both to be something that is beautiful. While drawn to the slightest details, I find myself with a desire to relate and understand the subject beyond a physical level; bringing to surface the idea of the human psyche which I desire to explore through my art.”*

*– Denise Jillian Tan*



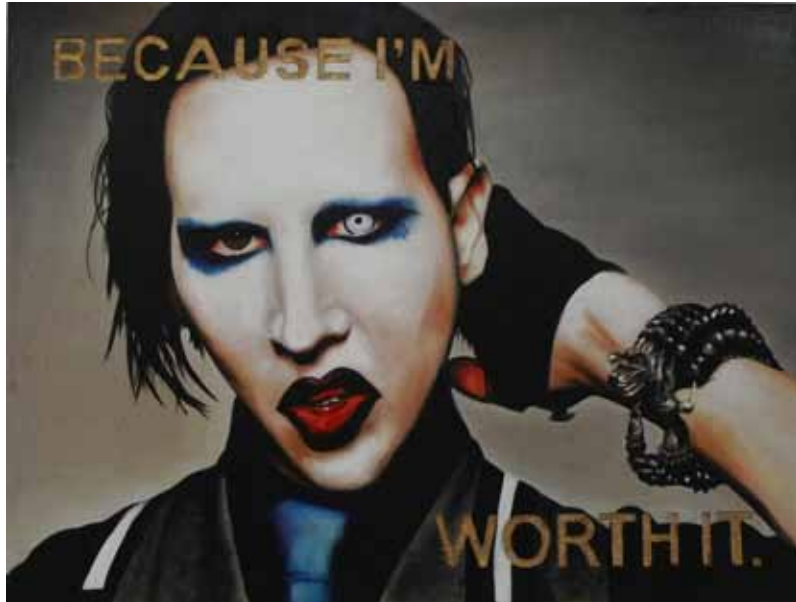
*Untitled*  
Denise Jillian Tan  
Oil on wood  
Approx 100cm x 130cm  
2010

It was no long ago, that young artist Denise Jillian Tan used portraiture as a vehicle for making an artistic statement, as part of her student's personal journey in art school. Her work has since evolved to highly expressive, almost abstract interpretations to carefully described, classically inspired representations of iconic personalities to marginalized members of society. Through constant practice and experimentation, the young artist has built up an assortment that boasts of bewildering tales that start to unfold before our eyes as she studies, schemes, investigates and analyzes a wondrous world she has now discovered – and shares with us.

Yet, the works by Denise Tan leaps beyond tradition and expectations. She mines the genre's rich and limitless territory by placing her fictional subjects – often the young and the vulnerable, in creative scenes, sometimes inspired by fairy tales, yet capturing the anxiety and fatigue of contemporary life's personal challenges and dramas, as well as transporting portraiture to encompass expressions of role play. As young as the artist is, she already manages to render a twist, a new dimension to many of her works on youthful innocence. While she places her subject in scenes which are often dark and conveying a sense

*Little Red Riding Hood*  
Denise Jillian Tan  
Oil on canvas  
150cm x 120cm  
2012





*Untitled*  
Denise Jillian Tan  
Oil on wood  
100cm x 130cm  
2010

of heightened drama, she mediates the intensity of expression through a leavening dose of playfulness and the ephemeral, while exploring the important question of how we define the self.

Or perhaps, how do we define an artist? All artists arrive at a unique destination with different routes opening up for them. For Denise, her art rides upon the juggernaut of photographic practice and renders her subjects' individuality with compelling intensity through her photorealistic painting style. Already a painstaking technician, Denise intentionally lifts the ordinary or otherwise unknown figures out of obscurity and considers them through the ennobling effects of a figurative style. Denise's works often evoke metaphoric representation of the tenuous connections between the individual lifespan and the overwhelming forces of time. At once delicate, yet powerful, her work profoundly evokes the Albertian understanding of art's "divine power" and portraiture's foremost virtue: *to make the absent present*.

*Innocence or Ignorance*  
Denise Jillian Tan  
Oil on canvas  
Approx 100cm x 130cm  
2009







*Cinderella*  
Denise Jillian Tan  
Oil on canvas  
150cm x 120cm  
2013



*Snow White*  
Denise Jillian Tan  
Oil on canvas  
150cm x 120cm  
2013



*Ring-A-Round a Rosie*  
Denise Jillian Tan  
Oil on canvas  
122cm x 154cm  
2012



*Untitled*  
Denise Jillian Tan  
Pen and ink on paper  
21cm x 14.8cm  
2010



*Craig*  
Denise Jillian Tan  
Graphite on paper  
42cm x 29.7cm  
2008



*Studies of People. 1*  
Denise Jillian Tan  
Oil on canvas  
30cm x 40cm  
2011



*Bob. 4*  
Denise Jillian Tan  
Oil on canvas  
100cm x 140cm  
2011



*Studies of People. 2*  
Denise Jillian Tan  
Oil on canvas  
30cm x 40cm  
2011



*Studies of People. 3*  
Denise Jillian Tan  
Oil on canvas  
30cm x 40cm  
2011

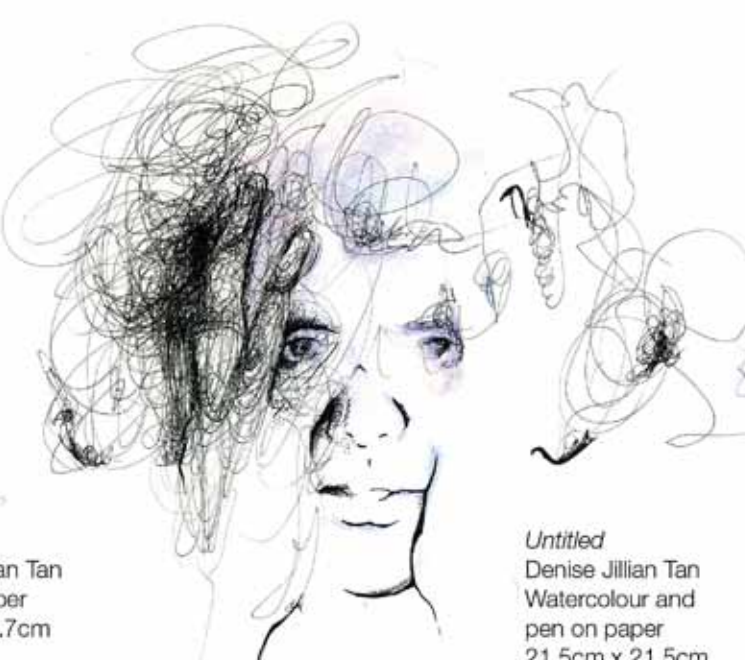


*Adrian Lim*  
Denise Jillian Tan  
Oil on canvas  
100cm x 140cm  
2012





*Untitled*  
Denise Jillian Tan  
Pen on paper  
42cm x 29.7cm  
2011



*Untitled*  
Denise Jillian Tan  
Watercolour and  
pen on paper  
21.5cm x 21.5cm  
2011



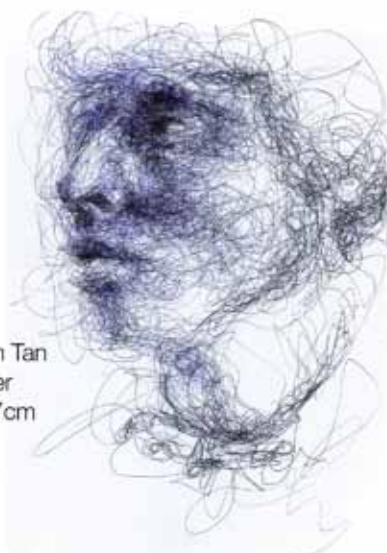
*Untitled*  
Denise Jillian Tan  
Pen on paper  
42cm x 29.7cm  
2011



*Untitled*  
Denise Jillian Tan  
Pen on paper  
42cm x 29.7cm  
2011

## About the Artist:

Denise Jillian Tan, born 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1989, is an award-winning emerging Singaporean artist who graduated with a degree in Fine Arts at LASALLE College of the Arts. Denise was recently nominated for the Sovereign Asian Art Prize in 2011 – and then won the category of Top 20 Singapore Artists in 2012. She also exhibited alongside the Top 30 Category in Asia at Marina Bay Sands, Singapore. She has exhibited at The Arts House (Origin of the World) and recently held her first solo show at Marriott Hotel alongside Singapore Tatler's Fashion Hall of Fame in 2012. Group shows include shows at the ICA Gallery at LASALLE College of the Arts, The Substation, The Arts House and at Alliance Francaise de Singapour.



*Untitled*  
Denise Jillian Tan  
Pen on paper  
42cm x 29.7cm  
2011

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328 North Bridge Road  
#01-26 Raffles Hotel Arcade  
Singapore 188719  
Tel 6338 5818

*We are also located at:*

**Artesan Gallery + Studio**  
793, Bukit Timah Road  
#02-01 (cor Sixth Ave)  
Singapore 269765  
Tel 6469 7818

[www.theartesan.com](http://www.theartesan.com)

[roberta@theartesan.com](mailto:roberta@theartesan.com)