

Spoonful of Sugar

Denise Jillian Tan



artesan

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Spoonful of Sugar
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F o r e w o r d

*“ The aesthetic image in the dramatic form is life purified in
and reprojected from the human imagination “*

- James Joyce

Exemplifying and validating our core value of nurturing young talent in the artistic and creative circle, Artesan Gallery + Studio closes 2014 with young artist Denise Jillian Tan and her second solo exhibition.

We first presented an “introspective” showcase of works charting Denise’s artistic development in May 2013. Eighteen months later, it is with excitement and pleasure we open her collection of entirely new works, *Spoonful of Sugar*.

I first came across Denise’s work in 2012 exhibited in a shopping mall atrium. Recognizing her fresh yet raw talent, I invited Denise to join Artesan as one of our fledgling artists, to be mentored and guided under the gallery’s experienced wings.

Denise is a visual author. Like a novelist, she crafts epic tales with her brush and palette, creating images that give pause for thought and introspection. Questioning the ways of the world and looking beneath the veneer of civility, Denise gives vent to the hopes of youth the world over, for an age and time of greater sensitivity and equipoise. Like a proud mother, I am so pleased Denise has pushed herself artistically and technically for this exhibition, presenting *all* new works for the very first time. It has been intensely gratifying to watch her grow and come out of her shell, refining her skill for every portrait, for every landscape.

Akin to pre-New-Year post-mortem of the year past and imagining what lies ahead after the countdown, this exhibition encourages a re-imagining of our codes and mores, allowing ourselves greater freedom of thought and knowledge.

Artesan wishes all a good Christmas and New Year and the very best in the year of the wood Sheep!

Roberta Dans
Founding Director
Artesan Gallery + Studio



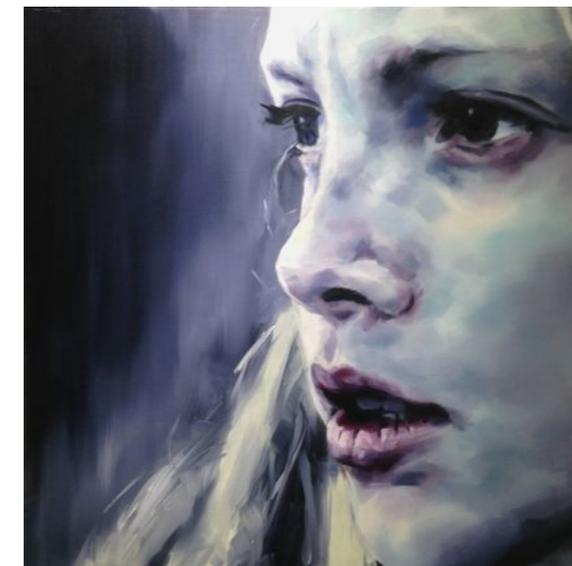
Studies 1
Denise Jillian Tan
Oil on Canvas
35.5 cm x 46 cm
2014

Spoonful of Sugar Cai Qinyi

The title *Spoonful of Sugar* is based upon the lyrics of a song in the famed movie, *Mary Poppins* (“Just a spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down...”) and young emerging artist Denise Jillian Tan subtly references the deception of the “sweetening parable”. With the song’s objective to preach and manipulate, Tan likewise guides her audience along the ‘bitter, arduous path of upholding burdensome precepts’, narrating with what at first looks like a fantasy tale, and then helping us to swallow sordid realities about our world.

Underscoring one’s vision of a wonderful world shaped by a blend of genre, imagination, and memory, Tan presents what seems to be picture postcards of apparent warm havens and idyllic seascapes and landscapes. Each painting presents a strong narrative of youthful wonderment and discovery amidst nature.

Using each canvas as a window, she invites us to escape into an idyllic land, a deliverance from fast paced structured reality, seduced by views that create a sense of wonder tinged with a hint of melancholy. Time stands still in the landscapes of breathtaking beauty. Our gaze is then drawn to a solitary figure of a young girl, in each scene, who seems oblivious to the vastness that surrounds her; the scenes whispering ominous tones, creating a not so easy sense of time and place. Looking even closer, bright skies are laced with overcast gloom as if a storm were brewing. Before long, the viewer is drawn into the shadowy manipulations within.



Studies 2
Denise Jillian Tan
Oil on Canvas
46 cm x 46 cm
2014



The works beguile speculation despite what might seem to be narratives of plain innocence and childhood curiosity.

In *Unwanted Plants* serious botanists recognize the hardy plant that has been uprooted and held in the hands of the innocent maiden. The landscape is filled with lush sunlit pine. All that thrives beneath are but a few sparse communities of hardy scrubs that can marginally survive the harsh climate of sparse water and minimal light, nourishment mostly suppressed by the pine and their potent needles. Yet despite surviving against all the odds, it has been especially plucked out by a child who is ever vigilant, ever watchful and apprehensive of the rise of that which does not conform to the forest of

Unwanted Plants
Denise Jillian Tan
Oil on Canvas
150 cm x 82 cm
2014



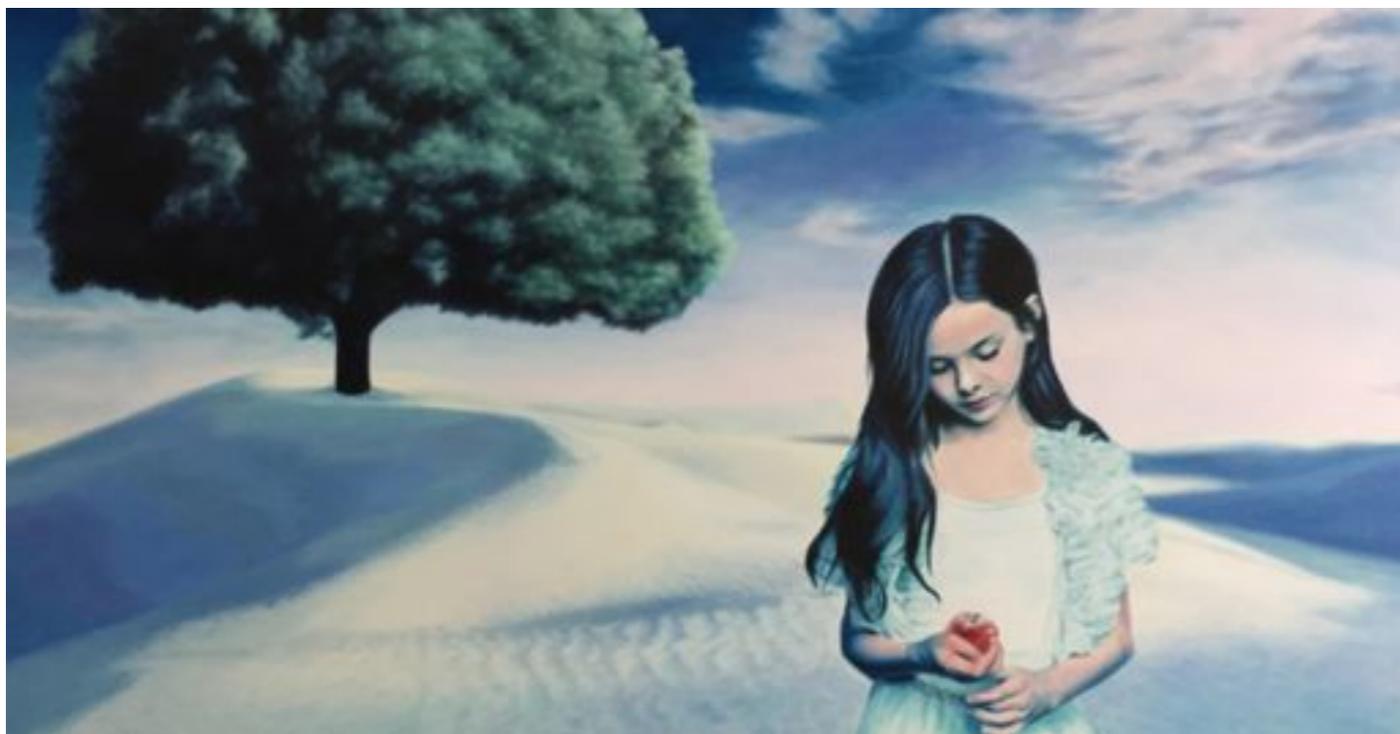
seemingly perfect and manicured pines, a youthful heroine donning what is reminiscent of the white dresses worn by maidens pure in spirit.

With the painting entitled *Chapter 5: The Day We Learnt to Read* one sees a young girl gazing intently into the depths of a lake. Is she seeking to admire her reflection in the water – and then spots a submerged book? Was the book discarded by accident or was it intentional? Can she make out the pages or are the waters filtering the text? Similarly with *Chapter 52: Breaking Promises* one encounters a campfire site. The young girl is neither

Chapter 52: Breaking Promises
Denise Jillian Tan
Oil on Canvas
100 cm x 160 cm
2014



*Chapter 5 :The Day We
Learnt to Read*
Denise Jillian Tan
Oil on Canvas
90 cm x 160 cm
2014



dressed for the outdoors nor the terrain. She has travelled far to a cold rugged part of the world. She is dressed in mourning black and resolute, burning white bits of paper as if she were in a trance, unrelenting, destroying any hint of trace and residue. Meantime, the tale of deception continues with *The First Chapter* – a young Eve and the biblical Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil looming behind, gazing upon her apple hints at megalomaniac dreams of ruling the world. And finally, in *Rotten Meat*, we find an ingénue flanked by raw carcasses reminiscent of Francis Bacon's 'Figure with Meat'. Yet here is a young girl who seems poised, putting up a veil of complacency and indifference as she sits in a cold, wet, dark cave, a fairy tale symbol for evil and wickedness.

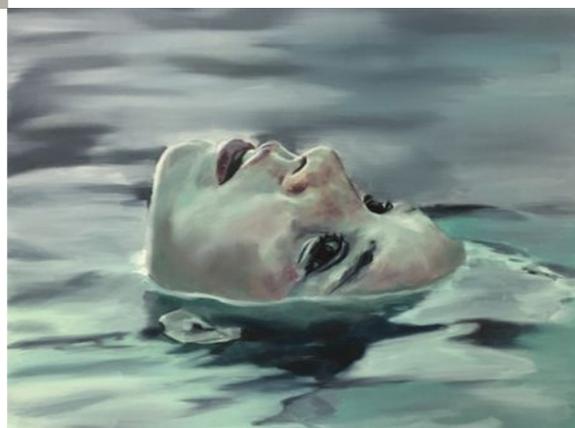
The First Chapter
Denise Jillian Tan
Oil on Canvas
160 cm x 84 cm
2014



Rotten Meat
Denise Jillian Tan
Oil on Canvas
150 cm x 120 cm
2014



Mirroring
Denise Jillian Tan
Oil on Canvas
61 cm x 61 cm
2014



Drift
Denise Jillian Tan
Oil on Canvas
61 cm x 46 cm
2014

Completing the panoramic narratives, Tan then zooms in with introspective portraits of close-ups of the protagonists in different mindstates: calm, curious, petulant, conniving, vulnerable and dismayed. As opposed to the more linear method she uses on her larger works, she executes her smaller works in a more painterly manner, using visible brushstrokes that suggest the simplistic charm of her *dramatis personae* and their ethos.

With stealth, Tan proves that in order to conceptually intrigue the mind, an image must often formally comfort and soothe in order to relax the eyes while the meaning of the image sneaks into our subconscious and chills the senses. In fact, it is young Tan's artistic ingenuity that merits one's attention. The works, which offer seemingly innocuous compositions, upon closer introspection not only evoke wonderment; they also reveal the enigmatic peculiarity of metamorphosis and how the story unfolds before our very eyes.

Denise Jillian Tan, through her second solo exhibition series of allegorical paintings, introduces subtle rhetoric within cinematic locations, staging a quiet yet resonant protest against societal actions of deceit and oppression. Tranquil scenes intimate underlying disquietude, inferring a veiled outcry in society. Tan's masterful storytelling and visual authorship through metaphors of underlying disharmony are revealed in the narratives, both vast and precise, revealing a tenacious and talented young artist who speaks with her paintbrush and her heart.



Hanging
Denise Jillian Tan
Oil on Canvas
46 cm x 61 cm
2014



Dark Hair, 6, Alla Prima
Denise Jillian Tan
Oil on Canvas
30.5 cm x 41 cm
2014

Blend. Sleeping. Peace.
Denise Jillian Tan
Oil on Canvas
46 cm x 35.5 cm
2014

About the Artist:

Born on March 3rd, 1989, Denise Jillian Tan is a young emerging Singaporean artist who graduated with a degree in Fine Arts at the Lasalle College of the Arts. Denise was 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 had her first solo show at Marriott Hotel. Group shows include shows at the ICA Gallery at LASALLE College of the Arts, The Substation, The Arts House, NUS Society Guild House, MoCa @ Loewen and at Alliance Francaise de Singapour.

In May 2013, Denise held her first show with Artesan Studio + Gallery, entitled *Therefore I Am: The Making of A Portrait* showcasing her works from an early stage and hinting at the young artist's innate talent. In December 2014, Denise stages her second solo exhibition of entirely new works with Artesan Gallery + Studio, *Spoonful of Sugar*.

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