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Headline: Chua Ek Kay's rich legacy

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THE late artist Chua Ek Kay (below) has left Singapore with a rich legacy of his genius and creativity that will survive the test of time, said Professor Tommy Koh.

The chairman of the National Heritage Board attended the artist's wake yesterday, and paid tribute to him.

Chua died suddenly last Friday at the age of 61 of nasal cancer.

The 1999 Cultural Medallion recipient was a well-known artist who worked in Chinese ink and, later, in oils.

In an e-mail to Life!, Prof Koh described Chua as one of Singapore's best and most innovative artists, whose work he has admired since the early 1990s.

At the time, he said, Chua painted the old houses of Chinatown, with just a few bold brush strokes and minimal use of colour.

The work stood out and the honours followed. In 1991, the artist went on to win the grand prize in the UOB Painting of the Year competition and the Asean Art Competition.

He also won a scholarship to do his bachelor's and master's degrees in Australia.

Prof Koh said the time Chua spent there had a deep impact on his work.

He said: "On his return to Singapore, Ek Kay produced a new series of paintings, more abstract and less figurative, more lyrical and less architectural, and deeply inspiring."

Prof Koh also cited the artist's 2005 one-man show at the Shanghai Art Museum, and his participation in the Shenzhen Ink Biennale.

"Through these exhibitions, Ek Kay's reputation in China was firmly established," he said. "The Chinese art community regarded him as one of the world's leading practitioners of ink painting."

He added: "A few nights ago, my wife and I were invited to a dinner at the St Regis hotel. We were delighted to see six large paintings by Ek Kay on the second floor of the hotel.

"Through these and other paintings, both in public and private collections, he has left us with a rich legacy of his genius and creativity, which will survive the test of time and continue to bring us joy and inspiration."

