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PHOTO: ALAN LIM

**SECOND DONATION: Mr Koh Seow Chuan (left) donated 63 paintings by artist Wong Keen (right) to the museum. Wong's Lotus Metamorphosis (background) is one of them.**

A HOME-GROWN artist who shuttles between New York and Singapore has found a permanent home here for most of his paintings.

The collection of 63 works by established painter Wong Keen has been donated to the Singapore Art Museum (SAM) by its chairman Koh Seow Chuan and his wife Koh Wen Gin, chief planner at the Urban Redevelopment Authority.

The paintings, worth \$1.27 million, join some 7,500 works in the museum's permanent collection. Eighteen of them will go on show at an exhibition, Wong Keen: A Singapore Abstract Expressionist, starting tomorrow.

Mr Koh, 67, an architect and avid art and stamp collector, had also donated 150 paintings by Cultural Medallion recipient Lim Tze Peng in 2003. He said his second donation was timely.

The founder of DP Architects said at a media preview of the exhibition on Tuesday: "Our visual arts space is expanding, and a world-class collection cannot happen overnight. I'm just doing my bit to enhance the national collection."

Mr Koh, who said he fell in love with Wong's paintings, met the artist in the 1990s, and they became good friends.

Wong, 65, said: "Artists need a platform and opportunities. I have both now and I'm very happy."

Born in Singapore in 1942, he studied under

renowned painter Chen Wen Hsi. He left for New York at the age of 19 to train at The Art Students League of New York, an artist-run school which pioneering local artist Georgette Chen also attended.

There, he was influenced by abstract expressionism, an art movement characterised by dripping and staining paint onto canvas or painting geometric colour fields.

He has been living in New Jersey with his wife and two daughters for more than 30 years, and used to run an art gallery in New York's Soho area. He comes home to visit his 96-year-old mother, three brothers and friends.

The paintings at SAM are drawn from work done in the United States and Singapore. They combine Eastern influences such as calligraphy brush strokes and lotus motifs, with Western ones such as abstraction.

His works now hang in the homes of private collectors and public buildings such as the National Library in Victoria Street.

"Home is where the heart is. My heart is in my paintings, and now they are in Singapore, so I guess I belong here," Wong said.

► Wong Keen: A Singapore Abstract Expressionist is on at the Singapore Art Museum from tomorrow till April 29. Tickets at \$5 for adults and \$2.50 for children under 12, Free admission for children under six years old.

**Adeline Chia**