



Art League Houston Press Release  
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*The Rains, 2018*  
oil on canvas, 30 x 48 inches, Loan Courtesy of the Artist

## Liyen Chong *Houston Paintings*

Opening Reception: 6 – 9 PM Friday, March 22, 2019  
Exhibition Dates: March 22 – May 4, 2019  
Artist talk: 6:30 PM | Hallway Gallery

February 23, 2019. Houston, TX - Art League Houston (ALH) is proud to present *Houston Paintings*, by Liyen Chong. Chong's art practice spans a diverse range of media and practices, including embroidery with hair, photography, ceramics, graphic design and collaborative community works. In 2016, after moving to Houston from Auckland, New Zealand, repeated visits to local museum collections sparked her return to painting. Using photographic images from the book *Houston's Forgotten History*, Chong's paintings re-interpret the content of these historical images and tease out new relationships to the present through her use of color. Chong goes on to explore photographic images from other sources, including videos from YouTube and children's encyclopedias from the 1950s. Intrigued by the unique details of life in the images, she is



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simultaneously repelled by the books' patronizing captions, which used the images to legitimize a dominant view of other ethnicities, women, children, and animals. Chong's paintings employ the use of saturated color and meticulous techniques in a bid to tease out previously unnoticed details, to highlight the construction of the source images, or to emphasize the mythological or symbolic qualities that exist in the mundane. She uses color in a non-natural way to jolt the viewer out of taking what they see for granted.

These paintings follow a line of inquiry that allows for the instability of history, and that considers arrival in a new place in dialog with histories of colonization. In her painting of Margaret Mead and Fa'amotu, Chong is drawn to their sisterly relationship and the warmth of the original encounter, even as she questions the impulse underpinning Mead's research. Her painting of the John Henry Kirby natatorium, built in 1901, revisits a photograph taken in the space before one of the most elaborate weddings in Houston history. The space is decorated but empty, an elegiac reminder of a family's personal history and of the absent archives of other communities. There are complex forgotten interactions meshed into our collection of knowledge and the ways in which we connect to other histories and places. "Much like paintings that focus on the archive, such as the works of Luc Tuymans, my work functions as a re-evaluation of images, bringing audiences face to face with images from different contexts presented in a different scale and in a physical body, that of painting. I'm drawn to the content and composition of the images I choose to paint and as I'm making each painting, I think both about the internal logic of the image and the historical instability of its meaning," states Chong.

#### About the Artist

Liyen Chong received her MFA from the University of Canterbury in New Zealand and regularly exhibits in her adopted home country of New Zealand and abroad. Her works are included in prominent public and private collections in New Zealand and Australia, such as the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra, University of Canterbury Art Collection and the Chartwell Collection in New Zealand. She is the recipient of multiple artist residencies including the McCahon House Artists' Residency in New Zealand (2011), artist-in-residence programs at the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art Korea in Seoul, South Korea (2012), and Cemeti Art House in Yogyakarta, Indonesia (2015). In 2014, Chong was awarded a solo show surveying her work, at Papakura Art Gallery. She was born in Malaysia and moved to New Zealand as a youth, where she lived for the next two decades. Chong moved to Houston in 2016 after an extended period of travel.

#### Note:

This exhibition is accompanied by a handout with the artist's text on each painting, and a website with documentation of each work.

[www.houstonpaintings.website](http://www.houstonpaintings.website)

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



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For more information, visit [www.artleaguehouston.org](http://www.artleaguehouston.org), or contact Sarah Beth Wilson, Director of Exhibitions and Curatorial Projects, at [sarah@artleaguehouston.org](mailto:sarah@artleaguehouston.org) or 713-523-9530.

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