

An element of fun

Straits Times
August 19, 1992

IT HAS been seven years since Chong Fah Cheong held a solo exhibition, so the current show featuring about 20 sculptures is especially welcome.

The exhibition is interesting, disclosing continuities as well as pointing to new interests. For instance, Chong, who lives in Canada, uses materials from his new environment — the range of wood has been expanded to include hemlock, fir, spruce and cedar.

A revival of past conceptions is also discernible in two bronze figure compositions harking back to Chong's earliest sculptures in the mid-'70s when the human figure was dominant. Again *Daddy!* and *Study* are in effect three-dimensional sketches.

There are three other compositions cast in bronze. Of these, *Kacang Puteh* is the most intriguing. Eight objects are placed on a tiny table; the objects represent items of food and drink favoured by Chong, such as peanuts, a can of beer, chicken feet, fish head and cuttlefish.

Kacang Puteh is analogous to still-life in painting; domestic and food items are removed from their customary environments and given fresh attention. Chong invites the



Art

SCULPTURES IN WOOD,
STONE & BRONZE

By Chong Fah Cheong
La Salle School of Fine Arts
Saturday to next Thursday
10 am - 6 pm

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viewer to re-arrange the items to suit their interests. This notion of playfulness is vital to his sculptural conception.

It is through the process of carving that Chong realises his most accomplished compositions. "I find the process of carving as opposed to modelling more challenging. Carving allows me sufficient scope to expand my energies, especially in wood and stone."

His preference for carving reveals values he cherishes most in art. By carving, the sculpture chips and subtracts material; in doing so, shape and form are brought to the surface.

It is as if form and meaning have been hoarded in a block of stone or wood and, through the action of the sculptor, are now unfurled like the

open face of a flower.

Whereas carving propels forms outwards, modelling turns them inwards. Modelling does not disclose but contains; the modelled form embodies an inner life.

The power of externalisation is vitally important for Chong. Materials reveal their characteristics and structural properties in detail; forms are never fixed but are readily available for varied configurations. All these are crystallised in works such as *Blue Cigar*, *Essence Of Duck* and *There Were Four In A Boat*.

In *Blue Cigar*, four upright forms are perched on a fence. One of them has a cigar protruding from a hole and its horizontal thrust counters the prevailing verticality. The viewer is invited to rotate the forms, thereby changing their orientations.

Essence Of Duck is delightfully playful; the feet of the duck are shod in uneven shoes, heightening the sense of hilarity. Even as the composition can be read figuratively, it can also be viewed as interlocking forms in space.

The works in this show have been produced with consummate mastery of materials and processes entailed in carving. However, such dexterity does not detract from deeper insights into these works.