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Yan Wen Chang on Sandra Meigs

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The Mural

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Khong Yan Chong's painted mural on the walls of Pudu Prison, Kuala Lumpur, measuring 860ft. in length, now regarded as the longest mural in the world.

Hardly anything has ever been mentioned of the former inmate who painted the mural of the now demolished Pudu Prison.

Yesterday, the walls that once held the regal paintings of vivid scenes from an ex-convict's captive imagination of jungles and streams came tumbling down to make way for a wider road.

Pudu Prison was located in the heart of

Kuala Lumpur where its ugly brick wall spanning the perimeters of the prison became a constant reminder to everyone, especially those who visited the city as tourists, that Kuala Lumpur had a troubling crime problem, a corrupt government and shady police officers. Inside the prison was even more terrible, holding a severe overpopulation of inmates who had committed brutal crimes and

were left to die under inhumane conditions.

Last year, the UDA announced plans for a commercial and residential project to be built over the site, proposing the urgent demolition of the prison. On Friday, Pudu Prison was destroyed.

In 1984, Khong Yan Chong, a then inmate of Pudu Prison, was arbitrarily chosen by government officials to cover the exterior prison walls with paint in a feeble attempt to make the prison less of an eyesore. Khong who was completely untrained as an artist—let alone wall painter—had no choice but to comply with the officials' orders.

As Khong began undertaking this task, passerbys witnessed him spread across the walls a white emulsion. As weeks went on, earth-toned colours appeared panel by panel. Outlines appeared to be of tree trunks. As tree branches were painted in, passerbys could confirm that a jungle was emerging across the wall.

Khong, under close surveillance by an accompanied watchman, laid the intricacies of the mural with his bare fingers and hands in both slowness and solitude with whatever house paint that was supplied by the officials. Khong relied on his intuition and his fond memories of the rural landscapes that surrounded him in his formative life as he had no photographs to reference for his painting.

Khong used over 2000 liters of paint to create a remarkable mural of tropical scenes, including palm trees, beaches and mountains across the prison walls. The mural, measuring 860ft. in length, made the entry to the Guinness Book of World Records for the longest mural in the world.



Khong painted palm trees, beaches and mountains as part of his mural, memories of his formative life before prison.

It was a peculiar sight to behold when it was completed—a beautifully painted landscape of rural Malaysia right smack in the middle of the dusty city. The majority of passerbys were compelled by the mural as many of them would be reminded of their own upbringing in the countryside before relocating to the urban city for work.

The seemingly infinite jungle brought locals temporary amnesia from what was really behind the wall. The wall itself had been a physical barrier between the free world and a world full of relentless suffering in the prison. As the wall tumbled down on Friday at its demolition, Khong's mural collapsed into a pile of rubble. Finally, the two worlds collided.

Khong died two years ago. His daughter, Lee, was present during the day of the prison's demolition.

Lee, who carries the legacy of Khong with two children of her own, said, "How my father completed this mural under his extraordinary circumstances is beyond my own belief and comprehension.

Running my fingers on the surface of the mural, I never seem to reach the end of it. The mural documents the time passed during his sentence—the only constant throughout all his states of being while he was an inmate.

We move through life shifting from one being to the next. There is not one being, but beings. Being is how we show up in that particular moment in time, how we respond to the relationships we are engaged with and how they change us—temporarily or forever.

The mural was a document of the remarkable relationship my father had developed with painting, and in that state of being he made the best of life with whatever he had. Today at its demolition, we are reminded that every state of being is temporary."

There is little recorded about Khong's life except that Khong was not able to complete the mural as an inmate—he was released from Pudu Prison before he could finish. He later returned as a free man to complete his masterpiece.