

Kit-Ling Tjon Pian Gi

SELF-PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST SPEAKING IN THE THIRD PERSON

Portrait of the Artist as A Surinamese Woman

Kit-Ling Tjon Pian Gi was born in Suriname in the nineteen fifties, a multicultural society of Creoles, Chinese, Hindustani, Javanese, whites and many others. Kit-Ling's ethnic roots are mainly Chinese, being the daughter of a Chinese businessman. By the nineteen fifties Suriname was not a real colony any longer, but an autonomous part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, an idea formed by the spirit of decolonisation of those days. This special relationship with the Netherlands entailed sizeable development funds that were supposed to lead to a broader production base and higher levels of prosperity. The middle class, to which Kit-Ling's family belonged, flourished and enjoyed such privileges as being members of the private sports club 'Oase'. Kit Ling grew up in a carefree childhood in a suburb of Paramaribo where she pursued piano and ballet lessons. She effortlessly graduated from reputable Roman Catholic primary and secondary schools for girls.

She enrolled in the three-year *Algemene Middelbare School*, a university preparatory school, in 1969. At the time it was one of the premier educational institutions in Suriname as well as a stepping stone to foreign universities. This school greatly influenced Kit Ling's later life and imagination; freedom, creativity and liberal ideas finally seemed valued after years of well-behaved obedience in Catholic schools. Kit Ling enthusiastically joined in the various extracurricular activities and fondly remembers the school entertainment evenings of the AMS.

In the meantime, the Surinamese intellectual elite had embraced nationalism. The poet Dobru visited schools and his poem "*Wan bon, someni wiwiri...*(One tree, so many

leaves...)" became well known. One of the main exponents of this movement was the AMS principal, Ronald Venetiaan, who would later become president of the independent Republic of Suriname twice. The atmosphere of nationalism was also tangible at the AMS, in the idea of "studying in one's own country," And so, after graduation, Kit-Ling decided to stay in Suriname, in contrast to her siblings. But choices were limited; you could study to become a teacher, doctor or lawyer, but none of these careers appealed to her. Architect seemed like an interesting job, but then she would have had to study in Delft, in the Netherlands. Her eldest brother advised against that, because she was a woman and mostly men studied in Delft.

She has liked drawing ever since she could remember. In primary school, drawing lessons were the only ones she took seriously and followed with concentration. In advanced elementary and secondary school, the margins of her notebooks were always full of drawings. She kept drawing after school and she still remembers her youngest brother teaching her the rules of perspective. She therefore decided to make her hobby into a career and become an art teacher, just like Rudi Getrouw and Stuart Robles de Medina, who both trained to become art teachers but established themselves as artists in Paramaribo. She studied Art at the *Instituut voor de Opleiding van Leraren* (the advanced teacher training college), where students were taught as though in art school. The fact that you were expected to teach later was secondary. Among her teachers were Rudi Getrouw, Stuart Robles de Medina and Jules Chin A. Foeng, important names in the Surinamese art scene. She was the first graduate of the MO-A course but because of the lack of advanced training, she eventually decided to study for the MO-B level in the Netherlands after all.

In 1979 she returned to Suriname, which by now had been independent for four years. She started working in government service as an art teacher in a secondary school and her former training institute, the IOL. Kit Ling transferred to the *Project Curriculum Vernieuwing Basisonderwijs*, the department of the Ministry of Education charged with reform of the elementary school curriculum. There her team developed a new method for teaching drawing in elementary schools, which was also piloted in a number of schools under her direction. Then in 1980 a military coup put an end to parliamentary democracy in Suriname.

The new rulers, who claimed to be revolutionary reformers, lost any initial goodwill they had internationally as well as nationally when they murdered seventeen prominent citizens at the end of 1982. The people were shocked but effectively silenced for a while....

International aid to Suriname dried up, inflation reached record heights and many products grew scarce. Kit Ling set up a small toy business for which she designed the toys of wood and cloth. She helped her husband in the enterprise he started from his parents' house. Her son was born in 1984. Then in 1987, her husband, who was a general medical practitioner, wanted to go the Netherlands to specialise in occupational medicine. His family went along. Kit-Ling chose to stop teaching and to take up art professionally, having discovered that it was not possible to effectively combine the roles of teacher, wife, mother, homemaker as well as being an artist. In the Netherlands she became a free-lance illustrator for a publisher of educational books. She returned to Suriname with her son at the end of 1988, while her husband kept travelling up and down between Suriname and the Netherlands to finish his specialisation. From 1988 on, her main preoccupations were her family, including her mother, and the arts.

The *Federatie van Beeldende Kunstenaars* – Federation of Graphic Artists – was founded in Suriname in 1998, for which Kit Ling still is the secretary. In that role she helped organise various successful international exchange programmes.

In the meantime, her husband's restaurant business flourished and in 1997 a hotel was added. Kit-Ling adapted the lobby for exhibitions, to enable artists who work and live in Suriname to present their work. She publishes positive and informative articles in newspapers to increase the appreciation of Surinamese artists and their work.

The future looks bright for Kit-Ling. She has been invited to teach at the MO-B / Masters Course in Art & Culture. She has agreed, because it will be on a challenging subject that she can work out herself: the psychology of art. She mounted a large solo exhibition in 2004.

Portrait of the Artist In Her Art

Nature, women and multiculturalism are the main themes in the work of Kit-Ling Tjon Pian Gi. These themes became apparent in her solo exhibition of 1992 where

she presented images of dancing women in traditional costumes, vibrant landscapes, startled birds, Javanese ceremonies and other typical Surinamese views. The paintings were executed in oils, water-based paints and pencil, for Kit-Ling is not bound to any particular technique. She loves to experiment with materials as well as styles.

President Venetiaan, who opened the exhibition, recognized the graceful, fluid ballet of her high school period in her water colors and oil paintings. Her later work, studies of patterns from Maroon culture, shows that she is also able to paint in a more direct, rigid style.

Kit-Ling's work expresses her experiences, her thoughts, her view of life. She has a message, and this is most apparent when she combines poetry with painting. But when she uses visual images exclusively, there is often some surprising element that challenges the viewer to think.

Nature

“The Back Yard” (1992) is an intriguing painting of wild growth behind thick iron bars, very different from traditional landscape paintings. The jungle war and crime changed the nature of wild places in Suriname, making it inaccessible. The following poem she incorporated in a brightly coloured painting emanates the same kind of melancholy.

*a busi ben kenki
a ben kenki
so wan langa ten k'ba
wan dei mi sa las' pasi
ini a memre fu busi*

the rain forest has changed
it already changed
a long time ago
one day I'll be lost
in the memory of the rain forest

(translation: Monique Pool)

This is from a series of paintings that express her view of the relationship between man and nature in words and images. The poems arose spontaneously, complementing the images, and showing the intimate link between nature and humanity. In one of her paintings she writes:

firi a krakti fu son
yu yeye sa de
in den dei di
alen e fadon

feel the power of the sun
your soul will be there
in those moments
when rain falls

In other paintings she shows how man is part of nature, physically as well as spiritually, such as 'Wan Dren'(1994). The image of a woman sleeping in a fetal position reflects Kit-Ling's concern about pollution in Paramaribo. It is as though the woman lies buried in the earth, while on the ground there is garbage. She added this to the painting:

me ben dren wan dren
a dren no ben de wan dren

I had a dream
and it was no dream

(translation: Monique Pool)

Kit-Lings link with nature reflects her spiritual side. She wanted to take up hatha-yoga after ballet, but only at the end of 1997 was she able to find time for herself, without responsibilities to others.

After five years of yoga she says this: “Once, during a trip to the interior, I was sitting in a waterfall. ‘Are you meditating?’ a companion asked. ‘No’, I said. ‘I’m just observing nature’. When I had started yoga, I realized that I really had been meditating then. I only never knew it was called meditating.”

The paintings inspired by the poem ‘dare to dream’, are intentionally spiritual. Especially the painting “...to be....” reflects what she has learned from yoga: “Without breath one cannot live. By breathing one absorbs oxygen. Oxygen is produced by plants. Through them you live. You live, so you think. Meditation produces enlightened thought. This one can project into the cosmos.” The painting originated spontaneously from the subconscious, triggered by a poem. “The poem inspired many paintings. They all seem rather surreal.”

The same is true for her first experiments on wood. By meditating on the patterns of the wood, Kit-Ling allowed her subconscious to come to the fore. In her later work, the pattern of the wood governed the image less. She even sticks pieces of paper on the wood and keeps to a particular theme from folklore.

Nature also plays an important role in Kit-Ling’s personal life. When her father dies in 1997, her love of nature helps her cope. She makes a series of watery landscapes. Her father loved the black waters of Surinamese creeks and swamps. He often went fishing, and took the whole family to Republiek, a holiday resort along the Coropina Creek, every year. An old Creole resident of the plantation taught Kit-Ling to paddle a *korjaal*, a traditional dug-out canoe. When she was young she spent hours in the waters of the Coropina Creek. After her father’s death she automatically starts painting this creek. She becomes obsessed by the reflection of leaves in the water. The transition from object to reflection seemed as fluid as the transition from life to death. And in the same way the reflection of trees and plants in the water seemed clearer than the real thing, so death seemed more tangible at that time than life itself.

Her mourning ends with bright and lively paintings as a reaction to the dreamy landscapes, but nature and memories of youth keep playing a role, as in “Uncle Eddy Wessels’ ceiba tree”. Uncle Eddy Wessels used to live a short distance away, and had a large ceiba tree in his yard and he played classical music. The two mango trees in “The mango trees, my little sister is making a fire” were her father’s favorite trees. The fruit

were all picked by hand. Her youngest sister liked to play under these trees and get up to mischief, like playing with fire.

Women

The twentieth Surinamese Independence Day in 1995 was the reason for a large exhibition of Surinamese art in Surinamese Museum in the recently restored Fort Zeelandia in Paramaribo, as well as in the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. A full-color catalogue accompanied the exhibition. This exhibition contained no work by woman artists.

Were Surinamese women artists not considered good enough, or had they simply not been considered?

When Kit Ling asked about it, the organizers explained that they had only had a few months to prepare the exhibition.

Kit-Ling then realized that she had been sleeping in the earth, covered by dirt, just like the woman sleeping in her fetal position that she had painted the year before. Ideas about her own position as a woman, the position of women in general and the position of Surinamese women in particular, became new themes in her work.

“Piranhas and Women”, a series she had been working on at the time, took on a new meaning. The first reason for these paintings were the enormous logging concessions that had been issued to transnational logging companies. She compared the uncontrolled felling of trees to the construction of a hydroelectric dam in the 1960s, which caused a large area of jungle to be flooded. The inhabitants of that area were forced to leave their beautiful villages along the river. They were evacuated to new villages that resembled refugee camps. The original idea was that the hydroelectric lake could also function as a holiday destination for swimming, canoeing and waterskiing. Miami Beach along the lake never materialized, and the waters are infested with piranhas.

The women in the paintings originally represented Suriname. In the process of painting, the symbolic meaning was gradually lost, and to Kit-Ling they became actual women, remaining undisturbed, even though they are surrounded by piranhas.

More paintings followed:

- Just a little resistance, going up the stream
- Diving without water, it did not matter at all
- Hanging down the hill, an easy way of living

In these paintings Kit-Ling expresses the way she operates as a woman in Surinamese society, as she experienced it up to then. She lived life lithe and gracefully, jumping, ducking, balancing, hanging, enjoying nature in Suriname, and nothing was impossible.

Kit-Ling explains her approach to life in different ways. At the AMS she shared her class mainly with boys because of the subjects she had chosen: mathematics, chemistry and physics. When she studied art, the other students were also mostly men. Functioning in a male-dominated world thus became natural. In her time she was one of the few who chose to study in Suriname after finishing the AMS. The course was not doing well, and every year a substantial number of students dropped out. She was the first to graduate from the MO-A course, even before people who had been at it for years. This strengthened her ability to persevere. She learned to find a solution to any problem. As she said to a friend from Holland in the early 1990s, when there were widespread shortages: “If there is no crème fraîche, we use regular milk and some flour. If we can’t buy butter, we make it ourselves. And if we can’t make butter, we have custard instead of cake.”

The new theme, ‘women’, combines well with her earlier theme, ‘nature’. The link with nature remains visible and you can feel how the female figures are empowered by nature.

“Once upon a time, she was passing by...” and “Once upon a time, she was drifting by...” call to mind a fairytale atmosphere. The mermaid passes all the monsters, as though they were flowers. The mermaid stands for all Surinamese women.

Kit-Ling is of the opinion that Surinamese women, including herself, are able to survive all kinds of dangerous situations while remaining cheerful and optimistic, as if nothing has happened. She thinks that Surinamese women are strong women; she is proud of her sisters.

In 1998 she started experimenting with painting on massive wooden planks. Initially she tried to find images in the patterns of the wood, the way people do with clouds.

Many paintings of women stem from this period, showing the figures' character and emotional state:

- Free Spirit, woman with a free mind, happy in all situations
- Survivor, woman with the urge to survive
- Mai, a Hindustani woman burdened by the past
- Childless mothers, facial expressions of women who are mothers but who have no children (anymore). They might have lost their children through war.
- Angel on Earth, the innocent face of a young woman, ignorant of earthly suffering.
- Mother and Daughter, the modest mother who functions within a strict religious system and the daughter who is open to the challenging world.

In 2000 the catalogue accompanying the 1995 exhibition "Twenty years of visual arts in Suriname" was extended to become "Visual Arts in Suriname; The Twentieth Century". A number of women artists, such as Kit-Ling, were included in this book.

However, Kit-Ling found that the great bias against women artists in Suriname still existed. That book includes the following passage:

"Art gallery owner and art critic Carla Tuinfort is of the opinion that the women artists still don't dare to believe in their own dream. She finds their work inhibited, dreamy and not particularly daring with regard to expression. 'The women artists often have metaphysical themes. When you look at the vague shapes they create, it seems like they don't believe their own dream. The dream that they can be a real artists. I miss their statement.'"

This view is not far removed from conventional international ideas about women's art, such as can be found in the book *Women Artists* by Karen Petersen & J.J. Wilson. (1978) "The art world has traditionally ignored the issues of sex, class, and race at most acknowledging them as background or context. Moreover, it originally assumes that a single human norm exists, one that is universal, ahistorical and without sex, class or race identity, although in fact it is quite clearly male, upper-class, and white." (Lise Vogel, p.5)

In 1992 Kit-Ling said in an interview with Elvira Rijdsdijk, art critic of the daily newspaper *De Ware Tijd*: "If you really and truly want something as a woman, you must go ahead and do it. For the rest, just trust your own judgment. You can listen to criticism,

but if it is unfair, just ignore it. You can work with fair criticism.” Nine years later, in 2001, she writes the following commentary on her work which was included in the traveling exhibition “Between Lines”:

“Often people consider very ‘masculine’ features when judging whether an artwork is good or not. Words like ‘strong’, ‘powerful’ and ‘revolutionary’ are used to emphasize it is good. Being a woman, I want to create a work of art, very feminine, soft, lovely and peaceful. I do so, even when I am visualizing something that is very strong and shocking. For instance: In these works, I used traditional Maroon patterns of patchwork, and images of Maroon girls of a society destroyed by a civil war and Western culture.”

Using the geometric patterns of Maroon patchwork was part of a study of shapes and colors. The results of his research were not unique. Her paintings prompted a number of people to remark: “Oh, this is Mondriaan”. It annoyed her, but then she read the introduction to the book “Afro-American Arts of the Rainforest” van Sally and Richard Price, and realized that this reaction should not have surprised her. The Prices write: *“In spite of growing sophistication about arts, for example, of Africa or Oceania, many people have expressed surprise that Maroon woodcarving is not dominated by masks or fetish figures and that Maroon patchwork textiles (because of their geometric patterns and contrastive primary colors) remind them more of Mondriaan than of Abidjan.”*

“The results of my color research were also outdated,” she admits. She found that there were female and male colors. Pastels were mainly feminine and bright primary colors were more masculine. “The Chinese have known about feminine and masculine colors for centuries. I recently read that in a book about Feng Shui.” The reactions to the results of her research do seem to indicate a greater appreciation for masculine colors.

She is not too enthusiastic about the results of the research mentioned above, because she spent almost a year reinventing the wheel. Still, her work from this period was clearly appreciated by a part of the public of the 2000 National Art Fair.

The National Art Fair is an annual event that has grown to be a national art exhibition. School children visit the exhibition to write reports on artists and their work. In 2000 Kit-Ling made a little installation in her booth by stringing up a washing line with a Chinese cheongsam, a Javanese sarong, a Hindustani shawl and some baby clothes.

Asked about this, she said: “Before you can see a woman’s work, you need to peer through the washing on the line.”

She considers taking the aspect of womanhood to its extreme in her work, but loses interest when she realizes that this has already been done in Europe by a number of women artists. She decides to elaborate on a theme that has preoccupied her for years: multiethnic Suriname.

Out of Many Cultures, One People

Kit-Ling considers herself an artist from a multicultural society. Already in high school she was fascinated by the rich diversity of culture among the ethnic groups in Suriname. The poem ‘*Wan Bon*’ by Dobru made a deep impression on her.

Wan bon
Someni wiwiri
Wan bon

One tree
So many leaves
One tree

Wan liba
Someni krika
Ala e go na wan se

One river
So many creeks
All are going to one sea

Wan ede
Someni prakseri
Prakseri pe wan bun mus de

One head
So many thoughts
Thoughts among which one good one
Must be

Wan gado
Someni fasi fu anbegi
Ma wan papa

One god
So many ways of worshipping
But one father

Wan sranan
Someni wiwiri
Someni skin
Someni tongo
Wan pipel

One Suriname
So many hair types
So many skin colors
So many tongues
One people

(Translation: David Chericlan)

Before and after independence, up to the early 1980s, Dobru helped create a political climate in which the government stimulated Surinamese to get to know and appreciate each other's culture. Kit-Ling fully supported this idea.

Visiting the cultural shows that were organized by official institutions were not enough for her. She went to the field herself, to the *kampong*, where she experienced Surinamese Javanese popular theatre, and to Abrabroki, a poor area in the capital with a fairly large Maroon community at the time. She was introduced to their way of celebrating and their way of dancing. In the District of Wanica, with its Hindustani majority, she saw a chokra-danser for the first time during a simple Hindu wedding. Fascinated by this female impersonator, she made a dry needle sketch on a flattened butter tin. Her teacher Rudi Getrouw didn't much like this etch. He did not understand the subject of the male dancer dressed like a woman, and he didn't particularly care for the experimental use of a butter tin. Etching was done on copper or at least zinc. Disappointed, Kit-Ling avoided themes from folklore for a number of years.

Only around 1990, when she was asked to make prints for a calendar to be issued by the Rando Suriname furniture factory, did she take up the theme again. Her first calendar series shows facets of Javanese culture. Once more she became obsessed by the variety of culture in her country of birth.

Multiculturalism often raises the question of one's own identity. In Suriname Kit-Ling envisages the following process of identity formation:

1. The first generations (slaves, immigrants, colonists) bring traditional cultural expressions from their homeland to the new country.
2. The culture of those in power becomes superior and parts of the other groups conform to that culture.
3. This is followed by groups promoting the idea of 'back to the roots', who strive towards renewed appreciation of authentic culture.
4. Then there are groups that create something new. This might be:
 - a. A natural process of assimilation. Very often a mixture of different races and conscious or unconscious experimentation with different cultural elements.
 - b. Experimenting with different combinations of 1, 2 and 3.

- c. Awareness of another culture or different cultural aspects and wanting to be part of that because it is all part of one's country.

Kit-Ling places herself in group 4, particularly in 4c. She simply starts working with anything that she has observed in the area of cultural expression. But it is just like falling in love; once the first fascination with the look of things has passed, one starts looking for the deeper meaning, and then one finds true love or not.

In 1986 a war broke out in the interior of Suriname. Traditional authority among the relatively isolated tribes was disrupted by armed groups. One Maroon village was completely exterminated. Schools were shut down. Many disrupted families moved to Paramaribo, where ghettos arose.

Prior to the jungle war, Kit-Ling visited the interior regularly for her work or to enjoy nature. In 1984 children in the interior had regular drawing classes in school. Cultural education outside of school was a family matter. Traditional Maroon of Indigenous art was taught by fathers, grandfathers, uncles, brothers, grandmothers, mothers, aunts, sisters. To what extent was this still possible after the war? In the series, '*Pikin fu busi, pe yu de?*' (Children of the forest, where are you?) Kit-Ling wonders what became of the Maroon children. Remarkable is the image of Marietje eating fried noodles, indicating how Javanese culture in the form of eating *bami* has filtered through to Maroon children. Their isolation has been broken, they have become part of multicultural society.

After the war Kit-Ling decided to resume her trips to the interior. One of these was to the Indigenous village of Palumeu. The advert said: 'Get to know the oldest inhabitants of Suriname and their culture'. Once there, visitors were only allowed into a sectioned-off part of the village; the villagers were not keen on snooping tourists. They also refused to perform the dance that had been promised. However, they liked to play volleyball with the tourists. The trip was not a waste of money, because the rapids and the virgin Amazonian jungle were impressive. The Indigenous People were friendly. The children were particularly charming. For Kit-Ling, seeing the children in NBA t-shirts was a big eye-opener. But the best was the small details that revealed their traditional culture. A typical example was the hairstyles of a number of boys; they were modern hairstyles, but the patterns in the hairstyles were original. Just like there is no front or

back in their mythological cosmic figures, one could hardly see where adaptation to Western urban culture started and what remained of the old culture that is transmitted from generation to generation. And so the “*Pikin fu busi*” (Children of the forest) series about Indigenous children came to be.

“*Pikin fu busi*” was followed by “*Pikin fu foto*” (Children of the city). She observed different problems among urban children than those among the children of the interior. The influence of Western lifestyle was very great. Children watch TV the whole day, and see all kinds of B-films with lots of violence. There are bullies and peer-groups. In this series she uses mixed media with a lot of ripping and gluing, reconstituting torn elements to a whole. “True to life”, Kit-Ling says.

The search for identity is not typically Surinamese. In 2000 FVAS and Eject organized an international exchange program “Without Boundaries”. [Eject is itself an exchange program of 9 artists of different disciplines and from different countries. It was initiated by Ellen Ligteringen, a Dutch artist whose mother is Surinamese. The exchange program between Eject and FVAS arose from intensive e-mail correspondence between Ellen en Kit-Ling]

A cycle of lectures was part of the exchange program. Charlotte Elias, Director of CCA (Caribbean Contemporary Arts) and Kenwyn Crichlow of the University of the West Indies, Trinidad, were two important speakers. At the end of her presentation, Charlotte Elias asked the people in the auditorium:

“Do you as people feel that you belong to which region? Latin America, the Caribbean or the Netherlands?”

Kit-Ling’s answer to this question would be: “Surely not Latin American because we don’t speak Spanish, even though we are part of South America, geographically. We are a former Dutch colony, and that is clearly visible. We have a typically Caribbean history. Migration is important, as it is in all Caribbean countries. People come and go. Even our “original inhabitants”, the Indigenous Peoples, were nomads. Our ancestors came from everywhere. We have a huge diversity of cultures and ethnicity.”

The choice for cultural and/or multicultural themes has also influenced Kit-Ling’s opinion about the way works of art are judged: “My whole life I’ve heard that as a person

you need to be honest. In the Catholic schools I was on, you had to be honest and never lie. All my drawing teachers told me to be honest in my work. So I have always been honest and I hope to stay honest in the future. But during my whole career I have felt indirect but constant pressure not to be myself. I had to produce art of the great Western art world. I refuse to conform to that and not be myself.”

According to Kit-ling it is the owners of art galleries, art critics, art collectors, senior civil servants in ministries and directorates of Art and Culture, museum managers, managers of funds, who dominate thinking about art within the current art world. The highest people in this circuit, the managers of major international museums and donor organizations, assisted by curators, are actually the major artists, because they have the power to elevate work to the position of Art with a capital A. Generally, participants in the process of art listen to their opinion.

The Western art world generally treats all creative expression with any cultural-ethnic aspect as folk art or folklore and considers this less than Art. Even if a Maroon dancer would be better than a classically schooled ballet dancer with regard to talent and technique, what the ballet dancer does would be considered art over that of the Maroon dancer.

In the book “Afro-American Arts of the Rainforest” by Sally and Richard Price there is an interesting passage about Bonno Thoden van Velzen who wanted to take the exhibition with the same name “Afro-American Arts of the Rainforest”, which had toured various museums in the USA, to the Netherlands: “...although major Dutch museums repeatedly rejected the idea of presenting arts from their former colony as “art” rather than as ethnographica or political statement, Bonno never tired ...”

Art with a capital A cannot be functional. As soon as a work of art acquires anything else than a purely esthetic function, it is no longer Art and is looked down upon in the great art circles.

Sometimes Maria Sibylla Meriam (1647-1717), P.J. Benoit (1782-1854) and Gerrit Schouten (1779-1839) are considered artists, but sometimes they are rather scornfully called illustrators. Maria Sibylla Meriam (1647-1717) from Germany and P.J. Benoit (1782-1854) from Belgium lived and worked in Suriname for a short while, and published beautifully illustrated books. Their work mainly showed images from the natural world and daily life in Suriname. Gerrit Schouten (1779-1839) was a mullatto who was born in

Suriname and lived there is whole life. He was internationally renowned for his beautiful botanical illustrations and dioramas.

Kit-Ling struggles against the idea of elitist art. Her statement: Art is more than a painting on the wall or a sculpture in a hall. Art should be more part of our daily life. "Art is life" and "Life is Art". This position is the basis for her work, whether it is a painting, an illustration for a calendar or a postage stamp.

Since the end of 2002, cultural and ethnic diversity has become the driving theme for Kit-Ling. It is a broad theme. How can one possibly explore such an extensive subject in depth? The answer came the moment she actually started thinking about it. Her old interest, dance, would enable her to penetrate the essence of the various cultures. Kit-Ling has taken up ballet again since the first half of 2003, and has now also started kathak classes at the Cultural Center of the Indian embassy. She has no idea what the final result might be, but she is convinced that this is the right way to try to make her vision of multiculturalism profound, a vision that will guide the production of intercultural art.