



Cheong Soo Pieng

LARASATI AUCTIONEERS

SUNDAY, 21 JUNE 2026

Devotion

Shown alone in a reflective moment, a young woman kneels in front of the entrance to Goa Gajah (Elephant Cave), one of the most recognisable of the numerous *pura* (temples) in Bali. It is an 11th century Hindu-Buddhist complex in the village of Bedulu near Ubud that Cheong Soo Pieng probably saw during his second documented trip to the island in 1977. He faithfully renders the face of Bhoma, the Hindu deity of forests, plants and the earth carved into the rock, who guards the sacred space.

The name of the man-made cave may have come from the ancient statue of the elephant-headed Hindu god Ganesh inside the entrance, or the river known in the 1365 narrative poem *Deśawarnana* (Description of the Country) as *Lwa Gajah* (Elephant River), written in Old Javanese during the Hindu-Buddhist Majapahit empire (1292-1527). Soo Pieng does not show us the sacred bathing pools and carved nymphs spouting holy water that were rediscovered in 1954 as the site descends into a ravine. Instead, he focuses attention on the foregrounded woman almost devoured by Bhoma's mouth and framed by the hibiscus arching above her.

We look at her and wonder why she is away from the crowd. We know that there must have been communal festivities at the site soon beforehand. The clue is the *Pagoda Gebogan*, an offering that local women make in preparation for large temple celebrations. They might be made for Odalan, a ceremony marking the anniversary of the temple every 210 days in the Balinese *Pawukon* calendar. It symbolises gratitude to the gods and invites them down from their sacred space on Mount Meru. Or the offerings might be made for Galungan, celebrating the triumph of good over evil, or for Kuningan, when the deities return to the celestial space. *Pagoda Gebogan* consists of a pedestal of brass or wood upon which a tower of fruit is built using skewers, topped with a *Canang Sari* (crown) of folded palm leaves and blossoms. Sometimes, as Soo Pieng shows us here, painted representations of the pagoda roof of the temple are added to the main body of the structure.

The Odalan, Galungan and Kuningan festivities are generally large events. In the young woman's solitude there is a spiritual connotation of what is absent: the beats of the *kulkul* (log drums) that signal the start of the ceremonies; the gongs and gamelan music, prayers, chants; the whiff of incense from inside the temple, the scent of body and hair oils, and cooking aromas from the stalls.

Perhaps she is thinking about the meaning of the festival – her origins and the delicate balance of the universe – or maybe she is caught in her own worldly cares. Either way, she embodies the purpose of Goa Gajah as a sanctuary and meditative space.

Soo Pieng presents us with an archetypal Balinese woman in his late style: the doll-like form, exaggerated facial features, the mix of precise and loose brushwork in shades of black, highlighted with a few dashes of colour. She wears a sarong of Balinese batik, which has been stamped in a regular pattern of *Patra Sari* – lotus within a mandala-like geometric form. These are interspersed with scattering of four- and five-petalled frangipani blossoms.



CHEONG SOO PIENG
(1917 - 1983, Singaporean)

Devotion

Painted in 1977; ink and colour on silk; 96 x 71 cm
signed in Chinese characters on the middle left; signed in English on the reverse

S\$ 85,000 - 125,000

Provenance: From the estate of the artist



In keeping with Balinese stamped batik traditions, the sarong is made of two colours – the natural buttermilk colour of the cloth and indigo dyestuff. More frangipani blossoms are in her hair and a shallow basket, with buds strewn around her knees. Her yellow sash, another indicator of the temple ceremonials, contrasts with her red top. This is more informal than the *kebaya*, a modest white blouse that would be worn at the height of the ceremonies. This is consistent with the moment Soo Pieng has imagined here: a quiet period of introspection in the wake of a lively community festival.

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LARASATI AUCTIONEERS

Sunday, 21 June 2026
starting at
4.30 pm (Singapore)/3.30 pm (Jakarta)

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