The Return of Mr. Chee
A New Exhibit Celebrates an Artistic Icon

"It's a Chee."

For most Duluthians, that
simple phrase immediately calls
to mind soft scenes of the city's
waterfront, stunning swirls of colorful
koi or, for many, the thought-
provoking picture book Old Turtle.

For half a century, artist Cheng-
Khee Chee and his wife, Sing-Bee
Chuee, have called Duluth home, and
we tend to think of him as "our"
artist. But the University of Minnesota
Duluth professor emeritus has lived in
Minneapolis and Singapore, too. His
talent and knowledge also is widely
traveled and he's done workshops
around the world.

The artist himself, a naturalized
U.S. citizen, considers Duluth home.
"I've lived here for 50 years,
longer than anywhere else," he says,
then adds his signature chuckle: "Of
course it's longer! Otherwise I'd have
to be over 100!"

While prints of his work are
available at art galleries in the region, it
has been 33 years since the last solo
exhibit of his paintings in the Tweed
and more than a decade since his last
solo exhibit in Duluth, at the North

That changes in May when the
Tweed Museum of Art on the UMD
campus will present "The Way of
Cheng-Khee Chee: Paintings 1974-
2014." The exhibit features 40
paintings spanning 40 years.

The artist describes his
work, like his life, as a blend of
Asian and Western influences.
He explains that his
revolutionary Saturated Wet
Paper Process "allows artists
upmost flexibility in taking
out or adding on colors freely,"
rare in watercolors. For any
painting, the artist/teacher
insists, "If you want to paint
anything, you have to study it,
have feeling toward it.
Without feelings, then why do
you bother to paint it?"

From May 12 to September 20,
visitors to the Tweed will be able to
see this artist's passion for his varied
subjects and for his "home" town.
-Konnie LeMay

Tweed Museum of Art, UMD, 1201
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www.d.umn.edu/tma.
Find an extended profile of Cheng-