

JIMMY ONG

1964, SINGAPORE –

VENUS ASCENDING WITH THE MOON (1998)

charcoal on paper, 150 x 150 cm



While Jimmy Ong's practice extends to painting in oil, drawing in the medium of charcoal has been for Ong the favoured mode of art making. In this regard, he has sustained a practice in still-life and figure drawing over two decades. For Ong, still-life drawing is a meditative and skill-honing practice that opens up possibilities for expressions of poetic sensibilities. Conversely, he regards his figure drawings as visual "prose" to which he appends allegorical narratives and reflections on personal memory, the human condition and interpersonal relationships.

Venus Ascending with The Moon belongs to the later category in Ong's practice. The drawing can be interpreted as an allegory of narcissistic self-absorption as the female figure turns her gaze onto herself and appears to admire her reflection. But it is equally plausible that her inward gaze proceeds from a longing for self-knowledge and self-affirmation. Her robust form defies contemporary notions of beauty, and while this may invite issues pertaining to the impact of social conventions on women's sense of identity, Ong's figures, male and female, are built after Rembrandt's own robust forms.