SINGAPORE: Chinese ink painter and Cultural Medallion winner Chua Ek Kay has died at the age of 61.

He was entertaining friends who had visited for the Lunar New Year when his nose started to bleed. He soon lost consciousness and passed away at home on Saturday.

Mr Chua's family said he was diagnosed with nose cancer about three years ago and was given the 'all clear' after getting treatment.

However, he had his first episode of nose bleed last month and was hospitalised for two days.

His brother, Felix Chua, said: "It took everybody by surprise because every one of us was looking forward to his recovery. We are from a big family, and we looked upon him as our elder brother."

The prominent artist had been hailed as a bridge between Asian and Western Art.

He trained under master ink painter Fang Chang Tien of the Shanghai School but later developed a keen interest in Western art.

However, Chinese cultural influences continued to be very much a part of his daily life and art.

Mr Chua received the Cultural Medallion in 1999 and held solo exhibitions in Singapore, Shanghai and Sydney.

Some of his paintings are on display at the Prime Minister's Office and the Singapore Management University.

His sudden death comes as a shock to family and friends.

Daniel Chua, Singapore Jiyang Cai Clan Association, said: "We were supposed to meet again after Chinese New Year to catch up and to celebrate the anniversary of our clan. He had graciously agreed to help us design the cover."

Mr Chua's family said his wake would be held for seven days to accommodate the schedule of relatives from Hong Kong and China who are expected to fly in over the next few days. He will be cremated at Mandai Crematorium on Thursday.

He leaves behind his wife, Madam Chua Yang Kew, and son, Benson.

- CNA/so