AT 74, PROFESSOR ARTHUR LIM IS a legend in his own right. Most would know him as a revered ophthalmologist, generous philanthropist and respected artist. The founding father of the Singapore National Eye Centre is the proud recipient of the Public Service Star and Public Service Star Bar award, bestowed on him by the Singapore government for his medical contributions.

Now Prof Lim shows his works at "Arthur's Socio-political Art" exhibition. This solo exhibition will feature 32 works — each reflecting his thoughts on the socio-political scene in Singapore over the past 20 years. "This exhibition is being held 10 years after my last one in Paris. When the Singapore Management University approached me, I was reluctant. There are so many art exhibitions out there and I wanted to have something which is interesting and appealing. I gave it some thought and decided on a socio-political theme. I have always been interested in such issues and am very much in touch with political people. The ex-Prime Minister of Malaysia, Mahathir Mohamad, sent me a note this morning in response to the card I sent him," Prof Lim explained with a smile.

His socio-political collection is a series of thought-provoking works brilliantly composed and beautifully painted. One of the featured works, Generation Gap, is a painting which highlights the importance of the younger generation expressing their socio-political thoughts. "I think it is important for them to be vocal. Young people have their own ideas and the future depends on what these young people feel. The older generation should have their say but should not dominate." Also on display will be portraits of political figures like Lee Kuan Yew and David Marshall and political artworks such as Sterile City and Caution.

His decision to produce works with a socio-political theme in Singapore surprised many. Foreign art lovers and diplomats including the American ambassador commented that Prof Lim was the only artist in Asia who dared to paint political paintings including the one of Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew. In his book Say What Should Be Said Prof Lim explained that he initially wrote, "He was concerned, he was dedicated and determined", about SM Lee as a commentary to his painting. "Most people agreed that was what it portrayed. But then I felt I shouldn’t, So I didn’t. He has made tremendous contributions to Singapore. Not only Singapore, but also the world. He’s got a brain that is superior to most people. And, I think the world will remember that. Of course not everyone agrees with everything he has done. But who in the world — Napoleon, Abraham Lincoln — they all had their little... what David Marshall called 'pimples'. I think Lee Kuan Yew has his pimples too." However, he is careful in his art. "You mustn'
annoy people too much. It would be very wrong if people dare not speak up, the city becomes sterile. A country will die if people are not able to say what is true. They should, of course, speak within reason."

Apart from being an artist himself Prof Lim is an avid collector of art and was once listed in Art International as one of the world's reputed art collectors. He has an art collection of 800 pieces made up of watercolours and oils by western artists as well as traditional Chinese paintings. Most of the paintings are kept in a warehouse while some are displayed prominently at his eye clinic at Gleneagles Hospital, in his home. The more valuable paintings are stored in a safe. "Almost all the pieces I buy go up in value. I am lucky because I also paint myself. I have an eye for picking out what's important and people agree with me. I choose pieces which are attractive and tell a story."

During his first 10 years of collecting art, Prof Lim made it a point to follow the advice of his good friend, the renowned surgeon and local artist, the late Earl Lu. "I did not buy anything without consulting him. Nothing I bought was over $1,000. A lot of people want to collect art because they want to make money. That is not altogether correct. If they want to collect art, they should study art and understand art," Prof Lim said with passion in his eyes.

It is for this reason that SMU president Howard Hunter is extremely proud to host Prof Lim's exhibition at the university. He says, "Presenting quality art exhibits and programmes is one way we seek to encourage greater understanding of societies and cultures and to expose our students to different ways of perceiving reality. We are, therefore, delighted to present Prof Lim's rarely seen but very meaningful works."

Arthur's Social-political Art Exhibition will be held at SMU from Feb 20 to March 9.