Minister, NAC pay tribute to late artist

THE Minister for Information, Communications and the Arts and the National Arts Council (NAC) have paid tribute to the late artist Chua Ek Kay.

Chua, a 1999 Cultural Medallion recipient, died suddenly last week at age 61 after suffering a nose bleed. He had been battling nasal cancer that was diagnosed in 2004.

Minister Lee Boon Yang, who attended the wake on Monday night, said he had known Chua since 2003.

He said: “It’s a huge loss to the arts community in Singapore to lose one of our most successful and respected artists at such a young age. Ek Kay has developed a unique style of his own. When one looks at his paintings, one is reminded how a simple approach to life can translate into something powerful.

“I find his paintings particularly interesting in the way he injects so much passion and emotion into a minimalist landscape. We understand the family is also grieved by his sudden departure and we offer our deepest condolences.”

Chua was a renowned artist who painted in Chinese ink, although he also started working in oils recently.

He became a full-time artist in his late 30s, winning the grand prize in the UOB Painting of the Year competition in 1991. He also served as a council member at the NAC from 2002 to 2004 and served on the Council’s Arts Resource Panel, as well as an arts advisor.

In a letter dated Feb 12 to his widow Tshiau Yi, NAC chairman Edmund Cheng wrote: “With Chua’s passing, Singapore has lost a great artist and a towering talent.”

In his letter, which was released to the media, he described Chua as an accomplished artist in contemporary Chinese ink painting who created an original style that captured the fine tradition of Chinese painting and the influences of modern Western art.

He added: “Through his passion and dedication to his craft and his engaging teaching at the local universities and arts institutions, Ek Kay inspired many budding artists.”

Mr Cheng noted that the artist did not let his illness hold him back.

Chua held a retrospective exhibition of his renowned street scenes at Singapore Management University Gallery last August and exhibited work in four exhibitions from August to October last year. He even found time to venture into a new medium – printmaking – creating 50 prints at the Singapore Tyler Print Institute at the end of last year.

Mr Cheng said: “To his friends and fellow artists, Ek Kay was a man of few words, and was always respected for his quiet confidence and humility despite his outstanding international success. Ek Kay was an exemplary artist who had left us at his peak.”