

THE PLIGHT OF OUR LOCAL ARTISTS



Local works of art in buildings not only enhance the beauty of their surroundings but add prestige and cultural value.

By GRACE FOO

KUALA LUMPUR: It begins like a romantic venture. First, he flirts with the cultural heritage of the country, then he invokes a dream which then becomes a vision transmitted onto canvas.

This is the artist's romance with his country and when he has successfully completed his art, it remains not only a personal but a national achievement.

Characterised in the works of art of the young Malaysian artists, whose growing preoccupation with localised subjects has injected a renaissance spirit into the Malaysian art scene.

Captured on canvas are such scenes as the ubiquitous crowds of Klang, a boy eating a durian, and even the national flag juxtaposed against the figure of a woman blowing a flute.

Malaysian history has also come alive and a local artist, Syed Thajudeen, will soon unveil his series of paintings of the Golden Age of the Malacca Sultanate.

Yet, the talent of our young artists is still not recognised and there is no final realisation of their art. Many then venture into the commercial art field for "that is where the money is."



Syed Thajudeen at work "... bringing out Malaysia's past glories."

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"If given the choice," said Ooi Cheng Kheek, a local artist, "we would not go into the commercial line. We are realistic enough to know that we have to live and we need money to purchase materials to pursue our own art forms."

Ooi Cheng Kheek, who is only 22 years old, has just graduated from the Malaysian Institute of Art and is already disillusioned by the lack of support for local artists in the country.

Yet Malaysian art has

been recognised overseas. As early as the sixties, an international art critic from New York commented that Malaysia will be the country to watch in the field of visual art.

"We are now in the late seventies," said Encik Ahmad Jamal, a lecturer in Fine Arts in the University of Malaya, "and we still have not created an atmosphere congenial enough to nurture the productivity of

our artists."

What is needed, he said, are more concrete plans, financial support not only from the Government but also the private sector. "They can," he continued, "commission the local artists to do works for buildings, which not only enhance the beauty of the building but adds prestige and cultural value, injecting an element of interest and vitality into

the surroundings."

An interesting aspect is the gallery system, which was experimented with in the West. It has been proved that art galleries can successfully promote local talent, not only by displaying their works but also by adopting a marketing strategy.

Until something positive is done, most of our young talent will have to live with their disappointments. People like Syed Thajudeen, who remembers the time when he spent over \$1,000 to set up his own exhibition in Penang only to find that not one of his paintings was sold.

"I have participated in five exhibitions throughout the country," he said, "but the results have been very disappointing. It's not just because I could hardly sell my paintings, but more important, the lack of appreciation from Malaysians for their own local art."

It is sad that Malaysians are more aware of artists from the west like Picasso than our own local artists, who have since stopped aping the west, to create a national image.



Malaysian scenes captured on canvas.

Goodbye to the old-style grans

THE traditional British granny is changing her old-fashioned image.

Out is the gran who likes baby-sitting and spoiling her grandchildren with gifts. In is the busy, independent granny with a life of her own.

Researcher Joan Robertson spoke to several hundred grans and found there are four basic types:

BUSY grans who adore outings, bridge parties and having their hair done.

Such grans indulge their grandchildren, but do not spoil them.

SERIOUS grans, who interfere in bringing up grandchildren, are less popular. Their main worry is seeing the children are brought up well.

LONELY grans are in the minority.

REMOTE grans — more than a quarter of all grans in the survey were in this group — appeared "indifferent" to their grandchildren.

Although most enjoyed being a gran more than being a mum, one-fifth felt unhappy or too old to be much use.

The survey was part of a social work report for a conference on old age.

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