

SYED Thajudeen, 43, weaves colourful narratives with threads of folklore, fantasy, surrealism and flashes of history and personal experience.

Syed, the first resident-artist to a bank, the United Asian Bank Berhad, has his artistic roots spread in four cultures — the Bauhaus art of Paul Klee, the miniature paintings of Persian and Indian artists and Malaysia.

Syed, who works from his studio in his Petaling Jaya home, has two trends running through his works — the depiction of scenes from Indian epics, and the exposition of personal philosophical views on a wide range of issues, among them nationalism and conservation of the environment.

Syed's favourite medi-

um is oil — Winsor and Newton and Rowney in an assortment of colours, Liquitex acrylic for gold.

In all the oils, the background is painted and allowed to dry for a fortnight before glazes are added on for the various motifs.

The *Ramayana Series* (started in 1972) and *Malacca Series* (begun in 1975) are his efforts at monumental pictorial narrative.

The *Ramayana Series*, which depict works like *Rama Hunting The Deer* and *Hanuman's Visit To India*, are masterly mural-like attempts.

They are enriched by textural effects inspired by the moss growing on the Ajanta wall-paintings.

In the *Malacca Series*, Syed shows the Malacca

From Bauhaus to his house

Sultanate from the period of Parameswara. Syed hopes such efforts as *The Beginning*, *The Golden Age of Malacca Sultanate* and *The Advent of Islam*, would generate appreciation of the nation's historical and cultural heritage.

Of his various miniature releases, he said they "are my attempts to know myself — how I feel about life, events and the environment and the unknown frontiers.

"I call these paintings miniatures not because they are small but rather in terms of style. They are stylised and inspired by Indian and Persian types of miniature paintings and are often based on local themes," he said.

An example of this style is *Lady and Flag*, showing a woman playing a flute with the Malaysian flag in the background.

It is his statement on the spirit and joy of nationalism and patriotism in the light of Merdeka.

Syed is also fascinated by Islamic themes. *Ramadan* is a product of this and he is working on various aspects and concepts of romanticism.



Syed Thajudeen with 'The Landscape', one of his works in oil

He is also working on a series, *Journey Into The Unknown*, in which he questions human origin, life on earth and human destiny.

Syed is probably the only Malaysian artist of national repute to be trained in India and as such his life and art are intimately linked with

both India and Malaysia.

Born in Alagan Kulen, a hamlet 64km from Madurai in Tamil Nadu, Syed joined his family in Penang when he was 11 years old.

He returned to India in 1967, intending to pursue a course in engineering or medicine, but was sidetracked into art instead.

"Madurai is a city full of temples and festivals. Every weekend, I would explore the temples and other places of interest and I became so fascinated by the art and culture there that I asked myself: 'Why not study Indian art?'"

He graduated from the College of Art and Crafts



in Madras in 1974. He also travelled extensively in India, familiarising himself with the ancient cities, caves, temples and monuments.

Syed returned to Malaysia in 1974, painted passionately and participated in shows organised by the National Art Gallery.

He also held two solo shows in 1975, one at the Penang Museum Art Gallery, and the other at Samat Art Gallery in Kuala Lumpur.

Syed worked for a spell as a part-time lecturer at Mara's School of Art and Design, and was appointed resident-artist to the bank in 1977, allowing him to pursue his art and be financially secure.

Several of Syed Thajudeen's oil-paintings are currently on display in the permanent collection of the National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur.

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