



FROM THE HEART ... A few of his all-monochrome line drawings reproduced in the 2001 desk calendar of Bumiputra-Commerce Bank

Art messiah of love

SYED THAJUDEEN'S canvases are virtually sacraments of love, of the intimacy and bond between man and woman, and between woman and her arcadian world, her natural affinity with it.

Love oozes ecstatically from every pore and pigment of the lush golden, orangey hues enveloping his paeans to one of the greatest joys of life.

So incorrigibly romantic, the narratives are mostly stylised maidens in embrace or exhilarating togetherness with their paramours.

Either in the privacy at home, framed by antiquated casements of louvered windows and trellised bays, or in the wild open where the horizon is neutralised.

On this plane, all creatures that fly and swim and walk meet on one common ground.

His works evoke the lyrical strains of Adrienne de Merpres Le Mayeur's — the sunbleached finish and the bevy of coy women, but often singly with a purity of spirit and purpose, and a charming aureole of innocence.

When alone, longing with chaste fortitude for her lover, the woman protagonist is rapt in her thoughts, cocooned in the paradisaical Garden of Eden where peacocks (and swans) glide by, cattle roam, fishes frolic, birds flit by, and a deer or two scamper by.

The viewer is like a voyeur privy to this intimate drama of coquetry.

Sometimes, the maidens emerge as water nymphs having a noctur-

Artist Syed Thajudeen's works literally ooze with love. This emphasis, he tells OOI KOK CHUEN, is to drive home the message to the younger generation that they should never lose that loving feeling.

nal dip or as court ladies fingering musical chords that send silent stirrings to our soul (notably the frieze "Irama dan Lagu", 14x6 feet, collection of Singapore Art Museum).

They are what he calls his "heroines," the unsung solace and soft touch that has come to mean tenderness, and love.

It's such a joyous idealised realm, a celebration of life with imagery so reminiscent of the mock magical world of Marc Chagall, but more pastoral.

The sacred shape of the dome, the use of sinuous contours for the figures, the stylised depictions of eyes (wavy slit and sometimes with eyeballs) and puckered lips like an inviting floral bloom awaiting pollination, the upraised cow-like shoulders, and the luscious bleeding "transparent" burnished colours with cotton-puff glows of pink and green...

He also borrows from batik motifs and blends the composition with other "indigenous" elements. There are also symbolic sprinkles of lotus, water-lily, and banana plants like the phallic linga, auspicious fish, heavenly birds.

Syed Thajudeen's alchemy of colours evokes serenity and softness — the kind so reminiscent of the Ajanta cave murals, in which he researched all 32 caves during his student days at the Madras

College of Art (post-diploma) in India.

(It was in India that Syed Thajudeen was attracted by the miniatures of Rajasthan and the Mughals, and the temples, palaces and monuments.)

It's thus not surprising that his moss-growth veneer is influenced by the Ajan'a relics, following a darker, saltish tinge.

Major works of this "dark period" are his nine-panelled Ramayana series (his largest, measuring 27x5 feet), which he started in 1972, and the mock-epic Malacca Sultanate series started in 1975 ("Founding of Malacca" and "Advent of Islam", both in three panels) — a year after he returned from his studies.

It was not until the mid-1980s that his oeuvre evolved into much brighter hues.

His colours and the way they are rendered — in his usual ponderous, loving style — seem designed to seduce one visually, then slowly overwhelms your senses and lulls you into a stupor, mellows your frayed nerves, and triggers a forgotten chord deep in your human spirit. It helps you think, and relearn, the meaning of friendship, camaraderie and love.

For more than one-and-a-half decades, Syed Thajudeen has passionately been spreading this universal message of love, something

that seems more trivialised in this Internet age.

His latest body of works, all-monochrome line drawings from the heart from original 52x35cm formats, are reproduced in the 2001 desk calendar of Bumiputra-Commerce Bank, where the 57-year-old works as a resident artist.

"Joy Of Being Together", "Joy Of Love", "Garden Of Paradise", "Longing For Love", "The Kiss", "Mother and Child", "Couch of Love", "Waiting For The Lover", "Joyful Ride" — such are the titles that capture the rubric of his commitment.

Apart from the artistic merit, these graceful and gently done insights into human relationships should be a balm to rejoice, refresh and re-energise the ill to build on or repair human links.

His paintings are about the eternal beauty and joy of love. If sometimes, the figures are rendered half-naked from the waist up, it jells with the theme.

"My paintings are very simple. The world is changing very fast, we are becoming very computerised, moving and running ahead. (I fear) the next generation will lose that sensibility of love and feelings.

"That is why I emphasise on love, on feelings towards each other human being. Without love, there is no productivity," he said.

"Love is like yoga. You won't get

tired, but it's good for blood circulation, for the heart. With the right approach to love-making and with the right meditation and prayers, one can also get good children."

This wholesome message of love is inspired by the Kamasutra, the ancient 4th-century treatise on love and sexuality, but given a sentimental twist and a U-rating by Syed Thajudeen.

Yet, sometimes his best intentions get misinterpreted by the narrow-minded, who see a Mapplethorpe/Anais Nin instead of a Weston/D.H. Lawrence in his thematic thrust.

They also forget that Syed Thajudeen has also done one religious series entitled "Prayers".

Even when in one work, a diptych dealing with the pregrinations of spermatozoic squiggles called "Journey Into The Unknown" (11x9 feet), which is one of his three works in the collection of the Singapore Art Museum, it is about the origins of life, questioning human origin, life on earth and human destiny rather than a crass biological interpretation.

Another major work, "Merdeka", which is shown in the Rupa exhibition both in London and the expanded Kuala Lumpur version, records the historic birth of a new multi-racial nation with Tunku Abdul Rahman taking centrestage.

One thing's certain, this messiah of love will keep on his passionate marathon run, on his canvas, extolling the art of love, and love on art.

Syed Thajudeen can be contacted at 012-3910739.



VISUALLY SEDUCTIVE ... One of Syed Thajudeen's works



AT THE CANVAS ... Syed Thajudeen's alchemy of colours evokes serenity and softness