

YEAR-END ROUNDUP — Art

Reflections

OOI KOK CHUEN looks at what has passed through our halls given to art this year.

BOLD AND BEAUTIFUL: Juhari Mohd Said with his printmaking art piece 'Untitled No.4'



ART sales are slow, yet activities remain frenzied with many commercial galleries still being opened. A strange case of Malaysian art-nomics? Maybe, to paraphrase Emile Zola, when "truth (creativity) is on the march, and nothing shall stop it."

Apart from some solo milestones, there were a few other events that were pretty significant but passed by with a conspicuous lack of fanfare.

One was the LNAEP, the first leg of the Ulu Langat Noko Art Exchange Programme, held on artist/printmaker Juhari Muhammad Said's 0.9-hectare kampung home studio at Batu 15 Ulu Langat. The open-air art "exposition" featured local and (seven) Japanese artists creating artworks and installations on the grounds.

It was tagged Selangor's first "art tourism" site. Run on a shoestring budget, kampung folk in the vicinity were even invited for a look-see of how art and the environment could come together in harmony.

The second instalment is scheduled for next year at Nokonoshima, an island off Fukuoka, Japan.

Then, there was the cobbled Chow Kit Festival "of visual arts, performances, music, films and videos", which had more promise than substance.

Also, we have a "new" eight-storey building at Lorong Medan Tuanku in Kuala Lumpur which has suddenly become a new "Middle Kingdom" of art — the Kuala Lumpur College of Art has relocated there. The pioneering art college established by artist/potter Cheah Yew Saik has been "re-invented" into a boutique-style all-in-one education centre.

The year saw the death of two art titans — the painter/calligrapher priest Reverend Datuk Zhumo (Chuk Mor) and pioneer cartoonist "Raja Kartun" Rejabhad.

Zhumo, who died on Feb 5 aged 89, set up the Triple Wisdom Hall (Jalan Pangkor, Penang) and the Malaysian Buddhist Institute, and amalgamated the disparate Mahayana Buddhist groups under the Malaysian Buddhist Association.

His espousal of the Lingnan style of painting was nurtured by Gao Jian Fu (1879-1951) himself, one of the three Lingnan Masters.

Rejabhad, who died at the age of 63, is noted for his *Perwira Mat Gila*, and his *Tan Tin Tun series in Utusan Malaysia*.

Pioneer Singapore art educationist/sculptor Brother Joseph McNally, the man behind La Salle Art College and had a short stint in Kuala Lumpur's St Johns, died at the age of 79.

Her Presence In Colours — Penang Chapter, which featured women artists such as 27-year-old Jane Yap and 73-year-old Tulsu S. Nayar showed at the Penang State Art Gallery before moving to Sheffield, England. Also making a huge presence in Britain was Wong Hoy Cheong, 42, who had a mini-retrospective tour of sorts in Liverpool, London, Nottingham and Southampton.

Notable solos included those of Md Hairi Yaakub (*Let Me Speak*), Syed Thajudeen (*Seroja*), Tajuddin Ismail (*Red*), Chang Fee Ming (*Journey*), Chow Chiow Teng, Chan Thean Chie and Wong Chin Kim (*A Parisien Perspective*) and Ahmad Shukri Mohd (*The Playground Series*).

The Best Newcomer award, if there were to be one, goes to Abdul Multhalib Musa hands down. His stainless steel sculpture entitled *A*



STRONG SOLO: A powerful work from Mohd Hairi's exhibition 'Let Me Speak'

Tale of Two Opposing Boundaries won Second Prize (among 355 entries) in the prestigious Oita Sculpture competition, the sixth in the series.

His work now stands at the Fumio Asakura Memorial Park in Oita alongside two other winning works by Malaysians — Ramlan Abdullah (grand prize, 1995) and Idris Awang (second prize, 1997).

The best foreign art show was definitely Ubuntu, which featured seven contemporary South African artists at the National Art Gallery. The gallery also hosted the Nordic Art show. Then there was the Islamic Art of India exhibition at the Islamic Arts Museum.

The Australian High Commission celebrated 20 years of hosting Malaysian art (45 exhibitions) with *Menjejak Kembali*.

The biggest shock in art came in the Philip Morris Asean Art Awards when a straight-out photoprint (C-type) billboard entitled *Constructing Construction 1* by Singapore's Francis Ng Teck Yong snared the Grand Prize of US\$15,000 (RM57,000) in the finals in Bali, Indonesia. Malaysia's Suhaimi Tohid won one of the five jurors' awards.

Photography seems to have made a strong mark with Eric Peris upending all rules again with his *Sarkara*, a Kandinsky-an hand-coloured form which blurs the lines between photography and fine art. Earlier, Eric had another solo entitled *Surya*.

The Malaysian Watercolour Organisation honoured Malacca, not only by featuring works of the historical city but also held by holding its annual show there.

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