

Arts

Celebration of life and love

Story and pictures
by VICTOR CHIN

After a hiatus of almost five years, Syed Thajudeen, a well-known figurative painter in Malaysia, is back with a solo exhibition at Sutra Gallery.

Titled *Seroja* (lotus), the exhibition shows a collection of 40 new works in oil and ink drawings, which look to be Syed's artistic celebration of life, especially love.

Syed, 59, who recently retired from his job as a graphic artist with a local bank, has been painting since 1974, after he graduated from the Government College of Arts and Crafts, Madras, India.

However, until his retirement, he only painted in his spare time because, he says: "A regular salary is important for me and my family. In my spare time I can paint whatever I like without depending on the sale of my artworks."

Syed was born in 1943 in a village not too far from the temple city of Madurai, South India, where his Malaysian-born parents lived during the Second World War. He joined his family in Penang when he was 11 years old but later went back to India to pursue further studies.

At first he went there to study medicine but the ancient arts and culture of the country soon waylaid him. He was especially taken in by the erotic sculptures and reliefs such as those found in the Devi Jagadamba temple at Khajuraho.

Naturally, Syed's paintings and drawings bear the imprint of his early Indian artistic influences but he later also took into consideration the western tradition of modern artists such as Paul Klee and Joan Miro.

"Whenever I feel depressed and low in spirit, I think of Vincent van Gogh. I think of how that man struggled on and on as an artist without being able to sell even one painting in his lifetime. Now his works are worth millions."

Closer to home, Syed enjoys the works of Latiff Mohidin, Khalil Ibrahim and a few others.

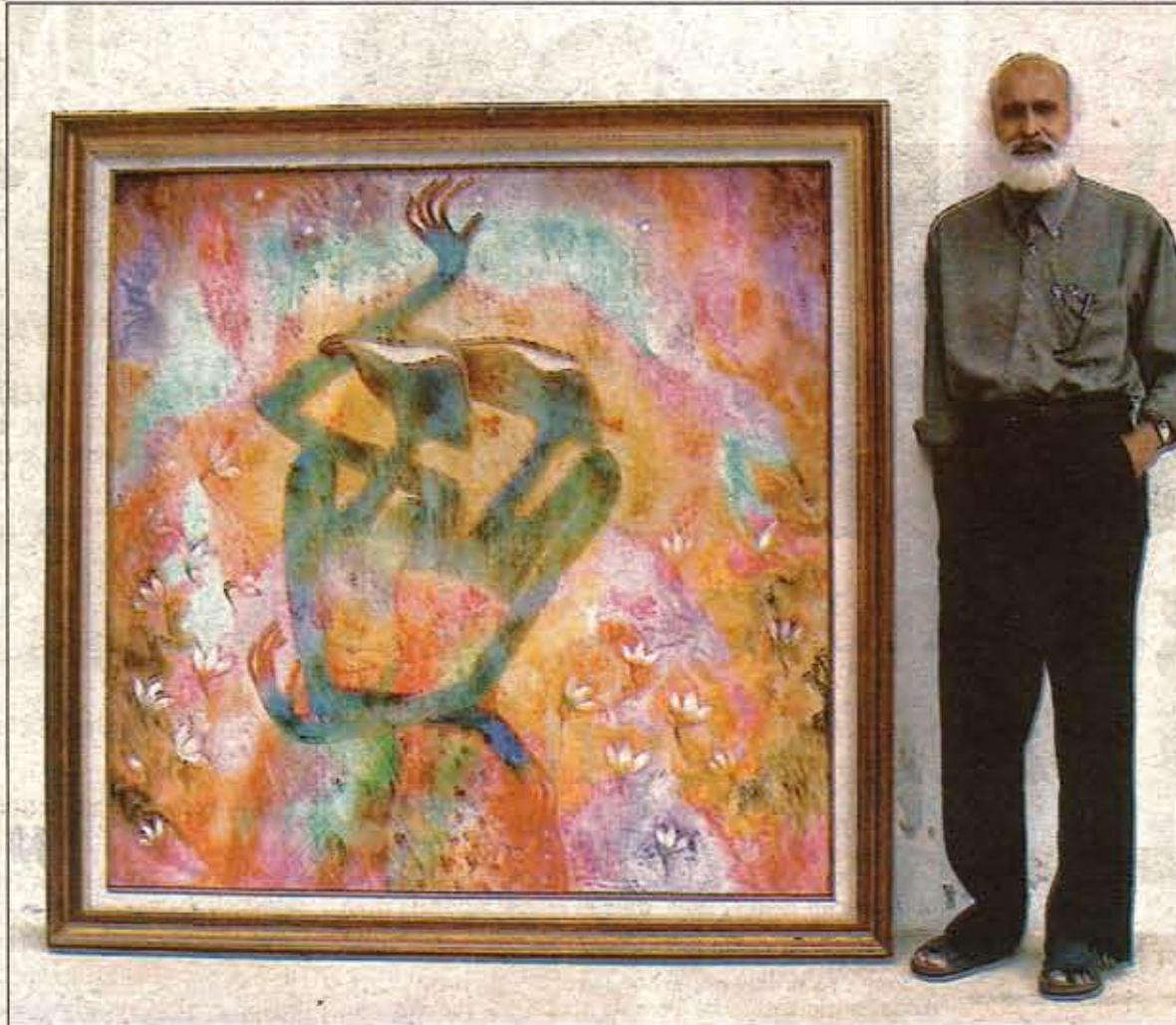
A characteristic feature of Syed's paintings and drawings is his stylisation of his figures, both male and female, making them look like a cross between Indian erotic miniature figure works and the temple carvings of sexual postures.

Another is his keen interest in the extruding lips, extraneous eyes (with just the white of the eye showing) and the long, boneless shape of limbs and fingers. He then finishes the background with dashes and drips of oil paint in primary colours thinned down with linseed oil until the oil marks are streaking down the surface of the canvas.

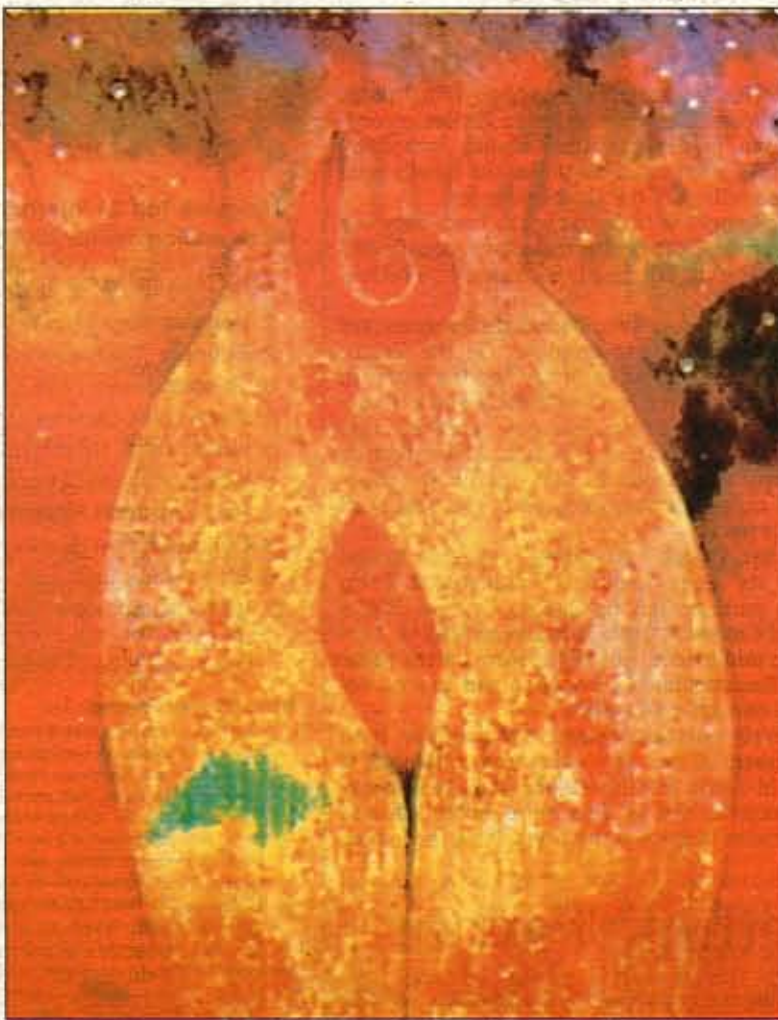
Looking at the sarong-clad, blue skinned couple in a painting called *Embrace*, I swear I could hear the echo of the poem *When He Pressed His Lips* by contemporary poet, Steve Kowitz.

Love being a complex and delicate subject, the ancient Indian artists and sculptors must have their reasons for their graphic descriptions of love and erotic pleasures, which to many may appear too blatant and even offensive.

But these matters of the heart



TRADEMARK FEATURES: Syed with his oil painting, *Embrace*, which bears the characteristic features in his works – extruding lips and boneless shapes of limbs and fingers.



ARTISTIC PORTRAYAL: In *Seroja*, Syed portrays a range of images related to the subject of love and life in an expressive yet discreet way.

and body can also be done with discretion, as Syed and Kowitz, an artist and a poet respectively, are able to express in their own way through their chosen medium. There are many ways, as there are human beings, to practise and to communicate these eternal longings of ours.

In this show, Syed has put

together a range of images related to the subject of love. Set among his figures and the backgrounds of his visuals are symbolic diagrams of *lingam*, *yoni*, fishes, birds and flowers. All these evocative pictures are Syed's personal artistic celebration of life and love.

To those who want art to be innovative (multi-media and

installation, for example) and political (addressing social, political, economic crisis), Syed's works may seem old fashioned and out of date.

But many of these so called post modern artists' works often do not transmit anything near to what Syed's can do at this exhibition.

Sure, the work does not portray love in all its complexities – suffering, pain, loss, betrayal. What he does is show the brighter side of the affair, which some may find a bit too sweet, soft and sentimental. Others may feel that Syed has turned love into a caricature.

But, he says: "Everyone may think that they can solve the chaotic problems in our world today. Some think the best way is the use of military might – let's go to war. Others use monetary tactics – let's buy it over. Many believe in religion and its rewards of salvation – let's convert them."

"But I think that love can overcome many of today's crises and I am thinking of a higher form of love, the transcendental sort of love."

"I hope some of my paintings and drawings can offer some brief moments of relief from many of the anxieties of today and induce moments of detachment or enchantment. Or just smiles."

"Let's forget it lah. No one, or one idea, can solve all the injustices of this world. In the meantime, why don't we just embrace each other and find some form of happy union and do what comes naturally?"

□ *Seroja* is on at Sutra Gallery, 12 Persiaran Titiwangsa 3, Kuala Lumpur from Aug 7 till Sept 9, 2002. Viewing times 11am to 5pm Mondays to Fridays, weekends by appointment only. Call 03-40211092 (weekdays) for more information.

Sundriary

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VISUAL ART

□ *The Dolls of Japan*, an exhibition brought by The Japan Foundation, will be on at Universiti Sains Malaysia's Museum and Art Gallery from Aug 13-31. Details: 03-2161 2104 (phone), 2161 2344 (fax) or www.jfkl.org.my

□ Galeri Shah Alam will host *Works of Schultze/Theiler/Schuhmacher – A German Contemporary Exhibition* until Aug 17. Opening hours are from 10am - 6pm everyday and from 10am - noon 3pm - 6pm on Friday. Admission is free. Details: 03-21422011 (phone), 03-21422282 (fax) or www.goethe.de/kualalumpur

□ *Reaksi-Reaksi*, a joint poster exhibition by wREGA (Graphic Design Association of Malaysia) and KECDC (Korean Society for Experimentation in Contemporary Design), is on at The Art Gallery, 1, Lorong Medan Tuanku 1, Kuala Lumpur until Aug 14. Opening hours are from 9am - 6pm (weekdays) and 11.30am - 4.30pm (weekends). Details: 03-4045 4159, 7783 7088 (Karen Choo or Alvin Chan), secretariat@wrega.org.my or www.wrega.org.my

DRAMA

□ DRAMALAB presents Jit Murad's *Spilt Gravy on Rice*, directed by Zahim Albakri, featuring Bernice Chauly, Sean Ghazi, Reza Zainal Abidin and Datuk Rahim Razali as 'Bapak', at The Actors Studio Bangsar until Aug 25 (No shows on Monday). Showtime 8.30pm (Weekdays), 3pm (Saturdays and Sundays). Tickets are RM52 and RM32 (Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturday matinees) and RM72 and RM42 (Thursdays, Fridays, Saturday nights and Sunday matinees). A 50% discount on all unsold tickets on the day of the performance for students with a valid student ID. Bookings: 03-2694 5400, 2692 5927, 2094 0400/1400 or tickets@theactorsstudio.com.my

□ The Actors Studio sixth Young Director's Showcase presents Anton Chekov's *A Marriage Proposal* directed by Amsalan Doraisingam and starring Anne James, Fiona Lee and James Lee at The Actors Studio Greenhall, Penang on Aug 16 and 17 (8.30pm) and 18 (3pm). Admission is by donation. Bookings: 04-229 6118 (The Penang Philomathic Union), 03-2694 5400, 2692 5927, 2094 0400/1400 or tickets@theactorsstudio.com.my

DANCE

□ This month's Dance Box Series features Mun Lee's *FangXue*, a hybrid of space, visual art and dance, at The Actors Studio Box, Plaza Putra on Aug 17 at 8.30pm. Tickets are RM22 (adults) and RM12 (students). Bookings: 03-2694 5400, 2692 5927, 2094 0400/1400 or tickets@theactorsstudio.com.my

MUSIC

□ Catch a capella groups The Choristers, Wicked Pitches and Six2Eight in *Boppin' Along – A Capella Fest 2* at The Actors Studio Theatre, Plaza Putra on Aug 16 and 17 at 8.30pm. Tickets are RM32 (adults) and RM22 (students). Bookings: 03 2694 5400, 2692 5927, 2094 0400/1400 or tickets@theactorsstudio.com.my