

# SUNDAY PEOPLE



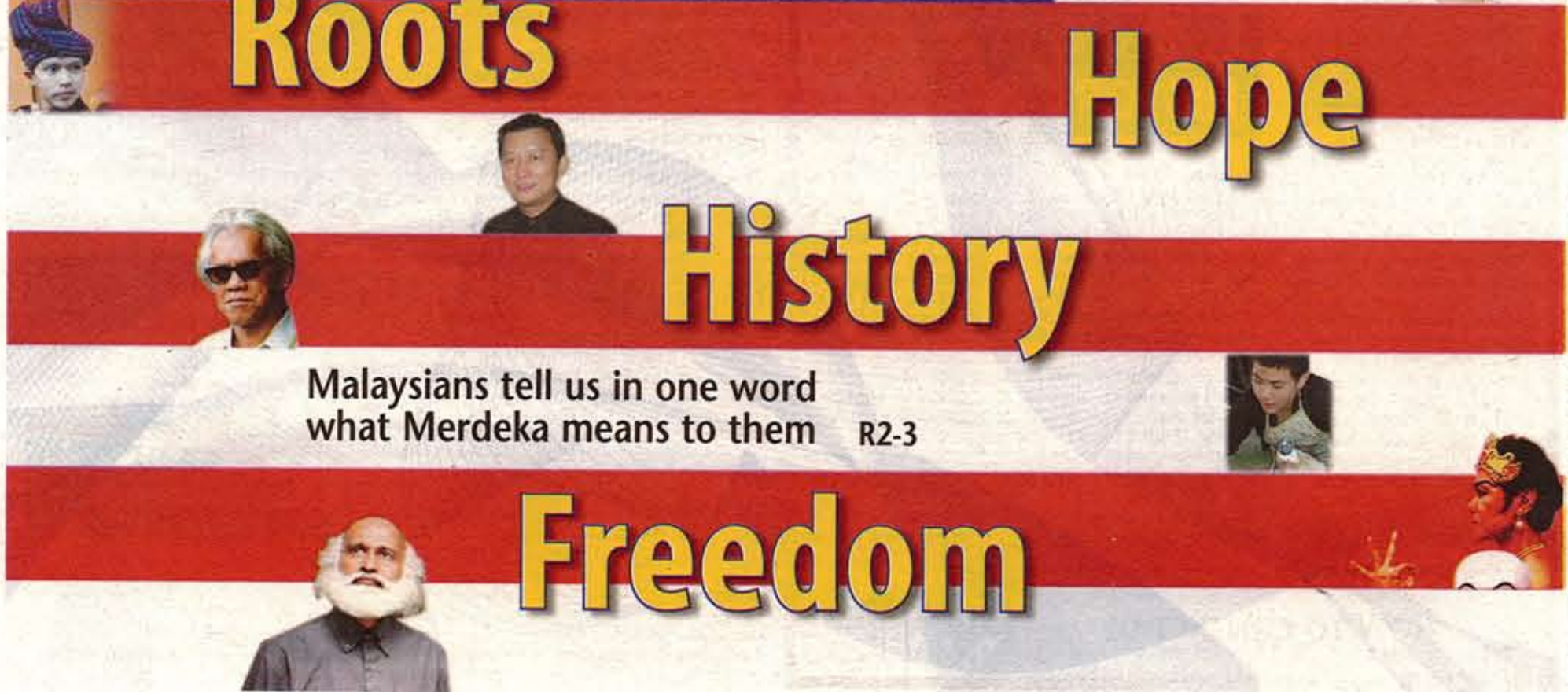
Roots

Hope

History

Malaysians tell us in one word what Merdeka means to them R2-3

Freedom



Great art takes time

By ADLIN ROSLI

As an artist, Syed Thajudeen's reputation precedes him. He's been an active force in art for three decades and continues to be a major part of corporate galleries and discerning private collections.

Given the man's standing, he has a surprisingly approachable air. Wise, experienced, but not uptight. "What do you think? Do I manage to pull off the appearance of a typical artist?" he jokes before we get seated to talk, referring to his massive beard.

Syed has seen the Malaysian

art world go through different changes. When he first graduated from India's Madras College Of Arts in 1974, Malaysia was just 16 years old.

From then to now, Syed has seen more opportunities arise for young artists. "It was a challenge back when I started. There were no art colleges and hardly any support from different galleries," he says. In fact, just wanting to become an artist then was a tough challenge.

"My parents wanted me to become a doctor, but I was moved by art. I told my parents I wouldn't hold it against them if things didn't work out, but I really wanted to be the master of my own destiny," Syed recalls.

While the rest of the Malaysian

art scene at the time looked to Europe, Syed immersed himself in Indian art. The perception at the time was that anything not European or Western was inferior. "We have to celebrate all types of art, especially from our region. What we have here is very rich, but back then hardly anybody wanted to pay attention to it. I wanted to find a different voice, so I looked to India."

Today, the Malaysian art scene is more vibrant. There are more galleries and many corporations such as Petronas, Siemens and JP Morgan have private galleries. Art academies are easy to find. "Right now a lot of art still resides in Malaysia. Future generations will be able to enjoy it."

As for younger artists, Syed notices that many of them are in a hurry to become superstars. "What I see today are artists fresh out of

their studies who want to instantly become the next Picasso. From my experience, it takes time. It took me close to 40 years to establish myself. You have to hone your craft and identity. This doesn't happen overnight," he says.

Syed's work can easily take over a year to finish. He currently has an amazing piece titled *The Beginning* on display at Galeri Petronas, as part of the exhibition to coincide with Merdeka titled, *Changing Phases*. Syed's *The Beginning* is the artists' interpretation of the founding of Malacca by Parameswara. "I took 18 months to finish that piece," he says. Bearing in mind the painting measures 183 x 512 cm and the intricate detail involved, the time spent makes sense.

Malaysian art to Syed is an important heritage he hopes to see preserved and encouraged by the powers that be. "P. Ramlee died a poor man. It was only



Syed Thajudeen says artists are a silent force. *The Beginning* is featured above

after his death that he got his wide recognition and accolades. Malaysian artists aren't out there being the doctors or engineers of our country, but they are a silent force that helps to elevate our culture."



Ping Lian's interpretation

By ADLIN ROSLI

ARTIST Ping Lian has been garnering acclaim for his work which has already been displayed in the US, Australia and Malaysia. JP Morgan Chase Foundation has also offered generous support. And if that wasn't enough, one of Ping Lian's pieces, *Ubudiah Mosque I* was sold for RM100,000.

What makes Malaysian-born but Australian resident Ping Lian interesting is that he's just 15 and an autistic savant.

He joins the ranks of other famous autistic savant artists — Stephen Wiltshire and Gottfried Mind. In the case of those who are autistic savant, they experience serious developmental and mental disability but have extraordinary abilities in art or music. The savant artist's talent is often a genius in their artistic interest and skill is

linked to having an amazing memory. By Ping Lian's side is his mother, Sarah Lee. She is constantly there to help him with his career. When asked what her thoughts are about "talent coming from anywhere" and the fact that people will only think Ping Lian's art is "art by a great artist and not someone who has autism," she insisted these questions were strange to her and shows the writer's ignorance of savant syndrome.

People who have savant syndrome essentially are natural artists. So there should not be any perception of these people being anything other than just extremely talented.

Lee did share how her son's art has given Ping Lian a chance to grow as a person. Being autistic means Ping Lian does not relate to people as others do but



Kuala Lumpur City (double pages, 75x100cm) — Picture by Diane Macdonald

he has shown tremendous growth as a person over the years.

"I didn't have a podium when I was delivering the thank you address at the Art Commune recently and Ping Lian helped hold my speech up for me. He understood the importance of the speech and what we were doing that day. I'm very proud of him," she says.

Ping Lian's work mainly showcases the artist's interpretation of scenery and landscapes. He collects ideas from pictures he shoots, postcards he collects and experiences in different cities and landscapes.

In Malaysia, Ping Lian has received tremendous support from The Art

Commune which has set up an exclusive and permanent gallery of the artist's work. You can check out the extraordinary work he has done. Seeing pictures does no justice to the actual impact of seeing the work in person.

Ping Lian's interpretations of scenes like the KLCC Twin Towers, Sydney's Opera House and mosques are extraordinary. They capture minute details but at the same time offer a whole different perspective of what you would typically perceive.

Ping Lian has a comprehensive website over at [www.pinglian.com](http://www.pinglian.com). The site is an exhaustive collection of his media appearances, upcoming events and samples of his work.