

ART FOCUS

BLAST FROM THE PAST

Gems of Heritage presents watercolour depictions of Malaysian heritage objects - some literally gems and others figuratively so.



Chin Kon Yit is one of the country's most eminent watercolourist and this largely self-taught artist is particularly fond of creating visual documentations of heritage architecture and artefacts, alongside rural landscapes and city sights.

"Every journey (of documenting Malaysia's heritage sites) is filled with hope and expectations. There were times where I sought out a heritage site only to find that the locals have disfigured it beyond recognition, or worst, demolished," reveals Kon Yit with a tinge of remorse.

Kon Yit is a heritage conservationist in his own right, as he relentlessly wields his brush to capture the elements of yesteryear before they get swallowed in the losing battle between conservation and modernization. "Like many who are passionate about preserving the past for future generations and raising its awareness, I only play a part within the broad spectrum of heritage conservation. I may have captured the grandeur of historical architecture and nostalgia of street life within the confines of my canvas and paper. But educating people about the need for conservation and the historical and cultural significance of our heritage is a monumental task that requires the involvement of the community, the corporate sector and the government."

For his upcoming eleventh solo exhibition – Gems of Heritage, Kon Yit has moved away from architecture and landscape to capture the delicateness of the country's regal objects and more common artefacts. "I first painted a series of gold artefacts and jewellery in 1992 as part of commissioned works for a hotel. The overwhelming response encouraged me to explore this subject further, but it somehow took backstage as I vigorously pursued my paintings of old buildings." When Private Gallery approached him to revisit the theme about two years ago, he immediately warmed to the project and has not looked back since.

Bringing out the nuances and finer details of jewellery pieces is a painstaking process, says Kon Yit. However, after decades of practicing the delicate art of watercolour and with many drawings of fine detail under his belt, he possesses the technical knowledge and wherewithal to rise to this challenge. "Having dabbled with various types of mediums, watercolour became my preferred choice as I found it one of the most chal-



lenging. It requires the artist to constantly practice and experiment through juggling the delicate balance between the three elements – water, colour and paper, in order to achieve the desired outcome in a painting," he shares.

Kon Yit will be exhibiting 30 to 40 works in Gems of Heritage and the ideas for this exhibition were inspired and conceived from the many references that he has accumulated throughout the years from his extensive travels around the country and museum visits. "It took me about a year to complete the collection for this exhibition." He carefully highlights the intricate metalwork of traditional Malay jewellery and ornaments, fine Nyonya porcelain urns, the Chinese auspicious guardian lions and the Hindu Lord of Success, Ganesha. "Viewers can expect to see unique and intricate cultural artefacts brought to life in the artworks. Hopefully it

would be an enlightening experience for all, providing a deeper understanding and appreciation for the fine artisan crafts borne out of the diversity of our multicultural society," he adds.

Shalini Ganendra Fine Art has worked with Chin Kon Yit for over 10 years. "I have personally followed his career for longer," shares art patron and gallery owner Datin Shalini. "His reputation as an outstanding heritage artist and watercolourist has not only built an international and local collector base, but also supported the heritage cause in an aesthetically convincing way." The Gem of Heritage exhibitions runs from October 17 to November 30 at Shalini Ganendra Fine Art - The Private Gallery, Petaling Jaya. Viewing is by appointment only. For more information, call 03-7958 2175 or visit www.theprivategallery.com