



FEATURE

Art Expo Malaysia 2011

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Syed Nabil, NN Gallery
Hong Kong Autumn Sales 2011

FEATURE

Art Expo Malaysia 2011

“The five-and-a-half-day Art Expo Malaysia 2011 saw a participation of 66 reputable art galleries, organisations and museums from 24 countries. It raked in total sales in excess of RM 13.5 million - a record new high (RM 11 million in 2010, RM 5.6 million in 2009) with 14,200 visitors flocking to the Art Expo,” said Organising Chairman Vincent Sim.

According to Project Director Sim Pojinn, “China is currently the world’s number one art market. This coincides with the selling of traditional Chinese ink paintings by masters Wang Xi Jing, Jia You Fu and Li Chi Mao, as well as the edgy Chinese contemporary art by Feng Zheng Jie (4 out of 5 artworks sold), in Art Expo Malaysia 2011.”

The works at ATR Gallery’s (Spain) booth and William Contemporary Art Space’s (Taiwan) booth were almost a sold out. The public is already familiar with Spanish artists such as Joan Miro and Jesus Curia, and Chinese artists like Du Xi represented by them respectively, for both galleries have been participating in Art Expo Malaysia for several years. Other galleries from Indonesia, Myanmar, Japan, Vietnam, and the Philippines who are frequent participants of the expo also recorded encouraging sales.

Local galleries who sold well were Pelita Hati Gallery



of Art (featuring Raja Shahriman and Haron Mokhtar), KL Lifestyle Art Space (featuring Syed Thajuddin, Khalil Ibrahim and Jeihan Sukmantoro), House of Matahati (featuring Bayu Utomo Radjikin), Yahong Art Gallery (featuring Chuah Seow Keng), City Art Gallery (featuring Dr. Foo Yong Kong, Goh Lye Hock and Wong Twing Twing), and Art Accent (featuring Eng Tay). Mr. Hoe Say Yong, the Invited Artist, also recorded outstanding sales with his *Waterworld: Reflected Reality and Illusions* exhibition.

The five participating embassies - Brazil, Cuba, Ecuador, Kazakhstan and Switzerland - showcased unique and stunning artworks at the Embassy Row zone. Among them, most notable sales came from the Embassy of Brazil where artist Andre Mendes sold 17 works (including some commissioned works lined up).

Since its inception, Art Expo Malaysia has remained as free admission and it is perhaps the only art fair in the world which does not charge an entry fee. This is an effort by the organiser in bringing the arts to a wider audience and the general public. Organising Chairman Vincent Sim and Project Director Sim Pojinn shout out, “Appreciate Art, Art Appreciates!”

Among the distinguished guests present were Tun Daim, Tan Sri Kamarul Ariffin, Tan Sri Dato’ Dr. Mohd



Munir Abdul Majid, YB Dato’ Sri Dr. Ng Yen Yen, YB Dato’ Mukhriz bin Tun Dr. Mahathir, Royal Patron Crown Prince and Crown Princess of Perlis, Chief Minister of Perlis and his wife, Sponsor Dato’ Steven Sim, Ambassador of Argentina, Chile, Cuba, Ecuador, Spain, Switzerland, Italy, Egypt, Japan, and High Commissioner of Pakistan and Singapore.



HBArt: Established in 1996, tell us about your vision for the gallery when you first began showcasing modern and contemporary Malaysia art more than a decade ago.

SN: NN Gallery was established with the aim of promoting Malaysian art through exhibitions, producing exhibition catalogues and providing an online resource for our artists to the public. Our first exhibition was a group show of artists we admired, a mix of the established and new, showing a range of paintings, installation art and sculptures, textiles, watercolours and works on paper.

HBArt: What were your challenges then?

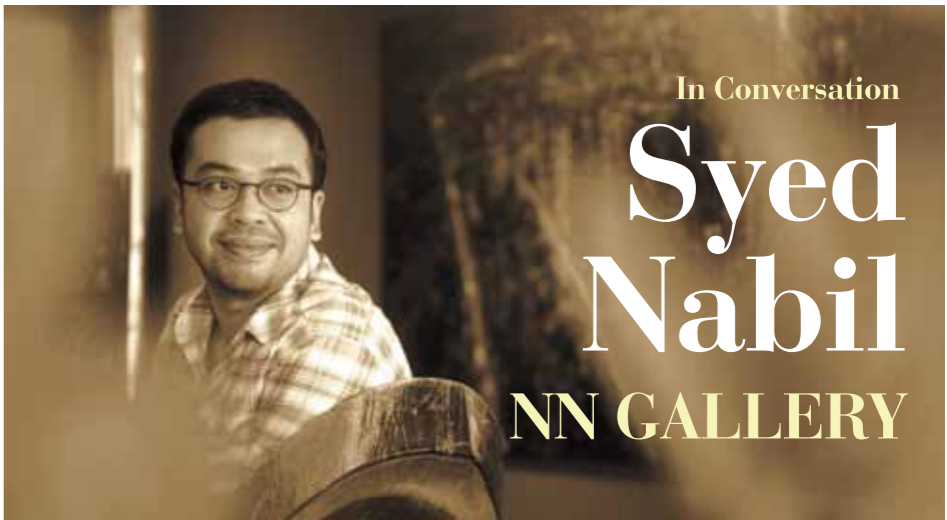
When we started there were already some established galleries in town promoting Malaysian art, but we found that there was still room to represent emerging artists. We were fortunate to have the support of established modernists such as Yeoh Jin Leng and Cheong Laitong and the support of many senior Northern artists from Kedah and Penang who helped boost our credibility.

On the onset there was a lot of support from private collectors and institutions wanting to build personal and corporate collections. It was an exciting beginning for us, as we would see not only the diverse language inherent in Malaysian art but also the differences in taste and approaches in collecting art.

Then came the lull of the Asian Economic Crisis. The art market inevitably slowed down. As a result, collectors became discerning which led to a positive outlook for the artists to create better works, bringing forth a new creative order and new kinds of artistic experimentation, all in a healthy bid for their works to be placed in public and private collections.

HBArt: How has the gallery as well as the Malaysian art scene evolved since then?

When we first started it was a selected number of regular art enthusiasts on the exhibition circuit. Today, however, the audience has grown which reflects the interest in collecting Malaysian art. The number of practicing artists have grown, and the price of artworks too has increased. Today I hear some of my early clients remarking that the days when art used to be affordable are gone!



There is undoubtedly an increase in art activity today with an equally growing number of people becoming interested in art. What is needed today to help enrich the art scene, would be to engage the artists and the public at large in dialogue, for our institutions to bring back symposiums on art and to assertively showcase our Malaysian artists internationally. In our small capacity as a private gallery we can only do so much. I believe that with such added value placed on the arts, the appreciation and consciousness for it will become stronger.

HBArt: In what ways does your gallery nurture young and emerging artists of the country?

SN: We host annual art competitions for young artists, and we also offer solo and group exhibitions for new emerging artists. Some of our more recognised artists today such as Zulkifli Yusoff, Ahmad Fuad Osman, Eston Tan and Chan Kok Hooi to name a few had held their very first solo exhibitions with us.

We have over the years, as project directors, facilitated some of our artists with their exhibitions abroad, taking part in international art residencies and in invitational art competitions. We work in partnership with universities, and help garner sponsorship from institutions, corporations and private donors.

HBArt: In your opinion what sort of issues have local artists grappled with over the last decade through their art?

SN: The issues that concern our artists are broad and varied. Some personal, some with universal concerns. Issues concerning family, identity, social, political, cultural and the environment are met with their individual

struggles and understanding of it, all in all adding to the diversity of expressions by Malaysian artists.

HBArt: Have these critical narratives shifted focus on more globalized themes?

SN: Absolutely! Our local artists now travel extensively, taking part in art residencies, exhibitions and fairs all over the world. Their interaction with other cultures provides for wider assimilation and dialogue of what is happening in the world and global art trends.

HBArt: How do you see your gallery evolving over the next ten years?

SN: We hope to continue what we have done so far, which is to generate awareness of Malaysian art here and abroad. Our hopes would be for a thriving and exciting art scene which would resonate beyond our shores.

A curatorial exhibition entitled *The Prayer* – a group show by some of our well known artists - is currently on view at White Box, MAP@ Publika till 7 January 2012. Subsequently, with our monthly schedules of exhibitions at the gallery, we will be presenting an exhibition entitled *Art & Architecture* by printmaker Ilse Noor to Huekeswagen, Germany, showing her seminal heritage works together with architectural models of our heritage buildings.

As a newly appointed consultant for the Henry Butcher Art Auctioneers 2011/12, I look forward to working together with our very first auction house, to raise the profile of our artists and their works, and raise the consciousness of the relevance and value of art.

REVIEW

Hong Kong Autumn Sales 2011



ENJOYING THE ART OF AUCTION | by Jessica Ho

Here I am, in Hong Kong, sitting in the Sotheby's *Modern and Contemporary Southeast Asian Paintings* sale to observe how the "big boys" do it. I was ecstatic of course, I had a prime spot, sitting there with most of the active bidders in front of me, clearly auction isn't a new game to all present. Some practiced restraint and discipline, refusing to pursue at the most exorbitant prices; others fell to the enticement of the auctioneer, chasing the tail of the rival bidder; some, just simply present, in hopes to score a particular piece at a fair price.

It seems most Southeast Asian works are heavily bid on the phones and on the internet, leaving the room half filled with bidders that come and go as they knew what they were present for.

Two of the Malaysian contemporary artists in this sale were the commonly featured Ahmad Zakii Anwar and Yee I-Lann. Lot 542 featured Zakii's *Kota Sunyi 7*, a photo-realistic figurative mix with urban influences in monochrome, sold at its higher estimate of HKD150,000 (including premium); and the other, Lot 568, I-Lann's *Sulu Stories:MAP* was sold at HKD100,000, a digital print series of 13 photographs about

Sulu, an intrinsic part of the artist's hometown, Sabah, and a story of identity. Both works were sold to bidders on the phone.

It was unfortunate that the Vietnamese works did not perform well with 14 out of the 40 lots offered left unsold. Thankfully interest picked up with the Phillipino section reintroduced, building up as the auction leads towards the Nanyang pioneers. The auctioneer called for bids after bids, leaving bidders to battle it out as the bidding reaches its height of war.

The tension in the room dissolved and erupts into applause as the hammer struck a new world auction record for the Nanyang artist: Lot 628, Cheong Soo Pieng's *Untitled (Balinese Girl)*, sold at HKD2,060,000 (including premium). Subsequently, Lot 629 Georgette Chen's *Lotus*, set another world auction record at HKD 1.1mil (including premium). Followed soon after was the last Soo Pieng on offer, an abstract landscape on canvas, which sold for HKD375,000 (including premium). For Lot 648, Gunawan's political and largest known work entitled *Tuak Manis*, fetched HKD7,220,000 (including premium), the highest auction

record for the morning session.

The bidding war intensifies as it moves on quickly to the high interest lots, beginning with the introduction of Affandi from Lot 662, his *Self Portrait* and *Balinese Dancer* hammered at HKD2.5mil and HKD2.9mil respectively. Taking a slight dip, Sotheby's *Modern and Contemporary Southeast Asian Paintings* Autumn sale ends on a high note with Lot 672, Srihadi Sudjojono's *Petrak Dadi Ratu (Petrak Becomes King)* at HKD4.22mil (including premium). This 3 feet by 2.5 feet oil on canvas is a political allegory done in 1979 to criticise to the government's New Order, based on a Javanese wayang story, the jester *Petrak* – seen as the embodiment of the common people – becomes drunk with wealth and power as he briefly ascends to the throne.

Sotheby's Hong Kong *Modern and Contemporary Southeast Asian Paintings* Autumn 2011 sale totaled at HKD82.8mil, more than double the pre-sale estimate of HKD33mil, fueled by the strong demand for Modern Masters across Southeast Asia. Only 31 of the 167 lots were unsold, achieving a total of 81.4% success rate.

SOUTHEAST ASIAN ART SOARS AMIDST GLOBAL ECONOMIC TURMOIL | by Chris Tay

HBArt was present at the controversial Christie's autumn sales of *Asian 20th Century and Contemporary Art* where Southeast Asian works were placed side by side with art from China, Korea, Japan and India. Four auctions, consisting of two evening sales and two day sales, took place over two days and we were there to witness the action first-hand.

The much-anticipated 'Faces of New China: An Important Private Collection', which featured 14 lots by Chinese avant-garde superstars including Yue Minjun, Zhang Xiaogang and Cai Guoqiang, failed to match the stellar results of the Ullens Collection Sale by Sotheby's. The crowded auction hall with only standing room witnessed this single-owner sale sorely underperformed when 6 out of the 14 lots were bought in and another 4 failed to meet their lower estimates.

The Day Sale of Asian Contemporary Art the following day saw a cool-headed auction room, with 72% of success rate by lot and total sales in excess of HKD113.6 mil/RM45.9 mil (including premium), only half of Sotheby's sale of the same category held the month before. The weaker results of Asian contemporary art at Christie's this autumn clearly shows a cautious art market amidst global economic turmoil.

However, the impressive results for Southeast Asian contemporary and modern art was made all the more evident when the decision of integrating them into the Asian sale was made, thanks to Eric Chang, Christie's International Director of Contemporary Art. This unprecedented move not only allowed Southeast Asian works to enjoy international exposure, but also encouraged cross-border collecting.

Indonesian works achieved excellent results amongst the Southeast Asians, while Vietnamese pioneers and Indian contemporary artists suffered with high bought-in rates.

The only Malaysian artwork on offer was a 2 metre by 6 metre quadriptych titled 'In The Road To...' by emerging Malaysian artist Phuan Thai Meng. The enormous painting achieved a Hammer Price of HKD130,000 (against a pre-sale estimate of HKD80,000 to HKD140,000) to a phone bidder who also bought the following lot by Indonesian artist Jumaldi Alfi.

The restrained response can also be seen in auctions occurring simultaneously in the peripheral areas. Across at the old Hong Kong Exhibition Centre, United Asian

Auctioneers failed to secure a buyer for its highlight piece by Lee Ufan, passing at HKD950,000 (estimated at HKD1mil to HKD1.4mil). Seoul Auction attracted a packed auction room at the Mandarin Oriental with the highly anticipated *Smooth Egg with Bow* by Jeff Koons. The sculpture, offered at a starting bid of HKD 54mil, did not draw any bid from neither the floor nor the phones. Similarly, the cover lot by Lucio Fontana was passed at a starting bid of HKD6mil/RM2.4mil (estimated at HKD9mil to HKD13mil) in a barely filled auction room at the JW Marriott by Japanese auction house Est-quest Auctions.

Despite weak sales of Asian contemporary art at the Hong Kong Autumn 2011 sales, ArtTactic stated in their November survey that the overall Chinese Contemporary Art Market Confidence Indicator remains strongly positive. It further mentioned that the art market would be tested in the next six months as experts were showing concern over the risk of an art market bubble. Nevertheless, it can be concluded that Southeast Asian art has benefited immensely from its integration into the general Asian Art auction category and its potential will continue to grow with international collectors venturing into art of this region.