



THE EDIT

BY THE **EDGE**

THEORY OF EVERYTHING

Luxuries, Style Ideas, Travel & Beyond





Lim Wei-Ling

FOUNDER AND DIRECTOR, WEI-LING GALLERY

As one of the first women gallery owners, the name Lim Wei-Ling and her eponymous gallery — which turns 16 this year — has earned its reputation as the vanguard of local art. Apart from running her two gallery spaces in Kuala Lumpur and carving out a presence on regional and international art platforms, the gallerist also puts her money where her heart is, with a personal art collection to envy.

The Edit: Do you recall the first artwork you bought?

Lim Wei-Ling: Way back when I was in art school doing jewellery design and silversmithing, there was a fellow student who majored in painting. I watched how he developed as an artist over the course of three years, and could see that he would be top of his class. At his graduation show, I bought a work by him because I felt great respect for all that he had achieved. I am not sure what has happened to him now, but it was the first painting I bought on my own using my pocket money at the age of 21, and it was the most wonderful and liberating experience.

What is the rule of thumb that you personally adhere to or would advise buyers on when it comes to acquiring art?

Buy what you like, first and foremost, because you have to live with it. In addition, you should definitely ask for the story behind the work. All serious artists should have a good reason for what they have made. Interestingly enough, sometimes, after you tire of the work visually (and this can happen!), the story might be the only thing that connects you to it. As American artist Robert Rauschenberg aptly said, 'The job of an artist is to be a witness to his time.'

Your recommendation of key art events and institutions for those who seek an artistic immersion...

Art fairs are mushrooming around the world, but for consistent quality works, I would say that any of the three Art Basel fairs around the world — Hong Kong, Basel or Miami — would be worthwhile due to the stringent selection process.

Biennales are also a wonderful way to be exposed to art from around the world. I always make it a point to visit the Singapore Biennale, and the Venice Biennale is a must for those who want to see what is happening on the international art front and what artists are concerned about.

Share with us a few of the artists whom you are currently excited about.

I really like the fact that Ivan Lam, who is largely

known as a painter, has ventured out of his comfort zone into more performative installations, or 'curated human experiences' as he calls them. It is always refreshing when artists move between disciplines to express their thought processes.

At this year's Venice Biennale, I enjoyed the works of Nigerian artist Peju Alatise, who made a room installation discussing the kidnap of the 234 Chibok girls and addressing the plight of young girls forced into servitude in her country. Before that, at the Singapore Biennale, the works of Filipina artist Marta Atienza moved me greatly. She drew reference from her seafaring family — recreating the hull of a ship in a room using sound, light, reflection, projection and water. The work touched broadly on all the Filipinos who have had to cross the waters to make a living.

You travel quite extensively to visit the region's art fairs. What's the sentiment now regarding Southeast Asian art?

I think that now, more than ever, the world is looking East. All the major art institutions — the establishment, so to speak — are certainly looking deeply at China, India and Southeast Asia. The Singapore government's support for the arts has helped boost the art development in this region overall. But where governments are not proactive, more and more private collectors are beginning to take on bigger roles, through private museums and the display of private collections.

This momentum can only keep growing, because there are so many voices to be heard here. Artists are observers and commentators on the world around them, and there is still so much to be discussed in this region. I believe serious collectors and curators are looking for artists who are mirroring and reflecting on their times, the contemporary world as we know it, be it the good, bad or ugly. Artists who are making works with sincerity and courage will stand the test of time and remain relevant historically. Ultimately, they also rely on patronage and interest to fuel stronger and more dynamic works of art.

What was a professional highlight for you this year?

The publication of Anurendra Jegadeva's much-anticipated 300-page book, which documents 30 years of this important sociopolitical artist's life and career.

Your favourite book on art?

One of my all-time favourite books is *Art Lover*, a memoir of Peggy Guggenheim's life.