

Blank Page: Group Show (2009)

Blank Page brings together fresh faces in the local art scene. Featuring four young contemporary artists, it is a platform for new artists to showcase their works. Every artist has a story, some concerns, imaginations and viewpoints projected in their art. As much as established and mid-career artists, young artists need to start their story somewhere. Many art lovers opine that the thriving arts scene in Malaysia, especially that of our young contemporary artists is an exhilarating one.

The pulse of contemporary art in Malaysia depends on the creative impulse of such young artists. Artworks from young artists bear witness to the prose of the new generation. While earlier artists were inclined towards landscape, expressionist or conceptual frameworks, cyber-culture and exposure to different artistic approaches has created individualistic perceptions from each of these young minds.

Blank Page marks the beginning, a fresh sheet, a new leaf, the start of serious art practice for young artists to carve a name for themselves as visual artists. Gan Tee Sheng, Dhavinder Singh, Chong Ai Lei and Anabelle Ng are local born and bred artists. Having received their formal art education at local tertiary institutions, this occasion marks an opportunity to view our homegrown talents. Profiled here are four selected artists below the age of thirty.

Gan Tee Sheng is a highly imaginative artist. His images provoke a sense of deep questioning about the self. Dealing with issues of gender within the family, the artist constructs surrealistic images with carefully composed subject matter. This creates tension and intensity within each depiction, causing unease and dislocation with what we assume is the norm.

Dhavinder Singh is an artist interested in aesthetics. The preference to let the audience make their own interpretation and deductions is in line with his ideology of creating 'arts for art's sake'. He engages with found materials and drawings to create mixed media works. His array of objects includes interior and abandoned objects that are then recycled. The artist uses geometric shapes, measurements and straight lines to create proportion and divisions in the art works.

Chong Ai Lei is a figurative painter who previously dealt with anthropological aspects of human behaviour. She refined the context with particular emphasis on the female body as her subject matter. A continuum of her previous body of work, the artist explores mystical and erotic feelings derived from the natural female shape.

Anabelle Ng considers herself an experimental artist. Using found objects and materials, she is inspired by discarded materials. Selected items give her a sense of interlocution that is coalesced with personal expression. The artist works strictly within a structured, but large framework of two-dimensional mixed media works installed onto the wall.

With diverse interests in their art-making, the artists have come together to create works based on a similar theme: nudity and censorship in Malaysia. Why these two topics? Nudity and censorship have always been hotly contested issues in the local context. Be it in films, art or books, such acts of blockage or deletion is visibly challenged with the accessibility of information on the internet. The opinions of young artists are much more different and liberal compared to the older generation. It is a refreshing take of an oft discussed issue by younger voices who are more exposed and inclined to visual and cyber culture. With this in mind, the artists have come together to focus on censorship with the body as the primary subject matter. Although they worked within the precincts of a similar theme, the artists were given free rein to develop exponentially.

Life drawing is typically incorporated as part of an artist's formal art education in art colleges. The gallery in its conceptions of the show has initiated this familiar practice as the starting point for these young artists. This exhibition is thus each artist's take on the human form, through four life drawing sessions conducted over the period of a month. The intensity of the sittings created a distinct series of artworks reflecting individualistic styles and methods of expressing the human figure. Investigation of the picture plane is reinforced with critical analysis and discourse of methodology among fellow artists. The audience is hence treated to the versatility and vitality of the young artists without muffling their voices.

Painterly and mixed media works by the four artists, marks a brand of naturalism seen as part

of a re-emergence of figurative narrations that this observer distinguishes as an important segment of Malaysian contemporary art. Exploration, study and portrayal of the figure signify a continuity of classical art training that stretches back to antiquity.

This exhibition may be seen as an initiation to a new generation of emerging artists eager to carve a name for themselves with their own unique styles and visual language. The theme of "Censorship and Nudity" is apt to understand the boundaries or non-boundaries of art in the local context for these young artists. Such topics are indeed pertinent and should be addressed.

Visually compelling, let us witness the beginning in Blank Page.

Kelvin Chuah, 2009