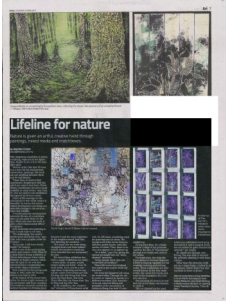


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# Lifeline for nature

Nature is given an artful, creative twist through paintings, mixed media and matchboxes.

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THE ubiquitous matchbox is slowly vanishing, replaced by the lighter. Now, thanks to art, it is in the lime-light again.

Veteran artist Chin Kon Yit uses it as a base for his miniaturised watercolour paintings. His work can use anything between three and 99 matchboxes.

"These days, it's hard to find matchboxes. Shopkeepers find you odd if you want to buy them. Nevertheless, matchboxes are more easily available in small towns," says Chin, 67, who has held 14 solo exhibitions throughout his 50-year career.

Chin's artful message on the matchboxes is that while nature is beautiful, he warns that uncontrolled development can bring considerable damage to the environment and wildlife.

"I would paint the miniaturised artworks the size of a matchbox, then cut and paste them on the box. When you view the work, it gives a three-dimensional effect," he explains.

Chin maintains that painting in such a small scale is not easy.

"It's challenging. You need a steady hand and sharp eyes," says Chin, who was a graphic artist for 15 years.

"At my age, I still have steady hands!" he assures.

Chin is one of the participating artists, and curator, of the *Hijau III Loving Nature Group Exhibition* at Wisma Kebudayaan Soka Gakkai Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur, which runs till April 23. He was also instrumental in coordinating the two earlier *Hijau* exhibitions.

Chin curated the first group exhibition in 1992, while the second edition was held in 2014.

At the launch of the recent exhibition, he shares a light moment of his encounters with three monkeys. The monkeys constantly visited his backyard garden (in Petaling Jaya)



Tan Ai Ying's *Sound Of Nature II* (oil on canvas).

because it had the most vegetation in the neighbourhood. But Chin isn't blaming the monkeys.

"If it wasn't for the trees being chopped down and their habitat ruined, the monkeys would not have intruded into our backyards," he says.

The latest *Hijau* exhibition features a range of different art styles – watercolour, oil paint, acrylic, mixed media and batik – from 26 local artists. Each carries a message about respecting and loving nature. Some of the artists are Goh Ah Ang, Lim Kok Hong, Koh Shim Luen, Ng Chee Kuan, Yew Souf, Tham Siew Moi, Ng Choon Kiat, Tan Ai Ying and Yap Chin Hoe.

At the exhibition, the "mysterious" artworks of Klang-based artist

Goh, 64, left many wondering what his paintings are all about. The background of his works features different green shades, with fine specks of colour. Then, there is an area that appears to be lighted up.

"It's a lotus," says Goh, giving the viewer an insight into his "semi-abstract" artworks.

"Some people think they see butterflies (or fireflies)!"

Then, Goh waxes lyrical about how Earth is the source of life for the lotus.

The lotus has inspired Goh since his student days. Through his art, he wants to capture its beauty in a different manner. Goh, founder of an art school in Klang and president of the Association of Artists in Klang, has held 15 solo



A close-up of Chin Kon Yit's miniature watercolour works mounted on matchboxes.

exhibitions.

Pa'ang Boon Kien, 42, a Kuala Lumpur College of Art graduate, captures the idea of "foundations" through tree trunks and roots in her works.

For inspiration, she visits the **Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM)** in Kepong regularly for her weekday morning and evening walks. These walkabouts are now central themes in her four latest works. She views tree trunks and roots as the foundation for a forest's survival.

One painting of a tree is so real that one of her three cats wanted to climb it.

"My cat climbed up the easel

where my unfinished work hung. I shouted at it, and it jumped down, but not before its paws touched the artwork," she recalls.

No significant damage, says Pa'ang. She was able to retouch the artwork, layering it with more colours.

Other than the artworks, SGM put up a stage design, crafted by its volunteers, which depict the various flora in tones of green.

*Hijau III Loving Nature Group Exhibition* is on at Wisma Kebudayaan Soka Gakkai Malaysia, Jalan Bukit Bintang in Kuala Lumpur till April 23. Opening times: Tuesday to Sunday, 11am till 5pm.



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*Tranquil Woods*, an oil painting by Pa'ang Boon Kien, reflecting the dream-like greenery of an untainted forest.  
— Photos: YAP CHEE HONG/The Star



Lim Kok Hong's *Rebirth #2* (acrylic on wood and canvas). — MAJORIE CHIEW/The Star