Beauty of nature on canvas

Art exhibition in KL portrays importance of environmental conservation

Story and photos by GRACE CHEN

gracechen@thestar.com.my

F

EATURING a myriad of landscapes from sea to sky, the From Sea To Summit exhibition which features artists Yeong Seak Ling, Ajis Mohamad, Raphael Scott Ahbeng and the late Joseph Tan opened on an engaging note at the Bank Negara Malaysia Museum and Art Gallery.

In the presence of fans such as Mimi Chung, who was so moved by the more than 50 pieces exhibited she shed tears, the joint exhibition also evoked a discourse on environmental conservation.

First to voice his thoughts was Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM) director-general Datuk Dr Abd Latif Mohmod, who was there to officiate at the launch with Bank Negara Malaysia deputy governor Datuk Nor Shamsiah Mohd Yunus.

“Do you know we have 15,000 plant varieties in Malaysia and that a study done between 2005 and 2013 revealed 1,132 have been obliterated. One of them is the Shorea kuantanesis reported to have become extinct in 1960,” he said.

Abd Latif, whose department made headlines last year when a proposed highway threatened to split the man-made tropical forest in half, implored artists in future to not only record the beauty of nature but to go further by stating the species, how many are left in the country and their living patterns to heighten awareness.

“Sometimes development adds to the glamour of a place. We must also not forget the job opportunities. For example, when you build a condominium it involves thousands of people,” said Ahbeng.

Yeong, who wowed audiences with vivid details of sarongs and sleeping babies in his Kampung Life series, said a country without development would go into regression.

Mankind can undo in days what nature has worked on for eons,” said Nor Shamsiah in her opening address.

Fragility, she said, is what nature’s wonders have in common, whether it is the underwater world of the turtle or the misty mountains, their futures exist in a fine balance.

From the artistic camp, Ahbeng, who is known for his paintings of Sarawakian jungles, agreed that the pursuit of profit had resulted in over-development but argued it was not altogether bad.

“As you know, I am already 77 years old, so career-wise, having my work shown by Bank Negara means a lot more people like my work and that makes me happy,” said Ahbeng.

“Sometimes development adds to the glamour of a place. We must also not forget the job opportunities. For example, when you build a condominium it involves thousands of people,” said Ahbeng.

Yeong, who wowed audiences with vivid details of sarongs and sleeping babies in his Kampung Life series, said a country without development would go into regression.

“No country can exist without development, but it must be properly planned. At the same time, it must go hand in hand with education. If not, you will have first-class facilities but third-world mentality,” said the colon cancer survivor.

As Yeong explained, for an artist to have his work collected by Bank Negara meant national recognition.

“In the Malaysian art world, there are two important collectors. One is the National Art Gallery. The other is Bank Negara,” he said.
Just like old times: The three important elements in this piece by Yeong are babies, birds and nature, which create harmony.

Moved to tears: Ajis (left) signing a catalogue for Chung.

Art in stone: In Tan’s ‘Memories of Dungun’, the rock formations here took millions of years but in the blink of an eye, all this can be wiped away.
Colours of the trees: Ahbeng’s ‘Borneo Magic’ depicts the beauty of the jungle.

Beauty beneath: ‘Ocean Mystery’ by Ajis shows the beauty of underwater life.
Honoured: Ahbeng in front of his work 'Rompin Adventure'.

Pretty petals: 'Exquisite Garden' by Ahbeng expresses the artist's quest to not abandon or treat lightly, God's greatest gift – our environment.
Peaceful: Tranquility, but for how long? - Yeong's 'Malaysian Sky Series'.