Lifeline for nature

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

BY MAJORIE CHIEW
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THE ubiquitous matchbox is slowly vanishing, replaced by the lighter. Now, thanks to art, it is in the limelight again.

Veteran artist Chin Kon Yit uses it as a base for his miniature 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 arthful 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 mininaturised 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.

In Chin’s case, 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 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 habitats 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.

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.

The latest Hijau exhibition features works by the following artists:

- Tan Ai Ying, 56, who has held 15 solo exhibitions
- 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.
- 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 latest exhibition. She views tree trunks and roots as the foundation for a forest’s survival.

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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 exhibitions.

Tham Siew Moi, Ng Choon Kiat, Tan Ah Ang, Lim Kok Hong, Koh Shim Luen, Ng Chee Kuan, Yew Souf, Tham Siew Moi, Ng Chee Kuan, Tan Ai Ying’s Sound Of Nature II (oil on canvas).

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