

CRAFTSMANSHIP THROUGH FRENCH VISION

Patrice Vallette of Vallette Gallery shares with us his vision for the local art scene as an entrepreneur

By Patrick Loh

Making a living in Malaysia as an artist is almost impossible. Markets are small and people are not easily convinced to spend a fortune to hang canvases filled with apples or horses on their walls; but Patrice Vallette is ready to make us see through his vision. With Vallette Gallery, he tells us that a picture on a canvas means more than just the oil pastels and colours. A painting of apples has more meaning than just red coloured fruits while horses represent power, strength and more than just animals sprinting across a white cloth. Patrice also has plans to bring Malaysian artists and their work to a castle in France. Yes, a castle, and he tells us all about it right here in his gallery.

ARE YOU A PAINTER YOURSELF?

I personally don't do any painting but I own this gallery and represent some local artists. I create exhibitions in this gallery to help sell the art pieces. I'm an entrepreneur involved in various activities like going for press conferences, scouting for new artists and right now, I'm working on a book for Rafiee Ghani. It will be a book about his journey as a Malaysian artist.

TELL US MORE ABOUT THIS BOOK BASED ON RAFIEE GHANI.

It'll include a lot of images and sketches of the artist's work. There will also be a story about the artist's aspiration and inspiration. Instead of just pictures, people now crave for a story to read in able to understand what an artist really does. For projects like these, we usually engage a writer and work really close with the artist.

HOW IS THE PROCESS LIKE WHEN PLANNING AN EXHIBITION?

First, we need to work with the artists to understand their work. Then we need writers and publicist to do the write up, catalogues, invites and the marketing. We also need to set up the gallery, plan the concept as well as the catering and working with the media. We do all these to successfully create a storyline with all the artworks.



HOW MANY EXHIBITIONS ARE YOU ABLE TO THROW IN A YEAR?

Last year, we had about six different exhibitions. This year we are trying to achieve the same while representing painters, sculptures and even photographers. The last exhibition we had was about emerging young, street artists. We aim to help build a career for them. Right now we are preparing for a showcase for photographers.

DO YOU ALWAYS HAVE THE PASSION FOR ART AT A VERY YOUNG AGE?

Art and couture is very accessible in France and I grew up with them. Back in the days, our schools will bring us on trips to museums, theatres and exhibitions. My mother loves the theatre, as my grandfather is an opera singer. I grew up in an environment where art is a part of my life. I do read a lot as well about arts and cultures.

HOW DO YOU SCOUT FOR ALL THESE TALENTS IN MALAYSIA?

Most of them came to me to be honest; maybe because the gallery is getting more popular now. My philosophy is to create a long term relationship with these artists. So we will usually sign an agreement for about one to two years. We will then work on projects together and they will introduce me to other artists in the industry. I was already very interested in Malaysian art even before this gallery was founded.

WHERE WERE YOU SHOWCASING THE ART PIECES BEFORE THIS?

I had a very big apartment and I'll usually do some exhibitions there. So I'll throw a

very private party with a few good food and drinks. It works very well like that. I've already started to represent some artists back then. When things got more professional, that's when I decided to open up this gallery.

WHAT WERE YOU DOING BEFORE YOU CAME TO MALAYSIA?

I have other businesses and was travelling a lot. I've been collecting art for more than 20 years, but I think Malaysia is a perfect place with lots of potential to do art. There are a lot of things going on around the Southeast Asia region. Compared to Indonesia and Philippines, Malaysia is somehow still conservative and that makes artists and painters very strong with good constitution.

ARE THERE MANY POPULAR ARTISTS HERE IN MALAYSIA?

We have a lot of masters here who studied in art schools in Paris and London during the 60s and 70s so they have a very strong base. I like how they all return to their home country after exhibiting around the world; to try and bring up the local industry. Not many people know about art but these masters as well as my gallery aim to create the awareness. Though this is a young country in terms of arts, there are a lot of talents.

HOW DO YOU INTEND TO INSPIRE THESE YOUNG ARTISTS WITH YOUR GALLERY?

Young artists are the future especially the really talented ones. During the Four Fantastic exhibition on February 9 this year, we featured paintings from upcoming artists. They are all self-taught



artists who didn't go to any art schools. These are the people with true talent and passion who have been through a long journey. It's a fact that it's almost impossible to survive as an artist in Malaysia. They have to keep focus and keep on working around the clock to survive. I also look at how committed, talented and creative these artists are; to see how the gallery can support and represent them.

HOW IS THE BUYING POWER LIKE HERE IN MALAYSIA?

There are collectors who really support the local art scene. Some of these collectors will constantly follow the artists. Today, there's a wave of new generation collectors who although don't know much about art, they still appreciate art. Some of them are very young lawyers who want to put investments in art and support the industry. Why spent your money unnecessarily when you can spend it on something you can enjoy and perhaps even benefit right?

HOW DO YOU ENVISION THE FUTURE OF THIS GALLERY?

I'm always looking for great opportunities. It takes a lot of focus, planning and

determination to create these opportunities. There are many prospects in Southeast Asia when it comes to art. Singapore emphasises a lot on Chinese art and sculptures; whatever that sells will definitely work there. Indonesia is stepping up as well with their cultural art. We are planning to represent artists around Southeast Asia and hopefully, around Europe and beyond. After all we're just getting started.

ANY PLANS ON BRANCHING OUT YOUR GALLERY INTERNATIONALLY?

Yes definitely. We hope to build a residency in France by 2016. It'll be a big castle, a real castle, welcoming Malaysian artists to work and showcase their work in Europe. There'll be private studios in the castle so every artist will have their personal work station. These artists can choose to stay and work on a project with us for three, six or 12 months. That being said, we also encourage artists to stay with us for a long term period of one or two years to really promote their art around Europe.

HOW ARE THE OPPORTUNITIES LIKE FOR ARTISTS IN EUROPE?

Europeans can be one of the biggest

supporters when it comes to paintings. We encourage Malaysian artists to stay in France and represent their work instead of coming for three months and boast about going to France when they return home. Collectors need time to think and choose the pieces that connects the most to them. It's the same if I were to bring in some French artists. Collectors will have no idea who they are and will need time to build the interest in their art.

ANY THOUGHTS OF VENTURING INTO FASHION?

I love fashion and couture and maybe one day I might. Why not? It's an interesting industry. Though I don't have a fashion related project right now, I will if my work can relate to fashion designers in the future. I think fashion designers here in Malaysia are very courageous. It's not easy to survive in Malaysia as a designer but yet many people took the challenge and make it work. Sometimes people give up even before starting but the local designers are very heroic.

IF THERE'S A DIFFERENT CAREER PATH FOR YOU, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

Though I love sports, I don't see myself

stepping out of couture and art. I need that every day as it has become a part of my life. I was doing a lot of businesses and living in a lot of countries like Istanbul, Greece and India and my passion for art has always followed me around. I opened my first company when I was 23 and I'm not as interested in anything else apart from loving art and being an entrepreneur. At the end of it, essentially, I like to do something good for the society.

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO SAY TO THE YOUNGER GENERATION?

You've to live the moment. Things are not as easy as how it used to be decades ago. You'll need to create the desire to learn and market your work. Never give up on your dreams as they are the key to help you kick start your career. Never take anything for granted and don't expect anything from anyone. Work on your creativity and express what you want to express. Most importantly, live your life and make yourself happy, not others.

For a look at the treasured pieces, visit Vallette Gallery at 22, Jalan Bruas, Damansara Heights, Kuala Lumpur.