

Artist Interview: Justin Lee (Singapore)

Source: Exposing art in boutique, The Straits Times Life!, 7 August 2007, Page 10

Exposing art in boutiques

Justin Lee is first Singaporean to be picked for Montblanc Young Artist project

Trisha Suresh

THE next time you are in a Montblanc boutique, look out for Justin Lee's art work on display.

The 44-year-old is the first Singaporean to have his work selected for the Montblanc Young Artist World Patronage project.

Started in 2004, it offers exposure for artists in the worldwide boutiques of the German maker of fine writing instruments, watches and accessories.

All finalists get 2,007 euros (\$4,210) each in cash. Lee's work, *Double Happiness*, is a piece of pop art that blends both Eastern and Western influences, a reflection of the reality that is Singapore. It features the Chinese character *Xi*, which means double happiness.

His work was among six shortlisted works from about 50 submissions received worldwide.

All the works from this year's six chosen artists – they are from China, England, France, Argentina, Italy and Singapore – are housed in a gallery at the Montblanc headquarters in Hamburg for permanent display.

Replicas of Lee's work are being displayed at the Montblanc boutiques in Singapore for the next six to eight weeks. It will then move on to other locations worldwide.

He was an aircraft technician for seven years with the Singapore Air Force. When he completed his bond in 1989, he decided to pursue graphic design. In 1994, he enrolled with the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (Nafa) and graduated in 1996 with a certificate in painting.

He went on to complete a diploma in fine art from Lasalle-SIA College of the Arts in 1999. Last year, he graduated with a degree in painting from the University of Huddersfield in Britain, via courses at Nafa.

He says: "I've never won any major awards in the Singapore art context. To me, an award is a bonus. What's important to me is how you communicate with your audience."

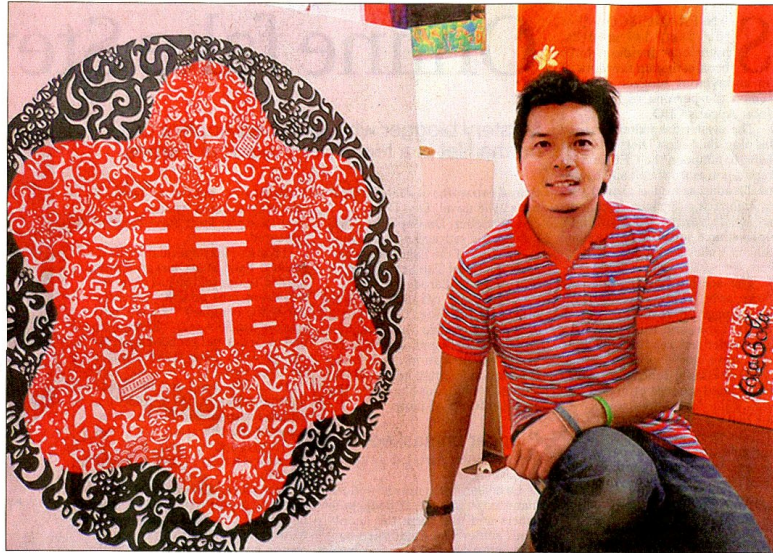
He had an art installation in Bangkok at shopping mall Gaysorn Plaza's Christmas celebrations last year. Earlier this year, he was involved in an art exhibition at Orchard Centrepoint during its relaunch.

"We need to educate the public on art. Exhibiting art in public spaces, especially in an alternative venue like the Montblanc boutique, is definitely a good idea," says Lee.

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> Replicas of Lee's work can be viewed at Montblanc boutiques at 391 Orchard Rd, 01-34 Ngee Ann City and 290 Orchard Rd, 01-18 Paragon. Opening hours are 10am to 9pm daily. Admission is free.

The Straits Times Tuesday, August 7, 2007 10



PURSUIT OF DOUBLE HAPPINESS: East meets West in Justin Lee's pop art piece.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF JUSTIN LEE