

With prices of Philippine artworks at local galleries going for a song, there's no time like the present to be buying up your favourite pieces. Many works are going for several hundred dollars to not more than \$6,000, and while auction houses like Larasati and Christie's are seeing prices ranging from \$2,000 to over \$100,000, this hardly compares to the million-dollar results that Chinese and Indonesian art sales are achieving. Allan Teo, director of Singaporean gallery Momentous Arts, reveals, "Having seen the prices of Chinese contemporary works skyrocketing, Filipino works are reasonably modest in price. It's a good time to invest."

In Singapore, though Philippine art has been eclipsed by the popularity of other Asian art, all that has been changing due to the attention that local galleries and international auction houses have been paying to Filipino artists, who had previously been neglected. Michele Ruth, assistant marketing executive of Larasati, explains the slow acceptance of Filipino art in Singapore: "The most sought-after Philippine art never leaves the Philippines. Their artists and galleries are rather conservative and unwilling to take the risk of sending artworks overseas to be sold. Freight costs and other expenses can be prohibitive to most artists and galleries. These pieces are usually snapped up by private collectors in the Philippines." This is no longer the case as auction houses and local galleries have started to feature these works in a consistent manner, producing a knock-on effect that will further encourage others to showcase them in Singapore.

## AUCTION FEVER

Keong Ruoh Ling, vice president and head of Southeast Asian pictures department of Christie's International Singapore, explains Filipino art's slow rise here, "Very simply, the lack of exposure resulted in less support. Both Indonesian and Vietnamese art were exhibited in Singapore galleries at a much earlier stage than Filipino art. Indonesian art is much more established in the Southeast Asian art auction market and has been achieving good prices since 10 years ago. It also helped that many Indonesian collectors



*Mother and Child* by Pandy Aviado, 2006, woodcut on Abaca paper.



*Stream IV* by Rico Lascano, 2006, acrylic on canvas.

## BUYING TIPS

The Philippines boasts a rich visual art culture with a strong focus on art education. Social and political content is popular because of the upheaval caused by the country's colonial history with Spain, Japan and the US, the Marcos dictatorship and the current political uncertainty, which continues to influence many artists. Artists have also been embracing the post-modern condition and producing figurative art profusely.

The first rule of buying any artwork is to purchase pieces that you appreciate for their aesthetic value and with which you can form a personal connection. Here are a few names to consider. Rico Lascano for his Zen-inspired Abstract paintings. Janos de la Cruz for his highly stylised, quirky depictions of ordinary people on the streets of Manila. Raul Isidro for his abstractionist pieces that have featured in exhibitions internationally. Edwin Wilwayco and Manuel Baldemor for their exuberant use of colours. Bencab for his bold, socially aware works. Rene Robles for founding the assertionism art movement — "Art which has power asserts, transforms & transcends."

Still, serious collectors tend to buy relevant works across the spectrum, not by nationality. Therefore, Keong says, "Just as good and exciting Filipino artists would be very much appreciated in Singapore, the same applies to other young artists from the region."