

Music and dance as rites of Passage

Malaysian artist Lim Ah Cheng puts horses aside and finds new draw in movement

Deepika Shetty

HORSES have dominated Malaysian artist Lim Ah Cheng's canvases for the past 15 years.

But in his new exhibition *The Passage*, the artist has looked for rhythm and movement in music and dance forms.

In an e-mail interview with Life!, the Kuala Lumpur-based artist explains the shift in his work: "I felt the need to move forward, to look for new subjects to focus on. I was drawn to dance and music because of their fluidity of form."

While the subject is new, the 40-year-old artist maintains that the latest body of work still has a strong link to his previous work.

Whether it is the drama or speed of a horse or the moves of a dancer, each of his works conveys a sense of movement.

The artist says these effects are often achieved through a flurry of brushstrokes. Their perfect rendition clearly demonstrates his mastery of the form.

To capture the dancers in motion, for instance, he has used the techniques of Chinese brush painting to great effect, but with oils on canvas.

He is exhibiting 20 oils on canvas, which are priced between \$2,400 and \$5,300 each. They include one of his earlier works titled *Flying With The Wind*, which shows various horses in motion. Also adding to the movement of this painting are graphic elements like colourful paper planes.



PHOTOS: MOMENTOUS ARTS

MOVING ART: Lim Ah Cheng's *The Moving Body* (left) is inspired by his travels to Bali, while *Flying With The Wind* (right) is an early work capturing horses in motion.

Lim says he included these planes to reflect the speed of the horses and to give the work a more contemporary feel.

Other works were inspired by his travels to Bali.

In *The Moving Body*, he captures the traditional Balinese legong dance. Legong was originally said to be the heavenly dance of divine nymphs and over the years has come to represent feminine grace.

On Lim's canvas, the dance takes on an abstract element as it is not clear what the dancers are doing in the painting. The

movements are painted in blurred lines and the faces of the dancers are not shown clearly.

Explaining why he does this, the artist says: "I was looking to capture the graceful movements of dancers during a performance. Giving it a semi-abstract look works as it blurs the movements and expressions."

This, in turn, invites the viewer to imagine what was on the dancer's mind or what was the particular dance move.

Lim studied at the Malaysia Institute of

Art and started painting professionally after graduating as one of its top students in 1992. He also trained under Malaysian master calligrapher Chong Chen Chuan.

His paintings have been collected by Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi as well as corporations such as Shaw and Mandarin Oriental Hotel.

He has exhibited in Singapore in group shows a number of times and had a solo exhibition here in 2004 at *Dynasty Antiques and Arts*.

Lim says he gets his artistic inspiration from his travels around Asia.

It is people and the great outdoors which draw him back to his canvas and it is the rhythm of their lives that he wants to continue showcasing.

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> *The Passage*, a solo exhibition of oils by Malaysian artist Lim Ah Cheng, is on at Momentous Arts, 20 Lorong Telok (behind Boat Quay), 02-01, till Aug 7 from 11am to 7pm from Mondays to Fridays, noon to 6pm on Saturdays. Sundays are by appointment only. Call 6535-3961 or visit www.momentousarts.com