

Lecturer with an eye for local art

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Story and pictures by Anna Vivienne

FOR a lecturer at Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS), appreciation of art goes beyond merely collecting paintings and other artworks as he believes it also means helping budding artists to achieve their full potential.

"I have always been very interested in art and the artistic talents of Sabahans. I enjoy and appreciate their artistic expressions, especially through their paintings," said Dr Awangku Hassan Bahar Pengiran Bagul, head of BIMP-EAGA Unit for Tourism Development at UMS.

"I think, people, including myself, have grown tremendously in art appreciation. Through their passion, art connoisseurs are also helping aspiring artists to develop their talents to the highest level. This should auger well for local artists as a whole," the 38-year-old added.

Hassanal, who heads the BIMP-EAGA Unit for Tourism Development at UMS, has been collecting the works of local artists for the past 15 years. His first collection piece was a beautiful painting by a local artist.

"I got it for a token RM10 but the



Dr Awangku Hassan Bahar Pengiran Bagul

painting's value is not the money but the efforts and love that went into it," he added.

Over the years, he acquired more paintings of other artists who caught his interest with their presentations and interpretations.

He now has some 70 paintings which he keeps in his apartment at Putatan.

"I really like collecting paintings. At first, I only liked them for how they looked. They were beautiful and depicted the artistic talents of a group of people -- and to show my appreciation, I bought them.

"I didn't think of their monetary value back then but I soon realised the paintings could be worth something in time to come. This is judging by the old masters' works which can fetch so much now. I, therefore, put a value on my collections nowadays."

He reckons he will continue to collect more paintings, and soon, his apartment may not be able to accommodate them all.

He hopes to open his own gallery one day to exhibit his collections, and at the same time, help promote the works of local artists. He is confident his gallery will attract art collectors.

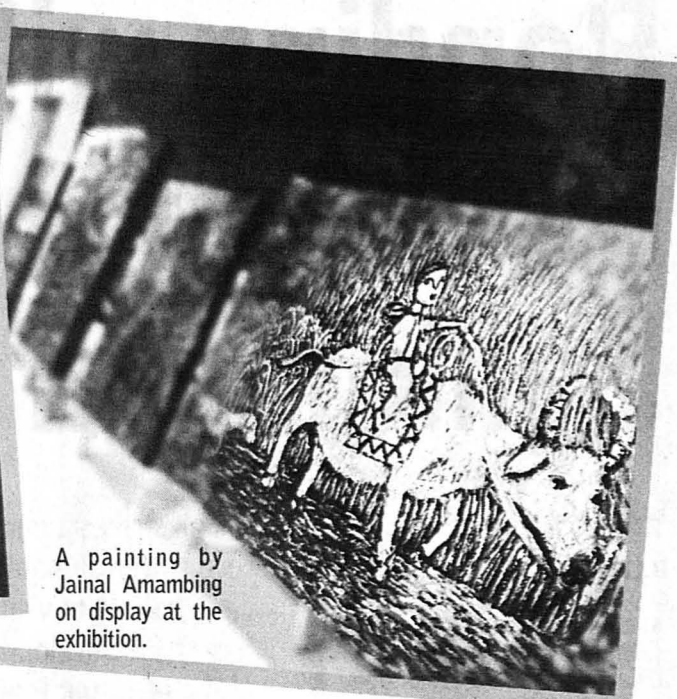
Hassanal recently organised the first Sabah Naïve Artists Showcase at Jesselton Hotel in Kota Kinabalu.

According to him, naïve art -- also spelt naïf art -- are the works of artists in sophisticated societies who lack or reject conventional expertise in the representation or depiction of real objects. The naïve artist creates with the same passion as the trained artist but without the latter's formal knowledge of methods. Each country is distinguished by its cultural identity through its people, arts, heritage and architecture.

Five artists took part in the Sabah Naïve Artists Showcase, including Arthur Stephen Siowou, Awang Fadilah Ali Hussein (also known as Awang Borneo), Azlan Dulikab (also known as Toytom), Jainal Amambing and Rosmaini Sunarjo.



One of Arthur Siowou's paintings on display at the exhibition.



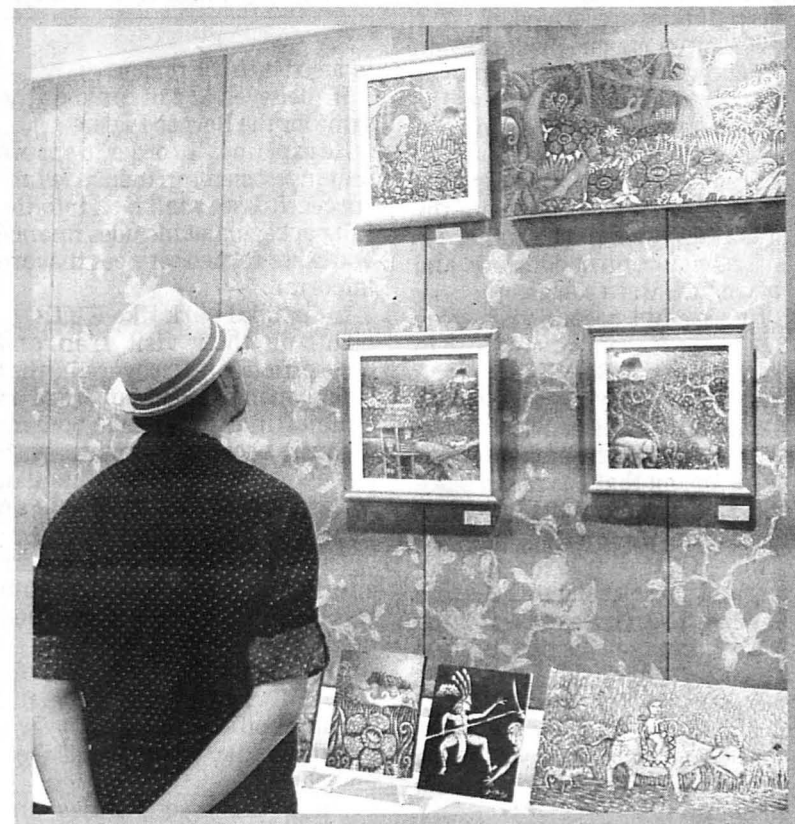
A painting by Jainal Amambing on display at the exhibition.

There were 35 new paintings from the naïve artists and some of their works had developed and moved away from their former styles. The paintings were on sale -- from RM350 to RM500.

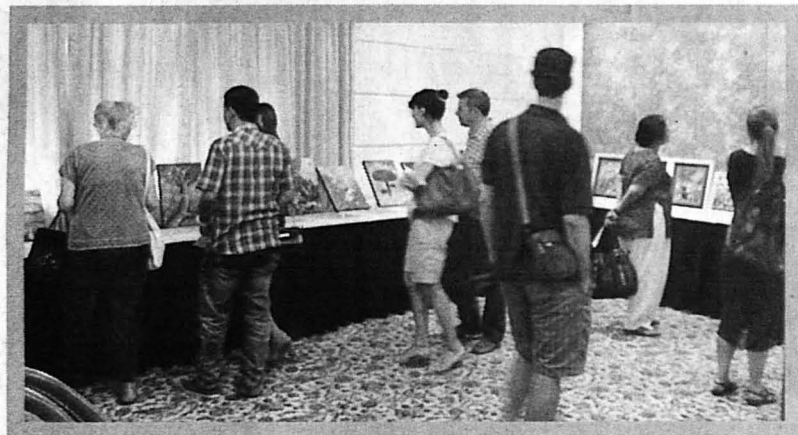
"Art and entertainment are thought to contribute towards enhancing the environment, economic prosperity, employment, social development and the quality of life of the local community. The relationship between art, entertainment and tourism is a close one, and art and tourism have proven to be the pull factor for tourism," Hassanal explained.

He noted that Malaysia's pursuit of art tourism through contemporary art was expected to capture the economic spin-offs envisaged by the Tourism Ministry "but with enhancement of the art sector's structure for commercialisation."

He said the more one appreciated and understood the art of different eras with regard to its movements, styles and techniques, the better one could develop, evaluate and improve one's own artworks.



A visitor appreciating the paintings at the exhibition.



The public at the 'Sabah Naïve Artists Showcase' event.



(From left) Jainal Amambing, Rosmaini Sunarjo, Jennifer Linggi, Dr Awangku Hassan Bahar Pengiran Bagul, Azlan Dulikab, Awang Fadilah Ali Hussein and Arthur Siowou.