

# Growing demand for works by Singapore artists

By Shah Salimat | SingaporeScene – Tue, Jan 21, 2014

*Shah Salimat is the editor-in-chief of Popsoken, an entertainment, lifestyle and issues newsblog in Singapore. He tweets at @shahsalimat.*

Just one hour into the VIP preview for Art Stage Singapore last Wednesday, all nine works from Singapore painter Ruben Pang were sold for some \$50,000 by Chan Hampe Galleries.

Shortly after, Pang was holding his champagne glass with a look of relief on his face.

The annual art fair has proven its salt in profiling local artists here. Recently back for its fourth instalment from January 16 to 19 at Marina Bay Sands, Art Stage brings together more than 110 regional and international galleries to showcase select artworks for buyers and the public.

Art Stage's Southeast Asia focus has attracted buyers keen on exploring the emerging art scene in this region, with its strong cultural heritage. The Southeast Asia platform is an example of a curated exhibit of key works from artists in this particular region.

After launching an Indonesian-based platform space last year, Art Stage launched eight country and regional platforms this year to showcase Asian contemporary art from young and emerging artists whose art can be better understood in a geographical context.

## Towards greater exposure overseas

For local artists Donna Ong and Robert Zhao Renhui, their artworks are presented together in one space within the Southeast Asia platform. Sending two Singapore artists was a conscious decision by Milan-based Primo Marella Gallery to push for a bigger Singapore presence.

"We placed Donna and Robert at the platform instead of our gallery booth so that it gives more attention to their work. Singapore artists are well-supported by Singapore collectors who are happy to see their country's artists perform on the international stage," said Elena Micheletti, gallery manager at Primo Marella.

"However, artists here are not really known by European collectors, yet. We are committed to promoting them more in



Jane Lee sold two of her Faces artwork, seen here at Art Stage, for over S\$120,000 (Photo: Shah Salimat)

Europe because they have so many things to say to the world," explained Elena.

Primo Marella is set to honour their word: a group show in October at their Milan gallery will profile Singapore artists including Donna and Robert. An solo showcase of Robert's work will be held in May.

Singapore artworks fetching good prices

Gallerist Helina Chan from iPreciation Gallery is pleased at the support their artist Chua Chye Teck received at the Southeast Asia platform. Although his black-and-white photographic series has not been sold yet, a few collectors have approached the artist to discuss a sale.

"The platform is a good opportunity to attract galleries who do not have money for a booth or want to feature emerging work. We don't want Singapore artists to be neglected at an event as big as this," said Chan, whose gallery approached artist Chua to place his artwork on the platform.

Chan hopes more can be done to support local artistes on the international stage. "It is not just about inviting the secondary art market overseas to Singapore. The public needs to know Singapore artists are selling well at a reasonable price in the international art market," she said.

"Local artists are not weaker than any other artists."

The sales have spoken for themselves. Within an hour of the VIP preview, local artist Milenko Prvacki's 12-square metre artwork closed the biggest sale for \$120,000.

Sundaram Tagore Gallery, with bases in Singapore and New York, reported that local artist Jane Lee sold two of her Faces artwork series for more than \$120,000. Similarly, Galerie Sogan & Art sold all five photographs from local artist Sarah Choo for \$32,500.

Chua Chye Teck is hopeful the spotlight on Southeast Asia will continue to be Singapore's gain, especially in areas outside the trendy contemporary art field.

"There is room for improvement to include older artistes who don't have the opportunity or gallery partnership to show at Art Stage," said Chua.

"Our artists just need a platform to show their work internationally."



Chua Chye Teck's "Nothing" photographic series is attracting interest. (Photo: Shah Salimat)



Milenko Prvacki standing in front of his artwork that sold for S\$120,000 (Photo by iPreciation)