

MODERN ART FOR MODERN HOMES

Art patronage in Malaysia has taken on a new form with luxury property developers commissioning artists to create signature works for show houses aimed at discerning property investors.

While this trend is still at its nascent stage, with only two major property developers using Malaysian art as part of their marketing strategy, it is only a matter of time before others wise up to the use of "real art" as opposed to hanging cheap paintings from Bali or Bangkok.

In the past, art patronage by corporate bodies has mainly been confined to the occasional purchase of paintings. Other attempts include using art as part of fund-raising efforts for charity. But such clumsy attempts have merely drawn ridicule from serious collectors and senior artists especially if the "work" is of questionable merit and quality.

Of late, CapitalLand Financial and joint-venture partners Ireka Group and Juta Asia Properties Sdn Bhd, have embarked on a series of luxury condominium developments that use the art of Malaysian-born artists like Eng Tay and Dr Jolly Koh, as part of their luxury marketing concept.

CapitalLand and Ireka started with Eng Tay sculptures and Jolly Koh paintings for their highly successful Kiaraville project in Mont' Kiara. Then CapitalLand and Juta Asia teamed up to use Jolly's modern landscapes for their Zehn Bukit Pantai project.

And just last week, CapitalLand and Ireka had a preview of their show units – decorated with Jolly's paintings – at the Seni condominium development in Mont' Kiara.

This development will even have a professionally-operated fine art gallery called Art Salon @ Seni to enable art lovers select appropriate works for their new homes that now cost about RM600 per sq ft.

While it makes sense to acquire creative works of well-known or established artists as a form of decoration, not all artists' works are suitable for use in luxury projects obviously.

And just what is it that makes the paintings of Dr Jolly Koh appropriate for such projects?

Explains Jolly: "The act of patrons commissioning artists has a long tradition, especially in the Western world. In fact, in the history of Western art, it is all about patronage.

"Even today, the modern form of the patron is the museum curator. But the act of patronage also comes in diversified forms. For example, corporate patronage is one such form."

Corporate patronage by property developers who leave the subject-matter or theme to the professional artist reflects an enlightened patron, says Jolly.

"They are the best kind of patrons any

In order to create the ambience of a luxurious interior design, the quality of the furnishings and the art works must match. Another Jolly Koh landscape painting used in the interior design of the Seni Mont' Kiara condominium development



artist can have," he adds. "They only want a certain size and colours, so I'm free to paint whatever I like. That is what a commissioned work should be.

"As for the theme, this comes back to the evolution of my work. They know my work and know what to expect. They would expect a Jolly Koh – in that sense – they are sensible and reasonable patrons.

"The concept is part of my body of work, a natural progression of what I have been doing all along. They are joining the flow or stream, so to speak.

"The request for certain colours and sizes don't compromise me artistically or require me to change gear in my work.

"As an artist, I decide what paintings they should have. I won't simply paint operatic figures. One has to have judgment and common sense."

Regarding his works for the Zehn Bukit Pantai project, Jolly delivered eight paintings for the first commission and five works for the second commission when the show rooms were re-decorated for the second phase of the project.

And when it comes to collaborating with the interior designer for the project, the artist couldn't have been more pleased.

"Of course, I'm happy. They decided which painting to use for which room based on the colour and size.

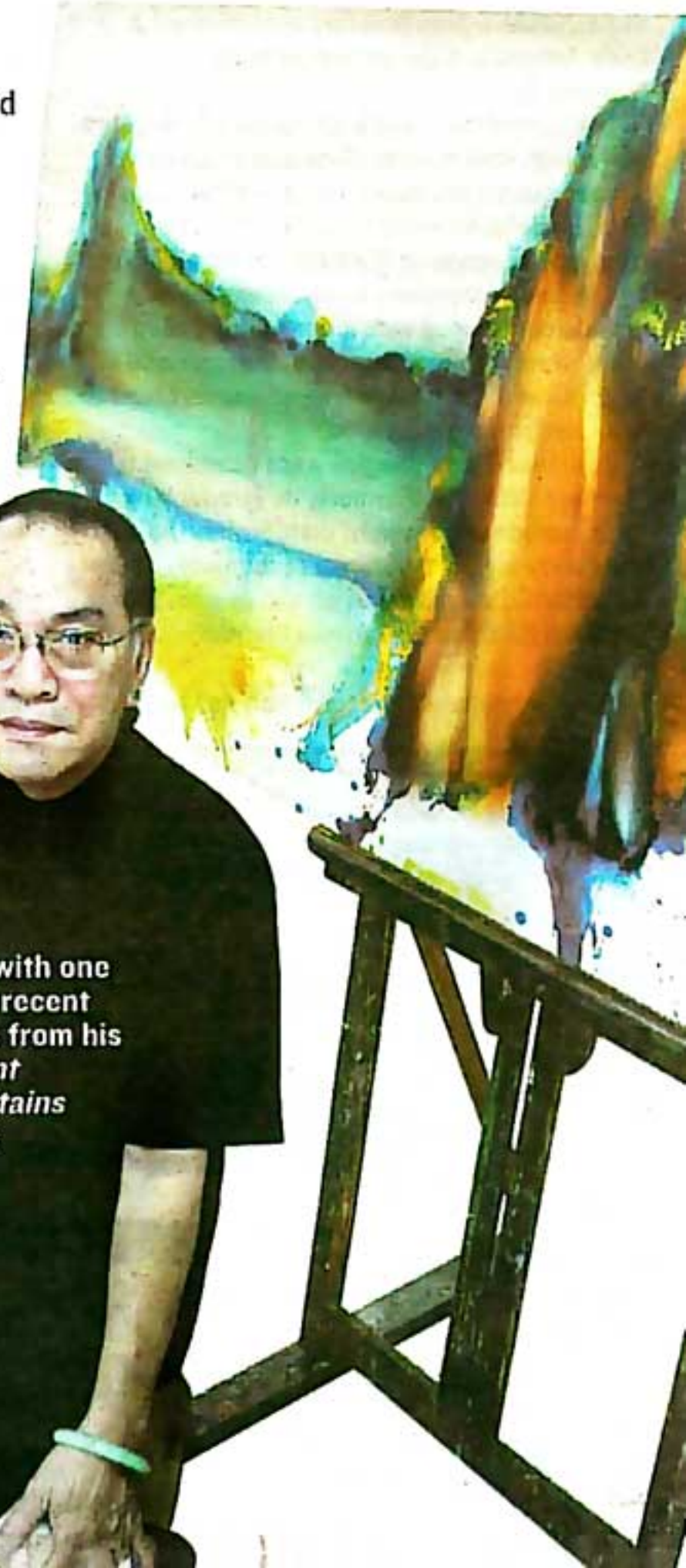
"My kind of paintings are ideal for that type of modern home design because they look very professional and not too expressionistic. Another artist whose works are suitable for that kind of home is Datuk Ibrahim Hussein. In contrast to my mine, Latiff Mohidin's works are very expressionistic, even if they were affordable.

"My works are decorative – which is a big plus. Most art is decorative, from Michelangelo (1475-1564) to Raphael (1483-1520). Even Vincent van Gogh's *Sunflowers* painting was meant to decorate his room to welcome Paul Gauguin. Except for post-modern art of (British artist) Damien Hirst with his dead flies (*A Thousand Years*, 1990) and dissected cow (*Mother and Child Divided*, 1993) – they were more for shock value and are visually boring."

And which of Jolly's commissioned works, does the artist consider the most significant?

"That's like asking me which of my children I favour. They are all different," retorts Jolly.

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Jolly with one of his recent works from his *Distant Mountains* series



A Jolly Koh landscape used in the study of the Zehn Bukit Pantai show unit