

Options

LIFE STYLE LEISURE

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the arts at a glance

BY ANANDHI GOPINATH



Return TO innocence



Stephanie Kuen's home-cum-studio is a cornucopia of colour and activity, and subscribes to the particular brand of clutter known as charming. A plush sofa sits by a wooden table which is next to an antique stool — all her precious finds from erstwhile trips to Malacca. Amidst all the disarray, a deep maroon wall stands out against which a bold, brightly coloured canvas regally hangs.

"I'm no fan of the minimalist look at all," she says firmly. And neither are her paintings. As many other art pieces today struggle to achieve a balance in economical uses of colours and lines, Stephanie's work is multihued and somehow conveys an intense sense of fun and playful innocence.

A self-taught artist, Stephanie graduated with qualifications in graphic design, and alongside husband Joshua (who she met in college) conceptualised *Flavours* magazine (now under the stewardship of *The Star*). "When I wanted to conceive my son Brian, I moved my work closer to home, and started going back to sketching and drawing — an activity I used to love as a child," Stephanie says. Joshua encouraged her to take



When Night Falls

it up more seriously, so armed with a canvas and a few tubes of watercolours Stephanie started to paint. "I'd obviously had more training and practice over the years, so I wasn't as abashed to hang my paintings on the wall as I used to be — it was turning fast into pieces I was genuinely proud of."

Stephanie sent her work to home décor stores like House & Co and Red Envelope, and much to her surprise they soon garnered a following. Again, it was Joshua who encouraged her to try her luck with galleries, and Anasrah Gallery in the former Starhill Shopping Centre gave Stephanie her big break.

Since then, Stephanie has amassed a following she says, consisting mostly of expatriates, who seem to appreciate her bold style a little more. "I never got a diploma in fine art or trained under a master painter — I just read books, look at work I like, and draw and paint what inspires me. I like the outdoors, I like people, I like the images of life. So that's what I paint," she says tentatively in her simple, innocent way.



Selamat Pagi

Reminiscent of the whimsical works of Matisse and Picasso, Stephanie's pieces bear images of characters in a kampung life. "Not that I ever lived in one, but I think the images of such a pleasant, simple lifestyle soaked into me when I visited friends in school or my old teachers," she says thoughtfully. "I've always liked rural areas and I've rather envied the kampung life that I've seen. There's a connection I've always felt with it, and that has seeped into my painting unconsciously."

Her upcoming showing in KLIFac is her first solo exhibition, and she admits she's excited and nervous all at once. "I've always had my work displayed alongside other artists, so this is really a big deal for me. I never thought I'd get this far — I just like to paint."

The *Finence of A Tropical Life* — in the Kampung is showing from March 12 to April 8 (10am to 6:30pm) at KLIFac, Jalan Sirhan off Jalan Ipoh, KL. Free admission. Tel: (01) 4017 9000

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