

## Art and the heroes of our time in the pandemic



Heroes Of Our Time featured more than 200 artworks by artists from the Singapore Art Society, students and migrant workers, among others. PHOTO: NHG



**Shabana Begum**

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SINGAPORE - Confined to his cruise liner cabin, Mr Tamil turned to his hobby for comfort: making pencil sketches.

The migrant worker drew portraits of his friends, of furniture in his cabin, and did abstract artwork inspired by the scenery at the Marina Bay Cruise Centre.

After recovering from Covid-19 in August last year, Mr Tamil was one of thousands of migrant workers who stayed on board cruise ships turned into temporary accommodation for them.

Mr Tamil, who is in his twenties and came from South India, has been working in Singapore since 2016. He declined to give his full name.

Ms Suwen Low, an employee of HealthServe, a non-government organisation for migrant workers, discovered Mr Tamil's sketches while she was conducting engagement programmes on the ship.

Having studied fine arts, Ms Low was able to tutor Mr Tamil on different shading techniques and gave him various types of paper and pencils.

Last week, some of Mr Tamil's works were showcased at the ION Art Gallery, in an exhibition dedicated to Covid-19 frontliners.

The exhibition, Heroes Of Our Time, featured more than 200 artworks by artists from the Singapore Art Society (SAS), students and migrant workers, among others. It was organised by SAS and the National Healthcare Group (NHG) and ran from March 13 to 17.

The exhibition's central piece was a 1.8m by 3m painting created by 18 SAS artists. The acrylic work depicts various scenes of the country's fight against the pandemic, from healthcare workers in personal protective equipment, to key pandemic venues such as the National Centre for Infectious Diseases (NCID) and the Singapore Expo, which served as a community care facility.

The artwork also contains a painted QR code - a tongue-in-cheek reference to the SafeEntry check-in that has become the norm. Those who scanned the QR code could watch a video showing the artists working on the painting, which took six months to complete.

After the exhibition, the central artwork was donated to the NCID.

On the masked frontliners in the painting, NHG's deputy group chief executive for education and research Benjamin Seet said: "During the pandemic, it is the frontliners, such as nurses, who make the most difference. We might not recognise their faces or know their names, but they take on the most important job of looking after patients. This painting celebrates their contributions and sacrifice."

The various artworks showcased at the exhibition can be viewed on SAS' website and on the Facebook pages of Asian Scientist Magazine and HealthServe.

## Some of the exhibited artworks



Migrant worker Mr Tamil, with HealthServe's head of communications and engagement Suwen Low, with the pencil sketches showcased at the Heroes Of Our Time exhibition at the ION Art Gallery. PHOTO: HEALTHSERVE

Mr Tamil's first portrait sketch was of Elsa from the popular animated movie Frozen, which he drew from an online video.

He missed his niece and nephew, and drew portraits of them in his sketchbook.

Now back at work, he still makes time for his hobby, determined to continue honing his craft.

More than 20 migrant workers contributed their artworks to the exhibition, including ceramic art and pottery pieces.



A woodcut print by Dr Ho Kah Leong. PHOTO: SINGAPORE ART SOCIETY

Woodcut, one of the oldest forms of printmaking, starts with the artist carving an image on a block of wood.

Once the full image is etched, the wooden surface is coated with ink and stamped onto a piece of paper, revealing a painting.

The print depicts an MRT commute under the new normal - people are wearing masks and not talking.

Dr Ho Kah Leong, a former MP and veteran artist, spent two months working on this piece.

He contributed three woodcut prints for the exhibition.



朱宏  
Zhu Hong  
Circuit Breaker  
2020  
Our Singaporeans are so united,  
to listen our government's  
order everyone is at home, but  
our police is still on duty.

A vibrant painting of a serene and empty waterfront during the circuit breaker period, painted by Singapore Art Society (SAS) artist Zhu Hong. PHOTO: NHG

The normally bustling roads around Marina Bay are empty, save for a lone police car on patrol.

The police car symbolises law and order during the circuit breaker last year, when residents mostly stayed at home to reduce the community spread of Covid-19, said Singapore Art Society president Terence Teo.

He added: "This was the artist's thoughts and feelings about the period, reflected through the painting. A quiet city."

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