

Sundriary

If you have an arts-related event and want it to be listed in this column, write to:

Sundriary
c/o Sunday Star
Star Publications (M) Bhd
13 Jalan 13/6
46200 Petaling Jaya

GENERAL

□ *Invisible Musicians*, an exhibition featuring a collection of more than 100 mechanical and automatic musical instruments from various private collections in Europe and North America, is being held at the Galeri Petronas until May 13. Details: ☎ 03-207 7770.

ART

□ An exhibition by artists Ahmad Zakii Anwar, G. Sampson Bieberich and Valerie Sepi will be held at the Galeri Taksu until April 13. Details: ☎ 03-451 4396.

□ *The Art of Lee Long Looi* will be held at the Art Gallery Showroom, Penang, until June 30. Details: ☎ 04-227 6986.

DRAMA

□ Helen O'Grady Children's Drama Academy conducts drama classes for children aged five to 16 in Taman Tun Dr Ismail and Bangsar. Details: ☎ 03-716 9558.

DANCE

□ *Dariwunyan*, a collaboration between leading Malaysian dance companies, will be staged at the Actors Studio Theatre today at 3pm. Among the dancers featured are Mew Tsang Tsing, Suhaimi Magi, Judimar Monfils and Aida Redza. Tickets are RM20. Details: ☎ 03-294 5400.

□ The River Grass Dance Theatre, led by dancer Mew Tsang Tsing, is conducting classes in several forms of dance including Contemporary, Chinese, Children's Creative, Ballroom, 3R Workout, Malay, Indian Classical, Line, Jazz and Special Dance Training at its new premises in Petaling Jaya. Details and enquiries: ☎ 03-777 8706/016-221 0562.

MUSIC

□ Newly-appointed Associate Conductor Kevin Field will lead the Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra in a performance of Copland's *Appalachian Spring*, Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* and Rachmaninov's *Symphonic Dances* today at 3pm. Tickets are RM100, RM70, RM60 and RM10. Details and bookings: ☎ 03-207 7007.

□ The Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra will perform a programme of Scandinavian music on Apr 10 at the Dewan Filharmonik Petronas. Composers featured include Grieg, Nielsen, Svendsen and Sibelius. Concertmaster Stig Nilsson will conduct. Tickets are RM140, RM100 and RM60. Details and bookings: ☎ 03-207 7007.

Observer of the ordinary

By J. ANU

The premature passing of any human being, be it a husband, a father, a friend, is always a difficult thing to deal with.

And when the unexpected passing is that of a prominent figure — in the art scene, for example — it is all the more moving.

Klang artist and social commentator Kok Yew Puah passed away suddenly last week at the age of 52.

A significant artist in the scheme of our Malaysian art scene, he never really achieved the status of public figure, not so much because he didn't merit it, but more so because of the nature of the man.

I was not close to Yew Puah, but the man I met was quiet and unassuming, with a shyness that concealed a cautious mirth.

Even at his own exhibitions, the artist preferred to observe quietly from the background; he was a great observer of human nature, so much so that, for the longest time, you would be unable to put a distinct personality to his patent compositions and signature paintings.

Best of all, he was courteous with other artists' works and generous with encouragement and praise to younger practitioners.

The other probable reason would be the fact that, although Yew Puah entered the local art scene in 1973 as a young graduate fresh out of art school in Melbourne, he took a long sojourn into the food business before returning to his art as a full-fledged practitioner in the late 80s.

"That is all the more reason why this is so tragic," Wairah Marzuki, director of the National Art Gallery, said of the artist.

"He finally had the time to paint with all his heart and create a range of work which was both aesthetically and intellectually mature."

Yew Puah's work evolved considerably between his first solo exhibition in 1973 at the Samat Gallery and his reentry into the Malaysian art scene with his 1993 exhibition at the National Gallery's Creative Centre.

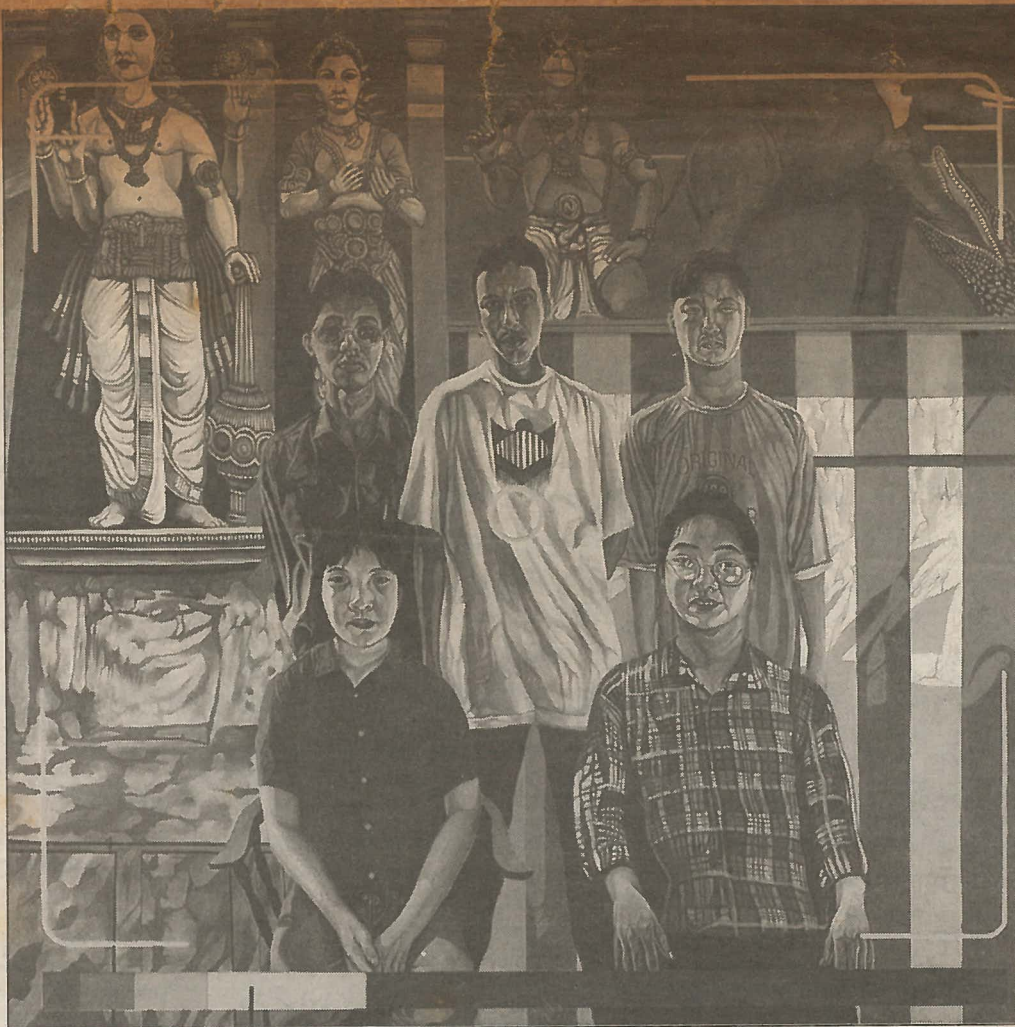
While as a younger man, Yew Puah was inclined towards the abstract-colourist, but he turned to the genre of social commentary in his later years.

The change may have been gradual, but since Malaysian art lovers were not party to his period of artistic evolution, the movement was simply taken with the new work as if he was a new artist.

And almost all the new works possessed certain stylised devices.

Firstly, they were realist, portrait-based: his actors defy the audience, staring into their viewing space and claiming it for themselves.

He interpreted the figure in an almost cubist religiosity for form and, in his compositions, often ignored the more conven-



QUIET COMMENTS
... Kok's 'Temple Figures' celebrates the ordinary man in every day existence. 'Camera View of the Artist' (below) is a self-portrait of the artist.



tional readings of perspective, space and strict realism.

And when Yew Puah addressed contemporary issues like the environment or society, he employed contemporary heroes. All the players in his paintings were ordinary people from ordinary times — young people, tourists, Chinese girls, students, businessmen, cyclists, children in fishing villages — and how their situation affected their lives.

Rather than choose romanticised symbols — the details from culture, tradition, history and religious practice — Yew Puah chose to draw from our most everyday, routine, mundane events to make his paintings extraordinary.

Even with the locations, he opted to depict the ordinary, for example, the forces of progress

(highways and flyovers) amidst the unyielding influence of age old symbols like the fishing village, the Thaipusam-coloured Hindu temple, and the car graveyard in pieces like *Sisters*.

All of which combined to make for what was often a difficult reading of not so much the intellectual reading of his work, but rather its decorative appeal.

He also revealed in his work what Redza Piyadasa, fellow artist and close friend, likes to describe as "the suggestion of the voyeur somewhere in his mental make-up".

Often, the artist includes the markings of a camera's framing view-finder for several reasons. On a purely aesthetic level, the device gives to his work a dramatic play of space and depth.

In a more conceptual manner, however, this "emblem" gives to

the work various implications like the capturing of a single moment in time, or the feeling of being trapped within one specific time and space.

At the centre of all these sensibilities was always the artist's beloved Klang.

Born and bred in Klang, Yew Puah lived his entire life there, presumably with his mother and father as a child and later with his own family — wife Sally Anne and two children.

While the venues in his earlier works were not so distinct, with *Klang and Beyond*, his final exhibition at Valentine Willie Fine Art, Yew Puah salutes his favourite place in the world, its temples, shop houses, flyovers, fishing villages, and its green grass.

In many ways, it is difficult to place Yew Puah within the context of our Malaysian art scene since he returned to it so recently.

Still, he has left his indelible mark, sometimes an artist in transition, but mostly as a detached observer and an unapologetic recorder of his environment and his time.

Perhaps Piyadasa describes it best in the forward for the catalogue for *Klang and Beyond*:

"This present one-man show may be viewed as his real point of 'arrival' as a distinctive and highly satisfying Malaysian artist. One cannot but feel that Kok Yew Puah, the older artist, can only further mature and improve, like old wine, with the continuing passage of time."

Both the truth and the irony in these closing lines make this tribute all the more painful.

Kok Yew Puah will be sorely missed as much for his works of art as for his genteel nature, his aura of unassuming and unpretentious quiet.