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Art from the heart

Sharon Nelson

A LITTLE boy in full white stands at the doorway and beckons visitors in. Behind him, in stark contrast, are canvases of brilliant oil colours.

This is the Gallerie Taksu in Kuala Lumpur, which is currently displaying works of abstract art.

A closer look at the pieces reveals a discipline of hues, all the more impressive because the artists are children aged between three and 12.

These paintings are part of a project to raise money for children with mental and developmental disabilities, and will be sold at prices ranging from RM500 to RM5,000.

The proceeds of "Abstract Expressions: By Kids for Kids" will go to two schools, the Centre for the Achievement of Human Potential (CAHP) and the Future Minds Centre (FMC).

The young artists themselves are from privileged homes, and are the children of high-profile parents such as Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir, Raja Eleena Sultan Azlan Shah and Sofi Ghafar.

"We're hoping that the parents of these kids, or their friends will buy the paintings," says Farah Khan, executive director of the Melium Group, and chairman of the project committee.

The formal opening of the exhibition will be on June 27, when 60 of the best pieces will go on sale. It is hoped that the project will raise RM100,000.

The 20 children who took part worked under the guidance of abstract artist Louis Wah, who conducted the workshops on weekends over the past 15 weeks.

"It started with Karim, Farah's son," says Wah, indicating the little boy who was at the doorway.

A closer look at Karim reveals a scar behind one ear where he has had a cochlea implant, and an electronic hearing device. Karim, who attends the CAHP, is also mildly autistic.

Early this year, Karim and Wah happened to be on holiday together in Bali when they started "messing around with water colours."

"I saw how much he enjoyed it. Nothing else existed for him when he painted."

The idea struck Farah, and the project was born. Besides the fund-raising objective, one of her aims is to expose children from well-to-do backgrounds to those less privileged, and to "get them to do something for others."

"And this is fun," she says.

She seems to be right; the concept seems to have settled well with the young artists.

Wong Jo-Yve is the youngest project participant at 3 1/2 years. She holds up a square canvas slathered with rose and peach hues.

"Pink is my favourite colour," she says softly.

Another artist, Tengku Aidy Ahmad Shah, 9, is shyly reluctant to answer questions. But he smiles as he holds his work in bold red, gold and black. "I like this kind of painting," he says.

Ineza Melanie M. Rousille is one of the older children, at 11. Her works include a portrait of Wah.

"I made his face blue," she says confidently, before skipping off.

"I encourage them to break the rules," Wah says.

And if the energy with which they have done so is anything to go by,

then the project will be a huge, colourful success.

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