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Stoking minds with strokes

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BE it the infectious poco poco or the sensuous salsa, he moves like a gazelle at a social event. But there is more to Luiz Allegretti's party graces than meets the eye, and in the very same manner, you have to look beyond the literals when it comes to judging his art works.

On Tuesday, Italian/Brazilian Allegretti, an artist of high repute in the European art scene, will have his first solo exhibition here titled "Vanity: A Contemporary Classicalism Art and Photography Exhibition of Grace, Elegance & Authority".

Belying the programmed concept of the line dance, the understanding of Allegretti and "Vanity" at that requires a stepping out of the confines of

a picture frame, so to speak. Not least the powdering of one's nose.

An artist who has moved from traditional oils to presentations in multimedia in all of 20 years, he makes a vocation out of provoking mind sets, mainly.

Take some of his video works which controversially juxtaposes the human body in varied social situations.

"Art needs to provoke. It has to make people evaluate about what it is about. And where it is going," he says.

"Vanity" in its superficial meaning is bound to strike a measure of askance and discordance, Allegretti reckons. But really, its meaning stems

from a very important concept in many 17th-century Western art pieces about the fragility of life.

"It is also a reflection of how short life is. If such is its span, then the message is - do something (worthwhile)," he says.

From that wide-ranging interpretation of the word, curator June Baharuddin has chosen authority, grace and elegance to carry the exhibition's concept through.

"Grace comes from God, its meaning is sublime whereas elegance is not just about having the right clothes and jewellery but about being human. Authority, in the meantime, can be exercised in the best of manner. All of

these three words have a bearing that is universal."

Aside from the portraitures, Allegretti, whose forte is the contemporary

classicalism genre, has created pieces using mosaic (a material which is common to both Western and Eastern cultures) in gold and silver paint interfaced with frosted glass frames bearing the word "vanity".

In keeping with the fusing of traditional and modern art forms, the images on mosaic are close to the disciplines of classical masters while the finish is extremely contemporary.

An awesome piece is that of the Petronas Twin Towers done in gold mosaic. Going back to the subject of provocation, Allegretti believes that

even the building of modern structures like the towers may have stemmed

from a need to stoke the minds of Malaysians.

"I believe that when Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had it built, he wanted people to think, react."

On one of the subjects in his portraits, he says that the provocative thrust of the shot was that amidst the regalia, the true jewel there is the subject's smile.

Still, since interpretation is the prerogative of the audience, and if vanity were to be taken literally, Malaysia has plenty to crow about.

"Its people are sometimes too humble. It's time to be proud," he says, adding that his personal message to Malaysia is it's time to strut her feathers and be proud of her achievements.

Allegretti's admiration for the country ("Malaysia's economic growth is remarkable! She has the best restaurants around! I can live a similar lifestyle here as I do in Paris!" he enthused) has spurred a need to do things on our shores.

In 2001, he collaborated with Malaysian musicians and artists in a multimedia stage presentation, Antara Semangat, at the National Art Gallery in Kuala Lumpur.

"Vanity is an important exhibition for me and I am proud to be here," says the man whose works have graced museums in Europe as well as Latin America.

Wanting to further lend his expertise to help the art fraternity here and satisfy an artistic soul that needs to explore and expand,

Allegretti has plans to work on an original opera on Malaysia next.

Still in its foetal stage, the show will possibly see him working with a classical Malaysian musician residing in Brussels. It will reflect the harmonious cultures here.

And then, there is possibly part two of Vanity which will feature the Malaysian man on the street and in the village. This, he hopes to bring to the Western world.

Like I said, line dances aside, this man moves...

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