

Living On TheHILL

DECEMBER 2017

A watercolor illustration of a garden scene. The background is white with various green and yellow plants and butterflies. The plants include large green leaves, smaller green leaves, and thin stems with small yellow flowers. There are three butterflies: one orange and black, one yellow and orange, and one yellow and orange. The overall style is soft and artistic.

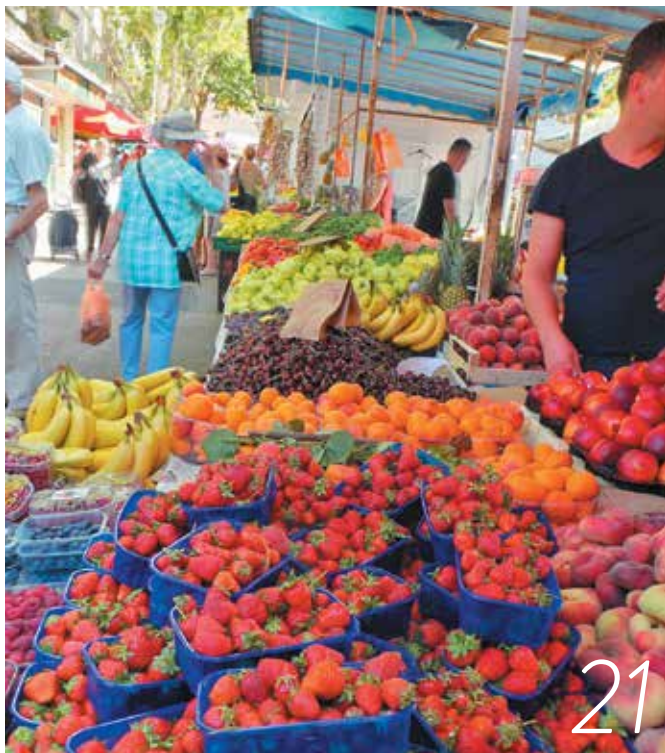
Taman Duta Property Values
Who's King Of The Hill
Black Gold

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Five Reasons I Collect Art

Ed Soo

If you're looking for a reason to collect art, here are five to get your started

The Pleasure of Beauty

"Beauty is in the eye of the beholder" is a commonly heard phrase. It is generally thought that perceptions of beauty are subjective, that it is socially and culturally conditioned. The late Denis Dutton argued a Darwinian theory of beauty. He contends: "I have no doubt whatsoever that the experience of beauty, with its emotional intensity and pleasure, belongs to our evolved human psychology."

I have no doubt that objectively (whether it is a result of Darwinian adaptation is arguable) certain colours (shades and combinations of them), shapes (their balance and proportion), and subject-matter (e.g. animal; human and especially the human face; landscape), and how skillfully the work was created, evoke

certain innate emotional responses (e.g. happiness, sadness, peacefulness, outrage) in us. We associate these with our ideas of beauty and pleasure, and we attach value to art pieces that are able to trigger these emotional responses in us.

When I started collecting art, I only collected figurative works. I could not understand abstract works. It was only much later that I realised I did not need to "understand" the art work. It only needed to evoke an emotional response in me. So when people ask me to explain Yeoh Choo Kuan's work "Cry me a rainbow," I tell them: "I don't know why, but I find it is very beautiful."

Leon Leong
Dinner at Sisli, 2014



The Pleasure of Owning

There is a certain pleasure in owning a piece of art (especially an original work that no one else has) or anything else of value, for that matter. I call it our squirreling instinct. I am reminded when I was young, my mother gave me a beautiful green Rotax fountain ink pen, which her mother (my grandmother) owned. I loved it because it was beautiful, and I was the only one in school who had such a pen. I used it for all my exams and believed that it brought me luck. Till today, I have my lucky pen and it still brings me much pleasure.

Art is also associated with the finer things in life. Owning art suggests that one is cultured. As good art often requires deep pockets, it is also an indicator of one's financial standing. Hence, owning art can give one a certain social and cultural status. Some call it "bragging rights." There is pleasure in this, too.

The Pleasure of Knowledge

Many artists are people with the luxury of spending most of their time thinking and reflecting on life. They then creatively express their insight in their works of art. Their works make us think, contemplate and to view life from perspectives that we would otherwise not.

One of my favourite works is a small piece entitled "Shelter" by Putu Sutawijaya, from his Poems of Nature series. It is a picture of humans prostrate under a leafless tree. Why did the artist title the work "Shelter," when the tree obviously provided none? Putu explains that life where he comes from (below Mt Bromo, an active volcano) is often very harsh. At any time, the volcano could erupt and disrupt the lives of its inhabitants. Humans need hope. We need to believe in the idea of "shelter" even if there is none. Otherwise, life would be unbearable. There is pleasure in knowledge.

The Social Benefits

When I started getting interested in art in the late 90s, I did not know much about art. I did not know anyone in the arts. My friend Zainah, whose best friend Anum is an artist, was the first to invite me to an art gallery opening at Valentine Willie Fine Art.



Yeoh Choo Kuan
Cry Me A Rainbow, 2014

It felt really "cool" and "in" to be swirling red wine whilst talking about art, in the company of interesting and beautiful people. I know it sounds pretentious but I was immediately hooked. As I got to know artists, gallery owners, and other fellow collectors, I received invitations to more art gallery openings, art expos, dinners, and other related events. In time, I also organised my own art events, and two years ago I started a piano lounge called Bobo at Bangkung Row. Art has now become an important part of my social life, and I have met many wonderful and fascinating people through my interest in art. I would not have it any other way.

The Financial Benefits

Collectors hate to talk about art and money, as it is deemed crass. But they all do. I was told that a long-time collector bought Latiff Mohidin's works at RM500 each some 40 years ago. They are now worth in excess of RM500,000 each. That's a 1000 times increase! Personally, I think art is one of the worse "assets" to invest in. But yes, there is pleasure in knowing that the price of the art works you bought has gone up.

A lawyer by profession and art collector by passion, Ed Soo periodically gives talks on "The Art of Collecting." Interested parties can contact Ed at edsoo@edsoo.com.my. Ed is the co-owner of five restaurants in Jalan Bangkung: Bobo, Cava, Leonardo's, Lucky Bo, and Opus, where he displays some of his art collection.