

# THE HEART IN ART

This month, more than 1,500 graduating students from local arts institutions LaSalle College of the Arts and the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts will be holding showcases of their final-year projects and graduating pieces.

They will be graduating with degrees and diplomas in a variety of disciplines, ranging from fashion design to art therapy.

The various graduation shows will run from this month to June at the schools' respective campuses.

Ng Wei Kai reports on four graduating projects that reflect the passion and creativity of students from these two arts schools.

One project is about helping people with mental issues through art, another is about expression through the avenue of art.

Two other projects are linked to fashion, with one seeking to make clothes a better fit for people with disabilities and the other trying to empower women by giving them control over their clothes.



Ms Pamela Lie's graduate piece, *Down The Rabbit Hole*, made up of 220 Enid Blyton books, depicts the sense of travelling into the unknown which she experiences at the start of her relationship with each new patient. ST PHOTO: LIM SIN THAI

## A healing journey through art

Two years ago, Ms Pamela Lie, 34, took a step into the unknown and applied for a Master's in Art Therapy course at LaSalle College of the Arts.

She left a comfortable job as a sales executive to pursue a vocation which she felt would give her a stronger sense of purpose.

"Even though I had plenty to be thankful for (then), I was empty and starving inside," she said.

This month, as a capstone to the two-year course, Ms Lie's graduate piece, *Down The Rabbit Hole*, will be on display at LaSalle's campus, alongside the works of her 10 coursemates.

Made up of over 220 Enid Blyton

books stacked in a circle to form an upward-facing tunnel, her work seeks to depict the sense of travelling into the unknown which she experiences at the start of her relationship with each new patient.

It stems from her experience with young adults suffering from depression, whom she had encountered during the course's practical learning phase.

"It's about each relationship as a new journey and getting to know the person behind the disease."

She chose art therapy, a form of psychotherapy that seeks to help people with mental health issues through art materials, as she feels "words are often insufficient in expressing the language of emotions".

Ms Lie, who is single, hid her decision from her parents initially as she felt they might not support her. But she later told them and they turned out to be supportive.

She felt her decision to give up her job for the course was the right one. "I felt that I finally found a way to express myself, and I hope to bring this liberty of self-expression to others," said Ms Lie, who intends to pursue a career in art therapy after her convocation in September.

The works will be on show from Thursday to May 31.

### BEYOND WORDS

Words are often insufficient in expressing the language of emotions.



MSPAMELA LIE who left a comfortable sales job to pursue art therapy, a vocation that would give her a stronger sense of meaning and purpose in life.



From left: Ms Elisa Lim, Ms Caroline Justine and Ms Ethrisha Liaw hope to establish their brand, *Will & Well*, which will focus on clothes that look good and are also tailored to fit the needs of those with disabilities. ST PHOTO: LIM SIN THAI

## Clothes designed for people with disabilities

Nobody likes wearing ill-fitting clothes, but the effects are worse for those who rely on wheelchairs.

Thick materials can cause pressure sores and the lack of airflow caused by sitting for long hours regularly results in a heat rash, among other things.

For their graduation project, Ms Elisa Lim, 23, Ms Caroline Justine, 22, and Ms Ethrisha Liaw, 23, who are graduating fashion studies students from LaSalle College of the Arts, are trying to come up with a solution.

Titled *1000 mph*, the project is a fashion collection that aims to dress people with disabilities in clothes that not only look good, but are also tailored to fit their needs.

Geometric prints break up the

**The collection aims to dress people with disabilities in clothes that not only look good, but are also tailored to fit their needs. Geometric prints break up the form of the wearer, allowing him or her to appear more proportionate, despite differences in posture or body shape**

form of the wearer, allowing him or her to appear more proportionate, despite differences in posture or body shape. Soft, natural textiles such as cotton do not trap heat.

Such designs fulfil a need that is not met by commercial brands, said the students.

"Fashion as a whole needs to better reflect the people it serves, to represent the world as it actually is," said Ms Liaw.

The trio involved in the project have different specialisations.

Ms Liaw and Ms Lim are from different majors in the Bachelor of Arts (Hons) Fashion Design and Textiles course, while Ms Justine is from another degree course – Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in Fashion Media and Industries.

What bound the women together was their experiences working with clients who have disabilities and the difference they feel they are able to make.

"Not only do you have to be a designer, you have to really know and understand the user's needs," said Ms Lim.

The students are pursuing this project full time upon graduation and have plans to establish their brand, *Will & Well*, which will focus on inclusive fashion for people with disabilities.

The reception so far has been positive.

"Our users told us we're only allowed to have a one-week break before coming back to make more clothes for them," said Ms Lim.



Mr Muhammad Asyraf Said, from this year's Diploma in Fine Art graduating class at Nafa, with his final-year project comprising acrylic paintings of "pocong" (Malay ghost) set on layers of Arabic script. ST PHOTO: LIM YAOHUI

## Provoking a response with 'pocong' mats

Standing 3m tall and flanked by his vividly coloured "brothers", the imposing image of a ghost on a prayer mat is the distinctive centrepiece of Mr Muhammad Asyraf Said's final-year project.

The 21-year-old, who has a congenital disorder that causes facial disfigurement, is from this year's graduating class of the Diploma in Fine Art at Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (Nafa).

Each piece in his work consists of

### OTHERWORLDLY ENTRY POINT

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**...The prayer mat is like a door for the audience, something familiar that they can relate to.**



MR MUHAMMAD ASYRAF SAID, who said that choosing to set the ghosts on prayer mats was to give people an entry point to talk about his works.

He chose to depict ghosts because of the sense of mystery and their ability to provoke a quick response. He said: "Some of my friends asked, 'What's wrong with you? Why do you have to draw this?'"

But he said choosing to set the ghosts on prayer mats was to provide an entry point for people to talk about his work.

a "pocong" (Malay ghost) set on layers of Arabic script. Two of them depict the ghost over a prayer mat.

The densely layered script consists of transcribed quotes from people around him, words that stuck in his head because of the unique way the speakers chose to phrase their thoughts.

"To me, this reflects life – little things adding up to one big thing."

Mr Asyraf took about a year to finish the pieces, but his relationship with art has been a constant throughout his life. "Making art is not a conscious decision. It's just something I have always done," he said.

Taking inspiration from the bold works of American tattoo artist Grime, Mr Asyraf has sought to provoke shock while also keeping his works accessible.

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But he said choosing to set the ghosts on prayer mats was to provide an entry point for people to talk about his work.

"The prayer mat is like a door for the audience, something familiar that they can relate to."

Making art has always been an emotional outlet for Mr Asyraf, who plans to pursue art as a career after his graduation this September.

"Sitting there reflecting (and working) helps me to think through frustrations," he said.



Ms Sharon Chrysilla Gunawan seeks to empower women through the use of comfortable materials and distinctive designs. Her work features multiple size options and zippers down the length of the pieces. ST PHOTO: LIM YAOHUI

## Empowering women to do what they want

At just 19, Ms Sharon Chrysilla Gunawan is no stranger to the corporate world.

Having started an accessory brand at age 15 before running her own company at 17, the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (Nafa) student has been immersed in business for much of her teenage life.

For sure, she had to overcome no small amount of discrimination.

"I have heard a lot of 'You cannot do this. You're too young or you're a girl, you can't run your own company,'" said Ms Gunawan, who will graduate with a Diploma in Fashion Merchandising and Marketing this September.

**Building on the concept of "enclothed cognition", the idea that what you wear shapes how you feel and behave, Ms Gunawan seeks to empower women through the use of comfortable materials and distinctive designs.**

Such remarks have served as the motivation behind Ms Gunawan's latest work, her fashion collection titled "UNDRCVR Heroine".

Building on the concept of "enclothed cognition", the idea that what you wear shapes how you feel and behave, Ms Gunawan seeks to empower women through the use of comfortable materials and distinctive designs.

"When they wear this garment, I want them to feel like they can do anything they want," she said.

Her work features multiple size options and zippers down the length of the pieces, allowing wearers to control how much of their skin to show.

Having experimented with how her outfit can change the perceptions of those around her, Ms Gunawan is fascinated by the amount of control that the clothes we wear have over the way others perceive us and ultimately, how we see ourselves.

In reference to this power that garments have over our self image, she said: "Fashion is the easiest and cheapest way of self-therapy."

After she graduates from Nafa, Ms Gunawan hopes to further her studies at Coventry University in Britain.

She hopes to tackle other social issues beyond female empowerment in her future works.

"I want to expand, go deeper into environmental issues and move into menswear because men face similar issues as well."