

news



Mr Pratama Eka Dharma is one of the participating artists in the Singapore Street Festival 2017.
TNP PHOTO: WENDY LIM

Getting to grips with graffiti

Street art growing in popularity here, with artists getting more commissions to create public installations

CHARMAINE SOH

Last month, Mr Pratama Eka Dharma, 25, spent a day painting a character inspired by electronic group Daft Punk on a wall at Bugis Junction's outdoor square.

No one complained about the "graffiti", because it was part of the Urban Street Art showcase for the Singapore Street Festival (SSF) 2017.

Mr Dharma, who goes by the moniker Pedmons, is one of a growing number of artists in the local street art scene.

The month-long SSF, which is in its 16th year and ends this Sunday, features live painting by street artists, as well as music, sports and dance events.

And that's not the only event with a growing graffiti bend.

This year's PAssionArts Festival, which launched on Saturday, will also feature public art installations.

Local art collective Band of Doodlers worked with residents from Bishan-Toa Payoh GRC on Senses, an installation which will feature boulder-sized lips that have been doodled on.

Mr Zulkarnaen Othman, 37, better known as Zero in the graffiti scene here, will also be part of PAssionArts. He will be working with Punggol residents on an installation that will be made public on July 30.

While some street artists here have produced street art and graffiti in public spaces without permission — and some still do, overseas — most have moved on to commissioned work.

Mr Zulkarnaen, who is a part-time lecturer at LASALLE College of the Arts, and his friends used to paint on large pieces of paper, leaving them on paths or

sticking them on walls.

He said: "We felt that public spaces were good locations to exhibit our work without having to go through galleries and institutions."

Band of Doodlers founder Mr Mas Shafreen Sirat said the group only draws on walls after getting permission.

He thinks more public agencies and companies have warmed to the idea of public art.

He said: "They encourage you to take over. It's just a matter of approaching an agency and seeking permission."

Mr Dharma, who moved to Singapore from Indonesia about seven years ago to study at the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, said he sometimes paints on walls with his "crew" when he's back home.

He said: "People in Indonesia, especially from the kampung, are more exposed and interested in the graffiti scene."

DIFFICULTIES

But he understands the difficulties faced by street artists here.

"Due to Singapore's small size, un-sanctioned graffiti or street art is often quickly removed," he said.

"That's when we learn how to share space. Agencies such as the National Arts Council and National Youth Council provide painting spaces as well."

SSF, he said, is a good way for Singaporeans to understand the "true meaning of graffiti".

"It's being able to take your art out on to the streets for the public instead of keeping it in a gallery," added Mr Dharma.

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