

Evoking tranquillity with colours

Leong Weng Kam
Senior Writer

After painting for more than 50 years, second-generation Singapore artist Wan Soon Kam, 73, is staging his retrospective exhibition, which will open at ARtrium at Mica building on Saturday.

The low-profile but prolific painter, whose last solo show here was held 32 years ago, is showing 67 works, including oil pieces done in the 1960s and watercolour and acrylic works he completed recently.

But only 23 of them are for sale.

"I still want to keep the rest as they have been with me all these years," says Wan, who became a full-time painter in 1976 after working for 15 years as a book illustrator and artist with a publishing company. The 1961 graduate of Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (Nafa) also explains that his show hopes "to tell my friends and collectors what I have been doing in the past three decades as I am getting

on in years and may not have many more years to paint".

He was encouraged to go into painting full-time after his works were accepted for show and sale by the late art English gallery owner Della Butcher, who promoted many home-grown artists from the mid-1960s until 1993. She died in her sleep at the age of 70.

"My works were sold very well by Della, who also took my paintings overseas for exhibitions," he recalls. Though Singapore-born, Wan went to Hainan, China, when he was six for his early education and returned 10 years later to enrol in Nafa because he wanted to be an artist.

Well known for his rustic kampung scenes; landmarks of cities all over the world he visited; and tranquil scenes here of mainly old buildings, he says his growing-up years on Hainan island and his frequent trips to Ipoh, where his retired music teacher wife of 31 years came from, had a great influence on him. They have no children.

He started to experiment with

mixed media, using watercolour, oil, acrylic and other painting materials, when he was a book illustrator.

His good friend and Singapore's best-known watercolourist, Ong Kim Seng, 71, says Wan's special technique and use of materials are unique. In the foreword of a book published in conjunction with the exhibition, he describes Wan as a "master of watercolours with a very distinctive style who uses subtle colours to create atmospheric compositions".

Ong says of House By The Mountain, Ipoh, painted in 2009 and among those in the show: "The subtle green of the great outdoors offers the viewer a sense of tranquillity. The row of houses which forms the focal point of the painting shows the sleepy rural abode of the local people. To show the time of the day, the mist in the background tells us that it is after the morning rain."

What is next for Wan after the exhibition? "I will still continue to paint, but this may well be my last show," he says.



House By The Mountain, Ipoh (far left, 2009) by Wan Soon Kam (left) is one of his works that will be shown at the exhibition.

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF WAN SOON KAM, TIFFANY GOH FOR THE STRAITS TIMES

VIEW IT / WAN SOON KAM RETROSPECTIVE EXHIBITION

WHERE: ARtrium @ Mica Building, 140 Hill Street

WHEN: From Saturday to July 20, 11am to 7pm daily

ADMISSION: Free