

Arts course for those with special needs

Nafa and charity VSA launch programme offering visual arts cert for aspiring artists

Derek Wong

Aspiring artists aged 18 and above with special needs can now enrol in a programme launched by arts school **Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (Nafa)** and charity Very Special Arts Singapore (VSA) yesterday.

The programme will give a boost to those hoping to forge a career in the arts.

The certificate in visual arts, issued by **Nafa's** Centre for Lifelong Education, is open to artists who have at least four years of visual arts training at VSA. Applicants are subject to a selection process.

Mr Cavan Chang, 30, who has Down syndrome, is keen to sign up.

"I want to join so I can be a better visual artist," said Mr Chang, who enjoys creating abstract art with acrylic paint.

His mother Cecilia Lai, 60, a retiree who worked in the banking industry, said the programme might be challenging for Mr Chang if it is too theoretical, but she believes it will be very beneficial if he gets to hone his painting technique.

Mr Aaron James Yap, 22, who has autism, is another budding artist interested in the course.

His mother, Mrs Diana Yap, said: "It will be a stepping stone for him in his art education."

"A certificate plays an important role for an artist," added the 52-year-old housewife.

The five-month programme, to be held at VSA (Bedok Centre), will help participants sharpen their conceptualisation and time management skills, and they will be assessed on two projects.

Set to begin this October, each edition of the programme will train between six and eight students.

"The programme offers artists with special needs an opportunity to improve their career prospects and show that despite their special needs, they can produce quality, conceptual works within a given

timeline," said Ms Maureen Goh, the executive director of VSA, which celebrates its 25th anniversary this year.

Set up by Professor Tommy Koh, Singapore's Ambassador-at-Large, VSA aims to give people with disabilities opportunities through the arts.

Ms Linda de Mello, who is director (sector development, visual arts) at the National Arts Council and guest of honour at the launch,

said: "Over the years, we have witnessed an encouraging shift in the arts scene towards embracing diversity among us.

"It is heartening to see our arts institution foster greater inclusivity through this programme."

The signing ceremony took place together with the launch of VSA's annual visual art exhibition by artists with special needs.

The exhibition, Rhythm And Water, held at The Art House, Gallery 2, is open to the public and will run until next Tuesday.

wderek@sph.com.sg



Mr Cavan Chang and his mother Cecilia Lai with his pieces at the Rhythm And Water exhibition. The 30-year-old, who has Down syndrome, enjoys creating abstract art and is keen on the new arts programme. PHOTO: HOSANNA CHANDRASEKRAN