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WINNER: Mr Muhammad Nur Faris Nakamura Mohamed Salim's (below) award-winning sculpture (right), which is made of metal and concrete. PHOTOS: BERITA HARIAN, MUHAMMAD FARIS NAKAMURA



SG artist wins big at Kobe Biennale 2015

Metal of honour

Report by SITI NUR AISHA OMAR
omarsiti@sph.com.sg

It was the first time he had joined an art competition.

But Mr Muhammad Nur Faris Nakamura Mohamed Salim ended up winning big, by sweeping the Kobe Biennale Grand Prize in the Shitsurai Art International Competition.

The competition was held in conjunction with the Kobe Biennale 2015 art festival in Japan.

"My whole body shook when I found out that I had won," said Mr Faris, 26, an operations executive at the Singapore Art Museum.

"I'm just so overwhelmed and honoured because I never expected to win, so, yes, that was one of the happiest moments in my life," he said.

For the competition, artists had to create traditional "shitsurai" art – a set of furnishings for decorating



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—Mr Muhammad Nur Faris Nakamura Mohamed Salim

a room or space – that make effective use of Kobe's waterfront Meriken Park.

Mr Faris' framed sculpture, made of metal and concrete and weighing 2,000kg, beat 40 other contenders from around the world to win the grand prize of 2 million yen (S\$23,000).

When asked about his inspiration for the piece, Mr Faris said: "In this day and age, photo-taking is such a common sight, since it's just with a click of your mobile phone button.

"With my framed sculpture, I hope that people will come together and take photos with the beautiful views of the sea and city of Kobe as a backdrop."

FIVE MONTHS

The sculpture, which is the largest piece of artwork he has ever created, took five months to complete.

Mr Faris, who attained a first class honours degree in fine arts from Lasalle College of the Arts last year, said: "I'm used to making wood sculptures, but for this event, I had to familiarise myself with working with concrete and metal, as these materials are the ones that can withstand Japan's weather."

"It cost about \$6,000 to ship it to Japan, but at least the money I won made up for that," he added with a laugh.

In September, Mr Faris went to Kobe to set up his sculpture and give a presentation to the judges about his artwork.

The judges commented that they loved the simplicity of his sculpture and the artwork was something that Japanese people would like because of its simple and subtle shape and colour.

His mother, Madam Ninna Kuchit Nakamura, 52, a pre-school principal, said she expected Mr Faris to win at least a consolation prize, but it was a good surprise when she found out he had won the grand prize.

"The family is extremely happy that Faris got this achievement and we support him in whatever he does," she said.

"There may be parents who may not be willing to let their children choose the arts path, but they should at least give the kids freedom to do something they like and are good in."

She added: "Even if they do not succeed, at least they have tried and will learn from the experience."

When asked if he has any advice for aspiring artists, Mr Faris replied: "Don't be afraid to try out new things and ask for help if you have difficulties with finance or finding a space to create your artworks.

"You'll be surprised how some (who are not even in the arts scene) will be willing to help you."