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2014年9月2日 星期二

李伟良新加坡第一幅画作，在往家客厅作画，为明年“艺术南艺美术文凭第一名李伟良”展做准备。

龙国雄、周雁冰、熊俊华、潘影



南艺美术文凭第一名邹慧娘，毕业作品是个可让人入梦、貌似帐篷的“棺材”。



的发展各有千秋，如何影响学生对艺术的思考？  
的素质？他们又如何看待未来的创作生涯？两所院校  
公布资料系第一名。这几位美术系第一名，各自院校  
马，指导收藏他们的作品。  
商业美术与画廊都将在青年艺术工作者中找到千里  
尔艺术学院透露，两院的毕业展近年引来人潮，画  
展中以一万零五百元高价被藏家买走。南艺与拉萨  
的李伟良，炭笔毕业作《创世记2》在7月的毕业  
刚从南洋艺术学院毕业，获美术系学士学位第一名



拉萨尔美术文凭第一名廖伟丽，喜欢创作油画时的自省过程。

## 南艺VS拉萨尔 我们都是第一名

经过七八十年的演变，我国今天的视觉艺术氛围，已呈现与早年全然不同的风貌。除了文化表现形式与内容，艺术市场同样不可同日而语。

刚刚南洋艺术学院毕业，获得2014美术系学位第一名的李伟良，其炭笔毕业作《创世记2》在7月份毕业展中以1万零500元的售价被藏家买走。去年李伟良的美术文凭毕业作，6000元售价曾引起一阵哗然。没想到一年之后，他的新作竟以高一倍价格被收藏。

相较于1951年，我国四大名家刘抗、陈宗瑞、陈文希及钟爱华的联展，售出总值9800元的作品，打破当时的市场纪录；就算考虑通货膨胀等因素，今天李伟良的成绩也是让人刮目相看的。

像李伟良一样，以第一名毕业南艺文凭课程的邹慧娘也是“技”人学。25岁的她早年修读理工学院旅游管理课程，觉得那不是正道。结果艺术的魅力最终让她屈服。“念完理工学院才来念艺术，其实很挣扎。一方面学费不便宜，一年要1万5000元，再加上自己的年龄又比其他同学大。”

在拉萨尔艺术学院，学位课程年度最佳学生南帝塔(Nandita Mukand)从印度移居我国12年，也是半路出家的艺术工作者。她说：“学生对学艺术时代的我来说，在经济上是一种不可能的奢侈。”

39岁的南帝塔在印度当过工程师，与丈夫来新加坡之后曾在跨国公司担任经理。她是在感觉家庭经济基础稳定了，才放心辞职，全心从事艺术。

“我从小喜欢美术，但家人和朋友都反对我往这方面发展，认为我痴心妄想。但在经历中学四年没有美术的日子后，我受够了！”那些年，只要看到别人做美术她心里就羡慕得发疯。中学一毕业她不顾一切报名拉萨尔，“就算到今天，家人也还没有完全认可我的选择。”

从小学习成绩优秀，并已获新加坡国立大学文学学士学位的李伟良，29岁才进入南艺，一路都在追梦和现实之间摇摆。“尽管老师鼓励，但我没选美术，很实际的一直往理科方向走。直到上大学时才发现自己对这个学科真的没兴趣。”

他没当过一天工程师，跑到出版社工作，希望能有创意的平。“就只能每天对着电脑上班。”

有一天，他决定给自己一个机会去念视觉艺术。



拉萨尔美术文凭第一名南帝塔，利用自然物创作，作品既像三维雕塑又像二维绘画。

邹慧娘和她说，她同样看中南艺的扎实基础课程。“我不是美术特长生出身，如果真有观念和想法，缺乏实践能力的话，说什么都都是空的。”

李伟良说走南艺大门，不爱上学的人才发现什么叫做开心上学。不过四年下来他最大收获却不是他当初以为的扎实基础，“而是生活的改变。南艺教会我怎么看世界。每一件东西都有它的特点，平时被当做背景的一部分，因为我们忽略了平凡中的美。李艺的过程，让我知道美与灵感在生活中无处不在。”

邹慧娘认为，南艺艺术不仅是关于知识的累积，它更改变了个人内心。“艺术实践就像修心，你要给它东西，都必须源自身体和灵魂最深处，它要求你奉献所有。”

灵感不会从天而降。李伟良认为自律很重要，每天花至少两小时创作。做研究是必经的一部分。低调也在所难免。前两年课程都有老师帮明确目标。进入第三年要做毕业作品时她确实迷失过。“突然要独立思考，是不小的挑战。我几乎把所有学过的技巧和概念都丢上画布做实验。老师们都不满意，认为我太笨。”

最后，老师看到李伟良素描中的炭笔绘图，建议他不如用炭笔媒介来表现。“炭笔其实是我最

排斥的媒介，现在我却通过它找到绘画语言。

邹慧娘说，她同样看中南艺的扎实基础课程。“我不是美术特长生出身，如果真有观念和想法，缺乏实践能力的话，说什么都都是空的。”

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### ***NAFA vs LASALLE we are all No. 1***

Singapore's visual arts atmosphere has completely transformed from what it used to be 70 to 80 years ago. Forms of expression and contents have changed, and the market for arts is completely different.

Lee Wee Leung, a recent Fine Arts degree graduate from Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA) with a top-of-class record, had his final-year project - the charcoal piece "The Genesis II" acquired by a collector for SGD 10,500. Last year, Lee's final-year project for his Diploma in Fine Art was acquired at an impressive SGD 6,000. It took just a year before his new work doubled in price on the market.

Back in 1951, the exhibits of four prominent Singaporean artists, Liu Kang, Chen Chong Swee, Chen Wen Hsi, and Cheong Soo Pieng were sold for a total of SGD 9,800 in a joint exhibit, a market record at that time. Even when inflation is taken into account, the market value of Lee Wee Leung's work is remarkable.

#### ■ The 5-figure work of the rising star

Lee Wee Leung was signed by a Singapore art gallery, Sogan & Art to become a professional artist well before he graduated from NAFA. When we visited the young artist, whose career seem to be sailing smoothly, he was painting in his living room. He was preparing for Singapore's most significant art festival, the Art Stage Singapore 2015 due in January next year.

With extensive public exposure through exhibitions and media publicity, young artists have been increasingly well received among the public and art collectors in recent years. Over one third of graduates managed to successfully sell their work at the NAFA Fine Arts Graduate Showcase.

According to NAFA and LASALLE, the two major art institutions in Singapore, their graduate shows which are typically held in the middle of the year have drawn a large number of visitors in recent years. Gallery owners and art collectors hope to identify young talents with the most potential, and acquire their works before they become famous.

Although not all future artists graduate as top students in their art schools, Ruben Pang was the top graduate in LASALLE's BA(Hons) Fine Arts programme in 2011 before he became a full-time art professional. At the Art Stage Singapore 2014 held in January, all nine pieces of his artwork which were exhibited at Chan Hampe Gallery were sold on the first day, with the highest selling price at SGD 9000.

NAFA and LASALLE will both be holding their graduation ceremonies this month and announcing their top graduates in the different majors. What are the common qualities of these top graduates? What are their visions for the creative work ahead? The two schools have evolved through distinct histories and unique cultural settings. How have these influenced their students in their views on art?

#### ■ Taking the long route to arts

Interestingly, these top students in art diplomas or degrees at the two institutions took the complicated road to find the right path. Some went the long way before realising their dream. Others knew their calling was in the arts and even went against their parent's wishes to pursue their dreams.

Graduates like Lee Wee Leung who have collectors, galleries and art festivals lining up to support him are a first in NAFA's history. However, few know that the journey for the 33-year old was not a smooth one. "The four years at NAFA was like a dream come true."

Academically inclined at a young age, Lee holds a bachelor degree in chemical engineering from the National University of Singapore. Caught between his dreams and reality, he didn't enroll in NAFA until he was 29. "I didn't choose arts in secondary school despite the encouragement from teachers, but instead took a practical route by majoring in science. I didn't realise that I had no interest in engineering at all until I was actually in it."

He didn't work as an engineer for one single day but went for a publishing position, hoping for some content of creativity, but only found himself "facing the computer all day long".

Going one full circle back to the beginning, he decided to give himself a chance to study visual arts.

Similarly, Chow Hui Nang, a top graduate from NAFA's fine art diploma course, came from a non-arts background as well. The 25-year old majored in Tourism Management at a polytechnic, before surrendering to the charm of visual art. "It was a real struggle for me to take an art diploma after polytechnic. The annual tuition fee of SGD 15,000 was not a small sum, and I was older than my classmates."

At LASALLE, top graduate of the BA(Hons) Fine Arts programme Nandita Mukand has been living in Singapore for 12 years. She also took a major career switch to become an art professional. She said: "When I was a student, learning art was a luxury that I couldn't afford."

39-year old Nandita was an engineer when she lived in India, and worked as a manager in a multinational company after arriving in Singapore with her husband. She only quit her job and immersed herself in art when she felt the family was financially stable.

Among the four top graduates, 20-year old LASALLE Diploma in Fine Arts graduate Leow Wei Li, is the youngest. Even though she started her course directly upon graduation of secondary school, she still thought she took the long route.

"I have had a passion for the arts since I was young, but my families and friends thought I wasn't being realistic, and didn't encourage me to pursue my dreams. But after experiencing four years in secondary school without art, I had enough of it!" During those years, when she saw others doing art, she would be filled with jealousy. Upon graduating from secondary school, she immediately enrolled herself in LASALLE. "Even up till today, my family has not completely approved of my choice."

## ■ NAFA: Learning basic skills and a journey of the soul

NAFA and LASALLE were established in the 1930s and 1980s respectively. The different historical backgrounds and development track have created unique traditions and teaching concepts at the two institutions.

The 1930s was a decade of growing fine art activities among Chinese artists. In 1936, the Singapore Society of Chinese Artists was established. In 1937, several artists, including Zhang Dannong, Xu Beihong, and Liu Haisu, came to Singapore from China with their art shows in an effort to raise funds for the anti-Japanese war, to a lot of positive reception.

With such a background, the Singapore Society of Chinese Artists suggested the establishment of NAFA, and gained the funding and support from the Overseas Alumni Association of China Jimei Academy. NAFA was set up in March 1938, with Lim Xueda as the first principal. Their Western art professors include Zhang Ruqi and Gao Peizhe who graduated from the French Academy of Fine Arts; Chinese art professors include Li Kuishi and Wu Zaiyan who graduated from the Shanghai Fine Arts Academy, and Shi Xiangtuo, among others.

To the new generation of art professionals, even if they are unfamiliar with the history of NAFA, they are still able to associate it with a strong 'foundation'.

Lee Wee Leung said, "Between NAFA and LASALLE, I chose the former. As a stranger to art, I needed a good foundation. NAFA has a long history and a legacy left behind by Cheung Soo Pieng, Zhang Danying and other teachers."

Chow Hui Nang added that she also highly valued the well-structured basic skill courses at NAFA. "I study fine arts at school; concepts and ideas would mean nothing without practical skills."

Lee Wee Leung said he had never enjoyed going to school, and he had no idea what the feeling of enjoying lessons would be like, until he started studying at NAFA. However, his most precious reward over the four years was not the solid basic skills he expected, but "the change of attitude in life. NAFA taught us how to look at the world. Everything has its own unique features, but a lot are taken to be a part of the background because we ignored their beauty. During the course of study, it has taught us that beauty and inspiration lies in every part of life."

According to Chow Hui Nang, studying at NAFA was not only about learning technical skills, but also about improving one's inner self, "practicing art is like conceiving a baby, the work should originate from the deepest part of the body and soul, and it requires the artist to give it all."

Inspiration doesn't come from nowhere. To Lee Wee Leung, discipline is very important. He practices for at least 8 hours everyday, painting or doing research. Low moments are inevitable. His teachers would set specific targets for him in the first two years, and when working on the final year project in his third year, he felt lost. "It was quite a challenge to have to think on your own. I virtually used all techniques and media learnt on the canvas, but teachers were not happy, thinking I was too uptight." In the end, his teacher saw his charcoal work in his sketchbook and suggested to him

to use charcoal. 'Charcoal was actually something I tried to avoid at the beginning, now it is the language I use to express my paintings.'

■ LASALLE: Independence, freedom, and exploration of the unknown

Founded in 1984 with Brother Joseph McNally as the founding principal, LASALLE College of the Arts was formerly the St. Patrick's Arts Centre. The 1980s was a decade of growth for emerging, experimental arts; young artists expressed their ideas with multi-media mediums, incorporated cross-cultural elements, and emerged with a new form of art practice distinct from the early generation of Chinese artists. In the same period, Singaporean artist Tang Da Wu came back from the U.K. and set up The Artists Village at an abandoned chicken farm at Ulu Sembawang. At its peak, the village had 35 artists. The origin and the background of the school sowed the seeds of a pro-western, creative, and contemporary art system at LASALLE. As Nandita and Leow Wei Li both told the reporter, the most prominent element of LASALLE's education philosophy was its high expectations of students to be able to think independently.

Nandita's final year project was a sculpture made of elements from nature, such as leaves, grass clippings, twigs, barks, spices, mud and newspapers, much like a garment woven by nature. She said, "I learnt so many things these past few years, from knowing nothing about the contemporary art world today to a fair bit of knowledge. You require a certain autonomy in the creative field, by choosing the themes and materials that you can relate to. The teacher's job is to ask questions, and inspire us to find ideas through answering those questions. There will also be peer evaluation from classmates, but it's your own choice whether to take in any of the suggestions. There are no right or wrong answers about art anyway." To complete her graduation piece, Nandita spent a lot of time researching for her final year project, and looked into ways to preserve the work and prevent the decay of the natural materials. "No one can teach you that; as it was my idea to use these materials, I need to explore my own new visual language."

Leow Wei Li, who recently completed her Diploma in Fine Arts programme, and is now in the BA Fine Arts Programme said she felt very comfortable at LASALLE. "Art is about freedom. You can decide on your own way of learning in the world of art. For me, the creative process is the best way to learn about the world."

She said she enjoyed the art education at LASALLE as she could take charge of her learning, and set directions for herself. "The teachers are very open-minded to experimentation, no suggestion would be taken as inappropriate for no obvious reason."

■ 2 out of 50 will succeed

A five-figure price for a piece of art might seem a lot, but artworks usually takes a few months' of hard work by the artist. To young artists, professional development is more important than income. Lee Wee Leung and Nandita all have plans for exhibitions and residency. To them, graduating as top performers was just the start of the journey rather than a final accomplishment. An opportunity to work in art is an unexpected gift, and it is never too late to start, as Nandita put it, if you get it early, you might take things for granted but not treasure the opportunity.

Chow Hui Nang was the only one among the four with no ambition to work as a full-time artist. She said that the practical needs in life still has to be considered. "Even the teachers work as part-time artists, then what about me?"

As compared to the past, pure fine-arts students definitely have more chances to make a name for themselves today. NAFA has 51 pure fine-art diploma and degree graduates this year while LASALLE has 123. According to Singaporean artist Milenko Prvacki, who has been teaching at LASALLE since 1994, "students who are persistent and who constantly set high standards for themselves and for others will eventually stand out in the end. It would be good enough if 2 students out of 50 become famous in this field."

Will the top graduates this year become successful artists in the future?

Notes to photos:

1. Lee Wee Leung, top graduate from NAFA degree in Fine Art, working in his living room and preparing for Art Stage Singapore 2015.
2. Chow Hui Nang, top graduate from NAFA diploma in Fine Art, with her final year project, a tent-shaped "coffin" that people could lie in.
3. Nandita, top graduate from LASALLE BA(Hons) Fine Arts, with her project made of natural materials, which featured both a 3-D sculpture and a 2-D painting.
4. Leow Wei Li, top graduate from LASALLE Diploma in Fine Arts, likes the introspection process when working on oil paintings.