

Review

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Selfish for the sake of art

Multicultural couple sculpt their way to more fulfilling lives

If you want to maintain a selfish lifestyle, like we do, you have to be honest all the way," declared sculptor Shonan Nunan.

The husband-and-wife sculpting pair, Nunan and Michael Cartwright, discussed their self-indulgent philosophy of life during the opening of their joint exhibition, "Art For Collectors", currently on view at The Living Room, Sheraton Grand Sukhumvit Hotel.

"We draw inspiration from our environment, which is all over the world," Nunan said, hinting at the couple's nomadic way of life. Australian by birth, the pair refuses to let national barriers limit their multicultural artistic identities. Although mainly working out of a Melbourne studio, the couple makes Europe and Asia their second homes.

"For a couple of months, we were living on a beach in the South of France, making sculptures from driftwood we found," Cartwright recalled, speaking of just one of their many worldwide adventures. Though the artworks made from ocean remnants didn't sell, the experience refuelled their creative energy.

"In a sense, we're lucky we're not a product of any single culture, which allows us to draw inspiration from many different traditions," Nunan reflected.

The couple's multiculturalism demonstrates today's postmodern fluid world in which cultural assimilation resists the circumscription of national borders.

Formerly struggling and starving artists, Cartwright and Nunan finally made a name for themselves as producers of precious collectibles regularly sought after by wealthy individuals and corporations.

"We did all sorts of crazy stuff when we were younger," said Cartwright, who feels he has now discovered his true calling — to sculpt as he pleases.

"There were times when I wasn't completely honest with myself, which backfired," Cartwright said, speaking of

the challenge of satisfying hard-to-please collectors.

"We've come to realise that art that isn't honest isn't art at all," Nunan added, talking about the importance of artistic integrity, which she believes has contributed to her skyrocketing career.

Although both artists work in similar media, namely, bronze and marble among other materials, they exhibit distinctive individual styles. The more romantic Nunan loves the sensual form of the human body — the passion is reflected in her elegant abstractions of female figures. Also influenced by the flat Australian landscape, Nunan's tendency for elongation opposes the horizontality of her native country's geography.

"I'm attracted to elongated forms, perhaps in resistance to the desert's flatness," she said.

Nunan's belief in a mother goddess and essential female fertility may seem anachronistic in today's more liberated society. Yet this adherence to primitive ideologies gives her work a sentimental power.

"I long for my sculptures to be tou-

ched," she said.

Cartwright, on the other hand, is inclined toward grounded shapes in his interpretations of still lifes and natural elements.

"I'm interested in the environment, and its interaction with humans. If we don't take care of the environment, there will be nothing left," he stated.

While his main objective may not be to promote awareness, he hoped that those encountering his works would sense the inspiration from nature.

Displayed at the Sheraton are solid organic forms of Cartwright's sculpture that harmonise beautifully with the hotel's elegant decor. While the exhibited works can fit neatly on small podiums, Cartwright says he enjoys working on large-scale commissions the most.

"I recently did a large scale outdoor piece for a Singapore building," he said.

Travelling to and from Thailand for the past six months, Cartwright and Nunan finally found the ideal bronze foundry.

"It's perfect," exclaimed Cartwright. "Thailand has such a rich tradition of bronze casting that dates back to pre-historic times, that it's truly an honour to be casting works here," Nunan said of the prospect of their future artistic production here in the Kingdom.

"We hope to be working here for a part of the year," Cartwright said. They plan to use Thailand as a springboard to further explore Asian markets.

While the couple works out of the same environment, their studio spaces remain strictly separate.

"We absolutely do not share studio space," Nunan declared with a firm nod of agreement from her husband.

The renowned artists with international jet-setting lifestyles may be able to escape any single cultural identity, yet they seem unable to escape the norms of husband-and-wife relations, as Cartwright confirmed.

"She has her space, and I have mine."



Nunan's elongated figurine to the left nicely offsets the organic forms in husband Cartwright's sculpture.