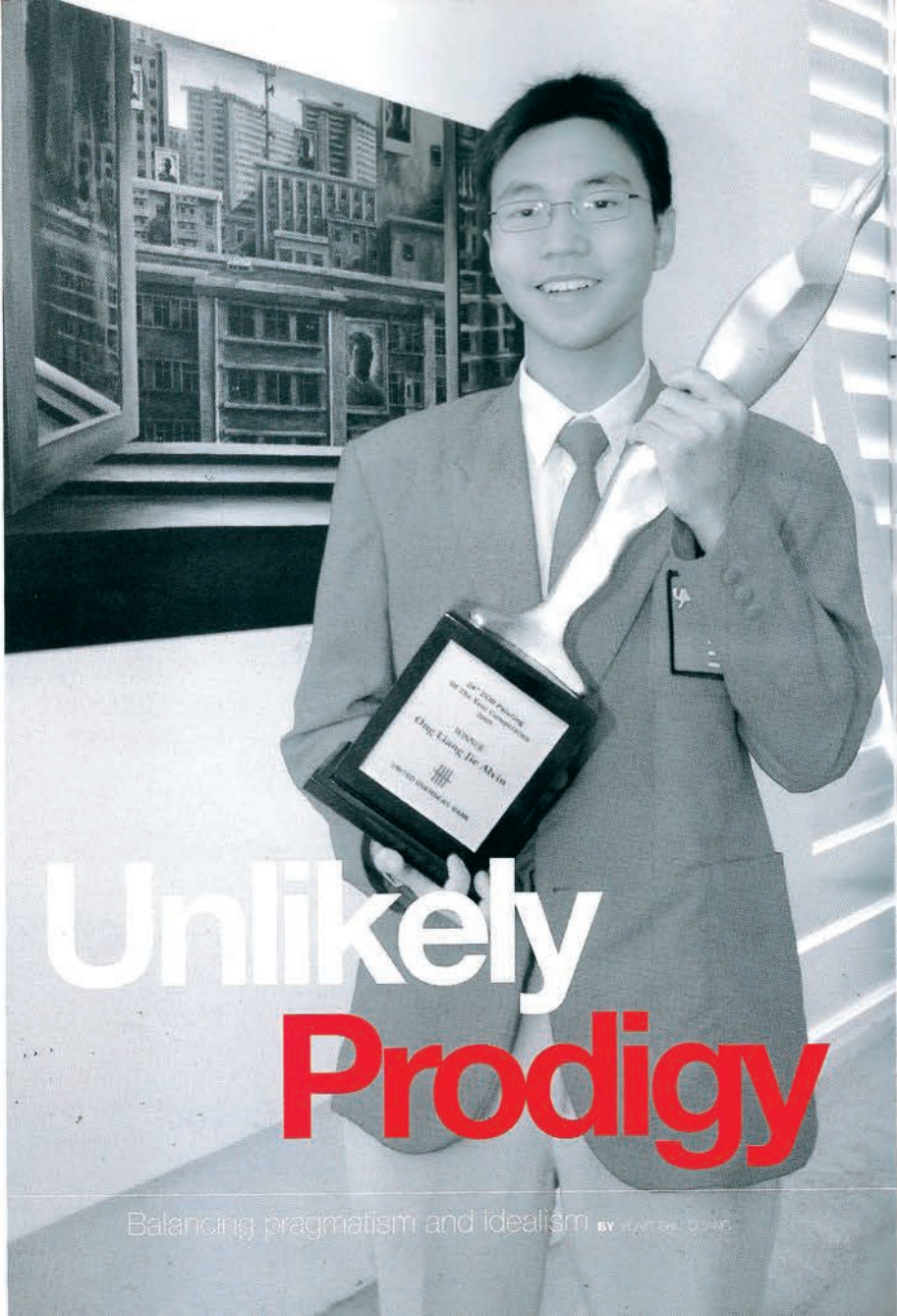


ISSUE 4

*elite*





# Unlikely Prodigy

Balancing pragmatism and idealism BY YANTER LIUANG

*The* 16-year-old winner of Singapore's leading visual arts award this year wasn't one of those hot-housed prodigies you often read quirky news items about.

He wasn't one of those children who could tickle the ivories to the tune of a complicated classical composition, or take an almighty swipe with a golf club, from say the age of three, before he could properly yell "Fore!"

The artist in Alvin Ong Liang Jie, last month a surprise winner of the 24th United Overseas Bank (UOB) Painting of the Year Award, only emerged in recent years, not at some elite international arts academy, but Saint Joseph's Institution.

Alvin took up, and held onto, the brush after his SJI art teacher Mrs Tan Lai Kuen advised him to paint, rather than focus on other visual art disciplines. Evidence showed her that he had the least difficulties with, and would later prove to have a genuine flair for, painting.

"She said I should paint because I had less problems doing so – and complained less!" recalled Alvin, speaking less than a fortnight after his unexpected triumph.

Mrs Tan encouraged Alvin, telling him he had "a certain style" when he painted.

The panel of judges for the Painting of the Year competition did indeed notice Alvin's very own style when they decided to name his deeply evocative entry, *The Window*, the top prize-winner, even though the acrylic painting of a cold, bleak landscape of lifeless buildings – inspired by the climate of the Cold War – had been entered in the Junior Section.

First held in 1982, six years before Alvin would be born to Mr and Mrs Ong Tuck Soon, UOB's annual competition has long aimed to promote interest in local art, encourage local artists in their creative endeavours, and provide recognition for the best homegrown works.

Alvin didn't crave recognition, accolades, or financial gain when he entered the contest, which awards its winner an attractive \$20,000 in prize money, and saw a record 940 entries from 578 participants this year.

Even though he is pleased to win, and to have created a work that has invited much thought and speculation as to its perspective and intent, Alvin maintains he is not considering a career in the arts.

Instead, pragmatism wins through on Alvin's list of priorities, though he called being an artist "a noble profession". He has no doubt been influenced by his parents, who are happy to see him, their only child, flourish as a painter. But only if he continues to study hard and stay on track to become an architect or, one imagines, finds an equally reliable career alternative.

Art is only to be a school subject for Alvin, a first-year National Junior College arts stream student currently →

## 非神童的天才

今年度新加坡杰出视觉艺术奖的得主年仅16岁，他并非您从社会新闻中常读到的温查神童之一，他也不想那些孩子一样，打从牙牙学语的三岁起，就能以灵巧的十指来回游走象牙琴键之间，弹奏出深奥难懂的古典乐章；或是拿起高尔夫球棒，挥出神奇的一杆。

对于上个月刚荣获大华银行本年度最佳画作奖的王亮杰来说，他的画家潜质是近年来才浮现的，况且仅是在圣约瑟书院就读期间，而不是在国际知名的美术学院里。亮杰是在该书院美术老师Mrs Tan Lai Kuen的劝导下，拿起画笔而不选择其他视觉艺术学科，且自此乐此不疲。这位老师通过种种迹象观察出绘画难不倒亮杰，时间终于证明他确有天分。

王亮杰在他意外得奖两周后受访时回忆说：“老师说我应该画画，因为我作画时困难少，牢骚也少！”Mrs Tan Lai Kuen不断鼓励亮杰并告诉他，他的画作展现出某种风格。

他那让人魂魄的股形参赛作品“窗口”，采用了冷冽的青蓝色调，由画中窗口往外看，是一片令人毛骨悚然，死气沉沉的建筑群。据他自己透露，作画灵感来自他所参考的冷战时期资料，他有意让窗外的萧瑟景象与原来被视为自由开放象征的窗口，形成一种强烈的对比。

当第24届全国绘画比赛的裁判们决定将作品冠以最佳画作荣誉时，确曾觉察到他那独树一帜的画风，正因为如此，尽管这幅作品原属于新秀组，却受到裁判的特别青睐而成为全场之冠。全国绘画比赛始于1982年，旨在加强人们热爱本地艺术，鼓励本地艺术爱好者努力通过无限创意，创作理想的本地作品，并予以奖励和认可。Ong Tuck Soon赏识的这位独生子，是在比赛举办六年后才呱呱落地。

比赛由大华银行所主办，最高奖金高达\$20,000，今年总共吸引了940件来自578名参赛者的作品。亮杰在参加比赛时，他并没有强烈的得奖或受认可欲望。

这次得奖为他带来喜悦，也引来人们对其作品的视角和意图之猜测和议论，不过亮杰表示他

无意走上专业艺术道路。虽然他认为画家是一份备受尊崇的专业，他还是任由实用主义主宰他在人生道路上的优先选择。他这种想法无疑是受到父母亲的影响，他们虽不反对独生子有朝一日成为出色的画家，但却认为他必须继续努力学习，以便日后成为一名建筑师，或选择生活更有保障的类似职业。

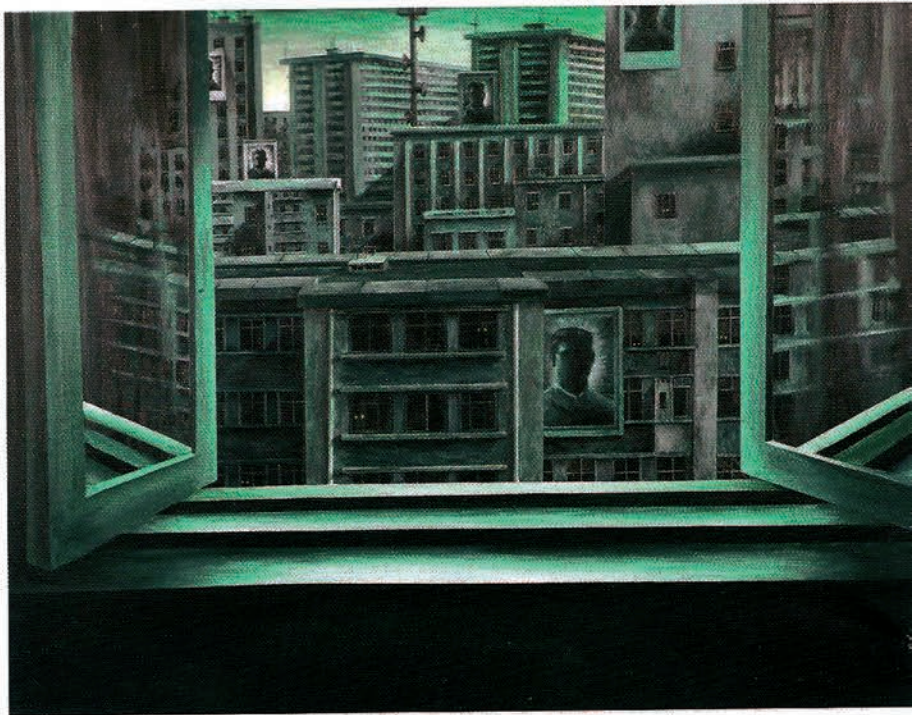
亮杰是国家初级学院的文科班高一学生，美术不过是让他在校内争取好成绩的选科之一，甚至仅仅是他消磨时间的一种嗜好而已。除了美术之外，他还选修历史、经济学和数学。

作为一个有理想的年轻人，亮杰表示他希望将来能将美术和工艺融为一体，他视建筑设计为他未来的天职，并轻描淡写地指出建筑设计同样是一门艺术。当他提起对西班牙画家萨尔瓦多·达利、墨西哥女画家弗瑞达·卡罗和西班牙建筑师安东尼·高迪之作品的仰慕时，不免令人联想起他这两种相辅相成的喜好，日后可能在他身上擦出火花，甚至演变成多种不同的新形式展现众人眼前。

别看亮杰年纪轻轻，却已抱有正确对待批评的积极态度。犹如美术界初中生牛犊的他，如今爆冷夺走无数资深艺术工作者梦寐以求的美术奖项，可能遭来的非议可想而知。“这是很正常的事，在现实生活里，根本就不可能找到任何一件能被所有的人接受的作品，”他接着说：“每个人的品味都不同，对我来说这不是问题，我会听取意见和评语。”

获奖作品滨海艺术中心展览期虽然已于8月5日结束，公众还有机会在9月或10月通过王亮杰的画作赏识他的才华，因为到时他将举行个人画展，展出至少五件新作，这是主办当局对所有得奖者的要求。

今后出现在王亮杰画板上的，极可能是目前备受争议的功能高于形式、实用盖过风格新加坡摩天楼群风景线。“我会尝试用自己的创新风格去处理。”——这位未来的建筑师画家表示。



→ also studying History, Economics and Math, to excel at school; or a hobby for him to indulge in during his free time.

With the idealism of youth, Alvin indicated he hoped to combine art and craft into one, matter-of-factly calling architecture, his proposed future vocation, “a form of art” as well.

When one listened to the teenager speak about his love for the works of artists Salvador Dali and Frida Kahlo, as well as for the Spanish architect Antoni Gaudi, one could start to imagine the possibility of his twin passions influencing each other, and perhaps manifesting in various hybrid forms.

Already, Alvin has a healthy attitude when it comes to dealing with criticism, as one so young might attract for snagging a prize coveted by many more experienced artists.

“I think it’s natural. I mean it’s a fact of life that you can’t produce art that pleases everyone,” he said. “Different people have different tastes, and I’m quite okay with and receptive to their comments.”

Though an exhibition of Alvin’s winning work, as well as other competition entries at the Esplanade ended August 5, the public will again be able to scrutinise Alvin’s artistic talents next September or October, when he will hold a solo exhibition, with at least five new works, as all contest winners must.

After that, Alvin’s canvas may very well be the Singapore skyline, which is arguably more known for function over form, substance over style.

“I will try to invent my own style,” said Alvin, architect-artist to be.