

22nd December 2010

Sebukit Bintang : Stars On The Hill

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written by Tan Hui Koon

Sebukit Bintang (Stars On The Hill): Is delicates to my former students who are giving me a shock to magnificent into them in a complex and spectacle perspective that I essentially lacked in reality. Sebukit Bintang (Stars on the hill) is to discover and encourage the young artists and designers to become an agent of change. Welcome to every teachers, lecturers, parents, and even among the students to send in the articles to pool the Stars and rock the hill.

Being two years and half teaching and preaching in art, I have to admit it's quite a painful yearning process especially the commitment to the students is partially vital. First of all I have to be versatile so that I won't be judgmental to all sorts of human neuron psychology characters whereby follow up with the most crucial part is to calculate the ability of creativities and innovative into digits. Nevertheless ideal in art is not to judge the individual's subjectivity but to the objective of art are infinity possibilities.

James Elkins's "Why Art Cannot Be Taught", pg 30: "Contemporary teachers adhere to this in that they do not try to foist a uniform standard on each student they advised. Instead they try to feel their way to an understanding of what each student is all about. Teachers acknowledge that everyone has different ideals, directions, talents, and potentials. That sense of individuality is quintessentially Romantic."

Contemporary sounds very recent but the ideal of unaffected individual natural expression leads oneself into a state of liberality has revolted since Romantic Movement.

I was amused most of the time and still to the late exposure of art education among the youngster who desperately try to capsulate and empower the skills of the mighty word of 'art' in a very short time. This is the purpose of Sebukit Bintang (Stars On The Hill) to discover the fascinating stories that hidden in every corner of the urban landscape, far away from home town that inspired and aspired at the bottom from our he(art).

This article is especially for NZ Phang (Yow Kit) and respectively Diana Phang Lai Peng with their beloved families who are generously to share with us about a mysterious and greatness mural painter who is among one of the painters who painted the longest mural in the world.

NZ Phang (Yow Kit), my dear former student came to me at one day and surprises me with the story of his uncle, the painter of Pudu Jail longest mural in the world. I was astonished because of I always adore to this hand painted longest mural in the world and really believe in art is the savage of soul: art as meditation and healing.

In front of me, NZ who looks more convincing in his social and practical personality rather than he is coming from an artisan family. Unfortunately NZ only know a little about his uncle's legacy and luckily his family kindly faxed me the only paper cutting they kept.



[http://3.bp.blogspot.com/_YSP9MQJNOyA/TRGrhdC1AI/AAAAAAAAALM/VgTF25_scps/s1600/33495_420456064159_573809159_4906008_6096264_n.jpg]
Profile Picture NZ Phang

Five Fingers Painted The Famous Walls by Li You (李友)

New Life Post新生活报

24.2.1993 Wednesday



[http://4.bp.blogspot.com/_YSP9MQJNOyA/TRGsVGZGbHI/AAAAAAAAALQ/zqs94739zxc/s1600/pudu+jail+2.jpg]



http://4.bp.blogspot.com/_YSP9MQJNOyA/TRGssnflUEI/AAAAAAAAALU/N5hwQDUclgs/s1600/pudu+jail+1.jpg

In this translation article, the painter is named **Pang Sun Qiang** (directly translate from mandarin name) and I found his named is **Pha Tee** in the Star, titled article: **Deriving Sense of Freedom from Art** dated 21 April 1994, interviewed by Helen Ang, Photographer: Jamah Nasri

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24.2.1993 Wednesday

Five Fingers Painted The Famous Walls by Li You (李友)

Who will come to their mind when they look at this sloppy looks Pang Sun Qiang (directly translate from mandarin name) is one of the painter of the Pudu Jail's wall, mural painting at Country Heights Kajang and developing urban residence. Although he was paid well by doing these mural painting jobs for high ranking officer where as he still in poverty, so he blamed the drugs.

You won't find Phang Sun Qiang's name in the artist's directories. He wasn't trained, never enters into any competition nor related with any art association; but his paintings are collected and hang in the VIP's room as decoration.

Phang (Phang Sun Qiang) is talented in realism painting. With his miracle and skillful technique, he could turn the zinc wall to become an amazing artwork and no wonder some important figures are his collectors.

From the first sight, I couldn't believe he is the guy who squatting beside the stinky drain meticulously turned the twenty feet long zinc wall into a landscape painting. When I walked closer to him, I was stunned when I saw the tools that he used wasn't any familiar painting materials but with his fingers and a lousy house painting brush that you even will think twice to pick it up.

"It's like that lah! As long as you have interest, nothing is impossible." He opened his husky voice along with his peculiar expression, but nevertheless he is a friendly person to talk to. He told me almost his everything included bad and sweet memories. He charged minimum two hundred for a painting, but for the mural in the Country Heights

Kajang he earned ten thousand. A man called Dato' Mark paid him seven thousand just to paint mural in his house. At the same time he also earned fifty thousand on all his commission artworks from the rich merchants, high rank officers and millionaires.

After few hours chit-chat with him, he shared with me more about his personal stuffs. "It's useless to earn much; I had chunked all the money to use drugs. I couldn't go back home to meet my wife and children, it's shameful and guilty too. I blamed the drugs!"

But he hates the drugs the most while he loves the drugs the most.

Phang spent his youth in the jail. He was being ruthless and involved in all sorts of crimes included stealing and bank robbing. Today, he is 51 year-old, surviving with his own paintings. His mood swing drastically, he can finish a painting without a break when his mood is in tune; vise versa not even one can persuade him to pick up the brush.

Phang's four season paintings are neither from his distinctive imagination nor his impression from other imageries that he saw from other places; indeed he never experiences any seasons in physically besides the tropical weather in our country. "I don't know what genius is, but I think interest is the main key. I still remembered my interest was nurtured after watching my dad demonstrated to me how to draw a hen when I was a boy."

When Phang was finished his standard five in Chinese school, his father wanted to transfer him to study in an English school. At that time he was over age to register the English school but he still succeed to enroll into form one by registered through his younger brother's birth certificate which name Sah Tee.

Phang afraid that he had disappointed his father's high expectation, he rather to find a job instead of finish the high school due to lack of interest in study. "Teacher teaches me to read, but I teach teacher to hunt wild boars." (Pun phrase from: 先生教我读书, 我教先生打山猪)

After quitting the school, he became one of the members of triode because of he thought this is the easiest way to make big money. When he realized the truth had turned his dream down then he drowned himself in drugs. Since that he never found his turning point to come back to normal life. "It's too late, there's no return"

He only started to paint when he was imprisoned and manage to make it as his survivor skill. He sends few hundred paintings to the warder to please him for sells. The warder paid him sixty ringgit per painting only. He knew his artworks worth more than that amount because of there's an Australia Merchant acted as an art dealer came to Malaysia to buy his artworks then sold his artworks in Australia.

This Australia benefactor even went through a middle man to approach him again and wished to offer him to travel to the world, in return Phang must paint each country's sceneries to him.

"Unfortunately I miss this glorious opportunity because of I was sent to Pulau Jerejak, Pulau Pinang just after bailed from jail." His voice resonant...

Pha Tee from NZ Phang

一个耳闻而没有肌肤接触过得二伯。我爸说过, 他写字很整齐, 很漂亮, 画画很美, 在兄弟姐妹之间, 他最聪明。 Second uncle whom I never touch but only through the verbal narrative from my dad: Among the brothers and sisters, he is the brightest. He not only inherit tidy and beautiful handwriting but also talented in drawing and painting.

[\[http://1.bp.blogspot.com/_YSP9MQJNOyA/TRGtPQ6TLil/AAAAAAAAALY/gGGCwULptH4/s1600/pudu+jail+3.jpg\]](http://1.bp.blogspot.com/_YSP9MQJNOyA/TRGtPQ6TLil/AAAAAAAAALY/gGGCwULptH4/s1600/pudu+jail+3.jpg)

对我来说他是一个走错路的聪明人, 身为家族的一员, 只觉得可惜, 为什么他会贩毒? 为生活? 还是。。。 For me, he is just a smart guy who had mistaken the wrong path in his life. As part of this family member, I felt sorry to him

and wondering why he used drug. Isn't for life or....?

墙上的画是爸爸告诉我，对于他是囚犯，我没意见，但是墙上的画，让我引以为傲。因为对我来说，贩毒每个人都可以，在于他要还是不要，是人性的选择。但是那幅墙画，不是你要就能完成，完成它是意志力的表现，天赋的表现，加上他是用手指和布来画。Through my dad's words of mouth, just I knew about my second uncle is the chic and tongue Pudu Jail mural painter. I have no offensive to him as a prisoner yet I'm taking the pride of the mural. To me, every people have a chance to choose either to be or not to be a drug user, it shows the human truly instinctive nature. But not to this mural, it is not just a matter of desire but must compliment with a strong willpower and great talent; plus he painted with only his fingers and rags.

我爸曾经告诉过我，以前他和二伯一起住过，当时他看见二伯在房间，用手指对着墙壁画画，我爸还问二伯，你在那干嘛？结果，他的指纹就印满了那副墙壁。My dad used to live together with my second uncle and witnessed him painted on the wall in his room with his own fingers. At that time my dad still naïvely to ask him: "What are you doing?" and the result was the wall ended up with full of my second uncle's finger print.

最后一次见，也算是第一次见的他，一只脚因健康问题割断了，而且脸上还有发炎的伤口。当时我才四岁多五岁，看见妈妈买食物给他，我也不知道为什么，当时他的穿着就像乞丐，但是有一种感觉告诉我，他是我的亲人。The first time and also is the last time I met him, he doesn't looks good. He has to lose one leg and has a swollen face due to heath problem. I think I probably only four to five year old and I still remembered my mom brought him food. It is a strange feeling, although he wore like a beggar but intuitively told me that he is my relative.

每一次经过那副墙，我都会告诉我身边的朋友，那幅墙画我二伯画的和告诉是怎样画的，他们的回应通常是，那幅墙不是囚犯画的吗？我都回答，嗯，他是。Every time I passed by the mural, I will announce to my accompanies the facts of my uncle is the painter and the unique way how he painted the wall. The feed back always is: "aren't the wall is painted by the prisoners?" and every time I will affirm to them: "Yes! He was."

破坏前，那幅墙是历史；破坏后，它是历史，也是传说。因为那幅墙不在了。Before the demolition, the mural is a history; so do as after the demolition but also become a legend, because of the wall wasn't there anymore.

时间的累积，我看见墙的感觉是越来越伤心，因为没有人保护及保养，它一直被破坏。从98年的运动会，在边框上白漆，就已经破坏原本的美，加上近这几年有无名人在上喷Graffiti。Time passes and it become really painful because of there is no cares and restoration vice versa it was being abused all along the time. Since 1998 Commonwealth Game, City Hall had painted the divider of the wall into white; numerous of white frames along the wall had ruined the originality and spoiled the visual aesthetic, even the anonymous did the graffiti on it in recently.



[http://4.bp.blogspot.com/_YSP9MQJNOyA/TRGt3-

[SsOkI/AAAAAAAAALc/dvpQ_ELpRIE/s1600/untitled+1.bmp](http://4.bp.blogspot.com/_YSP9MQJNOyA/TRGt3-SsOkI/AAAAAAAAALc/dvpQ_ELpRIE/s1600/untitled+1.bmp)]

Photo by NZ

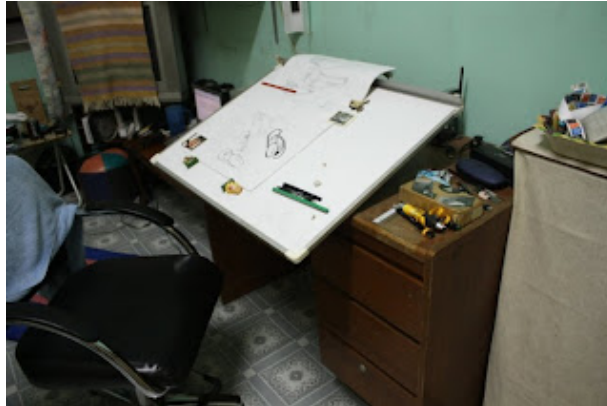
如果能保留，保养是最重要，因为这是历史遗迹。If we decided to keep it, restoration is the priority because of this is a heritage.

Dialogue vis-à-vis at below is me: K, NZ Phang: NZ

(NZ currently is the president of student body organization)

K: I'm wondering and just an assuming that your uncle must be inspired you a lot, is he influence your study?

NZ: Nop, nothing related with my uncle at all. Eventually I wanted to be a F1 racer but I didn't get my family's support. My dad did some product re-invention, they looks cool and practical so that's why I'm in industrial design.



[http://3.bp.blogspot.com/_YSP9MQJNOyA/TRGu3Wubm9I/AAAAAAAAALg/oDJz-Oi658I/s1600/desk.bmp]

Note (sources from Facebook):

This draft table provided thousand of possibilities to NZ's college mates who are struggling to buy IKEA's study table. NZ's dad modified a drafting table to make sure he always in the right body position while he is doing all his best assignment. All we need is just an old whiteboard x1, stool x 1, and old desk x1 along with lots of cute magnet bars to hold the drawing paper.

K: You mentioned that you regret to the Pudu Jail have become now, do you think of taking any action or solution to prevent and save it from the demolition?

NZ: As I said if we decided to keep it, restoration is the priority because of this is a heritage. But how, I really don't know and I have no idea who should take care of it. I definitely won't stand out to do demonstration although it is painful for us (me and my family members) to bear the demolition on Pudu Jail because of we only can get know and remember my second uncle through this wall. I do aware that nights before demolition (Pudu Jail) have gather crowds of people who have sentimental value on it; this old land mark really meant something to all of us and told us different stories.



[http://4.bp.blogspot.com/_YSP9MQJNOyA/TRGx72WkGHI/AAAAAAAAALk/ENaFmVF7FAI/s1600/untitled.bmp]

Note: photographed and note by NZ: Pudu Jail the wall,i found my memory on it

K: Perhaps we should have less shopping mall; de-value the leisure and entertainment in urban planning and developing. Don't you think of just as simple as to tell your story through a design? Or documenting the wall in nice photography?

NZ: When I was child, my dad never said a word of preserving or documenting the present of the wall, sometime he drove us passing by the mural quietly and started to tell us the story about my uncle. I think this is the way my family kept these memories and feeling in deep. This is new to me; I will keep your advice and think about it.

Photographer, Tan Chee Hon had started his documentary project of Pudu Jail wall painting before it was demolished by developed from UDA early this year. The series was taken from year 2000 to 2010. He kindly let us has a first peep on selected photos from "In Memories Of Pudu Jail Painting".



[http://4.bp.blogspot.com/_YSP9MQJNOyA/TRGzz19KXxl/AAAAAAAAALo/SrzUnFn5YQ/s1600/%25231%252C2000.jpg]

Title: #1,2000



[http://1.bp.blogspot.com/_YSP9MQJNOyA/TRG1-421k7I/AAAAAAAAALs/a3iAEfZnEBM/s1600/%25236%252C2007.jpg]

Title: #6,2007



[http://4.bp.blogspot.com/_YSP9MQJNOyA/TRG5lvX9Jfl/AAAAAAAAALw/Fsurc0X8Cuk/s1600/%252310%252C2010.jpg]

Title: #10,2010

K: Thanks for that thought, I'm bemoaning to your plight. From my point of view instead of you are waiting or pointing fingers to others, I think you can start some initiative and play a certain role in this lost. To a certain degrees of pain and regret, will you itinerant these experiences and apply in your career as a designer?

NZ: Something that I never thought about it. Can you be more specific?

K: Let's say heritage; in everyday we can't avoid from losing what we inherited from tangible to intangible heritage. For an example tangible as a building and intangible as our lifestyle or the air we are inhale now. The wall is a heritage for you from your uncle; there must be a certain value on the wall that normal people like me never can imagine.

As a designer and you being through the pain of lost, would you be more sensitive to the surrounding that probably significant to somebody else, so that you will make a plan of design that will avoid and reduce the pain of lost, even a design that have the thoughts of carrying the value from the past to the future?

NZ: I would like to move on my life and prefer to choose to not looking back too much. Probably I can keep this in my mind and let it evolve inside me because it's true that there's certain value that we should carry on.

After all, I'm very thankful to NZ's effort to approach Diana Phang Lai Peng, daughter of Pha Tee and let us have a glimpse to this respective family who have went through so much where we can't imagine.

Diana Phang who prefer stay low profile generously giving her true senses into words and posted on facebook as the response to this informal interview.

Phang Lai Peng's Photos - My Father

Since the demolition of the Pudu Wall, it brings back a lot of memories about my father, a figure that very very distance to me and my sisters. My father did not have a chance to visit his dying mother because he was still in the place where no one want to be in. We grow up without really knowing my father. He was in jail more often than at home. My only happy moment with my father was a day when we, the whole family was enjoying a session of singing together in one tiny room, where about, no idea at all because we shifted so often. The one and only one happy memory that i have. When i was young i used to look forward to his returned because he will give me some money for sweets. In my days in secondary school, taking a bus passing by Pudu Jail, i sometimes saw my father painting the wall but never once i called out to him. Shame, i think.

My father passed away away without one single kins by his side. He vanished the day he received news that my elder sister passed away in Singapore. He was unable to attend because he was not allowed to leave Malaysia as he hold a brown IC. Do you know what that's meant? Meaning he is a regular of Pudu Jail. He died without us knowing where and when. We do not know where his body were buried.

A visit to Pudu Jail in my early years was something to remember. I used to wait to be allowed in with handful of biscuit and magazines. My father love to read. How many of you been in there? I have too many visits. Most of the warden knew my father so well. Aiyah, you anak Pha Tee ah? He is so well known. He is in and out of that place as long as i can remember.


I have not once celebrate Father's Day with him. Happy Father's Day Pa, where ever you are.

Added June 26

Jess Phang 嘉 likes this.

 **Christine Mayhew** i am so touched by this article. knowing you for so many years i didn't realised the happy girl who always have a smile on her face were in fact carrying such a big burden since young. you were never ashamed of your dad - you were just young. highlighting to the world that your dad name were missing from the list - need lots of courage, lai peng. your dad would known that you and your family love him. we love our family unconditionally - no matter what - as the old saying blood thicker than water. i cannot comprehend to know how you felt not knowing where is dad buried but one thing i know is your dad is now in a better place where he is being look after, keep safe, free from the pain and heartache... he might have reunited with your sister. he is finally at peace so you must find in your heart to be happy. live well for yourself and your family ... and your dad will continue to keep you safe like a guardian angel from the heaven ... only we cannot see them but they are here besides us not knowing. Love, Ken Ling
July 24 at 6:11am · Flag

 **Diana Phang Lai Peng** Really hopeful that he has a better life now. Thank you dear for the wonderful comments.
July 24 at 10:12pm · Flag

 **Christine Mayhew** i thank the star who giving me the chance to be your FRIEND!!!
July 26 at 7:46pm · Flag

From the album:
My Father by Diana Phang Lai Peng

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[http://1.bp.blogspot.com/_YSP9MQJNOyA/TRG9d1FR4VI/AAAAAAAAAL0/Df7NTRfXF6U/s1600/Diana+FB.jpg]

Posted 22nd December 2010 by [Tan Hui Koon/koon](#)

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