

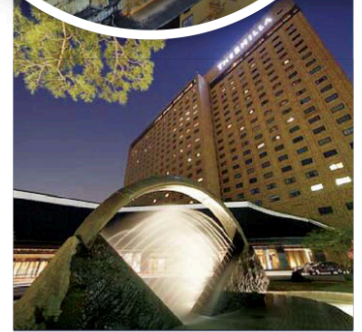
CHONG WEI-HSIANG

The co-founder of Sareng, Kuala Lumpur's newest gallery, talks about combining pursuit with passion, how art enriches all lives and his other great love — luxury hotels



The Siam Bangkok

View of the famed lake palaces of Udaipur, India



The Shilla Seoul

Options: Congratulations on opening Sareng. Tell us a little about the space and how you and your co-founder made it all happen.

Chong Wei-Hsiang: Sareng just opened on Oct 8, as a matter of fact, coinciding with CIMB's 2022 Arttober campaign. Syukur [Ali, Sareng's other co-founder] and I decided to open the gallery as a response to a greater appreciation for art collecting by Malaysians and an ever-growing number of talented, emerging artists. Syukur brings 12 years of experience in the local art market while it's new to me, as I still work in public relations, branding and marketing.

Here, on Level 8 of Menara Chan, we offer 4,100 sq ft of space for up to 30 artworks at a time, with the main gallery to the right and a more intimate salon on the left.

And what does Sareng mean?

It means to distill or refine in Malay. The classic way is spelt *saring*, but we think it looks fiercer with an 'e'.

It also looks very design-conscious.

There is a shadow gap designed between the walls and floor, creating a space that is modern yet minimalist. The floor is rendered cement while selected pieces of furniture from Herman Miller, Vitra and other celebrated designers may be found around the gallery which, beyond mere function, serves to provide the ideal setting for the contemporary artworks on display.



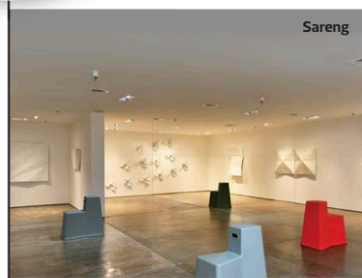
What sets Sareng apart from other galleries out there?

Syukur and I want to present what we believe to be beautiful art — work that is visually unique, with an authenticity of ideas and a story. We work with established artists who have the vision to produce important pieces in a cultural and social context, while also providing a platform for young and emerging ones, we offer a pathway for the development of viable full-time artistic careers with longevity, while also providing stability so they can flourish and be productive creatively. Ultimately, we want Sareng to be a place of culture contained within an adaptable, authentic and inclusive space.

Tell us about the debut exhibition by Amirul Yazid.

Logami showcases a body of work that explores the capabilities of one material by disguising it as another. The title is a play between the Malay and Japanese words for steel (*logam*) and paper (*kami*) while the pieces are inspired by Amirul's long-time fascination with geometrics and his previous study of origami. The works comprise uncomplex sculptures that examine the fundamentals of folding and the subtle energy of mark-making. The nature of the artworks is quietly contemplative, beckoning us to reflect the way we see the world, showing us less is indeed more and how there is potential

SAM FONG/THE EDGE



Sareng

in even the most unassuming objects and spaces.

You might not have worked in art before, but you have always loved it and collect yourself, do you not?

My career in public relations, branding and marketing has been intertwined with the development of Malaysia's creative economy for the past 26 years. Building brands for multinationals and blue-chip companies taught me that one cannot pour from an empty cup. Sareng now gives me a new opportunity to further extend and apply my creative inclinations.

How else would you fill your cup of life?

India has fascinated me ever



Edinburgh International Book Festival

since my first visit to Tamil Nadu in 2000. My most recent trip there was in 2020 to Udaipur with my mother, just before the world shut down. It was at the latter where I learnt the city gained its reputation largely through its painters in the 18th century, when they turned their vision from small poetic manuscripts to grand-scale paintings of its palaces and landscapes.

Next year, I hope to catch *A Splendid Land: Paintings from Royal Udaipur* at the National Museum of Asian Art in Washington DC. It features works done mainly between 1700 and 1900, many on public view for the first time, and promises to be a once-in-a-lifetime show.

And which other cities would you rate highly for their cultural energy?

Adelaide and Edinburgh, for their annual Art and Fringe Festivals as well as for their Writers' Week and International Book Festival.

You also famously love beautiful hotels. So, if you were to open your very own one day, how would you fuse luxury stays with art?

Well, it won't be gimmicky or too in-your-face — a disconcerting trend these days. Hospitality and humanity will always remain the heart of what we do, so I would first reference hotels that effortlessly and thoughtfully integrate art, as opposed to indiscriminately filling spaces. This would include The Shilla Seoul; The Murray Hong Kong — particularly for its treatment of sculptures by Bahk Seon-ghi and Jaume Plensa; The Capella Hanoi for its rich storytelling and uncompromising execution; and The Siam Bangkok for its peppering of the owner's quirks and personality.

A Splendid Land: Paintings from Royal Udaipur



— As told to Diana Khoo ■