

Pocketful of poesy

Poesy Liang fills DIAN PASQUINAL KAUR in on her plans to get real, take a step back from passion projects, and earn a living, support her parents, then come back as an even more effective philanthropist

SHE'S the girl who has lived to tell the tale of battling paralysis caused by a rare, recurring benign tumour in her spinal cord; and she also famously shaved bald in Cannes as part of her "Bald Empathy Movement" to inspire compassion for those suffering from loss of dignity due to premature hair loss and those losing hair due to chronic illnesses.

Poesy Liang wears many hats. The 37-year-old is an artist, interior architect, jewellery designer and a charity organiser who also founded Helping Angels on Facebook, a voluntary organisation that looks into the welfare of the underprivileged, matters related to education, the homeless, the aged, animal rescue and rehoming, and life-coaching.

We met up with Liang in June, just as she was preparing to attend a series of Nexus Global Youth Summit in Singapore and New York. This global movement strives to improve philanthropy by bringing young people – who are leaders in their individual fields – together for dialogues, education and collaborative problem-solving.

"It's a great place to meet inspiring people and get inspired. Most of the attendees are the new generation of millionaires, high net worth individuals with inherited wealth or who have made it on their own. I'll be the poorest delegate," she laughs.

Each delegate is driven towards philanthropy and they are Ivy-League alumni who have important formal jobs as well as creative ones, which sometimes are even more incredible than their day job. "At the first Asian summit in Bangkok last year, I met a management consultant who also founded Bangkok Charity Orchestra. Another guy was a successful architect who



is a concert pianist. The atmosphere of the summit was electric, a room full of incredible auras."

Liang is looking forward to surrounding herself with like-minded folks who are driven, diverse and generous. "I'm happy to be not the only mad one. Here, I always feel I'm the odd one out and I often get people telling me to focus on one thing because of my tendencies for random projects and acts of kindness. Why should I limit myself when I can do so much?"

She gave up her interior designing business to focus on making paintings, by the way. When Liang was travelling around Europe for her Bald Empathy Movement in 2011, she ran out of money before she could bring the project to culmination in Cannes.

And what did she do? She began painting and selling her little canvasses on the sidewalks of Paris. In nine weeks, she managed to raise RM30,000. This marked the launch of her art career and she hasn't looked back since. Even without gallery representation, Liang has clients from all over the world and even managed to pay her parents' rent for a year from the fee she has received for a painting she's currently working on.

While outsiders are supportive of her work, Liang bemoans the lack of appreciation on homeground. "I did approach one gallery once but they told me that I'm more expensive than I should be. But my existing clients are willing to pay, and I have bills to pay too," she points out.

Liang is working on a short animation film of her life and is in the midst of finalising the storyboard with her Singaporean animation team. "We manage to shrink my entire life, one sentence per chapter down to five minutes. I just finished the script and I also worked on the illustration and music score. I'm hoping to complete it by early next year."

She is hoping to use this animation film for her speeches and talks that she often holds. Her agent from France has been pestering her to make a movie but Liang doesn't think anyone would care about an autobiography of a little known Malaysian girl.

"Making a movie will take years, working on scripts, finding the right director (if it's not Ang Lee, I'm not going to bother), the right actress (it must be Shu Qi), putting together the crew and worrying about location and weather. My agent can use this animation film however she wants and I'll let it be the deciding tool if my life story is interesting enough to warrant a movie."

At this moment, Liang is focused on art to earn a living because through it she is finally making ends meet after living in a deficit for a good six years. "Now I'm paying my own bills and am gradually looking into my parents' expenses. It's time to be practical. I want to take a step back from passion projects and earn as much as I can so I can be wealthy enough to focus on philanthropy. Now it's time I took care of my parents. Charity, after all, they say, begins at home."

Wager at your own peril that this lady, who hopes to some day start a scholarship endowment fund, won't be back sooner than you think.



LIANG WORKING ON HER ROOFTOP CAT SERIES COMMISSIONED PAINTING IN THE COMPANY OF HER CAT, HARRY PUTTER