

StylePlus

LIFE IN STYLE

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Musician, artist, humanitarian and entrepreneur

Poesy's poetry of colours

PG 08-10

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BEAUTY AND THE BEARD

I have a great admiration for those who are multi-talented and seem to embrace every challenge effortlessly. That's why I'm in awe of Malaysian-Taiwanese personality Poesy Liang, a cancer survivor who has that trait in spades.

She is a musician, humanitarian and entrepreneur, among others. We are looking forward to the upcoming production of an eponymous short focusing on her life story.

Growing up, I was never a fan of facial hair of any sort. That is until I married a man with a beard. But never did I imagine that this sort of thing would grow into a full-fledged culture. Writer Marlina Azmi has the story.

Coffee aficionados are jubilant that Jason Loo has been crowned the champion of Malaysia Barista Championship 2015. The 28-year-old barista from The Red Beanbag café is now enroute to the World Barista Championship in Seattle, the United States, the world's premier barista competition which will be held in April. We wish him the best of luck.

Writers Choo Ching Yee and Angie Tan's immense love for good food saw them seeking out venues that have adopted the grocerant concept (a posh way of saying grocer cum restaurant). Shop for the freshest meat and produce, and have them cooked right on the spot. It can't get any better than that.

We are featuring several festive-themed articles in the spirit of ushering in the Lunar New Year. Writer Jenilyn Alexia's piece on Chinese New Year fashion takes a look at the *qi pao* and other oriental outfits that have been updated with a contemporary touch.

Writer Aliff Yusof provided a compilation of branded shades to protect your peepers from the bling bling of the season. He also detailed his first trip to Beijing, China, and the sights and sounds he encountered.

Here's to a happy and prosperous Year of the Goat.

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IN

**POESY LIANG ADDS A TOUCH OF CLASS
TO EVERYTHING SHE DOES,
FROM CHARITIES
TO COVER SHOOTS**

| Text by **ALIFF YUSRI** | aliff.yusri@hckmedia.com

The beauty of a jewel lies in its facets, with each polished surface reflecting and reinforcing the whole amid an intricate interplay of light. In the same way, the different sides of Malaysian-Taiwanese personality Poesy Liang have conspired to elevate this diamond in the rough to international fame, propelled by her poise, perseverance and positivity.

"I'm addicted to constant and never-ending self-improvement. It's about making a difference in my own small way, through the people in my world. On a personal level, I try to inspire them to believe in kindness. That's what my life is about and my way of giving back," says the bubbly bon-vivant at her pop-up gallery in Kuala Lumpur.

Poesy in motion

Like diamonds, Liang's shine is the product of profound pressure, as adversity early in her life scraped away the dross of adolescence to reveal the underlying treasure. Diagnosed at 17 with paraplegia arising from acute intradural meningioma, a rare form of cancer, she overcame long odds to recover her mobility despite a recurrence in 2003, and has been living large ever since.

A multidisciplinary musician, humble humanitarian and exuberant entrepreneur, the Kuala Lumpur-born talent's versatility seems to have no bounds, extending throughout the depth and breadth of human endeavour. Currently, the brainy beauty is trying her hand at animation, with the upcoming production of an eponymous short focusing on her life story.

"Over the years, a number of directors and filmmakers have approached me with proposals for documentaries, features and other ideas, including my agent in Cannes. But if my life story's going to be out there, I'll find my own way to tell it. In the end, an animated short made the most sense, because it's quirky, and I can bring my own artistic style to it," she says.

A collaboration with Singapore-based Scrawl Studios, Liang will be narrated by Priscilla Patrick, a familiar voice on Malaysian roads who currently airs on Red and Capital FM. The autobiographical account

Liang overcame long odds to recover her mobility after recurrent bouts of cancer

LIVING COLOUR

PHOTOS BY SHARIL AMIN

will follow the trials and tribulations of young Liang as she struggles with paralysis and publicity, with the artist herself composing the soundtrack to complement Scrawl Studios' visuals.

Worth a thousand words

The short will be distributed online, with additional plans to promote the piece through the international Ted platform. Throughout the undertaking, Liang aims to avoid overly dramatising her troubles or glorifying her achievements, choosing instead to emphasise the motivational aspects of her tale.

"I do want to capture all the emotions, everything from happiness, heartbreak and anger to laughter and all the little touches. I'll be designing the characters and backgrounds, with Scrawl Studios animating. It's a young team, though their work has been picked up by broadcasters like MediaCorp, Nickelodeon and Disney, and they were very supportive when I showed them my storyboard," she says.

Animation was a natural step for the vivacious virtuoso, with an extensive background in the arts which began in early childhood. Recognising and encouraging her talents, Liang's father placed her under the guidance of tutors in his personal circle, focusing on classical Chinese stone seal, calligraphy, landscape and watercolour techniques.

Her oeuvre has since grown to encompass modern influences, with the turning point in her creative career coming with the debut of her Rooftop Cats series, a whimsical exploration of city skylines with itinerant tabbies prominently featured. Rooftop Cats initially comprised 16 pieces on 5" linen canvases, though it was later expanded to 48 pieces on 14" squares after finding a following with her fans.

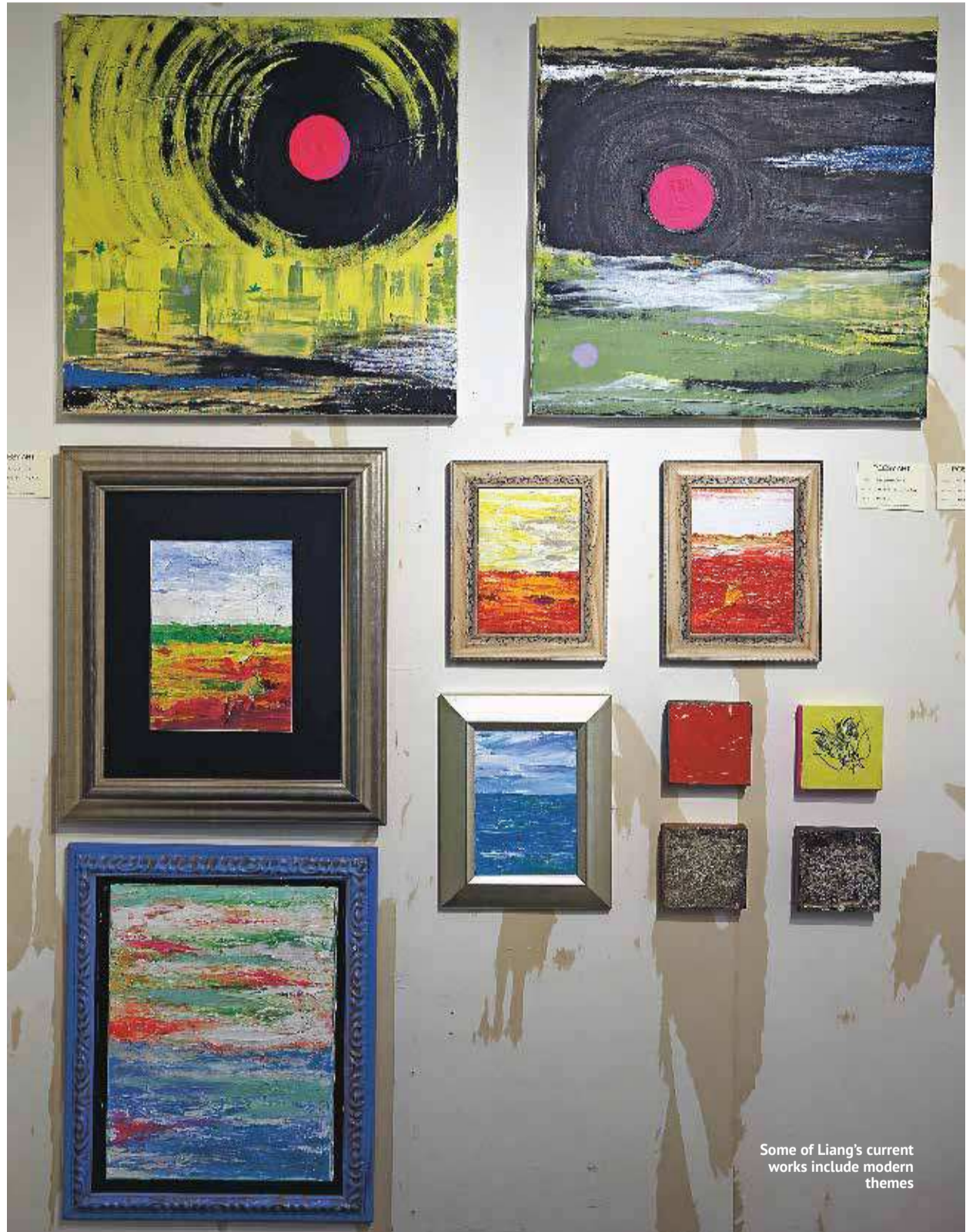
Striving towards satori

"I've always had an interest in the arts, doodling here and there since I was two years old. By the time I was six, my parents helped me learn my craft from working artist friends, so I've had four teachers who have mentored me since then. My favourite class was Chinese calligraphy, which helped me develop a steady brush hand, so there's a certain control and cleanliness to my lines," says Liang.

Building on the success of her previous pieces, she launched a gallery to exhibit her work in Kuala Lumpur last year, catering towards the classier crowd of clients in the fashionable end of Embassy Row. Simply titled Poesy's Art Gallery, the space is open for appointments only, though she maintains accessibility through her Paint a Gift of Love workshop.

Various influences are evident in her portfolio, with the full moon, dragonflies and everyone's favourite felines as recurring themes. Compositions tend towards the lighthearted, though she is not afraid of tackling more impassioned issues, as in Floating Balloons, a recent tribute to the victims of MH17 and MH370.

"As a pop-up gallery, I'll be exhibiting here for a year, until December. After this year, the long-term plan is to 'pop up' in a few selected countries, 12 months at a time, sort of a Romero Britto thing. I'm quite blessed in that my network includes art collectors, and I find that when you do good work, serendipity does shine upon you," she says.



Some of Liang's current works include modern themes

I'm quite blessed in that my network includes a lot of art collectors, and I find that when you do good work, serendipity does shine upon you.

A brilliant bijou

As with many labours of love, the space is supported by the proceeds of her other enterprises, notably her jewellery label. A boutique collection drawing on the artist's own fascination with gemstones, Poez Jewellers was established in 2006 after Liang began experimenting with designs and settings for her own accessories.

Her creations caught the eyes of close friends and acquaintances, who advised her to parlay her passion into a profitable pursuit. Turning her talents to a full range of collector cufflinks, signature pendants, sweetheart rings and exquisite earrings, the luxury

Continues on next page >>

HUMANITARIAN MOTIVES

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line proved lucrative, with her Signature-C Diamond Dragonfly band topping sales.

A classic white gold loop with diamond inset, the piece is also available in tanzanite, and comes with matching earrings to complement the wardrobes of felicitous fashionistas. Its popularity among patrons mirrors the acclaim won by her Dragonfly Lilypad acrylic paintings, which were displayed at the Saatchi Gallery in London.

"I started it as a business, but as I went along my compassion projects, I became aware of the ethical concerns surrounding the mining of precious stones involving inhumane conditions and labour exploitation. Even when you're digging, you're hurting the environment," says Liang.

"So I'll be moving out of that space. I won't be an extremist about it, but growing my jewellery business would require purchasing more stones, so I won't be expanding the line. The pieces are now reserved for existing clients who have supported me from day one," she adds.

A life in the limelight

No stranger to the media machine, Liang was introduced to the tinselled world of television and talk shows at the age of 14, when she was chosen as Levi's 501 Girl for Malaysia and Singapore. Her appearances prior to her first bout of cancer include commercial and programme host credits, though she parted ways with the industry in 1999 to focus on other aspects of her life.

Despite this, or perhaps because of it, fame has firmly followed the fleeting figure, with Liang winning *Her World's* Woman of the Year title in 2011, as well as recognition at NTV7's Bella Heart Award and *New-Man's* Creative Pioneer Awards in 2013 for her humanitarian work.

"I believe that there'll be a time when goodwill, or empathy, will just happen in your life if you're continually maximising your life's blessings. We'll see where providence will place me. It would be a bit lofty to think of myself as a philanthropist or a voice to influence the world, because there'll always be a whole load of people doing a whole lot more," she says.

A humanitarian at heart

Like the precious gemstones she curates, Liang's polish is not just skin-deep, as the plucky personality lives up to her own words through a number of charitable causes ranging from the international Helping Angels campaign and Bald Empathy Movement to the ChowK-ids Angels programme for child refugees.

Back in 2011, she helmed the Bald Empathy Movement at the 64th Cannes Film Festival, shaving her head bald to raise awareness for those suffering from premature hair loss due to chronic illness, a poignant premise given her own experiences.

The project was organised as part of the Helping Angels initiative, a compassion initiative centred around random acts of kindness. Despite her countless contributions and commensurate celebrity, the sunny socialite remains fundamentally grounded.

This year, Liang will be working on realising her resolutions for the year, which she dubs her Five Prayers. Aside from wishes for good health, family and career, she is also striving towards a state she calls fluent inspiration, marked by the free flow of creativity throughout her endeavours. ■



LEFT: The full moon, dragonflies and cats are frequent themes in Liang's oeuvre

BOTTOM: Liang will be composing the soundtrack to the *Poesy* animated short herself

