

## LIFESTYLE

# No object too trivial to make a point with art

DEBBIE YONG

**E**VERYDAY objects, from wooden tables and chairs to doors and electric fans, can be art.

Under the hands of veteran Filipino artist Rene Robles, they become the themes of abstract paintings, all in cheery primary colours.

Mr Robles is the founder of the Assertionism art movement, which has a growing following in the United States and European countries.

"It's a call to focus on the basic necessities and a reminder that money and luxury is not everything in life," he said.

After holding solo exhibitions in countries such as Germany, France, Spain, Canada and Hong Kong, Mr Robles, 57, is in town for the opening of his debut Singapore exhibition *The Art of Making Visible* this evening.

Mr Robles believes that trivial objects, too, can be tools for social and political commentary.

In his painting titled *Take Care*, for example, a blurry white zigzag brushed across an abstraction of a Filipino flag is meant to represent a falling plate that smashes into pieces at the bottom.

"It's a symbol of my country's fragile political situation. I want to tell people to be careful, make good use of it," Mr Robles said.

His paintings have sold up to US\$250,000 (S\$353,000) and are held in a number of perma-



**CATCHING ON:** Mr Robles' Assertionism Art has a growing following in the United States and European countries. It's a call to focus on the basic necessities of life. (PHOTO: NEO XIAOBIN)

nent collections, including those of Saudi Arabia's King Khalid, Spain's King Juan Carlos I, former US President Bill Clinton and the Vatican in Rome.

While Assertionism has been gradually catching on – at least seven American followers teach it in art schools worldwide – Mr Robles feels that the art form can be adopted by anyone from any country to "assert, transform and transcend" his or her individual or national identity.

He also expressed his faith in the growing modern arts scene in South-east Asia, particularly in the past decade.

"Little attention was paid to our art because of all the political turmoil in the region before, but we have woken up.

"Asia has talent and tradition, we could surpass the established Western greats if we find our own artistic voice."

He mused for a moment, and then added: "Sometimes when you look too far, you can't see objects that are right there in front of you."

*The Art of Making Visible* is at *Momentous Arts Gallery* at 20 Lorong Telok (behind Boat Quay) from Feb 22 to March 20, 11am to 7pm on weekdays

and noon to 6pm on Saturdays. It opens on Sundays by appointment only. Admission is free.

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## HELPDESK 我的字典

➤ Abstract: 抽象 chōu xiàng

➤ Art movement: 艺术运动 yì shù yùn dòng

➤ Fragile: 易碎 yì suì

## Reader's Digest-Discovery launches magazine

LEE SZE YONG

Editor-in-chief of the magazine Jim Plouffe, who is also the editor-in-chief of the English

similar concept – the National Geographic, which was first published in 1888.

of our successful TV brand. It will set itself apart from the competition by its quality, breadth