



Personality OF THE MONTH

Gregory Burns set three world swim records at the 1996 Para-Olympics, loves trekking in the Himalayas and has created TV documentaries. But it is with brush in hand that his spirit really comes alive.

his life and art. His favoured sports of scuba diving and surfing allow him intimate access to the splendour of the sea. He competed in the 1992 Barcelona and 1996 Atlanta Para-Olympics as a member of the USA Swim Team and achieved four world records and half-dozen gold and silver medals.

Gregory, who has made Singapore his home since 1995, believes that over the years, the significant landscapes he has painted were absorbed while hiking through nature and other peoples' neighbourhoods. A recent trek in Nepal provided the stimulus for his latest exhibition entitled simply 'Nepal'. These works, done predominantly on location during a two-week trek in the Everest Region, were inspired by the towering snow capped peaks that surrounded and inspired the artist. The paintings, and the subsequent works done in his Singapore studio, seek to capture the power and majesty of these sacred mountains and the innate beauty of Nepal.

FINDER: What keeps you attracted to art, especially painting and exhibiting so extensively?

BURNS: *Painting has been part of my life for 35 years. As with eating and sleeping, it is something I must, but also want to do. Besides being a form of expression it is a framework for living.*

FINDER: Has your way of seeing things, your style and any area in your attitude towards your inspiration and artwork changed in the past 10 years?

BURNS: *About 14 years ago, when I arrived in Asia, I drew and painted 'recognisable images' in a western style. For the next few years I studied Chinese calligraphy and brush painting as well as Chinese art history. I also learned about name seals (chops) and how to carve them. Incorporating Chinese arts and aesthetics into my work has provided me with the other side of the coin and something to contrast against my western*

aesthetics and techniques.

FINDER: How do you present your works?

BURNS: *It is a challenge to exhibit one's artwork in Singapore because there are a limited number of venues. Before a gallery commits itself to promoting an artist, it is challenging to find other suitable venues. The Substation is the best 'grass roots' venue for artists as it is open to anybody and is not expensive.*



FINDER: What do you try to convey in your works and exhibitions?

BURNS: *My last big exhibition was called, "Portals: Gateways to Sanctuaries". The word portal means a doorway or a gate. All the works in this series represent different gateways or entrances. To me, entrances are significant because they provide transitions between two different worlds. In life, we are constantly transiting different phases; for example, child to adult, single to married, sad to happy, close-minded to open-minded... I believe that gateways provide us with opportunities for discovery while encouraging us to explore our own spirituality. These paintings are part of my search for deeper meaning and joy in life.*



I recently had an exhibition called 'Nepal' which was a body of work that I did while trekking in Nepal last year. I later produced several large oil paintings that express the power and beauty of the Himalayas. Nature is my inspiration; I love the oceans, mountains and

deserts of the world.

FINDER: Please comment on the local art scene and how do you place yourself as an artist; are you Asian as a person and in your work?

BURNS: *Singapore is relatively conservative in its artistic tastes and the public especially appreciates traditional and Asian art. My art is a collage of eastern and western style and content. But I believe there is a universal thread that flows through both cultures. Creating art is a spiritual endeavor and I trust that my work springs from this spiritual root and can touch the hearts of all.*

FINDER: What is your next step?

BURNS: *I believe it is time for me to get outside help for my art career. I would like to work with somebody or a gallery*



which would promote me. It is very difficult to be the painter and the marketing person. Other people are good at promoting and selling, so I would like them to do what they do best while I do what I do best.