



Peranakan Portal
Oil pastel

To Gregory Burns, painting is akin to eating and sleeping; using images to express himself is something he has never stopped doing in his life despite the changes brought about by time and the circumstances around him.

However, in his coming exhibition, *Portals — Gateways to Our Inner Sanctuary*, Burns attempts to capture life's phases with objects like doorways and entrances. "Gateways provide us with opportunities for discovery while encouraging us to explore our own spirituality," he explains the name of his coming exhibition. "These paintings are part of my search for deeper meaning and joy in life; they are not completely realistic, but somewhat semi-abstract in nature."

"Since the early 1990s, my style has included abstract art,

and I have been painting with emotion and feeling; not just intellect. It was then that I began to work more with oils and mixed mediums," recalls the artist. "My style of painting has changed considerably over the years; I drew and painted realism and recognisable images, and I used to work predominantly with watercolour, Chinese ink and drawing," he adds.

For the paintings to be exhibited in *Portals*, he has used either oil paint or oil pastel. "I began working consistently in oil pastels because they allow me to incorporate aspects of drawing and line into my paintings," Burns explains. "In these works, I rely heavily on the use of colour and line to express my feelings."

At the age of one Burns contracted polio in Jerusalem, where his father was working as

a diplomat in the American embassy. He began painting at the age of five when his family moved to Paris. Despite being physically inconvenienced, Burns went on with life like any normal five-year-old, but chose to express himself through images. Given the opportunity to travel around the world with his family, he began to absorb the cultural and historical influences of different countries and peoples.

Burns' works have been strongly influenced by the Asian styles and ways of expression. "My art is a collage of Eastern and Western styles and content," Burns reveals.

The young Burns grew so accustomed to the nomadic lifestyle, that he went backpacking around China, Tibet, Nepal, India and Pakistan for 18 months after completing his first degree in

communication studies at the age of 23.

Since then, Burns has made Asia his home, working or travelling in Asia for more than a decade. He made a stop in Taiwan in the early 1980s, and studied in the Chung Da University while learning Chinese brush painting under the tutelage of Taiwanese watercolour artist, Liang Dan-Fong. Burns also picked up calligraphy and seal-carving, and exhibited his works during his two-year stay there.

"I believe that there is a universal thread that runs through cultures and art, which is spiritual in nature," Burns says. And it is through this spiritual dimension that he hopes to touch more hearts.

The only thing that has not



Above: *Chinatown Portal V*
Oil pastel
Below: *Portal II*
Oil on paper

changed in Burns' life is probably his love for painting. Painting is like eating to him. "Creating art has provided me with a framework for living, and at times brings me great peace and satisfaction," says Burns whose satisfaction also comes from his work as the Marketing/Public Relations Manager of Pepsico Restaurants International, and his record-breaking swims at the Paralympics of 1992 and 1996.

Prior to this exhibition, Burns showcased his works extensively in USA, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and The Substation in



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Singapore, which he considers the best 'grassroots' venue here.

His coming exhibition, *Portals — Gateways To Our Inner Sanctuary*, will be held at the Notices Gallery in Four Seasons Hotel from January 16 to February 16, 1998. Burns will be contributing a part of the proceeds to create a bursary for promising disabled artists identified by Very Special Arts (VSA), an organisation that promotes artists, musicians and actors with physical disabilities. ▲