

A love affair with art

Ho Sou Ping, artist, writer and gallery manager, began painting at the age of 13.

In 2009, he took the bold step of leaving a lucrative engineering career to become a full-time artist. In the same year, he started Artcommune Gallery, which is now one of the leading galleries in Singapore today.

Sou Ping holds a Bachelor Degree in Physics and a Master's Degree in Business Management and Art History, respectively. Always passionate about helping others acquire arts literacy and cultural appreciation, he has published books and designed courses to facilitate knowledge in these areas. He also contributes as a regular art columnist for the Chinese news press in Singapore.

In 2007, Sou Ping held his first solo exhibition. Soon strangers were buying his paintings, giving lie to the old belief that it is impossible to earn a living as an artist. At the same time, he attended some entrepreneur and life coaching courses and began to realize that one has to take action in life in order to get out of mediocrity – even if it meant taking risks.

A chance meeting with businessman Cheong Wing Kiat during his solo exhibition was the first turning point in his artistic life. Since their first meeting, they've worked on several projects together. The experiences were good for both of them. Mr Cheong encouraged Sou Ping to take on a career in the arts and backed this with promise of financial support. Sou Ping drew up a business plan. Mr. Cheong became his first patron, not only supporting his venture financially but by acting as his business mentor.

The continued growth of Artcommune is testament to the positive relationship between patron and artist. Sales at Artcommune grew 100 times from the first month of operations to January 2015. This amazing growth rate has carved many deep impressions into Sou Ping.

One of the most memorable moments is a group exhibition opening for the Equatorial Art Society, an important art society that was formed in the early 1950s but which was disbanded in 1972. The members who participated in the opening of the group show said the last time they had shown as a group was 50 years ago! It served as a reflection of Artcommune's vision to create awareness of Singapore's art history to Singaporeans.

Sou Ping feels that taking that step into what he really wanted to do has transformed his life. He said he retired at the age of 37 because he could no longer differentiate between work and play. Also, he felt a great sense of joy because he had finally put his talents to good use, to contribute to the society by improving the infrastructure of the art market in Singapore and also helping young Singapore artists to start their career.

As an artpreneur, Sou Ping feels many people enter the art industry thinking that it is very romantic and fun. The truth is it is like any other business: it requires the same intellectual muscles and discipline. The aesthetic skill is the product knowledge, and business skills are needed to run it professionally.