

# Art show with charity bent comes to town

By **MADHVI SUBRAHMANIAN**

ART is not only a form of self-expression but a means of promoting charity. Several organisations around the world are using art in various ways to help the disadvantaged.

Charities such as Sovereign Art Foundation, based in Hong Kong and the UK, run an annual Sovereign Art Prize in Asia (SAAP) to raise money through art auctions to rehabilitate disadvantaged children through art therapy and education.

This year, for the first time, the SAAP is tying up with Arts Outreach Singapore – a local charity outfit that promotes art education and visual awareness in primary and secondary schools – to host its art show here.

The show will also be taken to Hong Kong and Beijing before the works are auctioned off in Hong Kong.

The Sovereign Asian Art Prize exhibition shows only 30 selected painters and photographers from all over the Asia-Pacific.

The Singapore show includes a special addition of 20 works by some of the best Singaporean artists.

The Singapore works will be auctioned off at a charity gala dinner at Marina Bay Sands on Dec 15. The auction proceeds will be divided between Art Outreach Singapore and the artists.

Prior to the auction, the artworks will be on display at Artspace@Helutrans from tomorrow till Oct 29.

Sovereign Asian Art Prize has been an annual art competition for the last seven years and is well known around the region. The public prize is awarded to the piece which receives the most votes from those who attend the exhibition or cast their votes through the Foundation website. The first prize is US\$25,000 in Asia.

Included among the top 30 artists are four Singaporeans, John Clang, Wen Lee, Hui Har Ong and Juat Lee Tan, who are in the running for the award.

Entry into the show is by nomination, and a panel of world-renowned judges and curators selects the finalists. This year, the judges include Fumio Nanjo (director of the Mori Museum, Tokyo) and David Elliott (creative director of the Sydney Biennale). The director of the Singapore Art Museum, Tan Boon Hui, is also a member of the judging panel.

Most of the 50 artworks selected in the show seem to respond to contemporary society in a variety of ways. Iraqi artist Halim Al-Karim deals with the world of violence in his powerful photograph titled *Witness From Baghdad 1*. The image depicts three



**Photo finish:** Among the works at the Inaugural Sovereign Asian Art Prize Singapore show/auction are local artist John Clang's *Being Together/Dad* (above) and Iraq's Halim Al-Karim's *Witness From Baghdad 1*

washed out faces that peer at the audience with their sharp eyes albeit muted faces.

Other artists such as Singaporean John Clang depict contemporary urban realities of cities and their inhabitants, and the issues of

estrangement and intimacy in urban spaces. *Being Together/Dad* juxtaposes a picture of the artist with his father each in two different locations.

"Drawing on my own experiences of being separated from my family of origin



as a Singaporean based overseas in New York, this work documents and examines our new-wave diaspora – Singaporean families of various races and ethnicities who are grappling with that same predicament of separation through time and space from their family members living overseas," explains the artist.

Mae Anderson, chairman of Art Outreach Singapore, says: "This exciting exhibition and auction opportunity not only provides a platform for Singaporean

artists to share their work, but also brings in local participation and appreciation of a significant visual arts event in the region and spreads visual awareness."

*The Inaugural Sovereign Asian Art Prize Singapore 2010 exhibition is on at Artspace@Helutrans, 39 Keppel Road, from today till Oct 29. The auction will be held at Sky on 57, Marina Bay Sands on Dec 15. Contact: www.artoutreachprogram.org. Call: 65-68739505*

## Plenty of promise but short on delivery

By **NATALIE KOH**

WHAT would you do if you died and couldn't go to heaven? Or the equivalent of the afterlife?

You come back to the mortal world to sort things out, that's what. And such is the premise of Action Theatre's *Ma Goes Home*, where the protagonist (Catherine Sng) can't rest in peace, but gets a chance to return to earth for three days to figure out why.

It turns out that her son, Allan (Edward Choy), under pressure from his wife, Teresa (Josephine Tan), had sent her to a nursing home in Johor Baru but lied to her that she was in Woodlands. Under the "rules" of the other world, dying in Johor means that she can't cross the Causeway back to Singapore, so she needs to figure out a way to do so.

While playwright Edgar Liao's vision of the other world being full of doors to places that are exactly like those in the mortal world is a little cheesy, it played out the themes of filial piety and pragmatism versus emotional decisions surprisingly well.

These heavy issues, however, could have been explored further in the script by dispensing with some of the jokes and adding more insightful lines for some of the side characters such as Ali (Sazali Othman), whose sole role seemed to be helping the old lady escape from the nursing home.

Even though the script, which won Best New Play at Theatre Idols 2010, isn't perfect, it might have created a good enough comedy-drama on stage with a strong cast.

Sadly, even with veteran



**No home run:** While the script for *Ma Goes Home* could have created a good enough comedy-drama, the play suffers from under-rehearsed actors

actors such as Sng, it didn't.

The cast seemed under-rehearsed and stumbled over their lines, which they tried to cover up, though not well enough for the audience to miss.

Sng's performance was

disappointingly inconsistent. She managed to capture the audience's attention in some of the more emotional scenes, but seemed out of focus more often than not.

Tan's role as Teresa, a cold-hearted woman who

eventually shows a softer side, was one of the meatier characters in the play, which Tan managed somewhat effectively, albeit a tad unnaturally.

Teresa's mother (Irene Lim), however, was portrayed less successfully. As a drunkard who is struck with guilt about not taking care of her child as best she could, the character could have been a sympathy-evoking and very likeable character.

Many of Liao's well-crafted jokes fell flat, while the swear words, which could have come across as comedic, ended up sounding distasteful and crude.

Perhaps by this weekend, the cast would have been better rehearsed and offer a less disappointing performance.

*Ma Goes Home is on until Oct 24. Tickets at \$30 to \$40 are available at Sistic*