



**Publication:** The Straits Times Life!  
**Date:** Aug 14 2007  
**Headline:** Winning UOB works on show

## Winning UOB works on show

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ARTS REPORTER

MUSEUM director Kwok Kian Chow has just kicked himself out of his office.

He moved his office space on the third floor of the Singapore Art Museum (SAM) to nearby Stamford Court, to make room for more gallery space in the museum.

That extra space is the site of a new exhibition featuring all the past winning works of the UOB Painting Of The Year Competition.

The exhibition, Best Of UOB, is part of the ongoing Singapore Art Show. It showcases all the winning paintings in the competition's 26-year history and marks the inauguration of the new space at SAM.

Mr Kwok, 51, says: "I'm happy we kicked ourselves out to create more space for art.

"One thing that struck me about this exhibition is that the winners are all talking about icons. There's a search for a Singapore icon and a search for a Singapore identity."

The 26 paintings showcased run the gamut from portraits of people and cityscapes to still lifes.

There is even a witty critique of the definition of an art canon, as evidenced by the 1986 winning painting by Sandy Wong titled Exhibit '86. The work shows the back of a canvas facing an empty gallery space.

Grouped by themes rather than by chronology, the paintings enter a relationship which probe, question and echo one another's artistic motifs and painting methods.



ST PHOTO: ALAN LIM

**SPACE FOR ART: Winning works show a search for a Singapore identity, says Mr Kwok (right, with Mr Tran, left, and Mr Quak).**

Mr Matin Tran, 36, curator of the exhibition, says: "I didn't want people to look at the paintings and see which winner of which year did what. They should think about the paintings they're looking at. Looking at a painting is as artistic an experience as creating one."

Asked why it has taken so long for UOB to show the paintings in one single sitting, the bank's head of group communications and investor relations, Mr Quak Hiang Whai, 43, says: "We've been talking about sharing the artworks with the community for the last one or two years and we felt that the Singapore Art Show is a good platform to showcase the best visual artists in Singapore."

The bank has already taken a step towards making these paintings available to the public.

A mini gallery was established at UOB Plaza last year to display the works and those of Singapore's pioneer artists like Cheong Soo Pieng. Previously, they had decorated the offices and corridors of UOB offices or were kept in storage.

Asked if the bank plans to donate such works to SAM's collection in future, Mr Quak says: "If they are prepared to make space for a permanent gallery showcasing the works, we'll be happy to donate."

Mr Kwok quips in response: "Maybe we'll change the closing date of the show then."

➤ Best Of UOB is on the third floor of the Singapore Art Museum, 71 Bras Basah Road, from Thursday to Oct 8. It is open from 10am to 7pm daily with extended hours till 9pm on Fridays. Admission is free.