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SILA STUDIO PROMOTES CERAMICS ART – AN ATTRACTION TO FOREIGNERS

PENANG, August 2015 – Stepping into this studio for the first time has already stirred feelings of being in a rural setting, what more with the studio being within a house almost a century-old, located at Kampung Jalan Baru, Balik Pulau, Penang.

The studio reflects the interest and passion of this academician for the creative industry especially in ceramics which has inspired this lecturer from the School of the Arts, Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) to open 'Sila Studio' as a site to translate his works.

What is more interesting is, at the end of August, Sila Studio will be visited by a film production company from the United Kingdom (UK), for it to be used as a background in a film production with a yet-to-be-confirmed title, at the same time giving an opportunity to promote Sila Studio to Malaysian and world audiences.

The opportunity to interview Dr. Shamsu Mohamad, 53, has provided a new perspective in experiencing and understanding his artistic journey throughout the 32 years in this industry, which has accorded him with various international awards for his research and innovation in gilded ceramics.

Sila Studio is a ceramics studio operated by Shamsu together with his wife, daughter and a close relative and tourists from all over the world have been coming to this attraction, for them to have a closer look and feel of his works, other than also being a place for the local ceramics artisans to share and show their works to the local community.

"I was inspired to open this ceramics studio as there are still very few such studios in Malaysia, in fact as an academician of USM, I want to realise the motto of "We Lead" (Kami Memimpin), as a social responsibility that needs to be fulfilled in the best possible way, to allow this art to be introduced to the younger generation and the local community," said Shamsu.

He further said that the name "Sila Studio", which has been opened since September 2014 was taken from the word "Sila" which means "welcome", as it also brings a sense of "closeness" as one hears and keeps it to memory.

"Sila Studio brought a new transformation to the use of clay to produce contemporary objects which were seldom seen previously such as storage cases for items, shoes, shells, vegetables, fridge magnets, clips for shawls, home decorations and so forth," explained Shamsu.

The USM School of Housing, Building and Planning (PPPBP) Ph.D graduate who specialised in Architecture, spent most of his time studying the types of clay, the optimum temperature for baking and gilding techniques before embarking on a ceramics project to ensure the quality of each item produced at Sila Studio.

Besides that, in line with the concept of sustainability, Shamsu expressed his works through creative production of home decorations by using recyclable items such as drinking bottles and discarded pieces of glass, and in fact such products receive high demand from foreign tourists who visited his studio.

His unique handiwork has taken him to various parts of the world including the major cities in the world. On top of that, he receives strong support from Muzium dan Galeri Tuanku Fauziah USM and the Malaysian Handicraft Development Corporation, which have greatly helping him in promoting the ceramics craft items and besides inviting him to give talks in the area of his expertise.

“Personally, I chose this place to practice my art and put on display the ceramic works of other artisans because this house was uniquely built which reflects exceptional artistic beauty, as well as taking into consideration that Balik Pulau itself is a tourist destination,” said Shamsu.

“Currently, there are many noble and bold efforts have given a new life to this field, to elevate ornamental art and to prevent it from being lost in time, even though ceramics are seldom given high praises,” he added.

To date, he has spent RM15 thousand from his savings to set up the studio. He was grateful that even though the studio is still new, the earnings obtained from the studio are sufficient to pay for the rent of the house, the bills and the salary of his nephew who works there.

What made him more excited and proud was to see more youth interested to get involved in the ceramics industry.

Shamsu explained that such a positive development needs to be moved hand-in-hand with the acceptance of the public in appreciating the art of ceramics because not everyone is able to gild ceramics perfectly, for example the casting technique for ceramics alone requires one month to learn besides being patient, because the ultimate aim is not to gain profits but the satisfaction in producing a perfect work of art.

“We need to provide opportunity and take risk to develop the talents of the local youth through the ceramics production activity,” said Shamsu.

Traditional ceramics art more inclines towards the practicality of the items. Meanwhile, the modern ceramics art focuses more on the uniqueness and firmness of its external features. It has a style that reflecting unrestrained freedom, while giving emphasis to the efforts of the artisans in experimenting with clay and gilding techniques.

“Fine art and culture are within an industry that has a potential in the future, to generate a growth in income for the nation through tireless and continuous involvement,” said Shamsu.

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