

An Artist Re-Awakens

The 'caged bird' is singing again

By Adrienne Urbanec



The Caged Bird, 2007, Oil on Wood



Storm, 2009, Oil on Canvas



Le déjeuner sous l'arbre, 2008, Oil on Canvas

A demure smile crossed her lips as she shared the inspiration behind the enchanting painting on the living room wall. Titled simply *Lilies*, the explosion of teal and purple is both representative and whimsical. Artist Linda Ting Wareham, a slight woman with an easy laugh, is as enigmatic as her work. Born in Shanghai and raised in Hong Kong, Linda was fascinated by the colours, light and movement around her, but rather than picking up a paintbrush she worked in a more buttoned-down environment. It was not until after her first child was born that Linda allowed herself the luxury of dabbling in the arts. And what a 'dabble' it has been!

After reaching a notable level of distinction in Hong Kong – cited as a promising new artist in the mid-1980s, selling works to collectors around the region, Australia, the UK, the US and Canada, and honoured with a number of solo exhibitions – the family relocated to Singapore. While in Hong Kong, Linda was captivated by her surroundings and found motivation in the people, the animals and the oddly endearing way of life. Downtown is as animated and contemporary as the fishing villages are sleepy and antiquated – all of these divergent influences converged on her canvases. Probably her best-known series is the Hong Kong *Bird Street*; a charming depiction of how mundane transactions and daily activities are enlivened by the colourful creatures in their ornate cages.

The transition to Singapore posed a challenge to this unassuming artist and one she was not quite sure how to tackle. While in Hong Kong, she had been lavished with corporate sponsorships and an eager public that awaited each new show, but her new home was not so receptive. Additionally, the landscape seemed so foreign with its

emphasis on ethnic diversity, the oppressive heat and the unfamiliar foliage. For a brief period Linda could not draw from her surroundings and wondered if she would paint again.

After some languid rambles around the East Coast and cautious walks through the older parts of town, a sense of wonder and amazement began to emerge and Linda was moved to pick up her brushes and test them in Singapore. The results are a glorious display of religious symbolism and cultural intersections with a delightful dose of weather-related phenomena. A partially completed series presents local trees in varying effects, after sudden tropical storms have erupted across the land. Linda has also expanded the bird cage theme to reflect her initial feelings of captivity and ensuing liberation here in her new home.

Reflecting both her memories and expectations, Linda's paintings provide viewers with a joyful experience. When you look at them you can almost hear the birds chirping or the cacophony of a busy Asian street. In fact you will find yourself transported to the scene. For the time being Linda has some of her pieces on the walls of her own home, but is hoping to find a venue where she can display her older paintings, as well as those which have sprung from her new-found love of Singapore.

Adrienne Urbanec and husband, Tom, have lived in Asia for most of the last decade. Residing in Hong Kong, China, Japan and now Singapore, she devotes her time to animal welfare work, writes for a number of non-profit organisations, and chairs the AWA Arts and Culture Committee.

Photos courtesy of Linda Ting Wareham