

.interview: gloria keh



Image courtesy of Gloria Keh

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Luca Curci talks with the artist **Gloria Keh**, the winner of **HONORABLE MENTION** of **ITSLIQUID INTERNATIONAL CONTEST 5TH EDITION 2017**.

Gloria Keh is Born in the **Chinese Year** of the **Dragon**, in **1952**, she was **exposed** to **art** from **childhood**. Her late **father**, the **oil painter**, **Martin Fu**, was her first **art teacher**, and since the family was dead pan poor, Gloria began to **sell** her **artworks on paper** when she was in **primary school**, to supplement her pocket money. Her **father** always **encouraged** her to paint with abandon and **not to be afraid to express**. He said that there were **no mistakes in art**, and encouraged her to delve into **abstract art**. To go **beyond form**. As it was **difficult** to earn a living as an artist, Gloria took on other forms of **employment**, but her heart was always with her art. More than **50 years later**, Gloria **founded Circles of Love**, in **2008**, an **art-based non-profit charity outreach programme**, using her **art** in the **service** to **humanity**. She facilitated **workshops** on **mandala art** and **symbolism**, as well as in **art journaling**. She **studied Mandala art** and **symbolism** for over **10 years** at the **Theosophical Society** in **Melbourne, Australia**, and having **worked** as a **journalist**, she created **special modules** using **art** and the power of the **written language**, as a **form of healing** and **therapy** through **art journaling**. All her **paintings** are **sold 100%** for **charity**, supporting charities not just in her homeland **Singapore**, but **internationally** too. Her **works** are acquired by **collectors** in **Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, India, Sri Lanka, Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, Italy, Russia** and the **USA**. **Two** of her **paintings** are also part of the **collections** of **museums** in **South Korea**. She has **exhibited** in over **40 shows/art events**, in **Singapore, regionally** and **internationally**. Her **first overseas solo** was held in **Vienna, Austria** in early **2018** at the **Gallery Steiner**. In **2018**, she also **exhibited several times** in **Italy**, twice in **New York**, including the **New York Art Expo, Germany, South Korea, India, and Indonesia**; as well as held **two solo exhibitions** in **Singapore**. Her next **international exhibition** is in **November 2018** at the **Shanghai Art Fair**. Gloria has **won several international art awards**, including **three Italian art awards** and **one award** from **Kerala, India**. She is very passionate about her art and constantly raises funds to support charities through the sale of her paintings. **Said Gloria: "Art offers me great personal satisfaction, and a means to be useful to the community. I enjoy the solitude of art, and find it very soothing and healing. Art is sadhana, which means a spiritual practice in the Sanskrit. It is also my form of prayer. My painted prayers."**



Luca Curci – What’s your background? What is the experience that has influenced your work the most?

Gloria Keh – Although I have attended art courses, I am a self-taught artist. My late father, the oil painter Martin Fu, would be, on all accounts, my first art teacher. He was a true lover of the arts: of not just painting, but of music and especially classical and European opera, and of the ballet. He never travelled beyond Singapore and Malaysia, but his heart and his dreams were always in Europe. In order to try to earn a living as an artist, my father painted mainly commissioned oil portraits of people. This was all in the early 1950s. But he always encouraged me to paint, to express and to immerse myself in abstract art. To be fearless in expressing, and to go beyond the realm of form. One of the major incidents that totally influenced and in fact changed the way I paint was a session with my mentor, the American painter, Gregory Burns. I was struggling with a big loose canvas, changing stuff, adding colours, overpainting. Burns, who will NEVER touch, add to his students’ works, noticed this and asked why was I mucking around with the canvas. I explained that I did not like certain parts of my work, and was changing these parts to fit the part that I wanted to keep. Burns advised that I get rid of the part I loved instead. Initially, I flatly refused. But upon contemplation of his words that one does not change so much other parts but start afresh by getting rid of what one loves instead, I realised he was right. Egotistically, I wanted to hang on to what I liked, and wanted to change things to fit what I liked. The next time I was in the studio, I painted over the sections I loved, and started anew. This experience taught me Detachment, and it opened up great possibilities. This experience not only influenced my art, but my life as well.



L.C. – Which subject are you working on?

G.K. – A series of abstracts in what I call The Jewel Collection. A layering of colours to express various things, e.g., the four seasons, local festivals, emotions. Also working more and more on my collages. And painting on wood.

L.C. – Where do you find your inspiration?

G.K. – Mainly from Mother Nature, poetry, and music. I write a lot, especially poetry, and one inspires the other. My writings inspire my art, just as much as my art inspires my writings. Sometimes the art comes first, and poetry automatically follows. Sometimes, I write the poetry, put it away for a while, and one day an artwork manifests that illustrates my written words.



L.C. - What is your creative process like?

G.K. - I hardly sketch before working on a canvas, but I faithfully keep several art journals, of various sizes. From large A3 sized journals to small A6 notebooks that I carry in my handbag along with a small selection of colouring materials, like markers that I can use to make art whilst travelling on trains, or waiting in clinics (a usual thing at my ripe old age). I make art every day, but most are not for commercial use, but for personal satisfaction and pleasure. Art is like opium to me. An addiction. An obsession. I would rather doodle than engage in some chit chat with another person. This daily journal practice definitely constitutes the very foundation of my art. Another important part of my process lies in creating mandalas. I find making mandala very stimulating, yet at the same time it has a calming effect. The senses are stimulated, whilst the mind is still, silent. In addition, painting mandala helps to improve focus, and without focus there will never be success in anything. Also I read a lot, and enjoy research, especially on symbolism. The research itself often gives rise to more ideas. My daily practice thus in itself, provides another springboard of concepts, and a wonderful source of inspiration. Then, I contemplate on my art journal entries. Regularly sharing my art journal pages on social media with motivational messages, inspirational quotations, to help uplift and inspire others, because I truly believe that art must have a purpose, and in my case, a spiritual and healing purpose. I follow my heart, and am totally guided by my intuition. I find that the more I paint, the more I make art, the more creativity oozes out from my every pore. As Picasso once said: The Painting is more powerful than me. Basically, I am just a servant of art. A midwife blessed to deliver the art baby. I just take instructions, and am guided when I am in the art-zone. Art is my painted prayers.



L.C. - Did your style change over the years? In which way?

G.K. - Yes, there has been change for sure. Not only in my art, but in myself. I believe they both influence and complement each other. Making art forms a major part of my life. At this stage of my life, and since my immediate family members are dead, plus that I have no children, I have lots of time for art. The more I delve in art, the more I change, the more I grow. I must admit art has given me freedom of expression, and more confidence. The culture I come from conditioned women (in the old days) to keep quiet especially when in public, and not speak unless you were spoken to. Not to voice opinions. Not to make waves. But with art, and through art, I can express and certainly make waves. In fact, my Waves Series of 62 paintings celebrated this new found freedom.



L.C. - What do you think about the concept of this contest? In which way did it inspire you?

G.K. - I loved the free theme of the contest, because freedom is very important to me, and ultimately freedom is what we seek. Freedom from human bondage. I appreciated that the contest focused on contemporary art and offered various categories, hence recognising the difference fields of art. This inspired me to present my art in a safe, warm and welcoming environment. I felt that the contest and its organisers respected the ideals and concepts of artists with its all-inclusiveness. I also liked the idea of an international jury of distinguished judges. That not just one person sat in high judgement. I was convinced that the contest was based on fairness. And although I knew there was no way I could get tons of Facebook likes to win, I still wanted to be a part of this contest. When I entered the contest, winning was not on the agenda. Usually, I shy away from competitions, but I felt confident to just participate, to present and show my works to international judges. That the main thing was to participate, to be proud of my art. My paintings are my babies, and like any mother, I wanted to show off my babies.



L.C. - In which way the artwork presented in our exhibition is connected with the contest's theme?

G.K. - I submitted a variety of my styles, because I do not paint in any one style. Painting depends on my moods, that change from day to day, and on my prevailing frame of mind. As I mentioned, my paintings are my children, and like in any family scenario, the children are not the same. Even identical twins have different personalities. I also believe in trying out new techniques, exploring, reinventing, discovering. Playing with colours, like a child. In the Sanskrit, there is a beautiful word, Lila, and this means 'play'. I may be 66 years old, but I am like a child, because I love play, lila. Interestingly, in Hindu philosophy, and stories of old, it is said that the entire creation was the result of lila, as if the Almighty, Mr Big, God, or whatever one prefers to refer to the creative principle, just played, and in doing so brought about the whole of creation. Somehow, even though I am catholic by birth, I resonated with this idea: of play, of lila. That God must have had a sense of humour. And that this supreme being is most certainly an artist too. The free theme of the contest endorsed this. That we are all different, thank goodness. Our minds constantly change, and each of us is a unique being. I find this absolutely fascinating. This freedom that I place great importance on, and the freedom suggested by the contest went hand in glove. Freedom is an essential component to heighten, maximise creativity.



L.C. - What do you think about ITSLIQUID Platform?

G.K. - It offers great opportunities for artists of all disciplines. Artists coming from varying cultural backgrounds. In doing this, and offering such opportunities, the platform offers a means towards establishing world peace, and fostering a respect for not just artists but in turn, a respect for all that there is. I like that the group offers all sorts of art, from design to painting; from video art to installations, etc. It is a true international art family open to all artists irregardless of nationality, race, or creed.

L.C. - Did you enjoy cooperating with us?

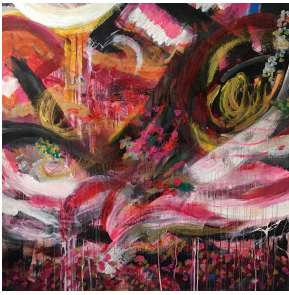
G.K. - Of course. It was a no fuss, easy working relationship. Plus for me, it has always been a pleasure to work with Carmen and the other members of your curatorial team. They are very responsive, efficient. Always reply promptly to emails, and very patient with me, who's a dinosaur with the internet. When one feels welcome, one automatically develops trust in the relationship, be it in the art circles, or anywhere else.



L.C. - What are your suggestions about our services? Is there something more we can provide to artists?

G.K. - I have made this suggestion before and am sorry to repeat myself. But my major drawback is the cost of courier charges from Singapore to galleries in Italy, Bogota, etc. These high costs in sending stretched canvases deters me from participating in more exhibitions. If paintings could only be couriered in rolled loose canvas form, and then stretched at the gallery destination, it will help tremendously. Then, after the exhibition, the painting is taken off the wooden stretcher bars, rolled up and returned to the artists. Of course, the artist must bear all the charges for this stretching and unstretching services. I believe this will be a great incentive offering major savings and will be more cost effective for artists like me to participate in more international exhibitions.





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