Ong Kim Seng’s showcase with his 52 students

Clara Chow  
ARTS CORRESPONDENT

AS THE Chinese proverb goes: “Green comes out of blue and can surpass the brilliance of blue.” That is, the apprentice can sometimes outdo the master.

For Singapore’s best-known watercolourist Ong Kim Seng, letting his many students have their day in the sun is a happy state of affairs.

Ong, a 1991 Cultural Medallion winner, is staging an art exhibition with 52 of his students for the first time.

Dedication To Watercolour, held at the Singapore Management University (SMU) until Wednesday, showcases two of his pieces and 96 of his students’ works — selected by Ong and a panel of his senior students.

The participating students range in age from 35 to 65, and run the gamut from housewives, doctors and lawyers to full-time artists. They have been under his tutelage for between one and nine years.

At the preview of the exhibition last Friday, Ong, 61, said of his pupils’ works: “By and large, the standards are good. I feel very proud and happy.”

The paintings on display include Singapore scenes, Bali landscapes, the water villages of China and sights of Nepal — all hallmarks of the artist’s own work. Many of his students’ works retain the same light-drenched atmosphere and deftly executed plein air (French for “in the open air”) strokes as their teacher’s.

They range in price from $600 to more than $3,000. Sales proceeds will be donated to the eight hospices under the Singapore Hospice Council (SHC), as well as the Lions’ SightFirst — a programme started in 1989 to battle preventable blindness.

Mrs Lun Chor Yee, chairman of the organising committee, says the idea for the show came about while a group of Ong’s students were having dinner during Chinese New Year in February.

Says Mrs Lun, 56, who is vice-president of human resources at the Nanyang Technological University and an avid watercolourist: “Someone said we should just stop talking about it and do it.”

The charitable cause rose out of her personal friendship with the SHC’s members, whom she got to know when she was director of finance at the Ministry of Health in the late 1970s.

Last Saturday, the exhibition was officially opened by Health Minister Khaw Boon Wan.

Already, the two works donated by Ong to the cause have been sold.

Morning Painting, depicting the Botanic Gardens, was sold for $8,000, while Fantasy Of Light, a Bali scene, was sold for $10,000.

They were bought by Ms Leong Wai Leng, Temasek Holdings’ chief financial officer, and Dr Chen Ai Ju, chairman of the SHC-Lien Foundation project committee, respectively.

Says Mrs Lun: “We would like to promote the awareness of the services being offered by the hospices. It’s also an opportunity for the artists to showcase their pieces and improve.”

Dedication To Watercolour – An Ong Kim Seng & Students Exhibition For Charity II