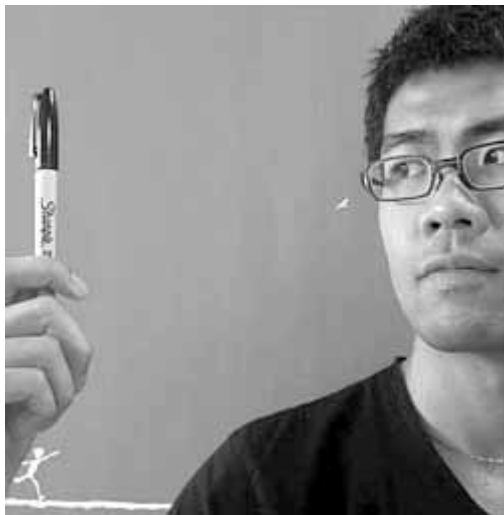


Cups full of art

This artist's creativity 'smacks mundane in the face'.

By Elaine Dong, The Star Online| thestar.com.my, February 21, 2010

His name is Cheeming Boey, but he goes by just Boey. He was born in Malaysia, but works in California. He's an artist, but he draws on disposable cups. That's right, Styrofoam cups.



Thinking beyond paper: Cheeming Boey with his trusty Sharpie and his boundary-breaking attitude is making waves with his art on disposable.

It's not disposable rubbish, though, what he does. Boey's creativity has garnered him the respect of his peers and the creative industry alike, and he is featured on several popular art blogs: linesandcolors.com, blog.sharpie.com, designverb.com, and booooooom.com, where one site visitor exclaims, "This is amazing! I love when creativity just smacks mundane in the face!"

Boey has also been written up in mainstream American newspapers and magazines like *The Orange County Register* and *At Home* magazine.

All this is what comes of doodling on Styrofoam as a kid and reading *Lat* and *Lau Fu Zi* (a Chinese cartoon strip for kids) religiously. Mums and dads, are you listening?

An uncle of his who was in advertising listened, and advised the art-loving boy to go to the United States to study, Boey says in an e-mail interview.



Boey explaining his art at an exhibition at **Marion Meyer Contemporary Art**. He generates enough interest to sell his 'disposable' cups for hundreds of dollars.

He started out studying advertising first and only stumbled into animation by chance: Though he had always loved to draw and had been fascinated by Disney's animated cartoons since he was a tot, he had no idea there was a career path in that area.

"A year into my (advertising) course at university, a friend showed me what courses to take to gear me towards animation. About two years into my studies, I got my first job at a video game company, and I have been working with them for 10 years now," Boey, 31, says.

While an accomplished animator in his day job, Boey's nights for the past three years have been occupied with developing as a "cup artist". There definitely isn't a career path in this field, but he's made it very much his own. His incredibly detailed art on Styrofoam cups sells for anywhere between US\$140 and US\$900.

"I don't tie myself down to any particular style; I do whimsical and realistic drawings," he says. "Therefore my cups tend to have designs that appeal to a broader range of people. Collectors, students, you name it. The price depends on time spent and content.

"The cups can take anywhere from a few hours to months to do, because I draw directly with a single fine-point Sharpie (a brand of marker pen). No sketching on the cup, therefore, I have no room for error.

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“What you see in the final result is done in a single attempt. I often spend hours just thinking about my next stroke and overall composition of a piece. Unlike paper, where the picture ends at the four corners, my art has to work all the way around the cup.”

While he'd always doodled, it was a sketch he'd done on a cup rescued from the trash at a coffee shop that turned out to be a keeper. He took that first cup back with him to work and put it on a shelf in his cubicle.



Katsuro 'victorious child', Boey's take on Japanese-style tattoos.– Photos provided by artist

“After a while and many cups later, my cubicle started to look like a dump, and my co-worker asked what I was going to do with all my cups. ‘They’re kinda nice, maybe I can sell them,’ I replied. ‘No one is going to buy that crap, Boey,’ he said. And I decided to prove him wrong.”

Boey's work is amazing; it ranges from single cup drawings to multi-cup series that boggle the mind. His *Wired Series* shows a series of telephone wires that seem to be interconnected from cup to cup from one angle. Then you move, and the view shifts.

According to Boey, it demonstrates how arranging the set allows viewers to feel different moods. “A picture is worth a thousand words, but what if the picture constantly changes?” he muses.



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Boey gets his ideas from traditional Chinese and Japanese prints and – “The Malaysian *wayang kulit* (shadow puppet) shows also influenced a lot of my pattern works,” he says.

“It may not be obvious in my designs, but it’s always something I think about. I have also always loved Greek and Asian mythologies, stories of how the Chinese and Japanese gods came about. So a lot of my works are a combination of what I heard as a child that fascinated me.”

His childhood growing up in Johor Baru seems idyllic. He roamed about his father’s large garden, every inch of which was filled with zebra doves, or merbok.

“My dad breeds them for competition. Back then, I didn’t have game consoles like kids have nowadays, so when I grew too old for (the TV cartoon series) *He-Man*, I went on to play with dogs, chickens, spiders, and mantis, ants, beetles. I guess that was a good thing because it allowed me to study animal and insect behaviours at a very young age,” he says, explaining how his interest in art began when he tried to capture on paper what he saw all around him.

Boey believes art exists in many forms. He still draws on paper, he paints, sculpts and animates. But to him, nothing is more rewarding or challenging than trying to complete a drawing on a cup without making any mistakes.

Some people find it hard to accept his cups as pieces of art.

“A lot of them asked me if I do stuff on paper, or canvas,” he says. “They have no problem paying for the works if it was on paper, but not on a disposable cup. But just because it is labeled ‘disposable’ doesn’t mean it has to be. The cup itself is incredibly durable, and it is also water proof.”

“I think that we should look beyond the traditional paper and canvas and embrace whatever else is out there. Look beyond paper, look at the idea. I don’t think if the recipe for Coca Cola came on a paper napkin that it would be worth any less, right?”

When Boey gets home from his day job, he works on what he calls his comic blog and his cups from 9pm to 2am daily, and he has been doing that for the past three years.

“I firmly believe the difference between a dream and reality is just doing it,” he says.