

# ARCH & ART

*For Edmund Ng, Suying Metropolitan Studio's newest partner, art and design are irrevocably intertwined. He shares how his love for one is manifested in the other, and how art plays a central role in the firm's design philosophy.*

BY: JOYCELINE TULLY



## FIRST LOVES

He may be an architect by profession but Edmund Ng is, at heart, an art lover and collector. Indeed, talk to him about Chinese ink wash paintings and contemporary sculpture, and watch his eyes light up. For Edmund, art is a subject that knows no bounds. Certainly, it is subtly weaved into his architecture and design aesthetics, and what first draw the eye of Ms. Patty Mak, his partner at Suying Metropolitan Studio.

The pair were introduced by Edmund's wife, but Patty had already heard, or at least know, of Edmund through his work at One Rosyth. A boutique condo with just 17 units along Rosyth Road, it stands apart from neighbouring buildings with its striking aluminium clad façade dotted with seemingly random perforations. By day, its perforations cast dappled shadows on the ground, subtly

casting an imaginary forest; at night, its façade morphs into a shadowy, forest tableau. Says Edmund, "The image of nature and the forest is therefore recreated in the façade in a permanent way." But not just mere form, the façade is first and foremost functional as an example of modern tropical architecture. It ensures shade for the west-facing site and protect from prying eyes along the main road.

Patty had long admired the building for its striking architecture. When she found out that Edmund was behind it and that they both shared similar ideals and a love for art, the possibilities for collaboration opened up. The rest, as they, is history. Edmund joined Patty at Suying Metropolitan Studio in early 2012.



## STATE OF THE ART

"Art is part of our soul and it will always be reflected in our works," says Patty. Not surprisingly, works of art dot the sleek, spacious offices of Suying Metropolitan Studio. There is the serene sculpture of Buddha with his eyes shut by Taiwanese artist Li Zhen.

It is a perfect environment for Edmund, who spent his first paycheck some 18 years ago on a contemporary-style Chinese ink wash painting by Li Yuen Shao and whose wife runs an art gallery. "Since young, I have been surrounded by art," says Edmund. "I had an uncle who worked in the National Arts Council, and I was exposed to it from an early age. It was part and parcel of growing up."

His interests run the gamut from contemporary Buddhist art and Asian art to postmodern conceptual art. The works of Chinese artist Ai Wei Wei, in particular, strikes a chord with Edmund. "I see his works as social statements," he shares. "They challenge conventional thinking and forward the social causes of the Chinese people."



Currently, he is contemplating purchasing a lot of the artist's porcelain sunflower seeds, which was exhibited at the Tate Modern as part of its Unilever Series. Titled *Kui Hua Za* in Mandarin, each seed is hand-sculpted and painted by artisans in China's Jingdezhen, traditionally famous for its exquisite porcelain. Together, they represent a counter narrative to the buy-and-throw 'Made in China' mass products that flood the markets these days.

Edmund has already bought two chairs from one of Ai's Documenta 12 Fairytale performance installations at Documenta Kassel, where Ai famously sent 1,001 Chinese farmers, vendors, workers, students, many of whom have never travelled outside China, to Kassel in Germany for one week. "There is nothing physically special about the chairs I bought; they are just old Qing Dynasty wooden chairs," Edmund says. "It's what they mean, their significance, that I value."

He also collects the works of contemporary local artists including Hong Zhu An, whose works in traditional Chinese ink wash fuses the techniques of Western oil paintings. "He is very under-rated; very few artists have such a breakthrough in the evolvement of the tradition," Edmund observes.

Other artists that he admires include Indonesian artist Henri Dono—"his works are fantastical and pushes you out of your comfort zone"—Indian-born British sculptor Anish Kapoor and French artist Philippe Pasqua. Perhaps because of his early exposure to the art world, "the things I like are so varied," Edmund admits.



SUYING DESIGN was founded in 1997 by Patty Mak. "It was to be a platform where we could express our creativity and have fun doing it," says Mak.

Since those early days, Suying has expanded to 25 staff with projects in more than 20 cities around the world, including India, China, Indonesia, Germany and the United States. In 2012, the company was rebranded as Suying Metropolitan Studio and ranks as one of Singapore's leading interior architectural design firms. It continues to be helmed by Mak, alongside partners Edmund Ng, Anita Chiu.

#### SUYING METROPOLITAN STUDIO

9 Muthuraman Chetty Road  
 APS Building, #03-01  
 Singapore, 238931  
 Tel: +65 6297 9797

*By appointment only.*

And while he concedes that there is always a commercial side to art, his approach to acquiring art is guided by his personal likes. "We have pieces that may be of museum quality but not commercial value," he confesses. "My wife and I enjoy the works, so we don't mind that."

#### DESIGN AESTHETICS

It is often said that architecture, art and design are merely different discussions of the same subject. But in architecture and design as in art, the devil is in the details. For Edmund, whose architecture hero is Tadao Ando—"for the purity in his forms and materiality of his works—that just about sums up his design philosophy.

"Aesthetic is in the details," he says. "And the clients who seek us out know what they want." Indeed, going by the body of work at Suying Metropolitan Studio, the details are where they get it right.

