

Malaysia

# 10 things about: Jeffrey and Masturah, the artists behind Maya Gallery

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Masturah (left) and Jeffrey with their works of art. — Picture by K.E.Ooi

GEORGE TOWN, May 10 — One is a trained architect but has decided to tap into his “inner artist” and create spectacular ink paintings of buildings while another is a graphic designer who finds beauty in old places and discarded objects.

Husband and wife, Jeffrey Wandly and Masturah Sha’ari, are the co-owners of the up and coming Maya Gallery in Singapore.

Jeffrey’s striking, bold paintings of buildings created by way of pouring and swirling ink onto canvas have garnered quite a following ever since his first solo exhibition at Artshow Busan, Korea last year.

As for Masturah, she focuses more on detailed pencil drawings of ordinary items such as a ball of scrunched up paper or the intricate details of a blossoming flower.

The couple established Maya Gallery back in 2012 to promote local artists internationally and to create an appreciation for art through art programmes and workshops.

The couple recently participated in the Three Islands Art Exhibition at Jawi House in Penang. They talk to Malay Mail Online about their work, Maya Gallery and their general passion for the arts.

## In their own words:

### Masturah:

We started in 2011, but we officially opened in 2012. That was in April. We are celebrating our third anniversary. We are both professionals, he (Jeffrey) is an architect, he’s in project management. Myself, I’m a graphic design consultant. That is our profession. **Art was something we did since our youth. This love for the arts is a thing that has been with us.** His late father was a music composer, so there’s music and the arts in his family.

### Jeffrey:

In those days, it’s difficult to find paper and all that. My time, at least. I’m quite old. **Anyway, I love to doodle so sometimes, you can’t find paper you will doodle on the wall.** But if you want to doodle on the wall, you are scared your parents will scold you. **So under the bed, there’s this section of wall right, so I doodled on that wall.** Sometimes, when I wanted to draw something, I just went under the bed and draw. So, it becomes my gallery. Those are my younger days in Singapore.

### Masturah:

I have a degree in economics. But because I love art and design, I took up a design course... **my profession changed from information, librarian to designer, now I do illustrations.** I love to draw. We both paint as well, we are artists. Mine is colour pencil but I paint too. **I am a graphic design consultant but I run the gallery so I do a lot of management and everything.** Most of the time we are promoting artists.

### Jeffrey:

We didn’t leave our profession. **Art is part of our profession. For me architecture, doing projects, there’s also an art part of it. She’s doing designing. If you look at my art, I would like to focus... not to say focus but there’s attention on heritage buildings, people, places, culture...** so this is also part of architecture too. The more stories the buildings tells me, the more intriguing it becomes. **If I look at an old building, it tells me all kind of messages.**

### Masturah:

My father was promoting the arts in the 1960s even though I was too young at that time. He was in the ministry for culture. **When we started, we thought, ya, maybe we do a gallery to promote the local artists,** we felt that there are many local talents that need to have their work shown. **That’s how we started with less than 10 local artists. So within three years we promoted almost 90 artists;** local, regional, international — Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam and Brazil, Dutch, Turkish... **in the end, the artists came to us because they’ve heard how active we were.**

### Jeffrey:

**My collectors call me a “building whisperer” because when I capture the essence of a building, I capture the soul of the building.** In Malay, they call it “bicara dengan bangunan.” Because when I do my art, I have conversations with the building. I don’t do the conventional brush. I use ink on canvas. I don’t use a typical brush, I use out of the bottle kind of effect on my work. In a way, I break from the conventions. **When I paint, I don’t put my canvas on an easel. I put it on the floor and I will stand and pour the ink out to form the**

**painting.** Sometimes, I'd get a bad backache from crouching over the canvas. There is something about standing, feet on the ground, to feel connected somehow to the painting as I paint with ink. I have painted buildings from all over... China, Nepal, Korea, Bali, Indonesia, Malaysia... probably I will start with Penang's heritage buildings.

**Masturah:**

**We expose our children to art too but their studies is also important. The thing is that kids nowadays are so stressed out.** We have a 13-year-old, an 11-year-old and a six-year-old. At a young age, they need to have something to be happy about. **We don't send them to tuition. We want them to enjoy learning.**

**Jeffrey:**

I wanted to do music and the arts when young. My father said no, it's very difficult at that time. **He wanted me to do a professional degree so something more closer to the professional arts and music would be architecture.** Now that we have kids, when we go overseas, we encourage our kids to do drawings, sketches. **It's through art that you learn about culture, you learn about people. You build relationships through art.**

**Masturah:**

**It can be a lonely journey when you start a new business.** Then again, it's what motivates you... I don't have to look far. I look at my late father, he worked very hard and he also spent time in arts. He achieved so much, that's as much motivation as I can get. My father was a very strong motivator. **Sometimes I remind myself that my father went through worse. They were the first generation to arrive in Singapore. My father came from Malaysia.** He came to Singapore to finish his studies after the Japanese Occupation. He joined politics for 12 years, he was in the ministry of culture. **The art scene is growing very rapidly in Singapore.** Yet, there is still this underlying thing that there is still this struggle. **There are still a lot of challenges.** We've made friends with other older galleries in Singapore, they've been there like more than 20 years. **And still, there is this complaint... too many new galleries, taking over their rice bowls.**

**Jeffrey:**

My father was a composer but he also liked to paint watercolour. **We are migrants from Indonesia so what he likes to do is encourage the family to know the relatives... so he will pick up a picture of his father or our relatives and he'd ask us to draw.** So in the process of drawing, he would talk, this is your grandfather, this is your granduncle, this is your aunty... so in a way, drawing is a part of our family, it's a medium that connects us. **Those days, there are no digital photographs, the most we have photographs. So the only way to create attachment is to draw. When we send Hari Raya cards back to Indonesia, we will draw our cards and send to our grandfathers, grandmothers, aunties and all that.**