

Options

LIFE • STYLE • LEARNING

The simple man

Men's fashion gets a plain palette this season

Balance of power

Audi's RS 5 receives the full RS treatment

Fine art of mixing

Matthew Bax juggles bartending and his first love, art

Winning FORMULA

Mukesh Valiram, director of the Valiram Group, has found the right balance between tenant mix and brands for its newly established Luxury Fashion at Resorts World at Sentosa

Fine art of MIXING

Lisa Marie Tan finds out how Matthew Bax juggles his time between bartending and art

When he's not charming the crowd at The Tippling Club in the leafy Dempsey area with his concoctions of alcoholic magic, award-winning mixologist Matthew Bax can be found holed up in an art studio pouring his heart and soul into another creative endeavour.

Along with Chef Ryan Cliff, Bax is part of the team behind the success of the year-old Tippling Club, which has already gained recognition as a leading trend-setting bars, winning accolades such as being voted among *Bartender* magazine's World's Top 20 Bars in 2009.

Adelaide, Australia-born Bax, who is also a Singapore permanent resident, has his hands full working his magic behind the bar but he hasn't allowed his daytime job (if you count a bar job a daytime one) to get in the way of his first love: art — specifically, painting.

The results of his dedication to his artistic pursuits will be unveiled to the public this month when Bax holds his second solo show in Singapore at FOST Gallery. "Is Text Cheating?" is his commentary on contemporary communication through a visual landscape of words, lines and their inherent subtext.

When not mixing drinks or painting, the 36-year-old bachelor stays up late watching football matches and bicycle races on TV. Most days, though, Bax spends time at the recently relocated La Salle College of the Arts studio, where he draws and paints, in-

spired by daily occurrences and nightly observations. He talks to *Options* about a subject close to his heart.

How did you discover art?

I discovered art at a very early age as my father is a painter and heads the art department at Westminster College in Adelaide. As early as I can remember, I have always been fascinated by art. I always knew I'd be an artist. My father had been dragging me to museums and galleries since the time I could walk. It's something we still love to do together.

However, it was the art scene and quality of museums in Munich — where I was, surprisingly, working as a tax accountant — that was inspiring. The Haus der Kunst remains, till today, one of my favourite contemporary museums, if not my No 1.

How did you go from occasional painter to solo-artist-exhibit status?

It was really just a matter of timing. I had been working away at producing a body of work in Melbourne when it happened. Without art-school training, it's a rather daunting and relatively uncharted path to make the leap from studio (or more just a corner of a cramped apartment) to commercial gallery.

I really had no idea if I was ready to exhibit. My naivety was probably a blessing in disguise and, with a bit of an ego to bruise, I took my work around to my favourite galleries. To my great fortune, Ute Marquardt saw something in the work and offered me a solo show. That show sold out in a day or two and, all of a sudden, I was a professional artist — at least on paper!

It's not terribly romantic or poetic, but one of the big breakthroughs I actually had was in a dirty, run-down public toilet in a Melbourne train station — specifically Flinders Street Station.

I had stopped in on the way home from an ordinary day at the office (I was working for Arthur Andersen as a tax consultant then) and had a burst of inspiration from that environment. The



Bax: Everyday objects and ordinary life are my greatest muses

next day, I woke up painfully early to photograph the toilets and it is definitely not an easy thing to take photos in a public toilet! Over the following weeks, I took more photos and then started painting and drawing. This led to the first painting exhibition I had in Munich. To a certain extent, elements of that original flash of inspiration haunt my paintings to this day.

What and who are your influences?

Everyday objects and ordinary life are my greatest muses. It's important for me to find subject matter and imagery that people can connect with. I'm not interested in being misunderstood and "bohemianly aloof".

Why your chosen medium of canvas as opposed to, say, mul-

timedia or sculpture?

Painting remains my first passion, although I agree that makes me old and dated. My father is a better painter than me, though — he's technically stronger. It's that I'm not interested in what's hip in art right now. I'm just passionate about what I consider good. There is far too much contemporary art that is no more credible than some passing fad in fashion. I think it explains why the general public find it hard to connect with some of the 'high art' of today.

That said, my work has been slowly creeping towards a grey area, where the paintings are almost sculptural and, I think in the coming years, you will see more installation pieces from me, but I'll never give up the paintbrush for good.

What usually goads you into creating a piece of work — is it the impending deadline of an exhibition date?

I wish I knew! Ideas and motivation are a tricky and mysterious beast; you just never know when it's going to hit. Sometimes, I'm full of energy but with no ideas. Other times, I can't turn my head off and I can't get enough studio time. It's usually some

simple object, text or image I encounter when I'm not looking for it. Also, trying to remain disciplined and going to the studio almost daily — whether I feel like it or not — helps with the process.

How different do you think art is between Europe, Australia and here in Asia?

Art is more a part of life in Europe and parts of America. I'd say art is still fighting for its place among everyday life in Asia and Australia. Nobody raises an eyebrow in Europe when you tell them that you are an artist. It's a perfectly normal job there.

So, how do you convince people that art is important?

That's tough; I think they need to feel it for themselves. There is more to life than just making money; most people have forgotten that.

What's your take on what makes the difference between a hobby, a mere interest and a passion? Your attitude, discipline and dedication towards it. ■

Lisa Marie Tan spins lifestyle and luxury stories into tales worth telling



Bax's piece titled *Watercolour — Statement in Medium*

IS TEXT CHEATING?

What: A solo exhibition by Australian artist Matthew Bax

Where: FOST Gallery, 65 Kim Yam Road

When: Until April 30 — Tuesday to Sunday, noon to 7pm; other days by appointment only. Admission is free.

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