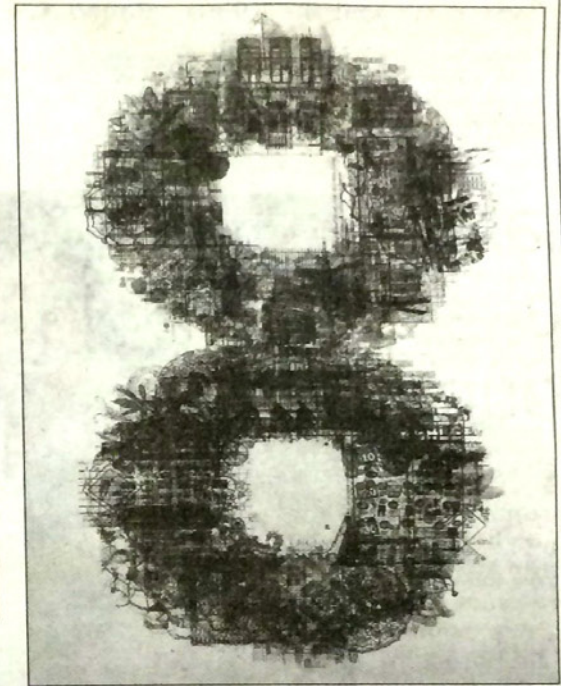




Print it: Art Loft started by showcasing works by Korean artist Young-shin Park (above and below) at Foundry



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Ms Tian: Is keen to tell regional artists' stories to the world – which she thinks is as important as the art works themselves. PHOTO: YEN MENG JIIN

Selling regional artists' works online

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TIAN Qiuyan took a liking to a painting by a Lao artist in a friend's gallery, then found out that it's done by a policeman who'd paint by night since he couldn't afford to be a full-time artist. Through Michelle Chan of M Gallery, Ms Tian found out that many genuine artists in regional countries such as Myanmar, Laos and Vietnam often paint in dire conditions, and need help to get their works to the buying public.

She later even made some trips with Ms Chan and saw their studio conditions for herself. She also recalled how difficult it was for her to buy some paintings a few years ago, and had wished she could buy them online. "So I thought, that with my experience with investment banking and e-commerce, I could do something about selling art online," says the 30-year-old.

Online art sales have been picking up in the last couple of years, and even Amazon started selling art online last April, but none of them carry much Asian art, much less South-east Asian works, Ms Tian notes. Since M Gallery's Ms Chan had also been toying with the idea of going online, they got together with another friend, Alexandra Eu, to start Art Loft, an online art sales site. The Internet

could be a platform for artists' works, but also tells their stories and their art processes, she feels. From her market research, she found that gallerists do want to move online, but most people don't know how to go about it.

Ms Tian felt that she was in a prime position: Trained in actuarial science, her 3½ years at Goldman Sachs in investment and wealth management had taught her about raising funds and management. After that, she started an e-commerce venture featuring lifestyle products and gadgets with a couple of friends, and worked it for three years before transitioning to Art Loft. With Art Loft, the idea is to sell art works online and also partner with the right businesses to showcase the works. That way, explains Ms Tian, the company doesn't need to run a gallery space. They've started by showcasing works by a Singapore-based Korean artist, Young-shin Park, at furniture store Foundry on Purvis Street; and are also featuring Marisa Darasavth from Laos and Montree Mounkun from Thailand at the newly opened Design Hub in Tuas.

"We also have a rental feature for Singapore-based clients," she says. But the thing about online art is that Art Loft will carry works that are priced below S\$10,000, because that seems to be the "hurdle price" for buyers, she notes. "Price points do matter for online businesses."

About 60 per cent of the works on Art Loft are from Singapore artists, and the rest are from the region. "I feel that I've learnt so much about art in these last six months," she declares, as part of her job scope is to travel to meet artists. As for the bigger picture, she's keen to tell these artists' stories to the world – which she thinks is as important as the art works themselves.