

AUGUST 16, 2014

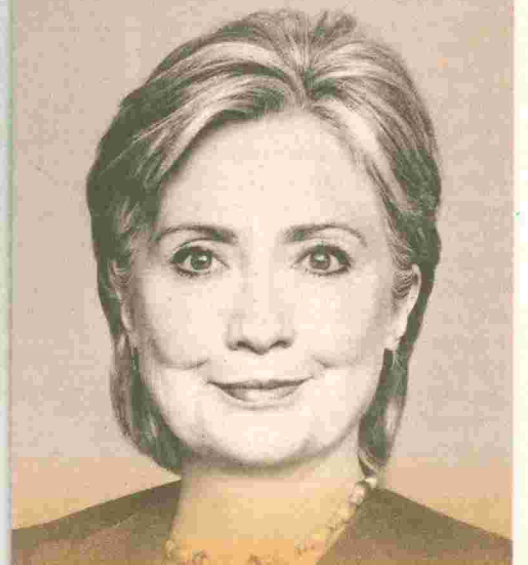
LIFE & TIMES

NEW STRAITS TIMES LIVE IT UP ON SATURDAY

BROWSER

MAGICAL TO A TEA

→ LIVING PAGES 6 & 7

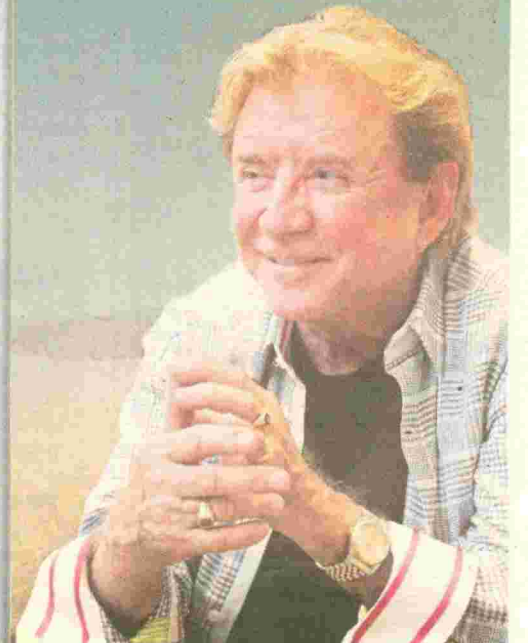


HILLARY CLINTON'S HARD CHOICES

→ WELL LIT. PAGE 8

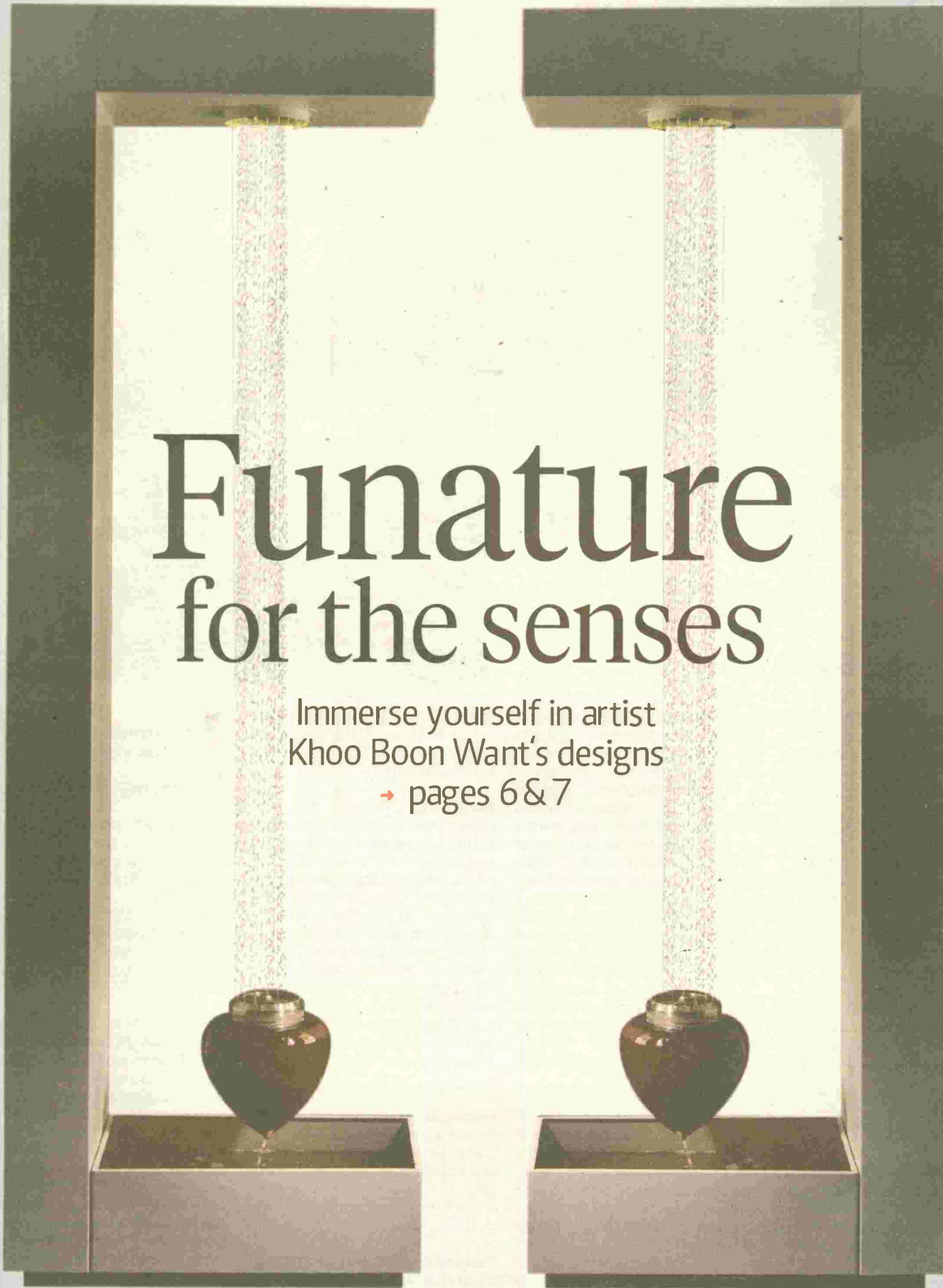
Who Johnny Tillotson really loves

→ SHOWBIZ PAGE 12



Funature for the senses

Immerse yourself in artist
Khoo Boon Want's designs
→ pages 6 & 7



LIFE&TIMES **LIVING**



Khoo Boon Want creations are always functional.

PICTURE BY SHAHRUL M. ZAIN

Functional, subliminal art

Khoo Boon Want's exceptional pieces of furniture excite the senses, writes **Aneeta Sundararaj**

IT'S Saturday morning and you can barely control your impatience — you're waiting for the sofa you had bought last week at the boutique furniture store to arrive. Its wooden frame had looked so smooth and shiny. In fact, you can almost still smell the luxurious

leather upholstery; you had loved its colour. But you're impatient to test it out — there had been a huge 'Do Not Sit' sign next to the sofa. "I hate those placards," says Khoo Boon Want, a self-confessed experimental Malaysian artist and designer. "You must touch and feel all furniture. You should be able to use your five senses to experience furniture."

The Stage by Wolo in Bukit Bintang, Kuala Lumpur is hosting a show called Funature by Khoo. It is a collection of functional art that is supposed to combine the best of fun and nature. He invites us to immerse ourselves in his art and encourages you to touch, play, sit and have fun with each artwork. He adds: "Each piece has been specially crafted for public interaction and enjoyment."

There is no mistaking the commitment Khoo, 45, has to art when he says, under no uncertain terms, "Art is my work. Art is my life. If I don't work, I die. It's my oxygen." After he'd obtained a diploma from

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The Galloping Trojan that Khoo Boon Want made for his 4-year-old daughter.

the Malaysian Institute of Art 20 years ago, he went into commercial work such as creating 300 pieces of art for a hotel.

"This kind work," says this native of Negri Sembilan, "involves calculating everything. But we need such work to live."

FUNCTIONAL ART

Now, though, Khoo focuses on what he calls "functional art". In simple terms, his creation has to have a function. The best example he has is the swing he created for his child called The Galloping Trojan. "This was a birthday present for my daughter, Khoo Xua Yu. She was turning 4. So, I designed a swing using something that I found in a shop in Malacca. It's the plough used in padi planting. The wood is very good Balau wood. When I bought the wood, I didn't know what to do. I left it in the store for three years. Then, when my daughter's birthday came, I decided to design it into this swing."

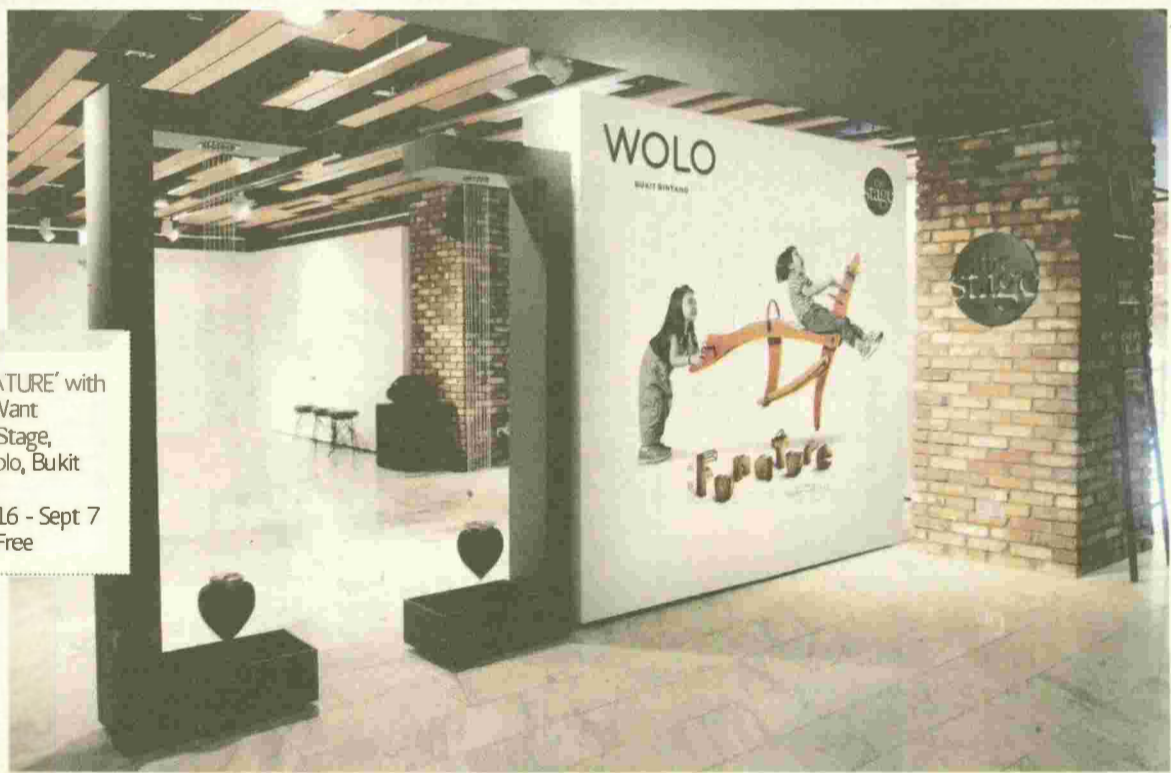
This swing has become such a popular item that he has now made another 10 limited edition swings using other unused ploughs with a starting price of RM2,800.

Even more fascinating is Khoo's custom-made water features, which he calls The Running Curtain. He was inspired by the Malay game gasing and what he describes as very similar to a levelling tool used in construction. He then suspended this from the ceiling using a fishing line. "I even drilled a hole in my staircase for this," says Khoo. But he wasn't satisfied because it was just wood. There was no 'life' to it and he wanted to add some movement. The idea he came up with was to get water to flow down this fishing line into a pool below. He describes what he eventually created as "droplets of water looking like diamonds cascading into a pond below."

Once he was satisfied with this prototype, others took notice and asked if he would create such a water feature in their houses. He did, and it has become his trademark.

REPURPOSED WOOD

Do not show Khoo a rectangular



The stage at WOLO.

What: 'FUNATURE' with Khoo Boon Want
Where: The Stage, Level 1 at Wolo, Bukit Bintang, KL.
When: Aug 16 - Sept 7
Admission: Free

coffee table and expect him to marvel at its construction or the high quality wood used. He'll tell you, bluntly, "It's boring. So conservative and no mystery."

Instead, Khoo becomes excited when one of his many contacts in the industry telephones him to say they have some spare timber to get rid of. "You know, sometimes, when we bring that wood back, it's something like 5 metres wide. Then, after we clean it, and cut into it, we find holes in the wood."

Such anomalies in the wood are no cause for concern for Khoo. On the contrary, he calls them bonuses. "We can use this wood to create a unique design. Maybe, I will have a plant grow inside. This is to create balance. To make it easy to maintain, we will cover

the top with glass, but the glass piece must be cut to the shape of the wood."

This method of creating his works of art underlie his philosophy that his clients should see how they can fit in with the table. It is not the case that the table should fit the buyer's needs. He emphasises: "When they like it, it doesn't matter if the shape is odd."

Concluding, he says: "This kind of furniture, even if you keep it for 20 years, it will appreciate in value. It's one way to use our natural resources to create, combine our ideas and make something different."



Aesthetically unique yet functional coffee-table