

# Penang artist creates a fake forest so visitors can learn to connect with Nature



Visitors look at the art installation 'A Real Fake Forest' at the Hin Bus Depot in George Town, Penang January 22, 2020. — Picture by Sayuti Zainudin

**By Opalyn Mok**

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GEORGE TOWN, Jan 25 — In this world of gadgets and high-speed internet, how many people would take the time to walk barefoot through a forest or jump into a pile of leaves?

Not many, judging by the curious reaction of the visitors who stumbled upon an art installation with its piles of dried leaves on the floor and what seemed like bare tree trunks sprouting out from the ground.

Titled “A real fake forest”, the art installation at Hin Bus Depot is one that requires visitors to take off their shoes and walk barefoot in the thick layer of leaves strewn on the floor.

Some visitors seemed delighted by the feel of dried leaves and twigs underfoot while others seemed to balk at the idea of going barefoot.

The “tree trunks” scattered around the space, upon closer inspection, are actually made from layers of cardboard pieces fashioned into the shapes of bare tree trunks that reached up to the ceiling.

According to the artist Tan Lay Heong, the art installation is aimed at getting people out of their comfort zone to explore and reconnect with Nature.

“I want people to realise that we are on the same level as Nature and animals because humans have been pushing Nature aside for the sake of development and they have forgotten this very basic law, that we are all on the same level,” she said.



Tan Lay Heong poses with her art installation ‘A Real Fake Forest’ at the Hin Bus Depot in George Town, Penang January 22, 2020. — Picture by Sayuti Zainudin

She said when people walk barefoot in the leaves, it might humble them, connect them back to Nature and remind them that it is our duty to protect Nature instead of destroying it.

“One visitor told me that in all her life, she had never walked barefoot outside but when she tried this here, it somehow brought her closer to Nature and made her realise the beauty of Nature,” she said.

The “tree trunks” were recycled cardboard boxes and newspapers with metal rods inside to support the structure.

The artist’s message of protecting the environment can clearly be seen on the tree trunks, with one sporting an oxygen mask, another covered in slivers of coloured plastic bags and another with an air conditioner remote control.

Tan, who is also a stage designer, has explored ways to create stage backdrops with minimal wastage and incorporated recycled materials.

“I try to source materials from reusable waste for my stage designs and my artwork,” she said.

She said it is not easy using recycled materials for her artwork but it is her way of triggering thoughts of reducing wastage and encouraging recycling for the sake of the environment.

“The real fake forest” art installation at Hin Bus Depot is open daily from noon to 8pm until February 9.

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