

Flying high with the Facebook connection

Artist Cheeming Boey tells **Aneeta Sundararaj** how he came up with the design for his latest project

MEDITATION, taking a walk, having a nap, visiting a museum, listening to music... these are some methods artists use to find inspiration.

Today however, there's a new way: Facebook. This is how Cheeming Boey, 36, came up with his latest design for a project called the Big Plane Project. The aim of the project was to paint the livery (distinctive colour scheme of an aircraft) for an AirAsia A-320 Airbus.

Boey, who is based in the United States, says he has always wanted to work with AirAsia and admits to being surprised when the company contacted him late last year. "I actually thought it was a joke at the time. Still, I am very happy because it is a local company and I like the story

of how Tony (Fernandes, founder of AirAsia) has brought the company to where it is today."

Similarly, Mawarni Adam, 35, head of Marketing and Programme Development at AirAsia Big, says: "We could have chosen a graphic designer, but we liked Cheeming Boey's story. He's a self-made Malaysian who loves what he's doing."

Currently on a four-month holiday in Malaysia, Boey elaborates on this point of being self-made: "I went to an Anglo-Chinese School in Singapore. When I was asked what I wanted to be then, it was doctor, scientist or artist. Actually, it was the third option that I wanted most, but it wasn't something you admitted to your parents in 1985.

"I was in a class with Asean scholars where the challenge wasn't to get an A but an A-plus. I never got more than a B-plus. But the good thing was that while the others didn't learn about failure until after



university, I learnt all about it early in life, and how to bounce back from failure. It gave me a different mind set from the rest. They went on to do jobs which they realised weren't quite what they wanted, but couldn't switch because they couldn't let anyone down."

At the beginning of the year, having secured the services of Boey (a graduate of Academy of Art

College in America), AirAsia Big ran a contest on Facebook where people were given a template and invited to submit creative livery designs. This could be a pattern, a scenery or an abstract design. The contest ran from Jan 15-26. Among the many prizes the winner would get was his portrait and name painted on an AirAsia aircraft.

There were six winners and the grand prize winner was Kritaphong Wongsachai, 27, a flight simulator and airport scenery developer. His design was based on the koi fish and showed the map of Asean and India (AirAsia destinations). The koi is said to be a lucky fish which has magical powers to help people be successful

in their careers as well as ward off evil.

Furthermore, the colours in the design were a combination of red (AirAsia's official colour, representing power and luck), white (for auspicious things) and black (for mystery and superstition).

When the winners were announced, Boey incorporated their designs and the vision of AirAsia to come up with a design of his own. He explains: "If I go into a restaurant and I come up with a painting based on the stories from *Narnia*, the painting is mine. But it is being in the restaurant that inspires me."

As such, Boey says, 70 per cent of the final design is his and 30 per cent belong equally to the winners and AirAsia.

Duly inspired, Boey then set about creating his design on the computer using programs like Photoshop. "The challenge," he adds, "was pleasing everyone. For example, one person might say that he wanted the pilot to be looking right, but the plane is going left. I had to compose the entire piece again."

Finally, when everyone was pleased and the design was finalised, Boey's artwork was sent to a company in the US for a process called sticker decal — think stickers you would put on a car, but on a jumboscale. Likening the process to putting up custom-made wallpaper, Mawarni explains: "The plane we've identified to feature this masterpiece by Boey will be grounded in the hangar. It'll be scrubbed down and painted white. Then, we will repaint it with Boey's masterpiece."

Boey's masterpiece was revealed on May 27 at klia2.



Boey and his masterpiece at KLIA2.