

**ALVIN'S PRIZE-WINNING WORK**, titled *The Window*, depicts two green window shutters opening out onto a foreboding scene of grey, empty high-rise buildings. The 16-year-old National Junior College student's acrylic painting was inspired by the late British writer George Orwell's novel, 1984, and has socialist motifs such as Big Brother public address systems and portraits of dictators.

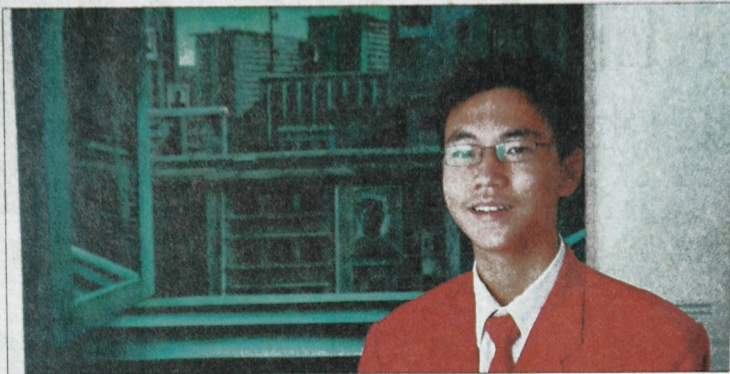


PHOTO: LAU FOOK KONG

## Teen is youngest winner of top art award

► Clara Chow

THE last time Alvin Ong won anything close to an art competition, he was in kindergarten and the occasion was a colouring contest.

But at the Esplanade Recital Studio yesterday, the 16-year-old National Junior College student saw his acrylic painting unveiled as the UOB Painting of the Year.

Health Minister Khaw Boon Wan graced the event as its guest of honour.

Indeed, Alvin is the youngest winner of what many consider to be one of Singapore's most generous arts prizes.

He pipped 577 artists to clinch the trophy and \$20,000 in cash.

His work, titled *The Window*, depicts two green window

shutters opening out onto a foreboding scene of grey, empty high-rise buildings.

It was inspired by the late British writer George Orwell's dystopic novel, 1984, and has socialist motifs such as Big Brother public address systems and portraits of dictators.

The competition's chief judge, Mr Choo Thiam Siew — who's also the president of the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts — praised the painting for its "refined execution and sound technique".

Renowned Singaporean artist Thomas Yeo, who was among the judges, said: "We went back and looked at it again and again and it grew on us."

Thing is, they and their fellow judges found the overall promise of this year's entries —

comprising 940 paintings and photographs in all — as bleak as the hues in Alvin's painting.

Asked then if they had considered not awarding the top prize to anyone then, Mr Choo said: "Ong's work caught our eye and we felt that it was really good enough to be awarded. We really didn't bother with who had painted it."

Calm and cheery, Alvin himself said that while he was honoured to have won, he felt the judges had chosen his work because they liked it — and not necessarily because it was better than the rest.

He had actually submitted his work for consideration in the competition's junior category — for artists aged between three and 18 — but the judges liked what they saw so much, they deemed him the

overall winner of the open category.

Mr Yeo said the judges had "picked the best" of the crop, and that it would be "presumptuous" to say that Alvin's chances of winning would not have been great if there were better entries.

Meanwhile, Alvin's peer — 17-year-old Roger Teo of Hwa Chong Institution — took home the competition's Most Promising Young Artist trophy and \$1,000 cash.

His acrylic painting, *Aspirations*, depicted the clash between the material goals of Singaporeans and the innocent dreams of young children.

Alvin, the only child of a financial consultant father and engineer mother, said he hoped to be an architect when he grows up.