

FROM sailor TO RENOWNED sculptor

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SOME life stories are filled with twists and turns, like pages out of a book or ripped straight out of a film.

From sailing in the Mediterranean as a skipper to working for a legendary fashion designer responsible for the "flower power" craze in the '60s, acclaimed sculptor Michel Anthony's journey is short of an adventure.

Born to rubber tapper parents, Anthony had to chip in at the estate before going to school, about 10km from home in Sungai Siput, Perak.

Unfortunately, after falling three months behind on school bus fare, Michel made the tough decision to stop schooling.

"I told my father I'd tap rubber instead," said the third son of eight siblings, now 58.

This went on for some years as well as taking on odd jobs — taking tourists on a fishing boat around Penang, which introduced him to the joy of sailing.

"I was 16 and it was my first time laying

eyes on the ocean."

What began as just another odd job for the adventurous young man soon turned into a serious passion. So when a skipper friend asked him to help deliver a yacht to the Mediterranean in 1977, he couldn't refuse. With his father's blessing, he set sail and never looked back.

The yacht did not make it to the Mediterranean however, due to a hurricane near the Bay of Bengal. Anthony made land in Sri Lanka and worked at a sports fishing club in Trincomalee, a port city on the east coast, for two years before returning home.

It did not take long for Anthony to set sail again when yet another chance to travel presented itself in 1979, this time on board of a 18m yacht headed for Cyprus from Sri Lanka.

"I took the offer and flew to Sri Lanka, and eventually worked my way to the Mediterranean," said Anthony, who was 19 at that time. "I set base in Larnaca, a port city on the south coast of Cyprus and

spent most of my time sailing the Greek islands as well as the Turkish Riviera.

"I've always been a curious person, so sailing is perfect because it means I always got to experience something new — new places, new people.

Determined to make a career out of sailing, Anthony took a year's worth of coastal navigation correspondence course and later acquired a Royal Yachting Association skipper's licence in Ipswich, England.

The young skipper continued to work his way up in the yachting industry until one fateful day, on board of a boat to Cyprus, a serendipitous meeting with American fashion designer Ken Scott turned in his life around.

Scott, who revolutionised the fashion industry in the '70s, was the pioneer of the "flower power" trend. Anthony, who impressed Scott so much that he was offered a job on the spot upon their meeting, became his first assistant in charge of the colour palette.



Artistic by nature, Anthony quickly settled in at his new job in Milan, mixing colours by hand to dye fabrics that were to be worn by the likes of Jackie Kennedy, Brigitte Bardot and Audrey Hepburn.

"I was exposed to a whole new world — the fashion world, where I got to work on textiles and designs, and meeting celebrities I never thought I'd have met. It was an exciting time," said Anthony.

Impressed by his enthusiasm and natural talent, Scott became his mentor and encouraged him to pursue

a career in arts, which prompted him to take up night courses at the prestigious Brera Academy of Fine Art and Scuola Superiore Castello in Milan, Italy.

Anthony also managed to pick up Italian, French and some German along the way, and it was during this time that he created his first sculptures, inspired by the abstractions he worked on from mixing colours and painting geometrical shapes on fabrics.

He continued to dabble in sculpting and painting while working for Scott, until the designer's passing in 1991.

Coming to yet another crossroad at the age of 33, he was to decide whether to stay in Europe or return to Malaysia, but it became clear when he met his wife-to-be.

"I was ready to go home when some friends invited me for a barbecue at the medieval village of Eze, where I met the love of my life. I knew then there was no turning back for me."

The lovebirds settled in Nice, France, where she resides, and Anthony dedicated himself entirely to making sculptures, with bronze being his only choice of material to this day.

"I love the volume and the form of the material — you can

communicate more with it."

Working on bronze demands not only artistic qualities but also impeccable realisation. After some less satisfying experiments, the perfectionist decided to search for a foundry where he'd be able to match his expectations and technical demands, and got accepted into the prestigious Massimo Del Chiaro in Pietrasanta, Italy, where many renowned artists like Fernando Botero worked in before.

The bronze here, said Anthony, has qualities that don't exist anywhere else.

The self-described "Malaysian by birth, Niçois by adoption" artist went on to make a name for himself as a full-time sculptor, and the art world took note. His sculpture *Amy* bagged him his first award in a European competition in 2005 and that was only the beginning.

He soon developed his own signature style, which is often described as "cosmic, light and symbolic".

"I usually start by sketching on a piece of paper and then painting it on a canvas before making a plaster replica.

"It's hugely rewarding for me when people look at my work in awe and with admiration in their eyes. Sometimes they can't help but to touch the sculptures and only after that they'd ask me if it's okay to do so.

"It's actually a huge no-no to touch one with greasy hands, but I can't deny the pure pleasure when it happens."

He participated in more exhibitions and competitions around the world — including in Malaysia — and collected more accolades along the way. This includes his latest, the Prix d'Honneur (Prize of Honour) for the sculpture *Universal, Unity & Liberty* at Arts Freedom, held at Carroussel du Louvre in Paris last October.

Standing at 102cm, the masterpiece took Anthony about three months to complete last year and has a powerful

message he hopes to convey. He has intended it to serve as a "totem for unity and liberty".

"The five continents of the world are represented by the number of intertwined hands of different hues, graduating from earthly tones at the base to the top that is of a highly polished neutral bronze, to signify that no race is superior to others.

"A bird held by the open hand on the top, spreading its wings, is taking flight, representing freedom. What you see is a heartfelt, artistic outpouring of a sense of everyone's interconnectedness on this planet; that all of us, together in this world, comprise of one universal human race."

The concept of unity, said Anthony, is the guiding force in his artistic endeavours, as he aims to invoke and instill peaceful values through universally recognised symbolic images — as seen on *Universal, Unity & Liberty* — in people.

Having been away from home for more than 30 years, Anthony said he does get homesick once in a while, but that "sometimes in life, one has to make some hard decisions and make the best choice we can".

"Not all of us are privileged enough to simply decide what we'd like to be one day — some of us need to first work hard and pay our dues, and when an opportunity comes along, grab it and make the best out of it.

"Take risks and you will go far."

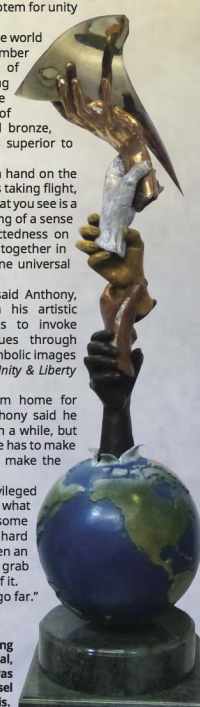
The award-winning sculpture *Universal, Unity & Liberty* was displayed at Carroussel du Louvre in Paris.



Anthony's atelier in Nice, France, where he displays his works.



'Amy', the sculpture that bagged Anthony his first award in 2005.



The award-winning sculpture *Universal, Unity & Liberty* was displayed at Carroussel du Louvre in Paris.

The maestro working on a sculpture at his atelier. — Pictures courtesy of Anthony.

