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Headline: Artist's family donates works to museum

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23 of the late Anthony Poon's works given to Singapore Art Museum

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SOME of Ms Poon Siew-Win's childhood memories include washing her father's paintbrushes, removing tape from his paintings and meeting his "cool friends with long hair".

The 37-year-old educational psychologist is the only child of the late abstract artist Anthony Poon, who died on Sept 2 last year from lung cancer. He was 61.

Now, she and her mother – Madam Tan Lee Lee, 60 – are giving 23 of his works to the Singapore Art Museum (SAM).

They were at a ceremony yesterday morning to mark the gift.

Ms Poon told more than 80 artists, art collectors and curators at the event that the family made the donation in accordance with her father's wishes. The works make up about half the family's private collection.

"He wanted his works to be in the museum

in order to share them with the public," she said.

The three sculptures, two three-dimensional relief paintings and 18 paintings will join the 16 pieces that are already in the museum's collection. The 23 works were chosen to "fill in the gaps" in the existing collection, said SAM curator Joyce Fan.

The donated collection spans the late 1960s until 2005. It does not contain any one significant work, but reflects Poon's entire body of work.

Ms Fan said: "Moving from geometric abstractions on flat canvases to curvatures, relief paintings and sculptures, his work is a visual expression of Singapore's development during those years."

The artist, who received the Cultural Medallion in 1990, had received a lot of commissions, including a piece for the Singapore chancery in Washington DC in the 1980s.

Poon, who studied at the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts and at London's Bynam Shaw School of Art, was part of the second generation of Singapore artists, many of whom studied in Britain in the 1960s and returned to Singapore with new and radical ideas.

He was best known for his Wave series of paintings, started in 1976, which include three-dimensional relief canvases.

Later, he moved into sculpture, and more than 20 of his works can be seen in places like the National Library in Victoria Street, the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts building in Hill Street, and HDB Hub in Toa Payoh.

A few years before his death, he also completed a sculpture commissioned for the Beijing 2008 Olympics.

The maquette, or small scale model, of this and other sculptures are now on display in a special exhibition, along with some of the donated art, until Sunday at the museum. SAM also plans to mount a retrospective of Poon's work in 2009.

While he was a much-lauded artist, his daughter said Poon was also warm and dotting.

"People often ask me what it is like to be the daughter of an artist, but he was no different from anyone else. He was just Dad," she said, before her eyes welled up with tears.

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PHOTO: EDWIN KHOO

SPREADING JOY: A 1997 sculpture, Joy, is among the pieces donated by Madam Tan Lee Lee (left) and Ms Poon Siew-Win (right).