

Local firefighter depicts his crew on canvas

Yu Hong

To mark National Fire Prevention Day, which falls on November 9 each year, an oil painting exhibition showcasing the daily life of firefighters is on display at Wo Jia Shu Fang Anting Pavilion. Each painting depicts vividly how firefighters combat fire and brave danger, winning acclaim from visitors.

The reason the paintings are so realistic is that the painter, He Shujun, is a firefighter himself, working as acting chief assistant at Jiading Chengnan Fire and Rescue Brigade.

Born in southwest China's Guizhou Province, He showed great talent in painting when he was a child. He began copying the illustrations in textbooks in primary school and gained a little unexpected fame.

"I remembered that we were going to take an open class about Dr Norman Bethune in the sixth grade, and the teacher gave me a pen and a large piece of paper to draw his image," recalled He.

However, his interest wasn't able to further develop due to the meager income of his family, and he decided to join the army, working at Shanghai Fire and Rescue Brigade's Jiading Branch in 2008 to help improve the living conditions of his family. It has now been 13 years.

"Honestly, I didn't feel tough during training. I'm a firefighter. You're not allowed to relax either mentally or physically, otherwise, you will be at a loss when facing real danger," said He, crediting his quick adaptation to his poor living conditions which helped him endure difficulties and work hard.

Even as a firefighter, He didn't want to stop creating, so he bought several books, watched online courses and stayed in a basement to paint when

there was no rescue task or training at night.

One day, one of his leaders noticed his artwork and saw it as encouragement and inspiration to other members, so a workshop was initiated on May 20 of this year, which also provides a better environment for He to paint.

His colleagues with no painting experience are also willing to have a try. To those green hands, He prepares "paint by numbers" kits to begin so that they can get familiar with colors, cultivating their interest. He also shares his thoughts with them as he also began the learning process from scratch.

Now, there are over 100 paintings in the workshop.

"I feel delighted when seeing them immersed in painting on the canvas when they're free. I think I've set up a good example of the 'practice makes perfect' mindset," said He. "Our work has always been under great pressure since we face life and death. So painting also offers a way to release pressure, idling away the hours and enriching our dull lives, as the fire station is our home."

To He, painting and training are similar. The firefighters summarize every training at the end to facilitate improvement. Similarly, He summarizes his art teaching sessions to enhance the painting skills of both his colleagues and himself.

One of the highlights is a painting portraying his teammates carrying materials to fight a flood and provide relief in Anhui Province last year. He aims to capture the significant moments of their daily work to spread the spirit of not afraid of difficulties.

Raising safety awareness is another task that He focuses on. As the fire station covers the Jiading Industrial



He Shujun creates a piece of oil painting at the workshop, featuring his teammates rescuing a resident trapped in a snowstorm in Jiading in 2008. — All photos by courtesy of He Shujun

Park which attracts enterprises to set up their factories inside, the promotion of safety awareness is of great importance. Fire drills, such as saving trapped people, and informational sessions on basic fire safety knowledge, such as the way to use a fire extinguisher, are also key to prevent fires.

In films, such as Fireproof, Only the Brave and Ladder 49, the audience may only see muscular firefighters, but a smart mind that can solve problems in a short time is another essential quality of firefighters in the real world, as unexpected things often happen.

"One time, when I arrived at the fire scene and started to size up the situation, a wall suddenly fell down, almost hitting me. I was lucky to avoid it, but I didn't feel fear, or you can say I didn't have time to feel fear," said He. "Our routine training includes fire tendency simulation and fire route analysis, so you won't panic. It's not an easy job, but I do like it."

More college graduates become willing to be firefighters despite the danger and difficulty. To He, this is a good thing. Their minds run faster and can formulate more suitable plans with their professional knowledge, which is a great benefit to rescue efforts, He said.

"To be honest, this career is the best way to strengthen one's mind through logical thinking, and that is the secret of the success of the workshop as well," said He with a big smile.



Paintings created by He feature rescue scenes and tranquil landscape.



He teaches oil painting to his colleagues at a newly-launched workshop with finished artworks hanging on the window.