

bay

Awang **Damit** Ahmad

Bayu **Utomo** Radjikin

TimuR



VALENTI
WILLY
J. M. ART



Bayu Utomo Radjikin

Abstract no. 42, 1998

Oil on canvass

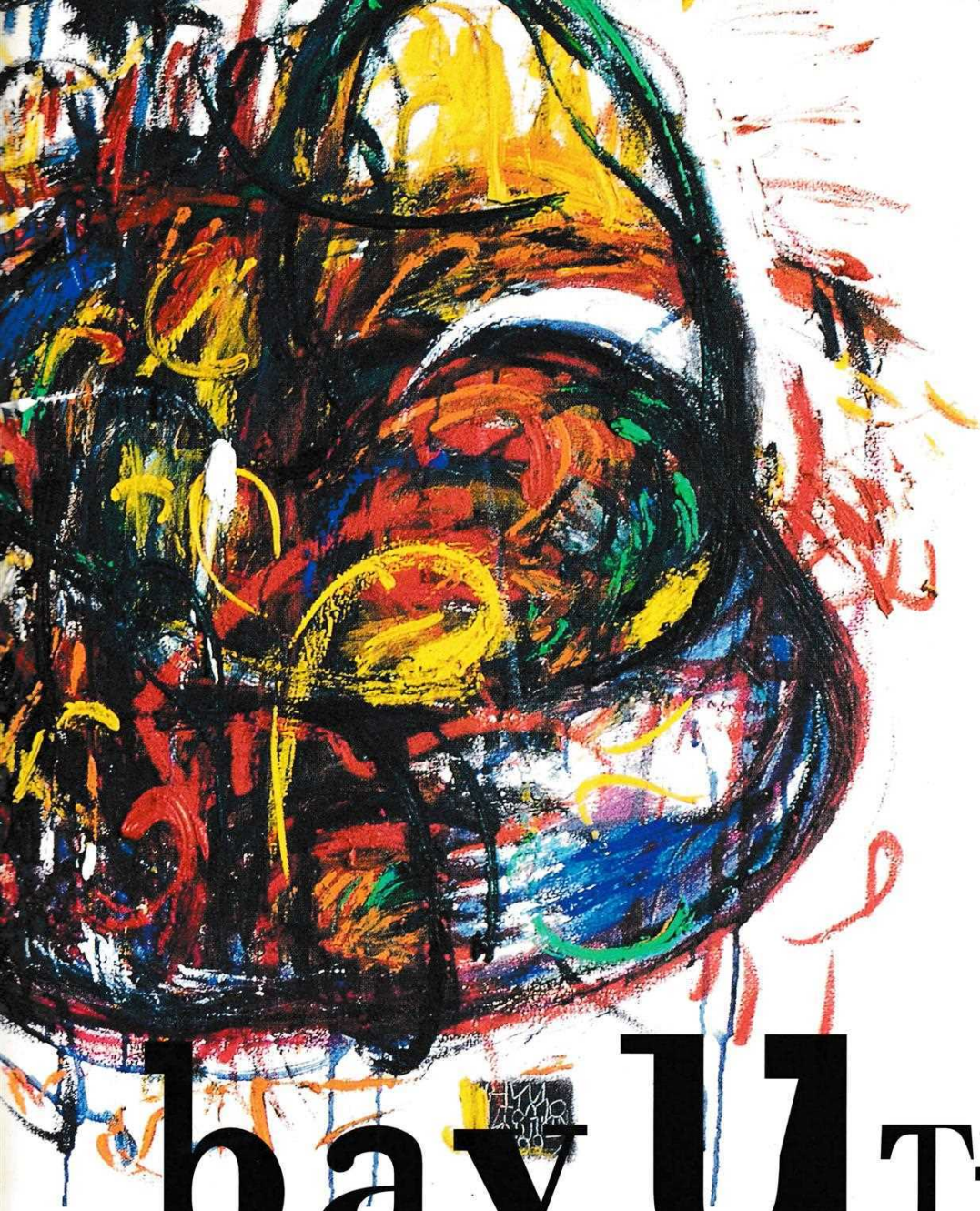
70 X 64 cm

Awang Damit Ahmad

Marista Series, 1997

Mixed media

50 X 46 cm



bayu Timur

Awang Damit Ahmad + Bayu Utomo Radjikin

“Colour yields its greatest potentialities only when allied in an organic unity to the form that controls it.

When that unity is missing, painting becomes either purely decorative or merely imitative.”

Awang Damit Ahmad

When most of us think of painting, we have visions of an artist alone in front of his canvas, palette in one hand, paintbrush in the other. With an artist like *Awang Damit*, however, such an idea is misplaced and over-simplistic. Awang's work has grown out of the natural forms of his Kuala Penyu childhood home in the south-west coast of Sabah. He has developed a distinct style of working that can tell us a great deal both about the man and his work.

First of all, Awang's work is more a 'making' than a painting. He sketches out drawings, deliberating on them—their overall form and structure, before turning to his canvas. However, even before he starts applying paint to the empty canvas, he spends his time tearing and cutting up extra lengths of canvas that he will glue to the main canvas, building another layer onto the work in progress. And it is these smaller pieces of canvas that help give his work the extra dimension, in low relief, that we later see in front of us.

Besides the layering, Awang has also explored various types of paints, glues and construction materials (**I did say he 'made' paintings**). This is because he wants to reinforce the strong tactile feel that distinguishes his canvasses. Because of his research he has stumbled across a number of different mixtures that gives the smooth surface of the canvasses a rough feel that somehow begs you to lean forward and touch the canvas. Since 1991, Awang has used a combination of construction materials, *Pre-Jibuild and PyeJibond* in his paintings which emphasises the texture of his paintings.

Finally, having laid down the form and structure of the painting, Awang picks up his palette and starts working with colours. For his “**Essence of Culture**” series, he adds “**dull**” shades of black, orche, green and white to his work, often with a palette knife, in vigorous and bold strokes because he doesn't want their addition to detract from the overall form and textural quality of his work. In his latest series, “*Marista*” [a Bruneian word meaning nostalgia], his colour palette has become bolder incorporating deep reds into the composition.

Whilst essentially his paintings recall or hark back to an environment long since disappeared, Awang is not trying to recreate the world of his childhood, nor indeed the swampy world of Kuala Penyu—he isn't trying to be realistic in his portrayal. Instead, he is seeking out something less tangible but more enduring. He is trying to convey to us a sense of that world and what it has meant to him personally, looking back from where he is now. In this he is perhaps trying to convey the half-remembered shapes and forms that lurk in his memory, nipah palms, sago plants, fishing nets, the fishes and fishing boats. In an important diptych, “*Pilutung Dan Beliang*”, (“*Squirrel Trap and Boat Axe*”) it is possible to discern the visual vocabulary that gives form to all his paintings in both the “*Essence of Culture*” and “*Marista*” series.

Whilst his primary concern is about form and texture, colour too plays its role. Awang quotes from an early primer on painting, “Colour yields its greatest potentialities only when allied in an organic unity to the form that controls it. When that unity is missing, painting becomes either purely decorative or merely imitative.”

If you think of the landscape of the mind you will begin to understand what Awang is trying to achieve. Using the things closest to him he has refined and reduced their form to an essence. And with this essence he reaches even deeper into his thoughts and memories to explore the workings of the **human heart and mind**, articulating what he finds there with his own language of forms, symbols and shapes.

It may sound arcane but if you think that Awang has actually named his series "Essence of Culture" and the more recent "Marista" you will begin to see the way his mind and his eye have been working. On a separate note, Awang has drawn a great deal of inspiration from the work of Malaysia's premier artist Latiff Mohidin, whose famous *Pago-Pago* series similarly uses natural shapes and forms in much the same way that Awang has in his paintings.

The high seriousness with which he approaches his art is acknowledged in the art critic, T.K. Sabapathy's glowing judges' report from the Salon Malaysia 1991 when Awang was awarded the Major Award in Painting.

"Awang Damit was awarded the winning prize for paintings not because the world he projected was preferred but because his control over the language and concept was consistently more commanding. Awang Damit's composition is person to *paintliness: surface, pigment, and brushmark are interwoven to produce a seamless image*; materially, structurally and psychologically the picture is self-sufficient. In viewing, we are absorbed into a world that is as complete as one can imagine and, for that reason completely satisfying."

Awang is an avowedly individual artist, undeterred by the dictates of the art market knocking at his door. His work – at least to an untrained eye, sometimes border on the ugly, dull and oftentimes depressing. Lack of colour will come as unpleasant surprise to someone weaned on the shallow, decorative art mass produced by a majority of artists working in Malaysia today. As one of the country's most prominent artists he has managed to retain his particular artistic voice. He is pushing his work in ways that is increasingly harsh and challenging to the onlooker and though not pretty it has a far greater chance of enduring permanence than much of what is being churned out by most of Malaysia's artists today.

True to the noble antecedents of the best Malaysian artists, he has not adjusted nor compromised his art to pander to the market's need for the familiar.

Bayu Utomo Radjikin

A brilliant start in his career in the late 80s has to a great extent hampered the acceptance of *Bayu Utomo Radjikin's* later works. A superb facility for figure drawing has left an imprint that is difficult to discard. When his abstract canvasses first appeared, they left most of local artworld, including myself, **bewildered**. But why did he abandon his obvious forte, just when he is so obviously on the cusp of greatness, especially in an artworld not given to figuration from the Moslem artist? Bayu is deservedly praised for perhaps for his early sculpture of a tribal warrior. As with Awang Damit, Bayu's work is harsh, challenging and uncompromising.

Having seen both earlier and recent works, it's impossible to say that his work panders to the viewer or to the art market. Bayu has always resisted the strong conformist elements in the Malaysian art world. For example, as a student at the MARA Institute of Technology at Shah Alam, he rebelled against its traditional disdain for the figure drawing and human representation in art by being stridently figurative in virtually all his work.

For example, in an installation held a few years ago entitled "*What About Converging Extremes?*" Bayu presented a darkly lit chamber which he had painted with a mural of contorted naked male figures. He also suspended screaming wax heads from the ceiling. Whilst shocking and bizarre, his work does open up the ambit of what is permissible and acceptable in Malaysia's rather stale artistic world.

His sculptures possess the same **potency and excitement**. They are fierce, violent works that harken back to his Bornean roots. The figure of Lang Kachang (a sculpture in the collection of the Singapore Art Museum) is a tribal warrior screaming into the void. As with much else of Bayu's work it makes you ask questions. **What is the figure representing? And why is he screaming? Is it a cry of despair at the loss of his natural habitat in the once verdant jungles of Borneo? Or is it a defiant scream at the logging industry?** Characteristically with Bayu the answers are left to the viewer to determine. His intention is to stimulate debate and **arouse awareness**. The answers and conclusions that spring from the debate he leaves to others.

In the early 90s, *Bayu did a series of anti-war art*. Using images taken from newspapers, magazines and the television, Bayu tried to invoke the initial horror of their condition – the lone abused child, the wounded soldier and the innocent bystander. The images are gaunt and stark. Unlike television screen with its rapid fire, flurry of images, Bayu lingers over the horror, as if asking the viewer to stop and ponder over the horror of it all.

He has often been accused of posturing, of being shocking for effect but the intention behind the work, I think puts paid to such criticism. Whilst it is possible to see them merely as examples of the gore and blood that permeate our lives, his treatment of his subjects is serious and thought-provoking. In this respect he differs substantially from many Malaysian artists who have revelled in much of the "**Bosnian**" **protest art**.

There can be no doubt that *Bayu's unusual background* has contributed to the added vibrancy of his work. He is of *Javanese descent*—both his mother and father are Javanese and this, coupled with his Sabahan roots makes him somehow more open and less cloistered than many other Malay artists working in Malaysia today. Growing up in Tawau, a town so close to the Indonesian border, the multiplicity and dynamism of his cultural references are readily apparent.

Bayu is the founding member and leading light of a lively group of artists (all trained in ITM Mara) called **MataHati**. Strongly influenced by the American-trained and outspoken artist-critic Wong Hoy Cheong, the group has ventured into work which is typified by Bayu's. Their work is challenging, thought-provoking and immediate. They are unafraid of risk-taking. As such, with Bayu at the vanguard, they are on the cutting edge of the most exciting work in Malaysia today.

The same spiritedness is still present in his work today, though there is little doubt that the power of his recent works on canvas has yet to match the vitality of his early sculptures. However, for Bayu the immediacy of painting and the fact that it allows him to produce more images means that he is happy with his paintbrush. And to his credit, and in spite of the many doubting thomases in the art world, he has persevered in his quest for a new visual language, a language perhaps less accessible to the nascent art market. True to the noble antecedents of the best Malaysian artists, he has not adjusted nor compromised his art to pander to the market's need for the familiar.

Where this quest will lead him remains largely uncharted. His is not a conscious quest mapped out with particularity. **Where his matahati and his paintbrush will take him** will be as surprising and refreshing to us as it will be to him. This has been the trajectory of his young career: ***bold, uncompromising and unapologetic.***

by **V.W.**

Awang Damit Ahmad

Born 3 May 1956, Kuala Penyu, Sabah, Malaysia

Education

Master in Fine Art (Painting)–The Catholic University of America, Washington D.C. USA

Diploma in Art & Design (Fine Art)–MARA Institute of Technology Malaysia

Solo Exhibitions

1995

'**Essence of Culture. A Synthesis**'–The Creative Centre, National Art Gallery, KL

1994

'**Intipati Budaya**'–Shenn's Fine Art, Singapore

Selected Exhibitions

1998

'**Art & Nationalism**'–National Art Gallery, KL
'**Rupa Malaysia: A Decade of Art 1987-1997**'–Brunei Gallery, London

1997

'**Malaysian Drawing**'–National Art Gallery, KL
'**Asian International Art Exhibition**'–Macao

1996

'**Nusantara Ekspresi**'–University Malaya, KL
'**From The Rain Forest**'–Petronas Gallery, KL

1995

'**International Art From the Islamic Countries Al's Fann**'–Hannmanden, Germany

1994

'**9th Asian International Art Show**'–National Museum of Art, Taipei, Taiwan
'**Getaran Jiwa, Contemporary Malaysian Artist**'–Museo Nacional De Antropologia, Madrid, Spain
'**8th Triennale**'–New Delhi, India

1993

'**Tresor d'art**'–Singapore
'**8th Asian International Art Exhibition**'–Fukuoka City Museum, Japan
'**Malaysian Art Exhibition**'–Weregam, Belgium
'**Form & Soul The Continuity of Tradition in Contemporary Malaysian Art**'–National Art Gallery, KL
'**Eyes On Eyes**' An Artistic Journey Through ASEAN

1992

'**6th Asian International Art Exhibition**'–Tagawa Museum of Art, Japan
'**National Open Show**'–National Art Gallery, KL
'**Malaysian Contemporary Art Exhibition**'–West Germany
'**1991/92 Salon Malaysia**'–National Art Gallery, KL

1991

'**Muhibbah Art Exhibition-Indonesia & Malaysia**'–Braga Gallery, Bandung, Indonesia
'**Istiglal Islamic Art Centre**'–Jakarta, Indonesia
'**5th International Art Show**'–National Art Gallery, KL

1990

'**Painting 90 Juried Show**'–Arlington Arts Centre, Virginia, USA

1989

'**Graduate Thesis Exhibition Art Department**'–The Catholic University of America, USA
'**3rd Asian Art Exhibition**'–Fukuoka Art Museum, Japan
'**Art League Juried Show**'–Torpedo Arts Centre, Alexandria Virginia, USA
'**Contemporary Malaysia Artist Art Exhibition**'–Asia Pacific Museum, Pasadena, California
'**Asian Painting & Photography Exhibition**'–Jakarta, Singapore, Brunei Darussalam, Manila, Bangkok & KL

1987

'**National Open Show**'–National Art Gallery, KL
'**30 Years of Malaysia Art (1957-1987)**'–National Art Gallery, KL

1986

'**National Open Show**'–National Art Gallery, KL
'**3rd Asian-Bangladesh Art Biennale**'–Dacca, Bangladesh

1985

'**National Open Show**'–National Art Gallery, KL
'**Young Contemporary**'–National Art Gallery, KL

1984

'**Asean Art Exhibition**'–Manila, Bangkok, Jakarta, Singapore & KL
'**Islamic Civilisation Art Exhibition**'–National Art gallery, Kuala Lumpur

1983

'**Malaysian Artist Association Art Exhibition (Titian 1)**'–National Museum Singapore

1982

'**National Open Show**'–National Art Gallery, KL

Awards

1984

Philip Morris Malaysia Art Award, Honourable Mention –National Art Gallery, KL
1991/92 Salon Malaysia, Major & Consolation Prize, National Art Gallery, KL

1988

Painting Competition, 2nd prize – Malaysian Bank Association, KL

1983

Young Contemporary, Best Student (Fine Art)–MARA Institute of Technology, Shah Alam, Selangor
Palestine Holocaust Art Competition, Consolation – School of Art & Design, MARA Institute of Technology, Shah Alam, Selangor

1981

Art Competition, 2nd Prize –MARA Institute of Technology



1971
JOHN
KARLSON



Bayu Utomo Radjikin

Abstract no. 41, 1998

Mixed media

70 X 64 cm

Awang Damit Ahmad

Marista Series, 1997

Mixed media

183 X 153 cm

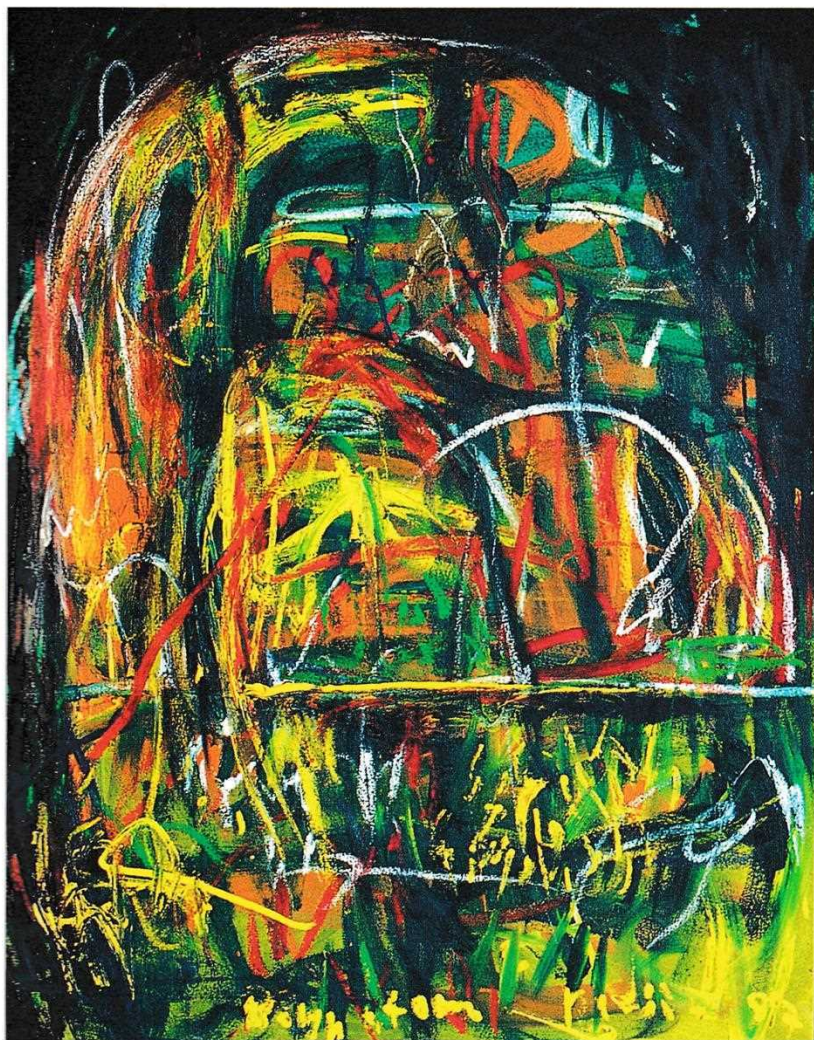


Awang Damit Ahmad

Marista Series, 1997

Mixed media

100 X 92 cm

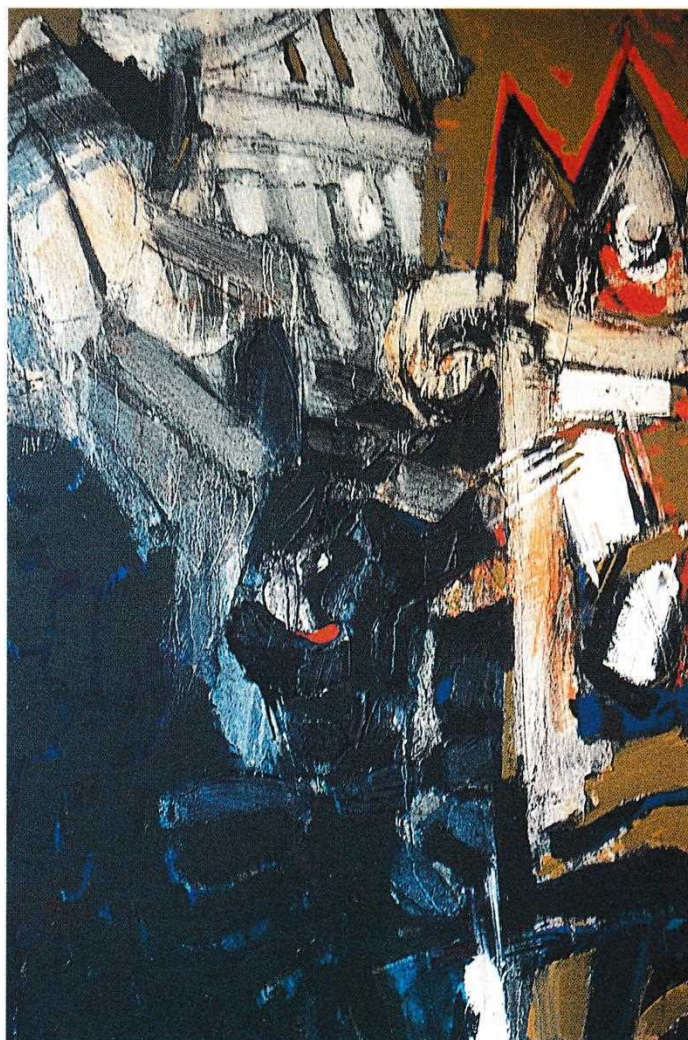


Bayu Utomo Radjikin

Abstract (Untitled), 1998

Mixed media

99 X 77 cm



Awang Damit Ahmad

Marista Series, 1997

Mixed media

183 X 153 cm



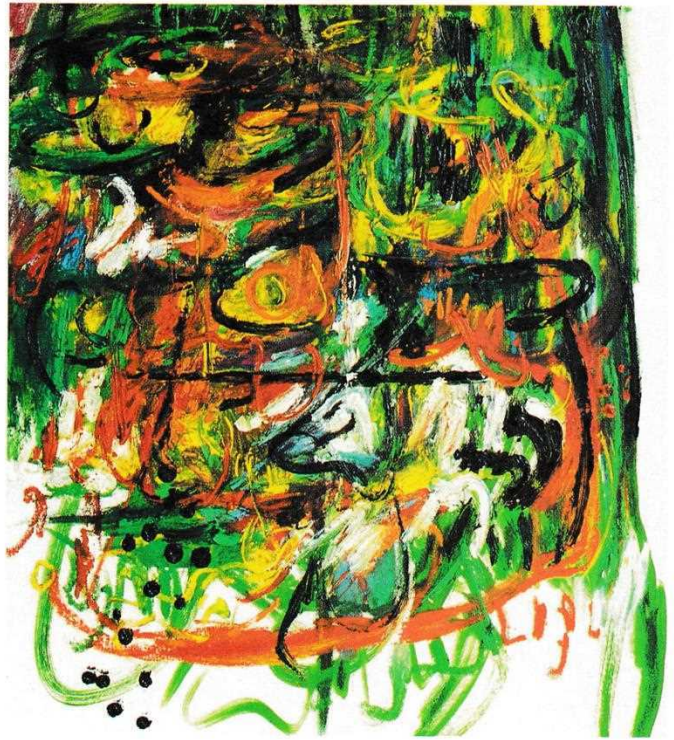
Awang Damit Ahmad
Martisa Series, 1997
Mixed media
100 X 92 cm

Bayu Utomo Radjikin

Abstract no. 42, 1998

Oil on canvass

70 X 64 cm



Awang Damit Ahmad

Marista Series, 1997

Mixed media

100 X 92 cm



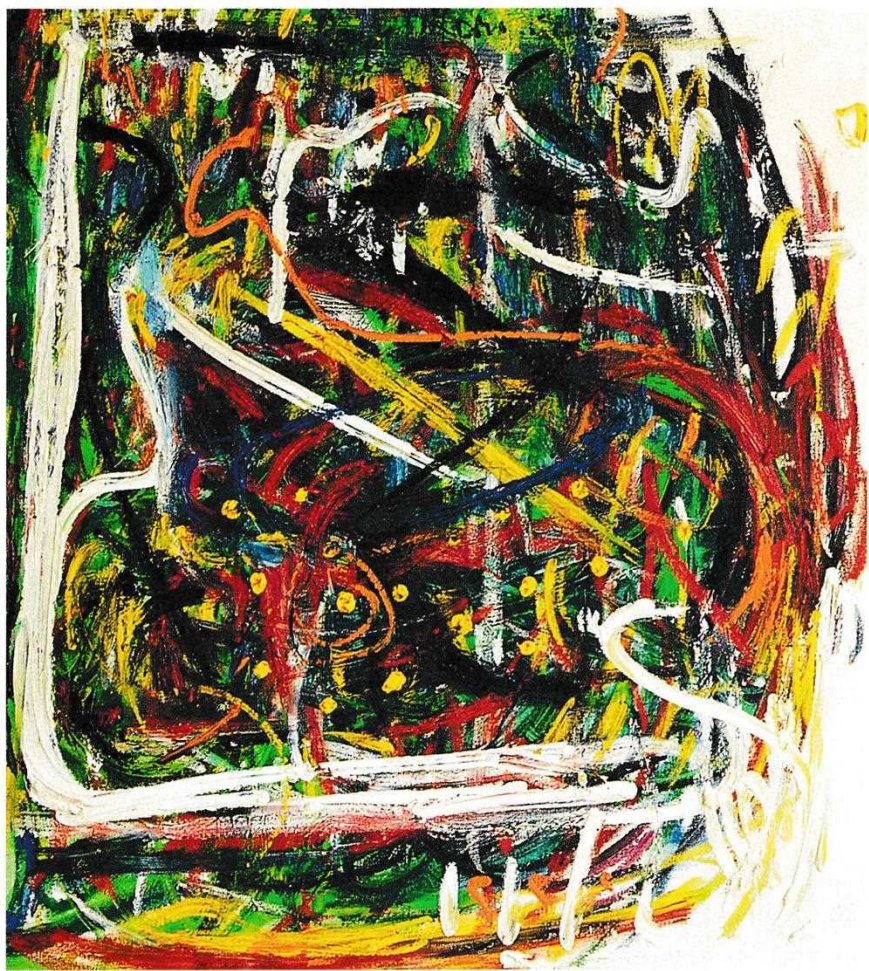
Bayu Utomo Radjikin

Abstract (Untitled), 1998

Mixed media

153 X 123 cm





Bayu Utomo Radjikin

Abstract no. 40 I, 1998

Mixed media

70 X 64 cm

Bayu Utomo Radjikin

Abstract no. 36, 1998

Mixed media

99 X 77 cm





Awang Damit Ahmad

Marista Series, 1997

Mixed media

50 X 46 cm



Bayu Utomo Radjikin

Abstract no. 38, 1998

Mixed media

153 X 123 cm

Awang Damit Ahmad

Marista Series, 1997

Mixed media

50 X 46 cm





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This exhibition will be opened by
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Chief Executive, Malaysian Mining Corporation Bhd.
on 2nd September 1998, and will end on
28th September 1998

Curated by Valentine Willie



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