

*This page*  
**Daun Berduri V**  
**1998**  
**Charcoal on paper**  
**40 x 58 cm**

*Collection of Mr. & Mrs. Mohd. Bashir Shariff*

*Cover*  
**Mysterious Enclave**  
**2004**  
**Oil on canvas**  
**122 x 152.5 cm**



## Wong Perng Fey Landscapes 1998-2004

Six years ago, Wong Perng Fey made his first landscape painting. This untitled work (1998) depicts a panoramic view of an abandoned site sweeping towards a limestone hill range and terraced hillside and beyond. Large cumulus clouds hover in a dusky sky over the landscape. Part of the cloud is mirrored in a stagnant pool of water. The view is strangely familiar, seemingly timeless, serene and yet disturbing. Details are picked out with meticulous care. The painting is a young artist's humble tribute to the power of his surroundings, to the beckoning land. It has been carried out with an emotional detachment sprung from reverential awe. Such a foray into a realistic depiction of landscape would never again be repeated, but it marked the beginning of Perng Fey's heroic obsession with landscape and its possibilities.

In Malaysian art, the landscape subject has been somewhat neglected or compromised post its ascendancy in "abstract expressionist" initiatives of the 1960s. Landscape naturally enjoyed a central role in the work of local pioneer artists, from the watercolours of Abdullah Ariff and Yong Mun Sen to the more stylized interpretations of the Nanyang School. The use of landscape as a means of defining a local or regional identity in art practice was crucial in the 60s, in the work of painters such as Latiff Mohidin, Syed Ahmad Jamal, Yeoh Jin Leng and Jolly Koh who used the Malaysian landscape to feed a new "expressionist" language in Malaysian art, part of a larger narrative for the birth of an independent, modern nation. Redza Piyadasa in turn attempted to debunk this approach by deconstructing the landscape into its formal and contextual elements with works such as "The Great Malaysian Landscape" (1978) and "Entry Point" (1978). While painters have since continued using the local landscape as a source, the subject is only just beginning again to play a part in contemporary art discourse.

The concept of land and our relationship to land is a loaded subject. Current approaches to land and landscape tend towards the conceptual and socially-charged. Such a trend would seem to grow out of the 'boom' years of the 80s and 90s which saw massive environmental and land development, when the country's natural resources came to be considered mainly as 'commodity' and 'property' to be mined and stripped for the good of the nation. In the urban mindset or in a metropolitan context, the idea of 'land' has become equated with 'real estate'. As the land's presence in the visual consciousness diminishes, and nature becomes an object for "preservation" our relationship to nature is no longer "natural".

As a young man growing up in the 90s, Perng Fey could not avoid witnessing the accelerated deforestation and urbanization of his country. His Chinese origin added another, complex dimension to this experience. In choosing the landscape as his subject, he was at first seeking out a greater sense of belonging, of identifying with his country. This emotional investment in landscape makes Perng Fey similar to the early modern painters. Yet the moods captured

in his paintings are entirely different than in those of his forebears. He is not seeking an ideal beauty, or identity. The gusto and idealism that so charged early landscape-based expressionism no longer seems possible in contemporary painting. To maintain and validate an expressive approach to painting landscape, Perng Fey holds to the belief in and seeks meaning through a subtle measuring of his personal emotional relationship with his subject, the changing nature of how he responds to his surroundings.

In that first untitled painting of 1998 Perng Fey had wanted to achieve a real landscape painting with close attention to detail and controlled brushwork. It is painted after an actual landscape located near his art school, Malaysian Institute of Art at Taman Melawati in the northeast suburb of Kuala Lumpur. This landscape is not a typical scene of rice-fields or swaying palm trees. It is desolate and barren. Human intervention has changed the topography, and yet there is a sense that nature is reclaiming it. Perng Fey does not try to celebrate a romantic idea of natural beauty nor does he try to point out humanity's scarring of the landscape, rather it is an attempt at a faithful document of a subject which would open up a broad emotional discourse to follow. He recalls it as "an endurance test" and on completing it, he knew that he could not paint another realistic work because such a careful and controlled style of painting is emotionally at odds with his temperament and fervor.

The large landscapes of his first solo exhibition in 2000 present a stark contrast to this first essay. They are shot through with a relentless energy, and compositional drama. The large formats are just able to contain the breadth of the subject, of the burden, or the weight of the land: "Land as in the rich and abundant mother earth that feeds you. The land that will take everything you do, absorbs you." He wanted to bring out the solemnity and melancholy of place, and at the same time he was simply trying to express a love for the land that is similar to love for country, but not in a political sense. "To have a basic love for a country starts from knowing the geography of the country, which is the land, from where everything grows."

The passionate ferment of these early paintings come to a climax in "Fire on the Bridge" (2001), and its making helps to describe the instinctive process of his painting. "It was a happening in itself. At first I had wanted to paint a bridge, but found it divided the painting, so to get rid of the compositional problem, I 'burnt' it down." The outcome is quite a riotous composition of colours and loose and free brushstrokes that give a dynamic feel and bursts of spirit to the whole work. The slight changes of movement in the strokes are by achieved through a layering technique that characterizes much of his work. The heightened sense of rhythm in his painting is instinctive, as we discover already in the early "Luminosity" (1999) series of red skyscapes streaked with dripping black cloud formations, where he describes his painting process as "a sort of breathing".



Exhibited alongside the land and skylscapes of this early body of work were a series of paintings of grass. These began with "Mid-August" (1999), where he wanted to evoke the feeling of an early childhood memory of wanting to be enveloped and protected within the grass. The point of view looking at the grass is unconventional, the blades of grass are painted expressively and it creates a sense of movement, but not too wildly. Why the common grass? "Because grass can grow anywhere and belongs everywhere. Because you can never comb it straight. You can hide inside, walk through grass or disappear in it. Deep in the roots of grass there is a complexity and chaos." Variations of "grass" paintings such as "February", "April", "May", "June", "Early July" (2000) can be read like a diary that observes and records specific moments, tracking the subtle changes in the passing of time, both in natural growth and his own quotidian life.

These first "grass" paintings were made at his studio in a squatter's area, a wooden shed among other wooden sheds on scattered patches of grass. When he moved out to a new apartment block, he made "Orange Field I & II" (2001), stimulated by the sense of order he found in a new environment, yet unlivd in. Working neighbours woke at a specific time, the sound of children would rise and disappear as they went to school. "Imagine being there during a quiet break in the morning between the rhythm and routine of suburbia. This quietness, newness and cleanliness of this apartment space was like a large field of orange that has a sense of order and repetition. I chose orange as the artificial colour closest to nature". When he was invited for a residency at Rimbun Dahan, on the outskirts of the city, working within an enclosed estate, he made "Morning" and "Morning Light", paintings of "composed" new grass that grows in rows. "In the early morning when it is still wet with dew or after the rain, the 'greenness' of the grass is refreshing". The movement of the grass blades is achieved through long, choreographed brushstrokes that imitate the movement of the wind or the rustling sound of the grass.

Perng Fey's second solo exhibition "New Landscapes" in 2002 revealed a will to explain in more concrete terms a concept of man and landscape, his idea of relationship to the land, his role as someone charting the territory, even his sense of alienation and powerlessness. In the vast "Perimeter I & II", "Double Horizon", and "Arising I & II" (all 2002), this new landscape relates to architecture. Having worked with his father on a construction site to build a high-rise block, reading and deciphering architectural drawing plans must have in some ways influenced his use of inorganic lines and shapes. Imposed upon what looked like cleared land, the thick red line suggests future or past ideas, vision, territorial claim or even graffiti, giving the vast view of the landscape another intriguing dimension. Forming skeletal structures, standing in middle of an open field or construction site that could stretch five to six kilometres to its edge, it changes our perspective. Here he applies the paint in particularly thick horizontal brushstrokes that have been laid over in layers "like brickwork".



Daun Berduri II  
1998  
Charcoal on paper  
58 x 40 cm  
Collection of Mr. & Mrs. Mohd. Bashir Shariff

*Opposite*  
Daun Berduri III  
1998  
Charcoal on paper  
58 x 40 cm  
Collection of Mr. & Mrs. Mohd. Bashir Shariff





In the most recent body of works, the landscape has returned to a more intimate scale and personalised emotional content. Indeed, here we witness a graduation towards an inner landscape. Lush and vegetative earthy tones describe the landscape as a vivid realm beyond our consciousness. The gestural brush strokes are bolder and there seems to be an ambivalence of the paintings being impressionistic or expressionistic. "Private Paradise IV & V" (2003) continue from a trio of paintings made earlier. The most recent ones were painted in a slow process over a year. The focus shifts from a wider and more general sense of landscape to a "domestic" one. He explores the idea of a garden as a self-made paradise. A garden as natural space has always been adapted to meet the aesthetic demand that reflects the conviction that by exerting a certain control - by the work of man - over nature, its beauty may be improved. The garden has also been used as a mirror of philosophical and cosmological views. Inseparable

from its utilitarian function as it is from its aesthetic or ideal function, a garden is a paradise for it creates a precious sanctuary from the tumult of the city. Here, Perng Fey also seeks a connection with land on a slighter scale, and a smaller format defines this new relationship.

Perng Fey's vocabulary thus becomes one of the domestication of nature - plants, flowers, man-made arrangements. In "Passing Through Gravity Field" and "Blaze" (2003), there is still a sense of tremendous energy. "Passing Through Gravity Field" began as a 'representative' painting of a landscape but developed into totally a different painting after observing an accidental detail of the canvas that was enlarged and turned into a whole composition. "In that smallness, I could feel the wholeness and this relates to the earlier grass paintings." "Bouquet" and "Rampant Nature" (2003) are two opposite readings of the garden, one is 'man-made' and controlled, and the other untamed. The flow of energy in a garden is no longer wild but controlled, like an ikebana composition that is about shaping nature to suit yourself. In the paintings, we see a new range of depth, new angles of seeing - the artist keeps measuring his distance, re-assessing his relationship to the subject.

Perng Fey's new search for paradise is also to a large extent a search for the meaning of 'home', as he sets up a household with his new bride, and are almost fantasies of the tangible and intimate. Following these works, his most recent paintings make up the "Glass Journey" series (2004), where an altogether different, intangible landscape is explored: "a breaking mirror with reflections that are shattered." These "journeys" are not based at all on real landscapes but based on personal memory. Memory becomes a fictive landscape, moving from real to imagined, from a mental picture to something intuitive or accidental, and moves away from the solid, and the energy of the real. His treatment of the paint becomes truly impressionistic, its compositional layering surreal - he attempts to capture the fluidity of memory. Each work attempts to "read" a personal dilemma: "Glass Journey -Ties", for example, pertains to weighing relationships, especially within the family; "Departure" questions the point of making a journey, "Vanity" looks at the stupidity of pride. "Glass Journey" continues an exploration of place from within, and expresses the difficulty of charting this clearly - nature, internalized, becomes hidden, ambiguous.

In tracing Perng Fey's work from that first untitled landscape to his most recent paintings, one sees that each of his landscapes frames a different idea, and this constantly offers new technical opportunities and challenges. There is no sense of an overarching idea of landscape, since each exploration begins with a sincere response and begins a conversation in painting. His work is not romantic in the grand sense of the word, and does not reach for pathos, although it is deeply emotional. In Wong Perng Fey's work, land, whether as given, or manipulated or even invented by man, exists in realms both outside and inside of oneself.

*Noor Mahnun Mohamed and Beverly Yong, in conversation with the artist*





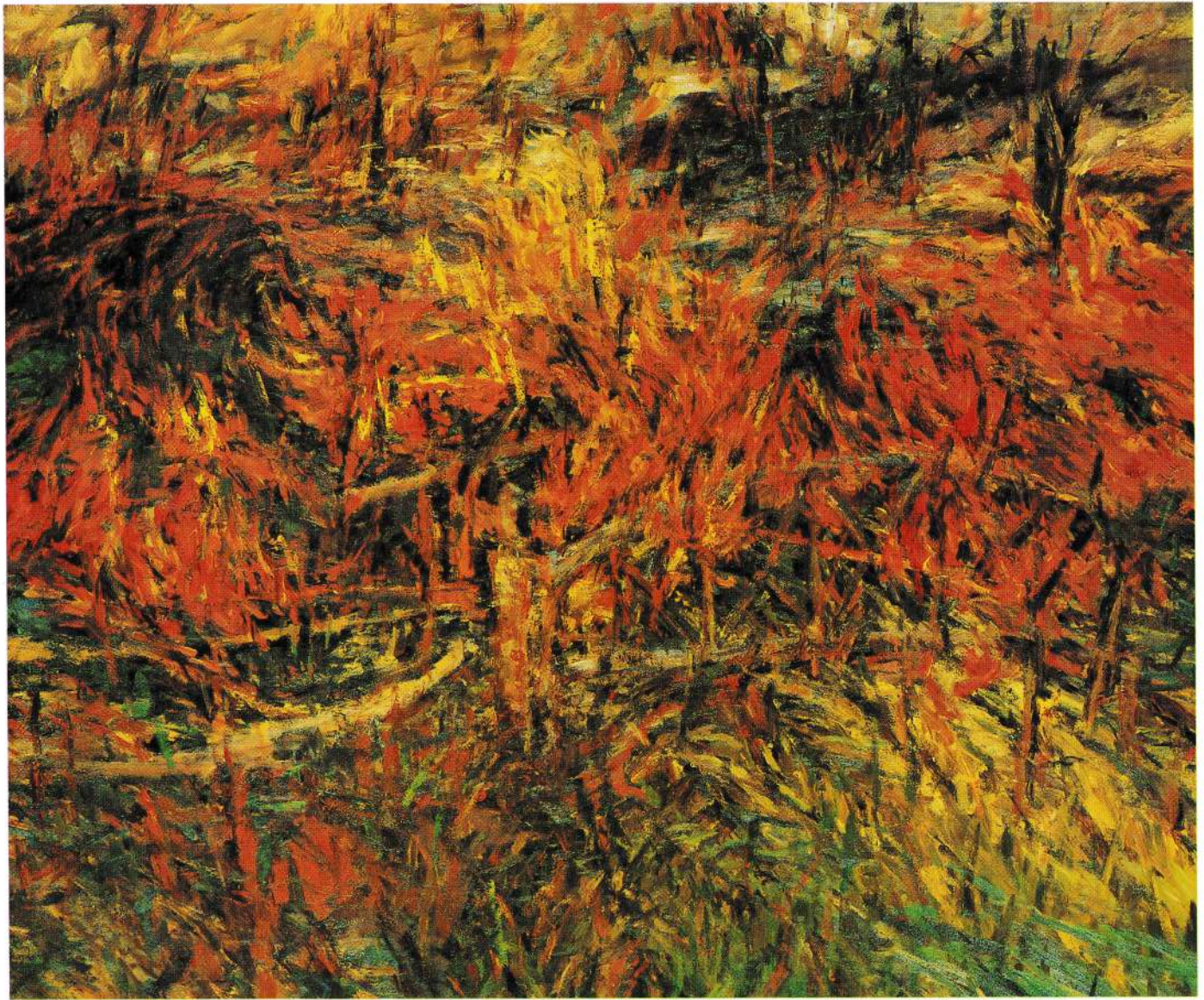
Untitled  
1998  
Oil on canvas  
188 x 200 cm





Mid-August  
1999  
Oil on canvas  
188 x 200 cm





Fire on the Bridge

2001

Oil on canvas

182 x 225 cm

*Collection of Mr. Chris Boyd*





Luminosity

1999

Oil on canvas

188 x 200 cm

*Collection of Bayerische Landesbank*

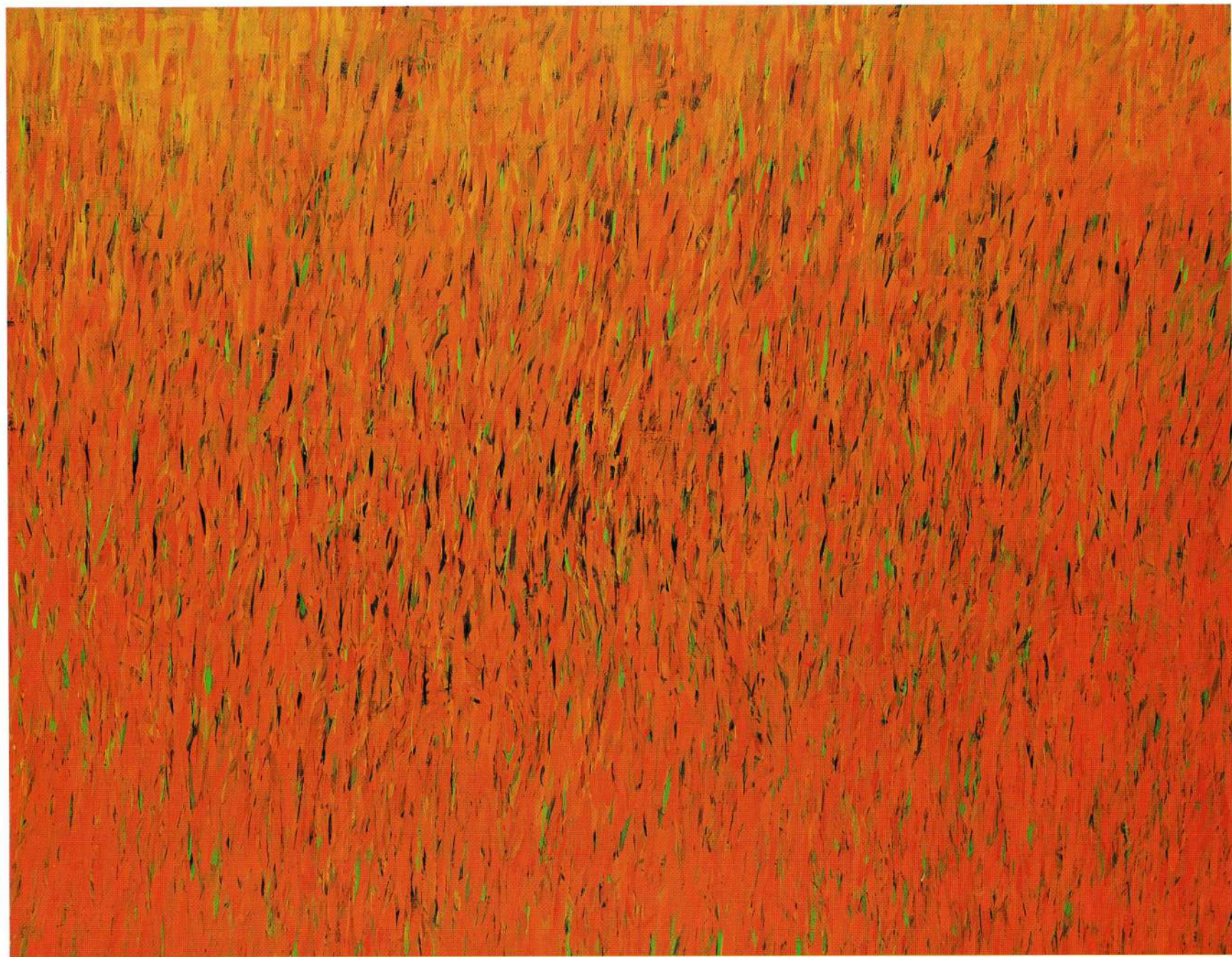


**Murmuring**  
2000  
Oil on canvas  
150 x 155 cm  
*Private Collection*

*Opposite*  
**Orange Field I**  
2001  
Oil on canvas  
172 x 220 cm





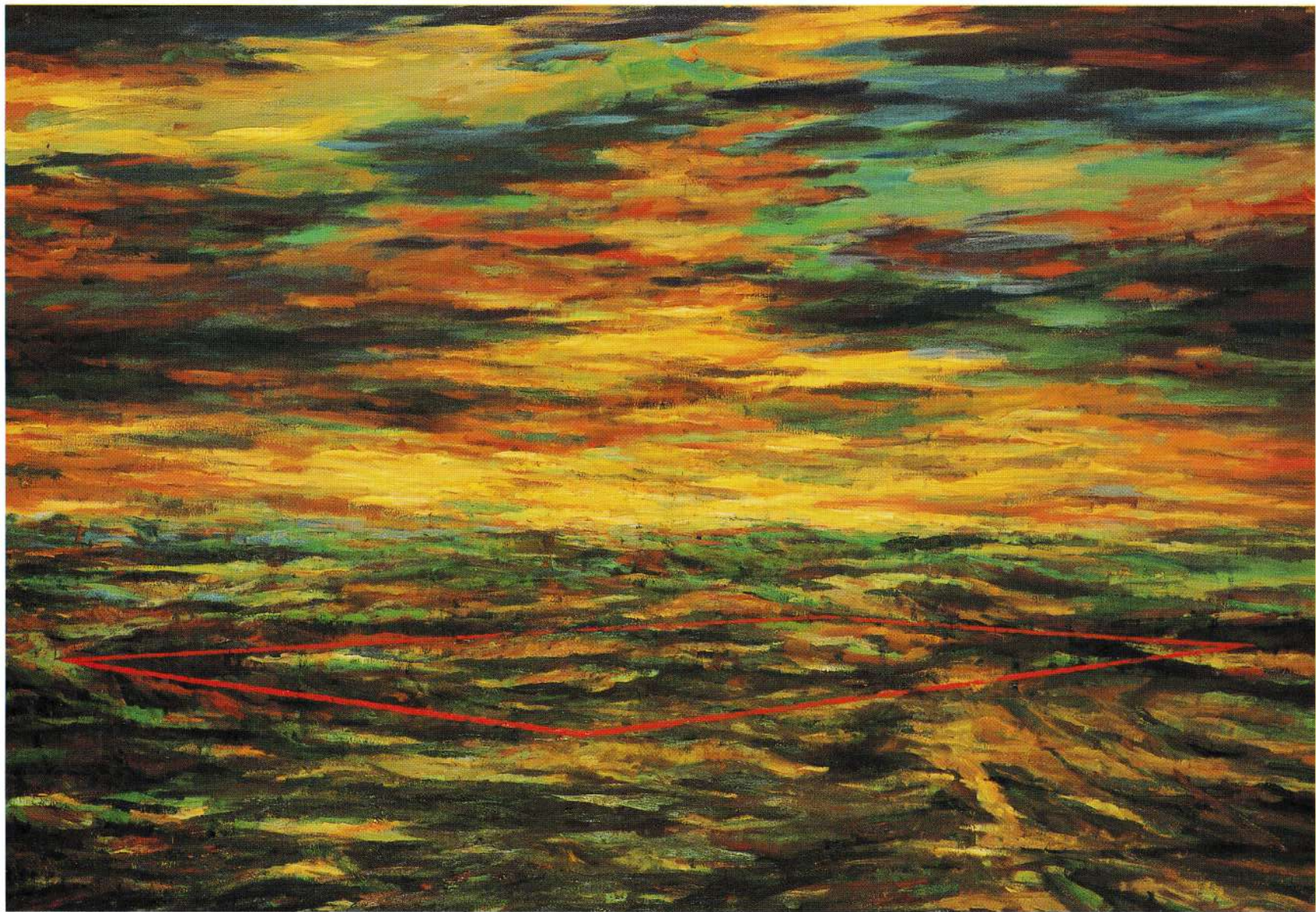






Morning Light  
2002  
Oil on canvas  
172 x 240 cm





Perimeter I  
2002  
Oil on canvas  
172 x 250 cm













**Still View**

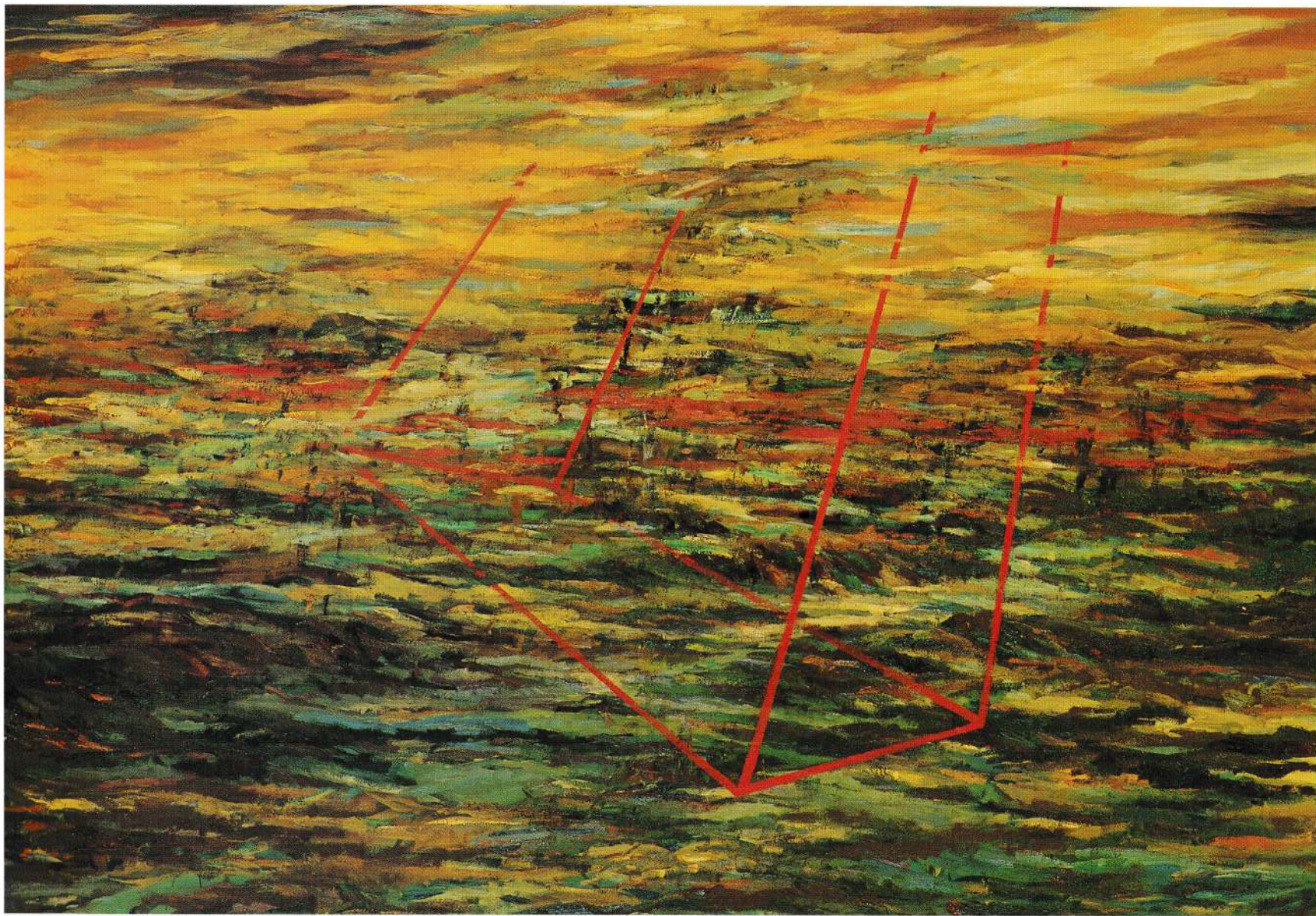
2002

Oil on canvas

46 x 46 cm (x4)

*Private Collection*





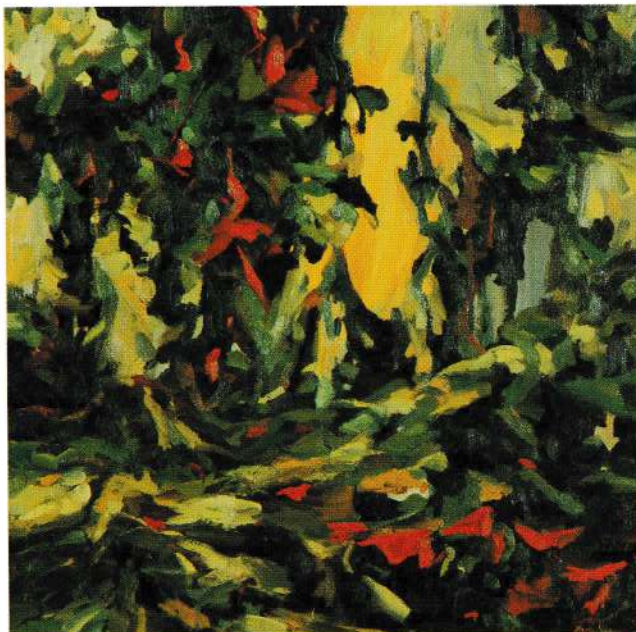
Arising I

2002

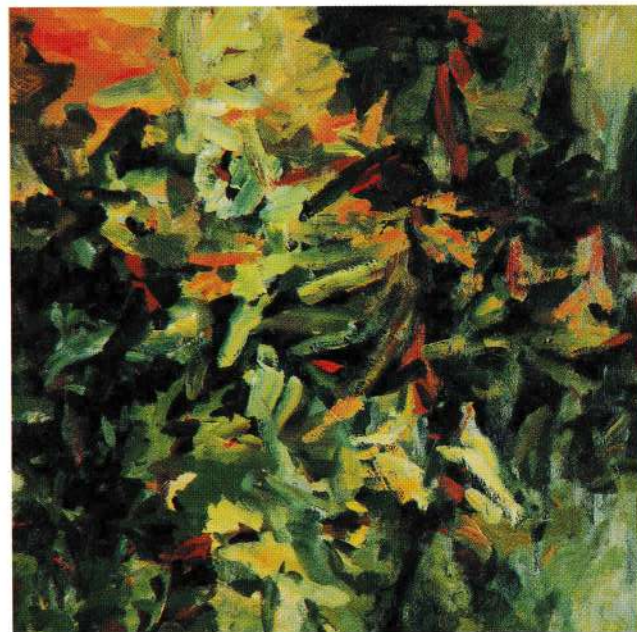
Oil on canvas

172 x 240 cm

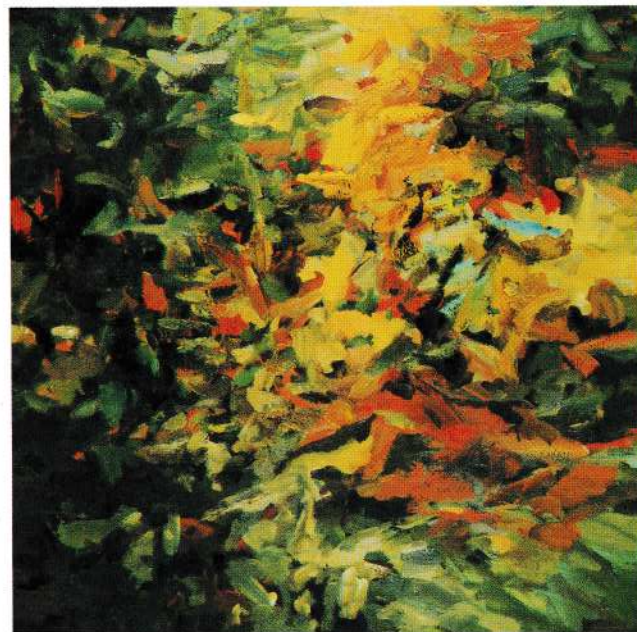




Private Paradise II  
2002-2003  
Oil on canvas  
107 x 107 cm

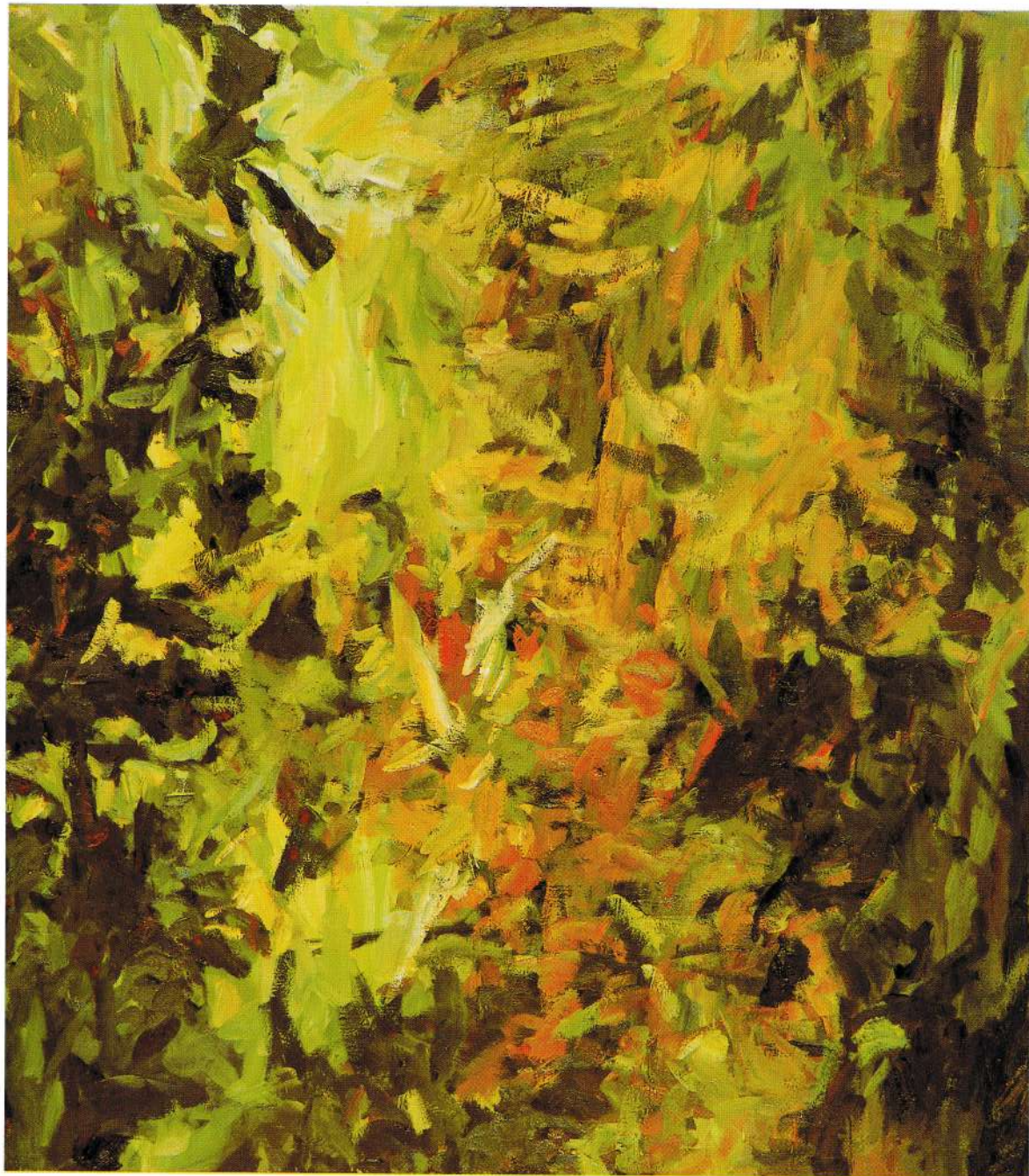


Private Paradise IV  
2003  
Oil on canvas  
107 x 107 cm



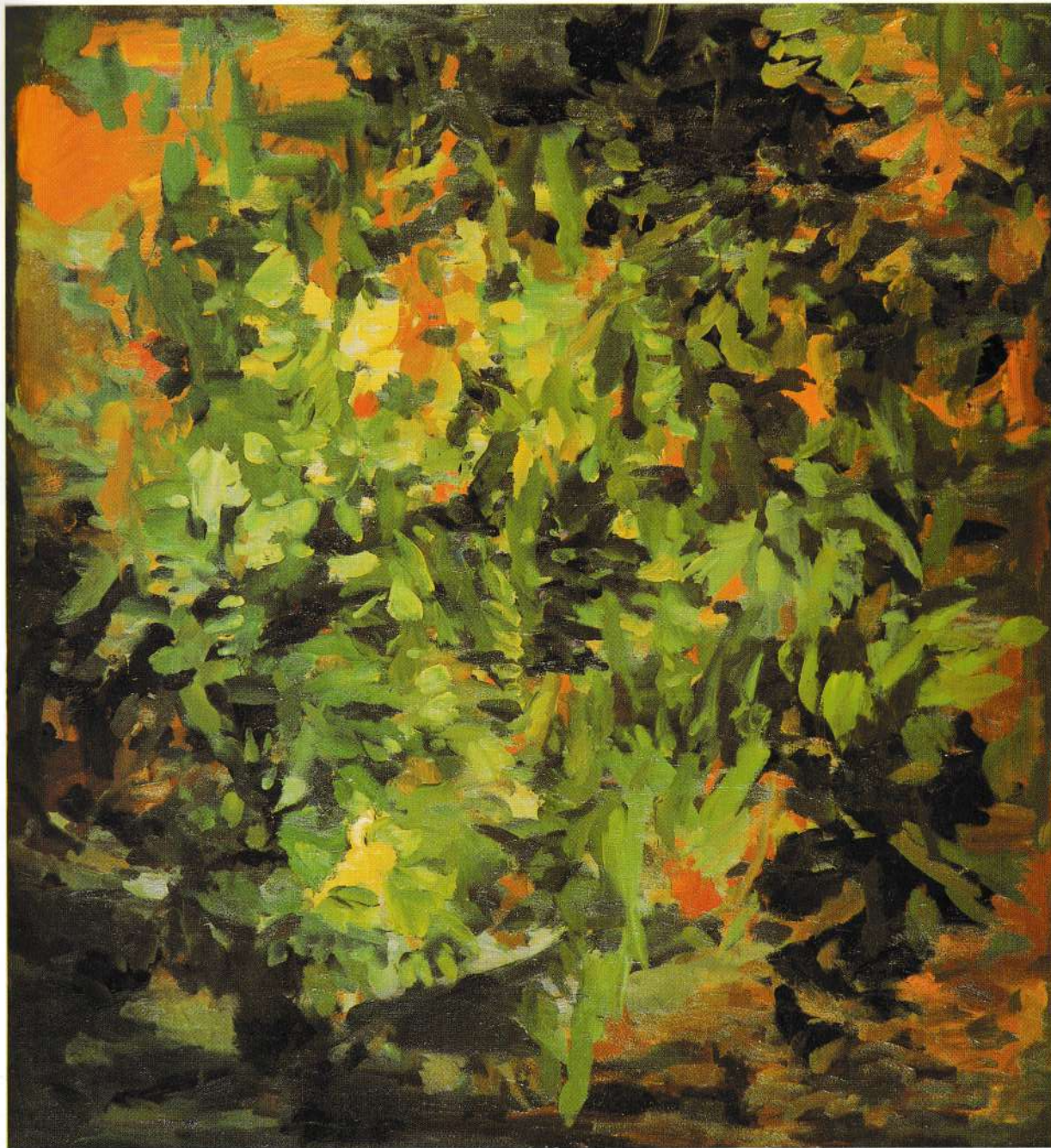
Private Paradise V  
2003  
Oil on canvas  
107 x 107 cm





Passing Through Gravity Field  
2003  
Oil on canvas  
150 x 132 cm





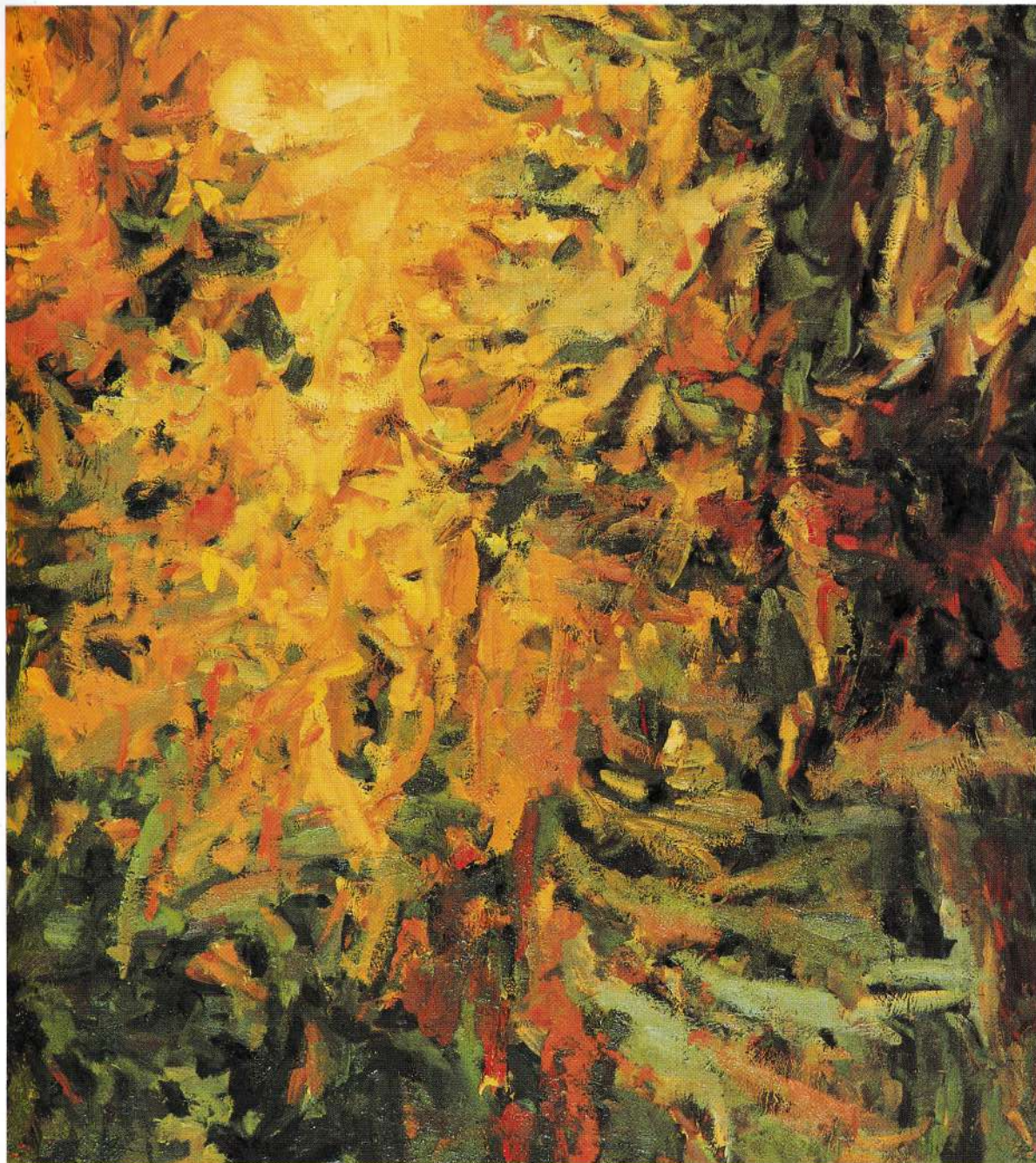
Rampant Nature  
2003  
Oil on canvas  
143 x 130 cm





Moist II  
2003  
Oil on canvas  
138 x 127 cm





**Blaze**  
2003  
Oil on canvas  
150 x 132 cm





Cluster I  
2003  
Oil on canvas  
137.5 x 122 cm





Glass Journey - Vanity  
2004  
Oil on canvas  
122 x 152.5 cm





Glass Journey - Ties  
2004  
Oil on canvas  
122 x 152.5 cm





Glass Journey – Departure  
2004  
Oil on canvas  
122 x 152.5 cm



## Wong Perng Fey

Born 1974 in Kuala Lumpur

### Education

1998

Diploma in Fine Art, Malaysian Institute of Art, Kuala Lumpur

### Solo Exhibitions

2002

*New Landscapes* Valentine Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur

2000

*First Solo* Valentine Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur

### Group Exhibitions

2003

*Inner Realm* Town House Gallery, Kuala Lumpur

*Four Friends' Meeting* 21 Armenian Street, Penang

*Games People Play* – Art for Nature, Rimbun Dahan, Selangor

*Young Contemporaries* National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur

2002

*Open Show* National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur

*Puncak – Alami II* National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur

*Touch* – Art for Nature Rimbun Dahan, Selangor

*Young Contemporaries* National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur

2001

*Climbing the Walls* MIA Art and Design Centre, Kuala Lumpur

*Philip Morris Malaysia Art Awards* National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur

*Face the Act* Galeri Petronas, Kuala Lumpur

2000

*Landscape to Landscape* Galeri Petronas, Kuala Lumpur

*Philip Morris Malaysia Art Awards* National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur

1999

*Painted Memories* Filmnet - Stonor Centre, Kuala Lumpur

*Minority - 7 Young Artists* MIA Art and Design Centre, Kuala Lumpur

*Art Connection* Art Extreme Gallery and Studio, Kuala Lumpur

*Aku - 99 Self Portraits* Galeri Petronas, Kuala Lumpur

*Fine Art Diploma Show* Galeri MIA, Kuala Lumpur

1998

*Malaysian Heritage* Bank Negara, Kuala Lumpur

*Found* – Installation Exhibition Galeri MIA, Kuala Lumpur

1994

*Malaysian Art Open* Galeri Petronas, Kuala Lumpur

### Awards and Scholarships

2002

*Artist-in-Resident*

Rimbun Dahan, Selangor

2001

*Honourable Mention*

Philip Morris Malaysia Art Awards, Kuala Lumpur

2000

*Honourable Mention*

Philip Morris Malaysia Art Awards, Kuala Lumpur

1996

*Scholarship Award*

Malaysian Institute of Art, Kuala Lumpur

1994

*Honourable Mention*

Malaysian Art Open, Galeri Petronas, Kuala Lumpur





Daun Berduri VI  
1998

Charcoal on paper  
48 x 58 cm

Collection of Mr. & Mrs. Mohd. Bashir Shariff



Wong Perng Fey : Works 2003 – 2004  
Exhibition dates June 17th - July 3rd 2004

ISBN 983-9389-08-4



VALENTINE  
*sine* WILLIE ART

1st Floor, 17 Jalan Telawi 3  
Bangsar Baru  
59100 Kuala Lumpur  
Malaysia

tel: 603 2284 2348  
fax: 603 2282 5190

[www.artsasia.com.my](http://www.artsasia.com.my)