

JALAINI ABU HASSAN



belacu berdepa,

berlagu berupa.



Ais Kacang, 2006, acrylic on canvas, 183 x 183 cm

The Bomoh, 2006, oil on canvas, 122 x 122 cm





Gadis Melayu, 2006, oil on canvas, 183 x 183 cm



The Painter, 2006, oil on canvas, 122 x 122 cm

In *Belacu Berdepa, Berlagu Berupa*, Jalaini Abu Hassan (Jai) makes a remarkable turn to figurative realism. An artist primarily concerned with the painterly process, the exploration of materiality and the nature of the visual imagination, his work has largely steered away from such a direct narrative approach, with the figure only gradually entering his field of play over recent years.

This new focus on figuration is partly driven by the challenge of addressing a primary genre of painting Jai has so far resisted, to see how far he can harness its power to express the Malaysian subject. He revisits the fundamentals of the painter's "curriculum", which stresses the understanding of the figure - its form and proportion - as part of an artist's developmental skills. He also begins to use oil as a medium, with its traditional ties to academic figuration, working simply with the portrait, and the figure in landscape.

On the other hand, the new paintings are also a natural progression of the storytelling strain of Jai's work, which is continually in dialogue with his immediate context and history. As the artist begins to narrow in on his thematic explorations, concentrating on more specific narratives, the figure begins to take centre stage, being the most effective tool in communicating a specific story. "Belacu berdepa" - a breadth of canvas, "berlagu berupa" - a lullaby of the image - the very use of the Malay *pantun* form clearly introduces the narrative impetus of the exhibition. In *Wet Paint* (2005), the figurative element is deliberately obscured by layers of surface noise and mark-making in a denial of pure narrative. Here, these have been stripped away to allow the central characters to become storytellers in their own world.

Scale plays a major role in our reading of the images, the way we interpret each painting's story. The artist's viewfinder zooms in and out, allowing certain images to breathe within a more relaxed, intimate space while others are magnified to awe-inspiring proportions. Here are images of the artist's seated father, his daughter, Panglima Lubalang Daik, the artist on his bike, our artist laureate Syed Ahmad Jamal. The paintings depict characters in Jai's immediate world, his heroes and loved ones, but they also each signify, with a gentle sense of humour, a value or archetype of the Malay world - the father, the artist, the bomoh, the classic Malay hero, the Malay beauty, the *dalang*/puppeteer. Each image touches on a different emotional range, at times tender and poignant, proud and invincible in others. The painter wears his heart on his sleeve, and with it, the values of a community.

VWFA 2006



Phuket, 2006, oil on canvas, 122 x 122 cm

JALAINI ABU HASSAN or "Jai" (b. 1963, Selangor) took his BA in Fine Art at MARA, Institute of Technology in 1985, and was awarded a Malaysian Federal Scholarship to the UK, where he gained his MA from London's Slade School of Art. In 1994 he then went on to take his MFA at New York's Pratt Institute, graduating in 1994. Jai has exhibited in Malaysia, Singapore, the USA, the UK and also in Australia, Spain and Iraq. *Belacu Berdepa, Berlagu Berupa* is his seventeenth solo show.

Some of the noted local exhibitions he has participated in include *12 ASEAN Artists* (2002) and *Malaysian Art Now* (2004) at the National Art Gallery, and international art fairs such as *Art Singapore* and *Melbourne Art Fair 2006*. His works are in the collection of the National Art Gallery in Malaysia, and in private, corporate and gallery collections around the world. In April 2006, Valentine Willie Fine Art published a new monograph for the artist entitled *Jalak*.

Exhibition dates: 30th November - 16th December 2006

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Southeast Asian Paintings & Works of Art

Front cover: *Panglima Lubalang Daik*,
2006, acrylic on canvas, 183 x 183 cm