

VALENTINE
WILLIE
fine ART



IMPORTANT MALAYSIAN WORKS
FROM 1940 TO 1991

25TH JUNE 2003 UNTIL 12TH JULY 2003

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INTRODUCTION

THIS EXHIBITION REALLY CAME INTO BEING IN RESPONSE TO A GROWING NEED. MUCH OF THE ENERGY OF THE MALAYSIAN ART SCENE IS CHanneLED INTO THE HERE AND NOW – WE THRIVE ON THE EXCITEMENT OF NEW ARTISTS, NEW BODIES OF WORK, EXHIBITIONS INSPIRED BY SPECIFIC CONTEMPORARY ISSUES. YET WHILE WE FEED ON THIS POSITIVISM, WE ARE ALSO IN DANGER OF LOSING SIGHT OF THE GREATER BODY OF MALAYSIAN ART – ITS EARLY FOUNDATIONS, ITS HEROES, ITS FORMAL AND CONCEPTUAL ACHIEVEMENTS, ITS REFLECTIONS ON OUR PAST. WITH EVERY NEW GENERATION OF ARTISTS, ART LOVERS AND COLLECTORS COMES A NEW CURIOSITY ABOUT THIS LARGER PICTURE. OVER THE YEARS, WE HAVE HELD A SMALL NUMBER OF EXHIBITIONS WHICH HAVE ATTEMPTED TO CONTEXTUALISE LOCAL ART, AND ALSO ITS RELATIONSHIP TO THE ART OF THE REGION, IN A BROAD WAY.

"IMPORTANT MALAYSIAN WORKS FROM 1940 TO 1991" IS SUCH AN ATTEMPT, ON A LARGE AND PERHAPS AMBITIOUS SCALE. THE THREE CURATORS (ASKANDAR UNGLEHRT, VALENTINE WILLIE AND MYSELF) HAVE IDENTIFIED WHAT WE FIND TO BE OUTSTANDING AND/OR PARTICULARLY INTERESTING PIECES FROM SEVERAL KEY LOCAL COLLECTIONS INCLUDING, AS FAR AS POSSIBLE, THE WORKS OF MAJOR PIONEERING FIGURES BOTH PRE AND POST-INDEPENDENCE.

WE USE THE TERM "IMPORTANT" TO DESCRIBE WORKS THAT WE FEEL TO MAKE A PARTICULAR CONTRIBUTION TO THE STORY OF MALAYSIAN ART. MANY ARE SEMINAL TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF PROMINENT ARTISTS, WHILE OTHERS ARE MORE CURIOUS, OR PECULIAR IN NATURE, PROVIDING RARE INSIGHTS INTO OUR HISTORICAL PAST, OR INTO THE FORMAL EXPERIMENTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS MADE IN EARLY YEARS.

TO "IMPORTANT" SHOULD BE ADDED THE DESCRIPTION "RARELY SEEN". WHILE THE NATIONAL ART GALLERY HAD ALREADY BEGUN TO BUILD ITS UNPARALLELED COLLECTION OF MALAYSIAN ART BY THE 1960s, MANY EARLY WORKS DID FIND THEIR WAY INTO PRIVATE HANDS, BOUGHT AT EXHIBITIONS FROM PIONEER GALLERIES LIKE SAMAD GALLERY AND GALLERY 11, OR OFTEN DIRECTLY FROM THE ARTISTS THEMSELVES. MANY, UNFORTUNATELY FOR US, WOULD HAVE ESCAPED PUBLICATION. WE HOPE THAT, BY BEING "UNCOVERED" HERE, SUCH WORKS MAY SHED NEW LIGHT ON PAST DEVELOPMENTS.

MOST OF THE PIECES IN THE EXHIBITION WOULD HAVE BEEN ACQUIRED BETWEEN THE 1960s AND 1980s, FORMING, IN A SENSE, A LEGACY OF TASTE, A SLICE OF COLLECTING HISTORY WITH MANY OF ITS OWN STORIES. MOST OF THE WORKS THEREFORE WERE MADE BETWEEN 1940 AND 1980, REPRESENTING THE OUTPUT OF FIRST GENERATION ARTISTS IN THE COUNTRY AS WELL AS THAT OF THE NEW WAVE OF POST-INDEPENDENCE ARTISTS, WHICH WAS THE ORIGINAL TIMEFRAME INTENDED. HOWEVER, WE WISHED TO INCLUDE THE POWERFUL LATE PAINTING *HANTU* BY DZULKIFLI BUYONG, AND ALSO THE VERY RARE AND IMPORTANT EXAMPLE, MADE IN 1991, OF THE WORK OF THE LATE ISMAIL ZAIN, WHO, JOINED BY REDZA PIYADASA AND SULAIMAN ESA, INSTIGATED THE MOVEMENT TO CHALLENGE THE DOMINANCE OF ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM IN LOCAL ART, BEGINNING A NEW CHAPTER IN ITS HISTORY. FINALLY, WE HAVE INCLUDED A SMALL EARLY WORK BY SHARIFAH FATIMAH ZUBIR, AS A FORETASTE OF THE GENERATION WHICH WAS TO DOMINATE THE ART SCENE IN THE LATE 1980s AND EARLY 1990s. THERE WILL, OF COURSE, BE SOME OBVIOUS OMISSIONS OWING TO THE NATURE OF THE EXHIBITION WHICH HAS RELIED ON THE AVAILABILITY OF SUITABLE WORKS.

WE WOULD LIKE TO EXPRESS OUR DEEPEST GRATITUDE TO KLCS ASSET MANAGEMENT SDN BHD FOR THEIR GENEROUS SUPPORT OF THIS CATALOGUE, WITHOUT WHICH THIS EXHIBITION AND THE MANY EXCEPTIONAL WORKS HEREIN WOULD HAVE GONE UNDOCUMENTED.

BEVERLY YONG

COLLECTING AS A CREATIVE ACTIVITY AN INTERVIEW WITH ASKANDAR UNGLERHRT

DR ASKANDAR UNGLERHRT WAS BORN IN WEINGARTEN, SOUTH GERMANY IN 1943. HE WENT ON TO STUDY FRENCH LITERATURE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF FRANCE, PARIS-SORBONNE AND HAS BEEN LIVING IN MALAYSIA UPON RECEIVING HIS PHD IN 1972. HE HAS BEEN COLLECTING ART FOR MORE THAN TWENTY YEARS NOW. HIS ACQUISITIONS INCLUDE PAINTINGS AND SCULPTURES BY SELECTED MALAYSIAN ARTISTS OF DIFFERENT GENERATIONS, SPANNING EARLY PIONEERS TO YOUNG CONTEMPORARY PAINTERS. AS AN ARTIST, HE HAS HELD SOLO EXHIBITIONS IN GERMANY, SWITZERLAND AND MALAYSIA WITH WORKS IN THE COLLECTION OF THE NATIONAL ART GALLERY, GALERI PETRONAS AND SINGAPORE ART MUSEUM.

BEVERLY YONG: DO YOU REMEMBER THE FIRST ART PIECE THAT YOU COLLECTED? DO YOU REMEMBER WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO ACQUIRE IT?

ASKANDAR UNGLERHRT: YES, I THINK IT WAS AROUND 1980. I WAS VISITING A TEACHER-STUDENT ART EXHIBITION IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE 10TH ANNIVERSARY OF UNIVERSITY SAINS MALAYSIA (USM). THERE WAS ONE WORK BY LATIFF MOHIDIN FROM THE *PAGO-PAGO* SERIES ENTITLED, *SHIVALINGAM*. IT WAS LABELED "NOT FOR SALE" BUT I FELT AN OVERWHELMING COMPULSION TO OWN IT. I CONTACTED THE ARTIST SEVERAL TIMES IN ORDER TO CONVINCE HIM HOW IMPORTANT HIS PAINTING IS FOR ME. FINALLY HE CONSENTED TO SELL IT AND I AM STILL FULL OF GRATITUDE FOR THIS ACT OF KINDNESS AND GENEROSITY.

FOR ALL THE YEARS I HAVE BEEN STUDYING THIS WORK, IT HAS NOT GIVEN AWAY ANY OF ITS HAUNTING POWER – THREE FACELESS FIGURES STARING AT YOU, MOTIONLESS, PRESENT AND ABSENT AT THE SAME; ENIGMATIC SYMBOLS INTERRELATES THROUGH A COMPUTER NETWORK OF FORMAL CORRESPONDENCES, SUGGESTING A KIND OF MYSTICAL CONSPIRACY. THEY APPEAR TO BEHOLD A SECRET – THE SECRET OF OUR EXISTENCE THAT THEY WILL NEVER REVEAL.

I WOULD LIKE TO ADD THAT THIS KIND OF HOLDING POWER IS THE ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTIC OF ANY WORK OF ART. TRUE ART CAN NEVER BE ENTIRELY DISSECTED, FORMALIZED AND EXPLAINED IN A WAY THAT WOULD SATISFY EVERYBODY.

B: DID YOU BEGIN COLLECTING BEFORE YOU BEGAN PRACTICING AS AN ARTIST, OR WAS IT THE OTHER WAY AROUND?

A: BOTH COLLECTING AND PRACTICING SIMULTANEOUSLY. I HAD MADE A FEW ATTEMPTS AT PAINTING BEFORE I BECAME A COLLECTOR, BUT THE OUTPUT WAS INSIGNIFICANT COMPARED TO THE CREATIVE OUTBURST WHICH OCCURRED ALMOST IMMEDIATELY AFTER BUYING THE FIRST WORKS OF MY COLLECTION.

B: HOW DO YOU THINK YOUR COLLECTING IS INFLUENCED OR INFORMED BY YOUR WORK AS AN ARTIST, AND VICE VERSA?

A: I AM A SELF-TAUGHT ARTIST. BUT I HAVEN'T TAUGHT MYSELF EVERYTHING. FOR INSTANCE, I AM EXTREMELY WEAK IN FIGURATIVE DRAWING, A SKILL DEMANDING YEARS OF PRACTICE AND A TREMENDOUS AMOUNT OF PATIENCE. BUT WHEN IT COMES TO ART, I AM VERY IMPATIENT. I AM SIXTY NOW AND STILL HAVE A CREATIVE URGE THAT I DOUBT I WILL BE ABLE TO SATISFY IN THIS LIFETIME. I HOPE GOD WILL BE KIND ENOUGH TO GIVE ME ANOTHER ONE, SO THAT I WOULD BE ABLE TO REALIZE ALL THE IDEAS AND PROJECTS, WHICH ARE CROWDING MY BRAIN. I THINK MANY ARTISTS ARE FACING THE SAME SITUATION, WHICH OF COURSE PROVES TO BE EXTREMELY FRUSTRATING.

THAT IS EXACTLY WHERE MY ROLE AS AN ART-COLLECTOR COMES IN. I SEE IT AS A KIND OF COMPENSATION: I BUY ART, WHICH I CAN IDENTIFY WITH AND YET AM UNABLE TO PRODUCE MYSELF, EITHER BECAUSE OF LACK OF TIME OR SKILL. I FIND IT EXTREMELY ELATING TO DISCOVER THAT THERE IS, OR WAS SOMEBODY (WHETHER I KNOW HIM IN PERSON OR NOT DOESN'T MATTER) WHO HAS HAD SIMILAR CONCERNS, FEELINGS AND THOUGHTS, AND WHO HAS BEEN ABLE TO EXPRESS THEM IN A WAY I WOULD LIKE TO BE ABLE TO. IT IS A BIT LIKE DISCOVERING MORE OF MYSELF THROUGH SOMEBODY ELSE: PARTS OF MY SUBCONSCIOUS SUDDENLY BECOME CONSCIOUS; A MOST REWARDING COMMUNICATION INDEED, LESSENING MY SENSE OF ISOLATION BY CONFIRMING MY OWN CONCERNS. AFTER HAVING SAID ALL THIS, I WOULD LIKE TO EMPHASIZE THAT COLLECTING IS FOR ME NOT A QUESTION OF INFLUENCING OR BEING INFLUENCED, BUT SATISFIES RATHER A NEED FOR COMPENSATION.

MY COLLECTED WORKS ARE BY AND LARGE VERY DIFFERENT FROM MY OWN. MY TASTE IS ESSENTIALLY ECLECTIC WITH A STRONG LEANING TOWARDS ECCENTRICITY. WHETHER THE ARTIST IS FAMOUS OR COMPLETELY UNKNOWN, I AM ALWAYS FASCINATED BY WORKS, WHICH ARE OUT OF THE REALM OF THE ORDINARY AND PREDICTABLE. THIS MAY BE THE COMMON DENOMINATOR BETWEEN MY COLLECTION AND MY OWN WORKS OF ART.

B: WHAT IS PARTICULARLY INTERESTING IN MALAYSIAN ART? WHAT MADE YOU CHOOSE THIS AREA TO COLLECT IN?

A: FOR THE LAST THIRTY YEARS I HAVE BEEN LIVING IN MALAYSIA. I FEEL COMFORTABLE HERE AND HOPEFULLY IT WILL BE MY LAST HOME. ART ALWAYS REFLECTS SOCIETY. AS I AM QUITE FAMILIAR WITH MALAYSIA'S SOCIETY I FIND IT EASIER TO JUDGE WHETHER A WORK IS A GENUINE REFLECTION OR A FALSE ONE. SO, IT MAKES SENSE FOR ME TO COLLECT MALAYSIAN ART. IF I WERE LIVING IN A DIFFERENT COUNTRY, I WOULD COLLECT DIFFERENT WORKS.

B: WHAT WAS THE MARKET LIKE WHEN YOU FIRST STARTED COLLECTING LOCAL ART?

A: I CAN ONLY GIVE YOU SOME RANDOM EXAMPLES:

A *PAGO-PAGO* OR A *LANGKAWI* BY LATIFF MOHIDIN WAS PRICED AT AROUND RM8,000. A FEW YEARS LATER THE *GELOMBANG* CLIMBED TO RM4,000 AVERAGE, THE SKETCHES COST BETWEEN RM100 TO RM300.

A KHOO SUI HOE WOULD BE PURCHASED AT AROUND RM500, A WATERCOLOR BY YONG MUN SEN RM2,000 – RM5,000 (HIS WORKS WERE ALWAYS A BIT PRICEY). TAY HOOI KEAT HAS ALWAYS SHOWN A GREAT RELUCTANCE TO SELL HIS WORKS (THAT IS WHY EVEN NOW THERE ARE SO FEW AVAILABLE).

ALMOST TOTALLY UNKNOWN WERE LEE CHENG YONG, KUO JU PING, HO KHAY BENG, AB IBRAHIM AND MANY, MANY OTHERS.

B: HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE DEVELOPMENT OF MALAYSIAN ART HISTORY, FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF A COLLECTOR?

A: I AM NOT AN ART HISTORIAN. FOR A SERIOUS OBSERVER I WOULD SUGGEST YOU READ SOME OF THE NUMEROUS PUBLICATIONS ABOUT THE SUBJECT. BUT I CAN GIVE YOU SOME ANECDOTAL FRAGMENTS FROM OBSERVATION:

IN THE EARLY 70s THE CENTERPIECE OF A TYPICAL MALAYSIAN LIVING ROOM CONSISTED OF A RM5 BIG-SIZE INDONESIAN "CONVEYOR BELT" PAINTING DEPICTING A LAKE WITH A MOUNTAIN BEHIND, THE WHOLE SURROUNDED BY SOME VEGETATION. OVER A DECADE, THESE CONVENTIONAL PIECES WERE SLOWLY REPLACED BY MORE MODERN ONES: BATIK PAINTINGS, EMBOSSED COPPER PLATES, POSTERS OF ALL SORTS, RELIGIOUS WRITINGS. SO MUCH FOR THE EVERYDAY SCENE. BUT I MUST SAY, SOME OF THOSE "POPULAR ART" SPECIMENS WERE SIMPLY DELICIOUS IN THEIR NAIVE UNPRETENTIOUSNESS. SERIOUS ART WAS NOT – AND STILL IS NOT – CONSIDERED SERIOUS BY THE GENERAL PUBLIC, BE IT HERE, THERE OR ANYWHERE – "ABSTRACT ART? WHAT? WHAT DOES IT MEAN? MY THREE-YEAR-OLD DAUGHTER COULD DO BETTER!"

OF COURSE, THERE WERE FROM THE NATIONAL ART GALLERY AND A FEW CORPORATIONS THE FEW ENLIGHTENED ONES WHO COLLECTED ART. BUT AT A TIME WHEN YOU COULD BUY A TERRACE HOUSE FOR RM20,000, PAYING A FEW HUNDRED RINGGIT FOR A PAINTING WAS SOMETHING, AND EVEN THE MOST SERIOUS ART LOVER HAD TO GIVE IT CONSIDERABLE AND LENGTHY THOUGHT. AT THAT TIME, IT WAS JUST UNTHINKABLE THAT A PIECE OF CANVAS COULD ONE DAY FETCH THE PRICE OF A CAR OR A BUNGALOW. THINGS SEEMED TO BE MORE PROMISING IN THE EARLY 80s – A MINOR ART BOOM. PRICES WERE STILL LOW. THEN, THE FIRST ECONOMIC CRISIS STRUCK. SOME ART GALLERIES WERE FORCED TO CLOSE. MALAYSIA HAD TO WAIT FOR THE 90s FOR ART TO BE APPRECIATED ON A LARGER SCALE. IT PROVED TO GENERATE A LOT OF MONEY, HELPING TO RAISE ITS PROFILE. ART WORKS SUDDENLY BECAME SUBSTITUTES FOR SHARE CERTIFICATES AND SYMBOLS OF PRESTIGE. TODAY, I WOULD SAY THERE IS A GIANT ART JUNGLE WHERE YOU CAN MAKE FANTASTIC DISCOVERIES BUT ALSO GET BITTEN BY MOSQUITOES AND SNAKES.

B: IS THERE A PARTICULAR PERIOD OR GENRE OF MALYSIAN ART THAT YOU COLLECT IN, OR PARTICULAR PATTERN IN YOUR COLLECTING?

A: ON WHAT I HAVE SAID EARLIER, WHICH ALREADY ANSWERS PART OF THIS QUESTION, I WOULD LIKE TO ADD THE FOLLOWING:

NOTHING COULD BE FURTHER FROM MY INTENTION THAN TO HAVE ONE PIECE OF EACH AND EVERY MALYSIAN ARTIST IN MY COLLECTION. NO COLLECTION CAN EVER BE OBJECTIVELY "COMPLETE". MY TENDENCY IS RATHER TO ACCOMMODATE MANY WORKS OF AN ARTIST WHOSE SENSITIVITY IS CLOSE TO MINE. BUT I DO NOT SPECIALIZE IN ANY PERIOD OR GENRE. AS A GENERAL RULE, I ONLY BUY WORKS I AM STRONGLY ATTRACTED TO. OF COURSE, I CANNOT BUY ALL OF THOSE THAT I WOULD LIKE TO HAVE. THERE ARE CONSTRAINTS: TIME, SPACE AND ESPECIALLY FINANCIAL RESTRICTIONS.

B: IT IS OFTEN ARGUED THAT THE APPRECIATION OF ART IS SUBJECTIVE, THAT "BEAUTY IS IN THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER". HOW SUBJECTIVE DO YOU THINK YOUR ACQUISITION DECISIONS ARE? IS THERE ALWAYS OR OFTEN A PERSONAL CONNECTION WITH A WORK OF ART OR ITS ARTIST?

A: ANY ACQUISITION IS SUBJECTIVE. THERE ALWAYS EXISTS A PERSONAL CONNECTION BETWEEN THE WORKS AND MYSELF. OTHERWISE, I WOULDN'T FIND THEM ATTRACTIVE. AS FOR PERSONAL CONNECTION WITH THE ARTIST, THEY ARE CERTAINLY VALUABLE TO ASSESS MORE ACCURATELY HIS ARTISTIC CONCERNS. BUT I NEVER BUY A WORK JUST BECAUSE IT HAPPENS THAT THE ARTIST IS A FRIEND OF MINE. I MUST SAY, I ENJOY THE FRIENDSHIP OF MANY ARTISTS OF WHOM I DO NOT HAVE A SINGLE PAINTING IN MY COLLECTION. ON THE OTHER HAND, I WOULD NOT HESITATE A MOMENT BUYING A MEANINGFUL WORK DONE BY AN ARTIST WHO I HAVE DIFFICULTIES RELATING TO AT A PERSONAL LEVEL. THEREFORE, I WOULD LIKE TO INSIST THAT ANY ONE OF MY ACQUISITIONS IS BASED ON THE EVENT OF THE WORK AND NOT THE PERSON WHO CREATED IT. THIS CRITERIA APPLIES TO EXTREMELY FAMOUS AS WELL AS COMPLETELY UNKNOWN ARTISTS.

THE DECISION TO ACQUIRE A WORK OF ART CAN AT TIMES BE EXTREMELY DIFFICULT. IF I AM NOT IMMEDIATELY CONVINCED OF ITS QUALITY, I USUALLY STUDY IT OVER A PERIOD OF TIME AND ALSO DISCUSS IT WITH TRUSTED FRIENDS. THEIR COMMENTS ARE CERTAINLY VALUABLE TO ME, BUT SINCE THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS TOTAL AGREEMENT OF INDIVIDUAL SENSITIVITIES, THERE MIGHT BE DIFFERENCES OF OPINION. THEREFORE, THE DECISION TO BUY OR NOT IS ALWAYS MINE – A DECISION, AS I'VE SAID IN THE BEGINNING, WHICH IS ALWAYS HIGHLY SUBJECTIVE.

B: WHAT IS YOUR VIEW OF ART AS A FINANCIAL INVESTMENT?

A: EXCELLENT AND RELATIVELY LOW RISK, PROVIDED YOU STICK TO CERTAIN BASIC GUIDELINES.

B: WHAT RATIONALE OR GUIDELINES DO YOU FOLLOW AS A COLLECTOR?

A: ART IS THE MOST IMPORTANT COMPONENT OF THE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF A NATION, A LEGACY NO CIVILIZED COUNTRY CAN DO WITHOUT. IT MIGHT BE TEMPORARILY OVERLOOKED BECAUSE OF THE URGENT NEED OF PROVIDING BASIC LIVING CONDITIONS LIKE FOOD, SHELTER AND ENTERTAINMENT. BUT ONCE THAT STATE OF DEVELOPMENT HAS BEEN ACHIEVED, WHICH IS CERTAINLY THE CASE IN MALAYSIA, AESTHETIC NEEDS HAVE TO BE SATISFIED.

THE VALUE OF ART GOES UP IN TANDEM WITH THE PROSPERITY OF A NATION, AS WITNESSED IN THE LAST FIVE YEARS. ART LIKE ANY OTHER ASSET MIGHT BECOME MORE DIFFICULT TO SELL, AND BAD "ART" BECOMES ALMOST VALUELESS, BUT THE INTERESTING THING IS THAT THE "CLASSICS" NOT ONLY KEEP BUT, MORE OFTEN THAN NOT, INCREASE IN THEIR VALUE. BY "CLASSICS" I MEAN WORKS OF EXCELLENT QUALITY APPROVED AND APPRECIATED BY A LARGE MAJORITY OF PEOPLE WHO ARE FLUENT IN THE LANGUAGE OF ART – CRITICS, ART HISTORIANS AND ART CONNOISSEURS.

THE PRIMARY AIM OF AN ART COLLECTOR IS NOT NECESSARILY GEARED TOWARDS INCREASING HIS FINANCIAL WEALTH. THERE ARE OTHER FACTORS WHICH MIGHT PLAY A DECISIVE ROLE, NOBLE AND NOT SO NOBLE – AESTHETIC PLEASURE, SELF-EDUCATION, A DESIRE TO SHOW OFF ART CONNOISSEURSHIP, STATUS, AND ABOVE ALL THE OBSESSIVE-COMPULSIVE BUYING CHARACTERISTIC OF MANY COLLECTORS (LIKE MYSELF).

B: WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO WOULD-BE COLLECTORS?

A: BUY WHATEVER GIVES YOU PLEASURE TO LOOK AT AND TO LIVE WITH. BUT IF YOU HAVE THE INTENTION OF MAKING SERIOUS INVESTMENT, THEN BUY SERIOUS ART. DO SOME HOMEWORK AND FIRST COLLECT AS MUCH INFORMATION AS YOU CAN. GET INVOLVED. TRAIN YOUR EYE. COMPARE AND DISCUSS. LEARNING THE LANGUAGE OF ART TAKES TIME, EFFORT AND PATIENCE. IT IS IN FACT A LIFE-LONG OCCUPATION.

IF IN DOUBT ABOUT ANY POSSIBLE ACQUISITION, SEEK HONEST ADVICE. YET, BE AWARE THAT THE LATTER IS NOT EASY TO GET.

IF YOU BUY ART WITH THE SOLE PURPOSE OF EARNING MONEY, YOU MIGHT OR MIGHT NOT SUCCEED. BUT IN DOING SO, YOU DEPRIVE YOURSELF OF THE MOST EXCITING ASPECTS OF ART COLLECTING – THE INTENSE VISUAL, EMOTIONAL AND INTELLECTUAL PLEASURE ARISING FROM THAT CREATIVE COMMUNICATION I HAVE BEEN TALKING ABOUT.

YONG MUN SEN

1896 – 1962



THE WOMEN
1940
OIL ON BOARD
43 X 54.6 CM
SIGNED AND DATED 'YMS 40'

YONG MUN SEN HAS SOMETIMES BEEN REFERRED TO AS THE "FATHER OF MALAYSIAN ART", BEING ONE OF THE VERY EARLIEST PRACTISING ARTISTS IN THE COUNTRY. BORN IN SARAWAK, HE EVENTUALLY SETTLED IN PENANG, WHERE HE SET UP HIS FIRST STUDIO IN 1922. CERTAINLY HIS WAS A VERY SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTION TO THE EARLY PICTURING OF MALAYA. HE IS KNOWN PRIMARILY FOR HIS WORK IN WATERCOLOUR, RECORDING HISTORIC ARCHITECTURE, PALM OIL PLANTATIONS AND TIN MINES, AND THEIR WORKERS, FISHERMEN, AND TRADESPEOPLE. HIS WORK IN OIL IS MORE RARELY FOUND. *THE WOMEN* IS TYPICAL OF THE THICKLY PAINTED, OFTEN DARK AND TRENDCHANTLY REALIST TONE OF HIS PAINTING, DEPICTING THE TOILS OF ORDINARY PEOPLE IN EARLY MALAYA. WHILE, LIKE OTHER EARLY PIONEERING ARTISTS, HE WAS INFLUENCED BY THE WORK OF GAUGUIN, HE SEEMS TO HAVE AVOIDED THEIR TENDENCY TO EXOTICISE LOCAL SUBJECTS. RATHER, HE INVESTS IN THEM A BRAND OF HEROISM, AND NARRATIVE DRAMA. IN THIS PAINTING, HE PULLS THE WORKERS UP CLOSE, ASSIGNING THEM A POWERFUL PRESENCE BY PUTTING THE VIEWER IN THE HEART OF THE ACTIVITY.

GEORGETTE CHEN

1907 - 1993

STILL LIFE WITH SALTED EGGS
C. 1950 - 1953
OIL ON CANVAS
65 X 54 CM
SIGNED CHEN



THE DAUGHTER OF A SUCCESSFUL BUSINESSMAN IN EUROPE AND UNITED STATES, GEORGETTE CHEN HAD A COSMOPOLITAN UPBRINGING, HAVING BEEN BORN IN PARIS AND EDUCATED IN NEW YORK. WHILE STILL A STUDENT, SHE MARRIED EUGENE CHEN, WHO WAS THEN FOREIGN MINISTER OF CHINA UNDER DR SUN YAT SEN. AFTER HER HUSBAND'S DEATH, SHE MOVED FROM HONG KONG TO PENANG IN 1950 WHERE SHE TAUGHT ART AT A SCHOOL THERE UNTIL 1954. SHE MOVED TO NANYANG ACADEMY OF FINE ART IN SINGAPORE IN 1954 WHERE SHE TAUGHT SEVERAL GENERATIONS OF MALAYSIAN ARTISTS UNTIL HER RETIREMENT.

THIS MAJOR WORK, *STILL LIFE WITH SALTED EGGS*, PAINTED WHILE SHE WAS ALREADY IN MALAYSIA IN THE EARLY 1950s REPRESENTS A PINNACLE OF HER ARTISTIC ACHIEVEMENT.

KUO JU PING

1908 - 1962



INDIAN DANCERS
1956
OIL ON CANVAS
60 X 77 CM
SIGNED AND DATED JU PING 1956

FUJIAN-BORN PENANG ARTIST KUO JU PING GRADUATED AS ONE OF THE FIRST BATCH OF STUDENTS TO STUDY AT THE NANYANG ACADEMY OF FINE ART IN SINGAPORE, IN 1940. IN HIS WORK AND TEACHING HE EMPHASIZED THE REWARDS OF DRAWING FROM LIFE, AND THE IMPORTANCE OF SKETCHING, AND THIS TENDENCY CONTRIBUTES TO THE CLARITY AND LIGHTNESS OF HIS PAINTINGS.

INDIAN DANCERS IS A PAINTING MADE AS A RESULT OF ONE OF THE MANY TRIPS THE ARTIST MADE TO BALIK PULAU AS A SPICE TRADER. THE EARLY IMMIGRANT CHINESE ARTISTS WERE FASCINATED BY THE EXOTIC CULTURES OF THE REGION, AND MADE AN IMPORTANT EFFORT TO RENDER THEIR EXPERIENCE OF THE COMMUNITIES THEY CAME ACROSS. A SIMILAR WORK BELONGS IN THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE COLLECTION.

TAY HOOI KEAT

1910 - 1989

GRAND CANYON
1981
OIL ON BOARD
60 X 36 CM
SIGNED AND DATED "TAY 81"

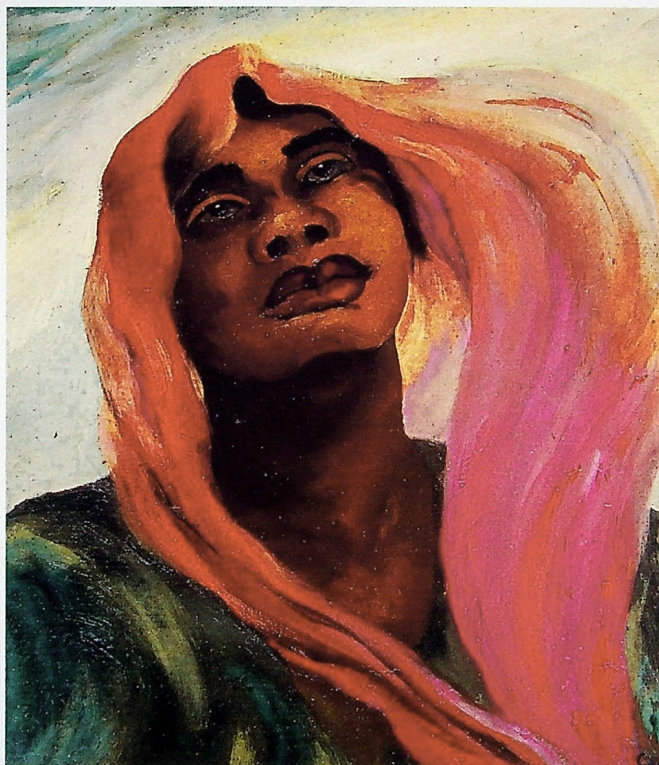


TAY HOOI KEAT'S OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENTS AS THE FIRST LOCAL-BORN PIONEER OF MODERN ART EDUCATION AS WELL AS AN ACCOMPLISHED ARTIST OF GREAT SIGNIFICANCE IN THE HISTORY OF MALAYSIAN ART HAVE LONG BEEN ACKNOWLEDGED. A TIRELESS TEACHER, AND FOUNDER AND PILLAR OF SEVERAL ART GROUPS FROM THE 1930s TO THE 1960s, HE WAS A MAJOR INFLUENCE ON THE PENANG, BUT ALSO THE KUALA LUMPUR ART SCENE. EMBRACING DIFFERENT FORMAL APPROACHES TO PAINTING, HIS ARE SOME OF THE MOST SUCCESSFUL ATTEMPTS TO CREATE A NEW AND DISTINCTIVE EXPRESSION FOR LOCAL SUBJECT MATTER.

GRAND CANYON, A WORK THE ARTIST COMPLETED IN 1983 AT THE AGE OF 73, IN SPITE OF ITS RATHER SMALL FORMAT, DOES NOT DISAPPOINT THE EXPECTATION OF MONUMENTALITY ARISING FROM THE SUBJECT. BOLD STRUCTURAL INTERPLAYS OF POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE SPACE GIVE THIS WORK ITS REMARKABLE SCULPTURAL EFFECT. THE LUMINOSITY OF THIS PAINTING IS CHARACTERISTIC OF TAY HOOI KEAT'S MOST IMPORTANT WORKS. THE VARIOUS BROWNS OF THE ROCKS IN CONTRAST TO THE STARK BLUE AND WHITE PATTERNS OF THE RIVER COMPLEMENT EACH OTHER TO CREATE A COLORADO OF GOLDEN GLOWS.

LEE CHENG YONG

1913 - 1974



HOPE
C. 1960s
OIL ON CANVAS ON BOARD
44 X 38 CM
SIGNED 'CY'

LEE CHENG YONG, A PENANG ARTIST TRAINED AT THE SHANGHAI ACADEMY OF FINE ART, FORGOTTEN AND REDISCOVERED ABOUT TEN YEARS AGO, SEEMS NOT ONLY TO BE ONE OF THE MOST VERSATILE, DARING AND VISIONARY OF THE EARLY PIONEER ARTISTS OF MALAYSIA BUT ALSO THE MOST ENIGMATIC AND, PERHAPS, ONE OF THE MOST UNDERVALUED. A MASTER OF LANDSCAPES AND PSYCHOLOGICAL PORTRAITS, HIS BEST WORKS OFTEN HAVE A SCULPTURAL QUALITY.

IN *HOPE*, THE DEPICTION OF A MALAY LADY, THE COMPELLING COLORS AND FORMS SEEM TO HAVE A SYMBOLIC MEANING IN LINE WITH THE TITLE. GREEN AND PINK SURROUND THE BROWN FACE LOOKING UPWARDS AS IF SEARCHING THE SKY FOR A SOLUTION TO HER LONGING, AND, EASILY MISSED BECAUSE OF ITS SUBTLETY IS THE PECULIAR EROTIC INNER SPACE OF THE FREE FLOWING VEIL WITH ITS FOLDS, CREATING A HIGHLY DRAMATIC AND SENSUAL PICTURE, WITHOUT SUCCEEDING TO THE DANGER OF OVERSTATEMENT.

KHAW SIA

1913 - 1984



UNTITLED (CRABS)
1977
WATERCOLOUR ON PAPER
56 X 77 CM
SIGNED AND DATED 'KHAW SIA 1977' WITH CHINESE SEAL

KHAW SIA GRADUATED FROM SUNG HUA ACADEMY SHANGHAI AND THEN STUDIED WATERCOLOUR PAINTING UNDER SIR RUSSELL FLINT IN ENGLAND. HE EMIGRATED TO PENANG 1937, LATER TO EXHIBIT EXTENSIVELY IN LONDON AND PARIS. ALTHOUGH HE ALSO WORKED IN OIL, AND WAS A FINE PORTRAIT ARTIST, HE IS MOST NOTEWORTHY FOR HAVING PUSHED THE TECHNIQUES OF AN ESSENTIALLY 19TH CENTURY TRADITION OF WATERCOLOUR PAINTING INTO THE REALM OF PHOTO-REALISM. DEVELOPING A PASSION FOR ORCHID CULTIVATION IN THE 1960s, MANY OF HIS PAINTINGS ARE BASED ON THIS SUBJECT. THIS STILL LIFE WITH CRABS IS A PARTICULARLY HIGH QUALITY INTERPRETATION OF A POPULAR SUBJECT IN THE PERIOD.

CHUAH THEAN TENG

1914



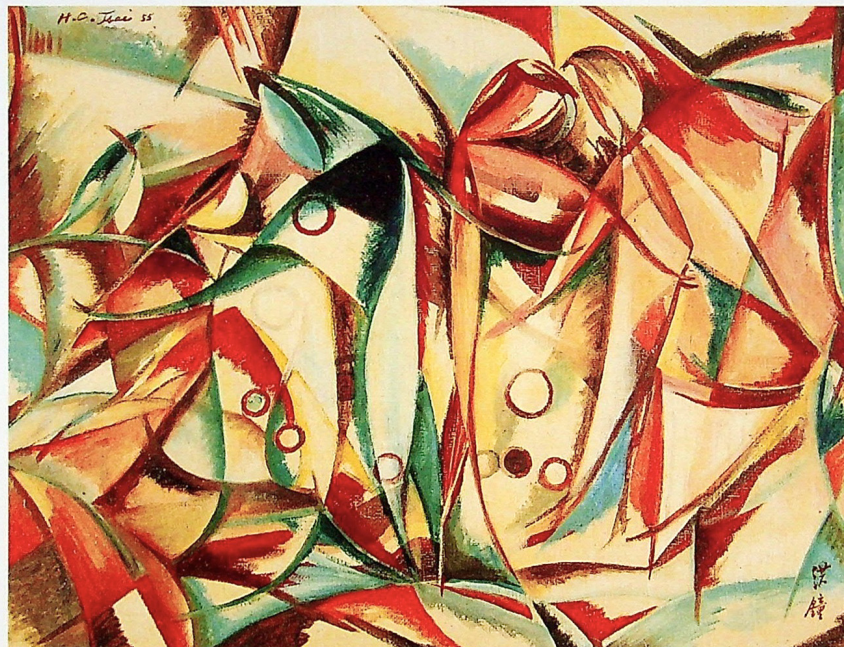
COW HERD
1985
BATIK
88 X 62 CM
SIGNED 'TENG'

RUBBER TREE
1976
BATIK
81 X 45 CM
SIGNED 'TENG'

PENANG ARTIST CHUAH THEAN TENG PIONEERED THE USE OF BATIK AS A MEDIUM FOR PICTORIAL ART IN THE MID-1950s. A GRADUATE OF AMOY FINE ARTS ACADEMY IN CHINA, TENG MIGRATED TO MALAYA VERY YOUNG, BUT THEN SPENT THE JAPANESE OCCUPATION BETWEEN BURMA, SIAM AND INDONESIA. HE LEARNT BATIK TECHNIQUES IN SUMATRA, AND SET UP A TEXTILE FACTORY BACK IN PENANG. HOWEVER, HE CHAMPIONED THE BATIK TRADITION AS AN INDIGENOUS ART FORM, AND SAW ITS EXPRESSIVE POTENTIAL. HE WORKED WITH THE ACCIDENTAL EFFECTS OF DYEING, THE GRAPHIC, PATTERNLINEAR QUALITY OF REGIONAL TEXTILE DESIGN AND THE OFTEN DUSKY, TRANSLUCENT QUALITY OF DYES, TOWARDS A UNIQUE STYLISATION OF LOCAL KAMPONG LIFE. *RUBBER TREE* IS A WONDERFUL ILLUSTRATION OF HOW THE ARTIST ENGAGES THESE QUALITIES IN A PICTORIAL NARRATIVE. THE SCHEME OF THE PAINTING, AND ITS LINEAR, SYMMETRICAL STRUCTURE RELATES TO TRADITIONAL TEXTILE ART, WORKING STORIES INTO A PATTERN, WHILE MARVELOUS DETAILS LIKE THE ROW OF TREE SILHOUETTES AND THE KNOTS OF THE TREE BARK EMERGE FROM THE MANIPULATION OF THE DYES. A LATER WORK, *COW HERD* BRINGS OUT A POWERFUL HUMOROUS STRAIN IN THE ARTIST'S WORK, PLAYING WITH SCALE IN A MEDIUM WHICH BY NATURE DISCOURAGES CONVENTIONAL MEANS OF DELINEATING PERSPECTIVE.

TSAI **HORNG CHUNG**

1916



ABSTRACT COMPOSITION
 1955
 OIL ON CANVAS
 35 X 46 CM
 SIGNED AND DATED H.C. T sai 55

AN OVERLOOKED PIONEER OF MALAYSIAN ART, TSAI HORNG CHUNG'S CONTRIBUTION TO MALAYSIAN ART WAS FINALLY ACKNOWLEDGED IN AN EXHIBITION AT THE NATIONAL ART GALLERY IN KUALA LUMPUR IN 1996. TSAI BELONGS TO THAT IMPORTANT GENERATION OF CHINESE ARTISTS, WHO STUDIED IN SHANGHAI DURING THE HEYDAY OF THE 1930s, WHEN WESTERN ART HAD BEGUN TO BE TAUGHT IN CHINA, BUT LIKE HIS COLLEAGUES, CHEN WEN HSI (1906-1992), CHEONG SOO PIENG (1917-1983) AND LIU KANG (B. 1911), THE SINO-JAPANESE WAR AND THE SUBSEQUENT COMMUNIST TAKEOVER DROVE HIM TO THE SOUTHERN SEAS OR NANYANG. TSAI MIGRATED TO SARAWAK IN 1941 AND THERE HE TAUGHT ART AND MUSIC TO SUCCESSIVE GENERATIONS IN SARAWAK UNTIL HIS RETIREMENT IN 1977.

THIS *ABSTRACT COMPOSITION* SIGNED AND DATED 1955 MAKES IT ONE OF THE EARLIEST SUCCESSFUL ABSTRACT PAINTINGS IN MALAYSIA. UNDOUBTEDLY, THIS PAINTING, LIKE MANY OTHER PAINTINGS FROM THAT PERIOD, WERE EXPERIMENTATIONS BOTH FOR HIMSELF AND HIS STUDENTS.

JOHN WONG CHING HEAN



COOLIE
1963
OIL ON CANVAS
60 X 44 CM
SIGNED 'CHING HEAN' IN CHINESE AND DATED '63

SIBU-BORN ARTIST JOHN WONG CHING HEAN GRADUATED FROM THE NANYANG ACADEMY OF FINE ART IN SINGAPORE IN 1963. WHAT EARLY WORK HAS SURFACED BY THIS ARTIST REVEALS A PECULIAR SENSIBILITY, SOMBER AND AT TIMES INTENSE. *COOLIE* IS ONE OF TWO PORTRAITS OF LABOURERS BY THIS ARTIST IN THIS EXHIBITION AND IS REMARKABLE FOR ITS CANDID PSYCHOLOGICAL MEASURE OF ITS SUBJECT. IT IS SIGNIFICANT THAT HE PAINTS THESE LOCAL WORKERS IN A MANNER FITTING MORE INTIMATE PORTRAITURE, ATTEMPTING TO DESCRIBE A SPECIFIC PRESENCE AND CHARACTER, AS ONE WOULD IN A SELF-PORTRAIT OR A COMMISSIONED PORTRAIT, RATHER THAN BEING TEMPTED TOWARDS A GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF A TYPE.

LEE JOO FOR

1929



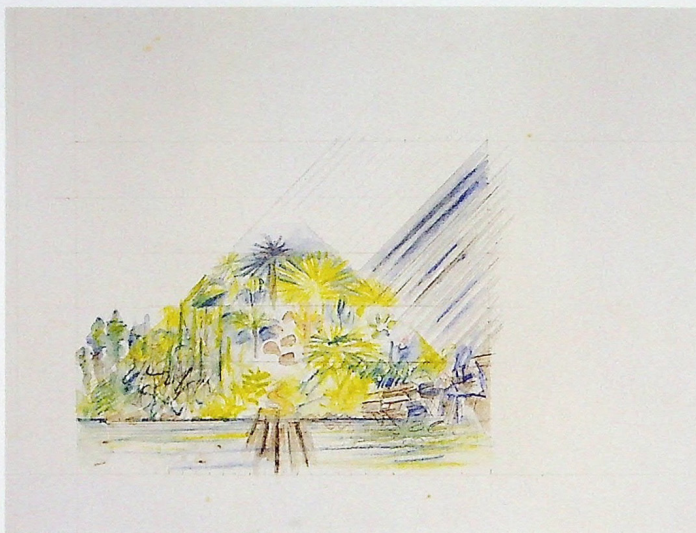
WORKSITE
C. LATE 1950s - 1960s
OIL ON CANVAS
74 X 124 CM
SIGNED 'LEE JOO FOR' IN CHINESE SEAL MANNER

LEE JOO FOR, WHO STUDIED AT BRIGHTON, CAMBERWELL AND ROYAL COLLEGES OF ART IN LONDON, IS DISTINGUISHED BY HIS ROLE AS A POWERFUL FIGURATIVE NARRATIVE PAINTER AND ACCOMPLISHED PRINTMAKER DURING THE 1960s AND 70s BEFORE HE EMIGRATED TO AUSTRALIA. HE ALSO WORKED OCCASIONALLY IN CHINESE BRUSH. A PUBLISHED PLAYWRIGHT AND NOVELIST, HE WAS A VOCAL AND OFTEN PROVOCATIVE FIGURE ON THE SCENE.

WORKSITE IS A PARTICULARLY STRONG AND VIGOROUS PAINTING DESCRIBING THE WORKINGS OF A CONSTRUCTION SITE, DATED BY THE ARTIST AS A LATE 1950s PAINTING MADE IN PENANG. IT IS A POTENT METAPHOR FOR NATION-BUILDING, AND THE ARTIST'S SIGNATURE BOLD AND ANGULAR OUTLINES, AND INVENTIVE PLAY WITH BRIGHT COLOUR CONTRASTS CREATE A NOISE AND BUSY RHYTHM ARTICULATING THE ENERGY OF URBAN DEVELOPMENT.

SYED AHMAD JAMAL

1929



STUDY FOR GUNUNG LEDANG
C. 1982
WATERCOLOUR/PENCIL ON PAPER
25 X 33 CM

STUDY OF FIGURE NO. 9
C. 1950
MIXED MEDIA ON PAPER
27.1 X 21.4 CM
SIGNED 'A'



SYED AHMAD JAMAL IS THE ONLY VISUAL ARTIST TO HAVE BEEN AWARDED THE RARE ACCOLADE OF SENIMAN NEGARA, OR NATIONAL ARTIST. ALSO A PRINCIPAL FORCE IN EDUCATION AND THE LOCAL ART SCENE FROM THE TIME OF INDEPENDENCE, HE IS THE MOST SENIOR OF A CORE OF ARTISTS WHO STUDIED IN THE WEST AND RETURNED AS CHAMPIONS OF ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM IN THE 1960s, USHERING IN A NEW AND DOMINANT FORCE IN MALAYSIAN ART. WHILE HE WAS PROBABLY THE EARLIEST LOCAL ARTIST TO WORK IN THE ABSTRACT MEDIUM (FROM THE LATE 1950s), IT IS IMPERATIVE TO POINT OUT THAT HIS FORMAL CONCERNS HAVE LONG BEEN STEEPED IN IDEOLOGICAL ONES – HIS WORK HAS BEEN TO CREATE A NON-FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE TO EXPRESS IDEAS ABOUT CULTURE AND RELIGION, AND MORE RECENTLY, POLITICAL ISSUES.

IF PRELIMINARY WORKS OFTEN PROVIDE USEFUL KEYS TO THE WORKINGS OF AN ARTIST'S MIND, SYED AHMAD JAMAL'S PRELIMINARY SKETCHES OFTEN APPEAR LIKE "PLANS" OF HIS PAINTINGS – THE SYMBOLISM OF FORM AND SYMMETRY AND COLOUR RELATIONSHIPS ARE ESTABLISHED AT THE OUTSET. WE BEGIN TO SEE THIS IN THE EARLY FIGURE STUDY, PROBABLY FOR A SCHOOL PLAY, MADE BY ARTIST AS A YOUNG STUDENT AT CHELSEA SCHOOL OF ART, BUT THIS SORT OF "DESIGN" BECOMES MUCH MORE ESTABLISHED, AND KEY TO HIS WORK, BY THE TIME OF *STUDY FOR GUNUNG LEDANG*. THE TRIANGLE MOTIF, WHICH REFERS TO A COSMIC ELEMENT OF TRADITIONAL REGIONAL ART FORMS, HAS BEEN CENTRAL TO THE ARTIST'S WORK SINCE THE 1970s.

ISMAIL ZAIN

1930 - 1991



THE MARRIAGE OF SULTAN MANSOR SHAH
1991
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS
152 X 121 CM
SIGNED 'ISMAIL ZAIN 90'

ISMAIL ZAIN WAS ONCE DESCRIBED BY TAN SRI ZAIN AZRAAI AS "ARGUABLY THE MOST COMPLETE ART-PERSON THE COUNTRY HAS PRODUCED". SENT TO MALAYAN TEACHERS TRAINING COLLEGE, KIRKBY IN THE EARLY 1950s, HE LATER STUDIED AT LONDON'S SLADE SCHOOL. BETWEEN 1972 AND 1985, HE SERVED AS DIRECTOR OF THE NATIONAL ART GALLERY, THEN DIRECTOR OF CULTURE AT THE MINISTRY OF CULTURE, YOUTH & SPORTS, AND THEN DIRECTOR OF THE NATIONAL FILM DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION.

AS AN ARTIST, HIS BODY OF WORK - OFTEN DIFFICULT, ALMOST ALWAYS PROVOCATIVE - WAS SADLY SLIM, PARTLY BECAUSE OF THE OTHER MATTERS TO WHICH HE GAVE HIS TIME AND PARTLY BECAUSE OF THE FASTIDIOUS STANDARDS HE SET HIMSELF AND THE EXPERIMENTATION AND CAREFUL THOUGHT WHICH WENT INTO EACH OF HIS WORKS. HIS WRITINGS, MUCH OF IT IN BAHASA MALAYSIA, WERE AMONG THE MOST ARTICULATE AND THOUGHTFUL IN THE COUNTRY.

THE MARRIAGE OF SULTAN MANSOR SHAH IS THE LAST PAINTING IN A SERIES OF LARGE WORKS WHICH ART HISTORIAN REDZA PIYADASA CALLED HIS "ABSTRACT DECORATIVE PAINTINGS". HE STARTED THIS SERIES IMMEDIATELY AFTER HIS RETIREMENT FROM THE CIVIL SERVICE IN 1985. THE SYMMETRICAL FORMAT OF THESE WORKS SHOWCASES HIS PREOCCUPATION WITH "MALAY DECORATIVE SENSIBILITIES AND NUANCES". THE MARRIAGE OF SULTAN MANSOR SHAH, WHICH HE FINISHED PAINTING JUST A FEW DAYS BEFORE HE DIED IN 1991, SUGGESTED A NEW DIRECTION IN THIS SERIES, WITH ITS INTRODUCTION OF FIGURATIVE ELEMENTS IN THE PAINTING.

CHEONG LAITONG

1932

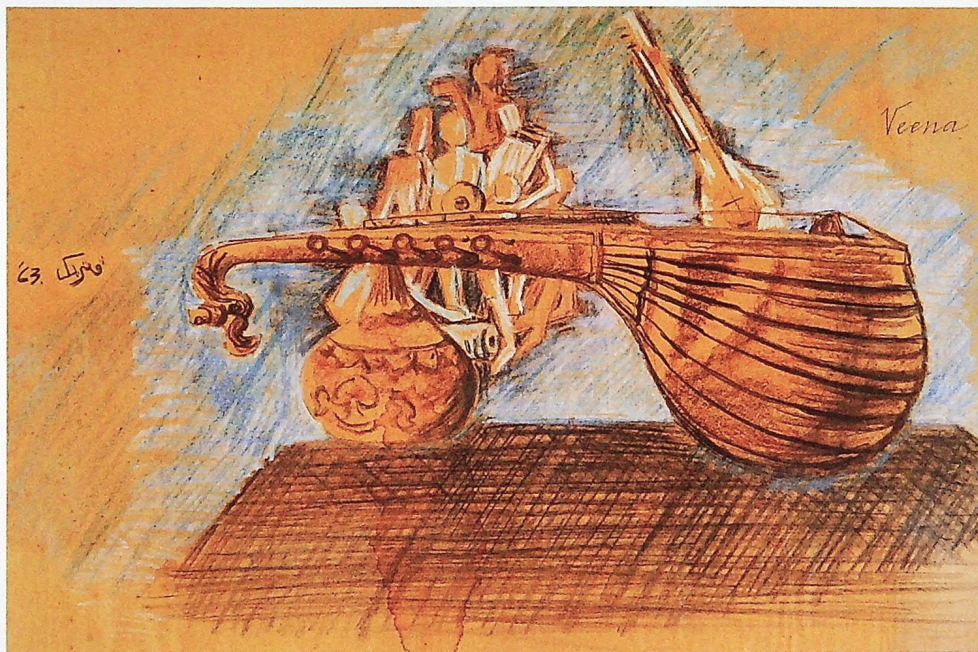


ABSTRACT
1964
OIL ON CANVAS
62 X 40 CM
SIGNED LAITONG 64

LIKE SYED AHMAD JAMAL, CHEONG LAITONG BELONGS TO A CORE OF PIONEER ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISTS, FAMOUSLY BROUGHT TOGETHER AT THE 'GRUP' EXHIBITION OF 1967, WHICH ALSO INCLUDED IBRAHIM HUSSEIN, JOLLY KOH, LATIFF MOHIDIN, YEOH JIN LENG AND SCULPTOR ANTHONY LAU. THE EARLY WORKS OF BOTH SYED AHMAD JAMAL AND CHEONG LAITONG SOUGHT TO BRING TRADITIONAL EASTERN ELEMENTS INTO THEIR WORK - WHILE THE FORMER BASED HIS BRUSHSTROKES AND FORMS ON ISLAMIC CALLIGRAPHY, CHEONG LAITONG APPROPRIATED THE FORMS OF CHINESE CALLIGRAPHY INTO HIS OIL PAINTINGS OF THE 1960s. THIS SMALL BUT ABSORBING ABSTRACT WORK OF 1964 SHOWS HOW REWARDING SUCH EFFORTS COULD BE, PUSHING, AND BLURRING, THE EDGES OF BOTH THE MODERN ABSTRACT AND THE TRADITIONAL CHINESE "EXPRESSIONIST" TRADITIONS.

PATRICK NG
KAH ONN

1932 - 1989



VEENA
1953
MIXED MEDIA ON PAPER
49 X 73.5 CM
SIGNED IN JAWI AND DATED '53

PATRICK NG KAH ONN WAS AN ACTIVE FIGURE ON THE KUALA LUMPUR ART SCENE IN THE 1950s, AND SOMETIME PRESIDENT OF THE WEDNESDAY ART GROUP. HE WAS A SELF-TAUGHT PAINTER BEST KNOWN FOR CREATING THE MASTERPIECE *SPIRITS OF THE EARTH, SKY AND WATER* (1959) IN THE NATIONAL ART GALLERY COLLECTION. HIS INTEREST IN REGIONAL ART AND AESTHETICS, AND HIS EFFORTS TO ASSIMILATE THESE INTO HIS OWN WORK WERE REMARKABLE FOR THEIR TIME, AND PERHAPS EVEN NOW. IN THE 1960s HE LEFT FOR LONDON TO STUDY AND NEVER RETURNED TO THIS COUNTRY. EXAMPLES OF HIS WORK ARE ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE TO TRACE. *VEENA* IS DRAWING MADE FROM A TRIP TO INDIA SHORTLY BEFORE HE LEFT MALAYSIA, AND SIGNED IN JAWI.

NIK ZAINAL ABIDIN

1933 - 1993



HULUBALANG KERA
1976
WATERCOLOUR ON PAPER
54 X 74 CM
SIGNED IN JAWI AND DATED 31.8.1976

BORN AND BROUGHT UP IN KELANTAN, SELF-TAUGHT ARTIST NIK ZAINAL ABIDIN MADE IMPORTANT EARLY WORK WHICH BUILDS DIRECTLY ON A FORM OF LOCAL MALAY CULTURE. HE SUCCESSFULLY TRANSPOSED INTO PICTORIAL FORM THE WORLD OF WAYANG KULIT PERFORMANCE, AN INTEGRAL EXPERIENCE OF HIS UPBRINGING. HIS WORK CAPTURES THE SHADOWS AND MOVEMENT, AND THE STORIES OF THIS ART FORM IN STILL TIME, OFTEN BRIGHTENING THE COLOURS OF THE PUPPETS, AS IF BRINGING THIS COVERT, NIGHTTIME WORLD INTO DAYLIGHT. THE VIVID *HULUBALANG KERA* BRINGS TOGETHER SEVERAL WAYANG CHARACTERS IN A POWERFUL CACOPHONY WHICH SEEMS TO EXPRESS AN UNDERLYING MORAL IMPERATIVE.

HO KHAY BENG

1934 - 1986



CHINESE OPERA FIGURE
1972
OIL ON CANVAS
72 X 60 CM
SIGNED 'H' BENG 72

HO KHAY BENG GRADUATED FROM THE NANYANG ACADEMY OF ART IN 1958 AND WENT ON TO STUDY AT THE ACADEMY OF FINE ARTS IN ROME. THIS UNUSUAL CHOICE PERHAPS EXPLAINS THE SINGULARITY OF HIS STYLE AMONG NANYANG GRADUATES OF HIS TIME. IN PARTICULAR, HE CREATES A MOTTLED EFFECT ON HIS PAINTING SURFACES, GIVING HIS OIL WORKS THE TEXTURE OF BEING WORN DOWN BY AGE, AT THE SAME TIME ALLOWING BRILLIANT PLAYS OF LIGHT AND SHADOW. *CHINESE OPERA FIGURE* IS A SURPRISING PAINTING OF AN UNCOMMON LOCAL SUBJECT WHICH IS WELL-SUITED BY THIS TREATMENT. THE DANCING LIGHT AND SHADOW ON THE SURFACE ENHANCE THE FEELING OF SUSPENSEFUL DRAMA HERE, WHILE THE UNEVEN AND SCRATCHED APPEARANCE ACCORDS THIS TRADITIONAL ART FORM A SUITABLY ANCIENT VENEER.

IBRAHIM HUSSEIN

1936



YIN YANG
1967
OIL ON LINEN CANVAS
90 X 136 CM
SIGNED AND DATED 'IBRAHIM HUSSEIN '67'

CERTAINLY THE MOST SUCCESSFUL AND WIDELY RECOGNIZED ARTIST OF HIS GENERATION, IBRAHIM HUSSEIN GRADUATED FROM NANYANG ACADEMY OF FINE ART IN 1956 TO GO ON TO BYAM SHAW SCHOOL AND THEN ROYAL ACADEMY SCHOOLS IN LONDON. RETURNING TO MALAYSIA IN THE LATE 1960s, HE EMBARKED ON A SERIES OF PAINTINGS FUSING POP AND HARD-EDGE ELEMENTS. AT THE SAME TIME DEVELOPING NEW APPROACHES TO FIGURATIVE ABSTRACTION FOLLOWING ON FROM HIS WORK IN LONDON, YIN YANG BELONGS TO THIS VERY SIGNIFICANT AND INTERESTING PERIOD IN THE ARTIST'S CAREER, AND ITS SOPHISTICATED COMPOSITIONAL STRATEGIES AND FORMAL CONCERNS CLEARLY ANTICIPATE MUCH OF HIS CONTINUOUSLY IMPRESSIVE LATER OUTPUT, WHICH IS CHARACTERIZED BY A STRIATED STYLE OF PAINTING DEVELOPED IN THE LATE 70s.

CHIA YU CHIAN

1936 – 1991



VIEW OF PARLIAMENT HOUSE
1987
OIL ON BOARD
60.5 X 197 CM
SIGNED 'YU CHIAN' AND DATED '1987'

CHIA YU CHIAN STUDIED UNDER CHINESE PAINTING MASTER AND NANYANG ACADEMY FOUNDER CHEN WEN HSI BEFORE GOING ON TO THE ÉCOLE DES BEAUX-ARTS IN PARIS ON SCHOLARSHIP IN 1959. WHILE THE INFLUENCE OF THE PARISIAN SCHOOL UNDERSTANDABLY DOMINATES THE EARLY WORK OF THIS PERIOD, AND THE 1980s SAW THE ARTIST EMBARK ON A NEW AND VERY DISTINCTIVE SERIES OF WORK ON LOCAL STREET LIFE, THE MAIN BODY OF HIS ŒUVRE IS CHARACTERIZED BY A SUCCESSFUL "NANYANG STYLE" FUSION OF FRENCH AND CHINESE FUNDAMENTALS.

THE MARVELOUS *VIEW OF PARLIAMENT HOUSE* IS A FINE ILLUSTRATION OF THIS. THE PAINTERLY, IMPRESSIONISTIC TREATMENT, ESPECIALLY OF DETAILS LIKE THE TREES, OR THE SUDDEN PLAY OF PURE COLOUR IN THE FAR LEFT CORNER ARE CERTAINLY PARISIAN, YET THE WIDE EXPANSE OF SPACE AND THE OVERALL PANORAMIC TREATMENT HAS ITS ROOTS IN CHINESE LANDSCAPE PAINTING.

MAZELI MATSOM

1938 – 1991



FISHERMEN AT THE BEACH
C. 1960s
OIL ON CANVAS
54 X 44 CM

KUALA LUMPUR-BORN MAZELI MATSOM WAS A MEMBER OF THE ANGKATAN PELUKIS SEMENANJUNG MALAYSIA, FOUNDED AND LED BY HOESSEIN ENAS, IN THE LATE 1950s AND 60s. THE APS WAS AN IMPORTANT GROUP RALLYING TOGETHER MALAY ARTISTS OF THE PERIOD. STYLISTICALLY, ITS ARTISTS TENDED TO FOLLOW THE STYLE OF ITS FOUNDER, CONCENTRATING ON FORMAL PORTRAITURE AND NARRATIVE SCENES IN A CONVENTIONAL REALIST MANNER, WITH SOME INDONESIAN INFLUENCE. MAZELI MATSOM WAS MAINLY ACTIVE IN THE 1960s, *FISHERMEN AT THE BEACH* WOULD PERHAPS HAVE BEEN ONE OF HIS LAST PAINTINGS OF THIS ACTIVE PERIOD. ITS TREATMENT IS INTERESTINGLY MORE CASUAL THAN IN OTHER KNOWN WORKS – ITS EFFECTIVENESS IS DUE RATHER TO THE BARE SIMPLICITY OF THE WORK, IMMERSSED IN LIGHT, AND PERFECTLY CAPTURING THE GLARE OF THE SUN ON WHITE SANDS.

KHOO SUI HOE

1939



BROWN MADONNA
1967
MIXED MEDIA ON BOARD
81 X 81 CM

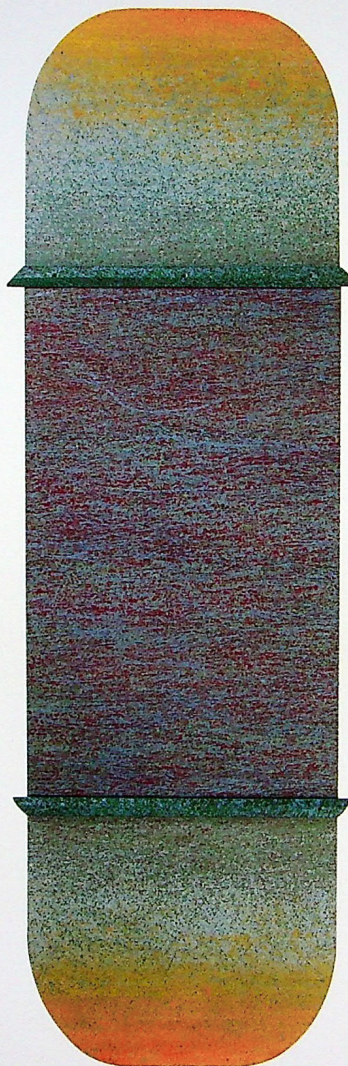
GRADUATING FROM NANYANG ACADEMY OF FINE ART IN 1959, KHOO SUI HOE'S UNIQUE STYLIZATION OF THE ASIAN FIGURE HAS BECOME ALMOST ICONIC IN THE HISTORY OF MODERN MALAYSIAN FIGURATION. HIS BEST PAINTINGS CREATE A STATE OF INNER PEACE, JOY, FREEDOM AND HUMOR. THE HUMAN BEING IS DEPICTED IN SERENE HARMONY WITH THE ELEMENTS: WATER, AIR, EARTH AND ITS VEGETATION. THE ARTIST'S UNIQUE BRAND OF GENTLE SURREALISM EXPRESSES A SOUTHEAST ASIAN IDEAL WITHOUT LOSING ITS UNIVERSAL APPEAL.

BROWN MADONNA IS A PERFECT AND AT THE SAME TIME SLIGHTLY UNUSUAL MODEL OF THESE QUALITIES, FAVOURING NATURAL BROWN TONES ABOVE THE TYPICAL LUSH COLOURS OF MOST OF HIS OUTPUT AND A MORE ANGULAR APPROACH TO THE FIGURE (WHICH LATER GIVES WAY TO A MORE CURVACEOUS LINE) WHILE MAINTAINING ITS SENSUALITY.

ABDUL LATIFF MOHIDIN

1941

UNTITLED - LANGKAWI SERIES
1976 - 1979
OIL ON WOOD
182 X 54 CM



HAILED AS "WONDER BOY" OF MALAYSIAN ART SINCE HIS FIRST SOLO EXHIBITION AT THE AGE OF 11, LATIFF MOHIDIN HAS IN MANY WAYS PROVED TRUE TO HIS MYTHIFICATION AS THE ARCHETYPAL MALAYSIAN, AND ARGUABLY SOUTHEAST ASIAN MODERN ARTIST. A PAINTER, POET AND SCULPTOR, HE MIGHT BE SAID TO HAVE CONSISTENTLY SOUGHT TO GIVE FORM TO THE SOUL OF SOUTHEAST ASIA AS EXPERIENCED FROM WITHIN. THE UNIQUE ARCHITECTURE AND VEGETATION OF THE REGION, THE POWERFUL ELEMENTS OF SEA AND STORM, THE DARK INTENSITY OF OUR RAINFORESTS, THE SPIRITUAL AND EVEN COSMIC FACETS OF OUR CULTURAL TRADITIONS HAVE FED HIS ART, THROUGH THE SEVERAL SERIES OF WORK HE HAS MADE IN THE PAST FIFTY YEARS.

REFLECTING ON THE GROUP OF WALL SCULPTURES COLLECTIVELY KNOWN AS THE LANGKAWI SERIES AND CREATED MAINLY BETWEEN 1976 TO 1979, IT IS SURPRISING THAT THEY HAVE NEVER BEEN GIVEN THE SERIOUS ASSESSMENT THEY MERIT. NOW, WITH THE BENEFIT OF HINDSIGHT, LOOKING AT THEM AGAIN SOME TWENTY YEARS LATER, IT IS CLEAR THAT THE SERIES IS A TURNING POINT IN THE ARTIST'S CAREER, BREAKING FOR A PERIOD OUT OF PAINTERLY EXPRESSIONISM INTO A MORE CONCEPTUAL AND HARD-EDGED IDIOM.

"LANGKAWI'S SCINTILLATING ISLANDS OF PEACE MIRRORED IN THE SEA ARE INSPIRING SHIELDS OF ANCIENT TIMES. SPARKLING VICTORIOUSLY, ILLUMINATED SHIPS SEEN AT NIGHT FROM ABOVE, SACRED OBJECTS SOOTHINGLY LIT; DOMES SUSPENDED IN SPACE, IN GLOWING, CONCILIATORY LIGHT, LIGHT WHICH MOVES AND TRANSMUTES ACCORDING TO THE ANGLE IT HITS YOU; COSMIC DUST, COLLECTED ASSORTED AND DISPLAYED FOR YOU IN FRONT OF YOUR EYES" (WONG HOY CHEONG AND ASKANDAR UNGLHRT, "LANGKAWI SERIES", PAGO-PAGO TO GELOMBANG: 40 YEARS OF LATIFF MOHIDIN, SINGAPORE ART MUSEUM, 1994).

DZULKIFLI BUYONG

1948



HANTU
1964
OIL ON CANVAS
135.5 X 80 CM
SIGNED AND DATED 'DZULKIFLI BUYONG DEC 1964'
ON REVERSE

BUYING COAL
1966
PASTEL ON PAPER
76 X 85 CM
SIGNED 'DZULKIFLI BUYONG 1966'



DZULKIFLI BUYONG EMERGED IN THE EARLY 1960s AS SOMETHING OF A BOY PRODIGY. HIS UNIQUE, NATURAL TALENT GAVE FORM TO A WORLD UNCHARTED - MALAYSIAN LIFE SEEN THROUGH THE EYES OF A CHILD. IT IS HIS INGENUOUSNESS, MATCHED WITH A SURE FEEL FOR PICTORIAL NARRATIVE, COMPOSITIONAL IMPACT AND THE ESSENTIAL COLOUR OF THINGS, THAT MAKES HIS WORK, ESPECIALLY OF HIS TEENAGE YEARS, COMPELLING AND ACCESSIBLE. YET HIS ART IS LACED TOO WITH METAPHOR, AND PSYCHOLOGICAL INSIGHT. IN *BUYING COAL*, ORIGINALLY EXHIBITED AT GALLERY 11 IN THE LATE 1960s, A CHINESE MAN WEIGHS OUT COAL FOR TWO MALAY LADIES, WHILE HIS WIFE (WE PRESUME) IN HER CHEONGSAM PREPARES MORE STOCK IN THE BACKGROUND. HERE IS A CHILD'S FASCINATION WITH THE DIFFERENT RACIAL COMMUNITIES IN EVERYDAY LIFE, AND RELATES WELL TO ANOTHER PASTEL, *CIGARETTE VENDOR* (1968/69) IN THE SINGAPORE ART MUSEUM COLLECTION.

HANTU, IS TO OUR KNOWLEDGE ONE OF HIS LAST, LARGEST AND ALSO, MOST COMPELLING WORKS. THE TITLE IS, OF COURSE, IRONIC - WRAPPED UP IN A SARONG A CHILD IS MASQUERADING AS A "HANTU" OR GHOST PLAYFULLY SCARING HIS/HER SIBLINGS. IN A RARE MOMENT OF ARTISTIC FLUIDITY - THE ARTIST SUFFERING FROM A TRAGIC STATE OF HEALTH - DZULKIFLI BUYONG HAS PRODUCED A WORK WHICH HAS BECOME AN ICON OF MALAYSIAN ART. ITS UNAFFECTED SIMPLICITY AND GENTLENESS COUPLED WITH FORMAL STRENGTH ARE A REFLECTION OF THE CHARMS INHERENT IN TRADITIONAL MALAY SOCIETY.

SHARIFAH FATIMAH ZUBIR

1948



WINDOWS
1975
OIL ON CANVAS
81 X 68 CM
SIGNED AND DATED ON REVERSE

SHARIFAH FATIMAH ZUBIR REPRESENTS HERE A MORE RECENT GENERATION OF MALAYSIAN ARTISTS, WHO CAME TO THE FORE IN THE 1980s, TAKING ON THE MANTLE OF THE PIONEER ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISTS. AN EARLY GRADUATE OF THE MARA INSTITUTE, SHE WENT ON TO READING UNIVERISTY IN ENGLAND AND THE PRATT INSTITUTE IN NEW YORK. AN ACCOMPLISHED COLORIST, SHE HAS EXHIBITED WIDELY OVER THE PAST TWENTY YEARS.

WINDOWS IS A RARE EARLY PAINTING BY THE ARTIST MADE DURING THE PERIOD SHE WAS STUDYING IN ENGLAND. IT TAKES AN UNUSUAL APPROACH TO THE PICTURE PLANE AND FRAME, AND IS A TELLING FORETASTE OF HER CONCERNS WITH SPATIAL STRATEGY, WHICH SHE WAS TO MASTER IN QUITE A DIFFERENT WAY IN HER PAINTINGS OF THE 1980s, WHILE THE COLOUR CONTRASTS USED CLOSELY ANTICIPATE THE WORK TO FOLLOW.

