



Q u i e t C o n c e r n s Y u s o f M a j i d



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Y u s o f M a j i d

Yusof's work, on first encounter, seems disconcertingly diverse. On the one hand there are the apparently childlike, playfully direct and literal drawings. On the other, there are the paintings that demonstrably occupy the serious high art, "grown up" territory. These, it is soon apparent, fall into two distinct groupings. There are those that are thickly textured, earth encrusted, and usually multi-panelled recalling 1970's Minimalism. In contrast there are the larger format, single panelled, thinly painted canvases in which simple signs or symbols and their grounds are repeatedly restated one over the other, their process and history discretely displayed in their "final" precarious states.

The drawings, less apparently "serious", more intuitive and literal than the paintings, offer insights into his interests, attitudes and concerns that are less directly assessable in the more formally focused and constructed paintings.

In talking to him about the work, and focusing on the more literal aspects of some of the drawings, it soon becomes apparent that there are a variety of complex references informing what he does and that these are most directly dealt with in the drawings. There are for instance references to H.G. Wells' *Time Machine* in *Red Planet for H.G. Wells*, the *Robot* drawings and, less obviously in the *Falling Circles* series of drawings (based on the crustaceans on the beach at the end of *The Time Machine*) - a clear example of the transformation of content from the literal to a poetic symbolic formalism. In this case "knowingly" (I think, because of the "informality" of working on paper) but used consistently thereafter, in the majority of the paintings, intuitively. Much of the "content", I think, is not there as a consequence of conscious intention but by having "infiltrated" a more conscious, "formally correct", process of decision making.

Many of these formal inventions in the paintings have their roots in the drawings and works on paper, where they generally have an intimate relationship with the content. *Falling Circles* and *By Night We Drink* are clear examples of this, leading directly to the overlaying and the interlocked circle motifs of the *Veiled* series. This series is different in almost all respects from the "earth texture" series, other than in a commitment to process as a central formal metaphor. In the *Veiled* series, the process poetically conjures memory, time and history. They are slow, quiet and unintrusive, playing unexpectedly and insidiously on our imaginations, their "ghosts" slowly and stealthily invade our complacency whispering their secrets and the artist's disquiet. His disquiet, as with so many of us, lurks behind his consciousness and reveals itself surreptitiously. Something deeper and more disturbing lies, literally, below the surface. The paintings' veiling, obscuring, layering mechanisms function metaphorically as well as physically, and serve to hide his presentiments and fears from himself as well as from us whilst, paradoxically, giving him "permission" to take account of them.

On the cover

Earth

1997

Mixed media on board

40 cm x 40 cm (each)

There are echoes of archaeology and excavation, of the past wanting to be listened to. Of the ritualistic rock drawings and particularly the cave paintings of early man, their purpose and meaning obscured by time, painted on uneven rock faces in dark caves, simultaneously eloquent and mute.

The "earth texture" paintings are far more matter of fact, feet on the ground. Here the attention to process reinforces their physicality, evoking a sense of the "geology" of the pieces, achieved by allowing the lower "stratus" of paint to show through, revealing, by erosion, the longer, slower metaphorical time of these pieces, the time of the planet, of place, of the country. The disquiet here is more openly revealed, it is that which underpins the disquiet of so many of us - and informs the eloquent discourse of all Suzi Gablik's criticism since the seminal *Has Modernism Failed* - the ecological state of the planet and the unsustainable rape of its resources.

Behind the often celebratory facade of modernism employed in this series, lies a disquieting sense of the cost of "progress" to the environment and the planet. (Why do so many of them, notably *Sepang MH 5/1*, have an iconic, flag-like facade?). Art, even when it appears to turn its back, cannot help but address the issues of its time and place.

This disquiet with the "consumer ethic" is also the "subtext" of the *Robot* series of drawings. Their depiction is playful, amusing, childlike - the innocent, trusting, mechanical players in the cultural ritual of man's exploitation of, and temporary "victory" over nature celebrated in consumerism. The celebrants 'denatured', metamorphosed into the "machines" that consumerism needs for its perpetuation. The informal linear schematisation of details (of heads and bodies) used in *Robot 115* and *Robot 118*, are abstracted and formalised into territorial divisions that are transposed into the "earth texture" paintings such as *Plan 2/1* and *Plan 2/2*. There they serve to divide the areas into territorial parts, like sports fields, where symbolic battles are fought, or into purchasable, exploitable plots where contemporary capitalism fights its battles and plays its games.

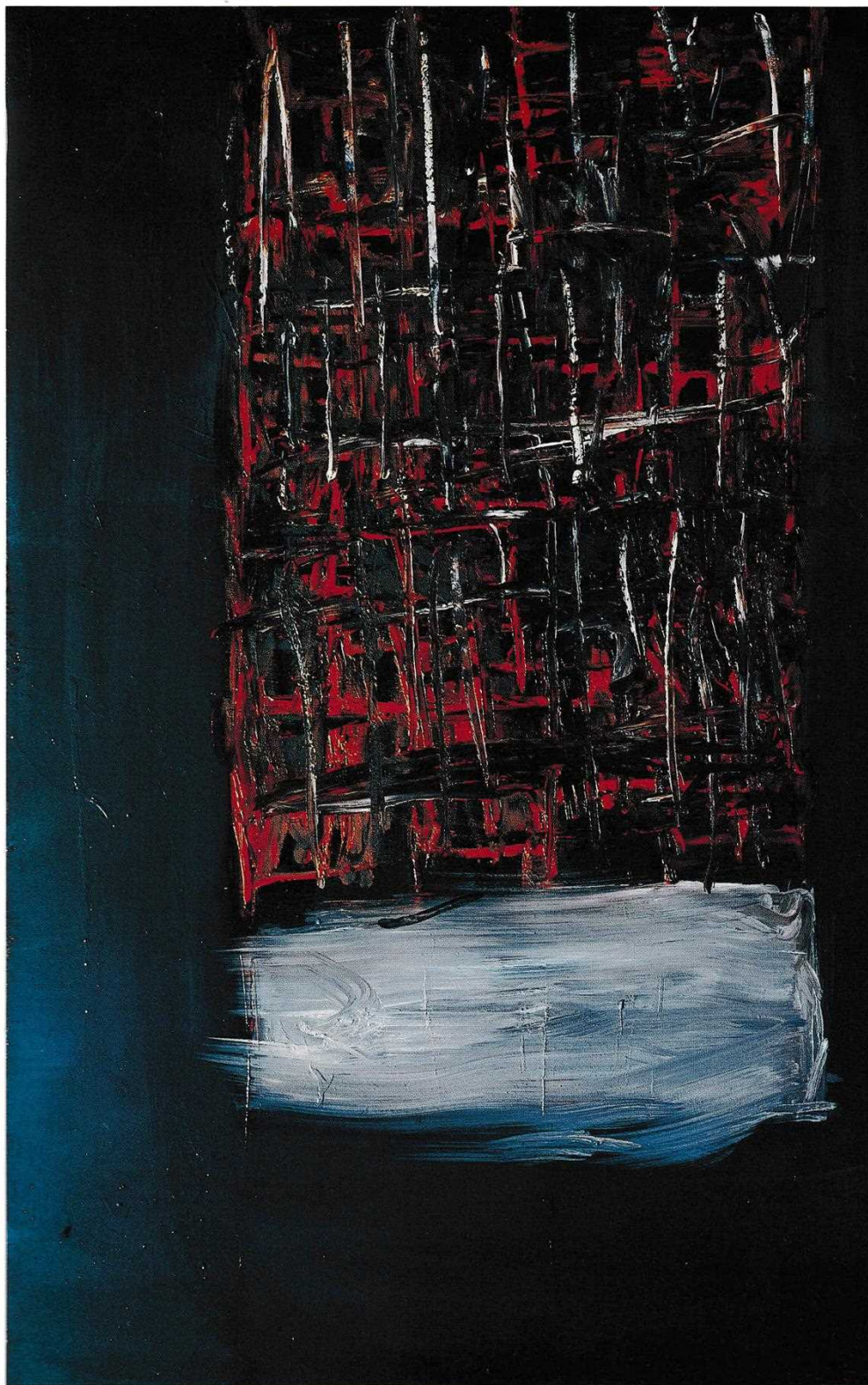
The informal grid-ing and stacking in the early drawing, *Homework I* is transformed into "reality" in many of the multi-panel earth-textured pieces such as *Plan 2/1*, and that, together with their depth, reinforces their "real" presence, and consequently reinforces their concern with "stuff", with earth and thus with life.

Susan Sontag in *On Photography*, talking about Diana Arbus, says: "Much of modern art is devoted to lowering the threshold of what is terrible. By getting us used to what, formerly, we could not bear to see or hear, because it was too shocking, painful or embarrassing art changes morals... But our ability to stomach this rising grotesqueness in images and in print has a stiff price. In the long run, it works out not as a liberation of but as subtraction from the self: a pseudo-familiarity with the horrible reinforces alienation, making one less able to react in real life." Yusof has an intuitive understanding of the dangers of this desensitisation that has become a commonplace of contemporary experience, and consequently he pitches his work on the thresholds of perception, the whisper, the innuendo and understatement.

Michael Thorpe

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August 1997



Token of Landscape
1997
Mixed media on canvas
121 cm x 76 cm

Nightfall

1997

Mixed media on board

40 cm x 40 cm

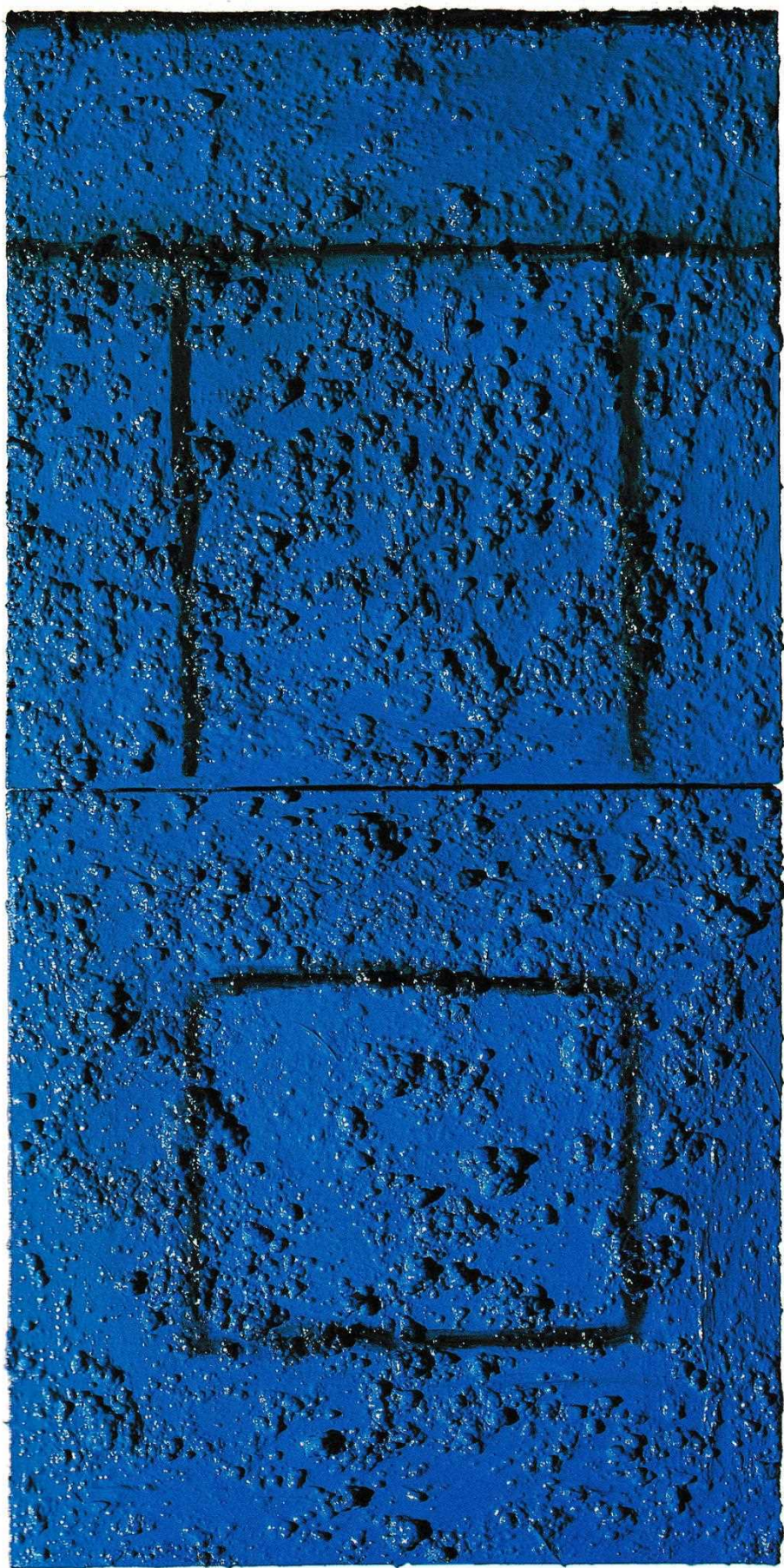
**Sepang MH 5/1**

1997

Mixed media on board

40 cm x 40 cm





Plan I

1997

Mixed media on board

92 cm x 46 cm

Lemon Circles

1997

Acrylic on paper

76 cm x 56 cm

**Blue on Lemon**

1997

Acrylic on paper

76 cm x 56 cm



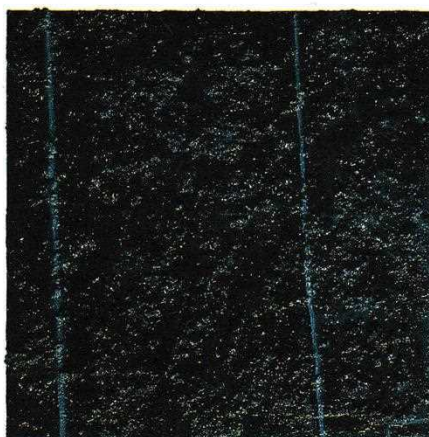


Veiled 3

1997

Mixed media on canvas

122 cm x 122 cm



Rawang HHH

1997

Mixed media on board

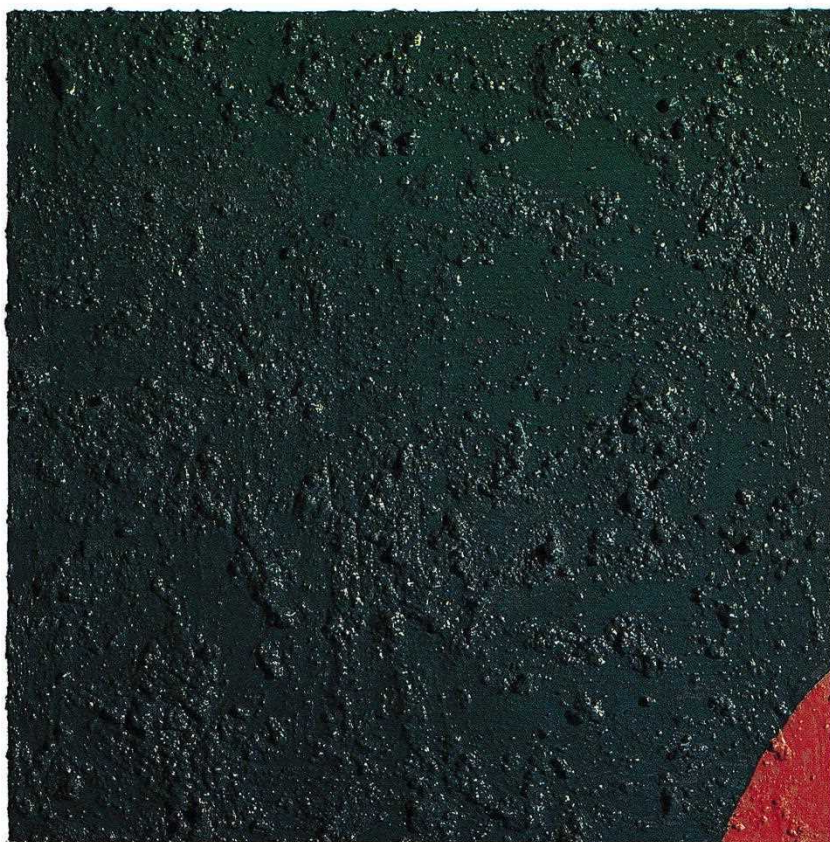
60 cm x 60 cm

Putra Jaya HQ 5/1

1996

Mixed media on board

60 cm x 60 cm



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Yusof Majid**Born**

Yusof Bin Abdul Majid, London 1970, Malaysian citizen

Education

- 1988 Chelsea School of Art, London, Foundation Diploma
- 1992 Chelsea School of Art, London, BA (Hons) Fine Art (Painting)
- 1993 Chelsea School of Art, London, MA Painting

Awards and scholarships

- 1993 Herbert Read Scholarship
- 1996 Philip Morris Malaysia Exhibition Commendation

Exhibitions

- 1991 Mutual Zeal, Two-man show, Galeriwan, Kuala Lumpur
- 1992 Group exhibition, Whiteleys Gallery, London
- 1993 Group exhibition, Slade School of Art, London
- 1993 MA Exhibition, Chelsea School of Art, London
- 1993 Solo exhibition, Municipal Gallery, Bergerac, France
- 1997 Homework, solo exhibition, Valentine Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur



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Southeast Asian Paintings & Works of Art

This exhibition will be opened by
YBhg. En. Rustam A. Sani,
Visiting Fellow at the Institute of Strategic & International Studies,
on Friday, 26th September 1997, and will end on 12th October 1997.
Curated by Valentine Willie.

