

REDZA PIYADASA

works past *and* present



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**Reclining Figure**  
1975  
Bronze  
36 x 31 x 10 cm

"To know Piya from up close, and when engaging him in dialogue, we face a personality brimming with ideas and an artistic spirit that reflects a critical and socially-conscious mind. He is very intense, equally provocative, yet possesses a strong awareness of the history and cultures that have shaped the plurality of life in Malaysia today. His intellectual understanding and commitment towards a multi-cultural society—without forsaking his responsibility towards the meaning of humanity—shines clearly through the Malaysian characters that make up his artistic subject matter in his *Malaysian Series* art works. We can easily recognize the painted ethnic images that remind us that they are a part of us all. We cannot discard the fact that we have all emerged from the same historical and social contexts of this country. As an artist and thinker, the significant contributions made by Redza Piyadasa have marked milestones in the development of a modern art tradition in this country."

**Dato' Baharuddin Zainal in the Foreword, retrospective exhibition catalogue, *Piyadasa: An Overview, 1962–2000* (National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, 2001)**

"Piyadasa's major artistic theme has been the story of all communities in the history of modern Malaysia, the story of people and families from different places, at different periods of time, all projecting the colour and uniqueness of their own communities, yet within the total Malaysian cultural reality, portrayed through his forte of mixed-media paintings. An artist, art critic, art historian and lecturer in art, Redza Piyadasa is today a major figure in the art scene in Malaysia."

**Professor S. N. Arsecularatne, *Sinhalese Immigrants in Malaysia and Singapore, 1860–1990* (K. V. G. De Silva & Sons Ltd., Colombo, 1991)**

"The artists are today no longer between two worlds as they may have been in colonial times or even in the very recent past. Today regionalism (in terms of locality) emerges as something of which to be proud (...) and an appropriate starting point for new definitions of national and cultural identity. Redza Piyadasa points to a new Southeast Asian cultural regionalism and the emergence of a neo-regionalist approach by artists who, despite their different formal approaches, exhibit a broader multi-racial and multi-cultural perspective."

**Dr. Caroline Turner, *Internationalism and Regionalism: Paradoxes of Identity, in Tradition and Change in Contemporary Art of Asia and the Pacific* (Queensland University Press, Brisbane, 1993)**

"Piyadasa, along with a handful of artists such as Sulaiman Esa, pointed to new ways of seeing local art and integrating it with more experimental art from elsewhere. In the retrospective of his work at the Balai Seni Lukis Negara in Kuala Lumpur in 2001, *Piyadasa: An Overview, 1962–2000*, Piyadasa's use of particular artistic strategies in an effort to make others view the world differently was evident. The results of this are provocative multi-dimensional artworks, which often do not rest easily with the official version of Malaysian art. Yet it was Piyadasa who for a while became Malaysia's representative in many exhibitions and diplomatic art events abroad, especially those organized by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Piyadasa provided not just an identity for art emerging from Malaysia, but also a point of dialogue about contemporary Southeast Asian art."

**Ana P. Labrador, *Redza Piyadasa*, Art Asia Pacific (Australia), October–December 2002**



"Redza Piyadasa (...) devotes himself both to the practice and to the theory of art. During the sixties and seventies he filled a serious vacuum, at a time when there were scarcely any debates in his country on the subject of art history or art criticism. Partly due to his persistent efforts, the situation is now quite different. In his many publications, both in English and Malay, in his countless articles in the Malaysian press and also in his work as an artist, he examines the context of art and their significance for the construction of artistic traditions and artistic values. His interest is centered on modern Asian art, which he places in relation to traditional Asian art forms and Western contemporary art. Piyadasa's art—such as the collage-like *Malaysian Series*, which he has been working on since 1980—and his art criticism are his answer to neo-nationalistic, Islamic and globalization currents in Malaysia, which have threatened to marginalize minority groups and alternatives."

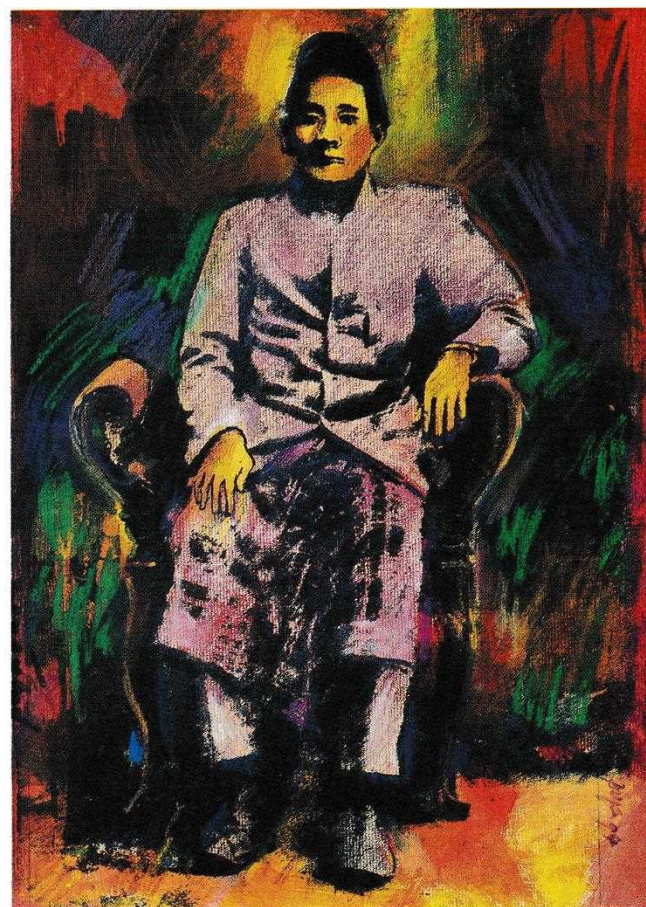
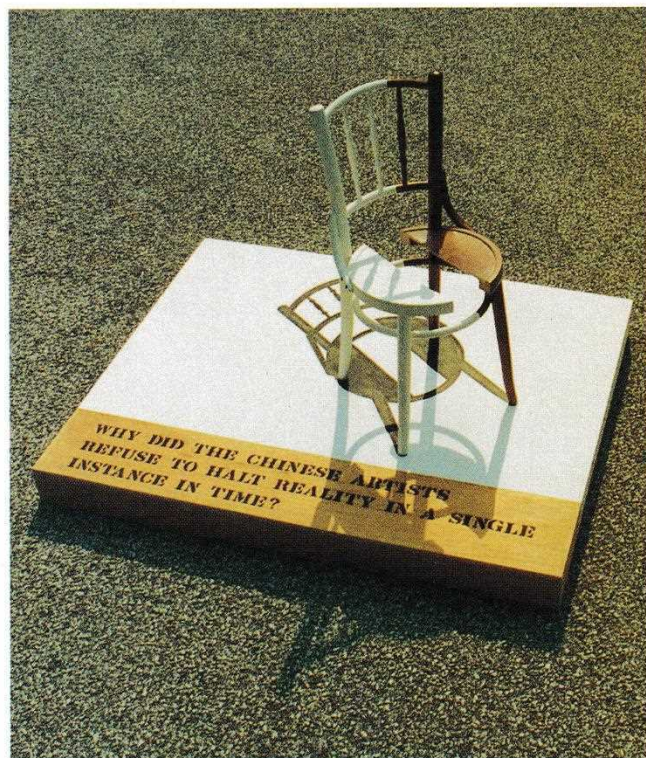
**Extracted from *Report of the Selection Committee of the Prince Claus Awards 1998*, The Prince Claus Awards 1998, Den Hague, 1998**

"His mixed-media collages incorporating silk-screened images of old photographs emerged amidst the government's Islamisation programme. And if Piyadasa was not deaf to the calls from the minarets, he also was not blind to the obvious connections between ethnicity and Islam in the country. His images of recent ancestors of present-day Malaysians are aesthetic reactions echoing the latent and manifest fears of Malaysians, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, of political and social marginalization. They offer us reminders of the historical background to present-day Malaysian social make-up; of multi-cultural realities; of migration and cultural assimilation; of traditions and heritage; of political and social history. They beckon Malaysians to confront their past—*The Baba Family*, *The Indian Family*, *The Haji Family*, in their frontal photographic depictions, all look the viewer in the eye. Do we cast our eyes away from these stares from the past and be overwhelmed by the ideological tidal wave that was overhauling our society? Could the deadpan Warholesque garishness of colours, bold and graphically raw, be loud enough to neutralize this rich cultural past of multi-racial Malaysia? Do we neutralize it? Piyadasa's metaphorical visual commentaries were reminders of Malaysia's multi-cultural roots."

**Zainol Shariff, *Towards an Alternative Vision: The Idea of Malaysian Art Since 1980*, Vision and Idea – ReLooking Modern Malaysian Art (National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, 1994)**

"The images of these works find their source in old Malaysian photographs. A rich world of tropical nostalgia is expressed in these paintings throughout the 1980s. He has been relentless in reminding his fellow artists and his reading public about the ineluctable philosophical basis of art. The suggestion is that any construction of a Malaysian identity in modern art must begin, not with superficial sentimental gestures, but with a fundamental apprehension of the conceptual basis of art."

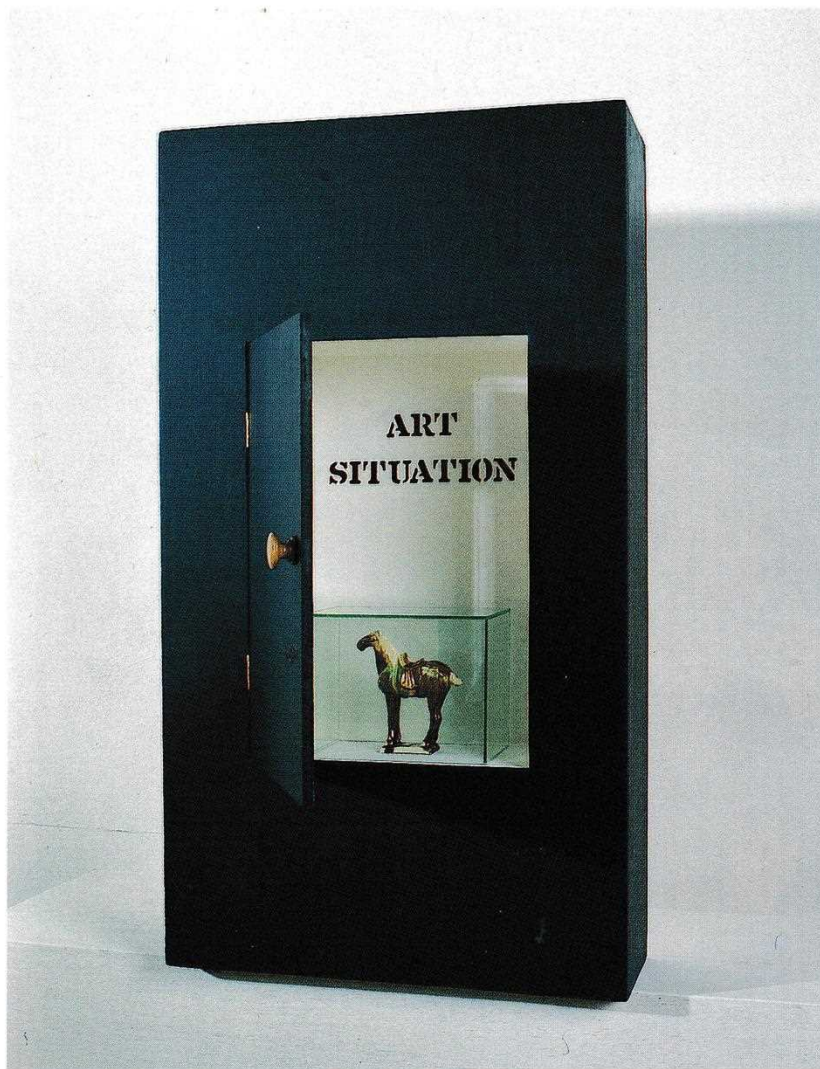
**Krishen Jit, *Symbols and Symbolic Visions in Modern Malaysian Art*, exhibition catalogue, 3rd Asian Art Show (Fukuoka Art Museum, Fukuoka, 1989)**



top  
**A Matter of Time**  
1977  
Found object, acrylic and plywood  
148 x 99 x 122 cm

above  
**Seated Malay Man**  
1994  
Mixed media on board  
46 x 33 cm





"Reality, transformed or otherwise, past or present, is an inescapable component of art. But photographs have the aura of something fixed in time, like reportage by Norman Mailer or a non-fiction novel by Truman Capote. In Piyadasa's hands, reality is past but its transformation is palpable. Serigraphy, especially the photographic silk-screen process, is the medium used by Piyadasa as a starting point. This means photographing a photograph—a process that places the image at a point twice removed from reality. By using formalist abstraction techniques, Piyadasa arrives at images that assert the surface of the painting, its flatness, its physical aspects—but also reaffirms the individuality, the personality of the subject. The retention of the subject's unique qualities and the specific reference to a definite time and place lend that distinctive Malaysian aura to Piyadasa's works."

**Dr. Rodolfo Paras-Perez, *Distant Mirrors, Lifestyle Asia, Manila, 1988***

"Noted as a scholar, curator and artist, Piyadasa's influence far exceeds that engendered by his art alone. Moreover, his works reflect a strong awareness of the contexts of his times and several series react against contemporaneous directions. Piyadasa sparked debate about the role of art itself."

**Laura Fan, *Piyadasa's Long Shadow, The Edge (Malaysia), 2001***



above

**Art Situation**

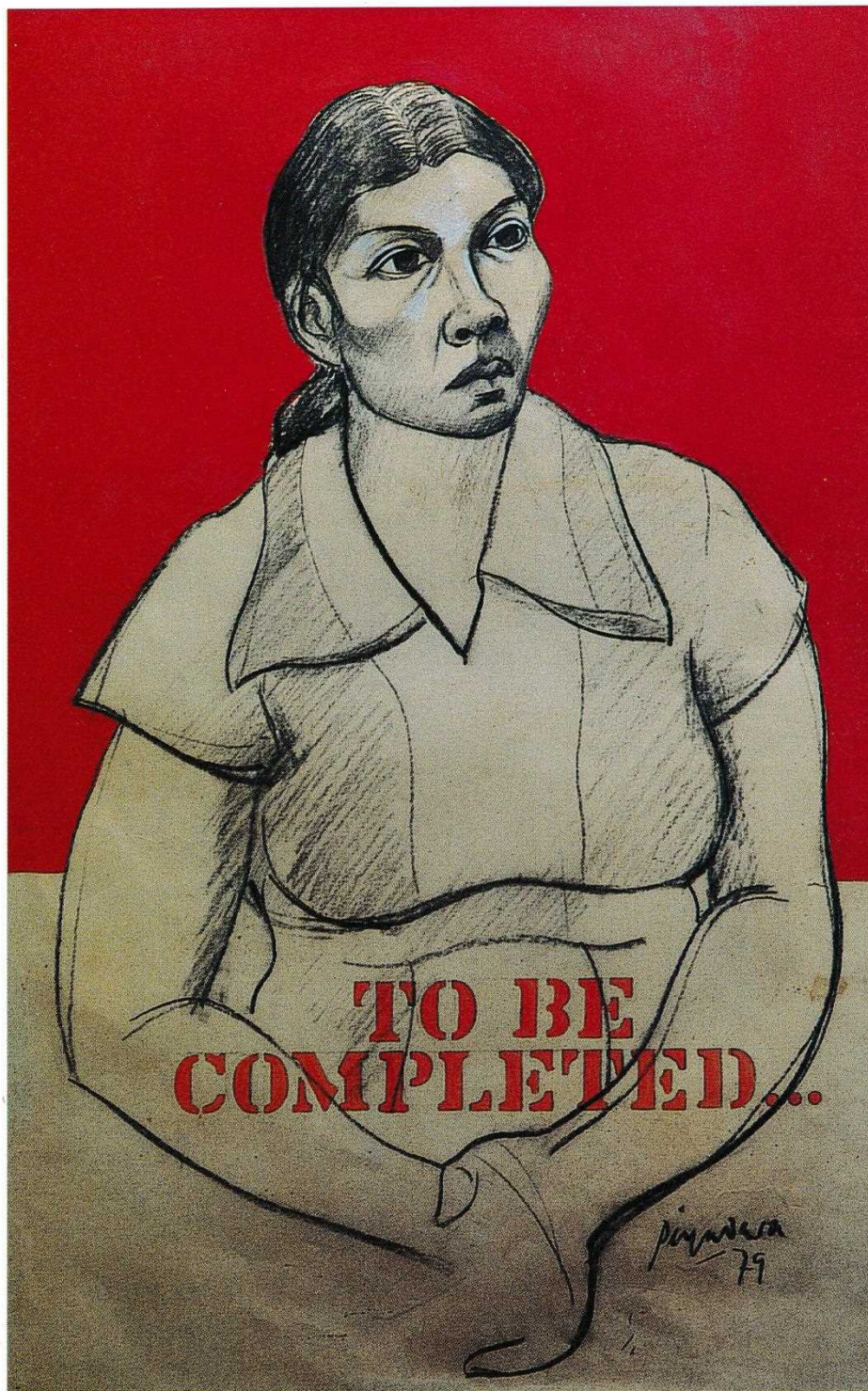
Art reproduction,  
glass and acrylic  
on plywood  
92 x 51 x 20 cm

left

**The Haji's Family**

1990  
Acrylic on board  
119 x 91 cm





**To Be Completed**  
1979  
Acrylic on paper  
59 x 39 cm



**REDZA PIYADASA** was born in 1939 in Kuantan, Pahang, Malaysia. In 1958 he was sent to Malayan Teachers' College in Wolverhampton, England. From 1963 to 1967 he studied at Hornsey College of Art in London. In the 1960s he taught art at secondary schools in Kuantan and Kuala Terengganu, and went on to become a founding Lecturer in Art at the School of Art and Design at the MARA Institute of Technology, Shah Alam, Malaysia. In 1975 he left to read for a Master of Fine Arts at the University of Hawaii, specialising in sculpture and Asian art history, and as a graduate was awarded the East-West Centre Post-Graduate Certificate, Honolulu. From 1977-1984 he was Senior Lecturer in Art at University Sains Malaysia, Penang, and from 1985-1994, Lecturer in Southeast Asian Art at Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur.

In 1969, he formed a crucial part of the groundbreaking exhibition, *The New Scene*, at Galeri 11 in Kuala Lumpur. In 1972 he was awarded the Major Prize at the Malaysian Landscape Competition at the National Art Gallery for his critical work *The Great Malaysian Landscape*, and in the 1970s participated in several group exhibitions in Kuala Lumpur, as well as around ASEAN, in the UK and in Honolulu, most notably the controversial *Towards a Mystical Reality*, a pioneering conceptual exhibition with Sulaiman Esa at Dewan Bahasa, Kuala Lumpur in 1974, and Modern Malaysian Sculpture at the National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur in 1976. In 1977 he held his first one-man show at the University of Hawaii, followed by a second solo at Lincoln Cultural Centre in Kuala Lumpur in 1978, in which he further developed his conceptual strategies using constructions of found objects and text.

He began his landmark *Malaysian Series* of mixed media works in 1981, first exhibiting these at an invitational show at the National Art Gallery in 1982. Since the 1980s he has represented Malaysia in numerous major international exhibitions in Fukuoka, Yokohama, Hiroshima, Okinawa and Tokyo in Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, Singapore, USA, Iraq, and Germany, as well as in several major local exhibitions. Some notable exhibitions include the *Third Asian Art Show* organized by the Fukuoka Art Museum in Japan in 1989, *Six ASEAN Sculptors*, Cultural Centre of the Philippines, Manila, 1989, *Asian Art Now*, Hiroshima Art Museum, 1993, *Vision and Idea—Re-Looking Modern Malaysian Art*, National Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, 1994, and *Modernity and Beyond: Themes in Southeast Asian Art*, Singapore Art Museum, 1996. He held a solo exhibition at Canberra School of Art in 1991. In 2001, the National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur honoured him with a retrospective exhibition: *Piyadasa, An Overview, 1962-2000*.

Redza Piyadasa received the Ahli Mangku Negara Award in 1983, and the Kesatria Mangku Negara Award in 1994, from the Yang diPertuan Agong of Malaysia. In 1998 he received the Darjah Paduka Mahkota Perak award from His Highness the Sultan of Perak. In 1998 he also became the first Malaysian to receive the Prince Claus Award from the Netherlands



Government. In 1991 he was invited to be Artist-in Residence at the Canberra School of Art, and has received cultural awards and travel grants from Australia, Japan, Iraq, Germany and South Africa during his career.

He was a long-serving member of the Board of Trustees of the National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, and of the four-man Acquisitions Board of the Asian Art Museum, Fukuoka, and has been invited to judge major art competitions in Asia such as the 3rd Asian Art Biennale, Bangladesh (1986), Oita Asian Sculpture Competition (Malaysian level, 1995) and the Philip Morris ASEAN Art Awards (1995, 1996, 1998).

As a writer on art, he has published some important books, including *Modern Artists of Malaysia*, with TK Sabapathy (Dewan Bahasa, Kuala Lumpur, 1983), and *Rupa Malaysia* (National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, 2000), as well as monographs on Tay Hooi Keat and Ismail Zain, and numerous articles and essays in seminal publications such as *Tradition & Change: Art of Asia and the Pacific* (ed. Caroline Turner, 1993), and *Modernism in Asian Art* (ed. John Clark, 1993). From 1992 to 1996 he also published a weekly art column in the BusinessTimes (Malaysia).

Redza Piyadasa's work forms part of a number of major institutional and corporate collections, including, in Malaysia, that of the National Art Gallery, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Universiti of Malaya, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Securities Commission of Malaysia, Malaysian Airline Systems, Tenaga Nasional, Petronas, Bank Negara, Oriental Bank, Chung Khiaw Bank, and UMBC Bank. Overseas collectors of his work include Singapore Art Museum, Fukuoka Art Museum, Asian Art Museum, Fukuoka, Ateneo de Manila University Art Museum, Canberra Institute of the Arts, National University of Singapore Art Museums, ASEAN Sculpture Park, Manila, and Japan Foundation ASEAN Cultural Centre, Tokyo.

cover

**Kapitan Cina**

1994

Acrylic and collage on board  
110 x 80 cm

this page

**My Son Edrin**

1977

Charcoal on paper  
42 x 32 cm

Exhibition dates:

30 October - 15 November 2003

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