

Contemporary art that stands the test of time

Highlights of The Edge Auction 2017 to be held on March 5 in Kuala Lumpur includes serious works by some of the most desirable names in Malaysian contemporary art. **By Sarah Abu Bakar**

Young artists from the 1980s onwards tend to experiment with human figures to express socio-political situations, more than the modernists of the Sixties and Seventies, in response to the era of modernisation and political developments in Malaysia. Since then, the leading contemporary artists who have emerged and are widely recognised today include Ahmad Zakii Anwar, Jalaini Abu Hassan, Bayu Utomo Radjikin, Ahmad Shukri Mohamed, Zulkifli Yusoff, Chong Siew Ying, Kow Leong Kiang, Shia Yih Yiing and rising star Chong Ai Lei.

Thirty of the 118 lots on offer at The Edge Auction 2017 are contemporary artworks by 20 Malaysian artists and dated as early as 1983 up until 2015. On offer are an array of genres from batik art and “Nanyang” style to traditional landscape watercolour paintings, as well as abstract work and contemporary art that encapsulates the country’s current socio-political landscape. The contemporary segment features 30 artworks comprising a number of exceptional figurative paintings as well as non-representational works of art.

Artistic development

At an auction with a range of desirable works, collectors can observe the progression of established artists in terms of style and technique. For instance, Ahmad Zakii is represented in the sale by two distinctive artworks: a pair of paintings illustrating the traditional Balinese dance titled *Legong 5 and 7*, which are dated 2004 and priced at RM7,500 to RM10,000 for the lot, and a male figure executed in charcoal and acrylic medium on Canson paper. Titled *Reclining Figure 6* and dated 2015, this work is 76cm by 182cm with an estimated of between RM48,000 and RM60,000. Both works demonstrate the artist’s ability to observe and render his subject matter with grace and precision.

Similarly, Jalaini’s early work, titled *Alam Benda*, illustrates his meticulousness as a student rendering still-life objects when the work was created in 1983. The more recent *Dolah Ayam*, from 2015, reflects his fascination with industrial space following his solo exhibition, *Painting Industry*, held in Singapore in 2015. Measuring 183cm by 183cm, *Dolah Ayam*, a nickname used in rural Malaysia to identify cockfighting champions, is estimated at between RM38,400 and RM48,000. The artist is considered one of the early adopters of bitumen in his artistic oeuvre. The discovery of this alternative medium occurred during his student days in New York in the 1990s. According to the artist, it is interesting to note the similarity of the colour tone in both artworks. His attraction to sepia-toned effects seems to have been subconsciously instilled from the treatment of colour in *Alam Benda*. *Dolah Ayam*, among a string of his other works, is executed in bitumen and acrylic. Both artworks highlight the artist’s creative progression from 1983 to 2015, preceding the discovery of bitumen and afterwards.

Opportunity

The secondary market provides an opportunity for art collectors to acquire early artworks by mid-career artists. For instance, Chong’s *Cattleya* is derived from one of the artist’s seminal series from the mid-2000s. The body of work represents a very private chapter in her life. Dated 2007, the work measures 113cm by 120cm and is estimated at between RM20,000 and RM25,000.

Similarly, Ahmad Shukri’s *Barcode series 10* and *Barcode series 11* were created in 1997. The artist employs butterflies and other insects to represent nature in his creative oeuvre, as a symbol of freedom, beauty and harmony. Ahmad Shukri has always been concerned about the environment and its exploitation, especially



Above: Jalaini Abu Hassan’s *Alam Benda* (1983) watercolour on paper is an early precursor to the tonal quality found in his later series of bitumen works experimented by the artist during his New York stint

the challenges that stem from human greed. Measuring 24cm by 25cm, the works are estimated at between RM4,000 and RM7,000 each.

International recognition

Almost all of the contemporary Malaysian artists featured in this sale have participated in exhibitions abroad. One of them, whose presence across the Causeway has been consistent since 1997, is Zulkifli. Going under the hammer in this sale is a charcoal on paper work from his provocative *Ahmad* series. Dated 1996, *Ahmad and His Shadow III*, which measures 75cm by 55cm, is expected to fetch RM6,000 to RM8,000. Zulkifli was Malaysia’s sole representative at *Modernities and Memories, Recent Works from the Islamic World* at the prestigious Venice Biennale, Italy, in 1998. His large-scale installation, titled *Rukunegara 2: The Voice*, was displayed at T.H.E.O. Arts at Art Stage Singapore in

2013. Another installation, titled *Pendita*, was exhibited at the Singapore Art Museum’s *The Collectors Show — Weight of History* that same year. A six-piece suite of installations, titled *Rukunegara 1 Belief in God*, which occupied a space on the ground floor of the Singapore Art Museum, was featured at Singapore Biennale 2013, themed *If the World Changed*.

More recently, an installation titled *Hujan Lembing di Pasir Salak* (2008) is being exhibited at *Artist and Empire: (En)countering Colonial Legacies* (until March 27) an exhibition presented at the National Gallery Singapore in association with London’s Tate Britain.

Rediscovery

Collectors will have a chance to rediscover talents whose early artworks are rarely found on the market, including Fauzan Omar, Yeoh Kean Thai and Choy Chun Wei. Fauzan’s *Luminosity* series, from



Raduan Man’s *Manusia* (2002) oil on canvas, 130cm by 210cm is estimated at between RM18,000 and RM20,000



Zulkifli Yusoff's *Ahmad and his Shadows* (1996) is estimated at between RM6,000 and RM8,000. The *Ahmad* series highlights the duplicity of people.

the Nineties, consists of a quadruple panel of fabric collage and oil on canvas. Measuring 51cm by 245cm, the artwork is estimated at between RM7,000 and RM10,000. Fauzan obtained his Master's degree in Fine Art from the Maryland Institute College of Art in Baltimore, the US, in 1984.

A solo exhibition was held at the Australian High Commission in Kuala Lumpur in November 1990 and in the catalogue, Wong Hoy Cheong — who participated in the 50th Venice Biennale in 2003 — wrote: "They left me an indelible impression — I was at once repulsed and mesmerised. These paintings compelled me to reconsider my earlier opinions. They were hardly formal. They appeared provocative and [too] serious to be dismissed. I needed and wanted to see more."

Ismail Zain expressed his thoughts on Fauzan's work in the catalogue, writing: "My feeling is when the dust of demystification finally settled on *Abstract Expressionism* and its derivatives in this country, some of Fauzan's works, especially his latest, will emerge as the most significant works to appear at this point in time."

Anthonie Chong's figurative paintings from the Nineties are sought after by seasoned collectors. On offer is *Seated Nude Figure* (1995), measuring 122cm by 91cm and estimated at between RM9,000 and RM15,000, as well as *Morning* (1998), 127cm by 105cm, and set to go under the hammer at the lower estimate of RM14,000.

Market demand

The regular appearance of an artist's work at auction may denote demand in the market. For instance, Kow Leong Kiang's *Facescape of Bali 9*, dated 2015 and measuring 150cm by 120cm, is estimated at between RM28,000 and RM35,000. Known for his portraits of a

young local beauty of the East Coast in idyllic landscapes, Kow has advanced from his rustic and soft treatment to a more gestural approach through his application of brush strokes, as seen in *Facescape of Bali 9*.

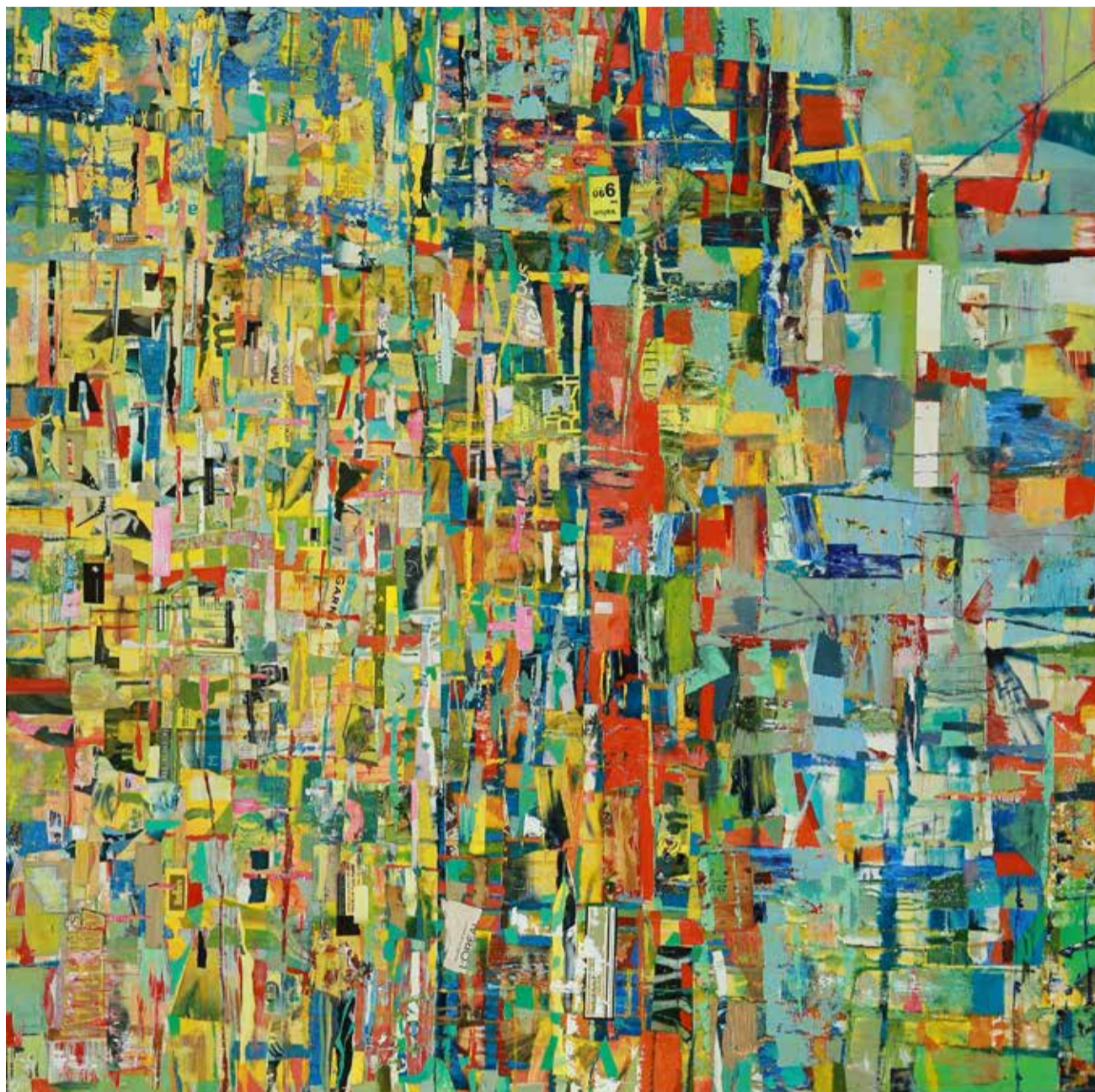
Raduan Man's early abstract work, *Manusia*, dated 2002, offers an opportunity for collectors to enhance their collections to include one of his early endeavours in abstract expressionism. Measuring 130cm by 210cm, the artwork is priced at between RM18,000 and

RM20,000. Known for his printmaking on canvas technique, the artist has recently re-examined gestural and abstract works with a solo exhibition titled *Raduan Man: The Ascension to Abstraction*, which was held at White Box @ Publika Solaris Dutamas, Kuala Lumpur, last year.

One-off works

One of the advantages of acquiring art at auction is that collectors are able to bid for project-based artworks such as Bayu and Shia's. Both works on offer

Choy Chun Wei's *Shredding* (2007), mixed media on canvas, 122cm by 122cm is estimated at between RM9,000 and RM12,000



Detail of *Reclining Figure 6* (2015) by Ahmad Zakii Anwar. It measures 76cm by 182cm and was exhibited at the Maritime Silk Road Art Festival 2015, Shanghai, China.

were created for The F Klub's inaugural exhibition, *Seated*, in 2013. Bayu's *Sitting Waiting Still*, dated 2012, measures 133cm by 163cm. Executed in charcoal on canvas, the work is estimated at between RM29,000 and RM35,000.

Shia's *Return Home with Splendour (Brain Drain)* is also dated 2012 and is 101cm by 138cm. The oil on canvas work will go under the hammer at the lower estimate of RM10,000.

Buying the works of younger contemporary artists gives collectors the opportunity to track their artistic development as well as the intrinsic value over time. An example is rising star Chong Ai Lei. As a young artist, her works are well-received and widely collected. On offer is *Hair Storm 1* and *Hair Storm 2*. Both artworks are painted in oil on canvas and dated 2015. They measure 120cm by 120cm and estimated at between RM12,000 and RM15,000. The works were exhibited at the Maritime Silk Road Art Festival 2015, in Shanghai, China.

The Edge Auction will also be offering artworks that may appeal to a younger group of collectors due to their attractive price points, namely Simon Ong, Kelvin Chap, Stephen Menon and Calvin Chua. Smaller artworks such as Wong Perng Fey's mixed media on paper *Abstract*, dated 1999 and measuring 26cm by 35cm, as well as Wong Chee Ming's acrylic on paper dated 1996, with the same title, and measuring 45cm by 69cm, are some of the options available for artworks under RM5,000. **E**

Supported by Matrix Concepts, The Edge Auction 2017 will be held at the Hilton Kuala Lumpur on March 5. The public preview of the 118 lots will be held at The Edge Galerie in Mont'Kiara, Kuala Lumpur, from Feb 23 to March 3 from 11am to 7pm and on March 4, from 11am-3pm. The gallery is closed on Monday and public holidays. Log on to www.theedgegalerie.com for updates.

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