

# Vivid manifesto

Art collective Anak Alam regroups in a showcase of the evolution of its idealism. **by Sarah Abu Bakar.**

**F**our members of Anak Alam, an influential art collective established in 1974, reunited recently for an exhibition of their latest works in Kuala Lumpur. Mustapa Ibrahim, 70; Maryam Abdullah, 65; Ali “Mabuha” Rahamad, 64; and Mohd Yusoff Osman, 66; showcased 38 paintings at the National Visual Arts Gallery from May 7 to 22.

Titled *Tunjang*, the show was curated by Tan Hui Koon and Baktiar Naim in collaboration with Yusoff’s wife, Siti Zaiton Abdul Hamid. The exhibition was opened by National Visual Arts Development Board member Datuk Taib Ali.

Eight of the works were by Maryam and 10 each by Mustapa, Ali and Yusoff. Presented as a survey show, the recent works were aimed at reflecting the idealism of the collective four decades on.

The name, Anak Alam, was derived from the German expression “Kinder Natur” and was proposed by Latiff Mohidin — one of Malaysia’s most prolific artists — upon its inception on May 1, 1974.

The collective has a manifesto, which emphasises the desire to become one with nature. An excerpt translated from Bahasa Malaysia by artist, curator and activist Wong Hoy Cheong reads:

“we are the children of nature.  
with a consciousness and a love which  
warms to a thousand colours and which  
believes in the freedom of humanity to  
announce its presence in a single force of  
artists communicating with  
the environment with tonalities of language  
and design as our expression  
that is known by all humanity.”

Mustapa’s interpretation of nature is delightfully expressed on rectangular canvases, creating organic outlines that frame multilayered hues of decorative form that resembles fine ornamental woodwork or filigree. He uses the colours of the earth such as sky blue, grass green and sunset orange to create undulating lines and curls that dominate the centre of the canvas.

Maryam’s floral-themed paintings are rendered in an abstract style by reconstructing the shape and colour of flowers blossoming into an explosion of organic lines and dots with a palette of feminine, pastel hues. Although her coarse brush marks convey hesitance, her confidence is projected through the scale of her canvases.

In the Seventies, Maryam, together with Mustapa, managed the premises of Anak Alam colony, known as Rumah 905.

Ali’s surreal dreamscapes depict the enchanting beauty and mystical qualities of dancing women and Mother Nature. The globetrotting artist has travelled extensively in the past four decades, residing in cities such as Amsterdam, Rosenheim and Los Angeles, before returning to Malaysia in 2013. Last year, he held a solo exhibition showcasing his Minangkabau and Angkor Wat series at The Edge Galerie.

Yusoff’s abstract paintings in mixed media are centred around perception, intuition and the existence of life. Executed in dark tones, his works suggest mystery and ambiguity. Apart from being an artist, Yusoff is an avid reader and writer, and has contributed sketches and short stories for publication by organisations like Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka. He is also a theatre set designer and art director.

Yusoff’s exhibitions are managed by his



(From left) National Visual Arts Gallery director-general Datuk Dr Najib Ahmad Dawa, Mustapa, Taib, Ali, Maryam and Yusoff



Maryam’s *Bunga Berkembang Harum Setaman*, an acrylic piece done in 2014 (122cm by 92cm)



Yusoff’s 122cm by 153cm acrylic on board painting, *Alamaya Fata Morgana 2 (Phenomena Low Tide) The Sea is King*, done this year

wife, Siti Zaiton, who was a keen observer of Anak Alam’s activities when she was an art and design student at Mara Institute of Technology in the Seventies.

Housed at 905 Persiaran Tun Ismail in Kuala Lumpur, Anak Alam attracted artists, poets, writers, performance artistes and actors, who congregated, lived, worked and held events there.

In Latiff Mohidin’s journal titled *Catatan*, published in 2010, he noted that among the spontaneous and creative activities carried out in 1974 were “enviro-sculpture, drama, pantomime, playreading and mini-kata, poetry reading, musical performances, light shows, the sounds of genta, ketuk-ketuk and bamboo gamelan, and much more”.

Recalls Siti Zaiton, “The house was always full of activities. People painting, reciting poetry, singing, hammering this, hammering that — making art. I watched them rehearse and perform plays, and followed the group when they had performances at a theatre or by the street.

“Being in their company was an eye-opener. They were friendly and open-minded. The art colony was vacated on Aug 1, 1988, to make way for Kompleks Budaya Negara. Now, it is the art education institution, Aswara.”

At the opening ceremony, speeches were delivered by Taib and Yusoff. There was a guided tour with the artists and curators as well as impromptu performances by Ali, who played the harmonica, and poetry recitals by Pyanhabib, Prof Ismail Abdullah and Mustapa. Among the friends and supporters of Anak Alam who turned up were Buyong Zasdar, Apayee, Shahurin Mohd and Raja Ahmad.

All the exhibited artworks were for sale, with prices ranging from RM8,000 to RM35,000. **E**

For more information about Anak Alam, call Siti Zaiton at (012) 610 5365 or email her at [siti.zaiton@yahoo.com](mailto:siti.zaiton@yahoo.com). Log on to [www.theedgegalerie.com](http://www.theedgegalerie.com) for more.