

**MADE IN
MALAYSIA**
BY AHMAD SHUKRI MOHAMED
WORKS FROM 2010 TO 2017

PREVIEW
27 SEPTEMBER 2017
7PM

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2017
11AM - 7PM
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FOREWORD

PREGNANT WITH MALAYSIAN MEANING

The Edge Galerie is showcasing a diverse and thought-provoking series of works by Malaysian contemporary artist Ahmad Shukri Mohamed from Sept 28 to Oct 13.

The 48-year-old artist has been creating art for over 20 years and his eighth solo exhibition will feature 23 new and recent works. Entitled *Made in Malaysia: Works by Ahmad Shukri Mohamed from 2010 to 2017*, the exhibition will be the first by the artist at our gallery.

The show comprises four series — *Postcards from Malaya*, *Made in Malaysia*, *Golden Gate* and *Text*.

These artworks span seven years and depict Shukri's efforts to "reformulate" the image of his home country and visually and metaphorically "reread our identity".

The concept of his art is not merely about highlighting the superficial elements of Malaysian culture or things that are identified as being Malaysian. It is about the economic, social and political developments in Malaysia since independence and how the country has been projected on the global stage.

Shukri's soul-searching works are imbued with subtle and symbolic elements that trigger a sense of recognition or even chagrin, especially among

those who take a keen interest in national affairs.

Formerly a member of the disbanded Matahati group that was established in 1989 and comprised Bayu Utomo Radjikin, Ahmad Fuad Osman, Hamir Soib Mohamed and Masnoor Ramli Mahmud, Shukri has forged ahead with his own identity and a distinct style since the collective's first group exhibition in 1993.

For instance, his *Golden Gate* series of meticulous paintings show how the country's rainforest, teeming with flora and fauna, is constantly at risk of being destroyed. The threat is viewed as a dark force.

The 208.4cm by 289cm *Garden of Heaven* was completed in 2010. Metaphorically illustrating the Malaysian rainforest, the work signifies the perfection and uniqueness of nature. But how do we utilise, manage and preserve such resources without harming the environment?

In Shukri's latest works in his *Text* series, the idyllic landscape is layered with alphabets — a collage of cut-outs fixed to the canvas and presented as a blackboard: an allusion to the local education system. The artist offers his interpretation of the political climate, reduced through a text and colour-only approach. Pregnant with meaning, it is not hard to read between the lines and fathom the thoughts behind each work.

Influenced by his mentor Fauzan Omar, a former art lecturer at Universiti Sains Malaysia and a respected artist, Shukri has incorporated the technique of fabric collage and layering in his work. He was Fauzan's apprentice for years in the early Nineties.

Among the latest works is a series of images of 12 colonial postcards from various states of Malaya. The images have been transferred onto wood and presented in a variety of gilded frames. Offered as a set and entitled *I Was Here*, the artwork features nostalgic landscapes of the Malayan era, including a kampung house, coconut plantation, colonial buildings by the riverbank, wildlife and a historical scene from Merdeka Day, among others. Shukri has added a quirky touch by incorporating a collage of birds into it.

This series depicts Shukri's printmaking technique in his mixed media approach to art-making. His creativity extends beyond painting. Also featured as part of his work are specially designed frames for works such as *Kami yang Mengikut Perintah — Yes Boss* from the *Text* series, *I Was Here* from the *Postcards from Malaya* series and the *Made in Malaysia* series.

A collection of nine watercolours derived from newspaper clippings of events are illustrated in a liberal manner in the *Made in Malaysia* series.

Symbolic iconography, such as diamond shapes, silhouettes of handbags, luxury cars, armoured tanks, handcuffs, suicide vests and more, comprises some of the top stories published in local newspapers.

Each watercolour is presented in a unique way — every frame is lined with a fabric such as the traditional songket — with a label embroidered with the title of the exhibition, *Made in Malaysia*.

Shukri's paintings are also noted for the way they are framed. The framing is done by Jinjit Station by Patisatustudio, located in Puncak Alam, Selangor. Jinjit Station is a social enterprise established by Shukri and his wife, Umibaizurah Mahir @ Ismail, a ceramic artist.

Last year, The Edge Galerie staged a solo exhibition by Umibaizurah entitled *Fragile by Umibaizurah: Recent Works 2015-2016*.

With the support of Matrix Concepts, The Edge Galerie presents Ahmad Shukri Mohamed's *Made in Malaysia: Works by Ahmad Shukri Mohamed from 2010 to 2017*.

HO KAY TAT
Publisher and group CEO
The Edge Media Group

AHMAD SHUKRI MOHAMED: MADE IN MALAYSIA

When I met with Ahmad Shukri Mohamed last month, he talked about the first Malaysian astronaut and how it had seemed symbolic to him the way life and ambitions in contemporary Malaysia had become so global. In one of his paintings in this exhibition, a spaceman and a rhinoceros meet in the jungle. If the spaceman comes from the future, or what we expect the future to be, the rhino comes from the past: rhinos are now believed to be extinct in Sabah as they are in Peninsular Malaysia. And that is what Shukri's work is often about: making the past and future co-exist in the present — and trying to make sense of it.

For the artist, who was brought up on the east coast of Malaysia, nature has always been a touchstone for his art. He is probably best known and admired for his landscapes, such as 2010's *Garden of Heaven*, which is one of the exhibits here. In it, he portrays the jungle as dense and rich with life and colour. But in many other works, especially in recent years, his jungles are threatened by pollution, the endless expansion of cities and oil palm plantations. At the same time, as adoring as nature is in its "pure" wild state, deploring much of what is seen as "progress", Shukri, like probably everyone else, is beguiled by the notion of a Malaysian in space. And as an artist, he instinctively paints images of despoliation, petty crime and global finance that are still beautiful.

His position is not an uncommon one for an artist today: that of becoming fascinated by what he dislikes most, of making beautiful pictures of ugly things and scenes. Perhaps the archetype of this paradox has

been the American photographer Robert Adams who loved nature and lamented the despoliation of his native Colorado by strip mining, tract housing and the freeways. Yet the pictures he made for his 1974 book *The New West* of trailer parks, traffic interchanges and fields scraped bare by bulldozers are hauntingly beautiful. In an interview, Adams remarked that he wanted to show both "what was wrong so we could try to change it, and what was right so we could take comfort from that". Asked how he did that some years later, he replied, "By refusing to cull away evidence of our abuse of the land and of each other. And then by refusing to turn away from what artists have traditionally celebrated in life — beauty." Or again, as he said in another interview, "the pictures reflect my continuing conviction that no matter how hard life is, the landscape is beautiful. The light. Even over a shopping centre".

If we look at the series of Shukri's paper works in this exhibition, we get a sense of how he attempts his own balancing act between the aesthetic and the moral — between making beautiful things and pointing out ugliness. This *Justice League* series of paper works are his meditation on those images he sees so frequently on the front of newspapers: people being taken to court to stand trial for corruption or gangsterism who invariably hide their heads from the cameras with their clothes. In one, for example, with a suited detective on either side, an alleged gangster pulls his T-shirt up over his face. When printed on the front page of the *Star*, the article beneath the photograph related how police

were tracking down such gangsters who ran illegal gambling dens and protection rackets in Melaka. But Shukri's picture is not just repeated reportage — it has a more dream-like quality. In it, as if infected with a stream of consciousness, other images and assorted spills of colour float into the empty, uncertain space of his painting — the background has disappeared. (In the original photograph, one saw the heavy wooden doors of an official building at the back.) With its flows of gouache, Shukri's work presents a more muted and lyrical scene. The two detectives, ghost-like, seem sombre rather than implacable. Images of trucks loaded with money, a dog, a crane and a spaceship float around them. And to the right is a figure drawn in a very different way — a mesh of lines.

Who could that figure, he or she, be? A judge or a mourner? A wraith or a saddened angel? There is no clear allegory here. As always, Shukri is working instinctively and the painting — its internal logic — requires that figure be there. The picture needs it: we make of it what we will. Personally, I want to think that it is a witness.

Happy Birthday Mao Zedong, Tun Razak is meeting and greeting the leader of the Chinese Communist Party — two thinly painted figures on a bed of red wooden letters chanting again and again the birthday greeting. But the Communist Party was then banned and remains illegal in Malaysia. Shukri has always had an eye for such paradoxes and perversities of politics, for example, the way many projects are signed off before

an election. He notes that behind the nationalistic tub-thumping demand — as in other countries — that one buy only local products, ones marked "Made in Malaysia", people prefer to buy goods from abroad.

The mood or form of address in letter paintings, such as *Happy Birthday Mao Zedong*, is far more sardonic than in the *Justice League* or other paintings. In *Bersih - 'Jalur Gemilang'*, the Malaysian flag is sketched loosely over the endlessly repeated word "Bersih", meaning "clean". Shukri is, of course, referring to corruption and the way it has, as in so many other countries, become endemic. The letter paintings, like the postcard series, allow him to speak more directly, to let out his anger. Also, they show that he has another string to his bow. Like every serious artist, he doesn't want to be trapped in one style or type of work — they give him more scope for experimentation.

This is not to say that they are simplistic. The relationship between word and image or, in the postcard series, bird, grandiose frame and image is complex. It is more food for thought than an easy quick snack. There is more ambivalence and nuances in the large paintings, though. At the most basic level, there are more layers, more elements and more languages. For example, underneath the forest scene where the rhino meets the spaceman, we see another landscape, a virtual landscape, something we might call a "notescape". When first I saw the bottom part of this spaceman painting with these columns of flickering forms, I was reminded of the film *The Matrix* where the

matrix is sometimes revealed as immeasurably large digital displays that act as simulacra of a happier world to pacify the captive and incapacitated humans. This can, of course, be distorted and even interrupted, as we find in the movie. It is not an inappropriate association: an insidious, incredibly powerful illusion. In fact, Shukri was thinking of the way money flickers as it goes through the note-counting machines at the bank or currency exchange. It is, for him, the motif of global capitalism. When we look closer, we see that there are all sorts of notes, dollars, pounds, ringgit, RMB and so on. For him, as for most, the international mobility of money like the matrix of the film is a net that imprisons us.

The title of the painting makes the connection between money, power and property very specifically: *Land for Sale #1*. Only paper money, something of symbolic value, can buy anything, control anything.

In this so fluid, so unreliable a world, where do we find a touchstone? In another painting, one not shown here, a strip of wood between the flows of money and the picture of the forest is taken from an old Malay house. Perhaps that is a touchstone, a fragment of an authentic life and relationship to nature? But there is no such clear touchstone in this exhibition. We are left with our paradoxical life position: how do we protect the forest and all its wildlife but feel comfortable occasionally eating a Big Mac or KFC?

There is clearly no touchstone in that other work

with flicking columns of money, one where the slogan “MADE IN MALAYSIA” appears. Between that slogan and the notescape is the jungle with three balloons floating through it. The other sign in the painting — NO ENTRY — may keep humans out of private property and military bases but it will not keep plastic rubbish, which, after all, is what lost balloons are — beautiful, still and harmonious though they are here.

The balloons in the two paintings *Balloons from Neighbour* (2012) are not so elegant, appearing instead comic and ridiculous. Shukri’s somewhat mordant sense of humour sends them on a parade across the jungle. Humour has always been a way to navigate difficult times, to keep some distance from the world while living in it.

Two other recent paintings similar to *Made in Malaysia*, each with admonitory signs — PRIVATE PROPERTY or NO TRESPASSING — are bitter-sweet, melancholy rather than angry. Across their images of the jungle, fish swim or butterflies flutter. Is he suggesting that today one can only see the jungle through an aquarium or the butterfly lounge in Changi Airport? They also serve, as do the paint splatters or drips on the surface, to emphasise the surface. These are, they remind us, flat paintings. Small strips of colour, like the colour swatches used by photographers accentuate that this is just representation — one is stopped from, tourist-like, slipping into the landscape and enjoying its lyrical beauty in a state of innocence. And, or so it seems, between the jungle and the

painting’s surface float large, beautiful flowers. They seem over-large, dreamlike and strangely unreal.

In a famous book, Marshall Berman wrote that “to be modern is to experience personal and social life as a maelstrom, to find one’s world and oneself in perpetual disintegration and renewal, trouble and anguish, ambiguity and contradiction: to be part of a universe in which all that is solid melts into air. To be a modernist is to make oneself somehow at home in the maelstrom, to make its rhythms one’s own, to move within its currents in search of the forms of reality, of beauty, of freedom, of justice, that its fervid and perilous flow allows”.

But Berman is talking specifically about city life. Is Shukri suggesting that the city and its moods have now effectively colonised the country around it? That under globalism, nature and landscape offer no peaceful refuge from the spectacle of money and commercialisation? Certainly, he presents it as threatened and invaded.

It is a truism, as Simon Schama notes, that we see landscape through the representations we know of it — we see what we expect to see. The difficulty Western artists had in painting Asian or Australian landscapes was because they had a fixed notion of what a landscape should look like. Can we now only know the jungle through Disney’s representation of it in his *Jungle Book* movie?

This is posed again and again: “What is real? What is authentic? In the balloon (*belon* in Malay) “paintings,

which is the dream? The inflatable toys that are so unlike real animals or the landscape behind?” On top of *Balloons from Neighbour #1*, the “real” leopards march as if on an architectural frieze. Do they march towards extinction? We don’t know: things are presented as questions rather than statements.

And it is this asking of questions — never spouting easy answers or solutions — that makes his work complex, intriguing and satisfying. There is beauty still in his paintings and collages but it is not so easily found or secured. But who says understanding the world we live in today is easy? This is an exhibition to both enjoy and think about.

Tony Godfrey, 2017

POSTCARDS FROM MALAYA



I WAS HERE 'MALAYA'
#1/12
 2017
 37.5cm x 46cm
 Mixed media on wood

I WAS HERE 'PENANG'
#2/12
 2017
 36.5cm x 45cm
 Mixed media on wood



I WAS HERE 'MALAYA'
#3/12
 2017
 37cm x 46cm
 Mixed media on wood

I WAS HERE 'KEDAH'
#4/12
 2017
 40cm x 47cm
 Mixed media on wood



I WAS HERE 'KUALA LUMPUR'
#5/12
 2017
 35.5cm x 44cm
 Mixed media on wood

I WAS HERE 'SELANGOR'
#6/12
 2017
 37.5cm x 46cm
 Mixed media on wood



I WAS HERE 'MALAYA'
#7/12
 2017
 47.5cm x 55.5cm
 Mixed media on wood

I WAS HERE 'KUALA LUMPUR'
#8/12
 2017
 37.5cm x 46cm
 Mixed media on wood



I WAS HERE 'PENANG'
#9/12
 2017
 34cm x 42.5cm
 Mixed media on wood

I WAS HERE 'PERAK'
#10/12
 2017
 36.5cm x 45cm
 Mixed media on wood



I WAS HERE 'KUALA LUMPUR'
#11/12
 2017
 39.5cm x 48cm
 Mixed media on wood

I WAS HERE
'MERDEKA MALAYA
31 AUGUST 1957'
#12/12
 2017
 35.5cm x 44cm
 Mixed media on wood

MADE IN MALAYSIA



JUSTICE LEAGUE #1
2017
93cm x 77cm
Mixed media on Arches paper



JUSTICE LEAGUE #2
2017
93cm x 77cm
Mixed media on Arches paper



JUSTICE LEAGUE #3
 2017
 93cm x 77cm
 Mixed media on Arches paper



JUSTICE LEAGUE #4
 2017
 93cm x 77cm
 Mixed media on Arches paper



JUSTICE LEAGUE #5
2017
93cm x 77cm
Mixed media on Arches paper



JUSTICE LEAGUE #6
2017
93cm x 77cm
Mixed media on Arches paper



JUSTICE LEAGUE #7
 2017
 93cm x 77cm
 Mixed media on Arches paper



JUSTICE LEAGUE #8
 2017
 93cm x 77cm
 Mixed media on Arches paper



GOLDEN GATE

JUSTICE LEAGUE #9
2017
93cm x 77cm
Mixed media on Arches paper



BALLOONS FROM NEIGHBOUR #1
 2012
 128cm x 158cm
 Mixed media on canvas



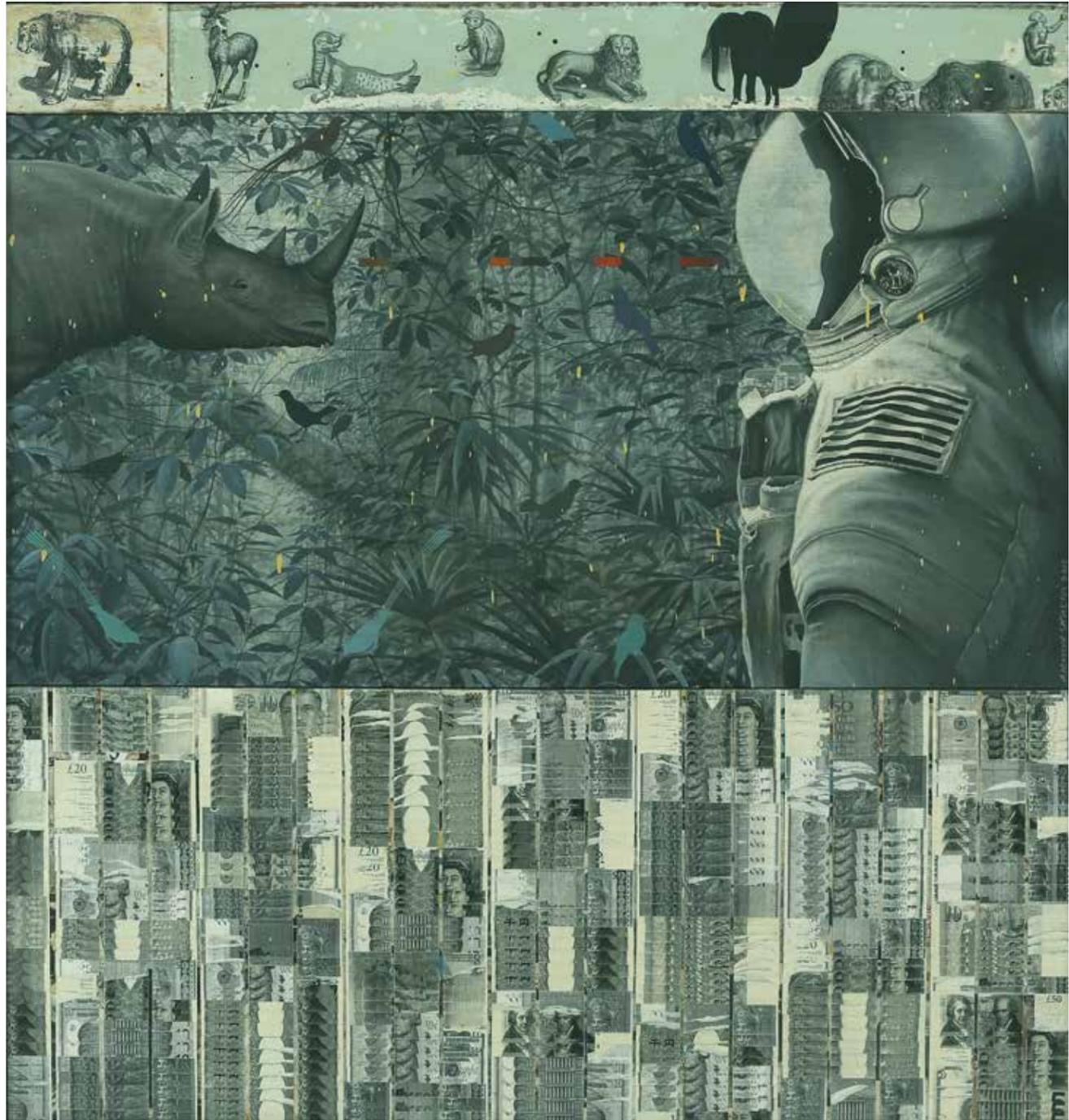
BALLOONS FROM NEIGHBOUR #2
 2012
 128cm x 158cm
 Mixed media on canvas



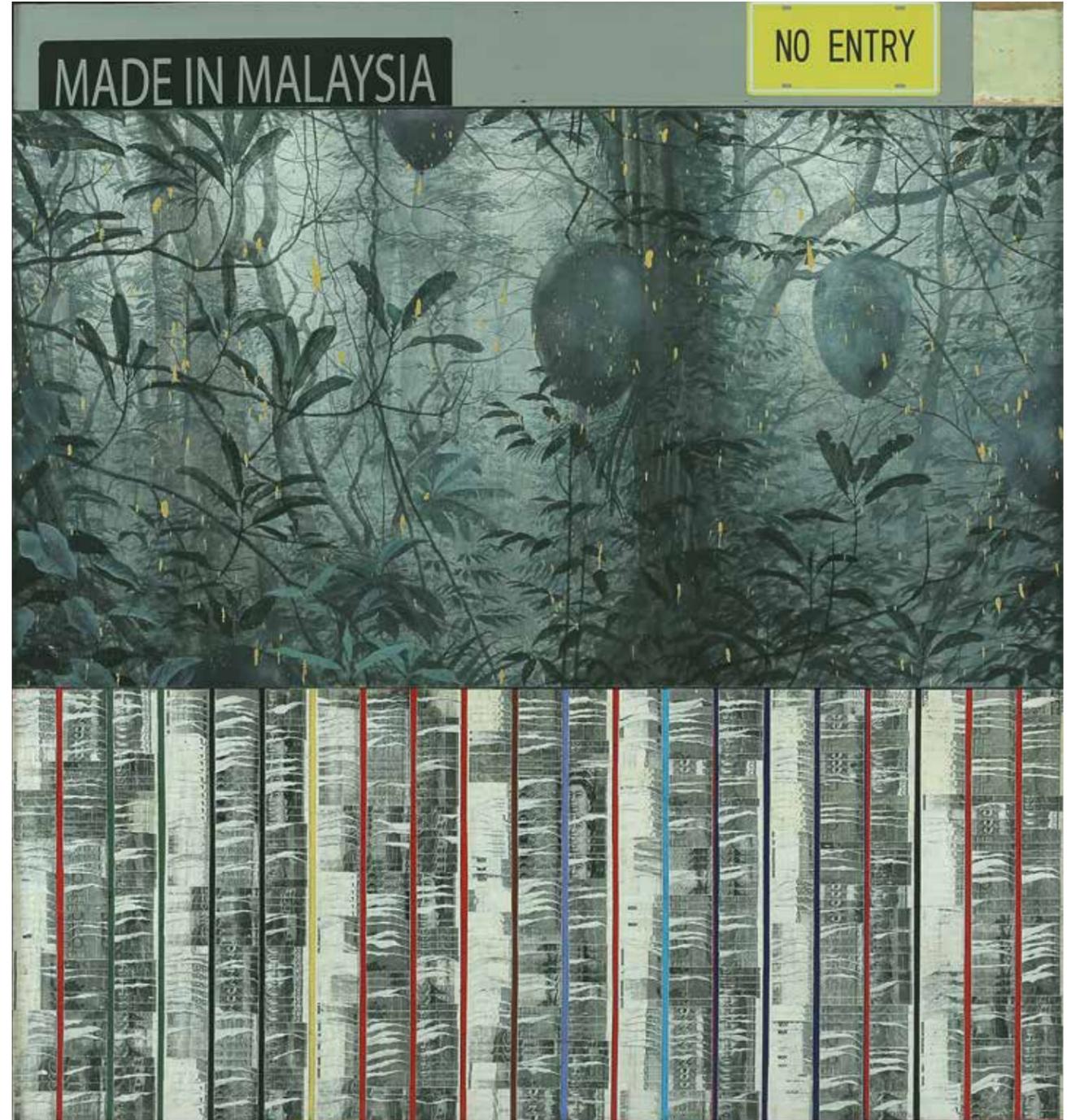
DO NOT ALLOW #1
 2013
 156cmx 174cm
 Mixed media on canvas and wood



DO NOT ALLOW #2
 2013
 156cmx 174cm
 Mixed media on canvas and wood



LAND FOR SALE #1
 2015
 178.5cm x 172cm
 Mixed media on canvas



LAND FOR SALE #2
 2015
 178.5cm x 172cm
 Mixed media on canvas

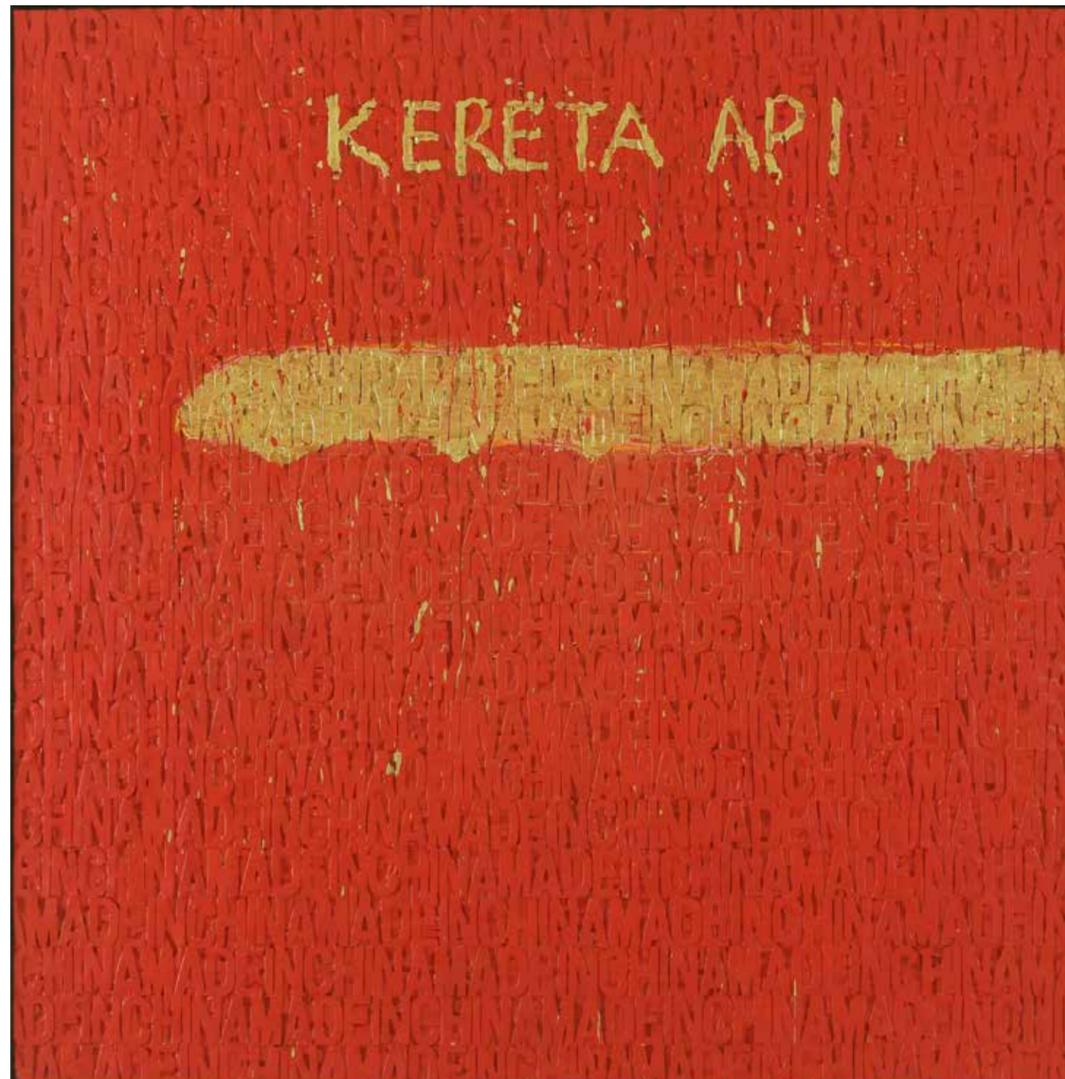


GARDEN OF HEAVEN
2010
208.4cm x 289cm
Mixed media on canvas



TEXT

40



MADE IN CHINA
'PUTRAJAYA ↔ BEIJING'
2017
157.5cm x 157.5cm
Mixed media on canvas

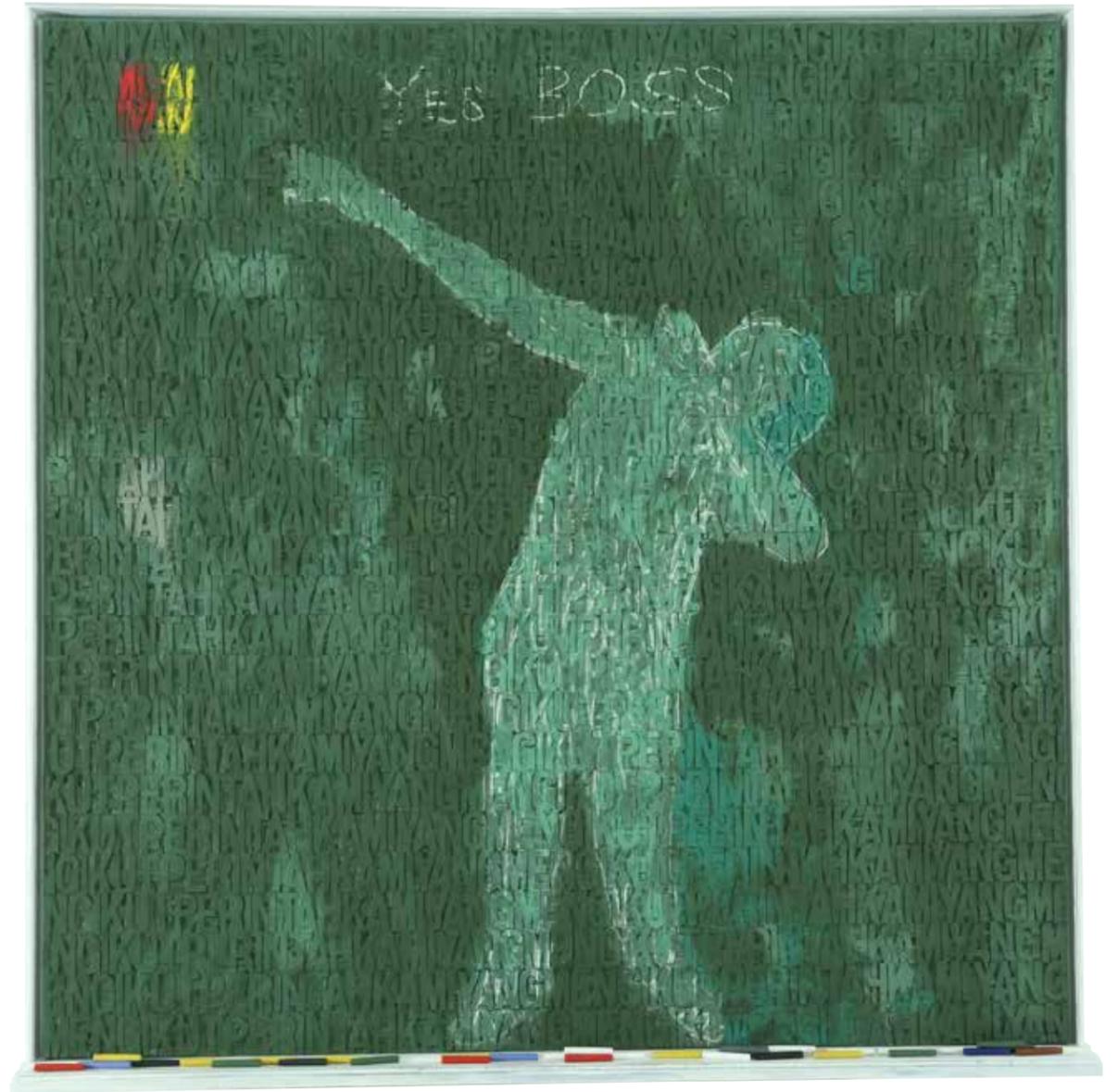
41



MADE IN MALAYSIA
'PUTRAJAYA ↔ BEIJING'
2017
157.5cm x 157.5cm
Mixed media on canvas



BERSIH 'JALUR GEMILANG'
 2016
 157.5cm x 157.5cm
 Mixed media on canvas



**KAMI YANG MENGIKUT PERINTAH
 'YES BOSS'**
 2017
 191cm x 190cm
 Mixed media on canvas





DAULAT TUANKU
'RAJA KAMI'
 2017
 213cm x 213cm
 Mixed media on canvas



HAPPY BIRTHDAY MAO ZEDONG
 2017
 192cm x 281.5cm
 Mixed media on canvas





AHMAD SHUKRI MOHAMED

Born: Aug 29, 1969, Kelantan, Malaysia

EDUCATION

1987-1991 Bachelor of Fine Art, Faculty of Art & Design, MARA Institute of Technology, Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2016 *Kaki Jual*, Nadine Fine Art, Petaling Jaya, Malaysia
 2012 *Golden Gate*, Pace Gallery, Petaling Jaya, Malaysia
 2005 *Fitting Room*, XOAS Gallery, Petaling Jaya, Malaysia
 2003 *Virus*, Art Seasons, Singapore
 2002 *Boy & Girl*, Taksu, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
 2001 *Ahmad Shukri*, Art Salon, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
 1998 *9495969798*, Art Salon, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2017 *New Landscape*, Two-Man Show, Art Seasons, Singapore
Alami Bebas "Be Loved", KL Biennale 2017, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
Art AID 17 Bebas, White Box, Publika, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Belantara, Segaris Art Center, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
 2016 *Art AID 16 Love for Sale*, White Box, Publika, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Art Expo Malaysia 2016, Segaris Art Center, MATRADE Exhibition & Convention Centre, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Transit A2, HOM Art Trans, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
 2015 *The 6th International Maiden Tower Arts Festival*, Baku, Azerbaijan
Art Expo Malaysia 2015, MATRADE Exhibition & Convention Centre, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

2014 *Diversity – Malaysian Arts*, La Galleria, Pall Mall, London, the UK
Route 19, International Exchange Exhibition, Malaysia & Holland, Pace Gallery, Selangor, Malaysia
Tomorrow's Land, Pace Gallery, Selangor, Malaysia
Malaysian Eye: Contemporary Malaysian Art, Saatchi Gallery, London, the UK
Malaysian Eye Project: Exhibition and book launch of Prudential Malaysian Eye: Contemporary Malaysian Art, White Box, Publika, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
 2013 *Five Seasons*, Galerie Norbert Dabekaussen Kunst NDK, Sittard, The Netherlands
 2012 *Art for Nature*, Rimbun Dahan, Selangor, Malaysia
Suarasa, Segaris Art Center, Publika, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
 2011 *World Travel Market 2011*, Exhibition Centre London (ExCel), London, the UK
Work II: 10 Malaysian Artists in Singapore, AndrewShire Gallery, ION Orchard, Singapore
 2010 *Tiang Seri*, Two-Man Show, Ernst & Young, Singapore
 2009 *Matahati ke Matadunia – Malaysian Contemporary Art to the World*, DCA Fine Art, Los Angeles, California, the US
 2007 *Grand Opening – Warning! Tapir Crossing*, Two-Man Show with Umibaizurah Mahir @ Ismail, Patisatustudio, Puncak Alam, Selangor, Malaysia
 2006 *Grand Opening*, Semar Art Gallery Surabaya, Indonesia
18@8 – Contemporary Artists from Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur – Karachi, Karachi, Pakistan

2005 *The 2nd Tupada International Action Art Festival*, Manila, the Philippines
Mager Project: Anting-Anting + Matahati, Pinto Art Gallery, Antipolo City, Rizal, the Philippines
 2003 *Of Shadows and Images*, Malmo Konstmuseum, Malmöhusvägen, Malmo, Sweden
Grand Opening, Art Seasons, Beijing, China
 Sharjah International Biennial, Sharjah, the UAE
 2001 *The 10th Asian Art Biennale Bangladesh*, Bangladesh National Museum, Dhaka, Bangladesh
The 10th International Exhibition, Invited Artist, Brande Hall, Denmark

RESIDENCY

2014 *Route 19: International Exchange Residency*, Patisatustudio, Selangor, Malaysia
 2013 *5 Seasons*, International Exchange Residency, Echt, Amsterdam, the Netherlands
 2004 *EMAAR International Art Symposium*, Dubai, the UAE
 2003 *Sharjah International Biennial*, Sharjah, the UAE Artist in Residence, Rimbun Dahan, Selangor, Malaysia
 2002 A participant of Asian Contemporary Workshop, BRAC Centre for Development Management Rajendrapur, Gazipur, Bangladesh
The 10th International Workshop, Invited Artist, Brande, Denmark

AWARDS

2010 Minor Award, *Mural Satu Malaysia*, National Art Gallery Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
 2001 Honourable Mention, Philip Morris Malaysian Art Awards 2001, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
 1999 Philip Morris Group of Companies ASEAN Art Awards '99, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
 Top Five Winners, Philip Morris Group of Companies Malaysian Art Awards '99, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
 1997 Major Award "Installation", Young Contemporary, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
 The Jurors' Choice Awards, Philip Morris Group of Companies, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
 ASEAN Art Awards 1997, Metropolitan Museum of Manila, the Philippines

COLLECTION

Grand Hyatt, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; Al-Burj Dubai, the UAE; Bank Negara Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; Hijjas Kasturi Associates, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; Remisen Brande, Denmark; Bengal Foundation, Dhaka, Bangladesh; Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy, Dhaka, Bangladesh; Galeri Petronas, KLCC, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; The World Bank, Washington DC, the US; Featherstone Meetinghouse for The Arts, Martha's Vineyard, the US; Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Fukuoka, Japan; Singapore Art Museum, Singapore; Sabah Art Gallery, Sabah, Malaysia; National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; Ascott, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; Mandarin Oriental Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; Galeri Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia; Langkawi Lagoon Resort, Kedah, Malaysia.

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To my collectors, media, fellow artists and friends.

And to all who have been involved either directly or indirectly.

Thank you.

With love
Ahmad Shukri Mohamed, 2017



THE **EDGE**
GALERIE

G5-G6, Mont' Kiara Meridin
19 Jalan Duta Kiara, Mont' Kiara
50480 Kuala Lumpur
Tel +603 7721 8188 / +603 6419 0102
Email: info@theedgegalerie.com

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DESIGNED BY

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Kenny Yap
Suhaimi Yusuf

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COVER

Daulat Tuanku 'Raja Kami', 2017, 213cm x 213cm
Mixed media on canvas

Supported by

