





# ReALISM

ALI NURAZMAL YUSOFF

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## Core Design Gallery

Core Design Gallery is an exclusive boutique art gallery that represents the face of Malaysian contemporary artists and their cutting edge artworks.

With its main philosophy of holding major shows that have critical values and museum qualities, Core Design Gallery aims to create massive awareness on the significance of Malaysian contemporary art through solid art management and important publications.

The gallery is committed to promoting and developing the artists to achieve international standard and global recognition for their quality artworks.



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# Words from the Curator

According to modern and contemporary art researcher Michelle Antoinette, "The history of modern art in Malaysia continues to cast its shadow over contemporary art practice and exhibition."<sup>1</sup> Perhaps this situation is rightly stated as it is true that contemporary art does not emerge from a vacuum but is partly a consequence of undertakings by others in the past; contemporary art is always situated in and influenced by its particular historical and cultural context.

*ReALISM* is not a standalone exhibition of three major works from Ali Nurazmal Yusoff. Rather, it is a narrative of the Malaysian contemporary art in part from the perspective and observation of a contemporary painter who has participated in exhibitions since the mid-90s until today.

An artist with technical skills in figuration and abstraction along with mastery of space, depth, perspective and colours (see later context from *CONNECTING THE DOTS*), Ali Nurazmal pushes beyond the modernist era of Malaysian art into the contemporary art movement, culminating and summing these three threads into a single climatic showcase of *ReALISM*.

Through this project, we will investigate the effect of the Malaysian



art scene on Ali Nurazmal's artistic growth; specifically, how he surmounted the challenges in his path and broke free from pre-defined expectations to become the artist he is today.

The booth is designed in three parts. "Progression", consisting of *Push Button* and selected exhibition posters, press clippings and awards belonging to the artist, offer an overview of his past. This section also pays homage to Ali Nurazmal's extensive documentation of his works and media coverage, even throughout an era when but a smattering of artists recognised the implication of doing so.

"Present" and "Future", represented by *Resurrection* and *Ralik 2* respectively, reveal Ali Nurazmal's recent stylistic developments, also giving viewers a glimpse of what is to

come in his art. Together, the three paintings encapsulate more than two decades of his techniques and ideas.

It seems to be most timely for a debut of *ReALISM* at *Art Stage Singapore 2016*, not as a mere project booth exhibition but rather a summation on the narrative of Ali Nurazmal's evolution through time and even projecting into the future, substantiating his place alongside the finest contemporary painters in Malaysia's history.

<sup>1</sup> Antoinette, M. (2005) *Different Visions: Contemporary Malaysian Art and Exhibition in the 1990s and Beyond*

## Why Ali Nurazmal Yusoff?

The artist was nine when he saw a whale for the first time in his life. "When the whale finally emerged above water, I remember wondering where this massive creature came from and how it got there," he shares. Ever since, the desire to inspire a similar sense of amazement and curiosity in his audience as they viewed his works grew to be one of the key factors driving his art-making.

To date Ali Nurazmal has participated in more than 70 exhibitions, with the first dating back to 1991. As a witness and partaker of local art events for over two decades, he has acquired an in-depth understanding of the industry, warts and all.

He has the rare vantage point of having shown with Malaysian art masters like Ibrahim Hussein, for instance in the 1994 *God, Nature and Man* exhibition when he was still a budding teenage painter, striving and thriving as a notable figurative artist in the 2000s, and being held in high regard by today's young artists as their reference point.

It is perhaps this ability to be conversant in the "language" of different times and age groups – from Generation X to Y to Z – combined with the perceptive eye of an observer and an innate impulse to enchant that enables Ali Nurazmal to bridge the early artists from the Malaysian contemporary art movement in the 90s and the pop surrealists of the late noughties.

While Ali Nurazmal was taught with Western formalistic training, he should not be appreciated from the lens of Western contemporary art. Unlike some of his predecessors who "look at" the West for directions, he creates what Zainol Shariff calls "'art' in the Malaysian context...a native Malaysian vision and idea."<sup>2</sup> True to this context, the idea and final result that Ali Nurazmal achieves in *ReALISM* is a true breed from a contemporary Malaysian perspective.

<sup>2</sup> Shariff, Z. (1994) *Towards An Alter-Native Vision: The Idea of Malaysian Art since 1980*





## Connecting the Dots

Above, left to right:

*Entertainer Goes to Heaven*  
Acrylic on Canvas  
122 cm x 164 cm  
2008

*Entertainer in Love*  
Oil on Canvas  
183cm x 183cm  
2008

Opposite page:

*Imitation Master: After Caravaggio*  
Oil on Canvas  
122 cm x 290 cm  
2009

The progression of Ali Nurazmal runs along the three threads of abstraction, figuration as well as space, depth, perspective and colour that led to his current style seen in *ReALISM*. Only through a thorough understanding of the influences of Malaysian art history and its formalistic training on Ali Nurazmal, are we able to study his style.

### Abstraction

In order to understand the importance and growth of abstract art, we will need to understand some fundamentals of the Malaysian art history. In the late 70s and 80s, the world and Malaysia by extension experienced a revival of Islamic principles and values.

The government had introduced a policy at the 1971 National Culture Congress that established Islam as an vital element in the national culture, in addition to indigenous culture as a foundation and elements integrated from other cultures where fitting. With figurative representations traditionally given a wide berth in Islam, abstract art flourished in the predominantly Muslim nation of Malaysia.

At the same time, the local art scene was showing promising signs

of growth. This was partly accounted for by the homecoming of artists who had received government grants in the 60s and 70s to train in the West.

They brought back to the educational institutions not just upgraded skills, but also refreshing artistic approaches and currents of thought shaped by exposure to globalisation and international art movements. Yusof Ghani, claimed by some to be the master of Malaysian Abstract Expressionism, brought back the influences of American abstract expressionists such as Jackson Pollock and William De Kooning.

The 90s was perhaps the beginning of the Malaysian contemporary art movement. Critically acclaimed artists such as Zulkifli Yusoff, Tan Chin Kuan and Eng Hwee Chu surfaced, followed by the Matahati group in the mid-90s and internationally acclaimed artist Shooshie Sulaiman in the late 90s, seeds the various forms and mediums of Malaysian art. However, abstraction was still very much a trend in the Malaysian art market during the 90s right up to the mid-2000s, with the likes of Yusof Ghani and his influential *Tari* and *Biring* series.

Meanwhile, the New Economic Policy (NEP) formed in 1971 to reduce poverty in the country and increase Bumiputera economic

equity from around 3% to 30% in 20 years meant that science and technology was given priority over the arts, indirectly impinging on the development of art infrastructure in the country.<sup>3</sup>

It was into a world bearing traces of these changes that Ali Nurazmal stepped. During his art studies at Institut Teknologi MARA (ITM), now known as MARA University of Technology (UiTM), in the late 90s, much focus was placed on honing the technical skills of the students, with recognition being doled out based on impeccable technique. One of the products of this system was graduates who did not instantly find it natural to adopt a discerning and intellectual approach to their art.

Untold numbers of shows, artists and artworks were inadequately documented, and thereafter disappeared into an abyss of oblivion – missing threads of the Malaysian art history narrative that rendered the overall tapestry frayed and incomplete. Furthermore, critical curation was missing from many exhibitions, as was the artists' awareness of how their artworks interacted with the space and other artworks in the show.

Although Ali Nurazmal still painted figures, on the whole his *ReALISM* works shown in galleries from the 90s and 2000s veer towards





the spontaneity of the Abstract Expressionism movement. For example, in *Faith, Plurality and Freedom* (2006), he painted the *Dominator*, followed by *Konflik – Which One #1 #2 #3* (2007) and *Entertainer in Love* (2008). These works mark the inception of the artist's semi-abstract style of painting that uses radiating lines to interpret form and motion.

### Space, Depth, Perspective and Colour

Ali Nurazmal did a considerable amount of research in the name of his craft. Not content with just reading about theories, he came to realization on the importance to enhance his fundamental basics and mastery of space, depth and perspective for his artistic development.

Where paintings are often two-dimensional in contrast to our three-dimensional reality, it was vital for one to illustrate the expanse of things and create the illusion of depth within a single limiting canvas. For this, he ventured into interior design for two years to obtain further understanding on realistic form and space.

Equipped with his interior design know-how, Ali Nurazmal produced various paintings that expanded on play with space and depth. Out of the many paintings, one notable and personal favourite of his is *Entertainer Goes to Heaven*. In a purely linear composition, Ali Nurazmal uses the clown as but one object in his interior still life. The table works first to divide the surface of the painting then to penetrate it, implying a great deal of space with the addition of linear perspective.

Curiously Ali Nurazmal chanced upon an opportunity to venture into the advertising and printing industry. As fate has its unique way of unveiling itself, it was during this five-year period from 2003 to 2008 that reinforced the path of Ali Nurazmal's artistic career.

It was through the management of the printing press that further enhanced his understanding of colours, granting him the expanded ability to identify even the most minute nuances among colour values and the acute eye to detect tiny changes in colours to create depth.



Paramount to the career development of any artist, the advertising work that Ali Nurazmal underwent brought about an in-depth understanding for the artist of his audience and their preferences. Aside from his technical skills that was formed during his formalistic education, the exposure within the advertising arena provided him with conceptual ideas and differing creative approaches that were necessary for the development of his contemporary art.

A master of colour values perhaps must be credited to Anuar Rashid for whom Ali Nurazmal has immense respect as one of the important painters in Malaysia art history. In Anuar's legendary *Inderaputera* series in 1970s, the use of explosive colours and varying tones set the precedent to the ways colours were used to create atmospheric perspective and equivocal space that hailed him the genius of his era.

With this, Ali Nurazmal's keen study of his personal observations coupled with his technical know-how brought forth the interesting use of varying red tonal values that can now be seen in the *ReALISM* works, giving it the push and pull factor in his paintings.

Opposite page:

*Great Festival*  
Oil on Canvas  
183 cm x 457 cm  
2009-2010

Above, left to right:

*Medicine Seller 1*  
Mixed Media on Paper  
152 cm x 92 cm  
2010

*Medicine Seller - Phenomenal*  
Charcoal on Paper  
164 cm x 114 cm  
2011

*Magician 1*  
Charcoal on Paper  
76 cm x 56 cm  
2010





## Figuration

In the noughties, the general perception of figurative art had changed. One of the factors was globalisation. Approaching the turn of the millennium, the country's overall economy experienced a boom – an outgrowth of Vision 2020, a monumental program unveiled in 1991 to propel the country towards becoming a fully-developed industrialised nation by 2020.

One component of the program involved establishing a progressive and technologically-advanced society. As a result of the improved technology infrastructure and access to the internet, the flow of information from other parts of the world – the West in particular – grew from a trickle to a gush during the 2000s.

The surge of internet was important to the younger generation who began to move towards mixed media, assemblage and installation and newer mediums. With the globalisation in effect, these alternative mediums also became a more acceptable form of art.

Instead of pursuing another medium for his expression in art, Ali Nurazmal persisted with his paintings. He took to imitating

Caravaggio, brushing up his skills in form-rendering. During the late 90s to early 2000s, Amron Omar who had 30 years of drawing and painting figurative art with a true formalistic understanding of form and figures in his seminal *Silat* series was an influential figure among the young generation of artists including Ali Nurazmal Yusoff in his 2000s.

His earlier works such as *Entertainer in Love* (2008) was a marked attempt of pursuing his very own style. Upon closer study, the clown figure was "flat" as his technical understanding on figuration was still lacking in his earlier years.

Thus taking a step back, Ali Nurazmal began painting clowns and cartoon characters naively and freely to allow another part of his creativity to flow while exploring figuration and his self-identity. This led to the derision of some collectors, who taunted that he would at best remain a comic artist instead of becoming a bona fide figurative artist.

Undeterred by their barbs, for his first solo exhibition *Satire in Paint* in 2009, Ali Nurazmal painted *Imitation Master: After Caravaggio*.



Its visuals were inspired by *Cardsharps*, a painting by 16th century Italian artist Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio presenting a young man swindled by two cardsharps.

Unlike the original painting, the artist painted himself standing in the shadows of the room; he had observed the silent exchange between the crooks and was eager to reveal their trickery.

The artwork, measuring more than three meters in length, combined elements that he had been exploring for years – figures, the conflict between Eastern and Western influences and chiaroscuro or the contrast of light and dark to shape volume. Taking six months of non-stop painting to complete, the artwork was all for the sake of understanding form-rendering and pushing his formalistic training further in figurative art.

The painting and subsequent works from his second solo *TellTale* in 2010 like *Letter for Mona* and *Force of Nature*, significant to Ali Nurazmal's career as they were, laid the groundwork for the next phase of his artistic journey: *ALISM*.

Opposite page:

*Letter for Mona*  
Acrylic on Canvas  
137.5 cm x 305 cm  
2010

Above:

*Force of Nature*  
Oil on Canvas  
140 cm x 284 cm  
2010





# ALISM

## Challenging the Status Quo

Above:

*Imitation Master: After Caravaggio II*  
Oil on Canvas  
168 cm x 352 cm  
2012

Opposite page:

*Feeling Good*  
Oil on Canvas  
152 cm x 152 cm  
2012

Like a musician just after composing a string of chart-topping hits, after his two solo shows Ali Nurazmal repeatedly questioned himself – what next?

He continued creating art, but years passed before he would create another massive painting à la *After Caravaggio* or *Great Festival*. Finally, in *ALISM*, Ali Nurazmal's third solo held in 2012 at Core Design Gallery, the artist decided that he was ready to dismiss the murmurs of his detractors that *After Caravaggio* was a fluke.

The 3.5-metre long *Imitation Master: After Caravaggio II*

incorporates eight figures, all drawn proportionally and freehand sans tracing, projectors or gridlines, a practice that Ali Nurazmal has maintained since the start of his career. A few hundred snapshots were taken daily, charting the progression of *Imitation Master: After Caravaggio II*, and formed into a stop-motion film as a further testimony on the authenticity of Ali Nurazmal's freehand painting style.

His Caravaggio paintings are more than mere derivations, which many technically stellar artists can accomplish with flair. To be sure, in part they form a study on the dramatism of the master's





works, which were as tempestuous as the personality and life of the artist that painted them. Viewers did not just look at Caravaggio's paintings, but it was as if they could step into the large, realistic scenes lit in theatrical fashion, as one steps into an adjacent room.

However, by inserting himself as well as various local touches amongst the men in Caravaggio's *The Calling of Saint Matthew*, Ali Nurazmal also became the director of his own play, watching his handpicked cast of elements – the classic and the contemporary, the East and the West – interact and contrast against each other. His ability to make the old relevant to our world today by seamlessly blending undertones of globalisation's influence on our daily lives into renowned figurative Western works, established him as an figurative artist to be reckoned with.

Interestingly, Ali Nurazmal's self-portraits be it the *Imitation Master* series or especially his *Smoker* series has turned out to be a phenomenon, producing some of his most important pieces such as *Feeling Good* and *Supplier* despite critics condemning the works as a product of his ego and self-obsession.

These self-portraits are very much based on his research and experimentation with light, colour and form. His methodology of executing numerous studies of the same self-portraits with subtle

compositional changes is typical of a figurative-formalist approach.<sup>4</sup>

Not just a solo exhibition by Ali Nurazmal, *ALISM* was a bid to revolutionise and set a precedent for the system of artist representation by galleries – a system that was lacking in the earlier years, causing a gap in the narrative of Malaysian contemporary art.

*ALISM* was planned more than one and half years in advance by Ali Nurazmal and Scarlette Lee, owner of Core Design Gallery. It covered important elements of curation, media coverage, writing and most importantly documentation, providing a narrative for future reference which was somehow not among the primary concerns of most private commercial galleries.

<sup>4</sup> Brown, C. & McLean, C. (2003), *Drawing from Life – Third Edition*, p. 194-217



Opposite page:

*Networking*  
Oil on Canvas  
122 cm x 76 cm each (set of 4)  
2012

This page, clockwise from top left:

*Smoker*  
Oil on Canvas  
153 cm x 153 cm  
2012

*One in a Million*  
Oil on Canvas  
153 cm x 153 cm  
2011

*Never Learn*  
Oil on Canvas  
168 cm x 168 cm  
2012

*Infernal Affair*  
Oil on Canvas  
168 cm x 168 cm  
2012







Above:

*Smoking Tiger*  
Oil on Canvas  
137 cm x 243 cm  
2014

Opposite page, left to right:

*The Glint*  
Oil on Canvas  
184 cm x 168 cm  
2014

*The Glory*  
Oil on Canvas  
183 cm x 168 cm  
2014

## I n c u b a t i o n

Black, White and Grey Areas

Post-ALISM and having made his name in the art scene as a brilliant colourist and realist painter, a familiar question resurfaced for Ali Nurazmal: what next?

The ebb and flow of market whims became of little consequence to him, but this posed a different challenge altogether. During this period, he often mentioned using his works as a series of studies on creating an “ultimate painting”, but perhaps the phrase was not so much about reaching a destination, as being in pursuit of his true voice, identity and style.



To achieve a greater sense of realism in his art, he revisited the basics. For many months, he painted only in greys, with highlights of black and white, learning to handle colour values and the contrast of light and dark with a precision that was near scientific. He also participated in significant exhibitions throughout 2013 and 2014, such as *Grande* and the *Great Malaysia Contemporary Art (GMCA)* show by Core Design Gallery. And as his repertoire grew, so did his confidence of manipulating space and depth from *Smoking Tiger* to *The Glint* and *The Glory*.

As a case in point, let us take a look at the former two. The first, while displaying his feathery brushstrokes and realist figures, lacked a certain tension in its composition and overall vigour. In the second, he tackles a more challenging bottom-up perspective, combining it with intricate detailing in the ripples of smoke to create a punchy portrait that is surreal yet realistic.



*The Glint*, featured in *GMCA II*, was perhaps one of the most important paintings in the transition towards his breakthrough in 2015, culminating his technical studies of looking at colours but imagining and painting in shades of grey.

*The Glory*, his entry in the well-received exhibition, portrayed his experience when he reached the peak of Mount Kinabalu. In the course of a few seconds, he'd been overwhelmed by a rush of emotions – exhaustion from the climb, trepidation at the thought of making his way down and above all, sheer satisfaction.

In painting not only the moment but alluding to the before and after of the moment, he was depicting a time lapse of sorts, making *The Glory* a prelude of Ali Nurazmal's inclusion of movement in his paintings.





Face Off  
Oil on Canvas  
153cm x 274cm  
2015

## Breakthrough

By the end of 2014, after more than a year of painting exclusively in monochrome, Ali Nurazmal was ready to inject colour back into his artworks. Despite his use of a greyscale colour scheme, which some might find limiting, it was as if the restriction had liberated something in him.

Whereas previously he often felt the need to represent colours exactly as they were in real life, now when translating his black and white works back into colour, he no longer felt the same restraint. There was no reference image to dictate the colours to be used; he was free to improvise from his imagination. This is apparent in *Face Off* where he creates volume and depth with broad expressionist brushstrokes in a spectrum of rich, unexpected shades.

From the single perspective of his prior work *The Glint*, the self-portrait of *Face Off* diverged into three different angles, indicating yet another development in Ali Nurazmal's style: motion. Emerging from the background, the body language of man in the painting oozes an air of self-assurance, directly confronting the viewer with his gaze and then turning away to release an upward stream of smoke.

The subsequent *Abstrak: Kini dan Dulu* exhibition in 2015 brought forth *Patriotic*, one of Ali Nurazmal's most interesting artworks to date due to its strong – if somewhat more literal than is typical of him – conceptual approach mixing abstraction and figuration. As the exhibition coincided with the Malaysian Independence Day, he employed the visual of an easily recognisable icon, the





Above and left:

*Patriotic*  
Oil on Canvas  
183 cm x 320 cm  
(7 interchangeable panels)  
2015

Opposite page:

*Ralik*  
Oil on Canvas  
183cm x 335cm  
2015



national flag of Malaysia, to illustrate his concept and express his bottled-up thoughts about the socio-political situation in the country.

The artwork took up seven interchangeable panels, which in itself posed the challenge of constantly switching them around while painting to ensure the accuracy of the figures. When the panels were arranged to present the flag in whole, images of the central figure and people were in disarray. Conversely, when the panels were shuffled to piece together the central figure, the flag became jumbled.

In this way, the artwork could be construed in several ways. It questioned the meaning of true unity in a society and the importance of presenting an image of stability to evoke confidence versus acknowledging the chaos of reality before finding a way to bring these discordant parts and people together.

Performing arts, namely contemporary dance, became Ali Nurazmal's inspiration for his next artwork, *Ralik*, shown in the *Reason 4 Season* exhibition at *Art Expo Malaysia Plus 2015*. In many aspects contemporary dance resembles contemporary art, as it continually evolves to incorporate elements like new philosophies and music or even actions from daily life, making each dance move a statement that reflects current events and the dancer's influences.

It was this aspect of contemporary dance that so captivated him. Observing the dancer's immersion in her craft during her performance, he was also reminded of the modern man's obsession with social media and technology, which had led to detachment in our face-to-face relationships with one another.

In *Ralik*, we can discern Ali Nurazmal's technical development from *Face Off*. His semi-abstract depiction of motion is refined



'R' Evo  
Oil & Print on OSB (Oriented Strand Board)  
191 cm x 371 cm x 8 cm  
2015

further here, conveying a certain restlessness in the dancer as she twirls about the stage, creating shapes and lines in space.

And to round off his breakthrough year, the artist participated in *X Canvas*. The exhibition gave artists the freedom to showcase the latest developments in their techniques without using paint on canvas as a medium. It was the ideal opportunity for Ali Nurazmal to demonstrate a method he had been exploring for a while – printing on oriented strand board (OSB), a type of engineered particle board.

For '*R' Evo*, taking the image of *Ralik*, he printed it on three layers of board as an extension of his play with space and time, with a final layer of oil paint adding to the work's tonal richness. The character in the painting did not just vacillate between two points on a single plane, but now, owing to the boards, could move forward and backward in actual physical space.

'*R' Evo* also displays what the artist calls "sculpted brushstrokes". Visually, the work can be likened to the aftermath of an action painting where the artist shows how his exaggerated brushstrokes would have appeared if not for the boundaries of the rectangular canvas. Its amorphous nature caused the artist to rethink the flow of movement and light within his work, bringing an enhanced fluidity to his brushstrokes and composition.







*Push Button*  
Oil on Canvas  
229 cm x 153 cm  
2015

# R e A L I S M

## The Bridge

### Push Button

*Everyone has intentions within their heart; it all depends on whether they are ready to take the first step...*

The man in the painting seems to have become aware of the need to spark a change, be it in himself or in the society. All it takes is the push of a button but...he hesitates. He glances from left to right and stretches his hand towards the button, allowing it to hover. The viewer watches all these as if the scene is played in slow-motion.

This indecision reflects Ali Nurazmal's uncertainty in the past of finding his own favoured style and achieving the elusive equilibrium between abstraction and figuration, being swayed by the various pre-defined expectations and restrictions placed on him by others and the market forces.

By locating the button in the foreground of the painting, seemingly within the reach of the viewers, he also extends an unspoken question to them – will they or won't they take up the challenge to be the person that brings about change in their respective worlds?

*Push Button* also combines elements from Ali Nurazmal's earlier works, through his well-known foreshortening perspective previously seen in works like *Great Festival* (2010) and *The Glint* (2014). Also visible are his smoothly rendered colours, realist forms and use of a tightly-framed frontal self-portrait, reminiscent of *Never Learn* (2012) and works from his *Smoker* series like *Supplier* (2011) and *Feeling Good* (2012).

It is evident that self-portraits are an important feature in his body of work, from early paintings during his formative years to the Caravaggio paintings in the late 2000s to his current works. They very much represent his observational nature, whereby he uses the most basic portrait at his disposal as a lens through which he views the world, as well as a monologue for incidents happening in the country, the local art scene or internally.

Following through Ali Nurazmal's artistic career, it is clear that Ali Nurazmal is an observer at heart, of his surroundings, the people around him, fellow notable artists and even of current events or art and historical developments. He is always keen to observe and understand things which often go unnoticed by the general masses. Notably in his *Imitation Master* series, his paintings were a result of his observations granted with a touch of satirical humour.

Now three years after his phenomenal *ALISM* show, he strives to set the stage again, no longer bound or bothered by negativity or meeting undue expectations. Ali Nurazmal took to refining his expressive strokes of abstraction, mastering form and light in his figuration techniques.

His confidence grew as his play with space and depth through colours and black-and-white gained recognition. Through an accumulation of the abovementioned factors, Ali Nurazmal pushes the limitations of the two-dimensional paintings on canvas.

Stepping into a new phase of his life and detailed study of art through the years, Ali Nurazmal now seeks to share his observations in a more mature and serious note. *ReALISM* touches on the basics of human psyche with this set of three paintings. His learnings about human sociology, also taking into account Islamic teachings, narrate these three paintings as a whole concept of human nature.

This was conveyed through the strong array of red tonal values and layering of expressive strokes that creates a dizzying ritualistic movement, indulging the viewer into deep contemplation as if to achieve a "spiritual communion".

Through pre-*ALISM*, *ALISM* and post-*ALISM*, it is interesting to note that it took continuous studying of the diverse disciplines in painting – be it figuration or abstraction – to arrive at *ReALISM*.





*Resurrection*  
Oil on Canvas  
229 cm x 305 cm  
2015

### **Resurrection**

*As one desires for something, his or her thoughts will naturally form a prayer to seek...*

*Resurrection*, on the other hand, exemplifies the present push and pull between figuration and abstraction in Ali Nurazmal's art. A particularly demanding artwork for the artist emotionally, mentally and technically, he first paints the figures, layers abstract waves on top, and then continues rendering and defining the figures. He performs these steps again and again to the point that the figures are interwoven into, even consumed by, the radiating, sinuous waves.

These expressionist waves have appeared at significant turning points in his career, such as *Faith, Plurality & Freedom (Dominator, 2006)*, *ALISM (Infernal Affair, 2012)*, and the *Great Malaysia Contemporary Art show (The Glint, 2014)*. Each time, he returns to the lines to re-explore movement and form, and each time he achieves a new level of depth, intensity and detail that propels him to the next breakthrough in his art-making.

*Resurrection* tells the story of a man rising from defeat and discouragement. His bowed head and dejected eyes at the top of the painting are overlapped with a head of a phoenix, the latter's piercing stare intimidating and triumphant. At the centre of the painting, we see the same man but this time with his arms thrown outward and his mouth open in a rousing roar, as though employing the last vestiges of his energy to overcome one final hurdle.

While the man and phoenix portray the earnest prayer of the artist to bring Malaysian art to the international arena, as well as the struggles – and personal victory – of the artist in overcoming stagnancy in his art, they also symbolise the overriding need of rebirth or restoration for the current socio-political situation in Malaysia.







Previous spread:

*Ralik 2*  
Oil on Canvas  
183 cm x 457 cm  
2015

## Ralik 2

*Man can plan, but ultimately the fulfilment of these plans depends on God Almighty...*

Once again Ali Nurazmal prepares a stage, except that this time he has pared down his cast list to a single performer, allowing her the space to move about freely. Like in *Ralik*, the artwork conveys a contemporary dancer engrossed in a performance that shifts between the conscious and subconscious, which Ali Nurazmal compares to a collection of stories and statements about daily life.

Composition-wise, *Ralik 2* has been refined from its predecessor. The semi-abstract brushstrokes might seem to be chaotic, but it actually directs the viewer's eyes in an intuitive flow around the canvas. While *Ralik* was "lit" by two lights in the left and right of the painting that symbolised choices, *Ralik 2* has just one. Through the artwork, the artist envisages a future where a choice has been made and agreed upon, an optimistic future where a diverse society moves together in one direction and makes concerted efforts with one mind.

Ali Nurazmal's on-canvas colour swatches – the row of short vertical lines at the bottom of paintings like *Force of Nature* and *Great Festival* – make a re-appearance in *Ralik 2*. For the musically-inclined artist, warm and cool colours had always corresponded with low- and high-pitched tones in his internal ear. The inclusion of the swatches was his way of indicating the "tunes" that went with the paintings. In *Ralik 2*, the swatches have evolved, and are now incorporated into the landscape in the form of vertical brushstrokes.

Brought up as a Muslim since birth, it is inevitable that Ali Nurazmal's faith also plays a part in the formation of his works. His exploration of space in *Ralik 2* is one example of this. The horizontal plane that the dance is performed on is a reference to the Islamic principles of *hablum minallah* and *hablum minannas*, our relationship with God and relationship with man respectively.

For the artist, the God to man relationship is expressed through the vertical, while the human to human relationship is expressed

through the horizontal. Thus for *Ralik 2*, he chooses the landscape format, as to him the work suggests that we need to work out our socio-cultural and interpersonal issues with others in order to make peace in our vertical relationship with the divine.

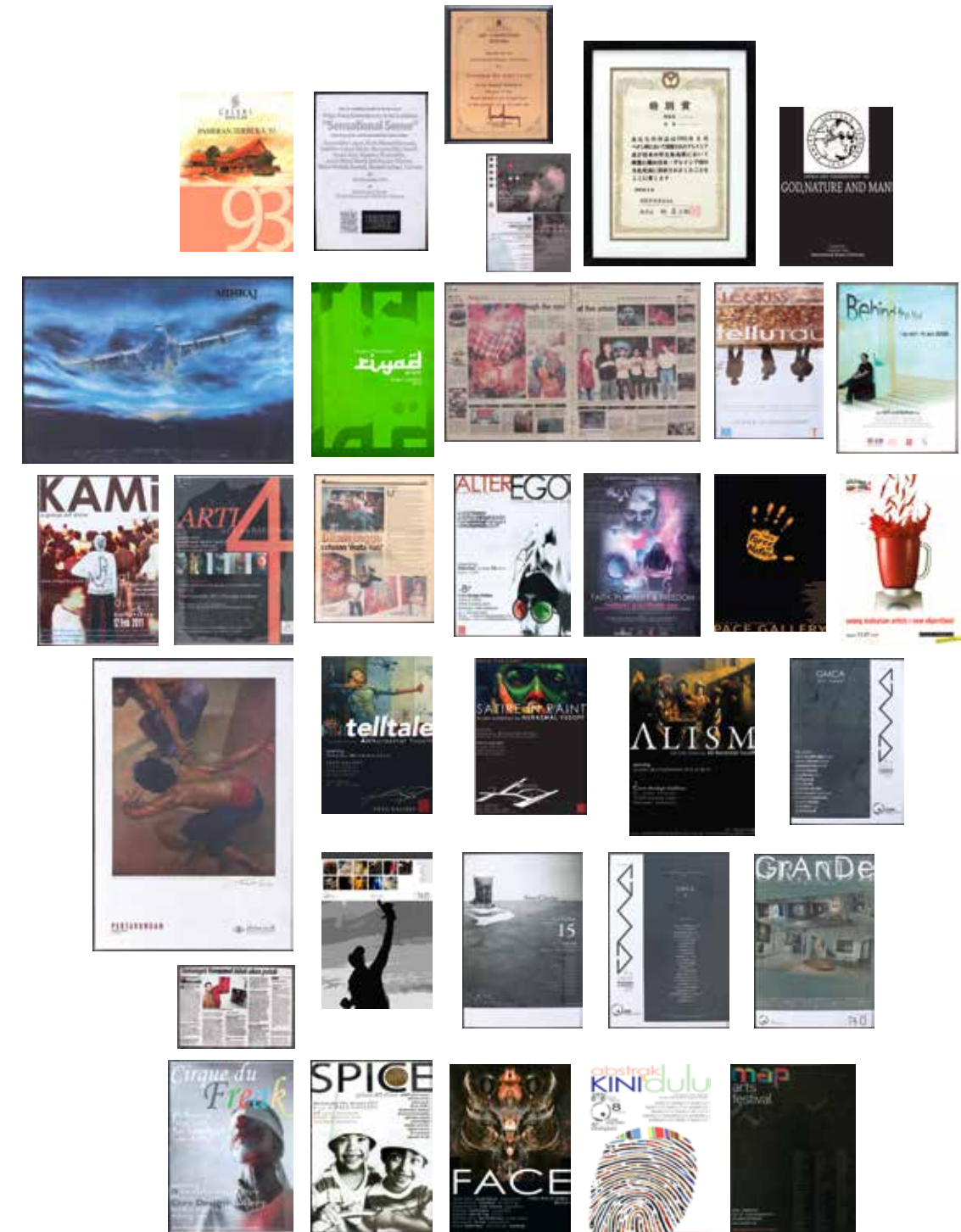
True to his nature, however, the allusion to his faith is never loud and always subtle. Even without knowledge of it, the viewer can still appreciate the artist's skilful use of colour planes to give the impression of a tiered landscape receding into the shadows, a progression from the first *Ralik* in terms of the scene's added depth.

Looking back, Ali Nurazmal has indeed come a long way. He started out being trained to be technically impeccable, but along the way went back to relearn the basics, tackling subjects like self-portraits and apples to fine tune his formalistic training in form and figures. He has since moved on from reacting to the chaotic pressures of society to finally responding with his own brand of semi-abstractness that combines measured and instinctive brushstrokes and the best of figurative and abstract worlds.

"In the end, it's not about competing against others but fighting stagnancy and keeping yourself challenged," the artist explains. And judging on his trajectory over the past 20 years, it's highly likely that not just him, but his audience will continue to find plenty to be excited about in his artworks for years to come.

Ali Nurazmal Yusoff is the epitome of a true Malaysian and represents that which is truly Malaysian in his art and in his ways. As an artist, he remains dedicated to his choice of career, persevering through the then lacklustre Malaysian art industry and the country's systematic chaos. Amidst all the multiracial and multicultural ways of Malaysia, he revels in and stands by its colourful society.

It is an inherent nature in Malaysians, Ali Nurazmal included, to assimilate the effects of globalisation and other events or matters that one may encounter...to adopt and adapt, often forging ideas that appeal to a wider audience, beyond the barriers of culture and nationalities. *ReALISM* is a testament of what Malaysia – and its art – is, in all its grandeur and quirkiness.





Previous page, rows from top to bottom and left to right:

**Open Art Exhibition**, Galeri Shah Alam, 1993  
**Sensational Sense Exhibition** by LimKokWing  
University College, Kuala Lumpur Life Centre,  
2006

**Art Competition Diploma – Top Five Grand Prize**, International Olympic Committee, 1993  
**Pancawarna: Seni Rupa Kasih**, Pelita Hati Gallery of Art, 2007

**Malaysia and Japan Art Competition Grand Prize**, Superintendent Board Education of Osaka City, 1995

**God, Nature and Man**, Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Malaysia, 1994

**Mihraj – Aku Hanya Seorang Tukang Cerita**  
by Anuar Rashid, National Visual Arts Gallery Malaysia, 2014

**Riyad Al-Ilm: Garden of Knowledge**, Galeri Chandan, 2010

**“Through the Eyes of Five Artists”** – News Straits Times, 2009

**Tellu Tau**, LookKiss Gallery, 2008

**Behind the Wall**, USM Penang, 2007-2008

**Kami**, Arti Gallery, 2011

**Arti4**, Arti Gallery, 2011

**“Dikalajingga cetusan ‘mata hati’”** – Sinar Harian, 2009

**Alter Ego**, Core Design Gallery, 2010

**Faith, Plurality and Freedom**, Pelita Hati Gallery of Art, 2006

**Here and Now: Force of Nature**, Pace Gallery, 2008

**Young Malaysian Artists: New Object(ion)**, Galeri Petronas, 2010

**Pertarungan** by Amron Omar, National Visual Arts Gallery Malaysia, 2012

**Telltale**, Pace Gallery, 2010

**Satire in Paint**, Pace Gallery, 2009

**ALISM**, Core Design Gallery, 2012

**Great Malaysian Contemporary Art (GMCA)** by Core Design Gallery, Art Expo Malaysia 2013

**“Semangat Nurazmal tidak akan Patah”**, 2006

**Grande II**, Core Design Gallery, 2015

**Soya Cincau**, Core Design Gallery, 2014

**Great Malaysian Contemporary Art (GMCA) II** by Core Design Gallery, Art Expo Malaysia 2014

**Grande**, Core Design Gallery, 2014

**Cirque Du Freak**, Core Design Gallery, 2011

**SPICE**, Pace Gallery, 2011

**Face**, Metro Fine Art, 2010

**Abstrak: Kini dan Dulu**, Core Design Gallery, 2015

**MAP Arts Festival**, MAP, 2010





