

MUCH 2DO ABOUT DRAWING

Abstract

Much 2do About Drawing

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First published in Malaysia in 2020
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About Us

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.

Previously, *Much Ado About Drawing* is a parody of the famous Shakespeare's theatre play and there are a few layers to this title. As one hand, it seems to imply that drawing should be a principal skill for fine art artist which is something given, thus there is no need to fuss over it. On the other hand, it seems to suggest that it is perhaps time to pay a little more attention to process such as thinking and the practice of drawing which up until now have been largely ignored.

This exhibition hope to inspire academia and institutions to look on seriously into the research that will set the stage for future forums, symposiums and supporting exhibitions, promoting in depth exploration of the possibilities thinking through drawing and its practice with knowledge. With this approach, part of the initial drawing project will discuss about the importance of drawing from the senior contemporary artist point of view. Moreover, it will be expecting more in depth research and sharing knowledge to provide a critical understanding of the drawing theory applied, the use of the drawing theory in the process and the insights that can be shared with the academics, institutions and students alike.

Much 2do About Drawing is not about setting any specific approaches of drawing. Instead of presenting a preconception of how a drawing exhibition should be, artists from different genres of mixed media, painting, printmaking, calligraphy and so on are invited to surprise us with their unique interpretation of the idea of drawing. It should be an exhibition to prompt research into the various theories of drawing, as well as to address the increasing concern regarding the drawing skills of artists everywhere. As mentioned earlier, this exhibition aims to spark awareness in various institutions and inspire academic forums as well as research to further discuss the importance of drawing within the context of Malaysian contemporary art.

an introduction of Much 2do About Drawing

by Zena Khan

"Given mastery of the medium, the structure can be assured foundations of such strength that it is able to reach out into dimensions far removed from conscious endeavour."

- Paul Klee

Paul Klee's statement in his essay 'The Modern as Ideal' (1924) emphasises the idea that a mastery of medium is necessary for artists to truly transmit concepts and philosophies to audiences. In art, changes in pictorial depiction and genre were necessitated and indeed heightened by changes to the contemporary condition. In Malaysia, this can be traced back to the late 1970's and 1980's, following on from the National Cultural Congress, consecutive to which the strong contemporary art world blossomed. As existence itself intensified in the newly Independent landscape, and became increasingly complex and colourful, so too did creative expressions adapt and evolve past simple paintings depicting romantic colonial ideals. To understand the success of the first generation of Malaysian contemporary artists (and indeed their successors) we can refer back to this comment by Klee, and see that it is the mastery of (often inventive) mediums that has allowed for complex conceptual conversations to stunningly shine through. For these Malaysian artists, formalism is a bedrock upon which artistic practice is built.

Much 2do About Drawing looks at this strand of thought through a very specific lens: drawing, and its impact on wider art production. Much like the act of writing,

drawing is a root form of communication. When studying fine art, classes to learn drawing form, be it still life or the figure, is a universal fundamental. This is not only for a strenuous training in observational skill, but to encourage the development of the artist's own visual style, as well as important basics including composition, spatial awareness and mark making. Therefore we may understand that it is often the serious study of and achievement in life drawing (which here I use as a term to encompass both figures and objects drawn from live observation) that leads to stronger skills in other non-figurative or imaginative areas. The works on display are not the drawings our imaginations typically conjure up, of pencil on paper, with a sketchy quality. Nor are they studies that prelude other works such as sculpture or installation. What we are offered instead are fully formed artworks that inform what the radical and creative potential of drawn marks and lines might be. What we are offered is a portal to the aesthetic possibilities gleaned from the basis of drawing.

In bringing together a mix of ten artists who today sit at the vanguard of Malaysian contemporary art history, Much 2do About Drawing does shed a light on the local state of art production currently. Overlaps in styles occur

"Given mastery of the medium, the structure can be assured foundations of such strength that it is able to reach out into dimensions far removed from conscious endeavour."

- Paul Klee



Suhaimi Fadzir's *Bila Singgah Rumah Hj. Kasah Di Ayer Hangat, Jebak Burung, Kopi, Pelita, Rokok Daun, Dan Macam-Macam Lagi Sentiasa Berada Di Atas Meja*

strongly, especially within the confines of the Mixed Media production, yet the exhibition as a whole is as distinct and diverse as the artists featured. A non-exhaustive list that spans artists who established themselves between the 1980's to 2010's, the strongest tie that emerges is the value that each of these artists has placed on the formal aspects of making art.

Twin emphasis on the formal and conceptual branches when making art can be seen as a result of strong grounding in drawing. As observed earlier, the act of drawing not only teaches hand skills but trains the eye to really see. And it is the act of looking that leads to wondering, questioning, analysing-key elements for philosophical or critical commentary to take place. This approach can be traced all the way back to Fauzan Omar, arguably the Father of Malaysia's Mixed Media art movement. Fauzan's place in the local contemporary art canon is assured through two routes: as an artist, yes, but also as an educator. His impact can be keenly felt, particularly in the generation immediately succeeding him. As a young artist, Fauzan was a recipient of a scholarship from the Malaysian government to pursue his Master's degree in Fine Art at Maryland Institute College of Arts in the United States. Building up imagery

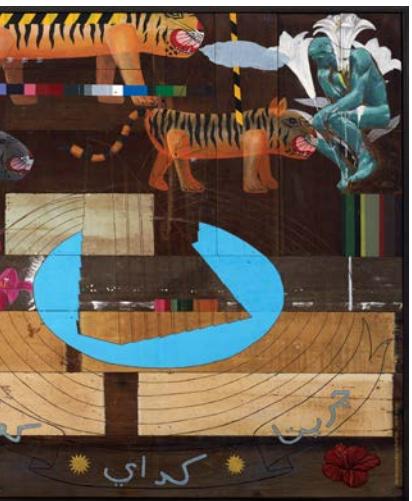
through textural relief-like surfaces of layered cut canvas and paint, Fauzan quickly brought visual culture into forums of contemporary discourse, thus establishing himself as an important documenters of heritage in a rapidly developing environment. *Certificate of Fitness (Construction in Progress)* displays the dense layering and textural surfaces that marked Fauzan's early practices, particularly in his Layer Series, when he established a dialogue between the craft traditions of his native Kelantan and the formal tenants of Western art production in an effort to construct a contemporary Malaysian methodology of art production.

Having mastered and refined the tenants of formal art production Fauzan began thinking about ways in which the rules of formalism existed within traditional Malay art and craft, resulting in a radical practice that not only felt fresh within the landscape of Malaysian art, but conceptually drove forward the local art ecology within the transnational discourses marking the global contemporary art world. The impact of Fauzan's art practice and indeed his teaching at UiTM upon his return from America has been keenly felt in the artists who were his students, particularly within the development of the mixed media movement within the contemporary art arena. Much of this can be attributed to his consistent encouragement for his students and young artists to observe, analyse and critique both artworks by themselves and their peers, but also the world around them. In featuring several mixed media artworks *Much 2do About Drawing* demonstrates ways in which this genre grew locally, particularly through the examples of two of Fauzan's students, Ahmad Shukri and Mohd Nor Mahmud, popularly known as Matnor.

For Ahmad Shukri, material is an integral component in art production. *Mr Thinker Teaching How To Survive?* takes audiences back to the works he produced in the 1990's, particularly his Target Series, through the use of wood as a base medium. However it must be noted that the wood he uses is conceptually crucial. As Target Series looked at ideas of consumerism within the rapidly developing and increasingly capitalist economy of Malaysia in the 1990's, the wood used was recycled from packaging and crates, often sourced from factories and warehouses. *Mr Thinker Teaching How To Survive?*, which concerns itself with the value placed on heritage in non-Western centres, is



Fauzan Omar's *Certificate of Fitness (Construction in Progress)*



Ahmad Shukri's *Mr Thinker Teaching How to Survive?*

produced on planks of wood salvaged from an old Malay house. Viewing the dismantling of a heritage home as a metaphor, Shukri shines a light on the disappearance of local heritage architecture, pointing out that as society strives for development and globalisation it should not be at the expense of authentic culture.

Shukri's commentary feels timely, as in an era marked by COVID-19 discussions of how human actions affect the earth are rife. He extrapolates these discussions into the arena of the socio-cultural. *The Thinker* by French sculptor Auguste Rodin looks over an abstracted representation of *Puncak Purnama*, a public sculpture by Syed Ahmad Jamal which was demolished in 2016. Shukri contrasts the longevity of Western culture, through their artifacts, architecture and art, against that of Malaysian culture. The inclusion of recognisable iconography within Shukri's work is a contrast to the more abstracted visual of both Fauzan and Matnor's offerings. Yet a thread that binds these practices is a concern with materiality and the impact of drawing within understanding composition and layering; which are integral components for successful mixed media artworks.

For Matnor material concerns appears in the foundation of his artworks. His canvases are primed with a mixture of sawdust, acrylic and glue, resulting in a thick, tacky surface which can be imprinted on or worked into. This is a

characteristic that has consistently recurred in his practice, and often he uses antique 'batik' stamps from his personal collection to create patterns that link back to the heritage culture of his home state Kelantan, on the East Coast of the Malaysian Peninsula. While there is much reference to his cultural past in *Musim Baru - Solat Hajat Di Bendan*, the metallic palettes he uses along with a mix of graphic lines with the more floral base patterns create a visual tension that parallels the contemporary condition of Malaysia today.

Concerns with spatial awareness and layering extend into the assemblage works of Suhaimi Fadzir as well. These works move past the arena of mixed media into a new genre Suhaimi 'archipainting', which can be defined as the blending of fine art principles with the structural and spatial intricacies of architecture to create paintings. Trained as an architect but practicing as a fine artist, Suhaimi's marriage of two creative practices can be seen as a metaphor for the duality of his life based between Malaysia and America. His compelling relief like works burst with inferences to history, society and his own experiences of the two cultures. His admiration for artists such as Marcel Duchamp and Robert Rauschenberg often shines through, as Suhaimi expands on the idea of utilising the rules of structure from two dimensional work such as painting to repurpose everyday artifacts so they might achieve a higher conceptual value—the bedrock of his artistic practice. Holding the view "art



Mohd Noor Mahmud's *Musim Baru - Solat Hajat di Bendan* and *Menabur Benih*





Ali Nurazmal Yusoff's
Si Kario

doesn't have to be traditional" Suhaimi's ability to push forward the research and execution of his work can be seen as direct extrapolation of a strong grounding in two dimensional formalism- such as drawing.

Umibaizurah Mahir Ismail, who is best known for pioneering the ceramic movement within Malaysian contemporary art, is today engaged in an arena that is not dissimilar to Suhaimi's, through modes of assemblage. It has become increasingly rare to see artwork by Umibaizurah in group shows as. As such *New Unfamiliarity* presents an interesting opportunity to study her current practice and position along her peers, drawing parallels and noting developments not only to her own practice but to the sculptural world of ceramics, which very much began with her work in the late 1990's.

New Unfamiliarity seems like an apt title not only for a work that is conceptually grounded in the rapid shifts the COVID-19 pandemic has brought to our lives, but in her technical approach, as she uses painting as a visual anchor, with a panel of cracked ceramics as an aesthetic support. Yet painting and drawing have always been a base from which Umibaizurah has built upwards; not only as

a tool to plan, but in the production of super pretty, layered finishes for her sculptural work. It becomes interesting to see her move forward again by taking the practice of painting and drawing from three dimensional spheres back into the world of two dimensionality, indicating a deftness with her drawing ability.

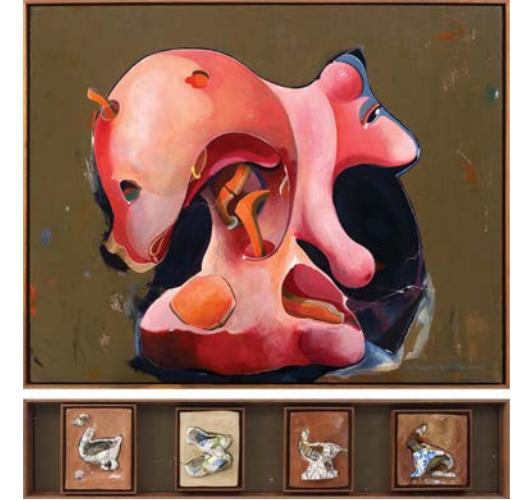
Merging painting and sculpture in an assemblage, Umibaizurah creates a visual bridge between two parts of *Much 2do About Drawing*: sculptural, mixed media artworks and pure paintings. Audiences are thus invited to view the impact of formalism across several genres of local art. With an abstract expressionist approach to calligraphy, Husin Hourmain demonstrates how a mastery of one genre, in his case abstract expressionism, can allow an artist to extend into entirely new areas. He first demonstrated this ability with the exhibition *Awal Huruf, Asal Huruf* (2013), which is today considered a landmark in Malaysian art history as the first comprehensive exhibition of contemporary calligraphy locally. The series of artworks denoting the Arabic alphabet which Husin Hourmain produced over a span of 3 years established a hyper-detailed, intricate signature style for the artist in his calligraphic works. *Alif/Lam/Ra* shows a direct continuation of this series, as Husin transcribes Jawi



Husin Hourmain's *Alif/Lam/Ra*

alphabets in the same style. In the process he initiates a discourse into the overlaps between religion and culture within the Malay community.

Kelantanese painter, Md Fadli Yusoff too looks to Malay and Islamic culture with a pair of paintings that show the two distinct parts of his painting practice: Figurative Painting and Contemporary Calligraphy. *Apa Tengok-Tengok* and *The Light* demonstrate the way that Fadli uses Western Old Master painting tradition to examine the here and now. His portraits such as *Apa Tengok-Tengok* are especially fascinating, as Fadli treats the human figure as a site for discourse. Rather than forcing audiences towards specific viewpoints or opinions, he uses instantly recognisable imagery, such as a well-known personality or in this case the increasingly common image of a woman wearing a surgical mask, to have his viewer question their own biases or thought processes. His remarkable technique made apparent through his use of Chiaroscuro and compositional skills focuses attention strongly on the subject at hand, and is a skill he developed in figurative painting and has since applied to calligraphy or still life object paintings. The full-resolution, slowly produced paintings are a welcome break from the frenzy of digital images that saturate our everyday



Umibaizurah Mahir Ismail's *New Unfamiliarity*

lives, and are a precursor to a larger series Fadli is working on to be debuted in 2021.

Expanding the canon of painting from its perceived Western Old Master origins through the infusion of the personal and local is definitively possible through a disciplined grounding in the tradition. Much as Md Fadli Yusoff has mastered painting tradition in a manner that allows him to communicate extremely specific contextual concerns, so too has mid-career painter Ali Nurazmal mastered the genre and expanded it through self-led experiments. Having spent his formative years as a painter engrossed in both realism and abstract expressionist painting concurrently, Ali has more recently been building up recognisable images, particularly large-scale portraits, through extremely expressionist mark making. This in fact comes back to the core of portraiture, which often busies itself not with simply reproducing likeness, but communicating personality or a specific story. The gestural energy in Ali's brushstrokes communicate the life, personality and story of his subjects, and his view on them.

The ability to gauge and communicate the contemporary experience can be seen as directly born of a regular

drawing practice. It seems apt that much of the work at *Much 2do About Drawing* is in fact referencing the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent global lockdown. The vast majority of these works were produced during the quiet moments of lockdown, which is a reason for the strong detailing and labour that underpins their existences. Masnoor Ramli, a founding member of the famed MATAHATI art collective, immediately captures audience attention with the delicate handwork in *Fitrah*. The spiritual, dreamy quality of his monochromatic rendering on canvas not only opens up discourse into the theological questions that have emerged during the pandemic, but into the artist's own way of working. While Masnoor is known for a successful multi-disciplinary art practice, he often approaches production, especially the construction of his finely detailed paintings from a classical point. Across the back of *Fitrah* we see a grid that acts as a reference point for scale and perspective, providing an insight into the discipline and tradition that he abides by as an artist. Concurrently he achieves a deconstructed atmosphere that moves his practice into extremely contemporary areas of drawing.

Perhaps the most radical approach to drawing seen at *Much 2do About Drawing* comes out in Haafiz Shahimi. *The Forenoon* is centred on a Cenderawasih, or Bird of Paradise, native to the Nusantara. The bird's Malay roots are emphasised through the palette born of Batik fabric dye,



Suhaimi Fadzir's Mengenali Bohor Merah



Masnoor Ramli Mahmud's Fitrah



Haafiz Shahimi's The Forenoon



Md Fadli Yusoff's Apa Tengok-Tengok

which has been intensified with touches of acrylic paint. The Cenderawasih's long swishy feathers seem to have been rendered through charcoal drawing, but are in fact a clever trick of the Pyrography Printmaking technique Haafiz has been developing over the past decade. Seeking a way to reproduce the careful pencil and ink images he draws daily in his sketchbook, Haafiz lights selected areas of his canvas on fire, before extinguishing the flames with quick hand gestures. Repeating this process allows for a layered depth of dark marks that mimic charcoal lines, giving the classic appearance most associated with drawing.

The boldness of the artworks featured at *Much 2do About Drawing* revitalise what audiences might expect from drawing, particularly within the Malaysian context. The majority of these works have in fact been produced in the unusual COVID-19 climate, which necessitated long bouts of isolation. It is interesting to see how creative output has subsequently emerged, in a period which very much allowed the artists time to reflect, produce and indeed layer their artworks. Could it be that the abundance of time allowed for a return to basics- of which drawing is a key fundamental? It would seem so, and that these works may be read with the notion that drawing is the base from which all artistic practice has grown- at least for the artists we see here. What is definitely apparent is that there is much that can be done within the field of drawing.

Fauzan Omar

Certificate of Fitness
(Construction in Progress)
Cut-Canvas, Acrylic and
Mixed Media on Canvas
122cm x 107cm
1993-1994





Musim Baru - Solat Hajat Di Bendan
Sawdust and Acrylic on Linen
122cm x 122cm
2020



Musim Baru - Menabur Benih
Sawdust and Acrylic on Linen
122cm x 122cm
2020

Ahmad Shukri Mohamed

Mr Thinker Teaching How To
Survive?
Mixed Media on Wood
127cm x 127cm
2007-2020





Alif/Lam/Ra
Acrylic on Canvas
122cm x 122cm
2020

Suhaimi Fadzir



<<

Mengenali Bohor Merah
Mixed Media Assemblages
82cm x 42cm
2020

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Bila Singgah Rumah Hj. Kasah Di Ayer
Hangat, Jebak Burung, Kopi, Pelita,
Rokok Daun, Dan Macam-Macam
Lagi Sentiasa Berada Di Atas Meja
Mixed Media Assemblages
133cm x 178cm
2020





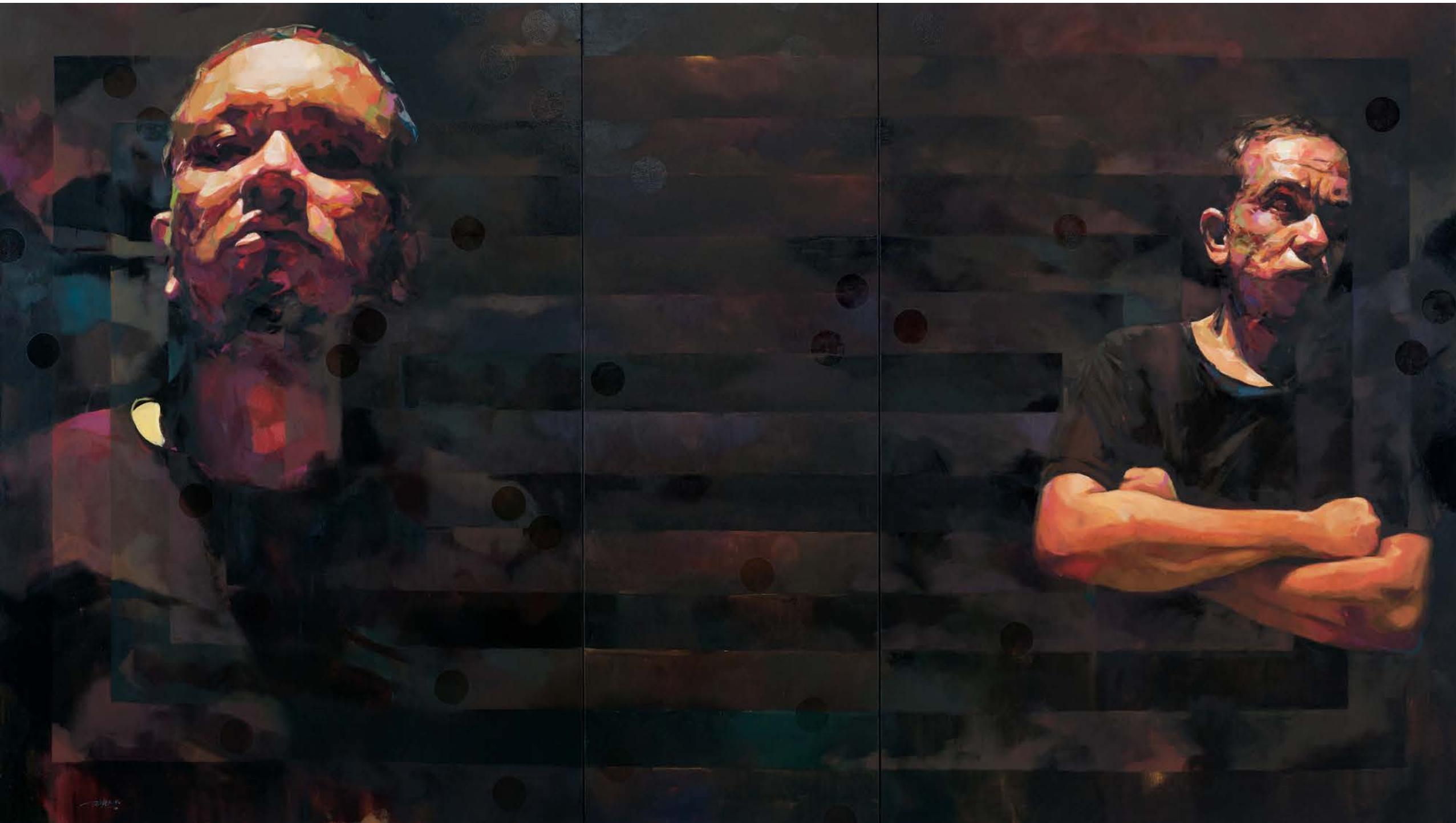
New Unfamiliarity
Acrylic and Ceramic on Canvas
127cm x 127cm
2020

Haafiz Shahimi

The Forenoon
Pyrography Print, Inverted Burn,
Direct Petrol Burn, Spray Paint and
Acrylic on Jute Finished with 2K
Matte Paint
123cm x 123cm
2020



Ali Nurazmal Yusoff



Si Kario
Oil on Canvas
168cm x 306cm
2020

Md Fadli Yusoff

The Light
Acrylic on Canvas
153cm x 138cm
2020



Apa Tengok-Tengok
Acrylic on Canvas
122cm x 122cm
2020

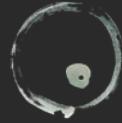


Masnoor Ramli Mahmud



Fitrah

Graphite and Collage on Canvas
123cm x 123cm
2020



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