

## Aliya and Farouk Khan's Art Collection

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“Each time you purchase a piece of art, you're investing in a piece of history and in another person's life.” - [Diane Overmyer](#)

### Prologue

Building an art collection comes through understanding the art. The impetus to investing in a collection is many and varied. Primarily, the collector is driven by a desire to understand and appreciate the art in his or her possession. A work at different stages of its life cycle may be passed off as a commodity. Yet at different times, it becomes subject to complex evaluation on questions of art, the artist, the centrality of culture, and the context of the work.

Collecting art or putting together a personal collection in a social setting is particular to its era. Social, political or cultural aspirations are unique to every age. For this reason, collections differ in type, theme, and approach in compilation. Paradoxically, a work is not frozen in time. For art traverses the past, present and future, open to interpretation in the creative zone of the mind. The way we understand, appreciate or approach a work of art is not locked in time.

Most of the works in the collection of Aliya and Farouk Khan., which portray “shape renewal” or novelty, parallel the context of Malaysia. Yet in their form and composition, the collection is complex. Various elements come to the fore on contemporary art segments or on modern Malaysia. Each invites appreciation of the technical or image-generating approach of the particular artist. At other levels, the collection distinguishes the diversity in technique of the artists. Such an approach is required of the collector, be it of modern art or on art of a particular era.

Of note with this collection is the focus on technique with contemporary time. The focused approach of Aliya and Farouk Khan to survey the rapidly developing contemporary Malaysian art scene, with the creation of different and “new” art from young artists, parallels the current desire in Malaysian art.

While art is not entrapped in time, the genesis of a work is influenced by contemporary needs and impetus. The trend in contemporary art, globally as with Malaysia, will change the values and criteria as well as the system that framed the genesis of the art.

Art is created according to interpretation of the culture of the time. It explores the form and the idea that tries to seek release from the bondage of previous art, by offering various “renewal” aspects. Contemporary art seeks to amend the array, convention, doctrine and rhythm of previous art, modern art in particular, while at the same time trying to provide a form and “renewal” value according to the traces and technique of the modern art. Contemporary art will always appear to challenge the status quo.

Contemporary art dismisses the justification gap and the regular array of art to a critical and crucial level. It will always seek to challenge the meaning and definition of art. Hence, it is difficult to evaluate contemporary art; it constantly seeks to free itself from the array generally accepted in the name of art. This is also why contemporary art finds it difficult to receive enthusiastic support.

Renewal brings new enthusiasm. It invites new interest. Aliya and Farouk Khan are in this category. Their collection projects the enthusiasm and the new form that exists in the contemporary artistic landscape in Malaysia.

They have been strategic in gathering art that mostly are categorised as contemporary Malaysian. They understand the intrinsic value and the potential worth in reputation of the socio-culture that exists in the contemporary compositions. Through their collection, Aliya and Farouk Khan have moved the measure in a relatively large and bold scale.

When this essay was written, the collection was continuing to expand. From the perspective of research, it is a challenge to evaluate. Seen in the light of appreciation, it is impressive. This essay seeks to give a glimpse of the importance of this collection based on the works of the selected artists. The ideas of the artists are explored in the socio-cultural context, and the issues around them.

### **Framework and context**

“Somewhere a portion of contemporary art has to exist as an example of what the art and its context were meant to be.” – Donald Judd

The collection of Aliya and Farouk Khan is difficult to categorise, even though various approaches could be used. Technique, approaches, media and methods to trace art are many. Art – contemporary art – is licensed for complex creativity. Several artists are aggressive in the creation of form and the representation of the art. To the point of “disguising” different or overlapping ideologies. We come to realise that the strategy and the formation of contemporary art are paradoxical and mutually overlapping.

This collection shows a change from modern art to contemporary art in the concealed history of Malaysian art. It is as if one was at the end garrison of modern art and at the starting point of contemporary Malaysian art. The collection captures the moment of transition. We see how the approach to modern art is merged by the majority of young,

aggressive artists. Contemporary compositions of this first decade of the new millennium are clearly characterised as brave and distinct in reforming art.

To understand and to try to provide a general idea for the classification of art, it is important to recognise style, approach and the development of Malaysian art. By correlating the artists in this collection and their work to the history of Malaysian art, we see a connection in the art and the artists involved. Of primary importance in this assessment, however, will be the style and approach of the artists. This exercise is at once challenging and stimulating, because most of the artists and their compositions have not previously been reviewed. Among the collection are many young artists with their most recent works.

This evaluation is based on the theory that Malaysian art has developed over four generations. The first are the modern pioneers of the 1930s. The second are those who obtained their formal education overseas, from the late 1950s to the late 1960s. The third generation obtained their early education in Malaysia, later resolutely developing their approach to modernism. This generation was influential from the early 1970s until the late 1980s, developing in several waves. From the 1980s, the fourth generation was catering to and using the approach of modern art, again developing in several waves. This is the generation now spurring the development of Malaysian art.

Many artists and much of the work in the collection of Aliya and Farouk Khan are from the third and fourth generations. Within this classification are several waves of changes that have occurred. Among the third generation are Fauzan Omar and Annuar Rashid. Yet their approach and rhythm are different. Fauzan Omar represents the first wave of the third generation. Coherent in his work is the formalism ideology. He does not get carried away with the romantic character or loyalty to modern art, but presents critical and radical interpretation in his compositions. Annuar Rashid's style incorporates local myth, cultural beliefs, and confident values of the East, Islam in particular.

Among those in the fourth generation, there is a clear difference in the works of Zulkifli Yusof and Chan Kok Hooi. Zulkifli Yusof is eclectic in his approach, combining features in his generation of image. The combined element is not only at the level of material. It is evident in the generation of ideas and imagery. The art becomes the assembling ground for various elements that are considered rare and weird, yet merged to bring out the hidden and meaningful messages. The presentation of his work is direct and distinct. Chan Kok Hooi also blends creations that are weird and diverse, but while his compositions incline towards a simpler yet sharp presentation, they are more elusive in perception. It is as if they were hidden in the diversity of the images. Differences notwithstanding, the works are connected not only in style and approaches but in ideology and interpretation of contemporary art.

The collection of Aliya and Farouk Khan is analysed on style and artistic approach. Broadly, it can be divided two groups. The first are those compositions that clearly fall under the rubric of modern art. Among the artists are Fauzan Omar, Annuar Rashid, Yusof Ghani and Juhari Said, stressing pleasant visual with a modern feel. The second group uses the approach of contemporary art. Among them are Zulkifli Yusof, Tan Chin Kuan, Jalaini Abu Hassan, Abdul Muthalib Musa, Ahmad Fuad Osman, Ivan Lam, Ahmad Shukri Mohamed and Hamir Soib.

These two broad classifications are open to debate. Several artists straddle the modern and contemporary. Jalaini Abu Hassan, for one. His compositions of the early and mid-1990s can be categorised as modernism. Yet gradually, since the late 1990s, he has shifted to contemporary art. Several young artists have actually used the approaches of obdurate modernism. At first glance, we might pigeonhole them as contemporary art. On closer examination, it would be clear that these compositions have undergone a “reverberation” and represent a revivalism of modern art. Clear in their distinction between the two ideologies are the works of Hamidi Hadi, Choy Chun Wei and Daud

Rahim. Their compositions reside in the exploration of the surface and the exploration of the specific materials used to produce the composition. Such an approach is associated with the modern art genre.

A clear and precise distinction of the composition of works in the collection of Aliya and Farouk Khan, however general and free, is difficult. From this, one comes to the conclusion of the fundamental issue in historical evaluation of Malaysian art. The classification of Malaysian art remains framed by Western constructs, in ideology and styles of composition. This is not unique to Malaysia. The art fraternity in other third world countries faces the same test.

The challenge has become more critical in the present art scene, made more complex by contemporary art. It becomes incumbent on the reviewer to take a more general approach in the evaluation of the works and the artists in the collection of Aliya and Farouk Khan in the context of the development of Malaysian art.

### **Composition Analysis**

#### *Local Tradition: Islam and the Malay tradition as a core idea*

The earlier compositions in this collection are from Annuar Rashid entitled “Inderaputra Series: Air, Angin dan Api” (1979). The subject is local, yet the technique and representation is derived from the West. This is an interesting and challenging enterprise. Annuar Rashid in his subsequent series in this collection uses the same mechanism to generate the aesthetic ideas. His paintings are dynamic, grand, and rich with visual stimulation. They are altogether sensational, illustrated in “Mihraj (Penerbangan di Langit)” (2008). The universe of Annuar Rashid is mysterious, visual and experiential. At one level, his paintings explore space and colour that overlap in layers, creating dynamic movements. In other interpretations, they invite inner exploration. Ideas and subject

capture the mythical culture projected by Malay and Islamic values. The aesthetic vibes, especially those derived from Islam, are particularly felt in “Wind, Water and Fire Asma al’Husna” (2008).

The blending of Malay and Islamic tradition with Western approaches is evident in works by Zulkifli Yusof and Jailani Abu Hassan. On the hand, Mohd Noor Mahmud has held firm to Malay tradition. The difference between his work and that of Annuar Rashid reinforces each other, based on their approaches of ideas generation and image generation. The compositions of Annuar Rashid involve more of the painting idea while those of Mohd Noor Mahmud lean towards a physicality that is yet orderly in the visual process. The decorative value of his compositions is intensified by the visual consideration and the judicious use of a combined material approach.

Visually, the compositions of Mohd Noor Mahmud are silent and serene compared with the active themes of Zulkifli Yusof, Jailani Abu Hassan and Annuar Rashid. Yet Mohd Noor Mahmud’s compositions are pure in the strength of their composition, arrangement and image display. The compositions of Mohd Noor Mahmud have put emphasis on tradition. Compositions from the Malay and Islamic tradition in this collection have combined elements that mutually reinforce Malay and Islamic visuals in the modern world. It offers one majestic outcome that invites its own interpretation.

### *Early Pre Formalism*

Over almost the same period as that of Annuar Rashid, interpretations of Fauzan Omar, derived from the West, were placed under critical scrutiny. Fauzan Omar questions and challenges conventional painting with his layer series, which started at the end of the 1970s. Prime example is “Untitled” (circa early 1980s), in which Fauzan Omar questions space in the context of reality. He aggressively establishes and at the same time dismantles the arrangement of space. His understanding of the elements of art has been radically interpreted through universal inspirations that are continual and subject to

modification. Composition, space, colour and the surface in Fauzan Omar's work challenge modern painting. His paintings contain aspects of duality that leave us uneasy. They lie between romanticism, universal title and the aggressive exploration to find the authenticity of fresh and visually sensational paintings. This process places different or additional materials to make it distinct or to question the presence of the different spaces in his paintings. The irony is that it now questions the contexts of the materials merged in his paintings.

“Certificate of Fitness Urban/Cosmetic” (1990-91) finds itself in this situation. Thus from one angle Fauzan Omar's compositions are complex, because he has firmly “fought” to establish and at the same time dismantle the arrangement of space in his paintings. His inspirations, observations and interpretations towards the universe have brought his paintings into a firm state based on universal processes. His observations of the universe and his innate character have exposed his artistic paintings to changes of the universe. This is clear in compositions such as the Layer Series “Luminosity 1”, Layer Series “Luminosity 3”, Kulat, Layer Series: Own Equilibrium, The Reef – City Under The Sea, Rejuvenation Series: One Late Afternoon, Reconstruction and Panorama.

The universal interpretation and the mechanism of space that Fauzan Omar brings out have cultivated a new tradition in Malaysian painting. Writers characterise this approach as post formalism. This approach has been extensively taken up young contemporary Malaysian artists. Thus the significance and strength in the paintings of Fauzan Omar is in his creativity to produce organic shapes formed through the interpretation and symbiosis of the character and the worldly situations. At the same time, he has brought paintings to a more real and aggressive level of interpretation through the exploration of various materials, leading to “additional materials” in his paintings. This has taken paintings to a more complex level.

*Abstract Expressionism Tradition*



Meanwhile, Yusof Ghani has given new injection to abstract expressionism, which started to develop in Malaysia at the hands of many second-generation artists. The flowing energy in the compositions of Yusof Ghani affirms that Malaysian artists continue to embrace this tradition regardless of time. The universal concept has broadened the application of this style without restricting the themes or the particular issues. This approach at the hands of Yusof Ghani has formed grounds to more freely release the thoughts or questions. The line and colour aspect has been exploited to a more openly characterised level. The saturation and the viscosity of the colours, together with the free movements of the lines that emerge from the compositions, reflect an ideology to free the art from specific dogmas or issues. Art is freed from shallow illusions, which according to the modernism ideology is a change to return an art to its actual characteristics, which are its elements and the principles. In the view of writers, Yusof Ghani is not producing any kind of critical revivalism of abstract expressionism, but lodging the style in his paintings to provide a sensational visual based on his personal perception in the local landscape. Universal humanitarian theme has become the base for the creation of his painting ideas through the producing of images that are sometimes semi or fully abstractly characterised.

Young artist Aswad Amier follows in almost the same tradition. Yet compared with Yusof Ghani, Aswad Amier is more passionate, conveyed in a more wild effect of brushing (“The Gathering”, 2005) and sometimes controlled brushing (“Jari Jemari”, 2007). This can be seen between the two artists in the colour, style in pressure applied and control of the lines. The colours that Yusof Ghani uses look more raw and clear (“Segerak Series”, 2005), while those that Aswad Amier uses are more dull and less saturated (“Metamorphosis 1”, 2005). Aswad Amier’s composition is as if wallowing in the raw, rough and at times difficult to control wave line. At times Aswad Amier releases his visual control strings totally because he has no ambition to produce an imagery reference to something that has character. His interest is to release his enthusiastic ideas in the abstract. The dullness and wild expressions that sometimes cannot be controlled

reenergise Aswad Amier's paintings with the specific visual features. This tradition imitates the style of American abstract expressionism in the mixture of German and Italian neo expressionism. From one aspect, the fusion that became the trend around the 1980s has reached higher levels at the hands of Aswad Amier.

Abstract expressionism has given Yusof Ghani and Aswad Amier the licence to explore different dimensions of metaphysics. The difference between them is that Yusof Ghani's compositions converge more towards human movement figures, masks or landscapes. Aswad Amier is more interested in providing an expressional feel to his ideas. In the artistic display in each of their paintings, Yusof Ghani moves from the outer inspirational universe to the inner self, while Aswad Amier moves from the inner self outwards.

Abstract expressionism from its appearance in Malaysia since the early 1960s has gone through various artistic versions, sometimes with the application of local characteristics and experiences. Yusof Ghani and Aswad Amier are considered to be among the contemporary heirs to this style, which deliberately works to repeat the attitude of one universal language in the arts. From the end of the 1990s, though, several young artists have sought to give abstract expressionism a new interpretation.

Among them is Husin Hourmain, whose paintings differ in visual composition and application of the painting material. Traditional abstract expressionism resonates in the paintings of Husin, but what is clearly noticeable is the control aspect in the lines, and the overlapping colours. This is reminiscent of the line formation of famed abstract expressionist artist Jackson Pollock. The abstract clusters of Husin Hourmain are surrounded by his desire to control the lines he has composed into abstract shapes that are specific and repetitive. This distinguishes his paintings in visual sensation, with the lines empowering the display space in his compositions.

*Post formalism 2: organic, concrete and contextual*

Of interest in this collection are the young artists who have injected new breath, taste and language to abstract visualisation in the arts, especially in paintings. Their art marks the dawn of a new level or interpretation of abstract paintings. Traditional abstracts in Malaysia go back to the early 1960s. Artists during the 1980s started to explore more varied composition in presentation and technical aspects. Fauzan Omar is clear example.

Abstract painting has found a new path involving not only the creation of expressive images. The exploration of new values emphasises the new and foreign materials. These artists more aggressively apply techniques of paint or these new materials. The variety of paints or new materials is explored as a main instrument to produce a more different and fresh imagery. The medium of mixture has become a trend that blooms in the hands of these artists. This paradigm rejects abstract paintings that give importance to lines, arrangements, shapes and space. The formalism tradition has come to be known as post formalism.

The collection of Aliya and Farouk Khan brings together excellent examples of post formalism abstract painting, among them the works of Daud Rahim and Hamidi Hadi. Daud Rahim in his exploration of aspects of the paintings' surfaces takes imagery creation to a newer level, creating different images through the exploration of particular techniques. His controlled skills in creating a compositional space on his paintings give his paintings a new value. His application of paint and other materials, and his control in composition, gives his paintings a more wave-like, foreign, and completely different look. We sense the energies that at times are not evident in the paintings. The energy is derived from the choice of colour and the wild and free brush movement in a same colour scheme.

The paintings of Hamidi Hadi are more rigid in compositional confluence. Hamidi Hadi is more controlled especially in the application of technique and execution of the composition. Hamidi Hadi epitomises the strength of these abstract paintings in the

exploration of image and the use of new materials, or mixture of these materials. Different features in the paint material are formed through the differential value of the paint itself, or after it has been mixed. The result is colour or colour stains that are visually different. This delivers a shape or form that is foreign, formed from the reaction of the materials used. In composition, Hamidi Hadi's paintings are more tightly controlled. He tries to establish a more passionate detail based on the entire clusters of his paintings.

These new abstract compositions are refreshing. At the same time, there are abstracts using conventional materials. Still, the execution or generation of their imagery differ from that of the past 10 or 20 years. Reviewers find this surprising, at the same time fascinating. At times it is as if these abstract compositions have lost their vitality when the same shapes and forms are repeated. Yet these new compositions have survived the perception of unexciting repetition.

Most of Choy Chun Wei's paintings are in this position. His abstract compositions, which repeatedly stress concrete arrangement from their historic legacy of constructivism, are rich in visual force, and complicated. Reviewers describe this approach as a new interpretation of concrete arrangement. The detail in Choy Chun Wei's arrangements advances the De Stijl and constructivism style in art. Reviewers see Choy Chun Wei as a conventional follower of abstract painting, but one who has brought the arrangement to a more challenging and complicated level. Level spaces in his compositions are arranged in scattered overlapping organisation. They can be appreciated as macro and micro. In visual complexity, his compositions leave the same impression as that of the "New Scene" writers in the second generation of modern Malaysian artists. Significantly, he has added elements of mixed materials that give a different dimensional arrangement to his paintings. The arrangement takes on a veneer characteristic that moves in the plane that is created. Choy Chun Wei's paintings have brought new life to the concrete abstract

interpretation said to be dead in Malaysia. His creative and critical interpretations have opened a new dimension to concrete abstract paintings thought of as aloof.

Contributing to Choy Chun Wei's work in breathing fresh and significant life to concrete abstract art are Justin Lim and Abdul Mutalib Musa. Justin Lim traverses paradigms between visual pressure and image creation. His eclectic compositions are different and bold in their concrete approach. Compositions of Abdul Mutalib Musa will be remembered for the concrete arrangement of their image, and the hard edge pressure that is perfectly formed on the pattern, motif and design of the image. Again we see how Abdul Mutalib Musa has manipulated concrete art, associated with the hard-edge style, minimalism, constructiveness and De Stijl that is always aloof, and given it a newer and fresher language.

The pre formalism tradition associated with Fauzan Omar, and later Hamidi Hadi and Daud Rahim, are more stern and aggressive in this collection. The other compositions from this group by artists such as Ahmad Shukri Mohamed, Fauzin Mustafa and Ahmad Zuraimi are more mixed in their shape complexity. The energy in figure exploration and process from Ahmad Shukri is distinctive and umbrageous, with piercing and overlapping images that are random yet structured. In "Target Series Camouflage II" (1994), "Heritage" (1997) and "Bersatu Teguh Bercerai Roboh" (2002), we see Ahmad Shukri's radical and strategic skills in building the space aspect in his paintings.

Not only are his paintings effective in image or composition, they have moved to a level of craftsmanship that is intelligent, manipulating the medium that is used and also the technical process that is involved. At a different level, his compositions play an important role as interpreter of the social condition, quiet yet penetrative. Compositions from the "Boy and Girl" (2002) series, "Incubator" (2002), and "Virus" (2002-03) show the social condition in the country. Yet the strength of Ahmad Shukri excels in image manipulation and the sharp use of materials. Compositions such as "Messenger III" (2005) and the later

series of compositions such as “Fitting Room” (2005) and “Kedai Hiburan” (2006) erupt with images that radically overlap or match. Ahmad Shukri uses the application of materials, stress on image and contexts as his visual weapon in compositions such as “The Wall (Negaraku)” (2007), “Adam verses Astronaut” (2007) and “Will for Sale” (2008).

Fauzin Mustafa is different. His compositions have an almost calm appearance in realisation of the universal processes, yet visually they collide in presentation of arranged and materials combination. Materials that stress the subject, shape and arrangement of the works give visual effect to works such as “White Painting Black Frame” (1994), “Spirit of Earth – Mystique 3” (1994), “Spirit of Earth – Deep Forest” (2001), “Eclipse Throughout The Night” (2002) and “Mimpi Serakah di Bukit Cerakah” (2005). The controls of the paintings are based on careful arrangement, and the visual focus created with the arrangement and the main image, which is of environmental elements. The materials and the process that occur move as if in orderly environmental rhythm. Two features mark the post formalism works of Fauzin Mustafa. The first is his effort to create a visual of sensation through the arrangement of subject and the mixture of materials. The second is the creation of image that at the same time gives an idea to the content of his work.

This post formalism nature can be found in the works of Mohd Noor Mahmud. Yet the difference between Mohd Noor Mahmud and Fauzin Mustafa is the focus of the theme and subject. Fauzin Mustafa seems more comfortable with the generation and the projection of the environmental elements that are direct. Mohd Noor Mahmud focuses on the floral motif and the painting process. Pressure on the exploration aspect of the materials process has given the works of Mohd Noor Mahmud a more viscous and thick look, and arrangement of thick veneer. The arrangement is alluring, with traditional motif and pattern. The arrangement of the motif with a relieving composition in addition to skilful use of colour has made his compositions appear as a new exposition in the design

of traditional fabric. Compositions such as “Kala Kota Bharu: Kain Lepah” (2006), “Kala Kota Bharu: Mek Gayah Buje” (2006), “Kala Kota Bharu: Wok Sohok Cherut Rumput” (2007) and “Main Bola Go Slipar (2008) are expressions of modern painting with the evolution of the traditional image that gives substance to contemporary culture. The painting strategies of Mohd Noor Mahmud are more conventional, with the use of the floral motif in the arrangement. It reminds us of the culture on which his works are grounded. Still, his paintings are modern. And pleasant. They bring out the overlapping era that is fresh and harmonious. Mohd Noor Mahmud is among the modern artists who have strategically and harmoniously succeeded in blending traditional values in modern painting.

Hasnul Jamal Saidon takes post formalism to a different level. He focuses on the combination aspects of the ideas dialogue rather than the materials dialogue. Ideas in combination with image have brought the works of Hasnul Jamal Saidon to a more complicated level of thinking. His collages, “Hujan Emas, Hujan Batu” (1990) and “Hero” (1990), exemplify the ideological combination of works. He shows his skills in managing image, composition and materials to give visual effect and bring out an idea in “Hijab Nurbaya Series” (2003), and three drawings in the series “Prelude to Hijab Nurbaya” (2003).

The influence of traditional formalism and post formalism has been strong in the development of Malaysian art since the 1980s to the 1990s. Through this collection, we see how abstract paintings or paintings with the material combination technique and process that is widely used, is created with passion. Artists such as Ahmad Shukri, Fauzin Mustafa and Mohd Noor Mahmud have created paintings that interact with the process and surface visual effects.

Later generation artists such as Ahmad Zuraimi have taken pre formalism ideas, in particular the use of painting materials and its processes, to a more radical level. He has

replaced the canvas platform with steel, which is definitely more challenging, and difficult. His compositions have provided a new and different visual, because he is not attached to the conventional character of paint and canvas. Compositions such as “Fate 1” (2005) and “Fate III” (2005) are developed and successful as mixed media painting, or pre formalism with a further interpretation. In this category are the paintings of Rajinder Singh. He has combined the illustrative elements, which are mixed until the entire presentation pattern for his paintings take on a different and alienated appearance. Yet the strength of the overlapping image and the application technique, which is more liberated, along with the merging of the entire visual elements, has delivered a strapping pre formalism effect. This is seen in “Rain” (2008).

This collection is a fitting display of the compositions that are pre formalism, technically referred to as a rich and developing mixed medium.

### ***The new Expressionism scream – Neo Expressionism***

The generation of the early 1990s inspired attractive new forms of art, outrageous at times. Zulkifli Yusof, among the first, displays astonishing visual work. His compositions are distinct – visually, and in their ideas. His protest paintings, which started to emerge around the second quarter of the 1990s, can be categorised as a version of the Neo Expressionism style. His compositions express a historic theme that relates to the incidents or the local characters. Works such as “Amok di Pasir Salak” (2007), “Amok di Pasir Salak II” (2007) and “Amok di Pasir Salak III – Dato Maharajalela” (2007) profoundly reflect the incidents in Pasir Salak.

Compact visual mixtures give the paintings of Zulkifli Yusof a distinct effect even though at times the paintings have a sharp and specific commentary. This can be felt in the paintings of Raja Maimunah that are in this collection. In a different context, the skills of Zulkifli Yusof in providing the orderly value of his compositions can be seen in his



compositions. Installations such as “Munsiy Abdullah” (2003) and “Subuh” highlight his skills and precision in gathering the theme and technique to create a strong visual display. This has long been a practice of his. A clear example is “Mencari Emas” (1998).

The strength of the compositions of Zulkifli Yusof is in the combination of his use of metaphor, along with his technical skills, which are specific and precise. This is the case, too, with a printed wood composition by Juhari Said, entitled “Berkubang” (2005). This printed composition stresses the technical aspect, giving movement to the composition with the value of the metaphor. The combination of idea and technique raises the perception value and culture of the compositions.

Neo Expressionism or Expressionism describe works that are distinct in scattering the semi abstract images, or which use techniques that are rough, unrestrained, yet the subjects are still recognised. In this category are works by Susylawati, Ahmad Fuad Osman, Anthony Cheong, Hamir Soib, Tan Chin Kuan, Bayu Utomo Radjikin, Haslin Hashim and Yau Bi Leng.

The compositions of Tan Chin Kuan are derived from his prediction or reflection of social values around him. He arranges or injects images that surround the social space of his life, at times riddled with dilemma. The strategy of displaying an image metaphorically or having a semiotic meaning is broadcast in a bold and distinct way. The strategy in compositions such as “Swimming Pool” (1992) and “The 26 Year Old Monk” (1992) has a metaphoric character, and benefits from the freedom to use specific symbols and images that give a direct meaningful effect. There are times when he uses foreign materials or combinations to strengthen the values and definition of the statements. That is seen in episodes of “Horse 1, 2, 3” (1995), “Eaten” (1995) and “Boat” (1995). The distinct figurative tradition evident in his compositions in this collection is interesting. Through this approach, and the use of other metaphoric images, his paintings

mark the re-emergence of art that has an allegorical character or specific stories with meaningful social effects.

This is unlike the works of Hamir Soib, whose works are more raw, rough, direct and teasing in their strategy. The world of Hamir Soib is dark and at times scary. His works dwell on negative aspects of the human condition, spurred on by jealousy and desires that can never be satisfied. The negative aspect is taking control of the human condition and the world. This is seen in works such as “Pilihan” (2005), “Pelukis Terakhir” (2005) and “Sepat Oh Sepat” (2006). The free, raw, and messy use of painting material indicates bold presentation in image generation.

The paintings of Hamir Soib, full of irony, criticism, queries, and issues, have brought modern painting to a different level in representation. Social and private criticism has been placed at a more radical level through techniques that are more raw and direct. While the picture as a whole acts like a setting or a piece of the setting that is ready to provide a story and character for the real situation that happens in the acting life of humans, the world is an act. Every stupidity, disgust and actions based on negative desire has become a tonic or fuel to the acting energy. Hamir Soib’s world through “Di Dalam Lingkungan” (2007), “Kering” (2008) and “Rapuh” (2008) shows the dark side of human desire.

With Bayu Utomo Radjikin, the self has become the metaphoric ground or focus of issues. He becomes the sieve of outer issues. Compositions of Bayu Utomo Radjikin move in two directions – from inner to outer and vice versa, sieved through self awareness. His paintings in the series “Mencari Pahlawan” (2003) and “Terbang” (2005), and the series of paintings that merge his image and subjects from European visual culture created in 2005 and 2006, open new dimensions in interpretation of his search of the self in the ideas and universal context that he has lived in.

A review of Neo Expressionism is not complete if it does not reflect on the works of Anthony Cheong. Compositions such as “Mime Series Painting 3” (1995), “Mime Series” (1995) and “Mime Series the Room” (1995) clearly carry a more raw and direct images of humanity. His aggressive tone through the wild stroke of brush in creating images is different compared with the compositions of Hamir Soib, Bayu Utomo Radjikin and Tan Chin Kuan. Yet the rhythm of their visual language is the same – the new Expressionism that is brave and distinct in projecting meaningful images that are rough and overlapping.

The paintings of Susylawati Sulaiman are not as intense. What is special is his focus on figurative images. His paintings in this collection display the attitude and radical definition of Neo Expressionism, overlapping on to Expressionism.

Composition titles of his semi abstract figurative images sneer at the ego and human condition. The images of human heads that dominate his compositions, such as “Roh Yang Keempat” (2005), “Si Tanah” (2005), “Api” (2005), “En Tali bin Barut” (2005), “Berkawan Dengan Melayu” (2005), “En Duit Orang” (2006), and the series of compositions, “Muka Lebih Berminyak” (2007), remind us of the semi abstract figurative tradition, debating the human situation through emotion and ideas. Works of young Shafiee Ramli are in the same tradition. But Shafiee Ramli leans towards the visual scale that is wide and dark, with subject element that is rough and raw. This is seen in “Tornado Series: Redemption Song” (2008).

The Neo Expressionism strategy of Ahmad Fuad Osman is something else in his use of the figurative image over different episodes. Initial images present themselves in a critical tone in semi-abstract form, in the artist’s search of the self, enquiring into the current standard. Compositions from this challenging era include “Paint Your Brain” (1996) and “Kemelut Alam Fana I” (1997). After 2006, Ahmad Fuad Osman became more critical and profound, his works informed by socio-political ideas, taking

on a more contemporaneous identity and theme. Compositions such as the “Fatamorgana” (2006) series and the “Recollection of Long Lost Memories” series take on a new dimension. Compositions that are worked on a huge scale in idea and size start to show a maturity in the image generation, the focusing technique and the special extraction technique.

At times the paintings take on a soft ironic and teasing tone, forcing the observer to focus on and think about the idea and the image. That strategic thought is broadcast through his work and image selection. The strategic tone of Ahmad Fuad Osman can be seen in “Fatamorgana #2 The State of Confusion” (2006) and “Poppy Love” (2006), which has a sharp and fine, yet cold and precise character.

Masnoor Ramli Mahmud takes a raw and rough approach with his early compositions such as “Sign of Life – 3rd element” (1994), “The Truth Within” (1994), “The Truth Within – Meditate” (1995), “Yang Benar” (1995), “Once Upon A Time” (1996) and “Global Chat” (1998). The stress is on self-reflection, which he alludes to emotionally through image selection and abstract or semi-abstract creation.

Mansoor Ramli Mahmud starts to move with a contextual element in compositions such as “Cinta Dewa Dewi” (2007), “Is Anybody Out There” (2007), “Berat Punya Cerita” (2007), “I Dream of Rome” (2008) and “Smell From Heaven II” (2008). Masnoor Ramli Mahmud has picked, generated, and combined foreign images in an ironic or at times critical presentation. He combines spatial time and cultural context, making the compositions appear different and weird in their image visualisation. It is clear that from “As It Is” (2005), Masnoor Ramli Mahmud has started to delve in strategies that stress meanings or intensions. Or they are of contextual dialogues, as with “Catatan Perjalanan II dan III” (2007).

Neo Expressionism takes on dissimilar tones and strategies depending on the approach of a particular artist. Interpretations are sometimes hazy or overlapping. Examples can be seen in the compositions of Yau Bi Leng. Reverberating through the works at a particular stage is the Fauvism enthusiasm in composition and use of colours that are contrasting and intense. At other times, they are softly wavy in a melancholic tone. What is apparent is the image construction, which is complicated, with the use of colours and appearance that is randomly overlapping, yet controlled.

A new enthusiasm that has emerged is the raw and vicious displays of Haslin Ismail. His compositions are as if they are a fusion of wild and unpredictable images. They remind us of the German Expressionism tradition of the 1970s. The rigid display space with different combination of shapes and images appear as if lifted from a dull or frightening dream. Even though the condition seems controlled, the weird and unfamiliar images will likely invite questions that will never be answered. The combination of materials gives strength to the ideas of his paintings.

### ***From Surrealism to Magic Realism: Subconscious stream***

Like the Neo Expressionism style of the mid-1990s, the new surrealist suddenly found a following among the young Malaysian artists. Eng Hwe Chu brought the paintings to the new level of magic realism. Reality images are embedded into overlapping social reality. It is a style of reflective creation that is difficult to be separated from that of visual reality and visual reflection reality. Eng Hwe Chu unconsciously uses the visual-generating platform to observe his self in God's arrangements and human creation. Reverberating through his paintings is an exploration of feminism that is at times foreign and cruel, and at other times wonderful. It wanders and pushes the boundaries between reality and idealism, blurring in our minds, raising questions as we go through our life experiences such as who am I or what am I. Magic realities emerge.

Eng Hwe Chu's statement reminds us of the social conditions and dilemmas women face. At the root of his dilemma is the convergence of Western culture and traditions of the East. Compositions such as "Reborn" (1997), "My Liberty" (2000) and "My Childhood Memories" (2001) represent personal records or diaries of his life.

There are parallels in the paintings of Khairul Azmir Shoib. Uncanny images display an attitude drawn from shadowy dreams. The style is more specifically post Gothic, yet is surrealistic in a general way. His character study is different in nature to that of Jeganathan Ramachandran. The composition of Jeganathan Ramachandran seems more controlled and surrealistic, leaning towards symbolist surroundings. Images, tale or symbols merge with individual clusters to bring out the messages or statements. The surrealistic nature of Jeganathan Ramachandran's compositions can be related symbolically or ichnographically with the art tradition of Hinduism.

Chan Kok Hooi is bolder in his application. The character of his compositions is unambiguously layered, projecting pre-modern ideology. Reality is weaved into the unconscious elements, resulting in effective image generation. The composition series of "Old Photo" (2006 and 2008) painted in black and white is effective in projecting the interpretations or inscriptions of the respective time frame. His efforts to re-interpret the history through current readings are significant.

### ***Realistic and illustrative tendency***

Realism did not have much of a following in the 1960s. The tradition has developed since in the hands of artists accepted as mainstream in Malaysian art. The tradition or the realistic art shapes have gradually been more readily accepted with the complexity of the contemporary art shapes that developed around the 1990s. It has taken on the freshness of an excavation long sunken in the wave of idealistic, conceptual and abstract art.

Jailani Abu Hassan (Jai), who came on the scene in the mid-1980s, has gone through several development levels. Since the early 1990s, he has found a personal touch. In this collection of Aliya and Farouk Khan, we learn that his earlier works were of illustrative form, and had been his favourites. “Two Palls” (1983) radiates a clear illustrative aspect. Compositions that are illustrative in character – so-called realism or romantic realism – have existed for more than 150 years ago in Europe. Compositions such as “Two Palls” can be characterised as a sketch. Rafee Ghani has several such compositions in this collection of Aliya and Farouk Khan, showing images of several mosques in 2004. He is clearly comfortable in this tradition, producing works that are illustrative, yet in a more free language. Other paintings show more of a Fauvism a la Matisse style, in use of colour and arrangement. Rafee Ghani’s style is more loose, with the technical stress on the illustrative or sketch. This is apparent in “Chaos II” (1997).

The illustrative painting tradition of Ahmad Zakii Anwar is quieter. This comes from single or pairing objects that appear shallow, and sometimes afloat. He uses emotional feeling and internal factors in a visual manner. Compositions such as “Happy Birthday Farouk” (2004) display the gaming aspect and depth of delusional space. What is interesting is his selection of images or subjects.

Kow Leong Kiang radiates initial enthusiasm for the realism of Courbet. The intensity in two of his compositions in this collection appears lighter, from the technique that he applies. Yet the enthusiasm is quietly evident. The serenity of Kow Leong Kiang’s compositions is felt through the composition and the subject selection. Kow Leong Kiang’s silent attribute is also evident in works of Stephen Menon, which appear to be more academic. This approach is reminiscent of the figurative and romanticism tradition of French art of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The portrait and figure study of Stephen Menon is a statement created from research on shape, plane and space. Yet his compositions are a result of his controlled exploration.

Illustrative paintings of the aforementioned artists present different tones based on technique, medium and processing approaches. The clusters of segregated compositions in the collection of Aliya and Farouk Khan have added to the variation in character.

***Contemporary style, contextual image.***

Composition with complicated image generation has taken Malaysian painting to a higher and challenging level. A new dimension that is different and at times bold draws our attention to understand and indulge in the art form. The contemporary shift is towards an eclecticism raising enthusiasm for difference. The combination and overlapping of ideology is now in the hands of a majority of artists who are bold. The definition of paintings has changed, and is challenged by previously unknown instruments and elements. Style, approach and image generation have moved in random overlapping fashion from the styles of art previously mentioned.

Take pop art, critical in its currency. Pop art, also known as Neo Pop, has taken on a following that portrays the changing visual nature that is more democratic. In this collection, Azmin Hussien's "Recovery – Transfer" (1992-2005), "Pop Art Revolution" (2005) and "Untitled" (2005) bring out the enthusiasm in guerrilla fashion. The same goes for Zaslán Zeeha Zainee's "The Fly" (2005). The enthusiasm for popular art that is coarse and direct is perceived as a challenge to the elitism of art in modern culture. This freeing of the arts in pop guerrilla fashion is achieved with the wider use of commercial images.

In this tradition are the comical compositions of Maizul Effendy, clearly guerrilla in their use of different images and materials. "Dark Years" (2006), "Bodoh... Bodoh... Bodoh..." (2006) and two compositions from the "Territory" (2007) series display the lower artistic approach of the popular character, yet placed acknowledged as contemporary art. Comical art in guerrilla fashion has become a trend. It comes through



in Muhd Sarip Abdul Rahman's "I'll be Watching You spiCHIKman" (2005) and "Art of Love" (2007). He tries to combine the stress elements and the formalism methods to stabilise the use of the comical image, so it appears as if there is a balance in the control of the visuals and ideas.

A stylish and intelligent interpretation is seen in the compositions of Ivan Lam. Captivating in his compositions are his selection of theme, visualising strategies and method of representation. His compositions have that pop relief nature, owing particularly to the selection of solitary and suspended images. Compositions such as "The Last Flower" (2004), "Beautiful Mistake" (2005) and "Toil for V.S.O.P" have a visual impact that is relieving not only due to their composition but also from image selection and use of colour. Clearly, a high pop interpretation has occurred, where pop art is combined with the current strategy, which is more calm and relieving without the need to be bombarded with packed, overlapped or chaotic visual elements. Painting technique in compositions such as "Surgery (Sorry Sir but We Did Our Best)" (2006) and "The First Truculent Argument Between the Aloof..." (2007) makes us realise that the new wave of pop art has reached a different level.

Earlier manifestations of pop art carried different figurative images. Their compositions also differed from the previously mentioned Neo Expressionism. The trend that sought to take root in Malaysia in the late 1990s was of the figurative aspect in a different human tone. Two portraits by Noor Mahnun Mohamed stand out, with their focus on empty space and detail on the appearance of the subject. Yusof Majid takes us to the foreign, raw and childish realities around us. The environment changes to one of a playground without boundaries or state of fixed reality, one of gleeful infatuation. Works such as "A Fairytale Encounter Homework 3" (2008) frees human realities to a peaceful level.

This collection traces the early developments of Jai's realistic and illustrative compositions from drawings that use materials such as charcoal and other mixtures such

as bitumen. Natural objects have become the theme or subject of his sketches. Jai stresses visual contrast, creation of shape and drawing sensation. The combination of these three aspects strengthens the compositions and gives them a special characteristic. The effect in compositions such as “Life Form Study VII” (1996) is that of drawings that have attained a high state in art. At the next level, Jai uses his illustrative skills to bring his compositions a step further with the combination of the three aspects to produce a more complicated arrangement. The combination of sketch and drawing emphasises composition, use and arrangement of colour, and theme generation.

The difference in using a composition platform, materials and drawing techniques, and the theme, lifts Jai’s compositions to an experimental level or a new approach in the creation of two-dimensional compositions that are conventional. Compositions such as “Untitled (Refound Object Series I and II)” (1996) and “101” (1997) are unique in the value that they place on the composing process. The development of Jai’s compositions became more complicated after that when he started to combine layered and overlapping image generation. His works took on more complex allegorical or metaphorical meanings. Technically, Jai still uses the earlier strategy worked on since the early 1990s, but the composition and image generation have changed. He started to work in texts elements and other elements combined through more controlled arrangements. This is seen in compositions such as “The Hermit” (1998), “Mangkuk Merah” (1999) and “Constructing Stills on Red” (2000).

Jai’s compositions have become grounds for discourse, attempts at technical exploration and semiotic expression, self-reflection and contemplation of his life experiences. Compositions such as “Red Verandah” (2001) and “ATENG” (2001) are clear in their intentions. Later compositions such as “Bio” (2003) and “Non Bio” (2003) to those in the “Bomoh Hujan” (2004) series show a more mature focus in image generation, using an advanced and proactive technique. Fauzal Yusri uses the same strategy from the point of

view of composition and imagery. Muhd Sarip A Rahman exposes us to fusion or a combination of pop image, semiotic tone and composition.

Another inclination of these young artists is the contextual unconscious aspect, which is different from surrealism. Artists such as Januri, Ilham Fadhli and Samsuddin (Buden) are unique in their use of visual silhouettes. Their compositions are a social statement that is dark and at times cynical. In the same dark tone are socio-cultural interpretations of Mohd Fairus Paisan, using coins as image mediator.

Kim Eng is eclectic in his radical approach to printed art. Khairina Khairuddin lays stress on the subject illustratively in conveying the message, even though her compositions are filled with contextual images.

J Anu focuses on the relation between the setting of the context, image and strategy of the composition. The compositions created are rich in socio-cultural tone and unmistakably political. The ideas and selection of topic are current and significant. Overlapping images in the paintings provoke debate, variously humorous and altogether serious. This is reflected in “Devine Vessel 1” (2006), “Fine Line” (2004) and “Fat Jentayuh Lost in Geelong” (2004).

The visualisation clusters of Chin Kok Yee are different from that of J Anu. Apparent in his paintings is the level of illusion, expanding and shrinking the visual space. He appears like a traveller who carries a sieve in his gaze. Through the sieve he reads, refines and interprets his world from the aspects of geography and culture. His world has no border, filled with grand colours.

### ***Installation Art and Sculpture***

Installation art worldwide developed in the 1960s. It attempts to transcend the dichotomy of three-dimensional art. Initial attempts to free the arts in the image field have become well developed.

Zulkifli Yusof is among the earlier Malaysian artists who at the end of the 1980s aggressively adopted the installation art form. His compositions in this collection reflect his approach to question the form, space, context and idea. The formalism tradition is apparent in “Munsiy Abdullah”, intrinsically strong in its idea and shape formation. The technique in the printing process, akin to an engraving, is precise in presenting the historical reading characters. The character is altogether different with “Subuh”. That formalism composition is compact in its use of image and symbol as a mirror.

The three-dimensional concept is more challenging, embracing space and structure that is true in physical aspect. Moreover, the technical element and scale are vital. At specific stages, the materials can have an impact and give visual effect to the entire creation. Examples are image compositions of Abdul Mutalib Musa. The effects are mixed from the aspect of minimalism, process, balance, visual dynamism, and light or compact form. The industrial character is lucid in his compositions, imparting a cold aspect to the expressive touch of an artist. His studies on the nature and visual organisation have taken control of his practice as an artist who is determined and consistent with the language that is being used. We sense the universalism in his images that transcend geographic and cultural divide. Abdul Mutalib Musa at times stresses the process aspect and the nature of the materials by not putting finishing touches to the carpentry work. From one angle it brings out the cold expressionism, evident in compositions such as “Besides the Point” (2005), “Reconstructing Beauty 2” (2005), and the series “Linear Twist” (2008). At times he focuses on the finishing and high visual dynamic force of specific idea. This is seen in “Twist – Gold” (2008), “Entwined 1” (2004) and “Palms (Marquette)” (2004).

If the character and approach of Abdul Mutalib Musa's compositions are industrial in nature, Susylawati Sulaiman's two sculptures in this collection are guerrilla in approach and aggressive. In his selection of materials, and approach to image generation and arrangement, he challenges the creation of sculpture. His use of readymade objects or recovered materials adds a different dimension to compositions such as "Wardrobe", "Setiap Kali Hujan Wairah" and "Zanita Menangis" (2006). This composition not only comes across at the form radicalism level, but is aggressive from the aspect of semantics.

Material is important in the creation of sculpture. Umi Baizura is imaginative in her use of ceramics. She has demolished the perception of ceramics solely to produce bowls and vases, and as material limited to conventional technique and glaze application. She has opened new opportunities through deconstruction and matching, and the mixing of shapes. Her sculptures offer a new perspective in creative ceramics, expanding and challenging in its use. The fresh dimension her use of different materials brings to all her creations is seen in "Bait" (2005). Radical overlapping and merging of material introduce organic abstract shapes that became an eye opener in the series "Gerabak" (2006). Rozana Musa has been just as creative. Her creations are freer in character, with distinctive waves and form construction. Rozana Musa's use of the conventional method in form and glaze creation does not stop her from creating sculptures that are just as fresh in shape formation and depth.

### ***Analysis conclusion***

Most of the compositions in this collection are contemporary in nature, especially the paintings. Aliya and Farouk Khan give special attention to paintings. Their focus is on compositions that are distinctive and challenging in technique and subject representation and image creation. Several of the sculptures, ceramics and installations are worthy of commendation.

Most of the artists represented in this collection are from the fourth generation of Malaysian art. The attention given to known artists of the 1990s would be unremarkable. Significant is the representation of artists starting out in their career. It is clear that criteria for selection have been on technical quality, aesthetics and impact of the works more than reputation of the artists.

### **Triumph of Painting**

As has been mentioned, Aliya and Farouk Khan incline towards paintings of contemporary Malaysian artists. There are works in the modern style, but the emphasis is evidently on contemporary paintings. Aliya and Farouk Khan have taken the selection of artists and paintings to a new level of awareness. Their focus is on theme, subject and new approaches to art. This is challenging, especially in the selection of paintings of mixed material, and the unconventional in subject. Thus the strength of this collection is on the specification of contemporary Malaysian paintings. Represented in most of the compositions are use of strategy and approach, or complicated techniques such as appropriation, kitsch, simulation and allegory.

It may be naive to literally relate paintings of mixed material or unconventional subject to contemporary art. It remains the case in Malaysian art history that the innovation of Aliya and Farouk Khan based on technical representation, theme generation, materials and subject in this collection is commendable. Most of the paintings display an enthusiasm that has freed itself from the grasps of convention, arrangement and history. The collection represents a new voice in the painting arena in Malaysia.

### ***The power of the new Status Quo***

At issue in Malaysian art since the late 1970s is the supremacy of its grand narrative. The grand narrative gives effect to the attitude, perception, history and value of Malaysian art.

It's the authoritative voice to the history of the arts and its value. It's been ingrained, grounded on three factors: the strength of the language, and the financial and political clout behind it. Increasingly artists are acknowledging the collection of Aliya and Farouk Khan.

The grand narrative purports to define the "truth" in the perception, creation in composition, and history of Malaysian art. Invariably the narrative seeks to maintain the status quo, suppressing emerging voices. Good art comes from the variety of styles and unrestrained control in shifts of time and change in appreciation of aesthetics. Yet the grand narrative unwittingly shapes artists, perception, and their compositions in accord with the status quo.

The collection of Aliya and Farouk Khan has opened a new space for other expressions. The collection has also contributed to the perception, value and narration of the status quo. Their purchase of art has given voice to artists, particularly those of contemporary Malaysian paintings. The collection represents a new domain in the Malaysian art landscape.

Artists do not see the collection of Aliya and Farouk Khan as intended to challenge the status quo. The collection has opened new space to the story of contemporary Malaysian art. The additional voice, story and range is vital to the democratic development of Malaysian art.

Unwittingly or otherwise, the status quo has isolated artists and their compositions. The conviction of Aliya and Farouk Khan instigated their quest to aggressively seek out fresh expressions of contemporary Malaysian art.

### ***The investment and market of the arts***

A fine work of art is crafted from thought and emotional awareness, and vigilance and skill in manipulating the materials based on an idea. Good art does not end there. The journey ventures beyond time. One attribute to value is through the process of trade and purchase. A good work of art does not stay in the studio, nor presented gratis. Fine art is appreciated and valued as much as philosophers, art observers and art affiliates. It is subject to the test of trade and purchase, and change in ownership.

Aliya and Farouk Khan approach their collection as they would run an aggressive business. They have assembled their collection with strategic thinking, understanding of business, and awareness of observation. The realisation of their contribution to culture has followed, particularly in contemporary Malaysian art.

Aliya and Farouk Khan at times bought in volume to build up their collection rather than on the basis of “my opinion”, as the status quo might have demanded. On one perspective, it may appear as if the two imperatives are attempting to dictate to the market. Through aggressive buying in volume, Aliya and Farouk Khan were at once seeking to increase the value of their collection while signalling the cultural value of the compositions. The strategy not only creates a reputation and lifts the value of the compositions in their collection. It lifts art down the economic and market chain.

Aliya and Farouk Khan have bought many compositions of contemporary Malaysian art that they see as important and significant. They feel that compositions that are challenging from young artists need to be given attention and support. Their aggressive purchase in volume has lifted the reputation of these artists and their work.

Individuals and the institutions have accepted the approach of Aliya and Farouk Khan. Time will tell if it will flow on to the market. The value of the artists and their works will be lifted in the medium and long term. More broadly, a market has been created for contemporary Malaysian art, one with price indicators of value. With value,



contemporary Malaysian art will become more active. The pressure is now on the creation of art that is of quality. No doubt Aliya and Farouk Khan will be important catalysts.

The potential is for compositions that are of better quality, provocative in their expression, to place Malaysia as a player in the global scene. In prospect, as a hub to the art market, is investment in the arts. Malaysia as a player in the colonised market opens up innumerable opportunities.

### *Epilogue*

Art collection has long been on the move in Malaysia. It has gone through many stages. Aliya and Farouk Khan have been innovative in their specification and approach. The number of compositions assembled over a relatively short time has injected enthusiasm in Malaysian art. Their substantial investment has given them important compositions of modern and contemporary Malaysian art, especially paintings. They have sought out contemporary Malaysian paintings that are fresh, distinctive, and challenging in their expression.

Their approach to buying is reminiscent of the eruption of the art market in New York in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Beyond America, aggressive collectors surfaced from Japan and the United Kingdom. Prices soared. The catalyst then were young artists bold in spirit. The Neo Expressionism of the time had a huge effect on the wave of acceptance, and on the international market.

Funding and investment is critical in the free market. This is no different in the arts. Without the market, art will not develop. Without the business process, art will not go anywhere. Without competition, art will not attain the best art system.

This is not to dismiss intrinsic value. On the contrary, the business of art plays an important role in the creation of fine art. Investment, business and market are important instruments to develop art as an industry. On a regional and international scale, the injection of funds through buying and selling has developed the process of creative art.

Aliya and Farouk Khan are reminiscent of Peggy Guggenheim and John Paul Getty in America. They started out from their own interest instigated by their aggressive buying of new art in the 1950s and 1960s. It was the same with Charles and Doris Saatchi (London) in the 1970s. Debra and Leon Black (New York) and Edythe L. and Eli Broad (Los Angeles) were more radical, buying contemporary art thought to be challenging at the time. They are now accepted as mainstream, in size of their collection, and value.

There are those who may not see eye to eye with these collectors for various reasons. As a commodity in the free market economy, it is accepted that buying and selling lifts the reputation and value of modern and contemporary art. Collectors are as important as artists in this art system. It was the case with Neo Expressionism in America in the 1980s, and the YBA (Young British Artists) in England during the 1990s. As with the collectors before them, Aliya and Farouk Khan are sensitive to the “eye index” in the investment market, moving as the system requires.

With art in the early or middle stages of development in Malaysia, collection can be a catalyst to build a stronger competitive system. The collection of Aliya and Farouk Khan will not stop at this level. They will continue to seek better compositions. The collection will grow, with the potential to be exposed in a different form.

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