



for:

**ESL,**

**Adam, Adelea, Amelie Nadine, Amir Battuta dan Alisa Naemah**

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# Chairman’s Foreword



Assalamualaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh.

In the chaotic world we live in, the real meaning of ‘Merdeka’ seems to have been taken for granted by many of us Malaysians. Defined as “not subject to control by others”, gaining independence is a significant feat for us as a nation of over 30 million people, for the ability to dictate our own harmonious way-of-life, whilst retaining our identity, tradition and culture.

Thus, in conjunction with the 60th Merdeka and 54th Malaysia Day celebration this year, as well as our continuous effort to support local budding artists, I am pleased to launch the 1st solo art exhibition by Badruddin Syah Abdul Wahab. Aptly titled ‘EMANSIPASI’, this exhibition is aimed to celebrate Malaysia’s enviable milestone and to instil and strengthen the sense of love for this country.

We hope the art works will trigger the audiences’ emotional experience and activate goal setting to remain united, to dissolve the illusion of division, but most importantly to love the nation with unconditional love and respect regardless of race, religion, class or gender; a sacred duty of every peace loving Malaysian.

We’ve come a long way since the independence of this land we proudly call Malaysia, but that does not indicate our work as the incumbents of this great nation is done. We still have ways to go towards developing this country to greater heights, both socially and economically.

As Malaysia’s largest bank, we are proud to be supported by thousands of local talented and dedicated workforce in serving the various banking needs of many Malaysians since 1960, contributing to the country’s progress as a whole. We truly understand what it takes to stand the test of time and we are committed to continue supporting the national transformation and development agenda. So we urge the same from everyone, to come together and stand strong as a nation for another 60 years and more.

Selamat Hari Merdeka Malaysia!

Thank you.

**Datuk Mohaiyani Shamsudin**  
Chairman, Maybank & Maybank Foundation



## AN APPRECIATION OF BADRUDDIN SYAH ABDUL WAHAB

In life, we meet many people. I am never tired of meeting new people. In the art world, I can tell you that I've met all types of people. Badruddin Syah Abdul Wahab came to see me through a mutual friend with some paintings and drawings back then. I knew he has been making art for quite awhile but at that time, his works looked quite raw to me.

I have always been very careful in giving out advice, especially to artists since we are all sensitive creatures. I stringed my words carefully as I did not want to hurt people's feelings. But inevitably it happens. Some can take criticism, some can't. As for him, he kept showing up, initially not consistently, but on every visit he stayed for hours. He took my criticism quietly; I have to admit that sometimes I don't know what is on his mind. What I do know is, he kept coming back and seemed to enjoy our chit chat. We moved on to not just talking about art but more and more about life in general.

Later, I noticed his execution of abstract forms and lines have a quality of light which to a certain extent, triggered in me to think of subliminal messages. At first glance, you may not notice it, but if you take the time to look and think about his artworks, you will sense that it reflects his self and emotions. In a way, his works are poetic and has meaning beyond a few lines and brush strokes. This can be seen from his application of colors, such as the dark juxtaposed against vibrant colors. His works are well spaced and thought out as he puts effort into arranging the abstract forms. Some of his works are spiritually driven, at least from my point of view. However, I found it most interesting that it manage to show the act of discovering "Art" as he experimented with new composition, colors, shapes and sizes.

We can see that he is truly passionate about what he does.

Badruddin has been waiting to have a show like this for some time now, I knew that, but besides patience, the other qualities I admired most about the artist is his understanding of "when" and "why" he needs to bring it out. To this exhibition entitled EMANSIPASI, I offer a resounding 'YES!', and to the artist Badruddin Syah Abdul Wahab, my heartiest congratulations!

**Yusof Ghani**

TAPAK, July 19, 2017

## FROM 'MERDEKA' TO 'EMANSIPASI' - THE SPIRIT OF MALAYSIAN ABSTRACT ART

by Tan Sei Hon

### Introduction

Malaysia's history of art is less than a hundred years old. Western style figurative painting were already practised in British Malaya in the 1930s though sporadically and in extremely small numbers. While The Philippines and Indonesia, where the Spanish and Dutch had respectively introduced, supported or provided training in western style art during their rule in the early 1800s, producing skilful and outstanding talents in naturalism, outside of the school system in Malaya, art training and knowledge were transmitted informally through individual artists or groups. Even Thailand which has never been under colonial yoke, brought western style art to the country in the early 1920s to its fine art department under the Ministry of Palace Affairs. By 1943, it had already established the famous Silpakorn University from a modest school of fine art founded in 1933. In contrast, the British Malayan government only began sending Malaysians abroad under scholarships to study art formally late in the 1940s. Though in the early 1950s there were already visible tendencies toward abstraction in the works of **Tay Hooi Kiat** (1910-1989) who was the first Malayan artist to be given a scholarship by the then British government to study art in Europe, he however did not pursue full abstraction in his later works. It was **Syed Ahmad Jamal** (1929-2011) and a handful of other Malayan artists namely **Abdul Latiff Mohidin**, **Yeoh Jin Leng**, **Ibrahim Hussein** (1936-2009), **Jolly Koh**, **Cheong Lai Tong** and **Anthony Lau** (1933-2016) who are considered early pioneers of abstraction in the country. Though their works did not represent a shared philosophy, they were nevertheless producing works that were almost entirely abstract. Many of these artists had already been working under various figurative styles before embracing the abstractionist idiom of Modern art.

### **MERDEKA! - The Spirit of Malayan Modern Art**

The late Syed Ahmad Jamal had done much to connect the spirit of independence with local abstract art making in his writings, statements and through his artworks. He wrote that 'The mood of *Merdeka* was inspirational; like a catalyst it generated vibrations which sparked off realisations. The activity gained momentum and motion which reached ecstatic heights in the sixties. The manifestations in visual form graphically reflected the tempo and mood of *Merdeka* - an expansive joyful sense of freedom.'<sup>1</sup>

### **Why Abstract Art?**

Syed Ahmad Jamal gave several reasons why abstract art (or in his term abstract expressionism) was their choice of artform to reflect the new realities and outlook of an independent nation 'The new way of looking at things, of the break with traditional ways of presenting the image of the seen world by means of representing the nature of the world, runs parallel to the impending break from the bonds of colonial patronage. Although one might argue that the form or rather the convention is in reality a perpetuation of western cultural tradition,

the spirit in which it is expressed is completely new. The new art form graphically reflects the new mood of the spirit of the people.’<sup>2</sup> This ‘break from traditional ways of presenting the image of the seen world’ had started earlier in Europe in the 1900s. The rise of individualism, the availability of commercial photography in 1839 (which had effectively challenged and devalued the artist’s ability in reproducing reality) and the exposure to the art and cultures of the non western civilizations especially Oriental art (Japonism), tribal masks and sculptures as well as other non mainstream worldviews had contributed to the development and look of modern art. Its subject matter, stylistic approaches and colour application were personal, arbitrary and anti naturalistic. It evolved into pure abstraction, a conscious attempt to purge any references to the external world. What became known as Modern Art in essence was a wilful break from centuries of representational or figurative art which the Europeans inherited from the Greeks via the Romans and their Renaissance that later spread to the rest of the world through colonisation and other means of influence.

### Malayan Modern Art - A New Form of ‘Indigenous’ Art

According to Syed Ahmad Jamal, ‘Malaysian artists were not looking back at history. There were no national archetypes to relate to. The art scene was devoid of any inherited symbolic images for reference as historical stepping stones.’<sup>3</sup> He states ‘The very essence of freedom has been the underlying energy for the creative force in the plastic arts. The tradition was being created then and there.’<sup>4</sup> Unsurprisingly, in an art scene that is overwhelmingly dominated by figurative art practitioners, Syed Ahmad Jamal and his fellow abstractionists were taken to task by the local leading lights of figurative art for introducing what they deemed ironically, as ‘western’ ideas (read: alien) that were unsuitable to the local cultural milieu. The National Art Laureate rationally posited that their adaptation of the abstraction and expressionist approaches were ‘natural’ developments from the loose atmospheric watercolour painting styles already practised by many early local painters. He refuted the accusation that abstract art, especially gestural or lyrical abstraction were merely borrowed styles or a fad from the west where he and his fellow artists received their art education. Rather, it was something that was already present in the local spiritual traditions, such as the flow, rhythm and the stylized forms of Islamic-Malay and Chinese calligraphy.<sup>5</sup>

### Against Totalitarianism: Abstract Art as Expression of Freedom

In the past, totalitarian countries (Hitler’s Germany, Mussolini’s Italy and Stalin’s Russia and Mao Zedong’s China) banned modern art forms as part of their concerted efforts to suppress individual freedom, of thoughts, actions and expressions. They favoured the realism that was close to the Neo-Classical style of figurative art with which to propagate their fascist and socialist ideologies and to glorify their leaders. This new form of totalitarian art called Socialist Realism would become the official art of the Communist countries around the world (Russia, China, North Korea, Vietnam, Eastern Europe, parts of the Americas etc).The unhindered practice of Modern art, especially non figurative/ abstract art and others by the Malayan and later Malaysian government ‘... truly reflected the underlying philosophy of the newly independent nation. There was an absence of any form of directive or ‘guidance’ from the authorities as to the ingredients that constitute the art form which was acceptable to the ruling power. Malaysian artists enjoyed a condition of total freedom.’<sup>6</sup>

### What Happened to Malaysian Abstract Art?

- National Cultural Congress- Against Art for Art’s Sake

Convened in Kuala Lumpur in 1971, the National Cultural Congress was organized by the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports to examine conditions and issues regarding cultural practices in Malaysia. Its role was to advise on the formulation of cultural policies that would reflect or to be in tandem with the New Economic Policy which was introduced after the communal riots of 13<sup>th</sup> May 1969 in the restructuring of a new Malaysia. There were those in the congress calling for creative activities in the country to be based on ‘reality’ (read: realism) so that art becomes accessible conceptually and formally. Syed Ahmad Jamal and **Redza Piyadasa** (1939-2007) who among others had helped in its organization, had earlier presented papers that supported the view that artistic practices in Malaysia were rooted in pluralistic circumstances, were strongly against such an imposition. They rightly saw it as an attempt to curb and control artistic activities in the country. “In the plenary meeting on August 20th, Prof. **Ungku A. Aziz** proposed that the ‘Art for Art’s Sake’ attitude in Malaysia should be changed to ‘Art for Society’. He stated that artists have been given full freedom to create, and that the country should now pay attention to art as an element in the economic and political development of the nation”.<sup>7</sup> Both sides debated the issue for two hours which led the chairman of the congress Tan Sri **Nik Ahmad Kamil** call for a vote to decide on a decision. The artists lost and left en bloc in protest.

- C.I.A’s Weapon of Free Expression?

Syed Ahmad Jamal wrote that ‘The *Merdeka* artists of the fifties and sixties subscribed mainly to the aesthetics of abstract expressionism. The immediacy and mystical quality of the mainstream art of the 60s appealed particularly to the Malaysian temperament, sensitivity and cultural heritage, and with the tradition of calligraphy found the idiom the ideal means of pictorial individuation.’<sup>8</sup>

He was mistaken on two counts.

The first was that abstract artists in Malaysia have always been in the minority. One would be hard pressed to name at least ten abstract artists of significance from the subsequent decades since the 1960s.

The second would be the misstep of identifying themselves with the Abstract Expressionists. The American Abstract Expressionists or Ab Ex, together with their European counterparts CoBrA (Copenhagen, Brussels and Amsterdam) and the Taschists working under the umbrella term *Art Informel* laboured from very different context and circumstances compared to Malaysian abstract artists who drew substantially from local situations, spiritual traditions and cultural practices. They were not bohemians, anarchists or members of the Avant Garde, but saw themselves as progressive cultural workers of a newly independent nation. They had operated from a place of hope and optimism for the future while the Ab Ex (who were predominantly made up of European emigrants), the Taschists, etc rose from the devastation of the Second World War. With the Cold War now in full swing between the communists countries and the ‘free’ world, it was believed that the Central Intelligence Agency or C.I.A, recalled how totalitarian countries had suppressed modern artistic expressions earlier, conspired with elite members of society and those in the art institutions to organized a

number of travelling exhibitions that featured the works of the abstract expressionists who at that time were a small obscure group of struggling artists living in parts of New York. Ab Ex (and Action Painting, named after Jackson Pollock's 'drip' paintings) were positioned and promoted as representing the freedom of expression and boundless opportunities enjoyed by every American protected by their government as opposed to the enforced conformity and regulated existence of a faceless worker under the 'revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat'. Ab Ex, Jazz music and Hollywood movies were used as part of the CIA's psy warfare against communist propaganda. Much money was spent purchasing these works and organizing the shows. However, when the general American public finally saw the works for themselves, there was a huge uproar. Even Harry S. Truman, the then president had remarked 'the vaporings of half baked lazy people' after seeing the exhibits in person.<sup>9</sup> The show was promptly recalled and all the paintings were all sold for a song. Abstract Expressionism was promptly replaced by Pop Art and other approaches related to it, among them Photorealism. The great popularity of American Pop Art, an art form that refers to images and ideas from popular culture (music, Hollywood, fast food, advertisement, etc), wrote John Zerzan 'simply reflects the enormous consequences of mounting post-war commodity production and consumption. Shallow, banal, indiscriminate, Pop Art exalts the standardized and makes no demand upon the viewer except his or her money. It has exactly nothing of the inner necessity or passionately sought authenticity of its immediate artistic predecessor.'<sup>10</sup>

## ● Contemporary Art

**Jean Baudrillard** (1929-2007) observed that 'The adventure of modern art is over. Contemporary art is only contemporary to itself. It no longer transcends itself into the past or the future. Its only reality is its operation in real time and its confusion with this reality. Nothing differentiates it from technical, advertising, media and digital operations. There is no more transcendence, no more divergence, nothing from another scene: it is a reflective game with the contemporary world as it happens. This is why contemporary art is null and void: it and the world form a zero sum equation'.<sup>11</sup>

What is the current situation of the local art scene? It has remained stuck at being 'contemporary' for more than 30 years now. Without provenance, justification or a destination, there is a need for Malaysian artists to return to the original spirit of the *Merdeka* artists. Instead of being lull by the euphoria generated and sustained artificially by the forces behind the numerous spectacles in a dystopic consumerist utopia, Malaysian artists must reject this 'reflective game with the contemporary world as it happens' and struggle towards attaining that pure 'expansive joyful sense of freedom'.

## Two Types of Freedom

From the writings of Syed Ahmad Jamal and Latiff Mohidin, there are two discernible types of freedom both were striving for individually. Underlying the former's outlook is a 'Freedom from..' approach, a kind of resistance against imposition from external forces, while the latter's 'Freedom to ....' approach is a form of empowerment and self acceptance. Syed Ahmad Jamal have always pushed against any form of coercion and prescription from any quarters with their vested interests while Latiff Mohidin himself is an embodiment of autonomous individuality, who continues to lead by example.

## The 'EMANSIPASI' of Badruddin Syah Abdul Wahab

In 2015, I was invited to organize a series of exhibitions for a newly established private gallery in Setiawangsa. I took the opportunity to organize a group show called 'I Love Abstract Art!'. The artist **Badruddin Syah Abdul Wahab**, who was introduced to me through a mutual friend, was one of the 13 invited artists. Badruddin is a slow painter. He spends a lot of time reading, thinking and brooding before executing a work. But once started, each stroke is purposefully applied, each colour is in its right place. There is strangely an 'old school' feel to his abstractions. We met up sometime late last year and the idea of a solo exhibition somehow came up. Visiting his studio again and looking back at Badruddin's body of works earlier had actually stirred something inside. The effect it had on me was akin to bumping into an old comrade whose struggle one had inadvertently abandoned without compelling reasons or serious forethought. There was a tinge of regret for lacking the foresight to appreciate the struggle at that time or the required faith to follow it through. However, there is also a wave of gladness to see, after all this years, someone from my generation has remained steadfast, truthful and sincere in the struggle.

"The struggle for what? " one might ask.

Freedom.

It was **Sigmund Freud** (1856-1939) the father of Psychoanalysis who said that 'most people do not want freedom, because freedom involves responsibility, and most people are frightened of responsibility'. In our age of post(3x) modern cynicism, the word 'Freedom' is usually greeted with amusement, disbelief or weariness for we are unable to make sense of the idea of autonomy, having grown comfortable to the strings we are attached to that governs our daily existence. To seek freedom is akin to cutting off those strings, a frightening and paralysing prospect for some, for now we alone are held accountable for our actions and its consequences.

Unperturbed by changing trends, transient demands of the marketplace or charges of naivety for pursuing something that some or many have dismissed as 'dead, buried and forgotten', Badruddin soldiers on at his own steady pace, like slow burning fuel. His confidence is much bolstered by his readings of Latiff Mohidin's writings. Poet, writer, printmaker, sculptor and painter, Abdul Latiff Mohidin is perhaps Malaysia's greatest living modern artist. In his artist's statement, Badruddin wrote that 'The paintings portray the metaphor of continuous flow of energy. To visualise such energy is something that can be done in infinite ways, so I have personally attempted to realise a personal interpretation. I have always held on to the belief that a piece of art must always have three intrinsic values: "*MERDEKA*" (Freedom), "*SERATA*" (All encompassing) and "*CEKAL*" (Resolute), as espoused by the artist Latiff Mohidin. It is when these three values exist in a piece of art then the deepest most personal views of an artist are realised visually. It is not assurance or validation that is sought, rather a self-acceptance that it is a complete visual portrayal untainted by doubt. '

**The Role of Art and The Artist: A Reminder**

In his opening speech as the President of the Malaysian Art Association (now defunct) at their inaugural exhibition in 1981, Syed Ahmad Jamal asked “Maybe among the observers here, there are those who long for stirring art that give life to conditions. Those who visit surely have his or her own philosophy about art. What is art for? Whom is it for? Is art for community more meaningful than art for art’s sake? Or art for development? Art for the nation? Art as an identifier of race? That which gives forms to the soul?”

An artist has certain responsibilities that differentiates him or her from a mere craftsman. An abstract artist is not an image maker or an idolater, but an iconoclast. Abstract art is not a method of making reproductions of one’s objective surroundings but a personal means to materialise visually one’s inner, subjective stirrings. Abstraction is not a mere mindless outpouring of raw emotions but a profound, self assured and direct expression of one’s being. If figurative art is the tedious process of building layers upon layers of dressing up an idea or an image for others, then abstract art is an emancipating process of becoming for the self. Malaysia’s early abstract artists were inspired by the spirit of Merdeka. As we celebrate the nation’s 60th anniversary, this exhibition by abstract artist Badruddin Syah Abdul Wahab is a timely reminder that for a nation to remain free, it must begin with the individual. Each of us has a responsibility to freedom. To blindly give up one’s freedom is an irresponsible act of surrendering one’s life to the control of another. That is slavery, of the mind, body and soul.

Can such a life be worth living?

Happy 60th Merdeka Day!

References

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10) John Zerzan, ‘Abstract Expressionism: Painting as Vision and Critique (1999) from ‘Running on Emptiness: The Pathology of Civilization’. Feral House (2002)  
11) Jean Baudrillard, ‘The Conspiracy of Art’ Semiotext(e) (2005)

**Songsang**

(buat Tok Awang)

Maafkan aku kalau aku sering saja berlaku songsang,  
Terutama di perayaan tahun seperti hari ini,

Apabila semua orang telah sedia duduk,  
Aku bangun berdiri,

Apabila orang bangun bertepuk,  
Aku duduk,

Apabila orang ghairah berbincang,  
Aku tidur,

Apabila orang melepaskan merpati,  
Aku tabur padi,

Orang lain telah merdeka,  
Aku belum,

Maafkan aku kalau aku sering saja berlaku songsang,

Aku hanya ingin mengingatkan.

**Latiff Mohidin**

Kota Bharu, Nov 1976.

*(Reproduced with kind permission from the artist)*





## A CONVERSATION WITH THE ARTIST BADRUDDIN SYAH ABDUL WAHAB

### Tan Sei Hon (TSH) : When did your interest in abstract art started?

Badrudin Syah Abdul Wahab (BSAW): The interest in art was already embedded in me since my formative years as a child. In 1992, I was awarded an undergraduate scholarship to study in the United States. Before leaving for the States, we had to attend a compulsory preparatory course at the Kolej Persediaan Pelajar(KPP) in Shah Alam. Being in Klang Valley, I took the opportunity to keep myself abreast with art through multiple visits to the National Art Gallery. Those regular visits familiarize me with the works of our local artists. I was fortunate enough to catch two of the most important exhibitions ever mounted at the gallery called ‘Vision and Idea’ and the ‘Retrospective of Ismail Zain.’ While the former exhibition’s catalogue was most informative, detailing in chronological order the earliest development of Malaysian art from the past up to then, the latter brought the question of the purpose of art, the fluidity of art in time and the importance of identity in art. I was fortunate too to spend my allowance at that time to get the first editions of the two exhibition catalogues.

I remember being most impressed with the abstract works of Abdul Latiff Mohidin. I was captivated at the way the artist approach abstraction which stood out from the others. I was also impressed with the works of Ibrahim Hussein, Syed Ahmad Jamal, Yusof Ghani, and to certain extend some Lee Joo For and Tay Hooi Keat.

### TSH: Did your time at the states encourage further your interest in abstract art?

BSAW: While in the States, Milwaukee to be précised, I read and studied art history. I also took the opportunity to see works by the the abstract expressionists. At that time, I was particularly taken by the ideas and works of Hans Hoffman(1880-1966). His paintings with the vibrant colors seem too easy to be imitated yet it never bored me. The images from Chuck Close, Mark Rothko, Pollock, Jasper Johns, de Kooning, Max Beckmann, Julian Schnabel, Alex Katz and Ed Paschke also kept my passion vibrating. However a small Picasso’s , ‘The Cock of Liberation’ (1944) in the permanent collection of the Milwaukee Art Museum, with its heavy political theme stood up higher than the rest. Standing in front of the painting brought never ending joy as I felt the vibrating sensation of its thick impasto and colors on my emotions. The time spent there was an eye opener and a great encouragement. After completing my studies in 1998 I came back with the intention of pursuing art seriously. However, since I was not yet comfortable painting with oil, I decided to produce drawings instead. I participated in a number of group exhibitions until 2001 when I stopped being active in the local art scene to pursue a diploma in teaching back in my home state of Johor. I had to shift my focus to other areas in my personal life while art took a back seat until 2008. However, giving up is never considered, that is for sure. I continued to read and seek inspirations especially by the writings of Latiff Mohidin.

### TSH: Can you tell us a bit about the ‘Jemaah’ Series?

BSAW: In the 1990s, the local contemporary art scene was moving toward issue-based subject matters. There were many works that were about the artist’s observations, reactions and critique towards a number of issues, be it political, cultural or about social justice. For a lot of younger artists, the art group Matahati were looked upon with respect and admiration. It was about this time I came out with Jemaah series. A visual statement that celebrates unity, freedom, peace, anti violence and individuality; though it is quite ironic to see through it because the basic meaning of ‘Jemaah’ stood on the strength and unity of the masses. From these major themes, the ‘Siri Budak Sekolah’ was born as a minor theme in the said ‘Jemaah’ Series. Trained to follow through rewards, penalties and punishment, a regimented life at such a young age, their individualities are suppressed in the uniformity of sameness while their time is subjected to the tyranny of the school bell. Underneath they are still kids, mischievous and playful, with all this in full view during recess and after school hours. I thought it was interesting as figure studies, especially the pattern of their movements. It was really about the joy of living and the innocence of childhood. From 2002 till 2008, my ‘Jemaah’ series began to shift towards abstraction. This new direction signalled the beginning of a dark period of struggle, as I wanted to produce oil paintings that capture the spirit of ‘Jemaah’ yet has a strong expressive tone in its presentation. It was hard. My outputs slowed and I did not participate in many exhibitions. I just let the pain of unproductiveness sat in and just followed my instinct. A small numbers of paintings emerged from this period though each one of them took a long time to finish.



Jemaah Rukuk (2002), Ink on paper, 25cm x 30cm,  
Collection of Norlisham Selamat, Selangor, Malaysia



Square Rukuk (2011)  
Acrylic and Oil on canvas, 100cm x 100cm  
Collection of Muhammad Isa Sadlon, USA



Budak Sekolah Agama Red, Yellow and Blue (1999)  
Oil on canvas, 30cm x 63cm(three panels), Collection of Shafee Ramli

**TSH: What was the inspiration behind the ‘EMANSIPASI’ series?**

BSAW: From 2010 onwards, I finally feel at ease with painting after years of experimenting. I also looked or relooked at the works of the old European masters such as Vasily Kandinsky, Edvard Munch, Joan Miro, Pierre Bonnard, Paul Klee and contemporary abstract painters from the American new scene namely Charlene von Heyl, Amy Sillman, Carrie Moyer together with expressive figurative painters such as Dana Schutz. From Europe, Neo Rauch from Germany caught my attention too. Along the way, I also discovered an elderly artist from Maine, USA by the name Lois Dodd, she is 90+ year old now and still at it. There is a certain calmness that I admire in her that is expressed through her works. Why I mention all these painters? As artists, we are constantly looking into others’ work for various reasons. Whatever the initial reasons, it basically comes down to a personal admiration for other fellow artists’ journey in art. I look into all types of output from various artists not for technical reason, but to dig further deep into their idea in relating their output to their environment. As you can see, this practice has been an on going process for me as I kept discovering newer artists that can inspire. This led to the emancipation of my visual vocabulary. As I got older, life seems to have gotten tougher but I found painting becoming easier as I believe the more I look the more my art grows. “Amor fati! Love your fate, which in fact your life.” says Nietzsche.

Needless to say, that things have picked up on the art side seems to have much to do with this sense of liberation from conformity. Still, I sought artistic closure from two important figures in the local art. The artists Yusof Ghani and Latiff Mohidin have always been close to my heart. Yusof Ghani or Pak Yusof was introduced by a school friend when we visited Tapak, the artist’s private gallery and studio in Shah Alam years ago. Pak Yusof became a personal friend who is both inspiring for his down to earth approach to life’s challenges and generous with his time and advice. We would talk about everything but seldom about art. His practical perspective about things triggered an optimism in me that is based on a realistic assessment of the local situation. I decided to go back to basics and returned to the studio with a renewed outlook to only produce works that would bring joy and pleasure to me. Instead of issue based art or art for society, it became art for art’s sake or more precisely, art for my sake!

“Apa saja boleh dalam berseni,  
asalkan jangan mencarut dan mengaibkan orang lain.”  
-Yusof Ghani

Latiff Mohidin’s influence on the other hand is more subtle. My inner strength as an artist is very much derived from my readings of Pak Latiff’s writings. Through his books, Pak Latiff became my ‘Pak Muri’. For those who followed Pak Latiff’s writings, Pak Muri is a fictional character complete with a real life profile invented by Pak Latiff himself. Pak Muri is like an invisible friend who the artist turns to for advice. When I found myself stuck, I often refer to Pak Latiff’s writing and translation works. I see Pak Latiff’s body of works and way of life as a testament of an individuated person who has consciously unshackled himself from the distracting ebb and flow of external forces to fully participate in the creative process of becoming. This freedom of becoming now forms the core of my expression as an artist and the process of my emancipation as a human being. Pak Latiff wrote in Catatan Latiff Mohidin(2010) about the three values which I found very interesting to quote here: *Merdeka*(freedom), *Serata*(all encompassing) and *Cekal*(resolute). It is when these three values exist in a piece of art then the deepest most personal views of an artist are realised visually. There you go, It is not assurance or validation from others that is sought, rather a self-acceptance that it is a complete visual portrayal untainted by doubt that I am looking for. Furthermore, in Catatan Dua Baris(2012), Pak Latiff mentioned “*kita diuji dengan kata-kata,dan janji diri kita sendiri*” and ‘*yang ikhlas dan yang sejati, tak perlukan perlumbaan*’ which made me think and question the purpose of art for me.

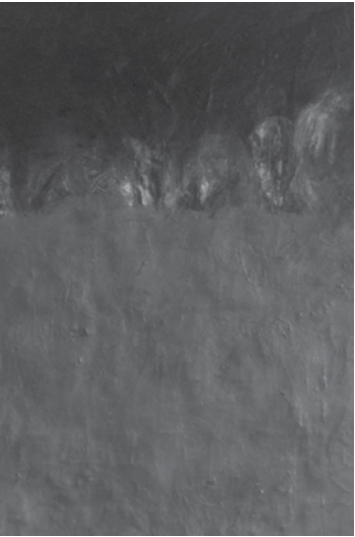


**TSH: When I’ve previously asked you where would you like to have your solo exhibition, You answered “Balai Seni Maybank” without hesitation. Why Balai Seni Maybank?**

BSAW: It was partly out of sentimental reasons. Balai Seni Maybank is one of the earliest corporate galleries in the country. Since the 1980s, many of the current seniors and veterans have at one time or another exhibited there. It was one of the few places in the middle of town where we could go and see art, which was wonderful. I wanted to follow the footsteps of our ‘seniors’ by exhibiting there. We were also very lucky as my works dealt with the theme of freedom that coincided with Maybank Foundation’s program or activities in conjunction with the month of Merdeka. It made sense that a country’s independence and its citizens personal freedom cannot be separated because it reflects the individuals that make a country.



Jemaah Sejuk (2008)  
Oil on canvas, 100cm x 150cm  
Collection of Dr Dahlia Zawawi



Jemaah Merah (2006)  
Oil on canvas, 100cm x 150cm  
Private Collection



New Blue, Cengkerik Malam (2016)  
Oil on jute, 244cm x 183cm  
Collection of Datuk Che Mokhtar Che Ali



I would like to end this interview with a poem from a friend during my unproductive period, which when I look again, is a catalyst that helped to shape my journey towards EMANSIPASI!

Dear Friend....

The truth is,  
I wish to see more of your melancholic side,  
a painter romanticizing colors singing to him,  
your frustration when the plain canvas not speaking to you,  
or when the wet canvas intoxicated you,  
how you compose your love, emotions and stories with your brush strokes,  
how energy storming your studio at 2am or 2pm,  
how black prisons your soul or white frees your burden,  
or how the unpopular blue waving the circle  
or the hungry red leaving the square  
how lemon is yellow  
and how lotus blossom in muddy water...

Ohh dear,  
enuf with the intellectual man barking over this mad world  
you never owe this mad world any explanation or justification  
you are neither a slave or fighter for this world,  
only a free man who is free to do anything  
so, how about choosing what you are supposed to do...  
paint for yourself, for your life... for your own peaceful night sleep...

I am now.....delusional...

*The Footnote, June 2011*

Reference:  
Latiff Mohidin, Catatan Latiff Mohidin (2010), Percetakan Maya, Kuala Lumpur  
Latiff Mohidin, Catatan Dua Baris (2012), LM Studio, Kuala Lumpur  
Latiff Mohidin, Rempah Ratus (2016), LM Studio, Kuala Lumpur

\*

- 1) *MERDEKA: Kemerdekaan peribadi sangat tinggi, seolah-olah tidak ada yang mahu diperintah.*
- 2) *SERATA: Tidak mempunyai rasa hina diri. Harga diri bagi setiap orang adalah sama, maka setiap perkosaan akan sentiasa ditentang.*
- 3) *CEKAL: Pantang merengek, mengadukan kesulitan atau nasib malang.”*



Potret Pelukis Sebagai Hantu Jembalang (1997)  
Oil on canvas, Artist's collection

“Tidak semuanya terletak di paksi kebendaan  
Bukan semuanya boleh diganti dengan barang-barang  
Maaf, ekspektasi kamu bukan urusan aku  
Biar aku belajar mengikut acuanmu  
Maaf, sekali lagi maaf  
kerana tidak memohon maaf.”

-BSAW, 2 Jun 2016



Selected Works 2011 - 2017

## Artist's Statement

The paintings portray the metaphor of continuous flow of energy. To visualise such energy is something that can be done in infinite ways, so I have personally attempted to realise a personal interpretation. I have always held on to the belief that a piece of art must always have three intrinsic values: "freedom", "all encompassing" and "resolute", as espoused by the artist Latiff Mohidin. It is when these three values exist in a piece of art then the deepest most personal views of an artist are realised visually. It is not assurance or validation that is sought, rather a self-acceptance that it is a complete visual portrayal untainted by doubt.

**Lanskap Munch**  
Oil on Canvas  
24cm x 32cm  
2011







**Emansipasi Awal**

Oil on Canvas  
61cm x 61cm  
2011

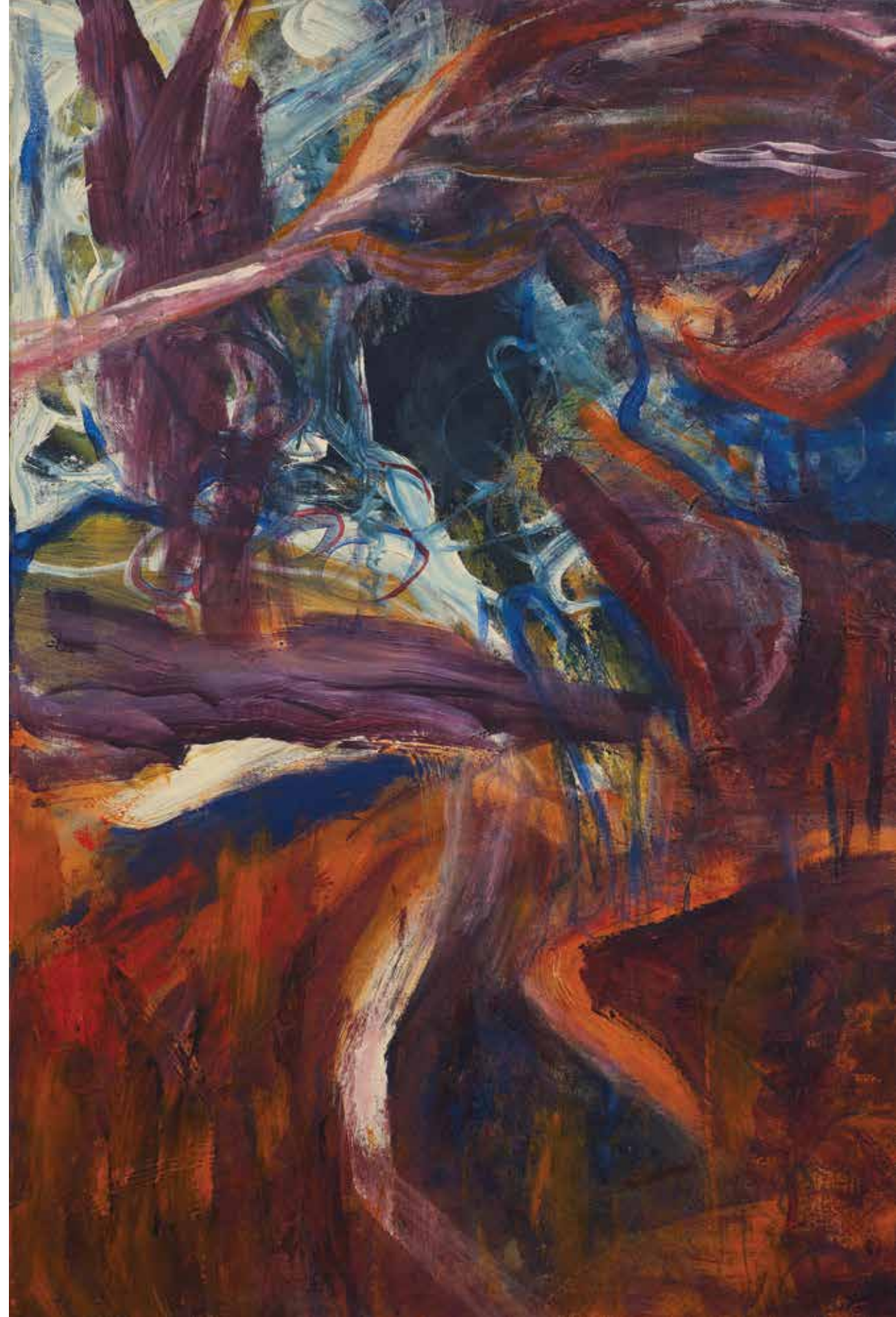


**Emansipasi Bentuk**

Oil on Canvas  
51cm x 76cm  
2017

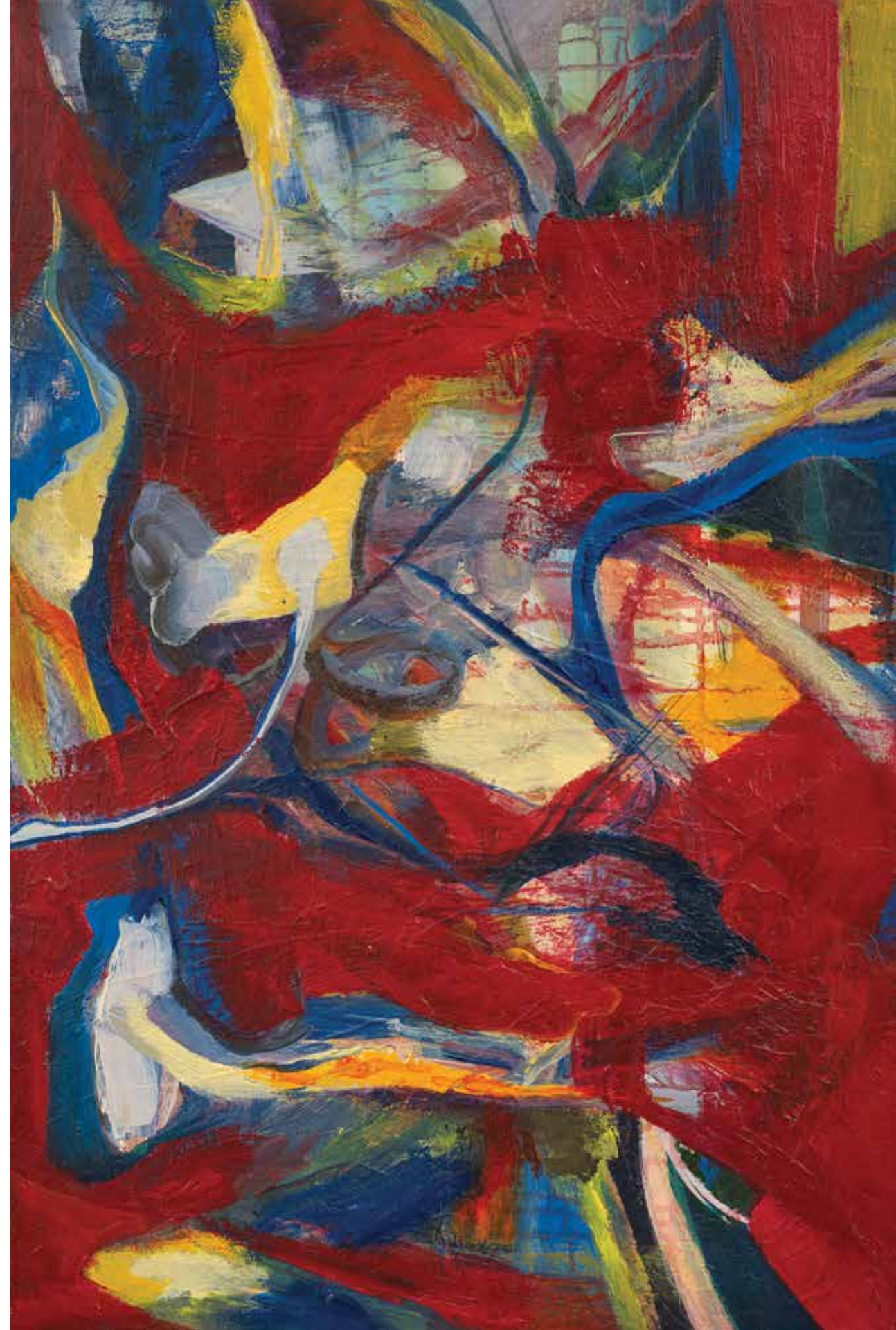


**Untitled (Ungu)**  
Acrylic on Canvas  
91cm x 61cm  
2011





**Untitled (Red)**  
Acrylic on Canvas  
91cm x 61cm  
2011





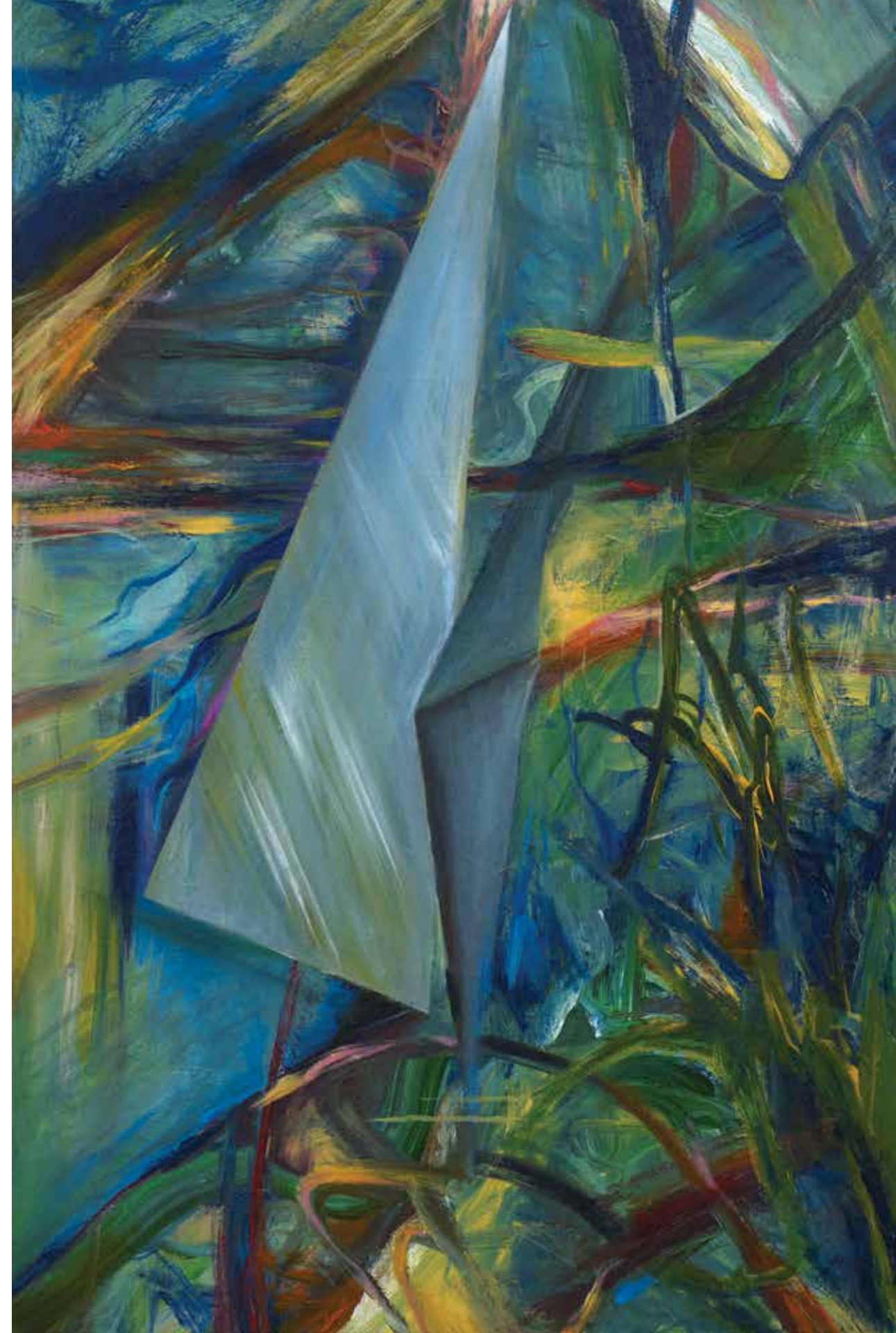
**Hiris (Kaca Series)**

Acrylic and Oil on Canvas

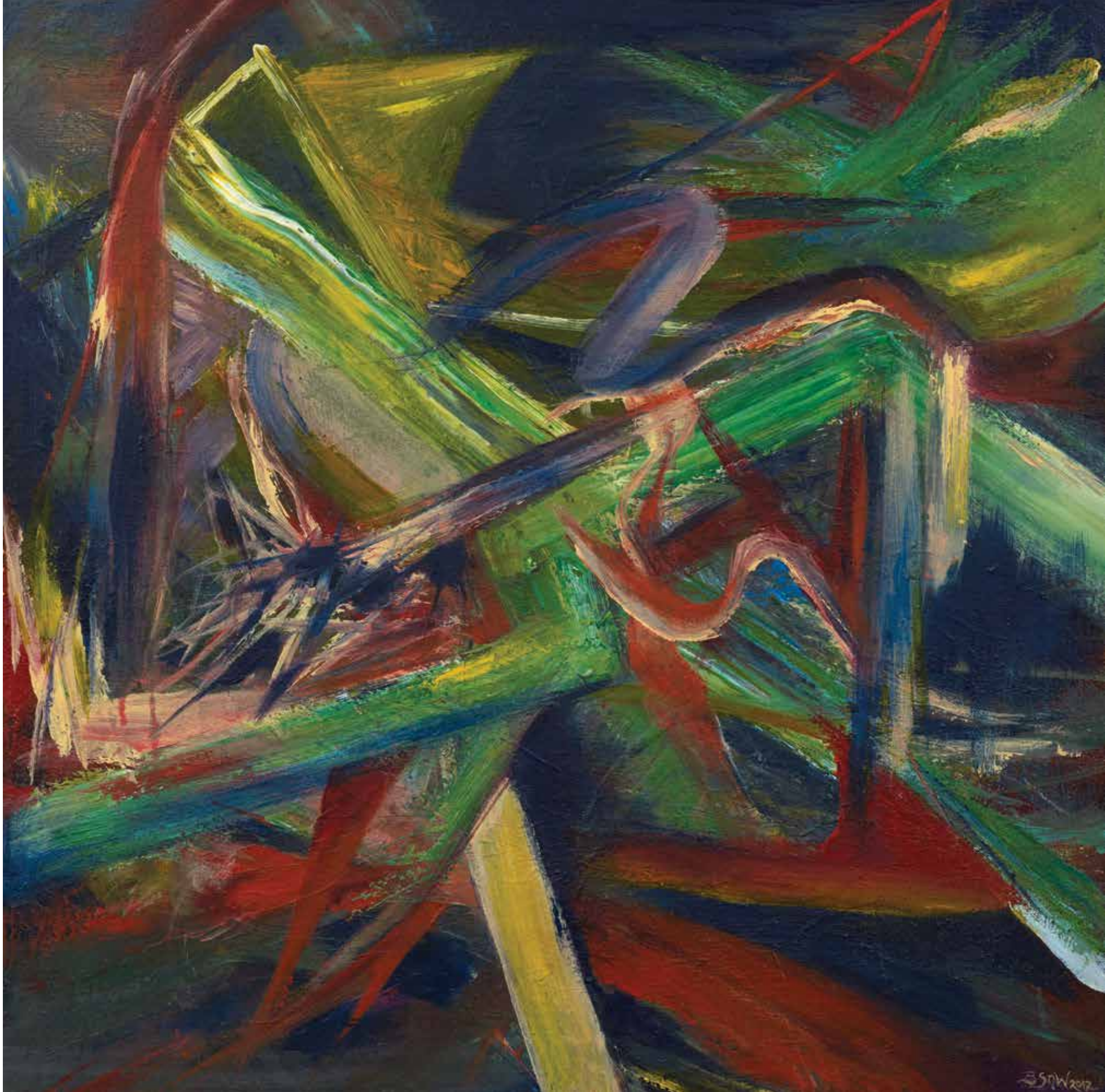
91cm x 61cm

2012

Collection of Pn Aslinda Abdul Aziz







**Malam Resah**  
Acrylic on Canvas  
69cm x 69cm  
2012



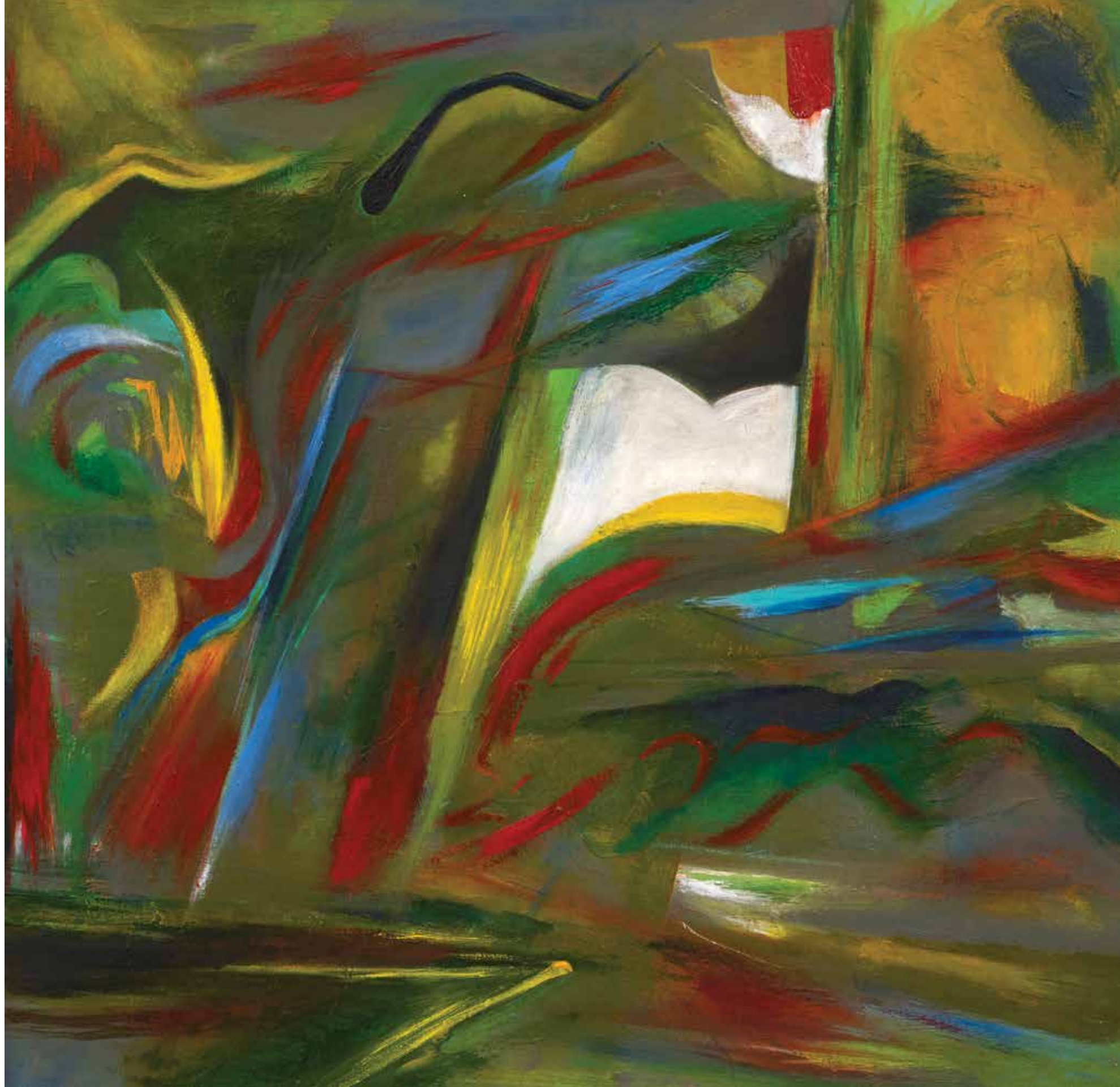


**Emansipasi Sepi**

Oil on Canvas  
61cm x122cm  
2012



**Greenlight II**  
Oil on Canvas  
91cm x 91cm  
2012





**Persengketaan**  
Oil on Canvas  
91cm x 150cm  
2013



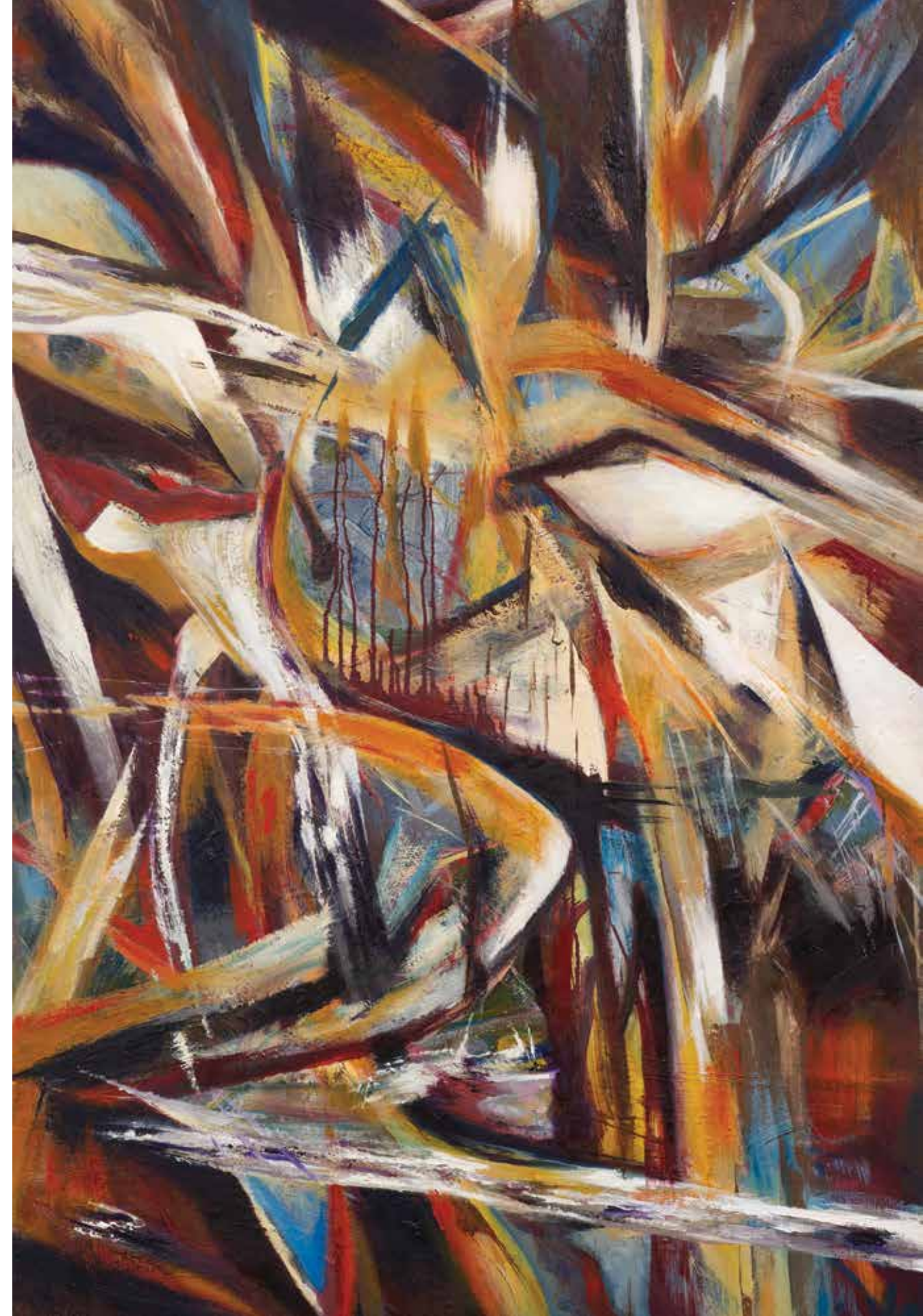


**Pergelutan**

Oil on Canvas  
100cm x 100cm  
2013

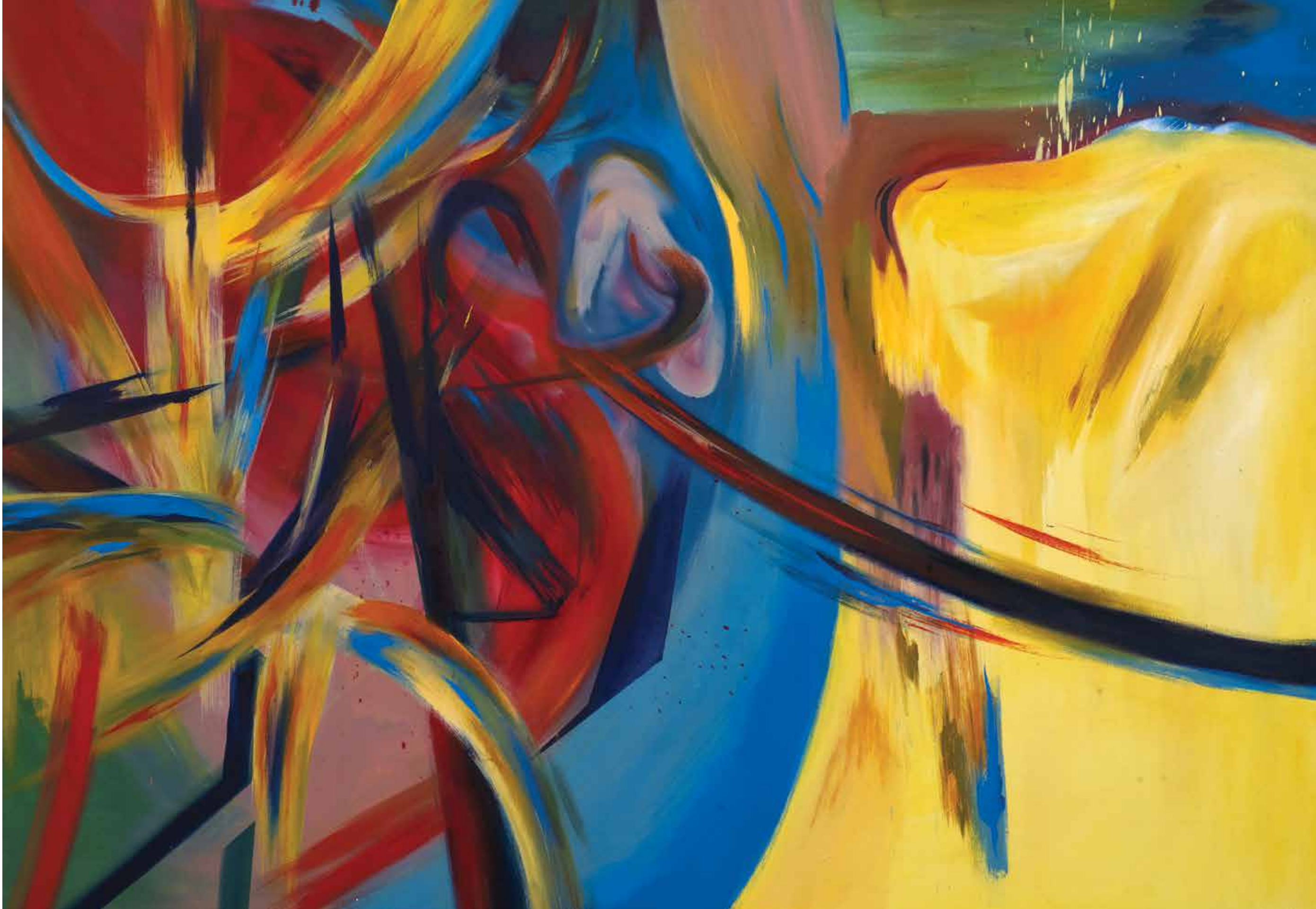


**Garis Ruang II**  
Oil on Canvas  
150cm x 100cm  
2014

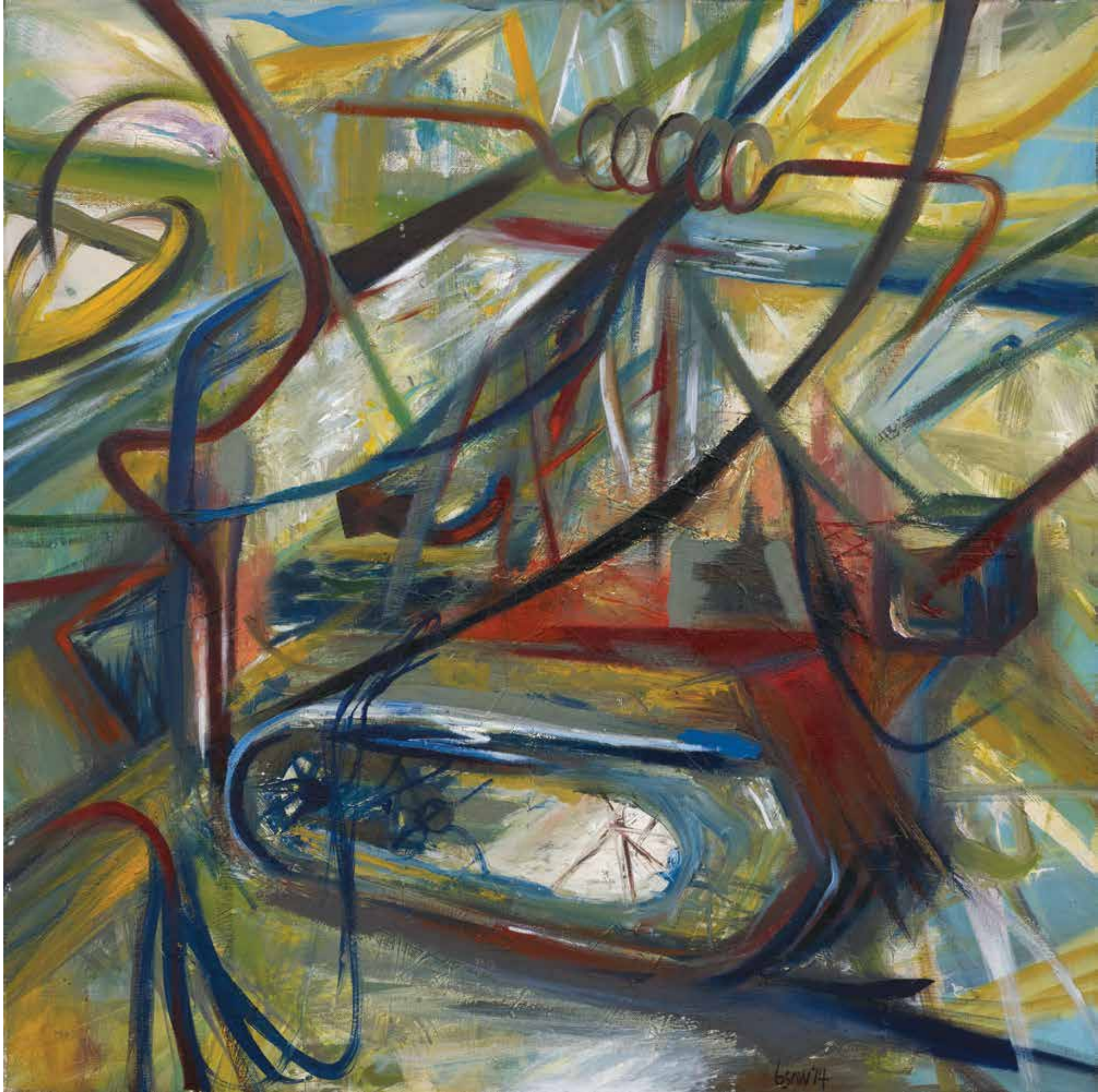




**Cetusan Emansipasi**  
Oil on Canvas  
137cm x 198cm  
2014







**Jentera**

Oil on Canvas  
91cm x 91cm  
2014



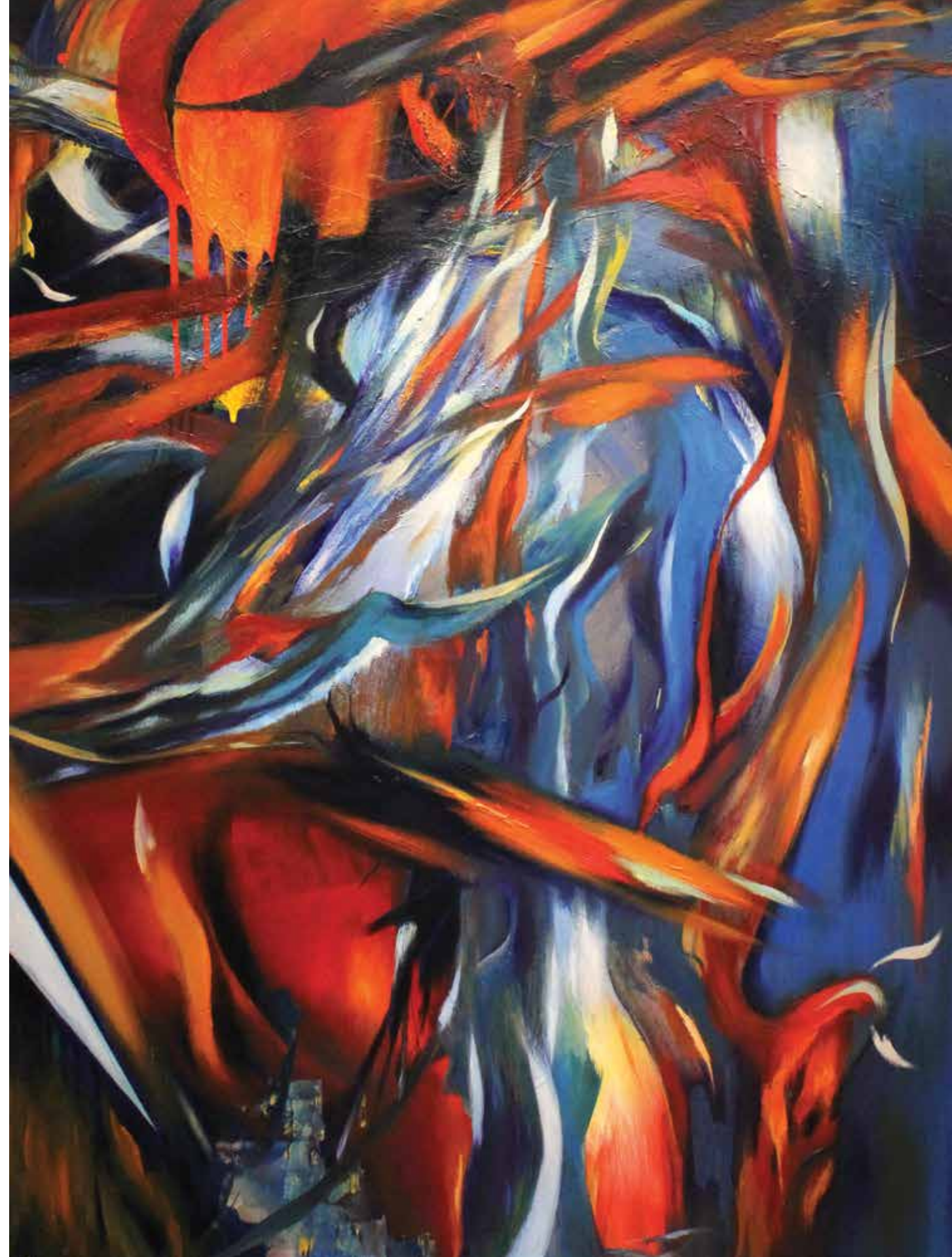
**Api Badai**

Oil and aAcrylic on Canvas

122cm x 91cm

2015

Collection of Dr Zulkifli Mohamed Haris  
& Pn Sharifah Izrina Syed Kamarul Bahrin







**This is Tao (Diptych)**  
 Oil on Canvas  
 91cm x 182cm  
 2015





**Kaca**  
 Oil on Canvas  
 61cm x 61cm  
 2015  
 Collection of En Iqbal Abdul Rahim



**Kaca #2**  
 Oil on Canvas  
 51cm x 51cm  
 2015



**Marak**  
Oil on Canvas  
137cm x198cm  
2015



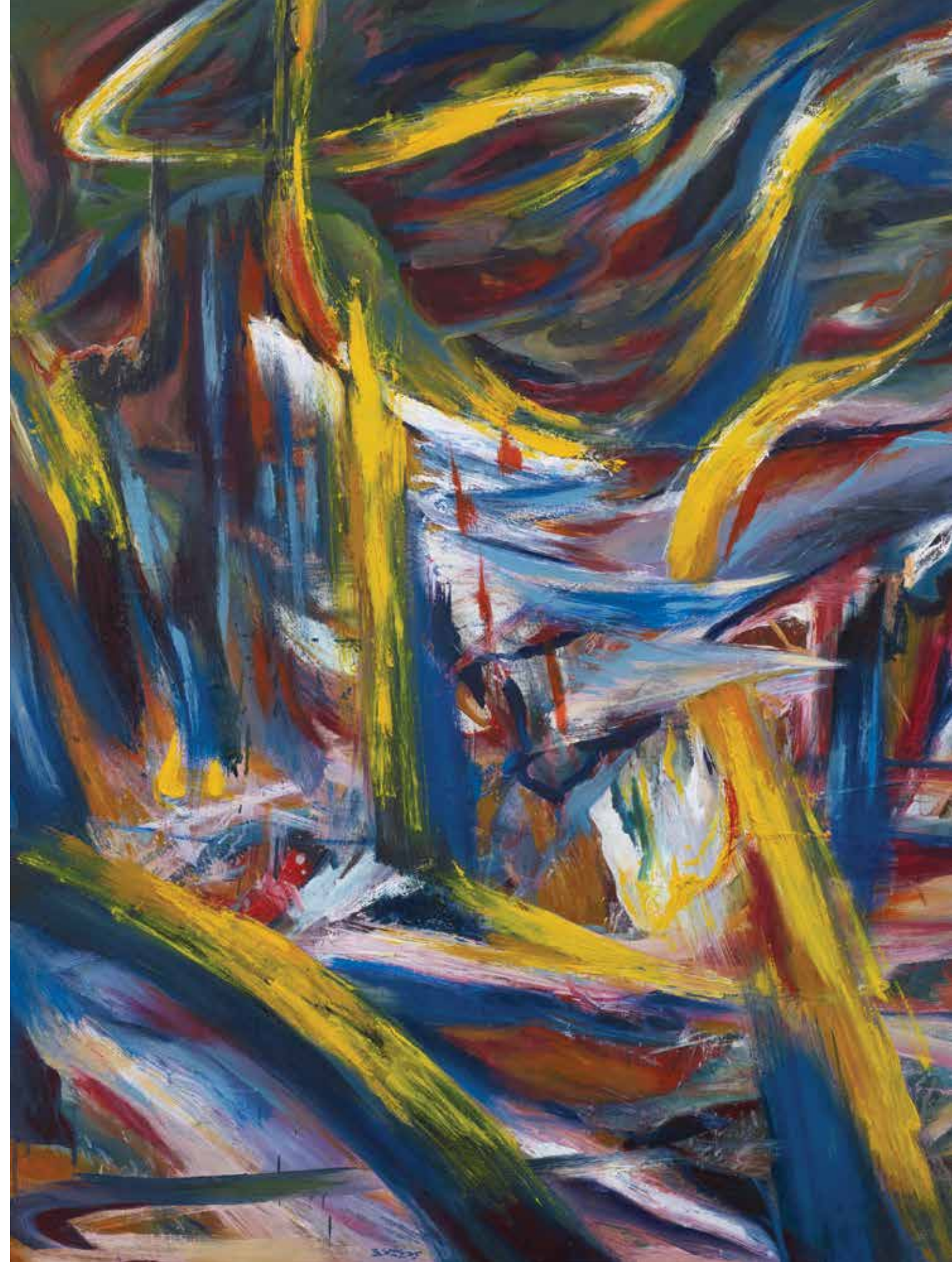


“Daun berguguran,  
kering dan kegersangan. Berubah lagi.  
Yang baru pun hadir,  
dan akan menjadi yang lama. Berganti lagi kepada yang baru  
dan aku terus menunggu”

-BSAW 1997

**Api (Tanpa Tajuk)**

Oil on Canvas  
122cm x 91cm  
2015







**Tandatangan**  
Oil on Canvas  
91cm x 91cm  
2016





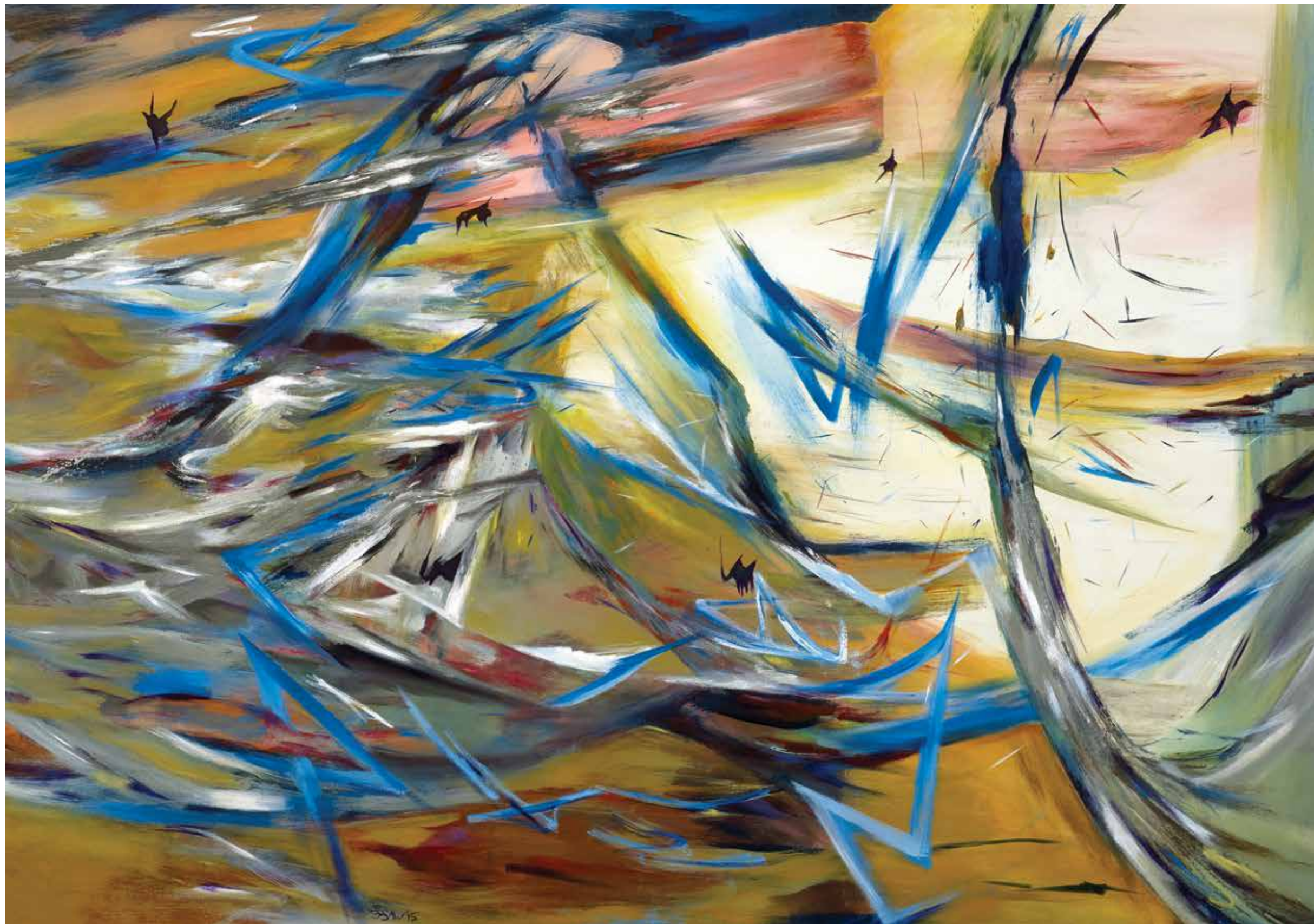
**Emansipasi Mimpi**  
Oil on Canvas  
71cm x 56cm  
2016



**Refleksi Emansipasi**  
Oil on Canvas  
66cm x 51cm  
2016



**Awal Ribut**  
Oil on Canvas  
137cm x 198cm  
2015







**Emansipasi Tanah**  
Oil on Canvas  
71cm x 56cm  
2016



**Emansipasi Hijau**  
Oil on Canvas  
77cm x 51cm  
2016





**W untuk Wahab**  
Oil on Canvas  
51cm x76cm  
2017



Di kelilingi mereka yang lemah  
hanya akan menjadikan kau lemah.  
Walau kau usaha sebaiknya untuk mengubah,  
akhirnya kau yang semakin lemah  
dan lebih lemah  
lemah dan lemah  
selemahnya

kelemahan,  
-BSAW 2016

**Emansipasi Malam**

Oil on Canvas  
100cm x 77cm  
2017





**Emansipasi Ada**  
Oil on Canvas  
122cm x 127cm  
2017





**Emansipasi Bebas**  
Oil on Canvas  
91cm x 122cm  
2017







**Emansipasi Hanyut**  
Oil on Canvas  
91cm x 122cm  
2017



**BADRUDDIN SYAH BIN ABDUL WAHAB**

APRIL 1, 1974 (MUAR, JOHOR)

Bachelor of Arts. Marquette University, Milwaukee, Wisconsin USA (1997)

Diploma in Art Education, Maktab Perguruan Batu Pahat, Johor (2002)



**EXHIBITIONS**

**1997**

- 1. STUDENTS' EXHIBITION, MILWAUKEE INSTITUTE of ART AND DESIGN (MIAD), MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN, USA.

**1998**

- 2. 3 YOUNG CONTEMPORARIES '98, VALENTINE WILLIE FINE ART, KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA.

**1999**

- 3. HUMAN EXPRESSION, VALENTINE WILLIE FINE ART, KUALA LUMPUR.
- 4. LOVE ON PAPER, VALENTINE WILLIE FINE ART, KUALA LUMPUR.
- 5. ART UNDER 1000, VALENTINE WILLIE FINE ART, KUALA LUMPUR.
- 6. THE B-SIDE, PELITA HATI HOUSE of ART, KUALA LUMPUR.

**2000**

- 7. TOLONG! VALENTINE WILLIE FINE ART, KUALA LUMPUR.
- 8. ARANG, GALERI TAKSU, KUALA LUMPUR.
- 9. RED, TANGSI GALLERY, KUALA LUMPUR.

**2001**

- 10. MALAYSIA OPEN, BALAI SENI LUKIS NEGARA, KUALA LUMPUR.

**2006**

- 11. 3 YOUNG CONTEMPORARIES REVIEW: 1996-2006, VALENTINE WILLIE FINE ART, KUALA LUMPUR.

**2007**

- 12. JUXTAPOSITION, KLPAC, KUALA LUMPUR.

**2008**

- 13. ESSENCE OF FINE ART, RA FINE ARTS, KUALA LUMPUR.

**2009**

- 14. PEACE: EXPRESSIONS OF HOPE, RA FINE ARTS, KUALA LUMPUR
- 15. MALAYSIA ART EXPO: RA Fine Art, MATRADE CENTRE, KUALA LUMPUR

**2011**

- 16. LIFEST, SOLARIS MONT KIARA
- 17. KALAM III, PUNCAK GALLERY, BUKIT JELUTONG, SHAH ALAM

**2012**

- 18. eARTh, PUNCAK GALLERY, BUKIT JELUTONG, SHAH ALAM

**2013**

- 19. BUKA, ARTELIER GALLERY KUALA LUMPUR
- 20. JAWI: PENA MALAYA, ARTELIER GALLERY KUALA LUMPUR

**2014**

- 21. SITI NURHALIZA: an ICONIC EXHIBITION, a GROUP SHOW, ARTELIER GALLERY KUALA LUMPUR
- 22. LIMBO by Alegori, a GROUP EXHIBITION, ARTELIER GALLERY KUALA LUMPUR
- 23. ARTEXPO 2014; ARTELIER GALLERY, KUALA LUMPUR

**2015**

- 24. KALAM IV, GALERI TAPAK, SHAH ALAM, SELANGOR
- 25. I LOVE ABSTRACT ART, XIN ART SPACE, KUALA LUMPUR
- 25. MASA by Alegori, M-SUITE HOTEL ART SPACE, JOHOR BAHRU, JOHOR

**2016**

- 26. NEO EXPRESSIONISTS, GALERI TAPAK, SHAH ALAM, SELANGOR
- 27. SHAH ALAM BEINNALE, SHAH ALAM, SELANGOR



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Empower future leaders in the finance community	Ensure inclusiveness of those in the communities	Promote community compassion	Promote artistic creativity of the youths	Help protect the planet’s diversity for future generations	Mobilize employees together with partners in disaster situation, locally and regionally

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