



This page, from top left to right: Portrait of Haffendi Anuar; Grill Work 4 (detailed view), 2015.

Facing page, clockwise from top left: Grill Work 1, 2015; Grill Work 6, 2015; Sotong Dalam Minyak (Squid in Oil) 1 (detailed view), 2013; Piloti 13, 2015; Jabberwocky (detailed view), 2015.

ART REPUBLIK MINDFULLY TAKES IN THE WORLD WITH HAFFENDI ANUAR. BY NADYA WANG

Adventure Time

Haffendi Anuar (b. 1985) is a Malaysian artist who works in sculpture, painting, drawing and installation. In 2015, Richard Koh Fine Art presented 'M13', his first solo exhibition. The title was taken from the block number of a low-cost building in central Kuala Lumpur that housed his previous studio.

'M13' featured 64 sculptures in four groups: 'Pilotis', 'Blocks', 'Grill Works' and 'Windows', and simulated a cityscape. Haffendi says, "When the smaller 'Windows' are installed in a grid-like manner on the gallery wall, they in turn activate that wall into a metaphorical building façade, and the 'Pilotis', which reference columns or building foundations, when viewed in a cluster, appear like an archipelago of skyscrapers."

With the architectural slant of the show, it is perhaps no surprise that while attending the International School of Kuala Lumpur, the artist had wanted to be an architect, partly because he thought it the responsible thing to do coming from an Asian family. However, he soon found himself spending most of his time in the school's art studio, and set his sights on becoming a sculptor, for the joy he found in making objects.



The artist's attention to detail is clear in the carefully constructed artworks. The 'Piloti' pieces are totem-like sculptures made by vertically connecting vessels such as bowls and plates with a rod, then filled with puttyfilla and sand. These were the first to come in the series. To artificially achieve the antique looks, the artist applied dozens of layers of paint and sanded them down after each layer. For example, a tall, primarily blue sculpture riddled with off-white specks appears well worn, suggesting a history that it has not lived.

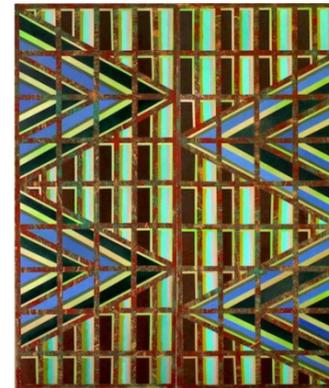
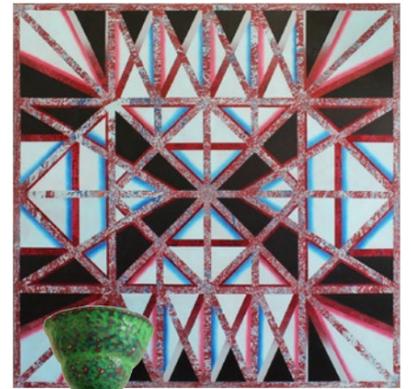
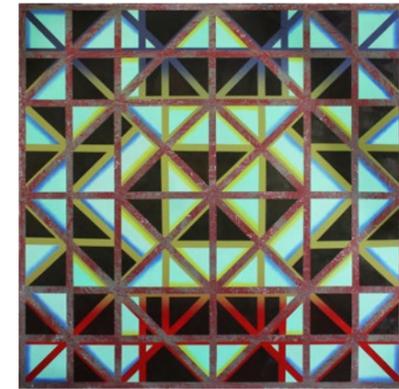
The body of work in the exhibition has been made with keen attention paid to the immediate environment, a conscious decision made by the artist, who has studied and lived abroad, from attending the Rhode Island School of Design in Providence, to Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design in London, to learning Mandarin in China. "Returning from abroad, I wanted to anchor my practice to local contexts and site is one of them," says Haffendi. "I do feel a sense of responsibility to make sense of my current environment, and the city offers an abundance of material to examine and fiddle with."

Looking at Malaysian art from the perspective of both an insider and an outsider, Haffendi is interested in addressing what he saw as a lack of geometry in Malaysian art, especially by young artists, and its association to culturally linked ideas of Western modernism, modernisation and urban reality. For 'Elephant Utopia', an extension of 'M13' for Art Taipei 2015, the artist wrote about the inspiration that 'The Wizard of Oz' served, in the scene where Dorothy and her friends stand on the red brick road against a background of an unpopulated emerald city that act as an empty symbol of the promise of prosperity and progress. It is an idea he builds on in his representation of the modern Kuala Lumpur cityscape.

In stark contrast to the neat, structured geometrical works Haffendi made for 'M13' and 'Elephant Utopia' is his 'Advanced Britttled Bodies' series of irregular-shaped sculptures, which he began in college. The masses, made in sizes similar to those of domesticated animals, are attached to castors or hinges. Coated in striking metallic colours that highlight their free forms, they can be seen as extractions of a uniform landscape. The series was picked up by Aesop to be displayed in their Kuala Lumpur store space in 2015.

In his time in London, Haffendi has worked as artist assistants for British sculptors Hew Locke and Nicholas Deshayes. For Locke, he assisted in the installation of cardboard boats for an institutional show. With Deshayes, he helped the artist out with some of his sculptures for his first solo show at the gallery where he interned. Haffendi counts this as one of the most enjoyable experiences he had in his time in London. Subsequently, the artist sub-letted his studio to Haffendi for a couple of months while he was away on a residency and Haffendi got a taste of having his own studio space in London.

Ruminating on his varied experiences, Haffendi says, "I think living in different places has forced me to be constantly adaptable and responsive to my immediate environment, and to be resourceful. Artistic practice is not



autonomous and does not exist within a self-created bubble, as artists are part of a larger system of networks, whether cultural, economical or political."

Incidentally, Haffendi is the gallery manager at Richard Koh Fine Art, which allows him to interact with others in the art world. It is a role that complements his work as an artist. "Both roles require a different kind of responsibilities altogether. I tend to zone into managing and writing when I am at the gallery, and focus on my practice when I'm in the studio. It's a little tricky at times. One good thing about working at the gallery is that I don't spend all my time in the studio, and get to meet interesting people in the industry."

Haffendi continues to find inspiration in art and design all over the world, but always with his finger firmly on the pulse of what is happening closer to home. At the moment, he is looking into regional crafts, from woven baskets and mats to wooden sculptures and textiles. And with art, he looks at fellow multidisciplinary young artists working in various cities. A modern-day flâneur, Haffendi says, "In the real world, I enjoy walking and getting lost in different parts of the city; I mean just looking and experiencing." The artist also delves into design history including product, furniture and industrial designs.

Despite or because of his experiences abroad, Haffendi considers himself a Malaysian artist without question, applying what he has learnt and seen elsewhere to understanding realities back home. "The ideas and ways of looking that I've had picked up from experience in the West has helped me to digest the current materials that I'm confronted with in Kuala Lumpur such as site, urban debris and online images," says Haffendi. "I guess I am constantly juggling with the training that I had from the West and my cultural identity that stems from how I grew up, and whether one outplays the other." ■

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