

**Siap
Tong Sa**

我
自
名
字
叫
苏
丹

Liew Kwai Fei

**You Look
Funn**

Siapa dia
Tong Sam Pah?

我的名字
哈哈苏丹

You Look F**king
Funny-lah!

Siapa dia Tong Sam Pah?

我的名字哈苏丹。

You Look Fking Funny-lah!**

1

Siapa Dia
Tong Sam Pah?

It was back in the 90's. Our headmaster who also taught us Malay and physical education was a man in his late 40's, or maybe 50's. Sometimes in the middle of the Malay class, he would give us an example or make a sentence by starting his phrase with a person called Tong Sam Pah*. With a surname like Tong, first name Sam Pah, I thought it could only be a Chinese because the names of my other Malay classmates sounded different. Meanwhile, the Malay students in the class would ask simultaneously: who is this Tong Sam Pah? With their snickers and interrogative stares at the Chinese students, we knew there was something wrong but somehow could not explain why. We did not know it was a joke, to the limit of being racist. Well, it was certainly not very funny, but our headmaster always maintained his smile while repeating the sentence in class.

*In Malay, tong sampah actually means rubbish bin.

2

我的名字哈苏丹。

他说: Nama saya Ha Su Tan.

我答: 我的名字哈苏丹。

他问: Ni nama saya dalam cina?

'hahahahaha' 我笑了, 虽然回想起来并不是十分好笑。

'可你还是笑了', kata Ha Su Tan.

3

You Look
F**king
Funny~lah!

An afternoon

'You look funny-leh!'

We were going to attend a gallery opening in town.

I tried to dress up, or be fashionable. Well, I tried...

'But you look funny...'

It hurt me, when she made such a remark.

Maybe she didn't mean it that way, but it hurt anyhow.

'What do you mean FUNNY? F**K you!'

I took it as an insult. I felt even worse after making the extra effort to dress up, which was unnecessary.

The train stopped; doors opened.

I stepped out, and waited for another train at the opposite platform.

At 4pm

I was still affected and sad, yet at the same time, I had an idea to

make a painting.

‘你很好笑’ I painted these words on a piece of watercolour paper with acrylic, but the words were arranged in such a way:

好你
笑很

And I further translated the sentence into:
好=fucking, 你= you, 笑=funny, 很= look.

In the evening

‘I am sorry,’ she said.

‘I love you,’ I answered.

Liew Kwai Fei,
Selangor
2015

Notes

When did I realize that meaning is created, and not merely what it is? I could no longer recall such a revelation, but ever since then, I have started looking at my everyday life and surroundings differently.

Have you noticed a shadow called ideology dragging the society and forcing history to change its itinerary? Ideology has been there, long before I noticed its existence, constantly influencing my thinking and decision-making. Throughout my life, I never stopped consuming signs embedded with programmed information and messages; it was not until recently that I began to think maybe it was the other way around – I am the one who is being consumed, and this gradually takes away the ability to counteract in an unequal structure of power.

To understand how ideology infuses meaning through signs is what I aim to explore in my solo entitled “*Siapa Dia Tong Sam Pah?* 我的名字哈苏丹。You Look F**king Funny~lah!” First, I started my creative and critical processes by trying to analyze how signs function, followed by the adventure of associating and interpreting meaning, and eventually going deeper by provoking system malfunction in the so-called common sense that governs everyday life.

Fighting back in a positive way perhaps could help to neutralize the damage already done to my poor soul. In my studio, I decided to deconstruct and reconstruct the villain signs by a variety of methods, such as appropriation, editing, collage, improvisation, game, derision, irony, etc... with the hope to create new meaning and the possibility of multiple readings. The outcomes are these fluid, unstable and dynamic combinations of signs, as my new allies to denounce the quasi-invincible hegemony operated by the state apparatus.

Compared to other signal carriers in this age of computerization, painting is far from being the most effective tool of communication. Nonetheless, I believe painting as a manual medium that emphasizes authenticity could play a crucial role, in counterbalancing the infinite duplicates of signs. Once frozen and fixed on my canvas, these muted signs are turned into subjects for reflection; I have regained the ability to analyze and examine the forms of ideology.

Works

艺术品

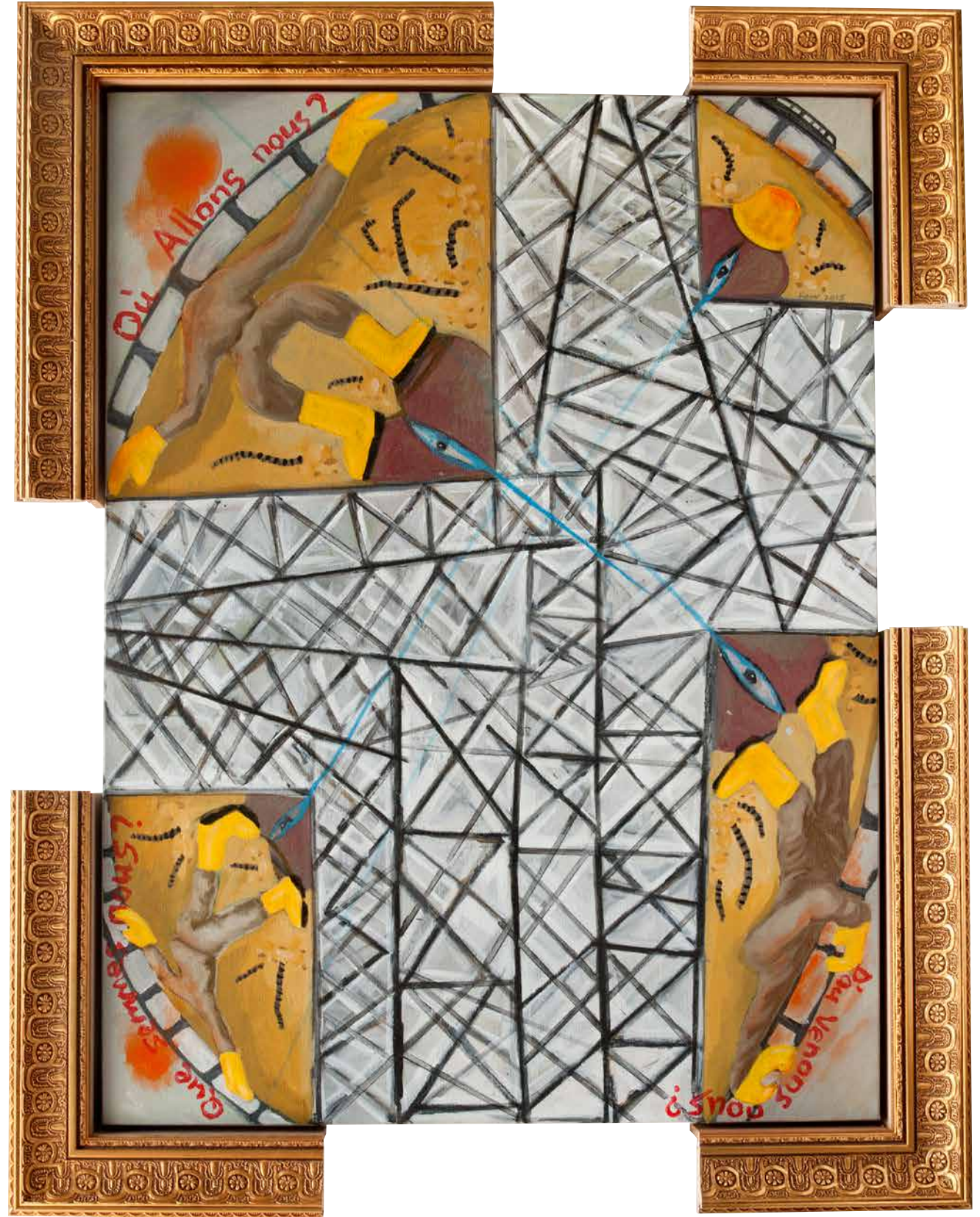


Somewhere Over The Rainbow
2015
Acrylic and graphite on linen, embroidery,
Velcro and custom made wooden frame
117 x 115 x 7 cm

Back of painting



Lu Siapa? Mana Kampung? Mana Mau Pergi?
2015
Acrylic on linen, embroidery, Velcro
and custom made wooden frame
115 x 90 x 8.5 cm (double sided)

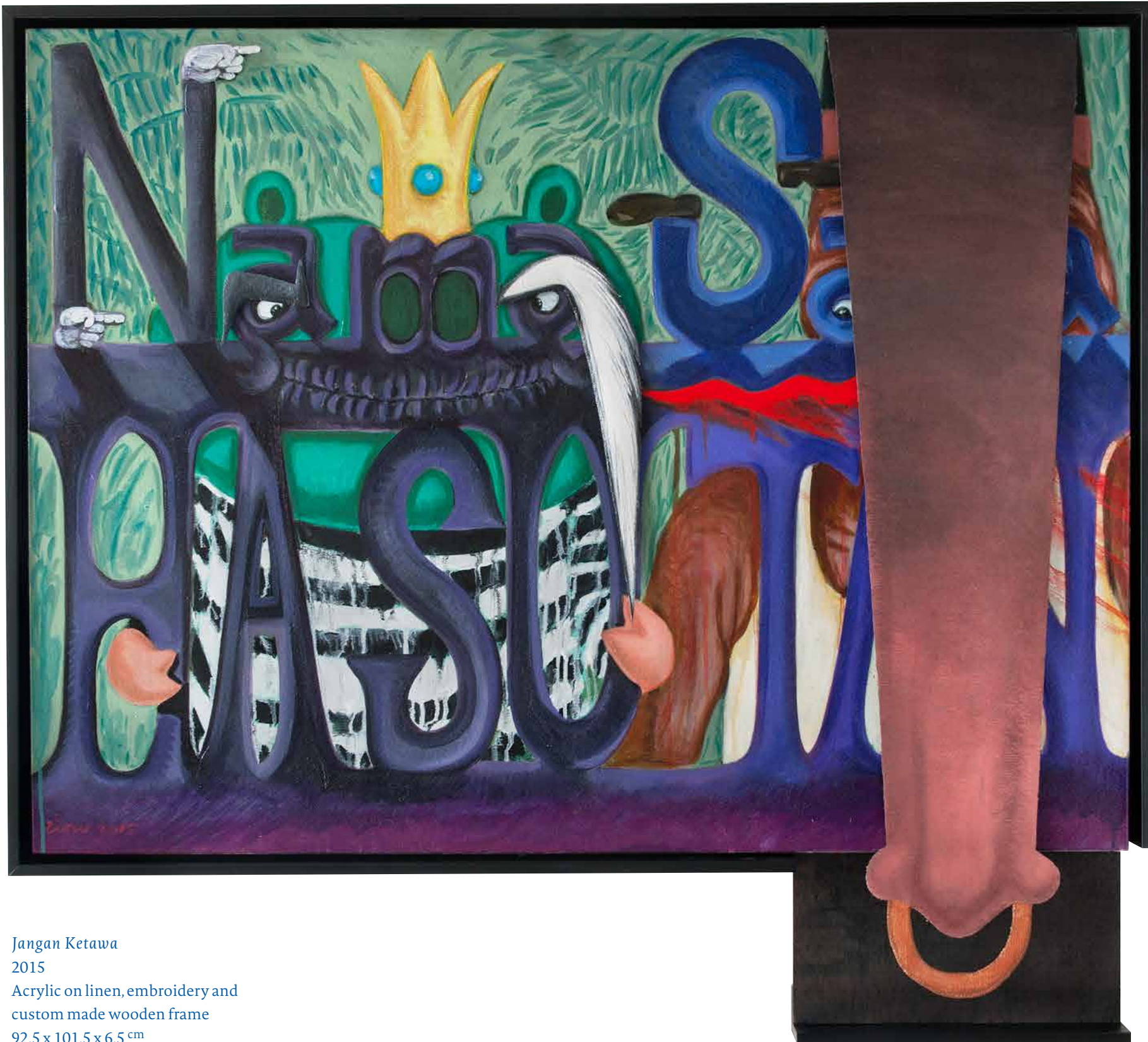




Ruang Antara Langit Dan Bumi
2015
Acrylic on linen, Velcro and
custom made wooden frame
65 x 88.5 x 38 cm (double sided)

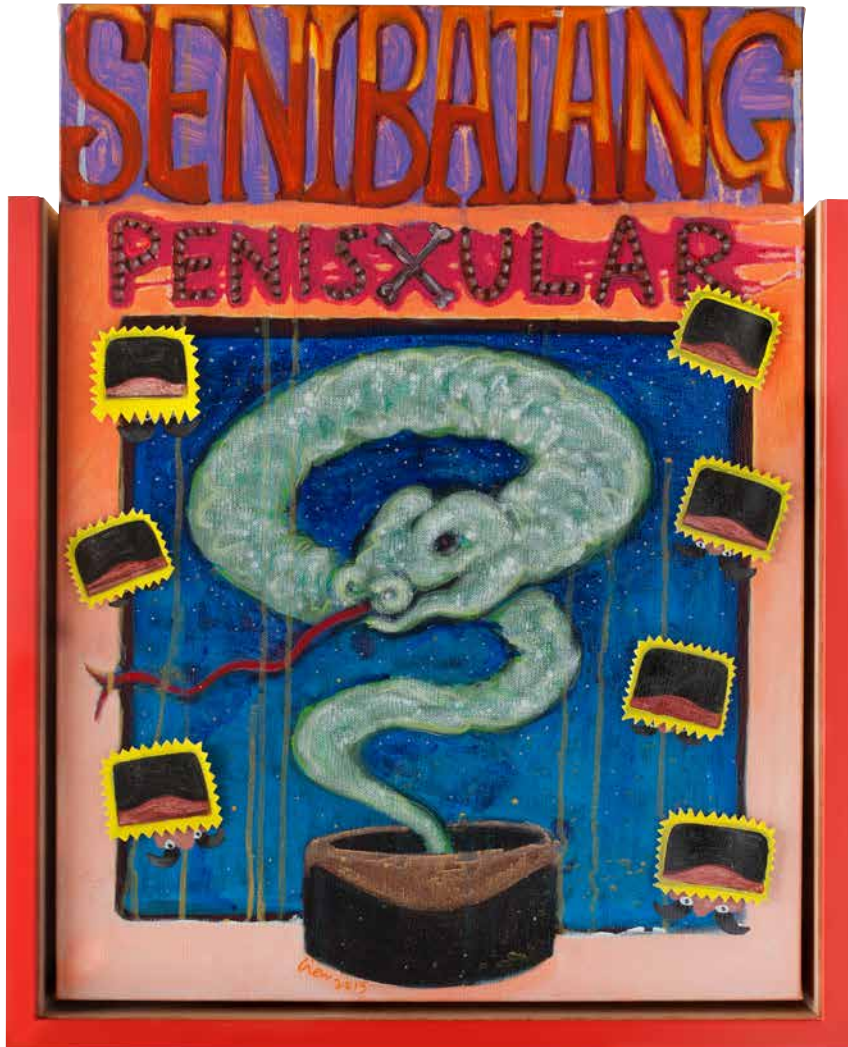
Back of painting



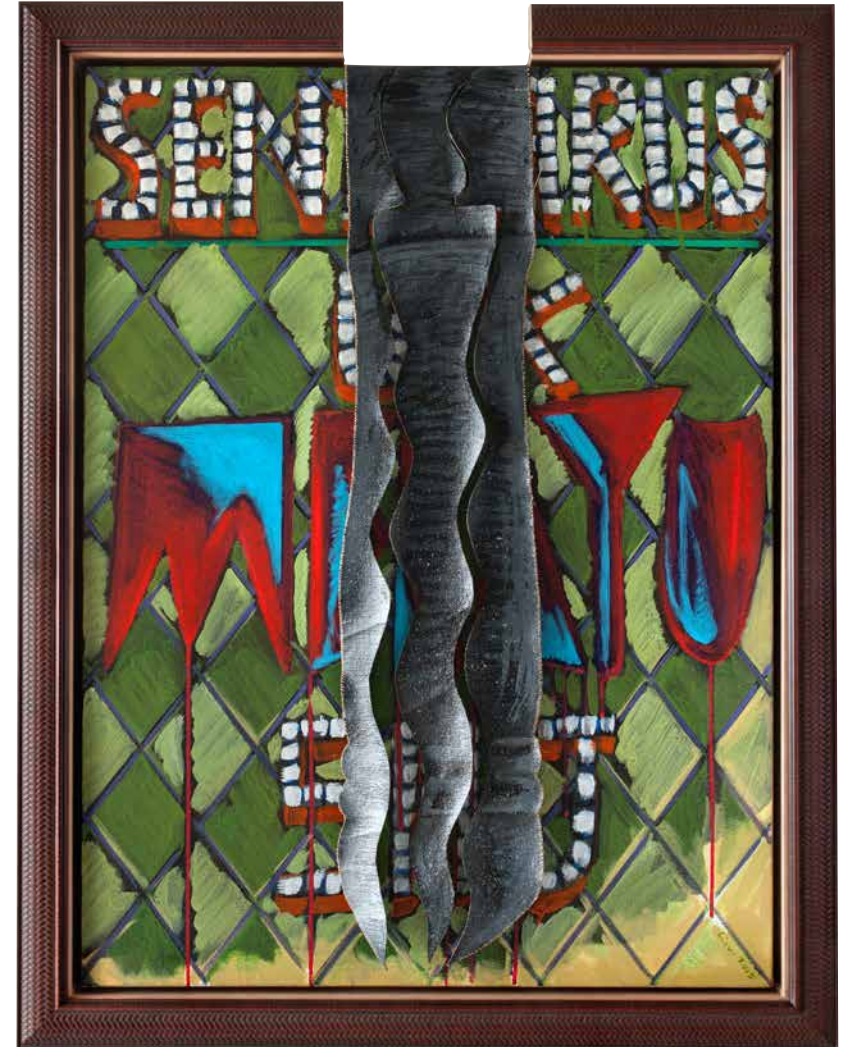
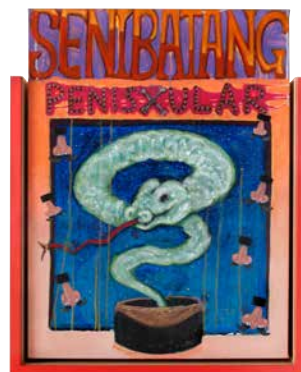


Jangan Ketawa
2015
Acrylic on linen, embroidery and
custom made wooden frame
92.5 x 101.5 x 6.5 cm





Seni X Batang
2015
Acrylic on linen, embroidery,
Velcro and custom made wooden frame
64.5 x 52 x 7.5 cm

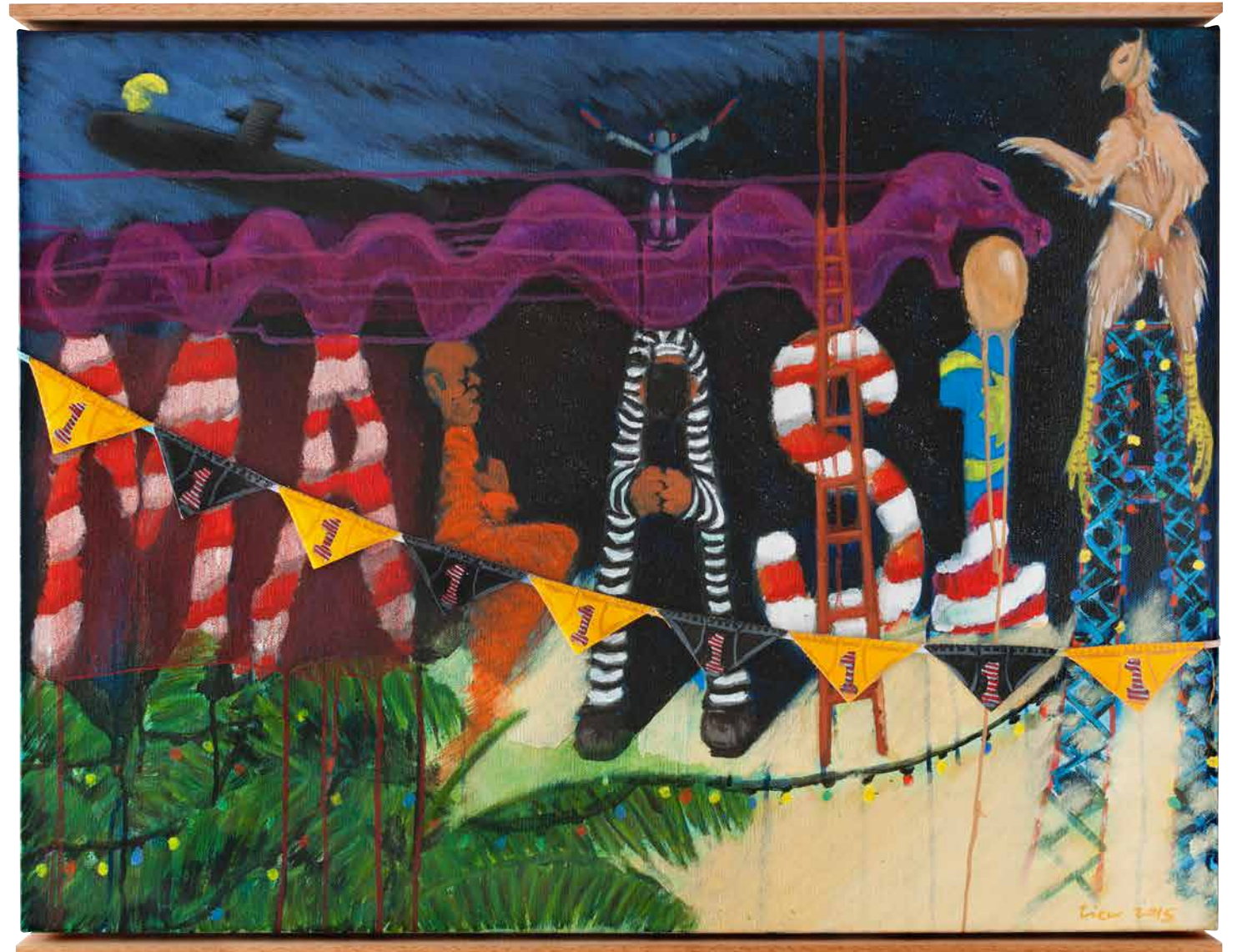


Takkan Seni Halus Hilang di Dunia
2015
Acrylic on linen, embroidery and
custom made wooden frame
93 x 73 x 7 cm





Kisah Misteri Di Jalan Bukit Lima Bintang Episod 505:
 SOS Dari Lubang ke Lubang
 2015
 Acrylic on linen, embroidery, Velcro and custom made wooden frame
 75 x 101 x 6.5 cm



1Malasia
 2015
 Acrylic on linen, embroidery and
 custom made wooden frame
 65 x 82 x 7 cm

The Imagination That Never Was

Between a nation-state and its citizens, an irreconcilability: the nation-state attains to a utopian model, homogenous and distanced from what exists down below; whereas the heterogeneity of the citizens is misconceived and simplified, engineered to accord with certain national standards. The ruled, being rendered controllable, legible,¹ but at once demoted to a bare life, is constantly beset by systemic pulverisation of the individual. The utopia of the ruler may very well be the dystopia of the ruled. This irreconcilability exposes a caesura in an imagined community and marks the shortcomings of its totality. Within this caesura, Liew Kwai Fei punctuates the imaginary with an imagination that never was.

In this showcase, every moment of revelation is overcome with a moment of trite derision. Fuck truthfulness. Fuck righteousness. Fuck the two asterisks that dotted the exhibition title. Liew Kwai Fei's wayward vision lures self-possessed freaks into his Malaysian escapades. They were once placated, excluded from the collective imaginary, incarcerated in the abyss of history, in order to keep the nation-state protected, and its people, uncontaminated. And now, returning from the deepest slumber, unceasingly, they live again as distorted beings and caricatured monsters.

Liew Kwai Fei does not seek redress. For his is a game restricted to those in seclusion, in the politics of concealment, of "official secrets" and "seditious issues". Instead, he invites us to explore the crevices of a nation-state, which tends to encode its subjects with a normative singularity,² such as "1Malaysia", or an equally demanding "One People, One Nation, One Singapore". By ennobling an imaginary as the one and only, the ruling power sets itself up as an officialdom of self-absorbed gluttons. It is this sordid underside of the national imaginary that Liew Kwai Fei seeks to unfold.

by Tan Zi Hao

The utopian 1Malaysia is Liew Kwai Fei's dystopian 1Malasia. Suggestive of "malas" (indolent) and "malaise", 1Malasia bespeaks an excess in itself:³ a flying submarine, a purple snake, a contemplating monk, a suicidal chicken, with a string of underwear passing itself off as a 1Malaysia pennant banner, altogether alienating a landscape abound with familiar Malaysian palms. This imagery of 1Mala(y)sia shies away from the cosmetic image of a jovial multi-ethnic where each is costumed in distinct traditional attire. Beyond the incongruous creatures, lo and behold, there looms a devouring shadow, as if in anticipation of a tempest, ready to wreck havoc on a paradise buttressed by profligacy and debauchery.

Making Sense with Nonsense:
無厘頭 (Mou Lei Tau), The Nonsensical

Aberrance is the quality of Liew Kwai Fei's paintings. Deviating from the norm is his means towards the politics of alterity. In fact, in the discourse of Malaysian politics, terminologies of the norm have endured sustained abuse. Wong Chin Huat has resorted to the "Uncommon Sense" in his serial discussions in *The Nut Graph*,⁴ Marina Mahathir has spoken of how rhetoric hinges on misinformation amongst politicians:

The less logic you speak, the more popular you are. The less facts you present, the more you are lauded. Better still, the more incorrect facts you give, invented out of thin air, the more you dazzle your followers.⁵

Nonsense becomes the absolute fulfilment. Seen in this light, the caesura is to Liew Kwai Fei a sign of (self-imposed) alienation. He establishes himself an illegible space of alterity as such – an *un-nonsense* to undo the nonsense, but no less of a *non-sense*. Making sense with nonsense, Liew Kwai Fei's paintings appear disjointed. His appropriation of 無厘頭 (Mou Lei Tau), the non-

sensical, as popularised by Hong Kong director Stephen Chow in the 1990s, is of no coincidence. Dry humour bordering on buffoonery, Liew Kwai Fei's sarcasm commits a disservice to clarity and communication. For instance, any decipherer attempting to interpret *Very Good!* will be disappointed: "You look fucking funny", "You fucking look funny", "Fucking funny you look", "Fucking you funny look" – whichever way one reads, one arrives at a trivial utterance. The Chinese "你很好笑" ("You are funny", or, "You are laughable") is more certain but is by no means clearer. The three hesitant faces, and a floating hairy anus that clings onto the gendered radical "女" of the "好"⁶ (meaning "good", but translated here as "fucking"), still elicit nothing more than a mockery unworthy of circumspection. Cryptic depthlessness is the drive of *Mou Lei Tau*, it appeals to our desire of meaning if only to congratulate us with a shallow rejoinder. Suturing a caesura with nonsensical connections, Liew Kwai Fei's *Mou Lei Tau* bridges the unbridgeable through analogies and harks us back to a political unconscious – the irrationality of politics and its profuse nonsense.

Ever since the 2012 solo *Painted Words and Written Paintings: For the Refined and For the Masses* in Valentine Willie Fine Art, Liew Kwai Fei restricts the accessibility to his paintings. Shunning his previously universalist, colour-field, abstraction,⁷ his idiomatic expressions, coupled with the introduction of Chinese characters, confounds those with foreknowledge of his artistic practices.⁸ Aesthetic illegibility and cultural or linguistic inaccessibility are instrumentalised to create distance, to instill a (non-)sense of nonsense. He now paints in defiance of the norms and conventions of contemporary aesthetic. He turns himself into a professional amateur, not unlike a high-school dilettante who paints with reluctance.⁹ And it is precisely this discomfort that has perturbed the artist for long. In a state where blatant racism remains unacknowledged, Liew Kwai Fei develops distrust against the idea of a nation. The nation-state remains to him illegible, inaccessible, discomfiting. Especially unsettling are his all-seeing lenses that overlay "PURE RACE"¹⁰ in *Somewhere Over The Rainbow* and the competitive "RACE for -ism" in -ism. In the latter— if one is allowed to speculate—two effaced Malaysianesque sa-



This painting, entitled 这里 Gotong, 那里 Royong (2012), was exhibited in *Painted Words and Written Paintings: For the Refined and For the Masses* in 2012. Packed with strong political connotations, this huge triptych is overflowed with visual details and Chinese cultural references, epitomising the horror vacui of the polychromatic decorations found in Chinese temples. This painting remains one of the most memorable moments in the artist's turning point towards deliberate amateurism and extravagant figurativism.

rong-clad masturbators race to orgasm, insinuating a scepticism towards "Malaysia" as a racial construct. Here, the multi-racial Malaysia is simultaneously multi-racist, within which we monitor one another in the petrification of a pure race; within which we enroll ourselves to compete for who could promise the most racist reassurance of one's insecurity. Consequently, what often amounts to mere chauvinist gibberish can become surprisingly vital to a collective imaginary – nonsense nonetheless, but one which provides an access, a possibility of making sense. From the suspicious "Tong Sam Pah" to the wry "Ha Su Tan" (哈苏丹),¹¹ prejudice is sublimated to the point of the unreal and the nonsensical. But do not laugh, *Jangan Ketawa*, the artist reminds, or risks being charged with sedition.

Neither Purely Chinese Nor Malaysian

To many, Liew Kwai Fei's atypical solo in 2012 is a rebound to a form of Chinese identification. This impression falls short of his manoeuvres, and falls straight into the insipid imagination of racially divisive institutionalism. The divide and conquer of yore persists today, mutual unintelligibility secures an aversion towards the unknown other. It is against such a racialised context that Liew Kwai Fei's 2012 transition is often misunderstood. To take a hint, in his solo titles, the shift from "Paintings for All Ages" (2010) to "For the Refined and For the Masses" (2012) implies a move towards heightened class-consciousness. Rather than a veer towards "Chinese-ness", it is one towards vernacularism. Born to a Cantonese working-class family, he harbours reservations about "Chinese-ness".¹² Speaking Cantonese in school had caused him a penalty of approximately RM0.20 per word.

An intrinsic chasm thus informs Liew Kwai Fei's identity as a "Malaysian-Chinese" – an unfortunate shatterproof dyad in a racialised Malaysia. And in between this unwilling twin, he straddles the frontiers, where one is no less homogenous and hegemonic than the other. The caesura herein manifests itself as the hyphen in between "Malaysian" and "Chinese". The hyphen is the nonsensical connector; the hyphen conflates two identities, masks its contention, and makes things palatable within a mul-

ticulturalist setting; the hyphen conjoins, as well as distantiates, the two, and thus reconstituting a subjectivity in a less nuanced manner, rendering the subject legible to the nation-state. Hyphenated identities are by-products of violence whose traumas have been reduced to polite diplomacy. “The silence of that hyphen does not pacify or appease anything, not a single torment, not a single torture,” instead, Derrida’s nihilism continues, “[i]t could even worsen the terror, the lesions, and the wounds. A hyphen is never enough to conceal protests, cries of anger or suffering, the noise of weapons, airplanes and bombs.”¹³ The imagination that never was, bursts out of an identity crisis as a spectre of forgotten narratives. Liew Kwai Fei’s *Mou Lei Tau* is a brutal riposte: it demonstrates the unreality of a nation-state, it unties the precarious hyphenation imposed upon him, yet it also introjects precisely the nonsense/non-sensibility of the national project. The infamous question that once worried Muhyiddin—“Malay or Malaysian first?”¹⁴—should put us equally at guilt for committing an epistemic violence against an individual, for incarcerating one into the iron cage of a nation-state.

In a bittersweet autobiography written for a group show, Liew Kwai Fei induces a self-deprecating humour: “Liew speaks well in *broken* Mandarin, *broken* Cantonese, *broken* Malay and *broken* English” [emphases mine].¹⁵ Perfect in his imperfections, his proficiency lies in articulating well in the *brokenness* of language. The languages with which he is familiar, are those he could not entirely master. However, those languages are of his own and his mastery in local idioms and cultural connotations is evident in his repertoire since *Painted Words and Written Paintings*. This puzzled reality presupposes an awareness of inadequacy, of being lesser than oneself. The ontology of hyphenated identities is reductive in nature. The diaspora is one whose genealogical distance is compensated by proximity to a locale at present, and whose genesis has become secondary but is nevertheless delimited by it. The caesura within hyphenated identities necessitates a bilateral reduction – Liew Kwai Fei’s “Chinese-ness” has offset his “Malaysian-ness”, vice versa.¹⁶ He is always perceived by the national imaginary as lesser than who he is, always inadequate, neither purely Chinese nor Malaysian, and is beguiled by a “sober

sense of self-subjectivity”.¹⁷

If the humour of *Mou Lei Tau* lies in its illogical ability to connect the unconnected, to bridge the unbridgeable, Liew Kwai Fei employs this device to summon a carnage in his (anti-)humour, to exaggerate the nonsensical imposition of his hyphen. Wounds, when forcefully stitched, results in a brutal remedy. In *Kisah Misteri Di Jalan Bukit Lima Bintang Episod 505: SOS Dari Lubang ke Lubang*, the two sinkholes are reconciled with an artificial rainbow, while the cracks are stitched with masking tapes¹⁸; in *God Breast You*, a toothed fissure of a tummy is stitched with a Glasgow smile. Tragedy is greeted with alacrity; sickness is greeted with festivity. Under the aegis of neoliberal political correctness, pain and sufferings are perpetuated, sublimated, and jollified. Panadol politics: the fetishism for decaffeinated politics inspires fake smiles as epitomised in *Xiao-Portrait* – a lump of exposed flesh fore-grounded with bits of skin, lips, tongue, and eye brows sliced into the shape of “笑” (laughter) evinces a forced optimism to be re-fashioned for sale. In the persuasion of purchase one lets out a sardonic smile and with tongue stuck out, the pleasure of “笑” (laughter) here only alludes to the agony of “苦笑” (bitter laughter)¹⁹.

Liew Kwai Fei ridicules the spectators with a self-referential parody – a (self?) *Xiao-Portrait* that invites us to laugh at him laughing off himself. Liew Kwai Fei’s merciless aesthetico-political project is an outright middle-finger to the political correctness of neoliberal multiculturalism in Malaysia²⁰. Implicit in the multiculturalist promotion of “tolerance” is a racist discourse of suppression. Often, the state assumes a moral high ground to delicately threaten the transgressive elements via a metanarrative of de-legitimation. One’s radical statement is rendered illegitimate not by its content but by its form. Political correctness is essentially the neoliberal form of the politics of fear, a fear mongering coated with a facile sense of civic tolerance.

To hasten a retort, Liew Kwai Fei sexualises his subject matters. Political incorrectness here becomes his resistance to servitude. “LUBANG” (hole), “HISAP” (to suck), “BATANG” (stick), “TETEK”

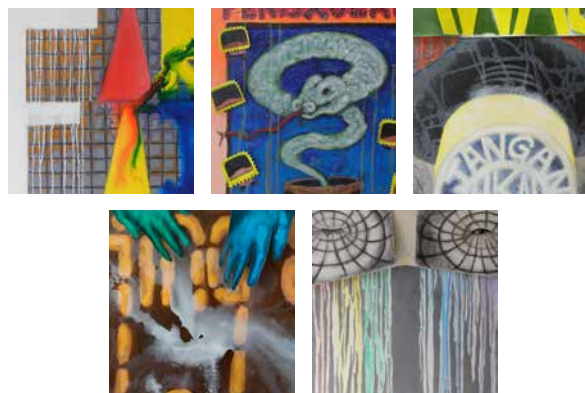
(tits, nipples) are ubiquitous intimations of lewdness, and due to the Malay language, make them all the more subversive. Racialising his subject matters is another of his ruse. Teoh Beng Hock's infamous silhouette is juxtaposed with "BUMI LOT" in *Ruang Antara Langit Dan Bumi*, indirectly asserting a racial/ethnic/ethno-class dimension to what appears to be a calculated remissness of a nefarious regime. In *Takkan Seni Halus Hilang di Dunia*, he reiterates "SENI HARUS UTK MELAYU SHJ" (The arts should only be for the Malays) as a response to the ethnocentric policies of the 1970s.²¹ This restatement is further racialised owing to his position as a "Malaysian-Chinese", whose identity immediately problematises the utterance of these very words. What Liew Kwai Fei endeavours to invoke here is how the same statement, whenever spoken by a person of a different "racial" background, could elicit a different response.²² The painting is easily an advocacy of Malay supremacy, yet, coming from a post-May 13 "Malaysian-Chinese", it becomes an impenitent racist mockery. His subject-position subverts an ethnocentric statement into a post-modern parody, thereby queering race in the most licentious manner – a flaccid keris in addition.

In the Wetness of Paint...

To the end, to reconcile with a destination, to smoothen a ridge, he lubricates. Liew Kwai Fei's paintings are a dismal batch; blood, sweat, tears, flood his visual plane. The irreconcilable caesura is always weeping. Unlike the opaque colours in *Painted Words and Written Paintings*, drippings and translucent layerings now prevail. Each painting is reconstituted with a tint of gestural abstract expressionism. Brush strokes resurfaced, chaotic gesticulations adorn the backdrops, entombing spectators in Bacon-esque claustrophobia. In the wetness of paint, lies the throbbing undercurrent of his repressed angst. The gaze that pierces through "AWAS" (Beware) in *Smoke Gets In Your Eyes* affirms his determination to fight back; the accentuated grief-muscles of the dog in *I've Hungered for Your Touch* attest to a desire to bite back. However different the two, they unite in their adamant tears. They are the rejectamenta of a nation-state.



In 2013, Liew Kwai Fei, together with Minstrel Kuik and Fufa, made *Fallen Leaves* (2013) for the Malaysian Spring Project at Kepong. The installation was made out of dried leaves, arranged into the shape of the posture in which Teoh Beng Hock was found dead.



The various drippings, layerings, and blendings of paint on Liew Kwai Fei's canvases. This watery painterliness is new to his repertoire as his earlier paintings have strokes of opaque colours. The reduced opacity of paint is significant as a subtle hint of amateurism, one that is typical of an amateur's water-colour painting that never fails in its supply of spatters and drips on a wet wash. But given the political nature of Liew Kwai Fei's pessimism, his drips are in no way mere decorative. From left to right: *No Fart No Fair* (detail), *Seni X Batang* (detail), *Smoke Gets in Your Eyes* (detail), *I've Hungered for Your Touch* (detail), and *Somewhere Over the Rainbow* (detail).

The dripping paint slides on the canvas, pursues its own course. First, slipperiness is itself threatening, for every stream of hue is a drift, a slippage, a potential transgressor. In *No Fart No Fair*, the "F(ART)" wittily contaminates the "F(AIR)". This contaminating element is prevalent from *-ism* to *Seni X Batang* and *Somewhere Over The Rainbow*, each of which hints at some lingering lachrymal phantasms that underlie the positive façade of a nation-state. Second, the dripping of paint further eroticises the subject matters. Baudrillard: "[i]t takes but a tiny drop of water trickling down a body, or down a smooth stone, to render it erotic."²³ The wet bodies of Liew Kwai Fei's imagination—be they teary, bloody, sweaty—exteriorise the sliminess of the interior organs to seduce the onlookers to participate in their catastrophic dystopia. The drippings herein become another nonsensical bridge, so inviting yet so merciless and sadistic.

Those whose existence remains insuppressible partake today in Liew Kwai Fei's asylum. Be aware of its slipperiness that allows one to slide too easily to the extent of becoming nonsensical. Inevitably, the asylum is a pandemonium of irrationality – a surreal space where contortion, disproportion, and mutation, derail national standardisation. These subjective elements, vulgar in their guises, disrupt the homogeneity and legibility of a utopian nation-state. Avian humanoid, chimeric beings, acephalous labourers, melting visages, flying organs, stomachic dentata, elongated arms, and so on, they drift away from a preconceived singularity hitherto imposed as the utopia's rationality. If to Bau- man "the rationality of the ruled is always the weapon of the rulers",²⁴ Liew Kwai Fei's exhibition of the irrational is thus a weapon of the ruled and suppressed. The utopia of the ruled is the dystopia of the ruler. Welcome to a reject shop, made in (and out of) Malaysia.

1 Rulers always attempt to “make a society legible, to arrange the population in ways that simplified the classic state functions of taxation, conscription, and prevention of rebellion.” James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1998, p. 2.

2 “The clarity of the high-modernist optic is due to its resolute singularity. Its simplifying fiction is that, for any activity or process that comes under its scrutiny, there is only one thing going on.” James C. Scott, *ibid.*, p. 347.

3 Similarly, 1Malaysia is exhaustively excessive. The list of acronyms generated from 1Malaysia is endless: Kedai Rakyat 1Malaysia (KR1M), Bantuan Rakyat 1Malaysia (BR1M), Buku Baucer 1Malaysia (BB1M), Perumahan Rakyat 1Malaysia (PR1MA), and so on. Of course, lies at the pinnacle of such excessiveness is none other than the scandalous 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB).

4 “Uncommon Sense with Wong Chin Huat” is a series of political discussions initiated by *The Nut Graph* with political scientist Wong Chin Huat. To view: <http://www.thenutgraph.com/tag/uncommon-sense/> [Accessed 27 February 2016].

5 Marina Mahathir, “My Record-Breaking Run Continues...” [online], *Rantings by MM*, 24 April 2012, retrieved from: <http://rantingsbymm.blogspot.com/2012/04/my-record-breaking-run-continues.html> [Accessed 27 February 2016].

6 The word “好”, meaning “good”, is composed of two distinct characters: the radical “女” and its counterpart “子”. The former, “female”; the latter, “child” or “son”. Inevitably a patriarchal expression, the combination suggests that the prerequisite to becoming a good woman is to bear a child.

7 Liew Kwai Fei’s early solos such as *The Rhythm of Doing* (2008), *Paintings for All Ages/Paintings with Extended Space* (2010), and *Colour, Shape, Quantity, Scale* (2010) assume a more abstract and minimalist form. The latter two were almost colour-field.

8 The Chinese characters in his paintings have affected the commercial reception of his works. The untranslatability of idioms has also restricted appreciation only to those who have accessed to particular Sinitic languages (i.e.: Cantonese and Mandarin).

9 There is an intention to imitate the vernacular and “amateurish” aesthetic prevalent in the various student-painted banners in the SMKs (Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan, National Secondary School). Through personal conversation with the artist.

10 A playful take on John Baldessari’s *Pure Beauty* (1966–68). From “Pure Beauty” to “Pure Race”, the artist seems to point at an absurdity of racialisation, instituted as an aesthetic of national standardisation.

11 In Malay, *tong sampah* means “rubbish bin”, *hasutan* means “incitement” or “sedition” (read: Akta Hasutan, Seditious Act). The artist’s Chinese transliteration of “苏丹” (su dan) in “Ha Su Tan” (哈苏丹) is the exact Chinese word used to denote “Sultan” in Malay. See artist statement “Siapa Dia Tong Sam Pah?” and “我的名字哈苏丹” (My Name is Ha Su Tan).

12 “The categories known as ‘China,’ the ‘Chinese,’ and ‘Chineseness’ are historically sedimented constructs built as much upon amnesia, violence, and imperial intention as subjective desires for belonging and community.” Shu-mei Shih, *Visuality and Identity: Sinophone Articulations across the Pacific*. California: University of California Press, 2007, p. 183.

13 Jacques Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other, Or, The Prosthesis of Origin*. trans. Patrick Mensah. California: Stanford University Press, 1998, p. 11.

14 Karen Chapmen, “Muhyiddin: I am a Malay first and Malaysian at heart” [online], *The Star Online*, 1 April 2010, retrieved from: <http://www.thestar.com.my/story/?file=%2F2010%2F4%2F1%2Fnation%2F5976477> [Accessed 28 February 2016].

15 *Fall into the sea to become an island | Jatuh ke dalam laut menjadi pulau*, exhibition catalogue, Run Amok Gallery, Penang, 2014.

16 “Chinese-ness” here also alludes to Sinocentrism, to the perception of “belonging to China”. In a racialised Malaysia, “Chinese-ness” makes one lesser than a Malaysian; but being a “Malaysian-Chinese”, being part of the overseas Chinese community, one is also a lesser Chinese. For an eloquent rebuttal to this Sinocentric claim to Chinese identification, see 黃錦樹 (Ng Kim-chew), “華文/中文: 「失語的南方」與語言再造” in *馬華文學與中國性* (Malaysian-Chinese Literature and Chinese-ness). Taipei: Yuan Zun Wen Hua; Shu-mei Shih, “The Concept of the Sinophone”, *PMLA* 126.3 (2011), pp. 709–718.

17 Chai Chang Hwang, “A Study on the Subjectivity of the Malaysian Chinese Painters (An Outline)” in Nur Hanim Khairuddin and Beverly Yong, with T.K. Sabapathy (eds.), *Narratives in Malaysia Art, Vol. 1: Imagining Identities*. Kuala Lumpur: RogueArt, 2012, pp. 77–89.

18 The artist is making a direct reference to an event where two sinkholes caved in on Jalan Imbi due to the construction of MRT (Mass Rapid Transit). Firemen were seen applying tapes on the cracks, the reason being to identify if the cracks continued widening. Nonetheless, the image has sparked an internet sensation. To understand the event as a whole, see Darian Goh, “So This Is Why Firemen Used Masking Tape To ‘Patch’ Cracks On Jalan Imbi” [online], *Says*, 2 July 2014, retrieved from: <http://says.com/my/news/so-this-is-why-firemen-used-masking-tape-to-patch-cracks-on-jalan-imbi> [Accessed 28 February 2016].

19 Through personal conversation with the artist.

20 But a middle-finger is amputated in *Lady’s F*, substituted with an innocuous lady’s finger. Perhaps the amputating vagina (or a vagina-dentata, as implied in *God Breast You*) at the background is waiting to castrate another father-figure, another phallic structure (see also *Hamsap Odyssey*).

21 Two Bumiputra-centric policies, namely, the New Economic Policy (1970) and National Cultural Policy (1971), were introduced in Malaysia to “repair” the deepening inter-ethnic rifts after the May 13 racial riot in 1969.

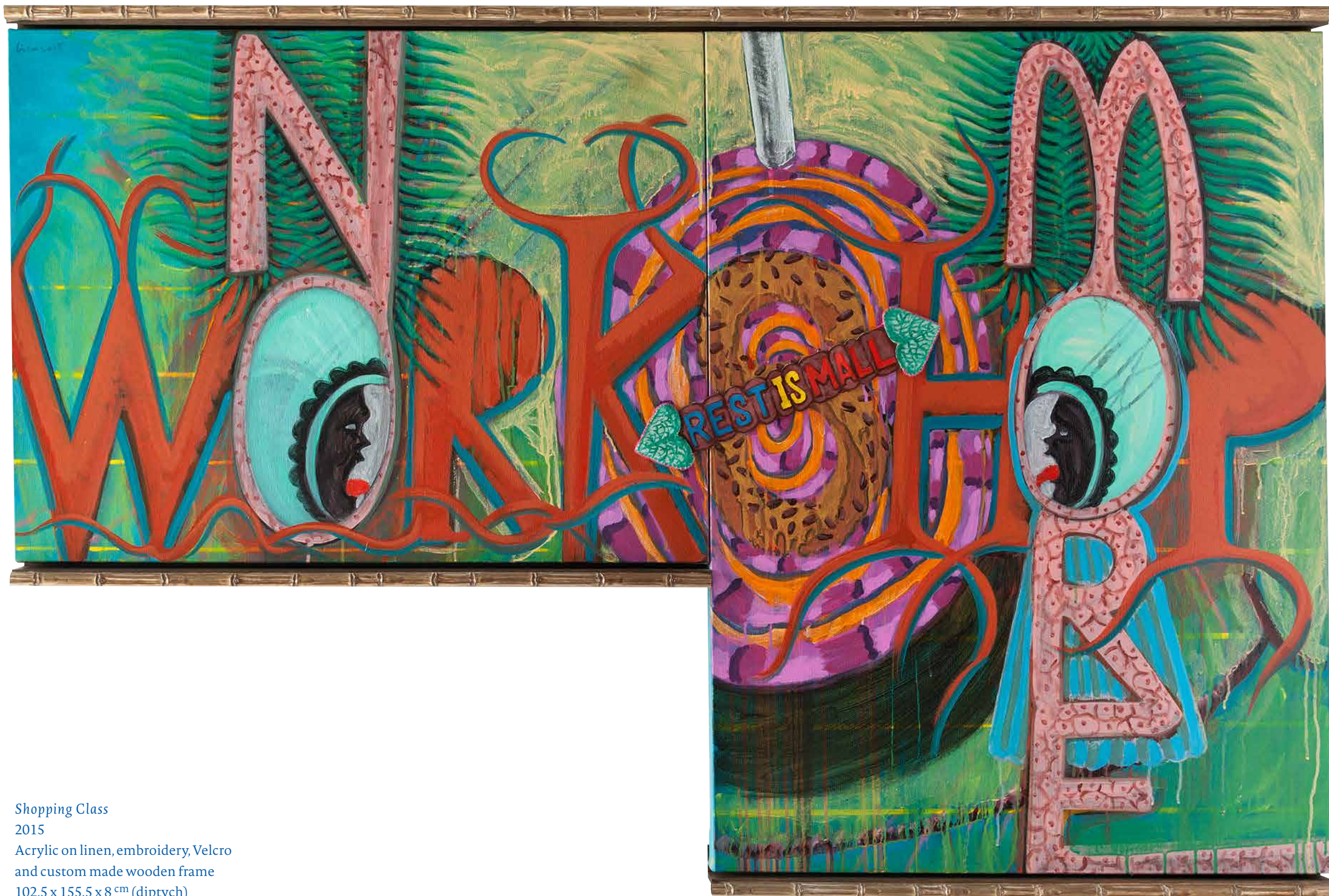
22 Through personal conversation with the artist. This racial queering must also be read against a background of an intensifying politics of fear in Malaysia. The state response to Anurendra Jegadeva’s *I is for Idiot* (2013) and Izat Arif Saiful Bahri’s “ف” (fa) and “ق” (qof) in *Insert#* (2014) has only substantiated how political correctness is instrumentalised as a way of politics in Malaysia today. See Aidila Razak, “Banned ‘Fa Qof’ lauded as study of culture” [online], *Malaysiakini*, 14 February 2014, retrieved from: <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/254383> [Accessed 28 February 2016].

23 Jean Baudrillard, “What Are You Doing After the Orgy?”, trans. Lisa Liebmann, *Artforum* 22.2 (1983), pp. 42–46.

24 Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*. Cambridge: Polity, 1989, p. 142.

—

Tan Zi Hao (b. 1989) is an artist, designer, writer whose interest spans across boundary politics, postcolonial theories, Southeast Asian cultural history, and the body. His artistic practice is largely informed by the contested politics of identities vis-à-vis the nation-state, revolving around the potentiality of encountering other-ness foreclosed by rigid state categories. He has held numerous exhibitions in Malaysia and internationally in Singapore, Kaohsiung, London, and Paris. Currently, he is pursuing a PhD in Southeast Asian Studies at the National University of Singapore.

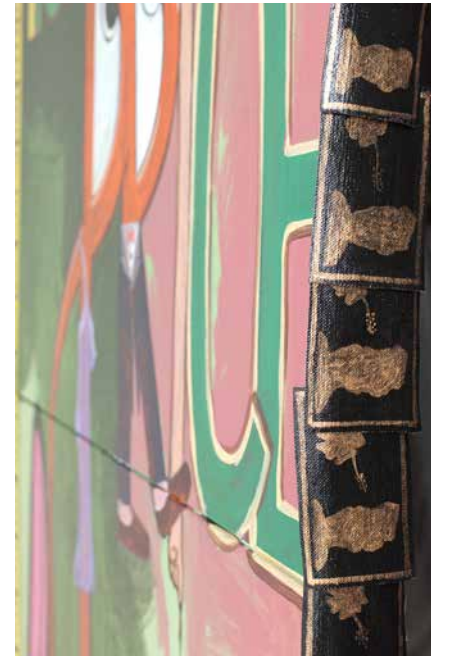
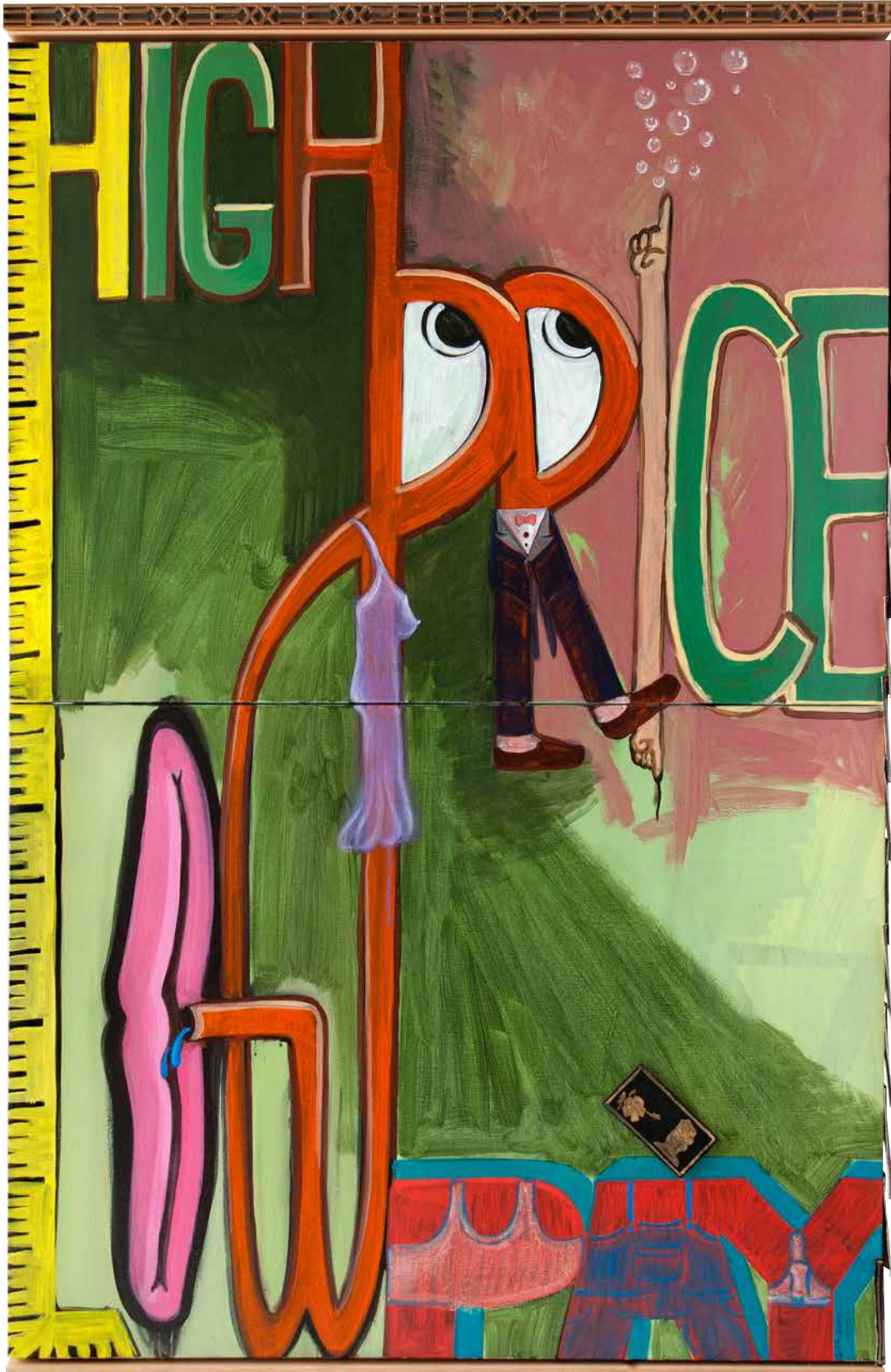


Shopping Class

2015

Acrylic on linen, embroidery, Velcro
and custom made wooden frame

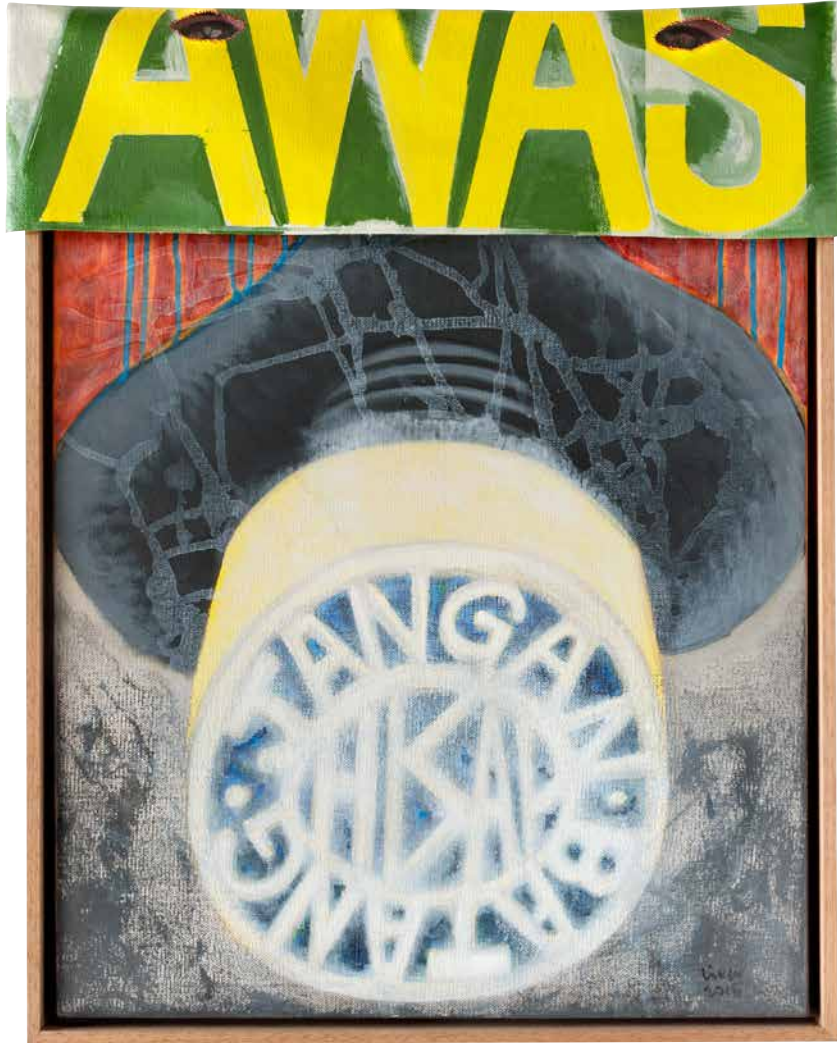
102.5 x 155.5 x 8 cm (diptych)



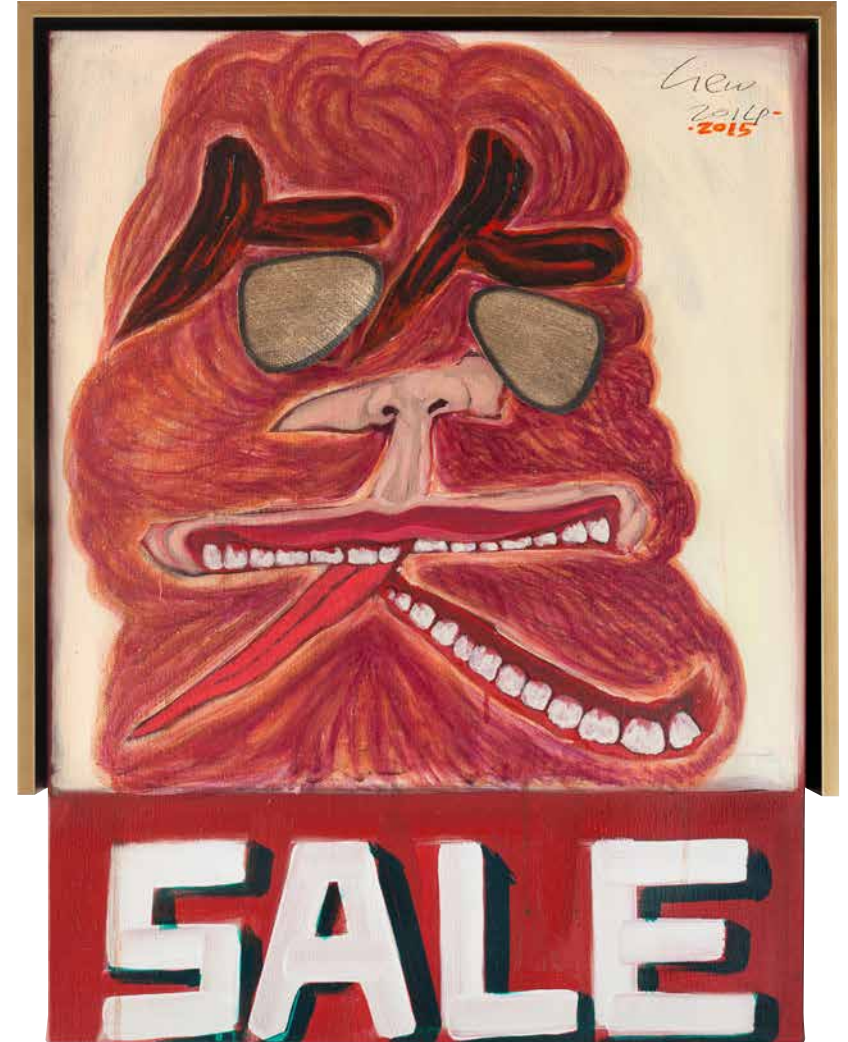
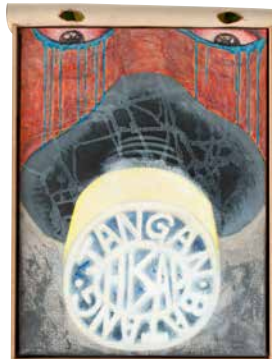
Working Class
2015
Acrylic on linen, Velcro and
custom made wooden frame
151 x 101 x 6.5 cm (diptych)



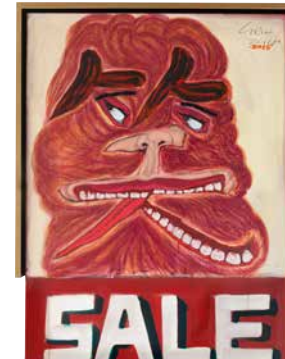
No Fart No Fair
2015
Acrylic on linen, and
custom made wooden frame
65.5 x 84 x 6.5 cm



Smoke Gets in Your Eyes
2015
Acrylic on linen, embroidery,
Velcro and custom made wooden frame
63.5 x 54 x 7 cm

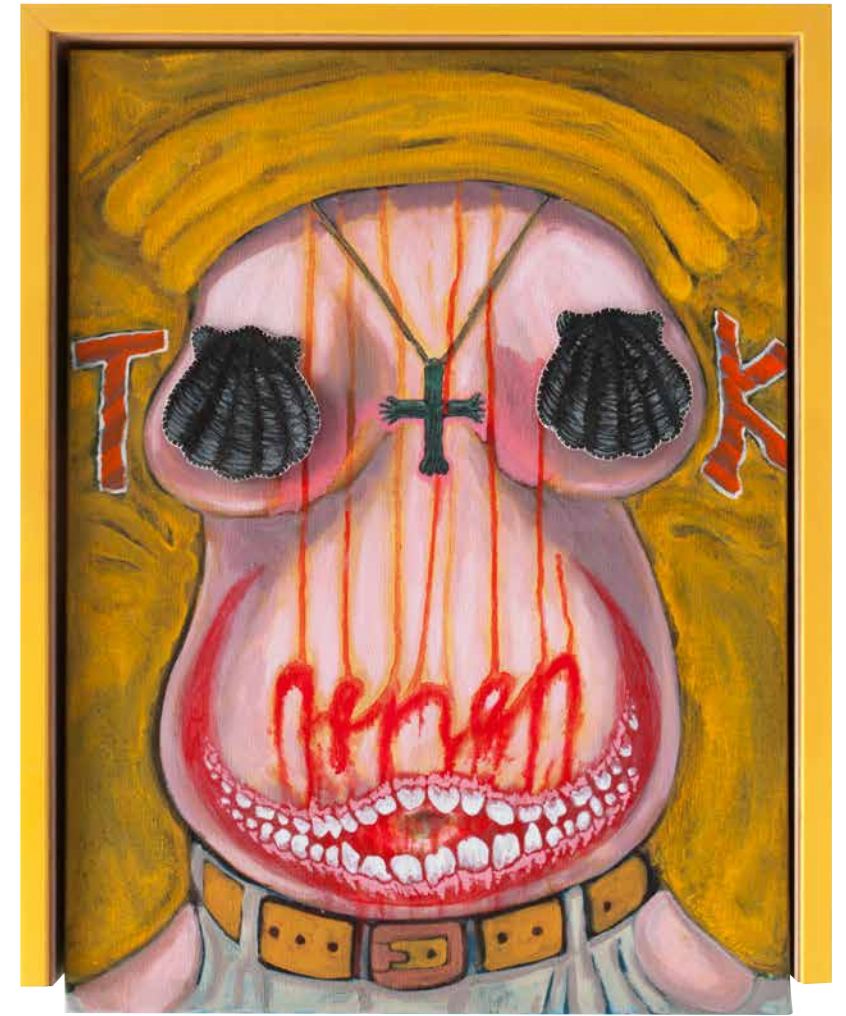


Xiao-Portrait
2015
Acrylic on linen, embroidery, Velcro and
custom made wooden frame
63.5 x 49.5 x 6.5 cm





Lady's F
2015
Acrylic on linen, embroidery,
and custom made wooden frame
66.5 x 51.5 x 8 cm

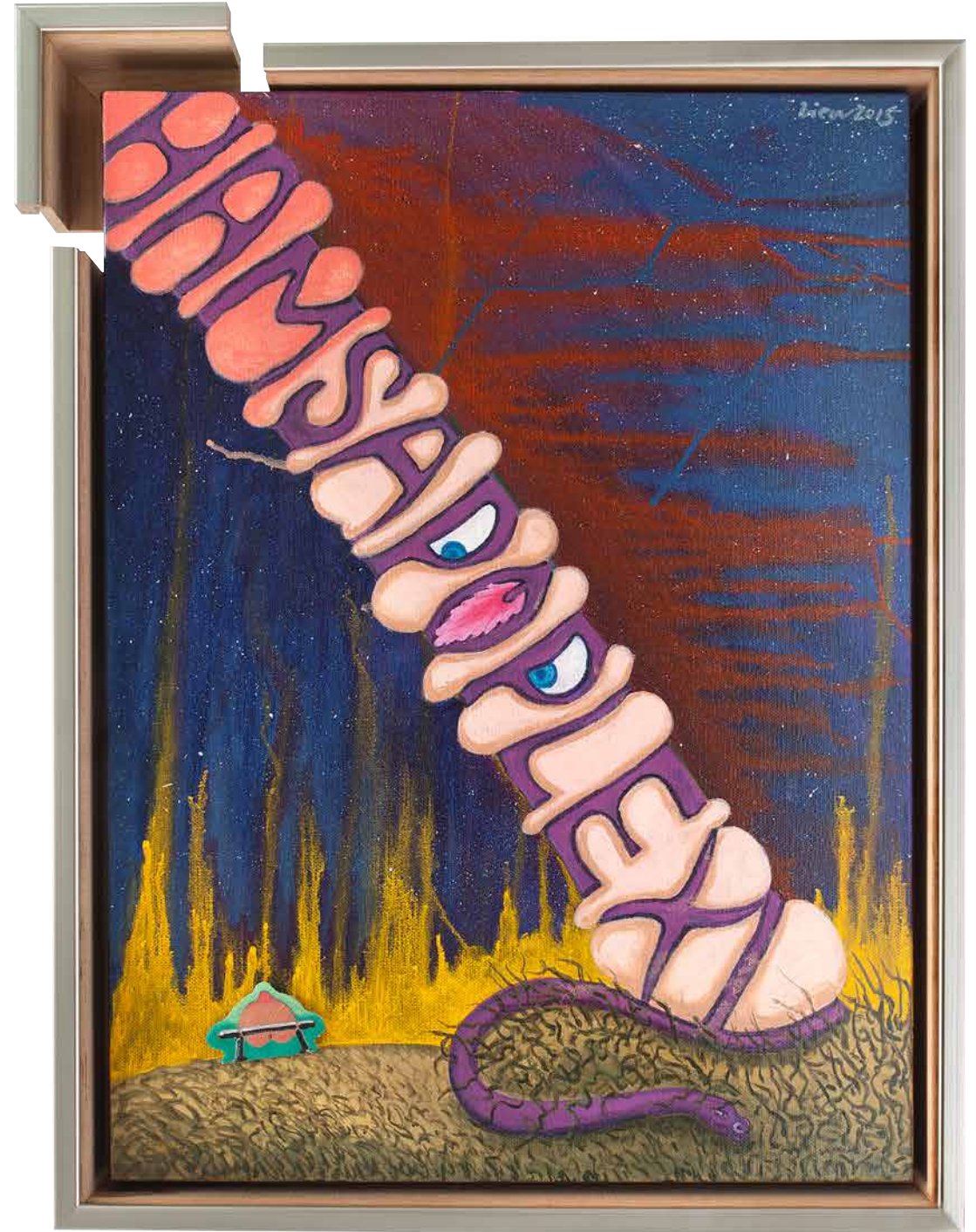


God Breast You
2015
Acrylic on linen, embroidery, Velcro and
custom made wooden frame
64.5 x 51.5 x 7 cm





-ism
2015
Acrylic on linen, and
custom made wooden frame
280 x 49.5 x 7 cm



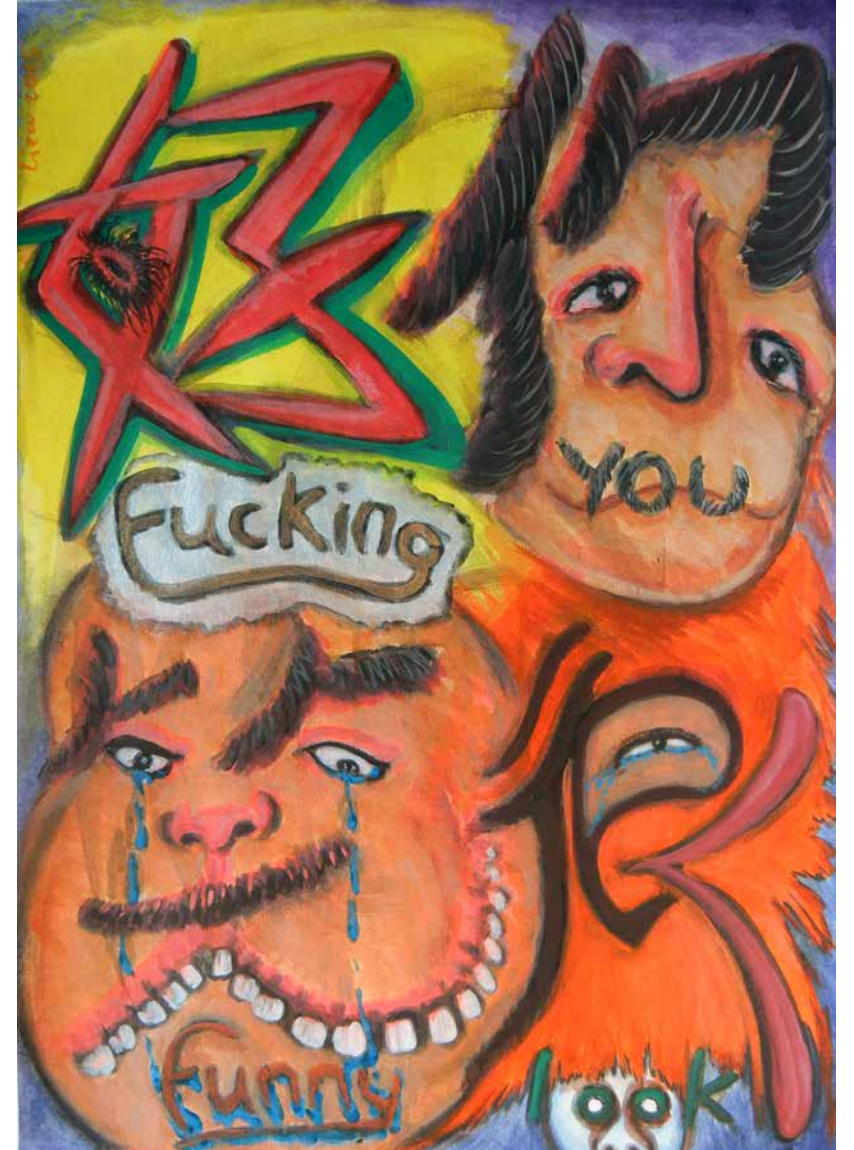
Hamsap Odessy
2015
Acrylic on linen, Velcro
and custom made wooden frame
68.5 x 54 x 8 cm



I've Hungered for Your Touch
2015
Acrylic on linen, Velcro and
custom made wooden frame
96 x 168 x 7 cm



Golah!
2015
Acrylic on paper
70 x 50 cm



Very Good!
2015
Acrylic on paper
70 x 50 cm



A for...
2014
Acrylic on linen with custom wooden frame
73 x 98 cm



F for...
2014
Acrylic on linen with custom wooden frame
73 x 98 cm

Liew Kwai Fei

Liew Kwai Fei (b. 1979) is an artist trained at the Malaysian Institute of Art (MIA) graduating with a diploma in Chinese ink painting. A well-exhibited artist, he has contributed works in many exhibitions locally and abroad as well as participated in various residencies in Malaysia, Pakistan, Australia and India. His works, which exude a DIY aesthetic include paintings, drawings, multimedia pieces and sculptural installations and explore the construction of meaning through cultural symbols along with mono and multilingual textual references. He lives and works in Selangor, Malaysia.

Education

- 1999 Diploma in Chinese ink painting, Malaysian Institute of Art, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Solo Exhibitions

- 2016 *Siapa dia Tong Sam Pah? 我的名字 哈苏丹. You Look F**king Funny-lah!*, Richard Koh Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2013 *Kami Bukan Hantu, Ah Pull & Ah Door*, Run Amok Gallery, Penang, Malaysia
- 2012 *Painted Words & Written Paintings, for the Refined and for the Masses*, Valentine Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2010 *Color, Shape, Quantity and Scale*, Jalan Mesui, Bukit Bintang, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2009 *Paintings for All Ages/Paintings with Extended Space*, No. 19 Jalan Berangan, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2008 *The Rhythm of Doing*, Project Room @ Valentine Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Selected Group Exhibitions

- 2016 *Art Stage Singapore 2016*, Singapore
- 2015 *I Am Ten*, Richard Koh Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- Malaysian Art, A New Perspective*, Richard Koh Fine Art, Singapore
- Malaysian Art, A New Perspective*, Richard Koh Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2011 *Melaka Art and Performance Festival*, Tun Tan Cheng Lock Centre, Malacca, Malaysia

- 2010 *Al-Kesah/Once Upon a Time in Malaysia*, Map Publika, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- Contemporary Rhetoric*, Valentine Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2008 *Cabinet*, Valentine Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2007 *NotThatBalai Art Festival*, Lost Generation Space, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2005 *Dream, Delirium + Face Exhibition*, Reka Art Space, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2004 *Youqing – A Showcase of Ink Painting & Drawings*, Rumah Air Panas, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2003 *Instalasi + 3@RAP – A Preview Installation Art & Drawings*, Rumah Air Panas, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Residencies

- 2011 The Australia-Malaysia Institute (AMI) Visual Arts Residency Program, Gertrude Contemporary, Melbourne, Australia
- 2010 The Khazanah Artist Commissioning Program, Mumbai, India
- 2003 International Artist, Residency in Karachi, Pakistan

Public Collections

- Khazanah Nasional Berhad, Mumbai, India
- National Visual Arts Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

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Richard Koh Fine Art has been in operation since 2005 and is regarded as a pioneer for introducing Southeast Asian contemporary art to Malaysia and the region. Promoting an adventurous roster of emerging and established Southeast Asian artists, the gallery regularly mounts exhibitions locally and abroad with a commitment to emerging practices and challenging media.

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Editorial Design — Shawn Chow Hung Yun

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