

RAFIEE Ghani

Painting the colours of emotion

BY ROSHINEE MOOKAIAH

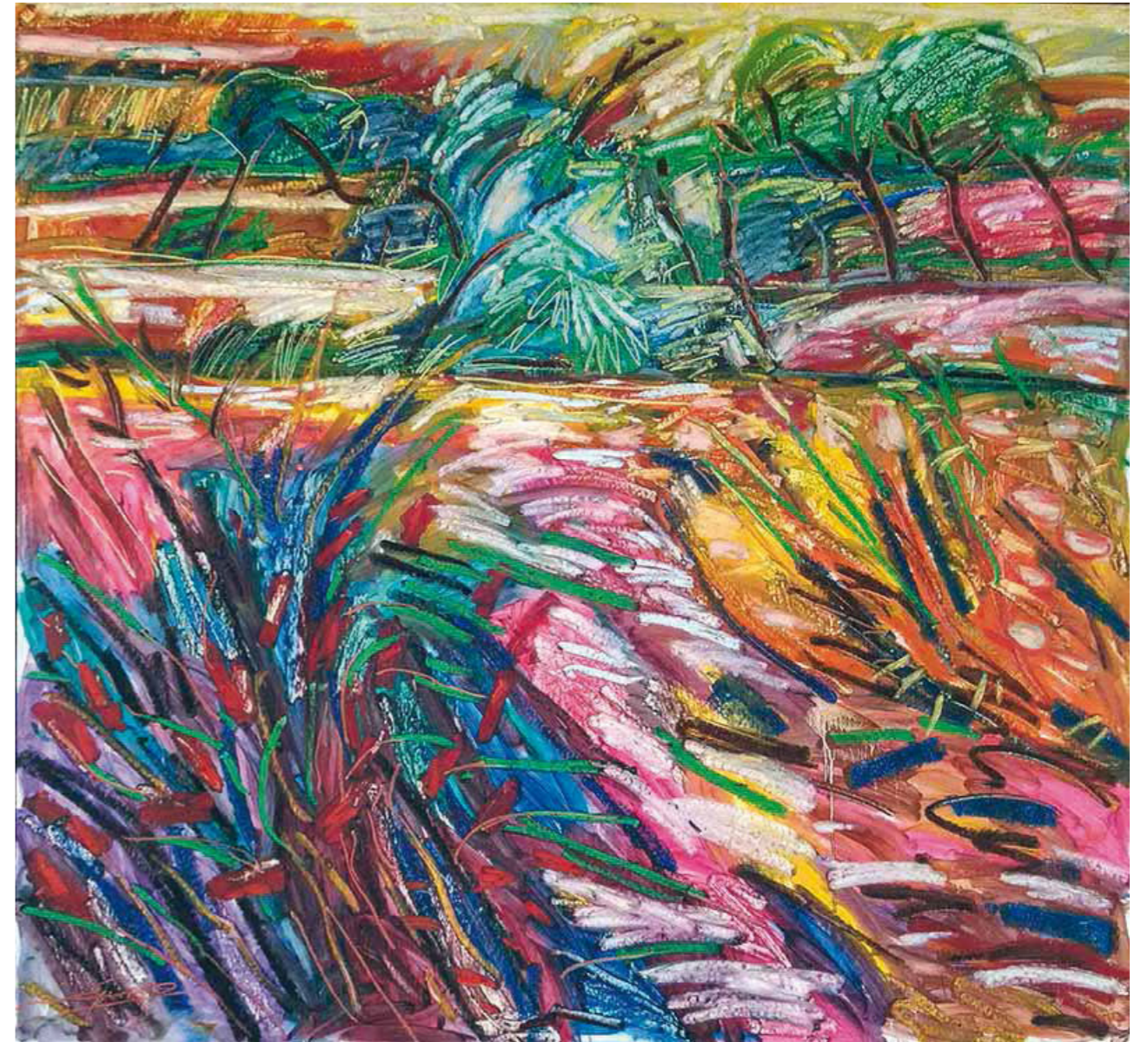


Rafiee Ghani is known in the local fine arts industry for his lyrical abstract and contemporary paintings, notably his oil paintings. One can easily identify the Kedah native's artworks as his bold use of colours and strokes have made his style particularly distinctive and emotive. With such a unique approach to painting, it is no surprise that his artworks are sought after to be exhibited in prestigious galleries, with the most recent one being his Homeland exhibition, which explored the theme of human displacement. We sat down with Rafiee Ghani to learn more about the man responsible for such poignant paintings.

What prompted your interest in the arts?

In 1978, someone showed me a copy of the Dewan Budaya magazine which featured the works of Latiff Mohidin and Datuk Hoessein Enas, but the one I remember most clearly are the works of Datuk Sharifah Fatimah Syed Zubir. She had been travelling then, and she had several pictures posted in the magazine along with her artwork. At that time, I was still studying in the science stream, but the photos depicting her travels in Iran and her colourful paintings truly moved something within me. From that moment, I bought more Dewan Budaya magazines but did not think much of it.

Also, my father, who was a geologist, was travelling a lot back then, and he visited many museums, such as those in New York, Tokyo and Amsterdam. So, he used to send me a lot of postcards with pictures of museums and paintings, such as those by Van Gogh, Matisse and Seurat. After my MCE (Malaysian Certificate of Education) exam, I went backpacking around Europe, jumping from town to town. When I was in Holland, I went to a museum because my father had recommended me to visit one. The moment I saw the paintings by Van Gogh and other Impressionists, it rekindled my old interest which I had back in school. Immediately, I felt that I wanted to do something about it, I wanted to paint, I wanted to draw.



Wetlands I, 1995
Oil on canvas 129.5 x 138 cm
SOLD - RM 20,064.16
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Clearly, Van Gogh and Matisse had a big influence on you back then and they still do until today, as evident in your artworks. Tell us a bit more about your artistic inspirations.

I believe that the first impression creates the most lasting impression. When I saw their artworks, all the bright orange, red and blues, all of it just hit me. To add to that, I remember seeing an exhibition by Srihadi, an Indonesian painter who had painted quite fluidly on the subject of seascapes. I felt as if his paintings were talking to me. They felt like poetry, and it was as if

you could sing a song with them. And I remember trying to copy these kinds of paintings. When I saw all the colours used by these artists, it just struck me, and now it has stuck to me too. Personally, I always speak with colours. I find them very important because they are a form of emotional expression.

You started your formal art training at De Vrije Academie, Netherlands, where you enrolled in a printmaking workshop and you pursued it further during your postgraduate at Manchester Metropolitan

University. What intrigued you about printmaking?

When I was walking along the corridors of The Hague while on my way to the workshop, I noticed a series of prints, which although were small-sized, I found them to be very intimate. I remember a print of a girl, with braided hair looking at the ocean. Because I grew up in Kelantan, I always went to the beach and I could relate to this moment of being by the sea and just watching it. I thought the artist had captured that moment perfectly. I realised I wanted to create something like that too: something small and intimate but very deep.