

# LATIFF MOHIDIN

Southeast Asia's modernist legend

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**PROVOKE, 1965**  
Oil on board 97.8 x 113.1 cm  
Collection of the artist

Latiff Mohidin is no doubt a noteworthy artist and incredibly sought after by serious art collectors. The man who was once a child prodigy and now a legend on his own accord is known for his eye-catching modernist artworks. His versatility has garnered worldwide the attention of many art enthusiasts, falling deeply for his demesne of expressions, uniqueness and originality. Now, he is making history by being the first Southeast Asian artist to showcase at the renowned Centre Pampidou, Paris on February 28, 2018.

## EDUCATION

Born in 1941 in Negeri Sembilan, Latiff Mohidin was an art genius with immense talent and passion at an early age. He had a gift of producing phenomenal works as one of the earliest Malaysian modernist artists, having studied at the Hochschule für Bildende Künste (Academy of Fine Arts) in Berlin from

1960 to 1964 on a German scholarship. That is why his earlier artworks had tinges of German Expressionism.

In 1964, Latiff returned to Southeast Asia and embarked on an exploration in countries such as Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and the Philippines which greatly influenced his famous poetry of the 'Pago Pago' series. In 1969, he went on to further his studies in printmaking at the Atelier La Courier in Paris on another scholarship and also went to Pratt Institute of New York on a John D. Rockefeller III scholarship in that same year.

He not only is well skilled in just the arts, he too delved into other art forms such as sculpting and print-making. The Penang-based artist has also showed interest in literature by publishing books of pictorials, translated literature and his anthology of poetry compositions.

## EXHIBITION TRACK AND OTHER WORKS

The prominent artist has mounted more than 31 exhibitions under his name, both locally and abroad. Some of his monumental exhibitions that were held locally included the Six Decades of Latiff Mohidin: A Retrospective (2012-2013) which was organised by the National Art Gallery in Kuala Lumpur. The exhibition showcased 344 of his masterpieces that he has produced over the span of 60 years of his art career. Another notable showcase was the Latiff Mohidin: Modern Sculptures 2007-2015, curated by art historian TK Sabapathy at The Edge Galerie in 2016.

Since his works were in demand, it is no surprise that he has been featured internationally in various solo exhibitions such as in Berlin, Frankfurt, Hamburg, Bangkok, Singapore, New Delhi, New York, Sydney, Sao Paulo, Osaka, Montreal, Manila, Jakarta,



**Pago Pago, 1966**  
Ink and wash on paper 13.6 x 21.5 cm  
Collection of the artist

Dublin and London. Of course, the art community took notice, therefore, in 1984, he was awarded the S.E.A Write Award in Bangkok.

As mentioned earlier, besides creating artworks, he is also known for his poetry and written anthologies. He has translated seven literary works by illustrious authors and playwrights to Bahasa Malaysia such as Gitanjali by Rabindranath Tagore, Tao Te Ching by Lao-tzu (Zhou Dynasty, 1046-256 BC) and Faust by German author Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Other literary works under his name also include Sungai Mekong (1971), Kembara Malam (1974), Serpihan Dari Pendalaman (1979), Pesisir Waktu (1981) and Sajak-Sajak Dinihari (1996).

## INSPIRATION AND STYLE

Through proper training, talent and experience over the years, Latiff Mohidin has developed his own identity in art practice and literation through extraordinary concepts and visualisation. What makes him unique is that while most artists draw inspiration from their physical surroundings, exterior environment or some form of somatic creation, he receives his muse from his imagination. He extracts the visuals from what is in his mind and illustrates it on canvas.

His primary source of his imagination comes from the memories of the place he has travelled to. He fuses his emotional and poetic vision of those memories and translates them through his art masterpiece. His art style, rather than replicating what is seen, he interprets and expresses it. This is

why he is so eminent in his style. Also, what he portrays not only depicts his imagination, but also his mastery in art techniques through his expressionist strokes. He is pure talent plus skills which make him extraordinary as an artist.

## PAGO PAGO IN PARIS

For the first time in history, Latiff Mohidin will participate and represent as one of Southeast Asia's leading modernists in a dialogue with his Western peers at the upcoming exhibition in Centre Pompidou, Paris. The exhibition is a collaboration with the National Gallery Singapore, featuring more than 70 modernist works from his infamous Pago Pago: Latiff Mohidin (1960-1969) series, a formative period in the artist's practice in the 1960's during his Europe and Southeast Asia journey.



**Malam Merah (Red Night), 1968**  
Oil on canvas 81.5 x 99.5 cm  
Collection of Zain Azahari

According to Shabbir Hussain Mustafa, senior curator at National Gallery Singapore and co-curator of the exhibition, it was during this time when Latiff Mohidin incited the consciousness that emerged through his travels with a phrase: 'Pago Pago', a manner of thinking and working that complicated Western modernism through the initiation of dialogues with other avant-garde thinkers in Southeast Asia. He said, "This exhibition will explore all sorts of interlocking connections in highlighting what constitutes a contribution to 20th century modernism."

The Deputy Director of Musée National d'Art Moderne of Centre Pompidou and co-curator of the exhibition, Catherine David, also explained, "This in-focus exhibition is designed to unravel the complexities of key works that Latiff Mohidin produced in the 1960's, a decade which could be characterised as a moment when Southeast Asia established itself as a locus within the major redraft of Modernism. The exhibition concludes with the 1969 moment of Neo Pago Pago, a critical year in the artist's practice as he transitioned from the Pago Pago series (1964-68) into a prolific output of literary prose and poetry, yet another understudied aspect of his practice that this exhibition will seek to tease out."

With a celebrated career of more than 65 years, Latiff Mohidin has proven his relevance and significance in the art fraternity. His artworks have received noteworthy praises and critical acclaim resulting in artistic awareness in modernism. The demand for his artworks as well as his upcoming showcase at the Centre of Pompidou evidently show his contribution to art in a global context. Therefore, there is no denying that he is indeed, a legend in the art scene.