

# TAY CHEE TOH

Diverse and Figurative

BY HIRANMAYII AWLI MOHANAN

Second-generation Singapore artist, Tay Chee Toh was born in Johor, in 1941. He is a diverse figurative and abstract artist, whose artworks span from paintings to sculptures and prints, ranging over different mediums and styles. The artist received great recognition in 1985 when he was awarded the highly-coveted, Cultural Medallion. He also went on to win the second and first prizes in the United Overseas Bank (UOB) Painting of the Year competition in 1982 and 1985 respectively.

## EDUCATION

In 1958, Tay moved to Singapore and enrolled at the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA) for two years, where he studied under the tutelage of Nanyang-style pioneer artist, Cheong Soo Pieng.

## ARTISTIC CAREER

Tay held his first group exhibition, entitled '4-Man Joint Exhibition' at the National Library Board, Singapore in 1960. The show garnered the artist critical attention in the 1963 book, 'A Brief History of Malayan Art'. Following the successful exhibition, was another group show, this time titled, 'Modern Art Exhibition' in 1963. The very same group established the Modern Art Society that year.

The artist's first solo exhibition took place in 1966, at the Chinese Chamber of Commerce in Kuching, Sarawak. There, he became fascinated with the indigenous Dayaks, studied them and used them as his muse. This then bore a fresh, thematic and stylistic art form, featuring Dayak women with elongated figures and arms. Tay debuted these new artistic expressions in his second solo exhibition at the British Council in Singapore in 1967. He collaborated with Alpha Gallery and held solo and group exhibitions at the gallery in 1972 and 1973. He also participated in several of Alpha Gallery's group shows, including its inaugural exhibition in 1971.

Tay achieved his first accolade when he won the first prize at the Singapore Innovations in Art competition, organised by the then Ministry of Culture and Singapore Airlines in 1981. The following year, the artist bagged second placing at the inaugural UOB Painting of the Year competition. Besides that, his works were highly recognised when UNICEF reproduced one of his paintings on a greeting card in 1969.

1985 was the year Tay was conferred the honorable award, Cultural Medallion in 1985 in recognition of his artistic talent and achievements. He won the first prize in the UOB Painting of the Year competition that same year. 1987 was a fruitful year for

Tay – he debuted his sculptural series in an exhibition, 'Tay Chee Toh's 1st Sculpture Exhibition' at the National Museum Art Gallery and completed the first hanging mobile, 'Flowers In Blossom', for the Orchard Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) station.

Armed with his work 'Rustling', Tay was placed first at the Real Estate Association of Singapore Building Sculpture Competition. In March 2001, his exploration of art led him on a new path, in figurative sculpture, in which he held a retrospective titled 'Body Lines' at the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts. Taken from an image in 'Body Lines', it was featured in the Celebrating Singapore Art series of stamps in 2009. By 2012, Tay had held 10 solo shows, the latest of which was an exhibition of woodblock prints on gold and silver fabric. Some of his print works were labour of love, took close to three years to complete, spanned 4.5 m in length, revolving around the theme of the Dayak women.

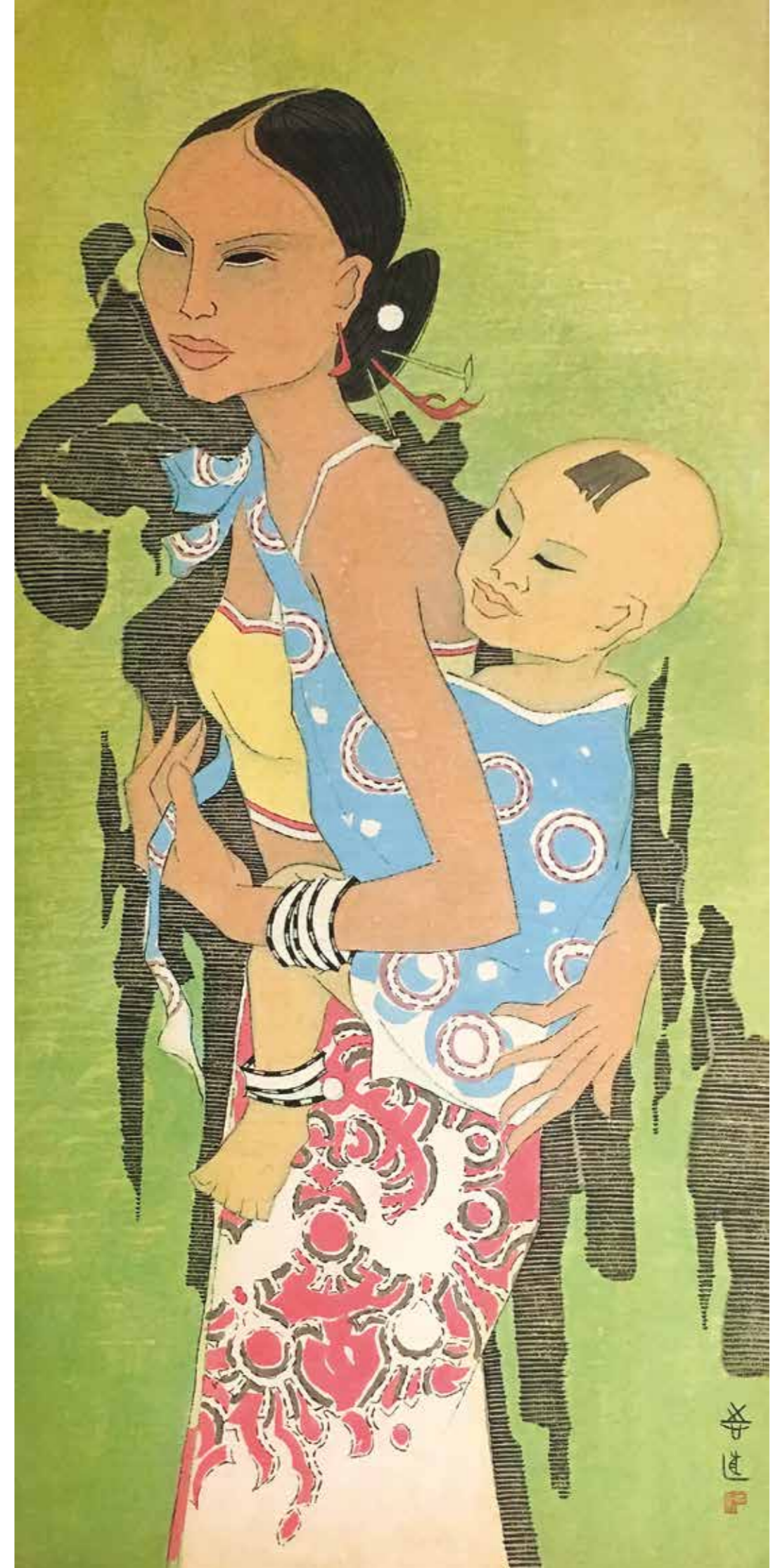
## STYLE AND MEDIUM

Tay's artistic practice has seen various experimentation in choice of media and modes of visual expression. He played a role in establishing the Modern Art Society and paved the way in figuration and abstraction. The artist's output, while embodying formal sensibilities, reveals surreal expressions with a derivation in fantasy.

After an enlightening trip to Sarawak in 1966, Tay brought forth the 'Dayak Women' series. These works portray the union of elongated lines and flattened forms comparable to that of his mentor, Cheong Soo Pieng's. The artist's batik works emerged in the late 1960's, as a result of exploration with the medium and introducing stylisation in his abstract and figurative works.

Then, towards the late 70's, Tay forayed into abstraction, producing the 'Aqua' and 'Windows' series of paintings with a juxtaposition of geometric lines with organic forms that float gracefully in fields of flat and robust colours. Later, advances in abstraction in the 80's saw his initial organic forms progress to become increasingly structured, which Tay attributed to the influence of industrial objects and their physical materiality. This influence soon became apparent in his three-dimensional sculptural works in the 80's, evoking the imagery of floating structures.

The early 2000's saw Tay produce fresh articulations of figurative compositions in paintings and sculptures. Evident in the 'Body Lines' sculptural series, the figures are articulated in fractured and contorted forms, exhibiting curved plains with languid sensuality.



Mother and Child, 1968  
Ink and gouache on paper  
95 x 46 cm  
RM 18,000 - RM 25,000



# TAN CHOHT TEE

Realist-Impressionist Artist

BY HIRANMAYII AWLI MOHANAN

Born in Guangdong, China in 1942, Tan Choh Tee relocated to Singapore in 1953 and developed an interest in art at a young age. He studied at the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA) from 1958 to 1962, under the tutelage of pioneer artists such as Cheong Soo Pieng, Liu Kang and Georgette Chen. As a student, he became deeply inclined to European modern art, particularly that of Impressionism and Post-Impressionism.

After graduating from NAFA, Tan worked as a book designer for McGraw-Hill Far East for over a decade before eventually practising his passion as a full-time artist in 1976. The artist is best known for his stunning depiction of realist-impressionist oil paintings of landscape and still life. While his subject matter often illustrates the various scenes of Singapore landscapes since the 1970s, he has also ventured to Bali, Taipei, Hong Kong, Paris, Suzhou, and many other places for plein-air painting.

Tan's pictorial language is generally characterised by layered gestural brushworks, paired with meticulous attention to detail. After the 1990's, Tan's artworks reflect an increasing use of palette knife effects, great for building up a thick texture and creating a broken colour effect. Over the decades, Tan has remained a persistent plein-air painter when it comes to rendering nature, rural scenes and urban landscapes, translating the intrigue of fleeting light conditions through colour, onto his oil paintings. In 2006, Tan was awarded the Cultural Medallion for Visual Arts by the Singapore Government. Additionally, he received the Asia Visual Arts Award from the Korean National Cultural Research Organisation.

In the early 1970s, Tan discovered that many parts of Chinatown were fast disappearing under the government's redevelopment plans. Having grown up in the area, Tan had a special affiliation for the place and felt an urgent need to capture the charm and uniqueness of the Chinatown he knew. Working relentlessly, he once managed to finish a painting in just two days. During this period in time, Singapore's art scene entered a vibrant phase. There was an increase in the appreciation of the arts and art patronage. Thenceforth, the artist produced a large number of impressive works featuring picturesque scenes of 'old' Singapore. Part of the artworks in this series is the 'Singapore Street Scene', illustrating zinc roofs and vintage buildings take centre stage amid the flurry of activities.

In 1984, Tan returned to NAFA, his alma mater, to teach. He subsequently went on to attend a masterclass at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in China in 1987.



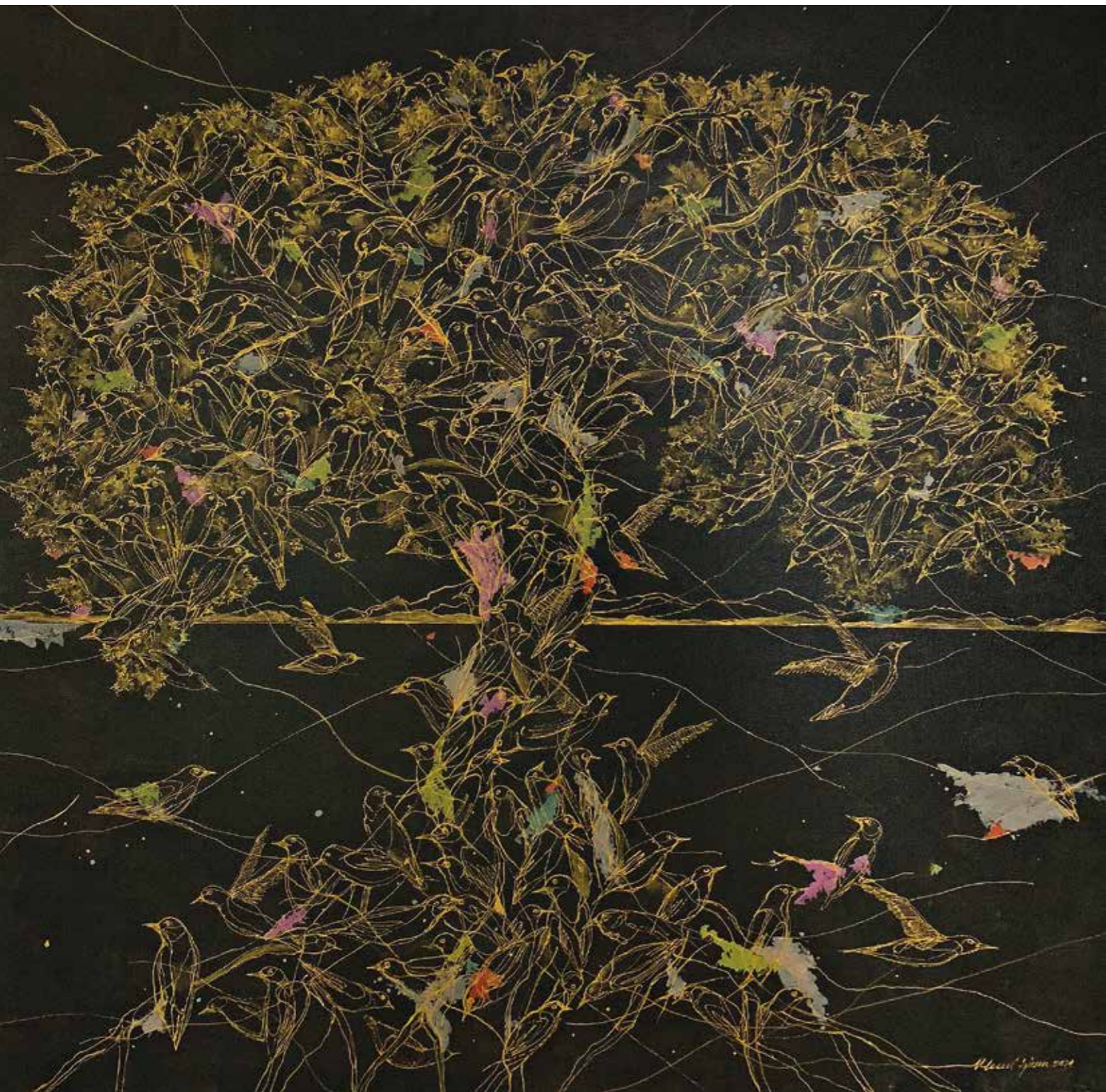
Singapore Street Scene  
Acrylic on canvas  
53 x 64 cm  
RM 25,000 - RM 50,000



# MOHD KHAIRUL IZHAM

A Vehement, Visionary Artist

BY HIRANMAYIL AWLI MOHANAN



Pohon Mas IV, 2019  
Acrylic on canvas  
152 x 152 cm  
RM 4,000 - RM 9,000



Di Ketika dan Waktu, 2015  
Acrylic on canvas  
197 x 152 cm  
RM 4,000 - RM 9,000

Di Tanah Itu, 2019  
Acrylic on canvas  
122 x 152 cm  
RM 3,500 - RM 7,000



Khairul Izham engrossed in painting, accompanied by his wife (also an artist) and their daughter.

The gifted and young contemporary artist, Mohd Khairul Izham was born in 1985 in Maran, Pahang. With a clear direction of his life path, he pursued a B.A. in Fine Arts (Painting) at Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) in Shah Alam, Selangor and graduated not long after. He has participated in a number of exhibitions including – Malaysian Emerging Artist Award (2011), Deceitful Truths (2011) and Dischromatic (2010). His latest show, held early this year was Neo Baroque – A Malaysia Reintepretation group exhibition in collaboration with Core Design Gallery. Khairul Izham lives and works in Kuala Lumpur.

He approaches the broad subject of past and memories with complex layering and conscious masking, leaving the audience with residue from the process of recollection. Khairul Izham is known to produce a dark, mysterious and elusive mood in his subjects. His brushes of colour create rough silhouettes in an expressionistic manner with details, contours and crevices accurately captured.

It is the artist's hallmark that his works boast outlining object in light grey or vivid colours against a dark background. Khairul Izham presents what is almost a literal visual board filled with sketches and drawings.

As the artist puts it, "It is the primary visual language and essential to our existence as intelligent beings." It is a common notion that many artists are influenced by other legendary artists. In Khairul's case, he turns to the late Datuk Ibrahim Hussein and his works.

For the artist, his artistic style involves a process in which the starting point begins with a line. This then connects to another line that subsequently creates shapes and forms. An artist seeks inspiration through many forms and many aspects, and for Khairul Izham, his inspiration is derived from everything and anything – from nature, people or the experiences in his daily life. His family – wife and daughter are his muses every day, and in different aspects. Music is the catalyst of creativity for Khairul. It puts one in a creative mood and ideas just flow.

In Khairul Izham's eyes, art is an instrument that artists use to create a story or share an idea and translate it onto a canvas. To him, art can be things that we see in our daily lives. The meaning behind Khairul's works are multiple, varying depending on subject and stimulus. According to the contemporary artist, "My artworks are about creating lines and turning them into a story or ideas on a canvas..."