

# ABDUL MUTHALIB MUSA

Beautifully sculpting the Malaysian art scene

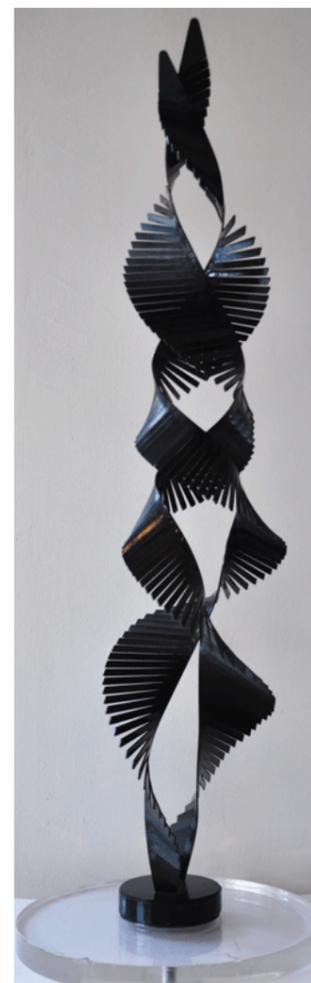
BY HIRANMAYII AWLI MOHANAN



Malaysian Breeze 2.1, 2003,  
Laser mild steel 60 x 120 cm x 6 pieces  
(Now Available for Sale at KLAS @ Jalan Utara)



Twist, 2008  
Laser mild steel 60 x 30 x 30 cm  
(Now Available for Sale at KLAS @ Jalan Utara)



Two Palms, 2002  
Lasercut mild steel with clear coat  
90 x 30 x 30 cm  
Private Collection Kuala Lumpur



Multhalib Musa's "Inverted Swirls" produced in 2009 measuring 155 x 155 cm  
Private Collection Kuala Lumpur



Dr Mahathir having a closer look at the "Reconstru ...  
on held in Galeri Tangsi Kuala Lumpur in 2005



Reconstructing Beauty I, 2004  
Lasercut Mild Steel 120 x 120 x 3 cm  
Private Collection of Datuk Gary Thanasan

Anyone familiar with Malaysia's contemporary art scene can certainly recognise Abdul Multhalib Musa as one of Malaysia's leading contemporary sculptors. His unique and energetic sculptures have earned him not only a name for himself, but several awards, residencies and commissions. Abdul Multhalib was born in Penang, in 1976. He gained a degree in architecture from Universiti Teknologi Mara in 2000. Sculpture and the allied arts have always been integral parts of an architect's training. This sparked a hidden fire and generated an interest in the arts. Multhalib uses his experience and degree in architecture by seamlessly materialising it into his works.

Multhalib sculptures exhibit magnetic energy and unmistakable silhouettes that justify the numerous awards under his belt. Multhalib's most recent residency was the 2015 Cité Internationale des Arts, funded by the French Embassy in Kuala Lumpur. His notable residencies were the Rimbun Dahan Residency in 2001 and the Australian High Commission Residency in 2004. In 2002, Multhalib was recognised for his work, winning the Award of Excellence at the 6th Oita Asian Sculpture Open Competition in Japan. Subsequently, he also won the Juror's Choice Award at the National Art Gallery in Kuala Lumpur in 2002. He was then selected for the Ordos 11th Asia Arts Festival, Inner Mongolia Autonomous

Region, China, as well as the Urumqi International Urban Sculpture Symposium in Xinjiang, China in 2009. Multhalib went on to achieve great heights by winning a competition to design a major outdoor sculpture for the 2008 Beijing Olympics in China. Multhalib had undertaken major commissioned works for Petronas, The Hilton, The Grand Hyatt, The Westin, Aliya and Farouk Khan and UMW Toyota.

Perhaps it was the predominant way of his architectural background that played a part in his sculptural practice, paving a way to his approach in constructing his sculptures. Multhalib uses technology as part of his process, to aid him in

visualising three-dimensional patterns. Then, if need be, he creates mini prototypes of that vision to ensure the right use of tools. It also helps him resolve any issues before the actual production commences. He is often aided by a team of builders in the fabrication of his work, similar to a construction of a building. Typically, Multhalib's sculptures go through a laser-cut steel. In order to attain his signature rusty effect, he would then douse his works in salt water and lo and behold, his masterpieces come to life only to be coveted by art aficionados.

According to Abdul Muthalib, the conception of his works is spontaneous, non-linear and they are derived from experiences and what he feels. He draws from the natural surroundings as well as built environment. He explained, "At this stage, I have come to perceive the self as a composite that is often contradictory and internally incomplete. Perhaps this is one way to relate to my work, in a sense that it is conceptualised and manifested in fragments and aggregates to reveal a certain personal characteristic that

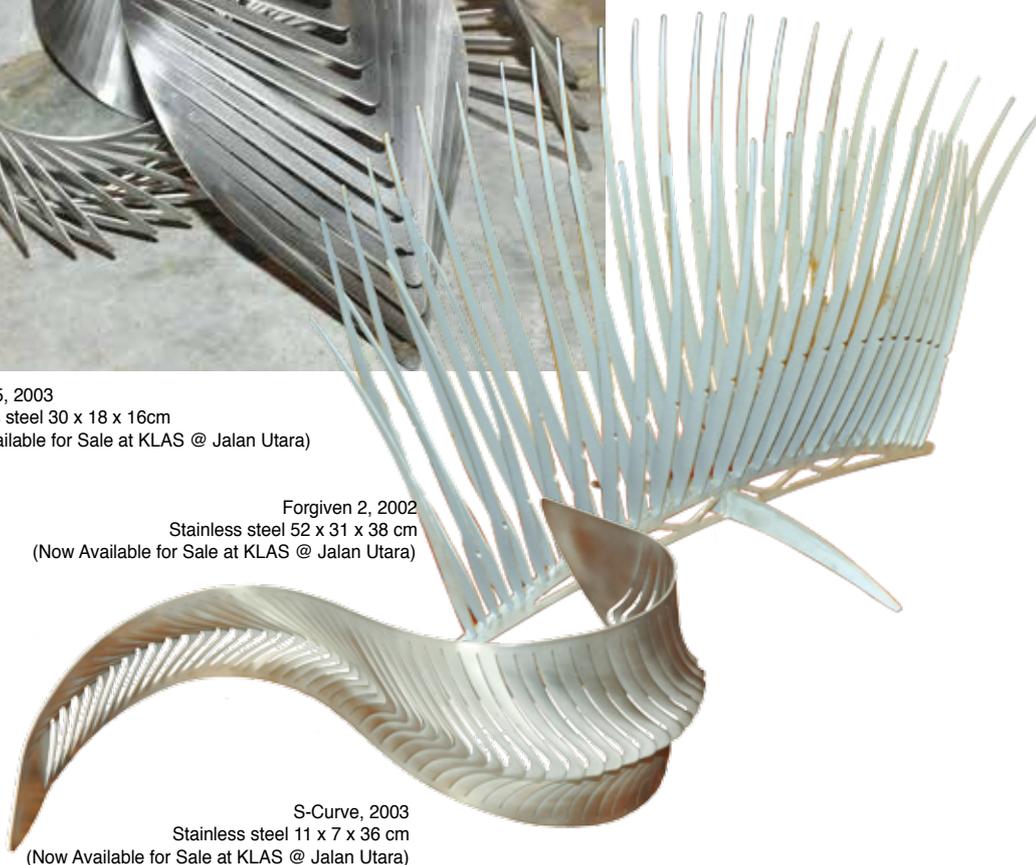
challenges the reader to engage with the work at various levels of interpretation." Multhalib fully utilises geometric shapes in his sculptures. Furthermore, mathematical shapes and equations of swirls, circles and ovals are abundant in the composition of his circular series, entitled, 'Swirls'. His series was showcased at the Australian High Commission Kuala Lumpur in 2005, featuring as the title suggests, a series of circular sculptures. He had showcased two of his other works, the Involute series (2005) and Twist (2008).



3-In Bloom 1, 2013  
Stainless steel with concrete base 75 x 22 x 17cm  
(Now Available for Sale at KLAS @ Jalan Utara)



Twisted 5, 2003  
Stainless steel 30 x 18 x 16cm  
(Now Available for Sale at KLAS @ Jalan Utara)



Forgiven 2, 2002  
Stainless steel 52 x 31 x 38 cm  
(Now Available for Sale at KLAS @ Jalan Utara)

S-Curve, 2003  
Stainless steel 11 x 7 x 36 cm  
(Now Available for Sale at KLAS @ Jalan Utara)

Multhalib approaches all his work with a consideration he developed while working on his Involute series. Although he considers all his works to be part of the same series, it also portrays how vastly different they are under different circumstances such as the shows they are displayed at the time and titles they hold. Abdul Multhalib lives by an unwavering principle to date, which is to transform two-dimensional creations to three dimensional figures in order to establish a connection between his sculptures and his audiences. It was initially a fundamental principle he had learnt in architecture which was then applied to art too. After all, beauty is in the eye of its beholder.

Abdul Multhalib's 'Involute' series consists of suspended spherical mobile sculptures. One can say that it shares an apparent similarity in aesthetics with the 'Swirl' series and his works from the 'Twist' series which debuted back in 2008. As mentioned earlier, Multhalib considers all his series similar and as one, yet they differ greatly depending on

circumstances. The Twist series features a series of sliced 'S' shapes standing up in tall totem-like structures.

You may recognise some of Multhalib's works in public spaces, prominently the Patience of Petronas which graces the lobby of Prince Court Medical Centre and The Essence of National Legacy which can be seen at the Putrajaya International Convention Centre. While there aren't a lot of public sculptures, Multhalib adds his art to be part of the Kuala Lumpur skyline which has been referred to as a form of contemporary Malaysian sculpture in itself.

Synonymous with his talent, his success has earned his artworks a place in prestigious hotels, namely, his Breeze and Bubbles for the Hilton Hotel and his latest, Darussalam at the brand new Grand Hyatt. Darussalam is Multhalib's first foray in bronze, and was an interesting development for him as

bronze limits laser cutting, which is a typical method by which he handles his metals. The final form therefore greatly differs from his previous works and shows an interesting new development in his repertoire. Rather than consisting of metal slices, the sculpture is a tall smooth edifice, mimicking the building that houses it. A bird's-eye view of the piece outlines a crescent, an icon present in both the Brunei and Malaysian flags, and which is one of the oldest symbols known to mankind signifying splendour and beauty.

Multhalib has masterfully combined his mathematical knowledge, spatial awareness and conceptual abilities to create sculptures that resonate with his audiences, both locally and internationally. Forging his way at the forefront of the contemporary Malaysian sculpture movement, Multhalib's ability to connect his works to the spaces that they inhabit, all the while exploring the precarious division of two and three dimensionalities, brands him as an exciting artist whose coming works are poised for an electrifying future.