

An oil painting of a woman, Zoebaidah, seated and looking slightly to the right. She has dark hair pulled back and is wearing a light blue patterned dress with a red pendant necklace and a ring. Her hands are clasped in her lap. The background is a soft, textured wash of colors.

journey

by Lee Chan Wai

Painter of People

In a special Father's Day feature for Journey, we speak to Puan Zoebaidah, daughter of the late, great portrait painter Hoessein Enas

Portrait of Zoebaidah (1958) 82x66.5cm Oil on Canvas



Zoebaidah

Zoebaidah is a genial, energetic woman with a broad smile. Born in Medan in 1942, Zoebaidah is Datuk Mohd Hoessein Enas' first born and eldest of his seven daughters and two sons. The unspoken bond between father and daughter is not only evident in the stories that she recalls but even down to the sophistication that Zoebaidah projects.

Stylish Painter

"My dad was a stylish man!" Zoebaidah tells us, "He had a taste for imported Italian brands back then and of course he would never be without his signature pipe. But at the same time he was always so warm and generous. He loved to joke around but always spoke softly, kindly and with great poise."

Much the same could be said of Zoebaidah. Her hospitality knows no bounds as she serves homemade tapioca cakes and spring rolls, the culinary arts being her chosen field as opposed to her father's well-known indulgence with oils, pastels and acrylic. As she recalls her father with great affection, she always carried herself with the same poise you would just imagine her father would have had.

"My earliest memory of my father was that he was not around!" continues Zoebaidah with a touch of humour that must surely have signalled the apple doesn't fall too far from the tree. "But I remember missing him a lot and always wondering where he was."

Early Years

Between 1945 and 1947, Zoebaidah had no clue where her father was. It emerged later that he had fled Indonesia, where he was born in order to escape the struggle for independence and upheaval at the time. Hoessein Enas was said to have helped Labuhan Bilk to print bank notes and even rode a trishaw in Singapore during that time before finally settling in Penang and sending for his wife and children in 1947. This was the year that the young Zoebaidah was reunited with her father.

"I remember we lived in a shophouse in Penang," Zoebaidah says, "with Bengali bakers downstairs. I still remember my dad taking me to Penang Hill within the very first few days of arriving there."

The family with Zoebaidah and her two brothers and one young sister at that time were overjoyed to be united with their father. Though they wondered whether they would be returning to Indonesia, Zoebaidah still remembers being told by her mother that they would stay, because that was where her father was.

"We never questioned our parents back then," Zoebaidah explains. "I was only five years old and didn't know much. We were just happy to be together and as I grew up and had more brothers and sisters, I would help to look after everyone."

After only a year in Penang, the family moved to Kuala Lumpur, first to Kampung Baru and later to Jalan Cochrane. The family then spent many years in Jalan Hose, near Merdeka Stadium. This was where Hoessein Enas finally had a studio that led to a most productive phase of his life. Zoebaidah was living in the Jalan Hose house until she completed her schooling, started working and right up until her marriage in 1965. Later, Hoessein and the family would move to Bukit Damansara where he lived until his passing.

Dedicated Artist

"We always knew he painted," Zoebaidah remembers with great pride. "But we didn't know the extent of his passion when we were young. It was in Jalan Hose that we really saw how much he loved it, locking himself away for hours, listening to his favourite Latin records, smoking his pipe and painting."

That certainly paints an accurate picture of the dedicated painter that Hoessein Enas was, who also had a dash of panache to his character. Throughout his life, he always had a full-time job, including working at the Malaysian Film Unit in Jalan Bangsar, a research artist with the

Among famous people Hoessein Enas painted

- Muhammad Ali
- Former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad
- Late former Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman
- Sarawak Chief Minister Tan Sri Dato Patinggi Abdul Taib Mahmud and his family
- Former Sabah Chief Minister Tun Mustapha

Biodata of Hoessein Enas

Born in Bogor, West Java in 1924

Education

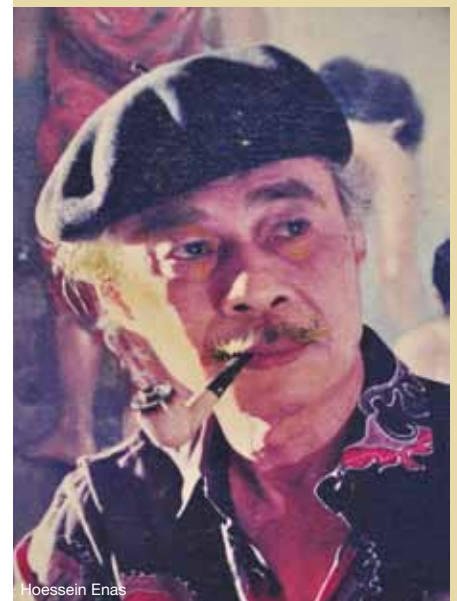
Studied under Mr Kioma in Medan and Professor Stanley Green in London, but mainly self-taught

Selected Exhibitions

- 1949 : British Council, Kuala Lumpur
- 1960 : Chaniel Gallery, London
- 1961 : Paris
- 1963 : Kuala Lumpur and Singapore
- 1964 : Hong Kong
- 1966 : National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur
- 1971 : Samat Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur

Awards

- 1960 : UNESCO Fellowship Award Winner in Art
- 1961 : Asia Foundation Grant
- 1965/76 : Colombo Plan (Australia and New Zealand)
- 1967 : US Fellowship
- 1990 : Selangor Royal Portrait Artist



Hoessein Enas



Hoessein Enas sitting with Zoebaidah directly behind

the important things. His understanding and loving nature was what endures in Zoebaidah's mind.

Doting Grandfather

"My father loved to give gifts," Zoebaidah says, pointing at paintings in pastel of her own children and grandchildren adorning the living room walls, signing off as "Kakek" or grandfather in Indonesian as Hoessein liked to refer to himself within the family.

"He was so generous with the young ones, always. Holiday time and celebrations like Hari Raya was always great. Also, every Father's Day we would always gather and celebrate with him. I remember so much joy and happiness during those times and we miss him."

Sadly, Hoessein passed away in 1995. But his memory lives strongly in Zoebaidah and everyone else who have been fortunate enough to be touched by his personality or his paintings. "Painting is in my blood," Zoebaidah relays how Hoessein Enas used to tell her. "He was from a poor, simple kampung family. He didn't have a diploma or degree, he was just naturally good and his passion was so great. I am so proud and grateful to have a father like him."

Zoebaidah ends by sharing with us another nugget of wisdom from the great man: "Art is life and life is art", my father always used to say." That went a long way to explain Hoessein's art and work. Ultimately he was interested in life and people, captured through his portraits.

Thankfully through Zoebaidah we learn that Hoessein was very much loved, especially by his family, and he was a terrific personality. Hoessein Enas was not just a Painter of People, but also the People's Painter.

Museum and Aboriginal Research Department and most famously as the director of Stage and Design for Radio Television Malaysia. Hoessein was so passionate about his art that he would paint furiously in his own time, often working until the early hours of the morning.

Loving Father

But Hoessein was far from one to neglect the family; Zoebaidah is quick to tell us: "He always was a very generous and loving father. For instance, he used to insist to have meals at home together with the entire family."

Besides the many famous dignitaries and celebrities that Hoessein painted, his family was also his favourite subjects. Zoebaidah recalls how she was once made to sit every day, posing for her father for weeks, wearing the same Malay dress. Her father would call her endearingly by her nickname "Bet" and she couldn't refuse.

"I remember I was in Form 3 and had to study for exams," Zoebaidah recalls, smiling. "I didn't really want to do it because it was tiring and I had to revise! But we would still do it because we loved him and he was very insistent." The painting with which Zoebaidah spoke of is one of Hoessein Enas' most loved paintings now, titled Portrait of Zoebaidah (1958).

Zoebaidah was not alone as the entire family was engaged from time to time as models. Hoessein was particularly interested in people and people's expressions. Zoebaidah tells us with great pride: "He had a great gift of looking into the characteristics of a person not just on the outside but the inside as well. He was interested in drawing people in different conditions, even if you look like a mess after a hard day at work." It was this ability that once led to Hoessein being

coined "The Man with the Golden Arm" after an exhibition in London.

Despite Hoessein's many accolades, Zoebaidah's most enduring memory of her father was his open-minded nature. "I still remember when I first met my husband," Zoebaidah tells us. "I was still a very obedient girl and would seek my father's permission for everything. But he was very open and even invited my future husband to the house to meet him."

After Zoebaidah's marriage in 1965, her own family would move to Kota Baru for work and would return to Kuala Lumpur seven years later when her own first child began attending school. All through that time while she was away and whenever she was back in Kuala Lumpur, she would always visit her parents, and her father had subsequently formed a very good relationship with her husband.

Lessons in Life

Hoessein's open nature was the one great lesson Zoebaidah keeps with her. "My father taught me to make friends with everyone," Zoebaidah says. "Whether you are Malay, Chinese, Indian or any other race, I was always taught to be open just like my father. Until today I have plenty of friends and I am very happy."

These days Zoebaidah keeps herself busy with volunteer work with charities and also spending time with her friends either cooking or taking walks in the Lake Gardens. They even go on yearly trips overseas together. Her fulfillment has come directly from the influence and nature of her father.

Although Zoebaidah admits that her mother was the one to go to for most everyday issues, Hoessein was always there for her to talk about



Zoebaidah in 1991 with Datuk Hoessein Enas's artwork East Coast Girl (1985) in the background