

ART & LIVING PREVIEW



LOT 77 ISMAIL MAT HUSSIN Senja 1981, Batik 73 x 96 cm RM 15,000 - RM 24,000

KLAS ART AUCTION MALAYSIAN MODERN & CONTEMPORARY ART



SUNDAY, 13 SEPTEMBER 2015 | 1.00 PM | KLAS @ JALAN UTARA

REMEMBERING BATIK'S LEADING LIGHT

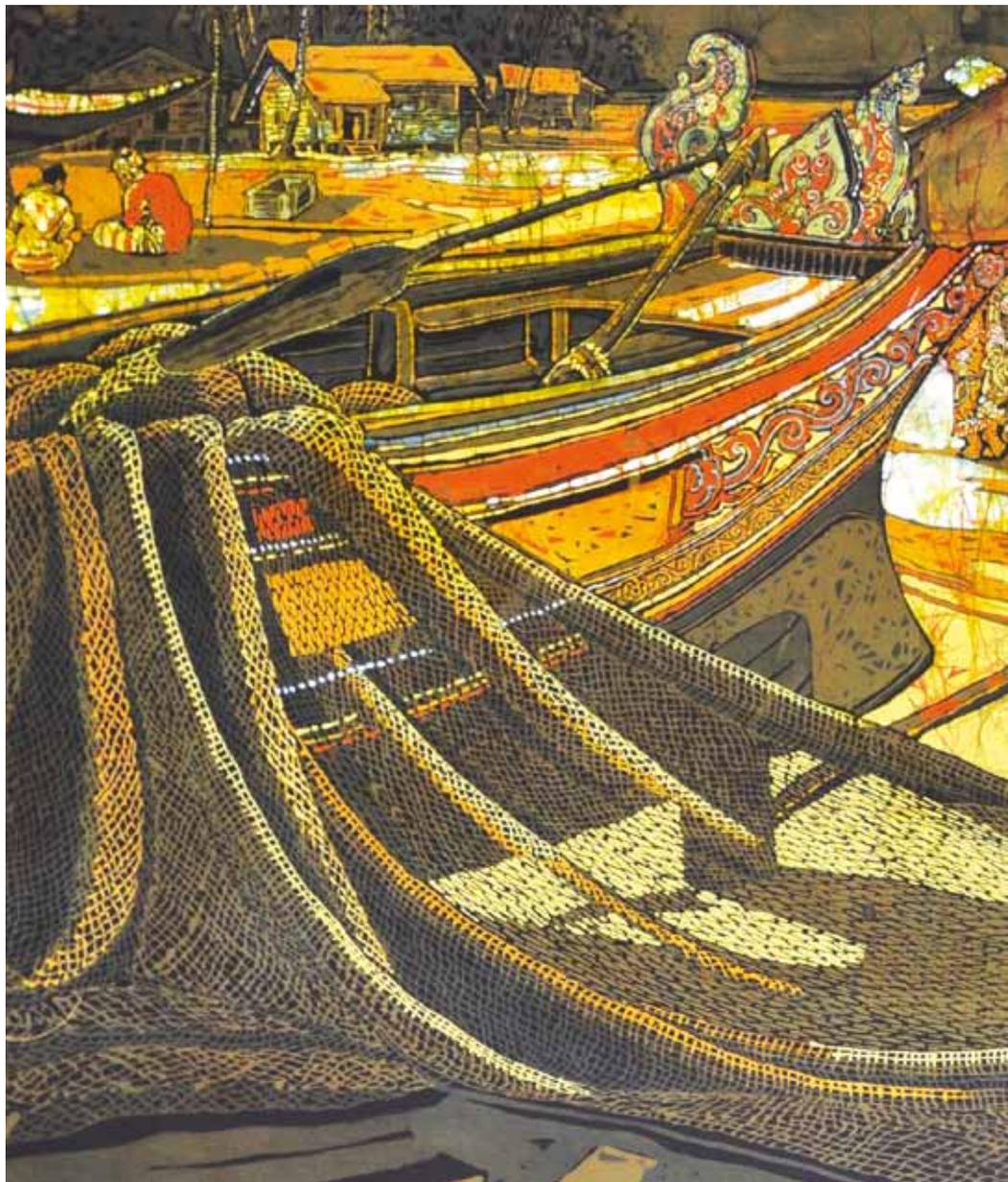
ISMAIL MAT HUSSIN

1938 – 2015

BY KATHLYN URSULA D'SOUZA

For some artists, art is a diary or a vessel of thoughts, emotions and beliefs transferred onto canvas with paintbrush. With every stroke, they convey subtle ideas, feelings or gestures. Art may, at other times, work as an ephemeral journey of the self, through all the trials and tribulations that have scarred and dented the psyche. Some may choose to ceaselessly flitter from one subject to another, relishing in adversities and such. Ismail Mat Hussin, however, painted the 'constant' in his life.

Many of us embark on adventures and quests to savour the most important things in life, but never realising that the one thing that has been closest to us through all these adventures is consistency – it is that one thing that gives us comfort. This was not different for Ismail Mat Hussin, as the East Coast remained ever-true, his constant comfort. From the very beginning until the last days of his life, it was something that remained dear to Ismail. The amalgamation of the clear skies, the untarnished air, untouched serenity and the feel and smell of earth and its humble and charming rustic quality instantly capture the hearts of the gazers, as they experience the same feelings as Ismail when he painted these bits and pieces of home. It is a reminder that despite whatever that has happened, is happening and will happen, home will always be there. With that thought in mind, he captured the spirit of the East Coast immaculately each time.





LOT 16 KLAS Art Auction, Edition XVII (13 September 2015)
Pantai Sabak 2010
Batik 75.5 x 158.5 cm
RM 55,000 - RM 65,000



“Khalil taught me how to draw and paint on batik. He advised me to just follow my own rhythm and to not restrict myself whenever I was drawing. From his point of view, every work of art has its own beauty. It’s just how one interprets art. Everyone is different.”
- Ismail Mat Hussin

Self-effacing and endearing are his works, and these qualities are often used to describe the man himself by those who have met him. His works were a personification of Ismail and his love for the East Coast, the atmosphere so palpable as if his entire being is present in these paintings. It is all a very intimate, moving and confidential affair. It is discernible, how his constant brand of paintings were constructed not merely for the sake of art, but came from deep within his roots.

Despite the popular misconception that batik art is somewhat textile-based and subservient when compared to other art forms, part of its charm comes from its modesty and simplicity, and the subsequent complexity with which it was created when rendering landscapes of nature and people result in a spectacular treat. Granted, it was an art form that was more practical and sensible, printed on cloth for the locals to wear as garments. It then progressed to “special occasions only” before turning into a more elegant and delicate form of art. Like Ismail’s work, it is a form meant for visual and artistic appreciation.

Back in the days, when other cities were progressing in art due to the colonial influence, the East Coast (Kelantan, mainly) never saw as much headway in modern and contemporary art, but it made its breakthrough, with its rich culture and heritage playing a pivotal role in motif, as seen in Ismail’s works. Home, tradition and culture shaped his works.

Ismail was born in Pantai Sabak, Kota Bharu in 1938. His calling was early, and at the tender age of 12, he developed an interest in painting. He signed up for art classes and was trained by Nik Mahmood, a teacher at Sekolah Melayu Padang Garong in Kelantan. Later on, he took up the violin and obtained a Grade V certificate from London’s Royal School of Music. Through this, he worked with Radio Televisyen Malaysia Kota Bharu as a part-time musician, earning a living as well as sustaining his creative interest in painting.

He began actively producing and exhibiting his paintings around the region and eventually joined the Angkatan Pelukis Semenanjung (Peninsular Artists Movement) or APS, having made the decision to become a full-time artist. While he was participating in competitions, he met fellow artist Khalil Ibrahim, with whom he forged a close friendship before Khalil left for London. For a brief time in the 1990s, he also worked as a graphic designer and illustrator for the Kota Bharu-based Syarikat Percetakan Dian, created a MAS-TDC calendar for Malaysia Airlines and the Tourist Development Corporation, designed playing cards for Malaysia Airlines and featured in an ESSO advertisement.

In the face of various experiences, exposure and competitions, the fire in Ismail’s soul was unwavering. It did not flag even a little

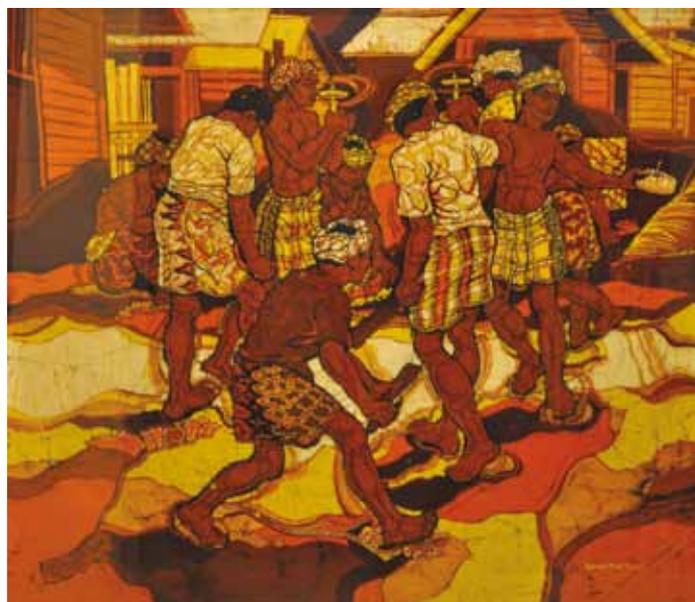
as the East Coast and its culture and legacies continued to feed his passion for both art and the countryside. It fuelled him unwaveringly so that in spite of being unsuccessful in competitions (such as the Salon Malaysia 1969 and 1979), he remained tenacious in his artistic pursuit, winning over the hearts and minds of various art collectors. It is through the naysayers and the doubtful that ostensibly added to Ismail's creative fire. Today, his works are collected by the National Visual Arts Gallery, National Museum, ESSO Malaysia, Malaysia Airline System, Bank Negara and Petronas Gallery, just to name a few. One of his pieces, "After the Catch", was flaunted and described by ardent collector Dr Tan Chong Guan as "the finest batik painting". Ismail remained till his death, one of the very few artists to still incorporate batik in their works.

There had been many outside influences that, had Ismail been an artist struggling with his own identity, would have turned his attentions elsewhere but these factors failed to exert their influence on Ismail, as he remained steadfast and committed to his chosen muse. His works captured the meek manner of living in the East Coast as seen in his works exhibited – marketplaces with people haggling, women in colourful clothing, headdress and sarongs, groups of fishermen mending nets or gathering with friends, a group of country women caught in a serene moment while bathing, musicians playing a melodious tune with traditional instruments – all-round ordinary course of events in the countryside, allowing the viewer to engage, to see what it is that Ismail saw in these seemingly mundane sceneries, and to learn how to appreciate how something so simple can be so breathtaking, much like the batik medium itself. Musculoskeletal renderings of the human figures set against warm and vivid hues, fine lines and rigorous descriptions of the boats, people and the transitory sceneries in the background are evidence of Ismail's penchant and care for detail, making sure that the essence of the countryside is captured, is done justice to. The aesthetic value of his pieces is only elevated with the welcome disruption of the batik designs, a sign of the labouriousness that goes hand-in-hand with batik-making. Nonetheless, in the end, he managed to make us feel something.

Sometimes, Ismail's works capture a quiet, serene and nostalgic mood and other times he captured the sun, something eventful and something remindful of a good memory, and we are all watching a scene unfold right before our eyes. Ismail's works take the viewer to a different realm, a realm of the much-desired tranquillity. His works can be likened to a paradox – daily occurrences in the countryside are made to look so majestic, and a simple art form resulted in such exquisiteness. In a way, Ismail's works speak to us, not only in communicating the beauty in simplicity, but also in connecting with our hearts and minds, if escape is what one is seeking but finding it difficult to catch.

Fortunately, Ismail offered the escape from the wear and tear of modernism. Through earthy browns, verdant greens and mellow colours – humble, friendly, stable and constant – Ismail's works bring to you a portal – a portal that takes you home. And even if he has left us, his legacy lives on.

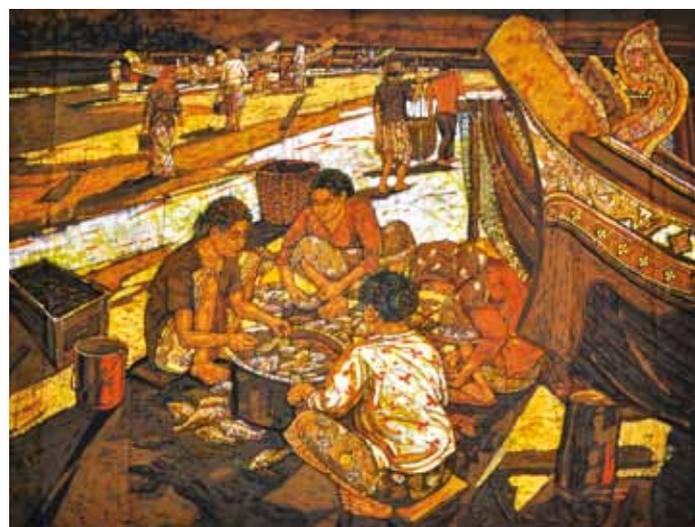
"Without art, the crudeness of reality would make the world unbearable." - George Bernard Shaw



Playing Gasing 1982, Batik 92 x 105cm



Wau Series 1983, Batik 94 x 105cm



Pantai Sabak Fishing Villlage 2011, Batik 118 x 143cm