

ABDULLAH ARIFF

A PIONEER'S LEGACY

BY AGNES AUI



Mr Abdullah Ariff at his desk at then Anglo-Chinese School

favourite subjects were rural scenes and landscapes as well as plants and human figures.

Abdullah taught art at the Pykett Methodist School in Burmah Road and served as an instructor of the ACS Art Club from 1932 to 1941. In 1945, headed out to Kuala Lumpur where he began working with The Straits Echo as a cartoonist and subsequently became active in politics. He continued to work

on his art where he participated in the 'United Society of Artists' group show in 1955 at the Royal Society of British Artists galleries in London. He passed away in 1962, leaving a legacy of excellent watercolours. Some of his paintings have been duplicated, and some can be seen on the wall behind now SMK (L) Methodist's (MBS) school office. A corner dubbed 'Sudut Abdullah Ariff' was devoted to the artist and his works at the school.

In 2006, an exhibition and art catalogue entitled *Father of Modern Art in Malaysia* by Zakaria Ali was held and published by the National Art Gallery. Abdullah was accorded as one of the important early 20th century artists in Malaysia at the same exhibition. Such exhibition was important in reappraising his works 56 years after his death. So much was his contribution to society that there is a road in Penang named Jalan Abdullah Ariff.



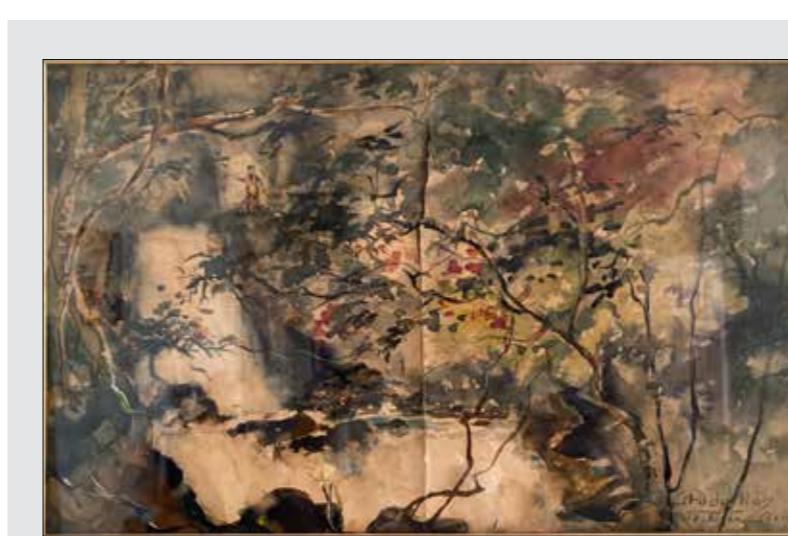
This watercolour on soft board mural was painted in 1951 by the students of the Art Club at Methodist Boys School (MBS). The mural spans up to 7.3 metres long and was conceptualised, sketched and supervised by Malaysia's pioneer artist, Abdullah Ariff.

This mural depicts the country's traditional professions during that era and aims to instill diversity in the current MBS students. Today, the mural hangs in the school's Heritage Centre and can be viewed by appointment.

The inimitable Abdullah Ariff was born on June 15, 1904 in Georgetown, Penang. He was a self-taught artist and an instructor of the Penang Impressionists in 1898 — an exclusive group of expatriate artists. The members of this group were the wives of Europeans and a few local members such as Mrs. Lim Cheng Kung, who was accepted due to her patronage. The artist was a pioneer of watercolour art in Malaysia together with Yong Mun Sen. Renowned for his meticulous and masterful handling of the watercolour medium, Abdullah employed a European technique and approach to his work compared to his contemporary, Yong Mun Sen.

Despite his young age, Abdullah was accepted in the Anglo-Chinese School (ACS), Penang at a mere nine years old and managed to pass his Senior Cambridge in 1925. Due to his educational background and enthusiasm in art, he was accepted by Rev. G. F. Pykett and later hired as an art teacher at the ACS. This was no easy feat as Western education was not easily available to non-aristocratic Malays and art education was not encouraged by the British in Malaya. He was later promoted to Supervisor of Art until the Japanese Occupation in 1941.

By the 1930s, Abdullah was making a name for himself as a Western-style painter in the annual art shows organised by the Penang Impressionists. As an impressionist, he felt obliged to adopt the quick touches of the brush strokes, often squeezing the paint directly from the tube, but the smudges of paint on the canvas and delaying the process of the oil paint discouraged him from using this medium. During this time, he experimented with various mediums like linoleum print, oil paint and watercolour. However, the artist found that the use of water colour suited him most and he earned his international fame in this medium. His

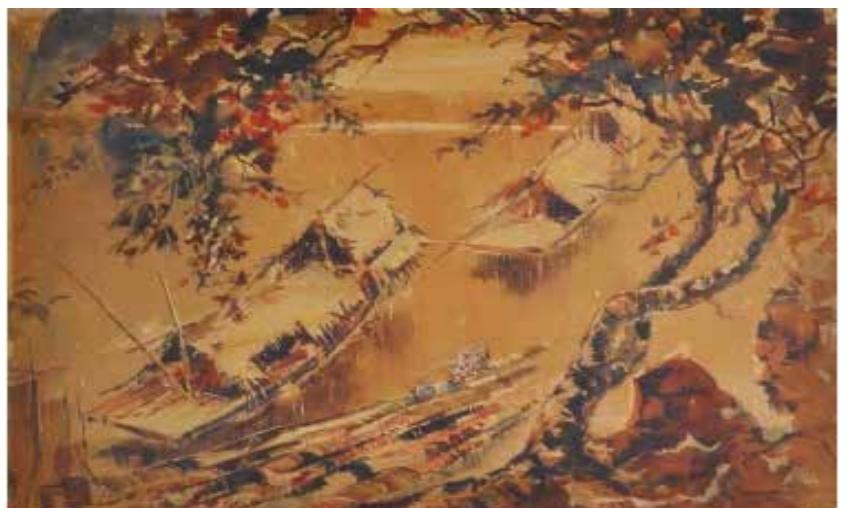


Everflowing Water, 1960
Watercolour on paper
30.5 x 25.5 cm
Private collection of Mr & Mrs Siew Hon Hoong

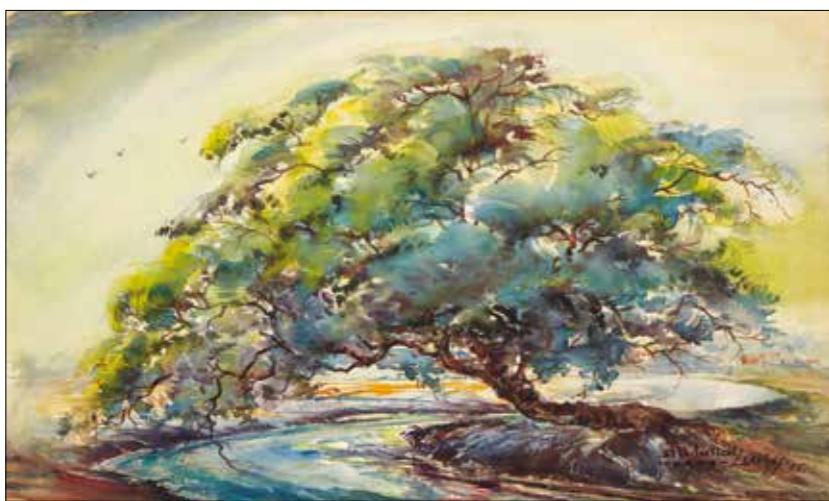
In 1954, Abdullah befriended Siew Hon Hoong, a first-year general subjects teacher who was given the task to teach Christian religious knowledge. At first, the two regularly argued about having different opinions on religions. But over time, Siew began to understand Islam and soon became best friends with Abdullah. On Siew's wedding day, Abdullah painted the "Everflowing Water" and gifted it to Siew and his wife on March 13, 1960. Till today, the painting hangs in the couple's comfortable home.



Abdullah Ariff
Misty, 1954
Watercolour on paper
34.5 x 52.5 cm
SOLD - RM 44,000



Abdullah Ariff
Destination, 1950
Watercolour on paper
34.5 x 52.5 cm
SOLD - RM 55,000



Abdullah Ariff
Tree by a River, 1955
Watercolour on paper 33 x 56 cm
SOLD - RM 57,120

MEMORIES OF ABDULLAH ARIFF AT METHODIST BOYS SCHOOL (MBS)

Abdullah was not only known nationwide and throughout the world, but he was also respected at the Methodist Boys School (MBS) in Penang. MBS was once known as Anglo-Chinese School (ACS), which was where Abdullah graduated from and later served there as an art teacher. Many of his students have recollected memories of Abdullah, and said that he was patient and kind when it came to teaching. He also imparted his skills in watercolour painting to many of his students.

During his time as an art teacher at MBS, he supervised the art club and helped students produce many watercolour paintings on soft board - including the famous 7.3m long mural that was produced in 1951, depicting the country's traditional professions during that era. Abdullah Ariff helped conceive, sketch and supervise while students from the art club painted it. He also supervised the art club to produce six pairs of half moon soft board paintings with biblical meanings, proving how the school came together during the time despite race and religion.

With the school's 130th Anniversary set to come in 2021, MBS aims to celebrate diversity - one that could evidently be seen in the friendship of Abdullah and Siew, alongside the diverse mix of students in MBS. In the anniversary celebration next year, Abdullah's duplicated works will be displayed at the Alumni's Art and Photography Exhibition. The murals which he helped supervise will also remain displayed in the school's Heritage Centre. Abdullah had earned the title, 'Father of Watercolour', throughout the school and even throughout Malaysia, but the notable thing about Abdullah was his contribution to the school's diversity for decades. And this memory of Abdullah Ariff in MBS will live for generations to come.

INTRODUCTION TO INDIAN ART

KL LIFESTYLE ART SPACE PRESENTS 3 INDIAN ARTISTS

BY HIRANMAYI AVLU MOHANAN

Indian art encompasses a variety of forms and originated about five thousand years ago, sometime during the peak of the Indus Valley civilisation. Largely influenced by a civilisation that came into existence in the 3rd millennium B.C., it blends the spiritual and the sensual, making it rather distinctive in form and appearance. However, progressively, Indian art has undergone several transformations and influenced by various cultures, making it more diverse and more inclusive of its people.

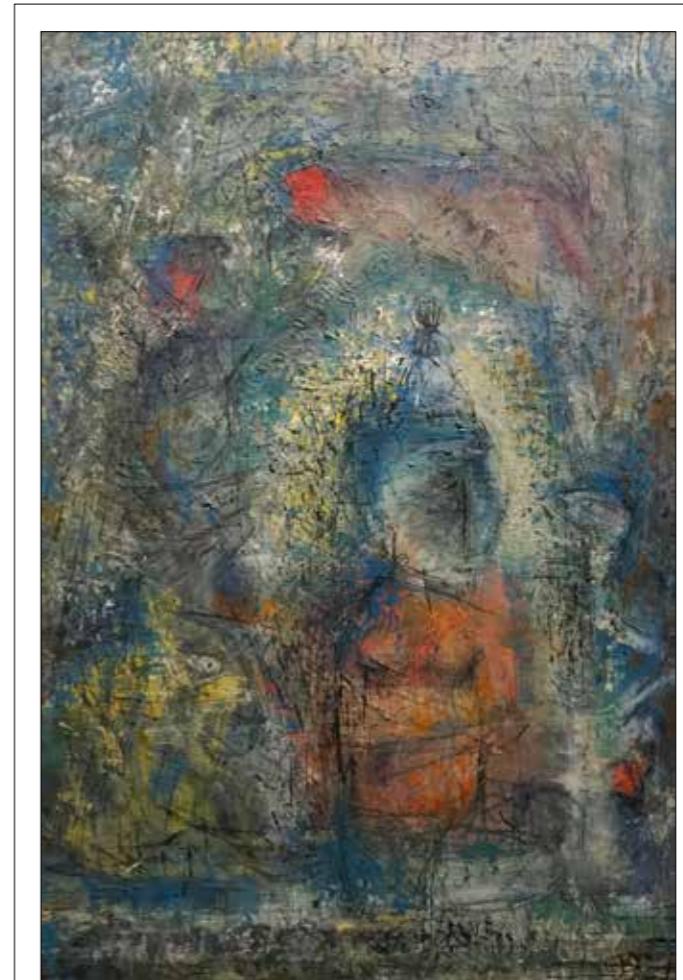
PARITOSH SEN

Paritosh Sen was a painter, illustrator, tutor and writer, who was a part of the world of Indian art, for close to four decades. He was born in Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh on Oct 18, 1919 and was a founding member of the Calcutta Group — an art movement established in 1942 which played an important role in ushering modernism into Indian art. Allured by the pages of the Bengali art journal, Prabasi, Sen ran away to Madras, to learn art.

Graduating with a Diploma in Fine Arts from the Government College of Arts and Crafts, Chennai, Sen moved to Calcutta in 1942, where he and a group of young Bengalis formed the Calcutta Group — an association of artists that sought to incorporate contemporary values in Indian art. In 1949, Sen left for Paris to pursue his passion, attending, among other institutes, the Ecole des Beaux Arts. He received a Fellowship for 1970-'71 from the John D. Rockefeller III Fund. The Indian artist's visit to Paris in 1949 was what got him closer acquainted with European art and its artists. Meeting Pablo Picasso was the highlight of his life.

Sen is recognisable for his caricature works, which strongly reflect underlying socio-political shades, and his female nude drawings. The artist's representation of art is laced with a hint of cubism and traces of modernity from his exposure to Western Modern Art. He used two-dimensional, structured planes but still created an illusion of voluptuousness. One can easily discern the strong lines and bold, stylised strokes in Sen's paintings. Although colour is an important aspect of his paintings, it is the human figure, expressing a myriad of emotions, that dominates his art. A repetitive subject in Sen's works is his depiction of scenes from everyday urban life. These activities were rendered from a cynical and detached perspective, which was typically Sen's viewpoint.

Upon his return to India, Sen survived on teaching jobs that allowed him to stay in



Ragini Asabari, 1961
Oil on panel
60 x 90 cm

Calcutta, from 1956 onwards. This was when a closer and more direct involvement with the city developed, where he witnessed the sufferings of the poor. Fuelled by his emotions, the artist's palette became passionately expressionistic with varying shades of raw umber and earthy brown. Clouds of colour laid on the canvas with the cruel abandon of palette knife replaced the linear depiction of defined forms that resurfaced in his art at regular intervals. He had married in between

and visited Europe, USA, Egypt and Mexico many times.

A prolific writer, Sen published many works in both Bengali and English, including a series of autobiographical vignettes titled, 'Jindabahar Lane'. His works have been exhibited in India and internationally, in Paris, London, Germany, Tokyo and in the US. Paritosh Sen passed away in October 2008.

M SIVANESAN

EXACTING THE SPIRIT OF ART

BY HIRANMAYI AWLI MOHANAN

M. Sivanesan was born in Chennai in 1940. He joined the Madras College of Arts and Crafts in 1956 and won an award at the International Inter Church competition, New York in 1962. The reputable artist carried several one-man shows under his belt, held within India and internationally. These included exhibitions in Bangkok in 1976, Los Angeles in 1977, Ottawa, Canada in 1978 and New York and Washington D.C. in 1979. Sivanesan had also participated in group exhibitions in Tokyo, Japan in 1967, New York in 1968, Frish Art Gallery, New York in 1981 and Dhoomimal Gallery, New Delhi in 1982. Sivanesan's artworks are figurative in style and subtle in colour. He approached the canvas as a means to explore his personal range of emotions rather than making too much of an effort to make his art accessible to the viewer via some profound statement. It is in the supreme manifestation of this interiorised subjectivity that the greatness of his art lies. Humans are predominant in his works, reflecting the beauty that he often saw within them. The Indian modern and contemporary artist's works possess an air of effortless ease, derived from supreme skill and confidence. They also have a subtle, sober, and yet lively exuberance of colour and freshness, which make Sivanesan's reputation as a facile illustrator.



Untitled, 1994
Mixed media on cardboard
26.5 x 40 cm
RM 800 - RM 1,500



Mother and Child, 1975
Acrylic on canvas
91 x 71 cm
SOLD - RM 5,000 - RM 10,000

While Sivanesan's paintings from some years ago were deemed too popular, or illustrative, his works later proved he was true to exacting the spirit of art. His forte lay in two branches of art, the portrayal of interiors and the delineation of still life. On each imaged face

the painter imposed his own perception. However, it is in his so-called interiors or still life that the painter was seen working with great verve. Sivanesan lived and worked between Chennai, New Delhi and Mumbai.

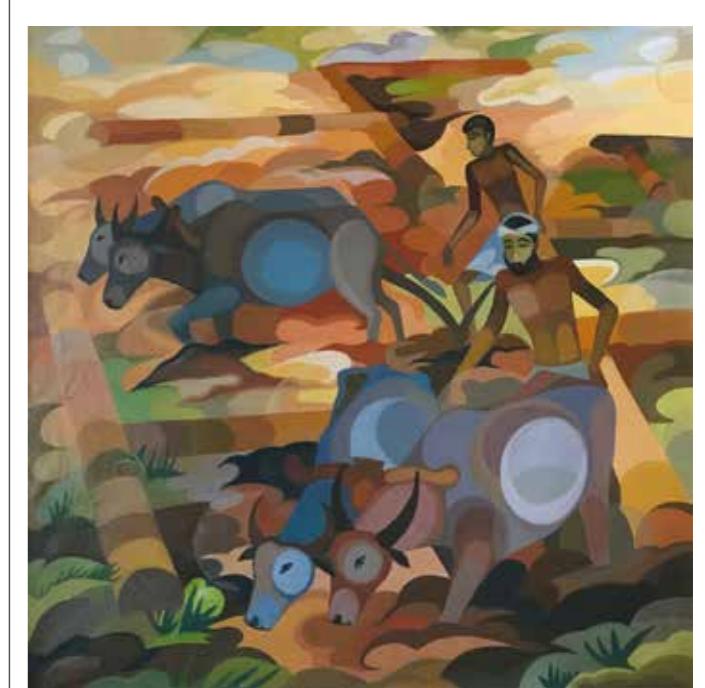
SENAKA SENANAYAKE

PAINTING THE BEAUTY OF LIFE

BY HIRANMAYI AWLI MOHANAN



Sugar Cane Workers, 1964
Oil on canvas
117 x 102.5 cm



Farmers
Oil on canvas
93 x 93 cm

Born in 1951 to an illustrious family in Sri Lanka, Senaka Senanayake was born to paint. He was celebrated as a child prodigy, whose work was first exhibited in Colombo in the late 1950's. Often compared to Mozart's childhood genius in music, Senanayake redeemed his early promise and went on to become one of the most sought-after painters of Asia, crossing international boundaries, a mystifying combination of technical skills and a dewy-eyed child looking at life around him as if for the first time. Subsequently, at the tender age of 10, he held his first international one-man show in New York.

At the age of 14, Senaka clambered up the steps of the White House in Washington D.C. His painting The Outer Harbour Colombo adorned the wall of the place to keep company with a number of masterpieces of the past and present. He went on to become the most accomplished and famous artist Sri Lanka has

ever produced. Senanayake's innate talent led him to continue painting and as a teenager, he held numerous exhibitions in Sri Lanka, Europe, the USA and Asia. However, it was only after he received formal training at Yale University, where he studied art and architecture, that he decided to surrender to art and painting. Soon after graduating, he moved back to his roots in Sri Lanka, where he has since established himself as one of the region's most important living artists. Fuelled by the plight of the Sri Lankan rainforests, his recent works encircled the subject, including intense deforestation to make way for tea plantations.

Senanayake's works show a fervent passion for nature's beauty and a great knowledge of the flora and fauna of the rainforest. His works have been shown in most parts of Europe and South Asia with critical acclaim. To date, he has more than 100 solo shows to his credit, and numerous group shows in the countries of Europe, China, Australia, Japan, Singapore, Czechoslovakia, Korea and Egypt to name a few. His work has been documented by Metro Goldwyn, British Movietone News, BBC TV, London, Yeo Soo TV, South Korea, TV Austria, and Star TV, India. Various journals, magazines and newspapers such as The New York Sunday Times, Washington Post, London Times, Weser Kurier, Germany, UNESCO Features, Paris, National Geographic Magazine, Asia Week and many others, have devoted their mediums to document Senaka's work. He lives and works in Sri Lanka.

This particular work, entitled 'Sugar Cane Workers', was painted almost like a celebration to life. Multicoloured swishes form the background of the painting while in the foreground, silhouettes of the sugar cane workers were painted in white and captured in motion, coming off almost like their dancing. It's an uplifting and energetic work.