

THE EMOTIVE RAFIEE GHANI

WEAVING COLOURS AND TRAVELS ON CANVAS

BY HIRANMAYI AWLI MOHANAN



The Yellow Mountain, 2013
Watercolour and acrylic on paper 93 x 106 cm
SOLD RM 9,520
KLAS Art Auction 8 November 2020

Rafiee Ghani's artworks are just as colourful as he is. Born in Kulim, Kedah in 1962, Rafiee Ghani is one of Malaysia's most prominent artists. He began his education in art at the prestigious De Virge Academie Voor Bildeende Kunst at the

Hague in the Netherlands before continuing his studies at the Institut Teknologi MARA in Dungun. Much of his muse and exposure to art began in Europe, where he visited all the great art spaces and museums.

Consequently, Rafiee drew his inspirations through old masters like Vincent Van Gogh and Henri Matisse and their works. Rafiee has been actively involved in shows in both private and public galleries and art spaces around the world. His works have



The Floating Mosque, 2017
Watercolour on paper 57 x 76.5 cm
SOLD RM RM 8,424
KLAS Art Auction 7 February 2021

been collected by major corporations both within and outside of Malaysia that include Bank Negara Malaysia, Petronas Gallery, Dynasty Hotel, Bank Utama, Malaysian Tobacco Company as well as Oriental Bank. His works are also in the collection of Mr Albert Rene, the President of the Seychelles and several private collections in the United States, Europe and Asia.

ARTISTIC PROWESS

Rafiee is known in the local fine arts sphere for his lyrical abstract and contemporary paintings, notably his oil paintings. His artworks aren't easy to miss for its loud, dynamic use of colours and strokes that make his style particularly distinctive and emotive. For Rafiee, aesthetics is an important part of his paintings — this is where balance and compositions are utilised to their fullest potential, often producing artworks that are artistic and pleasing for the eyes. The artist was formally trained in the arts and techniques of print-making, but it is his mastery in oil painting which sets him apart from other artists.

He is known to fully utilise the limited use of colours known in printmaking techniques. The artist also creates an imaginary illusion of objects and images by overlaying them with colours which are vibrantly mixed and integrated. Rafiee's Garden series is brilliant and every artwork from the series is a bold and vivid spectacle of colours.

The inspiration for this series is derived from the artist's hometown in Kelantan — his favourite place to be in as a child. This included swimming in the river with other children after school. Intimism remains prominent throughout his pieces. The bold strokes of colour were his way of conveying the brilliance of the local forest filled with natural colours to delight and excite. Rafiee's works evoke nostalgia, longing, tranquility and optimism.

WATERCOLOUR WORKS

Rafiee Ghani's works in watercolour are as brilliant as his oil painting, if not better. He still employs his signature loud and dynamic colours, complemented by brushstrokes where his style of Intimism are well established. Rafiee's watercolour artworks produce an imaginary illusion of images and objects which are submerged below his mastery in playing with colours which are vibrantly mixed and integrated. This is where one would be able to clearly see the objects or scenes which are portrayed amidst the sea of a strong tone of the colour scheme which epitomises Rafiee's body of work.

TAKING INSPIRATION FROM HIS TRAVELS

It's no secret that Rafiee's career on canvas has been long inspired by his travels. Whenever he came across a beautiful sight, he would take a photograph and later capture the scene on canvas. The artist first visited Morocco in 1986 as a young man and has since spent two months each

year in the Moroccan-Algerian-Tunisian region. He felt drawn to these places for a number of reasons, the first being that it's Africa but not really 'African' because of its proximity to Europe. Rafiee fell in love with the architecture and the influence of Moorish Islamic architecture and calligraphy on modern arts. It amazed the artist that the people of the desert were very accepting of his career as an artist and have on many occasions invited him to spend the night in their homes, huts or makeshift tents. It was moments like that that made him a curious traveller. Throughout his travels, he had made many friends and memories, some of which he can't put into words or paintings. Whether it is the rugged casbahs or crowded medinas of Moroccan cities or the vastness of desert sands at night, the artist captures the essence of a beautiful country with striking, brilliant hues and free-flowing lines.

An avid traveller, Rafiee has been travelling since being a teenager and has seen most of Europe, Middle East, as well as North and South Africa. He has also covered most of the Indian subcontinent, from Peshawar in the northwest to the tip of Bangladesh in the east; Kanyakumari, the southernmost tip of India; and also Gilgit in the north of Pakistan, where he attempted to cross over to China on a bicycle. The artist has also driven across North America, from coast to coast a couple of times. Rafiee has travelled so much that he said he can draw the map of Southeast Asia blindfolded. When he visits a location that has been depicted in a certain painting, he finds it very inspiring. For instance, when Rafiee was at the Maritime Alps in France, he contends that French painter Cezanne brilliantly translated the light, atmosphere and the colours of the region onto his canvas. Another instance was when he drove along the coast of California, the artist soaked in the myriads of colours and shades along the way, contemplating how the region influenced his favourite American painter, Richard Diebenkom.

When Rafiee was in Northern Thailand, he tried to decipher what inspired artist Latifdd Mohidin to write his epic poetry entitled 'Sungei Mekong' and the famed series of paintings known as Pago Pago. In Morocco, he sat in the cafe where the venerable French artist, Henri Matisse produced his sketches. Rafiee was also in Tunisia where the German-born painter Paul Klee lived and produced some of his works for a while. "I think all my travels helped me refine my observations while understanding and enriching my creative process," said Rafiee Ghani.