

KLAS Art Auction 27 June 2021

# YUSOF GHANI

## TOPENG AND SEGERAK SERIES

BY HIRANMAYII AWLI MOHANAN

### SEGERAK SERIES

Yusof Ghani's fascination with the human form was what birthed his first series — *Siri Tari*, in which he married abstract expressionism with figuration to make some strong socio-political statements on humanitarian issues. Then, in 2003 Yusof presented the *Segerak* series, which was yet again exploration of the human figure, interspersed with his philosophical perspective.

The artist's works serve as his social commentary on the world today. However, the artist himself said that his social commentaries did not change despite the change of atmosphere. It still had social remarks. He also said life is a bit like the lives of humans. Purposeless and unorchestrated at times, but it brings a lot of pleasure. This social commentary was brought to paper, based on his studies on human behaviour teamed with lines, colours and motion. The end-result of a seamless flow of lovely colours amalgamating with one another was not intentionally meant to look aesthetic and flowing. The initial lines and sketches were rough, chaotic and arbitrary, to portray the human behaviour of being wild and free.

Yusof narrated that *Segerak* allowed him to explore the human figure as a symbol of life, which he transformed into abstract statements to depict humanity's contrasting realities of struggle and victory, aggression and celebration, realism and fantasy. Observations from his own experiences, travels and heritage are the source of energy, movement and tension which he captures through a combined expression of drawing and painting. The social commentary has come to a conclusion: the realisation that time and space don't matter, and that human reality and aspirations are the same and are driven by the desire of building a better future. Since the birth of *Segerak* in 2003, Yusof's journey has taken him from a purely experimental stage in *Segerak I*, where he was finding his footing with the human form again, to a more confident, definite *Segerak II*. In *Segerak I*, his emphasis was on the movements of figures in specific activities, such as walking, running, or catching a bus and his colour tones were predominantly red. *Segerak II*, however, saw him expanding his palette to incorporate more colours on larger than life canvases.

### TOPENG SERIES

Yusof's *Topeng* series, executed between 1992 and 1996, began with the artist's visit to Sarawak in 1991. Inspiration struck when he saw the ceremonial masks worn by the ethnic Kayan and Kenyah tribes for curing illnesses and ceremonial functions. It gave him an insight into the spiritual life and the culture of the local community. In a state of spiritual block or illness himself, Yusof began to paint, as his cure, having doubted

whether his works reflected his true self, or merely an adopted persona.

The derivative of the Kayan and Kenyah masks could be associated with Africa through means of colonial trade ships. Made from wood, these masks were traditionally used for ceremonial and spiritual practices. Among the Kayan and Kenyah of eastern Borneo, masks are linked with the rice-planting festival, when elaborate performances are staged to ensure a good harvest. In southern Borneo, they traditionally appear as part of funeral ceremonies. Some represent refined human beings while some others depict fantastic animals based on real or imaginary prototypes, such as boars, hornbills or dragons. These masks have served as muses for many artists, from Picasso, Georges Braque to Yusof himself.

The *Topeng* series carries bold, distinctive strokes and colours, portraying the artist's perception of the Kenyah masks at the time — the more grotesque the masks, the stronger the power possessed by the masks to protect and cure. One might interpret the exaggerated depiction of the mask as Yusof's means to exorcise his own personal demons through each brushstroke. Highly primitive, the *Topeng* works visually recall the paintings of Willem de Kooning (1904-1997), which suggest the guises worn to mask the true self.

Merely as a portrayal of expressions, Yusof combines oil on canvas in controlled structures and intensifies it with outlines showing the artist's effort in exploring new forms and visual approaches that are to the point, solid, structured and meaningful. The figure, seen as a formative generator and embodiment of movement, is radically altered by Yusof. He dismantles and transforms them into planes of colour and curving lines. They are almost forceful, and at times, even awkward.



Topeng Series, 1996  
Acrylic on canvas 61 x 76 cm  
RM 15,000 - RM 35,000  
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Segerak, 2005  
Mixed media on canvas 51 x 25.5 cm  
RM 12,000 - RM 16,000  
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Segerak, 2005  
Mixed media on canvas 122 x 91 cm  
RM 12,000 - RM 16,000  
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**A.B IBRAHIM****MALAYSIA'S WATERCOLOUR MAESTRO**

BY HIRANMAYII AWLI MOHANAN



**A.B Ibrahim**  
Chinese Junk  
Watercolour on paper 27 x 38 cm  
**RM 1,000 - RM 2,000**  
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**B**orn as Ibrahim bin Abu Bakar in 1925 in Kedah, he was commonly known as A.B. Ibrahim in the art sphere. While he didn't have an academic degree, his struggles and effort have placed him as one of Malaysia's notable artists. He is known for his watercolour renditions, highlighting the natural beauty that surrounded him, the identity of communities and peaceful ambience. This Kedah-born artist is internationally recognised, with approximately 20,000 of his paintings featured abroad including Australia, Italy, London, Germany, Denmark, Britain, the United States, Singapore, Japan, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Qatar, Hong Kong, France.

A.B. Ibrahim is the fifth child of nine siblings. His brothers, Hassan and Kechik shared similar interests for art since they were young, but Ibrahim honed his own talent by using watercolours. However, his formal education ceased at the fourth grade in order to support his middle-income family. He worked at coffee shops selling ais kacang and assisting traders in Pekan Rabu. During the Second World War in 1941, Ibrahim was only 16 years old and

became a JKR labourer building roads. He later became a trader again in Pekan Rabu. Nevertheless, during that time, there were many drawing competitions such as posters and logos organised by the Japanese. This was propaganda as a means to improve the standard of living. However, Ibrahim took this as an opportunity to be active in the arts and exhibit his works to the public. He was once again very grateful because with the privilege of his drawing talent, he was able to escape from being mobilised by the Japanese to build a railway between Siam and Burma known as the "Deadly Railway." The Chinese at that time were also very familiar with A.B. Ibrahim was willing to order painting portraits of the faces of their family members to honour them in the eventuality of death.

A. B. Ibrahim was a self-taught artist and was one of the founder members of Persatuan Pelukis Melayu (Society of Malay Artists, Malaya) that was based in Singapore. His work, "Malacca Gate" is a permanent collection of the National Art Gallery in Kuala Lumpur and at the Kedah State Gallery and the Royal Museum in Alor Setar. Although he was based in Alor Setar, he spent most of his time in Penang where he sold his paintings along Penang Road and Chulia Street. The artist had held a solo exhibition in Dewan Besar Perniagaan Cina, Ipoh in 1962 and participated in group exhibitions including that of Persatuan Pelukis Melayu, Singapore (1945-1970), Penang Trade Fair (1948), and 4th Malayan Artists Association Exhibition and British Council, Kuala Lumpur (1958). A. B. Ibrahim excelled in creating and romanticising local landscapes only with the watercolour medium. It is a common, quotidian and modest scene carrying a quiet and tranquil mood that accompanies the atmosphere of villages. The artist creates a very nostalgic and sentimental mood, reminiscing the days gone by or homesick. His prowess in re-enacting moods and feeling as well as beautiful rustic landscapes on paper made him one of the most well-known artists in Kedah to date.

The artist passed away on December 25, 1977, a Christmas Day at his residence in Datuk Kumbang Alor Setar at the young age of 52. He left behind a great legacy in watercolour painting.



**A.B Hassan**  
Village in Penang  
Watercolour on paper 28 x 38 cm  
**RM 800 - RM 2,000**  
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# KOW LEONG KIANG

AN EMOTIVE PAINTER

BY HIRANMAYII AWLI MOHANAN



Portrait Series, 1970  
Oil on canvas 76 x 92 cm  
**RM 30,000 - RM 70,000**  
KLAS Art Auction 27 June  
2021

*"I like to observe the mannerism of Malay women because I think they are beautiful and East Coast ladies are very different from their city counterparts. Most of them still practise the traditional way of life and that is what makes them so special. I love travelling to the East Coast, especially to Terengganu and Kelantan, to head to the beaches, especially the fishing villages," explained Kow.*

**K**ow Leong Kiang has successfully established himself as one of Malaysia's respected figurative painters in the last 15 years since he won the grand prize at the Philip Morris ASEAN Art Awards in 1998. Since then, he has been working relentlessly to spread his artwork in the country and abroad. His works have also made their way into some of the permanent collections of corporations, private collectors as well as the likes of the National Art Gallery of Malaysia.

The Selangor-born artist received his early art education when he graduated with a Diploma in Fine Art at the Kuala Lumpur College of Art in 1991. Since then, he has had his artworks displayed and showcased in various public and private galleries in Malaysia as well as overseas. The hallmark of his works is the artist's exploration of personal expressions which he typically executes in a 'blur' motif. Most of Leong Kiang's works revolve around human emotions where he is never afraid to showcase his mastery in this technique.

It always feels as if his canvas is a piece of silk creating a veil over his subjects yet he brilliantly captures their emotions and expressions.

### DEVELOPING A LOVE FOR ART

His love for art developed when he was a secondary school student. A big fan of comic books, he was inspired by the artwork and that encouraged him to start drawing. He continued drawing things based on the comics he had read. "I loved reading comic

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**Innocence Series, 1999**  
Oil on canvas 23.5 x 23.5 cm  
**SOLD RM 9,900.00**  
KLAS Art Auction 7 July, 2013



**A Little Beauty, 1999**  
Oil on canvas 24 x 23.5 cm  
**SOLD RM 7,700.00**  
KLAS Art Auction 2 December, 2012

books when I was in secondary school and discovered a liking for art and started drawing things based on the comics I read," he said. "I bought a lot of them from bookshops and then I decided that I wanted to become an artist. I wasn't that great in academics and I realised I was better at art than most of the school subjects, so I chose what I was better at. And I don't like the nine-to-five job lifestyle, anyway. I love this job because I have more freedom doing what I love," he continued.

#### TO THE SEA

This talented man is widely known for his portraits of East Coast Malaysian women's beauty and his depictions of nostalgic rural scenes captured through masterful feather-light rendering. He held his first solo exhibition in Singapore, To The Sea at Ernst and Young Gallery under The Asia Outreach Programme. In this exhibition, combining landscape and portraiture, Kow used a single painting subject and one of his favourite ones – a Malay girl – to tell a nostalgic story of Malaysia's history and explore the current socio-political issues facing the country.

"I like to observe the mannerism of Malay women because I think they are beautiful and East Coast ladies are very different from their city counterparts. Most of them still practise the traditional way of life, and that is what makes them so special. I love travelling to the East Coast, especially

to Terengganu and Kelantan, to head to the beaches, especially the fishing villages," explained Kow.

#### GOING NUDE

In 2009, Kow launched his first solo exhibition, Jogja Constellation, in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, where he produced a series of portraits of well-known local artists such as Agus Suwage, Ugo Untoro, Putu Sutawijaya, Arahmaini and Angki Purbandono, among others. The vibrancy of Indonesia's art scene not only created chances for him to make new friends but also gave him a newfound confidence as he began to take more risks as a painter. He experimented with the most unexpected subject matter, the nude figure – something he had wanted to develop for many years. In 2010 and 2011, he created two series, Intimate Collisions and Soft that depicted bodies in physical and emotional conflicts. Alternating between balletic elegance and raw struggle. These represent some of Kow's most ambitious and technically sophisticated works to date.

"I was in Bandung in 2010, and I hired 12 models to do a series of nude poses for me to capture on my camera. I chose to do this in Bandung as there are many modelling schools in the area and I have a photographer friend there too and he helped get me the models. I ordered see-through boxes for the models to lie in and pose as I took their shots. The custom made boxes were quite costly. After I had finished taking all the photos, I brought

them back here to be painted," said Kow. Collisions represent one of the new chapters of his practice as he enters a mature period of style and contemplation.

#### HIS EXHIBITIONS

Kow Leong Kiang's most notable award came when he first entered the art scene where he was the recipient of the Grand Prize at the Philip Morris ASEAN Art Award back in 1998. Since then, he has been actively involved with the art movement of Malaysia where he has held solo exhibitions at public and private galleries around the country. One of his recent solo exhibition was held at the Valentine Willie Fine Art in Bangsar entitled 'Intimate Collisions' which was also where he had several other solo shows including 'Silent Conversations' in 2005 and 'Floating World' 2 years before that. He also has had a show entitled 'Human' at the Red Mill Gallery in Vermont, USA.

Leong Kiang's work has also been involved with various group shows that include the 'Art Cased by Jaguar' as well as the 18 @ 8 series show organised by Wei-Ling Gallery, one of the most established private galleries in Malaysia. Apart from that, some of his work has travelled to the Guangdong Museum of Art in China while enjoying constant publicity at the National Art Gallery. Other notable group shows that he has participated in include the "Three Man Show" in Bali and at the "The Contemporary Asean Art Fair" in Suntec, Singapore.

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## RAPHAEL SCOTT AHBENG

PAINTER OF THE BORNEAN LANDSCAPE

BY HIRANMAYII AWLI MOHANAN



Traga, 2012  
Oil on canvas 92 x 122 cm  
**RM 12,000 - RM 24,000**  
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Ahbeng, a Bidayuh, hails from Sarawak and is one of the most prominent Bornean artists and dubbed as the master of Sarawak's landscapes. He attended Bath Academy of Art in the United Kingdom, where he studied Art and Photography from 1964 to 1967 and returned again in 1973, under the British Council Grant to study English and Drama at the British Drama League in London. Before becoming a full-time artist, Raphael was a teacher, cartoonist and a radio

producer (in 1975, he joined RTM Kuching as a producer/newscaster). He also studied broadcasting at the BBC in 1990 under a joint Sarawak/British Council Grant.

**ACCOLADES**

Given his first solo in 1954, he took up an Art and Photography course at the Bath Academy of Fine Art in England (1964-1967). He also took up Drama in London in 1973 under a Sarawak Government scholarship. His awards

included 1st Prize in the Sarawak Shell Open (1959, 1982, 1983), and 3rd Prize in the Natural Malaysia art competition in Kuala Lumpur in 1991.

Playing an active and important role in the art industry, he was adviser to the Sarawak Artists Society (SAS) in 1999 to 2000, an organisation with the objectives to preserve and promote local culture, arts and crafts and to create interest and appreciation of

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art. Apart from that, he helped to save the lives of animals through his artworks sold at a Christmas Charity Bazaar organised by the Sarawak Society for the Prevention of Cruelty of Animals (SSPCA) in December 2011. His many accomplishments reveal a spirited character, with an unquenchable thirst for learning various subjects. His works have been exhibited at Convergence held at Petronas Gallery in 2013 which addresses the spiritual, social and economic concerns of the Malay Archipelago. His solo exhibition Legend: A Borneo Artist, showcases the complete oeuvre of Raphael's 60 years of work.

### ARTISTIC PROWESS

It is known to whoever is familiar with Raphael Scott AhBeng's works that his interpretation of nature strayed far away from the rest of his contemporaries. They have been modified into something that is purely AhBeng's style – atypical and fantastical. The artist's renditions of his favourite subject, the Bornean forest, is often depicted engulfed in various shapes, colours and shades. From his secluded studio in Bau, Sarawak, Raphael Scott Ahbeng painted on a variety of subjects and styles, with his métier being abstract. He employed various methods from water colour, acrylic to artworks of copper murals to convey his concern for the environment. His works could be seen in solo and group exhibitions held all over the country including Borneo and Kuala Lumpur. Due to his particular love of the colour red from a rich ironwood called diamond wood (kayu berlian) or "Staas" in Bidayuh, the colour strikingly stands out among the other colours he uses in his artworks.

Struck with visual wonder, the audience is left to discover more and more hues as they explore the canvas, each colour special and diverse, as trees and floras are in the forests. Ahbeng has produced countless variations of nature that naturally draws viewers in, coaxing them to take a longer look, as there is an underlying message or mystery to discover and to get acquainted with. Perhaps this is how Raphael Scott AhBeng sees plants, leaves and flowers collectively – he sees them as having their own aura, their own colour and own shapes despite their intrinsic and natural façade.

Apart from his painting, Raphael loved to sketch. In contrast to his professional painting, which consisted mostly of landscapes, his pen-and-ink drawings show his acute observation of people. As he grew older, they became more like cartoons, with little snatches of dialogue and witticisms. They depict ordinary people in everyday situations – in queues at the bank, at the market, furiously politicking in coffee shops – showing a deep interest in what people on the streets felt and thought.



3 Tiered Forest, 2013  
Oil on canvas 59.5 x 89.5 cm  
**RM 6,000 - RM 12,000**  
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Red Scarecrows, 2013  
Acrylic on board 30.5 x 30.5 cm  
**RM 350 - RM 1,000**  
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Surface Beauty, 2013  
Acrylic on board 30.5 x 30.5 cm  
**RM 1,200 - RM 2,800**  
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Grassline, 2013  
Acrylic on canvas 36 x 46 cm  
**RM 3,000 - RM 7,000**  
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