

ECHOES OF THE PAST

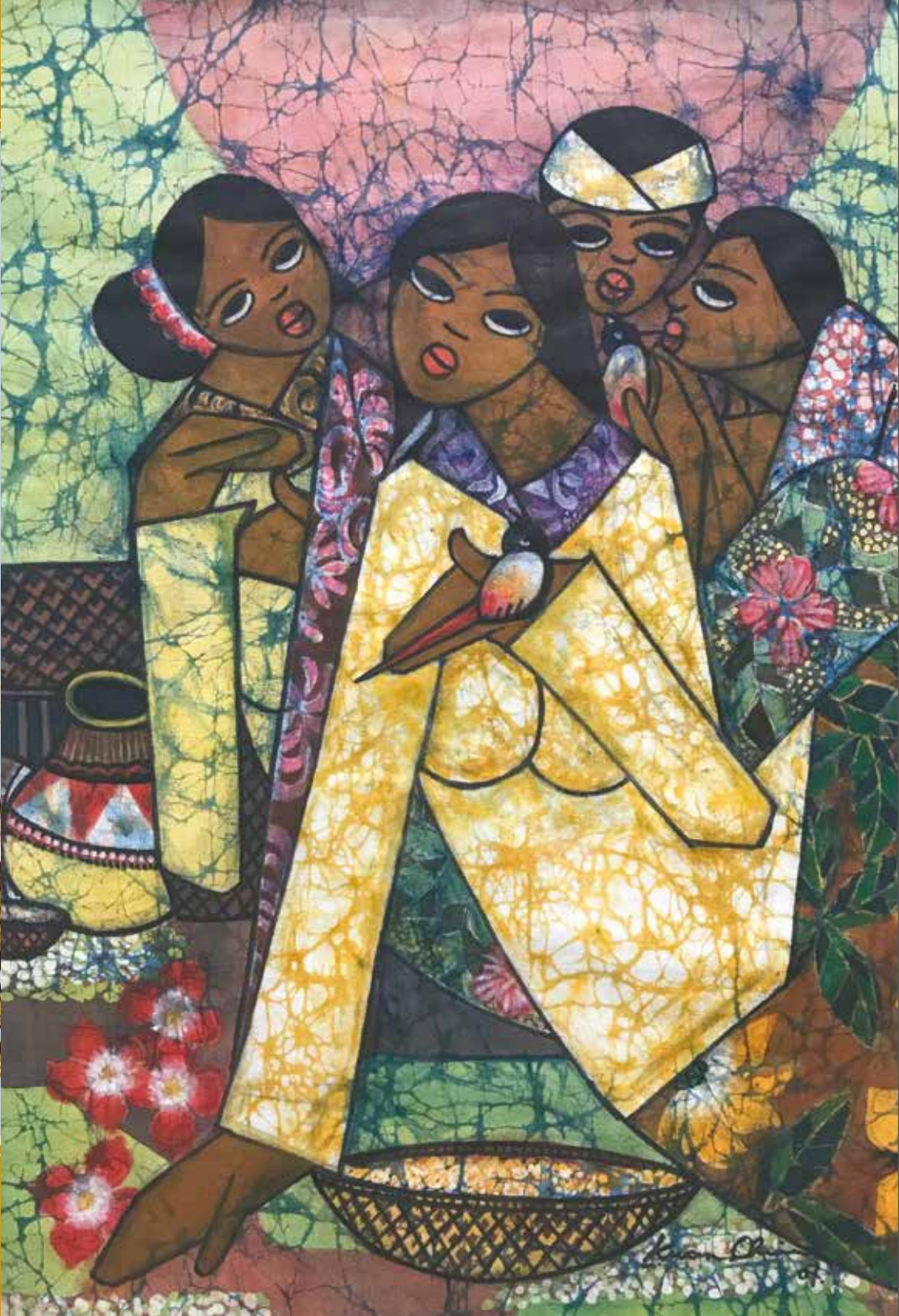
DATUK CHUAH THEAN TENG, KHALIL IBRAHIM & KWAN CHIN



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30 November 2021 - 3 January 2022



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FOREWORD

The origins of batik remains very much unresolved. Early traces of batik were said to have been found in Europe more than two thousand years ago. This ancient art was also discovered in China, India and Japan. Then there was the early production of batik textiles in Java where it has continued to flourish to this day. Some have therefore concluded that this technique might have been independently discovered in these respective regions. It is nevertheless said that the origins of the word batik is from the Javanese term amba, which means “to write” and the Malay word titik for “dot”. Through maritime trade and cultural exchanges in the early 19th century, batik making spread more extensively in the Malay Archipelago. It was in the 1920s that this technique was introduced to the East Coast of the Malaysian Peninsular where it has become a centre for the production of batik textiles.

It was following World War II, in the late 1940s when Chuah Thean Teng was a young man in his early thirties that he ventured into the production of batik textiles. It is from this experience that he saw the potential for this wax resist technique as a medium for works of art. He was already familiar with the process of waxing and dyeing to create patterns in the making of batik textiles, especially for producing the batik sarong. What ensued was the innovative creations of the most splendid and transcendent images from his creative instincts that drew inspiration from his appreciation for nature and the rural surroundings. His works also encompasses the deep emotions for family love and affection, particularly between mother and child. Integral in many of his works is the batik sarong worn by these women thereby ‘creating a batik within a batik’.

It was his germination of this idea for the batik technique to become a medium for the creation of artworks that has become his legacy to the world of art. It was his skills and mastery in the technique and his innate abilities as an artist that led to a lifetime of great works. Even as a child, he had shown potential in drawing. But it was in the early 1950s when he experimented with this medium, that it brought forth his creative and ingenious talents to become a master in the arts. In the decades that followed, he was prolific producing works that drew inspiration from the way of life in the villages and the rural folk at work in the fields and along the coast.

Known also for detailed depictions of economic activities during the period, his compositions were complex with the use of different shades of colour. At times there was an injection of humour into the paintings. His first solo exhibition was in 1955 in Penang. Ten years later he became the first local artist to have a solo art exhibition in Kuala Lumpur at the National Art Gallery in 1965. This was followed by a series of international exhibitions in London and Europe. Two of his works depicting mother and child were also selected to be on UNICEF cards.

In the decades that followed, several other artists took up the batik medium. While Khalil Ibrahim, whose art works are mainly in water colour, oils and acrylic, for about a decade, he worked with the batik medium. Upon his return from London equipped with a graduate and post-graduate education in the fine arts in 1966, he ventured to Kelantan to learn about the batik process and to experiment with the medium. Until the late 1970s, his works using the batik medium was very much influenced by the activities on the coast depicting both men and women in the attire worn during that time. He too had the ‘batik within a batik’. His first solo exhibition that included his batik works was in 1970. Several of his works depict groups of fishermen at work on the beach and their camaraderie. His prolific works have also been exhibited in the world over, in the different continents.

Another batik master that has used this medium for more than five decades, since the 1970s is Kwan Chin. He has also focused on the Malaysian village scene, illuminating on the way of life, family gatherings and market scenes. Several of his works also focused on economic activities that

included shorelines with fisherman at work, rubber being tapped and farmers at work. Distinctive in his works is the display of contrasting bright colours and the more pronounced crackling effects in the background. Using a brush to achieve greater control, he also uses browns and dark colours thus providing warmth that was sometimes enriched with captivating floral motifs while maintaining cohesiveness in the artwork.

While there are other artists that are not mentioned here, that have produced art works using the batik medium, among whom have contributed to the development of this form of art. They have also been recognised, appreciated and valued. Our batik masters that have produced these great works of art will be always treasured in the world over. This is an art form that is known to be distinctive and unique to Malaysia. It is an inspiration for our next generation of both contemporary and future artists to further innovate with this form of artwork while preserving the underlying potential of the process that brought so much enrichment to our lives.

Y.Bhg Tan Sri Dr. Zeti Aziz



FROM THE DESK OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

KL Lifestyle Art Space

After a hiatus from hosting exhibitions during the course of the pandemic, KL Lifestyle Art Space (KLAS) invites you to a rare opportunity to revel in some masterpieces by three very prominent Malaysian batik artists, Datuk Chuah Thean Teng, Khalil Ibrahim and Kwan Chin.

These three artists, while differing in generation and approach to batik, have a penchant for capturing Malaysia's rural scenes and its evolving landscape. Their works are the embodiment of nostalgia and the simple life. Through their works, the artists unveiled the treasure trove of the dying art techniques and the laborious traditional method of producing batik art with their own distinct identity and recognisable style.

This specially-curated exhibition showcases a treasure trove of masterpieces by these maestros, who over the past half century innovated the traditional form of batik fabric painting into an important medium of expression in fine art, recognised in Malaysia since the 1950's, with the "Father of Batik" Chuah Thean Teng at its helm.

Teng's fascination with the batik medium gave it a timeless feel. His artistic oeuvre germinated from his own ideas and determination to produce a kaleidoscope of intimate images of Malaysian life and landscapes. The possibilities of batik painting as a fine art were a revelation, but equally remarkable was the revolution which occurred in Teng's own approach to the works he produced.

Khalil, meanwhile, upon his return from England in the 1960's, experimented in producing batik artworks in a medium deep-rooted in his Kelantanese heritage since the 1920's. Khalil approached the batik medium with the knowledge and style he had learned whilst being in the prestigious St Martin of Art in London, adding a contemporary appeal to this traditional medium with use of vibrant and fluid movements in his works. Khalil enhanced the commercialisation of the batik art medium in Kuala Lumpur in the late 1960's after having hosted several hugely successful solo batik exhibitions at the Samat Gallery and subsequently in Switzerland, Australia and numerous other countries.

Kwan Chin's batik artworks depict life in the villages of Malaysia as he immersed in the subject and its beauty. In calmer, soothing tones, the artist captured the tranquil life of the countryside and with wider-angled landscapes, intimate village scenes, and a penchant for the ordinary kampung life, illustrating rural life in lively colours with sights familiar to some of us. Kwan Chin, who held numerous exhibitions at the British Council and National Art Gallery Malaysia in the 1970's, has his works collected by National Art Gallery Malaysia, Bank Negara Malaysia, Penang Batik Painting Museum, Ilham Gallery, and other private institutions and private collectors in Malaysia and internationally.

We are indeed very pleased to showcase this collection of works as a tribute to the historically-important batik medium and would like to take this opportunity to thank Tan Sri Dr. Zeti Akhtar Aziz for her show of support for this exhibition. Special mention of thanks is extended to the family of Datuk Chuah Thean Teng and Kwan Chin, The Penang Batik Museum and last but not least, the collectors who have been kind enough to share their collection of works by the three maestros.

We look forward to welcoming you to this exhibition which will commence from November 30, 2021 through till January 3, 2022.

Datuk Gary Thanasan

DATUK CHUAH THEAN TENG

Father of Batik Painting

Known as the Father of Batik Painting in Malaysia, Dato Chuah Thean Teng earned his stripes from his use of batik as a medium of fine art since 1953. Although batik painting has been around for hundreds of years, it is remarkable that no one before Teng had ever thought of adapting this age-old craft as a medium of fine art. Teng first started in this medium in 1953, and therefore he is considered the father of Batik Painting in Malaysia.

He received a Diploma of Merit at the First International Art Exhibition in Saigon, Vietnam in 1962. He was honoured with a Retrospective Exhibition by the National Art Gallery in 1965. For his contributions to art, he was awarded the A.M.N. medal by the Malaysian Government. His works have been reported extensively in numerous local and international newspapers articles and magazines. He was featured in the Reader's Digest in October 1988 (British Edition) and October 1987 (Asian Edition). He is also mentioned in numerous books — Chinese Arts in the Twentieth Century (by Michael Sullivan), Modern Artists of Malaysia (by T.K Sabapathy and R. Piyadasa), and Teng-Batik (by Yahong Art Gallery) etc. He is listed in "International Who's Who of Intellectuals", "Who's Who In The World" (1980-1981) and "Men of Achievement".

Chuah Thean Teng is credited with the first transference of the textile from its status as a craft and function as a garment, to a new identity as an art form to be framed and displayed from the 1950s onwards. Chuah's distinctive rendering in the medium persists to today as iconic encapsulations of the Malayan landscape and its people. The fluidity of his figures and vibrancy of his dyes combined with the geometric modernity of his compositions imbue his works with an unmistakable vitality and balance. Following that, Teng, as he is popularly known, found the patronage of a few influential art historians and art dealers and was given the opportunity to showcase his batik creations. He quickly adopted the motifs that were most central to Malayan art at that time, painting scenes of Malayan daily life.

According to Frank Sullivan, "His productivity in batik painting is enormous...never satisfied, he is always experimenting, seeking to give new depth and range to his batik art." Teng received international fame in 1968 when his painting entitled 'Two of a kind' was selected by UNICEF for its greeting cards selections. Twenty years later, his painting 'Tell you a secret' was again selected by UNICEF. In 1977, he was the only Malaysian invited to the Commonwealth Artists of Fame Exhibition in England. Since his first at the Arts Council, Penang, Malaysia in 1955, he has exhibited extensively all over the world, including Saigon, London, U.S.A, Holland, Australia, New Zealand, Brazil, Canada, Japan, Switzerland and Taiwan.



Self Portrait, 1970

Batik on cloth

61 x 45 cm

Batik Painting Museum Penang
Collection

MOTHER AND CHILD

Teng’s Mother and Child series is a classic, universal motif and one that he adopted and perfected. Despite the expressions on the mother and child subjects, there is an endearing quality to the renditions, each executed in style that is distinctively Teng. The artist employs a myriad of soothing tones to the works to symbolise the transcending quality of a mother’s love. The subjects portrayed differ with each artwork, mostly in a loving embrace and filled with warmth. The crackling in the background is the result of Chuah Thean Teng’s tie-dye technique with waxed cloth. Allowing the wax to crack and for the dye to seep through obtains the crackling effect which sets off against the figures well.

Art is the vision of the artist, his creation, imagination and expression reflecting the artist’s many degrees of feeling. It is an interplay of both emotional and visual expression where the illusions created convey the statements across. And through the different modes of expressions, we are compelled to seek some standard of value to enable us to distinguish between them. This distinction is called the transformation of things.” – Dato’ Chuah Thean Teng.



Mother and Child, 1970

Batik

55 x 43.8 cm

Private Collection

RM 55,000



Mother and Daughters : The Fruit Season, 1970's

Batik

57.5 x 45 cm

Private Collection of Bank Negara Malaysia

Not For Sale



Mother and Children, late 1970's - early 1980's

Batik

89 x 89 cm

Private Collection

Not For Sale



Mother and Daughter, 1980's
Batik
60 x 43 cm
Private Collection
Not For Sale



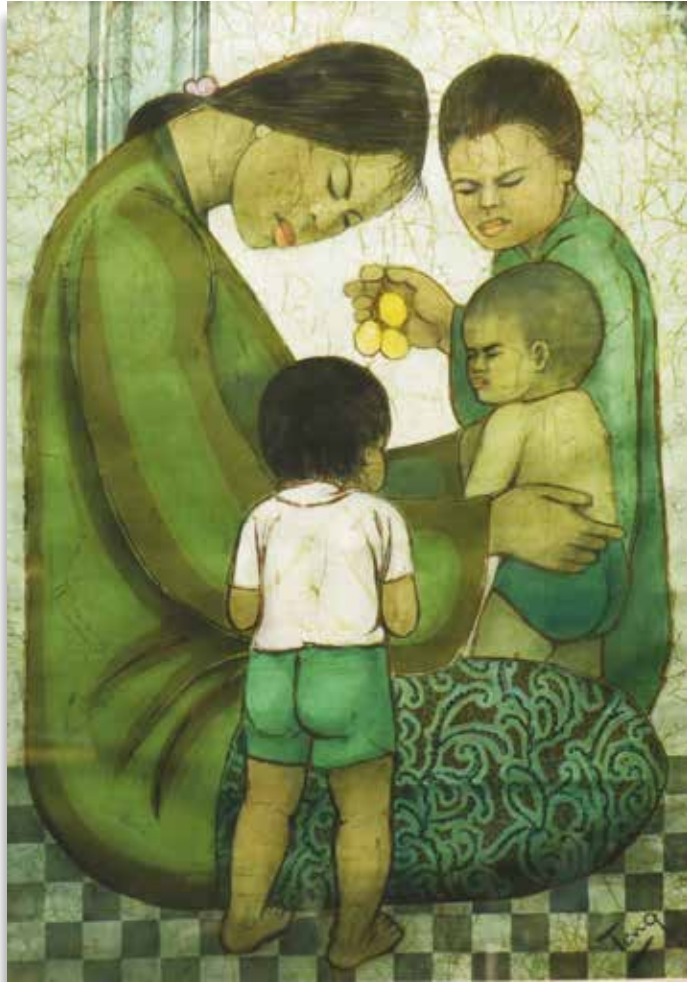
Mother and Daughter, 1980
Batik
92 x 63.5 cm
Private Collection
Not For Sale



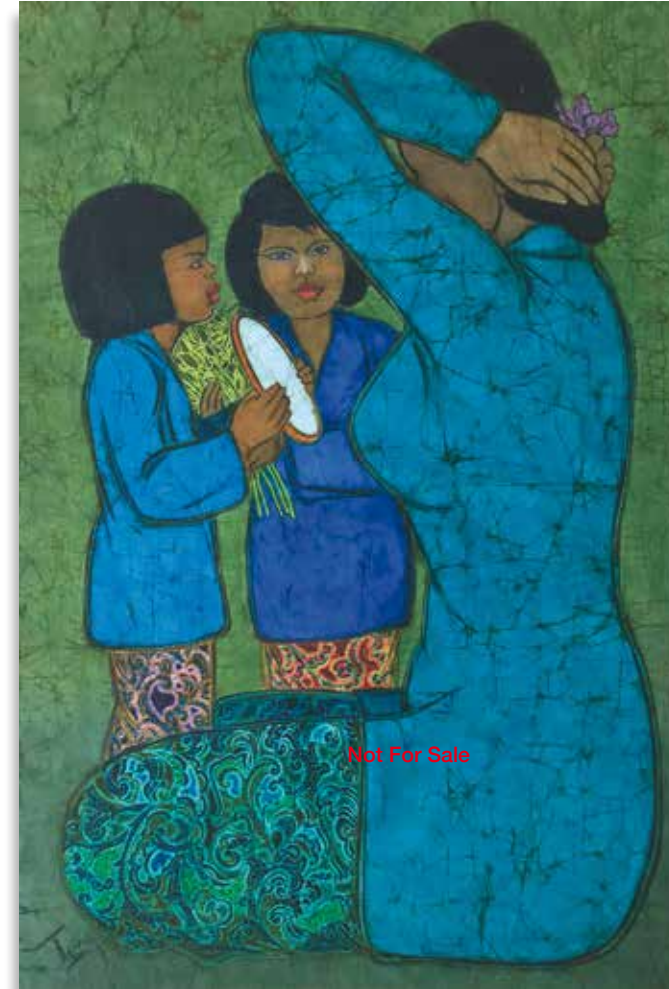
Eating Durian, 1980's
Batik
89 x 59 cm
Private Collection
RM 120,000



Two Women and a Child, 1980's
Batik
89 x 89 cm
Private Collection Kuala Lumpur
Not For Sale



Mother and Children, 1980's
Batik
74 x 52 cm
Private Collection
Not For Sale



Mother Grooming with Children, 1980
Batik
90 x 60 cm
Private Collection
Not For Sale



Mother and Children, 1983
Batik
63 x 48 cm
Private Collection
Not For Sale



Contentment, 1983
Batik
94 x 63.5 cm
Private Collection
RM 125,000



Mother and Children, 1990's

Batik
92 x 61 cm
Private Collection
Not For Sale



Feeding Baby, 1994

Batik on cloth
90 x 90 cm
Private Collection of Batik Painting Museum Penang
Not For Sale

TENG’S LANDSCAPES

When it comes to the artist’s landscape works, there is an undeniable charm. His perceptive mind and keen eye saw the extraordinary in the ordinary which he translated brilliantly onto batik.

Everyday events that others are jaded with suddenly take on a new dimension and emotion; children playing, women toiling in the paddy fields, farm creatures, picturesque fishing villages, men at work, all sorts of homely scenes. His lines are bold and sure, his figures sometimes flat and one-dimensional and flooded with mystical graduations. Teng’s landscape illustrations are simple, honest with no pretensions of grandeur and exhibit the subjects’ daily antics.

His draftsmanship acquired sweep and rhythm; colours flared from his artwork. His themes opened up new vistas of Malaysian life, not only the scene, but the people and all their daily activities. Women feeding chickens, children playing, farmers gathering the harvest — all warm human, simple and everyday subjects no other Malaysian artists seemed to have tackled with such relish before.

His paintings run the gamut from playful, touching, dramatic to personal and intimate. He hardly strayed from his beloved kampung scenes where he spent so many happy hours and languid afternoons. It takes a true master to reflect affection, perception and empathy on his medium. Through his paintings depicting rustic scenes of Malaysian folks going about their simple way of life, Teng’s works helped put Malaysian batik in the annals of batik history that could be traced as far back to the 8th century.

Some of Teng’s artworks weaved elements that were truly Malayan, such as the Malay craft tradition and designs into his narrative with intimacy and camaraderie, which also highlights the beauty of the traditional Malay house. He hit the international limelight in 1967, when his penchant for capturing the charm and pleasure of rural, kampung life caught the eye of the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF).



Untitled
Ceramic
81 x 61 cm
Private Collection Kuala Lumpur
Not For Sale



Penang Village Scene, 1970
Batik
44 x 59 cm
Private Collection
RM 55,000



Village Scene

Batik

45 x 119 cm

Private Collection

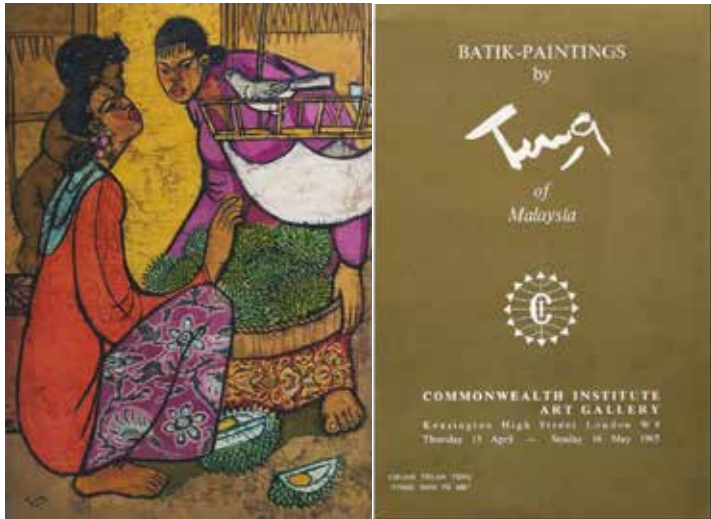
Not For Sale



Durian Harvest, 1965
 Batik
 91 x 60.5cm
 Private Collection
RM 65,000



Women at Home, 1960's
 Batik on cloth
 89 x 85 cm
 Private Collection of Batik Painting Museum Penang
Not For Sale



The Fruit Season - Come Sing to Me, 1965
 Batik
 90 x 64 cm
 Private Collection
Not For Sale



Fish Market, 1970's
 Batik
 84 x 114 cm
 Private Collection Kuala Lumpur
Not For Sale



Drying Salted Fish, 1970's
 Batik
 86 x 66 cm
 Private Collection
Not For Sale



The Paddy Farmers, 1980's
 Batik
 58 x 41 cm
 Private Collection
Not For Sale



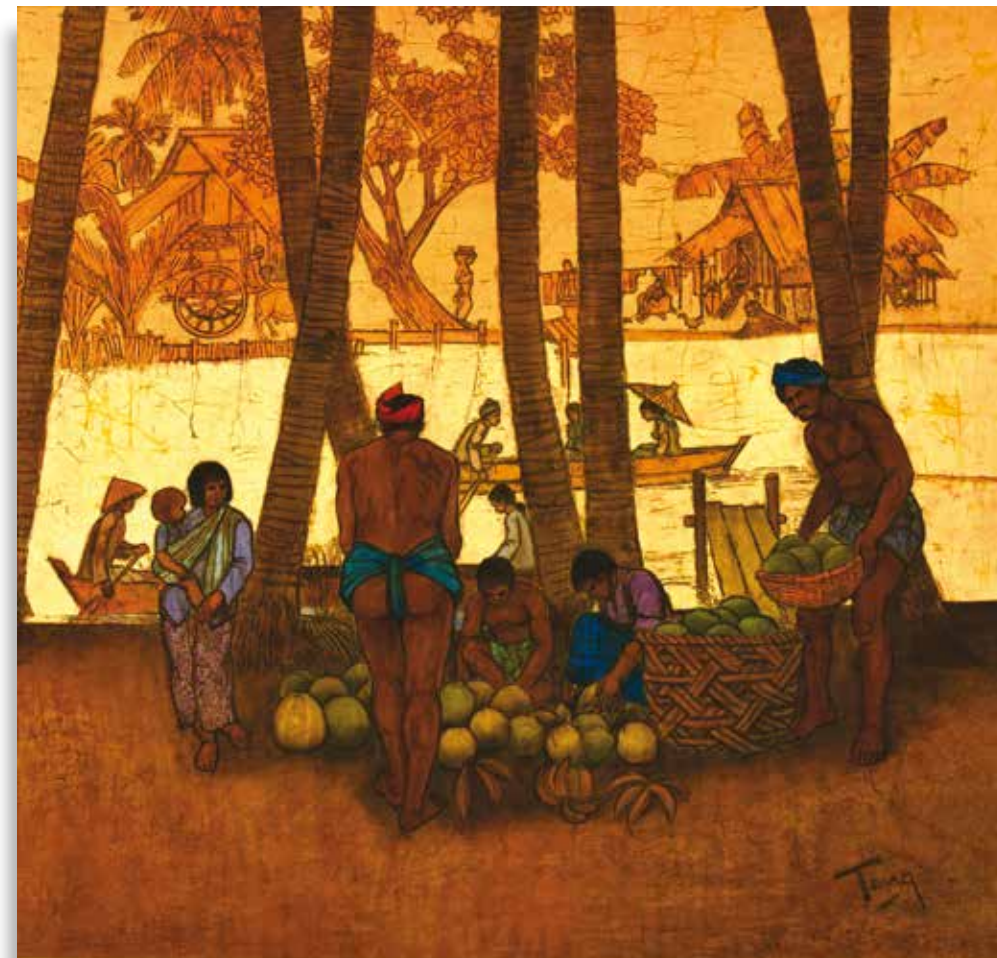
Threshing Rice, 1980's
Batik
89 x 60 cm
Private Collection
RM 68,000



Lady in Blue, 1983
Batik
89 x 61 cm
Private Collection
Not For Sale



Boys, 1986
 Batik
 90 x 87 cm
 Private Collection
Not For Sale



Huskers at Work, 1989
 Batik on cloth
 86 x 90 cm
 Private Collection of Batik Painting Museum Penang
Not For Sale

SCIONS OF THE FATHER OF MALAYSIAN BATIK, DATO CHUAH THEAN TENG

The Continuity of the legacy of batik paintings by
Chuah Siew Teng and Chuah Seow Keng

Known for his excellent prowess in the batik medium, Chuah Siew Teng, is a veteran in the Malaysian art scene, bringing with him a vast range of experience. Siew Teng heralds a reputation for being one of the most brilliant and celebrated artist in the batik segment. The artist was born and raised in Penang, in 1944, where he had long established himself and cemented a place among Malaysian artists. Siew Teng completed his education in 1965 at the Ravensbourne College of Art and City, as well as at the Guild Art School in England.

The artist's passion for art, specifically in the batik medium was handed down by his venerable and skilled father, the late Dato Chuah Thean Teng, who was a master in this art form. Thenceforth, Teng would go on to win the 'Art Prize' in 1961 through to 1963 consecutively. He would also win the 'Certificate of Merit' a year after that, before taking home a prize at the Malaysia Artist Competition a year after. It was only after bagging all the aforementioned prizes and creating a name for himself that Siew Teng graduated from the prestigious Ravensbourne College of Art and City. This goes to show the innate talent that this batik artist was born with. On top of that, Siew Teng is also known to be one of the biggest advocates of the Malaysian batik culture, where he had lectured on batik techniques in London as well as in Australia.

S.Teng, as he signs his works to distinguish from his more illustrious father's 'Teng' signature, is very versatile in all types of painting media — drawing, watercolour, oil, acrylic and batik. His batik art is distinguished by the play of light, with positive-negative elements, and with a stained-glass effect. In 1992, his batik titled The Monkey was selected for the UNICEF Greeting Cards programme. In 1964, his painting, Joy Of Living, was awarded a Certificate of Merit in the national art competition, and in 1965, he won a prize with his painting, Outdoor, in the Malaysian artists competition. His solos were staged in four different continents – Lower Gallery, London, Britain (1967), World Art Associates, United States (1971), Argyle Art Centre, New South Wales, Australia (1972) and Kanda Gallery in Tokyo, Osaka and Okinawa in Japan (1975). That same year, in 1975, he was invited to hold demonstrations at the Fremantle Art Centre in Australia.



CHUAH SIEW TENG
Malay Ladies
Batik 45 x 29 cm
Private Collection Kuala Lumpur
RM 15,000

Chuah Seow Keng, one of the trio of scions of the great batik-art founder Dato' Chuah Thean Teng is recognised as one of Malaysia's leading artists and is renowned for his batik and watercolour paintings. Born in 1945 in Kelantan, Seow Keng now calls Penang his home. In 1968, the artist was awarded a scholarship to study at the Süddeutsche Kunststoff Zentrum in Würzburg, Germany. While attending this academy, he specialised in fibreglass sculptures, a difficult, but rewarding art medium.

While being recognised as an accomplished sculptor, Seow Keng is also acknowledged as a masterful batik artist. His abilities as an artist were noticed at a very early age. He was exposed to the art of batik painting by his father, the renowned artist Chuah Thean Teng, who pioneered batik painting as a fine art form. Seow Keng excels in this intricate art technique and was chosen to demonstrate his batik skills at the International Freundschaftsheim in Buckeburg, Germany. In 1974, Germany's Television Channel Zweites-Deutsches- Fernsehen-Trans-Tel made a documentary film on Seow Keng and his brothers proclivity to batik painting for German viewers.

Trained by his father from a very young age, Seow Keng held his first solo of batik painting in Fuchu, Tachikawa and Tokyo in Japan in 1973, followed by Kanda Gallery, Tokyo, Osaka and Okinawa in 1975. He also had solo exhibitions in Europe, Australia and Canada. In 1989, he received a Certificate of Excellence (mixed media) for Outstanding Achievements at the Artitudes 7th International Art Competition in New York.

Two of the artist's batik paintings, Fish (1981) and Rural Life (1986), were selected for the UNICEF greeting cards in 1988. In 1992, two more of Seow Keng's works were again selected for the UNICEF greeting cards — Fish (a watercolour) and Sunrise (batik). He was commissioned to do fibreglass murals, among others, for Malaysia-Singapore Airline offices in Ipoh and Penang, and Bank Negara crest, now in Penang office. He also made a fibreglass replica emblem for the Penang War Memorial and Cenotaph.



(Top)
CHUAH SIEW KENG
Fishing Village - Penang
Batik 90 x 45 cm
Private Collection Kuala Lumpur
RM 18,000



(Bottom)
CHUAH SIEW KENG
Feeding Cockerel
Batik 89.5 x 45 cm
RM 18,000

KHALIL IBRAHIM

The Inimitable Maestro

Khalil Ibrahim was a multifaceted artist who forayed into many art mediums and excelled in each, proving his legendary status. Aptly named as a multifaceted maestro, Khalil was born in 1934 In Kubang Krian, Kelantan. He was one of the earliest Malaysians to receive a full scholarship to study art at the prestigious Central St Martins School of Art and Design in London. Throughout his long career, Khalil had held a number of solo and group exhibitions in Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and Switzerland. His masterful skills in drawing, watercolour and acrylic, are styles that move from the almost real to the almost abstract. Owning a piece of his artwork is truly a gift of beauty through the artist’s eyes. Khalil’s preference for the human figure and his deep affection for the East Coast had led him to create iconic images of men and women in the East Coast Malay fishing villages against stark backgrounds of blues and greens and watercolour landscape of villages.

PRIMORDIAL DAYS

Khalil’s rich Malay cultural background in the East Coast and the discipline of Islamic values that he learnt at the Pondok school shaped his primordial artistic journey. These values stuck by him which then merged with with the freedom of expression that he encountered later on through his formal education at St. Martins in London. Though he did not receive any formal education during the early years in Kelantan, Khalil’s awareness of modern art was cultivated through a period of colonialism and the experiences of pioneering artists from the Nanyang Academy.

With an innate passion for making wayang kulit, his artistic talent flourished. He would make the wayang kulit by drawing on a big leaf with the addition of a cardboard, which would then be used to play with his friends. Khalil took this newfound interest and competed in events and shows held almost every month. Unfortunately, his mother disapproved of his interest while his father urged him to become a teacher. Despite his parents’ disapproval, Khalil remained steadfast to his passion.

LANDSCAPE WORKS

Khalil formal education in art began when he would attend art classes every Sunday in Kota Bharu under the tutelage of art inspector, Nik Mahmud Idris who had a formal art education in Singapore between 1945 and 1947. Together with artists Yusoff Sulaiman and the late Nik Zainal Abidin, Khalil learnt the fundamentals of painting — drawing and painting first in watercolours and later in oils. The revolving theme in this class was the pastoral setting of kampungs and it was through this experience that Khalil enhanced his ability of capturing nature in all its glory. Now equipped with the techniques he learnt in art classes, the artist allowed his creativity to blossom, which resulted in scenic landscapes of the Malaysian East Coast in his works, such as the undulating hills and the padi fields. Evident in most of the artist’s East Coast landscapes, he possessed the ability to transform a humble rural scene to a sweeping visions of beauty using a display of colours and showcased his established precision.



Photo of Khalil taken upon his return to Temerloh from England (1966). He was unemployed for 3 months and was looking for direction during this time



The act of ‘canting’ by the artist

Khalil Ibrahim’s landscapes and their meticulous detailing is a celebration of nature. Besides European masters, it could also be presumed that Khalil was influenced by English landscape painter, John Constable, known for revolutionising landscape painting and whose works are sold for millions of pounds. In the 1950s, the self-taught artist painted regularly while working as a primary school teacher in Kelantan and Pahang, before he was awarded a Pahang state scholarship to study art in England. Seeing this, army officers and civil servants became interested and went on to purchase many of Khalil’s early works. The artist’s early genre of paintings such as ‘Sunrise, 1950’s’ and ‘Sunset, 1950’s’ emphasised much of his Kelantanese heritage and depicted the influence of traditional mid twentieth style of realist painting at the time. These works also became a representation of Khalil’s response to traditional art concepts while highlighting Kelantan’s cultural environment.

Khalil was sponsored by the Pahang state government to continue his studies at the prestigious Central St. Martin’s School of Art and Design in London and in the same year, the infamous art critic Clement Greenberg visited London and Cornwall to check out contemporary works of art. The next year, British pop artist Peter Blake joined St. Martin’s and lectured in the school at the same time Khalil was studying there. David Hockney used to drop by to give the budding art students lectures, and Khalil attended some of those sessions. Students at St. Martin’s were encouraged to visit museums and art galleries which were experiences that not only intrigued Khalil, but allowed him to study the works of great European masters.

Khalil’s ‘English’ or post St Martin artworks reveals a comparatively different style from his earlier landscapes and portraits. Influenced by his peers, lecturers, and his foreign surroundings, the early 1960’s saw him experimenting with abstraction in works like Destruction and Destruction II and Abstract I. The artist would experiment with abstract forms drawn into his sketch book and demonstrating his attempt at bringing portraiture and concepts of abstraction together. Khalil’s art works were still in flux as he sought styles and methods which spoke of his own unique journey. Like many aspiring artists, Khalil participated in numerous group exhibitions organised by St. Martins’s as well with the Malaysian Art Circle and at Malaysia Hall.

With Khalil Ibrahim’s legendary status and sheer talent, his works across all mediums are highly valued till today. More importantly, his landscape works of the 1950’s are beauty captured on canvas and a rarity. Only a limited number of artworks were produced by the artist and remains highly coveted by art collectors and institutions alike.

A SELF TAUGHT BATIK ARTIST

Malaysia’s legendary artist and aptly described by KLAS as Malaysia’s father of figurative paintng, Khalil Ibrahim was born in 1934 in Kubang Krian, Kelantan. He is one of the earliest Malaysians who received a full state scholarship in 1960 to study art at the prestigious Central St Martins School of Art and Design in London. His masterful skills in drawing, watercolour and acrylic, are styles that move from the almost real to the almost abstract. Today, at the golden age of 83 years old, Khalil still paints and continues to be ardent to art, surrounded by familiar canvas or batik on canvas before him and paint brushes for days in his studio in Petaling Jaya.



Khalil executing a batik abstraction artwork in his studio in Petaling Jaya



The artist cleaning up the wax work on his batik painting

Khalil’s rich Malay cultural background from the East Coast and the discipline of Islamic values that he learnt at the Pondok school shaped his primordial artistic journey. These values stuck by him which then merged with the freedom of expression that he encountered later through his formal art education at St. Martins in London. Though he did not receive any formal art education during the early years in Kelantan, Khalil’s awareness of modern art was cultivated through a period of colonialism and the experiences of pioneering artists from the Nanyang Academy. Khalil is well known for his amazing watercolour paintings, delicate batik works and intriguing acrylics. His artistic talent began as a young boy with a passion for making wayang kulit. He would make the wayang kulit by drawing on a big leaf with the addition of a cardboard, which would then be used to play with his friends. He took this newfound interest and participated in competitions and shows held almost every month. Unfortunately, his mother disapproved of his newly found passion while his father, wanted him to be a teacher. Despite his parents’ disapproval, Khalil remained steadfast to his passion.

In pursuit of his passion, he began attending art classes held every Sunday, in Kota Bharu. The art inspector, Nik Mahmud Idris bestowed upon Khalil the art of watercolour and painting techniques. Equipped with the painting techniques that he learnt in the art classes, he allowed his creativity to blossom, which resulted in the scenic landscapes of the Malaysian East Coast in his works, such as the undulating hills and the padi fields. His works generated the interest of army officers and civil servants who went on to purchase many of the paintings he produced. He was a teacher in a primary school, but he painted in his spare time and he travelled from Kelantan periodically to sell his works at the annual MAHA (Malaysian Agriculture and Horticulture Association) trade fair.

FROM A BATIK AMATEUR TO A BATIK MASTER

Behind the joys of a prominent artist, there are undoubtedly countless hardships. Before Khalil Ibrahim secured his name in the art arena, he faced a limbo over his direction as an artist. Having obtained formal western art education, he still felt the urge of delving into the art of his roots. The calling to his rich Kelantanese cultural heritage was strong, thus he decided to pursue batik painting upon his return from England in 1966.

The 1930’s marked the emergence of batik painting, but only became an accepted medium of artistic expression until the 1960’s. Though many artists have fascination for batik painting, they do not dare attempt to explore due to the difficulty in mastering the technique. Khalil did seek guidance during his introduction to batik painting from a renowned batik artist in the northern state of Malaysia upon completing his studies In St. Martins. However, he was turned away. Disheartened, but determined, it took many trials and errors for him to get a full grasp as the medium requires a great deal of control, focus, care and patience to understand its novelty. A tjanting instead of a brush, dyes instead of oils and a cloth instead of a canvas. After many weeks of discarded works, Khalil finally produced seven batik paintings of which he was fully satisfied with. Impressively, this made Khalil Ibrahim a self-taught batik painter.

Khalil Ibrahim introduced us to his East Coast Series for the first time in the late 1960s through his batik work. This subject matter was later painted on acrylic on canvas and remains to be very popular to this very day.



East Coast Series - Pantai Irama, 2004
Acrylic on canvas
56 x 56 cm
Private Collection Kuala Lumpur



East Coast Series - Pantai Balok, 2004
Acrylic on canvas
56 x 56 cm
Private Collection Kuala Lumpur

From tin mines to landscapes to his series of studies in rural themes of Malay girls and children, Khalil had a knack for producing a batik portrait directly from the model, which proved notable and successful. By then, he already had a full grasp of batik painting and was searching for new themes. This time, innovation and religion-centred. So during his travels to Italy, seeing the Byzantine mosaics of Venice and Ravenna inspired the production of his controversial masterpieces, “The Last Supper”, “Christ Calming the Waters” and “Entry into Jerusalem”, which broke a completely new ground for Malaysian Art.

KHALIL’S FIRST SOLO SUCCESS

As Khalil was on his way to making his name, it was Frank Sullivan who took notice of his massive potential and talent. Ready to make a formal appearance, he was given the opportunity by Sullivan to have his first ever solo exhibition at the Samat Art Gallery in February/March 1968. His show exceeded expectations and was very well received by the public. Due to the success, he had his second crowd-pleasing solo exhibition, which was an all-batik show, in December 1968. Since then, his career as an artist soared and Khalil became a full-time artist. In an article titled “The Batik Art of Khalil Ibrahim” published in The Straits Times Annual in 1970, Frank Sullivan himself commended Khalil’s distinctive style, independence and ever-widening experimentation with colours and noted how his batik painting themes showed a great variety and interest that had extended the whole range of batik painting, thus, creating his own niche.

EXHIBITIONS

One of the country’s most prolific artists, Khalil has held many group exhibitions in Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and Switzerland. His works have been acquired by many collectors, in places such as the Singapore Art Museum, Fukuoka Museum of Art in Japan and Victoria Gallery in Melbourne, Australia. His selected group exhibitions included X Biennale, Sao Paulo, Brazil (1971) and Man & His World, Montreal Canada (1970). His subsequent solo exhibitions included Khalil Ibrahim ‘The Art Journey’ (2015), A Tribute to Khalil Ibrahim (2011), Khalil Ibrahim - A Continued Dialogue, Galeri Petronas (2004) and The Spirit of the East Coast, Yayasan Seni Artisan, Kuala Lumpur (2001).

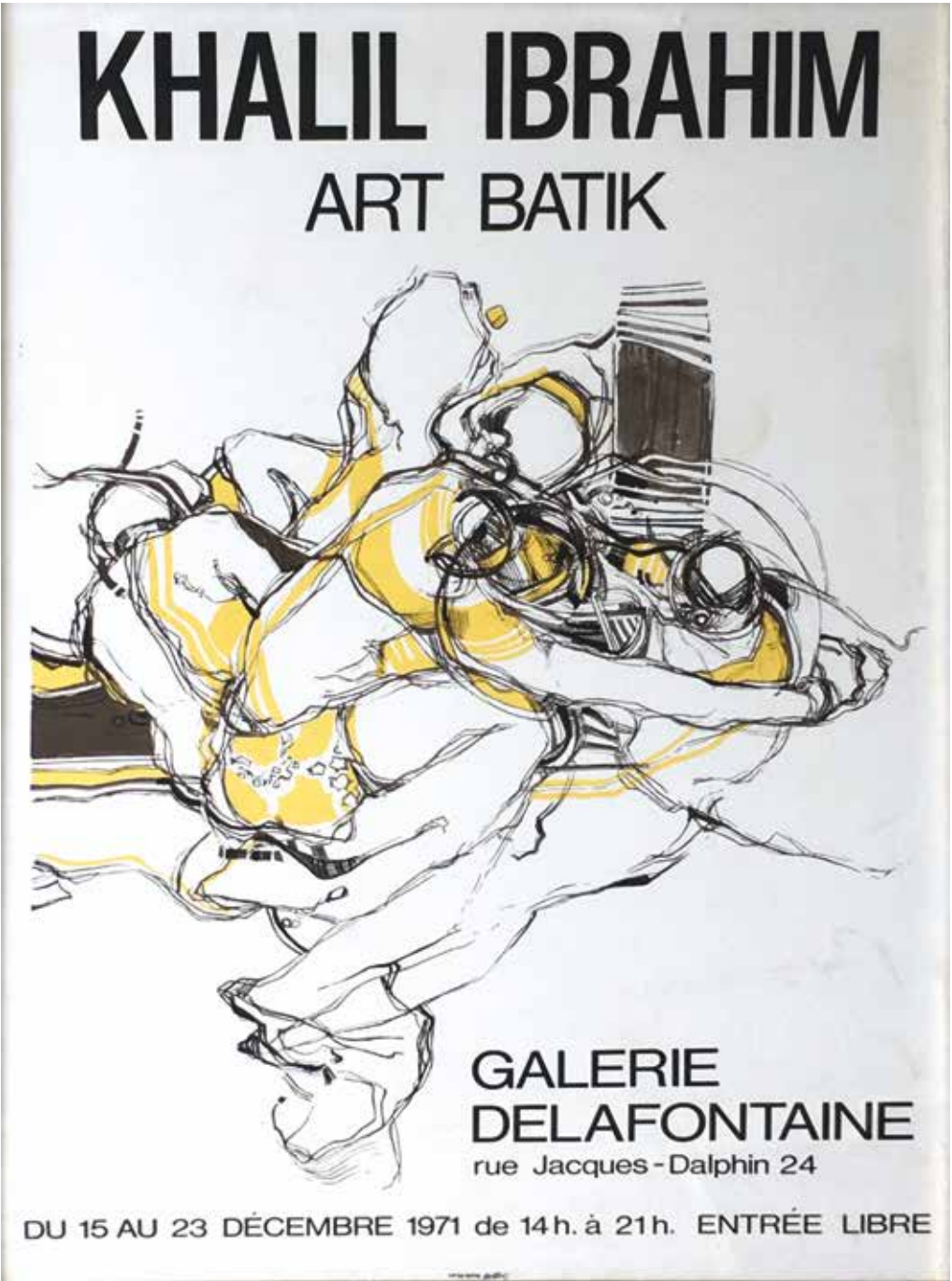
Many Malaysian art enthusiasts still mourn the passing of legendary artist, Khalil Ibrahim. There is no denying that his contribution to the art scene has inspired many of his fans and followers, as he has set a benchmark that is beyond the reach of many aspiring artists due to his originality and distinctive art pieces. His works today hold immense value, especially in sentiment, as he had left behind pieces of his legacy in the homes and offices of various collectors around the world.



East Coast Series, 2004
Acrylic on canvas
130 x 166
Private Collection Kuala Lumpur



East Coast Series, 2004
Acrylic on canvas
130 x 166
Private Collection Kuala Lumpur



*Khalil Ibrahim Poster,
1971 Galeries De La Fontaine, Switzerland
Collection of KL Lifestyle Art Space*

“Palm Sunday” is one of Khalil Ibrahim’s highly clamoured, controversial works. The painting was inspired by the Christian faith which was incited during his travels to Italy with his beloved wife. The artwork is a depiction of Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem prior to the Last Supper, based on the four canonical Gospels. Through batik painting, Khalil illustrated Jesus entering the city on a donkey. According to Eastern tradition, the donkey is an animal of peace, in contrary to a horse which represents an animal of war.

Clearly, Khalil took notice of the story with a comprehensive understanding. Colour-wise, Khalil used hues of warm colours and earthy tones. The texture of the background makes it seem like the painting was done on an old piece of parchment. He did not leave out the detail on Zachaeus. According to the story, word of Jesus travelling towards Jerusalem was heard by the people, hence Zachaeus made it a point to see him by climbing up a sycamore-fig tree in the midst of the sea of crowd as he was short in stature. Hence, the male figure shown on the tree.



This masterpiece by the artist is a reenactment of Christ’s entry into Jerusalem from the gospel book of Otto III c. 1000 Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich and was exhibited in Khalil Ibrahim’s inaugural sold out Batik exhibition at the Samat Gallery in 1968



Image from the Gospel Book of Otto III c. 1000

Palm Sunday, 1967
Batik
62 x 85 cm
Private Collection
RM 220,000



Kelantanese, 1968
Batik
36 x 45 cm
Private Collection
Not For Sale



Malay Boy (Kelantanese)
Batik
51 x 39.5 cm
Private Collection
Not For Sale



Portrait of a Balinese Girl, 1970

Batik

55 x 46 cm

Private Collection

Not For Sale



Mother and Child, 1968

Batik

46 x 36 cm

Private Collection

Not For Sale



Mother and Child, 1968
Batik
43 x 27 cm
Private Collection
Not For Sale



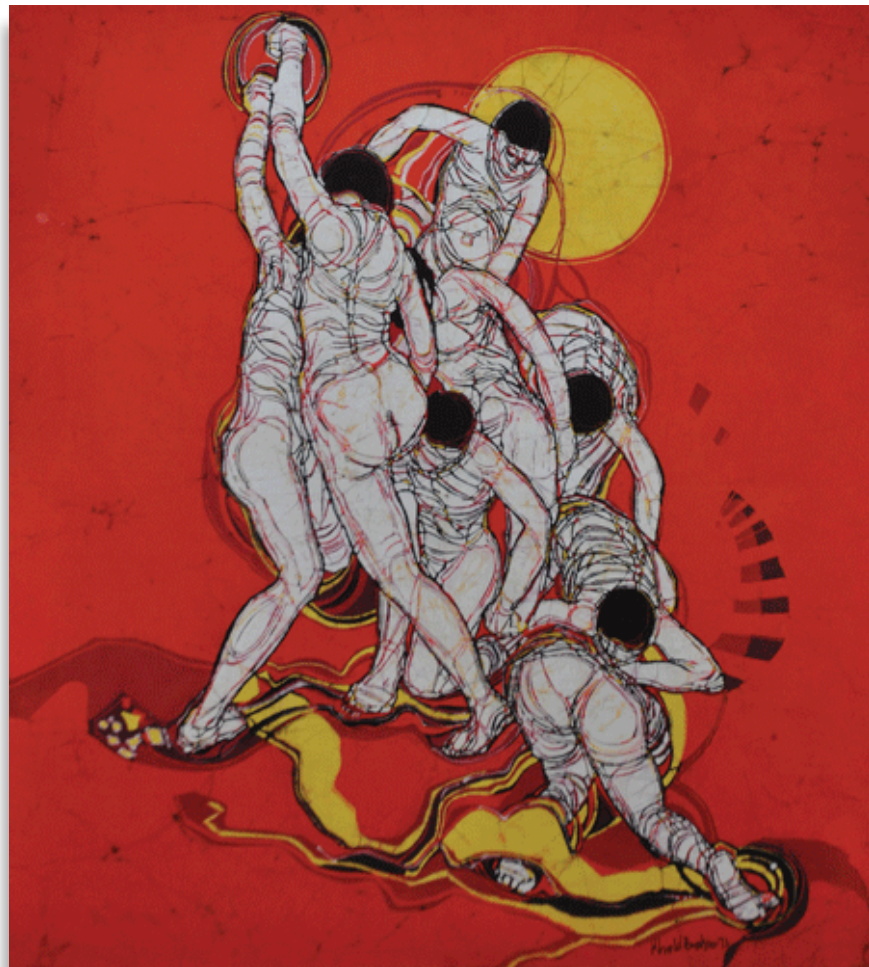
East Coast Fishermen, 1968
Batik
88 x 72 cm
Private Collection
Not For Sale



Fishermen, 1969
Batik
74 x 124 cm
Private Collection
Not For Sale

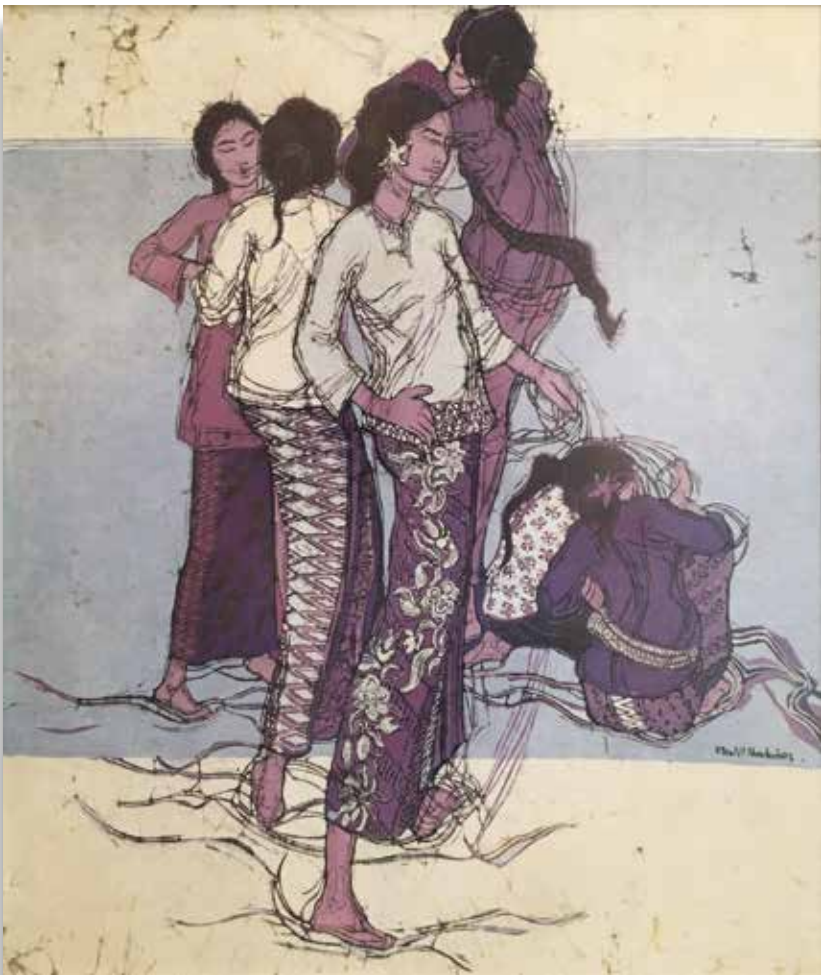


East Coast Series, 1970
Batik
87x 70 cm
Private Collection
RM 128,000



Movement in Red, 1971

Batik
91 x 81 cm
Private Collection
Not For Sale



East Coast Ladies, 1973

Batik
90 x 61 cm
Private Collection
Not For Sale



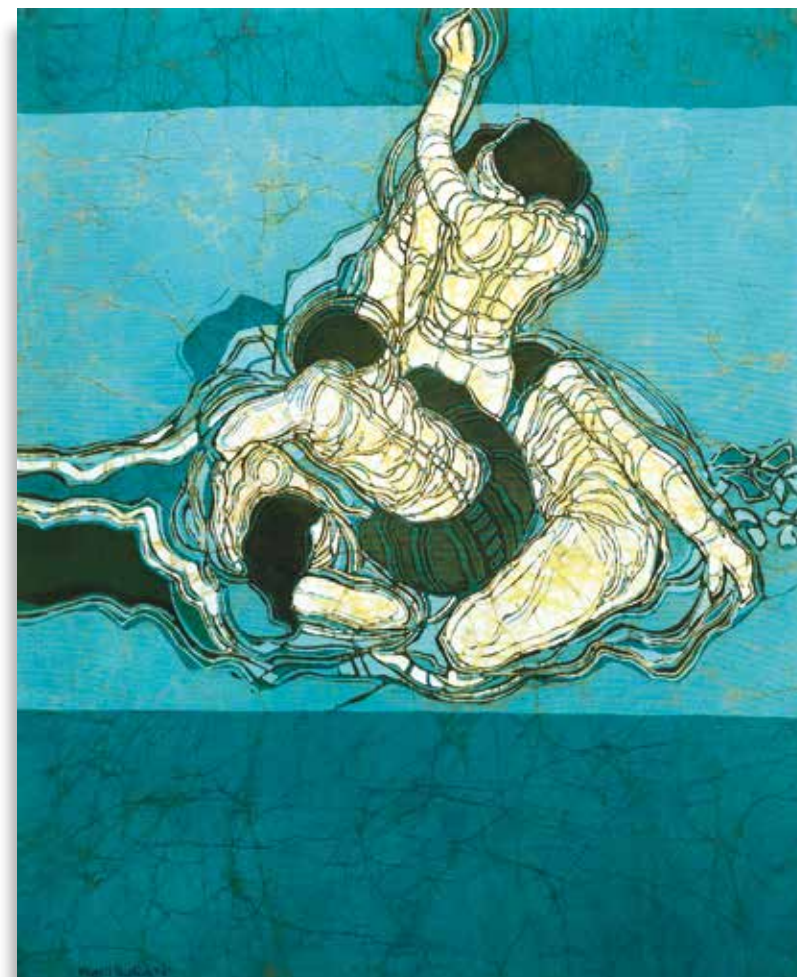
East Coast Series, 1973

Batik

90 x 60 cm

Collection of Bank Negara Malaysia

Not For Sale



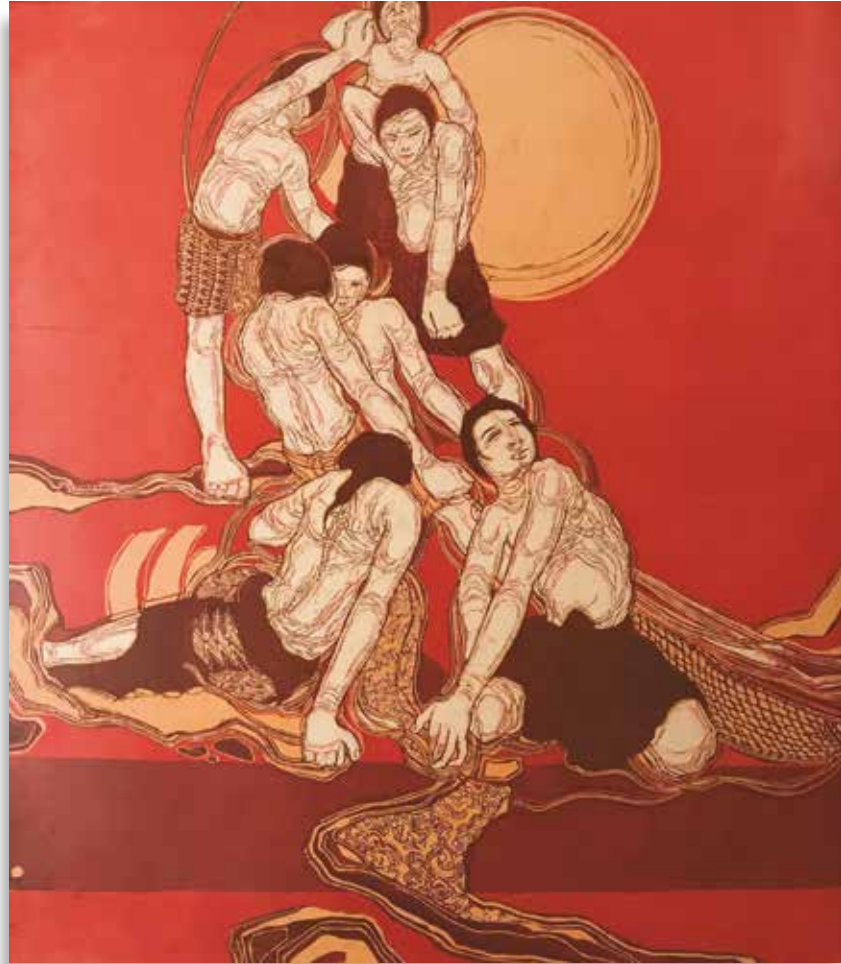
Movement in Blue, 1973

Batik

55 x 45 cm

Private Collection

Not For Sale



East Coast Figures - Movement in Red, 1975

Batik
92 x 80 cm
Private Collection
Not For Sale

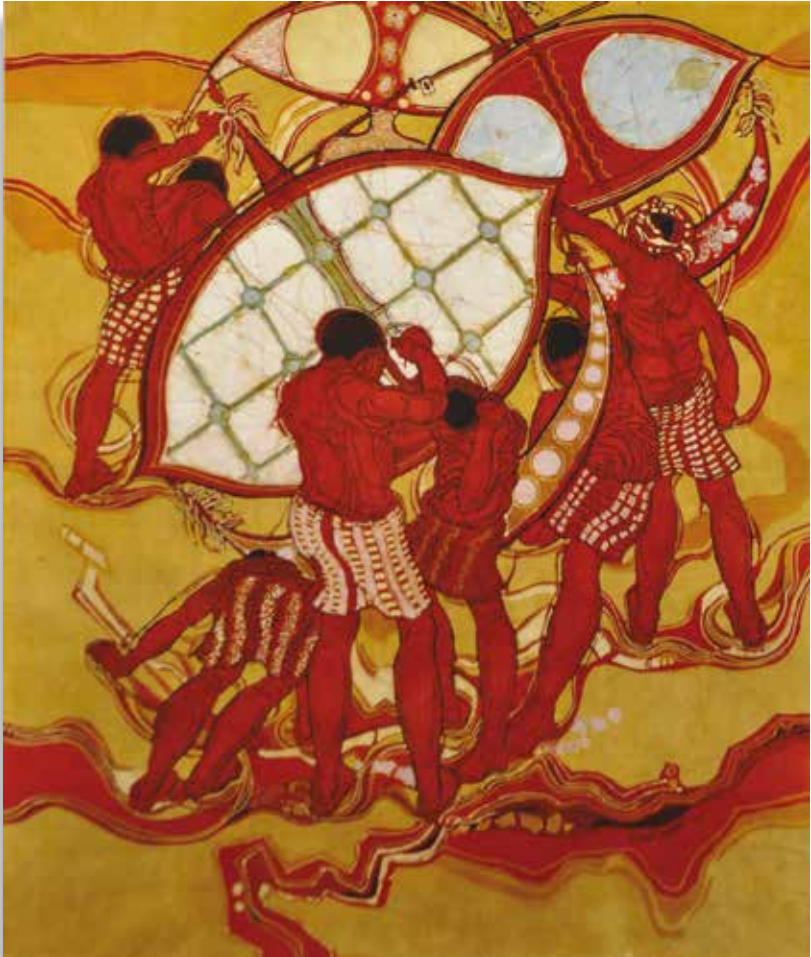


Two Sisters, 1976

Batik
51 x 42 cm
Private Collection
Not For Sale



Nude Movement, 1983
Batik
93 x 103 cm
Private Collection
Not For Sale



Wau Bulan, 1983
Batik
105.5 x 87 cm
Private Collection
Not For Sale



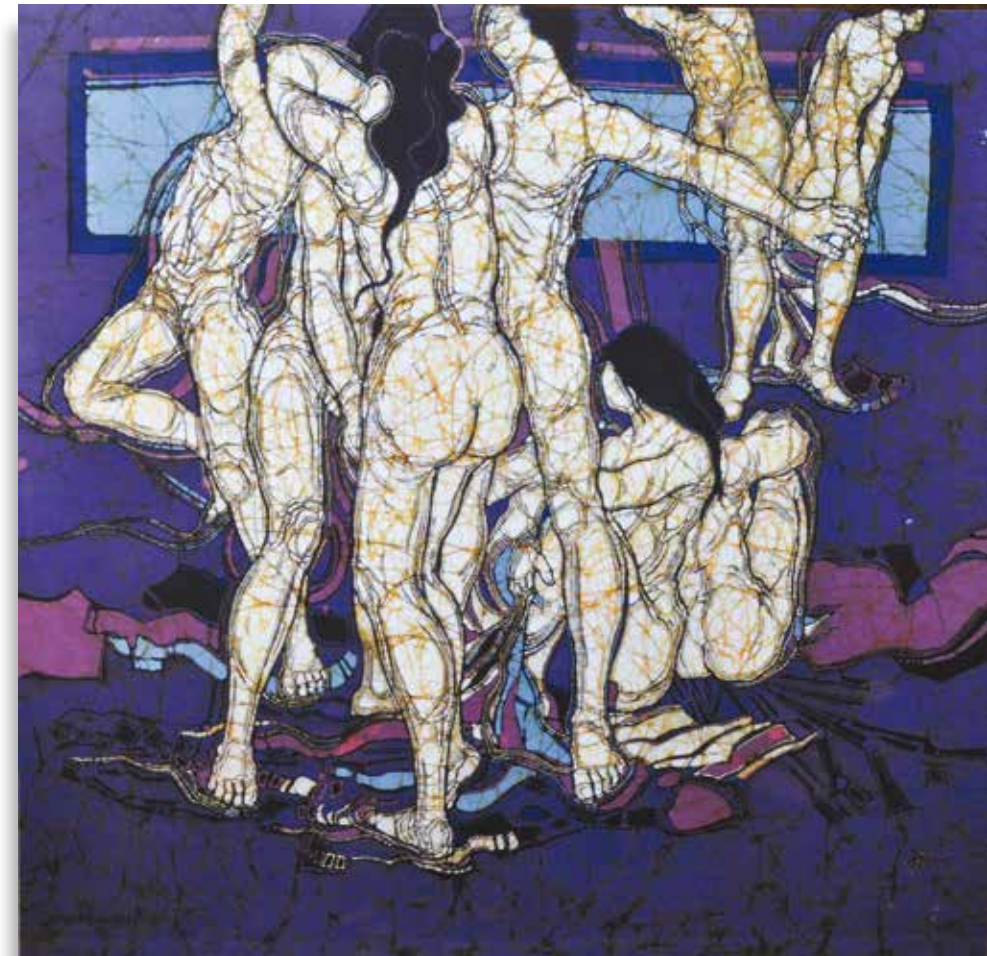
Permulaan, East Coast Series, 1983

Batik

95 x 115 cm

Private Collection

Not For Sale



Movement in Blue, 1985

Batik

92 x 91 cm

Private Collection

Not For Sale



Two Figures, 1986
Batik
90 x 60 cm
Private Collection
Not For Sale



Abstract, 1983
Batik
108 x 105
Private Collection
Not For Sale

KWAN CHIN

The Essence of Batik

Born in 1946 in Kepong, Kwan Chin studied at the prestigious Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts in Singapore. Upon his return to the then Malaya, a stint as a commercial artist in an advertising firm followed. But a brief introduction to batik by his good friend and Singaporean artist Tien Soong sparked his interest and he quickly turned to batik art, which he became very famous for.

BATIK WORKS

Kwan Chin is one of the remaining few Malaysian artists who produced batik masterpieces in the traditional methods to depict life in the villages of Malaysia and immerses in the subject and its beauty on canvas. The artist's oeuvre was using a bright atmosphere with excellent contrast of colours. Through his works, the artist unveils the treasure trove of dying arts and techniques used, from the beautiful strokes in bringing abstract figures to life to the laborious traditional methods of producing batik art.

Kwan Chin's paintings possess a strong cultural identity, employing various batik techniques using tjanting, wax and dyes to create dots, floral motifs and his signature crackling effect as the background. The 'crackled' effect in the artist's backgrounds was achieved by wrinkling the waxed fabric, allowing the dye to seep into intricate patterns along the cracks. While purist batik artists immersed their wax paintings completely in dye baths, Kwan Chin opted to apply dye with a brush, to achieve greater technical control.

Armed with knowledge in the use of charcoal, oil and watercolour from the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, the artist uses a batik-upon-batik method — a repeated process of waxing and dyeing. The result is a see-through effect with a conspicuous background and overlapping colours. The colours of his artworks are well contained within the outline he draws, leaving no space for smudges. Vividly-coloured batik paintings that depict scenes of Malaysian life were his specialty, and collectors all over the world typically have a copy of Kwan Chin's artworks.

His themes are forthright and uncomplicated, no intricacies or hidden messages behind this — stunningly executed and a visual treat. The only complication in his technique is executing it, from the laborious task of producing batik material from scratch to the detailing of the figures and scenery to the colours painted on them. Before Kwan Chin's 'Rubber Tapper' thrust him and his works to fame in the 1970's, his works were popular among tourists in Kuala Lumpur, where he began to exhibit in 1969. He seemed to have an understanding of what art aficionados were looking for in an art piece — he offered them with highly decorative paintings, combining commendable artistic prowess with a great sense of Malaysian life as it was during that period.



NO DREAMS OF MONEY, HONOR, GLORY FOR KWAN CHIN – HE HAS SUCCESS

Excerpts of a 1976 article published in Asia Magazine on Kwan Chin

Kwan Chin has no intention of wasting away in a garret sustained by dreams of future glory that he will never live to relish. Matter-of-fact and realistic, he combines commendable artistic ability with solid business sense.

Kwan Chin creates vividly colorful batik paintings which enrich the homes of collectors all over the world. Depicting scenes of Malaysian life, his work has been especially popular among tourists in Kuala Lumpur, where he began to exhibit in 1969.

Born Goh Yee in Kepong about eight miles from Malaysia’s capital, the 33-year old artist was educated in Chinese primary and secondary schools. He attended Nanyang Academy of Fine Art in Singapore for three years, where he mastered such traditional media as charcoal, water color and oils.

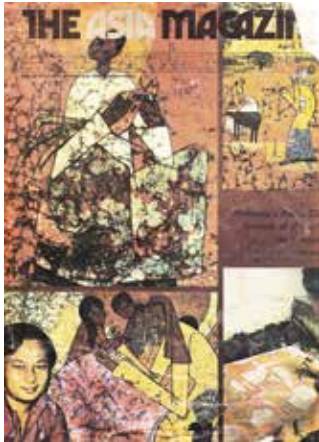
For the first few years after graduation he worked as a commercial artist in an advertising firm. A good friend, Singapore artist Tien Soong sparked his interest in batiks and he has worked in this medium for the past seven years.

Batik is the process of painting with dyes on raw white cotton. Molten wax is used to “resist” the dye in areas where a particular color is not desired. Purist batik artists wholly immerse their waxed paintings in a series of dye baths. To achieve greater technical control, Kwan Chin prefers applying the dye with brushes.

To create the “crackled” effect in his backgrounds, he wrinkles the waxed fabric, permitting the dye to seep into intricate patterns along the cracks. The wax itself is applied with an ordinary house painting brush over large areas.

It takes Kwan Chin about a week to complete one painting, but he works on several simultaneously. He confines his subject matter to his own first-hand experience. Frequent trips into Malaysian kampongs inspire his paintings of simple village life and he often depicts scenes from wayang kulit, traditional Malaysian shadow plays.

Shortly after he began experimenting with batik, Kwan Chin was “discovered” by a proprietor of one of Kuala Lumpur’s art gallery, a treasury of exotic art and handicrafts collected from all over Asia. His work immediately caught the public eye, and was featured in exhibitions at Malaysia’s National Art Gallery and the British Council in Kuala Lumpur.



The Cover of Asia Magazine



The Asia Magazine Feature on the Artist



Illustration and feature on the artist

More recently, his career has suffered a slight decline. In a past few years, batik artists have proliferated over the Malay peninsula. To survive amid cutthroat competition, many artists now mass-produce their paintings by using silk-screen techniques. Thus, they can undersell the artists who stick to one-of-a-kind originals.

Kwan Chin refuses to compromise his artistic integrity by copying his own successful paintings. But with a wife, child and parents dependent on him for support, he cannot afford the luxury of Bohemian poverty. “When my paintings no longer sell, then I’ll give up art and find another vocation,” he states simply.

“Yes, I have won some awards for my work,” he says modestly, “but I have no dreams that my paintings will hang in museums after my death. I am content to make a reasonable living doing something that I enjoy.”

Most of his customers, Kwan Chin knows, would be reluctant to hang a museum masterpiece in their own living rooms, however much they might appreciate its artistic merits. They prefer artwork that will complement their color schemes and harmonize with their furnishings. Kwan Chin understands what the general public is looking for – he offers them highly decorative paintings they can live with.



(Top)

Family, 2011

Batik

27 x 25.5 cm

Private Collection

RM 3,800

(Middle)

Moon Bathing I, 2011

Batik

27 x 25.5 cm

Private Collection of Batik Painting Museum Penang

RM 3,800

(Bottom)

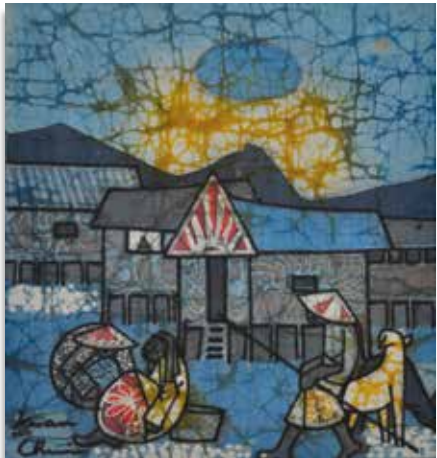
Rubber Tappers IV - Blue Series, 2011

Batik

28.5 x 28.5 cm

Private Collection

RM 3,800

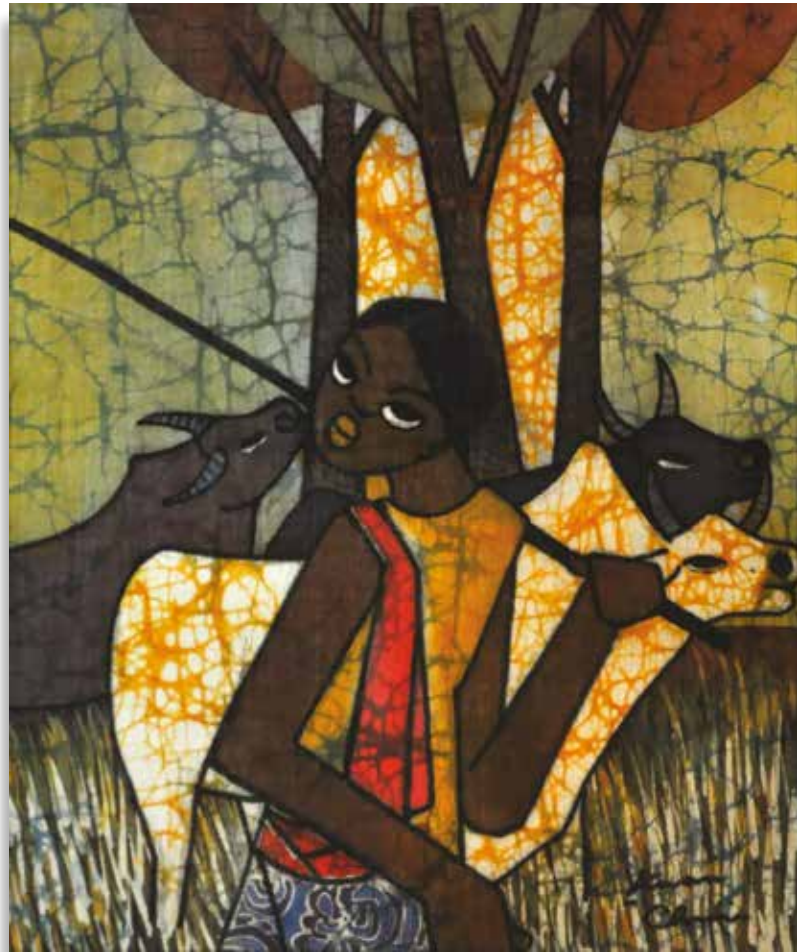




Harvest, 2012
Batik
76 x 51 cm
Private Collection
RM 8,800



Tin Miners, 1968
Batik
50 x 74 cm
Private Collection of Ilham Gallery
Not For Sale



Shepherd Boy, 2011
 Batik
 54 x 45 cm
 Private Collection
RM 6,800



A Cattleman, 2012
 Batik
 76 x 76 cm
 Private Collection
RM 68,800



Netting, 2012

Batik

76 x 54.5 cm

Batik Painting Museun Penang Collection

RM 8,800



Abound in Love, 2012

Batik

74 x 98 cm

Private Collection

KWAN CHIN’S LANDSCAPES

Kwan Chin had a penchant for the Malaysian country life, settings and people. He captured scenes such as wayang kulit (puppet shows), activities of the Malaysian wet markets, the shoreline with the fishermen, the farmers with fruits, family lives and the likes. He reflected a true Malaysian artist who applied cubism and geometric forms in some of the figures.

Kwan Chin gave a different dimension to art in applying broken lines on canvas to give an impression of batik art. The lines and details of the batik are very clear and evident, proving to the viewers how much of an expert Kwan Chin was with his detailing when it came to batik. The lovely display of colours that becomes a batik work sets a cheerful, charming, nostalgic and tranquil mood for the viewer, at the same time showcasing the complexity of batik-making.

“Yes, I have won some awards for my work but I have no dreams that my paintings will hang in museums after my death. I am content to make a reasonable living doing something I enjoy,” Kwan Chin said in the Asia Magazine, April 17, 1977 issue.

In contrast to his statement in 1977, Kwan Chin’s batik paintings have been exhibited locally and internationally, and can be seen in the permanent collections of Bank Negara Malaysia, National Art Gallery Malaysia, Penang Batik Painting Museum and other major private institutions as well as private collectors both in Malaysia and Singapore.

In 2013, Kwan Chin’s artworks were included in Matrade’s London exhibition as part of its music and food promotions, and a Malaysian exhibition on the fringe of Art Basel Miami in the United States in 2013.



Market Scene, 1979
Batik
53.5 x 152.5 cm
Private Collection
Not For Sale



Village Scene, 1986

Batik

63 x 89 cm

Private Collection

RM 12,800



Sunday Afternoon, 2002

Batik

85 x 142 cm

Private Collection

RM 18,800



Catch from the Sea, 2002

Batik

83 x 145 cm

Private Collection

RM 18,800



Playing with Birds, 2003

Batik

100 x 109 cm

Private Collection

RM 13,800



Fruit Sellers, 2003
Batik
84 x 145 cm
Private Collection
RM 18,800



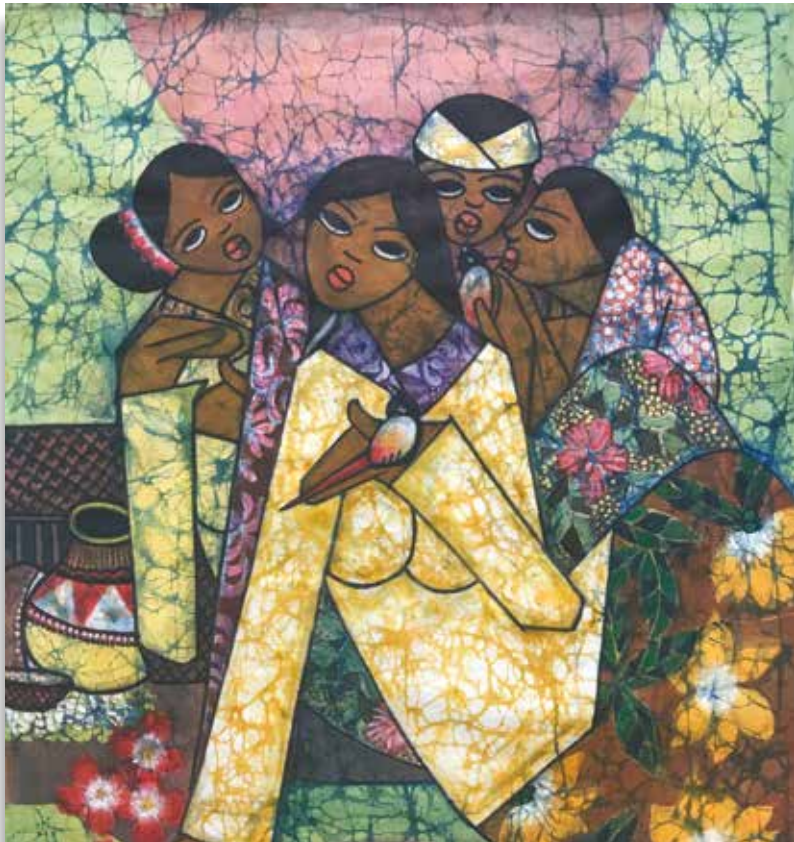
Fruit Sellers Series, 2003
Batik
85 x 143 cm
Private Collection
RM 18,800



Fruit Sellers, 2003
Batik
84 x 146 cm
Private Collection of Bank Negara Malaysia
RM 18,800



Family, 2007
Batik
60 x 90 cm
Private Collection



Playing with Bird, 2007
Batik
90 x 60 cm
Private Collection
RM 12,800



Market Scene Series, 2010
Batik
82 x 143 cm
Private Collection
RM 18,800



Resting, 2010

Batik

85 x 143 cm

Private Collection

RM 18,800



Sunday Afternoon, 2010

Batik

87 x 145 cm

Private Collectio

RM 18,800



Fisherman and his Family, 2010

Batik
87 x 145 cm
Private Collection
RM 18,800



Durian Seller, 2011

Batik
86 x 142 cm
Private Collection
RM 18,800



Bounty from the Sea, 2012

Batik

85 x 141 cm

Private Collection

RM 18,800



At the Coast, 2012

Batik

40.5 x 51cm

Private Collection

RM 6,800



At the Market, 2014

Batik
84 x 146 cm
Private Collection
RM 18,800



In the Garden, 2015

Batik
95 x 106 cm
Private Collection
RM 15,800



Rambutan Seller, 2015

Batik

85 x 143 cm

Private Collection

RM 18,800



Village Scene, 1970's

Batik

65 x 48 cm

Private Collection of Batik Painting Museum Penang

Not For Sale



Rubber Tappers, 2011
Batik
54 x 45 cm
Private Collection
Not For Sale



Rubber Tappers III - Blue Series, 2011
Batik
28.5 x 28.5 cm
Private Collection
RM 3,800



Moon Bathing II, 2011

Batik

27 x 25.5 cm

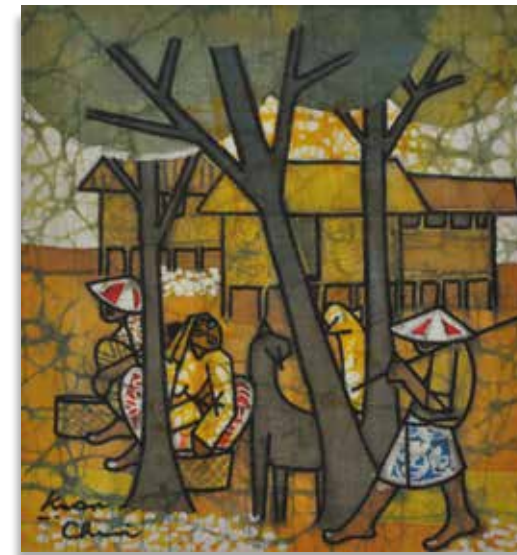
Batik Painting Museum Penang Collection

Rubber Tapping I - Green Series, 2011

Batik

27 x 25.5 cm

Private Collection



Farming, 2011

Batik

27 x 25.5 cm

Private Collection



Rubber Tappers - Brown Series, 2012

Batik

44 x 38 cm

Private Collection

ABOUT KL LIFESTYLE ART SPACE

KL Lifestyle Art Space's chief goal is to offer another avenue for the local public and visitors to view Modern and Contemporary artworks from Malaysia as well as the region beyond the institutions and existing art spaces.

We have been fortunate to have secured a prime location at 31, Jalan Utara, 46200 Petaling Jaya, Selangor.

The Malaysian visual art scene is growing rapidly, however, we believe more needs to be done to propel it to the same heights as many of our Asian neighbours, such as China, India, Indonesia and even Thailand. It is KLAS' intention to bring the country's visual art scene one step closer to or, even, one step ahead of those of our neighbours.

Our Being, a solo exhibition by Jeihan Sukmantoro, a highly reputable senior artist from Bandung, Indonesia, marked KLAS' foray into promoting artworks by renowned artists from the region.

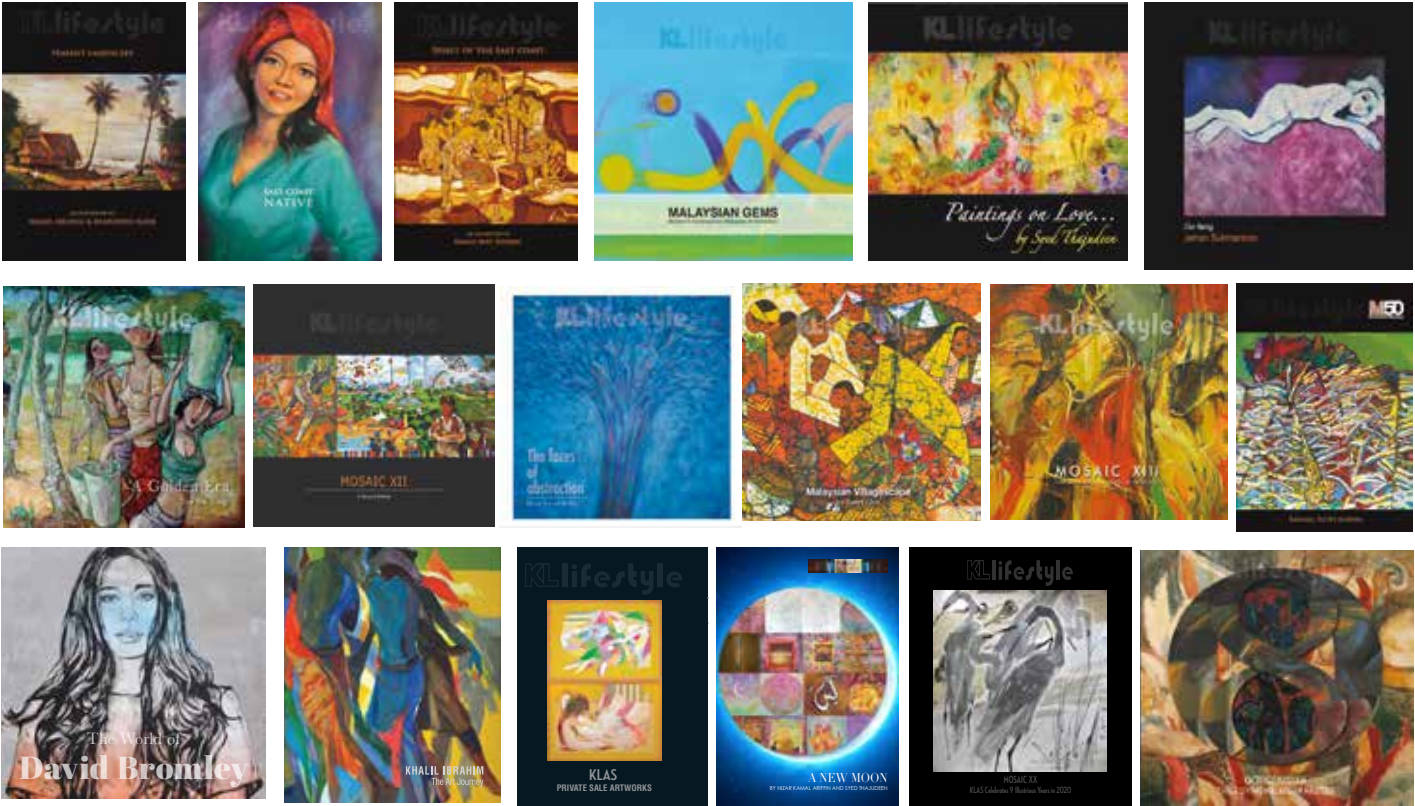
As a commercial gallery space, we hope to encourage a secondary market for Malaysian art, particularly for modern or pioneer works from established senior artists and masters from Malaysia and the region. These chiefly constitute artworks created up till the 1960s and many will be surprised to know that these artworks, as well as artworks by these pioneering artists, are still attainable at relatively affordable prices.

KLAS will also provide the service of receiving consignments from artists or individual collectors, thereby making their artworks available to interested parties. This will no doubt increase the chances of serious collectors acquiring those hard-to-secure pieces from specific periods, series or individuals and in the process encourage fresh, young collectors.

KLAS has its presence on the Internet too, a comprehensive website at www.kl-lifestyle.com.my/artspace that details previous and on-going exhibitions and which includes a stockroom with an inventory of artworks for sale.



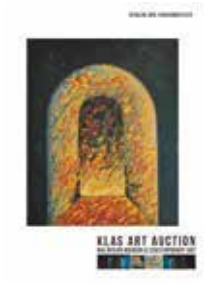
KLAS ART EXHIBITION
2011 - 2021



KLAS ART AUCTION

MALAYSIAN MODERN & CONTEMPORARY ART

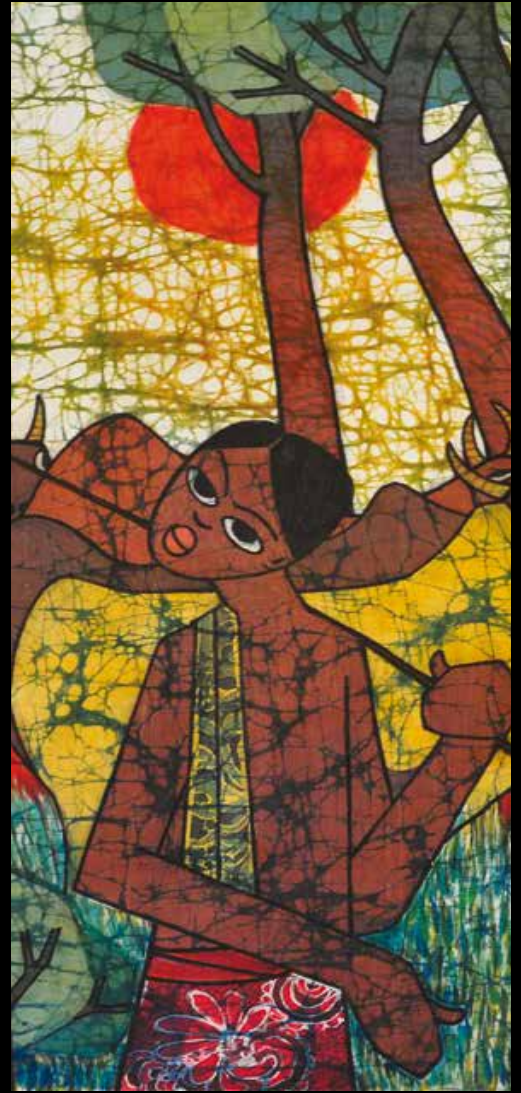
KLAS ART AUCTION
2012 - 2021





Designer

Afiqah Bt Mohamad



Presented by



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