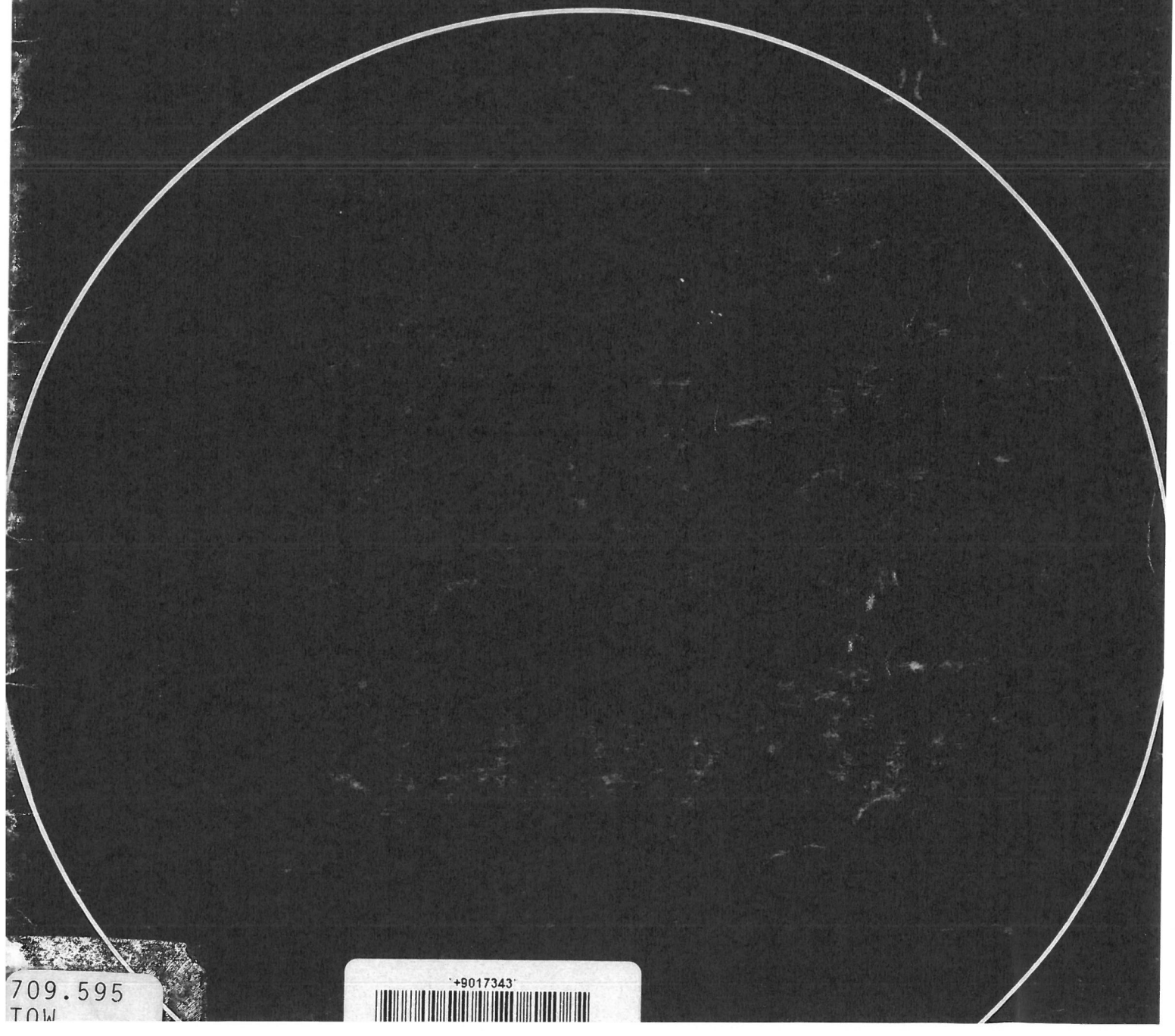
TOWARDS A MYSTICAL REALITY

a documentation of jointly initiated experiences by redza piyadasa and suleiman esa



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CANBERRA SCHOOL OF ART

"Piyadasa and Sulaiman Esa who share the same affinity for rejecting support and edges in painting have moved into a new dimension which totally annihilates illusion and accepts the actual physicality of things.
To understand their intentions, one has to dispel every association with that of picture-making which had its origin in the Renaissance spirit. Their icono-clastic attitude has been the result of a systematic search for an identity arising out of their experience in this country. The minimality and simplicity of their art is almost Zen in spirit."

ISMAIL ZAIN, in the catalogue of the "Dokumentasi 72" show, May 1972.

"You do not look at my paintings but you look into them and THROUGH them. In the richly-textured surfaces of my works, one sees the entity of matter, concentrating on the sum of energy of both pigment and material. In the transparent work, as a result of the dematerialisation of coloured surfaces, one is exercising a simultaneous reading of both matter/anti-matter, volume/void, figure/ground."

SULAIMAN ESA, in the catalogue of the "Dokumentasi 72" show, May 1972.

"My works exist within the same reality as the viewer's. The time and the space are the same. My works are always existing in the present. In a sense, my works cannot be sold. This is because the experience I am forcing upon the viewer is a real experience. My works may be reconstructed elsewhere in which case they will constitute an altogether new experience. The person buying my work will really be buying an actual experience not an artifact."

REDZA PIYADASA, in the catalogue of the "Dokumentasi 72" show, May 1972.

INTRODUCTION:

BY KRISHEN JIT, DEPUTY DEAN,
FACULTY OF ARTS,
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Redza Piyadasa and Sulaiman Esa will be satisfied with nothing less than a revolution in Art. Like most revolutionaries, they reject all that has happened before them, including their own early work. The clean slate becomes the most wonderful point of reference. It is therefore no accident that both proudly call themselves "savage innocents".

No total rejection, however, is meaningful without a profound understanding of that which is discarded. Their manifesto is a rich tapestry of the history of aesthetics, is a demonstration of their right to rebel. Seldom have we witnessed such a strenuous effort to achieve clarity. Inevitably, their unambiguous and uncompromising stance renders them awfully vulnerable. For me, that is the whole point of an exhibition. By so fearlessly offering themselves, they fulfill the graceful function of giving.

Their main target is the humanistic-subjection tradition, the colonial hangover from which so many of our Asian artists suffer. Easel-painting, picture-making, all forms of esoterica, come under total attack as anachronistic and harmful. The flow of creativity, they say, cuts through illusion, and all other intermediaries, so that the artist can directly confront nature. Their roots and their final resting is Asia, from which they construct a distinct artistic identity.

They also say that the real exhibition is their manifesto. Lest this be misinterpreted as an admission of a failure of creativity, let us be reminded that they question the very basis of Art as it is presently understood. By extending the limits of Art, they wish to touch infinity, which has been the eternal search of man. Yet, they are no mere visionaries. Their starting

point is the real, the concrete, those daily happenings of everyday life, which are so easily taken for granted. Our fragmented and catergorized life is thus blown apart to reveal an overwhelming wonder.

I hope I will be forgiven by them when I say that their exhibits interest me as theatre. I don't wish to compartmentalize, simply to suggest that the live situations which have been "initiated", are intrinsically dramatic. They communicate to us at a fundamental level, expose us to our everyday reality, and when we communicate with them, singly or collectively, we enter the realm of primordial theatre. It is a measure of their hunger for total comprehension that Piya and Sulaiman are willing to enter into all kingdoms of creativity in pursuit of their vision.

In the last two years for example they have related intimately with theatre. The set designs for "Uda dan Dara", "Alang Rentak Seribu" and this year, "The Birds" were made by them. They have challenged theatre and have, in turn, been challenged by it. It would not be an exaggeration to say that part of their new vision derives from theatre, especially their emphasis on phenomena.

Without doubt, this is the most important exhibition in Malaysian Art so far, if only because all our history is laid bare before us, albeit, a biased history. No artist in Malaysia, no creative person, can neglect it or avoid a confrontation with it. I believe that if this manifesto is torn to shreds, Piya and Sulaiman will be not unhappy for they cannot proceed any further unless and until another resolution is fashioned. What they ask for is perpetual renewal.

Ironically, while they reject all history, they are also victims of it. It is strange and somewhat unsettling to discover that they are very traditional in their approach to history, in so far as they believe in the idea of progress. For them one thing leads to another, the causal relationship is indeed the anchor of their being. But theirs is not a return, they are no children of the nineteenth century. They wish to embrace all time, past, present and future, and thus, transcend it.

ONE: THE DILEMMA OF MODERN MALAYSIAN ART

The present exhibition has been motivated by the two participating artists' desire to raise some questions regarding the direction of Malaysian art in the 1970s. In attempting to do this, we are, however, not limiting ourselves to a wholly provincial outlook. It is our belief that the questions we are raising relate directly to a greater Asian situation and as such, we are not functioning within 'nationalistic' considerations. This is especially so because the kinds of problems faced by Malaysian modernists today are also being faced by Asian modernists elsewhere who are beset with the dilemma of having to employ idioms and styles which are not altogether indigenous to their own cultural traditions. The flirtation with modern art influences which seems to have manifested itself over the last fifty years at least certainly reflects a cultural dilemma of sorts. Several factors may be attributed to it and perhaps, the most important is the general displacement faced by the Asian artists who have found themselves uprooted from their own cultural influences. The very long period of exposure to colonial domination has certainly contributed to the general disruption. Clearly, the links with a traditional culture is all but severed today as far as the plastic arts are concerned. What with 20th century scientific and psychologial advancements, the serious Asian modernists have been left with little choice but to lean heavily on a modern art tradition that has its origins in the western scientific and intellectual climate.

That vague generalisations still persist today regarding the notion of a "western-centric" and "eastern-centric" approach to art only reflects the complexity of a situation that is as yet not fully understood by most Asian artists themselves. The general tendency amongst Asian artists to become involved with picture-making pursuits which still persists today does not seem to have made it easier to understand the problem for what it is. No real attempts have been made to requestion the underlying considerations which have given rise to this artistic dilemma which is peculiarly Asian. That so much modern art produced in Asia these last few decades has tended to be trivial underlies the seriousness of the situation. THE PRESENT EXHIBITION THEREFORE ATTEMPTS TO RAISE SOME PERTINENT QUESTIONS ABOUT THE SITUATION AND OFFER SOME ALTERNATIVES. WHILST DEALING WITH SPECIFICALLY "MALAYSIAN" REFERANCES, THE QUESTIONS RAISED HOWEVER APPLY DIRECTLY TO THE MODERN ART SCENE IN ASIA. ANY ATTEMPT TO VIEW OUR CONTRIBUTIONS WITHIN A PURELY "MALAYSIAN" CONTEXT CAN ONLY RESULT IN A FAILURE TO REALISE THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE QUESTIONS WE ARE ATTEMPTING TO RAISE. THE PRESENT EXHIBITION DEALS WITH A KIND OF SITUATION WHICH PREVAILS IN MANY PARTS OF ASIA WHERE SOME KIND OF MODERN ART INVOLVEMENT EXISTS.

It seems necessary from the outset to state that we are MODERN artists and as such, we are not involved with traditional Asian art forms. We are however borrowing from Asian philosophies in order to come up with an attitude which we hope will help enrich the international modern art movement which needs to be considered in global terms these days. It is therefore not our intention to condemn or criticise all the major developments that have taken place in the west after the advent of the School of Paris. WE ARE HOWEVER ATTEMPTING TO WORK OUTSIDE THE WESTERN-CENTRIC ATTITUDE TOWARDS FORM. WHAT WE ARE TRYING TO DO IS TO SOW THE SEEDS FOR A THINKING PROCESS WHICH MIGHT SOMEDAY LIBERATE MALAYSIAN ARTISTS

FROM THEIR DEPENDENCE ON WESTERN INFLUENCES. It is our belief that all modern art produced in Malaysia up to the present time has not been altogether free of some kind of eclectic influences derived from the various "-isms" of the west. Clearly, there has as yet been no real attempt to re-question this under lying eclecticism behind our flirtation with idioms and styles derived from the major art movements of the west. Ours has been a total dependence on a system of aesthetics that derives its impetus from western philosophical considerations. Malaysian artists have, as a result, not been able to come up with a viewpoint of reality that differs from that being adopted by western artists. So long as we do not attempt to requestion the philosophical basis upon which we are functioning, we will go on producing works which for all their technical brilliance can only remain derivative and at worst, imitative!

IT IS OUR BELIEF THEREFORE THAT MALAYSIAN ART CAN ONLY BECOME PRODUCTIVE AND CREATIVE WHEN OUR ARTISTS BEGIN TO FUNCTION ON A VERY MUCH MORE DEEPER LEVEL THAN THAT WHICH HAS EXISTED TO DATE. To do this our artists will first of all have to requestion the kind of developments that have taken place so far. That the artistic activity has by and large been influenced by a 'picture-making' rather than a "problem-solving" approach to art certainly accounts for the absence of any polemical or dialectical tradition within the local artscene. Too many artists, for instance, remain incapable of discussing their works formalistically and too many remain oblivious of the implications of those modernist idioms that they are manipulating. Nor is there any serious attempt made to view their contributions within the context of time. The notion which still persists that artists do not have to verbalise on or justify their work certainly underlies a kind or thinking which accepts the artist as essentially a maker of artifacts and not as a thinker or theoritician. Perhaps such an attitude might have been excusable 20 years ago but certainly it is out of joint with the times in the 70s. That Malaysian art in the 70s has still to surmount these considerations certainly reflects the seriousness of the situation.

THE GENERAL ABSENCE OF A SERIOUS INTELLECTUAL AND POLEMICAL ATMOSPHERE WITHIN THE MALAYSIAN ARTSCENE THEN BECOMES A CRUCIAL PROBLEM THAT NEEDS TO BE SURMOUNTED IN THE 70s. IT MUST BE OVERCOME. The absence of an intellectual tradition for the most part despite the fact that we have so many trained artists today may be attributed to several factors. A superficial involvement with stylistic and technical considerations alone certainly seems to have limited the involvement to a "picture-making" one in most cases. Very little attempt has been made to consider the aesthetic and philosophical aspects of the artistic commitment. Where there has been some kind of attempt made to consider aesthetics there has unfortunately been not enough understanding of the particular issues being dealt with. Again the general tendency amongst local artists to have ignored the relevance of Art History and the history of ideas must surely account for the weakness of so many artists when it comes to a reconsideration of the rationale behind their work. Too many of our best artists have become exhausted of ideas within a few years and ceased to become committed to Art because of this. That so many of our best artists of the last ten years have become bogged down by stylistic idiosyncracies and artistic whimsicalities certainly neccessitates a very serious requestioning of our involvement with modern art under the circumstances. How valid is such a superficial commitment to the language of modernism? It is our belief that if Malaysian artists are going to become involved with modernism they should at least know their area of involvement thoroughly and meaningfully! Until this is done, our modern artists for all their technical brilliance will never succeed in arriving anywhere. It will remain very much a closed circuit activity that

cannot possibly become productive and innovative!

There are many other important reasons for the inability of local artists to function on a much deeper level than that which has manifested itself so far. Perhaps the most serious has been the tendency by so many of our artists to become involved with modernistic idioms and yet go on functioning on the basis of essentially 19th century attitudes toward creativity. The idea of the "unique-ness" of the artist and his work has, for instance, certainly been dictated by a 19th century Romanticism and by the notion that art is essentially for the museums and the art gallery. ONE RESULT OF THIS KIND OF REVERENCE FOR THE SACREDNESS OF ART AND FOR THE SALEABILITY OF ONE'S WORK HAS CERTAINLY BEEN A REFUSAL TO CONSIDER OTHER POSSIBLE FORMS OF EXPRESSION. THE OBSESSION WITH TRADITIONAL ARTIFACTS CONTINUES THEREFORE EVEN IN THE 70s AND WITH IT A SLAVISH DEPENDENCE ON TECHNIQUES WHICH REFLECT MANUAL DEXTERITY RATHER THAN MENTAL DISCIPLINE. It is still very much a "artifact-oriented" attitude which prevails even today and it is no wonder then that so many of our supposedly 'modern' artists still persist in carefully stretching their canvasses and laboriously preparing their etching-plates! The general absence of a sculptural involvement so far amongst our artists certainly points to the fact that our artists have so far been not so much interested in the many dimensions of reality as with the making of pretty "pictures" that will hang on a wall! In retrospect, the works produced so far have constituted little more than exercises in good taste. Modern Malaysian art proper has hardly begun.

The local artists under the circumstances have never come face to face with the analytical and requestioning nature of modern art. The search for a new viewpoint of reality or a new means of reflecting reality has certainly witnessed no real incentives so far. The kind of academicism that passes off for modernism in Malaysia then needs to be very seriously requestioned. What is the function of the Malaysian artist within the Malaysian context and what is the lesson to be learnt from the modern art developments which have manifested themselves in the west so far? THE ANSWER CERTAINLY DOES NOT LIE IN THE EMULATING OF EXPRESSIONIST INFLUENCES OR EVEN, CONSTRUCTIVISM. THE ARTISTS IN THIS EXHIBITION ARE THEREFORE REJECTING ALL THE DEVELOPMENTS WHICH HAVE TAKEN PLACE IN MALAYSIAN ART SO FAR, ESPECIALLY,THE ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONIST INVOLVEMENT OF THE 60s AND THE CONSTRUCTIVIST "NEW SCENE" INVOLVEMENT OF THE LATE 60s AND EARLY 70s. WE BELIEVE THAT THESE TWO GROUPS OF MALAYSIAN ARTISTS WHO CONSTITUTE THE TWO MOST SERIOUS GROUPS OF ARTISTS TO HAVE EMERGED SO FAR HAVE FAILED TO COME UP WITH ANY REAL SOLUTION TO THE DILEMMA OF MODERN MALAYSIAN ART. THE FACT THAT ALMOST ALL THE ARTISTS WHO FUNCTIONED WITHIN THESE TWO "MOVEMENTS" HAVE BEEN UNABLE TO CONTINUE DEVELOPING MEANINGFULLY FOR ANY ACTUAL LENGTH OF TIME CERTAINLY UNDERLIES AN INABILITY TO CONTINUE MANIPULATING THOSE INFLUENCES WHICH THEY HAD ATTEMPTED TO INTRODUCE. IT IS OUR BELIEF THAT THERE WAS, IN THE FINAL COUNT, NO REAL INTELLECTUAL CONVICTION BEHIND THEIR INVOLVEMENTS! THE COMMITMENT, IN-RETROSPECT, HAD TENDED TO BE MOTIVATED BY STYLISTIC RATHER THAN INTELLECTUAL CONSIDERATIONS AND NO WONDER THEN THAT THE ARTISTS OF THESE TWO MOVEMENTS HAVE SO EASILY CEASED TO PRODUCE WORKS. THE MOST MOTIVATING INFLUENCE ON ANY WORTHWHILE ARTIST HAS, IN THE FINAL COUNT, BEEN HIS ARTISTIC CONVICTION. THIS FACTOR IS, SADLY, VERY MISSING IN MALAYSIAN ART!

It is our belief therefore that some honest reconsiderations be made at this juncture in the 70s. Perhaps, the most important will have to do with the nature and function of art within the Asian context. Some interesting observations may be made when we begin to look at the art forms which appeared in the Asian past. If in the past Asian artists had produced works which reflected the underlying philosophical and religious attitudes within which they lived and functioned there is today an almost total absence of such committment. If in the past, Asian art had reflected particular cultural considerations there is today a very serious absence of such infuences. The modern Asian artists have by and large opted for a scientific and rationalistic attitude and ignored the mystical and religious considerations which helped produce the great artistic traditions of Asia in the past. Clearly, the dilemma of modern Asian art to a very large extent has been the inability of Asian artists to identify themsleves with their own cultural and philosophical traditions and values. The long periods of colonial domination plus the advent of a 20th century scientific materialism seems to have overwhelmed the Asian artist and left him dependent on a wholly rationalistic outlook. His art forms have changed in the process and he today mirrors an almost total dependence on artistic influences which are the outcome of a tradition which found its impetus in the west. The story of modern Asian art, ironically, has really been the story of an almost self-conscious attempt to escape this tradition! Very few Asian artists up to the present time have attempted to study the problem at its roots. THIS EXHIBITION IS AN ATTEMPT.

The argument that a scientific and rationalistic attitude toward artistic creativity is very inevitable in the light of a 20th century materialism seems somehow to ignore the very essence and purpose of art which is the heightening of the spectator's perception and experience of reality. The artist HAS a choice and he CAN dictate the process of perception. IT IS OUR CONTENTION THAT THERE ARE ALTERNATE WAYS OF APPROACHING REALITY AND THE WESTERN EMPIRICAL AND HUMANISTIC VIEWPOINTS ARE NOT THE ONLY VALID ONES THERE ARE. AS SUCH, THE TENDENCY AMONGST MODERN MALAYSIAN ARTISTS TO HAVE SUCCUMBED TO A WESTERN-ORIENTED VIEWPOINT OF REALITY WHICH BEGAN IN THE EUROPEAN RENAISSANCE (REALLY, GREECE!) SEEMS INDICATIVE OF AN EASY CAPITULATION TO A SCIENTIFIC VIEWPOINT OF REALITY. THERE HAVE, IN FACT, BEEN VERY FEW ATTEMPTS MADE BY ASIANS (EXCEPTING PERHAPS FOR SOME JAPANESE ARTISTS) TO SUBSTITUTE AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH IN THE APPRECIATION OF REALITY. ONE RESULT OF THIS READY ACCEPTANCE OF THE WESTERN VIEWPOINT HAS CERTAINLY BEEN THE INEVITABLE DEPENDENCE AND EMULATION OF FORMS AND IDIOMS THAT HAVE THEIR ORIGINS IN THE WEST. AS SUCH MOST MODERN ASIAN ARTISTS WILL NEVER BE ABLE TO COME UP WITH CONTRIBUTIONS THAT ARE TOTALLY OUTSIDE THE WESTERN EXPERIENCE. AS SUCH, THEY CANNOT POSSIBLY MAKE ANY SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE INTERNATIONAL MODERN ART SCENE. THEY WILL GO ON PRODUCING WORKS, WHICH NO MATTER HOW EFFICIENT THIER HANDLING OF WESTERN-ORIENTED IDIOMS, WILL ALWAYS REMAIN DERIVATIVE AND SECOND-RATE!

TWO: "ANTI-FORMALIST AND ANTI-AESTHETIC"

The present exhibition needs to be viewed as an extension of the "Dokumentasi 72" show which was held at the Dewan Bahasa Dan Pustaka in May 1972. The exhibition featured the results of our individual experiments carried out between December 1970 and May 1972. We were then very much influenced by Post-War developments in Constructive Art. In accepting the actual physicality of things, we had reached a point where our works drew attention to the "real-ness" of the elements that we were employing. We had abandoned illusionistic devices altogether by 1971 and had become involved with actual, space, actual time and actual light. Problems pertaining to actual gravity and movement were also manifesting themselves in our scheme of things then. Our approach at that time was however still dictated by "formal-esthetic" considerations. THE DIRECT CONFRONTATION WITH A REALITY THAT WAS NO LONGER DEPENDENT ON ILLUSIONISTIC DEVICES HOWEVER FORCED UPON US A RECONSIDERATION THAT HAD TO BE MADE IF WE WERE TO CONTINUE WITH THE MANIPULATION OF ACTUAL PHYSICAL SITUATIONS. HOW, FOR INSTANCE, WERE WE GOING TO CONFRONT PHYSICAL REALITY? AS CONSTRUCTIVE ARTISTS, WE HAD UNTIL THEN TENDED TO VIEW REALITY SCIENTIFICALLY AND OBJECTIVELY BUT AFTER THAT SHOW, WE BEGAN TO CONSIDER THE POSSIBILITY OF APPROACHING REALITY FROM AN ALTOGETHER DIFFERENT PREMISE. The examples of certain modern Japanese artists who had attempted to view reality from an essentially oriental standpoint tempted us to requestion the validity of a scientific and materialistic viewpoint of reality that is essentially western in origin. This exhibition is the outcome of several developments which took place following that decision nearly two years ago.

There were two fundamental issues that occupied our attention after the "Dokumentasi 72" show. We requestioned two essential considerations behind the traditional work of art, namely, (i) THE RELEVANCE OF "FORMAL-ESTHETIC" INFLUENCES IN THE WORK AND (ii) THE HUMANISTIC NOTION OF THE ARTIST AS A "UNIQUE" INDIVIDUAL AND HIS EGO-CENTRIC INVOLVEMENT IN THE ACTUAL CREATION OF A WORK.

We were at that time fully aware of the "anti-formalist" developments which had taken place in the west during the 1960s. Having arrived at a point where we were faced with the prospects of having to deal with the actual physicality of things, it seemed natural that we should requestion the validity and effectiveness of "traditional" art-forms (i.e. painting, sculpture, relief, print, etc.). Our attention was inevitably drawn to such "anti-art" artists as the Dadaists, Marcel Duchamp, Yves-Klein, Pierro Manzoni, Tingneley and John Cage (the composer of "silent music"). The conceptual work of the Japanese Conceptualist Yoko Ono also interested us at this point. The realisation that it WAS POSSIBLE to jettison all formalistic and aesthetic considerations from the work of art drew us quite inevitably to the notion of art as Conceptual experience. We became determined to work outside "formal-esthetic" considerations. Again, the realisation that so many of the "anti-art" pioneers of the west had in fact been inspired by essentially oriental philosophical considerations certainly bolstered our determination to function outside "western-centric" considerations.

There were some implications about the move toward a Conceptual involvement, however. For one thing, we realised that our art-college backgrounds had left us with very little to go on with. The many skills that we had acquired suddenly seemed irrelevant and with it, the many aesthetic theories that we had been exposed to in Art History. The crucial issue now seemed to point to a philosophical involvement! It was here that we found ourselves very inadequate. One outcome of this realisation has been a voracious reading programme that has lasted nearly two years. We read eastern as well as western philosophy. The realisation that the task at hand was a difficult hy. Therealisation that the task at hand was ad and complex one resulted in our deciding to enter upon an intellectual collaboration that was to finally lead to our deciding to produce works together. This was not be achieved until very much later but it seemed inevitable even then in 1972.

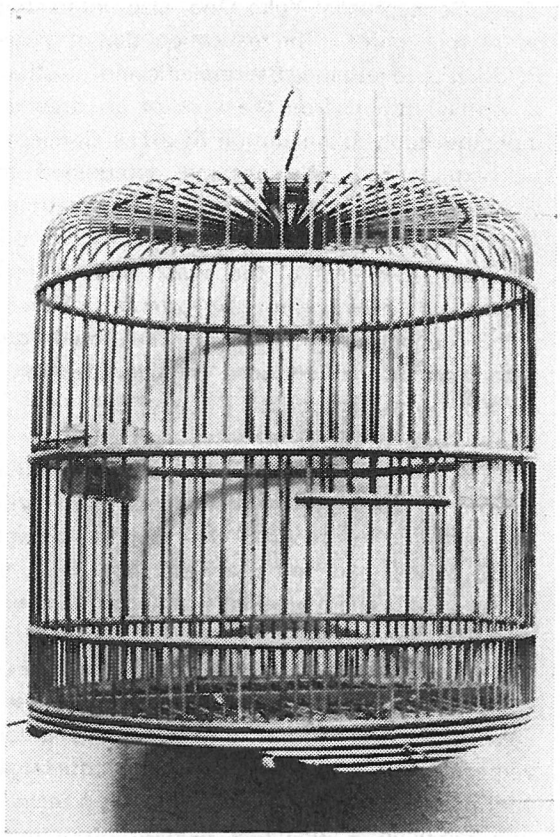
The voracious reading programme then constituted the most important aspect of the search. Besides reading philosophy, we also read books on the art of the east and west in the hope of discovering essential differencas which exist between the artistic traditions of the east and the artistic traditions of the west. We began to find even at this stage that local artists were unable to help us very much as their interests lay in "picture-making" pursuits that were still dependent on stylistic and technical considerations that are linked to a "formal-esthetic" approach. One outcome of this fact has been a dependence on persons outside the Malaysian artistic community. We consulted at various stages people outside the artscene who were very well-versed in the history of ideas and with the evolution of historical events. We consulted university lecturers, historians, sociologists, religious experts, writers and dramatists. The search for a philosophical rationale that would allow us to function outside a "western-centric" viewpoint of reality demanded that we think and function beyond the confines of art itself.

The desire on our part to reject "formal-esthetic" considerations in our scheme of things must also be attributed to our belief that what is needed in modern art in the 70s is not so much an involvement with techniques and styles but rather a new way of confronting reality that is not hampered by purely "artistic" considerations dependent on formalistic and aesthetic criteria. Very simply, the crucial issue in modern art today is not so much the problem of how we "see" things (visual/retinal) but how we "conceive" reality (conceptual.) This new attitude in art today demands that we requestion the very validity of a codified Art Criticism which has so far been founded upon aesthetic and formalistic criteria. That the validity of a schematised art criticism founded on an objective methodology is today being

attacked by younger artists points to a deliberate desire on the part of the serious artist of the 70s to view aspects of reality without the limitations of certain "relationships" of codified data which are based upon the art historian's form-inspired view of art. There is today a deliberate desire on the part of the most serious artists to understand "phenomenal" processes via dialectics and this seems to have brought the artist to a position that is akin to that of the philosopher's! The deliberate attempt to reject the myth of the 'unique artistic soul' and with it, the notion of the artistic experience as being an interplay of esoteric circumstances between the "artist/creator" and his "stimuli" has in fact been motivated by a new respect for the spectator's ability to confront reality directly. This new reconsideration of the spectator's relevance in the whole scheme of things has in fact resulted in a reconsideration of the very purpose of art itself.

THAT ART IS BECOMING A VERY DIALECTICAL AND CONCEPTUAL ACTIVITY TODAY IS INDICATIVE OF A NEW STATE OF AFFAIRS WHICH SUPPOSEDLY "MODERN" ASIAN ARTISTS ARE YET TO BECOME AWARE OF! Aesthetic and formalistic influences then become quite irrelevant and obsolete in the new scheme of things for they are essentially founded on the notion of art as something that is "created" out of the manipulation and organising of the various elements of design (i.e. line, shape, colour, texture, form, surface, design, etc.). Very clearly, the modern art committment today is pointing to an involvement that transcends preoccupation with the manipulation of materials and styles and finding its raison d'etre in a dialectical reconsideration of phenomenal processes that exist outside a "form-oriented" notion of art. The artist has, as a result, been forced to requestion the nature of his idioms.

The notion of art as conceptual and dialectical activity then demands that the artist equip himself with the means to undertake such a complex activity dealing with the world of pure ideas! He has, as a result, been forced to look beyond technical skills and equip himself with some semblance of awareness of such diverse areas of knowledge as philosophy, linguistics, psychology, sociology, physics, mass-communication and even mathematics! The effectiveness of any serious artist of the future therefore will depend on his ability to think and function beyond the confines of "traditional" notions of art itself. The best modern artists of the 70s are very clearly no longer makers of artifacts but rather thinkers and theoriticians and this fact must surely place their contributions on the same level as those of the most creative and influential minds of our epoch. Art is finally shedding its somewhat traditional function and acquiring a new significance that places upon the serious artist of the 70s a whole new challenge.



Empty bird-cage after release of bird at 2.46 p.m, on Monday 10th June 1974.

THREE: "NO HUMANISTIC OR SUBJECTIVE INTENT"

We discussed the possibility of jointly-producing works even as early as 1972. The idea of producing works jointly brought with it some reconsiderations that had to be made about the artist's ego in our scheme of things. The question of the artist's ego in fact drew our attention to some fundamental differences which exist between the "western-centric" and "eastern-centric" modes of artistic expressions. The Humanist viewpoint with its emphasis on the artist as an individual and its scientific and objective view of reality, we found, contrasted with the traditional Asian view of things as it had once existed. The attitude toward Nature, for instance, was not so much "felt" as in the case of the Chinese artist but observed and analysed on the basis of its outward appearances by western artists from the Renaissance onwards. The essential difference then was not so much one of viewpoint as that of attitude, we found. WHEREAS ONE WAS MOTIVATED BY MYSTICAL CONSIDERATIONS, THE OTHER WAS ESSENTIALLY SCIENTIFIC! Again, the realisation that all our important Malaysian artists have in fact functioned within a Humanistic and rationalistic attitude which stems from the European Renaissance of the 15th century seemed quite absurd to us. No one had bothered to requestion this tendency!

The essential difference between the individualistic approach of the western artist with his egoistic preoccupations and that of the oriental artist who remains a non-entity in his confrontation with Nature is also worth considering. Benjamin Rowland in his "Art in East and West" sums up the situation by discussing the work of Michealangelo and the eight-century Chinese painter, Wu Tao-tzu:

> "Michealangelo's violence and dynamic contortion appear as the outward manifestation of an internal conflict of forces mutually stimulating and paralysing each other. These titan forms are typical of the West, in that they are called from the vasty deep of the soul of an individual genius and are the expressions of his unique reaction to the world. Wu Tao-tzu's forms are not so much expressions of an individual's own state of emotion, but universal graphic portrayals of the flux of the world movement in action, the force that sucks up the tide and breathes whirlwinds. Wu Tao-tzu's design has no humanistic or subjective intent!"

IT WAS THE SELF-EFFACING ASPECTS OF ORIENTAL ART THEN THAT BEGAN TO ATTRACT OUR ATTENTION. That so many modern Asian artists involved with modern art have so readily accepted the scientific and humanistic view of things without having bothered to reconsider any other possibilities seems to us quite sad today. That they have up till the present time never bothered to requestion their acceptance and manipulation of art-forms derived from the west must certainly account for the fact that up till now all the art-forms produced have tended to remain little

more than echoes of their western originals. CLEARLY, WE FOUND OURSELVES RE-QUESTIONING THE TYPES OF FORMS THAT WE COULD POSSIBLY MANIPULATE AND THE PURPOSE OF THESE FORMS. WE NOW HAD TO PURGE OURSELVES OF ALL WESTERN-CENTRIC INFLUENCES IN ORDER TO PROCEED FURTHER. THE DECISION TO THROW OVERBOARD EVERYTHING THAT WE HAD LEARNT IN A WESTERN ART-COLLEGE BECAME A NECESSARY PRE-REQUISITE. THERE WAS NOW A SERIOUS NEED TO RE-CONSIDER THE "ROLE" OF THE ARTIST IN OUR NEW SCHEME OF THINGS.

Our interest in the self-effacing role of the artist must certainly explain our decision to start looking at the traditional artistic forms existing within the indegenous cultural traditions of Malaysia. Our special interest in the "Wayang Kulit" repertoire and especially, the role of the "Dalang" or the manipulator of this indegenous form of shadow-puppetry was to result in our discovering a new "role" for ourselves in our new scheme of things. The "Dalang" suggested to us the possibilities of functioning within a "mediumistic" capacity. What seemed especially interesting about the "Dalang" was that whilst he had to mouth all dialogue in the plot and play out the parts of all his puppets, the audience never saw him or learnt anything about him! His self-effacement, we discovered, was almost complete even if he constituted the real force in whole performance! He was quite simply the "medium" and the "initiator" between the audience and his puppets. Here was very clearly an "oriental" artist who functioned with no humanistic or subjective influences! Our idea of the artist as functioning within a "mediumistic" capacity then must be attributed to the "Dalang".

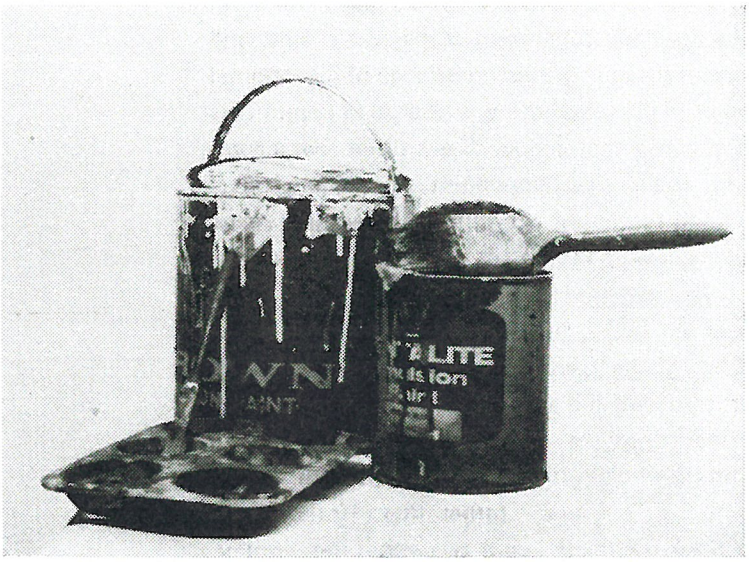
It was at this point that we decided to produce works jointly. THE DECISION TO PRODUCE WORKS JOINTLY WAS MOTIVATED BY OUR DESIRE TO PLAY DOWN INDIVIDUALISTIC CONSIDERATIONS AS FAR AS THAT WAS POSSIBLE. ALL DECISIONS WE DECIDED WOULD BE MADE JOINTLY AND NO EMOTIONAL CONSIDERATIONS WOULD BE ALLOWED TO DICTATE THE MANIPULATING OF THE FORMS THAT WE WOULD USE. THE OBJECTS WE WOULD USE, AS FAR AS IS POSSIBLE, WOULD NOT BE CONSTRUCTED BY US. IN A SENSE, WE WERE AIMING AT A CONSCIOUS DETACHMENT FROM THE WORK OF ART. THERE WOULD BE NO HUMANISTIC OR SUBJECTIVE INTENT! OUR WORK, WE ALSO DECIDED, WOULD BE MYSTICAL IN NATURE.

FOUR: THE RELEVANCE OF A MYSTICAL VIEWPOINT

The decision on our part to approach the artistic involvement from a mystical rather than scientific standpoint must inevitably raise certain questions about the relevance and validity of such an undertaking in the light of 20th century conditions. There are those who will no doubt question the relevance of a mystical approach and dismiss it as a somewhat "unrealistic" involvement in the context of our scientific and technological times. Are we not guilty of functioning on the basis of something that is vague and difficult to account for ? Our answer to such a question would be that a mystical approach is as valid today as it was before simply because the very basic questions about life and death still remain with us and with it, the desire to attach some kind of meaning to our very existence ! The overbearing materialism of the west seems somehow to have forced our attention to a consideration of tangible rather than intangible forces and no less an artist than John Cage, the composer of "silent music", has drawn attention to the dilemma of modern man. Calvin Tomkins is his book, "Ahead of the Game" describes Cage's attitude toward the situation :

> "Cage believes that the world is changing more rapidly and more drastically than most people realise. A great many of the traditional attitudes of western thought will soon be obsolete, he feels, and a great many of the older traditions of oriental thought are becoming increasingly relevant to life in the west. Cage insists that the true function of art in our time is to open up the minds and hearts of contemporary men and women to the immensity of these

Used tins of paint, palette and paint brushes found at the ITM School of Art and Design.



changes in order that they may be able "to wake up to the very life" they are living. Art and life, for Cage, are no longer separate entities as they have been in the western past, but very nearly identical; and Cage's whole career can in fact be seen as a long campaign to break down the demarcations between the two."

It is perhaps interesting to note that (i) John Cage was very much inspired by Zen Buddhist influences and (ii) that art and life have never been divorced in the East! Professor Daisetsu Suzuki, the great Zen Scholar, has in fact alluded to this fact in his book, "Mysticism: Christian and Buddhist":

> "In the same way, every minute of human life as long as it is an expression of its inner self is orginal, divine, creative and cannot be retrieved. Every individual life is thus a work of art. Whether or not one makes it a fine inimitable work of art depends upon one's consciousness of the working of 'sunyata" within oneself.'

We wish to quote the opinion of yet another western art-critic in our efforts to prove the relevance of a mystical approach in art today. Kenneth Coutts-Smith in his article "Art in Violence" which appeared in "ART AND ARTISTS" (Oct. 1966) states:

> "Art is not an isolated phenomenon, or a matter of simple aesthetics, but is on the one hand part of our total experience, both psychologically and socially, and on the other an objectification of our 'inner' experience. But we have, as Roland Laign has pointed out 'largely lost touch with our inner world in gaining control of our external world. We have become strangers to our own experience, we have become alienated from ourselves."

The relevance of a mystical approach then should seem meaningful enough. In the deliberate attempt to reject a materialistic viewpoint of reality we are simply returning to an artistic attitude that is essentially oriental. The desire to search for an approach that will induce a direct "spiritual" rather than "intellectual" involvement on the part of the spectator underlies the adoption of an alternate approach from that employed by the western artist. It is as such not a nihilistic involvement nor is it destructive in outlook. IT CONSTITUTES A VERY POSITIVE AFFIRMATION THAT ART, AT ITS MOST PROFOUND, AFFORDS THE VIEWER A MYSTICAL PSYCHIC EXPERIENCE THAT LEADS HIM DIRECTLY TO LIFE ITSELF.

That there is today in the west a serious need for mystical and spiritual committments is certainly indicative of a somewhat unusual situation which has arisen out of the western society's over-emphasis of materialistic values. One needs only to be reminded of the many pseudo-religious cults that have manifested themselves in the U.S. lately to become aware of the general absence of 'inner' peace in the west. Again, the tendency amongst the younger generation in the west to seek a "higher reality" via the taking of hallucinogenic drugs certainly underlies a crying need for the balming and soothing influences that mysticism can provide. In the face of a technologically-inspired alienation from life itself, the search for 'inner' peace becomes one of the crucial problems of our time. There are certainly many lessons that the Asian artist can learn from the developments taking place in the west and one of these is the very relevance of his oriental view of life and the world around him. It is perhaps symptomatic of our times that a mystical and spiritual viewpoint is so often ridiculed and dismissed as "old-fashioned" by Asian themselves in the face of a growing materialism!

It is our belief that the strength of the Asian artist of the past (especially the Far Eastern artist) lay in his ability to view life and reality in terms of the meditative and the spiritual. The mystical attitude of the eastern artists with its "spiritual" rather than "intellectual" outlook certainly contrastswith the notion

of "art for art's sake" that seems to be the fashion these days. Art in the Asian past was never meant to provide "intellectual entertainment" but rather it aimed at a heightening of one's awareness of reality and helped bring about a spiritual and mystical communion with nature and the Universe itself. As such, there was no dichotomy between art and life. Again, that so many major western artists of the 20th century have in fact drawn their inspiration from the mystical philosophies of the east (e.g. John Cage, Yves-Klein, Ad Rheinhart, Tobey, Brecht) certainly indicates how necessary it is for Asian artists to reconsider their Asian heritage. The tendency amongst so many creative Asian artistes (be they artists, writers, poets, dramatists, or musicians) to go on functioning on the basis of a "western-centric" aesthetics and formalism whilst remaining oblivious of their own artistic and philosophical traditions is certainly indicative of a very sad state of affairs which prevails all over Asia today!



Potted plant watered and looked after by the two artists over a period of seven months.

It seems necessary here to discuss some fundamental differences which exist between the mystical and materialistic philosophical viewpoints for an understanding of their essential differences might allow for a better appreciation of reality itself. If the scientific viewpoint draws its impetus from an empirical approach founded on "logical" demonstration, the mystical viewpoint functions on the basis of "feeling" and "intuition". What seems especially interesting is that whereas the scientist aspires toward an 'intellectual' understanding of the tangible forces of nature via 'objective' research and analysis the mystic strives toward a "spiritual communion" with the unknowable forces of the Universe via "mental" contemplation and meditation. As a rule, the scientist has tended to dismiss mystical considerations in his adherence to a "no nonsense" approach to things whilst the unperturbed mystic on his part has tended to smile tolerantly at the scientist's objectivity. It used to be a truism that positivist

science would not admit anything that could not be explained 'objectively' but things seem to have changed. If in the past 'intuition' had seemed a suspicious word to the scientist, it is today becoming a necessary key to new discoveries. After all, how many significant scientific 'breakthroughs' have been made on the basis of notions that first manifested themselves as 'intuitive' deductions! Similarly, if previously science had refused to function on the basis of uncertainties, there is today a greater willingness to entertain factors which cannot be explained logically. A classic example in 20th century physics is Huisenberg's "uncertainty principle" which marks the limit of the scientist's interest in the electron's exact nature and location in space. There have been profound changes in western thinking in the last ten years as regards the nature of the physical world, most clearly expressed in the physical sciences. No longer do scientists believe in a finite world or in the permanence of matter. The physicist may describe it in terms of waves, particles, or energy, according to the aspect of nature which he is investigating and he no longer speaks of objects but of events. It is interesting to note that oriental mystics have in fact been advocating the nation that reality and our world is a collection of processes rather than entities nearly 2000 years ago!

The last ten years have witnessed many new discoveries which have upset the scientist's traditional insistence upon "objective" scrutiny. One result has certainly been a new willingness to have second thoughts about the mystic. No wonder then that an eminent American scientist, Dr. Elmer Green of the Menninger Foundation chose to spend months in India sticking all kinds of wires on the body of a meditating Indian Yogi who remained quite oblivious of the happenings going on around him. The naked Hindu fakir resting on his bed of nails has evidently begun to interest the scientist! Again, the realisation that only one-tenth of the workings of the human brain is known to science has certainly brought with it a new reconsideration of such things as ESP and EEG which were at one time dismissed as mystical nonsense. In the field of cosmology, some of the most remarkable discoveries have been made that have upset traditional notions about the Universe. It is coming from all sides now — the inexplicable and the extra-ordinary. Matter over anti-matter, time flowing backwards, black holes in space, particles flying faster than the speed of light and passing through Earth without bumping! WHAT WE ARE TRYING TO SUGGEST QUITE SIMPLY IS THAT THE SCIENTIFIC AND EMPIRICAL VIEWPOINT OF REALITY IS NOT THE ONLY VALID ONE THERE IS. THE MYSTIC'S VIEW OF THE UNIVERSE IS ALSO VALID FOR THE MANY PARALLELISMS THAT ARE BECOMING APPARENT TODAY. In so many cases, the differences are no more than liguistic differences. What the Taoist mystic referred to as the "Chi" or Hindu yogi refers to as the "samsara" may be described scientifically as that "energy" which can neither be created nor destroyed but which may be transformed! WHAT WE ARE INSISTING IS THAT THERE ARE MANY LEVELS OF REALITY AND THE SCIENTIFIC AND EMPIRICAL VIEWPOINT ONLY LEADS TO AN UNDERSTANDING OF ONE FACET OF THAT REALITY. No less a thinker than Arthur Koestler, a scientifically-trained western writer, has openly admitted to this fact. In his book, "The Roots of Coincidence" Koestler admits:

> "I have no patience with religious dogma. As for mysticism, it's an undefined term. I just say there are other levels of reality than those we see with the eyes of the common man, of the scientist."



Discarded raincoat found at a Klang rubbish dump at 4.23 p.m. on Sunday 13th January 1974 that must have belonged to some one.

FIVE: A MYSTICAL CONCEPT OF TIME AND EVENT



Randomly collected sample of human hair collected from a barber shop in Petaling Jaya.

The search for a philosophical rationale within which we could function constituted our most serious problem. It must be stated at this juncture that we were not interested in any specifically "Asian" forms or imagery but rather in a viewpoint that would allow us to work outside the western-centric attitude toward form. We had chosen to work outside the "western-centric" approach (with its Humanistic, materialistic and empirical connotations) and were now interested in approaching art from a mystical standpoint. In our search for a suitable Asian philosophical tradition, we were careful however to avoid those traditions which had their origins in the notion of an absolute and moralistic God. We did not want to become encumbered by moralistic and religious

issues! A close scrutiny of the various Asian philosophical traditions then drew us to Taoist/Zen influences. The Taoist view of things with its emphasis on the spontaneity of "feeling" and its "peripheral" viewpoint of reality seemed to us a direct contrast to the scientific objectivity of the west. Again, it was very free of dogma. The fact that Taoist/Zen attitudes emphasised a "mental" (i.e. mind) rather than "retinal" (i.e. eye) view of the world convinced us that our answer might lie in this direction. It seems necessary to state at this point that Taoism (and Zen, which springs from it) is essentially a philosophy rather than a religion. Taoist thinking concerns itself with the understanding of life and reality directly instead of in the abstract, linear terms of representational thinking.

Our interest at this stage was with the perception of reality itself. We were now faced with two particular ways of perceiving reality. There was firstly a conscious one-thing-at-a-time "central" vision that went back to the European Renaissance and there was the "peripheral" vision of the Taoists which envisaged reality as a never-ending continuum of 'events.' If in the west, the tendency had been to isolate aspects of reality and study them consciously, in the Far East the tendency had been to observe reality in its entirety. The "peripheral" vision of the Taoist mystic thus allowed for the noticing of objects and movements not in the line of a "central" vision! It is perhaps interesting to note that the Taoist mystic had utilised this manner of looking at things neary 2,000 years ago and that the west was not to accept this viewpoint until Einstein published his theories on matter, time and space. Picasso's much celebrated Cubism was, in retrospect, a very belated attempt to correct the limitations of the Renaissance artist's Euclidian view of reality!

On the face of it, the kind of "peripheral" viewpoint we have borrowed from the Taoist/Zen mystics might appear similar to the viewpoint accepted by the western artist after the advent of Cubism and Constructivism. It is our belief that there are certain parallelisms but whereas the western artist still persists in viewing the physical state of the world, we are essentially approaching reality from a purely "mental" and "metaphysical" standpoint. The essential differences between the Taoist point of view and that of the western artist still remains today and it is in the final count one of attitude. The western artist's interest in the "physicality" of things must surely account for his interest in a "form-oriented" approach that generally persists. The following quotation from Neville Weston's "Kaleidescope of Modern Art" on Cezanne might be interesting to consider:

> "Cezanne wanted to see nature with the uninhibited eyes of the newly-born, and to deal with this idea, he evolved a method which was almost wholly concerned with planar abstractions. Looking for and emphasising planes parallel to the picture-plane, he involved himself and the spectator in the very PHYSICAL ACT OF LOOKING AND SEEING. Cezanne's method relied on an acceptance of the hemispheric quality of personal vision, which is contrary to the Renaissance Albertian perspective with its central vanishing-point. Cezanne allowed his eyes — both of them — to wander over the scene in front of him, whether it was portrait, still-life or landscape, and select different vanishing-points. In a letter to Emile Bernard, he recommended the study of geometric objects such as the cone, cube, cylinder and the sphere, later adding that Nature could be treated in terms of these shapes. CEZANNE WAS SUGGESTING A WAY OF SEEING NATURE'S COMPLEX FORMS." (The capitals are ours).

The essential difference between the Taoist/Zen "ontological view" of reality and that of Cezanne's "retinal" approach is summed up by Alan Watts in his book, "The Way of Zen":

> "Thus scientific convention decides whether the eel should be a fish or a snake, and

grammatical convention determines what experiences should be called objects and what shall be called actions. How arbitrary such conventions may be can be seen from the question, "What happens to your fist (noun-object) when you open your hand?" The object miraculously vanishes because an action was disguised by a part of speech usually assigned to a thing! In English, the differences between things and actions are clearly if not logically, distinguished, but a great number of Chinese words do the duty of both nouns and verbs — so that one who thinks in Chinese has little difficulty in seeing that objects are also events, that our world is a collection of processes rather than entities."

Again, the mystical viewpoint of the Taoist artist is very aptly stated by Mario Bussagli in his book, "Chinese Art":

"For the Chinese artist, plants and animals are not just physical presences, nor are landscapes just representations of places. All have a direct connection with something infinite and indefinable, as the very life of nature itself, for which the Chinese artist feels an almost mystical propensity."

Mario Bussagli goes on elsewhere in his book:

"Being convinced of the unity of the Universe, the Chinese artist (and the Far East) refuses to halt reality in a single instance in time or localise it in a definite point in space."

It will be gathered from all this that the Taoist view of reality is one that has already considered the question of time. The Taoist/Zen tendency to view the object as an "event" rather than as "form" presupposes that objects existence within an interrelated field or continuum. Time in this case is a "mental" time that cannot be measured for all measurements can only remain relative! Let us on the other

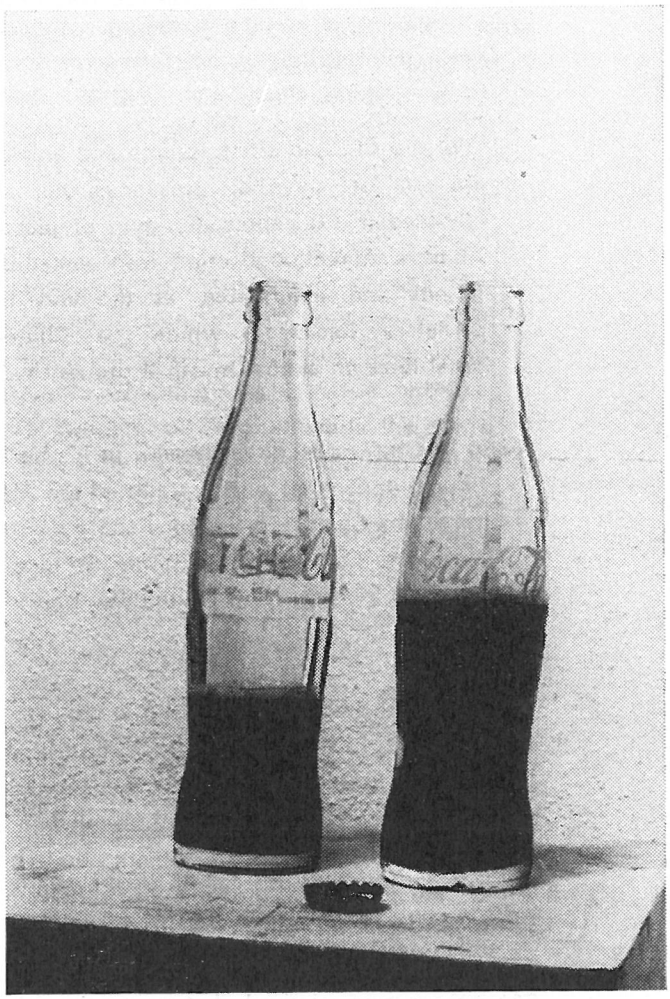


Empty chair on which many persons have sat on.

hand consider the western artist's treatment of of the time-element in art. Working within a temporal TIME/SPACE concept the western artist has tended to go on dealing with the time-element in "physical" terms. He has emphasised time by the deliberate activating of spaces either by actual "Kinetic" movement (Gabo, Maholy-Nagy, Calder, Tinguley, Le Parc, Schoeffer, Takis etc.,) or by forcing a physical interaction between the viewer and the work by means of 'environmental' considerations (Giacometti, Caro, Carl Andre, Serra, Flavin, de Maria, Agam etc.,). The western artist's attempt to create works which exist "within the viewers own space" then must seem quite redundant to the oriental artist. Similarly, the commonly held notion amongst so many "Kinetic" artist that their works are only "active" when "switched on" would seem very naive to the Taoist.' Whereas the western artist has tended to envisage time through "physical" action, the oriental artist "feels" it mentally. It is essentially a very metaphysical concept of time that the oriental artist deals with!

IT SEEMS NECESSARY AT THIS POINT TO STATE THAT ALL OUR WORKS, WHILST REMAINING STATIC ARE NEVERTHELESS "KINETIC" FOR THEY ENCOMPASS TIME/SPACE CONSIDERATIONS. THE TIME FACTOR IN OUR WORKS IS VERY MUCH A "MENTAL" TIME. THE EXPERIENCE OF THE FOURTH DIMENSION EXISTS IN THE MIND OF THE SPECTATOR. THE FORMS TRANSCEND THEIR "OBJECT-NESS" AND EXIST PRIMARILY AS DOCUMENTATIONS OF "EVENTS". WE ARE AS SUCH NOT INTERESTED IN THE FORMAL AND AESTHETIC CONSIDERATIONS. WE ARE INTERESTED IN THE PROCESSES THAT THEY ARE. WHEREAS THE WESTERN ARTIST APPROACHES ART IN TERMS OF "SPATIO-TEMPORAL/SENSORIAL" CONSIDERATIONS, WE ARE APPROACHING ART FROM A "MENTAL/MEDITATIVE/MYSTICAL" STANDPOINT.

Two half-drunk Coca-Cola bottles.



SIX: A "MENTAL/MEDITATIVE/MYSTICAL" VIEWPOINT OF REALITY AS OPPOSED TO A "SPATIO/TEMPORAL/SENSORIAL', VIEWPOINT OF THE WESTERN ARTIST

There are some fundamental pre-requisites that seem necessary for anyone wanting to understand and appreciate our work. For one thing, it seems necessary for the spectator to rid himself of any preconceived notions about what "Art" is and ought to be. Anyone coming to this exhibition with the expectation of being exposed to traditional artifacts (painting, sculpture, print etc.,) will certainly be disappointed. We are not involved with artifacts but rather with a series of "mental" experiences which we have jointly-initiated. Our work very clearly is of a conceptual nature. It is our hope that these "experiences" which we are initiating will result in a new awareness of the multi-dimensional nature of reality on the part of the spectator. As we have already mentioned, we are not interested in formalistic and aesthetic considerations. By rejecting all aesthetic and formalistic considerations we are attempting a deliberate liberation from 'form-oriented" considerations. As such, concepts governing "beauty", "harmony", "structure", "style", "symbolism" and "technique" are non-existent in our scheme of things. Any attempt to read "aesthetic" considerations into the pieces that we have randomly selected can only result in a failure to understand our objective which is an involvement with the "mental" awareness of time rather than of form. What are we aiming at is not the spectator's aesthetic appreciation of forms but rather his spiritual realisation that all forms are in essence events as real as his own existence in time and space. We are trying to force upon the viewer a consciousness that he is himself the result of a series of processes. The "objects" that we have chosen to display therefore encompass fragments of actual events. Any attempt to view them as essentially "physical" forms can only result in limiting oneself to an essentially "western-centric" view of reality that is founded on "Spatio-temporal/Sensorial" considerations. Ours is essentially an ontological view of reality that is not based on "physical" but rather "mental" and mystical considerations. It is as such a viewpoint that trandscends the senses and finds its impetus in the workings of the mind.

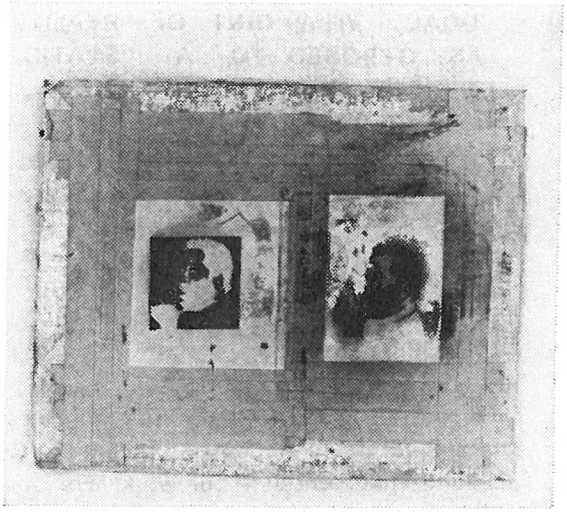
It might also seem necessary to remind our audience once again that there are no humanstic and subjective influences in our work. The artists' egoistic preoccupations are non-existent in our scheme of things even if we are initiating the process of mental perception. We are quite simply the 'initiators" of a mental process that begins initially with the confrontation which takes place between the spectator and the situation we have placed him in. What we are aiming at is a "meditative empathy" on the part of the spectator. It is an empathy that is the outcome of meditative and contemplative action. Our work is therefore founded upon a deliberate attempt to force contemplation and meditation on the part of the spectator. It is however a contemplation of a special kind that we are aiming at. It is a contemplation that does not seek "beauty" or "harmony" but aims at an awareness of the forces, the energies and the ungraspable laws of reality within which the spectator himself exists and functions!

We have placed the spectator in a situation in which he is forced to requestion his own reality. By supplying the spectator with the barest "hints" in each situation we are forcing upon the spectator an experience of "mental" time which interferes with his own consciousness of physical time. A series of time shifts manifest themselves in the spectator's mind and the spectator is transported "mentally" into a time-dimension that is essentially fluid and not hampered by physical limitations. The final result should be a multiplicity of "time-experiences" which exist beyond the work and the spectator himself. An ontological experience of reality that is not hampered by "spatio/temporal/sensorial" considerations results. The final outcome of these thought-processes functioning within "mental" time is dependent on the workings of the spectator's mind and his own imagination. At this point, we as the

"initiators", have no more control over the situation! The spectator is free to move backwards and forwards in time as his mind takes over in comtemplation and meditation.

It seems necessary to break down the process of stimulation that exists within our scheme. There are three basic requirements in the process: (i) the "object/event" (ii) the data we have supplied which helps to qualify the event and (iii) the spectator's ability to interpret and decipher the situation we have presented (both "object/event" and the data). The realisation that the "object" is really an event draws the spectator's attention to the fact that it exists within a continuum just as he does. The realisation that he and the "object" are both processes existing in time results in a breaking down of the essential differences between the 'thing' and the 'person'. In a sense, both are essentially energies in an infinite situation. As such, no heirachy can exist between the animate and the inanimate! The spectator's realisation of this fact should result in a gradual liberation from humanistic considerations. This does not result in "dehumanisation" (a western phobia!) but rather in a new spontaneity which brings him closer to "sunyata" (nothingness). This first pre-requisite of meditation and contemplation constitutes a signiricant objective in our work. Alan Watts in his book, "The Way of Zen" sums it up:

> "The idea is not to reduce the human mind to a moronic vacuity, but to bring into play its innate and spontaneous intelligence by using it without forcing it. A philosophy restricted to the alternatives of conventional language has no way of conceiving an intelligence which does not work according to an (one-at-a-time) order of thought. Yet the concrete evidence of such an intelligence is right at hand in our thoughtlessly organised bodies. This unconsciousness is not coma but what the exponents of Zen later signified as 'wu-shin' — literally "no-mind" which is to say un-self-conciousness. It is a state of wholeness in which the mind functions freely and easily, without the sensation of a second mind or ego standing in the way."



Discarded silk-screen which was used to produce many beautiful prints.

It should become clear that our whole effort is geared towards the initiating of "state of mind" via meditation. We are attempting to bring about a situation whereby the spectator will be able to grasp the 'essence' of the work itself which is the event that it is. The relevance of the data that we are supplying the spectator then seems necessary in order to draw the spectator's attention to the fact that what he is seeing in the first instance is an event not a form. It seems almost necessary at this stage to remind people used to thinking in terms of "entities" that an empty chair is really "a chair on which many spectators have sat on." Similarly, by providing necessary data we are reminding the spectator that an empty bird-cage is not so much a 'thing' as an event because of the fact that it is "an empty bird-cage with the bird flown away." It will be noticed that all our titles allude to the event. As such, it will be quite difficult to read the objects in this exhibition as forms which would be the case, otherwise.

BY DRAWING ATTENTION TO THE EVENT WE ARE INDIRECTLY ALLUDING TO THE 'ESSENCE' OR 'SPIRIT' OF THE WORK WHICH EXISTS BY VIRTUE OF THE EVENT. ONE IS AS A RESULT CONSCIOUS THAT THE MOST MUNDANE OBJECTS IN OUR EVERYDAY SITUATIONS ARE CHARGED WITH THE "ESSENCE" OF EVENTS. THIS NOTION

OF OBJECTS POSSESSING 'SPIRIT' (OR 'SEMANGAT') IS NOT DIFFICULT TO GRASP IF ONE IS AN ORIENTAL. THE ORIENTAL ARTIST HAS ALWAYS STRIVEN TO EMPHASISE THE 'SPIRITUAL ESSENCE' RATHER THAN THE OUTWARD FORM! Professor Daisetsu Suzuki has in fact summed this 'eastern-centric' approach in art:

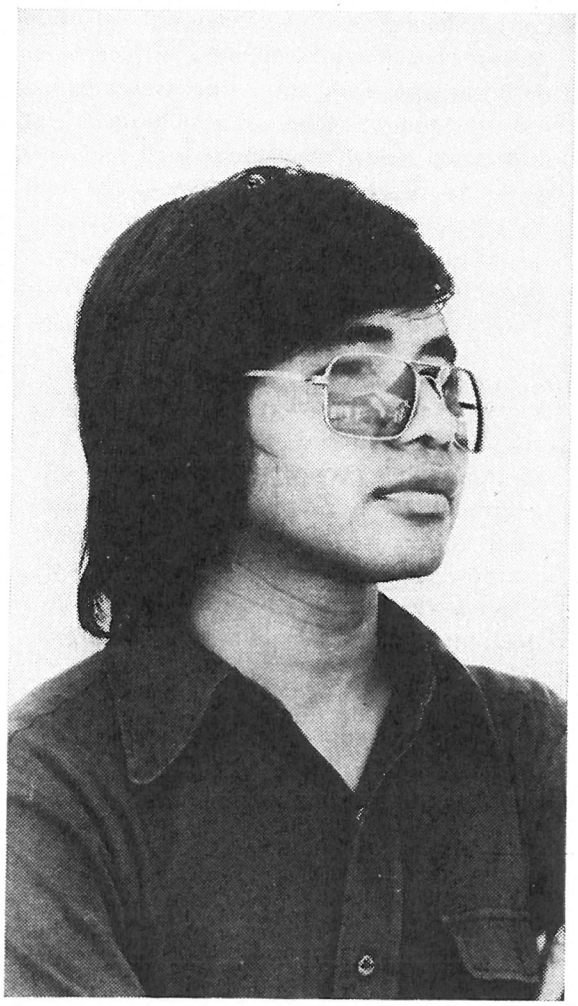
> "Oriental art consists in depicting spirit and not form. For they say that when the spirit is understood the form creates itself; the main thing is to get into the spirit of the object which the artist chooses for his subject. The West on the other hand emphasises form, endeavours to reach the spirit by means of form. The East is just the opposite: the spirit is the all in all."

It will become obvious that what seems so essential to our scheme of things is the willingness of the spectator to accept an altogether new way of perceiving forms that transcends the purely sensorial. Whilst the forms we have chosen to exhibit in this show may appear banal and mundane, they are nevertheless charged with the essence of phenomenal processes. As such, what we are drawing attention to is something that cannot be experienced by sensorial means but can be very easily grasped by the mind. In effect, we are advocating an alternate manner of viewing the most mundane things around us in our everyday situations. The works in the show, as such, are not "works of art" but the most randomly-chosen fragments of reality itself! To offer these randomly-chosen examples of reality for sale would therefore be most absurd. Indeed how does one go about pricing the most banal aspects of reality in dollars and cents? This fact should explain why all our works in this show are "unsaleable".

It seems necessary to state finally that the view of reality that we advocate whilst dealing with phenomena, is not so much phenomenological as mystical and spiritual. The experiences that we are forcing upon the spectator as such should not stop with this exhibition, but rather it should begin from this exhibition and continue with the spectators' realisation that he constitutes yet another link in the whole chain of "processes" that is the mystery of life itself. By choosing to contemplate on the most mundane of events, the spectator, we hope, will come face to face with the mystery of his own existence within an infinite and ever-evolving Universe!

Kuala Lumpur June/July 1974

SULAIMAN ESA



Biography:

1941 — Born in Johor Bharu, Johor

1962-66 — Studied at the Hornsey College of Art, London.

— Awarded the Diploma in Art & Design

1967 — Post-Graduate Course in Print-making at the Hornsey College of Art (under Michael Rothenstein)

1968 — Further study in Print-making at the "Atelier 17" in Paris (under S.W. Hayter)

1969 — Appointed Designer at the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Kuala Lumpur

1970 — Appointed Lecturer in Art at the Mara School of Art and Design, Mara Institute of Technology

1973 — Appointed Course Tutor of the Foundation Course, Mara School of Art and Design

Exhibitions:

1969-70 — Travelling Exhibition of Malaysian Art to Australia and New Zealand

— Salon Malaysia, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur

1970 — Experiment 70 sponsored by Gallery 11

— First Poets-Painters Exhibition, Kuala Lumpur

1971 — Malaysian Art 1932-71, National Art Gallery

— "Situasi Baru, Kuala Lumpur"

— Second Poets-Painters Exhibition, Kuala Lumpur

1972 — Represented Malaysia at the ASEAN Exhibition, Singapore

— Personal Choice, National Art Gallery

— "Dokumentasi 72" (with Redza Piyadasa) sponsored by the Samat Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur
— Annual Invitation Show, National Art Gallery
— Malaysian Landscape Competition, National Art Gallery

1973 — "Man and his world" Competition National Art Gallery
— Malaysian Art 1956-73, Samat Art Gallery

1974 — Represented Malaysia in the ASEAN MOBILE EXHIBITION, touring Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, Jakarta, Manila and Bangkok.
— "Towards a Mystical Reality" (with Redza Piyadasa)

Awards:

Winner of the Major Prize in the "Man and his World" Competition organized by the National Art Gallery, (1973)

Collections:

Works collected by the National Art Gallery, Malaysia; Private Collections

Other Activities:

1972 — Co-designer (with Redza Piyadasa and Latiff Mohideen) of the sets for the Malay-language musical "Uda dan Dara", Experimental Theatre

1973 — Co-Designer (with Redza Piyadasa) of the sets for the Malay-language comedy, "Alang Rentak Seribu" at the Experimental Theatre

1974 — Designer of the sets and costumes for the forthcoming comedy, "The Birds" by Aristophanes to be staged at the Experimental Theatre, in August 1974

REDZA PIYADASA

Biography:

1939 — Born in Kuantan, Pahang

1958-59 — Studied at the Malayan Teachers' College, Brinsford Lodge, Wolverhampton (U.K.)

1962 — Studied at the Specialist Teachers, Institute, Cheras, Kuala Lumpur.

1963-67 — Studied at the Hornsey College of Art, London. Awarded the Diploma in Art & Design

1969 — Appointed Lecturer at the Mara School of Art and Design, Mara Institute of Technology

1970 — Appointed Course Tutor of the Foundation Course, Mara School of Art & Design

1973 — Appointed Course Tutor, Liberal Studies Dept., Mara School of Art and Design.

Exhibitions:

1969 — Salon Malaysia, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur

— "The New Scene", Kuala Lumpur sponsored by Gallery 11

1970 — Experiment '70 sponsored by Gallery 11

— First Poets-Painters Exhibitions, Kuala Lumpur

1971 — Malaysian Art 1932-71, National Art Gallery

— Situasi Baru. Kuala Lumpur

— Second Poets-Painters Exhibition, Kuala Lumpur

1972 — Represented Malaysia at the ASEAN Exhibition, Singapore

— Personal Choice, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur

— "Dokumentasi 72" (with Sulaiman Esa) sponsored by Samat Gallery
— Annual Invitation Show, National Art Gallery
— Malaysian Landscape Competition, National Art Gallery

1973 — Malaysian Art 1956-73, Samat Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur

1974 — Represented Malaysia (with eight others) at the ASEAN MOBILE EXHIBITION touring Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, Jakarta, Manila and Bangkok.
— "Towards a Mystical Reality" (with Sulaiman Esa)

Awards:

Winner of the Major Prize, Malaysian Landscape Competition, organised by the National Art Gallery, Malaysia in 1972.

Collections:

Works collected by the National Art Gallery, Malaysia; Private Collections

Other activities:

Art Critic of the Malaysian "Sunday Times" Member of the Fifth Board of Trustees National Art Gallery and its Exhibitions Committee (since 1973); Regular contributor of articles on Art to the monthly literary journal "Dewan Sastra"

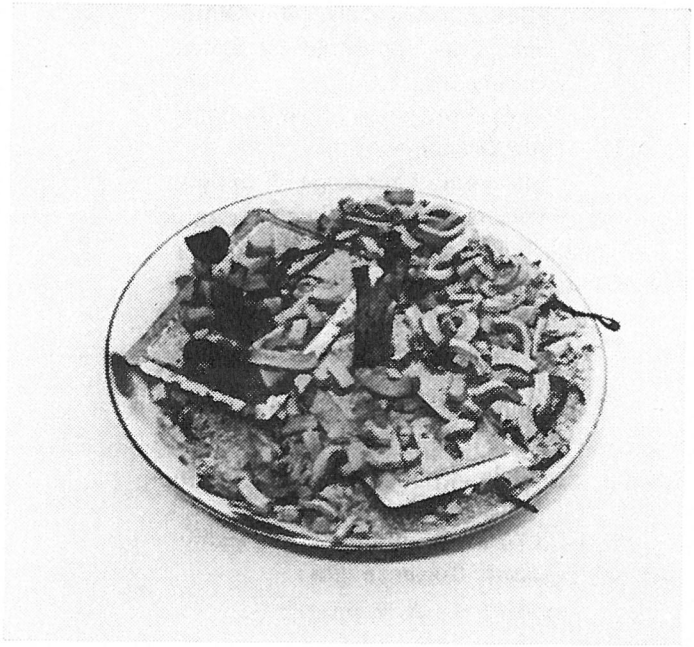
Experience in Theatre:

1972 — Co-Designer of the sets of the Malay-language musical, "Uda dan Dara" (with Latiff Mohideen and Sulaiman Esa) Experimental Theatre.

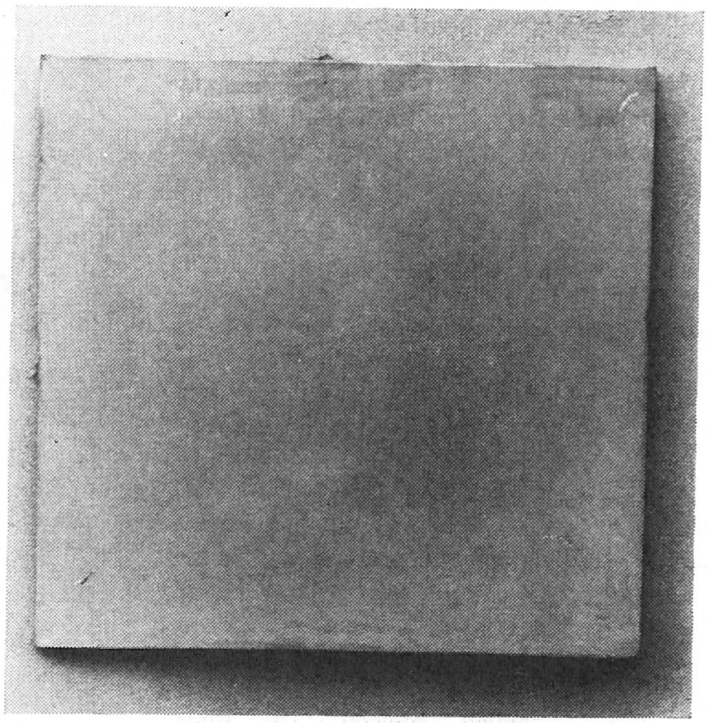
1973 — Co-Designer of the sets for the Malay-language comedy, "Alang Rentak Seribu" (with Sulaiman Esa) at the Experimental Theatre.

1974 — Artistic Director of the forthcoming comedy "The Birds" to be staged in August 1974 at the Experimental Theatre





Burnt-out mosquito coils used to keep away mosquitoes on the night of 25th March 1974.



Empty canvas on which so many shadows have already fallen,

MAJOR LANDMARKS AND KEY-FIGURES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF MODERN MALAYSIAN ART 1930-1974

Date	Kind of Development	Artist/Artists
1930s	The Water-colourists	Yong Mun Sen and Abdullah Ariff
Late 40s & 1950s	The "Nanyang" Painters	Soo-Pieng, Chen Wen Hsi, Georgette Chen, Liu Kang, Chia Yu Chian, Lai Foong Mooi, Lu Chon Min etc.
Mid 50s and Early 60s.	The Regional Imagemakers	Patrick Ng, Nik Zainal, Dzulkifli Buyong, Chuah Thean Teng, Khoo Sui-Hoe
Early and Mid-60s	Expressionism and Abstract Expressionism	Syed Ahmad Jamal, Abdul Latiff, Jolly Koh, Yeoh Jin Leng, Ibrahim Hussein, Lee Joo For, Cheong Laitong
Late 60s	The Formalist Influence Lyrical Colourist	Ismail Zain Jolly Koh
1969/70	Constructive Art	The "New Scene" Artists: Piyadasa, Tan Teong Eng, Tang Tuck Kan, Sulaiman Esa, Choong Kam Kow
1974	The Mystical Conceptualists	Sulaiman Esa and Redza Piyadasa

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Director of the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Kuala Lumpur.

Prof. Tone Brulin, School of Humanities, Universiti Sains, Penang.

Prof. Lloyd Fernando, Head of the English Dept., University of Malaya.

Usman Awang, Editor of the "Dewan Sastra" Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.

Baha Zain, Editor of the "Dewan Bahasa", Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.

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Shanmugalingam, Federal Treasury, Kuala Lumpur.

Raja Zahabuddin, Lecturer, School of Art and Design, ITM.

Baharuddin Musa, Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports.

Vijaya Samarawikerama, English Lecturer, ITM.

Ruzaika, School of Art and Design, ITM.

Ustaz Narkaie, Lecturer in Religious Studies, ITM.

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Susan Chong, Philosophy Lecturer, Mara School of Art and Design, ITM.

Cik Azizah, Typist, School of Art and Design ITM.