

BIBLIOGRAFI

1. Protesting man's misdeeds.

The political game is a subject matter for one of Ahmad Fuad's paintings on display at the gallery.

"This is the head of a rooster. There you can see a human figure cheering. I relate this to the current political situation - manoeuvring and scheming going on", explained Ahmad Fuad. In this, he shows two roosters fighting with their masters(owners) cheering.

K. Don Budhadasa, NST, 30th July, 1993. Pg 4

2. The Medium Is the Message

"The medium is the message!" asserted by Marshall McLuhan in his writings may best represent the art world of Malaysian artist Ahmad Fuad B. Osman. Through his techniques metamorphosing the title of world-renowned newsmagazine "TIME" into "ITEM" and "Newsweek" into "Newsweak" Ahmad Fuad conveys a sort of satire.

By replacing the cover of TIME magazine with his face and the name of Osama Bin Laden with his own family name, Ahmad Fuad intends to be in the focus of attention. The picture of his face is of course an image synthesized by computer. (His father's name Osman bin Ahmad is almost similar to Osama bin Laden and he is also a Muslim.)

With a series of works employing satirical computer generated images, he practices McLuhan's comment that the medium is the message. Moreover, the advertisement message of TIME magazine he utilizes apparently unveils a blind point of the information age.

"We're the world's most truthful newsmagazine, over 45 million people worldwide get their news from us than any other single source."

The advertising copy of Newsweek, which is known that more than 60 million people subscribe to it, is also quoted in this work titled "An eye for an eye will make the whole world go blind"(182 x 182 cm), 2003. One eye is the eye of a reader and the other is the newsmagazine itself as the window through which the reader watches the world. This work implies that the reader goes blind if the news media distort the facts.

The phrase "The medium is the message." is the theme flowing through the entire works of Ahmad Fuad Osman. He works in a wide variety of media: painting, drawing, printmaking, performance, video and installation. The critique of reality and political sarcasm is commonly sensed in his juvenilia as well as his recent pieces.

The exhibition presented now is entitled "Too Much (Not Enough)". Through two channel video's work, Ahmad Fuad embodies this theme: one shows the scenes of dog fighting and the other the scenes of washing the body. The artist remarks that we seems to wash ourselves 'too much' but it's still 'not enough' because the body gets dirty soon.

This video work is a cruel satire on the masses' rampant desires in the mass consumption society. As properly pointed out by Thorstein Veblen, material greed is in fact an illusion in present reality where men are incessantly stimulated to be in a state of conspicuous consumption.

A craving for higher social status at times causes a crime. Ahmad Fuad thus states that a mundane attachment is the source of all human sufferings. He denounces the material greed and physical pleasure of contemporary society where culture turns to a means of pecuniary gains rather than spiritual recuperations. Under this situation, the art of Ahmad Fuad Osman deserves our attention.

Yoon Jin Sup, leaflet of a solo show 'Too Much(Not Enough)', Korea, 2006.

3. MENUNGGU NOVELIS MALAYSIA (1. CATAN YANG POLITIKAL)

Melangkah ke NN Gallery, memerlukan ketabahan bukan sedikit. Ia terpinggir di Ampang Hilir. Namun masa hadapan galeri catan ini dikira besar, dengan segala pembangunan tempas KLCC, galeri ini bakal menjadi dunia penting bagi seniman kelak. Lain dari itu, malam tersebut merupakan perasmian pameran lukisan solo pelukis tanahair unik – Ahmad Fuad Osman. Apa sangatlah jarak jauh dan kemacatan lalu lintas, jika berpeluang merayau ke dalam dunia tengkorak Fuad!

Fuad dikenali sebagai kawan, tahu lebih kurang dia menyinar dalam dunia senilukis. Ada koleksi lukisannya dibeli Singapore Museum Of Art; itu sahaja petanda fuad artis bermasa hadapan cerah. Dan pameran solo Fuad membuatkan saya terpegun lama pada setiap catan terpampang.

Pertama, menilai permainan cahaya dan warna yang nampak berimbang. Warna-Warna gelap jika gagal ditangani baik akan mewujudkan suatu gambaran muram dan Ketidakpastian. Namun warna-warna gelap pilihan Fuad meyakinkan, setiap hasilKerjanya bagai berkata-kata dan amat berinteraksi. Kedua, saya lihat karya-karya Fuad lambing manusia terperangkap dan memberontak, berusaha untuk mendapatkan kebebasan dan kemerdekaan. Fuad

Secara luaran tidak menampakkan apa-apa kegelisahan tetapi kini karya-karyanya Dengan wanita terperangkap di dalam botol dan melaungkan pertolongan, sambil tercatat surah Al Asr dalam SOS: Message in the Bottle, jelas adalah sebalik dariPeribadi itu. Atau siri catan Self Portrait nampak gemar mendampingkan tengkorak Dan tulang-temulang manusia. Juga gambaran kepala manusia terkopak, kepalaKambing berdarah dan manusia-manusia telanjang mengerekot. Mengapa begini, saya tertanya sendiri.

Catan seperti The Victims amat kuat, meski Fuad mengatakan ia sesuatu yang Simple. Dua tiga wajah wanita dan kanak-kanak dengan mata penuh tuntutan danPedih adalah mangsa-mangsa kepada pelbagai diskriminasi. Ia nampak hidup dan berdendam, bagai mengharap kita melakukan sesuatu untuk mereka. Spontan saya menghubungkan Fuad dengan tempat kelahirannya Baling, bukankah di sini tumpah darah pejuang Memali? Political, begitu saya tanggapi sebahagian besar karya-karya Fuad. Ini mungkin bersebabkan Fuad mendapat pendidikan di sekolah yang pernah menyaksikan sejarah Tunku Abdul Rahman, Chin Peng dan Rashid Maidin duduk semeja menentu hala tuju Partai Komunis Malaya sebelum darurat dahulu. Baling juga merekodkan peristiwa Demonstrasi Petani pada tahun 70-an. Nyata imej pergelutan dan wajah Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra di sana sini terpancar.

Bekas penuntut School of Art & Design UiTM Shah Alam ini mulai menghulurkan karya untuk tatapan, seawal tahun 1990 dalam pameran Young Contemporary di Balai Seni Lukis Negara. Ini termasuk pada tahun 1995 dan 1996, menyertai Phillip Morris Asean Exhibition. Malah awal tahun ini, ada catannya terpamer untuk Gema...Resonance di Praque, Republic Czech.

Tahniah Fuad dan teruskan.

Faisal Tehrani, Tamadun, Jan. 1999, pg 62

4. NEW PERSPECTIVES

Fresh critical statements in art can be found in the solo exhibition by Ahmad Fuad Osman currently on view at NN Gallery. While those who've been keeping an eye on young Malaysian artists will find many of Fuad's paintings overly familiar, his new series entitled *Mat Jenin* (Always And Always Will Be) *Dreaming To Death* proves refreshing and more nuanced than his previous work. Sprinkled throughout the gallery, these pieces are worth hunting out and studying closely.

The series explores the aspirations of a newly-developed middle class. Whether it's the smugness following the acquisition of antique furniture which lends an "aristocratic air" to a home of fantasies of escape in fleshy pleasure, Fuad's view captures the terrifying self-awareness of a person slowly consumed by materialism, suffocating critical thinking, yet too lured by comfort to resist. The series fragmented format plays a major role in the effectiveness in these pieces. Turning away from the more commercial 4' x 3' painting size to smaller groups of sketches incorporating a variety of painting styles and text, the *Mat Jenin* series invites scrutiny. Linking each work together is the centrally-placed charcoal drawing of *Mat Jenin's* head.

Take for instance, his *Under the Dome of Heaven, Mat Jenin Is (Always And Always Will Be) Dreaming To Death III*. Comprising a series of small rectangular pieces, the main section features a traditionally-drawn charcoal work of a sleeping man. Off to the right, a dream features a collage of a ladder leading to a small skeleton-filled room. Below to the left is a black-and-white ink sketch of a nubile young woman. Above her, mimicking airline advertisement text are the words, "*come ...fly with me... where to? Heaven or Hell?*" The contrast of traditional drawing, the immediacy of photographic collage, and ink painting create visual variety which feels very immediate and contemporary, paralleling MTV's use of multiple visual styles to keep viewers watching. Another highly effective device used to connect the work to the audience is Fuad's beautifully written text. Using the first-person voice, Fuad provides insight into *Mat Jenin's* dreams and fears. The text makes *Mat Jenin* real, allowing the viewer to connect immediately with this character rather than remain removed as a viewer of the painting.

Laura Fan, The EDGE, Sept. 28, 1998. pg vi

5. HERE AND NOW

Fuad's installation is his most subtle and complex work to date. It features a white-shrouded bed on which rubber gloves are placed. Printed on them are the words associated with adat (custom) such as patuh (obey), sopan (manners), hormat (respect), and tanggungjawab (responsibility). Above the pillow lies a white ladder, stained with black, symbolic of dirt tracks left by someone escaping the bed. Text behind the ladder are Malay proverbs such as 'Musuh Dalam Selimut' (sleeping with the enemy), and 'Duri Dalam Daging' (thorn in the side). Purity and sexual taint combine in the materials are text used. The purity of the white bed is echoed in the clinically clean rubber gloves. The medical and sexual associations with the gloves themselves contrast with the prescribed behaviour suggested by the words carefully printed on them. The text behind the ladder

informs us that escape was made because that person was deemed traitorous and an annoyance. Above the ladder, the 'Survival Of The Fittest' is written in capital letters, adding a dimension of ambivalence, suggesting that the current events are not clear-cut cases of virtue and its opposite but rather of manoeuvring and tactical strategy.

Laura Fan, The EDGE, Nov.2, 1998. pg. vii

6. PAINT A PICTURE: TELL A TALE: SHARE A STORY

a. *"The artist must reflect deeply and confront the viewer who may not otherwise have tackled these issues or ideas. The artist is to provoke thought in areas where many prefer not to delve... Art is about self-inspection and demands commitment and honesty to what is expressed. Once we externalize our thoughts they become stories. Once they are shared they belong to more than just one person... You have to believe in what you say. Subsequently it becomes a guide and disturbs your conscience to improve your soul. When I share my stories I disclose my thoughts and I take responsibility for what I say. The difficulty is in sustaining interest whilst dealing with matters of gravity and concern."*

b. *"There is greater freedom to explore the self in the surreal realm of nightmares. It is open to all kinds of possibilities. No confines of logic nor boundaries of sense impose. Though the images are specific they can point to any variety of interpretations. The images are specific and yet they may point to any variety of possibilities. In this way I use what is identifiable in reality to depict what is felt in the abstract regions of our consciousness. It goes beyond using abstract images towards using reality to grapple with the abstract... In my work the struggles of life, the afflictions of pain, the harshness of cruelty and anger become the main concepts which arise in depictions of loss and fear. The work is a vehicle which transports my passion for the victim and my desire to share what I feel with other people."*

Charlene Rajendran, artist's statement extract from STORIES's Catalogue, 1995. pg. 9-10

7. PAINFUL AND 'UGLY': PASSAGES TO TRUTH

Art is rarely, if ever, thrust upon us such that we cannot avoid it. We choose to see. We choose to hear. We choose to feel.

We only see what we look at. To look is an act of choice. As a result of this act what we see is brought within our reach—though not necessarily within arm's reach. To touch something is to stimulate oneself in relation to it. 1

But are there valid reasons for disliking or liking a work of art? Or is each opinion of value as long as it is educated, sincere, enlightened? Can something ugly also be beautiful? Should art aim to please? Do these questions affect how we see and what we look at?

Things are what they are. That is their power. They are all the things we think they are, and more. They are themselves. If they meant something they would be less. Whatever you see is your personal wealth and paradise. You're lucky if you can see wonderful things. Some people who have been here see only infernal things. What you see is what you are, or what you will become. 2

Many of Ahmad Fuad Osman's works depict agony bursting out of human heads and bodies in positions of painful despair. Human figures seem to explode with a burning lava of angst. A naked woman lying on a bed in a room shadowy with fear. A bleeding head of a goat, severed from its body. A baby doll strung upside down in a crate full of nails and glass. A Mat Jenin lying comatose on a hospitalbed.

The fact is he does not use his skill as a painter to create pretty pictures of a happy life. Fuad used to produce abstract paintings. Until he wanted to communicate more directly. Although perhaps more pleasant to view, abstract images were not the best means to depict what he wanted his viewer to consider. This marked a move towards using the human figure. But does a viewer wish to encounter unpleasant images and ugly truths? Does a viewer need to be informed again that babies are being abused, people are in agony, lives are wracked by violence? Don't we already have enough pain and violence on the television, in the news, at our door step? What difference does it make to have it reiterated on canvas? Perhaps the canvas has a certain permanence that the moving image, the newspaper and the everyday experience do not have. The canvas stays. It is a two-dimensional telescope into an idea, a vision, a feeling. It is something to return to. A reminder. A trophy. A talisman even. Something that enables transport from one realm of thought to another. A passage in itself. Perhaps in Fuad's work it is the re-composition or de-composition of pain and how the artist acquaints us with his notion of the truth about pain. That what permeates through the artist's material is his personal perspective of pain, portrayed so that a viewer is invited to participate in that vision and thus allowed passage to new insights. Because no matter how often we look (choose to see) many of us still seem to be numb and helpless in the challenge to fight pain. Perhaps it is the idea that pain, conflict and grief are ever present and thus not worth exploring until forced to.

And each encounter that pushes to remind us only repels us further. We want escapes and not confrontations. Aristotle wrote of 'catharsis' in tragedy to purge the emotions in the theatre. Where human beings are meant to confront and be relieved of their pain by going through another person's pain. Yet although tragedies have their place, they are not as popular as romances and comedies. We still prefer the happy ending. We want to believe that things will work out alright.

And we have often been told that this constitutes positive thinking. But does positive thinking blind us to reality? Is confrontation too frightening to cope with? Have our lives become so full of torrent that any enquiry into truth yields only a bleak picture of the human condition? Has the 'ugly' become the only 'truthful beauty' there is?

Every extension of knowledge arises from making conscious the unconscious. The great basic activity is unconscious. For it is narrow, this room of human consciousness.

Nietzsche

Ahmad Fuad Osman would title this first solo show 'Experiments In Truth' (what M.K.Gandhi called his journals while he was a law student in London). The 'truth' would appear to be about pain. And the 'experiment' seems to be about exploring images that depict the structure of that pain and its origin. **Longing For Freedom** uses images of cages to capture the irony of seeking freedom when one's thoughts are imprisoned. **Hope** shows a man standing in a lake full of lotus flowers whose mind is erupting with anguish. **Kemelut Alam Fana** (chaos in a mortal world) shows a naked figure curled up asleep amidst the ruins of a house. **Paint Your Brain** has frogs, a snake and a tadpoles swimming in a swampy colour beneath a bleeding goat's head with flesh still hanging loose. Are these images which emerge from an artist's consciousness reflections which must be read according to a framework of the artist's beliefs? Or are they images that reflect an enquiring mind which can never be accurately explained? Is there a correct interpretation for them? Or should the viewer be concerned with how well they were painted and whether or not he or she connects with them?

The creative act, in so far as it depends on unconscious resources, presupposes a relaxing of the controls and a regression to modes of ideation which are indifferent to the rules of verbal logic, unperturbed by contradiction, untouched by the dogmas and taboos of so-called common sense. At the decisive stage of discovery the codes of disciplined reasoning are suspended—as they are in the dream, the reverie, the manic flight of thought, when the stream of ideation is free to drift, by its own emotional gravity, as it were, in an apparently 'lawless' fashion. 3

Fuad says he learns most from his canvasses. He also learns from the different media he is involved in – the stage, film, and video – but the canvas is the media he is formally trained in and most acquainted with. However there seems to be no pressure to choose one form or style over another and stick with it. Choices abound and they are being taken. Even if this means detracting from an 'approved quality', it may be a process that gains priority over and above the product – at this stage. It may lead to fusions and distillations later when the maturity of the work is the result of a maturity in the artist.

At present he does not labour over the meanings of what emerges as he is producing his work but allows the process to direct itself. His focus is how to select and arrange the ideas and images on a canvas. As he does this the meanings emerge. Sometimes it takes years before he really understands his own work. Maybe the very process of extracting these images from the mind leaves him in a new state of readiness for the next part of his journey. This passage serves to unearth what lies within and the next passage does something else. Fuad feels he is still searching and does not know where this passage will lead next. He admits that when he first began to paint

seriously it was purely for the love of painting. But now he is concerned to discover what else the canvas can do to convey what he feels and thinks and wants his viewer to consider. We belong to age of over-stimulation where so much assaults the senses. Making coherent wholes is no longer a casual task. More often than not it is impossible to make 'sense' – coherence is subject to a personal view.

So to trace threads and link patterns may offer some narrative of a time sequence, but only if there is a selection of the material that 'fits' into the framework. But does this mean that what does not get selected is useless? And what does not persist is gone? Or will it, like trends in fashion, surface later?

"I don't think I will ever understand," he said. "Understanding often leads to ignorance, especially when it comes too soon," replied his guide

"But if I don't understand how can I carry on?" "It's because you don't understand that you carry on." "But I have to make sense of what I have just experienced." "When you make sense of something, it tends to disappear. It is only mystery which keeps things alive," said his guide patiently. 4

Fuad plans to continue 'experimenting in truth'. A personal truth or a universal one? Does the notion of 'truth' allow both? Or must 'truth' be universal by its very definition? And if 'beauty is truth and truth beauty' (Keats) can experiments in 'truth' yield 'ugly' pictures after all? Or have we to learn how to look?

References

John Berger, *Ways Of Seeing*, 1972, Penguin. Pg.8

Ben Okri, *Astonishing The Gods*, 1995, Phoenix House. Pg. 11

Arthur Koestler, *The Act Of Creation*, 1964. Arkana Penguin Books. Pg.178

Ben Okri, *Astonishing The Gods*, 1995, Phoenix House. Pg. 30

Charlene Rajendran, leaflet of first solo show, 'Experiments In Truth', NN Gallery, 1998

8. LONGING FOR FREEDOM: A CONVERSATION WITH FUAD OSMAN

Wong Hoy Cheong: Can you tell me more about why you have moved from painting abstractions in the early 1990's to clearly figurative work now?

*Fuad Osman: Initially, I enjoyed exploring with colors and paint. I liked self-expression. If I wanted to just speak about colors and shapes and visual sensations, then it is fine. But when I wanted to say things beyond that, it became a problem. Like the painting *Cock-fighting* I wanted to use cock-fighting to conjure up the ruthlessness of man – like two generals strategizing a war, letting the men fight on until one party collapses. But people who saw the work perceived it quite differently. Some said it was a landscape! What I wanted to communicate was totally lost to people.*

So figurative art became a more appropriate and logical direction to take.

*Yes, I hoped figurative work will give me the opportunity to communicate what I felt and thought more clearly and directly to an audience. But I soon realized I was faced with a similar problem. For example, in *Laws Of Slavery*, I wanted to express that people adore money so much that they have started worshipping it. And yet it was interpreted quite differently. People talked about the color, the composition, and the brushstrokes as though the message and issue were irrelevant. Now, I've decide to just paint what I want. I think it is more important to take painting as a process to learn about who I am and what I believe in. I'm not really that concerned if people don't accept or understand fully what I do. People have their rights to interpret what they want from my works.*

This is always the case. What we want to communicate, the expression of it in the artwork, and how the audience perceives and interprets it are often contradictory and quite removed from the original intention. Everybody brings in with them their own way of seeing.

I suppose what we think and experience can never be the same as that of the audience.

Can you tell me more about the images you have chosen. When you returned to figuration, you used images like your own portrait, skulls and babies.

I am interested in the passage of time. Once we are born, everything is in a flux. Time is like a dripping faucet, one drop after another. Nothing is permanent. The only certainty is at the end of the road – death. So in 'Self (In Quest) Portrait: About The Journey', I disintegrated the well known image by Leonardo da Vinci of an ideal and perfect man (as a measure of all things) with my portrait and verses from Khalil Gibran's poetry about time. This painting records my uncertain and imperfect journey between birth and death.

What about the use of male and female nudes?

There is something pure about nudes. it is the state of birth. The only skin is the natural skin. A nude figure is free, without the layers of artificial skins like clothes or pretenses.

How do you feel about using nudes? In the context of Malaysian society, it is often seen as a taboo.

I do feel slightly uncomfortable. That's why it is easier for me to work with the male nude. There is more to conceal in working with the female nude. I guess I'm working with my own conscience and the limits of ease and unease, and of course, within the context of what is acceptable in Malaysia.

Some of the images have a grotesque and surreal feel to them. Like the half man, half beast in 'Longing For Freedom.'

I don't actually plan to make things grotesque. In this painting I started by rendering the face in a quite realistic and human manner, but somehow it didn't feel right, too clean or something, I don't know. But when I distorted the face, the painting felt more true to me.

You also use images which seem to carry some very strong personal emotions. Tell me more about your choice of symbols and images – like the cat and the hanging dead chickens in 'Silent Sorrow'. How do you arrive at these images?

Often I respond to images I see around me. And I try to understand the underlying meanings they stir within us. The feather-less chicken, stripped and hanging begins to reveal a poignancy when it

is placed next to the image of a naked woman. In Malay, we call women (a hooker) as ayam (chickens) in a derogatory way. And the cat, the black cat, which in a lot of cultures symbolized a bad spirit or omen, in this instance has the posture of a hunter, waiting to pounce, waiting for its victim.

Why a juxtaposition of these images?

Well, basically the work suggested the idea of 'don't just simply jump to conclusion' even if you saw a 'bad' things. In this case, we're talking about a prostitute. Actually, this piece was based on a true story which I read in a newspaper, about a girl who was twice trapped into prostitution by her own relative and a policeman. Quite some time later I found out that this story was also adapted into a stage play as a monologue piece, written by Bernice Chauly, directed by Krishen Jit and played by Faridah Merican. Unfortunately, I never saw it. But it's interesting to look at the same issue, expressed through a different medium.

There are two works which appear quite different from the rest. Rather than a composite of different images, each consists of a single image of a run-down house with a figure. Can you comment on these two works?

The two Kemelut Alam Fana paintings are based on an abandoned colonial house which I found in Frasers Hill. One can see that at one time, this house was grand and luxurious, but now, it is falling apart. It relates to the issue of impermanence and also time. The figure in it, like the house, is lost and traveling in progressive decay.

All your works seem tinged with a great sense of isolation and alienation. The feelings, like you say, of being trapped in a cycle of impermanence. The titles of your paintings refer to being lost and wanting to break free from it – a group of paintings are titled 'Lost Series' and the one we discussed earlier is titled 'Longing For Freedom'. Why this longing? This isolation?

Art gives me the most meaning in life. All types of art – theatre, film, music, visual arts. It is in art that I achieve some form of freedom. And visual art is the freest and most personal because it's only between the canvas and me. If I do not have art, I will feel even more trapped. Simply like a bird in a cage.

But why?

I guess it boils down to loneliness. I have many friends but we are caught in our own sense of loneliness. And this loneliness goes with you everywhere. Once I felt so lonely, I broke out laughing. I thought I was going crazy... (laughing)

Does this loneliness make you feel incapacitated?

No, loneliness doesn't prevent me from doing things, making art. I just carry it along with me. As an artist I am also confronted with many obstacles in trying to make art true to myself

How about when you are working with a group, like in theatre and film?

Sometime it is ok. But everybody has his or her own measurement of loneliness.

You are one of the few visual artists – out of a handful perhaps – who are interdisciplinary. You have been involved with film, performance and theatre. What drew you to it?

It's the freedom to express the idea with another medium. In painting you use paint, in performance you use your body and voice, in music you use sounds. Different media allow me to express in different ways. I think it is a waste to just stick to one medium of expression. The satisfaction and joy I get from doing a performance are very unlike that of painting.

Do you have a preference?

At this point in time, I still find drawing and painting the freest of all the media. In theatre and film, there must be a collaboration and compromise. One must learn to deal with people and personalities. It can be quite exhausting sometimes. In painting, I can start and stop whenever I want. I can be lazy. In that sense, painting gives me the greatest freedom and control.

Last year, you formed an interdisciplinary group called Type O Project consisting of Namron and Wan Azli in theatre, and Hasnol Rahmat and Farid in film. Tell me more about what drew you together.

I was interested in the off-beat nature of their work. They are experimental and kind of anti-commercial. I also relate to the issues they explore – to question the mainstream idea of 'beauty', to comment on oppression, the alienation in life, the hypocrisy of politics, etc.

Have you done any projects together?

We did our first project 'Bangau Oh Bangau' last year. All of us were involved and it was a multi-media project with performance, video and painting. We also hope to do more educational things like video workshops and performing in schools. I don't know if we'll achieve it but transformation in the way people think must start with the young.

And what about reading. I know you like to read.

*I started reading very late. Not until I was in my early 20's did I pick up reading seriously. I feel I have so much to catch up on. It is so important. Reading, like art, is a process of learning and discovery. I feel I have so much to learn, to develop my mind and heart. It is written in the Quran, that when the Angel appeared to Prophet Muhammad, he hugged the Prophet and said: **Read!***

Wong Hoy Cheong, a leaflet of a solo show 'Experiments In Truth', NN Gallery, 1998.

9. House of alternate realities

Fuad's Mr D's Last Meal looks at evolution and its impact on the belief in God. A semi-circle of 11 rectangular panels presents the development of mankind from apes. Anthropological labels identify each type, with the final panel curiously labelled "Homo XXXual – Millennium" and featuring two men holding hands. Last we suspect that this may be a statement on gay liberation, wall text addresses the conflicts between accepting Darwin's theory of evolution and creationism, a Christian fundamentalist reading of the creation of the universe. Godlessness is mentioned.

Fuad's use of furniture, panels, wall text and moving images creates an exciting space that adapts the character of the room well. However, there are several provocative statements made through the work and also contradicted by it. The tension between a faith-driven view of the world and one that accepts modernization underscores society's problems today.

This tension is also echoed in the artist's use of traditional, pseudo-scientific drawings and computer-housed moving images. Indeed, this conflict has formed the basis of earlier paintings by the artist questioning what is right and what is wrong.

Laura Fan, *The EDGE*(options), oct. 21, 2002. Pg.7

10. A Day On The Job – Ahmad Fuad Osman

Artist

IT STARTED OUT as sibling rivalry , but Ahmad fuad Osman's interest in drawing somehow gained momentum against all odds. Today, the visual artist has exhibited and sold his work in Malaysia and abroad, won several awards too.

"When I was standard two or three, I remember being really envious that my older brother could draw, and put up his drawings on the wall. And so I asked myself – if he could draw, why couldn't I ?" the artist from Baling, Kedah tells the Sun.

Today, Fuad , 35, is a member of a group of artists known as Matahati (translated to mean "eye of the soul"). He has had several group exhibitions with Matahati, whose members include other notable Malaysian artists like Ahmad Shukri Mohamad, bayu Utomo Radjikin, Hamir B Soib@Mohamed and Masnoor Ramli Mahmud.

Matahati recently held an exhibition at Valentine Willie Gallery in Bangsar from July 7 to 17, where Fuad put up two pieces of installation artwork. Fuad has also had one solo exhibition in Malaysia and another in Vermont, and taken part in other exhibitions in Singapore, South Korea, China, Australia, Germany and the Czech Republic.

His work has been bought by the National Art Gallery here, and the Singapore Art Museum. "Once in a while, I manage to sell my work," he says modestly with a smile.

Last year, Fuad was selected for a prestigious 2 and 1/2 -month residency programme at the Vermont Studio Center in the US, where he lived with other artists and worked on his art.

Fuad says he had no exposure at all to art or artists throughout his primary and secondary school days in small-town Baling. He does remember, however, how his mother would call to him every time a TV programme on art came on.

"That was one of the most important things which nurtured my interest in art," he says.

Fortuitously, it was a desire to get out of sixth form – which he had no interest in – which led him to apply to then Institut Teknologi Mara (ITM, now known as Universiti teknologi Mara), for an art and design course. He recounts how when he went for the admissions interview in Shah Alam, he had no clue what art was and what artists did.

"I didn't know who Van Gogh or Picasso were. During the interview, when I was asked which artist I was familiar with, I could only name Azman Yusof and Jaafar Taib, who were illustrators for Malay graphics magazines I used to collect," Fuad remembers.

Still he was accepted into ITM and from 1987 to 1991, he majored in painting and minored in print-making.

He graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree. "A lot of my training as an artist occurred on ITM. I never dreamt of being an artist, I only know that I liked arts," he says.

ITM was also the place where Matahati was founded in 1989 by seven classmates to provide support for one another's work.

After graduating, Fuad took a one-year break from painting and became a full-time set designer and builder for a Malay theatre company. It was only in 1993 when Matahati wanted to stage a group exhibition that he started to seriously think about his art again and to discover how important it was to him.

Fuad's work is important, says one gallery owner, because his vocabulary is constantly expanding. Indeed, Fuad, who does performance art as well, stresses that he does not like being bound to any one medium or way of working. "The choice of medium depends on the idea [that is going to be expressed]. Anything could be art. It's just a matter of how you express your idea and emotions," he adds.

Fuad is currently most concerned with the theme of culture, and the conflict between traditional and contemporary culture. At the recent Valentine Willie exhibition, he put up a clothesline from a Malay family in Baling, which had traditional Malay cloths as well as well-known US brands.

He is trying to be a full-time artist, but it is not easy, and he often takes up set-designing work for theatre, movie and TV productions because he needs to make ends meet.

Fuad pauses when asked what a normal day is like for him, and realises that he doesn't have a regular schedule like most others. "It depends on what project I am working on and how close I am to deadline," he explains.

Still, there is a method to his creative process as an artist.

"I always have my sketchbook with me because ideas can come at any time. I always jot down and sketch my ideas whether or not they are interesting. These ideas can come from anything. I also include the date and time in my sketchbook, so it is like a journal to me.

When I have a show to work towards, I will pick and choose and polish an idea on a theme that is closest to what we are trying to say in the exhibition.

From the very first meeting [to discuss an exhibition], I will start thinking. My mind is at work – thinking and polishing my ideas – all the time. The thinking doesn't just happen in the studio. The studio space is for building up the thought [and giving it form].

Sometimes, in between working on a piece, I discuss my work with my friends in Matahati. Or I may throw the idea at someone who is outside of the art community. Sometimes, the thinking that goes on is very intense and I need to share my ideas with others.

Everything inspires me. I keep my mind open all the time. Whether it is socio-political or personal, if it touches me, I want to talk about it [through my art].

Before I left Malaysia, I told myself that I would not bring any ideas with me from home because I wanted to be open to the new environment in Vermont. While I was there, I spent the first weeks just exploring and absorbing the environment, looking for possibilities for my work. I took photos of landscapes and objects to use in my works.

Once I was ready to work on my art, my schedule was more regular. I would be up by 6:30 am to have breakfast in the cafeteria with the others, then I would start work in my studio until it was time for lunch, and continue working after that. Then dinner, and after that, there would usually be some party to go to.

There were also live drawing sessions every Tuesday, and every Wednesday night, artists could show slides of their previous works and talk about it.

The residency was very good because everything was taken care of, and I was able to just concentrate on producing my work.

Since being in Vermont, I realise how valuable silence is. The Matahati studio recently moved to Ulu Langat, and I hope the silence there will give me more focus.

I am thinking of eventually building a studio in Baling to work there. I don't want the younger generation there to be in the same situation I was in before, where I did not know anything about art."

Jacqueline Ann Surin, THE SUN WEEKEND, July 31, 2004. Pg.9

11. Showing the way

Fuad's witty play on text and visuals in *An Eye for An Eye Will Make the Whole World Go Blind* examines the media's role in current global politics. The ordinary man has no recourse but to base his opinions on information from newspapers.

Television and magazines that seem to offer unbiased, unfiltered "news". By harnessing instantly recognizable media brands with self-promotional proclamation, Fuad scathingly reminds the viewer that our subjective views are based on subjective information. He makes a play on the power of the visual image by using his own photo as a depiction of an Islamic fundamentalist and alongside, a trustworthy politician. Same face and same expression, but the connotations of good and bad, right and wrong are implicit as well as explicit.

Li -En Chong, StarMag, Sunday, 21 sept. 2003. Pg.18

12. The Eye Of The Heart

Ahmad Fuad osman's 'Lost Series' delves into alternate realities and fantastic realms. The paintings visually hypothesise what would happen if the Koran disappeared. Each canvas uses human figures to convey the resulting bleak emotional landscape he imagines ensuing after the religious and moral loss. The link to the Koran can only be found in the accompanying labels. Rather than overtly moralizing, Fuad's figures speaks of universally shared emotions of isolation, suffering and aimlessness.

Fuad's range of work attest to his continued exploration of style. Part of the series uses a graphic red, black and white palette, featuring a lumpen human-like beings, portraying raw and single emotions in each image. Powerful though they might be, these works lack the subtlety displayed in two of his other canvases entitled *The Drowning II* and *The Drowning III*. In *The Drowning II*, a more differentiated palette of earth tones and cool shades colour these disquieting images of muscled

nude bodies piled together. Similar bodies float into a deep blue–green vortex in *The Drowning III*. Despite the close proximity seen in the tangled press of human flesh in *The Drowning II*, a curious coldness and lack of engagement characterizes the faces of these life–sized bodies. Each of the five people inhabit a private world of inner suffering. Although quieter than the red, black and white works, the alienation and pain seen in these two works strike disturbing resonant chords with urban viewers.

Laura Fan, *Art Asia Pacific*, vol. 3 – no. 1, 1996. Pg. 27

23. In the event of conveying the contemporary environment, successive generations of artists continuously seek to relate their work to the concerns of the masses, providing insights into the apocalyptic episodes of mankind. In 'Man's Rage For Chaos – Biology, Behaviour and the Arts' (1966), Morse Peckham claimed that the responsibility of the artist was to get the society out of the ruts into which it was prone to fall. He expounded on how art forms from time to time frustrate the human demand for order. This is the exact feeling one gets in seeing the works of Ahmad Fuad.

Ahmad Fuad paintings depict a series of nightmare and victims of that nightmare which he chooses to disclose as frightful prophecies.

An artist who is more familiar to the scene through the 'Lost Series' he had exhibited with the MATAHATI members, Ahmad Fuad had always relished the richness of expressionistic works in relating his discontent and the parasitic consequences of the lost soul. The choice of the bloody colours on his canvases render scenes which are disturbing, some surrealistic, in suggesting the fate of the next generation basking under the anarchy of amorality and evil.

Zanita Anuar, 'The Young Ones' exhibition catalogue, Nan Yang Gallery, 1995.

13. Where Truth Stands Out In Beauty

Wide nets of references seem to have been cast, capturing a glistening hoard of meanings which would elude ordinary interpretation.

What is absent from these paintings is as significant as what is present. There are no landscapes here ,nor are there flashes of green life, open air or natural sunlight.

Also missing are references to the contemporary world; the figures , whether nude or clothed, have an archetypal quality which transcends specific time periods.

Instead we are offered plucked chicken torsos, skeletons, mummified figures and fresco–like characters locked together within heavily worked grounds that pulsate with the ghost of overpainted images.

Fuad has moved dramatically from previous imagery which was dominated by abstract rendition of emotion, expressed through colour and a myriad of suggestions of form.

The current works have taken on complete figurative proportions.

"I found that while my themes were about social issues, abstraction made it difficult to convey my message to the people. It was very clear to me but to no one else," explained Fuad.

In pieces like *Lost Series – The Drowning*, the artist presents the viewer with luscious colour and the graceful movement of almost Michaelangelo-like frescoes to disguise the disturbed existence that dwells just below the surface.

According to the artist, this is the sign of our lives... troubled times beneath the surface of easy affluence, materialism and inevitable complacency.

Encountered in a variety of contexts, the images build in complexity and depth in a manner not unlike the treatment of the surfaces themselves, which are layered over many times with a succession of a hue and texture.

There is a poignancy in all Fuad's work, be it the *Lost Series* or the more surreal *Nightmare Series* or the doll assemblage that frightens at once but continues to captivate afterwards.

J.Anu, Sunday Star, Sept. 24. 1995. Pg. 17

14. Politics, religion via art form

Another work which is on display is entitled *Study For Mat Jenin* by Ahmad Fuad Osman.

The work features a dummy in a hospital bed, all wired up with a screen above the bed flashing all kinds of video shots – the patient's life.

The strong smell of antiseptic and the sound of heartbeats are to make believe the patient's condition.

The caption reflecting the work is inspired by Tolstoy's short story entitled *Death Of Ivan Ilyich*.

Just like the Malay folklore character, Mat Jenin, who dreams about marrying a princess while climbing a coconut tree and consequently falling to his death, Tolstoy's Ivan Ilyich is a salesman who dies of a chronic ailment.

Perhaps the artist wanted to remind those who are dreaming about all the world's glory and wealth about the reality of death.

Salina Khalid, STAR (Metro), Saturday, Sept.18, 1999. Pg. 17

15. A review for Goyang Studio's workshop.

More recent works of Ahmad Fuad Osman appear almost unpredictably multifarious in their themes. His artistic endeavors in presenting such themes are variously associated with many genres, extending the domain of his art. Despite the shift of his work's outward appearance, Ahmad Fuad's attitude and critical mind are thought to be as something different from his curiosity about new media or the change of styles. This is why his concern with life remains ontological.

Based on his experience, such ontological interest takes on a form of the exploration of life. As an artist who extends his understanding of art to the understanding of life, Ahmad Fuad's art is a curiosity about and experimentation of life that is given to him as an ongoing experience in an unknown form. As if keeping a diary of life that is like an endless journey, his art is always in the center of life, incessantly posing inquiries into and reflections of life. His art has been gradually

metamorphosed from abstract and half abstract to expressionist to conceptual, demonstrating his concern with a variety of media. That reflects his ontological anguish in the context of society.

As the artist has always taken his theme and subject matter out of his concrete, substantial experience, his concern with media differs from his purely inward, self-centered interest. Therefore, it should be considered that his art could be better understood in the context of historical and socio-cultural surroundings. His early works conveying his individual critique of social unrest in a strong expressionist style and performances and installation pieces raising a variety of social issues make sure the fact that his art lies consistently in the condition of life.

Paying more attention to personal experience and individual existence, his work is viewed as an art addressing private matters at the micro level rather than macro level. His work simultaneously reveals the stream of power affecting the life of individuals.

Min Byoung(art critic, Korea), 2005

We paraphrase...

The moment as passed.

The edge, jan 2007