# HYBRID

"I want to alter people's perception of ceramics. Modern times are bringing big changes to the making of ceramics, as it transforms from a functional form to modern artistic or sculptural forms."

UmiBaizurah Mahir @ Ismail

# HYBRID

Umibaizurah Mahir @ Ismail 19 October - 11 November 2009

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### Introduction

I remember meeting Umibaizurah(Umi) seven years ago when Yohan and I went to visit Shukri at his home/studio in Shah Alam. At that point in time, they had just moved into their new home and we were looking at Shukri's works and discussing his plans for the upcoming year. Shukri was already fairly established as an artist on the Malaysian art scene and Umi was very much just starting out and finding her feet as a contemporary ceramic artist.

Over the years, she has slowly but surely found her own voice and standing as an artist.Her accomplishments both locally and internationally have been most promising and she has already exhibited her works in Singapore, Japan,Indonesia,Sweden, Korea and Pakistan. Today, she can be described as one of the country's most important contemporary ceramicists with her distinctively naïve yet provocative works that dwell on issues of development at the expense of the environment.

The path of an artist is never an easy one and in staying true to her medium (clay) and her practice Umi has defied all odds in the pursuit of her calling as a ceramicist in Malaysia. Her new body of works, Hybrid, are a clear example of how far she has developed as an artist and we are proud to present them to you in this publication and to host Umi's first solo exhibition in her thirteen year career at the gallery.

> Lim Wei-Ling Gallery Director Wei-Ling Gallery October 2009

Hy-brid (n): a plant or animal produced from a cross between two different genetic constituents; a word that has derived from two different languages; a vehicle that runs on alternating power sources.

Despite her long and internationally successful career, this is Umibaizurah Mahir's (Umi) first solo exhibition in Malaysia. Titled simply "Hybrid," this single word captures the kind of potent, multi-layered readings that we have come to expect from Umi's contemporary ceramics.

Introducing several new series in this exhibition, Umi continues to push the traditional boundaries of her medium and probe Malaysian societal constructs with a strong environmental message. These are far from fragile ceramics. While her precursor series "Excavators", "Trespassers" and "Fireflies" delivered a tale of globalization with very specific local translations, these new works arguably take a greater personal risk. They have become more painterly and free in the application of glazes, Umi for the first time drawing back into the object adding to the narrative of the work. Furthermore, the trace between the physical object and its conceptual underpinning has become more challenging and offers an even greater departure from the traditional foundations of ceramics.

Umi adopts a particularly current reading of hybridity for this show, one that speaks to a fusion of green energies against Malaysia's car culture, for example, or the razing of kampong communities and natural forests with a celebration of the organic form and a devotion and skill in grafting hybrid plant species. And, when faced with the self-appointed question 'What is hybrid in contemporary Malaysia?', Umi turns to the most natural hybrid – a child - as the fusion of male and female offset against Malaysia's racial striation. It is a natural progression from her earlier toy works and, in its hybrid version, these accoutrements of play move further towards a 'plastic nation' - the hermetic state of global culture, or cloning. To understanding hybridity in Umibaizurah's vocabulary is an extremely textured reading.

This fusion is perhaps best illustrated in Umi's new body of work "Sitting with the Genii", intimate objects that sit oddly between figuration, toy and a mechanic's workshop collage. Perched atop a lofty stool is a 'hybrid' being – part animal, part human, part synthetic. Key is its presentation on a small timber block salvaged from an old kampong house and acting as a kind of ballast. Without these bases the ceramic would fall over. Is Umi

# **Deviating From The Decal**

-Dictionary

### reminding us that we need remnants of the past to anchor our future?

This confluence of crafted object [ceramic] and found object [pedestal] is an interesting one when considered in terms of the works spatial engagement and what that might mean. Scale is important here. The object's vertical stacking could allude to the hierarchies or systems that we operate within today, where the object becomes almost jewel-like on its oversized-stool elevating the status of the hybridas the more aspirational object – a kind of evolution from kampong history to genetically modified futures.

Take as example "Sitting with the Genii #16" (2009), a child's toy-bear that has been grafted with the appendages of metal piping and a drainage fitting as a crown. The bear becomes 'mechanical' with the application of a metallic glaze, any childhood nostalgia swiftly removed through its blatant disfiguration. In the same series, "Sitting with the Genii #2" (2009) Umi similarly plays with childhood narrative using the vernacular of superhero culture through the addition of a painted glaze-mask and arming this character with a flower sword. This hybrid is also branded tattoo-like with an insignia on its chest, somewhat reminiscent of a maiden on an ancient ship charting unknown territories. It evokes an individual spirit for adventure, a boundary rider – a little like Umi herself in her art making.

Umi consistently pushes beyond popular preconceptions of her chosen medium, extending 'ceramics' to sculpture and installation. Presentation has always played an important function in the display of traditional ceramics – we just have to think of a celadon bowl displayed on a carved rosewood stand. With a similar cognoscente of the object's need for 'completeness', Umi pays particular attention to the way her hybrid ceramics are presented, their concrete pedestals of the past and in this exhibition recycled timbers act as triggers to Umi's concerns for the desecration of the environment in the wake of commercial interests.

Using a similar scale to the Genii works is the "Road Runner" series. While they may take their cue from Umi's earlier "Endeavours" - stoneware play-horses mounted on large rubber wheels - these new works move beyond childhood nostalgia into a kind of freak-show alley display of the (un)natural. These are more intimate objects, presented in groups of three within glass vitrines on timber pedestals. Still playing off the consumer interests of the toy industry through their 'display case' presentation, these mobile hybrids also speak of Malaysia's as an affluent and aspirational kinetic society, one that is equally erosive environmentally.

"Road Runner #2" (2009) is a stunning example from this series, bejeweled with a painted chandelier as a choker and romantic floral decals as the skin to the object. Similarly in "Road Runner #4" (2009) Umi paints a bluebird and a rain cloud over decaled florals evoking Victorian botanical studies. However, these object are far from Victorian in sentiment. It is a constant push and pull between idealism and reality. With a ghastly pasty green face and an ambiguous crown adornment with slight sexual undertones, Umi has become more cavalier in her mixed references to disorientate us. This is further underlined by Umi's decision to use her paintbrush as the axel for the wheels, suggesting that it is creativity that drives us forward.

What must be mentioned is that it is delight to see Umi's sense of hand entering the work – a slight naivety in its articulation but one that adds a very personal stamp to her rigorous ricochet in the work between the crafted and fabricated object. It becomes particularly apparent in the larger scale works where her confidence in the painted gesture grows to match the form.

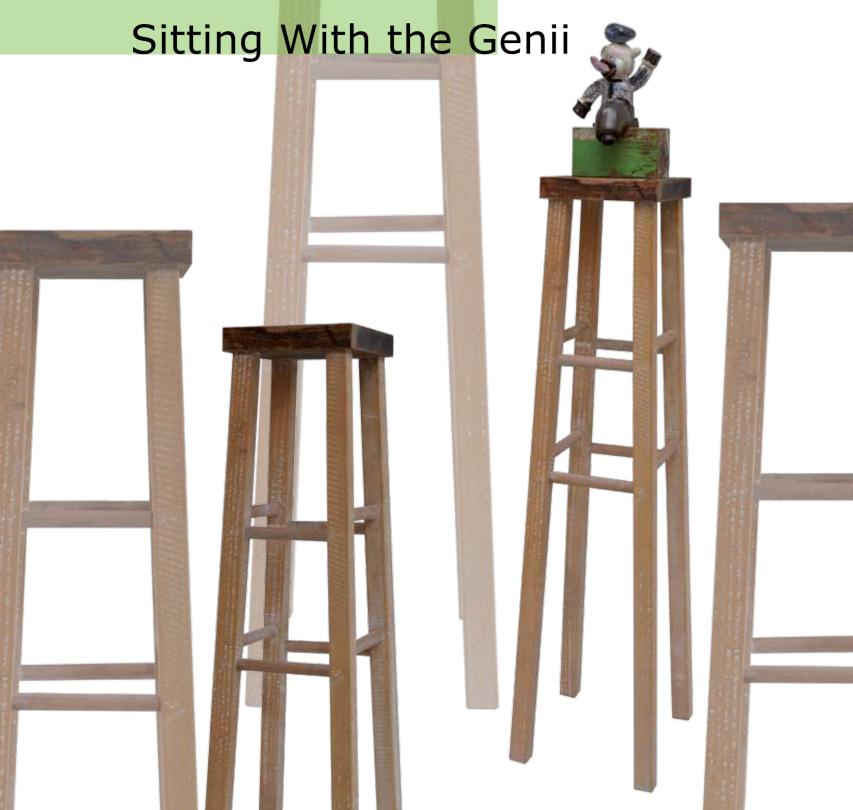
Perhaps the most surreal amongst these new works is the series "Hand's Up" where Umi has cast blow-up plastic toys. Presented on individual pedestals the figurines stand on a round wooden chopping board, which in turn balances upon a packing crate that is branded with barcodes, handle with care stickers, and outlines of the figures which perch above. Umi again plays with our expectation of materiality: the machine-seams of a plastic toy's fabrication celebrated in its crafted clone. Umi plays off notions of preciousness through surface, material and the every day elevated to 'high art'. She celebrates the flaws or unliness of fabrication against concepts of beauty and purity. For her these pieces are about renewal, to start afresh, accept and correct as we move forward.

This is a huge exhibition and I have only but touched on its depth. There is a maturity that comes with a willingness to experiment and to find one's own voice in these works that has little to do with traditional ceramics. Umibaizurah Mahir is foremost a superb artist and technician. Her ability to usher the viewer through the passage of time, transformation and constructs of cultural value has a humanity to it, and while an abstracted narrative, it pulls on simple 'connectors' like a blow-up toy or kampong timbers, for example, that anchor this journey we are all on. These new works are terribly exciting for the brave leaps they make. She is a true Malaysian visionary.



### Gina Fairley, 2009

Gina Fairley constantly shifts between Sydney and Southeast Asia. A former arts manager in America and Australia, she is regional contributing editor for Asian Art News, and writes regularly for art magazines from New York to Bangladesh, Germany and Korea.







Sitting With the Genii #1 . Stoneware, Decal, Timber Block, Bell and Wooden Stool . 140 x 33 x 33 cm . 2008/2009





Sitting With the Genii #3 . Stoneware, Decal, Bell, Timber Block, and Wooden Stool . 148 x 33 x 33 cm . 2008/2009



Sitting With the Genii #4 . Stoneware, Decal, Screw, Bell, Timber Block, and Wooden Stool . 140 x 33 x 33 cm . 2008/2009



Sitting With the Genii #5 . Stoneware, Decal, Bell, Timber Block, and Wooden Stool . 142 x 33 x 33 cm . 2008/2009









Sitting With the Genii #8 . Stoneware, Decal, Bell, Timber Block, and Wooden Stool . 142 x 33 x 33 cm . 2008/2009

Sitting With the Genii #9 . Stoneware, Decal, Bell, Timber Block, and Wooden Stool . 145 x 33 x 33 cm . 2008/2009





Sitting With the Genii #11. Stoneware, Decal, String, Bell, Copper Sleeve, Timber Block, and Wooden Stool . 143 x 33 x 33 cm . 2008/2009



Sitting With the Genii #12 . Stoneware, Decal, Bell, Timber Block, and Wooden Stool . 139 x 33 x 33 cm . 2008/2009





Sitting With the Genii #14 . Stoneware, Decal, Bell, Timber Block, and Wooden Stool . 147 x 33 x 33 cm . 2009





Sitting With the Genii #17 . Porcelain, Decal, Knitted Ball, Bell, Timber Block, and Wooden Stool . 143 x 33 x 33 cm . 2009





Sitting With the Genii #18 . Porcelain, Decal, Bell, Timber Block, and Wooden Stool . 145 x 33 x 33 cm . 2009

Sitting With the Genii #19 . Porcelain, Decal, Bell, Timber Block, and Wooden Stool . 140 x 33 x 33 cm . 2009







Sitting With the Genii #21 . Porcelain, Decal, Bell, Timber Block, and Wooden Stool . 141 x 33 x 33 cm . 2009





Sitting With the Genii #23 . Porcelain, Decal, Bell, Timber Block, and Wooden Stool . 145 x 33 x 33 cm . 2009





Sitting With the Genii #24. Porcelain, Decal, Bell, Timber Block, and Wooden Stool . 143 x 33 x 33 cm . 2009

Sitting With the Genii #25. Porcelain, Decal, Bell, Timber Block, and Wooden Stool . 152 x 33 x 33 cm . 2009





Sitting With the Genii #26. Porcelain, Decal, Bell, Timber Block, and Wooden Stool . 144 x 33 x 33 cm . 2009



Sitting With the Genii #28 . Porcelain, Decal, Bell, Timber Block, and Wooden Stool . 140 x 33 x 33 cm . 2009

Sitting With the Genii #29 . Porcelain, Decal, Bell, Timber Block, and Wooden Stool . 140 x 33 x 33 cm . 2009







Sitting With the Genii #30 . Porcelain, Decal, Bell, Timber Block, and Wooden Stool . 146 x 33 x 33 cm . 2009









Road Runner #2 . Porcelain, Decal, Wheel, Glass Box, and Wooden Table . 143 x 131 x 45 cm . 2009





Road Runner #3 . Porcelain, Decal, Wheel, Glass Box, and Wooden Table . 143 x 131 x 45 cm . 2009













# Hands up!







Hands Up! # 1 . Porcelain, Decal, Chopping Board, String, Copper Sleeve, Screws, Steel Band, Brass Corner, Metal Flower and Wooden Box . 120 x 46 x 43 cm . 2009



Hands Up! # 2 . Porcelain, Decal, Chopping Board, String, Screws, Steel Band, Brass Corner, Copper Sleeve and Wooden Box . 122 x 46 x 44 cm . 2009 Hands Up! # 3 . Porcelain, Decal, Chopping Board, String, Copper Sleeve, Screws, Steel Band, Brass Corner, and Wooden Box . 122 x 46 x 44 cm . 2009









Hands Up! # 4 . Porcelain, Decal, Chopping Board, String, Copper Sleeve, Screws, Steel Band, Brass Corner, and Wooden Box 117 x 46 x 44 cm . 2009

Hands Up! # 5 . Porcelain, Decal, Chopping Board, String, Screws, Steel Band, Brass Corner, Copper Sleeve and Wooden Box . 125 x 46 x 44 cm . 2009



Hands Up! # 6 . Porcelain, Decal, Chopping Board, String, Copper Sleeve, Screws, Steel Band, Brass Corner, and Wooden Box .  $121 \times 46 \times 44$  cm . 2009



Hands Up! # 7 . Porcelain, Decal, Chopping Board, String, Copper Sleeve, Screws, Steel Band, Brass Corner and Wooden Box . 122 x 46 x 44 cm . 2009







Hands Up! # 8 . Porcelain, Decal, Chopping Board, String, Copper Sleeve, Screws, Steel Band, Brass Corner and Wooden Box .  $117 \times 46 \times 44$  cm . 2009

Hands Up! # 9 . Porcelain, Decal, Chopping Board, String, Copper Sleeve, Screws, Steel Band, Brass Corner and Wooden Box . 117 x 46 x 44 cm . 2009



Hands Up! # 10 . Porcelain, Decal, Chopping Board, String, Copper Sleeve, Screws, Steel Band, Brass Corner and Wooden Box . 127 x 46 x 44 cm . 2009



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Fragile handle with care





Delivery # 2 . Porcelain, Wheel, Brass Corner, Screw and Wooden Box . 130 x 61 x 43 cm . 2009



To me, 'Hybrid' is as much about science as it is about society and culture. I use toys as metaphors for many different issues; responses to everyday objects, as a symbol of life; reflections of desire, sophistication, politics, globalization, cultural values, consumer culture, spirituality, beauty, and transformation.

These hybrid artworks are a reflection of change and identity in terms of environmental change as well as our desire to transform or improve things. I hope these artworks will provide my viewers with some insightful perspectives of women's self-perception

My technical process can be both complex and challenging. These pieces go through as many as 5 to 6 firings. I keep firing, experimenting, exploring, and trying different things - layering the color; glazes and oxides, stains, adding images, layering images, subtracting them, reapplying and the process goes on until I am truly satisfied with what I see before me.

Umibaizurah Mahir @ Ismail

# Artist Statement



A/KENAPA:



dilal versikir file.

### Curriculum Vitae

### Umibaizurah Mahir @ Ismail

B. 1975. Johor. Malaysia.

### Education

- 1999 Diploma in Education (Art Teacher's), Faculty of Art & Design, University Technology MARA UiTM, Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia.
- 2000 BA Hons of Art and Design (Ceramics), Faculty of Art & Design, University Technology MARA UiTM, Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia.

### Solo Exhibitions

2009 Hybrid, Wei Ling Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

### Selected Group Exhibitions

- **2009** Tanah Timur, Residency Exhibition, Japan Foundation, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
  - Iskandar Malaysian Contemporary Art Show 2009, Danga City Mall, Johor Bahru, Johor, Malaysia.
  - Tanah Air, Rimbun Dahan, Selangor, Malaysia.
  - Malaysia Services Exhibition 2009 (MSE 2009). Dubai, United Arab Emirates.
  - The Contemporary Ceramic Asia Ceramic Network 09, Penang State Art Gallery, Penang.
  - Asia Ceramics Network 08, Cyber & Catalog Exhibition, Seoul, Korea.
- 2008 Cabinet, Valentine Wille Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
  - Vice and Virtue 18@8. Wei Ling Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
  - Emerging Asia, 2008 Asia Arts Network, KEPCO Gallery Seoul, Korea.
  - Art Triangle 2008, Sokka Gakkai Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
  - Wet Seasons, Pace Gallery, Petaling Java, Selangor, Malaysia
  - Shifting Boundaries, Art For Nature, Rimbun Dahan, Selangor, Malaysia
  - Mind, Body, and Soul, Wei Ling Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
  - Out Of The Mould The Age Of Statement, Malmo Art Museum, Sweden.
- **2007** *Mapped*, Jendela Arts space, Esplanade, Singapore.
  - International Contemporary Ceramic, Asia Ceramics Network & Selsius. National Art Gallery. Kuala Lumpur. Malaysia.

- Puncak Alam, Selangor, Malaysia.

- - Lumpur, Malaysia.

- The Young Contemporaries 2006, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. - Out Of The Mould - The Age Of Statement, Petronas Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. - Jejak, Nasional Galeri Indonesia, Jakarta, Indonesia. - Exhibition, Pace Gallery, Petaling Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia. - Grand Opening - Warning! Tapir Crossing, Two Man Show with Ahmad Shukri Mohamed, Patisatusudio, - Ceramic and Textile, Pelita Hati Gallery, Bangsar, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. - Kunang- Kunang III, Studio- Gallery Kunang- Kunang, Selangor, Malaysia. - Open House, Kebun Mimpi Gallery, Bangsar, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. - Mekar Citra 2007, Galeri Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia. - Virtousity-Women Show, Galeri Seni Johor, Johor, Malaysia - Fund-Raising Matahati, Sokka Gakkai, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia - '00.15 Superstar', Art For Nature, Rimbun Dahan, Selangor, Malaysia. - Setahun Bersama, The Weld, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. **2006** - 18@8- Contemporary Artists from Malaysia. Kuala Lumpur – Karachi, Karachi, Pakistan.

- Art Invitational, Bank Negara Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

- Open house, Gema Rimba, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

- Sculpture Show, Gema Rimba, Kuala Lumpur. Malaysia.

- Feed Me! An Exploration of Appetites, Art For Nature, Rimbun Dahan, Selangor, Malaysia.

- Tabik Salute – A tribute Exhibition for Jeri Azhari, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

- Arts @ Earth, Xoas, Petaling Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia.

- Arts @ Earth, KL Performing Art Centre, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

- Art Salon Show, XOAS, Petaling Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia.

- Toys, Two Man Show with Ahmad Shukri Mohamed, Wei Ling Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

**2005** - Pop Culture, Maya Gallery, Bangsar, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

- Taman Sari, WWF, Art For Nature, Rimbun Dahan, Selangor, Malaysia.

- Grand Opening, Wei Ling Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

- Takung, National Art Gallery. Kuala Lumpur. Malaysia

- Form-ing Materials and Processes, Two Man Show with Ahmad Abu Bakar. Sculpture Square, Singapore.

**2004** - Fifth teen, Darling Muse Gallery, Bangsar, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

- Paradise Lost/Paradise Found, Art For Nature Rimbun Dahan, Selangor, Malaysia.

- Young Contemporary Award 2004, National Art Gallery Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

- IWCAT, JULY - AUGUST '04. The International Workshop of Ceramic Art in Tokoname, Aichi, Japan.

- Tokoname City Culture Hall, Tokoname, Aichi, Japan

- INAX, Togaku Kobo Gallery, Tokoname, Aichi, Japan.

- The World Children's Painting, Tokoname City Library, Tokoname, Aichi, Japan.

- Clay Design, Collaboration with Children, Tokoname City Culture Hall, Tokoname, Aichi, Japan.

- Symposium, Brush Calligraphy, Tokoname Higashi Elementary School, Tokoname, Aichi, Japan.

- Yakimono, Tokoname Ceramic Festival, Tokoname, Aichi, Japan.

- Immersion, Maya Gallery, Bangsar, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

**2003** - Wahana, Collaboration Singapore and Malaysian Exhibition, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. - Games People Play, Rimbun Dahan Selangor, Malaysia.

- Formalisma Tampak Dalam Seni Khat & Seni Tampak Malaysia, Dewan Bahasa Dan Pustaka, Kuala

- Virus, joint exhibition with Ahmad Shukri, Art Season Gallery, Singapore.
- Impressions, Shah Alam Gallery, Selangor, Malaysia.
- Incubator series, Collaboration work with Artist, Ahmad Shukri Mohamed, Rimbun Dahan, Selangor, Malaysia.
- **2001** OPEN SHOW 2001, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. - Phillip Morris Malaysian Art Awards '01, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
- **1999** Johor Exhibition, Yayasan Warisan Johor, Johor Bahru, Johor, Malaysia.
  - Nokia Arts Awards Asia Pacific, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
  - Philip Morris Malaysian Art Awards '99, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
  - The Malaysian Insurance Institute, Mandarin Hotel, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
- **1998** Degree Show, School of Art & Design, MARA University of Technology, Shah Alam, Selangor. Malaysia.
- **1997** Young Contemporary '97, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

### Awards

- **2007** Top 10 Winners, The Young Contemporaries '06. National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. - Consolation, Mekar Citra 2007. Galeri Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia.
- 2005 National Arts CouncilArts Grant, Singapore.
- **2004** Grant for IWCAT workshop awarded by the MARA (UITM), Selangor, Malaysia. - Top Five Winners. Clay Sculpture. Collaboration with Children, Tokoname City Culture Hall, Tokoname, Aichi, Japan.
- 1998 2001 Scholarship Award Degree Ceramics, Yayasan Pelajaran Johor, Malaysia
- **1999** First Prize, Johor Art Competition '99, Yayasan Warisan Johor, Johor Bahru, Johor, Malaysia.
  - Finalist, Nokia Arts Awards Asia Pacific, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
  - Honourable Mention, Philip Morris Malaysian of Art Awards '99, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malavsia.
- **1998** Dean's List (Ceramics), School of Art & Design, University Technology MARA UITM, Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia.
- **1995** Consolation Award, National Day's, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

# Collections

Private and Public Collection

NATIONAL ART GALLERY, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. ASIA ARTS NETWORK, Seoul, Korea. PETRONAS GALLERY, KLCC Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. ALIYA & FAROUK KHAN COLLECTION, Malaysia. KT. LIM & GRACE. Malaysia & Australia. FATIMAH & PAKHARUDDIN SULAIMAN, Malaysia. DR. STEVE & ROSEMARY WONG, Malavsia, DATO' SRI ABDUL AZIM MOHD. ZABIDI, Malaysia. NORIE & HIROMASA, Japan. IWCAT-THE INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP OF CERAMIC ART IN TOKONAME, Japan. YAYASAN WARISAN JOHOR, Johor, Malaysia. UNIVERSITY TECHNOLOGY MARA UITM, Malaysia.

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