

TOGETHER ALONE

IVAN LAM

Dedicated to the one I love the most





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PAINT***

GALLERY MESSAGE

Another two years have passed and Ivan Lam has emerged triumphantly from his studio with a body of work that surpasses anything he has ever done.

Together Alone is a series which saw Ivan taking up the challenge of working in an unfamiliar format and on a scale which most artists would steer away from, in addition to tackling a new, unstable medium-resin. All grueling hurdles which he posed to himself in a quest to push ahead on his journey.

The path for an artist is an arduous one. It is a constant struggle of looking introspectively for the intangible and searching for answers which no else can answer. Not many endure and most end up taking the easy way out, selling their souls to those whom they think can give them the answers. The few who stay true to the cause and remain untainted by the needs and wants of others are able to evolve and these are the ones who prevail and triumph.

In the seven years that I have known Ivan Lam, I have come to realise that he is one of those rare artists who is unafraid of the unknown, who is willing to take risks, to experiment and to struggle for what he wants, for he knows that that is the only way to forge ahead. He refuses to stagnate as he knows that this spells the end.

Together Alone forms the trilogy of two previous series, After all these years(2007) and Panorama(2009),each one finding its own place in his oeuvre, yet intrinsically linked in his exploration and mastery of house paint.

True to form he has delivered on his promise and forges ahead towards his next challenge leaving behind what he has already conquered. Ivan Lam is in a rare league of his own on the Malaysian art scene as he has consistently been able to push himself to reach greater and greater heights, with a fearless energy. He is at the peak of his contemporary relevance and in staying on the 'straight and narrow' is well on his way into the annals of Malaysian art history.

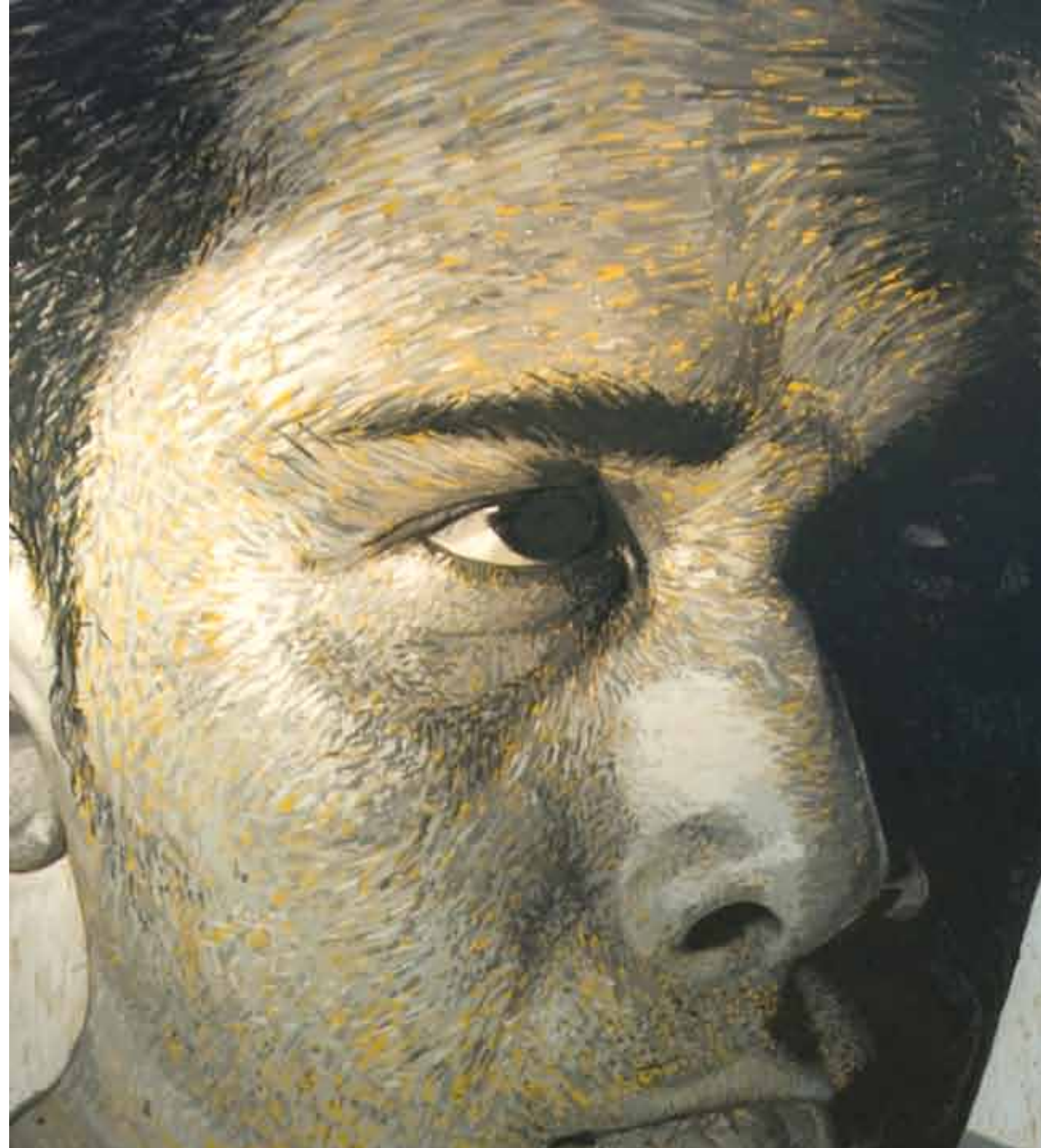
I hope that in immersing yourself in the beauty and sublimity of each of these works that you will be able to come a little closer to understanding the arduous road that Ivan Lam has traveled in delivering Together Alone to us.

Lim Wei-Ling
Gallery Director
Wei-Ling Gallery

March 2011

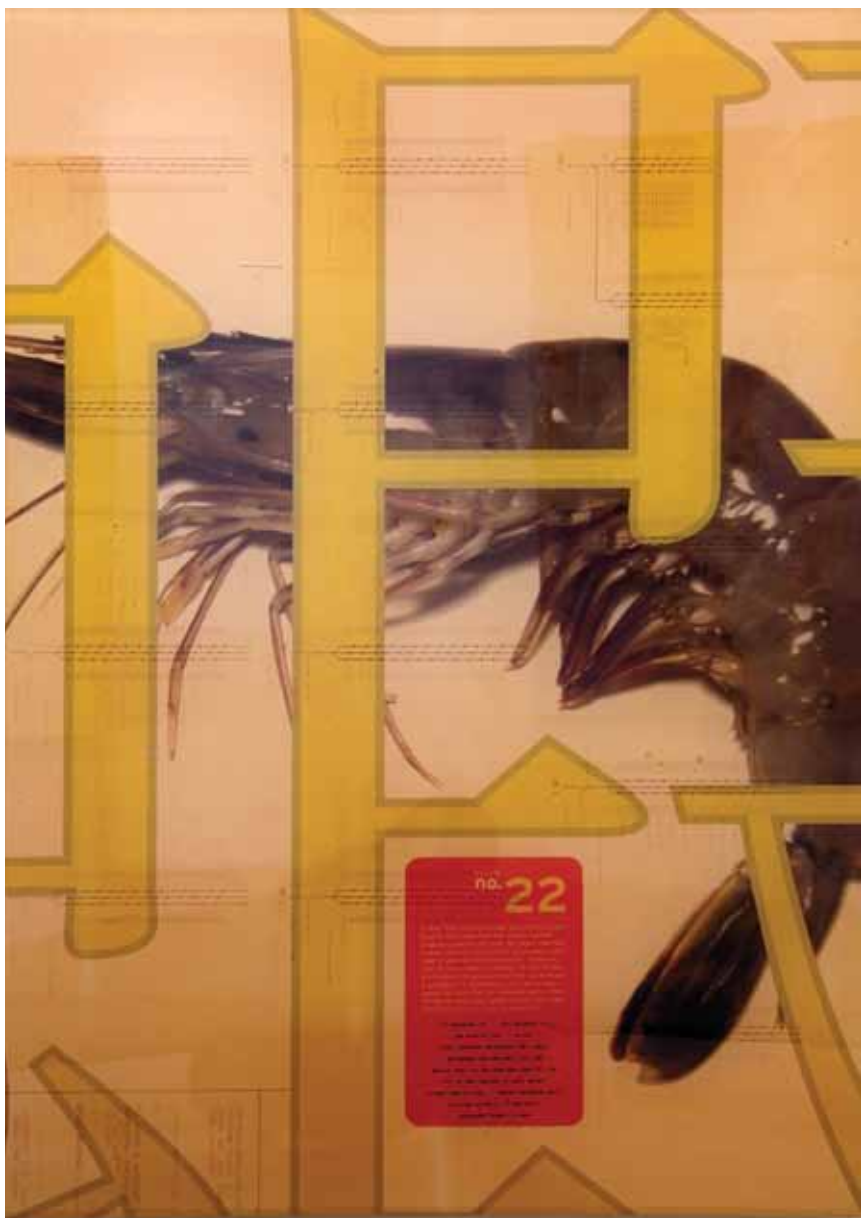






BANANA REPUBLIC 2
Nippon Paint on Canvas & Board
305cm x155 cm
2009
Private Collection

previous page:
WE DESTROY THOSE WE PROTECT MOST
Transparent Perspex, Fluorescent Tubes, Die-cast Metal Scale Down Cars
45.7cm x 365.5cm
2009
Private Collection





THE GREATEST SHOW ON THE PLANET

Nippon Nax Automotive Paint on Board
 25cm x 25cm X 6cm (each)
 2010
 Private Collection

IVAN LAM’S TOGETHER ALONE

Together Alone – a title, a framing device, a description, and a state of being. Paradox, duality, difference, interdependence. The phrase and idea of Together Alone is poetic and quite apt to what is at stake in Ivan Lam’s new body of work and his reinterpretation of the diptych. He plays with the distance between images and their discourses, and the ambiguity of meaning as images travel globally but not necessarily globally understood in the same way. This involves but is not determined by the artist-subject who cites, recycles, appropriates and re-appropriates images from the archive and the seamless and timeless space of the digitally mass-produced for an elitist form of cultural work.

Together Alone, Lam’s 2011 solo show at Wei-Ling gallery, is the artist’s deliberate and determined effort to move away from some of the concerns he explored in his 2009 Panorama series. Writing on the works in **Panorama**, Gina Fairley succinctly situates the work and its vision “that sits outside definitions of physical and psychological space. Just as panorama traditionally transmutes visual reality with its unrealistic optical expanse and warp, [these] paintings are able to transport the viewer to a different dimension using triggers that are recognizable – ‘photo-real’ – and yet in them, reality is slowly unraveled, undermined by the artist’s decisions.”¹ Ivan Lam uses similar recognizable ‘triggers’ in his new body of work, but moves from the broad scene to the universally familiar icons.

There artist has also shifted in his approach to subject matter beyond the pictorial field, while still holding a fascination for the structures of representation that convey it.

Lam has been consistent in his emphasis on “technical intelligence”, over and against “a seduction into narrative favored by Malaysia.”² Similarly, Anurendra Jegadeva suggests that in Lam’s 2007 After all these Years “the editing of the image and their (sic) arrangement are secondary to the design and formal considerations of color.” He adds that “more than the story itself, Ivan seems interested in the devices needed to tell it.” This includes the artist’s continued “obsessive act of layers and strategic placement of pigment.”³ The same tendencies and mode of working persist in Together Alone. However, he seems more relaxed in his painter’s skin - “I am no longer trying to prove I am a colorist.” But these works certainly show that he is and to great effect.

Lam recently introduced industrial resin to his already densely packed bag of pictorial tricks. After weeks of experimenting, he found that the layers of color below the surface of the resin appeared more vivid, clear and precise: “it’s like high definition LCD TV.” Hence, the resin, as a supplemental surface, extended and changed the possibilities of Lam’s already massive archive of colors. Additionally, resin, or rather its characteristics and properties, has become another kind of artwork for him. Here he plays with resin’s strength and fragility. That resin shatters like glass once the surface has been damaged makes these monumental works even more ‘precious’ for their very fragility. Lam relishes in such a string of what he calls dualities.

The works in **Together Alone** consist of five paired paintings. They are monumental in size. On a certain level, their sheer size is designed to envelop vision, making us blind to or forget our external surroundings. This relation of distance and experience has implications for the works’ intelligibility and legibility at every level and layer of the work. In order to enact the work as a whole, it must be seen in total, both sides fully available to the eye at the same time. To do this requires us to step back, far back. A different set of relations are set in motion when the works are seen from a “closer distance.” If seen from up close, close enough for vision to be engulfed in the work’s gravity, the building blocks of the work are revealed and one might be caught in the web of the artist’s obsessive universe and architectural structures. What at a distance looks composed, at a close remove reveals an intent to rein in an energy that threatens to get away from the artist. Even silk-screened symbols, so clear-cut and flat, are layered in such a way as to absorb the viewer in an endless game of penetrating the manifold layers below. **Submarine – I will sink to the bottom with you** epitomizes this momentum.

There is an assumed intimacy and a promise, as well as foreboding bordering on melancholy in **I will sink to the bottom with you**, which is bolstered by the sentimental title that is at once autobiographical and pop culture cliché. It also perhaps articulates the artists desire to share and a holding back from direct disclosure. One panel consists of numerous shades of the deepest black and variations thereof, giving a sense of endless depth and a gravity so massive that no light could possibly escape. The presence of submarine is only implied. We complete the picture, imagining a submarine doing what it is designed to do, remain hidden. Its mirror half carries a brighter spectrum of color. A

fantastic array of particles invades our space. Here, the symbol of submarine in outline is nearly hidden beneath the weight of the static or white noise of Lam’s brush. What I call the white noise of the brush seems like part of a contemplative exercise in self-control, release, and letting go – a meditation of sorts.

The white noise coalesces into a figure of concentric and overlapping circles; a figure that Lam frequently employed in his work of the late 1990s and up to After all these Years. At times, as in I will sink to the bottom with You, it becomes a kind of archetypical form. As ground for his paintings in this series, these circular figures resemble a kind of aura radiating outward in ever expanding ripples. Visual vibrancy and depth is built up through a sequence of colors layered in cross-hatch patterns, often beginning with an all over surface of red-orange or burnt orange-yellow. In some works, the brushstroke is short and staccato, in others elongated, rushed and dripping with excess materially and metaphorically.

The current series is a continuation of the artist’s engagement with historical genres and structures of representation from art history (read large, plural, multiple). He makes a conscious move away from his previous work with panoramic pictorial space to explore formal and rhetorical possibilities of the diptych. But he is not intent on a critical reappraisal of it. Put simply, a diptych is a visual work made of two panels, each side is supposed to be read simultaneously to form a third figure.

Such is the case in **Target and Deer --- You are being Missed, Dear**. The conceptual nature of the piece lies in the vacillation between two images that metaphorically refer to the same thing. The title obscures such a direct reading in that it shifts the location of target. Read in tandem with text, the deer becomes the primary target, and is also “beside itself.”

Considering the usefulness of the forces of contradiction he imports into the structure of his diptychs, Lam states: “the dichotomy between the two paintings creates visual tension and division... I constantly try to negotiate the boundaries of what is what is not. When you think you have it, you lose it. When you have presence it’s actually the absence of it. It is in this dichotomy that my art thrives - in the contrast, the comparison, in opposites, the straddling between both, the graphic and the fine art, and the known and the unknown.”⁴

Each ‘half’ of was completed separately and months apart, and the artist did not produce them with a linear progression in mind. The first of the pair was completed without thought to its companion, or opposite Other. The overarching concept therefore derives after the fact, after the two works have been placed together. Yet in some of his juxtapositions, he attenuates the distance between images and their general meanings to such an extent that the relationships between the two images seem to edge toward the random. The conceptual and spatio-temporal distance between the two images in **Buddha and Communications Tower – I Tried to reach you but you were engaged and Bird and Kimono – for a lark I will eat a crow**, for instance, seem difficult to bridge. And this is partly what the artist is counting on.

It can be argued that Lam appropriates and empties images in such a way that his work can read as knowingly bypassing or going beyond certain thorny positions and (dominant) discourses. They belong to everyone and no one. For some this might seem obvious. Along their varied journeys, images may lose some or all of their reflective capacity or may become blurred. Lam’s juxtapositions will be read differently across locations, and hence have something unique to say in them. But I underscore the artistic use of the homeless symbol shed of its dominant meaning here because this aspect in his work might have particular critical resonance regarding the dissemination of the culturally significant (marked) image in contexts in Malaysia.

Dr. Amanda Katherine Rath is a Fellow in the Dept of Southeast Asian Studies and Lecturer in the Curatorial Studies Program at the Goethe University of Frankfurt, Germany.

1 Gina Fairley, “Unleashed Reality,” in Panorama exh. catalog. Wei-Ling Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, 2009: 14
2 Gina Fairley, “Twelve Degrees of Separation,” Asian Art News (March/April, 2008): 62. Reproduced in Panorama exh. catalog. Wei-Ling Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, 2009.

3 Anurendra Jegadeva, “Getting Past Pushing Paint around on the Canvas,” in After all these Years, exh. catalog, Wei-Ling Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, 2007: 13.

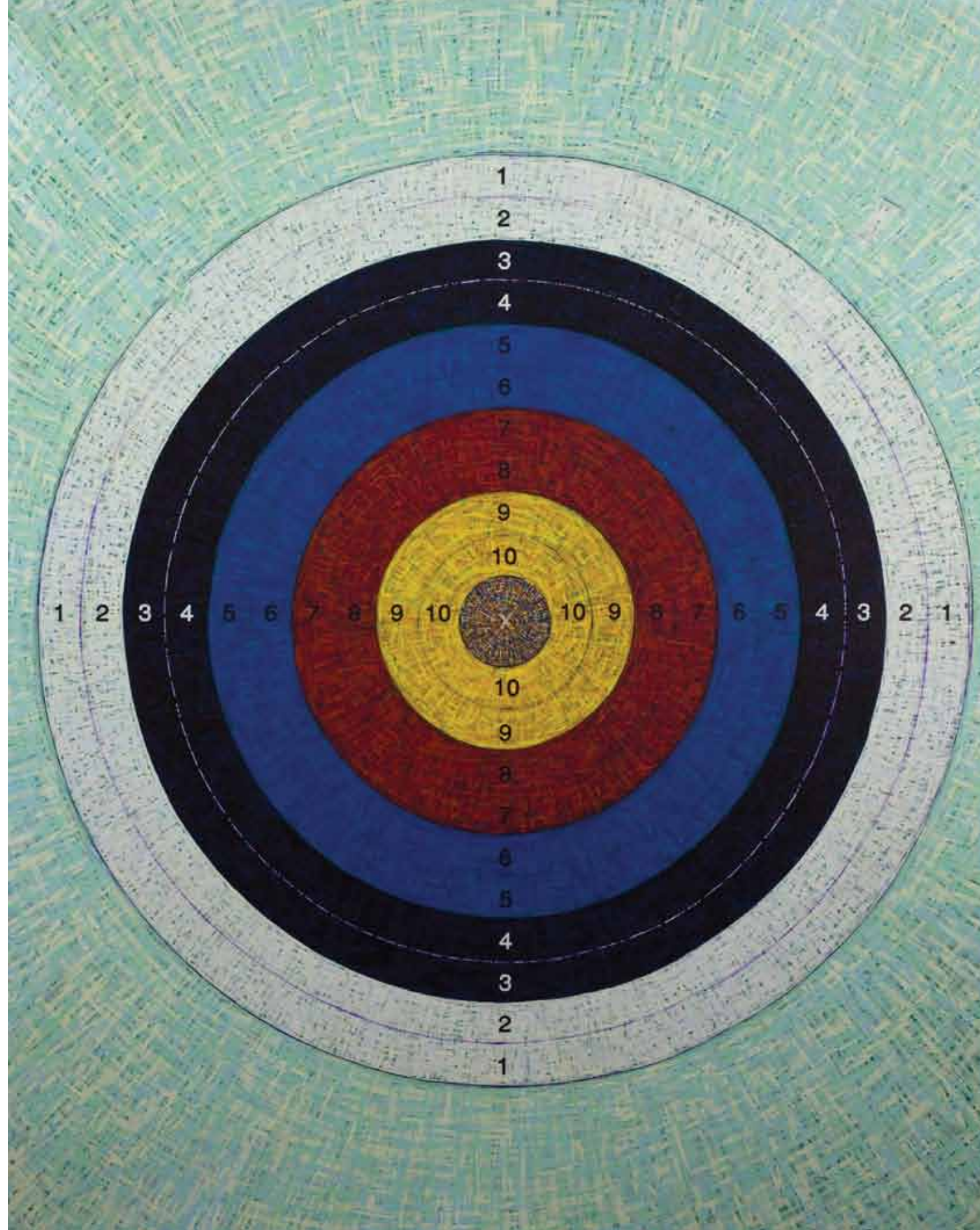
4 Anurendra Jegadeva, “Getting Past Pushing Paint around on the Canvas,” in After all these Years, exh. catalog, Wei-Ling Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, 2007: 13.



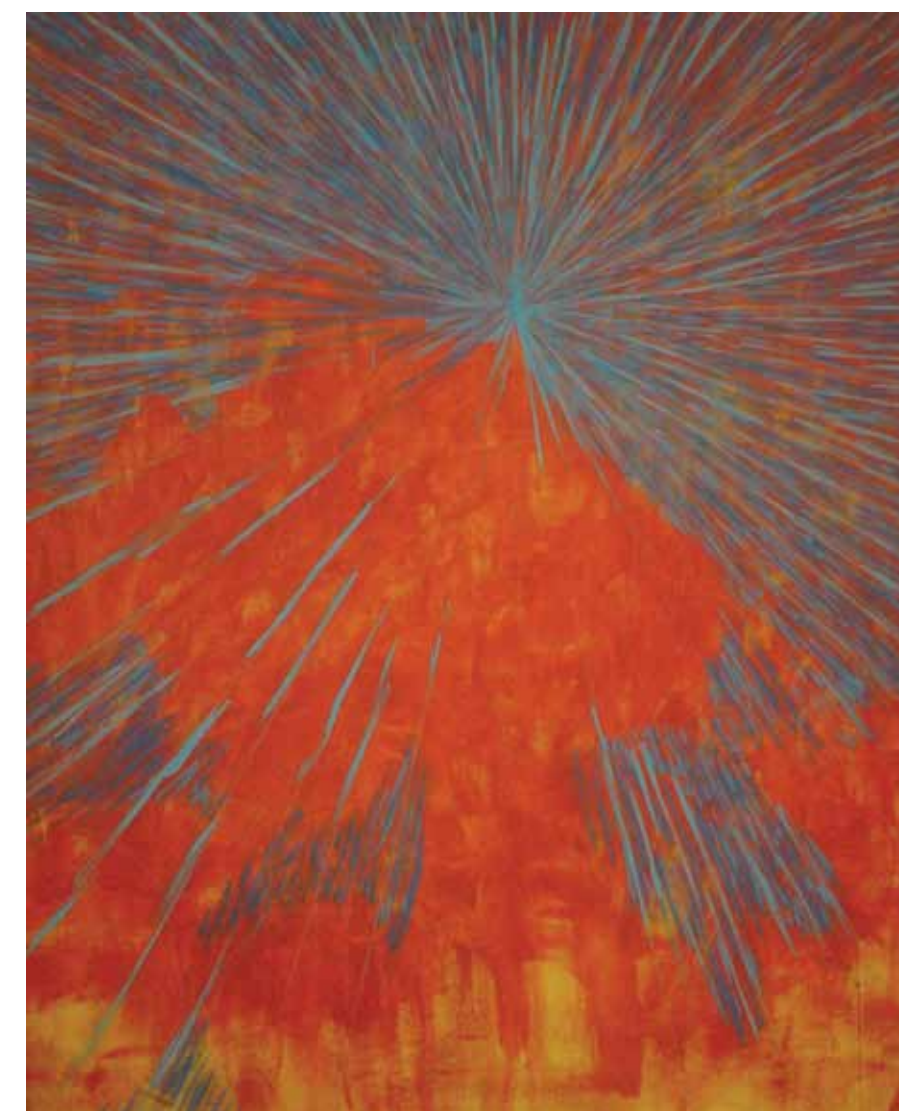
BANANA REPUBLIC 3
 Nippon Paint on Canvas & Board
 225 x 480cm
 2011

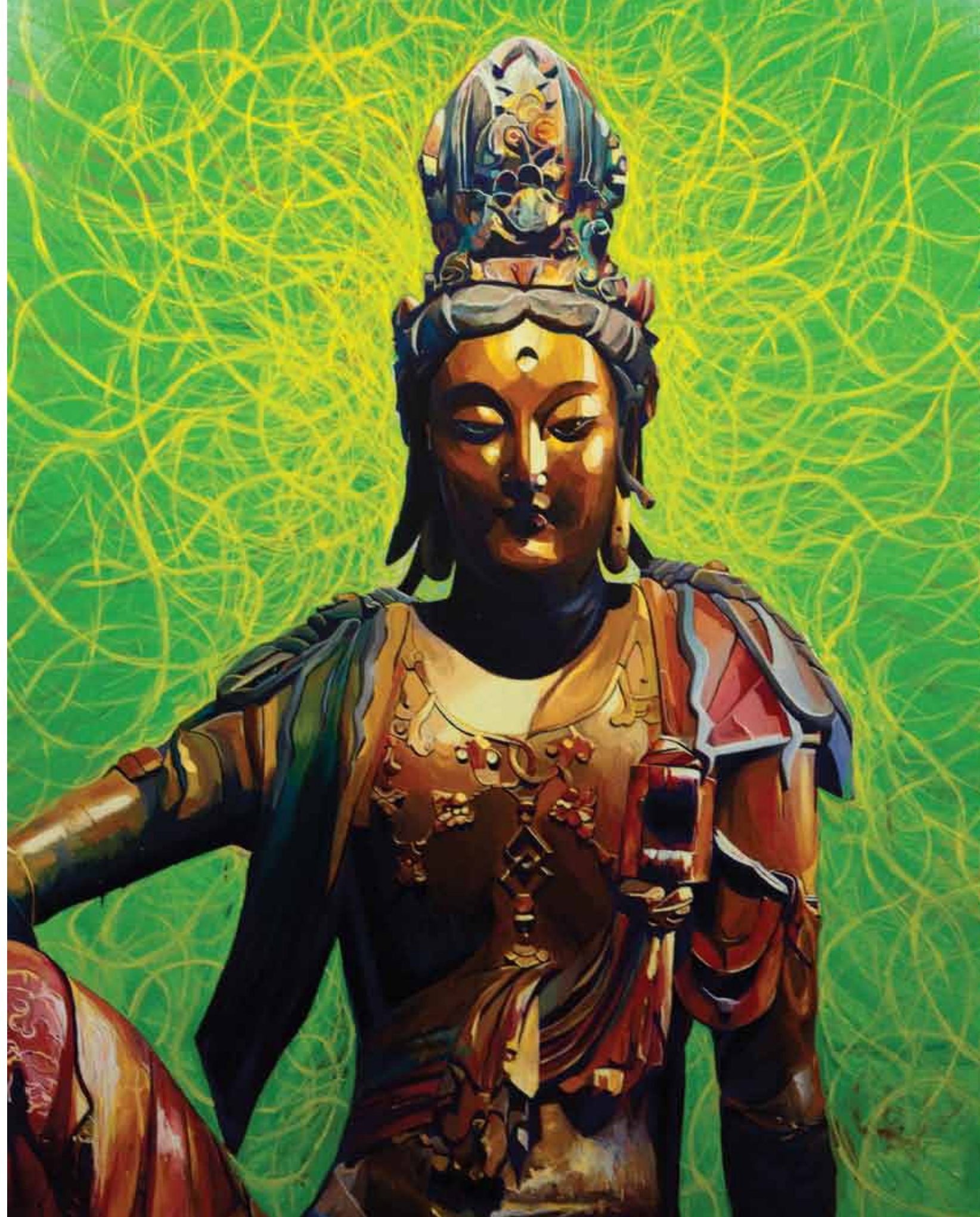
The image features a blurred background of a city street. In the foreground, the ground is covered with vibrant, colorful graffiti in shades of orange, yellow, and blue. The background shows a row of buildings with white facades and dark windows, slightly out of focus. The overall atmosphere is urban and artistic.

TOGETHER ALONE



YOU ARE BEING MISSED, DEAR
Nippon Paint on Canvas & Board
244cm x 396cm
2009/2010



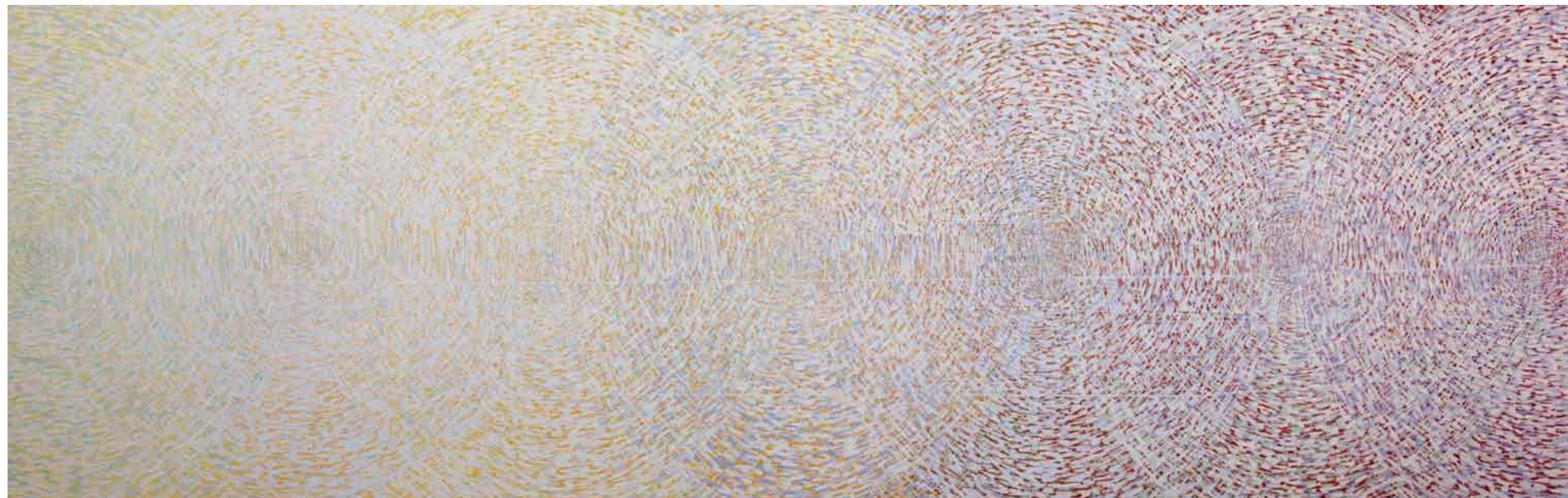




FOR A LARK I WILL EAT A CROW

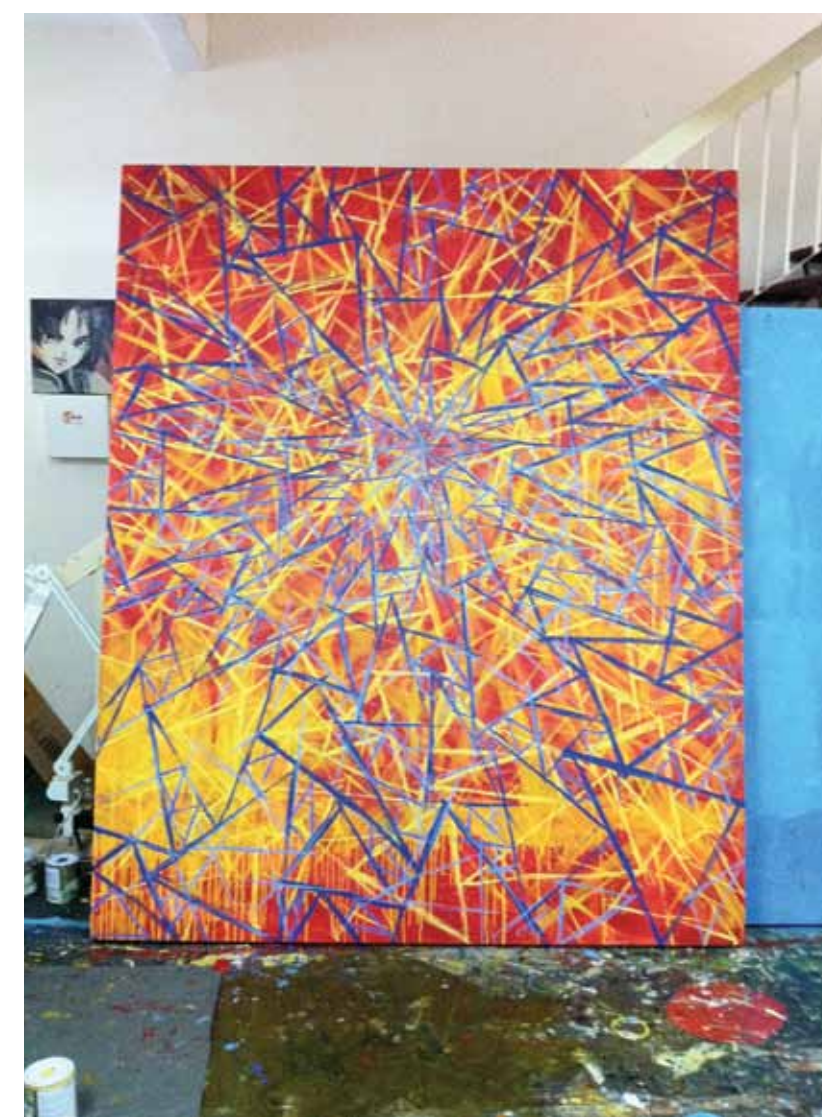
Nippon Paint on Canvas & Board
244cm x 396cm
2010





I WILL SINK TO THE BOTTOM WITH YOU

Nippon Paint on Canvas & Board
107cm x 335cm (each)
2010/2011







IVAN LAM
B. 1975

EDUCATION

- 2006 University of East London, MA in International Contemporary Art and Design Practice, London, UK
- 1998 Maine College of Art, Bachelor of Fine Arts, Painting
- 1994 Lim Kok Wing Institute of Technology, Graphic Design Certificate

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2011 Together Alone, Wei-Ling Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2009 Panorama, Wei-Ling Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2007 Ivan Lam: After All These Years. Wei-Ling Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2004 Plosive, Taksu, Singapore
- 2002 911, Taksu, KL, Malaysia
- 1998 Ins and Outs. Crank, Portland, ME, USA
MECA Senior Thesis Show, Institute of Contemporary Art, Portland ME, USA
Exit Removals, Artworks Gallery, Portland ME, USA

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2010 Absolut 18@8, Wei-Ling Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2009 18@8 - 1 Malaysia : Beyond The Canvas, Wei-Ling Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2008 18@8 Vice and Virtue. Wei-Ling Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Christie's SEA Art Auction. Hong Kong
CIGE (China International Gallery Exposition), China World Trade Centre, Beijing, China
Force of Nature, Pace, Petaling Jaya, Malaysia
- 2007 Filtered, Wei-Ling Gallery, KL, Malaysia
The Force of Nature. Darling Muse Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2006 Larasati Art Auction, Singapore
18@8 Kuala Lumpur - Karachi, Amin Gulgee Gallery, Karachi Pakistan (Collaboration with Wei-Ling Gallery)
Au Naturel, Darling Muse Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
3 Young Contemporaries (1997 - 2006), Valentine Willie Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Nasi Campur 2006, Taksu, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2005 18@8, Wei-Ling Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2004 Philip Morris Asean Art Awards 2004. National Art Gallery, Bangkok, Thailand
10th Anniversary, Taksu, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Footsteps. National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Art Fair Singapore, Singapore
- 2003 Taksu Singapore Opening, Singapore
Taksu Jakarta Opening, Jakarta, Indonesia
- 2002 ArtFair Singapore, Singapore
Identifying Landscape. Darling Muse Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2000 <1000, Valentine Willie Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Transformations, Sculpture Square, Singapore
Arus: Flow, (Australia - Malaysia Electronic Art, Joint Show), National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 1999 Philip Morris 99. National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Aku: 99 Portret Diri. Galeri Petronas, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 1998 Sequence 11, Time Based Art. Imaging Center, Portland ME, USA
- 1997 Maine Art Auction. Selected for Live Auction, Portland ME, USA
Artworks, Portland ME, USA

AWARDS

- 2006 Group Exhibit, Sovereign Art Prize (Top 10 Finalists) Hong Kong
- 2003 Group Exhibit (Grand Prize Winner), Philip Morris National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 2001 Group Exhibit (Honourable mention), Philip Morris National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- 1999 One Person Exhibit, Bright Sight Night Lights. Galeriwan, KL, Malaysia
- 1996 Merit Scholarship Exhibit, 1st place, MECA, Portland, ME, USA

PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

- National Art Gallery, Malaysia
- Merrill Lynch, Maine, USA
- Crank Design Consultant, Maine, USA
- The Aliya & Farouk Khan Collection, Malaysia
- Galeri Petronas, Malaysia
- HSBC, Malaysia
- Park Royal Hotel, Malaysia

