



Teh Tarik with The Flag

Teh Tarik with The Flag

23 July - 17 September 2018

Gallery 3B

National Art Gallery of Malaysia

Presented by



Curated by **Wei-Ling Gallery**

Anurendra Jegadeva

Cheng Yen Pheng

Chong Kim Chiew

Choy Chun Wei

Fauzan Omar

Hamidi Hadi

Hayati Mokhtar

HH Lim

Ivan Lam

Rajinder Singh

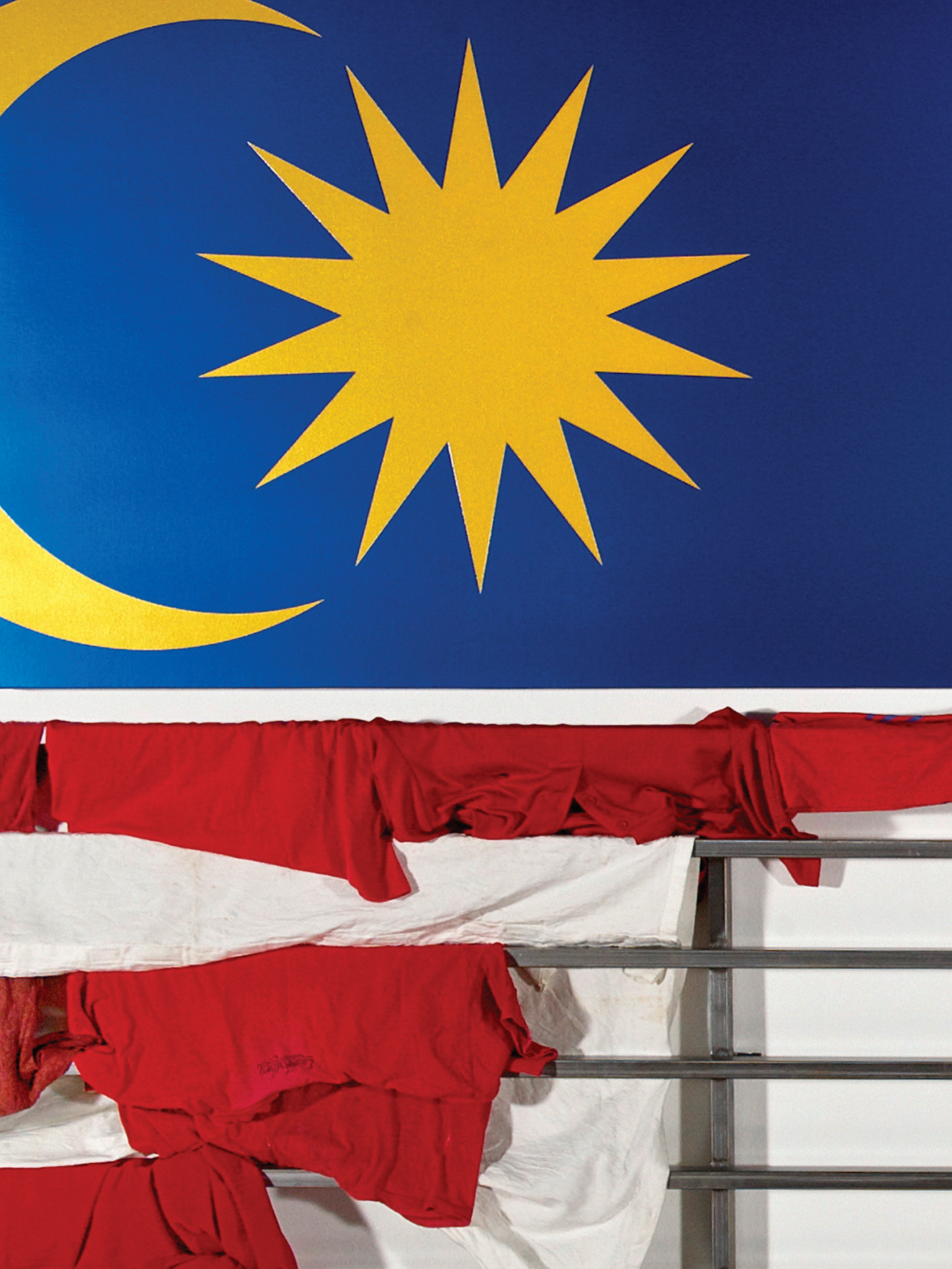
Sean Lean

Sulaiman Esa

Yau Bee Ling

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Sean Lean, *A few Malaysia(s)*, Mixed media, 203cm x 420cm; (top left) 102cm x 140cm; (top right) 113cm x 178cm; (bottom) 90cm x 420cm, (Triptych), 2018, (Detail)



United Overseas Bank and Art

United Overseas Bank Limited (UOB) is a leading bank in Asia with a global network of more than 500 branches and offices in 19 countries and territories in Asia Pacific, Europe and North America. United Overseas Bank (Malaysia) Bhd (UOB Malaysia) was incorporated in 1993 but has had a presence in Malaysia since 1951.

Just as we are dedicated to helping our customers manage their finances wisely and to grow their businesses, UOB is steadfast in its support of the social and economic development of local communities. Guided by our values of being Honourable, Enterprising, United and Committed, we contribute to local communities holistically through philanthropy, partnerships and employee participation, and by being inclusive. Our programmes connect people, strengthen bonds and enrich lives through art, children and education.

The UOB Painting of the Year Competition (POY) underscores our commitment to support the development of art in Malaysia and across the region. Launched in Malaysia in 2011, POY is one of the most prestigious art competitions in Southeast Asia. It is held annually in four countries across the region – Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand.

For more information on the UOB Painting of the Year Competition, visit www.UOBPOY.com.

For further information on UOB Malaysia, visit www.UOB.com.my.



National Art Gallery

- The eye represents the views of the visual arts artists
- The square represents visual arts
- The long oval suggest the essence of arts
- This logo was invented by YBhg. Datuk Syed Ahmad Jamal

Vision

To become the ultimate centre for the development and collection of the national visual arts and the trustee for the national art heritage

Mission

To collect, restore, preserve, exhibit, promote and nurture awareness, understanding and appreciation of art for all community

Objective

1. To have a collection of artworks as the National Visual Art Permanent Collection that portrays the creativity and cultural arts aspirations in local and international aspects.
2. To restore, preserve, document and research the National Visual Art Permanent Collection and the historical of national arts.
3. To promote and improve the quality of national visual arts by organizing exhibitions, seminars, workshops, competitions and arts activities in local and international aspects.
4. To create awareness, understanding, appreciation and respect towards arts.

Message by the Director-General of the National Art Gallery, Malaysia

First and foremost, I'd like to start off by congratulating Wei-Ling Gallery for their great initiative and efforts in presenting this exhibition at the National Art Gallery. As we celebrate the National Art Gallery's 60th anniversary, this exhibition aims to contribute to our nation through the arts.

Teh Tarik with The Flag portrays a symbolic and visual sense of belonging through the fostering and importance of our national flag. *Teh Tarik with The Flag* depicts the flag as a point of departure for artists to reflect on the poetics of the 'Jalur Gemilang'. The merging of the two highlights its uniqueness.

I firmly believe that this exhibition brings out a fantastic collaboration amongst the 13 artists as they demonstrate their wonderful ideas and strong creativity through the works presented. The artists' participation in this exhibition is vital as it is a representation of unity.

Our aligned vision focuses on facilitating, promoting and providing a platform for artists, collectors and the general public at large, to interact with art in the country. With this exhibition, we are delighted to share these important pieces of art that we hope, will extend beyond our borders.

Once again, congratulations to Wei-Ling Gallery and the participating artists for making this exhibition happen. The showcase will be held at Galeri 3B from the 23rd July to 17th September 2018.

YBhg Prof. Dato Dr. Mohamed Najib bin Ahmed Dawa
Director – General, National Art Gallery, Malaysia



Message by the Founder of Wei-Ling Gallery and Wei-Ling Contemporary

In celebration of the National Art Gallery's 60th Anniversary, our gallery is honoured to curate *Teh Tarik with The Flag*, an exhibition which brings together 13 prominent Malaysian artists to explore and reflect on, and extend the rich and complex story of the '*Jalur Gemilang*' as a potent symbol and a marker of identity, unity, belief and sovereignty.

Artists are the voice of our times, observers of their surroundings and environment-documenting within their work the ideas, conversations, hopes, fears, beliefs, joys and sorrows that affect them and those in their midst.

Being on the cusp of change towards the glorious new Malaysia, *Teh Tarik with The Flag* challenges personal, collective, local and global perspectives of the philosophical, ideological and often hierarchical status of the '*Jalur Gemilang*' – our national flag. Our unwavering attachment to the flag and emotions stimulated by the sentiments embedded within it, speak of the power of symbols in reaffirming our collective identity.

Below the fluttering flag and down at the '*Mamak*' stall (local coffee shop), occurs the simplest yet warmest everyday tradition of gathering over the national drink, '*Teh Tarik*', where social and political matters often dominate the discussions. Altering the physical materiality of the flag as icon and placing it vis-à-vis the people, this exhibition invites artists and viewers to extend the representational role of the flag, to a point where it would return to its original functions: fostering a sense of belonging, assuring cultural identities, and expression of autonomy.

It has been the gallery's continued objective over the last 16 years, to give Malaysian contemporary artists a platform on which to be heard, both at home and on an international arena.

This exhibition is testament to our commitment in developing art in Malaysia and bringing it to a wider audience. To this end, the *Teh Tarik with The Flag* exhibition marks a significant and relevant turning point in the nation's history, and it is an exhibition for Malaysians by Malaysians.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the team at the National Visual Arts Gallery of Malaysia who have given us the opportunity to present an exhibition that sits at the crossroads of such significant times, our presenting sponsor UOB Malaysia, for your unwavering and sincere support of art in the region over the last three decades, and the 13 Malaysian artists who have created such seminal works for this exhibition.

The presence of YABhg. Tun Dr Siti Hasmah bt Hj.Mohd Ali to officiate at this exhibition has made it all the more meaningful.

Happy 60th Birthday Balai!

Lim Wei-Ling

Founder, Wei-Ling Gallery and Wei-Ling Contemporary

www.weiling-gallery.com

July 2018





Installation view, Teh Tarik with *The Flag*, Gallery 3B, National Art Gallery of Malaysia, 2018



WED INVITATION



Installation view, Teh Tarik with The Flag, Gallery 3B, National Art Gallery of Malaysia, 2018

Teh Tarik with the Flag

When it comes to the question of a country's identity, the answer is always tucked within the fabric of its urban life: in street-stalls and the local coffee shops, or in the alleyways of the neighbourhood. It is in these ordinary, liminal spaces that balance in between margin and center, where locals gather to share their aspirations and anxieties, their opinions and concerns, and their hopes and fears. On a hot summer day in a Chinese '*Kopitiam*' nestled somewhere in Kuala Lumpur, stories that form the narrative of Malaysia unfold over a cup of '*Teh Tarik*'. The hot sweetened milky tea, which literally translates to "pulled tea", is synonymous with the multicultural nation. It is found in makeshift street-stalls and in five star hotels, transcending socio-economic boundaries and bringing together the various ethnic communities that form Malaysia. Whether it is a conversation on the prices of vegetables or the current political state of the country, the daily exchanges over '*Teh Tarik*' in informal settings shape the identity of Malaysia, and eventually they find themselves woven into the narrative of the nation and its defining symbol – the flag.

Malaysian artist Anurendra Jegadeva recalls in his work *Prophecy* the story his father spoke of after a morning tea and '*Roti Canai*' with his friends. The story, called the RAHMAN prophecy, is a peculiar theory.

"The word Rahman in the Tengku's name spelt out the initials for each Prime Minister that would follow his tenure as Prime Minister. R is for Rahman, A for Abdul Razak, H for Hussein, M for Mahathir, A for Ahmad Badawi ending with N for Najib which seems to imply that with N the dominance of UMNO and 'Barisan' in governing Malaysia would end. What would happen after N for Najib?"

A sense of irony and superstitious audacity sits at the heart of the story, yet the setting and the subject Jegadeva constructs in his work speak of the life of daily Malaysians and their stories that unravel in the most ordinary places.

Prophecy is one of thirteen artworks that hang on the walls of the National Art Gallery of Malaysia as part of the group exhibition *Teh Tarik with The Flag*. The exhibition gathers thirteen Malaysian artists to explore the symbolic power of the flag as a means to reflect on and extend the rich and complex story of the '*Jalur Gemilang*' as a potent symbol and a marker of identity, unity, belief, and division.

National symbols – in particular flags – are perhaps the strongest conveyors of national identities. They are symbols imbued with an aura that reverberates qualitatively throughout physical space. The presence of a flag swiftly waving in the wind conjures up strong feelings of pride and patriotism among those who stand beneath it. Its deterioration and desecration send out echoes of a fragmented nation. Unlike ordinary objects, cultural icons transcend their materialities and assume the qualities of living and breathing entities, and even the smallest scrap of an old nation's flag holds within it the narrative of the country. In no way is this more evident than in the work of Sean Lean, *A few Malaysia(s)*, where two separate components form Lean's vision of the Malaysian flag. The first part is composed of two panels depicting the '*Jalur Gemilang*': the blue canton bearing a crescent and a 14-point star known as '*Bintang Perskeutuan*', and the second panel is a field of 14 alternating red and white stripes on the second canvas. Lean retained the original vision of the Malaysian flag, where elements refer to values ingrained in every Malaysian: blue to symbolize the unity of the Malaysian people, red to signify strength and courage in facing adversity, white to mark integrity, and yellow to indicate the royal colors of the rulers.

However, beyond the intended symbolism of its star, stripes, and colors, Lean sought to invite the everyday Malaysian to complete the imagery of the flag by contributing their own white and red cloth objects – a shirt or a scarf – to a metal rack he strategically placed beneath the two canvases. An item of clothing is inherently a personal one, and it subtly mirrors the materiality and function of the flag, which is to protect. Essentially, Lean asks viewers to carry on a simple yet emotional gesture that dismantles the hierarchy and sews the gaps between the flag and the people it represents.

The rich and complex story of the *'Jalur Gemilang'* finds another interpretation in Ivan Lam's *The Death of a Nation / The Birth of a Nation*. The mixed media work is a political commentary on national identities and race relations in Malaysia. The project began from a small remark about the "race column" that has been a dominant fixture in government official forms in Malaysia.

"Being conditioned to checking the "race box" and defining oneself as "Malay", "Chinese", "Indian", or "Other", Malaysians have grown indifferent to the implications posed by this question. Little have wondered or even questioned the challenges provoked by such a presumption."

Yet, as Lam notes, *"the race category begs to question what constitutes Malaysian. Is one race more Malaysian than another? And aren't we all Malaysians regardless of race, creed, and religion? In a sense, the race question looms on every Malaysian's mind every now and then, despite government's efforts to forge a national identity; the race box reinvigorates racial ambiguity and discrimination."*

In attempting to navigate this question, Lam's four-panel work seeks to make the viewer conscious of the race question by materializing it in a physical way. The four panels are composed of narrow, thin strips of cloth driven from the 16 flags of Malaysia (3 Federal Territories and 13 States). Charcoal, a material that symbolizes rebirth, fills the gaps in between the stripes. In each panel, the ratio

of charcoal to cloth is set loosely in accordance to the demographic make up of Malaysia: “67.4% Malay, 24.6% Chinese, 7.3% Indian, 0.7% Other.”¹

In using charcoal, Lam has materialized the question of race, making the abstract notion of race and ethnicity a physical visualization in space. In looking at the ratio of charcoal, the viewer experiences what it means to be a part of a specific ethnicity, specifically what it means to have so much “space” or to be privileged, and what it means to have little “space” or be under-privileged.

For the unsuspected visitor, the thin strips of cloth could hardly be recognized as being made up of the 16 Malaysians flags. In a way, Lam has effectively stripped a national icon — a sanctified object — from its original quality, thereby destructing its original aura. The stripes of flags bear no difference to stripes of worn-out cloths, but the truth remains that the fraught, ambiguous pieces of cloth were once the 16 flags of Malaysia. Does the act of cutting apart the flag disrespect it as national symbol? Or does it remind the viewers that it is through our minds that we bring national symbols to life and into power?

Symbols come to life, quite literally, in *Rubia 5m Wide*, where Rajinder Singh explores his own relationship to the nation and the flag through a series of movements and gestures. The single channel video displayed by a grid of pigment prints on photo paper investigates the contribution of Sikhs throughout in Malaysian history. The Saffron orange of the turban — one of Sikhism’s sacred colours, becomes the central element of the compositions. Through choreographed movements, Singh expresses pain and prayer, questioning his place within the historical narrative of Malaysia.

In a similar vein, Sulaiman Esa delves into religion, weaving together iconography from the different religions that exist within Malaysia (Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity) into one colorful tapestry. The unity and harmony embedded in the

1 https://www.dosm.gov.my/v1/index.php?r=column/ctHEME&menu_id=L0pheU43NWJwRWVSZklWdzQ4TIhUUT09&bul_id=MDMxdHZjWTK1SjFzTzNkRXYzcVZjdz09

nation is reflected in the title of Esa's tapestry, *One God Many Paths*. Mosques, Buddhist and Taoist temples, Indian and Sikh temples, and churches of different denominations dot the streets of Malaysia, and the serene echoes of the Adhan, the fragrant incense from an Indian temple, and the meditative chants that reverberate from a Buddhist temple neighbor each other in some instances. Likewise, the sight of Malaysians of different racial and religious backgrounds gathering at a local 'Mamak' stall exchanging conversations over a cup of 'Teh Tarik' is not uncommon. In *No Colour*, Cheng Yen Pheng depicts this sight of harmony. Her photography collage, complemented with drawings by children that are integrated in the form of stitches, presents a portrait of the complex diversity of Malaysia that Esa represented in his tapestry.

On the walls of the National Art Gallery, several other works respond to the tension that prevailed throughout the recent election period. Choy Chun Wei and Yau Bee Ling's abstract canvases depict the radiating change sweeping Malaysia, while Fauzan Omar and Hamidi Hadi speak of the turbulent nature of Malaysian politics. In *Battlefield*, Omar collaged the aftermath of the 2018 General Election, collecting election posters, banners and flags from the ruling and opposition party that littered the streets on the night of the election. Layered on top of one another, the leftover materials became a document of the moment of glory and celebration. On the other hand, Hadi's response in *Save the Flag* is heavy with melancholy. The Malaysian flag sits behind waste paper and wire mesh in a state of disintegration, perhaps mirroring the emotions of the everyday Malaysian during times of political uncertainty.

Yet, despite the strong sense of belonging embedded in Malaysians, notions of diaspora prevail. Notions of home and belonging and images of shifting landscapes are the subject of *No. 55, Main Road*. Hayati Mokhtar does not reference the flag, but instead looks at what it represents: home. Mokhtar navigates the question of home. How do physical spaces, whether in the form of a house, a city or a country, morph into recognizable landscapes that house our fears and protect our dreams? In the three-channel video, she intimately

contemplates the personal history of 87-year-old ‘Uncle’ Chang Ching and his soon-to-be demolished shop-house and home that resides in the South of Ipoh. The video installation invites viewers to experience the intimacy of Uncle’s home, to note of his stubborn attachment to all that is familiar, and to mourn the fragility of the concept of home. Seen from this lens, the audience is encouraged to contemplate the larger, social, economic and political changes that are transforming Malaysia.

Identity, diaspora, and shifting borders are again the subject of *Transparent Flag (History of the Malay Peninsula)*. The work is composed of separate panels, each depicting one aspect of the flag. Dissected and devoid of color, the ‘*Jalur Gemilang*’ is no longer recognisable, and although it is tangible, its invisibility makes it difficult to identify. When overlapped, the panels accumulate to form the history of Malaysia. Chong Kim Chiew renders the familiar imagery of the flag foreign, prompting the viewer to imagine its uncertain future.

Aptly positioned towards the end of the exhibition is *Me, Myself and I*, a conceptual work by H.H. Lim that encourages visitors to contemplate their role as active protagonist in the nation’s story. The simple chair beneath a spotlight awaits the viewer in the National Art Gallery and invites him to think critically about the question of identity, belonging, home, and the narratives that are yet to be woven into the ‘*Jalur Gemilang*.’

“What does the future of the ‘Jalur Gemilang’ hold?”

Line Dalile, Curator

August 2018

Line Dalile is a writer and curator based in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. She studied art history and earned a Bachelor of Arts in visual culture in 2017 from Curtin University, Perth, Australia.



Hayati Mokhtar, No.55, Main Road (2010), Three channel video installation, 17 minutes, (continuous play),
 Dimensions vary with installation, Edition of 3 + 1 AP, (Detail)



Teh Tarik with The Flag

Anurendra Jegadeva

b. 1965

For me, notions of the Flag are synonymous with all things distinctly Malaysian, from '*Nasi Lemak*' and *Durian to King and Country*. I am much more interested in the place of '*Teh Tarik*' that – for the longest time – has been at the heart of Malaysian politics. Most Malaysians are '*Mamak*' politicians and patriots.

I grew up in a typical Malaysian home where politics was always part of this '*Mamak*' stall supposition and intrigue.

Prophecy (2010) for example is the result of a story my father used to tell me after a morning tea and '*Roti Canai*' with his friends. Perhaps it was simply meant to help me learn the order of our nation's prime ministers for civics class but I always loved the superstitious audacity of his theory.

He called it the RAHMAN prophecy.

According to him, the word *Rahman* in the Tengku's name spelt out the initials for each Prime Minister that would follow his tenure as Prime Minister.

R is for *Rahman*, *A* for *Abdul Razak*, *H* for *Hussein*, *M* for *Mahathir*, *A* for *Ahmad Badawi* ending with *N* for *Najib*, which seems to imply that with *N*, the dominance of UMNO and '*Barisan*' in governing Malaysia would end.

What would happen after *N* for *Najib*?

Strangely, three versions of the Mahathir panel were also made.

The more recent *Jemputan* or *Invitation* (2018) is the latest large drawing from my *Love Series*. Another '*Mamak*' stall favorite, this '*Teh Tarik*' special otherwise known as Eddin's Law, is the result of the '*Kacukan Bangsa*', or the mixing-of-races theory that – perhaps – only in this way can we ever become One Nation.

Jemputan references the mythical marriage of a Malay Sultan and a Chinese princess in 15th-century Melaka as a parallel to current events where Malaysians seem ready to cast aside historical divides in a bid for a new Malaysia.

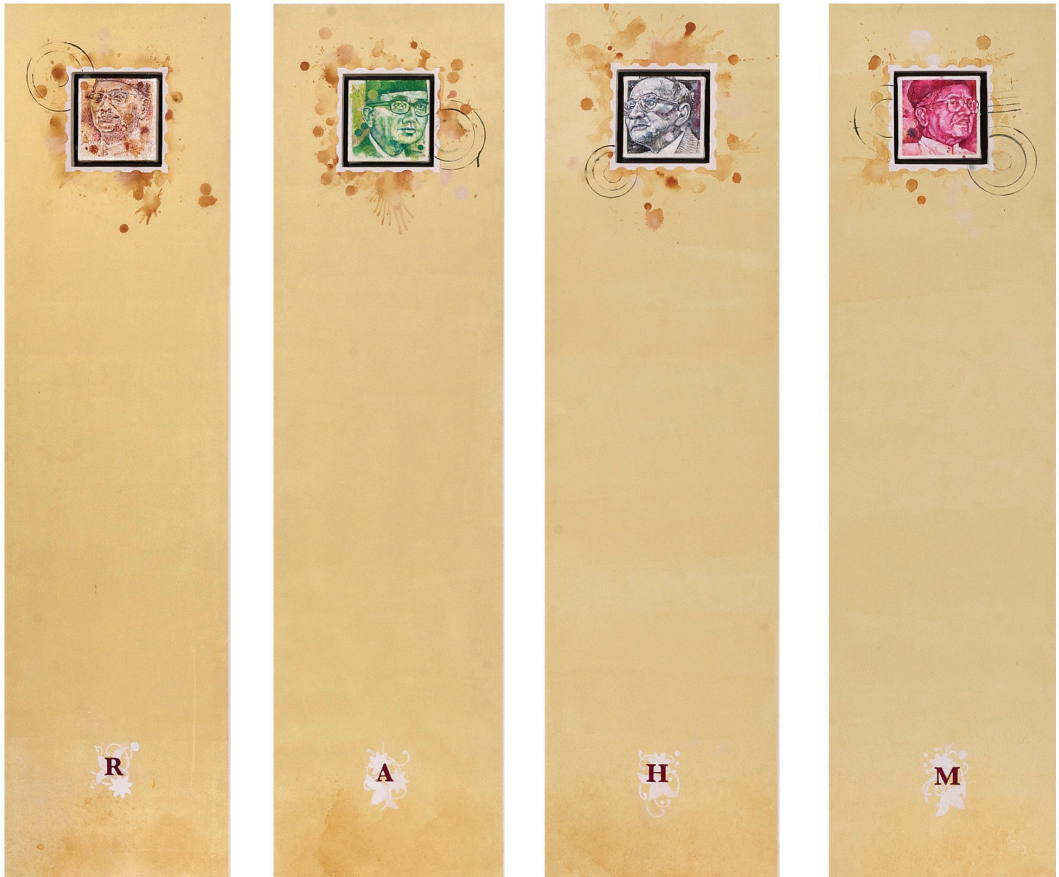


Jemputan

Mixed media on paper

150cm x 150cm

2018

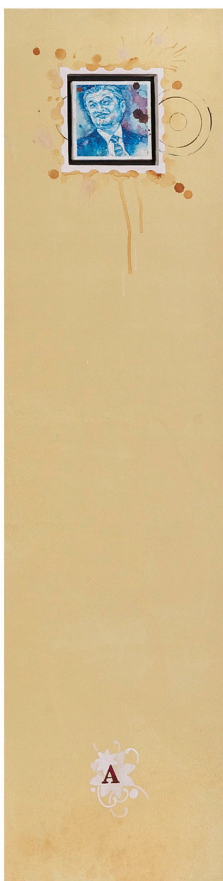


Prophecy

Oil on canvas

140cm x 39cm (each), 6 pannels

2010



The Leader II

Oil on canvas
140cm x 39cm
2010

Cheng Yen Pheng

b. 1982

This is a photography collage complemented with drawings by children integrated in the form of stitching or embroidery. The people photographed are my family members, friends, colleagues, neighbours, students and random passers-by. Despite having different faiths and coming from different ethnicities and parts of the country, we manage to get along well. Recent political events have shown that different “colours” are being assigned to different agendas. Sometimes too many “colours” may cause confusion, which is why I chose to eliminate all colours from the photograph, as if to unite all of the subjects presented. The only traces of colour that can be found are in the stitches of the children’s drawings. This was purposefully done in view of the children being innocent and pure.





No Colour
Mixed media
30cm x 308.5cm
2015-2018

Chong Kim Chiew

b. 1975

A transparent flag can be interpreted as a perspective or invisible flag. The national flag is a symbol and spirit of a country. Eric Hobsbawm proposed the concept of a nation in 1780; it is a relatively new concept. If we look at the history behind the flag, a flag has been used for multiple purposes for a long period of time, but the concept of the national flag only began to be popularized after the 19th century.

The material of the *Transparent Flag (History of the Malay Peninsula)* (2017) is tangible and touchable, but visually, it is invisible and difficult to identify. Parallel to the truth, sometimes an objective fact is difficult to identify, as though it was hiding in the dark.

The *Transparent Flag* can be viewed either separately or as a whole. If the audience were to view it from the front, they may see the flag as a strange and foreign flag, rather than a flag that they are familiar with. The flag's content is complex because of the overlapping images from each of the individual flags behind. However, if they were to view the piece from the side, the image of each flag becomes clearer, and sooner or later the audience will realize that each flag is not unfamiliar; they are in fact historical flags from the past.

No matter what angle they perceive the work, they will not be seeing a single image, due to the nature of the transparent material; they will see overlapping images of different historical flags. We can see this as a metaphor of a country; the accumulation of history creates a nation.

Transparent Flag (History of the Malay Peninsula)

PVC transparent film

Dimensions variable

2017



Choy Chun Wei

b. 1973

This piece evolves around a uniquely encapsulated moment that Malaysians felt and experienced collectively on the 9th of May 2018. I am inscribing that moment via abstract visual expression; I hope to express the communal joy and cheer in a non-obvious fashion. This historical and jubilant time is captured in the positive energy radiating within Malaysians. I captured this through the use of playful abstract rhythms, movements and colours. The hues are deliberately restricted to the Malaysian flag's symbolic colours, yet reconfigured to generate visual variations and rhythm.



Rebirth

Acrylic medium, paint, transparent gesso and enamel ink on acid free paper on canvas
91.5cm x 305cm (Diptych)
2018



Fauzan Omar

b. 1951

All of us Malaysians believe in exercising our wisdom and rationality when choosing our leaders. No one is questioned. Unfortunately, disillusionment within the ruling party – internal disputes, betrayals, broken promises, empty pledges, abuses of power, repressive laws, malicious propaganda and widespread corruption – have caused a rise in debt, high cost of living, GST, and “kleptocracy” which led to its downfall.



The Battlefield, Collage, acrylic and mixed-media, 168cm x 305cm (Diptych), 2018

In the moment of glory and celebration, the election posters, banners and flags both from the ruling and opposition parties littered our environment. I took it upon myself to take them down and keep them with me, as they are significant to me.

Dear winners, I congratulate you, but please do not forget the given mandates; do not let them end up in the dustbin.



Hamidi Hadi

b. 1971

This work is my response to the political atmosphere of the country today. The current issues in turbulent Malaysian politics created a profound effect on the perceptions and emotions of Malaysians.

To this end, my works seek to reflect the emotions that run deep, and that as Malaysians it is our right and within our capability to save our flag (country).



Hari Ini Dalam Sejarah, 9 Mei

Acrylic on canvas

156cm x 136cm

2018



Save the Flag

Mixed media wire mass, wasted paper, plastic, flag and resin

152.5cm x 152.5cm

2018

Hayati Mokhtar

b. 1969

No. 55, Main Road (2010) is the home of 87 year-old ‘Uncle’ Chang Ching – and it is one of the few inhabited buildings in the two rows of pre-war shop houses that make up the defining centre of Kampung Kepayang, just south of Ipoh. His address aptly reflects the dominating presence of the trunk road. The traffic is relentless and the speed at which the cars and lorries go has meant that the front-rooms of these shop houses seem besieged. Together with other actors – such as newer shop lots and housing developments that now exist nearby – the road has contributed to the near desertion of this small town. What were once dwellings and businesses, such as medicine and coffee shops, are now mostly abandoned ruins. Seen at a glance – from a passing car, for instance – it would appear that Kampung Kepayang, with its shopfronts shuttered or else exposed to the elements, is a virtual ghost town.

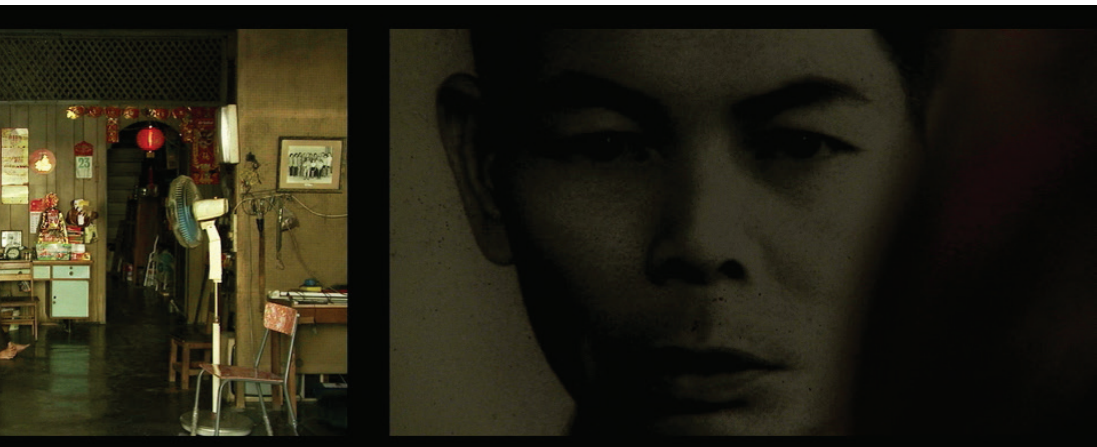
In fact, the truth is even bleaker: soon the town that one sees now may not exist at all. The two rows of old shop houses have been marked for demolition – by the District Council – under Section 83 of the Street, Drainage and Building Act



1974. The Council considers these buildings to be structurally unstable – and therefore unsafe both for their inhabitants and for passers-by. Another reason – and most probably the overriding motivation behind this move- is the fact that the trunk road needs to be widened again.

There is a chance that one row will be saved the side opposite Uncle's shop house – given the presence of the mosque at the end of the row. The Malay village and orchards further back towards the river will also be spared, but the coherence of Kampung Kepayang, as built up over more than a century, will be gone. Some of the townsfolk are resigned to the loss of this place – others don't really care – but, having been there for 50 years, Chang Ching is determined to stay put, to live out his remaining days here.

The work is spread across three screens: one shows a long tracking-shot across the fronts of shop houses; the centre screen is a static shot of 'Uncle's' living room, open to the road; the third screen reveals details of this living room, and of spaces to the rear of it, that are glimpsed down a passage.



By reading horizontally across the screens, one image can broaden the understanding of another – and there is a sense of concurrency as well as sequence, forming a diffuse narrative. For instance, the sight of notices (telling the occupants to quit), pasted on the fronts of the shop houses in one screen, points up the air of long-standing permanence in the ordered clutter of Chang Ching's possessions and photographs in another. We see the objects collected over many years – both treasured souvenirs and the leftover stock of valves and resistors from his days running a radio and TV repair business. At another point, in what hints at a story progression, the man – who has been sitting in his living room reading and listening to Chinese songs from his youth – closes his book, gets up from his chair and leaves down the passage to the back of his house.

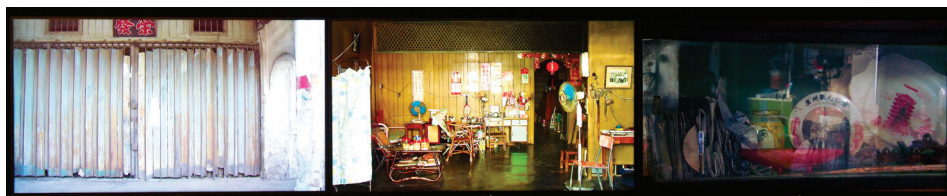
The place is viewed primarily from the inside – from within the intimacy of a home. The outside world impinges but only through indirect, peripheral intrusions. The sound of traffic is there, always. Less pervasively, less overbearingly, there are the reflections of the traffic – the flickers of light that the passing cars and lorries make as they hurtle along the road that cuts through this one-street town.

Uncle's stubborn attachment to his shop house, and to the town that is familiar to him, is an act of resistance to the dictates of a short-sighted bureaucracy that is acting to facilitate supposed progress. In *No. 55* the joss sticks are lit, a kettle boils, the key is in its usual place by the back door – and yet the next shop house along is only a facade.

Further down the street there are more abandoned buildings: strangely beautiful and melancholy structures that are littered with remnants of belongings, photographs and altars – and with staircases that persist simply as a pattern running up a wall. Each of them invites us to construct for it an imagined past or pasts; with some offering more clues than others.

This work emerges from my preoccupation with the hold that places – be it a hometown or house, or even their ideated versions, can have over us – perhaps because they epitomize our desire for a sense of belonging and continuity as we are forced to become reconciled to a modernity that appears not to accommodate such needs.

No. 55, Main Road focuses upon the process of transition whereby “a place becomes a space” – but here we see both the persistence of the personal realm, the daily ritual – and its fragility in juxtaposition: hard up against the ungovernable forces of the outside world, and indeed against neighbouring shop-lots that have already succumbed to dereliction.



No.55, Main Road

Three channel video installation

17 minutes, (continuous play)

Dimensions vary with installation

Edition of 3 + 1 AP

2010

HH Lim

b. 1954

This project invites the public to take a seat on a well-lit chair, taking on a role of a protagonist on stage for a few minutes.

For me, every citizen should be proud of belonging to the country in which they live in; proud to participate in its adventures, in its history and in the course of its life.

Me myself and I

Dark room with a chair and spotlight
Dimensions variable
2018



Ivan Lam

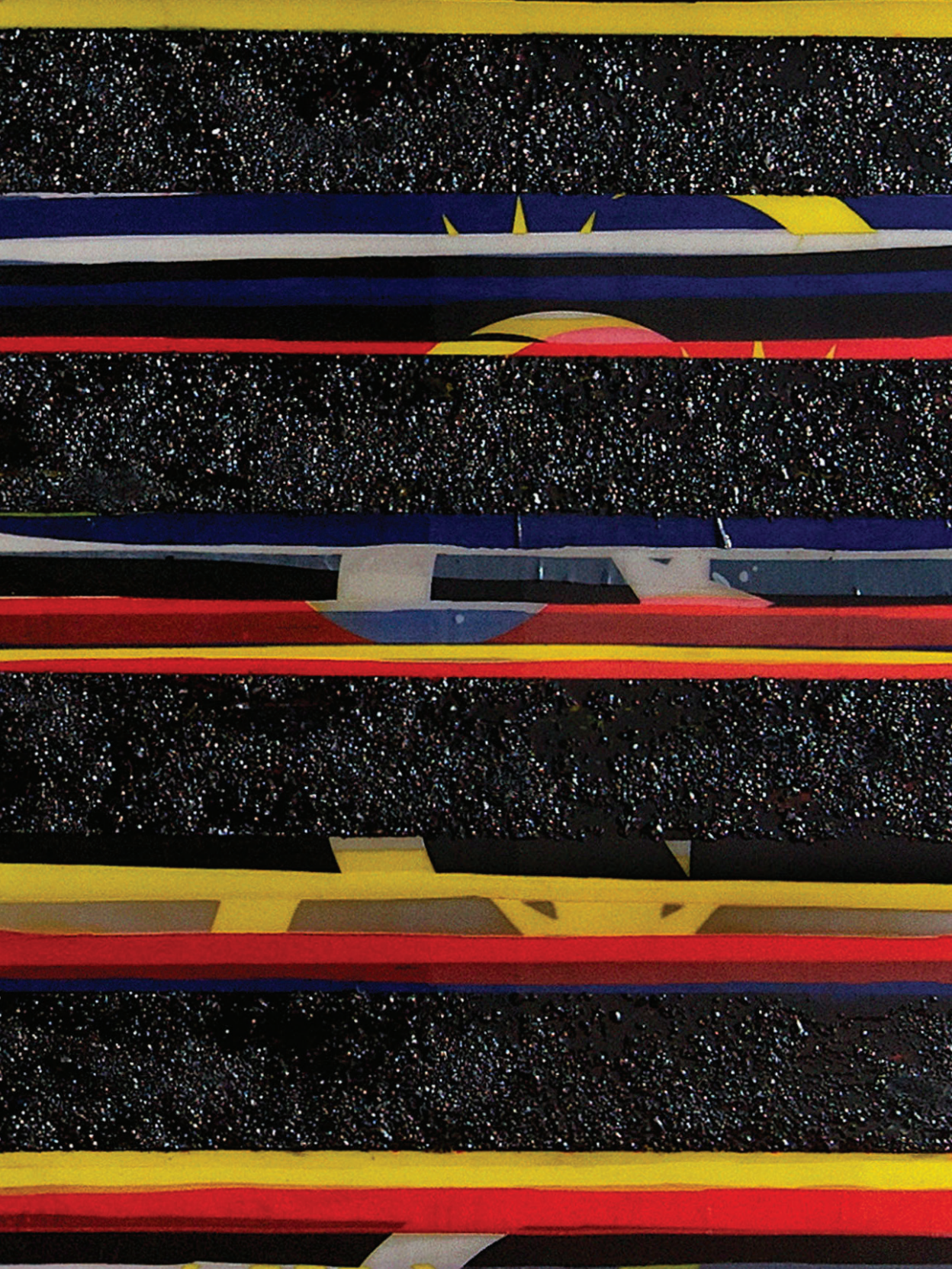
b. 1975

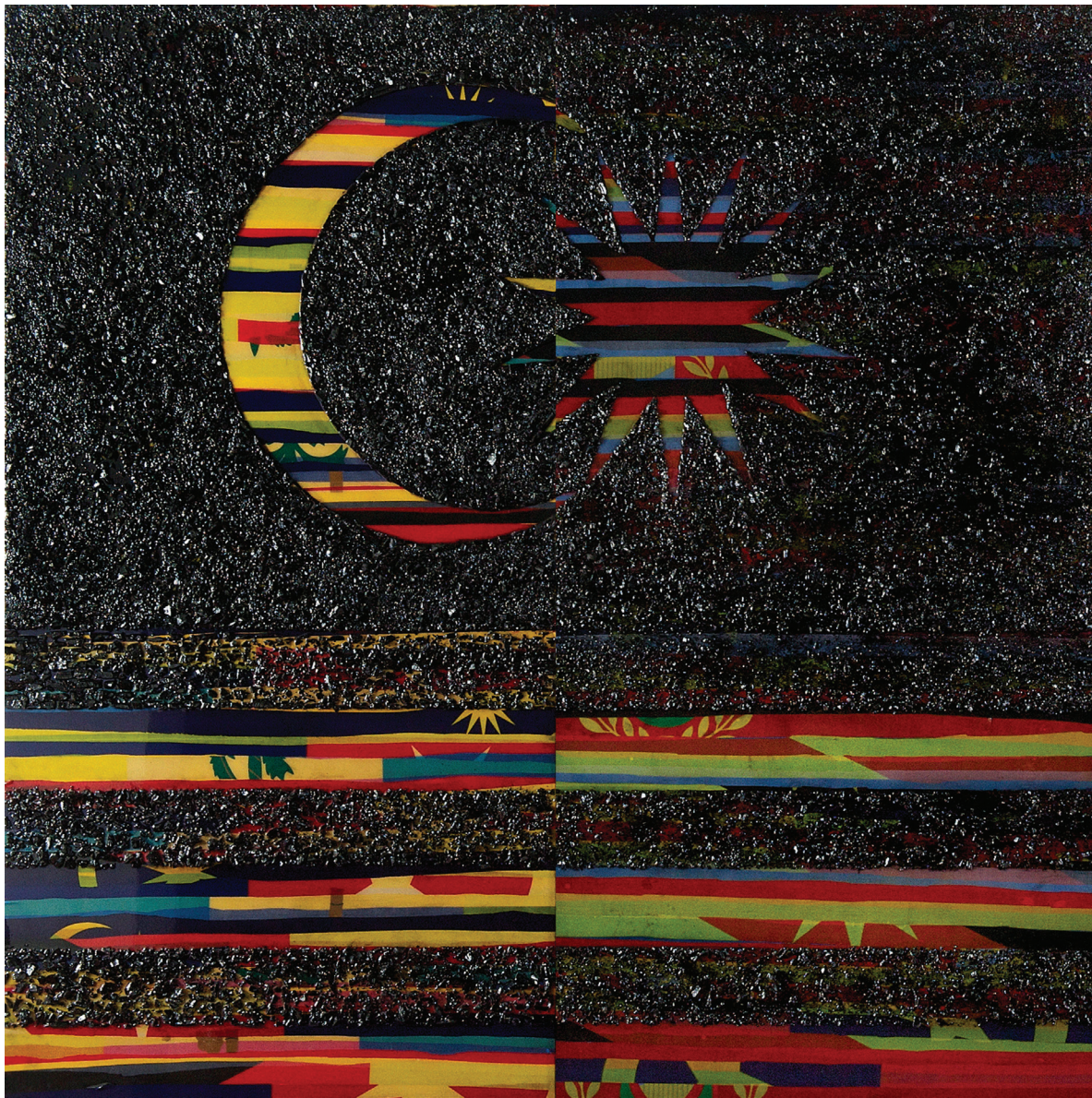
National symbols — in particular flags — are perhaps the strongest, clearest conveyors of national identity. Through ritual processes, they evoke a shared psychological state of solidarity amongst a particular group. The recurring presence of flags in a physical space activates our feelings by creating bonds between citizens, legitimatizing authority, and motivating patriotic action. The aura that surrounds cultural icons effectively transcends their qualities as mere objects. Thus, a scrap of an old nation's flag bears the same power as a new, original one. Unlike ordinary objects, the special treatment of cultural icons as living, breathing entities suggests that defining and reaffirming national identity and materiality does indeed matter.

It is the particular way in which cultural icons — such as flags — tap into our psychological nature and dictate a major part of our national identity that I explore as a Malaysian artist, in my latest work *The Death of a Nation / The Birth of a Nation* (2018).

The Death of a Nation / The Birth of a Nation is a political commentary on national identity and race relations in Malaysia. The project began from a small remark about the “race column” that has been a dominant fixture in government official forms in Malaysia for as long as anyone can remember. Being conditioned to checking the “race box” and defining oneself as “Malay”, “Chinese”, “Indian” or “Other”, Malaysians have grown indifferent to the implications posed by this question. Little have wondered or even questioned the challenges provoked by such a presumption. Yet, as I note, the race category begs to question what constitutes a Malaysian. Is one race more Malaysian than another? Aren't we all Malaysians regardless of race, creed, and religion? In a sense, the race question looms on every Malaysian's mind every now and then, despite government's efforts to forge a national identity; the race box reinvigorates racial ambiguity and discrimination.

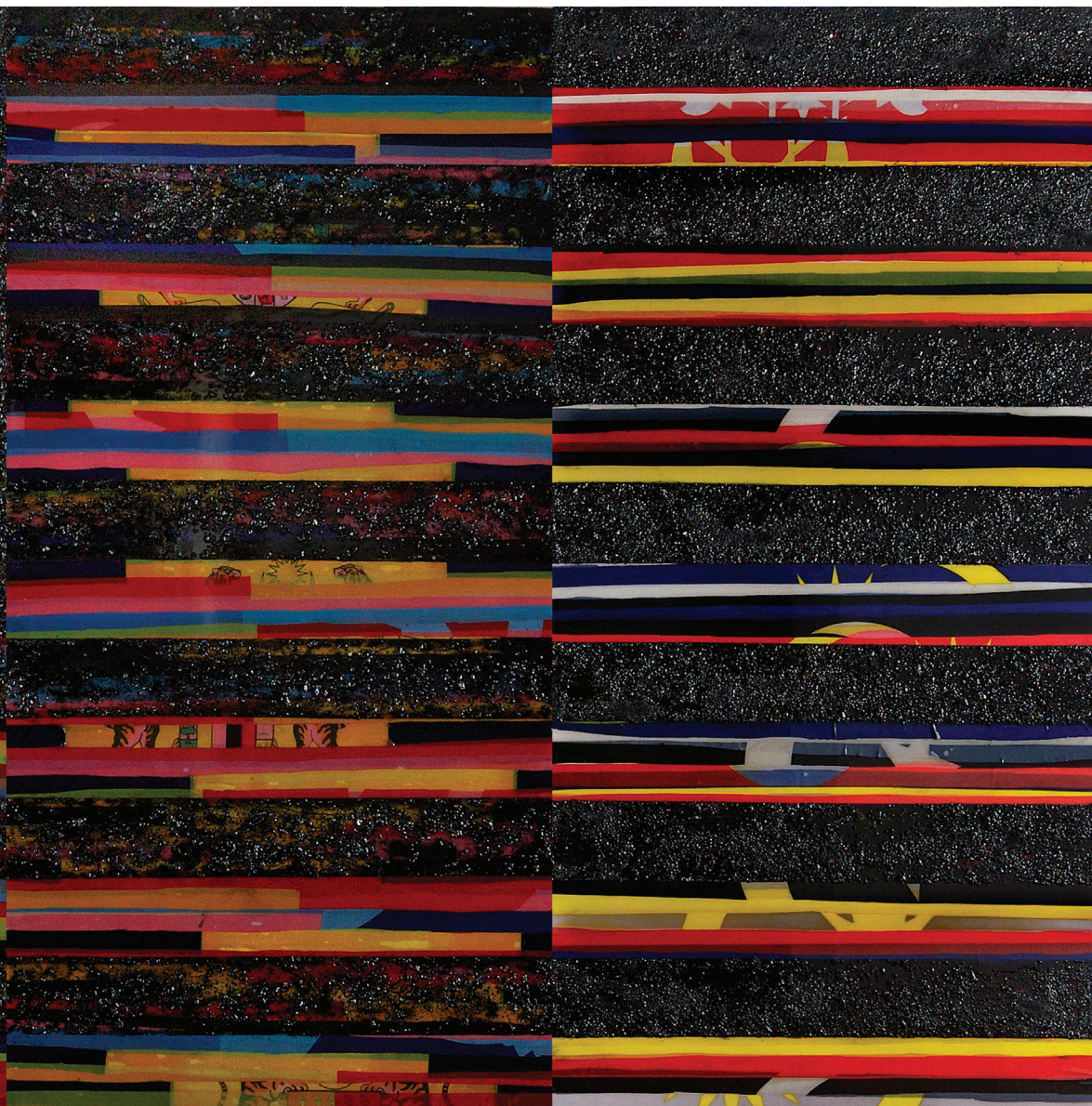
The Death of a Nation / The Birth of a Nation (Detail)





The Death of a Nation / The Birth of a Nation

Cloth, resin, coal on wood
240cm x 480cm (Quadriptych)
2018



Rajinder Singh

b. 1964

My grandfather arrived in Malaysia a century ago. He was a proud turbaned man who served as a police officer under the British, the Japanese and during the communist emergency, as did my uncles and my father. Through these photographs and video, I reflect on a century of Sikhs and their undeniable but little appreciated service to Malaysia.

I explore this through a vocabulary of movements, from the perspective of my grandfather's relationship with his turban and consequently his God, prioritising his gestures and their historical weight in worship. The film and photographs are choreography of pain and prayer, an exploration of the possibility of being alive through movement and a relationship with an emergent nation and its flag. I question time, space, place, memories and historical narrative through a choreographic practice.

Rubia 5m Wide

Pigment print on 260gsm photo paper with single channel video
30cm x 30cm (30 pieces) and 5 minutes video (on loop)
2018



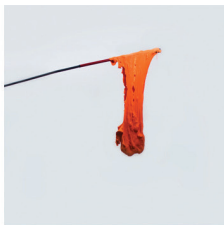
Small text label on the wall, likely providing information about the artwork or the performance.



Row 1



1



2

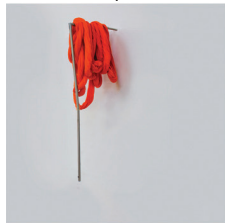


3



4

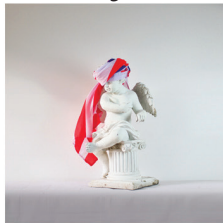
Row 2



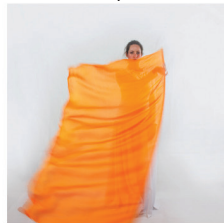
7



8



9



10

Row 3



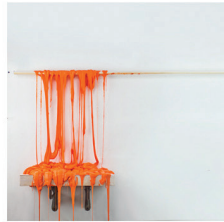
13



14



15



16

Row 4



19



20



21



22

Row 5



25



26



27



28

All , Pigment print on 260gsm photo paper, 30cm x 30cm, 2018, Edition: 1 of 5



5



6



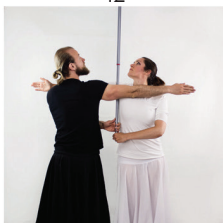
11



12



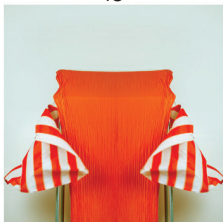
17



18



23



24



29



30

Row 1

1. Title: Flaghold (1 of 8)
2. Title: Rubia 4m wide
(Treated Capati bread dough on pole)
3. Title: Blue Parna 10m wide
4. Title: Flaghold (2 of 8)
5. Title: Full Voile 3m 40g/m
6. Title: Mal Mal 5m wide

Row 2

7. Title: Full Voile 5m 40g/m
8. Title: Mal Mal 3m wide
9. Title: Orange Parna 10m wide
10. Title: Mal Mal 6m wide
11. Title: Flaghold (3 of 8)
12. Title: Black Parna 5m wide

Row 3

13. Title: Blue Parna 5m wide
14. Title: Red Parna 5m wide
15. Title: Flaghold (4 of 8)
16. Title: Rubia 5m Wide
(Treated Capati bread dough on pole)
17. Title: Mal Mal 5m 40g/m
18. Title: Flaghold (5 of 8)

Row 4

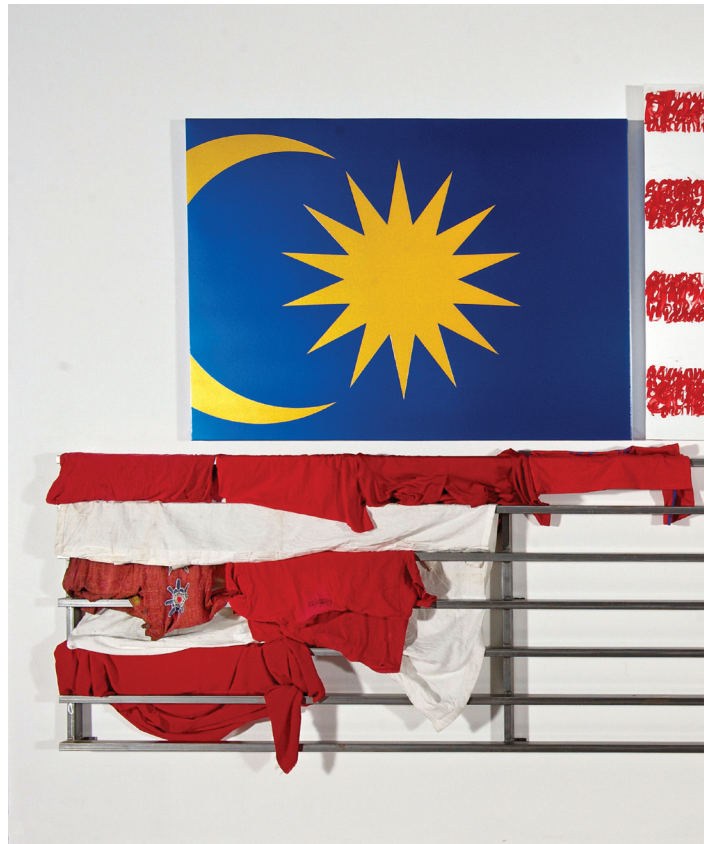
19. Title: Blue Parna 6m wide
20. Title: Flaghold (6 of 8)
21. Title: Full Voile 10m 40g/m
22. Title: Mal Mal 5m 80g/m
23. Title: White Parna 4m wide
24. Title: Gingham Orange and Red Parna 5m wide

Row 5

25. Title: Flaghold (7 of 8)
26. Title: Full Voile 6m 40g/m
27. Title: Mal Mal 10m wide
28. Title: Rubia 6m Wide
29. Title: Flaghold (8 of 8)
30. Title: Rubia 10m Wide

Sean Lean b. 1981

A few Malaysia(s) (2018) is the reality to the often-cited aspiration of “1 Malaysia”. However noble the aspirations of “1 Malaysia” is, it is vital to recognise the differences that exist in Malaysian society, the dividing lines in cultural, social and economic issues. Aspirations from the ruling class need to be anchored by the realities of what the Malaysian masses face in everyday life. Without it, the concept of “1 Malaysia” is reduced to mere platitude.



A few Malaysia(s), Mixed media, 203cm x 420cm; (top left) 102cm x 140cm; (top right) 113cm x 178cm; (bottom) 90cm x 420cm, (Triptych), 2018

The bottom piece of this triptych is a metal rack on which I invite the audience to hang their clothing, fabrics or any materials that are red or white in colour, to complete the imagery of the Malaysian Flag. Even though the 3 panels do not sit neatly together, I believe that the participation of the audience in completing the work will show that beauty does not always come in neat packages – a metaphor for the diverse, idiosyncratic yet beautiful nature of Malaysian society.



Sulaiman Esa

b. 1941

The belief in God constitutes the first principle of the '*Rukun Negara*'. It speaks volumes of how profoundly spiritual worldviews shape our values, beliefs and norms as citizens living in a multi-racial and multi-religious society like Malaysia. As adherents of our respective religious traditions – whether Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, etc. – we are not only enjoined to perform regular religious rites and rituals in order for our souls to be divinely guided, blessed and rejuvenated. We are also commanded to conduct our lives in this impermanent material world through a virtuous and righteous manner.

As God-centred and God-fearing Malaysians, we are expected to be morally upright, fair and just with one another; compassionate, considerate and above all, moderate in whatever we do, think and say. All forms of extremism, fanaticism and violence are qualities most Malaysian abhors. Therefore, it is not uncommon to hear foreign tourists expressing their disbelief in seeing the reality that Malaysians, regardless of their skin colour or religion, working and living together with unity, harmony and peace.

Furthermore, it also not unusual to discover different houses of worship throughout Malaysia – the mosque, temple and church can all be built along the same road if not in close proximity. Finally, the sight of Malaysians of different racial and religious backgrounds sitting together enjoying their glasses of '*Teh Tarik*' whilst watching football games at a local '*Mamak*' stall, has become such a commonplace spectacle! For me, it is not difficult to find an explanation for this "common place" phenomenon. On a large scale, as Malaysians our world-view, self-view and attitude towards others are shaped and guided through the principles of life that are spiritually and morally enlightened.

One God Many Paths (Detail)





One God Many Paths

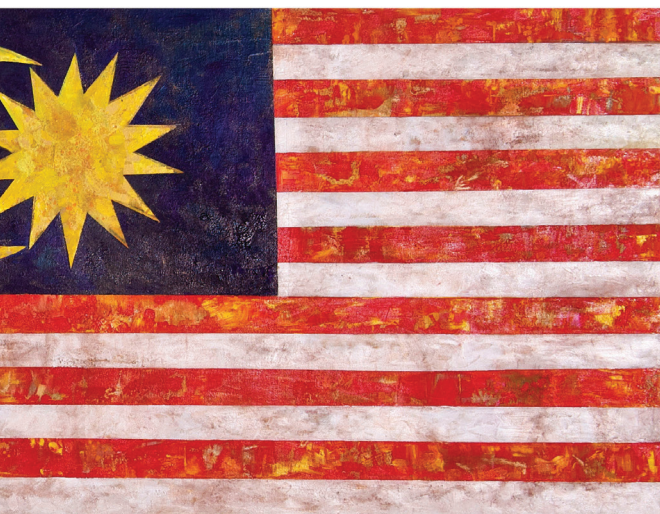
Mixed Media
155cm x 225cm
2018



Yau Bee Ling
b. 1972



As the national flag was waved, the joyful news spreads across the nation. The spirit of the nation is lifted. This spirit is lifted high up on the “sycamore tree”. The glory of the nation and the encounter of a gracious transformation have arrived. The climb to achieve greatness continues as we are on the “sycamore tree” – or does it?



Upraise

Oil on canvas

92cm x 170cm, 92cm x 170cm, 109cm x 170cm (Triptych)

2018





Installation view, Teh Tarik with The Flag, Gallery 3B, National Art Gallery of Malaysia, 2018





Installation view, Teh Tarik with The Flag, Gallery 3B, National Art Gallery of Malaysia, 2018

CURATED BY

Lim Wei-Ling
Wei-Ling Gallery

DESIGN BY

Lim Siew Boon & Amanda Ariawan

EDITED BY

Amanda Ariawan & Line Dalile

PUBLISHED BY

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Cover image:

Ivan Lam

The Death of a Nation / The Birth of a Nation

Cloth, resin, coal on wood

240cm x 480cm (Quadriptych)

2018

(Detail)

