



Biography of Space: PJ Terrace House (2022)
Oil on linen, 75cm × 115cm

This series was painted a little earlier, sometime after the Razak Mansion and Kampung Baru works. I still have a few pieces sitting at home, not quite finished. For me, it's a meditation on place. The place becomes a way of life, something lived.

There's still a lot of emotion tied to it. Sometimes people look at the painting and say, "Oh my god, my papa lived in a house exactly like that." Especially those who were originally from PJ and later moved to Bangsar, Damansara, and other areas.

There's also a feeling that these places might not be around much longer. I'm trying to capture a kind of social beauty. Not beauty in the sense of architectural charm, but a beauty that aches a little. You feel it might vanish before you're ready. Before we've had the chance to really sit with it.

I called this series a biography of play, or a biography of space. One of the works is set at Chin Woo Stadium.

Have you been there? It's a really special place. Chin Woo was the first Olympic-sized swimming pool in Malaysia. The diving platform is high. Really high. I used to go there just to swim and take photos. That space is incredible.

It has that classic Chinese-modernist KL feel. And it sits right behind the Merdeka 118. That whole area, including PJ and parts of Razak Mansion, really stayed with me. I know I need to continue this series so that it forms a clearer body of work.

Visual art can be a slow process. For me, painting is a way of documenting and looking. It's visual, so some people might connect with the surface of it. But I hope it draws them into something more meditative. A reflection on what these places mean.

It's not always easy to explain in words. But it's about paying attention to spaces that hold memory. Places worth noticing.



I'm not from KL, I'm from Ipoh, Perak, but some of these PJ houses and streets really struck a chord. They're quaint. I think a lot of people feel that way. Maybe they're tired of KL but still want to live nearby. PJ becomes that alternative. They can't afford the city, so they settle here.



Razak Mansion Intro: Razak Mansion and the Final Six Months

I had been living in KL for years, quite close to Salak South, but oddly enough, I'd never been to Razak Mansion. I don't think I'd even passed by it, or maybe I had without realising. It's tucked deep inside and not really visible from the highway.

By the time I learned about it, there were only six months left before its scheduled demolition. That urgency hit me hard. The first time I went, I had lunch there, I had economy rice at a price that felt like the 1980s. It was charming, but more than that, I felt unexpectedly emotional. Maybe it sounds silly, but I really did.

Not long after that visit, I met an uncle who sold that very rice. He became my way in, my connection to the place. He even helped me rent a unit. Within days, I was moving in. I dropped some other projects because this one felt urgent, necessary. The architecture itself moved me. It was an incredible apartment block from the 1960s, a kind of design we rarely see anymore.

That whole period of post-war modernist architecture had a different vision. There was a sense of social responsibility, ideas carried forward from European modernists like Le Corbusier, and picked up by Malaysian architects who were trained abroad. These buildings embodied a dream of public housing that was affordable, communal, and dignified. Not just about survival, but about a quality of life.

We've lost so many of these places. By the time I saw Razak Mansion, I knew I had to stay there, not just visit. Living there made sense. The time was short. I didn't know the people or the rhythms of the place, and just dropping in with a camera would never be enough. I didn't want to be another outsider, showing up and saying, "Let me take a picture of you." I wanted to earn their trust.

So I moved in. Some days I took photographs or made video recordings, but it didn't feel complete. I wanted to capture something deeper. That required time. And patience. You can't rush these things. If you're too quick, people pull away. But if you wait, if you're still, people come to you. The best moments come from those who are willing to stay and watch. The room in the painting looks finished, but that's just the surface. I was there long enough to observe how the cement caught the light, the way no photograph ever could. The texture, the feeling of it. That's something you can only access by being physically present.

All the paintings in this series were made partly on site, some more than others. The one you're looking at now, this was painted right there, from direct observation. It reminds me of Lucian Freud's approach, where the painting is about presence, not just likeness. Capturing something of the person's spirit. I've always admired that. It became a guiding principle for this project.



Aunt with Nephew and Niece (2017)
Oil on perforated board, 86.5cm × 122cm

One of the portraits is of a trans woman who lived in the area with her niece and nephew. She's an aunt. Open, proud, and beautiful. She carried herself with such ease, like she knew who she was and had no need to explain it to anyone. In her case, I didn't need to prompt much. I simply asked, "*Can you stand here, in front of me?*" And she did. It felt natural. She held her posture with grace, steady and unbothered.

There was something transformative about the moment. She said, "Wait," then disappeared into her room. When she returned, it was with makeup, lipstick, and a presence that somehow heightened everything. She had stepped back into the frame not just as herself, but as someone fully ready to be seen. An honest gesture that said, I choose how you see me. That stayed with me.

Her portrait came together faster than some of the others. Not because it was rushed, but because the process just moved without resistance. I think it had to do with the way she held space. There was clarity, but also all these small details that gave it weight. Her sudden disappearance, the quiet reentry, the softness of the lipstick, the steadiness in her eyes. This place has always been full of people like her. People you might pass on the street without ever knowing what they carry. And that's the thing about painting here. The neighbourhood is layered with stories that don't always announce themselves. You have to stay long enough, listen closely enough, and eventually, the texture of it starts to show.



Evening Routine of a Bank Programmer (2017)

Oil on perforated board, 90cm × 120cm

The other painting came about differently. A man saw me painting one day and casually invited me to his home. He didn't say, "*Come paint me,*" just "*Come by.*" That invitation was soft, and I appreciated that. It didn't feel like I was intruding. In a way, it was his subtle way of asking to be painted.

Eventually, I found myself standing in his living room, painting from the angle of a small balcony door. He was watching something on TV, then fell asleep. I kept working quietly and slipped out the door when I finished. These small things, like how the body moves, how the light falls, and how trust is given, became part of the work.

This series was never about cold documentation. It is about staying long enough to notice what a photograph cannot hold. It is about painting as a process, about bearing witness. Those six months before the building's fall became a time of urgency, closeness, and reflection. I hope the work carries some of that forward.



Cracks in the Wall Triptych (2018)

Oil on canvas, 150cm × 120cm each

From left to right: **A Farewell to Naga, The Departure, Drawers of Memory**

I was thinking a lot about Razak Mansion when I made these. Especially that Brise Soleil block. It's the most recognisable part of the building, the one that really gives it its identity. The pattern of holes lets light come through during the day, dappling the corridor walls. At night, it lights up from within. I used to walk through the five-foot ways and see those shifting lights. It reminded me of a dragon's scales. That became part of the visual language here.

The paintings echo the architecture, but more than that, they carry something of the way of life there. I stayed in Razak Mansion until the very end, even after most people had moved out. I was one of the last ones. There were rats, raids. Still, I stayed. I wanted to witness the demolition, to physically see the building being taken apart. That wasn't for spectacle. I wanted to feel how it moved me. How it affected my body, my thoughts, and how I could tell that story in my own way.

This housing block, built in the 1960s, was the last of its kind, a typical Malaysian public walk-up. Just four storeys. No lifts. That was what public housing looked like back then. They've since built Razak City where it used to stand. You can go there now and see for yourself. It's completely different. I once submitted a proposal to the developers. I asked them to preserve just one block. I thought it would be incredibly valuable, even for them. The building wasn't just a concrete shell. It was beautiful. It had soul. And it held the stories of so many people.

I'm not an activist. But when you go through something like this, some form of action naturally follows. That said, I'm quite pessimistic. I wouldn't say I was hopeful. But I still tried.

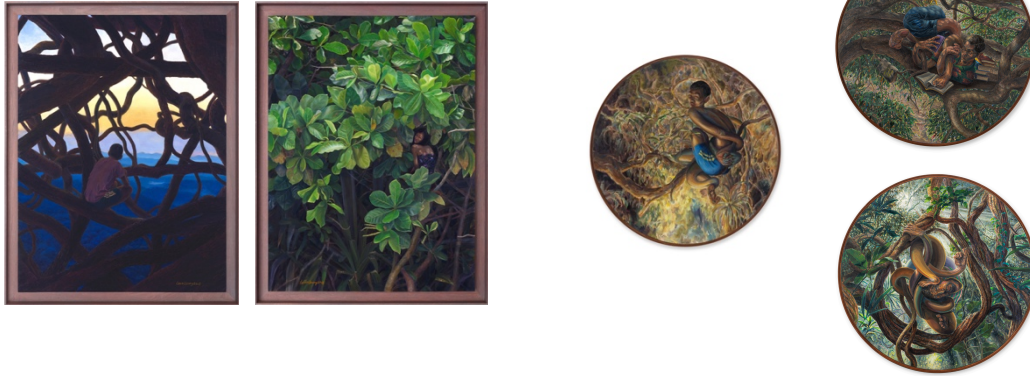
In '*A Farewell to Naga*', you can see some of the early motifs. That green umbrella, for example, is based on something I saw, maybe even linked to Chinese funerary rites. And the pets, the small domestic things, they remind me of my mother. All these personal fragments were there.

Originally, this work was painted in another order. Later, I rearranged the sequence. What's now in the middle was supposed to come last. But it felt right to move it. That centrepiece is the most skeletal. It holds the memory of what used to be, like a drawer full of stories.



Each panel carries a different phase. One is more about presence. One is departure. The last is memory. The light, the patterns, the structure, they're all fragments. They're what's left behind when everything else is gone.

AISYALAM: The Tree Nation



From left to right: **AISYALAM The Tree Nation No. 1, 2** (2018)
Oil on canvas, 122cm × 91cm

AISYALAM The Tree Nation — Twister No. 5,4,3 (2020)
Oil on canvas, ø80 cm

I've always known that "Aisyalam" is just "Malaysia" in reverse. The idea came from a very specific development, a kampung I was working with, but this series became something more ambitious. It grew into a deeper investigation into this imagined, reversed place, one that mirrors and distorts the country we think we know.

People who invest in places like Malaysia often arrive with a fixed image in their minds. They imagine the "three races," the traditional music, the food. It's a packaged fantasy, and I remember how angry our ex-PM was when the Encyclopedia Britannica described Malaysia in exactly that way. That simplified version of us was all anyone saw, and he wanted it removed.

That sparked something in me. I started thinking about how we're perceived, and whether these stereotypes are entirely false, or whether some part of them still holds true. I began reading *The Myth of the Lazy Native*, which one of the works in this show references. There's a moment in the book when a Western journalist tries to describe the "soul of the Nanyang," trying to pin it down, to make it legible. That stayed with me.

From there, I wanted to explore how much of us is shaped by our environment, and how much is determined by choice, by free will. Is there a point where we can choose to be better, to create better conditions for others around us, or even for the country itself?

Malaysia is full of contradictions. It's a beautiful place and also a frustrating one. Sometimes, it feels twisted. Growing up here, there's this strange mix of fluency and inadequacy. We speak multiple languages but don't really master any of them. It's like being a jack of all trades, stuck somewhere in the middle.

I felt this even more after living abroad. Distance lets you see things with a bit more clarity. You begin to understand why you are the way you are, and how much you've internalised certain behaviours or patterns without even realising it. When you're in it, it's like being with your family, you love them, but you're also blind to certain things you can't deal with.



So Aisyalam is a mirror, but it's also a provocation. It asks why we're still trapped in this outdated idea of the "three races." It reflects back the absurdity of some of the things we still hear from politicians today. We say we want to be a developed nation, but sometimes we behave worse than the very stereotypes we're trying to disprove.

This series is just the beginning. What's on view now is only a fraction of it. There's a long way to go, but for now, Aisyalam is where I begin.