

READING COPY

[An Intergenerational Dialogue in Malaysian Abstract Art]

STAND

Cheong Laitong

Hamidi Hadi

Iwadh Mahadi

James Ly

Khabir Roslan

Kim Ng

Latiff Mohidin

Mark Tan

Nasrul Rokes

Yau Bee Ling

Yeoh Choo Kuan

Zulkifli Lee

WICH

[curated by prissie ong]



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[Cheong Laitong]*Untitled*

Oil on canvas

155cm x 151cm

1995

Cheong Lai Tong's abstract paintings emerged from an intensely intuitive process. Often working late into the night accompanied by soothing classical music, he painted directly onto the canvas without preparatory sketches, allowing colour, rhythm, and gesture to guide the composition. Rejecting fixed formulas, Cheong constantly sought new visual possibilities, driven by a desire to create paintings unlike any he had made before.

Inspired by both observed and imagined landscapes, his abstractions evolved from the earthy, atmospheric tones of his earlier works towards increasingly luminous palettes and dynamic forms. In this untitled work, splintered and fragmented shapes intersect with swift calligraphic marks and intricate patterning, creating a sense of movement and improvisation. The composition reflects his ability to balance spontaneity with structure, while retaining the radiant glow that became a hallmark of his practice.

Cheong frequently chose not to title his works, preferring to leave them open to interpretation. Rather than directing meaning, he invited viewers to engage with the painting's formal qualities—its colour, energy, and rhythm—and to discover their own associations within its abstract landscape.

[Hamidi Hadi]*Landscape: Drop II*

Industrial paint on canvas

230cm x 170cm

2008

This work was produced in 2008, several years after my return from completing my Master's degree in the United Kingdom. Measuring 230 cm x 170 cm, it is executed on raw burlap canvas without undercoat, allowing the surface to remain open, absorbent, and responsive.

The burlap functions not only as a support but as a metaphor for a porous body—skin or membrane—capable of receiving and retaining traces. Using a dripping technique with diluted pigments, color seeps into the fibers, forming organic, evolving patterns. While these forms may evoke microorganisms or cellular structures, they are not intended as literal representations, but as reflections on broader systems of life—layered, interconnected, and in constant flux.

The work emerges from an extended process of observation and lived experience, prior to its materialization in painting. It is inspired by a chance incident—a spill of milk from my daughter's bottle that formed an unexpectedly vital, organic pattern. This moment was later translated into the language of painting as a form of material memory.

Ultimately, the work reflects an ongoing attempt to navigate and understand lived experience, where material, process, self, and the spiritual intersect within a shared, intuitive rhythm.

[Iwadh Mahadi]*Lumpuh*

Bamboo stamp on canvas

76.2cm x 76.2cm

2026

Lumpuh developed during a period of personal loss in which I found myself emotionally immobilised and unable to produce in the way I normally would. Rather than approaching the surface through a predetermined composition, I began repeatedly stamping cut bamboo onto a gessoed surface, attempting to align each mark while allowing slight shifts, failures, and inconsistencies to remain visible.

The repetitive process became less about constructing a perfect system and more about continuing through routine despite emotional paralysis. Each stamped impression carries traces of pressure, hesitation, exhaustion, and persistence. What emerges is not a fixed grid, but an unstable accumulation of repeated attempts at order.

I approach abstraction here not as a purely formal exercise, but as a way of embodying psychological and bodily conditions through material, labour, and process. The surface reflects the tension between structure and collapse, where repetition becomes both an act of control and a record of vulnerability.

Through bamboo, repetition, and imperfect alignment, *Lumpuh* negotiates grief as something that is not overcome, but moved through slowly, mechanically, and bodily.

[James Ly]*A.T.A.Z {Augmented Tides of Autopoietic Zones}**[From the Series REDREAMING TECHNICS]*

Unity game world, bio-materials, tree root, clay, cut up paintings from artist collection, self made books, spray paint, nike hyper venoms, Ultraman action figure, Claw rings, Goats fur, mutton rib bones, generative AI, video, audio recording of Earth's magnetic field, 3D model, projection

Variable dimension

2026

This work is a single organism disguised as an installation. I conceive it as a distributed nervous system stretched across a Unity game world, bio-materials, clay, canvas, spray paint, synthetic images and the low, constant murmur of Earth's magnetic field processing sensory and emotional information about civilisational change in real time. It sits in the midst of our technological revolution, where AI, quantum computation and planetary sensing are reshaping what it means to be human, and asks: how can consciousness expand enough to grasp civilisational evolution as it is happening?

Inspired by philosophy, science, peripheral cultures and ancient knowledges, my practice begins with an awareness of spacetime and the fragile fiction of the "human" as separate from its environment. I treat spacetime itself as a medium, building self-propagating, self-modifying ecosystems that emerge, evolve and disappear like constellations. In this work, those ecosystems take the form of an autopoietic automaton: a system that maintains and reconfigures its own identity under unstable conditions, ingesting data, player decisions, generative AI outputs and environmental recordings, and folding them back into its evolving world.

The piece emerges out of my ongoing project "Redreaming Technics", a methodological inquiry into human existence within a rapidly shifting planetary and technological landscape. Here, I use art as a heuristic a way of thinking through making to cultivate a situated, embodied awareness capable of navigating intricate biological, technological and spiritual systems. The work liberates objects, images and ecologies from narratives inherited from the Age of Enlightenment, which separated mind from matter and human from world, and instead speculates on futurities of humanity as fundamentally relational. Existence is treated as co-existence.

Materially, clay, canvas and bio-matter anchor the work in the tactile and vulnerable, while the Unity game space and 3D models host a posthuman abstraction: an expanded field of consciousness where human and nonhuman intelligences, algorithms and organisms, meet. The recorded vibrations of Earth's magnetic field form a kind of planetary heartbeat, a reminder that our nervous systems are nested within a larger electromagnetic body. Generative AI operates here not as a tool of control but as a collaborating agent, a partial mind inside the ecosystem.

Thematically, the work moves through kinship, extinction, regeneration and evolution. It imagines zones where autopoietic systems cells, minds, machines, cultures learn to sense, model, predict and adapt under rapid, non-deterministic change. These zones are portals into dense layers of memory and thought, functioning as epistemological constructs: poetic attempts to structure my ontology of the Anthropocene and what might come after it.

Ultimately, "A.T.A.Z {Augmented Tides of Autopoietic Zones}" is a posthuman mirror. It invites viewers to inhabit a shifting game-world and material landscape that reflects back our entanglement with other forms of life and intelligence. In doing so, it proposes an expanded consciousness—an emergent awareness able to recognise that every revolution in technics is also a revolution in how we feel, think and coexist.

[Khabir Roslan]*SEBELUM CAHAYA (BEFORE ILLUMINATION)*

Medical gauze, compost soil, burnt red soil, fiber thread

11feet x 23 feet (flat)

2026

SEBELUM CAHAYA is a wall installation made from folded medical gauze coated with compost soil and burnt soil. Through a labor-intensive process of repetition, folding, cutting and gathering, I interlock individual gauze units that are inspired from the structural logic of *tanggam* and traditional Malay architecture language.

The individual elements gather into a larger whole in which fragility and flexibilities coexist. Repetition is at the focus of this work, generative and contemplative in nature. The repetitive folding of each unit resonates with the rhythmic concept of *zikir* (remembrance of God), and with the basic principles of Islamic geometric and arabesque traditions in which multiplicity is reconfigured and reintegrated into recurring patterns. Repetition for me is more than simply a formal system, it is a direction toward continuity through focus, remembrance, and return.

The artwork is read in multiple layers. On a material level, gauze is a material of care that remains open. It holds without sealing, supports without fixing, and allows transformation to continue. Compost soil can be interpreted as cycling processes of decomposition and renewal. Burnt soil, on the other hand, is the residue of heat, breakage, and persistence. On the perceptual level, I reflect upon existence as a condition of interconnectedness. The interdependence of these forms mirror the notion of quantum physics, where no element exists in separate and alienation, but through its relation with one another. At the same time, the triangular arrangement of the burnt-soil motifs suggests a movement of gathering and ascent, a gradual ordering of multiplicity toward unity, much like a single cell dividing and organizing into a living system.

Rather than being presented as a flat surface, the artwork is suspended on the wall by gathering, folding, and settling into a wavy terrain. The topography transforms the work from a patterned field into a spatial condition in which shadow becomes an active material. Through these folds, visual certainty is interrupted, suggesting a condition of ongoing becoming. Lastly, *SEBELUM CAHAYA* inhabits the gap before emergence in the moment when form has not yet formed, relation has already begun. Within this suspended condition, repetition becomes remembrance, matter becomes transformation, and multiplicity gathers toward unity.

[Kim Ng]*Accumulated Absence*

Acrylic, silkscreen print, carving and varnish over plywood

183cm x 122cm

2026

This work emerges through a process of adding and taking away; reflecting the contradiction of human behaviour—layering, covering, erasing, and revealing. Each mark is both a presence and a trace of something lost. Built through multiple layers of silkscreen print and woodcut, the surface holds a tension between what is deposited and what is removed, where absence becomes a material in itself.

The composition reflects an inner landscape shaped by action and emotional residue. Fragments accumulate, yet clarity dissolves; what remains is not a complete image, but a shifting field of partial truths. The act of removal is not destruction, but a way of seeing—uncovering what lingers beneath.

In *Accumulated Absence*, the painting resists resolution. Instead, it holds space for what cannot be fully retained: moments, sensations, and identities that slip away even as they are formed. The work invites viewers to dwell within this instability, where meaning exists between layers—constructed as much by loss as by presence.

[Latiff Mohidin]*Rimba*

Oil on canvas
122cm x 260cm
1996

Rimba

Your breath: Night-embers
My fingers: The troubled wind
You wake up
Opening each layer of your skin
Each time I touch your wound

Rimba

A cluster of lalang
In the dried up land
I am your lover
I am the one that rustles

Rimba

Pale pulp of forgotten continent
Keep on howling Fling back your solitude
To my breast

(translated by Latiff Mohidin in Sabapathy, Rimba Series, 1998, 13)

In *Rimba*, Latiff Mohidin invites viewers into an intimate encounter with nature, one that is deeply tactile, visceral, and immersive. Rather than depicting the forest as a distant landscape or an idealised sanctuary, he brings us close to its very surfaces and structures. The title *Rimba*, which translates as “primaeval forest”, evokes an entity that endures across time, symbolising growth, continuity, and the ever-changing rhythms of life.

Focusing on the microscopic rather than the panoramic, Latiff examines the intricate details of trees, from bark and trunks to leaves, twigs, and flowers. These elements are not treated as static forms but as living organisms in constant transformation. For the artist, nature is “pregnant with life”, continuously growing, merging, rustling, and intertwining within dense environments. This sense of vitality is conveyed through vigorous brushwork and richly textured surfaces that make the act of painting itself visible.

Materiality plays a central role in the *Rimba* series. Latiff experimented with unconventional tools and mediums, including bark, coarse brushes, and even sticks. Reflecting on his process, Latiff explained that “there are four techniques involved in *Rimba*; they are wet on wet, wet on dry, dry on wet, and dry on dry” and that he employed “the coarse brush and even sticks on dry grounds” (Latiff Mohidin in Sabapathy, *Rimba Series*, 1998, 25). The resulting surfaces are layered and dynamic, emphasising texture as much as image.

At the heart of the composition, bold strokes of yellow and navy radiate outward, creating a sense of movement and energy. Through these gestures, Latiff transforms the forest into an experiential space. As he remarked, “In the *Rimba* pictures, you go deep, into the very bark of the trees, as if you are reaching for the invisible. Yes, as it is said, if you wish to reach for the invisible you must go right down, deep into the visible. Yes, you can walk in and out of the picture” (Latiff Mohidin in Sabapathy, *Rimba Series*, 1998, 28). Here, the forest becomes both a physical environment and a meditation on perception, inviting viewers to look beyond appearance and into the unseen forces of nature itself.

[Mark Tan]*Sunset*

Etching and chine collé on paper
38cm x 21cm
2017

Warp

Etching and chine collé on paper
38cm x 21cm
2017

Boulder

Etching and aquatint on paper
38cm x 21cm
2019

Adjunct II

Etching and chine collé on paper
38cm x 28.5cm
2019

The act of remembering: untitled I

Etching and monoprint on paper
38cm x 28.5cm
2019

The act of remembering: untitled II

Etching and monoprint on paper
38cm x 28.5cm
2019

Boulder scrubbing on tarmac

Oil on paper
50cm x 42cm
2026

Cloud

Acrylic and mixed media on paper
Multiple dimensions
2026

Modernization, Overpass II, Overpass I, Link II, Link I

Oil on paper
21cm (H) x 105cm (W)
2026

Mass I, Mass II, A voice within I, A glimpse into reality III, A glimpse into reality II

Oil on paper
21cm (H) x 105cm (W)
2026

This body of work is a reflection of me working in multiple different art studios throughout the years. The place itself becomes material: the surroundings' texture and objects, the sound that emits from the outside, the facilities that make certain works possible and the landscape observed through the windows. The studio doesn't just contain the work; it conditions how I see, what I notice, and what eventually makes it into form.

I begin by paying attention to the ordinary geometry of the space. The angle where two walls meet. The shadow cast by a shelf in the late afternoon. The way light flattens a corner into a single plane, then deepens it again as the day moves. Over time, I realized that my interest wasn't in documenting them, but in extracting their structure and letting go of their literal identity.

The process moves from place to shape to form. I start with direct observation—sketching, photographing, making quick studies of the studio environment. Then I reduce. I remove color, context, and detail until I'm left with a relationship between line, mass, and void. A ledge becomes a horizontal bar. A gap between objects becomes a channel of negative space. The specific dissolves, and what remains is an abstract interpretation of the experience of being in that place.

Through the years, the studio has changed, and so has my way of seeing it. Early work clung to recognizable structure. Now I work with ambiguity, letting form suggest architecture, landscape, or body without declaring which.

[Nasrul Rokes]*Liminal Space*

Sand and oil on canvas

152cm x 152cm

2026

This artwork explores memory as a fragmented system. Our memories are often incomplete rather than a continuous narrative. It will switch abruptly, appear and disappear.

The painting reflects this instability where moments are not fully connected but exist as separate yet interacting fragments. Through divided colour fields, layered transparencies and structural form, I construct memory spaces that are assembled through my personal experiences. Each section represents a discrete memory or emotional state, while the intersection acts as points of interference where boundaries blur and meanings become Uncertain.

This work focuses on its inconsistencies, distortions and sudden transitions. It reflects an experience of perception that is constantly shifting, interfering and disconnected.

[Yau Bee Ling]*The Space Between Appearances*

Oil on jute canvas

160cm x 61cm

2026

This vertical triptych examines the formation, transformation, and possible dissolution of identity under different forms of the gaze. The first panel presents a fluid and primordial state of being. Swirling blues and ochres create a vast, almost cosmic space where no fixed face can be identified. The self exists here as potential rather than definition, untouched by external judgment and not yet shaped by the perceptions of others. Circular movement and layered brushwork suggest an interior consciousness still whole, existing before the mirror of society.

The second panel marks the emergence of identity through social encounter. A face appears through fractured layers of paint, simultaneously revealing and concealing itself. Its gaze confronts the viewer while expressing uncertainty and longing. Influenced by Michel Foucault's notion of disciplinary observation, this section explores how individuals learn to see themselves through the eyes of others. Expectations, relationships, and cultural pressures become invisible forces that shape selfhood. Identity is therefore not simply discovered but constructed through recognition, performance, and the desire to be seen.

The final panel abandons the human figure entirely. Fragments of colour, gold, blue, and deep umber collide as the self is deconstructed and reassembled within a technological landscape. Here, artificial intelligence functions not merely as a tool but as a new form of mirror—one capable of predicting desires, replicating appearances, and translating human behaviour into data. The body becomes an interface and identity becomes increasingly mediated by algorithmic systems.

The triptych's vertical format reflects the standing human body, vulnerable under observation. Thick impasto, layered surfaces, and translucent passages of colour act as physical traces of lived experience. Ultimately, the work asks what remains when identity is increasingly shaped by technology and systems of visibility. It proposes that the most essential aspects of human existence may be those that cannot be measured, optimized, duplicated, or fully seen.

[Yeoh Choo Kuan]*Hard Target*

Oil on custom PE board and stainless steel
120cm x 75cm
2016-2020

You've Been Served II

Oil on custom PE board and stainless steel
110cm x 75cm
2016-2020

The Last Happy Meal

Oil on custom PE board and stainless steel
110cm x 75cm
2016-2020

Although *Today's Special* was conceived in response to the political climate of Donald Trump's first presidency and exhibited against the backdrop of the 2020 U.S. election, its concerns remain strikingly relevant in 2026. With Trump's return to the White House, escalating tensions between the United States and Iran, ongoing conflicts across multiple regions, and the increasing normalisation of political spectacle as governance, Yeoh Choo Kuan's works read less as a reflection on a particular administration and more as a broader meditation on the cyclical nature of power.

Across the exhibition, Yeoh examines the relationship between authority, violence, absurdity, and public performance. His recurring references to Trump's reality television persona, particularly the phrase "You're Fired", transcend their original context to evoke a political culture increasingly shaped by provocation, humiliation, and media-driven theatrics. In an era where global politics often unfolds as spectacle, Yeoh's works anticipate the blurring of boundaries between entertainment, governance, and public discourse.

The artist's heavily worked surfaces, scarred and disrupted through acts of cutting, scraping, and marking, resonate with contemporary anxieties surrounding geopolitical instability and social fragmentation. What once reflected the tensions of a polarised America now mirrors a

wider global condition marked by conflict, uncertainty, and the erosion of institutional trust. The chopping board motif—simultaneously associated with consumption, violence, and repetition—becomes an apt metaphor for societies continually subjected to cycles of political crisis and public spectacle.

Viewed from the perspective of 2026, Yeoh's shaped board works appear less concerned with documenting a historical moment than with exposing the enduring mechanics of power itself. Their damaged surfaces and fragmented forms suggest not only deterioration, but also the cumulative consequences of political decisions enacted through force, rhetoric, and performance. In this sense, these works remain a timely reflection on how authority is exercised, consumed, and contested in an increasingly volatile world.

(This text is based on an original exhibition essay by Christiaan Haridas, commissioned by Richard Koh Gallery for Today's Special (2020), with contemporary revisions and contextual updates for 2026.)

Today's Special; written by Christiaan Haridas

In *Today's Special*, Yeoh Choo Kuan presents works completed within the years of 2016– 2020. The works culminate as Yeoh's artistic contextualization of the current media phenomenon in the United States, closely tied to the current presidency of Donald Trump and his legacy in the reality TV show "The Apprentice". The exhibition tracks how Yeoh's practice has transitioned over the years from exploring abstract paintings to his recent board works. By extension, it also represents Yeoh's perspective on the gradual mental degradation of power. Yeoh alludes to notions of violence, resentment, chaos and absurdity through his pursuit of providing a visceral experience of power dynamics.

The 2017 paintings are an important series in Yeoh's practice as it marks a major shift towards gestural abstraction with highly textured strokes. Self-coined by the artist as "Fleshing Abstraction" – a synthesis of disintegration set in contrast as the tensions and forces are weighted on the oil surfaces. A sense of nonchalance is presented in the artistic process and echoes the titles of the works, while its base line of "You're Fired" in different permutations steep in disrespect. Akin to the chopping board series, the surface of the paintings has received similar treatments of mark-marking. Viewers are confronted by a purposeful but violent landscape.

The chopping board is a persistent iconography in Yeoh's shaped board series and serve as an entry point for his fascination of its duality; not only as a conduit of disgust, but also pleasure. Yeoh likens the painting surface to sleek and cleaned chopping boards with traces of permanent knife marks caused by blunt force and exertion. The act of scarring on the linen surfaces further serve as a cathartic experience for Yeoh, expelling frustration, and to a certain extent; social anxiety.

The first iteration of the shaped board series manifested in 2016 and eventually finalized in 2020 in Yeoh's unique satirical style. The works are unabashedly hung on butt plugs, framing the year of the pandemic, along with the anxiety of 'political theatre' in the United States. The second iteration takes a nuanced turn in terms of artistic expression. Completed in 2020, the works are not materialized as oil paintings but represent intentions via the act of destroying. The shaped board works

are marred by a barrage of cut marks – more so compared to the first iteration – which, seen at close range, alludes to a chaotic lacework. However, from a distance, the silhouette of the work hints at a sense of deterioration, in which traces of lost material are clearly visible.

As the next presidential election looms in the United States, *Today's Special* serves as a reminder of the artist's experience in the past 4 years and also fair warning to what's on the coming menu.

(Text courtesy of Richard Koh Fine Art)

[Zulkifli Lee]*Kembangan Majnun di Timur Tengah*

Ink on canvas

163cm x 150cm

2026

Lately, I have been exploring materiality through how pigments reflect light: the same color can absorb or glint depending on its composition. This physical fact shapes how I think about visibility, concealment, and our perception of distant relationships.

This work is my reaction to the current ongoing war in the Middle East. The work features mandala-like, radiating patterns constructed from the silhouettes of American and Iranian weapons. Rendered entirely in black, the compositions reflect the asymmetrical shadow war in the Middle East. Iranian weapons face outward, denoting an expanding proxy reach. American weapons largely face inward—turning the gaze back onto the architects of war, with a few deliberate exceptions that complicate any easy binary.

Materiality dictates visibility. Through variations of black inks, the surface tension between absorption and reflection conceals and reveals. Initially, darkness consumes the patterns. Only as light shifts do the hidden drones and missiles reluctantly emerge, mirroring how fleeting news reports momentarily expose a covert war before it fades back into obscurity.

This work reacts to our aestheticization of conflict. By drawing viewers in with ornamental elegance and unsettling them with lethal reality, I condemn the destruction these shapes represent. Black acts as mourning, stripping the weapons of their power and asking viewers to recognize the violence buried beneath the beauty. Ultimately, the material fact that not all darkness behaves the same way becomes a political truth.

Patah Tak Tumbuh, Hilang Tak Ganti

Stones, Tembusu wood, engine parts, stainless & mild steel

190cm x 25cm x 70cm (irregular)

2025

The idea for this sculpture emerged from an incident I remember: the sudden cutting of a tree outside my apartment window by the management. This personal loss opened into a broader contemplation of modern displacement. Like a gentrification of nature, where trees give way to skyscrapers, hands to machines, and the natural world to the artificial.

This reflection materialized through a gift from a friend, an engineer: bedrock core samples, the very stone used to test the ground before construction begins. Making sure the building can stand strong and secure. I found it deeply ironic, how our built world still depends on the very nature it replaces. Around these geological remnants, I created a jarring mix of wood, stone, and machine parts. Making physical dialogue between materials that allude to what is lost and what remains.

Drawing from architectural and engineering principles, the form references complex geometric solids, using industrial fragments to pose philosophical questions about progress and reality. What we are building, losing, replacing, and what we might yet heal.

This piece is a meditation on endings and alliances: it questions whether human ambition fosters connection or conflict with the natural world. It is a quiet plea to contemplate what we build, what we destroy, and how the world we make, in turn, remakes us.

