



A Leaf Through History

Chang Yoong Chia

CULT

A Leaf Through History

“The most popular motifs are leaves and flowers. Malaysian batik depicting humans or animals are rare because Islam norms forbid animal images as decoration. However, the butterfly theme is a common exception.” — Malaysian Batik, Wikipedia

I came across this phrase on many occasions. It is so often repeated that I have come to accept, like many things in Malaysia, there is a dominant narrative/rule that we simply have to follow. However, through my travels and exploration of batik in Indonesia and Japan, including a month-long residency in Kelantan to learn the craft alongside artisans, I discovered the rich tradition as well as experimentations on batik.

In modern Malaysian visual arts, batik painting was a popular medium during the years surrounding our nation’s independence. Perhaps these artists associate batik with our country’s nascent identity and potential, with their depictions of idyllic kampong life where people toiled the land to sustain their lives and spirit in a dream-like harmonious dance with nature and progress.

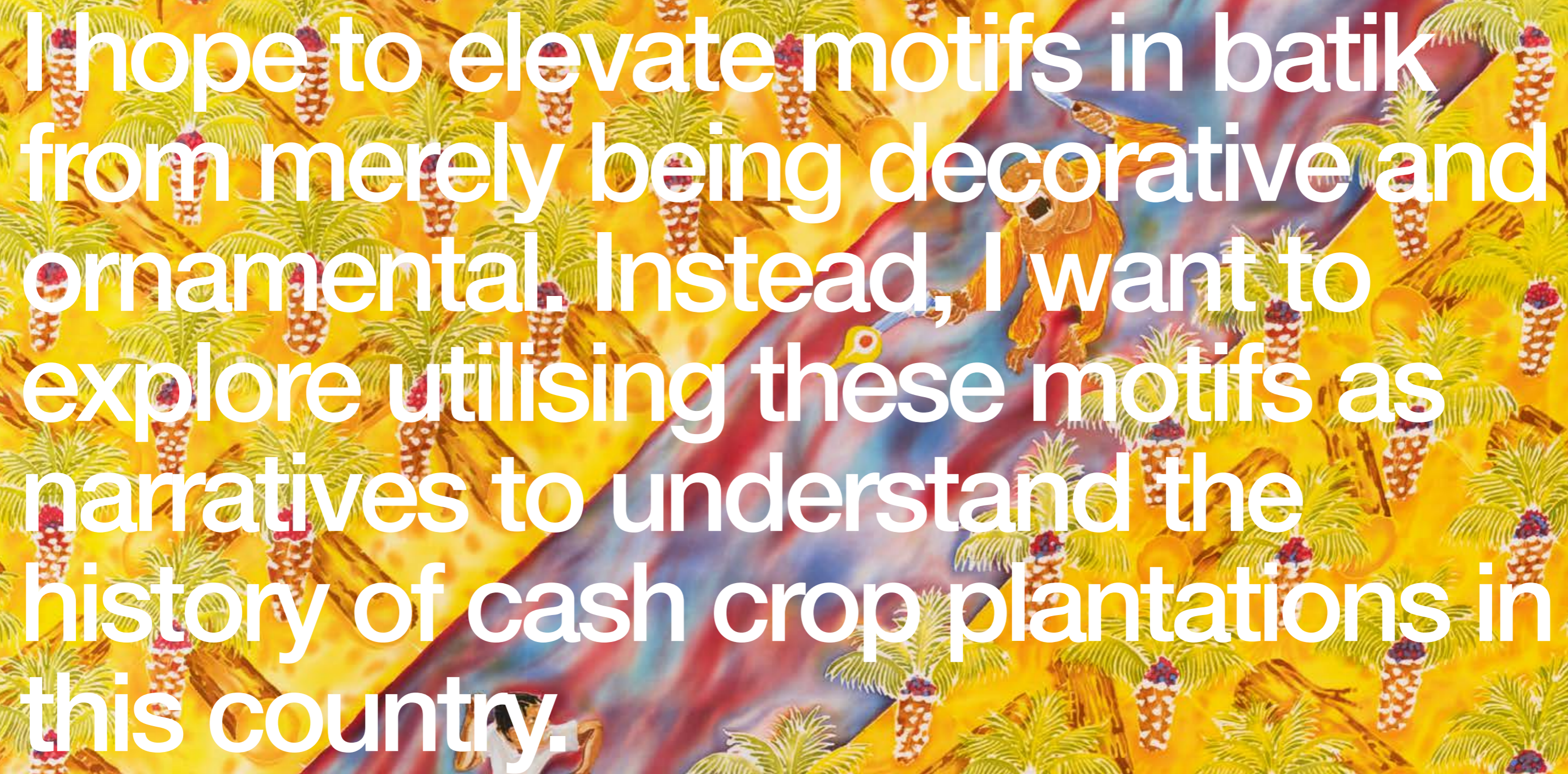
Since moving out of the capital, Kuala Lumpur, and in search of a simpler life to concentrate on art-making, I

discovered a small town that I have translocated to: Tangkak, Johor. Agri-culture is deeply rooted in Tangkak’s origin. From vegetable farming, it has gone through different cycles of plantations on the same plot of land with each new cash crop replacing the previous crop. I am wondering if that also applies to our own existence: Have the new narratives of Malaysia replaced the layers of our past?

Therefore, I am embarking on a series of batik artworks questioning the dominance of floral and butterfly motifs. I hope to elevate motifs in batik from merely being decorative and ornamental. Instead, I want to explore utilising these motifs as narratives to understand the history of cash crop plantations in this country. It is a glimpse into the landscape of profit, invasion, colonialism, exploitation and ecosystem as well as migration, setting down roots and preserving traditions. Amongst the rows of plants are hidden joy, hunger, love, envy, friendship and violence. When unprofitable crops are replaced by newer ones, the ground beneath us is overturned and everything that came before is covered in dirt while we live on the surface of things and pretend Malaysia is all leaves, flowers and butterflies.

CHANG YOONG CHIA

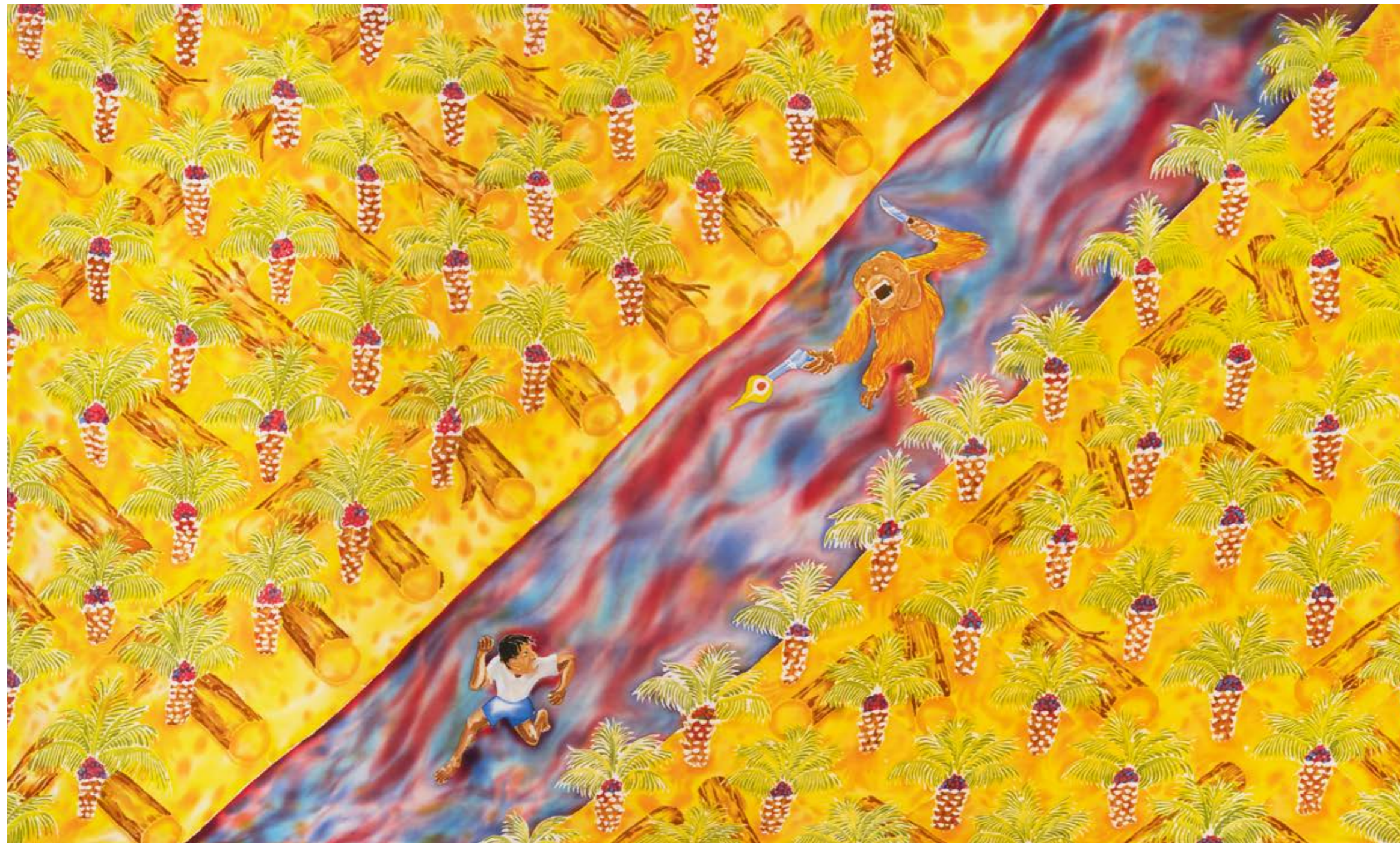
28 June 2022

The background is a traditional batik pattern. It features a repeating motif of palm trees with green fronds and brown trunks, set against a yellow background. A central figure, a man in a white shirt and blue shorts, is running across a red and blue striped path. The overall color palette is bright and warm, dominated by yellow, red, and blue.

I hope to elevate motifs in batik from merely being decorative and ornamental. Instead, I want to explore utilising these motifs as narratives to understand the history of cash crop plantations in this country.

Olfactory Memory
2022
Batik Sarong
(Remazol dye on viscose cloth)
118 x 182 cm
RM 33,000

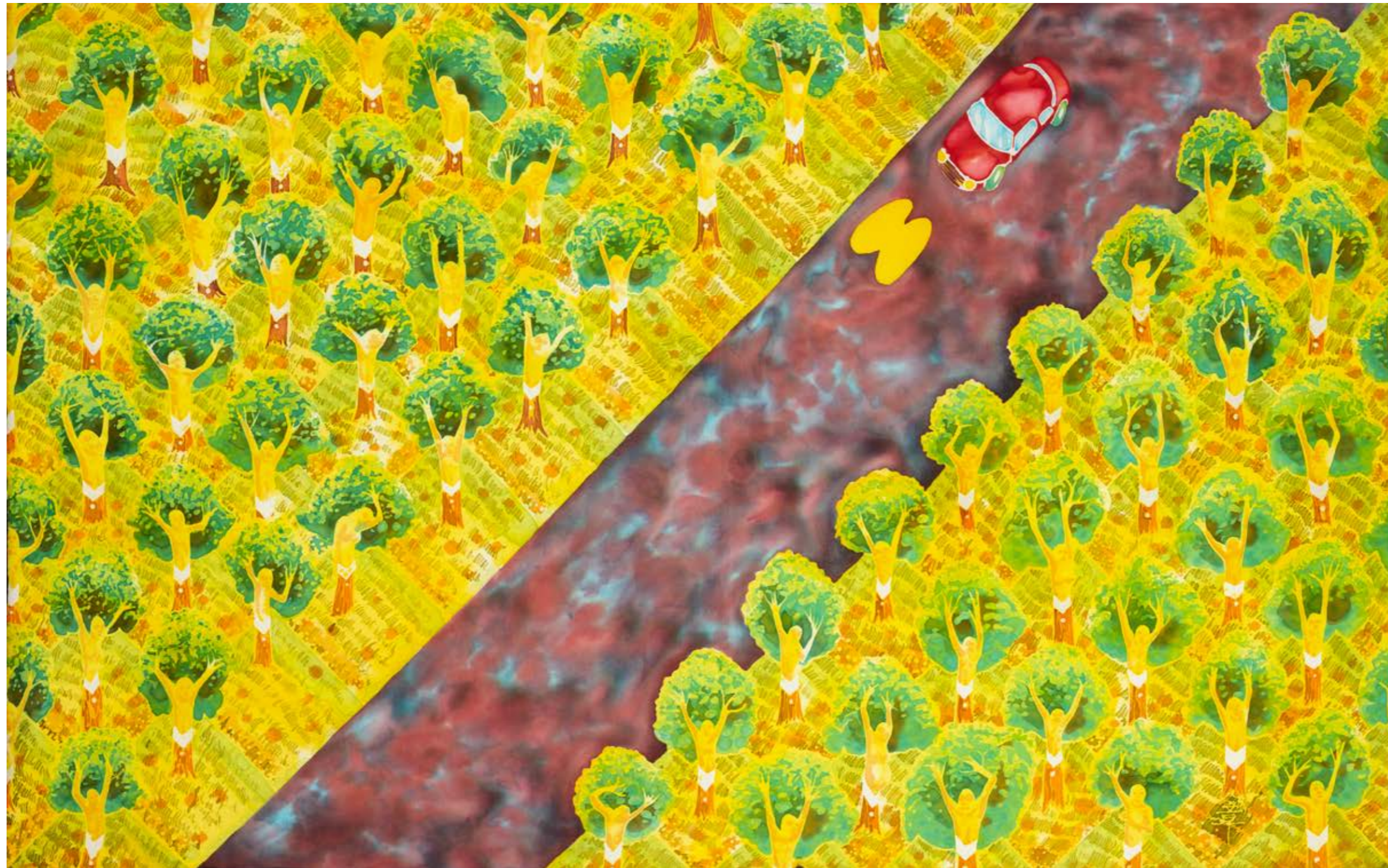




Battle
2022
Batik Sarong
(Remazol dye on viscose cloth)
116 x 188 cm
RM 33,000

Earth
2022
Batik Sarong
(Remazol dye on viscose cloth)
116 x 178 cm
RM 33,000





Driving at Night
2021
Batik Sarong
(Remazol dye on cotton cloth)
111 x 182 cm
RM 33,000



Orang Utan vs. Orang Asing
2022
Batik
(Remazol dye on cotton cloth)
92 x 92 cm
RM 19,000



The Disappearing Smile
2021
Batik
(Remazol dye on cotton cloth)
87 x 92 cm
RM 19,000



Betik Tetek
2022
Batik
(Remazol dye on cotton cloth)
115 x 65 cm
RM 15,500



Family Tree (Study I)
2021
Batik
(Remazol dye on cotton cloth)
112 x 68 cm
RM 15,500



Family Tree (Study II)
2021
Batik
(Remazol dye on cotton cloth)
110 x 63 cm
RM 15,500

A Need for Symmetry
2021
Batik
(Remazol dye on cotton cloth)
87 x 92 cm
RM 21,500





Gambir and the Tiger
2022
Batik
(Remazol dye on cotton cloth)
92 x 92 cm
RM 25,000

The Dyeing Era
2022
Batik
(Remazol dye on cotton cloth)
62 x 111 cm
RM 17,500





Seeds of Change

2022

Batik

(Remazol dye on cotton cloth)

115 x 65 cm

RM 15,500



Elephant Dream
2022
Batik
(Remazol dye on cotton cloth)
90 x 90 cm
RM 21,500



Here is Where We Meet
2017
Batik dye on cotton cloth
119 x 106 cm
RM 25,000

Hunger in War
2021
Batik
(Remazol dye on cotton cloth)
115 x 65 cm
RM 15,500





The Batik Motif Reimagined
2021
Batik
(Remazol dye on cotton cloth with
zipper support hanging system)
178 x 180 cm
RM 45,000



Empty Promises
 2021
 Batik
 (Remazol dye on cotton cloth)
 66 x 111 cm
 RM 15,500



Banapioca
 2021
 Batik
 (Remazol dye on cotton cloth)
 67 x 111 cm
 RM 15,500



Banana Eaters
 2021
 Batik
 (Remazol dye on cotton cloth)
 66 x 112 cm
 RM 15,500

Oops Lalang (野火烧不尽)
2021
Batik
(Remazol dye on cotton cloth)
68 x 115 cm
RM 15,500



Kelapa Kepala I

2020

Batik

(Remazol dye on cotton cloth)

120 x 200 cm

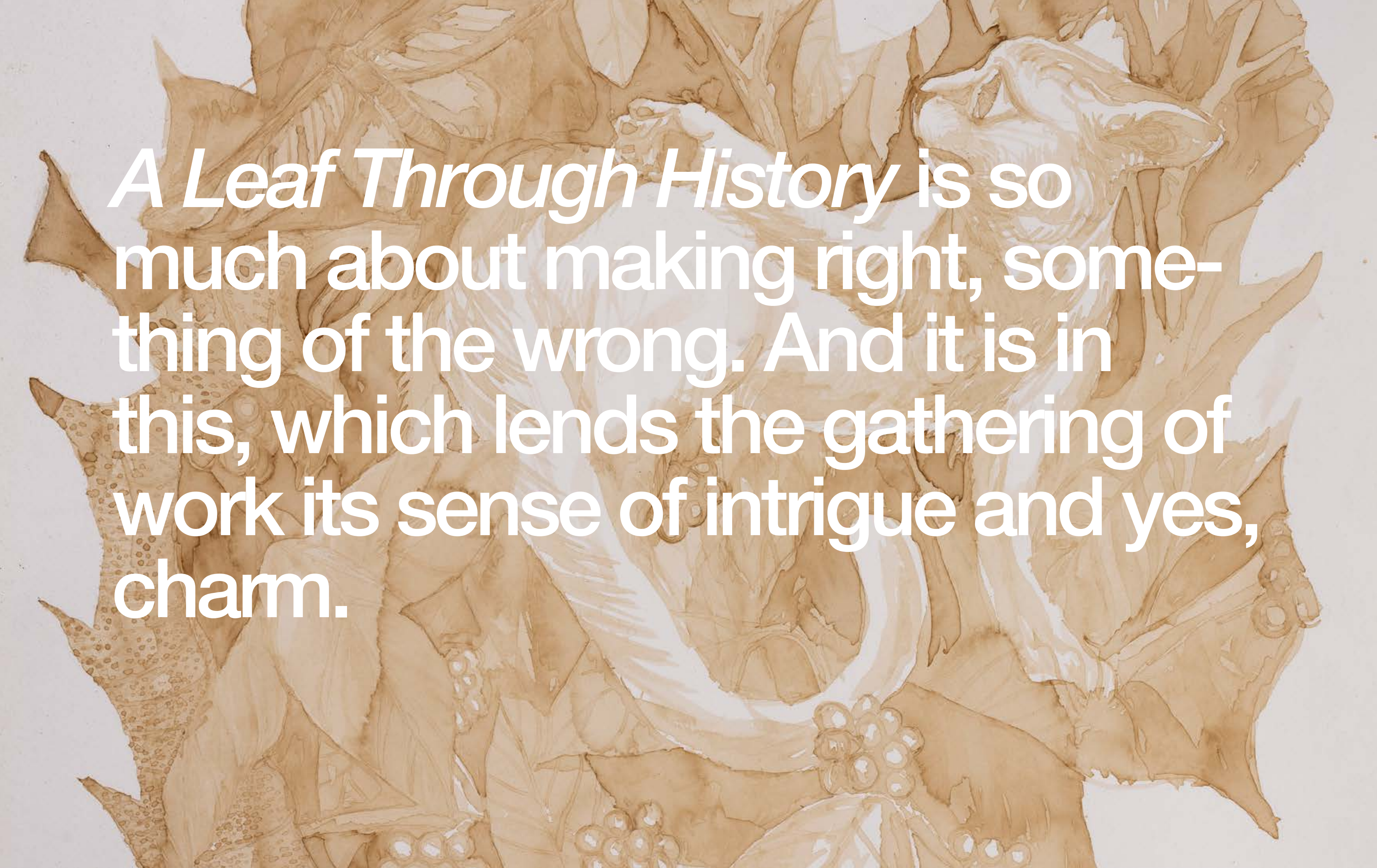
RM 33,000

(RM 63,000 sold together as a diptych
with Kelapa Kepala II)





Kelapa Kepala II
2021
Batik
(Remazol dye on cotton cloth)
118cm x 188 cm
RM 33,000
(RM 63,000 sold together as a diptych
with Kelapa Kepala I)



A Leaf Through History is so much about making right, something of the wrong. And it is in this, which lends the gathering of work its sense of intrigue and yes, charm.



Indocalamus tessellatus
2018
Graphite on
Hahnemuehle Nostalgie 190g Paper
42 x 29.7 cm
RM 4,500



Pyrrrosia piloselloides
2018
Graphite on
Hahnemuehle Nostalgie 190g Paper
42 x 29.7 cm
RM 4,500



Imperata cylindrica
2018
Graphite on
Hahnemuehle Nostalgie 190g Paper
42 x 29.7 cm
RM 4,500



Hevea brasiliensis
2018
Graphite on
Hahnemuehle Nostalgie 190g Paper
42 x 29.7 cm
RM 4,500



Mimosa pudica
2018
Graphite on
Hahnemuehle Nostalgie 190g Paper
42 x 29.7 cm
RM 4,500



Mangifera indica
2018
Graphite on
Hahnemuehle Nostalgie 190g Paper
42 x 29.7 cm
RM 4,500



Carica papaya
2021
Graphite on
Hahnemuehle Nostalgie 190g Paper
42 x 29.7 cm
RM 4,500



Ficus virens
2018
Graphite on
Hahnemuehle Nostalgie 190g Paper
42 x 29.7 cm
RM 4,500



Cocos nucifera / Orchidaceae
2022
Graphite on
Hahnemuehle Nostalgie 190g Paper
42 x 29.7 cm
RM 4,500

Kopicat

2021

Liberica coffee dye and poly-vinyl acetate glue on
White Watson 300g watercolour paper

46.5 x 54 cm

RM 6,000





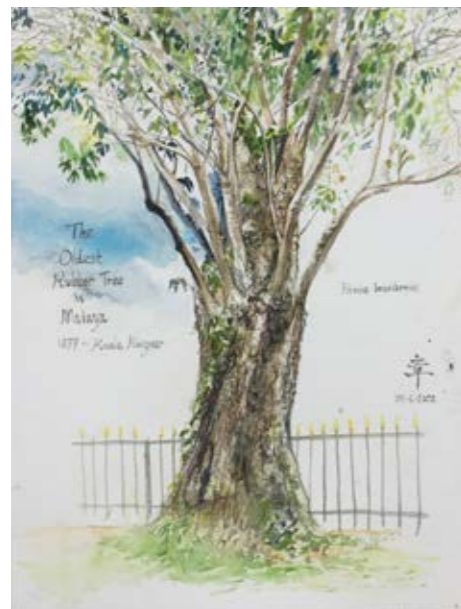
Stalk of Bananas – Study

2021

Watercolour on paper

39.2 x 31 cm

RM 5,500



The Oldest Rubber Tree in Malaya

2022

Watercolour on

Arches rough grain 300g watercolour paper

41 x 31 cm

RM 5,500



Manihot esculenta

2022

Watercolour on

White Waston 300g watercolour paper

46.5 x 54 cm

RM 5,500



Study for Batik Sarong
2021
Watercolour on
Maruman acid-free paper
32 x 40.5 cm
RM 4,000



Clitoria ternatea
2021
Watercolour on paper
59 x 42 cm
RM 5,000



Tiger
2022
Gouache and lacquer on rubber leaf
23 x 17.5 cm
RM 5,500



Surprise! (After William Blake)
2022
Gouache and lacquer on rubber leaf
19.5 x 18 cm
RM 5,000



Non-Endemic Birds
2022
Gouache and lacquer on rubber leaf
25 x 20.5 cm
RM 5,500



Chang Yoong Chia

BIOGRAPHY

Chang Yoong Chia (b. 1975, Kuala Lumpur) graduated from the Malaysian Institute of Art in 1996 with a Diploma of Fine Art in Painting.

Chang explores creating art using different kinds of materials but with the sensibility of a painter. He focuses on Malaysia – where ethnicity, religion and history are intricately mixed, he depicts stories of individuals living there and turns them into artworks. Apart from traditional painting on canvas, Chang uses a diverse variety of materials as his canvas ranging from animal and plant remains to household objects. His versatility as an artist has also seen the use of different mediums including stamp collages and embroidery. Similarly to his broad use of canvas and mediums, his subject matter often covers wide-ranging topics such as politics, religion, culture and nature. The repeated gestures and complex methods reflect a commitment with craft, in which the labour adds another layer of meaning to the work. Placing an importance on the material, he believes that each medium has its own characteristics and symbolism, thus new interpretations are conjured when found or mundane objects are transformed in an almost alchemical fashion.

Chang has exhibited in various exhibitions including the 3rd Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale, Japan, *Open Sea* in Musee d'Art Contemporain du Lyon, France, *Journey* in Israel Museum, *Welcome to the Jungle* in Yokohama Museum of Art & Contemporary Art Museum Kumamoto, Japan. He was invited by S-AIR, Japan, twice as an Artist in Residence, in 2008 and 2017. He was a finalist in the APT Signature Art Prize 2011. In 2018 the National Art Gallery of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia exhibited his mid-career survey exhibition. At the beginning of the pandemic in 2020 he was in Leipzig, Germany as Goethe-Institut Pazifik-Leipzig artist in residence. In 2022 he exhibited his batik series *A Leaf Through History*.

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2022 *A Leaf Through History*, Cult Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
2019 *Floating World*, a site-specific intervention on Kyuyorin Cafe, Shiraoi, Japan
2018 *Chang Yoong Chia: Second Life*, Mid-career survey exhibition, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
2018 *How Are You? I Am Well*, A+ Works of Art, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
2018 *People's Marchings in May*, Seonyoun Gallery, Gwangju, Korea
2017 *Second Life*, Hokkaido University of Education Gallery, Sapporo, Japan
2016 *Body of Water*, Art-U Room, Tokyo, Japan
2013 *Immortal Beloved*, Richard Koh Fine Art, Malaysia
2011 *The World is Flat*, Richard Koh Fine Art, Singapore
2009 *The 2nd Seven Years: Quilt of the Dead, Flora & Fauna IV, Narratives*, The Annexe Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2022 *Ilham Art Show 2022*, Ilham Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
2017 *KL Biennale*, National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
2016 *Asia Contemporary Art Exhibition 2016 – ASIA YOUNG 36*, Jeonbuk Museum of Art, South Korea
2016 *Era Mahathir*, Ilham Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
2015 *Open Sea*, Musee d'Art Contemporain du Lyon, France
2013 *Welcome to the Jungle*, Yokohama Museum of Art, Japan & Contemporary Art Museum, Kumamoto, Japan
2014 *Journey*, Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Israel
2011 *2nd Chongqing Youth Biennale*, Sichuan Fine Art Institute, Chongqing, China
2010 *14th Bangladesh Asian Art Biennale*, Dhaka, Bangladesh
2007 *Discovery of May*, 5.18 Memorial Foundation, Gwangju, Korea
2005 *3rd Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale*, Japan

ARTIST RESIDENCIES

2022 *Goethe-Institut Pazifik-Leipzig Artist Residency*, LIA Program, Spinnerei, Leipzig, Germany
2019 *Uymam Project Artist Residency*, Shiraoi, Japan
2017 *Second AIR, S-Air Artist Residency Program*, S-Air, Sapporo, Japan
2014 *Re:Engage: The People's Court*, Georgetown, Penang, Malaysia, Run & Learn, Japan Foundation
2012 *1 Shanthi Road Artist Residency*, Bangalore, India
2010 *Valentine Willie Fine Art & Tembi Contemporary artist residency*, Yogyakarta, Indonesia
2008 *JENESYS Program*, Sapporo Artist in Residence & Japan Foundation, Tokyo, Japan
2008 *WANAKIO*, Meijima Art Center, Okinawa, Japan
2007 *Art as Environment in Tropic of Cancer artist-in-residence*, Chiayi county, Taiwan
2007 *Ujiae Art Studio Artist Residency*, Gwangju, Korea
2006 *Rimbun Dahan Artist Residency*, Rimbun Dahan, Kuang, Malaysia
2006 *C21 Residency*, Blackburn, United Kingdom

AWARD

Finalist, APT SIGNATURE ART PRIZE 2011 juried by Fumio Nanjo, Ranjit Hoskote, Gregor Muir, Tan Boon Hui and Hendro Wiyanto, Singapore Art Museum, Singapore

PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

National Art Gallery, Malaysia
Central Bank of Malaysia
Singapore Art Museum
Gwangju City Art Museum, South Korea
Jeonbuk Art Museum, South Korea

Acknowledgements

While viruses move stealthily around us to reach their conclusions, whatever they may be, I wish to thank:

Suryani Senja Alias for planting seeds, watering at the right time and patiently waiting two years for my creative process to run its unruly course and for this series to come to fruition.

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Teoh Ming Wah for picking up all the snails and caterpillars and chasing away crows so no rot settles in.

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Imaya Wong

Nik Faiz Nik Amin

Nisa Nabihah

Padil Osman

Syakir Zakii

Yuu Yakiyama

CULT

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Opening hours
By appointment only
10am – 6pm