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ArtSphere

ISSUE 3

Editorial

Dear Friends,

In this third issue, we open the pages of Artsphere to the inspiring journeys of valued members whose passion, discipline, and imagination continue to shape the living landscape of Sarawak's arts community.

We begin with Petrus Albert, a senior member of SAS whose commanding steel installations have left their mark across Sarawak and beyond. His works stand in open spaces, roundabouts, and recreational areas, familiar landmarks to many, yet often encountered without knowing the hands and heart behind them.

We are grateful to have spoken with Petrus despite his busy schedule. Through this conversation, we are invited beyond the strength of steel and into the story of the artist himself. May his journey inspire you as deeply as it inspired us, and may the next encounter with one of his installations in Sarawak, Sabah, or beyond carry a renewed sense of recognition and appreciation.

From sculptural forms in public spaces, we move to the streets and walls of old Kuching, where Leonard Siaw has transformed local memories into vivid murals. Each wall becomes a storyteller, each image a doorway into Kuching's past. We are privileged that Leonard has shared the inspirations, recollections, and creative process that give life to his work.

We hope this issue offers fresh perspectives on the people, places, and stories that continue to nourish our creative community. Thank you for journeying with us, for your continued support, and for being part of the ever-growing circle of Artsphere. We warmly invite you to enjoy Issue 3.



Best wishes
Sheila Kho



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Publisher SARAWAK ARTISTS SOCIETY

Printed by YINK ENTERPRISE

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President's Message

It is my great pleasure to present Artsphere Issue 3, a publication that continues to chronicle the journey, achievements, and creative spirit of Sarawak Artists Society. More than a magazine, Artsphere serves as a window into our vibrant artistic community, reflecting our collective efforts to promote the arts, nurture creativity, and strengthen connections among artists both locally and beyond.

Over the past year, the Society has continued to grow through a diverse range of exhibitions, cultural exchanges, educational programs, community engagements, and collaborative projects. These initiatives have not only provided valuable opportunities for artists to showcase their talents but have also fostered friendship, mutual learning, and a deeper appreciation of the arts. This volume captures many of these meaningful moments, preserving them as part of our Society's ongoing story and development.

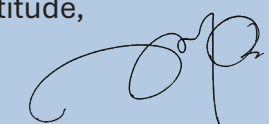
Sarawak Artists Society has always been guided by the belief that art is a powerful force for inspiration, expression, and connection. Through our activities, we seek to create platforms where artists can explore new ideas, share their experiences, and contribute to the cultural enrichment of our society. We are proud to witness the continued growth of our members and the increasing recognition of Sarawak's artistic talents on both national and international stages.

As you browse the pages of this issue, I hope you will discover not only remarkable artworks and events, but also the dedication, passion, and creativity that unite our members. Each page represents the collective efforts of individuals who believe in the value of art and its ability to enrich lives, build understanding, and strengthen communities.

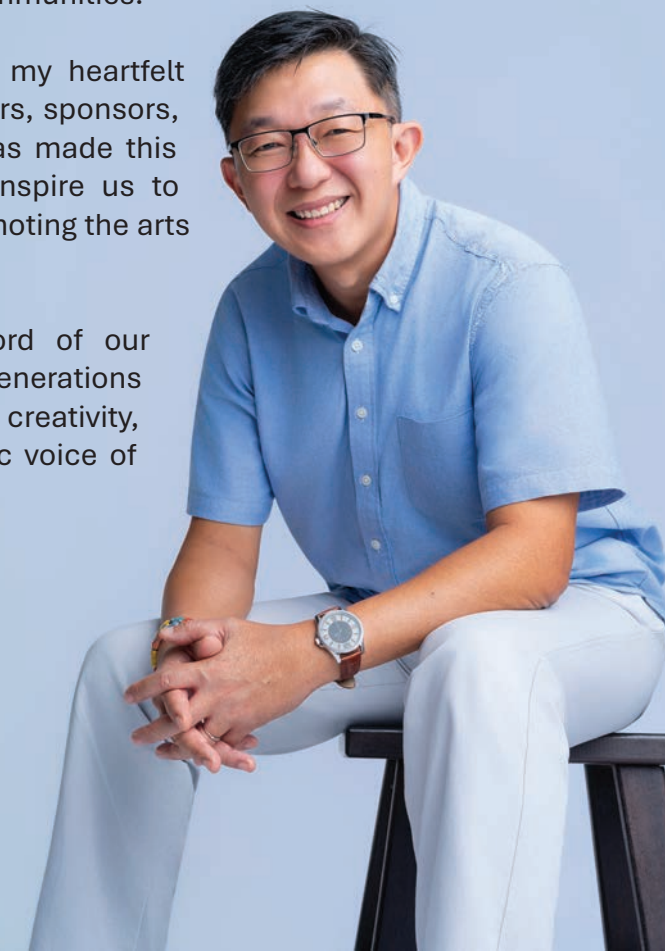
On behalf of Sarawak Artists Society, I extend my heartfelt appreciation to all contributors, members, supporters, sponsors, and partners whose unwavering encouragement has made this publication possible. Your support continues to inspire us to pursue excellence and to further our mission of promoting the arts in Sarawak.

May Artsphere Issue 3 serve as both a record of our achievements and a source of inspiration for future generations of artists. Together, let us continue to celebrate creativity, preserve our cultural heritage, and bring the artistic voice of Sarawak to an even wider audience.

With gratitude,



Sebastian Jong
President
Sarawak Artists Society



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Sarawak International Art Camp 2025

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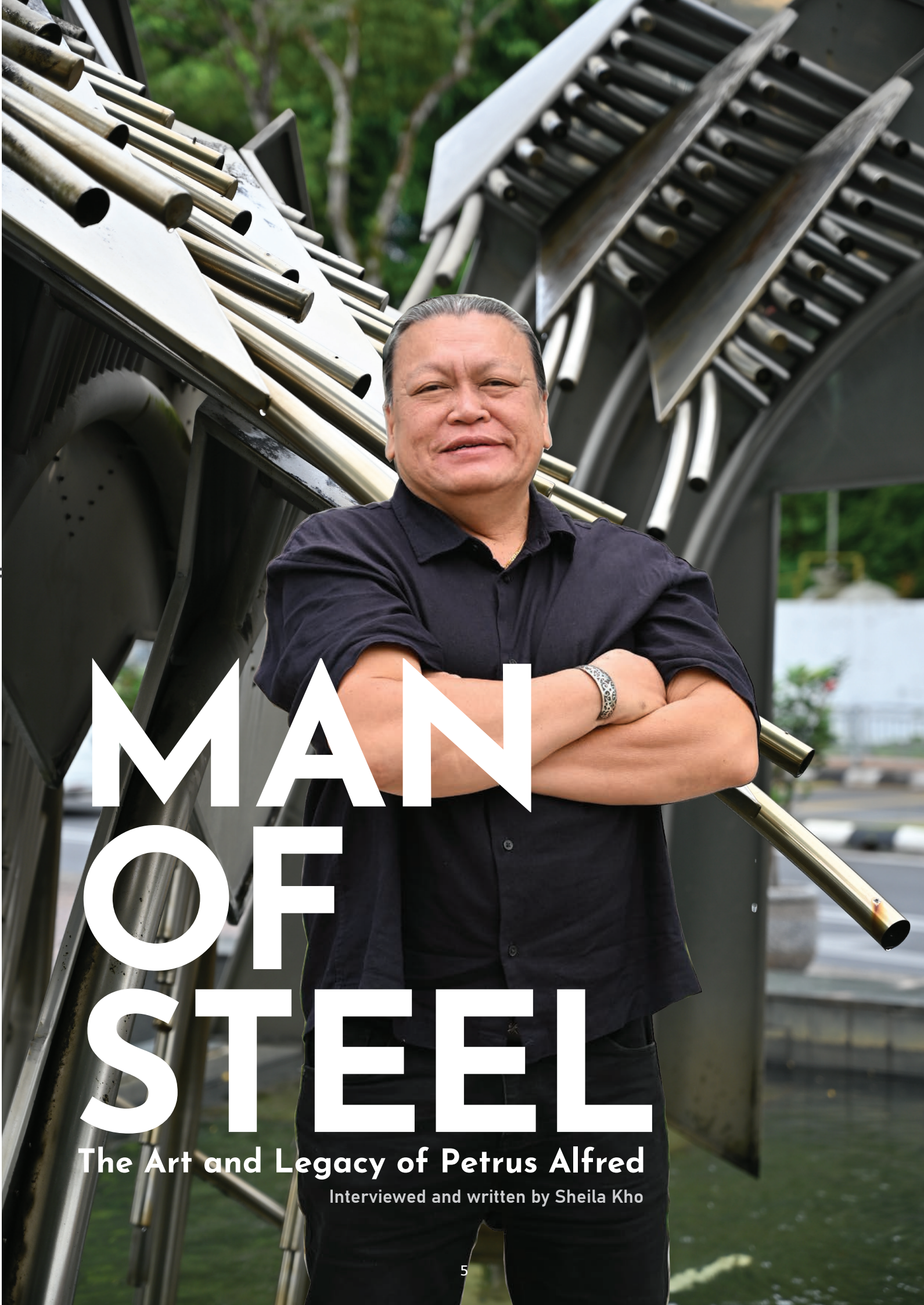
Kelvin Chan



Petrus Alfred



Joshua Jabeng



The Art and Legacy of Petrus Alfred
Interviewed and written by Sheila Kho

Where the Journey Began

Many people have seen Petrus Alfred's work without realizing it was his. As the artist behind many iconic sculptures across East Malaysia, from Kuching to Kota Kinabalu, Petrus has made Sarawak proud.

Petrus developed a love for art from a young age. After completing his studies at St. Joseph's Secondary School in Kuching, he continued pursuing his passion in Singapore. Encouraged by his principal, the late Brother Columba, he enrolled in a Diploma in Graphic Design at PA- LIN Art School, Singapore in the late 1980s.

During his studies, Petrus received a Young Designer Award. The recognition motivated him to search for a signature artistic direction. He was drawn to sculpture because of its challenge and its emphasis on form and design. Curious and determined, he immersed himself in learning about the field, believing he had to try it in order to discover whether it was truly the right path for him. With that conviction, he went on to study sculpture for three years at Billy Blue Art School in Sydney.

The Mind Behind the Metal

Petrus was deeply inspired by the late Raphael Scott Abeng. Through many conversations, he learned not only about art, but also about building a career as an artist. He admired how Raphael Scott Abeng developed a distinctive signature style and boldly marketed his work by approaching collectors directly.

From this example, Petrus learned that artists must create opportunities for themselves instead of waiting for opportunities to appear. He adopted the same approach in his own career, reaching out to potential clients with confidence. In his view, success requires a willingness to be bold and unafraid of rejection.

This lesson also highlights a common challenge among artist: many are too shy to promote themselves or too uncertain of their own abilities to present their work confidently. Overcoming this mental barrier is often an important step toward success.

Many Talents, One Vision

Before becoming a full-time steel sculptor, Petrus worked as an art director and lecturer at several art academies, including Limkokwing University. His expertise also extends to fashion design, interior design, window display, and cartooning.

He is an active member of Sarawak Artists Society and previously served as one of its vice presidents.

Petrus recalled that his first 3D painting was created for the now-defunct Star Cineplex. Several people assisted him on that project, including Leonard Siaw, now a renowned mural artist and one of Petrus's former students. He still remembers Leonard's talent fondly and is pleased to see him succeed in his own creative field.

Forging Landmarks in Steel

Steel sculpture is now Petrus's main area of work, and he typically manages two or three projects at the same time. Each new commission begins with a site visit, during which he studies the surroundings, environment, and local culture. This research usually takes about two weeks.

He then translates his findings into design proposals, ensuring that each work reflects the character and essence of the location. The proposal is submitted to the relevant authorities for approval, a process that generally takes one to three months. Construction may take around six months, depending on the complexity of the design, while installation typically requires another month. Altogether, a single project often takes about a year to complete.

Petrus credits much of his success to his skilled team of five full-time workers, whose support makes the demanding process more manageable. When deadlines approach, the team often works long hours, sometimes finishing as late as 11 p.m.



Today, Petrus and his team have installed steel sculptures in almost all of Sarawak's major towns, with the exception of Sibul. One of his works in Bario commemorates the fallen heroes of World War II. He is currently working on a major project in Tambunan, Sabah, which requires him to travel back and forth frequently.

When asked for advice for the younger generation, Petrus reiterated his belief in creating opportunities rather than waiting for them. He encouraged artists to step out of their comfort zones, expose themselves to different environments, and develop their own signature style. Most importantly, they must learn how to present and sell their ideas.

Petrus Alfred's journey is a powerful reminder that true artistic success is shaped by passion, courage, and unwavering perseverance. Through every sculpture he creates and every example he sets, he inspires young artists to trust their vision, seize opportunities, and leave a meaningful legacy in their communities.



Petrus, Sheila and Li Li

许庆喜书画展后记

2025年11月21日至23日，古晋中华小学校董会与砂拉越诏安会馆的联合主办，我的个人书画展假古晋南市民众会堂顺利圆满举行。在拿督陈日枝、拿督蔡文铎与徐蔡斌律师等人、所有筹委会成员及办事处全体同仁协助下，为古晋中华小学第五校礼堂募募到部份建筑经费：马币三百二十万令吉。

感谢光福、荣喜、振豪协助撰写对联，亦感谢中国诏安好友钟良成书法家、郑育成画家在展览期间的支持与相伴，恩情铭记在心。

开幕礼致辞时，我难免有些哽咽。毕生参与过无数活动，但这一次压力之大前所未有，比背景上几粒我的名字都还沉重。

我的书法启蒙老师是一中高中一年级时的房年胜老师、1982年至1985年间随蔡洪钟老师学习水墨画、2017年至2019年参加了中国广州暨南大学中国书画高级研修班，获益良多。2023年考获中国西安西北大学文学硕士、加强自己的学识水平。

早有意举办一场个人书画展，展示也肯定一下自己的努力，自知水平不高，但或许还可观赏，所以把作品当成纪念品送予捐款赞助人。

整整一年的准备期，我坚持着。2025年7月5日不慎跌断左臂，翌日也忍痛执笔书写，不敢懈怠。

谢谢大家。



A CENTURY OF COLOUR | Padungan Street Art Trail By Leonard Siaw

On February 12, 2026, the launch of the Padungan Heritage Murals, “7 Walls, 100 Years of Padungan,” marked a definitive milestone in my career as a muralist. For over a decade, this project existed as a quiet obsession, a concept shifting between my mind and my hands, waiting for the right moment to breathe. Brought to life in alignment with the Kuching South City Council (MBKS) and the Ministry of Tourism, Creative Industry and Performing Arts Sarawak, the walls of Padungan became more than just a canvas; they became a bridge between eras. Yet, the most profound transformation didn’t happen on the bricks, but within myself.

“To paint a city, you must first understand its pulse. In pulling back the layers of Padungan’s history, I realized how little I actually knew about the place that raised me.”

Stepping into this project forced me to become a student of my own hometown. It sparked a journey of relearning, of sitting with the past, and listening to the echoes of a changing landscape which involves visiting the locals, listening to their stories, histories, and even folklore. This process fundamentally reshaped my artistic trajectory, anchoring my vision in honouring silent masteries, fading trades, living heritage, and the beautifully humble lives that form the true bedrock of Sarawakian culture.

To understand the life of these murals, you must look at Padungan in the early hours of the morning. Long before the traffic builds, the street belongs to a different rhythm: the heavy roll of metal shop shutters opening, the sharp aroma of brewing local coffee, and the quiet footsteps of regulars heading to their usual breakfast spots.

This is where the artwork truly lives. It doesn’t exist in a vacuum; it coexists with the uncle carrying his morning paper, the market vendors preparing for the day, and the casual passersby pausing under the historic five-foot ways.

Unlike artworks confined to a gallery, where you need an invitation, an admission ticket, or the deliberate intention to walk through the doors, street art is radically democratic. The sterile, quiet atmosphere of an exhibition space demands that you go to it. A mural, however, surprises you with a quiet, persistent, “Hey, I’m here!” as if you accidentally bumped into an old friend.

It creates an unexpected pocket of resonance, connecting people to the very spaces they inhabit. The true life of the wall belongs entirely to the community walking past it every single day.

However, my goal on these streets isn’t traditional preservation. I am here to celebrate the beautifully fleeting nature of the murals themselves. No single collector owns these pieces. Instead, they belong entirely to the elements, to the tropical weather, and to public memory.

Speaking of longevity, there is a distinct freedom in knowing that street art is temporary. The moment the lifts come down and the scaffolding is packed away, the artwork ceases to be mine. It is immediately handed over to the elements: the intense Sarawakian sun, the sudden monsoon downpours, and the natural aging of the city's concrete. A gallery piece is frozen in time, fighting against decay, while a mural embraces it.

The inevitable weathering of the paint isn't a loss. it's a continuation of the story. As the colours slowly soften and blend into the texture of the old walls, the art becomes even more deeply embedded in the public memory. It belongs to everyone and no one all at once.

Celebrating that fleeting existence is what makes public art so honest. it mirrors the very lives and fading trades it seeks to honour, beautiful precisely because it doesn't ask to last forever. That impermanence is not a flaw. it is the entire nature, and the true beauty, of the craft.

Ultimately, my deepest hope is that these murals will truly resonate with the people who encounter them, sparking a quiet moment of reflection, a sense of pride, or a sudden connection to the soul of our city. A project of this scale is never a solitary endeavour, and I want to extend my deepest gratitude to the Kuching South City Council (MBKS) and the Ministry of Tourism, Creative Industry and Performing Arts Sarawak for providing the platform to bring these stories to light. Most importantly, my heartfelt thanks go to the local communities of Padungan. Thank you for welcoming me into your spaces, sharing your histories, and allowing your lives to guide my hands. Without your trust and daily presence, these walls would simply be paint on concrete. Together, we made them the living pulse of the street.



From the quiet depths of caves to the fragile skin of rainforest floors, nature speaks in subtle languages. For Sarawakian artist Melissa Shekinah Wong, these unseen conversations become the heartbeat of her art. A semi-abstract artist from Sibu, Melissa creates works that bridge the microscopic and the monumental, translating the hidden energies of soil, water, and ancient ecosystems into tactile, emotionally charged landscapes.

Her recent exhibition, Sacred Ground 1.0, held from 8th to 10th May 2026 at the Sibu Heritage Centre in conjunction with the Artisan Collective Market and supported by the Sarawak Tourism Board, offered audiences a compelling preview of her upcoming five-element series, Sacred Ground. More than an art exhibition, it was an immersive exploration of the living, breathing essence of nature itself.

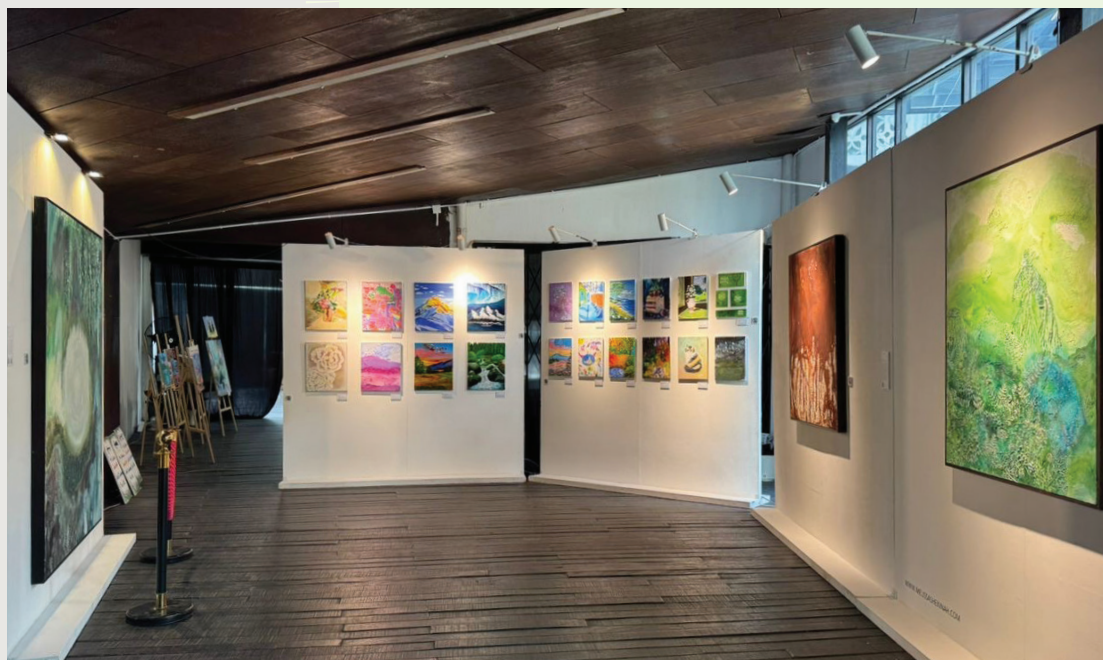
SACRED GROUND 1.0

By Melissa Wong

At the heart of the showcase was Spores Dance (Category: Air), a captivating tribute to the cryptogams of Borneo, mosses, lichens, fungi, and ferns that quietly thrive beneath the rainforest canopy. Often overlooked, these ancient, flowerless organisms form the invisible foundation of the ecosystem. Through layered textures and organic movement, Melissa transforms the canvas into a living surface that echoes nature's microscopic architectures. The work invites viewers to pause and appreciate the delicate worlds hidden beneath their feet.

In Voice of Mangrove (Category: Earth), Melissa turns her attention to Sarawak's threatened coastal ecosystems. Rich earthy pigments extracted from discarded mangrove bark debris give the piece both visual depth and ecological significance. As mangroves are strictly protected in Sarawak, the artwork becomes a subtle yet urgent call for conservation. The painting reflects the fragile interconnectedness between land, sea, and human activity, reminding viewers that every ecosystem, no matter how resilient it may appear, exists in delicate balance.

Another standout piece, Earth Remembers Water (Category: Void), draws inspiration from the haunting stillness of Silabur Cave. Here, Melissa channels the ancient memory of water carving through stone over thousands of years. Structured forms and flowing movements ripple across the canvas like geological echoes, capturing both the silence and power hidden within subterranean spaces. The result is meditative, almost spiritual, evoking a sense of time far beyond human existence.



Running concurrently with the main exhibition was First Encounter, a thoughtfully curated group exhibition featuring works by Melissa's students. The showcase reflected not only artistic experimentation but also Melissa's dedication to mentorship and creative growth within Sarawak's art community. Together, both exhibitions revealed an artist deeply committed to nurturing artistic dialogue while continuing to push the boundaries of her own practice.

Through Sacred Ground 1.0, Melissa Shekinah Wong reminds us that nature is never silent. Beneath every layer of soil, every cave wall, and every mangrove root lies a story waiting to be heard, if only we choose to look closely enough.



Lead artist Angelina Bong with Fair Team, Villagers and Students from The Faculty of Applied and Creative Arts, Unimas tracing the mural design by number in the night.

By Angelina Bong

At the foot of Mount Sejinjang lies a quaint fishing village, Pasir Pandak (PP). I had the privilege of frequently soaking in instagrammable views of striking sunsets, children playing with sand, colourful wooden houses and fishing boats, and graceful mangrove trees, for more than a year.

I was invited as the local artist-in-residence for the Frugal Artist in Residence (FAIR), a UKRI-funded collaboration between UNIMAS and Coventry University, engaging the community in PP. The invitation came during MCO via Dr. Aazani Mujahid, followed by a Zoom introduction to international project lead Dr. Sylvester Arnab and team. I began the residency in 2024, diving into the project, not really knowing the depths I would get into!

Locally led by Dr. Jacey Minoi, we kickstarted with the heart of the project, the community. A brainstorm and mind-mapping session led us to stories, folklores, the villagers' livelihood and struggles, their needs and wants and their vision for their village. We took strolls around PP, absorbing and observing every detail. Artistic ideas overflowed, fuelling my passion for art on conservation.

ASTREAM festival was the first milestone. Haslina Senin, our local designer, led the cyanotype workshops, which sparked the entrepreneurial spirits in the participating ladies. The art jamming sessions had kids and elderly doodling together on big illustrations of pre-drawn endangered marine animals. Kids learnt through play, cutting up trash we collected to make collages of the Irrawaddies! How many of you are familiar with the Irrawaddy dolphin, the mangrove horseshoe crab, the shark ray and the blue-spotted stingray?

We conducted several rounds of cyanotype and leaf printing workshops to instil awareness and appreciation of the coastal plants, including edible flora that the villagers often made into ulam. Everyone, including many first-timers got to explore floral arrangement, notice the details of each leaf, stem and petal and creativity was naturally cultivated. How often do we dismiss the enriching integration of science and art?

My personal highlight was working on the mural. I tried to embody the identity, heritage and culture of Pasir Pandak as well as showcasing the conservation message. The stories and ideas brewed in my head for a long time before I sketched them. I chose a naïve-style illustration so everyone could paint together easily. The villagers loved and approved the design, with a few minor changes. What a relief!

The community cleaned and prepped the wall. We traced my design at night unto the wall and spent two full days painting by numbers. I made a mistake by using black markers to number each block of colour. Some of the paints were translucent so it was a nightmare having to coat multiple layers for each colour. If not for this, we could have completed much earlier. The artist in me was screaming for every detail to be precise, every brushstroke to be balanced so I kept telling myself that it need not be 100% perfect. The scorching heat added to the stress, but when I saw everyone coming together to work on it, my heart melted along with the temperature. Volunteers from all ages, including senior citizens and primary school children came to bring my design to life! A heartfelt memory for a lifetime.

The mural encapsulates the spirit of Pasir Pandak as a coastal fishing village with the scenes of the sea, mangrove trees, and fishing boat set against the glorious sunsets, Gunung Sejinjang and Pulau Kera, woven together with depictions of local flora such as midin and ulam raja, and fauna including the finless porpoise (empesut), Irrawaddy dolphin, mangrove horseshoe crab, and crocodile. Not forgetting the famous produce of PP, the durian! Could you spot it?



The finished mural painting (you can find it via google map: Mural Kampung Pasir Pandak)



The doodling art jamming on an irrawaddy dolphin during the STEAM Festival



The ladies from the village during the Cyanotype Art Workshop. Photo credit: UNIMAS



Leaf Printing Workshop

I had a grand idea of turning an old fishing boat into an installation, as part of an extension of the mural, to make a makeshift playground for both children and visitors. Alas, we could not get hold of any fishing boats! However, a better idea emerged from James Robinson, the UK artist in residence! He designed an installation made up of plastic bottles. So, we started collecting, a task proved to be easier than we anticipated as they were abundantly found everywhere. A shocking revelation on the consumption of bottled mineral water in Kuching!

The UK team arrived with James, and we spent one week staying in the village with a group of Fine Art student volunteers and staff from UNIMAS, working on the sculpture. Prior to that, we had an engineering lecturer, Leonard to work with the villagers to create a concrete foundation with a metal structure. It was my first time ever sculpting plastic, or any sculpture! Everyone threw in ideas on improvisation. We worked from morning to night while feasting on delicious home-cooked food from the villagers. Ikan salai was my favourite! A must try!

It was a challenging week of trying to mould the plastic sheets cut out from the bottles into animals but our hearts swell with awe, when the Irrawaddy dolphin, finless porpoise and the saltwater crocodile, along with two mangrove horseshoe crabs stood proudly in front of the PP school. The base was an extension of the mural, so I added the sunset, waves and mangrove branches and flowers. James brilliantly created his own tiles in the UK, imbued with inspiration from our earlier leaf printing and cyanotype artworks, and these gave a meaningful touch to the overall assemblage beyond borders, forging a friendship of UK and Malaysia. Looking back, I miss waking up to the lullaby of the waves, the salty air, the tranquil village lifestyle, and especially a group of children who hung out with us at our worksite. One of them was Puteri, a feisty and cute girl that I could never forget.

Puteri was the anchor in the poem I wrote for this project, a letter to the Salt of Pasir Pandak. I thought of her and her generation as I wrote the poem, with layers of messages embedded on conservation and the charm of the village. I also brought a few poets to the village for a one-night writing retreat, where we just chilled and basked in the vibe of PP so we could write poetry about PP. The poems were turned into long scrolls, exhibited in Resonance at Think & Tink, along with all the other works we had done over the past year.

The Resonance exhibition lasted for more than a month, with a cyanotype workshop, a poetry performance night, a book launch and a paint together session where each participant painted a small section of the mural design on a mini canvas using limited colour spectrums. It transformed the mural into a completely new masterpiece!

This role of Artist in Residence was enriching, insightful and a great learning process. As an artist, I almost always worked alone or exclusively with a bunch of artists, so it was both a challenge and a special opportunity to work with people of diverse fields. The frugal experience was thrilling, stretching our brains. I poured a lot of focus, energy and time into FAIR, turning away many other projects but it was well worth it. I got to work with artists, designers, researchers, scientists, engineers, marine biologists, lecturers, students, fishermen, housewives, villagers and more! I believe this is just the beginning of a beautiful relationship with people, art, science, education and the environment and, I have fallen in love with the mangrove trees.



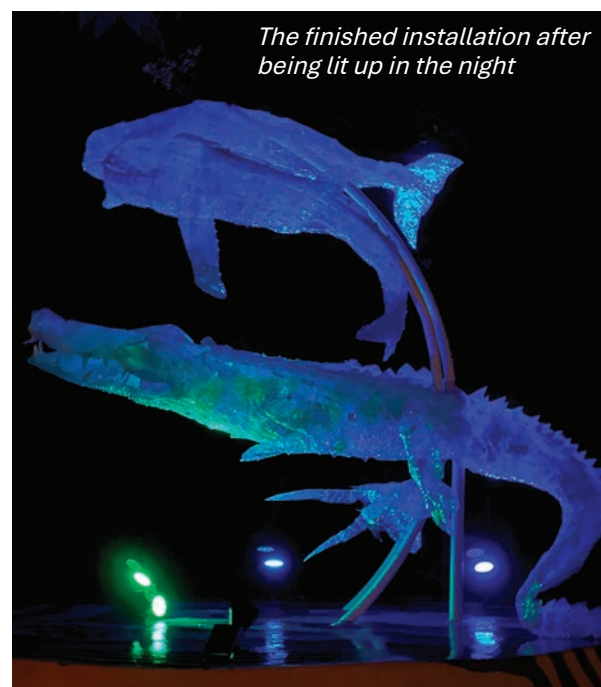
Local Artist Angelina Bong and UK artist James Robinson working on the plastic installation



UK artist James Robinson working on the installation



The finished installation in the day



The finished installation after being lit up in the night



Angelina with the exhibited poetry scrolls



Pasir Pandak beach view overlooking Pulau Kera



The Fine Art student volunteers and artists installing the plastic animal sculpture to the structure

Beyond the Photograph: Why Realist Drawing Still Matters in Contemporary Art

by Dr. Mohamad Faizuan Mat (iCreaTe, UNIMAS)

In an age where almost everyone carries a camera in their pocket, a recurring question continues to surface in art education and contemporary practice: Why do we still need to draw realism when photography can already capture reality instantly? At first glance, the argument appears reasonable. A photograph records details faster, more accurately, and with greater convenience than the human hand. Yet realism in drawing and painting continues to survive and even flourishes particularly within contemporary visual art practices in places such as Sarawak.

The persistence of realism reveals something important. Drawing is not merely about copying reality. It is about understanding, interpreting, and thinking through reality.

Historically, realist drawing functioned as one of the most essential foundations of artistic training. During the Renaissance, artists such as Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo used drawing not simply to imitate the visible world, but to study anatomy, structure, proportion, movement, and perception itself. Drawing became a method of inquiry. Even today, many art institutions continue to emphasize observational drawing because it trains the eye to observe critically and trains the mind to understand spatial relationships, form, light, and material presence.

Art historian John Berger once wrote in his influential book *Ways of Seeing* that “seeing comes before words.” His argument suggests that visual understanding is not passive; it is shaped by culture, memory, ideology, and experience. A realist drawing therefore is never merely a mechanical duplication of what is seen. Two artists observing the same object will produce two entirely different images because drawing inevitably carries interpretation, emphasis, emotion, and subjectivity.

Figure 1. The Vitruvian Man is a world-famous ink drawing created by the Italian Renaissance polymath Leonardo da Vinci around 1490, (Source: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Leonardo-da-Vinci>)

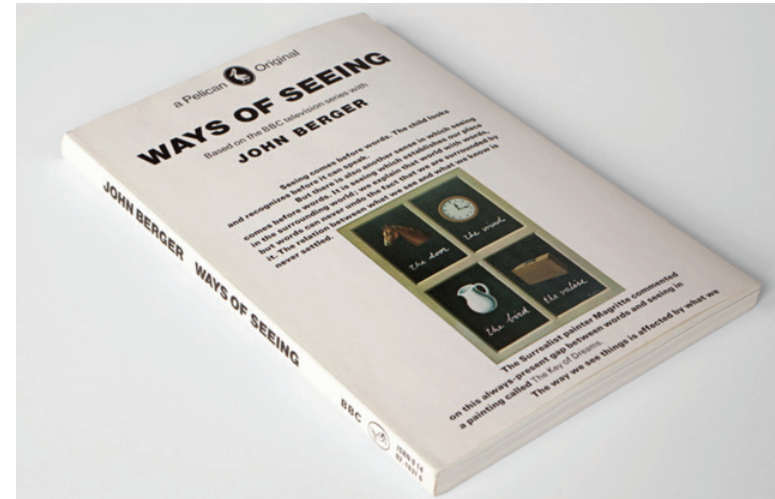


Figure 2. *Ways of Seeing* by John Berger, 2008/2009, (Source: Photo from https://www.maharam.com/stories/rock_john-berger-ways-of-seeing, Go and buy it from Kinokuniya, KLCC, I got mine already).

This distinction becomes even more significant when compared to photography. A camera records surfaces through technology, while drawing records duration, attention, and bodily engagement. The process of drawing forces the artist to slow down and negotiate with what is being observed. Philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty argued that perception is embodied, meaning we understand the world through lived physical experience rather than detached observation. In this sense, drawing becomes a phenomenological act. The hand, eye, memory, and body work together in ways that photography cannot fully replace.

Ironically, the rise of digital technology and artificial intelligence has made realism even more attractive in contemporary painting. Across social media platforms and gallery circuits, highly rendered figurative paintings frequently receive attention because audiences are astonished by technical mastery. In Sarawak particularly, realist and hyperrealist tendencies remain highly visible among emerging artists. Technical precision is often associated with artistic seriousness, discipline, and professionalism. Many young painters dedicate years to mastering skin textures, reflections, anatomy, and photographic detail.

This trend is understandable. Realist painting provides immediate visual impact and public accessibility. Viewers often respond quickly to works that resemble reality because recognizable images create familiarity. In many local exhibitions, realism also becomes a marker of artistic labor which is evidence that the artist possesses patience and technical competence.

However, realism alone is not enough.

One of the central challenges facing contemporary visual art today is the tendency to equate technical skill with artistic depth. A painting may be visually impressive yet conceptually empty. It may reproduce photographs flawlessly while offering little reflection on society, politics, memory, ecology, identity, or lived experience. When realism becomes only a demonstration of technique, art risks becoming decorative imitation rather than critical expression.

At this point, an important distinction must also be made between self-taught artists and formally trained art graduates. Society often admires self-taught or autodidact artists because their practice emerges from personal discipline, passion, and independent exploration. In many cases, technical achievement alone already represents a significant accomplishment for artists without formal institutional exposure.

However, expectations become different when discussing graduates from universities, academies, and formal art programs. An artist who has undergone official art education is expected to move beyond technical reproduction. Higher education in art is not supposed to function merely as a training centre for rendering skills. It should cultivate criticality, contextual understanding, research ability, conceptual development, historical awareness, and intellectual positioning.

An art graduate should not only know how to paint, but also understand why they paint, what their work contributes, and how their practice engages with contemporary discourse. Otherwise, formal art education risks producing technically competent image-makers (tukang buat gambarsaja) without critical consciousness.

This is especially relevant within the contemporary art ecosystem of Sarawak, I might say, soon, where realism continues to dominate many exhibitions and emerging practices. While technical excellence deserves recognition, the local scene also needs artists willing to interrogate issues surrounding environment, indigenous knowledge, development, identity, migration, technology, memory, and social transformation. Contemporary art today demands artists capable of constructing ideas and not simply reproducing appearances.



Figure 3. 'Domplatz, Mailand [Cathedral Square, Milan]' by Gerhard Richter, 1968, (Source: <https://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/ecatalogue/2013/may-2013-contemporary-evening-n08991/lot.20.html?locale=en>).

Many important contemporary artists employ realism not to celebrate technical perfection, but to question reality itself. Gerhard Richter, for example, paints from photographs yet intentionally blurs his images to destabilize ideas of truth and memory. Chuck Close transformed portrait realism into investigations of perception, grids, and human recognition. Their works remind us that realism can become conceptual rather than merely representational.

The future of visual art therefore should not revolve around the question of whether realism is obsolete because of photography. Photography has never truly replaced drawing because both mediums operate differently. The more urgent question is: What kind of thinking accompanies the image?

A technically skilled hand may produce accurate representation, but only a reflective mind can transform representation into art with lasting significance. In the end, contemporary visual culture does not merely need artists who can draw well. It needs artists who can see deeply, think critically, and respond meaningfully to the world around them. I love Sarawak and I love all of you.

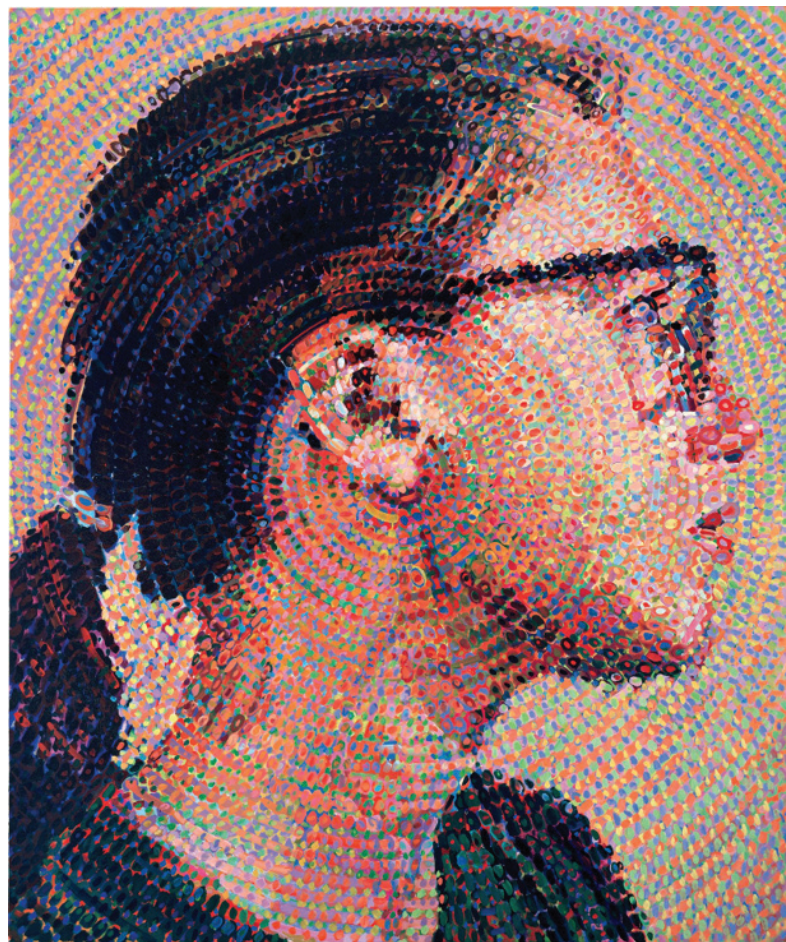


Figure 4. Cindy II, 1988 by Chuck Close, (Source: <https://www.vogue.com/article/chuck-close-artist-curator-legacy>).

陈崎祖籍广东，十岁时与家人移居砂拉越伦乐。他自幼对绘画产生浓厚兴趣，并尝试独自琢磨绘画技法。

陈崎曾言：“在南洋地方，画西洋画的人比较多，而画中国水墨画的人较少。如果能有画派是将西洋画的色彩学与水墨画的‘六法技巧’相结合，那才是最适合南洋的。”

1957年，陈崎有幸一睹赵少昂的真迹，内心受到深深的撼动。赵少昂融合东西方美术技法精髓、师古、师自然、师心的艺术理念，提炼出了艺术的真善美。陈崎不禁感叹：“美术法理博大精深，如果单靠自己探索研究而没有老师指导，那只能略涉皮毛，无法精通。”

1958年，在香港画家卜珍的极力推荐下，陈崎获得了向赵少昂以函授方式学习岭南画派技法的珍贵机会。具体而言，由赵少昂先寄出示范画稿，陈崎临摹研习并在画稿旁写下提问寄去香港；赵少昂则在画作上批文点评。若临摹习作有不妥之处，赵少昂便会在作品旁边一角示范正确的笔触，随后再将画稿寄还给陈崎，供他自行领悟。

2013年，在砂拉越美术博物馆举办的“陈崎回顾展”上，赵少昂的入室弟子何凤莲教授正聚精会神地观赏着陈崎的每幅作品。她当下赞叹道：“陈崎学长虽以函授学习，但其画功和实力，比起很多在赵少昂教授身旁习画的人犹胜多倍。陈崎学长后期的作品，多以砂拉越风土人情为题材，但画中的意境和铺设，依然沿用着赵少昂教授的岭南画派技法。这是非常了不起的成就。”



陈崎

首位把赵少昂岭南画派发扬於砂拉越的画坛前辈



符号迷恋与代表性错位：砂拉越艺术生态的“空心化”反思

文：磁铁

纵观砂拉越艺术生态的发展进程，一个现象正引发深思：在代表地方门面的国际文旅宣传与校园讲台上，频频亮相的作品和教学，在技法与美学深度上往往呈现出一种业余的稚嫩感。这群创作者在技术层面尚待打磨，在社会化运作上却展现出高度的成熟——他们通过高频累积资历履历，并借助艺术协会的制度化背书，搭建起一套程序合规的“能力证明”。在这种流于形式的合规掩盖下，大批真正经历岁月打磨、具备深厚技法与独立思考的创作者，反而成了公共视野与官方资源里最绝缘的局外人。

这种代表性错位，如果仅归咎于个体的功利或决策者的审美缺失，往往流于表面。这套包装机制之所以能够横行，症结在于地方艺术生态在体制层面的系统性失灵。一个生态若要维持健康运转，高度依赖于艺术组织的专业操守、行政评价指标的艺术化改良，以及独立学术评价体系的确立。当前乱象的本质，恰恰是这三者在职能上的错位与真空。

首先，民间艺术组织天然承担着双重职能：普及艺术的社会广度，与捍卫选拔精英的学术高度。然而，当地方协会的结构向业余爱好者和大众化市场过度倾斜时，学术与普及的边界便被彻底模糊。由于内部缺乏硬性的专业评审门槛，评价标准极易被“社会能见度”所绑架。一些懂得经营人际网络、擅长自我推销的创作者，凭借在协会与行政单位之间的活跃度，迅速填补了专业话语权的真空，顺理成章地成为官方眼中的“在地代表”。

其次，行政评价指标的功利化与“符号陷阱”，是这一乱象得以向外延伸的外部推力。官方资源的决策权往往掌握在缺乏艺术学术背景的行政人员手中。对行政逻辑而言，效

率、合规与可量化的成果远比艺术造诣重要。在缺乏专业审查支撑时，行政决策者倾向于依赖两个最安全的抓手：文化符号的直白堆砌，与创作者表象的社会名气。只要作品机械地罗列了本土特有的传统图腾或地域元素，便等同于完成了政治KPI。这种美学降维不仅无法识别技法的稚嫩，反而为平庸提供了制度性保护伞，使其得以代表地方门面输出至国际舞台。

最后，地方艺术生态中独立学术评价体系的真空，导致整个机制彻底丧失了自我纠偏功能。成熟的艺术生态高度依赖独立策展人、专业艺评家及学术委员会等第三方力量。他们的存在，是在商业名气和行政权力之外划定美学及格线。当地方生态缺乏这种客观机制时，定义“何为优秀”的话语权便迅速被市场流量与人际关系网抢占。在这种语境下，真正追求技法高度与精神内涵的创作者，往往因不愿迎合符号化的粗糙生产，也抗拒无效的圈子社交，而在评价体系中被进一步边缘化，最终主动或被动地将公共舞台让渡给业余包装者。

这种结构性的平庸化闭环，在更深层面上撕裂着未来的文化土壤。当缺乏审美思辨的流水线教育成为常态，年轻一代在面对本土艺术时，极易陷入几种分化的心态：一部分人可能在长期的符号驯化中丧失对美学的感知力，成为下一代惯性筛选平庸的行政执行者；而另一部分眼界率先开阔的青年，则可能在巨大的审美落差下对本土文化产生幻灭感，将其误读为“粗糙与业余”的代名词，进而转向外来成熟艺术体制的怀抱。这种代表性的错位与专业话语权的悬空，本质上是地方艺术生态在转型期必经的阵痛。它无情地提醒着我们，当外部商业市场与国际审美已经在加速迭代时，内部若继续满足于圈内的低质自嗨，最终透支的将是整个砂拉越艺术未来的生命力。

ART BEYOND BORDERS:

What Qingdao taught me about the role of artists in building cultural bridges By David Chew



Speech by the Malaysia Art Bridge founder, Datuk Sim Tiak Choo



David Chew (left), Guo Qiang (right), Dean of Qingdao Painting Academy



Artists round-table dialog between Malaysia and China artists, art leaders



The Malaysia artists visited places of interest for inspiration and understanding of Qingdao

In May 2026, I had the privilege of participating in the Malaysia Art Bridge Exhibition and Art Camp in Qingdao, China. Like many artists attending an international exhibition, I expected to showcase artworks, create new pieces, and meet fellow artists. What I did not expect was how deeply the experience would remind me of the larger role artists play in today's interconnected world.

During my stay in Qingdao, I had the opportunity to engage with artists, museum representatives, art educators, cultural leaders, and creative industry stakeholders. We came from different regions and countries, spoke different languages, and worked within different cultural contexts. Yet, I was struck by how similar many of our conversations were.

We spoke about creativity and artistic expression. We discussed cultural identity, the challenges facing by artists, the role of art in society, and how we can inspire younger generations to appreciate arts.

These conversations reminded me that art is perhaps one of the most powerful universal languages ever created. A painting may not speak in words, yet it can communicate emotions, ideas, and experiences that transcend language and cultural boundaries.

One observation that stood out during my time in Qingdao was the importance placed on cultural exchange. The exhibition was not merely a display of artworks. It became a platform for sharing ideas, learning different perspectives, building friendships, and exploring future collaborations.

I have always believed that artists grow not only through solitary studio practice but also through meaningful interaction with others. When we engage with artists from different countries and cultures, we are challenged to view our own work from new angles. International exchange broadens our horizons and reminds us that our artistic journey is part of a much larger global conversation. What impressed me most was not only what we could learn from others, but also what we could contribute.

As artists from Sarawak, we possess something unique. We come from a land shaped by one of the world's oldest rainforests, a multicultural society, and a rich indigenous heritage. These experiences influence how we see the world and shape our artistic voice.

Too often, artists from smaller regions assume that international engagement is mainly about learning from larger art centres. My experience in Qingdao reminded me that international exchange is equally about sharing who we are.

Sarawak has a voice.
Sarawak has stories.
Sarawak has artistic perspectives that deserve to be part of global conversations.

The experience also reinforced another important realisation that artists today play a role far beyond creating artworks.

Every international exhibition, art camp, and cultural exchange becomes an opportunity to represent our communities, cultures, values, and creative spirit. In many ways, artists serve as informal cultural ambassadors. Through art, we create opportunities for dialogue and understanding between people who may never have met under other circumstances.

One of the most meaningful discussions during the Qingdao exchange centred on the role of art and culture in fostering international relationships. It reminded me that cultural connections are often established long before business partnerships, trade agreements, or diplomatic initiatives take place.

When artists meet, barriers are lowered. Conversations become more personal. Trust develops naturally through shared experiences and mutual respect. Art is not merely an aesthetic activity. It is a bridge that strengthens relationships at a human level.

I believe governments, business communities, and diplomatic agencies should recognise the strategic value of cultural engagement. Artists can play an important role in opening doors, creating goodwill, and building understanding between communities and nations.

As I left Qingdao, I carried home more than photographs, sketches, and memories. I carried home a renewed belief in the power of art to connect people.

Art builds bridges between artists.
Art builds bridges between cultures.
Art builds bridges between cities and nations.

Most importantly, art builds bridges between human beings. As artists, our responsibility is not only to create meaningful works. It is also to help create those connections, fostering understanding, friendship, and collaboration in an increasingly connected world. Perhaps that is one of the most important roles artists can play in the twenty-first century.



In December 2025, Kuching once again became a meeting point for artistic exchange as Sarawak Artists Society (SAS) successfully organised the second Sarawak International Art Camp (SIAC 2025). Bringing together artists from across Asia, Europe, and the Middle East, the event demonstrated how art can transcend geographical, cultural, and linguistic boundaries.

Held over five days, SIAC 2025 welcomed 27 artists from 14 countries, creating a vibrant platform for dialogue, artistic exchange, and cultural understanding. Participants travelled from West Malaysia as well as neighbouring countries such as Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, Singapore, and Brunei. Participants also came as far as Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, Poland, Nepal, Egypt, mainland China, Hong Kong, and South Korea. The camp also benefited from the participation of SAS members and the dedicated organising committee, who extended Sarawakians' warm hospitality to all visitors.

According to SAS president Sebastian Jong, the camp was much more than an art-making programme. It served as a bridge connecting Sarawak to the world through creativity, friendship, and exploration. Artists spent the week not only producing artworks but also sharing techniques, exchanging ideas, and learning from one another's cultures and experiences. Friendships were forged over meals and laughter.



Unlike conventional exhibitions, where artworks are transported from artists' studios, all pieces displayed during the camp were created on-site at Chung Hua Middle School No. 4. Inspired by Kuching's heritage, architecture, landscapes, and cultural landmarks, the resulting works reflected a unique blend of local identity and international perspectives. Some artists expressed their national identities through their works, introducing flavours and cultures from beyond our borders to local audiences. The creations became visual conversations between Sarawak and the wider world.

The 2025 edition marked a significant expansion from the inaugural SIAC, held at Annah Rais in 2022. Supported by the Ministry of Tourism, Creative Industry and Performing Arts (MTCP), the camp attracted many first-time visitors to Sarawak. Some participants travelled for more than thirty hours to reach Kuching, demonstrating the programme's growing international reputation.

The camp concluded with an exhibition and closing ceremony at Chung Hua Middle School No. 4, where the public had the opportunity to view the artworks created throughout the event. The exhibition showcased a dynamic and diverse range of artistic expressions, from traditional painting approaches to contemporary mixed-media works, highlighting the richness of artistic practices across the globe.

Beyond the artworks themselves, SIAC 2025 reinforced Sarawak's role as an emerging centre for cultural and creative exchange. The programme contributed to the development of the local arts ecosystem by exposing artists, students, and the public to diverse viewpoints and voices from around the world, while simultaneously introducing overseas participants to Sarawak's cultural heritage.

As the state continues to invest in its creative industries, initiatives such as the Sarawak International Art Camp demonstrate the power of art to foster understanding, strengthen communities, and position Sarawak on the global cultural map. Through shared creativity and human connection, SIAC 2025 proved that art remains one of the most effective languages for bringing people together.

For more photos and artworks, visit:
Facebook.com/SIAC2022/



L1: Artwork by Ricky Hii (Sibu, Sarawak)



From Left
Artworks by Eddie Lui and Winnie Mak
(Hong Kong, China)



Artworks by Ewelina Kotakowska (Poland)



Artwork by David Chew
(Kuching, Sarawak)

Artwork by Paz DieDean
(Spain)



Artwork by Dr. Remon Samuel
(Egypt)

Artworks by Loo Ley See
(Penang, West Malaysia)



Artwork by Chris
(Netherlands)

Artwork by PGT
(Brunei)



Artworks by
Nia Latif
(Indonesia)

Artworks by
Prajak Supantee
(Thailand)



Artworks by Ute Seifert (Germany)



Artwork by Chin Kok Yan
(Perak, West Malaysia)

Artwork by Lee Eng Beng
(Penang, West Malaysia)



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