



khairudin zainudin

ORIENTAL EXPRESS

beyond identity

G13
gallery

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EXPRESS**

beyond identity

Oriental Express: Beyond Identity

by Azzad Diah Ahmad Zabidi

This essay was written in conjunction with Khairudin Zainudin's fourth exhibition.

It was the movement of a pair of hand filled the air, dancing back and forth to the muted sound. There is no music, yet the gesture was orchestrated, translating every words muttered from his mouth. The man opposite of him nodded, engaged in conversation. At other times, he sips his drink, then continue to chat. Unknowing to them, their movements attracted a pair of eyes from a distance. The act was observed and recorded – in drawing. Each constructed lines tracing the rhythm of two man having a chat, capturing and marking the moment on a paper.

"Minum apa? (What's your drink?)" , greet a voice, the waiter, with thick Indian accent.

Too busy to notice. Still working on his doodles.

"Minum apa bos? (What's your drink, sir?)" Again.

Still no answer. He's too busy.

"Oii, what do you want for a drink?"

This time the voice a bit louder. It was his friend who was asking him, in urgency. Khairudin forgot that he was in a dinner with his friends in a mamak restaurant.

"Err...", hesitating.

He was too caught in his moment. It becomes a habit, and had grown remarkably over the years. He would bring a sketchbook wherever he goes. Coffee shop, mall, park – his fascination with public space not so much grown from the connection the artist had with his subject matter. Rather, he situates himself in the actual environment to explore the spatial relationship between himself, the people and the site. Most of his subject was based from a direct observation of human activities, against a mundane and banal background.

Khairudin Zainudin works in a subtle manner by immersing in the environment. The sketch book becomes a personal diary in which pointed to many events of the artist's life. Most of his subject is

anonymous persons which he acquainted in public spaces. Although some of them are friends, Khairudin would deconstructed these images into anonymity. Such as in *Ise Talking About Art* (2015), an elaborated repetitious lines reenact the intensity of the situation. These lines marked the actuality, spontaneity, and the behavior of the subject matter. There are no recognized faces, leaving only the temperament of its character.

One could trace the impressionism in Khairudin's practice. The impressionist adopted their environment as a subject matter, documented through keen observation of social activities of the period in a works such as Degas, Manet and most artists of that time. Degas, for example, well known for his 'ballet' painting provided us a glimpse of modern Parisian quotidian life. Contemporary art demand communication and interaction across a thresholds of difference that may be experiential, psychological, or grounded in social and political hierarchies. Today, artist's practice is not simply to bring about the world; they are an attempt to communicate, exchange information, translate experience or even trade places.

Khairudin Zainudin's fourth solo exhibition, 'Oriental Express', loosely inspired by the mystical and exotic impression of Asia; particularly East Asia region. Now regarded as old-fashioned and politically incorrect, the term 'Oriental' in this exhibition referred to the vague generalization of the region towards its people, language and culture. Oriental Express serves as an extension of the artist's personal indexes, turning individual ambiguity into a composed image. These experiences further turn into a fragment of memories, translated into a psychological mapping of the artist journey.

This exhibition tracks Khairudin career over the past year, in his period of development to seek understanding over himself. The journey to Taipei, Kaohsiung and Hong Kong is such an opportunity for Khairudin to embrace the cultural-economic trade the art market has to offer. In over two years, Khairudin has travelled to Taiwan and participated in three group exhibition with other international artists in 2015 since his second solo exhibition (and first outside Malaysia) in 2014. Although most of his exhibition done in Taiwan, but it was the visit to Hong Kong inspired his latest body of work.

Hong Kong is known as one of highest density populated city in the world. Strategically a perfect harbor, it evolved from a colonial trading

port into the dominant center of international finance and commerce in the Eastern Hemisphere. The city returned to China in 1997 and propelled as key industrial city for the country. Asia economic triumph in global market contributing to the extensive art trading. This open up new trade route from the West to other side of the continent. The market boom has elevated Asian art into an international stage. Hong Kong gradually establish itself as hub of cultural industry, with a host of art fairs and events driving the market towards the international scene. Art Basel, one of world leading art fair held annually since its inauguration in 2013 in Hong Kong, has attracted thousands of art fraternity and enthusiasts alike. Perhaps, the change of rules in contemporary art paved ways to diverse approach on production and distribution. As the way Terry Smith put it, "(I)t is the contemporaneity of international contemporary art that's having the strongest effect: artists everywhere are much more aware of their contemporary elsewhere are doing, learn of it much quickly, and seem much more interested in and open to it, than ever before."

It is not unusual now when we think about art, the first images enter to our mind is trades. "(But) there is no doubt that seemingly favorable reception of Asian artists in the international art is embedded in an economic and political context that has necessitated broader engagement. We all now have a vested interest," wrote Melissa Chiu and Benjamin Genocchio. Culturally diverse, it is hard to pinned down and objectively define Asia in its entirety. The free market and capitalism has brought the world together and become a part of a large economic networking. Communication becomes an important aspect of the trade. In the world of constant network and mobile, we seek to fit in the burgeoning mono-culture. The relation between East and West have prolonged throughout the history. "Asia today is not necessarily identical with the East," wrote Asmudjo Jono Irianto. "Today Asia is a world of continuous change, but also demonstrated by tendencies of self-destruction, through intra-national conflicts and internal conflicts enflamed by religious and ethnic differences, or in different terms, a difference identity."

Asian generally known for their traditional customary, yet at the same time embraced the modernity brought by the West. This referred to the duality of Asian identity, between the inherited tradition and the modern. The notion of Asia-ness could be misleading because of the diverse intersection of history, language, culture and religion which shaped the region today. There are two main concept of identity; the "

essentialist," who seek a stable definition of identity, the "deconstructionist," who regards identity as a social construct that can be manipulated for political and social ends. These are the situation faced by Asian today. The rapid urban development in most Asia's major cities contribute to the acculturation of its inhabitant.

Hailed from East Coast Malaysia, Khairudin was raised and taught in Malay customary. Although, Malaysia is a multicultural country, it is uncommon to see the Malay to speak other language besides Bahasa Melayu and English. Language often seen as a barrier as the artist try to navigate himself in the Mandarin and Cantonese spoken world. "The only concerned that I have is to get halal food, which is a bit tricky since majority of the population are non-Muslim. I have to identify and memorized some of the Chinese words each time I'm buying food." Without any knowledge about the language, Khairudin would refer to the shape and form of the Chinese letters to get the clue. "At first, I only recognized these texts as a shape."

The only language that bridge the difference is visual language. Meeting with other people has helped him to grasp the culture although the language barrier left himself out of the conversation. Khairudin illustrated this experience in his painting entitled Ha ha ha. The painting consists of nine separate square portraits; each represent the acquaintance during the visit. Chinese typography read as ha, filled all over the painting in many sizes, referring to his experience communicate with the locals. The feel of awkwardness and displacement often exclude Khairudin from the conversation.

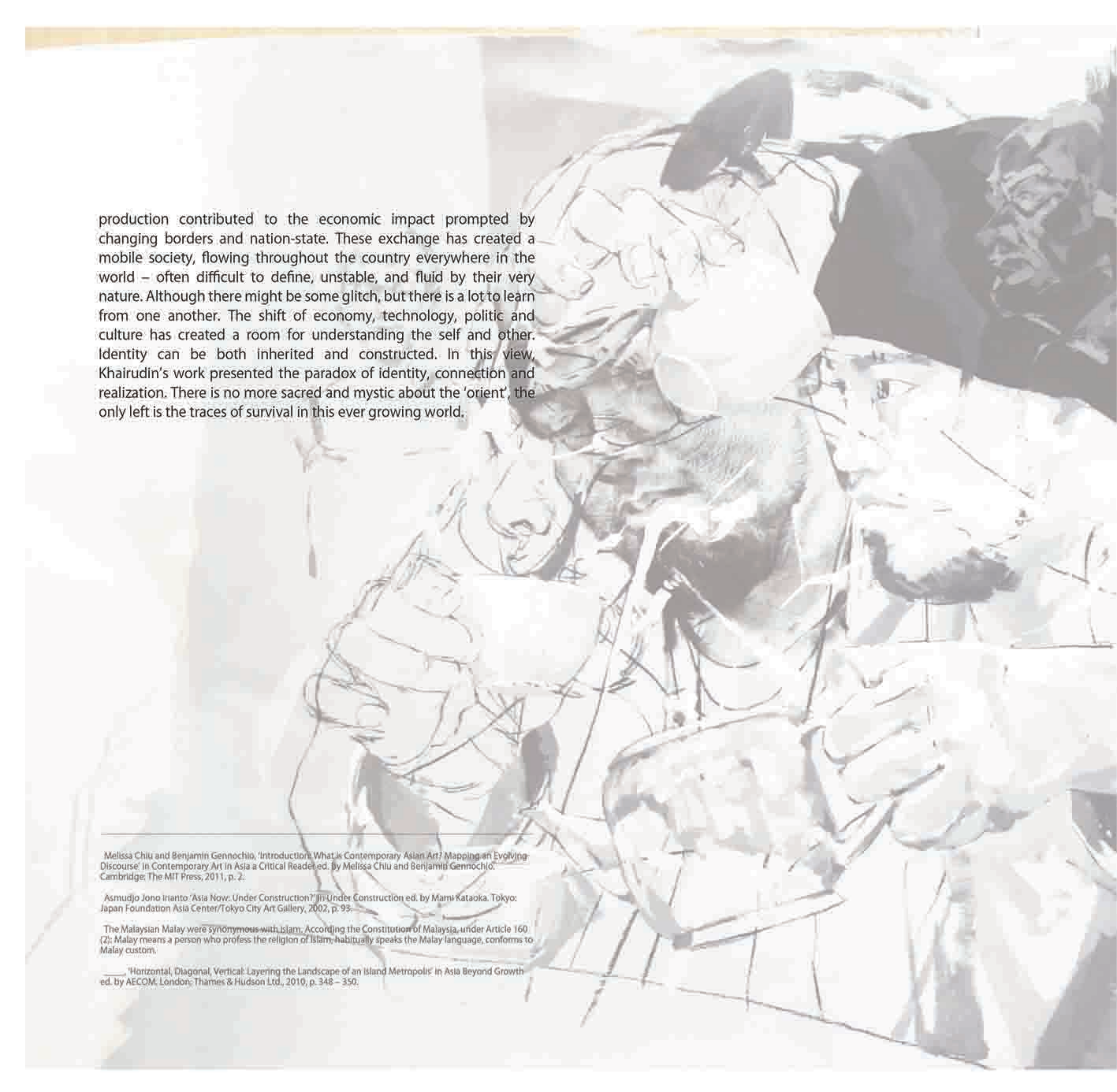
Transition from his usual artistic approach, the new body of work intends to project a moment of transformation, both as an artist and as a person. Khairudin reflects a personal outtake on the struggle of self and other, of isolation and of lost in translation in an unfamiliar environment. In this sense, art seen as a universal language capable to translate the ambiguity of the artist's experience. Khairudin's work offers a reflection on the many simultaneities in our contemporary world, its interrelations and superimpositions.

These fragments of experience can be translated as artist's psychological mapping. Enfold in both familiarity and peculiarity, Khairudin depiction of an urban landscape is a way of looking at our self as people, whilst understanding the city as a social and economic space. Aided with his compact camera, Khairudin would find a way

wandering around the cityscape. The scene of busy street crowded with people minding their own business presenting a common sight of urban life. "I am interested in human activities – the interaction and communication – because we are the social being." Modern life demanded constant mobility in a very large socio-economic network. Hong Kong, as Khairudin recalled, flooded with people moving from one place to another. There is a sense of familiar sight as he walking throughout the busy street.

Hong Kong becomes a complex system in continual transformation: the intersection of people, transport, flows, mutations, movement, energies, and crossroads. There is no delineation between what is private and public and no strong psychological difference between one piece of architecture and the next. As the outcome, Hong Kong has some of the most dynamic public spaces in the world. All these space have one thing in common, it was surrounded by wall. It is not unusual to see these wall occupied by posters or graffiti on it surfaces. Be it a street gang tagging their territories or an advertising of various services, each of them contended to be visible. Khairudin rendered this situation in one of his painting entitled Cramped. The work presents the juxtaposition of figures and posters layering into one another. Spontaneous and gestural, his strokes create a sense of movement, resulting from intervening lines and overlapping marks. It was chaotic, yet formed into a dynamic intersection of lines resonate the pace of our current life. In his other work, Rush Hour is exploring the idea of border and limitation of access in public area. In this particular images, the text 'Folding Door' and 'Keep Clear' was highlighted against the crowded background. These texts turned to geographical and psychological border, directing public away from particular territory. Modern Asia is growing with new megacity, and trading opportunity. Urban development taking over the domestic area to create more commercial space. Scarcity of space become regular as the city become the center of economic growth.

Globalization have shaped the world today. As the artist becomes more and more global, binaries like diaspora/homeland become less divided and more complicated and difficult to define. Khairudin journey to the Taipei, Kaohsiung and Hong Kong is an evident how culture play an important role to anticipate the transformation of identity, both on individual and community level. The increasing integration of different areas of the world and their respective worldviews, commercial products, ideas, money, and cultural



production contributed to the economic impact prompted by changing borders and nation-state. These exchange has created a mobile society, flowing throughout the country everywhere in the world – often difficult to define, unstable, and fluid by their very nature. Although there might be some glitch, but there is a lot to learn from one another. The shift of economy, technology, politic and culture has created a room for understanding the self and other. Identity can be both inherited and constructed. In this view, Khairudin's work presented the paradox of identity, connection and realization. There is no more sacred and mystic about the 'orient', the only left is the traces of survival in this ever growing world.

Melissa Chiu and Benjamin Genocchio, 'Introduction: What is Contemporary Asian Art? Mapping an Evolving Discourse' in *Contemporary Art in Asia a Critical Reader* ed. by Melissa Chiu and Benjamin Genocchio. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2011, p. 2.

Asmudjo Jono Inanto 'Asia Now: Under Construction?' in *Under Construction* ed. by Mami Kataoka. Tokyo: Japan Foundation Asia Center/Tokyo City Art Gallery, 2002, p. 93.

The Malaysian Malay were synonymous with Islam. According the Constitution of Malaysia, under Article 160 (2): Malay means a person who profess the religion of Islam, habitually speaks the Malay language, conforms to Malay custom.

_____, 'Horizontal, Diagonal, Vertical: Layering the Landscape of an Island Metropolis' in *Asia Beyond Growth* ed. by AECOM. London: Thames & Hudson Ltd., 2010, p. 348 – 350.



"Being an outsider in these unfamiliar setting, I share my experienced being an alien through my art"

- Khairudin Zainudin

ARTWORKS



Cramp

110 x 220 cm Acrylic and charcoal on canvas 2016



Rush Hour

110 x 230 cm Mixed media on canvas 2016



Feeling Displaced

104.5 x 155.5 cm Oil on canvas and sticker on acrylic sheet 2016



Reserved Port

93 x 123 cm. Oil on canvas and sticker on acrylic sheet 2016





Scattered Memories

101 x 244 cm x 10cm Charcoal and ink on moleskine sketchbook 2016



Pickled Vegetables with Pork Flavor

64 x 64 cm Oil on canvas and sticker on acrylic sheet 2016



Spicy Pork Chop Flavor

64 x 64 cm Oil on canvas and sticker on acrylic sheet 2016



Tonkotsu Flavor

64 x 64 cm Oil on canvas and sticker on acrylic sheet 2016



Vegetarian Flavor

64 x 64 cm Oil on canvas and sticker on acrylic sheet 2016



Ha Ha Ha

138 x 138 cm Oil and acrylic on canvas 2016



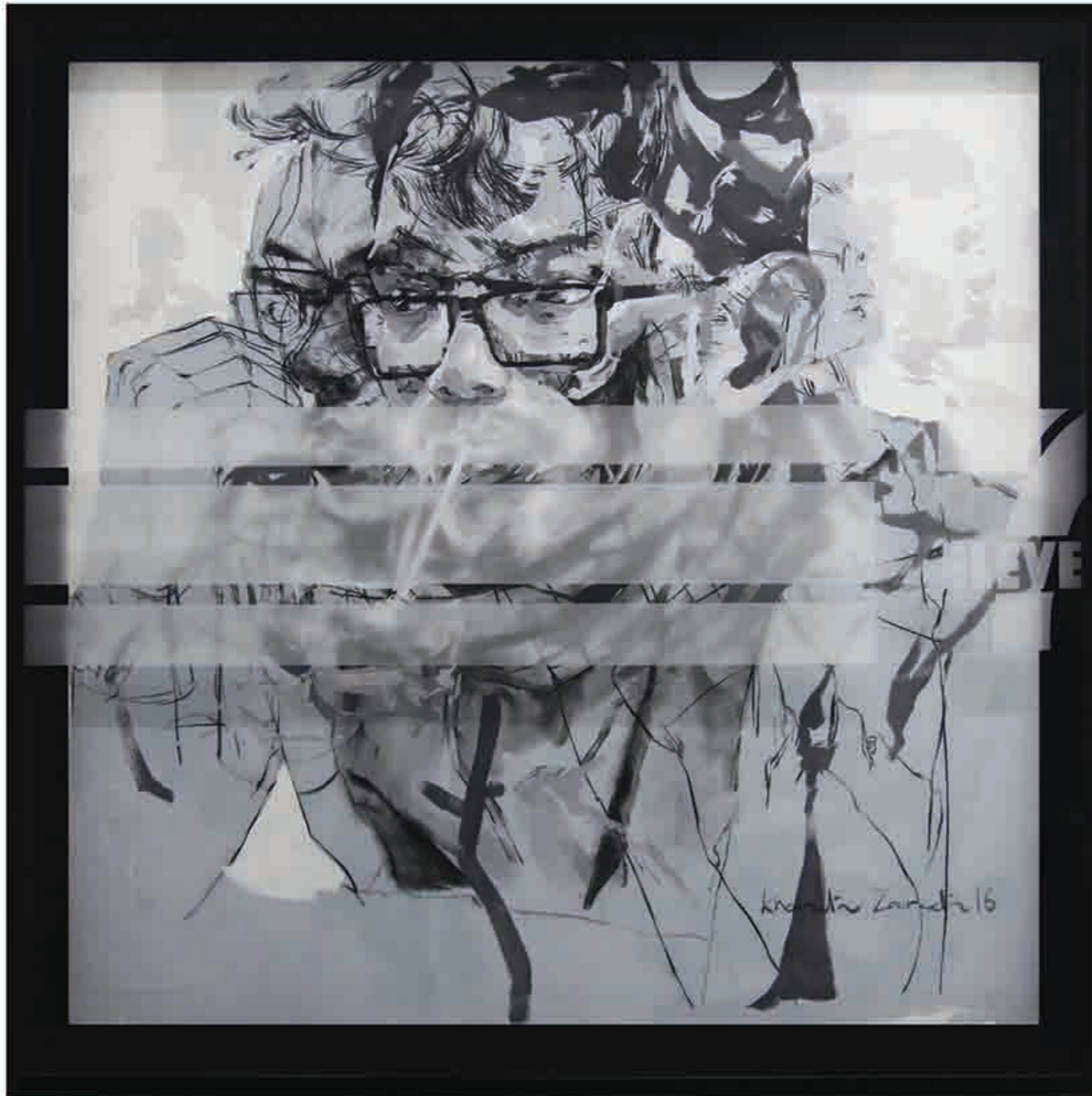
Mesmerized by Him

122x122 cm Mixed media on canvas 2016



Tranquility in the Big City

101 x 123 cm Oil on canvas and sticker on acrylic sheet 2016



Security Of Fimiliarity

113 x 113 cm Oil on canvas and sticker on acrylic sheet 2016



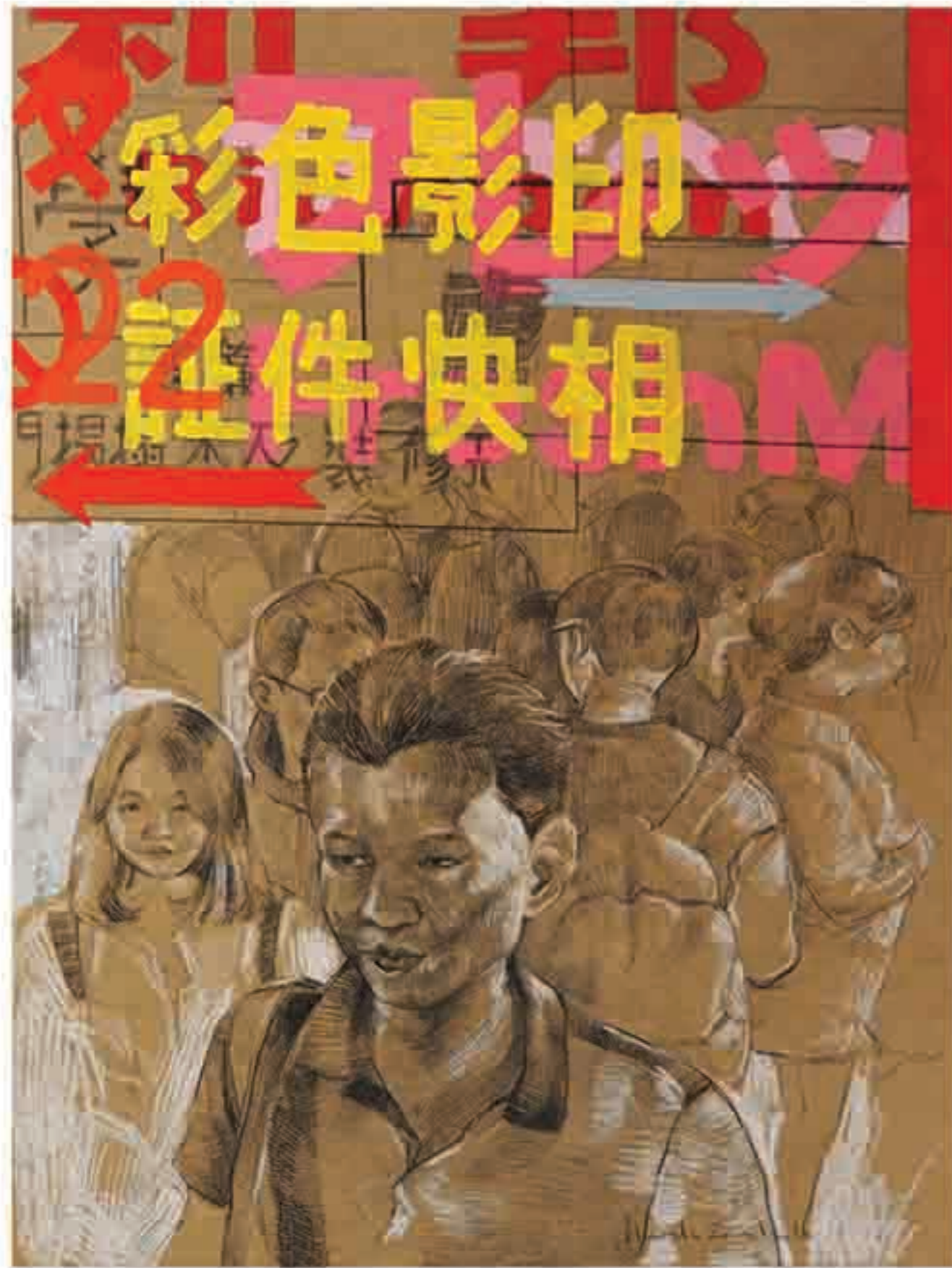
Anxiety

30 x 41 cm Oil pastel and charcoal on brown paper 2016

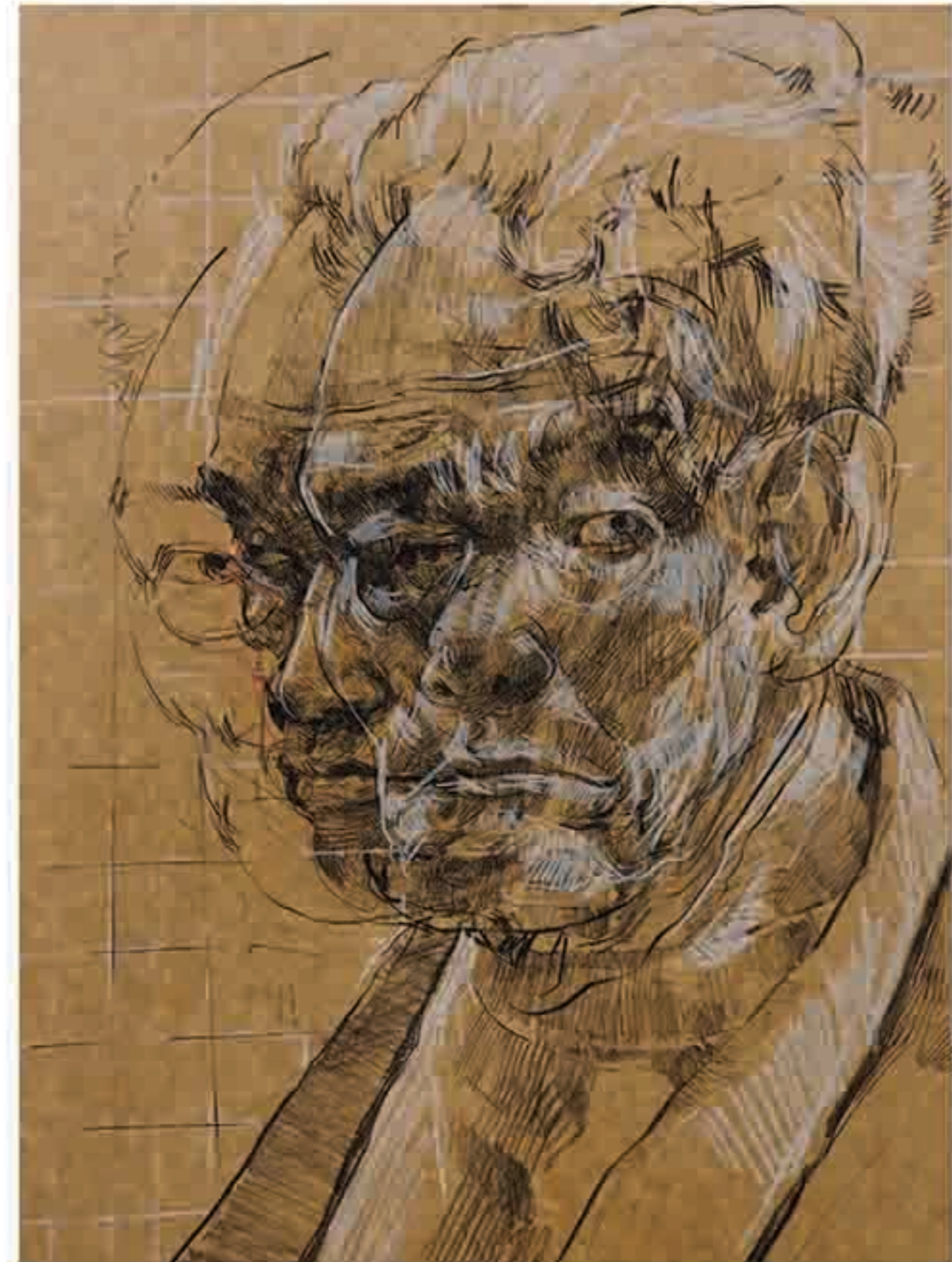


Sunday's Hong Kong Coffee Shop

30 x 41 cm Oil pastel and charcoal on brown paper 2016



Night in Mongkok
42 x 30 cm Charcoal, Oil pastel & acrylic on brown paper 2016



Old Man at Java Road Market
42 x 30 cm Charcoal on brown paper 2016





KHAIRUDIN ZAINUDIN



Born in 1987 in Kelantan, Malaysia

Solo Exhibition

- 2016 Oriental Express : Beyond Identity, G13 Gallery, Malaysia
- 2015 Art Stage Singapore 2015 with G13 Gallery, Singapore
- 2014 Young Artist Discovery, Art Taipei with G13 Gallery, Taiwan
- Senyap Dalam Gege with G13 Gallery, Malaysia

Group Exhibitions:

- 2016 Transit A2, Hom Art Trans, Malaysia
- Young Malaysian Artists III, Galeri Petronas, Malaysia
- Art Stage Singapore with G13 Gallery, Singapore
- 2015 Art Kaohsiung, with G13 Gallery, Taiwan
- Art Taipei, with G13 Gallery, Taiwan
- Tales From The City with G13 Gallery, Malaysia
- Bazaar Art Jakarta, with G13 Gallery, Indonesia
- Ke - Yuan New Stars 2015 with Ke- Yuan Gallery, Taiwan
- 2014 Suara 3 with Segaris Art Centre, Malaysia
- 'AQAL' Graduate show, with Segaris Art Centre, Malaysia
- Art Expo 2014 with G13 Gallery, Malaysia
- Prudential Malaysian Eye, Publika, Malaysia
- Read Drawing with Petronas Gallery, Malaysia
- ConFiguraTion with G13 Gallery, Malaysia
- 2013 Young and New Exhibition with House of Matahati, Malaysia
- KL Jazz Festival with University of Malaya, Malaysia
- M50 Merdeka Exhibition with Mome Art Gallery, Malaysia
- Art Expo 2013 with G13 Gallery, Malaysia
- AQAL with Segaris Art Centre, Malaysia

- 2012 Citra Terengganu 2012 with Muzium Terengganu, Malaysia
- Earth with Puncak Art Gallery, Malaysia
- Rasa Alam with University Kebangsaan Malaysia, Malaysia
- 1MCAT, Raub Pahang, Malaysia
- 2011 Nando's Peri-fy Your Art, Malaysia
- 2010 Open Show with Gallery Tunku Zahirah UiTM, Malaysia
- UiTM Group Show with SACC Shah Alam, Malaysia
- UiTM All Department Group Show, Foyer Faculty of Art and Design UiTM, Malaysia
- Out of Number, Solaris Dutamas, Malaysia
- 2009 1st Festival Mail Art Exhibition, Shah Alam, Selangor

Awards:

- 2013 Consolation Prize, Citra Terengganu Competition, Muzium Terengganu, Malaysia
- 2012 2nd Prize, Citra Terengganu Competition, Muzium Terengganu, Malaysia
- 3rd Prize, Ritma Johor Competition, Malaysia
- 2011 1st Prize, Tanjong Heritage Competition, Malaysia
- 2010 1st Prize, Tanjong Heritage Competition, Malaysia
- Dean List Award, Faculty of Art & Design, UiTM Shah Alam, Malaysia
- 2009 Dean List Award, Faculty of Art & Design, UiTM Shah Alam, Malaysia
- JPA Scholarship
- 3rd Prize, Tanjong Heritage Competition, Malaysia

Publication:

- 2014 Prudential Malaysian Eye

Public Collections:

- Balai Seni Visual Negara, Malaysia
- Private Collection Taiwan, France, Malaysia and Singapore
- Private Collection, Gallery G Exhibition, Korea
- Mome Art Gallery, Mara Tower, Malaysia
- Muzium Terengganu, Malaysia
- Gallery 12, Setapak KL, Malaysia
- G13 Gallery, Malaysia
- Muzium Terengganu, Malaysia
- Galeri Seni Universiti Kebangsaan, Malaysia
- Tanjong Public Limited Company, Malaysia

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Art Valley Sdn Bhd
G13 Gallery,
GL 13, Ground Floor, Block B,
Jalan SS7/26, Kelana Square,
47301 Kelana Jaya, Selangor,
Malaysia.
T: 03-7880 0991 / 7880 0313
F: 03-7886 5755
E: info@g13gallery.com
W: g13gallery.com
FB: facebook.com/G13gallery

Design:

Fawwaz Aiman
Teng Art Illustration

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