

Selamat Datang ke Malaysia

an exhibition of contemporary art from Malaysia

PRESS RELEASE

SELAMAT DATANG KE MALAYSIA:

Wong Hoy Cheong, Jalaini Abu Hassan, Anurendra Jegadeva, Emil Goh, Nadiah Bamadhaj, Sharmiza Abu Hassan, Yee I-Lann, Roslisham Ismail aka Ise, Vincent Leong and Sharon Chin

At Gallery 4A, Sydney, 30 June – 21 July 2007

2007 marks the 50th anniversary of Merdeka, Malaysia's independence from British rule. We are a nation 50 years old. We have many stories to tell. At Independence, we were left with a legacy of colonial rule and its systems of law and government, a Malay culture of sultans and their courts, and kampung communities, indigenous tribal cultures, a large migrant population of Indians and Chinese, busy trading centres and vast tracts of agricultural estate growing mainly oil palm and rubber. Today we are classed as a "developing nation", still building infrastructure at a furious rate, negotiating our place on the international stage. Our society is "multi-ethnic", our culture a hybrid of Malay, Chinese, Indian, Western, Middle-Eastern and regional influences. Our national religion is Islam. We remain rich in natural resources, and can boast a Formula 1 circuit, once having the world's tallest building, and a former James Bond girl.

To celebrate Merdeka, 2007 has been declared Visit Malaysia Year - an opportune time to "visit", to look at Malaysia today. The premise of the exhibition Visit Malaysia Year 2007 is a rough guide to the Malaysian contemporary reality. It plays with the idea of contemporary art as cultural expo. We ask here, how would we present ourselves to the world? How are we identified? What do we want ourselves presented as? How far is our real experience of Malaysia a reflection of our ambitions?

In the exhibition **Selamat Datang ke Malaysia**, a group of Malaysian artists, all born after Independence, offer Malaysians and outsiders alike their insights into this interesting nation - its successes and failures, its contradictions and eccentricities, its growing pains. From photography and video to charcoal drawing and sculptural installations, this exhibition presents the exciting range of approaches being used by Malaysian artists today. Innovative, witty, ambitious, contemporary art in Malaysia is an energetic forum for dialogue and the emergence of new ideas, an important force among younger generations of Malaysians.

The artists selected come from diverse backgrounds, many have studied abroad and returned to Malaysia to practice. A number have studied in Australia, like generations of fellow Malaysians. Each has been both a participant and keen observer of the unfolding drama of our developing nation. Internationally-recognised artist Wong Hoy Cheong first made his mark charting the migrant history of Malaysia, today he takes us on a tour of our suburban dreams. Yee I-Lann, who represented Malaysia in Contemporary Commonwealth exhibition at the National Gallery of Victoria in 2006, gives us a history in studio photographs of a generation of Malaysians growing up. Anurendra Jegadeva's "Family Album Thesaurus" offers a potted guide to our different communities and their social and culinary customs. Leading painter Jalaini Abu Hassan explores the mysteries of the Malay world and its resonance in the cultural imagination. Itinerant urban artist

Emil Goh celebrates the cultural binding power of 'Mangllish' (Malaysian English). Nadiah Bamadhaj looks at our architecture and what it symbolizes in terms of national development. Sculptor Sharmiza Abu Hassan explores the resonance of the notion of our homeland. Younger artists Ise, Vincent Leong and Sharon Chin draw from their personal experience of negotiating their way in today's Malaysia, its popular culture, its changing social fabric.