

YOUNG ARTIST AWARD 2018

HILMI JOHANDI



'Bangsawan', part of 'Dusk to Dawn | Fajar ke Senja' solo exhibition, oil on canvas, 2014.

Photo courtesy of Hilmi Johandi

Hilmi Johandi (b.1987) is a painter who is also concerned with interventions through different mediums that are associated within the domain of framing, fragmentation (deconstruction) and compression (reconstruction). His explorations are set in the range of the familiar, frequently engaging with symbolic motifs culled from Singaporean contexts. The montage carries a particular resonance for him and his art shows this through the synthesis of images from film, archival footages and photographs. His aesthetic is underpinned by his thoughts on the social effects of rapid development, and a strong emotional reaction against the forgetfulness in those who readily embrace modernisation.

In his previous solo exhibitions, 'Framing Camellia' and 'Dusk to Dawn | Fajar ke Senja', he has turned his gaze to Singapore in the late 1950s and 1960s as well as to P. Ramlee films. He is known for his interest in films of the era for their representations of pre- and post-independence Singaporean society. He orchestrates the flux of overlapping elements, reconstructing and synthesising them into a lyrical yet elliptical montage.

The exhibitions Hilmi has been involved in locally include 'Eagles Fly, Sheep Flock' at the Southeast Asia Platform with ART STAGE Singapore, 'Figment of Film' at ADM Gallery in Nanyang Technological University, 'In the Garden' at Objectifs, 'Spaces' in OTA Fine Arts and 'Peculiar Textures' with Galerie Steph. He has also exhibited internationally for works 'Flux - City of Change' at Strata Art Fair, Saatchi Gallery, London, United Kingdom, 'Portraits in Verses' with Fred Torres Gallery, New York, United States of America and 'Primavera 4' with Dena Foundation in Galerie Frédéric Lacroix, in Paris, France and Singapore. His past solo exhibitions were 'Dusk to Dawn | Fajar ke Senja' held in OCBC Artspace and 'Framing Camellia' in ION Art in 2014. In addition, Hilmi has been an adjunct lecturer at LASALLE College of the Arts since 2014.

Hilmi is a recipient of the National Arts Council's Arts Scholarship (Postgraduate) (2017), the LASALLE Scholarship (2017) and the Goh Chok Tong Youth Promise Award (2017). In 2015, he was selected to participate in the annual Dena Foundation Artist Residency, organised in partnership with the National Arts Council, in Paris, France. He also showcased at the Young Talent Programme by Affordable Art Fair in 2014. Hilmi received his Bachelor of Arts (Hons) Fine Arts in 2013 and Master of Fine Arts in 2018 from LASALLE College of the Arts. More recently, Hilmi was one of five artists selected for the President's Young Talents 2018 organised by the Singapore Art Museum. ■



A CONVERSATION WITH HILMI JOHANDI

Tell us about your earliest memories encountering the arts. Who or what were your key influences?

My parents got us a set of those children's encyclopaedia books published in the 1980s. These were as far as I remember, my first exposure to visual illustrations of human anatomy, animals, machines, etc. I was doodling, making a mess and re-interpreting things I found in these books. It is interesting to look back and see that my art practice revolves around re-interpretation of some kind. I never imagined I would be an artist until I became more serious about art making and started doing shows after I obtained my diploma. If not for the unfailing support of my family, peers and mentors in the arts, I wouldn't have reached where I am today.

What were some of the biggest challenges you faced when creating new works?

The challenges are on various levels. Finances are one of the main struggles in the life of an artist in Singapore. Finding a suitable studio space for an artist is important. And in my experience, it is an obstacle that I have to deal with time and again. Then when I'm making art there are the intellectual challenges like aesthetic and conceptual issues to grapple with along the way.

What motivated you to continue in spite of these challenges?

I would say it is the determination, motivation and satisfaction in making. My late father is my key influence, role model and inspiration. He worked hard, against many challenges, to manage his food stall business all his life to make ends meet for the family. He once told me he was motivated by his contented customers who gave him the necessary encouragement to keep providing them with quality food. As for me, aside from the appreciation of others, I find myself constantly intrigued and captivated by the excitement that art practice brings and those occurrences that reveal the next chapter of possibilities in the process.

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What is your personal philosophy in life, and how does it translate into your artistic practice?

My philosophy is akin to one of the fundamentals of aesthetics – balance and harmony. It is one of the ancient truisms that I still abide by, or at least attempt to, in both life and in practice. As a basis of my artistic practice, not only could it be relevant to the visual and aesthetic form, but this applies in my use of contextual and conceptual components. For every work or a series of works I create, I aspire to achieve a harmonious structure of both content and form.

What do you want the audience to experience through your works?

I have always liked to see my work as open to interpretation with the visual clues I have provided. These clues are those one would be familiar with. And then there is the tendency for my audience to have to put in some effort when interpreting my work. Like a sculpture for instance, it reveals its form in time as one moves around it – the narrative unfolds. My works share the same principle: what may seem like an illusion of images at a glance, turns out to be much more over time.



Work-in-progress of 'A Reading Session', part of 'A Reading Session' exhibition, oil on canvas, 2015.

Photo courtesy of Hilmi Johandi



What advice would you give to students who want to pursue a career in your field?

Have the determination and passion to learn and gain as much knowledge and experience as possible. Expose yourself to as many opportunities as possible. This will allow you to engage with and work with other artists, curators and creative individuals, and from these encounters there can come future opportunities. A plethora of artistic and professional connections can contribute to the development of your artistic sensibilities and concerns.

What are your hopes and vision for Singapore's visual arts scene?

Just like every artist here, my hope is to see Singapore's visual arts scene thrive. One of the key aspects is for the larger community to be more receptive and knowledgeable towards the visual arts. This will take time, but something I hope will take place, even if it is 50 years from now.

How does receiving the Young Artist Award change things for you? Tell us more about how you intend to further grow and contribute to the arts scene.

It will give me the opportunity to make new works, and I will see things come about in ways that I could hardly have imagined before. This should bring me to new heights of possibilities both in creative and professional aspects in years to come. And then it will be my responsibility and pleasure to share and impart my artistic knowledge and experiences to students and the arts community.



'The Glass Divider', part of 'A Reading Session' exhibition, oil on canvas, 2015.

Photo courtesy of Hilmi Johandi



'Great World City 村民生活', oil on canvas, 2015.

Photo courtesy of Hilmi Johandi

HILMI JOHANDI



WORDS OF APPRECIATION

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