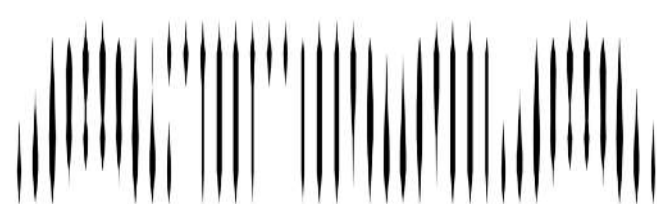


*U*nfolding
Conditions



Unfolding Conditions

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Fazreen Sukri
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20 June - 25 July 2026

Unfolding Conditions

Written by Ong Kar Jin

“I have blasphemed against the Holiest of Holies, the inbred figure of the Malay *sasterawan*, the shrill articulator of the Soul of the Race (race, not nation, mind you), that pious and sentimental defender of the glory of the Great Malay *Minda* (from the English “mind”- you see, we don’t even have a word for mind!).”

— Salleh ben Joned, *As I Please* (1994)

In typical Salleh ben Joned fashion, this is a multilingual rant, flitting back and forth between Malay and English, between sharp wise observations and profane mundanity. One can hear his sardonic voice, him grinning as he belts this out. Salleh often grappled with words and their untranslatability, the borrowings, and wondered what was lost or gained in the exchange. I feel another such word is condition.

Condition. At first, it is a seemingly sanitised, harmless word. There is the condition of a room, the condition of the light, the condition of the weather as you cross from the car park into the cool. There is a sense of openness, a shifting in the air. And true enough, this is the invitation of the show, to see the works shifting, aging, still in motion. The cement keeps cracking. Water keeps dripping. Paint on the canvas dries and cracks whether or not you are there to watch it. Condition, in this sense, is what a thing is in. It is the medium it moves through.

But press on the word and it turns.

There is the condition you sign. Terms and conditions, the box you tick without reading, agreeing to what you hurriedly scrolled past in the promise of better things. There is the condition the doctor names, looking up from the scan and saying, carefully, you have a condition, which is a sentence that is, for some, a life-or-death sentence. There is the condition of the job, of the body, of the lungs after years of work. In all these the word stops being the neutral atmosphere you

pass through and becomes the terms a body is governed by. It is no longer the room you are in but the contract you are held to.

And then there is the air conditioner. Is it not interesting that we stand inside the breath of a machine whose whole purpose is to hold a condition steady? The air conditioner exists to refuse the unfolding, to keep one corner of a tropical city at a fixed and comfortable degree while everything outside it bakes and rots and grows. In 1999, Lee Kuan Yew called it one of the most important inventions of all time, for it was the thing that had "changed the lives of people in tropical regions" by letting them work through the heat. To air condition is the technology of not-unfolding, the promise that a body can be made productive in the tropics by defying its natural conditions. Singapore built a state on that refusal. Kuala Lumpur runs on the same compressors.

In Malay there is no single word that holds this "condition". There is *keadaan*, the state of things, how matters stand right now. There is *hal*, the matter itself, the affair, the business at hand, as in *apa hal*, what is the matter with you. There is *nasib*, which is fate, fortune, the portion allotted to you, the thing you were dealt and must now live inside. Each catches a facet of what the English "condition" holds, and none catches the whole, and so when we need the whole we do what we always do. We borrow. We say *kondisi*, knowing it is not quite the word.

To make art in our part of the world is rarely a career, and that, too, is a condition in every sense at once.

The 2025 Gig Workers Bill named the e-hailing rider and the freelancer and even the "creative worker". But the law ultimately aims to protect a service provider: someone who has done something for a contracting entity. But the painter who pours acrylic with no buyer yet, the sculptor who carves chairs nobody ordered, performs a service for no one. They make the thing first and carry the risk. Theirs is only counted on the day they sign a

commission or sell a work, uncounted through the months of making. The word that describes this condition is a local one. Rezeki: sustenance, the portion you go out to look for each morning with no promise it will be there, settled by a hand well above your own. It is far closer to nasib than to any contract with its surety.

Such are the conditions for making art. There is no pension fund for the imagination, no injury claim when the lungs give out from too much paint. You teach. You freelance. You drive between studio days for an app that pays by the trip. You take the show that pays in exposure and the commission that settles in six months, hopefully. Someone asks what you do for a living and the explanation becomes long, because what earns a living and the work you pour yourself into are two different worlds most of the time. These are the conditions you signed without reading. Nobody read them to you. You agreed by carrying on making.

And yet the makers stay in it. Their work does not resolve the condition. To the contrary, the work itself is the condition, made visible, held still just long enough to be looked at before it goes on unfolding.

Eight of them are in the gallery.

Look at the cement Asyraf Hidayat pours. Outside, this is the medium of permanence, the stuff of LRT viaducts and gentrifying condominiums. Here, recorded up close is the scratch, the uneven tone, the blemish where the trowel slipped. It is a record where it has already begun to fail. One can always reach for wabi-sabi, the grace of the imperfect, of embracing the weathering of time, but in truth this surface did not age into beauty over a hundred quiet years. It cracked the way a slab cracks when someone mixes the batch in a hurry, paid by the bag, working in the sun so that someone else can stand on it later in the cool. The condition of the material is the condition of the labour that made it.

Saharudin Ali holds a longer view. He builds with meranti, chengal, and merbau, reclaimed from older structures, and reassembles them after the architectural language of the traditional Malay house. The wood arrives already conditioned: weathered, cracked, marked by the joinery of its previous life. He keeps the marks. The Malay house was itself a kind of conditioning, a spatial intelligence built up over generations from a close reading of climate, soil, water, the behaviour of timber in heat. To inherit that knowledge today is to inherit it as fragments, which is what he gives you. If Asyraf shows a material conditioned by hurried labour now, Saharudin shows a material conditioned by a knowledge system that the present has mostly built over. *Keadaan*, here, is also historical. The state of things has a long memory.

Fazreen Sukri approaches this same rigid infrastructure from the other side, turning the building block of the city into something vulnerable. He trained as a quantity surveyor before he trained as an artist, so he knows precisely what a brick is “meant to do”. He casts his in plaster, soft where a brick is hard, and scribbles across the industrial grid in a hand no site supervisor would sign off. The scribble is Kelantanese, the dialect going quiet on his generation's tongue. He calls the piece *BATU BATA*. Here is *hal* and *keadaan* both, a happening and condition: the slow decline of Kelantanese.

Hazim Jaffry carves heads from whole logs and lets the logs keep showing. Each face is pulled out of a trunk with the adze marks left where they fell, the crown scorched dark, and one head sits in a ring of its own shavings, the waste of its making left around its feet. The faces are tired. Eyes lowered or shut, the mouth set, the look of a long shift already worked. Hazim cites David Fincher's *Seven* as a reference, drawn to the film's portrait of lives trapped in systems that decide their hours, their roles, their direction. *Jika dunia ini aku punya*, he calls his own work. If this world were mine.

It is a conditional sentence. *Jika, if*. That is nasib, the condition you are handed and must live inside. Work wears a person down to the grain.

Alia Ismail gives the holding-up its domestic form. She sews. The apron is her ground, the most domestic surface there is, stitched into a record of mothering, the tenderness and the exhaustion drawn through the same patient seam. Then her son Alfie scribbles across it, and the surface is made and unmade in the same hour. Someone else is always in the condition with you, undoing your seam, needing your hands.

Afiq Romi draws cactuses in graphite, rendering every spine and bead of water with painstaking precision. The figure in his drawing is being watered, but the source is left uncertain. Beneath the drawing, a small garden of living cactuses grows in real soil. A cactus survives drought, not drowning. Too little water and it shrivels, too much and it rots. He calls the work *Within of Above*. The question of where growth actually comes from, from inside oneself or from somewhere above, stays open on the wall. The garden answers it slowly, plant by plant, over the course of the show.

Tofu Szeyu goes furthest inward, to the condition of the mind. In *Undercurrent*, the mind is manifested as a recurring, amorphous protagonist. The work is a dispersal of irregularly shaped, amoeba-like fragments floating across the wall. Across these drifting pieces, the condition takes on a body painted in pale washes like a slow-moving cloud. Its only anchors are translucent spheres resting along its shifting borders. The mind, too, is a condition, the least fixed of them all.

So back to Salleh ben Joned. The man, love him or hate him, was always writing about condition. The condition of speech, the condition of religion, the condition of race, the condition of cari makan. He wrote a poem, *Aku*, that captures all of it at once. The

poem, of course, is a direct reply to Chairil Anwar's *Aku*. Chairil, the Indonesian poet who died at twenty-six in 1949, gave the Malay-speaking world its sharpest image of youth refusing to be tamed: *Aku ini binatang jalang, dari kumpulannya terbuang*. I am a wild beast cast out from its herd. *Aku mau hidup seribu tahun lagi*. I want to live a thousand more years. It is the quintessential, deified poem of what it means to be young, defiant, alive, to throw off the reins and defy the conditions of one's time.

Salleh, as always, is a trickster. You can imagine him grinning again. The poem has suffered the fate of many a good parody, which is to be taken out of context and read straight, Salleh was being completely earnest. He is not. The cadence is Chairil's, the phrases are Chairil's, the bite is Salleh's own:

*Kebebasan kepadaku
hanya satu beban;
apa pemimpin kata
aku ikut saja;
akal yang diberi Tuhan tak payah digunakan
kecuali untuk cari makan.
Keraguan dan
kerinduan jiwa;
kubawa berlari,
berlari
dari rumah ke pejabat
ke rumah
sehingga hilang sangsi
dari bunyi lantang
peti tv
tiap-tiap malam hari
sambil ternganga tengok tv
aku menjilat jari*

*tiap-tiap malam hari
sambil ternganga tengok tv
aku menjilat jari
begitu sedapnya ayam kentucky.
Dan aku akan
lebih tidak peduli.
Aku mahu hidup begini
Seribu tahun lagi.*

The last line is the same as Chairil Anwar's word for word, but now in the mouth of a man licking his fingers listlessly in front of the TV, blindly following the leader, never troubling his *akal* except to make a living. *Aku mahu hidup begini seribu tahun lagi.* I want to live like this for a thousand more years. The condition of life that goes on and on. Where Chairil burned to live forever, this one only wants more time on the armchair.

A condition is not an event. It has no clean beginning and no full stop. It is the tense a life is conducted in, the ongoing, the unresolved, the thing that was true before you walked in and will be true after the show is struck, the cement wrapped, the chairs back in their boxes, the makers back at the class they teach. Their fingers drip with paint, not KFC grease.

The show ends on a Saturday. They will switch off the air conditioner and the room will go back to the temperature of the city it sits in. You will step out of the cool into the heat you came from, and somewhere across the city, in a studio nobody is paying to keep comfortable, the cement will go on cracking in the dark.



Afiq Romi

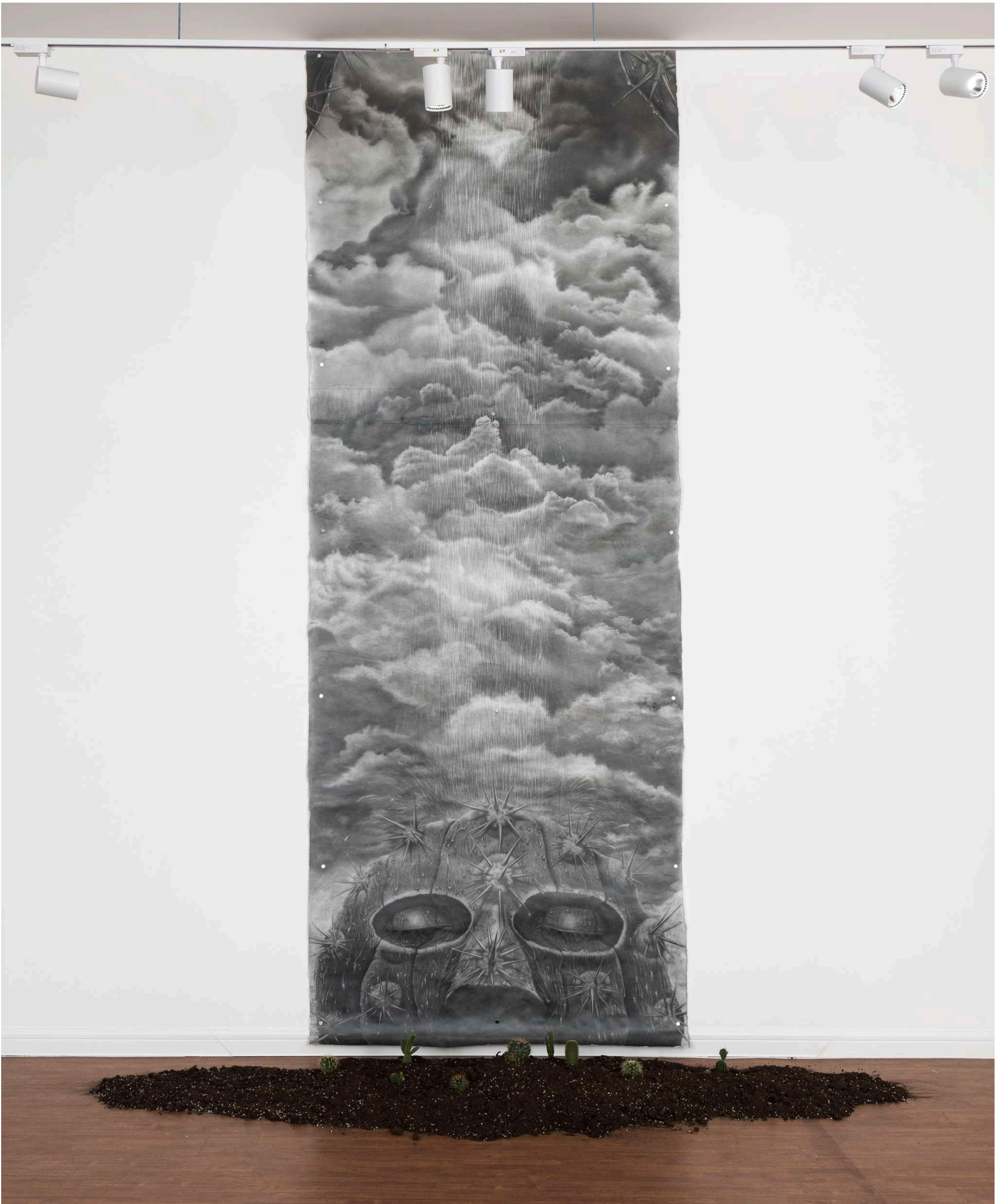
Within or Above

Graphite on paper, cactus plants, soil

Wall element: 304.8 x 142 cm

Floor element: 101 x 539 cm

2026





Within or Above is in two parts. On the wall, Afiq has drawn a cactus in graphite, every spine and every bead of water rendered in painstaking detail. In the drawing, the cactus is being watered, but the source of the water is left unclear. On the floor beneath the drawing, a small garden of real, living cactuses grows in soil. A cactus survives drought but not drowning. Too little water and it shrivels, too much and it rots. The title asks where growth actually comes from: from within oneself, or from above, in the conditions and care that surround us. The drawing keeps the question open. The garden answers it slowly, in real time. The work belongs to Afiq's ongoing *I Am Thorn* series, in which the cactus stands as a personal symbol of the artist himself.



Alia Ismail

Carrying Home

Threads, polyester fiber,, felt fabric, aprons
and beads

Dimensions variable

2026





Alia works with aprons. The aprons are stitched, embroidered, layered with patchwork built up over time, each one functioning as a kind of textile diary of motherhood, dense with the small repeated gestures of care. Onto and around the aprons, her young son Alfie has drawn freely, his scribbles spontaneous and immediate against the slow, deliberate work of her sewing. The two registers, the patient stitch and the quick mark, share the same surface without resolving into one image. Alia does not edit the scribbles out. She lets both hands stay visible. The work makes visible the ordinarily invisible labour of mothering, the seam constantly being made and unmade, the household always being held together by someone whose work is rarely seen as work at all. The apron, usually the costume of unnoticed labour, becomes the canvas where that labour is finally legible.



Asyraf Hidayat

I Build to Remember, and I Break to Continue Remembering

Linoprint and stencil with cement, fine sand, PVA, fiber and wire mesh

Wall element: 109 x 72 cm

Floor element: 96 x 214 cm

2026







Asyraf works almost entirely in cement. He casts thin panels and then treats them less as objects than as surfaces to be read, keeping the scratches, the trowel marks, the patches where the mix discoloured or the surface pitted as it set. From a distance the panels can look almost like monochrome paintings, quiet fields of grey and off-white. Stand closer and they declare themselves as cement. The material is everywhere in our cities, from pavement slabs to flyovers to apartment blocks, and Asyraf takes interest in what it usually hides: the haste in which it was poured, the small failures of the surface, the marks left by whoever finished it before moving on to the next job. He treats cement as a record of the labour that made it, rather than as the smooth background of modern life.



Farhan Rizuwan

Chairacters

Meranti wood, oil based paint and 2K
clear coat

Wall element: 263 x 495 cm

Floor element: 60 x 477 cm

2026







Farhan carves chairs from wood, but his chairs do not stand on the floor. They are mounted on the wall, climbing it in clusters, leaning on one another, hauling each other up. The carving emphasises the chairs' "muscles", long curving energy lines that read as limbs and tendons, so that the arrangement looks less like furniture than like bodies in a slow act of mutual rescue. A chair is built for rest, but these never rest. They stay suspended only because each one is held by the next, in a configuration that is precarious by design and stable only through collaboration. Take one chair out and the rest come down. Farhan uses the most ordinary object in a household to make a sculptural argument about community: that staying upright, here, has rarely been a matter of standing alone.

Fazreen Sukri

***BATU BATA: What fades, never
disappear***

Acrylic on plaster of Paris

305 x 60 cm

2026





Fazreen trained as a quantity surveyor before he became an artist, and the work in this show, *BATU BATA*, draws on both. He makes bricks from plaster of Paris, identical in shape to the industrial brick but soft instead of hard, and then he paints and scribbles across their surfaces with acrylic. The scribbles are quick, gestural, almost calligraphic, and they read at first as abstract mark-making. They are also Kelantanese, the dialect Fazreen grew up speaking, set down in a form that hovers between writing and abstraction. A real brick is a unit of construction. Fazreen's plaster brick is something else: a familiar object hollowed of its function, used instead to hold a language that is itself thinning out of daily use. The work places the rigidity of the building site next to the fragility of an inherited tongue.



Hazim Jaffry

Jika dunia ini aku punya

Acasia, meranti and clove wood, acrylic
paint and petrol oil

187 x 167 x 50 cm

2026







Hazim carves heads from whole logs of wood, leaving much of the log visible around the face. Each head is pulled out of the trunk with the adze marks left where they fell, the crown of the head scorched dark, the lower portion of the log often kept rough so that the figure seems to emerge from the wood rather than be separated from it. One head sits in a ring of its own wood shavings, the waste of its making deliberately left around its feet. The faces are tired. Eyes lowered or closed, mouths set, the carved expression of someone after a long day. Hazim cites David Fincher's *Seven* as a reference, drawn to the film's portrait of lives trapped in systems that decide their hours, their roles, their direction. *Jika dunia ini aku punya*, the title says. If this world were mine. The work asks how much of any of it ever is.

Saharudin Ali

Ambang

Wood assemblage (Meranti, chengal and merbau) and sand

Wall element: 299 x 585 cm

Floor element: 101 x 539 cm

2026







Saharudin builds sculptural assemblages from reclaimed wood, drawing on the architectural language of the traditional Malay house. His materials, meranti, chengal, and merbau, are hardwoods salvaged from older structures, and they arrive in his studio already weathered, cracked, and marked by the joinery of previous lives. He keeps these traces visible. Rather than reconstructing a house, he reassembles its grammar: beams, frames, thresholds, the corners where a structure turns. The result is closer to memory than to architecture, a set of fragments held in conversation with one another. The work asks what knowledge is carried in old wood, in the way a beam was cut to fit a particular climate, in the joint chosen for the weight it had to bear. Saharudin treats these fragments as carriers of a building intelligence that the contemporary city has mostly forgotten how to read.

Tofu Szeyu

Undercurrent

Oil and acrylic on canvas

Wall element: 163 x 206 cm

Floor element: 35 x 329 cm

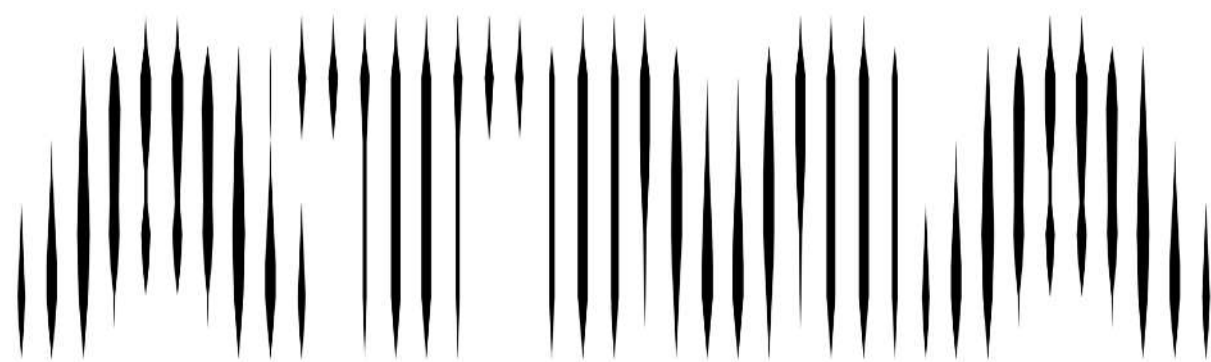
2026







Tofu's *Undercurrent* is a wall-based painting installation. Instead of a single rectangular canvas, the work is broken across multiple irregularly shaped panels, soft amoeba-like forms mounted across the wall with space between them. Across these drifting pieces, an amorphous figure takes shape in pale washes of paint, like a slow-moving cloud passing through, anchored here and there by small translucent spheres resting along its edges. The figure has no clear outline; you read it by piecing it together as your eye moves from one fragment to the next. Tofu uses the broken-up surface to ask how a mind actually feels from the inside: not as a single, stable interior but as something dispersed, drifting, occasionally cohering, never wholly graspable. The work treats thought and emotion as weather rather than architecture, atmospheric, in motion, never quite settling into a final shape.



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