

ANTARA

SABRI IDRUS 2012

9TH SOLO SHOW, TAKSU SINGAPORE

Despite its title Antara – a Malay word for being caught ‘in-between’ – this exhibition has little feeling of uncertainty or stasis. Rather, these paintings embrace a dynamism and surety in their making. They address a singular proposition and their execution is evidence of the artist’s intent and maturity. The ‘in-between’, then, is merely a tag used as a stop-gap when our 21st century compulsion to categorize and assign ‘meaning’ falters. Simply, it’s antara.

ALTERED PERSPECTIVE

by GINA FAIRLEY, Freelance Writer & Curator

In recent years this term has taken on an inflection in global art circles to describe the peripatetic artist – born here, lives there, works here and there – a translocality that is celebrated as the very nature of ‘contemporary art’. It is a new breed of place-politics and it hangs its hat on the neutrality of its fissures. As a Malay artist born in Kedah presenting this exhibition in Singapore, following an inspiring residency in Bandung Indonesia, Sabri Idrus could indeed be said to occupy antara.

But what about these paintings, how do they ‘visually’ occupy this layered semiotic zone of the in-between? Sabri plays out a curious proposition across this suite of works using ‘sameness’ as the moderator for observation. Working from the simple proposition to present thirteen/fifteen canvases of identical size and orientation, the premise was an even playing field so that our engagement was reduced to a purely formal dialogue: line, surface, form. In conversation Sabri explained, “I wanted to remove all narrative elements so that these works rest entirely in their material being. I wanted to look at painting as object, not as the object of making.”

Scanning across this group of paintings there is no disjuncture, no gaps or furrows. The spatial conversation flows from one painting to the next; it finds its nexus in the passage of Sabri’s career and yet pushes forward with clear understanding of a direct proposition and material exploration. The in-between has become the point of definition, not non-definition.

Perspective is an interesting element to this discussion. Perspective is conventionally defined as ‘the way in which objects appear to the eye based on their spatial attributes’. How variant is it dependent on our position? Does it account for the in-between? For Sabri “the abstract is non-perspective.” He continued, “I want to readdress perspective as a drawing mode. I want to invest in material as content.” While as viewers we may struggle to disconnect from

conventional perspective looking at the painting New York, for example, hard-wired to read its title against its driving angles that firmly locate us in relation to the object, Sabri offers an alternate answer with the painting History. Its spiraling dramatic red lines on a black ground, while seemingly leading us back to a vanishing point, flatten perspective to drawing - a linear abstraction in 2-dimensional space.

To further dissect this proposition one might consider Sabri’s idea of articulating perspective through ‘material content’. What does this mean? The painting Stead (2012) offers a good example. Sabri constructed a 12ft dome in his studio to test and observe how the movement of paint would react on the surface of the dome, responding to form, gravity, and time. He approached the painting as an ‘object engagement’ foremost. What we are witness to is a facsimile of that experiment, a kind of report of its outcome flattened again into a 2-dimensional plane. We are not looking at a dome; we are looking at the material reaction to an object.

The lessons learnt in Sabri’s earlier series inform these new paintings. As he explains, “The drips

“These points are not to polarize the intended occurrences – the natural and the self-imposed – but to acknowledge the reciprocities between the created work and the creation of work. The textures are manifestation of moments that concede space as finite while time is not, and that time encompasses space.”

I have drawn from my Masa series (2010); and their internal light from Keroncong series (2006).” It is an accumulative vocabulary and it is spoken through Sabri’s choice of materials and the physicality of the built form. Process has long been the silent subject of Sabri’s works. He is an architect of ideas.

As viewers we can see the connection between architecture and materials across this exhibition, most obvious in the paintings California and New York, or even Cage, Kosong and Cave where an abstract composition of lines allude to a built structure and its materials, such as concrete, glass, or steel, that are quite literally adopted by Sabri in the work’s making. In Cave, for example, he used plaster to build surface texture, ridges, and polish, a calibration of the craftsman and the build form. The material object overrides the narrative.

Cave is a fabulously optical painting. Looking into it one feels that are within a skate park or swimming pool, our eye carried on a journey through the painting’s belly. It is merely a channel through which we visually pass, engaged by its intrigue. But as Sabri states of these paintings, “I wanted there to be no entry point.” It is not weighted by narrative or meaning. We are permitted to enjoy it for its sheer physicality. It offers an interesting comparison to California, for example, both spatial propositions. While California takes its cue from the photograph, Cave makes reference to computer-aided architecture design programs (or CAD) and the use of vectors. It is further reduced in Kosong, Cage, and History, where the computer acts as a neutralizer reducing narrative to a graphic consideration spatially engaged.

It again returns us to that word ‘perspective’. We have all used the adage ‘to step back and get perspective’. It is about taking grasp of the situation. Sabri has taken this to the most extreme, examining a landscape from an airplane, its form and line abstracting before our very eyes.

The painting Pond is the areal observation of a water reservoir snapped 1,400ft above Indonesia. Aviation is a bird’s eye view of Kuala Lumpur. The photograph captures the integrated elements - light, movement, form, pattern – which are then abstracted on their own terms. Content is obscured.

Comparing Aviation to California this reduction process becomes clearly illustrated. Verdict takes that step further. A staircase, which is the foundation of this painting, has been reduced to the point where the image is removed. It is treated entirely as a surface built up with over 40-layers of lacquer, sanded and polished. We are left with antara.

This is an intelligent exhibition. It starts with a proposition – an idea – and then proceeds to strip from it all imposing thought so that what hangs on these walls are an observation of technique and material. It is as though the object of the painting is cracked open, and it is their in-between that remains as their substance.



Cage, 2012. Mixed media on canvas. 70" x 90" (178cm x 229 cm)



Aviation, 2012. Mixed media on canvas. 70" x 90" (178cm x 229 cm)



California, 2012. Mixed media on canvas. 70" x 90" (178cm x 229 cm)



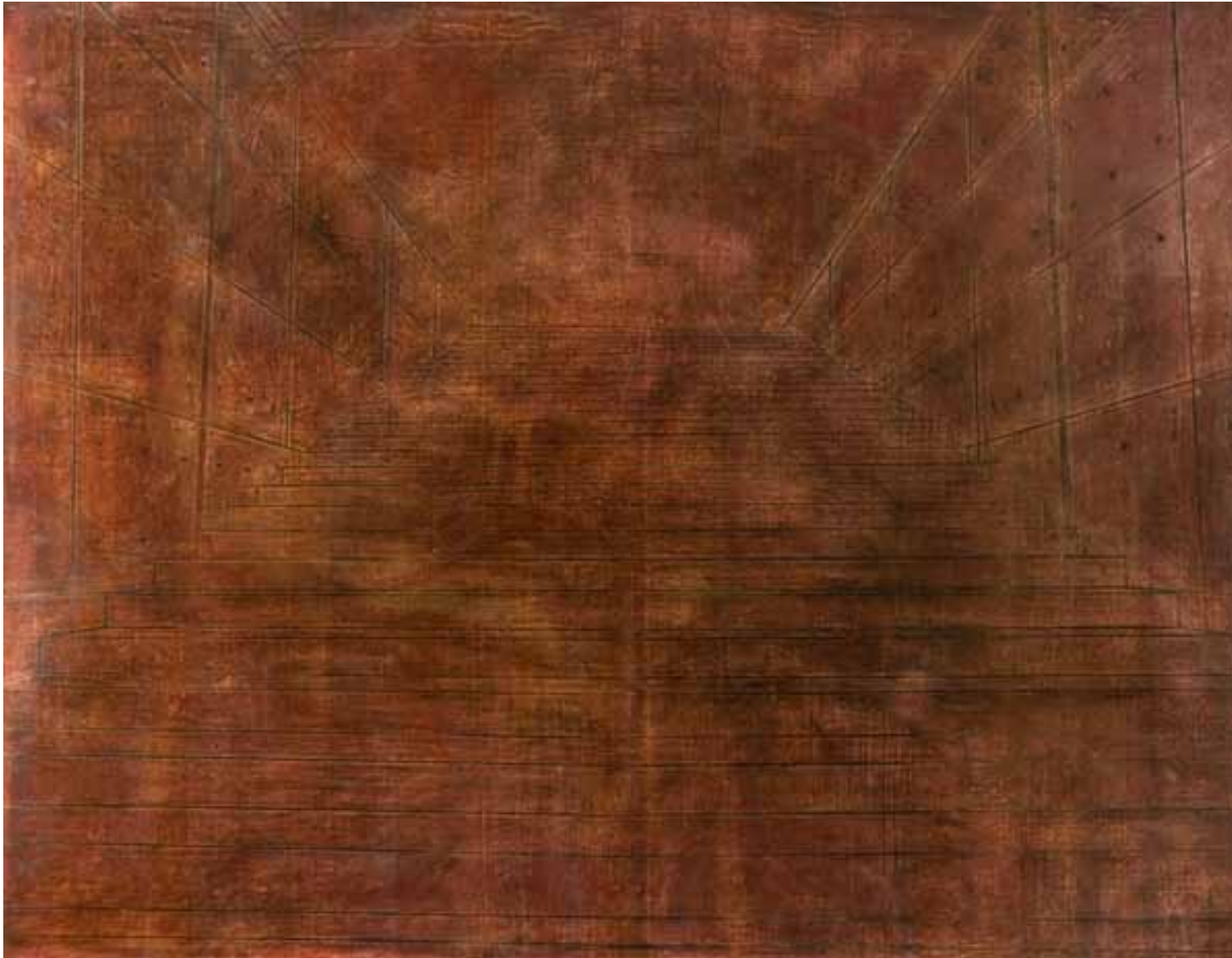
Cave, 2012. Mixed media on canvas. 70" x 90" (178cm x 229 cm)



Ranch, 2012. Mixed media on canvas. 70" x 90" (178cm x 229 cm)



3 point, 2012. Mixed media on canvas. 70" x 90" (178cm x 229 cm)



Verdict, 2012. Mixed media on canvas. 70" x 90" (178cm x 229 cm)



History, 2012. Mixed media on canvas. 70" x 90" (178cm x 229 cm)



Pond, 2012. Mixed media on canvas. 70" x 90" (178cm x 229 cm)



Stead, 2012. Mixed media on canvas. 70" x 90" (178cm x 229 cm)



Kosong, 2012. Mixed media on canvas. 60" x 90" (152cm x 229 cm)