

The background is a complex, abstract artwork. It features a repeating geometric pattern of interlocking shapes, possibly diamonds or triangles, in a vibrant red color. The red is layered over a darker, textured background that appears to be a mix of dark blue and black, with some greenish-yellow highlights. The overall effect is one of depth and texture, suggesting a process of reduction or layering of colors and forms.

masa series: A REDUCTION PROCESS  
**SABRI IDRUS**





**JUGGLER. 2009.** 175 cm diameter. metal, slate, fiberglass & bearing

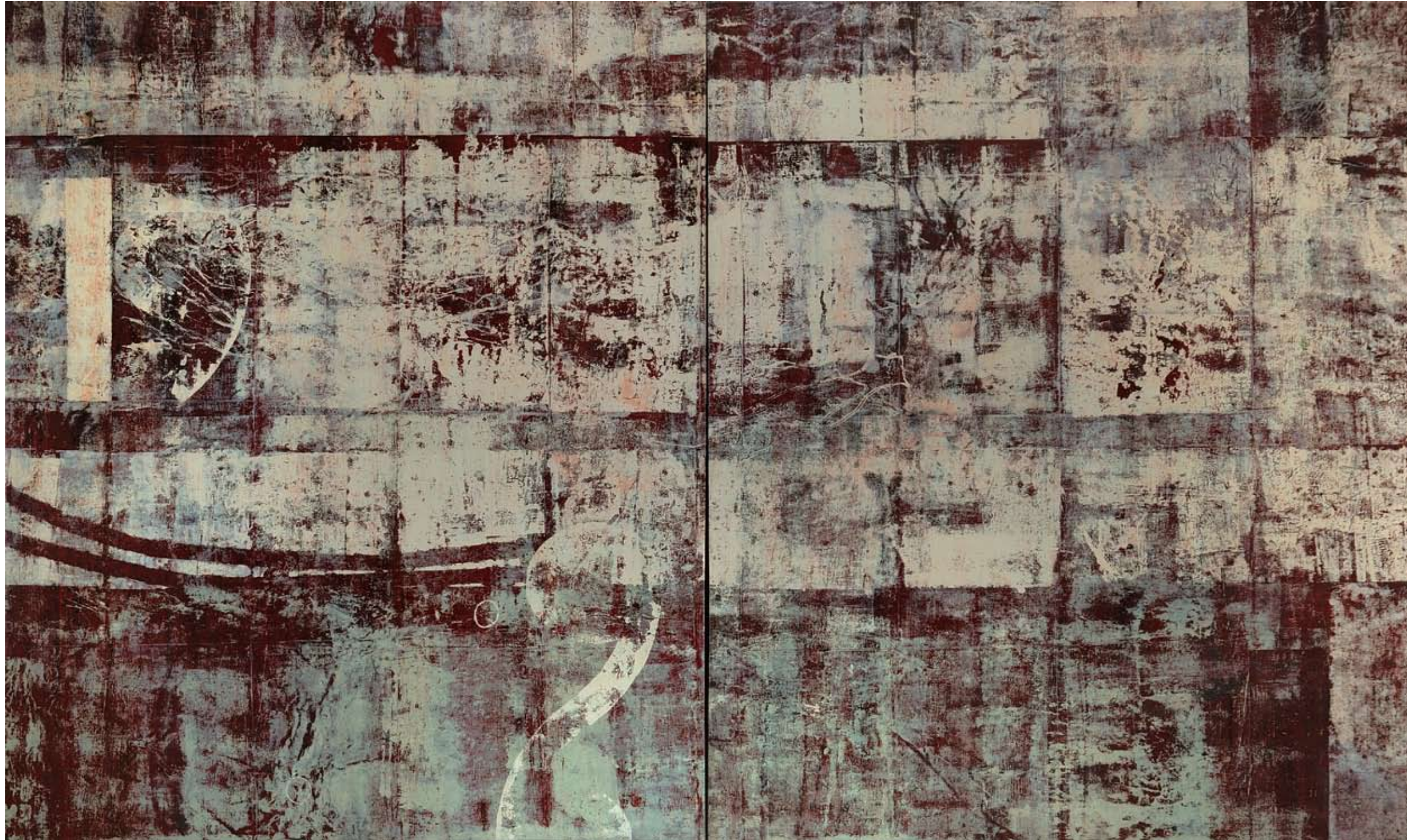
masa series: A REDUCTION PROCESS  
**SABRI IDRUS**

22.07.10 — 21.08.10

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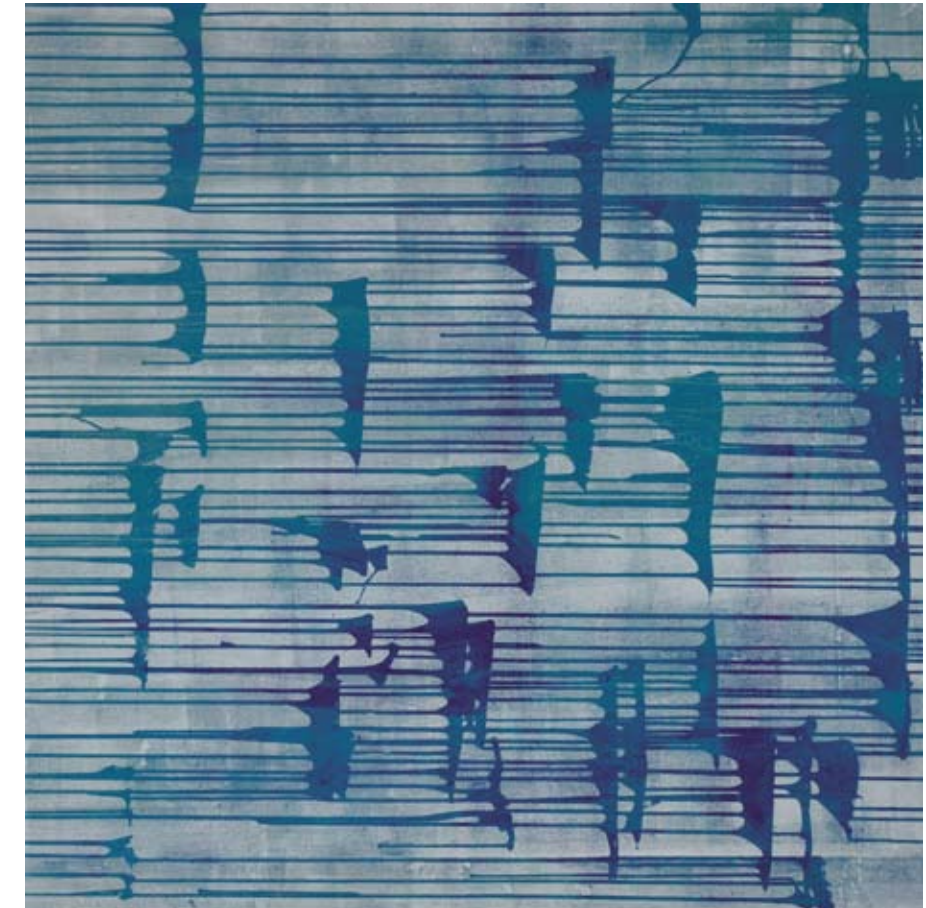
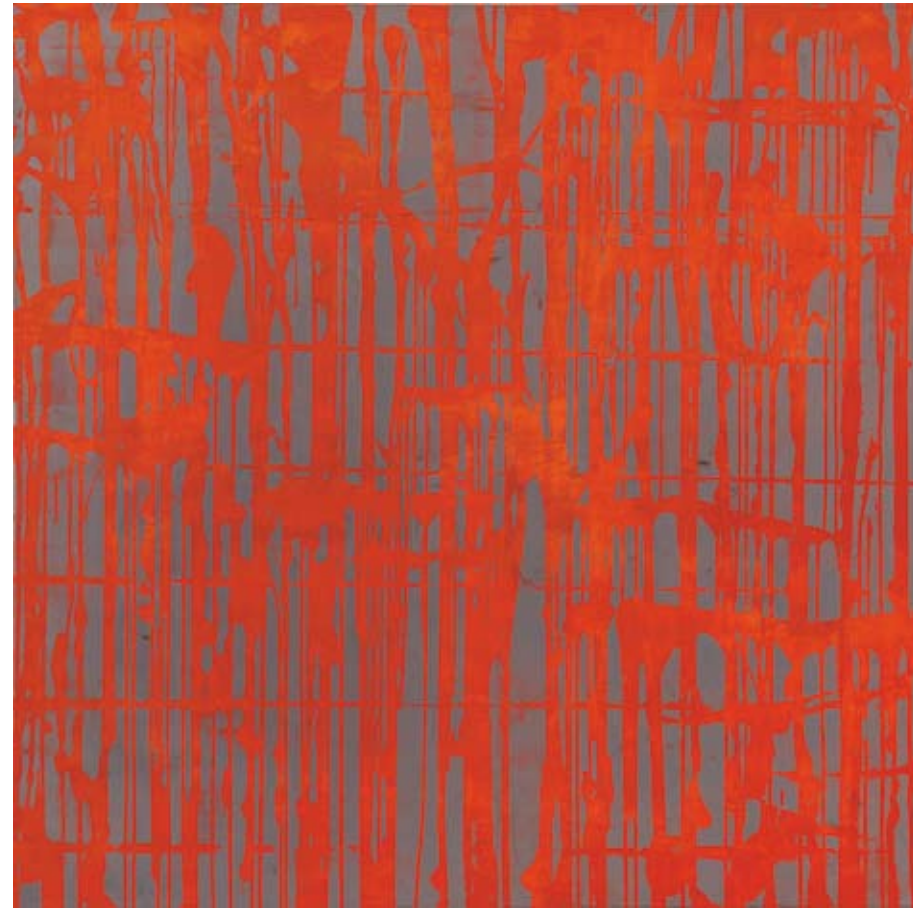




## (IT'S) ABOUT TIME

The decision to venture into the subject of 'time' (*masa* in Malay) has long been the concept of conflicting interests for Sabri, since time itself is something that could never be more clearly defined. But his interest in creating *Masa* series is not to further discuss or define the concept of time, but is more of a reflection of his own struggle with time.





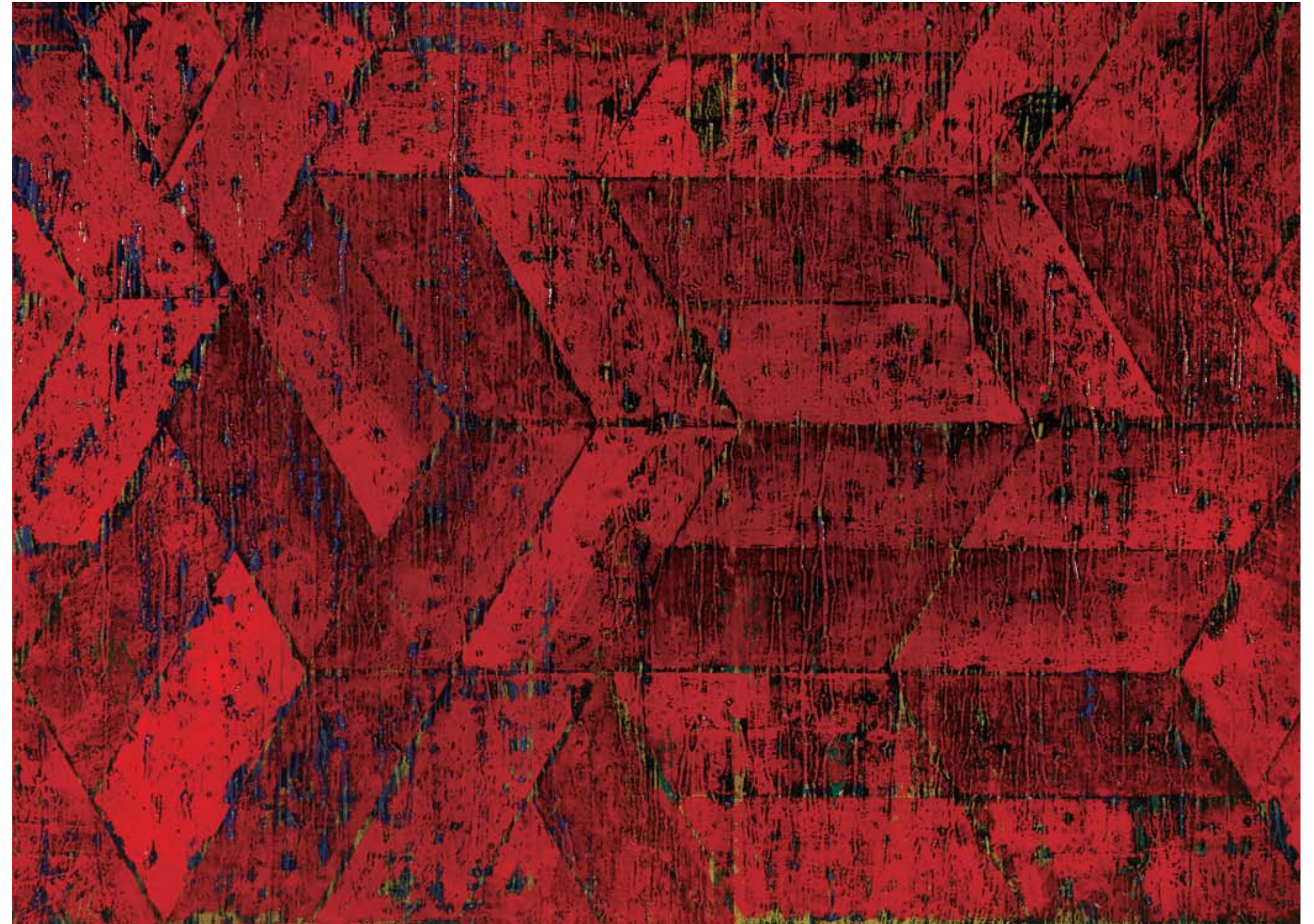
left: **SHOAL. 2010** 120 x120 cm. acrylic & oil medium on canvas  
right: **PRESENT. 2010** 120 x120 cm. acrylic & oil medium on canvas

left: **ECLIPSE. 2010** 120 x 120 cm. acrylic & oil medium on canvas  
right: **SPEED. 2010** 120 x1 20 cm. acrylic & oil medium on canvas

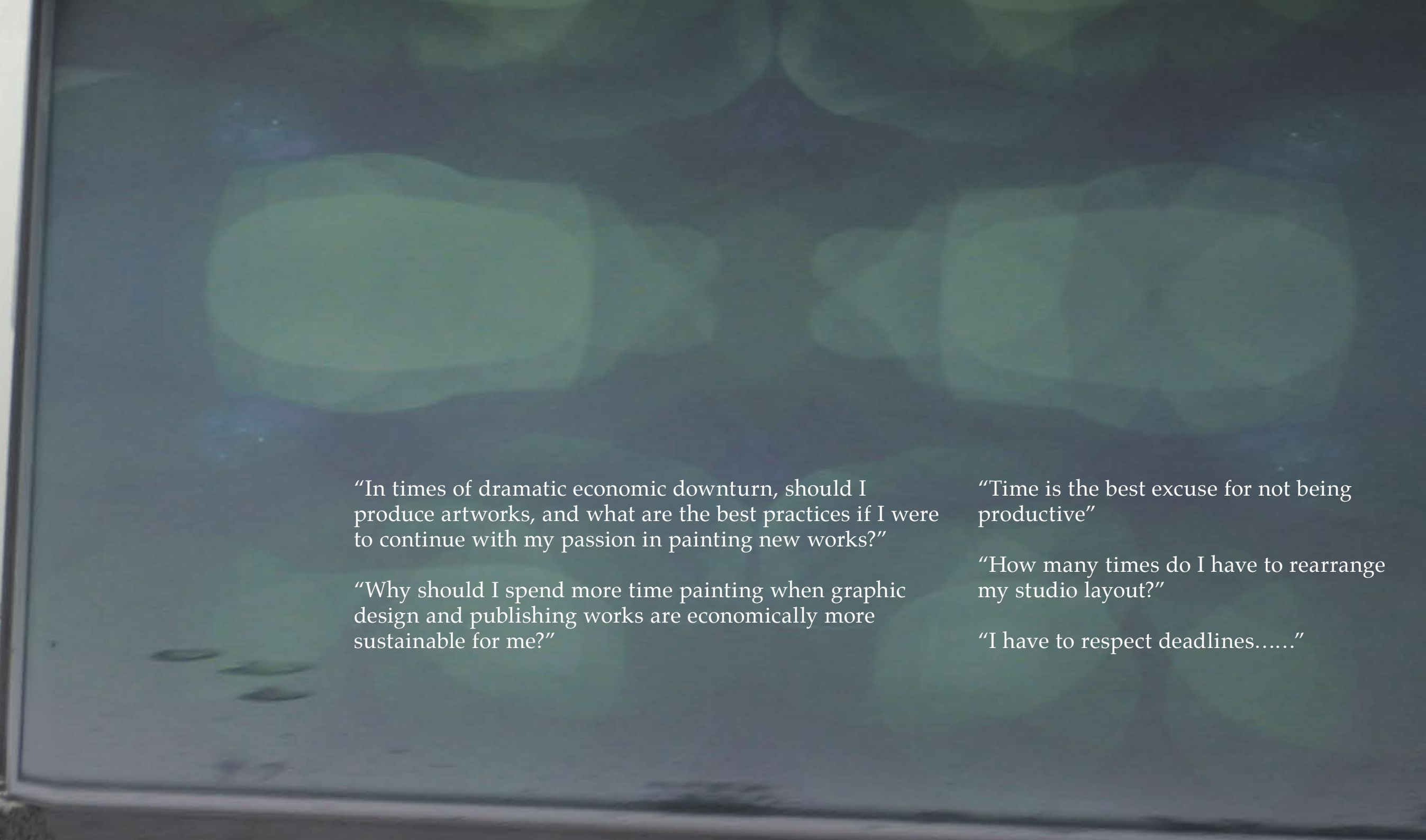




**OXIDISED. 2010** each (diptych) 56 x 178 cm. acrylic & oil medium on canvas  
right: **PANDORA. 2010** 127 x 178 cm. acrylic & oil medium on canvas







“In times of dramatic economic downturn, should I produce artworks, and what are the best practices if I were to continue with my passion in painting new works?”

“Why should I spend more time painting when graphic design and publishing works are economically more sustainable for me?”

“Time is the best excuse for not being productive”

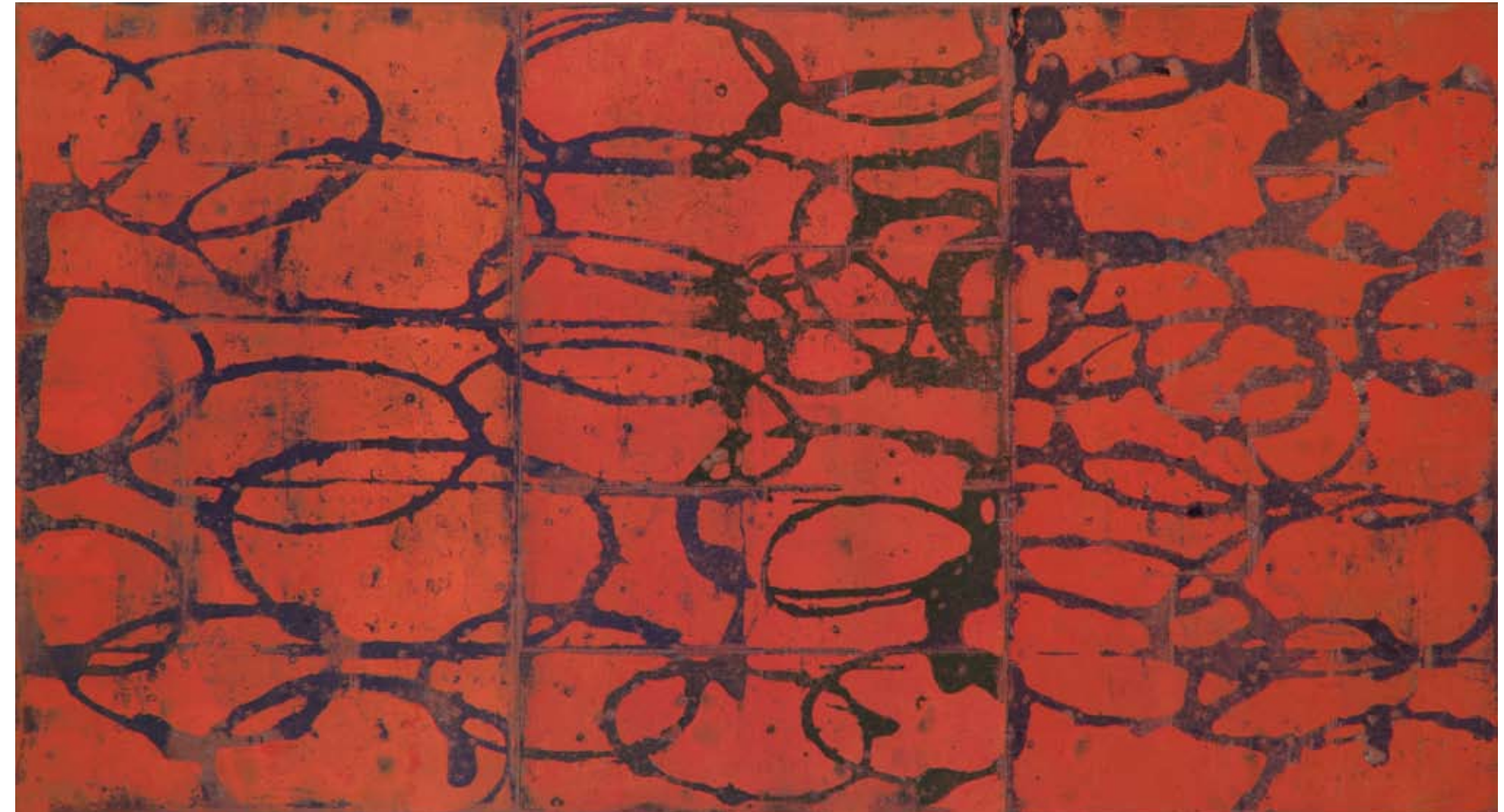
“How many times do I have to rearrange my studio layout?”

“I have to respect deadlines.....”





**MEMORY. 2010** 111.5 x 183 cm. acrylic & oil medium on canvas



**RIPPLE. 2009** 111.5 x 183 cm. acrylic & oil medium on canvas



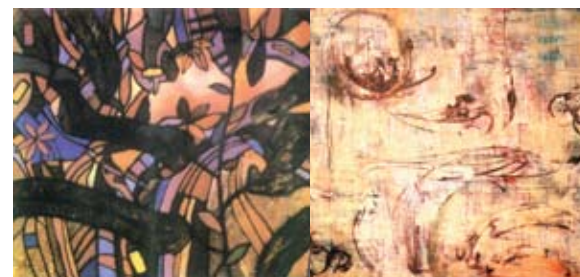
solo exhibitions

CAREER PHASE

Selected Collections 1990 — 2010

SEARCH OF THE UNCERTAINTISE  
THE PAINTING HALL

1999



**SUSUR GALUR. 1990.**  
122 x 183 cm  
Mixed media  
Bank Negara Malaysia

**PELICAN. 1997.**  
122 x 183 cm  
Mixed media  
Pelikan Malaysia

**FADED. 1999.**  
153 x 167 cm  
Mixed media on metal  
Private Collection

**AFTER DAWN. 2001.**  
163 x 176 cm  
Mixed media on metal  
Private Collection

**KARAT SERIES #2. 2003.**  
92 x 183 cm  
Mixed media on aluminum  
Private Collection

**LOREK-LOREK SERIES #15. 2004.**  
58 x 152 cm  
Mixed media  
Private Collection

**BANGAU OH BANGAU SERIES. 2004.**  
Variable sizes  
Oil on wood  
Ministry of Finance, Malaysia

**TIRAI. 2005.**  
Variable sizes  
Mixed media  
Private Collection

**KERONCONG SERIES. 2006.**  
104 x 115 cm  
Epoxy & light installation  
Artist Collection

**TAPIS. 2007.**  
122 x 122cm  
Coffee & resin on fabric  
Private Collection

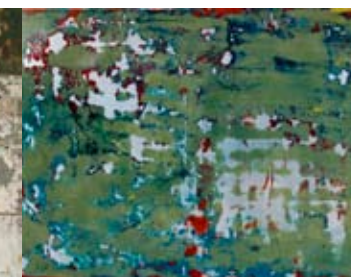
**ARCHITECTURE. 2008.**  
163 x 206 cm  
Mixed media on canvas  
Petronas Collection

**IN TRANSIT. 2009.**  
160 x 200 cm  
Recycled paper  
ASP Poznan, Poland Collection

**REVISITING ARCHITECTURE. 2010**  
100 cm diameter  
Slate, metal & resin on wood block  
Artist Collection

LOREK-LOREK. THE CREATION OF LINES  
TOWNHOUSE GALLERY

2004



BANGAU OH BANGAU  
BALAI BERITA NST

2004



KERONCONG SERIES: A NEW FORM OF PHYSICAL LISTENING  
WEI-LING GALLERY

2006



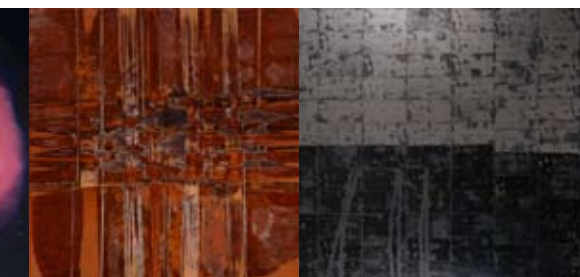
MYDOMAIN  
AHMAD ZAKII ANWAR'S GALLERY AT THE BACK OF THE HOUSE

2008



IN TRANSIT. MALAYSIA-POLAND  
AULA GALLERY, ASP POZNAN, POLAND

2009



MASA SERIES: A REDUCTION PROCESS  
TAKSU GALLERY, KUALA LUMPUR

2010





Sabri Idrus [b. 1971, Kedah] is an artist best defined by his compulsion to experiment with media. Oscillating between a career as an artist and a successful graphic designer, Sabri studied fine arts at Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) from 1995-1998. The following year he mounted his first solo exhibition, *The Search of the Uncertainties*. It would set the foundations for his art-making – a preoccupation with surface, spatial stacking, temporality and organic fluid forms – a kind of signature that is easily traced across Sabri’s career to this most recent suite of paintings, *Masa* series. **A PERSPECTIVE** by Gina Fairley

In those early days, Sabri called on nature as his primary motif – an uncurling fern or tropical plant, for example, rendered in industrial paint on aluminum or zinc sheeting; its luminance offering a shimmer between layers. While the references have become increasingly abstracted with time, we can witness these base elements in Sabri’s canvases today. One just has to turn to the calligraphic ellipses in the painting **RIPPLE (2009)** as a familiar form over a textured grid, or the controlled orange drizzles in **PRESENT (2010)**, which hover over a luminous surface mimicking the earlier aluminum sheeting. Like a traffic barrier its web has an imposing presence and, yet, its gestural expression places it within the lineage of international abstraction.

In the same way we are able to trace the journey from Sabri’s second solo exhibition *lorek-lorek (2004)*, what he translates as ‘the making of marks between the picture plane’, to the *Masa* series. These early paintings loosely referenced the Fibonacci number sequence and its rhythmic structure within music and nature, abstract equations such as the structure of a pinecone, where each number – or line in terms of Sabri artworks – is the sum of the previous two; a methodical accumulation that manifests as a kind of pulse, accent or phrasing.

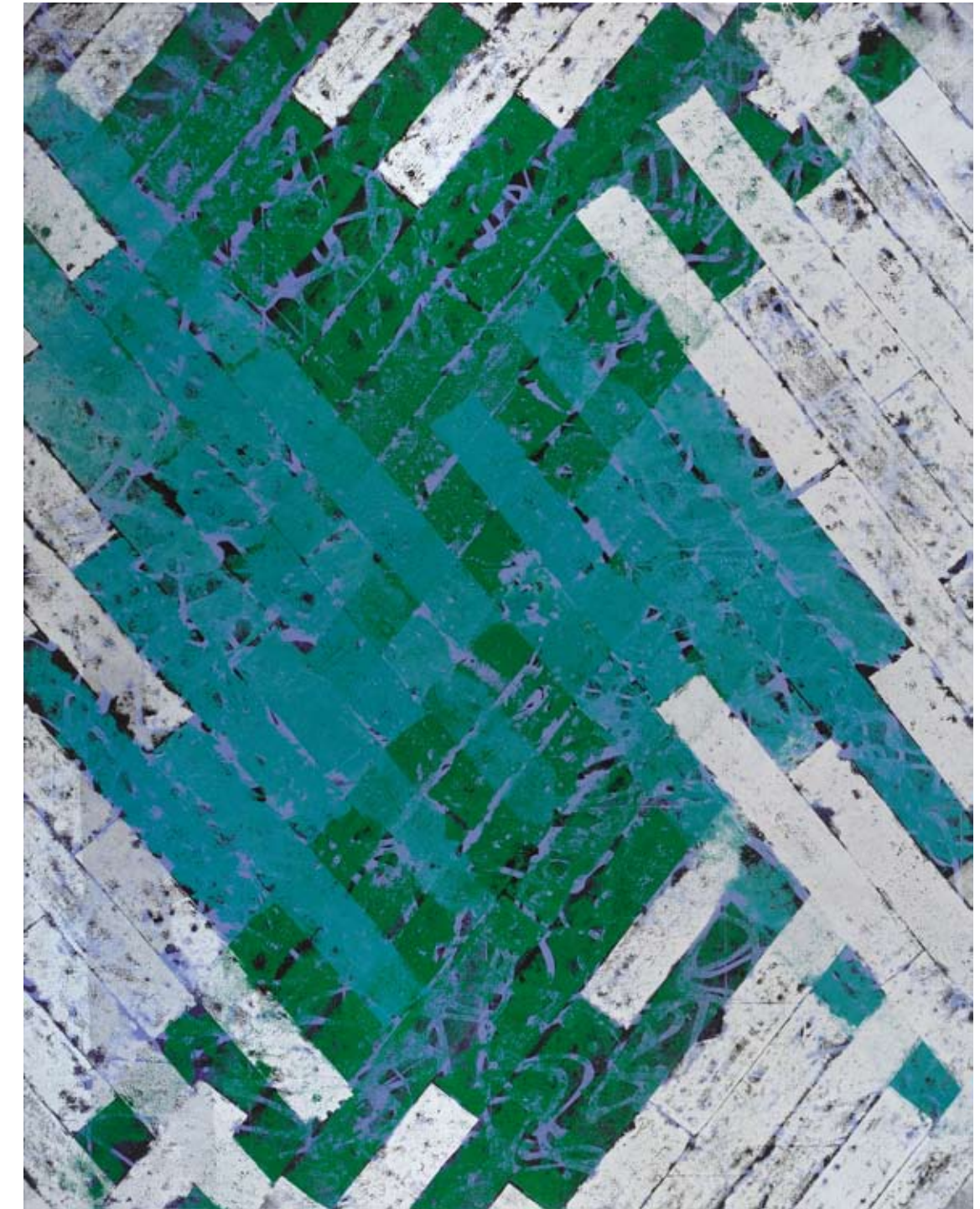
While the numbers fade to the background, it is the phrasing of the lines and spatial energy that has resonated over the years, echoing varying human and cultural conditions. It is an interesting

position to consider that while abstraction is neutral from ‘message’, it has the capacity to convey a ‘rhythmic dialect’ of the times and the kind of reverberation of self-expression within a more universal chant of the everyday. These paintings are both timeless and current.

Reading the titles of the paintings in the *Masa* series – **HOURGLASS, SPEED, ECLIPSE, OXIDISED, PRESENT, MOMENT** – clearly they are directives predicated on time. Sabri’s obsession with time stated with his very first artwork, titled *Susur Galur* [Generation] and exhibited at the National Art Gallery in 1990. It is now held in the Bank Negara Malaysia collection. Two decades later that passion remains.

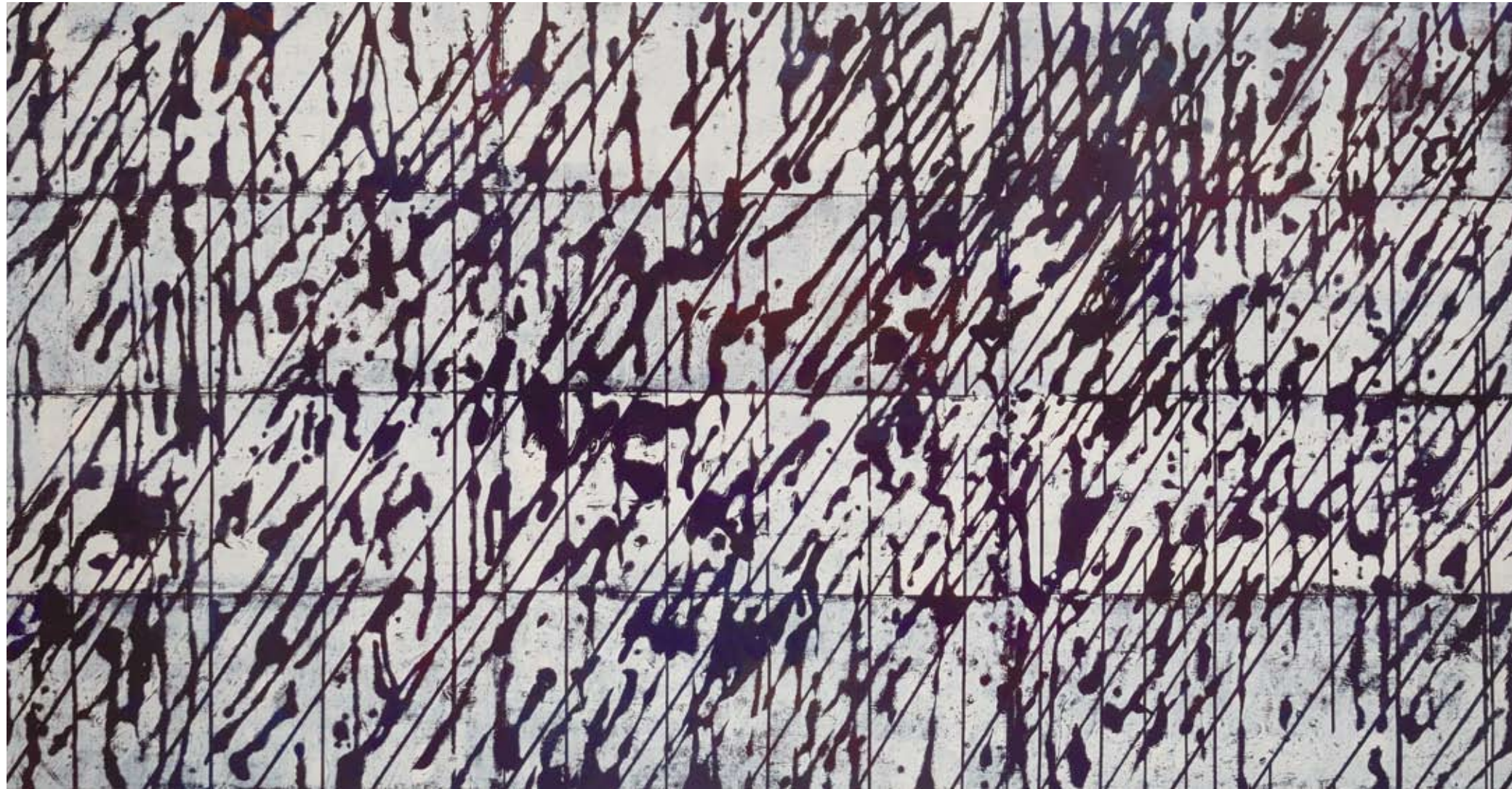
Regardless of what strikes a chord for the individual – albeit colour, texture or graphic choreography – as one stands observing “time” peppered across the white walls of the gallery it becomes apparent that Sabri’s arrangement of lines and layers describe a kind of inescapable probability. These paintings offer the equation where ‘random and chance’ find a harmonious balance. Hafiz Amirrol describes it in his essay as Sabri’s embrace of heuristics.

To illustrate Hafiz’s point, observe the progression in the following works of similar palette and scale: the woven geometry of **PANDORA (2010)**, relaxing into expansive repetition within **MEMORY (2010)** and eventually imploding with calligraphic energy in the painting **SITUATION (2010)**.



**HOURGLASS. 2010** 206 x 162.5 cm acrylic & oil medium on canvas





**MOMENT. 2010** 124.5 x 236 cm acrylic & oil medium on canvas  
 right: **SITUATION. 2010** 111.5 x 183 cm. acrylic & oil medium on canvas

Here the mechanical action of these three paintings is repeatedly bought forth, tested and contested in a series of time-based sequences – like the reduction of a good sauce. It is a deeply considered process.

Looking around the gallery the huge canvas **MOMENT (2010)** offers a similar response. Its black lines are cast in a diagonal gesture over a neutral grid. The controlled rhythm is interrupted by the chance blotting of paint on canvas, pooling in its own random sequence across the picture plane, almost separating it dimensionally and allowing light to filter through the painting's depth. These are extremely sophisticated paintings of Sabri Idrus' and they illustrate the artist's ability to let go of a 'knowable' uncertainty.

Equally recurrent across Sabri's oeuvre as this use of the grid, is his ability to take random everyday surfaces and lift them into something



sublime, luminous. *Karat* [rust] is a title often used by Sabri for his works that carry a more distressed patina suspended in resins, and it finds its place in the *Masa* series with the huge painting, **OXIDISED (2010)**. Here monochromatic tones are seemingly etched through the physical action of sanding and scraping back into the oil paint and applied layers of dilute solvents. Rust is a time-borne process. Life is a time-borne process.

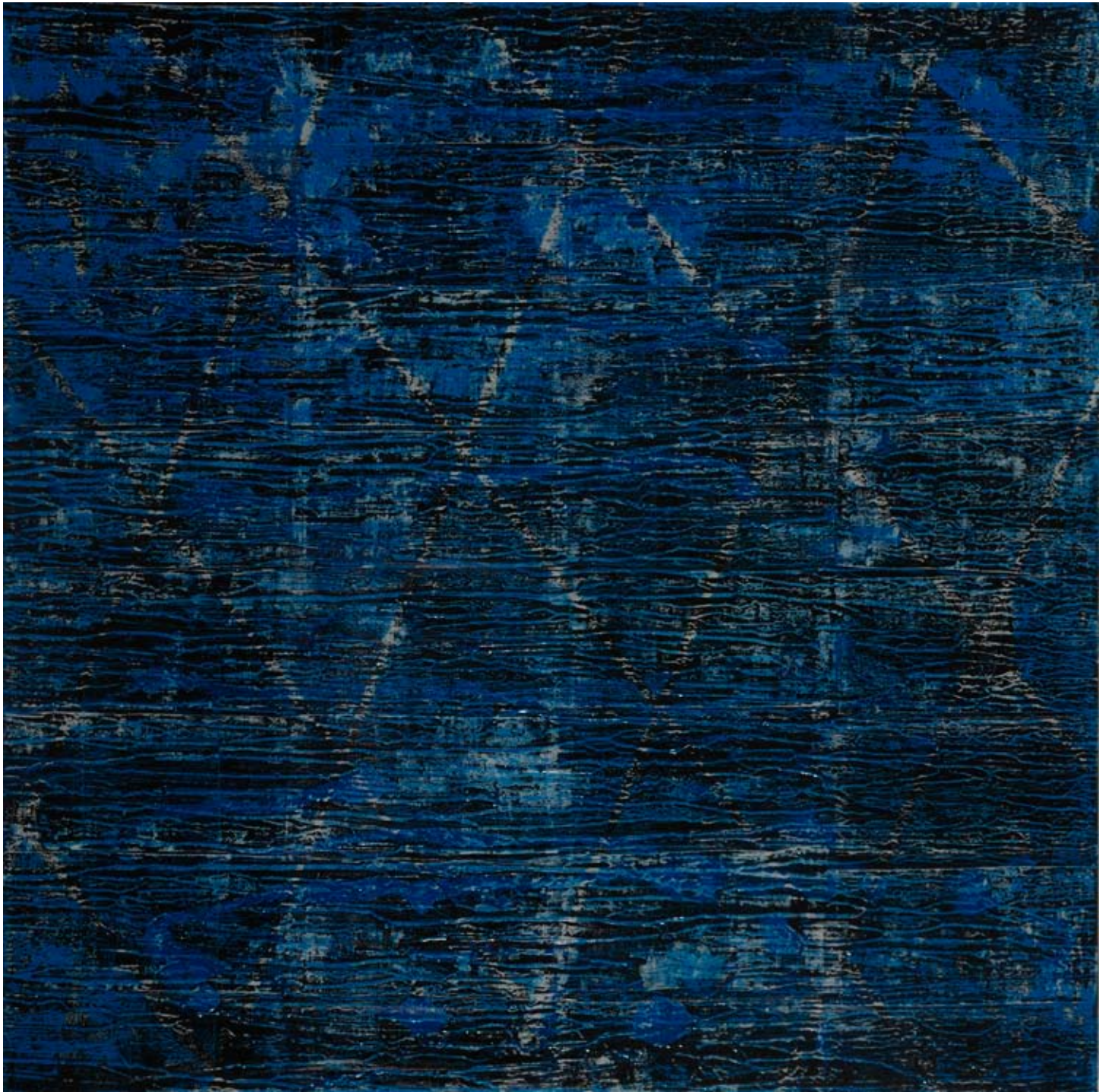
Wan Azhar Sulaiman perhaps best describes it referring to Sabri's 2008 exhibition *myDomain*, "the textures are manifestation of moments that concede space as finite, while time is not, and that time encompasses space... It is an endless permutation."

What signals Sabri's work out in the Malaysian context, is his passion to push the medium to new heights, where experimentation is the

modus operandi and the backbone, if you like, is a graphic clarity, digitally choreographed and ingrained in the way the artist registers his visual world. It is not surprising then, this, his seventh solo exhibit, is an extremely articulate understanding of abstraction developed over time. It is the resolve that comes with the maturity of looking and a fearless urge to continually chart new territory.

**GINA FAIRLEY** is an Australian arts writer with over 14-years experience as an Arts Manager in America and Australia. She received her MA in Arts Administration from the College of Fine Arts, Sydney and is the regional contributing editor for *Asian Art News* and *World Sculpture News* [Hong Kong]. Splitting her time between Sydney and Southeast Asia, she contributes regularly to many magazines internationally from New York to Korea, Manila to Bangladesh. She runs the alternative window-gallery slot with artist, Tony Twigg and in 2011 will curate a retrospective of Roberto Robles for the Ateneo Art Gallery, Manila.



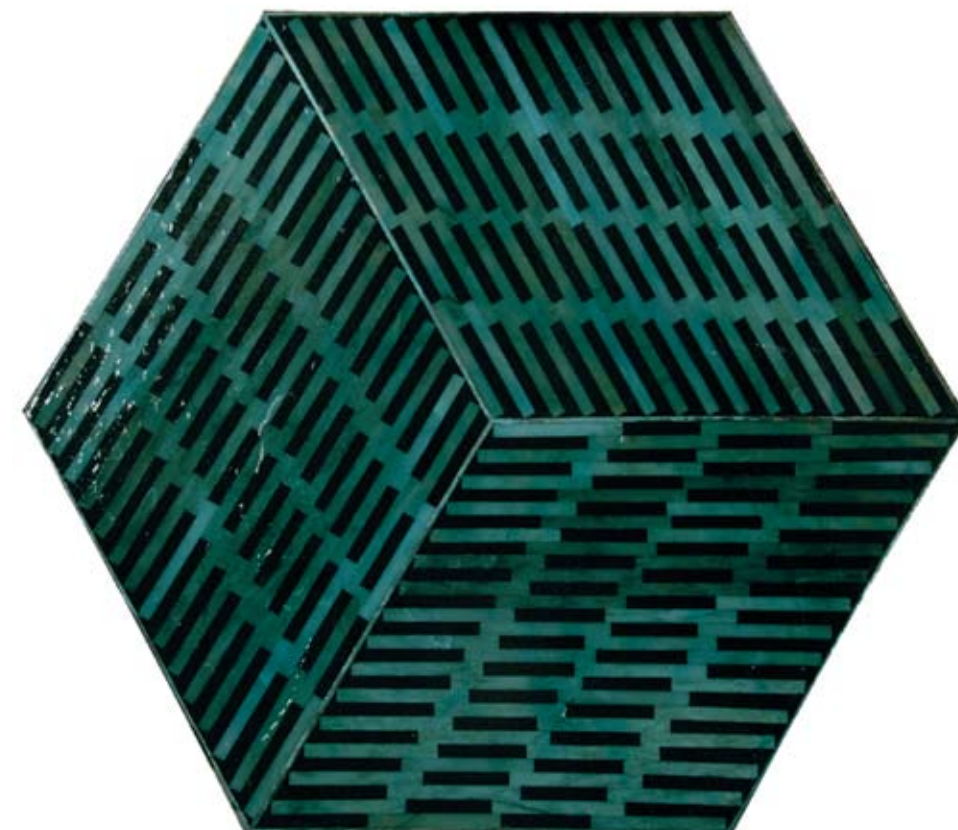
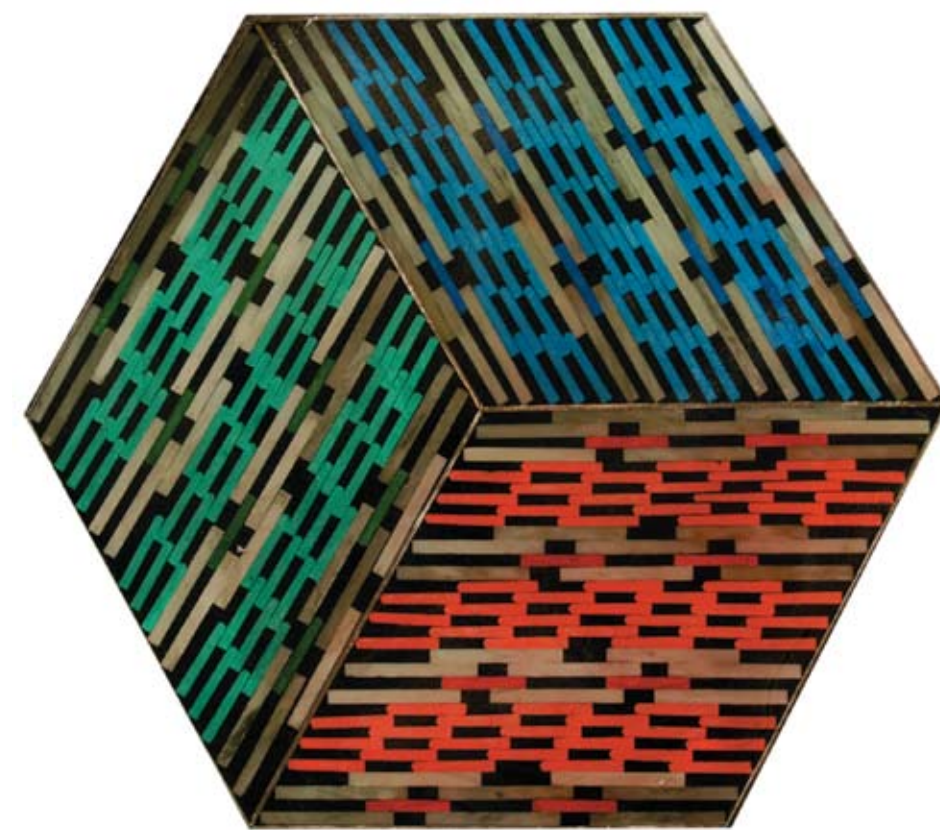
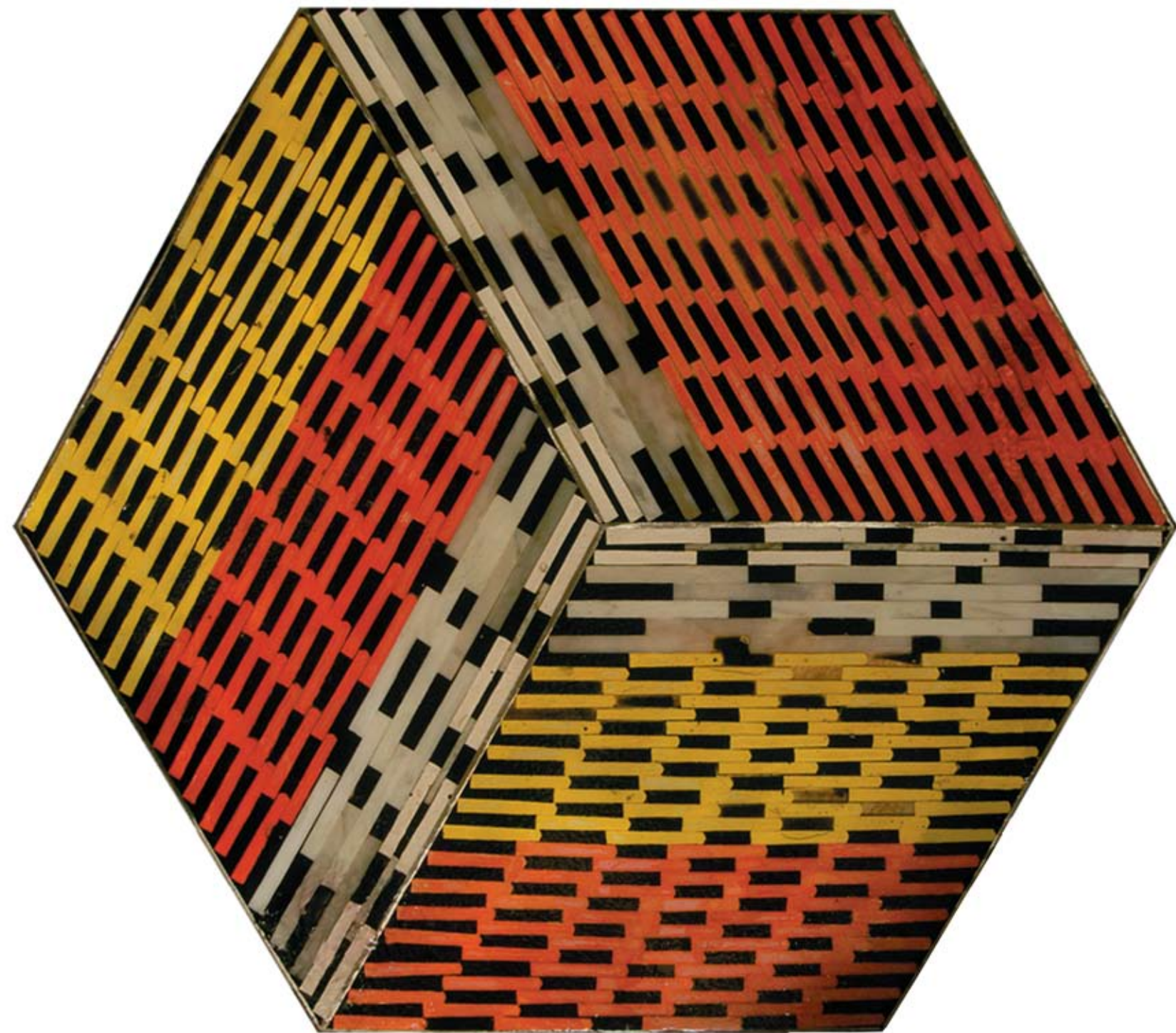


left: **SILHOUETTE. 2010**  
120 x 120 cm acrylic & oil medium on canvas



right: **FAITH. 2010**  
120 x 120 cm acrylic & oil medium on canvas





from left: **ORY. 2010**, **RGB. 2010**, **BLUE CUBE. 2010**. each 900 mm diameter Fiberglass, slate, stainless steel, plywood & bearing



**PRINTS, MARKS AND TRACES:** Sabri Idrus is a constant researcher in the process of art making, specifically in his endless search through the production of marks and traces. It is the nexus of visual representation, and it is a journey continued with the *Masa* series. These new pieces operate as a kind of “medium” to convey Sabri’s research and thoughts. It involves a strong visual presentation and appreciation for the materiality of the object that has lead him to experiment with graphic designs and industrial materials, almost to the point of transgression. **MASA SERIES: A REDUCTION PROCESS** by Hafiz Amirrol



It is coupled with a fascination for daily objects, ubiquitous in the practice of everyday life, and adds a humanity to Sabri’s abstractions. Strict rules and principles apply concerning grids, layers, selection of colours, and fluidity in making prints and marks. They invoke a very personal process of problem solving one that enters the realm of heuristics. It results in specific decisions within the work’s development aimed at reducing the difference, or gap between the artist’s early sketched ideas, their proposed solutions and what is produced. Advancing through transitional areas of experimentation, the resulting product has moved through long processes of reduction and simplification to becoming a simple formula of visual interactions. These are mediated through the actions of stamping, tracing, reworking, peeling, painting and marking to seize the right point of balance and emphasise the central notion of his art making.

**DESIGNING AND EDITING:** When Sabri proposed his idea for *Masa* series, he embarked from his previous designing process and

started from a point where it was new for him. His long journey in art making had landed him in an art residency program in Poland, where he worked, studied, explored and ventured into new things, producing new “stuffs” that are more experimental than his already experimental approach. Switching constraints and problems into strategies, such as working with found objects from the street of Poznan, making pieces from recycled wood from the forest of Pyzdry, and manipulating images from photographs of the city, Sabri started to treat his designing process as a form of editing. Every detail and move executed had to correspond with his limitation, thus forcing him to smartly ‘edit’ his concepts, desires and direction into clear strategies. Deduction, abduction and introduction of various techniques and methods helped in this process producing works that became representations of reality itself. His time spent wandering, discussing, making and experimenting in Poland contributed greatly in producing *Masa* series. From his task as a graphic designer – choreographing images,

texts and objects – to his collaboration with architects and other designers narrating artworks concerning dimension, space, moments and temporality, Sabri stepped ahead with his new curiosity. It was these changes and situations that forced him to think of alternatives, providing pleasurable pressures apprehended as the random accumulation of new thoughts and ideas.

**METHODS AND LEGIBILITY:** The process of mark making and layering of colour in this series leaves traces of what they signify, that is, a kind of visual syntax communicating the subject that is about movement, time and sequences. The fluid, yet controlled, composition signify a set of related events or things that follow each other in a particular order, repeating and creating sequences. They exist as natural temporal ordering. While it is sometimes hard to achieve a complicit agreement on what is being produced by Sabri, we cannot deny that his new works have entered an expanded field that liberates the process into a broader spectrum of art practice. By combining his previous formal interests, techniques and mechanical constructions, *Masa* series can almost be appreciated as non-referential indices, since these new paintings have the quality to be freed from any semantic-reference, but signal some particular value of the process itself. The final objects that are being presented here are the product of communicating ideas into simplified visual products. It is a complex thinking process, reliant on heuristic and, through this trial, error and process of discovery, is a superior procedure to those he routinely used in the past. *Masa* series could be described as expressions of time frozen. They were made to resemble quality that are visibly ‘vulnerable’ to the effects of time – discoloration, rust, tarnish, stain, warping, cracking, bruises, peeling and scars – thus becoming a suggestion

of natural process of dematerialization (or materialization). It is the act of accepting the inevitable.

**DISLOCATIONS AND TENSIONS:** What are usually regarded as Sabri’s secondary interests, i.e. graphic design and digital prints, have significantly contributed to his process and the mastering of his own visual language. The elements of balance and surprise discovered through the exploration of contrasts, is an aesthetic strategy Sabri has often used in his digital sketches, one that has merged into a kind of extrasensory mechanism. It has an efficiency applied to works on canvas. One thing that attracted Sabri were the experiments in basic elements: playing around with lines, space, volume and colours. These basic elements were always being put to test. The notion that meaning within those elements is complex, slippery, multifaceted and indeterminate is always in consideration. Parallel to this Sabri uses “paint as paint”, “colours as colours” and “forms as forms”. It is both a cerebral and visceral experience. Most revealing about this progressive body of works is Sabri’s desire to foster inscrutable outcomes for purely aesthetic reasons. From his position as an aesthetic obscurantist, missing or indefinable knowledge is seen as simply another aspect of his works’ inherent ‘incompleteness’ – an open-ended approach that allows the greatest flexibility to take his paintings to another level of development. Sabri’s interest in the obscurant lies in his detail – the creating of marks and in-between spaces, of tensions and voids, jagged edges, and moments or transitions that are frozen at strategic moments.

**THE PROCESS OF REDUCTION:** However, in Sabri’s process of translating his thoughts into a body of art works, the struggle of keeping things in control and simple result in him being encumbered with his own

struggle. One is faced with the question of how to exercise the restraint that simplicity requires without becoming sterile, austere? How does one reduce complexity without losing the essence of the detail? How is simplicity achieved without inviting boredom? These challenges Sabri faced by approaching his making from a position of research and specific methodologies. It is a process of inductive and deductive reasoning that guides his thinking and questioning mechanisms (thoughts and executions) and its context. Working tirelessly behind the computer screen during the very early stage creating digital sketches, photographic manipulations, collages and renderings, Sabri proceeds to ‘construct’ images physically, giving them material and tactile qualities. His long fascination with technology helps in hybridizing his work and, from the perspective of Gestalt Theory, Sabri’s work process can be seen as his own basic framework in the exploration of knowledge and techniques that compel him to revisit and rework his pieces over and over again. The cause and effect of these processes has ‘reduced’ unnecessary things from the final form. It is a distillation equitable with time.

**HAFIZ AMIRROL** (b. 1983, Kuala Lumpur) is an architect and has been collaborating with Sabri Idrus on various projects ranging from academic research, large-scale installation, graphic design, architectural and art competitions. Apart from his collaborative works with Sabri, Hafiz also focuses his architectural works on humanitarian and disaster response related projects for countries, which include Indonesia, Myanmar and Bangladesh. Hafiz currently resides in Bandung, Indonesia, finishing his post-graduate studies on architectural and urban design theory on urbanism in the developing countries.

a. Pinewood (4-5 meters long) used as internal structure for the conservation work of a local church in Pyzdry.

b. A piece of the Pinewood from the conservation site was measured and cut by Sabri, assisted by a local master craftsman.

\*c. Connection 2009, 110 cm diameter

\*d. Finish artwork: Reflection 2009, 110 cm diameter.

\* Finish artworks from a single plank of a 4 meter Pinewood. Collection of Cultural & Heritage Museum of Pyzdry, Poland.





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Measurements are given in centimeters, height before width (or diameter) and depth.

Terima Kasih

left: **TIME 1 (REMINDER). 2010** 61 cm diameter. polyester resin, sea sand, slate, metal, plywood & bearing  
right: **TIME 2 (REMAINDER). 2010** 61 cm diameter. polyester resin, sea sand, slate, metal, plywood & bearing  
back cover: **SPINNER. 2009** 121 cm diameter x 15 cm depth fiberglass, fabric, plywood & bearing



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