



he began the composition. The first stroke is the one he is most afraid of making.

He takes pride in painting freehand, without gridlines, or a projector, and he does not trace. This is why he needs to be well prepared, and sure-handed. He said he sat before the blank canvas planning, visualising, projecting in his mind what he had cleverly conceived in his head. When he finally started, it took him a good six months to compose, carefully painting the eight serious portrait figures proportionately on the 1.8 by 3.2 metre surface.

"It took me another eight months to put in colours and strokes before the final detailing." He adds, "when I work on this, I cannot work on anything else."

Nurazmal shares that he must work in isolation during the crucial composition period, thinking of nothing but the imageries he wants to convey on his canvas. "There was a period I was so obsessed with it, sleeping next to it for weeks just to get it right, documenting the strokes from beginning to end."

**THE ENTERTAINER**

Alism is very much a show. While the paintings standalone as individual pieces, for Nurazmal there is another element when crafting pieces for an exhibition. Nurazmal often sits and watches from afar, observing how each piece interacts with the other. Nurazmal, the man, is more than an artist. He was an athlete, a vocalist, dramatist and his work very much embodies these elements. His pieces are loud, with musical elements, and they speak.

"You see the lines behind the figure in this piece," Nurazmal asks, pointing to one of his pieces, *Networking*. "That is the soundtrack of the Godfather playing." Nurazmal beams from ear to ear as he explains the piece.

The piece is an adaptation of Michaelangelo's sculptures and as you see it, you hear it and then you watch it happening. "This is me," he explains pointing to his self-portrait within the piece. Nurazmal, in the painting, is trying to get to the boss, the figure on the far left, so he can get some things done. But to get there, he needs to get past two others. The guy seated on his right is hiding his half eaten apple in his hand while Nurazmal is holding an apple ready to give it to the next guy.

"You see?" Nurazmal beams cheekily, "This is how things work here in Malaysia."

The social critique plays out nicely in his piece. His portraits are his characters, and him the conductor, or the director of the play. "But I don't expect people to hear the message, if they are entertained, that makes me happy enough. It is after all a show," he says.

When all is said and done, there is more to be said and done. Nurazmal sits in the centre of his studio very often watching how his pieces interact, how they speak to one another and then he sees the necessary finishing touches each painting needs. "Sometimes it is just a dot, sometimes a few strokes here and there," he says.

**THE DISCIPLINE OF ART**

Nurazmal does what no other Malaysian artist does. He documents and encapsulates a part of society and views

it from a certain window. As Nurazmal sits in his stool before a painting of his son, he muses on the future for artists. Apparently, art might be taken out of the school curriculum.

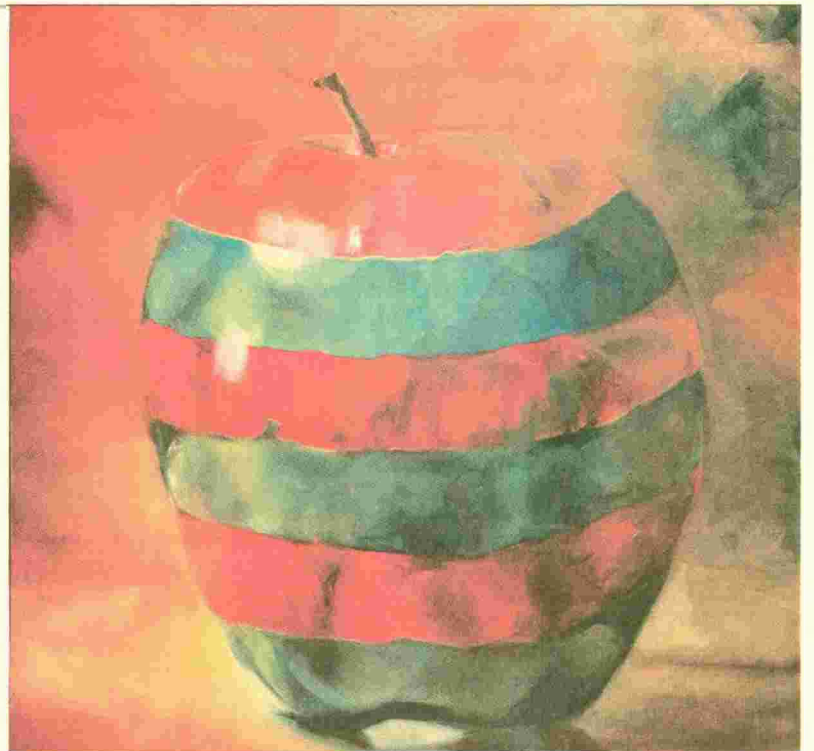
"It is because they think art is just about drawing, and so the ones who cannot draw or paint see it as irrelevant," he says. For Nurazmal though, art has taught him how to analyse and see things differently and taught him discipline.

"I have tried teaching art, parents send their kids to me and I try to help them cultivate skills. I tell them to draw everything they see, translate what they see onto paper. And they quit within weeks! It is not easy, it is not just about drawing something, it takes patience and discipline. A lot of thought.

"It is like kung-fu training," jokes Nurazmal who incidentally has a black belt in karate. "My studio is a mess though, some artists might think it is such a disorganised space, undisciplined, but when it comes to the work, it is disciplined."

It shows, his work has a sort of relentlessness, evident in its finish. And it shows art is not easy.

"I think art is there to develop mentality, and is crucial to the system. Art is in all fields and it is through art we can develop. If people see art as this, a form of discipline and thought that



*One In A Million*

is relevant in all fields, I think we can develop much more," he says.

Art, as his pieces show, document and encapsulate history, and society. It shows the development of society through a different perspectives. To discard a discipline such as art, is a grave matter. It is society discarding

a balancing tool. Then, what will our nation become?

Alism is a summary of Nurazmal's journey as an artist, expressing his thoughts and observations, in a brilliance of colours that is unique. The exhibition opens on Sept 2 at Core Design Gallery.

# Date with art



EVERY Wednesday, from 1958 to 1965, Sivam Selvaratnam met other artists at a gathering known as The Wednesday Art Group. "This group was organised by an Englishman, Peter Harris. He was the Superintendent of Art Education Federation of Malaya," says Sivam. "We were all equally interested in art and had informal art classes. We were free to paint and discuss all matters about art. I even served as secretary for two years."

Sivam, now 75, describes her participation in this group as being the most fruitful years of her life. "Being in the Wednesday Art Group broadened my artistic vision. It helped me get a fresh vitality and shaped my thinking. Prior to that, I was a college-trained art teacher. My lecturers in college didn't bring out the best in us."

Shifting attention back to her more positive experience with the Wednesday Art Group, she says: "We were often taken on excursions. We'd go to places like Malacca or Pulau Ketam. The whole thing was informal and fruitful. Sometimes, we could do live drawings and the senior artists would help guide the more junior ones."

Sivam recalls that the late

The Wednesday Art Group and their Contribution to the Malaysian Art Scene  
**When:** September 8  
**Time:** 9.30am - noon  
**Where:** Seminar Room, University Malaya Art Gallery.

paper. I'm sure the caption was taken from the Straits Times. I created an abstract of a murder scene." Sivam took three hours to complete her painting, *Malapetaka*. This masterpiece is now part of the National Gallery's Collection.

Together with other pioneers of this group like Hajeedar Majid, Cheong Lai-tong, Ho Kai Peng, Ismail Mustam and Renee Kraal, Sivam will speak at a two-day seminar to share her knowledge and experiences. "People always looked at us in surprise and anxiety as they didn't have any knowledge of what we did. So, I want to share our contribution to the Malaysian art scene."

Aneeta Sundararaj

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depressed because it comes through, and it affects the piece," he says. Excited is where he begins, and then his imagination takes charge, active, positive and alive.

Nurazmal began work on his centrepiece for the exhibition over a year back. Adapting one of Caravaggio's masterpieces, *The Calling of St Matthew*, Nurazmal's *Imitation Master After Caravaggio II* gives the Baroque piece a whole new meaning.

The most difficult part of painting, he relates, is the first stroke. And that was why Nurazmal stared at a blank canvas for two whole months before