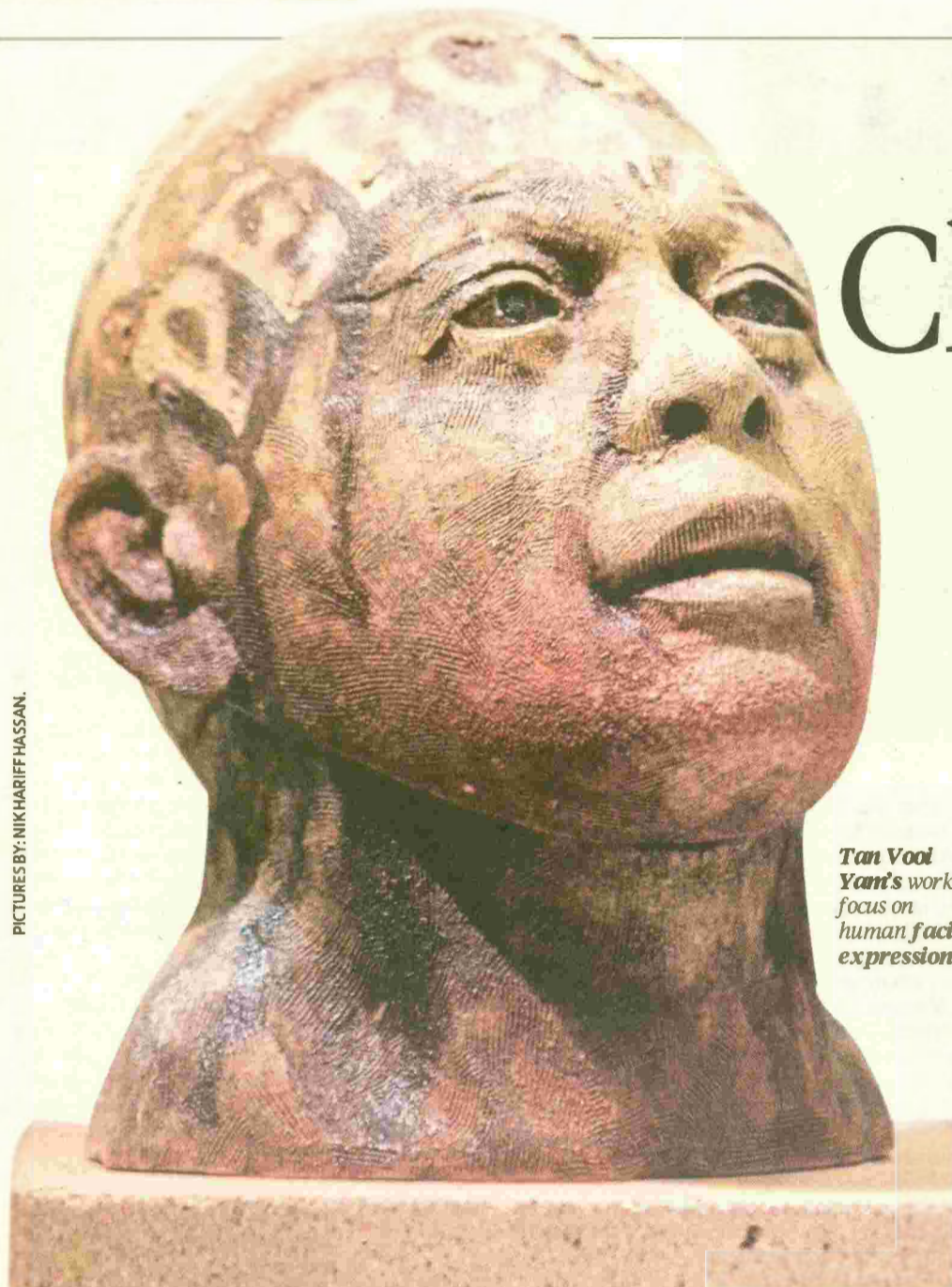


LIFE&TIMES **ART**

PICTURES BY: NIKHARIF HASSAN.

# Clay in artists hands

An exhibition at Galeri Petronas showcases ceramic works as art, writes **Aneeta Sundararaj**

**Tan Vooi Yam's** works focus on human facial expressions.



**Roslan Ahmad** and his nostalgic bottles.

An exhibition at the Galeri Petronas has captivated the curiosity of many visitors because many of the exhibits are not mounted on a wall as a painting or photograph would. In fact, many of them are placed on the floor or shelves. This exhibition, called Earthworks showcases the works of six Malaysian ceramic artists.

"Ceramics as an artwork is rare," says Badrolhisham M. Tahir, 48, the curator of the exhibition. "Works are usually divided into art and craft. Art is usually non-functional. For example, a painting — it's mounted on a wall and you can't use it. Since ceramics are usually considered functional (plates, bowls and more), they're not often considered art. There is this stigma attached to them."

This graduate of Fine Arts from Goldsmith College in the UK says that the first time ceramics was considered as a work of art was almost 98 years ago in 1917. Marcel Duchamp created the Fountain and the manifesto accompanying the piece described it as "an article of life, placed so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view — it created a new thought for that

object".

"Fountain was actually a toilet bowl," says Badrolhisham.

With an underlying concept of something called "mimesis" (which he explains as "trying to portray the idea of everyday"), the purpose of Earthworks is for us to question if the value of contemporary ceramic works are on par with other objects from various museum collections. It offers a radical way of overcoming the stigma of ceramics by examining

## Earthworks

**When:** Until March 22; 10am to 8pm

**Where:** Galeri Petronas, Lot 341-

343, Level 3, Suria

KLCC, Kuala Lumpur

**Call:** 03-2051 7770

Admission is free.

the taxonomy of contemporary ceramic works and deciding if they're works of art or museum objects.

He adds: "We are turning ordinary objects into something extraordinary."

The six Malaysian ceramic artists are Mohd Radzi Ismail, 33, Dr Shamsu Mohamad, 53, Awangko Hamdan Pengiran Arshad, 53, Tan Vooi Yam, 47, Mohd Roslan Ahmad 52, and Dr Salwa Ayob, 52.

## VARIOUS SUBJECTS

The only female in this group of ceramic artist, Dr Salwa, chose to feature a most humble object: The coconut.

She explains: "People take the coconut for granted. Think about it, without the coconut there will not

be a single festival in this country. All our festivals somehow use the coconut."

A graduate of UiTM and Institute of Cardiff, University of Wales, she adds: "Among the Malay folk, when a child is born, a coconut tree is planted. The child grows up and measures his age with reference to this coconut tree."

"Working with ceramics is a hands-on task. There are no short cuts," adds Roslan. The ceramic work he has chosen to exhibit are bottles. "We used to keep bottles when I was a child. Like the Fanta bottle and Orange bottle. We would buy the drinks, finish them and take the bottles back to the man for a refill. Those days, we didn't have the money for it. These drinks were very expensive."

Roslan says that to work with clay, "you must understand the language of clay. There are so many steps — they are technical and you must master each one. They include getting the raw clay, sieving it, drying the clay, making the dough and learning to fire it in the proper manner."

Tan, a third generation clay potter, agrees with Roslan. His works focus on the many facial expressions he can create with clay. "The whole process takes a lot of patience," he adds.

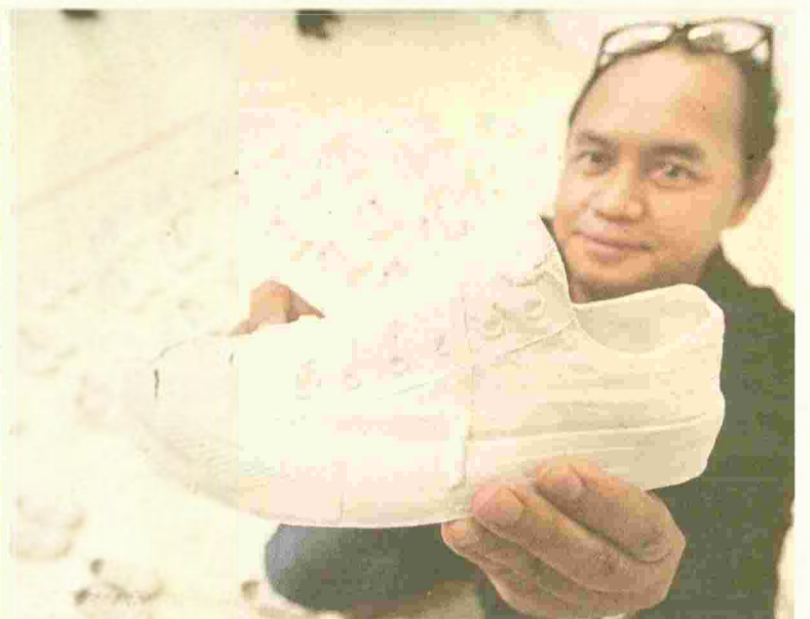
Roslan chimes in and explains why, like Tan, he likes to use wood



**Dr Salwa Ayob** chose to feature the humble coconut.



Awangko Hamdan showing a 'leather' bag made from clay.



Dr Shamsu Mohamad's shoes are a metaphor for the steps we take in life.

as a tool during the "firing" stage. "Sometimes, the fine ash from the wood will stick to the clay. This in itself will create a beautiful ash glaze."

For Awangko Hamdan, clay is a medium that's easy to manipulate. "Also," he says, "I feel a strong sense of belonging. As a Muslim, I believe we're made from earth. So to know that clay — made from igneous rocks which are millions of years old — makes me feel this sense of belonging. I chose to create leather bags from clay because I associate leather bags with journeys. They remind me of my late father. Whenever I saw him packing, I knew he was going on a journey."

Perhaps, the most fascinating item in this exhibition are the school shoes created by Dr Shamsu. "I use the shoe as a metaphor for each step we take in life. You can tell so much by looking at someone's shoes. Think about it: You can tell if someone is neat or untidy by

looking at his shoes. If the shoes are dirty, you can say that he's probably an untidy person."

Finally, the last in the group — and by far the youngest — is Mohd Radzi. His hometown is Langkawi and he does not hide the fact that he misses what the island used to be like. As such, he tries all the time to create artwork that is reminiscent of his childhood, such as seashells and sea creatures from clay.

"I come from Pekan Kuah and I can still remember how we used to collect all these seashells on the beach. Now, that beach no longer exists."

Putting into words what all six ceramic artists think, he concludes: "This is my way of remembering the past."

**Mohd Radzi Ismail** strives to create artwork that reminds him of his childhood in Langkawi.



**THE A-LIST** BY SAMANTHA JOSEPH

**THE GRASS IS GREENER ON THIS SIDE**

**Where:** Core Design Gallery, 87, Jalan SS 15/2A Subang Jaya, Selangor

**When:** Ends Thursday  
**Contact:** 03-56121168

LANDSCAPE art has had little attention in the contemporary art scene. This exhibition aims to fix that with a show curated by Benedetta Segala Ghani, featuring artists Haafiz Shahimi, Annabelle Ng and Husin Hourmain, and their interpretation of landscape.

**ART ECONOMY CONFERENCE 2015**

**Where:** JW Marriott Hotel Kuala Lumpur, 183 Jalan Bukit Bintang, Kuala Lumpur

**When:** March 24 and 25

**Contact:** www.arteconomyconference.com

THIS conference invites professionals from the art industry, related institutions and corporations to participate in workshops, roundtable discussions and debates on the significant roles that the government, communities, educational institutions and commercial entities play in the art scene.

**ART OF SEEING**

**Where:** Lobby, The New Straits Times Press, Balai Berita Bangsar, 31, Jalan Riong, KL

**When:** Ends March 27

**Contact:** bazuki@bazuki.com

THE solo photography

exhibition by photojournalist Bazuki Muhammad tracks his 30 years of experience. His works are both global and personal, with interesting framing that belies his architectural training.

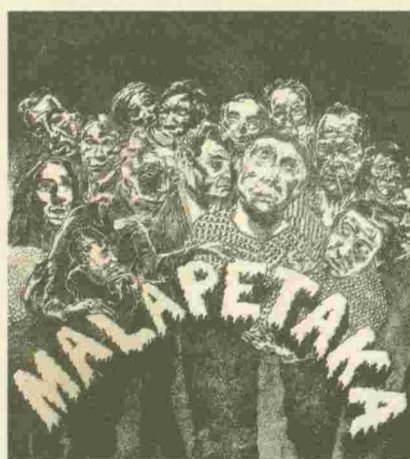
**LOOKING AHEAD**

**Where:** Fergana Art Space, 14A & 16A The Whiteaways Arcade, Lebuh Pantai, George Town, Penang

**When:** Ends March 29

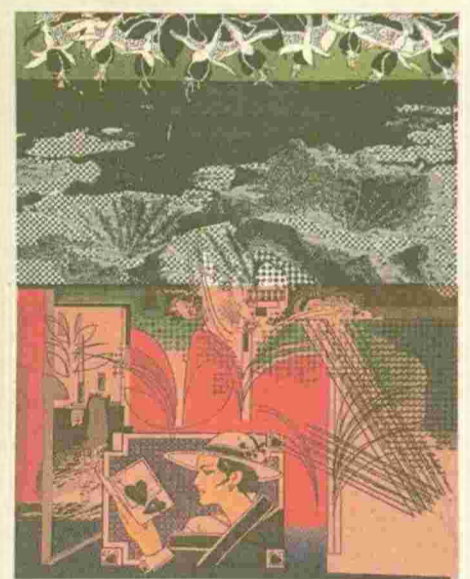
**Contact:** 04-2613002

WORKS of experienced and newer artists are exhibited including pieces by Ismail Hashim, Ismail Zain, Ahmad



Samsudin Wahab in Looking Ahead

Fuad Osman and Nirmala Dutt Shanmughalingam are showcased together with works from Chris Chong, chi too and Aisyah Baharuddin.



Ismail Zain in Looking Ahead