

BROUGHT TO YOU BY LIFE & TIMES

PLUSH art

ART OF THE MALAYAN GAUR

The magnificence of an animal facing extinction has captured one artist's imagination, writes **Aneeta Sundararaj**

IT is a bizarre meeting with artist Effendi Zahari for the first time. I have lost my voice and use sign language, almost, to introduce myself. When he does speak, his voice is barely above a whisper and he is happier speaking in Bahasa Malaysia.

Still, this affable man offers me a seat and puts me at ease, before proceeding to give me a Press release on his solo exhibition, Siri Selagour.

One of the first things that Effendi is keen to emphasise is that the title of his exhibition actually does mean something.

"Siri" denotes that this exhibition is part of a series, with the previous ones focusing on paintings of other animals such as birds and fish. The second word, 'Selagour' yokes 'sela' for 'Seladang' together with 'gour' which refers to the



The artist took two weeks to complete each painting.

SSW

PRESTASI MERENTASI EVOLUSI

SPEED & WHEELS

Majalah Digital Interaktif Auto Bulanan

PIT STOP: DUA RODA BASIKAL JENAMA KERETA

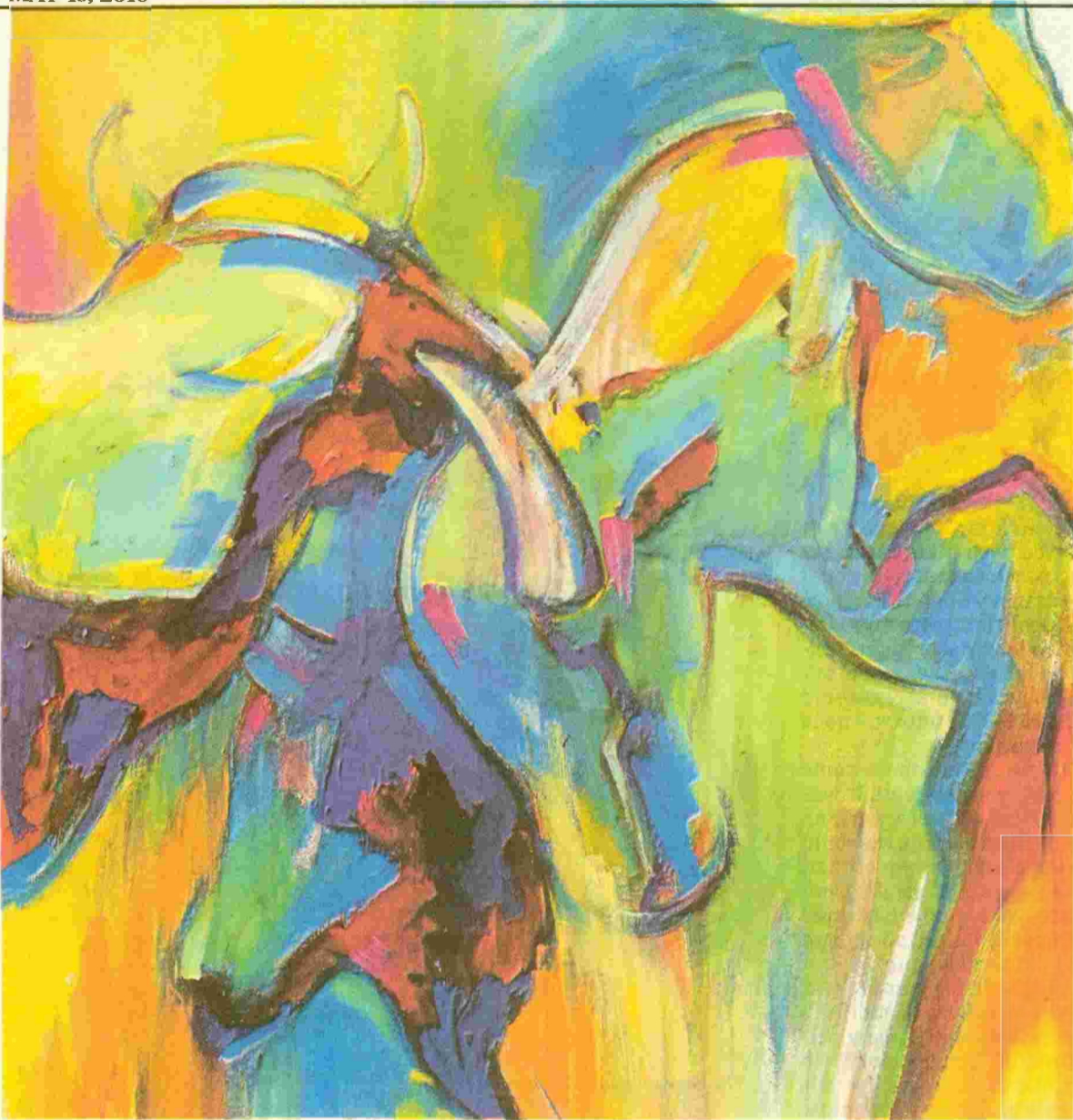
[READY GO: SKRIN REVOLUSI BATMAN

0-100: TORK HR-V vs CX3

PERCUMA! Muat turun sekarang!

EDISI MEI 2016

art PLUSH

BROUGHT TO YOU
BY LIFE & TIMES

Effendi Zahari

Of strokes
and colours.

Malayan gaur.

The 36-year-old bachelor, eager to show off his paintings, suggests we view some of his favourites which are mounted on the walls of the Main Lobby in Balai Berita.

PAINTING WHAT HE SEES

Unlike Salvador Dali, whom Effendi says

paints what "he sees inside his head", Effendi's works are a reflection of his take on the socio-cultural factors at play in his surroundings. His methodology to creating a painting begins when he tries to identify an idiom as a commentary or criticism of his take on life. In this series, he chose the Malay idiom, *Lembu punya susu, sapi dapat nama*. Loosely

translated, this means "The cow produces the milk, but the butter derives the glory."

This idiom is then interpreted in the following manner: In today's world, there are many sorts of individuals racing to achieve their goals. They live well without giving any thought to others' sensitivities and some abuse their God-given talents. "They will complain if they have to do any work at all," adds Effendi. "But they will want to live in luxury."

MAGNIFICENT BEAST

The talented artist is excited to share the reason why he has chosen the seladang as subject for his canvas. The animal, the artist believes, is a sub-species of the cow. Found in the peninsula, the seladang is the smallest sub-species of the gaur and weighs 1,000-1300 kg. That said, it is still the second largest mammal in Peninsular Malaysia, with the largest being the elephant. A distinct feature of the Malayan gaur is a high convex ridge on its forehead between its horns. Because this bends forward, it causes a deep hollow in the upper part of its head. Often, it is described as looking like a water buffalo from the front and a domesticated cattle from the back.

Unfortunately, the Malayan gaur is facing extinction. The reasons are also the same as many animals facing extinction here: Loss of habitat (indiscriminate clearing of land) and illegal poaching (the horns are used for medicinal purposes). In the 1990s, says Effendi, we had more than 600 gaurs. Today, he continues with a sigh, they number less than 400.

To highlight the plight of this magnificent beast, the artist then points to the first of his 25 paintings and says: "In this one, they're fighting with each other. Like the matadors in Spain, the gaurs are charging towards the matador."

INFLUENCE AND MENTOR

In the second painting, the focus is on the composition of the subjects. Taking up to two weeks to complete each painting, Effendi shares that this painting was probably influenced by the work of one of his lecturers at UiTM, Awang Damit Ahmad. Describing the lecturer as somewhat of a disciplinarian, Effendi concedes that Awang does possess immense patience. "When I didn't understand something, like composition, he was very patient to explain it to me."

Admitting to never aspiring to be an artist, Effendi then points to the third painting and says that the focus here was on brush strokes. There is also a play on colour, which is an influence by yet another one of his lecturers, Yusof Ghani.

"He is my mentor," says Effendi. He gives a small smile of reverence mixed with pride when he confesses that the veteran artist has told him he's proud of what he (Effendi) has achieved thus far. There was a time, though, he confides, when he actually despaired of ever pleasing this teacher.

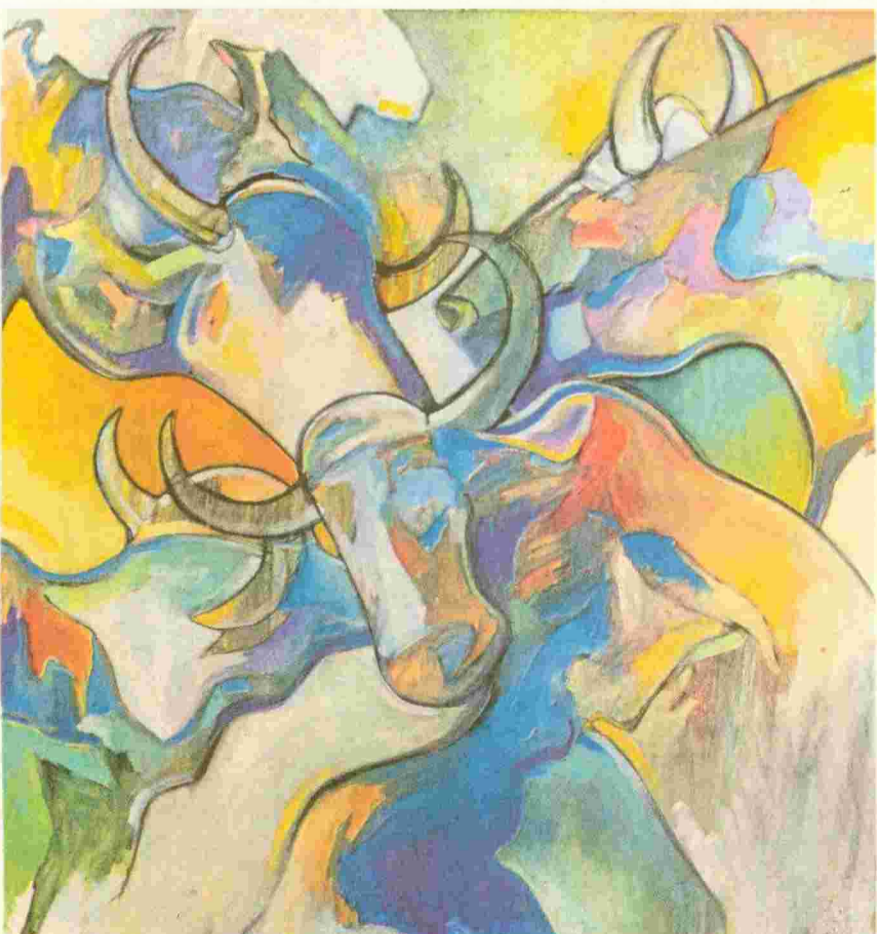
"You know," he says suddenly, "he once told me to produce 3,000 sketches in one night." That's a lot of work to do in a very short time. Did he do his mentor's bidding, I ask the artist.

"Well," concedes Effendi, "I don't think I created 3,000, but I didn't sleep that night. I worked through the night."

Shaking his head, he adds: "I think he wanted to see if I could face anything thrown in my way."

Perhaps, the artist who has influenced Effendi the most is Willem de Kooning. An immigrant to America, de Kooning is credited with taking the art world to a new level known as "American Abstract Expressionism" in the 1950s. Effendi employs the same technique of creating an image that is seemingly abstract, yet evokes a living form. Indeed, upon closer inspection, one will notice that Effendi's paintings, too, do not have a defined background.

Ultimately, Effendi accepts that he will continue to paint for a long while yet. Taking a deep breath, he concludes: "I can't be static. This is what I learnt from Yusof Ghani."

What Solo exhibition called 'Siri Selagour'**WHEN** Until May 27**WHERE** Main Lobby, Balai Berita, The New Straits Times Press, 31 Jalan Riong, KL

Beauty of the Malayan Gaur.

PICTURES BY HASRIYASYAH SABUDIN