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PLUSH art

HOPE FOR MOTHER EARTH

Two artists showcase their creativity and commentary on the state of Mother Earth, writes **Aneeta Sundararaj**

THE song *Tears in Heaven* by Eric Clapton is based on the death of his young son. Thoughts about his father's suicide underlie many of Ernest Hemingway's stories.

A *Portrait of My Dead Brother* is a painting by Salvador Dali about his brother who died as a toddler nine months before Dali was born.

The common thread of overwhelming sadness that permeates these works is also palpable in a painting called *Jendela Jiwa* by Professor Dr Abdul Jalil Othman, known to his friends as Professor Jalil.

As he runs his fingers along the brush strokes, Jalil says: "These symbolise my tears you know. My father was in a coma. For one month. I am crying here. I was so sad." His 76-year-old father passed away a day after the painting was completed.

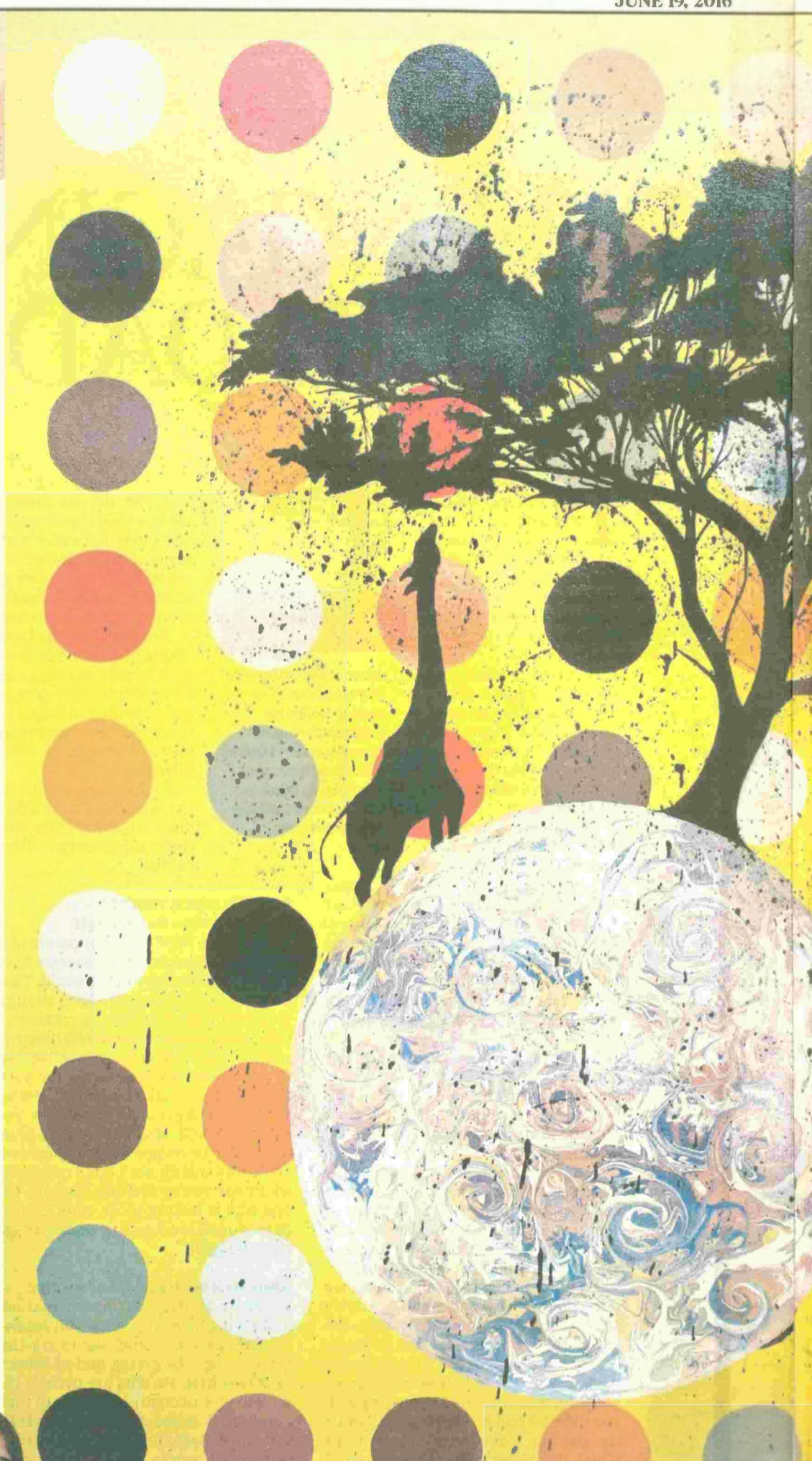
This painting and Jalil's other works, together with those of Johan Ishak, are part of an exhibition called Buana currently at Galeri Prima, the NST's new art gallery. This swanky art space creates a platform for both debut and established artists to showcase their works.

Reflecting the NST's serious commitment to promoting the arts, there are also CSR elements because there are plans to hold auctions for artwork. Money collected from such auctions will be channelled to the Media Prima Humanitarian Fund.

PAIN AND SLEEP

Before we view some of the paintings, this expert on pedagogy continues to dwell on memories of his father and says: "My father was so proud, you know. Sultan Nazrin

WHAT Buana' an exhibition by Professor Dr Abdul Jalil Othman and Johan Ishak.
WHERE Galeri Prima, Anjung Liku, Balai Berita, 31 Jalan Riong, KL
WHEN June 1 to July 29 2016



Extinction II by Johan Ishak (left)



Extinction III, where Mother Earth is taking away her blessings.

Muizzuddin Shah came for my show." The show in question was Jalil's first solo show in 2011, called Alam Samudera, at the Asian Art Museum. Although he'd dabbled in art since he was a child, Jalil began to take it seriously about 10 years ago. He also took part in various cultural shows when he was on sabbatical for a year in Tokyo. Once he realised that many people tended to gather around appreciating his artwork, he found the confidence to pursue art professionally when he returned to Malaysia in 2010. He has since showcased many of his works both locally and internationally.

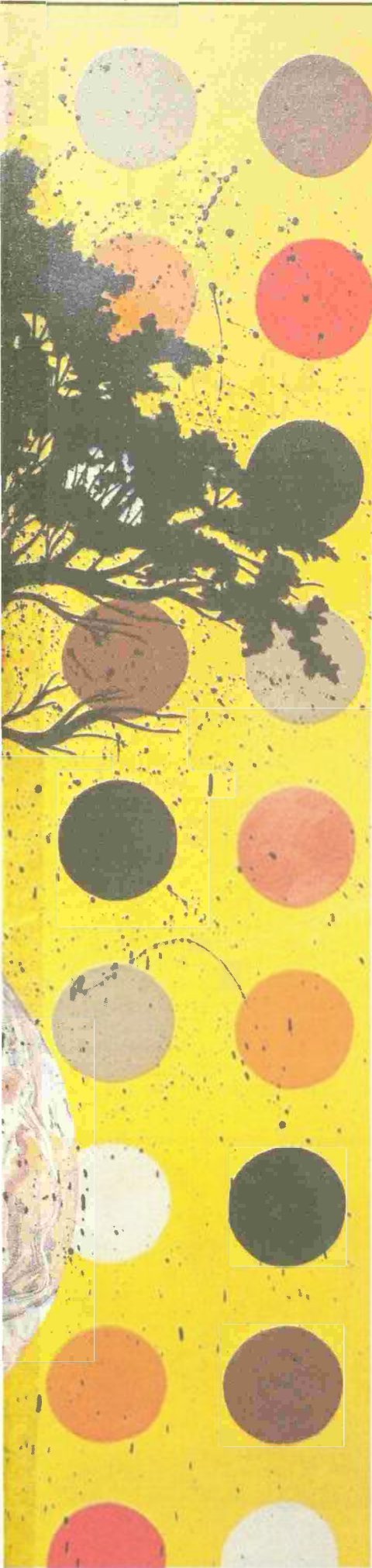
Lightening the mood, the 57-year-old lecturer from the Department of Language and Literacy Education at University of Malaya says: "My father had 10 children. I'm the second." Smiling cheekily, he adds: "I'm not so productive. I only have two. Maybe, it's because I'm so busy painting."

Indeed he has adopted the mantra, "While you sleep, I paint," when organising his work schedule.

ABSTRACT ALTERNATIVE

Suddenly, Jalil puts his hand up and says, "Mine is a new concept of painting. I call it 'Abstract Alternative'."

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PICTURES BY KHAIRUL HELMY

posefully to another painting called Horizon. Pointing at it, he says: "In this one, you can see the art of balancing the colour. I don't just use any colours. I balance them out." In so doing, he feels he's able to better plan his paintings.

JUST PAINTING

Johan, too, doesn't use brushes when creating his paintings for this exhibition.

"I've used my fingers," says this chartered accountant by day. He is the CEO of MyCreative Ventures, an investment arm of the Malaysian Government for the local creative industry.

"I apply my left brain training [from accountancy] on the right brain creative industry." Simply put, Johan's day job involves investing in creative ventures, from art galleries and book publishers to music schools.

What little free time he has is filled to the brim — publishing a novel, short stories, articles, poems and caricatures to computer graphics. On top of all this, he is also part of a musical band. What doesn't he do?

"Many others play golf. I just paint," he deadpans.

As we make our way to view some of his paintings, Johan shares: "My Dad told me that if I pursue art, don't expect to make money. But that's before. Nowadays, things have changed. Universities and colleges have courses."

Would this 41-year-old father of two allow his children to pursue art? "Yes, if they have the talent and the passion for it."

EXTINCTION

Buana is the classical Malay word for "world", shares Johan. He interprets this in the following manner: As the superior species in the animal kingdom, we humans were given the responsibility of looking after the world. Are we doing this job properly?

Johan answers this question with a resounding "no". His paintings address these issues. The ones he's chosen to highlight have the same name, but are differentiated by the Roman numerals that follow the name: *Extinction I*, *Extinction II* and *Extinction III*.

In *Extinction I*, he focuses on the tiger. Echoing the view of many a conservationist that the tiger is on the verge of extinction, Johan says: "The blue tiger in the sky represents that cold winter night. It's the spirit of the tiger looking down on us."

When we speak of extinction, the tendency is to say that it's animals that are going extinct. Rarely do we speak of trees going extinct. To address this, in *Extinction II*, Johan decided to focus on the tree. "So, you see the tree is black and earth no longer has any sea. I also use all the colours of autumn."

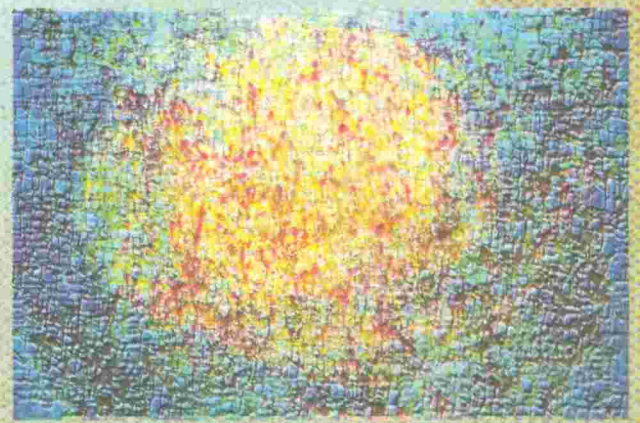
In the final piece, Johan showcases *Mother Earth* (a tribute to a sculpture by Lorenzo Quinn) pulling the planet. "She's taking away her blessings," explains Johan. "Our rivers are dying. We've had haze. Drought. Floods. All this, I believe, is because since the 1900s, there's been so much industrialisation."

As the tour of the exhibition comes to an end, the only question left is this: With the current abysmal state of the world, is there any hope for *Mother Earth*?

Taking a deep breath, Johan speaks for both artists when he says: "Hope will only come if we change."



Horizon illustrates beautifully how the artist balances his colour.



Galaksi by Abdul Jalil (right)