

BROUGHT TO YOU
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EXPRESSIONS OF COLOUR

Two artists use colours differently to tell stories in their abstract art, writes **Aneeta Sundararaj**

INSIDE the air-conditioned comfort of the New Straits Times' recently launched art gallery Galeri Prima, artist Robia Abd Jamal, or better known as Rube Jamal and I contemplate some of the works on showcase.

"I am a colourist," begins Rube, a statement which leaves me a little perplexed. In my mind, I was thinking aren't colourists, by definition, either hairdressers who dye people's hair or someone who tints black-and-white prints or photographs? Her statement begins to make sense only when she adds: "I'm very famous for using colours in my paintings. I like colours."

As an abstract artist, Rube explores colour, movement and space in her paintings. Currently, she has 10 works in an exhibition called Women Visual

Interpretation Exhibition, the second art exhibition to be held in this swanky gallery at Balai Berita, Bangsar, KL.

PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

Rattling off the names of some of her favourite pieces in the exhibition, Rube states that each painting is an expression of her innermost thoughts and feelings. With one of her paintings called Transition, it is only appropriate to ask what her feelings might have been when she created it.

Indeed, who or what underwent a transition? Is there a story behind the piece?

"Well, it's abstract. The title doesn't equal telling a story," replies Rube. Intensely private, the 60-something artist is unwilling to reveal her inspiration behind creating this piece. She adds:



Transition

"I cannot explain the story. It's up to you. Your own story. There is no right or wrong."

Pointing to another painting called Reunion, Rube says that she tries to invite her audience to really look at the colours she uses. She is interested in how her audience is going to accept the work, examine the colours, lines and shapes that she creates.

As I try to comprehend what the colours in her paintings mean to me, I subsequently learn that Rube completed a Masters of Fine Arts Degree from the Maryland Institute College of Art, US in the 1970s. Since then, she's been participating in art exhibitions and winning several awards. She's also been a judge in many art competitions.

WHAT Women Visual Interpretation by Rube Jamal and Zaidah Abdullah

WHERE Galeri Prima, Anjung Liku, Balai Berita, 31 Jalan Riong, KL

WHEN Until Sept 9

A DEAD COLOUR

By her own admission, Rube's paintings in this exhibition showcase a change in her style. Where she previously focused on "separate sections" with distinct areas of colour, Rube now employs a freer style for the base colour. The application of an overlay of dots, however, has been described as appearing as though they're printed on the canvas. Rube explains this technique by repeating an earlier statement: "I like all kinds of colours."

There is one colour, though, that the artist vehemently objects to using — black. The closest she'll come to using a dark colour, she shares, is very deep blue verging on black. There's a hard tone in her voice when she says: "Black is a dead colour. It's like a full stop. It's for sadness."

ELEMENT OF CHANCES

In complete contrast to Rube's views on the use of black, there was a time when artist Zaidah Abdullah's work consisted

of three basic colours: black, white and grey. Today, her work in this exhibition still features black, but also speaks of bold and expressive brushstrokes in vibrant colours.

Getting a sense that you're peering into nature when looking at Zaidah's work, this native of Johor describes her paintings as 'abstract landscapes of places she's visited'. A case in point is Tidal Kingdom. Ever so keen to share her thoughts, she says: "I was fascinated that whenever that sea comes to shore and the water goes out again, there's a new texture on the pebbles, on the sand. These things talk to me, you know. *Macam orang gila* (Like a madman). But, these different textures, they are what I call elements of chances."

What touched Zaidah deeply was that many of her ex-school friends from Kolej Tunku Kurshiah boarding school in

Seremban attended the cocktail reception to celebrate the launch of this exhibition. "We come to support each other," says Zaidah. So close is their bond that her actual siblings (she is the second of seven children) are sometimes jealous of this sisterhood among the former boarders.

Admitting that she wasn't academically-inclined in school, Zaidah's voice is tinged with amusement when she says: "You know, I had to do Science all the way to Form 6. I got credit in everything else. But I got an A in Art." Smirking, she adds: "And those days, good in Art means studying Architecture. I didn't do that."

Instead, the 57-year-old artist secured a Ministry of Education scholarship to study Fine Art at University Teknologi Mara in 1987. By 1991, she embarked on a Masters degree in Education from University Malaya. After 30 years of teaching, Zaidah no longer wanted to be

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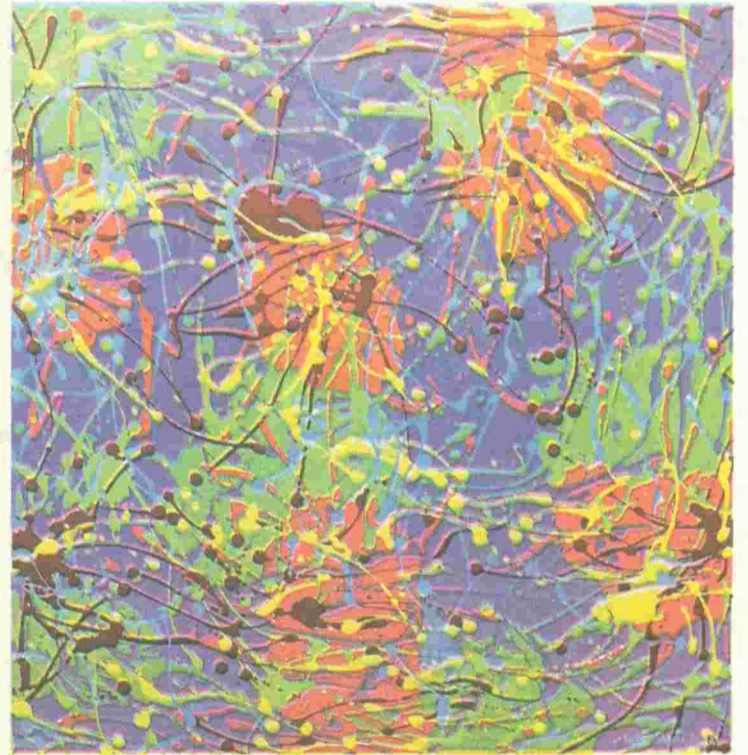
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Break Loose



Joyful Feeling

"I cannot explain the story. It's up to you. Your own story. There is no right or wrong."

Rube Jamal

constrained by duties and deadlines of academia. Describing herself as a "late bloomer", she retired early and now spends all her energy on being a full-time fine artist.

Emphasising her belief that all artists are expressionists, Zaidah feels that abstract work is decidedly simple. Where Rube asks her audience to come up with their interpretations of her work, Zaidah's has no qualms explaining the stories behind hers.

Take the painting called Kala Rimbun III 1st series. The trees she's painted are inspired by Zaidah's childhood memories visiting her grandfather's orchards in Johor. Having no taste for realism, Zaidah theorises that in the jungle, nothing grows in a neat fashion. "Many realists will avoid painting the *semak-semak* (undergrowth)," she explains. "I don't see this. It's all over the place. I cannot paint like others. Paint in a neat way."

In the end, the message that both these artists are keen to impart in utterly different ways is this: every work of art is based on a "journey" that the artists takes. How that journey manifests, as Zaidah points out, is a personal experience, be it for the artist or her audience.



Kala Rimbun IV
PICTURES BY HALIMATON SAADIAH SULAIMAN

Artist Zaidah Abdullah



Tidal Kingdom