



# PRIMAL SCORES

A New Song, with an Old Tune

A solo exhibition by **SHUKRI ELIAS**

# Ahmad Shukri Elias



Born 1960, Kedah, Malaysia

Graduated in Fine Arts from The Faculty of Art and Design, University of Mara, Malaysia in 1986. A full-time painter for the past 36 years. A resident artist at 'The Artist Colony' Kuala Lumpur for 10 years (1998 - 2008).

An avid traveler and exhibited regularly around Asia and Europe.  
Awarded the Juror's choice at The Phillip Morris 'Asean' Art Award in 2003.  
Represented Malaysia at the 'Catherina De Medici Art Award' at Florence in 2001.

Paints large expressionistic painting both in oils and acrylics.  
The artist's works deal through inner expression concerning nature and life.

# Primal Scores: A New Song, with an Old Tune

A solo exhibition by Shukri Elias

In his latest solo exhibition, Shukri Elias [known as Shook to both friends and family] brings to us Primal Scores – a series of paintings featuring emotive, mark-makings which make up a pictorial language honed by the artist over decades. The word primal came to me while in conversation with Shook at his studio. As a term often associated with cavemen or animalistic behaviours, primal usually indicates uncultured and uncivilised tendencies frowned upon by polite society. Yet, the origin of the word derives from the Latin root of *primus* which translates to “first”, suggesting the most basic or instinctual reactions of a being, be it man or animal. In that vein, applying the term primal in the context of art can refer to the primitive way of sensing and translating a subject, as well as the more intuitive nature of creating.

Surrounded by paintings of an array of sizes, both old and new within his studio – I was struck by the naïve style of his imagery. With bold lines, simplified facial expressions and motifs, the visual attributes of his paintings are akin to the characteristics of tribal and traditional artistic expressions originating from Africa, Asia, and Oceania. In the history of art, this emphasis on lines, elongated features, and handling of space were some of the attributes that had influenced the pictorial flatness in the works of the cubists, the expressionists and other modern art movements. As a fan of the likes of Picasso and Schiele, it is no surprise that traces of their style have been reflected in Shook’s work in different ways over the years.

For those familiar with Shook’s oeuvre of work, you would know that he was first engaged with abstract, non-representational imagery. Eventually, he began introducing figurative elements and landscapes into his practice while still applying some degree of abstraction in the depiction of his subject matter. Drawn to the communicative qualities of body language and facial expressions, he taps in to that primitive and instinctual manner of creative awareness to translate and capture the raw essence of human expression and emotion. These figures and facial expressions are not usually a representation of anyone, but rather act as suggestions of emotions that are interwoven with the energy and gestural marks of his brushstrokes. For example, the boldly painted, thick black lines in the painting *Menyapa* (2019), achieved a representational figure of a full-bodied person on the right, overlapped against the suggestion of a larger face as indicated by the eye on the left side of the painting. *Menyapa*, which translates to “greet” in English, expresses exactly that with the stylized hands of the figure on the right gesturing in a wave. Against a bright yellow backdrop, the blocks of blue, red, and salmon further accentuate the expressions and forms, essentially evoking a cheerful and warm ambience.



The expressiveness behind Shook's subject matter is further translated within the style of painting made apparent in the treatment of his canvases. By dripping, scraping, and shooting the canvas with paint and water, he works towards creating "surface opportunity" [as he coined it] by employing a variety of techniques when approaching his work. That said, as a senior artist who has had time to explore and refine his style, Shook clarified that his methods and the outcome of his work no longer fall into the category of experimental. He is well-versed with how to achieve the desired textures and effects. Yet, it is rarely as simple as that to see an artwork to completion – even for him. Most of the pieces featured in *Primal Scores* are made up of layers and layers of paint. If one were to examine these layers with X-ray technology, there would be significant differences between the first and final composition. The evolution of each painting mirrors an intuitive journey of creating; this process is akin to a conversation between him and the canvas, while the mark-making are emotional scores recorded by the artist himself.

Shook's sensitivity to colour is especially evident in, *A Night at Kapas* (2021), *Pangkor* (2022), *Langkawi* (2022), and *Tioman* (2022). He began these specific pieces back in 2019, but they were left unfinished for a few years; the completion of these four artworks was drawn from recent visits to local islands following the lift of the interstate travel ban. While these pieces are in no way a direct reflection of the landscape or the marine, the colours of his travels, such as corals from Pulau Tioman or the warmth of the sun at Pulau Langkawi, helped shape the completed artworks. Essentially, in embodying moments and characteristics that stayed with him, their titles became a namesake attributed to their influence in fine-tuning his work to the finish line.

Notably, most of the works from *Primal Scores* have embraced brighter, vibrant, and bolder colours, a change from his usual sombre and darker palette. That said, Shook's relationship with bright colours goes back to pre-1986, when he was still engaging with the form of abstract art that was highly non-representational. Eventually, after developing a more expressionistic approach in his practice, he rebelled against his artworks being labelled with commercially favoured terms such as 'beautiful', 'decorative', and 'pleasant to the eyes'. This rebellion shifted his colour preferences, bringing a raw and melancholic quality to his paintings.

Thus, reminiscent of his youth, he revisits the brighter colour palette that once dominated his canvases. "It is simply a new song, with an old tune", mused Shook. In drawing inspiration from his past, he shows us that things of old are not necessarily irrelevant but have the potential to flourish with time and maturity. While no doubt learning new tricks keeps us on our toes, revisiting old ideas can be worthwhile. After all, we are a culmination of ever-evolving versions of ourselves, and it can prove fruitful to treat old concepts and approaches as a resource that have served as a foundation of who we are today.

by Elizabeth Low

*i Etymonline.com. 2022. Primal. Etymology, origin and meaning of primal by etymonline. [online] Available at: <<https://www.etymonline.com/word/primal>> [Accessed 26 September 2022]*



## Night at Kapas

Acrylic on canvas | 130 x 127cm | 2021 | RM 22,500



## **Pepohon**

Acrylic on canvas | 130 x 124.5cm | 2019 | RM 22,500





## **Vermilion**

Acrylic on canvas | 130 x 127cm | 2018 | RM 22,500



## **Portrait in Red Landscape**

Acrylic on canvas | 130 x 127cm | 2018 | RM 22,500





## **Gerak Alam**

Acrylic on canvas | 130 x 127cm | 2018 | RM 22,500



## Swagger

Acrylic on canvas | 130 x 127cm | 2019 | RM 22,500

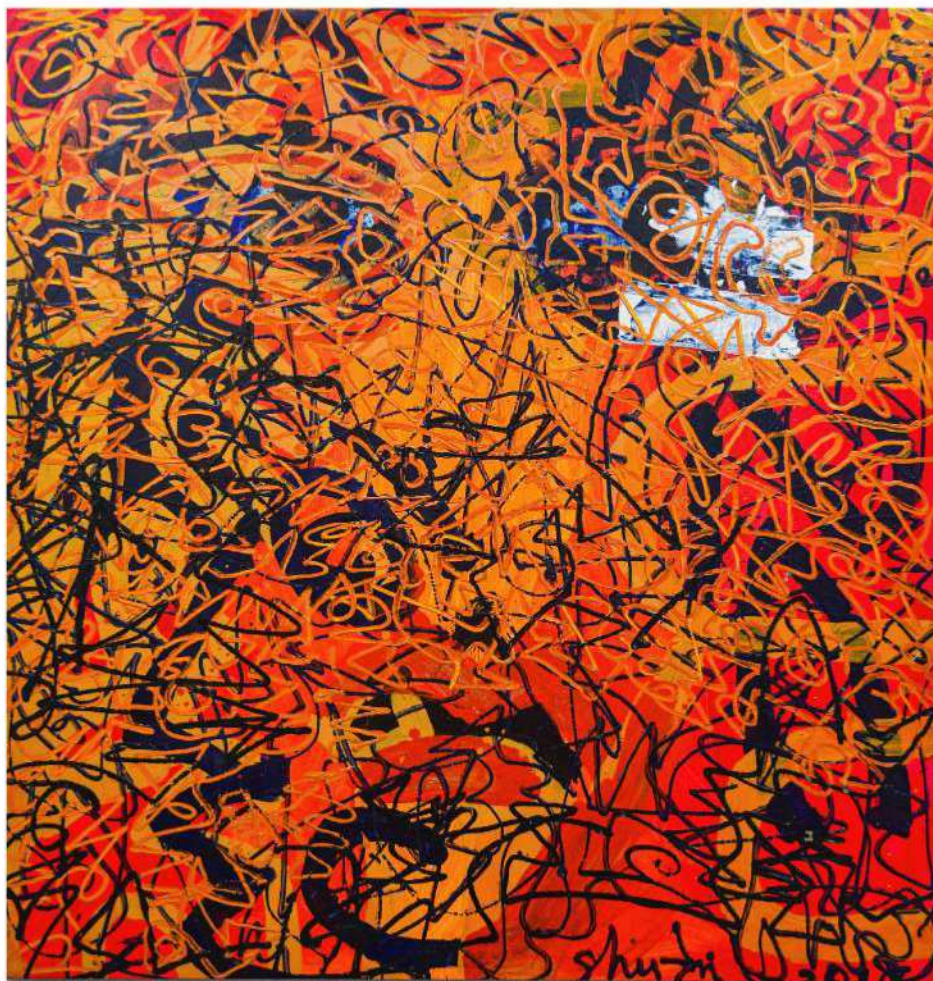




**Pasak**

Acrylic on canvas | 130 x 127cm | 2019 | RM 22,500





**Scribe**

Acrylic on canvas | 130 x 127cm | 2018 | RM 22,500



**Purnama**

Acrylic on canvas | 130 x 127cm | 2019 | RM 22,500





## Menyapa

Acrylic on canvas | 130 x 127cm | 2019 | RM 22,500





**Puncak 1**

Acrylic on canvas | 130 x 130cm | 2018 | RM 22,500



## Pangkor

Acrylic on canvas | 130 x 127cm | 2022 | RM 22,500





**Tioman**

Acrylic on canvas | 130 x 118cm | 2022 | RM 22,500





## **Puncak 2**

Acrylic on canvas | 130 x 134.5cm | 2018 | RM 22,500



## Langkawi

Acrylic on canvas | 130 x 137cm | 2022 | RM 22,500





### **Hari Jadi 2020**

Acrylic on canvas | 92 x 92cm | 2020 | RM 11,250



### **Portrait at Garden**

Acrylic on canvas | 92 x 92cm | 2019 | RM 11,250



### **The Portrait**

Acrylic on canvas | 80 x 80cm | 2020 | RM 9,800



### **The Figure**

Acrylic on canvas | 92 x 92cm | 2017 | RM 11,250





### **Tanah Merah**

Acrylic on canvas | 92 x 92cm | 2018 | RM 11,250



### **Cahaya Bulan**

Acrylic on canvas | 80 x 80cm | 2018 | RM 9,800

Special thanks to my friends and family.

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Thank you also to Mr Roy of Artas Gallery, Najib and Elizabeth for making this exhibition materialise.  
Thank you Dr Richard Chan for the lovely photo of the artist portrait.

A. Shukri Elias.

October 2022





Thank you  
Terima Kasih  
谢谢  
Nandri

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