

ALENA MURANG

Colours of the Highlands

Contents

INTRO	3
SWIRLS	5
PORTRAITS	9
ABSTRACTS	15
OTHERS	20
HOAN GALLERY	23



Alena Murang in her KL Studio.



FOREWORD

By SARAH LOIS DORAI

Kelabit filmmaker and children's book publisher

When I think of the Kelabit people, often the first images that come to mind are black and white photographs of a native person set against the backdrop of a longhouse or the jungle. This is perhaps because those were the only visual references that connected me, as a Kelabit, to my past, from which I drew identity and inspiration. But the thing about black and white is that it also gives the notion of something frozen in time, and for so long our culture has been just that: frozen in time.

This collection of artworks by Alena Murang, *Colours of the Highlands*, successfully breaks past the time barrier that surrounds indigenous imagery and allows us to look at Kelabit culture with fresh eyes. Her collection forces us to deconstruct our traditional perception of cultural preservation and reconstructs it into a world of cultural revival. Revival, unlike preservation, usually involves the introduction of something new into the mixture, which Alena has masterfully done through her playful use of colour. The images stir up a feeling that our culture is not dead and lying in a case well preserved like a mummy on display, but



rather a living and breathing thing, still evolving, still growing just like the ancient spirals, or *arit*, whose lines are always connected and continuous.

It is worth noting the use of colour is not foreign to Kelabit craftsmanship. Often you will find striking reds and a splash of blue and yellow amongst other colours in their beadwork, or painted into carvings of the *sape* and casings of *parangs*. Alena cleverly uses the mix medium of charcoal and acrylic colour in her portraiture that spotlights traditional craftsmanship that have been passed down through generations. And while our elders may

no longer be with us, their stories remain alive through these cultural artefacts that have now become popular symbols of our culture, weaved into modern day fashion as a statement of identity.

Alena's abstracts, while at first glance may seem so far off from what is considered to be typically Kelabit, with a closer look is very much evident of her years of close study of heritage through interactions with her elders and the larger community as well as her own lived experiences. Her choice of colours are nods to our people's deep connection to our land and nature. Her strokes show a sense of movement,

almost in diaspora, giving an impression of how we as a people have migrated from the highlands into cities all over the world, yet remain deeply connected to our land, culture and each other.

Her collection rightly paints the Kelabit highlands for what it truly is: a people full of colour. And in them, holds a wealth of artistic depth and a thousand memories, giving us an insight into the past while simultaneously having the present state of our cultural evolution stare right back at us, in full technicolour.



▲
Sky River, 2022

—
Acrylic on canvas
122cm x 76.2cm, 2 canvases
RM7,000



Earth Water, 2023

—
Acrylic on canvas
76.2cm x 76.2cm
RM6,000



▲
Sky Fire, 2022

—
Acrylic on canvas
91.5cm x 30.4cm
RM4,000



Ixora, 2022 ▶

—
Acrylic on canvas
61cm x 45.7cm
RM4,000



▲
Earth & Sand, 2022
—

Acrylic on canvas
Diameter: 40mm
RM2,000



▲
Ranera, 2022
—

Acrylic on canvas
Diameter: 60cm
RM3,500



▲
Abpa' (Water), 2023
—

Acrylic on canvas
Diameter: 40mm
RM2,000



◀ **A Universe of Prayers,
2022**

—
Acrylic & charcoal
from the longhouse,
on canvas
84.4cm x 59.6cm
RM6,000



The Storyteller, 2017

"The oral traditions of the Kelabit are fast fading in the face of modernity. The knowledge that exists in stories is largely expressed in songs and chants, and in no written form. Today, only a handful of Kelabit elders remember the songs. These storytellers have a strong connection to the land and to all the elements within."

The Storyteller, a self portrait facing Tepu' Sinda' Balan, is representative of the different generations. This art piece includes an audio recording of the artist receiving songs from her elders, from Tepu' Midang, Tepu' Doo' Ayu, Tepu' Ira and others.

Acrylic, chalk and charcoal on canvas + audio
228.6cm x 101.8cm
RM25,000



▲
The Storyteller II, 2022

—
Acrylic and longhouse charcoal on canvas
59.4cm x 84cm
RM5,000



◀ **Your Warm Smile, 2014**

—
Acrylic, charcoal and chalk
on card
30cm x 40cm
RM2,500



◀ **Joy, 2022**

—
Acrylic, charcoal, paper
and goldleaf on canvas
61.1cm x 91.6cm
RM5,000



When I Breathe, 2023 ▶

—
Acrylic, chalk paint and
charcoal on canvas
60cm x 84cm
RM7,000



▲
Whisper, 2022

—
Acrylic and pastel on canvas
100.2cm x 70cm
RM6,000

Pu' Ayam (Dear One), 2022

—
Acrylic, charcoal, pastel on canvas
61.1cm x 91.6cm
RM7,000





▲
Where are You Going?, 2017

—
Acrylic and collage on wood
60.5cm x 40.6cm, with frame
RM3,000



▶
Laki' Balo, 2015

—
Acrylic, charcoal and chalk on bark cloth
37.5cm x 61cm
RM3,500



▲
5AM Good Morning, 2022

—
Acrylic and pastel on paper
59.4cm x 41.9cm
RM4,000

A Dream Away, 2022 ▶

—
Acrylic and charcoal on paper
41.9cm x 59.4cm
RM3,500



◀ **Flight, 2022**

—
Acrylic, pastel and collage on paper
41.9cm x 59.4cm
RM3,500



▲
The Most Precious, 2023

—
Acrylic, charcoal and chalk on canvas
45.8cm x 61cm
RM6,000



▲
Sound of Nature, 2023

—
Acrylic and pastel on card
40.5cm x 50.8cm
RM4,000



▲
My Favourite Colour is Pink, 2023

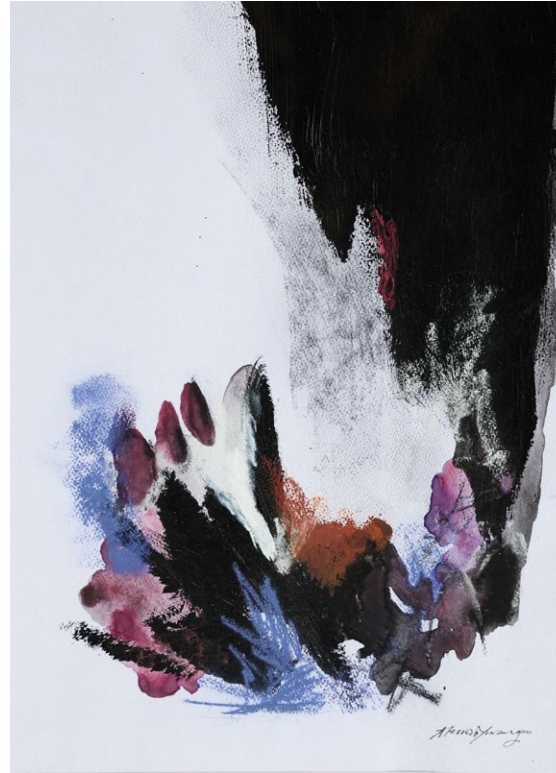
—
Acrylic, charcoal, chalk on canvas
61cm x 45.8cm
RM4,000

Abstracts



▲
Rise II, 2020

—
Acrylic, ink, goldleaf and longhouse charcoal on paper
38.6cm x 49cm
RM2,500



▲
Rise V, 2020

—
Acrylic, ink, pastel and longhouse charcoal on paper
29cm x 38.7cm
RM1,800



▲
Prayer II, 2020

—
Watercolour, acrylic, ink, longhouse charcoal on paper
22.8cm x 30.6cm
RM2,000



Cinnamon Skies, 2022 ▶

Acrylic, goldleaf, ink,
and pastel on paper
29.6cm x 42cm
RM2,500

A Fleeting Moment, 2022 ▶

Acrylic, ink, goldleaf and
longhouse charcoal
on paper
20cm x 29cm
RM1,000

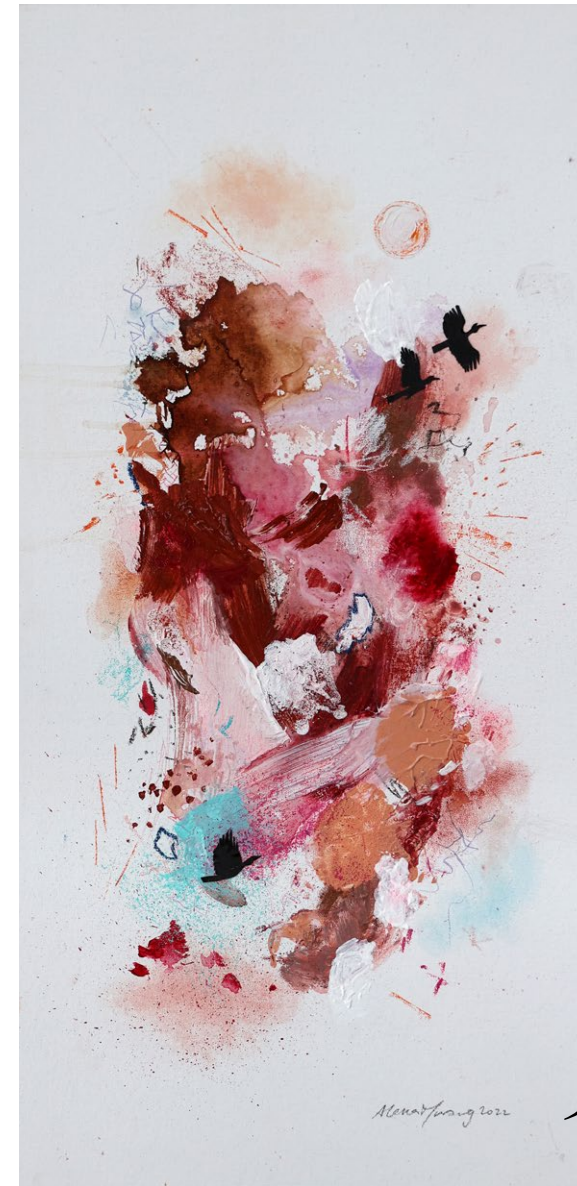
◀ **Tracing Time, 2022**

Acrylic, ink, goldleaf, card,
and longhouse charcoal
on paper
39cm x 48.8cm
RM2,000



The Joy of Flight, 2022

Acrylic, pastel and collage on canvas
30.5cm x 60.9cm
RM2,000





▲
Golden Hour, 2022

—
Acrylic, ink, goldleaf and pastel on paper
40.7cm x 50.8cm
RM2,500

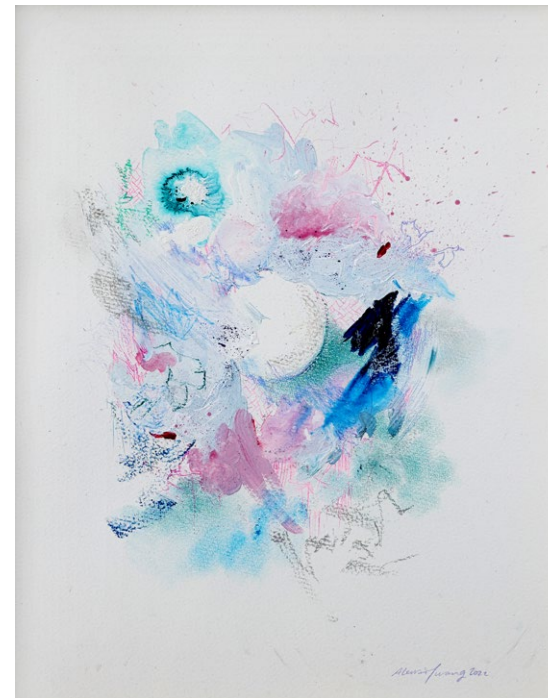


▲
A Glimpse of the Mountain, 2022

—
Acrylic, ink, goldleaf and pastel on paper
41.8cm x 59.4cm
RM2,000

Delicate, 2022 ▶

—
Acrylic, ink, pastel and
longhouse charcoal
on paper
39cm x 49cm
RM1,800



This Moment, 2022 ▶

—
Acrylic, ink, watercolour, pastel and
longhouse charcoal on paper
38.5cm x 48.8cm
RM2,000



Flying Sunlight, 2022

—
Acrylic, watercolour, pastel and
longhouse charcoal on paper
29.6cm x 42cm
RM2,500



◀ **Bulan, 2020**

—
Acrylic, watercolour
pastel and longhouse
charcoal on paper
29.6cm x 42cm
RM2,500



◀ **Cloudy Night, 2020**

—
Acrylic, watercolour, ink, pastel
and longhouse charcoal on paper
29.6cm x 42cm
RM2,500



▲ **Feathered Mountains, 2020**

—
Acrylic, watercolour, ink, pastel and
longhouse charcoal on paper
31cm x 42cm
RM1,800



▲
Cycles of the Moon, 2020

—
Acrylic, watercolour, ink, coloured pencil and charcoal on paper
22.7cm x 30.5cm
RM1,000



◀ **Fire, 2016**

—
Acrylic, charcoal and chalk on canvas
45.8cm x 61cm
RM2,500

Satu Ratus, 2014

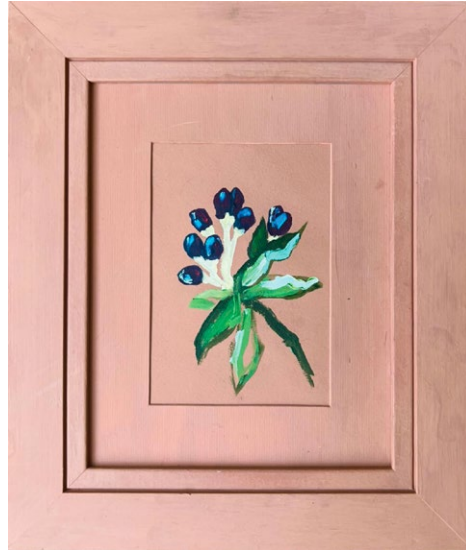
—
Mixed media on paper
19cm x 11cm
RM1,000





▲
Bua' Telal, 2023

—
Chalk paint and acrylic on paper
20cm x 20cm, *with frame*
RM1,000

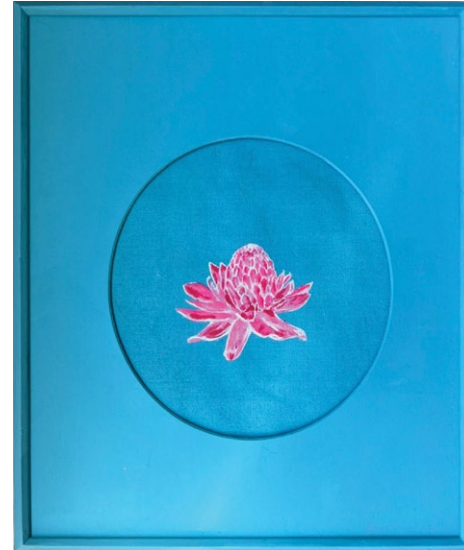


▲
Dabai, 2023

—
Chalk paint and acrylic on paper
29.5cm x 35cm, *with frame*
RM1,000

Bunga Kantan, 2023

—
Chalk paint and acrylic on canvas
38cm x 45.5cm, *with frame*
RM1,000



Pepper, 2013

—
Chalk paint and acrylic on paper
24.5cm x 30cm, *with frame*
RM1,000



Cousins, 2022

—
Acrylic, pastel and goldleaf on canvas
30cm x 30cm
RM1,500



▲
Terung Dayak, 2023

—
Acrylic on paper
27cm x 31,5cm, with frame
RM1,000



▲
Red Belimbing, 2023

—
Acrylic and watercolour on paper
20.5cm x 25.5cm
RM1,000



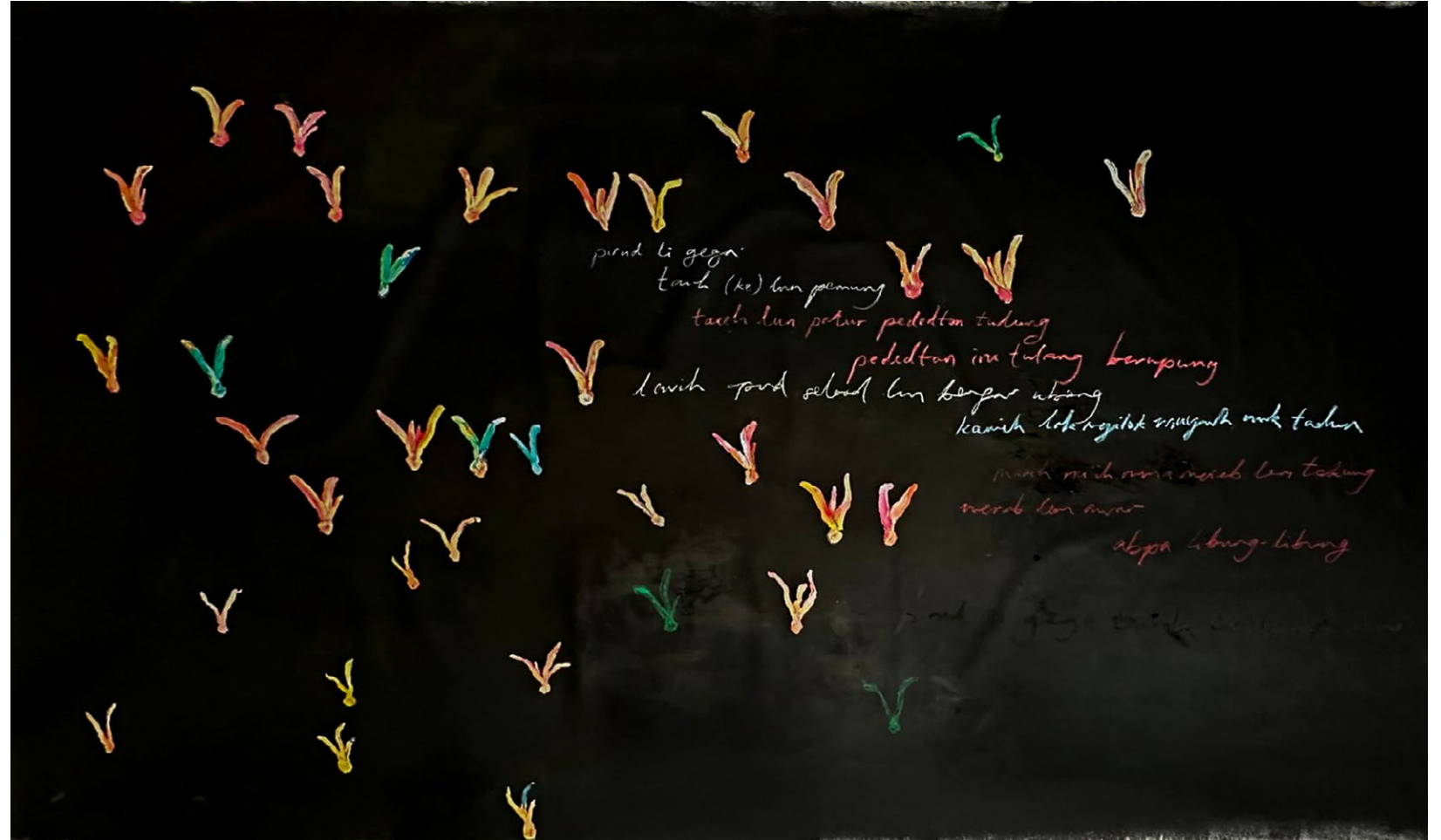
▲
**Pentatonic Major
Scale I, 2023**

—
Acrylic on canvas
20.5cm x 61cm
RM2,000



▲
**Pentatonic Major
Scale II, 2023**

—
Acrylic on canvas
30cm x 60cm
RM2,000



Sedarir, 2023

—
Acrylic, pastel and longhouse charcoal on canvas
220cm x 134cm
RM12,000



—
Hoan Gallery, by Kee Huang, is a passion project of patience and paint.

Discover the works of Sarawakian artists, past and present, in our opening exhibition. Visitors will see people and places, from unique perspectives, depicted in oil, acrylic paint, watercolour, Chinese ink and nearly lost traditional Batik techniques.

This gallery aspires to promote past masters and reveal future potential.

HOAN
GALLERY

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