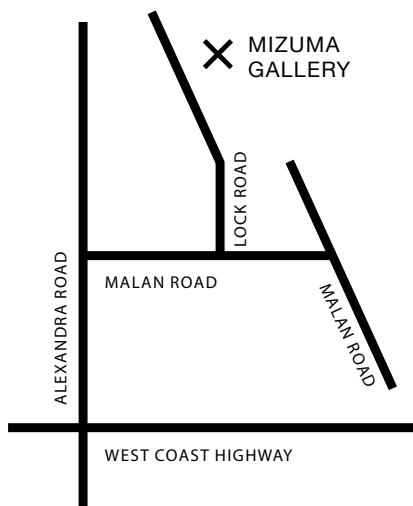


16 JANUARY -  
15 FEBRUARY 2015  
TUESDAY - SATURDAY  
FROM 11A.M. UNTIL 7P.M.  
& ON SUNDAY FROM  
11A.M. UNTIL 6P.M.



22 LOCK ROAD  
#01-34  
GILLMAN BARRACKS  
SINGAPORE 108939

T. +65 6570 2505  
F. +65 6570 2506

WWW.MIZUMA.SG  
INFO@MIZUMA.SG  
FACEBOOK.COM/MIZUMAGALLERY

## GILLMAN BARRACKS

Mizuma Gallery is a part of Gillman Barracks. Gillman Barracks (GB) is Asia's up-and-coming destination for contemporary art. It is distinguished as a vibrant centre in Asia for the creation, exhibition and discussion of contemporary art. Named after the late british General Sir Webb Gillman, GB is now home to 16 local and international art galleries, dining and creative businesses, as well as the Centre of Contemporary Art. For more information visit [www.gillmanbarracks.com](http://www.gillmanbarracks.com)

## A Study on Abstraction

A broad approach to abstraction in Asia, Indonesian art and the surroundings

16 January - 15 February 2015

*"For me, the province of art and the province of nature thus became more and more widely separated, until I was able to experience both as completely independent realms. This occurred to the full extent only this year." —Vasily Kandinsky, in 1913*

Vasily Kandinsky's statement upon his invention of abstract, shows that the emergence of abstraction as a solution to a spiritual crisis; that the conception of this momentous artistic innovation entailed a categorical rejection of the materialism of modern life; and that abstraction was envision to play a role in redefining our relationship to the universe.

Yet in western culture, in modern era, it is odd to mention art and spirit in the same sentence as proclaimed by Professor Rosalind Krauss (an art critic, art theorist and professor in Columbia University, New York) in 1980.

*"Indescribably embarrassing to mention art and spirit in the same sentence." Yet the artists who first created abstract painting—Vasily Kandinsky and Piet Mondrian pre-eminently among them did not share that embarrassment. They really did conceive of their artistic endeavors as serving a spiritual mission, and if, some eighty-plus years after the birth of abstraction, we still take an interest in the art of its progenitors, we are obliged, I believe, to examine the ideas that shaped it, however odd or alien those ideas may look to us today.*

In Asia, where spirituality and spiritual practice are still alive as an important part in the daily life of its society, talking about art and spirit in a same sentence is not some thing odd or embarrassing at all. For many artists in Asia, spirituality is becoming their main inspiration and force behind their art creations. Often art are becoming the reflection of its creator spiritual philosophy and belief. As we could see in Lee Ufan's 'From Point' and 'From Line' showed in this exhibition. Regarding to this series of paintings, Lee Ufan once mention:

*"All things in the universe start from a point and return to a point. Existence is a point and life is a line, so I am also a point and a line."*

Many artists along the history of abstraction, including Vasily Kandinsky and Piet Mondrian, based their artistic leap into abstraction from landscape painting. In my opinion, landscape is becoming a visual evidence of the great creation of God that it triggered a deeper awareness about our existence in the universe and our relation with our creator.

Works of H. Widayat, Made Wianta, Nasirun, M. Irfan, Yunizar and Yusra Martunus shown in this exhibition were also based on landscape painting, although their respective approaches to landscape were very different. Made Wianta, Yunizar and Yusra Martunus were that of ascetic, determined to strip nature of its mutable attributes. On the other hand, Widayat, Nasirun, Irfan and Yunizar were that of a mystical lyricist for whom nature is an enchanted realm of poetry and symbolism. One thing is common from both approaches, their leap into abstraction was guided by their spiritual vision that liberated their artistic expression from mundane observable world.

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Egyptian multidisciplinary visual artist and art curator Mohamed Abouelnaga build his visual narration about the existence of the present life of the Egyptian people; including his own life, through symbols and philosophy contained in the history, tradition and religion. For him every visual is a symbol, even the medium he used contained meanings. Quite similar to Nasirun, Mohamed Abouelnaga is a philosopher and a storyteller of his own culture.

Jane Lee's works remind me of works from many artists from 'Group Zero' such as Gunter Uker, Lucio Fontana, Yves Klein, etc who were more focused on the exploration of the new meaning of materials they used in their artworks. Jane Lee uses the most conventional art materials such as canvas, stretcher and paint, but what she created are so far from conventional. She reinvent the function and meaning of the materials she used. Paints are no longer meant to color, stretchers are no longer functioned to hold and stretch the canvas and canvases are no longer stretched, they are all becoming the artwork it self.

Awang Damit Ahmad creation seems having strong drive of expressionism but actually the collection of his works doesn't limit to that. From a longer span point of view of his creation we are forced to realize Awang's strong determination apparent in the systematic evolution of his paintings over the years. The image we have is of a refined academician translating his life landscapes into paintings as in a never ending retrospective of his own life. Depending of the momentum of life each of the paintings are focusing, it can range from powerful and dramatic to sorrowful and lyric, but always structured by the consistency of his mental strength. The abstraction was chosen by Awang as the best language to mingle his emotional and visual memories altogether.

Hermanto  
Soerjanto,  
Curator

**H. Widayat (1923-2002)**

Based on the oldest abstract painting of Widayat that we could found in OHD museum collection, 'Face Abstraction', Widayat begin his experiment on abstract as early as 1959. Although Widayat is better known for his figurative and landscape paintings, he made abstract paintings steadily from time to time. The latest Abstract paintings of Widayat that I could recall is the series of 'Decora-Magis Abstraction', featured in his last solo show in H Widayat Museum in 2001. Most of Widayat's art works are centered on the idea of human interconnection and the human relationship with nature (flora & fauna), such as family life, village life, Adam and eve, forest, etc. Another aspect that is unique to Widayat's art works is the influence of Javanese decorative ornaments in his visual exploration. In many of his works, we see no sense of perspective and volume. Objects are composed within one dimension that makes them feels like an ornament. His abstract works are adopting the same subject matter and visual exploration as we can see in two of his abstract works in this exhibition, 'Fish Abstraction' and 'The night Threes'.



H. Widayat | **Fish Abstraction**,  
1967, Oil and collage on canvas,  
128 x 150 cm





H. Widayat | **Night Tree**, 1983, Oil on canvas, 88 x 145 cm



Nasirun | **Abstraction of Nature's Aura**, 2014, Mixed media on canvas, 300 x 500 cm

**Nasirun** (Born in 1965)

Better known by the international art connoisseur for his wayang and Javanese mythology inspired works, Nasirun has also developed his own style of abstract painting. His works employ symbols and narrations originating from a 'traditional world'. Nevertheless, Nasirun is not discussing tradition. In fact, many of Nasirun's works talks about religiosity based on philosophical thoughts that is found in traditional Javanese culture and colored by mysticism. They are about his search for a mystical connection with God. This amalgamation of religion and other sensory elements as well as his various daily experiences in facing reality, compels his religiosity to often highlight morality, virtue and a sense of humanity.

Nasirun's abstract works are also based on the same principle and philosophy. 'The Aura of Nature' featured in this exhibition was inspired by his experience while visiting Koyasan Temple (the main temple of Esoteric Buddhism) in Japan. The dry garden he saw in the temple has left him a very deep impression about a harmonious relationship between man and nature that he could find a profound peacefulness.



M. Irfan | **The Origin**, 1999, Acrylic paint on canvas, 130 x 120 cm

**M. Irfan** (Born in 1972)

Used to be a member of Jendela group, M Irfan began his artistic career with abstract as his main genre of art. In his early works, M Irfan puts himself as a 'visual poet' who tells stories about life. As we can see in one of his early work featured in this exhibition, 'Cikal Bakal' (The origin), Irfan made an abstraction of a figure with the use of different shades of white colour. On the right chest we can see a black square and inside it there are broken lines resembling rain. Below that black square we see a naïve drawing of a vessel. This work tells a story about the origin of his creative expression that came from his own journey of traveling the ocean of his own feeling where weather is unpredictable

**Made Wianta** (Born in 1949)

Made Wianta is indisputably one of the most important figure in the birth of Balinese contemporary art and one of the prominent artists in Indonesian abstract art scene.

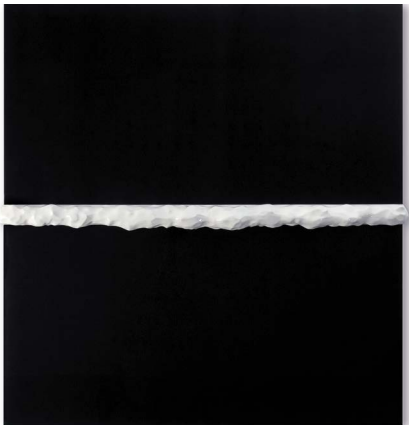
'Spatial Caligraphy #8', Made Wianta's work showed in this exhibition is part of his study on the exchange of Pulo Run (in Indonesia) and Manhattan Island (in USA) between the Dutch Colonial Government and British Colonial government in 1667. In this art work, Made Wianta used nails, wire, and oil paint on plywood to mimic the profound impression the carpet of coral reefs beneath the pristine seawaters of Pulo Run had made upon him. The nails' head and the wires create a sense of transparency and texture of water ripple, while the calligraphic like scribble on the surface of the plywood together with the metallic color on some of the nails bring imageries of the coral reef.

Made Wianta | **Spatial Caligraphy #8**, 2011, Nails, wire, acrylic paint on board, 245 x 480 cm (4 panels)



**Yusra Martunus** (Born in 1973)

Yusra Martunus is a member of Jendela Group; an important artist group that set as a milestone in the development in Indonesian contemporary art, consists of Rudi Mantofani, Yusra Martunus, Yunizar, Jumaldi Alfi, and Handi Wirman. His works meant to be the catalyst that instigate a deeper thought about our relationship with nature and at the same time create a more meaningful conversation between the artist with the audience. His work entitled '07117T' featured in this exhibition shows a line of white rough surface and rough stone liked surface flanked by two smooth black-colored surface that signify the manmade substance. The elements provoke a more profound awareness about the relationship between man and nature. Yusra often titled his works with numeric and alphabetical code that will intrigue his audiences to question about the meaning, but at the same time, liberate the audiences to imagine their own meaning of the art works. '07113A' a mountain like shape connected to a rectangular box, is a sculpture that intrigues our consciousness about the relationship between us and nature.



Yusra Martunus | **07117T**, 2007, Cast aluminium, aluminium sheet and polyurethane paint, 201 x 207 cm

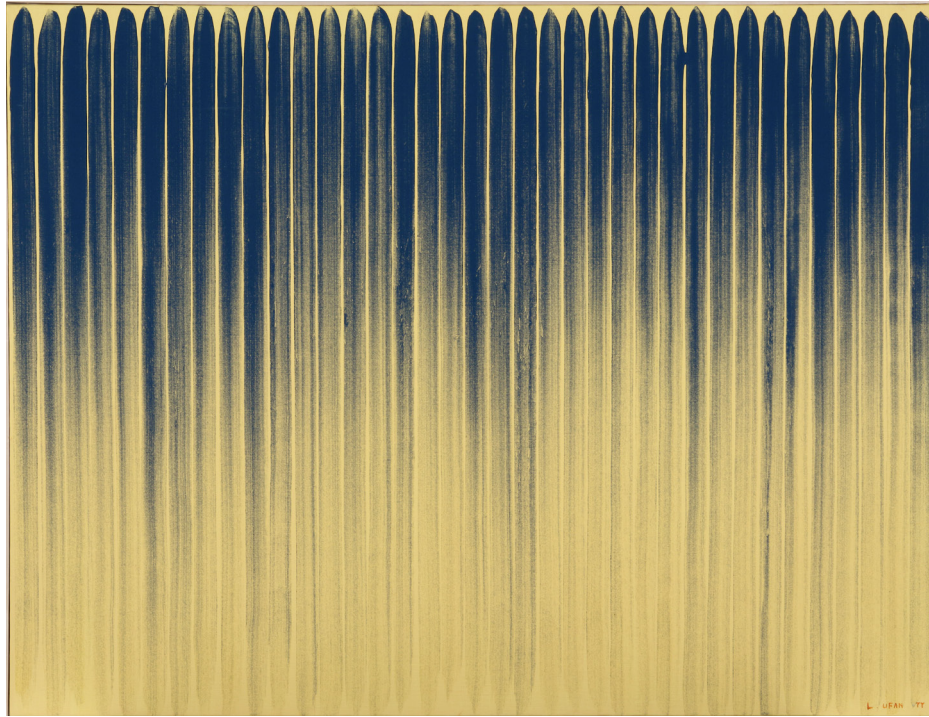


Yunizar | **Black Cloud**, 1999, Acrylic paint on canvas, 90 x 110 cm

**Yunizar** (Born in 1971)

Amongst the member of Jendela Group, I think Yunizar is probably the least conceptual but the most poetic person. Every day he wakes up very early in the morning and at about 4 a.m. after the Morning Prayer he starts to make painting until it's time to send his children to school. That short period of time is the only time he do his painting, then he will just wonder around for the rest of the day. He rarely changes the water he uses to wash his brush and mix his paints. He also rarely has any clear planning before he paints. The painting process often just go with the flow, depending on his mood. There are no right or wrong in his paintings but they all contain strong emotion. In my opinion he is the true mystical lyricist for whom nature is an enchanted realm of poetry.





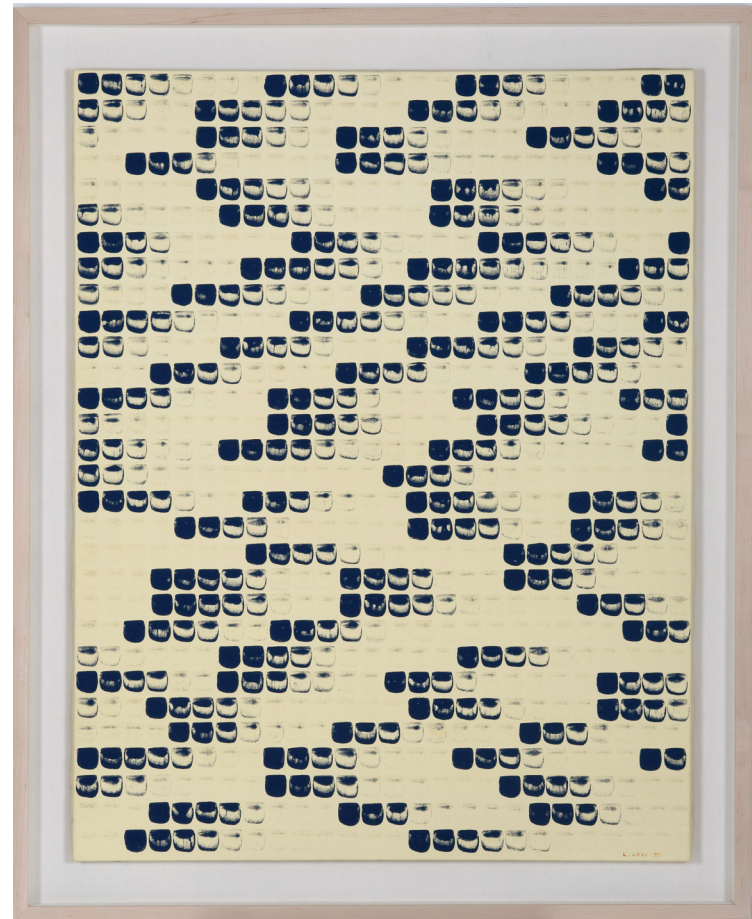
**From Line**  
1977  
Mineral pigment and glue on canvas  
112.1 x 145.5 cm

## Lee Ufan (Born in 1936)

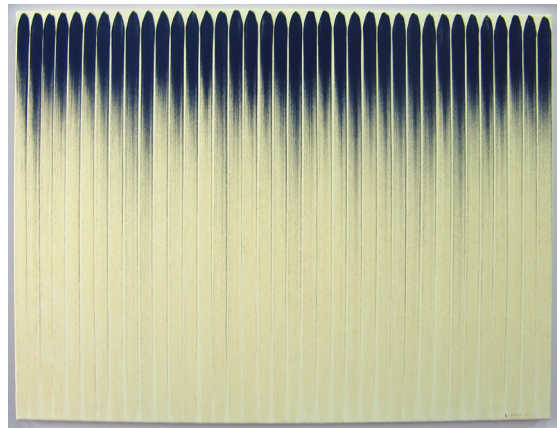
Lee Ufan is one of the member of Monoha or the school of things and also one of the prominent figures in Dansaekhwa, The Korean Monochrome movement.

In his early painting series, 'From Point' and 'From Line' (1972–84), Lee combines ground mineral pigment with animal-skin glue, characteristic of Nihonga painting in which he was trained. Each brushstroke is applied slowly and is composed of several layers. Where the brush first makes contact with the canvas, the paint is thick, forming a 'ridge' that gradually becomes lighter. The artist refers to this as yohaku or the art of emptiness. In the 'From Point' works he adopted a similar method in order to produce a fading series of small, discrete, rectangular brushstrokes. In this series of paintings, Lee once quote:

*"All things in the universe start from a point and return to a point. Existence is a point and life is a line, so I am also a point and a line."*



**From Point**  
1978  
Mineral pigment and glue on canvas  
117 x 91 cm



**From Line**  
1979  
Mineral pigment and glue on canvas  
90.9 x 116.7 cm

## Awang Damit Ahmad (born in 1956)

Awang's first encounter with art was when he was 20 years old, working as a technician at Telekom Malaysia. He was in a training in Malacca when he saw a lot of artists painting near St Paul's Hill. It was then, he decided to make a leap as an artist and make his commitment to make art for the rest of his life. He graduated as top student in fine arts in 1983 and pursue his masters degree at Washington DC.

During his study in the U.S.A he joined art collectives the Arlington Art Group and The Capitol Hill where he was exposed to various aspects of art. Abstract expressionist Professor Tom Nakashima recognized Awang's talent and push him to the next level of abstract style. The new style won him The Best Painter Award at the third Salon Malaysia in 1991/1992 - one of the most prestigious art award in Malaysia.

Awang's style is abstract but if one pays close attention, he can still distinguished the shape of figurative elements such as dayak shield, fishes, leaves and farmers that the artist grew up with in his hometown, Sabah. In his works, he talks about culture, humanity, social, even political issues that is happening in his home country. The artist's abstract artwork is dynamic, precise and conceptual, making it self-sufficient.

He believes that before one starts to paint, he must know the subject he wants to paint. Therefore the artist take years to finish his paintings in a few series, like "Dari Iraga ke Payarama" (series from 2003 - 2014) and "Alun Alun Ke Marista" (series from 1996 - 2002). Perhaps that is why he is known as artist with distinct view of Sabah's culture and nature.



**Payarama "Angkul"**  
2013  
Mixed media on canvas  
168 x 168 cm



**The Memory of Trees**  
2014  
Handmade Japanese kozo paper  
183 x 66 cm

## Mohamed Abouelnaga (born in 1960 )

Mohamed Abouelnaga is a multidisciplinary visual artist, art professor, curator, philosopher and developer. Born in Tanta city, Egypt, Abouelnaga studied paper-making both in Egypt and Japan and received his PhD in art philosophy in 1997. The artist combines the tactile qualities of his handmade paper with color from natural oxides to create award winning paintings and installations. Abouelnaga represented Egypt in the Venice Biennale 2002 and received the First Prize of the Alexandria Biennale in 2001. He founded El Nafeza for Contemporary Art & Development where he revives traditional paper making and employs the unemployed, women and the disabled in rural villages to make paper from agricultural wave. In "The Memory of Trees", he uses trees as analogy of existentialism.

*"Olive trees in our countries have a special standing from a religious and spiritual side in addition to their commercial dimension. Some olive trees or forests are hundred of years old and therefore, silent witnesses to our history and our agonies...In war, the trees are destroyed and in peace they blossom and multiply. I stand, contemplative, in front of these trees and try to listen to their stories about our land and our history, our silent and hidden history"*

- Mohamed Abouelnaga