

Jalaini Abu Hassan: Bangsawan Kebangsaan

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By Valerie Gladstone

Among Malaysia's most highly respected contemporary artists, Jalaini Abu Hassan exhibits a new body of mixed media works on canvas and paper, which relate to a form of Malay popular opera, "Bangsawan" and the national operetta, Kebangsaan, as well as other aspects of Malay life and culture. As a child, he saw these performances, which were based on colorful, often satiric stories and stock characters, such as princes, shamans and beautiful maidens.

But you don't need to know the operatic stories or contemporary Malay life to become fascinated by his beautifully wrought, often surrealistic depictions of people, village scenes and landscapes. In the powerfully dramatic "The Great Post-Colonial Landscape," a naked woman walks through a dark, yellow-brown forest of wind-bent trees, vulnerable and alone, symbolic of the desolation following the departure of foreign occupiers.

"The Domesticated King of Prejudis" is also filled with dire premonitions, showing an almost naked man astride a horse, both of them green, while a large ape, red mouth agape, looms behind them. Futilely, the man holds an orange umbrella on high for protection. Even more complex is "Srikandi." In the painting's center, a woman poses in a stylized position, a bowl of food in front of her, while a plane soars overhead, casting a shadow on the desert-like landscape. A robed and masked man looks on. Mysterious, haunting and a bewitching combination of folklore and timely references, these works make you want to see and know more of his intriguing, imaginative world.



Jalaini Abu Hassan

Through June 11, [Tyler Rollins Fine Art](#), 529 W. 20th St., 212-229-9100.