



Ulu Kenas
Oil on Canvas
Artwork by **Syed Mohd. Bakar**

Artwork by Syed Mohd. Bakar

After a period of general activity, I turn to experimentation. I have already had a long, busy experience of painting behind me, so it is inevitable that I am no longer take influences from art which is the typical postmodern thing to do. I am deeply involved in irreality, that is the way I have always worked. First of all I am interested in people. I just love to look at faces, expressions, gestures, clothes and every facet of a human, either in action or in repose. I am interested in many things; mathematics and physics, all that stuff. So-called high art was never very important to me.

I love marginal art, puppets and marionettes, toys and installations. I have a huge collection of old puppets. Some I have given away. At some point I would like to write a book or catalogue on makers of puppets in this region from the beginning of their history. Puppets are made by people who are also artists but they are not supposed to be artists. I put my dreams into these puppets through their funny expressions. They are very naïve but also beautiful. I like their size, they are just like statues of people. Of course I love and respect Rodin, Michaelangelo and new sculpture, Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth and that sort of thing, but for me they are closed. I can't touch them. The chances for dreams, new ideas, or new feelings are in these puppets which are on the edge and at the borders of art.

I can still recall strong and uncanny aesthetic experiences I had as a performer of glove puppets with an audience of the happiest children I have ever had the pleasure of meeting. The uncanny seems to be related to déjà vu and it also involves a somewhat muted sense of anxiety. All these feelings are provoked by a hand-made object that has a life of its own, a life that is somehow dependent on you and is intimately connected in some secret manner to your life.

This performance art, by the way is a very useful teaching aid. I cannot imagine a class of young children devoid of fun, laughter and enjoyment. It is totally, totally subversive to their development and process of learning. I have several years of experience making puppets and am happy to teach anyone interested in this craft. There is great cultural depth and intensity to these puppets – highlighting stories from Malaysia myth, history and literature.

Syed Mohd. Bakar

Artist in Residence

School of Arts, Universiti Sains Malaysia



Puppet