HERALD

by Henry Butcher Malaysia

OCTOBER 2016

THE PERANAKAN EDITION

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Of Phoenixes & Peonies - *A Peranakan Primer*

Rising Factors of Kedah

KDN PP18893/11/2015(034373)

Lim (center), with YB Datuk Johari Abdul Ghani, Minister of Finance II (left); and Erick Y.T. Kho, President, MIEA (right).

HENRY BUTCHER DIRECTOR CONFERRED LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

Lim giving his acceptance speech.

During the recent MIEA (Malaysian Institute of Estate Agents) Gala Dinner 2016, Mr Lim Eng Chong, director and founding partner of Henry Butcher Malaysia Sdn Bhd, was awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award for his contribution to the growth of the local real estate industry. Mr Lim co-founded Henry Butcher Malaysia Group in 1987, and has since grown to a network of 24 offices and over 400 personnel.

In his acceptance speech, Mr Lim advised those in the industry to stay the course. "Real estate agency is one of the toughest professions I have come across... I can tell you, it's not easy. To succeed, you must not only work hard, you must also persevere. This is the business of people - you must be sincere, honest, and loyal to your customer."

In his speech, he also encouraged all to be on the cutting edge - to adapt to current trends and changes. "In this day and age, you must embrace change. Keep up, or even stay ahead of the industry, its trends and practices... Be the Uber or Tesla of the real estate industry."

The Awards, into its 8th year, also commemorated 20 top real estate agencies, agents and negotiators. It is the leading Association that represents the estate agency profession in Malaysia.

Henry Butcher Malaysia is proud to have received the Lifetime Achievement Award through Mr Lim Eng Chong.

Lim with various Henry Butcher Malaysia staff.

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Publisher
Henry Butcher Malaysia Sdn Bhd
25, Jalan Yap Ah Shak,
Off Jalan Dang Wangi,
50300 Kuala Lumpur.
T• (03) 2694 2212
E• admin@henrybutcher.com.my
W• www.henrybutcher.com.my

OUR SERVICES

Valuation
Tel :603-26942212 **Fax:** 603-26943484
Email: hbmalaysia@henrybutcher.com.my

Project Marketing
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Real Estate Agency
Tel: 603-26942212 **Fax:** 603-26941261
Email: hbre@henrybutcher.com.my

Market Research & Development Consultancy
Tel: 603-42702072 **Fax:** 603-42702082
Email: hbampang@henrybutcher.com.my

Retail Consultancy
Tel: 603-91305550 **Fax:** 603-91304003
Email: tanhaihsin@yahoo.com

Facilities & Asset Management
Tel: 603-62053330 **Fax:** 603-62062543
Email: admin.assetmgmt@henrybutcher.com.my

Plant & Machinery Consultancy
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Email: hbmalaysia@henrybutcher.com.my

Auctions & Tender Sales
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Email: hbaamalaysia@gmail.com

Art Consultancy
Tel: 603-26913089 **Fax:** 603-26021523
Email: info@hbart.com.my

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PAST EDITIONS

2016

Printed by
Percetakan CL Wong Sdn Bhd
AS-84, Jalan Hang Tuah 4,
Taman Salak Selatan,
57100 Cheras, Kuala Lumpur.

Editor's Note

HBAA Embarks On a New Phase of Its Journey

Henry Butcher Asset Auctioneers was set up in 2006 and began life organising auction fairs to help banks clear off their stock of foreclosed properties and recover loans extended to borrowers who have defaulted on their repayments. Ten years on, we decided that it is perhaps time to take the company on a different direction and embark on a wider mission of not just auctioning properties but to include other forms of chattels. Auctioning of paintings and sculptures are already in our portfolio but parked under our sister company, HB Art Auctioneers. With the immense interest shown for Peranakan porcelain ware which was included for the first time during our art auction held on 21st September 2014, we thought why not we take on the delightful task of organising a Peranakan-centric auction to complement the efforts of our colleagues at HB Art Auctioneers.

So here we are, well on our way to organising what we hope will be a regular event on our auction calendar, the very first Peranakan focused auction entitled "Treasures of the Peranakan World / Straits Chinese". The auction will be held by us at Balai Berita Bangsar on the grounds of the New Straits Times Press office on the same day as and preceding our art auction. This is indeed a first for us; the first Peranakan themed auction and the first time we are using Balai Berita as an auction venue.

To assist us on our Peranakan journey, we brought on board as our advisor and curator, Mr Henry Bong a Peranakan himself from Sarawak, who is a highly respected authority on Peranakan culture and art. With his expert guidance, we met up with scores of consignors and went through hundreds of items before finally confirming 91 lots comprising more than six hundred carefully curated Peranakan artefacts which we feel are representative of the complex and colourful culture of the Peranakans. Although Nyonya porcelain ware is the most distinctive symbol of Peranakan culture, we felt that to do justice to this unique culture, we should also include other items which permeated Peranakan life since its early days. We painstakingly sourced for jewellery, furniture, fabrics, embroidery, beadwork, brassware, silverware, glassware and so on to put together a small yet comprehensive auction. We also received helpful advice from Mr CN Liew, a well-known Malaysian artist based in Hong Kong and who is also a collector of Peranakan artefacts as well as a Peranakan acquaintance from Singapore who wish to remain anonymous.

We went on a trip to Singapore to visit the Peranakan Museum besides partaking in the delightful Peranakan cuisine in the True Blue Restaurant just a few doors away to imbibe in the rarified air of Peranakan culture to prepare ourselves for the challenging journey ahead. We would also like to express our deepest appreciation to Anna Yussof who is the sweet and petite lady in charge of this Peranakan auction who went round tirelessly to meet potential consignors all around the country and who even sacrificed a family holiday to India just to see through the job and keep within the very tight deadlines. In fact, when we first started on the journey four months ago, Henry has already warned us that it was too short a time to organise an auction of such complexity and when we really hit some rough patches along the way, we wondered whether we should have taken his advice.

Nevertheless, the dark clouds are clearing. We have gone through a rigorous process of inspecting the items proposed to us and rejected those where we had doubts on their ownership and authenticity as well as those where we felt that the reserve prices set by the consignors were a little unrealistic. We also had to turn down certain items eg. large and heavy pieces of furniture as we were unsure of the level of demand for them in our inaugural auction but will certainly include them in our future auctions if we find that there is strong interest in these items. The full works of producing the auction including production of the catalogue, publicity materials, venue set-up and another thousand and one mundane but necessary tasks of organising the auction are well under way.

We are hopeful that the auction will be well received and our mission of building up an awareness of Peranakan culture and encouraging the collecting of Peranakan artefacts will have taken its first baby steps. We are already dreaming big and thinking of putting up an even bigger show next year if this inaugural auction is successful and to expand our range of items to be auctioned.

We hope to see you at our auction on 6th November.

Tang Chee Meng

Chief Operating Officer,
Henry Butcher Malaysia

PERANAKAN AND CHINESE WOODCARVING

Extract from 'Peranakan and Chinese Woodcarving' by Henry Bong, published in *Crafts and the Visual Arts*, Volume 14 of *The Encyclopedia of Malaysia*. Reproduced with permission of Editions Didier Millet.

From the intermarriage between early Chinese merchants and traders and local women, evolved a unique people, the Peranakan. Female elements such as the phoenix and peonies were the symbols of choice in their decorative arts and culture, largely due to assimilation of the local Malay concept of matrilocal control. Colonial and European influences are also evident in their woodcraft. In comparison, later 19th-century Chinese migrants favoured more purely Sinic forms and motifs.

Late 19th century Peranakan home interior displaying typical woodwork. This image was developed from an original glass plate negative (Henry Bong Permanent Collection).

Chinese migrants of the mid-19th century preferred the traditional culture and customs, costumes and hairstyles of China as reflected in this 1880s picture of well-to-do men.

Chinese craftsman in Penang carving a camphor teak wood chest in bas-relief, intricate handcarved chests, altar cabinets, altar tablets and furniture are usually produced on a commission basis.

A drawer being handcarved at Malacca Woodwork, a family-run business in Melaka, specialising in the reproduction of antique and classic Chinese furniture from local hardwoods. Traditional woodworking techniques are still used.

Trade links, Chinese settlement and evolution of the Peranakan

Excavations of maritime trade ceramics indicate that the Chinese were trading with the present-day Malay region and the Malay Archipelago as early as the 10th century CE. This is evidenced by the southern Song ceramics found in the Sarawak River delta, Limbang and the Kinabatangan area of Sabah, in the Bornean states of Malaysia as well as on Tioman Island and the waters off Pahang and Johor and in the Bujang Valley Archaeological Park in Kedah, in Peninsular Malaysia.

The earliest settlement of the Chinese in the Peninsular would have been in Melaka, where the tombs on Bukit Cina can be traced back as far as the Ming Dynasty period (1368-1644 CE). These early merchants and traders intermarried with the locals including the Malays to evolve into the Peranakan group, also known as Baba (men) and Nonya (women) or the Straits Chinese. The Peranakan are essentially a long settled Chinese-based group with strong links to the Malay World and distinct from mainland Chinese in their locally integrated approach to language (they used Nonya patois, a Malay-based dialect, and many did not know how to speak, read or write Chinese), food (a fusion of Malay and southern Chinese flavours) and culture and dressing (sarong and kebaya for the ladies – see 'Straits Chinese embroidery and beadwork' and 'Chinese and Indian dress'). Another distinction is epitomised by the fact that while the early Peranakan remained Chinese in their worship and their distribution of property only to male offspring, their social structure was matrilocal, a practice most likely adapted from the Minangkabau Malays of the neighbouring Negeri Sembilan area. Their unique eclecticism and fusion resulted in the exotic and adventurous expressions of the Baba and Nonya as a well assimilated sub-group of overseas Chinese in both the Nanyang and Malay worlds.

In the 19th century CE, the British colonial practice of importing migrant 'coolie' labour for the tin mines and the rubber estates resulted in another wave of Chinese-sinkeh as they were known (meaning 'new guests' in the Hokkien dialect) or Cina Gek, as they were patronisingly referred to by the long settled and established Peranakan. Some of these later migrant arrivals established themselves to become towkays (bosses) in the tin mining, textile and herbal trades.

Woodcarving traditions in Malaysia

The wealthy Peranakan families of the Straits Settlements of the 19th century provide the best examples of existing Peranakan style in the woodworking tradition of this nation. The assimilation of Malay and British colonial elements in their carvings resulted in a distinct robust and hybridised vernacular style based on, and yet different from, the mainland Chinese style. On the other hand, another group of patrons, the Chinese towkays emerging from the tin mining and trading enterprises of the later Chinese migrants had a more purist Chinese approach to woodwork commissioned by them.

Auspicious guardian lion or fu dog, carved from cengal wood and gilded, of the type that would have graced the entrance (usually on a pillar) of an early 19th-century Chinese Straits Settlement building.

Serving both of these groups, as well as the wealthy Malays and colonial masters, were a group of skilled tukang Shanghai – generations of highly skilled immigrant Shanghainese cabinet makers and carvers, Malaysian descendants of whom still run thriving traditional Chinese furniture enterprises in Melaka today. As a result, while the carvers were Malaysian of Shanghainese descent, their two main categories of patrons would have exacted two distinct styles of execution in the resultant woodcraft.

Melaka lintel made from cengal wood with a traditional Malay style awan larat inspired foliage and a central flower (bunga).

Types of crafted wood and styles

With the exception of China-imported blackwood and namwood Chinese and made-to-Peranakan taste furniture, local woodcraft traditions produced all the necessities for local use in architecture and artefacts for both secular and religious use. Items produced ranged from lintels, windows and their surmounts, doors, gables, ventilations vents, balusters and stairways to lanterns, lamps, furniture and palanquins. Their applications included domestic secular use in various parts of the late 19th-to-mid-20th-century shophouses, clanhouses and Kongsi, wealthy Malay and Indian residences and Malay royal palaces. Other works embellished Chinese temples and shrines, including some Melaka mosques, whose windows sport gilded Chinese surmounts.

Woods used included both imported and local woods – the later Chinese towkay migrants preferring imported blackwood/rosewood of the purple sandalwood (zitan) and rosewood or various huali types of the subtropical Dalbergia species. Most of these have a distinct Chinese Ming or Qing domestic furniture look and feel. The Peranakan taste was for using the same types of wood sparingly as well as imported species of Chinese cedar, namwood (Machilus namu) and Burmese/Thai teakwood (Tectona grandis). Among the local rainforest hardwoods used were cengal, balau, merbau and rengas (of the Dipterocarpaceae and Leguminosae families). Some rare Chinese furniture was also made from local Bornean belian (ironwood species) timber.

Specifically, blackwood/rosewood woodwork tended to be very Ming Chinese and austere in style. Namwood furniture was often carved and richly gilded on a red lacquer base – hence the name red and gold – and was a distinctly Nonya favourite. After the war between the Kuomintang and the communists in the late 1920s, the production of red and gold was severely disrupted resulting in the local production of Anglo-Nonya pieces in Burmese/Thai teakwood commonly available then in the Straits Settlements and used as an imported status symbol raw material preferred over local wood. Over time, the British colonial influence of the Straits Settlement became evident and teakwood carvings and furniture incorporating the English Jacobean, Regency, Georgian, Queen Anne, and Chippendale styles with Chinese Peranakan ornamentation on an European body began to evolve. Some without animal motifs were also known as the Anglo-Malay style as seen in the Istana Besar Royal Sultan Abu Bakar Museum (Bukit Serene) collection.

Symbols and their cultural significance

The assimilation with local cultures and their matrilocal social structure influenced Peranakan taste in adornment and decorative styles as seen in their ceramics, beadwork and woodcarvings and manifested by a distinct preference for depiction of female icons. This is why they favoured the phoenix, peony and other flowers, symbols of the female and a yin element, which was otherwise unusual in the Chinese cultural milieu. The presence of a dragon was very rare and, even then, it was understated of highly stylised or secondary to the total composition or aesthetics of the work. When prominent, it usually indicated marriage to a newer pure Chinese immigrant (sinkeh or Cina Gek) whose tastes were more Sinic and conservatively Chinese with a resistance to the local influences.

One of a pair of rare tall stand wedding mirrors with a strong colonial influence, made from teakwood in the brown and gold style (Penang, c. 1910s).

Main door of a Peranakan link house, usually at the five-footway entrance. It features cut through wood on its panels with incised work on the bottom panels and gold leaf decoration on the carvings (Penang, c. 1880s).

ABOVE *Opium day bed in the red and gold style made of cengal and seraya local indeginious woods from Penang (c. 1890s).*

RIGHT *Grand wedding tall sideboard, locally made from imported teakwood, for the main hall of a wealthy Nonya home with a strong neoclassic form and marble top counter. An ornamental Peranakan canopy is on the top pediment, but the other carvings are in the European style.*

Detail of peonies on the top pediment carved in wood and decorated in brown and gold (gold leaf gilding).

1. Yellow Nyonya porcelain jars belong to the upper echelon of Peranakan culture, mainly used by Kapitan family.
2. The factory stamp indicates that these cups were made during the Guangxu Emperor's reign.
3. Brown Nyonya porcelain appeared during the early days of the Republic.
4. The stamp on the spoon indicates that it was made during the Xuantong Emperor's reign.
5. Red Nyonya porcelain is mainly purposed towards celebratory use.
6. A green kamcheng - a common sight in Peranakan households.

OF PHOENIXES AND PEONIES

A PERANAKAN PRIMER

(Translated from CN Liew's feature in Nanyang Siang Pau, 2 February 2016, with permission from the author.)

Aside from being the name of a country, "China" is also defined as high quality ceramics, which speaks of its high regard in the world of porcelain. Common globally and useful in daily household applications, china - this author posits - should be recognised as China's fifth engineering marvel.

The Tang, Song, Yuan, Ming and Qing Dynasties each feature their unique characteristics and identity through the porcelain items of those periods, varying in design and motifs. For the past 2,000 years, ceramics are a looking glass into past civilisations.

The Silk Road and its maritime counterpart played an important role in the evolution and development of porcelain ware. Via the Silk Road, porcelain and tea were marketed either as daily consumables or as luxury goods.

The Rise of Peranakan Culture

Thanks to the Maritime Silk Road, Malaysia was one of the first countries in Southeast Asia to build a strong friendship with China. This interaction between cultures led to intermarriage between Chinese men and the local Malay women. Thus the Peranakan (or Baba-Nyonya) culture was born - the men were called "Baba", while the women were called "Nyonya".

Peranakan culture originated in Malacca, during the British colonial period. Most in the Peranakan community were English-educated and some of them moved out to Singapore or Penang. Some believe that the 19th century was the Golden Age of Peranakan culture, as the period saw the culture develop its distinct traits - language, music, lifestyle, food, apparel, embroidered textiles, jewellery and porcelain.

Peranakan porcelain is a culture shared by both Malaysia and Singapore. Its origin can be traced to Jingdezhen, China during the Qing Dynasty - boasting close to 200 years of history. In Southeast Asia, those porcelain products are commonly known as Nyonya Wares or Straits Chinese Porcelain.

Nyonya Porcelain

Nyonya porcelain ware is divided into three large categories, based on purpose: either they are used in the religious altar, the kitchen or the bedroom. In terms of aesthetics, it draws from Qing Dynasty porcelain. Apart from colourful porcelain (a mainstay in Peranakan ware), there is a subset of kitchen ware that is primarily blue and white, as well as porcelain produced in Japan.

CN Liew, a Malaysian artist based in Hong Kong.

According to Dr Ho Wing Meng of the National University of Singapore, Nyonya porcelain was made in Jingdezhen starting from the 19th century, up to the early 20th century. This writer has visited some of the Malacca heritage shops and according to these shop owners, some shops in Malacca still ordered Nyonya porcelain appliances from Jingdezhen in the 1940s.

Thus, it can be said that Nyonya porcelain was in production since Qing Dynasty to the Republic of China's early days (approximately 100 years ago), and porcelain collectors will take items produced within this period as real Peranakan treasures. Specifically, the best Nyonya porcelain was produced during the GuangXu Emperor's reign (1875-1908).

During the early years of the Republic of China, some of the skills of producing kilns were still present - passed on from the Qing Dynasty, hence the kilns of the time still boasted fine quality. Starting from 1949, and especially during 1980s and the present, Nyonya porcelain ware is mainly produced as souvenirs.

Auspicious Symbols

There are multiple prominent Peranakan symbols, each carrying an auspicious meaning - the notable ones are the phoenix and peonies. The former symbolises power and authority, while the latter represents wealth. Aside from the two, there are eight more auspicious symbols found in the designs of Nyonya porcelain ware. Though they look alike at first glance, Peranakan ware is in fact intricately painted by hand, and is one of the reasons why collectors are so enamored by these items.

In terms of difficulty, the hardest part of producing Peranakan ware lies in the lips and rims of the kamcheng, katmu/chupu and tableware such as cups and plates. For the kamcheng and katmu, as they have lids, both parts have to nicely fit each other, and their designs have to match, in terms of symmetry and colour. With these intricate designs, the craftsmen couldn't afford to be sloppy, in order to maintain a smooth and pleasant visual flow.

Color-Coded Porcelain

There are a number of base colours used as the background of the porcelain: red, blue, yellow, brown, pink, green and white. Some colours reflect the purpose of the piece: red was mainly used during weddings, blue for religious purposes, while yellow denotes status, as it was mainly used by Kapitan family. Brown-backed pieces are a rare find, as they were mainly produced during the initial years of the Republic of China. Pink offers a strong visual attraction, and most of the porcelain used green as the background colour, thus making it quite well-known and is considered "classic" in Peranakan porcelain. White, another common colour, was more for daily use, and there was a massive volume of white-backed ware. Due to this, finding pristine white porcelain ware can be a challenge, and is bound to be a worthwhile addition for collectors.

Worldwide Recognition

Since 1985, there have been books published about the Peranakan, and during the 1990s, Christie's had its first auction on Peranakan porcelain, with all lots sold. Suffice to say, research on Peranakan porcelain and its value is recognised by many. Henry Butcher Art Auctioneers also held a Peranakan-themed auction, and it too sold all its lots. These developments serve as a good gauge on the potential and value of Peranakan porcelain.

For those who want to study or are interested to delve into the world of Peranakan porcelain, you can pay a visit to the Singapore Peranakan Museum, which offers what is regarded as the most comprehensive collection of Peranakan ware. Closer to home, the Melaka Baba Nyonya Museum offers a detailed look into the living space of the Baba and Nyonya. Other places to visit include Peranakan Mansion Penang, Penang State Museum and the National Museum.

Artistic and Historical Value

The artistry, uniqueness and historical value of Peranakan porcelain have made it a local national treasure. It speaks of a time when intermarriage and intermingling gave rise to a harmonious society coupled with a fascinating, vibrant culture. Perhaps one can draw from the wisdom of the past, and learn from Peranakan culture on building a peaceful multicultural society. Thus, it is imperative that we strive to preserve the beauty of Peranakan Porcelain.

RISING FACTORS OF KEDAH

High potential for development.

Where we focused on the market down south in July, this time our eyes are set on the Northern side of Peninsular Malaysia, Kedah. Being the "rice bowl" of the country, it is a compelling area for business growth as an exporter, more so when it is situated near the border between Thailand and Malaysia, specifically the Songkhla and Yala Provinces on the Thai side.

Kedah boasts a robust tourism market, with Langkawi dominating a huge tourists following from both locals and foreigners alike. As a matter of fact, the state government is in the process of finalising the location of a new jetty at Kuala Kedah (to Langkawi) in order to stem the overcrowding problem at the current one. Even the mainland itself has many places of interest - one of them is the Ulu Muda Eco Park which is a forest reserve that allows activities such as jungle trekking and camping.

In addition to that, Kedah is an education hub as well with many local and private institutions including universities such as the Asian Institute of Medical, Science & Technology (AIMST), University Utara Malaysia (UUM), Polytechnic Institute of Sultan Abdul Halim Mu'adzam Shah (POLIMAS) and Open University, to name a few. The state also houses a number of reputable private and boarding schools. When peered from the perspective of skilled human resource, Kedah may not be lacking in this area.

On the real estate front, things are also well oiled and ready to roll. For example, approximately ten months ago around the turn of the new year, property developer Sentoria Utara Sdn Bhd made a big headline in the state by announcing its co-development venture to build residential and commercial properties alongside Sejati Pertiwi Sdn Bhd. The development is slated on a 120-acre piece of land in Kuala Muda. The undertaking makes it their maiden outing within the northern part of Malaysia at an estimated GDV of RM180 million.

The Market

"The value of land and property will continue to rise due to the cost of construction and with more projects coming up, it is safe to say that the demand and supply will be even in future as the population of Alor Setar is quite small with only about 200,000 people," said Mah Beng Fong, Director of Henry Butcher Kedah when asked about the Kedah property market.

Two other projects that are turning heads in the state are Mergong Avenue (by Teguh Harian Group) and Desa Seraya (by Long Island Corporation). Both are nearing completion this year.

Mergong Avenue, located just ten minutes away from one of Alor Setar's main shopping centre Aman Central Mall is a freehold development of four-storey shop-offices with lifts. Located in Bandar Baru Mergong, the built-up area for each of the 56 units is 20' x 70' with prices starting from RM1.5 million. Among the commercial conveniences around the area are Tesco, Grand Alora Hotel, Maybank Business Centre and Toyota Sales & Gallery Centre.

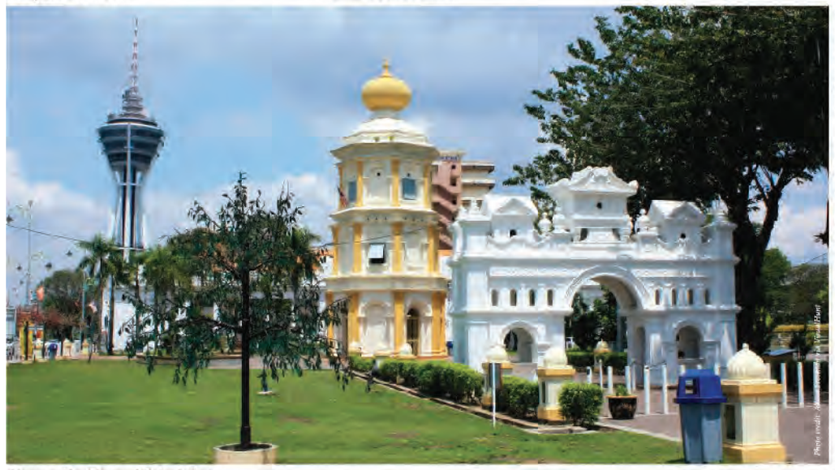
Desa Seraya on the other hand is near the entry point from the North-South Highway, specifically near the South Tollgate. It is an integrated development comprising 1,190 units altogether, made up of 164 semi-detached houses, 908 double-storey terrace houses and 118 units of shop-lots. An almost completed project, the development has a GDV of RM316 million. Launched in May 2002, six phases or 620 units have been sold within the first five years. On average, properties here now starts at RM500,000 each. Rather strategic in terms of location, one can easily head to Sungai Petani via the trunk road from here or Kangar through the Western Bypass junction.

Welcome to Alor Setar.

Aman Central Mall.

View from the tower.

Amansuri Residences.



Menara Alor Star and Balai Nobat.

Market around the vicinity is said to have the potential to grow and prices within the area will also continue to rise as supply for new developments is limited with only less than 20% allocated for non-Malay Reserved Land in Alor Setar. Another price factor is due to the rising cost of construction.

"As of now, the supply is still quite limited as non-Malay Reserved Land and those who can afford do not mind to pay a little more in order to obtain this kind of property as it is hard to find. On the other hand, the Malay Reserved Land is difficult to be sold as there are limited buyers and prefer a different kind or property type," said Mah.

First Among Many

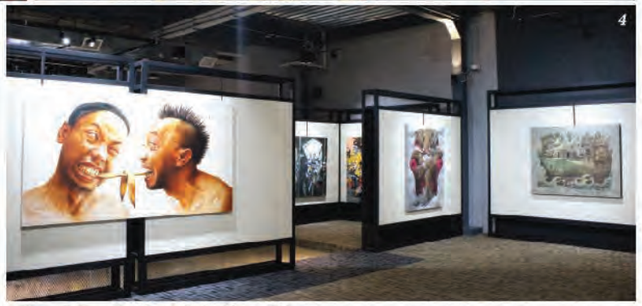
The scarcity of potential land however has not deterred any new developments from taking place. In fact, one new project worth mentioning is the Amansuri Residence, a north-south oriented high-rise luxury lifestyle condominium, touted as the first of its kind in the city.

Situated in a prominent location, Amansuri Residence is just within walking distance to Aman Central Mall and a few minutes drive to the hypermarket, medical centre, post office and a five-star hotel.

Wholly owned by the Belleview Group, Aman Central Mall houses 390 retailers over eight floors and supplemented by 1,700 parking bays. Homegrown international department store Parkson anchors the mall.

Judging from the ongoing projects and the contributing economic factors including Langkawi's international appeal, Kedah's property market is far from being saturated as it possesses a huge opportunity to further develop. With many more developers looking for land to be developed, coupled with the encouragement by the State Government for inbound urban migration, Kedah's future may rise beyond just championing the country's rice-factor.

For more information, contact Henry Butcher Malaysia (Kedah) Sdn Bhd at +6 04 - 731 5525 / 731 5405 or email hbkedah@henrybutcher.com.my



1. Penjual Manggis - Chusin Setiadikara, 2016.
2. Perang Diponegoro - Babad Tanah Jawi (Diponegoro War) - R. Sumantri MS, 2016.
3. Benny Oentoro, Director of Art XChange Gallery with Peta NKRI Telur Nusantara - I Wayan Cahya, 2014.
4. WhArt Now? features over 25 artists and around 50 works.

AN EYE FOR INDONESIAN CONTEMPORARY ART

Art Xchange Gallery's first travelling group exhibition, *WhArt Now?* is now in Malaysia, after its debut in Indonesia. The exhibition features over 25 established and emerging Indonesian artists, and around 50 works. Notable names include Agung Mangu Putra, Antoe Budiono, R. Sumantri MS, as well as presidential artists Melodia Idris and I Wayan Cahya.

According to Art XChange Gallery director Benny Oentoro, the idea for the project stemmed after the 2008 economic crisis, when Indonesia's art scene bubble burst.

"I've been thinking about this since two years ago - after the economy crisis."

The exhibit, according to him, was his part in the art market's rebirth and restructuring - to showcase the best of what Indonesia has to offer, and to also affirm the roles in the art ecosystem.

"All the institutions - artists, galleries, museums, curators - each has a part to play in the growth of the art market. For the ecosystem to grow, they need to co-exist."

Part of the art bubble burst was due to the muddling of roles, he claimed, which birthed speculation. "They don't understand the long term ramifications."

Post-bubble, the current art scene is now more discerning, with a focus on art that does not stop at quality in its execution, but also touches the soul. "An artwork needs to have soul. The special thing about contemporary work is that they have stories behind them… It's now survival of the fittest - only the best works are selected! Good works will still sell!"

Benny emphasises this fact, and he hopes to use *WhArt Now?* as a means of education and exposure. "I'm trying to educate the collectors and artists. The collectors have to appreciate the art beyond its value - to like and connect with the artwork… That's why I'm doing this three-country event - not just to promote the maestros and senior artists, but the up-and-coming ones too! It's about giving them a chance."

> *"Collectors have to appreciate the art beyond its value.*
> *- Benny Oentoro*

HRH King Bhumibol Adulyadej
1927 - 2016

Henry Butcher Malaysia extends our heartfelt condolences to the Royal Family and the people of Thailand on the passing of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej.

His reign of 70 years was marked with compassion and integrity, listening to the plight of the people, and tirelessly working to improve their lives.

Our thoughts and prayers are with Thailand.

hbaa
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ENQUIRIES
ELIZABETH WONG +6013 355 6578 | elizabeth@hbart.com.my
POLENN SIM +6016 273 3628 | polenn@hbart.com.my
Visit **www.hbart.com.my** for online catalogue

SYED AHMAD JAMAL, DATUK *Perchoboon* 1965, 90cm x 80cm, oil on canvas