

*Temu* is a creative meeting of sorts for two art contemporaries.

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**F**AIZAL Suhif has always been a man of the soil. Growing up, the farming life was all that he knew. The lush vegetation, tranquillity of a simple village life, and the stories and proverbs the elders would utter to him in the evenings took shape in his growing mind like a great tree.

From a very young age, Faizal drew inspiration from these fascinating elements in his life. And like the passionate artist that he is, he would go on to paint and draw with oil, charcoal and soil these images from his earliest memories. The results were altogether spectacular and nostalgic.

Faizal and his artistic peer Jamil Zakaria, another man whose works are personifications of traditional Malay adages, feature in Kuala Lumpur-based 69 Fine Art Gallery's latest exhibition called *Temu*, which boasts paintings and sculptures. Both are fine arts graduates from Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) in Shah Alam, Selangor.

The exhibition's title signifies the creative meeting of these two artists: Faizal from Muar, Johor and Jamil from Guar Chempedak, Kedah. Some of the works featured in this *Temu* exhibition also come from Dusun Seni, a studio in idyllic Ulu Langat, Selangor, where both these artists work from.

Though there is no crossover in terms of technique, subject matter or even theme, something else does tie their very distinct and unique artworks together.

Like his past works, Malay proverbs are evident in Jamil's steel wire installations in *Temu*. He is one of the few artists in Malaysia to thrive through his steel wire works, which involves a lot of visualising and planning on paper before a piece can be completed.

One such work, named *Mulut Meriam*, depicts half a human body in a kneeling position. Where there would have been a torso, two hands and a head was a cannon in wheels. Several cannon balls can be seen all loaded up and ready to be fired in the stomach of this part human figure.

Then comes the intriguing bit. One of the legs is shackled by an iron ball, akin to a slave or a prisoner.

The installation seems as if to say that humans are enslaved and shackled by the tragedy called life. We have no choice but to surrender.

For the visitors in this gallery, the key is in the title of the piece itself.

"*Mulut Meriam* is an idiom used to describe someone who lashes out at others with offensive and hurtful language," explained Jamil, 29.

# On the same page



**Honest toil:** Faizal Suhif's *Seharian Di Ladang*, which was inspired by an old farm worker in Bali, Indonesia.

"All of us have that nature within us and we have to control that nature. That is what the iron-ball shackle represents. We have to restrain it like prisoners are restrained." Another gripping piece is one called *Sarang Kehidupan*. Inspired by that famous Malay adage *diam-diam ubi berisi*, Jamil pointed out that the installation, an oddly shaped closed structure, alludes to tuber plants, whose stems and leaves are visible to us but not what grows underground. Within the structure are tunnel-like passageways, all leading to a central organ.

"Similarly, we can see the body of an anthill but we are not aware of the government and the structure within. It's as if the anthill is non-existent.

"This triggered a thought within me. I wanted to show that though something seems static, like my installation, there is life within. So, when you meet someone, you can't assume that is all there is to them," expressed Jamil philosophically. Faizal's pieces, on the other hand, lend a more nostalgic stance to the exhibition. Though some are based on Malay idioms, many of his artworks point back to the times he spent in the farm.

*Seharian Di Ladang*, a charcoal piece, was inspired by an old farm worker Faizal encountered in Bali, Indonesia. The black and white drawing depicts a septuagenarian, chewing a paddy stalk while carrying a gunny sack on her head.

"It's a symbol of working hard and harvesting something at the end as a result of diligence. In spite of her age, the old lady is still working on the ground, energetic, harvesting paddy and I asked myself, 'Am I doing anything substantial with my life? If an old lady can do it, why can't I?'" said Faizal, 30, who is no stranger to contemplation in his work.

But Faizal's most arresting piece is one called *A Piece of Land*. The massive, two-panelled drawing shows, well, a piece of land, with very large vegetation and at a distance, multiple tombstones lining the ground. Not too far from the land, a sapphire blue river flows and upon its bank, Faizal had masterfully woven images of a turtle and a man holding a tombstone, lying along the river.

At first glance, they would have merely looked like rock formations. But a closer look would reveal these somewhat eerie characters. There is an almost melancholic air about the painting.

"This piece is about life and death. Hence the vegetables and the tombstones. But more than that, it acts as a reminder to me that I, or anyone for that matter, should do something good with what life presents to us," said the full-time artist.

In this exhibition, both artists' works may be varied. Their techniques and forms may



*Bye See Call* by Jamil Zakaria, which is a mesh of wires and imagination.



Faizal Suhif with his monprint *Hope* series at 69 Fine Art Gallery in Kuala Lumpur.



Jamil Zakaria with his steel wire installations.

be worlds apart. However, what resonates the most from this *Temu* show is the unifying force between both artists asking visitors to appreciate the little and big things in life.

■ *Temu* is on at 69 Fine Art Gallery, Jalan Bruas, Damansara Heights in Kuala Lumpur till May 10. Visits are by appointment only. Contact Patrice Vallete (019 3012 569) or visit [www.fineart69.com](http://www.fineart69.com).



Jamil Zakaria's *Mulut Meriam* is the artist's statement about shackling our inner demons.