



Sutra FOUNDATION

# Pohon Beringin

by Muhammad Suhaili

An Exhibition of paintings inspired by Javanese Wayang





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## by Muhammad Suhaili

An Exhibition of paintings inspired by Javanese Wayang

Curated by Sivarajah Natarajan

6 June - 20 August 2023

### **Sutra Gallery**

12, Persiaran Titiwangsa 3  
53200 Kuala Lumpur

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*Exhibition continues until 20 August 2023*

## Pohon Beringin Re-imagined

Four years ago, Mohd Suhaili, a traditional craftsman originally from Lombok now living in Malaysia, presented his first foray into acrylic painting in a solo exhibition, titled '*Antara Bayang dan Wayang*'. He was then mentored and his exhibition curated by Sutra artist, Sivarajah Natarajan. It was clear, then, that painting had opened another vista and revealed an added facet of his natural and refreshingly unschooled talent.

The present exhibition titled '*Pohon Beringin*' is an extension of the previous series, which continues to focus on one of the most iconic wayang kulit themes - the '*Pohon Beringin*', or the '*Tree of Life*' (*Kalpa Vryksha*, as it is known in it's Indian context). The concept fundamentally describes a metaphor of the world stage, within which the drama of Life takes place. In his 'imagined' contemporary *Pohon Beringin*, our artist-craftsman has ingeniously incorporated another related textile motif; that is traditional batik.

Of all the artists who have collaborated with Sutra, the unassuming and shy Muhamad Suhaili is one of the most noteworthy of Sutra's associates. There is no corner of Sutra that doesn't bear the unique stamp of 'Abang Ali' as he is known among Sutra dancers. Ali, who has become part of Sutra family, has contributed to Sutra House's distinctive look – from the magnificent door-frame to the intricately mounted mirrors, lamp-hangings and candelabras and garden tables. The quaint outhouse under the huge mango tree where Sutra's stage props (designed by Sivarajah for many of Sutra's previous productions) are stored, testifies to Suhaili's talent at woodwork.

In *Pohon Beringin*, Mohd Suhaili explores the full gamut of indigenous Indonesian/Malay motifs and images. His '*Trees of Life*' have acquired new freedom and interpretations. They are no longer restricted to wayang kulit motifs. Suhaili has let his imagination run free and his '*Trees*' are now refreshingly teemed with tropical fauna and flora from traditional images of everyday life and batik motifs besides those of shadow puppets. The message of The Tree of Life, is however, still intact.

Painted in large canvases, they are unabashedly decorative, filigreed with rhythmic patterns and arabesque effects, swirling copiously with plenitude and positive energy. The works recall everyday appearances and nostalgic memories of decorative motifs that framed frescoes of Balinese temples, illustrations of wayang kulit and of indigenous textile motifs worn by the women of his village.

Suhaili's centrally-focused subjects, each incredibly intricate and richly designed whilst retaining the traditional naïve craft feel with the absence of perspective, simultaneously lend the paintings a contemporary elegance.

Several of the works stand out for their bold decorative oeuvre sans reference to the *pohon beringin*. Painted in flat colours against bright red or muddy orange-yellow background, the repetition of eddies and twirls of batik motifs demand attention as they acquire larger-than-life presence. The same goes with the animal (*hobby horse*) and celestial bird (*burung cenderawasih*) motifs which Suhaili has devised with churning flora or other decorative motifs that hypnotize us into a vertigo swirl of multi-tonal design. They have a fabric-on-the-wall feel that fashion designers would find attractive in their salons.

This time around, Suhaili executed his works not using the fauve colours he had previously painted, but in subtle olive-green or terracotta muted tints, possibly influenced by Sivarajah, who has adopted the same treatment of hues for his 'Covid' series.

One wonders if this was consciously chosen to give the collection an aura of urban contemporaneity which the series has acquired. They somehow no longer possess that 'ethnic' facade but exude a certain modern and subtle fashionable glow that brings in a breath of fresh air.

**Datuk Ramli Ibrahim**

*Chairman*

Sutra Foundation



***Gunungan Naga***  
Acrylic on Canvas  
183 cm x 115 cm  
2022  
RM 7,200.00



***Rimba I***

Acrylic on Canvas

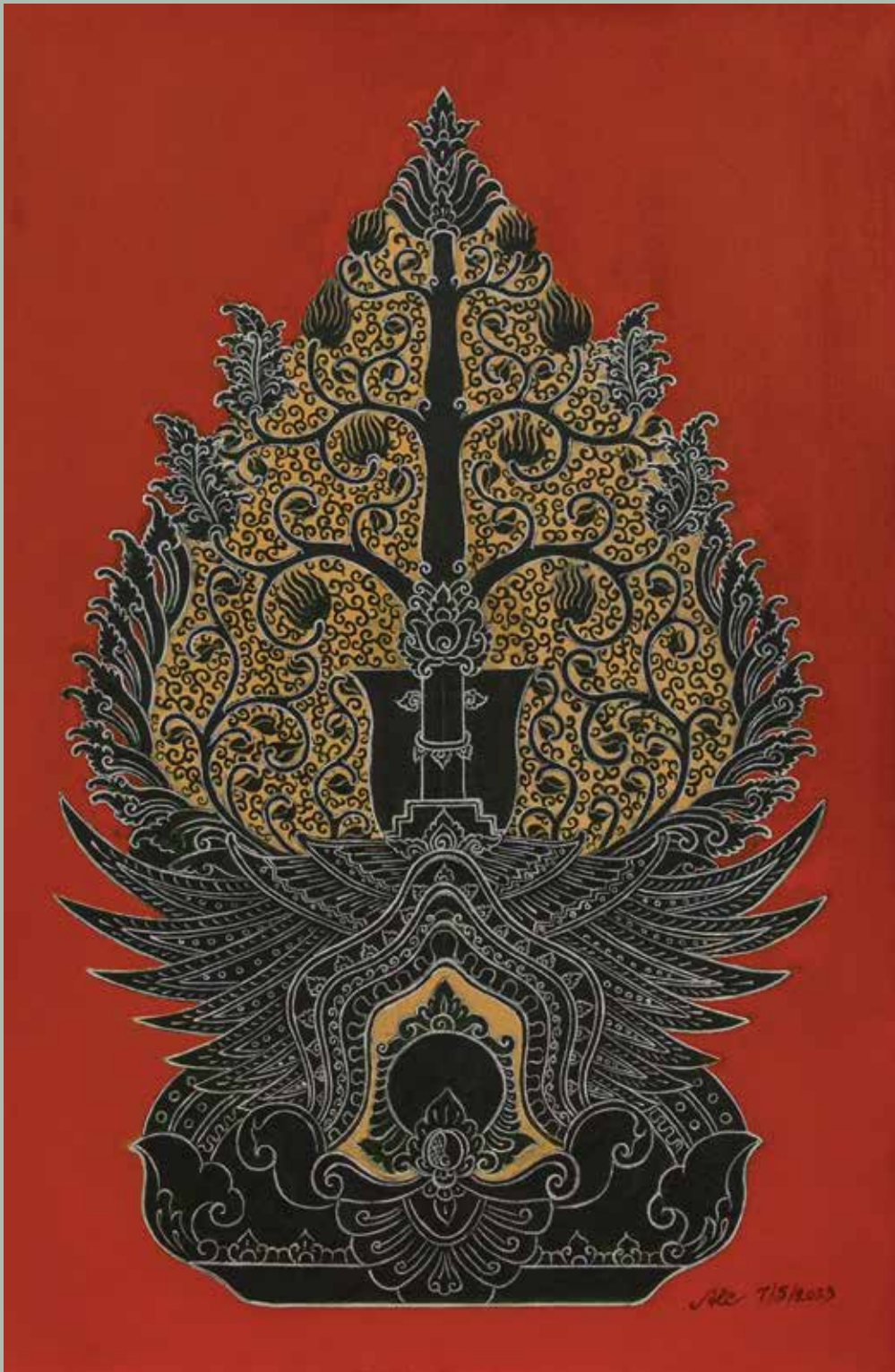
100 cm x 183 cm

2023

RM 7,200.00



**Gunungan I**  
Acrylic on Canvas  
97 cm x 64 cm  
2023  
RM 3,400.00



**Gunungan II**  
Acrylic on Canvas  
97 cm x 64 cm  
2023  
RM 3,400.00





**Gunungan III**  
Acrylic on Canvas  
148 cm x 97 cm  
2023  
RM 6,000.00



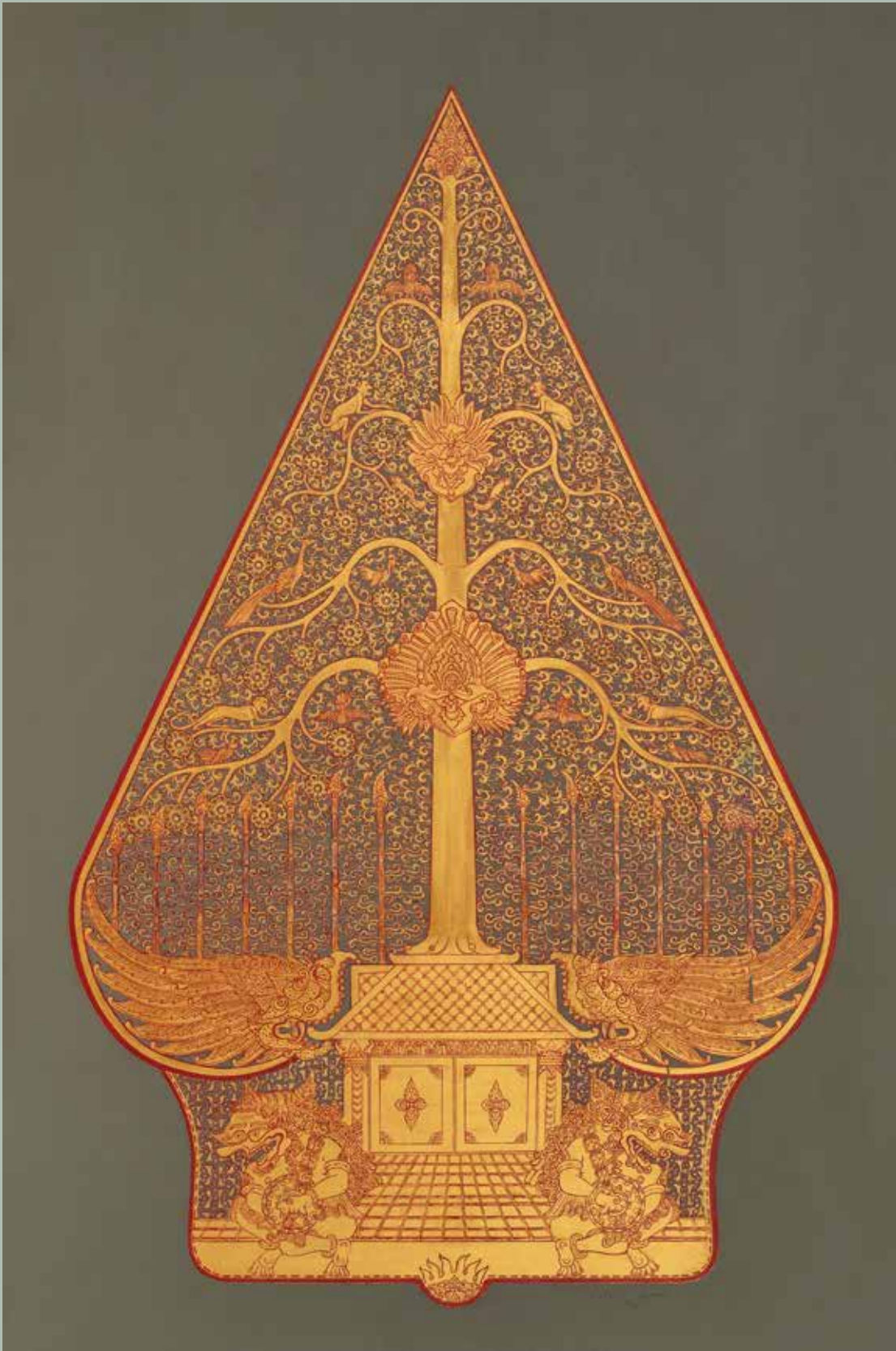
***Rimba II***

Acrylic on Canvas

100 cm x 183 cm

2023

RM 7,200.00



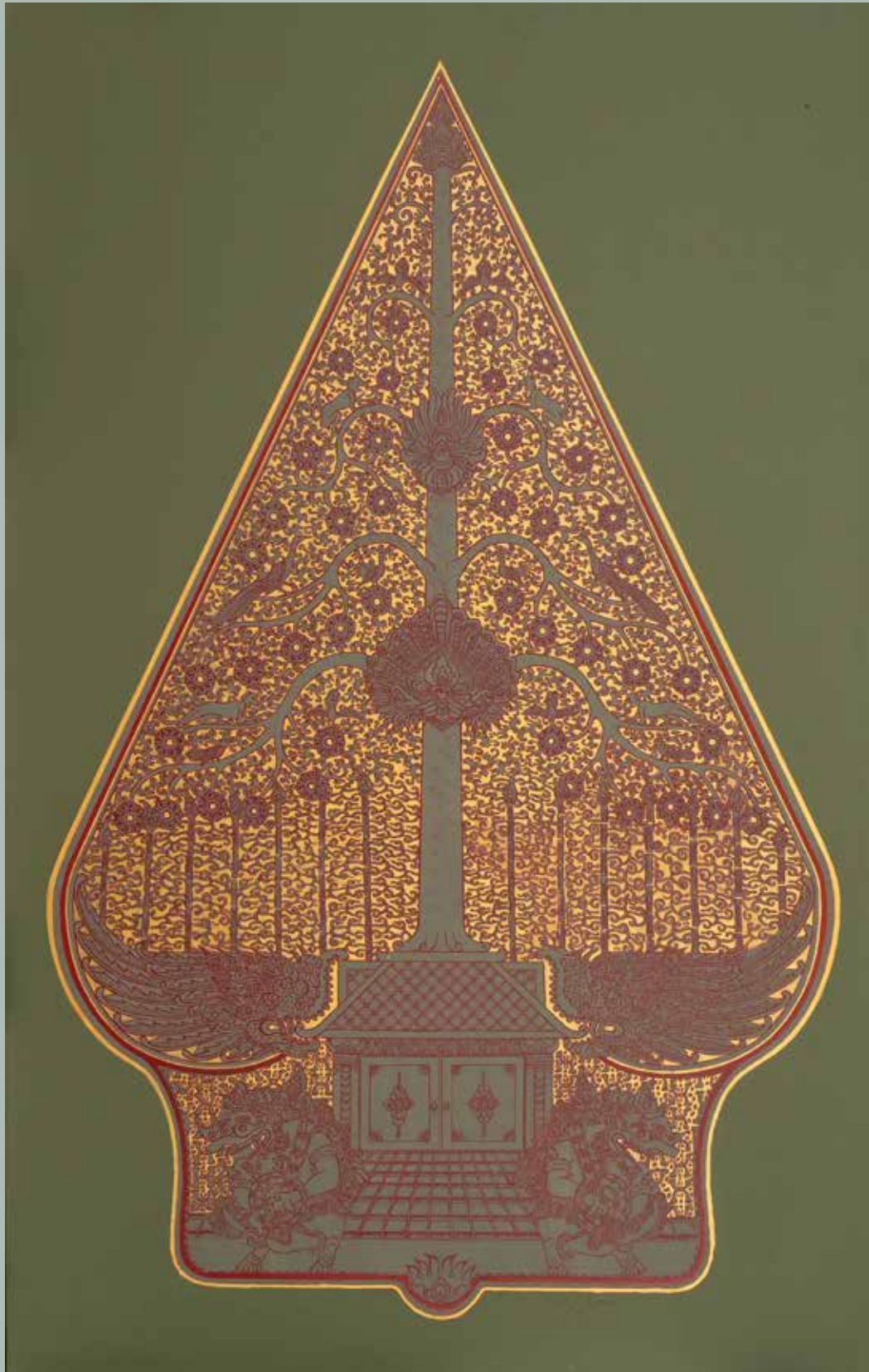
***Antara Wayang & Bayang I***

Acrylic on Canvas

183 cm x 120 cm

2017

Private Collection



***Antara Wayang & Bayang II***

Acrylic on Canvas

183 cm x 115 cm

2017

Private Collection



**Mitos - Naga Tasik Chini**

Acrylic on Canvas

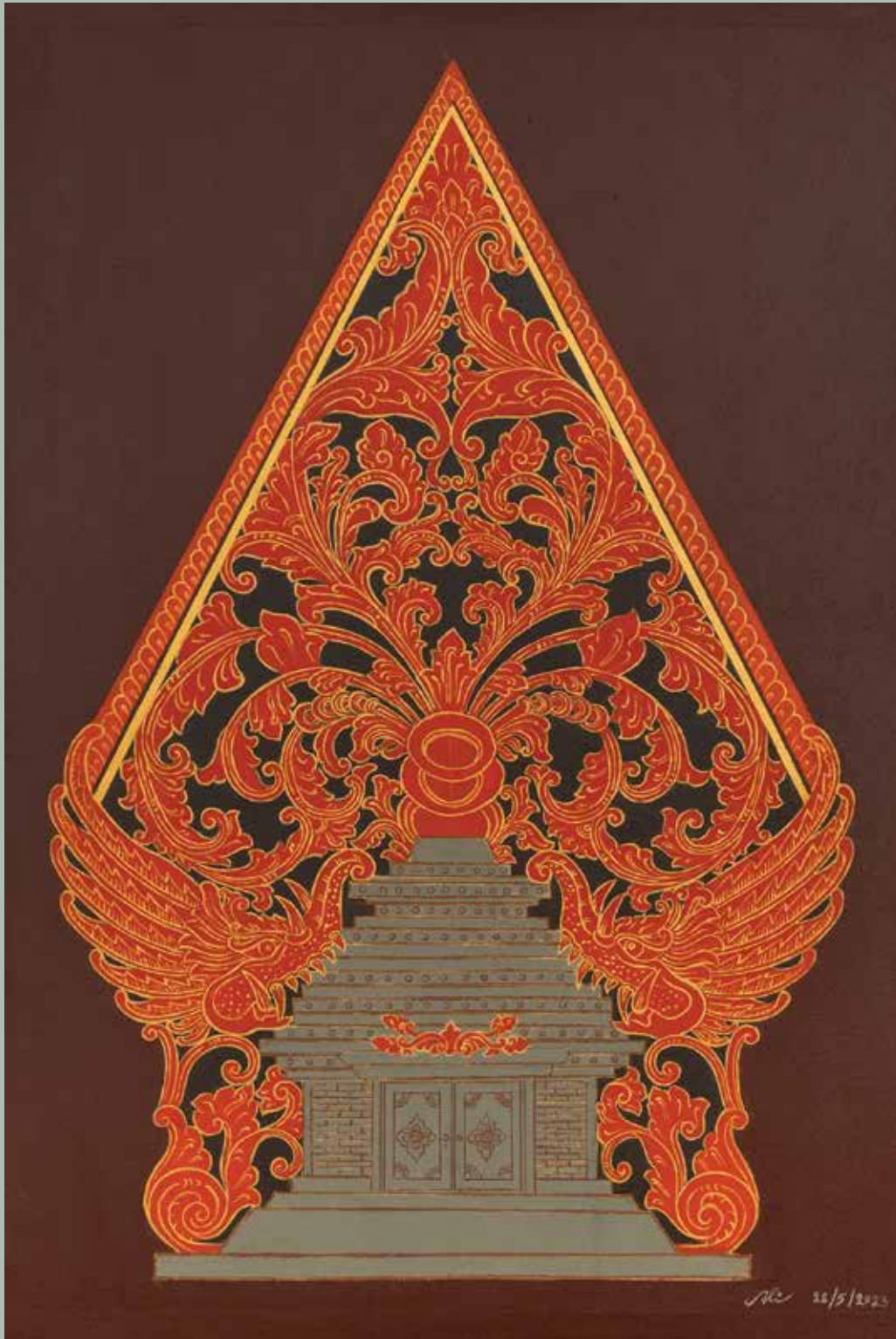
79 cm x 186 cm

2016

RM 16,000.00



**Gunungan IV**  
Acrylic on Canvas  
106 cm x 82 cm  
2023  
RM 3,700.00



**Gunungan V**  
Acrylic on Canvas  
109 cm x 74 cm  
2023  
RM 3,700.00



**Hanoman**  
Acrylic on Canvas  
163 cm x 123 cm  
2017  
RM 8,000.00

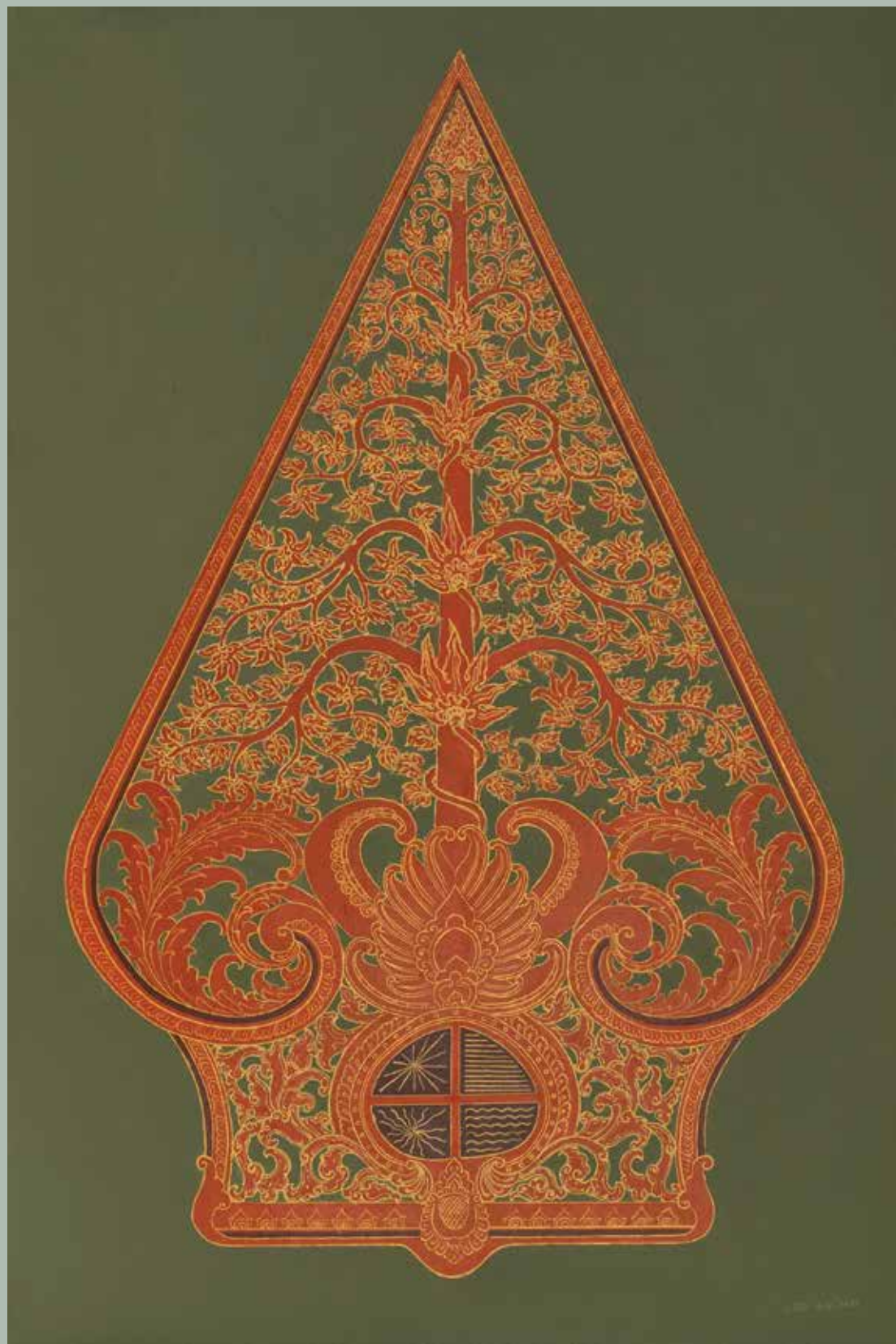




**Taman Firdaus II**  
Acrylic on Canvas  
183 cm x 127 cm  
2021  
RM 9,000.00



***Rimba III***  
Acrylic on Canvas  
120 cm x 90 cm  
2023  
RM 4,800.00



**Gunungan VI**  
Acrylic on Canvas  
183 cm x 122 cm  
2022  
RM 7,200.00



**Alam**

Acrylic on Canvas

122 cm x 122 cm

2016

RM 7,000.00



**Gunungan VII**  
Acrylic on Canvas  
152 cm x 110 cm  
2022  
RM 7,200.00



***Gunungan Cenderawashi I***

Acrylic on Canvas

183 cm x 127 cm

2017

RM 18,000.00



***Kuda Kepang***

Acrylic on Canvas

100 cm x 183 cm

2023

RM 7,200.00



**Rimba IV**  
Acrylic on Canvas  
100 cm x 150 cm  
2021  
RM 4,800.00





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[www.sutrafoundation.org.my](http://www.sutrafoundation.org.my)

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