

By ANN MARIE CHANDY

THIS year, the Barehands Residency has continued to solidify its reputation as a dynamic hub for cross-cultural artistic collaboration. Situated on a 1.5ha property called Akaldiulu, nestled in the lush landscapes of Hulu Langat, Selangor, this residency, founded in 2010 by artist and printmaker Juhari Said, has become a gathering place for artists worldwide to exchange ideas, share experiences and expand their creative practices.

Residencies like Barehands play an essential role in the global artist community by offering time, space and support for creative development, away from the distractions of daily life.

They foster an environment where artists can push the boundaries of their practice, engage in critical dialogue and form meaningful collaborations. These experiences often lead to lifelong relationships and international networks that extend far beyond the residency space and time.

Active in the local art scene since the early 1980s, Juhari has consistently aimed to elevate the artistic experience.

After graduating from ITM in 1983 (now UiTM), he studied traditional Japanese printmaking under renowned artist Yoshisuke Funasaka, an early artistic journey that broadened his world-view.

Sharpening your skills

“Barehands is a nod to well-prepared, adaptable creatives,” says Juhari.

“Artists need to be able to work in any environment and under any condition. If you’re expecting the comfort of your studio tools, gadgets, or machines, then we wouldn’t call this a ‘barehands’ residency.”

Juhari, 63, is passionate about redefining the role of residencies.

“A lot of people misunderstand what a residency is for. It’s not just about continuing what you already do. It’s about sharpening your skills – just as lawyers and doctors do, guided by mentors,” he says.

“I’ve participated in residency programmes abroad, and it inspired me to create my own, especially since I have a large studio and an orchard. I wanted to share my creative space with other artists.”

A unique aspect of Barehands is the personal touch Juhari adds by welcoming artists into his home.

“When artists come into my studio, they step into a system I’ve used for over 40 years. They eat what I eat, use my tools, and work in the same space as I do. It’s enriching not only for them but also for me, as I get to observe their creative process firsthand.”

Quoting an African proverb, Juhari reflects on the collaborative essence of the residency: “If you want to go fast, go alone; but if you want to go far, go together.”

This ethos is central to Barehands, where artists grow together through shared experiences, helping one another refine their craft and expand their horizons.

A place to experiment

Barehands is designed to promote exploration and collaboration, providing artists with the environment to experiment with



This year, Japanese visual artist Kazutaka spent three weeks in August as the Barehands artist in residence, exploring Hulu Langat’s environment and integrating it into his work.
- Photos: Barehands Residency

Langat,” he explains. “It was fascinating to elevate something familiar and ordinary to Malaysians into a work of art.”

His art bridged heritage and innovation, using Langsuir leaves alongside Yamewashi paper and images captured in Hulu Langat, blending Kazutaka’s Shinto-inspired philosophy with local elements.

The *Light Of Langsuir* solo exhibition was held in early September at the National Art Gallery in Langkawi, showcasing the deep engagement between artist, environment and mentor, which Barehands and Juhari emphasise.

Push the boundaries

Kazutaka speaks highly of the mentorship Juhari provided during his time at Barehands: “I learned a lot about flexibility and tolerance. When collaborating with artists from other countries, it’s essential to respect each other’s values and work methods. By accepting differences and finding common ground, we open ourselves up to new discoveries and growth.”

Juhari challenged the Japanese artist to push his boundaries.

“I didn’t want him to produce the same kind of work he had always done before. I suggested he use the Langsuir leaves, something they don’t have in Japan. It sparked a new direction for him,” says Juhari.

Such exchanges between mentor and artist lie at the heart of the Barehands Residency.

According to AP Art Gallery’s Nazura Rahime, project manager for Barehands, the programme offers not only mentorship from Juhari but also opportunities for local artists to engage with international artists.

For example, while Kazutaka was in Langkawi, he had the chance to host a Sha-Ko-Seki art workshop for local artists, further extending the programme’s impact beyond individual participants.

Nazura acknowledges the logistical challenges, such as transporting the large Langsuir leaves to Langkawi and later to Fukuoka for an upcoming exhibition in Japan, noting that these required meticulous planning. However, with the invaluable support of partners like the Japan Foundation Kuala Lumpur, these hurdles were successfully overcome.

“Collaborations with other stakeholders, such as Uku Gallery – responsible for bringing Kazutaka to Malaysia – and the National Art Gallery in Langkawi, where his exhibition was hosted, as well as funding partners like MyCreative Ventures and the Tourism, Arts and Culture Ministry, have all played a pivotal role in elevating the Barehands Residency programme,” she adds.

Thanks to these dedicated partners, the Barehands Residency continues to go strong. Nazura aptly concludes, “In the 21st century, collaboration and partnerships are the way forward for fostering artistic growth and creating a lasting impact.”

Finding common ground

Juhari Said’s Barehands Residency offers artists a unique space to refine their craft and grow through cultural exchange.

new techniques and philosophies while learning from each other’s diverse cultural and artistic backgrounds. The residency has held successful programmes from 2014 to 2017, and then again in 2023, each fostering an atmosphere of creativity and cross-cultural dialogue, featuring artists from countries such as Jordan, Japan, Indonesia, Taiwan, and the Philippines.

A significant milestone was achieved last year, when Barehands partnered with AP Art Gallery, which co-organised the event and provided a platform for the residency’s artists. This partnership enhanced the residency’s visibility and influence within the art community.

“Before teaming up with AP Art Gallery, I was handling everything – management, administration – on my own,” says Juhari. “Now, with AP’s expertise in documentation and social media, they’ve taken a huge load off my shoulders.”

This year the artist in residence was Japanese visual artist Kazutaka Shioi, who spent three weeks in August exploring Hulu Langat’s environment and incorporating it into his art practice.

Kazutaka, a part-time lecturer at Kyushu University’s School of Design, draws inspiration from the places he encounters, reflecting the essence of these locations through his subjective perceptions. His works have been exhibited globally, and in 2022, he created a piece dedicated to the Munakata-taisha Shrine, a World Heritage site in Fukuoka Prefecture, Japan.

During his residency, Kazutaka embraced the local environment, using a plant called Langsuir (or Bird’s-nest fern), which grows in the gardens surrounding Juhari’s studio, as a material for his artwork.

“I created works that combined light and plants collected in Hulu



Juhari (left) and Kazutaka explored the creative potential of a local plant known as Langsuir, or Bird’s-nest fern.



Kazutaka engaged in conversation with renowned abstract painter Awang Damit at his studio on the outskirts of Selangor.