NIGEL SENSE

ASAM BOI

Artist Statement

A quintessentially Malay concoction, ‘asam boi’ blends calamansi lime juice with dried plums cured in salt and sugar, creating a flavor that’s both vibrant and complex. This exhibition borrows its name as a metaphor for the layered, unexpected joys of travel, art, and love.

There are three things in life I treasure most: my wife, travel, and art. This collection of acrylic-on-canvas works is my love letter to the thrill of embracing the unfamiliar, the strange, and even the occasional misstep—like fumbling through the syntax of a new language. It’s about finding joy in the chaos.

Everything starts with movement. Without it, the gears grind to a halt, and the machine breaks down. Movement is everything. Time spent away from the studio feeds my work. I call it “going fishing”—aimless wandering, getting lost, and gathering fragments of the world like breadcrumbs. A tile. A sign. A fragment of conversation drifting through the air like smoke. These are the things that don’t ask for your notice but demand it anyway. They are scraps of raw material for something much bigger. They are nothing and everything at the same time, fleeting moments that must be recorded before they slip away.

In the studio, I try to capture that first jolt—the shock of seeing something, anything, for the very first time. Armed with my iPad, I translate these moments into layered, Frankenstein-esque compositions, blending snippets of life into surreal, digital sketches. These digital sketches are the backbone of my process. I sketch feverishly, obsessively, until the act of painting feels like an automatic reflex.

Painting isn’t polite. It’s tactile, loud, and messy. It’s about getting your hands dirty, finding the right music to hit the perfect frequency, and diving in. The wrong playlist can wreck a painting faster than a bad idea. Once the iPad sketches meet the canvas, that’s when the real work begins—rough, quick strokes, words scratched into paint, textures added without hesitation. It’s like building a sandcastle only to joyfully knock it down.

In the backgrounds of my paintings, eyes stare back—wide, unblinking, caught in a haze of wonderment—and Smiles stretched too far, flirting with ugliness. Not the airbrushed illusions of social media’s manicured perfection. No filters here, no carefully curated façades. Just raw, unvarnished joy, caught in a moment too real to fake.

These paintings dig beneath the gloss, where the truth flickers and burns. They catch that split-second when the mask slips, the performance collapses, and what’s left is wild, messy, and impossibly beautiful—the kind of joy that doesn’t need to be staged.

I leave the edges of my canvas raw, letting the material itself speak. My paintings transform the mundane into something wild. A tile becomes a world. A sign becomes a dream. A conversation becomes a revolution. Through bold strokes and unruly textures, the mundane becomes magic.

This ethos comes from my artistic heroes—Basquiat, Warhol, Pollock, and Schnabel—and the music of Lou Reed and David Bowie. They all understood that beauty isn’t clean. It’s raw, loud, and imperfect.

Asam Boi is a wild, joyful howl into the void — a celebration of life’s flaws, missteps, and beautiful chaos. It’s about finding beauty not in perfection, but in the messy, unpolished reality of life.

As the Australian singer Nick Cave recently remarked, "We have all had too much sorrow; now it’s time for some joy". This exhibition is my answer to that call.