

The Life and Paintings of Inauk S. Gullah

Sheau Yun Lim

Driving inland in Sabah on the highway from Kota Kinabalu to Keningau, the road rose slowly, almost imperceptibly at first. Then my rented sedan strained a little; the lanes tightened. The canopy of trees, forming a horizon line, began its upward ascent. And then the crucifixes began.

Churches – Catholic, Evangelical, Adventist, Protestant – were each announced with a crucifix. Their scales ranged from the humble – two wooden planks nailed to a pediment, almost domestic – to crosses that far outstripped the size of their congregations, that bore their weight on entire pylons, hulking creatures that projected Jesus’s sacrifice into the landscape. The trees were tall, but those crucifixes were taller, or at least they felt that way, as though height here was not only a matter of metres but also of conviction. They watched the road. They watched the newcomers.

Regardless of size, each crucifix was emblazoned with the same four letters: I.N.R.I.. *Jesus Nazarenus Rex Iudaeorum*: Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews. The phrase appeared again and again, as if the repetition itself was the point. We were, unmistakably, in Christian land. In Malaysia, and especially to an urbanite from the peninsula, I was taken aback to see a non-Islamic motif sustained for so long, uninterrupted, without the usual competition of signs. No onion domes, no temple rooflines, no quick alternation between Taoist red and Buddhist gold. Just crosses and crucifixes, repeated, extended over distance and time. Duration does its own work. After a while the crucifixes stopped reading as statements and began to feel like facts, part of the terrain in the way pylons or guardrails were. They were no longer something you noticed individually. They became the condition of the view.

1.

It was January 2025, and I was in Sabah to learn more about the life and work of the artist Inauk S. Gullah. I was accompanied with a friend, Adeline Chia: we had connected over a shared curiosity over three of Inauk’s paintings at Balai Seni Negara, Malaysia’s National Art Gallery. He was an artist previously unknown to us, and most people in the Malaysian peninsular, with little curatorial or exhibition trail to follow. I had first encountered these paintings in 2022 as a young and, admittedly, overly harsh critic when I reviewed ‘NUSA’, a permanent collection exhibition at the Gallery.¹ Inauk’s work caught my eye, but it was far too idiosyncratic, too odd, for me to historicise and place in the context of the survey show. But the paintings had stayed with me. Adeline, who edited my piece at the time, came to Kuala Lumpur two years later and saw the paintings for herself; in a half-hour Whatsapp text flurry, we decided to plan a trip.

Inauk’s paintings at the National Art Gallery suggested a painter with naivete: his brushstrokes were rough, the perspectives were simply rendered, and there was a flatness to his depiction of subjects in the landscape. He was clearly interested in war and colonialism, and its effect on peoples and landscapes. A 2010 painting *Sejarah Melukis Inauk* (‘History of Inauk’s Painting’) plays with size as power, showing a too-small, presumably Murut, boy in a longhouse looking up at two towering soldiers in fatigues. His 2004 painting, *Memori Pembinaan Jalan Kuda dan Pengangkutan [sic] Barangan Pegawai Daerah British di Pensiangan (1914–1919) II* (Memory of the Construction of Horse Road and the Transport of Goods by the British District Officer in Pensiangan (1914–1919) II) shows a road cutting through a lush mountain, the forest dappled with light; on the road, people mount horses and buffalos carry goods, fading in one-point perspective into the picture plane.

¹ Sheau Yun Lim, ‘How Not to Tell a Regional History of Art’, *ArtReview Asia*, 23 September 2022, available at <https://artreview.com/nusa-national-art-gallery-kuala-lumpur-21-june-2022-2025/>.

But one work in particular betrayed Inauk's singular, bizarre imagination. In the 2000 work *Bapa/Dewasa Kencing Berdiri, Anak/Remaja Kencing Berlari* ('Father/Adult Pees Standing, Child/Teenager Pees Running'), a field of green recedes into a vanishing point – a closer look reveals that they are not landscape, but rather rows of soldiers split neatly in half into opposing sides, each pointing their rifles at enemy troops. Fiery explosions detonate in the background. People in parachutes are falling from the sky, deposited by white aeroplanes. And in the foreground, two people in their underwear are shooting up, their clothes, perhaps uniforms, strewn on the ground alongside syringes, like the civilisation they have abandoned; a man is stabbing a woman lying face down in the ground, arms splayed wide; and, true to the title of the painting, a man stands peeing while a child (or teenager) runs as he too pees standing up. The artist's signature in the right-hand corner is in the shape of a cross, with 'Inauk' repeated horizontally and vertically, overlapping at the 'A'; and 'Gullah' written in a curve below, like the arm of an anchor.

2.

Based on newspaper articles and the Sabah Art Gallery website, I knew only the very basic biographical details of Inauk's life. He was Murut Paluan – part of the Paluan subgroup of the indigenous Murut people – born in Nabawan in the Interior Division of Sabah in 1938. He passed away in 2020. Between 1995 and 2009, he was a regular entrant in Sabah Art Gallery's Annual Art Award,² which was how his work ended up in the national collection – by way of dogged insistence.

In November 1958, Inauk was baptised as a Seventh-day Adventist (SDA),³ and the SDA Church's archives are where I found his most significant paper trail. Throughout the twentieth century, Muruts increasingly adopted Christianity of various denominations. The Seventh-day Adventist Church, a Protestant denomination founded in 1863 out of the eschatological Millerite movement in the United States, established a global presence first in Europe, Australia and China, and arrived in Jesselton (today's Kota Kinabalu) in 1912. Among the Church's beliefs are the adherence to the Sabbath on Saturdays, and the second coming of Jesus Christ. The church's initial evangelical activities targeted the urban, Chinese populace,⁴ proselytising to the Dusun and Muruts began in earnest in 1923.⁵ The first Muruts were baptised in 1931,⁶ and by the 1950s, the SDA expanded their work in the rural Sabah interior and established churches, kindergartens and schools, and ran travelling clinics. Adventism offered social services that the colonial administration had ignored, effectively offering a route out of illiteracy and illness and toward social mobility.

Unlike other church hierarchies more closely tied to empire and class structure, the SDA emphasised personal Bible study, trained local teachers quickly and encouraged local leadership. According to SDA documents, Inauk first learned of the church in 1956 while attending trade

² As of 2025, Karya Perdana Tahunan Negeri Sabah (KPTNS, or the Sabah Annual Art Award) has been ongoing for 40 editions. Administered by the Sabah Art Gallery, which was founded in 1984, Sabah's Annual Art Award is singular in its outreach, dividing the state into six districts, each with regional contact points. Based on a recent report, it seems that children's categories are more competitive than adult ones. See Sabah Art Gallery, "KTPNS Ke-39 2024," 33, <https://sabahartgallery.com/sites/default/files/uploads/downloads/279/e-book-kptns-ke-39-2024.pdf>.

³ Mrs. C. G. Oliver, "Don't Forget About us," *The Messenger* 9, no 1 (1951): 5.

⁴ See more in Abednigo Chow Yau Shung, *From Pioneers to Present: Seventh-Day Adventist Mission History in British North Borneo and Sabah* (Opus Publications, 2024).

⁵ *Ibid.*, 21-46.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 29.

school in Jesselton.⁷ In 1959, under the name Inauk Siambing, he penned a column stating that he had learned of Suloh Hidup ('Voice of Prophecy'), the SDA's Malay Bible correspondence course run through Singapore, through a friend.⁸ He wrote of his conversion, 'It pains my heart to see my people and loved ones still dwelling leisurely in darkness, and living a life without aim or hope.'⁹ Later that year, Inauk graduated from a one-year training course at the SDA's Sabah Training School in Tamparuli.¹⁰

In 1961, having adopted the full name Inauk S. Gullah, he wrote an article on souls he had 'harvest[ed]'¹¹ for the Church.¹² He describes how the ills of drinkers, 'hog-eaters', and chain-smokers alike were overcome through the Church, which offered not just individual religious salvation, but a way of re-entering one's community.¹³ Between 1959–61, he appears no less than thirteen times across the SDA's various publications, primarily in the Southeast Asia periodical, *The Messenger*. By October 1961, Inauk was married and writing from the village of Takul Penawan in Nabawan.¹⁴ By 1962, he was said to be among seventeen members of a church that SDA members built themselves,¹⁵ presumably the church at Sook, which was said to be a 'primitive structure of poles and attap, dirt floor, and backless planks across a framework [that] served as benches.'¹⁶

While his devotion to the SDA church was clear, it is unclear if Inauk was ever ordained as a pastor. In 1963 and 1964, he was mentioned as a 'Licensed Bible Instructor' in the Sabah mission. In 1964¹⁷, Inauk was cited as a 'young Murut worker' who introduced an SDA pastor to a couple he brought into the SDA church, Bakusut and Cinema, who wished to be baptised.¹⁸ After 1966, he was no longer mentioned in church records. However, an obituary¹⁹ and an official Keningau SDA blog both name him as a pastor:²⁰ this, perhaps, was more of a reflection of his role in proselytizing to the community more than a formal recognition by the SDA

⁷ "Bible Correspondence Schools," *The Messenger* 12, no. 3, (1962): 4.

⁸ Inauk Siambing, "From Curiosity to Conversion," *The Messenger* 9 no. 2 (1959): 4-6.

⁹ Siambing, "From Curiosity to Conversion," 5.

¹⁰ G. C. Oliver, "Graduation Day at Sabah Training School," *The Messenger* 9, no. 10 (1959): 5.

¹¹ Inauk S. Gullah, "The Wonderful Power of the Gospel," *The Messenger* 11, no. 1, (1961): 6.

¹² For instance, he describes a person who, prior to conversion, spent her money on alcohol instead of feeding and raising her children. 'Her children roamed the village and countryside half starved, almost naked and suffering from all kinds of disease.' When she accepted Jesus, via his encouragement, her demeanour transformed into one of cheer and youthfulness and she was 'dearly loved by her children and relatives'. *Ibid*.

¹³ *Ibid*.

¹⁴ W. A. Hilliard, "A Visit to Takul Pinawan," *The Messenger* 11, no. 4 (1951): 5.

¹⁵ "Bible Correspondence Schools," *The Messenger* 12, no. 3, (1962): 4.

¹⁶ Mrs. Hazel Peters, "A Visit to the Muruts," *The Messenger* 16, no. 3 (1966): 1.

¹⁷ It is not entirely clear whether this event happened in 1964 or 1966. One version of the article is from 1964, published in *Far Eastern Division Outlook*, and another is published in 1966 in *The Messenger*. Both articles are extremely similar and are written by Mrs Hazel Peters, wife of Pastor Andrew Peters, and write as if the events in the article had just occurred. For the sake of the essay, I assume the earlier date. See more in Mrs. Hazel Howard Peters, "A Visit to the Murut Tribe," *Far Eastern Division Outlook* 50, no. 4 (1964): 2-3 and Peters, "A Visit to the Muruts," 1.

¹⁸ Peters, "A Visit to the Muruts, 1. Inauk mentions a Bakusut and "his beautiful young wife" in another article, see Inauk S. Gullah, "He Saw the Great Physician," *The Messenger* 11, no. 5, (1961): 3.

¹⁹ Henry Bating, "Pastor Inauk tinggalkan legasi pelayanan rohani masyarakat Murut," (Pastor Inauk leaves a legacy of spiritual ministry in the Murut community), *Utusan Borneo*, 16 Oct 2020, <https://www.pressreader.com/malaysia/utusan-borneo-sabah/20201016/282333977383890>. Accessed 23 January 2025.

²⁰ Elroon Liberty, "Sejarah Evangelisasi Daerah Keningau," (The History of Evangelism in Keningau), *Blog Rasmi Gereja Seventh-day Adventist Keningau*, (Official Blog of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Keningau) <https://adventistkeningau.wordpress.com/profil-gereja/sejarah-evangelisasi-daerah-keningau/>. Accessed 15 January, 2025.

hierarchy. In any case, by the early 1970s a new leader had replaced Inauk at the head of the Sook congregation.²¹

The moral universe of the SDA church permeates Inauk's work. In *The Great Controversy*, a seminal SDA text by church prophetess Ellen G. White, all of history is framed as a grand moral conflict between Christ and Satan.²² Earth is the stage for the struggle between Christ's love and freedom and Satan's pride, deception and control. These conflicts simmer, implicitly or explicitly, across many of Inauk's paintings. In *Folk Art Ku Analisis Negeri Di Bawah Bayu* (My Folk Art Analysis of the Land Below the Wind, 2012), people are gambling on cock fights, fighting each other with spears, while angels and devils influence mankind and Satan tempts Eve. 'Don't kill', Inauk preaches in the painting. 'Wage war against they who war upon you.'

I wondered to what extent this conflict was playing out inside Inauk. Religious conversion, while uplifting, also ruptures. It rearranges kinship obligations, social lives, rhythms of the week. It produces new disciplinary paradigms: it also becomes a new way to judge one's neighbours. Inauk's writing about drinkers and 'hog-eaters' carries this double edge, naming not only actions of harm but also naming people as morally fallen. Individual and communities both are repaired through the church, and equally, they can be split by it.

The mouthpieces of the SDA church were also, clearly, fascinated by Inauk and his story. *Review and Herald*, the SDA's global publication proudly, although falsely,²³ declared him 'the first Murut Seventh-day Adventist', who upon his conversion 'encountered great resistance from his people.'²⁴ It emphasised the remoteness of his home, 'a day's journey by train and four days afoot into the jungles of North Borneo', a testament to both the endurance of the church and the recognition of their faith in the far-reaches of the world. He satisfied a double demand for the church, as both 'savage'²⁵ and insider-proselytiser. Through the church, he moved through an alternative set of institutions and was exposed to its narrative forms. He learned to write for print for a broader SDA audience. For his fellow Murut Paluans, he trained to communicate in public, to evangelise, to narrate his life as testimony.

Inauk's 'folk art analysis' (to follow the title of his 2012 painting) implies a certain self-awareness around the apparent 'folk' status of his art. Perhaps the same could be said of his life: he was a figure of the in-between, living between worlds, unable to and undesiring of full assimilation into either. In a comparable way, I like to think Inauk demonstrated some awareness of the church's gaze. A photograph of young Inauk was published alongside that article, dressed in Murut clothing and standing in front of a map of North Borneo (the old name of Sabah) and the South China Sea. He holds a *sumpit*, a hunting weapon that is both blowgun and spear. With his native clothing, he has chosen to wear white socks and black loafers.²⁶

3.

Keningau was merely a pitstop: after resting for a night, Adeline and I were driving onwards to the Murut Cultural Center in Tenom to meet two of Inauk's daughters, Rina and Narina, and his grandchildren. What happened to Inauk after the paper trail ended?

²¹ Liberty, 'Sejarah Evangelisasi Daerah Keningau', and Chow, *From Pioneers to Present*, 131.

²² See more in Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (1888/1911), <https://www.ellenwhite.info/books/ellen-g-white-book-great-controversy-gc-contents.htm>.

²³ He was not the first Murut Seventh-day Adventist – three Muruts were baptised in 1931. See more in Chow, *From Pioneers to Present*, 29.

²⁴ 'First Fruits from the Murut Tribe', *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* (6 August 1931): 11.

²⁵ See more in Michel-Rolph Trouillot, "Anthropology and the Savage Slot: The Poetics and Politics of Otherness," *Global Transformations* (Springer, 2003), 7-28.

²⁶ Photographer unknown, in *The Messenger* 14, no. 3 (1962): 4 and *Review and Herald* 139, no. 58 (1962): 19.

Inauk was fluent in at least Murut, Dusun and Malay, and by local standards unusually educated. He attended school in Tenom, living there through his primary years and completing Standard 6, an achievement that already set him apart. According to his family, Inauk returned to his hometown of Nabawan at around age thirty-five. This marked a decisive shift. He stopped pastoring and began to paint. His eldest daughter, Rina, was seventeen at the time. From this point on, painting became his primary occupation. He worked almost continuously, often stopping only for meals and sometimes skipping them altogether. However, he was deeply observant of the Sabbath, ceasing all work from Friday evening to Saturday, and abstained from smoking and drinking. This discipline stood in contrast to his earlier life, when he was known locally as one of the most dedicated *tapai* drinkers. His frequent paintings of *tapai* drinking, they joked, was less social commentary than nostalgia.

His children remarked to us that his artistic practice was resolutely self-directed. He did not study under anyone, did not copy existing styles, and did not sketch. He painted directly onto plywood, first blocking out form, then filling in colour and detail, correcting mistakes by painting over them. A work might take anywhere from a week to a month. His materials were local and improvised: small tins of *cat pagar*, industrial paint used to paint fences, bought from neighbourhood shops, brushes both purchased and handmade by splitting the ends of rotan for harder edges, frames constructed from wood. He also painted on *kulit kayu* to be worn as *Abag*, a traditional Murut Paluwan garment, and made sculptures. One sculpture of a deer, carved out of wood with its legs tucked in and sat on the ground, is on display at the Murut Cultural Centre.

According to his family, Inauk did not speak much about his art, even to them. He did not teach his children to paint or encourage them toward artistic careers. Yet he was, unmistakably, a professional and full-time artist. He was a cosmopolitan figure, travelled widely across Sabah – though rarely beyond it – painting portraits, nature, cultural practices, and sites he encountered. He painted market scenes in Kundasang near Mount Kinabalu; a portrait of a Rungus man making a gong in Kudat, the far northern town on the coast of Sabah; and even painted himself receiving an art award in Kota Kinabalu, with the winning work painted in the background in miniature. Inauk spent a year as an in-house artist at the Pusat Kraftangan in Nabawan when it was first established and occasionally stayed for extended periods in Kota Kinabalu or Kuala Lumpur when invited for exhibitions. He exhibited regularly, including during Kaamatan in Nabawan, and participated consistently in the Sabah Art Gallery's Annual Art Exhibition – his last submitted painting dates to 2012. Collectors included local Datuks,²⁷ police and government officials, and at least one buyer from Kuala Lumpur who sought him out in Nabawan. Over the course of his life, he is said to have sold around thirty paintings, a number his daughter once asked him about directly.

He lived a largely solitary life, working in a small space near the house; he never called it a studio, although it functioned as such. He was quiet, pensive and withdrawn; *tidak ikut campur*. His wife, also Murut Paluan, was similarly reserved, a housewife who maintained the domestic rhythm around his work. They had eight children; four passed away young. He read the Bible and the newspaper daily and owned many books, though their contents remained largely inaccessible to his children. In Inauk's later years, his eyesight deteriorated; spectacles offered little help. He passed away in 2020, during the pandemic but not from the virus itself.

The Murut Cultural Centre, where we met his family, had a few of Inauk's works on loan since prior to his passing. At the meeting, his daughters decided to sell his works to the Sabah Art

²⁷ In Malaysia, Datuk is a title conferred by the federal sovereign with certain orders of honour.

Gallery, with the exception of one work. This was a 2001 landscape painting of the sacred limestone hill of Batu Punggul, by the Sapulut river south of his hometown. It depicts an idyllic day: a group of people on a motorboat cruise down the muddy river towards the hill, beneath a clear sky. The family brought it home; this was the painting they wanted to remember him by.

4.

How should *we* remember the elusive Inauk S. Gullah? Between his known works, his life and words in the SDA archives, and his taciturn personality as narrated by his children, I constructed a picture of Inauk from the outside. But to narrativize him is an altogether more challenging task. Drawing from his own narration of ‘folk’, I began to see Inauk as a kind of folk figure in the anthropological sense as articulated by Robert Redfield, or even a Gramscian ‘organic intellectual’, one who moves between the rural and the urban, the vernacular and the institutional. Yet the category of ‘folk’ itself is unstable. Joan M. Benedetti writes that there are two distinctly different definitions of ‘folk’: one where cultural expression emerges from ‘culturally coherent communities’; and another where ‘individual vision predominates’, ‘the product of a personal consciousness that is (unlike that of the mainstream gallery artist) largely self-taught, and unaware of (or unconcerned with) the contemporary art market... often (though not always) functioning in opposition to any community context.’²⁸ This latter sense is where we derive the romanticized figure of the isolated, self-taught individual whose work is framed as instinctive, naïve and detached from both market and discourse. Inauk may have begun his life in the former category and notably continued to engage with craft throughout his life, but the personas in his paintings certainly conform to the latter definition.

Beyond the definitions, another question: Who is this ‘folk’ for? As cultural anthropologist Charles Keil replies pithily, it is for ‘the ruling class... and professing folklorists.’ The folk, he argues, allows these ‘Quaint-not-quite-like-us, the Pleasant peasants, the Almost-like-me-and-you, to be consumed at leisure.’²⁹ The folk becomes another way of expressing difference, an expression of being out-of-place and out-of-time. Earlier, I gestured at the SDA church’s representation of Inauk as fulfilling a role; I wondered if I was doing the same.

Inauk’s works are unmistakably singular. They do not offer the viewer comfort. They do not resolve. They do not behave like the ‘folk’ as a stable category, as if the rural is a reservoir of innocence. If anything, Inauk paints the rural as a place where violence and temptation are close at hand, where the sacred and the obscene share a fount. His work’s incompatibility with ‘folk’ clichés becomes even clearer when you remember how playful Inauk could be. For instance, where he paints himself in the act of receiving the 2002 Sabah Art award, including the very painting that supposedly earned him that recognition. The painting has an almost absurdly long title – *Memori II Sempena Perayaan Hari Jadi Rasmi Ke-72 Tun Hj. Sakaran Bin Dandai Inauk S. Gullah Terima Hadiah KPTNS 2002...* (Memory II in Conjunction with the 72nd Official Birthday Celebration of Tun Hj. Sakaran Bin Dandai Inauk S. Gullah Receives the 2002 KPTNS Prize, 2003). It is a work the loops back on itself: the artist, the ceremony, the institutional validation, and the artwork are all folded into a cheeky, knowingly constructed scene. It is hard to reconcile this kind of mischievous humour with the idea of the instinctive, naïve or untouched ‘folk’ creator. The painting is so self-aware. It understands spectacle, recognition, and the performance of success. Inauk is not just documenting an event – he is staging it, replaying it, gently exaggerating it, perhaps even poking fun at the machinery of awards and visibility. This is a wink.³⁰

²⁸ Charles Keil, ‘Who Needs “The Folk?”’, *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 15, no. 3 (1978): 263-5.

²⁹ Joan M. Benedetti, ‘Who Are the Folk in Folk Art? Inside and Outside the Cultural Context’, *Art Documentation* 6, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 3-8.

³⁰ See more on the wink in Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (Basic Books, 1973).

Perhaps what resists categorisation is precisely this: Inauk is not outside history. He is deeply inside it, inside its religious transformations, its environmental degradations, its cultural loss. To frame him as folk risks placing him before modernity, when in fact his work emerges from its consequences. What he is outside of is the scripts of history that are written from Kuala Lumpur, concerned always with nation, race and development. He is not a romantic rural figure but part of a historical transformation, recording relations being remade and undone. His view has been conditioned by his time, and we are mere witnesses to the life and work he has left behind.

5.

36 Jenis Buah Dalam Hutan Pupus Akibat Pembalakan Haram di Sabah (36 Kinds of Fruits in the Forest Extinct Because of Illegal Logging in Sabah, 2011) shows thirty-six fruits likely native to the region that are now extinct due to illicit deforestation.³¹ Hovering in the top corner is a logging truck, its trailer piled with logs, strapped down and ready to be transported out of the forest. The painting was made late in Inauk's life, when his eyesight had already started to take a turn. Many of the fruits are rendered rather crudely, hazy like a memory, amorphous blobs of one or two colours. Others, like the many varieties of durian, such as the Tayi, Tautungon and Paluka, are painted with much more care, as whole fruit and with their profiles once bisected to be eaten with various shades of fruit from yellow to red, and skin from green to purple.

The knowledge in this work is one that could only come with the long memory of age, one from an individual who had lived to see or try all these fruits. In the opposite corner to the logging truck is a burnt-yellow fruit growing in bunches, labelled Tampasak. When I showed the painting to artist Yee I-Lann – who is also from Sabah – she told me that there is a village named Kampung Tampasak named after this tree. This village had been submerged to make way for the 1992 Babagon Dam, which provides sixty percent of the water in urban Kota Kinabalu and Penampang. The people in this village, now relocated to just outside the dam, no longer know what the tree their home was named after smelled or tasted like. I-Lann snapped a photograph.

³¹ Shown in *The Plantation Plot*, curated by Sheau Yun Lim, Ilham Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, April-September 2025.

In loving memory of chi too (1981-2026), Project Manager at Ilham Gallery and artist extraordinaire, without whom this research, exhibition, and thinking would not have been possible. It was an honour to be one of your favourite(-ism)s. Thank you for all you gave me, and to your communities.

Thank you to Ilham Gallery for funding my travel to Sabah in conjunction with the exhibition I curated there, *The Plantation Plot*. Thank you to Adeline Chia for being such a generous conversation partner and my co-conspirator in this trip. Thank you to Wang Jiabao for the references and readings on folk, which informed my thinking around the essay. Thank you to everyone who hosted me and Adeline in Sabah, especially Sarah Ahmad Shah and Intan Hamzah from Sabah Art Gallery, and Yee I-Lann.