



**STRIKING ...** (clockwise, from above) 'Vietnam' (1980) is a state of suffering captured with the unconscious expression of the crucifixion; the artist is working feverishly on a new body of work as well; 'Anak Asia' (1980) is an earlier commentary in rich sobriety of black and umber.

## Sundriary

If you have an arts-related event and want it to be listed in this column, write to:

**Sundriary**  
c/o Sunday Star  
Star Publications (M) Bhd  
13 Jalan 13/6  
46200 Petaling Jaya

**ART**  
□ AN exhibition by Charles Low entitled *The Conquerer of Love* will be held at the Hotel Nikko until March 10. The exhibition is held in aid of the Cancerlink Foundation. Details: ☎ 03-496 4517.

□ ART Ease Galleries presents an exhibition entitled *The Spirit of Mezzotint* at its premises until March 15. Artists represented in this exhibition are Laurent Schklonyk, Mikio Watanabe and Mario Avanti.

**MUSIC**  
□ The Wallace Collection Quintet will present: *A Touch of Brass* - two concerts at the Panggung Eksperimen, Kompleks Budaya Negara, on March 7. Concerts will be held at 3pm and 8.30pm on that day. Tickets for performances are priced at RM10 and RM25 respectively and are available from the British Council (☎ 03-298 7555 ext. 34); The Actors Studio Theatre (☎ 03-294 5400) and Panggung Negara (☎ 03-294 3022). Details: ☎ 03-298 7555 ext.34.

**DANCE**  
□ The Channa/Upull Dance Troupe from Sri Lanka will present a final performance at the Kuala Lumpur Hilton tonight. The performance is in conjunction with the Sri Lanka Week.

**THEATRE**  
□ *The Morphing*, which witnesses the return to stage of Dicky Cheah, ends at the Actors Studio Theatre today with a matinee performance. Tickets are priced at RM10. Performance is at 2.30pm. Details: ☎ 03-294 5400.

# Striking the right chords

By J. ANU

**N**irmala Dutt Shanmughalingam: *A Retrospective*, the long awaited review of the artist's entire body of work, is finally being shown at Valentine Willie Fine Art.

This is Shanmughalingam's first major exhibition since her 1981 *Condition of Being* show at Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka - a time when the aftermath of Vietnam was still a relevant recent memory and issues like poverty and pollution were hardly being addressed by the local artists fraternity.

In that show, the artist showed these social issues through painterly collages and silk screens evoked by photo images from the media as well as photographs the artist herself took of issues that were close to her heart.

The squatter, the flower seller, the unforgiving horrors of war as well as the rolls and rolls of fragmented images of children were the centrepieces to the *Condition of Being* show.

Her dependence on the photographic image, far from being an insecurity about her own drafting skills, stemmed from her own belief that much of the mood of her subject must stand on its own and not be interpreted in her own mind's eye.

"I wanted to retain the objectivity of the subject, something only a camera can achieve," the artist explained. "If I had painted it, a part of me would have come into it."

Since then, Shanmughalingam, while continuing to be concerned with her social themes, has explored new means of expression.

The play of words and the use of the screened photographic image has begun to play a lesser role to the gestural and painterly stroke of the brush.

In her recent *Bosnia Series*, the artist moved away from the play of words and stark shadow and has begun to work on an



organic scale, the figures looming and ripe, ominous as a nightmare about death.

This shift to painting followed a period of research at the University of London in the early 90s, where the artist explored the relationship between war and art, which is the rationale behind her own work.

But her considerations remain rooted. "I agonise for a long time over what I want to paint and I found an old Chinese quotation that best described this phenomena - *Before you paint it, let the bamboo grow in your heart*," she explained.

"This best captures my emotional involvement with the subjects closest to my heart whether it is Bosnia, Somalia, *Anak Asia* or any form of injustice inflicted on the common man."

Despite this new direction, the most recent works have many important links with her earlier collages.

Social content, the news media, memorabilia and the predominantly black and umber colour schemes have been important elements in her work since the earli-

est photographic documentation from the early 70s.

Works like *Pollution Piece* (1974), *Statement I* (1973) as well as *Statement II and III* (1975/1979), marked a watershed in her artistic career.

Prior to this, her abstract expressionist landscapes like *Landscape* (1972) and *View from Federal Hill* (1972) - glorious outings in colour and form - failed to express the new realities which the new artist had begun to anguish over.

These were issues which surrounded her everyday: from the burning fires she witnessed from her home on the hill during the May 13 riots, to the everyday images that she was exposed to on the television, in the newspaper and, most importantly, on her various photography excursions with urban poverty and pollution.

So she began the collages of photographs, which bombarded the viewer with a myriad of issues and familiar

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