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PHOTOGRAPHY EXHIBITION BY
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Hart+A



ARTEMIS ART

SACRED CURRENTS

*An homage to
Malaysia's living,
life-giving rivers*

















01 | *The Kinabatangan River, Sabah (2015)*

As I soar above Sabah's picturesque landscape, my eyes are drawn to the winding beauty of the Kinabatangan River below. From an altitude of approximately 15,000 feet, its majesty unfolds before me like a ribbon of life snaking through the wilderness. Below lies the Kinabatangan Wildlife Sanctuary.

The river, Sabah's longest, has a rich history dating back to 631 AD. Its name, a blend of "Kina" from China and "Batang" meaning large river, speaks to the diverse cultural influences that have shaped this region over centuries.

Capturing this natural wonder from a small plane presents its challenges. The pilot manoeuvres carefully, making several passes to find the perfect angle for my shot. Unlike a helicopter, which allows for easy hovering, a plane demands precision and patience.

Yet, despite the difficulties, the rewards are boundless. The floodplain below creates a tapestry of ox-bow lakes, providing a haven for Malaysia's finest wildlife and birdlife. Every frame captures a moment of this vibrant ecosystem, frozen in time.

02 | *The Baram River, Sarawak (2019)*

As I navigate the skies above Sarawak in a small Cessna plane, my gaze is drawn to the sinuous path of the Baram River below. It begins its journey in the rugged Kelabit Highlands, nestled in the mighty Iran Mountains near the border of Kalimantan, before winding its way through dense tropical forests until it reaches its ultimate destination: the South China Sea.

This region, steeped in history and shrouded in mystery, has captivated explorers for centuries. It's a land where ancient warriors once roamed and headhunters held

sway, leaving behind a legacy that still echoes through the dense foliage.

For the hundreds of tribes that call its banks home, the Baram River is more than just a waterway—it's a lifeline. It provides sustenance in the form of fish and other aquatic treasures, quenching their thirst and nourishing their bodies. Its currents also serve as a vital artery of transportation, connecting remote communities and facilitating trade and communication throughout the state.

As I soar above this land of wonder and intrigue, I can't help but marvel at the resilience of the people who have thrived in its midst for generations. Their lives are intimately intertwined with the rhythms of the river, their destinies shaped by its ebb and flow. In the embrace of the Baram, they find both sustenance and solace.

03 | *The Central Forest Spine, Pahang (2016)*

As I glide above the vast expanse of the Central Forest Spine, its magnificence unfolds beneath me like a sprawling mosaic of colours & textures. From my vantage point 15,000 feet above, I can trace the gentle curves of its rivers, glowing like ribbons as they wind through the valleys of the Titiwangsa mountain range.

Officially designated as the Central Forest Spine, this ancient forest is known by many names. Some hail it as the oldest forest on Earth, while others refer to it as Peninsular Malaysia's Green Lung, acknowledging its crucial role in carbon sequestration.

But its significance goes far beyond its title. This pristine wilderness is a haven for endangered species like the majestic Malayan Tiger, the elusive Malayan Sun bear, and the gentle Malayan Tapir, along with a myriad of other creatures. As part of the Sundaland biodiversity hotspot, it teems with life, from towering trees to tiny

microorganisms, contributing to Malaysia's status as a megadiverse nation.

Yet, amidst its breathtaking beauty lies a story of neglect and exploitation. Decades of unchecked development, deforestation, and exploitation have left irreversible scars on this delicate ecosystem.

From my aerial perspective, I can't help but ponder the unseen and unheard. Beyond what meets the eye, thousands of animals, from the smallest insects to the mightiest predators, inhabit this forest. The echoes of the Malayan tiger's roar, the trumpeting of elephants, and the constant drone of cicadas are but a fraction of the symphony of life that reverberates through these ancient woods.

Today, as I bear witness to the splendour and fragility of the Central Forest Spine, I'm reminded of the urgent need to protect and preserve this invaluable treasure for generations to come.

04 | *Gunung Tahan, Pahang (2017)*

As I hover beside Gunung Tahan in my helicopter, my eyes are drawn to the mesmerising sight of a lenticular cloud formation hovering ominously overhead. These unique cloud formations, often shaped like UFOs, are known to signal impending bad weather. Seasoned pilots know to keep a safe distance from these areas, heeding the warning they provide.

Flying in these conditions requires not only skill but also a deep understanding of the ever-changing dynamics of the atmosphere. Turbulence can be unpredictable, and sudden shifts in wind direction can pose significant challenges. Yet, there's a thrill that comes with navigating through nature's raw power, a sense of awe at being so intimately connected to the elements.

Amidst the swirling clouds and mist-shrouded peaks, lies a world teeming with life. Gunung Tahan and its surrounding mountains are home to a diverse array of wildlife, from elusive clouded leopards to colourful bird species like the vibrant rhinoceros hornbill. In the dense rainforests below, Malayan tapirs roam stealthily, while sun bears forage for fruits and insects amidst the foliage.

But it's not just the larger animals that call these mountains home. Tiny creatures, from frogs to insects, play vital roles in maintaining the delicate balance of this ecosystem. Each species is a thread in the intricate tapestry of life, contributing to the richness and biodiversity of these ancient forests.

05 | Cameron Highlands, Pahang (2016)

The mountains encircling the tea plantations of Cameron Highlands are nothing short of breathtaking. It took me six gruelling hours of uphill trekking, navigating a labyrinth of tea bushes, to finally stumble upon an airstrip that offered a spectacular vista of the surrounding peaks.

The scene before me was like something out of a dream. The morning sun, just beginning to rise above the horizon, cast a golden glow through the shifting clouds, illuminating the mist-shrouded peaks in a surreal display of natural beauty. It was a moment of pure magic, a fleeting glimpse of nature at its most sublime.

In that moment, as I stood amidst the awe-inspiring landscape of Cameron Highlands, I couldn't help but feel a sense of awe. To be able to witness such magnificence firsthand, to capture it with my camera and share it with others, is a privilege I'll never take for granted. For me, there can be no greater reward than experiencing nature in all its glory, and being able to share that experience with the world.

06 | Gunung Berembun, Negeri Sembilan (2019)

Lenticular clouds are a rare sight to behold in the mountainous regions of Malaysia. However, during a trek near Gunung Berembun, Negeri Sembilan, I stumbled upon a truly remarkable sight—a stunning formation of lenticular clouds gracing the sky above.

It was early morning, and the air was still damp from the rain that had fallen the previous night. Perhaps it was the perfect combination of atmospheric conditions that gave rise to this breathtaking phenomenon.

As I gazed up at the sky, I couldn't help but marvel at the sight before me. The lenticular clouds, with their distinctive lenslike shape, hung suspended in the air like ethereal sculptures, casting a surreal aura over the landscape below.

It was a moment of pure serendipity, a rare convergence of nature's forces coming together to create something truly extraordinary. And as I stood there, witnessing this awe-inspiring spectacle unfold before my eyes, I was reminded once again of the boundless beauty and wonder that surrounds us, waiting to be discovered.

07 | Gunung Mat Cincang, Langkawi (2016)

Gunung Mat Cincang stands proudly as the second tallest peak on Langkawi Island, but to me, it represents the crowning jewel of the Andaman Islands. Steeped in legend and folklore, this majestic mountain is steeped in mystique and wonder. It is also home to one of Langkawi's most magnificent natural wonders—the Telaga Tujuh Waterfall.

Having captured its beauty countless times, I've had the privilege of photographing Gunung Mat Cincang from both the air, aboard a helicopter, and on the ground, tracing the path of the river that leads to the breathtaking falls.

But beyond its scenic allure, Gunung Mat Cincang holds a rich geological history. Formed millions of years ago, it is part of the ancient mountain range that extends through the Andaman Islands, bearing witness to the tectonic forces that have shaped this region over eons.

As a sanctuary for wildlife, Langkawi may lack the presence of predatory animals like tigers or clouded leopards, but it boasts a vibrant array of avian inhabitants. The island is renowned for its spectacular birdlife, with iconic species such as the hornbill and the eagle adorning its skies. The eagle in particular, holds a special significance as the emblem of Langkawi, symbolising the island's natural heritage and beauty.

08 | Bukit Tabur, Selangor (2016)

Just a brief drive from the bustling heart of Kuala Lumpur lies a natural wonder waiting to be discovered — Bukit Tabur in the state of Selangor. Close to the Klang Gates Dam, this area is renowned for its high rainfall, making it a vital source of water for the Klang Valley.

From the elevated vantage point of a helicopter, I captured this mesmerising scene shortly after sunrise. The sunlight gracefully illuminates the rising mist that blankets the rainforests below, creating a breathtaking spectacle of nature's beauty.

Bukit Tabur is not only a scenic marvel but also a thriving ecosystem teeming with wildlife. Once, these forests were home to majestic tigers, a testament to the area's rich biodiversity. Today, while the tigers may have retreated deeper into the wilderness, the hills remain alive with a diverse array of flora and fauna.

The Klang River, a lifeline for the surrounding communities, owes its existence to the pristine waters that flow from these majestic hills. Bukit Tabur serves as a critical watershed, replenishing the river and sustaining the ecosystems that depend on it.







12 | PERLIS STATE PARK
2018











09 | *Titiwangsa Mountain Range, Perak (2024)*

This scene before you could easily be plucked from a Hollywood movie. The morning sun rises, casting a golden glow over the low clouds and rising mist, creating a breathtaking backdrop against the lush backdrop of the Malaysian rainforest. Yet, this isn't a cinematic fantasy—it's a daily spectacle within the depths of the main Titiwangsa mountain range, stretching across the length of the Malay peninsula and dividing its east and west coasts.

Just a month ago, I had the privilege of immersing myself in this natural wonderland, spending three nights among the indigenous Jahai tribe. For thousands of years, they have called these lands home, their way of life untouched by the march of development. Living in harmony with the wild creatures that inhabit the forest, they have thrived off its bounty.

Central to their existence are the rivers that flow from the mountains, winding their way through the dense foliage. These waterways are teeming with life—fish, prawns, frogs, and countless other species thrive in their nutrient-rich waters, providing a vital food source for the Jahai people.

However, the tranquility of this ancient landscape is under threat. Logging activities in the area have escalated in recent years, driven by demand for timber and land conversion into agriculture land. The consequences have been dire—excessive deforestation has led to heavy siltation of the rivers, choking them of their life-giving nutrients and disrupting the delicate balance of the ecosystem.

As a result, the Jahai people are facing a crisis. Their once abundant sources of food are dwindling, threatening their way of life and the very existence of this pristine wilderness. If we do not act swiftly to halt the destructive forces of deforestation, scenes like the one captured on camera may soon become a distant memory, lost to the ravages of human greed and negligence.

10 | *Pulau Tuba, Langkawi (2016)*

Tuba Island, nestled among the 99 islands of Langkawi in the Andaman Sea, holds a special allure. It's a secluded paradise, untouched by human habitation, where the only way to truly appreciate its beauty is from above.

As I soar above Tuba Island in a helicopter, I'm struck by the breathtaking vista unfolding beneath me. The hill on Tuba Island, with a meandering river snaking its way towards its verdant slopes, is a sight to behold—a perspective impossible to attain through any other means. Even with a drone, accessing this part of the island would be a feat beyond reach.

From this aerial viewpoint, I'm granted a rare glimpse of Tuba Island's pristine beaches, where powdery white sands meet the shimmering emerald waters of the Andaman Sea. It's a picture-perfect scene, one that I hope will endure for generations to come.

As I marvel at the untouched beauty of Tuba Island, I'm reminded of the importance of preserving our natural treasures. It serves as a poignant reminder of what happens when humans refrain from inflicting themselves on nature—when we allow ecosystems to thrive undisturbed.

11 | *Kilim Karst Geopark, Langkawi (2016)*

The Kilim Geopark forests in Langkawi stand as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, a testament to their extraordinary ecological significance. Renowned as one of the most diverse mangrove forests globally, it serves as a vital nursery for countless marine species, nurturing them before they venture into the open seas to populate the oceans.

When I share images of this UNESCO site with others, their initial reaction often mirrors my own disbelief upon first encountering its majestic beauty—“Is this truly in Malaysia? Could these not be some distant hills in China?” Yet, as I delved deeper into its wonders, I marvelled

at the unique blend of natural splendour found right here in my homeland.

The Kilim Geopark forests boast a rich geological heritage, with rock formations dating back millions of years. The landscape tells a story of ancient tectonic forces at work, shaping the rugged terrain and carving out breathtaking limestone formations. It's a living monument to the passage of time and the enduring power of nature.

As I navigate the tranquil waters of the Kilim River, surrounded by mangroves and towering limestone cliffs, I'm humbled by the sheer diversity of life that thrives within this pristine ecosystem. It's a sanctuary for a myriad of plant and animal species, each playing a crucial role in maintaining the delicate balance of this fragile ecosystem.

12 | *Perlis State Park (2018)*

The first time I ventured into the Perlis State Park, I was immediately struck by the ancient grandeur of the Nakawan Range. The limestone formations, dating back a staggering 500 million years. The Setul Formation, stood as silent witnesses to the passage of time, predating even the reign of dinosaurs.

Traversing the rugged terrain, I marvelled at the sheer magnitude of the limestone cliffs, separated by enclosed valleys known as “wangs”. The landscape was punctuated by caves of varying sizes, each holding its own secrets and wonders. From narrow passageways to vast chambers adorned with fantastic formations, the caves teemed with life—cave racers slithering through the shadows, bats fluttering overhead, and insects scuttling across the damp earth.

Amidst the rich diversity of life in the Perlis State Park, water resources play a vital role in sustaining its ecosystems. The limestone formations act as natural aquifers, storing and filtering rainwater to supply the park's rivers and streams. These waterways not only provide essential hydration for the park's flora and fauna but also serve as vital corridors for wildlife movement. Additionally,

the park's water resources support local communities, serving as a source of irrigation for agriculture and a vital supply of clean drinking water

13 / *Serian, Sarawak (2015)*

Capturing the violent thunderstorm looming over an oil palm plantation in Serian, Sarawak was a meticulous endeavour that required careful planning. Timing was critical—I had to seize the moment just before the menacing rain clouds approached, then swiftly ascend into a waiting helicopter to freeze the scene in time. But why was this image of such importance?

Several months prior, a troubling incident had unfolded along the banks of the Tebakang River, where an Iban community reported the discovery of numerous dead fish and small mammals. Upon investigation, it was revealed that heavy rainfall had triggered the contamination, likely washing harmful pollutants into the waterway.

It's a stark reminder of the environmental repercussions of modern agricultural practices. Runoff from oil palm plantations, laden with pesticides and chemical fertilisers, poses a significant threat to river and marine life. Among the pesticides commonly used in commercial farming, substances like glyphosate, chlorpyrifos, and paraquat are particularly notorious for their detrimental effects on ecosystems.

The impact of such contamination extends far beyond immediate wildlife casualties. Polluted waterways disrupt delicate aquatic ecosystems, endangering not only fish and mammals but also threatening the livelihoods of communities dependent on these resources for sustenance and income.

By capturing the dramatic scene unfolding over the oil palm plantation, I aimed to draw attention to the urgent need for sustainable agricultural practices.

14 / *Straits of Johor (2017)*

Cloud seeding, the artificial induction of rainfall, has raised concerns due to its potential to disrupt natural weather patterns and ecological systems.

One of the primary criticisms of cloud seeding is its potential to disrupt natural weather patterns and ecological systems. By altering the distribution of precipitation, cloud seeding can inadvertently exacerbate drought conditions in some areas while causing flooding in others. This imbalance can have far-reaching consequences for agriculture, water resources, and ecosystems.

Examples include China's 2008 Olympics cloud seeding, which led to flooding, and controversies over water rights and environmental impacts in the US. While cloud seeding has benefits, like mitigating crop damage or replenishing reservoirs, sustainable water management practices should be prioritised to address water scarcity effectively and without adverse environmental effects. This photo, taken somewhere over the Johor Straits, showcases the phenomenon of isolated thunderstorms. While it's uncertain if this storm resulted from cloud seeding, it was peculiar to witness heavy rain pouring down from rainclouds against the backdrop of a bright, sunny day.

15 / *Temurun Waterfalls, Langkawi (2021)*

Langkawi Island's weather follows a typical tropical pattern, with a wet season from May to October and a drier period from November to April. However, extended droughts in recent years have strained water supplies and impacted natural attractions.

The effects of extended drought seasons are particularly evident in Langkawi's waterfalls, including the iconic Temurun Waterfalls. These natural wonders, usually cascading gracefully over rocky cliffs, can dwindle to a mere trickle during periods of drought. The lack of rainfall reduces the volume of water flowing into rivers and streams, diminishing the spectacle of the waterfalls and

impacting tourism, which is a vital source of income for the island.

Efforts to mitigate drought impacts include water conservation and exploring alternative water sources. Addressing climate change and improving water management practices are crucial for ensuring Langkawi's water sustainability and preserving its natural beauty.

16 / *Kuala Sepetang, Perak (2017)*

Whenever I fly over Kuala Sepetang, also known as Port Weld, Perak, I'm captivated by the incredible view of the dense mangroves that surround the town and the knowledge of its rich history intertwined with Malaysia's tin mining industry. Stepping back in time, I imagine the bustling port serving as a crucial hub for transporting tin ore from Taiping by railroad to international markets.

Yet, amidst the prosperity of the past, I can't help but notice the challenges the town faced, particularly regarding water availability. Despite the nearby Sepetang River, water quality issues and depletion of freshwater sources loomed large. Pollution from past mining activities and rapid urbanisation only worsened the situation, posing risks to both the community and the environment.

As I explore further, I learn how climate change has exacerbated these challenges. Erratic rainfall patterns and prolonged droughts have disrupted traditional water cycles, affecting river flows and groundwater levels. It's clear that sustainable water management practices are urgently needed to address these issues and ensure a reliable water supply for the future.

Thankfully, efforts by the local community are underway to tackle water scarcity in Kuala Sepetang. Initiatives aimed at conservation, water quality monitoring, and alternative water sources offer hope for a more sustainable future. It's inspiring to see local stakeholders working together to safeguard water resources while preserving the town's rich heritage.





















17 | *The Kilim River, Langkawi (2018)*

This is the Kilim River seen from the air. It slowly meanders through the thick mangroves then exits into the Andaman sea. Entering the Kilim Karst Geoforest Park in Langkawi feels like stepping into a hidden realm of wonders. As I glide through dense mangrove forests, alive with the chatter of wildlife and the flutter of colourful birds, I'm struck by the sheer beauty of this natural oasis.

When exploring the park by boat, I'm treated to glimpses of caves tucked away along the open sea. Inside, stalagmites and stalactites form intricate patterns, while a myriad of lifeforms thrive in the darkness.

Despite its tranquil beauty, the Kilim Geopark faces challenges. Over the years, the once-rural region has transformed into a bustling tourist destination, attracting visitors from far and wide. But this newfound popularity comes at a cost. Mangrove areas along the Kilim River have suffered degradation, threatened by activities such as clearing for development and recreational pursuits like trekking and canoeing.

While this growth has brought economic opportunities, it has also placed additional strain on the fragile ecosystem. Increased boat traffic along the river has raised concerns about riverbank erosion and other environmental emergencies.

18 | *Mangrove River, Desaru Coast, Johor (2016)*

The mangrove forest in Desaru Coast, Johor, stands as a pristine sanctuary teeming with biodiversity, offering a glimpse into the rich tapestry of coastal ecosystems. Situated along the picturesque Johor Straits, this vibrant mangrove expanse plays a crucial role in safeguarding the region's ecological balance while providing a haven for countless species of flora and fauna.

The proximity of the mangrove forest to the Johor Straits

adds to its allure, offering breathtaking views of the shimmering waters and distant horizons. Here, the ebb and flow of the tides create a dynamic environment, where mangrove ecosystems thrive in the interplay between land and sea. Beyond its scenic beauty, the mangrove forest in Desaru Coast serves as a vital buffer against coastal erosion and storm surges, protecting inland areas from the brunt of tropical storms and rising sea levels.

However, despite its ecological importance, the mangrove forest faces threats from human activities such as pollution, habitat destruction, and unsustainable development such as land reclamation and sand dredging used for construction.

19 | *The Secret Sanctuary, Langkawi (2022)*

As I journey deep into the heart of our tropical rainforests, I chance upon a hidden sanctuary concealed within the dense foliage. This pristine oasis, veiled from the outside world, demands hours or even days of relentless trekking to uncover.

Amidst these surroundings, a river and cascading pool lay nestled, offering a lifeline to the diverse wildlife inhabiting this forest realm. Originating from Gunung Mat Chinchang in Langkawi, the stream's serpentine path through the forest is accompanied by the soothing melody of flowing water and the soft murmurs of distant waterfalls. Here, amidst the tranquil embrace of nature, I find solace in the pure simplicity of this natural bounty—a sanctuary from the relentless tropical sun, where the soul finds respite and the spirit is rejuvenated.

20 | *Mangrove Rivers & Forests, Langkawi (2017)*

The mangroves have become a cherished part of my life, but it wasn't until I ventured into their depths that I truly appreciated their beauty. Growing up, I held onto the misconception that they were perilous places, fuelled by Hollywood's portrayal of them as haunted swamps

teeming with mysterious dangerous creatures. How wrong I was! Today, I find solace and joy in exploring the mangroves, preferring their tranquil embrace over the hustle and bustle of city life.

This image captures a moment of transformation within the mangroves, as a certain section of the trees undergoes a remarkable change. As new leaves emerge, bright and white against the verdant backdrop, it creates a scene reminiscent of a snow-covered mountain landscape. It's a breathtaking sight, a testament to the ever-changing beauty of nature's wonders hidden within the mangrove forests.

21 | *The Perfect Mangrove, Langkawi (2016)*

This photograph captures the essence of a mangrove forest in its entirety, showcasing every element that defines this unique ecosystem. From the rugged rock formations to the intricate network of tangled roots, and the layered canopy of trees stretching into the distance, it encapsulates the true essence of a mangrove forest.

I stumbled upon this breathtaking scene while aboard a boat, completely unaware of the picturesque view unfolding behind me. It was only by chance, as I casually glanced over my shoulder, that I discovered this hidden gem. In that moment, I knew I had stumbled upon something truly special.

This image serves as a reminder of the beauty and diversity found within mangrove forests, highlighting their importance in coastal ecosystems. It is a testament to the wonders of nature, waiting to be discovered in the most unexpected places.

22 | *Mudflats, Desaru Coast, Johor (2017)*

Mudflats are crucial coastal habitats attracting migratory birds and mudskippers. These nutrient-rich expanses provide food and resting spots for shorebirds during

migrations, while mudskippers thrive in their muddy terrain. From elegant sandpipers to majestic herons, mudflats offer a buffet of marine invertebrates and small fish, fuelling these birds on their arduous journeys.

Beyond their ecological significance, mudflats also provide important ecosystem services. Their sediments act as natural filters, trapping pollutants and preventing them from reaching coastal waters. Additionally, their intricate networks of burrows and channels help stabilise coastlines and protect against erosion, making them valuable assets in the face of climate change and sea-level rise.

23 | *Kampung Sungai Sangga, Perak (2017)*

As I fly past this landscape on my journey from Pangkor Island towards Taiping along the west coast, a picturesque scene unfolds before me - my vision of the 'Perfect Village'. Nestled along the banks of Sungai Sangga Besar, which meanders from the coastal town of Kuala Sepetang before emptying into the Straits of Malacca, lies this idyllic hamlet.

Surrounded by lush greenery, the Sungai Bahru forest reserve stands as a protective barrier, while also providing a source of water and sustenance to the village. The fertile land is well irrigated, ensuring bountiful harvests from the farms & rice fields that dot the landscape. Meanwhile, the towering mountains in the distance serve as guardians, supplying a continuous flow of pristine drinking water to the community.

It's a scene of harmony and abundance, where nature's gifts sustain and nurture the lives of those who call this village home. As I gaze upon this tranquil tableau from above, I can't help but marvel at the simple beauty and self-sufficiency of this perfect village.

24 | *Gunung Lesong & Sungai Seterap, Sarawak (2015)*

Gunung Lesong, also known as Gunung Lingga, stands as a sacred sanctuary for the Iban People in Sarawak, spanning an impressive 595 hectares. This revered national park and mountain holds the status of a gazetted and fully protected forest reserve, safeguarding its ecological integrity and cultural significance.

Steeped in legend and tradition, Gunung Lesong has long been revered by the Iban community, particularly during the era of headhunting. The mountain holds a special place in Iban mythology, with the grassland at its summit believed to have served as the spiritual site for cockfighting arenas, known as "kelang sabung ayam," of the people of Panggau Libau, the spiritual longhouse of Keling.

Flowing in close proximity to Gunung Lesong is the Batang Seterap river, which meanders gracefully before joining the mighty Lupar River on its journey to the South China Sea. This riverine ecosystem serves as a lifeline for both wildlife and local communities, sustaining biodiversity and providing vital resources.

In addition to its cultural significance, Gunung Lesong is also a vital habitat for a diverse range of species, including a viable population of Orangutans. These majestic creatures find refuge amidst the mountain's slopes, highlighting the importance of preserving this pristine wilderness for future generations.

25 | *Matang Mangrove Forests (2017)*

The Matang Mangrove Forest Reserve in Perak is a vast coastal wilderness, home to a rich diversity of plant and animal life. Covering over 40,000 hectares, it serves as a vital habitat for species ranging from migratory birds to elusive proboscis monkeys.

Beyond its ecological importance, the reserve is deeply intertwined with the lives of local indigenous communities, who have relied on its resources for centuries. Today, eco-tourism initiatives offer visitors the chance to explore this unique ecosystem responsibly, while also learning about the vital role mangroves play in sustaining coastal communities.

By valuing and preserving the Matang Mangrove Forest Reserve, we can ensure its continued beauty and biodiversity for generations to come.

26 | *Kuala Sepetang, Perak (2017)*

The coastal regions of Northern Malaysia, particularly Perak, are renowned for their stunning ecosystems teeming with life. These nutrient-rich waters are home to a diverse array of marine species, making them a vital resource for both the environment and local communities.

Studies have shown that the coastal waters of Perak are rich in essential nutrients, supporting a thriving marine ecosystem. This abundance of nutrients sustains a variety of fish species, providing a vital source of food for coastal fishing communities. Additionally, the nutrient-rich waters support commercial fish farms and prawn farmers, contributing to the region's economic growth and food security.

Furthermore, the coastal ecosystems of Perak play a crucial role in maintaining ecological balance and biodiversity. Mangrove forests and seagrass beds act as nurseries for juvenile fish and provide habitat for a wide range of marine life, including endangered species such as dugongs and green sea turtles.

Overall, the coastal regions of Northern Malaysia, particularly Perak, are invaluable natural resources that support both marine biodiversity and the livelihoods of coastal communities. Protecting and preserving these ecosystems is essential for the continued well-being of both people and the environment.









27 | Princess Norah's Beach, Tuba Island Langkawi (2016)

Princess Norah's Beach is a secluded haven, a pristine sanctuary untouched by the outside world and largely inaccessible to all but a few. This idyllic stretch of white sand has remained unspoiled for centuries, its beauty preserved by the remote and uninhabited nature of Tuba Island, Langkawi.

The island's lack of electricity and drinking water has served as a natural barrier, keeping human presence at bay and allowing the beach to retain its untouched allure. As I capture the scene from a helicopter, my eyes are drawn to a lone boat anchored offshore. I imagine its occupants enjoying the tranquility of the calm waters, perhaps lost in dreams of adventure and discovery.

I can't help but feel a pang of longing as I watch from above, wishing I could join them in experiencing the serenity of this hidden gem. Princess Norah's Beach is a reminder of the raw beauty and unspoiled wilderness that still exists in our world, waiting to be explored and appreciated by those fortunate enough to discover it.

28 | Datai Bay, Langkawi (2016)

This is where it all began – the birthplace of Southeast Asia. More than 550 million years ago, during the Cambrian period, the islands in the Andaman Sea emerged as the first land masses to rise from the seas. Among them, Anak Datai, a small rocky outcrop nestled in the Datai Bay Area, stands as one of the oldest formations in the region.

This ancient island predates even the mighty Himalayas, which are a mere 55 million years old in comparison. Anak Datai's rugged cliffs and weathered rocks bear witness to millions of years of geological history, offering a glimpse into the distant past when the earth was still in its infancy. As the cradle of Southeast Asia, it holds a special significance, reminding us of the forces of nature that have shaped our world over millennia.

29 | Tioman Island, Pahang (2015)

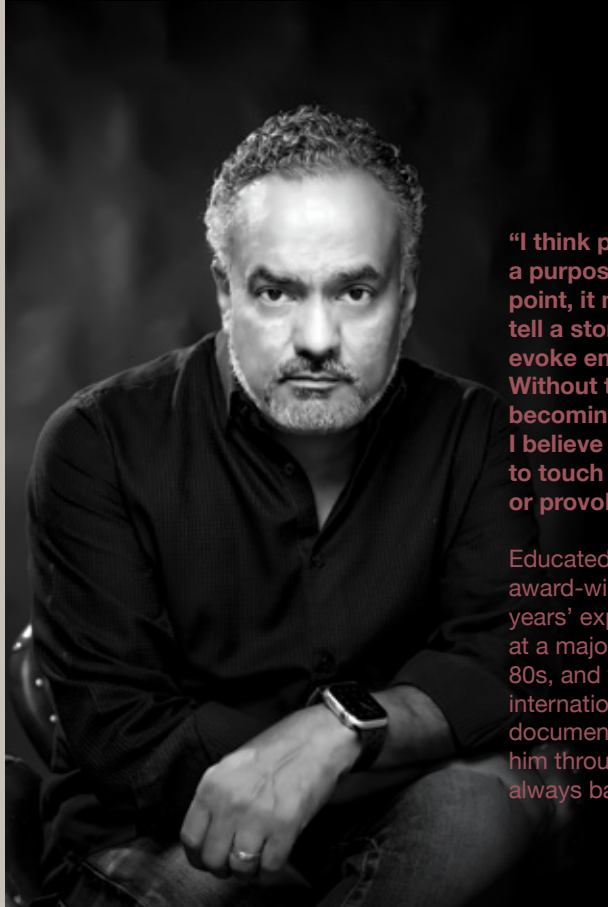
Few things rival the serene melody of waves gently crashing against the shore. In my photography, I strive to capture not just what I see, but the emotions I feel in that moment. It's a delicate balance, requiring a deep connection with my surroundings and a willingness to let go of control. It's in this state of surrender that spontaneity emerges, allowing me to capture the essence of a scene.

This particular image capture on the beaches of Tioman Island, was created using a timeless technique: employing an extremely low shutter speed to blur the motion of the waves. In doing so, I sought to convey the fluidity and rhythm of the ocean, mirroring the sense of movement I experienced while capturing the scene. It's a reminder that in letting go of expectations and embracing the present moment, we can capture the true essence of our surroundings.

30 | The Confluence, Kuala Lumpur (2021)

During the depths of the recent Covid-19 lockdown, I found myself at the confluence of the Gombak and Klang rivers, where the River of Life project unfolds. Here, nestled in the heart of Kuala Lumpur, stands the majestic Masjid Jamek, overlooking this auspicious meeting point. It's a place steeped in history, marking the genesis of Kuala Lumpur itself and serving as the catalyst for my own project: 'Sacred Currents', dedicated to documenting rivers and their surrounding communities.

As I embark on this endeavour, I seek blessings to continue unhindered along this path. May I be granted the strength and resilience to overcome any obstacles that may arise, and may the rivers and their stories flow freely, guiding me on this sacred journey of discovery and preservation.



SC Shekar

“I think photography always has to have a purpose. It must mean something. At some point, it must help with a vision. You have to tell a story with it; it must weave a narrative, evoke emotion, and propel a vision forward. Without this essence, a photograph risks becoming a hollow shell, devoid of substance. I believe that when a photograph manages to touch another soul, to evoke a response or provoke thought, it fulfils its true potential.”

Educated in Malaysia and Australia, renowned award-winning photojournalist with over 35 years’ experience, SC Shekar began his career at a major Malaysian newspaper in the early 80s, and then went abroad to work for several international news agencies. Shekar’s passion for documenting rich and diverse cultures has taken him throughout Asia and around the world – and always back home to Malaysia, the heart of it all.

*Shekar is currently working on a book project documenting the rivers of Malaysia titled **“Sacred Currents - An Homage to Malaysia’s Living, Life-giving Rivers’**.*

SC Shekar

Shekar’s body of work includes over 32 books, amongst them **“Our Land Within – Passages through Southeast Asian Communities”**, **“Raising Land – The Way of Land and Life in Sarawak”**, **“Daughters of Asia”**, **“Thailand – 9 Days in the Kingdom”** and **“7 Days in Myanmar”**. His most recent major project is **Grit & Grace: The Grandeur of Monochrome Malaysia**, a stunning collection of aerial photography of Malaysia’s topography and communities, that makes extensive use of helicopters. The images were published in a large-format handmade book of the same name. Many of Shekar’s works are in the collection of museums, corporations and private collectors.

Shekar describes his work as a combination of documentary photography and ethnographic portraiture which is rooted in the fields of anthropology and sociology. It is a study of mankind, ways of life, customs, beliefs and behaviours.



VISITOR GUIDELINES

To protect the artwork from damage, we ask that visitors please refrain from touching any of the artworks on display.

Food and drinks are not allowed in the gallery.

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