

# Making diversity matter

Orang asli artist Shahar Koyok aims to research indigenous art with his Merdeka Award Grant.

AN orang asli artist was announced on Dec 13 as one of the recipients of the 2017 Merdeka Award Grant for International Attachment. Shahar Koyok, 32, from the

Temuan ethnic group in Kampung Pulau Kempas, Banting, Selangor, has the distinction of being the first orang asli to receive the award along with two other recipients chosen



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for their exceptional and outstanding research proposals.

They received their respective awards in KL from the Sultan of Perak, Sultan Nazrin Shah, who is the royal patron of the Merdeka Award Trust. Shahar, also known as Shaq, whose work has been exhibited across Malaysia as well as in Melbourne, London and Miami, told reporters that the goal of his research was to raise the profile of indigenous culture in Malaysia, particularly its art forms.

"My research will explore the place of indigenous art within the context of celebrating the rich ethnic and cultural diversity of Malaysia as well as emphasising the spirit of Merdeka (Independence)," said Shahar, who aspires to do this at the National Art Gallery of Australia.

He was also the first Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) graduate to receive the grant.

Earlier this year, Shahar exhibited at the *Manah: A Living Legacy* group show at Galeri Petronas in KL, which focused on the contemporary notion of indigenous culture.

The two other grant recipients

were research medical officer Dr Sophia Rasheeqa Ismail, 30, from the Institute for Medical Research, and Dr Zetty Norhana Balia Yusof, 35, senior lecturer at Universiti Putra Malaysia's Faculty of Biotechnology and Biomolecular Sciences.

In his speech, Sultan Nazrin Shah said the three talented young Malaysians with pioneering spirit would make best use of the opportunity to engage with the world's best experts, collect valuable insights for their fields of research and develop solutions for the people.

"True to its name, the Merdeka Award aims to foster a culture of excellence, promote thought leadership and innovation, and encourage an expanded world view," he said.

Sultan Nazrin Shah said the grants were conferred annually to qualified Malaysians between the age of 22 and 35 to engage in collaborative programmes at globally-renowned host institutions and organisations. He said the grants offered successful candidates tailored financial support to realise a study, research or residency project for a period of up to three months. — Bernama



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