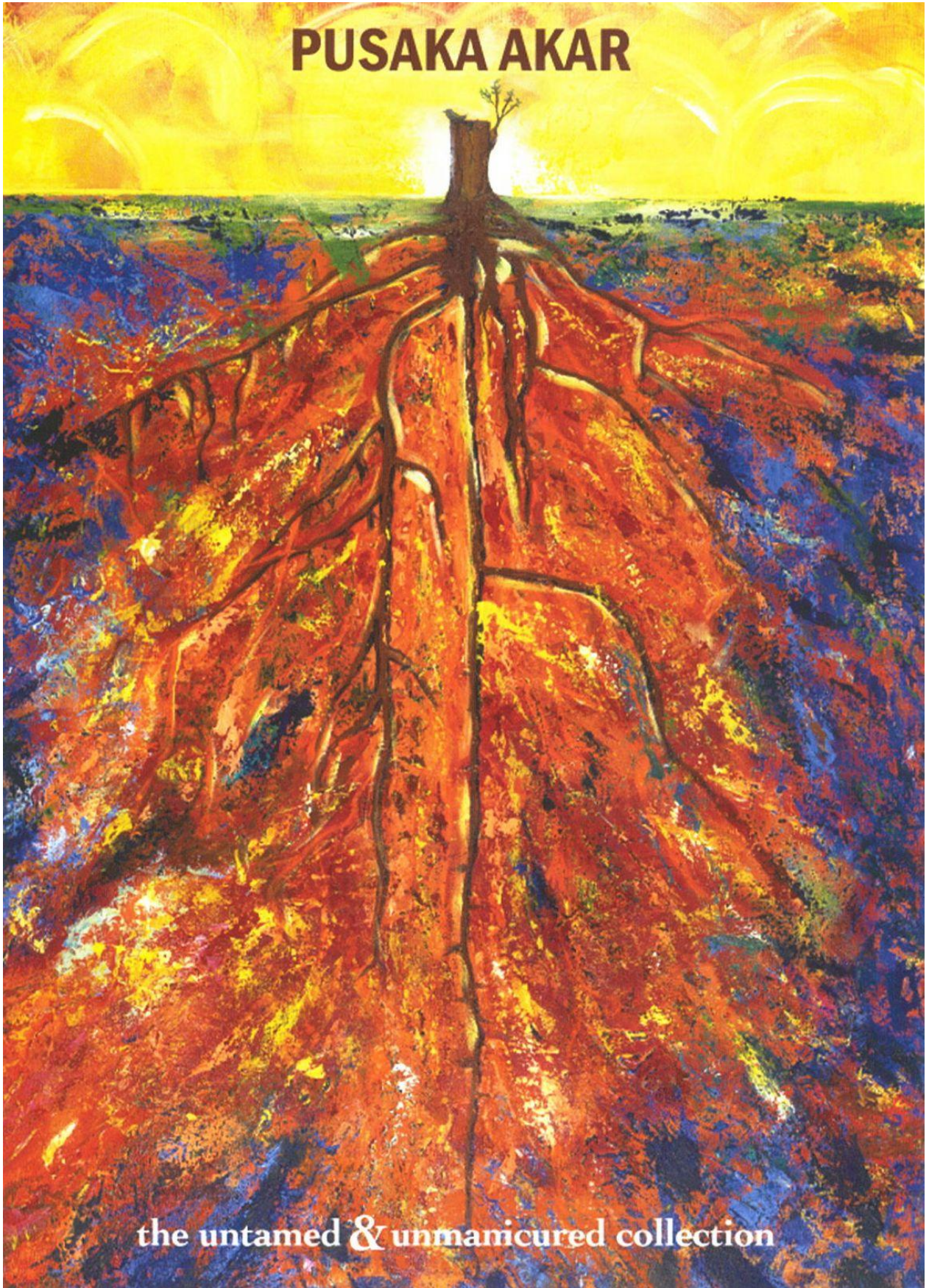


PUSAKA AKAR



the untamed & unmanicured collection

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Hijau

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Hardy survivors of the *Heath forest*

by Dr Rashidi Othman and Dr Ruzaimi Mat Rani

Heath forests are found in areas where the soil is acidic, sandy, hot, dry and nutrient-poor. In Sabah and Sarawak heath forests are known by local people as *kerangas*, *kapayan* or *kerapah*, and *baram* in Terengganu. The word *kerangas* which means 'land which cannot grow rice' comes from the Iban language and aptly describes the harsh conditions of the heath forest.

Structure and Species Composition of a Heath Forest

Heath forests, which are found on beaches, sandstone plateaus and ridges, are strikingly different from other types of forests. The trees in heath forests have small, tough leaves, sparse crowns and a low, uniform canopy in comparison to lowland dipterocarp forests. The species of trees and other plants which occur in heath forests are rarely found or not found at all in other forest types.

Trees in heath forests are typically small, both in diameter and height. Climbers, epiphytes and insectivorous plants are common in heath forests. During the drought season, heath forests are highly susceptible to fire; once disturbed, the humus layer and sandy soil beneath are quickly degraded and bleached, and the forest is reduced to grassland. During the wet season, heath forests develop into permanent wetland forests because the soil loses drainage capabilities, thus becoming waterlogged.

*The untamed, unmanicured Malaysian Rainforests
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to inform, to inspire and to instill a sense of
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