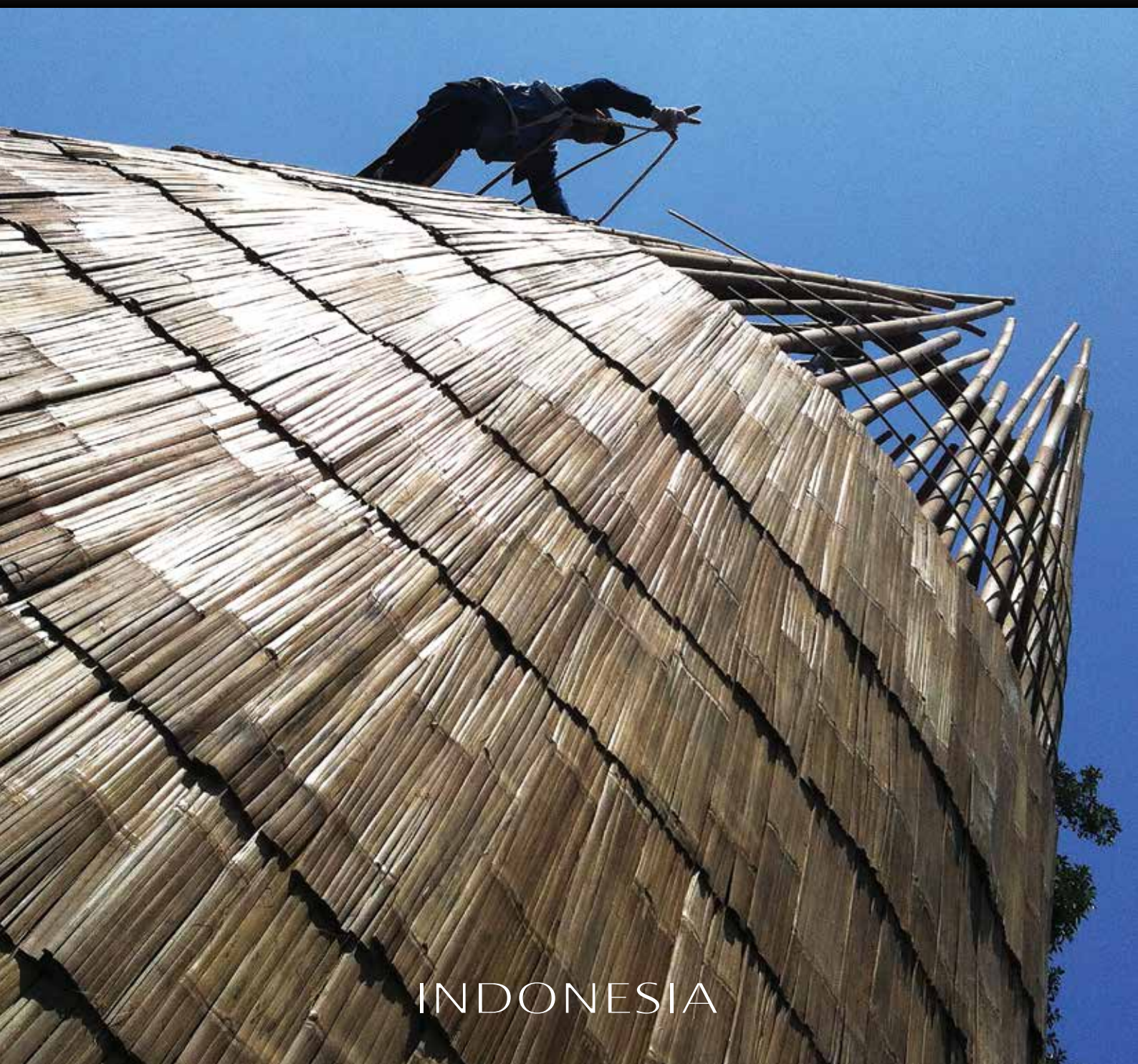


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THE JOURNAL OF  
THE ASIAN ARTS SOCIETY  
OF AUSTRALIA

# TAASA Review



INDONESIA

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## TAASA REVIEW

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## EDITORIAL: INDONESIA

*Christine Clark*

This winter 2019 issue of the *TAASA Review* trains its lens on Indonesia, corresponding with the National Gallery of Australia's *Contemporary Worlds: Indonesia* – the largest exhibition of contemporary Indonesian art ever presented in Australia. Another relevant initiative is *No god but God: The art of Islam* at the Art Gallery of South Australia, on display from late August. The articles on these two gallery endeavours, along with the other contributions in this issue, reflect the vibrancy and complexity at play across the Indonesian archipelago and its rich mosaic of arts and cultures. While this issue is not seeking to focus on particular themes, conversations occur between several of the articles. It comes as no surprise that a number address environmental concerns, and recognise the past as a keystone for guiding the contemporary.

We open the issue with NGA senior curator Carol Cains' overview of *Contemporary Worlds: Indonesia*. This major exhibition acknowledges the strength and growing prominence of our near neighbour's contemporary art scene, and includes significant works by artists of international prominence – many of whom are old friends of Australia, courtesy of such projects as the Asia-Pacific Triennials – as well as by creators exhibiting in Australia for the first time.

Two of the participating artists in *Contemporary Worlds* are featured in separate articles. Elly Kent writes on Sundanese artist Tisna Sanjaya's participatory performance art, with her erudite contribution incorporating a history of art as activism in the country. Wulan Dirgantoro looks at another of Indonesia's prominent contemporary artists, Arahmaiani, focusing on a recent performance, *The Past has not Passed*. Like Tisna, Arahmaiani is a passionate advocate for the environment and endeavours to raise awareness through art. Rising intolerance and the need to reconnect and acknowledge Indonesia's plural pasts are also pressing concerns for Arahmaiani, and these themes lie at the core of her performance.

My discussion with architect Eko Prawoto continues conversations around staying attentive to the environment and the past as guides for contemporary living. Constantly seeking to harness local wisdom, Prawoto creates stunning contemporary works that remain responsive to the natural environment and to Indonesia's enduring traditions of craft and design. Meanwhile, it is nature's devastating forces and the ensuing effects on artistic community and continuity that inform the fascinating piece by James Bennett and Muchammadun. Here we see how environmental catastrophes – earthquakes, tsunamis and volcanic eruptions – have markedly affected art

styles in Indonesia, with Lombok the case study. Karen Cherie MacDonald's article goes on to explore the loss of practitioner knowledge and skills, highlighting the fragility of cultural traditions. Hers is an inspiring account from the field about an initiative to revive and perpetuate the plaited art traditions, including basketry and the making of sunhats, in villages in East and North Kalimantan.

Other articles present evocative journeys-by-proxy to various archipelago islands, through consideration of remarkable pieces from Australian and international galleries. Joanna Barrkman shares her research on the Katharane Mershon Collection of Indonesian Art, Fowler Museum at the University of California Los Angeles, covering both American dancer Mershon's life in Bali during the 1930s and a selection of exquisite objects from the Collection. Art Gallery of South Australia curator Russell Kelty outlines some of the treasured objects in *No god but God: The art of Islam*, including a magnificent early-mid 19th century *sesako* (throne rest) from Southern Sumatra and a collection of manuscripts. Musician Margaret Bradley generously provides a personal account of her three-decade commitment to musical interchange between Australia and Indonesia, detailing some of the instruments of South Sulawesi and her recent collaborative performances in Makassar.

Keeping with the theme of travel, curator Matt Cox shares riveting background information on the making – in three separate batik regions in Java – of the Art Gallery of New South Wales' *Tiga Negeri* cloths, and discusses the profound effect on batik production brought about by the introduction of railways in parts of central Java.

Finally, Caroline Turner's book review is a fitting feature, as she looks at T. K. Sabapathy's *Writing the Modern: Selected Texts on Art & Art History in Singapore, Malaysia and Southeast Asia 1973 – 2015*. Sabapathy has been a monumental figure in the writing of Southeast Asian art modern and contemporary art history, and the volume will be a boon for all members interested in Indonesian art.

### *Editor's note:*

TAASA pays tribute to Carl Andrew, founding President of TAASA, who died in February this year. Carl played a pivotal role in the early years of TAASA's establishment and many members will be saddened to hear of his passing. His obituary on p26 has been kindly provided by Paul Genney, TAASA Secretary from 1991 to 2000.

The September issue will celebrate the life of Edmund Capon.

## CONTEMPORARY WORLDS: INDONESIA AT THE NGA

Carol Cains

From 21 June 2019, the National Gallery of Australia will showcase the work of 25 contemporary Indonesian artists in a major exhibition, *Contemporary Worlds: Indonesia*. This dynamic presentation brings together works from artists who have not previously exhibited in Australia alongside recent works by established artists known to local audiences, and includes the collective Tromarama, Eko Nugroho, FX Harsono, Jompet Kuswidananto, Uji 'Hahan' Handoko Eko Saputro and Umma Gumma.

The exhibition encompasses installation, performance, painting, moving image, photography and sculpture, with several artists inviting participation through activities as varied as zine making, processional choral performances, dialogues in a *kora-kora* boat, photography and online mapping of the route to art market success. The works reveal the diverse practices through which contemporary Indonesian artists explore history, gender, political and social themes, materials, the virtual world, art history and the art market.

The starting point for the exhibition is the period immediately following the fall of President Suharto in 1998, marking the end of three decades of the repressive, discriminatory New Order regime. The years from the mid-1990s leading up to this transformative moment in Indonesian history are known as the *Reformasi* period, as it was at this time that voices of dissent calling for reform became audible. From 1998, in the post-*Reformasi* era of transition from an authoritarian regime to a democracy, the sudden, unfamiliar opportunity for innumerable individual voices, beliefs and opinions to be broadcast created a declamatory cacophony accompanied by tactical manoeuvres as numerous social and political groups jockeyed for prominence.

Jompet Kuswidananto's installation *Memanggunkan kebersamaan* (Staging collectivism) 2013 references the post-*Reformasi* phenomenon of jubilation jostling with confusion and opportunism, as well as recalling an earlier period of political transformation following President Suharto's rule, when the banning of the Indonesian Communist Party in 1965 and subsequent scapegoating resulted in the deaths of millions of Indonesians. Jompet's installation, comprising an open

**SILENT OPERATION: SIGN STUDY BASED ON THE FORMULA OF CONTEMPORARY (VISUAL) ART**, 2018-19, UJI 'HAHAN'  
HANDOKO EKO SAPUTRO AND ADI 'UMA GUMMA' KUSUMA, INSTALLATION COMPRISING NEON WALL-WORKS AND AN INTERACTIVE GAME APPLICATION. NATIONAL GALLERY OF AUSTRALIA, CANBERRA, COMMISSIONED 2018 AND PURCHASED 2019



truck populated with faceless, disembodied, rudimentary mechanised figures swathed in labourers' garb, is accompanied by a soundtrack of slow, rhythmic clapping, executed by the figures. The muffled soundscape, scattered shoes and anonymity of the characters remind us of the many different mobilities in Indonesia's recent past – happy crowds travelling to festivals and sporting events, political supporters and their adversaries *en route* to rallies, or faceless, voiceless victims transported to untimely deaths.

The presence of sound and voices in the Indonesian political and social landscape is a reference point for several works in the exhibition. Tisna Sanjaya's mixed media installation *Seni penjernih dialog* (Art as purifying dialogue) 2019 features a carnivalesque swing boat (*kora-kora*) in which participants to the exhibition will engage in conversation and debate that the artist hopes will 'find a new way, a fresh and inspiring alternative peace effort' and function as an 'optimistic symbol of hope facing changes in the world'.

Julian Abraham Togar's kinetic sculpture *Tolerating the intolerance*, 2018 explores the contentious aspect of sound in Indonesia, where noise is not regulated through legislation. The soundscape entails a battleground for ownership by various broadcasters, from mosques projecting the call to prayer to factories emitting the relentless 'score' of industrial production. Togar's work

creates a continuous, self-perpetrating and inherently irritating soundscape that evokes the complex polyphony of public spaces in Indonesia and their potential for political exploitation.

The contentious arena of Indonesia's natural environment is the subject of works by several artists in the exhibition. Tita Salina's multi-media installation *1001st island - the most sustainable island in the archipelago*, 2015 consists of a video and an installation of a five metre-long island of plastic rubbish. In collaboration with a community of fishermen in Jakarta Bay whose homes and livelihoods were threatened by a proposed development, Salina collected the material from the polluted sea for the construction of the island. The work is one of a series undertaken by Salina with Irwan Ahmett in collaboration with local communities across the Pacific, which they call 'everyday acts of disobedience' in response to site specific issues with global resonance.

Partnerships, collaborations and collective practice are a feature of the contemporary Indonesian art scene and works by two collectives are included in *Contemporary Worlds: Indonesia*. Yogyakarta based photography collective MES 56 is represented by works by Akiq AW and Yudha Fehung Putera. Both artists respond to the notions of the 'ideal' family promulgated by the New Order government's *Keluarga Berencana*



**TOLERATING THE INTOLERANCE**, 2018, JULIAN ABRAHAM  
 'TOGAR', STAINLESS STEEL VENTILATION DOME, MOTOR,  
 LED LIGHTS, MICROPHONE, MEGAPHONE AND STEEL SUPPORT.  
 COURTESY OF THE ARTIST



(Family Planning) program, which promoted the nuclear family of father, mother, son and daughter. Through video and photographs the artists depict how contemporary Indonesians have reimagined that template to form new kinds of families which may or may not sit outside a politically and socially sanctioned ideal. Putera's work invites audience participation to arrange familial groups draped in brightly coloured fabrics, creating sculptural forms which can be photographed to record individual interpretations and representations of family.

Bandung based collective Tromarama, comprising Febie Babyrose, Herbert Hans and Ruddy Hatumena, explores the world of everyday, inanimate objects and the relationship between virtual and physical worlds. Their moving image works are infused with humour that plays on our expectations of the behaviour of ordinary objects. We expect a falling ball to follow a trajectory, and an electric fan to ruffle the pages of a book. Using stop-motion animation to manipulate the behaviour and sound of the objects in space and time Tromarama creates works with comedic punchlines that subvert our expectations and calls on viewers to consider the role of omnipresent digital technology in forming our perceptions of the physical world.

Everyday objects and materials also inspire the work of Handiwirman Saputra who has extensively studied the characteristics and behaviour of familiar 'stuff', such as resin, plastic, foam, paper and steel, and the things

**PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE COME TOGETHER**, 2017, YUDHA 'FEHUNG' KUSUMA PUTERA SERIES OF 9 INKJET PRINTS WITH ACCOMPANYING INSTRUCTIONS FOR PARTICIPATORY ELEMENTS OF THE WORK. NATIONAL GALLERY OF AUSTRALIA, CANBERRA, PURCHASED 2018



made from them that surround us each day. His sculptures, like Tromarama's videos, play with our expectations of the physical qualities of these materials to unsettle and amuse the viewer.

The two recent sculptures on display illustrate Handiwirman's mastery of materials and his delight in combining their various characteristics. *Dalam tampak luar – luar tampak dalam* (Inside out – outside in) 2015 presents the hard, angular form of a clear acrylic table cojoined with a bulging, fleshy version in silicon studded with surgical stainless-steel pins. Forcing the viewer to experience this conjunction of two opposite materials evokes a slew of associations, from Frankenstein and other surgical creations to orthodontistry and take-away food containers. *Tak berakar, tak berpucuk* (No roots, no shoots) 2018 – 19 takes as a starting point the bits of rubbish entwined with the roots and shoots of bamboo growing on a Yogyakarta riverbank. Observing that eventually this detritus morphs into new forms, the artist uses disparate materials – fibreglass resin, plastic, steel wire and cloth – to reimagine a draped, twisted rubber band tangled with a pebble.

The contemporary art scene in Indonesia is dominated by male practitioners, gallerists, collectors and critics but the number of female arts professionals is increasing. *Contemporary Worlds: Indonesia* includes six female artists whose works comprise painting, installation, performance and moving image. Gender is central to the work of two of these artists.

Balinese painter I Gusti Ayu Kadek (IGAK) Murniasih challenges traditional notions of womanhood and social and sexual norms established in Suharto's New Order Indonesia, exploring themes of sex, sexuality and the body. Painted in iridescent bubblegum and pastel colours, her paintings are executed in the Balinese *Pengosekan* style, with clear outlines and smoothly coloured forms. Murniasih depicts an array of explicit images, including grotesque mélanges of human and animal forms that grapple, writhe and co-join across the canvas. Her explorations of female sensuality are seasoned with a liberal dose of humour and charm, and playfully subvert established norms.

Based in Melbourne and Bandung, Octora looks at Indonesia's colonial history and picture making, particularly the representation of Balinese women, through photography, installation and performance. Using digital photographic techniques Octora inserts her own image into early 20th century daguerreotype photographs of Balinese women. Sourced from the collection of Netherland's Leiden University, the original images document a colonial gaze which Octora reclaims and returns, gazing directly at the viewer. Surrounded by an installation of photographic images, she presents *Global apartheid voyeurism: The pose*, an hour-long performance in which the artist, wearing a constricting sheath dress, precariously high heels and a 'posing collar' around her neck attached to a stand, teeters uncomfortably to the accompaniment of a Mandarin love song



*Love without end.* She is reflected in two brushed metal sheets, multiplying the discomfort and tension inherent in the colonial gaze.

Colonial and art historical legacies have informed paintings in the exhibition by Zico Albaiquni and Agus Suwage. In Albaiquni's high-key, fluorescent canvases, their neon palette sourced from the latest household paint colours found in West Java, motifs from Indonesian and Western art history, scenes from contemporary art events and popular culture, architectural details, landscapes and portraits are juxtaposed in unsettling, theatrical interiors and spaces. Through these pastiches the artist questions Indonesia's visual representation in the past, interrogating the role of colonial imagery and the place of his own practice and Indonesian art in the contemporary art world. Agus Suwage's paintings also reference his personal environment, and, an ever-present motif in his art, self-portraits. The resulting, seemingly playful bricolages critically examine Suwage's role as an artist, and continually reinterpret and reassess his artistic influences and inspiration.

Explorations of the concept of power are central to two very different works in *Contemporary Worlds: Indonesia*. These are *Transaction of Hollows*, a performance and

installation by Melati Suryodarmo, and *Silent operation: Sign study based on the formula of contemporary (Visual) art* by Uji 'Hahan' Handoko Eko Saputra and Adi 'Umma Gumma' Kusuma.

Melati's four-hour performance is, as the title suggests, a transaction between the audience and the artist involving participants' trust and co-operation and the artist's skill and strength. The performance takes place within a white room. Melati, who trained in *jemparingan* (Javanese archery), consistently and rhythmically fires hundreds of bamboo arrows from a *gendawa*, a traditional Javanese bow. Participants engage in a physical contract with the performer, moving out of the line of fire before the arrow is released to thud deep into the wall. The action requires strength and skill, as the bow is large and arduous to draw and the position of the drawn bow is difficult to maintain. The interplay of power in the performance, between the participants and Melati, takes place in an atmosphere of calm, measured suspense and involves physical control and mental concentration on the part of all in the room.

The final work in the exhibition, Hahan and Umma Gumma's immersive neon installation and participatory online game, explores the power of the various players in

the international contemporary art world through a structural analysis that maps in neon various pathways that connect the players. By participating in the online game the viewer is included in this art world labyrinth, empowered as a player by the selection of a preferred path to commercial and critical success.

The curatorship of the exhibition has been a collaborative effort, with the National Gallery's curatorial team from the Contemporary and Asian Art Departments working with four Indonesian curators, Enin Supriyanto, Alia Swastika, Grace Samboh and Agung Hujatnikennong, and Australian and Indonesian academics and curators.

*Contemporary Worlds: Indonesia* is a free exhibition at the National Gallery of Australia from 21 June to 27 October 2019. The exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue and extensive public program.

Carol Cains is Senior Curator of Asian Art at the National Gallery of Australia and Vice President of TAASA.



## THE INFLUENCE OF ENVIRONMENTAL CATASTROPHES ON ART TRADITIONS: AN INDONESIAN CASE STUDY

James Bennett and Muchammadun

The recent Lombok, Sumbawa and Palu earthquakes and Anak Krakatau tsunamis (July-December 2018) are a reminder of the devastation that natural disasters inflict on local populations in Indonesia. The history of tectonic cataclysms impacting on communities in Lombok is testified in the *Chronicle of Lombok (Babad Lombok)* that was likely compiled in its present form in the 18th or 19th century, incorporating earlier texts. The *Chronicle* vividly describes the eruption of Mount Samalas which vulcanologists date to 1257 CE:

At that time  
The Almighty showed His power to  
His creatures...  
Causing landslides on Mt. Rinjani and  
Mt. Samalas to collapse,  
a roaring flood of rocks then inundated  
the lands of Pamatan  
mud overwhelmed the houses, carrying  
them away,  
floating out to sea,  
bodies scattered everywhere.

Stanza 273-74, Lalu Gede Suparman  
(1994: 106) trans. by Muchammadun

The horrors did not end there. The *Chronicle* describes volcanic rock showering down upon the island for seven days, forcing the whole population to flee in every direction by land and sea, and wiping out the Hindu-Buddhist kingdom of Pamatan of which few traces remain today.

The series of earthquakes that struck Lombok in July-August 2018 also resulted in the destruction of many indigenous Sasak villages and hundreds of casualties. The disaster disrupted all aspects of community life at a time when many cultural traditions, including the weaving of ritual textiles, are being lost. Among the Sasak textile forms that are rapidly disappearing are *usap*, a small square supplementary weft-woven fabric revered for its use in ancestral rites of passage, such as mortuary ceremonies. The name has various religious associations which relates to the Indo-Malay term *mengusap* (to wipe), referencing the ritual washing of the deceased in preparation for burial and also describing the cleaning of graves. Sasak Muslims sometimes also refer to the same type of textile as *pasujudan*, literally meaning a prayer mat, which is derived from *sujud* meaning the act of prostration during prayer.

RITUAL CLOTH (*USAP*), DEPICTING SACRED TREE WITH ANCESTRAL FIGURES, UNDATED, NORTH LOMBOK, WEST NUSA TENGGARA PROVINCE, INDONESIA, HAND-SPUN COTTON, NATURAL DYES, SUPPLEMENTARY WEFT WEAVE, 42.0 X 39.0 CM. PROMISED GIFT OF MICHAEL ABBOTT AO QC THROUGH THE ART GALLERY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA FOUNDATION 2019, ART GALLERY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA.



The decline in the production of *usap* is often attributed to the ascendancy of the Muslim reformist sect known as Waktu Lima, meaning 'five times' in reference to the requisite daily prayers, over the religious practices of the Wetu Telu (literally means 'three times'). The Wetu Telu tradition, unique to Lombok, incorporates aspects of ancestral worship for which textiles are a key element in ceremonies. The significance of the ancestors in the Wetu Telu worldview appears in a rare surviving sculpture of a human head that decorates a 19th century Qur'an box. The style of the head resonates with depictions of clan forebears found throughout eastern Indonesian cultures although the bark-paper Qur'an manuscript was likely transcribed in East Java.

Prior to the early 20th century there appears to have been a wide variety of interpretations of Islam in Lombok (Hägerdal 2001: 5). Historically, the response to the arrival of Islam, like elsewhere in the Indonesian archipelago, was through assimilation into local spiritual practices rather than abruptly discarding those practices. An old palm-leaf manuscript recounts the story of the two

sibling ancestors of the Sasak people. The older brother, Ki Nurcahya, was founder of the Waktu Lima while the younger brother, Ki Nursada, was founder of Wetu Telu traditions (Cederroth 1992: 73). This origin myth articulates Sasak perceptions regarding the 'brotherly' compatibility of the new and old beliefs.

The Dutch colonial administration (1894-1942) first promulgated a definable division between the Waktu Lima and Wetu Telu practices, said to represent the dichotomy between religion (*agama*) and custom (*adat*), through their categorisation of Sasak communities as adherents to either one tradition or the other (Telle 2014: 40). Despite periodic outbreaks of communal violence between the two groups, notably post-1965 following the downfall of President Sukarno, the differences between the two are not always clear. Today many Wetu Telu communities embrace reformist Islam while some reformist leaders, whose religious credentials as graduates of Middle East theological institutions are impeccable, continue to acknowledge local ancestral Sasak customs (Dr Fahrurrozi Dahlan, pers. com.



Muchammadun 2017). The widespread Sasak perception of a middle path existing between the two religious identities is articulated by Haji Usni Indah Handayani, a former staff member of the State Museum of West Nusa Tenggara, who has observed: 'Islam obliges us to respect the old people who have died and become our ancestors. For the Muslim community there are two matters we need to know: To pray for those who are deceased and give charity' (Museum & Art Gallery of the Northern Territory 2005: 52).

Among the old *usap* preserved in international collections is a small group of unique designs that depict stylised standing figures. The figurative motifs, often portrayed standing frontally in a style commonly found in Austronesian art, suggest representations of ancestors. Sometimes the figures are placed alongside depictions of a branching tree, reflecting the Sasak tendency to conceptualise the world through arboreal imagery (Telle 2009: 295). Other *usap* depict the figures interspersed with houses further implying their identification with clan or family forebears, as dwellings are powerful symbols of kinship identity in Sasak society.

A recent change that is said to have occurred in Sasak weaving is the substitution of non-figurative patterns for the motifs depicting

humans. This is often attributed to the increased influence of reformist Muslim restrictions against the depicting of living forms. Robyn Maxwell in her seminal 2003 study of Southeast Asian textiles proposes that 'changes in religious beliefs have affected [Lombok] textiles...the patterns on the Sasak cloths have become far simpler and figurative scenes have given way to geometric and schematic patterns' (Maxwell 2003: 172-173). Nevertheless, information documenting the development of Sasak textiles before the 20th century is fragmentary. Thus it is difficult to verify the connection between religious belief and evolving styles. Anecdotal accounts by individual Sasak weavers attributing the phenomenon of change to religious piety may not always accurately explain historical trends. The modern-day Javanese reading of geometrical *ceplok* batik, whose patterns pre-date Islam, as symbolising the Islamic doctrine of Tawhid (Unity of God), reflects a common tendency to retrospectively project Islamic meanings onto historical traditions (Bennett 2019).

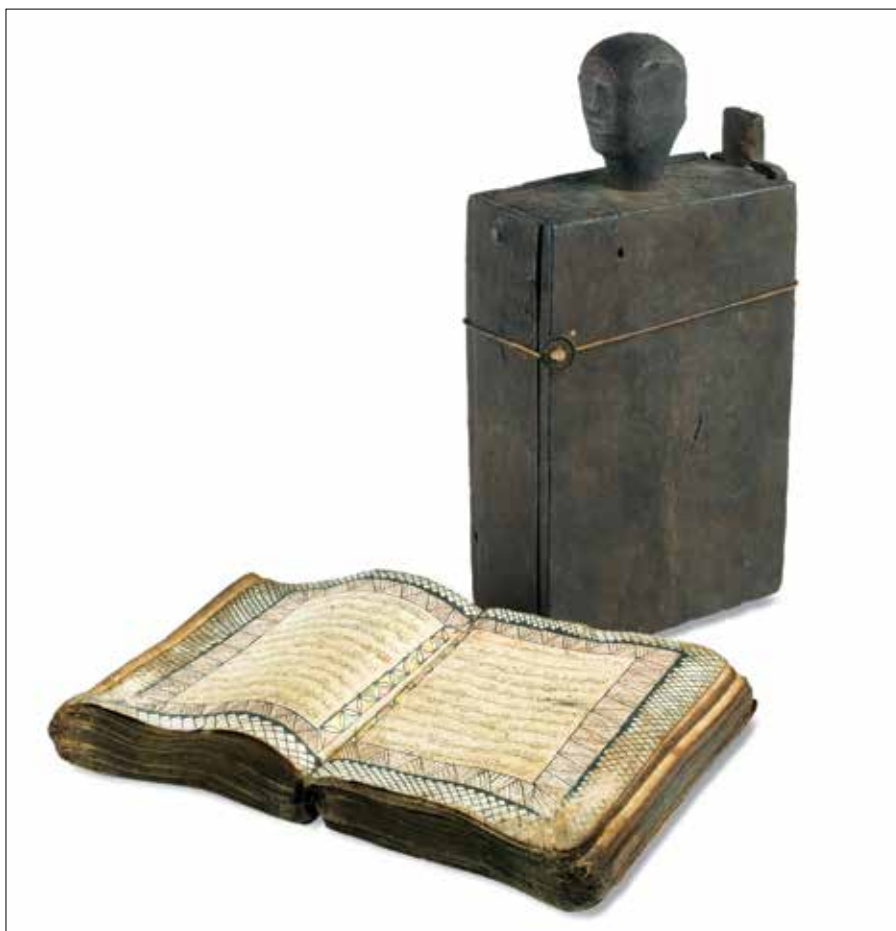
If changing religious practices in Islam may not have been the principal factor in the abandonment of figurative motifs in *usap* textiles, what might have been the cause? Cultural histories of Lombok often overlook the devastating consequences of the eruption

in 1815 of Mount Tambora, located 200km east from Lombok on neighbouring Sumbawa Island (Klingaman and Klingaman 2013: 12). The extent that volcanic catastrophes can disrupt local textile traditions is demonstrated by the eruption of Krakatau in the Sunda Strait, between southern Sumatra and West Java, in August, 1883. The explosion, with its resulting massive tsunami, destroyed Lampung coastal weaving communities such as Kalianda. According to textile scholars, Toos van Dijk and Nico de Jonge, the eruption wiped out the practice of weaving *tampan* (ship cloths), a textile whose dimensions and ritual uses are very similar to *usap* (van Dijk and De Jonge 1980: 9).

The eruption of Tambora, lasting from 5–10 April 1815, was ten times more powerful than Krakatau and killed an estimated 100,000 people globally (Wood 2014: 19). The reverberations were heard as distant as northern Sumatra as well as in Borneo, South Sulawesi and Maluku 1400 km away (Stothers 1984: 1192). The resulting ash cloud spread over an area approximately the size of Australia, plunging some regions into utter darkness for several days and suddenly plummeting temperatures. Tambora altered global climates so dramatically that 1815 became known in Europe as the 'year without summer'.



**QUR'AN WITH BOX**, LATE 19TH CENTURY, BAYAN REGION, NORTH LOMBOK, WEST NUSA TENGGARA, INDONESIA, WOOD, BARK PAPER, METAL, COTTON, PIGMENT, BOX 41.5 X 21.5 X 9.0 CM, QUR'AN 25.0 X 21.0 X 8.0 CM. GIFT OF MICHAEL ABBOTT AO QC THROUGH THE ART GALLERY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA FOUNDATION 2007, ART GALLERY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA



Thomas Stamford Raffles in his monumental *History of Java* (1817) recounts the scene in West Sumbawa shortly after the event: 'The extreme misery to which the inhabitants have been reduced is shocking to behold...villages are almost deserted and the houses fallen down, the surviving inhabitants have dispersed in search of food' (Stamford Raffles 1988: 27). The West Sumbawa kingdoms of Tambora, Pekat and Sanggar, with their unique culture and language, had disappeared forever.

In 2004, archaeologists commenced excavations at Desa Oibura at the foot of Mt Tambora (I Made Geria 2007: 37). They uncovered a considerable sized settlement buried under a three-metre layer of volcanic ash and pyroclastic flow deposited by the 1815 eruption. Among the various domestic artefacts found in the excavation were the remains of back-strap weaving looms at each dwelling site. Nevertheless, today nothing is known of the designs and techniques of Tambora textiles before the destruction wrought by the volcano.

Due to the prevailing winds at the time of the eruption, the direst effects were felt west of Tambora where falling ash produced a layer 60cm thick on Lombok and 30cm on Bali. A Dutch traveller, H.A. van den Broek writing

in 1835, 20 years after the eruption, observed how the ash-rain caused widespread crop failure, epidemics and starvation on Lombok (Bloch 2007: 37). One estimate suggests as many as 44,000 people died on the island while perhaps 100,000 migrated as environmental refugees to Java in the aftermath (De Boer and Sanders 2002: 146).

This devastation certainly had a dramatic consequence for Sasak textile practices where weaving skills and patterns were customarily passed down from mother to daughter. Not only is it probable that a generation of skilled weavers was lost but valuable loom equipment, such as those excavated at Desa Oibura, as well as many heirloom cloths and the pattern sticks that recorded the designs, were destroyed in the cataclysm. This volcanic cataclysm likely caused the disappearance of many patterns, including the technically complicated figurative *usap*. The repercussions of the disaster affected all aspects of community life and identity, and the subsequent ascendancy of religious reformism may have played only a secondary role in the change to weaving simpler geometrical and schematic designs

The history of *usap* is a reminder that the study of Indonesian art cannot be separated

from environmental factors that may have an even greater influence on art styles than changing spiritual values. Natural disasters, such as volcanoes, earthquakes and tsunami, can profoundly disrupt communal continuity and decimate customary textile practices, as almost certainly occurred for the Sasak people of Lombok following the eruption of Mount Tambora in 1815.

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## BALI – A DANCER’S HOME AWAY FROM HOME: THE KATHARANE MERSHON COLLECTION OF INDONESIAN ART

Joanna Barrkman

**A**udiences are increasingly engaging not only with museum collections but also the collectors who acquired them and the context in which they were amassed. Katharane Edson Mershon (1892-1988) was a Californian dancer, choreographer and dancer who was initially drawn to Bali to experience its dance traditions. Her collection, known as The Katharane Mershon Collection of Indonesian Art, was gifted by Mershon to the Fowler Museum at University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) in 1961. Consisting of 133 objects, the Collection features 90 works from Bali and 43 objects from the islands of Java, Sumba and Sulawesi.

Born as Katharane Edson in Los Angeles, she was raised in Antelope Valley, California by her grandparents, her mother and father. Her mother was a prominent political activist and her father a musician. She became a performer and dancer at an early age and as a young woman embarked on her first professional stage engagement in Pasadena before touring the States, together with her husband Harry Gray, as a professional ballroom dancer (Braitman 1985: 89). Following their divorce, she relocated to Chicago where she trained in ballet at the Chicago Opera Ballet with Serge Oukrainsky and Andreas Pavley. From there she travelled and performed in Vienna and Paris and later returned to USA where she taught dance at the University of California Berkley in the early 1920s. She met and married Jack Mershon, in either 1929 or 1930 (Braitman 1985: 89).

Katharane and Jack Mershon resided in Bali between 1930 and 1939 at the height of Bali’s ‘discovery period’ by Western tourists, anthropologists and artists (Braitman 1985: 150). From the late 1920s Bali became increasingly accessible to Europeans travelling by either steamship or aircraft. In addition to foreign tourists arriving at the ‘paradise isle’ there was an adoption of Bali as a locale for artistic pursuit and as a site of academic research.

Bali attracted notable artists, musicians, ethnographers and anthropologists. These included German artist Walter Spies (1895 Russia – 1942 Dutch East Indies), Dutch artist Rudolf Bonnet (1895 Amsterdam – 1978 Laren), Canadian musicologist Colin McPhee (1900 Montreal –1964 Los Angeles) together with American Jane Belo Tannenbaum (1904



Dallas – 1968 Putnam Valley), Margaret Mead (1901 Philadelphia – 1978 New York City), British anthropologist George Bateson (1904 Grantchester –1980 San Francisco), Mexican artists Rosa Rolanda (1895, Azusa – 1970 Mexico City) and Miguel Covarrubias (1904 Mexico City – 1957, Mexico City) and Noel Coward (b. 1899 Teddington – d. 1973 Blue

Harbor). Engagement between the Balinese and foreign artists and researchers contributed to Bali’s enduring reputation in the West as an ‘enchanted and exotic land of aesthetes at peace with themselves and nature’ (baliglory.com).

The Mershons were inspired to travel to Bali after watching a movie featuring the famous



Balinese dancer and choreographer, I Mario (I Ketut Marya) from Najar Lebah, Tabanan in Bali. They went with the intention of staying only one month and the ambition to witness live Balinese dance. However, within days of arriving the theatricality of Balinese ceremonies also impressed Mershon who wrote:

One could hardly believe that my interest in Balinese religion could have started when I was watching a procession. We had been in Bali for one day. We were seated in front of Hotel Den Pasar [Denpasar] on a terrace facing a roadway where a low white fence separated us from the through fare. Music filled the air, and then we saw them, hundreds of Balinese, pacing with quick tread down the not-too-wide road. On they came. Women in gloriously coloured sarongs woven with their nimble Balinese fingers; men carrying musical instruments, on which they were playing as they marched, the big bronze gong filling the air with deep resonant sounds. Then came the offerings borne on the women's heads, each token more breathtaking than the one before – tall high cones of fruits, flowers, cakes, all in brilliant colours... (Mershon 1971: 21).

Mershon's initial curiosity and enthusiasm for Balinese dance soon developed into a fascination with the broader Balinese culture and religion. The Mershons rented a house in Sanur, South Bali, where they adopted a Balinese son, Murda, from a nearby Balinese family. Later they built Sindhu House, which became one of the most desirable European residences in Bali visited by foreign artists and dignitaries including Charlie Chaplin who visited the Mershons in Bali during 1932 (Braitman 1985: 94, 104, 139).

While living in Sanur, Mershon established a health clinic that serviced the local village members. After she cured a local priest of an illness, she was adopted into his family as his daughter. Already fluent in French and Malay (the precursor to Bahasa Indonesian), through her association with Murda she learnt 'high' and 'low' Balinese which enabled her to communicate with all echelons of Balinese society (Braitman 1985: 78). Her fascination with Balinese culture led her to study religion



from a Balinese Hindu Brahmana (Shaivite) priest Pedanda Made Sideman of Intaran village, South Bali. With Murda's assistance, initially as a translator and later as a scribe, she attended, participated in and documented 14 Balinese life cycle rituals.

The Mershons returned to the USA in 1939 in advance of the onset of World War II, as did the majority of the resident foreign nationals. Bali subsequently became occupied by Japan between 1942 until 1945. Mershon returned to Bali soon after WWII to attend to some property she and Jack Mershon owned, but she considered the place and culture altered, so she returned to the USA where her life continued to revolve around dance, performance and Eastern religions.

In the USA Mershon developed theories on dance and psychology. Her abiding interest in religion led her to explore Zen Buddhism and mysticism in the form of the Chinese I Ching. She wrote *Seven Plus Seven – Mysterious Life Rituals in Bali* (published by Vantage Press, New York, 1971) an account of her experiences in Bali. It is claimed that her work never received the critical attention it deserved (Personal communication with Bronwen

Solyom 2019). She also contributed a chapter to the publication *Traditional Balinese Culture*, edited by the American anthropologist Jane Belo, who first met Mershon in 1936 in Bali. Katharane Mershon's chapter to Belo's book, entitled *Five Great Elementals – Pancha Maha Buta*, synthesizes her extensive analysis of Balinese life cycle rituals into an overview of the relationship between the Balinese people and their gods as a foundation for understanding Balinese ritual life.

Mershon's collection was acquired in Bali between 1930 and 1939 and post-WWII in 1948 when she briefly returned to Bali (Braitman 1985: 144). Her donation became the inaugural Collection gifted to the Fowler Museum at UCLA, with the first item accessioned being a *geringsing wayang*, a double ikat cloth from Tenganan village in Bali. The Balinese objects from the Collection consists of 36 textiles, 18 sculpted figurines, 4 performance masks, 2 fans, 3 *lontar* (palm-leaf) manuscripts, 16 pieces of jewellery and 4 holy-water vessels.

Mershon's enthusiasm for Balinese dance is reflected in her acquisition of an embossed delicate silk breast cloth. This *kemben* is decorated with glued gold-leaf (*perada*) and



KEMBE, BALI, PRE-1939. SILK AND GOLD LEAF (PRADA), 34 (H) X 183 (W) X 61.48CM. THE KATHARANE MERSHON COLLECTION OF INDONESIAN ART, FOWLER MUSEUM AT UCLA. PHOTO: DON COLE

**SAPUT, KAIN SONGKET**, BALI, PRE-1939. SILK AND METALLIC THREAD, 125 (H) X 151 (W) X 61.58CM.

THE KATHARANE MERSHON COLLECTION OF INDONESIAN ART, FOWLER MUSEUM AT UCLA. PHOTO: DON COLE



is a fine example of attire worn at that time either by youths participating in coming of age ceremonies (as worn by Murda in his coming of age ceremony documented in Mershon's book) or adolescent *legong* dancers (Mershon 1971: 132). The reflective quality of the golden *perada* added spectacle to the dancer's movements. It is possible that Pedanda Made applied the *perada* to this *kemben*, as Mershon noted that his expertise to 'appliqué gold leaf, *perada* [sic.], whether to statues of deities, fabrics worn by dancers, or the more elaborate art of composing headdresses for temple dancers, *legongs*, made him in constant demand' (Mershon 1971: 28).

This *kemben* features a densely decorated *prada* border that encases two symmetrical rows of a repeated vegetal design, suggestive of a sunflower. The flower's head is divided into quarters reminiscent of the cardinal points north (*kaja*) and south (*kelod*) that form the mountain-sea axis, and east (*kangin*) and west (*kauh*) that form the sunrise-sunset axis. Implicitly, the four inter-cardinal points are present. Arguably the dancer, when wrapped within this *kemben*, metaphorically formed the 9th central cardinal point in alignment with the Balinese concept of cosmological orientation (*nawa sanga*).

The cardinal and inter-cardinal points of the *nawa sanga* is also evoked by the decorative band of repoussé birds with outstretched wings and *bhoma* images on the sloping inner edge of a silver repoussé plate in the Collection. Offerings of areca nut, flowers or incense placed upon this plate visually

enhanced and metaphysically imbued them with holiness in the temple environs. Offerings were made to gods as well as lower *bhoma* and *kala* in an attempt ward of these malevolent spirits. The incised inner base (arguably representing the 9th central cardinal point) features an abstracted infinite interlocking knot emblematic of the three pointed trident (*trisula*) that symbolises the Hindu gods Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva (creator, preserver and dissolver of life) as well as mind, body and atman or the past, present and future. The *trisula* is also emblematic of the north-east (*kaja-kangin*) cardinal points. The Balinese attribute each cardinal point with a corresponding weapon, colour and god.

A man's cloth wrap (*saput*) in the Collection encapsulates Mershon's fascination with Balinese-Hindu culture and her role as an apprentice to Ida Pedanda Made Sideman. This *saput* was noted by Mershon as having once been worn by a Balinese priest, presumably at temple ceremonies. Six panels of silk cloth, woven with supplementary weft metallic yarns on a backstrap loom, were sewn together to create this garment. Its centrefield consists of two panels stitched together, resulting in four alternating rows of figures: two rows of a repeated standing figure and two rows of a repeated meditator. The former are depicted in the classic side-on perspective of the *wayang kulit* puppet tradition, with their feet presented from a side-view whilst the upper torsos are shown from a frontal perspective. The meditator, depicted in a seated lotus position, is shown from a frontal perspective. The Fowler

**RING OF A GRASSHOPPER**, BALI, PRE-1948. GOLD AND GEMSTONE (AMETHYST), 1.50 (H) X 1.90 (W) X 3.6 (L) X 61.120CM.

THE KATHARANE MERSHON COLLECTION OF INDONESIAN ART,

FOWLER MUSEUM AT UCLA. PHOTO: DON COLE



Museum accession records identify this figure as Arjuna, the protagonist in the Mahabharata epic. This imagery suggests his characteristics of both activeness and equilibrium. The cloth's centrefield is framed within an intricate running vegetal design along the selvedge and with borders of interlocking triangles (*tumpal*) at either end, known in Bali as *tetumpengan* (a word describing conical shaped rice offerings) and reminiscent of Indian *patola* cloth designs.

The Collection also contains a number of bracelets, earrings and dress-rings made from gold and gemstones that illustrate the craftsmanship of Balinese goldsmiths. A dress-ring designed in the form of a grasshopper is noteworthy for its distinctive design. Mershon wrote of how priests, when performing the purification rites of 'throwing away the filth' and releasing the soul for the deceased, used holy water (*tirta penglukatan*) to cleanse rings belonging to the deceased. Once cleansed through submersion in holy water, the ring was placed inside the corpse's mouth prior to cremation.

Mershon's publication *Seven plus Seven* provides insight into her experiences in Bali and complements the significance of the Balinese objects in The Katharane Mershon Collection of Indonesian Art. These objects provide a glimpse into Balinese material culture during the 1930-40s, while also revealing how foreigners such as Mershon engaged with Balinese culture during that era.

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## ARCHITECTURE IS ALWAYS TEMPORARY BUT NATURE WILL REMAIN: A CONVERSATION WITH EKO PRAWOTO

Christine Clark

**T**he several occasions on which I have met Eko Prawoto and discussed his architectural projects and philosophical approach have had one common outcome: my interest around the integral relationship between place and space is piqued and I am left hankering to learn more about Prawoto's way of seeing. No doubt, I am far from alone in this experience.

Architect, artist and educator, Prawoto is an influential figure in creative Indonesia, particularly in Yogyakarta. Yet, his work is more likely to feature in the pages of international contemporary art publications rather than in mainstream Indonesian magazines showcasing modes of contemporary architecture.

Based in Yogyakarta where he oversees a firm of architects and lectures at the Duta Wacana Christian University, Prawoto is known for his commitment to communality and craftsmanship and for striving to maintain and enhance the life-forces of local districts through design. He is a staunch advocate of harnessing local wisdom, investing time in the quest to understand existing contexts, lifestyles and needs. Wherever possible his process involves working alongside local builders and craftsmen, encouraging wider participation as means to preserve techniques, build agency and broaden understanding of environmental sustainability. For Prawoto, built structures need to function as social entities; he remains acutely aware of the flow of space between the inside and the outside, the private and the public, the individual, the family and the community.

What I find particularly affecting about Prawoto's work is its sensitivity and responsiveness to nature. Paramount to his practice is ensuring that built structures work in harmony with, and actually enhance, the natural environment. He explains, 'architecture is always temporary, but nature will remain', noting that we need to always 'respect the sacredness of the site, the environment, culture and social structure and adjust our intervention as otherwise we create conflict'.

I recently had the opportunity to speak with Prawoto about his creative approach. While interested in his process of undertaking large-scale community building projects - many initiated following the aftermath of natural disasters - and his various site-specific works

WORMHOLE, SINGAPORE BIENNALE 2013. PHOTO: COURTESY OF EKO PRAWOTO



featured in major international exhibitions, I was curious first to hear more about his deep respect for nature.

When asked about the nexus between his practice and the natural world, Prawoto suggests that to respect an architectural site is to give respect to Mother Earth. He is then quick to emphasise how our contemporary world is changing inexorably, due largely to the rapid explosion of and reliance on technologies, with the result that people increasingly face uniformity in almost all aspects of their lives:

Uniqueness is diminishing. It is more and more difficult to find a quiet moment mentally as we all seem just to follow a prescribed routine, one determined by big technologies and the media. We therefore miss many things, every day, and we do not live consciously. It is perhaps time for us to slow down; engage more in small ordinary things; be part of the environment where we live; observe closely and listen to the site ... the land ... the source of life. Too often we are buried by our ignorance or pragmatism in our daily life. We need to understand that our lives are not separate isolated entities but part of a larger interrelated web that requires respect. This is the starting point of my work and I try to reunify these broken pieces though art and architecture.

Prawoto sees the language of nature as largely erased from most people's lives with many skills already lost and knowledge bases eroded. He continues:

Our long traditions can be seen as an encyclopaedia of how to live in harmony with nature. The development of human culture has involved skills and knowledge that have evolved and been constantly refined over time. Yet, these bases are rather fragile and can suddenly be gone, becoming obsolete or forgotten with the introduction of new technologies. While these new introduced technologies may seem practical, they often lack a holistic aspect and are not sustainable. What may be better is slow adaptation and adoption with a conscious awareness of the social impact.

Gently yet passionately Prawoto talks about the need to reconnect and revive skills. Core to his way of working is the recognition that village craftspeople are, in the most part, the keepers of knowledge and traditions. For many of his architectural and art projects, Prawoto teams up with villagers and utilises local materials: a strategy to cultivate appreciation of the importance and value of cultural assets. 'It's not only about physical skills but also knowledge in its entirety: local organic materials, selection, preparation and tools'.



One community project Prawoto feels particularly fortunate to have been a part of was the reconstruction of Yogyakarta's Ngibikan Bantul village following the 2006 earthquake. While providing expertise, an integral aspect to Prawoto's role was acting as a facilitator and mediator. This involved enabling community consultation as well as creating the opportunity to empower various working groups, a method that ultimately led to the stimulation and development of craftsmanship.

Prawoto reflects:

I learnt so many things through this project. The physical structure is often severely damaged, or even gone, but the social structure remains very strong. It is important to be aware of this when working with a community after a disaster. We have to listen more to them. Architecture should be an important tool to bring back that life-force –manifestly.

Through the strong relationships forged by the 2006-reconstruction project, Prawoto continues to collaborate with stonemasons, carpenters and bamboo craftsmen from Ngibikan Bantul. The head chief of the village, Pak Maryono, is also the leader of building works and they now team up on most architectural and installation projects.

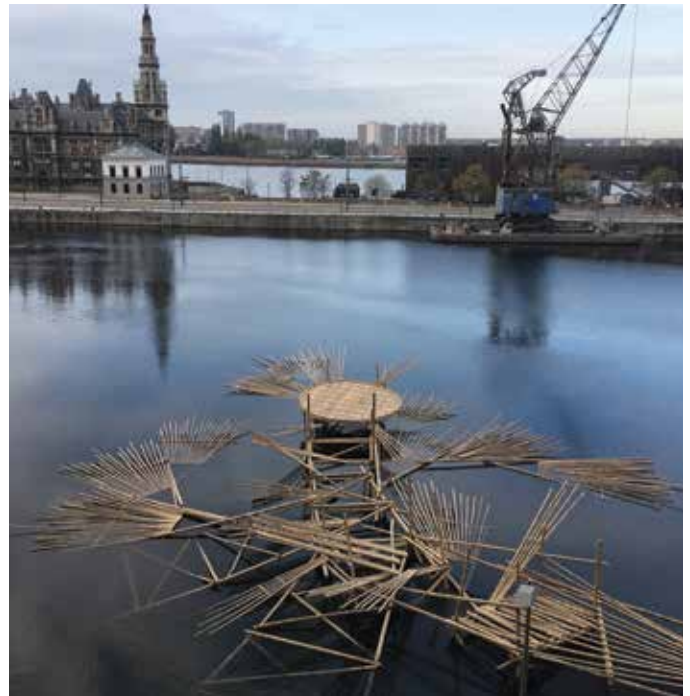
When asked about how his projects encourage local Javanese wisdom and skills while being focused on contemporary design, Prawoto speaks about feeling fortunate in being able to work with carpenters in Yogyakarta who still

know about old wooden structural systems, enabling him to replicate authentic wooden detailing with a contemporary twist:

Sometimes I used old structures, including the Javanese *Limasan* and modify the house accordingly to create a more contemporary feel. *Limasan* or even *Joglo* type houses are actually rather flexible wooden structures and easy to combine with other building materials. I find it very interesting to play with contrast and ambience. I try to achieve a special feeling of the space by putting together contrasts from nature such as old and new, rough and refined or natural and industrial.'

For residential assignments, the relationship between the client and the architect is also based on collaborative design solutions, with many clients being artists and musicians. Sustainability and eco-attentiveness remain important regardless. Design solutions reflect contemporary concerns – minimising traffic noise and dust for instance – though basic concepts, including ensuring airflow and respecting the placement of established trees, offer refined solutions reflecting traditional knowledge and regard for natural surroundings.

Prawoto's installations have been presented in various art initiatives, including recently in *Placing Home: Woodlands* in Singapore 2018; *Europalia Indonesia* in Antwerp, Belgium 2017; and *SONSBEK '16: transACTION*, Arnhem, the Netherlands 2016. Commenting on bringing artisans from Yogyakarta as part of his working team abroad Prawoto states:



It is both a way of learning for the community on the site but also it provides new experiences for the villagers.... It is not just about bringing or putting a nice structure in the designated site, but the process and the installation should give meaning to the community. An art object in itself or myself as an artist – this is not important.

Prawoto further explains that he relies on information (given or ascertained) about the various sites, along with his interaction with surrounding communities to determine the installation concept.

Usually I come first for a site visit and use that opportunity to meet people and sniff around to find information, and later use that for the design theme. To discover something local and rooted deeply in their culture is very important. In this way we can build a strong meaningful relationship with the heart of the community.

As with all his work, while his installations receive accolades and are celebrated internationally, the philosophical core to his visual art practice remains true to collectivity and respecting existing knowledge: 'The people are not just helping me to build the art installation project but it is more that we work together to reveal their collective memory or identity'.

Christine Clark is currently Exhibitions Manager at the National Portrait Gallery. Since 1991, she has worked on an extensive range of projects in visual art from the Asian region.



## NO GOD BUT GOD: THE ART OF ISLAM AT THE ART GALLERY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Russell Kilty

**N**o god but God: *The Art of Islam* gains its title from the *Shahadah*, or Declaration of Faith, that defines Islam and unites Muslim congregations around the world. *No god but God* is the first major display of Islamic art at the Art Gallery of South Australia to encompass a geographical zone extending from Morocco to Australia and the display's highlight is its special emphasis on Indonesia. *No god but God* features the earliest works of Islamic art to enter the Art Gallery's collection in 1916 to the most recent acquisitions, such as a 19th century palm-leaf manuscript of *The Story of the Prophet Joseph (Hikayat Nabi Yusuf)*, rendered in a Balinese translation, from West Lombok.

Given Australia's close proximity to Indonesia, it is fitting that the display prominently features a variety of works representing the archipelago's diverse Islamic traditions. Among the most ubiquitous motifs found in Indonesian art is the 'tree of life', a fantastical blossoming tree that commonly appears in ornamental woodcarving, illuminated manuscripts and textiles. The term 'tree of life' was likely first applied by Dutch colonial scholars, as the phrase seemingly appears nowhere in indigenous literature. Nevertheless, Quranic tradition refers to a magically auspicious tree, growing in Paradise, which closely parallels the Judaic-Christian 'tree of life' in Genesis Chapter 2:9. The Islamic subject of the heavenly tree deeply resonates with the cultures of the Indonesia archipelago, where the symbolism of the sacred or cosmic tree is a key theme in indigenous as well as Hindu and Buddhist art and spiritual traditions.

A remarkable image of the sacred tree features on the Art Gallery's monumental *Throne rest (sesako)*, created in Lampung, southern Sumatra, and dated to the early-mid 19th century on the basis of its style and radiocarbon test results. Two guardian *naga* serpents, whose appearance suggests the hand of an itinerant Javanese craftsman, flank the central panel. The imagery of the tree draws inspiration from imported south Indian *palampore* textiles, famous for their 'tree of life' motifs. *Throne rest* depicts the sacred tree in a mirror image, a common device found in Islamic art in order to enhance an object's talismanic powers. The panel's shape evokes the symbolism of the cosmic mountain associated with the ruler's

**THRONE REST (SESAKO)**, EARLY 19TH CENTURY, NORTH LAMPUNG, INDONESIA WOOD, 141.5 X 240.0 CM.  
GIFT OF MICHAEL ABBOTT AO QC, JOHN MANSFIELD AM, DAVID URRY, DICK WHITTINGTON QC AND  
FRAN GERARD THROUGH THE ART GALLERY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA FOUNDATION COLLECTOR'S CLUB



authority in many parts of Indonesia. The *sesako* was intended to compliment the 'seat of honour' (*pepadun*) whose use was the privilege of powerful Lampung aristocrats. Although mountain symbolism in Indonesian art is often generically interpreted in terms of the Hindu-Buddhist Mt. Meru, it was on the sacred mountain Jabal an-Nour, meaning the 'Mountain of Illumination', that the Prophet Muhammad received the first revelation of the Qur'an from the archangel Gabriel.

The tendency to incorporate existing motifs into a variety of media and dimensions, while at the same time imbuing them with new significance, is a defining aesthetic found throughout the Islamic world. Pyramidal forms suggesting a shape often identified with Meru frame the opening verses of several chapters in the *Qur'an* that is among a collection of manuscripts on display in *No god but God*. The manuscript was created around 1900 and the lavish, refined use of gold illumination, together with the elegant *naskh* script, confirms that a religious scholar of Madurese royal descent commissioned the masterpiece. The border frames of stylized mountains are filled with a configuration of flowers and vegetal scrolls whose ancestry is the sacred tree.

The designs, consciously or otherwise, closely replicate the 17th century headstone of the pious queen Ratu Ibu Sarifah Ambani, a

descendant of the great Javanese Muslim saint Sunan Giri (b.1442), who is buried at Aer Mata, Bangkalan. Instead of the sacred tree being depicted in mirror image, as occurs on the Lampung *sesako*, the talismanic power of the decoration is conveyed through the incorporation of Arabic calligraphy whose lack of diacritics is said to imbue the script with apotropaic potency.

Since 2006, AGSA has promoted the arts of Islam through a program of continuously changing displays in the only permanently dedicated space for Islamic art in an Australia public institution. *No god but God* is a reminder that the Islamic art of Indonesia can no longer be regarded as a tradition peripheral to the Middle East. Rather, it is a testimony to the extent that the new faith developed a unique artistic identity in a country that now is home to the largest Muslim population in the world.

*No god but God* will be on display from 24 August 2019 to mid-2020. In October, the Gallery will present a four week course on Islamic art. Details at: [www.agsa.sa.gov.au](http://www.agsa.sa.gov.au).

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## TRADITIONS OF DISSENT: CONTEMPORARY ARTIVISM IN INDONESIA

Elly Kent

From the shade of a blue marquee, I watch the man who will play the shaman organise the offerings: he unwraps incense, places a cake of brown sugar atop a coconut shell, lights a *kretek* rolled cigarette and sets it carefully on a dish. A group of musicians, dressed in black Sundanese (West Javanese) tunics and brown batik headdresses, stand to one side. A young drummer relinquishes his instrument and squats in front of the shaman. The shaman puffs on his cigarette before gripping the wooden head of the *reak* – a large lion-like creature with bulging red face, black mane and unadorned hessian sack body – which lies unanimated between them. The youth places a whistle in his mouth; the *reak's* head begins to quiver and leap in the shaman's hands and the whistle shrieks as the young man disappears into the creature's body.

The over-riding similarity of *seni reak* and other related trance-performances like *jathilan*, *reog* and *barong*, is their role as oppositional performative rituals; coded critiques of authoritarian power, whether dominant kingdoms, external religious values or foreign colonists (Rusmana 2011). This is what makes *seni reak* so appropriate to the polyvalent practice of contemporary artist Tisna Sanjaya, who invited me to witness this performance. Tisna is determined to revive local forms of cultural resistance in the face of the challenges of modernisation in Indonesia. As a Sundanese, Tisna descends from a family which has long practiced these syncretised forms of Javanese Islam.

Tisna is from the generation of Indonesian artists who emerged in the 1970s and 1980s, described by Indonesian historian Sanento Yuliman as 'the restless generation' (Yuliman 1987). In their dark, formative years during President Suharto's New Order regime, Tisna and his contemporaries walked a tightrope in their socio-political critique: to lose balance could mean imprisonment, or worse, 'disappearance'. Like Tisna, artists from this generation such as FX Harsono, Arahmaiani, Dadang Christanto and Moelyono gained international reputations after first learning to conceive work subtle enough to fly under the radar of officials, who at times banned or closed politically critical exhibitions. Harsono recalls an official visiting his *Voice Without Voice / Sign* installation (1993-94), in which large prints spell out the word DEMOKRASI in sign-language. 'I know a government spy

TISNA SANJAYA'S COLLABORATIVE PERFORMANCE AT THE OPENING OF ART MOMENTS JOGJA, 2015. PHOTO: ELLY KENT



came to the gallery to see the work, asking questions about the meaning, but I wasn't there, so I got lucky. The person in the gallery lied and told him he didn't know the meaning of the work' (Kolesnikov-Jessop 2010).

Critical expressive forms have carried through from traditions like *seni reak* into modernist art discourses. In the late 1930s, pioneering painter and revolutionary S. Sudjojono derided the *mooi indiës*, or 'beautiful Indies' painting favoured by colonists, demanding Indonesian painters attend to: '...sugar factories and the emaciated peasant, the motorcars of the rich and the pants of the poor youth...This is our reality' (Sudjojono 1946:7).

Often described as the father of modernism, Sudjojono formulated the concept of *jiwa ketok*, the 'visible soul', maintaining that beauty could only exist when founded on truth – especially in the social context. As the independence movement gained momentum this moral imperative was disseminated through a series of *sanggar*, associations of artists which appeared across Java and especially, after the 1945 Declaration of Independence, in Yogyakarta where the wartime government was based for a time. In the 1950s, the artists of the new nation were called on to conceive a unified and unifying culture based on Indonesia's hundreds of local cultures and languages. It was far from a conflict-free project, with Java's dominance over cultural and political discourse creating flash-points across the archipelago.

The Communist-aligned 'Institute for People's Culture', better known as Lekra, pushed artists and cultural workers to draw inspiration from direct encounters with the 'the people'. Musicians, writers, dramaturgs, performers and painters went 'down below', or *turba*, to examine the lives of farmers, fisherfolk and the urban poor. Lekra's philosophies, and many of its proponents, were obliterated in the anti-Communist purges which inaugurated the New Order in 1965-66. By the 1980s artists again cautiously began to find ways to examine the lives of Java's marginalised people, particularly the devastating impact of the rapidly developing resource economy on the environment and its inhabitants.



PLASTIC WAITING TO BE HAND-CUT BY WORKERS IN CIGONDEWAH, 2013. PHOTO: ELLY KENT





After the *seni reak* performance, Tisna Sanjaya sat himself among a group of men gathered around the ceremonial meal. He was in character that day, playing the role of Si Kabayan Nyintreuk on a regular television show that examined social issues in the provincial capital city of West Java, Bandung. A folk hero in modern literature, Si Kabayan was conventionally depicted as a naïve country boy, bewildered by urban life. Today Kabayan is drawing knowledge from academics and traditional performers. They sit on the ground discussing the meal's symbolism: the mountainous *tumpang* cone of yellow rice; boiled eggs; whole coconut; played chicken; a mirror; incense and cigarettes burning in a small dish. 'How,' Tisna asks 'do all these signs and symbols show us a pathway from the problems we have with corruption; pollution; flooding everywhere; poverty everywhere?'

For Tisna, the performance of *seni reak* is an entry point to engender critical dialogue between citizens, religion and authority. A devout Muslim, Tisna is determined to defend the role of Sundanese Islam against more radical forms. After the event has concluded Tisna tells me:

...of course, the position of traditional art – with its positive energy coming from a relationship with nature, and its humanist side, and ritual, tradition and so on – this is the same spirit as the contemporary art that I make.

Tisna's oeuvre consistently demonstrates this capacity to draw on both his ancestral culture and the strict disciplines of printmaking that he studied in Germany in the 1990s. There, Tisna

was introduced to printmaking's historical role in social critique. He was inspired by the work of Käthe Kollwitz and Otto Dix in expressing the trauma and social oppression of Germany between the World Wars.

For his doctoral studies, Tisna established the Imah Budaya Cigondewah (Cigondewah Cultural Centre) in a suburb in south Bandung that has, in Tisna's lifetime, shifted from a subsistence agrarian community to an industrial centre for textile factories and plastic recycling facilities. From here, Tisna has mounted international exhibitions that tout his work to elite art collectors, alongside activist campaigns that have successfully thwarted developers and government from turning urban forest into malls.

In Cigondewah he draws attention to endless mountains of plastic waste, using it as a symbolic substitute for the rice that once dominated Cigondewah's landscape. It appears as black lumps in woks and in piles of colourful slivers in winnowing trays throughout his exhibitions and performances; it is the centre-point of his international activism, speaking to the world which sends its plastic waste to Cigondewah for the socially and environmentally toxic process of recycling.

In 2015 I pedaled my bicycle up to the entrance of the Jogja National Museum, where opening events for the 'Art Moments' exhibition were taking place. 'Art is a prayer' was written across a sack of plastic to the left of an enormous canvas at which Tisna was working. In front of this a vast wok burned over hot flames, belching acrid smoke. Green, yellow and blue plastic snippets sat in trays while at centre-stage *seni reak* played out



again, accompanied by its Central Javanese cousin, *kuda lumping* (horse dance), replete with whips to keep the performers in check in case they descend into animalistic trances. Tisna smeared plastic onto the canvas with PVC glue while the accompanying music reached fever-pitch. Looking closer I noticed that it was indeed the same *seni reak* troupe we had met in Bandung.

Over the intervening months, Tisna had developed a relationship with the troupe, incorporating their participation into the very form of his performance art. In his commitment to establishing deep relationships between traditional and contemporary expressive forms, Tisna Sanjaya forges a paradigm for art practice that takes the perilous future of our common worlds at its heart. He shapes a prayer that demands to be heard at home and across the globe.

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## PERPETUATING THE PLAITED ART TRADITIONS OF EAST & NORTH KALIMANTAN

Karen Cherie Macdonald

The *sa'ap*, a beautiful and ultimately marketable Dayak Kenyah basket, formerly used to measure rice, was no longer being made in the village of Sungai Bawang. In fact, the community had lost the tradition of producing high quality plaited arts. The women had assembled to embark on a process of reviving the craft traditions of their village and improving their economic livelihoods. There was no prototype of a *sa'ap* in the community, so the *sa'ap* they made was reconstructed from memories. I was participating in a Craft Conservation Program (CCP) workshop in East Kalimantan, an inspirational and collaborative experience – the start of a long process in the intergenerational transfer of knowledge to revive traditional Dayak plaited arts.

Such two week facilitated workshops are a critical component in the craftsmanship-centred approach employed by master Dayak Aoheng artisan 'trainer', Theodora Hangin Bang, and Paulus Kadok, a Dayak Benuaq and Head of the CCP. A few senior Kenyah women had pieces of the puzzle: a couple knew how to best harvest bamboo and process the raw materials; others remembered how to prepare the natural dyes. Most had not plaited for years, others were new to plaiting. No-one was using natural dyes. This fragmentation of knowledge was not unique to this community.

The Dayak Kenyah are one of over 400 Dayak ethnic groups in Kalimantan – the Indonesian part of the island of Borneo. The plaited arts, using natural fibres and dyes, have occupied a central and multi-faceted role in their traditional communities. Most plaited objects have a utilitarian function and are made for local, personal use. But many are highly decorated and intricate in design, serve ritual functions and express the status of the maker, wearer or carrier in the village community.

Travelling around Kalimantan one can still see the rich tradition of Dayak plaited arts – handmade sunhats are still worn by fishermen and farmers, and baskets are still employed for planting, harvesting and carrying produce from *ladang* and *sawah* (dry and wet rice fields). It is also apparent that there has been massive (and accelerating) environmental, demographic, social and economic changes in recent decades which have irreversibly disrupted Dayak communities and their traditional practices.

DAYAK LUNDAYEH REING BASKET DECORATED WITH PAINT. PHOTO: JOHN BOYD MACDONALD



In many cases the utilitarian function of basketry remains, but much else has changed. Many plaited arts are no longer being made, or are produced using colourful synthetic fibres, plastic twine and chemical dyes – sometimes in combination with natural materials. Local tastes have also changed and may favour the new materials. Overall, the use of natural fibres is declining.

As belief systems changed the cultural knowledge associated with these former beliefs decreased. Heirloom pieces, formerly used as prototypes, were sold to outsiders. Religious conversions have meant a downplaying of the cultural and ceremonial role that basketry provides – beyond its practical utility. One example: in traditional animistic Dayak culture, rice is closely associated with female fertility as it is the source of life (King 1993: 240). As receptacles for rice, baskets such as the *tayen* rice harvest basket are spiritually and ceremonially significant. Elias Yesaya, Manager, Krayan Cultural Field School said that, as well as being used during traditional wedding ceremonies, the *tayen* was formerly the centrepiece of the rice barn (*lumbung padi*) created for the *Tayen Mali'* ceremony held one week before harvest.

Traditionally most Dayak economies have been based around swidden rice cultivation and other subsistence activities, in which basketry made using plants from local forests have great utilitarian value. But Borneo has

lost over 50 percent of its original forests, with a third disappearing in the last three decades. The principal fibres of rattan, bamboo and pandanus, as well as dye plants, have become increasingly difficult to obtain. Also, livelihoods have changed with the proliferation of logging, mining, and plantations of oil palms and pulp timber trees. The practical need for much of the basketry has declined, so artisans become inactive and their marketing channels disappear.

As the overall importance of basketry has decreased, the younger generation has become less interested in acquiring traditional knowledge and skills from their elders. Making basketry using lengthy and complex manual processes is not regarded as economically viable, and they seek alternative forms of employment. And – consequently and most significantly – the knowledge and skills to make high quality basketry using natural fibres and dyes is in danger of being lost.

The establishment of the Foundation, now known as Yayasan Mahakam Lestari, and its flagship activity (the Craft Conservation Program) was based on a process of extensive community consultation. It works with several Dayak communities in East and North Kalimantan to identify high-value plaited handicrafts with cultural significance, which serve as vehicles for improving women's livelihoods, building sustainable communities and preserving the natural environment.





TAYEN BASKET AND RAUNG BASUNG SUNHAT, DAYAK LUNDAYEH WEDDING. PHOTO: JOHN BOYD MACDONALD

The Dayak Kenyah community of Sungai Bawang is just starting to revive its craft traditions. But the CCP has been supporting and mentoring artisans in several Dayak communities since its establishment in 2008.

When the CCP first ventured into the Krayan region of North Kalimantan in 2010 there were no established cooperatives and a sporadic market for their fibre art. Artisans rarely made traditional baskets or hats or had become inactive. During a 2017 filming project Dayak Lundayeh community leaders and artisans from three cooperatives in the Krayan region were interviewed. They felt that the quality centred approach had assisted them in establishing their reputation for producing high quality handicraft and improved their ability to

market their handicrafts. 'The Foundation has shown that the natural fibres and dyes have more value' said Roslina Palung of the Batan Cooperative who make *reing*, *tayen* and other plaited arts.

At a wedding in a Krayan village it was clear that the material culture has a cultural role, a perpetuation of community values and identity. The *tayen* basket and *raung basung* were integral to the traditional part of the wedding ceremony, held separately from the Church service. The ceremony was explained as being an expression of the common cultural heritage (*adat*) of two families. 'It is *adat* not religion; we are Christian now' was a commonly expressed view. Only Elias Yesaya, the Cultural Adviser, discussed the traditional beliefs (Macdonald 2017).

The artisans and community leaders said that their continuing dependence on plants for their livelihoods meant that they have become advocates for their natural environment. 'The Dayak Lundayeh objected to proposals to establish palm oil plantations in the area...the people promise to take care of the forest' said Gunarso, Village Chief of Long Umung. From discussions with artisans and community leaders, it is clear that economic empowerment provides the main incentive for their communities to reinvigorate their traditional handicrafts. In the Krayan area this has meant that the plaited arts have once again become central to women's livelihoods. Preservation of cultural practices and material culture is interdependent with the preservation and maintenance of native forests and river systems.

There is a recognition of the interest of buyers and the broader community in the cultural knowledge of indigenous communities and the need to document and differentiate the unique Dayak handicrafts from the crafts of other regions and nations. Part of this CCP project has been to research and record community knowledge and to develop promotional materials.

The Dayak plaited arts, made from natural fibres and dyes, arose within a unique set of environmental, religious, economic and historical circumstances. They are the material expression of fragile cultural traditions. While communities may acknowledge that their material culture is unique and valuable, often the underlying cultural context (beliefs systems, ritual functions and meanings of symbols) is allowed to dissipate and disappear. The field trip to the Dayak Lundayeh in the Krayan highlands provided a timely reminder that more needs to be done in this field.

Karen Cherie Macdonald has lived in Central and East Kalimantan for the last five years and has worked for the Craft Conservation Program, Mahakam Lestari Foundation since 2016.

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## IN THE SHADOW OF THE PASTS: HISTORY AND CONNECTIVITY IN ARAHMAIANI'S PERFORMANCE ART

Wulan Dirgantoro

Under the hot late morning sun, a group of people stood around a graveyard in Indonesia's capital city, Jakarta. As they greeted each other and started to chat excitedly, it became clear that they were not there for a funeral. They were waiting for one of Indonesia's important contemporary artists, Arahmaiani, to start her performance. The performance titled *Shadow of the Past* was part of her solo exhibition *The Past has not Passed* at Museum MACAN (Modern and Contemporary Art in Nusantara) from 17 November 2018 to 20 March 2019.

Despite an impressive career which has spanned over two decades in Indonesia and overseas, the MACAN exhibition was Arahmaiani's first retrospective in Indonesia. The exhibition featured a diversity of the artist's work from small-scale drawings, painting and video to her more well-known installation and performance works. The artist draws largely on her personal experiences as a woman, artist, activist, and global nomad in addressing issues of social injustice, gender, sexuality, a critique of capitalism, the image of Islam, and especially over the past decade, the environment.

Arahmaiani chose performance art as her primary form of artistic expression because of the freedom that it offers, particularly its radical potential to connect directly with an audience. Her strategy to use performance art can also be seen as fundamental to the themes that she has developed throughout her career. According to her, performance art has the potential to immediately deliver political messages and, most importantly, to allow for interaction with the audience.

The unlikely site for Arahmaiani's performance on 16 December 2018 was Jakarta's Museum Taman Prasasti (Memorial Stone Park Museum), a former Dutch graveyard and now an open-air museum where the oldest graves date from the 18th century. The site has undergone several transformations including re-interments and repatriation for most of its occupants, and the collection now comprises mostly just gravestones. Nonetheless, the remains of some notable inhabitants remain on site (Judo and Antar 2007).

At precisely ten o'clock, the artist walked in slowly through the gate of the museum park. She was clothed in dark grey shirt and

EXHIBITION VIEW OF *THE PAST HAS NOT PASSED*, MUSEUM MACAN, JAKARTA. PHOTO: MUSEUM MACAN



pants, with her head and feet covered in clay. As she made her stately way down the main path, she started the performance by paying obeisance to a *prasasti* (stone inscription), a replica of *Prasasti Ciaruteun* (Ciaruteun Inscription) a 5th century stone inscription from Tarumanegara, a West Javanese Hindu kingdom that existed during the 4th-7th centuries CE (Wessing 2011).

After stopping at the *prasasti*, the artist picked up a large branch and continued to walk through the gravestones. She wove a path through the museum's collection and

stopped at several gravestones where she placed the branch over the gravestone in a gesture reminiscent of giving a blessing. The artist's deliberate movements enhanced the contemplative mood of the performance as the audience watched her silent communication with the various objects.

As she touched some of the Dutch tombstones with her branch, the artist/statue gestured to Indonesia's colonial past. While some of these figures were responsible for military campaigns—JHR Koehler (1818-1873) led a punitive military expedition to Aceh in March



PERFORMANCE ART ARCHIVES IN THE EXHIBITION *THE PAST HAS NOT PASSED*, MUSEUM MACAN, JAKARTA. PHOTO: MUSEUM MACAN





1873 — others such as HF Roll (1867-1935) who founded STOVIA (medical school for native Indonesians, and later the medical faculty at the University of Indonesia) had contributed to the advancement of institutions to advance modern education. Objects commemorating such different individuals highlighted the nuances of colonial relations as well as their legacies in present-day Indonesia, something that the artist seemed keen to emphasise.

As the performance continued, the blessing gesture was slowly replaced by other gestures. For example, the artist stood still next to the gravestone of Soe Hok Gie's (1942-1969) — a Chinese Indonesian student activist and intellectual figure. She then cleared a fallen branch from a path, sat on a bench, threw a handful of dry leaves in the air and eventually finished the performance by lowering herself to the ground and gently embracing a memorial statue of a woman prostrate with grief. It is known locally as the tombstone of a newly-wed Dutch woman who committed suicide after her husband died of malaria.

*Shadow of the Past* has been performed at several locations, such as Gothenburg, Sweden (2015), Lasem, Central Java (2016), Yushu, Tibet Autonomous Prefecture (2017), Jakarta (2018), and most recently, in Tibet again (2019). While each iteration of the performance was different depending on the site, the artist's focus remained the same. The performance is part of the Arahmaiani's ongoing interest in Buddhist thought and pre-modern history. In the artist's talk in Jakarta, she cited the role of Lama Atisha (982 – 1054 CE) in spreading Buddhism from Tibet to Sumatra during his stay in the Srivijaya Empire (1013-1024 CE). In an essay published in 2015, about the time she developed

the first performance, the artist wrote that an investigation of the pre-modern past could shift the modern way of thinking that among other things, has resulted in environmental destruction (Arahmaiani 2015: 110-111).

The performance can thus be seen as an attempt to connect Indonesia's plural pasts as comprising animistic, Hindu, Buddhist, and Islamic cultures through the artist's physical presence and actions. By covering her body in clay, the artist transformed herself into an ancient statue who walked these pasts into the present. By invoking ancient statues through her clay-smeared body, the artist sought to refer to Buddhist and Hindu sculpture from the 'Classic Era' (8th-10th century) in Javanese culture (Rollins 2016). These statues are valued not only for their religious significance at that time, namely as objects of worship, but these objects also fulfilled a particular social function that linked the people, the ruler and the gods through the acts of worship. In modern day Indonesia, the statues become a symbol of Indonesia's glorious pasts (Sedyawati 1992: 59, 2010).

As a performance artist, Arahmaiani is undoubtedly sensitive to the connection between the artist's body, the space it inhabits, and the audience. By referencing a sculptural representation, the artist's body amplifies the affective power of the spiritual and historical object as well its social function in its public re-enactment. At the same time, the audience is also made aware that there are human senses hard at work under the dried clay and the tropical sun. The performance is an invitation for the contemporary audience to connect with the pasts, not through an act of worship but through empathy.



The performance can be seen as a timely reminder of tolerance and plurality in the current socio-political climate in Indonesia. As many activists, journalists, and academics have highlighted Indonesia's drift towards illiberal democracy (Hadiz 2017), Arahmaiani's performance looks towards the past for an example of space that allows the coexistence of differences.

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## MAKING MEANING THROUGH MUSIC IN MAKASSAR: A PERSONAL JOURNEY

Margaret Bradley

'If we are to preserve culture we must continue to create it'. Johan Huizinga

Music is 'the poetry of human expression through sound in time' (modernmusic online). It usually reflects its origins through how the sounds are organised, but in this era of globalisation, YouTube video clips and streaming music Apps such as Spotify it becomes increasingly challenging to identify its traditional roots. Music is abstract, dynamic and evolving, especially in Indonesia.

In a busy urban port city such as Makassar, South Sulawesi, young Makassarese student musicians readily absorb outside influences but maintain cultural identity through revitalising traditional forms of music such as *paganrang* drumming. Older musicians pass on their skills and significant cultural knowledge through teaching drumming to school students.

While many Australians know of the gongs of the Javanese, Balinese, Sundanese and Cirebonese gamelan and perhaps the West Sumatran *talempong*, there is less familiarity with the brash, energetic and dynamic sounds of the *ganrang* (barrel drum) and *puik puik* (double reed wind instrument) from South Sulawesi. Yet in this locale, these instruments play a similar role to the gong in marking ceremonies and rituals. Ensembles often feature single or paired gongs played with the *ganrang* and *puik puik*.

The *ganrang* is a two-headed barrel drum played from a cross-legged position using two hands or one hand and a stick beater (*bakbalak*) made from buffalo horn. Two *ganrang* are usually played together with one player performing set patterns sitting behind the other playing improvised passages. These drums are also played in groups called *rampak ganrang*. The *ganrang* consists of two leather drumheads laced to each other with thin rattan. Sliding rings, made of either metal or rattan for adjusting the tension of the lacings, control the pitch of the drumheads. The drum shell referred to as *kale* (body, self) or *sanrangang* (basic form) is essentially cylindrical, but with one end somewhat larger than the other (Sutton 2002). On first hearing I was reminded of instruments with which I have great familiarity: the Sundanese accompaniments of *kendang*

SUNSET BEHIND THE MAIN STAGE AT THE 2018 MAKASSAR INTERNATIONAL F8 FESTIVAL. PHOTO: MARGARET BRADLEY



(drum) and *tarompet* (oboe-like instrument) used for the martial art, *pencak silat*. In South Sulawesi however, these instruments provide the dynamic accompaniment to the slow graceful fan dance called the *pakarena* and the entertaining dance of *ganrang bulo*.

Makassarese *ganrang* have long played an important role in ritual, both in villages and, prior to Indonesian independence, in the royal courts. And while some prototype of this drum might have been brought, along with the oboe, into South Sulawesi from elsewhere in the archipelago, it is widely accepted as an indigenous instrument. It now represents a local force, powerful aesthetically and spiritually. In recent memory *ganrang* have been used not only to accompany various dances, including the

ritually powerful *pakarena*, but also for ritual purification: for building a house, launching a ship, cleansing a house in which someone has recently died, and blessing persons about to undergo an important ritual such as marriage or circumcision (Sutton 2002).

I was impressed by the significance of these instruments in preserving and renewing cultural practices on a trip to Makassar last year. Yet, as musician Dr Arifin Manggau notes, while there has been an increase in performing arts studios, there is little local government support for cultural preservation, especially traditional music. The main cultures of South Sulawesi – Toraja, Bugis, Mandar and Makassar – are diverse. Sutton's 2002 study of music, dance and cultural politics of South Sulawesi revealed the need for further



SETTING UP FOR THE PERFORMANCE FOR THE EYES OF MAREGE AT THE 2018 MAKASSAR INTERNATIONAL F8 FESTIVAL.

PHOTO: MARGARET BRADLEY





exploration of these cultural practices and Manggau reiterates this is still the case.

During the last three decades, I have collaborated with numerous Indonesian musicians, particularly in Sunda, West Java where I studied *karawitan Sunda* (Sundanese traditional music). I visited West Java regularly in the early 1990s while studying the Sundanese *kacapi* and completing a Masters degree. Since this time, Indonesian and Australian collaborative ventures which invariably entail artistic experimentation and creating shared meanings have been core to my practice. In addition to solo performances in both countries I have been part of various collectives – Songket, Ethnotika Gamelan, Krakatau, Balawan Batuan Gamelan, Sirkus Barock and Trio Madois (with Dody Satya Ekagustdiman and Ismet Ruchimat) – as well as creative endeavours in recent years with Australian-Indonesian artist Jumaadi, and Australian-Indonesian dancer Ade Suharto. The last three decades have been a period of rich and largely continual musical interchange between Australia and Indonesia, enabled by the creative input of a core group of invested individuals, and, now, robust networks.

My musical connection with Indonesia has also extended to South Sulawesi through involvement in a number of performances and festivals, most recently last year in Toraja and Makassar. For the 2018 Makassar International F8 Festival & Forum I performed with multi-instrumentalist Australian musician Ron Reeves in collaboration with students from the State University of Makassar (Universitas Negeri Makassar). Director poet Ram Prapanca from the Fiction Writers and Fonts program produced for the festival an adaptation of Australian Aboriginal writer Julie Janson's *The Eyes of Marege*. In 2007, the original Australian

Indonesian collaboration between Teater Kita Makassar and Australian Performance Exchange, was performed at OzAsia Festival in Adelaide and The Studio, Sydney Opera House. Ram produced regular performances of *The Eyes of Marege* in Makassar because he believed the story showcased the significant history between the Yolngu people and the Bugis fishermen of Makassar.

*The Eyes of Marege* tells the story of a Bugis fisherman and Yolngu girl who fall in love and face the challenges of building and sustaining a relationship bridging two cultures. Since around the 17th century Bugis fishermen from Makassar have arrived in northern Australia annually to find *trepan* or sea cucumber. They would stay until the winds changed to allow them safe passage home. Historical accounts show how these journeys and encounters often led to intermarriage as well as exchange of customs, songs, dances, artefacts and culture.

For these collaborative performances, it remains integral to pay attention to the importance of Australian Indigenous protocols, while at the same time creating a polished performance, usually in a short timeframe. Ron Reeves and I rehearsed and performed two works with six Makassarese musicians led by local composer Ahmad Nur and Ram's ensemble of dancers and actors. Ahmad chose characteristic Bugis and Aboriginal instruments including the *ganrang* (drums), *puik puik*, gong, suling, flute, small keyboard, *kacapi* (a string instrument), rebana, electric bass guitar, electronics, small hand percussion such as shakers and jaws harp, vocals, didjeridoo, clapsticks and box didj. Rehearsals and performances took place in small spaces so the volume of the instruments was noticeably loud and impressive.

During the rehearsal period we collaborated in performing a Bugis song and an Australian Aboriginal acknowledgement of country song I carried from Aboriginal performer Matthew Doyle. I highlighted the vocal technique necessary to reflect the character of Yolngu singing.

Neither Aboriginal writer Julie Janson nor musician-dancer Matthew Doyle could travel with us but the spirit of their work supported ours. Music director Ahmad Nur mentioned how the local musicians gained much from the collaboration, as did we. Through performing music for theatre together, we exchanged knowledge of instruments and practices from inside and outside Sulawesi. We all learnt more about different styles of music and the musicians in Makassar appreciated getting to know musicians from overseas. The local musicians were generous and fascinated by what we could share with them and we learnt about their creative processes.

The tension between what is considered authentic or innovative, traditional or contemporary, comes to the fore in the preservation and creation of art and culture. When tracing the roots and historical influences impacting on Indonesian and Australian Aboriginal music today it is important to be aware of the complexity of local and external influences. My visit to Makassar was rich in creating musical meaning across cultures so that our cultural identities became stronger through the exchange. These processes have influenced my musical life and those around me. I am still in touch with our collaborators in Makassar and hope that we have more opportunities to further experiment and create music together.

As Yo Yo Ma observes: 'When you learn something from people, or from a culture, you accept it as a gift, and it is your lifelong commitment to preserve it and build on it'.

Margaret Bradley is a multi-instrumentalist (piano, flutes, kacapi zither, percussion and vocals), educator and composer from Sydney Australia. Having studied music in ISBI Bandung West Java, Sydney Conservatorium and UNSW, she collaborates to create intercultural understanding through music and arts experiences.

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## IN THE PUBLIC DOMAIN: TIGA NEGERI BATIK CLOTHS AT THE AGNSW

Matt Cox

When the industrial revolution arrived in Indonesia, like elsewhere in the world, it effected change at a previously unimaginable rate. At the fore of the revolution was the locomotive industry which embodied both the new technology and the speed at which it could spread, making everything closer and opening-up new routes for material, capital and colonial expansion. By 1888 eight main railways lines connected the 15 largest towns in Java. When the coal black metallic train tracks were first networked across the green landscape, for many, they must have seemed like yet another manifestation of the tentacles of Dutch colonial enterprise enriching itself through the extraction of natural resources, now at even faster speeds.

The spread of the railroads, however, also offered gainful employment for a broad cross section of Javanese society, from recently graduated engineers to the rural poor and offered many Indonesians their first experiences of long distance mobility. A mobility that engendered a new sense of the modern, of individuality, freedom and connectivity to other Indonesians, a sense of their shared experiences - or in the language of Benedict Anderson, a sense of belonging to an imagined community.

The introduction of the train lines along the north coast and between Semarang and Surakarta (Solo) also had a profound effect on batik production. Making connections and opening-up new business opportunities, it stimulated new styles and markets that synthesised north coast industries with the batik of central Java. It was particularly the Chinese and Arab traders with contacts in the various towns who took advantage of the new transport network to develop both a profitable business and a unique aesthetic. Beginning as an entrepreneurial experiment in a climate of increasing competition, a new mode of batik production emerged known as *dua negeri* or 'two regions batik'.

With different regions specialising in particular motifs and colours, 'two regions batik' incorporated design sense and local dyes from two regions into the production of a single piece of cloth. As train lines and communications between towns increased the *dua negeri batik* developed into *tiga negeri batik*, or 'three regions batik', spreading along the north coast to Surabaya and south to the

central highlands. Such cloths were generally produced in the north coast towns of Kedungwani, Lasem, Pekalongan and Kudus and Surakarta in central Java. Each textile would have local designs and dyes applied based on the colours and motifs indigenous to the region. The first waxing and dyeing was usually done in the north coast towns with the final design and colour applied in central Java. For instance, a cloth might have pomegranates and vines dyed red in Lasem, foliage dyed blue in Kudus and then completed with central Javanese motifs and the *soga* brown dye in Surakarta.

In 2008 John Yu and the late George Soutter generously donated a group of Indonesian textiles to the Art Gallery of New South Wales, among them two fine examples of *tiga negeri* cloth in the form of *kemban*, which are long strips of cloth worn by women across the upper torso.

These two cloths designed by Tjoa Siang Gwan of Surakarta and Tjoa Oey Mho of Kedungwani (one of which is illustrated in this article) are beautifully illustrative of the collaborative entrepreneurial and aesthetic accomplishments of Chinese businessmen working between the north coast and the central Javanese principalities in the early 20th century. Combining *batik cap* (stamp) and *batik tulis* (hand drawn) the two cloths also illustrate a synthesis of Peranakan Chinese and Javanese design principles.

*Kemban* always feature a central lozenge, either in rectangular or diamond shape. In both these cases the coloured central diagonal lozenge usually found to be a solid colour in the Javanese courts is brightly decorated consistent with the remainder of the cloth. Note the background of the Surakarta cloth which is covered with controlled wax cracks and the 'drawn' fake fringe which runs around this cloth.

BREAST WRAPPER (KEMBAN), INDONESIA, CENTRAL JAVA, SURAKARTA, COTTON,  
DYES: BATIK, 51.5 X 259.0 CM (IRREG.). GIFT OF JOHN YU AND GEORGE SOUTTER 2008



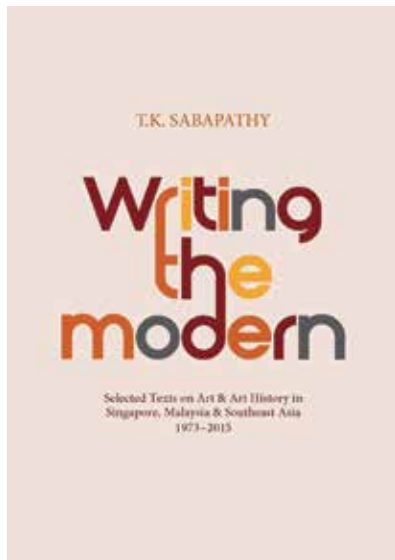
As time passed, Javanese batik makers and traders wary of competitors encroaching on their markets, formed unions to protect their businesses. Likewise, the young Javanese railroad workers became dissatisfied with their working conditions and also unionised. Galvanising their shared experience of exploitation, *Serekat dagang Islam* (Islamic trader union) opened up branches across the country to protect the rights of railway workers and batik makers alike and encouraged them to pursue a path of self-determination. On 17 August 1945 after the collapse of the Japanese occupation which had brought an abrupt end to *tiga negeri batik* production, this same highly politicised and unionised community claimed its independence from the Dutch as the Republic of Indonesia.

Dr Matt Cox is Curator, Asian Art, Art Gallery of New South Wales.



## BOOK REVIEW: WRITING THE MODERN

Caroline Turner



### **Writing the Modern: Selected Texts on Art & Art History in Singapore, Malaysia and Southeast Asia 1973-2015**

T.K. Sabapathy, edited by Ahmad Mashadi, Susie Lingham, Peter Schoppert and Joyce Toh  
Singapore Art Museum, Singapore, 2018  
RRP: 56.00 SGD, paperback 448 pages,  
75 illustrations

This anthology will undoubtedly become essential reading for anyone interested in Southeast Asian art consisting as it does of texts by Singapore's pre-eminent art historian, T.K. Sabapathy. Even this handsome publication of 53 essays (and these are only a small percentage of Sabapathy's total output) can hardly do justice to his more than 40 years as an educator and 'ardent advocate' for art and culture (9). He has also curated seminal exhibitions of Southeast Asian modern and contemporary art including the Singapore Art Museum's inaugural exhibition in 1996, *Modernity and Beyond: Themes in Southeast Asian Art* and *Intersecting Histories: Contemporary Turns in Southeast Asian Art* at Nanyang Technological University in 2012.

The style of writing and scholarship in the book is exemplary but the texts are also accessible to non specialists. They present the author as a formidable intellect and passionate interrogator of ideas with an extraordinary breadth of understanding of the historical and modern art of the region.

Born in 1938 in what was then British Malaya Sabapathy entered the University of Malaya

in 1957, the year of Malaysian independence, to study history. He also took undergraduate art history classes with Michael Sullivan, one of the most distinguished Western scholars of classical Chinese art. Sullivan introduced him to a new world relating word and image. Before beginning his own university teaching career, first in Malaysia then in Singapore, Sabapathy undertook postgraduate research at the University of California, Berkeley and the School of Oriental and African Studies, London. His focus was Southeast Asia art, including the great traditions of Hindu-Buddhist art.

There is enormous complexity and diversity in the art and histories of the countries of Southeast Asia which today have a combined population of some 625 million people. Perhaps one of Sabapathy's most significant contributions has been his resolute intellectual engagement with the need to develop regional perspectives and to link the modern and contemporary art of the region to its rich and varied artistic traditions. As he stated in the Introduction to *Intersecting Histories*: '...the contemporary and history are encountered as intersecting in manifold ways, generating varied, shifting, fluid networks that may be apprehended historically' (317).

This is made more complex he suggests in the text 'Retrieving Buried Voices' by 'overlapping anxieties emerging from intertwining historical experiences; most especially those that have been moulded by colonialism and its aftermath. Furthermore, since the creation of new nation states after the Second World War, and the reverberations unleashed by the dismantling of the Cold War, different sets of anxieties are fermented; I have in mind the excruciating contradictions and severe dislocations arising from...the inexorable push towards gaining or forging economic connectedness and enmeshing with global techno-economic systems on the one hand, and the pull away from such allegiances...in order to safeguard cultural uniqueness on the other'(383).

Sabapathy has always understood that art practices and art history are influenced by context and historical circumstances - that the aesthetic can be 'history and culture specific' (384). One unifying thread in his writing is his intense belief in the significance of art and the vital contributions of artists and writers to

society 'and in the way we see ourselves and in the way we see others' (266) noting: 'Writers illuminate entry points of art and artists into the pale of history. Written texts are just as important as works of art in representing significance, value and meaning in the world of art'.

Sabapathy has strong connections to Australia and was a key advisor for the Artists Regional Exchange (ARX) based in Perth in the 1980s and early 1990s and the Asia-Pacific Triennial (APT) at the Queensland Art Gallery in the 1990s. I first met him when I was Project Director of the APT in the early 1990s and recall his invaluable contributions to shaping our dialogue with the region as well as his towering intellectual presence at APT conferences. His catalogue essay for the second APT in 1996 took us on a journey covering centuries of art in Southeast Asia, the interconnections in that art, for example the influence of temple architecture from Java on developments at Angkor, noting that artists in Southeast Asia transformed imported artistic styles and developed their own art. As he stated: 'Movements of peoples, languages, technologies, and belief systems across boundaries and seas within South-East Asia have been continuous over the millennia...' (Sabapathy 1996:17).

The title of this book in many ways does not do justice to Sabapathy's achievement. He has not just been 'writing the modern' but defining and shaping its contemporary development in Southeast Asian contexts. In the process he has helped build international understanding of Southeast Asian art and its connections to centuries of traditions in art and culture and contributed to developing an art discourse that has also in recent decades moved beyond Euro-American domination of art history towards a new global understanding of art history in the 21st century.

Caroline Turner is a curator and academic with a special interest in Asian art.

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## CARL ANDREW (3 JULY 1939 – 18 FEBRUARY 2019)

Paul Genney

The first seeds of TAASA were planted when Carl Andrew, together with Claire Roberts (both with the Powerhouse Museum), returned from a stimulating visit to a collector of Chinese art. This inspired a vision of a forum where people could meet to share their interests in Asian art. Carl was one of the original 'yurt hatchers' at the now legendary gathering where the embryonic idea of an Asian arts society took shape (*TAASA Review*, Dec 2011).

For those who knew Carl, his boundless enthusiasm and passions were a force that could be hard to resist; those energies were integral to the creation and successful launch of TAASA. The first meeting of what was to become the founding Committee was held at his home in Potts Point in August 1991. Carl became the founding President and, fittingly, his membership number was No. 001.

For many years, committee meetings were held at his home. His dining table became a mini-workshop, stacked high with bundles of printed material as the committee prepared mail-outs of upcoming events or the *TAASA Review*. Discussions were spirited and not infrequently boisterous, and a great sense of camaraderie marked the new venture.

The paths through which people find their interests in art are often diverse. Born in Melbourne and matriculating from Eltham High School, Carl initially followed in his father Frank (Francis) Andrew's footsteps as a commercial artist. Studying graphic design and printing at the School of Arts (Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology), he graduated in 1960. With his Diploma of Art and portfolio in hand, he was immediately employed as a graphic artist in the advertising agency Ralph Blunden Pty Ltd. It was in its day the innovative agency in town, a heady environment with a flow of creative talent coming through its doors. He found himself working in a milieu that included Patrick Russell, Henry Talbot, Tony Irving, and for a while Helmut Newton.

Three years later, at the age of 24, Carl packed his brushes and books and sailed to Rhodes in Greece from where he painted and travelled extensively throughout Europe, visiting the major galleries and museums. He returned after a four-year sojourn, completing a Fine Arts degree at the University of Melbourne in

PHOTO © CHRISTOPHER SANDERS, 2007



1970, while concurrently presenting more than 100 lectures to the National Gallery Society of Victoria on paintings and sculptures in the NGV's collection. The thespian-like projection and resonance in his voice may well have been honed during this time!

With the encouragement of Daryl Lindsay (former Director of the NGV) Carl was appointed the inaugural Director of McClelland Gallery in Victoria in 1971, and so his career as an art curator began. This was followed by his appointment at the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery in 1975 as Curator of Art. Pursuing his interests in the decorative arts, he moved to Sydney in 1980 and joined the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences (Powerhouse Museum), holding senior roles in Decorative Arts and Collection Development until his retirement in 1996. His indelible contributions to these institutions are still reflected in their collections today.

Other highlights of Carl's notable career included being a member of the Australia Post Stamp Design Advisory Committee (1977-1982), member of the Crafts Board of the Australia Council (1980-1984), Foundation Board member of Artbank (1980-1983), and a member of the Art Advisory Committee for Parliament House, Canberra (1983-87), which was instrumental in developing the collection of artworks for the new building.

Carl often said that his jobs had never been work or hardship, but pure pleasure. His

interests were wide ranging, encompassing not only the visual arts, but architecture, design, literature, classical music and opera. The breadth of his interests and his gifts as a raconteur belied an extraordinary depth of knowledge in all these areas. Chinese and Japanese decorative arts were of particular interest and they formed a substantial part of his personal collection which also included works by ceramic artists such as Christopher Sanders and Mitsuo Shoji.

At the centre of his life was a passionate and total dedication and commitment to the arts. In his retirement he started painting again, exploring abstract colour-field works. While he shunned technology (mobile phones and computers were an anathema), he was intrigued by and embraced the digital art of teamLab of Japan. Ruefully, he realised that it would be impossible to find a space in his home for these works, his walls were already filled from floor to ceiling with paintings.

Carl's life was a life lived to its fullest, with passion, exuberance and an indomitable spirit. Apart from the many contributions he made during his long professional career, his personal integrity and capacity to develop and maintain enduring friendships were some of the hallmarks of his life. He will be greatly missed and never forgotten by all who knew him.

Paul Genney was a founding member and Secretary of TAASA from 1991 to 2000.



## RECENT TAASA ACTIVITIES

23/24 February 2019

### APT9 TOUR

TAASA members enjoyed a program of activities in Brisbane over the weekend which centred on APT9 at QAGOMA. Expert guidance to this triennial exhibition was provided by Tarun Nagesh, Curator of Asian Art at QAGOMA, who very generously accompanied the group through much of the weekend. We were magnificently hosted by our TAASA Qld chapter, headed by James MacKean. TAASA members from Qld, Sydney and Melbourne mingled over dinner at James' home, accompanied by musicians playing sitar and tabla, and entertained by a lecture from James on contemporary Tibetan painting, tatami room sake tasting and even a quiz.



TAASA MEMBERS WITH TARUN NAGESH AT APT9.

PHOTO: SANDY WATSON



DANA MCCOWN PRESENTING AT THE DECORATIVE ARTS OF INDIA SYMPOSIUM. PHOTO: JOSEFA GREEN

On Sunday morning, the Qld chapter ran a specially designed seminar in the morning on Decorative Arts of India at QAGOMA, which combined talks by James on the issues around the antique trade in ivory objects and Indian miniatures, and a number of textile presentations which included Dana McCown on Telia Rumal double ikat textiles from South Indian and a range of textiles presented by Janet De Boer. This was accompanied by a wonderful array of objects for us to examine including a lotus stem woven textile from Myanmar from Jenny Bellamy and a Laotian ceremonial shawl from Gael McAlpine. In the afternoon, Tarun

walked us through *A Fleeting Bloom*, the Japanese exhibition at QAG which featured key objects donated by the late James Fairfax.

*Josefa Green*

### TAASA NSW

#### THE SPIRIT WORLD

#### TAASA Monday Night Sydney Lecture Series

Monday 4 March 2019

#### Love the Buddha, Fear the Nat

We were immediately drawn into the fascinating world of the nats in Myanmar by Dr Sally Bamford's lively account of the legend of Maung Tinde, illustrating a typical nat story. Nats are generally guardians of a particular location following a sudden violent death, and often associated with an occupation or particular group. They are frequently native spirits or heavenly deities and their animist origins predate Buddhism. Her presentation illustrated the earliest images of nats from the 2nd century and the evolution of these images to the present when nat images are rendered in modern media such as oil painting as well as more traditional statues in wood.

*Josefa Green*

Monday 1 April 2019

#### Spirits and Djinn from the Islamic World

Dr Julian Droogan provided a fascinating insight into the origins of Djinn, their diversity, adoption into Islamic doctrine and the essential role they play in present day religion, spiritualism and the material arts. Djinn are connected to pre-Islamic Arabian folklore but are mentioned in the Qur'an (Surah 15) as being created by Allah from fire and wind and are intermediaries between the human and the angelic. Djinn may manifest themselves in dreams and be non-corporal or corporal in forms such as animals, birds, mermaid-type figures, satyrs or human beings.



(L-R) JULIAN DROOGAN WITH ANN PROCTOR AND SANDRA FORBES. PHOTO: SANDY WATSON

As Islam spread, the Djinn evolved new characteristics, stories and material culture. One story tells of Djinn who, fallen from grace, were banished by putting them into pots or amphoras buried at sea. Was this the origin of the genie in the lamp from the Book of One Thousand and One Nights?

*Margaret White*

### TAASA NSW CERAMICS STUDY GROUP

12 February 2019

#### Animal Magic

Animal motifs on ceramics proved very popular as evidenced by the large group of members who attended the first meeting of the year. Our first panellist, John Yu, focused on S.E Asia, beginning with two delightful Thai Sawankhalok (15th-16th c) mythical *hamsas* or geese which are regarded as semi-divine, so often seen on roof tops.

Ann Proctor discussed contemporary examples from India and Vietnam. A stoneware pig potted by Vietnamese artist, Nguyen Trong Doan and a round jar by Nguyen Khac Quan with a snake etched over its surface indicate the continuing importance of animal decoration.

Finally, Jackie Menzies, concentrated on East Asian examples such as a yellow-glazed sherd dating from the Hongxian (c.1916) period with nine, finely-drawn, multi-coloured dragons entwined around the exterior. Members contributed further examples to share including a large, 1940s era charger depicting a boy on the back of a mythical *qilin* with wishes for the speedy arrival of children. All in all, it was quite a menagerie!

*Margaret White*

### TAASA NSW TEXTILE STUDY GROUP

12 March 2019

#### Five Centuries of Tapas

Safrina Thristiawati gave a fascinating talk on tapis from her homeland, the Lampung area of Sumatra, Indonesia part of ancient world trade routes. Her presentation looked at tapis production methods, its traditional and contemporary use.

Tapis was traditionally only worn by women at ceremonies like weddings but this is gradually changing, with one male politician even wearing it as part of his attire. Today

its use has extended to wall hangings and women's accessories as designers endeavour to keep an important cultural tradition alive.

Members saw 16 tapis from Safrina's and other personal collections; tapis of silk and cotton, some with bast fibres or fine ikat work, some decorated with gold thread, mica, sequins or gold coins, others with motifs of birds, animals, stylised human figures, ships, chariots and mythical creatures. This visual feast certainly reinforced why members continue to study and enjoy textiles from all parts of Asia.

*Dianne Schultz-Tesmar*

#### TAASA QUEENSLAND

25 April 2019

##### Last days of APT9 tour

APT9 closed on the last weekend in April, and TAASA members took a last look around the show, followed by ANZAC cookies and afternoon tea outside on the lawn.

4 May 2019

##### Sattvic Vegetarian Cooking

Ten budding home cooks joined Aparna Datey for a nourishing and delicious vegetarian/vegan meal – a starter of

Aparna's Mom's turmeric infused savoury pancakes, followed by a traditional Khichadi, a pot meal with rice, three types of lentils, vegetables and spices. Other highlights were tasting Anna's homemade ghee and Manu's wicked lime chutney.

#### TAASA QLD TEXTILE INTEREST GROUP

30 March 2019

##### Textile Connections between Indonesia and Japan – from the Dutch East India Company to Contemporary Woodblocks and Batiks

Twenty TAASA members and supporters gathered for an illustrated talk by Maria Friend, who told us about her research at the Dutch archives, examining the Dutch textile trade with Japan. This was followed by a film



EXAMINING TEXTILES WITH MARIA FRIEND.

PHOTO: MANDY RIDLEY

viewing of *Women's Business – establishing a Weaving Collective in Northern Laos* introduced by Iain and Trish Clark, accompanied by a selection of woven and embroidered textiles made by the students.

*James MacKean*

#### TAASA ACT

13 April 2019

##### Laotian Textiles

A small but enthusiastic group gathered in the collection study room at the NGA where Bronwyn Campbell and Rose Montebello had prepared a selection of textiles from Laos, most acquired in the 1980s. Skirts, curtains, coffin covers, banners and a manuscript cover were included in the beautiful display. Bronwyn introduced the textiles and led a stimulating discussion from technical aspects of production to social and cultural considerations. We learned that many patterns have secret or magical aspects and any 'reading' of the meanings is intentionally complex. The group adjourned to the Proctors' home to continue the lively conversation and partake in refreshments with a nod to the upcoming Lao New Year.

*Ann Proctor*

# TEXTILES OF THE WORLD



Over two decades Christine and Robert have joined with esteemed practitioners to present innovative and fulfilling travel experiences focussing on textiles and crafts found at our stimulating destinations. Keeping ahead of the crowd, we constantly revise our programs and guests praise our choice of accommodation, workshops, comprehensive dossiers, informed discussion, quality of guides, flexibility and being part of a small group.

**intentionally**  
**different**  
travel experiences and destinations

## Our Calendar

### Uzbekistan and Iran: Sep/Oct 2019, with Christine Pearson.

Join our inaugural discovery of tribal weavings, ceramics and more.

### Classic Egypt: Oct 2019, with Nancy Hoskins.

Nancy shares her textile knowledge as we travel Egypt in style.

### Incredible Japan: Oct 2019, with Kaz Madigan.

See and enjoy amazing construction and uses of woven materials.

### Return to Lao: Jan 2020, with Valerie Kirk.

Traditional textiles are explored in the remoter areas of Lao.

### Indian Crafts: Jan 2020, with Sue Buckle.

From Kerala to the Deccan Plateau we find arts, crafts and fabric.

### Moroccan Crafts: Sep 2020, with Sue Buckle.

Travel throughout Morocco finding unique crafts and skills.

Robert Fletcher: [robert@intent.id.au](mailto:robert@intent.id.au)

Christine Pearson: [christine@intent.id.au](mailto:christine@intent.id.au)

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## TAASA MEMBERS' DIARY

JUNE - AUGUST 2019

### THE SPIRIT WORLD

#### TAASA Monday Night Sydney Lecture Series

Venue: Sydney Mechanics School of Arts

280 Pitt St, Sydney

All events 6 – 8pm

Drinks and refreshments served

Cost: Members \$20; Non-members \$30

Payment in advance essential. No refunds.

Booking confirmation to: Chris Manning.

Email: [bookings@taasa.org.au](mailto:bookings@taasa.org.au).

M: 0412 686 025

#### Payment by EFT:

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[www.taasa.org.au](http://www.taasa.org.au).

*Please visit TAASA's website for further details.* [www.taasa.org.au](http://www.taasa.org.au).

**Monday 3 June 2019**

#### Japanese Mountain Asceticism

##### John McBride

*Shugendo* is the ancient Japanese religion which links the power of nature and the mountains with the mundane world.

Mountains are where spirits come to rest and are revered for supporting life, but are also places of great danger. The Shugendo mountain ascetics attempt to understand and receive power from these forces. John McBride has a Shugendo license to guide in Japan's sacred mountains. John majored in classical Japanese literature at Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, and has post-graduate degrees in international relations and business. He worked in Japan for many years, and now leads walking tours of Japan.

**Monday 1 July 2019**

#### Along the Mystical Path: Sufis in Persia

##### John Tidmarsh

Although repressed in Iran since 1979, Sufism has always played a pivotal role in Persian history and culture and continues to do so. This talk will consider its origins and basic tenets before concentrating on

the numerous superb monuments to Sufi sheikhs and poets that illuminate the Persian landscape.

John Tidmarsh is an archaeologist who has conducted excavations in Syria, Jordan, Greece, and Cyprus. He is currently Co-Director of the University of Sydney excavations at Pella in Jordan and Co-Director of the Australian Mission to Jebel Khalid, Syria. He is a former President of the Near Eastern Archaeology Foundation. John has a BA (Hons), MA (Hons) and PhD from the University of Sydney.

#### TAASA TEXTILE STUDY GROUP, NSW

The TSG meets in the Annie Wyatt Room at the S.H Ervin Gallery, Observatory Hill in Millers Point from 6 – 8pm. Light refreshments provided. \$15 members, \$20 non-members. The venue is close to Wynyard station and parking is available on site. Enquiries to Chris Manning: [bookings@taasa.org.au](mailto:bookings@taasa.org.au).

#### Shared Passions: Ikats

**6 July 2019**

The ghosted patterns of ikats have fascinated for centuries through Central and Southeast Asia, China, Japan, Indonesia, India, Africa and South America. The Textiles Study Group would like to invite you to bring examples of your ikat textiles to share and explore.

#### TAASA CERAMICS STUDY GROUP, NSW

##### Guided Visit to Manly Art Gallery & Museum

**Monday 5 August 2019, 10.30am**

Join us for a special out of hours guided viewing of Manly Art Gallery's extensive ceramics collection. This collection offers many fine examples of Asian influenced ceramics, including works by Asian Australian ceramicists such as Hiroe Swen and Shigeo Shiga, and studio and contemporary pottery influenced by Asian ceramic traditions. Further details TBA.

#### TAASA QUEENSLAND

##### TAASA QLD CERAMICS INTEREST GROUP

##### The Pagoda in Chinese art and architecture Tuesday 4 June 2019, 7pm

We follow the story of the pagoda - from Buddhist stupas in India and Myanmar to Chinese temple architecture, and look at representations of pagodas in ceramics.

**Venue:** At a member's home at St Lucia

**Cost:** Members \$10 and non-members \$15, light meal included

**RSVP** to [taasa.qld@gmail.com](mailto:taasa.qld@gmail.com)

##### TAASA QLD TEXTILE INTEREST GROUP

##### Indigo Dye Bath with Dana McCown Saturday 29 June 2019, 10am - 1pm

We take over Dana's garage for an Indigo Dye Bath event. Please wear oldest clothes and bring a bucket and rubber gloves, and also consider bringing other pieces of white cotton or silk eg white tee shirt or pillow case. Numbers limited to 12 people.

**Venue:** At a member's home at Kangaroo Point

**Cost:** Members \$20 and non-members \$25, a 50cm length of cotton fabric and morning tea included

**RSVP** to [taasa.qld@gmail.com](mailto:taasa.qld@gmail.com). - if there is sufficient interest, a second session may be scheduled from 1- 4pm.

##### Batik Workshop with Heda Warisan Saturday 10 August 2019, 10am - 1pm

We welcome batik expert Heda Warisan and examine examples of old and antique batik cloths from her collection, followed by a three hour practical workshop giving insight into the wonderfully rich world of Indonesian batik textiles.

**Venue:** At a member's home at St Lucia

**Cost:** Members \$25 and non-members \$30, all materials and morning tea included  
**RSVP** to [taasa.qld@gmail.com](mailto:taasa.qld@gmail.com). - minimum of 8 and maximum of 12 people for this event.

## TAASA AGM – 6 JUNE 2019

The Monday night lecture on 6 June was preceded by the TAASA AGM. TAASA President Jackie Menzies referred to her detailed report to members previously circulated which outlined the wide range of activities which were held in 2018 across a number of states. She particularly thanked the TAASA Committee for their work during the year and TAASA members for supporting TAASA's events. A number of Committee members whose terms had expired were all re-elected unopposed. The full list of current Committee members is listed on p3 of this issue.

## WHAT'S ON: JUNE - AUGUST 2019

### A SELECTIVE ROUNDUP OF EXHIBITIONS AND EVENTS

#### SOUTH AUSTRALIA

##### No god but God: The art of Islam

24 Aug 2019 - 2 Feb 2020

Art Gallery of South Australia

The Gallery's first major display of Islamic art to encompass a geographical span extending from Morocco to Australia. The display includes a range of works from the 9th century to the contemporary era. Among them are some of the earliest works of Islamic art to enter the collection, from a bequest by Sir Samuel Way in 1916, to the most recent, *Portrait of Emperor Akbar*, acquired more than 100 years later. The Muslim Declaration of Faith 'There is no god but God and Muhammad is his messenger' inspired the title.



**RELIGIOUS STANDARD (ALAM)** IN THE FORM OF THE HAND OF FATIMA, DECCAN REGION, INDIA, 18TH C, GILT SILVER, 63.0 X 33.0CM. GIFT OF GEOFFREY HACKETT-JONES IN MEMORY OF HIS BROTHER FRANK THROUGH THE AGSA FOUNDATION 2007

## ASIAN ART

THE AUTHORITY FOR COLLECTIONS, READERS, GALLERIES AND MUSEUMS

We're delighted to offer readers of the **TAASA Review** a 25% discount on a print subscription to the **Asian Art Newspaper**.

Published eight times a year, the **Asian Art Newspaper** gives its readers an informed overview of the latest in Asian and Islamic art news around the globe.

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##### The Enchanted Forest: Nature and Devotion in Indian Art

To 21 July 2019

Art Gallery of South Australia

Explores the significance of the natural world for Indian artists over 500 years. The display features paintings, sculptures and textiles from the Gallery's permanent collection.

#### NSW

##### Walking with Gods

1 June 2019 – January 2020

Art Gallery of NSW

Mapping moments in time, key dynastic changes, stylistic evolutions and geographic wanderings, this exhibition covers 2000 years of figurative sculpture from the Gallery's collection of Asian art. Follow a path through Asia, from Afghanistan to Indonesia, from the 1st to the 21st centuries, meeting key deities and historical figures along the way.

##### In One Drop of Water

15 June 2019 – December 2020

Art Gallery of NSW

Drawing on rich and diverse works from the Gallery collection, this exhibition explores the poetic, symbolic and social significance of water in Asian art. The art of tea, the mixing of ink for calligraphy, dyeing of cloth and creation of porcelain are all dependent on water.

#### HOT BLOOD

15 March – 4 August 2019

White Rabbit Gallery

Curated by David Williams, this exhibition presents a group of artists who confound outmoded expectations about China, reflecting unflinchingly on the most uncomfortable truths of our age. They engage with global art discourses, adapt new and emergent technologies, reinvent art traditions and challenge sexual and social taboos. Playful, irreverent, and sometimes downright subversive, their subjects range from desire to spiritual ecstasy, from solitude in a crowded world to traumatic memories, from the frontiers of neuro-science to experiences of diaspora.

##### Memes, Myth and Meaning in 21st Century Chinese Visual Culture

18 July 2019, 6– 8pm

4a Centre for Contemporary Asian Art

Organised by UNSW | Art & Design in partnership with 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art, this presentation by Dr Justine Poplin (Victoria University Melbourne) with moderator Dr Yu-Chieh Li (UNSW Art & Design) outlines the background surrounding internet censorship in mainland China and explores significant expressions of identity through visual culture that proliferate despite censorship.

Visit: <http://www.4a.com.au/>

#### ACT

##### Contemporary Worlds: Indonesia

21 June 2019 – 27 October 2019

National Gallery of Australia

This major exhibition of contemporary Indonesian art showcases 20 of the most exciting emerging and established artists from Bali and Java's key artistic centres of Bandung, Yogyakarta and Jakarta. Featuring recent works and large-scale commissions, it reflects Indonesia's more recent social and political changes. It includes painting, sculpture, installation, moving image, photography and textiles, and features a performance program and a film series curated by renowned Indonesian film director Garin Nugroho. See pp4-6 of this issue.

##### Pilgrimage: Hurley in the Middle East

8 February – 25 August 2019

National Library of Australia

Explores a previously unexamined body of work from lifelong adventurer and documentarian Frank Hurley. One of the official Australian Imperial Force (AIF) photographers involved in the First World War, he reprised his role with the Second AIF during the Second World War, travelling around the Middle East and North Africa where his official mission was to record Australian service members during the desert campaign. Entranced by the local cultures, architecture and landscape, Hurley soon turned his lens towards them. This Collections-In-Focus exhibition captures the remarkable landscape and cultures of



the area and Hurley's deep passion for that part of the world. Drawing on the Library's extensive holdings of Frank Hurley material it features photographs, along with his diaries, writings, passport, guidebooks, map and other travel paraphernalia.

**Calligraphy and Painting from the National Museum of China**

5 April - 28 July 2019  
National Museum of Australia

This Australian-first exhibition explores the breadth and tradition of Chinese calligraphy and painting through artworks from the National Museum of China's collection. See exquisite paintings by three Chinese modern artists — Xie Yun, Xiao Lang and Wang Naizhuang — and a replica of an extraordinary 20-metre-long 18th-century scroll documenting Emperor Qianlong's 1751 tour to the southern provinces. A mesmerising and immersive animation brings the story of the scroll and its historical figures to life in intricate three-dimensional detail.

**QUEENSLAND**

**A Fleeting Bloom: Japanese Art from the Collection**

To 29 September 2019  
QAGOMA

Celebrates the classic arts of Japan. Magnificent folded screens, ceramics, photography and paintings capture moments of distinct and transient beauty through seasonal aspects of nature and the philosophies of transcendence and impermanence that underpin Buddhist art.



ON THE FLOOR OF A FLEETING BLOOM AT QAG.

PHOTO: JOSEFA GREEN

**VICTORIA**

**Terracotta Warriors: Guardians of Immortality**

24 May - 13 October 2019  
National Gallery of Victoria

Features more than 150 treasures: eight terracotta warriors and two full-sized horses with two replica bronze chariots from the Qin dynasty (221 – 207 BCE) as well as priceless gold, jade and bronze artefacts dating from the Zhou (1050 – 256 BCE) through to the Han dynasty (206 BCE – 220 CE). Presented in parallel, Cai Guo-Qiang: *The Transient Landscape*, sees this contemporary artist create all new artworks, inspired by China's culture and its enduring philosophical traditions, including a monumental installation of 10,000 suspended porcelain birds.

**A Fairy Tale in Red Times**

3 May – 6 October 2019  
National Gallery of Victoria

These works from the White Rabbit Collection feature 27 Chinese artists, an exciting collaboration between the NGV and arts patron and philanthropist Judith Neilson on the 10th anniversary of the establishment of the White Rabbit Gallery in Sydney.

LEONARD JOEL | 100 YEARS

ASIAN WORKS OF ART

AUCTIONS | MAY | OCTOBER

A LARGE CHINESE 'CHANGSHA' EWER, TANG DYNASTY (618-907)  
\$2,000-4,000

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# CONTEMPORARY WORLDS INDONESIA

21 June – 27 October | FREE

**NGA**

National Gallery of Australia

MOLONGLO



The Sydney Morning Herald

THE AUSTRALIAN ACE

The Canberra Times

Eko Nugroho *Throw away peace in the garden* 2018 (detail), manual embroidery on fabric with rayon thread, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, purchased 2018