



Elaborate gowns of the royalty, the common man in the fields, beasts, skeletons, strange multiplications—everything arranged against a signature shade of deep blue. Suspended between history and dream, the work of Budi Agung Kuswara takes us on a hypnotic trip into Balinese identity.

Born in 1982 on the island famous as a tourist attraction the world over, Kuswara (also known as “Kabul”), learned to surf as a growing boy. He would also sell souvenirs by the beach. This proximity to the sea instilled in him a great love for the forces of nature. He was raised into the custom of Kamasan painting, the art form used to decorate the island’s temples and the houses of the aristocracy, and serving to convey peace and harmony within Balinese society. Kuswara’s father has creative roots as well. He was born in Klungkung, East Bali, the Classical art epicentre of the island.

Kuswara moved to Yogyakarta in 1999 and graduated with a BFA from the Indonesia Institute of Arts. While the function of art on his home island was mainly related to ritual or tourism, the creative impulses he discovered in Yogyakarta were more associated with movements in society, including political issues and activism. His style is evidently a merger between these two dispositions—they draw upon the intricate designs of tradition while exploring larger social dynamics.



Budi Agung Kuswara © Budi Agung Kuswara, courtesy of the artist and Mizuma Gallery



Wildly Convenient (2019), cyanotype on canvas 300 x 560 cm (tetraptych, each panel 300 x 140 cm) © Budi Agung Kuswara, courtesy of the artist and Mizuma Gallery

Using visuals that seem to have emerged from the walls of a glorious old Oriental monument, Kuswara offers quiet yet forceful commentary on aspects of life in his region. He displays openly the luxury and opulence and excess, and, with that, makes room for an examination of the costs that may have been incurred in the process. Branches, leaves and flowers bloom beautifully, the costumes are heavy and well-crafted. But there is oppression and violence behind this extravaganza, coming to the fore in snippets. In some works, human parts like feet and hands are assembled, stripped of individuality. In others, faces of men have worried eyes, they are rendered mute after having been gagged. The final effect is that of celebration—of culture and society—but not an uncritical one.

The artist has something interesting to say on the meaning of art, and its reception: “Visual language is normally multi-interpretational. As an artist, we can’t always expect that our audiences will understand the meaning of our works like the way we do. Additionally, it’s also how the works can communicate something in a form that is not too serious, while still containing a seriousness within.”

Budi Agung Kuswara’s major exhibitions include “Rooted in Bali” at Mizuma Gallery, Singapore (2020); “ART•BALI” at AB•BC Building, Bali, Indonesia (2019 & 2018); “Arus Berlabuh Kita” at the Asian Civilization Museum, Singapore (2018); “Love Me in My Batik” at ILHAM Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (2016); “Floating Desires” at TAKSU Gallery, Singapore (2012); and “i.self” at Komaneka Fine Art Gallery, Bali, Indonesia (2009). He has also undertaken residencies at Bamboo Curtain Studio, Taipei, Taiwan (2016); Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Fukuoka, Japan (2012); and TAKSU Kuala Lumpur, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (2012). He is represented by Mizuma Gallery in Singapore and is the co-founder of Ketemu Project Space in Bali, a visual collective and social enterprise hybrid.



L: Summer Blooming; R: Eastern Fortune (deep blue mirror series) (2019), cyanotype and acrylic on canvas, 250 x 145 cm each © Budi Agung Kuswara, courtesy of the artist and Mizuma Gallery



The Grateful Society (2019), cyanotype and ink on cotton paper, 115 x 81 cm © Budi Agung Kuswara, courtesy of the artist and Mizuma Gallery



Socio Hormonal Legacy (2019), cyanotype on cotton paper, 115 x 81 cm © Budi Agung Kuswara, courtesy of the artist and Mizuma Gallery



Psychological Drama (2020), cyanotype on paper, 115 x 78 cm © Budi Agung Kuswara, courtesy of the artist and Mizuma Gallery



Psychological Drama #2 (2020), cyanotype on paper, 115 x 90 cm © Budi Agung Kuswara, courtesy of the artist and Mizuma Gallery



Anonymous Ancestors, (2019), cyanotype and ink on cotton paper, 75 x 57 cm © Budi Agung Kuswara, courtesy of the artist and Mizuma Gallery