



WITHDRAWING

SOLO EXHIBITION BY IWAN EFFENDI  
CURATED BY ARTATI SIRMAN  
12 NOV—13 DEC 2020  
MIZUMA GALLERY

*A puppet on a stage lives.  
Or, rather, we will eventually believe it does.*

*From where we sit, amongst strangers, but equally as a fellow audience,  
we see a puppeteer with his puppet and we follow both their movements across the stage.  
Before long, we will stop noticing the technical details  
and discontinue our ceaseless wonderment of: "How are they doing this!"*

*And with that, the puppet now has our full attention.  
It no longer just moves.*

*For us, on that stage, it lives.*





ABOUT



As a visual artist and the Co-Artistic Director of Papermoon Puppet Theatre in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, puppet theatre remains Iwan Effendi's universe that continually informs his creative process — a chosen one made out of objects, mystification, animation, and dramaturgy. Throughout Papermoon's productions, Iwan has always been accustomed to beginning each process with a narrative as the anchor for fabricating storyboards and puppet figures. In *A Cup of Coffee from Playa*, the audience find themselves immersed in Pak Wi's unwavering loyalty to the love of his life and, as they watched Tala write her letter to her father in *PUNO (Letters to the Sky)*, they imagine how it would feel to lose their loved ones. These two examples and countless others render puppet theatre the most rewarding vehicle for storytelling.

It is precisely this medium's efficiency that, contrastingly, tends to steer Iwan away from any narrative in his own exploration as an artist. As far as his studio practice is concerned, achieving successful storytelling was no longer an urgent objective. Nevertheless, one particular exploratory technique lingers: *Iwan continues to be drawn to drawing*, albeit this time not to drawing characters that adhere to or solve the presentation of a storyline. Without a predetermined thought, for Iwan, each line drawn slowly became a sense-making tool as he reflects on his process in Papermoon and rationalizes the basic relations between two subjects through a single object.

In his universe of puppet theatre, the audience and the puppeteer (the two subjects) both find interpretation through the presence of an object — *the puppet*. He noticed that even without a storyline, the tension from this triangle of trust between audience, puppeteer, and his puppets can still exist, sustained even. Regardless of its storyline, the audience follows the puppet as it moves across the stage and places their trust in the puppeteer who believes in the puppet being alive. In turn, the puppet does come to life, resulting in the audience's and the puppeteer's emotional, intellectual, and aesthetical shifts. A spectating experience very much similar to viewing an artwork. Therefore, Iwan arrives at a new objective: to establish a visual resolution that represents the phenomenology of the transformative elements that would normally exist in a puppet performance and its production, but this time through drawings, and in an alternative setting of a gallery space.

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Normally, even with the flexibility of every puppet's "daydreaming faces", Iwan would research them extensively before committing to a shape. Every aspect is detailed to each performative purpose, making their appearance, scale, posture, joints, and articulations very much dependent on the corresponding character of a storyline. That being said, with an essentially absent storyline now, how can one make present a puppet that does not possess any specificity, that cannot really be "there" in its entirety? On stage, a puppet starts "living" when the audience stops noticing the technical details as to how a lifeless object moves and willingly departs away from any form of critical thinking in favour of enjoying the puppet as a character, a subject in their own right. This phenomenon is popularly marked as "suspension of disbelief." Aiding this audience's willingness is the dramaturgical presence and interaction from the puppet's visible manipulators — *the puppeteers*.

And so, in ***Resurrection Series No. 1–3 (2020)***, Iwan began by mapping out the puppeteers' embodiment as a blueprint that will "awaken" the presence of his puppet. Once he figured this out as a point of departure, it was almost entirely his muscle memory from years of puppet theatre building that constructed the lines which, to him, represented the muscle and visual tensions that built the object of the puppeteer's attention. When the puppeteer works on their co-presence — that is, creating a character through the puppet yet simultaneously maintaining his presence as another character next to it — they authenticate the puppet's transition into being the subject of the audience's gaze. While charcoal produces intense, blackened marks, its vulnerability also means that it is easily removable. Each time Iwan draws in another line between existing lines, some fragments are removed, some parts are drawn out. This mixture of dense lattice lines, smudges, and erasures echoes the puppeteer's oscillating movement that duly slides into and, at times, withdraws from being present, as they slowly breathe life into the puppet.

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Now that we have established the puppet's existence, we move on to ***Preload (2020)***, where we find a puppet figure escaping its own materiality as an object and begins acting freely. Relying on our eyesight, we observe a seemingly endless testimony of motions in stillness, each pose drawn uniquely in charcoal, each one informing us of the extension of its movement. To yield mass production of

a single static frontal face into 99 pieces, Iwan manually shaped a copper plate into a puppet mask, and etched on it the puppet's facial features before proceeding to the process of mezzotint printing on each piece of paper. With this technique, it was almost impossible to produce identical prints due to the difficulty of wiping off the ink in a consistent manner in the same precise area each time. Nevertheless, this variable enabled the puppet figure to further exist as the varied gradation of shadows mimics the presence of light that falls on a living face.

Iwan's charcoal marks hint at individual poses of limb articulation that move on its own accord. However, in the process of his drawing, he ignored any chronological arrangement. There was no contemplation of before and after. He is, after all, avoiding any intended movement as this insinuates a story. With the absence of a pre-thought sequence, just as watching scenes in a live performance, we are free to look at whichever detail we would like, at the pace and focus of our own leisure. More importantly, as an audience we are able to take a step back to the middle of the room, distancing ourselves adequately from the wall to experience this complete configuration as a spatial whole. By the time we arrive at **Overlap (2020)** where we find the puppet's gestures arranged arbitrarily to a moving image, we have become aware of the relations of the puppet being situated in a space, similar to being "staged" in a performance. We no longer engage with sight as our sole receptive sense and enter a multi-sensory experience of the puppet as a movement in the gallery space. Additionally, there is a slight hint of narration to lead the audience, albeit in the form of narrative lines — *line as a movement*. We notice that in the video projection, there are traces of red and black lines that meander across the plane, leading or arguably following our imagination of the puppet's consciousness.

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As you position yourself in front of **Gaze #1–8 (2020)** and perhaps become enticed to adjust your eye-level to each drawing, you look into the deep marble-like eyes of the puppet figure. They draw your attention as you grasp a sign of consciousness. Your gaze is returned — you realize that they are no longer mere objects to be seen but apparent subjects that are also able to see. Iwan's lines, albeit minimalistic and considerably less dense in comparison to other drawings, accentuate a sensation of mutual acknowledgment in the form of a non-verbal exchange, one that you would often find

in a staged performance when a puppet stares directly at either its puppeteer or a member of the audience.

Now that you have equipped yourself with this idea of gaze, it is inevitable that you discover another layer that completes your spectator experience. In ***Shifting Memory 1 and 2 (2020)***, etchings of two puppet heads greet you from the shiny reflective surface of brass plates. Their gazes bring an already known sensation, but additionally, you recognize that staring at them staring at you is, well... you. Your reflection becomes part of the actuality of the puppet, and more crucially, their presence is now also in yours. By being in the same space and plane of existence, there is a spatial accord that strengthens both your emotions and that of the puppets. Other viewers who form your surrounding also share this accord, whose presence and projected emotions you catch peripherally from their movement reflected on the brass plates. The social experience of watching a performance with other audiences is fulfilled.

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How we remember a place feeds into how we experience a space. Wherever we are, there is this urge to identify the space as we naturally seek some sort of guidance on how to experience it, and often we experience space as a verb. Upon arriving at a restaurant space and sitting at a table, for example, we know that conventionally we will soon proceed to have a meal. This presumption is rooted in our earliest memory of experiencing a dining room at home. But what precisely made this association naturally etched in our memory? The answer is the atmosphere. We grasp the atmosphere of a space like how we would a prologue. Before identifying any details or understanding it intellectually, we grasp the atmosphere's essence — its nuance.

Thus, what Iwan was attempting to invoke is the nuance of a staged space, and at the end concluded his visual resolution in the form of a 4.4-meter long atmospheric drawing: ***Scape (2020)***. As we “enter” this massive drawing as a space, and observe the existing lines that form puppeteers and their puppets, the drawing in return enters the immaterial realm of our perception and imagination — the very same realm from when we first experience being an audience in a staged performance.

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Throughout the immediacy and mental experience of drawings, similar to his process in Papermoon, Iwan exercised the use of *codification*, whereby he records action-reaction on his findings. During the team's exercise in the Papermoon studio, found movements either from the puppeteer or from fabric on costumes are often documented into a log so that their effects can be repeated as required. With charcoal, Iwan codified certain strokes for certain effects and emotions, as apparent in ***Devotional State (2020)***. Two puppet-less puppeteer figures face the audience, each in opposite directions. To the left is the devoted corporeal body that is also the puppet's universe, slowly withdrawing his presence in lieu of the puppet's resurrection — completing the physical demand required, ignoring any pain and discomfort. And next to it is the puppeteer entering a state of disappearance as the performance ends and he leaves the stage while the puppet reverses his ontological ambiguity back into a lifeless object.

*DRAWING withdrawing* leaves you with the last two works depicting figures of puppets in ***Figure 1 and 2 (2020)***. They almost trace back to the multifaceted “daydreaming faces” in *Face to Face* (Iwan's first solo exhibition at this gallery back in 2019), but not exactly to the same effect. At this end point of the exhibition, you will have an experiential perspective and you will gaze at them with an experiential response. One that you will carry with the next time you attend a puppet theatre performance.

— Artati Sirman, 2020.





Still image from *Secangkir Kopi dari Playa* (*A Cup of Coffee from Playa*). Performed at an antique shop, Yogyakarta, Indonesia; supported by the Empowering Women Artists grant from Kelola, HIVOS, the Ford Foundation, and BIYAN (2011).



Still image from *The Translucence*, showing co-presence and the atmosphere between the puppet and puppeteer. *The Translucence* was performed as part of a 1-month residency at a washi paper mill in Kōchi and the performance was held at the Museum of Art, Kōchi, Japan (2017).







ARTWORKS





*Resurrection Series No. 1*  
2020  
charcoal, soft pastel, washi paper on Hahnemühle paper  
107 × 125 cm





*Resurrection Series No. 2*  
2020  
charcoal, soft pastel, washi paper on Hahnemühle paper  
113.5 × 125 cm





*Resurrection Series No. 3*  
2020  
charcoal, soft pastel, washi paper on Hahnemühle paper  
116 × 125 cm



*Scape*  
2020  
charcoal, soft pastel, washi paper on Hahnemühle paper  
125.5 × 443.5 cm



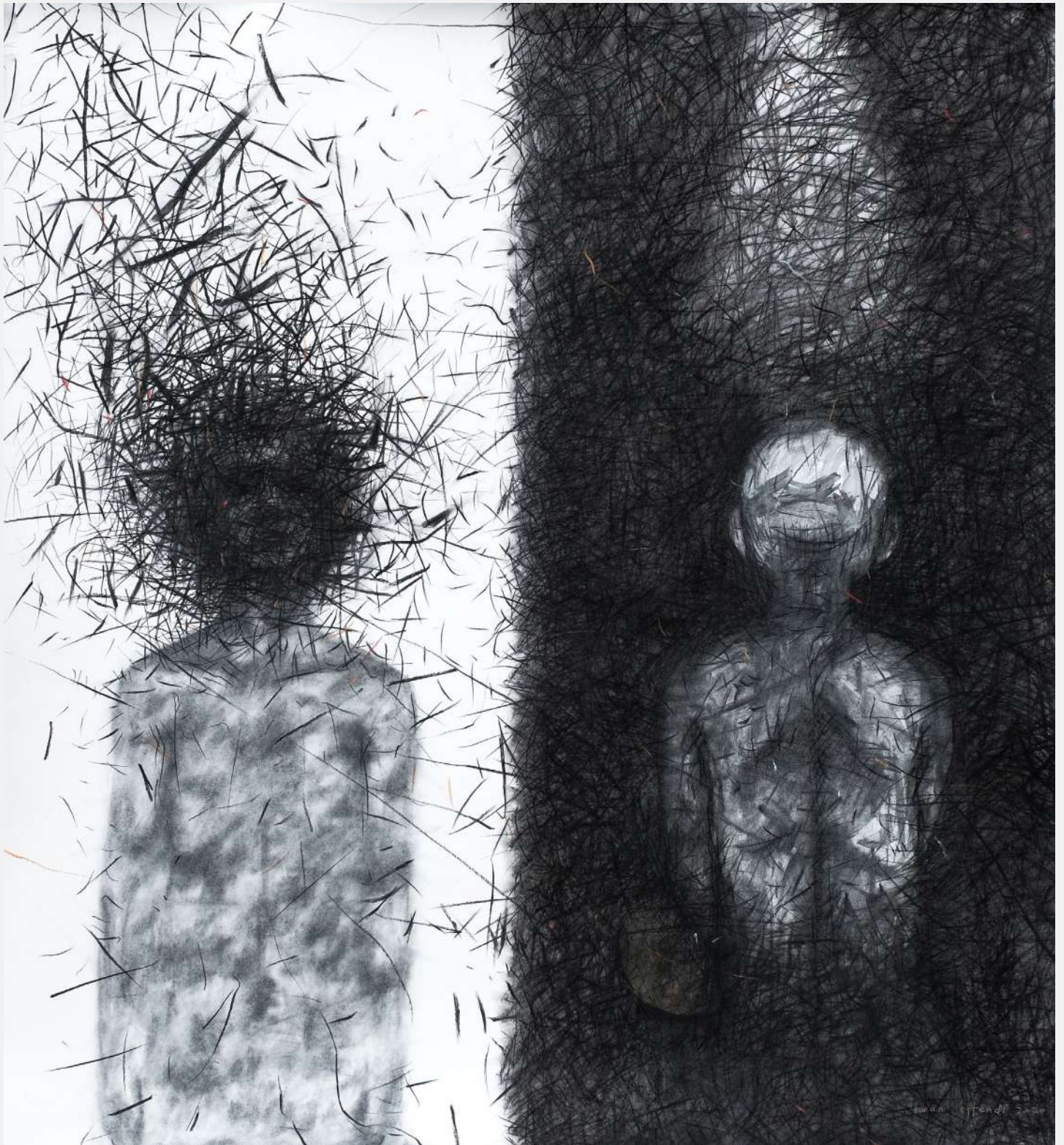


Figure 1  
2020  
charcoal, soft pastel on Hahnemühle paper  
101 × 45 cm



*Figure 2*  
2020  
charcoal, soft pastel on Hahnemühle paper  
105 × 80 cm





*Devotional State*

2020

charcoal, soft pastel on Hahnemühle paper

138 x 125.5 cm

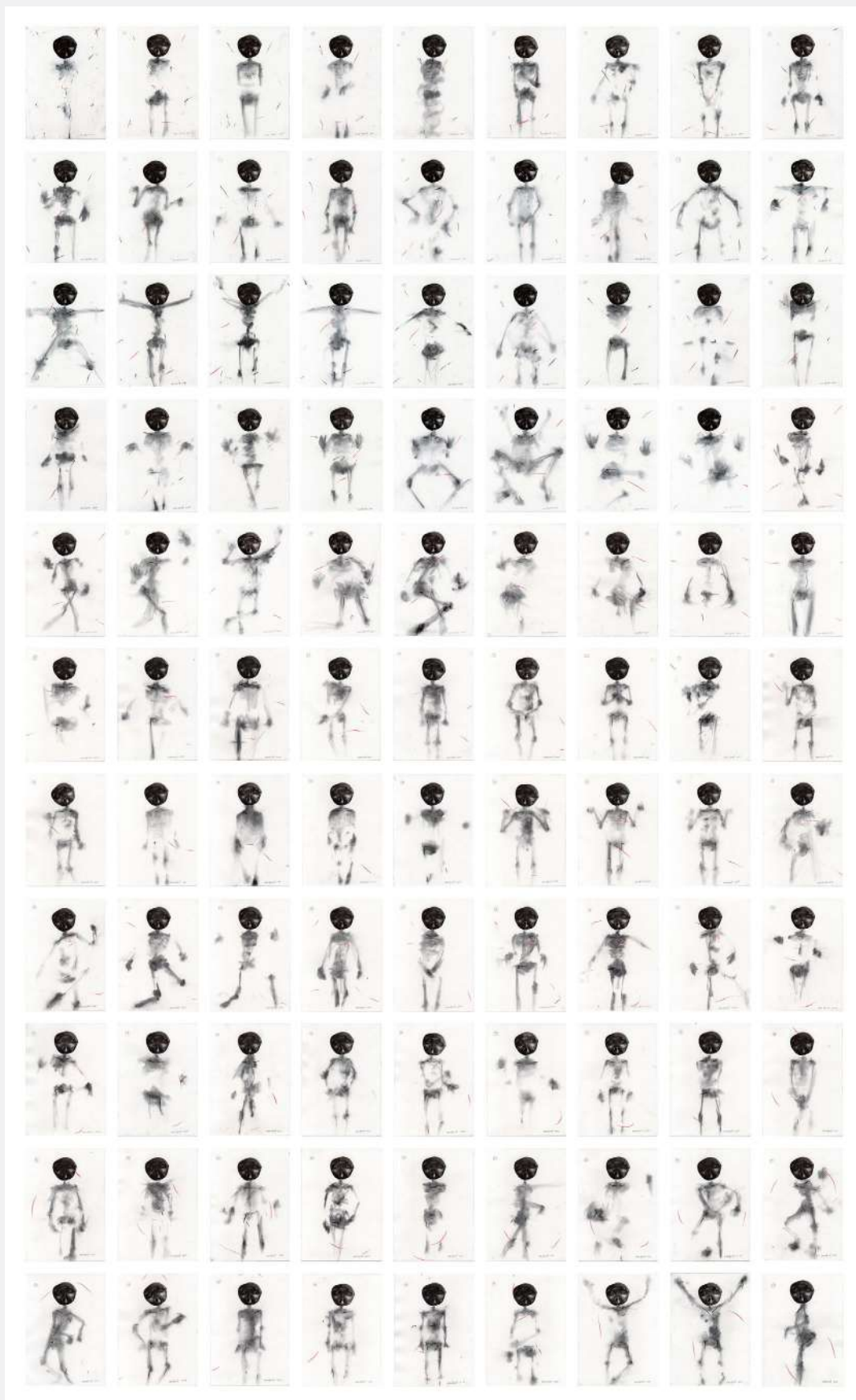




*Shifting Memory 1*  
2020  
etching on brass plate  
40 × 36.5 cm



*Shifting Memory 2*  
2020  
etching on brass plate  
40 × 36.5 cm



*Preload*

2020

artwork comprised of a set of 99 prints and a video

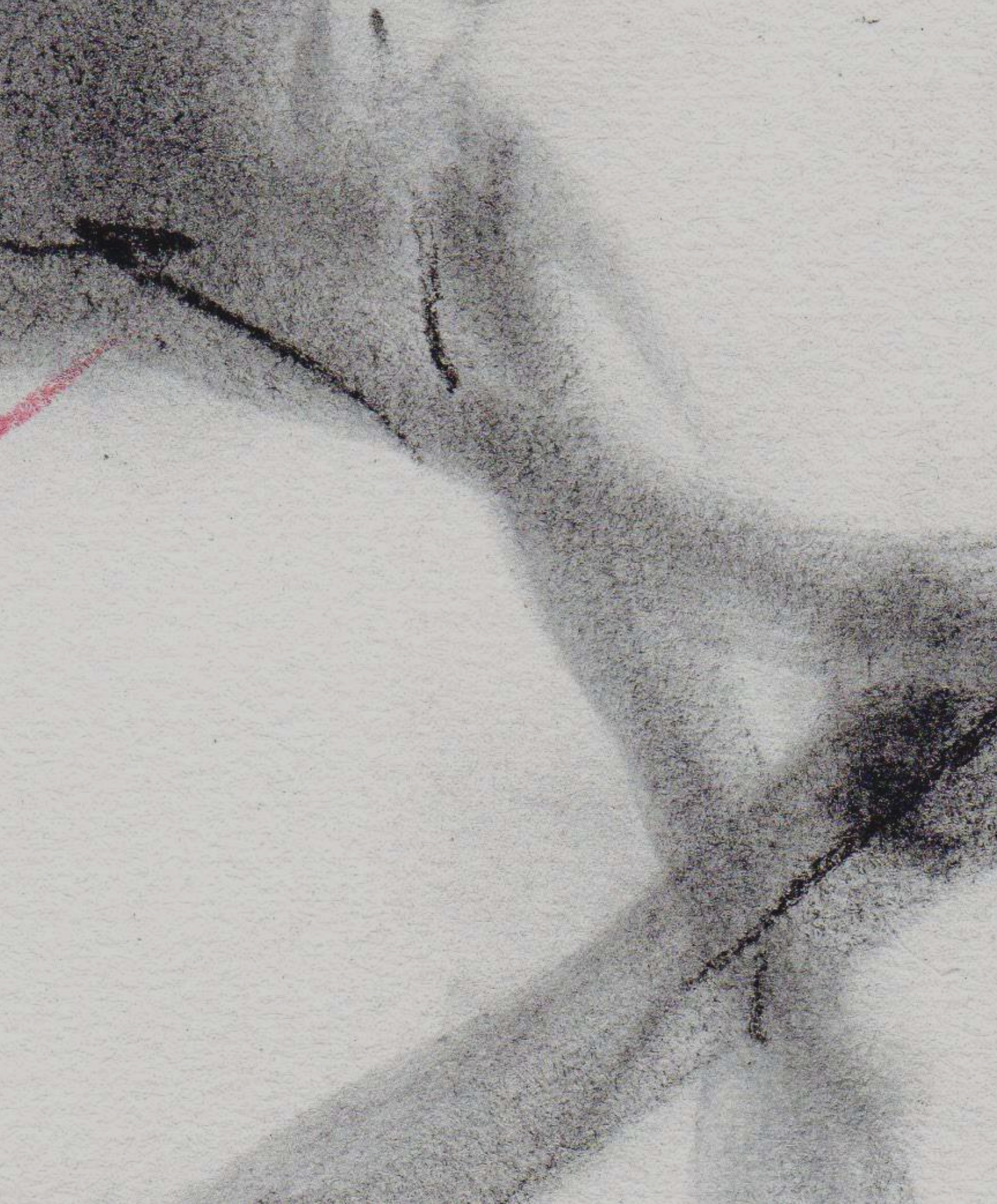
prints: mezzotint print, pigment, charcoal and colour pencil on paper; 26.8 x 19.2 cm each (set of 99 pieces); unique edition

video: single-channel video; 3min 8sec; edition 1 of 3 + 1 AP



Gaze 1-8  
2020  
charcoal, colour pencil on paper  
32.5 x 24 cm each





IWAN EFFENDI





**Iwan Effendi** (b. 1979, Yogyakarta, Indonesia) studied at the Department of Visual Art in Indonesia Institute of the Arts, Yogyakarta, Indonesia from 2002 to 2004. In April 2006, Effendi and his wife, Ria Tri Sulistyani, founded the Papermoon Puppet Theatre, and in 2020, he founded Ing Printmaking Studio. His solo exhibitions to date include *Face to Face* at Mizuma Gallery, Singapore (2019); *Lunang* at Lir Space, Yogyakarta, Indonesia (2013); *Eye of the Messenger* at Yavuz Gallery, Singapore (2011); and *Two Shoes for Dancing* at Valentine Willie Fine Art (Project Room), Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (2009). He has also participated in group exhibitions in Bulgaria, Singapore, Australia, The Netherlands, Philippines, France, Japan, United States, and Mexico. He has undertaken residencies with the Museum of Art in Kōchi, Japan (2015); Federation Square, Melbourne, Australia (2014); and Asian Cultural Council in New York, USA (2009-10) researching on puppetry, visual, and performance arts. Effendi lives and works in Yogyakarta, Indonesia.



Executive Director Sueo Mizuma established Mizuma Art Gallery in Tokyo in 1994. Since its opening in Gillman Barracks, Singapore in 2012, the gallery aims for the promotion of East Asian artists in the region as well as the introduction of Southeast Asian artists to the international art scene. From 2014 to 2019, the artist residency space “Rumah Kijang Mizuma” operated in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, providing a new platform for dialogue by supporting exchanges between East Asia and Southeast Asia. In 2018, a new gallery space, “Mizuma & Kips” in New York, USA, as a shared collaboration between Mizuma Gallery from Tokyo and Singapore, and Kips Gallery from New York.

Mizuma Gallery features the works of Japanese artists including Aida Makoto, Aiko Miyanaga, Amano Yoshitaka, Ikeda Manabu, Tenmyouya Hisashi, and Yamaguchi Akira. Moreover, it showcases the works of renown East Asian artists such as Ai Weiwei, Du Kun, Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba, Ken + Julia Yonetani, and Zhao Zhao. The gallery also features the creations of prominent and emerging artists from the region including Agan Harahap, Albert Yonathan Setyawan, Angki Purbandono, Entang Wiharso, Gilang Fradika, Heri Dono, indieguerillas, Made Wianta, Mark Justiniani, Nasirun, Budi Agung Kuswara, Robert Zhao Renhui, Zen Teh, Ashley Yeo, and Ben Loong. Mizuma Gallery participates annually in international art fairs including Art Basel Hong Kong and The Armory Show New York, promoting Asian artists on an international art scale.

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## GILLMAN BARRACKS

Set in a former military barracks dating back to 1936 and surrounded by lush tropical greenery, the Gillman Barracks visual arts cluster was launched in September 2012. Jointly developed by government agencies, the Singapore Economic Development Board (EDB), the National Arts Council (NAC), and the JTC Corporation (JTC), Gillman Barracks’ vision is to be Asia’s destination for the presentation and discussion of international and Southeast Asian art. For more information, please visit [www.gillmanbarracks.com](http://www.gillmanbarracks.com)

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