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# Entang Wiharso says yes

By MAYO MARTIN



*Entang Wiharso's Art History: Blue on Blue #2 from his show Never Say No at the Singapore Tyler Print Institute. Photo: STPI.*

SINGAPORE — Are those iPhone cases we see at the Singapore Tyler Print Institute? From afar, they certainly look like it, but they are actually acrylic blocks that comprise a work found in Indonesian artist Entang Wiharso's solo show, *Never Say No*.

Placed inside vinyl sleeves and presented in a grid, *Self Portrait* comprises a variety of images that the 48-year-old had chosen from his computer files or via Google, which he then took with his iPhone and silk-screened onto the blocks (hence the shape). While they're seemingly random, each one corresponds to or triggers a particular memory, from Bruce Lee and Muhammad Ali to former Indonesian leaders Sukarno and Suharto.

It's the most incongruous piece in the predominantly paper-work 80-piece showcase — until you realise the entire show has an adventurous “Why not?” streak to it. Yarn is employed to give texture to some of the works or even imitate blood veins. Glass mirrors, aluminium and copper sheets are incorporated, and paper is given a more prominent three-dimensional texture — either as paper cast reliefs or moulded into bricks.



*Indonesian artist Entang Wiharso's Decoded from his show Never Say No at the Singapore Tyler Print Institute. Photo: STPI.*

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It's pretty much in the spirit of the show's title. “I wanted to capture (in the phrase) different aspects like love, conflict, tolerance, intolerance,” explained Wiharso, who has represented his country twice at the Venice Biennale and whose wayang kulit-inspired house installation Temple Of Hope was a popular draw at the Singapore Art Museum in 2012. At the same time, he pointed out, the phrase is also laden with a subtle critique — particularly in the supposedly non-confrontational culture of the region. “I grew up in Java, and in Javanese culture, people try to avoid conflict. So ‘yes’ can mean ‘yes’ but can also mean ‘not sure ...’,” he said. “It sounds like a strong statement. It can be bold or quite poetic.”

While printmaking is more synonymous to edition works, most of the pieces here are unique one-offs. “It's in my nature as a painter,” said Wiharso, whose pieces in Never Say No delve into commentaries on domestic life, social history, art history and even language.



*Indonesian artist Entang Wiharso's Self Portrait from his show Never Say No at the Singapore Tyler Print Institute. Photo: STPI.*

His Decoded series, for instance, comprise solid blocks of paper moulded from bricks he had brought from his renovated house in Jogjakarta. Each brick is imprinted with an image and has a corresponding word or phrase in English or Bahasa Indonesia — the entire set is literally a visual vocabulary. These images laden with meaning surface elsewhere, most notably in *A Body Text*, a cast paper work that is literally covered with Wiharso's personal iconography.

Two huge works present a critical look at domesticity. In the colourful, satirical *Home Sweet Home*, he paints a kind of dysfunctional scenario of a household, while the predominantly white *Under Protection For 24 Hours* features a husband and wife, with the latter holding a rifle as if to safeguard the house from external forces. Both sport long hair (braided together), a recurring motif in Wiharso's works that reflect the metaphorical resonance of hair in many cultures. "It carries a lot of meaning. And because I also have long hair," he quipped.



*Indonesian artist Entang Wiharso's Under Protection For 24 Hours from his show Never Say No at the Singapore Tyler Print Institute. Photo: STPI.*

In *Never Say No*, Wiharso doesn't jump from one subject matter to another, but there are also sudden, surprising shifts in mood, as when the viewer segues from the "louder" works to quiet, minimalist landscapes. An example of this is *Art History: Blue Moon*, a triptych that offers a nod to Zen landscape paintings. (Incidentally, another *Art History* piece, *Blue On Blue*, also hints at artist Yves Klein and his trademark blue.)

"People expect a certain language from you," said Wiharso of certain expectations placed upon him. "But I like contradictions."

*Never Say No* runs until May 30 at Singapore Tyler Print Institute, 41 Robertson Quay. Free admission.