

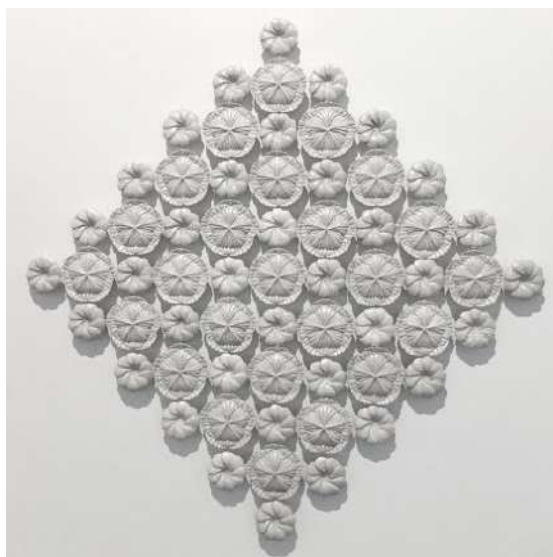


Geometry and repetition: Indonesian ceramic artist Albert Yonathan Setyawan in Singapore

Posted on 08/05/2015

For Albert Yonathan Setyawan, repetition does not fill a characterless void but instead endows a space with cosmological force.

In his ongoing solo exhibition “APOTHEOSE”, running at Singapore’s Mizuma Gallery until 17 May 2015, Setyawan, a young Indonesian artist from Bandung, presents two new mandala installations and several other works. The exhibition includes drawings and prints where the spiritual is symbolic, and the symbolic in repetition becomes spiritual.



Albert Yonathan Setyawan, 'Nature's Scintilla', 2014, ceramic, 100 x 100 x 5 cm.
Image courtesy the artist and Mizuma Gallery.

According to Freddy Chandra at **Mizuma Gallery**, Setyawan’s work is not a gaze toward religions born in antiquity; rather, it is a portal to contemporary spirituality, one that can **“transform something ordinary into something considered divine”**. His art-making is about “finding spiritual awareness outside the boundaries of institutional religion”.

Albert Yonathan Setyawan’s distinct style seems to pay tribute to the enduring traditions of Buddhism and Hinduism, practised in his native Indonesia – where he completed his Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees at the Bandung Institute of Technology – and in Kyoto, Japan, where he is pursuing doctoral-level Ceramic Arts Studies at Kyoto Seika University.



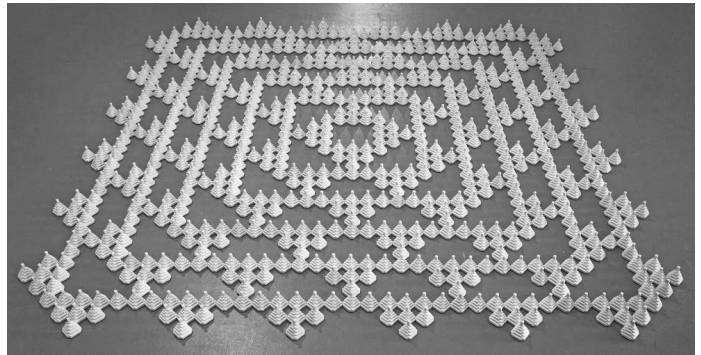
Albert Yonathan Setyawan, 'Song of Crimson Sunbird', 2014, dry point on Hahnemühle paper, 19.5 x 15 cm. Image courtesy the artist and Mizuma Gallery.



Albert Yonathan Setyawan, 'Mandala Study #4', 2015, terracotta, marble sand, dimensions variable. Image courtesy the artist and Mizuma Gallery.

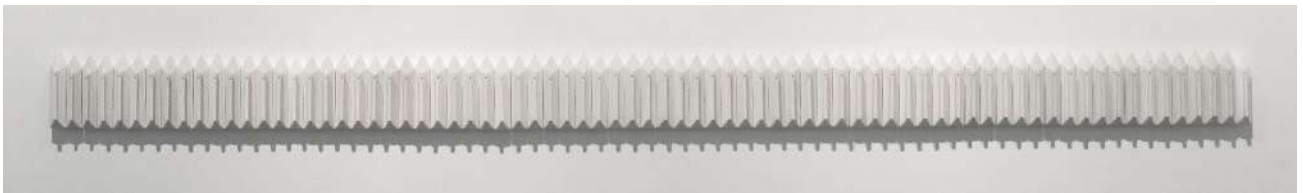
Inside the labyrinth

Setyawan's structures are designed like orderly mazes and are named in honour of the 'mandala' that represents the universe and serves as a medium of spiritual guidance for religious practitioners in the Buddhist and Hindu traditions.



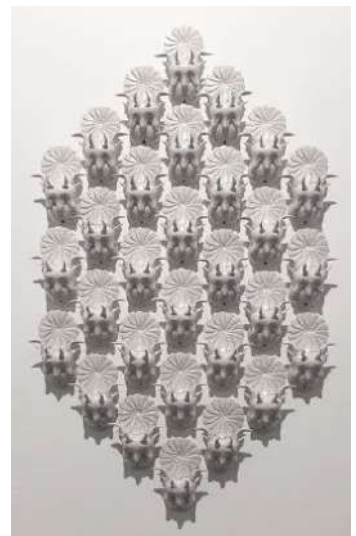
Albert Yonathan Setyawan, 'Mandala Study #3', 2015, ceramic, 300 x 300 x 7 cm. Image courtesy the author.

Mandala Study #3, a large-scale work that is the focus of the ongoing exhibit, is arranged in a square: an allusion to a mandala – a square with four gates. The work, however, is dotted with symmetrically placed ceramic pieces that resemble stupas, or symbolic Buddhist monuments found in South and Southeast Asia.



Albert Yonathan Setyawan, 'Unknown Sanctuary', 2014, ceramic, 360 x 21 x 6 cm. Image courtesy the artist and Mizuma Gallery.

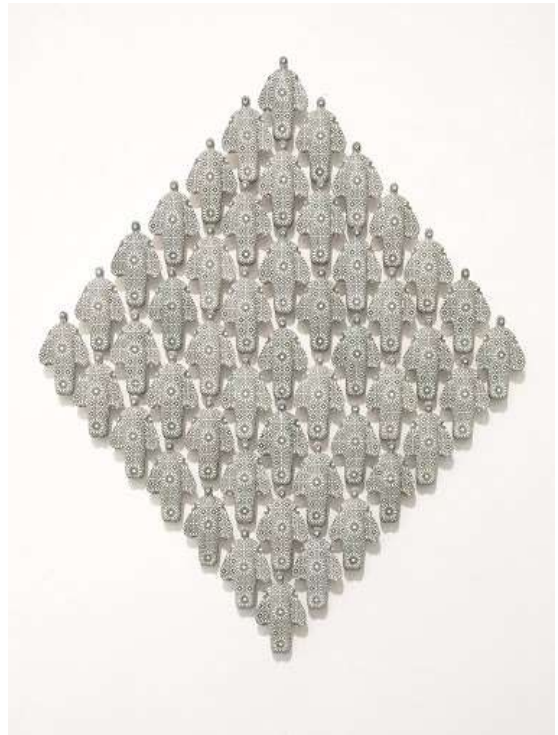
Inside any labyrinthine structure, a viewer is inclined to feel lost. But the pointed ceramic pieces in Setyawan's *Mandala Study #3* give the impression of a constellation of objects that bear semblance to the stars – guiding the uninitiated into the cosmological realm.



Albert Yonathan Setyawan, 'Demigods', 2014, ceramic, 80 x 50 x 8 cm. Image courtesy the artist and Mizuma Gallery.

Complications are simplified

Repetitions form a pattern in Setyawan's work. In geometric and symmetric arrangements, animals, plants and symbolic objects become atomic units of a coherent whole. The artist has selected his subjects carefully; butterflies, the petals of orchids or hummingbird wings effortlessly draw attention to nature's simplicity. As Chandra writes, "all of the objects were made in a simplified manner and [are] relatively small in size."



Albert Yonathan Setyawan, 'Incandescence', 2014, ceramic, decals, 65 x 95 x 3.5 cm. Image courtesy the artist and Mizuma Gallery.



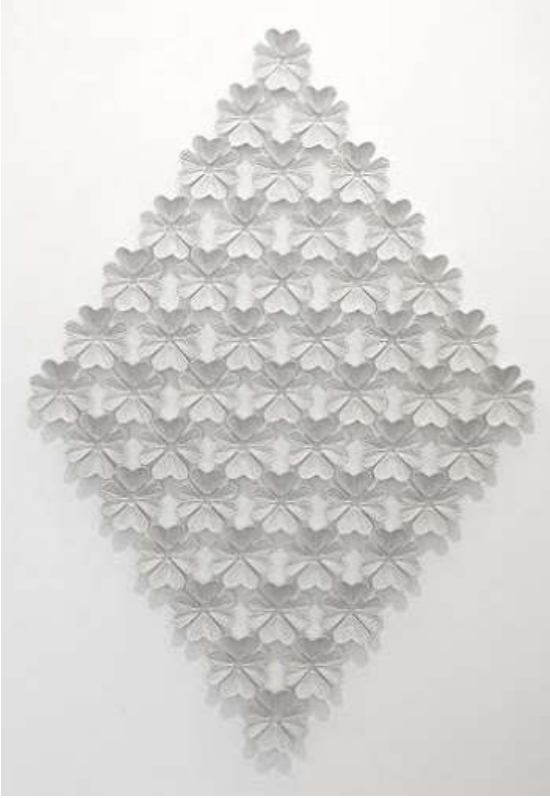
Albert Yonathan Setyawan, 'When The Sparrow Died', 2014, pencil on paper, 67 x 50 cm. Image courtesy the artist and Mizuma Gallery.



Albert Yonathan Setyawan, 'Incandescence', 2014, ceramic, decals, 65 x 95 x 3.5 cm. Image courtesy the artist and Mizuma Gallery.

In Setyawan's *When The Sparrow Died*, a pencil drawing on paper, solemn orchids form an arch over a sparrow that, at first glance, appears perched over its reflection, but upon closer look is pausing over another bird identical in size. With the orchid formation and the bird pausing to reflect death, the balance of symmetry conveys the peace that comes with that balance.

In the secular setting of the Mizuma Gallery, the symbols serve to channel the affective spiritual labour commonly found in the repetitive recitation of a mantra: an act that the devout engages in to achieve the highest point, or 'apotheose', from which the exhibition takes its name.



Setyawan's exhibition in Singapore is not his first, nor is it likely to be his last. He has participated in group exhibitions in Indonesia, Thailand, Italy and Japan, and represented Indonesia at the **55th Venice Biennale**.

Elizabeth Shim

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