

THE

*Exploring Tradition  
in Contemporary Art Practice*

curated by  
Hermanto Soerjanto

12 April -  
12 May 2024

MISSING

Alexander Sebastianus Hartanto  
Du Kun  
I Nyoman Arisana  
indieguerillas  
Kuncir Sathya Viku  
Marcos Kueh

LINK

MIZUMA GALLERY





US • HENYALANG • GORONTALO

FANTASTIC

怪胎秀

連人戲

SHEWAMA

US • HENYALANG • GORONTALO

US • HENYALANG • GORONTALO

SHEWAMA

US • HENYALANG • GORONTALO

Abstract black and white artwork.

Black rectangular artwork hanging from the ceiling.

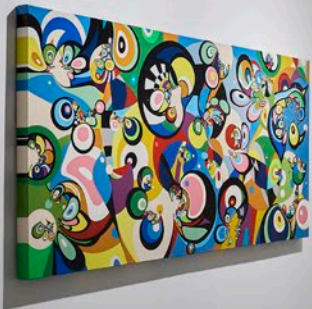
Three vertical posters or small artworks displayed on the right wall.

THE MISSING LINK

Small text below the main title, likely exhibition details.







## **The Missing Link: Exploring Tradition in Contemporary Art Practice**

Hermanto Soerjanto

When we look at the Western art history, we can see a clear path on how each period leads to the next, in relation to social and political contexts, religion, and advancement in technology. Based on my observation, there was a “missing link” in Indonesian art development, between the traditional art, such as *wayang*, *batik*, traditional stone statue, wood and stone carving, and the emergence of classical Western style painting by Raden Saleh. In my opinion, the Dutch colonisation played a very big role in that big leap in Indonesian art development. Not only did the Dutch colonise Indonesia politically for 350 years, they also colonised the mentality and the culture of Indonesian people. I think, many of us in Southeast Asia, with the exception of Thailand, share quite a similar inferiority complex towards the West. In my opinion, that is why in many places in Southeast Asia, there is a sudden shift, a “missing link” in their art history, from traditional art to the Western style art as we know today.

In this regard, there is one special place in Indonesia where we can see a clear trace of art development from traditional art to the Western modern art, which is Bali. There are several factors that made this possible. The first one is the introduction of the Baliseering policy of the Dutch colony that intended to protect Bali from the pro-independence Muslim power and the political uncertainty at that time, and their decision to construct Bali as the living museum of ancient Hindu culture. It was actually an anti-nationalistic spirit wrapped in the ethnocentrism of the colonial establishment. The second reason is the fact that Balinese people have a good sense of cultural negotiation, as what Sanento Yuliman (an Indonesian artist, art writer, and art critic) called “the flexible soul”, they can easily accept foreign influences without neglecting their own culture. When Walter Spies and Bonnet came to Bali, Balinese artists were able to intertwine Western influences into their own art practices and formed a new Balinese modern art. The third reason is the introduction of Western art in Bali was not through a formal and rigid education institution, but instead, through friendship between Spies and Bonnet with the Balinese artists, which opened up a two-way dialogue of cultural discussion. This is the reason why in my previous exhibition, “Post Tradition”, I focused on Balinese paintings as an example to trace back the roots of tradition in the contemporary art practice in Bali.



As I have mentioned many times in my essay, contemporary art is very open to any artistic style, medium, technique, form, and concepts. “Art can be anything and anything can be art”. It is time to explore our own culture, tradition, and heritage, and bring that knowledge into contemporary art practice, to create what is uniquely ours.

This exhibition showcases the cultural and heritage exploration of four Indonesian artists: Alexander Sebastianus Hartanto, indieguerillas, I Nyoman Arisana, and Kunci Sathya Viku; one Chinese artist: Du Kun; and one Malaysian artist: Marcos Kueh, in their contemporary art practice.

Alexander Sebastianus Hartanto, who is known for employing traditional weaving technique in creating his abstract works, is now exploring *batik* technique mixed with digital print to form a pointillist abstract image. His process in executing the works began with a digital print of a photo mosaic on a piece of textile, on which he applied *malam* (melted beeswax used in *batik* making) by using a traditional tool called a *canting*, creating dots on the fabric, which functions as masking. Subsequently, he dyed the fabric in black colour and finally removed the *malam* from the fabric, revealing the colour dots. In *batik*, this dots motif is known as *isen-isen*, and it is used to fill empty spaces in between the main motifs. To me, the main narration of his works lies beyond the beautiful and sensible abstract visual that he created, but mainly in his process of creation, where he brought the traditional Indonesian textile making process into the practice of contemporary art.

In the early works of indieguerillas (husband-and-wife duo, Miko Bawono and Santi Ariestyowanti), we often see their exploration of finding their self-identity and social self-criticism as Javanese people who live in the midst of the contemporary, materialistic, and Western-minded culture in Indonesia. This was evident in their visual language that juxtaposes *wayang* figures and many popular icons such as brands and comic characters. In their most recent works, they no longer discuss self-identity nor social criticism, but instead, their work became more spiritual along with the transformation on how they live their life. Both of them grew to become more aware of their purpose as social beings, and as human beings in the universe. The whole life transformation that they experience is reflected in their artworks. Although we can still see the figures of *wayang* in their recent painting, they are no longer the main objects. Their works are evolving to

become more abstract, fluid, and organic. They symbolise how everything in life, the universe and the cosmic, move together in a beautiful flow, and we humans should follow that flow instead of resisting it. In my opinion, their philosophy is heavily influenced by Kejawen or Javanese spiritualism. As I have known them since the early days as artists, I believe their works are always honest to themselves.

In contrast to my familiarity with indieguerillas, I have only known I Nyoman Arisana for about one year. Since the first time I saw his work, I knew that he was special — not only for the beauty of his intricate paintings, but mainly because of his ability to transform non-Balinese figures to seem ‘Balinese’, while at the same time retaining the ‘nowness’ in his paintings. To me, it is not only about technique, but also about his spirit and inner sense as a Balinese. To look at his works is to experience the world that we are living in now from the point of view of a Balinese person. Typically, there are two ways of looking at Balinese paintings: from a distance where we see the whole story, and from up close, where we see the details of each object and character. In the case of Nyoman Arisana’s paintings, from a distance, we see an intricately detailed depiction of many scenes, but in the midst of that, there is a disruption of empty space that feels detached from, but closely related to, the story of the painting. This kind of disruption is uncommon in traditional Balinese painting, as their conventional composition is always harmonious, reflecting the order of life of Balinese society. At a glance, this disruption is what makes Nyoman Arisana’s paintings feel contemporary. Upon closer observation, we can see that the figures and objects are not typically found in traditional Balinese paintings, instead it is more like a collection of visual references that he has encountered since he was a child. Through his imaginary figures and objects, he tells stories about what the artist experiences or sees in his daily life. In the painting presented in this exhibition entitled “*Perjalanan (Journey)*”, he tells us a story about the advancement of human civilization in many fields and looking back on whether it is still in line with the basic Balinese Hinduism teaching of Tri Hita Karana (the trinity).

As an artist, Kuncir Sathya Viku has a unique background that helps him create his own visual language. He grew up as a son to a *Balian* (Balinese traditional healer), and later pursued a formal education in visual communication design in the Art Institute of Indonesia in Denpasar, Bali. As a child, he often helped his father to make *rerajahan* (sacred drawings)

as amulets, and that was how he became very close and familiar with classic Balinese symbols and drawings. As someone who is exposed to the world of graphic design, his visual references are very relevant to our current society. Kuncir took the Balinese iconography from *rerajahan* as the main component of his visual language, with no spiritual purposes or intentions, but rather to express his identity and his being as a Balinese to discuss current issues, as we can see in his painting presented in this exhibition entitled “*LSD (Lukisan Seni Drawing)*”.

Du Kun, who is known for his surrealistic oil paintings, presents in this exhibition a series of Chinese landscape scroll paintings made of ink and mineral pigment on silk. The beauty of this series of scroll paintings are far beyond the visual, but rather, it serves as a bridge that connects his deep interest in both music and painting. Aside from visual art, music has always been Du Kun’s passion, and to quote his words: “*It can be said that a painter composes music with pigments, and a musician uses sounds to paint, just like mutual translation between different languages*”. Since he graduated in 2007, he has been trying to find the bridge between music and painting, until that one eureka moment while working on some music and he saw the pattern of sound waves in his computer monitor and he visualised images of forests and lakes. What makes this series of scroll paintings even more special is the fact that Du Kun did not execute them with his typical oil painting technique, which is his forte, but he chose to paint it with traditional Chinese landscape painting method. With this series, Du Kun is translating contemporary electronic music into traditional Chinese paintings.

Marcos Kueh is a textile artist born in Sarawak, in the island of Borneo, who currently lives and works in The Hague, the Netherlands. Looking at his works feels like looking at vintage posters from the colonial era. Marcos used to work in the advertising industry before he left to the Netherlands to pursue an education at the Royal Academy of Art in The Hague. From my short conversation with him, I discovered that he meant to convey the message of how colonialism has shaped our life and mentality in the present day. As I mentioned earlier in the opening of this essay, while we are now a free nation, politically, but mentally we might not be completely free from colonialism. Currently, Marcos’ artistic research is focused on evoking the presence of colonial narratives in our present-day lives and conjuring new myths to what it means to be an independent country.



The other interesting part of his works is his choice of medium, which is industrial woven textile. The traditional culture of the Dayak Iban tribe in Sabah is well known for their traditional handwoven textile, and they tell stories through the motif of their textile. In my opinion, Marcos' choice to employ the industrial woven textile as his main medium is beyond practical reasons — it is a juxtaposition between his roots of tradition with the Western concept of modernity.

I strongly believe that we should embrace our own roots and tradition to hold a strong position in the rapid development of the global contemporary culture. Culture is a powerful catalyst to accelerate the growth of a nation, as evident from how K-pop and K-drama contribute to the growth of anything “made in Korea” anywhere around the world.

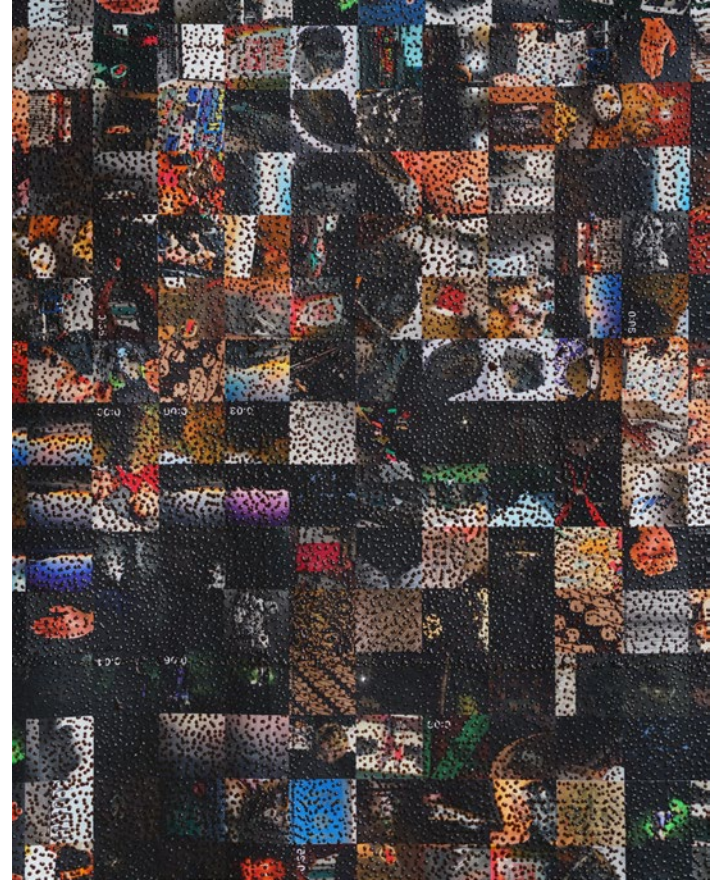
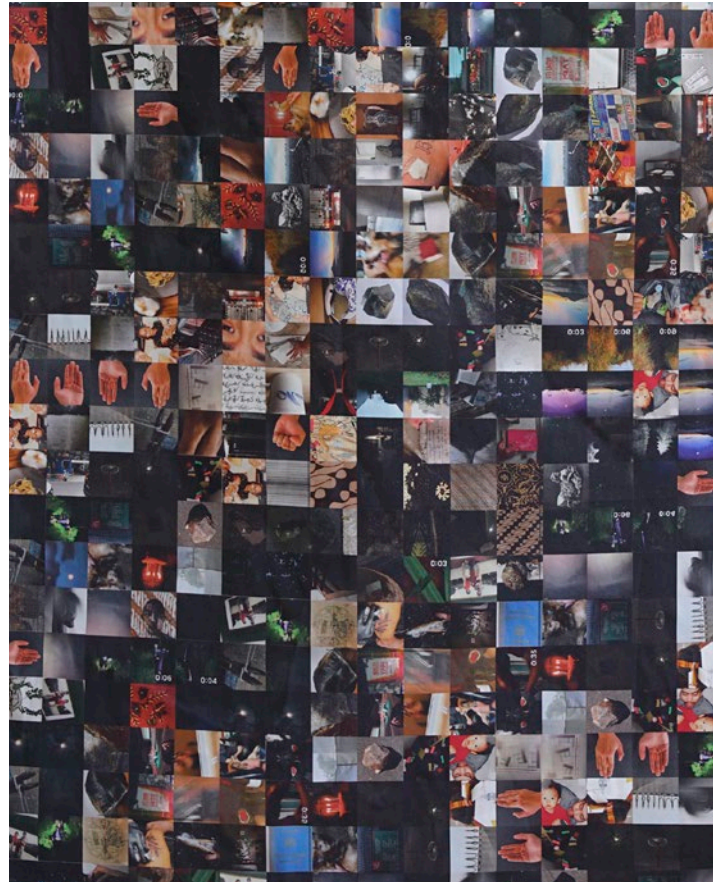
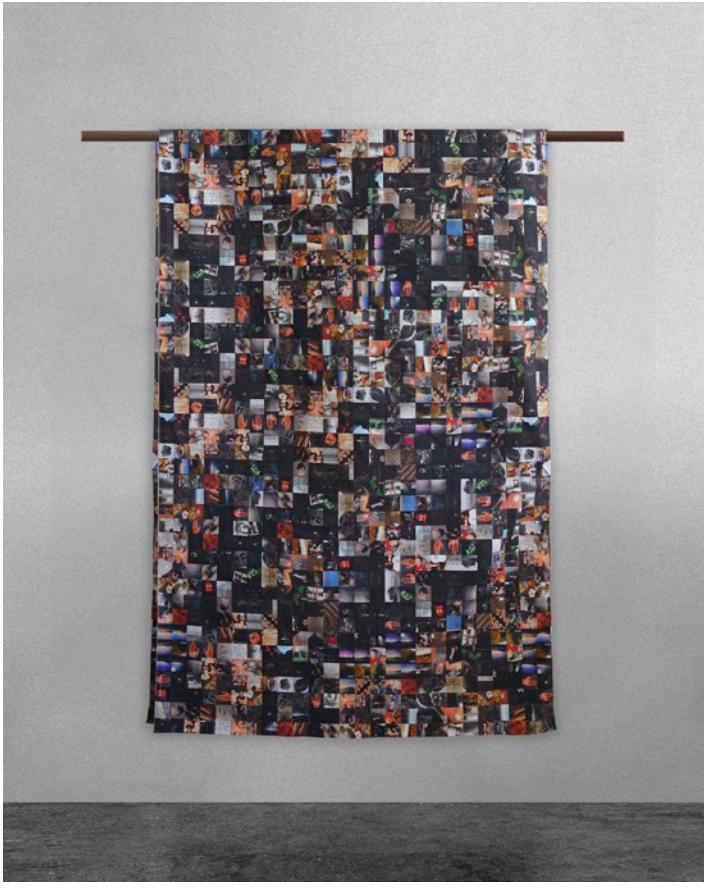


**Hermanto Soerjanto (b. 1970, Indonesia)** went to Palin School of Arts & Design in Singapore and Akademi Teknik Desain Interior (ATDI) in Jakarta, Indonesia, before joining Cipta Citra advertising agency in 1994. Since then, he has built his career in the field of advertising and currently holds a position at Pantarei Communications as Chief Creative Officer. As an art collector, Hermanto Soerjanto is familiar with Indonesian artists, having spent much time conversing with them and visiting their studios. In 2008 he established GARIS Artspace, an art gallery in Jakarta showcasing works by contemporary Indonesian artists, where he organizes and curates the exhibitions on a regular basis. To date, Hermanto Soerjanto has organized several exhibitions, most notably *Ethnicity Now*, a group exhibition at Galeri Nasional Indonesia, Jakarta (2010), and *Unveiling Fundamentals in Contemporary Art Through Asia* at OHD Museum, Magelang, Indonesia (2015). Hermanto Soerjanto lives and works in Jakarta, Indonesia.



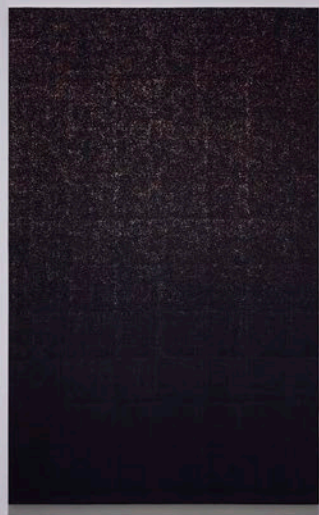
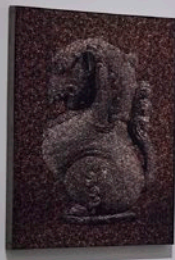
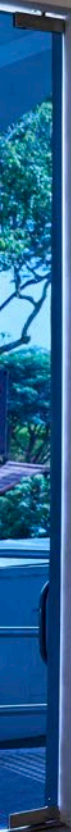
*LIMA LANGKAH PENITIKAN DARI (Five Stages of Constellating Froms)*, 2023  
installation of handbatik with beeswax on printed photograph and teakwood carvings  
300 × 110 cm each, set of 5



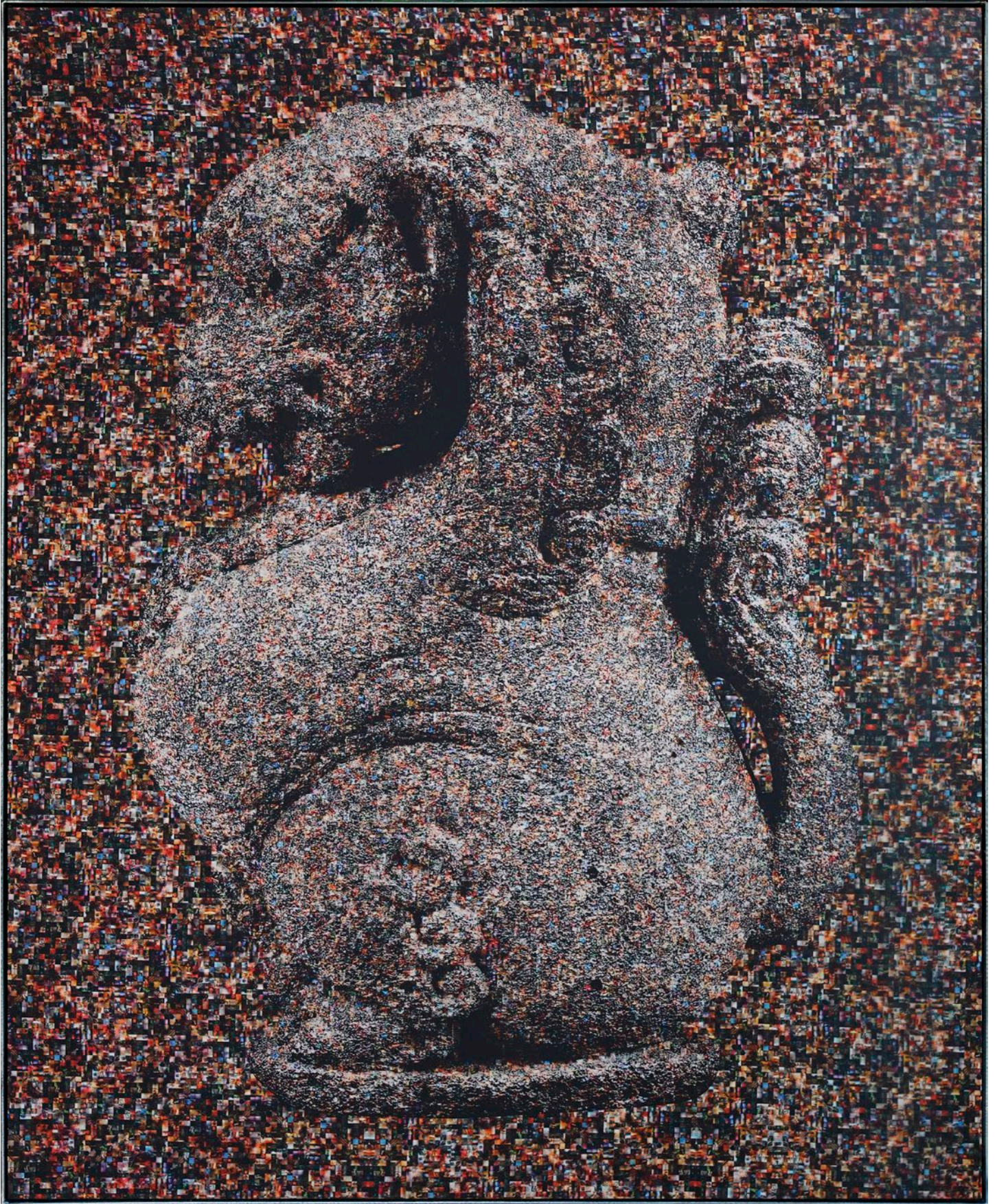


LIMA LANGKAH PENITIKAN DARI (Five Stages of Constellating Froms), 2023  
installation of handbatik with beeswax on printed photograph and teakwood carvings  
300 × 110 cm each, set of 5









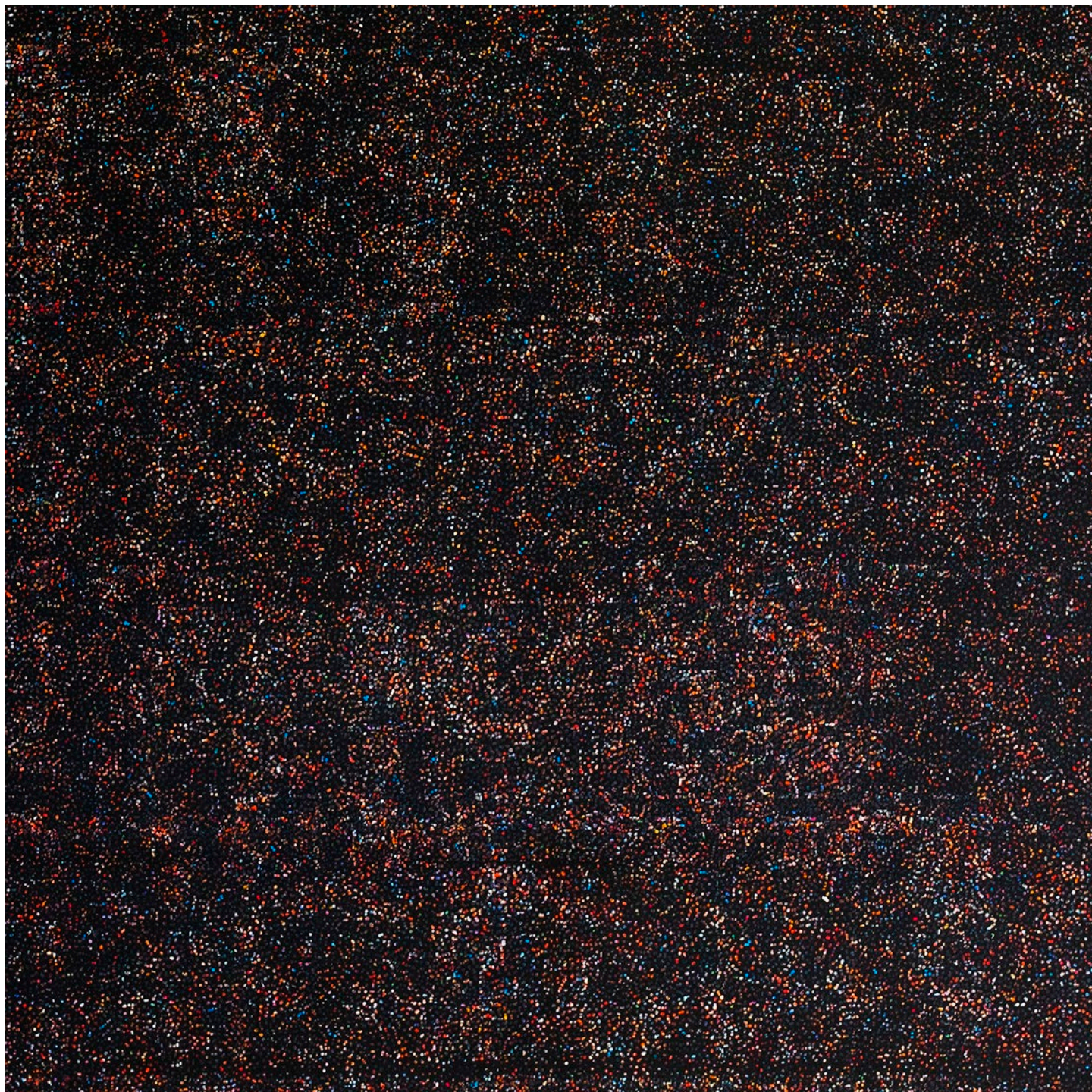
*Barong - Lot#25 - 02, 2023*  
dye and batik on printed photograph on cotton  
90 × 70 × 4.7 cm





*Butiran Menjelang Dari #01, 2024*  
batik on printed photograph on cotton  
200 × 125 × 5 cm





*Particles of From #4, 2024*  
batik on printed photograph on cotton  
110 × 110 × 4.7 cm





**Alexander Sebastianus Hartanto (b. 1995, East Java, Indonesia)** graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Fine Arts 3D) from the Massachusetts College of Art & Design, Boston, USA in 2018. Alexander uses experiential ethnographic re/search as a prominent intertwining mode of existence. His works explore the decontextualization of material cultures and how it is perceived, understood and ritualised in practice. Prior to his comparative art studies, Alexander was an apprentice for a Javanese master weaver, in East Java. Alexander has undertaken residencies at Monson Arts, Maine, USA (2018) and Haystack Mountain School of Craft, Maine, USA (2017). He was awarded the William Daley Award for Excellence in Art History and Craft (2017); and the Massachusetts College of Art & Design: Fiber Arts Departmental Honors (2018). Alexander Sebastianus Hartanto lives and works in Jakarta, Indonesia, where he works as a textile craft school developer and ethnographer at Rumah Sukkha Citta.







*山前听琴 雨后观云 / Listening to Guqin before the mountains, and watching the clouds after the rain, 2022*

ink and mineral pigments on silk

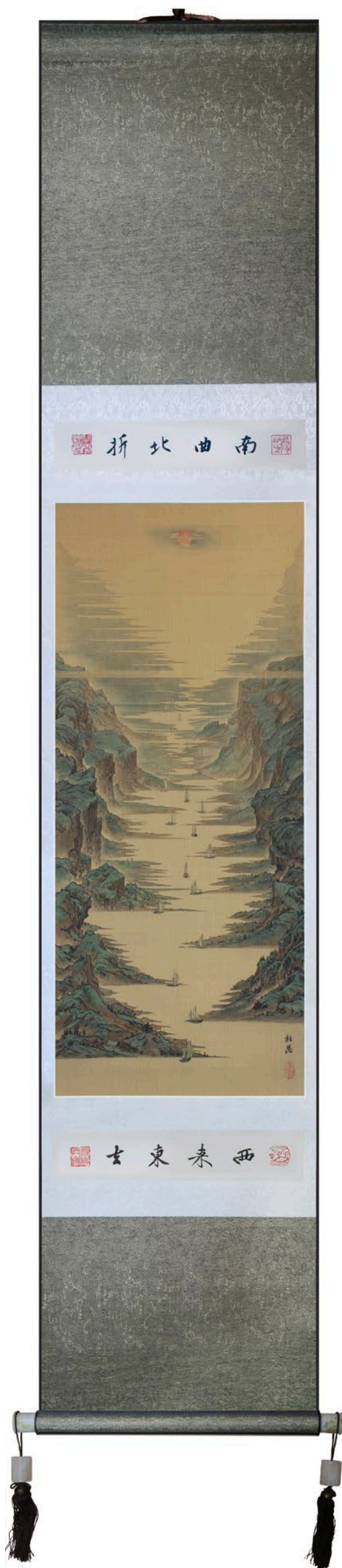
80 × 40 cm (painting), 215 × 47 cm (scroll)

4K video: 17sec

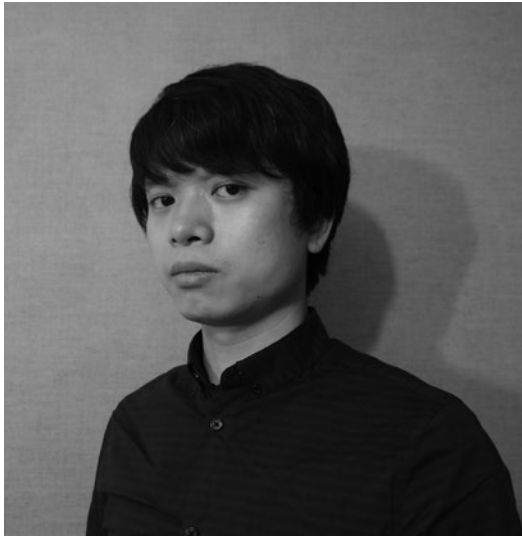


野径无声 赤桥有雪 / The wild path is silent, and Red Bridge covered with snow, 2022  
 ink and mineral pigments on silk  
 80 × 40 cm (painting), 215 × 47 cm (scroll)  
 4K video: 34sec





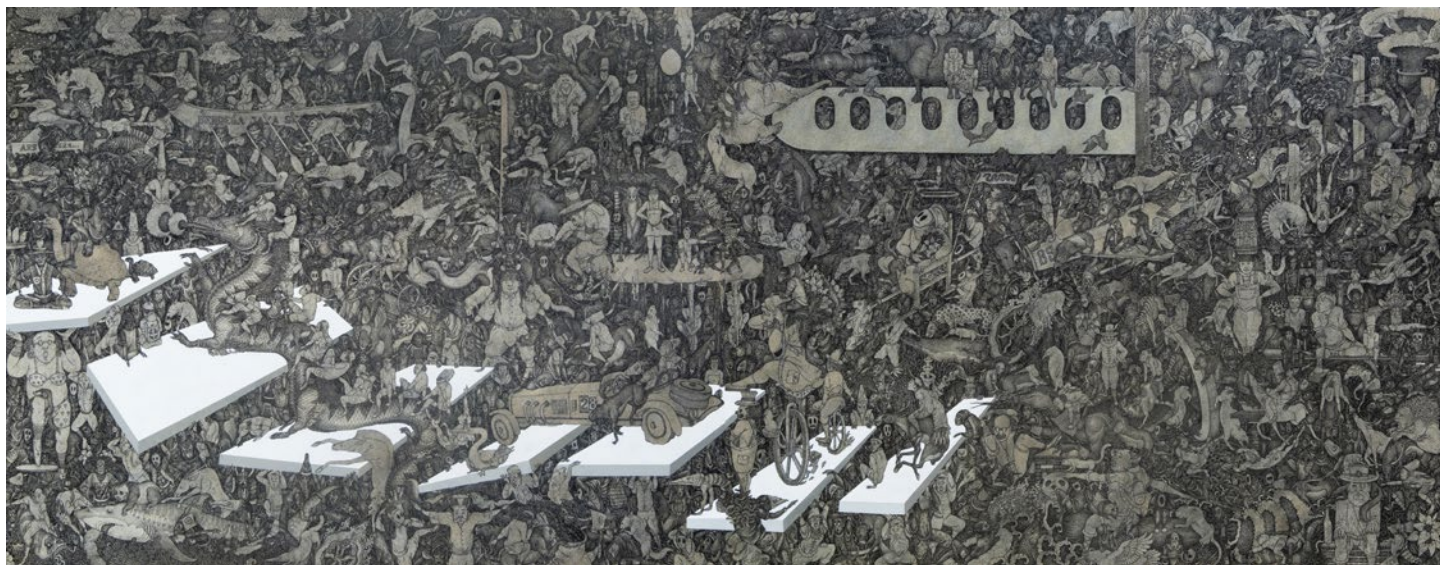
南曲北折 西来东去 / Winding from South to North, and from West to East, 2022  
 ink and mineral pigments on silk  
 80 × 40 cm (painting), 215 × 47 cm (scroll)  
 4K video: 1min 33sec



**Du Kun (b. 1982, Sichuan, China)** graduated with a BFA in Oil Painting from the Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing, China in 2007. Du's works have been featured in a range of exhibitions, including: *Magical Modern*, Space and Gallery Association Shanghai, Shanghai, China (2023); *Sights of the Mount Sumeru*, Mizuma, Kips & Wada Art, New York, USA (solo, 2019); *Temporal Turn: Art and Speculation in Contemporary Asia*, Spencer Museum of Art, Kansas, USA (2016); *Dark Songs for the Light*, Du Kun and Zhao Na, Tianjin Art Museum, Tianjin, China (2014); and *Made in China: Contemporary Chinese Artists*, Luciano Benetton Collection, Milan, Italy (2012). Du was the Finalist in the Sovereign Asian Art Prize, Hong Kong (2020). His works are in the collection of the Spencer Museum of Art, Kansas, USA. Du Kun lives and works in Tianjin and Beijing, China.







*Perjalanan*, 2024

ink, acrylic on canvas

140 × 360 × 5 cm (diptych, 140 × 180 × 5 cm each)





*Perjalanan*, 2024  
ink, acrylic on canvas  
140 × 360 × 5 cm (diptych, 140 × 180 × 5 cm each)





**I Nyoman Arisana (b. 1989, Bali, Indonesia)** came from a family of artists in Banjar Dauh Uma, Bitera, Gianyar, Bali — his grandfather is a painter, and his father is a wood carver and maker of barong masks. Since he was ten years old, he began studying traditional Balinese painting, creating works that depicted wayang themes, barong dance, traditional markets, and everyday lives of the Balinese people. In 2008, Arisana graduated from the Art Education programme of Universitas Pendidikan Ganesha (UNDIKSHA), Singaraja, Bali, and has since been actively participating in exhibitions. In 2017, Arisana was awarded the Titian Prize organised by Yayasan Titian Bali, and became one of the finalists of UOB Painting of the Year. I Nyoman Arisana lives and works in Bali, Indonesia.





*"I am You," Said the Foam to the Sea, 2024*  
acrylic on canvas  
90 × 180 × 5 cm





**indieguerillas**, founded in 1999, is a duet of artists from Yogyakarta, Indonesia. They are the couple Santi Ariestyowanti (b. 1977, Semarang) and Dyatmiko “Miko” Bawono (b. 1975, Kudus). The former has a background in visual communication design and the latter in interior design. Both are alumni of the Faculty of Art of the Indonesian Institute of the Arts in Yogyakarta (ISI Yogyakarta). In addition to their being known for their interest in folklore, indieguerillas are also recognised for their proficiency in visual effects and inter-media experimentation in their works. The unique intertwine between traditional values and contemporary culture has brought indieguerillas to numerous important exhibitions around the globe.







LSD, 2024  
acrylic on canvas  
180 x 150 x 5 cm



**Kuncir Sathya Viku (b. 1990, Bali, Indonesia)** graduated from Denpasar Institute of Art in 2013 with a degree in Visual Communication Design, and worked as a Graphic Designer for several years before he decided to make a path of his own. Infusing his training as a *rerajahan* (visual mantra) illustrator for his father — a *balian* (Balinese shaman), combined with his artistic experiences working with murals on the streets, Kuncir explores lines and forms that are rooted in Balinese visual language. Bringing into play his satirical wit, Kuncir composes global-local ('glocal') disruptions where forms are enchanted between tradition-modernity. He transmits hybrid shamanistic visuals — merging comic impressions with *rerajahan* traits and a touch of pop surrealism. Working across drawings, paintings and installations, Kuncir creates progressive narratives and evaluations on Balinese surrealism and 'glocal' social issues; often where clashes between modernity-tradition, conservative-liberal, spirituality-profanity, norms-exceptions and so forth take place. Kuncir Sathya Viku lives and works in Bali, Indonesia.









Woven Banner - Halal Wonderland, 2023  
 industrial weaving, recycled PET, 8 colours  
 225 × 75 cm  
 edition of 4 plus 2 artist's proofs





Woven Poster #10 - *Homo Servantis Erotis (Ready to Serve)*, 2023  
 industrial weaving, recycled PET, 8 colours  
 235 × 170 cm  
 edition of 3 plus 2 artist's proofs





Woven Banner - Land of Power, 2023  
 industrial weaving, recycled PET, 8 colours  
 225 × 75 cm  
 edition of 4 plus 2 artist's proofs





**Marcos Kueh (b. 1995, Sarawak, Malaysia)** is a designer who has always had a desire to better understand his place and identity as a Malaysian. He graduated with his Bachelor's in Graphic and Textile Design from the Royal Academy of Art, The Hague in 2022. His practice is about safeguarding contemporary legends onto textiles as tools for storytelling, just as the ancestors of Borneo did with their dreams and stories, before the arrival of written alphabets from the West. Currently his artistic research is focused on evoking the presence of colonial narratives in our present-day lives and conjuring new myths to what it means to be an independent country. In 2022, he was awarded the Ron Mandos Young Blood prize for emerging artists, and his work was acquired by Museum Voorlinden in Wassenaar and Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. His work has been included in exhibitions all around the world, including in *Kenyalang Circus* at The Back Room, Kuala Lumpur (2023), *Three Contemporary Prosperities* at Galerie Ron Mandos, Amsterdam (2022); *When Things Are Beings* at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (2022); *This Far and Further* at Museum Voorlinden, Wassenaar, Netherlands (2022); and *Unknown Asia*, Osaka, Japan (2017). Marcos Kueh lives and works in The Hague, the Netherlands.

### About Mizuma Gallery

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” opened in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, to create a new platform for dialogue by supporting exchanges between East Asia and Southeast Asia. From 2018 to 2023, “Mizuma & Kips” opened in New York, USA, as a shared collaboration between Mizuma Gallery from Tokyo and Singapore and Kips Gallery from New York.

### About 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. Gillman Barracks’ vision is to be Asia’s destination for the presentation and discussion of international and Southeast Asian art. Today, Gillman Barracks is a place for art lovers, art collectors, and those curious about art. The cluster is a focal point of Singapore’s arts landscape, and anchors the development of visual art in the region and beyond.

#### Executive Director

Mizuma Sueo

#### Director

Fredy Chandra

#### General Manager

Theresia Irma

#### Project Manager

Marsha Tan

#### Exhibition Curator

Hermanto Soerjanto

#### Designer

Yusuf Aji

*Published in Singapore, 2024.*

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**Artwork Images** © Alexander Sebastianus Hartanto (courtesy of ISA Art Gallery), Du Kun, indieguerillas, I Nyoman Arisana, Kuncir Sathya Viku, and Marcos Kueh (courtesy of The Back Room).

Artworks by Alexander Sebastianus Hartanto are presented with the support of:



Artworks by Marcos Kueh are presented with the support of:



**Exhibition Views:** Photography by Wong Jing Wei

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