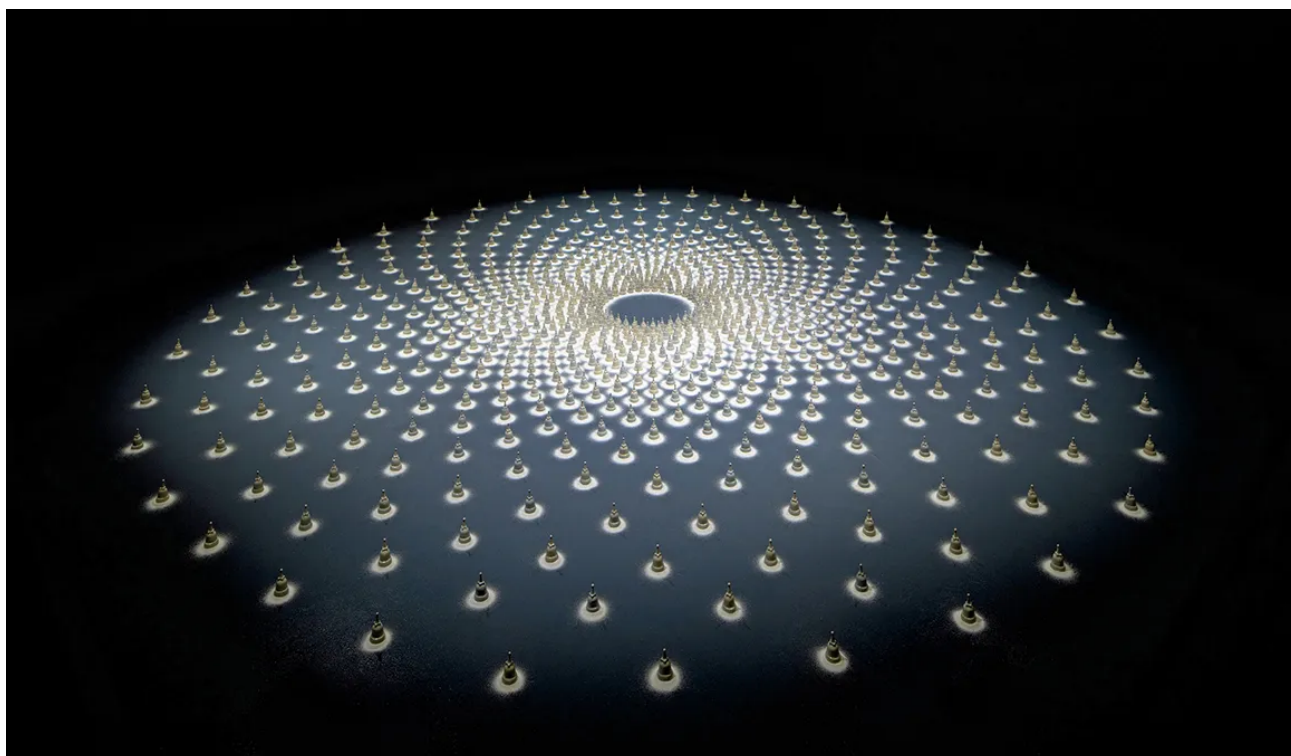


REVIEWS YOGYAKARTA

# Albert Yonathan Setyawan

Jogja National Museum

By Hung Duong 𠂇



Albert Yonathan Setyawan, *Mandala Study #2*, 2012, ceramic, marble sand, 756 pieces, overall 118 1/8 × 118 1/8 × 2 1/8".

For his solo exhibition “Capturing Silence,” Albert Yonathan Setyawan married spirituality and material imagination, using clay to duplicate the intricate patterns and concentric diagrams of sacred geometries. In *Mandala Study #2*, 2012, the artist constructed a mandala out of miniature ceramic stupas, covering these forms with white marble sand so that a milky tone emerged within the dimly lit room. Walking around this arrangement, one could discern in it the spiral patterns found in the head of a sunflower, which follow the Fibonacci sequence. In contrast, *Architecture of Affects*, 2023, orchestrated a compact presentation of tightly pleated, gray-hued pyramidal shapes, creating the optical illusion of a manifold labyrinth. If viewers relaxed their eyes and minds while pacing around the piece (as if performing *parikrama*, a ritual in Buddhism and other Indic religions where one circumambulates venerated objects), the pyramids’ rigid perpendiculars seemed to dissolve, a striking optical illusion. Undulating between slender curves and hard edges, Setyawan’s installations invite viewers to contemplate the transcendental potential imbued in clay.

Setyawan used scale to amplify the sublime character of his arrangements. *Helios*, 2017, transformed the whitewashed, twenty-three-foot-high wall of an indoor amphitheater into a monochromatic chessboard studded with two types of white-glazed ceramic pieces mounted onto it: a flower (representing vitality and ephemerality) and a seraph (purity and ardor). As we gaze at its shifting patterns and become enwrapped in the serene aura that emanates from the interstice between a flower's petal and an angel's wing tip, we gradually fall into a meditative realm. Slowly, the mind empties, as we gently anchor ourselves at the meeting point between earthen materiality and divine symbolism—where the purity of glazed ceramic evokes a sense of sublimation and otherworldliness.

At the heart of Setyawan's formal experimentation lies an inquiry concerning material transformation. For *Cosmic Labyrinth: The Bells*, 2012, a mixed-media installation featuring a single-channel video, the artist shows his arrangement of terra-cotta bells in concentric circles; he then smashes the bells one by one. Alternating between creation and destruction, the performance embodies the ethos of the mandala: All lives are ephemeral and shall return to soil. The sound of bells being smashed reverberates across the room, generating an andante tempo of rebirth as each terra-cotta transforms into wreckage. The end result is a closed circle of clay fragments, its ochre glow accentuated by the soft light from above. Walking around this fragmented terra-cotta circle, one gradually attuned one's eyes to its jagged edges and incongruous texture—a stark contrast to the polished and curved bells. Synthesizing the sounds and gestures of the performance with the contemplative visual character of the installation, Setyawan shares with viewers his durational engagement with clay and personal philosophy of its generative and transformative nature.