



# Heri Dono and his fallen angels

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## The Indonesian artist takes deadly aim at politics and other problems

Angels and astronauts have taken over the Bangkok gallery Tang Contemporary Art. Celebrated, sharp-witted Indonesian installation specialist Heri Dono is back in town, this time bringing a clutter of becaks – the ubiquitous tricycles of his homeland.

Ending next Saturday, “Angel’s Exodus” is Dono’s fourth show in Thailand, a noisy affair armed with weapons and a characteristically cutting socio-political edge.

Dono, 56, has done much to revive fading Indonesian cultural traditions, including the shadow puppets known as wayang kulit and the wooden tribal tau tau sculptures of Sulawesi, which join the clattering becaks in his conceptual artworks.

Dono concocts “hybrid creatures” out of disparate parts of the past and present and makes marvelous use of light and sound.

“Flying Angels” from 2006 is on view alongside newer series of acrylic angel paintings with matching titles, from 2014.

The older group comprises an installation of nine whimsical electronic angels with elaborate

headdresses, impish painted faces, broad cotton wings, tiny red boots and – shield your eyes – exposed genitals.

Dono's been floating these heavenly figures since 1996, when they debuted at the Bienal de Sao Paulo in Brazil. They've since miraculously appeared all over the world, including in New York, Japan, Switzerland and Australia. Bangkok is only now experiencing the visitation.

Unrelated to religion, Dono's angels instead symbolise the spirit, and he has a spirited view of the creative process. "Inspiration always moves rapidly toward the future," he says, "accompanied by imagination, fantasy, consciousness and perception."

"My work raises the questions 'why is humanity superior to other living things on earth or in the universe and why are we supreme?'"

In the gallery window is "Unidentified Unflying Objects" – a troupe of mobile astronauts assembled in 2011 as a form of criticism over his country's 1989 political shift from military to civilian government.

Dono still regards the government as too "old-fashioned" and makes his point with the 2015 installation "The Troops of Cakra", in which dinosaurs are driving 25 becaks.

New paintings on display include "The Ark", "Weapon's Creature Shoot the Mother Earth", "The First Dinosaur to Discover Human Beings" and "A Soldier has a Dialogue with a Hybrid Creature".

If the titles sound funny, it's intentional. Dono uses humour as he mingles faith and philosophy, folk tales and social commentary, but there are serious reflections on issues ranging from political corruption to environmental degradation.

Hou Hanru, the Chinese artistic director of Rome's MAXXI Museum – who's working to expand Dono's international profile – delights in the artist's "humorous skewering of the current political situation with imagination and illusion".

"He presents the tension between illusion and reality and highlights the intersection of local culture and contemporary art," Hou says.

#### **ALL EYES ON HEAVEN**

- The exhibition "Heri Dono – Angel's Exodus" continues through Saturday at Tang Contemporary Art on the third floor of Golden Place Plaza (former Peninsula Plaza) | on Rajdamri Road.

= Find out more at [www.TangContemporary.com](http://www.TangContemporary.com)