



**Jompot Kuswidananto**

# Biography



Born in 1976, lives in Bali and Yogyakarta-Indonesia.

Studied Communication at Faculty of Social and Political Science of Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta in 1995 to 1999, was a musician produced recording albums and performances during the same years and began to take part in Teater Garasi in 1998 up to present.

Self taught artist and trained by the local art community networks.

The networks as a terminal of knowledge is as important as the state is almost absent in the practical life especially after the fall of the Suharto in 1998.

The networks had also connected the artist to many different mediums; videos, sounds, performances, theater and visual arts as the main focus since 2000.

Travels shuttling from traditional to contemporary field as stepping grounds.

Works in the intersection of artistic and non artistic experimentation, both independently and collaboratively.

Believes that art is a way to understand and to communicate the reality then an artist is both self explorer and social actor.

Has been working in a focused theme for the past 4 years: 'Java's Machine', using the history of Java as a departure to hint at the complexity of living in today's world.

# Jompet Kuswidananto

## By Agung Hujatnikajennong

Jompet is one of the Indonesian young artists whose productivity and innovations in terms of the use of recycled electronic equipments for video, object, and installation works still remain unchallenged among his peer. His ongoing project *Java's Machine* (2008 – present) could perhaps prove such judgment. Realized in the form of installation series, *Java's Machine* intelligently questions the myriad of definitions regarding social and cultural concepts amidst the rapid change that has taken place in Asia since the modernization.

Jompet has long been interested to explore aspects of the society in Java: an island in the Indonesian vast archipelago, which served as one of the axes in the old silk road trade route. The uniqueness of the island lies in the collage of cultures that reflects the early history of syncretism in Asia. Within Indonesian context, the syncretism cannot be separated from all the trading process and encounter with different native cultures, such as Hinduism, Confucianism, Buddhism, Islam and Christianity that came after the end of the silk route in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The Dutch colonialism, which took place for 350 years in Indonesia, was also a consequence of all the changes after the all trades process in the past.

The idea of syncretism in Jompet's works involves the cultural transformation in the society through the technology or 'machine'. Whereas the current globalization has been marked by the interconnectedness among people, through the machine: computer, mobile phone, satellites, which actually still function as the tool of trade and exchanges of values, Jompet's practice has been really connected to that subject, especially in the idea of 'machine'. Since early 2000 he has been experimenting a lot with different kind of machine. He has created different art projects that involve different interactivity among public. Jompet's artistic practice can also project another issue, namely the attitude of people, or particular society in responding and adjusting to the use of value of machine or technology.

*Java's Machine* has been manifested in a series installation works that combines three-dimensional objects in the forms of a group of "ghost soldiers", the projection of synchronized moving images, and sound. The project reflects questions about myriad of definitions regarding social and cultural concepts, exploring the fragility of boundary between reality and illusion; the material and the immaterial; between static three-dimensional forms and dynamic moving images; between the mechanic and the magic; between 'Javanese' and 'non-Javanese'.

For *Java's Machine*, Jompet deliberately borrows the uniform of Yogyakarta Sultanese / Royal 'soldier' or *bregada* (adapted from Dutch word Brigade) to question about the notion of Java-ness reflected in the details of the uniform. Their unique uniform represents the syncretism, which has been 'the machine' for the survival of culture in Java up until now. The soldier also represents the idea of battle, which relates to the conflict of different values, especially today when globalization has created more and more contradictions to the concept of culture.

To me, Jompet's works reflect a unique character of artistic practice that combines social research, the richness of tradition, technological approaches and critical attitude to the post-colonial condition that is inseparable in Asian nations history. It is for all those reasons I would recommend him as one of the Asian artists who can express a clear and propitious voice in the future.\*\*\*



Java, the war of ghosts, 2009, installation

## Recent Works (2007-present)

# Java's Machine

The cultural history of a nation, a community, is always a history of intersections, contestations, juxtapositions and negotiations between different beliefs and values. Syncretism then happened to be a strategy, even a system, in an attempt to reconcile, to manipulate, or to overcome disparate or contradictory beliefs; between the 'old' and the 'new', the 'genuine' and the 'alien', the 'traditional' and the 'modern'; between 'us' and 'the other'. Hence, beside as a defense mechanism, we could see syncretism also as a device to reconcile and to alleviate such binary oppositions. As a result, the world produced by syncretism is a 'collage'; a world filled with series of layers of beliefs and values; a plenitude of cultural crevasse. A phantasmagoria.

Java, due to its geographical position, has been a point of interface between continents and between oceans for a long time. Thus, its cultural history is a history of syncretism. Instead of opposing any incoming culture and religion, the Javanese were thought to have taken everything as necessary ingredients to form a new synthesis: a basic Javanese syncretism. This "system" then became the island's true folk tradition, the 'fuel' of its civilization. The "machine" of its culture.

Java's cultural machine then came across with other cultural machine, modernism, which arrived and was powered by real machines. Machines that were impelling mechanized labor, mechanized way of life.

If, as happened everywhere, the experience of mechanized labor and the shocks of urban modern existence cause life to be lived on a fragmented, superficial level, then the syncretism/phantasmagoria renders such superficial experience into a state of illusory plenitude. The illusory wholeness of phantasmagoria/syncretism covers the real state of both subjective and social fragmentation. While technological change produces an experience of shock, it also comes to provide a compensatory mechanism: phantasmagoria, which function as the dialectical other of the factory. The rise of technology increases the potential for phantasmagoric effects. Hence, we also could say, phantasmagoria *is* a fantasy world that function *as* a protective shield.

In Java's case, the form of such protective shield manifested in mythologies and fantasies that are being (re)produced from time to time. Mythologies and fantasies that try to elucidate and embrace the superficiality of everyday life. This mechanism comes, and therefore could be explained from, the Javanese concept and perception of time, which is not-linear: the past, present and future reside in the same space/place; a world of phantasmagoria consists of juxtaposition of ancient symbols and ghosts, superficiality of everyday-life, and fantasies of the future.

On the other hand, the issue here, like the magic lantern spectacle, from which it takes its name, phantasmagoria produces an illusion so convincing that a shadow becomes material body. As the illusive (and elusive) play of cultural symbols that serve, previously, to obscure the debasing effect of colonialism/capitalism, could phantasmagoria perform the same role in our contemporary world? Or, in a world flooded by digitalized and visualized information, would phantasmagoria only produce bewilderment effects? ----(texts by Yudi AHT & Jompet)



War Of Java, Do You Remember? #2, 2008, single channel video

The video *War of Java, Do You Remember? #2* shows a figure performing a ritualised dance in a factory environment surrounded by colossal machines. It illustrates the intersection between two different knowledge systems, revealing their awkward synchronicity.

When the Dutch first introduced farming machines, sugar farmers invented a new ritual, called *Cembegan*, as a means through which the industrial machine is made comprehensible within the Javanese cosmology and belief. Agung Hujatnikajennong notes in the exhibition essay that this syncretic process created 'a unique juxtaposition between the magical and mechanical'.

More importantly, this return of history as a phantasmic host that wields military might hints at the violent and vindictive ambition of history as a form of moral authenticity. (\*\*\*)



War of Java, Do You Remember? #4, 2008, installation

The war of Java is no longer the historical war that happened in the past but the culture war waged in the present between a society that has hopped onto the vectors of globalisation, a fast machine towards a future, and the weighty baggage, the cultural history, that refuses to compromise or forgive an increasingly amnesiac generation that wants no lessons from the stream of letters that shored against the lonely sodden soldiers steeped in a watery pool of text in *War of Java, Do You Remember? #4*, plucked from Thomas Stanford Raffles' seminal work, *The History of Java*. (\*\*\*)

*War of Java, Do You Remember? #5* took place as a performance on the opening night and was later displayed throughout the exhibition in the form of a video recording showing a nondescript Javanese man stripped to his underwear facing an invisible jury of indicting voices that prosecute him for his failure to remember. Questions were hurled against his cowering body as he stammered and foundered from his inability to recall events that happened throughout Dutch rule Indonesia.

This archetypal clown of the commonplace everyday man is charged for the criminal act of forgetting. Yet, his body – palpable, and alive – is a stark contrast the absent bodies of the faceless, dour yet exquisite corps who could only contained within themselves a ceremony of words, a garble of information, beholden to a moral duty that is holier-than-thou. (\*\*\*)



**War of Java, Do You Remember? #5, 2008, performance**



In *War of Java, Do You Remember? #3*, a parading ghost army drums to the shadowy dance of an unidentified figure projected onto the far end wall. Each lash of a cloth whip towards the video camera produces a shift in the percussionists' rhythm. Piercing flags stick out in all direction, suggesting an inevitable march, a movement that is crucially tempo-ed to the spectral dancer's whip.

This wayang-like orchestration could very well fit into the prevalent reading of Jompet's practice as an examination of the notion of Javanese syncretism. The artist himself observes, 'Instead of opposing any incoming culture and religion, the Javanese were thought to have taken everything as necessary ingredients to form a new synthesis: a basic Javanese syncretism... Syncretism then happened to be a strategy, a system, in an attempt to reconcile, to manipulate, or to overcome disparate or contradictory beliefs; between the 'old' and the 'new', the 'genuine' and the 'alien', the 'traditional' and the 'modern', between 'us' and the 'other'.' (\*\*\*)

(\*\*\*) taken from *ARTERI online Magz*



**War of Java, Do You Remember? #3, 2008, Installation**



Java's machine : Phantasmagoria, 2008, installation



Java's machine : Phantasmagoria, 2008, installation and performance



*and also the armed merchants from the west.*



*The heydays of gods are over.*



*we will never know what we are waiting for.*

**Pilgrims and Plagues**, 2009, single channel video



**New Myth for the new family, 2009, Installation**

The installation shows a family tree based on the traditional history of Java. It is a family tree introduced by the first Javanese Moslem king in 16<sup>th</sup> century. The family tree shows that the king is the descendant of Adam and Eve, it marks the beginning of the new connection between Javanese myths with Islamic myths, while before 16<sup>th</sup> century Javanese myths were always connected to Indian/Hinduist-Budhist Myths.



Java, the war of ghosts, 2009, Installation



Long March to Java, 2009, Installation





Third Realm, 2011, installation (detail shot)

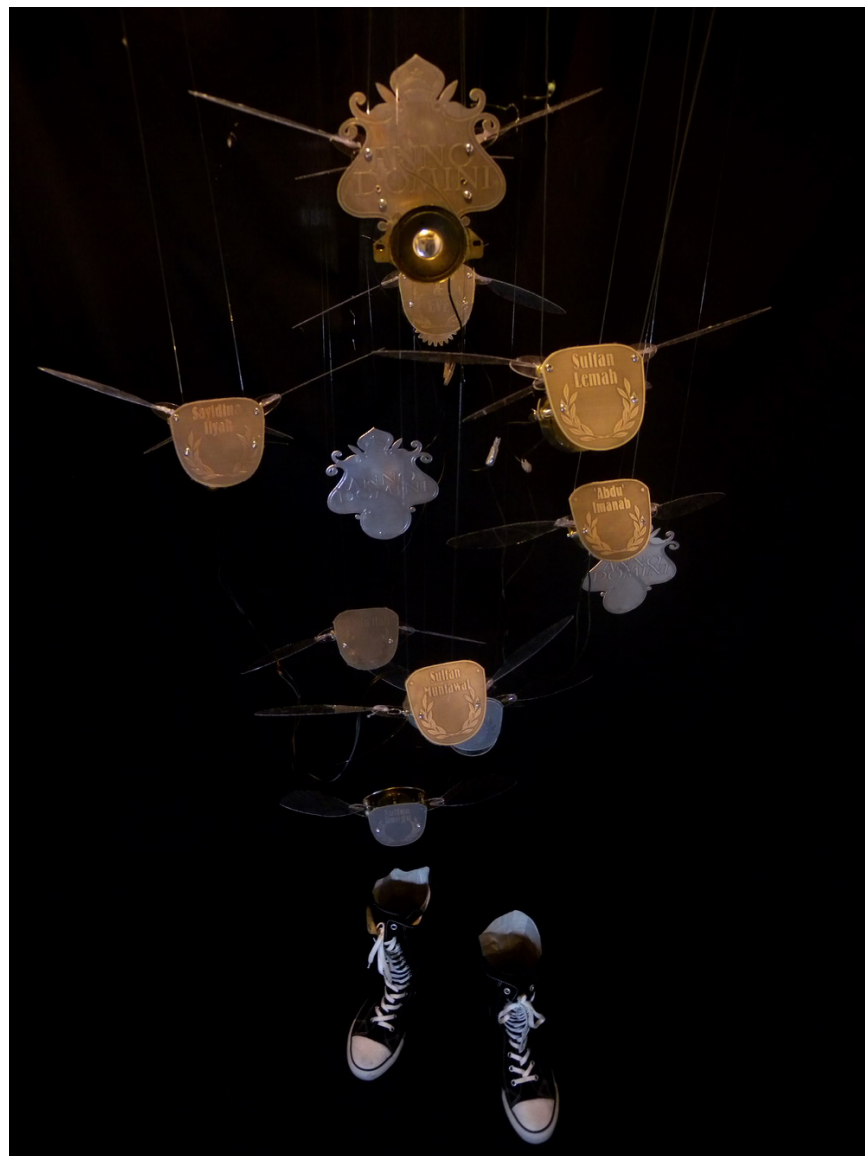




Cortege of the third realm#2, detail shot, 2012, installation



**Sleep Kingdom Sleep**, 2009, Installation



**Third Bodies #5, 2010, installation**



**Cortege of the Third Realm, 2010, Installation**



Cortège of the Third Realm, 2010, Installation



Anno Domini, 2011, Installation



Whispering Kala, 2011, installation and performance



Third Realm, 2011, Installation (detail shot)





Family Chronicles, 2011, Photographs

The history of Indonesian culture, as part of the Third World and former colonized countries, can be read as narratives of a nation that is perpetually in an “in-between” situation or state of transition. From pre-colonial to colonial periods, colonial to post-colonial, agrarian culture to industrial one, from industrial to post-industrial (information era that gives weight to informations and services), from rural culture and cosmology to the urban ones.

In a nutshell, the history of Indonesian culture is an “in-between” cultural history. A culture that is located between two cultural spaces: between the traditional and the modern, the original and the alien, the inside and the outside, the high brow and the low brow. It never (again?) stays and grows inside one cultural space that is specific and sharply different from another specific culture. It builds on a mix (and excess) of cultures. Its “body” is constituted by many different cultural layers.

As a cultural entity Indonesia is never singular, but the in-betweenness and the transitional conditions have become the overarching and constructing frame covering all the (sub)cultures within.

The questions then arise: How are subjects or spaces formed ‘in between’, or in excess of, the sum of the parts of difference? How do the notion of subjectivity and spatiality be formulated where the exchange of values, meanings and priorities may not always be collaborative and dialogical, but may be profoundly antagonistic, conflictual and even incommensurable?

Referring to the spatial realities and identity formulation created, developing and persisting in Java, the answers to the questions could be perceived from the creation of third realities; third space, third body or identity. Third reality is a hybrid reality. A reality made from a blend of many things. Third reality is a post-colonial/third world/Indonesian reality composed from elements that are contradictory to each other, unfinished, half-done, confusing and transitional or liminal.

As a metaphor, the third reality is a temporary and flexible term that attempts to capture what is actually a constantly shifting and changing milieu of ideas, events, performances and meanings.

Pertinent to the understanding of the metaphors is the insight that there is not just one single definition of body and identity but rather a multitude of approaches and perspectives.

Meanwhile, today, the world is increasingly a rhizomatic world. Creeping and connecting all things almost in an instant, in a speed like ever before. Nothing is singular anymore. Nothing is ever singular again.



Family Chronicles, 2011, Photographs

There could not be any wall to such world. Roof is the only shelter; the only illusion of identity that we could grasp.

Because, the “space” under the roof is constructed by a constantly shifting and changing milieu of ideas, events, performances and meanings. The space of “in-between”, where issues about origins, influences and identity could be discussed simultaneously without privileging one over the other.

In Java’s case: where one can be a Muslim (or any other religion) and a Javanese at the same time; local and global; modern and traditional. Where one is something in-between different things.

As Homi K Babha once said: “The ‘in-between’ space provides the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood –singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself.”

‘Culture’ in Indonesia, as may be also the case in any other part of this rhizomatic world, also can be seen as some sort of *carnival*; A celebration, a space, where the narratives of origins, confluences, amalgamations and different identities are accepted without favoring one to the other; A celebration of moments and processes that are created within the web of contesting cultures, that are in perpetual negotiations, which change and shape realities.



Family Chronicles, 2011, Photographs



The Liminal, 2011, installation



Third Realm, 2010, Installation



Body of God, 2010, single channel video



## Selected Early Works (2000-2006)

### Garden Of the Blind

Was a group of young artists with various skills background, produced multimedia performances actively during 1999 - 2002. Musics, sounds, video and mechanical objects were freely composed into a playful theatrical performance.

It was the earliest years of Jompét as a visual artist. Working collaboratively with some Indonesian today's iconic artists such as Venzha Christiawan (House of Natural Fiber) and Muhammad Marzuki (Kill the DJ)



Glorified, 2001, Performance







Ultra Output Project, 2002, Performance





Mini resistances, 2007, Performance

**Participatory.** Such style of arts dominated Jompet's works during the years of 2003 – 2005.

Exploring the issue of connection between 'oneself and others', the art works become a space to experience a unique interaction between individuals. *One Hour to be other (2003-2005)* and *Cross Personal Respiratory (2005)* are the projects.



**One Hour To Be Other, 2003, interactive installation**

## One Hour To Be Other

This work invites people to experience an extreme situation of 'self openness'. Through a pair of electronic head gears, a couple of visitors will find their eyesight electronically exchanged.

One person is fully having other's sight, while in the same time he/she is absolutely losing his/her own sight. And through an communication tool – the couple need to talk and inform each other about '**their reality**'. Each is disabled, and fully dependent one to the other. The authority of body is dismissed and the identity is blurred. Various game playings is designed to explore the interaction. For example, the participants are ordered to meet each other through solving the enigmatic labyrinth by guiding each other.





**One Hour To Be Other**, 2003, interactive installation

## Cross Personal Respiratory

The project is simulating the idea of risk management. Two participants are invited to breath from a single oxygen tube. By a mechanical valves, this two participants won't be able to breathe together in the same time, they have to breath by turns, in doing so they have to manage their rhythm of breathing. Meanwhile, they are ordered to finish such an electronic puzzle. The puzzle is electronically connected to the valve, so when participants finish the puzzle, the valve will move to such a way so the participant can take a breath together in the same time.



Cross Personal Respiratory, 2005, Interactive installation



# Dance and theater Performances



**Waktu Batu**, 2004, Theater Performance  
Collaborative work with Teater Garasi Indonesia





**King's Witch**, 2006, Contemporary Opera  
Collaborative work with Gunawan Muhammad and Tony Prabowo



Garibaba and the strange world, 2009, dance performance  
Collaborative work with Pappatarahumara Dance Company Japan





**Third Bodies, On Embracing the In-Between, 2010, dance theatre performance, in collaboration with Yudi Ahmad Tajudin**

## Selected Quotes

The war he now fights is not one of cataclysmic conflicts,  
but one that synthesises differences  
in the battle to preserve Javanese culture.

*The Business Times*

This form of mixing and matching is not only a coping mechanism,  
but has become the core identity of the Indonesian people

....

The work is an apt footnote to the artist's own effort to reconcile  
the past and present, and to help his country to negotiate  
a constantly evolving society.

*South China Morning Post*

It is a very complex and layered work which addresses issues that are fundamental  
and relevant to our times in a very interactive way.

*Eugene Tan*

Using the history of Java as a departure, Jompet hints at the complexity  
of living in today's world, especially when globalisation has created more and more contradiction in the cultural concepts and values.

*Surface Magazine*

# Curriculum Vitae

## EDUCATION

1995-1999 Gadjah Mada University, Faculty of Social and Politics Science, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

## SOLO EXHIBITION

- 2011 **Third Realm**, Independent project at 54<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy
- 2011 **Java's Machine: Family Chronicle**, Selasar Sunaryo, Bandung
- 2010 **Third Realm**, Para-site Art Space, Hongkong
- 2010 **Java's Machine: Phantasmagoria**, Osage Gallery, Hongkong
- 2009 **Java's Machine: Phantasmagoria**, Osage Gallery, Singapore
- 2008 **Java's Machine: Phantasmagoria**, Cemeti Art House, Yogyakarta

## SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2011 **Jakarta Biennale**, National Gallery, Jakarta
- Jogjakarta Biennale XI**, Jogja National Museum, Jogjakarta
- Global Contemporary, Art Movement Since 1989**, ZKM Karlsruhe, Germany
- Indonesian - Eye**, Saatchi Gallery, London
- Ekspansi**, Galeri National, Jakarta
- Motion / Sensation**, Edwin Gallery, Jakarta
- Trans-Figuration: Indonesian mythologies**, Espace Culturel Louis Vuitton, Paris
- Negotiating Home, Nation and History**, Singapore Art Museum, Singapore
- Closing the Gap**, MIFA, Melbourne
- Influx**, Ruang Rupa, Jakarta
- 2010 **Mental Archieve**, Cemeti Art House, Yogyakarta
- Kuandu Biennale**, Kuandu museum of fine arts, Taiwan
- Art Forte**, Gana art Center, Seoul
- Media Landscape, Zone East**, Contemporary Urban Culture, Liverpool
- Contemporaneity**, Shanghai Museum of Contemporary Art, China
- Loss of the Real**, Selasar Sunaryo Art Space, Bandung
- Asia Art Award Exhibition**, Seoul Olympic Museum of Art, Seoul, South Korea
- The Tradition of The New**, Shaksi Gallery, Mumbai
- 2009 **Jogjakarta Biennale X**, Jogja National Museum, Jogjakarta
- Beyond the dutch**, Centraal Museum Utrecht, The Netherlands
- 10<sup>th</sup> Lyon Biennale**, Musee d'art contemporaine, Lyon, France
- Perang, Kata dan Rupa**, Salihara Gallery, Jakarta
- Tradition of the New**, Sakshi Gallery, Taipei

- Magnetic Power**, Coreana Museum of Arts, Seoul, Korea  
**Biennale Cuvee**, OK Offenes Kulturhaus Oberosterreich, Austria  
**Kompilasi**, Bus Gallery, Melbourne  
**Jakarta Biennale**, Indonesian National Gallery, Jakarta  
2008 **Yokohama Triennale**, Yokohama, Japan  
**Landing Soon**, Group exhibition, Erasmus Huis, Jakarta  
**Manifesto**, Group Exhibition, National Gallery, Jakarta  
2007 **Jogjakarta Biennale**, Taman Budaya Yogyakarta  
**'Equatorial Rhythms'**, Stenersen Museum, Oslo, Norway  
**'OK Video #3, MILITIA'**, Indonesian National Gallery, Jakarta  
**'Anti Aging'**, Gaya Fusion Art, Ubud-Bali  
2005 **Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale**, Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Japan  
**CP Bienalle**, Indonesian Bank Museum, Jakarta  
**Revolution Ugly, No Beauty**, Cemeti Arts House, Yogyakarta  
2004 **Insomnia 48**, Arts House, Singapore  
**Move on Asia**, SBS 1<sup>st</sup> Floor Atrium, Korea  
**Artscope**, Selasar Sunaryo Artspace, Bandung  
**Identities vs Globalization**, Chiang Mai art Museum, Bangkok National Art Gallery, Dahlem Museum, Berlin  
2003 **Transit, 8 views of Indonesia**, Umbrella Studio Contemporary Arts, Australia  
**Urban Art Project**, Subway Stations, Melbourne, Australia  
2002 **Worm Fest III**, Plastique Kinetic Worms, Singapore

#### THEATRE AND DANCE PERFORMANCE

- 2010 **Third Bodies, On Embracing the in-between**, collaborated with Yudi Ahmad Tajudin and Teater Garasi.  
2009 **'Garibaba's Strange World'**, Dance Theatre with Pappa Tarahumara and Hiroshi Koike  
2006 **'King's Witch'**, a contemporary orchestra with Tony Prabowo and Garasi Theatre Laboratory  
**'Mnemosyne'**, Collaborative work of Kunauka Theatre Company Tokyo and Garasi Theatre Laboratory  
2002 - 2004 **'WAKTU BATU' Series**, Theatre performance by Garasi Theatre Laboratory.

#### HONORS AND AWARDS

- 2011 **Lecturis Award Finalist**, Art Amsterdam, The Netherlands  
2010 **Asia Art Award Finalist**, Loop Gallery, Seoul, South Korea  
2008 **Academic Art Award**, Yogyakarta Institute of Art, Yogyakarta

#### RESIDENCY

- 2010 Geumcheon Art Space, Seoul, South Korea  
2007 Cemeti Art House, Yogyakarta  
2006 Kawasaki Factory, Japan



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