

To understand Augustinus Kuswidananto's art, one need look no further than his family background. The Indonesian artist's grandmother is an animist, his father a Catholic and he practises "a very negotiated" Javanese form of Christianity.

Kuswidananto – better known as Jompjet – goes to Mass, but whenever he passes through a jungle or a cemetery he will quietly mutter, "Excuse me, please let me pass" – a local animist practice.

The 33-year-old says most Javanese are like him: although they are required to put their religion on their ID cards, religion is not actually an important part of their lives. Many Javanese mix and match religions and cultures, arriving at an integrated blend of personal beliefs – what the artist calls a "third reality".

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

The artist sees this syncretism, or the attempt to reconcile disparate or contrary beliefs, as a strength of the Javanese people. Given Indonesia's dynamic history, its ability to reconcile different ideas is essential. Ethnically, Indonesia is highly diverse, with more than 300 local languages; historically, it was a Dutch colony that was briefly occupied by the Japanese before gaining independence; religiously, it was dominated by Buddhism and Hinduism before the rule of its first Muslim king in the 1500s.

This socio-cultural pluralism also forms the backbone of his latest solo exhibition, entitled *Java's Machine: Phantasmagoria*, at Osage Kwun Tong gallery in Kowloon.

The title alludes to the idea that Javanese culture can only continue to prosper when it is fuelled by interactions and negotiations of different foreign cultures.

One installation shows a king of Java facing an incoming group of figures adorned with an Islamic minaret. A voice recording on the king's body repeats a Javanese saying, religion is only a piece of clothing. The piece, *Marry Us*,



Photo: Oliver Tsang

ARTS

Ghosts in the machine

Javanese artist Jompjet mirrors Indonesia's dynamic blend of disparate cultures and beliefs in his latest exhibition, writes **Han Yan Yuen**

makes reference to how Indonesia adapted Islam into local cultures.

In *New Myth for New Family*, the artist reconstructs a family tree described in a Javanese historical manuscript, where the first Muslim king in Indonesia legitimise his rule in a country formerly dominated by Hinduism and Buddhism by tracing his own lineage back to Adam and Eve. The names on the family tree are engraved onto models of buzzing bugs, reminding viewers of cicadas that come and go with the seasons.

"[In Javanese society] there is contact and interaction and

negotiation with different cultures. This process is always opposed to the idea of fundamentalism and, on the other end of the extreme, globalisation, because fundamentalism and globalisation both assume that everyone is the same and refuse to acknowledge their differences," Jompjet says.

The artist's works may suggest a tolerant Indonesian society, but with continued conflicts in Aceh and East Timor, car bomb attacks in Jakarta and the two Bali bombings that killed more than 200 people, the international community saw quite a different picture.

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

Jompjet explains that his works are more anthropological than political. He says he encountered a tolerant society in his historical research and found much evidence that points to an open-minded culture. But he is also acutely aware of the rise of fundamentalism in his country.

"It is my personal question: why, with a rooted culture in negotiation, have people changed and lost their roots?"

The centrepiece of his exhibition, *Java, the War of Ghosts*, is an installation of the Javanese Royal Army, a ceremonious troop that lost its military functions during the Dutch colonisation. Everything about the army is loaded with symbols, says Jompjet, with each piece of clothing telling a long history of cultural syncretism. The army wears Buddhist-influenced Aceh hats, Javanese overcoats and waistbands with Western belts, and

marches to a Dutch marching band music with a distinct Javanese flavour.

In Jompjet's interpretation, these soldiers appear only as their costumes without a physical body – a phantom army in a stationary parade.

"What happens in fundamentalism is the issue is trying to occupy your body to benefit from it. If you cannot negotiate this power, you will lose yourself," says Jompjet. "Nowadays, it's a war of symbols and the battlefield is your body. It's a fight for your life."

Jompjet's hometown, Yogyakarta City, has a history rich in arts and culture, and is a hub for contemporary artists.

He says thousands of artists live in the Yogyakarta region where exhibition openings can easily attract several hundred art lovers. "It's like a big neighbourhood where all the artists know each other."

The artist says although he's always had a close network of friends and family, he felt distanced from society when he was a student because he lacked knowledge of his roots and of Java's constantly changing culture. That is what first prompted him to examine Java's cultural history.

In a video piece, *War of Java, Do you Remember? #2*, a solitary man performs a ritualised dance in an old sugar cane factory surrounded by machines. When the Dutch first introduced machinery into



Indonesia, sugar cane farmers invented a ceremony to be performed before they started the mills. Jompjet says by including the idea of a machine in local cosmology and mythology, the Javanese people took a crucial step towards accepting an alien future.

The artist sees this as another example of how Indonesian people are constantly reinventing themselves.

"Maybe it's a sign that Indonesian people are creative and are always negotiating incoming

influences, but I am not trying to generalise," says Jompjet. "Not everyone is winning the war."

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

Java's Machine: Phantasmagoria, Osage Kwun Tong until Aug 22. Opening hours: daily (including public holidays), 10am-7pm. 5/F, Kian Dai Industrial Building, 73-75 Hung To Rd, Kwun Tong. Inquiries: 2793 4817



Java, the War of Ghosts (left); *Marry Us* and *New Myth for New Family* (far right) by Jompjet (top) reflect attempts by Indonesian people to reinvent themselves by absorbing other cultures and beliefs. Photos: Jompjet

Life

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SOUTH CHINA MORNING POST TUESDAY, JULY 27, 2010

REVIEWS

When Sushi Meets Wasabi
Pip Theatre
Shouson Theatre, HK Arts Centre
Reviewed: Jul 24

Love has been likened to many things, from wildflowers (it's often found in the most unlikely places) to war (it's easy to begin but hard to end).

Actors Tyson Chak Hoi-tai and Harriet Yeung Sze-man (left), creators of this new Pip Theatre production, compare love to sushi because, despite its wide variety, it's not to everyone's taste.

Directed by Jim Chim Sui-man, *When Sushi Meets Wasabi* is a series of sketches and vignettes that look at modern love through the eyes of the post-70s generation; some have been through the marriage and divorce cycle at least once to be cynical about what they call "that yucky thing".

"This is your story!" exclaim Chak

and Yeung, both in their mid-30s, before taking the audience through one disastrous date after another in the opening act.

The pair also explore the realm of teenage sexual fantasy in their hilarious take on the *Twilight* movies (below), with Yeung playing the angst-ridden Bella pursued by Chak's hormonal, goofy Jacob. Do people grow out of sexual rejection and hang-ups from their teen years?

In the most memorable sketch, a couple invite their friends and relatives to their "divorce ceremony", which proceeds exactly like a Hong Kong wedding feast. The

sketch ends with both destroying all the important reminders of their relationship, which is both sad and powerful.

When Sushi Meets Wasabi laughs at how inadequate young Hongkongers are as lovers and the possible reasons behind it. It's all pretty predictable stuff but because Chak and Yeung are such strong performers, their clichéd tales of woe still manage to engage and entertain. The two-hour show could do with some editing to give it greater emotional impact.

Kevin Kwong



Java's Machine: Phantasmagoria
Osage Kwun Tong
Until Aug 2

Crossed by centuries of external religious and commercial influence and those adapted from elsewhere. The continuing series *Java's Machine: Phantasmagoria* by Indonesian artist Augustinus Kuswidananto, known as Jompjet, revels in this cultural mixing through elaborately detailed installations.

Indonesia has one of the longest traditions of contemporary art in Asia, going back to the 1970s and 80s with artists such as FX Harsono (a founding member of the Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru, or New Art Movement), Jim Supangkat and later Heri Dono. Jompjet continues this relationship. While his work is surely informed by Indonesian politics, religion and cultural history, it is also filled with a knowing connection to global art trends.

Beautifully constructed, filled

with slippery signifiers and objects revealing Indonesia's many cultural influences, the show still feels detached. Jompjet sees his work (including *Third Bodies # 5*, right) as more anthropological than directly critical and this is played out in the craftsmanship – the work is well made and meticulously installed – and the aesthetics of historic/cultural exhibitions, mapped on to the artist's own quirky mixing.

It is this tension that is at issue. As he attempts feigned anthropological objectivity, the aesthetics of the work are countered by the coolness of the installation itself – the rather bright lighting, white walls and preciousness of everything.

There is then a kind of "self-exoticisation" that coupled with a museum-like quality, supports his efforts to remain balanced but might seem to work against much of the emotive nature the work seems intent on. Yet, Jompjet pulls all this together with confidence and style.

Java's Machine offers us a glimpse into a vivid and dynamic art scene that we rarely have access to. The cavernous spaces of the Osage



gallery may not be perfect for this kind of work, but it is a breath of fresh air to see contemporary Indonesian art in Hong Kong of this quality and complexity.

Norman Ford

Interview

Jompet

The musician-turned conceptual artist talks to **Anna Calinawan** about Indonesia as a nation that absorbs rather than fights its enemies

How do you arm invisible soldiers? With this question in mind, Indonesian artist Augustinus Kuswidananto a.k.a. Jompet explores the cultural power dynamics of his home island of Java in his first solo exhibition in Hong Kong. In the 2009 installation piece, *Java, the War of Ghosts*, a line of soldiers face forward, with their guns held high and their drums beating hard. They are all, however, bodiless. Their suspended uniforms, a blend of Dutch and Javanese garb, are the only markers of their presence. For Jompet, Javanese power lies in this symbolic presence – the island's historic ability to negotiate its cultural identity by appropriating the symbols of its colonisers.

Your background was in politics and music. What led you to become an artist?

I was bored with the traditional way of music. So I started to make more experimental music; I used my body movement to generate music. Then one day, a visual arts curator invited me to perform in Singapore. I didn't study in an art school. In Indonesia, it's almost impossible for you to rely on the university. So I learned from the community. I become an assistant for some established artists at the time. I tried to read what they read, and I tried to copy a little bit from what they do. That is the way I learned to be an artist.

Can you tell us a little about your exhibition?

This exhibition is inspired by the history of Indonesia, in terms of having contact with different cultures in the past. Java culture has found a way to negotiate the incoming culture. They've found a strategy called syncretism. [Java's religion] is the basic form of this syncretism. Islam in Java is very different. It has more influence from Hinduism, from Buddhism – it's really not Arabic Islam. Christianity in Java is also syncretised with the local wisdom and local religion. It's something happening everywhere in the world; for Java, the way they negotiate the incoming cultures has become the core of their own culture.

Why the exhibition title, *Phantasmagoria*?

Phantasmagoria is a magic lantern. It's like a series of images, a show of images. In this work, I use the term to point out that the identity of a culture is like a series of symbols, like a show of symbols. How they present these symbols is the basis of their culture.

"Indonesia is always in transition"

Can you talk about the single-channel video piece, *War of Java, Do You Remember #2?*

This was shot in an old sugar cane factory. It's a Dutch-built factory in Java. There's a scene of a man traditional street-dancing between machinery. The sugar cane factory is the first machinery that came to Java. It's a symbol of the first modernism and industrialism in Java. This man's



Soldier of time Jompet among his installation piece, *Java, the War of Ghosts*

street-dancing is a performance to invite the spirit of the ancestors. So the idea is how Javanese culture negotiates the industrialisation at the time. What they did was put the incoming machinery together with the mythology of the ancestors. This is the way Javanese culture accepts the change of time: by putting the future and the past together.

Why are you especially interested in this phenomenon?

I like the state of transitions, looking back to the history of Indonesia. There are transitions from enemies to religion, from Hindu to Islam, from agriculture

to industrialisation, from colonial to post-colonial. It's still going on now. Indonesia is always in transition.

In your work, the body seems to be always absent.

The idea is that [the] identification of an identity depends on your imagination, or the construction of it. The presence of the body always changes. Like liquid things, it changes any time. So this [exhibition] is a space for people to imagine.

Java's Machine: *Phantasmagoria* by Jompet is at *Osage Kwun Tong* until Aug 22.

Review

Spectral Evidence

★★★★★

1a Space Until September 6

New York-based artist and curator Steven Lam has created a rudimentary map to guide the viewer around his Asian Cultural Council funded show, *Spectral Evidence*. Without the small, black and white topographical chaperone, the viewer would be at sea, wandering from artist to artist without an obvious sense of the direction of the show. If a viewer saunters into the beautiful and considerable interior of 1a Space without this essential guide, the lack of wall tags indicating who the art is by, or what it is called, is utterly disorientating.

This expectation on the viewer



Blurred history Sreshta Rit Premnath's *Ekphrasis (Recto/Verso)*

to rouse their dilatory powers of deduction is somewhat intentional, with Lam stating that he wanted to create the atmosphere of being present at a "crime scene". There is certainly a sense of fragmentation. It is refreshing



not to have every detail spoon-fed to a usually indulged audience. They must work. Each piece seems to be a clue to a larger ideal. The ethos and intention of Sreshta Rit Premnath's ethereal studies of stone statues are illusive and

subsequently curious.

Tomorrow I Leave (2010) and *Even the Trees Would Leave* (2005), combinations of installation and video work by collaborative artist Lin + Lam, depict images from former Vietnamese refugee camps in Malaysia and Hong Kong respectively. Photographic postcards are placed among stones, string and wood chips on white, waist-height plinths in the centre of the gallery. They offer abstract glimpses into a solemn forgotten world but the awkward height of their stands limit the visual impact. It is their position on the cusp of a really powerful cohesive message that embodies the entire show. *Mary Agnew*

Battling against convention

Two artists wage a war on pop culture, politics and social change. **EMILYN ANG** reports

MUTILATION, gore and slabs of burnt flesh. This brand of figurative art could well be termed brutal, but 31-year-old Filipino artist Louie Cordero seems genuinely surprised by this description. "How I operate is that I get images and words I have a fascination with." Drawing, he notes, "is merely an exercise that expresses what I think about the time."

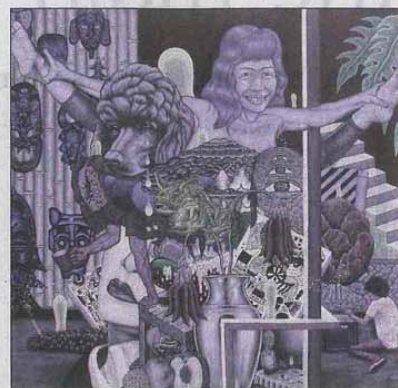
These creations are phantasmagoric, haphazardly associative imagery that Cordero had captured in a somewhat feverish frenzy. The result? Biomorphous shapes that celebrate the ugliness of pop culture and discordant images that grapple with sexuality and the complexities of the human soul.

Twisted beauty

Soft Death, his first solo exhibition at Osage Gallery, features 14 works of dismemberment, blood and gore that pay tribute to grotesque art, a Roman tradition that celebrates twisted beauty.

Inherently spontaneous creations assault the senses, functioning as anti-cultural objects. Clearly, Cordero's battle is one against convention. He challenges the status quo by taking what is considered low art - popular imagery, and illustration - distorting and placing it in a high-art context of a drawing or a painting. Everything else is left to chance, the only reality is one of fantasy. Drawings go untitled, while forms and shapes distort themselves in frighteningly freakish ways.

This surrealist theme prevails through the rest of the exhibition, with some of Cordero's works going straight for point-blank sensationalism - *Acoustic Volcano* is a case in



War battles: Jompet's *Java, the War of Ghosts* (left) is the centrepiece installation that tells a tale of lost military power. Cordero's *'Acoustic Volcano'* (above) is a case of point-blank sensationalism

point. "I wanted to create a painting that sort of transcends sound through images," he notes.

Several disparate images - a female form that dangerously bubbles volcanic sexual energy within while a teenage boy sits in a corner, playing nonchalantly with a boom box. A black dwarf sleeps peacefully in the corner, having taken a bite from the poisoned apple as a petrified onlooker realises he has to cannibalise to survive, alluding to the dog-eat-dog world in which we live in.

A steady blackening of pop culture can also be seen in *It was Pitch Black, the Blackest Black I've Ever Known*. Michael Jackson stands as a nostalgic artifact of the late super-pop star era against other fantastical elements which characterise the artist's work. "There's a traditional belief that whenever there's

an eclipse, weird things will happen," Cordero explains with a laugh. And ice-creams melting against the heat of the sun fit perfectly into this surrealist theme.

While Cordero wages a war on traditional notions of beauty, convention and the anti-thesis of culture, 33-year-old Indonesia artist Jompet battles binary opposites in his solo exhibition, *Java's Machine: Phantasmagoria*.

Patchwork heritage

He attempts to reconcile disparate points of cultural reference brought forth by Java's patchwork heritage. "The culture of Java developed through interactions, negotiations and transactions with many different foreign cultures... it then become the 'fuel' to run the 'machine' of Javanese culture," explains Jompet.

His work can be read as a discourse on post-colonialism and globalisation, anchored in history and civilisation. "After Java was lost from the Dutch in the last and biggest war in 19th century, the Dutch started to fully intervene in cultural and political affairs of Javanese kingdoms. Since then, Java's royal army had no more military function. There was no physical war to fight anymore for Java's royal army."

This is particularly evident in *Java, The War of Ghosts*, the centrepiece installation that tells a tale of lost military power. Invisible soldiers exist only as a symbol of ceremonial parade, standing in formation, aloof, and ready for battle. Their drumming is synchronised with the electronic sonic orchestra running through a five-minute video installation, *War of Java: Do you Remember?* "I built a simple electronic sensor reacting to the audioline of the video and from it, the mechanical sticks of the drums are controlled," explains Jompet.

Here, the artist uses technology to bridge tradition and modernity. "If you want to change the culture or way of living, you have to deal with the speed of time." The war he now fights is not one of cataclysmic conflicts, but one that synthesises differences in the battle to preserve Javanese culture. These visuals raise political questions and that's fine for the artist. "This kind of war, I'm sure, is everybody's war."

Two solo exhibitions - *'Soft Death'* by Louie Cordero and *Java's Machine: Phantasmagoria* by Jompet are now showing at Osage Gallery until Dec 27. Admission is free.



Tribute to grotesque art: Cordero's drawings go untitled, while forms and shapes distort themselves in frighteningly freakish ways



Colonial domination is a theme in the installation *Java, The War Of Ghosts* (left), where soldiers appear in Western hats, coats and boots but without their bodies and march to an Eastern drum beat. PHOTOS: OSAGE SINGAPORE

View it

JAVA'S MACHINE: PHANTASMAGORIA

Where: Osage Singapore, 01-12, 11B Mount Sophia
When: Till Dec 27, 10am to 7pm (daily including public holidays)
Info: Call 6337-9909 or go to www.osagegallery.com

A video titled *War Of Java, Do You Remember?* No. 2 (below) depicts the clash of old and new. It shows a Javanese dancer performing a traditional trance dance in a sugar cane factory, set up by the Dutch and a symbol of modernity.

Soldiers of misfortune

The colonial and religious influences that shaped Indonesia are explored in mixed-media installations

deepika shetty

A former Indonesian stage performer who has developed an international reputation as an experimental artist says a music festival in Singapore nine years ago set him on his road to visual arts success.

Jompet, whose real name is Augustinus Kuswidananto, has an exhibition, titled *Java's Machine: Phantasmagoria*, on now at Osage gallery.

On show are his mixed-media installations involving electronic equipment and models of soldiers as well as video works.

Some of the works on display here have been shown in Japan, Austria and France.

For the 33-year-old Javanese artist, who studied physics and politics at the Gadjah Mada University in Yogyakarta before drifting into music - playing in a band - and theatre, all of this has been a dream come true.

The self-taught artist tells *Life!*: "I never thought I would be an artist. In 2000, I was invited to do a sound performance at the Singapore Music Festival. That was the starting point for me. For the first time I looked at my work as an artwork."

Enter his thought-provoking exhibition split over two rooms and you encounter a lifeless tree surrounded by noisy mechanical insects.

The idea behind this involves exploring the various influences - for example, Dutch colonial and religious - that entered and shaped Java.

Titled *New Myth For New Family*, this is actually a historical "family tree" exploring Indonesia's family of religions. It looks at the advent of Islam in what was once a predominantly Hindu and Buddhist culture.

The cacophony of buzzing insects

leads the viewer into an even more dramatic room, where a CD plays drum beats.

The mixed-media installation, titled *Java, The War Of Ghosts*, features phantom royal soldiers, who appear as hats, coats and ankle-length shoes but minus their bodies.

The uniforms are those of a Western army, yet the drum beat they march to has a distinctively Eastern sound.

Through this, Jompet explores the cultures and beliefs encountered by his motherland.

He extends that exploration in another installation work titled *Marry Us*, where soldiers surround phantom Muslim dignitaries who are meeting a Hindu Javanese king.

Taking *Life!* on a walk through his exhibition, the animated artist often dwells on the word "pure".

"Nothing in this world is pure," he says. "We are all products of different influences and different cultures and the test is how we embrace these differences."



Adding to the sound and fury of the marching soldiers is the dramatic video projection of a bare-breasted dancer cracking a whip.

Titled *War Of Java, Do You Remember?* No. 2, it shows a Javanese dancer performing kuda lumping, a traditional trance dance, inside a sugar cane factory. The video was shot in the Madukismo factory, an early plant set up in Java.

"I was looking for a connection with the past and this seemed like a good fit. Sugar cane factories were the first factories the Dutch introduced in Indonesia," he says.

Such factories were viewed as symbols

of modernity and Jompet wanted to raise questions about traditions co-existing with modernity.

Speaking about the significance of his work, Osage's exhibitions director Eugene Tan, 36, says: "I felt it was important to show Jompet's work to audiences in Singapore. It is a very complex and layered work which addresses issues that are fundamental and relevant to our times in a very interactive way."

"He explores the clash of cultures and that of modernity and tradition as well, and he does it in a very engaging manner."

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War and Ghosts

Java's Machine: Phantasmagoria at Osage Singapore

By Rofan Teo



Jompet, 'Java, the War of Ghosts'

With 2009 coming to an end, Obama shores up the American military surge against Afghanistan from uniting NATO and its other allies to deploy army reinforcements, as economists weather the global financial storm. While wars are waging elsewhere in the world, a military campaign marked by synchronic rhythm of drumming is not far from home. Housed at Osage Gallery, this was the latest offering at the solo show by Jompet, an Indonesian artist, whose haunting staging of a battery of military ornaments converting into invisible soldiers, among other of his installations, is paired with the ghoulish world of Philippine artist, Louie Cordero.

Commenting about the tensions of objects and history, Sebald, the German writer, claims that though objects manifest history, memories previously embodying the objects turn into oblivion as the human body expires. Seemingly forgotten are the re-activated Lombok chilli, the royal guards of the Yogyakarta Sultanate fully decked in military garb, armaments, red flags to the boot standing erect in a military formation in Java the War of Ghosts. The regiment consists purely of objects suspended from the ceiling, which existence is made palpable by their automated strikes of the drums, connoting a constant illusion of marching forward, without ambulating. The sounds of drums are timed simultaneously with the man continuously lashing the ground with a cloth whip in a video, whose repeated actions highlight the stationery army. Who and what are they fighting? In synchrony, the upbeat and powerful roars of the instruments vault the bygone grandeur of the army, a boastful utterance that does not carry beyond the gallery. The recurrence of anonymous and allusions to death and past in the entire exhibition Java's Machine: Phantasmagoria might suggest an indictment of heinous crimes in wars and Suharto's regime. Yet, there are not even implicit testimonies of victim sufferings and political satires, but an ambivalent collective of consciousness towards the events might have unfolded in the past.

In another video installation Pilgrims and plagues #1, people are shown in silhouettes holding up weather cocks, that quickly shift to the wind direction, wondering with anticipation for people from the West who are rumoured to have entered their lands. It could be an allegory to the colonial history of Indonesia, where including Java fell into Dutch hands in the 18th century. However, since Indonesia did become a Dutch colony, the video sheds little light to the colonial past, instead while shuttling from myths and reality, it questions the existence of the West as a construct. This polarizes the colonisers and the subjugated people, though fictionalized in a vague settings, the westerners could be located as neither foes nor friends.

Goenawan Mohamad, the prominent Indonesian writer wrote that forgetting the discrepancies galvanise the building of a nation which was made of pluralistic cultures. Like Java the War of Ghosts, the lack of partisans is a unified chorus in the whole exhibition shifting from remembering and forgetting. Of note, is another video installation titling War of Java, do you remember? which features a sugar farmer performing a dance ritual in a factory. The ritual was created to link machines with the larger cosmology of the world when the Dutch merchants installed sugar factories in Java in the 19th century. While the video shows Western technologies co-existing with traditions, in an ironical twist to the title spelling conventionally chaos and disorder, New myth for new family, the latest installation of Jompet on the re-imagining of the modern Indonesia, remain impartial to the politics of Indonesia but a loud declaration of myth and stories. Here, a tree of buzzing digitized insects, consisting of found objects, including wire mesh and metal tags, are made flesh once again by sounds evoking from flapping of their wings. The creatures are at once inferring to solemn gravestones and fashionably engraved nametags, implied the mythologized narratives of those who are peopling Indonesia.

While the search for truth in events drew blank and provoke further questioning in Java's Machine, the collective works of Louie Cordero in Soft Death directly confronts our society's obsession with beauty, fame and wealth in the material culture. Instead of lush splendor and air-brushed perfection, the artist deftly exposes a parallel universe showing the dark underbelly of our world, infested by decay anatomies, skulls, eerie Frankenstein monsters, cannibalism and grotesque masturbation. Human anatomies and features in his works are mere facades that peel away and rapidly fester with mean entangling intestines, bones and maggots. A posthumous drawing of Michael Jackson portrays a looming badge of fame – weary eyed and frail, whose iconic status cripple life more than feeds it. In the work I have seen the truth but it doesn't make any sense, depicts a blood thirsty woman savagely devouring a bird, who is surrounded by her preys spouting assumingly adages or slogans including 'They are all about the vitality of gesture speed and action', and 'A drone clash of esoteric belief systems'. Their pending death signifies the birds as possible martyrs of essential but ugly truths, as the idealistic world of popular culture and celebrities blurs and dissolves into decrepitude, though they are hardly bedfellows.

Shifting between life and death, material and immaterial, fiction and reality, as well as remembering and forgetting, the two solos give pause to contemplate about world events this year. It locates us, not in spirituality, but a larger overarching narrative we might universally experience in the post-colonial and globalised context. As Barenboim, the renowned conductor might say 'Certain matters require the generosity of forgetfulness and others demand the honesty of remembrance'. Possibly, to move forward means occasionally lifting the weight of history, and to put a certain past behind us, while celebrating the plurality of things.

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Interview with Jompjet

DIAAALOGUE Editor Susan Acret spoke to Indonesian artist Jompjet about his home of Yogyakarta, his Yokohama Triennial work and the idea of 'Javanese Syncretism'.

Susan Acret: Your work often features sound and is somewhere between music performance and art installation. I understand you worked as a freelance cameraman/video editor, and your background is in music. How do you define your practice?

Jompjet: A very long time ago I worked as cameraman and video editor. Sometimes I make documentary films for social movement purposes, but now I work as a full time artist.

Ten years back I was not in art school, I was a musician, I joined many kinds of art communities; I was involved in many multidisciplinary art projects. My music and sound performances were then curated and performed in many visual art events. Then I found myself a visual artist.

I experienced how in a country like Indonesia, which doesn't have a proper education infrastructure, informal communities become very important and effective for the younger generation to learn something and to present their practice. Especially in my hometown of Yogyakarta, where community-based organization networks are growing massively, it's almost impossible to be unconnected.

I work freely for my arts, I use many kind of mediums, I talk about many issues, I work independently and collaboratively. I am also affiliated with some non-art communities like eco-social movement groups.

SA: You often incorporate elements of the Gamelan orchestra, and in your work *Garden of the Blind* figures sometimes resemble contemporary wayang puppets, hooked up to electronic sensors that react when the body moves. Tell us about the influence of traditional Indonesian culture in your work.

J: If you come to the city of Yogyakarta, you will see that various cultural values meet and mix or interact in parallel to build the social-cultural landscape of the city. I am really inspired by how Javanese people absorb these values and then produce a unique way of living.

I really do live and learn from the tension between traditional-modern, old-new, mystical-scientific issues of Javanese culture today. This kind of dialectic is the spirit of my artworks and the history behind the objects and the techniques I use in my work shows this tension.

SA: Can you explain your idea about 'Javanese syncretism' and also tell us about your work for the 2008 Yokohama Triennial, *Java's Machine: Phantasmagoria*.

J: The history of Java is a history of intersections, contestations, juxtapositions and negotiations between different beliefs and values. Java has been in contact with Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, European Colonialism, Christianity and modernity. Instead of opposing incoming cultures and religions, the Javanese were thought to have taken everything as necessary ingredients to form a new synthesis: a basic Javanese syncretism. This 'system' became the island's true folk tradition. The 'fuel' of its civilization. The 'machine' of its culture.

Syncretism then became a strategy for Javanese 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 being a defence mechanism, you could see syncretism also as a device to reconcile and to alleviate such binary oppositions. As a result, Java is always a 'collage'; filled with series of layers of beliefs and values. A phantasmagoria.

In *Java's Machine: Phantasmagoria*, fifteen figures of Javanese Royal Army stand in rows without bodies in the installation space. There are videos projected on the wall and some are screened on the monitors placed on the figures. Musical instruments are attached on the figures. Globally, this installation performs a video and mechanical music orchestra.

The Javanese Royal Army costume is a portrayal of how Javanese syncretism tries to merge divergent beliefs and cultures that have come to Java. Since the middle of 18th century, when the Dutch colonized Indonesia and started to intervene in cultural and political affairs of Javanese kingdoms, Java's royal soldiers have not had a military function. Their existence seems only to serve a symbolic status, but this should be seen as a new strategy. The army uniform was re-designed and various cultural symbols were collaged. Since then, the army of Java has not fought a war but they entered a new battlefield with a new enemy. A war that required a new defensive mechanism: the Javanese army is now opposing the idea of homogenization.

SA: Tell us something about the contemporary art scene in your home of Yogyakarta.


J: Yogyakarta society provides an interesting dialectics for many artists who live there, many wonderful and powerful artworks are produced and departs from this dialectics, and the most important thing is that the artists' initiative networks are growing very well and strong as reaction to the minimum role of the state.

SA: Indonesia is a huge archipelago with over 230 million people: are there many definitions of being an 'Indonesian artist'?

J: I just can say: I can be an Indonesian artist but it is impossible to represent Indonesia.

SA: Can you tell us what you are working on at the moment?

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Java's Machine: Phantasmagoria, 2008, mixed media.



Java's Machine: Phantasmagoria, 2008, mixed media.



Java Amplified, 2008, mixed media.



Resistance is not around, 2007, mixed media.



I Hour to be other, 2004, performance.



Resistance, 2007, sound performance.



Glorified, 2001, sound performance.



Ultra output project, 2002, sound performance.

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Bangkok Post, 2010-04-20 [THAILAND]

(1/7)


Bangkok Post The world's window to Thailand

A Thai gem in the creative city of Seoul

Art replaces politics with award for local film director hero

- Published: 20/04/2010 at 12:14 PM
- Online news:

On April 8, in Seoul, South Korea, headlines and newsflashes depicted the red-shirted protesters crashing through the gates of Thai Parliament as smiling police gave little resistance. As Cabinet Ministers were seen evacuating by helicopters, Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva's announced a State of Emergency. After three weeks of protests and negotiations between the government and the red shirts, Thailand had reached a point of peril where incidents were to escalate out of control.



Chim Pom's 'Super Rat (Minoringokun)', 2006, an art installation made of stuffed rats, plastic and toy models. Photos courtesy of A3: ASIA ART AWARD, SEOUL, SOUTH KOREA

Life, however, continues. In Seoul, the shopping streets at Myeong-dong, Namdaemun and Tongdaemun were filled with Thai tourists. They crammed into cosmetic shops, department and fashion stores, and food malls with their long shopping lists. Many favourite items for Thais such as cosmetics and BB whitening lotions Etude, Baviphat, Missha, Innisfree, Tony Moly, Nature Republic, and Skin Food, were already short of stock even before the Songkran festival holidays, when thousands of Thais visit. At night, they enjoyed bibimbap, the famous Korean traditional dish, before attending nocturnal performances such as Drum Cats. Oblivious to the steamy political situation back home, Thais enjoy their visit to the heart of Seoul. Perhaps shopping is a kind of escape to numb their worries and anticipation of unpredictable exasperations on their return home.

(2/7)

Call it a Korean wave, Korean fever or Korean sparkling, such phenomena have made Korean tourism thrive through its creative economy. Previously, South Korea's mission was to be one of the world's leading nations in information and digital technology. With success stories through their creative economy, Korean superstars such as Bae Young Jun, Rain, Song Hye-Gyo, Lee Seung Ki, 2 PM and Wonder Girls have become household names in Asia. Korean traditional image have been promoted in TV drama series in Asia such as Daejunggum and Jumon with advertisements of LG, KIA and Samsung.



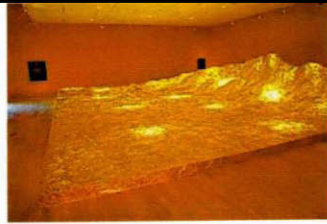
Apichatpong Weerasethakul at the award ceremony of A3: Asia Art Award, at the Seoul Olympic Museum of Art, Seoul. Photos courtesy of A3: ASIA ART AWARD, SEOUL, SOUTH KOREA

The day after the State of Emergency was declared in Bangkok, at the Seoul Olympic Museum of Art (Soma), the announcement of the winners of the prestigious A3: Asia Art Award came as a pleasant surprise as a Thai took first prize – something to soothe our broken pride and embarrassment as the world witnessed the debacle and calamity on daily news. The newly-founded A3: Asia Art Award is clearly designed as part of South Korea's drive to be an important nation for contemporary art and creative economy. Already, the Culture Ministry's Korean Creative Content Agency (Kocca) has been extremely successful in disseminating Korean games, animations, digital art and music. While CJ, a sister company of Samsung, aims to elevate South Korea into the world's top five film industries in the near future.

A3: Asia Art Award is co-organised by Soma, Alternative Space Loop, the Korea Sports Promotion Foundation, and is sponsored by the CJ Culture Foundation. It has clearly become Asia's most ambitious endeavour to create a contemporary Asian art network and promote emerging Asian artists on the international art scene. A3: Asia Art Award aims to nourish the next generation of Asian artists while the Asian Art Award Forum promotes a network among critics, curators, scholars, gallery representatives and art experts from various fields to create interdisciplinary discourses.

Bangkok Post, 2010-04-20 [THAILAND]


(3/7)



Yangachi's 'Middle Corea', 2010, an installation made of gold foils, video footage and photographs.

The selection process for A3: Asia Art Award involved 42 Asian critics, curators, and scholars, each proposing one Asian artist. For Thailand, Apichatpong Weerasethakul was recommended by Gridthiya Gaweewong. In February, the portfolios of 42 Asian artists were presented to international jurors for rigorous selection. The committee of jurors included Alexandra Munroe, senior curator at the Solomon Guggenheim Museum, New York; Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, artistic director of Documenta 13, Kassel, Germany; Fumio Nanjo, director of Mori Art Museum, Tokyo, Japan; Jonathan Watkins, director of Ikon Gallery, UK; Kim Honghee, director of the Gyeonggi Museum of Modern Art, South Korea; Wu Hung, professor at the University of Chicago; and Professor Dr Apinan Poshyananda, deputy permanent secretary at the Ministry of Culture, Thailand.

After the intense selection process in February, the Asian artists who qualified for the final round – Chim Pom (Japan), Jompet Kuswidananto (Indonesia), Shi Jin Song (China), Ashok Sukumaran (India), Apichatpong Weerasethakul (Thailand) and Yangachi (South Korea) – were invited to Seoul for a residency programme to create works for the final selection to be judged by international jurors.



Jompet Kuswidananto, 'Java's Machine: Phatasmagoria', 2010, an installation featuring a costume, musical instruments, books and a video.

(4/7)

On April 7, the international jurors interviewed the artists and viewed their works which were installed in the spacious galleries of Soma. The works were of a very high standard and varied in content. Yangachi's golden installation entitled Middle Corea (2009 to 10) is an imaginary space between South and North Korea. In no-man's land, it is an area of delusion that exists only in art, imagination and gossip. In it, secret tunnels appear from nowhere and lead to nowhere, neither South nor North. We are reminded of the incident that occurred at Mount Kumgang where inter-Korean relations recently broken down due to the North's decision to suspend tourism plans.

In contrast, Jompet Kuswidananto's video, War of Java, Do You Remember? (2008), is a powerful performance inspired by a Javanese dance that took place in a sugar cane factory in Yogyakarta. Reminiscent of Dutch colonial rule, trade, and violence, the trance-like performance symbolises the exorcism of colonialism. Java's Machine: Phatasmagoria (2010) is a combination of video, sound, costumes, and kinetic objects, harking back to the era of colonisation and local spectacle.

Beijing-based installation artist, Shi Jin Song displays an eclectic array of works ranging from fetishistic stainless steel machines, carved trees screwed with light bulbs and shining children's armour to muscle suits stitched with brands names and a burnt animal skull. His highly skilled techniques and understanding of materials are evident in each work. Huashan Project (2008) is one of the most impressive works in the show. An enormous metal rod is placed on the eroded stairs that lead down to the dark space. Thumping sounds resonate constantly from the wall as a lump of jade is shifted by a machine to damage the surface. Like an irritating voice against the institution and authority, the small but continuous damage leads to final destruction.



Shi Jin Song's 'Untitled', 2010, an installation made of branches, trunks, stainless steel, a muscle jacket and screws.

Chim Pom is a group of six active and brilliant young Japanese artists whose events and installations reflect the new poverty and urban frustration of life in Japan. Their outrageous actions include catching giant rats from the gutters in Shibuya and painting them yellow into the animation characters of Pichachu. In Black of Death (2007), they rode motorcycles holding stuffed crows and loudspeakers to attract flocks of real crows to follow them in Shibuya. In the controversial Lighting Up the Sky over Hiroshima (2009), Chim Pom created the Japanese word pika (sparkling light), seen in the sky from an aeroplane, reminding Hiroshima residents of the atomic bomb. The event touched a sensitive nerve and was met with outcry and protest.

Ashok Sukumaran is a Mumbai-based artist whose works often involve collaboration, network, and public interaction. Everyday relationships can become both political and artistic comments. In Glow Positioning System (GPS) (2005), Sukumaran involved residents, office owners, electricity workers in creating rhythmic movement of lights in a formerly colonised residential area in Mumbai. The participants must crank the machine to make light waves that are festive and vibrant. Such interaction and reciprocity among the Indian public allow art to be down-to-earth and fascinating. In On Black Boxes (2010), the artist narrates his ideas and sketches through the dimly lit spaces of a bedroom and cinemas, where light becomes the source of interaction and public communication.



International Jurors of A3: Asia Art Award (from left) Prof Dr Apinan Poshyananda (Thailand), Jonathan Watkins (England), Kim Honghee (South Korea), Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev (Germany), Prof Wu Hong (China), Jinsuk Suh (director of A3), Fumio Nanjo (Japan) and Heejong Ryu (curator).

Set up in a pitch-dark room, Apichatpong Weerasethakul's Phantoms of Nabua (2009) takes the audience to the remote Isan village of Nakhon Phanom. It shows a dark night in Nabua with luminous neon lights and an open-air screen showing images of light sources including lightning and moonlight. The area is a sleepy village near the Thailand-Laos border with a history of communist insurgents during the Cold War. As the artist wrote, "Nabua was the scene of fierce oppression, fighting and violence. Many people fled into forests. Those that remained in the district were mainly women and children. This really echoed the ancient legend about a "widow ghost" who abducts any man who enters her empire. According to the legend, the district became devoid of men and was known as "widow town".

As the film plays on the open-air screen, a group of young men gather by an open fire. A primal element involving the raw and primitive takes place as they begin to play around with an object that has caught fire. Like dancing ghostly chimeras, the game becomes something like a ritual. These young men who live in the "widow town" playfully kick the fireball until it grazes the screen and catches fire and eventually burns. The metaphor of fire, a ritualistic act becomes symbolic as the screen displays a film within a film. It's no "widow ghost", but is immaculate film-making in the way it creates layers of illusion and plays with our imagination.

The international jurors commented on the high standard of the six finalists, which posed great difficulty in choosing for the winner. Before reaching the decision for the winner, the international jurors discussed at length the criteria of selection for the A3: Asia Art Award. The standard for this prestigious prize for Asian artists under 40 has to be set as this year is the first of its kind. Among the questions raised was the definition of nationalities of Asia. Globalisation has blurred national borders and the meaning of Asian art that has become wide-ranging and multifarious. A focus on the emerging Asian artists hints at the kinds of content and new media that will appear on the art scene in the region. Moreover, as the A3: Asia Art Award is founded in Seoul, to what extent it will have influence on South Korea's role on contemporary Asian art or its relation with competing nations such as Japan and China? Should this award be judged as a mid-career achievement or evaluated from a series of works on view in the exhibition.

Answers to many such questions came down to South Korea's strategic plan for creating a creative economy



Apichatpong Weerasethakul and Apinan Poshyananda

A3: Asia Art Award placed Seoul in the centre of the limelight and all eyes were on the selection of the winner. Attention on this prominent and high-status art award, which has been compared with the Turner Prize in London, draws international press and media. Moreover, the Asia Art Award Forum that invited 60 or 70 critics, curators and scholars in contemporary Asian art focused on topics of Art and Capital; Oriental Metaphor; and Art and technology. The week-long symposium planned to build on

Asian networking, connection, and exchange. Credit is due to Jinsuk Suh, A3 Director, who has instigated these high-profile and complex artistic activities. Together with the A3: Asia Art Award exhibition of six finalists and the Asia Art Award Forum, the events are leading to September international art exhibitions Gwangju and the Busan Biennale. These creative and artistic activities contribute to South Korea's cultural tourism as well as help to elevate Seoul as one of the leading capitals of contemporary Asian art. We are reminded that Seoul announced in 2010 to be a World Design Capital and Creative City.

The ceremony of A3: Asia Art Award at Soma was attended by distinguished guests from the contemporary Asian art world. Despite his busy schedule, Apichatpong Weerasethakul flew to Seoul from Bangkok to receive the esteemed award. Surprised and thrilled for receiving the honour, the director also pocketed 20 million won (579,000 baht) as well as a huge boost to the promotion of his work throughout Asia. In his acceptance speech, Apichatpong said, "I am extremely honored to receive this prestigious award which will give me encouragement for my artistic endeavours and creativity for contemporary Asian art."

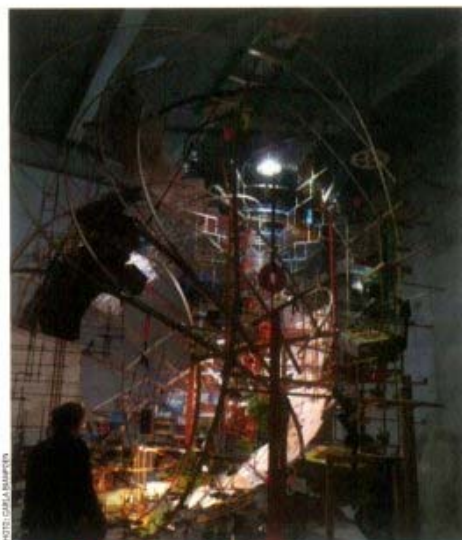
In the auditorium of Soma, the A3: Asia Art Award ceremony was followed by festivity and merriment. The cameras rolled as the media interviewed the finalist artists, jurors and participants with inquisitive interest. It was a historic night for Thai contemporary art as Apichatpong Weerasethakul redeemed some pride for Thailand by creating positive international headlines instead of simmering banners about Thai politics.

Ironically, it is an opportune time for Thailand to push the government's Strength to Strength (Thai Khemkhang) creative economy projects onto the international stage. In the creative city of Seoul, the limelight shone brightly on our Thai director and creative industry. Sadly, the time came one day after the declaration of a State Emergency in Bangkok, as the phantoms in shades of rouge, green and black lurked around corners as we prayed for the worst not to happen at the inevitable confrontation on Rachadamnern Avenue and Kork Wua Intersection.

Note: Prof Dr Apinan Poshyananda is deputy permanent secretary, Ministry of Culture. He is a committee member of Asian Art Council, Solomon Guggenheim Museum, New York, USA and international juror for A3 - Asia Art Award, Seoul, South Korea.

About the author

Writer: Apinan Poshyananda



Sarah Sze: *Portable Planetarium*, 2009.



Wangechi Mutu: *Our lost mind finding a heart in dirty water*, 2007.



Shilpa Gupta: *Untitled*, 2009

10TH LYON BIENNALE Creativity from Beyond Europe

Carla Bianpoen

A Jakarta-based art observer

SINCE its inception some 20 years ago, the Lyon Biennale's focus has been evolving in tandem with the winds of change. Thierry Raspail, its artistic director and founder has cleverly selected curators of world renown to make sure the issues of the time are accommodated in every event. Stemming from a project of the Lyon Museum of Contempo-

rary Art, of which Thierry Raspail was and still is the director, the biennale was preceded by an annual event called October of the Arts. The 10th Lyon Biennale is curated by one of today's most prominent curators, Hou Hanru, who is known for his visionary ideas in the arts. The theme he has set is *The Spectacle of the Everyday*.

About 70 artists from all over the world, a great number from non-western cultural backgrounds, are showing works within this thematic framework. Between the past that focused on History, Globalization and Temporality, the Everyday may sound quite different. But Wong Hoy Cheong (b. 1960), the Malaysian artist whose name is emerging

as a contemporary artist of significance, has keenly noted that in fact, the everyday of past centuries and the everyday of the present time does not differ greatly. He came to this conclusion when looking at paintings of the past centuries in the Museum of Modern Art in Lyon. Keenly noting the overall landscape of people in Europe whose residents are now more colored than ever, he visualizes the notion of a disappearing Europeaness in the everyday in photographs appropriating the paintings of the French paintings from the Museum of Modern Art in Lyon, in which he, however, changed the models with models from Europe's former colonies in Africa, the Middle East and Asia.

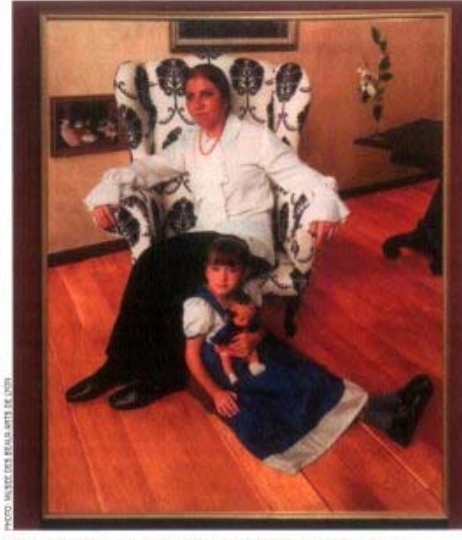
In the same venue, the Museum of Contemporary Art, one of the main places of exposition, is Jompet Kuswidananto (b. 1976) from Indonesia. He too, refers to the issue of colonies, though his focus is on Java, where he was born, lives and works. Jompet's work speaks of Java's syncretism as a strategy to reconcile contradictory beliefs and cultures that entered the island. *Java's Machine: Phantasmagoria*, 2008, features drums beating mechanically with the bodiless figures of *keraton* (palace) guards using Javanese, European inspired jackets in place of the body, shorts and European



Wong Hoy Cheong: *Days of Our Lives: Reading*, 2009



Eko Nugroho: *Cut The Mountain and Let it Fly*



Wong Hoy Cheong: *Days of Our Lives: Mother and Daughter*

boots in place of the feet and legs, and Western rifles held by imaginary hands. Buddhist hats instead of heads. Using multimedia—video, recycled electronic devices, drums, resin and video projections—including elements from European, Hindu, Muslim cultures, Jompet believes that syncretism is what has made Java strong.

But mourir fatmi (b. 1970) insists on having his name written in lower case and lives between his hometown of Tangiers and Paris. He tackles the issue of global impacts such as duplication, and perhaps of copyright in a global world where nothing is certain anymore. Part of the process of deconstruction, fatmi's work here uses VHS cassettes gutted on a wall, with strings of videotapes reaching to the floor and 'flooding' over the nearby photocopyers to make a 'landscape' that appears alien.

Along the outer wall of the Sucrière, the largest venue of the 10th Lyon Biennale, the mural by Eko Nugroho (b. 1977) who lives and works in Yogyakarta, is titled *Cut The Mountain and Let it Fly*, 70x15 m. With his typical semi-surrealistic images in blue, his work is immediately eye-catching and Eko seems to have been inspired by the landscape across the River Saône that

flows in front of the building. Inside, excerpts from the shadow play titled *Rainbow under the Saône* shows the result of his cooperation with the migrant residents of Vaulx-en-Velin, a suburb where he had stayed in residency. The shadow play is based on the concerns and the hopes of the migrant population there, while using techniques of the Javanese leather shadow play and the Lyon folklore theater figure of Guignol.

Sarah Sze (b. 1969 in Boston) lives and works in New York. Not only is her creation the most spectacular, it also is the most prominent in translating the theme of the biennale, to get the everyday out of the closet. The installation, like an architectural design, encompassing all the nitty-gritty objects of the everyday, is titled *Untitled/Portable Planetarium*. It is inspired by a Shinto ceremony of renewal and re-consecration, celebrating the life of things by regenerating them and keeping them alive for centuries (from an interview of the artist with Yuko Hasegawa). When her site-specific installation ends, she dismantles it and transforms the material to another place, thus giving it new life.

Up the sparsely lit and precarious stairs to the second floor, is the large installation by Wangechi Mutu (b. 1972 in Nairobi) who is based in New York.

Over the entire breadth of the Sucrière, the work shows a 'curtain' of light bulbs, some of which are almost touching the floor, where water leaks out of holes in hoses curled on the floor and plugged with high-heeled shoes. A portrait of the urban city where public and private space sometimes clash in blackouts caused by the meeting of water and electricity.

The Sucrière, an old sugar factory used as a warehouse until the 80s, with its 7,000-square-meter space was well suited for these contemporary works. At its entrance, the work by the Indian artist Shilpa Gupta (b. 1976) in the form of an iron gate created the spectacle of a construction site with its loud banging against the wall which supposedly criticizes current political and social situations in her country.

Indeed a lot of the works deal with such concerns: issues and protests that have become the tenor of every day, though often leaving out the magic supposed to be hidden behind the everyday.

The influential French newspaper *Le Monde* considers this the best of the 10 Lyon biennales. As such the Lyon biennale with mostly young artists, many from other cultural backgrounds, has earned itself a respectable place.

ART & DESIGN

The 10th Lyon Biennale 2009

DOMINATED BY YOUNG TALENT

Carla Bianpoen

CONTRIBUTOR/LYON, FRANCE

Biennales usually choose to have prominent, well-known and experienced curators to set a theme that reflects the needs of the time.



Eko Nugroho's *Art et Ciel sous la Pierre* (Rainbow under the Stone), a puppet shadow play with a total of 40 puppets.



Sarah Seo's *Untitled (Portable Nonsensitum)* mixed-media installation.

Unlike past Lyon biennales, which had themes like *History, Globalization or Temporality*, and were curated by prominent figures like Harald Szeemann, Jean Hubert-Martin, Hans Ulrich Obrist, and others, the 10th Lyon Biennale, currently on show, was put together by the visionary Hou Hanru, who recognizes that art is rapidly becoming part of the contemporary lifestyle.

Selecting mostly young talent (except for Agnès Varda, b. 1928, and Sarkis, b. 1938) with most of the 70 artists coming from nonwestern cultural backgrounds – although many of them live and work in the West, the exhibition titled “The Spectacle of the Everyday” shows a general homogeneity of contemporary works rarely seen in other biennales so far. Opened on Sept. 16, 2009, the Biennale will close on Jan. 3, 2010.

Among the most visible artists from the East is certainly **Eko Nugroho**, whose 70x15-meter-long mural on the outer wall of the *Sacrière*, the largest exhibition space of the biennale, is spectacular.

Cut the Mountains and Let It Fly is the title of the work facing the landscape across the river Saône, which flows in front of the *Sacrière*. Eko is also a star of the *Veduta* project in Vaudou-Wien, where he resided and worked with immigrant residents.

Together they created a shadow puppet show, combining the Javanese wayang kulit, the Lyon *Gaïgnol* theatre folk art and their joint imaginations. Excerpts of *Rainbow under the Stone* are shown within this building.

The *Veduta* is one of the projects bringing art to the people to spur creative thinking and bringuster to their everyday life. Other artists in residence were Erik van der Poel, at the Grand Parc, and Robert Millin in Lyon 8 and Venissieux.

The *Sacrière*, an old sugar factory used as a warehouse until the 1990s when it was converted into a 2,000-square-meter art space, holds the largest part of the works in this exhibition. Entering it is like visiting a construction site, with the banging noise of Indian artist **Shilpa Gupta's** (b. 1978) iron gate pervading the space, supposedly a strong critique of the prevailing social and political situation.

Eko's puppet shadow play excerpts reminds us this is an exhibition space, as does the large black board with humorous images put together by the Romanian artist **Dan Perjovschi** (b. 1964), of an artistic as well as political nature. “Those who brought a piece of the Berlin wall between 1990 and 2009 are kindly requested to return them to reconstruct the wall,” says one message.

But it is the spectacular installation of **Sarah Seo** (b. 1969) that stands out in particular to illustrate the spectacle of everyday life. Her work titled *Untitled (Portable Nonsensitum)*, featuring a large ephemeral architectural design with books and other kinds of household matters in it, gives the impression of a giant bird nest, while from another angle the artwork looks like a globe.

Inspired by the cycle of renewal and re-consecration experienced in a Shinto ceremony, it is meant to celebrate the life of things by regenerating them. After dismantling the work, the materials will be used in another place, for another work of art, engendering new life.

Disturbing, but beautiful photographs by Algerian **Adel Abdessemed** (b. 1971) who lives and works in Paris and New York, show exotic animals in urban settings portraying animal violence. His frontward drawing of a cortex transferred into white neon initially appears esthetic, but quickly becomes a depiction of the



Junpet Kuswidananto's *Jawa's Machine* at the 10th Lyon Biennale, Lyon, France.

dual nature of man, both animal and human, accompanied by two short films identifying vulnerability and terror.

Guangzhou- and New York-based artist **Lin Yilin's** (b. 1964) video still, *One Day*, features a young man handcuffed to his ankles on the Champs Elysees surrounded by people oblivious to his situation. The still comes from *One Day*, a video made in 2006 in Southern China, and shot again in Paris for the Lyon Biennale.

No doubt the works of **Barry McGee** (b. 1966) entice and split the mood in the space, appearing a bit messy, just as street art should be, but perfectly finished, cars upside down yet arranged neatly. The glaring colors of graphic design patterns may be splitting but also confusing at some points.

On the other hand, Hiroshima-born and based **Takahiro Iwasaki** (b. 1975) presents objects evoking the meditative as a refined craftsmanship in Lilliputian objects and a sense of the poetic, such as the Edinburgh castle in miniature emerging from a black garbage bag, or the Lilliputian telecommunication towers on a bunch of bath towels.

Going up the narrow sparsely lit staircase to the second floor, one arrives at an installation that fills the space. Made by Komyan horn, New York-based **Wungchi Mutu** (b. 1972), the urban scene where hoses leaking water from the river Saône lie curled on the floor, while a “curtain” of firefly light bulbs, almost touching the ground, is aesthetic despite the flooded floor.

A digital video of text by Guangzhou-born, Hong Kong-based **Tsang Kinwah** (b. 1976) projected against the wall in a dark space is impressive, appearing like fire tongs springing up from the ground. Bannisters of excavated corpses, the delicate Mac decorations on about 100 porcelain disassembled human skeletons displayed in wooden boxes by **Yang Jiechang** (b. 1956), immortalize the tragedy that unfolded in Tiananmen.

Mexican artist **Pedro Reyes** (b. 1972) brings forward human rights and environmental issues with a stirring installation of shovels made of metal illegal weapons supporting a tree-planting project.

The Belgian senior artist **Agnès Varda** (b. 1928), is the oldest in the biennale. Though known as a filmmaker or the ventures into building a culture, a hat built entirely of 35-millimeter film, where images capture the light.

Meanwhile in the Museum of Contemporary Art, the work of French **Sylvie Blocher** (b. 1933), a photo featuring a figure, welcomes visitors by singing the praises of Obama's rise to the presidency. The installation of the Javanese



Eko Nugroho's *Cut the Mountains and Let It Fly* mural along the outer wall of the *Sacrière*.



Pedro Reyes' *Polas Per Pintakas* installation.

Irupul phantom guards in *Jawa's Machine: Phantasmagoria*, by Indonesian artist Junpet Kuswidananto (b. 1976) speaks of the hybrid nature and syncretism of Javanese culture, to denote that there is no such thing as a “pure” culture.

Mounir Fatmi (b. 1970), who lives between Tangiers and Paris, focuses on duplication and the erasing of one's memory, in his work of VHS cassettes, a serpentine overlay of videotapes and photocopy machines.

The increasing numbers of immigrants in Europe, and France in particular, is almost changing the color of the population. Malaysian artist **Wong Hoy Cheong** (b. 1960) visualizes the changing face of Europe by appropriating paintings from the Modern Museum of Art, from which he replaces the “white” figures with models from ex-French colonies in the Middle East, Asia and Africa.

At the Bicher warehouse, **Pedro Cabrita Reis** (b. 1926 in Lisbon) lights up the ornate arsenal with strips of neon lights floating in the air or lying on the floor in an artistic composition.

This is perhaps the first biennale of this kind in France, or even in Europe. There is no doubt the event attracted much attention, judging by the streams of visitors who entered the *Sacrière* with me in late October.

— PHOTOS BY CARLA BIANPOEN

With most of the 70 artists coming from nonwestern cultural backgrounds, the exhibition shows a general homogeneity of contemporary works rarely seen in other biennales so far.

ARTERI MALAYSIA



War of Java, Do You Remember? #1

Jompét Kuswidananto

Java's Machine: Phantasmagoria

[Cemeti Art House](#)

15 Dec – 18 Jan 2009

Lining up against the entrance corridor into the main exhibition space at Cemeti Art House, Yogyakarta, last December is an armed unit of five invisible standing figures, suggested through a skeletal furnishing of their martial disposition by the uniformity of their red helmets, strapped-on rifles and firmly planted boots. They allude to the 'Lombok Chilli', royal guards of the Yogya Sultanate who still plays a ceremonial role today, that protects, above all, a distinct sense of pride in the Javanese identity they represent.

At their centre hang, in mid-air, speakers located in proximity to the heart region of these invisible men that contrapuntally compete to convey an interminable lists of historical facts in Indonesian, English and Javanese – producing a messy chorus that disrupts the possibility of a coherent narrative, pressing a surfeit of information onto an unexpected public as well as indicting the audience's failure to grasp its immensity, just as it proposes the incommensurability of any sense of total understanding in this ambitious undertaking.

This work (*War of Java, Do You Remember?#1*) sets the tone for Kuswidananto a.k.a. Jompét's powerful and subtle exploration on the terms in which the colonial history of Java are confronted today. The phantasmagoria, a modified magic lantern invented in late 18th century France that projected moving images of ghoulish subjects as entertainment to a popular audience, is a fitting title that describes the hallucinatory and haunting battalion that populated Jompét's installation.

Animated by rather primitive and by-and-large anachronistic technological computation, these automatons may seem dumb and antiquated, but the spook effect is largely derived from their

mindless and almost irrational shoring of the past into the present, a kind of return of the repress, and one with a violent comeback.

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.



War of Java, Do You Remember? #3

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'.'

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? #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.



War of Java, Do You Remember? #5

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.

To have been able to address the complexity of history's weight, how stifling it can be and the irresolution between the need to face history by the day and the desire to move on is in my opinion the strength of this exhibition.

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? #4

It is of course out of desperation and frustration rather than outrage that this spooky regiment returns to haunt. Like the spectre appearing to Hamlet, it seeks to address a time that is 'out of joint', of what it perceives to be a disturbing failure of our recent ability to remember.

The phantasmagoria is not merely a reminder; it is a moral injunction. Yet, like all injunctions, its single-minded pursuit might come across as brutally sanctimonious at times. The eerie tableau offered by Jompot succeeds because it is more than a historical diorama of the past; it delivers a sophisticated reflection on the present culture war, the value of its historiography and its implication on our lives.

(SS)

BIENNALES



JOMPET
Java: War of Ghosts, 2009
Mixed media installation

The Jakarta Biennale 2009 New Visions, Alternative Platforms

Eugene Tan

Biennales have invariably become a permanent fixture within the international contemporary art landscape. While debates rage on the benefits and disadvantages of biennales, their role in the development of art in countries that organize and host biennales cannot be denied. Indonesia is no exception, in spite of the problematic and sometimes difficult relationship that the country has with biennales. In 2005 and 2006, four biennales took place in Indonesia; CP Biennale in Jakarta, Bali Biennale, Jogja (Yogyakarta) Biennale and Jakarta Biennale, the largest number of biennales for any single country. Yet, these biennales were quite different from biennales that the international art world is familiar with, such as the Venice Biennale or Documenta, or even biennales in the region such as in Singapore or Sydney.

The biennales in Indonesia have been typically not very well funded, and consisted mostly of works by Indonesian artists. These biennales functioned very much as platforms for local artists and were unlike biennales in other countries such as neighbouring Singapore, which had significant state support and which were established with bigger ambitions in mind. These biennales were almost solely aimed at Indonesians, without much concern for, or pandering to the international

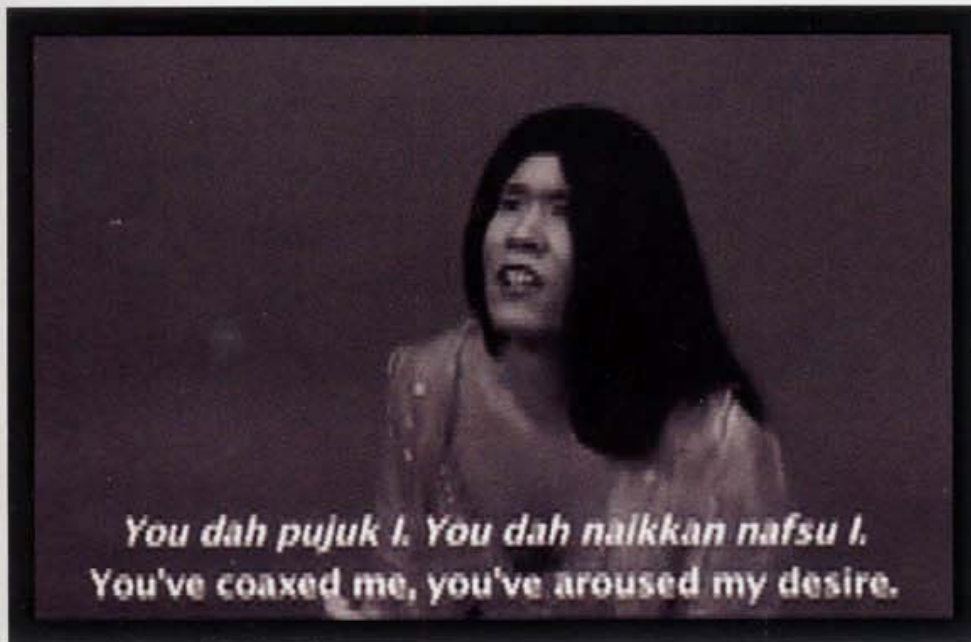
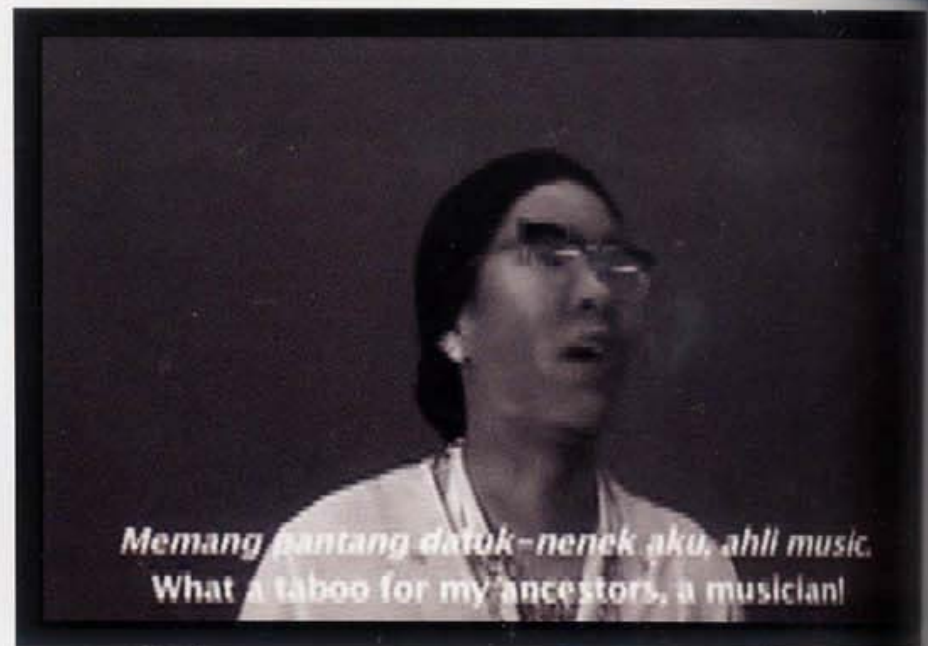
Courtesy of Jakarta Biennale



▲ TAWATCHAI PUNTUSAWADI
A Blind is Crying, 2008
 Mixed Media Installation
 Variable dimension



JOMPÉT, Java: *War of Ghosts*, 2009, mixed media installation



MING WONG, *Four Malay Stories*, 2005, 4 channel looped digital video installation, b/w, with audio, 25'

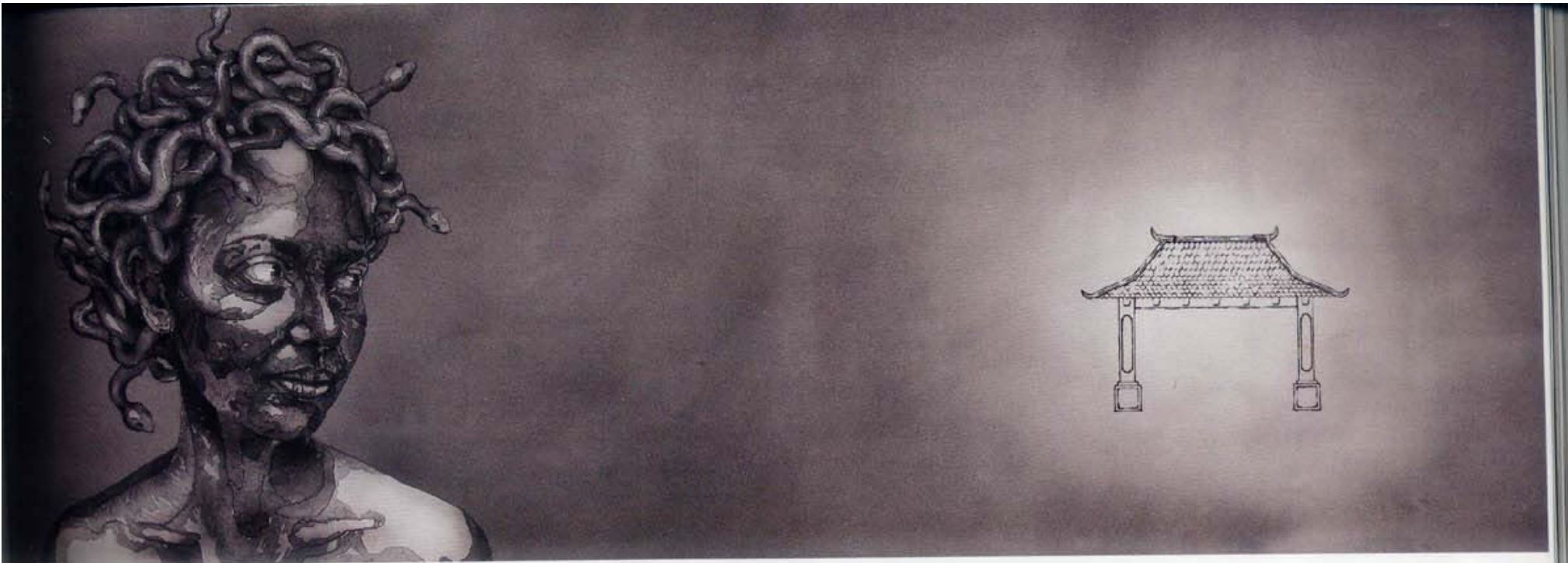
art world. This insularity characterized many of these biennales, and in many ways, reflected the nature of artistic communities in Indonesia. The Indonesian biennales were, in many ways, idealized examples of what biennales should be, mobilized by the local artistic community as a platform for their work, with their local and immediate audience in mind.

There were some biennales that came close to resembling international biennales, and which had some level of international participation, such as the Jakarta Biennale and the CP Biennale. The Jakarta Biennale in 2006 featured seven foreign artists, out of a total of 180 artists who participated in the biennale, who were either based in Indonesia or had lived there, in a section aptly titled 'The Others' curated by Rifky Effendi. The CP Biennale in 2005, curated by Jim Supangkat, included 18 foreign artists, out of the 70 participating artists. These 18 foreign artists were mostly from China, such as Fang Lijun, Yue Minjun and Xu Zhen, as well as Taiwan and Korea, which was without doubt largely due to Taiwanese curator, Shin Yi Yang's participation as one of the co-curators. The 2005 CP Biennale was also remembered for the controversy that surrounded Agus Suwage and Davy Linggar's work, *Pinkswing Park*, which was in effect "censored" following protest by the fundamentalist Muslim group FPI, leading to protests by other artists in support of Suwage. Supangkat also then announced that that was to be the last of the CP Biennale.

Although 2005 and 2006 was also a period when the art market in

boom in the art market in Asia, brought about in part by the boom in the Chinese and Indian art markets. Since then, in the short space of two years, Indonesia has witnessed an unprecedented rise in the art market. Also, in the last two years, half of the biennales that happened in 2005 and 2006 have fallen by the wayside. In addition to the cancellation of the CP Biennale, the Bali Biennale also seems to have disappeared, with no news of a second edition, leaving only the Yogyakarta Biennale, which took place in December 2007, and the Jakarta Biennale. The latter, originally planned for 2008 but moved to February 2009, further testifies to the problematic relationship that Indonesia has with biennales.

Critics of biennales have argued that biennales are showcases for galleries, highlighting the complex relationships that exist between biennales, galleries and the market. This is especially pertinent in recent years, given the overwhelming dominance of the art market internationally, and also in Southeast Asia, which has inevitably affected the production and reception of art. Given the recent global economic slowdown and consequent slowing down of the market, as evident in recent auctions of Southeast Asian art, never has it been more pertinent for a biennale to take place in Indonesia than the present. For in such times of recession and dwindling influence of the market, the art and ideas that emerge take on a more interesting character, impervious to the workings of the market. As such, the 13th Jakarta Biennale will be significant as an indicator for the direction



Agency of Jakarta Biennale

NADIAH BHAMADAJ, *Harus Lewat Gapura*, 2009, charcoal on paper collage and digital engraving, 82 x 244 cm

Being the earliest Biennale in Indonesia, dating back to 1968, the Jakarta Biennale (then known as *Pameran Besar Seni Lukis Indonesia*, or *Grand Exhibition of Indonesian Painting*) has witnessed significant milestones in the development of art in Indonesia, some of which it was directly responsible for. For example, the Jakarta Biennale in 1974 triggered a protest by a group of young artists opposed to the awarding of a prize to Widayat, arguing that this was tantamount to proclaiming the death of Indonesian art. Some of the artists involved in the protest, which came to be known as 'Black December', included FX Harsono and Bonyong Murni Adhi, who went on to form the Gerakan Seni Rupa Indonesia Baru or New Indonesian Art Movement. This movement was to become significant for the development of contemporary art in Indonesia.

Likewise, the 9th Jakarta Biennale in 1993 was notable for then curator, Jim Supangkat's declaration of the arrival of Postmodernism in Indonesian art through the installation and performance works in the Biennale. As such, the Jakarta Biennale 2009 has a strong legacy to follow.

Early signs of the Jakarta Biennale 2009 were promising, when activities began taking place as early as December 2008, well before the opening of the main exhibition on 6 February 2009. Coming under the title of "Arena", the biennale was therefore not conceived as a conventional large-scale exhibition, but instead as a series of events, projects and workshops taking place throughout the city, with the different components coming under three differently titled "zones". "Zone

TINTIN MULIA, *Recollection of togetherness* stage for installation of 132 Passport





PHIL COLLINS, *Dunia Tak Akan Mendengar (The World Won't Listen)*, 2007, colour video projection with sound, approx. 60'00"

through artistic production. This engagement with the region was framed through two sections within the exhibition. "Traffic" featured some 15 international artists who have spent time in Southeast Asia in residency programs, including artists such as Phil Collins from the United Kingdom and David Griggs from Australia. Collins exhibited the final part of his trilogy, made in Jakarta and Bandung, in which members of the public are filmed singing and performing to songs by the English group, "The Smiths", testifying to the power of popular culture. "On the Map", meanwhile, features about 50 artists from Southeast Asia, all under the age of 35. Some of the notable works include Singaporean artist, Donna Ong's video installation, "The Meeting", which centers around the 1927 Friendship Doll Project between Japan and the USA. This was an act of friendship involving children from the two countries, but which was disrupted by events in World War Two, and as a result of which the dolls came to symbolize the resulting hatred between the countries. Also interesting was Malaysian artist, Roslisham Ismail's "NEP" and "HI-S-TORY". Both these works can be seen as critiques of Malaysian government policy. In "NEP", Ismail highlights the growth of illegal money lending, resulting from Malaysia's "New Economic Policy" in which the working class have found it increasingly difficult to get bank loans, hence their reliance on loan sharks. "HI-S-TORY" meanwhile centers around a Malay hero, Hang Tuah, and the suggestion that he may in fact, have had Chinese roots, drawing attention to the racial tensions facing Malaysia, and its problems in fostering national identity.

Among notable works by Indonesian artists, meanwhile, include Kuswidananto a.k.a Tomnet, whose installation "Java: War of Ghosts"

was one of the highlights of the exhibition. Comprising a room full of mechanically constructed "ghost" soldiers dressed in Javanese and European inspired military uniforms, the sounds made by their drumming contrasted with a silent film of a dancer moving gracefully among heavy industrial machinery to produce a powerful visual and aural experience. Also interesting was RE Hartanto's "Cold Memory II", which centred around the process of the making of a painting consisting of two figures; Maridjan Kartosuwirjo, founder and leader of an Islamist separatist movement, and Ibrahim Adjie, a high-ranking military official who gave the order for Kartosuwirjo's execution. In the installation, alongside the painting, Hartanto shows a video of him making the large painting, which is then painted over, as an act of remembering and also to highlight this forgotten episode in Indonesian history, particularly in our current day and age.

The Jakarta Biennale therefore presents an interesting and pertinent perspective of the region by drawing on artists who have had a real engagement with Indonesia and the region. And given the dominance of the art market in Indonesia in recent years, and the telling signs of its lessening influence, the Jakarta Biennale aptly demonstrates that alternative platforms exist in the country and the region for artists; platforms which allow for the creation of new meanings and discourses about their work, and not just the creation of market value. 🇮🇩

Eugene Tan is the Director of Exhibitions, Osage Gallery

Undoing culture in agriculture

Ferdiansyah Thajib
Contributor/Yogyakarta

Marking the beginning of yet another rainy season, the incessant rain late last month added to the already grim atmosphere within the white walls of Cemeti Art House.

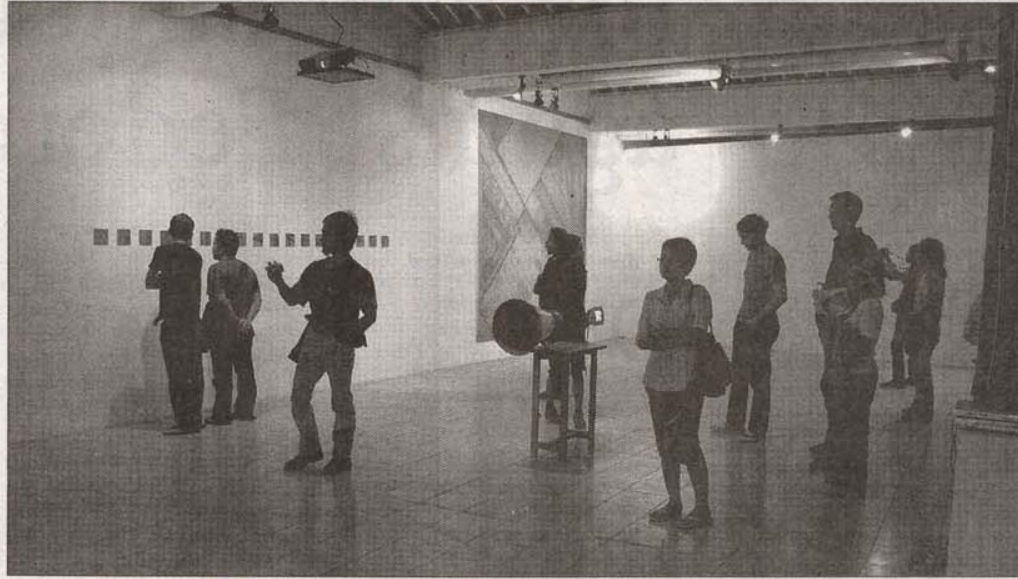
In one corner, a traditional sickle was tucked snugly inside a tray filled with white grains. In the background were video images in black and white describing natural exploitation.

The sickle endlessly crackled, as if awoken from a dream. Only this was not a dream, but a nightmare: one of the greed and destruction it had created.

The installation *Batu di Atas Ranjang* (Stone on the Bed, Kus Widananto (Jompét), 2007) was among the objects displayed in the exhibition called *Landing Soon 4*, which ended Oct. 30.

On display were some of the recent works of Indonesian artist Jompét and Dutch artist Gerco de Ruijter, who participated in the art space's three-month residency program.

The two artists set out with environmental issues — agricultural issues to be exact — as their meeting ground. However, through their artworks, they moved away from the lav-



People view the installation *Batu di Atas Ranjang* (Stone on the Bed, Kus Widananto (Jompét), 2007) at Cemeti Art House in Yogyakarta at the end of October.

ish landscapes of green farms or exotic representations of agricultural life commonly found in Indonesia.

Instead they explored the unlikely side of daily life on the farm through different mediums. Jompét experimented with video works, audio-automated sensors and everyday items, such as a traditional sickle and a cell phone, in his three installation works.

There was *Resistance is Not Around*, a real-time video projected on the wall with an

image of Jompét stubbornly trying to call someone on his cell phone.

While at the other end, somehow connected to the scene on the backdrop, a sickle was lying on the floor busy gyrating and ringing, along with a bunch of bells attached to its handle, unable to answer.

People have lost contact with their past without even realizing they are not using the correct medium to begin with.

Jompét contemplated this idea, saying: "In the past, the sickle has been used in many cultures with a similar function and shape. It was an effective tool for harvesting crops. By using it, we knew when to

stop and be happy with just enough crops. Yet, we humans are just too greedy and are driven toward exploiting nature to our own advantage".

Losing trust in mankind's own invention, we let greed push us further apart from each other and from the environment.

Broken Morse Code is another of Jompét's installations that emphasizes how power relations work. A television was set on a wooden table, showing footage of a female farmhand uttering something as if during an interview, a scene typically found in any documentary testimony on Indonesia's rural areas.

A loudspeaker was set next

to the screen, supposedly amplifying what the woman was saying. But every time she opened her mouth only loud unintelligible barking came out of the classic-looking gramophone speaker.

This work discerns how the politics of the media can sometimes twist words into something else. If Jompét's works are engaged with social context and content, Gerco de Ruijter is more resolved in approaching farmland through the forms and patterns of *sawah* (rice fields) captured by his aerial lens.

In 1993, The Vianen-born artist developed an aerial photographic technique using a kite and a helium blimp.

During his three-month stay in Yogyakarta, he found difficulties in capturing the sites due to the lack of wind, thus he improvised by using an ordinary pole to hold his camera up.

With this technique he took a series of landscape photographs of rice fields.

Seen horizontally from the ground, the variation of heights, differences between wet land and dry land, or cultivated fields and unplanted ones, can be easily recognized.

In *Contemplation*, the viewer comes upon a 300 by 300 centimeter sized image of rice fields taken from a flying kite. Shot from unspecified heights, the familiar scenery of rice fields turns into unearthly figures.

"I think by using this technique we can find the meaning in a more subtle way," de Ruijter said.

De Ruijter seeks to capture the dynamic contrasts within the immobility of the landscape.

Devoid of a farmer's presence and imposing on the milky mud of the soil, the green portion of the square seems to be disintegrating instead of populating the hollow part.

Human activity has a vital say in what is painted by nature. And de Ruijter was there to grab whatever moments were offered under his lens.

These artists show us how distance can reveal the tragic beauty of the relationship between man and the environment.

Landing Soon is a series of artist exchange programs jointly held by Cemeti Art House and Dutch organizer Artoteek Den Haag. The three year project is also supported by the Culture and Development Program of the Royal Netherlands Embassy in Jakarta.



A detail from Jompét's installation at Cemeti Art House.



A view of Jompét's 2007 installation *Batu di Atas Ranjang* (Stone on the Bed) at Cemeti Art House.

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 パクンともえは横浜で開催中の日本最大級の現代アート国際展、横浜トリエンナーレの舞台裏に潜入。世界各地から集まった旬のアーティスト約70名の作品は奇抜なものばかり。会場では日本人ボランティアたちが会場に来る外国人観光客への作品の鑑賞法や説明などに苦戦中。そこでもえ・パクンは直接アーティスト達に取材、現代美術ガイドのお手伝いをかって出る。
 青井アナはアートな人々が集う横浜トリエンナーレのパーティーに参加。そこで不思議な出で立ちで異彩を放つ「ドラァグクイーン」なる人物と遭遇。パーティーの奥義を学ぶ。
 一方八嶋は、アメリカ発のパフォーマンスグループ「ブルーマン」の舞台を直撃取材！全身を真っ青に塗り、言葉を一切使わずに絶妙なコミュニケーションで観客を笑いの渦に巻き込むブルーマンと八嶋がコラボ！素顔のブルーマンと焼鳥屋でトークを楽しむ。
 さらに、香港が世界に誇る映画人ジョン・ウー&トニー・レオンと台湾の人気俳優チャン・チェンにもえ・パクンがインタビュー！お楽しみに！



YASHIMA

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CALENDAR

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Dusty Routes and Digital Highways

*Artists, curators and academics convene in Bangkok for *The Making of the New Silk Roads*, a performative symposium. By Pier Luigi Tazzi*

In late August 2008, the Thai capital became a stop on the new Silk Road. More than 30 artists, curators, writers and architects from countries as diverse as Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Georgia, Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Singapore, China, Vietnam and the Philippines found themselves back at school, gathered in a makeshift classroom in the Bangkok University Gallery, where they held a three-day "performative symposium" entitled "The Making of the New Silk Roads."

Referring to the ancient network of overland and maritime silk routes that for at least 19 centuries—from the fourth century BCE to the end of the Yuan dynasty in the 14th century CE—linked China to the Mediterranean region, the event proposed the Silk Road as a "new metaphor for instable connections and uncertain achievements," a departure point for continued reflections upon Asia's cultural landscape." Organized by curators Davide Quadrio, Defne Agras and Fongsmut from ArtHub, a Shanghai-based nonprofit organization and think tank that supports the creation of contemporary art in China and the rest of Asia, the four-day event (August 27–30) included lectures, screenings of documentary and art videos, and live performances.

Occupying much of the classroom was an imposing plywood structure of a Soviet apartment. Entitled *The Flat Space* (2008–09) and created by Moldavian artist and curator Stefan Rusu, the installation was a reconstruction of the architecture that prevailed over much of the Communist Bloc at the end of World War II. With no external walls other than its floor, it served as both an artwork and a stage for lectures and performances, several of which occurred simultaneously, lending the symposium an air of disorder and spontaneity. In one of the three rooms within *The Flat Space*, Filipino artist Gary Ross Pastrana had a young man saw a white-painted wooden chair into pieces and post the segments through a hole in the plywood wall into the other room, where a young woman



2.



3.



4.



5.

disassembled a basket chair, in turn passing its fragments back through the room to the young man. Thereafter they both began to build new, abstract sculptures out of the remains of each others' objects. Lasting more than two hours, this exchange continued throughout the talks taking place in the adjacent classroom.

These talks varied greatly in tone and delivery, from the fictional to the academic to the performative. Lina Saneh, from Lebanon, told a parable that pitted art against laws. In her fictional narrative, she told how her wish to be cremated after her death was illegal under Lebanese law. (In actuality, it is legal.) She explained that to circumvent this prohibition, with the advice of lawyers and doctors, she cut off parts of her body and set fire to them, nevertheless maintaining a normal way of life as she did so. Chinese designer, editor and critic Jiang Jun discussed the relationship between China and Mongolia from the 12th-century conquests of Genghis Khan to the present day, presenting the opposition between Mongolian nomadism and agriculture, the main activity of the Chinese population. He examined relationships between the two nations' symbolism, design, cultural habits, political and military interests. Yogyakarta-based artist Jompert staged a short performance wearing a traditional Indonesian theater mask while controlling an installation of motorized devices that made white, feathered wings flap up and down in front of *The Flat Space*.

In contrast with the interpretation of the Silk Road as a vast site of collaboration, British historian Veronica Sekules explored the region's legacy of military conflict. Sitting on a chair in a corner of the room in front of New York-based Turkish artist Hakan Topal's black-and-white photo installation of tourists taking photographs of unspecified sites, Sekules proposed that catastrophes, at this stage of human civilization, are caused more by politics and economics than by environmental causes. While she spoke, Topal used a shovel to hack into paper bags filled with

cement powder, which he scattered around Sekules' feet.

As suggested by the symposium's slogan, "art is not made by politicians!" the event was a reminder of the discrepancy between sites of local production, the power of the international art market and the network of biennials and triennials that are interconnected within it. Curator Howard Chan, from Hong Kong, illustrated the idea with the example of the Community Museum Project, founded with artist and curator Siu King-chung, Tse Pak-chai and Phoebe Wong in 2002. The project aims to circumvent conventional museum infrastructures for a more flexible program that explores indigenous creativity, visual and public culture as "a platform to articulate personal experiences and under-represented histories." Their Street Art Museum on Lee Tung Street, in particular, is composed of basic everyday aesthetics (pieces of furniture, useful tools, decorative items, all made out of the remnants of other broken or discarded objects) which move out of the enclosed temple of high art to meet life in the streets of Hong Kong, a quintessential modern metropolis.

The wild and diverse approaches taken during this symposium were a shared feat of endurance that transcended conventional expectations of a forum as a prescribed format with a clear division between the roles of the presenter and the audience. However, given the huge breadth of the theme, participants in the symposium could only engage by elucidating their selective, local viewpoints. It was their collective participation in the event that served as a metaphor for what the silk routes might be in the increasingly interconnected world of the 21st century.

1. Participants in "The Making of the New Silk Roads" at the Bangkok University Gallery in Thailand, 2009. 2. JOMPET AKA KUSWIDANANTO, *Untitled*, 2009, performance documentation. 3. GARY ROSS PASTRANA, *Untitled*, 2009, performance documentation. 4. Documentation of Hong Kong curator Howard Chan's presentation on the Community Museum Project. 5. HAKAN TOPAL, *Concretescape, Softcity*, 2009, performance documentation. Courtesy ArtHub, Shanghai.