

# Travelling through Indonesia: The Interactive Installation of Andra Matin at MACAN

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**PHOTOS BY** Olla Mazaya A, Museum Macan

Matter and Place, the current exhibition at the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Nusantara known as Museum MACAN, features six large-scale artworks by local and international artists. It brings together Elevation, a piece of architecture by the prominent Indonesian architect Andra Matin, a site-specific installation by Malaysian artist Shooshie Sulaiman as well as several works from the museum's own collection. The exhibition explores the relationship between people and places, investigating how materials and sensory observation help define our understanding of identity.

The title Elevation has a double meaning; it signifies 'elevation' as a height difference and 'elevation' in the architectural sense as the horizontal projection of buildings. In 2018, architect Andra Matin was awarded one of the two special mentions by the jury of the 16<sup>th</sup> Venice Architecture Biennale at the exhibition FREESPACE, also marking the first time an Indonesian architect has been awarded at the Biennale.

Indonesia has the fourth largest population in the world. With over 265 million people inhabiting the country, over 55 per cent of the population live in urban areas. As the most expansive archipelago in the world spread on about 17,500 islands, the geography of Indonesia varies from coastal areas to highlands reaching 4,800 metres above sea level. From Sabang to Merauke, the westernmost to the easternmost area, various cultures and ethnic groups respond to the geography with their vernacular architecture. Elevation serves as a platform

for exploring the variety of elevation in Indonesian local architecture. It also reflects on how the people of each ethnic group interact with nature and culture. Made from *jabon* (Neolamarckia cadamba), a type of wood commonly used in the timber industry, the installation consists of stages in various heights, corresponding to Indonesia's traditional dwellings. The facades of the piece are composed of rattan weaving, forming Indonesian textile patterns. This rattan weaving was made with a holographic technique and inspired by the traditional weaving technique of the Dayak tribe from Kalimantan.

Visitors can enter the structure, wander around and discover constructions from different Indonesian regions. A staircase leads to the top of the installation, revealing miniature models of nine typical dwellings: Korowai tree house from Kaibar in Papua, Rumah Panjang or Longhouse from Kalimantan, Tongkonan from Toraja in Sulawesi, Omo Hada from Nias Island in Sumatra, Mbaru Niang from Wae Rebo in Flores, East Nusa Tenggara, Uma



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Mbatangu from Sumba in East Nusa Tenggara, Joglo House from Java, a traditional Balinese house and finally Honai from Papua. These houses imply diverse ethnicities, histories, cultures, religious beliefs and one shared design goal – surviving tropical climate.

As visitors enter the installation, they come across models of Honai houses. A sign stating “± 0.00” in front of the models indicates that Honai houses are built parallel to the ground. These mushroom-shaped structures serve as homes for the Dani Tribe in Papua. Unlike any other traditional dwellings in Indonesia, Honai houses are built with a narrow interior and minimum windows, as to protect the inhabitants from the cold wind, which often hits the Baliem Valley area.

The mockups of a traditional Balinese and Joglo houses are both placed in the second stage of the installation. Visitors need to climb a few steps to reach the terraces of both these houses. The sign “± 0.30–0.60”, meaning 30–60 centimetres above the ground, indicates the range of elevation for both houses. On the next level, one can find the models of Mbaru Niang and Uma Mbatangu. These houses, which originated in East Nusa Tenggara, are built with an elevation ranging between

80–120 centimetres above the ground. The space between the ground and the elevated floor is commonly used for keeping livestock.

The traditional house from Nias Island, Omo Hada, is marked at “± 1.40–1.80”. Between the ground and the top floor, the house is supported by massive columns made of *nibung* wood (*Oncosperma tigillarum*), an evergreen palm tree. Although Omo Hada is a traditional house, it has one advantage: it is earthquake-resistant. Since the columns are not embedded into the ground and the structures are put together with pegs, they are flexible and can resist an earthquake. In the olden days, after the house was fully built, the tribe would order the architect to stand on top of the roof and slide down it. If he survived the fall, he was allowed to live. This ritual was intended to prevent the architect from revealing the house’s secrets to strangers.

The models for both Rumah Panjang and Tongkonan carry a “± 2.00–2.60” sign. The word ‘Tongkonan’ derives from ‘Tongkon’, which means ‘to sit’. This house was originally built for Torajan noblemen to sit and do social gatherings. Tongkonan, which is widely known for its boat-shaped and saddleback roof, consists of many



parts: north (*Tangalok*), south (*Sumbung*) and middle (*Sali*). The gap between the ground and the floor is supported by *uru* wood columns and it is used for livestock.

The final stage of Matin’s installation displays a model of a Korowai tree house from Papua. These tree houses typically stand ten metres above the ground. The Korowai people believe that the higher their houses, the less mosquitos reach their homes. They used to also believe in a myth called ‘Laleo’, an evil spirit wandering at ground level during night time. For the Korowai, Laleo doesn’t only mean an evil spirit, but can also be used to address every living thing, including the Papuans themselves.

Incorporating modern and technologically-advanced materials together with components of traditional houses, this installation offers a different perspective and spatial experience to visitors. Through this interactive architectural piece, Andra Matin wants to convey that understanding the unique diversity and history of architecture in Indonesia is fundamental to developing contemporary ways of living alongside nature and our surroundings. The exhibition runs until 21 July 2019. [↗](#)

- 01 Model of Korowai Tree House. A dwelling of the Korowai people from Kaibar, Papua
- 02 Inner side of ELEVATION, featuring models of the Mbaru Niang from Wae Rebo, Flores and Uma Mbatangu from Sumba, East Nusa Tenggara
- 03 Front view of ELEVATION by Andra Matin, an award-winning installation originally presented at the 2018 Venice Architecture Biennale
- 04 Front façade, by Lim Masulin of BYO Living, composed of rattan weavings with holographic technique and inspired by traditional weaving technique of the Dayak tribe from Kalimantan

