

A Strong Passion for Art

PHOTOS BY Bagus Tri Laksono



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With a life mission of bringing Indonesian literature worldwide, John McGlynn, founder of the Lontar Foundation, also shares a deep passion for Indonesian modern and contemporary art.

Art collecting is not just a hobby, it is very personal and a profound dedication. It can be about the money, but it is rarely an issue. Like any aspiration, it requires a burning passion and years of diving into the vast and dynamic sea of art.

For John H. McGlynn, his love for art started early on. After pursuing fine arts and theatre at the University of Wisconsin in the United States, McGlynn came to Indonesia in 1976 to study the art of traditional *wayang* puppetry. But after learning and becoming fluent in the Indonesian language, McGlynn decided to pursue a different career path. This stemmed his life-long affair with Indonesian literature as he became one of the most notable translators of Indonesian literature and a prodigious supporter of the local arts scene.

In 1987, McGlynn founded the Lontar Foundation along with prominent authors, Goenawan Mohamad, Sapardi Djoko Damono, and Umar Kayam. He has since committed most of his time helping the growth of Indonesia's literary significance to an international audience.

Four decades of living in the archipelago, McGlynn finds an enduring fascination with the depth and diversity of Indonesian culture, literature, and the underrated richness of the art world. Since the very first time he bought a piece of art back when he was still a student, McGlynn has continued to expand his collection and at the same time create a special bond with the artists.

These days, McGlynn resides in a modest yet alluring home tucked in a corner in South Jakarta where he houses his vast collection of art. Stepping inside the residence, guests are welcomed by many artworks McGlynn collected over the years. His collection comprises of artworks that touch Indonesia's social and political stances, especially during the time of struggle and revolution, a subject that McGlynn is particularly fascinated with.

An important sculpture of a three dimensional cutout wooden horse by Taring Padi greets guests as they enter the house. Their eyes would then be automatically drawn to the foyer, where an infantile male sculpture wearing "Pemuda Pancasila" by Abdi Setiawan stands tall and other important pieces are placed.

Behind the Taring Padi sculpture, lies "Jakarta Burning", a critical piece made by Hanafi, which he painted live for 72 hours in front of large fires and a wave of violence during the riots in May 1998.



Deborah Iskandar

Art Consultant

Deborah Iskandar qualifies as an expert on Indonesian and international art, with over 20 years of experience in Southeast Asia, heading both Sotheby's and Christie's Indonesia during her career before establishing ISA Art Advisory in 2013. Her company now branded ISA Art and Design, provides advisory services for clients interested in buying and selling art as well as building collections. In addition, ISA Art and Design is also the leading provider of online resources of luxurious furniture, art, architecture and property for clients seeking to acquire and build their homes or any space with strong sophistications, spreading love of art into our beloved spaces.

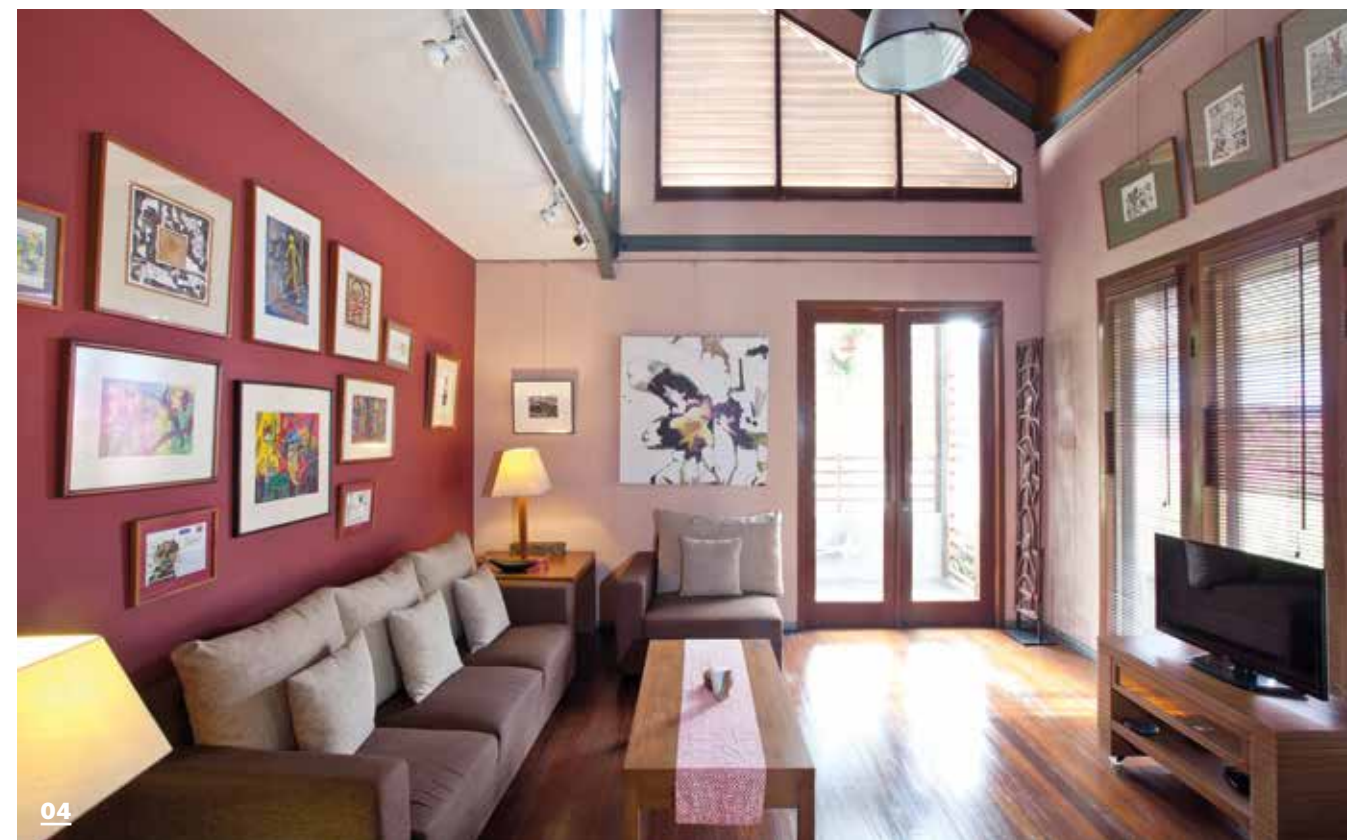
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McGlynn acquired the work in the same year when Hanafi held his first major exhibition at Taman Ismail Marzuki, “I walked to the back of the gallery, saw the piece, and said to myself that I really needed that...”

Above a rock garden in a brightly sun-lit corner of the foyer hangs a momentous piece by Nindityo Adipurnomo. The artwork is made out of plastic waste, comprising of empty bottles of various cleansing products, placed in a framework in the shape of a missile. It sends a message of a big threat to humanity and the world.

Like his good relations with Adipurnomo and his wife, Mella Jaarsma, a Dutch artist who is based in Yogyakarta, most of McGlynn’s collection plays a key role in his loyalty and commitment towards the local art communities. “I have always supported my artist friends. I was poor and they were poor, but whenever I had money, I would spend it on their artwork.” He adds. Financial circumstances rarely stopped him from purchasing art as he has always received special arrangements from



- 01 ‘Jakarta Burning’ a quadryptich by Hanafi and ‘Pemuda Pancasila’ sculpture by Abdi Setiawan in the foyer.
- 02 ‘Pemuda Pancasila’ sculpture by Abdi Setiawan located in the foyer. Above is a missile sculpture by Nindityo Adipurnomo.
- 03 Dining room features artworks by Yogyakarta-based Dutch artist Mella Jaarsma
- 04 Living room features early artworks by Eddie Hara and artwork by Agan Harahap.
- 05 Cut out wooden horse sculpture by Taring Padi greets guests as they enter McGlynn’s home.

the close relations he has built with the artists. McGlynn has also made sure that he attends every exhibit, “I was always present, leaving my name card at each show that I go to.”

Another particular artist that has taken an important part and make up a fair amount of McGlynn’s collection is Dede Eri Supria. McGlynn deeply relates with Supria’s surrealist commentaries on Indonesia’s urban landscapes and social viewpoints of day-to-day lives. He believes that Supria speaks well of Indonesia’s modernism. When the artist worked for *Tempo* magazine as an illustrator in the 1980’s, his drawing of Kartini on the front cover struck McGlynn’s eyes. This led him to find the artist and they became good friends. McGlynn helped sell Supria’s artwork as not many were buying his pieces. “Supria to me, more than anyone else, was kind of that modernist.”

The painting “Mother Crying” portrays Kartini, a pioneer in education for girls

and women’s rights for Indonesians, with a pistol through her head and a red lipstick. It talks about the role of women in Indonesia. Of the piece McGlynn says, “I thought it was well executed and has a lot of depth to it. It does not need to have any words on the painting to make a statement.” The work is still very much relevant in today’s world as it symbolises modern women and the rise of materialistic devotion.

The saying “art imitates life” is evidently interwoven in McGlynn’s world. Reflecting back to Supria’s commentaries on modernism, it has quite accurately echoed McGlynn’s view of society, as well as his passion towards Indonesian contemporary literature. While his love for the arts and living with masterpieces has been a form of personal enlightenment for him, this has also opened new perspectives and possibilities that has continued to inspire McGlynn in all aspects of his life. ▀