



## BRINGING Art to Life

DEBORAH ISKANDAR DISCUSSES THE MARRIAGE OF INSTALLATION, SCULPTURE, MOVEMENT, AND SOUND

culptures have made a major impact throughout human history, from the earliest known prehistoric sculpture Venus of Tan-Tan to the modern sculptures of today's contemporary art scene. They depict the history of humankind, telling the stories of heroes and legends, uncovering lost narratives, and capturing moments as the world shifts, grows, and develops. They are symbols of expression, the artists' ideas given a threedimensional form.

These sculptures stand on their own as a lasting record of human history, permanent and unchanging. Interactive installation art has given this art form a new life. With interactive art, the relationship between the artist and the audience plays a fascinating part; engaging the audience not only gives the artwork more attention and encourages its discussion, but transforms it as well. Though the artist may have given the art a specific intent, the participation of the audience offers the artwork a chance to become something entirely new. Without the artist, there would be no body of artwork to enjoy; without the audience's interaction, the artwork would not have unlocked all of its potential.

Aaron Taylor Kuffner and Jompet are two artists who understand this relationship between the art and its audience. Both Kuffner and Jompet present kinetic art sculptures, in which they marry visual art to motion and sound, and both centre their art in Indonesian culture, values, and ideas, bringing a discussion of this country in front of an international audience.

As an American conceptual artist who often works with a combination of sculpture, movement, and sound, Aaron Taylor Kuffner fell in love with Indonesian Gamelan music. With research as the foundation of his art, Kuffner devotes his time and effort into crafting artworks that are able to significantly contribute to society; spending years on a project and even working to learn new skill sets - music composition, ethnomusicology, metal sculpting, to name a few - for the sake of his art only highlights his passion towards his craft. His multi-disciplinary approach results in art that is always thought provoking and engages his audience in discussions, and The Gamelatron Project is no different.

As a result of over a decade of studying gamelan, first learning to play the instruments themselves, then delving deeper and finding out for himself the process of making and tuning gamelan, as well as its significance for the Indonesian people. During his residency at the League of Electronic Musical Urban Robots, a



collaboration with Eric Singer produced the first entirely robotic gamelan orchestra. After his residency, Kuffner began The Gamelatron Project, for which he sculpted works out of bronze, brass, iron and steel, and attached a system of mallets that are electronically instructed to play the instruments according to his compositions. The result is music that is both haunting and beautiful, drawing on the long-existing culture of the archipelago, yet is something entirely different and new.

In the artist's words, "The Gamelatron's mission is to create viscerally-powerful encounters with resonance through visually compelling works of art. It strives to create a harmony in the tension of fusing the East and the West, the modern and the ancient." With these kinetic sculptures, Kuffner combines tradition with technological advancement, the visual with beautifully unique yet underappreciated Indonesian heritage onto the international stage.

Jompet Kuswidananto, known simply by the name Jompet, is a musician-turned-artist who works with a variety of materials to create his installations, videos, and performances. With his background in music, and having studied Communication at the Faculty of Social and Political Science of Gadjah Mada University, he uses both the visual arts and audio in his work to communicate his themes of "politics, colonialism, power and mass-mobilisation



in the context of post-reformation Indonesia" while exploring "the complexities of life in a back of Indonesia's past. globalised world." The word 'syncretism' - the amalgamation of different cultures or religions, schools of thought, and beliefs - is incredibly important to him, and he references its significance in Java's history specifically as the island makes repeated contact with foreigners through trade, exploration, and colo-

Jompet focuses on the points of history in which Indonesia goes through a "cultural transition," such as the introduction of Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam, the Dutch colonisation of Indonesia, and its independence. Not only does he investigate how society reacts to these transitions in the present, but how these moments are remembered in the past, and how Indonesians perceive their own history, and what biases may colour their view. In order to unearth these events, Jompet collects everything including historical notes, testimonies from people who lived through the experience, government statements, and interview transcripts; anything that, to him, represents these points of transition.

War of Ghosts (2009), Java's Machine: Crevasses (2014), and the Cortege of the Third Realm series, Jompet arranges military costumes as if they were being worn, some positioned to play percussion instruments as they march, and others holding firearms. In Java, War of Ghosts, Jompet creates a multimedia experience, as he projects a video of himself cracking a whip to the beat of the drums, and his ghost figures each play a different tune, creating an orchestra to which they all march. Mirroring The Gamelatron Project, Jompet uses technology to beat the drums, bringing art, music, and

science together, giving the audience a flash-

Other installations like The Commoners (2012) portray Indonesia's conflicts closer to the present day. As common workers and farmers instead of soldiers in the military, Jompet's ghostly figures are given shovels and flags and megaphones this time, and their absent heads are protected and hidden by political t-shirts, wrapped in the signature style of modern Indonesian protesters. The TV plays footage of past political rallies as the sounds of the drum interrupt from time to time.

While Kuffner celebrates the vivid, beautiful Indonesian culture that he has come to love, Jompet uses his art to discuss and sometimes criticise the society in which he presently lives. Both artists examine the relics of Indonesia's past, and though they come from different backgrounds, both Kuffner and Jompet love Indonesia all the same. The collaboration of these two artists will be something unique, because while both artists share multiple similar elements in their artworks, they process it differently to present unique narratives.

the acoustic, art with science, and brings the For many of his installations, including Java, These works will be included in an upcoming exhibition at the ISA Art and Design Gallery. For more information about this exhibition and other ISA Art and Design Exhibitions, please visit www.isaartanddesign.com.

- Aaron Taylor Kuffner, Bintang Biru, Photo courtesy of
- Aaron Taylor Kuffner, Cemerlang, Photo courtesy of the artist
- Jompet Kuswidananto, Long Shadow #2, Photo courtesy of the artist
- Jompet Kuswidananto, Long Shadow #3, Photo courtesy of the artist