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Connections

DEBORAH ISKANDAR EXPLORES THE WORK AND PHILOSOPHY OF ALEXANDER SEBASTIANUS HARTANTO

lexander Sebastianus Hartanto - artist, writer, and ethnographer - explores enous art forms. the notion of decontextualising material cultures, with a focus on traditional Indonesian arts. Having learned from master traditional weavers, Hartanto investigates topics of

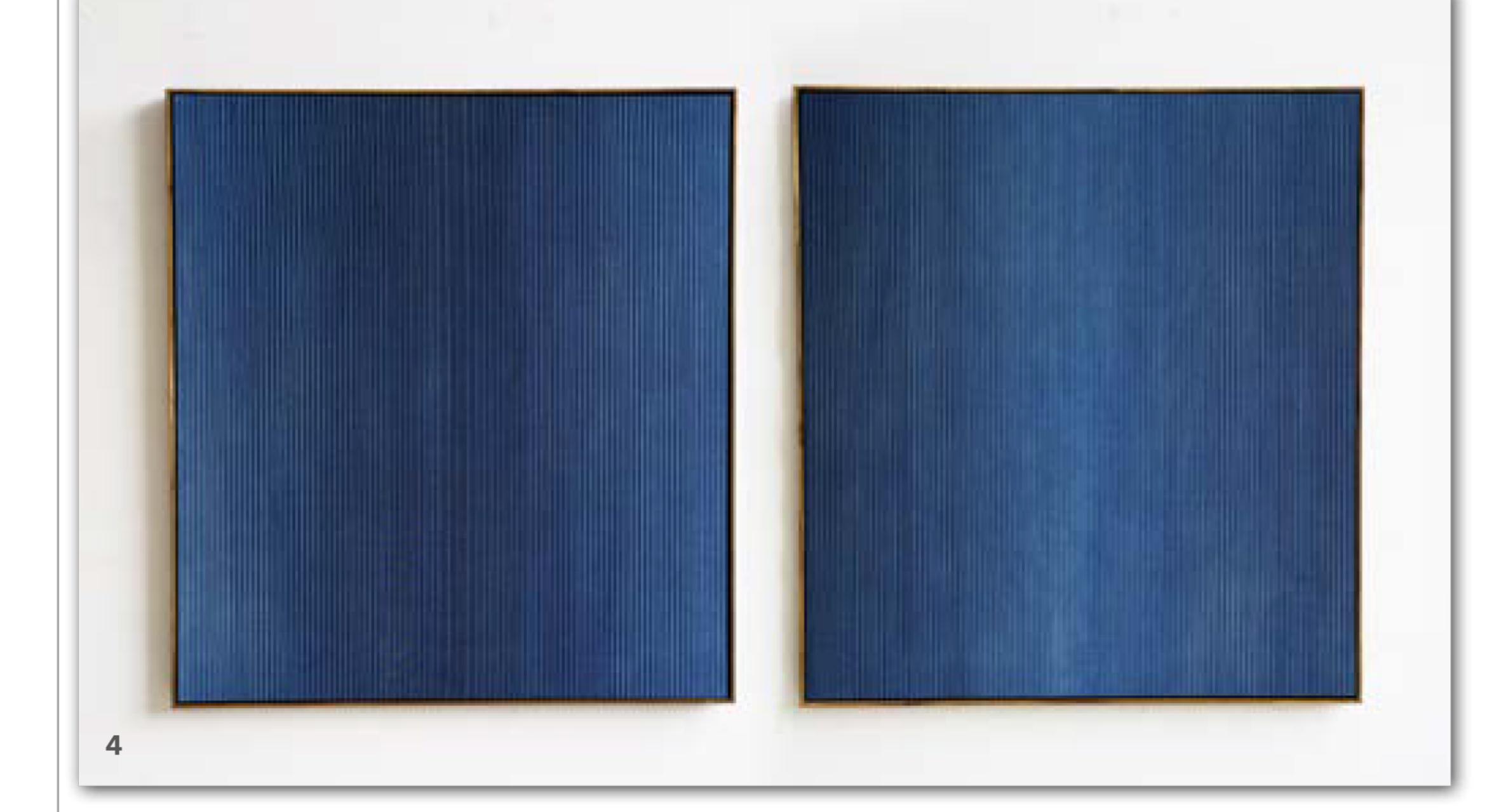
decolonisation and the reclamation of indig-

Hartanto has explained that, in Javanese, there is no word for 'art'; instead, there is the word "Sani", "a way of living which involves offering, service and search of the unknown". He pursues this concept of "Sani" in his life through both research and artistic practice, as well as recreating pilgrimages and sacred spaces.

With his artistic practice being deeply personal to himself, Hartanto carries out his practice of weaving as a form of meditation. At first, he wove as a form of grieving when his grandmother passed, imbuing in his creations his honest emotions, similar to the traditional craftsmen of the past. This process, from preparing the raw materials to weaving everything together into a piece of cloth, is a laborious one that the artist undertakes, both out of love and as a form of activism. He also likens this ritual of weaving to resembling the body of the artist himself; just as thousands of individual threads are woven together to create a single whole, the human body exists by being made up of trillions of individual cells that together form a single, sentient being. He creates every artwork with straightforward intentions, calling the process transcendent and transforma-

Hartanto traces back his career and identity in art to several things, including the people he grew up with and various experiences throughout his life. His dual existence living in both the bustling urban landscape of Jakarta, and in stark contrast, his grandmother's village in East Java, has opened his eyes to the modern world's habit of commercialising every aspect of life and culture. He claims that the contemporary art industry of the 21st cen-





of view, the act of creating art in and of itself of "Sani" can be seen in whatever remains. is a primal instinct in humans, rather than an activity fuelled by capitalist opportunity. The modern world has taken indigenous art-makand aesthetics, assigning them value accordindigenous art forms, is both devalued and ex- his own craft. oticised in the present day.

values in the contemporary art industry, Hartanto has made it his purpose to "decolonise" art. Hartanto redefines what it means to be an artist and a creator, utilising his weaving as a grouping of these lines into threes and fours. means to both reclaim Indonesia's culture, the contemporary art industry's focus on com- towards her child.

tury has commodified art. Through his point mercialism, aesthetics, and politics, the spirit

Hartanto marries the spheres of traditional and contemporary art. He both takes from his ing and has imposed on it Eurocentric views culture to guide his art, creating art with practices that have been passed down for generaing to Western standards. Hartanto calls it the tions, while engaging with the modern art in-"colonisation" of art; weaving, among other dustry and continuing to explore and develop

His exhibit, "Abdi Alam", is an installation and Because of this commercialisation, and the exhibit that recontextualises Indonesian tradipervasiveness of Western ideals and aesthetic tions for a contemporary audience. Hartanto uses traditional motifs found in Batik as the inspiration for this exhibit: "Lurik", repeating straight, parallel lines, and "Telupat", the

and to go against convention to create art for Consistent and strong, with its stacking lines, art's sake. He criticises the larger art industry, the "lurik" pattern weaves together creating an and reflects inwards as well, asking himself unconditional barrier; it symbolises a mothwhat it means to be an artist. By stripping away er's protection and her never-ending attention

From the words "telu" and "papat", three and four respectively, the "telupat" pattern was once reserved for the attire of the Jogjakarta Kraton's royal guardians, "Abdi Dalam". The repetition of the sacred number three alongside four stripes is meant to unite every individual person into a united entity.

To combat the colonisation of the arts, and to "re-sacralise" Indonesian indigenous creations and establish their worth outside the dictation of Western convention, Hartanto has represented "lurik" weavings in "Abdi Alam" as forest guardians throughout Java; the wrapping of individual trees protects the borders of endangered forest from poachers and loggers on the island. The pilot of the project will be exhibited at "Abdi Alam pt.1" in Omah Budoyo Gallery, Jogjakarta, and will expand throughout forest conservators across Java.

The exhibit showcases the remnants of the weaver's rumination during his pilgrimage within several forests in Java, 2017 and 2021. The collection consists of woven "lurik" studies of "Telupat" in Indigofera - true indigo and cyanotype film prints. The abandonment of roots, as well as the inevitability of change are extensions of the artist's contemplation during this pilgrimage, and are reflected within this collection of studies.

Masterfully skilled and established in his practice, throughout his career as an artist, Hartanto has been given several awards, including the William Daley Award for Excellence in Art History and a Craft Field in 2017, and the Massachusetts College of Art & Design: Fiber Arts Departmental Honors in 2018. Outside of his personal work, Hartanto teaches craft practice and theory both in Indonesia and the United States, and is involved with Yayasan Rumah SukkhaCitta as a textile craft school developer and ethnographer.

Hartanto's highly introspective art reflects his contemplation as he struggles with the reality of art-making in the modern world, and exists as a quiet yet persistent stand against the colonisation of the indigenous arts.

- Menjelang Malam by A.Sebastianus
- F. Rumination II by A.Sebastianus
- A Sebastianus
- Menjelang dan Berlalu II by A.Sebastianus