



Lake & Copper (2024) by Aimi Kaiya. Acrylic, acrylic ink, gold mica flake and black mica flake on Leonardesca linen, 40 x 30 centimeters.



Sky Mines (2024) by Aimi Kaiya. Acrylic, acrylic ink, gold mica flake and black mica flake on Leonardesca linen, 40 x 30 centimeters.



Calliandra haematocephala (2023) by Issay Rodriguez. Cyanotype on canvas with burlap backing, 156 x 129 centimeters.

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A Fold in Time, a group exhibition now showing at ISA Art Gallery in Central Jakarta, is the result of a cross-border collaboration between leading contemporary art spaces in the region: MONO in Manila, Richard Koh Fine Art with bases in Singapore and Bangkok and ISA Art Gallery. Coming at a time when the focus on Southeast Asia is strongly gaining momentum, A Fold in Time opened in Manila and will travel to Singapore after Jakarta. While issues of identity, history, memory, preservation and boundaries might mark the artists’ diverse conceptual premises, the collective realities of the past, present and future are inextricably intertwined with the diversity of artistic expression. The exhibition features only 12 artists, and its relatively small size offers an unexpectedly intimate view of their varied techniques, materials and levels of exploration. Painting appears to be central to the works of some artists, yet the focus is on materiality, technology and contemporary realities. The compositions of Thai artist Aimi Kaiya, born in 1989, though semi-minimalist and modest in scale, are imbued with rich, vivid color. She employs a mix of mediums—acrylic, acrylic ink and gold

A Fold in Time: Southeast Asian women artists explore identity, history

The relatively small exhibition features 12 women artists who use a varying range of mediums in a diversity of artistic expressions to explore collective realities.

and black mica flakes—on Leondesca linen. A gritty surface texture and rough edges define her signature style, as seen in *Lake & Copper* and *Sky Mines* in this exhibition. Myanmar artist Wah Nu holds a Bachelor of Arts in Music from the National University of Arts and Culture in Yangon. While she often collaborates with her husband on large-scale installations, here, however, personal emotions dominate in dreamlike clouds that seem to meander in the sky while imagining the sea beneath in *Cloud and the Sea* (acrylic on canvas, 48.8 x 61.2 centimeters). Wah Nu has also made films and participated in several renowned exhibitions in Asia, as well as in

Europe and the United States. The exploration of different mediums, albeit hidden behind the finished artworks, is one of the standout features of this exhibition. This is particularly so in the work by Issay Rodriguez titled *Calliandra haematocephala*, an image of a white flower made with cyanotype on a canvas measuring 186 by 129 cm. Cyanotype is a camera-less photographic process that produces a blue print on a white background. It involves applying a light-sensitive solution to paper or fabric and exposing it to ultraviolet (UV) light, using either sunlight or a UV lamp, which turns exposed areas blue while the unex-

posed areas remain white. Rodriguez creates drawings, cyanotypes and other types of art, such as virtual and augmented reality artworks, and has featured in various exhibitions including the 2017 Venice Biennale. Exploration of mediums also finds expression in *Terraphytic Narrative* by French-Indonesian artist Ines Katamso, who uses soil on handwoven cotton in her large work measuring 125 by 155 cm. As for Sinta Tantra, who was born to Balinese parents and studied in the United Kingdom, where she now lives, her works appear sculptural but are the result of a particular technique: A wooden frame is covered with linen stretched over a prepared image, and then other materials such as tempera, color and 24-karat gold leaf are applied to complete the composition. Sinta’s *Burning with a Bright, Fierce Flame* harkens back to Balinese narratives while her second work, *Let Us Always Have Great Dreams*, is inspired by a letter written by Javanese national heroine and women’s empowerment advocate Raden Ajeng Kartini, according to a gallery assistant. Other featured artists include Philippine-born Canadian Jill Paz, who combines analog and digital techniques while Goldie Poblador, also born in the Philippines, explores absence through glass and Manila-based Eunice Sanchez uses cyanotype, adding textiles and thread. The works of Indonesia’s Luh’De Gita explore preservation, Japan’s Kelli Maeshiro uses abstract imagery to denote the self and Taiwan’s Liu Hsin Ying works in the more traditional mediums of oil or acrylic on canvas, making for a sweeping showcase of varying textures and tones. *** A Fold in Time runs until June 20 at ISA Art Gallery at the Wisma 46 building on Jl. Sudirman, Central Jakarta. — PHOTOS COURTESY OF ISAARTANDESIGN.COM

Knight’s Dreams: when stories become the artist’s sword and shield

Visual artists Apin, Gula and Rato turn their gaze inwards in search of knightly resolve in the face of modernity

Storytelling is perhaps simultaneously meaningless yet meaningful, fleeting anecdotes, morphed by time into myths that shape our worldview. The French philosopher Roland Barthes wrote of how contemporary society is built and organized by myths, where mundane cultural constructs can be reframed as part of the natural order. Yet when push comes to shove, stories of heroism become integral symbols of steadfast resilience in the face of life’s challenges. The story of the valiant knight slaying the wicked dragon to rescue the distressed damsel then becomes a metaphor, encouraging readers to ponder on what they accept as a part of life. This sense of knightly resolve is central to Murai Arts Project’s *Knight’s Dreams* exhibition, offering a glimpse into how three visual artists perceive chivalric codes in the modern world. Running until May 31 at JP Live!Space, *Knight’s Dreams* highlights visual artists Firdaus a.k.a. Apin, Teguh “Gula” Septian Arifianto and Rato Tanggela’s journey through the theme, each influenced by their personal identities. Gula showcased a series of three paintings and two sculptures titled *Dance of Shadows*, taking in-

spiration from the hand shadow puppets of his childhood days. Meanwhile, Apin’s *Main Lawan Main Kawan* takes its cue from the contemporary athletic scene, portraying humanoid figures with a donut-like head preparing to throw a basketball or mid-swing at a tennis court. By contrast, Rato’s *Aku si Badi* is centered on an anthropomorphic dog figure, inspired by his own loyal canine companion Badi, in a range of scenes including being submerged knee-deep in water in the pouring rain to hugging a vaguely humanoid figure made out of the cosmos. **A hint of the self** Just as the knightly narratives are often not about the knights themselves, so too do Gula, Apin and Rato’s subjects represent a larger presence. Speaking to *The Jakarta Post* a day before the exhibition’s opening, Gula said the painting’s subject is actually his own alter ego, a more colorful, expressive version of himself. “Knights are probably associated with wars and weaponry, but now our battles are fought with art. *Dance of Shadows* is a call to return to our childhood imagination, and where our lives as adults are perhaps harder, perhaps we could dream a little more,” he said.



Murai Arts Project’s “Knight’s Dreams” highlights the works of visual artists (left to right) Rato Tanggela, Teguh “Gula” Septian Arifianto and Firdaus a.k.a. Apin.



Apin’s *Main Lawan Main Kawan* series is based on the Minang proverb “di ma bumi dipijak, di sinan langik dijunjuang”, a maxim similar to the English saying “do as the Romans do.”

In his previous career at an advertising agency, drawing was his escape from the ennui of clients and projects. Thus, Gula the alter ego lives in a fantasyland full of animals, with no humans in sight. “However, there are still wild and dangerous animals out and about, so that’s a reminder to go back to the real world. Make no mistake, the real world isn’t all that pretty, but we also have to tackle the difficult parts. That’s what a knight means to me.” Just like Gula, Apin’s works are also loaded with symbolism. Hailing from West Sumatra and based in Yogyakarta, his works reflect the local Minang proverb “di ma bumi dipijak, di sinan langik dijunjuang”, a proverb similar to the English “do as the Romans do.” On closer inspection, the donut-headed figure possesses a skin similar to that of a chameleon as a symbol of adaptation to one’s environment, while the rounded head signifies unbroken social bonds. At the same time, the match-like atmosphere hints at sportsmanship, where friend and foe start from the same line. *Main Lawan Main Kawan* is not

just a mere physical competition, but also one of attitude. In these matches, we learn to compete without vengeance and without losing respect. We play not to win, but to grow together,” he said. As for Rato, his artworks serve as a portrait of his life’s journey, with the characters symbolizing different aspects of the situation. In *Parade Hujan* (Rain Parade), the dogs sing and make merry in the pursuit of rain amid a blighted landscape, signifying hope for better things to come. Yet *When The Water Rises* cuts a less than ideal situation, with the pouring rain framing a single figure knee-deep in the water, arrows lodged throughout his torso. But for Rato, the dog has much to teach. It is both loyal and entertaining, courageous and responsible, perhaps man’s best friend and teacher. “Sometimes we will be in those kinds of situations, but we can’t give up too easily because there are others, maybe a friend or a family member. In my view, the challenges we face are probably there for a reason, either for us or for someone else, that’s something to think about,” he said. **Food for thought** Still, whatever it is that you might think about the shadow-wolf, the donut-faced chameleon



Aku si Badi by Rato takes its inspiration from the Yogyakarta-based artist’s pet dog Badi, representing his own journey through different situations.

and singing dogs, all three artists agreed that the message is ultimately in the eyes of the beholder. “Visually, my works are perhaps quite easy to discern, in the sense that they have one central message of ‘don’t stop playing, dreaming and imagining’. But I also want viewers to be free to interpret them as they wish,” says Gula. Apin concurs, noting that the relatability between the artwork and the audience is an added value. “Sometimes when our understanding of something is too rigid, there’s no more freedom for us to feel. In the end, the work is just dictating [ideas].” We all have our own reasons to create, added Rato, but different experiences and interpretations brought by the viewer enrich the artworks. “The hope is that rather than telling just our own stories, they can perhaps create even more stories for others. In a sense, that is rather freeing.” Just as knights once fought for honor and ideals, perhaps these artists, too, wield their brushes and chisels for theirs.



The *Dance of Shadows* series portrays Gula’s alter ego, representing the power of imagination and dreams.