

Made Dirty

Ardi Gunawan Solo Show

ISA Art Gallery

Curated by
Hendro Wiyanto

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Prologue

In the Mess, the Message

ISA Art Gallery on Ardi Gunawan's Solo Show: Made Me Dirty

ISA Art Gallery is proud to present *Made Me Dirty*, Ardi Gunawan's long-awaited solo exhibition. For many of us who have followed Ardi's practice since the beginning, we have come to know him not only as a painter, but also as a sculptor, educator, and installation artist, whose work traverses the fields of architecture, media, and design. This exhibition, however, offers a different kind of intimacy: a studio-sized storm of color, satire, memory, and mess.

"Painting makes me dirty—literally," Ardi jokes, referencing the splashes of paint that cover his clothes, floor, and skin. But beyond the physical residue, the phrase becomes a poetic metaphor for what painting means to him: a release from routine, a protest against sanitized systems, and a way of thinking through form. Although he once aspired to be a sculptor, Ardi approaches paint like a raw material, carving it onto the canvas with urgency. His gestures are wild, his surfaces chaotic—but beneath it all lies a sharp, often comical critique of the world around him. From political satire to emotional improvisation, Ardi's paintings take on many voices.

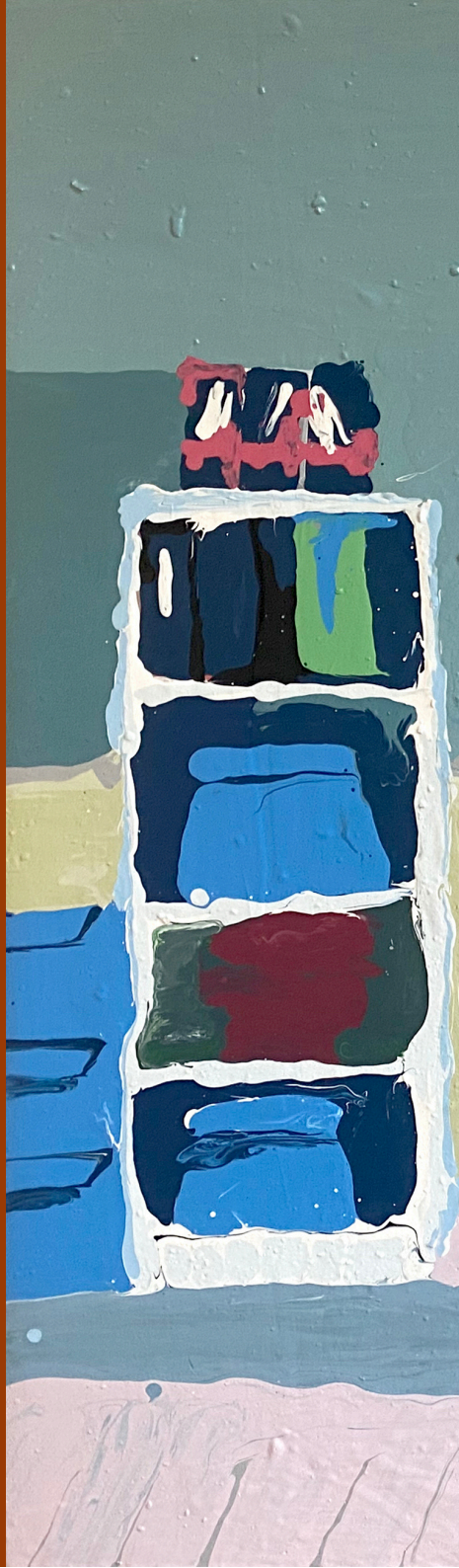
In *Natural History of Blob and Other Emotional Innovation* rejects recognizable forms altogether, celebrating abstraction as a site of emotional mutation. Here, blobs and textures become strange organisms—alive, confused, and constantly shifting. The playful depiction of *Pope Colonel Sanders* brings together two cultural icons—the religious and the commercial—into one absurd hybrid. What happens when sacred symbols are flattened into brands? The work doesn't offer an answer but instead revels in the absurdity of it all.

Other works such as *Bird Not a Bird* reference the mass reproduction of Chinese ink paintings, asking where authenticity ends and sameness begins. In *The Wall is Crying*, Ardi returns to a deeply personal space, continuing a therapeutic series he started during the pandemic. The distorted square canvas weeps in shape and tone—part face, part architecture—a melting portrait of vulnerability. It reminds us that art, at its core, can still be simple, emotional, and profoundly human.

And then there's Snow White, exhausted and unrecognizable. In this warped portrait of the beloved fairy-tale figure, Ardi introduces what he calls "zombie rationalism"—a world where things still function, but their spirit is gone. The character, much like so many images in mass media today, is overworked, commodified, emptied out. Taking from vintage advertisements from 1940s and 1950s in *Forbidden roles*, Ardi is fascinated by the gap in awareness between then and now—how images that once went unquestioned can now be seen as deeply problematic.

Throughout *Made Me Dirty*, Ardi Gunawan embraces contradictions: figuration and abstraction, chaos and intention, humor and sincerity. In doing so, he challenges the false divide between art and life, between the personal and the political. His paintings resist the need to be clever, yet they are never without thought. They are contemporary not because they chase trends, but because they reflect the fractures, absurdities, and emotional truths of our time. It's a joy for us at ISA Art Gallery to witness this side of him—a return not to tradition, but to freedom. This show brings together years of experimentation and reflection, offering audiences a chance to understand not only his paintings, but also the systems, struggles, and daily joys that shape them.

ISA Art Gallery
Jakarta, Indonesia
2025





Introduction from Dr. Lisa Radford

All that is solid, melts in Jakarta

Just a few weeks ago, Ardi Gunawan handed me the Vincent Namatjira Royal Tour catalogue when he arrived in Melbourne. A series of works by the Vincent where he inserts himself, a few dingoes and central Australian landscapes into the documented history of Royal visits to Australia. More correctly, he displaces the Royals, re-images them as visitors into his life, dismantling their appearance of power, humbling them. Vincent's humanist, sloppy, satirical paintings, prints and collages make zombies of the royals, rendering their representation, through the apparatus of photography and its proof-of-purchase, mute in the language of his determined forms.

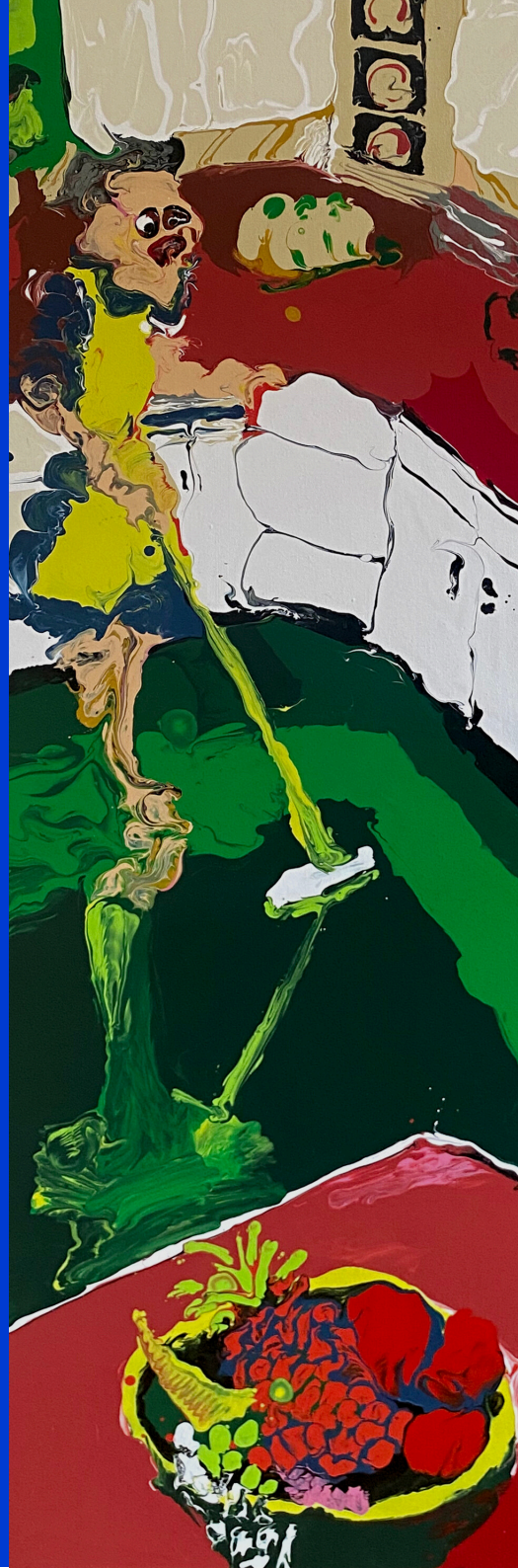
There is a through line between Namatjira and Gunawan, a critique and question to the images that dominate in a capitalism where excess melts into images enmasse via algorithms in our hands. Mark Fisher said something like *Capital is an abstract parasite, an insatiable vampire and zombie maker*. A visceral image extrapolated by Fisher where flesh is converted into "dead labour" and the "zombies made are us". (Fisher, 2009). Written in the aftermath of failed wars on terror, global economic collapse, Fishers remarks seem to precipitate also an always-already-never-ending-endism.

Techno-newism masquerades as anecdote at best, revolution at worst, set to fail amidst a jungle of in distinguished and unspoken class realities. Gunawans melting realities are sickly and sweet neo-nostalgia's, looping a future predicted from the past into a past that is seemingly always present. Unattainable images and proposed resurrections, Gunawan's dance between abstraction and representation caught in pigmented plasma, is a less a moral musing, more gifted observation. Your neo-liberal office as abject jelly roll sourced from stock-pot images, a macabre Snow White can't seem to find her face, over and over again, while the mundanity of the water cooler conversations breaks the datafication of your labour.

Hey Ardi, do you remember the James Ensor painting, *Skeletons fighting over a smoked herring* (1891)? I can't help but think of his work and the way scatterlogical humor was able to encounter a kind of theatre in painting. Gunawan's cakes have eyes. Ensor's context paralleled a birth of urbanised and overcrowded worlds, processions, protests, cities and mass gatherings — a body politic in painting.

Gunawan's body shares that encounter – with mass en masse; tired infrastructures alongside a glistening new. A body politic in painting were the liquid reality of false promises, the despair of pleasure in an excess of consumption. The grotesque approached in Ensor's work of the later 19th century, is different to Gunawan's submerging saccharine. How and what does one speak when faced with the onslaught of livestreamed barbarism? While the immediacy of A.I satire drifts into algorithmic history, it is Gunawan's paintings that will sit with us for more than the moment, laughing at us while we smile and cry with them.

Dr. Lisa Radford
Melbourne, Australia
2025





Esai Kuratorial

POLITIK PERMUKAAN: PROSEDUR LUKISAN ARDI GUNAWAN

*"Cita-cita saya mematung tapi malah mengambil jurusan cat. Kepinginnya bikin ilusi, tapi nggak dapat bikin realis...Cara memegang kuas saya seperti memahat."
– Ardi Gunawan*

Lukisan-lukisan Ardi tidak 'salah jurusan'. Pernyataannya bahwa patung dapat 'dibayangkan' atau seakan-akan objek tersebut dihadirkan ketika ia 'mengambil jurusan cat', seraya kuas diperlakukan seperti alat memahat justru memperkaya pengertian kita mengenai karyanya. Tentu saja di hadapannya hanya ada sebidang kanvas, tapi agaknya dorongan yang terutama dirasakannya adalah 'memahat'nya bukan melukisi permukaannya. Serangkaian kanvas yang 'dipahat' melalui 'jurusan cat' itulah lukisan-lukisan terbaru yang sekarang dipamerkannya. Kutipan dari pernyataan Ardi juga bermakna ganda, bahwa ia tidak hanya bermaksud memamerkan lukisan, tapi lebih dari itu ia mau 'memperlihatkan' prosedur atau kekhasan cara kerjanya, yakni melukis—dengan cat dan kuas—yang seolah-olah 'memahat'. Prosedur itu diimbui penjelasan lain dari Ardi perihal 'kegagalan'nya sendiri untuk membuat ilusi-ilusi realis pada kanvas. Tapi alih-alih cerita tentang kegagalan, justru dia tampak konsisten dengan 'cita-cita'nya semula untuk 'mematung' ketika merasakan kuasnya seperti alat pahat saat melukis.

Dalam khasanah bahasa Indonesia, kita beruntung tidak menerjemahkan 'painting' dengan misalnya 'cat-catan' karena 'paint' memang diartikan 'cat'. Kita menyebut kanvas yang dicat adalah dilukis, melukis adalah mengecat atau sebaliknya, dan hasil akhirnya tentunya adalah lukisan. Secara semantik istilah 'lukisan' menjadi lebih leluasa untuk ditafsirkan karena tidak ada unsur kata dasar 'cat' pada kata itu. Dengan demikian lukisan tidak mesti berhubungan dengan aktivitas yang secara harfiah dimaknai dengan mengecat. Meski sepanjang berkerja dengan semua kanvasnya Ardi tidak lepas berurusan dengan cat dan cat melulu, dia justru merasa tidak mengecat, tapi 'memahat'. Lukisannya bukan hasil 'cat-catan' melainkan adalah cat itu sendiri.

Kata 'ilusi' yang diartikan Ardi terkait erat dengan citra 'realis' berhubungan dengan dua istilah lain yang kerap kali digunakan oleh para pelukis di mana pun, yakni 'dunia' dan 'bayangan'. Kata lain adalah 'transparansi' seperti akan disinggung di bawah nanti. Kita ingat, di masa lalu Hendra Gunawan (1918–1993), maestro seni lukis kita itu, misalnya selalu berambisi untuk memperbesar ukuran kanvasnya, demi "sebuah dunia yang selalu ingin lebih luas". Makin besar ukuran kanvas, agaknya bagi Hendra makin luas pula bayangan pelukis perihail dunia yang ingin dijangkau atau dihidirkannya. Akan tetapi besar atau kecil ukuran kanvas seorang pelukis, benda itu niscaya dianggap menghadirkan sebuah 'dunia'.

Kiranya itulah makna primer dari kata 'ilusi', sebuah dunia yang transparan yang kita saksikan pada sebidang kanvas.

Pada pertengahan 1970-an, beberapa perupa muda di Indonesia mulai menuliskan manifestonya yang tajam terhadap dominannya kehadiran ilusi dalam lukisan. Misalnya, seperti pernyataan Anyool Subroto berikut ini: "Aku membuat karya tanpa bayangan-bayangan atau bermaksud membebannya dengan bayangan-bayangan. Maka tak perlu ia dilihat sebagai bayangan-bayangan atau dengan bayangan-bayangan". Lukisan bagi Anyool sekadar 'objek-objek' bagi mata, tidak lagi dihinggap bayangan atau ilusi tentang dunia – seluas atau sebatas apa pun imajinasi senimannya. Objek mata adalah benda konkret. Perhatikan pula pernyataan perupa lain seangkatannya, Bachtiar Zainoel ini: "...melukis bagi saya adalah membuat benda-benda dari benda-benda. Lukisan adalah benda konkret, tetapi tidak senantiasa benda konkret adalah lukisan. Lukisan mempunyai batasan, benda konkret bisa dibilang tidak ada batasannya." Di lingkungan seni rupa kita kedua pernyataan ini sangat penting untuk menandai perubahan status lukisan ke arah benda konkret. Praktik keduanya tetap lazim dibilang lukisan, tapi kritikus Sanento Yuliman buru-buru menaruhnya di antara tanda petik, bukan lukisan tapi "lukisan".

Ilusi atau bayangan bukanlah sesuatu yang konkret, maka lukisan–sejauh terpaut dengan atau diidentifikasi sepenuhnya sebagai ilusi dan bayangan–dengan demikian bukanlah 'benda konkret'. Menghilangkan 'bayangan-bayangan' pada lukisan dan menyebutnya sebagai 'benda konkret' tapi sekaligus mempertentangkannya dengan benda konkret lain yang lebih konkret itulah agaknya pengertian "lukisan" yang

membedakannya dengan lukisan-lukisan sebelumnya. Sanento Yuliman menyebutnya dengan lebih sederhana, "menghindari pertanda apa pun yang bisa menunjukkan emosi dan temperamen (pelukisnya)" (Sanento Yuliman, 1975).

Pada pertengahan 2010-an, Aditya Novali mempersoalkan elemen-elemen konkret yang mendukung kehadiran lukisan, yang tanpa ketersembunyian dari perangkat atau benda-benda konkret ini–termasuk kanvas–maka semua ilusi atau bayangan pada lukisan tidak akan pernah hadir. Sejumlah karyanya dalam seri *Painting Sense* (2014) membalikkan kanvas-kanvas kosong, memperlihatkan komponen-komponen material lukisan yang selama ini terabaikan begitu saja. Sarana-sarana pendukung–bidang kanvas segi empat dan kayu-kayu perentang–yang selama ini hadir secara kasat mata untuk mencapai misi sebuah lukisan, bagi Aditya Novali dapat dipandang memiliki tujuan pada dirinya sendiri, dan karena itu bermakna. Ada proses yang melibatkan konsep tertentu pada apa yang selama ini dianggap sebagai sekadar material sekunder (Aditya Novali, Why, 2022).

'Ilusi' sebuah lukisan tentunya berhubungan dengan kedwimatraan/kebidangan dan sifat kedataran, tritunggal yang dianggap sebagai keunggulan lukisan. Kritikus Clement Greenberg, misalnya menganggapnya sebagai syarat utama bagi esensi kemurnian atau kemodernan sebuah lukisan. Dengan pandangan yang kukuh semacam itu, sang kritikus mendefinisikan misalnya cipratan dan tetesan, tutupan cat yang merata di sekujur lukisan Jackson Pollock – prosedur 'cat-catan' yang berbeda–mulai menunjukkan kecenderungan untuk melampaui kedataran dan kedwimatraan lukisan itu sendiri, membayangi hadirnya sesuatu yang lebih konkret seperti karya patung atau objek trimatra. Di masa kini

sejarawan seni rupa kiwari menafsirkan obsesi para pelukis modern pada cat—dan dengan medium ini pula, sejak pertengahan abad lalu hadir dalam agenda-agenda internasional seperti biennale — tak lain adalah untuk menegaskan kehadiran mereka sebagai citizen-painter dalam konteks global/pascakolonial. Kondisi itu mencerminkan hadirnya ketegangan antara nilai berlebihan dalam kerefleksikan wahana yang sangat tertutup (opaque) — yakni kanvas dan cat—pada satu sisi dan kurangnya argumen mengenai keniscayaan untuk mendemistifikasi pretensi-pretensi pada ketransparanan wahana lukisan itu sendiri. (Patrick D. Flores, *Partaking of Paint*, 2013, hlm.11). Demikianlah ketransparanan pada lukisan terus menerus dipersoalkan: hubungan antara cat dan kanvas mencetuskan berbagai prosedur cara menge-cat. Lukisan dengan demikian adalah prosedur-prosedur, bukan entitas yang stabil dengan definisi mengenai bentuknya yang dianggap selalu tetap. Adalah ‘sentuhan’ yang telah menciptakan gambar, bukan visi seorang pelukis atau perupa.

Ardi ‘memahat’ kanvas-kanvasnya. Ia memilih prosedur itu —lebih dekat pada penciptaan objek trimatra atau patung— untuk memaknai kondisi ‘cat-catan’ yang dianggap melekat pada sebuah lukisan. Tujuannya bukanlah mengejar ilusi atau ketransparanan melalui medium cat —dan kadang kala kuas—yang digunakannya untuk ‘memahat’. Istilah ‘memahat’ tentu saja paradoks di dalam praktik semacam ini. Ardi tidak mengurangi atau menyusutkan bahan cat yang sudah ada depannya seperti seorang pematung berhadapan dengan seongkah kayu. Ia bahkan mengalirkan dan menumpuk-numpuk cat terlebih dulu. Ketebalan tertentu cat yang bertumpuk pada permukaan kanvas itulah yang ‘dipahat’ dengan kuasnya. Dalam hal ini bisa

dikatakan bahwa cat tidak berupaya menyulap subject matter atau pokok lukisan yang melampaui material cat itu sendiri. Pokok lukisan tidak berada ‘di luar’ cat, tetapi bersama-sama hadir mengalir atau ‘terpahat’ bersama catnya. Cat pertama-tama tidak berhasrat memburu suatu dunia penuh bayangan, yang tampak di sini dan membayangkan sempurna di sana sehingga kita merasa eksis di dalamnya. Cat berada di depan mata kita sebagai cat.

Pada lukisan-lukisan Ardi, apakah dia melukis sosok dongeng atau tokoh nyata — Anda dengan mudah bisa mengenalinya— objek konsumsi/benda-benda sepele atau semacam suasana, cat tampil sebagai cat yang dapat di’tunjuk’kan dengan jelas dan berada ‘di depan’ kanvas. Cat tidak bergantung atau bersembunyi di balik kanvas. Cat yang kita lihat pada lukisan Ardi adalah cat yang juga ada di dalam tube cat, secara fisik atau material. Cat yang keluar dari tube—bukan ‘berasal’ dari kuas atau bahkan ‘jari’ pelukis— adalah juga cat yang seakan-akan keluar atau menghambur dari bidang datar kanvasnya. ‘Memahat’ cat dengan demikian adalah tegangan antara sebuah citra dan materi. Materi cat tidak menghambur semata pada citra dari pokok lukisan. Sebaliknya pokok lukisan ditentukan juga bagaimana materi catnya bereaksi pada kanvasnya. Itulah sebabnya hasil akhir yang tampak pada lukisan Ardi sesungguhnya adalah sesudah upaya kesekian kali dia menghapus atau ‘memahat’ catnya agar citra atau gambaran itu sesuai dengan kehendak catnya. Dan bukan sebaliknya. Apakah Anda melihat upaya itu ketika berada di depan lukisannya?

Di masa lalu, bahan cat terbaik berguna untuk mendukung gagasan menghadirkan gambaran terbaik dari pokok lukisan yang dibayangkan pelukisnya. Ketika gambaran mengenai suatu peristiwa menjadi tampak

demikian nyata di atas kanvas, cat justru mesti meninggalkan substansinya sebagai cat: tidak nampak sebagai cat. Dia menjadi lukisan, bukan "lukisan". Istilah 'tipuan mata' yang kita temukan dan nikmati ketika memandangi 'keajaiban' lukisan selama berabad-abad telah melahirkan mereka dengan julukan para genius seni lukis, sesudah berhasil mengecoh mata kita. Akan tetapi selalu ada cara lain untuk menikmati lukisan selain membiarkan diri kita sendiri terkecoh. Konon suatu ketika Picasso pada usia lanjutnya melihat-lihat kembali *The Sea at L'Estaque*, sebuah lukisan karya Cézanne yang menjadi koleksinya. Dia mengetuk-ngetukkan tangan pada struktur rapat warna biru kehijauan dan biru ungu lukisan itu. "Lihat laut ini," katanya, "terasa pejal seperti seongkah batu." (Patrick D. Flores, hlm.9)

Tetapi tentu saja kita tidak hanya menikmati cat pada kanvas-kanvas Ardi di pameran ini. Kita menikmati cat pada lukisannya bersama suatu gambaran tertentu. Akan tetapi berbeda dengan lukisan-lukisan yang menyembunyikan materi catnya, menyulapnya sebagai suatu citra tertentu, cat dan gambaran tidak bisa dan sekaligus sungguh bisa dipisahkan pada lukisan Ardi. Cat bukan wahana untuk menggambarkan untuk kemudian dilupakan sebagai cat, melainkan untuk dilihat pertama-tama sebagai cat. Demikianlah seperti kutipan pernyataannya di atas, ada semacam tarik-menarik antara 'melukis' dari jurusan cat dan memahat untuk memaknai lukisan sebagai hasil pahatan cat.

Cat berusaha keluar 'meninggalkan' kanvas-kanvas Ardi agar tidak sekadar mengabdikan pada gambaran, akan tetapi gambaran juga memiliki 'ruang' yang tidak dibatasi hanya oleh cat. Gambaran pada lukisan, bagi Ardi justru perlu 'dikotori' oleh cat yang tanpanya suatu gambaran tidak akan muncul pada kanvasnya. Itulah

makna provokatif pernyataannya. Bagaimanapun cara Ardi memprovokasi gambaran dalam sebuah lukisan tetap berada dalam kerangka lukisan: dia membutuhkan teknik memotong, membuang di sini dan menambal di tempat lain, menempatkan citra, membuat penebalan pada fokus tertentu atau komposisi, menambahkan bingkai, membelakangi dinding dan seterusnya. Di luar perkara yang jamak itu sesungguhnya Ardi memberi arti yang lain dari pengertian 'mengecat': mengalirkan cat, 'memahat' cat, dan lebih-lebih 'mengotori' kanvasnya sendiri, alih-alih mau memperindahkannya supaya tampak seperti lukisan pada umumnya.

Ardi mengotori citra pada lukisannya dengan cat. Akan tetapi pada saat yang sama ia memperluas bingkainya, memberi penekanan pada perangkat fisik tersebut yang selama ini tidak dianggap menjadi bagian internal lukisan. Ia—seperti tindakan para pelukis 'konkret' lainnya—memprovokasi kehadiran bingkai ini menjadi serangkaian panel, tempat "lukisan"-nya memperoleh keluasan baru dari kehadirannya. Pelukis lain kadang kala bahkan membuang pigura lukisan mereka. Dengan "bingkai" itu, maka "lukisan" Ardi menciptakan semacam lingkungan konkret pada bidang-bidang kanvas yang dilukisi: sebuah bingkai yang tidak kedap, yang terbuka. Bingkai-panel itu membuat karyanya terbuka, tidak tertutup. Karyanya kini berinteraksi dengan panel-panel lebar warna-warni, bagian dari ruang senyatanya, tidak terpacak dan bergantung pada dinding. Panel-panel ini adalah keluasan baru untuk menghubungkannya dengan yang di luar, bukan sebagai ilusi atau bayangan.

Tentu kita segera teringat wahana yang tidak ada duanya di masa kini: layar, bingkai yang sanggup membingkai apa saja, di dalam dan di luar dunia. Layar adalah bingkai dari bingkai-bingkai.

Deleuze menyebut layar telah “memberikan standar pengukuran umum untuk hal-hal yang tidak memiliki bingkai...lanskap-lanskap yang jauh, wajah yang dilihat dari jarak sangat dekat, sistem perbintangan sampai imaji setetes air.” Bingkai-layar ini tak adalah ‘deteritorialisasi’. (Simon Morly, *Chaos and Awe: Painting for the 21 st Century*, 2018).

Ardi menyebut perluasan itu sebagai labirin dunia maya ketika ia berselancar di dalamnya dan bertemu dengan milyaran bits dan citra yang menghasilkan gambar apa saja. Citra di dunia maya tidak punya hierarki, semua sama saja. Sama buruk dan sama baiknya. Ada yang pernah menyebutnya semacam imaji yang berbau ‘sampah’, ada dimana-mana, berserakan di mana-mana dan orang bebas memungutnya. Lukisan-lukisan Ardi bukan soal apanya yang ‘kotor’, tapi bagaimana mengotorinya.

Hendro Wiyanto
Jakarta, 10 Juni 2025



Curatorial Essay

THE POLITIC OF SURFACE: ARDI GUNAWAN'S PAINTING PROCESS

"My dream was to be a sculptor, but I ended up majoring in painting. I wanted to create illusions, but I couldn't do realism... The way I hold a brush is like carving." – Ardi Gunawan

Ardi's paintings are not a case of being in the 'wrong major.' His statement that sculpture can be 'imagined,' or that an object can be made to appear as if it were present when he 'took up painting,' while treating the brush like a carving tool, in fact deepens our understanding of his work. Of course, what lies before him is merely a flat canvas — but the impulse he seems to follow is one of sculpting, rather than painting its surface. This series of canvases 'sculpted' through the 'medium of painting' forms the body of new works he now presents in this exhibition. Ardi's statement also carries a double meaning: he is not merely presenting paintings, but rather revealing the procedures — the distinct way he works — where painting with brush and pigment mimics the act of sculpting. This process is further clarified by Ardi's own reflection on his 'inability' to create realistic illusions on canvas. Yet rather than a tale of failure, what emerges is a quiet consistency with his original 'dream' of 'sculpting' — a dream that persists whenever he feels his brush become a carving tool in the act of painting.

In the Indonesian language, we're fortunate that the word 'painting' isn't translated as something like *cat-catan* (a rough term for "things painted with paint"), even though 'paint' literally means cat. We say that a canvas that has been painted is *dilukis* (painted), *melukis* means to apply paint, and the result is a *lukisan* (a painting). Semantically, the term *lukisan* offers more interpretive freedom because it doesn't contain the root word *cat* — thus, a painting doesn't necessarily have to be linked to the literal act of applying paint. Although, Ardi constantly works with paint — and nothing but paint — he doesn't feel that he is 'painting' in the conventional sense. Rather, he feels as if he is 'sculpting'. His paintings are not simply products of *cat-catan* (mere applications of paint), but are the paint itself — made present as form.

The word 'illusion', as understood by Ardi, is closely tied to the 'realist' image and relates to two other terms frequently used by painters everywhere: 'world' and 'shadow'. Another related concept is 'transparency', which will be discussed further below. We might recall how, in the past, Hendra Gunawan (1918–1993), our maestro of painting, always aspired to enlarge the size of his canvases — in pursuit of "a world that always wants to be bigger." For Hendra, a larger canvas seemed to represent a broader vision of the world that the painter wished to access or evoke.

Regardless of size, however, a painter's canvas is inevitably regarded as the site for presenting a 'world'. This, perhaps, is the primary meaning of the word 'illusion': a transparent world revealed on a stretch of canvas.

In the mid-1970s, several young Indonesian artists began writing sharp manifestos challenging the dominance of illusion in painting. For instance, Anyool Subroto declared: "I make my work without shadows or with the intention of burdening it with shadows. Therefore, it need not be seen as shadows or with shadows." For Anyool, a painting is merely an 'object' for the eye — no longer inhabited by shadows or illusions of a world, no matter how vast or limited the artist's imagination. What the eye perceives is a concrete object. Consider also a statement by his mates, Bachtiar Zainoel: "...for me, painting is about making objects from objects. A painting is a concrete thing, though not all concrete things are paintings. A painting has limits, whereas a concrete object can be said to have none." Within our art scene, these two declarations are significant markers of a shift in the status of painting — from illusionistic representation toward the realm of the concrete object. Although their works still fall under what is commonly called a painting, critic Sanento Yuliman notably placed the term within quotation marks — not painting, but "painting".

Illusion or shadow is not something concrete; therefore, a painting — insofar as it is bound to or fully identified with illusion and shadow — is, by that logic, not a concrete object. To eliminate "shadows" from a painting and label it a 'concrete object', while at the same time contrasting it with other, more literal concrete objects, is precisely what defines the notion of "painting" — a

distinction that sets it apart from earlier forms of painting. Sanento Yuliman described this shift more succinctly: "Avoiding any sign that could indicate the painter's emotion or temperament." (Sanento Yuliman, 1975).

In the mid-2010s, Aditya Novali began questioning the concrete elements that support the existence of a painting — elements which, without being concealed, would make it impossible for illusions or shadows to appear in a painting at all. In his *Painting Sense* series (2014), several of Novali's works feature reversed blank canvases, exposing the overlooked material components of painting. These supporting structures — the rectangular canvas surface and its wooden stretchers — typically go unnoticed in service of the painting's illusionistic mission. For Novali, however, they are not merely secondary or passive tools; they have intrinsic purpose and significance. There is a conceptual process at work in what has long been dismissed as mere secondary material — a view Novali articulates clearly in his text *Why* (2022).

'Illusion' in a painting is, of course, related to two-dimensionality/flatness and the nature of the picture plane — a trinity considered as the strength of painting. The critic Clement Greenberg, for instance, regarded this as a primary condition for the essence of purity or modernity in painting. With such a firm viewpoint, the critic defined, for example, the splatters and drips, the even coverage of paint across Jackson Pollock's canvases — distinct procedures of 'painting' — as beginning to show a tendency to surpass the flatness and two-dimensionality of the painting itself, hinting at the presence of something more concrete, such as sculpture or a three-dimensional object. Today, contemporary art historians interpret modern painters' obsession with paint —

a medium that has also been present on international agendas like biennales since the mid-20th century — as nothing less than a way to assert their presence as citizen-painters in a global/postcolonial context.

This condition reflects the presence of a tension between the excessive value placed on the reflectiveness of a highly opaque medium—namely canvas and paint—on one hand, and the lack of argument for the necessity of demystifying the pretensions surrounding the transparency of the painting medium itself. (Patrick D. Flores, *Partaking of Paint*, 2013, p.11). Thus, the transparency of painting is continuously called into question: the relationship between paint and canvas gives rise to various procedures of painting. Painting, therefore, is a set of procedures, not a stable entity with a fixed definition of its form. It is the touch that creates the image, not the vision of the painter or artist.

Ardi 'sculpts' his canvases. He chooses this procedure—one that is closer to the creation of three-dimensional objects or sculptures—to give meaning to the condition of "paint-ness" often considered inherent in a painting. His aim is not to pursue illusion or transparency through the medium of paint—and occasionally brushes—which he uses to 'sculpt'. The term 'sculpt' is, of course, paradoxical in this kind of practice. Ardi does not reduce or subtract the paint already in front of him like a sculptor working with a block of wood. Instead, he pours and piles up the paint beforehand. It is the particular thickness of paint accumulated on the canvas surface that is 'sculpted' with his brush. In this sense, one could say that the paint does not attempt to transform the subject matter of the painting into something beyond the material of the paint itself. The subject matter is not outside the paint, but coexist

flows or is sculpted—along with the paint. The paint, first and foremost, does not aspire to conjure a world full of shadows, visible here and perfectly mirrored there, so that we feel ourselves existing within it. The paint is in front of our eyes as paint.

In Ardi's paintings—whether he paints mythical figures or real characters (which you can easily recognize), objects of consumption/trivial things, or some kind of atmosphere—paint appears as paint that can be pointed to clearly and stands in front of the canvas. The paint does not rely on or hide behind the canvas. The paint we see in Ardi's work is the same paint that exists inside a tube—physically or materially. The paint that emerges from the tube—not "coming from" the brush or even the painter's "fingers"—is also the paint that seems to spill or burst from the flat surface of the canvas. To sculpt the paint, then, is to negotiate a tension between image and material. The material of the paint does not merely submit to the image of the subject matter. On the contrary, the subject matter is also shaped by how the material of the paint reacts to the canvas. That is why the final result we see in Ardi's paintings is, in truth, the outcome of repeated attempts to erase or sculpt the paint so that the image aligns with the will of the paint itself—not the other way around. Do you see that effort when standing in front of his painting?

In the past, the finest paint materials served to support the idea of presenting the best possible image of the subject matter imagined by the painter. When the depiction of an event appeared so vividly on canvas, the paint had to relinquish its substance as paint: it was not to appear as paint. It became a painting, not a "painting." The term *trompe-l'œil*—which we encounter and enjoy when gazing at the "miracle" of painting for centuries—has given rise to those hailed as geniuses

of painting, for having successfully deceived our eyes.

Yet there have always been other ways of appreciating painting beyond allowing ourselves to be deceived. It is said that at some point in his later years, Picasso was looking again at *The Sea at L'Estaque*, a painting by Cézanne from his personal collection. He tapped his hand on the tightly structured surface of blue-green and blue-violet hues in the painting. "Look at this sea," he said, "it feels solid like a block of stone." (Patrick D. Flores, p.9)

But of course, we are not only enjoying the paint on Ardi's canvases in this exhibition. We are enjoying the paint along with a certain image. However, unlike paintings that conceal their material paint, transforming it into a particular image, in Ardi's works, paint and image cannot—and at the same time absolutely can—be separated. Paint is not merely a vehicle for depiction, to be forgotten as paint, but rather something to be seen first and foremost as paint.

As expressed in the earlier quote, there is a kind of tug-of-war between 'painting' from the perspective of paint and sculpting to conceive of painting as the result of carved paint. The paint strives to emerge, to leave Ardi's canvases, so as not to merely serve the image; and yet the image also possesses its own space, not confined solely by paint. For Ardi, the image on a painting must, in fact, be dirtied by paint—without which no image could ever emerge on his canvas. That is the provocative meaning of his statement.

Regardless of how Ardi provokes the image in a painting, it remains within the framework of painting: he still relies on techniques of cutting, scraping away here and patching there, placing imagery, building thickness in certain focal points or compositions, adding frames, turning

away from the wall, and so on. Beyond these common techniques, what Ardi offers is a different understanding of 'painting': to pour paint, to 'sculpt' paint, and—above all—to 'dirty' his own canvas, rather than beautify it to look like a conventional painting.

Ardi dirties the image in his paintings with paint. But at the same time, he expands the frame, placing emphasis on this physical device which has long been considered external to the painting itself. Like other 'concrete' painters, he provokes the presence of the frame into becoming a series of panels—a site where his "painting" gains a new expanse through its very structure. Some other painters have even discarded the traditional frame altogether. With this "frame," Ardi's "painting" creates a kind of concrete environment on the painted canvas surfaces: a frame that is not sealed, but open. These frame-panels render his work open, not closed. His work now interacts with wide, colorful panels—parts of real space—no longer fixed or dependent on a wall. These panels become a new spatial expanse that connects the painting to the outside world—not as illusion or shadow.

Naturally, we are reminded of the most unparalleled medium of our time: the screen—a frame capable of framing anything, both within and beyond the world. The screen is the frame of all frames. Deleuze noted that the screen has "provided a general standard of measurement for things that have no frame... faraway landscapes, faces seen at an extremely close distance, star systems, to the image of a single drop of water." This screen-frame is a form of deterritorialization. (Simon Morley, *Chaos and Awe: Painting for the 21st Century*, 2018).

Ardi refers to this expansion as a labyrinth of the virtual world, where he surfs and encounters billions of bits and images that can generate any kind of picture. Images in the digital world have no hierarchy—they are all the same. Equally bad and equally good. Some have referred to them as a kind of trash imagery—everywhere, scattered, and free for anyone to pick up. Ardi's paintings are not about what is "dirty," but how they are dirtied.

Hendro Wiyanto

Jakarta, 10th June 2025



**Natural history of blob and other
emotional innovation**

50 x 60 cm

2025

Acrylic on Canvas



She's Hungry

107 x 115cm

2025

Acrylic on Canvas



snow white octo mobile

106 x 100 cm

2025

Acrylic on Canvas



Snow white is burning

106 x 111cm

2025

Acrylic on Canvas



Bird not a bird

50 x 70 cm

2025

Acrylic on Canvas



Artist statement

Made Me Dirty is both a literal and metaphorical title! Painting makes me dirty literally: paint on my face, splashes on my body, dirt on my feet. I usually paint half-naked, in old underwear, immersed in the mess. But it's also about resisting the tidy routines of institutional life — especially in the university, where I work as part of the academic precariat. It's a white-collar space dressed in structure, admin, schedules, and rationality. Painting becomes a form of refusal. A way to reclaim physicality, absurdity, and vulnerability. A way to disrupt the daily demand to be clean, efficient, and presentable.

The show presents painting as an activity that could liberate the self — a way to reclaim the dignity that has been dissolved under one logo. The title is a take on the commodification of routine that alienates and exploits. In this context, painting becomes an act of resistance — a way to assert individuality in the face of systems that suppress it. Beauty in painting, here, is both political and grotesque, reflecting the tension between the personal and the impersonal.

Painting is talking — not verbally, but visually. When you look at my painting, it's

almost like I'm speaking through images. Instead of explaining things with words, I react and respond visually. I want the painting itself to be the speech — not a speech about painting.

The subjects I choose — the paintings I make, the images I pick — are examples of something I want to express visually. Take Snow White: you can see she's exhausted. The character has been overloaded with meaning, recycled over and over, until it feels kind of dead. In my painting, Snow White looks old, almost man-ish, zombie-like, even vampire-like. Her cultural reality — all the weight of her history — is lodged somewhere deep in my psyche. When I paint her, the exhaustion comes out physically and visually, not through any preconceived plan. It's a reaction, not an illustration.

I call this approach: zombie rationalism. In the image, the figure is still functioning — Snow White is eating something — the gesture is rational and functional. The characters are still "doing" and "working" but the spirit is gone. I'm ripping off modernist rationalist ideology — the idea that form should follow function, that everything should work efficiently from production to consumption.



But I'm interested in introducing the zombie figure into that system — where things still function, but in an exhausted, and confused way. Figuration plays a prime role in this idea, since figuration itself was often seen as suspicious — even criminal — within modernist rationalism. In that sense, making figurative work the way I do becomes a kind of crime. I see my painting as criminal toward the ideals of modernism — and I like that. I like criminalizing modernist rationalism through figuration.

I also work with other problematic subjects — like domestic imagery from 1940s–50s advertisements. These ads, promoting women's domestic roles, have been dead culturally for a long time, but I try to bring them back — as zombies. They come alive again, but they're still dead inside. It's a play on function and death: function is deadly. It's also a metaphor for art itself — art becomes dead when it tries to be merely functional.

This era has a speculative function in my painting. These ads date from when my grandmother was about 30 — around the time she had my father, when he was about 10 or 12 — about the same age my daughter is now. So, in a way, I'm looking at the time when my grandmother was the same age as I am today.

I'm interested in the difference in consciousness between then and now. Today we know those ads are problematic — reducing women to domestic labour — but back then, they didn't question it. I like the idea of looking consciously at an unconscious time, through images that weren't aware of their own violence.

I'm not trying to take a moral stance, or say that I'm more "conscious" or "better." I want to play inside the tension, the confusion. Thinking and making about this: made me dirty!

Ardi Gunawan
2025



Speech desire

138 x 60 cm

2025

Acrylic on Canvas



Pope Colonel Sanders

50 x 70 cm

2024

Acrylic on canvas



Prabowo center

100 x 100 cm

2025

Acrylic on Canvas



Forbidden roles

120 x 90 cm

2025

Acrylic on Canvas

Made Me Dirty

Ardi Gunawan



The Meaning Is Lightly Confused

120 x 95 cm

2025

Acrylic on Canvas



**The Meaning Is Confused by
Average Effective Tax Rate**

100 x 79 cm

2025

Acrylic on Canvas



the wall is crying

56 x 56 cm

2025

Acrylic on Canvas



Trans Genre

35 x 50 cm

2025

Acrylic on Canvas



Ardi Gunawan
b. 1983

Ardi Gunawan maintains his practice as a transdisciplinary artist, seamlessly navigating the expansive realms of art, design, and architecture. His diverse work spans painting, sculpture, architectural-scale installations, video, and stage design. His work is informed by a deep-rooted interest in the philosophy of process, physics, and natural history. Gunawan is questioning the role of artistic beauty, humor, and aesthetics in our daily lives.

In parallel to his artistic pursuits, Ardi contributes to the field of Visual Communication Design as an Assistant Professor at Pradita University. Notably, he served as a teaching associate at Monash University (Drawing) and RMIT University (Landscape Architecture) in Melbourne, Australia, from 2010 to 2011.

EDUCATION

- 2008** Master of Fine Arts – with Monash Graduate Scholarship, Monash University, Melbourne, Australia
- 2006** First Class Honours Degree of Bachelor of Fine Art, Monash University Melbourne, Australia.
- 2005** Bachelor of Visual Arts, Monash University, Melbourne, Australia

AWARDS & RECOGNITION

- 2011** Australia Council Visual Arts Board “New Work” grant
- 2007** Monash Graduate Scholarship (MGS) to complete a degree in Master of Fine Art
Monash International Postgraduate Research Scholarship (MIPRS) for undertaking a degree in Master of Fine Art
- 2006** Head of Department’s Award for Interdisciplinary Innovation

SOLO EXHIBITION

- 2022** “Sleazy Environmentalism”, Rubanah, Jakarta. Curated by Mitha Budhyarto.
- 2013** “A Proposal for A Permanent Fixture at Ark Galerie in Two Edition: superlight”, ARK Galerie, Jakarta. Curated by Mitha Budhyarto
- 2011** “luckily there’s no inside (brick Muppet filth face anxiety ladder. Emotion traffic re-enactment Jakarta body)”, Open Archive, Melbourne.
“Desperate Exhibition Making Techniques” (with Nikos Pantazopoulos) – Y3K, Melbourne.
“Material formations and body movement”, Boxcopy Contemporary Art Space, Brisbane, Curated by Raymonda Rajkowski
- 2009** “Influence(s)” (with Nikos Pantazopoulos), Light Projects, Melbourne. Curated by Leslie Eastman
“Sculptural Relations: embodiment, event, forces, and material performance”, MFA project exhibition, Monash University, Melbourne.
“Time-Racing”, Studio 12, Gertrude Contemporary, Melbourne.
- 2008** “Reconfiguring still: proposals for the super light”, Gertrude Contemporary, Melbourne.
- 2007** “Substructure” (with Imogen Beynon, Remie Cibis, Catherine Connolly, Peter Pfifer, Tamsin Green, Sally Tape, Fiona Williams), Conical, Melbourne.
- 2005** “Club goodbye party”, CLUBSproject Inc., Melbourne

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2025** Stadiums and Construction Sites, Gertrude Contemporary Art, Melbourne, Australia
Salon et Cetera, Ace House Collective, Yogyakarta, Indonesia
The Apartments, Art Jakarta Gardens, ISA Art Gallery Booth, Jakarta, Indonesia
The Paper Menagerie, ISA Art Gallery, Jakarta, Indonesia
- 2024** Define Comedy, ISA Art Gallery, Jakarta, Indonesia
Whispers of Sisyphus, Art Jakarta 2024, ISA Art Gallery, Jakarta Indonesia
Inventions of a Present, ArtMoments 2024, ISA Art Gallery, Jakarta, Indonesia
THEM Show, ISA Art Gallery, Wisma 46, Jakarta
Lost in Whimsy Wisdom: Interplay of Realities, Omah Budoyo, Yogyakarta
Salon Et Cetera, Ace House Collective, Yogyakarta, Indonesia
- 2023** "Exploited Painting Workshop" in ARTJOG 2023 – MOTIF: LAMARAN at Jogja National Museum, Yogyakarta. Curators: Hendro Wiyanto & Nadiyah Bamadhaj.
Where Is The Line? by ISA Art Gallery in ArtMoments Jakarta (6th edition Art Fair) at Sheraton Grand Jakarta Hotel.
- 2022** Convocation by ISA Art Gallery in Art Jakarta Gardens (2nd edition Art Fair) at Hutan Kota, Jakarta.
- 2017** "Proposal for gaze-subverting" (as part of: Fantasy Islands) – Objecttifs, Singapore.
Curators: Mitha Budhyarto and Kin Chui.
- 2015** "Steiger dance" (as part of: Hacking Conflict – Biennale Jogja XIII) – Jogja National Museum, Yogyakarta. Curator: Wok the Rock.
- 2014** "Doubting Bodies" (as part of: Manifesto 4 – keseharian) – National Gallery of Indonesia, Jakarta. Curators: Jim Supangkat & Rizki A. Zaelani.
"Cemeti Residence" (as part of: 1x25 Jam) – Cemeti Art House, Yogyakarta. Curator: Mitha Budhyarto.
- 2013** "Shifting Grounds" (as part of: South East Asia Triennial: ways around Asia) – National Gallery of Indonesia, Jakarta. Curators: Jim Supangkat & Rizki A. Zaelani.
"Third/Fourth ((Y2/3/4K) Melbourne Artist Facilitated Biennial)" – Margaret Lawrence Gallery, Melbourne. Curator: Christopher Hill.
- 2010** "To give time-to-time" – Australian Experimental Art Foundation, Adelaide.
Curator: Domenico de Clario
- 2009** "Gertrude Studio Artists Exhibition" – Gertrude Contemporary, Melbourne.
"Gone in no time" – Australian Experimental Art Foundation, Adelaide.
Curator: Domenico de Clario
"West Brunswick Sculpture Triennial" (collaboration with Susan Jacobs) –Anstey & Ashton and 135 Union Street, Melbourne. Curator: Open Spatial
Workshop (Terri Bird, Bianca Hester, & Scott Mitchell)
"KOMPILASI: A Survey of Contemporary Indonesian Art" – BUS Artist Run Space, Melbourne. Curators: Kristi Monfries and Georgia Sedgwick
- 2008** "Many things seen at once" (as part of: Gertrude Studio Artists Exhibition) – Gertrude Contemporary, Melbourne.
"The (self initiated, Artist Funded) second (fourth) Y2K Melbourne Biennial Art (& Design)" – TCB
Artist Run Space, Melbourne. Curators: Liv Barrett, James Deutcher, and Christopher Hill.
"Advance/Retreat: three experiments in transdisciplinary collaboration" (collaboration with Brad Haylock, Bianca Hester, and Symon McVilly) – West Space, Melbourne. Curators: Brad Haylock and Mark Richardson.
"2020?" (collaboration with Bianca Hester) – Next Wave Festival, Arts House Meat Market, Melbourne. Facilitating artist: Ash Keating
"Objects in Space" – VCA Margaret Lawrence Gallery, Melbourne. Curators: Imogen Beynon, Kel Glaister, Tamsin Green

COMMISSIONS

- 2016** Corporate Commission, Ceramic wall – installed permanently at Bank Central Asia Learning Institute in Sentul City.
Corporate Commission, Sculpture – installed permanently at Bank Central Asia Learning Institute in Sentul City.

RESIDENCIES

- 2018** Cemeti – Institute for Art and Society
- 2013** National Gallery of Indonesia, Jakarta. Co-organized by Ruangrupa Artist's Initiative. (Aug–Sept)
Participating artist in “the Instrument Builders Project” – Indonesian Contemporary Art Network, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Curators: Joel Stern and Kristi Monfries. (Jun– Jul)
- 2009** Research Residency with Katherine Huang for “gone in no time” exhibition, devised by Domenico de Clario – Australian Experimental Art Foundation, Adelaide. (Oct–Nov)
- 2008** Gertrude Contemporary studio artist resident. (2 years)



ABOUT ISA ART GALLERY

ISA Art is an art gallery and art consultancy firm based in Jakarta, Indonesia. Deborah Iskandar, the owner and President Director, has invested her network and experience in Southeast Asian art and has an intense passion for Indonesian contemporary art for over two decades.

The Gallery space at Wisma 46 focuses on exhibiting Southeast Asian artist. ISA Art & Design also provides art consultancy services, assisting private viewing space at Jl. Wijaya Timur Raya No. 12. ISA is a one-stop solution to bridging the two worlds of art and design. Online gallery and upcoming projects are available on www.isaartanddesign.com

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