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Indonesia: Magic and Creative Power at the Venice Biennale

Indonesian curators Carla Bianpoen and Rifky Effendy unite with artistic producer Restu Imansari Kusumaningrum to place Indonesia under the cultural spotlight in the 55th edition of the Venice Biennale (1 June - 24 November 2013).



The Indonesia Pavilion will feature works of contemporary Indonesian artists: Albert Yonathan Setiawan, Sri Astari, Eko Nugroho, Entang Wiharso, and Titarubi, with special musical arrangements by composer Rahayu Supanggah. The artists will present installations revolving around the theme of *Sakti*, which translates as 'Magic and Creative Power'.

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Following an absence of eight years, Indonesia returns as a participant in the 2013 Venice Biennale. For the first time, the Southeast Asian country will set up its own National Pavilion in the historic Arsenale, one of the two main venues of the Biennale. The Indonesian exhibition will showcase pieces from five different artists, with the ambitious aims of offering visitors a glimpse of the vast Indonesian contemporary art scene and defining Indonesia as a new and rising cultural presence in the global art world.

The artists selected to represent Indonesia include emerging ceramic artist Albert Yohan Setiawan, painter and Javanese cultural traditions *connoisseuse* Sri Astari, bronze, graphite and aluminium sculptural specialist Entang Witarso, multimedia artist and founder of the comic book *Daging Tumbuh* Eko Nugroho, and ceramist and large sculptural installations creator Titarubi. These five artists, along with curators Carla Bianpoen and Rifky Effendy, have worked together to conceptually and structurally link their personal artworks in order to best represent their native culture and the pavilion's main theme, *Sakti*, which denotes the magical, divine and sacred.

Explaining the concept of *Sakti*, the curatorial team explained, '*Sakti* has been the basis for our curatorial reading of art praxis and has been used as a directive for the aesthetic exploration of the individual artist, who will refer to historical and social aspects as well as the value of local cultural pluralism within the global discourse.' Visitors to the Indonesian pavilion will be able to observe the five artists' diverse interpretations of this magical and creative power.



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Albert Yonathan Setiawan

Albert Yonathan Setiawan (b.1983) is the youngest of the Indonesian artistic team present at the 2013 Venice Biennale. He will showcase a labyrinth made of 1,200 ceramic figurines moulded manually, each of which is inspired by houses of worship, such as the Christian church, the Islamic mosque, and the Hindu temple. Through his interactive installation – entitled *Cosmic Labyrinth: The Silent Path* – Setiawan contemplates *Sakti* as a transformative energy that changes the human individual from the inside; going through the labyrinth is a metaphor for the meditative state and self enlightenment.



Sri Astari

Highlighting the importance of the Javanese culture within Indonesian culture is Sri Astari's installation, a traditional Javanese pavilion-like structure called Pandapa. Astari's piece – entitled *Pandapa: Dancing the Wild Seas* – will include nine dancers who will dance the Bedoyo, a sacred Javanese dance. According to the artist, the Pandapa symbolises the human soul, within which dance the nine young girls, who, by engaging in their ritualistic dance, manifest the strength of the Queen of the South Sea, the personification of *Sakti*.

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Eko Nugroho

Eko Nugroho interprets *Sakti* as the driving force that has helped the Indonesian population to grow and prosper in time. His installation, *Instigator of Storms*, comprises of a bamboo raft sitting on old oil barrels, upon which are placed a number of cartoonish figures. The visitor is expected to visualise the raft floating on an imaginary ocean and buffeted by an imaginary storm. This visualisation symbolises the social hardships, financial troubles and political uncertainties faced by the Indonesian nation, symbolised by the raft.

Watch an interview with artist Eko Nugroho:

<http://vimeo.com/30990300>

Entang Wiharso

Entang Wiharso's works often juxtapose the past with the present, imagination with reality. For his country's pavilion, Wiharso will present *The Indonesian: No Time to Hide*, a 14-



metre wide bronze, aluminium and graphite gate that separates the visitor from a house and its owners. The gate is covered with images both real and surreal, showing episodes of love and deceit. Wiharso also juxtaposes icons from his own culture with those of other Asian and Western cultures. According to curator Bianpoen, '*Sakti* has to do with both the individual and the universal, while also articulating the country's diversity.' The artist's goal was to present Indonesia not only from his personal viewpoint, but also from multiple foreign perspectives.

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Titarubi

Titarubi's *Shadow of Surrender* highlights the link between *Sakti* and education; knowledge being considered by the artist as the basis for civilisation. Her installation comprises of school benches made of charcoal-like burnt wood to represent the long learning process individuals endure throughout their lifetime. Oversized blank books will be laid on each bench, inviting viewers to fill them with their own personal stories. Words of wisdom in various languages will be projected on the books, reminding viewers of what is important in life. A massive charcoal drawing of a forest functions as the backdrop of the installation, in reference to Indonesia's tropical forests, the many fires that periodically destroy them and the burnt wood of the benches.

Unifying the group exhibition on an acoustic level will be the musical arrangements of Indonesian composer Rahayu Supanggah, who created the Indonesian Pavilion's background soundtrack made of deep gongs, whistling and wind, tings of gamelan instruments, and birds.

Indonesia Team

Artists: Albert Yonathan Setyawan, Eko Nugroho, Entang Wiharso, Sri Astari, Titarubi, Rahayu Supanggah

Curators: Carla Bianpoen and Rifky Effendy

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Commissioner: Soedarmadji JH Damais

Deputy Commissioner: Achille Bonito Oliva

Venue: The Indonesia Pavilion at the Arsenale – Tese Cinquecentesche

About The Culture Trip's Venice Biennale Project

The 55th International Art Exhibition of the Venice Biennale will take place from 1 June - 24 November. The Culture Trip's Venice Biennale Series is an article series leading up to the start of the exhibition. With 88 countries participating in this year's Biennale -- 10 of them for the first time -- and 150 artists from 37 countries, our coverage over the next couple of months will highlight a selection of the National Pavilions that will be participating in the 2013 edition of the Venice Biennale. Watch this space for our daily Venice Biennale updates or follow us on Twitter, Facebook and Pinterest!

By Marinel Valentini

Images courtesy: 1: Indonesia 2013 Venice Biennale Poster, 2: IndoArtNow, 3: Jean-Pierre Dalbéra/Wikimedia, 4: ARNDT Gallery, 5: Titarubi.



The Culture Trip showcases the best of art, culture and travel for every country in the world. Have a look at our Indonesia or Asia sections to find out more or become involved.