



PUTU SUTAWIJAYA
THE DANCE OF REMEMBERING





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Curator
Sin Sin Man

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Kris Budiman

Putu's Short Bio
Valerie C. Doran

Editing & Layout Design
Lie Fhung

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Sin Sin Fine Art
53 - 54 Sai Street, Central, Hong Kong
+852 2858 5072 | info@sinsinfineart.com
www.sinsin.com.hk

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FOREWORD

by Sin Sin Man

It is such a great honour and a real pleasure for us to be able to bring the latest works by the renown Indonesian artist Putu Sutawijaya to Hong Kong.

I have known Putu for at least nine years now, which really is a pleasure for me. He paints and he sculpts. He loves history, and he loves to study from the old masters. He explores historical ruins and meditates at the temples. You can just feel his boundless energy in his expressive brush strokes and in his figurative sculptures. He uses simple materials, and infuses them with his powerful energy, bringing his works to life.

He has been hibernating for quite sometimes now, so we are all eager to see what he has been creating in his vast studio in Yogyakarta. True to his nature, he continues to paint figures seemingly in solemn choreographed movements in search of something deeply spiritual. The energy he let loose through his dancing brush strokes is unmistakably strong and honest. He is forever digging deeper to his own personal history, and even perhaps further back to the collective memories of his ancestors.

I hope you will be moved and inspired by Putu's "Dance of Remembering" as much as it has done me. Enjoy!



THE DANCE OF REMEMBERING

by Kris Budiman

Not many people are aware that Putu Sutawijaya loves to ‘dance’ while he paints. More often, he dances through his paintings. Almost in any of his paintings we could see some elements of dance: figures choreographed in various poses, movements and rhythmic gestures. There is no doubt that dancing and dances are an important part of Putu’s daily life in the past, and perhaps even to his present day. Putu explores this theme in his current solo exhibition, by digging out his biographical memories through figures and special objects that directly relate to a certain genre in Balinese performance art: the Barong dance. In the process of recollecting events from his past life, these biographical memories are inseparable from his visual memories with all of the sensory quality and spatial context that entail within them. Precisely at this point, Putu’s biographical memories are overlapping with their visual dimensions, which definitely are more than just a structure of sensory information representing objects ‘as is’. Instead, they are reconstructed and reinterpreted visual imageries.

Observing the sequel in his paintings entitled “The Dance of Remembering”, it can be said that Putu Sutawijaya is an artist endowed with extraordinary capacity in recording visual imageries in his mind. These eidetic imagery which are preserved in great details are not photograph-like because they do not retain every single detail of the event as they factually are; they have

undergone a process of interpretative selection. Memory is more than just a copy of our perception upon reality coming directly from the outside. It is always an interpreted product. Through this process, we found a couple of visual details always present in Putu's paintings: figures and masks, in particular masks from Barong dance repertoire. In the Balinese cultural context, Barong dance possesses a very complex dimension: be it mythologically, ritually, or as a genre in performance art.

Inspected from any angles, the kinetic and the visual are definitely the most prominent aspects of the Barong dance. Through these two aspects, Putu Sutawijaya attempts to recover his biographical memories. Compared to other variants of Barong dance, the variety of gestures and movements in Barong Ket, is acknowledged to be the most complete. Visually, the Barong masks may undergo their own signification process. Each Barong mask shows a certain iconic character due to their resemblance to certain creatures such as a lion, etc. The mask in Putu's paintings is not positioned as a symbol for hypocrisy or falseness - a commonly used stereotype we found in daily life and in the visual and dramatic works. Instead of being symbolic, the mask in his paintings serves as an index of an identity in remembering his past. It represents a construction of Bali-ness identity which may have been distanced further away now that Putu resides in Java.

There are also other formal features which we can identify as mainstay elements that have characterized Putu's works for a long time. The first of these are the brush strokes and colourful splatters, seemingly applied at random although actually they are leading us towards certain patterns. Secondly is the handwriting which in the eyes of the audience must be very difficult to decode, if not completely incomprehensible. Therefore these scattered texts might be more apt to be seen as an element in a visual composition, rather than as a composition of words and sentences to be read. Thirdly is the naked figure(s) in motion, flying about, or arrested in certain pose, and almost all of them shown with their backs facing us, the audience. As far as my observation goes, these three features are characteristic of Putu Sutawijaya that he keeps on exploring to no end.

The figures in the third feature above seemingly in motion, in the progress of shaping a formation, or, let's say, a certain dance composition following the mask. Their presences are often collective and anonymous, without any particularly dominant figure. They, who could be identified as anyone, moving in circles, cyclical, although in some instances they seem to scatter to all directions, or forming a triangle shape. In these ways, a mandala is created - as Putu Sutawijaya himself explained to me one day. We know that a mandala (from Sanskrit language) is more than just a plane. It represents a kind of

cosmic diagram, connecting human being with the Ultimate Reality inside our bodies and minds, while transcending them at once. On the other hand, there are singular figures captured in a certain movement or gesture, dancing with a mask. Some of these solitary figures are depicted in a particular pose, that is with folded legs seemingly in the middle of performing a certain ritual, which we could understand as a meditation.

We could say, through all of these elements, that the fragments of Putu Sutawijaya's biographical memories are actively involved in a series of continuous dialogue about the construction of an identity, as someone who already belongs to a certain cultural community. The question now is: if remembering and forgetting are actually the two sides of the same coin, could "The Dance of Remembering" also be investigated from its other side: as an effort to forget a certain cultural identity?

Kris Budiman is a literary critic and an anthropologist living in Yogyakarta.



TARIAN INGATAN

oleh Kris Budiman

Agaknya belum banyak yang menyadari bahwa Putu Sutawijaya suka “menari” sambil melukis, meskipun lebih sering lagi dia menari melalui lukisan-lukisannya. Hampir di setiap lukisannya kita bisa menyaksikan tarian: koreografi tubuh-tubuh dengan aneka pose, gerak, dan gestur yang berirama. Bahwa menari dan tarian adalah bagian penting dari perjalanan hidup keseharian Putu di masa lalunya, bahkan mungkin hingga hari ini, merupakan sesuatu yang tidak perlu diragukan lagi. Putu membawa tema yang demikian di dalam pameran tunggalnya sekali ini dengan cara menggali kembali ingatan-ingatan biografisnya melalui figur-figur dan objek khusus yang secara langsung terkait dengan salah sebuah genre seni pertunjukan Bali, yaitu tari barong. Melalui proses pengumpulan kembali atas peristiwa-peristiwa dalam kehidupan di masa lalunya, ingatan biografis ini tentu saja tidak terpisahkan dari ingatan visual dengan segenap kualitas indrawi dan konteks keruangan yang ada di dalamnya. Di titik inilah kemudian ingatan biografis Putu itu sekaligus bertumpang-tindih dengan dimensi visualnya yang jelas bukan semata-mata struktur informasi indrawi yang merepresentasikan objek-objek secara “apa adanya”, melainkan sebagai citra-citra visual yang telah dikonstruksi dan ditafsirkan kembali.

Menyaksikan sekuel lukisannya yang bertajuk “The Dance of Remembering”, dapatlah kita katakan bahwa Putu Sutawijaya tergolong sebagai seniman

yang memiliki kapasitas lebih dalam menyimpan citra-citra visual di dalam ingatannya. Citra-citra yang terawetkan secara detail ini—biasa disebut sebagai *iedetic imagery*—bukan seperti-foto (*photograph-like*) karena tidak mempertahankan segenap detail peristiwa secara “apa adanya,” melainkan telah mengalami proses penyaringan interpretif. Ingatan bukanlah semata-mata salinan persepsi atas realitas yang hadir langsung dari luar, melainkan selalu sudah ditafsirkan. Melalui proses yang terakhir ini kita segera menemukan dua buah detail visual yang hadir di atas permukaan bidang lukisan-lukisan Putu, yaitu tubuh dan topeng, khususnya topeng dari khasanah tari barong. Dalam konteks budaya Bali, tarian ini memiliki dimensi yang kompleks, baik ditinjau dari aspek mitologis dan ritual maupun semata sebagai suatu genre seni pertunjukan.

Ditilik dari aspek manapun, unsur-unsur kinesik dan visual pasti tampak paling menonjol. Melalui kedua unsur ini Putu Sutawijaya mencoba untuk menggali kembali ingatan biografisnya. Di satu sisi, keberagaman gestur dan gerak tubuh, khususnya untuk barong ket, sering dikatakan paling lengkap bila dibandingkan dengan varian tari barong yang lain; topeng barong pun, di sisi lain, secara visual dapat menjalani proses signifikasi tersendiri. Setiap jenis topeng barong menunjukkan karakter ikonik lantaran kemiripannya dengan makhluk tertentu seperti singa dan sebagainya. Di dalam lukisan-

lukisannya unsur topeng tidak dia posisikan sebagai sebuah simbol bagi kemunafikan atau kepalsuan—sebagaimana sering secara stereotipikal kita jumpai baik di dalam kehidupan sehari-hari atau di dalam konteks karya visual maupun dramatik. Topeng di dalam lukisan-lukisan Putu bukanlah sekadar sebuah tanda simbolik, melainkan lebih berperan sebagai isyarat bagi sesuatu yang berbeda, yakni ingatan akan masa lalunya mengenai sebuah identitas. Ia mewakili konstruksi identitas ke-Bali-an yang mungkin telah berjarak jika dipandang secara keruangan bagi Putu yang bermukim di Jawa kini.

Di samping itu, beberapa fitur formal lain dapat kita identifikasikan sebagai unsur yang telah lama muncul dan terus bertahan di dalam karya-karya Putu. Pertama adalah sapuan-sapuan dan cipratan warna yang tampak seolah-olah acak, meskipun sebetulnya mengarah kepada pola-pola tertentu. Kedua, penambahan unsur berupa tulisan tangan yang di mata audiens pasti sukar di-decode, untuk tidak mengatakannya tak-terpahami. Oleh karena itulah teks-teks yang tersebar ini mungkin akan lebih tetapt jika didudukkan sebagai elemen di dalam komposisi visual, bukan sebagai rangkaian kata dan kalimat yang mengundang untuk dibaca. Dan yang ketiga adalah kehadiran figur(-figur) telanjang yang tengah bergerak, beterbangan, atau mengambil pose tertentu dan hampir semua membelakangi kita sebagai audiens. Ketiga fitur ini, sejauh yang saya amati, merupakan ciri yang tak habis-habisnya dieksplorasi oleh Putu Sutawijaya.

Sehubungan dengan ciri yang terakhir ini, figur-figur tersebut niscaya bergerak, menyusun formasi atau, katakanlah, komposisi tari tertentu dengan disertai atau mengikuti topengnya. Kehadiran mereka yang bersifat kolektif dan anonim, di satu sisi, menyebabkan tiada satu individu pun yang menonjol atau ditonjolkan. Mereka, yang bisa diidentifikasi sebagai siapa saja, bergerak melingkar, siklikal, meskipun di tempat lain tampak menyebar ke empat penjuru mata angin atau membentuk formasi segitiga. Dengan cara demikian ini, terciptalah mandala, sebagaimana pernah dikatakan sendiri oleh Putu Sutawijaya kepada saya. Kita tahu bahwa sebuah mandala (dari bahasa Sanskrit) adalah lebih dari sekadar bidang. Ia merepresentasikan semacam diagram kosmis yang menghubungkan manusia dengan Realitas Tertinggi, yang berada di dalam raga dan manah namun sekaligus melampauinya. Di sisi lain, hadir pula figur tunggal yang tengah melakukan gerak dan gestur tertentu, menari dengan atau menggunakan properti sebuah topeng. Beberapa di antara figur tunggal ini pun ada yang mengambil pose khas, yakni melipat kaki dan seolah sedang melakukan mudra tertentu, sedemikian sehingga mungkin dapat dipahami sebagai laku pemusatan pikiran (meditasi).

Bisa dikatakan bahwa, melalui segenap unsur tadi, fragmen-fragmen ingatan biografis Putu Sutawijaya terlibat dalam rangkaian dialog yang terus-menerus atas konstruksi identitas sebagai warga yang telah telanjur menjadi bagian dari komunitas budaya tertentu. Nah, pertanyaannya kini: apabila mengingat

dan melupakan sebetulnya merupakan dua sisi dari koin yang sama, bukankah “The Dance of Remembering” ini pun dapat sekaligus ditelisik dari sisi lainnya, yakni sebagai upaya pelupaan atas identitas kultural tertentu?

Kris Budiman adalah seorang kritikus sastra dan antropolog, berdomisili di Yogyakarta.

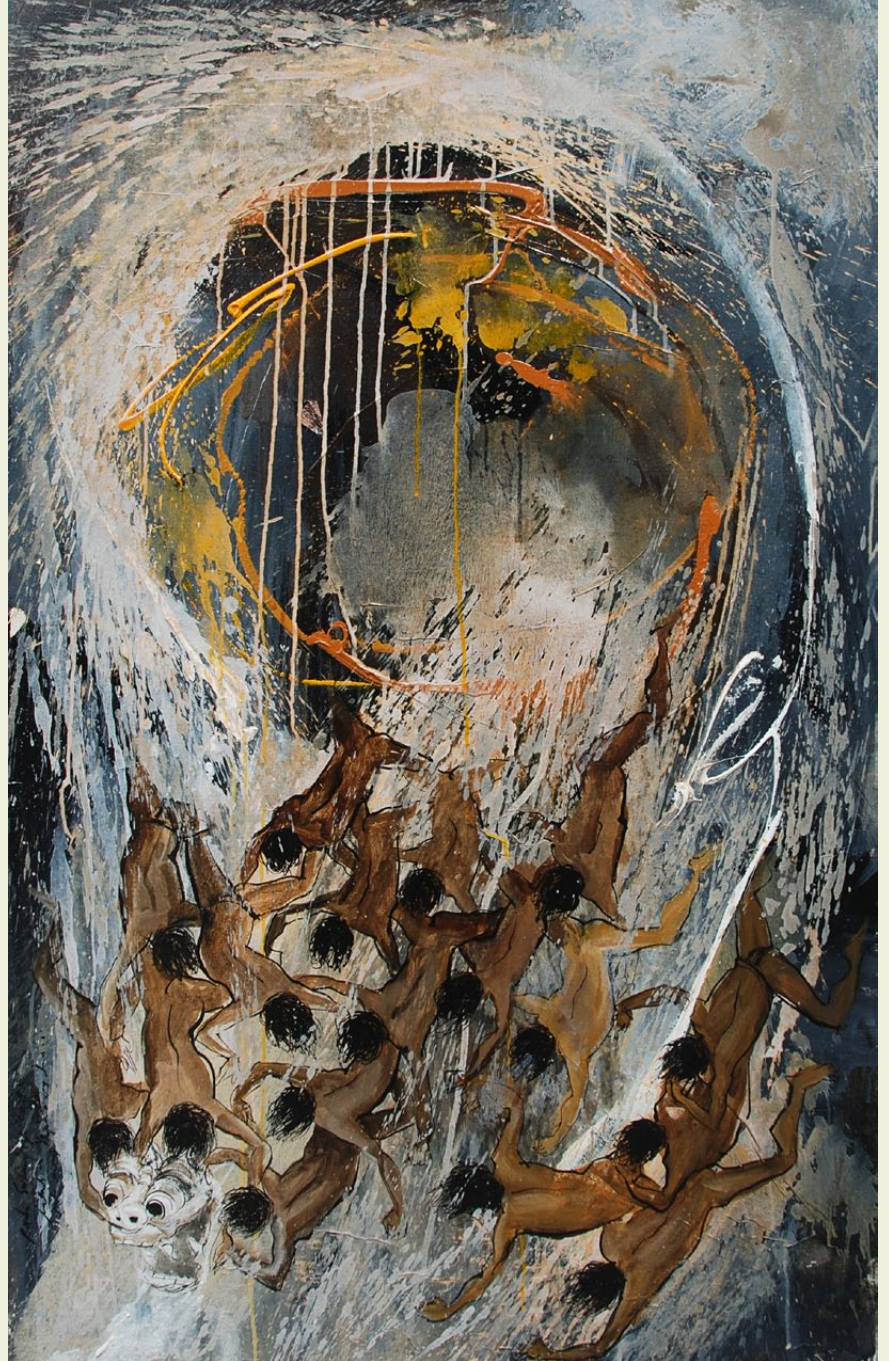
The Dance of Remembering #1

Acrylic on Linen
140 x 120 cm
2014



The Dance of Remembering #2

Acrylic on Linen
140 x 90 cm
2014



The Dance of Remembering #3

Acrylic on Linen
140 x 120 cm
2014



The Dance of Remembering #4

Acrylic on Linen
170 x 170 cm
2014



The Dance of Remembering #5

Acrylic on Linen
140 x 120 cm
2014



The Dance of Remembering #6

Acrylic on Canvas
80 x 70 cm
2014



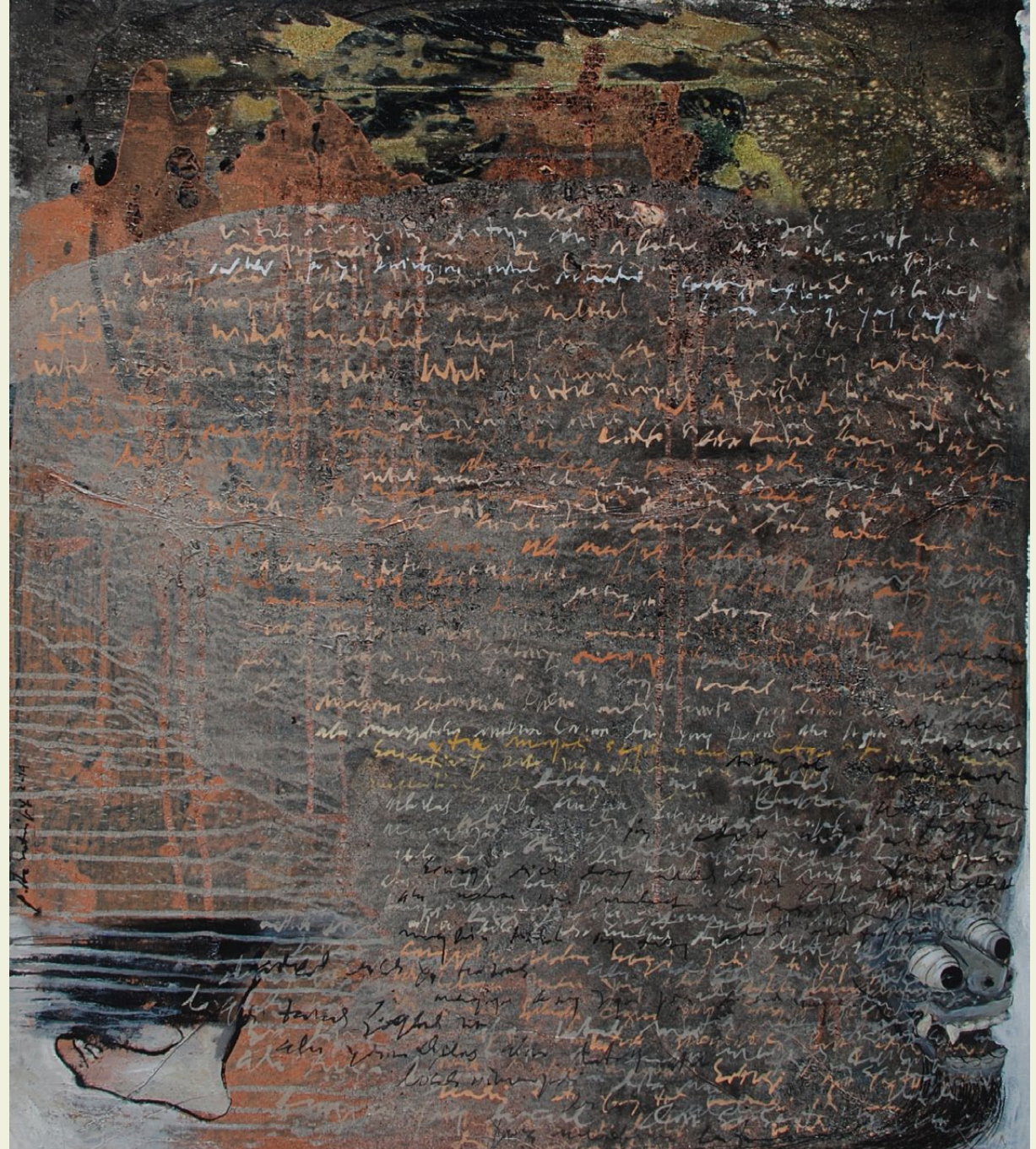
The Dance of Remembering #7

Acrylic on Canvas
80 x 70 cm
2014



The Dance of Remembering #8

Acrylic on Canvas
80 x 70 cm
2014



The Dance of Remembering #9

Acrylic on Linen
80 x 70 cm
2014



The Dance of Remembering #10

Acrylic on Linen
70 x 80 cm
2014





The Dance of Remembering #11

Acrylic on Linen
40 x 50 cm
2014



The Dance of Remembering #12

Acrylic on Linen
40 x 50 cm
2014



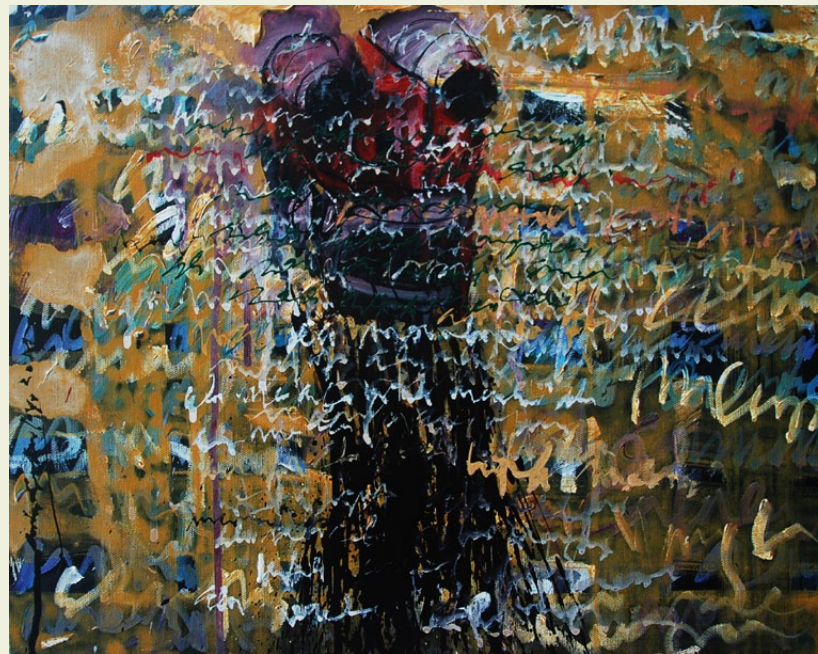
The Dance of Remembering #13

Acrylic on Linen
40 x 50 cm
2014



The Dance of Remembering #14

Acrylic on Linen
40 x 50 cm
2014



The Dance of Remembering #15

Acrylic on Linen
40 x 50 cm
2014



PUTU SUTAWIJAYA

(b. 1971 in Tabanan, Bali, Indonesia)

Putu Sutawijaya studied art at Indonesia Institute of Fine Art (ISI) Yogyakarta. He currently lives and works in Yogyakarta and Bali. As a painter, sculptor and performance artist, Putu embodies the multi-media, cross-disciplinary character of Indonesian contemporary art. At the same time, a main focus of his work is the human body as both an expressive form and a vessel of the spirit: as Putu says, 'the body is the medium of suffering, pain, laughter and fear.' The spontaneous energy of Putu's paintings translates naturally into his sculptures. As the Indonesian critic Kris Budiman has pointed out, it is almost as though the figures in his paintings have 'crossed over into three-dimensional space...to look for meaning in different contexts.'

Above all else, it is the gestural movement of Putu's works that communicates an intense spectrum of spiritual and emotional states, from contemplation to sorrow to the pure exuberance of dance. Putu is also deeply drawn to sacred sites and often travels to the ancient temples scattered around Java and Bali, where he spends days painting.

Full CV:

http://www.sinsin.com.hk/downloads/SSFA/artists-cv/PutuSutawijaya_CV.pdf

"We should never forget our past because therein lies the mysteries of our roots that have made us the way we are today. If we are strong today, we owe it to our past. To truly know who we are, we have to study our past - not just our present. The past could provide a valuable source of inspiration and creative power for the present."

Putu Sutawijaya





SANGKRING ART SPACE

www.sangkringartspace.net

In his efforts to give back to his community and to support the development of local artists and art scenes, Putu Sutawjaya founded a much welcome art space called Sangkring Art Space. The name Sangkring is originated from the name of Putu's ancestors. Putu hopes the name could connect the present with the past, inspiring the next steps in his artistic journey with his fellow artists.

Sangkring Art Space welcomes any art practitioners, enthusiasts and general public to participate, collaborate or to simply enjoy the space and the activities held within it. Sangkring Art Space values diversity and solidarity highly. It is a place for sharing. In practise, Sangkring serves as an open space for artistic experimentations by any motivated artist who is interested and dedicated to do so.

Since its opening in May 2007, Sangkring Art Space has hosted over a hundred of very inclusive and diverse art and cultural events - ranging from art exhibitions, artist talks and discussions, art and music performances, and more. Putu considers this as a homework that he would continue to improve upon: to provide a conducive space for artistic and creative endeavours for his fellow artists and local budding artists to thrive.





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