

# Baroque Archipelago

exhibition  
**BAROQUE ARCHIPELAGO**

date  
22.01 – 21.02.2021

artists  
AGAN HARAHAP  
BUDI AGUNG KUSWARA  
LULU LUTFI LABIBI  
MELLA JAARSMA  
OCTORA  
TOTON

curator  
**TAN SIULI**

**M**IZUMA GALLERY

**BAROQUE ARCHIPELAGO** brings contemporary art and fashion in conversation with one another, to illuminate parallel approaches in creation and exploration of current issues.

The exhibition title makes reference to both the baroque pearl as well as the Indonesian archipelago; the latter – spanning over 13,000 islands and a stunningly diverse spectrum of cultures, ethnicities and topographies – is compared to the former, an irregularly-shaped pearl celebrated precisely for its asymmetry and organic form. Embedded in the metaphor of the pearl is the process of its creation. It is formed when a foreign object is lodged within the interior of a mollusc; as a defensive mechanism, layers of nacre are secreted to envelop the external irritant, and these subsequently develop into a prized pearl. This process of formation may be likened to the *Nusantara*'s negotiation of the diverse and multi-faceted cultural landscape encompassed within its geographical and national boundaries, as well as with the foreign cultures that journeyed to its shores, in the process adopting and evolving these into something uniquely 'Indonesian'.

Turning on ideas of adornment, desire and difference, *Baroque Archipelago* shines a spotlight on Indonesian creatives reinterpreting and reworking Indonesia's rich traditions, and on the archipelago as an exemplar of the region's syncretic culture, borrowing and adapting from diverse sources and cultures to evolve a distinct and unique sensibility. The notion of a syncretic identity (as opposed to a monolithic one) is also explored as a strategy of resistance against essentialist nationalism. In addition, the art and fashion creations on display question social and cultural norms and their evolution, especially as they relate to notions of identity, gender and power. In Indonesia, artists and designers often collaborate with each other and form a supportive, close-knit community; this exhibition is in many ways a celebration of these creative synergies and relationships.



### TOTON

Founded in 2012 by Toton Januar and Haryo Balitar, TOTON is a contemporary womenswear label that explores Indonesia's natural beauty and diverse culture with modern reinterpretations, celebrating heritage while deconstructing traditions for a new approach. The label draws on artisanal techniques traditionally used for folk and ceremonial costumes, rethinking and reworking these in contemporary iterations of ethnic garments.



### LULU LUTFI LABIBI

Indonesian designer LULU LUTFI LABIBI's eponymous label was launched in 2012, and celebrates the beauty of traditional textiles such as *lurik*, which has become a signature in the label's collections. The Yogyakarta-based designer has revolutionised this once-overlooked fabric by incorporating it into fluid, draped garments that reference silhouettes of Asian dress whilst embracing a *wabi-sabi* aesthetic.



### AGAN HARAHAP

Agan Haharap (b. 1980) began his career as a painter and illustrator, and subsequently worked as a digital imaging artist and photographer for an Indonesian music publication. Today he is best known for his digitally manipulated images which are often disseminated through social media, harnessing the reach of this contemporary medium to comment on its potential and pitfalls, and on current issues.



### BUDI AGUNG KUSWARA

Budi Agung Kuswara (b. 1982) is the co-founder of Ketemu Project Space in Bali, an initiative that marries art collectivism and social enterprise. Trained in *kamasan* painting, Budi retains the intricacy and delicate linework of this traditional art form in his contemporary works. His paintings celebrate the treasury of aesthetic and cultural influences on the Indonesian archipelago, marrying these baroque sensibilities with observations on social tensions and dynamics.



### MELLA JAARSMA

Mella Jaarsma (b. 1960) is the co-founder of Cemeti Art House, one of Indonesia's foremost contemporary art institutions. Her artistic practice revolves around the body and its coverings as powerful signifiers of identity and its social and cultural politics. Her work often employs materials such as animal skins and horns – items charged with metaphoric potencies of race, human nature, sexuality, beliefs and origins.



### OCTORA

Octora (b. 1982) adopts a multi-disciplinary approach to her art-making, investigating the intersections between image, official history and collective memory. Her interest in clothing and covering as modes of power and dissimulation has been an abiding one, manifesting in her exploration of dress and accoutrement in Indonesia.



**TAN SIULI** has over a decade of curatorial experience with a focus on contemporary art from Southeast Asia. Her exhibition projects include two editions of the Singapore Biennale (2013 and 2016), inter-institutional traveling exhibitions, as well as mentoring and commissioning platforms such as the *Presidents Young Talents* exhibition series. She has also lectured on Museum-based learning and Southeast Asian art history at institutes of higher learning such as the National Institute of Education as well as Lasalle College of the Arts. Her recent speaking engagements include presentations on Southeast Asian contemporary art at Frieze Academy London and Bloomberg's *Brilliant Ideas* series.



SS21  
top: Baju Bodo Blouse: embroidered organza  
Arca Emas Breastplate: paper clay  
bottom: Macramé skirt: neoprene rouleau straps

TOTON's work seeks to "question, express, and at the same time celebrate all the differences in Indonesian cultures and ideals", translating the beauty of the archipelago's rich traditions into contemporary designs while also commenting on the contradictions and tensions in Indonesian society.

Some of his recent collections examine the current climate in Indonesia, where notions of female sexuality and public identities are shifting towards a regulated conservatism, in contrast to 'traditional' values or the 'past' where attitudes were relatively more liberal. The post-1998 power vacuum created in the wake of the end of Suharto's strongman regime saw increased political jockeying by various interest groups; amongst these, fundamentalist Islamist groups have emerged as the most vocal and militant in public life. Their demands and presence have been keenly felt in the social and cultural sphere, notably in watershed moments such as the clamour over the installation *Pinkswing Park* at the 2005 CP Biennale in Jakarta, and the group's subsequent agitation for an anti-pornography law to be extended to traditional cultural forms such as those found on the predominantly Hindu island of Bali. More recently, this schism between Indonesia's national slogan of pluralism ('*Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*') and a growing wave of conservative populism has made itself felt in the charges of blasphemy brought against Jakarta's governor Ahok, the outcome of which has left many shaken.

TOTON's FW19 collection explores ideas of veiling and censorship, starting with an evocative mood board comprising portraits of women from the archipelago taken from the archives of the Tropenmuseum, overlaid with embroidered images of Javanese mountain flowers. The lush,

enlarged blooms recall Georgia O'Keeffe's iconic flower paintings, commonly read as a visual metaphor for female sexuality. In TOTON's vignettes, flowers have been overlaid on parts of the women's bodies in what may be seen as a delicate, aesthetic act of veiling or 'censorship', the imposition of relatively recent or modern (imported) codes of decorum. At the same time, it can also be seen as an act of 're-wilding' and hence reclaiming the beauty and sensuality of these women who were photographed.

These ideas have been translated into diaphanous gowns and tunics with textured floral motifs veiling parts of the body. One runway look in particular also incorporates a tulle head covering or *hijab* – a reference to the current climate and increasing religious conservatism taking root in Indonesian society. However, this is also a commentary on the double standards around the adoption of the *hijab*, whereby some women choose to wear these coverings but reveal their body in other ways, thus defeating the principle of adopting this form of modest dress.

TOTON's SS21 collection was born out of the ongoing pandemic and lockdown situation. Observing how people clung on to spiritual beliefs in times of uncertainty and distress, the designer reflected on the spectrum of belief systems in Indonesia, with its rich repository of Hindu and Buddhist relics and diverse spiritual views, often syncretic in nature. In response to the limitations imposed by the lockdown situation in Jakarta, the SS21 collection was created entirely from materials available in the studio. The braided skirt for instance, references the same macrame technique explored in TOTON's SS16 collection; for the SS21 iteration however, the coils have been arranged in a chaotic pattern rather

than in an orderly and geometric manner. In keeping with TOTON's interest in traditional craft forms, the artistry of the macramé skirt also bears a strong resemblance to the noken bag of the Papuan people. Silhouettes for the SS21 collection are drawn from those of traditional costumes from Aceh and Sumatra, and paired with pieces of 'armour' for the runway presentation, signifying a form of (talismanic) protection as well as a fierce femininity. The breastplate is modelled on – and recalls – the sensual as well as powerful sculptures of female deities from the period

of the Singhasari kingdom. The notion of femininity or feminine dress as a form of defence or armour is also explored in the work of **Octora**.

TOTON  
*Tidak Lulus Sensor 01*  
2020  
C-print on photo paper, embroidery on silk organza  
42 x 33 cm  
10 unique editions + 2AP



TOTON

TOTON  
*Tidak Lulus Sensor 02*  
2020  
C-print on photo paper, embroidery on silk organza  
42 x 33 cm  
10 unique editions + 2AP



TOTON  
*Tidak Lulus Sensor 03*  
2020  
C-print on photo paper, embroidery on silk organza  
42 x 33 cm  
10 unique editions + 2AP



TOTON  
*Tidak Lulus Sensor 04*  
2020  
C-print on photo paper, embroidery on silk organza  
42 x 33 cm  
10 unique editions + 2AP



TOTON

TOTON  
*Tidak Lulus Sensor 05*  
2020  
C-print on photo paper, embroidery on silk organza  
42 x 33 cm  
10 unique editions + 2AP



SS19

Sleeveless Blorong Dress: embroidered organza on tulle  
Raffia Slip Dress: rayon, raffia



FW19

top: Buketan Blouse: embroidered organza, tulle

Kerai Veil: embroidered organza, tulle

bottom: Kerai Skirt: tulle



FW19

top: Sleeveless Bunga Tunic: embroidered & hand-embellished silk organza, cotton

bottom: Denim Pants: repurposed denim

hand gloves: Faux-Fur Teralis Gloves: faux fur, handmade fabric (merino wool & cashmere yarns sealed between tulle)



SS21

top: Baju Bodo Blouse: embroidered organza  
Arca Emas Breastplate: paper clay  
bottom: Macramé skirt: neoprene rouleau straps



LULU LUTFI LABIBI



LULU LUTFI LABIBI is well-known for using *lurik* exclusively in his collections, transforming and elevating this humble and once-overlooked fabric with his signature cutting and draping techniques, imparting a fluidity and fashionable asymmetry to this traditional textile.

His items of clothing are indicative of the far-ranging cultural influences that have shaped – and continue to shape – artistic creations in Indonesia. A white *kebaya* top for instance, pays homage to the long history of this traditional feminine dress in Indonesia as well as the Southeast Asian region, and its numerous iterations shaped by various stylistic influences. The wrap style of LULU LUTFI LABIBI's *kebaya* is a nod to other forms of Asian dress such as the *kimono*, and its lace sleeves hark back to the colonial influence on forms of dress in the archipelago, where lace was imported from Europe and incorporated into *kebaya* designs for the social elite. Elsewhere, the *batik buketan* designs recall the style of *batik* popular in coastal cities such as Pekalongan, where Chinese communities incorporated floral motifs and pastel colours from their culture. The designer's *lurik* garments marry traditional Javanese textiles with a contemporary *wabi-sabi* aesthetic, in unique silhouettes that reference the work of Japanese designers such as Yohji Yamamoto and Rei Kawakubo, as well the art of drape and fold that was once common in the region and evident in the numerous stylistic variations of the *sari* and *sarong*. This knowledge has gradually been lost with the advent of modern clothing closures such as zippers and buttons. Many of LULU LUTFI LABIBI's garments eschew these modern closures, and as such, can be styled in several ways; these items of clothing are also often unisex and unisize, offering a freedom in the exercise of its wearer's creativity. In contrast

to the highly regulated and socially stratified codes of dress of the past (and arguably even in the present, where expectations and social stigmas still surround forms of dress and public identities), LULU LUTFI LABIBI's clothing is gender fluid and democratic. His campaign images feature people from all walks of life and of all ages, as well as vignettes of daily life in Yogyakarta, celebrating the beauty and dignity of the everyday.

Emblematic of his approach is *Lurik Sewindu Bercerita*, a length of textile assembled from remnants of *lurik* and *batik* cloth collected by the designer over several years of his creative journey. Mirroring his ups and downs, these scraps are woven into a larger tapestry, symbolic of the vicissitudes of life. For the designer, textile is always intimately connected with the rhythms, ebb and flow of life, and this is reflected in the emotive titling of each of his collections: *Jantung Hati* (Beloved), *Perjalanan* (Journey) and *Tirakat* (Soul Searching).







LULU LUTFI LABIBI

*Lurik Sewindu Bercerita*

2019

handwoven textile

68 x 2400 cm

Left:

top: Batik Buketan Long Top: *batik tulis* on cotton  
bottom: Batik Buketan Skirt: *batik tulis* on cotton

Middle:

top: Kebaya: cotton, organdy  
bottom: Tenun Perca Skirt: handwoven *lurik*

Right:

outer: Lengan Panjang: woven *lurik*  
top: Duka Luruh Asimetris Top: handwoven *lurik*  
bottom: Tenun Perca Skirt: handwoven *lurik*

OCTORA



OCTORA's work focuses on forms of Indonesian dress that have been co-opted in the articulation of national agendas and other interests. *Nyonya's Armour*, presented at the Biennale Jogja in 2008, takes on the *kebaya* – a form of national dress for women in Indonesia, freighted with histories and notions of national pride, tradition, and feminine ideals. These bodices are made of metal mesh, the delicate white filigree conveying ideals of feminine beauty but also suggesting a steely undercurrent. The *kebaya* is presented both as an aesthetic object as well as a form of armour, suggesting that the adoption of 'accepted' modes of dress can be a form of defence as well as dissimulation. The installation is striking for its ghostly quality – the absence of real or physical bodies inhabiting these garments. In writing about her work, Octora reflects: "fashion is a powerful medium that can articulate...interests and agendas"; sartorial choices are powerfully loaded and can shape their wearers so much so that "(t)he subject instantly becomes no longer itself but a character", a persona that can slip with ease into a semblance of accepted social roles and norms. This idea of donning clothing as 'armour' is perhaps all the more heightened in Indonesia today, where codes of dress have come under public scrutiny and are becoming vigorously policed. While some may chafe against this prescriptiveness, Octora's work appears to offer a counter-narrative: that a semblance of conformity may sometimes be liberating, or empowering.



Octora  
*Nyonya's Armour*  
2008  
metal  
dimensions variable



*Makna* can be translated as ‘meaning’, and in this project, **MELLA JAARSMA** investigates how meaning is invested in what one wears. The inspiration for this project stemmed from the artist’s observation of a ritual in Bali, where villagers and priests came together to recharge the spiritual energies of sacred masks and costumes by placing images of the entity represented by the mask on top of the costume, thereby investing and re-animating the costume with meaning and symbolism.

In a similar vein, Jaarsma questions the nature of the urgencies of contemporary life, which can be invested in the clothing we wear and hence projected to the world. Two shrouds – one coloured black to represent freedom of expression and civil rights, and the other coloured white to represent religion and faith – are overlaid with images taken from local as well as international media, to highlight as well as to initiate discussion of some of the pressing social issues of our time by attaching them to that most intimate layer worn close to our bodies. Laden with these signs and signifiers, Jaarsma’s costumes also question how we might interpret signs and social identities attached to bodies through clothing – so much so that they almost overwhelm the subject beneath the garments, a thread echoed by other artists and artworks in this exhibition.



Mella Jaarsma  
*Makna Project (Black)*

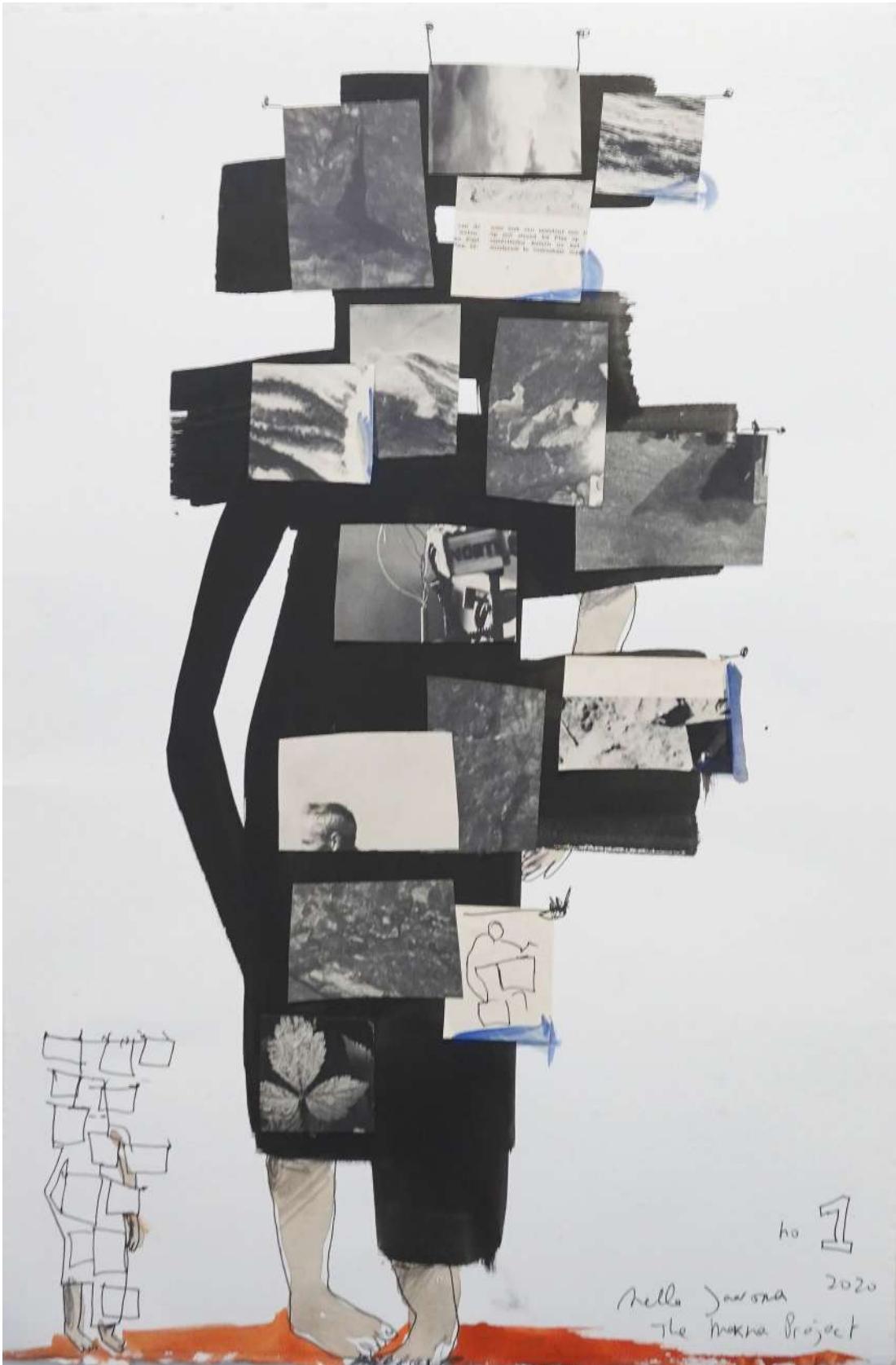
2020  
costume and video

costume: textile, stainless steel, digital print on textile of drawings  
by Alfin Agnuba; unique edition  
video: single-channel video; 3min 53sec; edition of 5 + 2AP  
dimensions variable

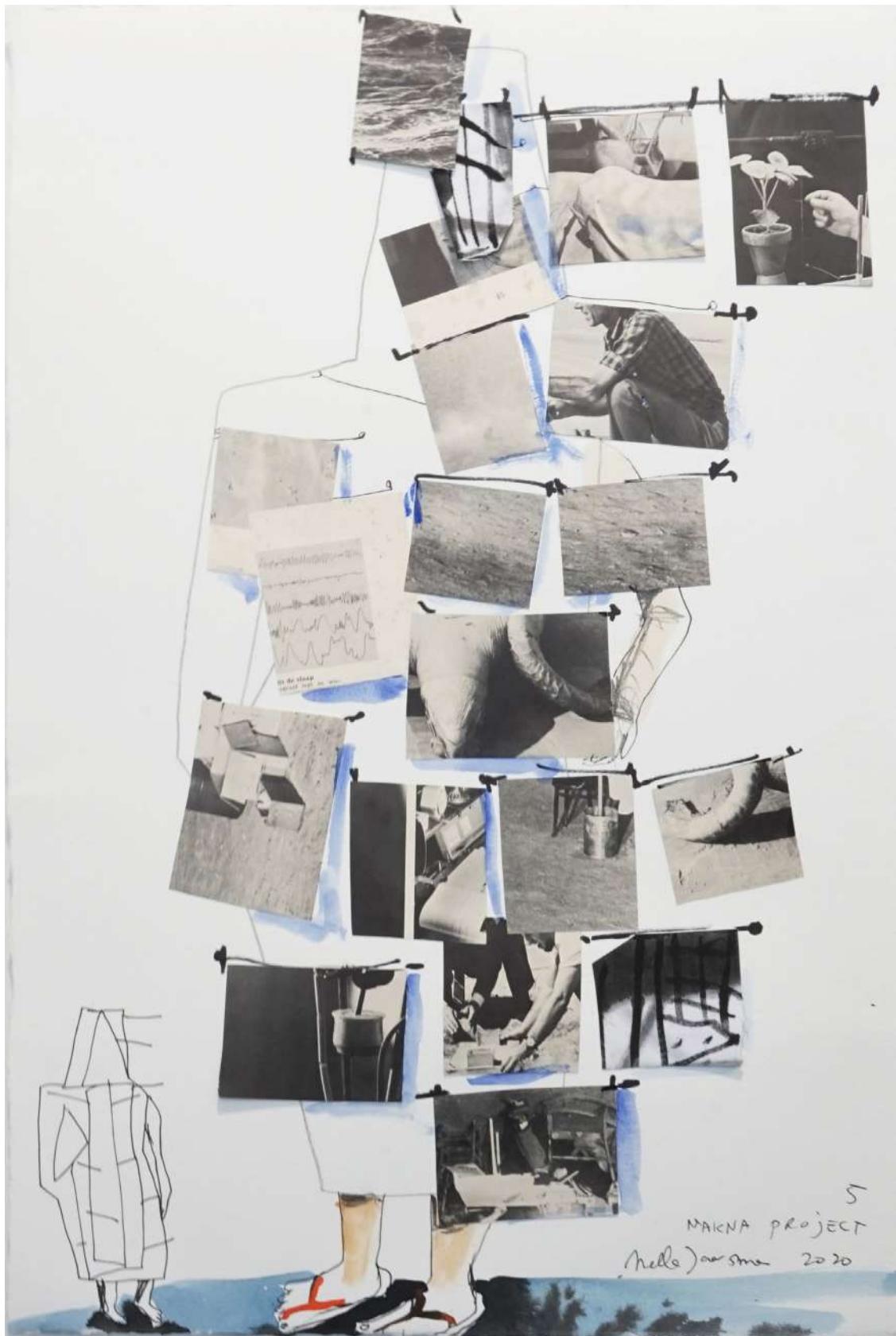


Mella Jaarsma  
*Makna Project (White)*

2020  
costume and video  
costume: textile, stainless steel, digital print on textile of drawings  
by Alfin Agnuba; unique edition  
video: single-channel video; 3min 20sec; edition of 5 + 2AP  
dimensions variable



Mella Jaarsma  
*Makna Project I*  
2020  
gouache, ink, pencil, collage on paper  
55 x 38 cm



Mella Jaarsma  
*Makna Project 5*  
2020  
gouache, ink, pencil, collage on paper  
55 x 38 cm



BUDI AGUNG KUSWARA's ornate images exemplify the spirit of 'baroque', with their heady syncretism of diverse cultural influences, and surfaces beautifully lavished with detail. His painting *Balinese Baroque #3* explores the image of Bali as promoted in Western tourism advertisements of the past, and the continuing role of these external 'market' forces in shaping the island's identity and image. The face of the central figure in his painting is that of a Balinese woman's who appeared in advertisements for tour packages in the 1930s. She is dressed, rather incongruously, in European dress, complete with a billowy crinoline, a commentary on the 'civilising' influence of the West. She is surrounded by a cornucopia of symbols connoting tropical exoticism as well as European notions of luxury, a parallel to the hyperbolic fantasies of Bali parlayed in advertisements for overseas markets. At the same time, this pastiche of images also acknowledges the rich cultural palimpsest of Bali, and its blending of diverse influences to evolve a uniquely syncretic identity that may stand as a counter-narrative to the hegemony of a monolithic 'national' identity.



Budi Agung Kuswara  
*Balinese Baroque #3*  
2020  
cyanotype and acrylic on *kamasan* canvas  
199 x 143.5 cm



AGAN HARAHAP's evocative image portrays a group of traditional dancers (*ledhek*) attired in their costumes, in a moment of repose. While staged to resemble an archival image, the poses of the women appear wholly modern, and have in fact been appropriated from a group portrait of popular Korean girl-band Blackpink. Like these contemporary pop idols, *ledhek* are the stars of the traditional *Tayub* dance, a performance often characterised by seductive movements and accompanied by *arak* (liquor) treats. Closely linked to the rhythms of life in agrarian village communities of Central and East Java, the traditional cultural form of *Tayub* has in recent years come under the crosshairs of contemporary culture wars, and deemed 'inappropriate' to moral and religious values. In Agan's observation, *Tayub*, like so many other cultural forms, has transformed in line with the needs and norms of the times, so that its existence can be accepted in the eyes of the community. In this way, his *ledhek* may be read as a portrait of Indonesia's multi-faceted ethnic make-up and pluralism, as well as a statement of its cultural regeneration and resistance, where traditional forms adopt new layers and evolve new forms, like the titular baroque pearl, as a means of remaining relevant and vital.



Agan Harahap  
*How You Like That*  
2020  
C-print on photo paper, mounted on aluminium composite  
79 x 122 cm  
edition of 3 + 1AP









# Baroque Archipelago

Agan Harahap, Budi Agung Kuswara, LULULUTFILABIBI, Mella Jaarsma, Octora, and TOTON  
Curated by Tan Siuli  
22 January – 21 February 2021

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Turning on ideas of adornment, desire and di...  
spotlight on Indonesian creatives reinterpret traditions, and on the archipelago as an example of borrowing and adapting from diverse sources unique sensibility.

The notion of a syncretic identity (as opposed to a strategy of resistance against essentialist models) is central to the exhibition. The artworks on display question social and cultural norms as they relate to notions of identity, gender and sexuality. Indonesian designers often collaborate with each other and with international designers, creating a vibrant community; this exhibition is in many ways a celebration of this interconnectedness and relationships.

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## GILLMAN BARRACKS

Executive Director Sueo Mizuma established Mizuma Art Gallery in Tokyo in 1994. Since its opening in Gillman Barracks, Singapore in 2012, the gallery aims for the promotion of East Asian artists in the region as well as the introduction of Southeast Asian artists to the international art scene. From 2014 to 2019, the artist residency space "Rumah Kijang Mizuma" operated in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, providing a new platform for dialogue by supporting exchanges between East Asia and Southeast Asia. In 2018, a new gallery space, "Mizuma & Kips" in New York, USA, as a shared collaboration between Mizuma Gallery from Tokyo and Singapore, and Kips Gallery from New York.

Mizuma Gallery features the works of Japanese artists including Aida Makoto, Aiko Miyanaga, Amano Yoshitaka, Ikeda Manabu, Tenmyouya Hisashi, and Yamaguchi Akira. Moreover, it showcases the works of renowned East Asian artists such as Ai Weiwei, Du Kun, Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba, Ken + Julia Yonetani, and Zhao Zhao. The gallery also features the creations of prominent and emerging artists from the region including Agan Harahap, Albert Yonathan Setyawan, Angki Purbandono, Entang Wiharso, Gilang Fradika, Hери Dono, indieguerillas, Made Wianta, Mark Justiniani, Nasirun, Budi Agung Kuswara, Robert Zhao Renhui, Zen Teh, Ashley Yeo, and Ben Loong. Mizuma Gallery participates annually in international art fairs including Art Basel Hong Kong and The Armory Show New York, promoting Asian artists on an international art scale.

Set in a former military barracks dating back to 1936 and surrounded by lush tropical greenery, the Gillman Barracks visual arts cluster was launched in September 2012. Jointly developed by government agencies, the Singapore Economic Development Board (EDB), the National Arts Council (NAC), and the JTC Corporation (JTC), Gillman Barracks' vision is to be Asia's destination for the presentation and discussion of international and Southeast Asian art. For more information, please visit [www.gillmanbarracks.com](http://www.gillmanbarracks.com)