



MIZUMA GALLERY

Curated by
Hermanto Soerjanto

Kemalezedine;

Epigraphic

Landscape

of

Balinese

Painting

7 September —
13 October 2024

I “accidentally” moved to Bali in 2011. I came for a brief escape from Jakarta but eventually stayed for art. I became fascinated with Balinese painting and learned about its philosophical foundations, rich history, distinctive techniques and styles that spurred many great works by local artists. I wondered, however, about Balinese painting’s standing in the current art world. Is it appreciated and valued by galleries, museums, and collectors? Is it considered significant or relevant by the international contemporary art community? In 2013, along with other Balinese artists, I formed Neo-Pitamaha, a collective that set out to study and research traditional Balinese visual art for the purpose of conservation and exploration. For the last couple of years, I’ve been promoting post-traditionalism, a further exploration of the artistic potential of Balinese painting by reinterpreting it from a contemporary perspective.

Kemalezedine; Epigraphic Landscape of Balinese Painting summarizes my study and perspective on post-traditionalism. It consists of 3 main parts: *Dawn*, *Day*, and *Dusk* — each differing in focus, expression, and personal meaning.

Dawn represents a beginning that holds a myriad of possibilities. This work highlights important elements in Balinese painting, i.e., history, drawing, craftsmanship, narrative language, nature themes, and distinctive colors while breaking away from traditional conventions and styles.

Day expresses the phenomenon of duality, i.e., old versus new, static versus dynamic, pale versus vibrant — which often clash resulting in tension and dissonance. Yet, in art as in life, we continue to seek balance and harmony among the dueling forces while keeping an open and accepting attitude.

Dusk reflects the underlying spirit and process that contributes to the intricacy of Balinese painting. Rather than a slapdash work in pursuit of sensation, novelty, or controversy, creating a Balinese painting requires a long and meticulous process where patience, diligence, and concentration are an artist’s virtues. So much so it is truly meditative. Once more, in art as in life, we take on a journey with the belief that art/life will reveal its beauty, wonders, and lessons along the way, from *sight* to *insight*.

Matur suksma,
Kemalezedine

Epigraphic Landscape of Balinese Painting

Due to the fatigue of living in the big city, in 2011 Kemalezedine decided to leave Jakarta and settle in Bali, closing his chapter in Jakarta as a film and TV producer, and as a part-time artist. Ubud was chosen as the new home for the new chapter of his life and for his family, based on its serene and calming nature of the place (back then, Ubud was still a relatively small town without traffic jams). At that time, Kemalezedine had no knowledge nor intention for a deeper involvement in Balinese visual art. He was a street art and lowbrow artist, with no connection to Balinese visual art. Until one day, he visited Tony Raka Gallery to see an exhibition of an artist collective, Bali Art Society. The exhibition presented traditional Balinese art on one side and contemporary Balinese art on the other side, making him wonder why there was no connection between those two groups of artworks, although they were all done by Balinese artists. This curiosity led him to get to know Gede Mahendra Yasa, who was one of the curators of that show. Since then, Kemalezedine's interest in Balinese visual art and culture grew and led him to a long journey of building a bridge between traditional Balinese art and contemporary Balinese art. Later in 2013, together with Gede Mahendra Yasa, Ketut Moniarta, and Tang Adimawan, Kemalezedine founded Neo-Pitamaha, a collective set out to study and research traditional Balinese visual art for the purpose of conservation and exploration.

During his research into Balinese art, he found some misinterpretations about it that we have become familiar with. What we now recognize as traditional Balinese art, such Ubud style or Batuan style, are actually not traditional Balinese art. They had been influenced by the modern western art, which entered Bali in the 30's through two of the most prominent and influential western artists in Bali, Rudolf Bonnet and Walter Spies.

“Calling Balinese painting ‘traditional’ misrepresents the dynamic and highly innovative nature of painting in Bali. ‘Tradition’ implies lack of change, adherence to set types. While both the old tradition of classical Kamasan painting and the new tradition of modern art that developed in the 1930s work from such set types, they allow for a high degree of change.”

— Adrian Vickers¹

¹ Adrian Vickers, *Balinese Art: Paintings and Drawings of Bali 1800–2010* (Singapore: Tuttle, 2012), p. 26.

Kemal saw this as a way to build the narrative that places traditional Balinese art and culture at the root of its contemporary art development. But he is also aware that as a non-Balinese, he does not have any spiritual connection with the religious practice, nor the culture and social structure of the Balinese. Unlike what happened in the 30's when Rudolf Bonnet and Walter Spies came to Bali and founded the artist collective Pita Maha, modernity in art practice was spared amongst the Balinese artists. Balinese artists at that time began to understand the concept of perspective in a painting, how to depict volume in their objects, and even in the theme of their paintings (daily activities, landscape, etc.), coloring technique, and so on. But the final result of their artwork was still strongly connected to their roots of tradition and culture.

When we look at Kemalezedine's paintings today, we see very little trace of Balinese painting style. Even though we can identify some Balinese objects around, which he uses as tools to tell a story, it is very clear that his paintings do not echo the traditional Balinese painting at all. What he does is that he borrows the essence of Balinese tradition in his art making process as the main inspiration for his paintings. As we can see in this exhibition, the element of drawing plays a very significant role in all of Kemalezedine's paintings. Contrary to the understanding of western art whereby drawings are often seen as a study for paintings or sculpture or as a plan for an installation, Kemalezedine discovers the importance of drawing in the process of Balinese traditional paintings. A bamboo pen (a piece of bamboo with one end sharpened, dipped in the ink and used as a pen) was used as the main tool to draw and to create shading called *sigarmangsi*, before it went to the coloring process using a water-based paint, applied with a brush. Bamboo pen was also used in the making of Balinese ritual drawing to complete a ritual ceremony or even to make an amulet. He was also inspired by the works of Balinese pioneers in contemporary art, such as Made Wianta, whose *Karangasem* painting series features his use of a bamboo pen to draw very intricate ornamentation on the Balinese traditional canvas. In essence, any visual on any surface made with sharp and hard edges is considered as drawings, and thus, Balinese painting is the act of putting colors on a drawing. This shows the significance and the importance of drawing in traditional Balinese painting.

Although he does not use a bamboo pen for the drawing in his paintings, Kemalezedine still highlights the importance of drawing in traditional Balinese art and cultural practice. The coloring process in his paintings presented in this exhibition became his statement on the influence and domination of western art in the global development of contemporary art. He chose a range of colors based on the colors used in the classic traditional Balinese style paintings of *Kamasan*, which are black, white, yellow ochre, red, blue, and green. Traditionally the process of coloring in classic *Kamasan* painting used water-based natural pigments. In his paintings, Kemalezedine uses oil paint as the representation of the influence and domination of western art in the development of contemporary art in Bali and globally. The panoramic format of his paintings is also inspired by the classic *Kamasan* scroll painting.

Many of Kemalezedine's paintings, including those presented in this exhibition, are predominantly landscape paintings. In my opinion, this is also influenced by the Balinese paintings, whereby landscape occupies most of the space in the canvas while figures of human or animals and buildings are depicted in a smaller scale compared to the landscape, but together they intertwine harmoniously to build a story. The resemblance is quite evident in his paintings presented in this exhibition, entitled *Dawn*, *Day*, and *Dusk*, as explained by Kemalezedine in his statement:

Dawn

Dawn 1-3 is an expression of my individual thoughts and practices related to the historical dissection of the formation of Balinese painting to the technical standards in creating works. As a person who is not a Balinese genealogist, in my works I try to show my awareness of the distance between myself and Balinese tradition, giving me a different perspective in analyzing Balinese painting. Acknowledging Balinese painting as a source of my practice, this work is about the open and independent position of Balinese drawing beyond the standards and new possibilities in contemporary art.

Day

My interaction with Balinese painting is not only in the local Balinese discourse, but it also intersects with national art issues. In 2016, my friends and I launched an art project called NU-Abstract. This is a comparative project that we carried out in response to a political, religious, and cultural movement by a right-wing group that echoed the anti-figurative art movement amidst the hustle and bustle of the general election in Indonesia at that time. Most of the artists who did it painted abstract works or inanimate objects. NU-Abstract criticized the basis of the practice of creating works that came from religious interpretations by making a comparison with the practice of creating works that came from art itself. Moreover, in the practice of Balinese painting, almost all works produced are figurative works depicting the lives of Balinese people and their nature, which will certainly be in contrast to the perpetrators of the anti-figurative art movement. In my personal view, as the only Muslim in the group, there needs to be a comparative argument related to this. In a catalogue from an exhibition held at Nadi Gallery, I wrote about my research, which started from Islamic literature related to fine art, to the problem of figure drawings/paintings. From here, abstraction also became an influence on my works. Day 1-9 shows a recording of an event, with drawing symbolism used in one group and painting symbolism (abstraction) in another. However, along with that, the problem of Balinese painting is not only about being anti-figurative, Balinese painting also faces the tourism industry that has raised it so far. There are not many Balinese painters today, and if there are, it is not their main profession, as many who used to be Balinese painters have now left their practice and chosen to work in the more practical tourism industry that is growing rapidly. The tourism industry not only benefits the Balinese, but also raises its own problems that intersect with tradition, social society, culture, and the environment. This tension between tradition and modern life of Balinese society is reflected in this work entitled Day.

Dusk

Post-tradition has recently become a strong discourse that I often speak about. Referring to Balinese modernity which is strongly colored by traditional values, the image character in traditional Balinese painting is my main concern, through an in-depth study of the methods and stages of line formation in Balinese painting. Not burdened by the rules of Balinese painting tradition, I am free to appropriate these stages, reversing, changing, disguising, reducing and adding. If the lines in traditional classical Balinese painting seem to emphasize the flatness of the object/figure, in my paintings, the overlapping, repetitive and subtle lines and colors actually become components that form a three-dimensional illusion. In my paintings, this is transformed into a different visual construction. Although aspects of narrative and traditional patterns actually appear in my works, they are not striking, some are visible and some are hidden. It can be said that my paintings are abstractions of traditional Balinese paintings, with an emphasis on more personal visual compositions. Many of my works show the combination of drawing techniques borrowed from the drawing methods of traditional Balinese painting with a formal approach to the composition of oil paint colors. This way, I am also able to work more intuitively. The repetitive aspect brings out a sense of meditative purification and has depth in seeing the hidden forms of abstraction. Although emerging from the same basic concept, each painting is transformed into a different visual composition. We can feel the genealogy of the lines of traditional art intertwined with the genealogy of modern painting in color, shadow, composition, and balance. My works aim to be in the middle ground between traditional and formalist painting styles, they do not appear modernist, nor do they appear like paintings.

— Kemalezedine

In my mind, Kemalezedine is not merely a painter, he is also a researcher, a scholar, a motivator, and a promoter for young artists in Bali, and an activist of the post-tradition art movement, as well as a student. It is quite rare for me to meet someone who has the same vision about the position of tradition in the context of contemporary art. Since I organized my first exhibition discussing this matter in 2010, entitled “Ethnicity Now”, in the National Gallery of Indonesia, curated by Jim Supangkat, I focused all my effort into art, to promote the understanding of post-tradition. Kemalezedine has been my critical discussion partner in this matter for the past few years, I could say that we are mentoring each other. What impresses me the most, aside from his vision and his quality as an artist, is his quality as a human being, his spirit to bring progress not only to himself but to the community that has supported him to become a better artist every single day.



Hermanto Soerjanto (b. 1970, Indonesia) went to Palin School of Arts & Design in Singapore and Akademi Teknik Desain Interior (ATDI) in Jakarta, Indonesia, before joining Cipta Citra advertising agency in 1994. Since then, he has built his career in the field of advertising and currently holds a position at Pantarei Communications as Chief Creative Officer. As an art collector, Hermanto Soerjanto is familiar with Indonesian artists, having spent much time conversing with them and visiting their studios. In 2008 he established GARIS Artspace, an art gallery in Jakarta showcasing works by contemporary Indonesian artists, where he organizes and curates the exhibitions on a regular basis. To date, Hermanto Soerjanto has organized several exhibitions, most notably *Ethnicity Now*, a group exhibition at Galeri Nasional Indonesia, Jakarta (2010), and *Unveiling Fundamentals in Contemporary Art Through Asia* at OHD Museum, Magelang, Indonesia (2015). Hermanto Soerjanto lives and works in Jakarta, Indonesia.



Dawn, 2024

acrylic and oil on canvas
140 × 540 × 5 cm (triptych, 140 × 180 × 5 cm each)



Painting Detail



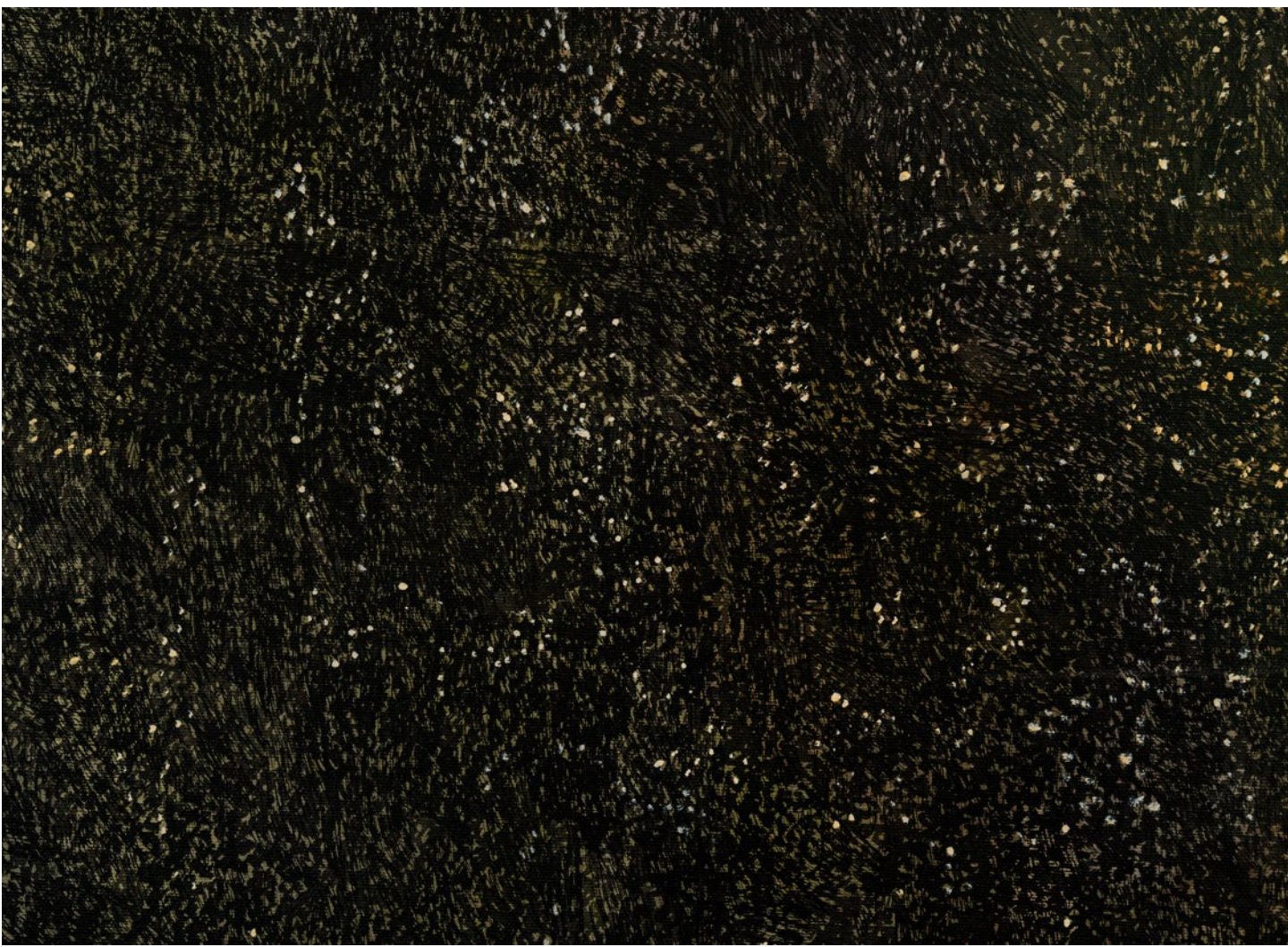


Dusk, 2024

acrylic and oil on canvas
140 × 540 × 5 cm (triptych, 140 × 180 × 5 cm each)



Painting Detail





Dusk #4 (Epigraph of Stem & Twig), 2024

acrylic and oil on canvas
150 × 200 × 5 cm

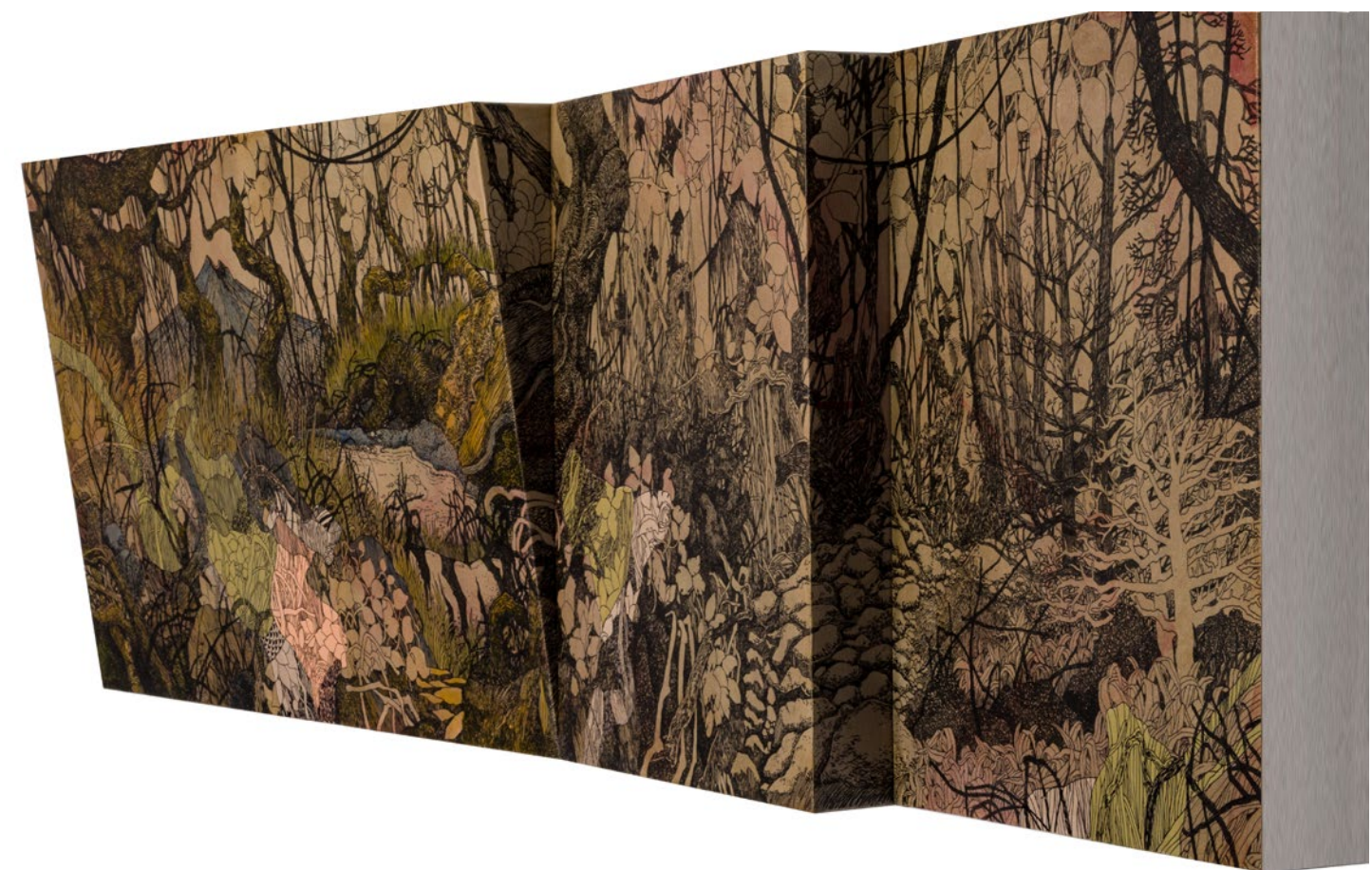


Dusk #5 (Epigraph of Root), 2024

acrylic and oil on canvas
150 × 135 × 5 cm



Myth #1, 2024
acrylic and oil on canvas
45 × 140 × 8 cm
(triptych, 45 × 70 × 8 cm, 45 × 35 × 8 cm, 45 × 35 × 8 cm each)





Myth #2, 2024

acrylic and oil on canvas
45 × 70 × 8 cm (diptych, 45 × 35 × 8 cm each)





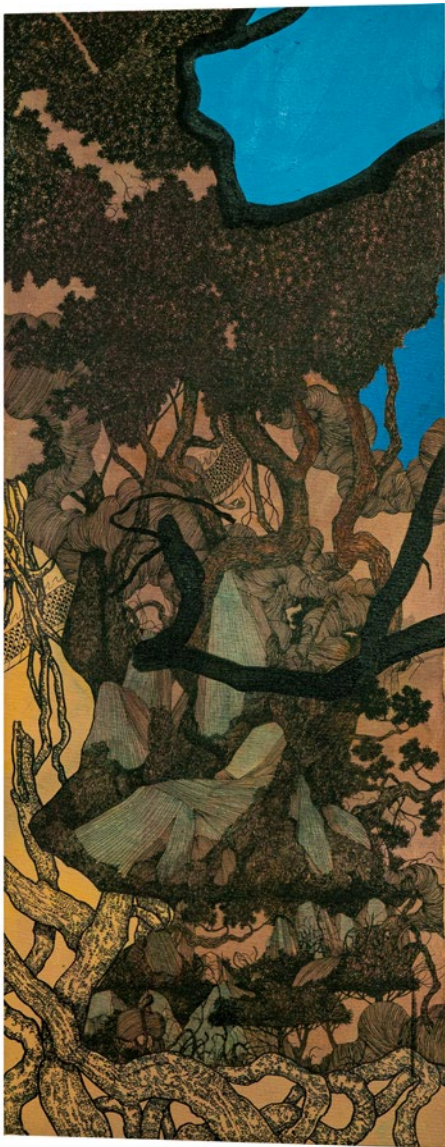
Myth #3, 2024

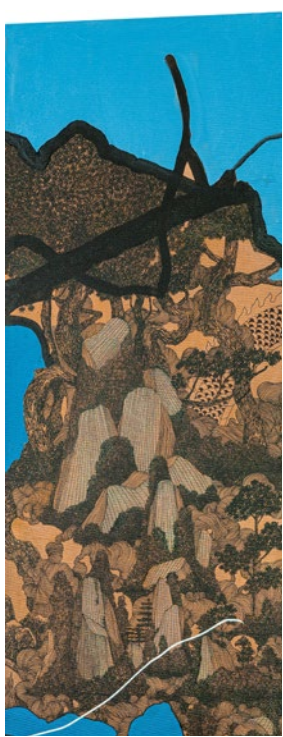
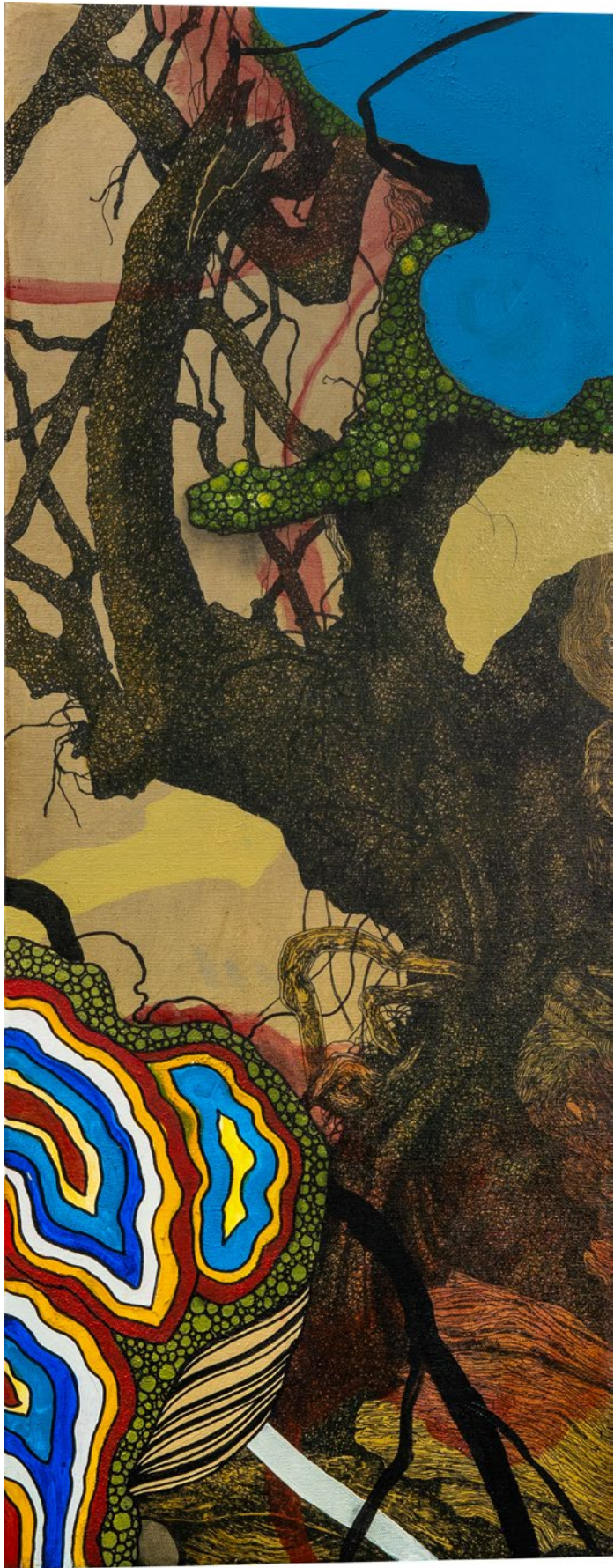
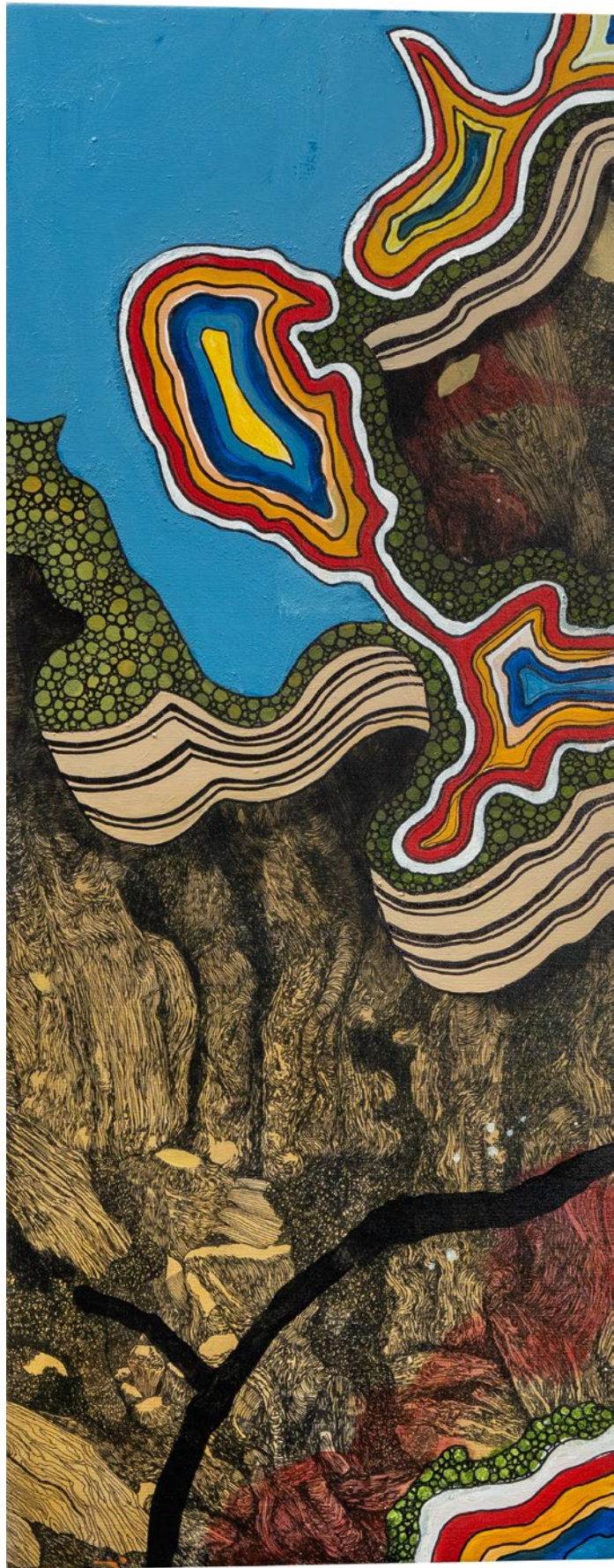
acrylic and oil on canvas
90 × 70 × 8 cm



Day #1 — #9, 2024

acrylic and oil on canvas
90 × 350 × 8 cm (set of 9)







Kemalezedine (b. 1978, Yogyakarta, Indonesia) studied at the Faculty of Fine Arts and Design at Bandung Institute of Technology (ITB), Bandung, Indonesia from 1997 to 2004. He is part of the Nu-Abstract and Neo-Pitamaha groups in Bali, who study traditional Balinese art, while incorporating new experimentations and ideas. Kemalezedine's focus is to create and explore the world of painting-drawing. His paintings intertwine the genealogies of both traditional art lines and modern painting through colour planes, composition, and balance. Existing between different painting styles, his paintings explore the tension between the traditional and the modern, natural and unnatural, macrocosm and microcosm, emptiness and fullness. Kemalezedine lives and works in Bali, Indonesia.

Education

2004 Faculty of Art and Design, Bandung Institute of Technology, Bandung, Indonesia

Solo Exhibitions

2024 *Kemalezedine; Epigraphic Landscape of Balinese Painting*, Mizuma Gallery, Singapore

2023 *Kemalezedine's Rerajahan: Deconsecrated Mantra*, Srisasanti Syndicate, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

2021 *Painting - Genic/Synesthesia*, CG Artspace, Jakarta, Indonesia
Draw Distance (virtual exhibition), Santi Saptari art consulting X CG Artspace, Jakarta, Indonesia

2020 *Comparing Perspective*, CG Artspace Jakarta, Indonesia

2016 *Balinese Graphic Art II: Painting and Drawing – Nyoman Ngendon, Pencarian Corak Seni Lukis Baru Indonesia*, Edwin's Gallery at Art Stage Jakarta, Jakarta, Indonesia
Balinese Graphic Art: Painting and Drawing, Langgeng Art Foundation, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

2012 *Tales of Moving Island*, S.14, Bandung, Indonesia

Selected Group Exhibitions

2024 *MILESTONE: Pameran ART IASR*, Lawangwangi Creative Space, Bandung, Indonesia
SHOWCASE SHOWDOWN, Titik Dua Ubud, Bali, Indonesia
Abstraction / Distinction, Semarang Gallery, Semarang, Indonesia

2023 *Contemporary Art & Printmaking: Indonesian Artists' Portfolio*, Titik Dua Ubud, Bali, Indonesia
Post Tradition: Revisiting and the Future of Balinese Painting, Mizuma Gallery, Singapore

2022 *Erotica*, Lano Art Project X Sika Gallery, Bali, Indonesia
Landscape: Reinvention, Kemalezedine & Savanhdary Vongpoothorn, 39+ Art Space, Singapore
Manifesto VIII : Transposisi, National Gallery of Indonesia, Jakarta, Indonesia
WARTA #2, Jogja Gallery, Yogyakarta, Indonesia
Good News from Bali, Mizuma Gallery, Singapore
Neopitamaha: Tradition in Translation, Titik Dua Ubud, Bali, Indonesia

2021 *+361 Unfolding the current ripple*, Titik Dua, Bali, Indonesia
Vestige, Srisasanti Syndicate, Yogyakarta, Indonesia
Garden of dystopia, Can's Gallery, Jakarta, Indonesia
Sixty percent around the sun, Artsphere x Black Hand Gang, Jakarta, Indonesia

- 2020 *Hidup berdampingan dengan musuh*, Ciputra Artpreneur, Jakarta, Indonesia
 ARTJOG: RESILIENCE, Jogja National Museum, Yogyakarta, Indonesia
- 2019 *Yogyakarta Annual Art 4*, Sangkring Art Space, Yogyakarta, Indonesia
ART•BALI 2019: Speculative Memories, AB•BC Building, Bali Collection, ITDC Nusa Dua, Bali, Indonesia
Drawing Bali Today, Sika Gallery, Bali, Indonesia
Intention Please!, Edwin Gallery, Jakarta, Indonesia
- 2018 *ART•BALI 2018: Beyond the Myths*, AB•BC Building, Bali Collection, ITDC Nusa Dua, Bali, Indonesia
NU – Abstract : The NU - Abstract, Orbital Dago Gallery, Bandung, Indonesia
NU – Abstract : Balinese Abstract, Edwin Gallery, Jakarta, Indonesia
Spectrum Hendra Gunawan, Ciputra Artpreneur, Jakarta, Indonesia
Redraw III: Ugahari, Edwin's Gallery Jakarta, Indonesia
NU- Abstract: Political Aesthetic, Nadi Gallery, Jakarta, Indonesia
NU-Abstract, Langgeng Art Foundation, Yogyakarta, Indonesia
- 2017 *Kecil Itu Indah XV*, Edwin's Gallery, Jakarta, Indonesia
What's Next I, Sika Gallery, Bali, Indonesia
- 2016 *Contemporary Art from Bali*, Langgeng Art Foundation, Yogyakarta, Indonesia
Crossing: Beyond Bali Seering, 45downstairs, Melbourne, Indonesia
South East Asia Triennial 2016, National Gallery of Indonesia, Jakarta, Indonesia
Redraw II : Discovery, Edwin's Gallery, Jakarta, Indonesia
- 2015 *Toyama Art Camp 2015*, Toyama, Japan
Violent Bali [Neo Pitamaha], Tony Raka Contemporary Art Gallery, Bali, Indonesia
Kemalezedine Special Presentation of Bazaar Art Jakarta 2015, Ritz Carlton Ballroom Pacific Place, Jakarta, Indonesia
Void, Langgeng Gallery, Magelang, Indonesia
Artmoments-Jogja|15 : Rooms With a View, Jogja National Museum, Yogyakarta, Indonesia
NOW: here – there – everywhere [Neo Pitamaha], Semarang Contemporary Art Gallery, Semarang, Indonesia
Neo Pitamaha, Paradigma Baru Seni Lukis Bali, Platform3, Bandung, Indonesia
Inside/Out, Braddock Tiles event, Brooklyn Street Art Event, Manhattan, New York, USA
- 2014 *Art Supermart 2014*, Sika Gallery Ubud, Bali, Indonesia
Pameran Besar Senirupa Nusantara 2014, Taman Budaya Jayapura, Papua, Indonesia
Kota Tua Creative Festival 2014, Kota Tua, Jakarta, Indonesia
Good and Wood, Ciputra Artpreneur, Jakarta, Indonesia
ART|JOG 2014: Legacies of Power [Mahendra Yasa feat. Neo Pitamaha], Taman Budaya Yogyakarta, Yogyakarta, Indonesia
Manifesto No.4 : Keseharian - Mencandra Tanda-tanda Masa, National Gallery of Indonesia, Jakarta, Indonesia

- 2013 *Pameran Ilustrasi Cerpen Kompas 2012*, Bentara Budaya Bali, Denpasar, Bali, Indonesia
 Mythography: Now, Sukadara Art Space, Sanur, Bali, Indonesia
 JALAN MONSTER, Ubud Public Art Festival, Seniman Industries Art Project, Bali, Indonesia
 Art Mini Mart, Sika Gallery Ubud, Bali, Indonesia
 Art Bromo: Collision of Nature and Culture, Java Banana Gallery, Mt. Bromo, Probolinggo, Indonesia
- 2012 *Reposisi*, National Gallery of Indonesia, Jakarta, Indonesia
 Renegotiating Boundaries, Lawangwangi Art Space, Bandung, Indonesia
 Indonesian Contemporary Art #1, Mapping, ART: 1, Jakarta, Indonesia
- 2008 *Showcase Showdown*, Guerillas Art Space [EAT Clothing company/art project], Bandung, Indonesia

About Mizuma Gallery

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” opened in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, to create a new platform for dialogue by supporting exchanges between East Asia and Southeast Asia. From 2018 to 2023, “Mizuma & Kips” opened in New York, USA, as a shared collaboration between Mizuma Gallery from Tokyo and Singapore and Kips Gallery from New York.

About Gillman Barracks

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. Gillman Barracks’ vision is to be Asia’s destination for the presentation and discussion of international and Southeast Asian art. Today, Gillman Barracks is a place for art lovers, art collectors, and those curious about art. The cluster is a focal point of Singapore’s arts landscape, and anchors the development of visual art in the region and beyond.

Executive Director

Mizuma Sueo

Director

Fredy Chandra

General Manager

Theresia Irma

Project Manager

Marsha Tan

Designer

Yusuf Aji

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Exhibition Views: Photography by Wong Jing Wei

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