

NEW OBSOLESCENCE  
ADITYAVOVALI

New Obsolescence: ADITYAVOVALI

JT  
4 MARCH 2023

::About the Video::

ROH is pleased to present *New Obsolescence: ADITYAVOVALI*, Aditya Novali's (b. 1978 Surakarta, Indonesia) first solo exhibition at our new space in Jalan Surabaya, and his third solo exhibition with the gallery to date. In this show, Novali conducts a rigorous, almost forensic evaluation upon an archival video documentation taken in June 17, 1989, in which Novali himself was, alongside two other group of performers, invited to conduct a solo *wayang* (Javanese shadow puppetry) performance at the *Istana Negara* (Indonesian Presidential Palace), or the living quarters of the country's president at the time, Soeharto, to a large crowd of in attendance. Although at first glance in and of itself the notion of anyone performing within the context of a presidential audience is somewhat remarkable, it would somewhat still be very easy for this video to be discounted otherwise in terms of its importance, especially as source material to build an exhibition around. In a deeper analysis, however, there are many aspects to what was documented by the video, as well as how and why it was documented, that when analyzed deeper, express multiple layers of contexts pertaining to Indonesia's complex geopolitical, cultural, and societal history, as well as its collective memory, or lack thereof, related to these broader ideas. The first part of the title of the exhibition, *New Obsolescence*, is itself an inherent paradox, where the concept of something new is rendered automatically obsolete, entering a continuous loop of constant contradiction, while the second part of the title, *ADITYAVOVALI*, refers to a misspelling of Novali's own name in the permanent archive of a document pertaining to the national presidential collection.

Due to the effects of time, what remains of the video originally recorded on Betamax

Cassette format, itself an obsolete artifact of the past that younger people today may not even recognize due to progression of modern forms of memory storage, is itself a very grainy, glitchy, distorted archival document. It begins with a black background that introduces the performers that will be taking center stage in the video itself, in interesting magenta, purple, and cyan typography specific towards the time the video was made no longer in utilization by today's computers and other digital devices. There will be, as the credit line suggests, a boy's church choir coming from Austria, and curiously thereafter this *dalang cilik* (young shadow puppeteer) apparently named Adityavovali, performing at the *Istana Negara*. This introductory scene provides critical context that frames the rest of the archival material in the sense that there are two inherently fallacious components to the information, first pertaining to the spelling of Aditya Novali's name as discussed previously, and the second being that the second performer documented in the video has been ignored completely, that being an *angklung* (traditional Indonesian bamboo wind chime instrument) orchestra. This is perhaps analogous to how our own memory oftentimes contains, whether consciously or otherwise, inaccurate versions of the past omitting certain points that may be substantial. It also relates to the notion of historical information and how the things that have been recorded as truth may be warped in different levels of magnitude, and also importantly, how these distortions may also occur without the specific intention of any single particular agent.

The frame then transitions into a point in which guests and performers enter into the *Istana Negara* venue, wearing various forms of traditional clothing or formal attire. Siti Hartinah, or Ibu Tien, the wife of Indonesia's president at the time, makes her entrance wearing a cobalt or Prussian blue kebaya (traditional blouse worn by Indonesian women), followed by other political dignitaries behind her. Although especially during this time period most political leadership gatherings contain a predominantly male audience, there is an unusual discrepancy in this case where most of the attendees are women, led by Ibu Tien. This was a moment in Indonesian history where soft power cultural diplomacy was, in fact, led by women. The Austrian choir boys sit on the front row of the palace hall. Glitches and noise begin to appear in the video itself as well at this point, and this takes the form of black and white distortions in the form of lines, as well as complete blue screen washes, indicative of the toll in which time has caused damage upon the cassette recording itself. Although perhaps unintentionally, there is at this point an interesting relationship between this blue color Ibu Tien wears, signifying a relationship to royalty or regality, and the color of the blue screen itself.

A piano begins to play, and the camera shifts its focus away from the audience seating and into the stage itself. A green and gold map of Indonesia placed under the *Garuda Pancasila* (Indonesian national emblem) is flanked by ornate chandeliers which have their origins in a colonial context. The choir boys then begin to sing a series of hymns belonging to a European Judeo-Christian tradition. Afterwards, the choir is replaced by the *angklung* ensemble mentioned in the introductory paragraph. This instrument is native to the Sundanese people, and takes the form of a bamboo tube attached to a frame made out of the same material. The *angklung* is itself considered in Indonesian culture to be an important artifact of promoting harmony and collaboration. It is curious once again, then, that the official credit line for this performance seems to have been omitted.

The camera again abruptly shifts thereafter towards a new loci of focus, being a white screen stretched upon an ornate traditional Javanese wooden frame, in turn surrounded on its sides by dozens of golden *wayang kulit* shadow puppets. In closer introspection, a young boy can be seen from behind as he begins to take the puppets closest to him and deftly begins to move them in a synchronous rhythm in conjunction with the traditional Indonesian musicians and instruments surrounding him. This young boy is none other than Novali himself, some 30 years prior to this exhibition, presenting a prodigious *wayang kulit* presentation to his audience. The performance takes up the majority of the next part of the video, in which Novali as a child presents a chapter of the *Mahabharata* through the traditional *wayang kulit* narrative structure. Though this form of shadow puppetry is itself indigenous to Javanese culture, the cultural origins of its narrative content are rooted in ancient Hindu folklore. Shadows itself in *wayang kulit* act as metaphor for representing the ontological nature of reality as expressed through the interaction of light and dark.

The respective components of happenings as archived by the video documentation represent a complex interweaving of identity, culture, and politics that emerges particularly as it pertains to the legacy of Dutch colonization in Indonesia. The Dutch East India Company (VOC) played a central role in establishing Dutch colonialism in Indonesia. It established trade relations with local kingdoms, seized control of strategic ports, and gradually extended its power throughout the archipelago. Dutch colonialism was not a homogenous phenomenon, but rather a dynamic process that evolved over time.

One of the most significant aspects of Dutch colonialism in Indonesia was its impact on the archipelago's cultural development.

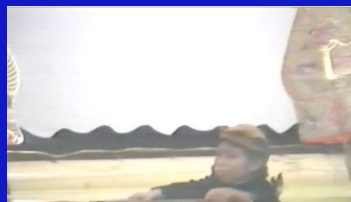
Dutch colonialism brought with it European influences, particularly in the realms of art, literature, and language. The Dutch introduced their own cultural traditions, including the Dutch language, which became the language of government and education in Indonesia. Dutch culture also influenced the development of Indonesian art and literature, as Indonesian artists and writers were exposed to European styles and techniques. This cultural exchange resulted in the emergence of a hybrid culture that was unique to Indonesia. For example, the Batik textile tradition, which is now synonymous with Indonesian culture, has been assimilated through the fusion of Indonesian and Dutch textile techniques.

The post-reformation era saw Indonesia grapple with the complexities of Dutch colonialism in the realm of cultural development. The fall of Soeharto led to the reformation period which began in 1998, marked a significant shift in Indonesian politics and society. It was a time of political and cultural transformation, as Indonesians sought to redefine their national identity and what it means to reclaim their heritage. In this context, the legacy of Dutch colonialism became a contentious issue, as Indonesians sought to reconcile the cultural influences of the Dutch with their own cultural traditions. The legacy of Dutch colonialism in Indonesia is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. It is marked by a dynamic interplay of power, culture, and exchange that has shaped Indonesia's development in myriad ways. The post-reformation era has seen Indonesians grapple with the complexities of Dutch colonialism, particularly in the realm of cultural development, predominantly led by Ibu Tien. But even today, the young nation that is Indonesia is itself still in the process of coming to terms with its myriad of complex underpinnings and identification of self.

The end of the video sees a more intimate interaction between the young Novali and Ibu Tien as they exchange gifts and expressions of mutual gratitude. It is in this interaction in which Novali gifts Ibu Tien with a painting he made at the time as a token of his appreciation towards being invited to perform to this audience at the *Istana Negara*. This is most likely the reason by which this exhibition, *New Obsolescence: ADITYAVOVALI*, sees a return for Novali, who has previously been developing his aesthetic explorations in many different mediums and forms, into painting once again. The exhibition takes from this single source material of archival video documentation from the artist's own past into an expansive and compound investigation into multiple layers of meaning and consideration, both within the context of the personal, but also into a much greater scope of understanding as well.

PADUAN SUARA  
ANAK-ANAK  
  
DIE WIENER  
SAENGERKNABEN  
( dari Austria )

DALANG CIUK  
ADITYAVOVALI  
(dari Solo)  
  
ISTANA NEGARA,  
Jakarta, 17 Juni 1968



New Obsolescence: ADITYAVOVALI

DIANA CAMPBELL  
28 FEBRUARY 2023

Our minds might trip up as we encounter a perceived spelling error and a gallery full of glitches in Aditya Novali's first solo show in Jakarta since 2016. We come to understand the artist and his decades-long multimedia practice through the entry point of misunderstanding, interpreted and worked out through a new series of paintings on canvas that are held together by the sounds of a choir and traditional instruments playing in the background, emanating from a video from the artist's personal archive. Aditya Novali describes the pandemic as a period when uncertainty blurred reality. This "blurry space of being" became even more evident to the artist when he revisited a Betamax tape holding within it footage of a *wayang* performance he gave as an eleven year old child in 1989 — part of the global pandemic phenomenon of filling empty time with moving images on screens. This factual documentation of a performance held in the Presidential Palace became fuzzy as blank blue screens, lines, dots, and blurry images rising from the celluloid tape's low resolution quality migrated onto a digital screen, making what actually happened that evening as unclear as his memory of it. The young Aditya Novali's presence is marked in the film credits, but as 'Adityavovali,' a replaceable presence included as ornament to an event catering to the wives of Indonesia's political and cultural elite. The artist plays with this by transforming the "screen shots" of the film footage, including the credits and the glitches into rotatable paintings, where the audience can manipulate the orientation of his painted images and become even more confused as to what "reality" might have looked like. Aditya is also confused about what his role in the staging of history is and might have been. Figures like *Dai Sentai Goggle V* register more clearly for the artist when thinking about that time than the political and cultural fashioning of Indonesia does. In the painting *Remanence:*

*But when I look at you* made from oil and ink on canvas with velvet and steel, the vague and fuzzy figure of a child is painted over with glitch lines as well as lines associated with the visual language of Betamax, and is confronted with a map derived from one found in the palace in 1989 which served to teach young and old minds alike about the provinces that made up Indonesia. What are the programs/programming that we build a child up with in the process of forming an adult citizen? Through this work and the wider exhibition, the artist tries to decode the personal and political significance of this event and time — details of the palace — of the floor plan — things he can see with the eyes of today as an adult who studied architecture and understands the political significance of culture.

The largest work in the exhibition, *Remanence: I'll be*, protrudes out from the wall almost as if it were a projection on a screen. Its glowing blue surface, built up from oil, brocade, and velvet on canvas, also project us into the time and place in Aditya's and Indonesia's history that he wants our presence to help him understand. Perhaps through this process of understanding, he can finally feel understood. Details from the intricate ornamentation found in *wayang* also emerge the closer you look at the painting. *Wayang* can be seen as an ancient technology not entirely unrelated to video technology in how the layering of images, light, and shadows transport stories from the past into the present and future through technique and storytelling. This exhibition reveals and widens generation gaps; only some of us will recognise the blue tone hovering in Novali's paintings and the scenography extending across the gallery as the specter of the "blue screen of death" from fatal system errors on Microsoft Windows operating systems, or conversion errors when trying to move audio-visual material from obsolete analog technology such as Betamax cassettes onto digital platforms used by billions of users today. Most people born after the mid 1980s would be unfamiliar with the boxy multicolored striped visual language of the Betamax cassette that Novali references in this show and specifically in the work *Remanence: We've gone too far to ever turn back now*, however its impact on international copyright law is lasting as it the 1984 "Betamax Case" with the United States Supreme Court deemed that making individual copies of complete television shows for purposes of time shifting did not constitute copyright violation. The artist shifts time by bringing 1989 into 2023 and by further compressing twenty-five minutes of an evening into a roughly six-minute introduction to the show, making chronological time simultaneous. Four screens play a glitching digital version of this video beginning at different points of the evening, where we can try to experience what young Aditya experienced in real time,

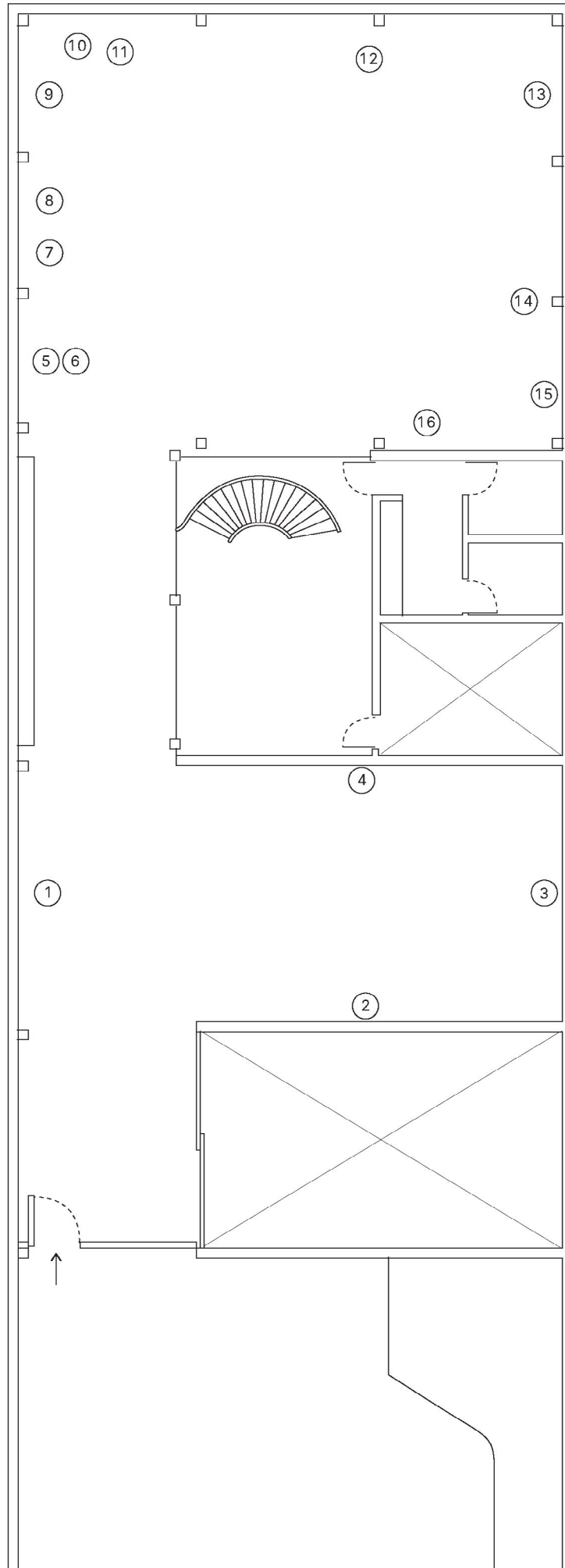
as well as in his memory, all at once without a clear beginning, middle, or end.

While accompanied by a traditional band, Aditya performed for Siti Hartinah, the First Lady of Indonesia/wife of Soeharto and her guests in a solo performance of traditional Indonesian *wayang* puppetry, speaking to just how accomplished he was as a child prodigy. His solo performance followed a Viennese children's choir singing religious hymns. "Adityavovali" faced a sea of powerful adult women's faces in the audience all alone; the Austrian children had each other. Aditya Novali was raised to excel, to be rewarded for his skill by trophies, praise, and accolades from "people who mattered." At the end of the video, Aditya presents First Lady Soeharto with a painting, another public demonstration of his remarkable skill. The Aditya Novali we know as an artist today rarely paints on canvas, but now the gallery is full of his paintings, directly referencing the kind of work he made to seek approval in the days he was (mis)recognized as "Adityavovali." He paints the glitched faces of the audience, including First Lady Soeharto, a sea of women recognizable only by their class and social position as evidenced by the style and color of their clothes, and the fact that they were in the Presidential Palace that night. We, as visitors in the gallery, are now their audience as we take in the work *Remanence: I don't want to see us part*. We look at paintings that depict the scene of the performance in the palace, with details of the chandeliers, the carpets, the wallpaper, the maps of the country; is the gallery, ROH, the stage for a new kind of performance? The female audience inspiring these paintings rewarded "Adityavovali" for his effort with applause. How do we reward an artist like Aditya Novali for his effort and show of vulnerability? What does he need to give of himself to get approval? These are existential questions that haunt many creative people, especially those who were raised in achievement based environments. Looking at the misspelling of Aditya Novali's name in the recorded video, did all of that effort really matter or register? I would answer yes, since the experience is embedded in the creation of the artist that we know today.

An artist (and all people) can be seen as collages of lived experience built over time. The book *Glitch Feminism* by Legacy Russel describes 'the glitch' as an opportunity for us to perform and transform ourselves in an infinite variety of identities. Misunderstandings could be viewed as glitched truth; our political as well as psychological traumas could be described as new programs trying to run on old operating systems. Just as the rotatable panels in Novali's celebrated ongoing series of paintings opens up multiple readings of reality, the deliberate use of glitches in the exhibition open up opportunities to read

into the multiple identities from the past that build up the artist and his work today — from a child *wayang* puppet performer, to an architect, to a product designer, to a relentless thinker contemplating the role of ornament and society, searching for the empty space within us in a world where nature abhors a vacuum.

FLOOR PLAN



GALLERY 🍊

GALLERY 🍎

- 1  
*Remanence: And a million for you*  
2023  
Oil and ink on canvas, velvet  
137 × 186 cm ; 94,5 × 134,5 cm
- 2  
Documentation of Aditya Novali's  
performance as *dalang cilik* at *Istana Negara*  
1989  
Digitized Betamax video  
28 minutes 43 seconds
- 3  
*Remanence: There's one for me*  
2023  
Oil and ink on canvas  
set of 60 pcs, 28,5 × 37,5 cm
- 4  
*Remanence: That everything*  
2023  
Oil and ink on 13 rotatable triangular zinc  
bars covered with canvas, wood, multi  
board, steel.  
139 × 104 cm
- 5  
*Remanence: There's just so much that I  
want to say*  
2023  
Oil on canvas  
Set of 3  
26,5 × 34 cm
- 6  
*Remanence: I can see it all now*  
2023  
Oil and ink on canvas, steel  
95 × 165 cm
- 7  
*Remanence: All my thoughts get in the way*  
2023  
Oil and ink on canvas, steel  
132,5 × 86,5 cm
- 8  
*Remanence: So don't ever leave*  
2023  
Oil and ink on canvas, steel  
132 × 92,5 cm
- 9  
*Remanence: Would go down under*  
2023  
Oil and ink on canvas, steel  
106,5 × 129,5 cm
- 10  
*Remanence: But when I look at you*  
2023  
Oil and ink on canvas, velvet, steel  
124,5 × 105,5 cm
- 11  
*Remanence: Yeah, it's forever*  
2023  
Oil on canvas, velvet, steel  
145 × 285 cm
- 12  
*Remanence: I don't want to see us part*  
2023  
Oil on canvas  
Variable dimension
- 13  
*Remanence: Yeah*  
2023  
Oil and ink on canvas, steel  
120 × 20 cm ; 140 × 53,5 cm ; 91,5 × 68,5 cm
- 14  
*Remanence: I'll be*  
2023  
Oil and ink on canvas, brocade, velvet  
150 × 480 cm
- 15  
*Remanence: We've gone too far to ever turn  
back now*  
2023  
Oil on canvas, steel  
92 × 139 cm
- 16  
*Remanence: The very thought of losing you  
means*  
2023  
Oil and ink on canvas, steel  
88 × 153 cm



PADUAN SUARA  
ANAK - ANAK

DIE WIENER



DALANG CILIK

ADITYA VOVALI



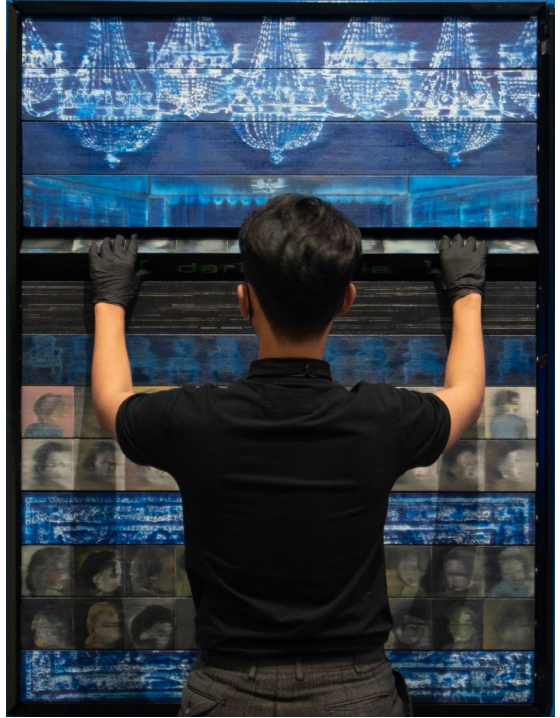
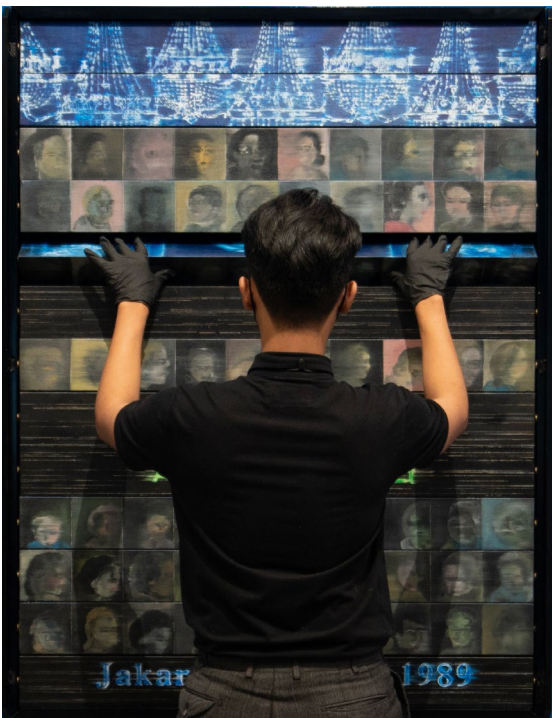
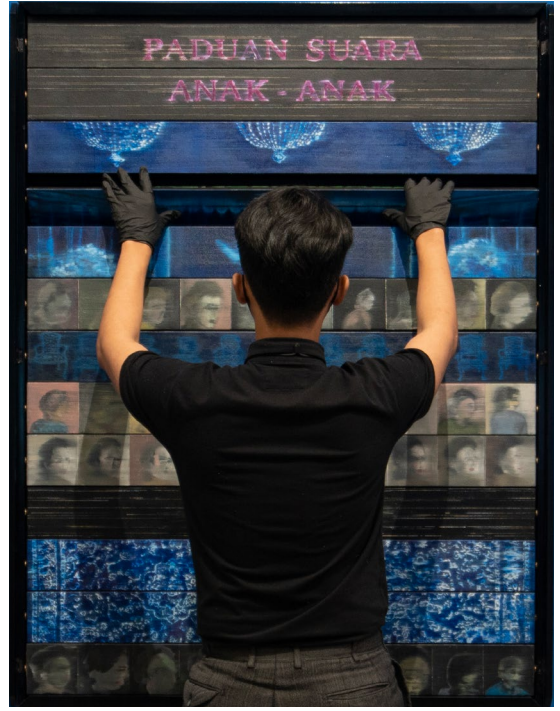
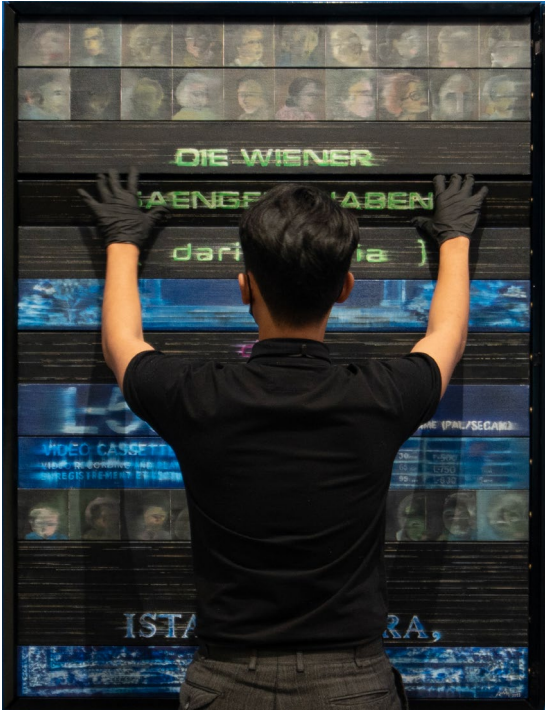
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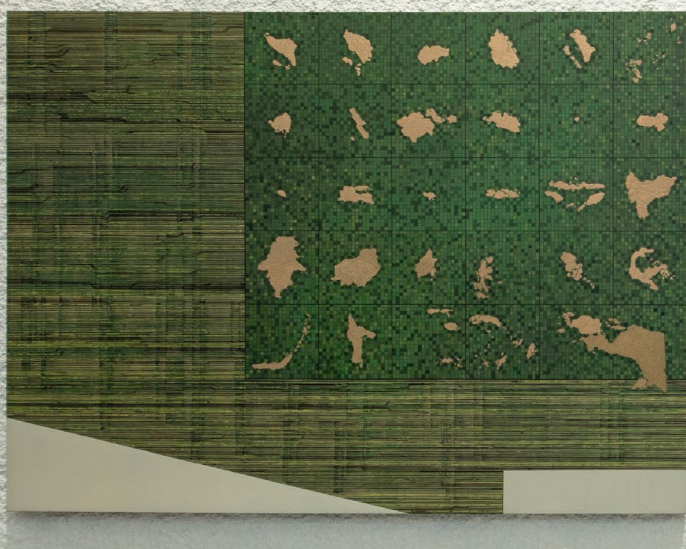
*Remanence: That everything*

2023

Oil and ink on 13 rotatable triangular zinc  
bars covered with canvas, wood, multi  
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139 × 104 cm





*Remanence: And a million for you*  
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*Remanence: There's one for me*

2023

Oil and ink on canvas

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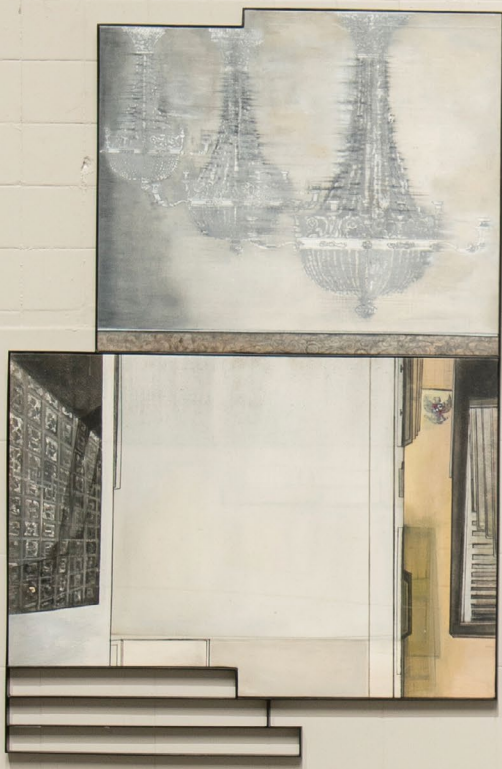
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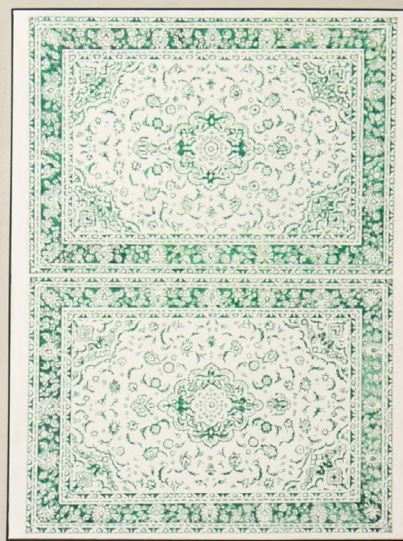
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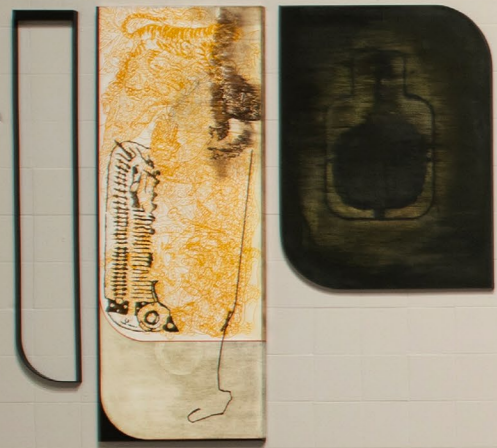
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Oil on canvas  
Variable dimension



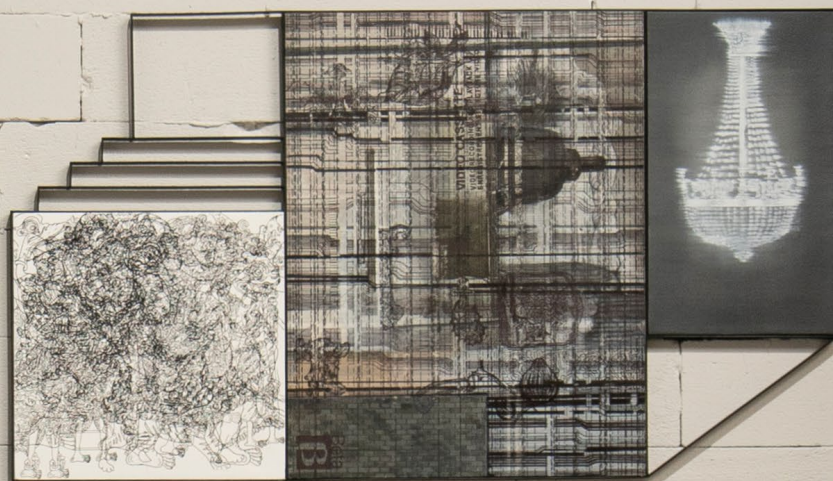
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B. 1978, Surakarta, Indonesia  
Lives and works in Surakarta, Indonesia

Aditya Novali works with a variety of mediums — installation, performance, painting, and sculpture — often first conceiving an idea and then finding the appropriate methodologies to realize his vision. Addressing themes such as identity, boundary, materialism, and life in an urban environment, Novali's multifaceted works often contain complex permutations of ideas that contain elements of transformation and an intersection between rationality and intuition.

Novali has participated in a wide range of exhibitions worldwide, a selection of which includes his first mid-career survey *WHY* at Tumurun Private Museum, Surakarta, Indonesia (2022); notable group presentations including Dhaka Art Summit: বন্বা *Bonna* in Dhaka, Bangladesh (2023); *On Muzharul Islam: Surfacing Intention* as part of Dhaka Art Summit in Dhaka, Bangladesh (2020); The 9th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art at QAGOMA, Brisbane, Australia (2018); *DIASPORA: Exit, Exile, Exodus of Southeast Asia* at MALLIAM Contemporary Art Museum, Chiang Mai, Thailand (2018). Solo exhibitions include *ME:DI:UM* at Liste Art Fair in Basel, Switzerland (2019); *Significant Other* at ShanghArt (2018); *Caprice* at Art Basel Hong Kong: *Discoveries* with ROH Projects (2017); *ACRYLIC* at ROH Projects, Jakarta, Indonesia (2016), and *Painting Sense* at ROH Projects, Jakarta, Indonesia (2014). Selected group exhibitions include *1* at ROH, Jakarta, Indonesia (2022); The 15<sup>th</sup> Asia Art Festival: *Multiple Spectacle Art from Asia* at Ningbo Art Museum, Ningbo, China (2017); *Imaginary Synonym* Tokyo Wonder Site, Japan (2016); *Aku Diponegoro* at National Gallery of Indonesia, Indonesia (2015); *Shout! Indonesian Contemporary Art* at Museo d'Arte Contemporanea (MACRO), Italy (2014); Dojima River Biennale in Osaka, Japan (2013); SEA+ Triennale at National Gallery of Indonesia, Indonesia (2013). Novali was nominated for Best Emerging Artist Using Installation at the Prudential Eye Awards, Singapore in 2016; awarded Best Artwork in the Bandung Contemporary Art Awards (BaCAA) and a Finalist in the Sovereign Asia Art Prize in 2010.

B. 1984, Los Angeles, United States  
Artistic Director, Samdani Art Foundation,  
Bangladesh

Diana Campbell is a Princeton-educated American curator and writer who has been working in South and Southeast Asia since 2010, primarily in India, Bangladesh, and the Philippines. She is committed to fostering a transnational art world, and her plural and long-range vision addresses the concerns of underrepresented regions and artists alongside the more established in manifold forums. While she was born in Los Angeles, her maternal family being indigenous CHamoru from the island of Guam, her heritage inspires her curatorial practice which seeks to amplify the reach of indigenous voices.

Since 2013, she has served as the Founding Artistic Director of Dhaka-based Samdani Art Foundation, Bangladesh and Chief Curator of the Dhaka Art Summit, celebrated both critically for its artistic and scholarly content and popularly as the highest daily visited art show globally. Campbell also leads the Samdani Art Foundation collection and programming and drives its international collaborations ahead of opening the foundation's permanent home and community-based residency program at Srihatta, the Samdani Art Centre and Sculpture Park in Sylhet.

Concurrent to her work in Bangladesh from 2016 – 2018, Campbell was also the Founding Artistic Director of Bellas Artes Projects in the Philippines, a non-profit international residency and exhibition program with sites in Manila and Bataan, and curated Frieze Projects in London for the 2018 and 2019 editions of the fair. Campbell also serves on the acquisitions committee of KANAL, Centre Pompidou in Brussels set to open in 2025. She is passionate about the role that artistic thinking can play in transformational social change, and is part of the Facilitation Group of Afield, an international network of cultural change-makers. Her writing has been published by Mousse, Frieze, Art in America, and the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), among others.

B. 1978, Surakarta, Indonesia  
Lives and works in Surakarta, Indonesia

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THANK YOU

JUN TIRTADJI

DANANG PRASETYANTO

DIANA CAMPBELL

MAMI, PAPI, ADE

ADINDA YUWONO

TEAM STUDIO AN

ADITYA SENA HADIKUSUMO

AND EVERYBODY FOR THEIR

AIRIEN ADANI LUDIN

GENEROUS AND GENUINE

ANNISA RIANI

SUPPORT ALL THESE YEARS

BISMA ALIFARDHAN NASTIA

DEA APRILIA

DEDI SUTOYO

HENDRA BUDIMAN

SUROSO

TUTI HARYATI

WIWIT BUDI SANTOSO

Writers

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AIRIEN ADANI LUDIN  
WIWIT BUDI SANTOSO

Installation Team

DEDI SUTOYO  
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BISMA ALIFARDHAN NASTIA

Support



New Obsolescence : ADITYAVOVALI  
ADITYA NOVALI