

PRESS RELEASE

6 JULY 2024

**ROH presents Ade Darmawan's first solo exhibition with the gallery, *Water Resistance*.**

**Jakarta, July 2024** – ROH is pleased to present *Water Resistance*, a solo exhibition by artist, curator and director of ruangrupa, Ade Darmawan. The exhibition unfolds Darmawan's continued research into the practice of distillation as visual analogy for the multiple histories of extraction in colonial Indonesia, which continue to reverberate in attitudes to nature and art-making in the present.

As a variant of extraction, purifying a substance in its liquid phase, distillation in a sense is an essentialization. For a long time—in a European genealogy of modernity—purifying, essentializing, distilling and extracting were considered fundamental to the production of culture, if we were to define culture as an adaptation of natural resources toward human ends. Darmawan's installation encompasses both process and product, neither of which is above politics. Poignantly he creates a dispositive to stage this paradigm of a specific cultural history which was enforced on the world and is highly problematic. His installation unpicks the thinking behind colonialism which often used monotheistic theology to embark on a disenchantment of the world and legitimize conquest, and the desire to control nature and the (indigenous) people living in and with the world.

The works in the exhibition result from research that Darmawan started a couple of years ago, after reading Pramoedya Ananta Toer's novel *Arus Balik*, narrating the implication of histories and politics in processes of colonization and shifts in maritime power in the sixteenth century for people and ports across the regions then called 'below' (the Straits of Malacca, South China Sea, Java Sea, and further east) and 'above' (the Indian Ocean and further west) the wind. As a starting point for his installation, Darmawan carefully studied *Arus Balik* with special attention to how different characters in the book use natural resources. Later, he undertook several field trips to Tuban, a city in East Java which plays a central role in the book, and to the nearby town of Bojonegoro, a major producer of teakwood and tobacco, which more recently became known as the location of the discovery of the biggest oil reserve in Indonesia. Both cities are not far from Blora, the birthplace of Toer.

In Gallery Apple, Darmawan presents an installation with laboratory equipment, gathering different materials such as soil, spices (nutmeg, cinnamon, sandalwood), and plants (clover and coconut leaf) to transform them through distillation processes using alkaline water from the water of the archipelagic region. His laboratory setting is a reminder that the scramble for control of the archipelago and the sea passages, was about the extraction of ore and goods in a tightly knit network of trade relations, drawing connections between the Dutch colonial *cultuurstelsel* (cultivation system) or Tanam Paksa (enforcement planting), and Suharto's New Order regime (1965–1998) in Indonesia. These laboratory devices leak their purified liquids on books about the New Order regime's schemes on land and resources, which slowly erode during the course of the exhibition.

The literal translation of *Arus Balik* from Indonesian would be "the reversal of the tide", referring to the reversal of Java's position in the world in the sixteenth century, from actively sailing out to remaining inactive and receiving others - colonizers. But Toer's reversal of the current also involves another

reversal, a meta-geographical impulse that is comparable to the notion of the “inverted telescope” that Benedict Anderson advances in his seminal book *The Spectre of Comparisons*. The promise of another reversal is implicit. In a new series of Artificial Intelligence text-to-image generated photographs, Darmawan creates images of colonial history that never existed, a gaze directed from textual description, as another way to re-enact the violent past through images as a form of self-subversion. Our crisis, Darmawan affirms in these images, which seem plausible but carry a whiff of absurdity, is ultimately the result of a mechanistic view of the earth, where nature exists only as a resource for humans, rather than a force of its own, full of agency and meaning. This crisis comes with the cultural conundrum that we are faced with: the challenge of how to think about and work through the profound links between art-making and extractivism. Darmawan’s distillation factory reminds us that art in its very techniques uses extraction, to transform agents of an ecosystem into ‘resources’ entering what in language would be cynically called another ‘life cycle’ subjected to processes and tasked with new functions.

The newer works in the exhibition tackle this industrialization of extraction, literally connecting it to the dependence on fossil fuels by using petrol barrels and elements of car motors. Indeed, creating multiple similar ominous distilling machines refers to mass production, the mechanization of the process. An extra layer of desacralisation is added to Darmawan’s distillation factory, brutally contrasting with the elegant installation of alembics and books. In their bulky and baleful matter-of-fact presence, the newer works sap the possible suggestions of magic and mystery which could still be conjured up by the process of distillation.

*Water Resistance* is accompanied with a text by Philippe Pirotte, a Belgian art historian and educator. The exhibition is open by invitation on 6 July 2024 and to the public from 7 July 2024 to 4 August 2024. The gallery will be closed on Monday, Tuesday, and Public Holiday. Follow the gallery’s Instagram account @rohprojects or reach out to info@rohprojects.net for further updates on operational hours and public program announcements.

**ROH**

**ADE DARMAWAN**

B. 1974, Jakarta, Indonesia  
Lives and works in Jakarta, Indonesia

Ade Darmawan lives and works in Jakarta as an artist, curator and director of ruangrupa. Darmawan's work deals with Indonesia, its history and its people, with a particular focus on minor histories that may seem irrelevant but are intrinsic to the DNA of the communities addressed. His presentation of these narratives assumes multiple forms, ranging from installation, objects, drawing, digital print, and video.

Darmawan studied at Indonesia Art Institute (ISI) in the Graphic Arts Department. In 1998, a year after his first solo exhibition at the Cemeti Contemporary Art Gallery, Yogyakarta (now Cemeti - Institute for Art and Society), he stayed in Amsterdam to attend a two-year residency at the Rijksakademie Van Beeldende Kunsten.

Darmawan has shown widely as an artist in various notable institutions around the globe. Recent solo exhibitions include *Doing Business with the Dutch* at Lumen Travo Gallery, Amsterdam, Netherlands (2018) and *Magic Centre*, held both at Portikus, Frankfurt, Germany (2015) and Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, Netherlands (2016). Selected group exhibitions include Diriyah Contemporary Art Biennale: *After Rain*, Saudi Arabia (2024), Indonesia Bertutur at Borobudur, Indonesia (2022), *On the Nature of Botanical Gardens* at Framer Framed, Amsterdam, Netherlands (2020), Singapore Biennale: *An Atlas of Mirrors*, Singapore (2016), Gwangju Biennale: *The Eight Climate (What Does Art Do?)*, Gwangju, South Korea (2016), and *The KUDA: The Untold Story of Indonesian Underground Music in the 70's* with ruangrupa at Asia Pacific Triennale, Brisbane, Australia (2012).

As a curator, he has contributed to *Riverscapes IN FLUX* at Goethe Institute Vietnam, Hanoi, Vietnam (2012), *Media Art Kitchen* (2013), *Condition Report* (2016), and 6th Asian Art Biennale: *Negotiating the Future* in Taiwan (2017-18). From 2006-09, he was a member of the Jakarta Arts Council, which led to his appointment as artistic director of Jakarta Biennale in 2009. He was the executive director of Jakarta Biennale during its 2013, 2015 and 2017 iterations. From early 2019-2022, with ruangrupa, he was part of the artistic team of *documenta fifteen* that took place in Kassel, Germany, 2022.

**ROH**

ROH is a gallery initiated in 2014 that aims to serve the Indonesian art ecosystem by building a consistent local program, while simultaneously fostering a broader, borderless dialogue. ROH has played a more nomadic role in the past couple of years while building its new permanent space, exploring unconventional presentations for artists in dynamic temporal settings and situations. In 2022, ROH has moved into its new permanent space in Jalan Surabaya 66, Jakarta, carefully reconsidering a colonial mid-century house into a flexible space for contemporary art.

---

For further information, please reach out to [info@rohprojects.net](mailto:info@rohprojects.net).

Wednesday - Friday, 13:00 - 19:00  
Saturday - Sunday, 11:00 - 19:00  
Closed Monday, Tuesday and public holiday

JALAN SURABAYA 66  
JAKARTA 10310  
+628118719066

ROHPROJECTS.NET