

GOOD NEWS FROM BALI

ARI BAYUAJI
BUDI AGUNG KUSWARA
CITRA SASMITA
I MADE DJIRNA
IDA BAGUS PUTU PURWA
KEMALEZEDINE

MIZUMA GALLERY

26 FEBRUARY - 3 APRIL 2022

GOOD NEWS FROM BALI

BY HERMANTO SOERJANTO

I notice that in the last five years there has been a lot happening in Balinese art scene. There are now a lot more artists in Bali who explore the local values of Balinese society, tradition, and culture as the main inspiration of their artistic practice. Although this is not something new, as it has been done by many Balinese artists such as I Made Wianta, Nyoman Gunarsa, I Wayan Sika, I Made Djirna, and others, I saw a big gap as many younger Balinese artists were more interested in creating works targeted to the market, abandoning their roots of locality. I could not blame them for doing so, because for many artists, to be associated with Balinese art is more a burden than an advantage, due to the mismanagement of the Balinese art scene for decades that led to a misperception that Balinese art is merely for tourist attractions.

I hope that the artists participating in this exhibition will be an inspiration and spirit booster for other artists, and especially for those in Bali to reconnect with their local values, culture and tradition, drawing from it as the basis and inspiration in their artistic practice. Amongst the group of artists from Bali, Kemalezedine and Ari Bayuaji are not actually Balinese. Kemalezedine moved from Jakarta to Bali ten years ago, and since then he has worked and built his career as an artist in Bali.

Ari Bayuaji is an Indonesian artist based in Montreal, Canada, who happened to be stranded in Bali due to the pandemic. He has been staying in Bali for about two years. He initiated an art project, 'Weaving the Ocean', in collaboration with a local community that has been economically affected by the pandemic. Budi Agung Kuswara is a Balinese artist who currently lives and works in Singapore. While I Made Djirna, Ida Bagus Putu Purwa, and Citra Sasmita are Balinese artists who were born, raised, and now work in Bali.

The various origins and backgrounds of the artists participating in this show remind me of how Balinese soul is so influential, but at the same time it is open to influences. As mentioned in my previous curatorial text on contemporary Balinese art in Mizuma Gallery, Singapore, 'Rooted in Bali', the current visual art commonly known as 'traditional Balinese art' is actually 'Modern Balinese art', which was influenced by Western artists who came, lived and worked in Bali in the 30s. Among them, the most influential in the development of Modern Balinese art were Rudolf Bonnet and Water Spies, and later Arie Smit who came to Bali in the 50s. Not only did they have a strong influence in the development of Balinese art, but their works were also strongly influenced by the Balinese traditional art. I think Balinese 'flexible spirit' or '*kelenturan jiwa*', as mentioned by Indonesian art writer and critic Sanento Yuliman, could open up many possibilities for the future development of Balinese contemporary art. Maybe Bali could once again be the most important place of art development in Indonesia, like it was in the past.

What really inspired me to curate this group show was a painting by **Kemalezedine** that I saw on Instagram. The work was so beautiful and I could sense a different feel in that abstract

painting, although I did not know what it was. The title of that painting, '*Dentiyis 1903, Pen and Weapon*', intrigued me so much. Dentiyis is the village where the Balinese master painting of Batuan, I Nyoman Ngendon was born. He was the first Batuan painter who embraced modernization. I wonder, how could a young painter (and judging by the name, Kemalezedine is not a Balinese) know about Dentiyis and Nyoman Ngendon? What is the relation between Kemalezedine and Batuan painting? I didn't know Kemalezedine at that time, and so I decided to visit his solo show at CG Gallery, in Jakarta. I was so surprised and mesmerised by his works displayed in the gallery. If we look at his paintings from a distance, they appear to be abstract, but when we get closer, we can see that they are actually fragments of landscape paintings. I began to understand his relation to the Batuan painting. He used the dark shading and staking composition typically seen in Batuan paintings. The curator of that show, Santy Saptari, introduced me to Kemalezedine. During my subsequent visit to Bali a few months later, I met Kemalezedine at his studio. He is one of the prominent members of the Neo Pitamaha, an artist collective with the vision to study the tradition of Balinese art as a foundation for development of Balinese contemporary art. We had a very interesting chat over cups of coffee, and I decided to have his work in this show in Mizuma Gallery. Through Kemalezedine, I was introduced to other Balinese artists who had the same vision of rooting their creative development in the local values, tradition, and culture.

Citra Sasmita is a Balinese female artist who talks about the position of women in Balinese culture through her works. She felt the inequity in the position of women in the Balinese society and she tried to seek answers to the current situation in ancient Balinese scrolls and texts. She found that in most of the ancient

texts and classic stories, the position of a woman is mostly limited to the procreation and domestic role, never in the position of a protagonist. In her works, she often tells stories of the old texts or paintings and changes the protagonist into a woman. She creates her own visual language inspired by the classic Balinese painting of *Kamasan* style (she studied under Ibu Mangku Muriati, a well-known female artist of *Kamasan* style painting), to tell those stories. For this exhibition she created a painting based on Hieronymus Bosch's '*The Garden of Earthly Delights*'.

Ida Bagus Putu Purwa is a Balinese artist who was born and grew up in the tourist beach area of Sanur. 'Ida Bagus' in his name means that he belongs to the Brahmana caste (the caste of priests), and indeed, he still actively plays the role of a society leader. A lot of his inspiration in his creative process is inspired by his childhood memories and his life as an 'Ida Bagus'. When he was a child, he found a book about Dutch painter Willem Dooijewaard in the garbage, thrown away by some tourist. The paintings he saw in that book left a very deep impression in his mind and inspired him to paint human figures as the main subject in his paintings. He grew up surrounded by the paintings of I Gusti Made Deblog (one of the prominent painters during the Pita Maha era in the '30s and '40s) in his parent's house. I Gusti Made Deblog lived with them for quite some time, seeking spiritual guidance from Putu Purwa's father. All these memories strongly influenced his artistic practice. In his painting entitled '*Journey*', we see fragments of his memories and life experiences about life in Bali, composed in layers with no clear perspective – a typical composition found in Balinese paintings. In the painting, a cow, the holy animal in Balinese Hinduism, symbolises how life in Bali revolves around religion and religious ceremonies. There are also human figures wearing diving helmets and diving gears,

representing our current need to always wear masks outside our home. There is also a small imagery of the Coronavirus on the top left corner of the painting. The horse represents strength, as in our strength in facing the current situation. All of these fragments are bound together by water and the underwater environment that represents Sanur, the place where he lives.

Together with Kemalezedine and Ida Bagus Putu Purwa, we went to see **Ari Bayuaji**, an Indonesian artist who moved to Canada in 2005. After graduating from Concordia University, majoring in Fine Arts, Ari continued to live in Canada, and now he divides his time between Montreal and Bali. He visited Bali in 2019, for his participation in the Art Bali exhibition. After his flight back to Canada was cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic, he decided to stay for a while in Bali and rented a place in Sanur, not far from the beach. On his routine walks by the beach, he found a lot of plastic rope trash, scattered from the fishermen's boat. He collected those plastic ropes, brought them home with him, and untied those ropes into fine nylon strings. Not far from where he stayed in Sanur, there is a small shop with an older lady weaving traditional textile in front of the shop. He then had the idea of weaving the nylon strings from the plastic ropes and turning them into textile. It took him quite a long time to persuade the lady to be willing to experiment with weaving the plastic ropes. It turned out to be a difficult process – the length of the nylon strings that he found were not long enough to be woven, so he had to extend the nylon strings by joining them together, but the knot of the joinery was a problem as it would often get stuck in the weaving process. After more than a month, finally it was completed, and the result surprised everyone. From this small experiment, it grew into an art project involving the surrounding community. Coincidentally, many people lost their livelihood because of the pandemic, and the whole process of turning

plastic ropes into textile took many steps and efforts. Ari named this art project 'Weaving the Ocean'. To me, the whole process is so beautiful, where he took the Balinese way of life and incorporated it into an art production. In Balinese society, life revolves around religion and religious ceremony, whereby the ceremonies can be costly and require a lot of effort for the average Balinese, so they must rely on each other within the community. This is the way of the Balinese community life that has been practised for many generations. It shows that embracing local values in an artistic practice is not only limited to the use of ornamental or traditional elements, but can in fact go deeper, beyond the visual surface. Through '*Contemplation Piece #1 – #3*', the three works from his 'Weaving the Ocean' series, Ari Bayuaji is not only presenting beautiful artworks, but also, a meaningful process and thoughtful impact on the society and environment.

I knew **Budi Agung Kuswara** from his participation in Art Bali in 2019. What really caught my attention at that time was beyond the visual appearances of his work, but furthermore was his art making process. His main body of works is a mix of techniques and mediums, blending the photographic printing method of cyanotype with modern acrylic painting and traditional Balinese painting, on traditional *Kamasan* canvas. In his works, he mainly discusses the development of Balinese culture from a historical point of view. The Balinese culture that we know is the result of a long journey of adaptations with many influences from foreign cultures, such as Hinduism from India, Chinese culture, Western culture that came to Bali during the colonialism period, globalisation, and influx of the internet influence. The key point in the development of local Balinese culture is the 'flexible spirit' or '*kelenturan jiwa*' of the Balinese people in embracing the foreign influences and beautifully adapting it into their way of life. One of the most significant influences in this current time is

the Internet. The Internet has built a global network of cultural inspiration beyond the geographical boundaries and also opened up many new possibilities in almost every aspect of our lives. It has also made it possible for Budi to harvest as many historical archives (pictures and photographs) as he needed, and with the help of Photoshop, he could edit and compose those photographs to form a visual platform for his artworks. He would then print the images on a transparency film, and use it as the medium to transfer the images onto the *Kamasan* canvas using cyanotype printing process. Subsequently, he would start to overlay the colours by first applying a layer of transparent acrylic paint, followed by drawing in the style of traditional Balinese painting. Budi Agung Kuswara's works are the reflection on how the unique local culture of Bali has formed over the centuries by embracing various influences and harmonious adaptation into the Balinese way of life.

I Made Djirna is the most senior artist participating in this exhibition, and also currently one of the most prominent figures in the Balinese contemporary art scene. His artworks depict the contemporary life he lives in, from the perspective of someone who upholds very strongly the values of Balinese culture, tradition, and the way of life. The main responsibility of a true Balinese is to carry out the religious ceremonies and community events, which is why most Balinese artists find it very challenging to manage their time between this and building their career as an artist. In the painting presented in this exhibition, entitled '*Conscience*', Djirna tells us how he always follows his conscience to maintain a good balance between his community and religious responsibilities; his responsibilities as an artist who must complete his artworks within the stipulated deadline; responsibilities in taking care his dogs, birds, and his collection of plants, not to mention his

responsibilities as the head of the family. This story is depicted in a complex interlocking composition of human faces, human and animal figures, as a symbol that everything in life should be in a harmonious relationship and guided by our conscience. He told me that in the process of creating this painting, he did not think too much about the concept, but instead, he mostly followed his conscience and his conscience brought him to this magnificent piece of painting.

To me, what makes contemporary art development in Bali interesting is the fact that for almost a century, Bali has its unique way of assimilating foreign influences into their own culture, creating a new kind of art. Balinese paintings after the era of Pita Maha and continued by Sanggar Dewata Indonesia are the evidences of that unique quality of Bali.

I have a very high hope that this new energy in Balinese contemporary art development will become the second chapter of Pita Maha.



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.





Ari Bayuaji (b. 1975, Mojokerto, Indonesia) graduated as a civil engineer and worked in Indonesia before deciding to move to Canada permanently in 2005. Once in Montreal, he studied Fine Arts at Concordia University from 2005 to 2010 and now divides his time between Montreal and Bali. The artist is known mainly for his art installations that incorporate the use of found and ready-made objects he collects from various parts of the world, thereby exposing himself to the different cultural traditions. He is an expert in conveying aspects of daily life within a culture as his works often expose the overlooked artistic value in everyday life expressed through objects and places and their roles within a society. Ari Bayuaji has taken part in numerous artist-in-residency programs in Canada, France, the Netherlands, Indonesia and Singapore. The artist's work has been exhibited in major solo exhibitions in Singapore, Taipei (Taiwan), Ste-Alvère (France), Dusseldorf (Germany), Rotterdam and The Hague (The Netherlands), and Yogyakarta (Indonesia).



Budi Agung Kuswara (b. 1982, Bali, Indonesia) graduated with a Bachelor in Fine Arts from the Indonesia Institute of Arts (ISI), Yogyakarta, Indonesia in 2009. His notable exhibitions include *Residual Memory* at Mizuma Gallery, Singapore (2021); *Arus Berlabuh Kita* at the Asian Civilization Museum, Singapore (2018); *Love Me in My Batik* at ILHAM Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (2016); *Floating Desires* at TAKSU Gallery, Singapore (solo, 2012); *The Wax on Our Fingers*, a collaboration with Singaporean artist Samantha Tio (Mintio), at the Indonesian Contemporary Arts Network, Yogyakarta, Indonesia (2012); and his first solo exhibition, *i.self* at Komaneka Fine Art Gallery, Bali, Indonesia (2009). He has also undertaken residencies at Bamboo Curtain Studio, Taipei, Taiwan (2016), Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Fukuoka, Japan (2012), and TAKSU Kuala Lumpur, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (2012). Budi Agung Kuswara lives and works in Singapore and in Bali, Indonesia, where he co-founded Ketemu Project Space, a visual collective and social enterprise hybrid with focus on social engagement.



Citra Sasmita (b. 1990, Bali, Indonesia) is a contemporary artist from Bali whose work focuses on unravelling the myths and misconceptions of Balinese art and culture. She is also deeply invested in questioning a woman's place in social hierarchy and seeks to upend normative construct of gender. Citra Sasmita has never been formally graduated from art institution. She studied Literature in Udayana University in Bali, Indonesia (2008) and Physics Education in the Faculty of Mathematics and Sciences, Ganesha University of Education in Bali, Indonesia (2009). Her dream as an artist was reignited when she joined the campus theater group and became a short story illustrator in Bali Post. As an illustrator, she deepened her self-taught world of art and actively participated in exhibitions in Bali and outside Bali. In 2017, Citra Sasmita received the Gold Award of UOB Painting of the Year (Indonesia). Some of her notable exhibitions include *Ode To The Sun* (2020) at Yeo Workshop, Singapore; *Garden Of Six Seasons* (2020) at Para Site, Hong Kong; and Kathmandu Triennale in Kathmandu, Nepal (2022). Citra Sasmita lives and works in Bali, Indonesia.



I Made Djirna (b. 1957, Bali, Indonesia) graduated from the Faculty of Fine Arts and Design at the Indonesian Institute of the Arts (ISI) Yogyakarta, Indonesia in 1985. Djirna grew up in a village in Ubud, Bali, surrounded by Balinese stories of spirits, dance, and shadow puppetry. The people of Ubud treated traditions, customs, and religion with great significance, as it was believed that it could help achieve peace and well-being – a principal of life rooted deep down in Djirna's heart. Through his works, Djirna explores the social and political issues of Indonesia and human relationships. Exploring the use of different materials, techniques and styles, he masterfully translates these thoughts and emotions into his paintings and installations. His solo exhibitions include *The Voice of Nature* at Mizuma Gallery, Singapore (2021); *The Logic of Ritual* at Sangkring Art Space, Yogyakarta, Indonesia (2013); *Seascapes* at Gajah Gallery, Singapore (2007); and his first solo exhibition at the Northern Territory Museum of Art and Sciences, Darwin, Australia (1989). His past exhibitions also extend widely across Indonesia, Singapore, Australia, Canada and the United States. I Made Djirna lives and works in Bali, Indonesia.



Ida Bagus Putu Purwa (b. 1976, Bali, Indonesia) or often called Gus Purwa is a contemporary Balinese artist who portrayed his works using human figure to express his feelings, emotions, and imaginations. They are reflections of himself, as an individual living his creative life and as part of social beings living in the Balinese community. However, his recent works are inspired spiritually by an artist from Denpasar, Gusti Made Deblog. Having been born and raised in Bali, also having graduated from Indonesian High School of Art (STSI) Denpasar, Ida Bagus Putu Purwa is strongly influenced by the custom, culture, and tradition in Bali, which became the roots of his artworks. His interest in working with charcoal and oil creates a distinctive feature in his works. Ida Bagus Putu Purwa lives and works in Bali, Indonesia.



Kemalezedine (b. 1978, Yogyakarta, Indonesia) studied at the Faculty of Fine Arts and Design of ITB, Bandung, Indonesia (1997 to 2004). He held his first solo exhibition in 2012 at S.14 Bandung. Since then, he has been actively participating in a number of national and international exhibitions. Kemalezedine is a part of the Nu-Abstract and Neo-Pitamaha group in Bali, which studies and experiments on Indonesian art (painting) and Balinese drawing and Balinese painting. Kemalezedine's focus is to create and explore the world of painting-drawing. Kemalezedine lives and works in Bali, Indonesia.



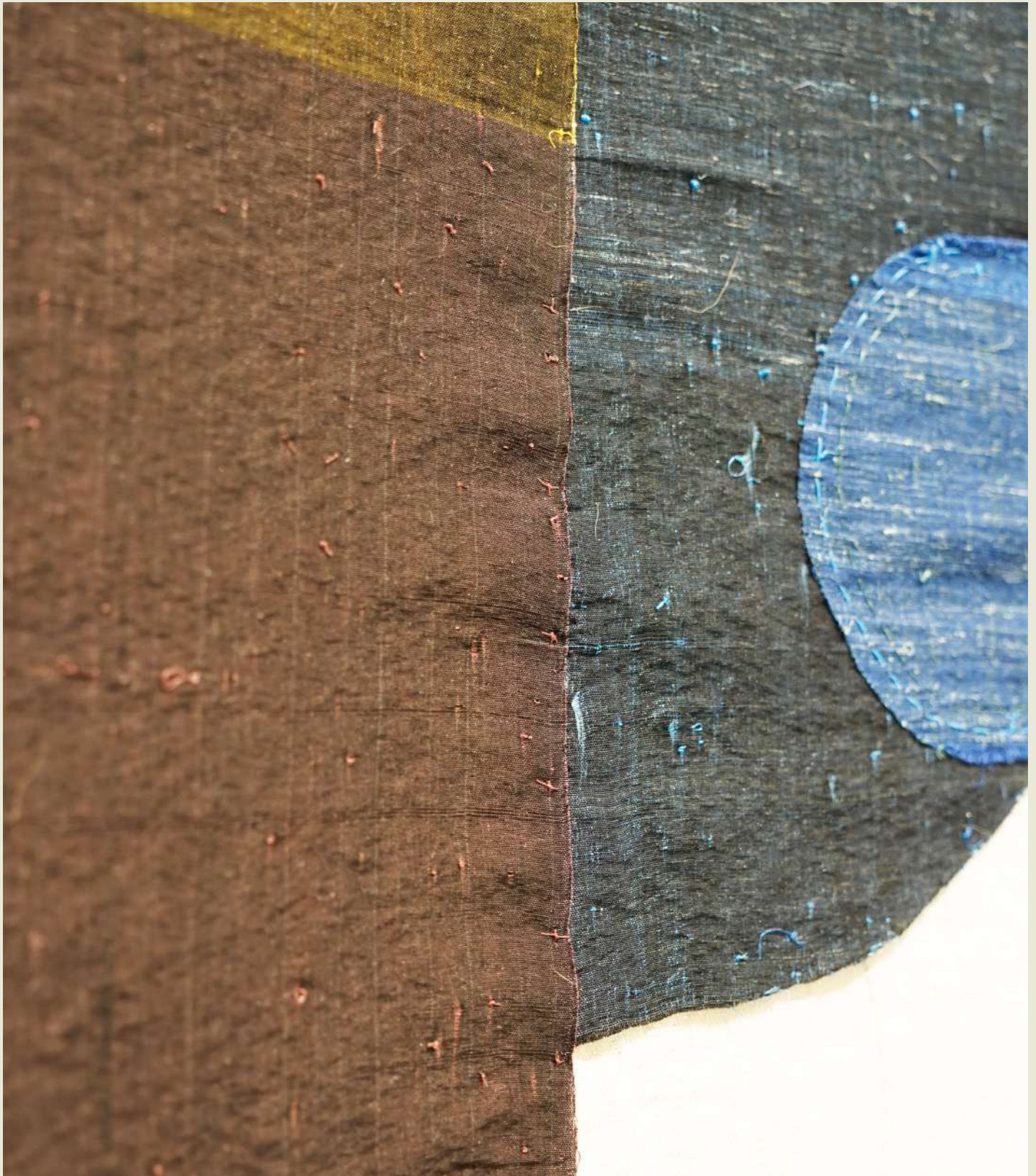


Contemplation Piece #1

2021

woven plastic and cotton threads, wooden rods

321.5 × 67.5 cm



Details

Contemplation Piece #1

2021

woven plastic and cotton threads, wooden rods

321.5 × 67.5 cm

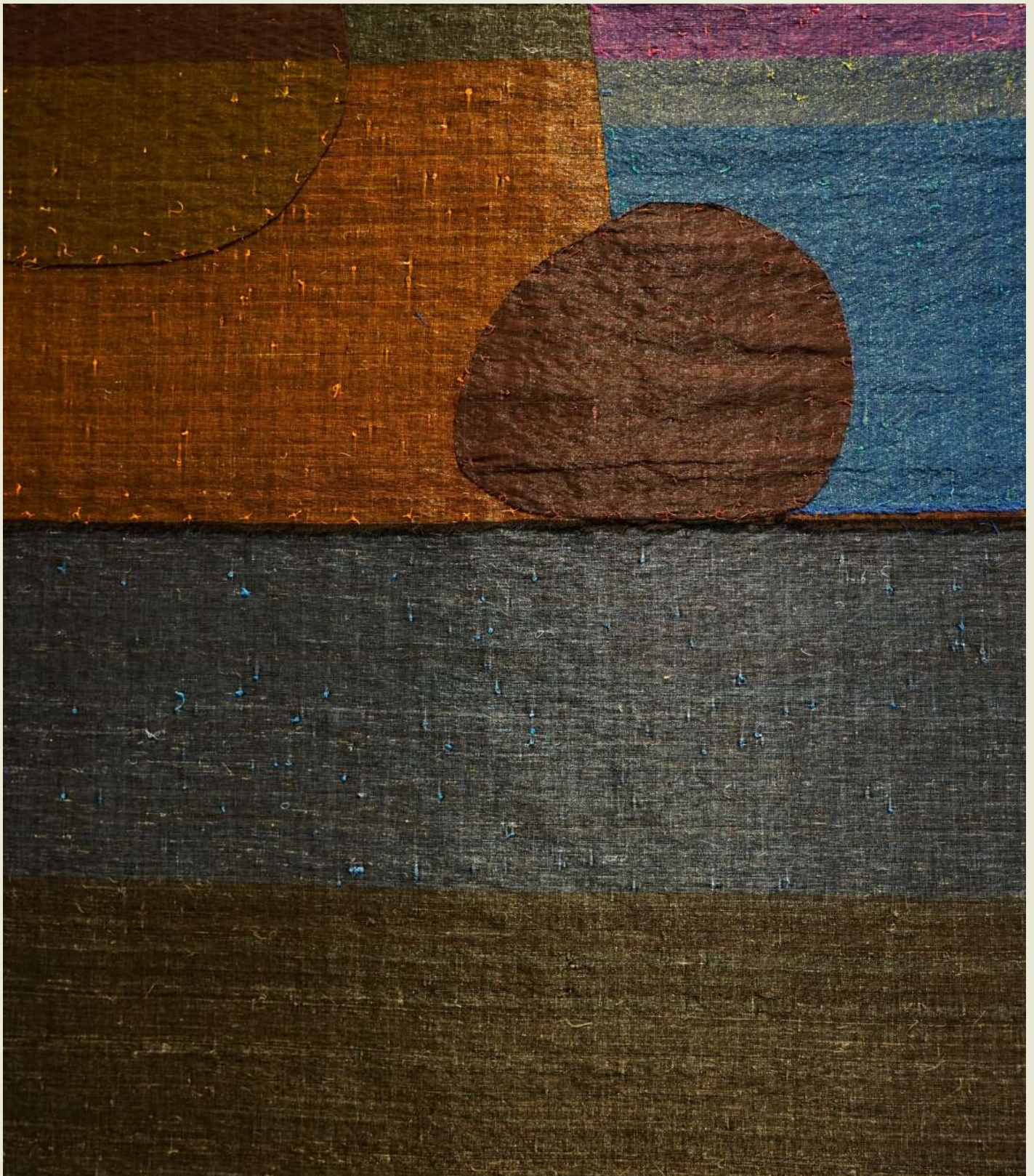


Contemplation Piece #2

2021

woven plastic and cotton threads, wooden rods

199 × 96.5 cm



Details

Contemplation Piece #2

2021

woven plastic and cotton threads, wooden rods

199 × 96.5 cm

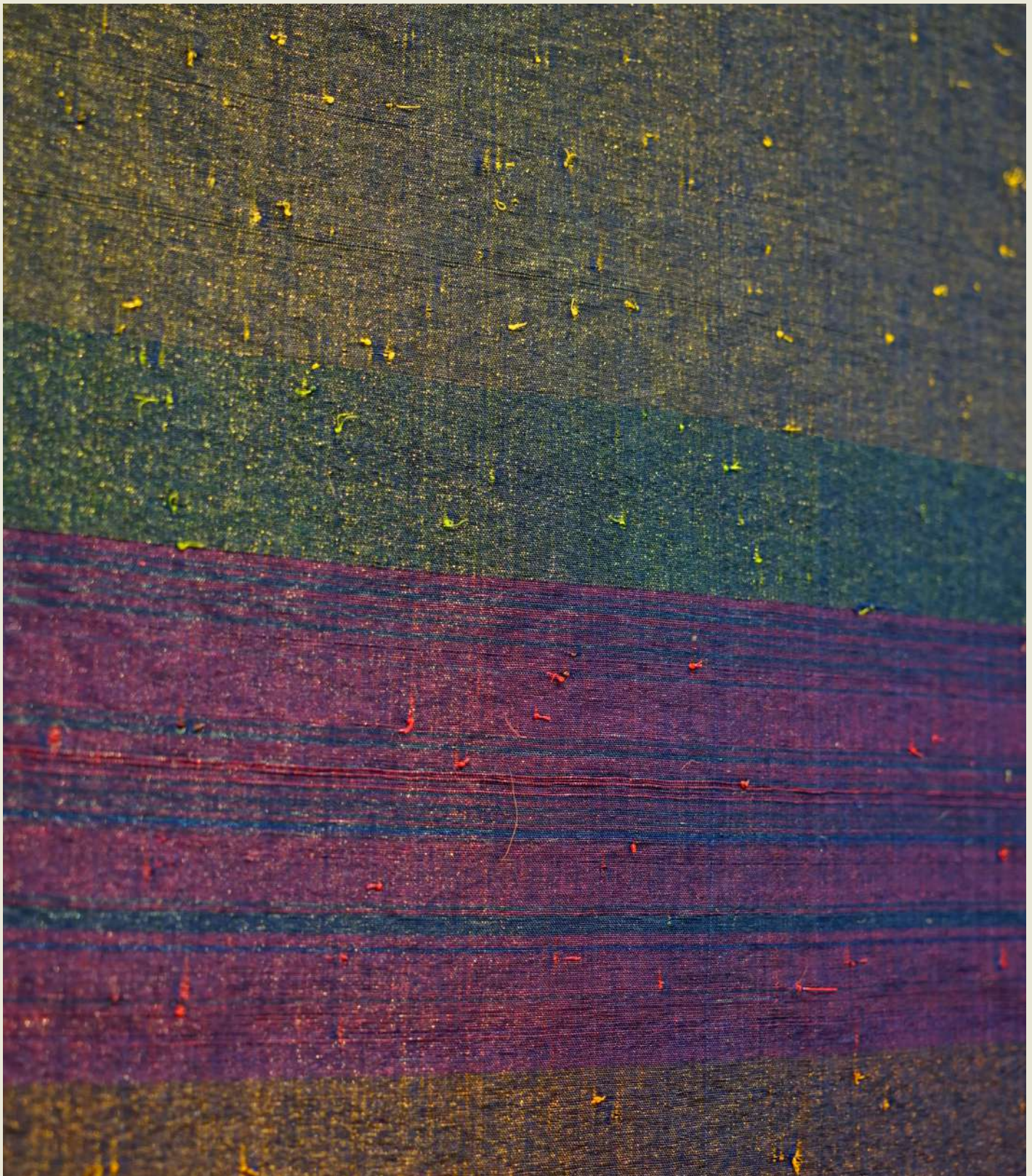


Contemplation Piece #3

2021

woven plastic and cotton threads, wooden rods

227 × 103 cm



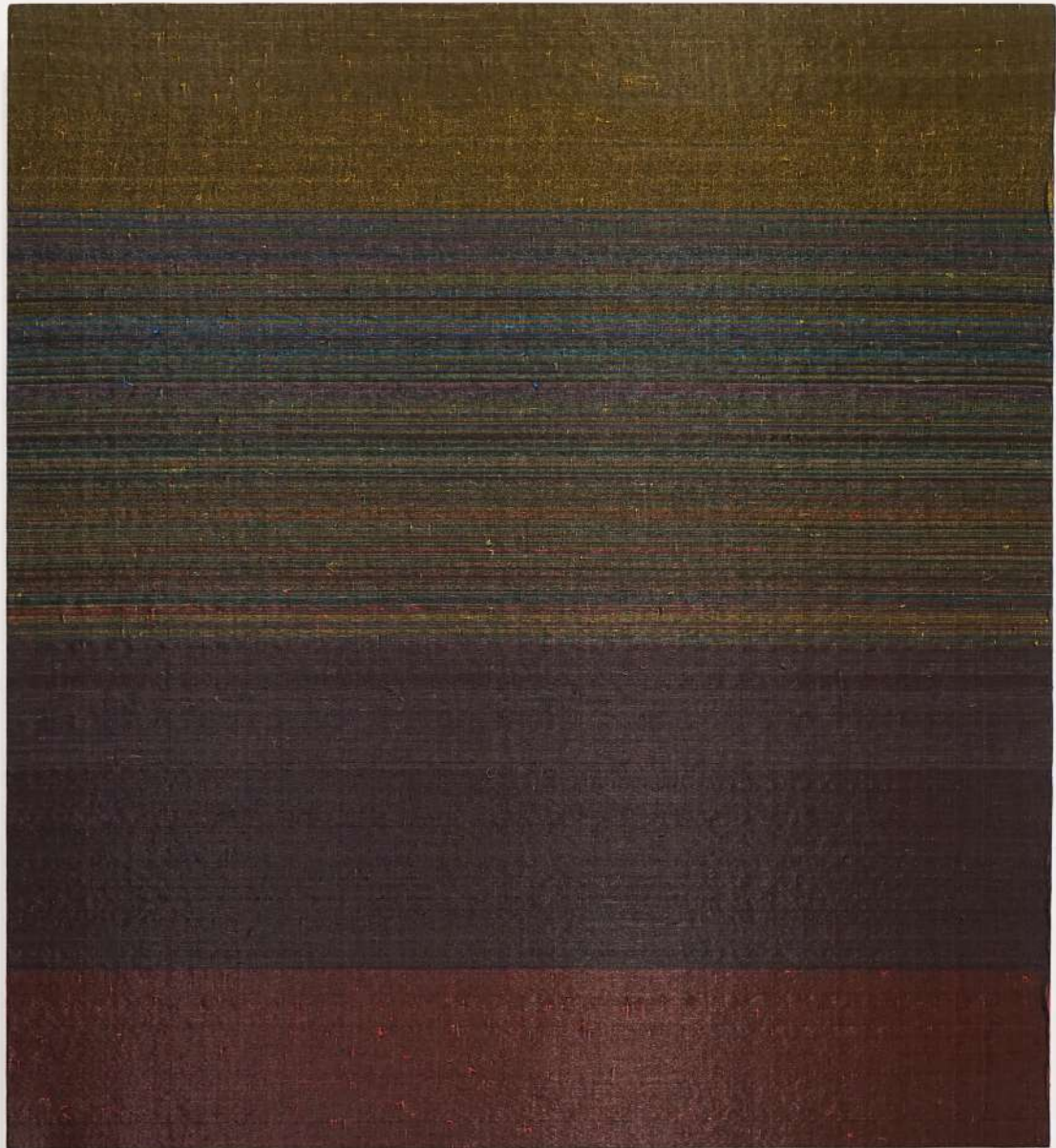
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Contemplation Piece #3

2021

woven plastic and cotton threads, wooden rods

227 × 103 cm



The Sunset

2021

woven plastic and cotton threads on wooden rods

92.5 × 86 × 4 cm



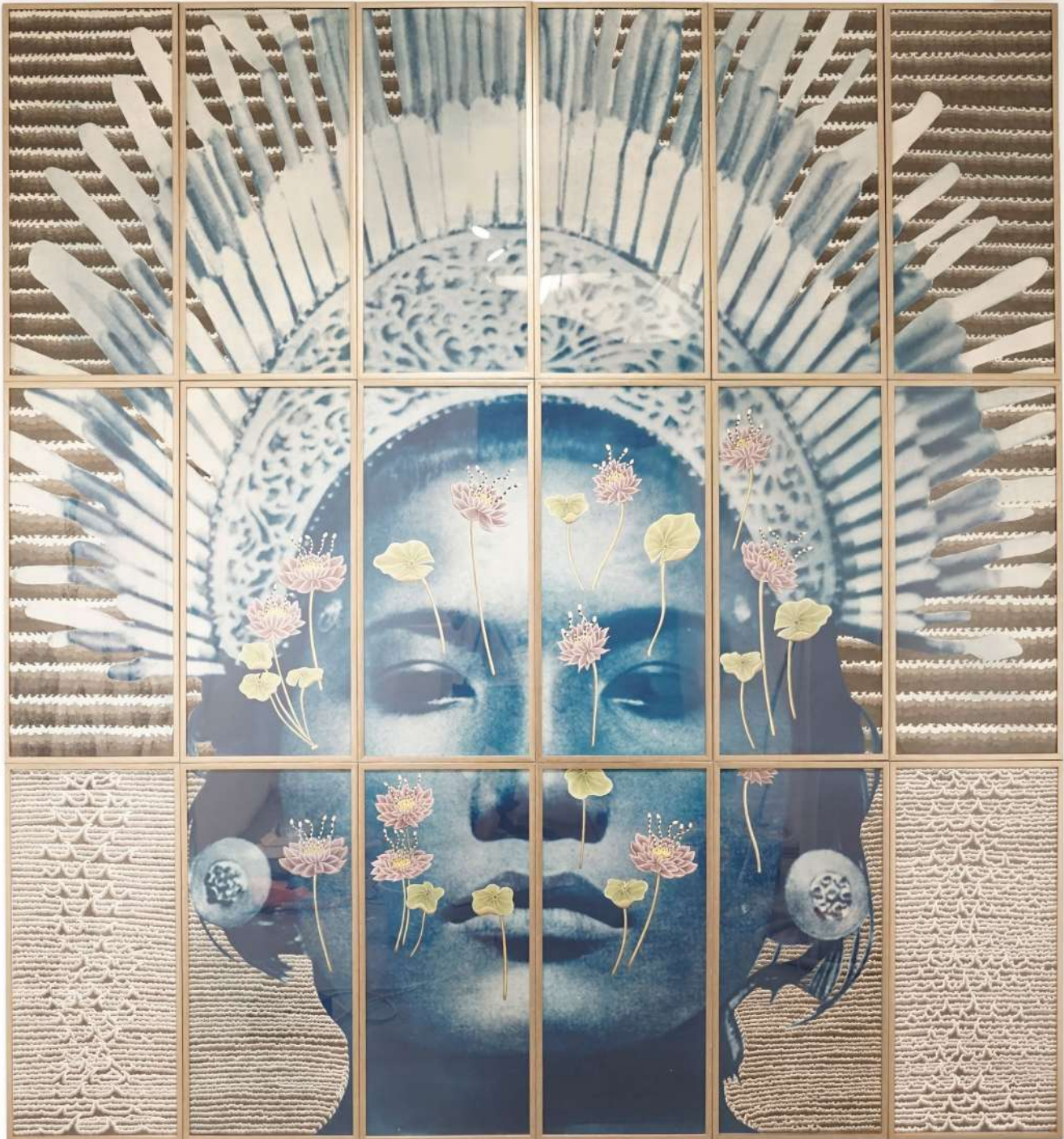
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The Sunset

2021

woven plastic and cotton threads on wooden rods

92.5 × 86 × 4 cm



Fertility Icon, Coloured Version (Anonymous Ancestors Series)
 2021
 cyanotype, silk paint, and Chinese ink on cotton paper
 279 × 258 × 1.5 cm (set of 18 pieces, 93 × 43 × 1.5 cm each)



Details

Fertility Icon, Coloured Version (Anonymous Ancestors Series)
2021
cyanotype, silk paint, and Chinese ink on cotton paper
279 × 258 × 1.5 cm (set of 18 pieces, 93 × 43 × 1.5 cm each)



Fireflies #3 (Anonymous Ancestors Series)

2022

cyanotype, silk paint, Chinese ink, and gold leaf on cotton paper
145 x 114 cm



Details

Fireflies #3 (Anonymous Ancestors Series)

2022

cyanotype, silk paint, Chinese ink, and gold leaf on cotton paper
145 × 114 cm





Timur Merah Project VII: Garden of Earthly Delights
2021
acrylic on *kamasan* canvas, antique wooden poles
605 × 90 cm (fabric), 194 × 12 × 12 cm each (pole)



Details

Timur Merah Project VII: Garden of Earthly Delights
2021
acrylic on *kamasan* canvas, antique wooden poles
605 × 90 cm (fabric), 194 × 12 × 12 cm each (pole)



Conscience
2021
mixed media on canvas
280 × 380 × 5 cm

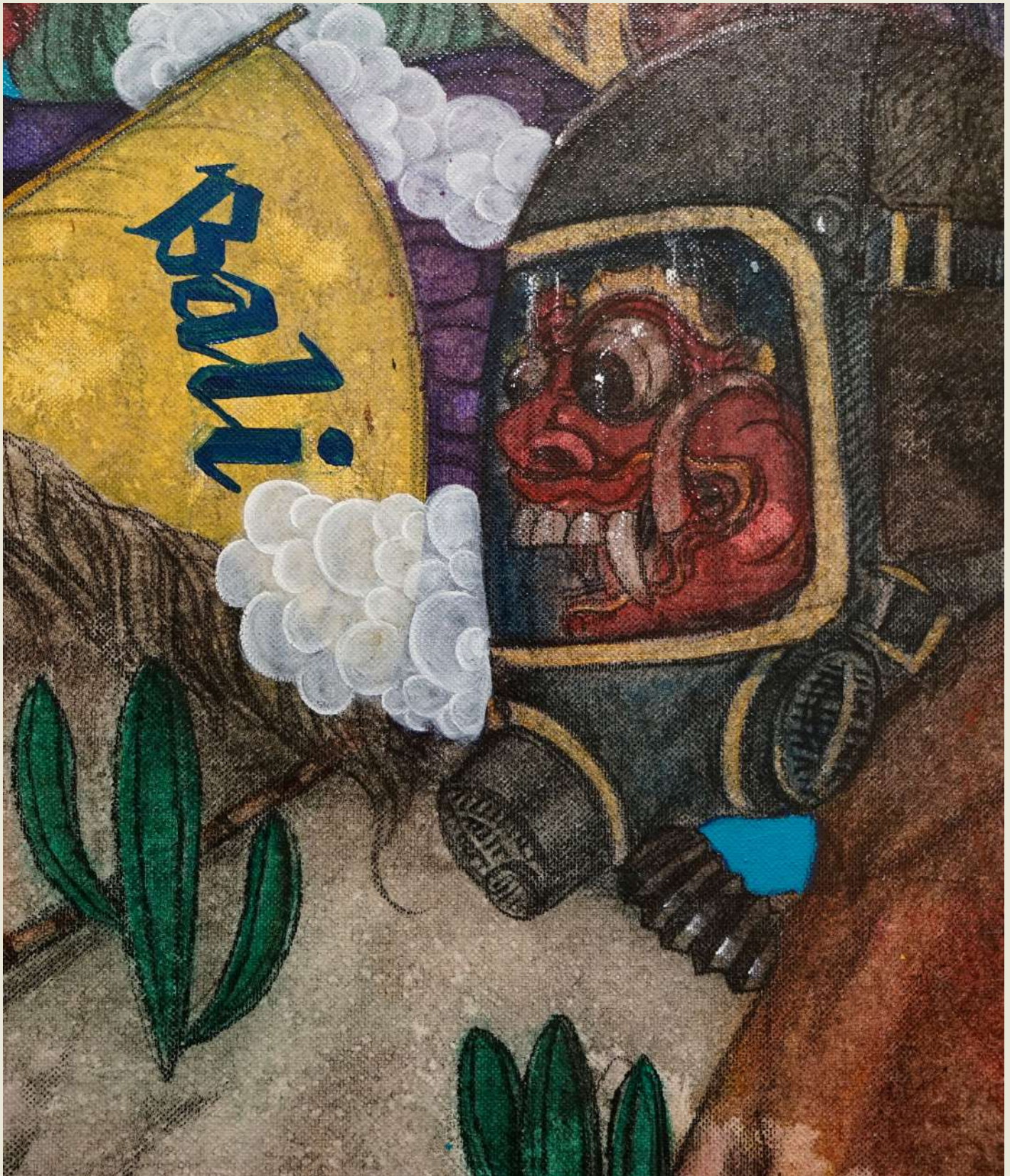


Details

Conscience
2021
mixed media on canvas
280 × 380 × 5 cm



Journey
2021
charcoal and oil on canvas
250 × 300 × 5 cm

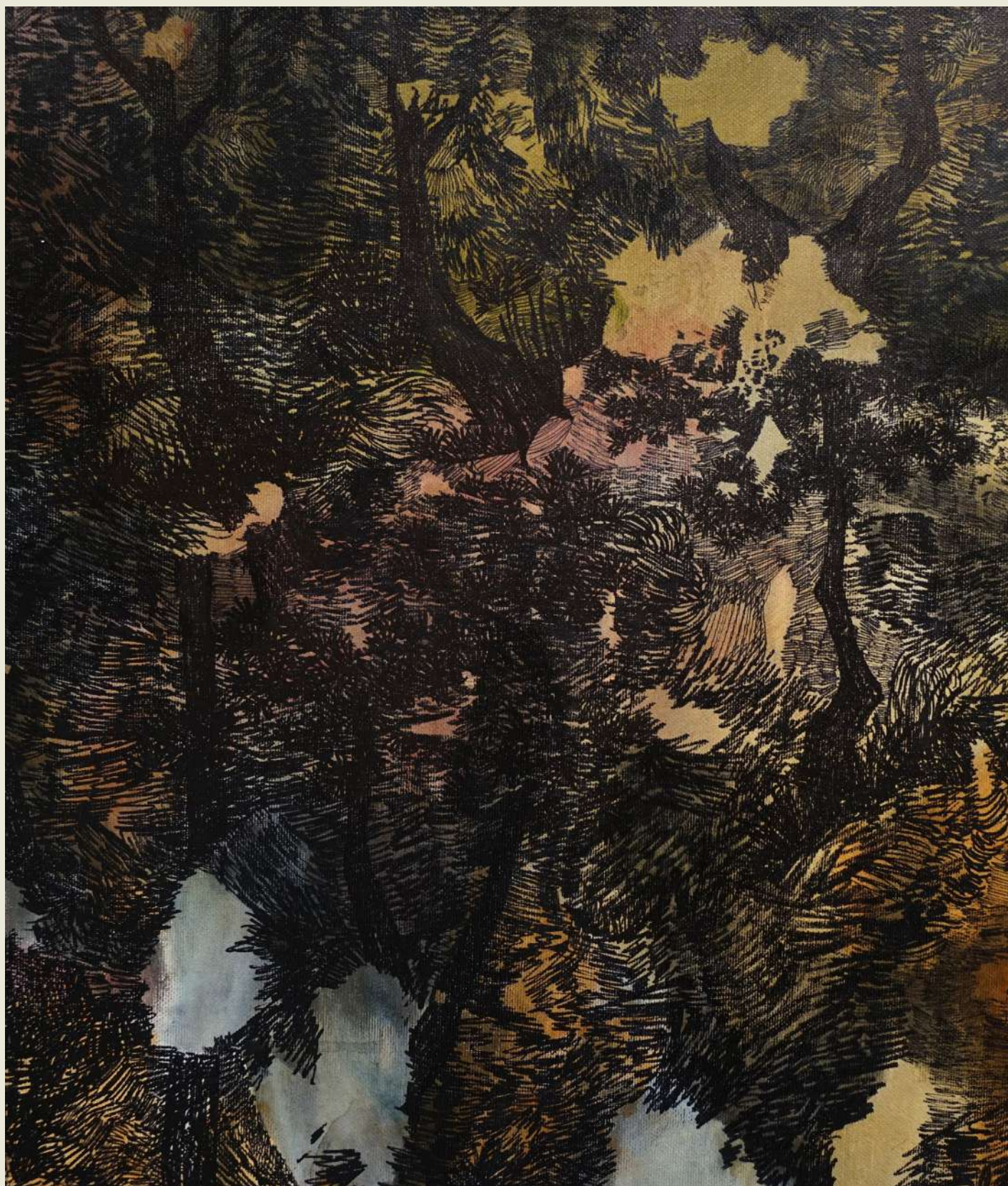


Details

Journey
2021
charcoal and oil on canvas
250 × 300 × 5 cm



A View from Batuan
2022
ink and oil on canvas
180 × 150 × 5 cm



Details

A View from Batuan

2022

ink and oil on canvas

180 × 150 × 5 cm



Yellow Ochre of Kamasan
2022
ink and oil on canvas
200 × 400 × 5 cm



Details

Yellow Ochre of Kamasan
2022
ink and oil on canvas
200 × 400 × 5 cm

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 Miyana, 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, Heri Dono, indieguerillas, Iwan Effendi, Made Wianta, Mark Justiniani, Nasirun, Budi Agung Kuswara, Robert Zhao Renhui, 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 scale.

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. For more information: www.gillmanbarracks.com

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