

GHOSTS FROM THE PAST

Ipeh Nur & Enka Komariah

Exhibition Catalogue

16albermarle Project Space acknowledges the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation as the traditional custodians of the land on which we work.

We pay our respects to elders, past, present and emerging, and acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded.

GHOSTS FROM THE PAST

Ipeh Nur & Enka Komariah

15 April - 20 May 2023

A 16albermarle Project Space exhibition



Ipeh Nur & Enka Komariah

Dijwa Baroe (New Soul) 2022

oil, clove extract, charcoal, rock powder on canvas, 160 x 400 cm

A HOUSE AND A SPECTRE OF HISTORY

Asep Topan

“To articulate what is past does not mean to recognize ‘how it really was.’ It means to take control of the memory, as it flashes in a moment of danger.”

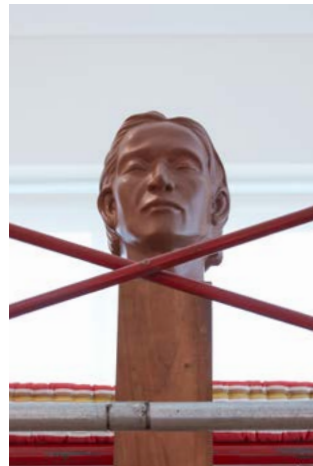
(Walter Benjamin, On The Concept of History, 1940)

The exhibition *Ghosts from the Past* is a configuration, a montage and an interference that enables us to look at scenes or moments in the history of Indonesia. Ipeh Nur (b 1993) and Enka Komariah (b 1993) deploy a variety of intentionally anachronistic motifs of visualization, emerging from the end of the Pacific War and Indonesian independence in 1945, to the contemporary lives of the nation.

While the artworks in this exhibition appear to connect contemporary lives with Indonesia's past starting from the 1940s to the 1960s, the tendency to re-examine history in Indonesian art has been well established since the 1990s. The legacy of 1970s and 1980s student movements, social disparity, economic inequality and the propensity to unravel history remained a potent artistic directive during the 1990s in Indonesia. Importantly, the fervent debate over *kebudayaan nasional* (national culture) and *ke-Indonesiaan* (Indonesianness) faded in the 1990s, permitting artists and curators to pursue fresh aesthetics and perspectives. A key example, Biennale Seni Rupa Jakarta IX (BSRJ IX) curated by Jim Supangkat (b 1948) in 1993, affirmed the philosophy of the postmodern ideal and introduced the method of installation art as a significant part of the exhibition. According to the artist Herry Dim (b 1955), through this exhibition Supangkat generated the impression that Indonesia could enter the new internationalist trend, as well as advancing the ideas that had been developed previously as part of the Indonesian New Art Movement (GSRBI) in 1975.¹ In the context of the works of Nur and Komariah, for the BSRJ IX Semsar Siahaan (1952-2005) presented his monumental site-specific work, *Penggalian Kembali (Re-Excavation)*. This work was a “negative monument” in the form of a 9 x 3.5 x 2 metre-deep excavation site that became a grave for clay statues depicting human forms in a pile of bodies, indicating the corpses of recent victims of political violence in Indonesia. Around the wall, Siahaan painted a black-and-white mural portraying his frightening Manubilis imagery.² *Penggalian Kembali* was a monument dedicated to the victims of the most recent political and human rights violations in Indonesia, as was also reflected in the paintings, drawings and installation works of his contemporaries such as Arahmaiani (b 1961), Dadang Christanto (b 1957) and Tisna Sanjaya (b 1958) later in this period.

In 1998, the country began its democratization phase with the resignation of President Suharto (1921-2008), also known as the Reformation Era, after huge pressure from citizens and students in Indonesia following a protracted economic crisis. This marked the end of Suharto's 32 year-long regime. The result was an emerging freedom of expression, and the possibility to question the human rights violations has been widely leveraged since. Moreover, this moment gave rise to renewed forms of creativity as artists actively engaged with their new-found democracy and as controls surrounding mass media relaxed. The impact of Reformasi - the movement to dethrone Suharto as President in May 1998 and the post-Suharto era in Indonesia that started immediately after - on cultural production was significant. Ideas and information circulated more readily and in different ways, aided by the proliferation of new media and new access to global popular culture. Up until now, such historically rooted thematic concerns appear in some of the works of a younger generation of Indonesian visual artists who may not have been directly affected by the events, but who have begun to understand the issues with more depth since more research has been done and literature published.

Apart from the historical narratives that are the content of the works in *Ghosts from the Past*, it is primarily the assemblage - the process by which the artists create new meaning from disparate objects - theatrical staging and the omnipresent depiction of the body that evokes associations with the Indonesian art of the 1990s with its strategies and potential affect. I would argue that Nur and Komariah intended the viewers to feel addressed not only on a political level but on an emotional level as well. On the one hand, Komariah engages with the likeness of his body to draw attention to the nature of Javanist nationalism and its relation to national identity. Manipulating his own representation, Komariah's works - such as *Pencuri Arca (The Statue Thief)* 2022, *Sekolah Rakjat (School)* 2022, *Tahanan Politik (Political Prisoners)* 2022, *Mata-mata (Spy)* 2022 and *Djiwa Baroe (A New Soul)* 2022 - feature him dressed in a batik shirt, in numerous historical moments that shaped Indonesian history. As the artist states: "It represents Javanese people who witnessed and had a role in those moments".³



Enka Komariah
Rumah Yang Yahud (A Cool House)
 detail, portrait bust of Enka Komariah
 2022



Enka Komariah
Pencuri Arca 2022 series installation view

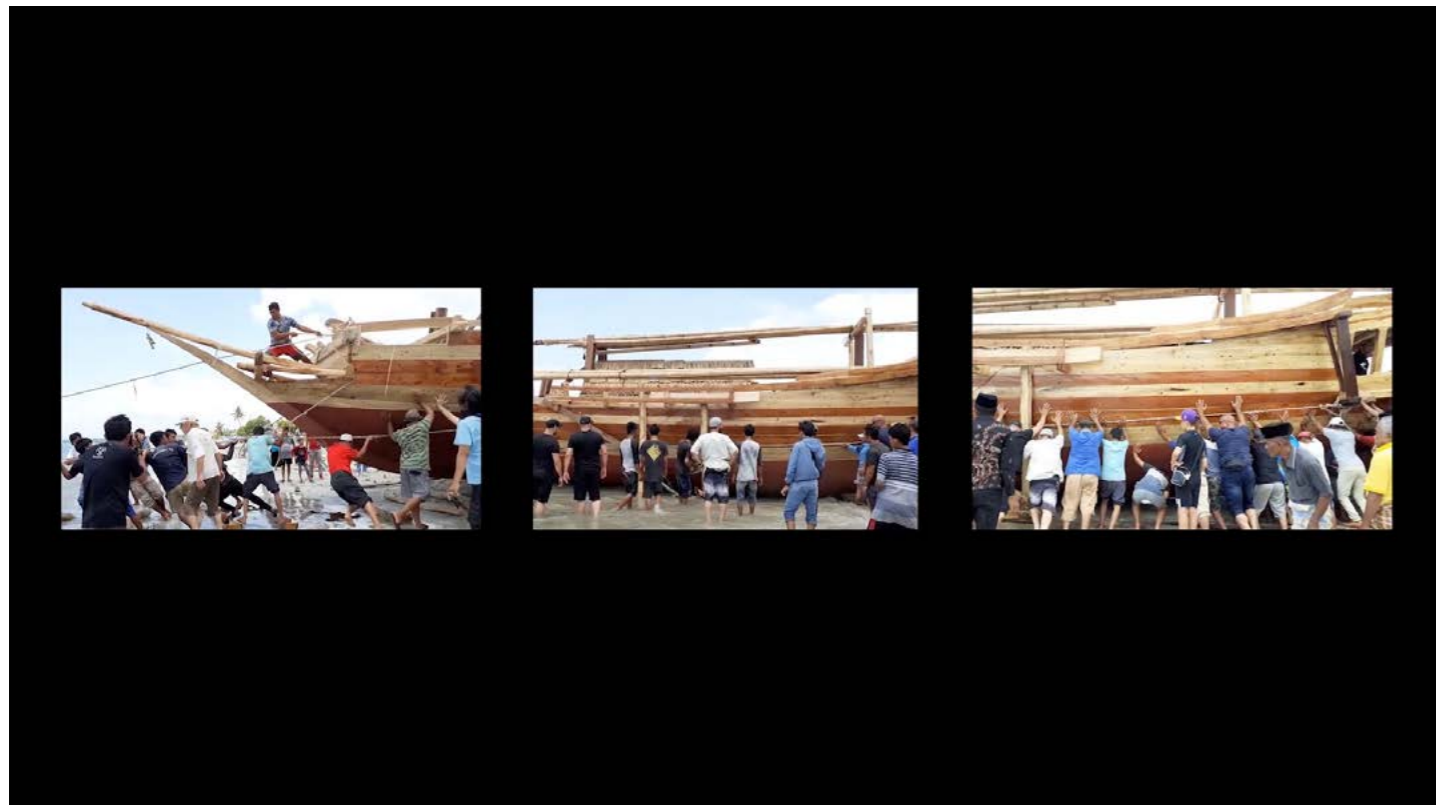


Enka Komariah
Mata-mata (Spy) 2022
oil on paper, 79 x 107 cm



Enka Komariah
Tahanan Politik (Political Prisoners) 2022
oil on paper, 79 x 107 cm

On the other hand, Nur presents the body from the perspective of her journey in foreign places, reflecting on her context as a Javanese woman. She produces three works - *Naskah: Tubuh dan Perjalanan (Manuscript: The Body and the Journey) 2022*, *Keluar untuk Ke Dalam (Outward for Inward) 2022* and *Menghanyut: Tubuh dan Perjalanan (Drifting Away: The Body and the Journey) 2022* - based on her journey through the island of Sulawesi, which focuses on the human experience and its spiritual nature, by representing it in transient, fragmented and emotive states. The journey took her through a boat-building ritual and participation in *motangnga* or fishing activities with Mandarese people, and an observation of the eroded relationship to nature and the diminished cultural lives of the places in relation to current developments. Influenced by their art training in printmaking and Agung Kurniawan's conceptual understanding of drawing - as a simple medium, yet wild, harsh and political - Nur and Komariah's multifaceted works bear visual witness to ecological and political tragedies.



Ipeh Nur

Menghanyut Tubuh dan Perjalanan (Washing Body and Journey) 2022
single channel video, 22:07.



Enka Komariah
Selamat Datang (Welcome) 2022
oil on paper, 156 x 56 cm

As the anchor for this exhibition, *Rumah Yang Yahud (A Cool House) 2022* portrays decisive moments from the history of post-independence Indonesia. However, the prominent narrative of the installation is not to do with the Indonesian National Revolution period from 1945 to 1950, instead, it focuses on the process of nation-building after the revolution and how Indonesia was actively involved in world politics by calling for decoloniality - that is, the detachment from structures of coloniality and the establishment of new ways of thinking, languages and ways of life and being in the world that coloniality rejects.⁴ The era between 1950 and 1965 was tempestuous for both socio-political and cultural life in Indonesia. From multiple perspectives, one can see its entanglement with the socio-political upheavals of this period such as internal ideological conflicts, the struggle to decolonize and Cold War interventions.⁵ The anachronistic motifs of visualization I mentioned earlier are best illustrated by this work: not only in the sense of the construction of images but also as regards the three-dimensional arrangement of the installation. The structure of scaffoldings, fences and barbed wire, and the multiple paintings and drawings that hang from the iron pipes evoke an immersive house-like experience, inviting viewers to walk around it. From this perspective, the owner of the house looks vigilant and welcomes every guest with two skeletons in the painting *Selamat Datang (Welcome) 2022*, which appropriates gestures from S. Sudjojono's (1913-85) unused sketch for a monument of the same name in Central Jakarta, dressed with flowers in their hands. *Rumah Yang Yahud* combines anachronistic arrangement and 'pictorialism'⁶ that appears in the photograph-inspired paintings within this work to convey its political message. Indebted to a collage aesthetic which blends drawings, paintings, objects, installation structures and photography inside 'the house', the installation rejects focus and depends on the audience to 'complete' their interpretation of genealogy.



Ghosts from the Past
Ipeh Nur & Enka Komariah

The artists explore the historical and contemporary narratives of the Indonesian independence struggle, focusing on the role of women and the impact of the 1965-66 mass killings. The installation uses found objects, photographs, and documents to create a multi-layered and immersive experience, inviting viewers to reflect on the past and its lingering presence in the present.

**SEDANG
DIBANGUN**

Ipeh Nur & Enka Komariah
Installation view of Rumah Yang Yahud (A Cool House) 2022

The installation's title, *Rumah Yang Yahud*, comes from a song of the same title by the legendary Indonesian band Naif, first published in 1998. The lyrics of this song do not in any way share the historical concerns of the artists, instead, according to Naif, as a love song *Rumah Yang Yahud* is defined as “a good relationship that is always based on openness” in the context of human love-relationships.⁷ It is not a coincidence that the artists refer to pop culture as part of their artistic practices. The roots of this approach are found in their first exhibition, *Beresyit (Beginning)*, at Krack Studio, Yogyakarta in 2016. *Beresyit* included murals, drawings and fictional posters referencing books, movies and popular culture, typically coming from the era of the New Order. Nothing was too prosaic for Nur and Komariah's attention — *Beresyit* included predominantly black and white drawings, depictions of animal bodies, anatomical models of human body parts, photographs, news headlines and quotes from the Koran, all stacked in chronological inconsistency, mimicking posters or graphic scenes from a horror movie.⁸

While Nur and Komariah appear to shift their focus from the ‘vernacular glance’⁹ of the *Beresyit* exhibition to situating and visualizing the past and the representation of history in *Rumah Yang Yahud*, it is important to acknowledge their palpable drive to keep progressing the notion of ‘horror’ in the installation. One of the historical chapters emphasised in this work is the 30 September Movement (G30S)¹⁰, the abortive coup that resulted in the crushing of the Indonesian Communist Party and led to the fall from power of President Sukarno (1901-1970) in 1965. The significant impact of this event on Indonesian history and its future is staged through the works *Tiga Tokoh (The Three Figures) 2022*, *Eksil (Exile) 2022*, *Tahanan Politik (Political Prisoners) 2022* and *Mata-mata (Spy) 2022*, which portray how a generation of people became victims on account of their status as followers of Sukarno, and their affiliation with the Indonesian National Party (Partai Nasional Indonesia, PNI). This directly affected as many as a million individuals, many killed and many more left on the remote prison island of Buru or exiled to foreign countries without any certainty of return. There is nothing more terrifying or ‘horrific’ than this historical truth, aside from the fact that Indonesia would not see democracy for another three decades until 1998 under the New Order regime.



Enka Komariah
Eksil (Exile) 2022
oil on paper, 107 x 79 cm

After 1998, Indonesian artists of diverse backgrounds were drawn to social and historical issues, and the current generation of artists are not exempted. Nur and Komariah aim to create a new imaginary reality - socially and artistically – sometimes created through the arrangement of historical photographs of figures and monuments which are painted on paper or canvas, and sometimes using natural materials such as clove extract and rock powder. Cross-pollination between photographic images and drawings is frequently used by artists to juxtapose a historical narrative and their contemporary interpretation. The picture is not technically perfect, but compared with current artistic trends the apparent spontaneity and its compositional arrangement in monochromatic looks innovative. The influence of printmaking techniques is apparent not only in black-and-white drawings, but also in the playfulness of positive-negative imagery such as in *Keluar Untuk Ke Dalam (Outward for Inward) 2022*, and the prevailing text in the manuscript-inspired works. The works often employ words or notes and use language to convey their message. Although Nur and Komariah have borrowed from previous generations by developing historical narratives and adopting identity politics as artistic gestures, it is critical to consider the role a historical approach can play in contemporary artistic research, placing art not merely as an expression but also as a way to unravel and speculate on the past. It disparages the notion of the historical rebirth that some artists hope to question through the exploration of existing narratives of Indonesian history. Nur and Komariah felt the urge to challenge this status quo by staging various critical historical moments, and it is these views that make the artists so dynamic. Their works not only illustrate what has happened in the past, but also encourage us to imagine how things might have been if these events had not occurred, and how this country could be in a future with such an obscure and complicated history.

Through *Ghosts from the Past*, Ipeh Nur and Enka Komariah portray the legacies that inform the present moment by opening up the ideas that seem excluded by the prevailing consensus. As Benjamin suggested in the quotation above, I see their approach to history as not about accounting for what was but seeing what is crucial in the ‘moment of danger’, that is, anything that threatens or calls out for urgent consideration. By repurposing historical lineage in light of the present, *Ghosts from the Past* presents as a series of parallel and coexisting versions, to escape our own inherited structures of understanding the past and as a means to negotiating our alternative future.

Endnotes

¹Herry Dim, “Biennale Seni Rupa dengan Sebuah Ide Besar,” *Pikiran Rakyat Bandung* (newspaper article), 13 January 1994.

² According to Semsar Siahaan, Manubilis is an abbreviation of three combinations of nouns: *Manusia* (human), *Binatang* (animal), and *Iblis* (demon). Manubilis describes three traits as one unit. Human as his body, animal as his lust, and demon as his cunning and deceit. Siahaan, S. (2017). “Seniku Seni Pembebasan” on *Seni Manubilis: Semsar Siahaan 1952-2005*. Jakarta and Yogyakarta: Jakarta Biennale Foundation and Nyala. Page 66.

³ Conversation with the artists, 24 March 2023.

⁴ For more about decoloniality, see Mignolo, W.D. C.E. Walsh. (2018). *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*. Durham: Duke University Press.

⁵ Lindsay, J., & Liem, M. H. T. (Eds.). (2012). *Heirs to World Culture: Being Indonesian 1950-1965*. KITLV Press. Page 1-27.

⁶ Pictorialism describes as a photograph that emulated paintings in style, manipulated by the use of soft focus and sepia tones. Gee, B., King, C., Lachbourne, L., Ritter, F. (Ed.) in *Art: The Whole Story* (2010). Thames and Hudson. Page 356.

⁷ See <https://web.archive.org/web/20081217143417/http://www.naifband.com/new/diskografi.php>

⁸ For more about the *Beresyit* exhibition and the notion of ‘horror’ in Enka Komariah’s works, see the essay written by Malcolm Smith to accompany the *Beresyit* exhibition: Smith, M. (2016). “The Beresyit.” Yogyakarta: Krack Studio. See <https://krackstudio.com/?p=1375>

⁹ The concept of ‘vernacular glance’ was used by critic Brian O’Doherty (1928-2022) to discuss Robert Rauschenberg’s (1925-2008) works, describe as ‘what carries us through the city every day, it doesn’t recognize categories of the beautiful and ugly, and just interested in what’s there.’ Doss, E. (2002). *Twentieth-Century American Art*. Page 145.

¹⁰ Within Indonesian history, this event is still considered perplexing and has remained shrouded in uncertainty. For further analysis and investigative explanation, see Roosa, J. (2006). *Pretext for Mass Murder: The September 30th Movement and Suharto’s Coup d’État in Indonesia*. The University of Wisconsin Press.

ARTIST BIOS

Ipeh Nur

Born in Yogyakarta in 1993, Ipeh graduated from the Department of Graphic Arts at the Indonesian Institute of the Arts in Yogyakarta, where she currently lives and works. Her art draws inspiration from personal experiences, everyday struggles, memories and historical events. Ipeh enjoys creating dramatic visuals that evoke the feeling of being on stage, featuring several plots or narratives within a single image. While most of her practice comprises black and white drawings on paper, she also experiments with other mediums and techniques such as batik, ceramics, screen printing, etching, sculpture, resin relief and mural painting.

Ipeh has exhibited extensively in Indonesia, Australia and the region. In 2018, her work was featured in the exhibition *Women, Art & Politics* at FCAC Roslyn Smorgon Gallery in Melbourne. In 2019 she did a residency at Kelana Laut, Pambusuang, Mandar, West Sulawesi and Tana Beru, South Sulawesi, through Biennale Jogja XV residency program. In 2021 she had a joint solo exhibition *Dhomala Dhawu / Macassan Sail Story* at The Cross Art Projects in Sydney, and at 16albermarle she has been included in the exhibitions *Indonesia Calling 2020* and *Our Grandfather Road: The (gendered) body and place in southeast Asian art*. Ipeh's collaborative work with her partner Enka Komariah, *Rumah Yang Yahud (A Cool House)*, was presented at Art Jog 2022 in Yogyakarta.

Enka Komariah

Born in Klaten in 1993, Enka graduated from the Department of Graphic Arts at the Indonesian Institute of the Arts of Yogyakarta in 2017. His work stands out for its imaginative narratives and the use of a variety of mediums, with a preference for drawing on paper. Enka often incorporates satirical and ironic symbols into his art, blurring the lines between societal taboos and norms. He also explores his personal identity by drawing from the agrarian traditions of Java Nan and contrasting them with popular cultural images.

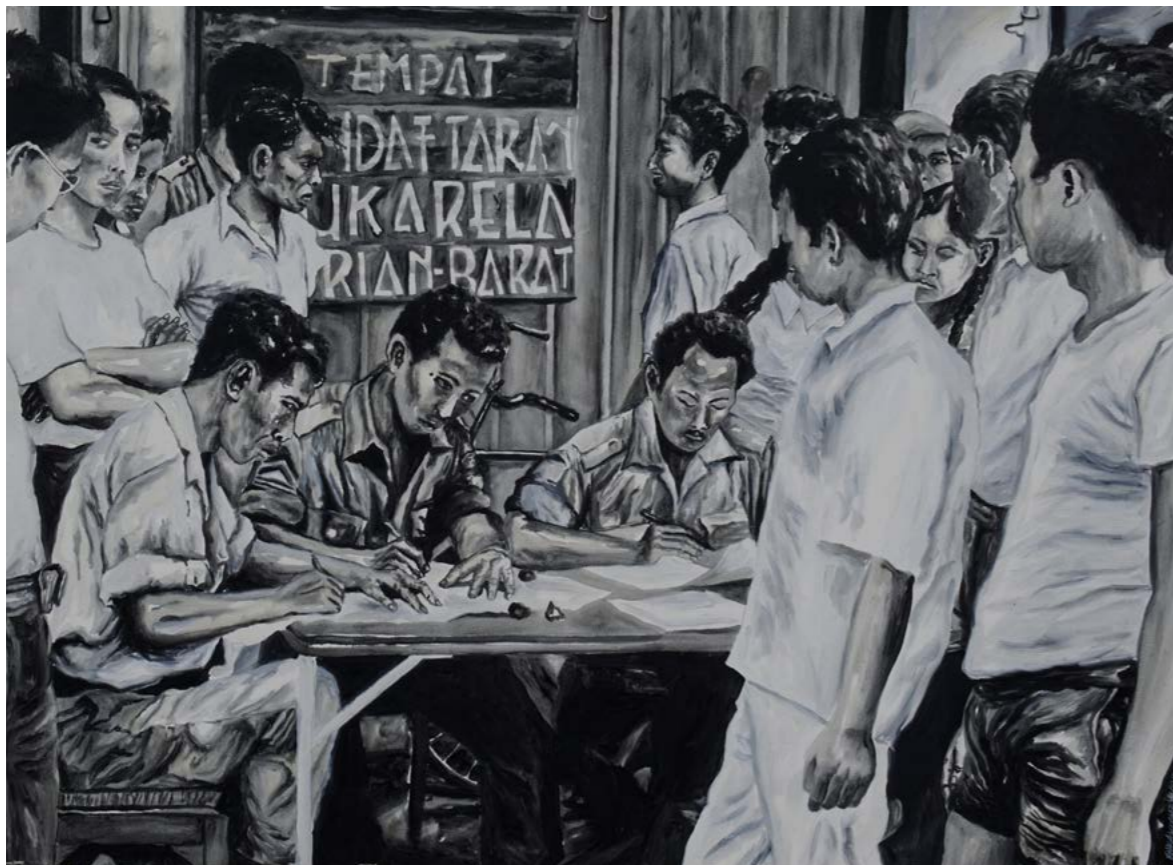
Enka is a member of several art collectives, including Barasub (comics), Gegerboyo (murals), and Beresyit (illustrations). He has exhibited widely in Indonesia, winning the Young Artist Award at Art Jog in 2019. He participated in the exhibition *Indonesia Calling 2020* at 16albermarle in Sydney. With the collective Gegerboyo, Enka's work was featured in the 2022 Setouchi Triennale in Japan. Also in 2022 his collaborative work with Ipeh Nur, *Rumah Yang Yahud (A Cool House)*, was presented at Art Jog 2022.



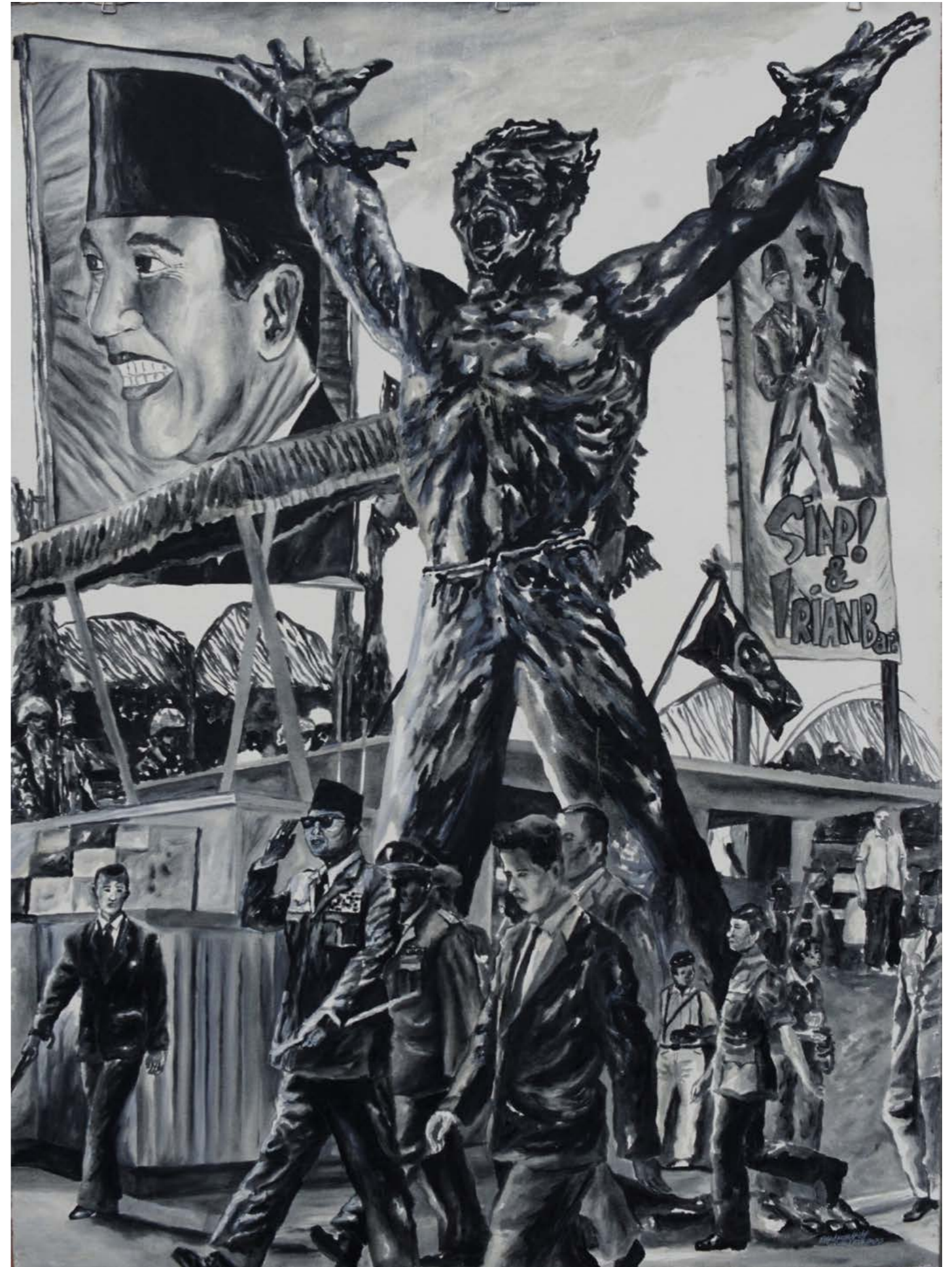
Left - Enka Komariah | Right - Ipeh Nur

(Image courtesy of the artists)

SELECTED WORKS



Enka Komariah
Pendaftaran Sukarela (Voluntary Registration) 2022
oil on paper, 57 x 77 cm



Enka Komariah
Monumen Pembebasan (Liberation Monument) 2022
oil on paper, 107 x 79 cm



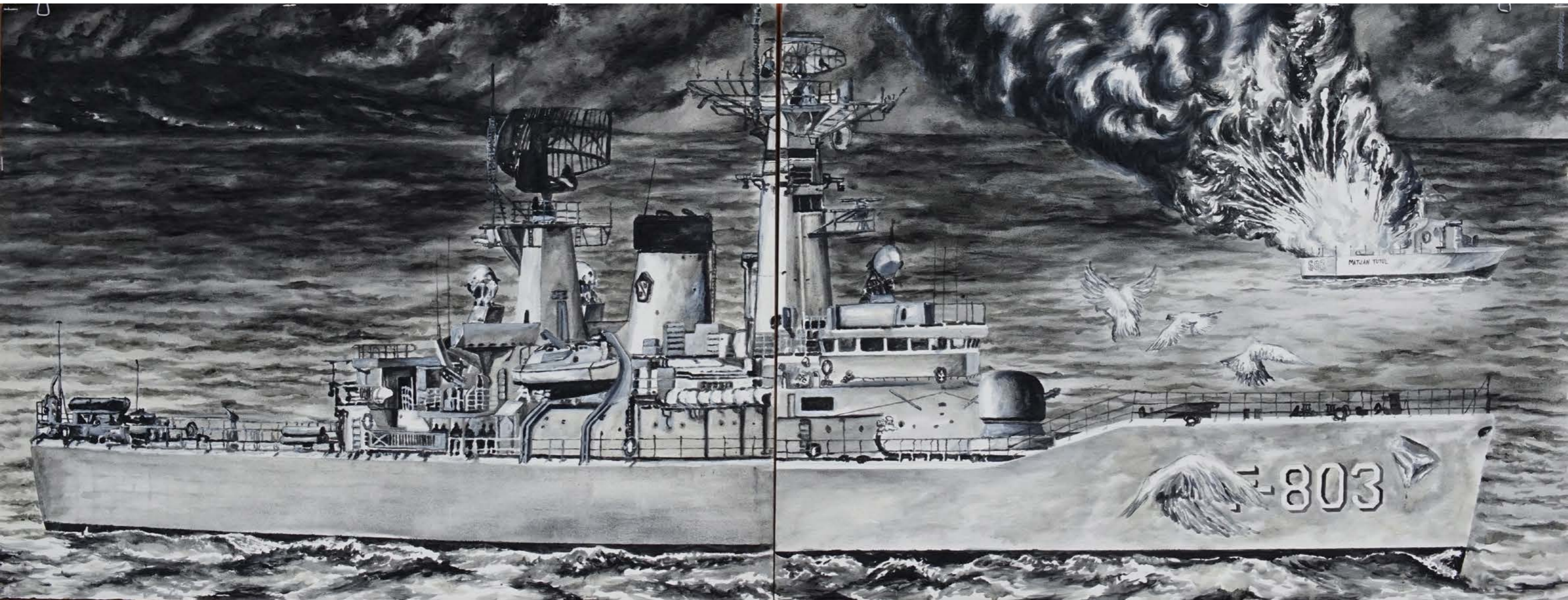
Enka Komariah
(left) *Orang Jawa 2 wayang/puppet*
buffalo skin, dimensions variable 2022 (part of *Tiga Tokoh 2022* artwork)



(right) *Tiga Tokoh (Three Figures) 2022*
oil on paper, 107 x 79 cm



Enka Komariah
Lukisan Penyambutan (Welcome Painting) 2022
oil on paper, 79 x 107 cm



Enka Komariah
Matjan Toetoei 2022
oil on paper, 56 x 152 cm



Enka Komariah
Sekolah Rakjat (School) 1 2022
oil on paper, 79 x 107 cm



Enka Komariah
Sekolah Rakjat (School) 2 2022
oil on paper, 79 x 107 cm



Enka Komariah
(top) *Pendaftaran Sukarela (Voluntary Registration)* 2022
oil on paper, 57 x 77 cm

(right) *Orang Jawa 1* 2022
wayang/puppet buffalo skin, dimensions variable 2022
(part of *Pendaftaran Sukarela* 2022 artwork)

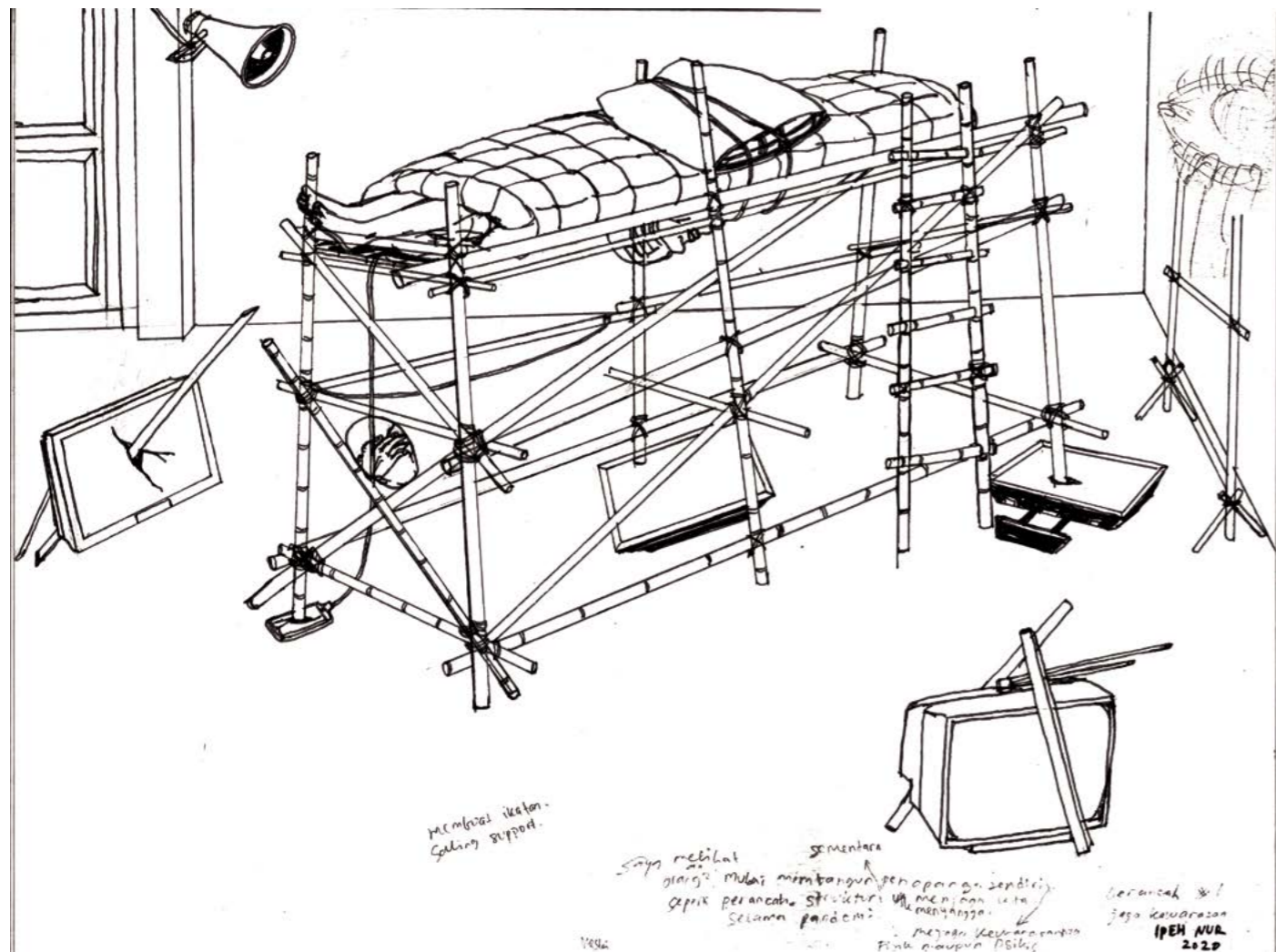




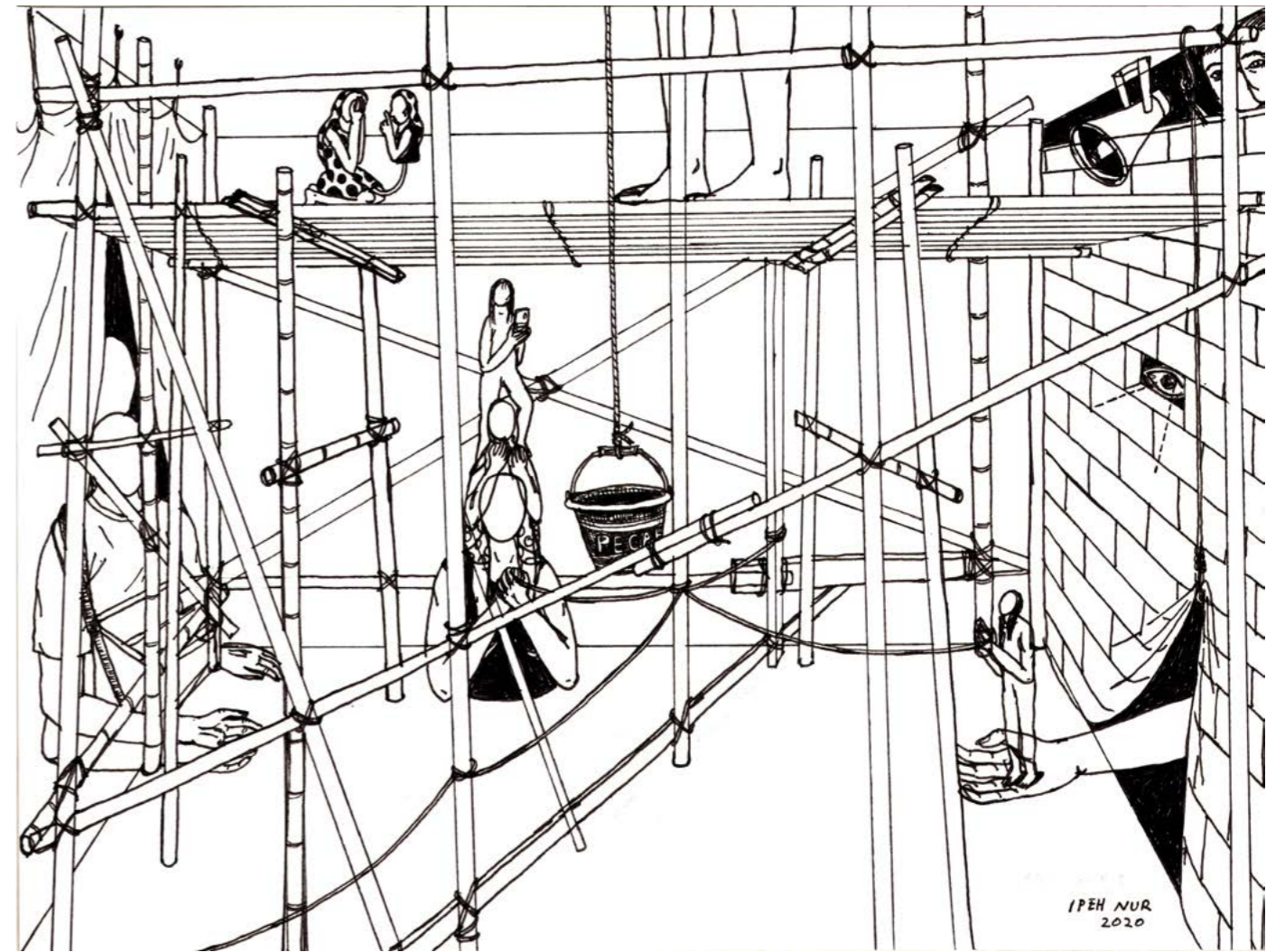
Ipeh Nur & Enka Komariah
Neo Eksotik (Neo Exotic) 2022
 clove extract, charcoal, rock powder on canvas, 96 x 130 cm



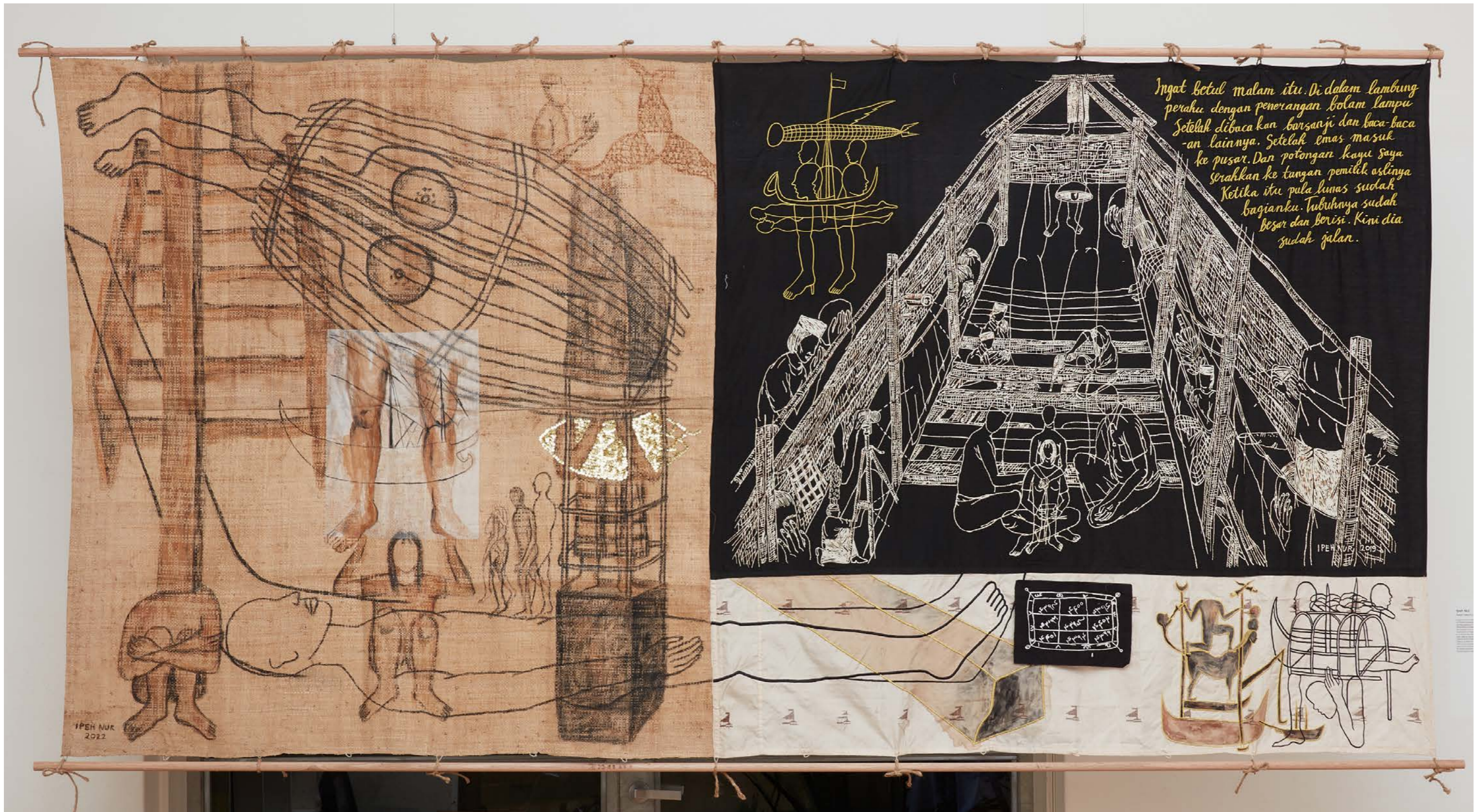
Ipeh Nur
Tolak Bala (Reject, Misfortune & Disaster) 2022
 clove extract, charcoal, rock, powder on window and iron, variable dimensions



Ipeh Nur
 Perancah (Scaffolding) 1 2022
 drawing on paper, 24 x 32 cm



Ipeh Nur
 Perancah (Scaffolding) 2 2022
 drawing on paper, 24 x 32 cm



Ingat betul malam itu. Di dalam lambung perahu dengan penorangan bolam lampu. Setelah dibaca kan bazaraji dan baca-baca-an lainnya. Setelah emas masuk ke pusar. Dan potongan kayu saya serahkan ke tangan pemilik aslinya. Ketika itu pula lunas sudah bagianku. Tubuhnya sudah besar dan berisi. Kini dia sudah jalar.

IPEH NUR
2022

IPEH NUR 2019

Ipeh Nur
Keluar Untuk Ke Dalam (Outward to Inward) 2022
 Lanu sail, charcoal, rock powder, sequins, cassava paper, hand drawn batik, embroidery, silk weaving
 145 x 286 cm



Ipeh Nur
 Naskah Perjalanan (Journey Manuscript) 2022
 cloves extract, charcoal, rock powder, drawing pen on canvas, 90 x 450 cm



Enka Komariah

(top) *Pencuri Arca (Statue Thief) #1* 2022, oil on paper, 89 x 119 cm

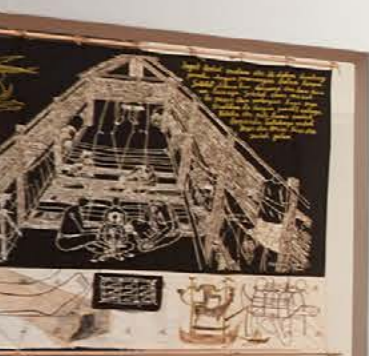
(bottom) *Pencuri Arca (Statue Thief) #2* 2022, oil on paper, 89 x 119 cm

Enka Komariah

Pencuri Arca (Statue Thief) #3 2022

oil on paper, 76 x 57 cm

EXHIBITION INSTALLATION
IMAGES



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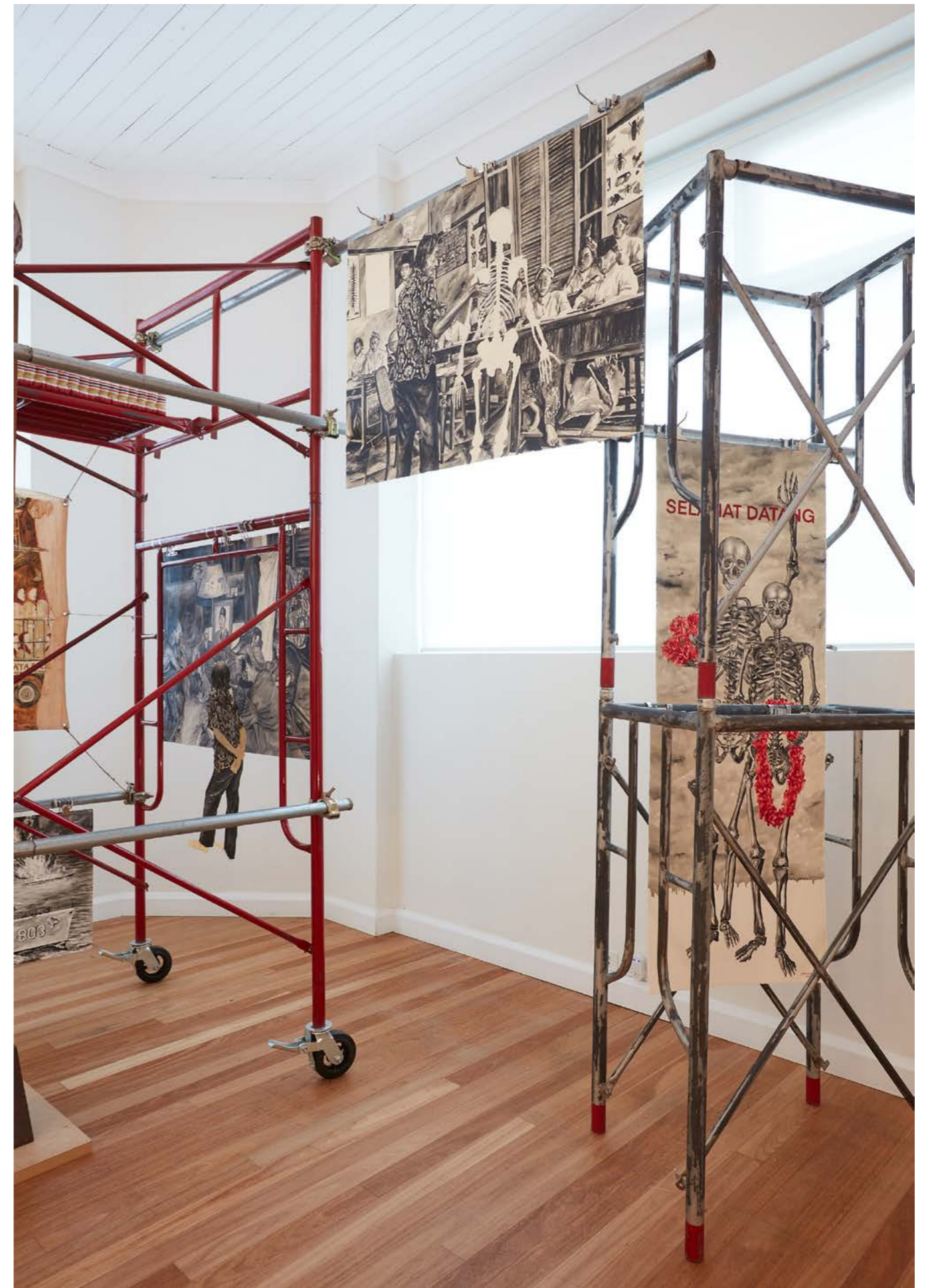


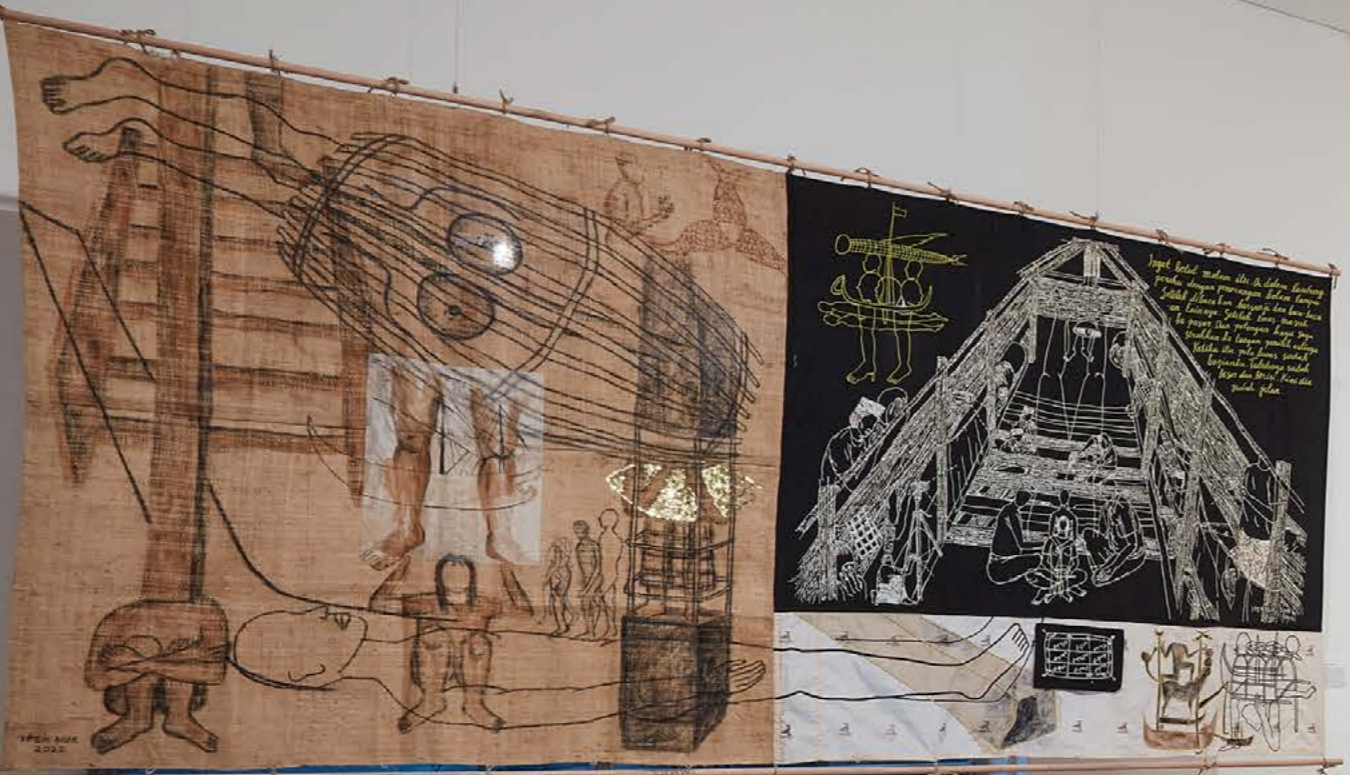
**SEDANG
DIBANGUN**











EXHIBITION PERSONNEL

Asep Topan ESSAY & WALL TEXTS

Asep Topan (b 1989) is an independent curator and lecturer based in Jakarta. He graduated from the master's program in Curatorship at Bandung Institute of Technology (2017) and the undergraduate program at Jakarta Institute of the Arts (2011). For the last 10 years, he has been a lecturer at the Fine Art School at Jakarta Institute of the Arts, where he teaches Indonesian history of art, exhibition making and art activism. As a curator, he was a curatorial team member at the Jakarta Biennale 2015 and Vice Director for its 17th edition (2016-18). He was a curator at Museum MACAN, Jakarta from 2018-21. In 2015-16, he joined de Appel Curatorial Program in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, where he co-curated a project titled 'You Must Make Your Death Public'. <https://aseptopan.com/>

Ellya Gunawan ASSISTANT CURATOR

Ellya Gunawan is an emerging art practitioner and curator based in Sydney who is dedicated to exploring the challenges and opportunities of contemporary art and culture in Australia. Born in Indonesia and with Indonesian-Chinese heritage, her work focuses on rethinking identity, cultural heritage and one's place in the contemporary visual culture of southeast Asia. Ellya has a Bachelor of Visual Arts from Sydney College of the Arts and recently completed her postgraduate studies in curating and cultural leadership at the University of New South Wales. With her newfound knowledge and skills, Ellya is eager to take on leadership roles and collaborate with artists and other professionals to create compelling and thought-provoking exhibitions that engage and inspire audiences.

16albermarle Project Space COORDINATION & GALLERY

Established in October 2019 by Australian art adviser/collector/curator John Cruthers, 16albermarle presents contemporary southeast Asian in an intimate space in inner-city Sydney. Our aim is to connect Australian audiences to southeast Asia through art and encourage their deeper engagement with the countries of the region. Alongside this broad cultural agenda, we also promote the artists showing here and sell the artworks we exhibit to return funds to the artists, most of whom live from the sale of their work. As such, 16albermarle is a semi-commercial space.

We have staged 13 exhibitions to date, with artists and artworks from Indonesia, Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia, the Philippines and Singapore. The focus is on younger and mid-career artists with established practices and reputations in their home countries whose work has not been seen in Australia. Exhibitions are accompanied by public programs, catalogues and educational materials for HSC and IB students. School visits are encouraged. Artworks are available to view on our website and all catalogues can be downloaded for free.

Published in association with the exhibition

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Ipeh Nur & Enka Komariah

15 April - 20 May 2023

16albermarle Project Space

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Education materials	Lauren Barlow
Logistics	Vindi Tri Nurhayati
Volunteer	Amber Wan Ling
Public programs	Simonne Goran



Image: Ipeh Nur, artist works on *Naskah: Perjalanan (The Journey)* 2022

GHOSTS FROM THE PAST

Ipeh Nur & Enka Komariah

15 April - 20 May 2023

16 Albermarle Street Newtown NSW 2042 Australia
Thu - Sat, 11 am - 5 pm, or by appointment.
16albermarle.com

