

## INDO ART LINK | AUGUST 2019

### *Highlights from John Cruthers* **Australia Indonesia Art Forum Tour** July 2019

#### PART 1: THE TOUR

On Sunday 21 July 2019 a group of 20 Australians boarded a bus in downtown Jakarta to begin an intensive familiarisation tour of the Indonesian artworld. One week, a thousand kilometres and six cities later when the tour finished in Jogjakarta, they were tired but elated by the art they had seen, the artists, curators, gallerists and collectors they'd met and the insights they'd gained into one of the world's liveliest and most diverse contemporary art scenes. (Scroll down to Part 2 to read the Q&A responses from participants!)

The tour was the initiative of Konfir Kabo, Indonesian born but resident in Melbourne and a passionate advocate for Indonesian art. Through the recently formed Australia Indonesia Art Forum, his mission is to bring the two countries he loves closer together through art. The annual bus tour, first staged in 2018, is an opportunity for a small group of Australian visual art specialists and collectors to connect with Indonesian art. Through his contacts and experience, participants gain access to private museums and collections, commercial galleries, art collectives, artists' studios and more across the length of Java. Opportunities abound for learning, but also for exchanges, information sharing and ongoing collaborations between educational institutions, galleries, artist collectives, curators, collectors and individual artists.

The 20 people on the bus included commercial gallerists, higher degree students, academics and curators with close ties to art schools and university art museums, heads of art organisations and events, artists and a core of collectors. They came from Sydney, Melbourne, Perth and Canberra.



*Our group viewing the all-woman exhibition Therefore I am..., Can's Gallery, Jakarta.*

The first day was a full-on tour of Jakarta, beginning with a visit to the office/gallery of visionary collector Wiyu Wahono and ending at the Akili Private Museum, followed by dinner with owner Rudi Akili, collection curator Alia Swastika, legendary collector Ibu Melani Setiawan, Indonesia's most senior art commentator Carla Bianpoen and representatives from the Indonesian government's agency for creative economy, Bekraf, and the Victorian state government.

It's fair to say many in the party were astonished by scientist cum collector Wiyu Wahono. Chinese Indonesian, German educated and with a PhD in plastics, Wiyu applies an intellectual and analytical approach to the task of representing his era through the contemporary art which has defined it. His collecting period starts with the birth of the digital age in 1989 and follows on to explore issues of globalisation, mass migration and technology as expressed through art – video art, light art, sound art, data art, bio art and more. Considered, articulate and passionate, Wiyu has been described by Dr Gene Sherman as one of region's top five collectors.



*Left: Two collectors, Wiyu Wahono and Konfir Kabo, Jakarta, Right: Wiyu Wahono speaks about his collecting philosophy, Jakarta.*

Another first day highlight was the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Nusantara (Museum MACAN), a private museum built by collector Haryanto Adikoesoemo. While the museum houses Harianto's collection of 800 international and Indonesian artworks, his plans for it are much more ambitious. It is the first art museum in Indonesia to operate professionally using international standards ranging from climate control and lighting through to conservation, registration, exhibition and display, publications, public programs and education. In scale and ambition it is similar to the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia.

MACAN's director Aaron Seeto was formerly director of Gallery 4A in Sydney and senior curator of the Asia Pacific Triennale at QAGOMA. Aaron kindly came in on his day off to walk our group through the current exhibition, *Dunia Dalam Berita*, a survey of 10 key artists and collectives of the period leading up to and following Reformasi in 1998, including FX Harsono, Mella Jaarsma, Heri Dono, I GAK Murniasih, Tisna Sanjaya and collective Taring Padi. The fourth major exhibition MACAN has staged in its two years of operation, it was a serious and well researched presentation focusing on the role of art in a key period of recent Indonesian history. We could not have had a better primer for the art which was to come as our tour unfolded.



Left: Museum MACAN director Aaron Seeto and artist Tisna Sanjaya in front of Tisna's installation in the exhibition *Dunia Dalam Berita*, Right: Artwork by Mella Jaarsma from the same exhibition, Museum MACAN, Jakarta.

Monday saw a 5.45am start for the drive to Bandung, location of one of Indonesia's premier art schools, Institut Teknologi Bandung or ITB, whose graduate artists such as Tromarama, Syaiful Garibaldi, Aliansyah Caniago, Zico Albaiquni, Octora and Bagus Pandega are making their mark nationally and internationally. We visited three locations built by senior artist Soenaryo – his breath-taking stone garden Wot Batu, the commercial gallery Bale Projects and the museum and exhibition space Selasar Soenaryo. A great contributor to Bandung art, the artist spent several hours with us. Later we visited Lawangwangi Creative Space, an artspace created by Dr Andonowati. We previewed impressive new photography by Jim Allen Abel and in the storeroom a selection of early etchings by leading Bandung artist and teacher Tisna Sanjaya.



Left and Centre: A new photograph and installation by Jim Allen Abel, Lawangwangi Creative Space, Bandung, Right: A young artist talks us through her painting, Bandung.

The day's final event was a presentation to our group of new works by 20 young Bandung artists. Each spoke for two to three minutes, after which we met them individually and discussed their work. Artists included sculptor Maharani Mancanagara, ceramicist Argya Dhyaksa, photographer Meicy Sitorus and filmmaker Vincent Rumahloine.

The following day was another early start, heading to regional city Cilacap to visit the Rumah Putih (White House) Private Collection, assembled by Benny Santoso Halim. With a focus on historical works it is a carefully selected collection featuring many textbook examples of Indonesian modernism by artists such as Mochtar Apin.



*Left: The tour group in front of a huge painting by Tisna Sanjaya, Rumah Putih (White House) private collection, Cilacap, Right: On the bus with the collectors from the Rumah Putih (White House) private collection, Cilacap.*

Next stop was Yogyakarta and the Langgeng Foundation. We arrived well after dark to view Salon – a national survey of young artists curated by Citra Pratiwi – and a solo exhibition of articulated wood sculptures by Dedy Shofianto. After dinner, two artists recently commissioned by Konfir presented and spoke to their work. Painter Taufik Ermas had extended his predominantly wall based practice into a large sculptural construction, while muralist Dias Prabu unrolled a series of eight stunning batiks made using traditional canting techniques to create swarming fields of imagery based on Javanese culture.



*Left: Ceramicist Dyah Retno Fitriani, one of the artists in the Salon exhibition at Langgeng Foundation, Yogyakarta, Centre: A mechanised wooden Garuda by Dedy Shofianto, Langgeng Foundation, Yogyakarta, Right: It was a happy bus! This bus, with two drivers, was our home for six days.*

Sunrise on Wednesday morning revealed the bustling city of Yogyakarta, busy but relatively under-developed, and with kampung – traditional villages with paddy fields etc – within the city's bounding ring road. Known as a 'city of artists', it is home to Institut Seni Indonesia (ISI), Indonesia's other leading art school

and a key source of the Jogja art movement, whose mix of pop and politics took Indonesian art to global prominence in the early 2000s. Healthy competition prevails between ITB and ISI, and their graduates, for the mantle of producing the most interesting contemporary art, with Bandung and ITB slightly ahead in recent years.



*Left: Artists Hendro Wiyanto and Ugo Untoro at MDTL (Museum dan Tanah Liat), Jogja, Right: Collector Melani Setiawan with artist Hartanto at his solo exhibition at MDTL (Museum dan Tanah Liat).*

Wednesday morning saw visits to the studios of two senior artists, the painters Dedy Sufriadi and Ugo Untoro. We continued with the painter Hartanto at Museum Dan Tanah Liat (MDTL), Erizal As at Gajah Gallery and the group exhibition POST-TRUTH In Material #2 at Ruang Dalam Art House. At Sarang Artspace we encountered Australian accents – five Masters students from the Victorian College of the Arts, Melbourne University on a residency program were opening their exhibition. Three exhibition openings at Sangkring Artspace were followed by the Sakato Art Community’s annual exhibition BAKABA, with its new exhibition name BEBAS.



*Right: Tour participants Allan Cooley and Stephen Shaul at the Erizal As exhibition, Gallery Gajah, Yogyakarta, Centre: An installation in the exhibition Ranah/Tanah by Restu Ratnaningtyas, Cemeti, Yogyakarta, Right: Surrounded by his works, it was hard not to be overwhelmed by the creativity of sculptor Entang Wiharso.*

We finished the day at Cemeti Art House. Since its founding by artist couple Mella Jaarsma and Nindityo Adipurnomo in the 1980s, Cemeti has been a mainstay of the art scene in Jogja, running residencies, exchanges and an ongoing exhibition program. Cemeti is notable for the encouragement it offers artists to experiment and extend their practice, demonstrated in the current exhibition by Restu Ratnaningtyas, which included watercolour, painting, sculpture, installation and video. Called Ranah/Tanah, roughly Land/Domain,

it paralleled personal challenges the artist faced as she and her child moved from home to home, with larger social dislocation arising from the development of the new Yogyakarta International Airport, which displaced hundreds of people from their homes and land.

On our second day in Jogja the stiff pace continued. After studio visits with leading artists Entang Wiharso and Nasirun, we visited collectives MES56 and Acehouse, followed by the Redbase Foundation. At MES56 co-founder Anang Saptoto outlined the collective's focus on photography used for social purposes, while students from a nearby high school used a camera obscura to make images they then printed in the (now quite rare) analogue darkroom.

At 3pm came the moment us old hands had been waiting for – the preview of Art Jog. Now in its 12th year, Art Jog is an open call, curated exhibition held annually in the grandly titled Yogyakarta National Museum – actually an artspace – and is the best single exhibition to see recent contemporary art from Indonesia and gauge the health of the local scene. Although billed as an art fair, Art Jog is closer to a biennale in feel, with no stands and few gallerists or dealers in sight, and a range of satellite events.

Art Jog varies from year to year, but this year it was excellent, notable for a shift towards more complex and installation-based works. Highlights among the 39 Indonesian and international artists were installations – often occupying full rooms - by Bagus Pandega, Fika Ria Santika, Handiwirman Saputra, Etza Meisyara, Elia Nurvista and Soenaryo. It was interesting to see Australian artist Tim Woodward, a Jogja veteran, whose 'Melbourne cool' approach sat well in the show. As usual Art Jog offered lots of opportunities to meet artists and discuss their work.

On Friday the bus headed for to regional city Solo to visit the Tumurun Private Museum. Started less than three years ago by young couple Iwan Lukminto and his wife Mira Setiady, it presents a compelling picture of Indonesian art and is, as they say in the Michelin Guide, worth a detour. The ground floor contains major works by key contemporary practitioners – Eddie Susanto, Heri Dono, Entang Wiharso, Handiwirman Saputra, Eko Nugruho, Melati Suryodarmo, Ninditya Adipurnomo, often with multiple works for each artist. These are mixed younger artists – Aditya Novali, Etza Meisyara, Eldwin Pradipta – and a smattering of works by key regional artists such as Sopheap Pich and Geraldine Javier.



*Left: A breath-taking installation by Fika Ria Santika at Art Jog 2019, Right: Etza Meisyara with her father Tisna Sanjaya in her installation at Art Jog 2019.*



*Left: Tour participants Jo Holder, Jill Morgan, Eric Moloney, the artist, Phillip Boulten, Damien Minton on a studio visit with winner of a young artist award at Art Jog 2019, artist Enka Kormariah, and Right: Enka's award winning work, Art Jog 2019.*

The focus upstairs is on historical work – some modernism but a stronger group of earlier works, including an impressive selection by European artists working in Indonesia in the early 20th century. Overall Tumurun is a remarkable achievement in such a short period and demonstrates the importance of a clear collecting rationale, a focus on quality and a willingness to pay for the best works.



*Left: Adrien-Jean Le Mayeur, Belgian, In the garden, Sanur, Tumurun Private Museum, Solo, Right: Dr Oei showing our group through the OHD Museum, Magelang.*

Our final stop was the OHD Museum in Magelang. Indonesia's oldest private museum, it has been built by collector and enthusiast Dr Oei Hong Djien (OHD) since the 1970s and includes over 2,000 artworks displayed over four buildings/museums. After hosting a lunch for us, Dr Oei walked us through rooms filled with works by the masters of Indonesian modern art – Affandi, Sudjojono, Hendra Gunawan, Lee Man Fong, Sudarso and others. Although not as numerous as the modernists, he has strong holdings of living artists such as Heri Dono, Entang Wiharso, Dadang Christanto, Nyoman Masriadi and Eko Nugroho. His enthusiasm is infectious and he remains one of the great advocates for Indonesian art.



*Happy campers on the Indo art bus with Dr Oei from the OHD Museum, Magelang*

The tour's finale was a dinner hosted by the Australia Indonesia Art Forum in Jogja. Guests of honour were the participants from our bus trip and a similar tour run by the Art Gallery of NSW for its foundation members. We were joined by about 100 local artists, curators, gallerists, collectors and local dignitaries. Speeches by Resika Tikoalu, Dr Matthew Cox (Art Gallery of New South Wales), collector Melani Setiawan and yours truly (on behalf of the bus tourists) outlined the historical relationship between the two countries through art – back to the ARX events in the 1980s - and suggested ways it could be strengthened to capitalise on the burgeoning Australian interest in Indonesian art. These included through annual residency and student exchange programs, museum and commercial exhibitions, publications and events such as the annual bus tour.

We finished the night, and the trip, on a high. And even after we straggled back to Australia, that high has persisted in our WhatsApp group, through which we continue to swap stories, photos and information about Indonesian art. I have a feeling that quite a few of our party will be back on the bus next year.



## PART 2: RESPONSES

### **Did you find the trip valuable and if so why?**

**JULIAN GODDARD:** Yes – the introduction to artists, collectors and curators was exceptional. If you had to organise this on your own, it would take months and probably not happen. Gaining access to some of the private collections was a highlight.

Julian Goddard is a professor in the College of Design and Social Context, RMIT University, Melbourne

**JO HOLDER:** Invaluable. The trip combined the knowledge and experience of so many experts and insiders. The programme combination of studios and collectors, artists and patrons offered a unique insight that would be inaccessible to the solo visitor. The collectors were noticeably un-hegemonic compared to the distorted influence a handful of collectors (or patrons as some call themselves) have over public institutions and public funding. (Compare for instance the OHD collection to Kaldor's leverage of the public purse.) Most collectors had reflected deeply on why they collect and the thematic directions of the collection.

Jo Holder is director of The Cross Art Projects, Sydney

**ANTONIA SYME:** I found the trip very stimulating and was impressed with the diversity of art offerings we were shown. We were extremely privileged to have access to so many important and diverse collections. The collectors were generous with their hospitality and their time. It was so good of them to share their passions with us. Similarly the artists and art collectives were generous in engaging with us. It was exciting to see such energy and engagement in contemporary art across Java. The art scene appears very vibrant.

Antonia Syme is director of the Australian Tapestry Workshop, Melbourne

**DAMIEN MINTON:** For a number of years I have heard of the energy and enthusiasm of Art Jog, so I knew this was something to experience. The trip provided a sketch of the depth and commitment of the contemporary art scene in Indonesia, something that Australian artists, collectors and curators should be a lot more receptive to and reciprocal in engaging with.

Damien Minton has directed commercial galleries in Newcastle and Sydney

**GREG DOYLE:** The trip was valuable to me for several reasons. It introduced me to several collectors and artists that I may not otherwise have met. It also introduced me to a diverse and interesting group of Australian enthusiasts for Asian art. However, it is most valuable as it allowed me to participate in a widening of what have historically been quite narrow connections between the Australian and Indonesian art scenes. Privately organised trips like these are extremely important because they smash the established Institutional filters through which Indonesian art is frequently made visible to Australians.

Greg Doyle is a PhD candidate in the School of Languages and Cultures, University of Sydney, specialising in Indonesian contemporary art.

**JOHN BARRETT-LENNARD:** My experience of the July trip was positive and I found much that was engaging and very interesting.... The trip gave me an overview of current, contemporary art across three major centres in Java, and some exposure to historical 19th and 20th century Indonesian art, including during the Dutch colonial period. That historical background was helpful, in getting a sense of the complex mix of traditional, colonial and contemporary outside influences that appears to be present in current Indonesian art.

John Barrett-Lennard is an independent curator and critic and Adjunct Associate Professor, University of Western Australia

## **Which events, activities and/or artists did you find most interesting?**

JO HOLDER: It opened and closed with a bang. Wiyu Wahono's collection was an invigorating introduction – a modest space but impeccably well-thought through and a quite unique rationale. Art Jog was always going to be the spectacular high point. In between it was also about getting a 'feel' for the cultural contexts in the cities, the art structure and listening carefully to the artists' voices. The presentation by the young artists in Bandung was an outstanding innovation. Generally the confidence and cohesion reflected the vibrancy of the two art schools (ITB and ISI).

JULIAN GODDARD: I found it all interesting. I guess the access to private collections and museums was exceptional. The generosity of these people was impressive. I don't have a preference for any one in particular. Soenaryo's garden was a great surprise.

DAMIEN MINTON: Every visit was interesting. It was a relief to visit small humble artist studios after some of the more opulent private museums and collections. The scale of the private museums open to the public was really impressive. Personally the artists I valued meeting were the contemporary artist bringing new life to the traditional form of batik, Dias Prabu, as well as the emerging artist award winner at Art Jog, Enka Komariah.

JILL MORGAN: As a board member of the Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria and the former CEO of Multicultural Arts Victoria I know intimately the power of the arts to create and stimulate positive change. Given the current changing political climate in Indonesia there are several artists whose works I believe are critically important, challenging and courageous voices that address social and political issues that affect our/their community. These include Tisna Sanjaya, FX Harsano, Mella Jaarsma and Citra Sasmita. I also enjoyed seeing the works and visiting the studios of new and emerging artists including Agung Santosa, Enka Komariah, Dias Prabu, Soni Irawan, Etza Meisyara (daughter of Tisna Sanjaya) and Dedy Shofianto. Jill Morgan AM is a former CEO of Multicultural Arts Victoria and a board member of the Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria.

GREG DOYLE: While every event was special in its own way I particularly appreciated the visits to White House and Tumurun museums, where there was a chance to see important examples of Indonesian Modern Art. While a lot of attention is given to contemporary art, there remains a lot of work to be done in introducing Australia to earlier periods in Indonesian art.

JOHN BARRETT-LENNARD: Places like the White House and the OHD space were interesting, both for some of their content, and for what they suggested about the overall collecting scene in Indonesia, but were not richly informative or engaging for me.

It appears that Indonesia is a long way from establishing a true national art museum or even regional public museums which is unfortunate, but apparently very unlikely to change. MACAN, the Tumurun 'Museum' and Akili 'Museum' of Arts are admirable, and did provide a welcome and interesting sense of 20th and 21st century art in Indonesia—one that I found very valuable. I will be very interested to see whether they can survive beyond the life of their founders and sustained over time. Clearly MACAN seems headed towards that larger role, and that's great.

## **What were your overall impressions of the Indonesian art scene?**

JO HOLDER: Lively and collaborative. The stressing of 'working together' is a unique structuring point.

GREG DOYLE: The Indonesian art scene is dynamic and pluralistic. It is also highly social and extremely welcoming of professionals and non-professionals alike. It operates at a number of different levels and in the absence of state funding it demonstrates a great deal of creativity in engaging the broader public.

DAMIEN MINTON: I was really energised by the strong independent spirit of the artists - most have an international outlook and a do-it-yourself determination. They are also willing to work in collectives, strength in numbers and purpose.

JILL MORGAN: The Indonesian arts scene is very vibrant and stimulating. The post Suharto period has seen the flourishing of the contemporary art scene – The artists are engaged in global issues: racism, democracy, the environment, multifaith, gender, sexuality and vitally importantly they reflect on the issues surrounding how Indonesia has evolved and is evolving as a country and its connection to the world.

JULIAN GODDARD: It is deeply interesting for its close engagement with Indonesian political culture. Given that, I wonder where it might go over the next 10 years as identity politics fades. I hope there is not another big political upset that seems to have structured the Indonesian art world – but I expect the rise of fundamentalism may well become the next big issue, if it isn't already. This will be hard for artists to confront but given the past, Indonesian artists don't seem to mind tackling difficult issues.

JOHN BARRETT-LENNARD: My overall sense was of a highly active and dynamic group of artists and collectors who were working hard and in engaging ways to build a presence for Indonesian art and to engage their audiences. Part of this may be just sheer scale, in a country with ten times the population of Australia. Part may be a greater integration of visual arts and culture within the overall society and culture within Indonesia? And, part may be influenced by a lack of public patronage networks (ie., equivalents to the Australia Council and state funding bodies), with a greater reliance on small artists' collectives, etc., than is common here?

### **How does contemporary Indonesian art compare to Australian art?**

DAMIEN MINTON: (It) makes the Australian contemporary art scene seem really flabby and suffocating, self-content, reliant on traditional self referential bourgeois cultural largesse and petty fighting over stagnant government funding.

JILL MORGAN: The key comparison that stands out for me is the artists collectives and the lack of reliance on government funding in Indonesia vs Australia. Despite the lack of support from the government, Indonesia is brimming with independent art spaces and amazing skilful and creative contemporary artists – SURVIVE!Garage, Ruang MES56, HONF, Cemeti, Redbase Foundation, Taring Padi, Ace House Collective, Via Via, etc.

JULIAN GODDARD: I find the Indonesian scene far more engaged – a bit like the 1970s/80s in the Australian art scene. From Australian eyes the Indonesian art scene is dynamic and highly articulated to social issues, unlike the Australian art scene.

JO HOLDER: The Indo art scene is very much more critically aware, cosmopolitan and historically informed than the insularity of most Australian (east coast) art. Perhaps the biggest area of similarity is with the developing First Nations contemporary art scene in Oz which is still emerging and yet to find full voice. This voice will be needed to advocate, persuade and curate in Southeast Asia.

GREG DOYLE: That depends on what kind of art you are looking at. Some Indonesian art is very similar to Australian or international contemporary art. However, a great deal more Indonesian art is unique in its own way. There is perhaps a wider range of artistic practices and thematic interests being pursued in Indonesia than Australia and a greater emphasis on technical skill for many artists. However, I think institutional Australian art (or more correctly international art theory) is starting to influence sections of the Indonesian art scene which will gradually see an alignment of themes and aesthetics between Australia and Indonesia.

JOHN BARRETT-LENNARD: I don't see much comparison between what I saw in Indonesia and contemporary Australian art. There were clear formal differences—we saw much more painting than a similar tour might reveal here—and differences of content, with references to traditional iconography and beliefs, as well elements of street art and popular culture that are not as prevalent here. From my Australian perspective much of the new art I saw seemed naïve or unresolved, even imitative, but that wasn't particularly unexpected (nor was it completely unparalleled to my response to a good part of what I see here). I can take a more positive spin on this, and see much that was locally specific, and not heavily influenced by extra national trends. (Once again, a language barrier, few opportunities for direct exposure to work from elsewhere, and the relative lack of access to international publications, etc., may all serve to isolate—for both good and not so good—Indonesian art and artists.) From what I saw the scene is healthy and vibrant, if particular and somewhat, to the outside world, insular.

### **Would you like to see more Indonesian art shown in Australia, and if so, how could it happen?**

GREG DOYLE: Yes. I think there is still a place for Indonesian-specific shows however it is more likely that we will see individual Indonesian artists being incorporated with artists from other countries in thematic shows around issues thought to be of contemporary importance. I believe that the commercial market is far more likely to represent, preserve and develop a specifically Indonesian art than our art institutions are.

JO HOLDER: The slow burn introduced by Konfir Kabo in association with his RMIT and VCA allies is a very impressive model. Perhaps the VCA benefactors could also stretch to funding 'incoming' scholarships for Indo artists to work/study/exhibit in Melbourne. Definitely what happens needs to be reciprocal and to avoid the 'export' mentality of Austrade/Asialink which is widely criticised. Sydney as we know is pretty much a write off in the art school department but perhaps what could work is a critical mass approach to exhibitions ie a season of small residencies/exhibitions. This is possibly a way to be effective in Sydney.

ANTONIA SYME: Given Indonesia is our closest neighbour it makes sense for state and national galleries to exhibit more Indonesian/south east Asian art along the lines of the APT and the current NGA Indonesian exhibition. Creative exchanges such as those happening between RMIT and the VCA and Indonesian artists are to be applauded. Artists with studios in Indonesia, such as Sally Smart, also help promote important creative exchanges and relationship building.

DAMIEN MINTON: On all levels from ARI exchange programs, commercial dealers being more in tune, and cultural public institutions looking beyond their own preconceptions on what is contemporary art, having the confidence to be more pluralistic in presenting to the Australian public what is going on, not dictated by their own agendas.

JOHN BARRETT-LENNARD: I would like to see more art from Indonesia and SE Asia more widely in Australia. We have a very narrow experience of these countries, largely as nearby and manageably exotic tourist destinations, or which we sell raw resources to, but which are very distant in broader terms by virtue of cultural, political and linguistic differences. Australians look at Indonesia and see, very, very largely, only difference and the foreign; and we remain much closer to other western societies. If we see more Indonesian

art here it needs to be presented in ways that break barriers of the exotic or ethnographic — ways in which it can be revealing and comparable rather than esoteric and foreign. I haven't seen the recent NGA show or an APT since 2009, so I'm uncertain how it is being presented elsewhere in Australia but it is wholly invisible in WA, and I don't see any institution (or private collector or foundation) that seems likely to change that in the next decade or more. Konfir's efforts in Melbourne and your own in Sydney are great but they have had no impact anywhere off the east coast.

JILL MORGAN: If there was greater awareness of the depth and breadth of talent that exists in Indonesia, our nearest neighbour, we might see more Indonesian art in Australia. We have had heaps of opportunities, yet this year's exhibition at the NGA is the first ever of "contemporary" Indonesian art for our premier national visual arts gallery.

Indonesia ranks as one of the most populous countries in the world and unites many different ethnicities, languages, religions and cultural influences. Australia has a huge Indonesian and Asian diaspora. Unfortunately, curation of art in Australian galleries largely comes from a western or European aesthetic and perspective. There is extraordinary Asian and Indonesian contemporary art to be discovered, enjoyed and celebrated, as well as cross cultural collaborations with our nearest neighbour to be had. It is essential to present challenging work, provide insights into contemporary Indonesia and provide opportunities for career pathways, as we build cultural diplomacy through arts and culture with our nearest neighbour. With a high percentage of the Indonesian population being Muslim it is also important to connect in meaningful ways. Independent galleries can be a platform for strengthening arts networks between contemporary independent artists across the Asian region, building connections and establishing collaborative ongoing relationships for both the Australian and the Asian artists. We can't wait for Australia's national or state art galleries that move at such a glacial pace to invigorate Australia's arts landscape with contemporary art from Indonesia and Asia - we just have to use our sphere of influence to create the change now!

### **How was the experience of being on the bus for six days?**

JILL MORGAN: The Indonesian art trip was a unique experience. People who mostly did not know each other were thrown on a bus to travel around Java for six days. It could have been fractious, but it was not – it was in fact quite the opposite. The bus became a creative and supportive space where we could learn about each other and from each other. Being on this trip was like being part of a tribe - sharing a passion of contemporary Indonesian art and making strong connections. We are all richer for the experience, we got to meet our like-minded tribe plus we saw some incredible and inspiring Indonesian art. We met many passionate private collectors and some extraordinary artists both emerging and established. It made the torture of sitting on bus for hours well worth it. Would I do it again – most definitely!

GREG DOYLE: I was pleasantly surprised how social and welcoming the entire group was. I think a lot of people established lasting friendships over the course of the trip and the level of discourse and exchange of ideas around art more generally and Indonesian art in particular was both fun and very stimulating. Everybody demonstrated an enthusiasm for learning and had a very open mind about what Indonesian art had to offer. I found that all participants brought a great generosity of spirit to the whole endeavour.

JO HOLDER: Size was good. Mix of people from different cities (Melbourne/Sydney/Canberra/Perth) was excellent, knowledge and with varied experience that helped build a portrait. It was a great luxury having all the arrangements made for you. Thanks again to all the creative minds who put it together.

ANTONIA SYME: I found the fellow bus travellers very interesting and from fascinating backgrounds, and everyone shared a passionate interest in contemporary art and a keenness to learn more about the exciting art practices of our nearest neighbour. We packed such a lot in, in a very short space of time. It was fun

spending time with old and new friends on our bus trip - which enabled us to see quite a bit of the beautiful Java countryside.

DAMIEN MINTON: I found it exhilarating, I was up for every opportunity to watch, look, engage. Maybe a few talks about the nature of how the Indonesian contemporary scene was arrived at would have been good, like the modernist struggle between art schools in Bandung and Jogjakarta.

JOHN BARRETT-LENNARD: The bus trip was both interesting and grim. I actually valued seeing more of the countryside than we would have if we'd flown from Jakarta to Jogja, but it was a long day from Bandung to Jogja. There were certainly times in Jogja when we were getting on and off the bus every hour, which was tiring, and I felt some consolidation would have helped — seeing less but at greater depth. The dynamic on the bus was interesting, with pretty clear division between where the men and women clustered, and with the real Indo experts largely at the front.