

ELECTRON SPECTRAL

SOLO EXHIBITION BY
SYAGINI RATNA
WULAN

30 APRIL 2016
ROH PROJECTS

OMEGA

Dear Ms Cagi,

ROH is very happy to show your exhibition, Spectral Fiction, here in our space. It has been a long time coming where we began talking about Lacan and Wittgenstein in relation to aesthetics and art.

Thank you for being a friend during good times and bad, and for inspiring us with your work and creative ways of thinking. I hope that through our simple conversations about things around us, and jokes about our friends, that we have begun to organically develop fresh ideas together. From Family and Friends, to Effervescence, and to Sens, it is my hope that you have finally discovered more comprehensively a deeper understanding of which directions you want to go with your artistic practice.

A message you've shared to me:

"Your attitude is like a box of crayons that color your world. Constantly color your picture gray, and your picture will always be bleak. Try adding some bright colors to the picture by including humor, and your picture begins to lighten up."

-Allen Klein

Enjoy the Show!

LAKSAMANA TIRTADJI

CHROMATIC SPECTRES

"God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light."

(Genesis, 1:3)

In the beginning there was pitch black and darkness. Only then did light fall upon the earth, and colors were birthed into existence. We then began to name them: red, blue, orange, and yellow... We are enchanted by the magic of world's colors. We give meaning to light and colors with different interpretations, frozen them into words. Color does not exist without light. Religious scripts and human theories—physics, aesthetics, psychology, sociology, semiotics, philosophy, literature, etc.—have discussed the notion of light and color for centuries. Yet our perplexity towards the two concepts remains perpetuated.

The historian Robert Finlay considers that in the modern discourse, the debate regarding color and light is still rooted in the difference between the two theoretical constructs:¹ The first is a standpoint that considers our world's material forms as fundamentally devoid of color: Color is not an inherent property within any objects, but rather an illusion resulted from perceptual reactions of human sight through emissions of light. While the second is a standpoint that color is a logical consequence of the colorful features of material world itself. The first construct was pushed forth by the discovery of visible light spectrums by Isaac Newton. Newton observed how a ray of sunlight that falls on a prism results in a diffraction and seven-color spectrum. The sun's white light is thus not a singular entity; roses are not red, and blue is not the color of sky and ocean Newton's optical theory was controversial and disrupted all pre-existing symbolic connotations of lights and colorful features of earth. Those who used to deeply admire 'the rainbow', a poetic and aesthetic object for writers and painters were disheartened because Newton disparages its magic and wonder as bare prismatic phenomena.

¹ On the difference between the two schools of thought, I refer to Robert Finlay, Weaving the Rainbow: Visions of Color in World History, *Journal of World History* (December 2007), p. 387.

The latter school of thought is more inclined towards the color theory of J.W. von Goethe who considered that Newtonian theory is flawed in its competence to define the physiological nature of color. A century after Newton's discovery, Goethe proposed new conclusions that color are resultant of a dynamic reciprocal effect between lightness and darkness. Color is something material, and exists in those things that are either exposed by, or sheltered from the light. Through experiments that centered upon the phenomenon of 'after images', shadows and reflections of light upon objects, he considered Newtonian theory as one which burdens the way the world sees within the scope of scientific authority which eliminated "... color from human realities."² Goethe's color theory attempts to reinstate color as a part of dynamic nature and human life.

In the following periods, some color theorists who attempt to bridge the gap between the Newtonian and Goethian schools attempted to emphasize the context of environments in which colors exist. Finlay calls this new school as the 'ecological optics', a perspective that attempts to connect the functioning system of optical nerves and cognitive faculties of living organisms (humans, animals, insects, etc.) and specific realities whereby color and light appear in particular moments.³ Resonating with such a theory, the painter Paul Cezanne once said that colors are nothing but "... the place where our brain and the universe meet."⁴ In his paintings, Cezanne attempts to capture the visual impact coming from the shifts of angles of the sunlight on objects. For him, the colorful features of objects, such as the beach for example, change at every instance. To capture such changes, he has to paint the colors in layers directly on the canvas, rather than mixing them on a palette.

Aside from some other inventions in physiological optics that attempt to introduce trichromatic theories (RGB, red-green-blue), James C. Maxwell's electromagnetic theories in the 19th century also provide vital contributions to scientific discourse about color and light. As a natural phenomenon, light is an electromagnetic wave that cannot be completely captured due to limitations of human perception. Color may only be captured when light (as electromagnetic radiation), within a certain wavelength, react to human optical nerves. According to this scientific understanding, we can see, for example, a red color because our eyes sense a range of light wavelengths between 620-750 nm, whereas for purple between 380-450 nm. It is the electromagnetic wave vibrations that intensify effects towards the retina so that certain colors appear.

²Ibid., hal. 386.

³Finlay, op.cit., hal. 387.

⁴Cezanne quoted by Merleau-Ponty (1964), see Evan Thompson, *Colour Vision, A Study in Cognitive Science and the Philosophy of Science*, London: Routledge, 1995, hal. 215.

Colors are also ‘invented’ and classified—some people even patent certain type of paints with their names. Colors are written, and made identical to certain rigid understandings. We categorize ‘bright’ (such as yellow and pink) as ‘pop’ colors, for example, ‘pastel’ as ‘feminine’ colors, and ‘dark’ as ‘elegant’ or colors associated with ‘horror’, and so on and so forth. But just as the invention of words and meanings in language, any naming and associations of colors are arbitrary in nature. Just as languages are varied, color associations are also not universal. In its usage, associations towards certain colors are never fixed; always changing, in constant play and twist, that it is always free from static meanings. Wittgenstein in his last work, *Remarks on Colour*, suggested that our logic of perceptions of color only leaves “... an inability to bring the concepts into some kind of order. We stand there like the ox in front of a newly-painted stall door.”⁵

In the solo exhibition of Syagini Ratna Wulan, a.k.a Cagi, *Spectral Fiction*, must be understood, firstly, as a project about light and color. This is indeed not a new topic—some may consider it ‘basic’—in contemporary art discourse. Even though the artist feels that she is talking about basic things, she is not concerned about such a claim.

Spectral Fiction is composed of three parts based on its material. The first component takes the form of what may be considered as “painting”, considering the paint and canvas as its primary material. Having formally trained not as a painter, Cagi is not alien to the complexities of painting. Canvas and paint is to her nothing but a material that is chosen depending on their correlation to the core ideas. Within her practice, Cagi does not always have to do ‘painting’ if she feels that her ideas are more appropriately executed through other mediums.

Then why does Cagi ‘paint’ on this occasion? Light and color are fundamental issues—not just elements—in painting. We are aware of how Western painting history can always be mapped as a history (of representation) of light and color. Light symbolizes the sacral in the Pre-Renaissance period; but for Caravaggio or Rembrandt light plays a more important role in determining light and darkness (the *chiaroscuro*) of an object. Impressionism and post-impressionism is clearly about painting that deals with empiric light, while colors in Frank Stella’s minimalist works are used to emphasize the existence of industrial paint, etc. We are also very familiar with Affandi as an Indonesian painter who removes illusions of reality on the canvas through the utilization of oil paint tubes as a replacement for the brush, as if directly stating that: this is merely “color (paint) on canvas”.

⁵ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on Colour*, G.E.M Anscombe (ed.), Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977, p. 16e.

In painting discourse, the term colorist may be used to describe artists (normally painters) who are obsessed by the utilization and manipulation of paint and colors. Even though Cagi's canvas works emphasizes the various colors of paint, I would not voluntarily consider her as a colorist, especially if the term only refers to artists who use colors symbolically. In Spectral Fiction, Cagi utilizes colors that point toward the existence of color itself, not in a formalistic consideration that emphasize color as color, but rather, as an optic phenomenon present on the canvas, illuminated by light within an exhibition space.

Cagi's initial reference comes from colors taken from digital references—photographs in social media or Internet browsers, on gadgets or the computer. Despite the fact that she draws reference from digital devices, Cagi never composes her colors with any image-processing software. From social media or the Internet browser she only studies colors of objects in an almost random manner. At times she may only stare at photos of plants, bacteria, single-cell organisms, details from landscapes, house interiors etc.—any colorful objects that contain certain spectrums which are then enlarged. Her choice of objects tends to be spontaneous, and taken upon certain moments as she enjoys the visuality of digital screens.

Cagi is fully aware that colors of objects on the digital screen have a risk of being manipulative in nature, full of biases and distortions—objects that are ugly may seem beautiful, and vice versa. But the awareness on these influences or power of the technological forces allows her works to contain different leitmotifs. These works are resultant from certain ecology of new colors and lights: 'optical ecology' of digital media culture.

There is no representational form in Cagi's series of painting. This feature may cause her works to easily fall under the category of 'abstract'. However to directly categorize Cagi's abstraction within the scope of the 'anti-pictorial' tendency may be a problematic simplification. Cagi constructs her canvases with particular shapes and dimensions. She admits that there are particular curves and patterns in the series that were converted from mathematical equations, such as the utilization of Fibonacci number sequences, to create canvases that are not flat. There are geometric lines that separate the contour of the panels in certain pattern and scale, so that the appearance of these paintings as a whole is not entirely two-dimensional. The border between one color and the other is ambiguous. She never draws lines. These patterns cause the colors in Cagi's canvases to correspond to color spectrums.

For her 'painting' series, Cagi creates her own color spectrums. She also applies fluorescent colors to the edges of some paintings, which result in illusive colors reflected on the white walls of the exhibition space. She does not intend to create or introduce new colors, let alone their symbols. Nor does she intend to incite a certain psychological sensation. Cagi intends to allow colors in her work to speak for

themselves, within the exhibition space, and in doing so construct narratives or fictions: Fiction regarding color and color spectrums. Cagi's interest in fiction is not something new if we observe her past works since *White Lies Pt. 1 – The Dining Room* (2010).

The second series of works takes the form of two-dimensional objects made out of resin. Her choice of using resin, among others, is instigated by her desire to present both the materiality of colors and light derived from digital devices. The sense of slickness and reflection present from hardware devices is something inseparable from today's color and light phenomena. To her, this is not a subjective experience: Do people today not live surrounded by artificial light, primarily those emanating from screens of televisions, computers, and gadgets? In this series, she incorporates colors that imitate Newtonian (natural) light spectrum. This is a provoking juxtaposition (or perhaps a dialectic), which creates another fiction regarding light and color.

Meanwhile, the third part of this show takes the form of an installation where Cagi simultaneously integrate her canvas as well as resin works below the spotlight of colorful lights. This is where the issue of colors in *Spectral Fiction* is placed vis-à-vis another 'optic ecology', which is the exhibition space itself. In collaboration with a lighting specialist, Iskandar Loedin, Cagi attempts to face the exhibition viewers with a redundancy of light and color. She intends to create an atmospheric situation that is at the same time awkward and consciously artificial. As of completing this text, I cannot imagine myself how this installation will turn out to become, and how the audience will then react towards it. Cagi intentionally has not made a sketch or diagram of the space whatsoever for this particular work, and chose to complete this work in-situ and impromptu, relying on improvisation.

Martin Heidegger once brought onto surface his philosophy on 'technology as techne'.⁶ Techne is concept of liberal skills developed in Ancient Greece which encapsulates various aspects of knowledge: technical skills or craft, applied science, farming, medicine, navigation, construction, systems of war, painting, poetry, etc. Today, the various skills of techne have been compartmentalized more rigidly, by the division of practices/disciplines of art, craft, science, and literature, amongst other. To Heidegger, techne is related closely to physis, a term that may be understood simply as 'nature': a place in which techne may grow organically and authentically, melting with the character of its environment. In Heidegger's contemplations, technology does not take the form of single device or object, but rather a system and context of innovation, application, realization and utilization that go beyond mere organized behavior controlled by external forces. *Spectral Fiction* is very much influenced by techne/technology and physis/nature, or media ecologies where Cagi works, to the point that,

⁶ Carolyn L. Kance, *Chromatic Algorithm, Synthetic Color, Computer Art and Aesthetics after Code*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014, p.11-13

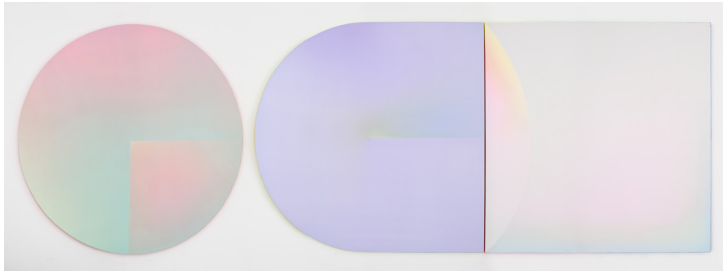
in Heidegger's footsteps, I am of the opinion that the issue of color and light that he has brought to surface is very specific and ingenious. Furthermore, this exhibition does not constantly affirm the existence of layers and media technology only, but rather takes issue with its relations in painting, exhibition spaces, and its audience as its own ecology for artworks.

After working together with Cagi for a number of exhibition projects, including Rumah Prahara (100 Years of Tempest, 2012) and Numbers (for Not a Dead End, Jogja Biennale 2013), I understand Spectral Fiction as a project that emphasizes Cagi's artistic temperament that, although full of leaps, truly accentuates a deep interest in issues of perception and consciousness. We enjoy light and color like the air we breathe—oftentimes we are not aware that we are doing it. Light and color must be reissued in novel ways, especially when we can only memorize the names of colors, and become burdened by its literality.⁷ Spectral Fiction may also be positioned as a project that responded to a proclivity for the chromophobia—an excessive fear of the use of color—that may be pushed by certain reluctance to return to an art that is more formalistic-abstract-modernistic. Cagi believes that color remains a mystery to people. But at the same time it does not act as a haunting ghost that may possess into art to become a form of artificial practice. Although it is oftentimes demoted as cosmetics, decorations, and mere ornamentation, color remains a color, which truly has no name.⁸

AGUNG HUJATNIKAJENNO_{NG}

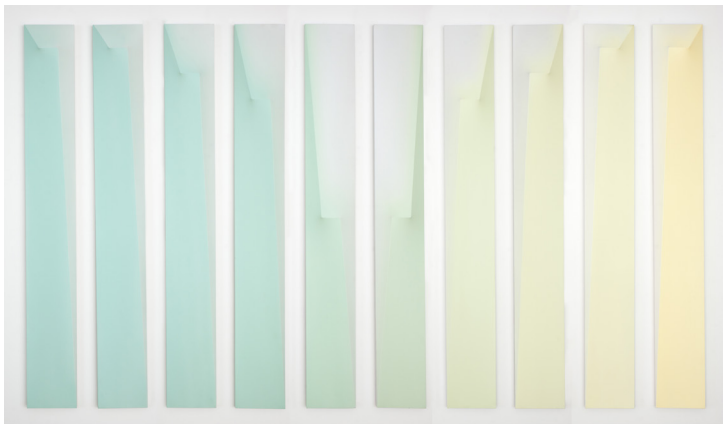
⁷ Wittgenstein: "When we're asked "What do the words 'red', 'blue', 'black', 'white' mean?" we can, of course, point to things which have these colors,—but our ability to explain the meanings of these words goes no further!", Wittgenstein, op.cit., hal. 11e.

⁸ 'Color has not yet been named' kata Jacques Derrida, dalam David Batchelor, Chromophobia, London: Reaktions Books, 2000, p. 87.



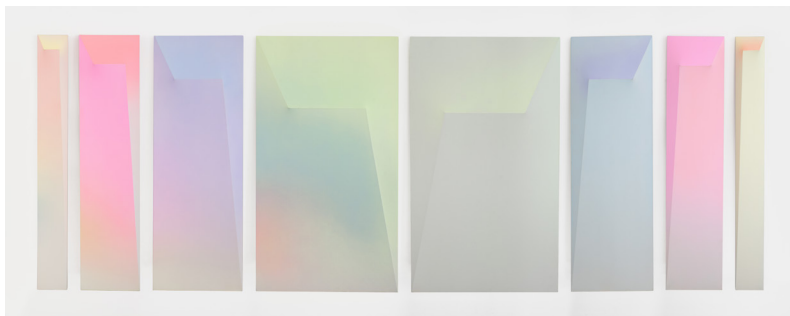
425, 676, 597 to 488 nm

2016
Lacquer on shaped canvas 150 x 450 cm



500 to 555 nm

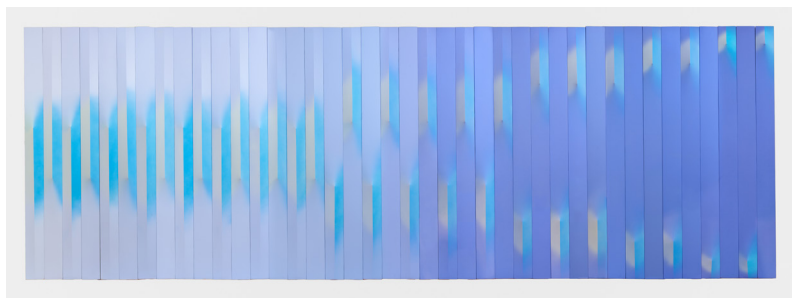
2016
Lacquer on shaped canvas 200 x 260 cm



1235885321

2016

Lacquer on shaped canvas 138 x 420 cm



1016

2016

Lacquer on shaped canvas 200 x 600 cm



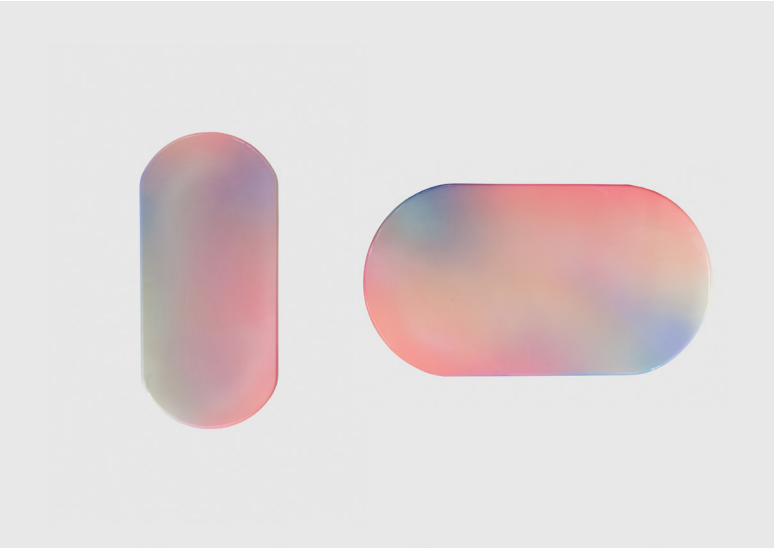
80 inch 16 : 9

2016
Epoxy resin and lacquer 169 x 112 x 1,5 cm



80 inch 16 : 10,

2016
Epoxy resin and lacquer 165 x 120 x 1,5 cm

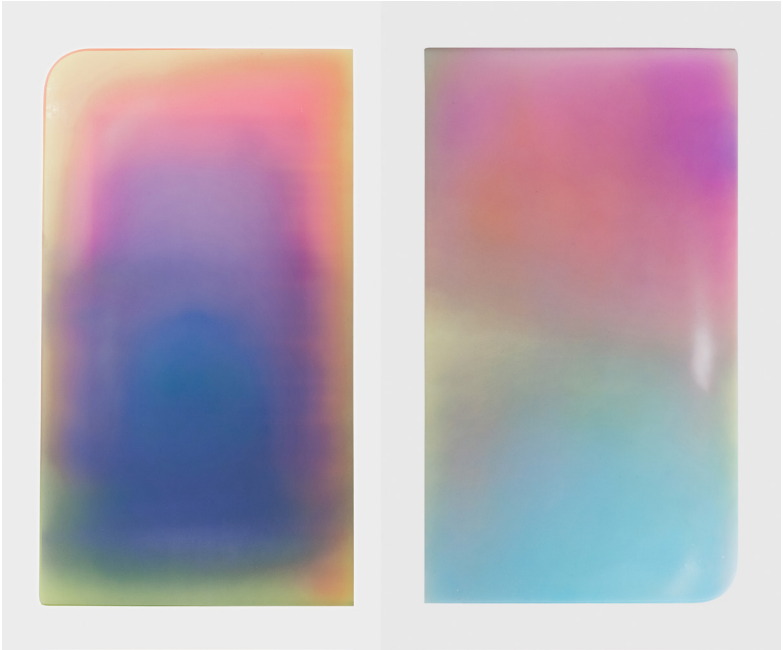


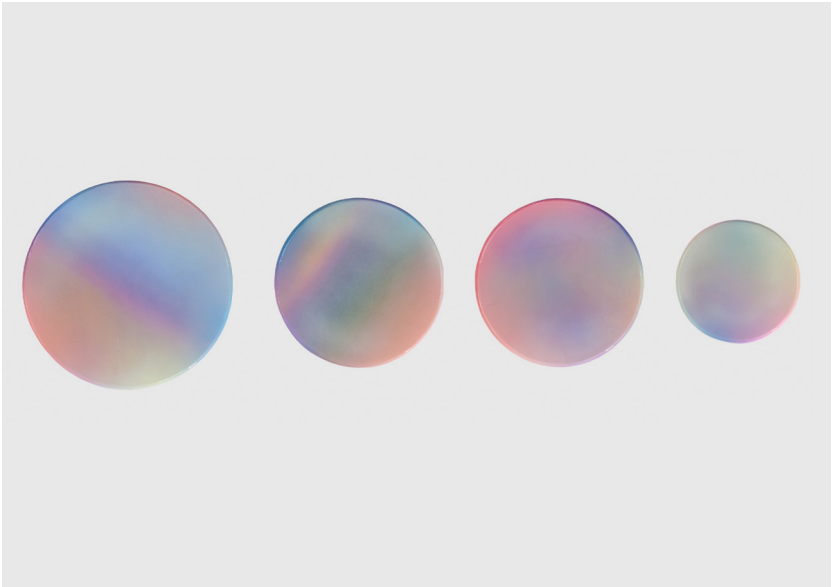
6230

2016
Epoxy resin and lacquer
Variable Dimension

64 inch 16 - 9

2016
Epoxy resin and lacquer
Variable Dimension





50,40,40,30

2016
Epoxy resin and lacquer
Variable Dimension

Born in Bandung, 18 April 1979

• EDUCATION

- 2005 – 2006 MA Cultural Studies, Goldsmiths College, University of London, London, United Kingdom
 1997 – 2001 BA Fine Art, Fakultas Seni Rupa dan Desain, Institut Teknologi Bandung, Bandung, Indonesia

• RESIDENCY

- 2011 Art Initiative Tokyo Residency Program, AIT Tokyo, Tokyo, Japan

• SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2016 "Sens: Project Booth with ROH Projects," Art Stage Singapore, Singapore
 2015 "Catharsis," Mizuma Art Gallery, Singapore, Singapore
 2012 "100 years of tempest," Ark Galerie, Jakarta, Indonesia
 2011 "BIBLIOTECA, ArtOne Project," Vivi Yip Artroom, ArtHK 2011, Hong Kong
 2010 "Love Affair pt. 1: Dining Room/ White Lies," Vivi Yip Art Room Jakarta, Indonesia

• SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2015 "Effervescence," Gillman Barracks, Singapore, Singapore
 "#familyandfriends," ROH Projects, Jakarta, Indonesia
 2013 "Some Like it Hot," Shanghai Gallery of Art, Shanghai, China
 2012 "Bandung Pavilion," Shanghai Biennale 2012, Shanghai, China
 "PANORAMA: Recent Asian Contemporary Art," Singapore Art Museum, Singapore
 "Coming Home," Hara Museum, Tokyo, Japan
 "Fountain of Lamneth," Gajah Gallery, Singapore
 2011 "Rounds, BAR Vol. %," Hiromiiyoshii Roponggi, Tokyo, Japan
 "Beastly," Cemeti Art House, Yogyakarta, Indonesia
 2010 "Decompressed: 10 Years of Ruang Rupa Artspace," Galeri Nasional, Jakarta, Indonesia
 "Mental Archive," Cemeti Art House, Yogyakarta, Indonesia
 "Lompat Pagar/Crossing Borders," Galeri Nasional, Jakarta, Indonesia
 "Critical Points," Edwin Gallery, Jakarta, Indonesia
 "Shipping," Nadi Galeri, Jakarta, Indonesia
 "Post-Psychedelia," Selasar Sunaryo Art Space, Bandung, Indonesia
 2009 "Cross/Piece," Canna Gallery, Jakarta, Indonesia
 "Survey 2," Edwin Gallery, Jakarta, Indonesia
 "Bandung Art Now," Galeri Nasional, Jakarta, Indonesia
 2008 "Untitled," Selasar Sunaryo Art Space, Bandung, Indonesia
 2004 "Trans-Indonesia," Govett Brewster Gallery, Plymouth, New Zealand
 2003 "Exploring Vacuum: 15 Years Cemeti Art House," Cemeti Art House, Yogyakarta, Indonesia
 "Seduction/Boys Don't Cry," Cemeti Art House, Yogyakarta and Ruang Rupa, Jakarta, Indonesia
 2002 "Underconstruction: Dream Project," Tokyo Opera House, Tokyo, Japan and Fabriek Gallery, Bandung, Indonesia
 "Alam Hati Kecil," Edwin Gallery, Jakarta

• PUBLIC COLLECTION AND COMMISSION WORK

- Singapore Art Museum
 Obayashi Private Museum
 Indonesian Exchange (IDX)

I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to Arin and all CA3A crew for the immeasurable amount of support and guidance throughout the process. I am ever thankful to Agung, Jun, and ROH Projects for your endless support and trust in me. Thank you so much.

I am especially grateful to my family for giving me the opportunity to follow my dreams and the love to make them a reality. I would like to thank my comrades, Tarie and Chanduth, who have me the best teamwork that anyone could ever hope for. Most of all, I would like to thank my little girl Surasuci. Your unconditional love, patience and tolerance are the real strength behind all my work and accomplishments. I owe you everything for the simple reason that you always have been and always will be my everything.

And above all things, I thank the universe for letting me be grateful everyday.

SYAGINI RATNA WULAN

