

Jumping The Shadow:

Mulyana (Indonesia) & Iwan Effendi (Indonesia)

Curated by John Silvis



July 8 – August 21, 2020

Opening Events July 8 (3 – 6pm) and July 10, 2020 (11am – 3pm)

SAPAR Contemporary is pleased to present the two-person exhibition ***Jumping the Shadow*** that celebrates the New York City debut of Indonesian contemporary artists Iwan Effendi and Mulyana, both of which are inspired by the puppetry tradition. The Indonesian shadow puppet theater tradition (*Wayang*) has been woven into the culture's history for more than a thousand years. The term *Wayang* means shadow (as well as visual imagination) in Javanese. Although their artistic lineages do not directly reference the history of shadow puppets, their work envisions imaginary worlds and characters that open up our minds to timely narratives. The whimsical and animated characters in their work point to a rich tradition of story telling.

Effendi and Mulyana started their education at the UPI Fine Arts in Bandung, and at different points, migrated to the city of Yogyakarta. The city has an unparalleled density of artists and artisans, functioning as a thriving incubator for the Indonesian art scene. The rich artist tradition of the region supports artists at all stages of their career and is

known for its collaborative spirit. This ethos has been a fundamental component of Effendi and Mulyana's creative expression.

Effendi's relationship to puppetry is a deeply personal one. His paternal grandfather, who was a political prisoner for several decades for his alleged communist views, was a shadow puppet master before he was incarcerated. As a student, Effendi focused on painting and print making, but was particularly inspired by comics as a young boy. This became a driving vernacular for his *Papermoon* puppets, a non-verbal, performance theater group which he formed with his wife Ria Tri Sulistyani in 2007. The approach to puppetry as a *tableaux vivant* mimics elements of installation and performance art that engages the audience as a protagonist in the experience.

The most recent drawings and figures he created stand alone as objects embody a range of emotions and psychological states. Effendi intends for each character to portray a unique sincerity and the subtlety of his *Faces* compel the viewer to look inward. His charcoal, mixed media drawings are so sensitively executed that they seem to emerge from a puncture in the wall. Particularly the mixed-media figures rendered in relief demand our attention. The kinetic puppet's personas begin as drawings and are created using layers of papier-mâché and clay, to then be delicately mounted on sinewy bodices that are constructed with stockings, bamboo and cloth.

In the entrance of the gallery the viewer is greeted by a beautiful installation of suspended knit and crocheted creatures and a wall mounted *Coral Island* by Mulyana. Mulyana talks about the act of knitting and crocheting as a form of meditation and prayer. "In God's eyes, our earthly being will eventually meet the Creator in a beautiful place," is his motivation for caring about the environment and he views his artistic expression as a privilege to "show gratitude to the Creator who has blessed me with a sound mind and a healthy body for life on earth."

Mulyana employs and educates several groups of artisans to execute his vision of a captivating biosphere below the surface of the ocean. As a formation, the organic shapes are bound together by an invisible force as they occupy the floor, or wall, or hang from the ceiling. In *Jumping the Shadow*, Mulyana has created new characters and coral islands, and continues to expand the language of his avatar, the Mogus (octopus). Mulyana's creatures cast beautiful shadows reminiscent of shadow puppet scenes but dazzle us with the beauty of their intricate details. The magical worlds he creates appeal to our collective consciousness—he believes that protecting the environment and being a good neighbor go hand in hand. Using re-purposed yarn, his

collaborative practice invokes ideas of spirituality and community by a poignant portrayal of a magical underwater world that is quickly eroding.

The pairing of Effendi's and Mulyana's work signals the importance of collective narratives that emphasize togetherness. With their installations and drawings they allow us to suspend our disbelief and immerse ourselves in allegories that elevate the human spirit.

Essay by John Silvis

About Artists

Mulyana (b.1984, Bandung, Indonesia) formed his alter-ego, the *Mogus* (monster) in 2008, which is an acronym that merges the Gurita animal (octopus) with Mulyana's family name (Sigarantang). His colorful, knit installations are emblematic of the global social and environmental concerns we currently face and inspire a renewed responsibility for both nature and the respect of all persons. After completing his graduate degree in art education at the University Pendidikan Indonesia in Bandung (2011), Mulyana moved to Yogyakarta in 2014 to investigate the possibility of community-based projects as an extension of his studio practice. One of the first groups of collaborators he encountered was a community of transgender women in Sorogenen village, which is well known in the Yogyakarta region. Mulyana's signature medium of soft knit and crocheted sculptures was conceived through this partnership.

ArtJog 2018 commissioned Mulyana to create his largest installation to date, *Sea Remembers* (2018). Creating an immersive environment out of knit and crocheted materials, the sculpture features an expansive underwater panorama of creatures and corals, including a three-dimensionally printed whale skeleton. The work is now included in the permanent collection of the Motomoto Museum in Jakarta, Indonesia. In 2019, Mulyana's works were featured at the HERMES flagship store in Singapore, a solo exhibition at FORM/The Shed in Perth, Australia, a large-scale environment *Anima Mundi: Soul of the World* at Central Embassy, Bangkok, and a solo museum exhibition at OCMA, Los Angeles.

Iwan Effendi (b. 1979, Indonesia) is known for his beautiful, immersive installations that combine drawings, paintings and movable large-scale puppets. The Indonesian art scene has a strong history of theater and puppetry and Effendi is known for his innovative approach to multi-media puppet theater that often references cultural and political histories. Together with his wife Ria Tri Sulistyani he founded the Papermoon

Theater in 2007. The first manifestation of their collaboration resulted in a full-scale theater piece, titled *The Stain on Mona's Chest*, featuring three main characters.

Effendi's narratives and ideas are generated from his fascination with the fantasy genre, comics, and traditional Indonesian folk lore. He sometimes refers to his style 'magical realism' because of their whimsical auras. The facial expressions of his puppets, which are made out of bamboo, nylon and papier-mâché, set the tone for his sets and installations. The puppets come to life by the movement of their handlers who animate the sculpture and become a part of the work.

In *Jumping the Shadow*, Effendi will present a series of new drawings and figures that are a continuation of his solo practice as an artist; his recent series of relief drawings merge the puppet visage with the graphite and chalk drawings. They create an eerie visual effect that makes them jump off the wall. His previous exhibition at Mizuma Gallery in Singapore included two life-size, breathtaking figures that combined sculpture and wall drawings. His narratives point to the complexity of the human psyche by tapping into ancient narratives.

About Curator

John Silvis is a New York-based curator and art advisor. Silvis' recent client research has taken him to Berlin, Indonesia and Vietnam. In addition to curating contemporary in New York and Los Angeles, he writes for Artsy, CNN and PARNASS. Recent curatorial projects include *Season 3* at the Orange County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, *Twinkle* at Barney Savage, New York and *Define Gravity: Sculpture in the Ahmanson Collection*, Irvine, California. As an advisor, his expertise is on working with dynamic collections to expand their public presence.