

# COLLECTIVE CRAFTING in POST-SUHARTO INDONESIA

A Journey with Ruangrupa from the Jakarta Institute of the Arts to *Documenta Fifteen* in Kassel.

*Sophie Goltz in conversation with Reza Afisina, Ade Darmawan,  
and Iswanto Hartono*

Ruangrupa is a Jakarta-based arts collective established in 2000 by young art practitioners in the midst of the Indonesian *reformasi*, a period of political liberalization and economic reform that followed the fall of the New Order Regime (1965–98). In her conversation with three of the founding members of the group, Sophie Goltz contextualizes the emergence of ruangrupa within a longer history of student networks that connect resurgent, campus-based oppositional politics across the cities of Indonesia in the 1980s, to the massive nationwide student protests that brought down the autocratic regime of President Suharto in 1998. On Goltz's invitation, Reza Afisina, Ade Darmawan, and Iswanto Hartono reconstruct their relationship to the collective by reflecting, at length, on their respective personal biographies and motives; the conversation serves, in turn, to document the acutely multidisciplinary (even divergent) practices and uses of media that have defined ruangrupa's practice, spanning more than two decades. The intersecting narratives of each member resonate around an emphatic account of the origins of ruangrupa in the broader countercultural spaces of the *reformasi*, which emerged through intensely localized engagements with informal urban environments and everyday technologies of the neighborhood, the marketplace, or the spaces of the extended family house, even as previous

progressivist artistic traditions that had hitherto mobilized oppositional emblems of the nation increasingly lost force with the collapse of New Order. To the extent that the members of *ruangrupa* here account for the beginnings of the collaboration in “movement”—around the provisional time spans and choices of individuals to move “in and out” of an ecosystem of architectural space, urban location/s, friendships and discrete projects—the conversation coheres around an emphatic collective memory of post-’98 Indonesian society, and the idea of “reformation” as, itself, an explosive current of hitherto purged or subordinated expressions of an informal youth culture.

Currently, *ruangrupa* collectively provide the artistic direction for the fifteenth edition of *documenta* (June 18–September 22, Kassel, Germany) and are the first Asian art practitioners to hold this position since the inception of the event in 1955. Held every five years, *documenta* was originally conceived as a platform for rehabilitating avant-garde works of art, previously suppressed under the National Socialist regime, for the purposes of post-war reeducation in Germany; the trajectory of *documenta*’s own recent exhibition history comprises a key moment in the current turn toward the decolonization of the museum, and the attendant demand for decentred, “global” art histories. As such, the event remains one of the most significant platforms for democratizing international trends in contemporary art through the free engagement of wider public audiences. The 2022 edition of *documenta* derives its conceptual and organizational structure from *ruangrupa*’s uses of the *lumbung* as the principal device of the exhibition. The Bahasa word for the shared space of a rice barn, the *lumbung* is a traditional architectural structure deployed for storing the products of shared labor, and, as a

proposition for the organization of artistic space, the conceptualization of an alternative economic logic based on the equitable calculation and distribution of communal surplus. While the idea and its suggestiveness for collective value of collaborative art practices itself has been widely anticipated and discussed, Goltz redirects the concept of *lumbung* as “communal space” from its culturalist overtones (in the idea’s potential assimilation to presumptive logics of cultural identity/difference within the history and location of *documenta*) to iterated formations of the “house” in the specific biography and geographical history of *ruangrupa*. As such, the conversation rehearses the different forms and locations taken by the so-called ruru house—the group’s colloquialism for actual sites of communal living, artistic experimentation, and public engagement that have housed their practice, in Jakarta and beyond, in other permutations within European art and urban spaces over the years. The conversation arrives, in this way, at a provisional account of *ruangrupa*’s practice by detailing an extensive ecosystem of informal networks around figures of hospitality, a concretion of biographical details around the intergenerational wounds of the post-Suharto era; and a related ethos of care, deployed and localized as shared resource, across the trajectory of *ruangrupa*’s transnational mobility.

*Ruangrupa* itself functions across multiple axes of “common” space, generating shared knowledge across the discrete practices of visual and video art, filmmaking and printmaking, graphic design performance art, architecture, as well as research and writing—among its several initiatives, mentioned here, are, ArtLab, which supports research collaborations around urbanism and media; the study space and public art education platform, *Gudskul* Contemporary

Art Collective and Ecosystem Studies; and also Video Art Division, which is recognized for overseeing the Indonesian biennial and media art festival, OK. Video, over the past two decades.

**Sophie Goltz:** In interviews, and at discussion forums, you are repeatedly asked about the idea of the “we.” I would also like to begin with the concept of this “we,” a kind of collective moment, but I would like it to be reflected more specifically in your voices. My idea is to use this conversation as a kind of ethnographic method so that you could be free to speak as an “I” in relation to the group. I’m not against “we,” but I think it’s more interesting to understand individual motivations and reflections with regard to the history of ruangrupa—to follow how those biographies are reconstituted in the “we,” as a kind of polyvocality. I thought it would be more interesting to consider how, for ruangrupa, the “collective” might *retain* individual histories and their trajectories over time—and in this aspect, represent a departure from a Westernized or neo-Romantic idea of “collectivism,” even though the group is often described in that way. I’m interested in how the movement between the “I” and the “we” is a practice in itself—one that formulates ruangrupa, I think, but which has not really been described or documented.

**Ade Darmawan:** That’s an interesting perspective because when I think about how it started, I cannot recall any angle apart from the one you suggest. Actually, we even had diagrams for representing that kind of movement, like a logo. This notion of “in and out” is also why we don’t have a membership. Though we are asked, many times: How do we survive? How we do we sustain as a group? Different individuals in ruangrupa have different answers. My most recent reflection as a response is, we have

sustained, or survived, this long because we never really put ourselves 100 percent in ruangrupa. We have always done the “in and out”—everyone—we celebrate and support that. The individual is an entity in a collective way, for me, as it is for ruangrupa—it’s stronger when the individual is also strong. So we must have this “in and out”—as integration, as an integrative process that can be spatial but also happens in time. And we have done that, we do that.

**SG:** This is already an interesting comment, to say that if the individual is strong, the group is strong—right? Not so much that the individual is weak, and if it comes into a group, its qualities become stronger but rather: what becomes possible is a strong collective *response* to how individuals are located in a particular place or moment in time. Can I put the idea of the “we” this way?

**AD:** Yes, because we cheer our differences; we believe that the group is a collection of different people. We adore each other, we envy each other; we don’t read the same stuff, and we don’t necessarily watch or listen to things in common. Of course, there is always overlap, intersections between our respective engagements and interests, but we think that the divergences make the collective life of ruangrupa richer. It wasn’t always like this—in the beginning, we were, more or less, a group of art school students, sharing a collective life together in such informality—but after some years, we preferred to use the term “ingredients”—like a kitchen—to construct or represent our identity where one element can actually trigger, accelerate, or strengthen the others.

**SG:** What is your background, the histories you each give to ruangrupa? Specifically, what does it mean to be born in a

posttraumatic situation, the massacres of 1966 and '67—and to be educated under the Suharto regime and to then emerge from that education by creating an artistic collective practice, postdictatorship? What did the proposition of *reformasi* in 1999, “reformation,” mean for you? And how did the frustration or assimilation of the reformist moment lead to *ruangrupa* as an answer or a counterproposal? How are your ideas of art linked to your original engagement with education and community? This is another way of asking the question: where do each of you start and come into what is called *ruangrupa*?

**Iswanto Hartono:** Separately, from the collective? . . . to point out that for us, it's not—

**SG:** Sorry to interrupt. It would be more interesting if you responded by putting in the “I.” Where did you come from as an individual? Because you didn't start as a group in life. I am trying to understand how you *began*—what was your educational situation, and how did it ground your decision to either found or enter *ruangrupa*? My question is not only about *where* you come from; what is more interesting is to understand *how*. In psychoanalytic terms, that would mean to speak as an “I” and not as a “we” because, typically, the “I” hides behind the “we.”

**Reza Afisina:** I would like to put forward my particular story, then. For me, the first time I came to Jakarta was at the beginning of '95, when I came from West Java—so at that time, I didn't know how to situate those origins in Jakarta. I only had that one choice, first, because I was really interested in something called cinematography and there was only one cinematography faculty in Indonesia, which was in Jakarta Institute of the Arts, and

that is still the case. The Institute was really accommodating to me, since I had only worked with analogue technologies until then—I had no idea, really, what cinematography or an art education was apart from the name of the faculty itself. It was like realizing a dream because I came from a very ordinary high school in West Java without any background that would prepare me for art school. So I paid around two euros for the application form, filled it in, and took the test. At the same time, I was already accepted to a state-run university in my hometown, but I didn't choose to go because I hated living in my hometown. I was seriously bored, and I needed to escape that boredom—yes, the laziness, Sophie. So, the Arts Institute was also, then, an escape into experiencing something outside of this boredom—of family, of the town in West Java. Now, it was going to be fun: by seeking out the Jakarta Institute of the Arts, trying to find out about what they did, making friendships there, I got introduced to Ade. That's the first time we met. Mostly Ade would come to the Jakarta Art Institute, have some lunch there, we would hang out together while also preparing for Dialog Dua Kota (an exchange of young artists between the two cities). So many friends from the Indonesia Art Institute at Yogyakarta came to Jakarta during that time, and they stayed there, for a time, with us; we were hosting them. Very quickly, between Jakarta and Yogyakarta, it became like a family gathering. The Dialog Dua Kota is the occasion that we most celebrate, a meeting that occurred twice in our friendship, that first time in '95 in Jakarta, and then '97 in Yogyakarta, which was my first time there. In this period, I got to know Ade. Indra *aka* Ameng, Daniella Praptono, and I—we already knew each other because we studied together; even if we were in different years. We were all

together; Indra and Ade became friends, and everybody came together through the art-school connection between Jakarta and Yogya, and also, to an extent, through Bandung Institute of Technology, ITB (Institut Teknologi Bandung).

We are all very different, but I should say we come together probably because of our shared experience of precarity—Jakarta Institute of the Arts as well as Indonesia Art Institute lack funding for students' support. I mean, we were rich at heart but poor economically, and this is how we connected, in this search for a relation, a relation without means. As a family. In my case, I couldn't pay rent so I mostly lived in the school, and for me, this was my particular way of learning in art school because I needed to share with anybody who would be open to it. I had to keep moving into different studio spaces because, though I was studying cinematography, I had to stay at the art faculty because I needed a place to sleep . . . its like that there, at the Art Institute, the Fine Arts Faculty is always open, twenty-four hours, always having a different kind of party. So it was there that I found my family. And I decided this is really how I would like to study, rather than pay tuition. So I used to skip paying tuition and kept occupying different studios until I got caught, and so, I couldn't graduate; I don't have any diploma or title. I'm happy, you know, that I'm not part of this deal of—you know—formal art education. Because with Ade, we knew everybody that was involved, as college students in art school, and this was especially so during "the '98," when Ade left Indonesia.<sup>1</sup> After '98, we all separated, but we knew that we were still connected—were already like a movement, though we didn't know what kind, because there were Ade's friends in Yogyakarta, but they were also in the circle of our friends in Jakarta. A connection of friends

generating outward into more than a family.

**SG:** When you say, "the '98," and that Ade left during those events, what was the situation in Indonesia?

**RA:** Let's go back a little bit, to just after we left Yogyakarta for Dialog Dua Kota in July '97—I still remember, because during that time I was still in . . . because I was on the campus. The campus is in the middle of the city center—in what we call the "first ring out of the centre" of this concentrically organized city. So the campus was at the center of turmoil. There used to be a single unit of a political party, Indonesian Democratic Party (*Partai Demokrasi Indonesia*, PDI) and its headquarters was located near our campus—suddenly, there were all these masses of people, driven through our campus, and we found that we were surrounded by a huge military. At the time, there was an international dance festival in the Art Centre, and our campus is situated inside it—I remember because I tried to volunteer at this international dance festival though I didn't get the position. But in any case, there we were, just sitting around, you know, hanging out outside the Art Centre. And then suddenly the masses and the army collided, and it was like a flood stream that came to us, in our place. The military crashed through everything. The canteens and places where we ate, even the venue of the dance festival was smashed in the chaos. And because I lived there, I sort of knew my way about, and so I helped move all those people who had rushed inside our campus, and we locked it from inside, turned off everything—and the military didn't come for them. Negotiations continued past midnight, and it was chaotic, so we simply stayed there—with friends, mostly, who had fled the riots and

come onto the campus. At the time, I had a rock band that was involved with the Indonesian Democratic Party—we were always campaigning, leftist, socialist-oriented, you know?—although actually, there were a lot of conflicts within our own group, my band, during that time—we are still active, by the way, we are still producing albums—(*laughter*). But, so yes; this was the starting point, May '98.

**AD:** Yes, May '98 . . . it started the year after Dialog Dua Kota.

**RA:** Yes. There was looting in every part of Jakarta, burning. And I am sorry to speak about this—the victims of mass rape, especially in the north and center of Jakarta, where the Chinese Indonesian community reside—all this was the result of the attempt to generate conflict against minorities. And then I got involved with a logistics team, delivering food, medication, mainly because I had somehow lost my job, Sophie. I used work as a sound recordist—and so these events, my joblessness, was in parallel with the economic crisis. I did everything—from one scrap job to another—because I need to survive. I barely had food during that time. But I was able to get food when I began working with the logistics team. When I had extra food, I brought it to the campus, and I shared with many of my friends who also stayed there. I'm talking like this (with the "I"), but it's not only me, most of my friends lived through that situation, and many had it worse than me. In '98, so many of our dearest friends were shot—and then the movement, which would become *ruangrupa*, really started. We could not stop. Since Indra and Daniella were mostly with me, confined in the art school, we began staging a different sort of demonstration, together. Not quite

political demonstrations, but we could, at least, generate cultural statements from there. In my personal view, in this particular moment that led up to Suharto stepping down—not the end of the regime, really, but Suharto stepping down (in the wake of student protests in Jakarta and other cities)—we discovered how much we already admired each other and that we had had a deeply shared sense of how to support each other from the start. So '98 showed us our basic foundations, which we had never actually realized until then. While we have been framed as working as a collective, we never realized until that moment that that was what we had been doing.

So that's why when I think about it, I celebrate this euphoric moment of the reforms era in July 1998, when Suharto stepped down (under direct pressure of the student protests), together with the moment when, a couple of years later, we met again as friends. And it was then, suddenly, that everyone came up with different stories of that period in 1998. Ade had his share of participating in resistance efforts in Amsterdam—he says, however, it felt like drinking a glass of wine! (*laughter*)—We were also drinking wine, too, different wine, for sure, on our campus in that time, Javanese red wine (*laughter*)—very bad for the health! After he returned in 1999, Ade and a group of artists began to create shows, and I didn't know exactly what they had planned, you know, whether they were to have a space, until Indra told me, hey, Ade and a couple of his friends are having a fundraising event for newly founded collective *ruangrupa* in Cemara Galeri, Jakarta, and so I went to see what was going on.

**SG:** *Ruangrupa*, as the collective is known today, was established, then, in 2000?

**RA:** Yes, 2000. But in a way, it was there before that because Ade and several of the founders came from the Jakarta Institute of the Arts, and most were part of our circle of friends. I was already part of the conversation in 2000 even though I didn't know the name, ruangrupa, itself. So every night I went to warung emak (kiosk), and Ade would be having a meeting there with Ronnie Agustinus or with Lilia Nursita. People would stay, have a beer, sometimes Indra would just come and go because we happened to be having a drink in the same place—it still exists, that place, we call it Bata Merah in front of Jakarta Art Centre. So that's how the conversations used to start—like Ronnie Agustinus . . . creating zine or writings, mostly, in the printmaking studios, as one of the founders. And Lilia Nursita was also from the printmaking studios, like Daniella, so we were always engaging shared capacities, sharing knowledge. Then, I went to the Garuda Complex in the south Jakarta . . . where, at that time, ruangrupa was situated as a house. I was seeing the first house, different kinds of activity that I was not able to really recognize; but what I did realize was that I really needed the space to reflect—or no, maybe really just to sleep there. Because they had an empty room downstairs. *(laughter)* They had a kitchen, we could cook. And every night we had conversations at the table . . . the living room was part of the so-called presentation space, and we also moved to the backroom where we had a small garden and a table. And then we had one room we always used for parties, right? And then in 2001 I was invited to give my first public exhibition for Jakarta Art Festival, 2001. And suddenly I got this letter with money in it *(laughter)*—it was . . . thirty euros? I was so f'n rich! But then, I thought, Ade didn't know what my works were like, nor,

probably Indra . . . ruangrupa didn't know about my artistic practices—but now, I had this first, invited public interaction.

**AD:** That's when you did a performance with a bicycle.

**RA:** Yes, I staged the performance “Estar Flotante Vida Mia” at *JakArt@2001*. This was an international arts, cultural and educational festival in June 2001, where ruangrupa activated its public space program, “Jakarta Habitus Publik.” This place was actually connected to the house of Megawati Sukarnoputri. But I didn't know that! I was questioned by the security services *(laughter)*—Megawati Sukarnoputri was running for the next president. I didn't know—I only liked using this park because it's in the center, and I wanted to create an interactive site with the balloons—like a park of floating balloons—and then do performances with the bicycle. But I was questioned for hours, and after that, my work was gone, cleaned up by the city, erased because an important political person lived there. So Ade then asked me if there was any documentation of it—and I hoped so because it was only there for a couple hours; it was starting to grow, and then suddenly it was gone, really gone, everything was really clean. But at that same point in time, I was able to be part of the economy for the first time, in the sense that I got money by turning my relationships into artwork, productions . . .

**SG:** You are saying you became a professional artist.

Reza, you have given us a wonderful way of starting the narrative of ruangrupa, of how, for you, the group originated, what it meant for you, in your particular positioning within this transitional moment in Indonesian history. And you suggest,

too, perhaps another order of “reformasi,” transformation, in this account: the transformation from student into professional. In every context you raise, you do suggest the capacity for change.

But you have also expressed to me your admiration of Iswanto Hartono—of how you were aware of his practice, without knowing him. Your interest in getting to know Iswanto personally, even before you met, and inviting him to run ruangrupa in 2008: if I have understood what you have told me, Iswanto’s practice was very suggestive to you, presenting an idea of what ruangrupa *could be*.

So I think it’s a good moment to go over to you, Iswanto, before we go to Ade—because Ade seems to be the godfather of everything (*laughter*). You were a late member of the collective but already admired because of your practice. If I have understood correctly, there was something in your work that compelled Reza to want to know you; but put another way, could there also have been a desire in *you* that you might be part of the group, despite not having an explicit motivation in the first place?

**IH:** Yes, maybe, because I did not start at the art school from the beginning. I studied architecture. I came to Jakarta ‘91, and finished in ‘96. I joined the art school only later, after I graduated, and it was then that I could earn independently. The Jakarta Arts Institute had one of the best libraries at the time, and there, half of what I picked up were art books, I really loved it, even more than architecture at the time. I really liked art. I was painting at the time and thinking of joining the art-school course. And that’s where I came across the events that Reza narrates. With reference to the Ketapang riots, I worked very close to the buildings around which the riots occurred.<sup>2</sup> And I was the one—I’m the

architect—who renovated the church that was destroyed and burned at the riots. And so yes, after that, I joined the art school in 1999 . . . after the riots and just after the New Order regime fell. And I had common friends with Reza, and Indra also, and one of my friends in architecture was already in ruangrupa. After I attended for two years, I got a scholarship to India, and I left the art school. I came back in 2000 and started practicing. I studied urban design and also started working as an artist. And yes, Sophie, as you suggest, before I knew them, I had actually heard this name, ruangrupa, I was following many of the artists who were well known in Yogya for some time. Funny story: I applied for some kind of membership in the group with another person, and they said, “Sorry, but you have to get back to us after five years, apply again.” And that was right—I really had no confidence to work as an artist at the time. And I had no friends in Jakarta. I worked alone, I was lonely. I knew about ruangrupa, of course, when it was launched in Pasar Minggu in Jakarta. but I had no confidence to actually come in. I felt, “I’m no one, I’m nobody.” But that lack of confidence is very deeply personal for me, maybe because I come from a Chinese family. There was no mixing between Indonesian and Chinese where I was growing up—this came from the New Order, that system of minoritization and separation was a part of my blood. The Indonesian Chinese always suppress themselves; we were quiet compared to the general “citizen” of Indonesia at the time. And so yes, after that, I did more exhibitions, starting from nothing, and things slowly rolled up. My first solo show was in Yogyakarta in 2002, I had a few more, as well, attended by Reza; I met Rifky Effendi *aka* “Goro” in New York in 2004, following that, did several residencies before I went to ruangrupa. I



would meet Reza and Ade throughout this time, and in 2008, I was invited by you (Ade) to participate the following year in the Jakarta Biennale. In 2009, then, I had a presentation in ruangrupa, and Ade invited me to come in—it was fast—and I did go to ruangrupa with a little bit of confidence because now it was different. Reza called the collective a “family”; my feeling for the group, for everything that was shared there is akin to the sense of comfort and place of the word, “family.” It’s very simple: I found confidence and an identity, even a political identity of which I was previously uncertain because of my experience with racism. With Reza and Ade we discussed the ArtLab so as to develop works, future projects, and collaborations. And so yes, I was “in”—where before I had no friends—no?—at least no artist friends beside Goro, in New York, and a very old guy there, who was close to me.

**SG:** Would you say that the ability to be in a group, the “going in and out” that we have been talking about, informs your practice?—that the collective movement, which happens between friends, informs your individual practice? Because for you, it was an advantage—right?—because you had, from the beginning, the freedom to shape your practice the way you wanted. You could choose whether you wanted to be part of a group or an individual practitioner.

**IH:** Yes, but also I think after a few years I found that my practice was embedded as a correlation with the space—because the space was literally where we were, at that given moment; its there that we were gathered, and this movement occurred in and through an actual house. Of course, the function of the “house” is completely altered by this movement—it mixes up, crosses the public, semiprivate, turning

what we could consider a space of privacy into the public; bringing the public *in* to this semiprivate space. The relation of space to architecture for ruangrupa may not have been devised intentionally, but it was deeply embedded within the collective and its everyday practice. So yes, in my own practice, my choices are relational to the ruangrupa collective, just like this collective space is relational to its architecture.

**SG:** Thank you. You bring us to an interesting moment because you introduce us to the architecture of space—of spatialization on the move. This is a substantial part of the practice of ruangrupa: what space means—how to identify with a location in space but also to identify with something that *happens* in the space. So there’s two different things. When we look, for example, the iteration of the ruru house in Kassel (*ruruhaus*), together with the *lumbung* activities.

**IH:** You know, in the end, I think our understanding of these two dimensions of architectural space was already combined in our practice, and it was always a conscious choice. Remember when we had the exhibition *Ten Years of Ruangrupa*—we brought together so many different objects that were actually each elements of architectural space: the fridge, the bathtub. No? Those things were incorporated into the space of the show . . . cupboard, chairs. Each object was a conscious choice in telling the story of what we had done, after ten years, and that doing was so related to the nonhuman (*laughter*)—yes—the architectural part of the building, itself, incorporated into the exhibition together with objects. 1:22:09

**SG:** So it’s not just a single idea of how you are together as the “we”—and space facilitates this inherent diversity of

interests, of things, right? But in another sense, these transformative possibilities that inhere in both the material aspects of a place and the collective, together, suggests the precarity of space. I mean: When you *don't* have space, when you can't afford it, and all the many reasons why space might not be available. Yet, once it is available, it can also act in reverse, it can give so much—all those many things you mention that were suggestive of your history and your personal story, Iswanto—it can give that back. We can acknowledge, from your response, the gesture of *giving* space, providing space, or simply just to leave a space open, as if to say, let's see what can still happen in this space . . . isn't this is a part of an identity too? So there might be an artistically innovative way of using space, not only because it was never used before for those purposes but also because that was not economically possible. Space is a tool for creating the moments we have been discussing, whether those moments serve to individualize you, as practitioners and as people, just as there was a space, for Ade, for Reza, also to simply live in—and to make a space livable, you need a moment that is a private moment.

**AD:** Space is like the other member of *ruangrupa*.

**SG:** Ade, we have heard so many things about you, Ade was there, and Ade was there again, and Ade created the exhibition and gigs. So the impression is that you are the *godfather*—or *mother*?—of all of this. Which might be wrong—or perhaps it's right? (*laughter*)

**AD:** In parallel with Reza and Iswanto's narratives, I can add my own story to that of the Dua Kota Dialog, because though I was born and raised in Jakarta, I was

educated in Yogya. So I did all this back and forth between Yogya and Jakarta, and as to the personal, I had a girlfriend also in the art school in Jakarta at the time. So there were connections. The question is, why was it so easy to establish this relation, the network? I agree with Reza, there were commonalities within a certain kind of class we came from . . . the precarity, a shared sense of the economic and also personal insecurity of which both Iswanto and Reza are speaking. I saw how, because of this common experience of precarity, the dialogues between students acquired an intensity and how the campus became a space where experimentation could sprout, emerge, in the nineties. A lot of political demonstrations, a lot of artistic experimentation because students were actually living on campus—they were sustained there, materially, which is not the case anymore. To live was actually part of the education; it was the school, the art-school environment. My father passed away in 1988, when I was fourteen years old. So I lived with my mum, but it is interesting to recall that even my mum could afford to send four of her kids to university—though she was a working woman, she was not a career woman, and she was mostly involved with nonprofits. This is to say that even though we came from backgrounds with very little, things were still affordable back then, as students because we were given this long duration of time in the university, on campus, when we learned it was possible to live on minimal means. I didn't like to study, and I didn't do exhibitions during that time—I was mostly into music, Reza's reference to the gigs I organized at that time is not in reference to art exhibitions but to music. Music is what energized and connected. I was also involved with underground student publications—it was a way of responding to that period of our own education during the

Suharto regime, our own way of engaging notions about the freedom of press, the freedom of speech in the mid-1990s—to do it ideally, in our own way—and we worked along those lines with comics and graphic art, which we circulated underground. When you mention being professional artists, well, we didn't really have that, we did what we were passionate about and didn't think so much about categorization, the attempt to define what we were doing at that time. In fact, to be categorized meant that you were visible to the authorities, and they would trap you. As practitioners, to be uncategorized was also a kind of strategy. So, we did a lot of different stuff in the beginning in the mid-1990s. And I remember missing Reza, Indra Ameng, Daniella . . . so while there were not necessarily similarities in our practices, we did think about each other, about what kind of space we could create, you know, that could hold us together and that would enable us to support each other—and for that, there was no platform. We had to initiate it. In 2000, when we had our first exhibition and launched *ruangrupa*, we wrote short texts about how, with growing commercialization within Indonesia, the arts were also becoming bureaucratic, institutionalized. Now, if I am to remember those texts, they sound very innocent (*laughter*)—because now it's even worse (*laughter*). We have two art fairs, and many galleries and artists are educated, work, with the fantasy of going professional . . .

**SG:** Ade, that leads me somewhat to my second question for you. Since the turn of the millennium, we see the rise of Asian biennales, and, in it, new formations of desire related to artistic networks and their key locations in Asian capitals—the need of Asian artists to be part of—to

be synchronic with—something like a “global contemporary” moment. So global contemporary art together with categories like “global art-history” emerge and are sustained, at least in some fundamental part, through the visibilization of artists *through* these very categories—their assimilation into these increasingly institutionalized concepts. So, major institutions from Europe feature midcareer Southeast Asian artists, presenting them as, at once, alternatives to their own cultural and institutional foundations—which are, of course, in colonial history—and, also, as figures of a global art-historical narrative.

With regard to this increasingly hegemonic discourse of the global contemporary, how can we situate your own reflections, here, on the personal, together with the localized, interdisciplinary, or decentred practices of the collective you have been describing? After all, this is an account of the origins of an artistic direction, which emerged between the mid-1990s and the first few years of the millennium as, itself, part of the story of political transition in Indonesia. How do we retain that context and history, while paying attention to the rise in the demand of contemporary artists from Southeast Asia, whether through biennales or the global art market?

**AD:** I grew up with admiration for a previous generation of artists such as Mella Jaarsma, Arahmaiani, Agus Suwage, Tisna Sanjaya, or FX Harsono, but also, at the same time, criticism of their positioning, which was shared across my generation. In any case, we didn't want to be that way, you know, to follow our senior artists, who were mostly in Yogya where we also, of course, were studying. I mean, I'm connecting this countercultural direction of our generation to what you are asking about the representation of Asian art in

global art events today—what I am saying is that process of assimilation was actually already happening when we were students. I am thinking of an older generation of artists, in the 1980s, who were representing Indonesia for the world, using an eclectic symbolism that, for my generation, was super problematic. This logic of supply and demand between global and domestic art markets was already in place by the early to mid-1990s, but there was a rise, again, at the end of the decade following the Asian economic crisis, the political crisis in the transition from the New Order regime, and so on. What you describe as a global “supply and demand” system is, actually, already a story of identity—a kind of political identity, the political victim—that was being sold.

You know, I was raised in a family of educators, my father was a maths teacher, so, actually, I’m pretty good in math (*laughter*). It helps a lot, in fact . . . there should be some people really good in math—you know, like Reza and Iswanto! (*laughter*)

But anyway—when I think back it’s probably for these reasons, I didn’t like this power, the authority, in a sense, of education. I mean, school—whether I like it or don’t like it—it is still authority, right? So when I said I didn’t like school, I meant this kind of authority connecting nationalized art practices to education. Because I did learn a lot at art school, although I learned not from being in the class but from hanging out. I didn’t feel I had any real talent in class, or that I could learn in the same way as other charming students. I studied printmaking, but I didn’t really do that; I challenged the way it was done, so maybe now we call it experimentation, but it wasn’t like that then, really; I just tried to do printmaking in different ways. By doing that, my attempts ended up in several exhibitions, leading to a solo exhibition in ‘97

in Cemeti Galeri (Yogyakarta) when I was I was still a student. And after that, I got really bored with art school, and I couldn’t go back because I didn’t really have any good reasons. And then I remembered Nindityo Adipurnomo, the owner of Cemeti, who had given me this application form to the Rijksakademie Van BeeldendeKunsten Amsterdam, and he had said, you should try, though it’s very hard. I got the place, and I went to Rijksakademie. I was twenty-four, so that was a big challenge. When I got to that place, I was put within the studio-structure, you know? And I was confronted with how different the practice that I had experienced, believed in, and was familiar with was from the studio system.

**SG:** Exactly, yes.

**AD:** It’s never been private; thinking and brainstorming have never happened for me in an isolated environment. And it was a real struggle for me at the Rijks; I needed to knock on almost everyone’s door just to have a conversation. Of course I had to, because the studio was treated like an artist’s address, you know, like, an office. They go at a certain time, exactly the same time every day, lock their studios, and then they go to meet outside at lunch for a few minutes, and then they go back in and don’t see each other again—I just couldn’t do it. So I connected a lot with the city itself, with people, with Indonesian activists in Amsterdam. So that is what Reza was speaking of—this was happening in parallel to ‘98—and it was ironic, like I was in the student demonstrations in Jakarta, because there were friends who got shot, killed. I did my part—I can send you some pictures I did with some activists demonstrating in Amsterdam Dam Square. And then at night, before the demonstration, we made a big, big banner that we painted together in my

studio at Rijks. It's really funny because when I did another presentation last year at Rijks, and I saw that picture, the banner that we did in '98. I just realized that I never told them about it when I was actually there (*laughter*)—we brought that banner to Dam Square, and then we burned it because it was Suharto, his face and all. I always joked after that, you know: a demonstration in Amsterdam is not like a demonstration in Jakarta when students get shot, because in Amsterdam, it's like an exhibition opening, you know, with red wine (*laughter*). And that's why Reza mentioned the wine. So, you see, the seeds for our practice in *ruangrupa* were actually already there; the conversation never stopped when I was at Rijks, neither the meetings with so many friends; which, after I went back to Jakarta, would become even more intense. There, sadly, I didn't know how to do it, but maybe I should have.

**SG:** Ade, maybe you're at a point, in this response, where it would be interesting to pause. This moment—corresponding with your movement between the Rijks and Jakarta at the turn of the millennium—is when a global contemporary art field begins to evolve. That's also exactly the moment out of which you came: an ending, the fall of the Suharto regime, but in another way, the post-Suharto opening onto the world. I wonder if this conjuncture might not be a way of reflecting on the postcolonial situation . . . the *reformasi* movement in Indonesia, which, in many ways, of course, evolves out of the anticolonial struggle to the extent that the anticolonial moment, itself, ended up in another, let's say, indigenous order of dictatorship: authoritarianism. And perhaps people at the time didn't exactly understand that these continuities with anticolonialism was already there, a condition of possibility for artists like you,

and perhaps that is also why Rijks Academy might be a special place—but still, I wonder how much of the category of the “contemporary,” generated largely from outside Asia at the time, was able to pose the postcolonial as a question of its *own* history.

Your residency was about four years before *Documenta11* (2002) after all, which basically introduced the category of the “postcolonial” to the concepts and practices of European art institutions (under the late Okwui Enwezor, the New York-based Nigerian curator and the first non-European director of *documenta*)—the postcolonial was, to that extent, a new thing. It was the entirety of the educational program of *Documenta11*, for which I, too, worked. Every guide had, in turn, to go through this kind of reflection to understand his or her location in an implicitly hierarchical Western exhibition structure . . . well, “to go through” is a strong phrase (*laughter*), but it was, of course, meant to be taken very seriously, through the conceptualization of different platforms in which the institutional space confronted its historical relation to complex knowledge systems that it couldn't comprehensively represent or speak for, where one could engage in a conversation about the conditions of democracy and how those very preconditions for more democratic representation in the art space remain intertwined in orders of historical and economic asymmetry. So that the “postcolonial” didn't necessarily mean an automatic decolonization of space or knowledge forms.

**AD:** What you say makes me remember . . . I forgot who . . . but an advisor from Rijks, who came to my studio and asked, “Why use these contemporary artistic formats”? I couldn't understand the question and then he's, like, yeah, well, because you have a great culture, tradition. For me,

the question was a surprise. Of course, I responded—but the incident shows how at the end of the nineties, these institutions were still very Eurocentric. I sense that there was also a fear in the question—

**SG:** If I may, I'd like to interrupt—what kind of fear? Of someone who can tell the other side of the story?

**AD:** More a fear that . . . your culture will be taken over by someone else, and in a way, the fear is real, because it's really, really strong, no? It's at the basis of a lot of institutions, also a history that has been written. I remember there was also an interview in the newspaper. And they asked whether I would like to stay in Amsterdam, or go back to Indonesia. The question, then, was really, "What are you doing, here?—doing *our* stuff?" It was this threat, you know, to a certain singular manifestation of what art should be and the belief that art—in the sense the advisor meant, the "contemporary" stuff—should be owned by a particular people—it runs deep in the sense of ownership . . . this fear of having one's ownership over history threatened, no?

**IH:** I was about to answer some part of your earlier question. I do think about the postcolonial and its relationship to the colonial, precisely because this issue for us, in Indonesia, is not consciously practiced. So *documenta eleven*, as you said, was really when there was a conceptual announcement of the postcolonial across global institutions. But maybe the work was already unconsciously practiced in Indonesia. I mean, Ade has studied enough about it—no?—written history, and the suffering of the freedom fighters during the colonial period is studied, after all. So, you know, I think artistic practice has to be

contextualized, relativized—because if you compare the case of Indonesia with India, you see it is completely different, I lived in India for two years and saw that the discourse of colonialism was really consciously, you know, addressed. And that's not the case in Indonesia—we don't have comparably strong writers or thinkers on the subject of Indigenous hierarchy after decolonization, for example—but there may already be ways in which the question is engaged or practiced unconsciously.

**SG:** Isn't it different because you had literature—an imaginary for the postcolonial as dissent—during the New Order? I'm thinking of, say, Pramoedya Ananta Toer's quartet—of literature, that is, the narrative form and possibilities of the novel that enabled this imagination of the postcolonial, which restaged colonial history but for Indonesia *in that time*, currently, under the New Order.

**IH:** That's what I'm saying. . . . In Indonesia, the thinkers of independence in the early twentieth century up to Sukarno or Muhammad Hatta, really, several others from that period believed the only way to be independent, to be free from colonization, was to become modern, to be literate—conversant in the same lingo of the colonizer and then fight with it, within it. But of course, other thinkers contested this idea of the modern with the counterproposal of locality, like, Ki Hajar Dewantara, for example, who wrote about how education systems should be mixed with the ethos of Taman Siswa, or the praising of local tradition . . . Indigenous wisdom and so on. Pramoedya belongs in this history on the side of Sukarno because he took literature as a tool of the modern while situating it in localized experience; he added context to the notion of the modern.

In the late '90s and 2000s, when I was still an outsider to the arts, I watched how the art scene made artists of this time famous because they struggled against the New Order regime—and that is exactly what the painters in the modern era did against the Dutch in the early twentieth century. Using the medium, though in a different mode, and so constructing a new art form in its opposition to the Suharto regime. But if you notice, now, only a few of these artists have survived. Because in the reformation era they are no more, I mean, the medium itself lost its force—there was a moment when using the medium in a strong installation was powerful (as a way of representing nationhood), but then, after the *reformasi*, there was no context anymore for this kind of practice. From my outside position, in this moment, I saw that *ruangrupa* was working in very different ways *from* this history to voice, to address, the urban.

**AD:** Most of us may be nonbelievers—we don't really believe in art. Even as individual artists, you know, we're just happy enough to do things collectively in *ruangrupa*—"nonbeliever" may be too strong, but I mean we don't really define our practice unidimensionally, and so maybe that is also why people see *ruangrupa*—rightly or wrongly—as a place, a location—not as art or from the perspective of a use in the economy.

**SG:** I would like to bring that question back, now, to Sonsbeek (*Sonsbeek '16: TransACTION*, Arnhem). How was your artistic direction of the prestigious Sonsbeek exhibition tied up with the biographical element of growing up with Bandung? As Iswanto has pointed out, Bandung's anticolonial internationalism was a part of your education, a national imagination but also, considered speculatively after the passing of dictatorship, it was the promise of the modern in your country. Was

Sonsbeek an invitation to respond to this historical sensibility? You were a collective from Indonesia, invited for the second time to the Netherlands, the erstwhile colonizer, to create an exhibition of public art. How to answer the cultural demand of a Western-centric, self-critical, or revisionary approach to Europe's colonial history, while also developing your own strengths through regional Asian networks?

**AD:** I would say we had already begun developing a response to this question in the project before Sonsbeek, which was much smaller. What was it called? *Beyond the Dutch*.

**RA:** *Beyond the Dutch*, 2009. And that was the first time that we developed the concept of the *uru* house as a home for collecting and sharing ideas.

**AD:** Yeah, we joked that first time. We said, let's do a cultural center, you know, in the *uru* house, and we screened movies that mock the Dutch—a popular convention in the movies—but the Dutch never saw these films, or themselves, that way. So we did address colonialism, and the institutional guilt, too, but in a really humorous way. . . . We played with the guilt, but also with Indonesian history, Indonesian collective memories—in a way, '65, independence, has a much more powerful hold over the imagination, one's consciousness, than colonial times, because as so-called Indonesians, we went through it physically—kicking out the Dutch meant spilling a lot of blood; it was a war, lots of war exists in living memory.

**SG:** *Documenta* started in '55 with a view to rehabilitating so-called degenerate art of the modern era in Germany. It originated in the decision to return that art, and history, to the public as the terms of a democratic

reeducation. But to the same extent, this was also very much an American-driven idea. In '55, it was already a Cold War moment, in the sense that *documenta* engaged with abstract expressionism from the US side. And if you think of abstract art more broadly—though it was much more strongly represented in the second *documenta*—it was already linked in the first, inaugural event to the question of free public education as it was being debated within the project of national reconstruction in Germany. Ruangrupa is the first Asian artistic director—as a collective—for *documenta fifteen*, this year. How do you understand your own relation to the origins of the event, the postwar moment within Europe, which has been thought of as an opening to so much of contemporary art history.

**AD:** I want to draw the line to back to the Bandung Conference, to how it's been politicized not only internationally, of course, but also internally in Indonesia, so that for a lot of people, the Bandung Conference is dated to '55. But for us, it's not only '55, it happened several times afterward—it has been politicized in the “post” or aftermath of '55 several times, as also, the figure of Suharto. To talk about the Bandung Conference is not the same thing as imagining a clean break with the past, you know, a chronology of a colonized country being empowered and so on, and then that story of empowerment, imagined as being filed off into a different narration from the present—because in the '70s, we saw how that idea of Bandung fails, how it's corrupted in the history from Sukarno to Suharto, from Suharto into the oil boom, the military autocracy and so on. Because '65—national independence—*that* was the break, the real twist, and through it, the nation from which we get all the things from Suharto to what we have now. The revolutionary moment in '55 just doesn't work.

So that's why we don't see our presence in *documenta*, its function, as critique. We are there more as a practice, as the possibilities of speculation, or even experimentation, how we can actually influence how we see . . . who are the other parties that we're going to work with, what we can learn from them . . . that's actually how we approach the other entities or artists or collectives that we have involved. It's more like a journey or a process rather than making decisions about representation. Like the exhibition of *documenta* itself, ours is a practice that is actually open to the public; to create another kind of school that challenges our understanding of learning and artistic experimentation by coding both together, in the space-time of *documenta*. I look forward to what happens afterward. Ours is a sporadic moment, too, within the larger process because there is something to look forward to—to see how people will go on creating or taking the Kassel *lumbung* and use it through similarities to their own experience, through their own networks and exposition. After all, we developed the *lumbung*, too, with others, in Indonesia; just as there is ruru house, so the *lumbung* (the traditional rice-barn structure prepared for *documenta fifteen*) is, actually, accomplished from diverse units that will connect, hopefully, in conversation and persist afterward.

**SG:** “After-*documenta*”—that is itself an interesting proposition, do you mean that *documenta* will continue, in a sense, beyond the event of Kassel?

**RA:** Yeah, we would like to stay here in this network. Because for us, the ruru house is not really a project, it is a kind of continuation within our body—that was the plan with Iswanto—so we wanted to see what could continue, as a collective, beyond us—because after Gudskul, we are now in Kassel where we are dealing



with another new ecosystem that also has so many good friends, and which is already connected to those other networks that know us since the beginning of our time—this is a way of continuing, extending. It's not really a matter of being in Germany, with others in Jakarta—we blend in distances through this network, somehow.

**SG:** We are nearly out of time. Before we conclude, I'd like to come back to a consideration of your decades-long collaborative practice, which might be viewed as a decentring aesthetics. There are multiple ways in which this decentring occurs, from your intervention into global or national aesthetic regimes through your networks of informal association, to your focus on the urban and the everyday. I ask, because after Kassel, it is likely that you will be associated even more strongly with a denial that has been considered essential to this decentring practice—the denial of art as object. How do you reconcile this critical frame through which your history as a collaborative has been understood, with your own individual stories as you have presented them to me. Because, after all, you went to art school, you went to study film and architecture, there must have been something of art, at least as orientation, through your education.

**AD:** I think we cannot avoid reflecting on what we have been doing over twenty years—and that “doing” is a process, like *ruru* house. Some people have chosen to see this, the *ruru* house, the *lumbung*, as a curatorial method in itself. But for us, if you listen to us now, it's simply a way to be *us*, a way of living and being ourselves—being Reza or being Iswanto, in one place. With all our individual backgrounds, these personal biographies in Kassel, the backgrounds of those, in turn, in Kassel—it comes together, really, like a living thing.

**IH:** For the Indonesian, I think, the house is important in its relation to family. My parents are not in Jakarta, the house where I live is in a small city as well. It is an inheritance from my grandfather, but it's quite a big house—if, as Ade says, people come from the small cities to the big city for jobs, schools, whatever—the hope for a better life—for me, the case is the opposite. The function of the house is to gather everyone in the family from the big city, from Jakarta—we travel back not for jobs but for the family gathering. So, the house was a site where everyone came back and lived, and paid a contribution—they hosted. This was, actually, a natural way for me to grow up—the house is also, literally speaking, a collective because it was given to my mother and her sister, divided, but distributed across different and quite complex families.

**RA:** If Ade and Iswanto have mostly been hosts, I have mostly been hosted in my life because I had three different fathers growing up. So, I moved a lot, and that's why I never really settled in one space—even now, my mother rents a room, she has no house, and my stepfather lives in a worker's dormitory in Central Java. So, for me, the question is: what does it mean to live under a roof together and to really *initiate* something together? That's really precious—because then, suddenly, through the others, you're not only hosting, you are also hosted yourself. Hosted so well. This is how we learn and nurture ourselves—how we became adults together through the things that happened in *ruangrupa*, together, with friends and families, mostly. Now we have kids ourselves—and the space is an accumulation of how we practice being together.

The interview was held between Kassel and Salzburg via Zoom in December 2021.



**Figure 1** Rumah 1 (first house of ruangrupa), Garuda complex, Pasar Minggu, Jakarta, 2001.



**Figure 2** Rumah 1 (first house of ruangrupa), solo exhibition by street artist Bujangan Urban, 2001.

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**Figure 3** Rumah 1 (first house of ruangrupa), members of ruangrupa (Daniella Kunil), 2001.



**Figure 4** Rumah 2 (second house of ruangrupa), Tebet Barat, Jakarta, 2003.



**Figure 5** Rumah 2 (second house of ruangrupa), Tebet Barat, Jakarta, 2002.



**Figure 6** Rumah 2 (second house of ruangrupa), workshop, Tebet Barat, Jakarta, 2007.



**Figure 7** Rumah 3 (third house of ruangrupa), Tebet Timur, Jakarta, 2004.



**Figure 8** Rumah 3 (third house of ruangrupa), Tebet Timur, Jakarta, 2008.



**Figure 9** Rumah 4 (fourth house of ruangrupa), opening ruru gallery, 2008.



**Figure 10** Rumah 4 (fourth house of ruangrupa), concert of hardcore punk band Be Quiet, 2012.



**Figure 11** Ruangrupa, "THE KUDA: The Untold Story of Indonesian Underground Music in the 70s," rock music festival, Jakarta, 2012.



**Figure 12** Ruangrupa, sound performance gig, National Gallery Indonesia, 2008.



**Figure 13** Ruru huis, TRANSaction: Sonsbeek '16, Arnhem, 2016.



**Figure 14** Ruruhaus, kitchen, *documenta fifteen*, Kassel, 2021.



**Figure 15** *Where's the P|art|y?*, sketch, *documenta fifteen*, Kassel, 2021.



**Figure 16** Ruru haus, members of ruangrupa (Farid Rakun, Indra Kusuma, Ade Darmawan), Kassel, 2021.





**Figure 17** Ruangrupa, "self-portrait," Jakarta.



**Figure 18** Ade Darmawan, banner of Haji Mohamed Suharto (president of Indonesia, 1967–98), action during protests against Suharto regime, Dam Square, Amsterdam, 1998.



**Figure 19** Ade Darmawan, banner of Haji Mohamed Suharto (president of Indonesia, 1967–98), artist's studio, Rijksakademie, Amsterdam, 1998.



**Figure 20** Reza Afisina, *Estar Flotante Vida Mia*, JakArt@2001, Jakarta. 2001, video still.



**Figure 21** Reza Afisina, *Estar Flotante Vida Mia*, JakArt@2001, Jakarta. 2001, video still.

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**Notes**

1. Anti-Suharto protests are considered to start from February 19, 1998, with the start of the first prominent student protests, which waged a campaign to bring down President Suharto; in May, riots broke out around student protests, which were met with military action, especially in Medan, in Jakarta, and also Surakarta (or Solo). These events had their immediate political and economic causes in the run-up to parliamentary elections held the year before, in May 1997, when students organized the *golput* (open ballot) campaign, calling for an election boycott. The call, more broadly, for both political and civil reform also increasingly issued from faculty and intellectuals based on university campuses. The monetary crises that crippled Southeast Asian economies in 1997–98 resulted in the collapse of the Indonesian rupiah, accelerating nationwide demands for an end to Suharto's thirty-two-year rule. When, in early March of 1998, organized opposition-party leaders failed to effectively challenge the establishment, with Indonesia's parliament unanimously electing Suharto for a seventh five-year term, the student protest movement became the nationwide focus of political opposition.
2. In November 1998, a neighborhood brawl in the narrow streets of the Ketapang area, a small *kampung*, or communal settlement in the shadow of the Gajah Mada Plaza mall, escalated into two days of unabated sectarian violence. With police and state forces preoccupied with quelling civil unrest related to the student protests, Muslim mobs pursued and lynched local Ambonese Catholics, unchecked; these clashes involved arson as well as the mass rape of ethnic Chinese women and resulted in at least fourteen fatalities.

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**Reza Afisina** studied cinematography—specifically sound recording for film and documentary features—at Jakarta Institute of the Arts, Indonesia (1995–99). He was an artist in residence at KHOJ International Artists' Association, New Delhi, in 2004. Afisina remains a key member of ruangrupa, supporting art initiatives in an urban context through research, collaboration, workshops, exhibitions, and publications. He served as the program coordinator for ruangrupa from 2003–7 and has been the artistic director of their ArtLab since its inception in 2008.

**Ade Darmawan** lives and works in Jakarta as an artist, curator, and director of ruangrupa. He studied at Indonesia Art Institute (ISI), in the Graphic Art Department. A year after his first solo exhibition in 1997 at the Cemeti Contemporary Art Gallery, Yogyakarta (now Cemeti Art House), he moved to Amsterdam for a two-year residency at the Rijksakademie Van Beeldende Kunsten. In 2000, he was one of five artists from Jakarta who founded ruangrupa.

**Iswanto Hartono** is one of the few contemporary Indonesian artists with a background in architecture. Recognized for a strong conceptual base to his practice, Hartono has been exhibiting his works since the late 1990s, showing works with strong social and political content. His work investigates the tensions among history/memory, globalization, and geopolitics within frames of race/identity and the postcolonial. Previous projects have focused especially around the legacies of colonization and postcolonial debates, within the battle for identity in contemporary Indonesia. Some of his latest exhibitions include *Beyond Wonder: Perspective of Utopia, Tokyo Wonder Site, Nagoya* (2018), *DAK'ART 2018*, during Dakar Biennale 2018 (*Para-Site*); and his latest self-titled solo show, staged in Oudekerk, Amsterdam, during *Europalia Indonesia* (2017). Iswanto Hartono lives and works in Jakarta as an artist, architect, curator, and writer. With Reza Afisina, also a founding partner of ArtLab, ruangrupa, he established the duo, RAIH.