



W YEO WORKSHOP

**CITRA SASMITA
INTO ETERNAL LAND**

31 January - 21 April 2025
Barbican, The Curve, UK

INTO ETERNAL

Citra Sasmita: Into Eternal Land
31 January-21 April 2025
Barbican, The Curve

Commissioned by Barbican, Citra Sasmita transforms The Curve into a spiritual journey entitled *'Into Eternal Land'* for her first UK solo exhibition.

Working fluidly across painting, sculptural installation, embroidery and scent, Sasmita brings visitors on a symbolic, multi-sensory experience through the 90-metre-long gallery to explore ideas of ancestral memory, ritual and migration. Sasmita draws from long histories of displacement and migration across the Indonesian archipelago, and takes inspiration from stories of heaven, earth, and hell—from the Hindu epic Mahabharata to Dante's Inferno.

The exhibition unfolds across several acts. Panoramic scroll paintings reveal women undergoing transformation and rebirth, while embroidered textiles—made in collaboration with women artisans in west Bali—honour the history of women herbalists. At the exhibition's close, Sasmita offers a space for meditation around a golden mandala of ground turmeric, welcoming visitors to take some time to sit and reflect. An ambient soundscape by Indonesian experimental composer Agha Praditya Yogaswara responds to the commission.

Into Eternal Land speaks to universal and urgent concerns: connecting with ancestral traditions, grappling with the precarity of the natural world, and proposing the possibility of feminist resistance.

LAND

Citra Sasmita
Into Eternal Land

For her first solo UK exhibition, Indonesian artist Citra Sasmita invites viewers on a symbolic journey, exploring ancestral memory, ritual, and migration

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Sasmita's practice challenges traditional narratives and rejects reductive Dutch colonial conceptions of Bali. She reinvents the motifs and materials of Indonesian Kamasan painting, which dates from the fifteenth century and depicts Hindu epics and Indonesian mythologies. Historically practiced exclusively by men, in these paintings women were either sexualised, reduced to the sole purpose of reproduction, or cast as evil. Reclaiming this tradition, Sasmita's protagonists are powerful women inhabiting a post patriarchal world.

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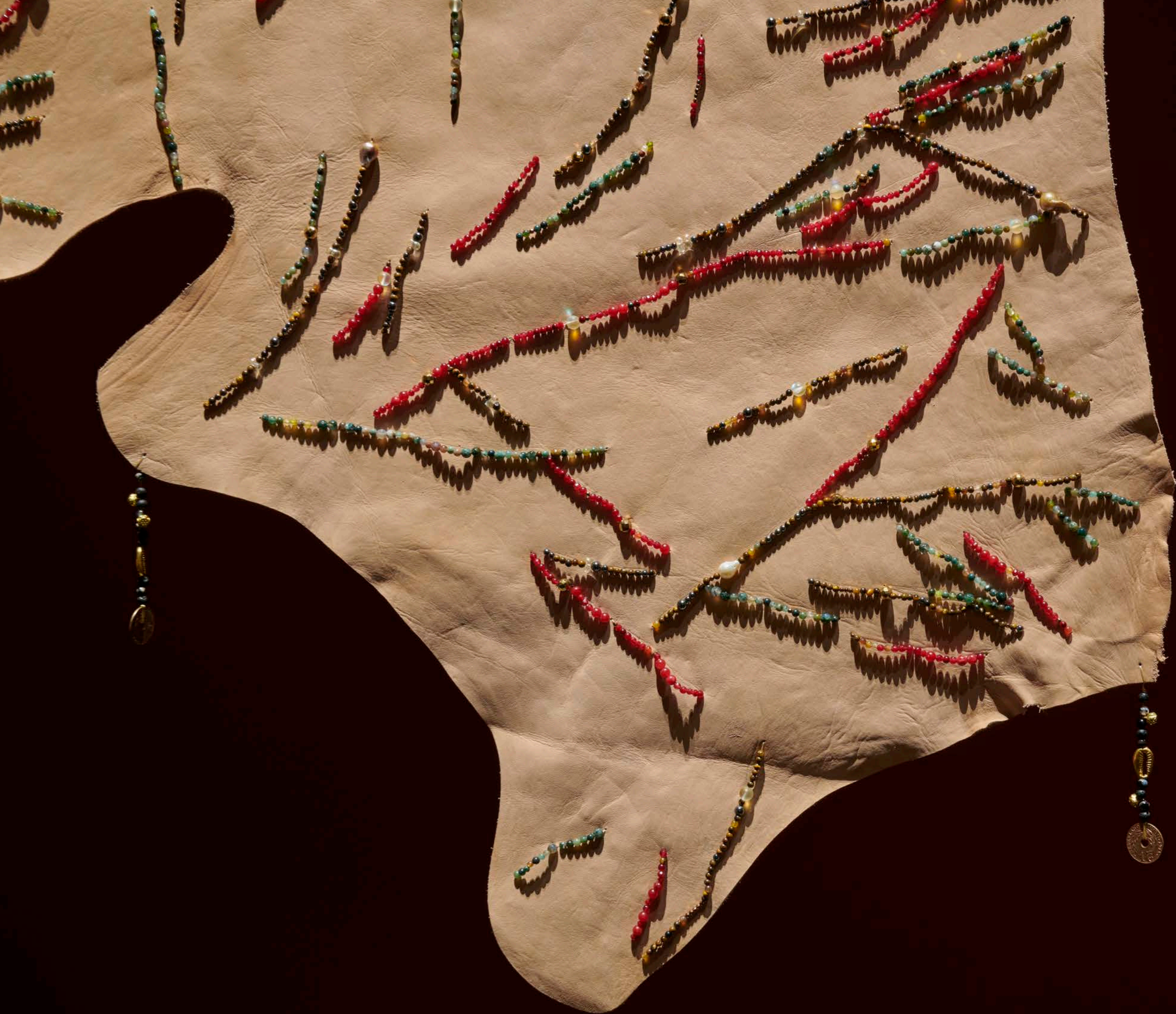




PROLOGUE

Embarking onto this site-specific ritual that Citra Sasmita has carefully orchestrated, the journey *Into Eternal Land* begins with a fleet of flying horses—ornate strips of cowhides suspended over antique wooden pillars punctuated across the space. The artist transports us to a time before, of migration and bustling trade routes in Asia—the fervent pursuit of new lands and resources for survival and continuity. Antique Dutch coins from 1945 and brightly coloured beads adorn each piece of cowhide, tracing the numerous wrinkles and creases across the leather, which serve as markers for memory and passing time, at the same time resembling the landscapes of Nature.

Sasmita likens the cowhides to our own bodies as vessels for memory, where stretch marks on our skin carry the memories of our ancestors and that of our human experience, of migration. These cowhides undulate over antique wooden pillars that have been carefully sourced and are characteristic in the homes of Royal families in Bali, where the carvings of flowers are more complex and feature three petals than those in ordinary homes. Reminiscent of shelter and civilisation, these ancient wooden pillars—all salvaged and incomplete—echo the dilapidation of ancestral heritage, where there no longer are foundations to anchor the spirits of our pasts.

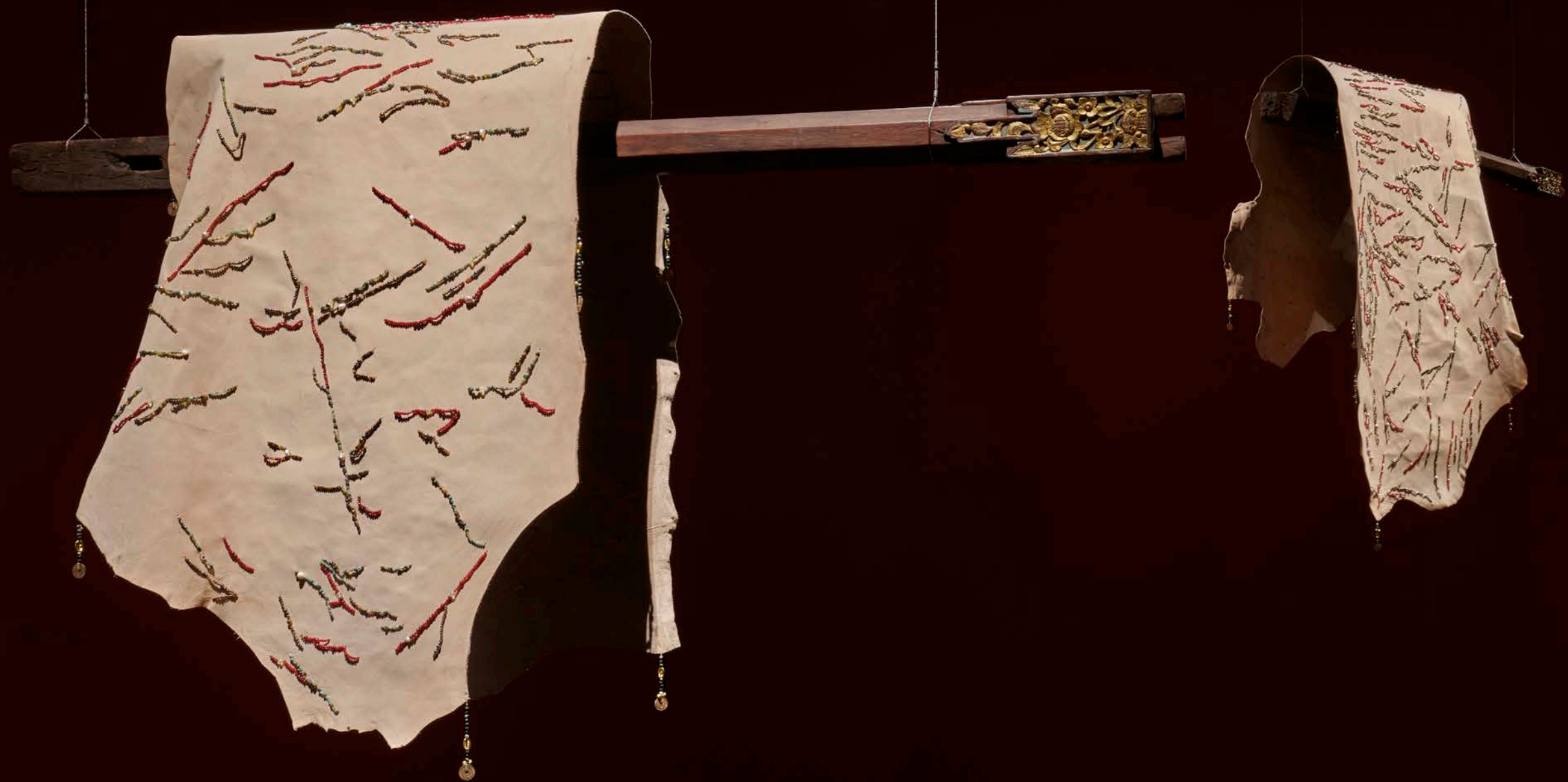


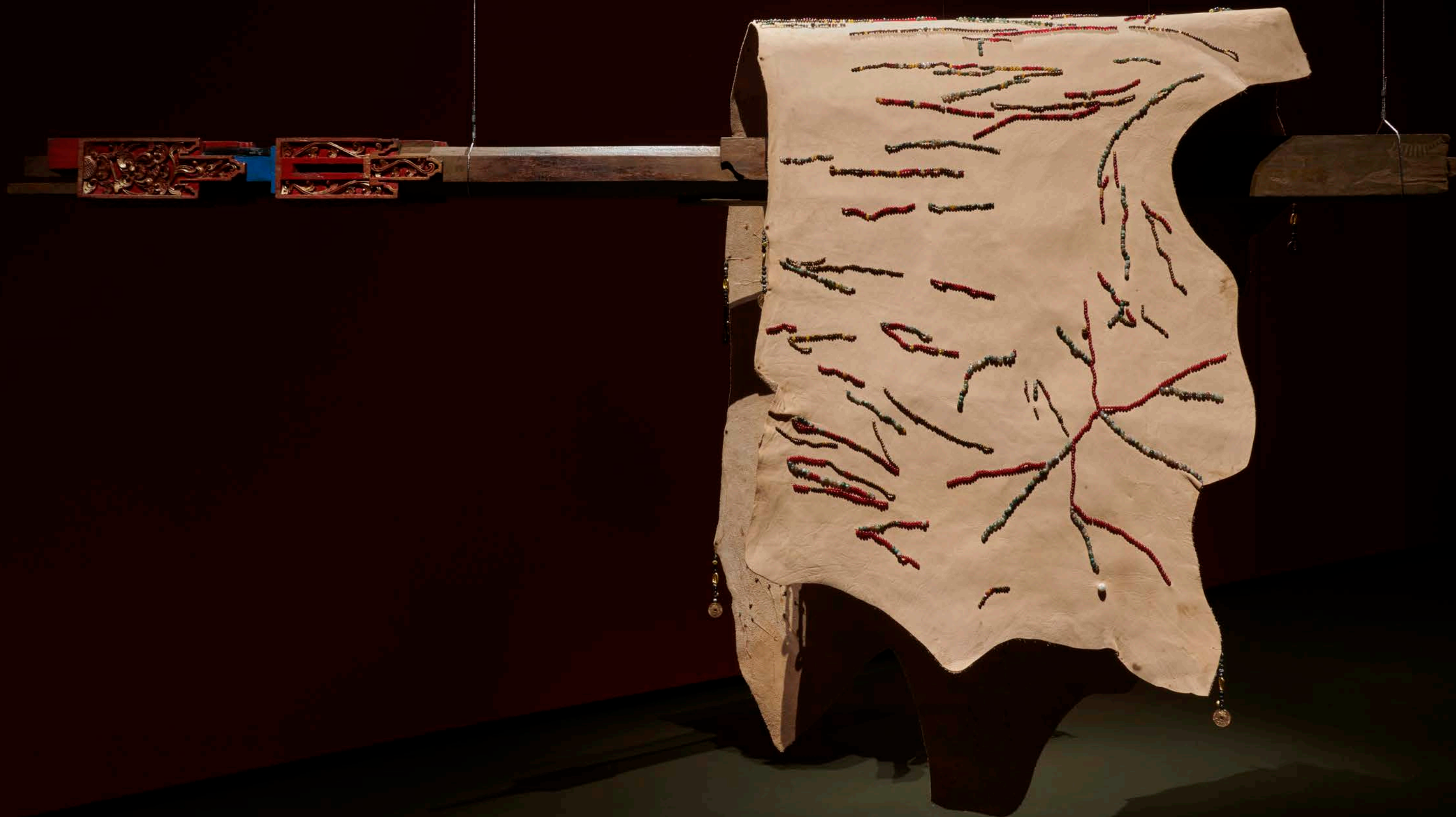


CITRA SASMITA

Prologue (Cowhide 1-5), 2024

Beaded cow hides hung on antique wooden pillars with aluminium saddles
each 100 x 180 cm (cowhide) , wood length 170/180 cm
(CITS25013-CITS25017)





ACT I



From worldly sights, one arrives at the Anthropocene in *Act One*. Sasmita animates the dynamic powers of the human and superhuman as four panoramic scrolls of Kamasan paintings unfurl horizontally across Barbican's curved walls. Kamasan paintings, the earliest form of painting in Bali, typically extend across hundreds of meters of canvas displayed along the ceiling of a traditional Balinese structure called *ider-ider*.

A cosmological concept from Hinduism, an *ider-ider* refers to the notion of a central axis of energy that anchors and connects the macrocosm and microcosm of our universe. Much like planets that revolve around the sun in our solar system, human life follows cyclical patterns and philosophical narratives that provide guidelines for living and solutions to daily challenges. Sasmita thus incorporates this inclusive idea of *ider-ider* in *Act One*, reflecting on the various states of human experience: from harnessing power to releasing it; from discovery to enlightenment; suffering to salvation; sacrifice to rebirth.





Headless female figures form a ubiquitous presence, representing the relinquishing of personal ego towards greater empathy and ultimately, self-sacrifice — for the purification of one's body and soul. Drawing parallels to the story of reincarnation in *Journey to the West*, the fiery figures in Sasmita's intricate compositions undergo different stages of torture and regeneration in Fire and Water, to enter the womb of birth into a life anew.

Sasmita's own palm is also hidden within these canvases, a reminder of how deeply present the artist's hand is in her work and a broader affirmation of her personal aspirations. She recalls drawing a map on her palm in the past, dreaming up these fantasies to visit other countries in the future, which she has since realised much of.

Her own alter ego is depicted in the form of a fountain, where knowledge is growing and branching out from her head, connecting her to her ancestors and the countless heroines in Balinese history that have inspired and influenced her. Grounded in a wellspring of empowered cosmology, Sasmita sees the evolution of herself as one that has become fruitful and fertile. Such earnestness echoes throughout and to the tail end of *Act One*, where a lotus emerges from within, with roots stemming from the heart, and blooms at the crown chakra (the energy centre of higher thought and spiritual connection in Sanskrit).

“The mind is not from the brain but the heart, that is when you receive enlightenment,” says Citra Sasmita.



CITRA SASMITA

Act One (Scroll 1), 2024

Acrylic on Kamasan canvas

75.5 x 829.5cm

(CITS25003)





CITRA SASMITA

Act One (Scroll 2), 2024

Acrylic on Kamasan canvas

75.5 x 817 cm

(CITS25010)





CITRA SASMITA

Act One (Scroll 3), 2024

Acrylic on Kamasan canvas

75.5 x 801.5 cm

(CITS25011)





CITRA SASMITA

Act One (Scroll 4), 2024

Acrylic on Kamasan canvas

75.5 x 799 cm

(CITS25012)





ACT II



Following the state of enlightenment, a vessel is conceived by Sasmita to hold and protect such divine energy. *Act Two* consists of two temples, where a pair of giant creatures appear to be at meditative rest, enveloped in cascades of alternating black and white braids of hair. Here, Sasmita focuses on how to manifest transcendence within a space.

Balance and harmony underlie every aspect of this section, from the doubling of the mythological creatures that serve as guardians of heaven and hell, to the black and white braids of hair symbolising yin and yang. An antique mask rests atop each 'temple', one representing masculine energy while the other feminine, as seen from the subtle differences in their features, the latter sporting gentler lines and curves. Similar to spiritual masks used in Balinese rituals and made from wood growing in cemeteries that are cut only on sacred days, they almost function as the Hypothalamus of the brain—the hormone that controls all bodily functions.



Sasmita's iconography continues to suffuse the space, this time on python skins that form the bodies of these celestial guardians, emphasising yet again the motif of the snake omnipresent in this exhibition. Serpents are often present in many mythologies, from the 'ouroboros' in Ancient Egyptian and Greek mythology to the 'naga' deities in Hindu and Buddhist legends, associated with the symbol of infinity and eternal renewal.

In Balinese culture in particular, they also represent spiritual power and the balance between opposing forces, where the coiled snake or 'Kudalini' is said to harness primal energy at the base of its spine, waiting to be awakened and rise through the chakras towards spiritual enlightenment.





CITRA SASMITA

Act Two (Snake Painting, Ular 1), 2024

Acrylic on python skin, artificial hair and found wooden carved mask

400 x 200 cm

(CITS25006)



CITRA SASMITA

Act Two (Snake Painting 2), 2024

Acrylic on python skin, artificial hair, and found wooden carved mask

400 x 200 cm

(CITS25005)





ACT III



If Kamasan Village represents the East of Bali, then *Into Eternal Land* is Sasmita's own metaphorical journey to the West. From the Kamasan paintings in *Act One* that highlight the traditions of Klungkung, she brings us to the West of Bali with the embroideries in *Act Three*. These embroideries were made in collaboration with artisans from the Jembrana community, who Sasmita has been working closely with for more than a year. A continuation of her larger installation *Timur Merah Project XII: Rivers With No End* (2023) which she first showed at Diriyah Biennale in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia last year, these newly developed textile works for Barbican reflect the Jembrana artisans' deft mastery of colours and craft, which is now a dying trade in Bali.

Nearly symmetrical in composition, these embroideries honour the history of women herbalists. They also reinforce the fundamental importance of repetition in Balinese rituals and culture, as an accessible means for passing on knowledge to the local community across generations. For Sasmita, her iconography of impassioned figures is a vernacular that she is creating in hopes to translate and transform our understanding of Balinese heritage, colonial history and womanhood, through the manifold ways in which she adapts her language onto Kamasan canvas, ancient fabrics, the many other constellations she has conceived.





CITRA SASMITA
Act Three (1), 2024
 Embroidery on canvas
 300 x 150 cm
 (CITS25007)



CITRA SASMITA
Act Three (3), 2024
 Embroidery on canvas
 300 x 150 cm
 (CITS25008)





CITRA SASMITA
Act Three (2), 2024
 Embroidery on canvas
 300 x 150 cm
 (CITS25009)



EPILOGUE

For the *Epilogue*, Sasmita has envisioned a sensorial golden mandala for visitors to gather around, pause and take a moment for quiet reflection. She pens a translation of a fourteenth century Javanese poem, Kidung Wargasari, in turmeric powder, whose fragrance innocuously envelopes the space and reinvigorates our senses.

The poem speaks of the year's most fertile season, a time eagerly anticipated and celebrated through poetry recitation and rituals in Bali. Above it, a Kamasan canvas laced with fire edges, depicting the seven chakras, hangs like a stairway to heaven. Adam and Eve, the epitome of cardinal desire and temptation, form the base of the canvas and lead upwards to eventual enlightened consciousness at the crown chakra where everything—body and soul—comes full circle.

*Thou Mother of Earth, Mother of Universe
The intangible, unthinkable
As the almighty creator of all that is seen
and the unseen above the world
Only for Your blessing and grace
Then words become a fountain and wisdom
becomes the current
The essence of the beginning is a necessity
As the days bend to the times
In a scene that is expertly played by its
inhabitants;
Between giving and stealing lives,
There aren't many choices*





CITRA SASMITA

Epilogue, 2024

Acrylic on Kamasan canvas, ribbon from Sumba Island, tumeric, cushions , ambient soundscape
by Indonesian composer Agha Praditya Yogaswara
6 meters high, 7 small painting each 30 x 30cm
(CITS25018)





Between the unthinkably
giving and the
As the

CITRA

SASMITA

Citra Sasmita (b. 1990, Bali, Indonesia) is a self-taught artist. She studied literature and physics, then worked as a short story illustrator for the Bali Post before she began developing her expanded artistic practice.

Sasmita focuses on unravelling the myths and misconceptions of Balinese art and culture. At the same time, shedding light on the Dutch colonial history, which had shaped notions of authenticity in Bali. She is also deeply invested in questioning a woman's place in social hierarchy and seeks to upend normative constructs of gender by reimagining mythical and classical narratives of war and romance to exalt female resistance instead. Her works reflect the complexity between the Anthropocene and post-human, while simultaneously repositioning women within the historical canon – an action that is necessarily urgent in her Balinese environment.

Sasmita employs the Kamasan painting technique, which originates from a small village in Klungkung, East Bali since the 15th century and is traditionally exclusively practised by men to narrate Hindu epics. She engages with it as a reclamation of female agency, reimagining narratives drawn from ancient Balinese literature, rituals, mythologies and iconography. In recent years, she has expanded her practice to include sculpture and installation, incorporating various materials such as braided hairs, exotic animal skins, antique wooden pillars and ancient textiles to create her universe of empowered and divine cosmology.

Her work will be featured in the forthcoming Sharjah Biennial 16, Sharjah, UAE (6 February-15 June 2025) and Hawai'i Triennial 2025, Hawai'i (15 February-4 May 2025).





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CATALOGUE

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Installation views

Citra Sasmita, *Into Eternal*

Land, The Curve, Barbican,

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Photo: Jo Underhill / Barbican.

Portrait of the artist for FT

Photo: Toby Coulson.

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