

# Monsoon Song



FYEROOL DARMA

Semalam  
...orang hilang kepala  
menangis kebudakaan...<sup>t</sup>  
**Kini**, orang hilang kepala  
mencari pegangan.

**Yeo Workshop presents *Monsoon Song*,**

the second solo exhibition by Fyerool Darma. Drawing from the aesthetics of urban subcultures, traditional ceremonies and the folk craft of Singapore, Malaysia and the region, this exhibition brings into collision a range of seemingly hostile sounds, images and objects, and gives expression to the synthetic conformation of Southeast Asian cultures.

Like a documenting device making fugitive passage across distance and duration, Darma captures and collages vistas, rememberings and imaginaries too contrasting to compose a cultural singularity. A framed work comprised of text on artificial cowhide imitates the Indonesian practice of printing Arabic calligraphy on goat skin, sculptures are modelled after bunga manggar – palm blossoms composed of tinsel, styrofoam and bamboo poles – used in Malay weddings in Singapore, Malaysia, Brunei and Indonesia, an audio piece distorts and loops a violin sample from the P. Ramlee classic “Jeritan Batinku”, an angel wing is handcrafted from the deconstructed material of Aliph sneakers – only ever “Made in Malaysia” and, as they say, “Made for Rockers”. Darma invokes multiple articulations of Southeast Asian rural and urban culture, gestures towards the aesthetic commerce between these varied phenomena, but seeks not to resolve their meanings. The exhibition is nonspecific in its feeling, and functions as an open set of works that resists being determined along national lines.

If not a bordered entity, *Monsoon Song* then presents itself as a song continually revised by the vessels in which it traffics; a wave coalescing out of archipelagic waters, yet breaking

always back into its surrounds. Taken collectively, Darma’s works speculate postnational ways of being together. They give granularity to the connectedness of our social worlds, and moments of communal gathering, feeling and loving that exceed, whilst accounting for, conventional expectations for sovereignty and self-determination.

In such a sense, this show makes a clear demand: that we define and commit to a new kind of cosmopolitanism. Yet one that will not neatly abide by the logics of a transnational condition that was global capital’s original invention and now its socio-administrative correlate; the conflicted internationalism that transcends cultural difference to make itself the setting for the pitting together of culturally differentiated merchandise. Proposed by *Monsoon Song* is instead a para-cosmopolitanism, we might say, that avows cultural difference whilst maintaining the inseparability of cultures. One that understands the distressed bandana fastened to Darma’s sculptural installation – bearing the generic slogan “Legends Never Die” – to be both a plausible insignia of different subcultures and a pivotal point of relation between them: their shared conviviality and vitality.

In Darma’s work difference manifests not as alienation but as profound entanglement.

**i have phantoms in me.**

These works are additions to an ever growing inventory of artifacts: paintings, sculptures, melodies, texts and gestures that are informed by aesthetics of the lived as much as the reshaping landscape. They are recalibrated navigational points, updates from previous determined positions<sup>1</sup>. These markers echo the valuable and additional stimulus that transpose our spatial idea of time, space and the period – of the now – as well as its connectedness to its past. These marks are residues of my jaunt in locating the presence of ghaib; companions that are left behind by the progenitors. Within the contemporary, they exist like the unseen atoms (anu) invoked for the pleasures to serve as embellishments of culture, or sit reserved at unions of love, or to satisfy desires. Those who linger to savour its silence are minimized to being an other in the plural environment. We are in a multiverse, these different worlds are within us. Their manifestations are only separated by the different anu of time, loca, geographia, the limits of their articulare and familiarity to us. That anu, is the ghaib, jiva or the spirit/mind, yang berdamping or companions that still walk with us, they had aided me in navigation like a fog signal or the stars that glitter the skies which only guid me further.

If these works are not fitted within the frame of art of this moment, divorce it from the complexities of the contemporary context. Neither shall it be an addition to the expanding nostos and algos (or nostalgia) of the modern. We resign ourselves to a long wait, only to embrace *Si Anu*, whose beauty and values have long been minimized to myths or fallacies.

Sekalung budi,



Fyerool Darma

August 2017  
On Monsoon Song  
(Or Sumbangsih buat keesokan hari yang sia sia /  
Contributions to the fruitless futures)



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*Those who linger by the berth savour your silence (hitam)* | Bleached canvas 105 x 70



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TOP: *Those who linger by the berth savour your silence (biru)* | Bleached canvas 105 x 70

BOTTOM: *Our chants, they grace the skies as we wail with the monsun (hitam)* | Bleached canvas 105 x 10



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*Those who linger by the berth savour your silence (oleng)* | Bleached canvas 105 x 70



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*There are no names like nirvana and samsara (pertama) | Digital print, aerosol 167 x 119*



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*There are no names like nirvana and samsara (terakhir) | Digital print, aerosol 59.2 x 40*



*We resign ourselves to a long wait* | Printed cotton, painted synthetic plants, polystyrene, wood, raffia string, cotton thread, synthetic feathers 116 x 110 x 85





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*Paradise is at the tip of a needle* | Synthetic polymer paint on artificial cowhide,  
cotton thread, aluminium 114 x 80

## A CONTRABAND BANDUNG SPIRIT

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The paradisaic scenes evoked in the two *There are no names like nirvana and samsara* prints might resemble for some viewers the comically unrealistic backdrops of Malay karaoke videos of the 1990s – depicting rocky landscapes (of boulders and of gorges) of faraway lands. The images in these prints were in fact visually derived not from those videos but from an unnamed Hindi movie. A playful, if unspoken, instance of cosmopolitan disloyalty to the artist's own immediate geography of reference, yet one conceptually filial to the 90s-karaoke-video tendency towards surrealism.

In the same way these paradises are made somewhat generic and unplaceable, tableaux of motorbike riders in Terengganu, Malaysia, and the foxtail palm trees of East Coast Park in Singapore in *Our chants*, they grace the skies as we wait with the monsoon and the *Those who linger by the berth*

*savour your silence* triplet are reified and reduced to abstract silhouettes of what might have been their original, and more informative, photographic content. And yet these movements towards abstraction, or Darma's way of obfuscating the geographical specificities to which these images refer, are perhaps less representative of a journey towards the global and more the materialisation of micro-attempts to denationalise an exhibition's aesthetics.

Equally, the sound work *For an auburn moon* is wordless, and suffused instead with whistle-hums which explicitly elide any of the linguistics (and literary poetics) that would have accompanied the melodies of the heavily lyrical ballads on which the work is based. Instead of say, the multilingualism, demanded of the cosmopolitan, that makes language both a means of communication and an active archive of difference, Darma's insistence on the semantics of sound over language creates for a more democratic common currency between listeners, an alternative ordering of social relations.

*Monsoon Song* is formulated on the understanding that the normalization of the nation-state as the necessary form of human organisation carries within itself a logic for apprehending cultural difference and ascribing that difference a political meaning. It then tentatively makes palpable to the viewer: a contraband cosmopolitan spirit that insinuates itself into demarcated zones of difference, leaving in its wake holes in the walls that separate communities, apertures for seeing the other side.

Arivan Kanaga is a Singaporean curator currently researching the cultural, political, and economic viability of art's alternatives to contemporary art.



*Paradise is at the tip of a needle* | Synthetic polymer paint on artificial cowhide,  
cotton thread, aluminium 114 x 80





*gempai mela*

*At dusk, we return to perch together* | Painted shoe leather, polyvinyl acetate, thread, metal 25 x 10



TOP: *Installation of Monsoon Song*



*For an auburn moon* | cover of Oslan Husein  
'Menimbang Rasa' (Tahu Tempe: 1962) hummed  
by Mohammad Alkatiri and Dealova; violin cover  
of P. Ramlee 'Jeritan Batinku' (Ibu Mertuaku: 1962)  
by nyonya\_liew; guitar cover of Sweet Charity  
'Teratai' by Izzad Radzali Shah, originally performed  
by Wan Ahmad with Sweet Charity 4:42

**Fyerool Darma** (b. 1987, Singapore) works primarily in the medium of painting and two-dimensional installation, and is increasingly working with sound, video and sculptural installation. With a focus on themes of migration, cultural identity and postcolonialism, his works take on storytelling qualities, which retrace contested histories of Southeast Asia.

Using a methodology of creation and obliteration, he examines the relationships between symbol, text and image. He continues to live and work in Singapore.

#### EDUCATION

Class of 2012  
LASALLE College of the Arts Fine Arts – Fine Arts

#### INDIVIDUAL PRESENTATION

2017  
Monsoon Song, Yeo Workshop

2015  
Moyang, flaneur gallery

#### GROUP PARTICIPATION

2017

- Fantasy Islands, Objectifs
- Ubi, Ubi! UbiStudio

2016

- Singapore Biennale 2016: An Atlas of Mirrors, Singapore Art Museum
- SEMANGAT X, Galeri Petronas
- SCOUT Singapore: Emerging Art Practices, Gillman Barracks

2015

- Art of ASEAN, Bank Negara Malaysia Museum and Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
- Portraits in Verses, Fred Torres Gallery, New York, USA (in collaboration with Galerie Steph)
- Coming Home, Bedok Reservoir, Singapore

2014

- Cam Biasa, ArtOne 21
- FRAGMENTS, TAKSU, Singapore
- An Eminent Takeover, Eminent Plaza
- SENI MINI, Mi Casa Su Casa

2013

- GLIMPSE, BUNC@Radius
- Treehugger, FOXRIVER
- MICASA SUCASA, Mi Casa Su Casa
- A National Conversation: blah! Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore
- DUSTBUNNIES (Almanic), Société General Gallery, Alliance Française de Singapour

2012

- The Kids Aren't Alright, Almanic Clinic, Blue House Artist Village
- Painting 12B, Brunswick Street Gallery, Melbourne, Australia
- OCCUPIED ART (Lit Up '12), Telok Ayer Performing Arts Center
- Paradox-ity: City of Contrast, World Expo '12, SG Pavilion, Yeosu, South Korea
- LASALLE SHOW '12, Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore

2011

- DAIXYGALASY, INSTINC
- The City Limits (Lit Up '11), Goodman Arts Center Art Gallery
- Minimart '11, The Substation

2009

- WHITEWASHEDII:grRR! Dbl O Art Space,
- Sour Jokes, Société General Gallery, Alliance Française de Singapour

2008

- BE(long)ING, Mint Museum of Toys
- Insert Title, The Art Studio, Old School at Mt. Sophia

2007

- Pandora's Box, Frontroom Gallery, Orita Sinclair, Singapore

**Yeo Workshop** is a commercial art gallery located at the first block of Gillman Barracks. It represents local, Southeast Asian and international artists who show a strong artistic process. It aims to challenge and explore boundaries and conditions under which contemporary art is shown, exhibited and sold.

It also puts emphasis on education surrounding its exhibitions in order to create access for art markets of tomorrow and produces artist's catalogues regularly.

Further to its gallery space and range of exhibitions, it also hosts the Arnoldii Arts Club, an elite association that provides access to the art world via art appreciation engagement activities, tours, information and courses, or short talks, focusing on art history, art production and art markets.

Moreover, it has completed public art projects such as the newly rebranded Singapore Arts Club, a Gillman Barracks – based Public Arts project 2014 - 2016, whereby it hosted a district wide outdoor platform for artworks.







Fyerool Darma, *Monsoon Song* 2017

For Adam, Alawiyah, Alana, Aryque, Khidr, Nara and  
you who constantly watches and answers me in silence.

There were many songs and individuals that accompanied  
me in the months prior to this presentation. All of whom I am  
grateful for the dialogues, faith, time and space - Arivan Kanaga,  
Audrey Yeo, Charmaine Ng, Rachelle Toh, Farhan Darma,  
Razalee Eepsooni, Tauhid Munawwar, Nurulhuda Darma,  
Lee Khee San, Kassim Wari, Hjh Siti Saharah, Hjh Juaria,  
Hj. Kassim Wari, Darma Juned. To Wardah Mohamad,  
thank you for the unconditional warmth.

Photographic documentation by Matthew Teo  
and Nicholas Ong; 11 and 29 (speaker)

*Monsoon Song* has been curated by Arivan Kanaga  
Exhibition period: 8 September to 29 October 2017.

**Presented by**

**Supported by**

**Designed by**



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