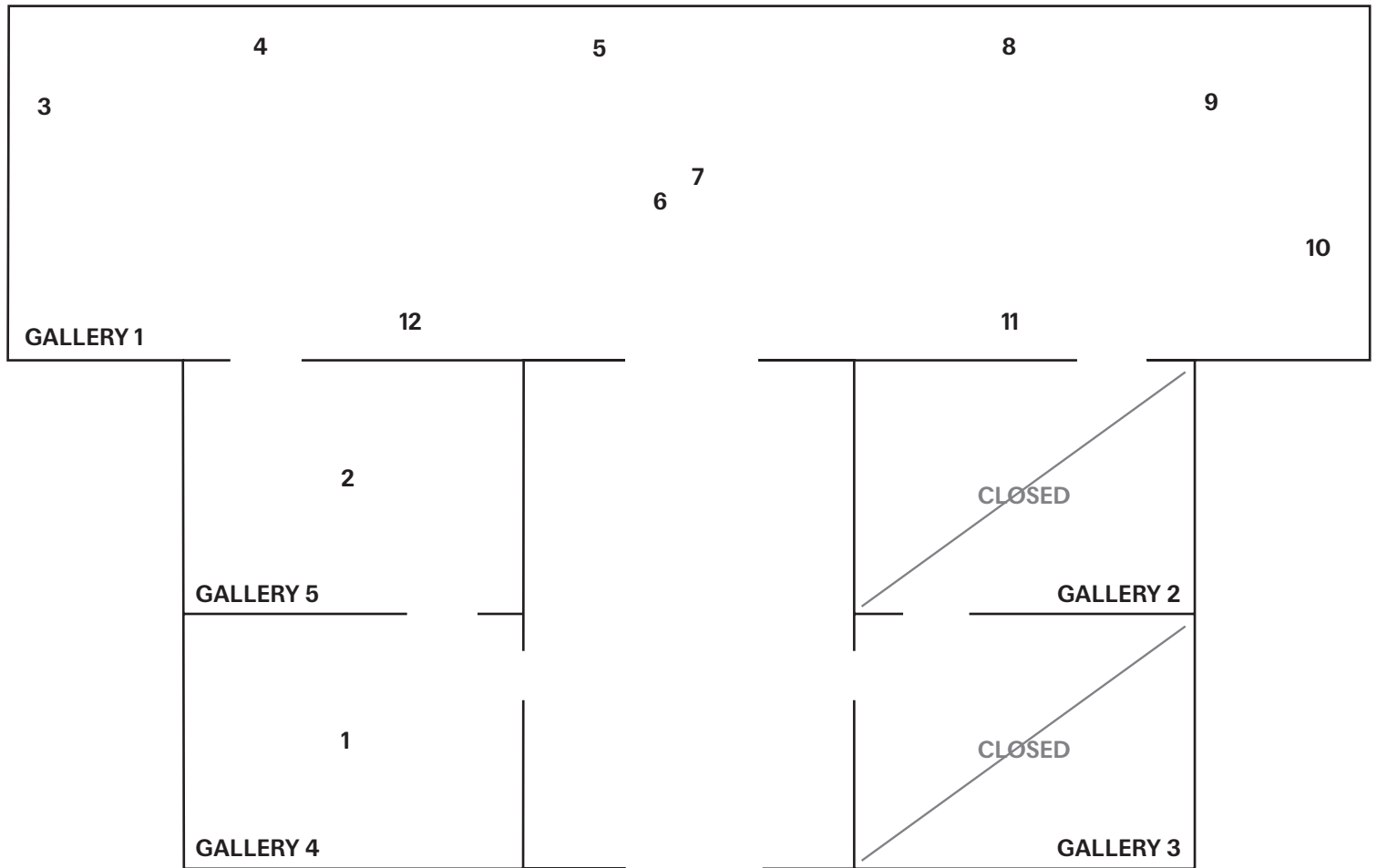


Citra Sasmita: Who Stole the Sky

Exhibition Guide
English

12.03.–16.08.26



GALLERY 1

- 3** *Enigma (2022)*
Acrylic on canvas, Endek weaving, beads, coins, 200×100 cm
- 4** *The Rites of Creation (2025)*
Acrylic on canvas, 200×803 cm
- 5** *Rise of the Mountain and Sea (2025)*
Oil and acrylic on canvas, 200×150 cm
- 6** *Into Eternal Land Act One (Scroll 3) (2025)*
Acrylic on Kamasan canvas, Endek weaving with beads, old coin, synthetic tassel, 75.5×829.5 cm. Commissioned by Barbican Centre, London
- 7** *Into Eternal Land Act One (Scroll 4) (2025)*
Acrylic on Kamasan canvas, Endek weaving with beads, old coin, synthetic tassel, 75.5×817 cm. Commissioned by Barbican Centre, London

GALLERY 4

- 1** *The Beginning of the Flesh (2025)*
Five embroidered textiles, dimensions variable

GALLERY 5

- 2** *Temple of Amygdala (2025)*
Artificial hair, brass bowl, spices, pillow dimensions variable

- 8** *Memorabilia from Far Away Land (2022)*
Acrylic on canvas, 300×160 cm
- 9** *The Rites of Revelation (2025)*
Acrylic on Kamasan canvas, hair, Jackfruit wood, 400×90 cm
- 10** *Oracle of the Sea (2022)*
Ink and acrylic on Kamasan canvas, 148×122 cm
- 11** *Cosmic Rebirth (2025)*
Oil and acrylic on canvas, 200×150 cm
- 12** *Tree of Eden (2025)*
Oil and acrylic on canvas, 200×150 cm

Who Stole the Sky is the first solo exhibition in the Nordic region by Balinese artist Citra Sasmita. For Kunsthall Stavanger, Sasmita has created a new body of work that unfolds as a multisensory meditation on ancestral memory, humanity's relationship to nature, and spirituality. Moving across painting, textile, sculpture, and installation, the exhibition proposes art as a ritual space that invites the viewer to encounter history, cosmology, and the body not as separate, but as deeply entangled realms.

At the heart of *Who Stole the Sky* is a desire to build a bridge between Balinese cosmology and Norse belief systems. Both traditions understand reality as layered and relational, structured through multiple realms that coexist rather than oppose one another. In Balinese cosmology, these realms are articulated through the Dewata Nawa Sanga: nine directions inhabited by gods, spirits, and ancestral forces. Nordic mythology similarly describes a universe composed of nine interconnected worlds, connected by the world tree Yggdrasil. By drawing these parallels, Sasmita activates a shared mythic language that transcends geography, suggesting that collective memory and spiritual knowledge move across borders and cultures.

The exhibition unfolds as a ritualistic journey rather than a sequence of discrete artworks. While it may be entered from any direction, Sasmita has structured the space according to a ceremonial flow, where thresholds mark transitions between bodily, spiritual, and cosmological states. The works are not presented as autonomous objects, but as interdependent elements within a holistic cosmology. Viewers are invited to move slowly, engaging not only visually but through breath, scent, tactility, and bodily presence.

Gallery 4 functions as a prologue. Here, embroidered textile 'hides' reference animal skins traditionally used in ritual sacrifice. In Balinese culture, such sacrifices are not acts of violence alone, but part of a broader system of redistribution, communal gathering, and shared sustenance. By translating hides into embroidered textiles, Sasmita introduces the skin as the first threshold of the body, a surface through which ritual and transformation begin. The works were produced in collaboration with master embroiderers from Western Bali, who selected colours based on spiritual and energetic significance. The installation also reflects on how artistic traditions in Bali emerge in direct relation to the land. While Western Bali is known for embroidery due to the availability of cloth and thread, Eastern Bali is associated with weaving traditions shaped by different material conditions.

A second threshold appears in Gallery 5, where braided hair installations and vessels of ground spices form *The Temple of Amygdala*. Here, hair becomes a metaphor for veins, nerves, DNA, and hormonal pathways; an internal architecture through which knowledge, memory, and instinct circulate. The spices activate the senses, engaging smell and breath while gesturing toward forms of knowledge historically transmitted through nature rather than formalised education. Prior to the introduction of Western schooling systems, such knowledge was received directly from the land, elders, and ancestors. The braided hair also invokes the gathering of ancestral and particularly female knowledge, emphasising relationality over hierarchy. Visitors are invited to sit on a meditation cushion and reflect on their connection to nature and their own embodied ways of knowing.

The Kunsthall's main gallery is filled with Kamasan scroll paintings, a tradition historically dominated by heroic patriarchal narratives. Sasmita radically reclaims this form by placing women at the centre of each cosmology. Her figures are often pregnant, on fire, split open, or bleeding; images that insist on the body as a site of creation, destruction, and renewal. Here, nature is not an external resource but a relative, reflected within the human body itself. Drawing on Christian cosmology and Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Sasmita reconfigures heaven, hell, and purgatory as internal states located respectively in the heart, mind, and stomach, emphasising self-realisation over transcendence. At the centre of the gallery, two monumental scrolls, *Into Eternal Land Act One (Scroll 3)* and *(Scroll 4)*, form an immersive passageway that visitors can physically enter. These works invite an intimate encounter with a narrative that unfolds across states of heaven, hell and purgatory. Again, Sasmita directs attention inward, to the triadic movement between heart, mind, and stomach, while foregrounding the porosity of the body in relation to its earthly environments. Backed with antique fabric depicting a Balinese temple gate, the scrolls invoke spiritual ritual and underscore the devotional dimension of Sasmita's practice.

Throughout the exhibition, sacred symbols recur: snakes, trees, fire, blood, and female anatomy form a universal pictorial language that speaks across cultures. The sacred world tree appears in *The Rites of Creation*, resonating with both Balinese cosmology and the Nordic Yggdrasil. Another suspended scroll, *The Rites of Revelation*, draws on the *lamak*, ritual hangings that function as stairways between worlds, reinforcing the exhibition's vertical movement between divine and earthly realms.

Installed nearby are three large paintings on canvas that together echo the trinity of Western religious doctrine while offering an alternative creation narrative rooted in feminine cosmology. *Tree of Eden* shows multiple figures emerging from a single hand, symbolising ancestral connection and shared lineage. In *Cosmic Rebirth*, a woman in a birth pose erupts in flames from crown and root chakras, embodying the nurturing feminine God birthing the universe; a blue lotus in her hand signifies medicine and spirituality. *Rise of the Mountain and the Sea* depicts a divine figure with fire radiating from womb and head, evoking both creative womb knowledge and the destructive power of Bali's volcanic mountains. Throughout the exhibition, fire emerges repeatedly as both a destructive and generative force, symbolising purification, volcanic power, blood, and rebirth.

Memorabilia from Far Away Land and *Enigma* trace Sasmita's transition between traditional Kamasan painting and Western canvas formats. *Enigma* explicitly addresses colonial violence, with lions symbolising Dutch imperial power in Bali during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Ultimately, *Who Stole the Sky* is an invitation to reconciliation: between humans and nature, creativity and devotion, tradition and contemporary practice. As many Balinese rituals depend on dance, movement, and continual artistic creation, Sasmita reminds us that art is not merely a commodity but a condition of being human. 'Our religion is art,' the artist notes. 'Art is intrinsic to our spirituality. We need to keep creating art to be human.' In this exhibition, art becomes a shared ritual space that asks us to remember, to sense, and to imagine new ways of living together with our human and non-human relations.

Sasmita is a self-taught artist with a background in physics, illustration, and poetry. She has trained with traditional Kamasan painters and priestesses and is one of only two women globally to have been taught this technique, which has historically been passed down through male lineages. Her practice engages with ancient Balinese myths, rituals, and iconography while reinserting female narratives into histories from which they have long been excluded. Through this reclamation, Sasmita also confronts the enduring effects of colonialism on land, education, belief systems, and artistic production, reimagining tradition not as a static inheritance, but as an evolving and critical force for transformation.

Her work has been shown in several notable biennales and triennales such as *ALOHA NŌ*, Hawai'i Triennial (Hawai'i, 2025), *to carry*, Sharjah Biennial (United Arab Emirates, 2025); *Precarious Joys*, Toronto Biennial of Art (Canada, 2024); *After Rain*, Diriyah Contemporary Art Biennale (Saudi Arabia, 2024); *Ten Thousand Suns*, 24th Biennale of Sydney (Australia, 2024); *Choreographies of the Impossible*, 35th São Paulo Biennale (Brazil, 2023); *The Open World*, 3rd Thailand Biennale, Mae Fah Luang Art and Cultural Park, Chiang Rai (Thailand, 2023); *Garden of Ten Seasons*, Savvy Contemporary, Berlin (Germany, 2022); Kathmandu Triennale (Nepal, 2021-2022); ARTJOG MMXXII, *Time To Wonder*, Jogja National Museum, Yogyakarta (Indonesia, 2021); and the Biennale Yogyakarta (Indonesia, 2019). Recent solo exhibitions include *Into Eternal Land*, Barbican The Curve, (London, 2025); *Atlas of Curiosity*, Yeo Workshop (Singapore, 2023); *Ode To The Sun*, Yeo Workshop (Singapore, 2020); and *Tales of Nowhere*, Museum MACAN, Jakarta (Indonesia, 2020).

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