



From his beginnings as street artist in Yogyakarta, Farhan Siki has become one of the most sought-after Indonesian artists to international collectors. His trademark stencil paintings address contemporary society and consumer culture.

TEXT: Naima Morelli

IMAGES: Courtesy of the artist

Farhan's non-linear path to contemporary art has laid the foundations for his current work. An history and literature major, he followed *extracurricular art* courses at University, then went straight into advertising. Making stencils and cutting out paper for a living, his day-job proved itself an important training for Farhan's art. Not only the advertising field thought him a few technical skills, but also informed the content of the artist's current practice. Farhan Siki's latest show "Trace", curated by Rifky Effendi, is currently in view at the most unlikely of the spaces for a street artist – the bank Banca Generali in Milan. For the exhibition the artist interpreted the icons of Western art history, from Leonardo Da Vinci's

“Vitruvian man”, to the Bauhaus, re-mixing them with logos and tropes of today’s materialistic society.

Even though Fahren is the darling of high-end galleries like Primo Marella, the artist has never lost touch with the street. Wherever he goes, he is always genuinely interested to bond with local artistic communities and explore the social impact of street art.

Your work appears like a stark critique of capitalism and consumer culture, but at the same time you seem fascinated with the aesthetics associated with it. Are you interested in conveying a specific message?

With my work I don’t want to make a direct commentary. I’m much more interested in creating juxtapositions between seemingly opposite concepts and images, the past and the present, the good and the evil – showing that in the end they might not come from radically different places. I’m happy that whoever sees my work can have their personal take on it. Every contemporary artist has to accept that his work will be subjected to multiple interpretations – unless, of course, he’s a propaganda artist!



At the beginning #7. 2015. Acrylic, spray paint on canvas. 200 x 200 cm

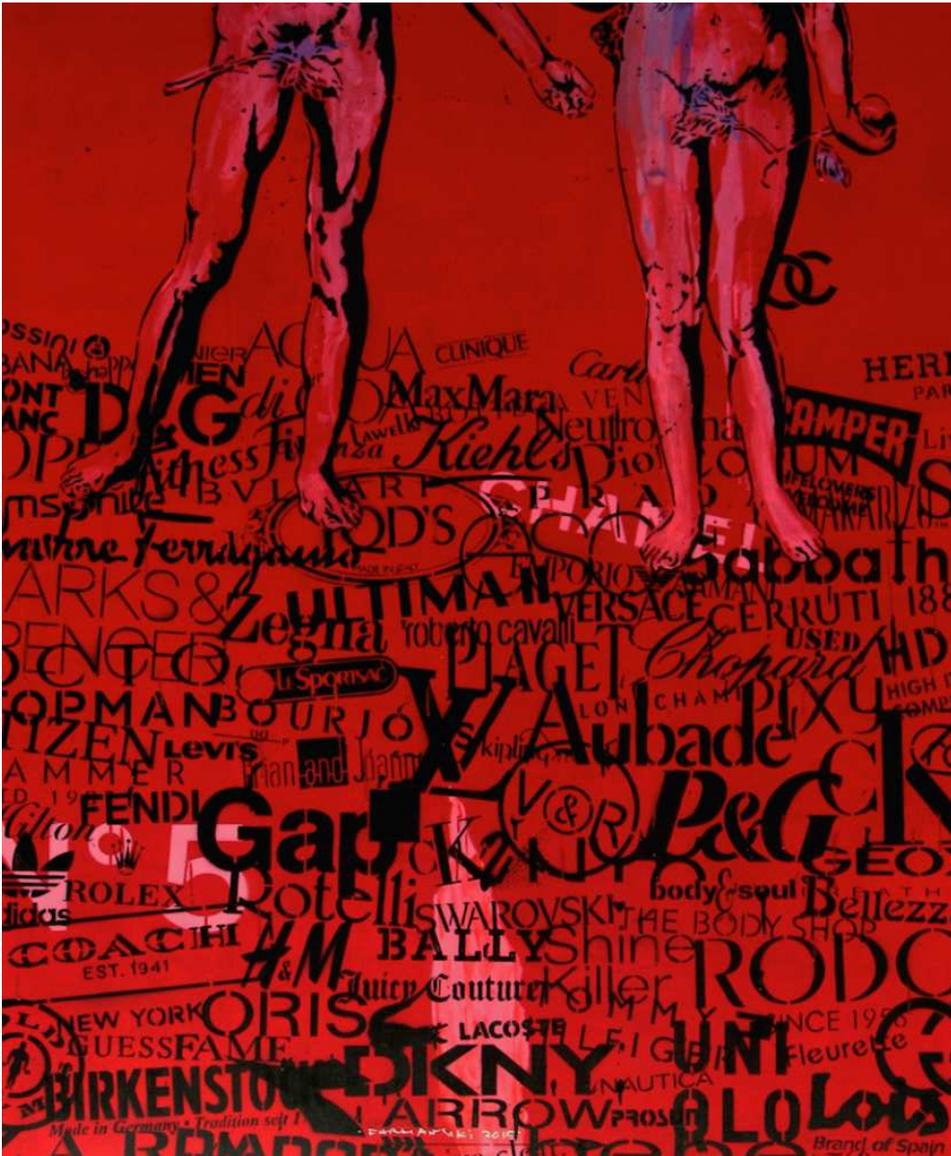
Can you tell us about the work in the exhibition at Banca Generali? Was it made specifically for the show?

Yes, the exhibition consists of roughly 26 works. For the show I elaborated images from Western art history, the Renaissance and modern art and mixed it with symbols from our modern lifestyle. I'm interested in questioning people's understanding of history. For example, the Renaissance is considered one of the greatest achievements of European culture. In the show I have this work called Now#1 with the quote from Latin poet Ovid saying "Prisca juvent alios: ego me nunc denique natum gratulor", which means: "Let

others praise ancient times; I am glad I was born in these". The writing is next to a stylized image of Milan's Duomo, a smiling emoticon and some graffiti.

You like to put high brow and low brow next to each other. In this regard, you have to admit that to have an exhibition in a bank is quite ironical for an artist coming from the street!

(Laughs) I know! If someone had told me that ten years ago, I would have never believed it! In my work I'm critical of banks as an instrument of capitalism, but the people at Banca Generali didn't feel attacked at all – they actually liked the work! Well, of course when they appointed me to exhibit in their art space, they told me: "Do whatever you want Farhan, only please, don't reference Italian banks!"



A & E Now #3, 2015. Spraypaint on canvas. 170 x 145cm

As an Indonesian working with icons from Western history and art history, do you think you have a peculiar perspective?

The Western world has always had a tendency towards Orientalism, and that persists to this day. Indonesian or Asian art are seen as exotic – their path in art history as disjointed from the western trajectory. Of course, we can't ignore the fact that Indonesia was colonized for a very long time. Before the Dutch came, Indonesia had a proud and lively culture, very diverse. After the independence there was an awareness that we needed to rebuild Indonesian identity. Because the country was rich in culture and natural resources our values have always been tolerance and optimism. On one hand traditional art kept

itself alive, on the other hand we had the Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru, the New Art Movement, that brought change both in terms of themes and media.

The artists of the Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru were not bounded to the tradition anymore. When they referred to it, they explored it in relation to today's world. I'm thinking of the famous sculpture 'Ken Dedes' by Jim Supangkat, with the upper part of the body being an ancient statue of the queen Ken Dedes, and the lower part of the body being of a cartoonish girl with unzipped jeans.

I like that work very much. In a way it is a linguistic device similar to the one I use in my work.



What are you trying to erase? #2, 2015. Alkyd enamel, spray paint on canvas. 87 x 76 cm

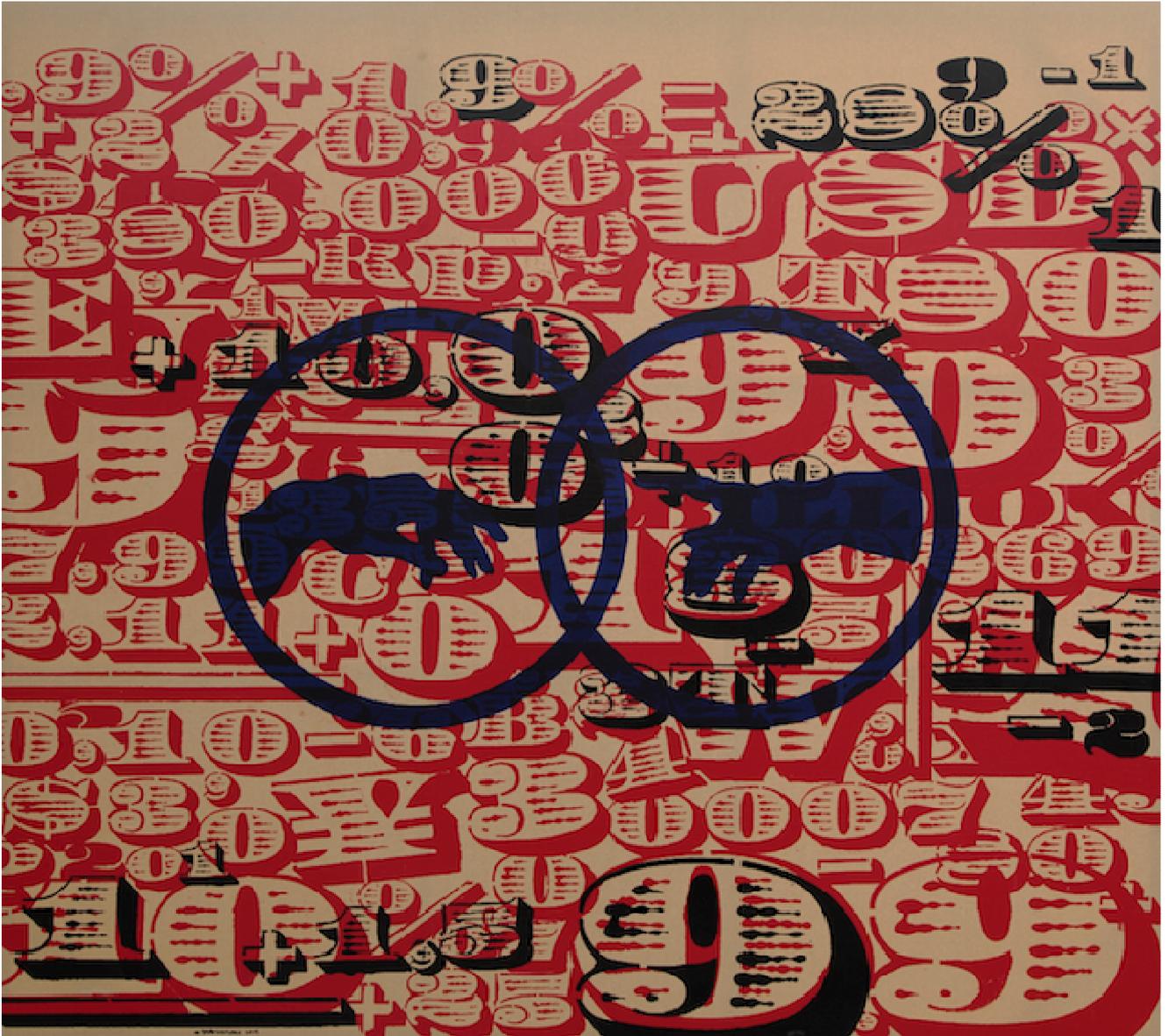
Can you tell us of your process for making art?

I always start from an idea or an observation of everyday life. Then I look at concepts that on a symbolic level are the opposite to that idea. Now for example I would like to start experimenting with tridimensional work and see people's reaction to that. I'll try to produce

some new work for the next ART Art JOG, the art fair in Yogyakarta. I like to constantly challenge myself and develop my work, both in terms of conception and execution. I'd like my art to make people pausing for a second, and think about what surrounds them in a critical way. That is something street art can do particularly well, being available to everyone passing by.

In terms of concept, where is your mind right now?

Lately I have been interested in exploring what made western art so established and in challenging the concept of value. Today the art critique it's no longer a Western purview, so we have to make our own parameters. The question that I'd like ask myself and other artists is: where is art going? With that I mean: what are the values that we artists are bringing forward, and what's the meaning of art in contemporary society? Through my art practice I try to explore these questions.



Big Deal, 2014, Acrylic, spray paint on canvas, 180 x 200 cm

Farhan Siki

Trace

2 March – 30 September 2016

Banca Generali

Piazza Sant'Alessandro 4

Milan

Naima Morelli is an arts writer and curator with a focus on contemporary art from the Asia Pacific region. She has written for ArtsHub, Art Monthly Australia, Art to Part of Culture and Escape Magazine, among others, and she is the author of “Arte Contemporanea in Indonesia, un’introduzione” a book focused on the development of contemporary art in Indonesia. As a curator, her practice revolves around creating meaningful connections between Asia, Europe and Australia.