

Video as Simulation of Reality: Interview with New Media Pioneer Krisna Murti | COBO Social

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Krisna Murti, Branded Fruits Archipelago



Krisna Murti, Still of The Kabau Gadang

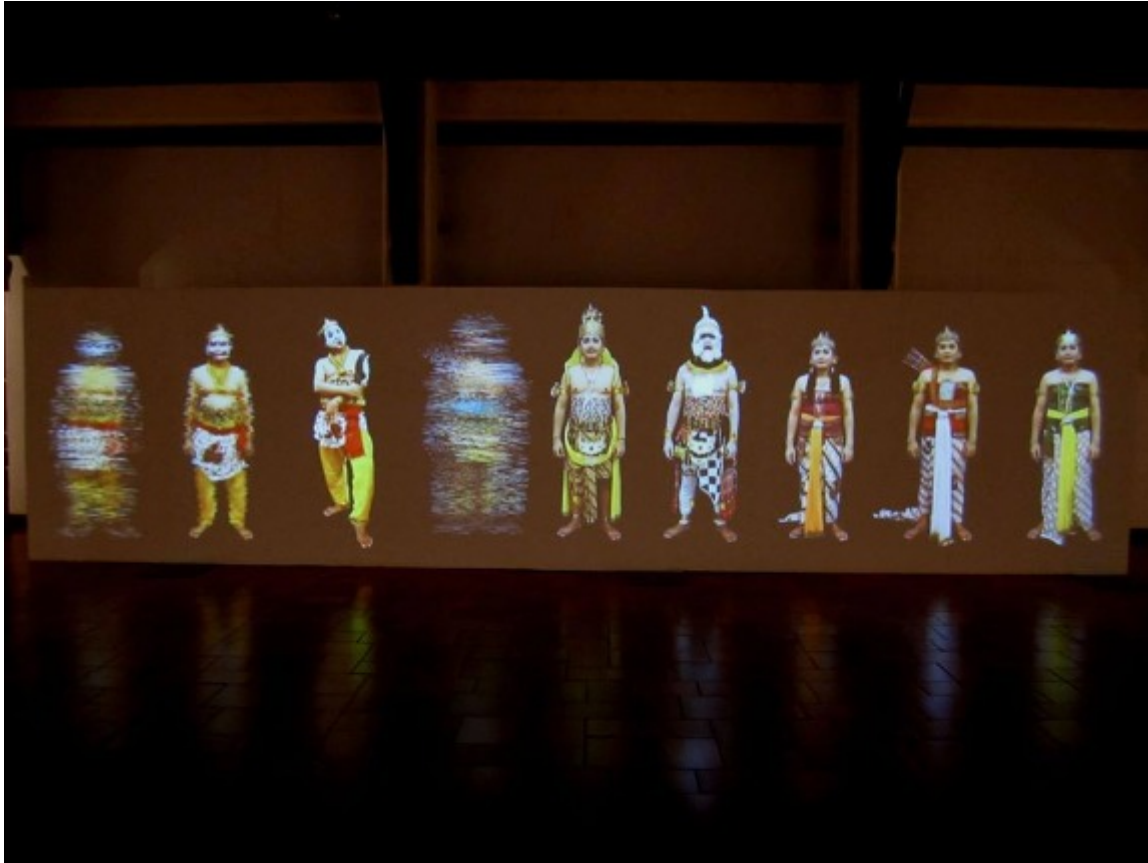


Krisna Murti, Still of The Kabau Gadang





Krisna Murti, e-ART-h-quake No. 2



Krisna Murti, Still of Empty Theater



Writer Naima Morelli (left) and the artist Krisna Murti

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Naima Morelli is an art writer and curator with a focus on contemporary art from the Asia Pacific region. She has written for ArtsHub, Art Monthly Australia...

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Indonesian artist Krisna Murti has pioneered video art in Southeast Asia. He gave us a preview of his new video work *The Kabau Gadang* ("The Big Water

Buffalo”), based on Silek, a martial art from West Sumatra.

TEXT: Naima Morelli

IMAGES: Courtesy of the artist



Krisna Murti, Branded Fruits Archipelago

Krisna Murti is a pioneer of video art and new media in Southeast Asia and a human milestone in contemporary Indonesian art. His first solo exhibition of videos in 1993 in Bandung featured the work *12 Hours in the Life of Agung Rai the Dancer*, which in 2014 became part of the National Gallery Singapore’s permanent collection.

The artist grew up in the tradition of the Wayang Kulit, or shadow puppets, in Java and Bali, which still constitute the basis for his approach to video art. In the words of the artist: “Video art is shadow art with the aid of media technology. People now see reality through a screen, and that is part of the reason why I use the video.”

Krisna Murti’s latest work *The Kabau Gadang* is set in Sumatra and will be exhibited in Bandung in mid-November 2016, in conjunction with the Indonesian new media art festival.



Krisna Murti, Still of The Kabau Gadang

Your new project deals with Silek, West Sumatra’s version of Silat. How did you become interested in this martial art, and why did you decide to make a work about it?

I have visited West Sumatra several times, and felt it was time to make a video based on local culture. On some of my trips to the area, I was impressed by the countryside and the fertile, prosperous agrarian culture that has developed around the rice fields. This is reflected in the martial arts, the rituals and everyday habits.

In general, West Sumatra has two kinds of martial arts called Silek. The first is more of a sport. The second, Silek tuo, is less known and consists of more of a spiritual practice. Silek tuo is the basis of my new video *The Kabau Gadang* (“The Big Water Buffalo”). The movements of West Sumatra’s Silek are inspired by animals such as goats, tigers, cats and so on, and in this farming-based society, the buffalo is the most important protector-animal.

In the video I wanted to make the audience “drift in relation” (like ‘in relation

to it?’) – basically I used an aesthetic strategy to make the audience not only understand the work on a conceptual level, but to actually experience it. This idea was actually included in the original mantra which accompanies the buffalo-inspired movements in Silek.



Krisna Murti, Still of The Kabau Gadang

What role does Silek play in the local community?

Silat or Silek? provides a social counterweight within the local culture. According to the martial arts teacher “Kabau Gadang”, aka Firzal Antoni, Silat teaches a humble attitude and survival skills/self-defence skills without knocking out an opponent. Silat is a *silaturahmi* (relationship).

My work *The Kabau Gadang* shows the full range of movements against a background of rice fields and mountains characteristic of the territory of the Minangkabau ethnic group. This is a reference to the history of early 20th-century Indonesian landscape paintings, called Mooi Indies, a genre introduced by the Dutch during the colonial period. I represented the Dutch colonial perspective on Indonesia as biased towards its beautiful nature and seen through an exotic lens. Paddy fields, palms and other trees and mountains were the main themes. Mooi Indie painters wanted to represent a sense of longing for a slow-paced world as opposed to the modernity of Europe.

Can you describe how the final work looks?

The final work is a double-channel video. The right screen shows a Silat warrior reciting incantations relating to the landscape on the left screen. The video aims to be a trigger for the audience to connect with both their mind and feelings. The space is modified through contemplation. While in painting it is relatively difficult to avoid the trap of subjectivity, in video I can map the boundary of events which happen between subjectivity and objectivity. In this specific case, Mooi Indie corresponds to colonial psychology and human cultural events in a particular time period. A video work has the ability to illuminate a time, a place, an event beyond an analytical explanation, as well as representing the impact on layers of human experience. “The Kabau Gadang” doesn’t provide any solutions, but rather a fantasy which is endlessly produced.



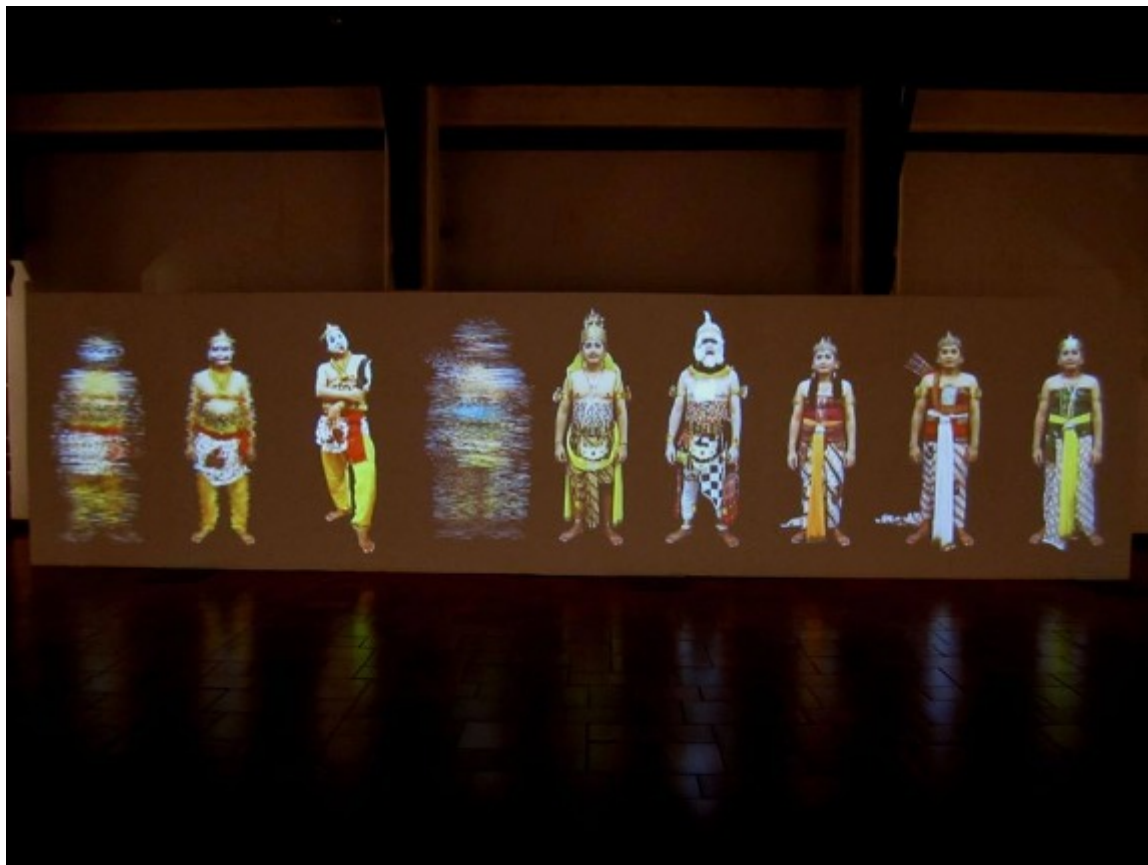
Krisna Murti, e-ART-h-quake No. 2

A recent project of yours was *e-ART-h-quake* at Selasar Sunaryo Art Space, in collaboration with Lena Guslina Legus. Can you tell me about the concept behind the performance/video-installation?

For that work I was inspired by the phenomenon of earthquakes. Earthquakes are sudden, unexpected events which force out our unconscious self. Earthquakes make humans lose balance both mentally and physically. To represent this, I made a video projection of sand and placed it on the floor, making it appear to shake to show the sort of imbalance in the body the shock of earthquakes produces. In this sense, video for me is so much more than, say, a scientific presentation on the walls of the seminar room. For me it has become a simulation of reality.

Traditions, and sometimes the gradual loss of them, are central to your work. We can see that in some of your most famous works like *Tale of Sangupati* or *Empty Theater*. Was tradition very present in your life growing up?

Tale of Sangupati, *Empty Theater* and many others showed visual glimpses of traditional performances. But if you pay attention, you realize that it is just an aesthetic strategy – it is criticism or parody or mimesis – which is precisely the way you can offer ideas. In the video installation *Empty Theater* I digitally put my body into 12 characters of a dance theatre performance from the Javanese tradition (Wayang Wong). Thanks to digital technology I was able to transform my body into a puppet character. This possibility is at the core of my videos.



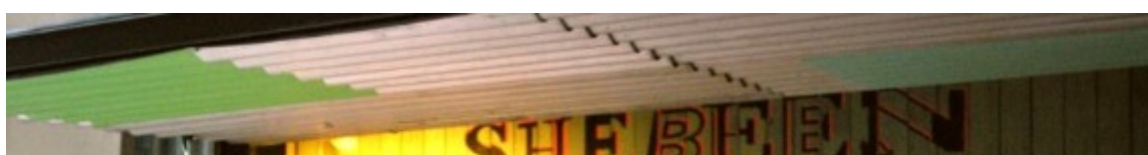
Krisna Murti, Still of Empty Theater

Are there any young Southeast Asian artists using video you find particularly promising?

There are many young artists – 40 years old or younger – making video in Asia and Southeast Asia. They have been heavily influenced by the internet, social media and the latest technology, which amazes the artists of my generation. The progress is also supported by infrastructures, such as the increasing number of international new media festivals in Asia. The way for them to improve is to look back at the values within “shadow art” which is continually progressing in countries such as Myanmar, Cambodia, Malaysia, India, Indonesia, Thailand, China, etc.

One last, big question: what kind of legacy do you want to leave with your art?

I’ve been making videos for almost 30 years, and also written extensively on local and international media. My dream and aspiration is to build a video library that would allow young people to access a collection of my work, as well as my writings, my books, my texts on video and new media art. There, the public could also access the work of other artists. I’d like to have a video library to provide information and knowledge.





Writer Naima Morelli (left) and the artist Krisna Murti

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.

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