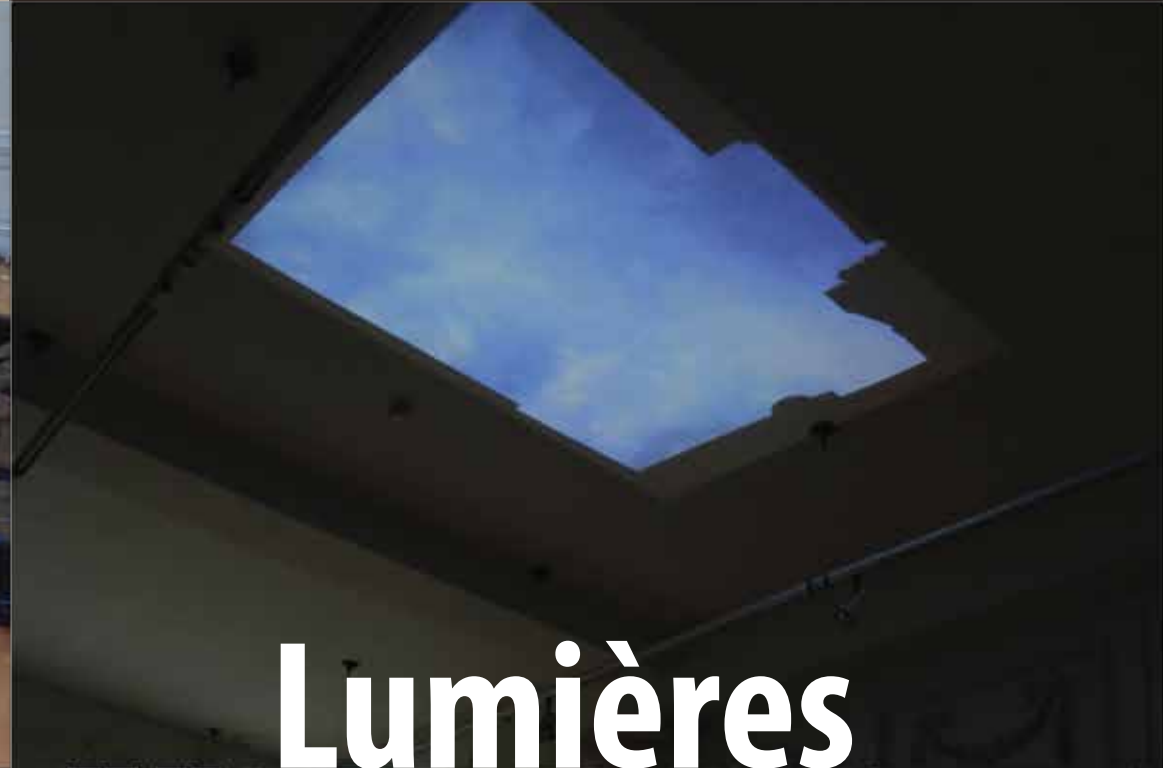


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# Lumières



Syaiful Aulia Garibaldi  
 Muhammad Akbar

23 Mai - 2 Août 2014  
 Espace Art Contemporain  
 La Rochelle



# Lumières

Syaiful Aulia Garibaldi  
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## Akbar and Syaiful: Two "Aliens" in La Rochelle

Akbar and Syaiful are two prominent young artists from Bandung. They both have different working methods compared to other artists of their generation. Thus, their works are considered to be special in contemporary art field in Indonesia. However, like most young artists, both are quite heavily influenced by contemporary global situation. Born and raised in a big city has made them surrounded by urban environment, free from the traditional influence and its values. By the time they grow as young artists, Indonesian contemporary art practice has become fairly well-established, and various issues in the global contemporary art have already affected their understanding and awareness. That is why, it is not easy to read the Indonesian aspect in their works. Nevertheless, the works they produced during their residency in La Rochelle could not be separated from their perspective and position as Indonesian artists that are affected by the social and cultural condition in Indonesia.

Information technology may be seen as a very easy tool for artists to access and acquire information of contemporary art. France, for the contemporary Indonesian artists and middle-class society, is not considered as foreign. Yet, the knowledge about France that they receive is not direct, but through the knowledge and information that they have absorbed, especially for Akbar. His background in French Education Program provides enough knowledge about France. However, it is his first time in France. Indeed, it is a direct experience for him. Despite the intense globalization and cross-cultural impact, the daily life of French society in La Rochelle—socially and culturally—remains different from what Akbar and Syaiful experience everyday in Bandung.

Akbar and Syaiful are quite sharp in observing their surroundings. During their residency in La Rochelle, they enjoyed capturing the new atmosphere around them. Staying for several weeks in La Rochelle, which is famous for its old and historical buildings, is

a valuable experience for them. Old buildings from Renaissance era are still standing, functioning and well-integrated, blending with other new buildings. Something that cannot be seen in urban cities in Indonesia. In their hometown, Bandung, most of old buildings are poorly maintained. No wonder that their works are inspired by the presence of La Rochelle, including the attitude of its people.

According to Akbar, one of the visual effects that attracts him immediately after he landed in La Rochelle is its solid blue sky, which he said is similar to the color on the TV screen when it is not getting a signal. This prompted him to create *Il Fait Bleu*, a video projection of sky footage in La Rochelle, started from sunrise to sunset. It reminds us of fresco painting on the ceiling of many classical buildings in Europe since Renaissance era. The empty blue sky with sheer clouds also marks Akbar's effort to clear all of his memories related to his hometown, Bandung. Surely it is not an easy thing for him to release his references about Bandung. As it is shown in his second work, *Curfew*, a small semi-club with a DJ playing techno music, accompanied by a video projection on the wall which shows Akbar's figure is walking down the empty street of La Rochelle at night. This work shows how Akbar compares the night in Bandung, which is still crowded with people driving or walking, to a quiet night in La Rochelle.

The strict rules and laws in La Rochelle also affects Akbar. It is seen in his work entitled *Downloading Fiction*, which tells how the rule of HADOPI avoids him to arbitrarily download materials from the internet, though he has superfast internet connection at his place. In this work, Akbar portrays the 'fake' download process. Similarly, *Merde de Chien* also represents the annoying side of the city in Akbar's point of view: dog poo is everywhere on La Rochelle's sidewalks. This work shows a photo series of dog poo and displayed it as a slide show. *Fleur de Terre* is

in continuation to this work. It pictures daisies planted in dog poo and displayed as a video. *Fleur de Terre* clearly demonstrates the paradox between beauty and ugliness.

Akbar's last work in this exhibition is called *Pierre*: a pile of construction debris highlighted with doodling images projection, has quite similar idea with Syaiful's works. Not much different from Akbar, Syaiful apparently also wants to comment on the social and cultural situation he encountered in La Rochelle. Syaiful, who has long been using fungi, moss and other microscopic plants in his works, often communicates and collaborates with teachers in Biology Faculty at ITB. Syaiful approach to work with biology researchers is a rare thing in the field of Indonesian contemporary art. His working approach is in line with the natural science researcher approach, but not in a rigid term.

Plants are not considered as narrative and representational medium, even though it is possible to arrange them as potential representational. However, it successfully shows in Syaiful works in La Rochelle. Talking about high culture, it is difficult to deny that France indeed shows its power. Thus, the French pride on their material cultural heritage is acceptable. Syaiful notices that historical information signage is provided in every street which has old buildings. It shows how well the French government and its people preserve their historical heritage, better than any other countries. That is why Syaiful was amazed, but in the same time he felt 'compelled' to enter this 'standardized' historical construction. Most of La Rochelle residents are quite familiar with the history of their city, and proud of their well-maintained old buildings. But on the other hand, Syaiful feels that the strict preservation is somehow eliminating the natural aspects of its materials and elements of the building itself. It seems like every material is burdened by identity and cultural values. Through his works, Syaiful

wants to reverse it and invite audience to look back at the nature of the material, and remove it from its identity construction. Syaiful wants to see the building no more as a pile of stones, and wood as merely organic material that will decay over time. Therefore, it is not a surprise if Syaiful uses found objects he collected in La Rochelle as part of his works.

Syaiful made two series of work in his residency at La Rochelle. The first series is entitled *It's Better to be Ugly Than Only to be Wild*, using found objects as its main medium such as boats, chairs and tables. These objects are used to subvert the high tendency of 'preserving' in La Rochelle. He wants to see the destruction process in boats, chairs and tables in a natural process by covering their surfaces with moss and fungi. One of the works displayed in La Rochelle depicts the text arranged in moss using 'Terhah language' (language created by Syaiful). The moss text looks strange, and can certainly be seen as a representation of the limitations of language to explain various natural phenomena. Furthermore, language can always be extinct and grow over time.

Syaiful's second work is a series of drawings and paintings about found objects surrounded by images showing the life cycle, as shown in its title: *Life Cycle Installation*.

At last but not least, Akbar and Syaiful works represent their view towards La Rochelle, both the situation of the city as well as the attitude of its citizens. Their works also represent another perspective from the artists who come from Bandung in Java, far away from France in Europe. On the other hand, their works hardly reflect the artists' identity. Perhaps, their works during residency in La Rochelle have triggered them to wonder what it means to be an artist and citizen of Bandung. Questioning on what construction and cultural identity provided by Bandung toward them, or vice versa.

Bandung, May 2014  
**Asmudjo J. Irianto**  
Indonesian visual artist & curator  
Lives and works in Bandung

English translation by Invani Lela Herliana

### Espace Art Contemporain

28 rue Gargouilleau - La Rochelle  
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Ouvert tous les jours, de 14h30 à 18h, sauf les mardis et les dimanches.  
Fermé le 14 juillet.

Exposition organisée par la Ville de La Rochelle, le Centre Intermondes, le Carré Amelot et ArtSociates under AB Foundation.

En collaboration avec l'Association des Amis du Musée Maritime, l'Université de La Rochelle, LIENS, AAA.  
Avec le soutien de la Région Poitou-Charentes.



## BIO

**AKBAR MUHAMMAD** Né en 1984, Muhammad Akbar est diplômé de l'Université de Pendidikan ; en 2012, il obtient son Master en art de l'Institut de Technologie de Bandung. Artiste vidéaste pluridisciplinaire, il s'intéresse aussi au graphisme, au VJ-ing sous le nom de Killafternoon. Ses oeuvres sont présentées en galeries et dans divers festivals où il aime à collaborer avec des musiciens. Lauréat du ASEAN New Media Art Competition (2007), il est également finaliste de l'exposition BaCAA #3, Lawangwangi, Bandung (2013). En octobre 2013, il reçoit le Prix national du jeune artiste émergent d'Indonésie à la Galerie Nationale de Jakarta. Parmi ses expositions récentes : *Gaze (The Unseen) / Tatapan (Tak Terlihat)*. Selasar Sunaryo Artspace. Bandung (2012) ; *Inside The Moment Film Festival*. Crane Arts, Philadelphie. US (2012) ; *Extranoema*, Galeri Padi, Bandung (2012) ; *Exquisite Corpses And Other Memories Of The XXth Century*, Bandung Pavilion. Power Station of Art. Museum, Biennale de Shanghai.

(makbarmakbar.net)

**SYAIFUL AULIA GARIBALDI** Né en 1985 à Jakarta, Syaiful Aulia Garibaldi vit et travaille à Bandung. Diplômé de l'Institut de Technologie de Bandung, il obtient un master en gravure et poursuit ses études d'agronomie à l'Université de Padjajaran (UNPAD) à Bandung. Lauréat de nombreux prix comme celui de la Triennale Seni Grafis2, Bentara Budaya Jakarta (2006), 2ème Prix de la meilleure composition de fresques murales de Cihampelas Walk, Bandung (2005), il est finaliste de l'exposition BaCAA #3, Lawangwangi, Bandung. Il exposera à Pearl Lam Gallery à Singapour en 2014. Parmi ses expositions: *Padi Artground* avec Regnum Fungi (2012) ; *Pressing, VideoInsight*, Turin, (2013) ; *Trick or Truth*, Fang Gallery, Jakarta (2012) ; *Indonesian Contemporary Fiber Art*, Art : 1 Museum, Jakarta (2012) ; *Design Art: Renegotiating Boundaries* Lawangwangi, Bandung (2012) ; *Self Portrait Mushroom Hunting et Dry Point Experience*, THR Ir H Juanda, Bandung.