

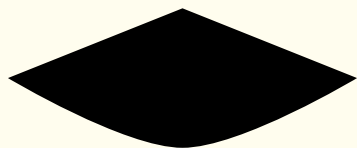
TAKSU

**FLOATING
DESIRES**

**BUDI
AGUNG
KUSWARA**

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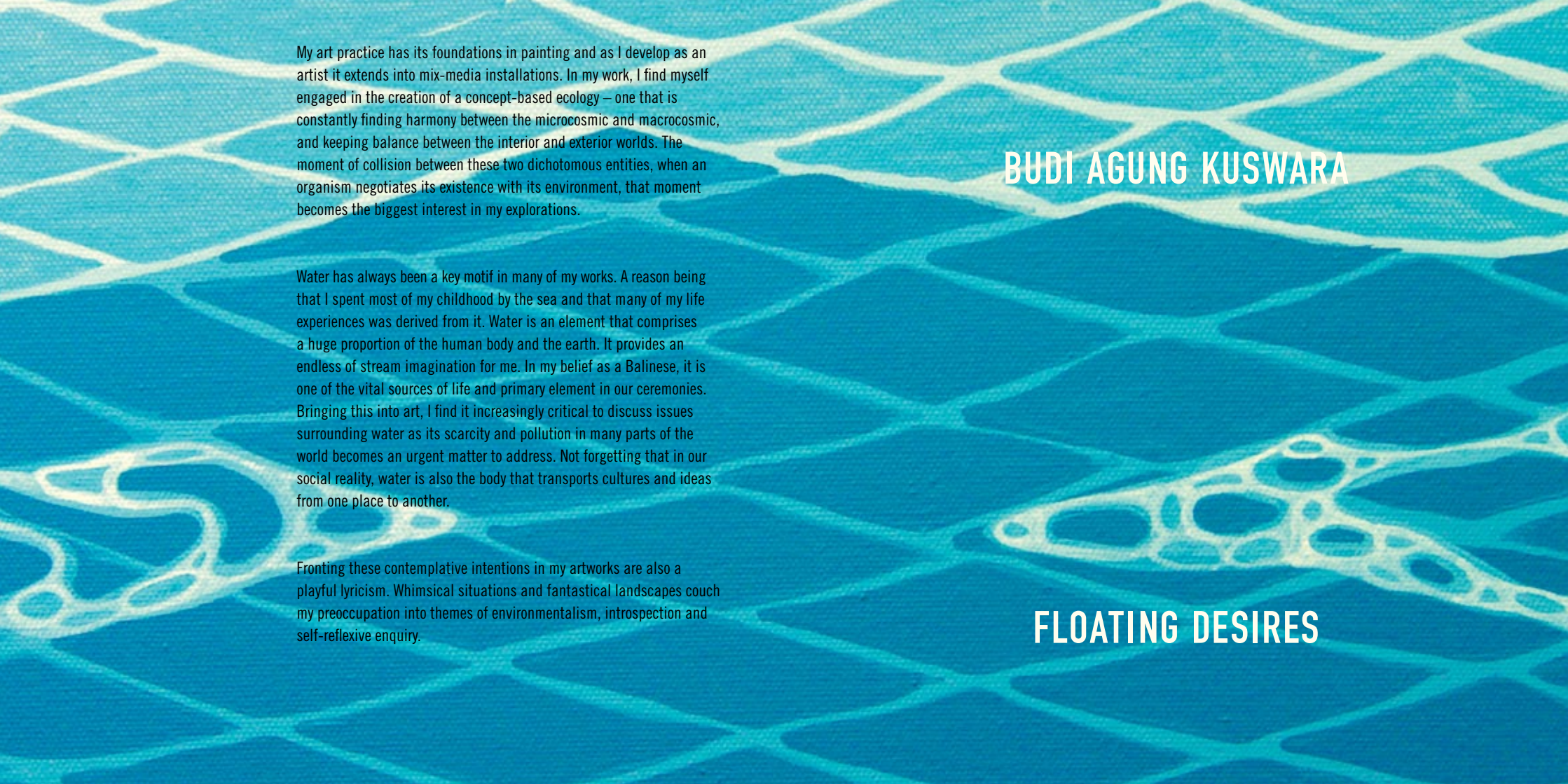
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E-BOOK



BUDI AGUNG KUSWARA



FLOATING DESIRES



My art practice has its foundations in painting and as I develop as an artist it extends into mix-media installations. In my work, I find myself engaged in the creation of a concept-based ecology – one that is constantly finding harmony between the microcosmic and macrocosmic, and keeping balance between the interior and exterior worlds. The moment of collision between these two dichotomous entities, when an organism negotiates its existence with its environment, that moment becomes the biggest interest in my explorations.

Water has always been a key motif in many of my works. A reason being that I spent most of my childhood by the sea and that many of my life experiences was derived from it. Water is an element that comprises a huge proportion of the human body and the earth. It provides an endless of stream imagination for me. In my belief as a Balinese, it is one of the vital sources of life and primary element in our ceremonies. Bringing this into art, I find it increasingly critical to discuss issues surrounding water as its scarcity and pollution in many parts of the world becomes an urgent matter to address. Not forgetting that in our social reality, water is also the body that transports cultures and ideas from one place to another.

Fronting these contemplative intentions in my artworks are also a playful lyricism. Whimsical situations and fantastical landscapes couch my preoccupation into themes of environmentalism, introspection and self-reflexive enquiry.

BUDI AGUNG KUSWARA

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During my days of being a teenager, I would always look forward to the holidays when I would spend my time by the beach.

I recall the waters being crowded with holiday-makers, wading around in the chorus of a shared excitement. This memory, imprinted in my mind, has got me to constantly think about how unifying the ocean can be.

Borrowing the words from a good friend, 'the sea is my Disneyland!'

— **Budi Agung Kuswara**

FLOATING DESIRES

**GINA
FAIRLEY**

As humans we define ourselves by the narratives we construct, whether they are based on folklore, account or memory. They are how we anchor ourselves in our complex world. It is a device as old as the Mahabharata, Ramayana, and *Wayang Kamasan* (Balinese Classical painting), epic instructional tales to lead us on our way through a framework of visual storytelling. It is not surprising then, growing up in Bali with a father a painter in the *Wayang Kamasan* tradition, that Budi Agung Kuswara, or Kabul as he is known, has emerged as a vibrant storyteller of his times. Kabul explained, "For every issue that I find gripping, a satirical or symbolic image will appear in my head. That image is often a very personal one. My body and brain become a laboratory for these ideas and like *Wayang Kamasan* they take on a reality in their own time by using the language of that time."

Constructed by fusing layers of information to create a more 'complete' story, Kabul's paintings become deceptively loaded and wry commentaries. Kabul insists they are a simple continued tradition that records everyday observations; as a writer, in contrast, my compulsion is to poke and probe into his provocative images questioning their deliberate clues for meaning and political position; and, as the viewer, you will bring your own triggered memories and local knowledge to his surreal subjects and floatation devices. Its like Alice's Rabbit Hole: the encounter is colourful and reality writes its own definition for each.



Summertime Memories / acrylic on canvas / 150 x 150 cm / 2011

Using a tableaux format, the sea is a key motif for Kabul, a limitless and uncharted landscape equally the site of pleasure and piracy. It is also the landscape of his childhood. Growing up on the west coastline of Bali, the sea Kabul knew was a place of sports and tourism. Drawing on that he has chosen the floatation device as a metaphoric thread across this new series. But this metaphor is far denser than its veneer of play suggests. Kabul offered, “It spells a kind of existential fragility, that the inflatable is given form by air and is hollow in the centre.” He continued, “I use the inflatable to convey the idea of human existence. To me it is an all-encompassing symbol. The whole irony that survival is based on an object that is empty intrigues me.” It is a stunning metaphor for nostalgia. It is a stunning metaphor for commentary. It is this bi-lingual aspect of Kabul’s painting that led me to ask whether there was a further jab to his ‘floats’ that related to Balinese resort culture and the insertion of Western culture with its excess of leisure, especially given this exhibition’s title *Floating Desires*? Kabul was quick to correct me. His metaphor was the place of dreams.

To understand the complexity of Kabul’s paintings we need to unravel these dream-like symbols. They are hardly random – one only has to glance at Kabul’s painting *Exodus* with its flock of green sheep transported on human rafts across a turgid sea. Why pair objects if not to tell a story, to make a statement, provoke or incite the poetic? Again, it seems I am off track. Kabul’s intention foremost was not a discussion about the live meat trade (as one might deduce of these briny ewes) but rather it is a less literal passage. Kabul explained that as an adult moving away from Bali to study art in Yogyakarta, it was the sea that carried his image of ‘home’. Nightly he dreamt it. And it was only when he painted the sea that his dream of it would leave. It was a kind of anchor and it allowed him to better navigate the political landscape art scene of Yogyakarta. He explained, “It has almost been an everyday cultivation that every action I make, the way I speak, carry myself, and move is a conscious political decision.” So the dream becomes conscious.

Using an illustrative style, Kabul’s conversation brushes off the political edge of his painting. They are his personal stories. A good example is *Musim Panas (Hot Season)*. Indonesia has the largest Muslim population globally. The lobbying power of fundamental Islamic groups is enacting change in Indonesia, and

communities are feeling the tear and ruptures of difference at a ground roots level. The burka is becoming an increasingly common sight in Java. Kabul asks, “Could this possibly be the ‘guarantee to paradise’?” He uses an inflatable to subtly question the idealization of holiness and righteousness as mere rhetoric – hot air? This painting with its mash of comic phrasing, pool-culture and Islam comes at a fitting moment when the Muslim world is violently reacting against a video posted on YouTube. These changes are no longer exclusive to the kampong mosque but have become universal topics for discussion.

Kabul uses the same phallic-shaped flotation device in the painting *Profit Value*, a kind of ‘screw-you’ attitude as traditional culture is traded off for a profitable Balinese tourist economy. *Profit Value* uses the iconic Rangda mask but in its contemporary form as the tourist ‘knick-knack’. Spatially this is an interesting painting. In both it and *Musim Panas* the subject floats to the surface, holding the viewer in its gaze. Who is looking at whom? *Profit Value* perhaps best explains Kabul’s use of the boarder, here evoking the decayed edge of an antiquarian photograph complete with the discoloration of age. Similarly in the painting *Stranger* the image has slipped slightly askew within its frame. Kabul plays with symbolic containment of the image and the notions of contemporary slippage. He is a master at using extremely simple devices that we can latch on to as a means of ‘reading’ his narratives.

What we start to realize looking at these paintings is that the initial storybook illustration is a web of carefully constructed clues, a bit like a treasure hunt. A good example is the painting *Nenek Moyangku Seorang Pelaut (Our Ancestors were Sailors)*. While Kabul sings me the tune of its title in a skype conversation – a song that makes little sense to me in my place but connects with his childhood – I see an image in front of me that fuses the universal storybook pantomime of pirates as treasure hunters and piracy’s contemporary definition as an industry of ‘the fake’, from the kampong hawker ‘flogging’ the latest movie and label sneakers to the machinations of the art world and forgeries. Kabul is reticent to explain the painting further. Viewing this exhibition then – his *Floating Desires* – it is the viewer’s choice how far they wander into ‘Alice’s Rabbit Hole’ of illusion and innuendo.



Buaya Sawah / acrylic on canvas / 130 x 160 cm / 2011



Stranger / acrylic on canvas / 180 x 140 cm / 2011



Nenek Moyangku Seorang Pelaut
acrylic on canvas / 150 x 200 cm / 2012



Nothing Without You / 150 x 150 cm / acrylic on canvas / 2011



Nothing Without You Three / acrylic on canvas / 152 x 152 cm / 2012



Nothing Without You Too / acrylic on canvas / 152 x 152 cm / 2012



Musim Panas / acrylic on canvas / 110 x 140 cm / 2011



Profit Value Summer / acrylic on canvas / 180 x 130 cm / 2012



Exodus / acrylic on canvas / 140 x 180 cm / 2012



Save The King / acrylic on canvas / 150 x 200 cm / 2011

EDUCATION

Bachelors in Fine Art

Institute of the Arts Indonesia

AWARDS

2009

THE DREAM (The Power of the Dream)

Tujuh Bintang Gallery (Yogyakarta)

Art Award

RESIDENCIES

2012

Fukouka Asian Art Museum

Residence Program (Japan)

TAKSU Kuala Lumpur

Artist Residency Program (Malaysia)

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2012

Floating Desires TAKSU Gallery, Sg

The 12th Winds of Artist in Residence

Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Japan

The Wax on Our Fingers Indonesian Contemporary Arts Network, Yogyakarta

2008

i.self Komaneka Fine Art Gallery, Bali

BUDI AGUNG KUSWARA / KABUL

BORN IN 1982, INDONESIA

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2012

Nasi Campur TAKSU Gallery, Singapore

2011

Peripheries Asian Triennial Manchester, United Kingdom

Drawing Conversations Siena Art

Institute, Italy

Jogja Art Fair 2011 Taman Budaya, Yogyakarta

Foreign Exchange Diego Rivera Gallery, San Francisco Art Institute

Halo Halo 5 Manila Contemporary, Manila

Bali, Making Choices Indonesian National Gallery, Jakarta

2010

SDI Now Toni Raka Gallery, Ubud Bali

ExpoSign Jogja Expo Centre, Yogyakarta

Jogja Gumerkah! Jogja Bangkit!

Jogja National Museum, Yogyakarta

2009

3 Young Contemporaries Valentine Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Seeing You, Seeing Me, Contemporary

Portraiture Manila Contemporary, Manila

2008

Reinventing Bali Sangkring Art Space, Yogyakarta

Hybridity, Bali Art Now Jogja Gallery, Yogyakarta

The Last Supper Bentara Budaya, Yogyakarta

2007

KALIYUGA Gallery TEMBI, Jakarta

Global Warming - Local Warming I Bumi

Garuda Wisnu Kencana, Jimbaran-Bali

NEO-NATION Jogja Biennale IX, Yogyakarta

2006

Rotten Head The Art Center, Denpasar, Bali

2005

Indonesian Art Festival

Sekolah Tinggi Seni Indonesia, Bandung

Obesity (A performance art piece),

Bali Museum, Denpasar-Bali

2004

Having Fun Langgeng Gallery, Magelang

2003

Open Air Borobudur International Festival, Magelang

Termogram Neka Art Museum, Bali

PUBLICATIONS

2009

Kritik Ekologi Bernuansa Surrealis

by Wayan Sunarta for arti Magazine

Contemplating the Future

by Mas Zetti Atan for The Star Magazine

Tragedi Narsisme ala Kabul

by Anton Muhajir, for Bale Bengong

2008

Witness the Self-evident: Budi Agung

Kuswara at Komaneka Gallery

by Susi Johnston

I would like to give my heartfelt thanks to

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TAKSU is a leading contemporary art gallery and specialist in Southeast Asia. Representing selections of fine art with distinctive urban edge, we are at the forefront of contemporary art in this region. TAKSU works to forge a platform for established and emerging artists to share their pool of creativity and knowledge through its residency programs and exhibitions. Encapsulating the true meaning of the word TAKSU; divine inspiration, energy, and spirit.

Suherwan Abu
Director, TAKSU Galleries

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