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Sin Sin Fine Art proudly presents a solo exhibition by

# PUTU SUTAWIJAYA THE DANCE of REMEMBERING



11 September - 30 October 2014

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Putu Sutawijaya is a multi-talented artist who was born and brought up in Bali. He currently lives and works in Yogyakarta and Bali. As a painter, sculptor and performance artist, Putu embodies the multi-media, cross-disciplinary character of Indonesian contemporary art. At the same time, a main focus of his work is the human body as both an expressive form and a vessel of the spirit: as Putu says, 'the body is the medium of suffering, pain, laughter and fear.' This much anticipated solo exhibition, is his first in the past few years. Art lovers in Indonesia and abroad are excited to finally be able to see Putu's newest works.

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## THE DANCE OF REMEMBERING

By Kris Budiman

Not many people are aware that Putu Sutawijaya loves to 'dance' while he paints. More often, he dances through his paintings. Almost in any of his paintings we could see some elements of dance: figures choreographed in various poses, movements and rhythmic gestures. There is no doubt that dancing and dances are an important part of Putu's daily life in the past, and perhaps even to his present day. Putu explores this theme in his current solo exhibition, by digging out his biographical memories through figures and special objects that directly relate to a certain genre in Balinese performance art: the Barong dance. In the process of recollecting events from his past life, these biographical memories are inseparable from his visual memories with all of the sensory quality and spatial context that entail within them. Precisely at this point, Putu's biographical memories are overlapping with their visual dimensions, which definitely are more than just a structure of sensory information representing objects 'as is'. Instead, they are reconstructed and reinterpreted visual imageries.

Observing the sequel in his paintings entitled "The Dance of Remembering", it can be said that Putu Sutawijaya is an artist endowed with extraordinary capacity in recording visual imageries in his mind. These eidetic imagery which are preserved in great details are not photograph-like because they do not retain every single detail of the event as they factually are; they have undergone a process of interpretative selection. Memory is more than just a copy of our perception upon reality coming directly from the outside. It is always an interpreted product. Through this process, we found a couple of visual details always present in Putu's paintings: figures and masks, in particular masks from Barong dance repertoire. In the Balinese cultural context, Barong dance possesses a very complex dimension: be it mythologically, ritually, or as a genre in performance art.

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Inspected from any angles, the kinetic and the visual are definitely the most prominent aspects of the Barong dance. Through these two aspects, Putu Sutawijaya attempts to recover his biographical memories. Compared to other variants of Barong dance, the variety of gestures and movements in Barong Ket, is acknowledged to be the most complete. Visually, the Barong masks may undergo their own signification process. Each Barong mask shows a certain iconic character due to their resemblance to certain creatures such as a lion, etc. The mask in Putu's paintings is not positioned as a symbol for hypocrisy or falseness - a commonly used stereotype we found in daily life and in the visual and dramatic works. Instead of being symbolic, the mask in his paintings serves as an index of an identity in remembering his past. It represents a construction of Bali-ness identity which may have been distanced further away now that Putu resides in Java.

There are also other formal features which we can identify as mainstay elements that has characterized Putu's works for a long time. The first of these are the brush strokes and colourful splatters, seemingly applied at random although actually they are leading us towards certain patterns. Secondly is the handwriting which in the eyes of the audience must be very difficult to decode, if not completely incomprehensible. Therefore these scattered texts might be more apt to be seen as an element in a visual composition, rather than as a composition of words and sentences to be read. Thirdly is the naked figure(s) in motion, flying about, or arrested in certain pose, and almost all of them shown with their backs facing us, the audience. As far as my observation goes, these three features are characteristic of Putu Sutawijaya that he keeps on exploring to no end.

The figures in the third feature above seemingly in motion, in the progress of shaping a formation, or, let's say, a certain dance composition following the mask. Their presences are often collective and anonymous, without any particularly dominant figure. They, who could be identified as anyone, moving in circles, cyclical, although in some instances they seem to scatter to all directions, or forming a triangle shape. In these ways, a mandala is created - as Putu Sutawijaya himself explained to me one day. We know that a mandala (from Sanskrit language) is more than just a plane. It represents a kind of cosmic diagram, connecting human being with the Ultimate Reality inside our bodies and minds, while transcending them at once. On the other hand, there are singular figures captured in a certain movement or gesture, dancing with a mask. Some of these solitary figures are depicted in a particular pose, that is with folded legs seemingly in the middle of performing a certain ritual, which we could understand as a meditation.

We could say, through all of these elements, that the fragments of Putu Sutawijaya's biographical memories are actively involved in a series of continuous dialogue about the construction of an identity, as someone who already belongs to a certain cultural community. The question now is: if remembering and forgetting are actually the two sides of the same coin, could "The Dance of Remembering" also be investigated from its other side: as an effort to forget a certain cultural identity?

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*Kris Budiman is a literary critic and an anthropologist who lives in Yogyakarta.*

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