

**IN CON  
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**FX HARSONO**

**x**

**IDA LAWRENCE**

13 July - 12 October 2019



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## Curated by Emily Rolfe and Bianca Winataputri

A conversation can be a space to recall stories and histories that may otherwise be left untold, a space to listen, learn and be heard. With this in mind, Emily Rolfe and Bianca Winataputri travelled to Indonesia to begin a dialogue between renowned Indonesian artist FX Harsono and early-career Australian-Indonesian artist Ida Lawrence. The conversations centred on Harsono's life, research and practice, specifically *Writing in the Rain* 2011 in which Harsono investigates his own family history as a Chinese-Indonesian, a minority group in Indonesia.

*In Conversation: FX Harsono x Ida Lawrence* presents *Writing in the Rain* alongside a new body of work by Ida Lawrence, shaped through conversation with Harsono and a wider community of family and peers. Lawrence's works consider the visible and invisible, the spoken and the untold, in the history, stories and traditions of her family's village in Java.

This exhibition invites the audience into the exchange between two cross-generational and cross-cultural practitioners, providing insight into Harsono's almost five decade career, the role of the artist in society, and the importance of learning about the past.

# FX HARSONO

## *WRITING IN THE RAIN*

by Bianca Winataputri

Two decades after the fall of the New Order (Suharto's regime 1965-1998) and the civil violence of May 1998, Chinese-Indonesian histories still largely remain untold, hidden and often collectively forgotten. Stories of the past are only shared in 'safe' spaces, at home or abroad, and almost never in public. Art becomes an alternative 'safe' space for these histories to be uncovered and re-told in ways that challenge its roots and offer a glimpse into what the future may be.

FX Harsono's artistic practice has always been deeply connected to the social and political issues surrounding him as he witnessed the rapid transformations in Indonesia and the country's ongoing struggle with democracy. After the May 1998 riots, triggered by the country's economic problems following the Asian Financial Crisis and which eventually led to the resignation of President Suharto marking the end of the New Order, Harsono created the video performance *Burn Victims* (1998) in which he sets fire to five wooden sculptures in the shape of human torsos. The work references an incident during the riots where an angry mob locked civilians inside a shopping mall in Jakarta and set the building on fire. *Burn Victims* was Harsono's immediate reaction to the tragedy charged with trauma, grief and disbelief.

Harsono's practice post-1998 took a sharp turn as he began looking inwards, reflecting on his identity and

place within society. He explains that during this period '...the situation had changed.... people could now criticise the government.'<sup>1</sup> With this new-found freedom Harsono began questioning his identity within Indonesia's history and complex political landscape; he recalls 'Suddenly I am thinking... "Who am I? Oh, I am Indonesian Chinese." And then I ask again "Is it true that I am Indonesian Chinese? What do I know about Chinese culture?"... So maybe I know about Indonesian or Javanese culture? I also don't know about Javanese culture. So I am questioning about my identity, from that time I suddenly changed my work.'<sup>2</sup>

From the year 2000 to the present, Harsono's works have sought to uncover repressed histories, cultures and identities as he investigates his own family history and, ultimately, his identity as a Chinese-Indonesian. In 2011, Harsono created one of his most seminal works, *Writing in the Rain*. The installation and series started with a video work of the same title where Harsono is seen repeatedly writing his Chinese name using ink and a brush as the rain washes it away. *Writing in the Rain* reflects on the artist's erased identity and revisits Suharto's 1967 regulation where Chinese-Indonesians were forced to change their names to an 'authentic' Indonesian name and obtain proof of citizenship as an Indonesian.

FX Harsono was born with the name Oh Hong Bun. In Chinese the name translates to someone who is



FX Harsono, *Writing in the Rain* (video still), 2011, single-channel video, 6:02 minutes

prosperous artistically and has a gift for words and literature ('Oh' is his family name, 'Hong' means harvest and 'Bun' is literature and the arts). In 1967, following Suharto's citizenship regulations, the then 18-year old artist changed his name to 'FX Harsono' inspired by Indonesian illustrator/cartoonist 'FX Har'. The name 'Harsono' developed after his search for a unique Indonesian name - in Javanese the name translates to 'happy' or 'happy man'. These layers of meaning and the complexities of having a name changed and created against Indonesia's political backdrop during the New Order (1965-1998), ultimately present the on-going struggle of belonging for many Chinese-Indonesians.

In *Writing in the Rain* Harsono returns to his Chinese name that was erased during the Suharto era. He explains 'I want to write, I want to emphasise this is my Chinese name, but the situation was making it so that I must forget my Chinese name and now I exist with my Indonesian name.'<sup>3</sup> The video work shows the artist continuously struggling to write and keep his name intact on the watery surface, contemplating the erased and fleeting memory of his Chinese identity. After identifying solely as an 'Indonesian' throughout the New Order regime, Harsono finds himself struggling to remember the culture, traditions and language of his Chinese heritage. The desks, as part of the *Writing in the Rain* installation,

recreate a classroom setting where students from a young age learn to write and memorise the many characters of the Chinese language. Here Harsono focuses on the idea of repetition as a way to reinforce and perhaps also recover lost memories and identities; the carving on the desks a result of his name stacked multiple times. The installation exposes the artist's desire to re-learn his ancestral language and culture, whilst revisiting his childhood memories of being a student in a Chinese school.

After many editions, touring international exhibitions and displays of *Writing in the Rain*, this work ultimately represents a fragment of the past. A key component of capturing and presenting a performance through video is to show that it happened, that there is no undoing and that it is a past action. For Harsono, *Writing in the Rain* is a form of acceptance of the past, which can be at once painful and unsettling. But it is the 'belief in a shared past that opens the possibility for commitments to collective missions in the future.'<sup>4</sup> *Writing in the Rain* is both an acknowledgment of history and an ongoing effort to remember and belong within a changing society.

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FX Harsono, *Writing in the Rain* (video still), 2011  
Single-channel video, 6:02 minutes  
© FX Harsono

<sup>1</sup> FX Harsono in conversation with Bianca Winataputri, Emily Rolfe and Ida Lawrence, 29 March 2019, Jakarta, Indonesia.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Seixas, Peter, ed. *Theorizing Historical Consciousness*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004, p.5.

# IDA LAWRENCE

by Emily Rolfe

The body of work created by Ida Lawrence for *In Conversation: FX Harsono x Ida Lawrence*, was made during a period of immersion in Yogyakarta, shaped by regular conversations with FX Harsono, her father and others. For Lawrence, painting has always been a way of processing and working through conversations and experiences. Harsono and Lawrence share a drive to explore their personal identities in order to question and attempt to understand broader social, cultural and political issues. They also share an interest in storytelling and history, asking, what stories and histories are visible and being spoken about? What is invisible or untold? Are difficult stories ignored, alluded to, or even told through metaphors?

Lawrence lives between Sydney, Australia and Yogyakarta, Indonesia, regularly visiting Bali, Jakarta and her father's village Kliwonan, in Central Java. She was six when she first visited Indonesia and in the 25 years since has regularly returned, studying dance at the Indonesian Arts Institute (ISI), living with extended family, learning Bahasa Indonesia, undertaking residencies and creating work. Over this time she has watched the country transform socially, politically and culturally, and feels she is continually trying to 'learn what is normal, what is etiquette',<sup>1</sup> what she can and cannot talk about, especially with her extended family.

Lawrence is a story teller and her work is very personal. Using fiction and humour,

she creates comparisons between Indonesian and Australian cultures to consider her familial relationships and share her grappling with language, new experiences and cultural particularities. Her *narrative paintings* series (2012 - ongoing) recounts stories in English and Bahasa Indonesia, the inclusion of spelling errors and grammatical corrections 'makes transparent her uncertain relationship with Indonesia', 'there is so much I don't understand culturally and within the language'.<sup>2</sup>

Lawrence has been forging cultural comparisons for a number of years, seen in works such as *BULE*, 2012 and *Wish you were here*, 1970s/2012. *BULE*, a performance first developed with West Papuan dancer and choreographer Darlane Litaay, references two Bahasa Indonesia terms: *kerbau bule*, the sacred white buffalo found in the South Square of the Palace in Surakarta, Central Java, and *bule*, a term sometimes used derogatorily to describe white-skinned non-Indonesian people. Lawrence made this work as she was becoming aware of the 'contrasting ideals of beauty and femininity in Javanese and Australian cultures',<sup>3</sup> as well as existing stereotypes of 'the other', from Indonesian and Australian perspectives. In *Wish you were here*, Lawrence considers a perplexing comment her father made while driving through Kliwonan in 2008, 'Yes, just like Barmedman'. The work presents two postcard series side-by-side, one featuring landmarks in the town of Barmedman, NSW (her

mother's birth place), purchased by Lawrence in the town post office, the other, photographed by Lawrence, features every day scenes of Kliwonan (her father's birth place).

Lawrence's father is also a story teller. She feels she can talk to him very openly, the hierarchies and cultural sensitivities are not present, and she often turns to him for information about their family, their village and Indonesia more broadly. She loves to listen to him and is eager to learn as much as possible, admitting, however, that his stories are quite unreliable, he often employs a lot of artistic license and speaks in metaphors.

*I often turn to him to explain or culturally translate things... he is my link to our family in Java, and learning and understanding the experiences and lives of my ancestors and relatives, including my father, is important to me... just listening and learning seems important somehow - even if it is incorrect or more likely that information will be forgotten or misunderstood in this process.<sup>4</sup>*

Ida Lawrence and Darlane Litaay performing *BULE*, 2012. Bizarre on Stage, ISI Yogyakarta, Indonesia, March 2012. Photo: Adel Boros.



When approaching *In Conversation: FX Harsono x Ida Lawrence* as a project, Lawrence was determined to act as a sponge and soak up daily life in Indonesia. Based in Yogyakarta, but travelling to Jakarta, Bali and Kliwonan to visit family, Lawrence gleaned information, facts and stories from regular coffees, beers and studio meetings with Harsono, as well as from conversations with family, friends, neighbours, shop owners, artists, curators and taxi drivers. As a keen listener and observer, and overflowing with questions, this is a common method of working for Lawrence and allows her the space to playfully imagine new interpretations, new possibilities and new connections.

While under the presidency of Suharto (1967-98), a narrow definition of 'Indonesian' existed throughout Indonesia. The hangover and legacy of this plays a large role in both Harsono and Lawrence's work: Lawrence is navigating what it means, for her, to be Indonesian and Harsono is uncovering lesser-known Indonesian experiences. They approach the narrow definition from opposing directions but with the same desired outcome, to question, deconstruct, and uncover what it means to belong. Grappling with this, Lawrence told Harsono, 'I am trying to fit in and Pak Harsono is trying to move away from that... from following the social rules of what we can and cannot talk about... you say "let's talk about it, let's acknowledge"'.<sup>5</sup>

In March 2019, Bianca Winataputri and I travelled to Indonesia (visiting Yogyakarta and Jakarta) to spend a week with Lawrence and meet with Harsono.

Early in the week Lawrence told us she had been thinking about Indonesian folklore or *dongeng* and what roles these stories play culturally. Often recounted to children from a young age, *dongeng* relay important societal values and vary from city to town to village, reflecting the diverse cultures that comprise the many island nation. *Dongeng* are an apt window into Indonesia for Lawrence, and during our time together stories began to appear in conversations with artists, curators, friends, and our driver Pak Digdoyo. Individuals' recollections varied, 'I think this happened', 'my father explained it to me like this', 'I can't remember the ending', 'I always understood that character to be male'. The importance of *dongeng* also varied, for Timoteus Anggawan Kusno, artist and close friend of Harsono's, they are a political method of 'keeping order'.<sup>6</sup>

Recently, Lawrence's father recounted an oral story or *riwayat* he first heard as a child: a princess was accused of eating jackfruit, she claimed innocence and declared they could cut her open and check for themselves, so, they cut the princess open. Lawrence's father can't recall what happens next and Lawrence wonders about the origin of this story. The grave for the princess, located close to her family's village, suggests the story is founded in history, and yet different interpretations exist - maybe she was pregnant, maybe she was ill.

Ida Lawrence, *Wish you were here*, 1970s and 2012, found and printed postcards

**BIG 7** **View Pic** of 7 **DETACHABLE POST CARDS**  
**BARMEDMAN**  
New South Wales



**BIG 7** **View Pic** of 7 **DETACHABLE POST CARDS**  
**KLIWONAN**  
Sragen, Jawa Tengah



In *A story my father heard as a child*, 2019 repetition of jackfruit imagery reflects the repetition in the telling of history or a story and how it distorts over time. Her choice to mix small amounts of paint at one time results in each jackfruit comprising numerous shades of green. The jackfruits, compared side by side, morph and change, we recognise each one as the same thing and yet they are unique. The series *A village and surrounds*, 2019 presents a multitude of stories with 'different perspectives, above and across'.<sup>7</sup> Lawrence chooses to present only parts of stories, running out of space or finishing early, acknowledging that any version would be incomplete and some will always remain invisible.

In this new body of work, comparisons of language and personal experience continue to feature in Lawrence's storytelling, however her focus has shifted to the act of remembering and the act and language of storytelling itself. In *Conversation: FX Harsono x Ida Lawrence* has created space for Lawrence to consider and reflect on the way stories are told, the purposes they can serve, and what stories might be missing. Like Harsono, working in a personal space has allowed Lawrence to begin wider discussions. Recognising the importance of learning about the past, she has uncovered stories, common and uncommon, which refer to historical events and culture in her family village.

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<sup>1</sup> FX Harsono and Ida Lawrence in conversation, 16 March 2019, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup> Stevens, Leyla, *Between 'Here' and 'There': Migrations of Memory, Gesture & Archives*, Looking Here Looking North exhibition catalogue, Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre, 12 January - 17 March 2019

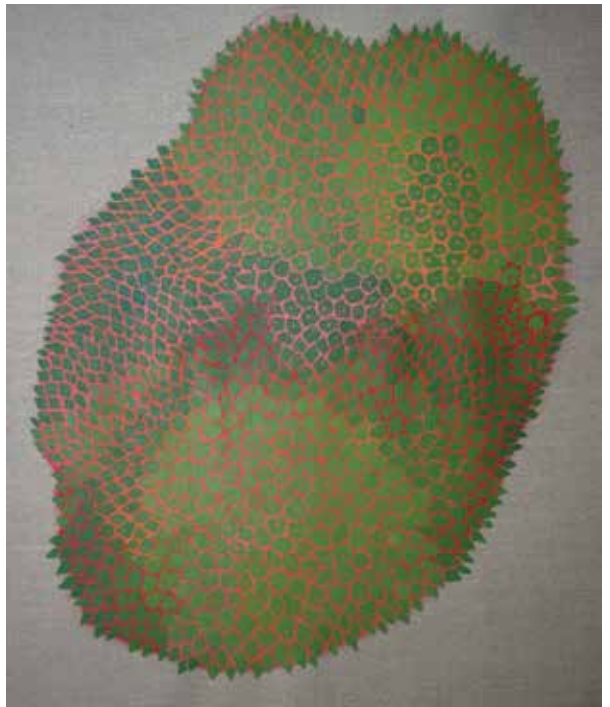
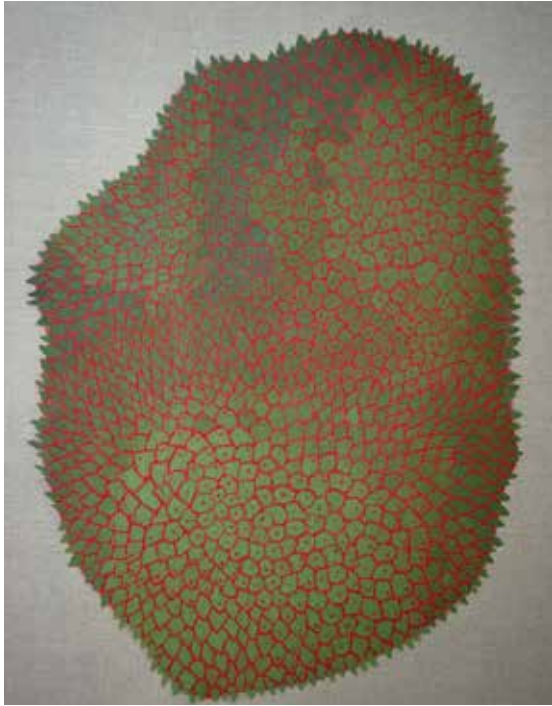
<sup>3</sup> Ida Lawrence website <https://idalawrenceprojects.wordpress.com/2012/03/05/bule-2012/>

<sup>4</sup> Ida Lawrence email to Emily Rolfe, 21 May 2019

<sup>5</sup> FX Harsono and Ida Lawrence in conversation, 16 March 2019, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

<sup>6</sup> Timoteus Anggawan Kusno in conversation with Bianca Winataputri, Emily Rolfe and Ida Lawrence, 25 March 2019, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

<sup>7</sup> Ida Lawrence email to Emily Rolfe, 6 June 2019



# IN CONVERSATION

Ida Lawrence, Emily Rolfe and Bianca Winataputri in conversation with FX Harsono at a Jakarta cafe, 29/03/19

**[BW] How did you start *Writing in the Rain* as a work of art?**

[FXH] Before *Writing in the Rain* I made a work about my name called *Rewriting the Erased*, 2009 [this work was shown at 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art, Sydney in 2012 as part of *Edge of Elsewhere*]. The work is about names which have been erased by political situations. In the work I am writing my name on paper on a table and then putting the paper on the floor, and continuing this until the floor is covered with my name. After this I continued to work with my name and found myself questioning, 'why must I always talk about my name?'. I realised that I wanted to emphasise the fact that I have a Chinese name, that my Chinese name was erased by a political situation during the Suharto era, that the situation forced me to forget my Chinese name and exist only with my Indonesian name. I thought, how do I express this? I will write it down but then something must sweep it all away. When making *Writing in the Rain* I decided I wanted to make a video performance, not a live performance because this situation is in the past and a live performance is in the present. I use video to show this has already happened.

**[IL] Can you tell us about the shape that is cut out of the desks that are part of the *Writing in the Rain* installation?**

[FXH] I chose to install the work so that it looks like a classroom. There is

a blackboard that the teacher writes on, and the desks where the students are trying to follow the teacher. The holes in the desks are my name stacked multiple times. When I was a child I studied in Chinese, Chinese language has thousands of characters and every character has a meaning. In languages that use Roman letters, several letters together become one word, but in the Chinese language one character alone has meaning. So when learning Chinese we must memorise a lot of characters. Chinese students memorise characters for a long time so they stick in their memory and cannot be erased. I still remember some characters, I forget a lot of pronunciation but I can remember meaning.

**[ER] And the desk cut out is stacked because you repeat the characters so many times - when learning as a child and now, when reclaiming your name?**

[FXH] Yes

**[IL] This action of writing and repeating your name is in a number of your works, is there a reason to make more than one work?**

[FXH] It only appears in *Rewriting the Erased* and *Writing in the Rain*, but I also made some paintings related to *Writing in the Rain*. The curatorial team from MACAN [The Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art Nusantara, Jakarta] asked me 'why do you make a painting?'. I told them that when I made a performance, *Writing in the Rain*, it only



talked about the memory of my name and the situation of how the name was erased, but behind that performance there are complex political, social and cultural situations. I cannot show all of this in my performance because I just want to focus on why I tried to write my name again and again, emphasising my name, and the erasure. But in a painting I want to address parts of the situation one by one. Usually I don't say I made a painting, instead I call it a manual reproduction. I was always working with reproductions when I worked as a graphic designer - digital reproduction or mechanical reproduction - and I was thinking why am I not making a manual reproduction using my hand? I had already completed the design using the computer so I projected onto the canvas and then I painted without any expression or emotion, therefore I say this is only a manual reproduction. I want to show the intersections of society and politics, I cannot show this in a performance, so I show it in a painting. In the painting there is an outline of my body but it doesn't register with CMYK - the layers are slipped.

There is always a bargaining between me and the social/political situation. I accept that or I'm not accepting at all. If I accept the situation, I have to think, what can I do? What must I do? There is always a bargaining. The situation is not always attached to or the same as one's ideal. So the output of the result of this bargaining is that I cannot show the ideal of one person.

**[IL] Like a negotiation? A compromise?**

[FXH] Yes. Always everybody compromises because of the situation. It's either you accept it or not.

**[BW] You play with that through the CMYK. Sometimes you have this set of ideals, like 'I want to be this certain person', or 'I want to be a certain way' but you can't really do it, it's a compromising space.**

[FXH] It is always a compromise. We cannot make anything that is very ideal. Always compromising, because of the social situation, the political situation, because of family...

**[IL] How does this relate to the themes of *Writing in the Rain*? And the history behind this work?**

[FXH] My ideal is to be able to use my Chinese name, but the political situation says I cannot. This means I must change my name into an Indonesian name. I accept that. So I must choose my name.

**[BW] How did you find the experience of choosing your own name? My parents gave me the name Bianca as well as a Chinese name.**

[FXH] When I was 18 all young Chinese-Indonesian people were told they must give a formal statement saying 'I want to be Indonesian' or 'I want to be another citizen'. If they chose to say 'I want to be Indonesian' then they would go to the court, declare this, and be given Indonesian citizen papers. They were required to not only do this, but also state that they want to change their name into an Indonesian name. So I had to choose my name. I thought, what Indonesian name do I want to use? At the time I liked one illustrator, his name was 'FX Har', I thought, 'what is FX Har? I like that'. I made some names, 'Harsono, Hardono, Haridono' and then I asked someone who knows about Javanese language 'what's the meaning

of this one?', they said 'Harsono means 'happy'. I thought, 'oh that's interesting for me, I can become a happy man'.

**[IL] Are you curious about the way in which your work will be received by the audience in Fairfield, Sydney?**

[FXH] I don't know. When I ran a workshop at 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art [Sydney, 2012] about the memory of a name, there was about 10 participants, people from the Philippines, Vietnam, China, Australia, and others. During the workshop many people said 'oh I already changed my name', and the person from Vietnam said, 'yes I changed my name because a lot of people found it difficult to pronounce my name, but now I will use my Vietnamese name again'. People realised that a lot of people in the world must change their name for a lot of reasons, because of gender, politics, economy.... So I hope that some people who see the work can think about another name they may have had and why they had to change it.

**[ER] Give them courage to use their true name.**

**[BW] and to know that it is actually something that is wider, not just an Indonesian experience.**

**[IL] The work you make is very personal and about uncovering and making Indonesian history visible. You are showing internationally as well as in Indonesia. How does knowing that you will be exhibiting internationally affect the way you work? Does it affect the way you think about making work?**

[FXH] This is a problem for artists who are working with local history or local culture - if they want to show internationally then the audience will

sometimes not know the social or cultural politics behind the work. They won't know what the work means or will wonder why. Because of this I always use language that suggests that something happened, that looks like a clue. This makes the audience guess or realise 'oh, there is something behind this work'. I don't just make an artistic object, not just a beautiful object, I don't like a beautiful object. Like when I made *Burned Victim*, 1998, I showed it in my solo show in Singapore, Tan Boon Hui, he was the Director of the Singapore Art Museum at that time, he said to me 'you know, if a child saw this work they could say that this work is talking about something, a war or something like that'. I always want to show, but not completely, the background of the social or cultural situation behind this work. I give something that can be a clue or sign to the people that there is something behind this work. And then they can start to try and find out what's behind this work.

If I make a film I can say a lot of things, but if I make just one work, how can I say that there is a lot more behind this? In my experience if I talk a lot in the artwork then the artwork doesn't say anything. But if I talk about one thing, and just be very focussed on one thing, then the work can say a lot. Some artists make a lot of things, put a lot of things on the canvas, they want to say a lot of things. But after seeing it I think 'what do they want to say? I don't understand anymore'. Like when I talk about my name, suddenly people realise this is not just about me and my name, this is about the Chinese name, the Chinese people in Indonesia. So from being



*FX Harsono, Rewriting The Erased/Video Performance, 2009*  
installation with wooden and rattan chair, wooden table with marble,  
Chinese ink on paper, and performance video, dimensions variable,  
installation view 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art, Sydney.  
Photo credit: Susannah Wimberley.

very focussed on one thing, suddenly it reflects a lot. So, I always say to young people when they ask me how to make something, 'don't talk too much'.

**[ER] So your work can be shown around the world and people can find a point of interest or entry.**

[FXH] Yes I hope that.

**[BW] Do you feel like there is a responsibility as an artist to do research and share these things?**

[FXH] I always say that artworks show the social responsibility of artists related to their social culture. My work is expressing my social responsibility to my society, to the society I live in. Because of that, I think that I must not just only make an interpretation of one situation or one problem. If I just make an interpretation of one thing it means that I am only on the surface of this problem. But I must know the situation deeply, and if I want to do this then I must research. A lot artists say, 'oh my work is expressing the social issues', 'what social issues?', 'oh like ah corruption', 'what corruption?', 'I don't know anything more about the corruption'. Or if they want to talk about discrimination, 'what kind of discrimination do you want to address? A lot of things involve discrimination, discrimination about gender, about race, a lot... What do you want to talk about? You cannot only say discrimination, that's very general.' If you talk very generally then it means that you are just only on the surface, so your work becomes superficial.

The first time I made work based on research was in 1985 when I was interested in the pollution in Jakarta. I was working with a group of five artists

and we were discussing the pollution. I said, 'do you know about the pollution in Jakarta?', someone said 'yeah I know the pollution in the air', I said 'what kind of pollution, why? What kind of chemical or particle has polluted our air?' Suddenly they said 'yeah I don't know'. I told them that if we make an artwork that is related to a situation or condition that we don't know enough about then we could create distortion in our work. So how can we make work about the pollution? We must work with a person who knows about pollution, so we worked with an NGO that is concerned with the environment in Jakarta.

**[IL] Speaking about research, when you read about your practice it says after 1998 is when Pak Harsono started to make work related to his Chinese-Indonesian identity and Chinese-Indonesian history, or Indonesian history. It doesn't say why that's when that started, or when your research on that started. Can you tell us a little bit about why and when?**

[FXH] In the year of 2000 I got appendicitis and the doctor said that I must have surgery to have it taken out. I had the surgery, my appendix had already burst and I had to rest for maybe two weeks. During my rest I was thinking 'what work do I want to make now?'. Because now the situation had changed, the feeling had changed, people could criticise the government. Suddenly I was thinking 'why am I questioning this? Who am I?' 'Oh, I am Indonesian Chinese'. And then I was questioning again, 'is it true that I am Indonesian Chinese?', 'What do I know about Chinese culture? So maybe I know about Indonesian or Javanese culture?

I also don't know about Javanese culture.' So I was questioning my identity, and from that time I suddenly changed my work. Slowly I realised, okay I am Chinese, if I want to talk about my identity I cannot see my identity clearly from culture because I am a hybrid person. I don't know much about the Chinese because for 32 years the Chinese people were unable to show or follow their culture. So what do I want to say? What do I want to know? If I want to talk about my identity then how must I do it? Oh, maybe from history! So I tried to read a lot of books about Chinese people and I did some interviews. I wanted to look very deep into my family's history. Suddenly I realised, I don't know where I come from, how many generations are already here? Who is my mother? My mother is Indonesian Chinese, she studied in a Dutch school so she can speak Dutch very well. Is her orientation more to the Chinese or to the Dutch? How can I work this out as my mother has already passed away? I made a video interviewing my mothers friends. I asked, 'if you had money, or if someone gave you money, would you prefer to go to China or the Netherlands?' They said, 'I would prefer to go to The Netherlands because I cannot speak Chinese'.

When I tried to talk about my father's history I found a photograph - my father was a photographer - of the exhumation of the Chinese massacre [1947-49] and then I realised, 'oh, this is a big history'. So I tried to work very personally and realised this reflected a lot of issues with discrimination and more.

**[IL] So you had never seen those photographs before?**

[FXH] I had seen them when I was a child. I always saw one album, it was full of bad photographs and my father always told the story of what had happened. But during the Suharto era I forgot about this as I was focussing on Suharto and the political situation. After that I realised 'oh this is very interesting', and then I started to research.

**[BW] Previously your process was more installation focussed, and then we start seeing more self portraits, like Writing in the Rain and others. Why did you shift to looking at yourself, representing the self in your work?**

[FXH] Because I want to see my identity - I want to look into myself, so I started with myself. Suddenly I realised I am talking about very personal things but they reflect the people's problems with discrimination. Some people began to say that Harsono's work during the Suharto era was reflecting everything outside himself, but now it looks like Harsono is trying to look into himself. I said yes, but even my works which talk about my problems and myself are reflecting broader issues.

**[IL] Your philosophy of being specific about a problem, an issue, it's like being specific about your identity in order to reflect a lot of meaning and a lot of experiences.**

[FXH] Yes that's true. When I talk about myself it's very personal, but myself, me, is part of our society. So if I talk about myself, I talk about a person who is part of the one society.

# FX HARSONO

*Writing in the Rain*, 2011

Installation with wooden desks and chairs,  
TV monitors, and video projection

Dimensions variable;

each desk approximately 70 x 80 x 75 cm

Gene & Brian Sherman Collection, Sydney

## BIOGRAPHY

**FX Harsono** is a seminal figure in the Indonesian contemporary art scene with a career spanning close to five decades. He co-founded Indonesia's *Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru* (New Art Movement) in 1975, with a group of young artists who believed in engaging with social and political issues, through an emphasis on experimental and conceptual approaches that incorporates everyday materials. Since his student days he has been an active critic of Indonesian politics, society and culture, consistently refining his artistic language to the contemporary social and cultural contexts. For the past decade (2009-2019) Harsono's projects focus on the mass killings of Chinese-Indonesians in Java in the years 1947-49. His on-going research on this lost history has led him to discover and visit over ten mass graves sites in several cities across Java.

Since 2015, Harsono has lectured at the Faculty of Art and Design, Pelita Harapan University, Tangerang, West Java, Indonesia. In addition to teaching, he regularly writes about social questions and the development of contemporary art in Indonesia and Southeast Asia. Notable solo exhibitions

include *Beyond Identity*, Nexus Arts, Adelaide, Australia (2015); *Testimonies*, Singapore Art Museum, Singapore (2010); and *The Erased Time*, National Gallery of Indonesia, Jakarta (2009). Recent group exhibitions include *Sunshower: Contemporary Art from Southeast Asia 1980s to Now*, Mori Art Museum, Tokyo (2017); *After Darkness: Southeast Asian Art in the Wake of History*, Asia Society Museum, New York (2017); and *Tell Me My Truth*, 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art, Sydney (2016). Harsono has participated in key local and international biennales including the 20th Biennale of Sydney, Sydney, Australia (2016); Jogja Biennale XII, Yogyakarta, Indonesia (2013); the 4th Moscow Biennale, Moscow, Russia.



FX Harsono, *Writing in the Rain*, 2011  
installation with wooden desks and chairs,  
tv monitors, and video projection, dimensions variable  
Installation view at Jogja National Museum, © FX Harsono

# IDA LAWRENCE

When I arrived in Yogyakarta in March this year to meet with FX Harsono, I did not yet know what I wanted to make for this project. My intention was to let the conversations with Harsono, books and articles on his practice and *Writing in the Rain*, and new experiences and other conversations in Indonesia, direct me towards new research.

Through these processes, I became fixated on the gaps: of history and knowledge. Which stories do we hear and which stories do we not hear? Which stories and traditions are passed down to the next generation, and which ones are not?

This preoccupation with gaps was also coming from a place of being very conscious of the many holes in my knowledge of Indonesian language and Javanese culture. I wondered about the overlaps between the way one looks at and understands the past, and the way one looks at and understands another culture.

***A village and surrounds I  
(maps and props), 2019***  
Acrylic on unstretched canvas,  
160 x 187 cm

***A village and surrounds III  
(kehidupan baru), 2019***  
Acrylic on unstretched canvas,  
160 x 185 cm

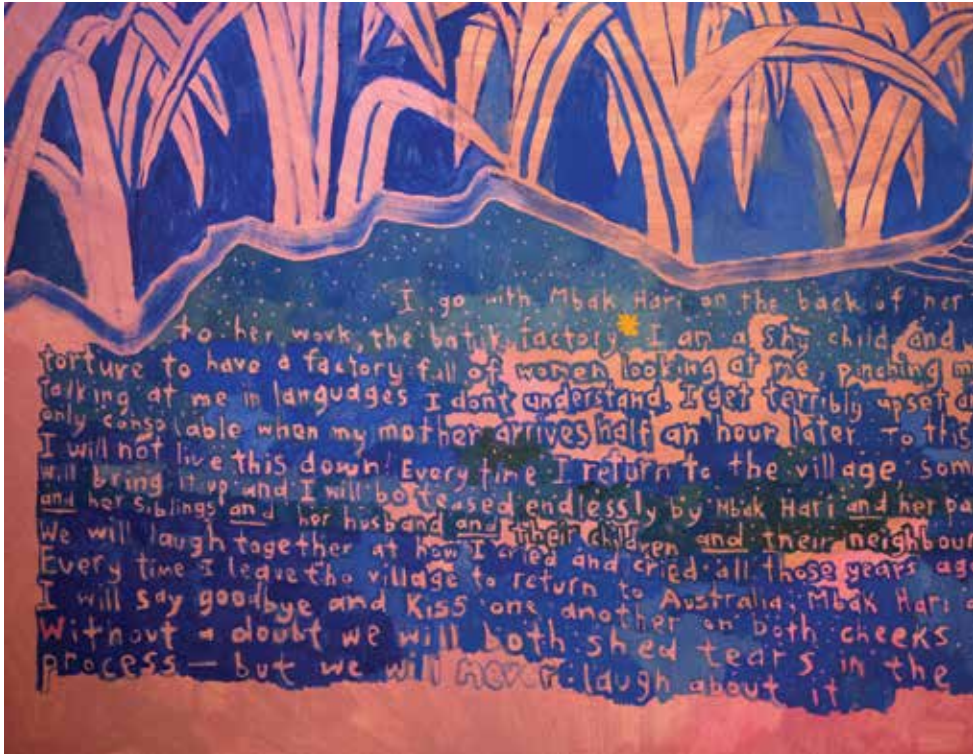
***A village and surrounds VI  
(mirrors and mould), 2019***  
Acrylic on unstretched canvas,  
160 x 191 cm

FX Harsono's reflection on the question 'who am I?' has informed his practice of the last two decades. After meeting and talking with him, I decided I wanted to use this project to learn more of the stories that 'came before me' – the stories, traditions and experiences of my relatives in Java, and the histories around our village. Some of those stories, the ways they are remembered and retold (or not), and the connections I could see between them, inform this painting series.

Harsono chose to work with video for *Writing in the Rain* because he wanted to use a medium that could record a past action to talk about things that happened in the past. For these paintings, I wanted to experiment with plotting different stories, from different eras, into the one map, as if these memories and events are occurring all at once; as if the past is still present.

Painting, for Harsono, is 'mechanical reproduction'. For me, painting is a thinking and reflection process, and a bridge for understanding my encounters with the world, particularly as I move between cultures. It is also an intuitive and playful process of constructing a composition. The finished product contains traces of the painting's own construction and history – layers, mistakes and corrections, or the illusion of these. While developing these works, I especially wanted to consider how to create something that acknowledged its own limitations of representing 'the full picture'.





Ida Lawrence, *A village and surrounds VI (mirrors and mould)* (detail), 2019

***A story my father heard as a child,*  
2019  
acrylic on linen, multiple panels,  
dimensions variable**

This painting takes its starting point from a *riwayat*, oral history from my father's village in Central Java. I wanted the gaps of this story to be as large as the story itself. The advice FX Harsono gives to young artists is to create work focused on one specific thing and not 'talk too much'. In Javanese culture however, in order to talk about

something difficult it is best to speak about a lot of other things first and only talk about the difficult topic indirectly. The way I often like to paint, and the way these jackfruit have been painted, is to paint 'indirectly' or 'backwards' – that is, instead of directly painting lines into the composition, lines are formed by the painting of shapes around them.

## BIOGRAPHY

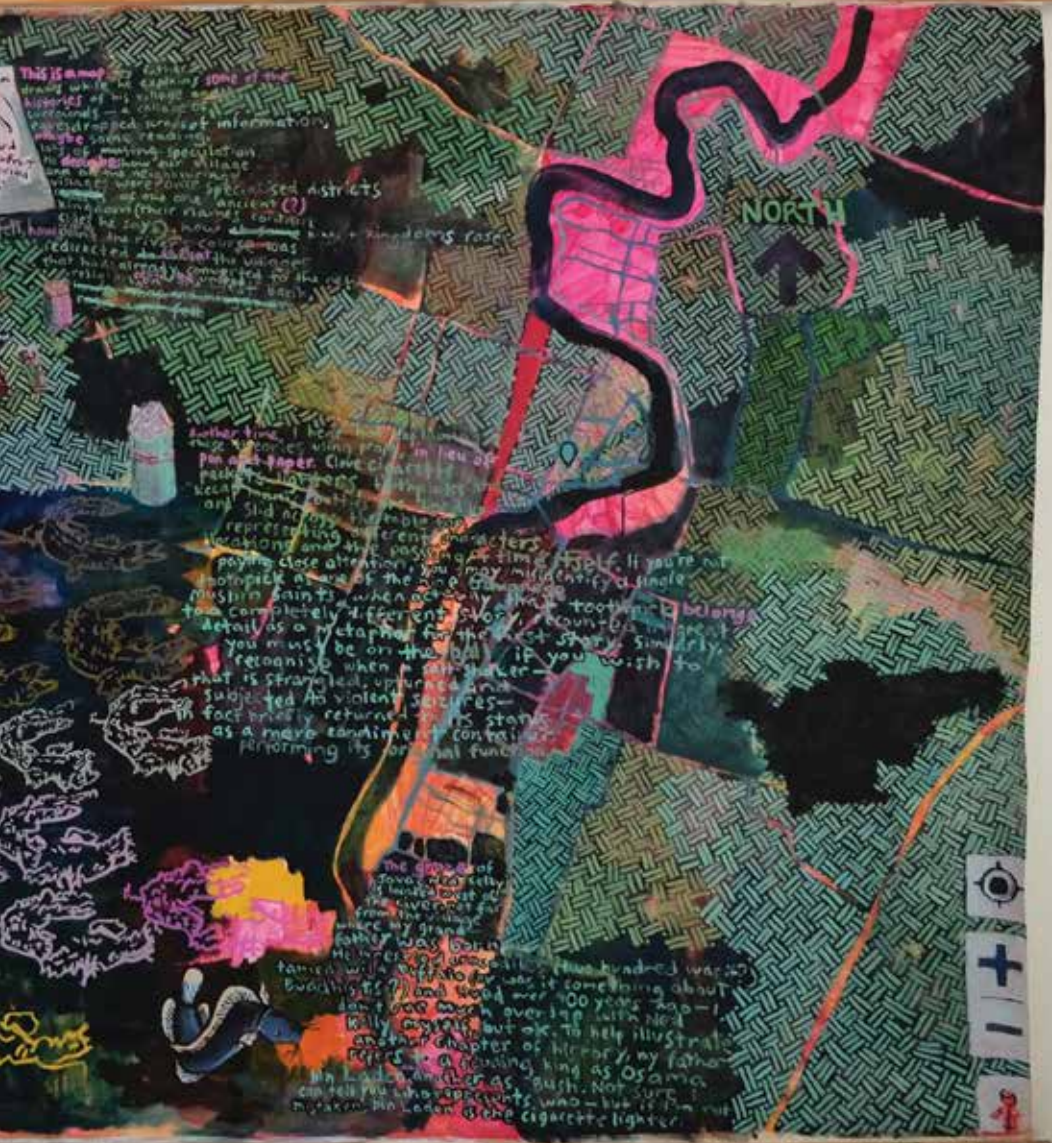
**Ida Lawrence** weaves stories through her art and education projects and uses narrative to consider or subvert attitudes and assumptions. Her narrative paintings, which combine text and image, are informed by personal experiences and research between Australia and Indonesia. In the projects she calls *Fabricated Histories*, she brings fictions to life through installation, text, curation and collaboration. Ida is based in Sydney, and sometimes in Yogyakarta, and is a member of Woven Kolektif, a group of artists who work between Australia and Indonesia. She graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Painting) at the Sydney art school situated in an old gaol, and completed Honours (Sculpture) at the one situated in a former mental asylum. In between, she studied traditional Indonesian dance on a Darmasiswa Scholarship at the Indonesian Institute of Arts, Yogyakarta, and in 2009 co-founded MILS gallery for emerging artists in Sydney.

Solo and collaborative exhibitions include: *bloody woop woop / (n)desa: stories from Barmedman, Kliwonan and between*, TeMBI Rumah Budaya, Yogyakarta & Jakarta (2012); *Fitri Graham's Melancholia: A Retrospective*, Kings Artist-Run, Melbourne (2017); *Jangan Lupa Bawa Oleh-Oleh Ya*, Redbase Foundation, Yogyakarta (2018); and *Breathing Room*, Cement Fondu, Sydney (2019). Group exhibitions include: *The 15th Asian Art Biennale*, National Academy of Fine and Performing Arts, Dhaka (2012); *Sculpture By The Sea*, Bondi, Sydney (2013); *Brisbane*

& *Elsewhere Art UnTriennial*, Outer Space ARI, Brisbane (2019); *Ecologies of Being*, Kudos Gallery, Sydney (2019); and *looking here looking north*, Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre, Sydney (2019).



Ida Lawrence,  
*A village and surrounds /*  
*(maps and props)* (work in progress),  
2019, acrylic on linen



Ida Lawrence,  
*A village and surrounds III*  
(*kehidupan baru*)  
(work in progress), 2019,  
acrylic on linen



I am doing a back-crawl as  
forwards motion, but should I be  
from head to toe? Or the reverse? A  
rest? too slow?) My uncle  
handful and sort of walks on  
feeding pellets to chickens in  
the nearby plastic bag upside  
and flaps it about for a bit until  
the last pellet has no choice but  
succumb. The whole time he  
but even time he seems to be in a  
location. Either my memory is playing  
tricks or we have just kept on  
the wrong woman's grave,  
and other person's grandma or  
Maybe this is not such  
a terrible thing

Scattered and lost  
to someone if any  
knows it



# EMILY ROLFE

**Emily Rolfe** is Assistant Curator, Contemporary Visual Arts at Campbelltown Arts Centre. From 2014 – 2017 she was Assistant Curator at Sherman Contemporary Art Foundation, Sydney. She is actively involved in the Asia Pacific region working as a curator, writer and project assistant on national and international projects. In 2018 she worked as the assistant curator of the survey exhibition *Lisa Reihana / Cinemania* at Campbelltown Arts Centre, and in 2017 she co-curated *Tracks and Traces: Contemporary Australian Art* at the Negev Museum of Art in Be'er Sheva, Israel. In 2018 Emily participated in the 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art's Curators' Intensive program in Melbourne. She is interested in cross-cultural exchange and collaboration and the impacts that real and imagined borders and barriers have on communities. Emily studied media/ film and art history at the University of New South Wales.

# BIANCA WINATAPUTRI

**Bianca Winataputri** (born 1995, Jakarta, Indonesia) is an independent curator, writer and researcher based in Australia. Recently she was Assistant Curator of Contemporary Art at the National Gallery of Australia, where she is part of a curatorium for the major exhibition *Contemporary Worlds: Indonesia*. She graduated with a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Melbourne, and completed her Honours year (First class) at the Australian National University where she received the Janet Wilkie Prize for Art History for her thesis in 2017. Bianca's research focus is on contemporary practice in Southeast Asia, looking particularly at the relationship between the individual and the collective in relation to history, globalisation, identity and community building. In 2018, Bianca was selected to participate in 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art's Curators' Intensive. Her upcoming independent projects include *Crossroads/Titik Temu*, Bus Projects, Melbourne, and *Who am I: Chinese-Indonesian art practice post-1998*, Monash University, Melbourne.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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- Create NSW, for assisting us to travel to Indonesia to spend an intensive week together discussing and developing the project
- Ashley Murray for the exhibition branding and booklet design

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- Family and friends in Sydney and Yogyakarta, for ongoing conversations and support.

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Artwork: Ida Lawrence, *A story my father heard as a child* (detail), 2019, acrylic on linen

