



ABOUT US

Literally means basement, **RUBANAH Underground Hub** is located in the basement of a building in the center of Jakarta's hubbub. The space accommodates various art activities, especially exhibition or presentation of artwork. **RUBANAH** is a meeting space for sharing information and knowledge, a shared learning space for artists, curators, researchers or writers, or anyone interested in deepening and enriching the experience and knowledge of contemporary art.

RUBANAH is open to all possible cooperation with an emphasis on the dialogue process that can enrich the artistic and thematic ideas that lead to exhibitions, presentations, art discussions.





ARDI GUNAWAN

Ardi Gunawan is a Jakarta based flexi-disciplinary artist and an Assistant Professor in the Visual Communication Design program at Pradita University. He works across mediums ranging from painting, sculpture, architectural-scale installation, to video, and stage design. His artworks have been exhibited widely including at Objectifs (Singapore), Open Archive (AUS), Gertrude Contemporary (AUS), National Gallery of Indonesia (ID), Cemeti - Institute for Art and Society (ID), ARK Galerie (ID).

Ardi was awarded an MFA from Monash University with a scholarship in 2009. He received a New Work grant from the Australia Council in 2011. He was also a former studio artist at Gertrude Contemporary, Australia, from 2008 - 2009.

His work has been written about, featured, and mentioned in numerous publications, including: Place.Labour.Capital; Dissect Journal; Giramondo Publishing; New Museum/Art Asia Pacific; Sarasvati; The Age Australia; Jakarta Post; UnMagazine; and Art Monthly Australia.





SLEAZY ENVIRONMENTALISM

Anyone would be hard pushed to recognize the kinds of animals hanging inside the gallery. Strange creatures, bastardised hybrids of a bird, beetle and butterfly, like characters from an experimental TV cartoon show about taxidermy: while there are clear references to existing species, these beasts also deviate from commonly known ones. The series of GIF works on an odd, fantastical animal kingdom are also unsettling in being simultaneously cute and vulgar, childlike but also crass and indecent.

This exhibition presents Ardi Gunawan's latest works, which explore environmentalism through the lens of queer theory. Queer theory is an attempt to critically unpack heteronormative tendencies that shape socio-cultural norms: "to queer" is to seek out and investigate what is discarded, put out of sight, considered improper and unsightly as a particular norm is formed. In this sense, Ardi's work are attempts to "queer" widely held norms about environmental awareness.

16th-century Europe, the bird-of-paradise: a precious commodity sourced from Indonesia that would later on be traded and exchanged by the hands of Dutch and Spanish merchants. The story goes that these birds rarely arrive intact: wingless, with shrivelled feathers and giant beaks that look disproportionate - there are even versions where they are said to be legless - these distorted creatures were considered both beautiful and monstrous, unlike any other avian species seen before. The story of the bird-of-paradise tells us how the natural sciences and its history evolved not only from colonial fantasies about exotic, untouched territories, but also from the study of monsters: creatures engineered from imagination, interpretation and available resources.

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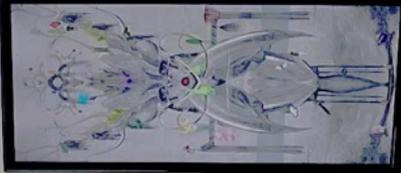
Anti-naturalist claims suggest that, as in the legend of the bird-of-paradise, knowledge about the sciences are fickle, open to manipulation, distortion and fabrication. “Nature” is a constructed and assembled field, rather than a given or indeed, “natural”. Ardi’s work may be understood as an attempt to engineer nature and present an alternative position to dominant narratives on environmentalism. Surrealist methods of absurdity and perversion are used to re-imagine accepted beliefs and meanings about nature, beyond conventional norms of, say, preserving nature or promoting ecologically sustainable ways of life. By highlighting the sexual, irrational and humorous aspects of a realm that we designate and refer to as “nature”, the work in this exhibition deviate from thereby shifting and expanding commonly held norms relating to the term.

There is no denying the value of these perspectives. Beyond that, any perspective harbours within it the danger of becoming monolithic and dogmatic. As queer theory argues, norms are shaped by exclusion and concealment: they are produced through such mechanisms of cover-up and disguise. This exhibition offers an alternate perspective on environmental care: that such care does not necessarily be limited to noble virtues such as “awareness”. Instead environmental care also needs to be interpreted and discussed through absurdity, ambivalence and irony.

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SLEAZY ENVIRONMENTALISM



And what could be more ironic than the way we interact with various kinds of audio-visual information facilitated by social media platforms - such as Instagram - on the latest and usually most polarising issues - such as “environmental awareness”. On Instagram, use of the term as search words will lead us to a plethora of “content”, ranging from youth activism on fast fashion, to opinionated “momfluencers” on the danger of vaccinating children, to fundraising to prevent the extinction of bees and news about natural disasters on different parts of the world that seem to be happening all at once. The more information we get, none the wiser we seem to be.

How do we even begin to make sense of anything through Instagram, through its endless waves of content, from posts to feeds, stories, reels and GIFs? The current exhibition presents a series of animated video montage from Instagram GIF content, searched by using phrases such as #hunting, #bugs #birdofparadise #discovery #kill and so on. The use of Instagram content and GIF is consistent with Ardi’s practice of using waste materials (as seen in *Reconfiguring still: proposals for the super light*, 2008; *Luckily there’s no inside*, 2011; *A proposal for a permanent fixture* at Ark Galerie in two editions: *Superlight*, 2013). Whereas in his previous works physical waste products such as rubbish was salvaged from the area surrounding the exhibition space, the works in the current exhibition make use of “virtual” waste. GIF is a form of capitalist technology of cheap entertainment, regularly used to decorate social media “feeds” as emojis and “stickers”. The use of GIF in Ardi’s practice deviates from the usual function of the technology, in acting as a way to explore aspects of nature through its perversion.

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SLEAZY ENVIRONMENTALISM





In short, *Sleazy Environmentalism* affords a hallucinatory perspective on current environmental tropes. It is an attempt at doing environmentalism, but badly, challenging prevalent “serious” advocacies of care and awareness.

Mitha Budhyarto
Curator

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MITHA BUDHYARTO

Mitha Budhyarto is a lecturer in Lasalle College of the Arts Singapore. She was awarded a PhD in Humanities and Cultural Studies by the University of London (Birkbeck College, UK) and has been based in Singapore since 2015. Her research has been published and presented at various academic journals and conferences, and she has received numerous grants for both her research and curatorial practice.

