

Dismantling the Monuments: Artistic approaches in the making of *Luka dan Bisa Kubawa Berlari*

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As We Talk Under the Shadow of History

In Spring 2022, the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam showcased the exhibition ‘Revolusi!’,¹ highlighting Indonesian perspectives on the fight for independence. Directed by curators from the history department, Harm Stevens and Marion Anker, the project was a collaboration with Indonesian curators Bonnie Triyana and Amir Sidharta. The exhibition featured objects and art from the 1945–1949 Indonesian revolution. I was invited to collaborate as a commissioned artist, working with the museum’s collection, and particularly the artefacts now in Dutch museums that were taken from across the Indonesian archipelago during the colonial period.

Prior to my involvement, I engaged in discussion with the Dutch curatorial team. I questioned the implications of having colonial objects in their institutions, considering that the Dutch colonised the Indonesian archipelago for more than three centuries. I emphasised the importance of understanding the context of colonial oppression and resistance before 1945 to fully grasp the significance of ‘Revolusi!’.

Our discussion prompted us to delve into the historical and ethical consequences of preserving these artefacts, particularly those plundered during the colonial era. We also looked at the Eurocentric bias in interpreting colonial history, restitution and repatriation, and the role of museums in shaping knowledge production. This echoed the post-World War II unease in European cultural institutions about displaying artefacts from former colonies without perpetuating colonial structures.²

In *The Birth of the Museum*, Tony Bennett says that museums were initially designed to establish a lasting state ideology.³ However, museums needed flexibility and exhibitions revitalised the museum ideology in order to adapt to varying short-term goals. While public museums offered a steadfast ideological base for the state, exhibitions injected more flexibility, aligning the museum’s framework with the evolving strategies of a diverse national bourgeoisie.

¹ ‘Revolusi!’ was at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam from 11 February to 5 June 2022; see www.rijksmuseum.nl/nl/zien-en-doen/tentoonstellingen/afgelopen/revolusi

² See Timoteus Anggawan Kusno, ‘Panggung Poskolonial Indonesia dalam Narasi “Memoar Tanah Rucuk”’, *Retorik: Jurnal Ilmu Humaniora*, vol 4, no 2, 2016, pp 233–253, p 247 <https://doi.org/10.24071/ret.v4i2.421>

³ See Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, Routledge, New York, 1995, p 80

The discussion reflected on themes explored by Yiu Fai Chow and Jeroen de Kloet, who emphasised the need to challenge the Eurocentric bias in knowledge production by critically analysing the power dynamics that shape cultural narratives and address silenced perspectives.⁴ This involves examining the complex cultural production process, considering who holds cultural authority and who defines ‘truth’, and whose perspectives are marginalised.

Simultaneously, the Indonesian government was also pursuing a plan to repatriate cultural heritage, including the illegally acquired Indonesian historical artefacts in Dutch museums.⁵ The Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture prioritised repatriation efforts, ongoing since 1975, particularly regarding items taken during colonial times.⁶ Unfortunately, the Dutch government claimed that many items from the colonial period were missing, including those associated with Diponegoro and Pattimura (both are recognised as Indonesian national heroes who fought against colonial oppression) and the insignia from a Muslim-majority region, the South Sulawesi sultanate of Luwu. Discussions also covered items such as the Wadjak skull (a prehistoric human fossil discovered in late nineteenth-century Indonesia), objects from Aceh’s army museum collection, and missing items from the Singasari period (the thirteenth century).⁷ These gaps underscore the complexity of addressing colonial injustices, necessitating multiple strategies.

Mirjam Shatanawi has observed that the Netherlands was actively taking steps to decolonise its museums, including repatriating collections, re-evaluating colonial terminology, engaging with communities and acknowledging the cultural diversity within Dutch society where these collections are housed.⁸ In addition to such discussions, the Dutch government allocated 4.1 million euros to support a joint research programme by the Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies (KITLV), the Netherlands Institute for Military History (NIMH) and the Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies (NIOD), which aimed to investigate the period of independence, decolonisation, violence and war in Indonesia from 1945–1950.⁹

⁴ See Yiu Fai Chow and Jeroen de Kloet, ‘The Spectre of Europe: Knowledge, Cultural Studies and the “Rise of Asia”’, *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol 17, no 1, 2014, pp 3–15, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1367549413501475>

⁵ See ‘Repatriasi, Upaya Indonesia Kembalikan Benda Cagar Budaya dari Belanda’, Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Republik Indonesia, 11 January 2021, <https://www.kemdikbud.go.id/main/blog/2021/01/repatriasi-upaya-indonesia-kembalikan-benda-cagar-budaya-dari-belanda>

⁶ See Jos van Beurden, ‘Treasures in Trusted Hand: Negotiating the Future of Colonial Cultural Objects’, unpublished PhD dissertation, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, 2016, p 112

⁷ See Mirjam Shatanawi, ‘Making and Unmaking Indonesian Islam: Legacies of Colonialism in Museums’, unpublished PhD dissertation, Universiteit van Amsterdam, 2022, p 14

⁸ See *ibid*

⁹ See ‘Independence, decolonization, violence and war in Indonesia, 1945–1950’, NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies, accessed 6 September 2024 www.niod.nl/en/projects/independence-decolonization-violence-and-war-indonesia-1945-1950

In this article, I give a critical exploration of my experience in creating the *Luka dan Bisa Kubawa Berlari* [Wounds and Venom I Carry as I am Running] installation for the ‘Revolusi!’ exhibition in 2022. I delve into my artistic research and my approach and strategies when dealing with colonial objects, addressing the challenges and complexities that arose during the process. Gillian Rose has highlighted the subtle power dynamics within museums and galleries.¹⁰ I examine these dynamics in my role as an artist working with a Dutch institution and reflect on how the Rijksmuseum, as a cultural institution, can shape knowledge about Dutch colonial history.

Dipesh Chakrabarty notes that the ‘history’ knowledge system is rooted in nation-state priorities.¹¹ I am aware that my participation in this exhibition contributes to the knowledge produced by the Rijksmuseum regarding the shared colonial history between the Netherlands and Indonesia. Through this exploration, I aimed to shed light on the complexity of artistic collaborations with institutions while maintaining my own artistic vision and critical perspectives.

This article focuses on an artistic intervention at the Rijksmuseum in 2022, and connects this to the broader field of Indonesian history and cultural studies. By examining the incorporation of colonial-era Indonesian artefacts in the installation, I aim to delve into the people’s anticolonial struggles, resonating with the themes of the ‘Revolusi!’ exhibition. This intention aligns with Sartono Kartodirdjo’s critique of conventional colonial historiography:

My criticism of the conventional approach in colonial historiography is based on the fact that it assigns a very passive role to the people in general and the peasantry in particular. In the first place, colonial historiography dealing with the 19th century places great emphasis on the broad framework of government institutions and the making of laws and their enactment, and seldom goes beyond the level of formal structures. In the second place, Neerlandocentrism views Indonesian history only as an extension of Dutch history, and no active role has therefore been ascribed to the Indonesian people. Thus the history of 19th-century Indonesia becomes largely the history of the Dutch colonial regime.¹²

This approach responds to Chakrabarty’s observation regarding the subalternity of non-Western and Third World histories. Historians from Third World countries often reference European history and historians, while the reverse is not as common. This study aims to address this imbalance by placing Indonesian (art) history within the context of (Southeast) Asian studies.

¹⁰ See Gillian Rose, *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials*, 4th edition, SAGE Publications, London, 2016 [2011], p 226

¹¹ See Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (with a new preface by the author), Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 2008 [2000], p 41

¹² Sartono Kartodirdjo, *The Peasants’ Revolt of Banten in 1888: Its Conditions, Course and Sequel: A Case Study of Social Movements in Indonesia*, Springer Netherlands, 1966, p 5

Additionally, a decolonial approach will be used to explore how artists engage with colonial archives while challenging the dominant paradigm, particularly in the Indonesia–Netherlands postcolonial context. Decolonial thinking,¹³ according to Walter Mignolo,¹⁴ emerged in colonies and ex-colonies as a critical theoretical option,¹⁵ emphasising the recognition of racial discrimination, human hierarchy and class exploitation.¹⁶

This study contextualises the decolonial approach within Indonesia's colonial history, which is marked by its shared past with the Netherlands and experiences of authoritarian rule post-independence. Ariel Heryanto has noted Indonesia's establishment of various forms of authoritarianism after colonial liberation,¹⁷ which provides a context for my examination of the New Order regime from 1966 to 1998. I propose that the New Order may have replicated colonial methods in order to maintain power,¹⁸ a perspective that resonates with Heryanto's findings on political violence and militarism during this era.¹⁹

During the New Order regime led by Suharto, centralism and developmentalism were imposed. Henk Schulte Nordholt has argued that the regime pursued a developmental authoritarianism in order to achieve rapid economic growth and political stability, with the state's centre as the sole legitimate driver of progress.²⁰ This imposition of centralism and developmentalism with a militarist approach parallels the colonial concept of *Pax Neerlandica*. *Pax Neerlandica*, as defined by Sartono Kartodirjo,²¹ refers to the period of Dutch colonial rule in Indonesia when peace and order were enforced across the archipelago, involving the pacification of various regions. Some of the colonial objects, particularly the flags, incorporated

¹³ This frame of thinking has its roots in the Asia-Africa Conference in April 1955 in Bandung, Indonesia. In this conference, twenty-nine newly and later independent Asian and African countries gathered to envision an alternative future to the hegemonic paradigms of capitalism and communism. This momentum continued with the Non-Aligned Conference in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, where several Latin American countries joined with Asian and African countries to explore an option outside of Western canons. This historical context provided the ground for 'decolonisation' and led to the development of decolonial theory; see Walter D Mignolo, 'Geopolitics of Sensing and Knowing: On (de)Coloniality, Border Thinking and Epistemic Disobedience', *Postcolonial Studies*, vol 14, no 3, pp 273–283, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13688790.2011.613105>.

¹⁴ See Walter D Mignolo, 'Delinking: The Rhetoric of Modernity, the Logic of Coloniality, and the Grammar of De-coloniality', *Cultural Studies*, vol 21, no 2–3, 2007, pp 449–514, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380601162647>

¹⁵ The idea of 'option' is important to distinguish from the Western concept of 'mission', which imposed colonialism, religion, liberalism, democracy and other ideologies on non-Western societies; see Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández, 'Decolonial Options and Artistic/Aesthetic Entanglements: An interview with Walter Mignolo', *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, vol 3, no 1, 2014, pp 196–212.

¹⁶ See Walter D Mignolo, 'Introduction: Coloniality of Power and De-colonial Thinking', *Cultural Studies*, vol 21, no 2–3, 2007, pp 155–167, p 164, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380601162498>

¹⁷ See Ariel Heryanto and Sumit K Mandal, *Challenging Authoritarianism in Southeast Asia: Comparing Indonesia and Malaysia*, Routledge, London, 2003, p 3

¹⁸ See Kusno, 'Panggun Poskolonial Indonesia dalam Narasi "Memoar Tanah Rucuk"', op cit, p 248

¹⁹ See Heryanto and Mandal, *Challenging Authoritarianism in Southeast Asia*, op cit, p 6

²⁰ See Henk Schulte Nordholt, *De-colonising Indonesian Historiography*, Working Paper No 6, Centre for East and South-East Asian Studies, Lund University, Sweden, 2004, p 15

²¹ See Kartodirdjo, *The Peasants' Revolt of Banten in 1888*, op cit, p 2

in the *Luka dan Bisa Kubawa Berlari* installation were captured during the Aceh war in the context of establishing this *Pax Neerlandica*.

Both *Pax Neerlandica* and the New Order relied on the idea of modernity as a key element of coloniality. This can be seen in the military conquests, the efforts to civilise and the consolidation of structures promoting capitalism, aligning with Aníbal Quijano's argument that European-Western rationality/modernity emerged through power restructuring in capitalist and urban social relations, nation-states and colonisation.²²

In contrast, I align with Leonie Schmidt's view that 'Indonesian modernities are not monolithic wholes' and that they manifest as diverse, conflicting and collaborative forces.²³ Understanding Indonesian modernity should stem from the people's struggles and lived experiences rather than being dictated solely by top-down power. This study thus aims to contribute to comprehending the multifaceted anticolonial imagination in Indonesian history through contemporary art practices addressing colonial remnants.



Timoteus Anggawan Kusno, *Luka dan Bisa Kubawa Berlari* (Wounds and Venom I Carry as I am Running), installation view, 'Revolusi!', 11 February–5 June 2022, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, photo by Albertine Dijkema, courtesy of the Rijksmuseum

²² See Aníbal Quijano, 'Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality', *Cultural Studies*, vol 21, no 2–3, 2007, pp 168–178, DOI: 10.1080/09502380601164353, pp 174–175

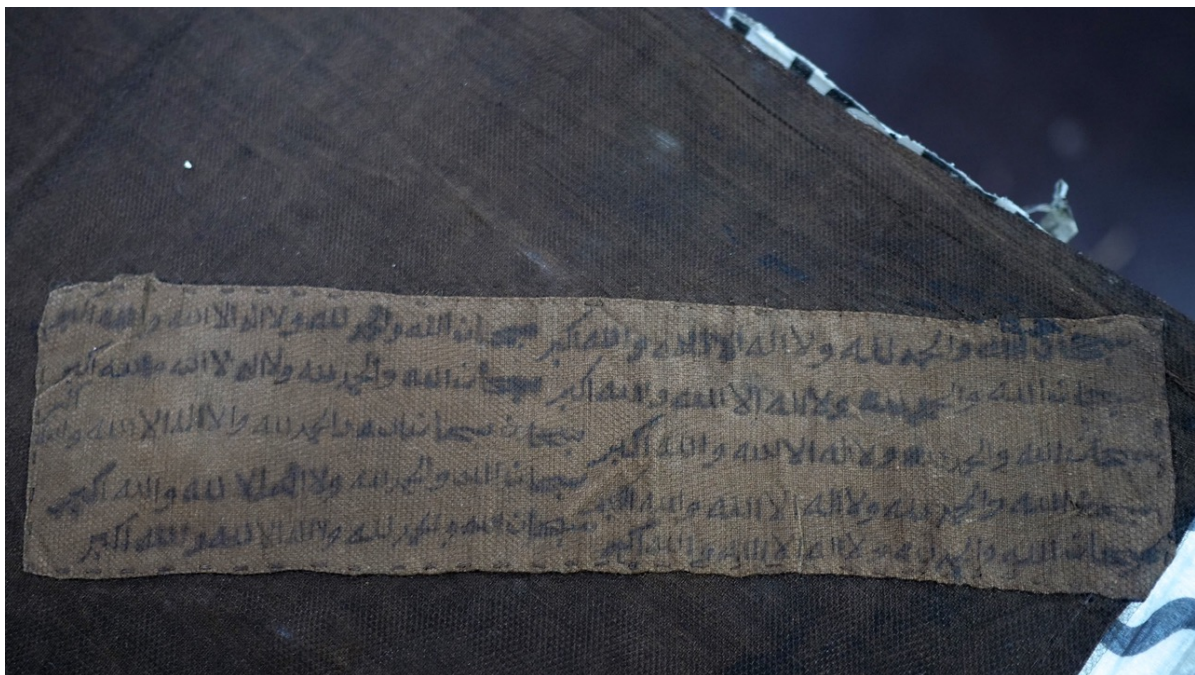
²³ See Leonie Schmidt, *Islamic Modernities in Southeast Asia: Exploring Indonesian Popular and Visual Culture*, Rowman & Littlefield, London, 2017

Encountering the Sterilised Past

During my initial visit to the Rijksmuseum's depot in 2019, I was impressed by the meticulous care given to each object. As a visual artist who works in a tropical environment like Indonesia, I understand the challenges of preserving art against humidity and time. Whether it is canvas, paper, fabric, steel, wood, or other materials, preserving art's veracity demands attention to detail and effort, and requires a disciplined approach and an understanding of material nuances and environmental responses.

We visited the fabric storage area, where flags from the Indonesian archipelago, mostly captured during Dutch military expeditions, were stored. Unrolling these flags, I could not help but feel that they had been silenced and 'exiled' throughout history. I saw them as symbols of the anticolonial spirit, as if they were alive and muted.

I took a particularly close look at these historical artefacts, many of which bear deep associations with anticolonial resistance. I approached them with a sense of reverence, recognising the profound significance they held. Some, with intricate designs and symbols, are adorned with Arabic prayers, excerpts from the Quran, carefully stitched onto them, underscoring their spiritual and cultural importance. I saw flags captured during the Aceh War, a reminder of the tumultuous past of these objects. It is concerning that the museum lacks information about the origins of these flags that were primarily acquired as war trophies. Stored far from their native lands for centuries, their connections to their origins are fading, along with their associated memories and symbolism. I also saw some flags with restoration issues, such as glued paper material adhering to the fabric, probably from past conservation efforts in the 1970s.



Detail of one of the flags included in the *Luka dan Bisa Kubawa Berlari* (Wounds and Venom I Carry as I am Running) installation in 'Revolusi!', 11 February–5 June 2022, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, photo courtesy of Timoteus Anggawan Kusno

After examining the flags, we briefly observed a set of Dutch governor-general portrait paintings. Harm Stevens explained how the paintings served as a barometer of Dutch rule in the East Indies, with little change from 1840 until the end of Dutch colonisation in 1942. During the Japanese invasion, the portraits were evacuated and later discovered in a sugar factory in East Java. After World War II ended, the Dutch made every effort to re-establish their authority, including reinstating the governors-general gallery at Rijswijk Palace, but the postwar handling of the paintings by an art teacher in Batavia named De Leeuw caused more damage than benefit to the canvases and panels. Yet his recreation of three missing portraits of the governors-general – Van Hoorn and Nederburgh from the eighteenth century, and Janssens from the early nineteenth – did restore the continuity of the collection.²⁴ The portraits have a complex history, with cultural significance in Indonesia as well as the Netherlands, offering insights into the power dynamics of colonialism and the legacy of Dutch rule in Indonesia.

I viewed the museum artefacts not just as mere objects but as archives shaping knowledge, memory and politics in modern society. As Tang Hongfeng notes, these archives, when artistically mediated, impact both body and memory, potentially reintroducing the colonial experience into contemporary individuals' thoughts and actions.²⁵ This fosters reflection on modern colonial history, and its reproduction, which remains integral to Asian and global political structures.

An Exhibition in the Making

Working with objects from the Rijksmuseum collection made me keenly aware of my position in relation to Indonesia's intricate cultural identity and its shared colonial history with the Netherlands. This stemmed from encountering artefacts not only from Java but also from various Indonesian regions, prompting questions about my connection to these 'looted artefacts' as an Indonesian with a background in Javanese culture. This is particularly challenging due to the ongoing influence of the Javanese-centrism that is rooted in colonialism and which has persisted post-independence. The centralisation of power in 'Java' during the colonial era, later shifting to Jakarta, exemplifies the colonial legacy, as Ben Anderson discussed in *Imagined Communities*:

But in spite of a spate of ethnic rebellions in almost all parts of independent Indonesia between 1950 and 1964, 'Indonesia' survived. In part it survived because Batavia remained the educational apex to the end, but also because colonial administrative policy did not rusticate educated Sundanese to the 'Sundalands,' or Batak to their place

²⁴ See Harm Stevens, *Bitter Spice: Indonesia and the Netherlands from 1600*, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, 2015, pp 134–135

²⁵ See Tang Hongfeng, 'Archive, Mediation, and Reflections on Colonization in Modern Asia', *China & Asia: A Journal in Historical Studies*, vol 2, no 1, 2020, pp 97–133, <https://doi.org/10.1163/2589465X-00201004>

of origin in the highlands of North Sumatra. Virtually all the major ethnolinguistic groups were, by the end of the colonial period, accustomed to the idea that there was an archipelagic stage on which they had parts to play.²⁶

This Javanese centralism, introduced during colonial rule, aligns with Adrian Vicker's description of institutional structures that could be adapted for Indonesian needs but which also resulted in massive inequalities and an economic system that benefited foreign interests.²⁷ Indonesia's first president, Sukarno (1945–1966), favoured centralism over federalism due to negative connotations associated with Dutch-sponsored states in 1949, which were seen as remnants of colonialism. Following Sukarno, Suharto assumed the leadership. Suharto was known for his centralist approach, which some provinces resented as a form of Javanese cultural imperialism. Suharto, an ethnic Javanese military leader, enforced centralised power and economic control through military force throughout the archipelago during his New Order regime (1967–1998).²⁸

To work strategically and to understand the cultural significance of the Rijksmuseum objects, I formed a reading group with colleagues interested in history and cultural studies. We collaborated remotely between Amsterdam and Yogyakarta in reading the content and context of select objects, sharing and discussing our findings. During the selection, I proposed a novel approach that involved 'dismantling the monument' and challenging traditional exhibition methods. I conceptualised a site-specific installation, an intervention to offer a new meaning-making experience that acknowledges the museum's colonial context. I discuss this further in the following as a series of creative approaches.

Artistic Approach No 1: Looking for the Unseen

Following discussions with the conservationist team, the selection of flags for the exhibition was narrowed down to fourteen from an initial twenty. All the flags underwent necessary restoration and preservation treatment, including adding a see-through fabric for structural reinforcement. However, some were too fragile and damaged, making restoration and installation for the exhibition too risky.

I thoroughly examined the flags, and considered their symbolic and material aspects. They were likely taken as war trophies during a Dutch military expedition over a century ago, although their history and origins remain largely unknown. The introduction to the

²⁶ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Verso, London, 2006 [1983], p 132

²⁷ See Adrian Vickers, *A History of Modern Indonesia*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2013 [2005], pp 117–220

²⁸ See Ariel Heryanto and Sumit K Mandal, eds, *Challenging Authoritarianism in Southeast Asia: Comparing Indonesia and Malaysia*, Routledge, London and New York, 2003, pp 4–5

Rijksmuseum's flag catalogue acknowledges this lack of knowledge, attributing their acquisition to the numerous Dutch expeditions to Indonesia in the nineteenth century.²⁹

In the final selection for the exhibition, several flags display significant Islamic symbols, such as the crescent moon and star and the Tahlil phrase *Lā ilāha illa l-Lāh* (There is no god but Allah). Additionally, some depict the Zulfiqar symbol (*Dhū'l-Faqār*, or *Dhū'l-Fiqr*), a double-edged sword associated with 'Alī, the first imām in Islam, known for his knowledge, bravery and chivalry and revered among Muslims with epithets such as Asad Allāh, Ḥaydar and Shīr-i Khudā, all translating as 'Lion of God'.³⁰ This symbol holds great importance in the context of religious legitimacy and military supremacy in the premodern Muslim world.³¹ According to Daneshgar, *Dhū'l-Faqār* is an iconic symbol of 'Alī, subject to scholarly debate regarding its origin and features. It appears on various historical objects, including amulets and flags, and in Malay-Indonesian Islamic culture it is often referred to as an actual sword belonging to 'Alī.

The Banner of Al-Iskander or Baros flag had already been researched. Upon close inspection, I observed its texture, fading colours and the traces of blood, mud and gunpowder – a reminder of the people's tragic battle against the colonial military forces. This flag featured patchwork with prayers stitched into it. Stevens noted that the flag was captured near Baros during the 1873 Aceh war. Arabic inscriptions on the flag served as a battle call and talisman. A W T Juynboll's study (1873) deciphered the flag's components (moon, sword, square) as containing text from the Quran.³² Handwritten text on the appliquéd cotton moon and sword invoke the Almighty, expressing faith in 'Alī and *Dhū'l-Faqār*: 'Thou shalt find He is your help in difficult times. Every care and smart will be resolved. Through your prophecy, Mohammed! Through your supervision, 'Alī! There is no nobleman but 'Alī, no sword but Dsu' l-fakar [sic]. Best of the Merciful's creatures! Greatest of the believers! O He! Great One, Important One! O that is He! O He, other than whom no God exists!'

I was impressed by the intricate details on each flag, including the prayers and the citations from the Koran so meticulously stitched onto the fabric. These discoveries led to discussions with the curatorial team, who recalled finding similar items on objects belonging to Indonesian freedom fighters that were confiscated by the Dutch military during the revolution and now housed in the National Archive in The Hague. I joined the team on a visit to The Hague, where we explored the National Archive collection for references and items related to Indonesia's struggle for independence. I encountered personal belongings and amulets

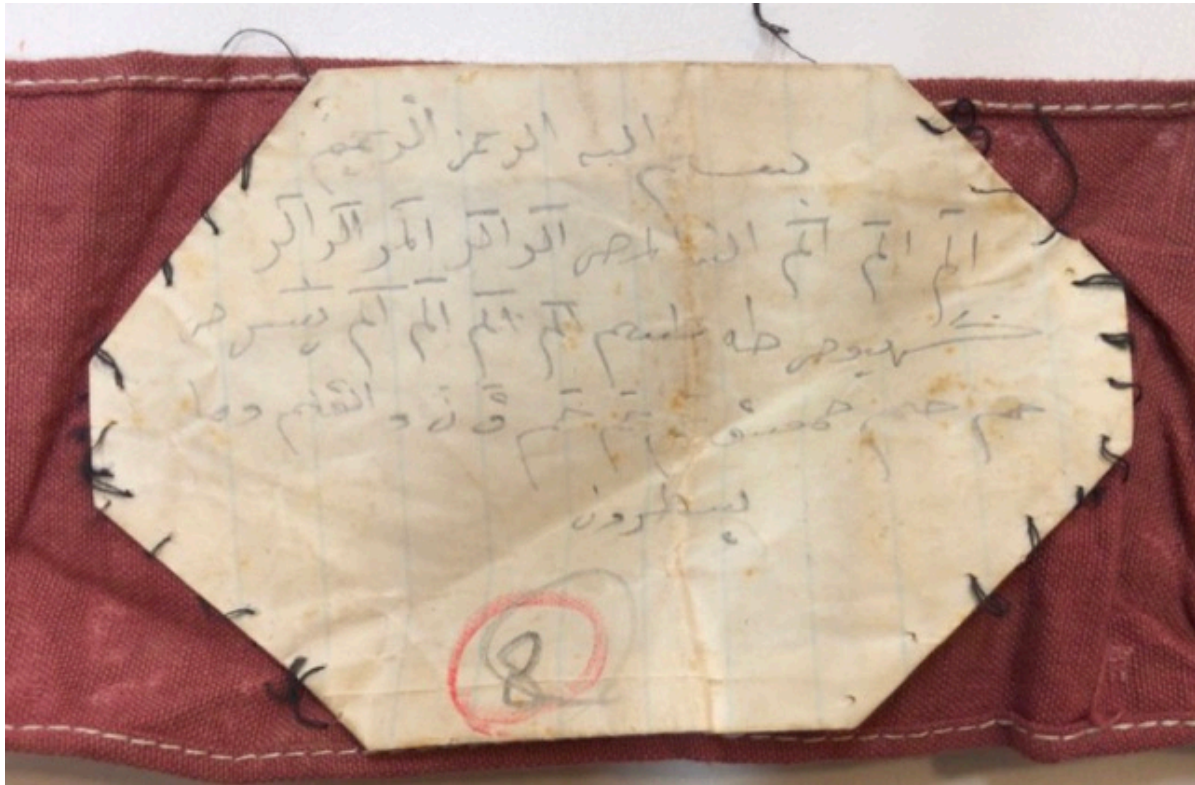
²⁹ See Mischa van den Brandhof, *Vlaggen, vaandels & standaarden van het Rijksmuseum te Amsterdam. Een geïllustreerde catalogus*, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, 1977, p 77

³⁰ See Majid Daneshgar, 'A Sword that Becomes A Word: A Supplication to Dhū'l-Faqār (Nad-e Ali) in the Middle East and the Malay-Indonesian World', *Mizan Project.org*, 2017, p 3 (retrieved from www.academia.edu/35594411/A_Sword_that_becomes_A_Word_A_Supplication_to_Dh%C5%AB_l_Faq%C4%C4r_Nad_e_Ali_in_the_Middle_East_and_the_Malay_Indonesian_World)

³¹ See Jane Hathaway, *A Tale of Two Factions: Myth, Memory, and Identity in Ottoman Egypt and Yemen*, State University of New York Press, Albany, New York, 2003, p 170

³² See A W T Juynboll, 'Een Atjineesche vlag met Arabische opschriften', *Tijdschrift voor Nederlands-Indië*, November 1873, pp 325–340; see also Stevens, *Bitter Spice*, op cit, p 61

belonging to Indonesian freedom fighters that are adorned with Koranic scriptures. These items had been taken by the NEFIS (Netherlands Forces Intelligence Service)³³ during the *Revolusi*, a tumultuous period in Indonesia's fight for independence.³⁴ The talismans I saw in the National Archive's collection reminded me of similar items worn by childhood friends in Sumatra, Indonesia, that we call *jimat*.



Detail of an object confiscated by NEFIS during the Indonesian War of Independence, stored in the National Archives in The Hague, the Netherlands, photo courtesy of Timoteus Anggawan Kusno

I documented and analysed the scriptures and *jimat* found in the Archive, collaborating with the online study group. The examination focused on understanding the meanings and contexts

³³ NEFIS, an intelligence unit of the Royal Netherlands East Indies Army during the Indonesian National Revolution, was established in World War II by the Dutch East Indies government-in-exile in Australia. It focused on gathering intelligence and conducting counterintelligence operations against Indonesian nationalist forces. Later renamed the Central Military Intelligence Service, NEFIS swiftly packed and shipped its archives totalling 300 metres of paper in 130 crates in 1949. These archives contained sensitive materials such as lists of names, individual files, reports on Dutch subjects' reliability, communist agitation documents and interrogation transcripts. The urgency to move the archives to the Netherlands before the sovereignty transfer on 27 December 1949 aimed to avoid potential strain in Netherlands–Indonesia relations. The unpacking in the Netherlands commenced in January 1950. See Harm Stevens, Amir Sidharta, Bonnie Triyana and Marion Anker, *Revolusi!: Indonesia Independent*, Rijksmuseum and Atlas Contact, Amsterdam, 2022, pp 141–162.

³⁴ During the Indonesian Revolution, the ordinary Indonesian suffered more casualties than the British and Dutch troops combined, with estimates ranging from 45,000 to 100,000. Dutch counter-insurgency tactics in Sulawesi alone resulted in the execution of approximately 6,000 Indonesians. Civilian casualties numbered anywhere between 25,000 and 100,000, and over 7 million people were displaced in Java and Sumatra. Tens of thousands of Chinese and Eurasians were also killed or displaced, despite many Chinese supporting the Revolution. See Vickers, *A History of Modern Indonesia*, op cit, pp 104–105.

of these holy Koranic scriptures. Adrian Vickers highlighted the prevalent use of talismans and bamboo spears among everyday Indonesians during the Indonesian Revolution.³⁵ Notably, the use of *jimat* extends beyond the revolution to earlier anticolonial struggles, as documented by Kartodirdjo in the Peasant Revolt of Banten in 1888:

In serving the need for physical and material security, the *djimat-cult* gave tremendous spiritual impetus to the struggle against the infidels. In short, their fighting spirit was so completely at one with their faith that the rebels felt certain of achieving victory over the modernly-armed forces of the colonial power. ³⁶

In Javanese culture, these talismans serve various purposes for their bearers. As described by Clifford Geertz in *The Religion of Java*,³⁷ *jimat* are typically Arabic inscriptions created by traditional Koranic scholars. When worn, they function not only as healing amulets but also as protective charms and even tools of sorcery.

Contemplating the flags and amulets, many inscribed with verses from the Koran, and their capture during wartime, I became curious about their connection to the anticolonial spirit. I sought to understand how these objects reflected the people's perspective on colonialism before the concept of Indonesia emerged. While designing the installation with these objects, I wondered about the beliefs and motivations that drove individuals to sacrifice their lives and to resist long before nationalism or the idea of a nation-state had fully taken shape.

In Aceh, particularly during the nineteenth century, when most of the flags were captured, societal bonds were primarily formed around a shared Muslim identity, transcending other divisions.³⁸ This religious identity served as a powerful unifying force, fuelling anticolonial movements. James Siegel's research highlights how the anticolonial struggle in Aceh drew inspiration from the concept of the Holy War, as depicted in the *Hikajat Prang Sabi* (Story of the Holy War). According to Siegel, the central theme of the *Hikajat* is clear: those who participate in the Holy War are promised paradise, described as 'the merciful place of the fulfillment of all desires'.

Similarly, in colonial Java, Sartono Kartodirdjo noted that the religious revival and transcendental motivations behind anticolonial resistance aligned with the idea of the Islamic Holy War. The anticipation of the Mahdi's arrival at the end of the world, marking the beginning of doomsday or *hari kiamat*, played a significant role, as described by Kartodirdjo:

The belief in the *Mahdi*, a messianic figure, has been present in Islamic history for centuries, emerging around 50 years after the death of the Prophet. This belief in the

³⁵ See *ibid*

³⁶ Kartodirdjo, *The Peasants' Revolt of Banten in 1888*, op cit, p 108

³⁷ See Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java*, University of Chicago Press, 1976, p 103

³⁸ See James T Siegel, *The Rope of God*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1991 [1969]

Mahdi is not confined to a single region but has been widespread, spanning countries like Persia, North Africa, India, and Indonesia. A notable Mahdist movement occurred in Sudan from 1881 to 1888. The term *Mahdi* means the well-guided, and it refers to a figure who is expected to appear at the end of the world to confront and defeat the false prophet of the last hour known as *Deddjal*. The *Mahdi*'s coming is associated with a period of chaos, disbelief, and conflict. It is believed that when the time is right, the *Mahdi* will emerge to restore tradition and true faith, revitalise Islam, reinstate its former glory, and eliminate unbelievers.³⁹

My artistic approach for the 'Revolusi!' exhibition was inspired by the utilisation of religious language in the pre-revolutionary war against colonial rule and the idea of an impending doomsday. I aimed to bring to life the silent anticolonial spirit embodied by colonial objects by transforming the written prayers and *jimat* found on them into an immersive auditory experience. To achieve this, I displayed the flags and amulets worn by Indonesian freedom fighters, inviting *qori'* and *qori'ah* (individuals skilled in reciting the Koran) to recite the prayers from these objects. Additionally, I created soundscapes from locations linked to colonial memories to envelop the installation. This conversion of written prayers into sound aimed to amplify previously silenced anticolonial perspectives and convey how people used their culture and beliefs, including magic and religion, to resist oppressive colonial power.

Artistic Approach No 2: Listening to the Unheard

During 2020–2021, I travelled across Java on motorbikes and trains to collect soundscapes, which helped me organise my thoughts for creating the 'Revolusi!' installation. My approach to recording these soundscapes was intuitive; I selected locations with associations to memories of resistance, loss, ghosts, nostalgia and betrayal linked to colonial power. For instance, I explored the coasts along the southern sea of Java island (Yogyakarta, Central Java and East Java), facing the Indian Ocean, which held personal significance. Having spent my childhood in Sumatra and later returning to Yogyakarta, I could sense the weight of Javanese myth in the neighbourhood, particularly the myth of Nyai Roro Kidul, the Queen of the Southern Sea of Java. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that this myth carries multifaceted layers for *pribumi* (indigenous Indonesians) concerning colonial domination and control over the northern coast of Java. Pramoedya Ananta Toer, in his written speech on receiving the Magsasay award in Manila in 1995, stated that during the seventeenth century, Sultan Agung, the ruler of the Mataram kingdom in Java, suffered a devastating loss to the Dutch in Batavia.⁴⁰ This resulted in the kingdom's loss of power and control over the northern Java Sea, a crucial international trade

³⁹ Kartodirdjo, *The Peasants' Revolt of Banten in 1888*, op cit, p 166

⁴⁰ See Pramoedya A Toer, 'Literature, Censorship, and the State: How Dangerous are Stories?', speech transcript available in the Pramoedya Ananta Toer Collection, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, <https://hdl.handle.net/10622/ARCH02733>

route. To mask this setback, Javanese poets crafted the legend of Nyai Roro Kidul to create the impression that the Mataram Kingdom still held sway over the sea, particularly the southern Sea (Hindia Ocean). This tale spawned many related myths, such as individuals being barred from wearing green at the southern Sea, a colour associated with the Dutch company uniform. Additionally, this legend helped maintain the Mataram kings' authority for generations, with Nyai Roro Kidul even becoming the moral arbiter for the Javanese people. During one of my sound collection trips, fellow artist Jompet Kuswidananto accompanied me to Sumbing Mountain and Windusari in Magelang. This highland area combines lush forests with cultivated fields, and holds a poignant significance for me. It resonates with memories of loss, resistance and betrayal tied to colonial rule in Java, much like the backdrop of Raden Saleh's painting *The Arrest of Prince Diponegoro*.



Raden Saleh, *The Arrest of Pangeran Diponegoro*, 1857, oil on canvas, collection of Istana Negara, Jakarta, Indonesia

Peter Carey has highlighted that Raden Saleh painted this monumental piece in 1857 after his return to Java, with its depiction of the 1830 scene outside the Residency House in Magelang.⁴¹ In the painting, the Dutch commander General H. M. de Kock directs Prince Dipanagara (Diponegoro) towards a waiting carriage for his exile. Diponegoro, a charismatic leader, portrayed himself as *Ratu Adil* or the 'just king' of Java and sparked the Java War against colonial rule. The war emerged from deep-seated social and economic grievances, along with millenarian expectations, a belief in the radical fundamental change towards a new era of peace,

⁴¹ See Peter B. R. Carey, 'Raden Saleh, Dipanagara and the painting of the capture of Dipanagara at Magelang (28 March 1830)', *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol 55, no 1, 1982, pp 1–25

justice and prosperity in Java centered around *Ratu Adil* as the messianic figure. The historian Onghokham has contended that the Java War marked a pivotal shift from the Javanese feudalistic regime to what the Dutch termed 'state colonialism'.⁴²

Carey's 1982 research reveals that Raden Saleh painted this artwork as a token of gratitude for his European artistic education from 1829 to 1851, which was funded primarily by the Dutch government and the royal family. The painting was originally gifted to the Dutch king William III and was believed to be based on a similar work by the Dutch artist Nicolaas Pieneman, now in the Rijksmuseum. In 1978, the painting was returned to Indonesia as a personal gift from the Dutch royal family to the Indonesian Government, following the 1968 Cultural Agreement,⁴³ and today it resides in the Presidential Palace Museum in Yogyakarta.⁴⁴ I went to the distant mountains, a landscape pictured by Raden Saleh on the right side of his painting. There, I imagined and captured the sounds and silences of the forest where Diponegoro may have gazed in wonder nearly two centuries ago during his exile journey.

In gathering the soundscapes, I also went to some abandoned sugar factories in Yogyakarta, Central Java and East Java. The sounds, and silence, of these now neglected and ghostly colonial-era sites were a haunting experience; as John Pemberton has noted, they are significant remnants of the nation's early modernity.⁴⁵

I composed a 20-minute 34-second audio work from two years of sound recordings, combining soundscape, holy readings, *jimat* mantras, and prayers from anticolonial war flags. The looping audio enhanced the atmosphere of the *Luka dan Bisa Kubawa Berlari* installation, synergising with every element, including the sculpture *Trumpet of the End Times* (*Sangkalakala Akhir Jaman*). The sculpture is made from chromed galvanised metal and features seven horn-like megaphones resembling the customised motorcycle exhausts found in Indonesia. The horns draw inspiration from the Abrahamic religious concept of the Trumpet of the End Times, aligning with the doomsday theme in the exhibition that represents anticolonial struggles.

⁴² Onghokham, in his foreword in Peter Carey, *Asal Usul Perang Jawa: Pemberontakan Sepoy & Lukisan Raden Saleh*, LKiS Yogyakarta, Yogyakarta, 2001, pp ix–xviii

⁴³ Significant shifts in Dutch-Indonesian relations occurred between 1960 and 1971, with cultural cooperation serving as a means to ease political tensions. Queen Juliana's state visit to Indonesia in 1971 marked a renewal of the bilateral relationship with a strong cultural focus. The Dutch government continued efforts to document and strengthen ties with Indonesia during this period, aligning with broader trends in Dutch international relations that emphasised cultural exchange and mutual understanding. While the colonial past had been a source of conflict in earlier years, the relationship between the two countries evolved during this time. This is exemplified by events such as the return of cultural artefacts. See 'The story of the Erasmus Huis #2: 1960–1971', *Dutch Culture.nl*, <https://dutchculture.nl/en/news/story-of-the-erasmus-huis-1960-1971>; see also 'Agreement on cultural co-operation between the Kingdom of the Netherlands and the Republic of Indonesia', *Overheid.nl*, <https://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBV0004208/1970-01-08>; and Peter B R Carey, 'Raden Saleh, Dipanagara and the Painting of the Capture of Dipanagara at Magelang (28 March 1830)', op cit.

⁴⁴ Source: Government of Indonesia, Presidential Secretariat: 'Mengenal Koleksi Benda Seni Kenegaraan Bagian 3', available at <https://setkab.go.id/mengenal-koleksi-benda-seni-kenegaraan-bag-3>

⁴⁵ See John Pemberton, 'The Specter of Coincidence', in J T Siegel and A R Kahin, eds, *Southeast Asia over Three Generations: Essays Presented to Benedict R O'G Anderson*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York, 2003, pp 75–90

The sculpture's wings were formed using batik-writing techniques on fabric, creating an intertwined narrative with the flags, tigers and crows in the installation. The scene depicted on the wings includes soaring crows as *memento mori* and alludes to the *Rampogan Macan* colonial ritual symbolised by the tiger sculptures in the exhibition. The use of chrome and galvanisation in the seven-horn trumpet carries a strong association with Indonesian street culture, emphasising people's mobilisation. Customised motorcycle exhausts symbolise power and dominance on the road, and are often amplified during political events and mass gatherings.



Timoteus Anggawan Kusno, *Luka dan Bisa Kubawa Berlari* (Wounds and Venom I Carry as I am Running), detail of installation in 'Revolusi!', 11 February–5 June 2022, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, photo courtesy of the artist

The black silicone rubber crows embedded in the sculpture also connect to street culture. Black rubber, a common material on Indonesian roads, dominated as they are by motorcycles and cars, reflects the introduction of a vision of 'modernity' by the colonial powers. This aligns with Rudolf Mrázek's observation that modern roads in the Indies were a contested space.⁴⁶ The crows in the installation represent both a reminder of mortality and a liminal space signifying the afterlife, symbolising spirits suspended between heaven and earth, or '*De kraaien als boodschappers van het bovennatuurlijke symboliseren de geesten die blijven hangen tussen hemel en aarde*' [The crows, as messengers of the supernatural, symbolise the spirits that linger between heaven and earth] as interpreted by Tessel Janse.⁴⁷ Their presence holds a personal connection for me

⁴⁶ See Rudolf Mrázek, *Engineers of Happy Land: Technology and Nationalism in a Colony*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 2002

⁴⁷ Tessel Janse, 'Tijgers, koloniale amnesie en postkoloniale kwelgeesten: Timoteus Anggawan Kusno in Revolusi!', *Metropolis M*, 1 April 2022, www.metropolism.com/nl/features/46284_tijgers_koloniale_amnesie_en_postkoloniale_kwelgeesten_timoteus_anggawan_kusno_in_revolusi

as they link to my grandfather, a guerrilla fighter in the struggle for Indonesian Independence. During the Dutch Military Aggression in Yogyakarta in December 1948, the Dutch military named their one-sided *politioele actie* Operation Kraai, adding an additional layer of symbolism to the crows in this work.

Artistic Approach No 3: Unframing 'the Master'

The governor-general portraits were repatriated to the Netherlands following Indonesian independence. They were removed from the former colonial governor-general's palace in Batavia, now the Indonesian president's *Istana Merdeka* (Freedom Palace), marking a monumental shift of power within just twenty-four hours. I witness these colonial continuity monuments as they rest in the museum depot.

My approach to the paintings involved a careful and representative selection. Initially, the aim was to include all of the portraits; however, practical constraints led to a narrowing down of the selection. It was decided to concentrate on the era of state colonialism, and I made a selection that would fit the exhibition space and symbolise the influence of governors on the colonial territory and the formation of Indonesia.

The paintings are accompanied by frames that display the name of the subject in the portrait and the artist. The act of hanging the paintings on the wall within these frames could be viewed as a modernist gesture that serves to glorify this authority according to modernist epistemology. To challenge this symbol of colonial power, I proposed an alternative approach to museum display protocols. I suggested unframing the paintings in order to decolonise them and to convey a sense of chaos by scattering them on the ground rather than displaying them on the walls. The museum agreed to consider the proposal, particularly for the portraits that had never been exhibited. To ensure their preservation, a timeline was set for the frame conservator to remove the frames. However, due to concerns about the paintings' condition, the plan had to be modified. Instead of showing the frameless portraits, I proposed exhibiting only the frames, maintaining the artistic and ideological statement while allowing flexibility in response to changing conditions.

The exhibition showcased the original wooden frames, complete with the sitters' names and the years they were in power. This created an eerie ambiance akin to an abandoned cemetery where the lingering spirits of colonialism persist. The damaged frames spoke to the hurried transportation and preservation efforts tied to this emblem of colonial continuity. I also proposed a visitor booklet that includes a 'cemetery' map and printed images of the portraits, replacing the physical paintings, encouraging visitors to reflect on the significance of these portraits within the contemporary relationship between the Netherlands and Indonesia.

Two dying golden tigers lay amid the scattered empty frames, representing the symbolism of tigers in *Luka dan Bisa Kubawa Berlari*, inspired by the *Rampogan Macan* ritual. This ceremony

involved the killing of big cats, known as *macan* in Javanese culture.⁴⁸ Tigers were considered manifestations of evil and had to be eliminated to restore order. Javanese kings even invited colonial officers to witness tiger/buffalo fights during the ritual, signifying a collective desire to vanquish darkness and chaos.⁴⁹ These rituals were intricately tied to social as well as spiritual elements, with the tiger representing an evil spirit – escaping tigers brought bad luck for the entire community.⁵⁰

The *Rampogan Macan* ritual embodies the concept of ‘the other’, where society seeks to cleanse itself of evil spirits and establish ‘*rust en orde*’ by persecuting ‘the other’, symbolised by the tiger’s lynching to ward off misfortune. Consequently, persecution becomes a tool for asserting collective power under authority, manifesting as a ritualised celebration of violence. This particularly brutal ritual faded away at the start of the twentieth century;⁵¹ however, the underlying logic of this tradition, stemming from the marriage of colonialism and feudalism in Java, resurfaced in the form of institutionalised violence legitimised through crowds and people.

Approach No 4: Black Box

I proposed the use of a black box as a metaphor for the journey and struggles of anticolonial resistance culminating in the Indonesian *Revolusi*. The idea draws inspiration from the black boxes used in flight systems, which record flight performance and conditions and help in the investigation of plane crashes. To enhance the theatrical effect, the exhibition room was entirely painted black, directing the audience’s focus inside. In the context of this exhibition, the black box symbolises the colonial catastrophe and the subsequent journey toward anticolonial resistance and revolution. It represents the struggles, sacrifices and persistence of the Indonesian people who fought against colonialism and oppression. It also signifies the complex and difficult history of Indonesia’s fight for independence and the ongoing impact of colonialism on society, in both the Dutch and Indonesian contexts. At the same time, the black box serves as a counterpoint to the idea of a ‘white cube’ and the sometimes sterile approach to museum displays.

To underscore this metaphor, I integrated a line from the poem ‘*Semangat*’ by the Indonesian poet Chairil Anwar (1922–1949) that reads ‘*Luka dan Bisa Kubawa Berlari*’ and translates as ‘Wounds and Venom I Carry as I am Running’. This expression encapsulates the revolutionary

⁴⁸ See Robert Wessing, ‘A tiger in the heart: The Javanese Rampok Macan’, *Bijdragen tot de taal-, land- en volkenkunde*, vol 148, no 2, 1992, pp 287–308

⁴⁹ See Peter Boomgaard, *Frontiers of Fear: Tigers and People in the Malay World, 1600–1950*, Yale University Press, New Haven, Connecticut, 2001, p 145

⁵⁰ See Timoteus A Kusno, ‘The death of a tiger and other empty seats’, in *How Little You Know About Me*, National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul, South Korea, 2018, pp 61–74

⁵¹ See Boomgaard, *Frontiers of Fear*, op cit, pp 156–161

fervour of the poet and the unwavering resolve of the people for liberation from colonial oppression. Inside the black box, visitors are encouraged to contemplate the colonial legacy and to delve into Indonesia's intricate history of anticolonial resistance.

Conclusion, and the Afterlife of *Luka dan Bisa Kubawa Berlari*

From the beginning, it was evident that the installation *Luka dan Bisa Kubawa Berlari* would be site-specific and temporary, as many of the colonial-era objects from the Indonesian archipelago used in this work are still hosted in the Rijksmuseum. While the restitution and repatriation projects are in progress, artistic intervention plays a crucial role in challenging the meaning of colonial history, working alongside efforts to disrupt the enduring influence of colonialism and its discourse.

In summarising the creation of *Luka dan Bisa Kubawa Berlari*, the approaches employed when working with colonial remnants in a museum setting can be categorised into four distinct strategies: (1) Looking for the Unseen; (2) Listening to the Unheard; (3) Unframing the Master; and (4) Black Box. There are narratives behind what is visible, and more stories, often suppressed, behind what remains hidden. *Looking for the unseen* involves a meticulous examination of the object, delving beneath the surface to unveil what lies concealed or beyond immediate sight. Even if initial findings are minimal, this approach serves as a starting point for deeper critical inquiry.

Working with colonial artefacts within a museum context entails a deep involvement in the study of historiography and how these items are documented, stored and displayed. By actively *listening to the unheard*, I aim to heighten my awareness of the power dynamics that underlie knowledge production and the suppressed narratives represented by these objects and their surroundings. This requires diligent research, attentive listening and the revealing of previously disregarded stories. In tandem with the earlier strategy, the objective is to render the invisible visible and to bring to light the hushed narratives and injustices they conceal.

Unframing the master is an assertive strategy that involves direct intervention. Its primary purpose is to disrupt the process of constructing meaning and to deconstruct the established symbolism and historical context of a particular object. The aim is to entirely dismantle and empty the object of its connotations, provoking a radical shift in its significance. Within the framework of this exhibition, this strategy includes the demonumentalisation of the governor-general portraits that once symbolised the continuation of the colonial regime.

To create an immersive artwork experience, the mentioned strategies involve engaging the senses, combining visual perception (*looking [for the unseen]*), auditory perception (*listening [to the unheard]*) and tactile perception (*unframing [‘the master’]*). These approaches aim to decentre historical narratives, demystify institutional power and provide a contemplative space for historical reflection. The concept of the *black box* serves as a unifying element for these sensory

components, empowering the audience to actively reflect within their contexts, offering a liberated and personalised experience with the installation *Luka dan Bisa Kubawa Berlari*.

The installation's concern with temporariness is evident, and while its documentation may persist, the true experience goes beyond the confines of an exhibition. I see this exhibition as a gateway, a starting point for broader discussions that extend beyond the artwork itself. This post-factum ethnographic reflection is an ongoing process, serving as a continuation in the effort to deconstruct and question colonial remnants within cultural institutions and their knowledge production.

Timoteus Anggawan Kusno is an artist and filmmaker. He has exhibited at the Rijksmuseum, the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Seoul, Mumbai City Museum, the Museum of Contemporary Art Taipei, the Bozar Centre for Fine Arts in Brussels, the 13th Gwangju Biennale, and Kunstmuseum Bonn, among others. His films have been screened at international film festivals, including CPH:DOX, Arkipel, IFFR and VideoEx. Since 2013, he has been developing the Centre for Tanah Runcuk Studies, an art project in the form of a (fictional) institution that conducts experimental studies on a (lost) territory in the Dutch East Indies, involving historians, ethnographers, artists, curators and writers. He is currently a PhD candidate at the University of Amsterdam.