



sensuous

yusra martunus

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21 May - 7 June 2009

Valentine Willie Fine Art Singapore

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Sensuous

In the last few years, Yusra Martunus has been creating many three-dimensional works conveying a play of the “language of the material.” With this, we are not talking about “the material for art” in its narrow sense. Yusra treats the materials in his works by tackling their essence as a particular substance—whether it is liquid or solid, organic or industrial, wild or structured. It is those characters or the essence of the materials that he would then adapt, process, or play around with, treating them as a means for creating signs or metaphors.

The language of the material

Yusra’s profound interest in the material substance essentially reflects his musing about the relations that we humans have with objects and things. Such thoughts naturally come as a result of his intense engagement with the issue for years as an artist—or, to be specific, as a sculptor. Personally, Yusra understands that relationship as something arbitrary, complex, vast, and layered.

The first layer involves him as an artist—the producer, or creator of things. Yusra sees one of the tasks of an artist—just like that of any other creators (film directors, writers, or musicians, for example)—is, naturally, to materialize the ones that were previously “immaterial” or “nonexistent”. In many cases, the material serves as the object for artistic explorations. In a creative process, visual artist generally situates him or herself as a volitional subject with an authoritarian stance over a certain material—insofar as the material becomes the artist’s subordination.

In Yusra’s creative process, however, the artistic ideas often come to being precisely from the characters of the materials. Further, he sees the creative process as a symbiosis of sorts—in which the artist is highly dependent on the objects or materials at hand. Yusra’s ideas, specifically, often emerge from the material features, which in general merely functions as a means for the artist to bring his or her artistic ideas to being. Furthermore, Yusra comprehends the substance that gives shape to the material as something unique.

Yusra’s artistic process hints at a specific pattern within the discourse of material culture. Since the beginning of industrialization, the modern society has been exploiting a myriad of materials and substances within the nature for their own good. The artists, in this case, form a segment of the industrial society that also takes part in the exploitation. The industrialization gives rise to the ‘subject – object’ relation—between human beings and things—that takes on a stereotypical pattern.

The dominant interest of the modern-industrial society over the material world has shaped a general perception over objects. Objects and the materials that form them are seen and valued based on their pragmatic-functional content,

such as durability, practicality, serviceability, or utility. Interestingly, there is a parallel link between the subject-object relationship in the modern material culture and the symbolical patterns of the material language in modern sculpture.

In the discourse of the sculptural arts, the pattern of the relationship between the creative process and the material has followed the "conventions" of the language of symbols. Metals, for example, are generally seen as 'strong' and 'enduring' substance; resins tend to be identified with 'plasticity' and 'kitsch'; while wood or other natural materials are considered as representing 'frailty' or 'fleetingness.' The conventions of the language of the material symbol arbitrarily follow the dominant perceptions within the industrial society about objects.

However, Yusra's observations about the world of things around him make him sure that the substance of the material itself actually contains distinct potentials that can precisely "defy" the arbitrary conventions of the language of material within the industrial society. To understand this proposition, we should take a close look at one of Yusra's works. For example, in the work 07115U (*Soft-hard series*), Yusra exposes the dent of a certain white "soft substance" that sticks out of a black square plane, seemingly pushed by a certain internal force.

All parts of the work, including the "soft, white substance," are created using aluminum, which is generally seen as a rigid and hard material. This is Yusra's effort to present a manipulation of forms and materials. As we observe the work closely, our perception hovers in a tension, torn between grasping it as a soft object due to its shape and texture, and accepting the fact that it has been created out of solid and rigid pieces of metal.

Neither abstract nor minimalist

The details of the shape or forms of Yusra's works as a whole do not often resemble "reality." If there are indeed such shapes or forms in reality with which these works show a certain likeness, then they generally slip out of our attention: Half-melting solid substance; arrested dripping liquid; or even anonymous drapery. Perhaps this is why several curators or critics have used such terms as 'abstract' or 'minimalist' in their reading over Yusra's works.

One cannot avoid the fact that in Yusra's works, the 'abstract' or 'minimalist' visual characters appear quite strongly. Due to their strict understanding—especially in the context of the history of Western modern art—the terms of 'abstract' and 'minimalist' run the risk of becoming a misleading simplification if we use them to analyze Yusra's works. I wish to stress upon this matter because of at least two issues.

First of all, albeit having received a lot of influences from the Western art discourses, the artistic practices of the young contemporary Indonesian artists such as Yusra Martunus have in fact been moved mostly by the dynamics of local culture. The emergence of works by Yusra Martunus and his colleagues in the *Kelompok Jendela* was influenced by the development of the Indonesian art world at the end of the nineties, when the representational art practices containing social and political criticism dominated the scene. Yusra's works, at the time, were seen as 'deviant.'

When artists of his generation were engaged in 'direct' and almost stereotypical responses on the hot political situation in the country, Yusra was more concerned about the matters of forms and materials. Yusra then deliberately took on such an 'abstract' artistic practice precisely as an antithesis of sorts of the dominant tendency at the time.

Second, the visual character of Yusra's works that at a first glance seems 'abstract' and 'minimalist' is in essence light-years away from the concepts of abstract art and Minimalism as they are known in the history of modern art in the West. The abstract forms in Yusra's works have mostly been inspired by the process in which a substance or material has been transformed—in drips, melts, dents—and captured and "frozen" in three-dimensional forms. Yusra even sees the process of 'softening the metal,' for example, as an effort to convey a certain metaphor about a particular radical transformation of one's perception.

Regarding the "simple" visual forms—that are entirely unlike the conceptual manifestations of Minimalism—Yusra prefers to see them as representative of his stance in *"...presenting the answer of a problem. My works look simple, indeed. But what we see at the outside doesn't always reflect the long, arduous process that I've taken. Actually, simplicity isn't in my mind at all. Putting it in an analogy: To answer a complex and difficult question, we might take our time and think about it thoroughly and meticulously, but the solution or the answer doesn't have to be long-winded and complex, does it?"* Yusra told me this amid his hectic activities preparing the casting of aluminum for one of his works.

To me, that statement of his is highly relevant to his way of thinking and what he has been doing—even considering his usually quiet nature. It seems as if the simple and 'minimalist' forms of Yusra's works have been rendered to hide his intense years-long journey of struggling with the materials and trying to conquer them. I think that his stance in presenting the simplicity of expression is the most consistent and prominent artistic trait in his works since the end of the nineties.

Ironical, sensuous, ambiguous

In general, Yusra's play of forms and materials presented in this exhibition is ironical in nature. In the work 07112N (*Tahan series*), for example, Yusra arranged a black large metal block pressing down a "soft," green substance. At the first glance, the scene might seem simple and natural due to its great proportion of the black block, which appears altogether "heavy" due to its intense blackness, seemingly able to depress and transform the soft substance underneath. As we look at it more closely, however, it transpires that one of the dents in the "soft," green shape precisely holds the block in balance, preventing it from falling down. It turns out that the formal aspects that Yusra has processed in such a way, making the work looks highly "formalistic," contain subtle mockery.

Other works in this exhibition presents a play of signs that is no less naughty: A 'watery' yet solid resin sleeping on aluminum bars, a solid plank with natural curve on its tip, firm metallic objects resembling drapery, a soft yet solid metal cropping up like flexible liquid, etc. All of them are present with a great attention to details and final touches that are almost as perfect as those of industrial objects—meticulously calculated and highly tactile. It seems

that the audience is called to touch and experience the sensations of their tactility and tangibility. This is actually representative of the artist's outstanding effort to impart a metaphorical play of the human sensory perception. Yusra truly intends to use his three-dimensional works as a tool for perceptual translation of the visual language. He considers that his task as an artist is to render the imaginary, or, in other words, to provoke new relationships between the material world and human's immaterial perception.

The process of transforming particular material into something contradictory reflects the artist's thoughts on how he sees the so-called binary values. Oppositions—such as hardness vis-à-vis softness, or solidity versus fluidity—at Yusra's hands can always meet at a certain point of adjustment. It is the artist's philosophical stance to put everything not in its extreme situation. He emphasizes, instead, on the 'the ambiguous', created through a combination of the incongruities. It is on that point that the artist's works represent a particular cultural significance related to the current state of his society, where the notions of contrasts, tension, opposition and conflicts—in the social, economic, and political realms—have been mingling with a sense of 'pseudo-harmony'.

Agung Hujatnikajennong

Exhibition Curator

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4. Rizky A. Zaelany, *Necis, Yusra Matunus' Silence Zone*, curatorial essay, catalogue of Yusra Matunus' solo exhibition *Necis*, Nadi Gallery, Jakarta, 2008

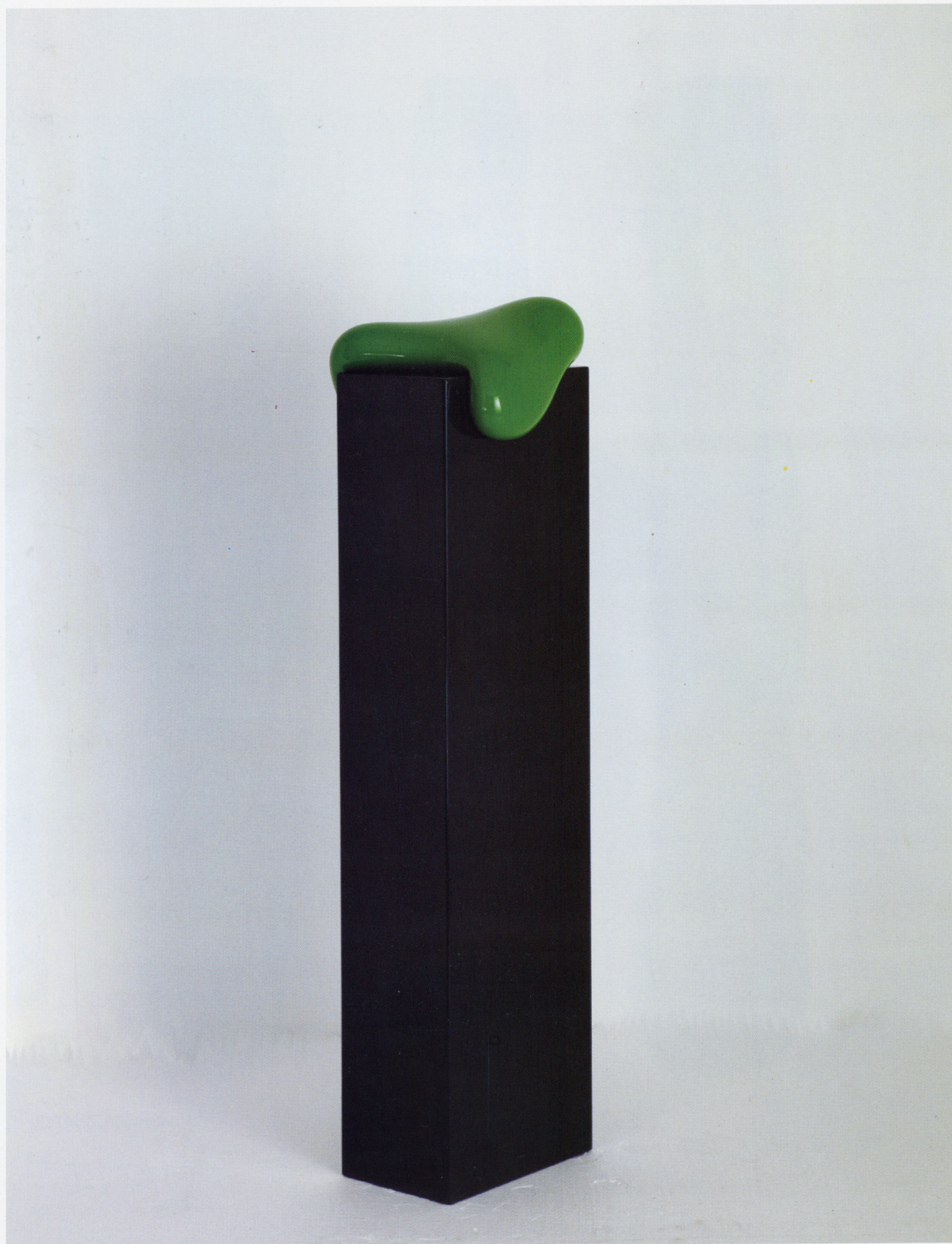
03102R (lentur-series)

aluminium casting and sheets, polyurethane painted
186 x 100 x 36 cm
2003



0710N (lentur-series)

aluminium casting and sheets, poliurethane painted
120 x 30 x 30 cm
2007



05110 (soft-hard series)

fiberglass, polyurethane painted

155 x 90 x 10 cm

2005



07112N (tahan-series)

aluminium casting and sheets, poliurethane painted
117 x 37 x 40 cm
2007





06201

oil on canvas
150 x 150 cm
2006



06202

oil on canvas
150 x 150 cm
2006

06203

oil on canvas
150 x 150 cm
2006



06204

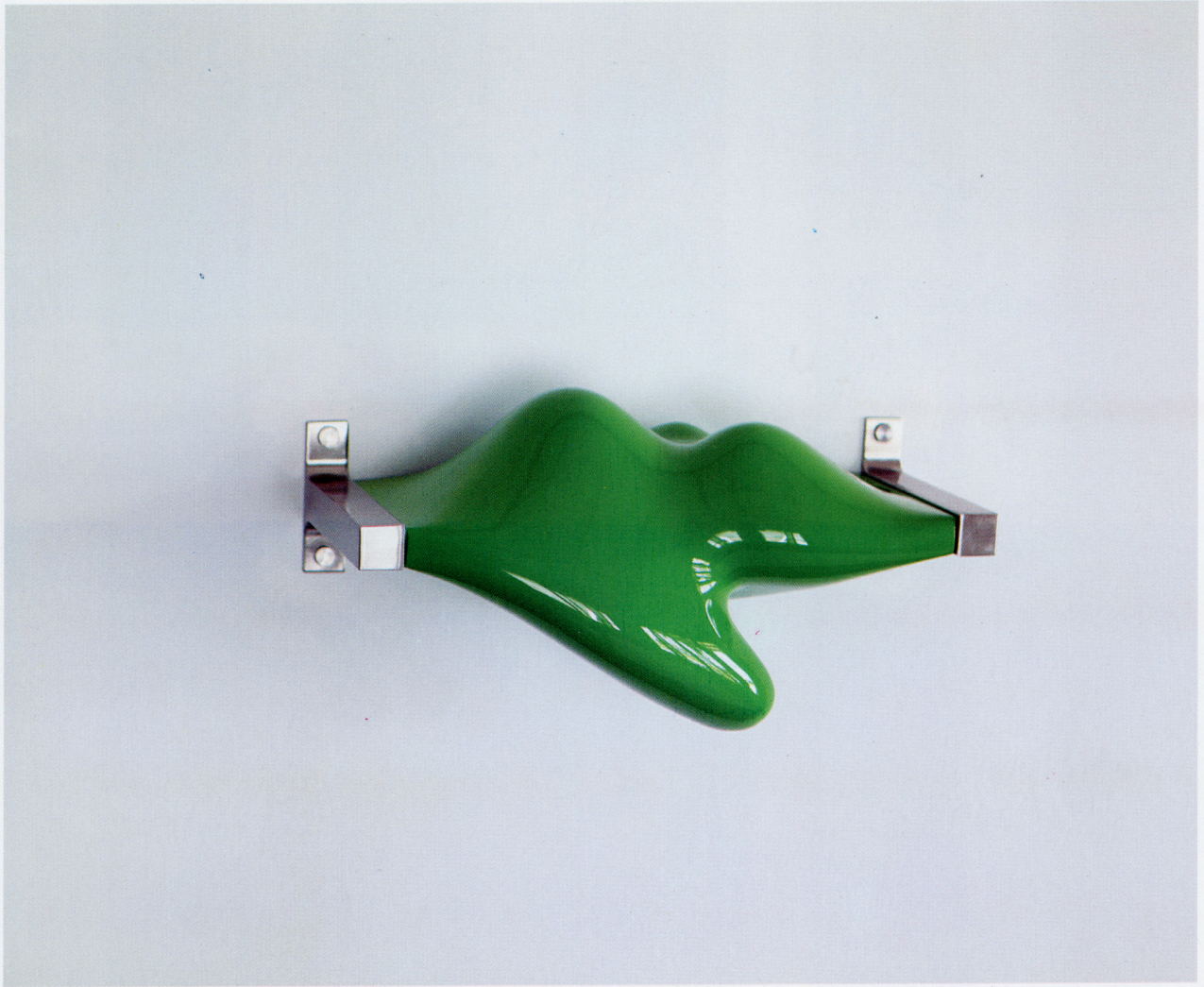
oil on canvas
150 x 150 cm
2006





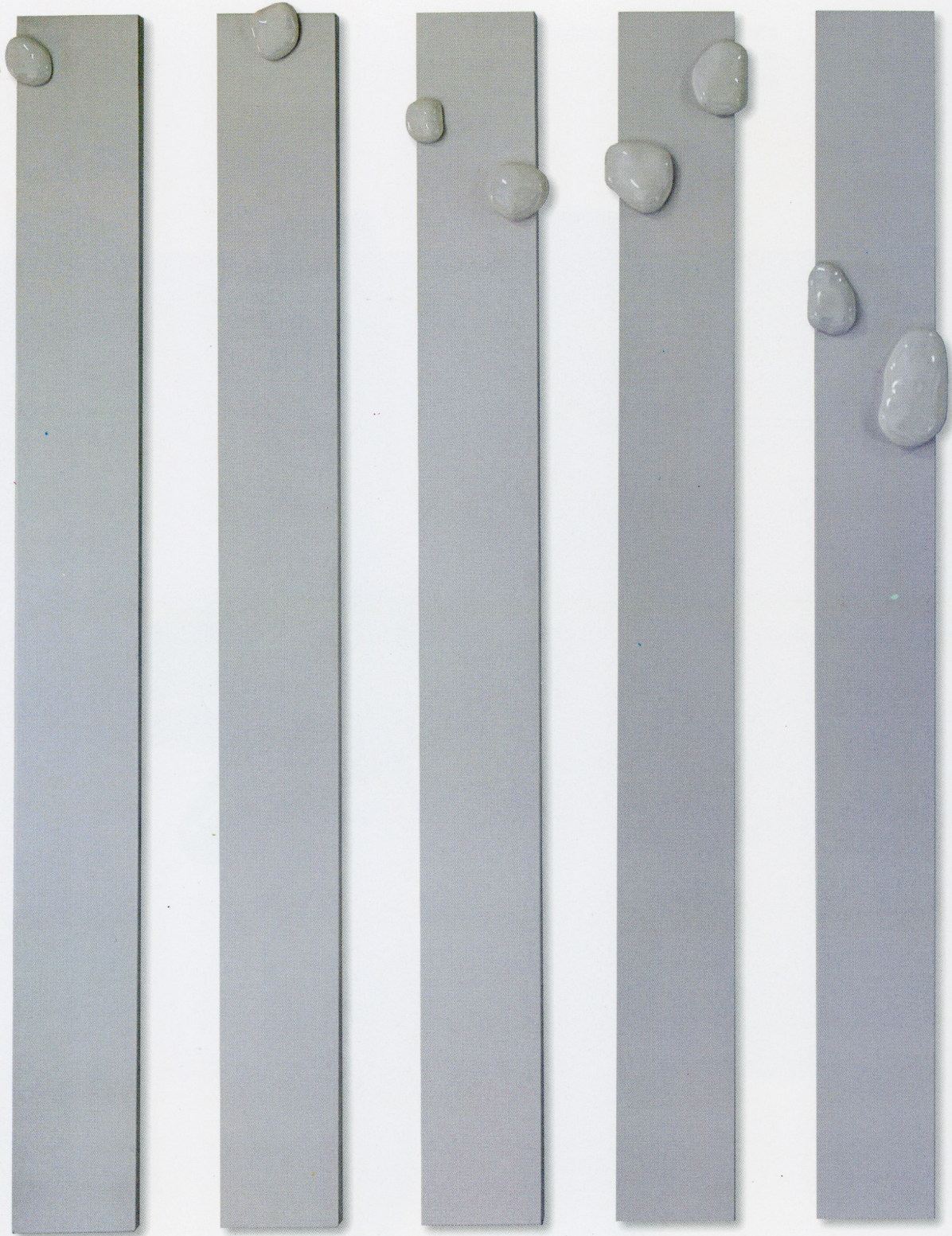
07103S (lentur-series)

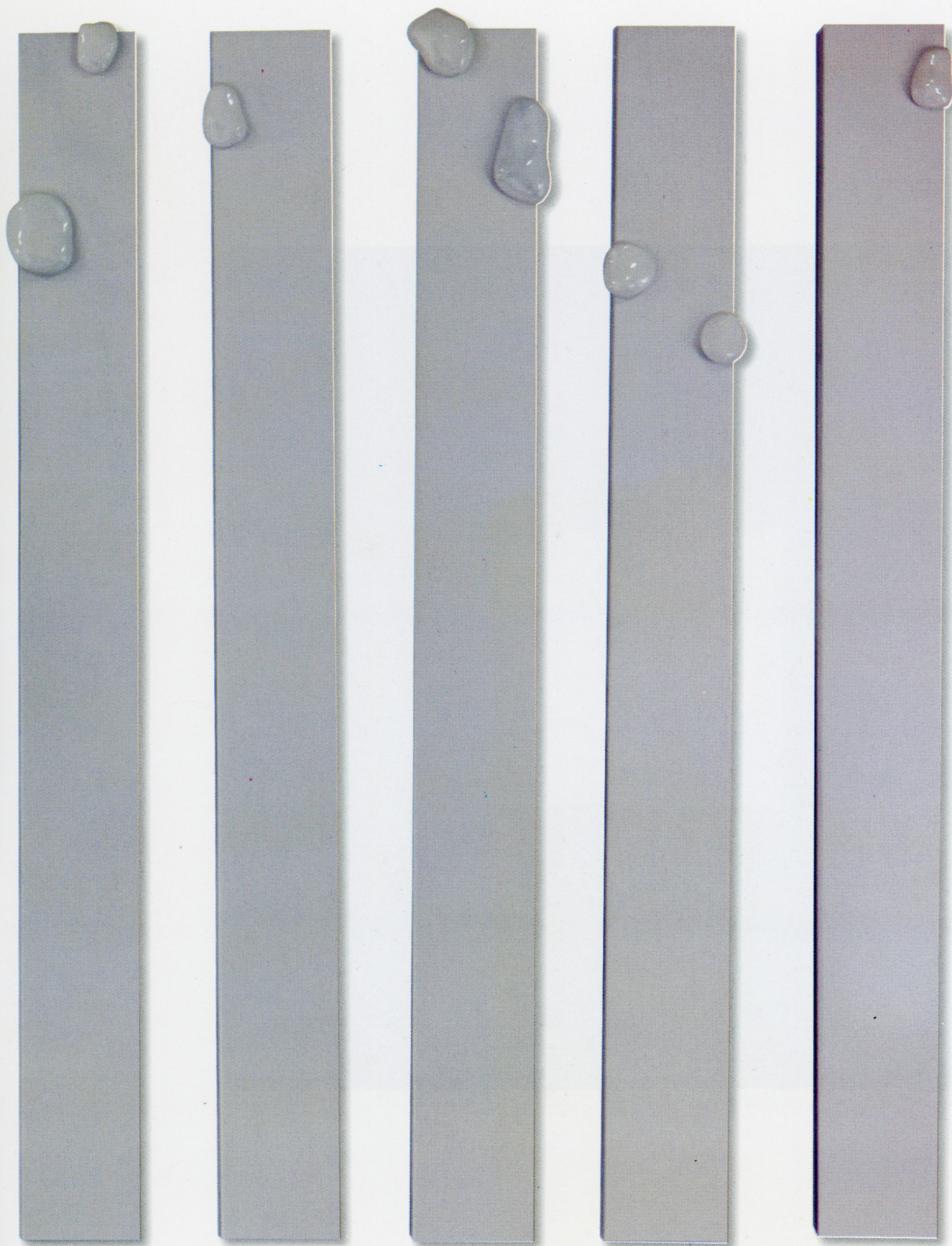
towel bar, aluminium casting, polyurethane painted
50 x 69 x 12 cm
2007



07106y (tahan-series)

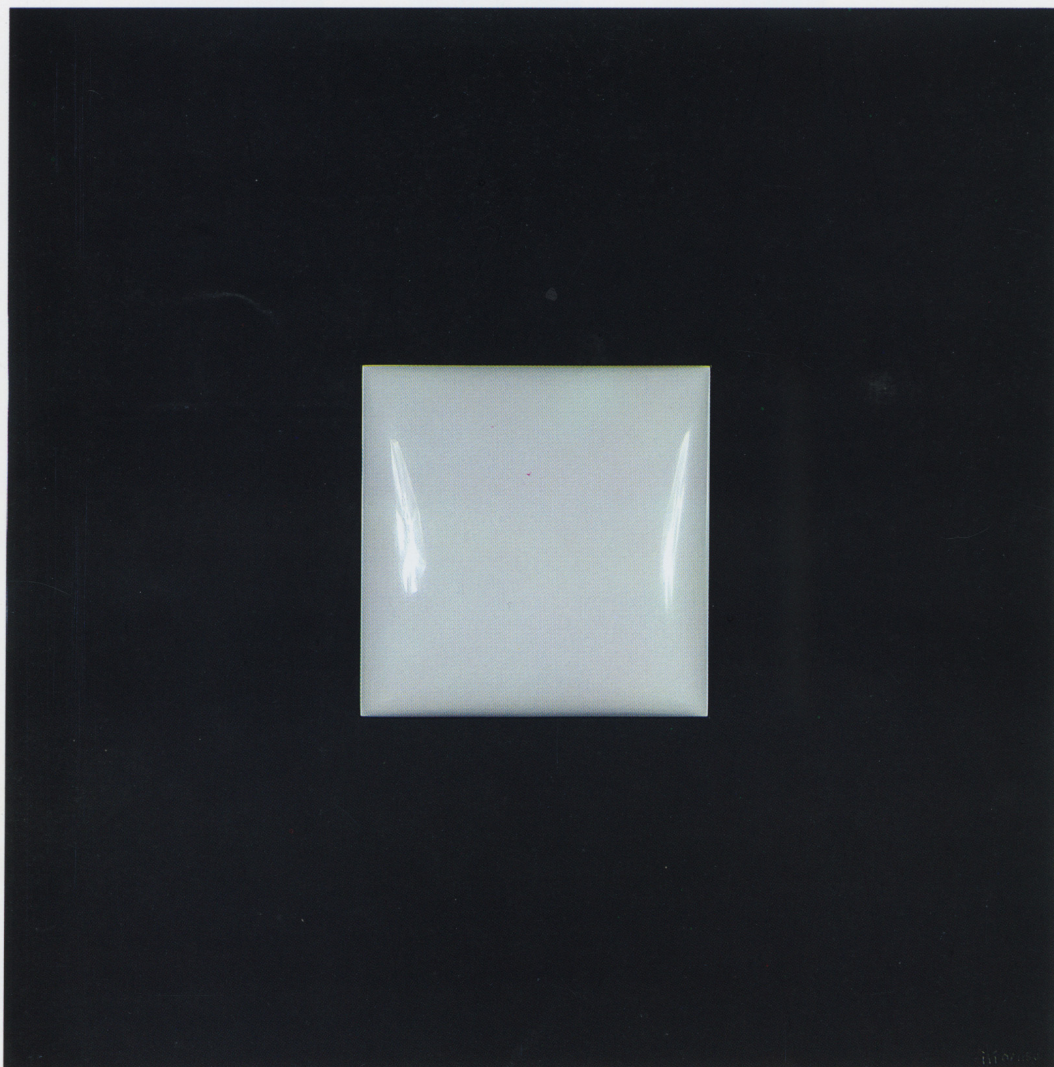
bjarnum bracket, aluminium casting, poliurethane painted
25 x 50 x 24 cm
2007





08101R (lentur-series)

aluminium casting and sheets, polyurethane painted
203 x 316 x 9 cm
2008



07115U (soft-hard series)

aluminium casting and sheet, polyurethane painted

120 x 120 x 10 cm

2007



09101 (lentur-series)

towel bar, fiberglass, polyurethane painted
15 x 53 x 27 cm
2009



09103 (tahan-series)

aluminium casting, polyurethane painted, stainless steel bar
10 x 54 x 11 cm
2009

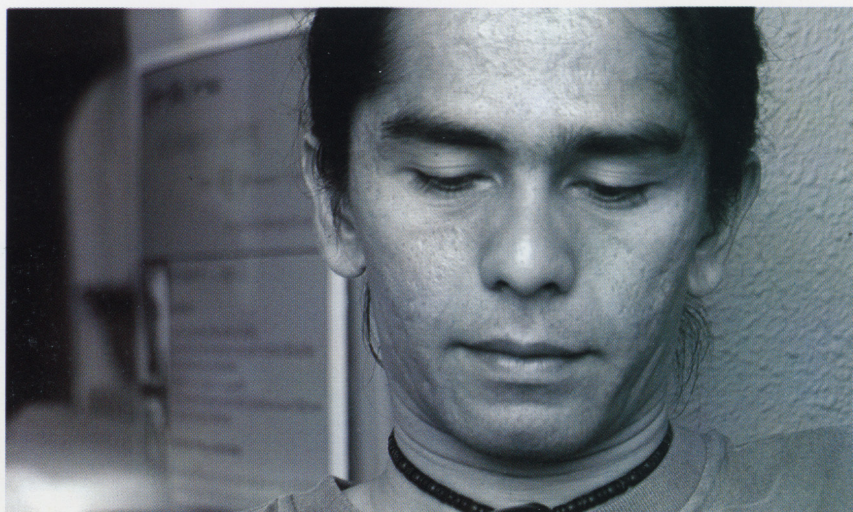


09102 (soft-hard series)

fiberglass, sheet aluminium, polyurethane painted

120 x 120 x 9 cm

2009



YUSRA MARTUNUS

Born, Padang Panjang, Indonesia, 1973
 Graduated from the Indonesian Institute of Art,
 Yogyakarta (BFA, 2000)

Awards

1994: The Best of McDonald Art Award
 2003: The Best of Indonesia ASEAN Art Award
 2004: Finalist of ASEAN Art Award
 2005: The Winner of "Kudus Kota Kretek" Monument Competition

Solo Exhibition

- 2009 • "Sensuous", Valentine Willie Fine Art, Singapore
- 2008 • "nécis", Nadi Gallery, Jakarta

Selected Group Exhibitions

- 2009 • "In Rainbow", Esa Sampoerna Art House, Surabaya
- "CIGE 2009 (China International Gallery Exposition 2009), Beijing
- "Art HK 09 (Hongkong International Art Fair), Hongkong
- "Jendela, a play of the ordinary" NUS Museum, Singapore
- 2008 • "The Highlight" Jogja National Museum, Yogyakarta
- "Salon Yogya" CG art space, Jakarta
- Art • "A Decade of Dedication" Selasar Sunaryo Space, Bandung
- "Bentuk-Bentuk" Contemporary Indonesian Art in 3D, Melbourne Art Fair 2008
- "Expose#1 - A Presentation of Indonesian Contemporary Art by Deutsche Bank & Nadi Gallery", Four Seasons Hotel, Jakarta
- "Manifesto", The National Gallery of Indonesia, Jakarta

- | | | | |
|------|---|------|---|
| | • "Live is Art, Art is Live" Coral Gallery, Yogyakarta | | • "Membaca Dunia Widayat", H. Widayat Museum, Mungkid, Magelang, Central Java |
| | • "De Paris a Jakarta", The National Gallery of Indonesia, Jakarta | 2003 | • "Indonesia ASEAN Art Award 2003", Grya Dome, Medan; The ASEAN Secretariat, Jakarta |
| 2007 | • "Fetish", Objects Art Project #1, Biasa Art Space, Seminyak, Bali | | • "Interpellation", CP Open Bienalle, The National Gallery of Indonesia, Jakarta |
| | • "Cilukba! (Peekaboo!)" KSRJ (Kelompok Seni Rupa Jendela), Valentine Willie Fine Art, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia | | • "Implotion", ExpatriArt Gallery, Jakarta |
| | • "Common Grounds", The National Gallery of Indonesia, Jakarta | 2002 | • "25x25x50", Lontar Gallery, Jakarta; Benda Art House, Yogyakarta |
| | • "Indonesian Contemporary Art Now", Nadi Gallery, Jakarta | | • "Pose", KSRJ (Kelompok Seni Rupa Jendela), Affandi Museum, Yogyakarta |
| 2006 | • "ICON: Retrospective", Jogja Gallery, Yogyakarta | | • "Ecstasius Mundi", KSRJ (Kelompok Seni Rupa Jendela), Selasar Sunaryo Art Space, Bandung and Air Art House, Jakarta |
| | • "Passing on Distance", Base Gallery, Tokyo | | • "Age-Hibition", Edwin's Gallery, Jakarta |
| | | | • "Lampu", Benda Art Space, Yogyakarta |
| | | | • "Object", Fabriek Gallery, Bandung, Indonesia |
| 2005 | • "Space and Scape" Summit Event Bali Biennale, Bali | 2001 | • "Not just Political", H. Widayat Museum, Mungkid, Magelang, Central Java |
| | • "Beaute et Expression Terrorise", Galerie Loft, Paris, France | | • Bidar Art, Taman Budaya, Palembang |
| | • "Urban Culture" CP 2 nd Biennale, Museum Bank Indonesia, Jakarta | 2000 | • Yusra Martunus, Hedi Harianto and Ahmad Syahbandi, Cemeti Art House, Yogyakarta |
| | • "Open View", Biasa Gallery, Seminyak, Bali | | • "Membuka Kemungkinan", KSRJ (Kelompok Seni Rupa Jendela), Purna Budaya Yogyakarta and Taman Ismail Marzuki, Jakarta |
| | • "Biasa (Ordinary)", KSRJ (Kelompok Seni Rupa Jendela), Nadi Gallery, Jakarta | | • Indonesian Art of Sculpture 2000, Taman Budaya Yogyakarta |
| | • "Passing on Distance", NAF Gallery, Nagoya, Japan | | |
| | • "Seni Rupa Alat Bantu", Bentara Budaya Yogyakarta, Yogyakarta | 1999 | • "Yusra Martunus and Rudi Mantofani", Lontar Gallery, Jakarta |
| | • "Makan Seni Rupa", Rumah Michelle Chin, Yogyakarta | | • "From a Window", KSRJ (Kelompok Seni Rupa Jendela), Bali Padma Hotel, Bali |
| | • "Eksodus Barang", Nadi Gallery, Jakarta | | • Sakato Group, Benteng Vredeburg Museum, Yogyakarta |
| 2004 | • "Spacious Territory", AUDI Centre, Jakarta | | • "Volume and Form", Singapore |
| | • "Silent Action: Creativity for Tolerance and Peace", 4 th Art Summit, The National Gallery of Indonesia, Jakarta | | • "Media Dalam Media", The National Gallery of Indonesia, Jakarta |
| | • "Membaca Kembali Konvensi", Edwin's Gallery, Jakarta | | • "6 th Yogyakarta Biennale", Purna Budaya, Yogyakarta |
| | • "ASEAN Art Award 2004", The National Gallery of Thailand, Bangkok | | |
| | • "Barcode", 16 th Yogyakarta Art Festival, Taman Budaya Yogyakarta, Yogyakarta | 1998 | • Taman Budaya, Lampung |
| | • "Mempertimbangkan Tradisi", Sanggar Sakato, The National Gallery of Indonesia, Jakarta | | • Sanggar Suwung, Yogyakarta |
| | • "The Soul of Arts", Senayan Plaza, Jakarta | | • "TVRI Anniversary", TVRI Station, Yogyakarta |
| | • "Object(ify)", Nadi Gallery, Jakarta | 1997 | • The 2 nd Sculpture Art Triennial, Taman Ismail Marzuki, Jakarta |
| | • "Wings of Words, Wings of Colors", Langgeng Gallery, Magelang | | • Sculpture Art of Gumpal Group, FSR ISI Yogyakarta, Yogyakarta |
| | | | • ISI Anniversary, Taman Budaya, Yogyakarta |

- "Sakato", Purna Budaya, Yogyakarta
 - "Jendela", 1st exhibition of KSRJ (Kelompok Seni Rupa Jendela), Purna Budaya, Yogyakarta
 - Citra Raya Environment Sculpture Art, Citra Raya Housing Estate, Tangerang
- 1996
- ISI Anniversary, FSR ISI Yogyakarta, Yogyakarta
 - "The 8th Yogyakarta Art Festival", Benteng Vredeborg Museum, Yogyakarta
 - "Dialog Dua Kota I", Cipta Gallery, Taman Ismail Marzuki, Jakarta
 - "Dialog Dua Kota II", Purna Budaya, Yogyakarta
- 1995
- "Dimensi", Sculpture Art, Taman Budaya, Yogyakarta
 - Citra Raya Environment Sculpture Art, Citra Raya Housing Estate, Tangerang
 - National Outdoor Sculpture, Yogyakarta
 - "Sakato", 1st exhibition of Sanggar Sakato, Purna Budaya, Yogyakarta
- 1994
- "Seni Rupa LUSTRUM II ISI", Yogyakarta
 - "Seni Patung NUANSA", Yogyakarta

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