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STORIES & IDEAS • ARTICLE

Jumaadi on making art – and the beauty of pineapples

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Jumaadi speaks about his studio practice in Australia and Indonesia, with a focus on four recent acquisitions in the MCA Collection (now on display).



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Jumaadi, 2020

I often use two figures or two objects together, almost embracing but also almost departing ... I like the idea of that.

I am an artist. I make drawings – that's what I do. I also do paintings, sculpture and shadow performance. I've been working in Australia and Indonesia over the last 10 years. I have a studio in Sydney and in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, in a small village in Imogiri. How I work, usually, I come to the studio very early in the morning, like 6am, to finish at 6 in the evening, but I have a few breaks. So, I draw and draw and cut and paint like that. I don't start my work with new themes [in mind], usually. One drawing leads to the next drawing; one painting leads to the next

painting. For example, if I draw a person, maybe a tree will grow out of his head tomorrow, then fruits will grow out of that tree, then a baby will grow out of that fruit, and then the person will start disappearing on the fifth day of the drawing. And it continues that way. So often, I don't actually start my drawing with ideas.



Jumaadi's studio in Sidoarjo, East Java, Indonesia. Image courtesy and © the artist



Jumaadi's studio in Imogiri, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Image courtesy and © the artist

There is some occasion where I start my drawing with ideas when the idea is faster and if I don't have tools, such as drawing or painting tools, I just write down the idea. For example, a man on a canoe: the canoe is floating on the water, large water with large sky, and the sky is full of birds getting hit, by each bird who are hit by arrow, things like that. It's faster to write it

down and then come back to the drawing, really. So, sometimes I craft the words like poetry, which I keep it for, then maybe there are some general ideas. That's where my ideas come from.

Looking at my drawings now, I think they are about birth, death, sacrifice, ceremony, love, despair, longing and loneliness. I often use two figures or two objects together, almost embracing but also almost departing ... I like the idea of that. It has two meanings where the audience or myself cannot be sure, cannot be certain what they are actually doing.

In this particular series, there are four paintings in the MCA Collection. They are the origin works for my recent exhibition at Mosman Art Gallery, *Cintaku Jauh di Pulau (My love is in an Island Far Away)* (2019). The monumental size or scale of them allowed me to put a lot of narratives within narratives, and also gave me a lot of time to prepare. They were not just made in one hit, like a lot of my watercolours, for example. Sometimes I can forget where I started, and to what end; when it is like that, I reverse or come back to my notes – either notes in the written sense, but also the shapes and characters that might appear again, then I navigate the whole painting that way.



Jumaadi, *Antara Nanas & Duri* [Between the pineapple and the thorns], *Siapa yang menjelma sungai & siapakah perampoknya* [And who is the river and who are the thieves], *Aku* [I], *Boekan Katjoeng* [Not the 'katjoeng' (The Savage)], 2019. Installation view, *Connected: MCA Collection*, MCA, 2020. Acrylic on cotton cloth primed with rice, Museum of Contemporary Art, purchased with funds provided by the MCA Foundation, 2020. Image courtesy and © the artist. Photograph: Jessica Maurer

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Jumaadi, 2020

To revisit very ancient materials, and ancient methods of putting pigment into the cloth, is enlightening.

The material I used to make the paintings is a specific Balinese textile, woven in east Bali. Some of them are woven on a small island called Nusa Penida, but also in Klungkung. Those weavers have been weaving this material for a long time, but the uniqueness of it is that they seal the woven textile in a large bath of rice, so that when you put stretched cloth into and dip it and bring it up to the surface, all the rice glue is on top and then you just press it, really press it, so it penetrates into the textile to seal it. When it is sealed with the rice glue, it's easier for the pigment to stay on the surface.

For me, to revisit very ancient materials, and ancient methods of putting pigment into the cloth, is enlightening. It is not a very expressive kind of medium, it's almost like watercolour; [the paint] is very tenderly applied. Once I have the pencil outline or pictures, I apply the colour quite softly with more water than pigment, so it almost replicates the softness and a gentle aspect of watercolour. It teaches me to paint more slowly and softly, because I can also paint very expressively.

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Jumaadi, 2020

Nanas is such a beautiful fruit. Its surface has a texture like eyes, like a wound, like another fruit inside a fruit.



Jumaadi, *Siapa yang menjelma sungai & siapakah perampoknya* [And who is the river and who are the thieves] (detail), 2019. Acrylic on cotton cloth primed with rice. Museum of Contemporary Art, purchased with funds provided by the MCA Foundation, 2020. Image courtesy and © the artist.

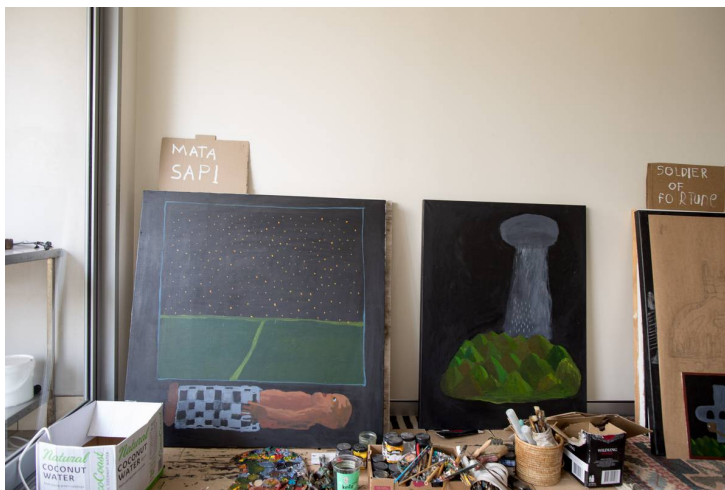


Jumaadi, *Antara Nanas & Duri* [Between the pineapple and the thorns], 2019. Acrylic on cotton cloth primed with rice. Museum of Contemporary Art, purchased with funds provided by the MCA Foundation, 2020.

I use a lot of recurring motifs, particularly the pineapple. I don't know why they call it 'pineapple' ('pine' and 'apple'?) – we call it *nanas*. *Nanas* is such a beautiful fruit. Its surface has a texture like eyes, like a wound, like another fruit inside a fruit. It's almost like broken stone. Slowly, when it ripens inside your house or in the garden, you can sense its aromas. So, alone on its own, *nanas* already have a lot of qualities and beauty. To me, it has much more beauty than a bottle, for example. People paint bottles, stars, suns, the sea, but *nanas* is something very special. So, it is easy for an artist to find ways of transforming it into the surface of a canvas – a *nanas* lends itself to the picture. And it's foreign, it's strange, it's beautiful, it's aromatic, it has enough qualities to give it a lot of potential symbolism. So, you can put it above a woman's head, you can put it on your gate, you can put a *nanas* on the table, they can be independent. They are like a dancer or a storyteller. They seduce you with some kind of craft, or some kind of texture. As a painter, I can reuse it – there are a lot of *nanas* in my paintings. The motif of *nanas* is very helpful.

When I'm working, my paintings become very close to me. When I move between Indonesia and Australia, I carry more of them in my bag than I do clothes or other materials. When a painting is not finished and I need to move because of other reasons, I have to pack up those works – I pay extra money for that. I couldn't bear to be parted with them, in case I need to put another little gesture or add some detail which the painting might need. Being close like that helps to resolve a painting, you know. I like them being around.

This article was adapted from a recorded interview with Jumaadi at his Sydney studio in September 2020. [Connected: MCA Collection](#) is now showing at the MCA. Free entry.



Jumaadi with MCA Assistant Curator Manya Sellers at his Sydney studio, 2020. Image courtesy and © the artist. Photograph: Jean-Pierre Chabrol

More about the exhibition

Connected: MCA Collection

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