

**Helwaser**  
Gallery

**Boedi Widjaja**  
**Declaration of**

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the exhibition **Boedi Widjaja: Declaration of**  
organized by Helwaser Gallery, New York  
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## Imaginary Homeland: Notes on Drawing and Photography

by Junni Chen

*I don't think about drawing as a medium; I see it closer to an action, a method or in my case, a faculty. It is about sensing intuitively from my location, a point, and the act to reach it.*

– Boedi Widjaja, in conversation with curator and writer Louis Ho, 2014<sup>1</sup>

In the large-scale negative drawing 等著你回來 (*Waiting for you*) (2016), two ghostly, spectral figures fill the space of the work. Sukarno, the founding president of Indonesia, shakes hands with the first Premier and Foreign Minister of the People's Republic of China, Zhou Enlai. Both figures are smiling widely; Zhou's head is tilted slightly, as though in acknowledgement of something said in the moment. 等著你回來 (*Waiting for you*) is based on a press image taken in 1965, during a meeting between the two leaders. Underlying the outward signs of friendliness and camaraderie between them, Widjaja's drawing incorporates visual symbols that assert Indonesia's position as a young, independent nation. In Sukarno's left hand, he carries a presidential sceptre. Also present is the *peci* (a type of traditional headgear commonly worn in Southeast Asia) that Sukarno often wore, which was adopted as a symbol of Indonesian nationalism. Having resisted the Japanese occupation, as well as Dutch re-occupation, Sukarno played a role that would shape developments in Indonesia's modern history in the broader context of the post-colonial world, eventually becoming the first president of independent Indonesia.

*Declaration of* focuses on the period of Indonesia's history under the political leadership of the first two presidents—Sukarno, and General Suharto, with an emphasis on the former. The press images that Widjaja has gathered of Sukarno making visitations to world leaders, public events, and diplomatic conferences exist as more than a record of Sukarno's activities as a politician; in their historical context, they also functioned as a medium through which

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<sup>1</sup> Boedi Widjaja, quoted in Louis Ho, "Interview with Boedi Widjaja," in *A Drawing Show* (Yeo Workshop, 2014).



我是不是该安静地走开 (*Shall I quietly walk away*), 2015.  
Graphite on paper, acrylic, steel and camera tripod  
Drawing: 30 x 22 cm

the politics of the “visibility of power” plays out.<sup>2</sup> Having resisted the Japanese occupation, and Dutch re-occupation after World War II, Sukarno stood as the leader of Indonesian nationalism in its immediate post-independence years. Described as a cult personality, Sukarno communicated his nationalist agenda through the mediated spectacle that the camera lens accorded to him. These press images, consequently, are performances of national identity, often documenting milestones in the young nation’s history, and peppered with symbols of “Indonesian-ness.” The works shown in *Declaration of* belongs to a body of work, *Imaginary Homeland*, which Widjaja has worked on since 2015. Widjaja’s initial debut of the series at the Objectifs Centre for Photography and Film, Singapore, presented images of the Indonesian leader at political rallies, and in meetings with leaders such as Fidel Castro and Mao Zedong, drawing from a visual iconography that had shaped the development of Indonesia’s collective consciousness.

Widjaja takes the archive of press photographs as the entry point for *Imaginary Homeland*; reworking the photographs into negative drawings is the first step in Widjaja’s process-based approach, which underpins the production of this body of work. Rendered in black and white, the resultant body of negative drawings draw formal parallels to the aesthetic of analogue film. This visual reference to the methodology of photography, expressed through the medium of drawing, serves to complicate our reading of the image: by converging the formal logics of two disparate formats into a single surface, Widjaja gestures towards the relationship between image, memory, and meaning-making. In his reflections on photography’s methods, German theorist Siegfried Kracauer notes the didactic impulse of photography, commenting that “the photograph [...] must be essentially associated with the moment at which it came into existence.”<sup>3</sup> Photography, Kracauer suggests, is inherently ambivalent, functioning as a record of a spatial and/or temporal continuum; only from the perspective of memory does photography take on new meaning.<sup>4</sup> In relation to memory, Kracauer states, photography “cease[s] to be fragments” and becomes legible.<sup>5</sup> In the same vein, it can be said that

<sup>2</sup> Jaeho Kang, “The Media and the Crisis of Democracy: Rethinking Aesthetic Politics,” *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory* 57, no. 124 (2010): 1–22. The term “visibility of power” was used in Jaeho Kang’s reading of Walter Benjamin’s thesis of aesthetic politics. Kang notes that “Benjamin reaches the conclusion that technologically mediated spectacle becomes the dominant mode of political communication.”

<sup>3</sup> Siegfried Kracauer and Thomas Y. Levin, “Photography,” *Critical Inquiry* 19, no. 3 (1993): 428.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*



Installation view of *Imaginary homeland: 我是不是該安靜地走開*, Objectifs Centre for Photography and Film, Singapore (January 13 to 31, 2016)

these images of Sukarno take on meaning when viewed within the context of Indonesia's historical exercise of nation-building, turning into a visual lexicon that stands in for a broader narrative. It is precisely this process of signification that *Imaginary Homeland* meditates upon, and eventually attempts to destabilize.

Drawing, as a medium, serves not just as a record of content, but also as a process of individual mark-making. Within the space of the exhibition, it is hard to read Widjaja's works purely through the lens of history, as his works bear the traces of conscious re-mediation. Upon encountering these drawings, the viewer witnesses an act of transcription: Widjaja not only transfers the content from one medium to the next, but he also edits—splicing, adding, and omitting details in each of these images. In *帶我去月球 (Fly me to the moon)* (2019), Widjaja adds lines of Javanese script above his depiction of John F. Kennedy and Sukarno sitting besides each other. These lines of Javanese script—which spell out sentences taken from John F. Kennedy's famous 1962 "Moon speech" transliterated from English—serve as footnotes that speak to Widjaja's own attempt to make sense of the source material that he draws from, connecting it with his own lived reality as an immigrant diaspora.



Installation view of *Imaginary homeland: 我是不是該安靜地走開*, Objectifs Centre for Photography and Film, Singapore (January 13 to 31, 2016)

In that sense, drawing works as a means of dislocating these images from their original time-based referents, and re-casting them as part of the artist's attempt to reclaim agency. Speaking of the original photographic images that form the backbone of *Imaginary Homeland*, Widjaja notes that these visual documentations "often led me to imagine that I was (or could be) a part of this shared identity despite my physical disconnection [...] while at the same time reminding me why I was never part of it."<sup>6</sup> Even as Widjaja appears to be working through an archive of the past, the question that he asks does not quite seem to be "what has happened?" as much as he is bringing his own experiences to bear on the content of the images and relating it to his current moment. For Widjaja, drawing frees this visual vocabulary from its singular reference to a narrative of Indonesian identity, allowing him to "reconstruct [these images] in a new place of beginnings and infinitely defer their meanings."<sup>7</sup> Widjaja's negative drawings, hence, now become a site where new meanings can emerge.

<sup>6</sup> Artwork label for Boedi Widjaja, *Imaginary Homeland: 我是不是該安靜地走開*. Objectifs Centre for Photography and Film, Singapore, January 13 – 31, 2016.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

If *Imaginary Homeland* begins from the photographic image, perhaps it is also important to note that Widjaja's working process comes full circle. As a final step, Widjaja re-photographs his negative drawings using analogue studio photography processes, isolating and re-appropriating details of his works in order to produce another body of images. Unlike the artist's negative drawings, these images locate greater significance within the medium of photography itself. In *就是找不到往你的方向* (*Can't find my way to you*) (2015), much of Widjaja's depiction of General Suharto is obscured, a product of the camera's flash. Similarly, the three images that make up *想著你回來* (*Pining for you*) (2019) appear hazy and indistinct, reflecting the movements of the camera during the moment of capturing its subject. These works operate as a means of hypermediacy, returning the gaze of the viewer to the methods of photography rather than its represented contents. As it were, Widjaja's final act points to the practices involved in the construction of images, allowing viewers to grasp not merely the semantic possibilities of the image, but also the very characteristic of the photograph as a material phenomenon in and of itself.

"The indexicality of photos," Widjaja writes, "their authoritative testimonies of what-has-happened, and their transparency proved problematic in my attempt to come to terms with my absence from Indonesia."<sup>8</sup> *Imaginary Homeland* brings the viewer face-to-face with the complications that come along with the reading of images, examining the connections between representation, semiotics, and forms that allow us to make sense of these visual texts. At the same time, *Imaginary Homeland* also stands as an autobiographical reflection. In the intersection of historical and personal narratives, the body of work invites its viewers to participate in the act of meaning-making alongside the artist, investigating the generative potential of the embodied image. ♦

<sup>8</sup> Artwork label for Boedi Widjaja, *Imaginary Homeland*: 我是不是該安靜地走開 Objectifs Centre for Photography and Film, Singapore, January 13 – 31, 2016.



A visitor holds a smartphone (with "invert colors" enabled) in front of Widjaja's negative drawing, revealing the positive image of the work. *我喜歡這樣想你* (*I like to think about you this way*), 2015. Graphite on paper, 22.64 × 12 inches (57.5 × 30.5 cm)

# Specters of History

by Shona Mei Findlay

Boedi Widjaja's practice shifts effortlessly between photography and drawing. Complicating the process of image making, Widjaja asserts an additional layer of mediation, obscuring his own painstakingly made drawings with analogue photography processes, appropriating his own appropriated images to produce abstract, distorted images that differ widely in context. The work is often austere, portraying specters of historical figures; at other times, his subjects are abstract or corporeal manifestations of personal and cultural memories. His first US solo exhibition, *Declaration of*, is an examination of identity, politics, and nationhood, which is refracted through his own immigrant experience. Born in 1975 to ethnically Chinese parents in Java, Indonesia, Widjaja grew up at the height of widespread anti-Chinese sentiments of President Suharto's repressive New Order<sup>1</sup>, which included the purging of "'Communists', 'Communist sympathizers', Sukarnoists and other subversives.'"<sup>2</sup> Soon after consolidating power, the Suharto regime began imposing anti-Chinese legislation, which included the banning of Chinese-language material and the prohibition of the display of Chinese cultural and religious expressions. These policies created conditions that later coalesced into the race riots of 1998, which ended in the tragic massacre of approximately 2000 Chinese Indonesians. Because of these circumstances, Widjaja spent his formative years away from home and his parents, placed under guardianship arrangements in Singapore since the age of nine. As a consequence of his upbringing, his artistic practice emanates out of a need to reconcile his own experiences of displacement, estrangement, and a search for belonging.

*Declaration of* takes Indonesia's political history during the Cold War as a point of departure, focusing on Indonesia's first President Sukarno<sup>3</sup> and his diplomatic choreography around the power blocs of Russia, China, and the US.

<sup>1</sup> The New Order is a term coined by the second Indonesian President Suharto to characterize his regime as he came to power in 1966, after overthrowing the first President of Indonesia Sukarno. Suharto used this term to contrast his rule with that of his predecessor.

<sup>2</sup> Benedict Anderson, "Exit Suharto: Obituary for a Mediocre Tyrant," *New Left Review* 50 (March/April 2008): 35.

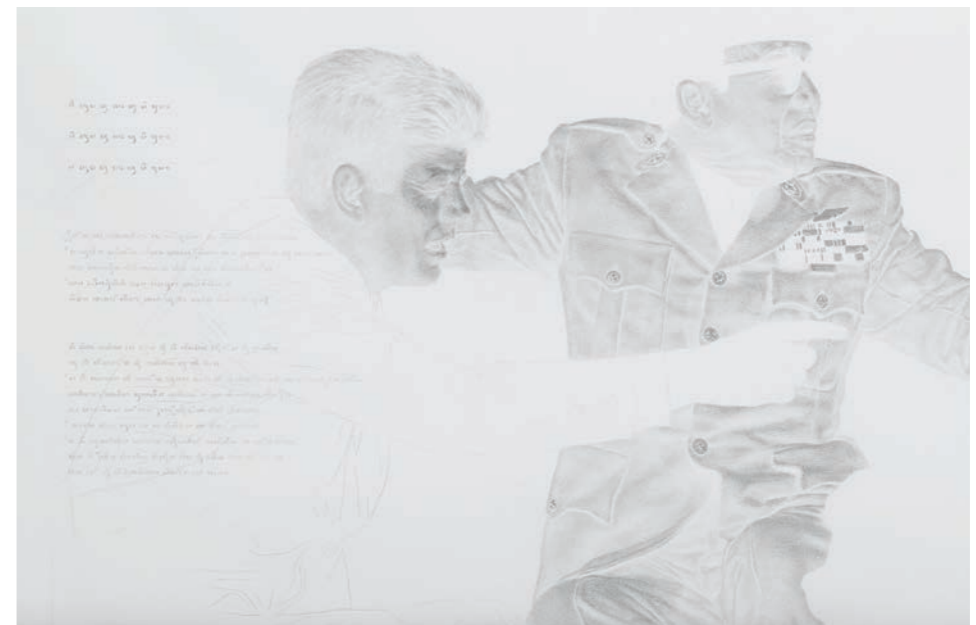
<sup>3</sup> Sukarno was the leader of his country's struggle for independence from the Netherlands. He was a prominent leader of Indonesia's nationalist movement during the Dutch colonial period, and was known for his aggressive anti-imperialist policies.



就是找不到往你的方向  
 (*Can't find my way to you*), 2015.  
 archival print under diasec,  
 47.25 × 31.5 inches (120 × 80 cm)

Widjaja's newest work, 九百九十九朵玫瑰 (*Nine Hundred and Ninety-Nine Roses*) (2019), is an installation comprising nine black *pecis* mounted atop a multi-directional tripod. While the *peci* is commonly associated with Islam, as a headdress commonly worn by Muslim men across Southeast Asia, the cap was popularized in Indonesia by Sukarno, who was known to have worn it (always in black) during state visits and political appearances. In so doing, the *peci* simultaneously became a symbol of Indonesian national identity and the nationalist movement against the struggle for Indonesia's independence. Accompanying Widjaja's installation are nine pinhole negative photographs created by the *pecis*, depicting assorted images of President Sukarno's meetings with leaders of the power blocs during the Cold War. In the work, the *peci*, this signifier of nationhood, takes on the role of image producer, as Widjaja modifies the headdresses into pinhole cameras, allowing light to pass through them onto photo-sensitive paper, thereby reforming his own imprints of a history he only experienced through mass media. Mimicking the form of an outdoor megaphone, like those used during times of emergency and in the dissemination of mass public warnings, the structure of the work becomes a salient reminder of the global barrage of fake news and widespread media sensationalism of our own times.

For Widjaja, the process of drawing is an act of reclamation, a gesture of filling a void—both in an intimate personal register as well as in terms of a larger historical amnesia. By appropriating images from a shared public imaginary, often drawing from mass media and sourcing images from the internet, Widjaja recovers these snapshots as his own, where retracing these figures become an act of symbolic recuperation. Two of Widjaja's signature negative drawings accompany the installation: 等著你回來 (*Waiting for you*) (2016), depicts a meeting between President Sukarno and the People's Republic of China's first Premier and Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai in 1965, a tumultuous year in the history of Sino-Indonesia relations; while 带我去月球 (*Fly Me to the Moon*) (2019) references an image of Sukarno sitting next to the 35th US president John F. Kennedy. In Widjaja's depictions of these historic meetings, he isolates the figures from their original situations, inverting the images as negative drawings of found reportage, creating at once photo-realistic and somewhat abstract and obscured images. Together, the works reflect on the legacy of Sukarno, revealing the veiled web of interpersonal relationships below the surface of a newly-independent nation.



带我去月球 (*Fly me to the moon*), 2019 (detail).  
 Graphite on paper, 31.5 × 47.25 inches (80 × 120 cm)



In *Declaration of*, Widjaja magnifies the tempestuous relationship between Indonesia and the US, interrogating the latter's role as a superpower, in the mass killings of 1965 and 1966 led by Suharto, who was at the time a powerful military leader, that targeted Communist Party members resulting in the death of at least 500,000 people (the total may be as high as one million).<sup>4</sup> The US cultivated ties with the Indonesian military, encouraging them to go after the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI).<sup>5</sup> As a result, the US was able to cease the spread of communism, bringing countries around the world into its sphere of control, replacing Sukarno with his anti-imperialist ideology and his position as a founding member of the Non-Aligned Movement of nations with Suharto's dictatorship.<sup>6</sup>

Widjaja further pursues the veiled nature of politics in *Art is only a continuation of war by other means (flags)* (2019), an outdoor installation comprising ten flags, each composed of red and blue graphics arranged uniquely—an encoding of part of the work's title. The sentence references a quote by Zhou Enlai, "Diplomacy is only a continuation of war by other means,"<sup>7</sup> which is a play on Clausewitz's famous maxim, "War is merely the continuation of policy by other means."<sup>8</sup> While unproven, Clausewitz's quote in English has been contested as a misquotation or mistranslation of the 19th century military strategist.<sup>9</sup> Pointing towards semantic instabilities, Widjaja toys with notions of translation, mistranslation, and mediation, by transposing the sentence into the dots and dashes of Morse Code and obscuring the words into the artist's own idiosyncratic visual language. Together, the flags become abstract representations of national identity, underlining the mystifying and illegible nature of war and politics at the fault lines of cultural economic policies and military power.

<sup>4</sup> *Indonesia: US Documents Released on 1965-66 Massacres*, Human Rights Watch, October 18, 2017. Accessed October 16, 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/10/18/indonesia-us-documents-released-1965-66-massacres>.

<sup>5</sup> Vincent Bevins, "What the United States Did in Indonesia," *The Atlantic*, October 20, 2017. Accessed October 16, 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/10/the-indonesia-documents-and-the-us-agenda/543534/>.

<sup>6</sup> Hennie Strydom, "The Non-Aligned Movement and the Reform of International Relations," *Max Planck Yearbook of United Nations Law Online* 11, no. 1 (2007): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1163/18757413-90000002>. The Nonaligned Movement (NAM), founded at the height of the Cold War, is a group of developing countries that do not want to align themselves with any major superpower. Non-alignment meant the rejection of control by the superpowers of the time and the adoption of a foreign policy stance that implied resistance against East-West pressures and solidarity with Third World interests relating to strategic world political and economic issues.

<sup>7</sup> Edgar Snow, "Red China's Gentleman Hatchet Man," *The Saturday Evening Post*, March 27, 1954, 119.

<sup>8</sup> "War is merely the continuation of policy by other means." from Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. Michael Eliot Howard and Peter Paret (1976; repr., Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).

<sup>9</sup> James R. Holmes, "Everything You Know About Clausewitz Is Wrong," *The Diplomat*, accessed August 29, 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2014/11/everything-you-know-about-clausewitz-is-wrong/>.

The significance of language in Widjaja's practice is further exemplified through the titles of his work, often drawing from the saccharine lyrics of Mandopop love songs from the 80s and the 90s that accompanied him through adolescence. The titles represent the complex relationship with his Chinese heritage, the double estrangement from being forced from one place of immigranthood to another, and the separation from his Chinese identity, while ironically inferring the intimacy of political power. 因為我的心中有你 (*Keeping you in my heart*) (2015) and 就是找不到往你的方向 (*Can't find my way to you*) (2015) reference two images of Suharto, before his 31-year authoritarian rule, while 希望你能對我說你愛我 (*Please say you love me*) (2015) alludes to an ambiguous image of Sukarno and Mao Zedong's hands touching, capturing a fleeting moment of intimacy between the world leaders.

In a society saturated by images, Widjaja slows down the production and consumption of images by employing steady, contemplative techniques of drawing and analogue photography. Combined with the appropriation of popular culture—borrowing from popular Mandarin songs and familiar press material—Widjaja launders these images through his memories as well as anxieties of displacement. At a new juncture in history, where notions of national and cultural identity are being renegotiated across the globe, Widjaja's processual practice can be seen as quiet acts of reflection and recuperation, personally metabolizing global narratives, and examining the transformative possibilities that a single image holds. ♦

## Interview with Boedi Widjaja

by Annie Jael Kwan

**Annie Jael Kwan:** Since 2015, I have had the pleasure of working with you as an independent curator as well as co-director of Something Human<sup>1</sup> on several projects in the UK and Europe, and thus have had the privilege of observing how you have developed various aspects of your multidisciplinary practice over the last four years. There are several strands that one could say underpin your practice, that we see emerge in different forms and contexts. The first is how you center “mark-making” in your work, whether it be via intricate, detailed, photo, or negative realistic drawing work, such as in the *Imaginary Homeland* series, to a full-body exertion of dragging chalk around a city for *From East to the Barbican* (2015). With reference to the etymology of the word “draw” that suggests the dragging of a weight over distance, and Merleau-Ponty’s notion of “the labour of vision,”<sup>2</sup> could you please discuss how the different ways of mark-making continue to drive your work? Are you always attracted to natural materials such as graphite, chalk, and rock? How does weight, effort, and texture factor into the making of the marks?

**Boedi Widjaja:** Mark-making in my artistic process is about beginnings and the practice of seeing. In 2012—the year I began making art full-time—my wife and I visited the Lascaux cave in Dordogne, France. In the caves, we saw parietal wall drawings rendered with earth pigments at varying scales—the prehistoric drawings seemed to respond to the spatiality of the different cave chambers and also to the three-dimensional profiles of the cave walls. The ancient images of beasts and humans, dated to be around 20,000 years old, seemed animated by the continuous flickering of the guide’s torch. It was a highly emotional moment; my feeling of uncertainty about starting an art practice in my late thirties was overwhelmed by a profound sense of awe and wonder, upon realization that with every mark that I made, I partook in the deep beginnings of art and architecture that I witnessed in the caves. Geological materials bring tactility and material specificity to my process of mark-making. The earth’s materiality—weight, texture, resistance—helps to internalize the cave marks that I saw and in doing so, reminds me of the historical continuity in the marks that I make. The act of seeing through mark-making is two-fold—reflexive and reflective. The former could be described by Merleau-Ponty’s

<sup>1</sup> Something Human was co-directed with Alessandra Cianetti from March 2014–March 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, ed. Galen A. Johnson, trans. Michael B. Smith, Northwestern University Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 129.

sensorial, embodied mode of vision—the entire body looks—that engages with and to some degree, imagines the world into being. In contrast, the reflective mode of vision is akin to the Cartesian gaze—a critical way of looking at something with the intent of revealing its underlying structures and meanings. The two modes of vision have been described as binary opposites but I don't find their mutual exclusion practicable in reality. Every act of mark-making—walking performatively through the city, drawing an image or making frottages—constitutes a continuous dialing of the respective intensities of the two ways of seeing.

**AJK:** In your practice—the exploration and play of language also plays a central role—whether it be via specific words, language, poetry, myths and folktales. Could you elaborate how language offers a pivot from which one may explore an artistic enquiry? Your exhibition for Helwaser Gallery is titled *Declaration of*—how is this project an utterance?

**BW:** Language is a complicated material for me; not only does it mark a culture but it also touches the boundaries of home. When I migrated to Singapore, all I could speak was Bahasa Indonesia and a Javanese dialect; I only studied English and Mandarin subsequently during my school education in Singapore. Due to this, there is a psychological line that latently cuts across the languages that I know. The line, however, is complicated by familial history. My parents were the generation of Indonesian Chinese who studied in Chinese schools prior to the latter's state-sanctioned closure during Suharto's New Order, and I had heard Chinese words being uttered at home even before I left for Singapore. Furthermore, my father listened to BBC Radio to learn English as he had intended to find a job in Singapore. In choosing textual references, making text art or composing artwork titles, I close and blur the distance between the languages I know, in their written and spoken forms, by employing methods of translation, transliteration and juxtaposition.

There are several contexts to the exhibition title *Declaration of*, the primary one being the context of Southeast Asian nations declaring to the world their sovereignty against the geopolitical backdrop of the Cold War. The title is an expression of the power of the spoken word, words that could spark a revolution, command armies, bring together lands and separate a nation, and bring humankind to the moon.

**AJK:** In our many conversations, we have discussed how for you, a sense of personal and familial history is intertwined with particular political moments and trajectories—that is, your family ancestry hails from China where you were born to Chinese immigrant parents

in Indonesia in 1975, then escaped the ethnic tensions due to the racist policies of President Suharto's New Order to settle in Singapore. In your practice, especially in the ardent and determined performative gestures you make repeatedly and in durational format—there seems to be an underlying urge to address or resolve, perhaps, these genealogical ruptures and enquiries. Why do you think revisiting past traumas is part of the role an artist might play?

**BW:** Art may be useful to resolve a painful memory; I observe that artists would sometimes seek closure through catharsis by articulating their traumas in order to achieve emotional release from it. The method, however, proves to be challenging as my childhood memory manifests as a void—a thick cloud of latent emotions that are difficult to crystallize. The memory is beyond what I can fully grasp, much less exorcise.

I had read about a house that the Japanese architect Toyo Ito designed for his sister after her husband had passed away. Ito wanted to express the notion of a family living with a void hence the house was built with a permanently closed central courtyard that nobody could enter. I think of Ito's house as a substance that gives continuity after a trauma and similarly, making art is for me akin to generating new substance upon the ruptures in my memory. Along the lines of mark-making, I may also describe it this way: around the imaginary contour of the void, marking the invisible image of my childhood home, I seek out new connections and meanings.

**AJK:** While your drawings are capable of achieving hyperreal detail, you play with legibility in your process and what is offered to the viewer, in that, you deliberately present the negative image or blur the clarity of the image at times. Also, you present a series of notes or points that seem random but have a hidden algorithmic structure or code. How would you describe this play of readability and obscurity in your work?

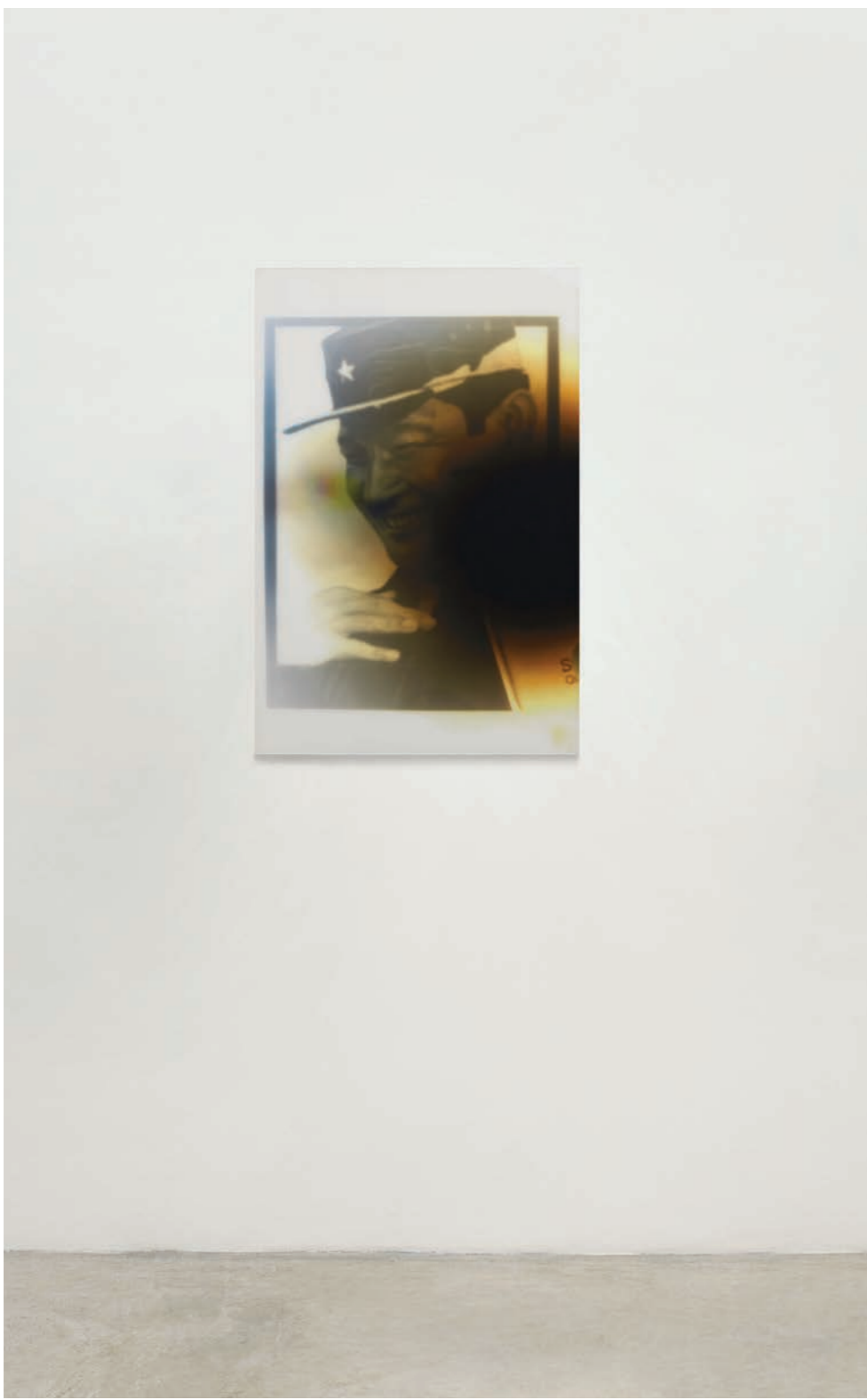
**BW:** By introducing visual, semantic and narrative slippages, in other words, complicating linear modes of looking at an artwork, I want to underscore the instability of art and its semiotics. This instability is an effect of the instabilities found in mainstream and social media (for eg. the face changing algorithm, and fake news), as suggested by the post-media condition which posits that there is nothing in art that can escape from the media experience; the media has become the norm of all aesthetic experience. However, I think that art hasn't been subsumed completely by the media given its different speed and method of dissemination; in contrast to the instability of media that would be dangerous especially when news go viral, the communicative instability of art has the potential to disrupt linear modes of reading, open up multiple contexts and allowing for alternative or even tangential meanings to emerge.

**AJK:** Your projects explore and reflect on transnational moments of political and personal entanglement. For the exhibition at Helwaser Gallery in New York, you present a selection of existing and new works, including an outdoor flag installation that traces these global trajectories of power and memory. How do you think this exhibition would resonate in New York during this era's context of the public space?

**BW:** I recently read an article about the state of public spaces in New York City. The article highlighted that spaces in the city (such as airport terminals or shopping malls) that may look or feel public are in fact, privately owned; the hazy distinction being a point of tension in the city's relations with the public. Taking a cue from Michel de Certeau's "Walking in the City"—a chapter from his book *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1980)—where the author had suggested for the tactical agency of street commuters as counter to the hegemonic strategy of the state, the flags installation in the gallery's outdoor terrace and its graphically coded language, expresses a spatial-visual gesture that seeks to engage with the public street life along Madison Avenue. Thematically, the artworks in the exhibition reference the Cold War—a geopolitics that divides the world along ideological fault lines. If history—even a traumatic one—could be seen as a common space, how fitting it is to show a small fragment of it in NYC, in a city of contradictions that at the same time, is a dynamic nexus of diverse cultures and origins. ♦

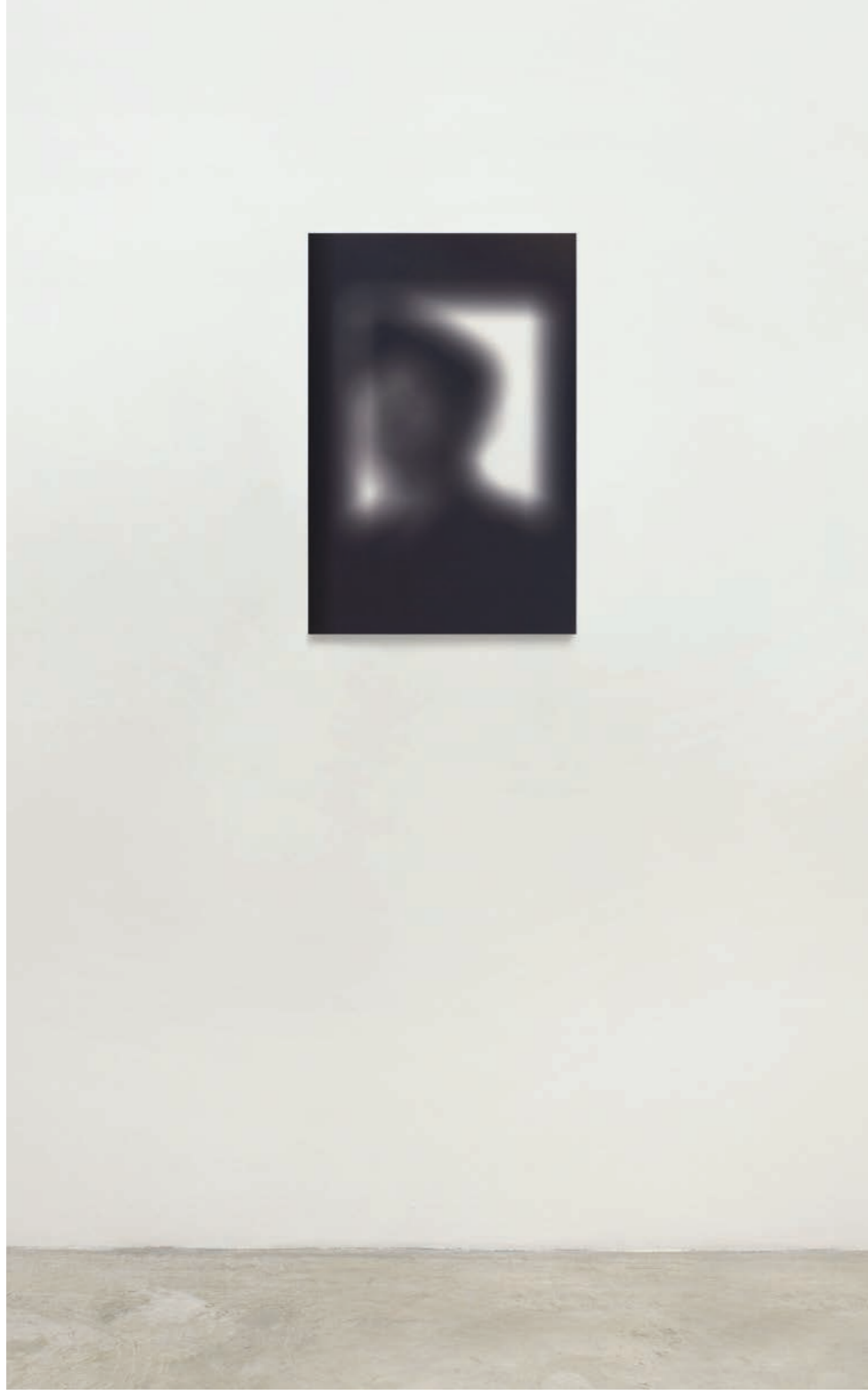
## Works in the Exhibition

就是找不到往你的方向 (Can't find my way to you), 2015, archival print under diasec, 47.25 x 31.5 inches (120 x 80 cm)

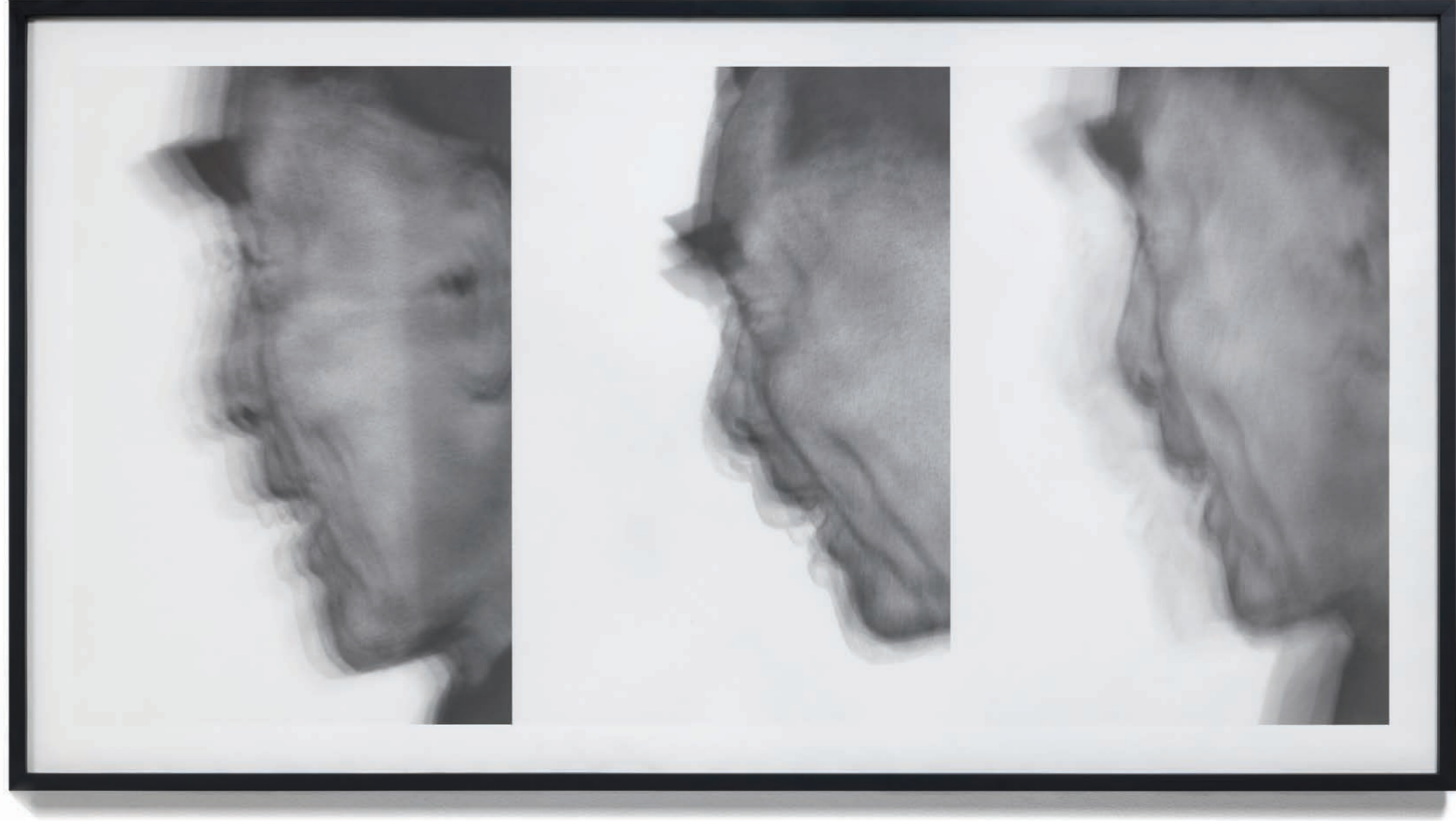




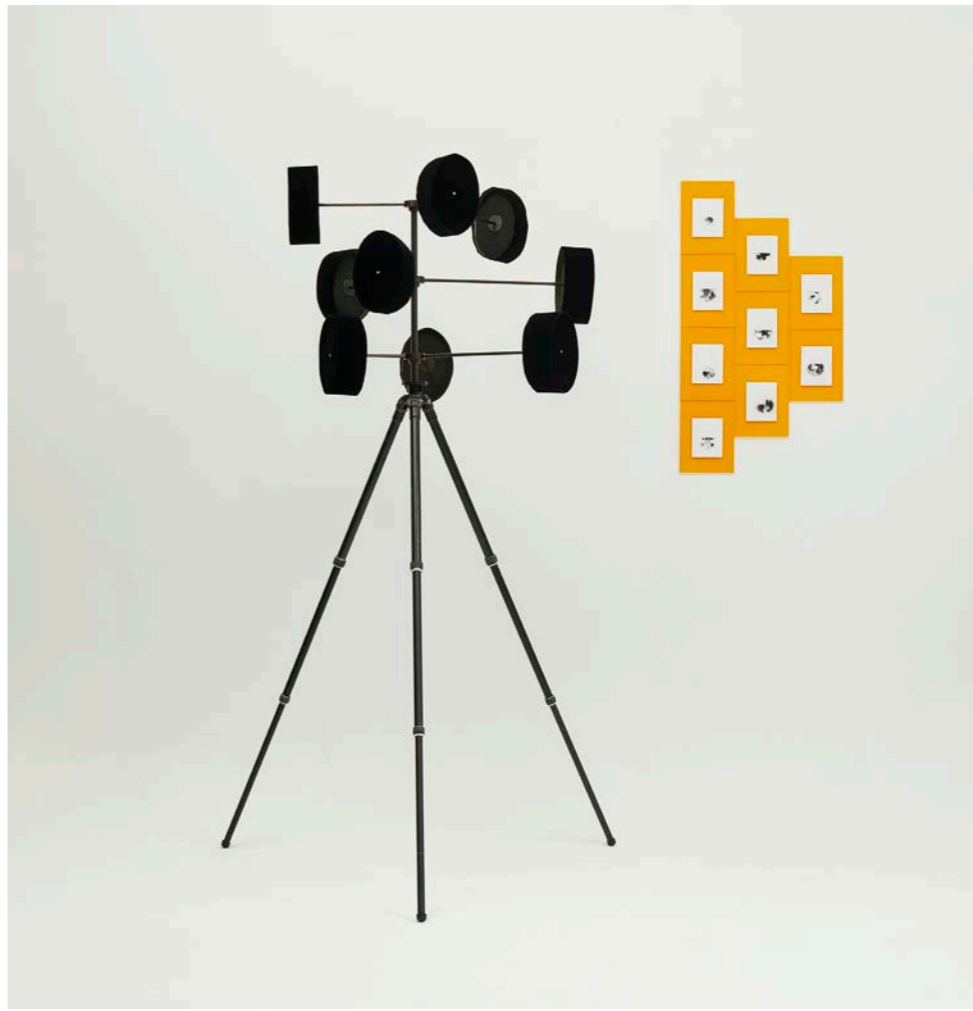
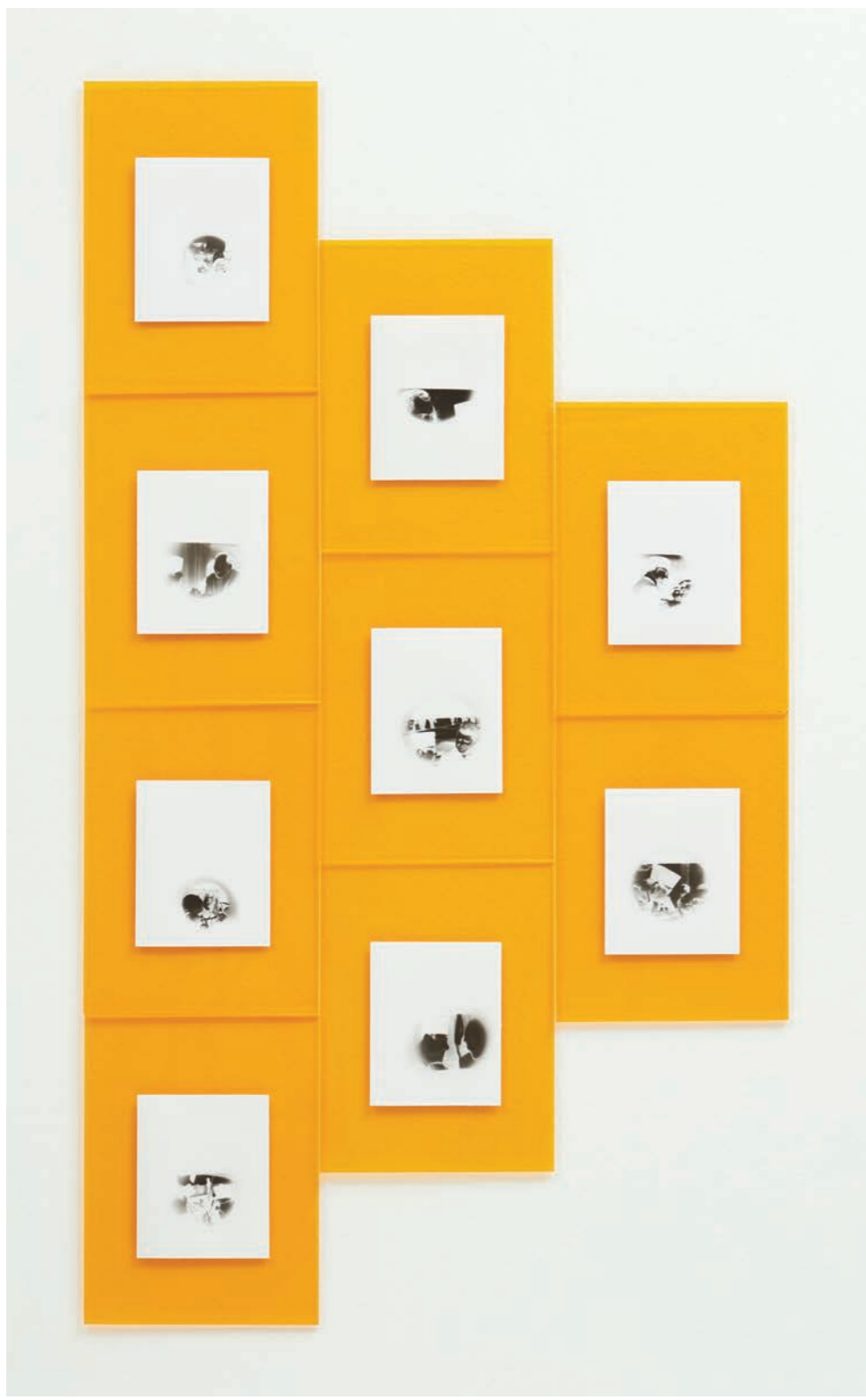
因為我的心中有你 (*Keeping you in my heart*), 2015, archival print under diasec, 35.375 x 23.625 (90 x 60 cm)



想著你回來 (*Pining for you*), 2019, archival print on Awagami Kozo Thick White, 36.5 x 68 inches (92.7 x 172.7 cm)







希望你能對我說你愛我 (*Please say you love me*), 2015, archival print under diasec, 31.5 × 47.25 inches (80 × 120 cm)







## Installation Views













## Biographies

**Boedi Widjaja** currently lives and works in Singapore. He has shown in numerous exhibitions internationally, including the Singapore Biennale (2019), Asia Pacific Triennial 9 (2018); *MAP1: Waterways* (2017), Diaspora Pavilion, 57th Venice Biennale; Yinchuan Biennale, China (2016); *From East to the Barbican*, Barbican, London (2015); *Infinity in flux*, ArtJog, Indonesia (2015); and *Bains Numériques #7*, Enghien-les-Bains, France (2012). The artist's solo exhibitions include: *Rivers and lakes Tanah dan air*, ShanghART Singapore (2018); *Black—Hut*, Singapore Biennale Affiliate Project, Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore (2016); *Imaginary homeland: 我是不是該安靜地走開*, Objectifs Centre for Photography and Film, Singapore (2016); and *Path. 6, Unpacking my Library* • 书城, Esplanade, Singapore (2014). Recent accolades include: Top 10 Winner, FID Prize (2017); Finalist, Sovereign Asian Art Prize (2015); ArtReview Asia Future Greats (2014); Grand Prize (Sound Arts; with David Letellier), Bains Numeriques, France (2012); and First Prize, Land Transport Authority Beauty World Station (2012).

[www.boediwidjaja.com](http://www.boediwidjaja.com)

**Junni Chen** currently serves as Director of Exhibitions and Programs at Helwaser Gallery. Previously, she has held curatorial positions at the National Gallery Singapore and the National University of Singapore Museum, and has also written on contemporary art and culture at *ArtHop* and *Art Radar Asia*.

**Shona Mei Findlay** is currently Curator for Asia Programs at KADIST, San Francisco where she most recently curated Pio Abad's solo exhibition *Kiss the Hand You Cannot Bite* (June 2019). She was Assistant Curator for *If These Stones Could Sing* (2018), KADIST, and *On Struggling to Remain Present When You Want to Disappear* (2018), OCAT, Shanghai, co-curated *FOOTNOTES #0: Good Luck, See You After the Revolution* (2017) and *Why Is Everybody Being So Nice?* (2017), both at De Appel, Amsterdam and *The Power Nap* (2017), Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam. She was previously Curatorial Assistant, Residencies at the NTU Centre for Contemporary Art, Singapore (2014–2016) and project assistant for *No Country: Contemporary Art for South and Southeast Asia*, UBS Guggenheim Global Art Initiative MAP exhibition (2014). She was a participant of the De Appel Curatorial Programme, Amsterdam (2016–17) and received her BA in Fine Art and History of Art from Goldsmiths College, London (2011). She contributes to contemporary art publications including *ArtAsiaPacific* and *Ocula*.

**Annie Jael Kwan** is an independent curator and researcher based in London, and who works between Europe and Asia. As an experienced producer and curator, she has delivered numerous art projects in the UK and internationally since 2005, working with major arts and cultural institutions including the South Bank Centre, Geffrye Museum, Barbican Centre, Manchester Art Gallery, and the Live Art Development Agency. She holds a BA Hons. in Drama and Theatre Arts from Goldsmiths, University of London, and a MA (Distinction) in History of Art, SOAS, University of London.

# Exhibition History

## Boedi Widjaja

Born in 1975 in Java, Indonesia  
Lives and works in Singapore

### Education

2000 Bachelor of Architectural Studies (Hons), University of New South Wales, Sydney

### Solo exhibitions

- 2019 *Boedi Widjaja: Declaration of*, Helwaser Gallery, New York, NY
- 2018 *Rivers and lakes Tanah dan air*, ShanghART Singapore, Singapore  
*Imaginary homeland: kang ouw (-), I\_S\_L\_A\_N\_D\_S*, Peninsula Shopping Centre, Singapore
- 2016 *Black-Hut*, Singapore Biennale Affiliate Project, Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore, LASALLE College of the Arts  
*Imaginary homeland: 我是不是該安靜地走開*, Objectifs Centre for Photography and Film, Singapore
- 2014 *Drawing Cage*, The U Factory, Singapore  
*Path. 6, Unpacking my library.* 书城, Jendela (Visual Arts Space), Esplanade, Singapore
- 2012 *Path. 1, The white city*, The Substation, Singapore  
*Sungai, sejarah.* 河流, 历史, 源, Yellow River Arts Centre Singapore Base

### Group exhibitions

- 2019 Singapore Biennale 2019 (SB2019): *Every Step in the Right Direction Longings*, 寄望, jiwa, 28 Temenggong Road, Singapore  
*Media Art Globale*, Komunitas Salihara, Jakarta
- 2018 *Asia Pacific Triennial 9*, QAGOMA, Brisbane  
*Unauthorized Medium*, Framer Framed, Amsterdam  
*Imago mundi – art theorem #1*, Benetton Foundation and Fabrica, Salone degli incanti, Trieste, Italy  
*Imaginarium: into the space of time*, Singapore Art Museum  
*State of Motion 2018: Sejarah-ku*, Sungei Serangoon, Singapore
- 2017 *從土, 黑也 (From the earth, black)*, Jerusalem Biennale  
*Air mata air*, Joined by the Crown, GeorgeTown Festival, Penang
- 2016 *Betwixt festival: Art & bytes*, ArtScience Museum, Singapore  
*Derwent Art Prize 2016*, Mall Galleries, London  
*For an image, faster than light*, Yinchuan Biennale 2016, Museum of Contemporary Art Yinchuan, China  
*MOVE WITH (OUT) – Krisis*, Bonnington gallery, Nottingham Trent University, Nottingham

- 2015 *From east to the Barbican*, Barbican Centre, London  
*London calling*, British High Commissioner's Residence, Eden Hall, Singapore  
*Infinity in flux: The unending loop that bonds the artist and the audience*, ArtJog 8, Taman Budaya Yogyakarta (TBY), Indonesia  
*53rd International show*, San Diego Art Institute, CA, United States  
*Potong ice-cream \$2*, Latent Spaces booth, Art Stage Singapore, Marina Bay Sands, Singapore  
*Sovereign Asian Art Prize finalists' exhibition*, SOHO189 Art Lane, Hong Kong
- 2014 *DiverseCity*, Singapore Art Museum  
*A drawing show*, Yeo Workshop, Singapore  
*Print lab*, Grey Projects, Singapore  
*Singapore, Inc.*, Unit 21, The Lorong 24A Shophouse Series, Singapore  
*SeptFest 2014*, The Substation, Singapore
- 2013 *Closure*, organised by Free of Charge Art (FOCA), #1-52, Block 8 Teban Gardens Rd, Singapore  
*Displacements*, 13 Wilkie Tce, Singapore  
*Masterpieces*, National Museum of Singapore  
*Passports: Through the red dot into other worlds*, Unit 11, The Lorong 24A Shophouse Series, Singapore
- 2012 *Celeste Prize 2012*, Centrale Montemartini, Rome  
*DiverseCity 2012*, Singapore Art Museum at 8Q  
*31st UOB painting of the year*, Singapore Art Museum
- 2011 *INSITU.ASIA*, organised by Beautiful/Banal, National Geographic Store, Regent Street, London  
*INSITU Fort Canning Hill*, organised by Beautiful/Banal, Salon Space@Festival Village, Singapore
- 2010 *Centre to periphery*, Japan Creative Centre, Singapore  
*TITAN illustration in design*, organised by ESAD College of Art and Design, Matosinhos Municipal Gallery, Portugal
- 2009 *Space, Flat*, Night and Day Gallery, Singapore
- 2002 *Fascination*, Singapore Art Museum
- 2000 *Harbour/Metropolis*, Museum of Sydney
- ### Awards
- 2017 Top 10 Winner, FID Prize
- 2016 Finalist, Derwent Art Prize
- 2015 Finalist, The Sovereign Asian Art Prize
- 2012 First Prize, Bains Numeriques #7 (sound art; with David Letellier), Enghien-les-bains, France  
First Prize, Land Transport Authority Downtown Line Art – Beauty World Station Recipient, Open Call/  
Visual Art 2012, The Substation, Singapore  
Highly Commended, 31st UOB Painting of the Year, Singapore  
Finalist, Celeste Prize 2012  
The Castle Mountain Prize in the Bachelor of Architectural Studies, Sydney

**Additional photography credits:**

等著你回來 (*Waiting for you*), 2016  
 Graphite on paper  
 60.625 × 57.125 inches (154 × 145.1 cm), cover  
 Photography: Cher Him Chua

*Art is only continuation of war by other means (Flags)*, 2019  
 Series of 10 dye-sublimation printed flags  
 Each flag: 47.25 × 31.5 inches (120 × 80 cm), p. 4, 12, 18  
 Photography: Cher Him Chua

我是不是該安靜地走開 (*Shall I quietly walk away*), 2015  
 Graphite on paper, acrylic, steel and camera tripod, p.6  
 Photography: Cher Him Chua

Installation view of *Imaginary Homeland: 我是不是該安靜地走開*  
 Objectifs Centre for Photography and Film, Singapore  
 (January 13 to 31, 2016), p.8  
 Photography: Cher Him Chua

Installation view of *Imaginary Homeland: 我是不是該安靜地走開*  
 Objectifs Centre for Photography and Film, Singapore  
 (January 13 to 31, 2016), p.9  
 Photography: Cher Him Chua

我喜歡這樣想你 (*I like to think about you this way*), 2015  
 Graphite on paper, 22.64 × 12 inches (57.5 × 30.5 cm), p.11  
 Photography: Cher Him Chua

Exhibition curator: Junni Chen  
 Catalogue editors: Junni Chen, Grace Hong

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 Photography: Cher Him Chua

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 Photography: Phoebe d'Heurle

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