

"Constellations of Being", A Family Story of Sinta Tantra

ARTS | 15 August 2022



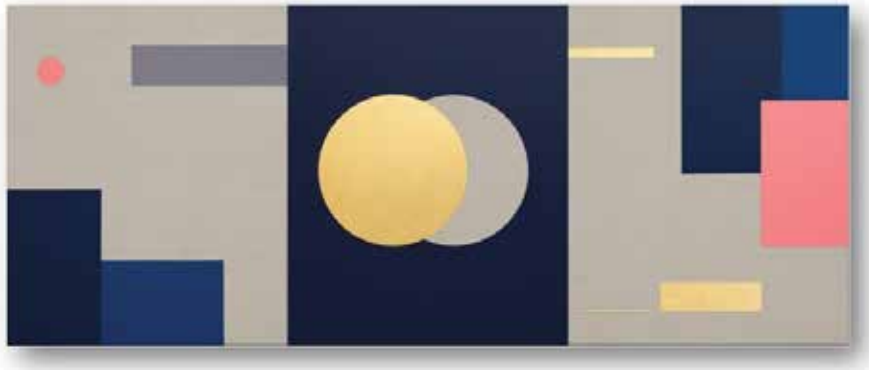
Known for her fascination with colour and composition, Sinta Tantra's work is an experiment in scale and dimension, a hybrid of pop and formalism, an exploration of identity and aesthetics. Her new series of works, "Constellations of Being", is being held at Wisma 46, Jakarta until 30 September, and is presented by ISA Art & Design. Photos by Sinta Tantra.

Sinta Tantra, a Balinese artist based in the UK and Ubud, Indonesia, is known for her colourful abstract paintings and site-specific murals. Her works include murals and installations colouring the public realm in many places from Hong Kong to Liverpool, including the most notable, a 300-meter-long bridge painting in Canary Wharf, London, commissioned for the 2012 Olympics. She has recently also engaged in public art projects in Jakarta with the completion of Poins Square Mall and Apartment in South Jakarta.

Tantra's work has drawn on art movements such as Bauhaus, Art Deco, Abstract Expressionism, and Modernism. And for her style, she is pretty much influenced by Nyoman Lempad and the prolific two -and three-dimensional lines of Sol LeWitt.

This time Tantra's solo exhibition illustrates her stories and family histories, which she describes as "constellations". She meticulously researched and interviewed her Balinese mother and father to tell her about their family histories and memories for over two years throughout the pandemic.

Sinta learned a lot about her parents and grandparents from both sides. She continued to work on paintings and resulting in a beautiful collection that talks of past, present, and future as well as family connections of “constellations” between mother-father-daughter and grandfather-cousin-granddaughter. These paintings explore the sense of being and belonging, the fluidity of migration, identity, and the shift from the human to the global, merging the colonial past with the present to form new dialogues and ways of relooking, and reconnection. The series explores Tantra’s past within past family constellations to create new constellations of history, emotions, experiences, shapes, colours, and materials.



“I want to connect with people on a level that transcends words and cultures. I have a vocabulary of shapes and colours that I can arrange and de-arrange and a self-constructed set of rules that I can adhere to or, at times, break. And, I’m interested in creating a kind of tension for the viewer in the compositions and combinations, a place where they can find their narrative, where I can find my narrative,” said Tantra.

In three of her paintings, “Taksu (A Reincarnation)”, “Taman Ujung (A Water Palace)” and “Two Cousins (Batu Bata)”, Sinta told the story about her great grandfather who was one of the sculptors of Ujung Water Palace. He was a great artist but they were paid not in cash, but with a Balinese orange tree that was planted in the centre of their family compound, which was probably a common practice back then.

“I found that my great-grandfather was incredibly talented, a stone carver or undagi in Balinese, which is the same word as ‘architect’. He would travel around Bali with his cousin, trying to get commissions. Both men worked on the elaborate stone carving of the majestic Ujung Water Palace, built by the King of Karangasem,” continued Tantra.

The oranges that grew from the tree were the literal fruits of the stone mason’s labour, a continued legacy of creativity, determination, and work ethic to which Tantra feels deeply connected. Although abstract in composition, the two circles in the middle could be interpreted as the two cousins, an illustration of their friendship and brotherhood. ‘Batu Bata’ refers to a type of Balinese stone or brick, represented here by rectangular forms.



"Taman Ujung (A Water Palace)" sees the continuation of the story of the grandfather and his two cousins who built the water palace that rewarded with an orange tree for their hard labour. A leaf-like form sprawls across the canvas, its opulence resembling an orange tree leaf but could also be interpreted as a splash of water, while the colours of the work evoke a rainbow.

The large triptych painting "Taksu (A Reincarnation)" forms the central nucleus of the exhibition. According to the Balinese, taksu is an innate creative power one is simply born with - something that cannot be taught. This painting reflects the taksu of her forefathers and perhaps a reincarnated spirit within her. Fluidly flowing from one panel to the next gold circles merge, symbolising the cycle of life, rebirth and the essence of DNA itself.

Another series of three are odes to family members, "Indah Ripon (Black Magic)" takes its title from Tantra's paternal grandmother rumoured to have been the most beautiful woman in the village. Cast under a black magic spell, she was forcibly married to Tantra's grandfather. The story made Tantra reflects on the historical position of women and the complex nature of female beauty and patriarchal system. Here feminine beauty and innocence are represented in the decorative, harmonised pinks with gold, a cut-out coral motif revealing the bare canvas.

Tantra creates her paintings with tempera paint on portrait linen, working with organic materials and minerals, which she describes as 'living and breathing'.

The "Constellations of Being" exhibition is curated by Sadiah Boonstra.

#bali arts

#arts



SARI WIDIATI

Sari has been an arts and culture enthusiast for many years. She has written extensively on the arts, travel, and social issues as Features Writer at NOW! Jakarta.