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ART & CULTURE

Sinta Tantra: Her balancing acts

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30
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Meet the artist: Sinta Tantra sits on a couch, balanced by a pair of her paintings on the wall behind her. (Sinta Tantra/File)

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For artist Sinta Tantra, life has been full of balancing acts.

Sinta Tantra, a British artist of Balinese descent, is no stranger to balancing her life: She balances her time between her parents' home in Bali and her own London residence, as well as "A House in Bali," her recent solo exhibition in Jakarta.

Held at South Jakarta's LAFLO in cooperation with the ISA Art Advisory, the pieces in her latest exhibition were inspired by its namesake, a book by American composer Colin McPhee.

In *A House in Bali*, which was originally published in 1946, a young McPhee explores the traditional ensemble music of the Balinese gamelan. It also discusses his stay in Bali, explores Balinese society and the role of music in Balinese culture.

McPhee himself also produced some gamelan music, from which Sinta also drew inspiration from while working on her exhibit.

"I've always listened to gamelan music, but [McPhee's] is unusual because it is played by a western orchestra. It's strange, and has sort of a magical quality to it," Sinta told *The Jakarta Post*.



Tabuh Tabuhan in Sapphire, Linen, Violet and Prussian - Screen (Colin McPhee), 2017, by Sinta Tantra. (JP/Dewanti A. Wardhani)

The artist introduces two different styles in her solo exhibition: one is bright and colorful, channeling the sights and smells McPhee recalls in *A House in Bali*, such as landscape and temple offerings.

To balance the vibrant palette, Sinta also included paintings that were linear and minimalist, with some representing musical notes, like the pieces in her *Tabuh Tabuhan* series. This style, Sinta said, also transcribed the abstract quality of Indonesian art, like those found in gamelan, batik and wood carvings.

Sinta said the paintings in the exhibition did not stray from her typical style, which featured bright colors and geometric abstraction, but were more personal compared to her previous work.

“I’ve been working in Europe a lot, so this work was about trying to connect more with my roots and my parents. Sometimes, when you get older, the more you want to connect with where you’re from,” she said.

The artist is largely known for her murals and public installations, having been commissioned for projects in various cities across the UK as well as in South Korea. Her most notable public work was a 300-meter painted bridge that was commissioned for the 2012 London Olympics.



The Horizon Comes in Chinese Blue, Hague Blue, Archive, Railings, Cornforth, Bubblicious, and Firefly Red Bronze (2013), by Nick Hornby and Sinta Tantra. (Sinta Tantra/File)

Sinta, who is a cheerful and gregarious person, has always enjoyed organizing events and meeting people. As her personality was especially suited to working on public projects, she initially preferred public projects and painting in public spaces to painting on canvas.

However, she also appreciated the creative freedom that comes with painting on canvas and exhibiting in galleries. In public projects, creative freedom was understandably more limited, as such projects underwent a bureaucratic process before the painting itself could begin.

“Right now, I’m enjoying the balance between working on public art projects and gallery spaces,” Sinta said.

Sinta describes herself as a painter working in an architectural scale in an abstract geometric style, exploring color, identity and narratives while questioning the function of spaces.

She also draws her inspiration from American artist Sol LeWitt and Indonesian artist I Gusti Nyompad Lempad. While LeWitt is known for his conceptual art and minimalism, Lempad, who is also a sculptor and architect, is known for his simple black-and-white drawings of traditional Bali.



Gentlemen Prefer Blondes (ceiling, 2011), Nunnery Gallery, London; group show for Apocalypstick. (Sinta Tantra/File)

Following her solo exhibition in Jakarta, Sinta said she had more upcoming public art projects in Indonesian cities such as Jakarta and Bandung, as well as in Hong Kong and the UK.

She also has upcoming exhibitions in Indonesia, the UK, Singapore and Malaysia, so it appears she'll have a busy year ahead full of more balancing acts.

Even so, Sinta said she found traveling to different countries and the thought of meeting various people exciting.

"I always like keeping busy," she laughed.

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