



2011 Asian Art Biennial
亞洲藝術雙年展

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Meditation

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The *Orang Besar* Series is set on the seas of the Southeast Asian archipelago. In this geography, dominated by a history of maritime trade, the horizon brought new possibilities and influencing forces that, by its flow of traffic, disallowed an insular bordering. Land mass, as marker of this corridor-ed territory, has been stained and shaped by the traffic that has rubbed its porous edges. The batik crackle that I utilize represents the paths of trade, shared knowledge and interconnectedness.

The story takes place in no particular period. Time lattices back and forth with the ebbing of tides and monsoons suturing history and current commentary unhindered by habits of linear reading.

The keepers of the Southeast Asian archipelago have long been the Sultans and their henchmen: the *Orang Besar*. It was the *Orang Besar* that described the nature of Southeast Asia's political and economic structures that had both centrifugal and centripetal mandala-like dynamics including distant trade and migration, shifting centres and peripheries. Real power and influence often lay in far-reaching entrepôts controlled by the *Orang Besar*.

The temperament of these *Orang Besar* structures, the body politic, continues to the present despite colonial influence that has been absorbed into classical forms of rule and control. The vertical bondage between persons, notions of obligation and patronage, critical to classical power structures, remains.

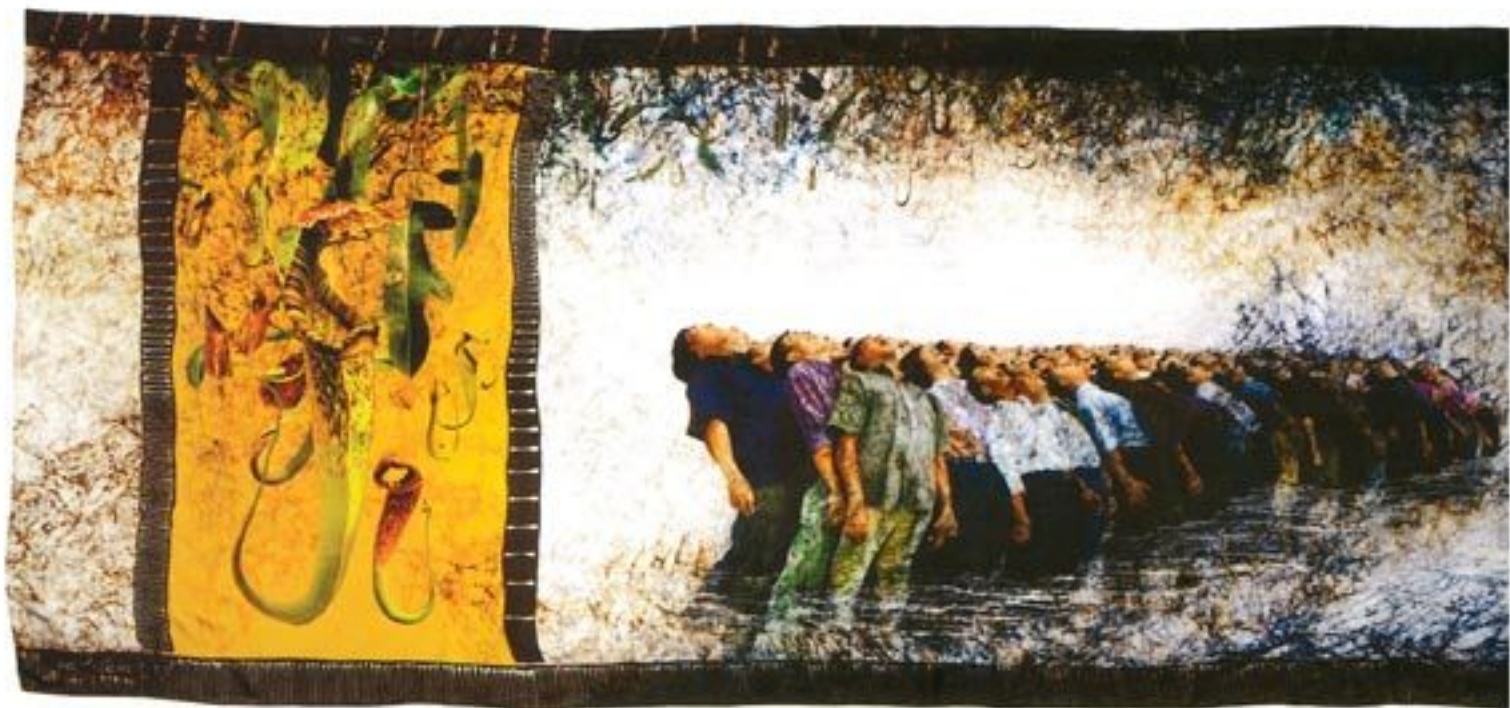
"*Orang Besar*" (lit. "Big Person") is a common term throughout the Southeast Asian archipelago dating back centuries, denoting a person of elite socio-politicoeconomic standing in a community, a "man of prowess". The term is interchangeable with "*Orang Kaya*" (lit. "Rich Person"). The term can also be interchangeable with the title "Dato" or "Datuk" and can also be made in reference to a Sultan.

The *Orang Besar* were themselves often under obligation or indebted to a higher power within the structure of this vertical bonding which they had to pay tribute to. A regional Sultan would grant favour to them in return for continued patronage, a percentage of the takings and their loyalty.

The poor or the weak found security and opportunity in being bonded to an *Orang Besar* who could protect them and would in turn be obligated to their needs.

Early Western traders encountered many local pirates throughout the Southeast Asian seas who would often rob the European ships of cargo, murder and cause mayhem. Often these accused local pirates were the Bugis or *Orang Laut* who were famed and feared as warriors of the Sultanates and *Orang Besar*. Their traditional trading routes were exactly those that the Western Empires aspired to and eventually dominated, subjugating the local populace to their European systems of governance and trade. I see these acts of local "piracy" as defensive precolonial resistance and in Western terminology an act of "privateering" for the local Sultanates and *Orang Besar*.

The *Orang Besar* continues to be a major character in Southeast Asia's political and economic narrative.



《大人物系列：以豬籠草起頭之長行》·2010·絹印版畫·106.7×234公分·藝術家、Valentine Wille Fine Art畫廊與安卓藝術收藏。

Orang Besar series: Kain Panjang with Carnivorous Kepala, 2010. Direct digital mimaki inkjet print with acid dye. batik canting Remazol Fast Salt dyes on 100% silk twill, 106.7 × 234cm. Courtesy of the artist, Valentine Wille Fine Art and the Mind Set Art Consulting.



《大人物系列：以樹根起頭之長布》·2010·綢印版畫·106.7×234公分·藝術家·Valentine Willie Fine Art 畫廊與安卓藝術收藏。

The Orang Besar Series: Kain Panjang with Parasitic Kepala, 2010. Direct digital mimaki inkjet print with acid dye, batik canting Remazol Fast Salt dyes on 100% silk twill, 106.7×234cm. Courtesy of the artist, Valentine Willie Fine Art and the Mind Set Art Consulting.

《大人物系列：以含露草起頭之長布》·2010·綢印版畫·106.7×234公分·藝術家·Valentine Willie Fine Art 畫廊與安卓藝術收藏。

The Orang Besar Series: Kain Panjang with Petulant Kepala, 2010. Direct digital mimaki inkjet print with acid dye, batik canting Remazol Fast Salt dyes on 100% silk twill, 106.7×234cm. Courtesy of the artist, Valentine Willie Fine Art and the Mind Set Art Consulting.