

Weaving the Ocean

by Ari Bayuaji

Curated by Siuli Tan

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*For full information and video of the installation view
please visit
www.warinlab.com*

Weaving the Ocean

Essay by Siuli Tan

Weaving The Ocean is a project initiated by artist Ari Bayuaji, who is based between Canada and Indonesia. When borders closed at the start of the global pandemic, Ari found himself on the island of Bali for an extended period of time. Observing both the devastation of the local tourism industry as well as the environmental pollution despoiling Bali's beaches, Ari embarked on a series of work transforming plastic waste into textile art, made in collaboration with Balinese artisans. Weaving The Ocean addresses pressing environmental and social issues – the pollution of oceans, and the destruction of marine life and the island's natural beauty – but through a conciliatory approach that endeavours to transform the 'negative' into a 'positive'. In this way, it draws on the ethos of Balinese philosophy which seeks to balance the energies of the universe. This ongoing project is a coming-together of community effort and resourcefulness, as well as a homage to Indonesia's rich textile traditions and the central role that the sea plays in Balinese culture.

"I'm always inspired by the contemporary challenges we are having in our time."

~ Ari Bayuaji

The issue of plastic waste first came to Ari's attention in 2015, when he photographed a mangrove tree covered with plastic. During his sojourns in Bali, he observed coils of colourful plastic rope wrapped around vegetation on the beach, or washed up onto the shore, often entangled with other found objects or marine life such as corals. These plastic ropes (or dolly rope as they are known), are used to protect fishing nets, and often wash up on coastlines in large quantities.



Bird of Paradise 2015



Bird of Paradise 2015



Plastic ropes on the beach



Plastic ropes on the beach

Ari engaged the collective efforts of artisans and others in the local community who had been made out of work to collect the plastic ropes from the beach, and to transform this unsightly detritus into works of art. Meticulously unraveled, the colourful ropes yield sturdy raw material to be transformed into evocative tapestries that celebrate traditional craftsmanship while evoking the shifting states at sea.



Weaving process



Weaving process

The seascapes “Morning Breeze” and “Evening Breeze” for instance, recall the gentle play of the breeze on the water’s surface, with tiny ripples suggested by horizontal skeins of coloured thread. A thick band at the top of the tapestry evokes a horizon line, or perhaps the changing depths of water. “Sea Grass” and “The Coral Wall” were inspired by an aerial view of the ocean: a combination of weaving techniques is punctuated by loose strands and tufts of coloured thread, recalling the gentle sway of sea grass in the waters or clusters of corals. In another work, a tangle of loose threads evokes forms of marine life such as jellyfish.

Central to Ari’s practice is his collection of images and objects he encounters during his travels, and the assemblage of these into new configurations that draw on their associative meanings. This is perhaps best exemplified in the work he created for his solo exhibition at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts in 2017, the outcome of his artist residency engaging with the Museum’s collections. Titled *A Cabinet of Curiosities*, the expansive installation featured poetic juxtapositions of everyday objects collected by the artist from various Indonesian islands as well as items of personal significance, introducing audiences to new visual and cultural vocabularies. True to its title, *A Cabinet of Curiosities* evoked the piquant wonder of discovering new and distant worlds.

A similar spirit can be seen in a selection of small sculptural objects included in this presentation at Warin Lab, where pieces of driftwood and coral are arranged in small ceramic vessels like bonsai, and adorned with strands of plastic rope as well as fragments of beads and other small items found by the beach. These works poetically evoke the treasures of the sea and its maritime histories, and also exemplify a Balinese ethos where everyday objects are made beautiful and sacred, as witnessed in the daily ritual offerings found all over the island. The small sculptures are visible embodiments of the ocean’s storied depths, with civilisations, histories, worlds beyond our grasp, and a palimpsest of past and present held in co-existence.

Much of Ari's work is inspired by the culture of the locales he visits, and in the same way, *Weaving The Ocean* pays homage to the central role of the sea in Balinese spiritual life. Balinese religion is inextricably bound up with water, and the syncretic blend of Hinduism and animism widely observed on the island is often referred to as Agama Tirtha, or the religion of water. The sea plays a significant role in purification and blessing rituals, and the robes included in the exhibition are a direct reference to the ceremonial garb and costumes worn during ceremonies that the artist observed taking place on the beach, amidst and in spite of all the marine debris. White is a colour commonly worn by the Balinese during these ceremonies, and the scale of the robes is inspired by the imposing costumes donned by devotees during ritual dances.



Barong Landung



Sea Dancer Robes

The balance between 'light' and 'shadow' is very important for the Balinese, who seek to reconcile 'good' and 'evil' through such rituals and offerings; in the same spirit, Weaving The Ocean transforms the devastation and filth of marine debris into something beneficial for the community at large in order to achieve a harmonious equilibrium. The project gives purpose and dignity to Bali's artisans while honouring their time-honed skills, and the resulting artworks evoke the deeply calming vistas of the sea and its many shifting moods, attesting to its importance in Balinese spirituality and culture, as well as reminding viewers of what is at stake. In this way, Weaving The Ocean is Ari's 'offering' to Bali. It elevates prosaic found objects and materials into an expression of the relationship between the worlds of the visible everyday and the invisible transcendent – the *sekala* and *niskala* – a powerful reminder of the interconnectedness of all things and beings, and our responsibilities and agency within these interwoven realms.

References

Margaret Dougherty, "How The Balinese See The Sea: Interpretations of Oceanic Power", 2018. Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection. 2934.

Fred B Eiseman, Jr., *Bali: Sekala & Niskala. Essays on Religion, Ritual, and Art*, 1990. Tuttle Publishing: Tokyo, Vermont, Singapore.

About the Artist



Ari Bayuaji, Artist

Ari Bayuaji was born in Indonesia in 1975. Moving permanently to Canada in 2005, he studied Fine art at Concordia University (2005-2010). Dividing his time between Montreal and Bali, the artist is known mainly for his art installations, which incorporate the use of found and ready-made objects that he finds in different part of the world, thereby exposing himself also to the different mechanisms of the cultures.

Ari Bayuaji is an expert in conveying aspect of daily life, as his works usually try to show the overlooked artistic value in everyday life through objects and places and their roles within society. He has been consistent in using found/old objects from all over the world as the material and subject matter in almost all of his artworks. These objects as his creative material might be old, but the “content” as a work of art is completely new as he injects his work with emotion that is also influenced by contemporary issues he seeks to address.

His work has been exhibited in some major international solo exhibitions including The Esplanade Theatre on The Bay Singapore (2014 and 2019), Nunu Fine Art Taipei, Taiwan (2018, 2021), Parkhaus in Malkasten Düsseldorf (2018) A collaboration with Agnes B. Fondation Paris at Ste-Alvere, France (2017), Redbase Foundation Jogjakarta in Indonesia (2016), and Kunsthal Rotterdam in The Netherlands (2016).

About the Curator



Siuli Tan, Curator

An independent curator and former Museum professional, Tan Siuli has over a decade of curatorial experience with a focus on contemporary art from Southeast Asia. Her exhibition projects include two editions of the Singapore Biennale (2013 and 2016), inter-institutional traveling exhibitions, as well as mentoring and commissioning platforms such as the Presidents Young Talents exhibition series. She has also lectured on Museum-based learning and Southeast Asian art history at institutes of higher learning such as the National Institute of Education as well as LaSalle College of the Arts.

Her recent speaking engagements include presentations on Southeast Asian contemporary art at Frieze Academy London and Bloomberg's Brilliant Ideas series. Tan holds an MA in Art History from University College London, a BA in Literature and Art History from the University of Nottingham, UK, and a Postgraduate Diploma in Asian Art from the School of Oriental and African Studies (University of London), UK.



Flores, 2021, Woven plastic and cotton threads, 300 x 95cm



Morning Breeze, 2021, Woven plastic and cotton threads, 160 x 100cm



Evening Breeze, 2021, Woven plastic and cotton threads, 173 x 100cm



Sea Grass, 2021, Woven plastic and cotton threads, 200 x 100cm



Ghost Net, 2021, Woven plastic, cotton threads, and copper, 182 x 102 cm.



The Coral Wall , 2021, Woven plastic and cotton threads, 210 x 96cm



Ghost Robes , 2021, Woven plastic and cotton threads, 170 x 97cm



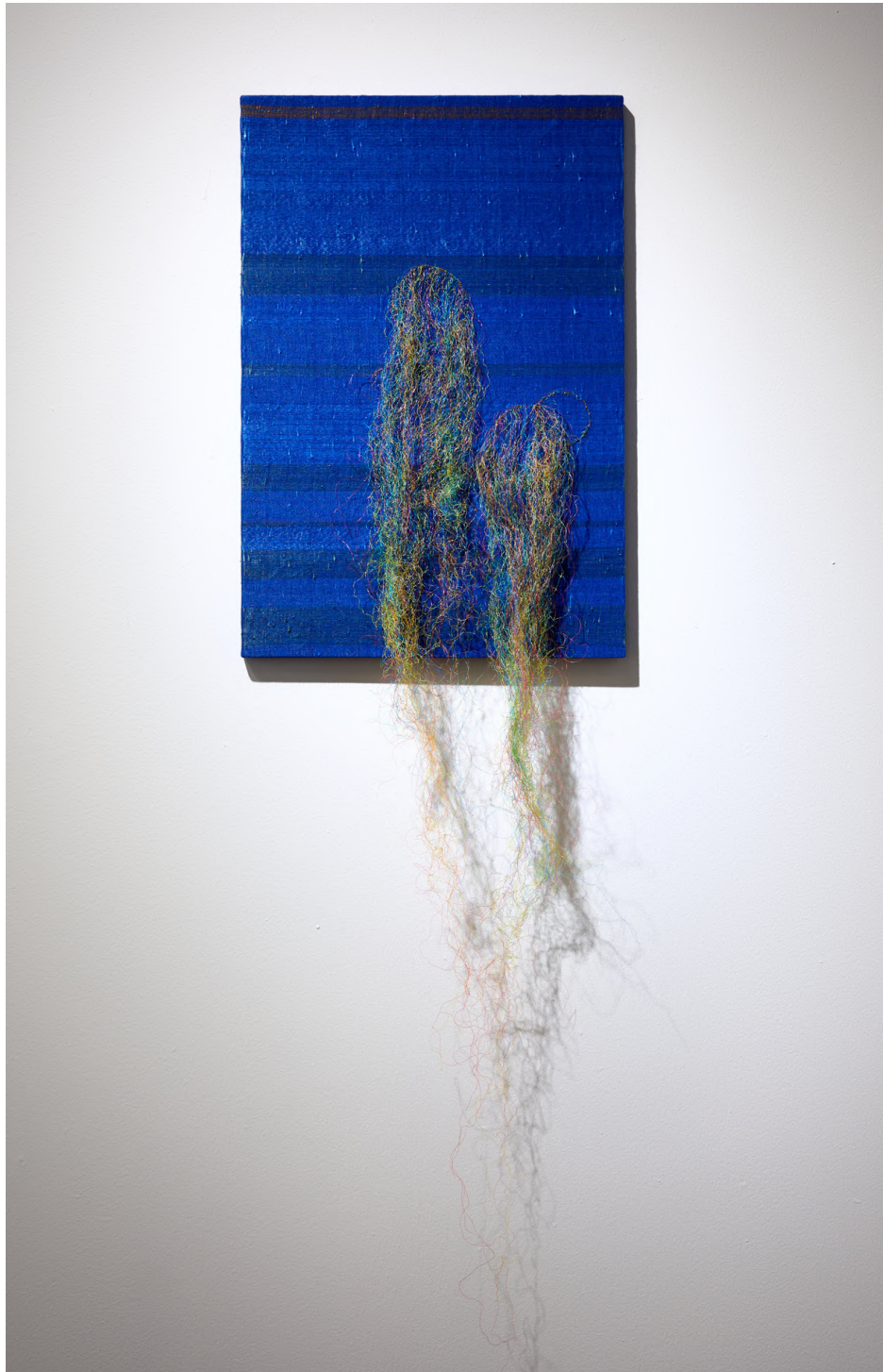
Small sculptures series Untitled #1, 2020-2021, Mixed media, Variable



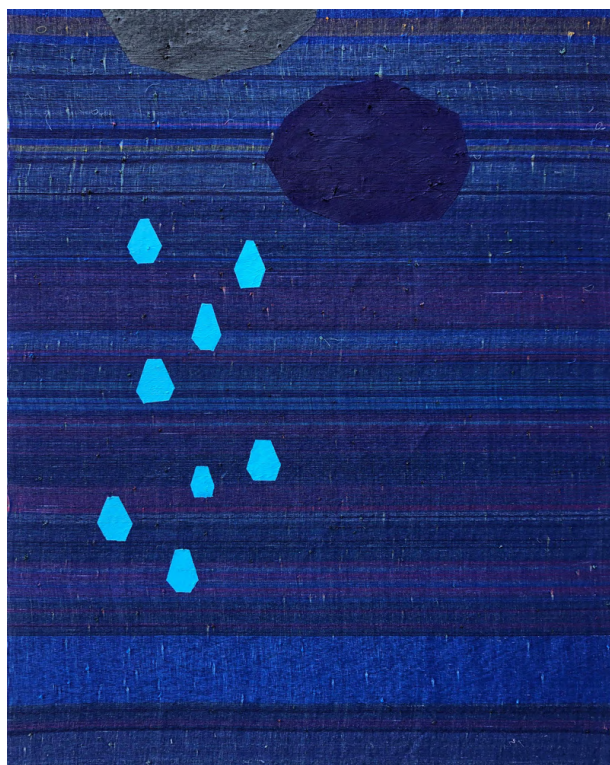
Small sculptures series Untitled #5, 2020-2021, Mixed media, Variable



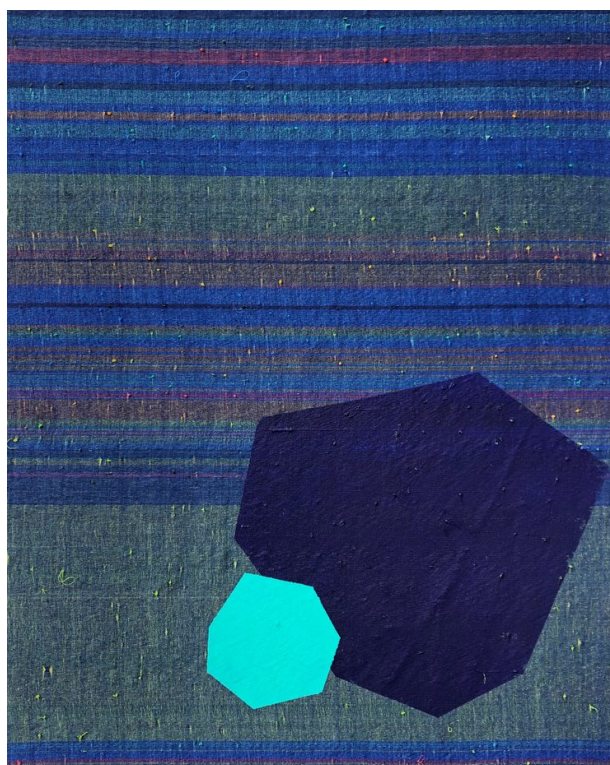
*The monument of Sacrificed Turtles, 2020,
Ceramic, carved wood, mixed media, 15 x 10 x 9cm*



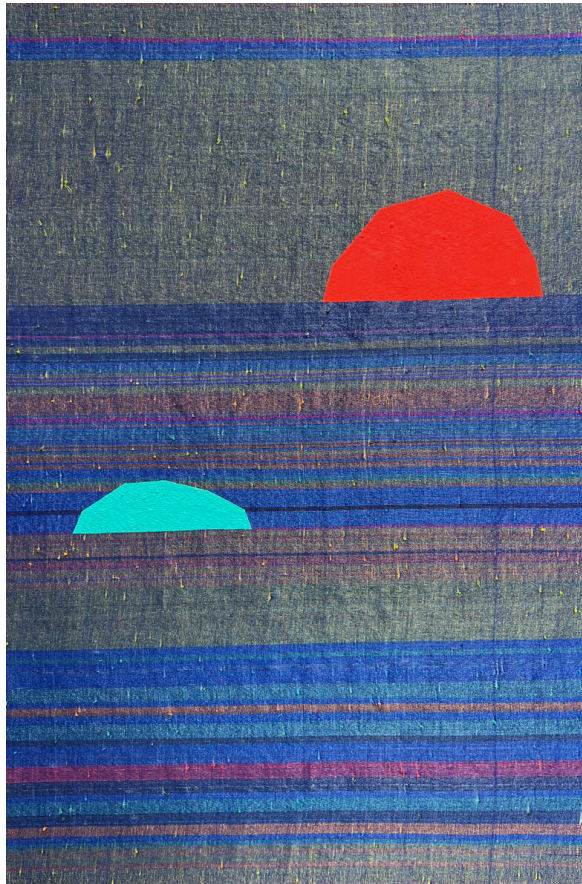
*Rainbow Jellyfish #1, 2021, Woven plastic and cotton threads,
handstitched plastic threads, plywood, 63 x 43 x 2.5cm*



*Sunday Morning Rain, 2021,
Woven plastic and cotton threads, acrylic paint, 60 x 42 x 2.5 cm*



*The Coral #1, 2021,
Woven plastic and cotton threads, acrylic paint, plywood, 60 x 43 x 2 cm*



*Sunrise at the Little Island, 2021,
Woven plastic and cotton threads, acrylic paint, 60 x 43 x 2.5 cm*



After The Rain #1, 2020, Woven plastic and cotton threads, 50 x 30 x 2.5 cm



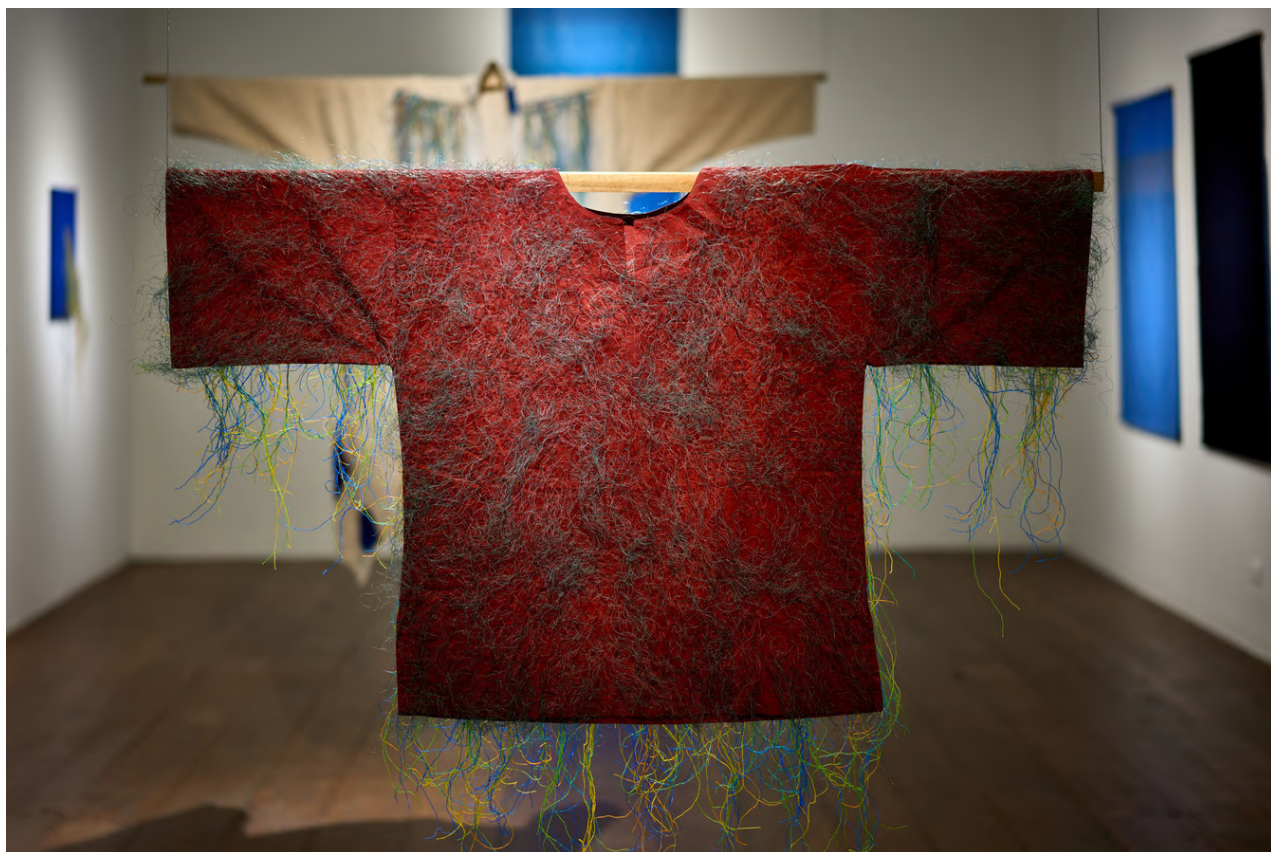
After The Rain #2, 2020, Woven plastic and cotton threads, 35 x 25 x 2.5 cm



Sea Dancer #2 (white robe), 2021, Plastic threads, canvas, 202 x 154 x 6cm



Sea Dancer #3, 2021, Plastic threads, canvas, 124 x 74 x 6 cm



Sea Dancer #4, 2021, Plastic threads, canvas, 124 x 74 x 6 cm



*Fisherman's Bag, 2021,
Woven plastic, cotton threads, ceramic shred, plastic ropes, corals on the toes,
28 x 19 x 4 cm.*

Collaborators on '*Weaving the Ocean*' Project

Desak Nyoman Rai

Widarto

Nazah

Dewa Ayu

I Made Junawan

A. A. Sagung Ratih

Agustina Ellen Ogom

Rofinus Jo Wasek

Marcelino Stoykov

Lina Amelia

Widi Yanti

I Made Sastra

Nengah

I Made Rindu.

