

Octopus 26: Melange

Curated by Krisna Sudharma

Artists: Noviadi Angkasapura, Kadek Armika, Mia Boe, Nyoman Darmawan, Maharani Mancanagara, Gian Manik, Todd McMillan, Galih Adika Pariripurna, Sangeeta Sandrasegar, Isadora Vaughan and Pande Wardina

Gertrude Contemporary
Saturday 11 April –
Saturday 30 May 2026

An initiative in its 26th year, platforming new modes of curatorial practice and exhibition-making methodologies, *Octopus* is a mainstay of Gertrude's annual exhibition program. The program invites an independent or external organisational curator to research and develop a major group exhibition and its composite public and performance programs. For the first time, *Octopus 26* is developed by an international curator, Krisna Sudharma, a contemporary art historian and writer, and director of Nonfrasa Gallery in Ubud, Bali, Indonesia. The relationship with Sudharma forms out of Gertrude's two-year partnership and engagement with DESA (now DESA Projects), organising a program of month-long research residencies for Australian and international artists from 2023 to 2025. This project will continue, evolve and deepen the connections between Gertrude, Nonfrasa Gallery and DESA Projects, and connect contemporary art practices from Bali, Indonesia and Australia.

The premise of this exhibition lies in a phonetic accident, a slip of the tongue between two languages that reveals the tension of our shared geography. On one hand, there is the melange: a mixture, a medley, a distinctively anti-essentialist state where Indonesian and Australian identities blur and entangle. On the other, echoing in the local vernacular, is the Balinese imperative *melahang*: a command to handle with extreme care, to fix what is broken, or to split a material along its natural grain. It is within this friction; between the desire to mix and the necessity to be careful, that this exhibition operates. *Melange* is an act of endurance. It asks us to suspend our desire for easy translation and instead engage with the distance between us.

To navigate this landscape requires a complex form of entanglement. The artists here are not simply blending cultures; they are engaging in a dual motion of fostering and remembering. There is a commitment to nurture a collaborative space that pushes boundaries, yet this forward momentum is inextricably tied to the *tutur*, the oral transmission of folkloric narratives. By resurfacing these old-world messages and placing them within a modern, speculative landscape, the works act as a bridge. They suggest that identity is not a fixed object to be displayed, but a fragile material that must be *melahang*; handled properly, sometimes cracked open, to reveal the mixture inside.

However, we are not here merely to look at the results of this mixture. Drawing from Nicholas Mirzoeff, we are here to grapple with the autonomy of the image, to attempt 'to see how it is itself seen.' These artworks are not passive objects awaiting our approval; they possess their own logic. To understand them is not to grasp them by gesture or definition, or to offer a polite nod of comprehension. It is to acknowledge that by the time we feel we have grasped a moment, the circumstances have already shifted, angling toward a place where we have lost sight.

Henri Bergson asserted that 'a mind is a thing that endures.' One might add that it is our duration that thinks, feels, and sees. The first creation of consciousness is its own speed in time-distance—a causal idea, an idea before the idea. The dialogues in *Melange* navigate this speed. They suggest that when you are living in uncertainty, you are acting for yourself, navigating your own survival in the void. Conversely, when you live in pure contentment, you are often performing for others. There is always a double-edged dagger here: the safety of conformity versus the terror of the void. We must order and disorder this orientation so as not to become hostages of our own emotions. We do not move forward with the 'dead weight' of contentment; we continue because we are led onto a journey of the whimsical, the speculative, and the unknown.

Octopus 26: Melange will be a new model for international exchange through evolving curatorial collaboration, and inter-organisational sharing and cooperation. Distinct from importing an exhibition by Balinese and Indonesian artists, instead, this project takes focus on the modes with which these three unique organisations and initiatives have worked and continue to work, and intersects practices from Bali, Indonesia and Australia. The project draws on through-lines between a range of practices from these distinct yet neighbouring contexts, that already have a degree of connectivity and familiarity.

Curator acknowledgments:

I would like to extend my most grateful acknowledgment to the artists who, from the very beginning, engaged with this project with such genuine encouragement and spirit: Gian Manik, Galih Adika Paripurna, Isadora Vaughan, Kadek Armika, Maharani Mancanagara, Mia Boe, Noviadi Angkasapura, Nyoman Darmawan, Pande Wardina, Sangeeta Sandrasegar, and Todd McMillan.

A profound thank you goes to Mark Feary, who gave me so much of his thought and trust. Thank you for nurturing me so kindly throughout the entire process. To Brigid Moriarty and Tracy Burgess, thank you for making everything feel smooth and so beautifully organised. I am deeply appreciative of Kyle McIntyre for his patience and for being so cooperative during the installation, and to Vicki Nguyen, whose sincerity welcomed me from the moment I arrived; thank you for the references and for being my guide to the city. My thanks also to Sharon Flynn and the wider Gertrude team for their collective effort in bringing this show to life.

Behind the scenes, the Nonfrasa team Lintang Diani and Kartika Septia worked tirelessly; you were both instrumental in preparing every detail. I also thank Gatari Surya Kusuma and Vicky Rosalina for the opportunity and for helping the process move so smoothly for MTN Seni Budaya. My gratitude also extends to Station, Niagara Galleries, Sutton Gallery and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery for their assistance.

On a more personal note, I want to thank Todd McMillan and Sarah Mosca. Your gentle guidance allowed me to delve deeper into the 'odd' and the unknown, opening up possibilities I hadn't yet imagined. Finally, my heart goes to my mother, Ni Made Susilawati, and to Ida Ayu Saras. Your presence is my constant ground, and I thank you for always supporting me.

Curator biography:

Krisna Sudharma is a Bali-based curator and artistic director at Nonfrasa Gallery. He is dedicated to exploring and emphasizing the significance of history and culture, approaching these themes with a modest curiosity. Through various projects and exhibitions—spaces where these perspectives often intersect—he seeks to deepen understanding and foster appreciation. Sudharma has established several collectives, including Nonfrasa, Paras, and his creative studio, Kharma. These initiatives focus on examining the cultural history of Balinese heritage, its aesthetic principles, and their relevance within contemporary disciplines and tools

Acknowledgments:

Gertrude Contemporary acknowledges the Wurundjeri people as the traditional owners and custodians of this land and pays respect to their Elders past and present.

Gertrude is assisted by the Visual Arts, Craft and Design Framework, an initiative of the Australian, State and Territory Governments; and the Victorian Government through Creative Victoria.

The *Octopus* series of exhibitions has been supported by Proclaim since 2002. *Octopus 26: Melange* is supported by DESA Projects, Kemenbud and MTN.



List of works

1. Maharani Mancanagara & Nurrachmat Widyasena in collaboration with Jalan Teater *Jejak Akar Bayang Langit* 2025 found objects, wood, metal, audio 36 x 31 x 33 cm 30 minutes
Courtesy of the artists
2. Galih Adika *How to Measure Luck in Unlucky Situation* 2024 etched stainless steel mounted on acrylic frame 99.5 x 11 x 2.8 cm
Courtesy of the artist
3. Todd McMillan *Megorot* 2025 16mm film transferred to digital file, colour, silent 4 minutes 48 seconds
Courtesy of the artist
4. Noviadi Angkasapura *Untitled* 2025 ink and graphite on paper 12.5 x 33 cm
Courtesy of the artist
5. Nyoman Darmawan *Bersama Angin 1* 2026 ink and acrylic on canvas 20 x 15 cm
Bersama Angin 2 2026 ink and acrylic on canvas 20 x 15 cm
Menikmati Pagi 2026 ink and acrylic on canvas 20 x 15 cm
Sejuknya Hati 2026 ink and acrylic on canvas 20 x 15 cm
Mendayung Rasa 2026 ink and acrylic on canvas 20 x 15 cm
Courtesy of the artist
6. Mia Boe *The Preparations* 2026 oil on linen 152.5 x 101.5 cm
The Preparations 2026 oil and acrylic on linen 6 x 30.5 cm
Courtesy of the artist, Sutton Gallery, Naarm Melbourne and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney
7. Pande Wardina *Arsitektural Tradisi 3.0* 2023 stainless steel, water cooling system, zeloite stones, flower 150 x 100 x 100 cm
Courtesy of the artist
8. Nyoman Darmawan *Benih Kehidupan* 2026 ink and acrylic on canvas 200 x 200 cm
Courtesy of the artist
9. Gian Manik *Marouflage* 2020-2021 oil, acrylic, enamel, pen and plaster on unstretched canvas 435 x 510 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Sutton Gallery, Naarm Melbourne
10. Galih Adika *Petals on The Elder Matriarch* 2025 oil paint, lacquer paint and polyurethane clear coat on aluminium sheet 140 x 174 x 3 cm
Empty Shade 2025 vinyl, epoxy resin, nylon thread and polyurethane clear coat on acrylic sheet 40 x 27 x 4 cm
Courtesy of the artist
11. Isadora Vaughan *Sunrake* 2020 cast gypsum, glass fibre, steel, fixings dimensions variable
Pony 2026 grapple, polyurethane fragments, wore, chainsaw blade, used fruit fly trap, epoxy, plastic, sand, metal clips 93 x 23 x 10 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Station, Naarm Melbourne and Sydney
12. Maharani Mancanagara *Allegory of Cornupia #4* 2026 acrylic on wood 27 x 40 x 3 cm
Allegory of Cornupia #5 2026 acrylic on wood 32 x 27 x 3 cm
Courtesy of the artist
13. Sangeeta Sandrasegar *Within the assembly of the lotus there are no differences (elephant)* 2016 glazed ceramic 66 x 35 x 36 cm
Within the assembly of the lotus there are no differences (hare) 2016 glazed ceramic 66 x 35 x 36 cm
Within the assembly of the lotus there are no differences (snake) 2016 glazed ceramic 66 x 35 x 36 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Niagara Galleries, Naarm Melbourne
14. Noviadi Angkasapura *Untitled* 2026 ballpoint pen, ink, acrylic, coloured pencil and graphite on linen paper 110 x 79 cm
Courtesy of the artist
15. Kadek Armika *Drawing Sculpture* 2026 fibre rod, nylon paper dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist
16. Todd McMillan *Megorot (People)* 2025 HD video, colour, sound 6 minutes 22 seconds
Megorot (Kites) 2025 HD video, colour, sound 6 minutes 22 seconds
Cinematographer: Wayan Martono
Sound design: Putu Septa
This project has been assisted by the Australian Government through Creative Australia, its principal arts investment and advisory body
Courtesy of the artist

