

Leyla Stevens

A Temple in Three Acts

Gertrude Contemporary
22 August – 17 October 2026

In *A Temple in Three Acts*, Leyla Stevens responds to the evolving nature of cultural preservation and inheritance in south Bali amidst the region's urbanisation and environmental decline. Conceived as a series of interconnected acts, the exhibition centres on material and architectural details found in the artist's family temple, and in its expanded location within the family home – which doubles as a hotel – and the surrounding neighbourhood in Kuta.

Temple trees, carvings and shrine decoration are represented through drawings, photographic prints and sculptures cast in beeswax and resin – a material turn within the artist's predominantly lens-based practice. A new video work featuring the artist's family members documents the art of Payas Bali – the elaborate ceremonial attire, hair and makeup worn during rites of passage. The video also honours the legacy of Leyla's grandfather, a goldsmith whose pieces feature throughout the footage. Together, these elements map stories of shifting traditions and inheritance, positioning the temple as both a site of familial memory and an enduring archive of south Bali's rapid cultural and socio-economic shifts.

In a region transformed by mass tourism, temples persist as heritage sites protected by their sacred status. Responding to her family's approach to caring for and preserving their temple, Leyla Stevens' *A Temple in Three Acts* engages with approaches to cultural continuity that challenge the logic of western heritage practices, speculating on what conservation practices might look like when steeped in tropical rain and co-habitation with birds and insects.

Leyla Stevens is an Australian-Balinese artist who works predominately within an expanded documentary and lens-based practice. Her work is informed by ongoing engagements with storied places, archives, cultural geographies and performance lineages through a transcultural lens. Leyla's research-lead practice is centred on collaborative engagements with place and communities, and the recuperation of counter-histories within dominant narratives.

Recent solo exhibition include: *PAHIT MANIS, Night Forest*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, 2024; *A Dance Retold*, Contemporary Art Tasmania, Hobart, 2023; *Sang gunung menyerahkan jejaknya ke laut/The mountain gives way to the sea*, CushCush Gallery, Denpasar, Bali, 2021; and *Labours for Colour*, Mosman Art Gallery, Sydney.

Leyla's work has been exhibited widely through major national and international group exhibitions at Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney; Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney; TarraWarra Museum of Art, Healsville, Victoria; UQ Art Museum, Meanjin Brisbane, Artspace, Sydney, West Space, Naarm Melbourne; Campbelltown Arts Centre, Sydney; Guangdong Times Museum, Guangzhou; and Seoul Museum of Art.

In 2021, Leyla was awarded the prestigious 66th Blake Art Prize for her film *Kidung*, 2019. Her films have been screened internationally including at the 2025 CIRCA Art Prize at Picadilly Lights, London, 2025; *Counter Archives: On Acts of Resistance and Remembrance*, Queer East Film Festival, London 2025; Arma Festival at Arma Museum, Ubud, Bali, 2025; *Queer as Folk/Lore*, OTHERNESS ARCHIVE X QAMERAD, London, 2024; and *View From a Body*, e-flux screening, New York City, 2024.

Leyla works collaboratively as a member of Woven Kolektif and is a lecturer in Fine Arts at Monash University, Naarm Melbourne.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to CushCush Design team: Suriawati Qui Chunyang, Jindee Chua, Putu Adi Atmaja, Wayan Yana Pratama, Raniah Dinda Azzahra.

Thank you to my family: Anang Matana, Ni Made Rai Suma Yulawati, Ni Made Ayuni Dindasari, Ni Putu Chastiana Dian Sawitri (film participants) and collaborator Wayan Martino (camera).

This project has been assisted by the Australian Government through Creative Australia, its principal arts investment and advisory body.

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



Australian Government
Visual Art, Craft and Design Framework



CREATIVE
VICTORIA



List of works

1. *Fat Yogi* 2026

photographic print on fabric

250 x 280 cm
2. *Payasan* 2026

single-channel video, colour, sound

16:00 minutes
3. *Pura Taman Sari I* 2026

beeswax, damar resin, limestone, terracotta brick

dimensions variable
4. *Pura Taman Sari II* 2026

graphite and charcoal on Japanese kozo paper

97 x 82 cm
5. *Pura Taman Sari II* 2026

graphite and charcoal on Japanese kozo paper

97 x 73 cm
6. *Untitled 1* 2026

silver gelatin print

60 x 48 cm
7. *Untitled 2* 2026

silver gelatin print

60 x 48 cm
8. *Pura Taman Sari II* 2026

graphite and charcoal on handmade Balinese banana paper

157 x 108 cm
9. *Pura Taman Sari II* 2026

graphite and charcoal on handmade Balinese banana paper

157 X 108.5 cm
10. *Pura Taman Sari II* 2026

graphite and charcoal on handmade Balinese banana paper

157 x 110 cm
11. *Pura Taman Sari II* 2026

graphite and charcoal on handmade Balinese banana paper

157 x 104 cm
12. *Untitled 3* 2026

silver gelatin print

60 x 48 cm

All works courtesy of the artist

