

Irfan Hendrian

CLOSED



PATI¹

For thousands of years, paper has given us both temporality and permanence. Old manuscripts, letters, and documents serve as means of preservation, captured on a single sheet of paper that carries histories of latent ambiguity. Irfan Hendrian practices in a period now referred to as 'paperless', a world that we imagine to be more sustainable.

In an age that actively promotes the end of paper-based culture, along with other printed materials, Irfan, on the contrary, employs paper as a medium, both intensively and extensively. In actuality, Irfan is not working 'with', 'on', or 'upon' paper, yet he chooses to look 'into' the medium² itself. For him, paper is not merely an artistic tool through which to demonstrate technical articulation, but an artistic necessity³. Its use in his works is particular rather than general, foregrounding the material concreteness of paper itself. His works do not conceal or manipulate the material; rather, they bring forth its specificity as a form, resulting in a new artistic and aesthetic expression. The materiality of paper is neither removed nor transformed into another form, such as *mâché* or pulp. The nature of the paper sheet remains evident throughout his works. The practice of crafting, designing, and structuring his works always originates from units as singular as a single sheet. With the precision of an industrial printmaker, Irfan employs the technique of book-binding, wood-working, die-cutting, and prefabricating through print-based methods. His works are structured as three-dimensional objects, sculptures, or miniatures. This mode of working, closely aligned to engineering practice, also reflects the artist's concern with the accumulation of paper waste in printing environments. Indeed, Irfan's practice challenges a longstanding tendency in Indonesian visual art to 'kill' paper-based works, treating them as inferior and disregarding their materiality.

In art, materiality is understood as the generation of 'meaning' within the material itself. 'Meaning', in this context, is even considered to be intrinsically present in certain materials (metal, marble, glass, plastic, paint, wood, paper, and so on). Artists seek to understand, or perceive, the meaning of the material they have chosen by attending to its concreteness or the substance of its presence while shaping their works. Another term used in this context is 'knowledge', which denotes a way of understanding detached from practical aims, and in classical philosophy, fell within the framework of *theoria* (*theoritika*). Works with certain material qualities – firm, soft, textured, sturdy, fragile, heavy, light, dense, transparent, warm, cold, and even malodorous – affect how they are perceived, giving rise to what is commonly described as a sensory, tactile, and haptic experience.

The use of these terms acknowledges that perception, within an aesthetic experience, is inherently synesthetic: multiple sensory faculties operate simultaneously, without any hierarchy.

Studies on visual cultures increasingly emphasize the approach of materiality and visibility in contemporary visual art. These studies do not confine their focus to 'art' objects grounded in traditional aesthetic claims, such as high/pure/expressive/personal art or low/applied/design/craft/mass-produced art, but encompass all types of visual material around us, including works created by amateurs who are not recognized as artists. In 1987, critic Sanento Yuliman announced the death of the traditional aesthetic in our art environment by employing the term 'a blurring aesthetic'. To Yuliman, there is a tendency toward 'blurring' that venerates a visual aesthetic based on a single sensory modality, namely, the 'purity of vision alone. 'The most evident and relevant factor of visual "impurity", as written by Mieke Bal, 'is the assumption that an object possesses a different meaning when placed in a different discursive context. This is the central idea in art history, yet it hasn't been taken to its radical conclusion because tracing it back to its origins would hinder the discipline'.⁴

Irfan Hendrian came from a design background. His formal study was in graphic design with the tendency to practice as an industrial printmaker, as mentioned earlier. This discipline brought him closer to the practice of designing, creating patterns, specifying dimensions, printing, and, of course, working with various types of paper. The majority of his graphic design projects were related to print, including catalogues, books, and packaging. A designer is, in fact, already (beginning) to create before any visible work appears. The design itself is the work. Design is not a 'pre-work.' There is no such thing as pre-design, as some people assume there is something called 'pre-work'. The elements of a design, such as those we see in fractal patterns, are themselves a design. There is no fixed, definitive, or inherent distinction in artistic or aesthetic value between what is called 'pre-design' and what comes after design. From the perspective of a visual artist/designer/printmaker such as Irfan, this means the dissolution of boundaries between design, art, printed matter, and what is considered a work. A (art) work may appear as a design, rather than as the outcome of a designing process. The design is art in itself, just as any art will pass through, or choose to stop at, the process of designing.

In Irfan's works, we see a strongly articulated three-dimensional form. Form, for Irfan, is evidence of clarity in design.⁵ The forms of his works are three-dimensional objects made entirely out of paper, shaped by the visual-design sensibility of an artist who works 'within' paper.

To work 'within' paper is to bring forth the sensibility and the power of tabula rasa inherent in our perspective or imagination of paper. Because materiality carries 'meaning', the visual of a paper is not merely physical, either in the process of creation or in the experience of seeing the work.

'Forms', in Irfan's works, carry the context of particular memories or experiences from his teenage years. He states

I still clearly remember my visit to a friend's shophouse (ruko) in 2000. The interior was dark, damp, and heavily barricaded – colored windows encased behind trellises, and every point of access secured with multiple keys. Twenty-five years later, this architecture of fear remains unchanged. Modern shophouses are seen to mimic this defensive design, prioritizing fortification over function. These buildings bear the 'scars', which are evident in the Tionghoa community (Chinese-Indonesian). They are the product of centuries of Southern Chinese migration to Southeast Asia, yet over time, they have transformed into something entirely different.

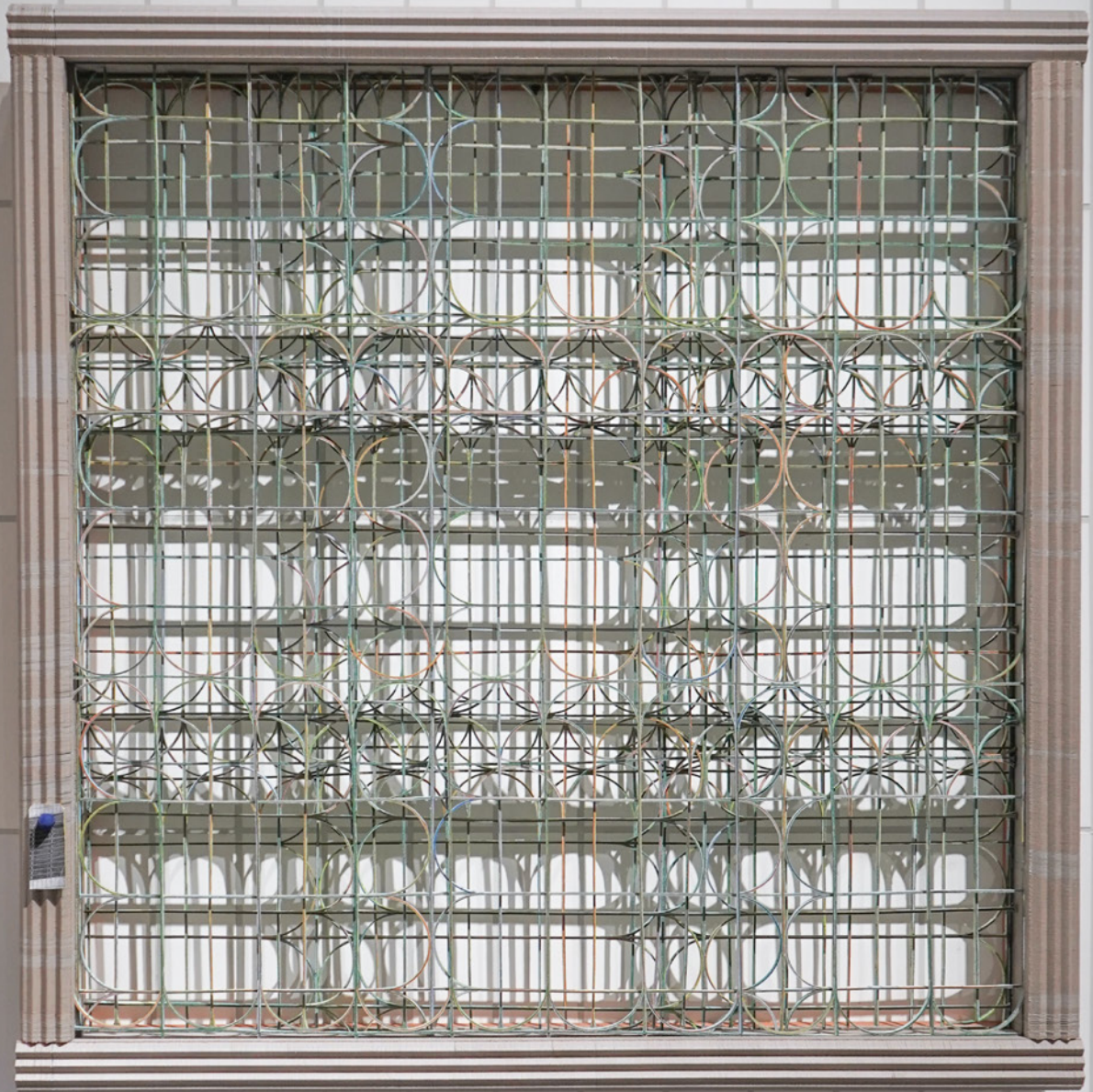
Form—more precisely, shape—reveals the 'other side,' making visible what the work intends or signifies. In a work of art, form works together with the 'other side,' which Luhmann calls 'the unmarked space, the indispensable other side, a reference to possibilities that, in turn, lead to an infinity that cannot be contained in a single place.'⁶ Through the works featured in *Closed*, Irfan seeks to reopen the space of his memories—an 'other side' of form that invites alternative dialogues, revealing aspects beyond the purely artistic shapes.

Irfan also seeks to preserve the purity of paper, as part of the form. While he applies motifs (photographs) and a range of colors to his paper, the final forms primarily display only subtle traces of ink or any elements outside the paper itself.

He says

The photographs in the works were first printed in hundreds of copies using risography, which causes each copy to shift slightly. These layers were then sliced and cut by machine before being finally rearranged. In the work's final structure, only traces of ink along the edges of the papers are visible, manifesting history as a delicate, layered artifact.

The unmarked space in form, which renders the work more 'visible' as Irfan intends, is what he refers to as context, 'history as a layered artifact'.



Chinatown Window Sample: Oblong 2, 2025
risograph and dye cut on layers of paper
91 x 90 x 12 cm



The trellis shapes, in this case, carry a certain context or historical framework. This framework itself is treated as a form of reality, encompassing Irfan's memories and experiences of the anxieties faced by the Tionghoa minority in Indonesia. This community has been targeted multiple times during ethnic riots in Indonesia's post-independence period. In Bandung, a racial riot targeting the Tionghoa community occurred in 1963 and 1973. When the reformation movement that ousted former President Soeharto erupted in 1998, Bandung was one of the cities that remained safe. Then, in August 2025, week-long protests erupted in several cities, demanding the dissolution of the House of Representatives (DPR). Several residences of officials, including Ahmad Sahroni, a member of the DPR, and Sri Mulyani, now former Minister of Finance, were looted by the crowd. Although the looting did not happen in Bandung, 'many shophouse owners in Bandung's Chinatown took precautions by closing their shops,' Irfan said.

He stated, 'The Tionghoa people still find it difficult to trust the government that is supposed to guarantee their safety...They stay alert to possible unrest, while also wanting to settle down comfortably and build homes and a proper future for their families.'

Stereotypes about being Tionghoa emerged during the colonial period, crystallized from various representations of the Tionghoa people since their waves of migration to the Nusantara in the 15th century. In Dutch-Indies narrative prose from 1880 to 1950, which depicted various aspects of Tionghoa life, as gold and tin laborers, merchants, officers, small shopkeepers, members of associations (kongsi), and so on, they were portrayed as people who were diligent, hardworking, friendly, clever, loyal, strong, brave, and cowardly. One of the oldest Dutch-language texts, from 1598, about the Nusantara, for example, provides a particular and nuanced depiction of the Tionghoa people:

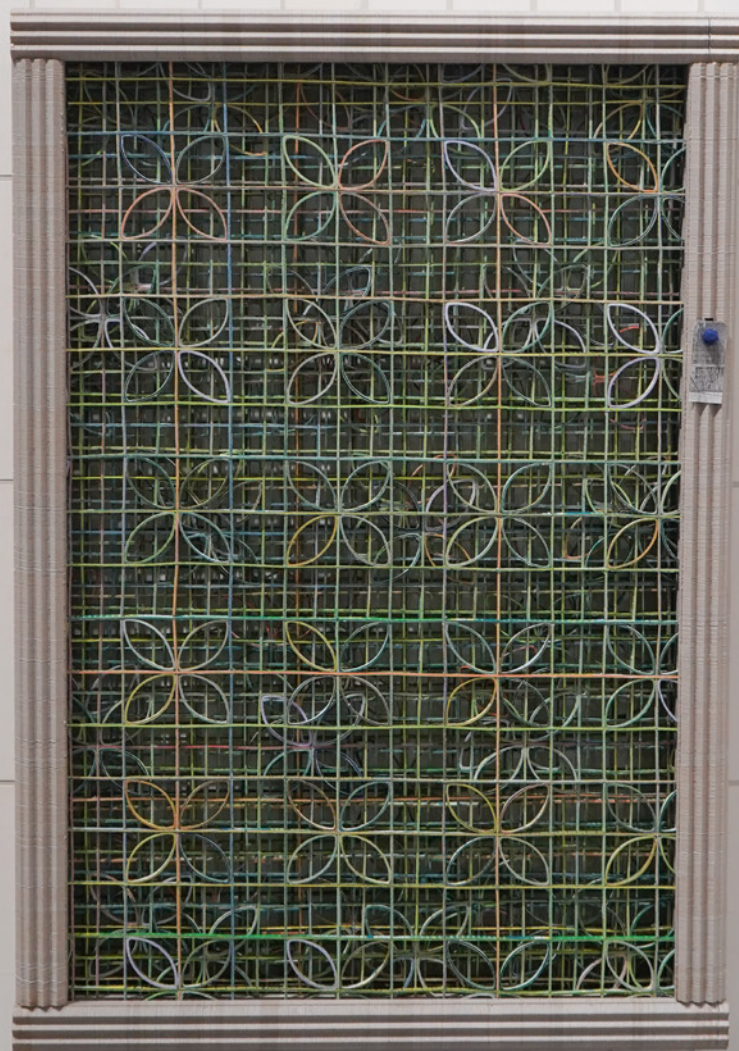
The Chinese resided in a designated district, enclosed by sturdy fences and a moat, where they owned the finest houses in the city. They were regarded as highly shrewd, constantly seeking to amass wealth, and with a taste for fine food.⁷

Chinatown Window Sample: Scroll 2, 2025
risograph and dye cut on layers of paper
30 x 96 x 12 cm





Chinatown Window Sample: Kawung 2, 2025
risograph and dye cut on layers of paper
92 x 63 x 12 cm



This stereotype later fueled racism: a sentiment in which one group harbors negative feelings toward another group of a different race. Yet, misperceptions about race are frequently driven more by 'the role of favoritism within one's own group than by animosity toward external groups.' This favoritism depends on interests—on when a person, from a certain group, is considered part of the 'group' or the 'outsider'⁸. For instance, the Dutch regarded a Chinese individual as belonging to the 'in-group' if they courageously upheld solidarity within their community. By contrast, that same individual was seen as part of the 'outsider' if they acted as an intruder⁹. The Dutch East Indies authorities instituted the *passenstelsel/wijkenstelsel*, especially targeting the Tionghoa community, and enforced separate laws for Europeans, Inlanders, and Chinese to prevent intermixing, which was considered detrimental to colonial rule. The *passenstelsel* functioned as a travel permit controlling intercity movement, whereas the *wijkenstelsel* confined the Chinese population to cities that had established Chinatowns. Ironically, during the New Order period (1966–1998), only the Tionghoa were formally 'acknowledged' as Indonesian citizens, as they possessed the official papers required.

The trellis objects in the series *Chinatown Window Sample* (2025) showcase a beautiful visual; these motifs 'follow trends' and are pleasing to the eye, yet on the other hand, they are part of what Irfan calls the 'architecture of fear.' Each layer of trellis added within the sturdy frame signifies the deepening political trauma experienced by the Tionghoa, a latent condition of 'growing pains'¹⁰. The intricate, layered interweaving of trellis motifs and colors reflects the complexity, dilemmas, and uncertainty faced by the community.

Irfan shared a note from his research :

Each political upheaval means another layer of defense. Even in Bandung—which was considered a relatively peaceful city, spared from the worst of the 1998 unrest—barricades remained everywhere. My research reveals that iron trellises in Bandung proliferated rapidly during the 1970s and 1980s, representing a delayed architectural response to the racial riots of 1963 and 1973.



Chinatown Window Sample: Seroja, 2025
risograph and dye cut on layers of paper
59 x 58 x 12 cm

Chinatown Window Sample: Moroccan 2, 2025
risograph and dye cut on layers of paper
99 x 53.5 x 8 cm

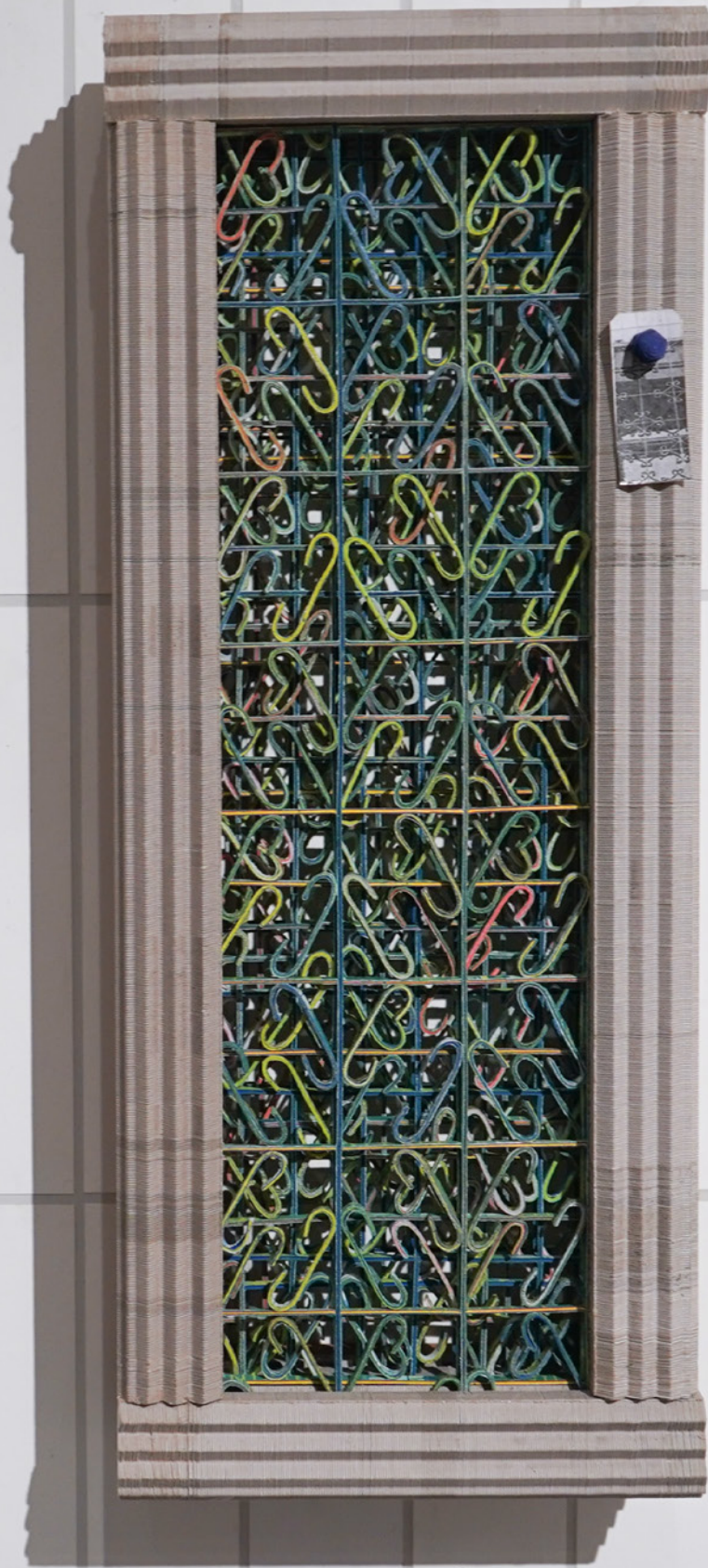




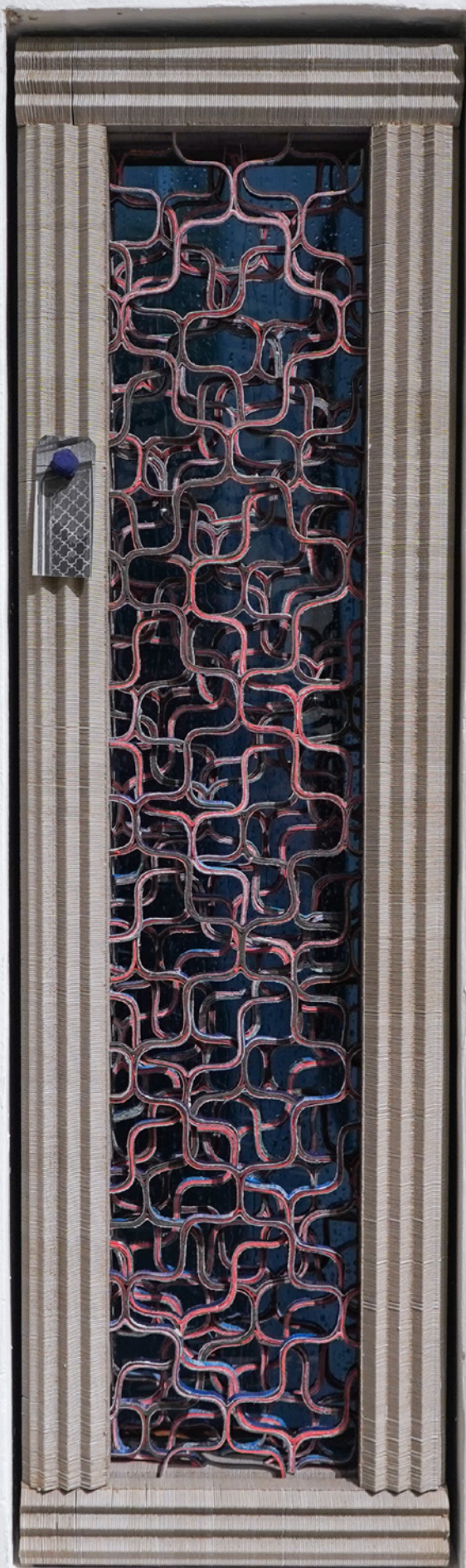
Chinatown Window Sample: Circle, 2025
risograph and dye cut on layers of paper
41 x 71 x 12 cm



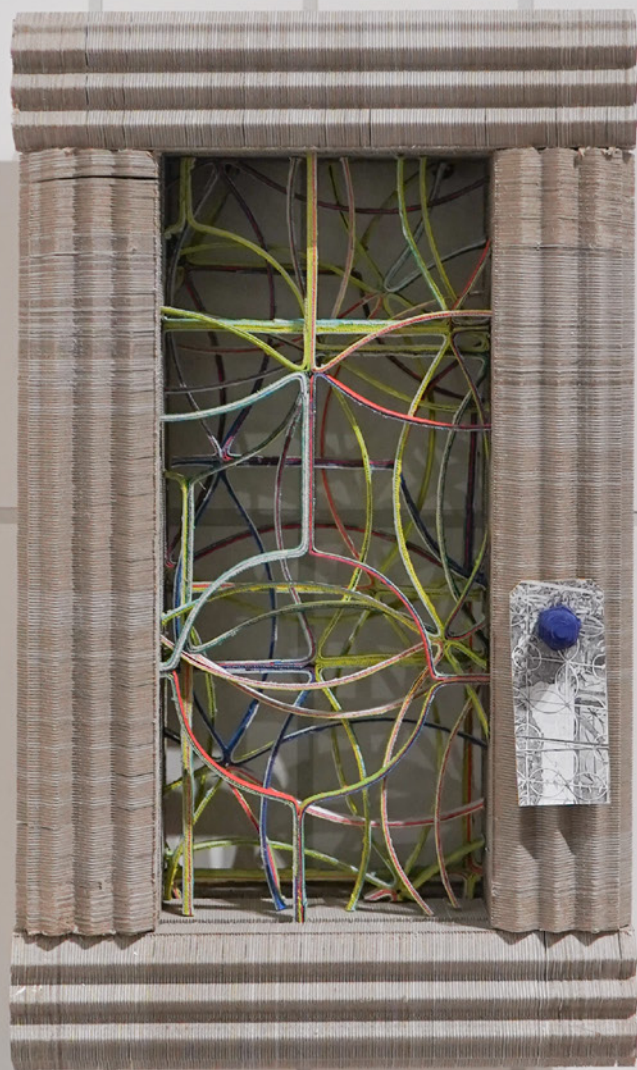
Chinatown Window Sample: Waterfall, 2025
risograph and dye cut on layers of paper
59 x 58 x 12 cm



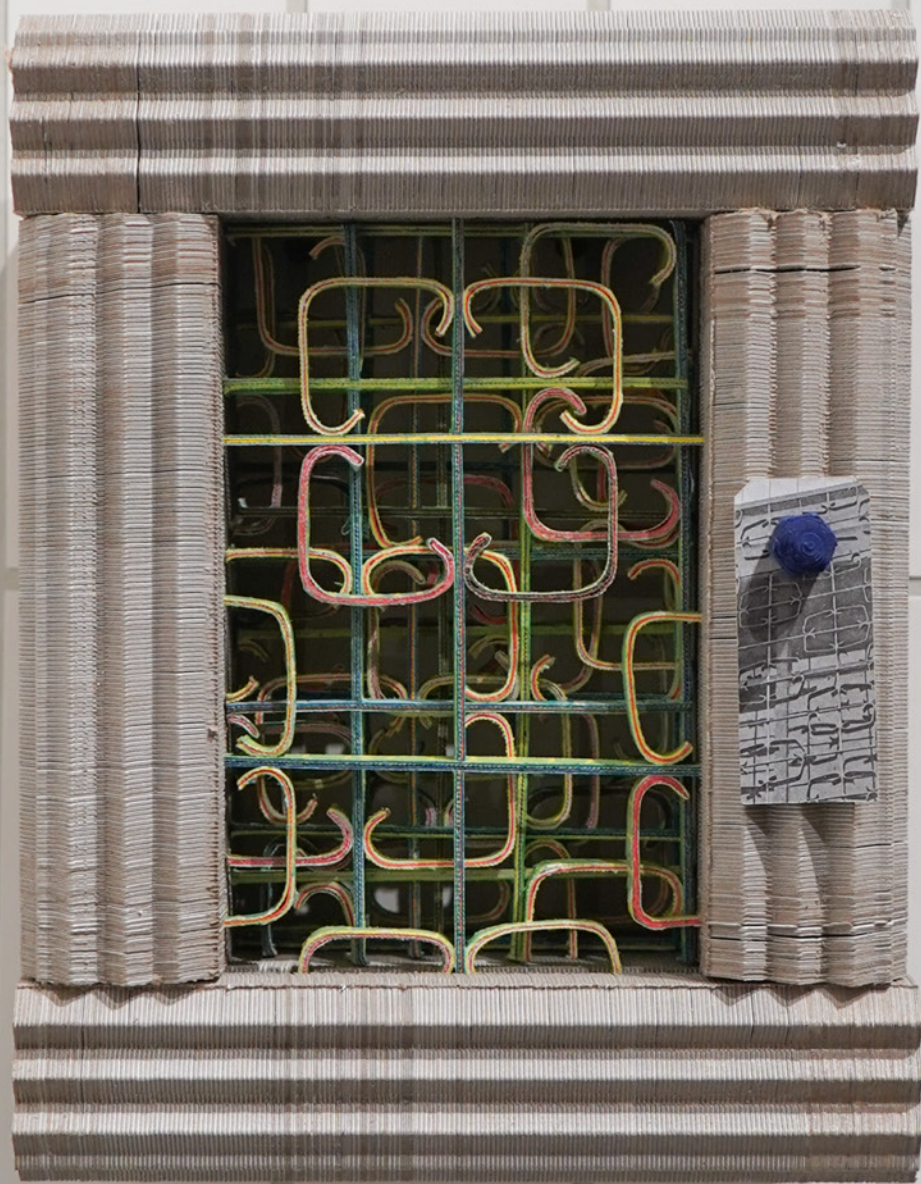
Chinatown Window Sample:
Generic 2, 2025
risograph and dye cut on
layers of paper
63 x 25 x 12 cm



Chinatown Window Sample: Moroccan, 2025
risograph and dye cut on layers of paper
79 x 22 x 12 cm

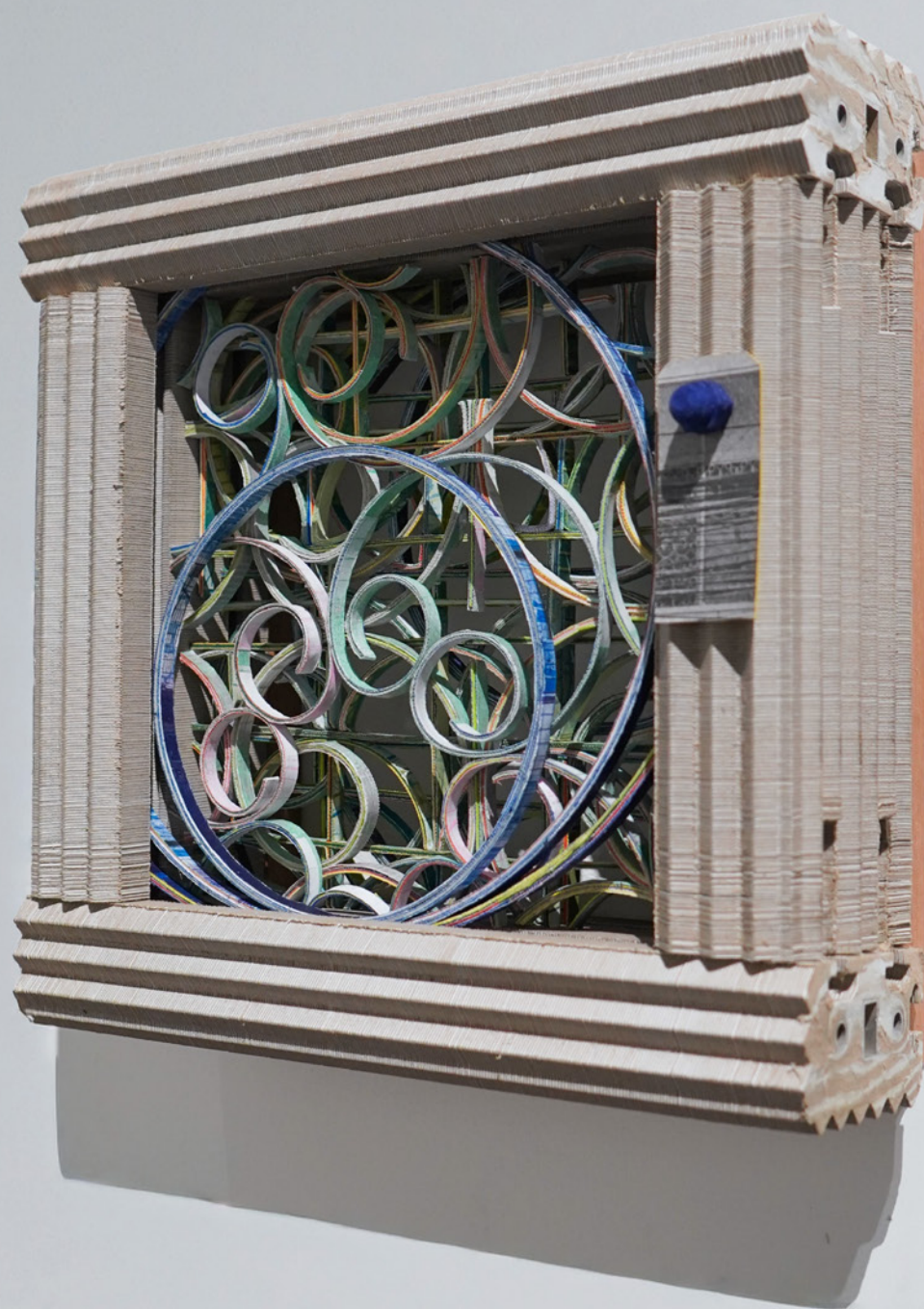


Chinatown Window Sample: Ogee, 2025
risograph and dye cut on layers of paper
34 x 20 x 12 cm



Chinatown Window Sample: Generic 3, 2025
risograph and dye cut on layers of paper
26 x 20 x 12 cm

Chinatown Window Sample: Scrap, 2025
risograph and dye cut on layers of paper
30 x 29 x 12 cm





Chinatown Window Sample: Pearl, 2025
risograph and dye cut on layers of paper
41 x 100 x 12 cm



Chinatown Window Sample: Scroll 1, 2025
risograph and dye cut on layers of paper
41 x 100 x 12 cm



Chinatown Window Sample: Kawung 3, 2025
risograph and dye cut on layers of paper
63 x 25 x 12 cm

Other objects of trauma and paranoia are the various forms and types of locks installed on closed doors, as seen in the series *Paper Thin Protection* (2025). Irfan arranges locks and additional security devices in a row on doors, representing the urgency and vigilance of the homeowners. Other elements in the configuration of his work related to this context are the (key) 'hooks.' The key hooks are presented like stacks of long 'crossbeams,' with stacks of keys hanging in rows. In reality, the iron trellis on windows, doors with barricades and locks, and other security devices inside the house actually provide only a vague sense of security for its occupants. For Irfan, the thin materiality of the paper and the refined form of his work are meant, ironically, to reveal the fragility of these physical security measures.

The aesthetic qualities we observe in these artworks emerge from the interplay between form and medium. The coherence between the two can be a sign of a work's artistic success, while at the same time serving as an 'impossible evidence' because the medium itself contains nearly limitless possibilities. This paradox of coherence has been used by writers typically labeled 'modernist' to examine the boundaries of art's social function.¹¹ In this regard, the relationship between form and medium, material and meaning, or thing and sign can be observed in the physical presence of Irfan's works, allowing us to consider their social function. These relationships move in two directions, forming a state of double presence that cannot be reduced to a single pole.¹² The 'innocence,' fragility, and simplicity of these paper objects signal irony, and at the same time, the strength of the material's 'durability,' which Irfan seeks to convey.

He explained that several of his works were created using photographs of the 1998 riots, which had been wiped out during the 2024 presidential election. Irfan reprinted the photographs he had once collected, aware that there was always a chance they could be removed. 'In this case, paper becomes the most enduring medium,' he said. The paradox between fragility and durability opens up the possibility for an appreciative engagement between the viewer (subject) and the artwork (object). To cite some phrases concerning the nature of Minimalist works: 'objects capture subjectivity in a space where that subjectivity is not present'¹³. In this context, the association with the work develops within the framework of events, history, and memory that Irfan presents: trauma, anxiety, vigilance, and paranoia. A life overshadowed by 'death'. These works function together as objects that establish a context, revealing a 'side' beyond what we see as merely visual artistry.



Paper Thin Protection, 2025
dye cut & ballpoint on layers of paper & magnet
Variable dimension

Pseudo Protection (2026) is a series of 'graffiti' on wide, layered sheets of paper, made to resemble intact corrugated metal sheets, a material commonly used for emergency fences, which in the work are depicted as having been burned. Claims of indigeneity or authenticity subtly overlap with a collage of photographs of house interiors, guides for choosing attractive colors, and paint brands, all overlaid with blackened 'dust.' *Closed* invites us to open our eyes and examine more closely the shadows within the 'scars' that will remain in memory.

Hendro Wiyanto Budiman
January 2026

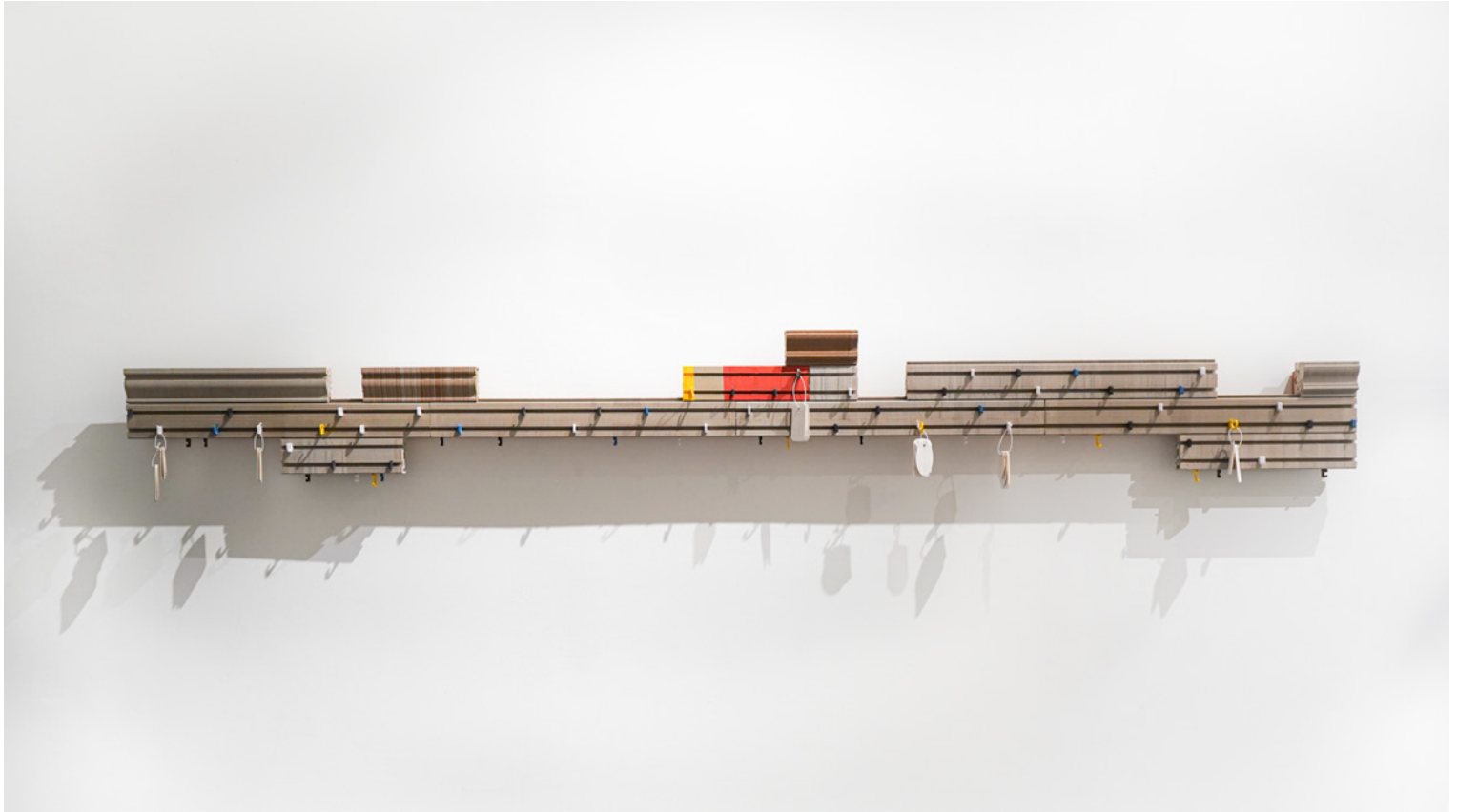
Pseudo Protection, 2025
collage & spray paint on layers of paper
195 x 196 x 10 cm





[REDACTED] *censored, 2025*
layers of risography on paper on board
190 x 190 x 5 cm





Paranoia Holder, 2025
dye cut on layers of paper, wood, aluminium
35 x 282 x 12 cm



Trelis trend 2025: The Sahroni, 2025
layers of risography on paper on board and iron bars
51 x 39 x 9 cm



Trellis Trend 2025: The Sri Mulyani, 2025
layers of risography on paper on board and iron bars
51 x 39 x 9 cm



Emas Beras, 2025
deboss and dye cut on paper
15.5 x 5.5 x 2 cm



ARTIST BIO

Irfan Hendrian

b. 1987

Lives and works in Indonesia

An artist and printmaker by profession, Irfan Hendrian has consistently explored and pushed paper's formal qualities as well as its sculptural potential. In Hendrian's hands, paper is no longer merely a planar support for representation; it becomes both pigment and canvas, shaped into objects and installations that have grown in intricacy and scale throughout Hendrian's artistic practice.

He has held several solo shows; these include *Incognito*, The Arts House, Singapore (2024); *Incognito* at Art Jakarta, Jakarta, Indonesia (2022); *Constructed _scape* at Sullivan+Strumpf Singapore (2020); *Some Other Matter* at Aloft at Hermes, Singapore (2019); *SANS*, at Sullivan+Strumpf Singapore (2018); and *Terenne* at Jeonbuk Museum of Art, South Korea (2016). Hendrian's works are in the collection of Deutsche Bank, Germany; Jeonbuk Museum of Art, South Korea; Museum MACAN, Indonesia; Singapore Art Museum, Singapore; and Tumurun Museum, Indonesia.

Footnote

1. *Pati*, in the Javanese (primbon) language, has several meanings, such as “a trial that must be faced” and “a warning to be cautious,” in addition to its primary meaning, “death.”

2. The medium that is present in all works of art is not something that is physically visible. It can be understood as “the sum total of possible ways of crossing form boundaries (distinctions) from within toward the outside and of discovering fitting indications on the other side that stimulate further crossings by virtue of their own boundaries.” The presence of a medium that is not perceptible to the eye allows it to operate only on the other side—something unindicated—becoming a kind of attractive force that draws observation further. (Juliane Rebentisch, *Aesthetics of Installation Art*, Sternberg Press, 2012, p. 87)

3. Aesthetic form keeps its medium present. The space marked within a formal artistic work preserves the unmarked space of that medium—that is, its various possibilities as the other side of the artistic form. Aesthetic specificity lies in the relation or collaboration between medium and form.

Accordingly, aesthetic form should not be misunderstood as the product of an artistic production process that, once considered complete, merely awaits identification by the viewer. As Luhmann suggests, the aesthetic form instead emerges within the process of observation. Materiality is no longer experienced as something literally material in nature. (Juliane Rebentisch, *ibid.*, pp. 87–88)

4. Mieke Bal, *Visual Essentialism and the Object of Visual Culture* (2003) <https://konspektikaust.wordpress.com/2012/02/16/mieke-bal-visual-essentialism-and-the-object-of-visual-culture/>, 12 Januari 2026

5. The influence of the Bauhaus perspective is evident here, as Irfan Hendrian himself has acknowledged. His use of paper, in fact, appears unfashionable; such a term never existed in the vocabulary of Bauhaus artists. Bauhaus works emphasized precision, sensible design, and were, by their nature, contemporaneous with their time. Art combined research, craftsmanship, science, technology, and intuition, but the central question was design—namely, a design that integrates beauty and function. Irfan named his studio Werkbound, after the organization that once commissioned Walter Gropius, the founder of the Bauhaus. (*Bauhaus and Bauhaus People*, edited by Eckhard Neumann, 1993, pp. 176, 178)

6. "The unmarked space is the indispensable other side, a reference to possibilities that, for their part, point to an infinity that cannot be contained in one place." In interpreting works of art, we return to their materiality, but not as something that is simply "given." Materiality presents itself as something dense with meaning and as provoking new formations of interrelations among its elements. In works of art, not only the production of meaning takes place, but also its subversion. These two processes—production and subversion in meaning-making—are intertwined and give form to one another. Luhmann argues that art does not exist as something in and of itself; constitutively, art is a "social medium." (Juliane Rebentisch, *Aesthetics of Installation Art*, Sternberg Press, 2012, pp. 86, 90)

7. See Widjajanti W. Dharmowijono, *Bukan Takdir: Kisah Pencitraan Orang Tionghoa di Nusantara* (Ombak Publishing, 2021), p. xiv.

8. Idem, p. 18.

9. Idem, p. 224-225.

10. The alliance between the Dutch colonial authorities and the Chinese population up to the end of the nineteenth century was regarded as mutually beneficial. The Chinese provided advantages to the colonial economy due to their extensive knowledge of both regional and internal trade. This interest-based alliance collapsed in the final decade of that century, when the Chinese were no longer seen as a stabilizing buffer. The colonizers' growing concern for the underdeveloped conditions of the indigenous population created circumstances in which the Chinese could easily be made scapegoats. The period from 1900 to 1942 was a difficult one for both sides, marked by resistance from the Chinese themselves and anxiety on the part of the colonial authorities. (See Mona Lohanda, *Growing Pains: The Chinese and the Dutch in Colonial Java, 1890–1942*, Yayasan Cipta Loka Caraka, 2002, p. 18.)

A well-known Dutch divide-and-rule policy was the appointment of the Chinese as tax collectors, which led to their being hated as exploiters by the indigenous population.

11. A work of art that is considered successful demonstrates an impression of coherence drawn from the almost limitless possibilities of its own medium. Luhmann refers to this as evidence that cannot be directly pointed to, or "improbable eviden(t)ness." The social function of art lies in its capacity to organize possibilities within the boundless fields of possibility of a medium. (Juliane Rebentisch, idem, p. 88.)

12. "[...] Any object becomes aesthetic in a constant passage between two poles: between form and content, or, more precisely, between material and meaning, or between thing and sign. It is important to note that this passage carried out by aesthetic experience runs in both directions: from thing into sign, and from sign back into thing." (See Juliane Rebentisch, "7 Negations: Against Aesthetic Affirmationism," in *Aesthetics and Contemporary Art*, edited by Armen Avanessian & Luke Skrebowski, Sternberg Press, 2011, p. 59.)

13. The openness of a work of art to its audience does not undermine its autonomy. The autonomy of a work of art does not mean it is free from the actual presence of its viewers. Autonomy is, rather, realized and continually renewed within the actual process taking place between subject and object, between viewer and artwork. As in Minimalist works, "one could see that this process might indeed entail registering a quasi-subjectivity in the objecthood of those works that seems to make itself felt precisely to the degree to which these objects pretend to have been purged of all subjectivity. Indeed those objects seem to record subjectivity at the site of its absence." (See Juliane Rebentisch, "7 Negations: Against Aesthetic Affirmationism," p. 56–57.)



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