

ara contemporary Presents Iwan Effendi's Solo Exhibition *Once Was*

Jakarta, 2025 — 'Once Was' continues Iwan Effendi's artistic practice, which draws from his background as a puppeteer, incorporating both the core principles and the emotional resonance of puppetry. Upon viewing, the exhibition highlights the contrast between stillness and movement, showcasing a moving image, paintings, and drawings on paper. However, the focus is on the memory of the presence, as the works on paper record traces of the existence and movements of his moving images, which are erased and redrawn repeatedly. As a result, abstract imprints suggest that these movements have left a lasting mark—something tangible, yet still connected to the action itself. Beyond the subjects depicted, Effendi is equally interested in the traces left behind by the layered history of action, seen as an ongoing dialogue between permanence and impermanence, the visible and the invisible. Each iteration builds upon the last, not to cover it, but to coexist.

*'Sometimes a sheet of paper will end up as a grey mess after drawings have happened and then been erased and erased and erased'* - William Kentridge

The title of the exhibition suggests elements of memory and transformation, particularly in a puppeteer's process of capturing, embodying, and ultimately translating a story and identity into a puppet. Part of Effendi's process leaves no room for a backward glance; he erases what he has drawn on the paper, only to cover it with the next scene, making it impossible to return to the origin of the trace. His new body of work concludes with a series of self-portraits on canvas, in which he transforms himself into objects — a conversation between movement and stillness, the animate and the inanimate — mirroring the relationship between puppeteer and puppet. At its core, *Once Was* is the language of memory: it implies something that once existed, but has since transformed.

### About Iwan Effendi

As the Co-Founder and Co-Artistic Director of Yogyakarta's Papermoon Puppet Theatre, Iwan Effendi brings puppet characters to life with their narratives and emotions. His artistic practice spans puppet-making, painting, drawing, and performance, all grounded in a fascination with the memories and stories that each puppet embodies, even when their expressions remain static. This approach invites the viewers to have the authority to interpret it, and by doing so, they find reflections of themselves in the puppets.

His solo exhibitions to date include *articulate*, Mizuma Gallery Tokyo Japan (2024); preload at Mizuma Gallery Singapore (2023); *Daydreaming Face* at Ruci Art, Jakarta (2021); *DRAWING withdrawing* (2020) and *Face to Face* at Mizuma Gallery, Singapore (2019); *Eye of the Messenger* at Yavuz Gallery, Singapore (2011); and *Two Shoes for Dancing* at Valentine Willie Fine Art (Project Room), Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (2009). Iwan has also participated in group exhibitions in Bulgaria, Singapore, Australia, the Netherlands, the Philippines, France, Japan, the USA, and Mexico. He has undertaken residencies with the Museum of Art in Kochi, Japan (2015); Federation Square, Melbourne, Australia (2014); and Asian Cultural Council in New York, USA (2009-10) researching puppetry, visual, and performance arts.

### About ara contemporary

Established in 2025, the gallery's name ara comes from the abbreviation of the founders' names: Arlin, Ramadanti, Chandra. Beyond that, the word holds a layered meaning that aligns with the gallery's philosophy. In Sanskrit, ara means a place of shelter, adaptability, and consideration of others. These values are at the heart of ara contemporary, shaping its role in the arts community.



The gallery's focus will center on artists, from emerging to established, whose practices engage with the context of Southeast Asia, exploring the connections between immediacy and global discourse. Founded with the mission to thoughtfully advocate for Southeast Asian artists, ara contemporary aims to serve as a dynamic platform for dialogue and collaboration and to contribute to the burgeoning art scene in the region and beyond.

***Once Was* by Iwan Effendi**  
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ara contemporary  
Jalan Tulodong Bawah I no 16  
Senayan, Kebayoran Baru,  
Jakarta Selatan  
Jakarta 12190, Indonesia  
[www.aracontemporary.id](http://www.aracontemporary.id)  
[@aracontemporary.id](mailto:@aracontemporary.id)

For further information and inquiries, please contact:  
Citra Utami  
Gallery Manager  
+62 821-2409-6226  
E: [citra@aracontemporary.id](mailto:citra@aracontemporary.id)