

BLACK—HUT, BLACK—HUT

AN ARCHITECTURAL INSTALLATION
BY BOEDI WIDJAJA

QAGOMA is delighted to partner with the Singapore Art Museum on a co-commissioned work for both APT9 and the 2019 Singapore Biennale. Singapore artist Boedi Widjaja, whose unique architectural installation also pays homage to his childhood in Indonesia, has created a site-specific project for QAG that will travel to Singapore next year. **Reuben Keehan** explores the influences that have shaped the artist's practice, as well as the confluence of features that can be found in urban design in Singapore, Indonesia and Queensland.

Boedi Widjaja is no stranger to thinking across localities. The experiences of displacement, isolation, travel, and bridging multiple cultures have defined much of his practice. Widjaja was born in Solo City, Indonesia, to ethnically Chinese parents. To avoid the racial tensions under President Suharto's New Order, he was sent to Singapore as a young boy, where he lived apart from his parents in a succession of foster homes. His works often refer obliquely to this autobiographical history or to the feelings of anxiety and estrangement he experienced.

Widjaja trained in Sydney as an architect and also has a background in graphic design; the techniques, materials and tools of drawing have subsequently become a defining element of his artistic practice. This is expressed through a broad range of media, from photography and text to compelling installations and 'live art', with an emphasis on process and bodily engagement.

Widjaja's ongoing 'Imaginary Homeland' series, which he began in 2016, examines the impact of photographic images on memory, and the forming and re-forming of personal narratives. These installations centre on drawings created from press images of Indonesian leaders in the pre- and post-Suharto years, rendered in negative so that they can only be viewed in positive through a mobile phone camera. Meanwhile, the 'Path' series 2012–present, triggered by the artist's adoption of Singaporean citizenship, explores notions of displacement and identity in a

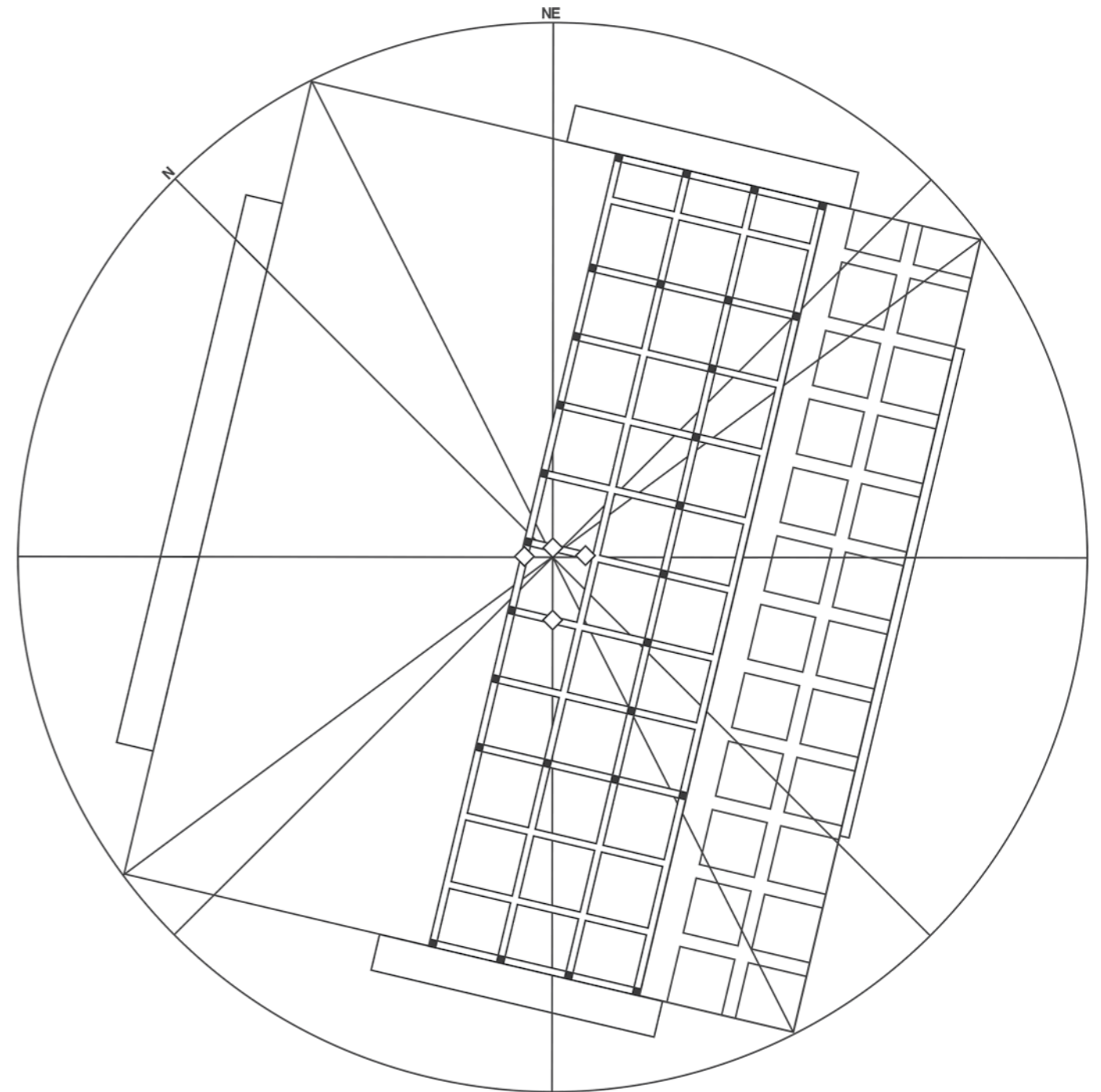
global Asian city through a range of outcomes, including live art, drawing, text, photography and video.

With his 2016 installation *Black—Hut*, Widjaja began to shift his attention to the physical structures of home. The work drew on the materials of the homes he encountered in Singapore, as well as the process of transformation he underwent as a child away from his parents. Singapore's urban design is notable for the concrete Housing Development Board (HDB) apartment blocks that house more than 80 per cent of the city-state's population. Accordingly, *Black—Hut* incorporated a tinted cement render, treated with salt, whose lines slowly emerged over the course of the exhibition. The work also included blocks of petrified wood sourced from Indonesia, a reference both to the country of his birth and to a material that has undergone an implacable process of change.

The first iteration of *Black—Hut*, *Black—Hut* 2018–19 at QAGOMA intensifies these autobiographical references and introduces an array of corresponding features between regional architectures. Widjaja effectively extends the overhang of QAG Gallery 2 into Gallery 5 below. The work can be viewed from above, as well as entered from below, where the artist has created a 'space underneath', inspired by the open, ground-floor community space under HDB blocks known as a 'void deck'. The work actually departs from Widjaja's memory of accounts of the house that was

'Widjaja trained in Sydney as an architect and ... the techniques, materials and tools of drawing have subsequently become a defining element of his artistic practice'

Right Diagram for *Black—Hut*, *Black—Hut* 2018–19 / Courtesy: The artist





built for Sir Stamford Raffles, founder of modern Singapore, at what is now known as Fort Canning Hill. That house featured a thatched wooden roof in the Malay *attap* style, but, in his early research, Widjaja had understood the whole residence to have been constructed as an *attap* house. He was also struck by the similarities between the *attap* (with its raised floor), the Javanese *joglo* and the Brisbane Queenslander home, particularly the resemblance between the space beneath the Queenslander and the HDB void deck, invoked in APT9.

The underside of *Black—Hut, Black—Hut* includes a number of elements that recall Widjaja's childhood. The work's supporting poles are painted in the same turquoise that features prominently in the architecture of Solo City, including the iconic Surakarta Palace and the fixtures of Widjaja's childhood house. The four central pillars hover above four blocks of Indonesian petrified wood, paying homage to the way that the structure supports the ceiling of the *joglo* house. At the centre point

of the installation, which Widjaja has carefully aligned with the centre of the room, a column of sound descends from a directional speaker, a digitally treated recording of a Javanese gamelan that can only be heard when the viewer moves into its path.

On the upper side of the work, a number of intersecting diagonal lines drawn between the corners of the gallery space overlay the cardinal points of the compass. The central columns and their petrified wood foundations also face north in a nod to the ideal orientation of Queenslander houses. This subtle gesture locates the work in a specific geographic and architectural context ahead of its second iteration in a new site in Singapore — a homecoming of sorts for an artist with a complex understanding of home.

Reuben Keehan is Curator, Contemporary Asian Art.

Boedi Widjaja's installation work will be on display at QAG as part of APT9 until 28 April 2019.

‘The four central pillars hover above four blocks of Indonesian petrified wood, paying homage to the way that the structure supports the ceiling of the *joglo* house’

Above Boedi Widjaja at his childhood home in Solo, Indonesia, 2012 / Photograph: Audrey Koh / Image courtesy: The artist

Opposite Installation view of Boedi Widjaja's *Black—Hut, Black—Hut* 2018–19 / Co-commissioned with Singapore Art Museum for APT9 and Singapore Biennale 2019 / Photograph: Chloë Cattistemon

