

## PRESS CONTACT

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## Helwaser Gallery presents *Boedi Widjaja: Declaration of*

Opening Reception: **Wednesday, September 11, 2019 from 6-8pm**

Exhibition Dates: **September 11–November 7, 2019**

Artist Performance & Conversation with Boon Hui Tan: **Saturday, Sep 14, 2-4pm**

Literary Reading: **Monday, Sep 16, 7-9 pm**

Helwaser Gallery is pleased to present *Declaration of*, the first solo presentation in New York of works by artist **Boedi Widjaja** (b. 1975, Java, Indonesia). The exhibition presents recent and latest works from the artist's *Imaginary Homeland* series (2015–ongoing) encompassing drawings, photography, and installation. For this exhibition, Widjaja focuses on press photographs taken during the Cold War of Indonesia's founding figures, Sukarno and Suharto. Having left Indonesia at a young age, the artist's perception of his former country is constructed mostly through images, and the imagined. Widjaja's works re-examine these images, connecting them with ideas of embodiment, gaze and memory. *Declaration of* will be accompanied by a catalogue, with an essay by Shona Mei Findlay, who currently serves as curator for Asia Programs at KADIST, and an interview with Annie Jael Kwan, an independent curator and researcher based in London.

A highlight of the exhibition is the newly commissioned work, *九百九十九朵玫瑰* (*Nine Hundred and Ninety-Nine Roses*) (2019), an installation comprising nine small-scale pinhole photos, alongside nine pecis<sup>1</sup> mounted onto a tripod stand. This series of pinhole photos captured then-President Sukarno's meetings with leaders of the three power blocs—Russia, China, and the US—at the time of the Cold War. Using the methods of the camera obscura, these images were created by exposing photo-sensitive paper to light passing through a small hole made on the top of each peci.

The exhibition also presents two large-scale negative drawings. *等著你回來* (*Waiting for you*) (2016), references a photograph taken during a meeting between Sukarno and the People's Republic of China's first Premier and Foreign Minister, Zhou Enlai in 1965. *帶我去月球* (*Fly me to the moon*) (2019) alludes to a different image depicting Sukarno sitting alongside the 35th US president, John F. Kennedy. Collectively, these drawings reflect on the legacy of Sukarno and his role in veering a newly-independent nation through the fraught geo-political terrain of the time. During his presidency, Sukarno

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<sup>1</sup> A peci is a popular and widely-worn type of headgear in Indonesia, Malaysia and broader Southeast Asia. In Indonesia, it has been adopted as a symbol of solidarity with nationalist aspirations cultivated by Sukarno.

had attempted to balance the sympathies of opposing factions that aligned themselves with the two power blocs, China and the US. This ultimately led to his own removal from power in 1967 by Major General Suharto.

For these negative drawings, the viewer is invited to view the works through the camera of a mobile device, with the classic invert settings turned on, revealing the positive images of the work.

In addition, a series of archival prints on diasec are on view: 因為我的心中有你 (*Keeping you in my heart*) (2015); 希望你能對我說你愛我 (*Please say you love me*) (2015); and 就是找不到往你的方向 (*Can't find my way to you*) (2015). Adopting a process-based approach within his practice, Widjaja further put his negative drawings of Sukarno and Suharto through analogue studio photography methods, resulting in a body of images that is removed from their original contexts. These works, as well as other works in the exhibition, are named after the lyrics of 1980s Mandarin pop songs; mostly about heartbreak and melodrama, the songs were popular radio selections that the artist listened to growing up.

This exhibition will include an outdoor installation of ten flags on the gallery terrace. Titled *Art is only a continuation of war by other means (flags)* (2019), the work is the artist's latest iteration of his outdoor photographic installation, *Art is only a continuation of war by other means* (2016) that was presented at the 1st Yinchuan Biennale. On each flag is a distinct composition of red and blue graphics which represent an encoding of words. Together, the flags read "Art is only a continuation of war by other means," a reference to "Diplomacy is only a continuation of war by other means"—a famous Clausewitzian quote credited to Premier Zhou, as reported by American journalist Edgar Snow in 1954. The artist transposed the short and long clicks of the Morse Code into abstract compositions of red and blue. This formulation of a visual language echoes the artist's childhood of imagining his national identity through mediated images.

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Gallery

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# Exhibition Programs

Co-presented by Helwaser Gallery and Singapore Unbound

## **Threshold I (Artist Performance & Conversation)**

**Saturday, September 14, 2019, 2-4pm**

Viewers are invited to step into and experience a collaborative performance involving art and poetry as artist Boedi Widjaja and poet Jee Leong Koh conduct a literal exchange of roles to evoke a multiplicity of meanings around the theme of "Threshold." Thereafter, Boon Hui Tan (Director, Asia Society Museum) engages Boedi Widjaja in a conversation about his process and works.

## **Threshold II (Literary Reading)**

**Monday, September 16, 2019, 7-9 pm**

Artist Boedi Widjaja and three authors—Claudia Serea, Donald Breckinridge, and Celina Su—read from their work to find a common and autonomous space for literature and art in the midst of recent geopolitical tensions.

[Singapore Unbound](#) is a NYC-based literary non-profit dedicated to the struggle for freedom of expression and equal rights for all through cultural exchange and literary activism.

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## About the artist

Boedi Widjaja currently lives and works in Singapore. He has shown in numerous exhibitions internationally, including the Asia Pacific Triennial 9 (2018); *MAP1: Waterways* (2017); Diaspora Pavilion, 57th Venice Biennale; Yinchuan Biennale (2016), China; *From East to the Barbican* (2015), Barbican, London; *Infinity in flux* (2015), ArtJog, Indonesia; and *Bains Numériques #7* (2012), Enghien-les-Bains, France. The artist's solo exhibitions include: *Black—Hut* (2016), Singapore Biennale Affiliate Project, Institute of Contemporary Art Singapore; *Path. 6, Unpacking my Library* 书城 (2014), Esplanade, Singapore; and *Sungai, Sejarah* 河流, 历史, 源 (2012), Asian Film Archive, Singapore. Recent accolades include: Top 10 Winner, FID Prize (2017); Finalist, Sovereign Asian Art Prize (2015); ArtReview Asia FutureGreats (2014); Grand Prize (Sound Arts; with David Letellier), Bains Numeriques, France (2012); and First Prize, Land Transport Authority Beauty World Station (2012).

## About the gallery

Based along Madison Avenue, Helwaser Gallery presents mid-career and established artists, including Anton Ginzburg, Boedi Widjaja, Christina Kruse, and Lin Yan. It also specializes in the work of post-war masters, such as Tom Wesselmann, Alexander Calder, Adolph Gottlieb, and Helen Frankenthaler, among others. In 1986, the gallery was founded in Paris and initiated significant exhibitions, including a retrospective on Jean Dubuffet (1996), and others on French cubist masters, notably George Braque, Jean Metzinger, and Pablo Picasso. In 2008, Helwaser Gallery marked its inaugural relocation to New York with the group exhibition *Red*, exhibiting Hans Hofmann, Andy Warhol, and Jean-Michel Basquiat amongst others. In 2019, Helwaser Gallery reopened its present space with a public exhibition program, presenting internationally recognized artists. The gallery program emphasizes a dialogue between contemporary art and modern art historical movements.

## About the speaker

Boon Hui Tan is Vice President for Global Arts and Cultural Programs, and Director, Asia Society Museum, NY, where he leads the organisation's global arts and cultural activities spanning visual arts, performing arts and film. As museum director, he oversees Asia Society Museums acclaimed exhibition programs and collections, including the Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection of Traditional Asian Art and the Contemporary Art Collection of photography and new media works by Asian and Asian American artists. In 2015, he was Artistic Director for Singapour en France, le Festival, the largest multidisciplinary presentation of contemporary culture from Singapore and Southeast Asia in France. Tan is founding board member of the International Biennial Association. From 2009 to 2013, he was Director of the Singapore Art Museum.

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