

IKON

Ikon Gallery
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Birmingham B1 2HS
0121 248 0708 / ikon-gallery.org
free entry / donations welcome
Registered charity no. 528892

MELATI SURYODARMO

PASSIONATE PILGRIM

17 May – 3 September 2023

Ikon Gallery, Birmingham

Live performances from the artist on Friday 19 and
Sunday 28 May 2023



Melati Suryodarmo, *I'm a Ghost in My Own House*.
Performed at Lawangwangi Foundation Bandung (2012). Photo courtesy of the artist.

From 17 May – 3 September 2023, Ikon becomes home to a major exhibition of ground-breaking performance art with the first UK solo show by acclaimed Indonesian artist Melati Suryodarmo. Suryodarmo is renowned for her strenuous durational performances that last several hours, testing the limits of the human mind and body. Through live performances from the artist and “delegated works” performed by over 50 associated artists and community activists, the exhibition, which occupies the entire gallery, celebrates her

dedication to pushing the boundaries of her own practice and building performance art networks.

Since the 1990s, Suryodarmo has created durational performances, installations and films that merge live art with sculpture, drawing and time-based media. In 1994, she moved to Germany, where she was mentored by Butoh dancer and choreographer Anzu Furukawa and artist Marina Abramović. Now based in her hometown, Surakarta, her work is inspired by Javanese cultural traditions such as *sumarah*: a meditation that seeks to achieve heightened sensitivity and acceptance through deep relaxation. Her longest and most gruelling work, *I'm a Ghost in My Own House* (2012), sees her grind blocks of charcoal with a stone rolling pin for 12 hours on Ikon's First Floor on **Friday 19 May** (10am-10pm). While expressing the estrangement she felt upon returning to Indonesia in 2014, its altered context within Ikon evokes the coal mining history of the West Midlands. Following the performance, audiences can see the artist's blackened dress, charcoal pit and video documentation alongside charcoal rubbings on paper which mirror the brutal gestures of Suryodarmo's performance.

Further repositioning her classic works within new contexts, Ikon debuts the first hybrid performance of *Passionate Pilgrim* (2010) – a piece which Suryodarmo performs at Ikon with UK-based network and activist group Voice of Domestic Workers on **Sunday 28 May** (2pm). Over two hours, Suryodarmo and the women move around an installation of 100 mirrors – which will remain after the performance – while contemplating their reflection and the gaze of the audience. Inspired by an encounter the artist had with an Indonesian domestic worker in Taiwan, it investigates the often-precarious living conditions of Southeast Asian migrant workers.

Continuing the exhibition, feature films and recorded performances from Suryodarmo demonstrate her diverse practice. Filmed more than 15 years apart, two videos of her iconic *Exergie–Butter Dance* (2000) show a young and older Suryodarmo dancing on blocks of butter to the sound of Bugis percussion while slipping, falling and pulling herself up. Meanwhile, the more recent 30-minute film *Memory of Water* (2022) shows the artist exploring the 'soul' of the derelict house of her father, Suprpto Suryodarmo: a pioneer of Amerta movement practice.

On Ikon's Second Floor, visitors are immersed in a space that emulates Suryodarmo's artist-run initiative, Studio Plesungan. Capturing the venue's collaborative spirit through documentation of residencies, workshops and performances, as well as prints of the studio and wider Javanese countryside, the space at Ikon also hosts a performance art laboratory led by Suryodarmo. Titled *Present to Presence*, the programme includes Indonesian and UK-based artists Kelvin Atmadibrata, Selina Bonelli, Alastair MacLennan, Sinéad O'Donnell, Ratu R. Saraswati and Marintan Sirait.

Moving through the Second Floor, viewers encounter Suryodarmo's photographic triptychs *Self-Portrait* (2018) and *Membran* (2019). Taking inspiration from Javanese culture, East

Asian and Western painting, Japanese Butoh and theatre, the self-portraits depict Suryodarmo moving across backgrounds reminiscent of photographic studios, where signifiers of identity – clothing, make-up, hairstyle and furniture – are often staged. An image archive further explores the integral role of photography in performance art and the impact of fellow artists, dancers and choreographers on Suryodarmo's work.

Offering a dramatic finale, *Kleidungsaffe (Clothes Ape)* (2006) – a vibrant 6.2-metres-high 'tree' adorned with donated clothes from West Midlands-based organisation Collection 4 Clothes – towers over visitors. **From Thursday 25 May**, solo performers sit on a hidden perch and hold the multicoloured structure for 3 hours on Thursday and Saturday afternoons, re-enacting Suryodarmo's original performance and its reflection on excessive consumption and belonging. Concluding by embracing the fabrics of real local communities, the exhibition conveys a lifelong commitment to weaving meaningful connections among performance artists and beyond.

Other performances take place at Ikon and off-site, with 30 young women performing ***Sweet Dreams Sweet* (2013)** on **Wednesday 17 May (Ikon) and in July (Handsworth Park)** as part of the gallery's annual **Migrant Festival**. In this 2-hour piece conceived by Suryodarmo, pairs of performers signify tensions between individual and collective identity for women in Indonesia and around the world by staining their white costumes with blue water from the buckets they carry. Also in the summer, Ikon collaborates with Birmingham-based **Vivid Projects** on a performance programme for artists in the West Midlands, developed at Vivid Projects' Digbeth venue and presented at Ikon.

A publication celebrating Suryodarmo's solo exhibition at Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Nusantara (Museum MACAN) Jakarta, *Why Let the Chicken Run?* (2020–21), and her exhibition at Ikon will be available at [Ikon Shop](#) and [MACAN Shop](#). The fully illustrated hardback publication features texts on Suryodarmo's practice by Aaron Seeto, Director of Museum MACAN; leading curators Alia Swastika and Philippe Pirotte; and Melanie Pocock, Acting Artistic Director, Exhibitions, Ikon.

Suryodarmo's exhibition at Ikon is supported by the [Bagri Foundation](#), the British Council through the [Connections Through Culture](#) grants programme, [Birmingham City University](#), [University of Leeds](#), and the Melati Suryodarmo Exhibition Circle: [A.I. Gallery](#); [ShanghART](#); Tanya Michele Amador and Michiel Verhoeven; and Michelangelo and Lourdes Samson. Developed in collaboration with [Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Nusantara](#) (Museum MACAN), Jakarta, Indonesia.

For more information, press appointments, high-res images and to request interviews please contact

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Social Media Handles - Instagram, Twitter and Facebook:

@ikongallery #MelatiSuryodarmo #PassionatePilgrim #IkonGallery
@museummacan @bagrifoundation @britishcouncil @_ai_gallery @shanghartgallery
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Notes to Editors:

1. Melati Suryodarmo (b. 1969) is a visual and performance artist based in Surakarta, Indonesia. A former student of Marina Abramović, she has an MFA in Performance Art from the Hochschule für Bildende Künste Braunschweig, Germany (2002).

Suryodarmo's physically challenging durational performances are the result of ongoing research in the movements of the body and its relationship to the self and the world. Her multidisciplinary practice spans installation, photography, film, and performance and explores concepts of home, spirituality, family, and personal history, drawing on Javanese culture, socio-political, activist and feminist ideas.

Suryodarmo has presented her work in various international festivals and exhibitions, including the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin (2001); the 50th Venice Biennale (2003); Fridericianum, Kassel (2003); International Performance Art Festival, Toronto (2004); Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (2005); Videobrasil, Sao Paulo (2005); Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma | Finnish National Gallery (2007); Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin (2009); Maison des Arts de Schaerbeek, Brussels (2010); Biennale Jogja XI (2011); Parasite and Spring Workshop, Hong Kong (2012); Lawangwangi Art foundation, Bandung, Indonesia (2012); ShanghART, Singapore (2018) and (2023); STPI – Creative Workshop & Gallery, Singapore (2019); Museum MACN, Jakarta (2020–21); and the Asia Society Triennial, New York (2021), among others. In 2022, she received the Bonnefanten Award for Contemporary Art – BACA, with a major solo exhibition at the Bonnefanten Museum, Maastricht, the Netherlands, *I am a Ghost in My Own House*.

In addition to her solo work, Suryodarmo is a dedicated teacher, curator and arts organiser. In 2017, she was the Artistic Director of the Jakarta Biennale, *JiWA*. Since 2007, she has been organising Undisclosed Territory, an annual international performance art festival in Indonesia. In 2012, she founded [Studio Plesungan](http://StudioPlesungan.com), an artist-run space in the Javanese countryside that runs residencies, workshops and public performances, engaging with society, traditional culture, and the natural environment.

Suryodarmo's work is represented by ShanghART. melatisuryodarmo.com

2. Ikon is an internationally acclaimed contemporary art venue situated in central Birmingham. Established in 1964 by a group of artists, Ikon is an educational charity and works to encourage public engagement with contemporary art through exhibiting new work in a context of debate and participation. The gallery programme features artists from around the world and a variety of media is represented, including sound, film, mixed media, photography, painting, sculpture and installation. Ikon's off-site programme develops dynamic relationships between art, artists and audiences outside the gallery. Projects vary enormously in scale, duration and location, challenging expectations of where art can be

seen and by whom. Education is at the heart of Ikon's activities, stimulating public interest in and understanding of contemporary visual art. Through a variety of talks, tours, workshops and seminars, Ikon's Learning Team aims to build dynamic relationships with audiences, enabling visitors to engage with, discuss and reflect on contemporary art. ikon-gallery.org

3. Ikon is open Wednesday – Sunday and Bank Holiday Mondays, 11am-5pm. Free entry, donations welcome. Ikon is supported using public funding by the National Lottery through Arts Council England, and Birmingham City Council.
4. The Bagri Foundation is a UK registered charity whose main mission is to realise unique, unexpected ideas from and on Asia, weaving traditional culture with contemporary thinking. The Foundation provides support towards artistic and educational projects and establishes collaborative partnerships with institutions that range in scale—from small cultural organisations that share our ethos and mission to large national and international partners like the British Museum and Hayward Gallery in London, Artes Mundi Prize in Cardiff, The Metropolitan Museum of Art of New York, and La Biennale di Venezia. The Foundation's supported projects include film, visual arts, music, literature, courses and lectures, and each of them aims at giving artists and experts from across Asia and the diaspora, or those inspired by the continent, wider visibility on the global stage. www.bagrifoundation.org
5. The British Council is the UK's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities. We build connections, understanding and trust between people in the UK and other countries through arts and culture, education and the English language. Last year we reached over 80 million people directly and 791 million people overall including online, and through broadcasts and publications. Founded in 1934 we are a UK charity governed by Royal Charter and a UK public body. We receive a 15 per cent core funding grant from the UK government. www.britishcouncil.org
6. Arts Council England is the national development agency for creativity and culture. We have set out our strategic vision in Let's Create that by 2030 we want England to be a country in which the creativity of each of us is valued and given the chance to flourish and where every one of us has access to a remarkable range of high-quality cultural experiences. From 2023 to 2026 we will invest over £440 million of public money from Government and an estimated £93 million from The National Lottery each year to help support the sector and to deliver this vision. www.artscouncil.org.uk.

Following the Covid-19 crisis, the Arts Council developed a £160 million Emergency Response Package, with nearly 90% coming from the National Lottery, for organisations and individuals needing support. We are also one of the bodies responsible for administering the Government's unprecedented Culture Recovery Fund of which we delivered over £1 billion to the sector in grants and loans. Find out more at www.artscouncil.org.uk/covid19.