

National Portrait Gallery testimony

The award for a discrete project recognises an exemplary collaboration between Australia's National Portrait Gallery and the National Gallery of Indonesia for the 2014 exhibition *Masters of modern Indonesian portraiture* and associated capacity building workshops.

Over the past year the National Portrait Gallery (NPG) and the National Gallery of Indonesia (GalNas) have collaborated on a major exhibition of Indonesian master paintings presented at the NPG and are developing a series of capacity-building workshops. These initiatives facilitate important cross-cultural exchange and professional development while forging strong and significant affiliations between these two national collecting institutions.

***Masters of modern Indonesian portraiture* exhibition**

Masters of modern Indonesian portraiture was a significant GalNas initiative developed collaboratively over several intensive months by staff at GalNas and NPG. It was presented at the NPG, 20 September to 15 October 2014. This is the first time an exhibition from the GalNas collection has travelled to Australia and the project provided a rare opportunity to view paintings and drawings by important Indonesian modern masters outside of Indonesia. The exhibition also presented a curated selection of work by emerging and mid-career Indonesian contemporary artists. Indonesia has made a dynamic and unique contribution to the genre of portraiture and it was the NPG's intent to foster an understanding and appreciation of Indonesian portraiture for Australian audiences.

The exhibition provided significant insight into Indonesia's rich modern and contemporary portrait practice. It included many key modernist works from the GalNas collection (1940s–1980s) complemented by a selection of contemporary Indonesian works. Notably, the exhibition provided the Australian public with an overview of the dynamism of historical portrait practice in Indonesia, and an exploration of contemporary identity and cultural and social issues through current portrait practice in Indonesia. The exhibition fostered increased awareness and a growing understanding of the work of Indonesian modern masters including Sudjojono, Affandi, and Hendra Gunawan. These artists merged modern elements with traditional and international influences, creating individual expressions that were distinctly their own. As Professor Sasha Grishin noted in the Canberra Times review (27 September 2014) 'In many ways, *Masters of modern Indonesian portraitures* a ground breaking exhibition which starts to fill in our knowledge of an episode in the art of Australia's most populous neighbour.'

The exhibition received extensive media coverage both in Australia and Indonesia and attracted a substantive and noticeably culturally diverse audience including many first time visitors to the NPG. The project increased the awareness and understanding of Indonesia in Australia, with many visitors commenting on its educational and cultural value. School and university groups and the general public alike embraced the exhibition. The media coverage received in Indonesia also demonstrates that the exhibition positively increased awareness and appreciation of Australia in Indonesia. The exhibition averaged 405 visitors per day, a particularly high daily average for NPG exhibitions, which included a considerable number of 'destination' visitations.

Staff from GalNas and NPG worked collaboratively on all aspects of the exhibition's development. Two staff from the NPG travelled to Jakarta to meet with Indonesian gallery staff. Eight representatives from GalNas travelled to Canberra for unpacking and exhibition installation, the official opening, seminar and artist talk and three representatives travelled for the de-installation at the exhibition's closure. All GalNas representatives were extremely appreciative of the support shown by NPG. They found this exhibition experience particularly educative and beneficial in increasing their knowledge and skills and spoke of the NPG as a leader in best museum practice. The Indonesian visitors also met other Australian museum professionals from various Canberra cultural institutions.

Capacity building workshops

NPG and GalNas are now working together on a collaborative workshop series. The aim of the workshops is to develop professional art museum skills for staff at both institutions, allowing for a tangible transfer and flow of experience, and expertise and capacity building in collection management between the two institutions.

In late March 2015 two representatives from GalNas will travel to Canberra to work with NPG on the content development of the first workshop, scheduled for May this year at GalNas. Professional staff from NPG will travel to Indonesia for this workshop, which aims to be presented jointly with GalNas staff, utilising the GalNas collection, focusing on a hands-on methodology.

Through *Masters of modern Indonesian portraiture* and *Beyond the self: contemporary portraiture in Asia* (NPG's 2011-2013 travelling exhibition that included Indonesian contemporary portraiture), the NPG has established a reputation in Indonesia for its commitment to Indonesian visual arts, best museum practice, innovation and dependability. Consequently, the NPG is seen as the preferred partner by many of Indonesia's arts professionals, including staff at GalNas. This established reputation will be further enhanced by the workshops series. GalNas has stated that developing professional skills for staff in art handling, preservation, and exhibition management is 'exactly what is needed'. The sharing of skills and fostering of staff relationships through this project continues to develop the links between the two national art institutions, and between Australia and Indonesia.