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ANONIM

THEO FRIDS MARULITUA HUTABARAT at FRAMER FRAMED

THE ATELIER KITLV-FRAMER FRAMED ARTIST IN RESIDENCE PROGRAM

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Final Letter to Anonim

Theo Frids Marulitua Hutabarat

This passage was written in the realisation of the limitation of language and my own comprehension in regard to the complex experiences (bodily, socially, artistically) that happened in the past year. While the initial proposal that launched this project already mentioned the word 'anonymous', artistically speaking, I didn't know what I would make, or to be precise, what I should make. There is a lingering sense of critical approach that is growing when the words 'Indonesia' and 'The Netherlands' are mentioned together, giving me a heads-up in terms of 'how', 'methods', 'proceed', etc. What kind of gesture(s) and what kind of impact(s) should be taking place in these moments of re-thinking and un-doing many things surrounding our colonial pasts. Without knowing a definite direction, the idea was to let exchanges and conversations gain some momentum and build on that. The forms of exhibition, curatorial experimentation, and various workshops and talks served as milestones that shape the project as a whole. But entering the final half of the project, all of those experimentations should manifest in a wall piece.

Previously imagined as a projection onto a wall painting, the idea was to re-create the intersubjective connection that was present at the time when the photographer captured the moment, and engaged with his/her photographed subject. By re-creating this connection, one can put themselves in active positions (either as the photographer or the photographed subject) and 'give birth to a distinctive scenario that only works through their imagination'. Reading this passage more than a year after it was written, I can see now that the notion of a 'distinctive scenario' actually refers to the existing-yet-overlooked narrative that organically grows in someone's life. Or in this case, my own. For me, before, the KITLV photographic archive stands as an abstract entity. But, after developing this project for almost half a year, I started to realise that this 'distinctive scenario' also lives somewhere inside me and it was simply a matter of recognizing the impact of the photographic archive on my own understanding of the reality that I'm living in.

So I embraced my 'scenarios' and made them explicit, with the aid of photographs. Not just KITLV photos, but also my family photos. The disappeared faces from my family photos that got flooded struck me, first, as an abstract loss and trauma. But as soon as I acknowledged this irreversible process in life, the images started to resonate with the sense of anonymity in the colonial-era photographic archive. As if their faces and existence 'got flooded', swept away by the violent stream of history. Thus came the decision to make the painting in a similar process to the damaged family photos, by staining the canvas with colours. But, rather than the faces from my family album, the images that disappeared came from the KITLV collection. And this is where the 'visual scenario' met with the 'verbal scenario' from my family history, through the words Hutabarat, Pematang Siantar, Toba, and Sumatera that refer to the familial roots that, previously, I took for granted. By entering those keywords to the search box in KITLV digital collection, I can have entirely new visual information about realities that, sadly, was unexplored until recently. Not to stop there, I added more keywords that almost embodied the idea of the anonymous itself: 'baboe' (which in a general sense means 'servant', 'babysitter', or 'nanny'). Although many photos came up through the prompt of the word 'baboe', there are some patterns that come with the description of the photos: aside from describing the location of the 'baboe' or the other person that interacts with them (namely mother, baby, or children), these descriptions also mention some name(s). These names create the kind of description that shows the power relation that worked at that time: how the descriptions of the photo of 'baboe' mostly refer to the name of the employer, rarely to

her own name (except for a few particular images). 'Baboe' is explicitly seen as property without agency.

I can imagine the photographer, who owned the camera and wrote some description at the back of the photo, and whose family donated the photos to KITLV, was the only source of information for archivists who worked on the digital collection. Or in other sense, the 'baboe' simply didn't have the access to the camera and had to submit to the photographer who depicted them, and later on to the archivists that catalogued them. But, I am also aware of the usage of the word 'vermoedelijk' or 'presumably' that is used by the archivists to describe the images, naturally, from the existing visual information in the photo. Somehow, this approach paradoxically puts the unnamed subject into categories, but also suspends the definite knowledge on that subject. From here, I decided to use the liberty to presume the 'baboe' and her existence through my painting, not by explicating her, but by drowning her in a 'flood', to make her invisibility visible.

After few studies on digital compositions² and painted smears and stains³, I started to work on one particular image of a 'baboe' from Pematang Siantar, a small city in Sumatera where my father grew up. As a place that I visited just once when I was a kid, when my grandfather was still alive (and just recently, to visit his grave), Pematang Siantar, for me, always stands for this imagined place that lives in my parent's stories. Through this particular 'baboe', I can project my accumulated knowledge from stories about a world called Pematang Siantar. The question of 'who is she' and 'how was her life' came together with the question of 'did she live near my grandfather's house' or maybe 'did she ever pass him by, somewhere at the market', etc. I started to develop some 'distinctive scenarios' through this image⁴ (from circa 1935), that in the website described as 'Baboe, presumably in the house of H. ter Brugge, working for the Bataafsche Petroleum Company in Pematang Siantar'. Even though I can further search the name 'H. ter Brugge', I decided to intentionally avoid to do that, as I want to know her specifically through the visual information that exists in the photo. From that photo I can see her gaze a bit downward, with a visible frown on her forehead. She smiled in hesitation, maybe to the one who photographed her and almost certainly not to us, who sees her far in the future. Her right hand gently held a dachshund. Sat on, presumably, the back door of the house, I can see traces of dignity in her posture. And, the most important thing, she looked straight to the camera. She looked at me.

Those details mattered, because they were gone in the painting. I painted them just to make them smeared and covered in smudges. The 'mental flood' manifested as organic marks that, now, support the central figure, whom I call 'inang baboe'. As if recalling the flood that washed away my family photos, the process of painting her into a decayed state was almost like seeing the water itself work in slow motion, mercilessly altering her form. Along with that process, the feeling of faded memories from my family photos converge with the growing sense of a strange connection with the 'inang baboe', that previously belongs to KITLV. I can feel our position shifted and our distance recalibrated. I was trying to recognize her, again and again, through the minuscule details that vanished or were covered by paint. In fact, the paint showed me a lot, as I kept making changes for the next five days. Soon after I finished, body covered with paint at two in the morning, the painting took everything that I could give to it. My 'inang baboe', in her elevated version, suddenly felt content in her being. I asked for her permission. I took her photo. Somehow, I knew her. Seeing her now, is just like remembering a damaged photo that belongs to my family, where faces disappeared, but revived as sedimented memories.

FOOTNOTE

- 1 Presented on the floor, I printed 150 images of 'baboe' downloaded from KITLV digital collection. Visitors are encouraged to take those images, now exist as postcards and stickers.
- 2 Some of the digital sketches also present as printed images. They depict some KITLV photos and damaged photos from my family collection. Some of them

are the combination of both, in the same visual structure that appear on the painting. The KITLV photos were searched under the keywords: Sumatera, Pematang Siantar, and tea plantation.

- 3 There are four other paintings with the same size that was made before the final one. As studies, each one of them provides me with specific painterly vocabulary and atmosphere. The first two showed the various possibilities

of smeared effects from the interaction of oil paint and solvent. The colours from the pigment got damaged and showed different kinds of marks and transparent qualities. The last two studies showed the interaction between the figure and pool of colours that disrupt its form. Through these paintings, the idea of 'damage' and 'residue' were exercised.

Postcolonial history in gentle hands.

Theo and the babu

Marieke Bloembergen
KITLV & Leiden University

The *babu* is the beginning and the end, the Alpha and the Omega, the key to our understanding of how history works. If there is anything that comes out of Theo Frids Marulitua Hutabarat's project *Anonim*, then, that, to me, is the clue. Through conversations with Theo and with his friends who contributed to his project-in-development, and while seeing and hearing his artwork taking shape, I realized, that, of all people, it is the anonymous *babu* who may help us in our ongoing task and efforts to understand the politics of knowledge production in and on colonial history, and the legacies of these politics today, and to look beyond. There is nothing new in emphasizing that the frames of colonial history and colonial archives keep on influencing the way we look at history and each other, and how they still shape socio-political relationships today – and this, whether we grew up in, and are formed by experiences in former colonizing, or in former colonized countries. But, ideally, the *babu*, and the family histories she helped forming, might help us in breaking open these frames, unsettle our views, and seek for alternative, perhaps more ambiguous histories that go beyond the dichotomies of colonial suppressors and colonized victims/anti-colonial heroes.

The archive as a 'peculiar playground'

'No frame is free from bias', Theo tackled this problem, and the question how to address 'anonymity' in history and archives, by starting from two different yet comparable set of sources: his own fam-

ily photos – a private collection – and the 'Indonesia in colonial-era'-photos kept in the KITLV collection. Sadly, the family members pictured on Theo's photos got anonymized through accident – or natural disaster. A flood damaged them, to the effect that the pictures transformed into colourful artworks with their own merit. However Theo's family members are unrecognizable behind the fluid colourlines. On the other hand, a big part of the KITLV-photos has been made accessible on a line through digitization. These digitized pictures are eagerly gazed at by young generations in Indonesia, and re-used in Indonesia's trendy cafes that seem to embrace colonial nostalgia, some of them even claiming to take you back – to the shock of a small company of friends that included Theo and me – to 'the glorious days of Indonesia's colonial past'.²

Yet, the colonial-era photographs in collections like those of KITLV – as the toolkits, showing means to 'unlearn', provided by Theo as part and parcel of his artwork make clear are also limited in their accessibility because of the categorizations fabricated in registration processes of colonial and postcolonial times. Some Indonesians, like the Raja of Lombok on KITLV 2506, imprisoned in Batavia, get names. But most of them remain anonymous. They can only be found, nameless, through the category of 'houses', 'region', the name of the photographer, or the name of the owner of the album the photograph comes from. Yet, at the same time, these categories helped Theo, somehow, to connect part of his anonymized family's history to the photographs in KITLV.

The unnamed woman on Theo's

painting, taken out of one of KITLV's photographs, is still visible, yet she is partly hidden by precisely the kind of fluid colourlines that damaged Theo's family photos. This is a deliberate intervention. With this, Theo addresses the popular habit of quickly going through such digitized pictures, as we do on our mobile phones, and asks us to stop and ponder. He does so by trying to connect the picture to a local experience, and the big events of history that unsettle us, and influence what we see and do not see from history – like a flood, or the capitalist/violent colonial interventions that led to the production of such a picture. He draws us gently into a conversation on how to gauge this problem, and how to picture this from the perspective of the portrayed. He does so by using another item of popular culture that speaks to our imagination: the sticker. Producing stickers of the fluid colourlines that damaged his family's photographs, and of prints of colonial photographs³, and letting us play with that, he shows us precisely that seeing is not the same as understanding what we see. And that it may help us understand what we see if we play with visual means, or in Zaldy Armansyah's project of Reframing, by 'cutting out' the possible perspectives in and framings of the picture that determines what we see and not see.

Pematang Siantar: naming places, extracting minerals, reimagining family histories

Theo encountered the unnamed woman, when he searched for photos made in the region where his father, born in 1950, grew up: Pematang Siantar in North Sumatera. She is portrayed on KITLV 67630. Unnamed, she gets a description: 'baboe', posing, 'circa 1935', 'possibly' in the house of 'H. ter Brugge', who worked at the Bataafsche Petroleum Maatschappij (Batavian Oil company, BPM) there. The picture is taken from Album 1322, owned by another staff member of BPM, a Leiden University law graduate, Johan G. Heil. 'BPM', 'Domestic workers',

'Indonesia', 'Pematang Siantar' are the subject categories that may lead us to this photograph, but to understand what we see we need our imagination go work, as well as other sources, and it is there I believe that historians, artists and anyone who wishes to understand Indonesian family histories in colonial situations may help each other, if they listen to each other and look.

The picture, through its keywords, brings together complex colonial relationships, capitalist interventions, and problems of environmental history, that we do, however, not actually see on this picture. Who, moreover, is the babu, what did she see and experience, how do these histories matter to her, and to what extent has she contributed to these histories? Is the babu also a *njai*, that is to say, a sleeping-companion of Ter Brugge, and how then should we gauge that relationship, and its contribution to oil extraction or capitalism? How did she bring up Ter Brugge's (and perhaps also her own) children? There is a flood of colonial nostalgic – and critical – literary works in Dutch, in which the babu is memorialized for her gentleness, and for the magic local histories she told her 'expat' children. Then why have we not yet understood her in that role of nurturer of children – especially also Indonesian children – growing up, who would come to play a more visible role in history?

Theo's family history is related to agricultural practices that involved colonial interventions and extractions: a tea plantation, where his grandfather worked as treasurer. His father recognized some of the houses pictured on the colonial-era photographs of Pematang Siantar. He also recalled their babu at that time. Telling me these histories, Theo, and his friend, writer-lecturer Ari Respati who was also involved in this project, then stood still by the phenomenon of the babu, still so important for middle class Indonesian families today. They too were partly brought up by babus who, like Theo's father's babu, and Ter Brugge's babu, were born and raised in Java. What kind of history emerges if we could tell it from their perspectives? The *babu* is the beginning and the end, the Alpha and the Omega, the key to our understanding of how history works. I dare say: how all history works, if we extend the babu's role to the family.



4 Baboe, presumably in the house of H. ter Brugge, working for the Bataafsche Petroleum Company in Pematang Siantar (KITLV 67630)

FOOTNOTE

- 1 Zaldy Armansyah, in *Reframing*. Bandung: Copyright/Reserved, 2023, 10.
- 2 Quotation from the text on placemats of Braga Permai Restaurant, at Braga Street, in Bandung, seen 10 November 2023. This restaurant is located in what was in colonial times the well-known restaurant 'Maison Borgerijen'. Intriguingly, via another digitized newspaper website, Delpher, we can read in *Tweentsch Dagblad Tubantia*, 4 December 1957, that Maison Borgerijen, on 3 December 1957, had placed a sign in front of the restaurant with the text 'Verboden voor Hollanders' (No Dutch allowed). (This finding, with thanks to Taufiq Hanafi).
- 3 They are parts of a playbook called *Anonim* which is included in the *Course Kit*, published in collaboration with Copyright/Reserved, an experimental design studio from Bandung.
- 4 *Reframing*, together with *Anonim*, were published in 2023 as playbooks. They reimagine a workshop series called *Merangkul Jarak* (held in Parahyanan Catholic University in November-December 2022), in printed version.

CANVAS STUDY



DIGITAL STUDY



FLOODED PHOTOS

'The past' seen through the archives and art-making naturally re-created and re-imagined as 'the past that we want to see'. Oil paints, as fluid as they can be, help me to re-structure my perception on what I want to see on the canvas, by voluntarily accepting what can be made or happen on the canvas. This, ultimately, leads to what the painting allows me to see. The dialectic of 'seeing' and

'making' that happens simultaneously on the canvas give birth to specific sights that fall between the spectrum of 'what I can make' and 'what I can see'. From this painting process, I understand that 'seeing' and 'making' are the essential forces to unleash the potential meanings of archives and the past.

These images were made by superimposing the flooded photos from my family album with photographic archives from the KITLV digital collection. The disappeared parts of KITLV photos, which made them look like the flooded photos, embody the erasure of certain aspects from the past, swept away by the violent stream of history. The 'flood' evacuated the image, pushing us back

to the white ground of an unknown land. This absence of something enables the presence of another things: the embodied resilience and the will to stay. These digital impressions provide us with 'what ifs' scenarios that could lead to new ways of recognizing visual informations from photographic archives, beyond the structural limitations.

In New Year's Eve 2020, my childhood home in Bekasi, Indonesia was flooded, the worst flood in ten years. Our family photo album, like everything else in the house, sank into one giant mess. These remaining colors in our family photos were the 'depiction' of the water that touched them. The images from our family moments were wiped out, but never truly left the photo-paper. Even in the

most abstracted ones, the color information and the accidental textures and motifs actually still hold their function as memory-keepers. They just demand another way of remembering: one that involves both the eyes (the common and the taken-for-granted visual perception and the mind (with its intuitive imagination, desire, and fantasy).

Strange Pictures

Yacobus Ari Respati

The *Anonim* project started its life with a hybrid online presentation between Bandung artists and KITLV (Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies) researchers that became an exhibition *Declaring Distance*, Selasar Sunaryo Art Space, Bandung, April 2022, in collaboration with Framed Framed. Theo was inspired to gather artists, writers, filmmakers, researchers—a network of friends and individuals encountered along the way who were doing work with colonial archives. Activities from the initial exhibition evolved into a series of talks and workshops (*Merangkul Jarak*, Parahyangan Catholic University, Bandung, October–November 2022), and some records of processes with the collaborators, both from Bandung and Leiden, became playbooks and zine (produced together with Copyright Reserved, 2023).

Theo's interest initially was with how openly accessible colonial photographs from places such as the KITLV online archive, is distributed across a number of social media platforms, generating interest in relating with the past for its users from Indonesia. Theo described it as a 'threshold', forming a dialogue of identifying with a past that goes into hiding and to synthesise memories. It is a formal identification, as if the stasis of the images became eternal symbols, more often seen as an idealised form of the same subjects now. The exhibition comes together as a way of sharing questions with ways of working and connecting between the archive and its interpretation at the local level. It included a display of paintings, installations, and images, weekly film screenings, cooking and music performances, tours, workshops, and online seminar/presentation. It becomes a way in which Theo examines the understanding of the past, as personal histories with a degree of shared visibility in formalised representations.

Tucked within the display was two very small images of raw, colourful textures on a vast white wall. This was to be Theo's painting. They were family photographs unable to be saved from a flood in Bekasi in 2020, leaving behind stain patterns compounding to the chemical specifics of the paper. Across them in the exhibition area were a rack of postcard-sized images printed in thousands from KITLV and colonial era photography distributed by art historian Alexander Suparonto to artists several years before. They provide a stark contrast between differing 'alien' images.

One was unrecognisable by becoming an abstract texture that captivates with forms and accidental compositions, from what were very dear images of family members and private moments. The other being highly visible depictions of various settings of land, people, and acts which should have been a shared memory, sparking interest and imagination, that shares the same earth but as if not the same world. The postcards were free for anyone to take and proved to be very popular as they were reprinted several times over the course of the exhibition. This large drive to take them home, to own them was strange, in parallel with what was observed initially in the social media platforms. Do they see the truth in them? What dreams do they project? Do they see their surroundings there? Their relatives? Their friends' families' stories? Did they see anything at all or were simply smitten by difference? The wiped family images of Theo's were of course, in contrast, hidden while being in plain sight.

How Stories were Lost

When we travelled to Leiden in July 2022, both images were also brought there. With what materiality they have embodied, we were then confronted with the fact that the kind of collection of colonial images we had accessed easily, physically exists in a very different state. It was the unitary transparency of the digitised that enabled our reading in the first place. The actual archive being more fragmentary, comprising many different collections housed in many different depots, evoked a very different imagination. The printed postcard size images were stickers, with reflective almost metallic sheen that at a glance would look like silver print. Our research, rather than just looking at the actual photographs, became a comparison with the existence of the sticker prints. Through Liesbeth Ouwehand, who oversaw the digitisation of original images into the KITLV repository, we discovered small details and intentions embedded in the physical photographs. Being originally presented in albums, for instance, or having a particular sequence and narration when in them. Some, originally, were very personal, diminutive in

size, or grand and for show. There exist unique subjects and biographies hidden from view when they are transformed into the workings of search engines and systemic discoverability gifted to us.

Theo's specific object in studying the plethora of images were how non-white subjects depicted in the collection were most often unnamed in the directories, or captions. Their anonymity holds stranger resonance when compared to how the exhibition audience flocked to collect the postcard-sized stickers, or how they have developed interest in the archives shown on social media. Things that are ripe for interpretation, for free. This presents a kind of limit to our understanding on signifying the past.

The diluted chemicals of Theo's family photographs on the other hand can only be explained by his telling of the stories. They used to depict people that he himself never had the chance to signify. Had the flooding never happened, the album would probably stay at the back of his and his family's mind. They had to become residue beyond recognition. And after the flood, as damaged things, they could have been easily thrown away. Their ironic parallel with the sticker prints was how they move their stories about in different, opposing directions.

Sharing Space

Theo refers to the person depicted in his painting as inang baboe, adding an honorific and dearly 'inang'—mother, or

madam—for her. The painting came to be as a merging between residual stains of the lost family photographs with her portrait, a Dutch family baboe in Pematang Siantar, Sumatera. The unnamed individual gazes upon us in the original photograph, seated at what may seem to be a terrace of a house, with a dachshund beside her in the grasp of his right arm perhaps to keep it still, as we may imagine the time taken for the photograph's exposure took quite some time. An empty gaze, one that may imply reluctance, yet the strength in her arm's grasp may be given as some form of control and conviction on her part. She would probably be originally from Java. Theo's paternal line, meanwhile, came from Pematang Siantar a generation prior, before moving to Bekasi in Java. They probably had moved in opposite directions. Theo combined inang baboe's portrait with one the blurred family image of his. In paint,



Street in Siantar (Mom's Version) — digital photomontage — 2023

Conversation between Theo Frids Marulitua Hutabarat & Emily Shin-Jie Lee

Edited by Dewi Laurente

EL I want to start the conversation by offering the context of our collaboration. Over the past year, my practice and research interest have directed my work at Framed Framed towards developing collaborative residency programs together with different artists and institutions. One of them is the Atelier KITLV-Framed Artist in Residence program. Together with KITLV researchers, we would like to learn and work with artists whose practices center on topics at the intersection of art, activism and academia, and with an interest in engaging with postcolonial discourse.

In 2022, we officially kicked off the residency collaboration with you Theo, and while the restriction of travel due to the pandemic in the beginning of your residency demanded we start much of our collaboration through online discussions, what came out of this first phase of residency was a fruitful hybrid project titled *Declaring Distance*, a trans-local exchange on ways of imagining and engaging with the colonial archive.

The first part of this hybrid project was a two day intensive online roundtable and film screening program connecting researchers from KITLV in Leiden, local communities and university students in Indonesia, as well as a wider public around the world. The second part of *Declaring Distance* was a one-month off-site presentation at the art space Selasar Sunaryo in Bandung. The presentation included pop-up cinemas, musical performances, and culinary experiences which formed a foundation for the public to engage in discussions around contested histories through embodied senses.

Now in the final phase of the residency, we are sharing the year-long journey through the presentation *Anonim*. For me, the presentation is not an intention to offer any conclusion, but an invitation for future participation and dialogue concerning issues around the colonial archive. While I am sure this is difficult to answer, if you would however try to summarize the past year, what would be your general take away or key memories from this program?

TH Indeed, it would take a while to answer this question! But if I were to pinpoint a few things from this year-long residency program, they would be:

Firstly, the various meetings and unexpected encounters with many new friends who also share the same interest in building upon the conversation on archive and art-making, while still feeling local and close, rather than institutional and official. These new approaches to accessing and exploring things 'domestically' really had

a great impact on how I treat this project. Turns out, with this approach, histories (in the archives) can reveal their friendly and more human faces.

From these friends that I've met along the way in the past year, I learned a lot about the importance of a broad network and intensive dialogue as the main drives to keep everything growing. By giving this project as much time and space it needs, I can feel the organic process that, somehow, develops itself: I am just simply there to see things unfold and embrace every moment and opportunity. Many points in this project started as a simple exchange and ended up as collaborative efforts. To keep the project as open as possible to absorb many influences and new ideas, and to give spaces for more friends to get involved, I can safely say now, is the vital key that defines this project.

Although it began as a proposal for a commissioned artwork for KITLV, this year-long process is mostly filled with experimentation on working models and different approaches to art-making itself. Starting with an almost completely different visual sketch for the final piece, this project taught me a lot on how to develop my own painting practice. Before, it was almost unimaginable for me to see how different methods would impact the final painting, from making an exhibition, or to setting up a forum, or to develop a workshop series, or to publishing a zine. But, now I can start to see, albeit vaguely, the intersections of those events and the internal logic of the painting itself. The fluidity that was needed for those moments to happen also appears and finds its way to the surface of the canvas. The final painting, literally and figuratively, is inspired by this fluid approach to activate the archive.

And lastly, the generosity and trust that was shared for this project throughout the year. From institutions like KITLV, Framed Framed, Parahyangan Catholic University, and Selasar Sunaryo Art Space, this project had great privilege to get funded and get exposure. But this project is also forever in debt to the intense discussions with many friends, in particular, Yacobus Ari Respati, Aulia Yeru, Zaldy Armansyah, Marieke Bloembergen, Esther Captain, and of course you, Emily! I think as a project that tried to highlight the anonymity around archives, I can't be grateful enough to be in such company!

EL Yes I can relate to all of what you said. Generosity and trust has been such a crucial part of the working process for us. What has been beautiful was the openness from all collaborators you bring in

they manifest a merging of lost narratives. Stories existing only in partial form, sharing earth though there may be unrepresentable distance in-between them. In paint, they could perhaps lend plasticity to what hidden subjectivities lost to time and became structurally erased from memory.

In the course of making *Anonim*, Sunda, a friend of mine and Theo's and one of the collaborators for the project, once mentioned what she observes as 'marudur-udur' atmosphere being present. 'Sharing space and exposure for family and friends', and 'pooling resources' was what I understood to be carried by the Batak phrase. A concept with which the shared future for this milieu of persons is open to assume form, no matter how arbitrary opportunities and possible permutations in life may come. They are related with the past through convergence and closeness of relations. I would like to end by expressing belief to her reading.

materials, another interesting aspect of this residency project is to interrogate the established disciplinary/colonial methods of generating knowledge and to question the existing state of affairs around colonial archives. Instead of pursuing inquiries with the sole purpose of presenting definitive outcomes, as what is often asked from a scientific research project, the project tries to disrupt and broaden our perspectives, encompassing its less glorious historical aspects — namely via the anonymous — and testing and performing alternative approaches to the representation of archival materials through a variety of artistic practices as what we've attempted in *Declaring Distance*.

As you and Ari are also teaching in the Integrated Arts – Parahyangan Catholic University, Bandung, I wonder how you see the possible roles of the university in artistic studies, the relevance of art as a practice of science, and how might they mutually benefit each other?

TH This is also an interesting question, as Ari and I are also in the middle of developing this experimental curriculum in our university. In the Integrated Arts program where we teach, art-making is seen in its capacity and relation to the social and human condition that we are facing now. While tied to its philosophical nature, students in our university are encouraged to embrace the broadest possibilities of artistic forms and social practices as means of making. With this approach, the notions of experimentation and collaboration provide the foundation to develop a project. This can be seen in the Extension Course Integrated Arts (ECIA) that took shape as a series of workshops and talks at our campus. Entitled *Merangkul Jarak*, the event questioned histories and the pasts, through archives and artistic practices, in collaboration with various artists and writers.

Later on, the workshop series was reimagined by Copyright/Reserved, an experimental design studio from Bandung, as a DIY course kit. One of our friends, Zaldy Armansyah, who also joined the previous workshop and exhibition, used collage to build interaction with the photograph archives. In collaboration with the Copyright/Reserved team, the materials were translated into a playbook called *Reframing*. Together with my playbook, called *Anonim*, the kit extends this project in a form of printed matter that will have new life at bookstores and at art book fairs. This kind of open-ended and collaborative working-method is the approach that we tried to explore within the Integrated Arts program, that sees the subtle abilities of art-making and its intersection with other forms of knowledge production.

EL For me, having been working with you on this residency program reminds me of what anthropologist Tim Ingold elaborates once in his lecture on art-research-knowledge, where he states that perhaps it is artists that are still doing the 'real' research nowadays, because real research means entering into the relation and processes of what is going on in the world; it is a kind of experimental practice — not a research done, but an experience. This reflection also brings me to the final aspect, which is the wide range of interlocutors and collaborators you have involved in the process of creation, and how those experiences relate to the ways in which we might make use of archives in accordance with the global situation today.

How do you see the role and effects of these conversations and collaborations within the context of the residency project, and how have these conversations influenced your own individual practice?

TH As I pointed briefly in the first question, the conversations are really the center piece of this project. There was some kind of common sentiment that was

CONTRIBUTORS

Theo Frids Marulitua Hutabarat

Theo Frids Marulitua Hutabarat (1987) is an artist from Bandung, Indonesia. He has a Master's degree in Fine Art from the Faculty of Art and Design at Bandung Institute of Technology. His work was part of group exhibitions in Bandung, Bangkok, Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur, Seoul, Singapore, Turin and Yogyakarta.

Marieke Bloembergen

Marieke Bloembergen is senior researcher at the KITLV/Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies and professor of Heritage and Postcolonial Studies in Indonesian History at Leiden University's Institute for History. Her research interests concern the politics and networks of cultural knowledge production and heritage formation, with late colonial and post-colonial Indonesia as point of departure, studied at local, transnational and global levels, and in relation to (epistemic) violence.

Yacobus Ari Respati

Yacobus Ari Respati is a curator and lecturer of art theory & philosophy at Universitas Katolik

shared in between those conversations, in regard to the relevant gestures that can be made to reconnect with archives. The ideas of family, personal recollection, and internalized damages were emblematic and frequently came up at our discussions. Yet, those were also the points that conjured up silence and, more than once, ended the discussions in a solemn and quiet mood. But, there were also exceptional moments to combat the gloomy mood, that mostly took place as playful irony and self-deprecating gestures, perfect for anyone who recognised the absurdity of the very idea of colonialism and its impact on our societies today.

Through these kinds of sentiments, I developed the structure of my individual practice. From the damaged photos from my family album to the KITLV collection, and from the digital photo montage to the thick and thin layers of the painting, the whole process felt like one big composition, with a tinge of melancholy embedded in every micro-gestures and micro-decisions. Soon after finishing the painting, I felt a feeling of anesthesia, a feeling of numbness, almost like remembering disappeared faces on a damaged photograph or letting go a warm and caring 'babu' back to her hometown. Maybe, what we had in our conversations and what I got from my painting was simply a taste of the photographic archives, that paradoxically also informs the return of 'the anonymous'.

This pervasive sense of loss, together with the imaginative intervention from various artistic approaches, provide a new cornerstone for my practice that is built upon empathy and the sense of 'we are not alone in this journey'. With so many concerns that are being shared around this issue, it's only logical to keep the party growing and embrace more living and non-living things to join the conversations. Facing the existing structure around the archives, collections, heritages, repatriation and reparation, and many other complex problems that bind Indonesia and The Netherlands together for centuries, I think it's time for us to hear more from the common, everyday voices that used to be depicted as quiet faces in the photographic archives. I believe we can learn new understandings on how to perceive the world from them, if we can start to see the realities that were seen from their point of view. Realities that live beyond the given structure subjected to them before, and one that we're still living in today.

EL For me, one of the most meaningful parts of our collaboration was also the rather personal conversations we had over meals, and the different places and people we meet together, which allowed us to understand indeed that 'we are not alone in this journey'. The multiple voices, different bodies of knowledge and modes of engagements that have been previously silenced organically developed throughout the residency process, suggests that if we are to talk about decolonising institutions, we cannot treat archives as isolated and comprehensive entities separated from their sociopolitical context, which continues to affect places and people near and far away in a daily basis. To decolonise is to ask all stakeholders to be actively involved in ongoing conversations and processes of remediation, to critically reflect and cultivate potential scenarios where diverging epistemologies, conceptions of creation, and sensory experiences can emerge.

I think *Anonim* is a beautiful gesture towards a critical openness to the unknown, a manifestation of creative processes, cross-border and transcontinental encounters between artists and communities, and an aesthetic and intellectual exchange that holds the potential to create new relations and conversions beyond the time frame of this residency. Thank you again for allowing me to be part of this journey.

Parahyangan. His focus has been on exhibitions in 20th century Indonesia. He was co-curator of Indonesian Pavilion at 2019 Venice Biennale.

Emily Shin-Jie Lee

Emily Shin-Jie Lee currently works at Framed Framed with a focus on art residencies and cross-institutional collaborations. Since 2022, she has been conducting a PhD project at the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis (ASCA) at the University of Amsterdam, in which she studies art residency and its critical engagement with ecological, feminist and decolonial inquiry.

Dewi Sofia Laurente

Dewi Sofia Laurente is currently a production and research intern at Framed Framed. She graduated from Leiden University College with a degree in Liberal Arts and Sciences. She is also a freelance writer, researcher, musician, and community organizer focused on dismantling coloniality through (and within) the cultural sphere.

Jhen Chen

Jhen Chen is a graphic designer and is currently serving as the co-founder of Limestone Books, an art book platform.