

The Instrument Builders Project: Collaborations in Sound by Australian and Indonesian Artists

The *Instrument Builders Project (IBP)*, curated by Kristi Monfries and Joel Stern, is a collaboration between Australian and Indonesian artists and musicians which involves conceptualising, building, performing and exhibiting new works together over the course of a shared residency. The *IBP* centres on an evolving workshop space that is open to the public throughout the duration of the project, with public programs – concerts, exhibitions, workshops and talks – punctuating periods of experimental ‘free time’. The works created through the *IBP* range from traditional craft-based instruments to avant-garde works that draw from experimental music, sound sculpture, installation and conceptual art.

The first *Instrument Builders Project* was held in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, from 24 June to 16 July 2013. The participating artists were Michael Candy (Brisbane), Rod Cooper (Melbourne), Dylan Martorell (Melbourne), Pia van Gelder (Sydney), Ardi Gunawan (Jakarta), Asep Nata (Bandung), Andreas Siagian (Yogyakarta) and Wukir Suryadi (Yogyakarta).

The second iteration of the project was again held in Yogyakarta, from 15 March to 9 April 2014 .The participants were Peter Blamey (Sydney), Caitlin Franzmann (Brisbane), Dale Gorfinkel (Melbourne), Tintin Wulia (Bali/Brisbane), Bagus Pandega (Bandung), Jompot Kuswidananto (Yogyakarta), Wukir Suryadi (Yogyakarta) and Mas Wibowo (Bantul).

This third iteration of the *IBP* takes place here, at the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, from 1 November to 23 November 2014.

Michael Candy

born Australia 1990

Pia van Gelder

born Australia 1982

Andreas Siagian

born Indonesia 1981

Mountain operated synthesizer

2013

cotton, bamboo, water, plastic, electrical components, electronic sensors, speakers

Mountain operated synthesizer, or *MOS*, is an installation at the peak of the Mount Merapi volcano in Yogyakarta. The volcano erupted shortly after *MOS* was installed, in July 2013, and it is unknown whether the instrument survived. Presented here are prototypes and documentation first displayed at Indonesian Contemporary Art Network in Yogyakarta as part of *IBP1*.

On Merapi, flags containing sensor devices measure natural conditions, including moisture and temperature. The measurements, gathered in real time, are instantaneously converted to sound, then broadcast through speakers installed next to each flag, producing a chorus that fluctuates with the elements.

Dylan Martorell

born Australia 1971

Wukir Suryadi

born Indonesia 1977

Asep Nata

born Indonesia 1964

Drum plough

2013

metal, wood, bamboo, plants, earthenware,
aluminium, rocks, coconuts, solenoids, computer

Drum plough features percussive beaters affixed to motorised levers, or 'machine drums', programmed to strike, at complex rhythmic intervals, an assemblage of objects – musical, industrial, recycled and found – built around an old wooden plough. This collaborative work is led by Melbourne's Dylan Martorell, an artist with a longstanding interest in DIY culture and a background as an improvisational musician.

Peter Blamey

born Australia 1970

Motherboard tree

2014

computer motherboards, rattan, copper wire, amplifiers

Motherboard tree is an amalgam of synthetic and organic materials. Constructed 'trees' made from Indonesian rattan palm wood sprout motherboard 'branches' covered in veins of connective copper wire. These wires carry low-voltage electrical currents that move unpredictably along the tangled threads. The sound produced is simply amplified electricity, fluctuating and unstable.

'I was interested in making something that bridged the gap between the synthetic, manufactured world of computer componentry and the physical, biological world. The sounds that come out are as complex and unruly as trees themselves, sounding distinctly electronic one minute, insect-like or noisy the next.'

Peter Blamey

Tintin Wulia

born Indonesia 1972, arrived Australia 2003

Lintang Raditya (collaborator)

born Indonesia 1981

Odong dangding prototype

2014

odong odong vehicle, bamboo *angklung*, music box cylinder, motor, car battery, electrical switches, modulator, LEDs

The *Odong dangding prototype* is a modified *odong odong* – a type of Indonesian pedicab. Its roof has been fitted with an electrically powered *angklung*, a tuned percussive instrument made of interlocking bamboo pipes.

‘There’s a strong culture of copying and imitation in Indonesia, which allows preliminary amateur designs to be produced and individually modified while at the same time publicly spread, improving and being refined in the process; always changing, always inspiring, though sometimes dying, giving way to the next trends. *Odong odong* is a part of this strong phenomenon, and thus is fertile soil for experimentation.’

Tintin Wulia

Wukir Suryadi

born Indonesia 1977

Mahogany root (Akar mahoni)

2013

Mahogany (*Swietenia sp.*), theremin and guitar components, leather, synthesizer, amplifier

Mahogany root (Akar mahoni) is a multifaceted instrument carved out of a single mahogany tree root. It incorporates leather straps that produce bass tones, a moveable guitar neck, an in-built theremin, and a step-sequencer synthesizer. The instrument is designed to be played by multiple musicians simultaneously.

Jompet Kuswidananto

born Indonesia 1976

A model for mass and explosion

2014

plaster, steel, wood, electrical motors, mosquito
zapper

In *A model for mass and explosion*, a pair of hanging plaster-cast hands, attached to steel saws, are automated to 'clap' at protracted intervals. While the claps themselves are silent, the saws are rigged with electricity from a mosquito zapper so that when they touch, an electrical spark and an accompanying tiny explosion are produced.

Dale Gorfinkel

born Australia 1982

Lotek exercise machine

2014

birdcage, foot pumps, balloon, plastic, polyvinyl chloride, metal

This bellow-powered instrument is built around a metal frame modelled on an exercise machine. By stepping inside the device – into a cage from Yogyakarta’s bird market, and onto the foot bellows – the participant’s foot movements pump air through the tubes and balloons suspended around their head. Participants generate an array of sounds that provide personalised feedback on their exertions.

‘The cage could symbolise our domestication of the planet and the limitations of our own perceptions and habits. It is also a safe place to play, where one can learn new behaviours in relation to the external environment.’

Dale Gorfinkel

Andreas Siagian

born Indonesia 1981

Asep Nata

born Indonesia 1964

Glass bell

2013

tattoo machine components, glass, cowbells,
electronic controller, wood, metal

The word 'tattoo' commonly refers to the practice of inking an image into the skin. But tattoo also describes a form of military music characterised by rapid drumming. *Glass bell*, adapted from a simple tattooing machine, is a percussion instrument in which metal pins strike a range of objects – including laboratory beakers and tuned cowbells – creating machine-gun rhythms.

'I admire how Asep represents the traditional instrument-making spirit in Indonesia. *Glass bell* is an effort to connect our different backgrounds and practices. It is an artwork built from the hybrid blend of Asep and me.'

Andreas Siagian

Caitlin Franzmann

born Australia 1979

Between two trees, between two ears

2014

leather, wood, transistor radios, media players,
headphones, electronic sensors

Between two trees, between two ears is a set of custom-made leather masks that simultaneously blindfold the viewer and provide a range of sonic experiences which vary from mask to mask.

‘Our homestay was located next to the Alun Alun Kidul [southern city square in Yogyakarta], which we passed on our way to the *IBP* workshop. One of the folklores identified with the Alun Alun Kidul is *masangin*, the ritual of walking through twin banyan trees in the square blindfolded. It is believed that those having pure hearts can walk directly through the trees.’

Caitlin Franzmann

Mas Wibowo

born Indonesia 1975

Auto gendèr

2014

gendèr bars, bamboo, metal, bronze, wood, motor, bicycle components, electronic sensors

Gamelan is an Indonesian orchestra composed of tuned percussion instruments. *Auto gendèr* is a motorised spinning frame housing wooden tubes that act as amplification for a set of gamelan bars. As the frame spins, a mechanical striker hits the bars, sometimes making contact, sometimes missing the mark.

The work was devised by Mas Wibowo, a master gamelan builder who operates workshops in Yogyakarta attended by gamelan ensembles throughout Indonesia and internationally. This work reflects the unique context in which gamelan now finds itself: it is at once a traditional expression of Indonesian culture as well as a site for continued avant-garde experimentation.

Wukir Suryadi

born Indonesia 1977

Ekologi gong

2014

polyvinyl chloride, vinyl, water, bamboo, brass, pumps, electronic sensors, lights

Ekologi gong produces and harvests energy to power a 'sonic ecosystem'. At the installation's centre is a children's pool, housing a metal gong. Running water passes through different levers which act as an engine, causing a large bamboo shoot to strike the centre of the gong.

'The function of the gong as a traditional musical instrument is to signify a beginning and an ending. This *Ekologi gong* is an effort to set the gong free of its normal functions, to consider it as an organism that keeps developing, interacting with its environment and adapting through time.'

Wukir Suryadi

Resource room

This room contains materials related to the first two iterations of the *Instrument Builders Project*, which took place in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, in June 2013 and March–April 2014. Included are a collection of photographs of the instruments in their various stages of conception and realisation. These images are testimony to the methodology of experimentation and collaboration central to the project. Digital material from the *IBP* website, including blogs and images by the artists and *IBP* team, also feature in this space.

Workshop space

The workshop space is the creative engine that drives the *Instrument Builders Project*. In this space, over the course of three weeks, the participating artists will collaborate on the task of imagining, designing, constructing and realising new 'instrumental' artworks.

The project uses a methodology of experimentation, meaning that the results may be surprising and unpredictable. Trial and error, open-ended jam sessions, works that 'fail' (but succeed in another way) and interchanging artistic roles are all integral to the *IBP* process. The *IBP* artists invite you to eavesdrop on them and observe the creative struggle as they work towards unexpected outcomes.

In the final week of the project the workshop will transform into an exhibition/performance space for the public presentation of the new instruments.