style

The modern art museum hoping to send

Indonesian art global

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Arts

Credit: Museum MACAN Written by Krithika Varagur, CNN. Jakarta

here's a Jakarta shopping mall called Gandaria City that houses sculptures by Yayoi Kusama, Lucian Freud and Fernando Botero. The strength of this "collection" encapsulates how, for a long time, there has been no real place to show modern art in the world's fourth most populous country.

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alongside those of international heavyweights like Basquiat, Rauschenberg and Warhol. "I'm interested in how works of art talk to each other," Adikoesoemo said in the gallery's in-house cafe, whose floor-to-ceiling windows look out onto Jakarta's congested cityscape. Indonesia, a nation of over 17,000 islands, has a thriving artistic community: contemporary artists can be found working across its major cities, with countless more upholding traditional art forms like weaving and shadow puppetry. But despite initiatives like the Jakarta Biennale, the country's art scene has proven somewhat insular, in part due to its sparse gallery and museum

A 2004 oil painting by the American pop artist James Rosenquist, "The Xenophobic Movie Director of Our Foreign

But that changed last November when Indonesia's first-ever international modern art museum,

the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Nusantara (or MACAN), opened in West

Jakarta. Drawn entirely from the private collection of billionaire Haryanto Adikoesoemo, a

chemicals and petroleum mogul, its catalog features works by most major Indonesian artists,

Policy." Credit: Museum MACAN

infrastructure.

(and an additional floor) next year.

"It's a platform for Indonesian artists to meet the world," he said, "and for world artists to be introduced to the Indonesian public." A different offering MACAN welcomed around 90,000 visitors the first three months after opening, according to

museum officials. The museum currently occupies the mezzanine floor of a Jakarta high-rise,

AKR Tower, though there are already plans to expand the space by a further 1,000 square meters

MACAN arose from Adikoesoemo's singular, decade-long vision of a world-class Indonesian

museum that shows domestic and overseas art on the same walls.

About one-tenth of the nearly 800 works in Adikoesoemo's collection are currently on display, including an "Infinity Mirrored Room" by Yayoi Kusama and a Jeff Koons sculpture of the Incredible Hulk.

"Haryanto's collection is the best in Indonesia," said FX Harsono, one of Indonesia's most prominent contemporary artists, known for his politically charged installations and for cofounding Indonesia's New Art Movement in 1975. "Jakarta has a lot of art space but it's very commercial. Indonesian art institutions are controlled by the market. The collectors here usually want to collect for resale. Their standards are: (whatever will sell at) Sotheby's and Christie's. Haryanto is doing something really different and important by trying to create a conversation between works from the East and West." A 2011 painting by FX Harsono entitled "Wipe Out #1." Credit: Museum MACAN

MACAN's inaugural exhibition, "Art Turns. World Turns," traces the development of Indonesian art

over the last two centuries alongside its intersections with social history and the global art scene.

The show teases out two schools of mid-century Indonesian art that reflect the international

A 1962 color block oil painting by the Bandung artist Srihadi Soedarsono is shown next to an

iconic abstract painting by Mark Rothko from a year earlier. The resemblance illustrates just how

much -- and for how long -- Indonesian artists have been plugged into international movements,

Due to its immediate prominence in the Indonesian art world, MACAN has adopted a democratic

sensibility. It is, for instance, leading a month-long grassroots initiative to create more Wikipedia

classrooms of Jakarta students are invited into its children's art space every month. ("Although, I

used to cry when teachers asked me to draw in art class," joked Adikoesoemo.) Gallery officials

The museum is occasionally open after hours for events, as well as to community groups:

movements of their time -- social realism and abstract expressionism, centered, respectively, in

"It's structured around Indonesia's place in the world," said Seeto.

the cities of Yogyakarta and Bandung.

lending a sense of revelation to the exhibition.

Engaging young audiences

the Asian Financial Crisis. Credit: Museum MACAN

Indonesians' historical consciousness.

Art and tolerance

But for me, art is borderless."

ecosystem."

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people to understand that independence is hard won."

hope to engage with a younger generation of new art lovers.

pages on Indonesian art history.

"Lanskap" (1962), an abstract expressionist painting by Inodneisian artist Srihadi Soedarsono that echoes the work

of the mid-century American painter Mark Rothko. Credit: Museum MACAN

"It's exciting to work here because there aren't (the) norms of museum-going that you might have in the West," said Seeto, who moved to Jakarta from Brisbane to work for MACAN. "There is no sense of obligation... our visitors are fairly young, middle-class, multi-ethnic and multi-religious."

"The Dutch colonized us because we were disunited," said Adikoesoemo plainly. "We want young

Adikoesoemo began collecting art in the 1980s, starting with Indonesian painters like Hendra

of them off to keep his family business afloat after the 1997 Asian financial crisis.

more interesting anyway. I like contemporary art because, well, it's happening now."

just a painting -- it was also the story of life in America in the 1980s."

Gunawan, whose expressionist works can be found in the museum today. He went on to acquire

paintings by impressionists and modernists like Braque and Chagall, but was forced to sell most

"When I decided to get back into collecting, I was already priced out of those artists whose work

I had just recently sold!" he recalled. "So I looked to contemporary art. And that turned out to be

One of the first paintings he acquired after the financial crash was Basquiat's "LF" in 2003.

"No one in Indonesia knew about him," Adikoesoemo said. "But I could see his painting wasn't

Having declared independence in 1945, Indonesia is a relatively young nation. It has periodically

fundamentalism in national politics. Adikoesoemo has somewhat utopian ideas about the role of

been wracked with sectarian tensions, including the recent resurgence of Islamic

Both Adikoesoemo and Seeto feel strongly about the museum's role in building young

Left: "LF" (1984) by Jean-Michel Basquiat, one of the first contemporary paintings that Adikoesoemo bought after

art in a multiethnic society. "Art makes you more creative, calm and tolerant," he said. "Our country needs that now." The current exhibition explodes with energy in its last section, evocatively dubbed "Global Soup." It shows art made after 1998, when the Suharto dictatorship fell and ushered in a new democratic era in Indonesia. But its scope is transnational, highlighting the work of overseas artists like Ai Wei Wei and Wang Guangyi.

The backdrop to MACAN's children's art space, designed by artist Entang Wiharso. Credit: Museum MACAN

"MACAN is very exciting, because finally we have a platform that is more global, and because

multidisciplinary Indonesian artist who was commissioned by the museum to create a sculptural

backdrop for its children's art space. "Usually Indonesian collectors are just about Indonesian art.

The gallery's collection is still growing and the exhibitions are set to briskly rotate, offering a

chance to address the inaugural show's shortcomings -- like the fact that only three female

artists are included. Seeto acknowledged the gender gap, saying that we should "watch this

borne impressive fruit. There are often long lines to enter the museum, even on weekdays.

up, I remember we would go to malls because there was nothing to do and nowhere to go. I

hope we can attract people here instead. That's how we will build this country's artistic

space" for better representation in the future. But already, Adikoesoemo's ten-year crusade has

"The most important thing right now is that people come and look," said Adikoesoemo. "Growing

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(the museum is) collecting and showing important artists," said Entang Wiharso, a

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