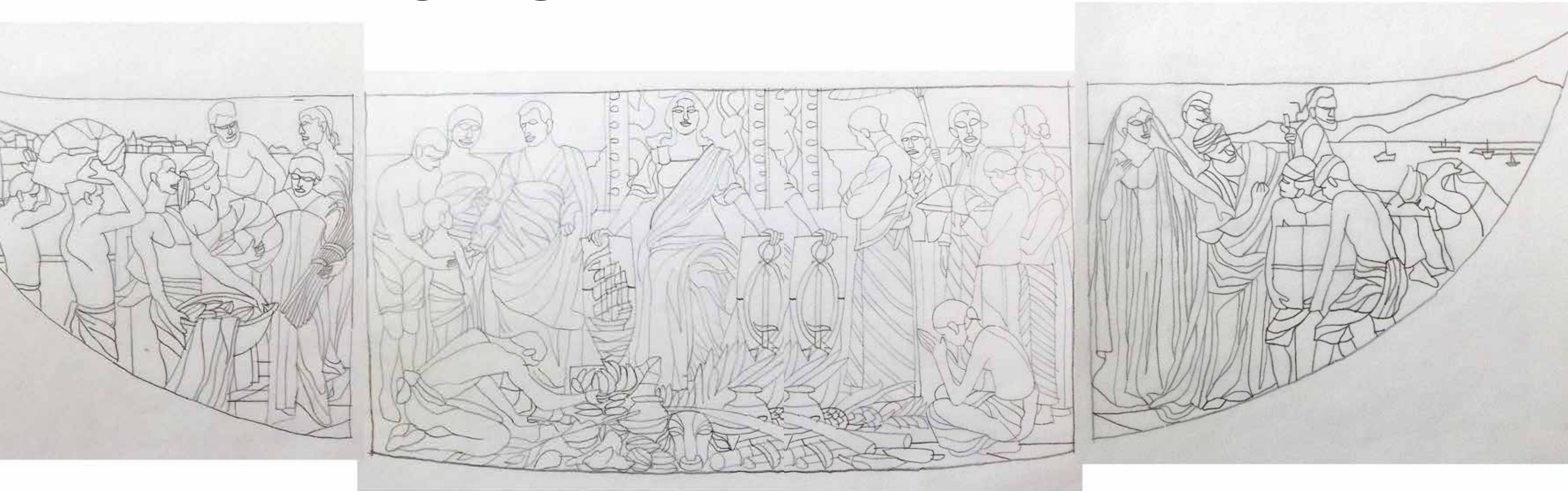


# DEALING WITH THE DUTCH



**Iswanto Hartono**  
scrutinises the past

TEXT SAM STEVERLYNCK

Shadow, 2017  
Steel, sound

Europalia, the Brussels-based multidisciplinary festival, focuses on Indonesia this year, with a rich programme that encompasses music, visual arts, literature, dance, and much more. Though most events take place in Belgium, some also extend to the country's former coloniser, the Netherlands – for understandable reasons. Such as the exhibition *Monuments* by artist Iswanto Hartono, who tackles the Dutch colonial past in a site-specific installation in one of the oldest buildings in Amsterdam, the Oude Kerk, a historic church that now serves as a venue for large-scale contemporary art projects.



Coen wax sculpture, 2017  
In progress / Clay

**DAMN°:** For your exhibition at the Oude Kerk, you have worked a lot around the history of Indonesia and the iconography of Dutch colonialism. Is that something that has always featured in your practice or is it specific to this show?

**Iswanto Hartono:** I came up with this concept for the Oude Kerk because I find it interesting to work with the space there. One of the first things I found out about the church is that it was built with money from colonialism. The tomb of the leader of the first Dutch expedition to Banda, Jacob van Heemskerck, is also there. As well as this, the director of the Oude Kerk,

Jacqueline Grandjean, encouraged me to make site-specific work to deal with the venue's architecture and history. For me, this issue of colonialism is not about right or wrong or bringing things back to the Netherlands. I see the idea of colonialism more as a global issue because it took place everywhere. As Indonesia is a postcolonial country, there are still a lot of interesting issues to explore. Not all my work revolves around this theme. But quite a lot of it does. For an earlier solo show in Jakarta, I made texts in steel. I had collected quotes from Dutch writers like Eduard Douwes Dekker (Multatuli) who lived and worked here. I took some of their sentences and combined them in new ways to create new meanings.



After 'Twee figuren met een kijker op het strand van Groot Banda (Lontor of Banda Besar)', C. Dietrich [photographer], c. 1875-1880  
Oil on tracing paper

**DAMN°:** At the Oude Kerk, you will also be showing models of Dutch monuments in Indonesia. What are those about?

**IH:** The monuments are made of candles - they will melt down slowly during the show. There are 10 to 15 of them, measuring 70 cm x 1 m. These will be statues, monuments, and buildings like the Batavia City Hall, symbols of Dutch colonialism in Indonesia. The work tackles the tension between memory and forgetting. Many of those monuments had been demolished earlier by the Japanese, or during the period of the after independence.

**DAMN°:** You also analyse the iconography of the Gouden Koets (Golden Coach) that is still used by the Dutch King or Queen on Prinsjesdag (Prince's Day). Can you elaborate on the colonial remnants you have discovered?

**IH:** On the left side of the coach, there is a triptych painted by artist Nicolaas van der Waay called Homage from the Colonies. In the middle is the Queen on a throne. To her right are people from the African colonies; to her left are Indonesians. They are all bringing offerings to the Queen. I think the symbolism is fascinating. You could say it is 'heritage'. But it's surprising to see that with all those colonial symbols, the coach is still used in the present day to carry the Royal Family. I basically recreated the paintings by only using the contours, which I formed from steel rods to create the image.



Monuments, 2017  
In progress / Moulds  
Photo: Kotot



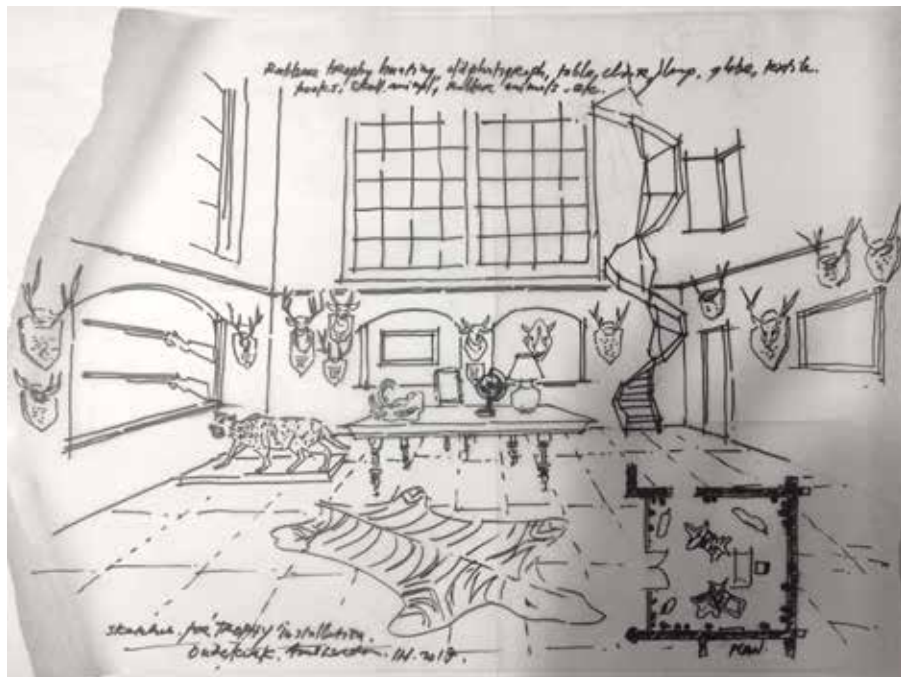
Monuments, 2017  
In progress / Wax moulds



Banda Neira, 2017  
Video still



Trophy, 2017  
Production preview / Rubber and FRP



Trophy: Sebastian Chapel, Oudekerk, 2017  
Preliminary sketch / Pen on tracing paper



Trophy: Bull head, 2017  
Rubber

**DAMN°:** What about the third body of work you are going to show?

**IH:** With this exhibition, I want to tackle colonialism as a global issue, but I also want to link it to my family history. I will create hunting rooms with trophies of animals like deer and rhinos, as my grandfather used to hunt, a sport introduced by the Dutch. In Indonesia we had headhunting of tribes and animals. But this is very different. A lot of Dutch-Indonesian houses were decorated with these hunting trophies. The culture of hunting itself, or how a man's basic instinct is to overpower others, is universal. The colonials did the same thing, in a way, by overpowering a nation for economic reasons. For this piece, I create replicas of animals from the entire Dutch colonial empire: Africa, India, Taiwan, etc., to show how it spread across the globe. At the same time, I am trying to see this idea through my particular family situation.



Trophy: Babiroussa head, 2017  
Rubber and FRP

*Monuments* is at the Oude Kerk in Amsterdam, 27 September – 15 November 2017.

EUROPALIA arts biennial: 10 October – 21 January 2018. europalia.eu

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