

Pavilion of Malaysia
at the 58th International Art Exhibition - La Biennale di Venezia



This year Malaysia marks a historic event with the country's first ever National Pavilion at the world-renowned 58th International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia. Four eminent Malaysian artists – Anurendra Jegadeva, H.H. Lim, Ivan Lam and Zulkifli Yusoff – will represent the country in an exhibition titled *Holding Up a Mirror*. Malaysia joins 90 other countries who will be participating at Biennale Arte 2019. The country's inaugural National Pavilion marks a momentous occasion for Malaysia and Malaysian art and highlights the development of the country's contemporary art practices. It celebrates the beauty and complexity of Malaysian culture and its recently renewed cultural identity and transformation. The Malaysia Pavilion's commissioner is Professor Dato' Dr. Mohamed Najib Dawa, Director General of Balai Seni Negara (National Art Gallery of Malaysia), Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture of Malaysia, and its curator and project director is Lim Wei-Ling.

Commenting on her role in delivering Malaysia's inaugural National Pavilion, Wei-Ling said: *"I have always questioned why the country has never been represented on this major international art platform, and it's been my ambition to spearhead Malaysia's first National Pavilion. I approached the Honourable Prime Minister to request his blessing on this project and I was delighted that we shared the same vision of elevating Malaysian art into the international arena. When selecting the participating artists it was important to work with professionals who could step up to the challenge and deliver thought-provoking works that would best represent contemporary art in Malaysia today. The inaugural Malaysia Pavilion at the 58th International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia features the works of four Malaysian artists who have already established stellar careers and carved solid reputations, both in Malaysia and abroad. Malaysia's inaugural National Pavilion is a first step forward for the country and I hope it will mark the beginning of many more National Pavilions exhibiting the work of other reputable contemporary Malaysian artists at the Venice Art Biennale."*

Malaysia has recently opened a new chapter in its history. Driven by the desire for democratic change, the people of this vibrant multiracial, multi-ethnic, and multicultural nation were galvanized to come together and peacefully bring about an unprecedented change in a historic national election. The Malaysian identity has been re-affirmed through the country's transformation, and a spirit of optimism has prevailed. Reflecting the overarching theme of the 58th International Art Exhibition of La

Biennale di Venezia, *May You Live in Interesting Times*, set by this edition's curator Ralph Rugoff, the Pavilion of Malaysia's exhibition *Holding Up a Mirror* is a discourse around the concept of identity within the larger context of society at a time of immense political, social and economic change. *Holding Up a Mirror* takes as its starting point the concept of national identity as the space where the personal and the public intersect, where myth and history collide, where national and international perspectives are constructed.

To grow up in Malaysia is to become acquainted with different cultures and multiple histories. The construction of the Malaysian identity comes through a process of narration that hovers in-between the past and the present, often extending across different geographies to recount stories of diaspora, migration and integration. One needs to look no further than the four featured Malaysian artists whose backgrounds reflect the diverse and complex narrative of Malaysia. While each artist is *Malaysian*, their diverse ethnic, religious and cultural roots illuminate the many histories embedded in the Malaysian national mosaic.

Together, the works at the National Pavilion of Malaysia represent an enquiry around self when perceived against a wider framework of the collective. They demonstrate that identity is heterogenous and in constant flux; it is a weave of many personal narratives into a shared fabric of public consciousness that is at once diverse and unified. Across different media – painting, video, sound and installation – the represented artists offer a commentary on their own search around identity, embracing concepts and ideologies around alterity, cultural hegemony, patriarchy, and globalisation.

The 58th International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia runs from 11th May to 24th November 2019.

The Pavilion of Malaysia is located at Palazzo Malipiero – 3198 2nd Floor, Campo San Samuele, Venice, Italy. Admission hours are Tuesday - Sunday, from 10 AM – 6 PM.

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