

# Jompet Kuswidananto: Of Thousand

Ames Yavuz

Opening reception: 18 October 2025, 4–7pm

On view: 18 October – 29 November 2025

Location: Ames Yavuz Singapore, Gillman Barracks, 9 Lock Road #02-23, Singapore 108937

Ames Yavuz is pleased to present *Of Thousand*, a solo exhibition by Indonesian artist, **Jompet Kuswidananto**. Imagined as a memorial, the exhibition bears witness to the thousands of unnamed forced labourers, *rōmusha*, who went missing during the Japanese occupation in Java during World War II.

Using the unresolved past as his source material, Jompet Kuswidananto has explored the complex sociopolitical history of Indonesia over the past 35 years, with a special focus on his home region of Java. Haunting objects, figures, sounds and utterances from pivotal moments of the country's violent past, ranging from Dutch colonial rule and the Japanese occupation, to the authoritarian 'New Order' regime (1967–1981) and the 'post-1998 sonic blast of democracy' share a stage in the artist's multi-media and immersive installation based works — that invoke ghosts as ghosts, without shepherding them back into the domesticated realm of the living.

*Of Thousand* began with a search. The artist's grandfather was forcibly relocated in early 1943 and went missing. It is suspected that he was taken as a *rōmusha*, a forced labourer, to repurpose Dutch sugar factory railways in Central Java for the coal mining trade, connecting Saketi to Bayah in West Java — the deadliest Japanese war project on the island, taking tens of thousands of lives. With no official records of the labourers nor a formal search for the graves of the deceased, the memories of the lost lives were relegated to slip through the cracks of history and gradually fade along with their anonymised identities.

*Of Thousand* is rooted in the Javanese tradition 'Nyewu', a memorial rite held a thousand days after a person's death to release their soul from earthly attachments onto the realm of the ancestors. This exhibition performs 'Nyewu' as both a spiritual and political gesture, to make space in the landscape of memory for the unarchived *rōmusha* deaths and their unfinished business.

The works transform remnants from the railway tracks. The steel rail, an instrument of double violence from colonial extraction and imperial forced labour, is reworked into tone plates of a gamelan installation — an ensemble of traditional Indonesian instruments played at ceremonies. The gamelan is used here as a vessel to transmit discordant feelings of not just grief, longing, and loss, but also of recognition and healing.

Some wooden rail sleepers are transformed into prayer beads, and others are pulped into paper on which a thousand kinds of physical acts are written out, acts imagined to have been carried out by the *rōmusha*. These words also act as lyrics for a song played within the gallery space. The gamelan is installed nearby hanging 'ghost' figures, dressed in costumes decorated with traces from historic railway constructions.

Not seeking to reconstruct a precise history in the absence of archives, *Of Thousand* embraces the inexactness of memory. In the voids and interstices of these recollections, the works offer a resonant space where the echoes of the unarchived and the erased may linger a while longer.

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A performance featuring Dr Jan Mrazek and the NUS Singa Nglaras Gamelan Ensemble will open the exhibition at Ames Yavuz Singapore on 18 October 2025, 4:30-5:30pm. Alongside the exhibition, works by the artist are on view at the Setouchi Triennale (3 October - 9 November 2025).

## Selected Works



*Gamelan Kyai Setrodinomo*, 2025, Wood, casted iron from steel rail, brass, glass lamp, light bulbs, cables, mallet, floor mat, dimensions variable

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*Echoes From The Hollow #1*, 2025, Costume, shoe, plastic mannequin, dimensions variable



*Of Thousand #1*, 2025, Wood, plastic, Iron, steel string, dimensions variable

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## About the artist

Infused with theatricality and political bent, Jompet Kuswidananto's (b. 1976, Indonesia) multimodal works surface the undulating effects of Java's complex history, its syncretic cultural and religious heritage, as well as the brutal legacy of colonialism and occupation, on contemporary society. Studying sociology and political science at the Gadjah Mada University in Yogyakarta, Kuswidananto began his artistic journey as a musician, emerging during the final years of Suharto's authoritarian rule in the late 1990s. During this time, he joined *Teater Garasi*, an interdisciplinary performing arts collective bridging traditional and contemporary art forms to explore Java's sociopolitical realities. This influence reveals itself in Kuswidananto's affective explorations and syntheses of various mediums in his work, including installation, video, sound, and music.

Kuswidananto often uses fragments of found objects representing different eras, religions, and political events. It is in these idle articles where omitted and obliterated identities lost to history are implied and invoked, creating spectral compositions of fractured temporalities. These assemblages, termed 'ghost' figures, tease out the nuances of Java's blended identity, from its Hindu, Buddhist, and Islamic religious heritage to the problematic histories of Dutch colonialism, the deadly Japanese occupation, followed by the mania of freedom and uncertainty following the end of Suharto's presidency. At times anomalous, mysterious, and discorded, Kuswidananto grounds these conflicting roots of Java's identity in the potency of memory, and the charged feelings the act of remembering elicits.

Kuswidananto has exhibited across numerous institutions, including solo showcases at Museum of Contemporary Art Grand-Hornu, Belgium (2017), Esplanade, Singapore (2016), Sherman Contemporary Art Foundation, Sydney/Gadigal, Australia (2016), and Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam (2014).

His major institutional group exhibitions include: *Spirits of Maritime Crossing*, presented by the Bangkok Art Biennale at Venice Biennale, Italy (2024); Sharjah Biennial 14, United Arab Emirates (2019); *Contemporary Worlds: Indonesia*, National Gallery of Australia (2019); *SUNSHOWER: Contemporary Art from Southeast Asia 1980s to Now*, Mori Art Museum and National Art Centre Tokyo, Japan (2017); among others. Kuswidananto is part of the upcoming Setouchi Triennale, Japan and Kochi-Muziris Biennale, India.

His installation works were recognised with the Prudential - Eye Award in Singapore in 2014, and his works are collected by institutions such as the Mori Art Museum, Japan; M+ Museum, Hong Kong; the Singapore Art Museum; National Gallery of Victoria, Australia; Museum of Contemporary Photography Chicago, United States; LACMA, United States; Kadist Foundation, United States; and the Sharjah Art Foundation, United Arab Emirates.



## About the gallery

Ames Yavuz embraces its diverse cultural background through a strong international focus and perspective. The gallery's vision is underpinned by robust curatorial practices that form the core of our program and foster intercultural discourse on a global scale.

Representing a wide range of multidisciplinary artists across continents, Ames Yavuz aims to challenge, inspire, and reclaim through art. The gallery provides a platform for transformative and compelling artistic voices who bring care and attention to the most urgent conversations of our time, and celebrates storytelling with authenticity, innovation and wit.

For further information on the artists and the works, please contact:

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