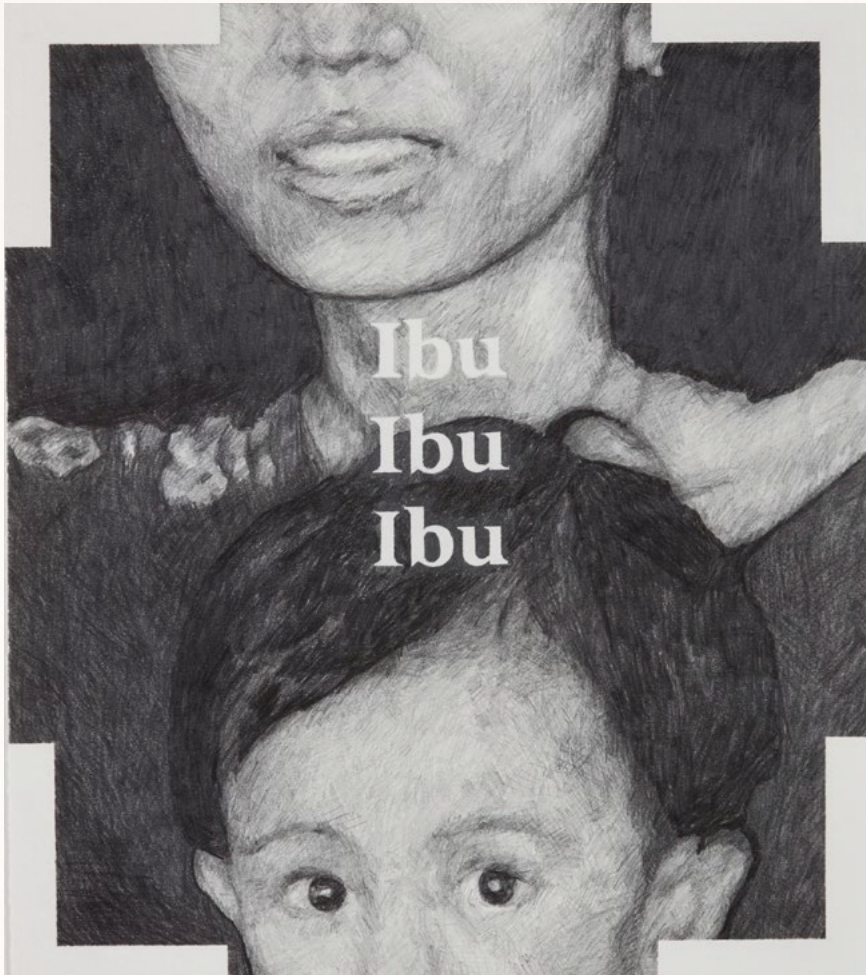
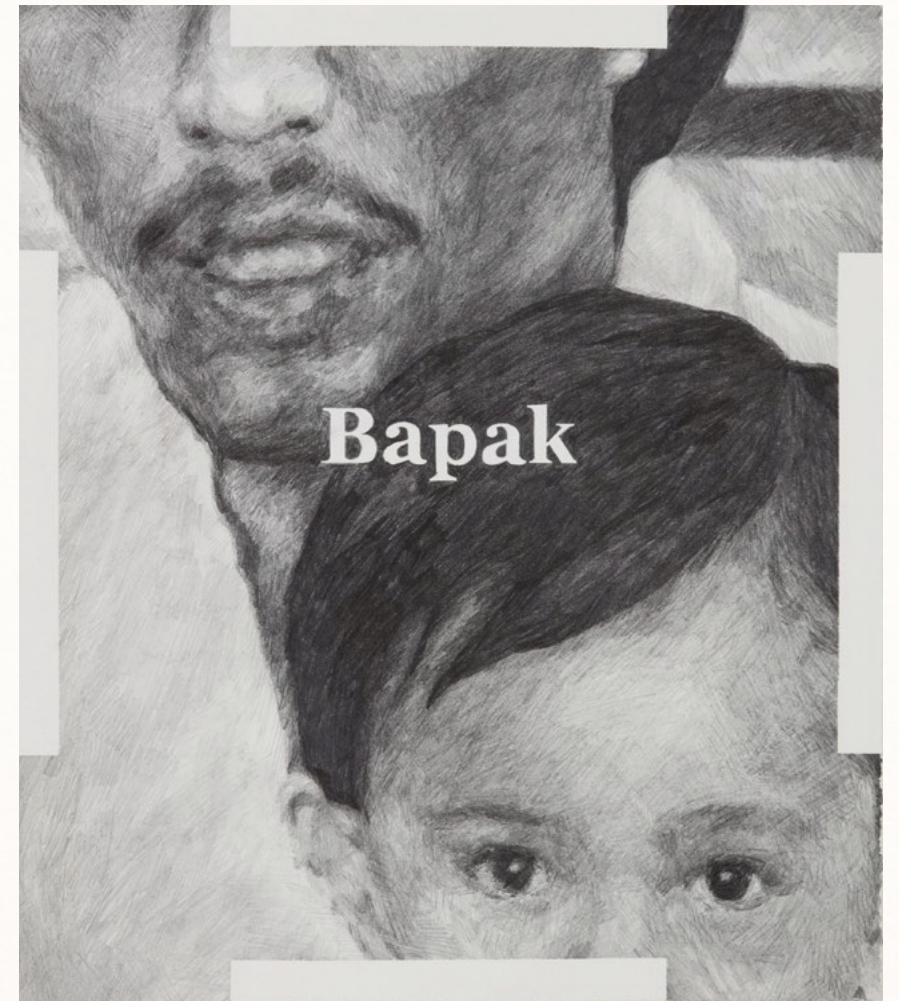


Badra Aji:
Get the boy a dog and
call it a day



Mother, Mother, Mother (Ibu, Ibu, Ibu) 2026



Father (Bapak) 2026



Get the boy a dog and call it a day

Shell Odgers

In the semi-narrative *Get the boy a dog and call it a day*, Badra Aji (born 1985, Indonesia) seeks to locate a missing half-sister, the result of his father's alleged affair, to disprove a family karma.

The exhibition title speaks of parents applying band-aid solutions to children dealing with trauma. Aji, however, employs the phrase contradictorily, seeking understanding rather than judgment of his parents and of the inherent complexities of raising a child. Further explaining the name, Aji recalls: 'When I was a child we had a photo album with two basset hounds on the cover. Inside, there were only photos of my dad when he was young. It's funny to think that everyone in his family is a cat person. I wonder if we all became cat people because we weren't allowed to have dogs.'⁰¹ Raised Muslim, the Ajis were not permitted to interact with canines. Aji speculates whether his father chose this dog-illustrated album as he secretly desired a pup, despite their poor reputation among those of their faith.

As a possible subconscious fulfillment of his destiny to become a feline lover, Aji adopted his first cat while conceiving this exhibition. He has named his companion Cinta ('love' in Bahasa), perhaps as an antidote to the perceived karmic love curse that, in seeking his missing sibling, he aims to either prove or dispel. *Get the boy a dog and call it a day* explores this redemptive journey.

Referencing memories, dreams, personal archives and photographs, alongside poetic musings, Aji's imagining of his alleged half-sister is realised through video and a series of drawings and texts. Throughout the installation, the recurring motif of women in hijab is both a nod to familiarity and emblematic of the threatening force of strict religious law in the artist's homeland. Meanwhile, the theme of passed-down trauma is

explored as a supernatural phenomenon and psychological wound. The work is embedded with layers of symbolism, gesturing towards magical realism yet remaining non-prescriptive in its storytelling.

Opening the exhibition, *Segalanya Akan Ada Pada Waktunya* (*Prayers*) depicts a figure in hijab who could be either Aji's mother or half-sister. While for Aji there is a fondness attached to seeing his mother in prayer, a tension arises for the viewer due to the ambiguity of the central figure, positioning them as witness and outsider simultaneously. The repeated motif of a pointed index finger adds to the effect. To the western eye, this symbol may be reminiscent of Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel fresco, *The Creation of Adam*, c.1508–12, yet in Islam the hand gesture proclaims the oneness of God. For Aji, the motion is also indicative of being singled out as an adolescent in his adopted homeland for being different—in his case Asian, queer and Muslim-raised. The aquatic motif in the work relates to both the video *Tiap Selasa Sore* (*Every Tuesday Afternoon*), and drawing *Luruh* (*And everything that remains*), which feature water as a metaphor for memory, and to create a feeling of continuity.

The drawn poem *Maria* contextualises the exhibition's karmic theme. Aji relates:

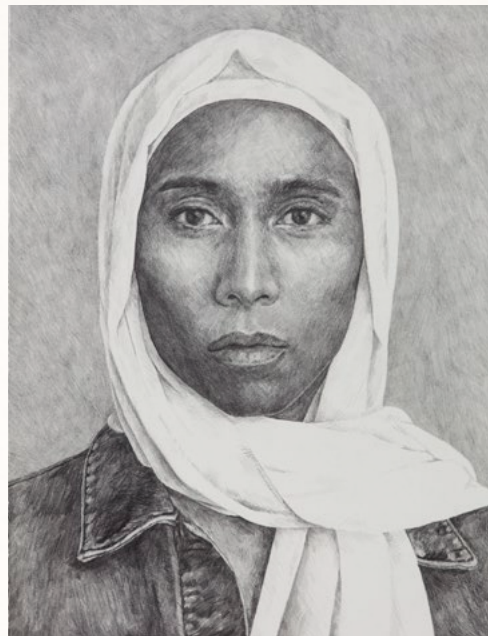
We watched telenovelas growing up, and Maria: The Lost Love was our favourite.⁰² We loved Maria but disliked the evil sister. She was beautiful but very mean. Two weeks after my father passed, a woman and a little girl came to our house. We served sweet tea and shortbread, but they didn't touch a thing. Soon after, the woman told my mother that they were, in fact, my father's second family. My mother didn't raise her voice. She merely said the woman was mistaken if she thought there would be any inheritance left for them and sent them away. I don't remember much about that day, but I often thought of Maria and how, if you live long enough, life starts to resemble those telenovelas. Only, I am not playing Maria.⁰³

Aji admits his embellished storytelling sensibilities are influenced by these Mexican telenovelas, and that a tone of morbid humour underlies his work as a way of processing memories and trauma. While Aji himself can barely recall the time his father's alleged

02. *María la del Barrio*, 1995–96, television series, directed by Beatriz Sheridan and Marta Luna, Mexico.
03. Badra Aji, *Maria, The Lost Love* (Page 22) 2026, pencil on paper. Courtesy of the artist.



Segalanya Akan Ada Pada Waktunya (*Prayers*) 2026



Self Portrait as Half Sister #1 2026
Self Portrait as Half Sister #2 2026
Self Portrait as Half Sister #3 2026

mistress and illegitimate child visited the family home, his mother has planted the memory in his mind via retellings. He wonders if his half-sister viewed him as an evil stepbrother type who received all their father's love, time and attention. The mystery child's paternity to this day has never been confirmed, nor have the family heard from her or her mother again.

In the drawings *Self Portrait as Half Sister 1, 2 and 3*, Aji contemplates his unconfirmed sibling's appearance and identity. Is she a civil servant like their father? Does she conform to societal expectations, while battling internalised homophobia, as the artist himself does? Does she wear hijab in a cool casual manner as Aji suspects he would, if he were a creative woman trying to fit in in Indonesia? Is she glamorous and outgoing like his older sister? These drawings are not referenced from AI generated or photo-shopped images. Instead, Aji dressed and photographed himself as all three versions, attempting to both embody his half-sibling's persona, and to channel the complexity of being a woman in the most Muslim-populated country in the world. Aji has noticed a rise in the use of, and the nuances of wearing Hijab each time he has returned to Indonesia—a reflection of the broader and increasingly conservative political landscape.

Hanging on opposite sides of the gallery, *Mother, Mother, Mother (Ibu, Ibu, Ibu)* and *Father (Bapak)* speak of both Aji's original family unit, and the divide created by the posthumous revelation of his father's affairs, and potential paternity of an additional child. The drawings' titles reference Muhammad's Hadith, in which a man asks the Prophet: 'Who is most deserving of my respect?' The reply, 'Your mother'. The man asks again, 'Then who?' Again, the reply, 'Your mother'. When asked a third time, 'Then who?', another 'Your mother'. Finally, the man asks for the fourth time, 'Then who?' and the Prophet replies, 'Your father'. Here the cropping of faces serves to highlight shared facial features. How much of our face is from our mother? And from our father? The top half? The lower? Aji has reflected, 'When I finally shaved all my hair—what was left—my mother said, 'you look like your father. Your eyes, your nose, your teeth, your face'. Others agreed. They said we were cut from the same mould'.⁰⁴

04 . Badra Aji, *Tiap Selasa Sore (Every Tuesday Afternoon)* 2026, HD single-channel video. Courtesy of the artist.

In the central work of the exhibition, the Bahasa narrated moving image work *Tiap Selasa Sore (Every Tuesday Afternoon)*, Aji continues speculation about and addresses his possible half-sibling. He shares with her memories and his pink-skyed dreams of their father, the artist's only way to now see him. Aji admits while he always welcomes his father in dream form, he worries that it is an 'omen of misfortune'. His mother would always say that if you dream about the dead, either they want you to pray for them, or they want to warn you about something.

As Aji and his older sister could read the Koran before their mother was able to, they thought she was simply testing the waters when she commenced wearing hijab and practicing the Muslim religion. What would she now think of her gay son? This anxiety is further referenced in the memory of Aji's mother's prayers: 'Long before my mother mastered reciting Qur'an, she already prayed five times a day, woke in the dark for tahajjud. I'd wake to her prayers. Though the words were foreign, I knew what she was asking. I knew her prayers by heart'.⁰⁵ The last line of the video narrative alleviates some of this pain when Aji's mother, after implying she knew why he would never make heteronormative life choices, lovingly tells him, 'You are still my child'.

A basketball court stands in for the implied swimming pool in *Tiap Selasa Sore*, referencing Aji's anxieties around school sports. While water is never visible in the piece, it enters through the soundscape and leads to *Luruh (And everything that remains)*. This drawing is referenced from the artist's mother's fishpond and indoor aquarium. It reminds Aji of being back home in Indonesia. As one of Aji's favourite authors Toni Morrison writes, 'All water has a perfect memory and is forever trying to get back to where it was'.⁰⁶

The flowers in the work refer to the adjacent poem *Aunty Sri*:

Of the seven siblings, Aunty Sri was the only one who never married. This was something we never spoke about, but I'd heard that she had her heart broken and never truly recovered. I saw her two years before she passed. I came to the old house. The part of the courtyard where the flowers used to be

05. Badra Aji, *Tiap Selasa Sore (Every Tuesday Afternoon)* 2026, HD single-channel video. Courtesy of the artist.

06. Toni Morrison, 'The Site of Memory' in William Zinsser (ed.), *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir*, Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1987, pp. 103–124.





had been turned into a musalla. She wore a purple headscarf, but I imagined her hair was all grey underneath. Two cats, and no children. She said repeatedly that I looked like my father. Unlike my other aunts and uncles, she never asked me when I would marry. I think she knew. I think the bearers of the karma always do.⁰⁷

While this, and in fact none of the works, explicitly mention the artist's queerness, it is implied. For Aji, contemplating his half-sister is a means to test the veracity of their patriarch's karma, and whether they are therefore hereditarily cursed in love. Is it him or her? Did their father break too many hearts, and is that why Aji cannot find love?

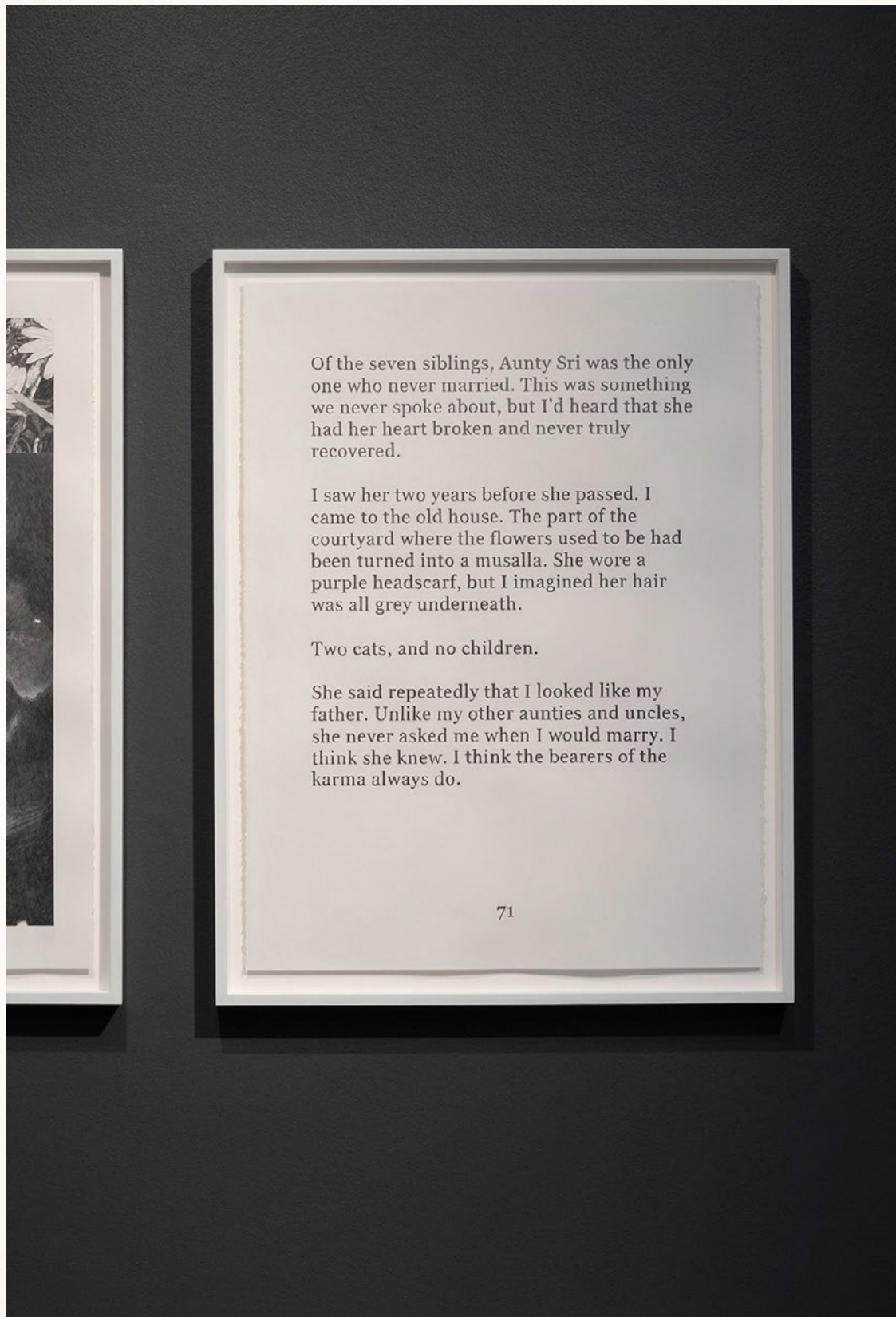
Through the western lens, karma refers to the individual. Yet to the Indonesian, it flows on to offspring and future generations of the receiver's family. Karma is a shared experience in which a child can bear the brunt of a parent's or forebear's missteps, even as far back as seven generations. In *Get the boy a dog and call it a day*, Aji blurs the distinction between karma and trauma. Drawing deeply from personal and collective memory, Badra Aji's works grapple with the tension between the intimate and personal, cultural memory and the political realm. He pulls viewers into the complex, often unseen forces shaping family and identity, weaving private history with broader social tensions, while asserting the significance of marginalised perspectives.



Wahneema Lubiano
Black and White
2011
Photography
100 x 100 cm



Wahneema Lubiano
Ibu
2011
Photography
100 x 100 cm



Of the seven siblings, Aunty Sri was the only one who never married. This was something we never spoke about, but I'd heard that she had her heart broken and never truly recovered.

I saw her two years before she passed. I came to the old house. The part of the courtyard where the flowers used to be had been turned into a musalla. She wore a purple headscarf, but I imagined her hair was all grey underneath.

Two cats, and no children.

She said repeatedly that I looked like my father. Unlike my other aunts and uncles, she never asked me when I would marry. I think she knew. I think the bearers of the karma always do.

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Call it a Day, Call it Home

Wulan Dirgantoro

Dear Professor,

I'm emailing you to ask whether you could help me identify this object. Growing up outside Indonesia, I have little connection with my Indonesian roots—until my grandmother passed away last month. I remember she used to carry this object in her handbag; she said it was a protection charm. It was given to her when she left Medan fifty years ago or so. I'm not sure who gave it to her; my guess is her own cousin. Sadly, my grandmother lost this charm at some point, so I bought this one on eBay to have something that reminds me of her and helps me reconnect with my Indonesian roots.

I would be grateful for any information.

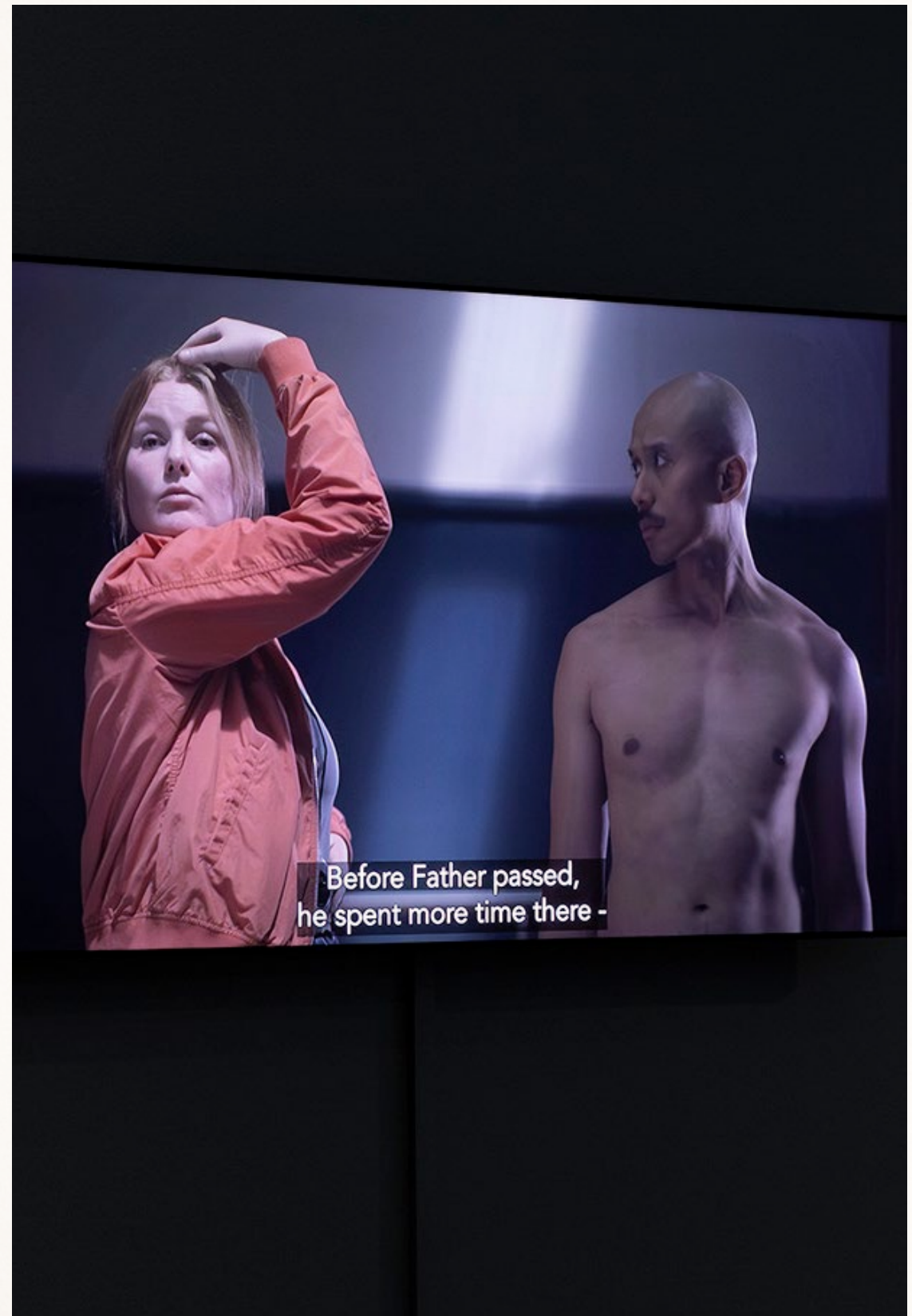
An object, a memory, a story—three things that are familiar to those who identify as a part of a diasporic community. Things that remind us of home, yet home is already elsewhere. I occasionally receive emails from the Indonesian diaspora asking for information about an object or an artwork, always with a story attached. When they are asking for information, it seems that what they are seeking is an affirmation that we are still Indonesian, no matter how far removed we are now.

Badra Aji's works in *Get the boy a dog and call it a day*, sensitively grapple with this notion of home, and not home, in his drawing series and a moving image work. The black-and-white

images and texts capture the little details that anchor his memory to home—the story of his half-sister, the details behind a woman’s *mukena*, the fish with aquatic plants. *Tiap Selasa Sore (Every Tuesday Afternoon)*, the single-channel video, however, is set more firmly in the physical space of Melbourne than in his hometown of Pekalongan, a historic coastal town in Central Java. The drawings guide the viewer through intervals of looking and not-looking. The grey space between the images in the gallery becomes part of the encounter, shaping how one moves, pauses, and returns—mirroring the careful navigation that structures the images themselves.

I visited her house in the afternoon. She brought out a cup of tea and several glass jars filled with biscuits. She placed them on her glass-topped coffee table, ‘Ayo diminum’, she said. We chatted for a while, catching up on news from her neighbourhood and on our vast network of relatives, while sipping on the steaming sweet tea. She rose from her seat, ‘If you’ll excuse me, I need to do my prayer.’ I smiled awkwardly, not sure what to do now. She noticed my hesitation, ‘Would you like to join me? It’s okay, I have a spare *mukena*.’

It’s been a while since I prayed together with my aunt. Since moving here twenty years ago, I hardly fast during Ramadan, let alone pray five times a day. My aunt looks much older now; her movements are not as fluid. She raised her index finger during the Tashahhud, her lips moving in silent prayer. Watching her, I am aware of how easily devotion reads as obedience, and how little space there seems to be for those whose bodies or desires already place them slightly out of line.





Indonesia formally recognises six official religions: Islam, Catholicism, Protestant, Buddhism, Hinduism and Confucianism, despite having the world's largest Muslim population. The Presidential Decree No. 1/PNPS/1965 formalised this position by obliging every Indonesian citizen to adhere to one of the officially recognised religions. Such a shift occurs noticeably during one of the bloodiest episodes in Indonesian modern history, namely the 1965–66 anti-communist killings. The Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) was scapegoated for a failed coup, leading the New Order regime to promote propaganda linking communism with atheism and justifying violence. Since then, religiosity in Indonesia has functioned not only as belief, but as proof of legitimacy—something to be performed, named, and registered through the national identity card. To be irreligious remains largely unintelligible.⁰¹

Within this landscape, religious practice in Indonesia is less a private conviction than a form of navigation: between state expectations, familial obligation, and personal distance. Faith becomes something one learns to move through, adapt to, or return to—sometimes out of devotion, sometimes out of necessity.

As scholars Amar Alfikar and Diego Garcia Rodriguez observe, queer Muslims in Indonesia continuously have to navigate the spaces of religious belonging and public spaces. Since 2016, sexual and gender minorities have been a target of hostility in Indonesia. Today, both elites and the general public make use of the acronym 'LGBT' to portray minorities as a figure of national menace, forcing queer individuals to negotiate visibility, safety, and religious belonging simultaneously.⁰²

Badra Aji's series of works mirrors this careful navigation. His drawings assemble fragments of memory and intimacy. Meaning emerges through the negative space—an invisible structure that holds together familial affection, intimacy and distance.

01. In 2017, the Constitutional Court Ruling No.97/PUU-XIV/2016 ruled that adherents to *aliran kepercayaan* (Indigenous beliefs) have the right to state their belief in their national identity card. Observers see this move by Indonesia's highest court paved the way towards acceptance towards diverse religious and spiritual expressions in Indonesia. However, adherents of Indigenous religion continue to face legal and cultural discrimination, as their beliefs have been stigmatised as culturally and politically deviant as influenced by the 1965–66 mass killings. See Affaf Mujahidah, 'Sacred and silenced: How indigenous beliefs struggle for space in Indonesia', *Melbourne Asia Review*, published 27 August 2025, <https://www.melbourneasiareview.edu.au/sacred-and-silenced-how-indigenous-beliefs-struggle-for-space-in-indonesia/>, accessed 27 January 2026.

02. Amar Alfikar and Dr Diego Garcia Rodriguez, 'The contemporary shifting landscape of LGBTQ+ Muslim expression in Indonesia', *Melbourne Asia Review*, published 27 August 2025, from <https://www.melbourneasiareview.edu.au/the-contemporary-shifting-landscape-of-lgbtq-muslim-expression-in-indonesia-2/>, accessed 27 January 2026.

From his diasporic positioning, these works acknowledge what is understood but left unsaid, reflecting a Javanese sensibility where restraint, rather than articulation, becomes a mode of care.

'I'm starting to pray again now.'

'How come?'

'Well, it's like this: we're so busy busy writing grants, supervising students, teaching, attending committee meetings and we even take our work home, so praying five times a day forced me to take a break. Though it's hard to find ablution and prayer facilities at work.'

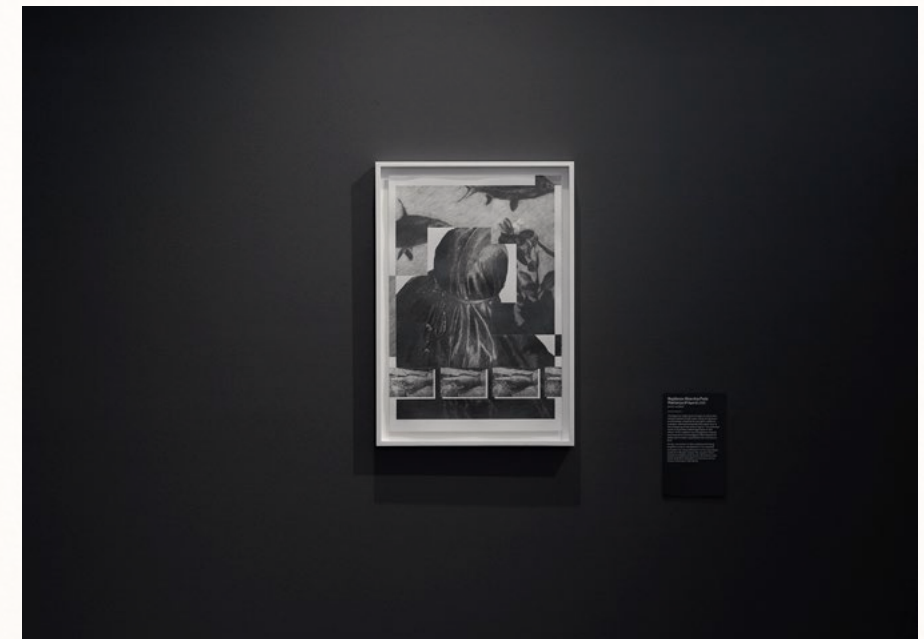
'Do you still remember the prayers?'

'Babe, it's all muscle memory now. They'll come back to me eventually.'

Later, I try to remember when I last touched the floor with my forehead. The sequence returns before the words do: standing, bowing, prostrating. Muscle memory, as he said. My body remembers what my mouth stumbles to recite.

In Badra Aji's works, nothing is resolved. The drawings do not reconcile faith and distance, queerness and kinship, home and elsewhere. Instead, they sit with them—quietly, insistently—like prayer times interrupting the day. They ask for pause, not belief; attention, not clarity.

Perhaps this is what remains for those of us who live slightly out of step with home: not answers, but gestures. A drawing held together by negative space. A prayer half-remembered. An object carried across oceans, even when its meaning is no longer fully intact.





with chili and tomato sauce.



Of the seven siblings, Aunty Sri was the only one who never married. This was something we never spoke about, but I'd heard that she had her heart broken and never truly recovered.

I saw her two years before she passed. I came to the old house. The part of the courtyard where the flowers used to be had been turned into a musalla. She wore a purple headscarf, but I imagined her hair was all grey underneath.

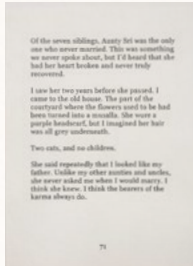
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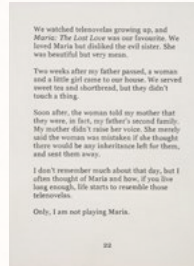
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List of works

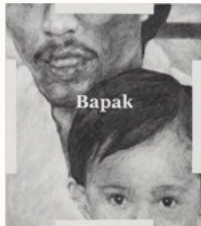
The catalogue is arranged alphabetically.
Measurements are height before width. All
works courtesy of the artist.



Aunty Sri (Page 71) 2026
pencil on paper
76 x 56cm



Maria, The Lost Love (Page 22) 2026
pencil on paper
76 x 56 cm



Father (Bapak) 2026
pencil on paper
33 x 29cm



Mother, Mother, Mother (Ibu, Ibu, Ibu) 2026
pencil on paper
33 x 29 cm



*Luruh (And everything that
remains)* 2026
pencil on paper
76 x 56cm



*Segalanya Akan Ada Pada
Waktunya (Prayers)* 2026
pencil on paper
68.5 x 46cm



Self Portrait as Half Sister #1 2026
pencil on paper
39 x 29 cm



Self-Portrait as Half Sister #2 2026
pencil on paper
39 x 29 cm



Self Portrait as Half Sister #3 2026
pencil on paper
39 x 29 cm



*Tiap Selasa Sore (Every Tuesday
Afternoon)* 2026
video
duration 7:02 min
Director & Writer: Badra Aji
Co-Director & Editor: Lesley Pinder
Producer: Shell Odgers
Cinematographer: Martine Wolf
Choreographer: Al Swanson
Swimmer & Narrator: Badra Aji
Swim Coach: Al Swanson
Supported by City of Melbourne and
Creative Victoria

Artist's biography

Badra Aji's practice draws deeply from personal and collective memory, manifesting in works that blur the boundary between intimate and political, disrupting familiar interpretations, while asserting the significance of marginalised perspectives. Through a combination of figurative drawing, video, writing and photography, he constructs poetic semi-narratives employing a deliberate disjuncture between imagery and language. This intentional friction creates distance for the viewer, positioning them as both witness and outsider. Aji's use of personal archives and historical paintings furthers this tension, embedding his work with layers of symbolism and gestures towards magical realism.

Contributors

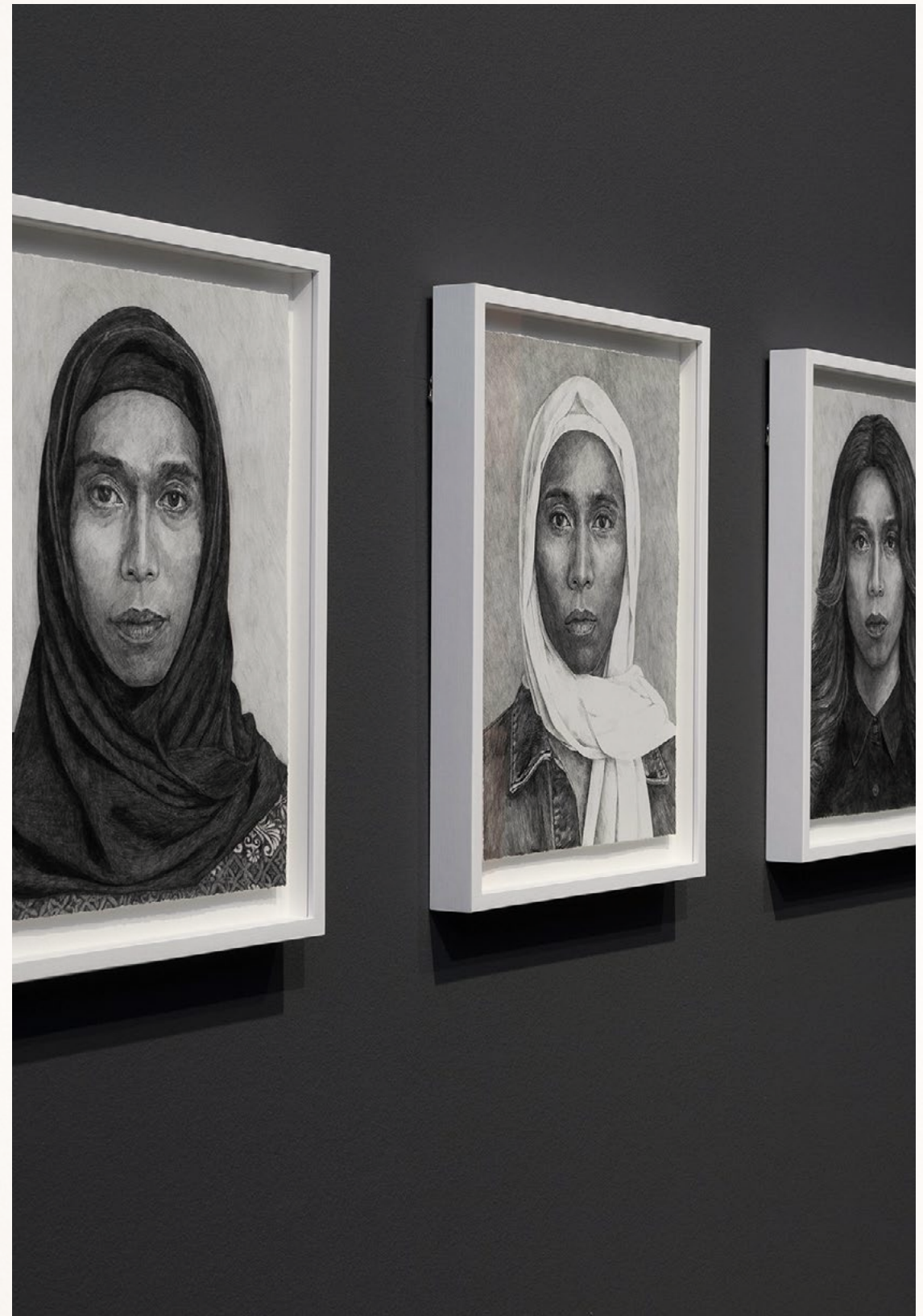
Shell Odgers is a designer, curator and arts facilitator living and working in Naarm on the unceded lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation. Trained as a graphic designer and formerly working for the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV), her design work specialises in outcomes for the arts, focusing on promoting galleries, exhibitions, artists and their work. Previously co-director/curator of Mailbox Art Space, Shell's curatorial projects focus on championing underrepresented voices within the contemporary art sector, including neurodivergent artists and those with intellectual disability via her work at Arts Project Australia.

Wulan Dirgantoro is an art historian specialising in modern and contemporary Indonesian and Southeast Asian art, with a research focus on women artists, feminism, memory, and the visual cultures of historical trauma. Her work brings together art history, oral history, and interdisciplinary methodologies to examine how artists respond to political violence, social change, and lived experience

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Badra Aji and Shell Odgers would like to thank Heide Museum of Modern Art for hosting this exhibition. We thank Artistic Director Lesley Harding for championing Badra's work and providing editorial mentoring, Collections & Exhibitions Manager Chloe Jones and team for realising the exhibition, Head of Design & Marketing Michael Gibb and team for their considered design outcomes and promotion of the show, and Visitor Services & Volunteer Program Manager Melissa Viola and teams for welcoming visitors to the space.

We also thank our exhibition collaborators. Lesley Pinder, Martine Wolff and Al Swanson for their work on moving image piece *Tiap Selasa Sore (Every Tuesday Afternoon)*, Agung Muchtar and Vasa Amadea for their assistance styling and photographing Badra for the works *Self Portrait as Half Sister # 1, 2 and 3*, and Wulan Dirgantoro for contextualising Badra's work within the broader Indonesian cultural landscape.





Published to accompany the exhibition
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Curated by Shell Odgers
Heide Museum of Modern Art
14 March to 16 August 2026

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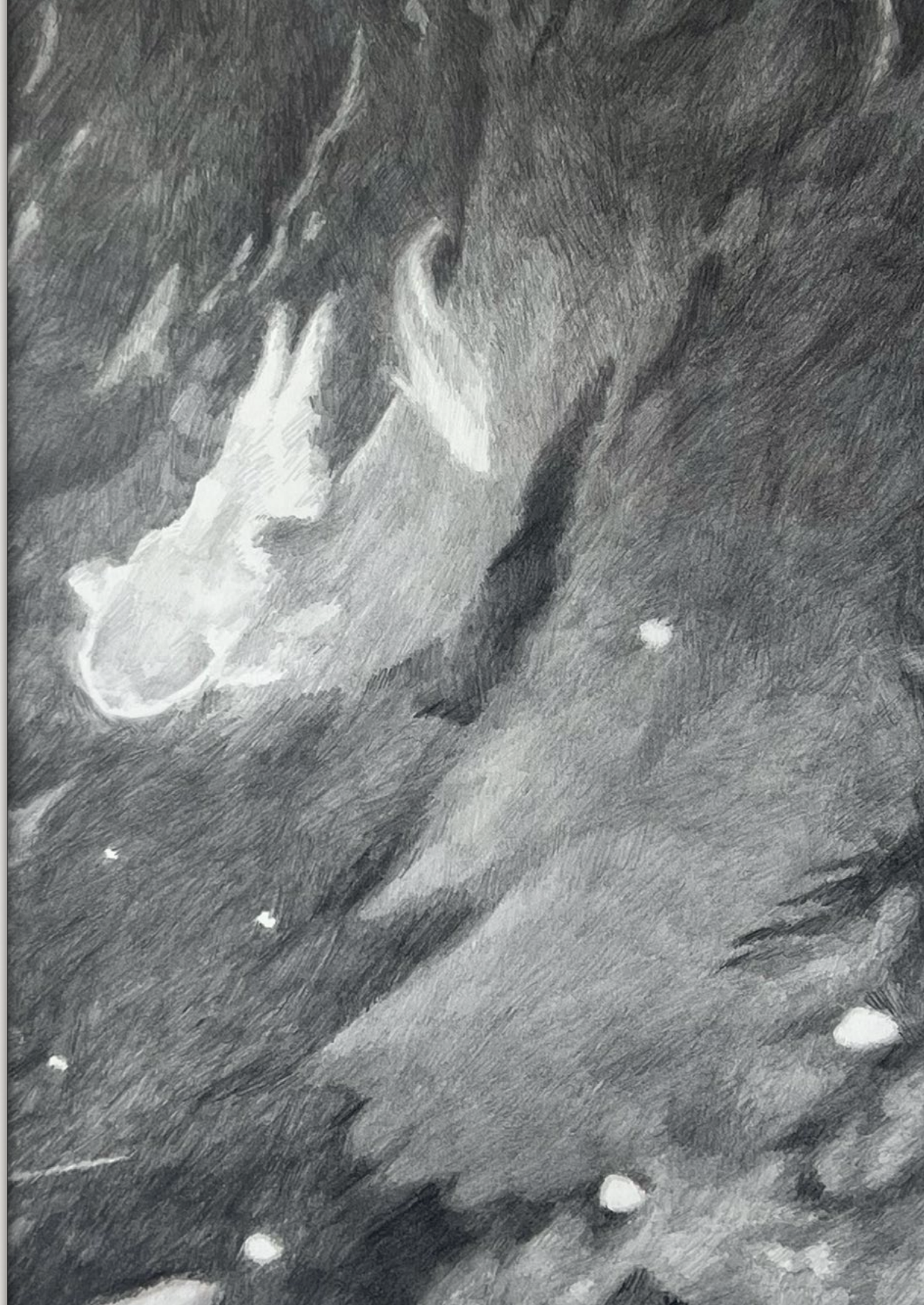
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Owners of the land and waters on which the museum
is located. We pay respect to their Elders past and
present, and recognise the rich traditions and
continuing creative cultures of all Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia.

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