



News

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Asia Society presents *Diponegoro* performed by *Sardono Dance Theatre* and conceived by Sardono Kusumo of Indonesia

Part of *Muslim Voices: Arts & Ideas*, a city-wide festival June 5–14, 2009 celebrating the extraordinary range of artistic expression in the Muslim world presented by Asia Society, BAM, and NYU Center for Dialogues

Ten-day, multi-venue arts festival and conference includes artists from India, Indonesia, Iran, Kuwait, Morocco, Pakistan, Palestine, Senegal, Syria, and the U.S.

New York, NY/April 17, 2009—Asia Society presents *Diponegoro*, performed by Sardono Dance Theatre of Indonesia, June 13–14. *Diponegoro* is a dance theater work depicting one of Indonesia's most revered heroes, a Javanese prince and Muslim mystic who led a rebellion against Dutch colonial rulers in the 1820s. Created by renowned director/choreographer Sardono Kusumo and featuring a cast of eight Indonesian dancers and musicians, *Diponegoro* explores the nobility and character of this legendary figure in a piece that bridges formal Javanese and contemporary dance.

Muslim Voices: Arts & Ideas is an unprecedented ten-day festival and conference taking place June 5–14, 2009 throughout New York City, celebrating the extraordinary range of artistic expression in the Muslim world with more than 100 artists from as far away as Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and as near as Brooklyn. In addition to dance, the festival features live music, theater, films, exhibitions, talks, and other events, ranging from the traditional to the contemporary. The full festival press release and line-up can be found at www.MuslimVoicesFestival.org.

Muslim Voices: Arts & Ideas June 5–14, 2009

Dance

Sardono Dance Theatre: Diponegoro

Saturday June 13 at 7:30pm

Sunday June 14 at 3:00pm

Free pre-performance lecture on June 13 at 6:00pm and June 14 at 1:30pm

Lila Acheson Wallace Auditorium, Asia Society, 725 Park Avenue, New York, NY

Tickets: \$25, 35 at 212-517-ASIA or www.AsiaSociety.org

Experimental performance has been a major part of the Indonesian cultural landscape for many decades. Some of the most cutting edge work has come out of contemporary works that combined a deep knowledge of tradition with a thirst for expressions that move to comment on current issues or ideas. Much of this exceptional work is not known well in the United States. For decades in Indonesia, new creations of dance, music, theater, poetry and visual arts—perhaps more so than almost any other country in the region—have proliferated. Sardono has often been at the forefront of this work, whether as choreographer, or as cultural impresario.

Diponegoro is a performance work that builds on this cultural richness, with choreography that combines classical and folk forms of Javanese dance and contemporary movement. Waluyo's music, first presented in the U.S. during the New Music Indonesia tour in 1991, combines new musical ideas in the gamelan (large ensemble of gongs and metalophone used in Java and Bali). He has most recently been creating new works that combine Islamic texts with Javanese sensibility.

Bridging formal Javanese and contemporary dance, *Diponegoro* is a theatrical depiction of Diponegoro's life (1807-1880), with the narration/*libretto* drawn from the autobiography he wrote while exiled from Indonesia for his role in the revolution. The style adopted for this performance is a form of Javanese dance drama, (Langendriyan) in which the performers, trained as dancers, also sing to live gamelan music. Musical elements that incorporate Western expressions are integrated in the performance to complement the Javanese elements.

Diponegoro, who as a young man witnessed his father's humiliation at losing his realm to the Dutch, led an unsuccessful but heroic rebellion against them from 1825–30. A charismatic prince in the Javanese court of Yogyakarta, he has been hailed by many as the spiritual leader and liberator of Java.

The celebrated painting by Raden Saleh (1807-1880) entitled "*The Arrest of Diponegoro*" provides an important iconographic reference for the work and reinforces its anti-colonialist message. Painted in 1857, it depicts Diponegoro's arrest in 1830. In his oil painting, Saleh—the first Indonesian artist to paint in the Western style—deconstructs Dutch accounts of this historical event. During the performance, an image of the painting is depicted on a translucent front-drop with supertitles.

About Sardono

Sardono W. Kusumo is a renowned choreographer, director, dancer and film-maker. Hailed as a brilliant theatrical imagist, Sardono's work emerges from a specific context – the pluralistic multi-cultural society that is modern Indonesia. Described as Indonesia's "most famous but also most rebellious choreographer and dancer" (The New York Times) Sardono is a cross-cultural explorer, travelling not only from one area to another but also moving freely between traditional and contemporary traditions. For the past 30 years he has performed regularly throughout Asia, Europe and America.

In fall 1993, Sardono Dance Theater performed *Passage through the Gong* in a five-city U.S. tour. In June 2009, Sardono will return to North America after 17 years to present *Diponegoro*, a contemporary exploration of the life and myths surrounding one of Java's most charismatic leaders.

Sardono's formal training is in classical Javanese dance which developed in the royal courts of Central Java. This highly evolved form of emphasizing extreme control, refinement, opulence, and spiritual power, has generally been perceived as static rather than dynamic. For Sardono,

however, the strength of Javanese dance has less to do with its status as beautiful ceremony than its plasticity. Sardono's work is also informed by his activism, most notably on behalf of Indonesia's rain forests and the indigenous peoples who inhabit them. Yet his investigations of man's place within the global community express universal contemporary concerns.

Sardono does not maintain an ongoing company, although there is a group of artists who have performed in many of his works. Although he lived for many years in Jakarta, Indonesia's capitol city, he recently returned to Surakarta (Solo) his native city in Central Java, and views the entire Indonesian archipelago as his artistic lab and home. Sardono seeks to work with and encourage a diverse group of artists; he has traveled widely throughout the archipelago – and abroad. Each encounter, whether with villagers in Bali, Dayak tribesmen in the rain forest of East Kalimantan, the peoples of Nias, or Peter Brook and Ariane Mnouchkine in Paris, has informed Sardono's work.

Sardono's pieces are developed during rigorous workshops that emphasize movement exploration based on an understanding of a form's cultural and natural environments. Many workshops take place outdoors – in the mountains, at the sea shore, or atop the great Buddhist stupa Borobudur. While Sardono is clearly the creative leader, his is a democratic system intent on opening up paths to self-discovery and self-development. This constant experimentation extends to his performances, and many critics have commented on the fluidity of each new work, which may change from performance to performance.

Born in 1945 in Surakarta (Solo), Java, Sardono took up the Javanese martial art *silat* at the age of eight and began studying classical Javanese dance in the refined (*alus*) style two years later under a local master. He attended high school within the Solo court and continued his studies.

As a teenager, Sardono created an immediate sensation as Hanoman, the heroic white monkey of the Hindu epic Ramayana, at the Prambanan temple. This was a considerable feat, as his role was in the coarse or *kasar* style—one very different from the refined form of dance in which Sardono had been trained. After performing as Hanoman, he took on the role of King Rahwana, the Ramayana's royal antagonist. Performing a wide range of roles in both styles was uncommon for a traditional dancer at the time and his portrayals established him as his generation's most gifted performer. From 1963-64, his performances were seen in New York as part of Indonesia's cultural mission to the World's Fair.

Sardono has continued to be a leader in the arts field in Indonesia. In addition to creating his own work in dance and film, he has organized festivals and is currently the rector of the Jakarta Arts Institute. He has become a very active painter in recent years, creating large and small-scale abstract works. In keeping with his interest in the figure of Diponegoro, he is currently making a film about the painter Raden Saleh. He has recently created a new dance work called *Sunken Sea* in response to the tragic Tsunami of 2004, since which time he has been doing work in Aceh.

Please contact Elaine Merguerian at 212.327.9313 or elainem@asiasoc.org for more information.

About the festival

Muslim Voices: Arts & Ideas is presented by Asia Society, BAM, and NYU Center for Dialogues. The festival features more than 100 artists and speakers from as far away as Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and as near as Brooklyn for performances, films, exhibitions, talks, and other events,

ranging from the traditional (calligraphy, storytelling, and Sufi devotional voices) to the contemporary (video installations and Arabic hip-hop). Festival presentations and programs aim to present multiple perspectives from the Muslim world. In addition to the mainstage offerings and complementary education and humanities events from Asia Society, BAM, and NYU Center for Dialogues, programs associated with the *Muslim Voices: Arts & Ideas* festival will take place at locations including: Austrian Cultural Forum New York, Brooklyn Museum, MoCADA (Museum of Contemporary African Diasporan Arts), The Metropolitan Museum of Art, American Museum of Natural History and The New York Public Library. In celebration of *Muslim Voices: Arts & Ideas*, the Empire State Building and Brooklyn Borough Hall will be lit green from June 5—7. The color green has many significant associations in Islam and is considered auspicious. More information about the festival can be found at www.MuslimVoicesFestival.org.

About the organizers

Asia Society is the leading global and pan-Asian organization working to strengthen relationships and promote understanding among the people, leaders, and institutions of the United States and Asia. The Society seeks to increase knowledge and enhance dialogue, encourage creative expression, and generate new ideas across the fields of policy, business, education, arts, and culture. Through the presentation of groundbreaking museum exhibitions and cultural programs, Asia Society provides a forum for both traditional and contemporary Asian artistic expressions. Founded in 1956 by John D. Rockefeller 3rd, Asia Society is a nonprofit educational institution with offices in Hong Kong, Houston, Los Angeles, Manila, Melbourne, Mumbai, New York, San Francisco, Seoul, Shanghai, and Washington, D.C. For more information visit AsiaSociety.org.

Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM) is recognized internationally for its innovative programming of dance, music, theater, music-theater, opera, and film. BAM presents leading national and international artists and companies in its annual Spring Season and highlights groundbreaking, contemporary work in the performing arts with its Next Wave Festival each fall. Founded in 1983, the Next Wave is one of the world's most important festivals of contemporary performing arts. BAM Rose Cinemas features new, independent film releases and BAMcinémathèque—a curated, daily repertory film program.

BAM also serves New York City's diverse population through a weekend concert series in BAMcafé, community events, literary series, artist talks, and a wide variety of educational programs. BAM, America's oldest performing arts center in continuous operation, has presented performances since 1861, and attracts an audience of more than 500,000 people each year. The institution is led by President Karen Brooks Hopkins and Executive Producer Joseph V. Melillo—each of whom has been associated with BAM for more than twenty-five years. For more information visit BAM.org.

NYU Center for Dialogues is an institution of New York University dedicated to knocking down the walls of misunderstanding between the Islamic world, the United States, and other Western countries and replacing them with bridges of knowledge, mutual respect, and reason. Founded in the aftermath of the Sept 11, 2001 tragedy by Director Mustapha Tlili, the NYU Center for Dialogues has established a solid reputation on both sides of the Muslim-Western divide. Its conferences are widely discussed in international policy circles and its publications are used as educational materials in university classrooms, while its initiatives have contributed to new connections made at the institutional and individual levels. Tlili is a NYU research scholar and

senior fellow at the university's Remarque Institute. He is a former senior UN official, having served as director for communications policy at the UN Department of Public Information, director of the UN information center for France, and chief of the Namibia, Anti-Apartheid, Palestine, and decolonization programs in the same department. For more information visit centerfordialogues.org.

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CREDITS

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