



NATIONAL GALLERY SINGAPORE



「DALAM
SOUTHEAST ASIA」

9 MAY 2025 -
1 FEB 2026

DIPLOMACY AND DESIRE

BASOEKI ABDULLAH
IN SINGAPORE



UOB SOUTHEAST ASIA GALLERY

nationalgallery.sg/DiplomacyAndDesire

LET *Art* SURPRISE YOU

DALAM SOUTHEAST ASIA

Dalam Southeast Asia is a dedicated project space located within the UOB Southeast Asia Gallery. Projects presented here pose critical questions about and explore lesser-known narratives in Southeast Asian art, while rethinking what a collections-based display is, and what it may seek to achieve.

The Malay word *dalam* means “inside,” and is used when inviting someone to enter a place or room. The word also carries esoteric undertones that suggest the “deep within” or “interior”: the part of the Self that can be perceived but that is not fully known.

Dalam Southeast Asia presents one to two projects annually, each offering unique insights into our curators’ ongoing research on the modern art of our region, and on artworks in Singapore’s National Collection.

DIPLOMACY AND DESIRE

Diplomacy and Desire: Basoeki Abdullah in Singapore is an exhibition of artworks by Indonesian painter Basoeki Abdullah (1915–1993), known for his paintings of stalwart statesmen and attractive women. This exhibition explores Basoeki’s relationship with Singapore, where he lived between 1958 and 1960. This was a critical time for the country, which achieved self-governance in 1959.

Centring on two artworks that Basoeki gifted to Singapore, *Diplomacy and Desire* considers how the artist navigated his roles as a high-society painter and a cultural producer attuned to the “geopoetic” value of his artworks. Through this lens, the exhibition invites us to consider the “power” of art in postcolonial Southeast Asia and to see this prominent portraitist anew.

The exhibition layout recalls Basoeki’s studio in Singapore at One Tree Hill, which included a picture gallery and a backroom of portraits of international beauties.

nationalgallery.sg/DiplomacyAndDesire

Please be advised that some works in this exhibition include nudity, which may not be suitable for all audiences. Discretion is advised.

This exhibition is in English, with room sheets in 中文, Bahasa Melayu and தமிழ்.

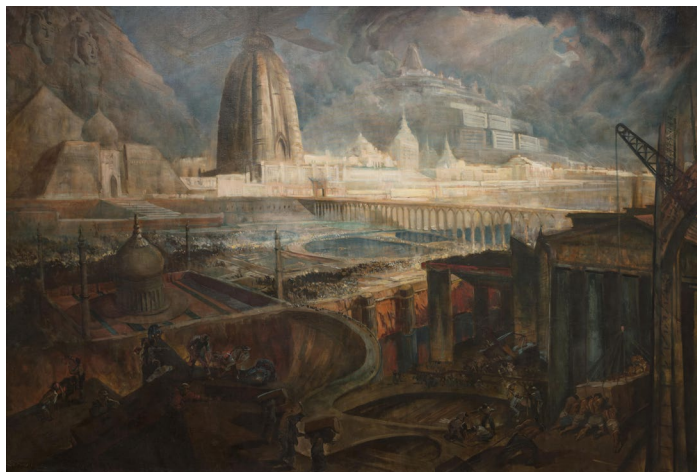
ON COVER
Basoeki Abdullah. Detail of *Labour*. c. 1959.
Oil on canvas, 195 × 293 cm. Collection of National Gallery Singapore.

ABOUT

BASOEKI ABDULLAH

Raden Basoeeki Abdullah (1915–1993) was born in Solo, Java, into the family of the well-known Mooi Indie painter, Raden Abdullah Suriosubroto. In 1933, with a grant from a Catholic mission, he attended the Royal Academy of Fine Arts (Koninklijke Academie voor Beeldende Kunsten) in The Hague, the Netherlands, before furthering his studies in Paris and Rome. He achieved international fame when he won a competition on the occasion of the coronation of Queen Juliana of the Netherlands in 1948.

Once described as “the Rembrandt of the East,” Basoeeki is renowned for his accomplishments in Western painting techniques and his portraits of political figures. His artworks are found in national collections throughout the world. His patrons included the Indonesian Presidents Soekarno and Soeharto, the Philippine President and First Lady, Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos, King Bhumibol Adulyadej and Queen Sirikit of Thailand, Prince Sihanouk of Cambodia and Sultan Bolkiah of Brunei.



Labour. c. 1959. Oil on canvas, 195 × 293 cm.
Collection of National Gallery Singapore.

ON

DIPLOMACY

The exhibition focuses on two artworks that the artist gifted to Singapore: *Labour*, presented to the City Council of Singapore in 1959, and *Struggle for the Re-establishment of the Democracy and the Right for the People*, donated to the National Museum Art Gallery in 1981.



Struggle for the Re-establishment of the Democracy and the Right for the People. 1981. Oil on canvas, 200 × 490 cm. Gift of the artist. Collection of National Gallery Singapore.



Untitled (Chinese Woman with Red Lips). 1958.
Pastel on paper, 65.2 × 48.6 cm. Gift of Mr. Lok Bok Sim.
Collection of National Gallery Singapore.

AND

DESIRE

The exhibition presents a selection of Basoeki's pastel drawings of attractive models and public figures in post-war Singapore. Taken from Singapore's National Collection, they were part of a formative donation by Lok Bok Sim to the Singapore Art Museum in 1994.



Untitled (Man in White Shirt). Undated.
Pastel on paper, 64.2 × 48.6 cm.
Gift of Mr. Lok Bok Sim.
Collection of National Gallery Singapore.
Signed by Sutan Sjahrir and the artist.

Some of Basoeki's drawings, like this one of Sutan Sjahrir, Indonesia's first Prime Minister (1945–1947), were signed by their sitters, and serve as historical documents of the artist's meeting with them.

Basoeki described his style as "Romantic Realism." The term brings together romanticism, the late 18th-century European art movement that emphasised subjectivity and emotion over rationality, and the artist's desire to evoke the realities of postcolonial movements.

PROGRAMMES

In conjunction with the exhibition, we are bringing together a variety of discussions, tours and artist talks for you to unpack and connect with its key ideas, artworks and artists. For more information about the programmes, please visit nationalgallery.sg/DiplomacyAndDesire.

TOURS

Curator-led Tour

Sun 11 May | 2pm | Supreme Court Wing, Level 3, UOB Southeast Asia Gallery, Dalam Southeast Asia

Join exhibition curator Kathleen Ditzig for a special tour of Basoeki's alluring portraits and landscapes. Learn about the exhibition and explore how "geopoetics" relate to postcolonial nation-building in Singapore and Southeast Asia.

Check our website for other special dialogue tours led by the exhibition curator and invited speakers.

CATALOGUE

Building on the themes of the exhibition, this catalogue explores Basoeki Abdullah's influence through two essays. Bayu Genia examines the artist's legacy from an Indonesian perspective, while Kathleen Ditzig discusses his regional Southeast Asian identity and the agency of art in postcolonial worldbuilding.

Download the free e-catalogue to access these essays along with artwork and archival images from the exhibition.



SCAN FOR
FREE CATALOGUE

TICKETS

Purchase your tickets and register for programmes and tours at **tickets.nationalgallery.sg**

FREE ADMISSION[^] for Locals (Singaporeans/PRs) | Gallery Insiders | Children aged 6 and below | Local/locally based students and teachers | Persons with disabilities (PWD) and their caregiver

[^]VALID VERIFICATION IS REQUIRED.

JOIN US

Unlock the world of art with National Gallery Singapore membership. When you become an Insider, you can enjoy benefits such as free exhibition access, complimentary two-hour daily parking, dining and shopping discounts and more! Join a vibrant community of art enthusiasts and elevate your art experience.



SCAN FOR
MORE INFO

AN ACCESSIBLE EXPERIENCE FOR ALL

The Gallery is committed to creating an inclusive experience that can be enjoyed by visitors with access needs.



SCAN FOR
ACCESS GUIDE

OPENING HOURS

Daily 10am–7pm

General ticket sales end
30 minutes before closing time.

ENQUIRIES

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