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Luciano
Benetton
Collection

Indonesia: Islands of the Imagination

Contemporary Artists
from Indonesia

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Indonesia: Islands of the Imagination

Contemporary Artists from Indonesia

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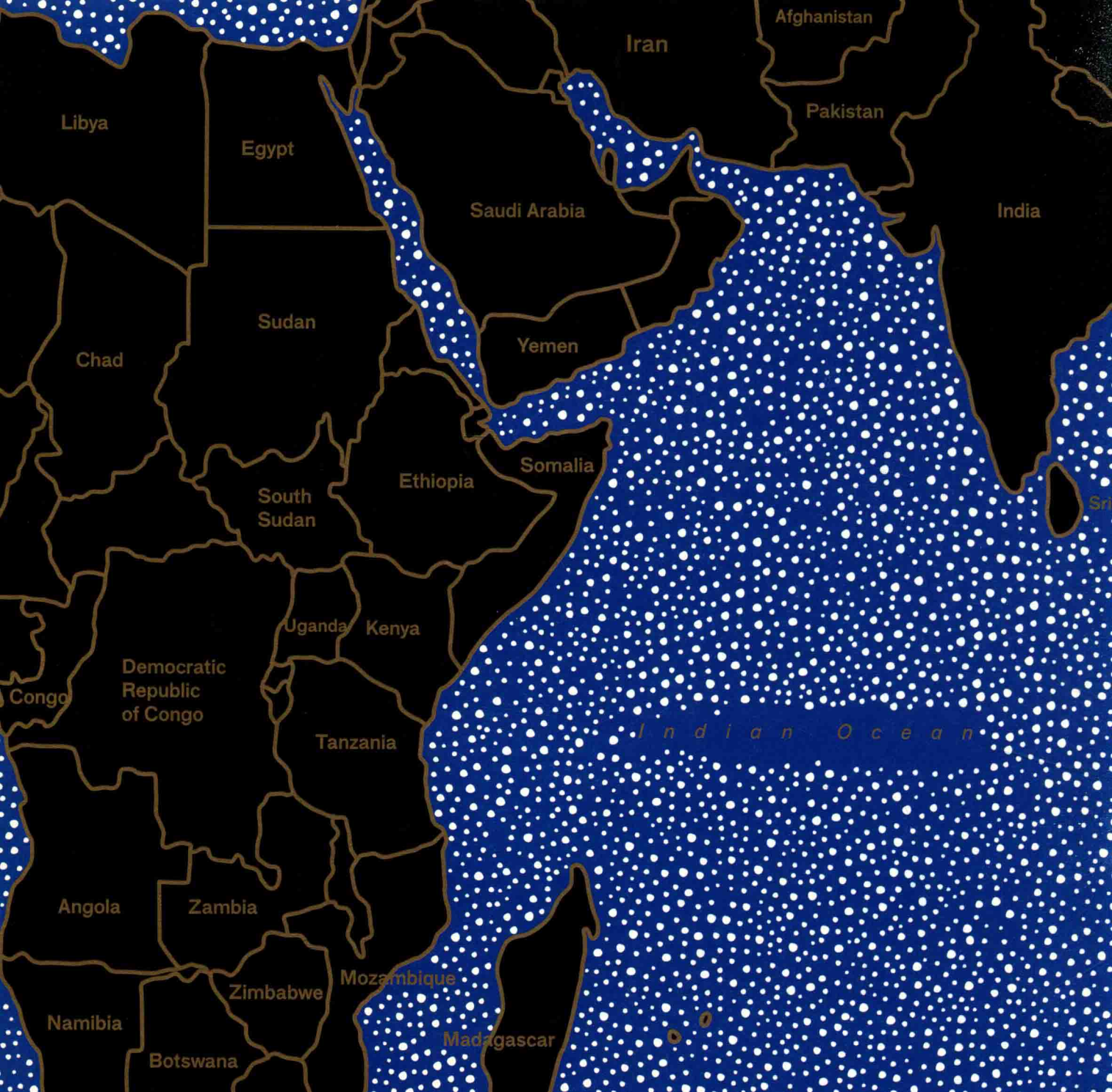
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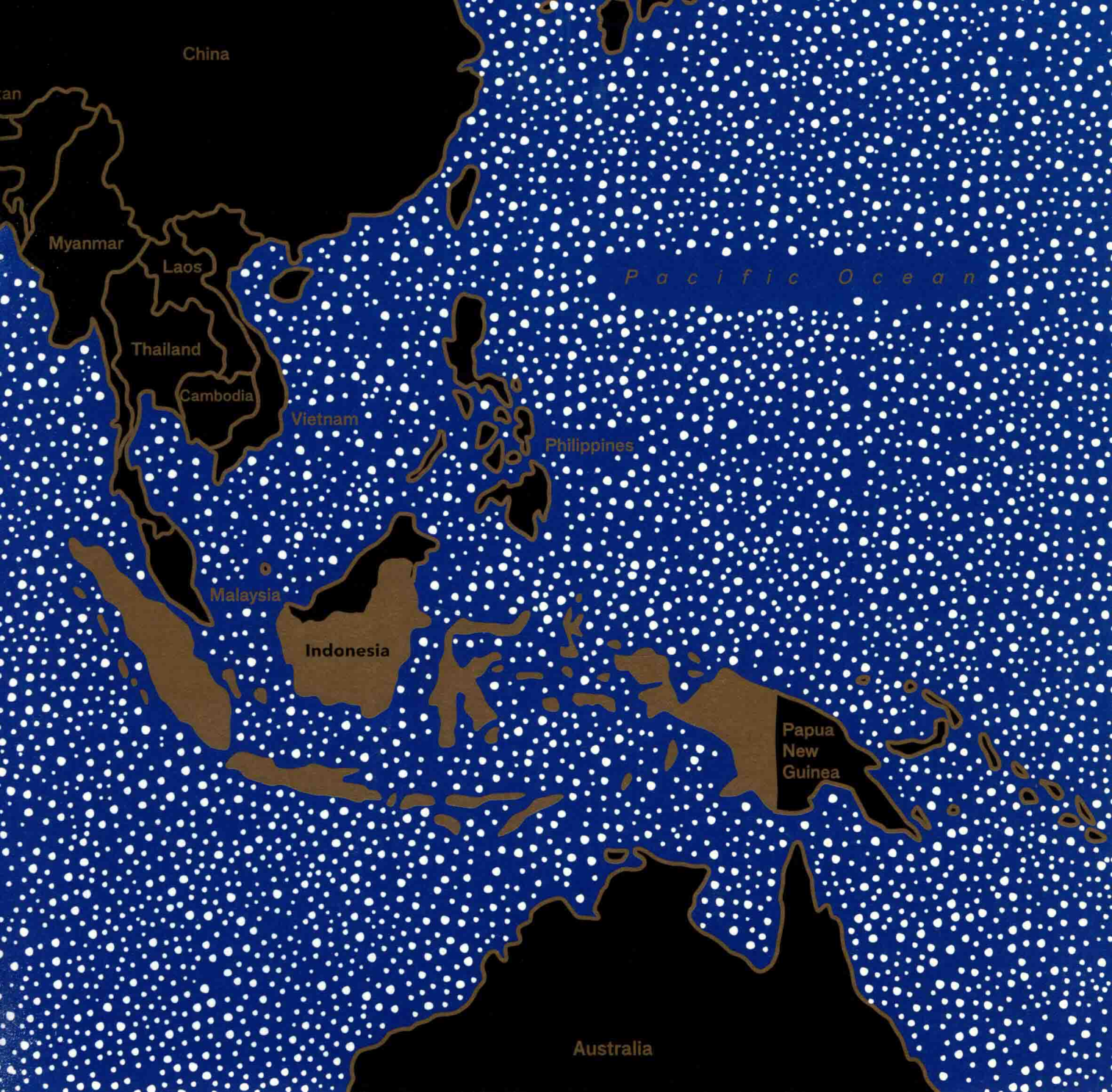
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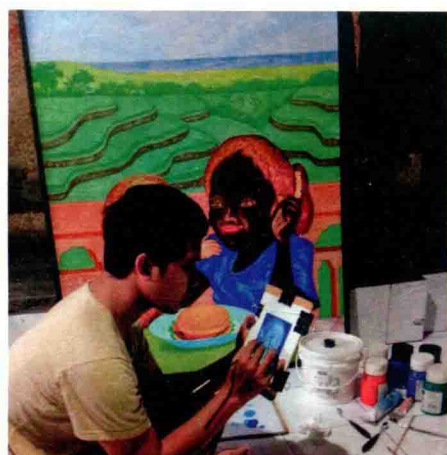
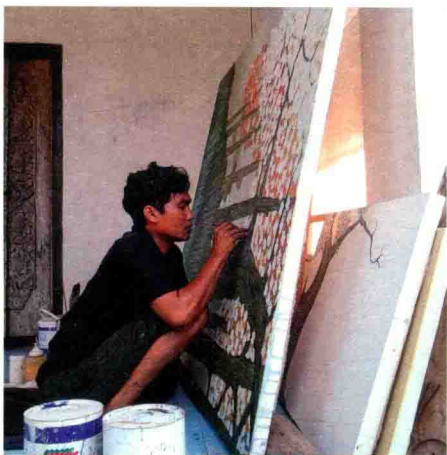
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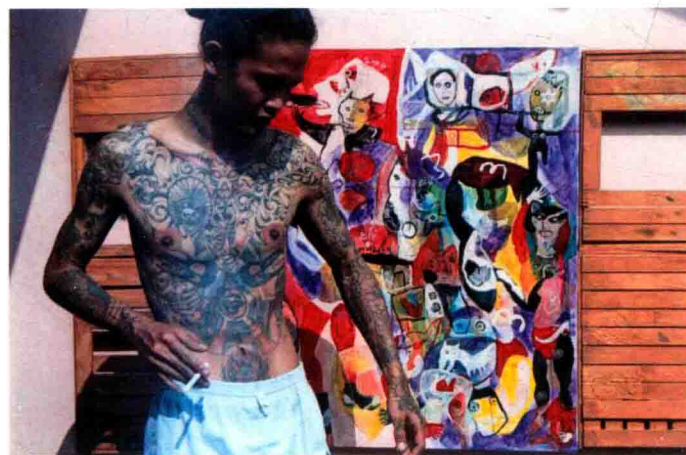
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Introductions



Introduzioni

Islands of the Imagination

Luciano Benetton

*I do not know what is said in the 12th commandment.
"Maybe something about the wind and the estuary,"
you say.*

I hear your voice.

*I imagine salt scraped off waves,
and waves sundered on the shore.*

I imagine a barge seeking space.

Getting, not getting.

Goenawan Mohamad
poet, writer, publisher

In Indonesia, the history of human art begins with a new, ancient, chapter. The image of a hand on the wall of a cave near Maros, on the island of Sulawesi, has been dated to nearly 40,000 years ago, making it one of the oldest examples of rock art ever discovered. Perhaps the oldest of all.

In addition to other stencils of human hands, 12 in total found in seven caves, a painting was also discovered of a babirusa, a kind of pig that lives on some islands of Indonesia, one of the earliest figurative portraits ever to come to light.

The findings, close to the age of similar European prehistoric artwork, significantly expand the geographic area of the first-known artists of our world.

Indonesia, though, has always been one of the richest places in the world for different cultures and traditions, unique for its geographical fragmentation and the resulting environmental and ethnic variety. A transcontinental state, between Asia and Oceania,

and the largest archipelago in the world, it stretches – with more than 17,500 islands – over more than 5,000 miles from west to east. It is also the most intensely volcanic area of the earth: of its 400 volcanoes, over a hundred are still active.

Flora and fauna are exceptionally rich because, in the past, this territory represented a connecting bridge and crossing point between Asia and Australia, with the result that it possessed some of the greatest biodiversity in the world. Today that biodiversity is threatened by massive deforestation carried out by burning, causing high levels of pollution – and serious health problems among the local population and for the survival of some animal species – due to the heavy layer of smoke that extends to neighbouring Malaysia and Singapore.

Although two-thirds of Indonesia's territory is covered by the sea (one third – 1.9 million square kilometres – is land), Indonesia is the fourth most populous country in the world with over 250 million people from 300 different ethnic groups and more than 500 linguistic variations.

Over half the population is concentrated in Java alone, an island half the size of Italy, and Jakarta, the capital, has a population of 12 million, making it one of the largest cities in Asia.

With such a varied culture, a mix of Indian, Arabic, Chinese, Malay and European influences, Indonesian life is based on harmony and tolerance, represented in the national motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, Unity in Diversity.

For centuries under the influence of the Dutch who retained control, albeit with different administrative forms, from 1602 to the end of the Second World War, today Indonesia, a member of the G20, is working towards reform and development in accordance with the “people first” principle of President Joko Widodo, who was elected in 2014 in a break with the archipelago's authoritarian past.

To continue the process of growth of the fifth Asian economy, Widodo (who enjoys strong popularity among young people: counting about 2.5 million followers on Twitter) is looking beyond the oceans, to possible opportunities in the world and aims to make the country the pivot between the Indian subcontinent and the Asia-Pacific area.

To compensate for the economic downturn of recent years, the Indonesian government launched a package of reforms to boost domestic consumption and give new impetus to production activities. Work is also underway on a number of major projects in energy and transport, including the first high-speed rail line between Jakarta and Bandung city, which will be ready by 2019 thanks to a collaboration between a consortium of Indonesian companies and China Railway International.

Infrastructure investments also will support the priority sector of tourism, which focuses particularly on three islands, Java, Bali and Sulawesi, that are rich in history, art, culture and nature. Java, dubbed the “island of fire” by the French writer Alexandre Dumas, is a place of extraordinary beauty with volcanic sandy beaches and green rice fields, and the legacy of a fascinating past, evidence of which can be found in