

PRESS RELEASE - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ASHLEY BICKERTON AT YOGYAKARTA ART LAB (YAL)

"I wanted to confront the long standing tradition of the 'Eve image' in light of the avalanche of information we now have at our hands. It's a configuration more felt than reasoned. She is the 'Eve figure' in spirit, if not anthropological fact. Some of the faces even look like they might have been frozen at that critical moment of the inception that determined all our destinies." – Ashley Bickerton



In his most recent works, created in collaboration with Gajah Gallery's Yogyakarta Art Lab (YAL), Bickerton explores ideas concerning the phenomenon of the "Mitochondrial Eve". Mitochondrial DNA being the genes passed down exclusively from mother to daughter, and the 'Mitochondrial Eve representing the

single individual who modern genetics has determined lived in East Africa a little over one hundred thousand years ago, and who is the direct matrilineal ancestor in an unbroken chain of every single human being alive today, in effect the mother of us all. Bickerton approaches this figure through sculpture and with a good deal of humor.

To create this body of work, Bickerton has been working with the highly versatile and talent rich YAL team for the past 18 months. Originally derived from clay models the artist created in his Bali studio, they are being reinvented in Jogjakarta in a variety of archival materials centered on cast aluminum. These new works now coming out of YAL have been described by Jasdeep Sandhu as "Some of the more important contemporary sculpture produced in the past 10 years".

The sculptures originally came about in a rather offbeat manner. Bickerton, in his attempt to get rid of human models in his ongoing painting/photography hybrids, decided to build his models himself. This would give complete control and move the whole process closer to both painting and abstraction. Bickerton found that these works increasingly developed a

life of their own, and needed to be made into permanent pieces. He states, "I was surprised by the power of these heads, and indeed studio visitor after studio visitor insisted that they needed to be realized as permanent sculptures in and of themselves, and not just props in the construction of a painting."



The original "Heads", as he calls them, were made of painted unfired clay and composed with mostly organic material. After the photo-shoots they would just be left to rot and were all around the studio in a state of decay. "The lemons were rotting and moldy, the flowers were wilted and dead, and the Butterflies sagged with broken wings. But still, everyone kept saying 'these are

amazing, why aren't you making them? I kept hearing it from all sorts of people, but I kept protesting that they were so complex; I had no idea how to build them as permanent artworks. It wasn't until one of those studio visitors said to me, "I know how we can make these things." That visitor was Jasdeep Sandhu who had only just recently set up the forward thinking YAL specifically deal with difficult projects like this one.

When the crew at YAL first saw the prototypes for the pieces, they were excited to get involved with some of the most intriguing and lively art the Lab had seen. As Sandhu, also the owner of Gajah Gallery explains, "Touching these works in the process of creating them, has also been part of a process of realizing how important they are in the world of contemporary visual sculpture"



(detail) Ashley Bickerton, MV-2, 2013, Aluminum and Mixed Media, 75 x 80 x 210cm



Ashley Bickerton, MV-2, 2013, Aluminum and Mixed Media, 75 x 80 x 210cm



(detail) Ashley Bickerton, MV-1, 2013, Aluminum and Mixed Media, 40 x 50 x 210cm



Ashley Bickerton, MV-1, 2013, Aluminum and Mixed Media, 40 x 50 x 210cm

ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Born in Barbados in 1959, Bickerton is the son of Derek Bickerton, a pioneering linguist and scholar of Creole and Pidgin languages. His father's research work caused his family to move constantly. As a child he lived in a number of countries across four continents, never stopping in any one place more than a couple of years. The family finally settled in Hawaii in 1972. British by birth, Bickerton became a naturalized US citizen in the mid-1980s. After graduating from the California Institute of the Arts, then a hot bed of Avant Guard activity, he moved to New York to attend the prestigious Whitney Museum Independent Study Program. He ended up spending 12 years in New York where he firmly established his artistic career before finally settling on the island of Bali in 1993 where he resides to this day.

Ashley Bickerton first exploded on the scene in New York in the mid 1980's, where he was, along with compatriot Jeff Koons, a core figure in the widely influential Neo-Geo Group. While Bickerton's work has always been noted for its color, wacky vibrancy, and very physical presence, this often belies a strong foundation of highly evolved critical thinking, as well as a fearless exploratory wanderlust.

As Holland Cotter declares of Bickerton in the New York times, "it's easy to forget what natural-born moralists American artists are until you encounter someone like Ashley Bickerton. His work doesn't just wag a finger or propose reform. It offers a worldview that is basically an end-of-the-world view, beyond solution, beyond revulsion, blissed-out on the terrible wonder of it all. He has been such an artist for a long time, and he's getting better and better at it".

It is a widely held opinion that Ashley Bickerton has made a crucial and defining contribution to the ongoing dialogue of contemporary art. His seminal work, 'Tormented Self-portrait: (Susie at Arles)', created while in his mid-twenties, is now an important piece in the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Canonized in textbooks and graduate-school thesis's around the world, it is considered among the most important artworks of its decade. One of the more colorful of the original New York 80s Arts Stars, in this period Bickerton was "making work that was instantly recognizable as postmodern, a decisive and necessary break from the arid minimalism of the time" (Adam Fisher, T Magazine). His career has moved on to span multiple themes over many continents.

Because he abandoned the industrial West to take up permanent residence on an island long regarded as an “idyllic Earthly paradise” (Bickerton has lived in Bali since 1993), he has often been compared to the Post-Impressionist master Paul Gauguin. While some, including Bickerton himself, find this comparison laughable, others have been enraged. The truth is Bickerton occupies a very unique position in contemporary art. While having been a pioneer at the cutting edge of art culture for thirty years, today he enjoys a revered position amongst the very youngest generations of artists for this well acknowledged fearlessness

ABOUT YOGYAKARTA ART LAB (YAL)

The Yogyakarta Art Lab (YAL) is Gajah Gallery's major initiative based in Yogyakarta; Indonesia's up and coming art hub. YAL is an experimental platform where emerging and prominent artists will come together to produce works across various mediums such as paper, sculpture, performance and digital visual production.

In an increasingly customised world where control over inputs, processes and outputs has made a definite return to the hands of contemporary artists, YAL takes this a step further by integrating artists with craftsmen in order to re-define the term artistic collaboration within our contemporary circumstances. Pushing beyond conventional boundaries, YAL fosters a culture of collective participation at each stage of the production process.

