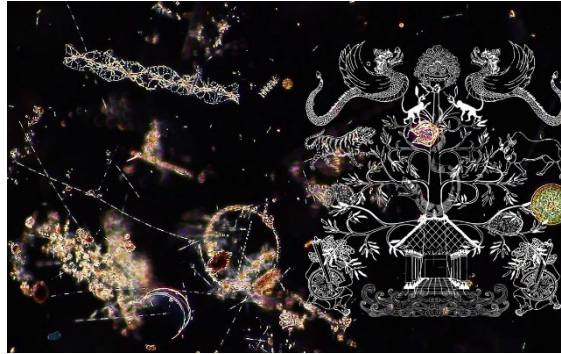




Indah Arsyad
The Ultimate Breath

26 November 2025 to 25 May 2026

Indah Arsyad (born 1965) is one of Indonesia's most important contemporary media artists. With *The Ultimate Breath*, the Weltmuseum Wien is presenting the artist's first solo exhibition in Austria. In her poetic-technological installations, Arsyad deals in particular with the fragility of ecological systems and opens a dialogue between scientific observation, Indigenous mythological traditions, and contemporary media art.

'Arsyad shows us how closely cultural knowledge, ecological systems, and technological developments are interlinked,' says Claudia Banz, director of the Weltmuseum Wien. 'Her works transform scientific data into powerful images – and at the same time make us aware that the question of the balance between humans and nature is more urgent today than ever before.'

Art in the age of ecological crisis

Arsyad's works arise from an intense examination of the global ecological crisis and the disturbed balance between humans and nature. Although the themes she explores are rooted in the ecological reality of Indonesia, they transcend geographical boundaries and convey a universal message that is highly relevant to today's world.

Personal experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic led her to completely rethink the fundamental role of oxygen as the basis of life. It is estimated that 50 to 80 per cent of the oxygen on Earth comes from phytoplankton. Its vulnerability to pollution and climate change is a central reference point in Arsyad's artistic practice. In her works, oxygen appears both as a biological necessity and a spiritual metaphor: as the 'breath of life'.

Arsyad's art combines these current issues with imagery from the Hindu-influenced mythology of Java and Bali. Wayang figures, the sound traditions of gamelan, and the tree of life *Gunungan* form a cultural reservoir that Arsyad transfers into a contemporary, technology-based context. This dialogue between myths, data streams, and ecological reality lends her works a special poetic power.



A dialogue between mythology and data

The exhibition includes a five-part series of works on Plexiglas and the multimedia installation *The Ultimate Breath*.

The Plexiglas series presents microscope images of phytoplankton decorated with mythological symbols of power, transience, and cosmic order. The engravings are inspired by ancient Javanese temple reliefs and the *Gunungan*. They build a bridge between nature, mythology, and humanity's ever-changing relationship with the universe.

The aim is to emphasise the indispensable role of phytoplankton as the primary producer of oxygen on Earth. At the same time, attention is drawn to the fragility of ecosystems under pressure from human activities – symbolised by the reliefs depicting a gas mask.

The works on display enter into dialogue with selected historical objects from the collections of the Weltmuseum Wien as well as with items on loan from Indonesian communities invited by the artist to participate in the exhibition. The wayang figures used for shadow play illustrate how alive this practice is to this day. They refer to the long cultural tradition from which Arsyad draws inspiration and at the same time make the topicality of her themes visible.

The Ultimate Breath: a universe in real time

The central installation, *The Ultimate Breath*, is an immersive video installation in which Indah Arsyad animates symbols from Javanese mythology – including *Gunungan* (tree of life) and Batara Kala (god of time and guardian of cosmic balance) – as well as images of phytoplankton viewed through a microscope.

Sensors in the Indonesian rivers Cimanceuri and Cisadane provide real-time measurement data on the respective pH value of the water and the carbon dioxide content in the air. This information directly controls the light sequence of the installation, the visual structure of the projections, and sounds from the traditional instrument *bonang*. The latter is meant as a warning signal of the danger of environmental pollution leading to the destruction of the earth. The phytoplankton images appear as pulsating microcosms whose movements also respond to the data collected in Indonesia.

The result is an audiovisual ecosystem that reacts to the respective environmental pollution – an image of a universe that loses its balance when nature is disturbed.

Jani Kuhnt-Saptodewo is co-curator of the exhibition.

Exhibition website: <https://www.weltmuseumwien.at/en/exhibitions/indah-arsyad/>



Indah Arsyad – Biography

Indah Arsyad (born in 1965 in Ambon, Indonesia) is a trained landscape architect and environmental technologist who deals with issues such as climate change, ecological destruction, and pandemics.

Arsyad pursues a quiet but powerful path that reminds the audience: Every breath we take is a dialogue with the planet itself.

Her works have been exhibited in Korea, India, Argentina, and at the London Art Biennale 2021, among other places.

The artist's long-standing research for the installation *The Ultimate Breath* is supported by BRIN (National Research and Innovation Agency) and the National Centre for Oceanography in Indonesia.

WMW Contemporary: a space for the present and global voices

The exhibition is on display in *zam*, the museum's open, free-access area. As the fourth edition of the *WMW Contemporary* series, it continues our commitment to making marginalised perspectives visible and re-examining historical collections through contemporary art.

Events

26 - 29 November, 4 to 5.30 p.m.

Meet the Artist

Take advantage of the opportunity to meet Indah Arsyad in person, ask questions, and gain exciting insights.

Come and go at any time. No registration required.

30 November, 4 p.m.

Sastraswara

A sonic journey through gamelan sounds and live electronics

In his sophisticated compositions, Indonesian musician **Bilawa Ade Respati**, better known as Sastraswara, combines the traditional Javanese gamelan play with electronic sounds and algorithmic music composition. He is coming to Vienna for the first time.

To **participate** in the event, guests need a valid museum ticket.

The supporting cultural education programme will be regularly supplemented and expanded during the course of the exhibition. Detailed information can be found here:

<https://www.weltmuseumwien.at/en/exhibitions/indah-arsyad/#accompanying-programme>

Press Photographs

Press releases and images for up-to-date coverage of special exhibitions and projects at the Weltmuseum Wien are available for download free of charge from our press area:

<https://www.weltmuseumwien.at/en/press/>

Indah Arsyad
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Indah Arsyad
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Exhibition view
© KHM-Museumsverband, Weltmuseum Wien,
Photo: Daniel Sostaric



Exhibition view
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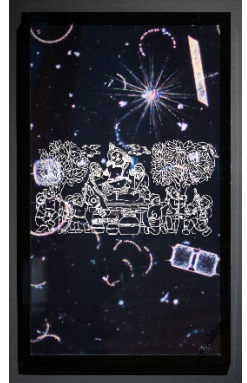


Exhibition view
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Photo: Daniel Sostaric



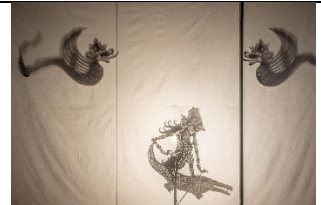
Exhibition view

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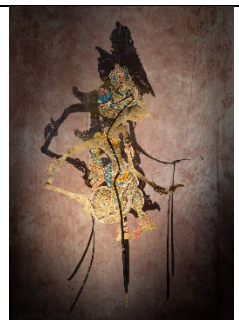
Exhibition view

© KHM-Museumsverband, Weltmuseum Wien,
Photo: Daniel Sostaric



Exhibition view

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Photo: Daniel Sostaric



**Opening times, tickets, entrance fees**

www.weltmuseumwien.at/en/information

Additional information regarding your visit

Guided tours, bookings, and reservations for events

+43 1 534 30 - 5150

kulturvermittlung@weltmuseumwien.at

Information, questions, and suggestions

+43 1 534 30 - 5052

info@weltmuseumwien.at

Exhibition programme and events

All events are listed online in the Weltmuseum Wien [event calendar](#).

Social Media

Follow the Weltmuseum Wien on Facebook and Instagram.

#WeltmuseumWien

Journalist accreditation

Journalists visiting the KHM-Museumsverband for professional purposes are entitled to free admission to its exhibitions and locations. Please register at presse@weltmuseumwien.at at least two working days in advance.

Please identify your medium, specify the date of your visit and attach a scan of your valid press pass. Thank you!

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