



# SURVIVOR

DADANG  
CHRISTANTO

# Foreword

*Survivor* is a seminal work by contemporary Indonesian-Australian artist Dadang Christanto that reflects upon human survival; what it means to endure tragedy and loss, and the power of hope and unity. Through performance, video and photography, *Survivor: Dadang Christanto* exemplifies how art can convey a highly emotive and moving message.

Kultour and Museums & Galleries NSW (M&G NSW) are delighted to have the opportunity to partner on the presentation and tour of this dynamic project to six regional galleries across New South Wales, Queensland and Tasmania. As organisations that value community engagement, education and life long learning, we encourage schools to take advantage of this Education Kit as an informative aid to understanding the *Survivor* project and to promote further interest in all forms of cultural and artistic expression.

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# About Museums & Galleries NSW

Museums & Galleries NSW (M&G NSW) supports a dynamic mix of museums, galleries and Aboriginal cultural centres in both metropolitan and regional areas throughout the state. With a primary focus on the small to medium sector, M&G NSW generates services that improve program performance, capacity, sustainability & networking across the sector, and seeks to advocate and communicate the value of sector wide programs and activities to stakeholders and communities. Our values and influences centre on ensuring that galleries, museums & Aboriginal cultural centres are able to reflect, contest, involve and support their communities in a variety of ways.

As part of the National Exhibitions Touring Support (NETS Australia network), M&G NSW is committed to the delivery of best practice touring exhibitions of contemporary visual culture to remote and metropolitan communities throughout NSW and Australia. M&G NSW also offers in-kind touring support across areas such as crating and transport management, condition reporting and conservation, resource and program development, marketing, workplace health and safety, and risk assessment.

*Museums & Galleries NSW is assisted by the NSW Government through Arts NSW and by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body.*

# About Kultour

Kultour is a national member-based organisation that advocates for greater representation of diverse cultural perspectives in the arts in Australia. It provides a range of services to the arts community and supports the mobility of high quality arts practices, representing Australia's contemporary multicultural society, to wide and diverse audiences. Established in 2001 by the Australia Council for the Arts, Kultour supports intercultural and cross-cultural arts projects and dialogue through partnerships with the arts and non-arts sector.

Kultour has developed a vast number of contemporary touring exhibitions to metropolitan, regional and remote locations in its nine year history, developing strong audiences for the work of culturally diverse Australian artists.

*Kultour is supported by the Australian Government through the Australia Council for the Arts, its arts funding and advisory body, as an initiative of the Arts in a Multicultural Australia policy.*

# How to use this Education Kit

This Education Kit for *Survivor: Dadang Christanto* (2012) can be adapted for students, upper primary to secondary. There are worksheets for Years 5–6, 7–10 and 11–12.

## Primary (Years 5–6)

Teachers should adapt the background information for their students prior to their visit to the exhibition. There is a worksheet for students in this kit that can be completed onsite at the gallery and back in the classroom.

The **Performance Worksheet** can be used during the performance, with questions that examine the artist's intentions and the relationship between subject matter and context.

The **Exhibition Worksheet** can be used post-performance with questions that examine the site of the performance (the exhibition). This side examines why this artwork was made and interrogates the meaning of the work.

*Note: It is suggested that the worksheet **not used** during your visit can be completed as an imagined exercise back in the classroom. This will require some reframing of the questions by the teacher. Completing both worksheets will open up interesting discussions about the dual nature of the work as both an event and a static exhibition.*

## Secondary (Years 7–10 & 11–12)

Teachers should print the background information for each student to assist them in filling out their worksheets during the excursion. The 7–10 worksheet and 11–12 worksheet can be interchanged depending on the level of the class. There are two sides to each worksheet. Students should be able to complete the worksheets individually; there are long response questions at the end of each sheet.

The **Performance Worksheet** can be used during the performance and examines the relationship between the artwork and the audience within the context of the Conceptual Framework. The worksheet also examines the performance through the subjective frame.

The **Exhibition Worksheet** can be used post-performance and analyses the work through The Frames looking at the signs and symbols that refer back to the performance as well as the cultural context of the work.

*Note: It is suggested that the worksheet **not used** during your visit can be completed as an imagined exercise back in the classroom. This will require some reframing of the questions by the teacher. Completing both worksheets will open up interesting discussions about the dual nature of the work as both an event and a static exhibition.*





## About the Artist

Dadang Christanto  
Born 1957 Java, Indonesia  
Lives and works in Brisbane, Australia

Dadang Christanto is an Indonesian-Australian artist whose practice spans painting, sculpture, works on paper, performance and video. Born in 1957 in Central Java, Indonesia, Dadang studied with a number of schools and groups throughout the 1970s and 80s before joining the Indonesian New Art Movement in 1987. During this period he developed a practice of connecting with political issues through his work. He experimented with different media and techniques widely, and was the first artist in Indonesia to incorporate installation into his practice. He was also one of the first Indonesian artists to enter the international art world in the 1990s.

Dadang's artworks often have an earthy, organic quality, emphasised through his use of a muted, **ochre-coloured palette**. Some of his earlier paper works also echo the aesthetic of traditional Indonesian **ikat** or weaving designs with use of bold, repeated patterning. He also creates works that are strongly connected to his personal experiences as well as the social and cultural politics of his homeland. His artworks often deal with themes of loss, universal human suffering and collective grief.

The political and cultural issues that recur in Dadang's works are often manifested through a process of **memorialisation** and remembrance. This action is rooted in the disappearance of his father, an ethnic Chinese who was taken from the artist's home by soldiers when he was a young boy. This abduction was one of many disappearances of Chinese-Indonesians during a tense time in the Suharto **regime**. During this period, there was a deep mistrust of the Chinese as they were considered connected to Communism. This traumatic event has come to recur in Dadang's works frequently, symbolising political upheaval, personal loss and a collective malaise. Another work which highlights these themes is *They Give Evidence* (1996-97); you can find more information on this work in *The Art Gallery of New South Wales Education Collection Notes*.

Often, the feel and emotive import of Dadang's works is one of **transience**; they simultaneously resemble both dream-like installations and fragile, foreign cultural **artifacts**. It is no surprise that many of Dadang's works also remind the viewer of the beauty and delicacy of memory and the relationship between lived events and what remains as time moves on.

# Indonesia during Dadang Christanto's development as an artist

Dadang Christanto was born into a period of political and economic uncertainty and volatility in Indonesia. Kusno Sosrodihardjo (known as Sukarno) had just struggled for and achieved Indonesian independence from the Netherlands. He became Indonesia's first president in 1945, about a decade before Dadang's birth. During his time in power he reorganised parliament from a democratic system to a more **authoritarian** state.

Towards the end of his presidency, in 1965, an attempted **coup** by the Communist Party of Indonesia resulted in an anti-communist counter attack by the army. This involved a purging of artists, intellectuals and communist-sympathisers as well as many ethnic Chinese (who were believed to be affiliated with Communism). It was during this purging that Dadang's father disappeared.

Sukarno was succeeded by his Lieutenant General, Suharto, in 1968. Although Suharto was able to manage many of Indonesia's economic issues, he was widely criticised for corruption and his militaristic foreign policy — namely his invasion of East Timor, which was flagged by the United Nations Human Rights Commission as a deep concern. Suharto also took a no tolerance policy towards public criticism and activism, banning demonstrations, forcing media **ensorship** and jailing his critics.

It was within this political and cultural **milieu** that Dadang matured and developed as an artist. The ongoing political and economic instability of the country as well as the sometimes tense relations between Indonesia's many ethnic and religious groups perhaps also accounts for his ability to convey the murky nature of **socio-cultural** relationships and politics.



# About the artwork

*Survivor* is a **multi-disciplinary** artwork that encompasses performance, photographic and video-documentation and installation. The work **commemorates** the ongoing trauma that is the Sidoarjo or Lapindo mudslide; an environmental disaster that occurred in May 2006 following a massive earthquake and exploratory drilling by a mining company. The toxic mud buried approximately 11 villages and displaced over 50,000 people in Sidoarjo, East Java. Many people also have died. This 'mud volcano' is expected to **leach** for the next 25–30 years.

*Survivor* was originally presented in Indonesia in 2008, involving 700 participants who took part in a live protest over the Sidoarjo disaster and the lack of adequate care and remuneration for the families that were affected. This is not the first time that Dadang has used his art to raise awareness of particular political or cultural issues. He is an artist who frequently creates works that could be considered cultural activism. This is an interesting point to consider when analysing the different audiences and attitudes towards his work.

The work consists of two components; the performance and the exhibition (post-performance), which can be viewed as the performance's '**legacy**' or '**aftermath**'. In the two-hour performance the artist, accompanied by local volunteers, takes silent vigil in the gallery. The event participants are caked in mud from the neck down, and hold photographic portraits of the victims of the mudslide. The process of standing still and quiet for such an extended period of time is clearly emotionally and physically taxing. This strain is also apparent in the video documentation that is recorded and then screened in the gallery as a part of the exhibition. The artwork is then created with remnants of the performance (mud, dust, photographs, footprints and trails), which are all left in the space as evidence of what occurred.

At each venue, the performance is **re-enacted** with volunteers from the local area. As a result, each performance and installation is unique and imparts the sombre experience of **memorialisation** upon new participants. *Survivor* is **aesthetically** and thematically linked

to Dadang's practice in its dealing with themes of loss and collective grief, usually at the hands of a greater or **institutionalised** power. Again like many of Dadang's works, nuances of the loss of his father play out throughout the artwork.

The performance is an act of remembrance, but is also an **actualisation** of a traumatic event in itself. The participants spend a long and uncomfortable two hours caked in mud while trying to remain very still; a less than comfortable emotional atmosphere. As such, the exhibition is the aftermath – each object, footprint, and drop of mud is a scar, a symbolic reference to what has occurred.

The exhibition and the performance are texts that can be read as separate entities but also constitute the work as a whole. Examining the two together highlights the **dichotomy** between action and inaction – active re-living and **static** memorialisation. This contrast could also be considered as a **metaphor** for memory and two fundamental ways in which traumatic events are dealt with by the human **psyche**: relived in a **visceral**, bodily fashion (as shown in the performance), or to exist as a forlorn memory, triggered by objects or photographs.

The work is not static; the elements of the work change in meaning across the performance and exhibition. For example, the photographs are a constant element in the work; however their meaning shifts significantly when held by people, compared with when they are left on the ground. Similarly, the mud that is painted onto the participants is a literal reference to the mud from the mudslide, but also makes the performers appear eerie and ghostly – perhaps a metaphor for the lives lost in the disaster.



# Glossary

**actualisation**

the process of making real or giving the appearance of reality

**aesthetically**

the nature of appearance, beauty, art, and taste

**aftermath**

the consequences or after effects of an event, especially when unpleasant

**artifact**

any object made by human beings, especially with a view to subsequent use

**authoritarian**

favouring complete obedience or subjection to authority as opposed to individual freedom

**ensorship**

suppressing parts deemed objectionable on moral, political, military, or other grounds

**commemorate**

to serve as a memorial or reminder

**coup**

a strike or blow, often political

**dichotomy**

A division or contrast between two things that are or are represented as being opposed or entirely different.

**ikat**

a method of printing woven fabric by tie-dyeing the warp yarns

**institutionalised**

establish as a convention or norm in an organisation or culture

**leach**

to dissolve out soluble components by percolation

**legacy**

Anything handed down from the past, as from an ancestor or predecessor

**memorialisation**

honour the memory of someone or something

**metaphor**

a thing regarded as representative or symbolic of something else

**milieu**

social or cultural surroundings

**multi-disciplinary**

composed of or combining several, usually separate, branches of learning or fields of expertise

**ochre-coloured palette**

a set of colours that are earthy and reflect those found in nature, namely browns and red

**psyche**

the mental or psychological structure of a person, especially as a motive force.

**re-enact**

perform again

**regime**

a mode or system of rule or government

**socio-cultural**

the combination or interaction of social and cultural elements

**static**

fixed or stationary

**transient**

for a short time only, shifting or changing

**visceral**

characterised by coarse or base emotions, raw



# Primary Performance Worksheet

Write a brief description of the performance. How many people are there? What are they doing?

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How does this performance make you feel?

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This performance relates to a tragic event in Indonesia, where a mudslide damaged villages and many lives were lost. Why do you think the artist made this work?

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Imagine that the mudslide happened near where you live and that this performance was about that mudslide. If you saw this performance, would there be a difference between how you would feel then and how you feel now?

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Can you think of an object that reminds you of someone close to you? What is it and who does it remind you of?

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In the box below draw this object.



If you were to put this object into an exhibition, how would you let people know what this object means? Think about accompanying sounds, photographs and other objects. Where would you place your object? Would it be high on a shelf, or low on the ground – why?

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### Back in the classroom

- In groups of four or five, think of an emotion. It could be happiness, longing, jealousy or even a combination of the three! It may help to think of any event as inspiration.
- Now decide how you would communicate this emotion to your audience.
- What would your movements be – slow and steady? Or fast and frantic? Would you stand very close to one another or lie down very far apart? Remember, this is not acting like in a play – we are thinking more about positioning of your bodies and movement.
- After acting your emotion to the class for one minute, have a discussion about your performance. Did they guess your emotion correctly? Explain what techniques you used and why.

# Primary Exhibition Worksheet

Write a description of what you can see in the exhibition. Try to capture everything, even the little details.

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The subject matter of this work is a mudslide that happened in Indonesia that affected a lot of people; it wiped out villages and many lives were lost.

If you didn't know the background information, what would you think this work was about?

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Spend some time with the videos. The performance went for two hours and the participants had to stand very still and hold the photographs.

Why do you think it was important for the artist to use people and this technique of performance in his work?

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Video documentation is becoming an important technique used by artists; it allows them to show complex artworks or events that are not always repeatable to the audience.

Why do you think the artist documented the performance by video and screened it as part of the exhibition?

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What kinds of feelings do you get from being in the exhibition?

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Do you think the artist meant for you to feel this way? Why?

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## Back in the classroom

- Choose one or two members of the class to bring in old clothes that can get dirty. These volunteers will be painted with clay slip, just like the participants in the performance. They will then need to stand still for 5 minutes in silence. After their performance ask your classmates some questions. How did they feel? Was it difficult to stand still for so long? These responses might give you an idea of how the performers felt during the making of this work.

Long response questions may require additional pages.

# Years 7–10 Performance Worksheet

Please read the background information on the artwork and artist accompanying this worksheet and use the information to respond to the questions below.

In a few dot points, describe the performance you are viewing.

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In a few dots points, explain the themes of the performance. What is the performance about?

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In a short paragraph, explain your subjective response to this work and the reasons for this.

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Why do you think it was important for the artist to use actual people in the performance and document the event? i.e. why did he not just exhibit the photographs and dried mud?

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*Survivor* is a work that has been repeated multiple times across many different venues. Read the background statement on the work and consider the different audiences for this work – how might the context affect the relationship between the artwork and the audience?

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## Back in the classroom

- Using the internet research the different definitions of the terms memorial, activism (activist demonstration), and performance art. Then, using these key phrases find a video example to illustrate each term from *YouTube* or *vimeo*.
- Present your findings to the class making comparisons between *Survivor* and your videos. Following from your research, which categories do you think the artwork falls into?

# Years 7–10 Exhibition Worksheet

Please read the background information on the artwork and artist accompanying this worksheet and use the information to respond to the questions below.

In a few dot points, describe the artwork.

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In a few dot points, explain what you think the themes of the artwork are.

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What is your subjective response to this work?

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What are the signs and symbols in this work that communicate the themes and subject matter?

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How has the artist evolved the meaning of some of the materials he uses to communicate new ideas and feelings to his audience? Think about his use of mud, photographs and people.

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Think about the artist's cultural influences, how have they shaped the type of work he produces?

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## Back in the classroom

Imagine that you are an artist, about to create a multi-disciplinary work that incorporates both performance and installation. Write a short summary of your work. You will need to answer the following questions:

- What is your artwork about? Is it about an environmental incident or a person?
- What materials will you use to communicate your message? Think about their metaphorical value.
- How will you incorporate performance into the work?

Here is an example to give you some help.  
*This work is about the helpless drought conditions in Australia over the past few years. The work will involve two troughs and a bucket with holes in the bottom. In the performance a person will carry water from a full trough to an empty one until it is full, however water will also spill from the bottom of the bucket. The performance will last until the water has run out.*

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Long response questions may require additional pages.

# Years 11–12 Performance Worksheet

Please read the background information on the artwork and artist accompanying this worksheet and use the information to respond to the questions below.

In a few dot points, describe the performance you are viewing.

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In a few dots points, explain the themes of the performance. What is the performance about?

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In a few sentences, using the information in the print out and what you see in the performance, describe the artist's practice.

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Analyse this performance through the subjective frame, what is your response to the work?

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The artist is also partaking in this performance. What do you think is the significance of his participation?

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How does *Survivor* blur the boundaries between artwork, artist and audience?

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## Back in the classroom

- Using the internet, research the role of endurance in performance art. A good place to start would be Australian artists Mike Parr and Fiona McGregor.
- Using the information you have researched discuss why you think that Dadang Christanto incorporated an element of endurance into his *Survivor* performances.

# Years 11–12 Exhibition Worksheet

Please read the background information on the artwork and artist accompanying this worksheet and use the information to respond to the questions below.

In a few dot points, describe the artwork.

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In a few dot points, explain what you think the themes of the artwork are.

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Examine this work through the structural frame. What are the main messages conveyed by the artwork and how are they conveyed?

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How has the artist utilised the material of mud? Discuss this element of the work through the Postmodern Frame. (3 sentences)

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Consider the cultural influences upon the artist Dadang Christanto, how do they manifest within his work?

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In a few short paragraphs, analyse Dadang Christanto's practice with reference to the artwork *Survivor* and background information provided.

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Read the description of the exhibition and compare and contrast the two terms 'legacy' and 'aftermath' to describe the artwork's relationship to the performance.

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## Back in the classroom

The excerpt below is part of a review of the artwork after its first exhibition in Sydney, *DADANG CHRISTANTO: ART, ACTIVISM AND THE ENVIRONMENT*, by Sue Ingham.

*The performance in Jakarta was a public event at a site loaded with symbolism, a monument commemorating freedom from the colonial control of the Netherlands; whereas the performance at Gallery 4A was an art event. Although the purpose was the same as the performance in Jakarta, that is, to raise awareness of the situation and sympathy for the victims, the effect was different. Dadang, standing still and streaked with clay, created a powerful image that will last in the documentary photographs that recorded the performance; but sympathy for the people of Sidoarjo was dissipated by the wine and conversation of an exhibition opening, where silence would have been a more appropriate response.*

What does this excerpt reveal about the relationship between artwork and audience?

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Long response questions may require additional pages.

## References and further reading

Ingham, Sue, *Dadang Christanto: Art, Activism and the Environment*, C Arts: Asian Contemporary Art and Culture (2009), found at <http://www.c-artsomag.com/articles/detail.php?Title=DADANG%20CHRISTANTO:%20ART,ACTIVISM%20AND%20THE%20ENVIRONMENT&articleID=89>

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All images in this publication:

Dadang Christanto, *Survivor*, 2009, performance at 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art, Sydney. Image courtesy of the artist and 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art, Sydney. Image credit: Garry Trinh

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