

# ADRI VALERY WENS

## Cinta Mati



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## ADRI VALERY WENS: *Cinta Mati*

For his first solo exhibition at MOP Projects Sydney, Adri Valery Wens presents eleven distinctive, choreographed photographs that take the form of veiled self-portraits. In each image the artist appears only partially. In some works his eyes and face are concealed from view behind thick red masking tape, or his body is shown in sections, revealed incrementally behind a rolling garage door. In others, only his hands and torso are visible, tossing black and red objects into the air, the paper's edge cropping out his neck and head.

As a graduate student at the College of Fine Arts, University of NSW, Wens has pursued a path of sustained research and found influential mentors in the field of contemporary photo-media. The resulting images reveal a strong debt to western art history and performance practices of the late 1960s to the present, in which the artist's body and acts of endurance or repetition are foregrounded. Equally, the photographs draw on his personal history as a young Indonesian man born to a Catholic father and a Muslim mother, who relocated permanently to Sydney from Jakarta over four years ago.

As a person who has questioned, and ultimately renounced his religious faith, Wens employs the metaphor of play – balls/objects held in suspension, snapped by the camera mid air – to weigh the complexities of belief and doubt in his art. Representations of the face wrapped in masking tape, its mouth silenced, or of the body slowly revealing itself from behind the roller door hint at unspoken questions: things that have been locked away and are now only slowly brought to light.

Central to Wens' practice is an investigation of spiritualism in art, particularly the work of Kazimir Malevich and his non-objective paintings of the 1910s-20s. Speaking about his photographs, Wens observes, 'I have always been interested in what people believe; I question religious belief in the context of joking and role-play. My alignment with Malevich is a critique of the idea of spirituality and man's superiority – of the male painter as the hand of God.' The colours black and red, both strongly associated with Russian suprematism and Malevich's paintings, recur in Wens' photographs: from the colours of the juggling balls and the masking tape to another portrait series (not exhibited here) in which Wens simply holds a black square card, in reference to Malevich's 'black square' paintings.

In this exhibition Wens shows six red masking tape photographs (*Cinta Mati*, 2011) as well as a single black masking tape work (*Black Circle*, 2011). He also shows three images from the series *Juggling*, 2011, and one panoramic print from the wider series *Roller Door*, 2011. Extending his interest in art history are the three photographs which depict the artist tossing objects like a juggler, including a bottle and a tin that have been wrapped in black and red tape. Speaking about them, Wens cites his interest in the still life paintings of Braque and Picasso, and his desire to 'animate them by throwing them up into the air'. If there is a sense

of irreverence in this gesture, it is a playful one that nods surreptitiously to the artist's work as a barman in Jakarta, mixing cocktails and performing for his patrons.

While religion, ritual and non-objectivity are recurring themes in Wens' photographs, sexuality is also ever present through the human body, which appears in varied states of dress and and bareness. The red and black tape images moreover hint at bondage or sadomasochism. As the artist winds masking tape around his face from the neck upwards, he is eventually obscured by it, as though wearing a skin-tight fetish mask. His unfaltering, direct look at the camera as he begins to apply the tape is also a challenge to us as viewers – it acknowledges the erotic power of the gaze, or the desire we might feel in witnessing this act of purposeful disappearance. By the end of the series, although Wens' eyes are obscured, we continue to look. The title of Wens' exhibition, *Cinta Mati*, means 'crazy love' in Bahasa Indonesian. It is a fitting metaphor for the desire that drives us mad through looking, but not touching.

Extending the theme of sexuality is Wens' *Roller Door* photograph, one of a wider series which show the artist's body revealed bit by bit, as a garage door draws upward. In this work he wears casual black jeans and a red tee shirt, a nod to Malevich, but the primary reference here is to the work of American post war artist Robert Rauschenberg. Well known for his monochromatic paintings in white, black and red and his sculptural 'combines', Rauschenberg also experimented with photographic and print techniques. *Cy + Roman Steps* (1952) is a five part photographic sequence showing his peer and lover Cy Twombly descending the famed steps of the title, identified at a distance only by his feet, then by his legs and waist as he nears the camera. There is a cool, understated sexuality to the sequence as the body draws nearer and the camera hones in on its masculine form and tanned, bare forearms. For Wens, the unspoken relationship between the two young artists is significant: it is hidden from view like Cy's face, yet implicitly revealed through the camera lens.

Concealment and revelation, spirituality and desire are threads that connect Wens' photographs like links within a chain. Acknowledging the role of past precedents, Wens draws actively on art history in formulating his works while infusing them with a striking, intimate sensibility. They ask us to look at, not away, from them and acknowledge our role in the creation of desire.

Rachel Kent 2012



*Cinta Mati #1*, 2011  
pigment on silver rag paper  
80 x 80cm



*Cinta Mati #2*, 2011  
pigment on silver rag paper  
80 x 80cm



*Cinta Mati #3*, 2011  
pigment on silver rag paper  
80 x 80cm



*Cinta Mati #4*, 2011  
pigment on silver rag paper  
80 x 80cm



*Cinta Mati #5*, 2011  
pigment on silver rag paper  
80 x 80cm

*Cinta Mati #6*, 2011  
pigment on silver rag paper  
80 x 80cm





*Roller Door*, 2011  
pigment on silver rag paper  
46 x 173cm



*Juggling #1*, 2011  
pigment on silver rag paper  
90 x 110cm



*Juggling #2*, 2011  
pigment on silver rag paper  
90 x 110cm





*Juggling #3*, 2011  
pigment on silver rag paper  
90 x 110cm



*Black Circle*, 2011  
pigment on silver rag paper  
80 x 80cm



1



2



3



4



5



6



7



8



9



10



11

## List of Works

1. *Cinta Mati #1*, 2011  
pigment on silver rag paper  
80 x 80cm

2. *Cinta Mati #2*, 2011  
pigment on silver rag paper  
80 x 80cm

3. *Cinta Mati #3*, 2011  
pigment on silver rag paper  
80 x 80cm

4. *Cinta Mati #4*, 2011  
pigment on silver rag pape  
80 x 80cm

5. *Cinta Mati #5*, 2011  
pigment on silver rag paper  
80 x 80cm

6. *Cinta Mati #6*, 2011  
pigment on silver rag paper  
80 x 80cm

7. *Roller Door*, 2011  
pigment on silver rag paper  
46 x 173cm

8. *Juggling #1*, 2011  
pigment on silver rag paper  
90 x 110cm

9. *Juggling #2*, 2011  
pigment on silver rag paper  
90 x 110cm

10. *Juggling #3*, 2011  
pigment on silver rag paper  
90 x 110cm

11. *Black Circle*, 2011  
pigment on silver rag paper  
80 x 80cm