

PEMILIHAN SUBJEK SEBAGAI BENTUK AFEKTIF: EKONOMI AFEKTIF SARA AHMED DALAM SETENGAH RINDU

PORTRAIT SELECTION AS AFFECTIVE ACT: SARA AHMED'S AFFECTIVE ECONOMIES IN SETENGAH RINDU

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the affective logic underlying the selection of portrait subjects in Setengah Rindu (2026), a collective exhibition by the artist collective Simpullapan held at Galeri Raos, Kota Batu. The exhibition presents five portrait paintings by artist Dwi Christanto depicting world figures: Frida Kahlo, Princess Diana, Vladimir Putin, Mahatma Gandhi, and Tan Malaka, whose apparent thematic arbitrariness constitutes the central analytical problem of this study. Drawing on Sara Ahmed's framework of affective economies and the cultural politics of emotion, this article argues that the selection of these figures is governed by a coherent internal affective logic in which public figures accumulate emotional value through cultural circulation, becoming sticky objects to which feelings adhere and through which they are transmitted and contested. Using qualitative interpretive methods, this study analyzes documentation of the exhibition including artwork photographs, wall texts, and the artist's statement. Findings reveal that each portrait subject carries distinct affective qualities, constituting what this study terms an affective archive: a coherent emotional landscape assembled through the deliberate accumulation of sticky figures. This article contributes to emerging discussions of affect theory within Indonesian visual culture studies, a field in which this theoretical approach remains markedly underutilized.

Keywords: Affective economies, Indonesian contemporary art, Portrait painting, Sara Ahmed, Sticky objects

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji logika afektif yang mendasari pemilihan subjek potret dalam Setengah Rindu (2026), sebuah pameran kelompok yang diselenggarakan oleh kolektif seniman Simpullapan di Galeri Raos, Batu. Pameran ini menampilkan lima lukisan potret karya seniman Dwi Christanto yang menggambarkan tokoh-tokoh dunia: Frida Kahlo, Putri Diana, Vladimir Putin, Mahatma Gandhi, dan Tan Malaka, di mana kesewenang-wenangan tematik yang tampak dari pemilihan tokoh-tokoh tersebut menjadi masalah analitis utama dalam penelitian ini. Dengan mengacu pada kerangka kerja ekonomi afektif dan politik budaya emosi karya Sara Ahmed, artikel ini berpendapat bahwa pemilihan tokoh-tokoh tersebut diatur oleh logika afektif internal yang koheren, di mana tokoh-tokoh publik mengakumulasi nilai emosional melalui sirkulasi budaya, sehingga menjadi "objek yang melekat" yang menjadi wadah bagi perasaan serta sarana penyampaian dan perdebatan emosi. Dengan menggunakan metode interpretatif kualitatif, penelitian ini menganalisis dokumentasi pameran, termasuk foto-foto karya seni, teks di dinding, dan pernyataan seniman. Temuan-temuan ini mengungkapkan bahwa setiap subjek potret memiliki kualitas afektif yang berbeda-beda, yang membentuk apa yang dalam penelitian ini disebut sebagai "arsip afektif": sebuah lanskap emosional yang koheren yang disusun melalui akumulasi "figur-figur yang melekat"

secara sengaja. Artikel ini berkontribusi pada diskusi yang sedang berkembang mengenai teori afek dalam studi budaya visual Indonesia, sebuah bidang di mana pendekatan teoretis ini masih sangat kurang dimanfaatkan.

Kata kunci: Benda lengket, Ekonomi afektif, Lukisan potret, Sara Ahmed, Seni Rupa Kontemporer Indonesia

INTRODUCTION

Portrait painting has long served as a medium for recording identity and affirming social belonging. In contemporary Indonesian visual art, the genre increasingly functions as affective gesture rather than documentation, raising a question existing scholarship has yet to address: when an artist paints public figures spanning history and geography with no apparent thematic connection, what governs that selection? This article examines *Setengah Rindu: Yang Belum Selesai, Yang Tetap Bekerja* (2026), a collective exhibition by Simpullapan, an eight-member artist collective in East Java, held at Galeri Raos, Kota Batu, in which five portraits by Dwi Christanto depict Frida Kahlo, Princess Diana, Vladimir Putin, Mahatma Gandhi, and Tan Malaka. These figures span different eras and political alignments with no single thread uniting them, yet the exhibition generates a palpable coherence that the title, *Setengah Rindu* (Half of Longing), names but does not explain. Existing studies on Indonesian contemporary painting favour semiotic representation (Sucitra, 2015; Taylor, 2006) or the documentation of national identity and historical memory (Saidi, 2008), with affect theory still marginal to Indonesian visual art scholarship even as it opens productive directions elsewhere for understanding how art and exhibitions circulate emotion (Ilic, 2022; Varutti, 2023), and theoretically grounded painting analysis remains productive within the field (Dardiri et al., 2025). These approaches, however, are less equipped to account for an artist's selection of subjects who are not personally known to them, belong to no unified ideological camp, and share only the intensity of emotion they provoke, a gap calling for a different theoretical entry point.

Affect has been theorised from Massumi's (2002) pre-discursive intensity to Berlant's (2011) cruel optimism and Gregg and Seigworth's (2010) bodies affecting and being affected. This study adopts Ahmed's (2004a, 2004b) framework of affective economies and the cultural politics of emotion for its attention to how emotions circulate socially, accumulate around figures, and acquire political force through that accumulation, a lens especially productive for portraiture, where choosing who to depict is itself an act of emotional positioning. The seemingly arbitrary selection of subjects in *Setengah Rindu* is, this article argues, governed by a coherent affective economy in which certain figures accumulate emotional value through circulation, becoming *sticky objects* to whom feelings

adhere and through whom they are transmitted, amplified, and contested, an act of emotional positioning that reveals the artist's own emotional world.

This study pursues three aims: to identify the affective qualities attached to each portrait subject; to analyse how these qualities function as mechanisms of stickiness within Ahmed's framework; and to argue that the exhibition as a whole constitutes an *affective archive*, an emotional landscape constructed through the accumulation and juxtaposition of sticky figures. In doing so, this article contributes to an emerging conversation about affect theory's potential within Indonesian visual culture studies, where its application remains markedly underexplored.

This study employs a qualitative interpretive approach suited to research concerned with meaning-making and the subjective dimensions of human experience (Rose, 2016), drawing on Ahmed's framework as both theoretical lens and analytical instrument, reading the data through stickiness, circulation, and the accumulation of emotional value. The primary object of analysis is *Setengah Rindu: Yang Belum Selesai, Yang Tetap Bekerja*, held at Galeri Raos, Kota Batu from February 2026, presenting roughly forty works across media and positioned as a manifesto against algorithmic culture and the erosion of human memory (D. Nana, 2026). Street art visual language, with its history of political expression in Indonesian urban spaces (Mansfield et al., 2024; Minanto, 2024), plays a central role in Christanto's work; this study focuses on his five portraits of Frida Kahlo, Princess Diana, Vladimir Putin, Mahatma Gandhi, and Tan Malaka.

Data were collected from five sources: photographic documentation of the five works; accompanying wall texts, which mediate viewer encounters (Rose, 2016); the artist's statement; media coverage including D. Nana's (2026) feature in *Indonesia Online*; and a semi-structured interview with Christanto on his rationale for subject selection. Interview data were analysed thematically and used to triangulate the visual and textual sources.

A central methodological consideration concerns researcher positionality. The lead researcher contributed to *Setengah Rindu* as writer of its wall texts and as a conceptual interpreter of the artists' intentions; she is also married to the exhibiting artist, Dwi Christanto, a relationship disclosed here for methodological transparency. This differs from a primary curatorial role: she did not determine which works were included or how the space was arranged, occupying instead a position of critical proximity to the artists' creative deliberations while remaining analytically external to curatorial decisions. As Mainsah and Rafiki (2023) establish, participation in producing exhibition texts is a legitimate form of research access provided its scope is clearly delineated. Given this dual

proximity, findings were triangulated across all five data sources, including the interview, to strengthen validity and reduce researcher bias (Bukamal, 2022).

Analysis proceeded in three stages: each subject was analysed individually for affective qualities associated through cultural circulation, drawing on Rose's (2016) compositional interpretation extended through Ahmed's (2004b) sticky objects; the five works were then analysed relationally as a series; and findings were triangulated across all data sources to ground interpretive claims in evidence rather than prior familiarity.

This approach is consistent with recent qualitative studies of symbolic meaning in Indonesian visual art (Iswandi & Sarwanto, 2025). Two limitations apply: the analysis excludes audience reception data, left to future research, and, focusing on one artist within one exhibition, its value lies in theoretical transferability (Creswell & Poth, 2018) rather than generalisability. Several references predate 2021, centrally Ahmed (2004a, 2004b), Massumi (2002), Berlant (2011), and Gregg and Seigworth (2010): foundational affect-studies texts for which no more recent equivalent exists without altering the analytical framework, and their inclusion reflects methodological necessity.

A. Affective Archive as Analytical Category

This study deploys *affective archive* as a precise analytical category, distinct from three cognate terms. It differs from a conventional or institutional archive, which organises materials by documentation and retrieval logics without foregrounding emotional charge. It differs from collective memory, which describes shared cognitive representations of the past; an affective archive may draw on collective memory, but its organising principle is affective coherence rather than historical continuity. And it differs from a curatorial assemblage in the neutral sense: an affective archive is constituted specifically by the accumulation and juxtaposition of sticky figures, such that the relational field between them is emotionally and politically resonant in ways a purely formal or thematic grouping need not be. When Dwi Christanto places Frida Kahlo, Gandhi, Tan Malaka, Diana, and Putin within the same curatorial space, the resulting assemblage functions as an affective archive because its meanings are produced not by any single work but by the affective field that emerges between them, consistent with recent scholarship positioning curatorial selection as an active mechanism for shaping audience experience rather than merely framing pre-existing artworks (Shao, 2025; Varutti, 2021).

B. Individual Affective Analysis

The analysis of the five portrait works in *Setengah Rindu* is organised across three stages: individual analysis of each work, relational analysis of the series as a whole, and triangulation against wall texts, artist statements, and exhibition documentation. All five works are mixed media on canvas, combining expressive portraiture with layered street art aesthetics, graffiti typography, fragmented alphabets, doodle-style mark-making, urban gestural marks, which the artist describes as the visual language of urban burnout and routine (D. Nana, 2026). This shared formal language functions as a constant affective background against which each iconic figure is positioned, framed, and encountered.

Wound That Smiles (Frida Kahlo, 100 x 120 cm, 2026)



Figure 1. Wound That Smiles, Dwi Christanto, Mixed Media on Canvas, 100 x 120 cm, 2026

Frida Kahlo is among the most heavily circulated iconic figures in global visual culture. Decades of reproduction across posters, film, fashion, and social media have given her image a dense affective charge, transforming a relatively obscure painter at her 1954 death into one of the most recognisable figures worldwide (Dosamantes-Beaudry, 2002). In Ahmed's terms, she is a highly sticky object: encountering her image already activates a pre-loaded affective field before any compositional reading begins (Ahmed, 2004b).

In *Wound That Smiles*, Dwi Christanto depicts Frida with eyes half-closed, her expression neither suffering nor triumphant but quietly enduring. The figure occupies roughly the right half of a densely layered canvas, her face rendered in cool blues, purples, and greens against a chaotic background of alphabet fragments, neon doodles, and gestural marks. The palette drains the natural warmth from her skin, yet rather than dehumanising her, this chromatic displacement produces a strangeness that mirrors the wall text's description: the experience of being fully human while continuously negotiating one's own body and circumstances (Simpullapan, 2026).

The tension between the serene figural centre and the surrounding visual noise drives the work's affective operation. Frida does not react to the chaos behind her; she is present within it without being consumed by it. In Ahmed's framework, the stickiness activated here is not pain per se but *endurance as a mode of being*, the capacity to remain intact and expressive amid conditions that threaten dissolution.

Christanto's own account illuminates the personal logic behind this selection: "*She is someone who I find resilient and has extraordinary creative breakthroughs*" (Dwi Christanto, personal communication, February 2026). This maps closely onto Ahmed's (2004b) account of stickiness as the property of figures that resist release, clinging to consciousness through the qualities they appear to embody. Frida's persistent presence in the artist's emotional world suggests a figure whose cultural stickiness has become personal stickiness, absorbed into the individual affective economy of an Indonesian artist navigating the same conditions of endurance and creative pressure her image appears to emblematises.

Fading Manifesto (Mahatma Gandhi, 180 x 130 cm, 2024)



Figure 2. Fading Manifesto, Dwi Christanto, Mixed Media on Canvas, 180 x 130 cm, 2024

If Frida's stickiness builds through decades of visual reproduction, Gandhi's operates differently: through repeated invocation of his principles in institutional and political discourse. Gandhi has become what Ahmed (2004b) describes as a moralised sticky object, one whose associated values are so thoroughly sacralised that the emotional charge attached to him has hardened into moral obligation rather than lived feeling; the stickiness, in this reading, has calcified.

Christanto's treatment of Gandhi stages this calcification explicitly. GENTLENESS is stencilled in large graffiti letters across the canvas top, its dripping paint suggesting a slogan repeated so often it is losing structural integrity; POWER appears in red at left, in tension with the gentleness above. Gandhi's face is painted in stacked colours, his round spectacles anchoring identification within the visual complexity. The wall text names this condition *setengah rindu* (half-longing): the object of longing demands more than the subject feels able to give (Simpullapan, 2026), an instance of what Ahmed (2004b) calls *affective depletion*, the eroding capacity to fully inhabit a relationship with a sticky object under the acceleration of contemporary life.

Christanto's own account supports this reading: "*Gandhi is indeed popular and represents peace and gentleness. His ahimsa is genuinely compelling*" (Dwi Christanto, personal communication, February 2026). Rather than a personal struggle with Gandhi's legacy, this is an attraction to what the figure publicly represents, values circulated across decades of reproduction, so institutionalised that the charge registers as simply "obvious." The longing the work activates is accordingly not anguished but elegiac: a half-longing for qualities whose cultural salience is recognised but whose weight may no longer be felt with the intensity that once animated them.

The Lost Loud (Tan Malaka, 180 x 130 cm, 2024)

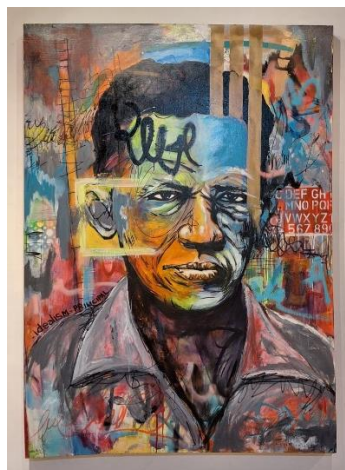


Figure 3. The Lost Loud, Dwi Christanto, Mixed Media on Canvas, 180 x 130 cm, 2024

Among the five subjects, Tan Malaka presents the most distinctively Indonesian and politically volatile instance of affective stickiness. Ideologically marginalised under the New Order, he has only partially re-entered public memory in the post-Reformasi period, a rehabilitation documented across historical scholarship since the early 2000s (Poeze, 2013; Victoria, 2015). His stickiness is produced through a combination of suppression and rehabilitation, carrying an emotional charge constituted by what was lost, buried, and not yet fully recovered (Ahmed, 2004a).

Visually, *The Lost Loud* is the darkest and most fragmented of the five works: Tan Malaka's face rendered in deep blues, oranges, and greys, partly obscured by a rectangular fragment of painted paper layered over its left side. Unlike the other four figures, his gaze is angled away, as if already disappearing; the inscription "idealism-principal" sits almost illegible at lower left. The background's fragmented vertical colour blocks suggest a wall repeatedly painted over, official narrative layered over dissident memory.

The wall text poses the question that gives this work its affective sharpness: "*What do we actually long for: his voice, or the possibility he represented?*" (Simpullapan, 2026). Because his circulation has been deliberately disrupted, the emotions attached to him remain unsettled; the longing activated is closer to what Ahmed (2004b) calls *affective recognition of loss*, encountering an object whose stickiness has been systematically undermined.

Christanto's account is the most personally invested of the five: "*I have a deep admiration for him. He is a founding father whose narrative has been exiled from the history that has been constructed until now*" (Dwi Christanto, personal communication, February 2026). Where Kahlo compels through resilience and Gandhi through familiar moral association, Tan Malaka activates something closer to what Berlant (2011) describes as attachment to a figure whose promise has been foreclosed. The deliberate suppression of his circulation in official memory has produced a stickiness constituted not by repetition but by calculated absence, making the encounter with his image an act of affective recovery.

Sympathy Behind the Walls (Princess Diana, 100 x 120 cm, 2026)

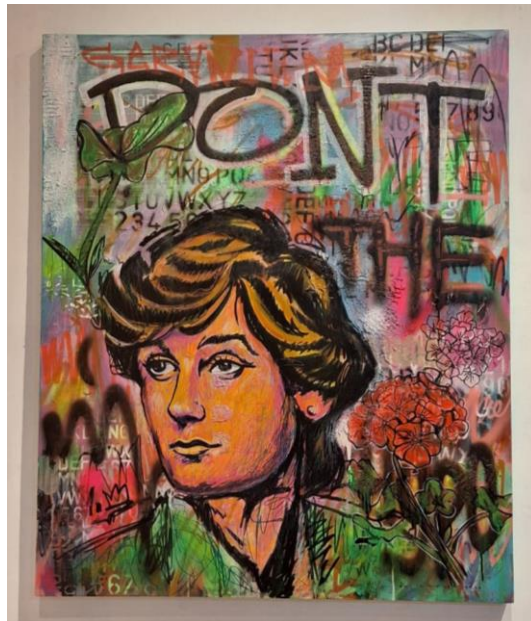


Figure 4. Sympathy Behind the Walls, Dwi Christanto, Mixed Media on Canvas, 100 x 120 cm, 2026

Princess Diana represents perhaps the clearest example of what Ahmed (2004b) calls a publicly grievable figure, whose death transformed private emotion into a collective affective event of global scale. The mourning that followed her 1997 death produced what scholars describe as a transnational community of mourning crossing cultural and national boundaries (Kear & Steinberg, 2002; Thomas & Barry, 2008), her image continuing to circulate as a vessel for collective longing across generations.

In *Sympathy Behind the Walls*, Christanto renders Diana in a notably different register: the most naturalistically rendered face of the series, with less chromatic distortion. The geranium flowers at lower right carry the work's argument: the wall text specifies the longing activated is not for the person but for a way of being human inside a rigid, unwelcoming structure (Simpullapan, 2026). In Ahmed's terms, the stickiness has been redirected, from Diana as an individual onto the quality she is perceived to embody.

Christanto's account of Diana introduces the series' most distinctive dimension. Unlike the other figures, rooted in his own admiration, Diana entered the exhibition's affective economy differently: "*She is a populist figure who seems to love people and is very sweet. My wife admires her*" (Dwi Christanto, personal communication, February 2026). This extends Ahmed's framework: Diana's stickiness for Christanto operates through *proximate affective transmission*, the charge carried by a figure in the life of

someone close to the artist migrating into his own affective economy, becoming sticky by proximity rather than direct encounter.

Frekuensi Tanpa Jeda (Vladimir Putin, 180 x 40 cm 2025)

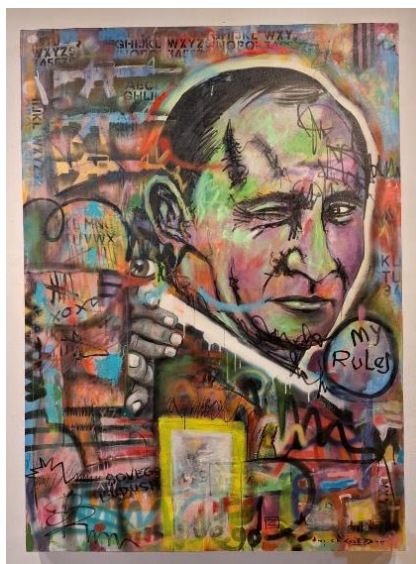


Figure 5. Frekuensi Tanpa Jeda, Dwi Christanto, Mixed Media on Canvas, 180 x 40 cm, 2025

The most formally distinctive of the five, *Frekuensi Tanpa Jeda* occupies a dramatically narrow vertical canvas, 180 by 40 centimetres, forcing the viewer to step back for the whole composition or scan close, never holding the full image in one gaze, enacting before any reading of content the title's central claim: there is no pause, no space of rest. Putin's face dominates the upper two-thirds, rendered in greens and purples against the densest, most layered visual field in the series. A speech bubble reads *My Rules*, the only direct verbal assertion from any figure in the series. Putin's stickiness in the global affective economy is constituted by ambivalence: a simultaneous circulation of fear, respect, critique, and a contested longing for the clarity of absolute authority. The wall text names this as the work's core: the longing activated is half, because integrity in power always comes with a price (Simpullapan, 2026), an instance of what Ahmed (2004a) identifies as affective economies around figures of power circulating in contradictory directions rather than cohering around a single valence.

Christanto's own account adds a dimension the visual analysis alone cannot access: "*He is an admirable figure as a leader, regardless of the controversy. He appears to put everything on the line for Russia and his people. For me it is more about a longing for a figure like that, even though the ideal leader almost does not exist*" (Dwi Christanto,

personal communication, February 2026). Rather than simultaneous attraction and repulsion, this reframes the portrait's stickiness as longing for total commitment, potent precisely for being nearly unattainable.

C. Relational Analysis: The Exhibition as Affective Archive

Analysed as a series, the five portraits constitute an affective archive: an assemblage of sticky objects whose juxtaposed charges produce a coherent argument about the affective condition of the contemporary Indonesian urban subject navigating digital acceleration, algorithmic mediation, and political disillusionment. The five figures span radically different contexts, Mexican art history, British royalty, Russian geopolitics, Indian anti-colonial movement, Indonesian revolutionary history, that would appear to resist any unifying logic, yet each embodies a distinct quality of longing while together constituting a single condition: navigating a world where resilience, moral commitment, historical justice, human warmth, and principled leadership are structurally unavailable.

Manually painting large-format portraits of iconic figures in an age of generative image production is itself an affective act, insisting on the slowness of human attention against the speed and disposability of digital circulation. In Ahmed's terms, the paintings perform a kind of *affective friction*, slowing the circulation of already-sticky figures. The street art background shared across all five works, with its history of political commentary in Indonesian urban spaces (Minanto, 2024), functions not merely as style but as affective infrastructure, embedding iconic figures within the grammar of urban distraction and information overload.

DISCUSSION

The findings confirm that the selection of portrait subjects in Christanto's contribution to *Setengah Rindu* is not arbitrary. Analysed through Ahmed's framework, the five figures emerge as a deliberately assembled affective archive whose internal logic is consistent, culturally grounded, and politically situated. The study's primary theoretical contribution lies in extending Ahmed's concept of affective economies, previously concentrated on textual and discursive fields (Ahmed, 2004a, 2004b), into visual art practice and portraiture. Where existing studies of exhibition reception focus on audience response as an outcome of curatorial design rather than the affective logic embedded in the selection of works themselves (Krause & Davidson, 2021), this study demonstrates

that affective economies operate with equal force in the choices an artist makes about which figures to depict, how to render them, and in what proximity to place them.

Portraiture proves a particularly productive site for affective economies because the human face activates registers of recognition and identification other visual forms do not. When a depicted figure is already a sticky object in wider circulation, painting that face intensifies rather than merely represents its charge: the labour of hand-painted portraiture enacts the slowness digital circulation forecloses, fitting for an exhibition positioned against algorithmic acceleration.

The study also contributes to Indonesian visual culture studies, where the affective turn has been slow to arrive. Tan Malaka is particularly significant: his volatile stickiness within Indonesian collective memory, produced by decades of state suppression and partial rehabilitation, cannot be adequately accounted for by semiotic analysis alone. The co-presence of Frida Kahlo and Tan Malaka further generates what Ahmed would call a contact zone, where trans-cultural longing for embodied endurance meets a specifically Indonesian longing for suppressed political possibility. The anomalous vertical format of *Frekuensi Tanpa Jeda* extends this line of argument, showing that affective stickiness can be shaped through the material and spatial conditions of the artwork itself, not only its imagery.

Finally, this study contributes to wider conversations about affect theory in the Global South. Affective economies function differently in Indonesian contexts: Tan Malaka's stickiness is constituted through state suppression with no direct equivalent in Ahmed's original examples, ambivalence around Putin is filtered through post-authoritarian political exhaustion, and the longing activated by Diana is shaped by a specifically Indonesian position of transnational identification, specificities that enrich Ahmed's framework by demonstrating its transferability while insisting on local conditions.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine the affective logic underlying Christanto's selection of portrait subjects in *Setengah Rindu* (Simpullapan, Galeri Raos, Kota Batu, 2026), applying Ahmed's framework of affective economies and sticky objects. The central argument has been sustained: the selection of Frida Kahlo, Mahatma Gandhi, Tan Malaka, Princess Diana, and Vladimir Putin is governed by a consistent affective logic in which each figure serves as a sticky object carrying a specific quality of longing, mourning, or ambivalence recognisable within the contemporary Indonesian urban subject's emotional landscape.

Three findings stand out: stickiness is not uniform, ranging from Gandhi's calcified moral stickiness to Tan Malaka's volatile, contested one; the affective archive is analytically productive for theorising the relational dimension of exhibition-making; and the artist's formal choices actively shape the conditions of affective encounter rather than merely illustrating pre-existing content.

The study contributes to three areas: extending Ahmed's framework into visual art practice and curatorial selection; introducing affect theory as an analytical lens in Indonesian visual culture studies; and offering the affective archive as a generative category for future exhibition-making research. Two directions for future research follow: audience reception studies testing the affective charges identified here, and comparative studies applying the affective archive to other Indonesian collective exhibitions.

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