**Wayang Kontemporer: Innovations in Javanese Wayang Kulit**

By Dr Miguel Escobar Varela

**Date** : 26 Nov 2015  
**Time** : 16:00 - 17:30  
**Venue** : Asia Research Institute Seminar Room  
Tower Block Level 10, 469A Bukit Timah Road  
National University of Singapore @ BTC

**CHAIRPERSON**

**Dr Amelia Fauzia**, Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore

**ABSTRACT**

Although *wayang kulit* is one of the oldest and most respected performance traditions in Java, conventional all-night performances are rarely watched by young, urban spectators. However, a group of innovative *dalang* (puppeteers) such as Enthus Susmono, Catur “Benyek” Kuncoro and the late Slamet Gundono devised new performances, collectively described as *wayang kontemporer* [contemporary wayang], that re-ignited an interest in the tradition among younger people. Working together with visual artists, writers and theatre directors, the *dalang* created performances where the conventions of *wayang* were interwoven with hip hop music, complex stage machinery, digital media and everyday objects. The traditional stories were also combined – and sometimes replaced – by narratives that emerged from topical events. Through these controversial interventions, the artists addressed a wide range of positions towards sociocultural change in Indonesia. This talk will present an overview of the key aspects of these performances, offering an interpretation of what they say about contemporary Java. The full research project can be accessed at wayangkontemporer.com.

**ABOUT THE SPEAKER**

**Miguel Escobar Varela** is a translator, theatre researcher and web programmer who has lived in Mexico, The Netherlands, Singapore and Indonesia. His academic work on Javanese performances and digital humanities has appeared in *Asian Theatre Journal, Contemporary Theatre Review, Performance Research* and *Digital Scholarship in the Humanities*. He has also contributed chapters to the edited volumes *Theatre and Adaptation: Return, Rewrite, Repeat* (London: Methuen, 2014) and *Community Art: The Politics of Trespassing* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2010). He is currently Assistant Professor of Theatre Studies at the National University of Singapore. More information is available at miguelescobar.com.

**REGISTRATION**

Admission is free. We would greatly appreciate if you RSVP to Ms Tay Minghua via email: minghua.tay@nus.edu.sg.