



# IN LIGHT OF SHADOWS

10 FEBRUARY — 7 JULY 2018

A BERNDT MUSEUM EXHIBITION AT THE  
LAWRENCE WILSON ART GALLERY





Wayang kulit (shadow puppet), Krishna, late 20th century, Central Java, Indonesia, pigment on parchment, buffalo horn. M.G. Kailis Collection, Berndt Museum [2004/0055]



Kondō-dōrō (bronze lantern), c 16th century, Nara, Japan, cast bronze. R. Cleland Collection, Berndt Museum [1999/0001.1-2]



Keris, 20th century, Indonesia, metal, wood. RM & CH Berndt Estate, Berndt Museum [1994/0050.1-2]

## IN LIGHT OF SHADOWS

*“How can I be substantial if I do not cast a shadow? I must have a dark side also if I am to be whole”*

C.G. Jung

The notion of the shadow is one that speaks to the psychoanalytical, the philosophical, the aesthetic and the cultural. It occurs in the presence of light and yet consists of its absence: darkness. The shadow produces and is produced by this interaction of light and dark – one existing in relation to the other rather than in opposition.

*In Light of Shadows* explores the concept of the shadow in both a literal and metaphorical sense, using material culture to interpret cross-cultural understandings of light and darkness. These displays are especially concerned with how people sense light and shadow, in order to examine how these dimensions of brightness and darkness reveal or conceal aspects of material and social life in conscious and unconscious ways. Drawing upon these interpretations, the exhibition aims to elicit a human response to light, darkness and shadows as mediums through which familiar themes such as morality, mortality and memory can be identified. Although these narratives speak to (and of) distinctive contexts, a majority of them transcend many socio-cultural boundaries. The items selected for display seek to embody these in order to show that the lived experience requires both light and darkness to be whole.

### SHADOWS IN USE

The use of shadows in a literal sense to communicate social narrative and issues has been practiced in many cultures. In particular, shadow puppetry has a long history of being performed for both entertainment and social commentary. The shadow puppets on display from Java (*wayang kulit*) and India (*tholu bommalata*) exist not only as an art form, but also materially as a vehicle for political and social criticism – a means of transmitting values and meaning through narrative. The *dalang* (puppet master) makes use of this tangible depiction of light and shadow to reveal knowledge that corresponds with the audience’s recognition of characters and stories. The practice of *wayang* is one that continuously undergoes adaptation and transformation while maintaining links to tradition – as seen in the performances of the Fusion Wayang Kulit group from Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Light is often used symbolically in religious and cultural beliefs with the Japanese bronze lanterns being introduced - along with new Buddhist ideas - from China via Korea sometime during the sixth century. Functioning as votive offerings, the light held in the lamp symbolised the light of Buddha’s teachings that helped overcome the darkness of ignorance. Originally used to line and illuminate paths at Buddhist temples, stone and bronze lanterns were later used in shrines, private homes and Japanese tea gardens. The segments of the lantern represent the five elements of Buddhist cosmology – *chi* (earth), *sui* (water), *ka* (fire), *fu* (air) and *ku* (spirit) – that expresses the idea that after death, our physical bodies will return to their original, elemental form.





Image from the Fusion Wayang Kulit project Peperangan Bintang (English translation: Wars of the Star)

## LIGHT & DARKNESS – A BALANCED WHOLE

Light and darkness are often positioned within a preconceived binary – a framework in which they are direct opposites. A closer consideration of this opposition reveals a more dynamic interaction, where light, darkness and shadows co-exist. Religious and cultural beliefs intertwined with ideas of light and darkness – in the sense of morality, knowledge and mortality – are embodied within Buddhist figurines, Indian *khalighats* and Indonesian *keris* that also play on the idea of physical luminescence. This effect of luminosity, or lack thereof, is integral to the human response to light and darkness – particularly in the act of revealing different understandings of the world

Plato's *Allegory of the Cave* posits the existence of shadows as a manufactured reality for 'prisoners' unable to look beyond sensing what they know. *In Light of Shadows* questions this concept, arguing that light and shadow occupy legitimate spaces within different cultural imagining and understandings. For many, what is illuminated and what is hidden in the shadows is understood through familiar narratives, characters and meanings. It can be said then that the identification of abstract social meaning and cultural stories is similar to recognising an object by the shadow that it casts. This exhibition suggests a beauty and a necessity in the co-existence of light and darkness – whether in the form of narratives, cultural practices, material representations or our own responses.

*"We find beauty not in the thing itself but in the patterns of shadows, the light and the darkness, that one thing against another creates...were it not for shadows, there would be no beauty"*

Junichiro Tanizaki

Sarah Ridhuan  
Curator, *In Light of Shadows*



Yama, Lord of Death 18th Century, Tibet, gilded copper, stone. R.M. & C.H. Berndt Estate, Berndt Museum [1994/0705]





*Hari - Hara  
the half of Hari, the sup-  
porter, and the half of  
Hara, the destroyer of  
the world.*

হরি ও হর একাত্ম



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

*In Light of Shadows* is my first exhibition and I am very grateful for all the support that I have received during the course of its development.

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The Berndt Museum would like to acknowledge the work and skills of Anthony Kelly, Lyle Branson, Casey Ayres, Daniel Bourke, Richard Foulds, Simone Johnston, Damon Lockwood and Patrick Miller; all of whom did an awesome job with the installation of this exhibition and made my curatorial endeavour an enjoyable experience.

We would also like to recognise the conservation work done by Stephanie Baily and Vanessa Wiggin to prepare the items for display. Ongoing support from the staff from the Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery and the Cultural Precinct has also been a significant contribution and I would especially like to thank Clare McFarlane, Caine Chennatt and Janice Lally.

Researching and identifying the various cultural materials on display would not have been possible without the help and expertise of James Bennett from the Art Gallery of South Australia. This show has also allowed me to meet groups and individuals such as Gloria Kurnik, Tintoy Chuo and the *Fusion Wayang Kulit* team who continue to work with cultural traditions and practices in contemporary contexts – getting to know them has really broadened my understanding and appreciation of art and culture.

### CAMPUS PARTNER

The Berndt Museum is also privileged to work with the Discipline of Asian Studies as a Campus Partner for this exhibition and look forward to developing this relationship for further projects.

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Cover image: Kondō-dōrō (bronze lantern), c 16th century, Nara, Japan, cast bronze.  
R. Cleland Collection, Berndt Museum [1999/0001.1-2]



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