

The Department of Anthropology
2011-2012 Colloquium Series

Presents:

Kenneth M. George

University of Wisconsin-Madison

Wednesday, October 12, 2011

5:30 P.M.

61 Schaeffer Hall

*"The Making and Unmaking of Islamic
Art: The View from Southeast Asia."*

This talk aims to throw light on some of the cultural politics shaping today's Muslim art publics by looking at the ambitions and anxieties surrounding the use of Qur'anic script in Indonesia's contemporary art world. Focusing on problems that have befallen painters, designers, and performance artists who work with Qur'anic materials, I suggest how a custodial ethics for handling Qur'anic Arabic has played into the hands of Muslim religious conservatives as they extend their authority into national and transnational art worlds, and more generally how Qur'anic art has become a space of struggle over the scope of secularism, religion, and culture.

Kenneth M. George is Professor of Anthropology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and Senior Fellow at the UW-Madison Institute for Research in the Humanities. His ethnographic research in Indonesia has focused on the cultural politics of minority ancestral religions (1982-1992), and more recently (1994-2008), on a long-term collaboration with painter A. D. Pirous, exploring the aesthetic, ethical, and political ambitions shaping Islamic art and art publics in that country. His books include: *Showing Signs of Violence: The Cultural Politics of a Twentieth-Century Headhunting Ritual* (awarded the 1998 Harry J. Benda Prize for best book on Southeast Asia by the Association for Asian Studies); and *Picturing Islam: Art and Ethics in a Muslim Lifeworld*. He also has co-edited (with Andrew C. Willford) a volume on *Spirited Politics: Religion and Public Life in Contemporary Southeast Asia*. Ken has been the recipient of major postdoctoral fieldwork fellowships from the Social Science Research Council, the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, and the Aga Khan Trust for Culture. His fellowships for writing and study include awards from the National Endowment of the Humanities, the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation, and the Institute for Advanced Study. Ken was the editor of the multidisciplinary *Journal of Asian Studies* from 2005-2008, the first anthropologist and the first specialist on Southeast Asia to hold that position in the course of its 70-year history.

This talk is co-sponsored by Religious Studies, Center for Asian and Pacific Studies, International Programs, and Art & Art History.

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