

“IdeTriBali” – Kayu by Lucie Fontaine

The art of traditional mask making, along with its associated performances and festivals, may be found in many cultures throughout the world, dating back thousands of years. Ritual and ceremonial masks are an essential part of these cultures religious and spiritual belief systems.

“In the 80’s I was travelling the world developing a map pinpointing indigenous cultures of traditional mask makers, and this led me to Bali in 1981,” says renowned Italian artist Luigi Ontani, who was born in Grizzana Morandi, Italy in 1943. “My intention was to collaborate with some of Bali’s master masks makers and I was able to meet Ida Bagus Anom from the famous village of wood carvers in Mas.”

Like Bali, Italy has a rich tradition of mask making as well, there’s being related to the Christian celebrations of Lent, highlighted in the annual Carnival of Venice, the festival famed for its elaborate paper Mache masks with origins dating back to the 12th century. The mask has been Ontani’s vehicle and creative muse for experimentation and witty exploration deep within his psyche since the late 1960’s involving expressions of hybrid aesthetics, investigating the nature of human dualities and symbols of iconography. The Balinese tradition has been passed down through the generations with the origins of the mask dance believed to be derived from the 13-16th century East Javanese Majapahit Hindu Empire.

“My initial ideas and fantasies about masks were consistent with the expressions found here in Bali, therefore the Balinese are an ideal match for my collaborations,” Says Ontani who first collaborated with the Balinese in 1981 and he has returned on numerous occasions to continue this relationship. However “IdeTriBali”, open from 17 March at Rumah Topeng & Wayang Setia Darma, Ubud is his first exhibition in Bali.

“IdeTriBali” includes an exhibition of 18 masks carved by Balinese artists Made Lopang, Ida Bagus Anom, Wayan Tangguh, and Wayan Sukarya from Puli wood and painted in natural pigments, along with Wayang Kulit puppets of Ontani’s design. The opening was celebrated with three performances and an Ogoh-Ogoh parade.

“I am organizing this project to help develop Bali as an international platform for contemporary art making,” says “IdeTriBali” coordinator, Ubud based Italian artist Marco Cassani. “I see the island as a great meeting place of Asian and global cultures, yet it is lacking international events that underline the mixing of cultures.” “This series of Kayu Lucie Fontaine events began in December 2014 and continues for one year, including four exhibitions and at the end a book will be compiled highlighting the distinctions.”

“The first event “Domesticity” featured 27 invited international artists exhibiting alongside one another, and considering Luigi Ontani’s long history of collaborations in Bali, it was essential that I invited him in to be a part of this project.”

“TriBali” is a part of a year long project Kayu (wood in Bahasa Indonesia), aiming to provide a creative space for the exchange of information and knowledge between Bali and the global art world to help stimulate awareness and practices of contemporary art making via experimental and conceptual art events. Kayu is a part of a global art initiative by Lucie Fontaine, a self described art employer who lives and works in France, with many such programs around the world, including in Milan, Stockholm, Tokyo and now here in Bali.

Rumah Topeng and Wayang Setia Darma is the perfect location for the exhibition with its vast and unique permanent collection of Balinese, Indonesian and global traditional masks and Wayang puppets to compliment Ontani’s designs. While the exhibition pavilions of Rumah Topeng and Wayang Setia Darma are traditional Javanese houses made from teakwood that coincide with the Kayu theme.

“Many years ago I began working with Wayang Kulit shadow puppets here and in Thailand were the artists were inspired by Malaysia’s versions of the puppets. I was motivated to investigate and observe the 2 different interpretations of the puppets from the sacred Hindu texts and I began to incorporate traditional Balinese designs into my imaginative ideas,” Ontani says.

Setia Darma's exhibition pavilion showcased more than 20 wayang puppets carved from buffalo hide and mounted upon the walls, a dozen sketches on paper, along with the masks, all painted in an array of dazzling colours. The vibrant works set against the neutral tones of the aged teakwood pavilion presented beautifully. Ontani's extraordinary hybrid designs took on countless manifestations ranging from variations akin to the Balinese traditional forms to the surreal and bizarre. All forged by the master Balinese arts while the forms were often inspired by the Italian renaissance painter Arcimboldo best known for creating imaginative portrait heads made entirely of objects such as fruits, vegetables, flowers, fish, and books.

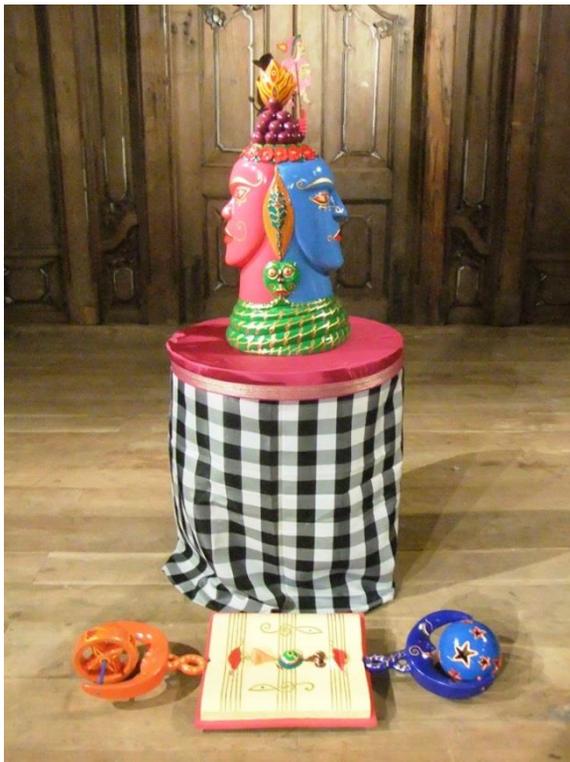
Performance's during the evening included Tavolozza RifioRITO including twelve Balinese performers wearing Ontani's masks, a set of kitsch pop music songs sang by Balinese musicians Bogam and Made Bahama, who have collaborated with Ontani since 2006 creating pop music videos, and a dynamic Ogoh-ogoh parade with accompanying gamelan orchestra around the Rumah Topeng dan Wayang grounds. An ogoh-ogoh is a traditional Balinese statue featuring mythological creatures that symbolize evil spirits that are cast aside during the Ngrupuk parade on the eve of Nyepi ushering in the Balinese day of silence and the new year. Ontani's ogoh-ogoh design featured a human pyramid with Balinese symbols along with those of his invention.

Celebrating the 65th anniversary of bilateral relationships between Italy and Indonesia, "IdeTriBali" is supported by the Embassy of Italy and the Instituto Italiano di Cultura Jakarta.

A Wayang Kulit performance presented by Candra Mas, a group of children who collaborated with Ontani closed the night. The narrative was a composition of traditional Arjuna stories and contemporary elements conceived by Ontani, the dalang, or puppet master, was Wayan Anom Candra who revealed a depth of talent that belied his teenage years.

"IdeTriBali" continues through to April 8 at Rumah Topeng & Wayang Setia Darma, Banjar Tegal Bingin, Mas, Ubud, Bali

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GianGenioGentile Design Ontani, Carved by Made Lopand, Puli Wood, 2015. Image richard Horstman



BuioChiaro by Made Lopang, Design Ontani. Puli Wood. Image Richard Horstman



Ontani performing Tavolozza RifioRITO with Balinese friends. Image Richard Horstman