

“Violent Bali” – Bali Art Intervention #1

In October 1971 John Lennon released his iconic pop anthem ‘Imagine’. Via the power of music and song he communicated directly with our hearts, inspiring us to imagine a peaceful world, where we all live as one.

Mental and physical violence, perpetrated upon ourselves and/or others is the most counter productive, disturbing and misery inducing of all human traits. It is one of the most critical issues of the modern era and one that society must collectively address and find passive solutions for. Bali, perhaps like no other location is perfect for the exploration of this theme by its local artists, especially in light of it’s turbulent history, and the 50th anniversary of the 1965-66 mass killings of suspected communists by right wing parties supported the Indonesian military in Bali, and other parts the country.

More sixty Indonesian artists, including one foreigner, all residents of Bali, focus upon the issue of violence in their paintings, installations, sculpture, photography and video in the exhibition ‘Violent Bali’ – Bali Art Intervention #1, which opened at the Tony Raka Art Gallery in Ubud 10 November.

“The theme is unusual, inconvenient, even disturbing. It is a self-critique of Bali, yet is challenging because it deals with a sensitive issue that confronts the popular image of Bali,” says exhibition curator Arif Prasetyo “Bali is internationally famous as a paradise island, yet it has its own dark side. Prevailing violence has been present throughout Bali’s history and many scholars have documented this. This tends to be hidden, however behind the beautiful image of Bali the government and the tourism industry promotes.”

“To this day, violence lingers in Bali. Migrant issues, rivalries among political and religious elites, land conflicts, the struggle for economic resources, customary disputes and many more problems are fuels to burn in Bali at any moment,” he adds.

The exhibition is the first in the series of biannual events at the Tony Raka Art Gallery titled ‘Bali Art Intervention #1’, in which Bali will come under the microscope. Each participating artist presents one work (with the exception of one sculptor), and several works are created collectively by groups of artists. The theme has inspired many artists to dig deeply within their consciousness and succeed in producing some of their strongest work to date, this is especially true with Made Mahendra Mangku, Edy Asmara, Ketut Suwidiarta, Kadek Agus Ardika, and IB Sindu Putra. With many strong works on exhibit it is difficult to mention works without, of course failing to include other artists who also deserve merit as well.

“Violent Bali” raises issues of identity, gender and cultural conflicts, the New Order regime and the mass killing of 1965-66, violence against sex workers, the environment, Bali’s modern development and the loss of traditional culture, and socially marginalized people, amongst others. Perhaps the most alarming violence is that inflicted upon innocent children. The two painters who pour their emotions into this issue achieving strong results are Achmad Pandi, “I Love Bali”, and Arcadia with his composition “Punch Fun Punch”, the paintings cracked and eroding surface emphasizing the impact of violent blows upon a child. Citra Samita, one of three exhibiting women, is a young talent on the rise. “Torment” is an intelligent painting in concept and composition, equally powerful, yet disturbing.

Made Bayak’s mixed media installation “Memory, Hidden History & Legacy of the New Order” investigates events of the Suharto’s New Order Regime and features an installation focusing on the brainwashing of school children, a large painting, sketches and de classified documents on the pre coup activities of President Sukarno.

It is refreshing to see Dodit Artawan, a talented hyper-realism painter step out of his usual mode and adopt a looser style resulting in a playful composition underlined by conflict and tension. As too it is encouraging to see Gusti Nengah Sura Ardana’s composition style evolve to be coherent with the theme. A jagged broken bottle of Arak, and a blood soaked canvas, highlighting alcohol and violence is Mangu Putra’s contribution. Tatang BSP’s beautifully poetic and surreal composition “Menulis Riwayat Hidup” tells of disconnection and loss of identity.



Agus Cahaya Density I&II



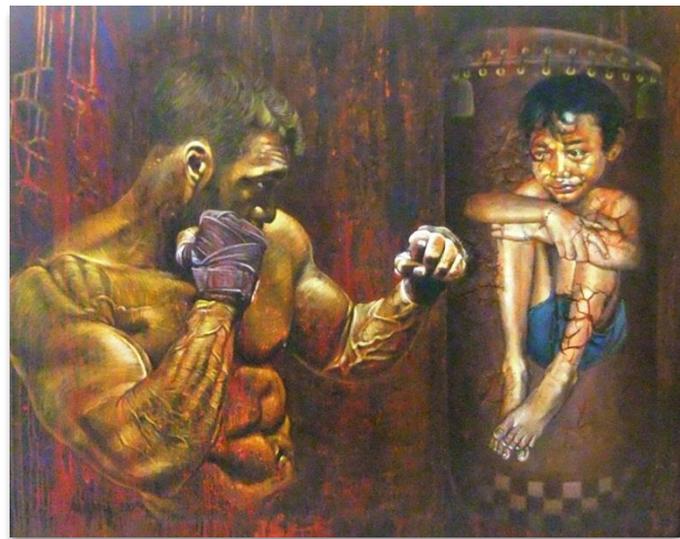
Tatang BSP Menulis Riwayat Hidup



Putu Edy Asmara - Teror Game



Citra Sasmita - Torment



Arcadia Punch Fun Punch



Gede Sayur Last Bastian #2



Made Bayak Memory, Hidden History of the New Order



Wayan Wirawan Everyday

Gede Sayur's "Last Defence #2" a symbolic installation based upon the loss of Bali's traditional agrarian culture is an improvement on his first incarnation of the work exhibited mid year. Bambang Adi Pronomo's two sculptures are diverse and engaging, "Desex" is disturbing. Wayan Wirawan's installation "Everyday" featuring a cars front wind shield and functioning wipers clearing away blood is a superb imaginative work. "Density I & II" is an enormous double panel diptych revealing excellent technique and concept by Agus Cahaya.

Photography works by DP Arsa, Totok Parwata and Rudi Waisnawa, along with Yan Palapa's "Foto Seri, Visum of Kus" exploring the issue of violence and female sex workers, and I B Putra Adnayana's "Kijang Kencana" black and white composition of duality, tension and impending danger are highlights. Other works worth mentioning are by Made Wianta "Dry Rain" and its thousands of falling metal needles and Wayan Suja, Sujana Suklu, Neo Pitamaha, Made Budiana and Alit Suja.

"Critically and openly questioning violence, "Violent Bali" is a cultural intervention that is expected to raise awareness of violence and contribute ideas in making a better and brighter Bali," Prasetyo says. All of the participating artists must be commended for their contributions to the exhibition that is the strongest and most important collective showing of the year. Tony Raka and staff, along with Prasetyo, too must be honoured for putting together a painstakingly large project that highlights a sensitive topic that must never stray far from the public forum of analysis and discussion.

In his introduction in the exhibition catalogue Adrian Vickers, Professor of SE Asian Studies at the University of Sydney says, "Artists have been at the forefront of the Balinese community working to promote practises of peace, and to ask questions about the structures that promote violence. Such action is a part of the role of art in engaging sympathy and exploring the feelings and sense of the world that make us who we are." He finishes with, "We all should be grateful for their continued efforts to engage our consciousness, especially at this time of the 50th anniversary of the mass killings."

'Violent Bali' continues through 30th December
Tony Raka Art Gallery
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Open daily: 10am – 6pm
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IB Putra Adnayana, Kijang Kencana photograph. image by Richard Horstman

