

A Rising Phenomenon in Balinese Art

During his July 5-10th exhibition at Sangkring Art Gallery in Yogyakarta senior Balinese artist Made Djirna was prepared to bring his religion under close scrutiny.

His paintings and installations in *The Logic of Ritual* are protests against numerous ritual practices, whose meaning, according to the artist, is now driven by modern and commercial practices.

Djirna criticizes the consumption of money (his works utilize a countless number of Chinese coins used in the rituals) in direct relation to the demands of Balinese Hindu religious rituals that are becoming increasingly glamorous, luxurious and festive.

Such demands, while indeed granting communion between the devotee, the spirit world and Gods, may be perceived as rigid mechanisms, ultimately keeping the 'little people' poor.

Djirna dedicates his exhibition to the plight of the impoverished of Bali, who suffer in silence, while paying excessively for offerings and rituals that demand perfection both in the materials and presentation.

Presented during the course of the Art Jog 13 Indonesian art fair in Yogyakarta by Gajah Gallery of Singapore to attract local and international collector's attention while visiting Yogyakarta. Unfortunately, however *The Logic of Ritual* will not be seen here in Bali where it would have the most impact.

Gajah Gallery is the architect of the meteoric rise of the new Balinese/Indonesian maestro cum international art superstar Nyoman Masriadi, a clever and witty contemporary social narrator who employs imagery derived from his interest in comics and computer games.

In April 2010 two talented, young Balinese artists, Wayan Sudarna Putra and Gede Suanda made another important statement. An installation of white bamboo poles erected in green rice fields near Ubud, arranged to read the words - *Not For Sale*.

A statement about our consumptive nature, yet more specifically, the uncontrolled acquisition of land (rice fields) in Bali. This is an issue of complexity as well as enormous concern. Money laundering, perhaps the severest issue confronting Bali is directly related to this as well.

Not For Sale has become an icon.

A brilliant Balinese painter now comes to mind, Agung Mangu Putra and his landmark August 2010 exhibition *Teater Rakyat* (People Theater) at the Galeri Nasional in Jakarta. He displayed a series of works about the marginalized people of Bali. His powerful realistic compositions of extraordinary detail rendered in palette knife revealed glimpses of people forgotten by today's society. Mangu Putra portrayed his people in manner and with a sentiment rarely, if ever seen in an exhibition in Indonesia.

We must be grateful for the sensitivity and courage of artists such as Djirna, Mangu Putra, Masriadi, Suanda and Sudarna Putra who through their work shine light upon social issues that are obstacles to our sovereignty and the innate essence of justice and equality. These artists are driven moral responsibility and are prepared to make a stand.

Their work invites discussion that opens the door to solutions. And we have the solutions for a harmonic future geared to build thriving, healthy communities, and positive and creative youths.

Indonesia has an important history of the revolutionary artist who, in particular played a vital role during the mid 1940's opposition to the Dutch when they returned to Indonesia to assume rule after the end of WWII following the Japanese occupation. Under the Suharto regime (1967-98) artists were incarcerated for publically expressing their beliefs that were critical of the country's leadership.

In Bali however, the course of modern art has been different and due to the Pita Maha artist collective in the 1930's and then the impact of tourism, the majority of art created was for the marketplace.

We are witnessing a rising phenomenon - social issues are coming to the fore in Balinese art.