

Artists Camp

Political relations between Indonesia and Australia often have to endure stormy seas and recent controversies, including issues of spying along with the execution of Australian drug offenders have raised tensions between the countries to new heights. Associations forged through art and culture, however, have always been on healthy and growing terms, and the continuation of one event, the Artists Camp will generate some much-needed good will.

Six Indonesian contemporary artists will venture to Darwin, Northern Territory of Australia, arriving mid June to continue the on-going tradition and the return of the artist's camp. The camp, which started as a concept with the original Director of Museums and Art Galleries in the Northern Territory (MAGNT) Dr Colin Jack Hinton, has a strong and rich tradition of engagement. Hinton had the foresight to realise that even as of 1978 the north of Australia had been interpreted in art and carvings by aboriginal people for thousands of years however, not by non-aboriginal and Australian artists.

Along with Frank Hodgkinson, a gifted Australian artist, Hinton invited a range of now famous Australian artists to go to the pristinely beautiful and culturally rich Top End of the Northern Territory (NT) to interpret aboriginal culture and the landscape. The Artists Camp, first initiated in 1978 and supported by the MAGNT, required the artists to live in the Kakadu National Park and other parts of the region with the aboriginal people. The goal was to create a body of works on canvas and paper to expand the collections of the museums and galleries in the NT in order to increase the understanding of this largely wild part of northern Australia.

The insight of long time collector of Indonesian and Aboriginal art and former Director and Chairman of the Board of MAGNT, Colin McDonald, developed the concept further when he took Balinese artist Made Budhiana to the NT to participate in the first international Artists Camp, along with Australian and Malaysian artists in 1990. Later that year Budhiana exhibited in the Museum of NT to great success and was invited to the next camp and an artists in residence program the following year.

"I have always been fascinated by the Northern Territory, its climate and the character of the landscape with its rich reddish-brown colors are very different to Bali," says Budhiana. "The Aboriginal cave paintings have a powerful and expressive character. Studying the dynamics of the Top End, along with the people and paintings is a great inspiration for my work. The rivers and swamps are rich in flora and fauna and are also very evocative of the heart."

Coming to terms with the enormous space and isolation of the NT Budhiana's first series of works in the region was entitled 'Tanah Kosong', (Empty Land) which he exhibited in Darwin, and according to McDonald, "Many people then came to realise that exciting art was being made by Indonesians."

The Artists Camp was, however, discontinued in 1993 and, realising the benefits for both Indonesian and Australian art McDonald was inspired into action. "In conjunction with Budhiana and the Northern Center for Contemporary Art (NCCA) in Darwin we began to resurrect the vision of the camp in 2011," McDonald says. In 2012 Budhiana along with fellow Balinese artists Wayan Wirawan, Gede Gunada and Dewa Rata Yoga, along with the support of the then Northern Territory Chief Minister, the Commonwealth Bank, the Australia Indonesia Institute and Indonesian Department of Foreign Affairs conducted a successful Artists Camp.

During July and August the artists spent six weeks in the Top End. Wayan Wirawan recalls, "We had to endure extreme temperatures unlike anything experienced in Bali. In the middle of the day the dry heat was above 100 degrees, while at night at our camp down below 7 degrees. Thank God we survived!"

"I enjoyed living in the desert having to fish and search for food and observing the landscape. Aboriginal culture is deeply associated with the world of spirits and their cosmological view of the universal is similar to the Balinese. We made deep connections with the local people."

This years Artists Camp, beginning in mid June for five weeks, includes Budhiana and Wirawan along with Wayan Sudibia, Made Surimbawa and two women Ni Nyoman Sani, and Javanese artist Suryani. Indonesian art journalist Henny Handiyani from Bali Arts Magazine and Surat Kabar Seni will participate as well. An exhibition of the artists work will be held in Darwin 19 August and will be attended by representatives from the sponsors of the camp, while being opened by the NT Chief Minister Mr Adam Gilides and the Indonesian Ambassador to Australia Mr Nadjib Riphath Kesoema.

To compliment the success of the Artists Camp the first Bali Artist's Camp was conducted in late 2012 with the support of the Made Budhiana Gallery in Ubud, bringing together artists from Indonesia, Australia, Japan, Holland and America to engage with the culture and landscapes in remote areas of East Bali. The next Bali Artist's Camp in 2014 featured Indonesian, Australian and Polish artists who later exhibited a selection of strong works at the Made Budhiana Gallery in September.

The aim is interlink the Artists Camp with the Bali Artists Camp. Plans are currently underway for the next Bali Artists Camp to group foreign and Indonesian artist together to forge more creative, cross cultural friendships within the Balinese natural and cultural environments while increasingly raising the profile of Bali as a unique international arts destination.

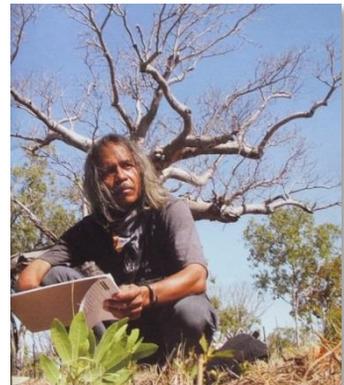
The future of Indonesian and Australian art relations will be prosperous and is open to more opportunities considering the great number of Australian artists that visit Bali. And as McDonald reveals, "The vision of the Artists Camp is that in nine years time the Chief Minister of the NT, the Australian Prime Minister and the Indonesian President will open a touring exhibition at the Australian National Gallery that will include the first retrospective of the Australian Indonesian artists engagement."

Echoing the words of the Ali Alatas, one of Indonesia's most respected diplomats, and the longest serving Indonesian Foreign Minister who in 1995 was awarded the Order of Australia, the country's highest honor, "Art and culture are the most important means of engagement because; they are enduring."

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Installation inspired by the N.T - Wayan Wirawan , Exhibited in Darwin 2014. Photo M. Budhiana



Made Budhiana engaging with the Top End. 2014



Made Budhiana, Photo M. Budhiana