

I Love Bali - C S R & Art?

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in Indonesia is a concept that is slow to catch on as business ethics are driven by financial profit, while too, the benefits of CSR's are not well understood.

Based on the vision that businesses need to be accountable to shareholders, employees and the community, CSR is characterized by the contribution of a percentage of company profits into projects that benefit social or environmental programs.

A recent example of CSR, "Wayang For Students", an event held 15-17 April at the Rumah Topeng & Wayang Setiadarma, Ubud was initiated by PT. Bank Central Asia (BCA) as a part of their "BCA for Indonesian Wayang", national program. In this pioneering event hundreds of local school students were given the opportunity to watch various Wayang traditional puppetry performances, and participate in workshops to kindle the spirit of their cultural identity.

While the traditional arts in Bali receive support from the state and regional governments, the aristocracy, community groups, and the hotel and corporate sector, there are however shortcomings. Engineered tradition is being celebrated, building an exotic national identity while culture is manipulated as a commodity fueling the tourist economy. Vital parts of the culture are, however, being ignored and without documentation and preservation and will soon be lost.

Contemporary art in Bali, on the other hand, has few supporters that are prepared to invest in this essential modern cultural expression. One recent landmark event, sponsored by the private sector, Sprites Art & Creative Biennale 2013, however, was an inspiring example of what can be achieved with an excellent concept, creative synergy and funding. The iconic Bentara Budaya Bali Cultural Center, owned by the Gramedia Group of Jawa, stands alone as the most important supporter of contemporary art in Bali, with a sound model of leadership and organizational expertise and with a program of enormous creative diversity.

Of note, recent inactivity by the once leading contemporary art galleries in Bali, (Kendra, Gaya and Tony Raka) reveals the art business is becoming more challenging and unfortunately art and the community loses out due to their absence from the local scene.

Contemporary art is a dynamic expression incorporating writing, poetry, film making, music, performance, fashion, multimedia works, painting and sculpture, and is responsive and inseparable from modernity. While globalization began centuries ago in Bali, one of the most noticeable results of the recent onslaught impacting the island is the behavior of the local youth.

Obsessed with new technology, cell phones, computers, motorbikes and "selfies", modernity, in the guise of consumerism and materialism is being fed to them and rapidly consumed without regard of the consequences.

There is, however, a growing trend within the youth wishing to explore contemporary art. Especially as it is cohesive with their desires to investigate ideas and expressions outside of their own culture. Contemporary art is an important language of self-expression that ventures into the human condition and reflects on current issues that impact the younger generation, such as identity, social and political circumstances, environmental issues and other key parts of life that need greater understanding. Contemporary art highlights the growing needs of the community, needs that the local and national government, along with globalization are neglecting, with the view, amongst other things, to developing infrastructure that supports the enormous youth demographics on the island.

The reality is that we cannot look to our politicians. So what about the growing corporate and private sector here in Bali, invested in by locals and outsiders? What about their sense of responsibility? Where does their vision for a sustainable, prosperous collective future lie?