

Crossing: Beyond Baliseering

Bali holds a special place within the hearts of many Australians, and while Balinese traditional art has long been recognized as icon of the Island of the Gods, Australian audiences however, know little, or nothing about contemporary art from Bali.

As a platform for understanding contemporary Balinese and Indonesian culture, and maintaining a cultural bridge between Indonesia and Australia, Crossing: Beyond Baliseering, a group showing of emerging contemporary artists from Bali opened 6 December at FortyFive Downstairs Gallery in Melbourne.

Crossing: Beyond Baliseering reflects upon Bali's visual and social culture while exploring themes of personal life experiences, environmental, social and political issues in the contemporary society, showcasing a range of paintings, photography, sculptures, and large-scale installations by some of the finest young artists in Bali.

Presented by Project 11 as part of Multicultural Arts Victoria's Asian contemporary arts festival Mapping Melbourne 2016, the exhibition features work by Art of Whatever, Made Aji Aswino, Budi Agung Kuswara, Citra Sasmita, Kemal Ezedine, Made 'Dalbo' Suarimbawa, Natisa Jones, Slinat, Made Valasara, Wayan Upadana and Yoesoef Olla.

The policy of 'Baliseering' was first introduced in the 1920's by the Dutch colonial government to train locals to continue the traditional arts of dance, theatre, painting, sculpture and literature. Visually, this meant that art portrayed scenes of the Balinese in cultural activities and 'authentic' settings that became fastened in the Balinese art identity through the media and tourism.

Attended by members of Melbourne's Indonesian community along with the local art community, FortyFive Downstairs Gallery, situated in the inner city gallery precinct, was crowded with enthusiastic art lovers who warmly welcomed the foreign visitors. A few of the art works stood out for their authentic references in media and technical expertise.

During the past ten years Made Aji Aswino has become an avid critic of Indonesian and Balinese culture, focusing especially upon the pitfalls of the human ego. Aji exhibited a monumental two-sided wood carving installation, Doors of Perception 2016, 250 x 300 x 80 cm, a representation of a candi (traditional Balinese temple entry). The outside of the entry features carved figurines and faces of ego monsters, along with some of the typical iconography to be found in Balinese wood carvings.

Vibrantly painted figures adorn the work with long conical noses echoing a Pinocchio-like-character - a reflection on the pretensions and lies of everyday society the artist witnesses. The dynamic colours of the outside of the entrance represent varieties of 'disorderly' personalities, while the inner side of Doors of Perception reflect duality, painted in subdued monochromes representing the 'peaceful' personalities.

Kemal Ezedine presents Baliseering 2016, 180x 300 cm, a mixed media narration about the influence of the Dutch Colonial government in shaping the political identity of Bali. His colourful and dynamic composition combines and layers the techniques traditional Indonesian painting method adapted from European practices *alia prima*, or the direct painting technique, with graphic techniques inspired by Balinese sacred drawings, and Indonesian social realism art. The results are a colourful and dynamic composition layered with technical and philosophical meanings.

One of Bali's most well known emerging artists Wayan Upadana exhibited three old, yet nonetheless excellent works. Globalisation Euphoria 2010 features a chocolate covered Rangda reclining in a white bath tub, while Glo(BABI)sation 2013 a chocolate coated pig relaxing in a modern kitchen sink. Si Gendut Pencari Tuhan (Fatty the God Seeker) 2013

On the other hand features a Barong masks attached to a fat naked body sitting in the lotus position. Upadana makes critical social references while adopting icons of the Balinese culture in his polyester resin works that are technically and conceptually strong.

Two dimensional works featuring contrasting images of iconic Bali are presented by Budi Agung Kuswara, The Fireflies # 1&2, 2016, Golden Farmer, 2016, both cyanotype (photogram) and pigment prints on archival paper provide strong aesthetic impacts while being interesting departures in media adaptation and technical skills. Natisa Jones exhibits two abstract figurative compositions that are visually engaging and strong, while Made Valasara presents his signature canvas relief works that break with the conventions of Balinese traditional painting.

Pantaggruelisme 2016 utilizes polyethylene terephthalate stuffed in canvas, while in The True Portion of David 2014 Valasara uses laminated canvas. Adopting the canvas as a standalone medium, along with sewing techniques, he layers and fills the canvas to create 3 dimensional embossed, or as in The True Portion of David debossed compositions.

Art of Whatever's Everyday is Sunday 2016 invited people to sit, relax and reflect upon his functional art creation. The colorful three-meter couch shaped into a reclining figure with tentacles for a head, along with matching helmets were popular with the audience, many opting to loll and engage in the light-hearted art experience.

Yoseof Olla Let's Play Series # 1,2&3 2016, features three leather wall hangings, compositions in permanent marker that combine pop and street art imagery that parodies of the popular international perception of Islam and the burqa wearing Muslim women.

One of the strongest works in the exhibition is Narasi Menunngu Lahiran (The Anticipation of Giving Birth) 2016, a sculptural mother and child representation by Made 'Dalbo' Suarimbawa. During recent years Dalbo has been experimenting with paper within his two dimensional compositions, Narasi Menunngu Lahiran however reveals his greater commitment to technical skill and concept in this enthralling installation that reveals him as a artist of unique talent.

Citra Sasmita's works make strong statements about gender politics within the patriarchal Balinese society. Always confronting, she exhibits three works, two paintings and one installation, Mea Vulva, Maxima Vulva 2016 that features ceramic vagina's within a set of scales and comments upon social class distinctions.

Street artist Slinat (Silly in Art) presents a poignant and intriguing installation Ironic, Ironic Island 2016 that features his signature gas masked figures upon wooden windows and doors adopting imagery from iconic paintings by Abdul Aziz. He contrasts Bali's exotic and peaceful international tourism marketing identity with current social and economic issues that are confronting the people of Bali today.

Crossing: Beyond Baliseering
Continues through 17 December 2016,
FortyFive Downstairs Gallery
45 Flinders Lane, Melbourne.
Open: Tuesday – Friday 11am – 5pm
Saturday 12pm – 4pm
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Doors of Perception - Made Aswino Aji.





Baliseering - Kemal Ezedine

