

Genetik – SDI

To encourage audience participation with his installation *Playing with the Ego*, Balinese artist Made Aswino Aji invites us to sit in quiet contemplation. He positions a children's playground swing in front of his work to enhance the experience. Hung upon the wall, and from the ceiling, his eerie cut out characters, representing the darker angels of the psyche, appear floating, while gazing out at us. Under observation is the human ego.

"In daily life man often plays with his ego, both can be mutually supportive," Aji says. "Sometimes the ego dominates, while other times it remains hidden away. In my mind's eye the ego is a monster..... man is a monster." Aji does not shy away from making direct cultural references - one of the 'monsters' holds a Balinese traditional umbrella.

Last Defence, Gede 'Sayur' Suanda's towering straw installation stands as an omnipotent guardian in the furthest corner of the exhibition space. Taking the form of a four meters tall chess piece – the rook – set upon scattered unhusked rice, 'Sayur's' modest, yet daunting statement emphasizes the preservation of Balinese traditions, while highlighting the deterioration of Bali's rice growing culture. 'Sayur' says. "Our agrarian culture is sacred and can not be compromised. The price we may pay is the death of our last bastion of life."

These engaging installations are representative of the calibre work on display from 9 June at Ubud's Agung Rai Museum of Art (ARMA), in the group exhibition *Genetik*. Commemorating ARMA's 19th anniversary, the exhibition features some of the most promising young Balinese contemporary artists, all of whom are members of the collective, Sanggar Dewata Indonesia (SDI). *Genetik* reveals the continuation of ARMA's longstanding relationship with SDI, and its support of the development of Balinese art. A large crowd, including resident dignitaries, friends of ARMA, and local and foreign art lovers, celebrated the festive occasion.

Upon entering the museum our attention is captured by a curious chocolate character reclining in a white bathtub. Closer inspection reveals Rangda, the mythical demon queen who personifies evil, is the counterpart of Barong, and features in the famous dance, at the heart of the Balinese religious philosophy, that represents the eternal battle between good and evil. 'Euphoria Globalisasi', 2010, a beguiling work by Wayan Upadana, has been exhibited throughout Java to acclaim, while this is its first appearance in Bali. Upadana's resin sculptures emphasize melting flowing liquid forms underlying his artistic concepts, that art, just like life is an on going process. "The euphoria of modern culture can be overwhelming," says Upadana. "The Balinese are often too quick to adore the material spoils of globalization without considering the consequences."

A performance and installation by Wayan Sudarna Putra, 'Cerita Lama' (Old Story), is next in our focus. While a school child reads texts from a tablet in a recreated classroom, Sudarna Putra sets about communicating a vital message. Upon the walls he paints a mural of a Balinese farmer planting rice, then aggressively stamps the composition in bold red paint – 'Not For Sale'. The opposing wall depicts a similar agrarian scene upon which the artist has scrawled, "Tanah kita tanah Surga, bukan untuk dijual dan belikan." (our land is the land of heaven, not for sale or to be bought).

'Journeys', a large bamboo installation set in the grounds of ARMA, by Dewa Gede Jodi Saputra and Putu Suardana highlights the Balinese Hindu concept of Tri Hita Karana - the spiritual, harmonic relationship between man, nature and God. Yet the question posed by the artist is - where is the harmony? Finalist in the 2015 Mandiri national art award, Wayan Gede Budayana's presents a series of mixed media masks, 'Rekonstruksi Topeng' revealing the on going tradition of mask making - key Balinese cultural, mythological and identity reference points. Budayana's reconstructions however, are suggestive of the paradoxes facing Balinese society today.



Wayan Sudarna Putra, *Cerita Lama* Installation and performance 2015, Image Richard Horstman



Budi Agung Kuswara, *Revolusi Industr* 2015, Image Richard Horstman

Made Mehendra Mangku's installation 'Eclectic' simply juxtaposes synthetic along with natural materials, yet the aesthetic and cultural contrasts are clearly apparent. Budi Agung Kuswara mixed media work, 'Revolusi Industri' is highly imaginative, featuring technical precision, aesthetic cultural contrasts, while emphasizing the commercial mantra driving modern culture "Ambil-Proses-Jual, (grab-process-sell). Other artists in *Genetik* are Gusti Ketut Adi Dewantara, Made Suarimbawa, and Made Gede Putra, whose works are equally imaginative, engaging and strong.

In the 1920's – 1930's Balinese religious art underwent a revolution upon its meeting with the modernity. Globalisation then played a major influence upon the conventions of Balinese traditional art, however, it wasn't until the 1970's when these canons began to be challenged. Ironically, this was to take place outside of Bali and within the halls of the ASRI (Indonesian Academy of Fine Art) in Yogyakarta, now known as ISI (Indonesian Institute of Art). The pioneering artists at the forefront of this new art (Gunarsa, Wianta, Supada, Arsana & Sika) decided to form a new collective of Balinese artists, who at the time were all living outside the traditional socio economic and religious systems dictated by the village banjar organizations. These artists were young and dynamic and desired to experiment with new techniques and aesthetic concepts. This collective, the Sanggar Dewata Indonesia (workshop of the Gods) has played a major role in the development of contemporary art in Bali ever since.

Unfortunately the descriptions labelling the works, which included the artist's statement, are printed only in Indonesian, and considering more than a third of the attendees at the opening were foreigners, and the majority of ARMA's daily visitors are as well, the artists have failed to take advantage of the opportunity to fully communicate with their international audience. Their messages have both local and global relevance. Despite this, *Genetik* is a strong presentation of installations that follows on and compliments the landmark 2013 'Irony in Paradise' exhibition. *Genetik* is underlined by the strong sense of media and aesthetic exploration, yet what shines through, and is of utmost importance, is the artist's heart felt desire and need to voice their protests.

Genetik continues through 9 July
Agung Rai Museum of Art
Jalan Raya Pengosekan, Ubud.
Opening daily 9am – 6pm

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'Last Defence' Gede 'Sayur' Suanda. 2015,
Image Richard Horstman



Made Mahendra Mungku, Eclectic 2015, Image Richard Horstman