

Gusti Nengah Sura Ardana

"Weathered and old is beautiful," says Balinese contemporary artist Gusti Nengah Sura Ardana, who specializes in hyperrealism paintings of elderly Balinese people. His compositions are much more than studies, in extraordinary detail of the senior generation, they too are important social and political statements of sentiments close to the artist's heart.

Long before the invention of photography realism painting was the method of recording portraits of people, often the wealthy and well to do. The term realism originated in the 1850's in France with the beginning of the Realism movement which rejected the artificial elements that categorized the Romantic art that had been dominating French literature and art at that time. The new realism artists were dedicated to representing everyday, common subject matter truthfully.

Hyper realism, a genre that has become very popular in Indonesia during the past decade, ventures beyond realism to reveal in close up, each minute wrinkle, blemish and pore of the skin upon the subjects face. The attention to detail is enormous and the painstaking works often take many months to complete. This genre demands an honesty and passion from the practitioners, along with the highest levels of academic technical skill.

Sura Ardana's paintings feature an elderly subject, withered and wrinkled, set within square timber frames that too reveal evidence of aging. They are often accompanied by dried salty fish that seem to be hovering upon the canvases surface along the edges of the composition. The subject's face bare little expression, they are dressed in old ragged clothes. The inclusion of the fish is a political statement making reference to the food source that is a staple for the economically marginalized people of Indonesia.

"There is a beauty contained within ugly things, there is a strength behind a frail object, and there is smile to be found behind a tough, hardened face," says Sura Ardana.

Born in Tabanan, Bali 1960, Sura Ardana studied fine art at ISI Yogyakarta (Indonesian Institute of Art) for 10 years and is a member of Indonesia's oldest art collective, the Sanggar Dewata Indonesia. He is a lecturer in fine art and the Ganesha UNDIKSHA University in Singaraja, North Bali, and is responsible for the education of some of Bali's finest young artistic talents.

Emphasizing the harsh economic situations that subject millions of Indonesians to poverty his political statements point to the conditions that can indirectly lead to poverty, including corruption, collusion, nepotism, illegal logging, and political and business mafia activities which are rife in Indonesia.

"In my work I wish not only to display artistic competence yet also remind us all that the problem of poverty is a joint responsibility," he says. "Not all old things are bad, on the contrary, they often contain values that are being ignored in this modern era." The subjects that Sura Ardana beautifully bring to life in his paintings are the backbone of Bali's agrarian culture, many are custodians of traditional oral knowledge that if not documented soon will be lost, leading to cultural misfortune, not only for the Balinese yet for the global community.

Regarded as one of Bali's finest realism painters, Sura Ardana will represent Indonesia at the Art Malaysia Art Tourism Fair in Kuala Lumpur 13-18 August 2014.



Profile of Gusti Nengah Sura Ardana



Painting by Sura Ardana 2013
Image by Richard Horstman



Garutan Makna 2 Sura Ardana Image by
Richard Horstman



Guratan Makna 2 Sura Ardana 2009 Oil on Canvas 145x200cm