

## **The Value of Intercultural Art Exchange Programs - I Love Bali - Bali Daily.**

The renowned Australian art critic Robert Hughes (1938 – 2012) stated that the great meaning of art is that of protest. The sentiments of protest were highlighted during a performance at the opening of the art exhibition "Neo Barbarian", 2<sup>nd</sup> February at Bentara Budaya Bali Cultural Center in Keramas.

The performance by visiting Thai contemporary artists Dearborn Mendhaka and Paretas Hutanggura was an out pouring of emotions, painted letters scrawled onto paper which were hung upon the wall revealing the word – DEMOCRACY.

S. E Asian neighbor, Thailand is currently in the midst of political crisis. Since November 2013 the country has witnessed unprecedented social protest in an eight-year struggle between opponents and supporters of the exiled former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra.

"Neo Barbarians" is a part of the Thailand and Indonesia contemporary art and culture exchange project and will continue until 7<sup>th</sup> February at Bentara Budaya Bali. The exhibition, that features, paintings, installations, sculptures and performances is an expression against the present trend that art and culture has become a economic strategy of extreme capitalism.

The impact of globalization upon Bali may be traced back many centuries to the first visiting traders from other parts of the archipelago, long before the beginnings of the modern phenomenon we are familiar with today.

The invisible, intricate web cast upon the planet by the internet has ushered in rapid change. As the new global culture threatens the sovereignty of indigenous cultures, the communication networks developed through globalization, however function also to do the contrary.

These networks foster greater sharing and understanding of cultural knowledge promoting tolerance and acceptance, and serve to reignite cultural practices.

The globalization has provided enormous opportunities for local artists to learn more about western and regional art. Email and social media facilities have consolidated relationships, increased the sharing of ideas and cultural learning and has forged "new" international art communities.

Contemporary artists need to be continually exposed to new environments, cultures, social circumstances and other artists so as to build on their knowledge and skill bases. In the past decade intercultural art exchange programs have led to the development of new networks particularly for S. E. Asian artists, and the realization that they share many things in common.

A pioneer of Indonesian intercultural art exchange programs is long time Ubud resident Antonius Kho. Born in 1958 Klaten, Central Java Kho is committed to the development of contemporary art and culture through his dedication to organizing programs between Indonesian and artists from other countries. His programs have included Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, La Reunion, as well as Thailand this year. They involve exchange journeys by participating groups into their host countries and feature exhibitions, group art projects, art and cultural discussions, museum, gallery and studio visits along with exploring tourist destinations.

Artists, along with other members of the intellectual community (musicians, academics, performers, environmentalists, writers, students, etc) are often on the front lines of social and political activism. They are aware, being the eyes, ears and the heart of responsible society and they are willing to make a stand against ineffective government.

Importantly, 2014 is an election year for Indonesia, and as witnessed in the performance by the Thai artists at Bentara Budaya Bali, their actions are timely reminder to the local community to send a clear message of protest, prompting the authorities that their real responsibilities are the best interests of the people.