

IRONY IN PARADISE

June heralds the beginnings of the peak holiday season in Bali and it is venues such as Ubud's Agung Rai Museum of Art that are icons of local wisdom communicating the virtues of the Balinese culture to the multitudes of inquisitive foreign visitors.

On 9th June friend's of ARMA and members of the local and national art communities turned out in force to celebrate the 17th anniversary of the internationally renowned museum. The occasion was also marked by the annual exhibition of Indonesia's most prestigious art community, Sanggar Dewata Indonesia, commemorating 43 years of collective artistic synergy.

"It is fitting that ARMA, with a philosophy of being a living cultural museum should celebrate this occasion along with Sanggar Dewata, says ARMA founder Agung Rai.

"SDI has been fundamental to the emergence of big name artists like Nyoman Gunarsa and Made Wianta who have successfully presented Balinese contemporary art to the international audience. It is essential that we acknowledge, as well work to safeguard the pioneering spirit of the forefathers of this important art community."

Sanggar Dewata Indonesia (art studio of the Gods) artists association was established in 1970 during a turbulent period of Indonesia's political history in Yogyakarta by five Balinese artists, Gunarsa and Wianta along with Pande Gede Supada, Nyoman Arsana and Wayan Sika.

They were drawn together through friendships developed while studying at the ASRI, now known as ISI (Indonesian Arts Institute). These artists were young and dynamic and they loved to experiment with new techniques and aesthetic concepts. The dream of SDI grew to create a social collective to coordinate artistic activities, mount exhibitions and organize critical debates on art outside the institutional teaching framework.

Much has transpired during the past four decades in Bali's socio-economic, environmental and artistic landscapes. And now, nearly a century after Bali, and the myth of the utopian paradise was revealed to world, the artists of SDI unite to exhibit reflections of their island home in the exhibition 'Irony In Paradise'.

As the modernization of Bali speeds relentlessly into the 21st century, SDI are witness to an unparalleled clash of cultures. In Irony in Paradise, the collision of Eastern and Western values comes under scrutiny in the works by 65 Balinese members of the group.

"Irony In Paradise marks the first exhibition in Bali for 2 years by the Bali chapter of SDI and features the works of all generations, senior members exhibiting alongside their contemporaries. SDI grew to include other members of the Indonesian art community who also studied at ISI Yogyakarta," says exhibition committee Chairman Made Surya Darma.

Exhibited works are in various diverse media such as painting, installation, photography, digital prints, video and sculpture and the opening was punctuated by a dramatic art performance by senior member Nyoman Erawan.



Agung Mangu Putra, Warga Negara, Digital + Acrylic print on Canvas 2011



AAN JUNIARTHA, YOU AND ME, 2013, 250 cm X 200 Cm, Acrylic On



Putu Wirantawan, Cosmic Energy 2013.



Wayan Arnata, barong nike, 145.5 x 100 cm mix media 2013



Made Djirna, Potret Petani, 2013, mixed media.



Wayan Sudarna Putra, Say Anything with Love 2013, mixed media.



Made Aswino Aji, Under the Shades 2, 2013, mixed media



Gede Suanda, Nenten Meadol 2013, mixed media.



Iwayan upadana 'the process' 2012
Video instalation in sculpture
(Polyester resin, spray paint



MADE WIGUNA V, HSMTM,
200 X 260 CM, STUFFED CANVAS,
2013

“This exhibition is our statement, not only to the Balinese and Indonesian people yet also to the international community. The members of SDI are concerned about the future of Bali, yet our concerns about the environment, safe guarding traditional values and the dangers of exploitive behavior are also global issues with dire ramifications that threaten our planet,” adds Surya Darma.

Highlights of the exhibition include Gede Suanda’s mixed media work “Nenten Meadol” which includes an installation of the island of Bali created from brown grains of rice with the letters NFS (Not For Sale) created from fresh green rice shoots protruding from the center, senior member Wayan Sika’s installation “Illegal Logging” focusing on recent events in the forests of Jembrana, West Bali, Wayan Arnata’s mixed media work “Barong Nike” and its wonderful composition created with fiber cords, Made Aswino Aji’s “Under the Shade 2” a critical observation of the Balinese culture, Wayan Upadana’s video set within a figurative sculpture “The Process 2/2”, Made Kedol’s intricate painting “Panen”, Made Valasara’s “Hidup Segan Mati Tak Mau” (I Don’t Want To Live, But I Don’t Want To Die), Wayan Sudarna Putra’s installation “Say Anything With Love”. Other notable works were by Made Djirna, Mangu Putra, Putu Wiranatwan and Putu Suardana.

SDI chairman Wayan ‘Doel’ Sunadi feels that ‘Irony In Paradise’ is a poignant milestones for the association, yet also an opportunity to resurrect and consolidate the mindset of the members. “Post 2000 there has been a decline in SDI activities as many members have been focused on individual rather than a collective artistic experience and hence, communication barriers have hindered the recent progression of SDI.”

On June 10th a public discussion led by Agung Rai and Chris Dharmawan and Ridwan Muljosudarmo from Central Java reflected on the Balinese, Indonesian and global art worlds, the history of SDI and its present situation. The discussion was well attended by the younger generation of SDI members, and there was some concerns expressed by members of SDI’s current situation within the Indonesian contemporary art scene.

Overall the exhibition presents a strong body of works, however it is notable that some works make no readable reference to the exhibitions theme. And due to the relatively quiet recent period in SDI activities art observers and some members are questioning the present relevance of SDI.

Considering the strength of the work by young SDI members Suanda, Aswino Aji, Upadana, Legianta, Juniarta, Valasara and Sudarna Putra and their noticeable presence at the post opening discussion there is indeed cause for good hope for the future of Sanggar Dewata Indonesia.

“We now have an excellent opportunity to evaluate SDI and to refine its vision and mission and then create strategies so that we will gain momentum and strength and continue raise our ‘voice’ to the local, national and international communities,” says Surya Darma. “It is essential that we as a collective of contemporary artists continue to make important statements, not only about Bali yet also about humanity in general.”

Irony In Paradise
9th June – 9th July 2013.
Open Daily 9.30am – 6pm.

ARMA Museum
Jalan Raya Pengosekan, Ubud.