

Not For Sale – Art Intervenes for ‘Not For Sale’ Movement

Throughout history whenever artists have channeled their energy outside of their studios and into events that engage with the community they have been able to achieve considerable impact. In Bali there is now a timely phenomenon in the process that involves the most important statement ever communicated by Balinese artists, inspired by the love of their cultural heritage, and driven by social conscience.

On a day early in 2010 after a discussion concerning the alarming rate of the transformation of rice fields into houses and hotels in Bali, three young contemporary artists, Wayan Sudarna Putra, Gede Suanda and Pande Setiawan decided to make a stand.

Their imagination took the form of an installation of white bamboo poles erected in the green fields north of Ubud. Arranged to read the words – Not For Sale. The site, owned by Suanda on Jalan Sri Wedari, Junjungan, has since attracted much attention, while become an unlikely Balinese icon.

“Not For Sale has generated an incredible response from locals and foreigners alike,” says Suanda, also known as Sayur. “However, some Balinese have argued, what right have we to question them about selling their land?”

With increased exposure via the local media, and especially the power of digital social media to connect the Balinese, eventually key figures of various community groups were able to collaborate with the artists to create a unique grass roots project.

“Bali - Not For Sale”, is a public movement responding to the high conversion of rice fields in Bali that are being developed, mainly for tourist accommodation buildings. It aims to restore the awareness that rice is 'Life', and is not limited to commercial value,” says Made Aswino Aji, member of the Bali - Not For Sale committee. “What was initiated amongst our small group of artists easily attracted the attention of others within our networks because they too shared similar concerns about the future of Bali.”

The rapid conversion of land for commercial use is also threatening a delicate and intricate organization that is one of the fundamentals of the Balinese culture – the subak water irrigation system. A subak is a co operative where the farmers share water from the same source for their irrigation needs and has a recorded history going back over a thousand years.

Bali – Not For Sale – a public awareness event on the location of installation in Junjungan, and now the site of Luden House, an art and community creative space ran by Sayur and his friends, was held on 26th July 2013. Members of the collective, Sanggar Dewata Indonesia (SDI), Indonesia’s oldest artist community organized this event. Local environmental groups WAHLI (the Indonesian Environmental Forum) Eco Defender and Lawa Humon, RUMBL clothing, Anak Alam a charity organization for under privileged children, and Bog Bog Bali cartoon magazine all joined forces to contribute while hundreds of Balinese youths gathered in the fields to attend the concert and public awareness event.

Activities on the day included a workshop conducted by Anak Alam with local children and during the afternoon and evening local bands performed live music on stage. Headlining act was Superman Is Dead, (SID) Bali’s most popular rock band with an international profile, an enormous draw card for local music enthusiasts.

“Ironically it is one of the natural icons that has made Bali famous that is actually endangering its very own well-being,” says Jerinx, drummer for SID and well-known environmental activist.

During 2014 'Not For Sale' has been given new life and adopted as a protest slogan for the 'Tolak Reklamasi' demonstration rallies against a mega development threatening the natural environment of South Bali. The planned reclamation, in which investors aim to reclaim nearly 800 hectares of shallow water in the sensitive estuary in Benoa bay and transform into villas, apartments, luxury hotels, a Disneyland-style theme park, and even a Formula One racing circuit has polarized the island, dividing the population into opposing sides in what has become perhaps the decade's most controversial issue.

The proposed project has seen Bali's Governor Mangku Pastika, as a vocal advocate, become embroiled in the debate. The 'Not For Sale' slogan upon banners held by protesters during these rallies has gained the movement even more vital media exposure.

On 18 October the 'Not For Sale' installation, again made from white painted bamboo poles graced the magnificent rice terraces of Tegallalang, famous for its dramatic vista and a unique environmental landmark that receives hundreds of international visitors each day.

"It has been our plan to erect 'Not For Sale' at other key locations around Bali," says Sayur. "More exposure is essential in creating greater awareness to the cause. We are continually on the look out for other high profile locations, and wish to co operate with sympathetic local land owners in order to build our installations."

As 2014 draws to a close the 'Not For Sale' installation in Junjungan stands as a lone bastion upon a plot of green that is gradually being surrounded by sprawling commercial property developments. Upon the wall of Luden House a large mural depicts a figure, half human, half tree wearing a traditional Balinese mask, a clever fusion of styles, rooted in both modernity, as well as in tradition. In one hand grasping a farmers' sickle, the other holding a sign reading 'Sold Out'.



Not For Sale Sold Out 2014, Image Richard Horstman



Not For Sale Tegallalang Rice Terraces, Oct 18, 2014, Image courtesy of Gede Suanda



Not For Sale Junjungan, Ubud, December 2014, Image Richard Horstman



Gede Suanda + Not For Sale 2014, Image courtesy of Luden house



Sold Out Luden Family, 2013, Image Richard Horstman