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Indonesian Contemporary Art in Berlin

In times when so many emerging artists complain how difficult it is to get exposure abroad, Indonesian artists once again managed to be exhibited in one of the art capitals of the world. Berlin is the home of so many creative forces in art, design, music, film and architecture and starts to get major attention for its art exhibitions too.

Two artists from the famous “Jendela” group, Handiwirman and Yusra Martunus, both originating from West-Sumatra, show opposed visions of reality.

Handiwirman is known to be very handy and often starts his artistic process by creating objects which he photographs and later incorporates in his minimalist still- life like paintings. Two of these objects made of recycled items and consisting of a multitude of materials like sponges, plastic, pvc and textiles are exhibited.

Besides these classical objects, the artist surprised us by showing four large horizontal canvases, depicting a river with a forest background located near the city of Yogyakarta, where he lives. His paintings are shown on the floor leaning against the gallery wall so that the viewers get the impression they are having a leisurely stroll along the river.

The technique used is absolutely stunning. By using puffy ink, often used in screen printing, Handiwirman obtains an extremely delicate, fluffy, matte look that gives a very tactile impression. The ink also has a relief effect that gives a special dimension to the rocks and the trees.

The artist has contrasted the paintings with two massive rock-like objects that materialize the interplay between two and three dimensional objects. The objects are made of fabric screen-printed with puff-ink, corrugated roof sheets, plywood and steel. This magisterial double-view of the beauty of nature in the paintings and in the rougher man-made objects is the apotheosis of Handiwirman’s interest for texture, technique, colour and form.

On the other hand his colleague from Jendela, Yusra Martunus exhibits an installation and two sculptures. His art is minimalist and visual. No doubt he has a certain affinity with Western minimalism but he has developed his own artistic language, which essentially consists of objects arranged with a certain meaning.

His main installation is part of his “Envelope Series” and scintillating blue and red aluminium objects affixed to the wall create a gigantic installation consisting of hard objects with a soft feel. This contrast between reality and impression is very often present in his objects as well.

The envelope has a deeper meaning for the artist as it can have so many different purposes: to pass on a message, to hide something in it, to keep valuables or simply to collect letters received.

There is often an allusive and playful character in the approach of the Jendela artists, who have been deeply influenced by their West-Sumatran culture.

After the tactile and visual artist only a conceptual artist could round off the exhibition by giving a third vision of reality.

Yuli Prayitno hails from the Javanese city of Bandung, which is presently the most dynamic artistic city in Indonesia. He shows two amazing installations and one sculptural work.

His installation "Colour up, Growing Faster" consists of 47 chairs made of silicon rubber foam that grows up to the ceiling like a tree. The chairs look strong, because they are stringed together with wire, but in fact they are soft and weak. Prayitno wants to criticize the lazy individual who believes his dreams will come true, although he does not put in much effort. His foundation is weak and in the end it will collapse.

Another installation "I'm Deer, I'm Going There" features 23 differently coloured deer's antlers made of silicon rubber and fixed to a wooden support.

Again the artist criticizes the individual who is not satisfied with one object but wants 23 trophies coming in different colours. It is a biting comment on greed and over-consumption.

Prayitno's sculpture "Uniform" made of silicon rubber is a scaled-up version of a toy soldier. The difference is that in the small version you can see all the details and the expression of the face, whereas in Prayitno's work the viewer sees an anonymous soldier without facial features so that he cannot determine whether the soldier is peaceful or aggressive. The artist's message is that a lot is hidden in our society and that the reality is sometimes not what you seem to see.

The three different approaches used by the artists are a feast for the eyes, the mind and the senses. They form a perfect mix, which is living proof of Indonesian Contemporary Art's diversity and innovative power.

Marc Bollansee
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