

26.09.2015 – 10.01.2016

FRANKFURTER
KUNSTVEREIN

ROOTS

Indonesian Contemporary Art

Wall Texts

Roots. Indonesian Contemporary Art

Joko Avianto, Jompot Kuswidananto, Eko Nugroho, Tromarama

The exhibition provides insight into the artistic practice of a generation of artists in Indonesia for whom tensions between tradition and modern identity as well as local roots and globalism have been formative.

The artists and artist collectives participating in the exhibition all grew up during a time of momentous political reform and fundamental sociopolitical change.

Indonesia unites a variety of diverse ethnicities, languages, religions and cultural influences on its archipelago. After the fall of Haji Mohamed Suharto's authoritarian regime in 1998, which had lasted for 30 years, the country underwent a swift and profound transition to democratic governance. In light of the sweeping socio-cultural upheavals of the last two decades, the artists reinterpret prevailing historical narratives and the significance of cultural roots. The issues the artists respond to as well as the artistic media and materials they use reflect the search for individual and collective identity in a globalized world.

Joko Avianto

BIG TREES (POHON BESAR), 2015

Bambus, Beton / *bamboo and concrete*

Courtesy the artist

Joko Avianto's stunning bamboo sculpture on the facade of the Frankfurter Kunstverein is part of the exhibition "Roots. Indonesian Contemporary Art," which marks the occasion of the Frankfurt Book Fair. The scale of "Big Trees (Pohon Besar)" and the artist's choice of material call attention to the environment, effects of redevelopment and urbanisation as well as experiences of displacement and marginalisation in the early 21st century. As a site-specific work, it reflects issues of the changing nature and values of space, in this case Frankfurt's reconstructed old-city centre, which is a hub of culture and tourism. In this regard, Avianto responds to the loss of trees in the changing environment around the Frankfurter Kunstverein. Traditionally, old trees have been an important feature in Indonesian public space, as places where people meet and socialize. However, such places are under increasing pressure from urbanisation and the effects of pollution.

"Big Trees (Pohon Besar)" consists of 1525 woven stalks of bamboo imported from plantations in West Java. Bamboo is historically associated with traditional craft. Both decorative form and functional object, it is a familiar material of daily

life but was still an uncommon material in contemporary sculpture when Avianto started experimenting with it in 2003. He borrows and reinterprets traditional Sundanese (West Java) weaving techniques to construct his exaggerated sculptural forms. His innovative process of breaking the long compact fibres of the columns between each node of the bamboo stalk makes it pliable while maintaining its strength. This allows for the bamboo to be manipulated, bent and woven into soft curvilinear lines. An underlying concern for Avianto is the changing socio-economic and cultural values associated with bamboo cultivation. This includes the decline of village owned and cultivated bamboo forests in West Java due to a new wave of global industrialisation, and the aggressive monoculture of the palm oil industry.

Eko Nugroho

NICHT POLITIK, SONDERN SCHICKSAL (Non political, but destiny), 2015
ortsbezogene Wandmalerei / site specific mural
Acrylfarbe / acrylic
Courtesy the artist

TRAVELLER, 2015
Fiberglas und Acryl / *fiberglass and acrylic*
Courtesy ARNDT Berlin

UNTITLED, 2012-2013
Stickereien / embroideries
Courtesy ARND Berlin

Eko Nugroho entered the Yogyakarta art scene at the beginning of the early period of democratisation in Indonesia (1998-2001). Though trained as a painter, he emerged as a key member of the diverse community of street artists in the city. With increased freedoms of speech, the streets became open galleries and open forums through which to directly re-engage the urban environment. Nugroho's mural has unfolded as a result of his response to the art space and exploration of its local environment and context in Frankfurt. It is a fleeting work, meant to be experienced as an event that cannot be reproduced. Much of Nugroho's artistic practice is the result of his longstanding concern over the democratising potential in technologies of reproduction, in the production and dissemination of art and its accessibility as a potential instrument and space of communication. He combines the symbolic language and logic from comic books with a typically Javanese strategy of satirical and dark humour to examine political and social situations and human relations. His constructed world is populated with personal symbols of a humanity transformed by external influences, mutated into hybrid, half-human/half-machine beings. In "Traveller" he follows an aimless wanderer whose multiple beaks imply incessant chatter, and hence an inability to listen. "Traveller" can be seen as the artist's interrogation of how democracy and democratic society has come to be defined in a post-Reformasi political discourse in Indonesia.

Like many artists in Yogyakarta, Nugroho integrates traditional craft from Indonesia in his contemporary art practice. The five pieces of embroidery that have been selected from the larger series "Street Talk" interpret images taken during his many travels in which he recorded everyday politics and human interactions.

Tromarama

BREAK A LEG, 2015

Videoanimation, Handtücher, Drahtseil / *video animation, towels, wire*
Courtesy the artist

The idea for “Break A Leg” began with the ordinary Good Morning brand of towels. These thin rectangles of cheap white cotton are mass produced in China and sold throughout Asia in packages of multiples.

The art collective Tromarama often departs from simple, familiar everyday objects as the site from which to reflect on a variety of issues: in this case, the increasing pressures on individuals, families, and communities to keep pace with recent transformations in early 21st century globalisation - processes of production, distribution and consumption. The simple towel has been repurposed and animated: it has become the background for a video projection that shows a man walking up a seemingly endless flight of stairs that lead nowhere. His monotonous movements are accompanied by images symbolic of the economic and political conditions that influence commonplace effort. The work initially evokes notions uniformity and homogeneity. As we move through the space, however, it becomes clear that every one of the towels is unique. This has implications regarding the artists’ concerns over a person’s worth in the latest wave of global industrialisation.

Tromarama are among the younger generation of artists for whom the digital revolution and the Internet have shaped the way they think and work. The group has been exploring the possibilities of mediation via processes of stop-motion animation for the last nine years. They combine the meticulous, manual process of craftsmanship with instantaneous digital photography, thus accentuating the fact that images are not innocent nor are they natural, but are constructions.

Jompet Kuswidananto

POWER UNIT, 2015

Stoff, Mechanik, Holzstäbe, Lichter, Schuhe, Harz / *Fabrics, mechanics, wooden sticks, lights, shoes, resin*
Courtesy the artist

The installation “Power unit”, is a kinetic work and theatrical presentation. Using motion triggered sensors, Jompet Kuswidananto encourages the audience to engage with his work. The installation is a staged public demonstration or political rally consisting of the artist’s ‘mechanical figures’. As with most of his other large-scale works of the past decade, “Power unit” is a kind of phantasmagorical scene in which ‘Hollow figures’ are recognisable by their symbols which frame or stand in for an absence.

It is Jompet’s critical reflection on the sweeping changes to public political and social discourse since the fall of the authoritarian regime of the New Order (1967-1998) in Indonesia. The transition to democracy has not been without its problems or tensions. While it is easier to organise and mobilise the masses in a post-New Order political environment and an era of increased civil freedoms, the concept and definition of what a democracy or a democratic society is,

remains highly contentious. Many repressed and subverted voices have reasserted their influence, staking their claims in the renewal of the country. In this regard, Jompet further accentuates how new patterns of group affiliation and images of personal identity have influenced and transformed political behaviour in Indonesia over the last decade. How do words help to bring people together around an idea? With social media, everyone has the right and opportunity and potential to gain supporters, galvanise and mobilise people into action. The critical question for the artist is what really is being produced in this process.

Jompet emerged on the scene of experimental music and contemporary art and theatre in Indonesia in the late 1990s. At that time Indonesia was experiencing a significant growth in independent art spaces, collectives and community-based initiatives, many of which focused on new media art.

PRESS CONTACT:
Julia Wittwer (Head of PR)
Frankfurter Kunstverein
Steinernes Haus am Römerberg, Markt 44
60311 Frankfurt am Main
Tel.: +49.69.219314-30, presse@fkv.de