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'Mystical Machine Made in Indonesia' stuns audiences

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JAKARTA (JP): This may be an unnecessary inquiry but a valid one nonetheless: Do you find it disturbing when you realize that technology, a human achievement that is supposed to make life easier, ends up making your life more difficult?

Such questions were raised in the recent performance of multimedia artists entitled *The Mystical Machine Made In Indonesia* from Yogyakarta at the Teater Utan Kayu over the weekend.

The exhibition was part of their touring show which is hitting several cities in Java, including Yogyakarta and Bandung.

This multi-media artwork, a collaborative effort of more than a dozen of artists, could be categorized as a blend of performance and fine art.

The avant-garde artists utilized their own bodies as important elements in the creative process, but their performance seemed to offer more questions than answers.

The central theme of the performance was the dehumanizing aspects of technology.

The stage was itself an industrial installation of metal pipes and wires. Technology was initially a science of "art" in the archaic sense of "craft".

It was a human craft that was supposed to improve the lives of people, freeing them from menial tasks and, inevitably, from slave-like existences. In developing countries like Indonesia only the rich and powerful are able to benefit from technology. The majority of the poor still live in misery.

Once you adopt technology and industry to improve the economy, you cannot detach yourself from the disastrous effects of repressive globalization, including its political and economic impact.

In the performance, Sigit K. Pius remarkably created a scene where a man is bound to a primordial monstrous-looking contraption and writhing hellishly in its clutches, illustrating how much we are controlled and dominated by technology.

Technology actually derives partly from the structures of he

human body.

The 30-minute multi-media performance was followed by a series of visual actions presented by artists and through computerized video clips and soundeffects.

There were two kinds of human scenes: two boxers fighting, and a woman shackled in an iron cage indifferently protesting her destiny.

The boxers danced together when *dangdut* songs were played. The woman then burned paper sculptures of female and male figures, houses, cars, trees and heart-shaped forms. Surprisingly, one of the boxers canvassed his enemy on the stage.

The video clips, on the other hand, featured scenes of *dangdut* singers chatting with each other, an image of a woman's body tied up with a rope and local TV clips of news reports and riot scenes.

All scenes had a satirical edge.

In the end, however, the performance was elaborate and too elusive, and the focus too vague.

Amrizal Sulaiman, the director, actually eliminated some of the more intriguing scenes.

When they performed in Yogyakarta and Bandung, they recited the National Guidelines (GBHN) articles while a male artist performed a masturbation scene with a female doll.

– JP

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