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Tales From Wounded-Land: Eko Nugroho and Wedhar Riyad

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By Valerie Gladstone

The soaring value of contemporary Chinese and Vietnamese art has been one of the art world's most widely documented recent phenomena. But looking elsewhere in Asia, adventurous art lovers have discovered extraordinary beauty and value in Indonesian art, which, in the last couple of years, has caught fire with Asian collectors, galleries and auction houses. One need only to see the vibrant works of Eko Nugroho and Wedhar Riyadi, two young artists widely shown in Asia but rarely seen in the United States, to understand why.

In their first American exhibition, Tales From Wounded-Land, Nugroho and Riyadi demonstrate highly developed, rich and varied styles, as much affected by the intricate and soulful traditions of ancient Indonesian arts as pop culture—particularly drawings, comics, cartoons and animation. Both men live and work in the city of Yogyakarta, the vibrant artistic capital of Java. Even in this cultured environment, however, they cannot but be aware of their country's horrendous violence, poverty and corruption, and both comments in his own way. In a series of three elated canvases, Nugroho satirizes the emptiness of political slogans, as in bright blue and red "Fertile Land #2," in which a robotic figure wears a fierce-looking helmet shares space with a masked skull, decorated with a dragon head; both appear empty and alone. In "Agama Manusia (Human Religion) #1," Nugroho painted a masked boy with a backpack riding a human being with a dragon head, illustrating the dominance of animal passions in human nature.



Tales from Wounded-Land

To convey chaos, Riyadi employs cartoon characters, such as a wizened Mickey Mouse, exaggerating their features by outlining them in black and transforming them into elderly and macabre figures, such as with "In Fashion We Trust," which depicts a bug-eyed character sporting a helmet while holding a cell phone. Violence also underlies "Under Attack," which contains a strange, oversized girl—painted in pastel blues and pinks—who has her eye plucked out by a horrific dragonfly. These are complex works to be relished and studied for their nuances and brilliance. The artists may be new to us, but their psychological truths will continue to reverberate. (VG)

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Tales From Wounded-Land through July 25 at Tyler Rollins Fine Art, 529 W. 20th St., 10W (betw. 10th & 11th Aves.), 212-229-9100.

Tags: American exhibition, Eko Nugroho, galleries, Tales From Wounded-Land, Visual Art, Wedhar Riyadi

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