

# Ruang Rupa exhibition invites unique participation

Many exhibitions place visitors in a passive position: they come, observe and appreciate works of arts on display, and that's it.

But *Lekker Eten Zonder Betalen* (Nice Eating Without Paying), an ongoing exhibition organized by Ruang Rupa at Cemeti Art House, is quite different.

At the exhibition's opening, the visitors were not taken around the exhibition hall to observe the exhibited works. Instead, they came as if attending a party.

Upon arrival, the visitors were greeted with a flower bouquet with an inscription saying, "Have a good time, ladies and gentlemen. P.S. Nice greeting from me". The organizer, Ruang Rupa, is a group of Jakarta-based artists.

The hall was decorated with five ice statues and colorful lighting. A special space was set for the performance, upstairs, of a Jakarta band. A number of 1980s-style sofas were provided for the guests, as well as dinner. Beside the

dining table, there was a wash basin and a table where oxygen tubes were placed.

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**Ade Tanesia**  
Contributor  
Yogyakarta

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After eating, the guests could enjoy the music performed upstairs and then they could dance, with music accompaniment arranged by a DJ. The longer the visitors had a good time dancing, the more chaotic the situation became as some of them began to throw pieces of cake at each another.

Interestingly, a video camera and a Polaroid camera installed on the wall recorded all these activities. When the party was over, all that was left were dirty plates on the table and floor, empty bottles and glasses, food remnants and chairs all over the place. All of them were left as they were. It's these "leftovers", along with the documentation that are now being exhibited.

Naturally, the exhibition raises question, what does it really offer?

The initial idea for the exhibition came from a different perspective in viewing the arts. In this perspective, artists are no longer the center of creation. They only stimulate things to happen and serve as mediators. Statements that art is noble are questioned and even discarded. Art cannot be expected to solve problems but is enough to inspire people.

Through the exhibition, Ruang Rupa created an interaction between the exhibited works and the viewers, eliminating distance between the viewers and the viewed, thus no longer presenting the final product of an artist's creation.

Ruang Rupa chose a "party" with good reason. In local culture, dining and food have a significant role for people from the cradle to the grave. Eating together does not simply fill an empty stomach, but forges solidarity.

Ruang Rupa understands the value of social relationships, given the fast pace of

life in the artists' hometown Jakarta, where people have become alienated from each other. In busy Jakarta, social life can be found at a cafe or restaurant, at financial expense. Only when they go to a birthday or wedding party are they free from a "paying commitment."

With this phenomenon in the background, Ruang Rupa presents an exhibition without overtly introducing a specific artistic element. Instead they have tried to introduce visitors to a particular social experience.

But Jakarta and Yogyakarta are not just far apart in terms of distance. In Jakarta people might be thirsty for relationships but in Yogyakarta, social relationship between people are still close.

Still, it was interesting to observe how the exhibition developed, observing how the visitors showed their true colors. In Yogyakarta, where people prefer to be modest and the very opposite of arrogant, some took their chance to show their true colors when the opportunity knocked.



In a way, if one believes there is nothing original or authentic in artistry, Ruang Rupa has tried to show it at this particular exhibition. This project, however, reminds one of the works of German artist Joseph Beuys. In his exhibition in Italy, he invited a number of people to a discussion with him and then all the dirty glasses, cigarette stubs and pieces of paper scattered around during the discussion were later exhibited.

Still, social experience like Beuys' discussion with some

of his guests, or the party held by Ruang Rupa, are a creative process in practicing art.

The distance between a work of art that is considered noble and the audience was questioned and consequently led to an idea to create something that would involve the public. In the West, this idea could be traced back to the Dadaist Movement in the 1916-1922 or the Fluxus Movement in the 1960s, in which books on the history of art were burned.

The same restlessness has remained a trend in interna-

tional contemporary fine art today. The artistic ideas and practice that Ruang Rupa is now offering are inseparable from the constellation of ideas in international contemporary fine arts.

*Lekker Eten Zonder Betalen (Nice Eating Without Paying) exhibition runs until March 30 at the Cemeti Art House, Jl. DI Panjaitan 41, Yogyakarta. Tel: 0274 371015, e-mail: cemetiah@indosat.net.id, or cemetiartthouse.com*



*Cemeti Art House*

Dirty plates, remnants of food and drink (photo above) and scattered chairs on a littered floor (photo below) make up an exhibition at the Cemeti Art House in Yogyakarta. The unique exhibition strives to involve visitors, and therefore, it does not present the final product of the artist's creation.

