

The Liberation of the Visual Language

In the contemporary art world, there have been quite a lot of successful artists with a background in graphic design. One of them is Indieguerillas, which is a group of two life partners, Santi Ariestyowanti and Dyatmiko “Miko” Bawono.

The success of such artists might be related to the “liberation of the visual language” that takes place in the development of the contemporary art. This is no longer debated today: it has been agreed that the contemporary art liberates a range of aspects in the art idioms that have been previously “stifled” by modernism, as evident in the development of late modern art. In the contemporary art, we have witnessed the liberation of the media (previously, only painting and sculpture were acknowledged), the liberation of narratives, the liberation of theatricality (giving rise to performance art), and the liberation of idioms.

The liberation of idioms has to do with the essence of the contention between the modern and contemporary art. This argument finds its roots in the modernist belief that there is only one universal language in modern art, i.e. the language of abstract (in painting and sculpture). The function of communication in the universal language has been diminished to serve another interest that is seen as loftier, i.e. the discovery of the “essence of art”. This symptom separates late modern art from early modern art, and also from almost all other art traditions in the world. Almost all other art traditions recognize the function of communication in the language of art.

The contemporary art shatters the “impoverishment” of art idioms and liberates the formerly-shackled visual language. Therefore, all languages that artists have discovered along the history of art—as reflected in the various “isms”—are revived (after having been put to death). The liberated languages then flourish on a new platform.

In the world of graphic design, the function of communication of all visual languages is not only present, but also serves precisely as the most important function. All graphic designers thus have an inherent drive to communicate with their audience as they proceed with their work. When they look for ideas, develop the visual language to present their ideas, and even when they are seeking provocative ideas and visual languages, these graphic designers never lose this drive.

This is different from other artists with no background in the discipline of graphic design or visual communication. With these artists, the influence of avant-gardism that has been so deeply entrenched in the development of art so far encourages them to present peculiar ideas and idioms, based on the spirit to present novelty, originality, individuality, and depth, which are believed as uncommunicative after all. When the contemporary art liberates the visual language and revives the communicative function of the visual language, such artists find themselves in a rather difficult situation. Although they intend to develop communicative idioms, the drive to present peculiarities, which has been strongly ingrained due to the influence of common images, is not easy to control.

Artists with a background in graphic design do not encounter such impediment. Even when they are in the process of developing peculiar, off-the-mark ideas and idioms, there has always been the underlying desire to communicate with the audience. The result is evident in the collaborative works by Santi Ariestyowanti and Dyatmiko “Miko” Bawono that are on display in this exhibition today.

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