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Carla Bianpoen, Contributor, Kuala Lumpur | Fri, 02/18/2011 9:29 AM



Holy War 6, c-print on aluminum d-bond by Agan Harahap

dogmas to justify terrorist acts.

He says all this becomes even more complicated when interwoven with political agendas.

The world is like a make-believe stage, a theater of jokers, so to speak.

And it led him to create his own "theater". He started by asking his friends to pose as actors in various positions holding toy pistols. A photographer by profession, Agan then recorded the "acts" with his camera and printed everything onto aluminum, in three editions.

The images that appeared in the Special Project booth of Art Stage, organized by Vivi Yip's Jakarta, are now on show at Richard Koh's gallery in Kuala Lumpur.

Figures are dressed, not in white robes, as one might have expected, but in white military-like costumes, wearing dynamite over their chests, holding a weapon or pointing it at some invisible target.

Embodying activist fervor with figures holding their arms up in the air or preparing to shoot a target, the images are particularly striking thanks to the white that dramatically dominates the pictures.

White, says Agan, is a metaphor for purity, holiness, which sharply contrasts the violence emanating from the weapons featured.

Such contrast is also revealed through the use of aluminum instead of print paper. Aluminum is hard and strong, the photographer says, as opposed to the delicate nature of the white used in his works.

Agan Harahap, born in 1980, is a graduate from Sekolah Tinggi Desain Grafis Indonesia, a private institution in Bandung. He is a self-taught photographer, now working for Trax, an Indonesian music magazine.

Agan says his interest in photography, an activity he initially hated, was stirred when a colleague's photographs — which he found quite average — were acknowledged as good.

In an act of playfulness, he submitted his works to the Indonesia Art Awards in 2002. These were nominated for an ensuing exhibition.

He then met Angki Purbandono, the well-known scanography artist who happens to also have worked as a photographer at the same Trax magazine.

Angki told him he should have a show at Ruang MES 56, Yogyakarta. So Agan did, marking his first solo exhibition as an artist.

When Vivi Yip asked him to expose his work at her gallery in 2010, it was the first time he entered the commercial

The title of Agan Harahap's exhibition at Richard Koh's gallery in Kuala Lumpur is likely to either pique one's curiosity or stir a sense of intense frustration.

The term "Holy War" is often understood in a religious context. For some it is a jihad, which according to Wikipedia means an internal struggle to maintain faith, a struggle to improve Muslim society, or a struggle in a holy war.

But for Agan it's none of the above. His work stems from the many ways society masks the truth through make-believe, from the veneer of holiness radicals use to cover their actions, and the use of religious

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scene as an artist.

In his show titled "Super Hero", Agan who draws inspiration from video, movies and his own imagination, incorporated the images of super heroes and villains onto memorable images of World War II scenes, placing them alongside the most noted political figures of the 20th century.

His images in "Holy war" are certainly of a different kind.

Unlike those in "War Hero" which may conjure a sense of the unreal or absurd, his "Holy War" images remind us of real situations in our time.



Holy War 10, c-print on aluminum d-bond by Agan Harahap

His way of mimicking the very same stage he criticizes in political and religious situations is akin to poking fun at a worrisome situation through the use of toy weapons.

Agan Harahap says he will continue working as a photographer for Trax magazine. For now, he has no intention of becoming a full-time artist, as he fears it will destroy his creativity.

Holy War

Solo exhibition by Agan Harahap
February 18 to March 6
Richard Kho Fine Art
Lot No. 2F-3, Level 2,
Bangsar Village II, Jalan Telawi 1
Bangsar Baru, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

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