



MATAHARI

LOCATION> PERMATA MOVIE THEATER | ARTIST> AARON NOBLE



The mural is painted on a disused movie house, the Bioskop Permata (Precious Jewel Theater). I worked in the theater business for years, it runs in my family. An old reel to reel 35mm carbon arc projection system is about the most romantic machine I know of. Dream furnaces, burning in dark and grimy holes, light spilling from the seams, stoked by strange, gnomic men. Foot fetishists; cross dressers, retentive paranoids: I knew of one who clipped a frame from every nude scene that ever passed through his hands. All gone now, the unions are broken. A sterile xenon light reveals the blockbusters now, teenagers push the buttons of automated platter systems for minimum wage.

I'm not the first painter to show on the Permata by a long shot: every program featured a huge handpainted banner, property of the distributor in Jakarta. Not for Sale!





Bamboo scaffolding is absolutely the best for its tactile qualities; personality and DIY adaptability. The varied widths of the poles which make up the platform massage the bare feet of the painter as he travels over the wall. The creaking and swaying of the structure is like a faithful sailing ship and making repairs a pleasant self-sufficiency. Even the legendary "bamboo hell" adds an intriguing complexity to the work; those patches of tiny, vicious barbs near the joints which left such a nasty rash on Andy's arm. And when you practice the cure for the problem (as close as your own scalp) it makes you feel savvy, culturally adapted.





You could argue that the American artist came to Java during the US annexation of Iraq and painted an incomprehensible and terrifying machine to loom above the innocent streets of Jogja. I had a persistent feeling that my work was incarnating the arrogant soul of the empire— despite the many alterations I made to soften the design.

My mood was very fragile. The seesaw of my feelings about the project could rise and fall in an instant. Once a truckload of workers passed beneath me and I turned at the shout and thumbs-up of a grinning young man only to be fixed by the hard stare of the older man beside him. I often thought of something I heard on the radio station in Los Angeles before I left the US— opposition to the war does not insulate us from its demonic qualities.





