

Exhibit comes full circle through elements of life

Installation art may confound potential exhibition visitors as to how to approach the seemingly esoteric art form, which typically combines a variety of techniques and materials, including everyday objects, into a three-dimensional, spatial work.

Grace Siregar, whose *Weather, Tragedy, Life* opened on Friday at Bentara Budaya in Central Jakarta, and will run until Dec. 12, responded to this ever-present dilemma of appreciation: "Installation art is a powerful way of encouraging people to look at the objects and materials around them in their daily lives with fresh eyes.

Artists often use 'art' materials that create a diversion from their daily reality. Installation art can counteract this tendency."

For those unfamiliar with installations, the catalog lists individual pieces along with a quotation from renowned figures to provide a framework of reference.

No darling of the local arts community, which tends toward the more classical fine arts forms of painting, sculpture and illustration, her works are often bold,

frank and to some, garish, expressions of the world around her, an approach she attributes to her Batak heritage.

Beginning her foray into art at the age of six on Bangka Island, South Sumatra, Grace's schoolteacher father placed her under the "apprenticeship" of a traveling painter and encouraged the pursuit of her creative talents across the island.

Later, after graduating from Sriwijaya University with an international law degree, she studied under the late Jan van Stolk as his sole student in Oosterbeek, the Netherlands. His mentorship pushed her artistic development into a departure from traditional material and toward exploring alternative media such as metal, plastic, toiletries and kitchen appliances. Most recently, she has begun to experiment with

digital media and organic material and, in this exhibition, meteorological phenomena.

Perhaps it is this early introduction to travel, combined with her strong ethnocultural identity, that has provided Grace with a drive to seek artistic expressions of universal issues within a communal context. *Weather, Tragedy, Life* draws mainly upon a one-year residency in Ternate, North Maluku, where she worked in a rehabilitation program organized by World Vision Indonesia for post-conflict trauma survivors and trauma support workers, focusing on art as an outlet for their experiences.

With Grace appearing in traditional Batak dress, the opening day featured *Global Warming*, a 2 x 2 x 3m stack of 192 ice blocks in the gallery courtyard, tracing the

transformation of water through the life cycle of ice, from solid, liquid to gas.

Similarly, Grace weaves the title themes through the individual exhibition pieces into a study on the cyclic nature of life — and death — a Batak philosophy.

"You could say that Batak see death as a celebration of coming full circle," she said.

At times satirical and humorous, the pieces capture prevailing sentiments to provide a commentary on an event or a social issue through a juxtaposition of materials, inviting the response — or reaction — of the viewer in determining their own perspective. Her style is eclectic and vibrant, in which artistic elements from Dutch Impressionism to American pop art can be found.

One such piece is *Munir, Simply*, a tribute to the late human rights activist that

plays on Andy Warhol's famous silkscreen of celebrities, and which attempts to redefine the notion of an icon. Conceived before police began investigating the possibility of foul play in Munir's death aboard a Netherlands-bound flight, Grace believes recent developments have made the work thematically more relevant.

As it is often said, all art is social commentary and no art is created in isolation of the world; and Grace's work brings the contemporary world and its many issues to life within the confined space of the Bentara Budaya.

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Courtesy Grace Siregar



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