

Art Summit Indonesia

# Much lacking in first visual arts exhibition

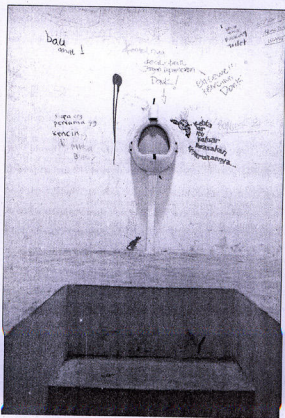
The opening of the fourth Summit Indonesia on Sept. 11 in the open air of Galeri Nasional Indonesia kindled high expectations for the visual arts exhibition, which was included for the first time in the international summit. Unfortunately, it failed to deliver.

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Contributor/Jakarta



As the flickering lighting played on the old Galeri Nasional Indonesia building amid the reverberating music of I Wayan Sadra, there was the feeling this was something different, yet entirely worthy of the prestigious event.

Even the failure of the curtain to open on time was



JP/Aniel Suhardiman

Graffiti now adorns Agus Suwage's provocative work *Air Seni (Urine)*

taken in stride.

In hindsight, it could be considered an omen of what was to come.

While Masuda Hiromi's glass installation in the main hall initially seemed to justify high expectations for the visual arts summit, S. Teddy D's *Demarcation* installation, which has been seen in the Yoga Biennale and elsewhere, was the first sign to alert all was not right.

For frequent art exhibition visitors, there were too many works that did not meet the expectations of a summit.

For example, there was the art installation of Mella Jaarsma with the same theme of identity, minority, etc., renewed only with a changing motif on the burkha; Nindityo Adipurnama's eternal hairbun in the interactive installation titled *Massage a la Hairbun* placed in the same space as at CP Biennale, or Dolorosa Sinaga's sculptures — we had all seen them to the point of boredom.

In addition, the three lone painters represented — IGK Murniasih, Dikdik Sayahdikumullah and Made Wianta — made us wonder how these works could possibly reflect the top of the rich painting community.

Meanwhile, Agus Suwage's controversial installation *Air Seni* (Urine), consisting of a real urinal and five monitors to show the act of urinating, with the artist's actual peeing witnessed by the public and his wife, provoked graffiti — both in support and against the work — on the surrounding walls.

Fortunately, there is more to the exhibition, with Nyoman Erawan's stirring installation of faces made of stone, spread in a "pool" of sand and hung along the walls of the space *Ritus Wajah di Batu-Batu* (The Rite of Face on the Stones); Krisna Murti's impressive multimedia installation (*E)Art(h)quake*, consisting of a giant mythological dragon looking over a plot of sand that transforms into the tides brought about by a video and uniting with the sound of thunder.

There is also Arahmaiani's lyrical video art, *I Don't Want to be Part of Your Legend*, using just a leaf and a *wayang* puppet accompanied by poetic text to question women's status in the burning of Sita in the *Ramayana* epic story. Oscar Motulloh's inspiring photo installation *Theatre of Dreams* offers

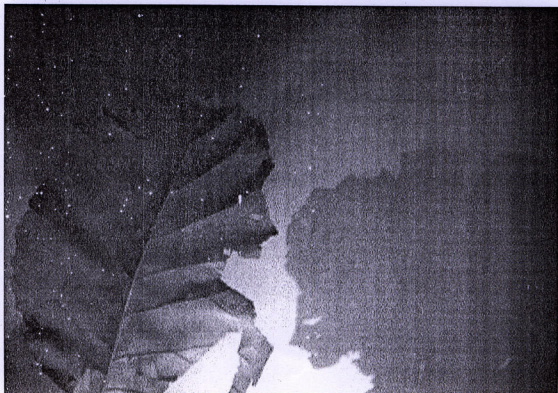
exhilarating esthetics and professional skill that both enlighten and lift our spirits with a touch of humor.

Heri Dono's innovative blend of low- and high-tech to portray the difference in rural peace and urban buzz also helps the overall display. Tisna Sanjaya provides a theatrical illustration of a world that is upside down through the portrayal of a skeleton in the upside-down position, fenced in with quotes from famous authors like TS Elliot and Wiji Thukul.

The participation of foreign artists from Australia, France, Japan, Pakistan and Thailand is an asset, but their works would have been better understood by the public if there had been some kind of explanation on their backgrounds.

The photo exhibition of Eliza Hutchinson's portraits, for instance, is a series of photographic performance portraits, presented as exaggerated characters in order to capture a range of physical and psychological responses to the action of gravity on the body.

The same goes for the photographs by Darren Stives, an Aboriginal photographer from Australia, which



Arahmaiani questions women's status in her work *I Don't Want to be Part of Your Legend*.

Courtesy Arahmaiani

Naoko Majima fills her canvas with little charcoal points or lines (photo right). Oscar Motullo's *In The Search of the Lost Vision* offers a refreshing esthetic touch (photo below).

The Art Council Indonesia



Courtesy Oscar Motullo



J.P. Ariel Subardiman

The stirring stone faces of Nyoman Erawan's *Ritus Wajah di Batu-Batu* (The Rite of Face on the Stones).

become outspoken and stirring once one knows their context in Aboriginal society in colonial times, evoking questions that are revealed in the title *Just is*, which can also be read as "justice".

Naoko Majima's large canvases *Heaven and Paradise*, filled with little charcoal points or lines, would be even more interesting with the knowledge that the act of drawing leads her in a kind of trance in which visions of the distant past are revealed.

Masuda Hiromi's material of glass alone attracts attention, but understanding her *Requiem* installation that goes beyond a mere condolence wreath would come with the information that the green palms on bare dry branches, and the addition of small yellow coconuts, substantiate her belief that there is life after death.

Moreover, the video works of Bruno Samper and Pierre Giner from France would be an enlightening example of groundbreaking digital video art if there had been some information on their backgrounds.

Samper is a highly skilled designer and founder of the Net revue *Panoplie* whose work in this exhibition, *Society*, was created for the first New Media Art Biennale in France. *Keep the Distance* by Giner experiments with the complexity of space occupation inside virtual worlds and our relationship with reality, thus revealing the stigmata of a new way of perceiving the world.

The lack of attention to thorough selection of works, and the apparent dearth of even minimal communication efforts, is compounded by a website with inadequate information (sad to say, most of it is from an article written by me for this paper, without any attribution).

It is hardly surprising that the visual arts part of the Art Summit Indonesia, unlike Wayan Sadra's music on opening night, failed to cause any reverberations.

One would be inclined to agree with artist F.X. Harsono's comment in a discussion held on Tuesday at Galeri Nasional Indonesia: "Let's be professional, and if we can't, then it's better not to have a summit than having one that doesn't deserve its title".

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