

**PRESS RELEASE**

**La Biennale di Venezia – 50th INTERNATIONAL ART EXHIBITION**

**Dreams and Conflicts: The Dictatorship of the Viewer**

**15 June - 2 November - Open hours 10.00-18.00, Closed on Mondays**



**INDONESIA**

***Paradise Lost: Mourning of the World***

**Palazzo Malipiero (ground floor), S. Marco 3078, Venice**

(Vaporetto n. 82, 3 + 4, station: S. Samuele - Palazzo Grassi)

**2nd participation of INDONESIA since 1954**

**Artists: Dadang Christanto, Arahmaiani, Tisna Sanjaya, Made Wianta**

**Commissioner: Sinta Maroe**

**Curator: Amir Sidharta Co-Curator: Paolo De Grandis**

**Organized by COMMITTEE OF INDONESIAN PARTICIPATION**

**Co-organized by Arte Communications**

On Saturday, 12 October 2002 (just a year, a month and a day after the attack on the twin towers of the World Trade Center on Tuesday, 11 September 2001), two bombs exploded in Kuta on the Island of Bali, killing 180 individuals, mostly Australians, but also Americans, Europeans and Indonesians. The incident sent a grim message to the world that there was no longer any place in the entire world that was isolated from terror and violence. Since "9.11" changed the state of the world, terror was even happening on the Island of Paradise. A global conflict has affected world's dream—world's sense of peace and freedom. Paradise is now lost! After being absent from the event for around half a century, Indonesia will be participating once again at the 50th INTERNATIONAL ART EXHIBITION La Biennale di Venezia, featuring the work of four artists representing the centers of art in the country (Bandung and Yogyakarta on Java, and Bali). The project focuses on Bali, "Paradise Lost", as a starting point to introduce the contemporary art emerging from this tumultuous nation, and a point from which the artists explore contemporary issues that influence and form their artistic work.

Currently working as a resident artist and lecturer in Darwin, Australia, **Dadang Christanto** (b. Tegal, C. Java, 1957) presents *Cannibalism*, a piece that was initially done not long after the violent riots that hit Indonesia in 1998. The piece consists of what seems to be chunks of meat (crafted out of ceramics) threaded on skewers, roasted on a four meter long barbecue grill that would remind one of the Indonesian dish, *sate (satay)*, usually served with spicy peanut sauce.

For **Arahmaiani** (b. Bandung, W. Java, 1961), the Bali bomb is a result of the prejudice and hatred that develops amidst the social, political and economic imbalance and injustice that is happening in the world today. Moreover, she observes that the world is becoming even more polarized than ever, and prejudice has further developed around the world. "As an artist with an Islamic background, I think that this is a matter that needs to be addressed, not from the viewpoint of any of the sides/parties in conflict (Islam and the West), but my own personal point of view," she states.



**Tisna Sanjaya** (b. Bandung 1958) presents an installation entitled *Sacred Prayer for the Dead/Sketsa Wajah Kita*, consisting of a tall human figure standing up-side down in front of a canvas and a freestanding mirror, all placed in a boat. Both the boat and the figure are crafted out of hand-woven bamboo. Behind the boat is a fishing net attached with photographs of various people. The piece comprises of a set of artworks that have become the artist's obsession over the years: the up-side down human figure signifying people "who think with their elbows" and image of the *Mooi Indiës* ("Beautiful Indies"), a term used to refer to "pretty picture" painting of the Indonesian archipelago popular since the end of the 19th century, when the country was still under Dutch occupation.

The Balinese artist **Made Wianta** (b. Apuan, Tabanan, Bali, 1949) attempts to recreate the gruesome feeling of horror of the Kuta Bombing through his installation. Effigies signifying the human corpses of the victims of the violence are scattered around the space, while truly unbearable, daunting images of the bombing are displayed on the walls. Painted pitch black, the nuance of the space is indeed macabre. Wianta's piece is meant as a lonely yet loud and rash scream of horror in the midst of silence infesting the rest of the Island of Bali, bewildered by the terror of evil. As he is no longer able to remain contained within human existence, the scream seems to extend beyond humanity; he suddenly discovers, and then uncovers, evil itself. Wianta extracts morality from horror itself.

Coming from the most advanced centers of visual art in Indonesia, **Dadang, Arahmaiani, Tisna and Wianta** have responded to the Bali bombing (as a starting point) and tried to look for their own answers in their struggle to comprehend the matter. They explored issues and made use of elements coming from their cultural and religious backgrounds, from the paradigms of their personal experiences, to create their artworks.

Yet, for them, Bali, Paradise Lost, is not limited to Bali or Indonesia alone. It is indeed the Mourning of the World (playing on "The Morning of the World" Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's poetic words used to describe Bali during his visit in the 1950s). What has happened is a tragedy for the whole world. Through their art works, the artists reflect on their cultural and personal identities to address universal questions of humanity in this world that is becoming increasingly complex and prone to conflict. We must rediscover our Paradise and wake up to see "The Morning of the World" again!

*On the readings about Wianta's installation, I am greatly indebted to Jean Couteau who has provided me with valuable insights about the piece.*

Amir Sidharta

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