

## Conversation: Endless acts in human history

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*Sound of Garden: Delicate Machine* by Entang Wiharso

Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung once said that the meeting of two personalities was like contact between two chemical substances - if there is any reaction, both are transformed.

Around two years ago, celebrated Indonesian contemporary artist Entang Wiharso met with Australian feminist contemporary artist Sally Smart while he was preparing for a group exhibition in Melbourne called '*Closing the Gap*', as well as preparing for a pop-up show.

'It was the last day of my residency in Melbourne and my friend asked whether there was anyone I wanted to meet. Her [Smart's] artwork popped up in my mind,' Entang told The Jakarta Post.

When the two finally met, they connected easily.

'We clicked talking about many things. It was like meeting an old friend. I told her she should come to my studio in Yogyakarta. Later, I invited her to come to an art dinner I hosted. At that time, we were like, 'We have to work together,' Entang said.

They began to formulate ideas for a future collaboration. After a number of lengthy long-distance phone calls, Smart taking several trips back and forth between Australia and Yogyakarta and her doing a six-week residency at Entang's studio, the two artists eventually exhibited their individual works together in Jakarta.

Held from Jan. 14 to Feb. 1, the exhibition is titled '*Conversation: Endless Acts in Human History*' and is held at Galeri Nasional Indonesia in collaboration with the Canna Gallery.

The exhibition is a dream come true for Entang and Smart, who had spent two years preparing for it.

Nothing could prevent them from celebrating their long-awaited achievement, not even the deadly attacks that shook the busy Sarinah mall intersection near the gallery on their opening day.

Curator Suwarno Wisetrotomo said the collaboration between Entang and Smart went beyond a pragmatic way of thinking, as the two did not work in the same medium.

'This is a collaboration of conversation, thought and ideas. The two artists share a critical perspective in terms of social, political and cultural problems,' he said.



*Chronic Satanic Privacy* by Entang Wiharso

The two artists said they shared common ground in the cutting out method. In their creative process, they were also keen to explore issues related to identity, living abroad, migration, politics and various aspects of borders, including economy, geography and religion.

They played with various kinds of media to express themselves.

Most of Entang's artwork in the exhibition was gigantic with his dominant materials being aluminum, copper, light bulbs and car paint. He used many bright and shiny colors in *Promising Land* ( 2015 ) and *The Other Dream: I Love You Too Much* (2011-2015), which displayed various symbols of migration, violence and foreign culture.

He also instilled satanic and animalistic visual elements, which seems to be one of his signatures.

In the artwork titled *Chronic Satanic Fences (2010)*, he used five scary figures with long tongues that tried to break a house fence. It was intended, Entang said, to highlight issues surrounding tolerance.

'The fence represents a code of ethics. Breaking down morality is another thing, but we should not break the ethical code. When that border is breached, people will be like animals. Maybe worse, because animals use violence to survive, while humans use it for their pleasure,' Entang said.

He also engraved short dialogues containing strong questions or statements to ponder and worked in intricate detail on the aluminum.

This could be seen in the hand-cut aluminum artwork *Being Guest: Double Happiness (2015)*.

Entang included in his work various elements, such as human figures, skulls, legs, a head with three eyes and tables of food - all of them interconnected with many long thin objects such as bones, spider webs, hair and other body parts.

For Entang, the cutting method was not only aimed at creating beauty, but also a conceptual act attempting to describe the chaotic social conditions in Indonesia. The little details, he said, were meant as visual elements to uphold the bigger ones.

'The chaos has a structure. It may be difficult for us to see because we live in it,' he said, adding that he could see the structure clearly when he lived far away from the country.

For Smart, to cut means to change. She cut, pinned and reconstructed the materials into new artwork that represented her ideas.

'There were connections between our works, and differences as well. Art speaks across borders, boundaries and different generations. I think we share an interest in investigating systems and how they might function. For me, I often have to take them apart,' Smart said.

Entang Wiharso's Self Portrait uses digital print and laser cut Plexiglas. The work is one of the creations on display at the 'Conversation: Endless Acts in Human History' exhibition at the National Gallery in Jakarta.

Smart played with various collage elements, including synthetic hair, pins, fabric and paper, and used a TV screen, mind mapping and a video installation to express her creative energy. She also explored shadows and puppets and combined them with her cutting method.

Entering the main building of the gallery, one will see Smart's two giant black pirate ships installation on the wall. One of them is titled *The Exquisite Pirate (2015)*, a collage made of mixed media that has been cut out and put together to form a vivid construction. Further inside the Gallery, there are some pictures of female pirates in the artwork, *The Exquisite Pirate Blue Collage #1*.

It was interesting to imagine the ship exploring the ocean with women pirates onboard.

'As a feminist, I believe very strongly in women's part in the world and I show that. I show things about women in the way I use process or in the things that I represent, [such as] women pirates,' she said.

She said her first exploration of women pirates took her back to 2004 when she started to wonder whether women pirates existed, as pop culture only portrayed men pirates and their treasure islands. She later found that there were many women pirates in human history.

Smart used the pirates and the ships to talk about breaking down borders and humanity.

'I was thinking about Australia [...] and the indigenous people who were there long before colonialization. With colonialization, everyone came on ships. They settled in Australia, and yet we have always had issues around the ship and borders.'

Entang and Smart's collaboration resulted in artworks that encourage conversation, and which can hopefully ease tensions. As Entang put it, 'In human civilization, there is always terror and violence. That is why we need dialogues. This is an endless conversation'.

Photos by JP/DMR