

Made Djirna – soul mining

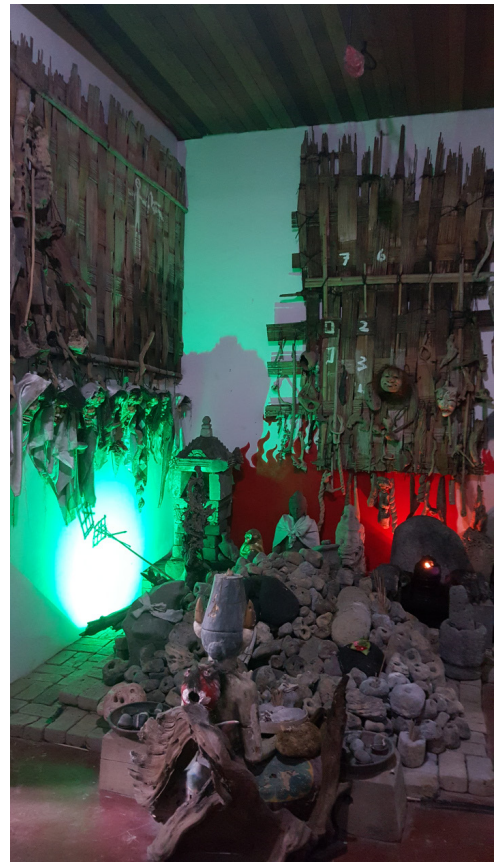
Posted on June 26, 2017 by Richard Horstman

Exploring Balinese artist Made Djirna's cavernous studio conjures up notions of a journey into a mysterious inner sanctum that is vibrant and fascinating, yet is equally as powerful and confronting.

A collector of all manner of cultural artifacts, naturally formed shapes and unusual objects, which he then converts into intriguing installations, typically, Djirna's lively yet simplified and raw figures reflect the primitive tribal arts. He constructs enormous "shrines and altars" from old timber, crude sculptures and rocks, complete with fire, coloured light, and abstract painted deities that are infused with a sense of ritual and resonate with spiritual energy.

Within the National Gallery of Indonesia, Djirna recreates the unique essence of his studio by placing his installations within small rooms and in confined corners. He allows the audience an insight into the creative world of one Indonesia's finest contemporary artists.

"My concern is to express reflections that go far deeper than what we can know with our panca indra (eyes, ears, nose, tongue and skin). All of my work is a process that goes hand in hand with the demands of my soul. It is essentially a spiritual process taking visible pictorial shape," Djirna.



Installation by Made Djirna at his Ubud studio, 2017



Installation by Made Djirna exhibited in "Ubud 1963, (Re) Reading The Growth of Made Djirna", at the National Gallery in Jakarta. 24th November – 5th December 2012.



Benang Merah Bali (the red thread from Bali to Basel) – Made Djirna, 1993

A versatile artist who loves to experiment with new materials, techniques and styles, from 2010 onwards Djirna reinterpreted his method of producing his paintings and the new works were highlighted in his exhibition *Ubud 1963, (Re) Reading The Growth of Made Djirna*, at the National Gallery of Indonesia, in Jakarta. The exhibition ran from 24 November through to 5 December 2012.

In this, Djirna's eighth solo, retrospective exhibition, observers may take a brief sojourn through his creative development and witness the metamorphosis he has undergone. *Mengenang Piramid (To Reminisce About the Pyramid)*, 1994 and *Kabut Hitam (Black Fog)* 1994, are memoirs of his childhood experience of 1963. Both paintings are rendered in darkened acrylic hues with traces of red and white. These bleak abstract works convey anxiety and distress, evident in the facial expression in *Piramid* and the tension created by vigorously scored details into the body of the work. *Kabut* suggests architectural objects overcome by thick black clouds and bright red denotes volcanic flows and the horror of such a scenario.



Wajah Wajah Mengambang (Floating Faces) – Made Djirna, 2008

Within his curatorial essay, senior Indonesian curator Jim Supangkat began by describing the extraordinary events of 1963 that had a catastrophic impact on Bali, as well as shaping the formative years of a young Djirna who was living just north of Ubud. Mount Agung in East Bali, the island's spiritual pinnacle, began its process of tremors in January, volcanic eruptions started in March and again in May and tremors then continued until its final blast in January 1964. This was an unprecedented year with extensive infrastructure damage, crop failures, wide-spread famines and many deaths, while also putting an immediate halt to tourism in Bali.

Born in Kedewatan, Ubud in 1957 Djirna was just 6 years old at the time of this event. He later went on to graduate from the Faculty of Fine Art and Design at the ISI (Indonesian Institute of Art) Yogyakarta in 1985 and spent 10 years living in the cultural capital of Java. He actively exhibits his works locally and internationally and is a member of the respected SDI, Sanggar Dewata Indonesia association of modern artists.



"Gajah Genit" (Flirty Elephant), 260 x 400 cm, 2012 - Made Djirna

Among Djirna's captivating new works exhibited in the National Gallery, *Gajah Genit (Flirty Elephant)*, 260 x 400 cm, serves as a metaphor of a power crisis in the face of change. Djirna communicates the damages inflicted by power and domination via deforestation. Posing in jest, the "flirty elephant" stands confidently in defiance. Yet also he depicts a ruler's demise by placing the image of a vulture on the elephant's head. He also symbolizes the

dawn of a new era by depicting a dove on a stump of a tree. This intelligent work in rich blues, reds and greens is infused with humor that helps to resolve the seriousness of the alarming reality we face.

Upon his mixed media canvases of huge proportions (up to 350 x 400 cm) Djirna first applies a thick base of texture into which he scores his vast narratives, then adds color in rich metallic paint and finally contains all the characters within black lines. In a style reminiscent of the traditional Balinese paintings with the narrative covering the complete expanse of canvas, Djirna's works take on modern narratives and issues that for the artist are very close to home.



Metamorfosis (Metamorphosis), 260 x 400 cm, 2012 - Made Djirna

His recent use of metallic paints adds a wonderful luminous dimension, particularly when highlighted by artificial lighting. They are aesthetically spectacular not only because of the dynamic coloration, yet the scale of the works simply overwhelms. Some have taken Djirna more than 4 months to complete.

In *Metamorfosis (Metamorphosis)*, 2012, 260 x 400 cm, two lovers embrace in the forest surrounded by hundreds of brightly colored butterflies, on the trunks of the trees are numerous large caterpillars. What may appear to be a simplistic narrative denoting change reveals the reality that life is full of paradoxes. Butterflies are nature's symbol of grace, yet they become caterpillars which are destructive and are seen as pests. This is a creation of wonder and beauty, and it is here that Djirna's brilliance shines through.



Installation by Made Djirna in the exhibition, "The Logic of Ritual" at Sangkring Art Gallery, Yogyakarta, 2013.

During his July, 2013 exhibition at Sangkring Art Space in Yogyakarta Djirna was prepared to bring his religion under close scrutiny. His paintings and installations in *The Logic of Ritual* were protests against numerous ritual practices, whose meaning, according to the artist, is now driven by modern and commercial practices.

Djirna criticises the consumption of money (his works utilise a countless number of Chinese coins used in Balinese rituals) in direct relation to the demands of Balinese Hindu religious rituals that are becoming increasingly glamorous, luxurious and festive. Such demands, while indeed granting communion between the devotee, the spirit world and Gods, may be perceived as rigid mechanisms, ultimately keeping the 'little people' poor.

He dedicated his exhibition to the plight of the impoverished of Bali, who suffer in silence while paying excessively for offerings and rituals that demand perfection both in the materials and presentation.



The Logic of Ritual - Made Djirna, 2013

Djirna was invited to participate in the landmark 2016 Singapore Biennale – An Everywhere of Mirrorings at the Singapore Art Museum (SAM). His installation – *Melampauai Batas (Beyond Boundaries)* 2016, sought to transcend the boundaries between the interior and the exterior, the microcosm and the macrocosm, along with the spiritual and the physical planes.

A fusion of different elements, it featured found objects, 1000 terracotta figurines representing humanity (the fragility of clay signifying the precarious nature of life), an antique traditional ironwood boat from Sulawesi –symbolic of journeying between Nusantara and the larger world and the worlds of the living and dead (in Balinese belief the boat carries the soul to its ancestral abode after death). Positioned in the corners of the room, large trees constructed from driftwood – its trunks and branches, some with crude primitive figure scribed into the wood, suggest fragments of other lives, cultures and civilizations.



Melampauai Batas (Beyond Boundaries) 2016 – Made Djirna, Singapore Biennale – An Everywhere of Mirrorings at the Singapore Art Museum.

The artist's earlier works are categorized by naïve figurative and abstract expressions often rendering thick chunks of paint to create ambiguous forms with faces that reveal the darker emotions of the human experience. His strong earthy figures are a reminder of the past when life was simpler and with a greater connection to the environment.

What has remained consistent throughout Djirna's career is his sense of unity within the collective experience and importance of the personal process while learning to endure the dualities of life.

“Through the personal development that is achieved by the inward journey of self-discovery, compassion, understanding and healing, we gain wisdom and strength. These are the tools which will support us during the journey of life.” Made Djirna's expressions are intimate, honest and expose the heartfelt emotions of the human experience. They convey a profound sense of authenticity.

Djirna is currently working on a large installation for the Jakarta Biennale in November 2017.



Rimba, 2011 – Made Djirna



Installation by Made Djirna at his Ubud studio, 2007



Painting from The Logic of Ritual – Made Djirna, 2013

Words & Images: Richard Horstman

*Author's note: No part of the written content of this website may be copied or reproduced in any form, along with article links uploaded to other websites, for any commercial purposes without the written permission of the author. Copyright 2020