

Budi Agung Kuswara: Art's Real Values in Perspective

Art In Bali | Written By, Richard Horstman | June 18th, 2018

Art plays distinctive and irreplaceable roles within the development of a healthy society. Art offers us opportunities to be inspired, become more educated and aware, as well as to observe the thoughts and feelings of our fellow man.

The best contemporary art is essential to our well being, having something important to say about the era we live in. Due to the onslaught of globalisation, however, the financial values of art are becoming increasingly prized, over the real, functional values of art.



Balinese artist Budi Agung Kuswara represents the vanguard of emerging contemporary artists in Bali today who are reshaping the genre. What is significant about this artist, however, is his passion for how art can transform and bring greater meaning to individual lives, while building resilient communities.

‘Kabul’, as he prefers to be known, was born in Sanur in 1982. From the age of twelve he worked beachside selling souvenirs to tourists, and he learned to surf the pristine waves that race along the coast’s outer reefs. Surfing inspired his deep connection with the forces of nature that influence his physical and non-physical worlds. His father was born in

Klungkung, East Bali, the Classical art epicentre of the island. He was raised into the custom of Kamasan painting, the living tradition of story telling art used to decorate the island's temples and the houses of the aristocracy, and serving to convey peace and harmony within Balinese society.



Anonymous Ancestors

As a child painting was a readily accessible mode of expression, nurturing and playful, a medium through which Kabul could later explore his feelings, and ideas about identity and life. "My perspective was different to the traditional cultural identity and I came to understand that I didn't fit in with the mainstream," Kabul said. "So I learned to follow my own path."

The path of an outsider is one of duality – of freedom, yet of isolation as well. Kabul's solitary experiences eventually led to feelings of lack of confidence; at times he felt depressed. His love of art became an increasingly vital activity – a guiding creative force. Motivated by the desire to share and inspire positive change, Kabul wished to capitalise upon what had manifested during his personal struggles while he was a youth – his knowledge of art as a practical tool for self-transformation.



Golden Farmer

Kabul became aware of a community rehabilitation initiative established in 2015 by Rai Putra Wiguna, a psychiatrist at the Denpasar Regional Hospital, along with some of his patients. “RumahBerdaya”, meaning house of empowerment, began as a meeting place for local men and women with schizophrenia, so they could learn new skills, interact and express themselves. Its focus is to create opportunities for the patients to constructively engage with the public, while helping them to regain their status as useful and productive members of society.

“I am inspired by the intervention of art into the public sphere and how it can become increasingly meaningful by responding to problems and needs of society,” Kabul said. “Through my own psychosomatic experiences I understand art is a potent medium for healing and self-empowerment.” In 2016 Kabul began working with “RumahBerdaya” and went on to create the “Skizofriends Art Movement”, that focuses on both art therapy, and life-skills training programs. “I am committed to eliminating the stigma attached to people suffering from mental illness, while promoting their inclusion in society,” he said.



Pleasure

Following on from the success of Kabul and his colleague's efforts in the lobbying of the Denpasar Government "Skizofriends Art Movement" in 2017, it became a part of the Denpasar City Health Department Care Program, and is still ongoing. "By introducing a simple, sustainable model of how an organised art program can beneficially function for people, we immediately gained the government's support," Kabul said. The group was then offered an abandoned building in Jalan Hayam Waruk (next door to the Bali Bakery in Renon) that became "Rumah Berdaya".

From 2002 Kabul spent thirteen years living in Yogyakarta, studying fine art at the prestigious Indonesian Art Institute (ISI), here his work became more politically and socially driven. Charmed by 'orientalism' and how exotic images led to supposed attitudes and ideas of Bali by westerners, in 2013 Kabul started using an old printing technique to experiment with, and explore his ideas about cultural identity, while creating new inroads in Balinese contemporary art.

With his life partner, Singaporean artist Mintio, they are the creative force behind Ketemu Project, in Batubulan. A visual art collective and social enterprise hybrid with a focus on social and international engagement, Ketemu burst onto the scene in 2015 during a critical period in the development of contemporary art infrastructure in Bali, injecting important fresh energy into the Bali art world.

Look out for Kabul's art "Anonymous Ancestors", on exhibition, and featured on all promotional media, in the upcoming 2018 UWRF, 24-28 October.

www.budiagungkuswara.com
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