

REAL BALI | ART IN BALI

Weaving the Ocean:

ARI BAYUAJI'S LANDMARK SOCIAL ENVIRONMENTAL ART PROJECT ACHIEVES INTERNATIONAL EXPOSURE

BY RICHARD HORSTMAN

Indonesian born contemporary artist Ari Bayuaji has an intimate relationship with the ocean. An association that spans two decades and embraces two distinct viewpoints. Ari has ritually walked Sanur beach, stretching more than five kilometres; often exploring the mangrove forests fringing Serangan harbour. As an avid diver, the isolation within the vast and mysterious aquatic realm below offers him an alternative perspective. These enjoyable past times also serve as vital opportunities for artistic research.



The pandemic, starting in March 2020, impacted us in many ways. The threat of illness became a real possibility. International tourism closed. The Bali economy, overly dependent on tourism, plunged, and an unsettling psychological ambience swept the island. For Bali's many artists, however, this uncertainty intensified their practice. Passionate about Balinese culture (with a love of traditional textiles) and sensitive to his surroundings and the island's ever-changing social dynamics, Ari was inspired to merge his obsessions to explore new artistic territory.

Ari's initial environmental statement in 2015 'Paradise Almost Lost' #1,2,3&4, digital photographs describing the shape and colours of plastic trash littering the beach and mangroves fused poetic beauty with the dread and irony of environmental tragedy. His images were featured in the group Art/Science exhibition '125,660 Specimens of Natural History' in South Jakarta. A response to the pandemic, 'Weaving the Ocean' is Ari's next evolution as an environmentally engaged artist. This project, however, has broader social implications.

REAL BALI | ART IN BALI

Ari's abstract two-dimensional compositions boasting blue, green, yellow, orange and golden tones shimmer with a fresh aesthetic dynamic. They reflect light akin to morning rays of sun glistening upon the water's surface and the pulsating rhythms of the ocean. He may add vibrant acrylic paint colours in geometric shapes or depictions of Balinese traditional jukung fishing boats floating upon the water. This offers beautiful contrasts while developing the narrative content and imaginative potential of the work. Frayed plastic fibres may protrude from the compositions enhancing the visual impact.

His 3-Dimensional works vary from pieces of coral and old ocean artefacts strewn with plastic threads, textile pieces strung from ceilings arranged as installations, fashion items and representations of the mythical Balinese creatures Barong and Randga decorated with plastic fibres, and fabulous flowing hair.

"I was inspired to collect discarded plastic ropes, string and fishing nets littering the shoreline and trapped within the branches of the mangroves," Ari told me. "I recognised the material had creative potential. So I began working with a Balinese family of traditional textile weavers in Sanur whose business they abandoned due to the halt of tourism. My wish was to utilise the colourful plastic fibres to weave unusual tapestries." The idea, however, was met with various technical challenges.

"Desak Nyoman Rai, my head weaver who has been with the project since its inception, explained it was impossible to use plastic threads in the endek weaving technique because of the fibre's slippery qualities. We then combined the plastic with cotton threads by tying lengths together. The cotton holds the plastic threads tightly to become like fabric. The weaving process was complicated because of the many knots in the threads, which often became stuck in the loom and tore the cotton. The solution was to manipulate the weaving action slowly. After months of trial and error, the outcome was spectacular textiles. Ari's imagination revelled in possibilities, transforming trash into elegant two and three-dimensional artworks.



REAL BALI | ART IN BALI

The installation, highlighting floating jellyfish suspended from the ceiling, emerge two creative disciplines, one as an artist and the other as an engineer. Beautifully designed and crafted bamboo forms function as the creature's headpiece and structure to which long plastic cords, its tentacles, are attached. Central to the installation is the mythical Balinese creature, part elephant, part fish, the Gajah Mina. Guardian of fisherman while venturing across the oceans, the Gajah Mina is carved into the wooden bow of the jukung. Its likeness often adorns the temples around Sanur. A representation of the God of the Sea, Dewa Baruna, the Gajah Mina, observes the giant jellyfish floating above, surrounded by plastic waste.

"Weaving the Ocean is an excellent triple-bottom line initiative. It is environmentally-friendly by recycling waste materials, socially responsible by providing alternative incomes to local people, and economically viable through artwork sales. CTC is very interested in working with

Ari has presented 'Weaving the Ocean' in solo and group exhibitions in Germany in August 2020 and Taiwan in October 2021. Then in Thailand in February 2022, in Singapore in February 2022, in Canada, in May 2022, and in Singapore again at the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, July 2022, ArtJog, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, July 2022 and in Jakarta, Indonesia at the region's premiere boutique art fair ArtJakarta, in August 2022. His current presentation of 'Weaving the Ocean' opened to the public at the Coral Triangle Center, Sanur 3 September and continues throughout 2022. The exhibition includes an installation, 2-Dimensional works and a video explaining the artist's process of transforming plastic ropes into textiles and how complex yet innovative this community art project is.

Ari and promoting his community artwork," Coral Triangle Center (CTC) Executive Director Rili Djohani told NOW!Bali Magazine. With a mission to inspire and train generations to care for coastal and marine ecosystems, CTC is an Indonesian marine conservation foundation and learning facility.

"CTC are proud that 'Weaving the Ocean' originated from Sanur, where we are based. Aligned with CTC's mission, Ari's exhibition has inspired many visitors to learn more about his initiative. Many are in awe of how the plastic ropes are transformed into beautiful textiles and artworks. The exhibition provides CTC with the opportunity to inform the public about plastic pollution on a global scale, the types

REAL BALI | ART IN BALI

of plastics and marine debris in the ocean and what we can do to address this problem."

"A unique aspect of 'Weaving the Ocean' is that it provides eight full-time and ten part-time Balinese with sustainable incomes since the pandemics beginning," Ari stated. "The project has demonstrated that the Balinese may retain their traditional skills yet diversify their business model to access emerging markets and be less dependent upon tourism."

Born in Mojokerto, East Java, in 1975, Ari Bayuaji is an international artist living and working between Montreal, Canada and Bali. A civil engineer graduate from Malang University in 1998, he worked as an assistant product designer with an interior design company in Denpasar. Ari studied design and drawing in Germany in 2001 and then Fine Arts at Concordia University, Montreal, from 2005 to 2010. In 2005 he opened Osik Design, a studio and gallery in Montreal displaying his woodwork and colourful designs.

Part visual artist and part craftsman with an eye for architectural form, Ari has created a distinct voice within Indonesian art. His fusion of old and new items, stone and timber ornaments, and metal relics resonates with bygone qualities of colour, texture, and symbols inspiring myths or bygone scenarios. Ari's gift is to merge seemingly unrelated objects to create captivating art works.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of The Republic of Indonesia commissioned a 'Weaving the Ocean' documentary produced as part of the 13th Bali Democracy Forum. The eighteen-minute video is shown in Indonesian embassies worldwide to help promote Bali and Ari's special project. 'Weaving the Ocean' will be presented in solo exhibitions in November in Sydney, Australia, Singapore, in March 2023, and Montreal, Canada, in March 2023.

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Weaving the Ocean
Balinese traditional
textile weaver
Desak Nyoman Rai.
Image Ari Bayuaji