

Ari Bayuaji explores superficial judgment in 'Golden'



Judgement call: A visitor and her dog take in Ari Bayuaji's newest minimalist project "Golden". (Courtesy of Ari Bayuaji/-)

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Indonesian artist Ari Bayuaji has made a career out of taking everyday objects and putting his own creative twist on them to create artwork full of symbolism and meaning.

His latest project, "Golden", does exactly this. During his residency in Düsseldorf, Germany, Ari decided to tackle the complex issues of immigration and discrimination.

As an Indonesian who splits his time between Quebec in Canada and Bali, Ari has seen firsthand how outsiders can be treated.

"Living as an immigrant in Canada, I have witnessed some challenging situations where color, ethnic background, sexual orientation and political views are still subject to judgment and discrimination," Ari told The Jakarta Post in an email interview from Düsseldorf.



The exhibition was inspired by the signage that is typically used to adorn old storefronts. A shop's name would haphazardly hang from a makeshift wooden sign attached with a metal wire.

In this project, these old signs are an allegory for snap judgments made by people who label others just by looking at the color of their skin. Such labels are not only assigned onto others, as a person can have their own self-labels.

"Some people put a kind of signage on their chest as if to demonstrate that their ideology is 'golden', or better than that of 'the other'," Ari said.

This type of hierarchical judgment is especially relevant at a time when political differences seem to be aggressively dividing communities globally.

The setting for his exhibition is perfect for his message of unity. It is being displayed in Malkastenpark, a public park located within Düsseldorf where people gather communally for various activities.



Under the sun: Malkastenpark in Düsseldorf, Germany, is perhaps the perfect place to showcase Ari Bayuaji's exhibition, which calls for unity and community. (Courtesy of Ari Bayuaji/-)

The city itself also happens to be art-centric and contains a diverse population, all of which play well into Ari's themes of inclusion and harmony.

The exhibition is specifically being hosted by Parkhaus, a garden shed located on the grounds of Malkastenpark, which, for the past 22 years, has been used for experimental art. Ari is the first international artist not based in Germany to be given a residency and exhibition at Parkhaus.

Parkhaus is integral to the art scene in Düsseldorf, and each exhibit opening has become a ritualistic gathering of artists around the city and beyond. Even when exhibits are not being shown, artists can be seen gathering beneath the area's trees to share a drink and socialize.

However, Parkhaus is in danger of being shut down. Even though Ari has only been there for a short time, he is among a large group of creative people who are backing an effort to keep it open.

"Parkhaus has contributed enormously to the arts community in Germany and, for that matter, in Europe as a whole," he said.



The artist: Ari Bayuaji is the first international artist not based in Germany to receive a residency at Parkhaus in Düsseldorf. (Courtesy of Wilko Austermann/-)

To construct the sculptures for the exhibition, Ari used a variety of materials, including ready-made pieces and natural objects such as stones and wood that were found in Malkastenpark. He also applied acrylic paint on the surfaces of his three-dimensional sculptures in order to connect them, creating a cohesive narrative.

"The colors of the plywood, the stone, the metal and the acrylic paint reflect the colors of human skin," Ari said.

The paintings on the sculptures are abstractions more than they are concrete drawings, and they are seemingly shapeless. Ari did this purposefully in order to offer a sense of familiarity while also proposing something new to each viewer. A viewer might even see something completely new with each look.

The timing of Ari's residency was chosen in order to coincide with Sommerfest, a massive art festival held at Malkastenpark on July 12. Many other festivals also occur during this time of year, including the graduation ceremony of Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, one of the top art schools in the country. His exhibit will remain up until July 22.

As crowds mingled on a nice night for Sommerfest, it was clear that Ari's goal of community and unity was achieved at least for one evening. Thousands of visitors gathered as one at Malkastenpark, and judgments seemed to be directed toward art rather than one another. (ste).