

Entang Wiharso crosses cultures and borders through art



Artist Entang Wiharso (ASEAN Secretariat/File)

Audrey Cahyadi (The Jakarta Post)

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Three beautiful pieces by renowned Indonesian artist Entang Wiharso that explore cross-cultural interactions between modern-day borders take center stage at an exhibition in Jakarta to mark ASEAN's 51st anniversary.

Artist Entang Wiharso's three floor-to-ceiling mixed-media art pieces immediately catch visitors' eyes at the gallery of the ASEAN Secretariat in Jakarta, where the exhibit will be held through Aug. 31. The exhibit also presents works of art by young and veteran artists from ASEAN countries.

Titled *Diam Berdiri (Standing Silently)*, *Mama Bear 1* and *Mama Bear 2*, the pieces convey a powerful message of protecting youth as they try to adapt to today's changing political climate and global influences, both good and bad.

The artist uses every aspect of his work to broadcast his meaning further, whether through the vibrant colors, selected objects or in the use of shapes.

Entang said he believed art was the best way to send a message, especially one as powerful as this.

“Art is a very effective tool because its language is very universal. Everybody can sense [what is going on]. Usually, people say ‘I don’t understand’. But now, they understand,” Entang said. “It can be through color or composition or lines, you know. And then if somebody wants to learn more, they can keep digging and learning slowly to develop a better sense.”



Mama Bear I by Entang Wiharso (JP/Audrey Cahyadi)

Born in Tegal, Central Java, in 1967, the award-winning artist is known for his mission to promote the Indonesian culture through his art.

Entang had always been interested in art and the idea of creating something new from a young age — something he credited to a lack of toys during childhood, which led him to make his own through natural materials.

“Playing with my friends, I thought, ‘We should create wayang or puppetry, but using really basic materials like something that could be found in a garden. We also used plates and buckets and spoons to create music,” said Entang, who studied at the Indonesia Arts Institute (ISI) in Yogyakarta.

To this day, the artist has never stuck to just one medium and has created all kinds of artwork, from paintings to sculptures to installations, and even performance art that mixes surrealism with a touch of realism.

His art has been shown all over the world, from Indonesia to China, Germany, the United States, Italy and to the Czech Republic.

For his ASEAN exhibition, Entang opted to create three eye-catching pieces. Gallery visitors bee-lined to his artwork, and many took pictures and talked to the artist about their details.

Among the three pieces, Diam Berdiri (Silently Standing) particularly captured the visitors' attention, showing a figure in pastel pink with an emotionless face.



Diam Berdiri (Silently Standing) by
Entang Wiharso (JP/Audrey Cahyadi)

Through this piece, Entang said he hoped to portray a person looking silently toward the future while trying to understand the increasing globalization, social problems and violence occurring today. The figure holds a knife in one hand, symbolizing a form of protection in today's ever-changing world.

"[The knife] is a weapon, like a gun. When people created guns, it was with the intention to protect, not to hurt or to kill people. It was to protect, to be used for hunting to provide for the family," said Entang.

The other two pieces are displayed against another wall, both in a shade of dark blue with brown eyes. Part of the Mama Bear series, the artist was paying tribute to mothers protecting their children against the dangers of the outside world, where they could be exposed to negative ideas like racism, fanaticism and prejudice.



Watchful eyes: An artwork titled Mama Bear 2 by Entang Wiharso features many eyes, which represent a mother's watchful gaze to protect her children. (JP/Audrey Cahyadi)

Entang specifically addresses the increasing radicalization in Indonesia, incorporating the socio-political dynamics of his home country in his work.

The artist explained that the dark blue symbolized sadness in its cool tone and that the eyes represented the ever-watchful mothers.

“So many bad things happen these days like racism, violence, people with a really narrow mind-set, fanatics, and I think blue, for me, represents sadness. But [it also represents] silence, because blue is a cool color. It does not tell just one thread, but so many threads. So many stories [are told] through this color.”