



Albert Yonathan's performance with his work *Cosmic Labyrinth, The Bells* at the opening ceremony of Jogja Biennale XI; photo: Herkristi Kusumaningtyas.

Equator's Heat: Biennale Jogja XI 2011

RIFKY EFFENDY

The Jogja Biennale has been going on since the nineties but it was only recently, in its eleventh episode in 2011, that it included artists from abroad. This biennale realised a new curatorial platform, focusing on bilateral cultural dialogues within the contemporary art world of equatorial countries. In *Equator #1*, the organisers chose to focus on contemporary art developments in Indonesia and India. The event took the title of 'Shadow Lines: Indonesia Meets India' and was held from 26 November 2011 to 8 January 2012. This undertaking may bring to mind what curators and artists from Thailand, Burma, Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia did in 2006–2008 with the Mekong Art and Cultural Project, a forum for discussions, workshops, and exhibitions within the context of the shared culture among the nations comprising the Mekong region.

The cultural encounter between India and Indonesia began with the spread of the Hindu religion in Southeast Asia. Traces of the Hindu-Indian culture are evident in ancient

temples found across Java. Even today, we can still see traces of this culture in personal names and the existing traditional rituals, and on the island of Bali where Hinduism remains the predominant religion. Products of Indian pop culture such as Bollywood films are also quite popular in Indonesia. The Indonesian art public, however, has largely been ignorant about the contemporary art development in India. Problems pertaining to the lacking art infrastructure and government support in the two countries make large-scale cultural exchanges between them a rarity. The endeavour made by the organisers of Biennale Jogja XI was an important initiative in the effort to bring the art and craft culture of Indonesia to the world stage.

Works by forty artists were selected by two curators: Alia Swastika from Indonesia and Suman Gopinath from India. They detected a range of similarities and differences as various artists of the two countries try to deal with such issues as faith, spirituality, mythology, and religiosity, as well as issues pertaining to power and identity seen in the local and global contexts. The themes were



Andy Dewantoro, *You Were There*, 2011, installation view, Jogja Biennale XI; image courtesy the artist; photo: Arief Sukardono



Arya Pandjalu and Sara Nuytemans, *Bird Prayers*, 2007-11, installation view, Jogja Biennale XI; image courtesy the artist; photo: Dwi Oblo

presented in a variety of works and idioms, and displayed in two locations: Jogja National Museum and Bentara Budaya.

Strong traces of spirituality could be detected in the forms and idioms chosen by the artist Albert Yonathan (Indonesia, b. 1983) in his work *Cosmic Labyrinth: The Bells* (2011), an installation consisting of hundreds of terracotta bells spread on the floor, accompanied by a series of drawing works on the wall displaying geometric patterns. The series of drawings was connected to another wall with a thread. Displayed on another wall were several monitors recording the artist's performance as he arranged the bells to resemble a mini labyrinth on the floor. Here Yonathan articulated a certain spiritual stance in the face of various kinds of violent acts committed by different parties in the name of religion. The bells and the rhythmical arrangements gave rise to a distinct contemplative atmosphere. Meanwhile, the wall installation by Anita Dube (India, b. 1958), *Neti Neti (not this, not either)* (2011), took the form of a random arrangement of eyeballs,

which symbolise the sacred quality of humanity, conveying the artist's dream about a better future.

Religious icons were abundant, as seen in the collaborative work of object installation and performative photography titled *Bird Prayers* (2007–2011), by Arya Pandjalu (Indonesia, b. 1977) and Sara Nuytemans (The Netherlands, b. 1971), which was the artists' response towards the many conflicts between different religious groups. The work uses the metaphor of helms that took the shape of houses of worship. Meanwhile, the artist Pushpamala N (India, b. 1956), with her photography project titled *Motherland – The Festive Tableau* (2009), reconstructed the paradoxical images representing the history of the Indian independence movement in the 19th century, the weapon-carrying goddess Durga sitting on a lion and in resplendent costume. In Pushpamala's work, violence and religious institution seemed to be inseparable.

Today's artists often deal with such weighty themes as the paradox between religion and violence, albeit in light packages that



KP Reiji, *School*, (detail), 2011; image courtesy the artist



Pushpamala N, *Motherland - The Festive Tableau* (detail), 2009; image courtesy the artist

incorporate elements of pop, as shown in the work by Wedhar Riyadi (Indonesia, b. 1980), *Holy War #1 and 2* (2011), displayed on the wall along the staircase. Meanwhile, the work by KP Reiji (India, b. 1972), *School* (2011), was a triptych with illustrations that resemble those found in school books, presenting fragments of daily life linked with mythological stories from Hindu texts such as the *Bhagavad Gita*, *Ramayana*, or *Mababbarata*. To him, different texts in mythology generally taught us about morality and manners, which we sometimes took as a reference as we considered or committed certain acts. Meanwhile, Titarubi (Indonesia, b. 1968), in her work *Bacalah* (Read, 2011), presented a wooden school table with an open book lying on it, with thousands of blank pages. The work seemed to say how holy texts were the essence of void.

India and Indonesia are two countries and nation states with similar histories of religious violence in the postcolonial era. Political strategies using elements of religion and culture, as well as of economy, as a means to strengthen or seize power, are the 'smouldering fire' that is continually rekindled and maintained. The difference lies in the fact that in India, whose majority of population are Hindu, the link with the ancestral culture is still

strongly felt and reflected in daily life. Meanwhile, in Indonesia, the essential values of the old traditions have mostly been diminished. Popular culture now dominates as the key cultural reference including in religious life. In this biennale, therefore, the special booth that presented the Bollywood film archive, complete with their 'celebrity heroes', was not something that the public urgently needed, as one can easily find displays of related ephemera at the street-side vendors selling pirated Bollywood DVDs across Yogyakarta.

It is perhaps more urgent, and also challenging, to introduce the contemporary art from India, to show how art confronts the increasingly stronger popular culture of the mainstream, which gives rise to stereotypical values. This is true in India as well as in Indonesia. With the shared culture arising from the traditions of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam that have evolved for centuries in the two countries, one expected the Biennale work to be open to various communication channels and to have 'dialogues' with their audience. The public, for example, might have learned something from the work by Sakshi Gupta (India, b. 1979), *Reality Bites* (2006), in which a weaving of red



RESTLESS

ADELAIDE INTERNATIONAL 2012

Curated by Victoria Lynn

Including the work of 18 leading international contemporary artists, located over four public galleries in Adelaide.

2 March - 5 April 2012

www.adelaidefestival.com.au
www.finders.edu.au/artmuseum

Flinders University City Gallery

State Library of South Australia, North Terrace, Adelaide, SA, 5000

ADELAIDE FESTIVAL
2-11 MARCH 2012



Postcommodity, *With salvage and my knife tongue* 2011-12, still from four-channel video installation with sound, courtesy the artists



Sakshi Gupta, *Reality Bites*, 2006, red chillies, wooden cot; installation view, Jogja Biennale XI; image courtesy the artist and Galleryske; photo: Dwi Oblo

chillies became a screen installed over a bed. The work represented complex emotions arising in a certain spatial context. The work by Andy Dewantoro (Indonesia, b. 1973), *We Were There* (2011), took the form of a miniature building in Gothic architecture, which brought to mind the various neglected and even forgotten buildings in different cities all over the world.

As a mark of the new stage in the tradition of the Jogja Biennale, *Equator #1* is expected to contribute to contemporary art's development in Indonesia, especially in the global context. New discourses should hopefully arise from this undertaking, which might serve as an alternative for Indonesia to re-view globalisation from another angle, rather than simply noisily celebrating it by presenting celebrity artists or international high-fliers. Considering Indonesia's existing art infrastructure and policies, as well as the dismal government support for contemporary art, it is not yet possible to hold large-scale biennales here. This new platform provides us with an alternative for independent biennales with distinct curatorial policies. It also presents the art public with the possibility to examine different developments in art in a comparative fashion, considering shared and different histories, cultures, and social and political surroundings.

Spot the difference



Do you have the training to identify an authentic work?

Graduate Certificate in Art Authentication

May 28th, 29th, 30th, 31st & 1st June 2012

Issues in Art Fraud

History & Theory of Art Authentication

August 20th, 21st, 22nd, 23rd & 24th 2012

Introduction to Art Authentication Techniques

Art Authentication Investigative Project (Individual Research Project)

In art production, collection, trade and conservation, authenticity is a concern that reaches from the studio to the courtroom. Artists, curators, collectors, conservators, police, lawyers, and insurance providers can all be engaged in issues relating to authentication.

Offered by the University of Melbourne, Melbourne Consulting and Custom Programs, in conjunction with the Centre for Cultural Materials Conservation, the **Graduate Certificate in Art Authentication** provides participants with an understanding of the rigorous, analytical interdisciplinary approach and the broad skill base that are needed to deal with issues of authentication and art fraud.

Registration

To obtain an application form please contact Pamela Salvo:

p.salvo@commercial.unimelb.edu.au

Venue

Graduate House, 220 Leicester St, Carlton Vic 3053

For further information visit:

www.mccp.unimelb.edu.au/artauth



Equator #1, Jogja Biennale XI 2011: 'Shadow Lines: Indonesia Meets India' took place 26 November 2011 to 8 January 2012; see related article in *Art Monthly Australia* #246, December/Summer 2011/12 by the Biennale's co-curator Alia Swastika.

Rifky Effendy is Jakarta-based and born, and studied art in Bandung. Since 1997 he has worked as a curator in Indonesia and abroad as well as writing articles. This article was translated from bahasa Indonesian by Rani E. Ambyo.

ARTISTS' INSURANCE \$230 as part of NAVA's Professional Membership

go to www.visualarts.net.au

NAVA
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION
FOR THE VISUAL ARTS LTD