

Ari Bayuaji: Finding New Meaning in Art

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Jakarta. Art is a playground for the imagination with the power to encode itself permanently into our memories, especially art of the caliber we seldom observe. When you merge the ambience and values of modern design, balancing form and space, with the aura of cultural artefacts into works of art, the results can be creations that stand alone in their presence and context.

Ari Bayuaji is an artist who achieves such distinction and justifiably is gaining the attention of international curators and collectors.

A civil engineer by training, with experience in art and design production, Ari is gifted with acute sensibilities, honed from an early age when he began exercising his eye to the beauty within ordinary objects.

"I started collecting found objects when I was a small child. The initial attraction was purely imaginative, and my parents were always encouraging, yet it was my father who was to instill within me a curiosity that evolved into a love of art and culture," says Ari, who was born in Mojokerto, East Java, in 1975, and lives and works between Canada and Bali.

"I have been using found, or old objects as the material and subject matter in almost all of my artworks. These objects might be old, but the 'content' as a work of art is completely new as I inject my work with emotion that's also influenced by contemporary issues that I seek to address."

After graduating from university in Malang in 1998, Ari worked as an assistant product designer with an interior design company in Denpasar. He then ventured abroad to Germany where he studied design and drawing, as well as traveling across Europe exploring museums and historical sites. Returning to Indonesia, Ari pursued design projects while immersing himself within Balinese art and culture, and in 2004 he moved to Canada to study fine art at the Concordia University of Montreal.

Ari shipped quantities of collected objects to Montreal and, inspired by his new urban, Western environment, and driven by self-discipline and determination, any spare moment was ripe to channel imagination into creation. In 2005 he opened Osik Design, a studio and gallery displaying his woodwork and colorful designs.

In 2008 Ari won a Bronze Prize in the Danfoss Award, a global competition open to students of art, design and architecture. In 2011 he was commissioned to create "Giving Our Heart," an exhibition of installations at Marguerite-Bourgeoys Museum at Notre-Dame-de-Bon-Secours Chapel, Montreal.

“I am fascinated by life and inspired by that which is around me, memories from the past, even the people who have touched my heart.”

The Balinese spiritual way of life has had a special impact upon Ari.

“How they prepare ceremonial offerings, transforming ordinary natural resources into spiritual objects with such devotion and attention to detail helps me to appreciate the dedication required to truly share with nature,” he says. “This helps me understand on a deeper dimension that faith is the heart of culture.”

Guided by his unique inner radar, the variety of items he utilizes is unrestricted. Part visual artist and part craftsman, with an eye for architectural form, Ari’s perception is open, constantly striving to create work that has the essence of being fresh and vibrant.

A strong understanding of the art of placement – the dynamics of contrast and complementation – is at the foundation of Ari’s fusion of old and new items. Stone and timber ornaments, metal relics, resonating with bygone qualities of color, texture and/or symbols may inspire myths, or bygone scenarios.

Juxtapose these with modern forms, carefully planned touches of color, even pop culture imagery – such associations then become a catalyst for the imagination – rousing future orientated contemplation. Viewing Ari’s sculptures and installations may be an experience in traversing linear time – the present moment gives way to the past, transforms, then hints towards the future.

Notable projects include "Silence," 2014 at the Esplanade Theatre by the Bay, Singapore, a commissioned installation comprising of 1,400 traditional wooden bells suspended from the ceiling. A solo exhibition of sculptures at Rene Blouin Gallery, Montreal, early in 2015, followed by a two-month residency program this year at the United World College of South East Asia, Singapore, and upcoming in 2016 a residency at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.

Unusual works include "Untitled (After The Winged Victory of Samothrace)," 2012 – a marble pedestal becomes the plinth for a piece of ocean-bleached driftwood ordained with a touch of turquoise blue paint, and, "There Was Some Big Parties' (Time Capsule)," 2014 featuring an old wooden box with various old metal bracelets and old bronze percussive instruments decorating the interior.

A heightened sense of observation translates perfectly into photography – Ari regularly compiles visual diaries of inspiring scenery, objects, and moments – functioning both as essential references, and works of fine art. Open from Aug. 15, 125,660 Specimens of Natural History, an Art/Science exhibition at Komunitas Salihara, South Jakarta, features “Paradise Almost Lost” #1,2,3&4, digital photographs taken by Ari in a remote mangrove forest in Bali.

This group exhibition challenges 25 artists from Indonesia and abroad to respond to the work of A. R. Wallace (1823-1913), recognized as one of the figures who defined the Theory of Evolution. From 1854 to 1862, the renowned British naturalist traveled the archipelago documenting its vast ecological diversity, that later was to featured in various European museums collections.

“I was both captured and astonished by the colors and shapes of an abundance of plastic

trash littering the beach and 'adorning' the trees," says Ari of his photos that merge poetic beauty with the dread and irony of environmental tragedy.

"There were no birds within this 'plastic landscape,' only colorful plastic bags, reminding me of 'Native Shooting the Great Bird of Paradise,' an illustration from Wallace's book "The Malay Archipelago." At first glance the surreal scenario appeared like an art installation rather than a scene of ecological ruin. As an artist who employs found objects in my works, I found this project to be both challenging, and essential. Art is not only about esthetics, at its core it is also about provocation."

125,660 Specimens of Natural *Until Sept. 15*

Komunitas Salihara Galeri Salihara, Jalan Salihara No. 16 South Jakarta

www.salihara.org