

The Jakarta Post

Tuesday, March 29, 2011 21:43 PM

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ART AND DESIGN

For you Singapura!

Carla Bianpoen, Contributor, Singapore | Sat, 03/26/2011 9:36 PM | Art and Design

A | A | A |



As Singapore's dignitaries on stage "shot" confetti into the air, the Old Kallang Airport that was closed down in 1955 came to life again on March 12, kicking off the third edition of the Singapore Biennale.

Because it was organized by the Singapore Art Museum, led by a Singaporean arts director, and themed after the city state's open house tradition, where locals open up homes to friends during festivities, the biennale initially comes across as a Singaporean affair.

But upon closer inspection, one will notice an impressive Australian

MY WE, by Louie Cordero, fiberglass figures impaled with found objects.

connection. Matthew Ngui, the Biennale's artistic director, is a practicing artist who has spent most of his life in Australia.

Russell Storer, one of the curators of the Biennale, is from the Queensland Art Gallery, and Trevor Smith, the other curator who now works for the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, the US, was formerly from Perth. Meanwhile Broadsheet, the biennale's official art magazine, is published in Australia.

The show features 161 works by 63 artists from 30 countries and is spread across several venues: The Singapore Art Museum (SAM), SAM at 8Q, the National Museum, the old Kallang Airport and Marina Bay.

Because the Biennale encouraged artists to demonstrate how they created their art, rather than focus on their finished work, the outcome was not overly exciting.

Many of the important processes the artists used may have been crucial to the curators, but is unlikely to be understood by simple audiences, let alone appeal to them.

Yet some of the artist talks helped shed light on what their artworks were about, rendering them more appealing to the public.

Thai artist Arin Runjang for instance explained that his living room installation titled Unequal Exchange, which is filled with IKEA furniture, was inspired by Thai workers in Singapore who are allowed to come and swap their piece of furniture with one of IKEA's for the duration of the show.

On the other hand. Ming Wong's acting in a five channel video installation Devo partire. Domani appealed to many without the artist having to elaborate on the process of creation.

Similarly, Australian artist Gosia Wlodarczak's drawings that appeared like scribbles on glass windows and partitions are fascinating without words, but became even more interesting when she explained she had been "documenting" her every single act, thought or movement for 12 days.

Meanwhile, painter, cartoonist, sculptor and musician Louie Cordero's installation MY WE consists of peculiar sculptures of monstrous or wounded bodies stabbed with knives and arrows, akin to a cross between cartoons, local stories and mythology.

At SAM 8Q, South African Candice Breitz brilliantly explores the theme of identification in identical twins and

identical triplets in a multi-channeled video installation titled Factum.

Roslsham Ismail aka ISE offers an interesting insight into the links between financial affordability and the food content of the fridge of six families in Singapore in his installation titled Secret Affair.

Standing out at the National Museum, is Vietnamese Tiffany Chung's work which seeks to find ways humans will survive in the face of environmental depletion such as global warming and rising sea levels. Rethinking urban planning, she proposes a floating city with floating houses.

She designs houseboats inspired by architecture typically seen in communities from Srinagar (Kashmir, India), Tonle Sap Lake (Cambodia), Halong Bay (Vietnam), Sangklaburi (Thailand); and in Gifu as well as Yamaguchi (Japan).

Contrasting to the technical aspect of her work, are her delicate and intricately embroidered cartographic maps.

Embroidery is also used by the Chinese photographer couple Shao Yinong and Muchen in their Spring and Autumn series of obsolete currencies. Using the refined technique of traditional Suzhou embroidery, only used for the Emperor, the beautiful silk embroidery of bank note images on transparent material reflect the power and beliefs of regimes before and after the revolution.



Singapura Fiction a work by members of the Ruangrupa group from Indonesia.

Impressive embroidery is also used to highlight censored knowledge like in Kyungah Ham's work on show at the Old Kallang Airport.

His designs for Nagasaki and Hiroshima Mushroom Clouds were made by the artist in Seoul and embroideries were commissioned from North Korean factories through various intermediaries.

No doubt Japanese artist Tatzu Nishi's Merlion Hotel at the Marina Bay is the most visible of art works. Covering the Merlion in a sort of cube construction, it appears to add to Singapore's visible tourist destinations as it stands across the Flyer and the Marina Sands.

Yet not all is gold that glitters. The Indonesian arts group Ruangrupa at the National Museum showcases Singapore's hidden realities while at Old Kallang, Singaporean artist Charles Lim's video uncovers the dirt and waste that flow underneath the city's waterways.

Singapore Biennale 2011: Open House

Until 15 May
Daily shuttle buses to the various venues
start from Singapore Art Museum (SAM)

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