

## **MEMBACA ULANG KEMAKMURAN – Rereading Prosperity**

Guest at Kunstraum Engländerbau | Indonesia and Liechtenstein

30 May to 23 July 2023 | Soboman 219 Artspace in collaboration with Visarte Liechtenstein

Every year Visarte Liechtenstein has the opportunity to host an exhibition at the Kunstraum Engländerbau. A central concern of the association is an ongoing exchange and networking program with artists and artists' groups from the region and abroad. Based on this an exciting cooperation has developed with the Indonesian artists' collective Soboman 219 Artspace from Yogyakarta. The idea of merging or even breaking down geographical, social and cultural boundaries in the Kunstraum Engländerbau has proved to provide an effective dialogue.

Through the mediation of the Liechtenstein-Indonesian artist Fauzie As'Ad, a delegation from Visarte met the Indonesian group last year in Yogyakarta. The participants of this delegation will show their artistic documentation in the small hall.

*My ancestor, a peasant, loved to hoe the paddyfields, the meadows and forests, hacking bravely through the heat without fear, and together with the rain it was ordinary. The wind blows, the rice yellows, the harvest echoes near, signaling the picking of each leaf of rice stalks. Now, the bold peasants all rise to our paddyfield in crowds.*

This spectacle of an artwork reconsiders many of the accumulating realizations of bringing traditional Indonesian values and beliefs into its contemporary society. Rereading into the myth of Dewi Sri, what Indonesia's traditional community built around it, and what it now represents, became the foundation of the work. The space of the Kunstraum Engländerbau is filled with different elements of Javanese social, cultural, and ecological settings. Three integral parts, the Angkringan, Tree Stumps, and Dewi Sri statues, became a way for the meaning of the work to linger. Permanent parts of the work, as well as the on-site projects occurring in the space is a containment of the value of culture and shifting meanings of the Dewi Sri myth.

Bringing the Goddess Dewi Sri and its myth into the work whilst having a look at what surrounds it brought us to multiple issues in relation to the peasant communities. Being an inherited universal myth in many Indonesia's regions made the process of paddy cultivation a ritual of its own, an honoring to the land and nature that brought them prosperity. Having the weight of the nation's prosperity on their shoulders, the community has been put through so much each decade. Forces from the early days of colonization, the Old Order, the New Order, or even the governing national bodies and systems now, various forms of oppressing orders constantly put the community in such a tight spot with their livelihood. Movements of Agrarian reform that illustrates the community's drive for change and resistance, acting upon the injustice they face. The matter for the community's existence might be one thing, but these coercive changes brought big alterations on the vital aspects of their craft and beliefs.

*What becomes of the myth? What is left of the Goddess once all is tyrannized by modernization and machinery? A shift in meaning, or even a loss of meaning. The Goddess, the rice, turning into a capitalistic commodity, only worth what it is good for. There's no longer honor that comes with the processes when it's all done for the sake of making more and having better. Rereading Prosperity comes at a time in between the romanticized state and reality of the nation.*

In the midst of us at the center of it, then, there is the reality of our surroundings – Changing conditions brought by «greater» bodies of the nation, or the disconnect that the coming generations have with their tradition, what we take away from and not give back, all that's left is the earth stripped down out of its own cloth. The 36 tree trunks of varying types encircling the Angkringan, on top of them each, a statue of Dewi Sri, becomes the indication of a feeling of irony, «a blessing» surrounded by a desolate, barren forest of trees. The Dewi Sri myth taught them to be tender and to have respect, yet all is no longer valued and it is not applied, it is left as just mere wishes and hopes.

At the center of the space is a small hut, known in Javanese society as the equivalent of a food vendor, called the *Angkringan*. In this work, it functions as a vessel of human society. The Angkringan in this artwork also serves as a social hub, gathering different people that are in different points of their lives, different backgrounds, and objectives, under a roof that is made from the nature that is surrounding us. Inside the Angkringan also presents an array of spices (*rempah*), that in the original myth came from the remains of Dewi Sri, now being a commodity used to trade.

The three artists turn the space into a working progress. With a 20-meter long cloth hanging on one side of the wall filled with the artists' free roaming strokes is a projection of their views on the issue, as well as expression of the experiences they have from working in a new environment. A performance is also presented, *Cowongan*, a rain-calling ritual originating from peasant communities, and with it a celebratory event, *Memasak Kemakmuran*, where local Indonesian dishes are prepared and eaten as an act of togetherness, whilst being a demonstration of gratitude towards the food and everything the earth has given to humanity.

*Rereading Prosperity* notions about local and internal issues of the nation is one side to be discussed, but bringing such the concept and campaign of ecological matters, that are affected from the changing meanings of traditional folklore into a global stage could mean many things, one of them being to create dialogue of hegemonic issues, planting a root from colonialism to colonial liberation. The presence of raw natural materials, ecology, social settings, and locality in the artwork will become developing chapters for the reintroduction of the parts that are essential in the culture, including rituals, traditions, art, and even gastronomy. The complex process of the artwork, are happenings, or even cultural happenings, that are meant to give a taste of reality, deprecating itself by the myths of a nation that haunts it.

(Text: Soboman 219 Artspace and Visarte Liechtenstein)