

ARI BAYUAJI: WEAVING ART, UNDERSTANDING COLLABORATION

ARTIST ARI BAYUAJI MOBILIZES COMMUNITIES IN BALI TO CREATE WOVEN WORKS USING PLASTIC WASTE.

By Rini Kustiasih 29 January 2024

(The original article can be found in Ari Bayuaji: Menenun Seni, Memaknai Kolaborasi)

Ari Bayuaji (49), an Indonesian artist, exhibited his works at Art SG 2024 held at Marina Bay Sands Expo & Convention Centre in Singapore on Thursday (18/1/2024).

Ari Bayuaji (49) sees art as a spiritual path. His works express his belief that life should be about giving and benefiting others. Born in Mojokerto, East Java, this artist imbues collaboration into his creations.

Two works by Ari titled "The Storm in the Golden Afternoon" and "The Sparkling Waves under the Full Moon" caught the attention of collectors and art enthusiasts at the Art SG event held at Marina Bay Sands Expo & Convention Centre, Singapore from January 17-21, 2024. Visitors to the international art exhibition, which was held for the second time, often couldn't believe that the two pieces, which resemble woven cloth, were made with plastic thread.

The two woven works were displayed in the exhibition booth of Mizuma Gallery, a Japanese gallery with offices in Singapore, Tokyo and New York. At first glance, the two hanging woven works look like fabric in general. However, you can feel the plastic texture when you touch the woven expanse. Knots of plastic thread ties that stick out like bundles of thread left at the end of a stitch bring to the realization that the work is not entirely driven by a loom.

"To connect these plastic threads, we tie them one by one by hand. So, there are dots like this bundle, before we roll them into recycled plastic bottles and put them into the weaving machine," said Ari when met at the exhibition area on Thursday (18/1/2024).

The gradient of colors produced from those plastic threads is very soft. A pattern resembling waves can be seen with a background of alternating dark green and lighter green color shifts. "Sometimes, I have to manually insert the plastic thread because it is impossible to do it all with a weaving tool," she said.

Ari himself has to combine colors in his work to form a pattern. He also cuts each piece of plastic thread and ties it together. However, in order to become a complete work of art, Ari collaborates with many residents of Bali.

Through his project, Weaving the Ocean, Ari specifically invited local weavers, fishermen, and other locals who were affected by the pandemic. Many of them lost their jobs and had to struggle to support their families.

At that time, Ari was unable to leave Bali due to mobility restrictions during the pandemic. He had to postpone his plan to return to Canada, where he had been building a career in fine arts for years and previously studied fine arts at Concordia University (2005-2010).

Not remaining idle, Ari is inspired by environmental problems plaguing Bali. The issue of trash deeply troubles him, as well as the genuine social issues right before him.

"At the beginning of 2020, I started my project by working with Ibu Desak, one of the weavers in Sanur. I tried to utilize plastic waste from the plastic ropes commonly used to tie boats and fishermen. Ibu Desak was my only assistant to help me weave those threads," he remembered his first project.

Other local residents, including several fishermen, also helped him collect plastic ropes from the beach. They were rewarded with Ari's personal money. "At that time, what I was thinking was how to help these people," said Ari, who graduated from the National Institute of Technology in Malang with a degree in civil engineering.

Plastic strings from the beach that have been cleaned up are then woven with cotton thread. The vertical part of the weave uses cotton thread, while the horizontal part uses plastic thread. The combination actually produces a unique work of art. Rich colors emerge from the unravelled fishing nets. "Inside those fishing nets, there are actually so many beautiful colors," he said. His effort pays off. He received support from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) of Indonesia to create a documentary video about his art project. The video caught the attention of his colleagues from various countries. One of his works was even collected by the Kennedy Center in the United States.

When the pandemic began to subside, the opportunity for exhibitions arrived. He brought his various collaborative works to exhibitions in several countries, such as Taiwan, Thailand, and Canada. In those countries, his works were highly appreciated. One of his works was collected by the Contemporary Art Museum in Montreal, Canada. Many of his works were also purchased by the Canadian government.

The benefits of his works are always shared with the supporting community. Ari realizes that his project combines traditional weaving art that is almost extinct in Bali and the concept of art that draws inspiration from current contemporary issues in Bali, namely environmental problems. He wants to share with the community where the work was born.

The spirit of sharing was born from memories of her mother. "My mother always taught me to be useful to others. Being an artist is a job that is related to spirituality. Like other professions, artists can also be like teachers, doctors, engineers who must provide benefits to others," she said. Born to a couple of teachers and an aerobics instructor, Ari is fortunate that his parents have social sensitivity. His family sent several underprivileged children to school in their community while he was young. This spirit of sharing inspires his work.

He also did not want to waste his education at Concordia University. At first, his parents did not agree with Ari's decision to switch from a civil engineering to an artist. However, the calling to become an artist was unbearable.

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Ari used to work as a civil technician in the construction of a villa in Bali. However, he left the job because he felt that the burden was too heavy. He then took a drawing course in Germany. Only a short time in Germany, he returned home because he felt he did not find a future there. The opportunity to become an artist arrived when he was accepted at Concordia University, Canada, in 2005.

In North America, Ari spends his time, among other things, volunteering at the Redpath Museum at McGill University. At the museum, he identifies various antique and ancient items such as keris, batik, statues, and other discoveries from the 19th century, many of which originate from Indonesia. Fortunately, Ari's parents also collect a number of antique items. His parents have several books about antique items and antiques. Armed with this collection of books, Ari identifies various antique and ancient items at the museum.

The path to becoming an artist is becoming more open when he underwent a residency at the Montreal Museum of Fine Art. In the residency, his first artistic expression took the form of strange artefacts, which were a combination of old and new found objects from Indonesia and new objects from Canada. "The result looks like a strange artefact. However, according to me, it is worthy to be kept in the museum," he said.

Since 2011, Ari has been fully immersed in the world of art. He lives in Bali and Canada. His artistic expression was initially poured into sculptures made from recycled materials. For example, old wooden house beams or antique carvings that he transforms into new works with architectural shapes.

However, after his experience in the Weaving the Ocean project, Ari has a new expressive landscape, namely weaving. He hopes that high appreciation from international art enthusiasts for his work will also awaken global awareness to preserve the environment and share with those marginalized.

Ari Bayuaji

Born: Mojokerto, January 12 1975

Education: Civil Engineering at National Institute of Technology (ITN) Malang (1993-1998), and Fine Arts at Concordia University (2005-2010).

Solo exhibitions include:

- Pierre-Francois Ouellette contemporary art Montreal Quebec, Canada, May 27-August 5, 2023.
- Redbase Gallery Sydney, Australia, 8 November-16 December 2022
- Parkhaus im Malkastenpark Dusseldorf, Germany, 2019
- Theater by The Bay Singapore, 2019
- NUNU Fine Art Taipei, Taiwan, 2018
- Maison du Conseil des Arts de Montreal, 2018