

Agus Suwage goes back to the basics

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Feast of The Sacrifice

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Prominent artist Agus Suwage celebrates the basics in creating art at his latest exhibition, uniquely titled << || >> meaning rewind, pause and fast forward.

The exhibition, which is hosted at the Nadi Gallery until Jan. 12, serves as the artist's reflective journey.

It's like looking at the past and taking a pause before creating new works, Agus told The Jakarta Post, adding that he refused to give the exhibition a theme.

The 55-year-old said that most of the displayed works were from his Daur (Cycle) exhibitions, which were held in Jakarta, New York and Berlin from 2012 to 2013.

A painting of a shark fin, for instance, is a two-dimensional version of my previous three-dimensional work [from Daur]. Some paintings in the second floor of the gallery are also reinterpretations of my old works, added the artist, who studied graphic design at the Bandung Technology Institute.

His latest piece, Feast of the Sacrifice, is an installation made of digital print on canvas that is mounted on wood, a neon sign, vinyl stickers and acrylic paint on a wall. Another new work is Rolasan an oil work on Indomie leftover cardboard boxes.

He said the Feast illustrates his point of view on Idul Adha Day of Sacrifice that honors the willingness of Ibrahim [Abraham] to sacrifice his son Ismail [Ishmael] in compliance with Gods commands.

I am a muallaf, I converted to Islam from Catholicism and I've been conducting the [sacrificing] ritual over the years. However, as an animal lover myself, deep in my heart, I disagree with the sacrificing act because, for me, it's like a massacre, Agus says.

His other work, Rolasan, depicts a person eating instant noodles with nothing other than plate of steamed rice a fact that touches his senses since he considers such habits unfortunate because the instant noodles lack nutritious ingredients.

For the exhibition, the artist embraces various media, showcasing his liberating spirit.

My works are applied on paper, used objects like the Indomie cardboard boxes, zinc media that are often considered second class in the art world, he says.

I've been using such media over the past few years for a personal reason. Those media are really challenging.

In terms of challenges, he found that making the piece 100 Drawing dan 720 Hari (100 Drawings and 720 Days), a series of paintings mostly in watercolor, was tricky. All 100 paintings are a mix of reproductions and new works.

'I did the 100 drawings within 720 days, in between 2012 and 2014, and it was really a tough process because I had to discipline myself in order to finish it,' he said, adding that he also used tobacco juice, stencils and ink for the series.

Grace Samboh, who made introduction for the exhibition, said creating watercolor paintings is harder than using oil and acrylic.

The 100 Drawing, she said, shows the artist's discipline to live in a certain lifestyle to ensure his consistency when finishing the pieces.

'I mean, creating artwork on pieces of paper with watercolors, you'll lose your basic drawing skills if you don't sleep enough, you'll get a shaky hand. That is what the discipline all about,' Grace says.

'There is no room for a mistake with watercolors, while with oil and acrylic you can correct it right away. If you look at 100 Drawing carefully, you'll see that Agus had done each of the paintings perfectly.'

'Photos by JP/Jerry Adiguna