

EXHIBITIONS

Tales From Wounded Land: Eko Nugroho + Wedhar Riyadi

By Katy Donoghue | May 26, 2009 - 10:43 pm



Indonesian contemporaries, Eko Nugroho and Wedhar Riyadi currently have a group show up at Tyler Rollins Fine Art in Chelsea. A few days after the opening Tyler Rollins, the owner of the gallery, walked me around the exhibition. By choosing Nugroho and Riyadi Rollins hoped to convey how young artists in Indonesia deal with contemporary issues and the clash of modern and traditional cultures.

Riyadi and Nugroho grew up in Java, a major art center in Indonesia, just a few years apart and attended the Indonesian Art Institute. They came of age after the 1997 Asian financial market crash. Subsequently, they differ from artists born just a decade before them. Rather than taking politics and social issues head on, their socio-political commentary is latent content.

We started with Riyadi's *In Fashion We Trust* (2009). In it, a vibrating, slime-green teenaged boy sits in a Rayband-wearing skull. The skulls shades are cracked open from its bulging, vieny eyeballs. The kid is wearing new sneakers and a Kangol hat covered in reptilian scales. He is using his dismembered right hand to talk on a cell phone. Behind him is a cartoon-like dragon giving a peace sign and holding a digital camera. Tyler tells me that Riyadi, using comic book aesthetic (ubiquitous across Asia), is commenting on the dark side of popular fads and materialism. "Its a bit more dark, comic-like, but still making a commentary about society," said Rollins. Often used in the background of his work, like in *Under Attack* (2009), are images of corn to symbolize consumerism and tree stumps that represent devastation.

Images of stumps are also used in Nugroho's work, but whereas Riyadi's are detailed and grainy illustrations, Nugroho's stumps are simple and geometric. As a background pattern, Nugroho's stumps evoke the traditional Indonesian craft of batik while criticizing urbanization's decimation. *Agama Manusia (Human Religion) #2* (2008) features a man dressed in traditional Islamic garb against a background of red stumps. In the center of the work is a diamond, representing prosperity. In his pocket next to his peacefully linked hands is a pair of scissors – hinting at the possibility of violence. Embroidered plus and minus signs line the body, referencing the Indonesian tradition of embroidery and binary ways of thinking in religious dogmas.

Indonesia is home to one of the highest populations of Muslims. The form of Islam practiced there is more moderate, incorporating traditional religions like Hinduism and Buddhism. Recently there have been conflicts with a rising group of Islamic fundamentalists who would like to purify how the religion is practiced. "It's a very sensitive issue right now. I think it's interesting to see artists dealing with it. People are naturally very curious about these issues but it's dominated by the Middle East."

Rollins hopes to show a different side of Islam in Indonesia and young Javian artists. Each uses a comic book aesthetic to portray the everyday occurrences of contemporary and traditional crossings. By pairing Nugroho with Riyadi, Rollins has captured the youth of Indonesia, their shared concerns, and their divergent expressions.



Tyler Rollins in front of a work by Eko Nugroho.