

## Innovation and creativity characterize visual arts

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This year saw great artists passing away and leaving a large gap behind them.

Bali's most outspoken female contemporary painter I Gusti Kadek Murniasih (Murni for short), died of cancer in early January at the age of 39.

In October the 74-year-old artist of modern sculpture, Gregorius Sidharta Soegijo, passed away, also due to cancer. He was a proponent of modern art and chairman of the Indonesian Sculptors Association (API).

This year also saw new initiatives and a vibrancy in art creations. For one, Vanessa Sutanto shifted away from the limitations of a gallery, setting up Vanessa Art Link in the Kuningan area of South Jakarta, which was to open a wider scope of world connections.

In a follow-up, she opened her 900-square-meter, two-floor gallery of the same name in Beijing. The joint exhibition of top Indonesian and Chinese artists was a groundbreaking event.

Auction houses faced slightly less enthusiasm of bidders, but mostly persisted in standing tall. Borobudur Auctioneers launched their own modern facility for auctions, the first of its kind in the country, and expanded their auctions of Southeast Asian art with a separate part on Chinese contemporary art.

Larasati Auctioneers booked surprise success at their groundbreaking Bali auction, held as part of the Bali Bangkit project organized by art collectors in collaboration with Bali partners.

The project focused on the island's arts and culture, which was considered to be on the verge of disappearing into an overwhelming global trend.

The project also included special exhibits of rare masks and wayang puppets, Balinese dance performances and demonstrations of Balinese art production as well as the launch of the Bali Bravo, Lexicon of Balinese painters by Agus Dermawan.

A lexicon of Modern Indonesian Artists also saw the light this year. Comprising information on about 300 artists, from Raden Saleh to the present day, the book is edited by Koes Karnadi.

The multi-faceted curator workshop organized by Goethe Institut in collaboration with the [Asia-Europe Foundation](#) brought together 18 young curators from various countries in Europe and Asia, including Indonesia, to seek new strategies for the changing role of art curators.

As an important follow-up thereto, a three-day workshop for young Indonesian curators was recently held in Bandung, at which a European curator became the resource person. It is the first of a longer term project of curatorial studies for young upcoming Indonesian curators, drawing on the experience of curators from Europe.

**Medium becomes the message**

Photography as art was highlighted in a groundbreaking exhibition of Chinese photographers at Vanessa Art Link, including the three- to four-meter pictures by Shi Gorui who uses the technique of Camera Obscura, and large-format images of Michelangelo's Last Judgment in Cyberspace made by Miao Xiaochun.

Fiberart was highlighted at Bentara Budaya here in an exhibition of 45 works by Biranul Anas who has engaged in fiber for a long time.

The opening of Toi-moi art space in Kemang shows that art today has several layers of appreciation. Art that young urbanites love is remote from the mainstream cutting edge or the preferences of their seniors.

But, while pleasure is written in capitals, experiment and innovation are keywords fulfilling artistic urges elsewhere.

This was evident in the works of architect Iswanto, whose canvases at Cemara Gallery used lubricating or brake fluid to make artistic visual essays on the issue of geopolitics, the quest for world power believed to be rooted in the control of the oil fields.

The issue of "peeping" was taken up by Sim F, a graduate from the School of Fine Art and Design of the Bandung Institute of Technology, who engages in a myriad of video and TV projects.

His Phantabox, a large black box with a whole to peep at Cemara Gallery, was made of a few pictures of young girls on neon boxes around whom he had created a sort of park with branches and grass. Using mirrors all around, it gave "peepers" the illusion of seeing a dream garden.

An almost similar, but more sophisticated technique was used in Kuwaiti-born, Bali-based, Hamad Khalaf in *Minotauer Trench* as part of a unique exhibition at Nadi gallery. He displayed war objects as works of art using metaphors of Greek mythology.

It was an installation consisting of a cabinet 200 centimeters high, 120 cm deep and 70 cm wide, filled with rows and rows of helmets, or so it seemed.

In fact, Hamad had used one-way mirrors to suggest a multiplication of the few helmets that were there. The helmets were used war materials he had collected from the deserted killing fields in the aftermath of the Iraqi invasion of his country.

For the first time, women painters expressed their views on Calon Arang, the witch in traditional Balinese legend whom feminist Toeti Heraty had called the Widow victimized by Patriarchy in her contemporary version of the story.

The exhibition was held at Cemara Gallery to launch the English version of Toeti Heraty's book.

Haris Purnomo's comeback after a long absence of 20 years was celebrated in his solo exhibition at Nadi gallery. Haris Purnomo, was an exponent of PIPA, a group of artists that have taken a stand against oppressed identity in the late 70s to 80s, and who choose to disappear from the art stage in such circumstances. His comeback exhibition, however, signals profound distress at the country's condition.

Edwin Gallery's exhibition of Chinese Xing Jing and Qu Qu Guangci and Indonesian Dolorosa Sinaga and Yani Mariani Sastranegara, contemporary sculptors at the main spaces of the National Gallery, as well as Basrizal Albara's solo exhibition of modern

sculptures, put an accent on the growing interest in sculpture today.

In Yogyakarta, the Jogja gallery opened in post-earthquake conditions with a retrospective exhibition on what it called icons of art development in Yogya since the 1970s.

In a second exhibition the Jogja gallery focused on emerging artists, themed Young Arrows. This evoked the ire of others who staged a counter-exhibition, Yang Error, an Indonesian twist on the English words.

Sadly, the works of the Errors missed the seriousness of good art. But as Chris Dharmawan, the owner of galeri Semarang, who sponsored Errors, said, it added to an animated discourse as an essential part of art development.