

# THE NATION'S NEW ART PATRON

BY DEBORAH ISKANDAR

Reflecting back on 2017, it has been a strong year for art in Indonesia, in both patronage and exhibition support. Not since the Soekarno period have we seen such a strong government infrastructure for the arts. For the past 50 years, the development of the art market in Indonesia has been driven by private collectors. But under the direction of President Joko Widodo in the past two years the Creative Economy Agency (Badan Ekonomi Kreatif), better known as BEKRAF, has been instructed to support the creative industries, including fine arts, to further accelerate the economic growth in this often-overlooked sector. BEKRAF has become the new patron of Indonesian art by supporting important exhibitions throughout the year.



The highlight of the international art scene was the Venice Biennale 2017. BEKRAF funded the Indonesian pavilion for the solo participation of Maria Clemetine "Tintin" Wulla. Tintin is no stranger to the international art world, as she has been featured in major exhibitions over the past decade. But her interactive work, "1001 Martians Homes" was the most ambitious to date. It was like a sci-fi story told through a combination of video, art and installation. Depicting the evolution of time starting from the communists movement in Indonesia in 1965 to an imaginary future, her installation was about crossing space, borders and connectivity between Jakarta and Venice. In a new twist to a country's participation, BEKRAF supported the construction of an identical pavilion in Senayan City shopping mall in Jakarta. This exhibition enabled visitors in both cities to interact with each other and the artwork through digital technology. This concept brought the Venice Biennale to Jakarta so the Indonesian public had the chance to appreciate Tintin's creative work and to learn more about the importance of art exchanges.



Investing in future talents, BEKRAF hosted a booth during Art Jakarta 2017. Entitled "BEKRAF Indonesian Emerging Artists" it featured 45 artists (out of 473 candidates) selected to present their works. The artists exhibiting were from all over Indonesia, from Jakarta to Papua, and showed a wide range of styles, influences and disciplines. This program was a great opportunity for young artists who are not part of the Jakar-

ta-Bandung-Yogyakarta art triangle to exhibit their work to the public, and to gain access to important art connoisseurs, collectors and gallery owners. Opening doors for young emerging artists is also a strategic move, since it can directly affect Indonesia's economy through international art trading and foreign exchange.

BEKRAF's patronage is not limited to the fine arts, as it took eight designers to the 2017 New York NOW show, a leading wholesale products and innovative design trade show. The goal was to showcase Indonesian craftsmanship and environmentally respon-



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: BEKRAF brought eight Indonesian designers to New York Now; BEKRAF Indonesia Emerging Artist Booth at Bazar Art Jakarta 2017; Europalia Mural - "A Soldier without a King" by Prihatmoko Moki; Europalia Arts Festival Indonesia - "Atom Jardin" by Yudha Sandy at Muntput.

sible products made from local resources. Highly developed craftsmanship skills are a source of pride in Indonesia and an impressive way to differentiate itself from other countries. The participating designers were from small and medium handicrafts, and were selected in partnership with Jennifer Isaacson, who has been working with SMEs in Indonesia for over 25 years, and has a pulse on the taste in Western markets for Indonesian products.

The highlight of BEKRAF's art patronage was Indonesia's participation as the feature country for Europalia 2017. Established in 1969, Europalia is one of the biggest multidisciplinary arts festivals in Europe. The selected country has an opportunity to showcase a range of artistic practices from music, dance, literary performances and art exhibitions. Europalia is the perfect vehicle to show the diversity of Indonesian cultures throughout the archipelago from Jakarta to Papua, Bali to Makassar. For four months, Indonesia will send over 460 participating Indonesian artists to conduct performances and exhi-

bitions. The festival is organized simultaneously in seven European countries through January 21, 2018.

As the international art industry has turned its focus towards Southeast Asian, the Indonesian government is starting to realize the potential of arts and culture in promoting tourism. Local art events such as Art Jakarta, Art Stage Jakarta, the Jakarta Biennale and ArtJog in Yogyakarta, are contributing in drawing international visitors to the Indonesian art scene. This growing interest by the Indonesian government to support cultural and artistic endeavors truly shows a shift in attitudes and values; art is seen as relevant, as an integral part of the country's national heritage, and a potential export product.

The recent developments and the active role of BEKRAF in art events is a sign that the government is not only talking about a change in theory, but that it is serious about making a difference. However, certain practical issues remain as recurring concerns for those working in the art industry. It is vital to set clear rules regarding the importation and taxing of art, and consequently guarantee that these rules are applied and respected, in particular for ensuring a smooth return of the artworks.

When the government shows its appreciation and respect towards the local creative industry, it sends an important message to the public that arts and culture can be sources of great collective pride and financially beneficial for the whole nation. As important as it is to encourage established and upcoming artists who are currently producing new works, equal attention and support needs to be directed towards museums, which safeguard invaluable pieces of history and culture. BEKRAF has supported bringing iconic Indonesian art to the public by joining forces with organizations such as the Yayasan Mitra Museum, building significant exhibitions like the Presidential Collection exhibited at the National Gallery during Indonesia's independence month.

The collaboration also led to the resurrection of Srihadi Soedarsono's long lost Jayakarta painting, which not only educates the Indonesian public, but also pushes citizens to respect and celebrate their artistic history. Such unique collections and works from past masters must be promoted to the public and appropriately conserved for the future generations, an honorable task which BEKRAF will hopefully fully embrace. Thanks to this newly focused government-based art patronage, artists will have better access to showcasing their work internationally in art events. BEKRAF plays a crucial role in providing platforms for Indonesian artists and giving them a chance to prosper in both the local and international spectrum. 



Deborah Iskandar is the founder and Principal of ISA Advisory, which advises clients on buying and selling art, and building collections. An expert on Indonesian and international art, she has more than 20 years of experience in Southeast Asia, heading both Sotheby's and Christie's Indonesia during her career before establishing ISA Art Advisory in 2013. She is also the founder of Indonesian Luxury, the definitive online resource for Indonesia's looking to acquire, build and style their luxury homes.