



Top End X-ings: The Art of Jengis Isdianto

The Faces, an exhibition by Jengis Isdianto is currently showing, from June 23rd at at The Box Set, 24 hour Art, Darwin, Northern Territory.

By Lycia Trouton, DCA

This time last year, I arrived in Darwin just after the bi-annual International Guitar Festival and during the July Festival of the Arts. An all-day 'Cultural Awareness' workshop on Indigenous issues/relations on campus was a type of induction to my Visiting Artist/Lecturer job at Charles Darwin University. It was there that I met artist Jengis Isdianto who has lived in Darwin the better part of a decade, having migrated from Yogyakarta, on the island of Java, Indonesia.

Isdianto's work has been influenced by the history of ancient pre-Islamic Java. His sculptures also engage with contemporary concerns from a top-end Australian context and universal philosophical ideas:

"Basically I love to see something beautiful, natural and organic...
Sometimes I create a dilemma in the materials and media in which I work."

As the focus of his art, Isdianto uses the iconic 'Coconut' of his cultural heritage. He states that he knows more about the coconut than about any other organic matter! For example, Indonesia is sometimes referred to as The Coconut Islands.

Isdianto sells craft items made from the coconut shell as his 'day job'. He runs a stall at one of the infamous, festive markets that make Darwin a much-loved tourist destination. Yet, it would be disparaging to separate Isdianto's oeuvre into that high/low theoretical separation that seemed to rule the artworld for so long since Clement Greenberg (1940s – 90s). Isdianto's practice is more complex and fluid than is suggested by the severe division that A) Isdianto has his high art practice (conceptual, non-object oriented sculpture for the gallery and museum) and B) his low or folk art practice (in which he sells his culture 'wares' on weekends). Isdianto describes his practice not in terms of one being contemporary and one traditional but as a continuation of "a journey."

Isdianto's process of working with the coconut and other sculptural materials also involves a deliberate and unabashed "destruction of the beautifulness of the material in order to arrive at his desired target". Isdianto cites the centrality of Javanese shadow puppet theatre (*Wayang Purwa*) and *Ja/Da*, the (en)lighted road as influences in his artwork. Also, Isdianto employs aspects of botanic illustration and studies to be "more wise and relevant" about the organic world which unfolds around us.

This article draws from my published essay in the Community Content section of *Australian Mosaic* Issue 13, No. 1, 2006, published by FECCA, (The Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia) Canberra. My article is entitled "The Postcolonial Edge: emerging cross-cultural visual artists in Darwin" pp. 31 – 33.

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