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Art Installation Captures Chaos of Jakarta

By Jaime Adams



The Goethe-Institut in Jakarta has received a makeover by German artist Sandra Havlicek, who has created the artwork "Tivoli To Go" – a colorful installation resembling a construction site. (Photo courtesy of Goethe-Institut/Ramos Pane)

The German Season, a three-month festival celebrating the friendship between Indonesia and Germany, officially kicked off on Sept. 5. Until December, more than 20 events will take place in several cities across Indonesia, ranging from culture and education to politics and economy.

Specifically for this occasion, the foyer of the Goethe-Institut has received a makeover by German artist Sandra Havlicek, who has created the artwork "Tivoli To Go" – a colorful installation resembling a construction site.

Havlicek's artwork serves as a meeting point during the German Season – it is intended to become a place where staff, language students, visitors and artists can meet, have a chat or simply relax over a cup of coffee.

The artist, who studied under one of Germany's leading contemporary artists, Tobias Rehberger, spoke to the Jakarta Globe about the concept of her installation and her favorite memories of Indonesia.

Q: When did you first become interested in art?

A: I already started very early to create architectural drawings: layouts, houses and rooms always fascinated me. But architecture also includes a lot of math – that put me off. So I already knew that I needed a creative outlet to express myself, I just wasn't sure about the medium yet. I then studied at the School of Design in Offenbach, and

then everything happened pretty fast. My first artistic work was a room installation, and from that moment onwards, I knew exactly what path I wanted to go down.

You have studied under the renowned artist Tobias Rehberger. What were the most important lessons you learned from him?

We had a lot of fun in our class. I don't think there was "the most important lessons," but instead, we all learned from each other. It had a lot to do with self-responsibility – if you didn't ask, you didn't get answers, and as a result there wouldn't have been an exchange. If you are not opening up to others and their opinions and views, you don't get any feedback. Sometimes, we started our sessions at 4 p.m. in the afternoon and continued until 3 a.m. in the morning. It was very intense, but at the same time, extremely valuable.

Could you explain the concept behind the art installation at the GoetheHaus?

I often work with material and everyday objects that are connected to transformation and possible flexibility. I am mostly interested in the inner logic of things and functional processes. In my works, I try to break these patterns and put them in a new context.

In the case of the Goethe-Institut, they wanted me to create an artwork that at the same time functions as a lounge. Since I was supposed to create a room-specific work, I wanted to include the local environment as well. One very significant feature of Jakarta is the rapid urban transition. It seems that everything is on the move, nothing stands still, and there is an insanely immense chaos and bustle – it's as if one is trying to move forward, but can only zigzag.

The scaffold is a nice metaphor for this situation. It's a temporary piece of architecture that shapes the image of a fast-growing city and the architecture itself. It is the physical expression of urbanization and conveys the process of social progress. But it also gives an impression of the hidden hustle and bustle, the scaffold looks fragile – a tall and complex clutter of rods where nobody has a clear view.

In my installation "Tivoli To Go", I try to capture the chaos of the city and transform it into a place that is not fixed and remains flexible, yet can become a space where one wants to linger if only to become one with the chaos. I try to achieve this through a combination of colorful scaffolds, beanbags and hammocks.

What does the name of your artwork "Tivoli to go" mean?

The Tivoli in Copenhagen is one of the oldest amusement parks, built in the 19th century. The word "Tivoli" in my artwork describes a tradition of wanting to have fun and the human play instinct. The additional "to go" represents the fast-paced city, and the velocity of the here and now.

Could you describe your creative process? How fast did you to come up with the concept of this artwork, and how long did it take to realize it?

By the end of June, I had my first talks with the Goethe-Institut about the installation in the foyer as well as the conditions that needed to be fulfilled. Afterwards, I began to research and developed a sense of understanding about the location through photographs and layouts that helped me to create first sketches of my artwork. One month later, in late July, I traveled to Jakarta the first time, already with a concrete idea in my head, to check out the location. This was the most important moment, as I knew it would help me make a final decision if I could realize my plan or had to come up with something else. I was then convinced that what I had planned is doable, and I got in touch with different companies and vendors I wanted to collaborate with.

Back in Germany, I finalized the last details with the staff of the Goethe-Institut before coming to Indonesia a second time, by the end of August, to set up the installation. So the whole work was created over the course of two months. Sometimes, I felt there was a lot of time pressure, but sometimes, this kind of pressure also helps to make faster decisions.

What will happen to your artwork after the German Season ends?

I think we still have to discuss it, but I hope it can stay there.

After spending some time in Indonesia, what are your favorite memories?

I will definitely remember the taste and smell of Indonesian clove cigarettes; sweet and sticky and such a great fit for this stifling city. There are also small details I won't forget: a big tree standing in the middle of the sidewalk, and you have to find a way around it; gliding through traffic on a motorbike; not wanting to go to sleep because the city is still awake and it's still warm and humid outside.