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'Volution/groove space': brings a city to the stage

Tertiani ZB Simanjuntak



I'm right here: Groove Space dancers interact and respond to the audience at the Volution/Groove Space show at Komunitas Salihara's theater space in South Jakarta.

If one wished to put a finger on the urban rhythm of Jakarta and then transfer it into a performance, the stage would offer one a seamless transition. A collaborative work between German and Indonesian artists attempts to capture the daily life of urban Jakartans and present it in a unique way.

As a part of the "German Season" in Indonesia, the Goethe-Institut Indonesia, the German Embassy and the Indonesian-German Chamber of Industry and Commerce (EKONID) will bring the "volution/groove space" performance to audiences at Komunitas Salihara's theater space in South Jakarta.

The show integrates contemporary dance, visual art, music, fashion and audience participation into a peculiar, yet moving, performance.

German-based Groove Space dancers led by choreographer and contemporary dance researcher Sebastian Matthias worked together with Indonesian installation artist Iswanto Hartono, artists Irwan Ahmett and Tita Salina, collage-based art collective Cut and Rescue and designer Didiet Maulana from the IKAT Indonesia fashion house to put on the show.

Instead of erecting a raised stage for the performance, the artists created layers of stages so that the audience could experience a multidimensional urban art performance.

In a dress rehearsal on Friday attended by Goethe-Institut regional director Heinrich Blömeke, the show started with a group of motorcycles in helmets maneuvering in a street in front of an art compound. Then, the audience walked to the gallery space where the main performance took place.

Collage music of a busy bus terminal and traffic ushered the audience to the next stage called "the haze room."

"Motorcyclists are a part of Jakarta. Everyone is riding a bike regardless their economic or social status. This city is choked full of motorcycles from the time we step out of our house," said Irwan.

The smoke-filled room, he said, represented the surreal future of a city that had overlooked environmental aspects in its development.

"Smoke symbolizes the sensation of terror," he added during a discussion that ensued after the show.

The low-lit black brick walls of the theater boasted a minimalist décor, filled only with two green rugs and artificial leaves and flowers designed to emulate a garden.

Do not expect a seat, but expect instead to interact with and meet the eye of six dancers who move around and between the audience.

In an interactive performance, according to dancer Jubal Battisti, the dancers have to keep eye contact with the audience to be able to read their reaction and then react to it. "It's a privilege as an artist," he said.

The dancers wore a black outfit with details made from woven ikat fabric.

The speakers blasted dangdut music now and then, creating an ambience fit for a dangdut club on the outskirts of Jakarta.

The motorcyclists served as useful props for the dancers, whose movements were dictated by the responses they received.

The audience was invited to move along with the dancers. At times, the audience followed the dancers. At other times, the dancers approached the audience and impersonated their actions.

Begun as a collaborative project in Berlin, Groove Space is a performance that examines the relationship between urban space and the body, movement and rhythm in different cities.

It has been performed in Zurich and Freiburg and after Jakarta, it will make stops in Dusseldorf, Tokyo and Hamburg.

One of the dancers, Lisanne Goodhue, explained that during their five weeks of research and practice in preparation for the performance in Jakarta, their experiences crossing the city streets and taking the sidewalks inspired the dramaturgy of the choreography.

"We have to stay focused but also aware of all the movements in our surroundings," she said.

Unlike ordinary performances, there is no border between Groove Space dancers and spectators, allowing spectators to experience a multidimensional urban art performance. The dancers integrated other aspects of daily life familiar to Jakartans in the performance, including the obsession that many have to achieve a lighter skin tone and to perform in singing contests.

Her colleague, Harumi Terayama, said the main stage was set-up to accommodate a concentrated point of view in order to enable person-to-person interaction.

“With that, we can receive immediate feedback from the audience,” she added.

The artists will put on four shows over the weekend. Admission is free but because of limits in the capacity of the gallery space, the public are encouraged to make reservations through daftar@salihara.org.