

In contemporary visual realm, which has been hectic and full of symbols, finding a place to rest and enjoy one's self in it has become a rare opportunity for us to have. Over time, the journey of finding it often feels like a spiritual conquest in order to meet cosmic and universe itself. Indirectly, I think, collaborative works of Faozan and Katia presented on this exhibition show a spiritual dimension of such conquest.

Mainly, if we still believe in categorization as we value photography, then we would place these works in landscape photography. In recent development of contemporary photography, although one still uses such categories to frame, but at the same time it also shows challenge and possibility of how such categories contradict and develop each other. Therefore, although the works of Faozan and Katia belong to landscape, but they reveal a new approach on nature matters, something which was deemed as a principal matter in landscape.

Inevitably, from the beginning, when I asked Faozan and Katia to show me their works, they reminded me of works of Andreas Gurski. Although I must emphasize that I don't feel that Faozan and Katia have any tendency to emulate Gurski. In peculiar way, although they represent some most similar objects, the works of Faozan and Katia provide different sensation than the ones I could get from works of Gurski. Initially, I emphasized that point at once: personality and individuality. Everybody could feel something when facing with such images, although there are also symbols which provide a guide in order to maintain some inter-connectivity.

In the last five years of history of contemporary fine art, Andreas Gurski was known as a superstar who gets a lot of attentions from public. His position somehow is different from other photography maestros such as Cartier-Bresson, Cindy Sherman, or Nan Goldin.

On Gurski's last landscape projects, especially the ones with gigantic size, the first impression that would hit us would be their sense of monumental. They represent irony by enlarging the size, so the empty space in picture could offer the audience to come in and stay in the inevitably empty and big situation.

An important literature of photography called "Photography: A Critical Introduction," states that there is a big difference between land and landscape which in turn would affect the acceptance and practice in landscape photography. In English, land or soil, is something which immediately refers to nature subject. While landscape, or disposition, is a result of cultural construction which involves the intervention of human being. Therefore landscape could be simply defined as a meeting of nature and changes caused by human behaviors.

In photography, landscape has become one of the important genres, especially because it's been developing by adapting compositional convention of landscape painting. Although it was considered as a photography which tends to make a documentation of journey, but lately it shows its new tendency of perceiving nature as something given and constructed. New generation of landscape photography offers critical questions which relate to nature and human being, while at the same time, and also gives another point of view on how capturing nature with camera.

What Faozan and Katia represents, through visual images dominated by empty landscape which show sense of beauty, is not merely a beauty itself. Although as photograph, what Faozan shows is an beautiful empty space, but the feeling comes from it would demand audience to find and grow another questions out of it. Personally, I find that such questions, like what I'd mentioned in the opening of this writing, lead to existentialism ones; the relation between me and the universe in which I'm fully aware of my existence.

Most of these photos have an open space background, i.e lake, jungle or desert. And all of them hold position which enables eyes of audiences to see them on the same level of high. The color of these works is almost monochrome, a little bit different than colorful "landscape" photos that one finds on tourism magazine. Therefore silence would grab audience immediately.

At one glance, these visual images seem similar to another works of journey photography. But when we start to delve in those landscapes, Faozan and Katia would steal our attention by placing a ceramics statue somewhere in there. Those statues, which were made by Katia, represent the idea of hole. She made a long model from wood and another circle form from ceramics.

Katia states that the important irony in process of creating the hole is watching its empty space, or staring at the deep black side. Observing this object as a focus in the midst of wide landscape and entering its hole, according to Katia, is like a journey through a long tunnel, a visualization of something transient.

At one corner of that nature, we'd find a subject, a thing that feels so strange and has a certain distant from us or the nature where it was being placed. In one of our conversations, Katia stated that the subject is there to substitute its own being. In film project that she ever did with Faozan, she danced within the empty vast landscape. A crater-like place was located at a mountain in East Java. One day, she found that her movements was getting quitter and minimal, and then she decided to replace her body with a statue.

It's also the beginning of decision to choose photography as a medium to express ideas. She stated, "The decision to move from film to photography was a result of how movement got quitter and being influenced by the decision to replace body with statue. We didn't need motion pictures anymore. Then we decided to make film again based on our photography pattern, so that we also could record the movement of nature."

Then they'd got the idea of photography while they took a quest in New York, United States of America, where they found room to place such statue subject in the snow, where the background of its landscape found a newer context. In the series of snow landscape photography, the objects, which were made of ceramics faced with its distinctive irony: what was being made, created, dealing with nature.

Besides showing works of photography, Faozan and Katia also produced a performance (its documentation itself is a beautiful video work) and a video art work. This work, which based on movement also gave another dimension of a static photography picture.

Collaboration and cross-genre work is an interesting thing we could get from work of Faozan and Katia. Trajectory, whether between nations, cultures or backgrounds of creation, for Faozan and Katia no longer became a thing emphasized as motivation and reason, especially since both of them realized that such thing is not uncommon in recent contemporary social life.

They started to work together almost eight years ago and have been exploring many mediums according to their own diverse backgrounds. Katia is an all round artist, her specialties are dance and performance art, while also studying statues and photography. While Faozan Rizal was known as a reliable Director of Photography for big screen movies, while also doing art projects with artists from various backgrounds.

This Hole Project, which mainly based on exhibition of Bumi Memahat Waktu (The Earth is Sculpting Time), developed in awareness to resign oneself to the medium, then in return it could develop into many things. From the idea of performance, then being a video after being recorded, then into statue and captured as photography image. This long journey shows their consciousness in reading every shifting of their artistic practice and process. There is a particular need to keep on taking a note, re-viewing and reflecting in them, so for both of them the artistic process has been a struggle of organic mind and feeling.

Lately, it's rare to find such long artistic journey like this, with its high level of spontaneity modus, regarding the high dynamics contemporary fine art world. Long term project has been reduced into something else entirely and only a few artists have such energy to take a journey, read and span the map, then creating a subject along the way.

This project also gives them a juncture, enough to create personal and intimate images. Sublime, transient spirit, and at the same time one could feel its existentialism. Therefore audience could experience the journey through the tunnels of time chiseled by statues, which they found in those works.

Transcending the footprints of human existence

Paul Hayanto Agusta, Contributor, Jakarta Post | Thu, 04/28/2011 10:19 AM | Art and Design

Mother Earth is a tough old girl. Enduring millions of years; bruised, battered, and abused by time and the human elements of technology and progress.

She remains strong, she fights back, she absorbs and transcends everything thrown at her. She is the ultimate survivor; a force not even Father Time can defeat. She is larger than life and beyond understanding; a space well-explored but never fully comprehended.

Mother Earth does not conform to us, we conform to her. When we force our will against her, the results can be devastating. When we approach her with respect, when we try to understand her beyond what we need from her, when we acknowledge that we are part of her and not her masters, only then will harmony reign.

In their collaborative exhibition, "The Earth is Sculpting Time", Indonesian filmmaker/visual artist/husband/muse, Faozan Rizal, and German dancer/sculptor/performance artist/wife/muse, Katia Engel, explore the sense of peace attained through accepting, absorbing and gifting back nature's aesthetic elements in an attempt to comprehend the expansiveness of our outer environment by immersing ourselves in the innerspace of the human psyche.

Einstein once said that ordinary minds seek out the extraordinary, while extraordinary minds examine the ordinary; taking a close look to gain an encompassing understanding of a much larger existence.

This is apparent in the works resulting from the melding of minds and creative expertise of these two artists from two radically different physical and cultural landscapes now on display at Ark Gallery in South Jakarta.

Katia and Pao, as Faozan Rizal is popularly known, blend not only aesthetic sensitivities and cultural views in their explorative spiritual interaction with Mother Earth, they layer art form upon art form into a definitive approach to understanding where humans beings stand in the larger scheme of things.

Tanah Merah 1, a 150 x 100 centimeter photograph printed on canvas, is a prime example of this creative duo's richly explorative approach involving scouting out and immersing themselves in stunning landscapes, photographing them, and then taking the images in their minds and cameras back to the studio where what Mother Earth has gifted to them is taken into a secret inner human space and transformed into gifts to be given back to the giver.

For this particular work, Katia created smooth hollow guord-like ceramic pieces open at both ends that were then returned to the stark red-earth landscape that inspired them and set out in in a carefully calculated randomness before being photographed in preparation for further processing and presentation.

Katia says she discovered an important irony in the process of making holes in the ceramic and wooden sculptural pieces created for the purpose of highlighting the experiential interaction of the small and large spaces of human perception and existence.

The sculpted objects can be embraced in terms of their contained space, the darkness within, and the exit, as if through a tunnel, into light.

Set within the larger landscapes that triggered their initial emergence through the couple's collaborative creative process, Katia's sculptures also speak of the transience of human existence within the passage of time and the resilience and lastingness of Mother Earth.

One of the things that makes this ongoing exhibition a highly memorable one is that not only can the pieces be absorbed individually, but the spatial choreography set out in the wide open venue allows all of the works to be experienced as one unified installation piece. The artists' clearly studied and thought deeply about the placement and visual flow of each given piece — photos, sculptures and video projections — in relation to the space and the visual convergence of all elements.

A fine example of this clever use of space is the multi-level presentation of the Kawah Putih (White Crater) 1, 2 and 3 series of photographs on canvas, which were set slightly above a striking sculptural display of red-clay pierced orbs.

In another particularly striking juxtaposition of artworks, the piece titled Bayan Tree interacts visually and spiritually with the work titled Tanah Lot 1 in an intriguing dance of intellectual and creative delving.

Overall, this exhibition makes one wish they could carry the images away with them. And the wonderful thing is that just as the sculptural pieces merge into and enhance the landscapes into which they are placed, while functioning as individual elements of the installation encompassing the exhibition space, each one of the large photographic images has the potential to enhance the large open wall spaces of modern residences or office building and hotel lobbies as visual odes to the beauty and significance of Mother Earth to humankind.