

creative-i

The
Singapore
Issue

WOMEN WHO LEAD

Arahmaiani in Tibet

Sandra Hill
Stolen Generations

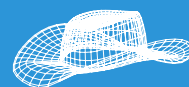
Aminah Hussien
The Little Arts Academy

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WOOSON Gallery

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Designing art



CREATIVE
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In this issue we visit Singapore's where *Art Stage* (Singapore's International Art Fair) becomes centre stage as we trace the art and convictions of some of the artists exhibiting at the fair. The rise and

rise of contemporary art in Indonesia is reflected by the Indonesian Pavilion at *Art Stage* where the work is compelling and a demonstration of how contemporary art can be a powerful reflection of society and meaning.



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It is here we catch up with ARAHMAIANI (Indonesia's representative at the 50th Venice Biennale) whose work stands as a bridge, connecting cultures, connecting communities and connecting

ideas. In her article Arahmaiani takes us on journey to Tibet and we meet the 15th Lab Kyab Gon Rinpoche who tells us about the conservation project that the monks and the artist are creating in the Lab community.



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We go on an *Art Stage* journey with *Technopia Tours*



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Singapore's *The Little Arts Academy* Aminah Hussien



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In the education section of the magazine we visit Singapore's *The Little Arts Academy* as some of the students tell us about their work and hopes for the future In the education section Maasai creative

cowboy scholar FRANCIS NKODIDIO gives us an update on his progress from Nairobi.



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We look at 'designing art' with Singapore based architect Yann Follain as we uncover the architects work in the art spaces and places of Singapore.

Back at *Art Stage* we catch up with Eun-Ah, Kim, director of Korea's WOOSON Gallery from Daegu.



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Andrea and I particularly want to thank SANDRA HILL for her generosity in taking us through her life journey, in which art has become a critical expression

of culture, of meaning and survival, as she tells her story, the story of too many Aboriginal people in Australia.

That is the story of the stolen generations, in this case of her people, the Nyoongar people of South West Western Australia and again we thank Sandra for sharing her story in art with us all.

Andrea and Peter Hylands

art stage
centre
stage



ARAHMAIANI

“Because basically what I want to do is just to do good things for all beings on this planet you know”

And it is in this place of environment and collective creativity where we find Indonesian and international artist Arahmaiani (50th Venice Biennale). Something very special is happening in Indonesia and that is the rise and rise of Indonesian contemporary art and the work of Arahmaiani internationally is central to that journey.

ARAHMAIANI's work explores social themes and her art is a social commentary that engages with society and community, not only working in Indonesia, but as a global artist engaged in activism in many fields internationally.

“I implement an *open art system* in which art is defined as broadly as possible, to break through rigid discourses and established values, engaging in democratic dialogue, but also taking a critical approach when this is needed. During this process, outcomes, artworks and

other forms (such as performance) are produced collectively, collaboratively or individually”. And it is in this place where ARAHMAIANI stands, as a bridge connecting cultures, connecting communities and connecting ideas.

Later in this article ARAHMAIANI describes one such project in Tibet, where the artist is working with the monks and the Tibetan and the Chinese communities in an effort to bring people together and in doing so to reverse the environmental degradation of their region of Lab.

“During this process, outcomes, artworks and other forms (such as performance) are produced collectively, collaboratively or individually”.



art stage Singapore

ARAHMAIANI and PETER HYLANDS are at Art Stage, the Singapore international art fair, as they discuss the work that ARAHMAIANI is showing at the Indonesian Pavilion at the fair and some of the other projects the artist is developing.

The memory of nature: Wukir Suryadi provides the sound for Arahmaiani's performance

ARAHMAIANI: I have different kinds of projects coming up apart from my work with Tibetan Monks in Tibet which is ongoing and now it is somehow bigger because the local government are now happy, after three years they see the result and approve somehow.

PETER HYLANDS: And so the work at Art Stage is *The memory of Nature?* (*The memory of Nature* is a reflection on the artist's work in Tibet. ARAHMAIANI also performed at the Indonesian Pavilion, Art Stage as part of this work).

ARAHMAIANI: Right, right and I am also now working with young Indonesian artists to deal with the environmental problems in Indonesia and we are going to have also collaboration with artists from Germany, young artists as well. So they will do something together and we will have a show in October and I am going to do curatorial work for this project.

For the Singapore Biennale I am going to work with artists from Singapore, Philippines and Japan as well as an artist from South Korea and dealing with

the issue of ring of fire and of course environmental issues will be the main theme there.

PETER HYLANDS: How long have you worked on environmental type issues?

ARAHMAIANI: Well actually I started in 2006 when my district was hit by an earthquake, where in my district there were more than 4,000 people who died. Less than one minute earthquake, so this opened my eyes really widely. This is the thing we have to deal with now.

PETER HYLANDS: Where were you at the time of the earthquake?

ARAHMAIANI: When it first hit I was actually in Bangkok and so panicked and then everything cuts off, I cannot call anybody, friends, anyone you know. And anyway after a couple of days I went back then it was like big shock, yeah.

About Wukir Suryadi

The sounds of Wukir Suryadi are contemporary, a unique fusion of ancient Javanese tradition with an 'onslaught' of contemporary noise. His original instrument, shaped like a bamboo spear utilizes both percussive strings carved from the bamboo's skin, and melodic steel strings, bringing together elements of traditional Indonesian instruments with garage guitar distortion. Schooled in the theatre, Wukir Suryadi brings theatrical ruckus to the classical stage, plucking, strumming and bowing his way from peaceful meditations to rhythmical frenzies. The evolution of his music is never complete as Wukir utilizes the agility of his instrument to collaborate with musicians and performance artists from around the world, fluently bridging musical styles and inventing new instruments as he goes.

The memory of Nature





Monks outside the main temple

...we really have to build this new way and new awareness of a sustainable way of living, right?

And then since that time on I have been working with the community in the area of earthquake recovery until today. Community based project might be dealing with environmental issues.

In this case I realized it is just not like helping when the disaster is there you know, but we really have to build this new way and new awareness of a sustainable way of living, right?

I have been working on this kind of concept for years but dealing with community empowerment, especially on art, education and economics. So then this community based kind of work is becoming my speciality because of this and because of this reason.

PETER HYLANDS: And that covers environment, it covers gender issues, socio political kind of issues?

ARAHMAIANI: Of course, yes.

PETER HYLANDS: Is it correct to say you are bridging cultures, placing yourself in between things?

ARAHMAIANI: That's right, that's right, that's very true. Sometimes, maybe for some people it is a little bit difficult where to place me because people

like to categorise; you are there; you are there, no, but I am somewhere in between. And I said there will be more people in between and you have to have a place for people like this.

PETER HYLANDS: And being in between, what does that make happen if you like. Do you see yourself as a bridge?

ARAHMAIANI: Yes right, as a bridge. For example with this project in Tibet, why I can go there. Everybody is asking how can you make it. Everybody knows that foreigner cannot go there let alone doing something with monks, Tibetan monks.

And I said I was very lucky and maybe it was the right timing and that they see me as someone who can bridge these two groups because they cannot really communicate with each other, because of the situation and the belief system, Tibetans accept me as Tibetan and Chinese accept me as Chinese.

So then I can go in between. Yes this is one example. But this is also my role in Indonesia itself, I am always in between Indonesian and Chinese, between Indonesians and foreigners.

PETER HYLANDS: In a way there is still quite a gap between what Australian's know about Indonesia, I don't know if it applies the other way around, but it probably does?

ARAHMAIANI: Yes definitely.

PETER HYLANDS: It's quite interesting how that has persisted over a long period of time.

ARAHMAIANI: Yes, that is right. But I think now it is changing again and getting a little bit closer now.

PETER HYLANDS: Well it should be close.

ARAHMAIANI: Yes, there is no excuse not to be close and since I used to spend a lot of time and I used to live in Sydney, in Perth also so actually I have a lot of good friends in Australia and being doing some, recently, projects in Sydney on the Sydney Festival for three years. Then it is also becoming alive again.

I am also thinking of doing other projects for the future especially now dealing with this environmental concern. We know what happened, Australia is now really hot and has all these forests

Arahmaiani in Sydney – Make-Up or Break-Up (Artspace, curator Blair French, August 2007)



burning and all that. And we have been affected by all that you know. I was in Jogja (Yogyakarta) last week and we also experienced the heat coming from the south.

PETER HYLANDS: Yes, because you have this trough of incredibly hot air sitting over Australia. We all share the world and we need to think about each other.

ARAHMAIANI: Right, exactly

PETER HYLANDS: And in a way what is happening on the Tibetan Plateau has got very little to do with Tibetan people themselves because all their (environmental) problems are being imported from somewhere else whether it is China (India) or Europe or the United States.

ARAHMAIANI: And that's right, then I said to my monk friends look you know you now really deal with things around you. You don't have to go into this too abstract. Ideas are coming from everywhere but now it is about dealing with the real thing, the issues around you. Then you will help yourself. If you feel miserable because of the situation now is time to help yourself. Well if I can help you I will try to do my best.

Working together, Arahmaiani and Sonamrinchen





But so far what I can do like giving ideas you know, in a way teaching science basically, science of nature, science of environment . Slowly, slowly I got support from friends but of course working in China I have to be very careful in connecting these things to western world and on the other hand you know on the western side there are many different groups with different interests, I have to find also the right people to deal with this kind of thing. Because basically what I want to do is just to do good things for all beings on this planet you know. So politics sometimes can be a bit tricky.



But on the other hand there is this new kind of awareness, like a flower starting to bloom. I see that, I feel that and that is why I am going up there with some optimism because we can do something you know.

Maybe some parts of the world will be destroyed, some people, some nature will be destroyed but we can also start something new. I am quite optimistic about that.

PETER HYLANDS: How do you see the 21st century? Is it more depressing than the past or is it getting a little bit better? Do you have hope, I suppose, is what I am asking?

ARAHMAIANI: Yes what I have seen so far because I travel almost right around the world, on the one hand there are some really depressing situations, natural resources wise everything is almost falling apart, people are like busy, busy, busy with themselves and they do not care about their neighbours.

Restoration



...on 27 May more than 5,700 people died in less than one minute

PETER HYLANDS: And tell me the story of the Tibetan Plateau.

(Here we are joined by the head of the Monastery the 15th Lab Kyab Gon Rinpoche).

ARAHMAIANI: I am going to start by telling you a little bit of the story of how I got to Tibet around three years ago.

My journey to Tibet started with a project at the Museum of Contemporary Art Shanghai. We had a group show there of Indonesian artists and then I asked the curators to allow me to work with the community because my art is community based kind of art and then usually I am working with community leaders in earthquake disaster regions.

So the curators say to me well okay there is an earthquake in Yushu (Qinghai province 2010 – 2698 deaths) Tibet which is a very isolated and remote place and at a very high altitude.

With all the challenges I heard from people I finally decided to go there. I was accompanied by a young artist from Shanghai. We went there and there was nobody to see so my intuition told me to go and see the monks, the Lamas.

Yushu is a town of 300,000 people and it was almost completely destroyed, when we arrived it was about two months after the earthquake. I have worked with victims of earthquakes back home in Indonesia in Jogja since 2006 where the region in which I live was hit by an earthquake on 27 May and more than 5,700 people died in less than one minute (36,000 people were injured and 1.5 million people were left homeless). The most tragically impacted area was Bantul. That was something very dramatic and opening up my eyes and since that time on I am somehow working on this and environmental issues in Indonesia and Tibet and I guess globally because I move around places.

After visiting Yushu we went to visit Lab Monastery which is about two and a half hours away in a much more remote region

On the journey we travelled along the Yangtze River, the longest river in Asia at some 6,500 kilometres on its journey from its headwaters from the glaciers of the Tibetan Plateau on to Shanghai and the East China Sea.

PETER HYLANDS: The Tibetan Plateau or Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau as it is also known is the highest and largest plateau on earth. It is a place of critical importance to Asia as it is the great well spring of the entire region, delivering water to some two billion people in the subcontinent and China and elsewhere through the great river systems that are born on the plateau. For very obvious reasons the environmental health of the plateau is a critical matter.

The great glaciers (the third pole) that grind slowly through their rocky landscape are the source of the great river systems of this part of the world. This is the third largest ice depository on earth and the cooling and warming of the plateau as the seasons change from winter to summer has a major impact on monsoon activity and hence precipitation further to the south.

Environmental concerns about the Tibetan Plateau include the rapid increase in average temperatures on the Plateau which is speeding up the glacial melt. The great river systems of the region including, the Yangtze, the Indus, the Ganges and the Mekong owe much to the stability of these glaciers over centuries past.

Everything about the Plateau is impressive, its extremes, in parts it is one of the least inhabited places on earth, the beauty of its mountainous terrain and escarpments, its rivers, wetlands and grasslands, its weather and its scale at nearly a million square miles.

To the North-East of the Tibetan Plateau are the critically important Zoige Wetlands, that feed both the Yangtze and Yellow Rivers and nurture the surrounding region, the largest alpine peat wetlands on earth, are increasingly in trouble, as are the associated grass-

lands, both for a set of complex reasons which I won't go into here. Tracking at 30,000 feet on a flight to the north of the Plateau and then down in to China it is not difficult to see the inversion layer of pollution gathering here from a host of places and one of the many reasons for the environmental problems going on below.

ARAHMAIANI: In Lab I am working with the monks on an environmental project. From here comes my work *Memory of nature*, an installation now at the Indonesian Pavilion at Art Stage which is composed of a mandala made from natural materials, soil, plants and water and a series of photos of the monks that I have worked with.

In Lab the environmental project with the monks including cleaning up the garbage dumped in various places including near rivers. The monks cleaned up the garbage themselves so a place that was not that clean is now pretty good.

As part of the environmental project the monks have now planted an extra 70,000 trees including Poplar trees and Pine trees and medicinal and herbal trees. The area has improved a lot and the people from the village and neighbouring villages are also joining in on these kinds of activities and there is an increased awareness about these matters.

Another segment of the community are the elders, the old people, they have their own group. There is also the artist group in the village as art is important particularly as the temple has many sculptures and paintings and people are once more producing traditional clothing. These are all activities supported by the Lamas.

The surrounding area of the village is now very clean and flowers are blooming. Our plans for the future are to get further support from the locals as well as the international community so we can continue to improve the environment to help protect the 'third pole' and Asia's 'water tower' and its rivers, this is a really crucial point of the project. If it all goes wrong up on the Plateau then there will be serious problems in many other places.





The 15th Lab Kyab Gon Rinpoche describes to us what has happened to the environment around Lab over the last century.

LAB RINPOCHE: The degradation of the environment occurred over the last 100 years and the problem is that the environment and all sentient beings interdependently survive so during the time our environment was degraded we needed to think about how we could reverse the situation. As part of this project we started a regenerative project in Lab. So you understand the situation I want to tell you about the past, the present and the future.

The livelihood of people in the Lab region in the past and up to the middle of the last century was mostly traditional farming and herding cattle. For hundreds of years the way of living as farmers and nomads has contributed immensely to preserving the natural environment and the flora and fauna in the region of Lab.

There were herds of yak, horses and sheep grazing the hills around our region and these good natured and domesticated animals enjoyed the lush green grasses and their natural fertilization of the land contributed to the natural history of the region and made it

possible for natural growth of beautiful flowers, herbs and medicinal plants to flourish around Lab on the mountains and in the valleys. Also the water used by farmers and nomads was from natural rivers and streams that flowed down from snow covered mountains and from lush green forests and valleys. These places were very clean and pristine.

This natural water was also full of minerals and far superior than any modern bottled water, for example in summer when people got sick they would resort

to drinking lots of water. The mountains and valleys also had many medicinal plants over which the water would run, passing their medicinal qualities to the water itself.

By 1914 the 13th Lab Rinpoche had developed a great concern about the Tibetan environment and started a large tree planting programme of many trees. This first project involved discovering which trees would be best suited to our high altitude places and the soils of the region. So the 13th Lab Rinpoche travelled to similar regions and found that Poplar trees grew the best. He then undertook the enormous task of transporting back to Lab 440 shoots of Poplar. He travelled back through wetlands and river banks to ensure there was water, the shoots were carried in bundles of 15 and watered during the night.

The journey took the team up to 70 days of travelling through treacherous and difficult country. Even with all the care taken to transport the young shoots many Poplars perished on the



Li Mu (Chinese assistant), Sonamdawa (the translator), Sonamrinchen (working partner), Lobsangnima (a little Lama) with Arahmaiani



long journey. By the time they reached Lab only 13 shoots had survived and these were planted with great care. Further such trips were made over a period of six years and eventually many Poplar trees were planted and grew successful around the Lab Monastery and surrounding areas.

During the last century and particularly during the 1980s people moved to larger towns and cities from rural areas and their livelihood began to change to trading and other business activities. Meanwhile the livelihood of farmers began to shift away from working with natural resources to working with modern technology that involves a lot of use of chemicals and so forth.

The result of all these things was that the natural soils and environment began to rapidly degrade and Lab and its region has suffered this fate. Because of these changes many people in Lab over the last 30 years have resorted to harvesting many rare and precious medicinal plants beyond their needs as a means to getting quick money.

In this drive to get more money people did not consider the impact on the environment and nomads have also been selling their herds of cattle and sheep as they do not want to do this work any longer. As a result many precious herds of Yak have declined and some species are on the verge of becoming extinct.

Some rare and precious plants have already become extinct and many more have become endangered. Furthermore the growth rate of trees has declined and there have been irregular changes

to the climate including a lack of rain. Vast areas of farm land are now being left empty as farmers are not interested in farming anymore.

Wild nature, the animals and birds in the surrounding mountains are declining year by year and many of the natural resources and water systems, rivers and lakes, have become polluted by people throwing garbage into them which has made the water unfit for human consumption. Areas are also drying out and the number of trees that are dying is increasing year by year, all indicating the grave dangers our environment is facing.

I would like to propose some ideas about how to prevent the future decline and destruction of our environment. It is clear if the future of humanity is going to be able to survive well, we, as human

beings must be responsible for protecting our environment.

In Lab we will initiate a care campaign for our environment involving everyone. There will be a cleanup day every week where the monks and locals will come together and clean up the lakes and river banks and other places by picking up the rubbish. I am also proposing to plant trees along the river banks.

It is my hope that by implementing these initiatives Lab can clean up its environment and water so the water will, once more, be safe to drink. I also intend to encourage the local farmers and nomads to go back to the old ways of making their livelihoods which will benefit both themselves and the environment. I hope these proposals will go some way to restoring the natural flora and fauna of the region and we want to establish a long term plan to plant trees by involving local communities.

The procession



Yangtze River



Collecting rubbish



“It is clear if the future of humanity is going to be able to survive well, we, as human beings must be responsible for protecting our environment”

The 15th Lab Kyab Gon Rinpoche



The memory of nature
at Art Stage



We will need advice about farming and what kinds of crops and fruit trees can be planted under present conditions and how to prevent species from dying out and our trees from dying in the current climatic conditions. We will implement a fund raising scheme to help us protect and beautify our environment. Through these things we will make the region an enjoyable and pleasant place for local people to live and for people to visit.

I would also like to thank ARAHMAIANI for contributing to this project by visiting us, organising cleanup projects and planting new trees and bringing awareness to the local people, I would like to acknowledge her efforts and take this opportunity to extend my sincere thanks. Artists getting involved in protecting the environment is special, it is through art and performance that the message is sent to the public, it can be a very effective and innovative way of telling people about environmental problems and how they will impact on them.

ARAHMAIANI: There will be new works from me out of this experience and I look forward to returning to the region to continue this work.

“There is this new kind of awareness, like a flower starting to bloom. I see that, I feel that and that is why I am going up there with some optimism because we can do something you know.”

Beneath our feet

Tectonics do matter

ARAHMAIANI's plans to explore the ring of fire with the regions artists are extremely interesting. The question being asked by the artist is what impact does the morphology of the earth, the shaping of its surface by volcanoes and plate systems and earthquakes, have on human populations.

Does the warming of the earth, the melting of the polar ice sheets, particularly in the arctic, impact on the stability of the earth's tectonic plate system? Are the ice sheets themselves giving greater stability to these plates and if so what will be the consequences for Pacific Rim nations if the ice cover continues to vanish?

While much of what happens to shape the surface of the earth can be measured in millions of years the impact of tectonic processes on the landscape can occur in minutes and on a vast scale as they did because of the recent earthquakes in Indonesia and Japan.

Earthquakes can submerge, by lowering the land surface, large areas of land, creating new areas of wetland while volcanoes can build new islands or totally destroy them. Volcanic eruptions can profoundly impact the earth's atmosphere as did Indonesia's Krakatoa eruptions in 1883, the largest and loudest explosions ever recorded, causing fearsome tsunamis, blasting away and pulverising the major part

of Krakatoa Island and killing tens of thousands of people as huge tsunamis rolled and churned their way across the region.

Krakatoa was a global event, impacting weather systems all around the world, in England and the United States the red sunsets caused by particles from the explosion in the atmosphere lasted for many months. In Northern Australia the boom from the explosions resonated across the landscape.

This is a critical example of how complex the connections between the earth's systems are, that is, its biodiversity, its weather patterns, its atmospheric composition and its geomorphology.

Indonesia of course has another fascinating story to tell in relation to the early understanding of the earth's geomorphology and that is the story of the Wallace Line. We will consider the Wallace Line in the next issue of creative-i magazine as we speak with John Wolseley about art and nature and his work in this evolving landscape.