

apexart

2017-18 Franchise Proposal

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Dipping in the Kool Aid

submitted by: Mary Lou Pavlovic

Franchise location: Bali, Indonesia

In April 2015, I received a request from a prisoner in an Indonesian jail to help set up a prison art program. Inmates felt they needed more constructive activity, to help the long, lonely days inside, with little to do all day. A successful jail art program they had either participated in or heard about had an uncertain future, as its organisers had been executed under the Indonesian death penalty system. Some of the prisoners had loved the activities of painting, drawing, printmaking, silversmithing, and even cooking and English classes. Local schools had attended the jail silversmithing classes, highlighting the broader, positive community effect of art programs in jails. Life can be tough in Indonesian prisons; prisoners often experience cramped living conditions, some do not even have bedding, as most often, they must pay for it. Family members can be too poor to travel to those incarcerated on different islands to home. Visits from outside can be limited to fifteen minutes. Stressful living circumstances, combined with little to do all day, can lead to non-constructive activities, entrenching prisoners in criminal subcultures.

Together with a group of prisoners, we undertook a crowd funder, raising money for a new art program in a different jail. Luckily, our friends and family were very generous. After inmates learned colour mixing and design, we painted a large mural around the prison kitchen. All prison staff and incarcerated continue to enjoy its beauty and prisoners are proud. A traditional Balinese woodcarver provided wood-carving tuition; inmates created spectacular floral carvings. I've rarely seen such focus; prisoners happily work all day in the Balinese tropical heat. Our projects give people the ability to move with their minds, in circumstances where space is confined and time placed on hold.

In 2017, extending our program, four carefully selected, funded, confirmed international artists will visit Bali, carrying out a series of artistic projects with prisoners. Funds are requested for 'Dipping in the Kool Aid' (jail slang for entering uninvited into conversation), an exhibition in a professional Balinese gallery. The exhibition comprises local Indonesian artists, prisoners and visiting internationals' prison projects. One work is a visually beautiful, eternal orchid flower monument for prisoners that have passed away, with ex-prisoners contributing Indonesian woodcarving designs. Another invited work is larger than life video screenings of two prisoners sitting, motionless save for breath, their tattoos and scars testimony to a violent, tragic past. Some works will simply display prisoners' spectacular, patterned carvings. Works coming from the jail will also include rock polishing, decoupage and paper mache, which fits well into Indonesia's extraordinary craft scene, highlighting how prisoners are preparing skills for employment once they leave jail. Most artists involved in our project have a background interest in aesthetics and politics. The exhibition will be billed as celebrating the collaborative works of prisoners and artists. 'Dipping in the Kool Aid' socialises positively by its very presence, attempting to bring light to psychologically dark situations.

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