

apexart

2017-18 FEP Proposal

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Dipping in the Kool Aid

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Franchise location: Bali, Indonesia

In 2015, after several years in Indonesia without state-sanctioned death penalty executions (which consist of prisoners given seventy-two hours notice, then late at night tied to a post and shot by marksmen), the new president, Joko Widodo, re-instigated executions, mainly for those with drug-related convictions. Eight men killed in the second execution round included a South American with bipolar disorder, a Nigerian caught with minimal amounts of marijuana, and two Australians, who'd legally proved rehabilitation. Over ten years, the Australians had established an art program in the jail workroom, prisoners and public attended multi-disciplined classes. Prior to the executions, there was an international public outcry. The Indonesian government responded with displays of might; military jets flew over the prison, terrorising the prisoners, for international press. A jet loaded with missiles transported the Australians to their deaths, the Nigerians travelled by truck. The political exploitation of the prisoners wasn't disguised, instead celebrated by the government. In Bali, I watched in horror. These were the most evil circumstances I'd yet witnessed. I'd been visiting an Australian drug-convicted woman inmate for years. I burned to create an effective artwork about the death penalty but what?

Soon after the executions, I met many traumatised prisoners, who'd studied art in the jail, some imprisoned lengthily for smoking marijuana.

To offer relief for those traumatised, who'd little constructive activity, my prisoner friend and I undertook a crowd-funder, raising money to create art projects. After prisoners 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 those executed, with ex-prisoners contributing Indonesian woodcarving designs. Another invited work is larger than life video screenings of two now executed prisoners, motionless save for breath, their tattoos and scars testimony to a violent, tragic past. Some works will simply display prisoners' spectacular, patterned carvings. Most artists involved have a background interest in aesthetics and politics. To protect ourselves in non-safe political circumstances, the show will be billed as celebrating the collaborative works of prisoners and artists. In reality our project seeks, by means of sophisticated, creative activity, to act as a gentle, anti-death penalty statement; 'Dipping in the Kool Aid' socialises positively by its very presence, attempting to bring light to the darkest of situations.

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