

Kunst & Cultuur Kunst: Botanical Gardens

On the Nature of Botanical Gardens

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One of the first stops on the route of the royal state visit to Indonesia was the Presidential Palace in Bogor, better known here as Buitenzorg Palace, after the name of the place under Dutch rule. The estate also houses a famous botanical garden, created by the German botanist Reinwardt, who collected plants and seeds from all over the archipelago for the Netherlands for cultivation purposes. The Lands Botanic Garden is now called Kebun Raya Bogor.

This garden appears a number of times in the new exhibition at Framer Framed, platform for art and culture in Amsterdam East. There is the antique postcard in an installation by Sintia Tantra, a black and white photo of tall trees protruding from dense forest, 'Buitenzorg' written in graceful letters in the corner of the card. And there is the beautiful painting by Zico Albaiquni, *Ruwatan Tanah Air Beta, Reciting Rites in Its Sites*(2019). Elongated and colored, the canvas captures the long history of the garden in one panoramic image. It depicts the Sundanese, the native ethnic group of West Java, with people dancing in a ritual to perpetuate the connection with nature, ancestral spirits and god. Colonial times are represented with a view of the Dutch cemetery in the garden. Albaiquni's bright orange, deep blue and poisonous green contrast sharply with the earthy colors of the romantic painting that Indonesian artist Raden Saleh made of the cemetery in 1871, as court painter to the kingdom.



With eight artists and a collective from Indonesia, *On the Nature of Botanical Gardens* is about the intertwining of botanical and colonial history. Botanical gardens are there as 'instruments of colonial expansion': plants, herbs and knowledge were eagerly transferred to the 'motherland' which cut deep holes in the country. Not only is it a question of profit and power reflected in such gardens, of wealth seized away, but also of less visible gaps, in memory and culture. It is in this area that the artworks in *Framer Framed* surprise and excite.

At the heart of the exhibition is an Ade Darmawan laboratory, where water drawn from herbs - pala (nutmeg), cendana (sandalwood), kayu manis (cinnamon), lada (pepper) - drips onto open books. There is a container of soil by artist Arahmaiani where visitors are invited to create a mandala with seeds. And in a cramped loft behind a heavy curtain, the video work of an artist from Surabaya who works under the name Edwin runs. The video combines impressive (colonial) archive material from the Eye Film Museum collection with new images, shot in the Hortus Botanicus of Amsterdam, starring a somewhat silly botanist and an Indonesian beauty who is eager to show him her flower. The perversity of the exotic, of the observation and glorification of a distant nature and of a distant people, comes to a boil here.

On the Nature of Botanical Gardens, until April 26 at *Framer Framed*, Amsterdam. framerframed.nl