

'Sinta Tantra Pushes Cultural Boundaries Through the Arts', Jakarta Globe, 7 September 2014

## Sinta Tantra Pushes Cultural Boundaries Through the Arts

*British artist Sinta Tantra was drawn to Yogyakarta because of creative innovation and tradition. (Photo courtesy of Sinta Tantra)*

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The riot of colors decorating both sides of the DLR bridge across London's Canary Wharf area is hard to miss. Titled "A Beautiful Sunset Mistaken For A Dawn," the commissioned public work by the Canary Wharf Group stood out because of its melange of seven shades, including the relatively obscure racing green and blue Wentworth China.

While the use of colors initially seems out of place in the financial and shopping district's austere postmodern, conceptual facade, there is

a method to the madness. British artist Sinta Tantra and creator of "A Beautiful Sunset Mistaken For A Dawn" can best describe her piece as a "painting on an architectural scale."

"More than anything else, the work is a study in contrasts" says Tantra of the work, which was designed to mark the 2012 London Olympics.

She also highlights its effects with a 24-hour time lapse sequence showcasing the bridge's different looks throughout the day.

“The contrast between sunrises and sunsets, particularly on the River Thames, is reflected in the use of darker colors highlighted in the daytime, while the brighter shades offset the night. It also explores statism and dynamism— notably how the colors offset the contrast between Canary Wharf’s staid, Thatcherite facade, yet capture the dynamism of the train that crosses the DLR Bridge,” she says of the painting, whose creation saw the use of over five thousand liters of paint applied by 65 painters from the Alfred Bagnall and Sons contractor company. “The painting also alludes to the masculine and feminine principle, the difference between nature and manmade structures, as well as the contrast between East and West.”

The structure also reflect Tantra’s ability to cross over between the artistic disciplines of painting, sculpting, as well as design and architecture.

### **Rediscovering roots and reinventing artistic visions**

The last premise explored by “A Beautiful Sunset Mistaken For A Dawn” is one that Tantra can relate to all too well, due to her Balinese descent.

The Royal Academy of the Arts alumni has been in Yogyakarta for her artistic residency for the past year, after she was granted the 2014 Artist International Development Award by Arts Council England and the British Council.

“I chose to do my residency in Yogyakarta because of its out-of-the-box arts scene, as seen in their innovative public art spaces, projects and installation art, characteristics it owes in no small part to Gadjah Mada University’s progressive outlook,” she says. “It contrasts with the academic approach in Bandung or Bali’s traditional approach to the arts that is largely driven by its tourism industry.”

“For me, Yogyakarta epitomizes Indonesia because it has one foot in its progressive future,

and another in its past,” she says. “Yogyakarta’s vibrant arts scene has many similarities to Berlin, though its lower [cost of living] enable artists to make an impact without spending too much money.

“It also derives its energy from the grassroots communities of young artists and the numbers of art curators that help them highlight their art, making it appeal to art buffs throughout Indonesia and around the world.”

She adds that Yogyakarta’s sense of community is one that she can relate to, as it brought back fond memories of her visits to her father’s home village in Bali’s Karangasem district.

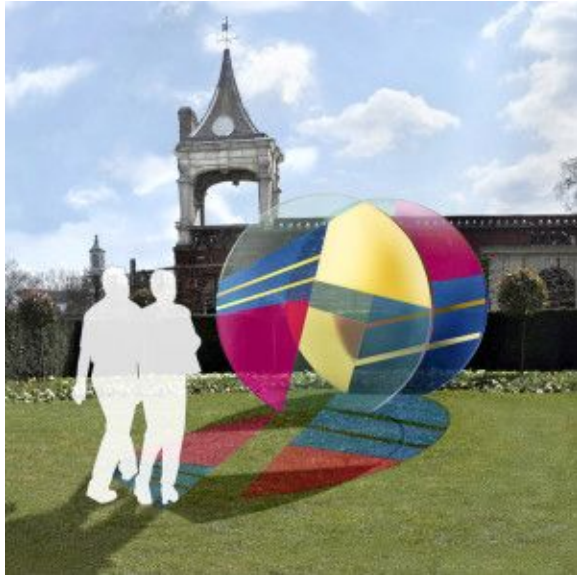
“Another draw of Yogyakarta is its extensive use of traditional crafts, like woodcarving and metalwork, in its art. This lends it a more natural, organic feel that one doesn’t see in the West, [where artists] are more likely to use state of the art techniques, like laser cutting” says the 35-year-old. “One feature in Yogyakarta’s art scene that I can relate to is the overlapping of fields like design and architecture. This is a recurring feature in my work, as high costs in London kept me from having a studio, forcing me to make my designs on the computer before they are outsourced to contractors, designers and architects.

“This is hardly the case in Yogyakarta, as I get to rent a big house that doubles as a studio where I get to make my designs firsthand.”

While Yogyakarta’s renowned leisurely pace seemed idyllic, it doesn’t come without its challenges.

“People here don’t really work on a tight schedule, as they don’t really have a ‘time is money’ attitude like they do in London. While this is understandable due to the lower cost of living, it also makes me work twice as hard to get things going,” she laments. “But the trade-off is that working here is an incomparable experience, as the chance to explore

progressive yet traditional art is an incomparable experience.”



### Expanding boundaries

“One of the things that I tried to do in Yogyakarta is break down batik to its more elemental, geometric forms and colors. It’s a far cry from the fabric’s better known decorative aspects” says Tantra, whose use of striking colors reflect the influences of De Stijl Dutch painter Piet Mondrian and the German Bauhaus art movement, particularly the latter’s exploration of form and function.

Tantra adopted a similar approach, as seen in her 2013 pieces “The Eccentricity of Zero,” which used vinyl colors between two panels of glass to make an impression, and the more eclectic “The Broken Man in Cornforth, Hague Blue, Arsenic, Lush Pink, Incarnadine and Downpipe.” Tantra preferred to stay mum on the end result, divulging only that the pieces will be exhibited at Yogyakarta’s ICAN (Indonesian Contemporary Arts Network) at the end of

the month in a collection which was also influenced by paintings and murals.

However, her take on batik was inspired by the work of late Indonesian painter Mukta Abend and his austere approach to batik.

“[Mukta’s] approach to batik is innovative, as it cuts through the decorative aspects of the art form that made it synonymous with an ethnic, exotic art. This factor is one that I’m determined to avoid throughout my career, as it would pigeonhole me in that category,” says Tantra, whose accolades include the 2006 Deutsche Bank Pyramid Award in Fine Art, the Westminster Civic Award for Public Arts in London the following year, and the 2009 Courvoisier the Future 500 award in partnership with the Observer Newspaper. “Conventional wisdom of the British art market says that as an artist of Indonesian descent, I should make ethnic art. As a woman artist in Yogyakarta, I also encountered similar obstacles, as I move in a male dominated world. But as far as I’m concerned, this is just another hurdle to overcome.”

In addition to the British art scene, Tantra has also made inroads into Indonesian art, as seen in her 2009 solo exhibition “Arsenic Fantasy” at the Gaya Fusion Gallery in Bali. Her growing fame has also been detailed in publications like the Kompas daily and Dewi Magazine, as well as the “Kick Andy” show on Metro TV.

“In Britain much of the press exposure I received was on my work, not on [me]. In Indonesia, it’s on my person — as an Indonesian artist who has made a name overseas. It’s a welcome change, but one that I’m not fully used to,” she admits.