

EDITORIAL

This year Indonesia becomes the guest-country in the Europalia Arts Festival, a major biannual international art festival held in various European countries with its center in Brussels, Belgium. Numerous exhibitions and performances in heritage, music, painting, film, and literature are presented to showcase the multicultural Indonesia from October 2017 to January 2018. Indonesia is the 25th country in the world, the 4th in Asia, and the first in ASEAN which is invited in this most visited festival in Europe.

The main exhibition *Ancestors and Rituals* held in the Bozar Fine Arts Centre in Brussels is possibly one of the most interesting to be discussed. Displaying more than 150 heritage artefacts from various places in Indonesia, this exhibition is designated to illustrate the close relation between Indonesian communities with their ancestors and the related rituals since prehistoric time to present day. This exhibition theme had previously raised a big question in Indonesian side whether this would provide a good chance to present the cultural achievement of the contemporary Indonesia in the perspective of European modernity, or would even show the “primitiveness and irrationality” of Indonesian communities. There was also suspicion that the exhibition would only fulfill the desire of the Western exoticism and romanticism in which the primitive East is deemed to be fascinating attraction as it had been in the Colonial Era.

However, such suspicion, is in fact, a great mistake. It is evident that most Europeans consider the Ancestors and Rituals exhibition as an arena for reflection. There is a strong feeling that those two cultural elements, the close relation with the Ancestors and its rituals, have long gone from their modern culture as the individualistic and pragmatic characters of modern rationality

reckon those cultural elements as non-sense. The belief in the ancestor’s important role in human life is regarded as irrational or even superstitious while ritual which is sometimes costly and time-consuming is a waste of time and energy. Now there is a growing awareness that the above-mentioned cultural elements are significant as cultural capital in developing personal as well as community resilience in daily life and especially in time of grief, loss, conflict, and distress. Hence, there is a longing to recollect and revitalize the close relationship with the Ancestors and its related rituals.

That reflection is clearly demonstrated in the last session of the exhibition where the visitors are involved in a small workshop held by Barbara Raes. She is a Belgian artist with interdisciplinary background who develops a laboratory in the University of Ghent to restore and recreate new rituals needed for the present European society. In her small workshop, the exhibition visitors, children and adults, are invited to rethink their relation with their ancestors and descendants. They are involved in certain newly created rituals. Eventually they are required to reflect on the newly experience and write their thoughts on a big book.

This exhibition should also be a good chance for Indonesians to reflect on the strive for better livelihood. Like the majority population of the world, we are too fascinated by modernity. We are struggling all out to turn into it even if we have to abandon our cultural traditions which are regarded not in line with modern rationality. We are often amazed by modernity and we make it as a measure of our successful life although this may not be true and suitable for us or even the world. As we can learn from the Western world, in which the modernity originated, modernity is not everything.

In fact, there are weaknesses and some aspects that have caused negative impacts to the world. This has been voiced by the post-modern movement that questions and criticize the modernity as a measure to enhance humanity. In fact, such a critique is not enough to make us more realistic as to modernity. We continue to abandon our deep-rooted cultural traditions which have evidently strengthen and unite us in pursue of new external culture as yet hardly suitable and necessary for us. Perhaps, that pursuit is caused by the post-colonial condition which is still with us today. It is ironic indeed, while many nations turn their face to our eminent

cultural elements, we turn our face away and let those eminent elements disappear from our life.

At one point we may realize our mistake and then new awareness will emerge. However, it would be too late. We have already discarded our own precious gemstones in exchange of false diamonds which are glittery but much less valuable. That is certainly a modernity trap that we should be on the alert. The Ancestors and Rituals exhibition should bring that awareness earlier to us, that will prevent us from further greater loss of our precious cultural gemstones. (DAT)