

Art as Child's Play, Dolls Included

Jenny Marc | July 12, 2012



The super-cute 'Super-MON' is just one of the pieces on display at the contemporary art show 'Imaginary World: Childishly Inspired.' The exhibition is at Plaza Senayan until Sunday, July 15, 2012. (Photo Courtesy Jeong-ok Jeon)

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Invincible. Powerful. Fast. There's about a million different ways to describe Superman.

But cute?

"It's so humorous," exclaimed Jeong-ok Jeon as she admired the blue-suited figure. "Too small, too cute."

Well perhaps those adjectives were, in fact, correct, seeing as she wasn't describing Superman, but rather "Super-MON" — a six-inch-tall female version of the famous superhero.

"Super-MON" is one of dozens of pieces included in "Imaginary World: Childishly Inspired," a contemporary art exhibition on display this month at Plaza Senayan in South Jakarta. The show, which is sponsored by Art Sidharta, features installation and sculptural work from three Yogyakarta-based artists.

Jeong-ok, the exhibit's curator, said "Imaginary World" aimed to blur the lines of childhood, explaining that there's no definitive boundary between youth and adulthood.

"As I get older, if I do something naughty or childish, people think that's not really proper. Adults have to behave in a certain way, but nobody really says why," Jeong-ok said. "As I was putting together this exhibition, I realized that it could make us question that."

But while the official mission may be to blur the lines between two of life's biggest chapters, a closer look at the work reveals each artist's relationship with the idea of childhood itself.

For the duo thedeoMIXBLOOD, a man and woman who together create assemblages, youth can only be conceptualized in terms of their personal memories, which are apparently painful. According to Jeong-ok, the duo experienced some traumatic events that are reflected in their grotesque creations.

Made out of recycled doll limbs and figurine heads, pieces like "Dasamuka" resemble toys in terms of shape and stature. But the discordant combinations create a sinister quality, as if they were designed in a toy shop gone wrong. As if to heighten the confusion, "Dasamuka's" main head — which protrudes from five others — is a smiling clown, a seemingly happy character that is the source of so many children's nightmares.

"Our childhood memories are not always happy," Jeong-ok reiterated while examining the piece. "Sometimes we feel very scared about things, and those things are stuck in our minds."

Whereas thedeoMIXBLOOD can't seem to escape their own demons, Tina Wahyuningsih explores youth with the help of her 2-year-old daughter. Using mostly fabric, she stitches together whimsical dolls that would be at home in any infant's nursery.

In work such as "Flying Elephants," Tina re-creates the world through her daughter's eyes — an imaginative place where animals fly, rabbits speak and anything is still possible. Whether these pieces are influenced by her daughter's own musings or the fairy tales that they read together, it's clear that Tina looks

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at childhood with a sense of wonderment.

While these first two artists seem to interpret youth through their own experiences, Rennie "Emonk" Augustine may be the only one to consider a childhood beyond her own. Inspired by well-known superheroes and comics, Emonk produces both sculptures and felt patchwork that combines her own persona with that of the character. As with "Super-MON," Emonk creates a new alter-ego in all of her pieces. "She's not just the creator creating art," Jeong-ok said. "I think she's a part of her art work by putting in her own personal story lines."

Perhaps these pieces reflect Emonk's inability to leave her own childhood behind. Or maybe they're asking us to not loose touch with our inner child. Whatever the case may be, they certainly come the closest to begging Jeong-ok's original question — what exactly is the difference between childhood and adulthood? A particular age? A certain moment?

According to these three artists, there is no definite answer. But if you'd like to try and determine that for yourself, the work will be on display in South Jakarta until Sunday.

Imaginary World
 Until Sunday, July 15
 Plaza Senayan, Jl. Asia Afrika
 South Jakarta

