

# INDONESIA CALLING

## INDONESIAN ARTS TODAY

### Asialink Annual Arts Forum

Sidney Myer Asia Centre, Melbourne, 18 July 2008

## REPORT

“Thank you for creating the opportunity for me to make a contribution to a wonderful day of Indonesian culture and sharing. Wow! There are many brilliant Indo artists in Melbourne, I look forward to future creative collaborations and events”

**Jade Dewi Tyas Tunggal**, performer, speaker, email 28 July.

Report prepared by Alison Carroll, Asialink Arts Program, University of Melbourne  
August 2008



## ASIALINK FORUMS

This forum is part of our Annual Asialink Arts Forum series, now in its ninth year. *The Great Leap Forum* in 2007 was held in Brisbane and opened general discussion on issues of engagement with Asia, with recommendations for future action. 2006 concentrated on residencies *Blind Dates & Foreign Affairs; Australia/Asia Arts Residencies* and 2005 on Japan *Sun Rising; Japanese Culture Today*. These have become the main forums for discussion of arts exchange between Australia and Asia and attract delegates from around Australia and overseas. These have been highly praised by attendees for their focus, their liveliness and for the outcome-driven nature of their discussions.

## **INDONESIA CALLING, INDONESIAN ARTS TODAY**

For the 2008 Annual Forum, Asialink decided to follow the example of the 2005 Japan-focused forum in concentrating on the culture and engagement of one country: Indonesia. The decision was made in part because it was felt Indonesian culture is insufficiently known and appreciated in Australia and also 2008 is the year of exchange with Indonesia for the Australian International Cultural Council.

Funding to bring speakers from Indonesia had been sought from DFAT but this became impossible after the cuts to the DFAT cultural budget in late 2007. In the event, one of the 'successes' of the forum was indicating the depth and knowledge available amongst both Australian and Indonesian speakers resident in Australia.

As usual, Asialink took advantage of mid-year cross-art form committee meetings to create synergy for the forum, with committee members asked to take part in the forum, and engage with the ideas and speakers. Because Asialink has three cross-art form committees (performing arts, visual arts and literature), the focus on each annual forum has been to include speakers from each of these disciplines. This year we added a speaker on film, which added well to the mix. We see an advantage for everyone engaging with art forms beyond their own, something which is quite rare in Australia, and something that (certainly in Indonesia's case) is sympathetic to many arts practices in Asia.

The Indonesian Ambassador HE Teuku Mohammad Hamzah Thayeb attended in the afternoon, with the Indonesian Consul General for Victoria, Mr Budiartman Bahar.

An extension of past forums in 2008 was asking Ria Soemardjio to open the forum with a performance, and Amrih Widodo to lead a dance workshop for all delegates at the end. Both were deemed very successful.

The forum remains a free event, and 150 people registered to come. A brochure was prepared and disseminated. The University of Melbourne provided the venues free of charge and information was sent out through Asialink and Miranda Browne Publicity. The main publicity achieved was an interview with speaker Ian Pidd and Alison Carroll on ABC 774 (local radio).

## **PROGRAM**

The schedule, with speakers and their descriptors, is laid out in the attached brochure.

As noted, the day started and ended with performance, the key area of Indonesian practice. Dr Ariel Heryanto was asked to give a background to Indonesian culture and he did it with enormous style, clarity and humour. He was followed by Caroline Turner and Wulan Dirgantoro providing a highly thoughtful lecture on Indonesian visual arts, Caroline leading into the current situation, covered by Wulan. Dewi Anggraeni spoke in similarly insightful ways about Indonesian literature. She was followed by three speakers talking on specific examples of arts practice, Susan Barlow speaking with eloquence on her Green Turtle project, Arsisto Ambyo with clarity on Indonesian film today and Sarah Robins, manager of the Asialink Eastern

Indonesia/Northern Territory project, taking over from Julia Suryakusuma who could not travel to Melbourne at the last moment.

The afternoon focused entirely on performing arts: Barbara Hatley demonstrating her huge knowledge in this area, followed by Ian Pidd, Jade Dewi Tyas Tunggal and Ria Soemardjo talking again of their arts practice, Ian about a recent puppet project in Yogyakarta, Jade and Ria about their personal stories that have made their practice as it is: all insightful, moving and often humorous. Amrih Widodo spoke with deep knowledge about Indonesian dance practice before leading everyone in the movements of Javanese dance, all extremely enjoyable and engaging.

The day *was* enjoyable and engaging. The themes of humanity – humour, sex, politics – kept coming through in almost all papers. References to the 1965 anti-communist also were surprisingly (to me) consistent through the day. The simple stereotypes of Indonesian culture either in the arts – the word ‘batik’ never got mentioned and ‘gamelan’ only once – or wider (Islam was mentioned fleetingly by Ariel, terrorism never) were remarkable for their non-appearance.

Asialink’s main concern was that not more people in Australia were able to access the richness of the day. The talks are on iLecture on Asialink’s website, but a poor reference really.

## COMMENTS

“I really enjoyed the day and thought the range of work and ideas presented was excellent.” **Andrew Donovan**, Australia Council, email 22 July.

“It was a wonderful day, and I am sure it will lead to many other wonderful things. I have already exchanged emails and discussed ideas with some of the people who attended during the day.” **Arsisto Ambyo** film-maker and speaker, email 22 July

“Once again, I wish to congratulate you for the great success of the event "Indonesia Calling". Thank you for inviting me to take part.” **Ariel Heryanto** Convenor, Indonesia Forum, University of Melbourne, speaker, email 22 July

“Top day last Friday. Congratulations to you all.” **Ian Pidd**, performer and speaker, 21 July email.

“Thank you for the hospitality and the forum last week. I enjoyed hearing so much about Indonesia.” **Jeremy Sparrow**, Asialink Literature Committee member, 21 July email.

“Thank you for inviting me to speak today I felt very privileged to be part of the day. I really enjoyed meeting many of the presenters and feel very inspired by the events.” **Susan Barlow**, artist and speaker, 20 July email.

“Thank you very much for *Indonesia Calling* forum that I attended at Asialink last week. I had great time and I gained a lot of experience and new things.” **Bambang "BB" Nurcahyadi**, artist and attendee, Email 20 July

“Great forum on Friday!” **Sonja Balaga**, PhD student, ANU, and attendee, email 21 July.

“Congratulations on a splendid forum on Friday. I heard nothing but praise for you, Asialink and the forum programme (which was all your work and I was happy to bathe in reflected glory! ) It was terrific working with you.” **Caroline Turner**, Senior Research Fellow, ANU, speaker and co-organiser, email 22 July

## **PARTNERSHIP WITH THE AUSTRALIA COUNCIL AND THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY**

The Australia Council provided the majority of funding for the costs of the forum, particularly the brochure, catering (morning and afternoon tea for all delegates), and airfares for some interstate speakers, and Australia Council Director of the Inter-Arts Office, Andrew Donovan, took over the chairing of the forum for the final afternoon sessions. Andrew’s colleagues Josie Emery and Laura McLeod (all three members of Asialink’s arts committees) were among the delegates. ANU, through Dr Caroline Turner, worked on the program with Asialink and provided support for two ANU speakers to come and take part in the forum.

.....

“It was a very, very satisfying experience” **Ria Soemardjo** performer, speaker, email 24 July

## **Budget**

### **Income**

Asialink	\$9,000
University of Melbourne	4,000
Australia Council	10,000
ANU	2,000
Delegates (inc.30 from interstate)	<u>5,000</u>
Total	\$30,000