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Melati Suryodarmo



OzAsia. Banquet Room. 25 Sep 2015

Patience must be the gift of the viewer just as endurance is the gift of the performer. And originality.

If Melati Suryodarmo is anything, she is original - in the same way that Yoko Ono was original back in the day with her very strange performance art asking people to cut the clothing off her immobile body or imagine their own art work.

Suryodarmo requires no such direct action from her audience. They are simply witness to her art and to think

their own thoughts.

For OzAsia, they can see it at the CAS gallery or in The Art Space as videos. Pop on the headphones, sit on the ottoman, watch the artist's extraordinary efforts rolling on a floor and writhing her way into a veritable op shop of garments, one after another, layer upon layer upon layer. The longer you watch, the stranger it seems. Weird, unpleasant, sad, unnecessary. What is she saying? Surfeit rules? Yes. And one can ponder out myriad theories as one watches her go on and on, the mind wandering, conjuring...

And isn't that the point.

Hence, Suryodarmo is all over town, so to speak, in various manifestations of her performance art.

She is most famous for the butter dance in which, in high heels, she dances slowly and steadily upon a little stage made of blocks of butter. As she breaks into them, they become more and more viscous and slippery and she begins to fall, heavily. She is not a small woman. She falls again and again, hauling herself up to once again dance, try to balance, fall again. Bruised and brave she finally gives in after about 20 minutes. Why? It's life, hard knocks from soft things.

Its...what you think it is.

Suryodarmo brings a new work to Adelaide. She has given it a name which represents the girth of the planet - 24,901 miles. She has explained that she is thinking of circles as beginnings and ends and continuities.

For her live performance, now moved from The Artspace to the Banquet Room at the Festival Centre (because of the disruptions from the Noodle Night Market on the plaza) she works in a classic gallery space. There is an opening for audience members to enter and a few chairs. People may also sit on the floor. Annoyingly, vacant chairs are reserved by people who have left possessions there while going off to do other things.



It is an epic performance. No one is staying there for the duration. People come and go. Sometimes only one or two people are watching.

To be frank, when Suryodarmo's performance is not hypnotic, it is pretty boring. I spent what felt like too long watching her hiding under a mattress. I thought she would never move. We were sitting there looking at a mattress. My partner was nudging his restlessness. People were getting up and leaving.

There was hardly anyone left when, eventually, very slowly, she rose and began to undertake a journey with the mattress, wading through a floor of deep red sand in the twilight hues of the performance space. She saddened me. Her journey was arduous and lonely. She was somewhere nowhere in a bleak landscape, her mattress a shelter, a comfort, a companion, a burden...

No one will have seen the entirety of Suryodarmo's performance. The endurance is hers alone. We have choice to go out into the sunshine, eat, wander in and out...to come back the next day and watch a bit more.

Many, like my partner, will think her art is an absurd indulgence, a waste of precious time and attention.

But, if they look upon it for a while, I'm betting just as Suryodarmo is, that they will find themselves thinking about it, pondering the ifs and buts of life, the universe and art and, most likely, never forgetting it.

Samela Harris





When: 25 and 26 Sep

Where: Banquet Room

Bookings: Admission free

Works also at Artspace Gallery until Oct 4

Contemporary Art Centre of SA Until Sept 30

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