

ART & CULTURE

‘the last IDEAL PARADISE’: An immersive performance-installation with a chilling subject



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Gazing: ‘the last IDEAL PARADISE’ is the last chapter of choreographer Claudia Bosse’s ‘IDEAL PARADISE’ series. (Goethe-Institut Indonesien/-)

German choreographer Claudia Bosse’s performance art-installation hybrid *the last IDEAL PARADISE* immerses the audience in a narrative that relishes in being uncomfortable to experience.

Performed on Feb. 26, 28 and 29 at the State Film Production Company’s (PFN) studio in East Jakarta, the Asian premiere of *the last IDEAL PARADISE* is a site-specific work, being completely tailored around the old studio and surrounding buildings in the complex.

Visitors first enter the exhibition space through the door of a building that does not, at all, indicate that it is the host of an art exhibition.

A far cry from the sleek and glossy surfaces of typical art galleries, the old PFN building was not altered in any way to mask its age and grittiness. Lighting was dim in some parts, while air conditioning units were only available in a few rooms, making it rather uncomfortable to experience on a humid afternoon.

But more uncomfortable were the installations themselves, with old medical photos and decapitated mannequin heads showcased alongside narrations describing beheadings in a terrorism context.

A few performers dotted the exhibition space, unmoving yet at times making brief eye contact with the audience, which contributed to the eerie feeling of the space.

Beyond the exhibition space was the studio itself, where performers stood in the relative darkness. While viewers do get to stand in the dim light, the soundtrack played was a constant



Dividing: The two-and-a-half hour performance involves audience participation, or rather the audience is made part of the work. (Goethe-Institut Indonesien/-)

A break in the performance saw the performers walk outside the studio, which elicited applause from the audience, who believed it to be over. However, the performance went on, taking the audience on a walk through the complex between abandoned buildings, while a woman spoke of gruesome imagery like beheadings and the like.

The second part of the performance saw performers and the audience return to the studio, with the former further encroaching on the latter's space by spreading out tarps on the floor that forced the audience to move constantly so as to avoid stepping on the fabric.

Toward the end, the performers went into a frenzy, kicking the tarp wildly and thrashing about, with the piece finally brought to a close with a solemn speech on issues like capitalism and racism.

Bosse noted that she wanted the audience to experience an artistic way of understanding the spatial and political constellations they are a part of.



Splayed: The work, which is site-specific, explores political constellations and issues of terrorism. (Goethe-Institut Indonesien/-)

the last IDEAL PARADISE is actually one part of the *IDEAL PARADISE* series, which itself is the last chapter of the long-term (*katastrophen 11/15*) *ideal paradise* project that started in 2013 and ended in 2017.

The first stage of the *IDEAL PARADISE* series itself was built upon Bosse's long-term project with sound artist Günther Auer, *some democratic fictions*. The work – which began in 2011 and ended in 2015 – took the form of interviews with artists, activists and lawyers from 10 cities including New York, Cairo, Tel Aviv and Brussels on the political situations of the time.

Before making its way to Jakarta, *the last IDEAL PARADISE* had been performed several times since its world premiere at Forum Freies Theater (FFT) Düsseldorf in 2016, including three performances at the Tanzplattform 2018 in Essen, Germany.

Bosse, the artistic director of the Vienna-based company theatercombinat, said that the work itself did not travel or tour per se, but rather she worked with the space to provide more context “I find it quite interesting with the film studio, because I feel a lot of the national narrative was produced here and also a lot of political propaganda,” she said, adding that the studio had a lot to do with the production of the Indonesian imagination.

According to Bosse, the format of the work made it so that the audience experienced the installation beforehand to get a certain understanding of the material, but the viewers' independence also allowed them to be responsible for what they saw.

“With the performance over, you can visit the installation again, but I think the order made sense because I wouldn't work [give the performance] and then tell them to look at the installation, because I think you'd be too excited to look at being situated with other bodies because you cannot concentrate.”

Bosse said she felt the location in which an artwork was displayed or performed contained certain contexts that could influence the work. In an art gallery, she continued, the context was “safe”, but elements in the space were inscriptions of history, and could transpose with objects and sound, in which case the audience could see both.

“You should make visible the context, which is a partner of a work.”