

Note for the performance for art magazine PIPE LINE

“Song for Lives: People sing while I plant”

By Sakiko Yamaoka

venue: Studio Plesungan, Solo, Indonesia

project : Undisclosed Territory#9

organized by Padepokan Lemah Putih, Melati Suryodarno

I have worked site-specifically in most of my career. When I saw the environment in Solo, it gave me huge power. Also, it confused me. question : how fine art-based performance would work there and I pondered the type of audience we'd get. The key component of the festival is Melati Suryodarmo herself. I asked her to invite villagers to join me: I needed to have a bridge between my art and the local nature. She said that the villagers would be too shy, that they never sing, and that they would expect to be paid. She suggested inviting local singers. They were happy to come. We discussed it. For me the process was also important to get to know the local scene. For example, in Japan, farmers are often richer than artists, and they like to sing; they often go to karaoke.

Also, the two days of workshops I ran leading up to the festival influenced me with regard to our perception of reality. I talked to the participants and they proposed various kinds of thoughts to describe reality. I learned a lot from them. So I did not bring another time and another space to the place; I tried to find the truth of what was really happening here – the other time and space in the place.

A lot of the audience looked happy. I was surprised because the performance was a bit of mess. I was a bit unhappy because the singers were too theatrical. I expected them to be more in daily-life mode. But it is OK; it must just be another reality. I suppose the people were happy because they take pride in their local art very much and recognized the songs and the jokes, and the fact that they were involved in an art performance, even though it was clumsy. There was a friendly spark. And I guess people enjoyed the improvised side of things and how stupid I looked. Right? I replanted two of the kemuning plants [Bahasa Indonesia for orange jessamine, a tropical, evergreen plant native to Southeast

Asia] in the grounds. I gave what was left of the plants to the young local artists. These are for the future.

Singing songs involves the simplest basic human emotion; every culture has songs and poetry. And singing is connected to plants by breathing. Plants give us oxygen and we give them carbon dioxide. It is a cycle. Poetry must be human breath. The action of planting can emphasize the relationship, I thought.