

Welcome to

“The Red, Gold and Green of the Khasis”

An international exhibition with poetry and live performances.

Presentation of an installation by Arno Peeters and Iris Honderdos (NL) with poetry and musical appearances by Acid Row, Benedict Skhemlang Hynniewta, Cryptographik Street Poets, Bah H Kerious Wahlang, Serenity Choir and Summersalt.

Introduction

Iris and Arno have been in Shillong for the last one month, closely interacting with the local people, musicians, poets, academicians, cultural elders, students, traditional healers and others from different walks of life, in an attempt to understand and grasp the essence and character of Khasi society. Through the prism of their perspectives, they have created a multi-dimensional portrayal of Khasi culture, its precious heritage and its fragile existence.

Iris Honderdos has global experience producing community-based art on location. Starting as a creative therapist in psychiatry, she studied drama at the Academy of Fine Arts in Utrecht. Iris makes three-dimensional installation artwork, often combining her interests as a photographer and video-artist. She has worked with communities on issues of concern in the former Yugoslavia, Russia, Ukraine, Korea and Vietnam.

Arno Peeters is a composer and sound artist. He was one of the first techno-artists in The Netherlands and his award-winning composition AeroSon was released on the German Mille Plateaux label. Arno is also a public radio producer and editor for Dutch National Radio. His company and studio, Tape TV Productions, offers services for radio, feature films and video games. His surround sound and audio interactive applications have featured at international festivals.

Iris and Arno have worked in tandem in many countries on a unique method of direct contact with communities using participatory observation and communication techniques to learn about the emotional currents and relations that shape the community they are working with. This process of local research is followed by a period of meditation to distill a characteristic theme from these interactions. After sketching and modeling three-dimensional visualizations of the theme the actual work on building the installation and/or performance begins. The installations usually include ordinary objects from daily life. Installations are accompanied by sound or video using environmental sounds composed into a rhythmic stream. Installations are launched during a public presentation to both the community and audience during a performance, concert or festival.

Iris and Arno have been hosted and assisted by Martin Luther Christian University for this project, which is part of a global initiative “Visualizing Development with Identity” of the Royal Tropical Institute (KIT), The Netherlands. This project examines and refutes stereotypes of indigenous people. KIT has collaborated with indigenous people in Africa and Asia to show how indigenous cultures have changed across generations and examines

the cause of these changes. Their exhibitions and films have traveled to audiences in Europe, Africa and Asia. The next exhibit will be in Uganda with the Bennet Peoples.

The artists want to thank our project manager Ms. Pauline Oosterhoff from the Royal Tropical Institute and Dr. Glenn Christo of MLCU, who coordinated this project. We wish to acknowledge the contributions of the many dozens of people in Shillong and abroad who have provided time, ideas and participation. A special word of appreciation is for the artists, musicians who will come together for this special performance.

Description of the artwork:

The installation consists of 4 'rings' in which each of the 7 elements (referring to the Ki Hynñiew trep) represent a particular Khasi relation: the lowest circle of big cone shaped baskets represents the 'Gold' of the Khasis. In no particular order:

- Rice
- Bamboo
- Limestone
- Shriew
- Coal
- Betelnuts
- Medicinal herbs

These essential, precious material elements of Khasi life are decorated with the typical red and golden-colored pearls of the Khasi necklaces (Kynjri Ksiar).

The second upper circle of cone-baskets represents key aspects of the Khasi spiritual cultural heritage:

- Language
- Matrilineage
- Music
- Sacred Forests
- Ethics
- Beliefs and Rituals
- Herbal healers

This inner immaterial life is depicted through icons located within the baskets and expressed in spoken words (sound) to accompany it: statements can be heard, both in Khasi and in English, about these 'jewels' of Khasi culture. These texts will be spoken by women voices.

Then there is the third outer circle of erected rain shields (Knup). They voice the need and reason for protection of Khasi culture this time by male speakers. Just as in the traditional Khasi dances, the women are in the center and the men move around them.

And lastly, there is a the circle of serpents, depicting the dangers that threaten Khasi culture; again in no particular order:

- Unabated influx of foreigners
- Alcoholism and substance abuse
- Pop-culture and TV
- Corruption
- Religion
- Urbanization
- Pollution

These are again depicted with symbols.

These are not direct causal simple relationships between the inner and outer circle, these are some of the threats mentioned by the Khasi people that can influence several aspects of Khasi culture. Although these are possible threats in this specific context today they are not always bad in itself and are not harmful unless the Khasi themselves allow it to be: influx and pollution are mostly a result of the need for profit and cheap labor and religion is good in itself unless it is forced upon people. Pop-culture and TV are of course not bad at all, but can push traditional music and oral traditions to the background and make Khasi musicians mimic the mainstream (foreign) music by popular demand.

The choices for these threats are based on what Khasi people (young, old, academic or illiterate, man and woman) have expressed to the artists and what the artists themselves have gathered from the local media reports.

Finally, in the center of the installation, there is a rope ladder (referring to Jingkieng Ksiar) going up, but also resembling the double helix of DNA. The red and golden pearls dotted on the steps enhance the DNA-appearance.

It has been said that the Khasi-DNA is over 70.000 years old, making them the original inhabitants of this area, well before the Indo-Aryan arrived here. DNA is about the only thing that can be used to positively and uniquely identify any true Khasi. All other attributes may be undisputed historically, but certainly have been influenced by other cultures.

Explanation of the title.

Red can stand for the blood. Also it can symbolize danger.

Gold represents the wealth of natural resources and the Khasi cultural heritage.

Green is the land and the environment from which the Khasi live, which they love and (need to) cherish. And of course both red and gold are to be found in the Khasi jewelry.