



THE BULÈ ARE COMING: BALI'S EXPAT ARTISTS EXHIBITING IN NAPLES, ITALY

Words by Naima Morelli

Imagine walking into the Archeological Museum in Naples. You are probably an Italian student who has come to study the Greco-roman statues and ancient reliefs, expecting a whole afternoon devoted to ancient busts of emperors and marble gods. The last thing you expect is to bump into the bust of a colorful woman with rotten teeth, dreadlocks and a creepy smirk. Pretending nothing has happened, you keep on walking in the museum's aisle looking for a statue of Dionysus. What you find instead is a whole series of Balinese-style masks and Pura relics. Well, if you are that Italian student you might as well just forget about your quiet afternoon immersed in the white marble antiquities. The Balinese colors exaggerated by an extra expat irreverence demystify the classical art's metaphysical aura.

The mastermind is curator Maria Savarese. For this groundbreaking exhibition she decided to gather the three most prominent expat artists in Bali, "I started thinking about this show in 2012. That year I was the curator for artist Filippo Sciascia's solo show in a Naples' castle, featuring his Balinese work. That time also another Bali-based artist came to Naples for the opening. It was Ashley Bickerton, the American artist that in the '80s, along with Jeff Koons and Peter Halley, took New York by storm. Although Sciascia and Bickerton's work looks very different, I always felt it was complementary in a way. And of course, living in Bali influenced them both. We started thinking of exhibiting them together and we chose the Archeological Museum as the location. At the point we found out that the discourse around Bali from an expat point of view wouldn't be complete without Luigi Ontani, another great Italian contemporary maestro working in Bali. It has been Ontani himself who chose the title for the exhibition, "Bali Bulè" The title is self-declaring. These three artists are strangers who have been influenced by Balinese culture and environment, yet they continued their personal research. Their work is brought back to Europe, filling a gap and creating a bridge between two cultures.

Even more surreal than seeing Contemporary art from Bali in the Archeological Museum, is imagining the three

artists interact. Ontani is the typical Italian dandy fascinated by "The Orient", with his dignified talk and aristocratic manners, wandering around in his fuchsia silk dress. Ashley Bickerton is much more easy-going, preferring a surfer shirt and plastic slippers to a suit, discussing epistemology and surfing with the same passion. Filippo Sciascia on the other hand is a gentleman with lyrical eyebrows and nonchalant elegance, worldly and introspective at the same time. With those mixed personalities, it is inevitable that their artistic approach to Bali is very different as well. Sciascia goes straight to the archetype, mixing Balinese references with his childhood memories of growing up in the Greek ruins of Valle dei Templi, Sicily. Ontani likes to play with words and concepts in his drawings, sculptures and masks. His work is realized by craftsmen in Bali. Not surprisingly, his masks have been hijacked into the local Balinese shops and sold as traditional souvenirs. Ashley Bickerton's tribal and apocalyptic women with Balinese traits are a symbol of a purity that has been distorted and perverted by material gluttony.

"Placing the work of these contemporary artists in the Farnese collection could be startling at first sight", says Savarese "But giving yourself the time to explore the exhibition, you will discover an unexpected harmony. While Ashley represents a sharp rupture with the tradition, Sciascia is the joint between the two worlds. For Ontani, on the other hand, a hierarchy between cultures doesn't apply. Both Bali and the Greco-roman mythology are sources of symbols to play aesthetically with." The curator also remarks the increasing Italian interest towards contemporary art from Indonesia, "The reception of "Bali Bulè" from the Italian public has been really great. I believe this exhibition represents the first step for a mutual cultural interest."

Laughing at the outdated dichotomy East/West; Sciascia, Ontani and Bickerton show how you can boldly cross cultures - without being accused of sacrilege. Now the only problem is to go tell it to the Italian antiquities student.

