

Pengembara Molek

Cỏ Cứt Cỏ

ꨀꨁ ꨀꨂꨃꨄꨅꨆꨇꨈ ꨉ ꨊꨋ

The exhibition, whose title consists of three languages, begins with a casual but strange series of conversations about a type of plant that often adorns the corners of our eye when we walk in the middle of a metropolitan city, or in the wild. We know this plant as saliar, tembelean, or chicken shit—and, yes, in many Southeast Asian languages, it's often called 'chicken shit. Often found on the road, many people are not aware that this plant, with the latin name Lantana Camara, actually originates from Central America. When did they come? Who brought them? Why were they brought here?

These three titles are a reflection of the diversity of perspectives on the Lantana Camara. According to IDSBA, Pengembara Molek (lit. the exotic wanderer) departed from the fact that in botanical studies, Lantana Camara is recognized as an invasive plant. To the extent that it is rated as an unwanted weed. They seem to have gotten here on their own, as it is unknown who [brought them] or how they arrived in Asia. Maybe they did get here on their own, then they felt at home, and decided to settle in many places. Called salihara in Sundanese, it means "appears everywhere, at will". They wander, uniting one area with another, which they dominate secretly. The plant themselves have beautiful, exotic flowers, as revealed in these paintings.

"Awkward weed!" said Dương Mạnh Hùng, half laughing during one of our cross-language conversations while working on this project—thus the loose translation of Cỏ Cứt Cỏ. Our conversations were lengthy, time-consuming, and full of curiosity. Even though they are categorized as invasive plants, their presence in everyday life, ranging from decoration to their medicinal benefits, makes them familiar—even intimate. They seemed to be in a position between; not necessarily poisonous, but also not grown solely for medicine. Their perpetually odd position reminds Hùng of the ambiguity of the Southeast Asian region (both in discourse and as a geopolitical narrative). The

inhabitants of this area are of similar fate to the Lantana Camara. Always here and there at the same time; flanked by various interests; constantly on the bank, but never falling; always ready to migrate, move, shift, but never tire of digging for roots—however it is interpreted.

In his journal entitled **អំពី ឈើស្រស់ៗស្រស់ៗ ឬ (read: Kedhayohan Tamu Wagu/The Arrival of a Bizarre Guest)**, Hani Ristiawan tells of Lantana Camara as a guest who came from nowhere, for what purpose, behaved strangely, and was completely alien. However, as a guest, they were always welcomed and properly received. With such a behavior, some were fond of them and some weren't. They could stop in both beautiful gardens or arid corners. The tales of this guest's journey are always fascinating to be pursued.

The conversation between Hùng, Hani, Trần Công Trọng, and the Indonesian Society of Botanical Artists (IDSBA) began during the Jakarta Biennale 2021 ESOK and is now manifested in the form of an exhibition containing a short story, a journal and 36 paintings. Is this the end of the Lantana Camara story? Of course not! RUBANAH Underground Hub exhibits these collaborative works to encourage other curiosities that are cross-border, cross-regional, and cross-form. Enjoy the exhibition!

Jakarta, 13 May 2022,
Grace Samboh

Dương Mạnh Hùng

A writer and translator who lives and works in Saigon who also co-founded Bar de Force, an independent press focused on translation of Vietnamese literature. His artistic practice highlights translation work as a method to understand visual and cultural production, history of botanical art in Vietnam and Southeast Asia; and historical and sociopolitical networks between Vietnam and the regions of Southeast Asia, South Asia, Latin America, and the MENA region. He is also participating in the 2077 Kathmandu Triennale.

Hani Ristiawan

During his study at the Conservation of Forest resources and Ecotourism, Bogor Agricultural Institute (abbreviated as IPB), Hani discovered his interest in the art of botany and nature journaling. Through various field activities, expeditions, and internships in conservation areas in Java, he explores the diversity of plants and their habitats, while honing his drawing skills. Hani is currently pursuing a postgraduate

study at the Biodiversity Conservation Study Program, IPB, while continuing to deepen his interest in the art of botany.

Trần Công Trọng

Designer and founder of Navigator studio, Trọng has acute interests in nature. He sees an artwork not only as an aesthetic entity but also a medium to raise awareness.

Combining the aesthetics of traditional watercolor with the problem-solving mindset in design, Trọng's wish is to imbue his works with emotions to invoke poignancy, while coupling them with narratives collected from his field trips - cautionary tales about human role in the natural ecosystem.

Indonesian Society of Botanical Artists (IDSBA)

Starting as a small group of botanical art lovers who met in cyberspace, IDSBA was established in 2017 by Eunike Nugroho and Jenny Kartawinata. Anyone interested in the art of botany at any skill level or background, can become a member. IDSBA's current members include botanical artists, botanical illustrators, botanists, biologists, and plant lovers at home and abroad.