



Art, Charcoal, and Dice:

New Tales from Batuan

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On a balmy Sunday morning 9th May 2021, on a small street still adorned with graceful penjor, a group of children return from a strange scavenger hunt, carrying back treasure of uniquely-shaped leaves to the village communal hall.

This unusual scene took place during a creative workshop organized by CushCush Gallery (CCG) and LagiLagi (LL) as part of their annual Charcoal for Children program.

The brainchild of architect Jindee Chua and his interior designer partner Suriawati Qiu, CCG has rapidly established itself as one of the most active cultural platforms in Bali since its opening in 2016. Envisioned as a space to bring together the duo's passion for art, craft and design, the gallery is a haven of creativity and multidisciplinary collaborations in the heart of Denpasar.

As the pair started experimenting with recycled wood for their designs, they launched LagiLagi, meaning 'again and again' in Indonesian, an initiative focusing on the production of unique household items making use of the natural shapes of wood from production offcuts.



Driven by a strong belief in the importance of creative education and culture, the duo always had in mind to develop a creative program for children. Always full of ideas and with the hands-on experimental approach of their trade, they sought a way to make use of Lagi Lagi's leftover wooden offcuts. This led to the creation of their Charcoal for Children program, just one year after the gallery opened. Simple but ingenious: the wooden offcuts are upcycled into drawing charcoal sticks, which children can then use to draw during workshops. The program has been running for four years now, exploring various artistic disciplines in collaboration with several local and international artists and designers.

While workshops for Charcoal for Children program usually take place at the gallery in central Denpasar, this year's edition is taking place outside of the island's bustling capital for the first time, an unexpected consequence of the Covid 19 pandemic. Although CushCush Gallery closed its doors at the onset of the pandemic a year ago, it did not stop Jindee and Suriawati from continuing their activities. On the contrary, they decided to reach out directly to local communities and run the workshops in villages around the island instead. Supported by young volunteers, the team has planned an itinerary that will take them as far as Negara in West Bali and Buleleng in the North. The selected villages reflect CushCush Gallery's efforts to reach out to various communities inhabiting the island. The Bali Aga village of Penglipuran, Serangan's Bugis village, and the "deaf & mute village" of Bengkulu are among the six locations the team will visit over the next few months.



Batuan is the second stop on their journey, following a successful first workshop in Tabanan. Famous for its expressive and intricate painting style, Batuan is a “nest of artists”, as I Wayan Diana, the village head explains, beaming with pride as he welcomes the team at the village hall. While the volunteers start to set up, he embarks on an impromptu sharing about the village’s rich artistic past.

Recognized since August 2018 as one of Indonesia’s national intangible cultural heritage, Batuan’s unique painting style has also gained international recognition, featured in museums or private collections across the globe. The village’s ancient bronze tablets inscribed and documented the fundamental principles of its many art forms, including its specific painting style. Next year, Batuan village will celebrate its 1000 years of their Batuan painting existence.

Batuan’s culture and arts flourished thanks to royal patronage and are still prominently featured in many ceremonies and rituals. The village has produced some renowned artists such as I Wayan Bendi and I Nyoman Kakul, both revered as contemporary Batuan-style painting masters.

It is clear that art and culture are taken very seriously in Batuan and are deeply rooted in its identity and pride. So much so that the village’s artists created their own community called “Batur Ulangun”, literally meaning Batur’s art fascination, in reference to the village’s former name. “We offer various activities and art classes for the village children on the weekends, both at school and in our own homes”, explains artist Ketut Sedia, Batur Ulangun’s respected leader. For him as well as for the other older artists in the village, it is vital to pass on their knowledge and techniques to the next generation in order to keep Batuan’s rich heritage alive. Roughly 80 artists are part of Batur Ulangun and about 25 of them open their homes to children interested to learn from them. Other local artist who attended CushCush gallery’s workshop is I Wayan Malik, a respected painter and instructor, who welcomed the gallery’s outreach initiative. Some of his students are among the 18 young participants.



The theme of this year’s edition of Charcoal for Children, “Tell Me Tales”, focuses on the art of storytelling. The workshop was cleverly designed to pique the children’s creativity and make them come up with their own stories through a game based on the use of elements that they are familiar with and can easily relate to. The young participants can choose from various elements found around their village, such as birds, flowers or local landmarks. Each child can choose their favorites and then play a game of dice on which those elements have been stuck. Using four elements randomly generated from the dice roll, everyone must create their own story. The game was developed by one of the three young workshop facilitators, Putu Juli Sastrawan, a talented Balinese writer who recently published his very own novel. He is joined by “Jong” Santiasa Putra, a multitalented Balinese director, scriptwriter, actor and puppet player at Teater Kalangan, one of the most active theater troupes on the island. His natural comic and acting talent truly shines, as he makes the children burst into laughter throughout the workshop with his antics and jokes.

Avid appreciators of art and perpetually looking for new artistic talent, Jindee and Suriawati discovered Irene Febry, the third and last workshop facilitator, after attending an exhibition in a gallery in Ubud. Hailing from Bogor, she studied fine arts in Singapore before settling down in Bali. Specializing in collage art using recycled materials and found objects, she came up with the idea of the scavenger hunt and helps the children illustrate their stories using the objects they found as inspiration.





Following in the steps of the Batuan painters in the olden days, who used soot and natural pigments as their tools to paint, the children experimented with LagiLagi's charcoal to draw illustrations to accompany their texts. The team is genuinely impressed by the young participants' technical skills and imagination despite their tender age. Interestingly, looking at the various drawings coming to life, the Batuan style is clearly present amidst more childlike creations one would expect from ten-year-olds.

Although Batuan children's artistic skills are already advanced for their age, the workshop provides an "opportunity to open their mind, to think out of the box, to explore their own creativity in a very concrete way and to be exposed to artists from other backgrounds in a less traditional way", says Suriawati with utter conviction.

After reading out their story to each other, the children happily grab their own completed minizine made of simple folded paper, their memento of this fun experience.

Next stop on this journey: the Bali Aga village of Penglipuran.

