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'MTV generation' tunes in to web: a Hong Kong show for Indonesian video art trio

Just as video killed the radio star, the internet has made music television channels less relevant, so Bandung collective's stop-motion video art has evolved to respond to 'nowness' of the web

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Enid Tsui



23 SHARES



The usual labels for contemporary Indonesian artists are often tied to that watershed moment in the country's recent history: the end of the Suharto dictatorship in 1998.

The three members of Tromarama, the Bandung-based collective recently in Hong Kong with new works exploring the concept of reality in the age of social media, are certainly products of the *post-reformasi* era that has seen the country open up and steadily democratise over the past 17 years. But they would add another description for themselves: the three thirty-somethings are also the MTV generation.

"Growing up, we were mainly influenced by films and music video directors. Because of MTV, which we watched on television at home, we saw how music videos were really experimental," says Herbert Hans, the 31-year-old who formed the collective with his partner Febie Babyrose and high school friend Ruddy Hatumena.



In fact, it was the experience of working together on a music video that convinced the three to jointly pursue a career as artists.

In 2006, they were finishing their respective degrees in design, advertising and print-making at the prestigious Institut Teknologi Bandung when they decided to collaborate on an extracurricular video assignment. The result was a stunning piece of animation using nothing but a video camera and a lot of

woodcut panels.

Serigala Militia, created for a song by Indonesian heavy metal band Seringai, was shown at the 2008 Singapore Biennale and the trio refer to the making of it as “traumatic”, a moment when it all clicked, and a moment that gave birth to Tromarama.

Since then, they have built up a solid international reputation with their combination of time-lapse camera wizardry and attention to craftsmanship. But just as video killed the radio star, the internet has made music television channels less relevant, and the members of the 10-year-old collective, who owe their start to MTV, have decided to try something new.

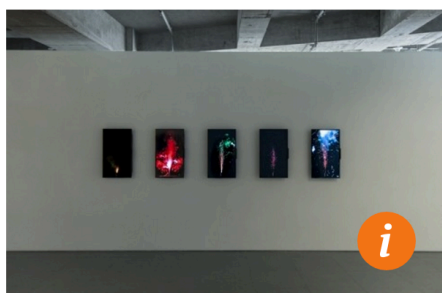


The new works on show at Edouard Malingue Gallery in Hong Kong are ruminations on the internet generation and how the web affects our perceptions of reality. If their earlier stop-motion videos were about tricking the audience into believing a piece of fiction, then this new batch of work is the equivalent of the illusionist revealing his tricks.

“We are the generation that grew up with MTV. Now, the internet has come and we want to question how it offers a new reality, how it changes ‘the truth’ of our daily lives,” says Hans.

Panoramix appears to be a video of plants growing in the wild, but it turns out to be a projection, a video within a video.

Intercourse is a two-channel video that shows a fan on one screen “blowing” at the objects displayed on another screen facing it. As the pages of a telephone directory flutter and paper napkins get blown about, it is impossible for the viewer not to see a causal relationship between the two images.



Also included in the exhibition is *Surflux*, five video screens showing exploding fireworks. “In reality, all fireworks will die eventually. But in this work, they live forever. This generation always updates information on the internet, always celebrating the ‘nowness’. So we want to freeze the moment of now,” says Babyrose.

Their eagerness to explain their works may well be the result of a decade of having to verbalise visual ideas for each other.

“We work as a collective. We discuss ideas. Personal experiences are thrown on to the table and we try and share them, or react to them differently, and then come up with a way to express them through art,” says Babyrose. She admits it can be tough.



“It’s easier to work by yourself because as an artist you can express everything that’s on your mind. With us, it’s like living in a commune. You must trust each other and communicate. We give each other space but we also need to know what’s happening with you, what you’re writing right now,” she says.

Many of the music bands that inspired them have split up over the years, but these three staunch friends and artistic partners say they have fine-tuned the way they read each other’s minds, and solo careers are not on the agenda.

Tromarama: Panoramix, Edouard Malingue Gallery, 6/F 33 Des Voeux Road Central, Central, Mon- Sat 10am-7pm. Ends Jan 23.