

VISITOR REPORT

by Eva Posas

on Nuraini Juliastuti's *Stories of Wounds and Wonder*

Book Launch

Saturday 17 February 2024, 14.30–17.30hr

Framer Framed

Oranje-Vrijstaatkade 71

1093 KS Amsterdam

The Story of a Traveling Turtle

To write this report, I looked at the pictures I made that Saturday 17 February. The day started with my partner David building a boat out of cardboard with pizza boxes for sails, and then our Turtle from the Clouds sailing in that ship. Later, I saw our arrival – as a *gezin* – to Amsterdam. Did we sail from the sea of Scheveningen to these canals?

On our way to Framer Framed, we recognized people travelling to the protest against the ongoing genocide in Gaza. I felt conflicted to be going somewhere else. Still, this *gezin* was very excited to see the experimental children's book, and be with more children. For the last two years our little world has been sprouting around the act of mother/parent-hooding Turtle from the Clouds. As an independent curator, becoming a mother has been tainted by the worries of being in a new country, with a new professional life to build, next to moving to a new city with a new human life. Ah ah ah. Although I've been mostly amazed by motherhood, I've also felt quite lonely. So any time that the 'professional' can join the 'personal' is something of a family celebration. This little fact already conditions my experience(s) in the outside world(s).

When we arrived, there were not many children, but I found my place at the threshold between the performance space and archival room. From there, Turtle from the Clouds and his dad went into the archival room, exploring, attending to stickers on a table. A children's workshop had happened showing traces of fun, blinking at Turtle's curiosity. That gave me a feeling of relief, to walk through the available materials. Yet, I still felt a

bit nervous that Turtle might break something, like the animals made of what looked like coconut shell. There was a giraffe, Turtle's new favourite friend. There was an elephant too, Turtle's former favourite friend. Luckily, David was accompanying Turtle in caring for the beautiful animal gang in different sizes, shapes, organic and non-organic materials.

The minute I sat down, I encountered people that I knew. Furthermore, I could speak Spanish with them. Although it is not my mother tongue, it is the language that I learned to socialize with and here in the North I miss it a lot, regardless of its coloniality. The paradox is that this language, there and in that moment, was refreshing.

In Spanish you can say *alzar la oreja* or 'raise the ear' for when you're trying to pay attention. From my seat at the threshold, I raised my ears between the archival room and performance. *Not to despair but keep singing for life*. A phrase from Donna Haraway shared in the introductions gave me some warmth. These days I find it difficult to be in the world, I even feel guilty enjoying the blessings I have. But there, sitting next to all these people, we were joining the demonstration in spirit. Every day I wish I could do more, teleport my food, my bed, anything to those persons in the Strip. Maybe this stomach hole I feel is a shared sensation.

The reading started. Nuraini Juliastuti acted as narrator and at some point made animals sounds. I heard *muakak-kkkaaaakaaaak*, and in the other room I heard Turtle saying *uh oh* – the human borrowing animal words, the Turtle borrowing human expressions. The performance kept going and I kept hearing the children in the other room, conspiring playfulness. Turtle from the Clouds sometimes crossed the threshold, curious about the sounds from this other room. At some point we even sat on the floor closer to the performers. Turtle loved the music breaks. He sat observing the DJ, shook his little body with the tunes and tried to crawl closer. I mini danced. When Turtle got bored, he returned to the archival room with the father, cushions and rest of the kids. From the threshold chair my attention was divided between the grown-ups sitting and reading aloud and the wilder room where Turtle played, coming in and out. A neck -even a core movement to the front and to the left in repetition. Here: I heard about finding freedom in riding a motorcycle. There: I saw children playing on pink cushions. Here: I followed a rat's dialogue. There: a full table of kids drew, hugs among little ones. In the

coming and going of the grown-up reading room and the little jungle room, I felt joyful.

I thought about how the script was supposed to be for a children's book. Except for two girls in the front row, the other children were at the threshold. Everybody listened closely, with their bodies opening up to the animal tongues. Listen more with compassion is a phrase Nuraini mentioned somewhere and I could see the collective enactment of it, including the children hearing subconsciously through being active.

There was a beautiful moment at which Ratu R. Saraswati was performing as a monkey, and at the same time shared the story of Armina, the freedom fighter. Until that moment the performers mostly read from their chairs, but in that instant, Ratu stood up, adding fire to her lines about rebellion and bravery. I wish the other performers had also read more freely, throwing the weight of their bodies into the text; after all, storytelling demands an embodiment of words, the body transpiring a corporeal story. As if Ratu had also read my heart, in the Q&A she mentioned the loneliness of being an Indonesian woman in the Netherlands. We're not from the same land but we share the feeling. I felt her courage.

The reading ended and we had a drink before the conversation between Yazan Khalili and Nuraini. Kids ran around everywhere, even in the exhibition downstairs. I cannot but salute this wildness: mama screaming, papa making noise from the ground floor, parents running to catch their wildlings. That afternoon everybody could drink, talk, laugh, run, rest, nap and play as they wished. Play play play for all of us. If my Turtle can't play, I don't wanna be part of your revolution. This event was a space that literally accommodated all of us. A scenography for attentive listening and adult play on the threshold of a room full of children's imaginations.

After the pause, you could feel a more calmed atmosphere mixed with fatigue. When raising a little being, you learn terms such as 'overstimulation'. You could say that the same term applied to everyone here. At that point I had to breastfeed my tired little Turtle there on my threshold. I also noticed the many fathers taking care of their toddlers, while us mothers were engaged with the programme. Yazan and Nuraini talked about the theoretical side of children's books. They described storytelling as a form of theory, the importance of collectivising knowledge, of hiding things in plain sight and how by reading for a child, in reality you are reading for yourself. This event, this book

presentation embodied precisely that: the ritual act of learning and soothing yourself by the attempt of doing it for somebody else. The storytellers healing themselves through the consciousness of future listeners.

When the event finished, we said goodbye and walked to the station. In other times, I would've loved to join for dinner or drinks. In this current life, Biguzaa (or Turtle from the Clouds in Zapotec language), David and I got happily exhausted on our way back home to the sea.

ABOUT THE EVENT

Nuraini Juliastuti's publication *Stories of Wounds and Wonder* was launched at Framer Framed in Amsterdam Saturday 17 February 2024. For this occasion, the book was turned into a radio play performed live by Juliastuti with Mercedes Azpilicueta, Astrit Ismaili, and Ratu R. Saraswati. The play was followed by a conversation between Juliastuti and architect, artist and cultural producer Yazan Khalili. Accompanying the launch was a display of books, fables, textiles, prints, puppets, stickers and other artefacts that inspired Juliastuti's children's book.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Eva Posas is a curator living between Mexico and the Netherlands. Working across curatorial and editorial boundaries, she is interested in the politics of language, in identity and memory as a form of production, and in Zapotec culture. Through exhibitions, books, texts, educational initiatives and public art projects, her work investigates publishing as an articulation of social complexities, storytelling as a form of curating, the crossing between public and private spaces, and subtleness as a subversive methodology.

ABOUT THE VISITOR REPORT

At If I Can't Dance we see the visitor report as a method of documentation. The affectual, relational and embodied nature of performance work is not always easily captured in audio-visual formats. To supplement such formats, If I Can't Dance commissions written visitor reports, which are meant to offer subjective responses to a lived experience of a work and its context. The visitor report is, therefore, not to be confused with a critical review. It is first and foremost a form of witnessing. The people commissioned to write the report span a range of positions and practices within and outside the field of art.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Concept: Nuraini Juliastuti
Curator: Sara Giannini
Performers: Mercedes Azpilicueta, Astrit Ismaili, Nuraini Juliastuti, and Ratu R. Saraswati
Conversation: Yazan Khalili
Hosts: Sara Giannini and Reza Afisina
Musical intermissions: Cempaka
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Production support: Dewi Laurente

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