

Botanica 1.1: Vanda Tricolor and Other Findings

It started with a long walk and even longer talk in the park. Anyhow, Kaliurang is partly located in the Merapi Volcano National Park area. We spent days of exploring, fulfilling Edita Atmaja's curiosity of the native plants and flora, amidst the cold mountain air. For such exploration, time was of the essence. It has to be reclaimed. It is nice to have plenty of it in our hands: to waste, to be able to find surprises along the way, to experience the little details, and to move beyond hospitality as a small part of the community. One can not rush such connection. This was one of the aims for Atmaja's residency in Yogyakarta. She took her time; distance herself from the fast-pace city life, finding a place in the society. Kaliurang was a perfect place for that. It was built over time with a strong sense of community that forms a big number of extended family who reside the area. That was another thing Atmaja experience during one of her expedition.'

It is easy to be overwhelmed by the nature in Kaliurang if you are looking through the magnifying glasses. There are layers and layers of stories in the leaf, the tree, the hills, and the mountain. Atmaja starts her journey by visiting flower nurseries, climbing up a hill, walking down the main road, and visiting the neighbors' garden. In this little expedition, she found a certain similarity of domestic plants in almost every house; as well as its dissemination pattern from the nature to the domestic area, and vice versa.

She starts tracing the passage of the plants and vaguely saw a plant circulation map brimming with human touch. She finds how gotu kola (*Cantella asiatica*) was plant in several houses as well as scattered on the ground by the main road. Some people might actually take the original plant from the wild and start planting it in their houses as soon as they learn about its health benefits and particular taste. On the other hand, she witness how a man transform the wilderness of a hill in the middle of the National Park into his garden without ever claiming it his own. This man decided to take several types of house plants and plant them along the way to the hill where he went every day. There was no reason for that. He simply wants to make the pathway beautiful, and for him, the simple beauty of cordyline tree should be shared with other people who walk down that shady forest. In fact, he used to carry seeds of an orange he ate, hoping that it will one day grow to feed the wild monkeys. He tried to grow grass in front of a cave so that people could sit and have picnic, and other failed attempt he made to leave a silent trace of his being. We might see the act as a sincere contribution to the society and a gentle counter-message to the National Park that forbid people by law to take any part of the plant and the trees on the hill. But for the man who grows those domestic plants in the wilderness, it was just a simple thing he does in his spare time without reason or agenda. In other part of this area, few years ago, the community grows fruit trees along the main road for a simple reason: when people come visiting Kaliurang and they walk along the street, they can help themselves with a fresh fruit. It was a treat and an experience offered by the community to the guest. Whereas on the hillside, the local youth plants hundreds of calliandra tree for ecological reason and to avoid landslide.

From all these stories, we can see how this community was built based on a strong sense of belonging. The member of the society act as creator and co-owner of the society. They live with a cultural instinct to care for the common good that leads to a natural willingness to provide hospitality and generosity.

Atmaja interested in Kaliurang native plants with distinctive dissemination pattern that portrays its communal connectedness. The relationship between the nature and the people become her gateway to look deeper into the layer of culture and lifestyle aside from individual matters. Through plants, she saw an image of the community in that area, its organic exchanges, and the knowledge distribution that is going on. Atmaja's exploration as a stranger in Kaliurang allows her to experience the hospitality offered by this community. She was curious of how almost all houses along the way has similar type of flora in their garden so she start visiting the neighbors for hours of unplanned conversations that ended with a handful of new plants to grow. This pattern is repeated in each house that she visited. There is an intangible currency of knowledge and plant exchanges. Not only adding plants in her collection, she learned about edible flowers, health benefits of certain leaf, and other useful tips. Knowledge distribution is apparently becoming another currency used in this type of community.

In the exhibition, Atmaja presented traces of her expedition in form of scribbles, bits and bobs, recipe, trivia, and memorabilia. *Vanda tricolor*, a native mountain orchid type, is not only repeatedly seen in almost every house but also become one of the prides of this neighborhood. This impression and repetition is presented in Atmaja's exhibition through her chosen medium of silk-screen and etching; two mediums she just started to develop aside from her usual impeccable monochromatic technical drawing. The sensation of smell, sounds, and light is also brought up to recreate her experience of exploring the nature. Entering this exhibition is like exploring a little forest of her own. It is transient, but with a little bit of curiosity, each layer of the leaf holds a never-ending story.

(Mira Asriningtyas –Curator)