"Bed Check" scene portrays the importance of love and companionship in the healing process. In this tapestry, the presence of Acehnese’ Saman dance did not feel like unnecessary addition. Instead, the dynamic dance with its ever-increasing tempo played a critical role in defining the mood of the lunch time scene at a mental hospital. The performers had to dance a circulation before they entered the lunch enjoying next to them through the doors.

Shackled Spirits was conceived by College of the Holy Cross professor Kremer and Wianta, one of a few Baliinese painters who has garnered global recognition. In the past, Wianta, who is also a prolific poet, had dabbled with media devoted commercial, including videos and TV series.

The play focused on people with mental illness and their families. It would be staged in Bali, a world-famous resort island where adequate treatment for mental illness is either unavailable or too costly to be affordable. The Suryani Institute for Mental Health, the only NGO working in this field, estimated that there are around 800 people with severe mental illness in Bali. As many as 80% of them are shackled or confined by their own families. Most of these people are living in impoverished villages in north and east Bali. Mental illness in a topic rarely taken head by local theater. Shackled Spirits was the first major theater performance on that topic staged in Bali.

The main storyline featured various available therapies for mental illness — from occupational therapy, black magic and trance, art, medication, meditation to physical therapy — presented by local artisans, monasteries and religious characters with mental illness, such as Charles V of France, Ludwig II of Bavaria and George III of England. It contained the theme of stabilization of people in a society, the stage provided a bridge for the non-linear narrative.

The presence of these royals and the monarchy’s proclamation that mental illness was the same as the Devil did not seem to bother the audience.

Shackled Spirits is a collaborative project performed by students of Massachusetts College of the Holy Cross and the Singapadu Makaradhwa=

A substructure on "Robbing the Dollhouse", in which two girls of different ages gradually emptied a dollhouse while reciting poems, lent the whole play a poetic and cryptic beauty.

Shackled Spirits was a play with a grim theme and a complicated structure. It was an entertaining, presenting elements that appealed to the elites and masses.

Scores of the island’s art heavyweights, including students of Massachusetts College of the Holy Cross and the Singapadu Makaradhwa Troupe, only lasted for a few minutes. Yet, it was enough to send a message to the audience that the oncoming scenes were not only about substance, but style.

The stage turned pitch black and immediately fliters of light materialized on the dark background. The ‘fires’ fluttered and danced across the stage.

The captivating opening scene of Shackled Spirits, a collaborative project performed by students of Massachusetts College of the Holy Cross and the Singapadu Makaradhwa Troupe, only lasted for a few minutes. Yet, it was enough to send a message to the audience that the oncoming scenes were not only about substance, but style.

For Wianta, mental illness was a far more interesting subject than a unique cloth. “Insanity is universal and the number of mental hospitals across the world keeps increasing,” said the painter cum poet, often praised as well as derided for his treatment over controversial subjects.

Wianta was responsible for the visual elements of the play. His works were translated into masks and puppets by College of the Holy Cross’ Bobbie-Jean Powell and into costume by Kurt S. Hultgren. Sound and video were crafted by Cooper Gardner and lights by Barbara Craig.

Made Bandem and Swasthi Widjaja brought the traditional theater and musical elements to the play. Kremer herself embraced Balinese performing arts enthusiastically.

“I really love Indonesian dance and music. It changed how I went about making a theatrical piece,” she explained.

The masks are inspired by beasts and creatures from the fantasy world in Wianta’s paintings.

In 2009, I Made Bandem, one of the brightest and most influential masters of contemporary Bali, introduced Made Wianta and his wife, Swasthi Widjaja to Lynn Kremer from the theater department of the College of the Holy Cross.

Kremer admired Wianta’s work particularly his large-scale installations and they began to explore a new project. The first idea was a theatrical production about mental hospitals and their patients. They traveled to the island’s sole state-funded mental hospital in Bangli. They taped the daily life of the patients and interact with their families.

“What they showed us was how people can transform their lives back to Wianta’s painting. I came back home more invested in the idea. The painting of shackled ladies’ hands, the sort of what would become the principal visual element and stage props in Shackled Spirits.

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