

Tirollesia: A Trans-Medial Art Project Bridging Two Regions

Helena Manhartsberger

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INTRODUCTION

As a student at the Department of Development Studies, University of Vienna, and a journalist and artist interested in global social issues, my early passion for *pencak silat*¹ grew into an intensive involvement with Indonesia – its people, social and cultural diversity, dynamic history, and current socio-political developments. In the course of traveling throughout the Indonesian archipelago, my passion for this country grew stronger and I decided in 2012 to channel my aspirations into a project, bridging my homeland Tirol and Indonesia.

‘Tirollesia’ is a trans-medial art project aimed at enhancing the intercultural dialogue and artistic exchange between Tirol² (Austria) and Indonesia (Java, Bali, Lombok). By using different means of expression (film, photography, and stencils) and presentation (exhibitions in both countries and virtual space), this dialogue transcends geographic borders. The participatory approach towards visual media encourages a profound communication between people from two regions that appear to be separated both geographically and culturally. The visual narratives show how people identify, perceive, create, and present their immediate surroundings. Based on photographs, people are encouraged to invent stories about this ‘other’ place and the conscious reception of these ‘foreign’ stories at home gives the opportunity to inquire into stereotypes, clichés, and prejudices regarding an often ‘unknown’ or remote reality. Interactive exhibitions in Yogyakarta, Jakarta, Innsbruck, and Vienna as well as virtual presentations offer an opportunity for the wide public to join the dialogue and continue the stories.

Each place, image, or setting of a photograph – taken either in Tirol or Indonesia – is intimately connected with a story; and behind this story lies the narrative of a person. With a backpack of images taken in my homeland, Tirol, I made my way on a motorbike through the Indonesian archipelago in search of these stories and their narrators. I showed these pictures to people I met along the way and asked them to pick one that they associated a strong memory or an intensive experience with. Consequently, they told me stories that were as diverse as the people I met. At the end of this journey, I had gathered portraits – stories and captions – for a much larger composition which cast a light on Tirol from the eyes of Indonesians. I presented these stories and images at the art festival “urban spricht kunst” in Innsbruck, Austria, in September 2013.

1 *Pencak Silat* is an umbrella term for martial arts and fighting styles in Indonesia.

2 Tirol (in English, Tyrol) is the Austrian name of a mountainous region in the west of the country which is also part of the Alps.

In order to continue this dialogue, I took the chance to invite the Indonesian street artist and musician, Digie Sigit, to change the perspectives. Digie Sigit was traveling on a motorbike through Tirol and inquired into the narratives and memories of Tirolean people as they looked at images taken in his homeland Indonesia. This photo essay illustrates the people, images, and stories that contributed to this project both in Tirol and Indonesia.

In a next step, the entire project (TIROLESIA #1 and #2) will be presented at exhibitions and workshops in Austria as well as in Indonesia. The large variety of stories, thoughts, and perspectives will be made visible and accessible to a broad public in both regions. The exhibitions will take place throughout 2015 and will continue on the project's website (www.tirolesia.at).



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Helena Manhartsberger studies development studies at the University of Vienna and works as a freelance journalist. She is currently engaged with *ipsum* – an association that works in the fields of dialogue, education, culture, and development on a global level. In her projects she strives to combine arts (particularly photography) with journalism and theoretical discourse.

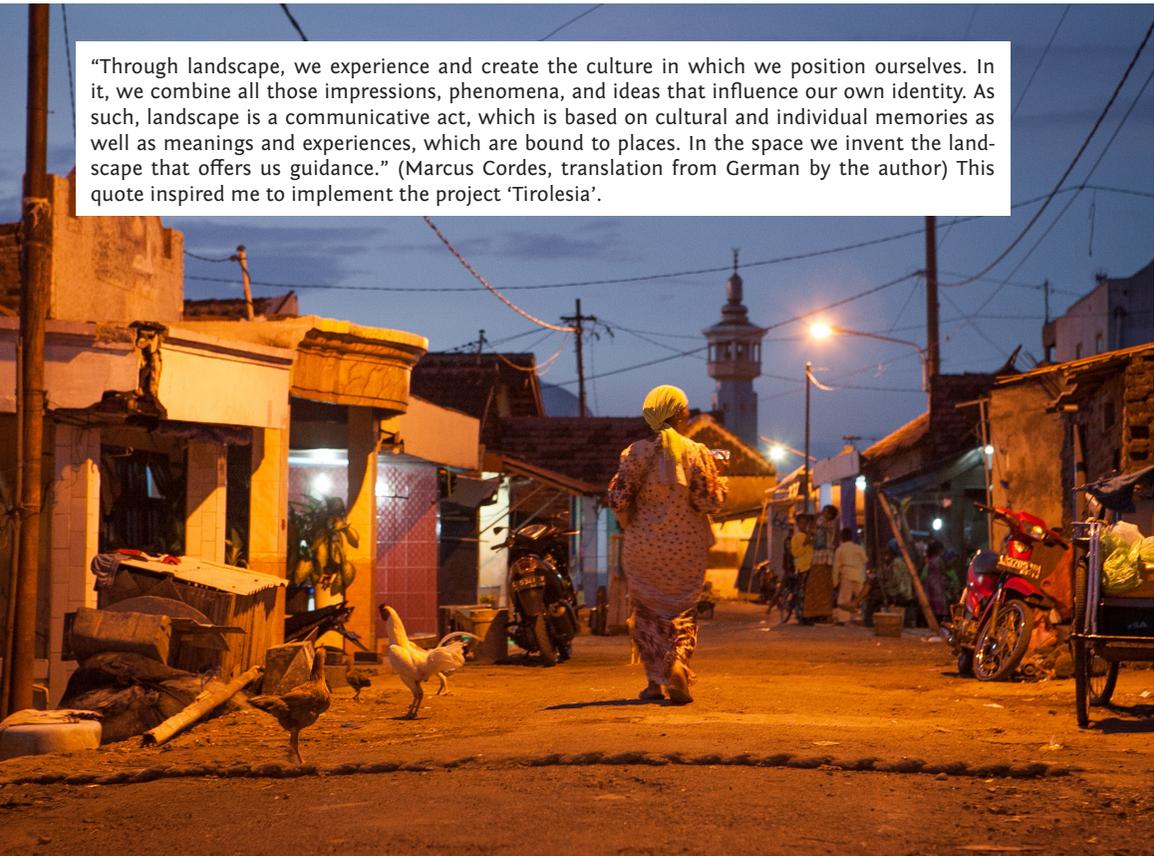
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank all the people involved in the project, especially Digie Sigit, for all his personal contributions and ideas, *Euphoria Audiovisual*, who realized the montage and design of the first movie TIROLESIA#1, *NonPlus Filmproduction*, who are currently working on the second movie TIROLESIA#2, and *ipsum*, for their methodological guidance prior to the project.



“Through landscape, we experience and create the culture in which we position ourselves. In it, we combine all those impressions, phenomena, and ideas that influence our own identity. As such, landscape is a communicative act, which is based on cultural and individual memories as well as meanings and experiences, which are bound to places. In the space we invent the landscape that offers us guidance.” (Marcus Cordes, translation from German by the author) This quote inspired me to implement the project ‘Tirolesia’.





While searching for an adequate method in order to implement the project, I considered the method of generative picture processing. This method is based on photography as a non-verbal impulse capable of evoking the beholders' associations of personal memories, stories, and experiences.

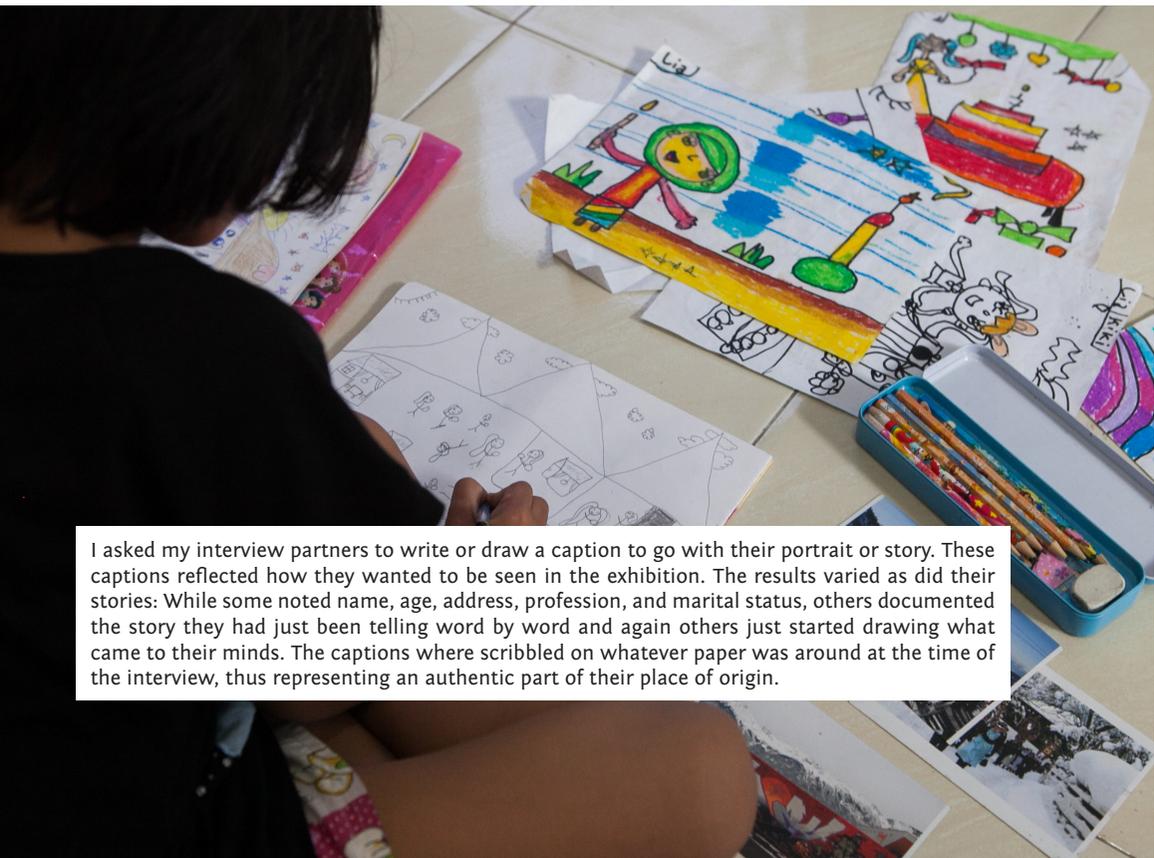




As I came to select the pictures, I thought of a phenomenon that highly intrigued me – the fact that many people get their first impression of a country by searching the Internet. This is why I browsed the Internet to see what kind of images I could find of my home region.



I took these pictures on a journey that led me from Yogyakarta through East Java and Bali to Lombok. On my way, I showed them to random people I met and asked them to share the impressions these pictures evoked. I recorded the interviews on video and took photographic portraits of my interview partners.



I asked my interview partners to write or draw a caption to go with their portrait or story. These captions reflected how they wanted to be seen in the exhibition. The results varied as did their stories: While some noted name, age, address, profession, and marital status, others documented the story they had just been telling word by word and again others just started drawing what came to their minds. The captions were scribbled on whatever paper was around at the time of the interview, thus representing an authentic part of their place of origin.

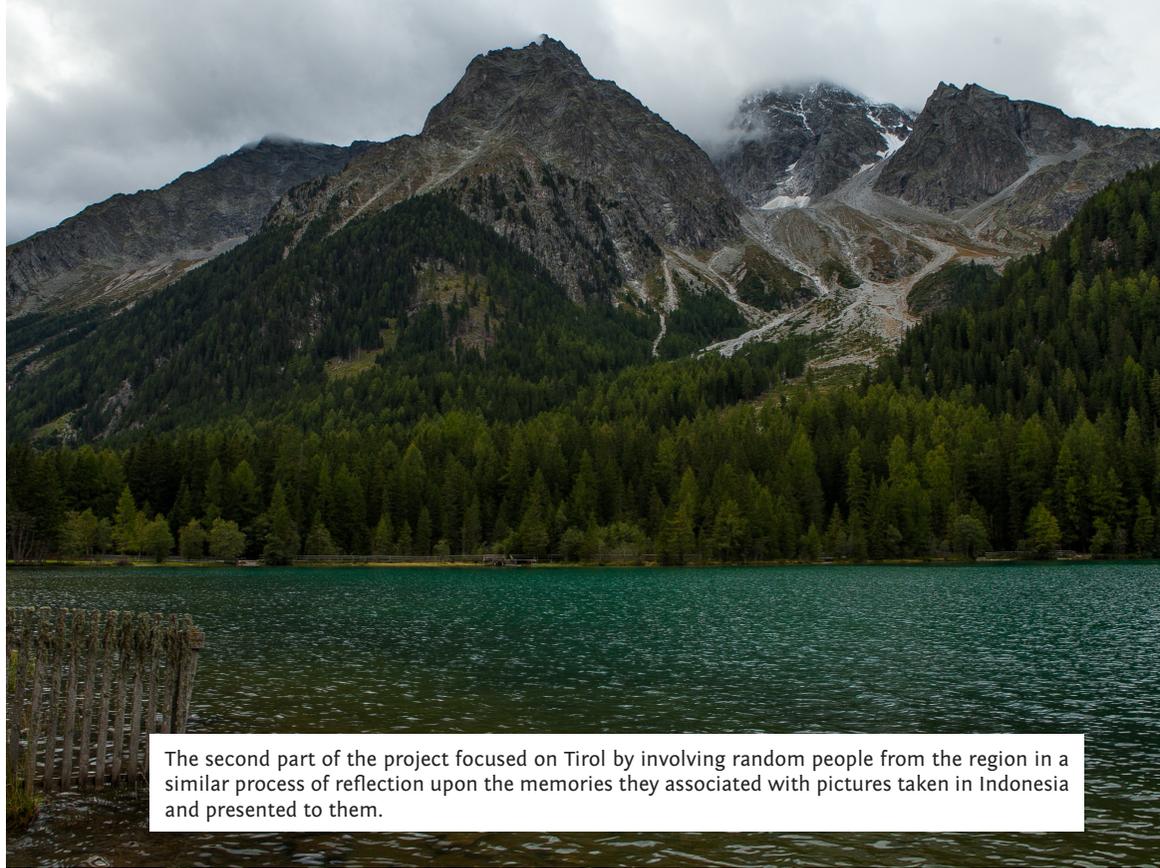


NAMA . SUPRIYANTO
UMUR - 51 TH
JOB = POLRI
ALAMAT = JL. SRIKAWATI
20 YOGYAKARTA
STATUS = KAWIN
1 STRI / ANAK 3
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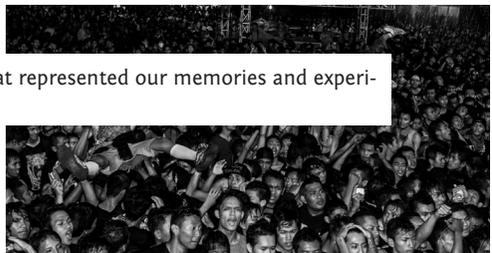
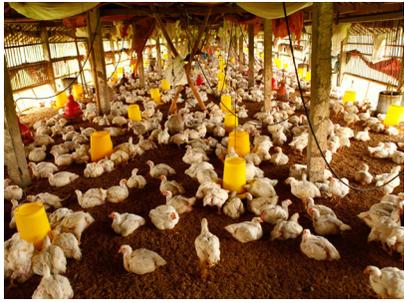
Since the project is based on the premise of a mutual exchange of thoughts, memories, and perspectives between two places, the project had to continue in Austria. I invited the Indonesian graphic artist, musician, and street artist, Digie Sigit – one of my interview partners in Yogyakarta who had experienced the project and who was willing to contribute to this project with workshops and presentations throughout Indonesia.





The second part of the project focused on Tirol by involving random people from the region in a similar process of reflection upon the memories they associated with pictures taken in Indonesia and presented to them.





Sigit and I decided to use pictures taken by ourselves that represented our memories and experiences of Indonesia.





On a three-week journey across Tirol, I accompanied Digie Sigit as he confronted people we met on the way with photographs of his home. He invited them to share their personal experiences and stories that they associated with the images.







John Craik, New Arzl,
Innsbruck;

If I could find the right
words at the right time
I would write a book!

yours
sincerely,

John
★

02. 04.2014, 09:57:18, fragmutter.de, 05

Rainer Maria
König - Alm 1850m
9977 Matrei / Osttirol

Ich lebe auf der Alm im
Sommer u. bewirtschafte mit
meiner Familie eine Jausen-
Station. Wünsche dir, alle
Menschen in so einer schönen

Wanderkomfort auf höchster Ebene
Wandlberg
Leisberg

02. 04.2014, 09:57:18, fragmutter.de, 05

Jugend leben könnten
und vor allem in einer
friedlichen Welt sich ihr
Leben gestalten könnten!
Wünsche allen alles
Gute und vor allem
viel Glück u.
Gesundheit
Ihre Maria!

Wanderkomfort auf höchster Ebene
Wandlberg
Leisberg





Both parts of the project 'Tirolesia' created space for the mutual exchange of thoughts and perspectives related to images of two geographically and culturally distant regions. In a dialogue, people shared their aspirations with regard to their perceptions of 'home' and 'identity'. At subsequent workshops, presentations, and exhibitions both in Austria and Indonesia, this dialogue between the 'authors' and the 'observers' shall continue.



