

CO-WRITTEN BY PEOPLE
WHO LIVE IN MERAPI

FOOTHILLS
WOMENS



A FIRST FEATURE FILM
BY RIAR RIZALDI

2023

PRESS

KIT

LOGLINE

Several professional actors and non-actor professionals portray a dynamic of human-nature relationship in one of the most active stratovolcano in the world, Mount Merapi. In the shadows of recent eruptions, these actors play a story that is written together with volcanologist, sand miner, and a mystic—people who have a close bond with the mountain, potentially illustrating fiction and nonfiction situations that could and would have happened in Merapi.

SYNOPSIS

Repressed by the state-sponsored violence, a mystic is determined to stay in his land in the foothill of Mount Merapi. Nothing can change his determination to stay on his land and keep practicing his belief of being one with the mountain. On the other side of the mountain, a volcanologist keeps insisting that the end of the world is near.



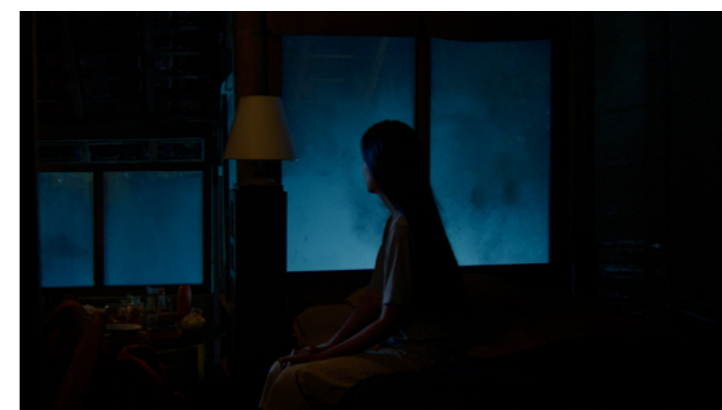
Although he is criticised heavily by his female assistant by questioning his worldview, this volcanologist insists that the only reality is a scientific one. Gaining knowledge from the earth-sensing technology, he declares that mitigation is the only way for humanity to survive from a colossal eruption of Merapi that he predicts. Not far from where volcanologists conducted their research in Merapi, the sand mining industry blooms. One miner, while documented by a filmmaker, contemplates the impact of sand mining and extraction economy for the community, the mountain, and his own psyche. In Merapi, everything is connected by the presence of paramilitaries.

A form of state apparatus.



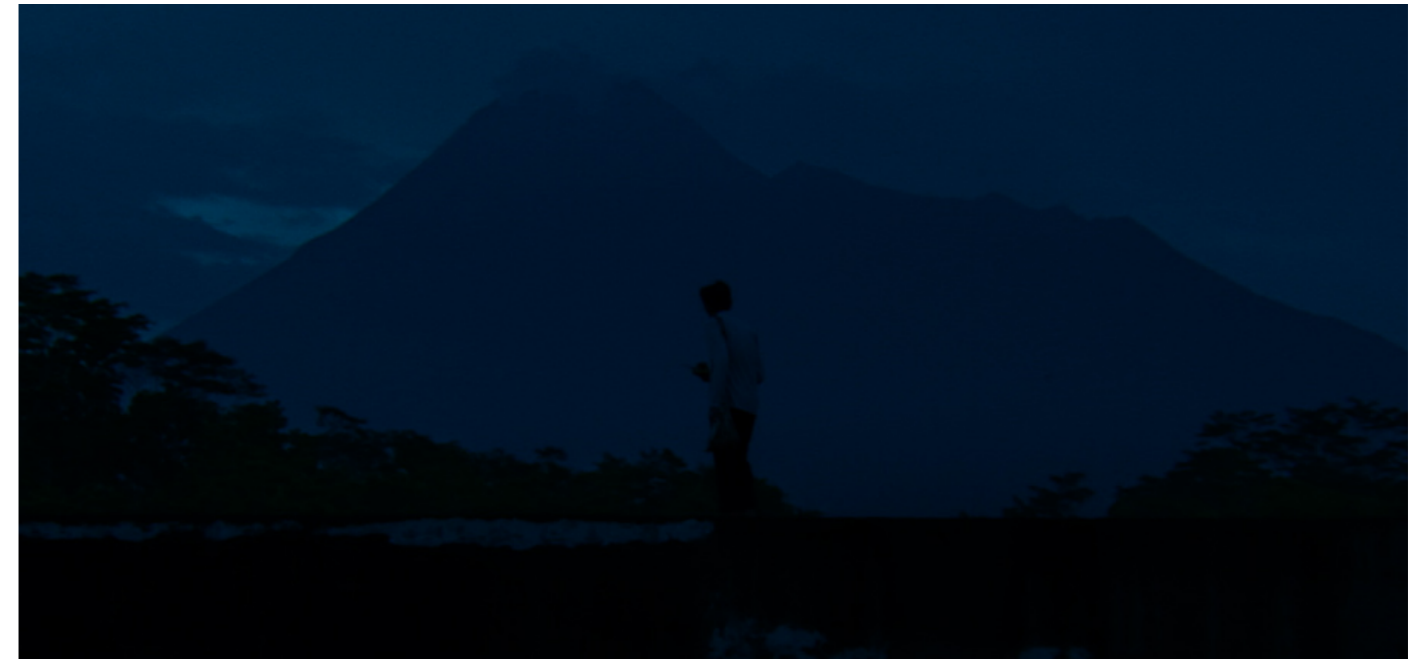
Formed in a spirit of collective filmmaking and between factual and fictional, future and past, material and incorporeal, scientific and magic, Monisme reflects the intermingled relationships between people in Mount Merapi: from a mystic who believes that Merapi is a God who gives him life

and death, a volcanologist who sees Merapi as a threat to human existence, to a sand miner who treats Merapi as a source of livelihood because it provides him with resources to extract. Monisme trips to the place where actuality is intertwined with myth and legend.





NOTES ON THE PROCESS



Since 2018, we have been researching about Mount Merapi extensively. We realised that the process of research is one of the big part of this project. In 2019, we meet several people that closely connected to Merapi that has different worldviews. From many people we met, three of them are the one that really open to their connection with the mountain and see the volcano as an important part of their life. They are Pak Yulianto the volcanologist, Pak Suparno the sand miner, and Pak Juritno the mystic shaman. We tried to approach them not as a filmmakers with camera or researcher with goals, but as curious friends that want to know more.

In 2020, we start to juggling idea that it would be great to make film together with them. Not a film about them. But a film about Merapi made together with these people with different worldview. It could be fiction, it could be documentary, it could be experimental, it could be everything, or it could be nothing. But it has to be a social practice. And it has to portray Merapi as the main character.

Then we start to ask Pak Yulianto, Pak Suparno, Pak Juritno, and the Mount Merapi (through Pak Juritno) "What do you think about cinema?"

This generate a really interesting conversation about the aesthetic of cinema, especially the aesthetic of documentary cinema. Most of



them throwing idea about making a fiction film, as some of them are not really comfortable being in the camera. When we said that we work a lot in the context of documentary filmmaking, they see it as a journalistic approach. So for them cinema needs to be platform for them to imaginatively express their thinking about the volcano. We think this is an interesting idea and in line with our understanding of Merapi that actually also shaped by cinema.

Eventually we decide to make a hybrid film, a mix of dramatisation, re-enactment, genre-filmmaking, and staged interview, where the screenplay is written together and brainstorm together based on their imagination and our conversation. The involvement of them in this project is not only on the screen but also in constructing the film.

Pak Yulianto suggest to make a fictional character that speak a lot about the volcanological knowledge. He wrote this character as someone who always think about humanity existential risk that could cause by Mount Merapi. Pak Suparno concern on how the sand miner always portrayed as people who don't understand environmental issues, so he creates a fictional character that is more focus on the livelihood of sand mining community. On the other hand, he also asks us the film crew the possibility of him to act with a professional actress in the film. As for Pak Juritno, his biggest issue is the characterisation of shaman in Indonesian cinema that always looks either goofy and comical or really frightening, so in Monisme he wants to make a

character that is true to the actual representation of a shaman. That the person has to be think logically and rationally in addition to the practice of ancient knowledge of shamanism and seeing Merapi as a God.

Throughout the process of the film, we also try to involve the Mount Merapi as an active participant. Pak Juritno organised a ritual to ask what Merapi thinks about cinema and how it wants to portrayed or created in this film. Through this ritual, and mediated by Pak Juritno, Merapi give us a recommendation how to portray the spirits that live in the mountain that needs to be shown in the film.

Meanwhile, for us, the film crew, after discussion and juggling idea, we decided to write the character of paramilitaries. Paramilitaries as the representation of nation-state that control the mountain. In the screenplay, besides Mount Merapi, the paramilitaries is the backbone of the story that we wrote together.

In the end, the structure of the film will follows the structure that you read in the writing treatment. We have a 38 pages of screenplay and the content crosses from the fiction written by our collaborator and the actual footage we record during our production.

Documentary filmmaking is always a collaborative process, and what we are trying to do in this project is to expand the form of collaboration that incudes in the process of research and pre-production (the pre-production took 4 years counted from 2018), thinking together how this work will be shaped. Our film practice is necessarily a social practice, at once producing works and doing work.

Building on the models of collective filmmaking, we incorporate experimental production techniques developed together with the documentary subjects and the mountain that have involve in the process of conceiving this film, the technique including spirit possession, re-narration, infiltration, dramatisation, genre-based fiction filmmaking in order to experiment a new model for film production. The idea is to insert fictive within the horizon of "reality" in Merapi, eschewing fiction narrative as the expressive vehicle of the writer-director, but rather exploring the ways in which people conspire with the apparatus of filmmaking to enact their own stories and desires within social reality.



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT



I've always been obsessed with the notion of labour. I am always awed by people's capacity to make and remake the world. Some of my previous works have always investigated the notion of labour and nature from a more speculative approach by looking at how labour intersects with the socio-political conditions that occur in Indonesia, and perhaps the world. In this film, I try to reflect the idea of labour in a place where different types of labour are intertwined. In Indonesia, especially in Java, Mount Merapi is the source of life (and possibly extinction) of humans that live around it. What makes Merapi fascinating is the existence of several modes of labour with distinct features interacting with it.

Material and manual labour is represented by the sand miners at the foothill of Mount Merapi, volcanologist illustrates an immaterial mode of labour, and the villagers who mostly follow the syncretic version of Islam and Javanese mysticism believe that ritual is a form of communication labour

between humans and Mount Merapi—which something that I understand as a spiritual labour. Moreover, these three modes of labour also show a different approach to technological devices that they use to extend their capacity in sensing the world. The volcanologist is immersed by the advanced technology of earth-sensing devices which are mostly image-based. The miners are artisanal who rely a lot on their hands and simple tools. Meanwhile, the villagers construct their spiritual labour purely based on their extra-sensorial attempt and intersubjectivity. Based on this exposition, through cinema I would like to see the dynamics of three modes of labour in detail and investigate how each mode is closely connected (or disconnected).

On the other hand, there is a nostalgic feeling that I want to observe between myself as a person and Mount Merapi. When I was a child, the only knowledge and information I got about Mount Merapi was taken from its representation in



popular culture, predominantly from the period dramas TV series and radio play. Of course this changed when I grew up and learned that at Mount Merapi, at least according to science, there are no fairies, ghosts, or spirits. In popular culture—the most famous one in Indonesia is the Mystery of Mount Merapi series on TV and also its radio play adaptation—Mount Merapi is a magical place where many spirits and ghosts live there, from the most evil one to the most generous.

My personal attachment to Mount Merapi, which I deem as a fantasy place filled with kingdom of unseen entities, determines my intent to develop this film not in a straightforward documentary style, but rather incorporating magical and mythical elements. In this film, an investigation into the actuality of the labour phenomenon from the three modes will be combined with a more fantastical imagery and sound. This film tries to see actuality and fiction in the same form. This is an effort to continue my personal exploration and experimentation of the entanglement

between fiction and nonfiction, technology and magic. Moreover, these two aspects are embodied in the cosmology of the people living in the Indonesian archipelago, where legends and myths determine everyday life as well as social, political, and economic decisions of the country. There is nothing more real or objective, neither nothing more fantasy.

Ultimately, from these three modes of labour, we will subtly see how the contemporary political and social mechanics in Indonesia work. All of these

relate to the observation of how the politics of oppression work in the country. From the dispossession of land experienced by the indigenous, to how we see politics and capital accumulation interact with nature.



Director

Riar Rizaldi



Riar Rizaldi works as an artist and filmmaker. He works predominantly with the medium of moving images and sound, both in the black-box of cinema settings as well spatial presentation as installation. His artistic practice focuses mostly on the relationship between capital and technology, labour and nature, worldviews, genre cinema, and the possibility of theoretical fiction. His works have been shown at various international film festivals (including Locarno, IFFR, Viennale, BFI London, Cinema du Reel, Vancouver, etc) as well as NTT InterCommunication Center Tokyo, Centre Pompidou Paris, Times Museum Guangzhou, Istanbul Biennial, Taipei Biennial, Venice Architecture Biennale, Biennale Jogja, and National Gallery of Indonesia amongst others. His short film *Tellurian Drama* (2020) won Silver Screen Award for Best Southeast Asian Short Film at Singapore International Film Festival 2020 and awarded Honourable Mention at DOK Leipzig 2021.

Producer

B. M. Anggana



B.M. Anggana, personally known as Eng/Ang is an Indonesian theatre artist/film producer based in Yogyakarta. He is the founder and director of Komunitas Sakatoya, an art collective working on art management and theatre production focusing on ecological issues. He produced several music videos, theatre and dance productions, and films. From 2019 he is appointed as the Program Director for Indonesia Dramatic Reading Festival. In early 2020 he achieved Professional Development Training - Management Production at Art Centre Melbourne, fully funded by Australia Council for the Art. He produced a performance film by visual artist Natasha Tontey, *The Order of Autophagia* (2021), premiered at Kyoto Experiment 2021 and *Garden Amidst the Flame* (2022) that screened on Queer East Festival 2023 and 57th Karlovy Vary IFF 2023 – Imagina Section.

DIRECTOR'S FILMOGRAPHY

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Kasiterit

(2019, 18 min - Locarno Film Festival, International Film Festival Rotterdam, BFI London Film Festival)

Tellurian Drama

(2020, 26 min – Singapore International Film Festival – *Best Short Film*, International Film Festival Rotterdam, Cinema du Reel, DOK Leipzig – *Honourable Mention*)

Ghost Like Us

(2020, 20 min – Istanbul Film Festival, Singapore International Film Festival, Top Ten Video Essays of The Year 2020 - Sight & Sound Magazine, etc)

Becquerel

(2021, 20 min - Kurzfilm Festival Hamburg, etc)

Notes from Gog Magog

(2022, 19 min)



MONISME

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Indonesia, Qatar

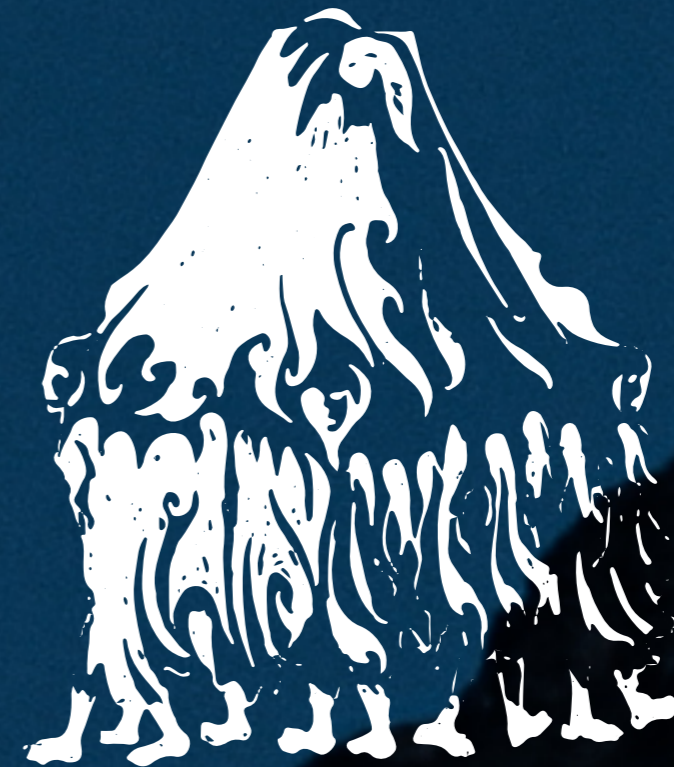
115 min / 2023 / 1.85 / 2K / 5.1

Indonesian, Javanese with English subtitle

CO-WRITTEN BY PEOPLE WHO LIVE IN MERAPI FOOTHILLS

With

Rendra Bagus Pamungkas / Kidung Paramadita / Whani Darmawan
Puthut Juritno / Yulianto / Suparno



Director Riar Rizaldi

Producer BM Anggana

Associate Producer Robin Moran & Pinkan Veronique

Director of Photography Aditya Krisnawan

Production Designer Arda Awigarda

Art Director Rizal Umami

Music & Sound Designer Wahono

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