

A scene in *Prenjak*.

Twelve Minutes of Poetry

The short film *Prenjak* won an award at this year's International Critics' Week in Cannes. It is an encouraging achievement.

THE story is set in a kitchen filled with hanging pots and pans, and cans of flour for pizza. Diah, the short-haired woman, pulls aside Jarwo, a chubby male co-worker wearing an apron.

"Sit down," Diah (Rosa Winenggar) orders. Jarwo refuses as he is busy making dough.

Diah is in need of money. She makes him an offer to buy matches for Rp10,000 a match. Jarwo (Yohanes Budyambara), impatient, interrupts her mid-speech as men

tend to do. Then she makes her surprise statement. "For each match you light, you can look at my vagina until it burns out."

Jarwo swallows hard before deciding to accept. The first match goes out quickly. Jarwo pauses a beat, then comes up with a few more Rp10,000 notes. However, Diah is in need of more than Rp100,000. While lighting another match, Jarwo tells Diah she should look for a boyfriend or a husband to get some security.

Diah retorts sharply to shut him up. When the final match burns out, she puts

on her underpants and stands up to leave. That is when Jarwo makes a proposition of his own: He will pay her some more if she looks at his penis. Diah hesitates, and then accepts. Jarwo counts to 25, during which time Diah keeps her eyes closed under the table. The match is nearly out. She slowly opens her eyes and looks at the penis in front of her. Her expression is grim. She does not seem excited and looks sad.

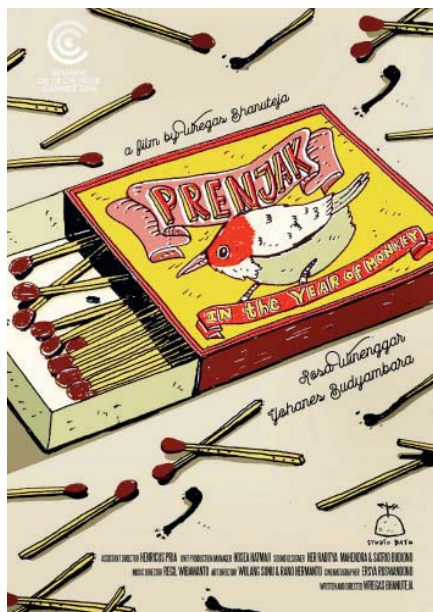
This 12-minute film directed by Wregas Bhanuteja took the Internet by storm this year after winning *La Semaine de la Critique Cannes*. It is only the third Indonesian film to have competed in the prestigious event, joining *Tjoet Nya' Dhien* (1988) and *The Fox Exploits the Tiger's Might* (2015). *Prenjak: In the Year of the Monkey* is an ambiguous film, despite having some moments of depressing humor. The genitals are a mere plot device to get the characters to express certain emotions, silliness among them, which is both surprising and unsettling.

However, that is not what makes the short film special. From the outset, Diah is portrayed as a brusque person. She speaks emphatically, with no emotion. She does what

she has to do because she needs cash. However, under the table in the light of a dying match, we see a slow change in her expression. One parallel to the final minutes in the film when, while bathing her son, he asks where his father is and she replies that she doesn't know.

The idea for the film came from a story about 'match girls' in Yogyakarta in the 1990s. Wregas Bhanuteja had a friend who once told of such a match girl with a ginger drink vendor. "By paying for a match, the girl could take a peek at the vendors' genitals," Wregas told *Tempo*. When Wregas went to go look for the vendor, however, he never found him. "I became so curious, the visual stuck in my mind. So I decided to turn the story into a film," Wregas said.

After raising Rp3 million, Wregas' Batu Studio group created their own version of the ginger drink vendor and set him in present-day Yogyakarta. In Cannes, Wregas not only beat out nine other filmmakers in the



PRENJAK
Director : Wregas Bhanuteja
Screenplay : Wregas Bhanuteja
Actors : Rosa Winenggar, Yohanes Budiyambara, Hosea Hatmaji, Banyu Bening

short film category, he had also managed to tell a moving story in just 12 minutes.

The film's theme reminds us of *Siti* by Eddie Cahyono, which won a Citra film award last year. The female protagonist in *Siti* is also ready to do anything for her children.

Wregas capably captured the complex emotions of a mother seeking to make ends meet for her child after her man has dumped them. The film's visuals carry the stark story well: Light from a match illuminating a face, making it look melancholy. Money shown changing hands, only adding to suppressed grief. The film's dialogue, in other words, is secondary.

What *La Semaine de la Critique* curator Marine-Paulien Mollaret, said rings true. "Bhanuteja banishes sordid voyeurism to the benefit of tender and humorous poetry."

At 23, Wregas has a bright future, and is paving the way for Indonesian cinema to carve a foothold in the international arena.

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