



Many Hands International
culture based community development

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Ita Nia Kultura: Iha storia diferensia bar-barak

Our Culture: Many Different Stories

**4 pm, Saturday 4 February, 2012
Old Market, Lospalos Central, East Timor**

Imagine giant scattered jigsaw pieces creating the floor, a ceiling hanging with the layers of *Tais* (weavings) threads, words and images projected onto the staggered threads, perfect acoustics and visibility. Well, that's not happening right now! But there is the premise for the vision and a collection of elements that will be presented as a community performance next Saturday at the Old Market in Lospalos, East Timor. With an open structure, a rubble floor and no electricity in the building, we must perform before dark!

Five elders, a woman and her daughters, vai hoho singers, youth dance group *Sanggar Haburas*, and accomplished Australian theatre director Catherine Simmonds in Lospalos on an Asialink residency: these are elements and this is the beginning, the 'blueprint' of a performance that searches for culture and knowledge. Sacred stories of ancestors will emerge; yet equally, by default and necessity, some remain submerged.

Catherine spent weeks with her eleven year old son filming and consulting with community and leaders about the meaning of 'culture'. A defining moment occurred when gathered elders passionately debated and navigated what could, and could not be spoken. Yet all agreed about the danger that these sacred stories could be lost with time. An air of urgency, excitement and trepidation transpired, as all decided to go ahead with a process that aims to transform these sacred ancestral stories of oral tradition into a public presentation.

Catherine's residency is being hosted by Australian NGO Many Hands International, who will continue community cultural development activities in Lospalos, working with local people, community organizations and government. Many Hands and partners are collaborating to reinstate the Mercado Antigu (Old Market) to its former glory, and establish a Centre for Traditional and Contemporary Art and Culture in this isolated regional town at the far eastern end of East Timor.

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