Art and Youth Culture of the Post-Reformasi Era:
Social Engagement, Alternative Expression, and the Public Sphere in Yogyakarta

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This thesis titled
Art and Youth Culture of the Post-Reformasi Era:
Social Engagement, Alternative Expression, and the Public Sphere in Yogyakarta

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ABSTRACT

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Art and Youth Culture of the Post-Reformasi Era: Social Engagement, Political Expression, and the Public Sphere in Yogyakarta

Director of Thesis: Elizabeth Collins

This thesis examines the development of contemporary art in Yogyakarta, Indonesia in the post-Reformasi era. Focusing on communities who consider themselves “alternative” to the mainstream commercial art world, I examine three aspects of art in Yogyakarta including collective organization, alternative space, and the public sphere. Based on six months of research involving semi-structured interviews and participant observation, carried out from January 2012 – June 2012, I argue that the artists and groups described can be related to ideas of socially engaged art and do-it-yourself (DIY) practice. This examination stems from a discussion of Indonesian modern art history focused on the development of sanggar (artist groups) during the revolutionary era that contributed to the establishment of a collective tradition in Indonesia that again manifested itself in the work of Reformasi era groups, Apotik Komik and Taring Padi. Today, in the post-Reformasi era, the individuals and groups discussed legitimate their work through the support of an increasingly wide network throughout Indonesia and abroad. It is through the support of this peer-to-peer network that these artists are able to imagine the possibility of art to have an impact on Indonesian society, thus becoming socially engaged artists.
DEDICATION

To the artists and communities whom without this would not have been possible.
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I would like to address my first line of acknowledgement to my parents who have always encouraged me to explore and follow my passions. If it were not for their support and blessing, time and again, I would have never had the courage to undertake the adventures I have. Along with my parents, I must also thank my extended family both in the United States and my “keluarga besar” in Indonesia. To all of the individuals in Majene, Yogyakarta, Jakarta, and Bandung who have made me a part of their families and help to make me feel at home no matter where I am. Without the feeling of family so far from home, I may not have returned to Indonesia time and again.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1: Indonesian Modern Art History</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Revolutionary Generation and Sanggar</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Independence and Gerakan 30 September</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The New Art Movement</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased Politicization of the 1980s and 90s</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2: Collective Organization and Artist Groups</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apotik Komik</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taring Padi</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Underworld Youth Movement</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ketjilbergerak</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networked Communities and Mutual Support</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3: The Development of Alternative Space</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cemeti Art House, Kedai Kebun Forum, and Via-Via</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SURVIVE!Garage</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kedai Belakang</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of “Alternative” Space</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4: Public Art and The Development of Graffiti</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Place of Public Art and Graffiti in Indonesia</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aksi Kota: Collaborative Public Action</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications for Participation</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5: Conclusion</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glossary</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Parade for Taring Padi Lapindo Commemoration Project</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Abdullah Suriasubroto, <em>Untitled</em>, Early 20th Century</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Affandi, <em>Boeng Ajo Boeng</em>, 1945</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Jim Supangkat, <em>Ken Dedes</em>, 1975</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Dede Eri Supria, <em>Labyrinth</em>, 1987</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Apotik Komik, <em>Sakit Berlanjut</em>, 1999</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Apotik Komik &amp; Clarion Alley Mural Project, <em>Sama-Sama Project</em>, 2002</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Main building of the Gampingan Campus</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Taring Padi, <em>Semua Bersaudara</em>, 1999</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Example of LOVEHATELOVE Street Art Yogyakarta</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Example of LOVEHATELOVE Street Art Yogyakarta</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>HereHere, <em>untitled</em>, 2012</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Example of HereHere in Public Space Yogyakarta</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Example of HereHere Political Commentary in Public Space Yogyakarta</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>HereHere, <em>untitled</em>, 2012</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Collage series by HereHere for Underworld 2 at Kedai Belkang</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Anti-Tank, <em>Menolak Lupa</em>, 2012</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Example of Anti-Tank <em>Menolak Lupa</em> in Public Space Yogyakarta</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Rasefour, <em>Java Skull Rider</em>, 2012</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 20: SILENCEReight, *Six Bones*, 2012.................................................................56

Figure 21: Community Festival and Dance Performance for *Membatalkan Keperempuanan* .................................................................63

Figure 22: ketjilbergerak, *Benih Bunyi*, 2012.................................................................64

Figure 23: ketjilbergerak, *Benih Bunyi*, 2012.................................................................65

Figure 24: Cemeti Art House .........................................................................................70

Figure 25: Yogyakarta Contemporary Art Map ..............................................................72

Figure 26: Kedai Kebun Forum ......................................................................................73

Figure 27: Interior of Via-Via Cafe with Art Display on Walls ........................................76

Figure 28: Sangkring back gallery .................................................................................78

Figure 29: Sangkring front gallery .................................................................................78

Figure 30: Front View of SURVIVE!Garage .................................................................79

Figure 31: First Mural Project at SURVIVE!Garage .....................................................80

Figure 32: Roda-Roda Soundsystem ............................................................................83

Figure 33: Exhibition opening for Roda-Roda Soundsystem .......................................84

Figure 34: Embroidery by Fitri DK ..............................................................................85

Figure 35: Discussion held for *Bunga Bunga Besi* at SURVIVE!Garage ....................85

Figure 36: *AWAS!30 September* Exhibition at SURVIVE!Garage ............................87

Figure 37: YK LOGOS Exhibition at Kedai Belakang .................................................89

Figure 38: Monumen Nasional Indonesia (MONAS) ..................................................94

Figure 39: Tugu Tani located at the Menteng Roundabout ........................................94

Figure 40: Anti-Tank, *Berbeda dan Merdeka 100%*, Yogyakarta ..............................98

Figure 41: RHARHARHAR, *Berbeda dan Merdeka 100%*, Sabang, Aceh .................99
Figure 42: Mural Created for Jogja Rumah Bersama Movement..................................101

Figure 43: Rally held at Gedung Agung for Yogyakarta untuk Kebinekaan ...............102

Figure 44: Mural by Jakarta Street Artists for Sunday Street Art Movement..............104

Figure 45: Mural by Yogyakarta Street Artists for Berani Jujur Hebat ....................105

Figure 46: Exhibition held at MONAS for Berani Jujur Hebat..................................107
INTRODUCTION

On May 29, 2006, near Sidoarjo, East Java, the largest mud volcano in the world began to erupt. This eruption was caused by the blowout of a natural gas well, owned by the Indonesian oil and gas exploration company, PT Lapindo Brantas. A subsidiary of the Bakrie Group, this company was owned by politician and businessman Abzurizal Bakrie, reputed to be one of Indonesia’s richest men. As a result of this eruption and the subsequent mudflow, which continues today at rates as high as 160,000 cubic meters per day, approximately sixteen villages have been destroyed, displacing thousands of residents, many of whom relied on this land for their livelihoods. The communities affected by this disaster, however, have not received compensation for their losses due to Lapindo’s unwillingness to admit fault and the government’s failure to intervene.¹

In order to help the people of Sidoarjo commemorate the fourth anniversary of this disaster, speaking out against the ongoing devastation caused by the mudflow, Taring Padi, a political artist collective from Yogyakarta, joined the people of Sidoarjo for a four-day collaborative project. While in Sidoarjo the artists of Taring Padi organized workshops to teach the residents of Sidoarjo the techniques of woodblock and screen-printing. People of all ages joined in these workshops, creating posters, banners, and T-shirts with messages that read, “Your Gas is Poisoning Us,” “Where Will We Grow Our Rice,” and “Give Us Back Our Place to Play.” The posters and banners, along with homemade wayang (traditional puppets) and life-size paper mache statues created by

Taring Padi artists and Sidoarjo residents were used in a parade, depicted in figure 1, held on the last day of the collaborative event. This parade culminated with a carnival for the residents of Sidoarjo. At the carnival citizens and artists alike sang together, expressing their discontent and continued concerns on a community stage that was the carnival’s central focus.

Figure 1: Parade for Taring Padi Lapindo Commemoration Project (Reprinted from Taring Padi: Seni Membongkar Tirani (Yogyakarta, 2011), p.295)

Taring Padi’s work with the community of Sidoarjo is exemplary of this group’s engagement with local communities in Indonesia and abroad. Since the group’s founding in December 1998, they have worked to bring art to disempowered communities in order to engage in discourse regarding issues such as development, corruption, and inequality. Work created by Taring Padi never holds the signature of a single artist but rather is the
product of the collective and the communities they work with. While the production of art is a significant aspect of their work, the process of communication and collaboration is held superior to the production of objects. This type of art practice is representative of a growing global trend known as “socially engaged art.”

The practice and product of socially engaged art is often difficult to define due to the lack of a clearly articulated language that can be used to describe such work. Throughout the development of socially engaged art practice, primarily in the last two decades, this type of art has been given many names including “relational,” “dialogic,” and most recently, “living-form.” For the purpose of this thesis I choose to refer to it as “socially engaged.” While each definition differs slightly, at the core of these many associated forms is a desire of artists to engage audiences in the production of art while moving art into life. Art Historian Claire Bishop describes this type of art as a response to contemporary capitalism, which produces passive subjects who lack agency. Bishop states that socially engaged art and artists attempt to “re-humanize a society rendered numb and fragmented by the repressive instrumentality of capitalist production.”

Responsible for coining the term “dialogic” in relation to such art, art historian Grant Kester argues that work included within varied definitions of such practice should not be viewed as a movement but rather as an inclination in the work of artists over the past thirty years. Describing the development of this trend, Kester references community art traditions in the United Kingdom and temporary public art in the United States. He points

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to art practices of the 1960s and 1970s that led to happenings and performance-based actions. Further, he stresses the impact of alternative spaces and community-based art projects in the 1980s, as influential in the development of a disparate network of artists and collectives that have come to be associated with socially engaged art. While disparate, Kester argues that these groups are united by “a series of provocative assumptions about the relationship between art and the broader social and political world and about the kinds of knowledge that aesthetic experience is capable of producing.”

Socially engaged art is a type of practice that has proved capable of challenging a “globalized hyperreality,” bringing art into the political sphere.

As the examples discussed throughout this thesis show, various artists and groups in Indonesia are creating art or are involved in communities that demonstrate characteristics associated with socially engaged art. In the late 1990s, groups like Taring Padi developed around the desire to empower communities and improve public spaces through art. Such groups carried on the legacy of previous generations of Indonesian artists also concerned with the ability of art to impact life and voice the concerns of the rakyat (people) of Indonesia. It is often argued that the history of Indonesian modern art emerged as a result of collaboration. Regarding this argument Yoshi Fajar Kresno Murti states, “The practices and discourse (of modern art) are moved by the energy of the people, the environment, and the networks that exist and are constantly emerging. Momentum is created within the dynamic of fine art along with the sociopolitical and economic development of Indonesia. The ideas and work that emerge are the result of the

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culture of a creative collective.”⁴ As this statement indicates, the history of Indonesian modern art is closely aligned with the spirit of collaboration and the life of the Indonesian people.

Beginning in the 1930s with the work of artists such as S. Sudjojono, Affandi, and Hendra Gunawan, Indonesia’s first modern artists developed an art ideology that stressed awareness of the rakyat. Art Historian Caroline Turner argues that these artists, considered the fathers of Indonesian modern art, emphasized an art depicting the lives of ordinary Indonesians, an art, which embraced a vision of freedom encompassing all levels of society.⁵ The organization of these artists around collectives known as sanggar aided in the development of a modern art discourse that stressed the necessity of finding an “Indonesian” identity in art, while aiding in the nationalist cause. The ideology and Realist tradition that these artists promoted has continued to inform Indonesian art throughout its development, remaining relevant today. However, while awareness of the people and the development of the nation remain important themes in a great deal of Indonesian contemporary art, these concerns exist within very different frameworks than those that confronted Indonesia’s first modern artists over eighty years ago.

Since the fall of Suharto’s New Order regime in 1998 and the subsequent Reformasi (Reformation) period, Indonesia has emerged as Southeast Asia’s largest economy and the world’s third largest democracy. At the same time, boundaries that once

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defined the international art world have continued to shift. In countries throughout the world, at international exhibitions and art fairs, artists from the “periphery” have disrupted the once strong dominance of Western-European and American art. In the last decade, Indonesian artists have become some of the highest grossing artists in the world. However, while a handful of artists have succeeded in the international market, the large majority of individuals who call themselves artists go unnoticed by international collectors and often by local art world mediators. As these artists, many who are still students, work to define their identities, they contend with issues of globalization, the growth of the international market, and alienation brought about by the hyperrealism of a market-dominated society. Engaged with questions of both local and global identity, the continued function of art as a form of political expression, and the role of the artist in contemporary Indonesian society, young artists are creating work that confronts both contemporary and historical issues, providing insight into the concerns of Indonesia’s youth in the present post-Reformasi era.

In order to examine the work of such artists, this thesis explores various aspects of the Indonesian contemporary art world. Based on six months of field research carried out from January 2012 – June 2012, in cities throughout Java, I focus primarily on the work of artists in the city of Yogyakarta, one of Indonesia’s major art centers. As a short overview of Indonesian modern art shows, the work and organization of artists in this city has a long history of engagement with the rakyat. Focusing on the work of young, largely unrecognized artists, I draw attention to the place of individuals who are not necessarily

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interested in the commercial success of their work. While these individuals describe themselves first and foremost as artists, secondary descriptors such as underground or alternative, street artist, graphic designer, or activist are of equal importance. As artists, these individuals are concerned with issues of public space, their ability to participate fluidly in creative communities, and the possibility of their art to inform and educate a wider audience.

In chapter one I present a discussion of Indonesian modern art history. As it is of course impossible to cover all aspects of this history, I choose to focus on events that have had a significant impact on the development of modern art specifically and Indonesia generally including: independence and the early formation of sanggar, Gerakan 30 September (September 30th Movement) or G30S, Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru (The New Art Movement), and the period leading up to Reformasi. Focusing on these events and periods in history, I provide a condensed overview of Indonesia’s political history as well as important moments in the history of modern art. Throughout this discussion I stress the role of collective organization and collaboration throughout Indonesia’s modern art history, relevant to the discussion of current trends in contemporary post-Reformasi art practice.

Chapters two, three, and four, which include data from my field research, look specifically at the Yogyakarta art world. The information presented here was gathered through interviews, both semi-structured and informal, as well as participant observation carried out at the spaces described, exhibition openings, and events associated with the art community. These chapters provide an overview of various aspects of Yogyakarta’s
art communities including how groups organize, types of exhibition spaces that exist, and collaborative projects that utilize public space. These chapters, while examining the work of young, self-proclaimed “alternative” artists in Yogyakarta also provide insight regarding the influence of graffiti and other sub-cultures that are increasingly connected throughout Indonesia and with similar communities abroad thanks to greater access to Internet and the development of social media in the last decade.

Chapter two, focused on the history of collective organization, begins with a discussion of two groups that emerged in the late 1990s, namely Apotik Komik and Taring Padi. These groups provide examples of how artists during the Reformasi era engaged with local communities and political issues, challenging notions of the exhibition space and exploring the possibilities of public art. In addition, they provide insight into the growth of youth sub-cultures in the 1990s, relevant to the organization of more contemporary groups like the Underworld Youth Movement and ketjilbergerak, also discussed in this chapter.

Chapter three provides an overview of the development of alternative art spaces in Yogyakarta, beginning with a discussion of Cemeti Art Gallery, the first alternative exhibition space to open in Indonesia. Along with Cemeti, I highlight two additional spaces, Kedai Kebun Forum and Via-Via Café that have also gained significant respect in the last decade as “alternative” galleries in Yogyakarta. I argue, however, that while initially these sites were “alternative,” intended for the work of “emerging” artists, today young artists increasingly choose other, newer sites for the display of their work. Two such spaces include SURVIVE!Garage and Kedai Belakang, discussed in this chapter.
In chapter four I turn to a discussion of how, since Reformasi, artists have increasingly utilized public space for the display of their work. Focusing more specifically on the work of street art communities discussed in the previous chapters, I highlight details regarding the development of public art in Indonesia, leading to a discussion of three collaborative projects that have been initiated by street artists in response to incidences of religious violence and corruption. I argue that these projects, while not directly involving input from the larger community, engage viewers as passive participants and thus serve as a type of socially engaged art.

In the final chapter I bring these examples back together in order to examine more closely how the communities described represent trends in socially engaged art practice and do-it-yourself (DIY) cultural activity while also extending the idea that these artists are representative of what artist and art historian Gregory Sholette describes as “creative dark matter.” While creative dark matter often evokes a negative image of art that opposes the mainstream art world or is not accepted by it, I argue that this concept provides insight regarding the peer-to-peer network and DIY nature of the artists and groups discussed throughout this thesis. Although the work of many of these artists has been accepted by mainstream or formal institutions, a great deal of these artists’ production is intended largely for audiences associated with the communities the artists themselves claim allegiance to. The increased visibility of these artists as an active community that exists throughout Indonesia supports Sholette’s argument that with information technology and globalization this dark matter is getting brighter.

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CHAPTER 1: INDONESIAN MODERN ART HISTORY

The Revolutionary Generation and Sanggar

The story of Indonesian modern art’s engagement with the people of Indonesia and the formation of an independent nation begins with the artists of the revolutionary generation. Artists such as Sudjojono, Hendra Gunawan, and Affandi, who are discussed in association with the history of revolution and how the free Indonesian state came about, dominated artistic life in Indonesia from the 1930s until after the revolutionary period. The organizations that these artists established or participated in, known as sanggar, created standards and championed styles that came to characterize and influence Indonesian modern art during and after independence. Because there were no art academies or formal art institutions at this time, sanggar were central to the development of the Indonesian art world. Described by art historian Astri Wright as “small artist groups, independent of the academies, centered around one or several senior artists,” during and after the revolutionary period, sanggar were places where artists lived, worked, and studied together.

The first sanggar of significance was PERSAGI (Persatuan Ahli Gambar Indonesia) or the Union of Indonesian Painters. Founded in 1938 by artists Sudjojono and Agus Djaya, PERSAGI promoted the development of art that was “Indonesian,”

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8 Remco Raben, “In Search of Freedom,” in Beyond the Dutch: Indonesia, the Netherlands and the Visual Arts, from 1900 until now, ed. Meta Knol et al. (Amsterdam: KIT Publishers, 2009), 91.
championing a style of “socially engaged realism.” PERSAGI’s slogan read, “Technique is not important. What is important is what comes from the heart, the soul, which must be poured out onto the canvas.” This ideal and the associated Realist style that marked the work of PERSAGI artists, was a direct rejection of the dominant Mooi Indie (Beautiful Indies) style of the early 1990s, demonstrated by Abdullah Suriasubroto’s painting in figure 2.

Figure 2: Abdullah Suriasubroto, Untitled, Early 20th Century (Indonesian Visual Art Archive)

Prior to the emergence of PERSAGI, Sudjojono had already begun to advocate for change in Indonesian modern art standards. He wrote, “Paintings we see nowadays are mostly landscapes: rice fields being plowed…or a hut in the middle of a ripening rice

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11 Ibid.
field with the inevitable coconut palms…Everything is very beautiful and romantic, everything is very pleasing, calm, and peaceful. Such paintings carry only one meaning: the beautiful Indies… for foreigners and tourists.” Artist groups that emerged during the revolutionary era and immediately after, such as PERSAGI, held as their ultimate objective rejecting this style while supporting the nationalist cause of a free Indonesia.

Sudjojono is credited with being the first to use the term sanggar, a word, which comes from Jawa Kuno (Ancient Javanese). Art Historian Aminudin TH Siregar (also known as Ucok) recounts an interview between Sudjojono in the 1980s, in which Sudjojono tells how he chose the term sanggar as a reference for artist organizations. Sudjojono states:

I discovered the word sanggar when I was in Madiun. I was looking for the meaning of the word “studio,” but then I remembered the word “sanggar,” which in Ancient Javanese means a place where people “meditate.” At first I wondered if the word “sanggar” has a relationship with the word “sangkar” (cage), or with the word “langgar” (a small place where Muslim’s pray). I believed they were indeed related and so I used this term! I was not comfortable with using the term “bengkel” (workshop) for a place to paint. Why? Because “sanggar” as a place for artist’s to paint, no matter how rough or how dirty that artist is, they are thinking of beauty and mysticism, and more or less, in a sense, are doing meditation. Calling such a place “bengkel” would not be appropriate. Therefore, I used the word “sanggar,” and until now it is valid.

The word “bengkel,” which translates literally as “workshop,” is most commonly used to describe a place where motorcycles or cars are fixed. Sudjojono’s rejection of this word, as descriptive of artist studios, reflects a desire to honor the role of the artist in

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Indonesian society. Art Historian Claire Holt describes how traditionally in Indonesia artistic creativity served magic or religious ritual functions. The artist was afforded a particular status, honored for his mystical nature. While the role of the artist changed during the revolutionary era, artists remained important figures in society with a duty to depict the history and fight for independence. Sanggar, such as PERSAGI, served as places where the artists could collaborate, creating work that served the people of Indonesia.

In 1942, with the invasion of the Japanese, PERSAGI disbanded. The artists who had participated in this organization, however, remained active, joining with POETERA (Pusat Tenaga Rakyat) or the Center for People’s Power in 1943. Claire Holt describes how during the Japanese occupation the impetus first given by PERSAGI began to accelerate and by the time independence was declared from the Dutch in August 1945, the number of Indonesian painters was perhaps double; possibly triple that of prewar days. Following the declaration of independence, the capital of the Indonesian republic was moved from Jakarta to Yogyakarta, which subsequently became the center for revolutionary activity. Many artists migrated to Yogyakarta, resulting in the rapid development of sanggar. During the revolutionary period sanggar were hotspots of nationalist debate. In 1946, Sudjojono again became the leader of an artist organization known as Seniman Indonesia Muda (Young Artists of Indonesia) or SIM. Holt states that SIM’s members produced anti-Dutch and revolutionary posters that were often

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15 Ibid, 200.
distributed behind enemy lines.\textsuperscript{16} One such poster, depicted in figure 3, was designed by Affandi in 1945. The story behind this image recounts General Sukarno asking Sudjojono to create a poster that would inspire the spirit of nationalism. Featuring a man breaking free from his chains with a raised fist and sword, the poster reads “Boeng, Ajo Boeng,” a modification of the statement, “Boeng Sini Boeng” or “Brother, Come here, Brother.”\textsuperscript{17}

![Poster](image)

Figure 3: Affandi, Boeng Ajo Boeng, 1945
(Reprinted from Beyond the Dutch: Indonesia, the Netherlands and the Visual Arts, from 1900 until now (Amsterdam 2009), p. 95)

\textsuperscript{16} Claire Holt, Art in Indonesia: Continuities and Change, 201.
\textsuperscript{17} Carla Bianpoen, “Art and the Nation: The Cultural Politics of Sukarno,” in Beyond the Dutch: Indonesia, the Netherlands and the Visual Arts, from 1900 until now, 97.
During the revolutionary period the activities of sanggar were largely focused on the production of art that engaged with issues related to the struggle for independence. Scenes of combat with the Dutch, guerilla fighters, and hardship were depicted on canvas and in the form of murals and posters displayed throughout cities. While the artists in these groups produced work individually, the sanggar provided a way for artists to organize together, exhibit their work, and teach younger artists. Historical accounts of these sanggar describe various exhibitions organized by the artists themselves. Following official independence from the Dutch in 1949, the newly established art academies began to take precedence over the activity of sanggar. While new collectives did continue to form, they no longer served as the art world’s primary mediators as the sanggar of the revolutionary generation had.

**Post-Independence and Gerakan 30 September**

In 1947, the Bandung Institute of Technology (ITB) formed a fine art department under the direction of Dutch artist Ries Mulder. In 1950, a fine art institute was founded in Yogyakarta, known at that time as ASRI (*Akademi Seni Rupa Indonesia*) or the Indonesian Academy of Fine Arts. Following the inception of these institutions, the dominance of Bandung and Yogyakarta as modern art centers began to show, and particular identities developed. Argued to be the result of the founder of ITB’s art department, Ries Mulder, Bandung took on the identity of an institution that promoted the development of western aesthetics. Formalism and styles such as Cubism began to overtake representation in the work of Bandung artists, leading to artist Trisno
Sumardjo’s definition of Bandung as the “Laboratory of the West.”

Yogyakarta, in contrast, having played an important role as a center for the development of nationalism during the revolution period, remained a city permeated by a sense of national pride and the spirit of artists to “cari sendiri” or find one’s own way.

In the post-independence period, the new Republic began to feel the influence of the growing Indonesian Communist Party (Partai Komunis Indonesia), commonly known as PKI. With the growth of PKI in the 1950s, sanggar began to form along political lines, with strategy becoming an important part of each group’s activities. Groups like Seniman Indonesia Muda (SIM) and Pelukis Rakyat (People’s Painters) promoted kepedulian masyarakat (awareness of the people) in their work. Artists in these Yogyakarta based groups continued to create work in the style of social realism in their commitment to the rakyat. As a result, by the early 1960s, artists in Yogyakarta had become largely associated with the left and PKI’s cultural organization LEKRA (Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat) or the Organization of People’s Culture.

Antagonism towards the Communist party and associated organizations culminated on September 30, 1965, following the murder of six generals by a group of military officers. Immediately following these murders, Major-General Suharto, who

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19 Claire Holt, Art in Indonesia: Continuities and Change, 231.
21 R.E. Elson, “In Fear of the People: Suharto and the Justification of State-sponsored Violence Under the New Order,” in Roots of Violence in Indonesia:
was the second most senior military officer at the time, seized the capital and declared the murders to be a coup. Following this coup attempt, the killings of PKI members and associates began. From October 1965 until March 1966, between 500,000 and one million people were killed. These killings occurred throughout Indonesia but were heavily concentrated in Central and East Java and on Bali and Sumatra. In each area killings took a different form. In some cases the murders were orchestrated by local militias, while in others the army was responsible for guiding civilian groups. Attacks were originally directed at PKI members; however, as violence mounted, many non-PKI were targeted for having “associations” with PKI. Throughout the period of the PKI killings President Sukarno remained in power but slowly transferred additional powers to General Suharto. Finally, on March 12, 1967, Suharto gained complete control of the presidency.

Among the individuals who were killed, imprisoned, or disappeared as a result of G30S, were numerous artists and writers. With the rise of Suharto’s New Order Regime, all forms of expression were suppressed and would remain increasingly so for the next three decades. Miklouho-Maklai describes how from the early New Order period until the mid-1970s, the politicization of art was associated with the banned PKI. This effectively deterred artists from commenting on society through art. Following the start of the New

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24 Ibid, 158.
Order, Bandung became the favored art academy due to modernist tendencies and the dominance of art characterized by individual expression, internationalism, and decorative styles. Simultaneously, the influence of sanggar continued to wane as the art institutions gained hegemony, further encouraging students to distance themselves from social commentary in their art. Many individuals, however, were not satisfied with this situation or the direction that the development of Indonesian modern art had taken.

By the mid-1970s, students began to oppose what they saw as the dominance of Western methods and styles in the work of Indonesian artists and curriculum of the art academies. At the same time, worsening economic conditions, corruption, and policies of the regime were beginning to create restlessness amongst the Indonesian populace. In February 1974, this discontent culminated in student protests known as the Malari Affair. These protests resulted in the deaths of eleven students at the hands of the military and the imposition of repressive measures intended to curtail the activities of student organizations. In this context of increasing violence and suppression, young artists directly confronted the art world.

**The New Art Movement**

In December 1974, during the biannual Major Indonesian Painting Exhibition held at Taman Ismail Marzuki Cultural Center (TIM) in Jakarta, several young artists stepped forward, challenging what they perceived as a sterile art world. In response to the selection of what they called “decorative and consumerist” works, these artists sent to the

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26 Ibid, 165.
exhibition’s judges flowers, with an attached ribbon that read, “Condolences on the death of Indonesian painting.” These artists, who referred to themselves as the Black December movement, were predominantly students from ASRI in Yogyakarta. By challenging the selection of the exhibition’s judges, these artists sought to express their dissatisfaction with accepted aesthetic standards, arguing that the Indonesian art world did not allow for the exploration of new media and form in modern art. The reaction of prominent artists, art critics, and the art institutions against these students was strong. Artists from ASRI involved in this movement were expelled. The then director of ASRI, Abbas Alibasyah, accused these students of disturbing the nation’s stability, stating that such matters should not be in the hands of art students and that mixing such issues with art was “very dangerous.”

Despite the backlash of the art world following the Black December incident, art students from ASRI traveled to Bandung and Jakarta. With likeminded students from these art centers, a set of principles was developed that became known as Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru or the New Art Movement. In August 1975, the New Art Movement held its first exhibition at TIM in Jakarta. At the time of the exhibition the movement distributed its manifesto entitled, “The Five Lines of Attack of the New Art Movement.” This manifesto outlined the movement’s principles, which in brief argued for the development of art that was more alive, involved greater experimentation of form and media, and

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rejected standards that had been established by the leading academies – standards, which they argued stifled the development of an “Indonesian” identity in modern art.

The New Art Movement’s inaugural exhibition, featuring the work of twelve artists from Yogyakarta, Bandung, and Jakarta, received harsh criticism from the art world and the general populace. Miklouho-Maklai states that the first responses to the Movement’s 1975 exhibition were illustrative of the kinds of attitudes prevailing in Indonesia during the mid-1970s. While collectively the art of the New Art Movement was criticized, Jim Supangkat’s two-part sculpture Ken Dedes, depicted in figure 4, elicited the most controversy.

Figure 4: Jim Supangkat, Ken Dedes, 1975 (Indonesian Visual Art Archive)
This sculpture presents a representation of the 13th century queen of Singhasari, Ken Dedes, situated on a wooden base that depicts the lower half of a woman wearing partially unzipped bell bottom jeans. The suggestive nature and supposed degradation of traditional culture symbolized by this sculpture gave rise to a debate between the two most prolific art writers of the period, Kusnadi and Sudarmadji. In her discussion of the New Art Movement Astri Wright states, “Kusnadi dismissed the New Art Movement as a group of immature and frustrated students who mistook immorality for creative freedom.”

Arguing that the use of traditional forms in the New Art Movement’s work was plagiarism, Kusnadi stated that the only new elements in any of the works were their vulgar, profane, and pornographic elements. In response to Kusnadi’s harsh criticism, Wright describes how Sudarmadji urged critics not to draw hasty conclusions by referring to art movements and ideas similar in the West. Sudarmadji stressed that viewers must consider the intent of the movement’s work and its function for the Indonesian art world as well as society at large. Just because this art was different and for many difficult to understand, did not mean that it was without value.

Following the movement’s first exhibition in 1975, subsequent exhibitions were held over the next two years. In August 1976, a “Concept Exhibition” was held at Balai Budaya in Jakarta. This exhibition’s goal was to address the question “How serious is our art?” Based on the perception that Indonesian art had lost its direction, this exhibition

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30 Ibid.
sought to challenge the elitism of the Indonesian art world while examining Indonesian art history. The exhibition took place in two parts. The first two days involved “action sketching,” during which members of the New Art Movement and supporters gathered to discuss issues related to the movement’s manifesto and the exhibition’s stated concerns.

Miklouho-Maklai describes the events stating:

> During the informal discussion the participants chatted, debated, cracked jokes, exchanged ideas, read books, and then out of the brainstorming, attempted to identify the problems facing contemporary Indonesian artists. The process of problem solving was then carried out collectively by writing, sketching, and drawing on paper, which was fixed all around the walls of the exhibition room. As well as drawing and writing, photos, newspaper cuttings, three-dimensional everyday objects and sculpture incorporating written text appeared around the room, on the theme of the discovery of art in relation to history, aesthetics, and social and political science.\(^{32}\)

Viewers who attended this exhibition were shocked by the work presented. Unlike exhibitions at that time perceived as “normal,” this exhibition sought to involve viewers directly with questions related to the development of Indonesian modern art. Through collective discussion and problem solving the artists of the New Art Movement sought to highlight the potential of art for communication and the production of discourse. This exhibition can be viewed as one of the first socially engaged art events in Indonesian modern art history, including dialogue as a major aspect of the exhibition’s final product.

The New Art Movement’s next exhibition was held in 1977, again at TIM in Jakarta, featuring the work of the movement’s original members as well as additional artists. Artist Dede Eri Supria became the focus of this exhibition for his photorealism

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seen as similar to that of Sudjojono during the LEKRA period.\textsuperscript{33} His work, such as that depicted in figure 5, is described as follows, “Out of the forms of urban landscape he devised mazes, labyrinths, corridors of windows like a hall of mirrors. In these surroundings he located ordinary people, the urban poor of Jakarta or Yogyakarta, resulting in images of alienation, isolation, and confusion.”\textsuperscript{34} Alongside Supria’s realistic paintings were sculpture and installation pieces that exhibited the movement’s openness to all forms of expression. The themes present in these artists’ work brought back into art social, political, and environmental issues that had been avoided during the decades following Suharto’s seizure of power.

Figure 5: Dede Eri Supria, Labryinth, 1987 (Indonesian Visual Art Archive)

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid.
In 1979, the members of the New Art Movement held their last exhibition. While the artists no longer worked as a group, many members remained (and continue to remain) influential within the art world. When the group disbanded various criticisms were put forth. Miklouho-Maklai discusses how some observers felt that after the group was accepted by the mainstream art world, they lost their edge or opportunity for renewal. However, it was never the goal of the movement to become an established part of the art world. Rather, through new modes of production and controversial statements, the artists of the New Art Movement hoped to pave the way for greater diversity and more open commentary in modern art production. As Wright argues “the influence of the movement on the Indonesian art world continued to be felt in the wider range of possibilities for artistic expression than what had existed during the preceding decade and in the livelier debate about culture and society that followed.”

**Increased Politicization of the 1980s and 90s**

By the mid-1980s, the art world had accepted the style and content of work like that of the New Art Movement. Despite this acceptance, however, during the 1980s many young artists tended toward developing styles of surrealism and photorealism. Miklouho-Maklai argues that “although the limits on form and content had become less rigid, there was no doubt that continuing anxiety as to the critical limit on social and political comment was very real.” While the work of the New Art Movement often did include political themes, their ability to repeatedly exhibit is attributed to the movement’s strong

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focus on aesthetics rather than political issues. During the late 1980s, artists also began to feel the first impacts of a commercial market. It was in this context that alternative spaces such as Cemeti Art House opened (discussed in chapter three), which supported the continued development of art that did not subscribe to market standards.

Moving into the 1990s, Indonesian art began to appear in international exhibitions, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region. During this period, the number of art events increased, along with the launching of new projects and grants by state-funded art centers and foundations, particularly in Australia and Japan. Artists, many who had studied abroad in the 1980s, including Nindityo Adipurnomo and Mella Jaarsma (founders of Cemeti Art House), Heri Dono, Tisna Sanjaya, and Arahmaiani (to name a few), took part in such events that provided them the space outside of Indonesia to exhibit their progressive and experimental works that were generally critical of the New Order. Curator Agung Hujatnikajennong states “these regional events and projects were greeted with enthusiasm by Indonesian artists because they offered space where artists could speak more freely about the situation in Indonesia.”37 During the 1990s, international curators responsible for organizing exhibitions of Indonesian art placed a large stress on artists who worked with sociopolitical themes. Hujatnikajennong states, “During the 90s, the “localness” of Indonesia was mainly presented as a tendency to engage with sociopolitical problems, such as violence, communal trauma, gender inequalities, and

identities of minorities.” The themes present in the work of these artists were a reflection of the growing animosity towards the New Order. At home this animosity was seen in the increased strength of groups that used their work to engage directly with issues of democracy and development. Discussed in the following chapters, the fall of Suharto’s New Order regime in 1998 and the subsequent Reformasi period allowed for the rapid development of politically oriented artist collectives, alternative exhibition spaces, and youth sub-cultures that had been suppressed for decades by policies of the New Order.

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38 Agung Hujatnikajennong, “From the Local to the Global and Back: The Story of Indonesian Art in the International Arena,” 19.
CHAPTER 2: COLLECTIVE ORGANIZATION AND ARTIST GROUPS

Following the end of Suharto’s New Order regime in May 1998, political upheaval, ethnic conflict, and general disorder persisted. In order to combat such problems, media and local civil initiatives developed throughout Indonesia. In an article discussing the impact and legacy of such initiatives, Nuraini Juliastuti, co-founder of KUNCI Cultural Studies Center in Yogyakarta, describes the context of Reformasi:

The reform period ushered in a time where ideas spun quickly, buzzing almost. This increased activity reflected the intensity of local cultural production in Indonesia and was partly encouraged by the urgency to express the long suppressed counterculture movement. Sensitive as these projects were to the social and political situation of the region, their lifespans varied, but the significance of what they produced proves that ‘alternative’ and ‘initiative’ are keywords by which to understand Indonesian society post-1998.39

In Yogyakarta, this context led to the emergence of groups such as Taring Padi who engaged directly with political issues in their art and collaborative projects. Artist Dolorosa Sinaga describes the work of Taring Padi stating, “Through art, they began building an understanding amongst the people to fight against injustice, helping to forge a community aware of environmental, social, political and cultural issues, inviting the community to be active and courageous in voicing their real life experiences and their opinions on the performance of government.”40 While Taring Padi gained attention for their bold expression of sensitive political issues, they are only one example of the type of collective organization that occurred at this time.

Artist and writer Nano Warsono in his recent publication, *Jogja Agropop: Neogsiasi Identitas Kultural Dalam Seni Visual* (Jogja Agropop: Negotiation of Cultural Identity through Art), details the development of youth culture and art in the 1990s.\(^\text{41}\) He states that while the growth of youth culture in the 1970s and 80s was also influenced by western culture, particularly in the realm of music, the 1990s were unique due to the growth of Internet and western television programs like MTV.\(^\text{42}\) As a result of the growing influence of western pop culture, Warsono describes how “fine art” and popular or “low art” began to coalesce. Sharing the same independent spirit, the mix of art and youth culture in the 1990s, became increasingly intense. While previous generations also sought to “challenge the establishment,” Warsono argues that earlier groups such as the New Art Movement were characterized more strongly by the spirit of renewal, influencing most significantly the realm of fine art. In contrast, artists of the 90s generation began to take art into the public arena, utilizing alternative art practices and new forms of media to express themselves.\(^\text{43}\) It was in this context that Taring Padi emerged as well as the group Apotik Komik, generally considered the founders of a street art tradition in Yogyakarta. Warsono describes these groups as “phenomenal, yet each

\(^{41}\) This book was published in March 2012, in correlation with an exhibition of the same name held at Taman Budaya in Yogyakarta. This exhibition and publication were an attempt to further articulate Yogyakarta art practices of the 1990s. The name “agropop” can be divided into two parts, “agro” referring to the grassroots style of art in Yogyakarta and “pop” referring to the association of 1990s art with popular culture or “low art” such as street art, comics, and other youth sub-cultures.


\(^{43}\) Ibid, 53.
with a different platform. While Apotik Komik emerged prior to Reformasi and Taring Padi after, each group provides insight into the cultural forces that were at work during this era, cultural forces that continue to influence the organization of artists today through the legacy of these groups.

**Apotik Komik**

Apotik Komik is known for their work as mural artists in the late 1990s and early 2000. While this group organized themselves officially as “Apotik Komik” in 1997, their collaboration began in the early 1990s through the production of a comic book known as *Core Komik*. In the early 1990s, fanzine (zine) and comics had become popular forms of alternative media. Such publications were easy and cheap to produce, using available technology such as Xerox machines. As a result, during the latter part of the Suharto era, artists and activists used zine and comic books as forms of protest and self-expression. Many artists, who were exploring new options for the distribution and display of their work, created and distributed such independent publications at exhibitions as well as art festivals and community gatherings. *Core Komik* was one of the first comics of significance to emerge from the art community. In 1997, when a number of individuals who had been active in *Core Komik*’s production formed Apotik Komi, the influence of comic book like imagery and style showed in their public art. The students who formed

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Apotik Komik included: Samuel Indratma, Bambang Witjaksono (known as Bambang Toko), Arie Dyanto, and Popok Tri Wahyudi.\(^{47}\)

Apotik Komik’s first group project was done in the area of Nitiprayan near ISI’s campus. This project with the theme *Melayang* (Flying), involved the production of murals in collaboration with the surrounding community. Prior to the production of Apotik Komik’s first mural project there had been no groups in Yogyakarta whose focus was the production of public art or murals that involved community input.\(^{48}\) Apotik Komik’s primary desire to create murals was in order to promote the idea that art could be used to improve public spaces. They did not involve direct political commentary in their work, a reason why their public art was not met with government criticism.

Producing work in public spaces, Apotik Komik also sought to challenge the idea that art must be presented in formal galleries, a developing trend amongst young artists at this time.

The group’s second project entitled, *Sakit Berlanjut* (Sickness Continues), took place in 1999. For this project the members of Apotik Komik created hundreds of cardboard cutouts such as those in figure 6. These figures were nailed in four locations throughout Yogyakarta. Prior to posting the figures, Apotik Komik advertised their project, encouraging citizens to take the figures off the walls. The goal of this was to involve Yogyakarta’s citizens as active participants rather than passive observers in the production of public art. The theme of this project, “Sickness Continues,” can be seen as


a reference to the Reformasi era and the belief of many that although the New Order was no longer in power numerous challenges remained in the development of a democratic Indonesia.

Figure 6: Apotik Komik, *Sakit Berlanjut*, 1999 (Indonesian Visual Art Archive)

In 2002, Apotik Komik began a project known as *Sama-Sama* (Together). This project involved a group of San Francisco based artists from the Clarion Alley Mural Project. In various locations throughout Yogyakarta, murals, such as that depicted in figure 7, were created collaboratively. In relation to this project Bambang Toko states:

After the *Sama-Sama* Project, which was successful and covered in mass media, many communities were then interested in making murals in their own areas, in villages and in schools. The people felt that they could decorate walls freely without being afraid of government authority and suppression like during the New Order period.\(^{49}\)

The success of Apotik Komik’s work led to an increased production of murals throughout Yogyakarta. Further, the ability of Apotik Komik’s members to form positive

relationships with government officials, paired with greater freedom of expression during Reformasi, led to public acceptance of their art.

Figure 7: Apotik Komik & Clarion Alley Mural Project, Sama-Sama Mural Project, 2002 (Indonesian Visual Art Archive)

Following the Sama-Sama project the members of Apotik Komik began to focus on their individual activities as artists.\(^50\) While they are no longer a group, these individuals continue to influence the Yogyakarta art world. Bambang Toko is now a professor at ISI and often serves as curator for exhibitions in Yogyakarta. In 2012, he served as curator for Art Jog, an internationally recognized exhibition that occurs annually in Yogyakarta. Samuel Indratma continues to work as an artist. He lives in Yogyakarta and actively encourages young artists and street art communities. Nano Warsono, also a professor at ISI, continues to produce art while also producing historical

\(^{50}\) Bambang Witjaksono (original member Apotik Komik), in discussion with author, March 2012, Yogyakarta.
accounts of the development of Indonesian art in the last two decades. Young artists view these individuals as important mentors. They are often invited to open exhibitions, particularly those that involve the work of students from ISI or artists associated with Yogyakarta’s street art community. Further, these individuals frequently attend other art activities (i.e. discussions, festivals, exhibition openings) throughout Yogyakarta. If these figures are in attendance, they are usually engaged in conversation with a group of young artists.

Not long after the emergence of Apotik Komik, Taring Padi began their work. While Apotik Komik is no longer active as a group, Taring Padi has continued to work with communities both in Indonesia and abroad since its inception in December 1998. Thus, while they are a historical example relevant to the development of collaborative socially engaged art practice since Reformasi, they are also a contemporary, ongoing example of such art.

**Taring Padi**

In 1998, when Taring Padi’s first members declared themselves as an organization, the group was known as *Lembaga Budaya Kerakyatan Taring Padi* (The Organization of People Oriented Culture Taring Padi). The name “Taring Padi,” translated as “the fang of the rice plant,” is said to have come from one of the group’s original members, Dodi. Writer Puthut EA describes how the phrase “Taring Padi” was from Dodi’s hometown of Bukit Tinggi, West Sumatra where the name “Taring Padi” is used to refer to the end of a rice plant that makes people itch. When Taring Padi formed it
was their goal to be like the fang of the rice plant, itching at or agitating the authorities while inspiring other artists to engage with pertinent issues during the Reformasi era.\footnote{Puthut EA, \textit{Menanam Padi di Langit} (Jakarta: Subur Printing, 2008), 195.}

Influenced by the ideology of “people oriented culture,” the members of Taring Padi formed with the desire to continue the effort of the student movement. Toni Volunteero, one of Taring Padi’s initial founders, notes that there were still many concerns faced by the Indonesian populace during Reformasi.\footnote{Toni Volunteero (original founder of Taring Padi), in discussion with the author, July 2012, Yogyakarta.} Coming together with other art students who had been active in the student movement, Taring Padi was formed with the goal to create art that would represent the voices of the most marginalized and oppressed populations in Indonesia, the farmers and laborers. After the official declaration of Taring Padi in December 1998, members of the group began working and living in the empty buildings of ISI’s Gampingan campus, depicted in figure 8.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure8.jpg}
\caption{Main building of the Gampingan Campus (Reprinted from \textit{Taring Padi: Seni Membongkar Tirani} (Yogyakarta, 2011), p.23)}
\end{figure}
In 1997, Yogyakarta’s art institute had changed locations and names. ASRI (Akademi Seni Rupa Indonesia) or the Indonesia Academy of Fine Art became ISI (Institute Kesenian Indonesia) or the Indonesian Institute of Fine Art. The historic Gampingan campus was relocated to Sewon, a region both further south and further removed from the heart of Yogyakarta. Many artists who were students at Gampingan comment on the lack of character ISI’s Sewon campus has in comparison to the old Gampingan campus. During Reformasi, the spirit of Gampingan lived on in groups like Taring Padi who utilized the facilities of the old campus. Taring Padi was not the only group that squatted at Gampingan. Toni Volunteero describes that after Taring Padi’s declaration and with increased recognition, more and more groups formed and joined in their efforts. While groups like Anak Seribu Pulau (Children of a Thousand Islands) and Kelompok Malioboro (Group Malioboro) had different goals than Taring Padi, working and living in the same space allowed for collaboration and discussion.  

At Gampingan, Taring Padi created wood-block posters and banners that were displayed throughout cities in Java. Since their inception, Taring Padi’s mode of production has stressed a democratic collective approach. Prior to the creation of any piece of art, the group discusses first what the theme or message will be. The group then works together, most commonly with cukil kayu (woodblock printing). The poster

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53 Anak Seribu Pulau and Kelompok Malioboro were activist organizations that formed at the same time as Taring Padi. Anak Seribu Pulau focused on environmental concerns while Kelompok Malioboro, a performance based art group, staged politically oriented performance pieces on Malioboro street, one of Yogyakarta’s main thoroughfares.
depicted in figure 9, which reads, *Semua Bersaudara* (We are all Brothers), is an example of one of Taring Padi’s first campaigns focused on human rights.

Figure 9: Taring Padi, *Semua Bersaudara* (Reproduced courtesy of Taring Padi)

While the end of the New Order brought the possibility of increased freedom of expression and democratic rule, areas such as Kalimantan, Ambon, Poso, and Aceh struggled to overcome deeply entrenched conflict. In response to continued violence and the threat it posed to the 1999 general election, Taring Padi created a “Humanitarian” poster series as a campaign to promote an anti-violence movement. As many as 10,000 copies of their posters were printed and distributed in public spaces in at least eleven Indonesian cities. An additional 1,000 posters were distributed in collaboration with the
Institute for Press and Development Studies in the conflict areas of Ambon and the Moluccas.\(^{54}\)

After squatting at Gampingan for approximately four years, Taring Padi moved its location to a rented house in the Sewon area near the new ISI campus. It was at this time that Taring Padi’s name was changed from the Institute of People Oriented Culture Taring Padi to *Komunitas Seni dan Budaya Taring Padi* (Community of Art and Culture Taring Padi).\(^{55}\) Today, this remains Taring Padi’s official name; however, they are more commonly referred to as *Komunitas Taring Padi* (Taring Padi Community) or simply “TP.” Toni Volunteero states that the group’s name was changed because the original name was too formal. By 2003, the dynamic of the group had changed. Stressing the character of their group as a “community,” the members felt that they would encourage a larger, more fluid membership with the new name.

In 2007, following a massive earthquake that hit the region of Bantul where ISI’s campus as well as many art spaces and art collective headquarters are located, Taring Padi again relocated. Taring Padi now has a permanent location that is owned by the collective in the village of Sembungan, still located very near to the ISI campus. This residence has a workspace as well as a community library. Today, Taring Padi remains active in myriad activities. In 2012, members of Taring Padi attended a conference in the Moluccas organized by the *Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nusantara* (The Alliance for Indigenous Peoples) or AMAN, focused on the rights of Indonesia’s ethnic minorities. In

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\(^{54}\) Djuwadi Ahwal (Taring Padi member), in discussion with author, June 2012, Yogyakarta.

\(^{55}\) Toni Volunteero, in discussion with author, July 2012, Yogyakarta.
the same year, a member of Taring Padi visited the United States through the invitation of Creative Time in New York. While many of Taring Padi’s original members are no longer active, a new generation is carrying on the group’s legacy and ideologies.

Apotik Komik and Taring Padi are significant examples of collective action that occurred during the Reformasi era. While the work of Apotik Komik was not as political as that of Taring Padi, the work they did in public spaces challenged accepted standards of public expression. Like the artists of the early sanggar, the members of Apotik Komik and Taring Padi felt they had a responsibility to the people of Indonesia to create art that would express concerns relevant to the rakyat. Today, nearly a decade and a half after Reformasi, a trend persists amongst young artists in Yogyakarta to join together in order to display their work. Part of this has to do with space and access to exhibition sites. Another factor relates to a directly stated desire for mutual support from the community that serves as the audience of “alternative” or underground arts.

During my time in Yogyakarta, I became familiar with many artist groups or creative collectives, each with their own particular focus or mode of production. While there are numerous groups associated with “fine arts” – painting, sculpture, etc. – there are also puppet and theatre troops, photography and film collectives, and cultural studies centers. Each of these groups has their own following, providing members a particular context for the advancement or sharing of a particular skill set. This is something that makes Yogyakarta unique. The ability for young people to find their “niche” in one of the many creative communities is unprecedented in comparison to other Indonesian cities. This is largely due to the influence of the many universities and large youth population as
well as the generally open environment of the Yogyakarta community. The two groups that I chose to focus on during my research not only share a great deal in common with Apotik Komik and Taring Padi but also demonstrate the influence of these groups via direct interaction and shared style. Formed by street artists, the first group I will discuss is known as the Underworld Youth Movement, while the second group, ketjilbergerak, works directly with local communities organizing workshops and community festivals, much like Taring Padi.

**The Underworld Youth Movement**

Ten artists formed the “Underworld Youth Movement” in early 2012. The work of the Underworld Youth Movement can be divided into two styles with half of its members calling themselves street artists and the others identifying as graphic design artists. Many of the artists in this group are still students at ISI while some work as graphic designers, art teachers, or in careers completely unrelated to art. This group was formed due to the impetus of Rolly, also known as LOVEHATELOVE. Rolly is known in Yogyakarta for his tag that appears on walls throughout the city in the form of murals, stickers, and posters, such as those depicted in figures 10 and 11.
Active as a street artist since early 2000, Rolly describes the members of the Underworld Youth Movement as “underground” artists. He explains that the individuals involved in this group have varying skills, styles, and interests in the development of their
Their art is created in many different forms, from paintings on paper, canvas, or city walls to the creation of merchandise like patches, stickers, CD covers, and T-shirts. The members of the Underworld Movement are part of a larger community of young artists who create such “underground alternative art.” Underworld held its first show in February 2012, at SURVIVE!Garage (commonly referred to as SURVIVE!), an alternative space that will be discussed in more depth in chapter three. This show was done in two parts due to space limitations at SURVIVE!. The first part of the SURVIVE! exhibition displayed the work of the group’s street artists and the second the work of the group’s graphic design artists.

The group’s street artists include LOVEHATELOVE, HereHere, Anti-Tank, Methodos, and Irrenius Bongky. As demonstrated by figures 12-18, the work of these artists reflected the characters and styles that each individual uses in public spaces. Artist HereHere’s character, a Keith Harring-esque figure, appears throughout Yogyakarta, on large city walls and in small, often hidden nooks and crannies [figures 12 & 13]. HereHere is one of Yogyakarta’s most active street artists. The massive distribution of his character throughout the city as well as his involvement with collaborative street art projects demonstrates his dedication to expression in public space. HereHere is a student at ISI; however, his desire to create public art and participate in exhibitions with groups like Underworld often takes precedence over his academic study of art. This is a trend not uncommon amongst young artists who view their work outside of ISI as more relevant to their development as artists.

—-56 Rolly LOVEHATELOVE (member of Underworld Youth Movement), in discussion with author, March 2012, Yogyakarta.
HereHere often includes political commentary in his public work, such as that shown in figure 14. This mural, created in collaboration with artist Hello Space reads, “Sir, stop arresting the trash pickers, it’s your friends sir that scavenge the money of the people!!”
HereHere’s interest in sociopolitical critique is also represented in much of his work created for exhibitions, such as that shown in figure 15. In this piece, HereHere’s character sits with his arm around Indonesia’s first president Sukarno, who states, “An advanced nation is a nation that does not take bribes.” This image, taken from a 1961 photo that features Sukarno with John F. Kennedy, was part of a series of collage prints, depicted in figure 16, made for Underworld’s second exhibition.
Anti-Tank, another street artist from the Underworld Youth Movement, also creates images that are political in nature, related to issues and events both contemporary and historical. The piece depicted in figure 17, created for the first Underworld exhibition, features one of Anti-Tank’s posters with the image of Munir, a human-rights activist who was poisoned on a flight from Indonesia to the Netherlands in 2004. While the framed piece in figure 17 was created for this exhibition, the poster, which reads “Menolak Lupa” (Refuse to Forget), is one of Anti-Tank’s earliest works. Anti-Tank maintains that his images are more powerful if they are more widely distributed. In order to increase their distribution, Anti-Tank allows friends and supporters to download posters that he has created from his blog in order that they can be posted more widely.
As a result, Anti-Tank has successfully inundated public spaces in Yogyakarta and other Indonesian cities with his posters as seen in figure 18.

Figure 17: Anti-Tank, *Menolak Lupa (Refuse to Forget)*, 2012 (Reproduced courtesy of SURVIVE!)

Figure 18: Example of Anti-Tank *Menolak Lupa* in Public Space Yogyakarta (Reproduced courtesy of Anti-Tank)
The second part of Underworld’s first exhibition presented the work of the group’s graphic designers, such as that depicted in figures 19 and 20. The work of Underworld’s graphic designers generally does not include political commentary. While the work of the Underworld’s street artists was often oriented around political themes, the work of the group’s graphic designers showed little coherence in style or subject. As the images in figure 19 and 20 indicate, the style of these artists is varied and thus difficult to analyze in terms of a particular method or meaning. What this work does represent, however, is the development of graphic design within Indonesia’s art world.

Figure 19: Rasefour, *Java Skull Rider*, 2012 (Reproduced courtesy of SURVIVE!)

Figure 20: SILENCEReight, *Six Bones*, 2012 (Reproduced courtesy of SURVIVE!)
In the last two decades, a number of institutes, specifically for the study of graphic design, have opened in cities throughout Indonesia. While universities such as ISI and ITB have graphic design departments, institutes such as Akademi Seni Rupa dan Desain (Academy of Art and Design) in Yogyakarta, also known as MSD (Modern School of Design), offer three-year programs similar to associate degrees. Such programs offer what students describe as more practical degrees in art as there are many jobs available in fields, such as commercial advertising where they are able to use their skills.

In correlation with the second half of this exhibition, a discussion was also held, featuring a presentation by local photographer Geger Agung, who in early 2012, began a website known as “urbancult.net.” Run by a group of individuals dedicated to the documentation of street art, this website archives and maps street art in Yogyakarta. This discussion focused on processes of documentation and the perceived necessity of documenting Yogyakarta’s ephemeral art. The initiative of urbancult is one example of a number of similar archiving efforts that have developed in cities throughout Java and increasingly on Indonesia’s outer islands. Such archiving efforts have led to a stronger network of street artists spread throughout Indonesia.

The Underworld Youth Movement’s second exhibition was held in late March 2012, at another of Yogyakarta’s alternative spaces, Kedai Belakang (also mentioned in chapter three). This exhibition featured the work of the ten artists together. Following the opening of the exhibition a screening was held of a film made by the Underworld artists. This film featured each artist briefly elaborating on the style of their work and feelings towards the Underworld movement. During the discussion that followed this screening,
Bayu Widodo, artist and owner of SURVIVE!, expressed his view of the Underworld Youth Movement stating that they are different than other groups that have emerged in Yogyakarta in the last few years in showing a concerted effort to document themselves and consistently organize exhibitions and events in relation to their work.  

Finally, Underworld held a fourth exhibition at a clothing distro in the northern area of Yogyakarta. Distros, which emerged in the 1990s, are independent clothing stores that sell T-shirts and other merchandise generally designed by young Indonesian artists. These stores are frequented by high school and university students and have become associated with indie and punk culture. By holding their exhibition at a distro, the underground or alternative nature of the Underworld Movement was exemplified. The opening of this exhibition featured a live performance by local hip-hop groups. While in the 1990s, punk music served as an organizing factor of alternative underground groups, since mid-2000, hip-hop has become a more popular form of music among alternative youth communities.

As these examples indicate, the members of the Underworld Youth Movement are part of a much larger community that includes street artists, graphic designers, hip-hop groups, and distro owners, to name a few. The modes of production and networks that connect these various communities reflect the way in which the “underground” art community functions in cities throughout Indonesia. During my time in Yogyakarta, I

57 Bayu Widodo (owner of SURVIVE!Garage), in discussion with author, March 2012, Yogyakarta.
found that street artists have become a major organizing factor between such communities. While the next group described moves away from the street art and underground art culture represented by Underworld, this group, known as ketjilbergerak, demonstrates the continued engagement of art groups with local communities in order to achieve particular goals. Much like Taring Padi, dialogue between groups is an important factor in the work of ketjilbergerak.

**ketjilbergerak**

Ketjilbergerak was formed in 2006 by students at Sanata Dharma University. Formerly members of Yogyakarta’s punk scene, the group’s founders, Greg and Vani, began their activities producing a “zine” that was circulated throughout Yogyakarta. As they became recognized on their campus, they formed a discussion group with the intent to initiate dialogue amongst students regarding socio-political issues. Asking about the name ketjilbergerak, Greg and Vani state that “ketjil,” similar to the Indonesian word “kecil” or small combined with “bergerak” meaning “to move,” was meant to signify a desire to continue the struggle of Reformasi and development, albeit slowly, with small steps. In 2006, when this group was formed, they did not have a direct connection to Yogyakarta’s art world. Art became a part of their mission due to a desire to find new media through which to express their message. In 2007, Greg and Vani began to associate themselves with alternative art spaces and communities by attending exhibition openings in Yogyakarta. Vani states that they felt art was a more effective and creative way to
display ketjilbergerak’s message and initiate dialogue amongst those that participated in their activities.\textsuperscript{60}

In 2008, ketjilbergerak held its first art exhibition. This exhibition was a solo show, featuring the work of Greg. Following this project a series of solo shows, again displaying Greg’s art, were held at various spaces in Yogyakarta. While these exhibitions featured only the work of Greg they were made possible by a larger community of supporters who helped with each exhibition’s preparation and were thus seen as ketjilbergerak projects. Each of the exhibitions was held at a space not commonly associated with art, such as Sanata Dharma University and the Kanisius bookstore. According to Vani this was done with the intent to familiarize a larger audience with the mission and activities of ketjilbergerak. In 2010, ketjilbergerak’s projects began to evolve into more collaborative activities, designed to initiate dialogue amongst communities, artists, and art world mediators. Each of ketjilbergerak’s projects is designed around a particular theme, often intended to effect change in a particular area of Yogyakarta or in relation to a certain issue. To date, ketjilbergerak has held eighteen events as a group including their initial exhibitions that featured Greg’s artwork. What is most impressive about ketjilbergerak’s events is the time commitment involved in order to plan and execute each project. Greg and Vani themselves are fully committed to this group and have found ways in which to support themselves in order that they are able to continue the activities of ketjilbergerak.

\textsuperscript{60} Vani (founder of ketjilbergerak), in discussion with author, June 2012, Yogyakarta.
In honor of international women’s day kejilbergerak organized a series of events in March 2012 that included a gallery exhibition and discussion at Sangkring Art Space, an online exhibition supported by Taman Budaya Yogyakarta, studio visits with female artists, and a community festival. These events were all organized around the exhibition title, *Membatalkan Keperempuanan* (Cancelling Femininity). In the exhibition’s curatorial text, following a definition of “keperempuanan”, translated as “femininity,” it is explained that the exhibition and associated activities were intended to help create a new definition of “femininity” or identity for women. The idea of “cancelling femininity,” is described as an invitation to one’s self, be it a man, woman, or child, to think about the stereotypes or prescribed identities associated with women in Indonesian society. In an interview for the *Jakarta Post* Vani states, “Cancelling femininity for women is a way to clear their mind in order to create an absence of concept (about their femininity) and afterward be free to redefine themselves in line with what they want to say and do in accordance with the life they live.”

The exhibition at Sangkring featured the work of eleven artists, mostly recent graduates of ISI along with two younger participants, one a student at Gadjah Mada and one a student at Yogyakarta’s Fine Arts High School, SMSR (*Sekolah Menengah Seni Rupa*). By including young artists in this exhibition, ketjilbergerak’s goal was to create dialogue and transfer knowledge amongst a younger audience. Following the exhibition a discussion was held at Sangkring. The discussion was well attended by both men and

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women. Some in attendance criticized the exhibition’s title, stating that it held negative connotations in relation to femininity. Vani responded that such criticism was welcomed. As is the case with all of ketjilbergerak’s activities, Vani and Greg hope that with any of the group’s discussions, dialogue will flow in both directions, challenging perceptions of certain issues such as the role of women in Indonesian society.

Along with the formal gallery exhibition and correlating discussion, open studio visits were held at the homes of five female artists. These visits created the opportunity to engage more directly with artists in an informal environment. Further, the online exhibition, organized through Taman Budaya Yogyakarta’s Art Shop, served as a way to create more exposure for a larger number of female artists in a generally male dominated art world. Finally, as the culminating event in this series, a community festival was held. This festival involved dance and performance art pieces put on by communities from regions throughout Yogyakarta [figure 21]. Village residents, artists, and students attended the festival, participating in the lively performances and enjoying the traditional foods sold by the women of Tegal Kenongo, Bugisan where the event was held. Vani states that such events allow the members of ketjilbergerak to give something back to the community in which they live and where their art is displayed (in reference to Sangkring’s location). The members of ketjilbergerak believe that it is not enough to simply hold an exhibition and discussion in a formal space such as Sangkring as such events are attended by a relatively limited audience. By taking the theme of Membatalkan Keperempuanan into more informal spaces such as artists’ homes and local villages, ketjilbergerak is able to involve a greater number of participants.
Another, more recent project held in October 2012, known as *Benih Bunyi* (Seed of Sound) was intended to elicit the opinion of youth regarding their place in Indonesian society. Over the course of forty days, Greg and Vani, as well as other regular participants of ketjilbergerak’s activities interviewed, 180 young people ranging in age from 18 – 35. The interviews were recorded and then analyzed in order to create a larger statement regarding the views of youth on the development of Indonesia. A photo was taken of each individual interviewed. These photos were displayed on Facebook and as part of an exhibition and discussion that were held in culmination of the project. These images are simple yet provide concise powerful statements, conveying a sense of disappointment amongst youth regarding the present state of Indonesia.
The image in figure 22 depicts a 22-year old female student from Yogyakarta’s Islamic University. This student states, “Now many young people follow foreign culture, they have forgotten their own culture.”

Figure 22: ketjilbergerak, *Benih Bunyi*, 2012 (Reproduced courtesy of ketjilberberak)

In figure 23, a 21-year old female student from ISI states, “We can make a youth movement because our ancestors could, how is it possible that our generation cannot do this, before there were still limitations, you were not allowed to do this or that, but now, we are free.”
The final discussion came up with five points regarding the overall view Indonesian youth hold of their nation and their role in its development:

Indonesian youth are disappointed with and pessimistic towards Indonesia. Indonesian youth today do not believe in one another. Indonesian youth need a means through which they can become one. Indonesian youth need to form a movement together in order to change the situation. Indonesian youth want to be able to empower themselves and create synergy with the people in order to advance together.62

Networked Communities and Mutual Support

The four groups discussed in this chapter represent contemporary trends in collective action and art production in Yogyakarta. While many artists prior to Reformasi and after engaged with local communities and included political commentary in their work, Apotik Komik and Taring Padi are significant examples of collaborative practice that stressed a group identity over that of individual members. Working collaboratively, the members of both Apotik Komik and Taring Padi were able to establish themselves

within the history of contemporary art in Yogyakarta, demonstrating the power of
collective action. As Nuraini Juliastuti states in regards to initiatives such as Apotik
Komik and Taring Padi, the lifespans of each varied. This is seen through a comparison
of Apotik Komik and Taring Padi. However, although Apotik Komik is no longer active
as a group, the impact that they had is still felt in the work of collaborative projects like
the Underworld Youth Movement that represent the strong street art community in
Yogyakarta. While Juliastuti states that the words “alternative” and “initiative” were
keywords during the Reformasi period, I argue that these ideas remain central to the
practice of young artists today. What has changed since the emergence of Apotik Komik
and Taring Padi in the late 1990s, however, is the ability of artist groups and
collaborative projects to connect more quickly and efficiently with one another despite
geographic distance as well as the more open democratic environment.

In the 1990s, informal publications such as zine were primary modes used by
groups to share their ideas and work with other communities. Passed by hand from group
to group, the distribution and sharing of such publications relied on the movement of
individuals between cities. Today, communities such as Underworld and ketjilbergerak
are able to elicit support for their activities through Facebook and Twitter allowing for
greater connectivity and support. Yet, while artists today have greater freedom and more
options for the display and distribution of their work, they are also faced by an
increasingly competitive environment. As discussed in the following chapter, since the
establishment of Indonesia’s first alternative art gallery in 1988, Cemeti Art House,
myriad alternative spaces have emerged throughout cities like Yogyakarta. Some of these
spaces last for only a short period while others become significant sites for the continued production of alternative or underground arts.
CHAPTER 3: THE DEVELOPMENT OF ALTERNATIVE SPACE

Cemeti Art House, Kedai Kebun Forum, and Via-Via

Defining “alternative” in the context of Indonesian art spaces begins with a discussion of Cemeti Art House. Founded as Cemeti Gallery in 1988, by Balinese-Dutch husband and wife team, Nindityo Adipurnomo and Mella Jaarsma, Cemeti is widely recognized as the first alternative art gallery in Yogyakarta and in Indonesia. Descriptions of Cemeti’s original site in Ngadisuryan, an area located within the walls of the Kraton, detail an informal space that was part of Nindityo and Mella’s home. The main gallery was the house’s living room. Curator and writer Farah Wardani describes how this space was not intended to function as a “gallery” per se but, rather as an informal space that welcomed all in the promotion of discourse and the development of new standards in contemporary art production. With little established art infrastructure at that time, Nindityo and Mella had relative freedom to determine what type of art would be displayed and how. Despite meager funds to support the space, the effective management and organization of Cemeti from the get go, aided in its rapid and successful development.

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63 Yogyakarta is Indonesia’s last remaining sultanate. This region was granted special status following independence from the Dutch. While it is a part of the republic of Indonesia, the Sultan remains a part of the governing body in the Special Region of Yogyakarta (Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta). The Kraton is the Sultan’s home. It is located in the center of Yogyakarta and remains an important cultural hub for the city’s activities.

The period in which Cemeti emerged was a dynamic moment in Indonesian art history. While the international art market was just beginning to exert its influence on the Indonesian art world, the oppression of Suharto’s New Order Regime continued to dictate what type of art was permissible. Artist and curator Asmudjo Jono Irianto discusses how in the late 1980s, a venue like Cemeti was unheard of. Previously, the only available exhibition facilities were commercially oriented galleries, mainly in Jakarta, or government funded institutions such as Taman Budaya, Bentara Budaya, Karta-Pustaka, and the French-Indonesian Institute in Yogyakarta. 65 Artist FX Harsono states that when Cemeti opened it stood out as an alternative gallery that could provide a space for young artists who resisted the esthetical dominance of the market. 66 What made Cemeti unique and different from commercial galleries or cultural centers was that it extended opportunities to young, unknown artists, presenting works that were in a different vein from the mainstream tendencies of the time, namely decorative and Surrealist. 67

As it developed, Cemeti quickly became recognized as a place where international careers began. In 1995, in order to further facilitate international collaborations and the documentation and archiving of Indonesian art events, the Cemeti Art Foundation was created. While possessing the name Cemeti, this organization was separate from the gallery space. In 2007, Cemeti Art Foundation became the Indonesian Visual Art

67 Ibid, 74.
Archive, better known as IVAA. Cemeti, depicted in figure 24, is now in its own site created specifically as an exhibition space with facilities to allow for international residencies, an important aspect of Cemeti’s regular activities. As one of Indonesia’s most established and respected contemporary art spaces, for many, Cemeti has come to represent the mainstream. Following Cemeti’s opening other alternative spaces began to emerge in both Yogyakarta and Indonesia’s other art centers.

Figure 24: Cemeti Art House

In Yogyakarta today there are now a plethora of spaces where emerging and established artists can display their work, including commercial galleries, do-it-yourself (DIY) artist run spaces, government owned institutions, and international events like Yogyakarta’s Biennale and the annual art fair, Art Jog. Amongst these sites the use of the term “alternative” remains pervasive, creating a situation in which it is sometimes
difficult to determine what such spaces are alternative to or who is responsible for determining what is alternative versus mainstream. Yogyakarta now touts over thirty-five art venues on its annually published “Contemporary Art Map” pictured in figure 25. While Yogyakarta is by no means a large city in comparison to Indonesia’s other art centers, the number of sites in this small city identified as “art venues” makes Yogyakarta unique. Yet, in discussions of the development of alternative art spaces in Indonesia the issue of sustainability is raised continuously. The ephemeral nature of both art spaces and art in Yogyakarta (referencing here the vibrant street art culture) are important characteristics that make the Yogyakarta art world distinct. However, it is also a characteristic that leads to criticism of art spaces that quickly sputter out, perhaps due to lack of energy or, more commonly, lack of funds. Of the spaces that developed in the mid-1990s, two are worth mentioning in terms of their ability to sustain themselves as well as their ongoing commitment to the Yogyakarta art community. These spaces, Kedai Kebun Forum and Via-Via, are both café-gallery spaces that initially exhibited the work of emerging, less-established artists.

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68 Kedai Kebun and the Indonesian Visual Art Archive annually publish a map that lists all “contemporary art spaces” in Yogyakarta. The most current edition of this map, published in 2012, shows thirty-five art spaces including: government sites such as Taman Budaya, established galleries like Cemeti, cafes that function as exhibition spaces, and increasingly, smaller artist run initiatives like SURVIVE!Garage and Kedai Belakang, discussed in this chapter.
Kedai Kebun Forum, owned by artist Agung Kurniawan and wife Yustina Neni, was established in September 1996, first as a restaurant. Shortly after opening, a small room located behind the kitchen was converted into an art space. Neni describes the impetus for turning this space into a pseudo gallery based on a lack of funds to purchase chairs or tables that would allow for the expansion of the restaurant. With experience in the visual arts and a desire to provide a space for friends and fellow artists to display their
work, Kurniawan and Neni chose to use the space for the display of visual art, theatre, music, and dance performances, poetry and book readings, and discussions.\(^{69}\)

In 2001, Kedai Kebun expanded its art activities, creating a separate space, depicted on the left in figure 26, next to its café, depicted on the right amongst the trees. This space consists of a gallery on the first floor and a multi-purpose space on the second floor used for performances, film screenings, and workshops.

![Figure 26: Kedai Kebun Forum](image)

Kedai Kebun maintains a website that includes information about its regular activities, history, and mission, which states:

To create an area of interaction with a critical attitude towards social phenomena through art. To support smart and playful artists so that they have the opportunity to present their artworks without troubling themselves with the categorization of good or bad art. To provoke art communities that have similar commitment to that

of Kedai Kebun Forum in order to collaboratively bring about an art climate that is fresh, energetic, and constructive. To provide alternative shows to the public. To offer inspiration to the existing art communities so that they are capable of raising alternative income in order to live independently and, subsequently, they are able to support other art communities and encourage the creation of an “original” and efficient art management method.70

This mission includes a number of points, which, I argue, can be found in the philosophies of other alternative spaces in Indonesia. While the majority of my field-research was conducted in Yogyakarta, I had the opportunity to visit art spaces such as Common Room in Bandung and Ruangrupa in Jakarta.71 These spaces, like Cemeti, opened with the intent to foster critical attitudes through art, encourage artists to explore new forms of production, rather than concerning themselves with the market, and to provoke collaboration amongst groups in order to foster a more critical, democratic, civil society. As new art spaces emerge, catering to young artists and students, the attitudes that shaped Kedai Kebun’s mission persist in the character of new alternative venues.

At the same time that Kedai Kebun began its art activities, Via-Via opened as a traveler’s café. Kedai Kebun and Via-Via are located within a mile of one another on a street that is intersected by the main thoroughfare, Jalan Parangritis. The road where Via-Via is located, Jalan Prawiotaman, is without a doubt known by most tourists that visit Yogyakarta. This road is one of two main tourist areas in the city, home to guest houses,

71 Common Room, originally founded as the Bandung Center for New Media Arts in 2001 is a space that encourages collaboration between all forms of art, actively planning events and discussions intended to encourage discourse regarding socio-political issues. Ruangrupa, founded in 2000 is a similar venue that focuses on urban issues addressed through art. These spaces are two of Indonesia’s most established and well-respected alternative art venues.
restaurants offering western cuisine, and shops selling what are advertised as traditional and contemporary art artifacts. Cemeti’s current location is within walking distance of these spaces. As the map in figure 25 illustrates, the area of Yogyakarta surrounding the Kraton and extending south towards ISI is densely saturated with art spaces. South Yogyakarta is generally known, as the “art area” while North Yogyakarta is associated with universities including Gadjah Mada or UGM, one of Indonesia’s oldest and most prestigious academic institutions.

In contrast to Cemeti and Kedai Kebun that were opened and are owned (at least partially) by Indonesian artists, the owners of Via-Via are Belgian. There are presently fourteen Via-Via locations on four continents. These restaurants, including Via-Via Yogyakarta, encourage the use of local products and collaboration with local communities in order to promote education and development. Shortly after opening, Via-Via began to display the work of young local artists. Since it began displaying art, Via-Via has consistently held monthly exhibitions organized by an art manager responsible for the planning and promotion of these events. Via-Via’s main café space and style of exhibition on the café’s walls are depicted in figure 27. While the owners of Via-Via are not artists as are the owners of Cemeti and Kedai Kebun, their association with and promotion of art has earned them a role as mediators in the Yogyakarta art world.
While there is a great deal of literature both written about and by Cemeti, there is relatively little documentation regarding the activities of Kedai Kebun or Via-Via. I argue, however, that in establishing an understanding of the alternative art scene and the development of young artists in Yogyakarta today, the significance of these spaces cannot be overlooked. For many artists that emerged in the last decade, exhibitions at these spaces were important milestones in their careers. Throughout my field research I often spoke with artists about these spaces, questioning the perceived significance and place of Cemeti, Kedai Kebun, or Via-Via for the development of an artist’s career. Many artists, particularly those who had graduated from ISI in early 2000, stated if one was able to show their work at all three, they had made it. However, speaking with younger artists, many still students at ISI or those still in high school, I found that these spaces no longer hold the significance they once had. While young artists showed respect for these institutions, they also viewed them as more mainstream or difficult to enter.
Rather than these established galleries, young artists commonly said they would prefer to exhibit their work in spaces that afford them greater freedom and are more closely aligned with the communities toward which they feel an allegiance. In order to provide an understanding of such spaces that can be seen as the “new alternative,” I focus on two particular art venues because of their consistent exhibition schedules, more formal presentation system, and support that can be seen through consistently high attendance at exhibition openings and associated events. These spaces, SURVIVE!Garage and Kedai Belakang, are both owned by local artists. Each space shares similarities with the venues discussed previously. What sets them apart, however, is the support that they receive from a younger community of artists who seek new outlets for the display and reception of their work.

**SURVIVE!Garage**

SURVIVE!Garage (commonly referred to as SURVIVE!), owned by artist Bayu Widodo is located on Jalan Bugisan near the area of Nitiprayan. This area, while not in walking distance of the three art spaces discussed previously, is only a short motorbike ride away. Nitiprayan is home to many artists as well as art spaces, including Sangkring Art Space and Jogja Art Lab. Sangkring, owned by Balinese artist Putu Sutawijaya, is an extremely modern building situated amongst rice fields and small unimposing village homes. The property consists of two gallery spaces depicted in figures 28 and 29. While young artists are often given the chance to exhibit in this space, international standard exhibitions featuring the work of more established artists can be seen as the focus of Sangkring’s exhibition schedule.
Figure 28 (left): Sangkring back gallery
Figure 29 (right): Sangkring front gallery

Jogja Art Lab is an extension of Gajah Gallery, a commercial gallery located in Singapore that manages high-grossing artists like Nyoman Masriadi and members of the Jendela Group. Gajah Gallery recently built Jogja Art Lab in order to promote what owner Jasdeep Sandhu describes as “international standard” artist connections and residencies. SURVIVE!, shown from the outside in figure 30, whose gallery space is literally the garage of Bayu’s home is largely the opposite of these spaces located only a stone’s throw away.

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72 Jasdeep Sandhu (owner of Gajah Gallery), in discussion with author, June 2012, Yogyakarta.
SURVIVE! has not always been located in a physical space. Rather, the idea of SURVIVE! first began as a community of artists in 2004. With a desire to gather friends to work together in promoting and selling their work, Bayu encouraged a number of friends to collect the funds necessary to rent a booth at Festival Kesenian Yogyakarta (Yogyakarta Festival of Arts) commonly referred to as FKY. This festival, which occurs annually around the month of June, is now in its twenty-fourth year. FKY involves various events and activities including an art fair, which gives artists and creative communities the opportunity to promote and sell their work. In 2004, the SURVIVE! community began its activities at FKY by selling screen printed t-shirts and patches as well as offering temporary and permanent tattoos. It was not until 2008 that Bayu was able to rent the space, which now functions as SURVIVE!.
In 2008, Bayu was one of a number of artists who experienced the positive impact of the “art boom.” While Bayu states that his commercial success was luck, until now he continues to sell his work both in Indonesia and abroad. In mid-2009, with the profits from his first significant sales, Bayu rented the space where SURVIVE! is currently located. With the help of friends, the small garage was transformed into a gallery space and art shop. In addition, the first murals, shown in figure 31, were created on the house’s front walls that form its courtyard area. Discussing with Bayu the desire to open a space like SURVIVE! he described how he had had the idea for a long time; however, it was not until the success of his artwork that he was able to realize this dream.

Figure 31: First Mural Project, 2009, (Reproduced courtesy of SURVIVE!)

The name “SURVIVE” comes from the idea that all people, whether artists, students, or businessmen, struggle to survive in the fast paced changing world in which we live. Bayu states that this name and the philosophy were originally his own. By
involving friends in this project to “survive,” Bayu wants to encourage the constant production of artwork and discourse surrounding its production. He states that while we must survive as human beings, it is important to also consider how we survive in relation to the choices that we make in life. Choosing to live as an artist, Bayu describes how when he was younger, he was not as serious about the significance of discussing the reason for creating a particular piece of art. In his own development as an artist, Bayu hopes to provide a space in which artists of any age, but particularly those who are younger, are able to explore and define the particular identities that they choose for themselves. Although Bayu experienced commercial success as a result of Yogyakarta’s early-2000 art booms, Bayu states that his mindset and vision stay the same today. What has changed for Bayu is the seriousness with which he considers his role as an artist and mentor within the community of contemporary artists in Yogyakarta.73

Looking more specifically at exhibitions and events that have been held at SURVIVE!, I highlight a number of shows in order to give a sense of the SURVIVE! community and the type of art shown at this space. Since SURVIVE!’s first exhibition, held on October 18, 2009, SURVIVE! has maintained a relatively consistent schedule of monthly or bi-monthly exhibitions. Exhibitions held at SURVIVE! are planned through the initiative and proposal of artists or by invitation from Bayu and the SURVIVE! team. Bayu states that he has no restrictions regarding who can hold an exhibition at this space. Generally, if an artist wishes to show their work they must first bring Bayu a proposal. Many artists who create proposals are students at ISI. For Bayu an important aspect of

73 Bayu Widodo, in discussion with author, April 2012, Yogyakarta.
SURVIVE! is the ability of students to learn about the exhibition process. While the SURVIVE! team helps with the preparation of any show held at the space, it is ultimately the responsibility of the artist showing to prepare the exhibition. Bayu stressed time and again how much he has learned from this process. While he feels that he is mentoring students and young artists, he also learns a great deal. Along with frequent shows featuring the work of ISI students, SURVIVE! has also exhibited the work of a number of international artists who are friends with Bayu. In the past year the number of requests to exhibit at SURVIVE! has increased significantly; Bayu, however, explains that he maintains an open attitude towards this schedule because, he states, you never know when someone may be in Yogyakarta eager to collaborate with local artists.

One of the first events held at SURVIVE!, that demonstrated the spirit of collaboration with international groups, was a project referred to as “Roda-Roda Soundsystem.” This event held on September 30, 2010, mirrored what is known as “critical mass.”74 Organized in partnership with a group of Australian artists, bikes were decorated with colorful materials, bells, and even acoustic sound systems as depicted in figure 32. Participants began the ride near the Kraton, riding through the streets of South Yogyakarta, and finally ending at SURVIVE! where an opening was held for a collaborative exhibition put together by local and Australian street artists.

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74 Critical mass refers to a cycling event that began in San Francisco in the early 1990s. Critical mass it not usually formalized beyond individuals meeting at a set location and time. Often this location and time remain consistent on a weekly or monthly basis. Critical mass rides have often been perceived as forms of protest. Such rides have developed into various forms throughout the world such as the group bike ride organized as “Roda-Roda Soundsystem” in Yogyakarta. Participants generally view critical mass rides as a form of spontaneous collaboration.
Many of the artists and individuals that support the SURVIVE! community are active as street artists in Yogyakarta, other Indonesian cities, or abroad. This has been demonstrated in numerous exhibitions, such as the shows associated with the Underworld Youth Movement described in the previous chapter. As the photo in figure 33 suggests, the SURVIVE! community is supported by individuals who claim allegiance to other sub-cultures. Many are tattoo artists, were active in the punk scene of the 1990s, or participate in groups like Taring Padi. Bayu himself has been a member of Taring Padi since early 2000. SURVIVE! provides a space for such individuals to adapt the work they create in public spaces to a gallery setting while also connecting with members of other communities and groups from Yogyakarta and abroad.
In May 2012, an exhibition was held that was slightly different than previous shows. This exhibition entitled *Bunga Bunga Besi* (Flowers and Iron) was initiated by Bayu himself in order to promote the work of female artists who are less commonly represented in Yogyakarta’s galleries and alternative spaces. The work of the five participating artists related to themes of domesticity and the female body. This work was also varied, including drawings on paper, sculpture, and even needlepoint as shown in figure 34.
Figure 34: Embroidery by Fitri DK (Reproduced courtesy of SURVIVE!)

As part of this exhibition a discussion was held, shown in figure 35, focused on issues faced by female artists. In the past year Bayu has encouraged the organization of discussions or activities such as film screenings in relation to all exhibitions held at SURVIVE!. His hope is that as SURVIVE! continues to grow, it will become a place where artists feel comfortable not only to display their work but also to bring up sensitive topics such as the role of female artists and women in Indonesia.

Figure 35: Discussion held for Bunga Bunga Besi at SURVIVE! (Photo by author)
Finally, reflecting the often political nature of the art exhibited at SURVIVE!, an exhibition held on September 30, 2012, represented the desire of underground or alternative artists to address issues associated with Indonesia’s past. This exhibition entitled, *AWAS: 30 September* (Watch Out: 30 September), was in honor of G30S and the subsequent deaths of PKI members from 1965-66. Since the Reformasi period, the history of G30S has increasingly become a topic of public inquiry or discussion. The history of this tragedy was not discussed for over thirty years during the New Order regime. Today, it is a topic frequently discussed by artists, activists, and students, demonstrating the desire of young people to come to terms with this aspect of their nation’s history. All of the individuals that participated in the *AWAS: 30 September* exhibition were street artists. The work they created reflected the characters and styles they commonly use in public spaces. The images and phrases utilized in their work show a desire to remember or address the horrors of 1965 while also criticizing the present state of Indonesia. The mural depicted in figure 36 reads, “Can we stop the tragedy inflicted upon our ancestors?”
This exhibition and the image in figure 36 is just one example of political commentary that I encountered in the work displayed at SURVIVE!. It is clear that artists feel comfortable in this space not only to explore new media and form in their work but also sensitive issues related to Indonesia’s history and present development.

**Kedai Belakang**

Another space that has become an important site for young artists is known as Kedai Belakang. Like SURVIVE!, Kedai Belakang began as a community before it became an alternative gallery space. In 2001, artist Anton Subiyanto, the owner of this space, rented the building where Kedai Belakang is now located in order to create a *kos-kosan*. Kos-kosan refers to a house with multiple rooms that are rented out like apartments. Kos-kosan are the most common form of housing for university students.
After forming the kos-kosan many students from ISI came to live at this space, including Bayu Widodo. Anton describes how during this period the space served as a central meeting location for the residents of the kos-kosan as well as other students from ISI. In 2002, Anton along with the residents of his kos-kosan began to organize small exhibitions of their work and that of fellow ISI students. This period of do-it-yourself exhibitions lasted only a short time. In 2003, Anton converted the kos-kosan into an office space for a local NGO called Anak Wayang Indonesia (Indonesian Wayang Children).

While the establishment of an NGO in this space halted its exhibition activities, art remained a part of this space as Anak Wayang Indonesia was involved with the development of art in village areas in Yogyakarta. Involved in this NGO Anton stated that he faced a personal dilemma in relation to the function of art. Was art intended simply for art’s sake or was art something that needed to be shared with a larger population? Working with Anak Wayang Indonesia gave Anton a chance to work more directly with local communities through art. In 2007, the headquarters of this NGO were moved, leaving Anton again with the space that is Kedai Belakng. At this point he chose to turn it into a warung or small restaurant as well as a gallery for young artists to display their work.

The gallery space at Kedai Belakang is one room, relatively small and with poor lighting. This, however, does not deter the artists who are eager to display their work at Kedai Belakang. When Anton converted part of what is now Kedai Belakang into a warung, he hoped that it would become a type of “in-between space” for “calon seniman”
or emerging artists to expand their skills and develop their identities as artists. Anton felt that in 2007, there was a lack of such spaces that would give young artists the freedom to experiment. As at SURVIVE!, artists who display at Kedai Belakang must first make a proposal to Anton. They are then responsible for putting together their exhibition. They must provide their own materials for hanging or displaying work. Anton allows artists to modify the space as they please as long as they return it to its original state. Many of the artists that display their work at Kedai Belakang are street artists. Their exhibitions, such as that depicted in figure 37, take advantage of the ability to create art directly on the space’s walls.

Figure 37: YK LOGOS Exhibition at Kedai Belakang (Photo by author)

The majority of artists that display their work here are also students. The work they create reflects a trend amongst young artists to use found materials for the production of their
art or simple materials such as paper, cardboard, and wood. Frequently attending exhibition openings at Kedai Belakang or SURVIVE!, I quickly realized that while those in attendance are interested in the work of their peers, such events are equally important as opportunities to socialize and discuss new ideas that often lead to the formation of groups or collaborative projects.

Another interesting aspect of Anton’s desire to promote artists at Kedai Belakang is his focus on students that are in departments of art education. In Indonesia, if an individual is interested in studying art, they have only a few options. They are able to study fine art at ISI, enter a program in graphic design offered at a school with three-year diplomas rather than four-year bachelor degrees, or enter an art education program that will prepare them to become teachers. Anton feels that individuals in departments of art education are often left out of exhibition spaces or are less frequently encouraged to display their work. By holding a weekly meeting for art education students, Anton hopes to encourage these individuals to not only become teachers but also active artists.

**Significance of “Alternative” Space**

The development of alternative spaces in the mid-1990s and the use of the term “alternative” occurred at a time that was increasingly volatile due to discontent felt by the Indonesian populace in relation to policies of the New Order. Some argue that the use of this term not only described art spaces that opposed market forces but also those that signaled an opposition to the authorities. Art Historian Amanda Katherine Rath argues that the development of alternative spaces reflects a trend relative to the early
development of sanggar (artist collectives) during the independence era. These spaces offer opportunities to learn outside of formal academies as well as a place for artists to exhibit their work. Today, however, immersed in much wider networks both within Indonesia and abroad, alternative spaces face greater challenges regarding sustainability and legitimation. While sanggar were the art world mediators during the independence era, emerging art spaces and their communities must now contend with more established spaces that have become the mainstream. In a 2001 publication by Cemeti entitled, *Yogyakarta within the Contemporary Indonesian Art Scene*, art historian Sumartono stated, “Should this gallery (Cemeti) close, the progress of Indonesian contemporary art could easily grind to a halt.” This has obviously not been the case. While Cemeti remains a key factor in the contemporary art world, the last decade has seen the continued growth of do-it-yourself style artist initiatives, supported by young artists eager to exert their voices both collectively and individually.

Yet, as alternative spaces and communities continue to emerge, it remains necessary to question the impact of such sites. In an article regarding the spread of alternative spaces and communities Nuraini Juliastuti, a researcher at the Kunci Cultural Studies Center in Jogja, argues that such sites and groups are not united or powerful enough. She argues that these spaces must continue to unite, forming a single supportive body in order that “New Order style” of cultural repression is not allowed to mute the

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voice of cultural products considered dangerous.\textsuperscript{77} While Juliastuti’s comment is somewhat pessimistic, I argue that the influence of these alternative communities are in fact being felt as the examples in the next chapter will demonstrate. It is generally not the case that art displayed in spaces like SURIVVE! or Kedai Belakang will gain attention from international collectors or more mainstream galleries; however, these sites are critical spaces that allow young people to engage in dialogue regarding issues related to their individual expression as well as the development of Indonesia. The result of such dialogue is often seen in the form of expression in public spaces, intended to engage audiences outside of the art community.

CHAPTER 4: PUBLIC ART AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF GRAFFITI

The Place of Public Art and Graffiti in Indonesia

In the United States, the term “public art,” emerged during the late 1960s, in correlation with government-sponsored projects. Such early public art programs, “sought to ensure that the cultural good of art was equitably distributed, and not solely dependent on the (implicitly elitist) delivery mechanisms of the private art market.” In Indonesia, such initiatives are not a part of the history of public art. While a few examples can be found of mural projects sponsored by the Suharto regime, these programs were intended to portray messages that supported the ideology of the New Order. Until the Reformasi period, the majority of government-commissioned public art existed in the form of national monuments, which can be found in both small rural villages and large urban centers. Indonesia’s national monument MONAS (Monumen Nasional), depicted in figure 38, located in Jakarta, is by far the most well-known monument in Indonesia. Commissioned in 1960, by Indonesia's first president, Sukarno, this monument is 137-meters tall and topped with 35-kilograms of gold. It was created as a symbol of nationalism and modernity.

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79 Ibid.
Along with the construction of massive monuments like MONAS, smaller statues such as *Tugu Tani*, shown in figure 39, were also built during Sukarno’s presidency. This monument located near MONAS at *Bunderan Menteng* (Menteng roundabout), features the statue of a farmer and his wife. In contrast to the imposing nature of MONAS, *Tugu Tani* symbolizes the *rakyat kecil* (common people) important to the growth of the nation.

Figure 38: *Monumen Nasional Indonesia* (MONAS)

Figure 39: *Tugu Tani* located at the Menteng Roundabout
When Suharto became president in 1965, the focus of public monuments and art shifted. While Sukarno’s public monuments symbolized national heroes and the growth of a modern nation, Suharto’s use of public space for visual expression intended to reinforce the ideology of the New Order regime. The creation of monuments, billboards, banners, or murals was thus dictated by the desires of the regime. Bambang Witjaksono, one of Apotik Komik’s founding members, states, “Murals that were made during this era were more like a campaign that described the significance of Suharto’s role as the father of development, plastered on every street throughout the city.”

These examples, while providing only a brief view of public art during the presidencies of Sukarno and Suharto, indicate the lack of participation afforded the general Indonesian populace in decisions regarding the public sphere. In this context, graffiti as a form of visual resistance appeared in Indonesia’s urban areas. The history of graffiti in Indonesia follows a similar trajectory, albeit a bit later in time, to that of graffiti in the United States. In both contexts, graffiti was a way for members of civil society to reclaim space that they felt was co-opted by government control. Graffiti began to appear throughout New York City in the 1970s, at the same time that government programs were dispensing millions of dollars for public art projects intended to help revive depressed urban areas. Both in New York and Indonesian cities, graffiti became a forum for social criticism among youth and marginalized groups.

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In Indonesia, graffiti or “tags” began to appear in the 1980s. Syamsul Barry describes the association of tags with sub-cultures similar to those in America that were responsible for the growth of graffiti culture, namely hip-hop and punk groups.\textsuperscript{82} It was not until the late-1990s that graffiti became more focused and organized with projects initiated by Apotik Komik. When Apotik Komik began creating murals they sought to not only improve public spaces in Yogyakarta but also explore new forums for the production of their art.

After the fall of the New Order in May 1998, public spaces were inundated with new forms of expression. In Yogyakarta, the work of groups like Apotik Komik and Taring Padi contrasted with the campaign ads of myriad political parties vying for power. In mid-2000, street art began to enter gallery spaces. In Yogyakarta, street art exhibitions were held at Cemeti Art House and Kedai Kebun. Following exhibitions in alternative gallery spaces, street art was featured in more formal institutions such as Sangkring Art Space and Salihara in Jakarta. At the same time Indonesia was also experiencing increased attention from the international art market. With the influence of the art-boom, issues of commodification became increasingly relevant for street artists. These exhibitions were thus not without controversy.\textsuperscript{83} The issues that arose reflected concerns present in street art communities throughout the world such as street art’s place in contemporary art discourse or the effects of consumerism on such art. While many artists who identify as street artists have established individual names for themselves and are

\textsuperscript{83} Ibid, 74-78.
now recognized throughout Indonesia, these artists remain committed to the function of street art as a form of non-commodity public expression. This can be seen through an increasing number of collaborative projects as well as initiatives to archive street art in online databases and weblogs. In order to examine more closely street art’s engagement with public spaces and civil society, I highlight three major aksi (actions) initiated by street artists in the last two years.

Aksi Kota: Collaborative Public Action

In February 2011, members of the Islamic hard-liner group FPI (Front Pembela Islam) or Islamic Defenders Front attacked members of the Ahmadiyah sect, a small Islamic minority living in Indonesia. This brutal attack, caught on video, resulted in the death of three Ahmadi. Citizens and human rights organizations considered the government response to these murders insufficient. In order to speak out in a non-violent way, three Jakarta based street artists organized a movement known as Berbeda dan Merdeka 100% (Diversity and Freedom 100%).

A call was put out to friends via text-message, Facebook, and Twitter. Participants were instructed to utilize the Berbeda dan Merdeka 100% slogan in the production of street art on a particular day, Sunday, February 13th. After creating pieces with this tagline photos were to be uploaded on the movement’s weblog. Throughout various cities in Java, in the city of Tanjung Pinang, Kalimantan, and even in Singapore, artists responded to the request of the movement’s initiators. Artists used multiple forms and styles to express this message, including murals, stencils, stickers, wheat paste, and

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Additional photos from the “Berbeda dan Merdeka 100%” movement can be found at http://indonesiastreetartmovement.tumblr.com/.
tags. Yogyakarta based artist Anti-Tank, discussed previously in association with the Underworld Youth Movement, joined the *Berbeda dan Merdeka 100%* movement with the poster depicted in figure 40.

![Anti-Tank, Berbeda dan Merdeka 100%, Yogyakarta (Reproduced courtesy of the Berbeda dan Merdeka 100% movement)](image)

Figure 40: Anti-Tank, *Berbeda dan Merdeka 100%, Yogyakarta* (Reproduced courtesy of the Berbeda dan Merdeka 100% movement)

As a collective action, this movement sought to bring attention to issues relevant to the entire nation. The initiators of this movement stated that they had intended to organize a street art movement for a long time focused around issues of urbanization. After the attack on the Ahmadis, they reoriented their message to what they saw as a more critical issue.\(^5\) The positive reception of this movement and perceived importance amongst street artists has led to multiple reiterations of collaborative and individual

\(^5\) Anonymous artist, in discussion with author, April 2012, Jakarta.
projects with the same theme. One example is the work of Jakarta based artist Andi RHARHARHA. During a visit to Sabang, Aceh, Indonesia’s most western border, RHARHARHA created the piece depicted in figure 41. This piece is made out of duct tape placed on a street in Sabang. RHARHARHA commonly uses duct tape for the production of art in public spaces in Jakarta.

Figure 41: RHARHARHA, *Berbeda dan Merdeka 100%,* Sabang, Aceh (Reproduced courtesy of Berbeda dan Merdeka 100% movement)

In mid-2012, another collaborative street art project was initiated, this time in Yogyakarta. Referred to as *Jogja Rumah Bersama* (*Jogja One Home*), this project was again in response to the actions of FPI. Generally known as one of Indonesia’s most progressive and diverse cities as well as the home of many universities, Yogyakarta is often chosen as a site for the visit of international scholars and activists. In mid-2012, Canadian Islamic activist and writer Irshad Manji planned to visit Yogyakarta. Prior to
Manji’s visit, however, FPI voiced their opposition to Manji’s work, threatening to break up any presentation that took place. Students at Gadjah Mada who had helped planned this event felt that it was imperative to stand up to FPI. However, in line with their warnings, a mob of FPI members confronted those who came to see Manji, effectively preventing her presentation from taking place. While this attack was not as brutal as that which resulted in the death of three Ahmadi, individuals were harmed including Manji. Following this and a similar incident in Jakarta at the Salihara Arts Center, street artists again came together to spread a message of pluralism in reaction to religious violence that remains a significant issue in Indonesia.

For this project the tagline “Jogja Rumah Bersama” or “Jogja One Home” was chosen in order to express the plurality and diversity that citizens of Yogyakarta wish to protect and hold as an important characteristic of this city. While Berbeda dan Merdeka 100% was initiated by three artists who chose to remain anonymous; Jogja Rumah Bersama was the result of conversation amongst the larger community of Yogyakarta street artists. Further, Jogja Rumah Bersama utilized murals such as the one shown in figure 42 as the primary mode of expression.
Throughout Yogyakarta there are numerous spots that serve as key locations for street art. The art in these locations changes rapidly, sometimes on a daily basis due to the high production of street art in this city. Utilizing these spots, which are highly visible and familiar to Jogja’s citizens, the artists involved in the *Jogja Rumah Bersama* movement sought to reach as many people as possible. All murals were created collaboratively. As the project progressed and gained recognition, the number of artists who participated in each mural’s construction increased. Over a two-week period more than eight murals were created. The production of many of these murals was videotaped and shared with street art communities throughout Indonesia via social media sites and YouTube. In addition, student groups from Yogyakarta’s major universities, including Gadjah Mada and Sanata Dharma, joined in the support of a larger movement referred to as *Yogyakarta untuk Kebinekaan* (Yogyakarta for Diversity). Gaining recognition from
the Sultan of Yogyakarta, this movement resulted in a rally on June 24th, shown in figure 43, which was presided over by both the Sultan and Governor of Yogyakarta.

Students, artists, and general citizens attended this rally. It began with a march led by the street artists who had initiated the *Jogja Rumah Bersama* movement. Originating from the northern end of Malioboro Street, a major thoroughfare that runs through the center of Yogyakarta, this march stopped in front of Gedung Agung. The presidential palace during the Indonesian Revolution, this building holds symbolic significance. Holding the rally in front of this highly symbolic building associated the *Yogyakarta untuk Kebinekaan* movement with the ideals on which Indonesia was founded. On the day of the rally a manifesto was distributed that highlighted the goals of the *Yogyakarta untuk Kebinekaan* movement. It stated:
Diversity is an everyday living reality that cannot be ignored in Indonesia. The founders of our nation created Indonesia based on the values of Pancasila, not on the values of specific religions or ethnic groups. This formulation was based on the spirit of a tolerant nation that appreciates diversity and holds high freedom of thought and opinion.\textsuperscript{86}

At the rally the Governor and Sultan of Yogyakarta gave speeches that expressed these ideals. In addition, community members, activists, and artists stated their concerns regarding threats to Indonesia’s harmony. While members associated with this movement had been involved in various groups that promote diversity and peace, the \textit{Jogja Rumah Bersama}, movement was considered the catalyst for this event that brought the desires of many citizens together.\textsuperscript{87}

The growing strength and solidarity of Indonesia’s street art community was demonstrated through collaborative projects in other cities on the same day as the Yogyakarta rally. In support of the combined efforts of the \textit{Jogja Rumah Bersama} and \textit{Yogyakarta untuk Kebinekaan} movement, members of the Indonesian Street Art Database (ISAD), an archiving initiative based in Jakarta, organized the Sunday Street Art Movement. A call to action was spread through Facebook and Twitter that asked artists to create new art or share documentation of activities that had already been done in order to voice diversity and peace. Like the \textit{Berbeda dan Merdeka 100%} movement, these photos were uploaded and shared through various social networks.

Again, multiple artists met the call for collaborative expression. Murals were created throughout Jakarta such as the one in figure 44, which reads “This country, the


\textsuperscript{87} Isrol MediaLegal (Jakarta Street Artist), in discussion with author, June 2012, Yogyakarta.
Republic of Indonesia, doesn’t belong to any group, nor to any religion, nor to any ethnic
group, nor to any group with customs and traditions, but is the property of all of us from
Sabang to Merauke!**88**

![Mural by Jakarta Street Artists for Sunday Street Art Movement](image)

Figure 44: Mural by Jakarta Street Artists for Sunday Street Art Movement
(Reproduced courtesy of Jakarta Street Artist Howl)

The third example of collaborative street art production occurred at the beginning
of December 2012. This project was not in response to religious violence but, rather,
focused on the issue of corruption. This project was initiated by members of ISAD. It was
planned as a collaborative project in observation of international anti-corruption day held
each year on December 9\textsuperscript{th}. Thirteen street art communities responded to ISAD’s call for
action. This project was named \textit{Berani Jujur Hebat}. Difficult to translate, the name of

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88 The statement “Sabang to Merauke” is a common phrase used by Indonesians
referring to the distance between Indonesia’s most western and eastern borders.
this project expresses the importance of honesty, considered berani (brave) and hebat (awesome), suggesting the need for transparency. The communities that participated were located in Aceh, Medan, Pekanbaru, Cilacap, Wonosobo, Magelang, Tangerang, Solo, Jogja, Semarang, Padang, and Jakarta. While the use of the phrase Berani Jujur Hebat was encouraged, artists were creative in their production of art that criticized the pervasive corruption in Indonesia. The image in figure 45 is one example. Comprised of two figures created with stencils, a man holds a broken toy stating, “Sorry I broke your toy little one.” In response, the small girl in front of him replies, “Don’t worry Pa; being brave to be honest is awesome.” The artists who created this piece placed it in three locations in Jogja, all near elementary schools in order to highlight the significance of teaching children the negativity of corruption.

Figure 45: Mural by Yogyakarta Street Artists for Berani Jujur Hebat (Reproduced courtesy of Digie Sigit)
The documentation of the *Berani Jujur Hebat* project and its final product are indicative of the growing recognition of Indonesian street art as form of social expression. Each city that participated created a video that was uploaded on YouTube and a website that was created for this project. In addition, an exhibition of the *Berani Jujur Hebat* project was held at MONAS, Indonesia’s national monument in Jakarta, on December 9th. Large billboards, shown in figure 46, were created that showed documentation of each participating city’s work as well as an explanation of the community that participated. This movement was supported not only by street art communities but also by Indonesia’s National Anti-Corruption Commission (KPK) and Indonesia Corruption Watch (ICW). When *Berbeda dan Merdeka 100%* began, the work of these artists was recognized mostly amongst fellow street art communities, two years later the work of these artists is being funded by national corporations and government agencies.

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89 The website created for his project: http://www.beranijujur.net/id.
Figure 46: Exhibition held at MONAS on December 9, 2012 for the Berani Jujur Hebat movement. (Reproduced courtesy of Indonesian Street Art Database)

**Implications for Participation**

As these examples indicate the goal of Indonesian street artists, increasingly organized around collaborative action, is not always to create individual expression. Much like the art of Apotik Komik a decade before, street artists today are working to improve public spaces while engaging with pertinent social and political issues. The work of the Berbeda dan Merdeka 100%, Jogja Rumah Bersama, and Berani Jujur Hebat movements has become a part of the public sphere in the same way as government commissioned public art. While monuments commissioned by Sukarno and Suharto display lasting messages of nationalism and modernity, murals done by anonymous street artists, although ephemeral, present bold statements of pluralism and tolerance. Street artists do not directly elicit assistance from the general populace prior to creating their
art. However, by utilizing public spaces to display their messages, street artists ensure participation of viewers who pass their work on a daily basis. While this art may not always result in a collective action or the creation of a single body acting together, it does have the ability to raise consciousness. The power of emancipation according to Ranciere is the power of an individual to translate what they perceive and link it to their own experience.\(^90\)

In “The Emancipated Spectator,” Ranciere presents an argument for the redefinition of theatre and ideas of the spectator in a spectacle society. This discussion is applicable to all forms of art, including examples of public art. Ranciere asserts that we no longer live in an era where artists wish to portray truth or strategies of overcoming capitalist domination to their audiences. In contrast, artists today, aware of the spectator’s agency, seek to “produce a form of consciousness, an intensity of feeling, an energy for action.”\(^91\) According to Ranciere, spectators are not passive but, rather, have their own individual ways of seeing. Ranciere states that “the spectator also acts…she observes, selects compares and interprets. She links what she sees to a host of other things that she has seen on other stages, in other kinds of places. She composes her own poem with the elements of the poem before her.”\(^92\) Placed on main city streets and at busy intersections, the work of Indonesian street artists is strategically situated in order to ensure a maximum number of citizens will have the opportunity to observe the message portrayed, becoming passive participants.

\(^91\) Ibid, 14.
\(^92\) Ibid, 13.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

British artist, Andy Abbot, in an article on the ethics of do-it-yourself (DIY) in self-organized art and cultural activity, describes how such action is born out of a void or a perceived lack. Abbot discusses how working collectively in alternative spaces breeds a more organic understanding and attachment to a politics that challenges both capitalist and state orthodoxy. With DIY activity, Abbot states that there is a sense of pride and ownership over outcomes; there’s also the transparency of process and control afforded by doing something DIY; and there’s the necessarily collective aspect, where pooling resources, skill-sharing and generally having a go at the things normally reserved for “professionals” leads to new abilities and novel approaches.\(^{93}\) In the United States, DIY activity similar to that discussed in the previous chapters, arose in the 1980s, based on a desire of participants to reconnect with the public while challenging the views of the religious right and other groups hostile to artists.\(^{94}\) Such activity was intricately bound up in subcultures of punk and hip-hop and were frequently collective creations. Artist and writer Jesse Drew states:

The punk scene, often deprived of venues for its music, had to organize alternative spaces, in warehouses and squats, relying on a system of alternative zines to spread the word. Hip-hop culture, homegrown in ghettos and barrios, was often organized around “crews”…all of these activities were contributing to a new


type of collective cultural production that privileged group activity over individual activity.\textsuperscript{95}

In Indonesia a similar phenomenon occurred in the 1990s. Punk communities and collective art organizations began to challenge the repression of the New Order through DIY organization. Comic books and zine were used as alternative media to connect communities and share ideas. Prior to Reformasi, artists had no other choice than to organize individually; however, fear of Suharto’s authoritarian regime remained a real and constant threat. It was not until after the start of Reformasi that groups such as Taring Padi were able to aggressively confront issues that were the result of three decades of New Order rule. Today, almost fifteen years after the fall of the New Order, alternative spaces and communities who embody the DIY spirit flourish in urban centers like Yogyakarta and increasingly throughout more rural regions of Java and Indonesia’s outer islands. Whereas Abbot, in his discussion of DIY activity states, “Few people who desire to change the world would think the best way of going about it would be to start a band, run a record label, form an art collective, perform street interventions or create counter-institutions,” many Indonesian artists who embody the DIY spirit do in fact intend to impact society and effect change through their practice and engagement with local communities.\textsuperscript{96} The characteristics of DIY activity described by Abbot are similar to those associated with socially engaged art practice. In order to further highlight how the work of the artists described in this thesis demonstrate characteristics of socially engaged


art practice, it is illuminating to look more closely at the idea of “living form,” a term coined by the New York based organization Creative Time.

Founded in 1973, Creative Time states as its mission “to commission, produce, and present art that engages history, breaks new ground, challenges the status quo, and infiltrates the public realm.”

Collaborating with artists and communities both in the United States and abroad, Creative Time works to create and promote art that stresses the organization’s three core values, “art matters, artists’ voices are important in shaping society, and public spaces are places for creative and free expression.” Since 2009, Creative Time has held an annual summit dedicated to exploring the intersection of art-making and social justice. In 2012, Taring Padi participated in Creative Time’s summit themed “Confronting Inequality,” thus becoming a part of a global network of artists deemed socially engaged.

The idea of “living form” emerged in conjunction with a 2012 project that sought to highlight socially engaged practices from countries throughout the world. As part of this project, Creative Time published a book, *Living as Form: Socially Engaged Art From 1991-2011*, in which the organization’s curator, Nato Thompson, explains that socially engaged art practice should be seen as a “living form.” Like Grant Kester, Thompson argues that this art is not simply a movement nor can it be reduced to a particular name. Rather, Thompson suggests, if seen as a “new social order,” the cultural practices associated with such projects, which span disciplines ranging from urban...
planning and community work to theater and the visual arts, indicate ways of life that “emphasize participation and challenge power.”\textsuperscript{99} In this way, as a living form, socially engaged art is a method for diverse individuals to engage in productive discourse regarding issues faced by a global population. Groups that create such art have varying objectives and outputs; however, all are linked by a belief in the empowering creativity of collective action and shared ideas.\textsuperscript{100} Describing what is meant by “living form,” Thompson discusses particular qualities associated with the words “life” and “form.”

In relation to the word “life,” Thompson argues that such art is anti-representational, involves participation, is located in the real world, and operates in the political sphere. These characteristics demonstrate the nature of socially engaged artists to create work that functions outside of gallery spaces. Many socially engaged artists create work with the goal to have some impact on society. Located in the “real world,” represented by public space and public forums, this art has a greater ability to challenge government institutions or accepted norms than art confined by mainstream galleries, infrequently visited by those outside of a particular social group. The word “form” refers to the methodologies used in the production of such art that are usually intended to take focus away from aesthetics. Thompson states, “By focusing on how a work approaches


\textsuperscript{100} Claire Bishop, “The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents,” \textit{Artforum}, February 2006), 176-83.
the social, as opposed to simply what it looks like, we can better calibrate a language to unpack its numerous engagements.”

As the history of Indonesian modern art shows, for decades, artists have realized the significance of collaborative space and social realism. It was not until the Reformasi era, however, that Indonesian artists brought art into the public sphere or as Thompson states, the “real world.” With goals to improve public space and to empower communities, Apotik Komik and Taring Padi were amongst the first in a new generation of artists who included dialogue and engagement with local communities as a key aspect of their practice. While many of the examples presented in the preceding chapters such as the collaborative projects of ketjilbergerak and street artists are easily associated with ideas of social engagement, many of the examples in fact indicate a trend amongst artists to remain relatively local, exhibiting at spaces that support their given community or sub-culture rather than amongst wider non-art publics. In order to understand this characteristic of the groups and communities described alongside ideas of social engagement and living form, I turn to Gregory Sholette’s concept of “creative dark matter.” This concept provides additional insight into the nature of young artists who are part of alternative youth sub-cultures that may appear in opposition to mainstream culture yet, also play an important role within the larger Yogyakarta and Indonesian art worlds.


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also makes up the bulk of artistic activity produced in our post-industrial society.”

While at first this term may seem negative, it should not be looked at as such. Rather, the concept of creative dark matter can be used to understand the massive amount of creative activity and production within the Indonesian art world not necessarily highlighted in international exhibitions, market sales, or written accounts of recent art history. Sholette continues his description of creative dark matter discussing how, while such art is an essential pillar of the formal art world, it is generally invisible to the individuals who make the art world function. This leads to the question, “How would the art world manage its system of aesthetic valorization if the seemingly superfluous majority—those excluded as non-professionals—simply gave up on its system of legitimation or if they found an alternative to it by creating a peer-to-peer (P2P) network of support?”

In Indonesia such networks do exist. Despite the fact that Indonesia is the world’s largest archipelago and home to the world’s fourth largest population, distance does not hinder communication between artists, collectives, and those associated with DIY organization. While artists and members of associated sub-cultures (i.e. punk) utilized zine and photocopied comics in the 1990s, blogs and social networks such as Facebook and Twitter now allow art spaces and communities to connect and collaborate both within Indonesia and abroad.


\[^{103}\] Ibid, 3.
According to Sholette, the realm of dark matter includes “makeshift, amateur, informal, unofficial, autonomous, activist, non-institutional, self-organized practices.”\(^{104}\) While spaces such as SURVIVE! and Kedai Belakang have gained recognition from art world mediators as seen by their placement on the Yogyakarta Contemporary Art Map, they can also be viewed in relation to Sholette’s framework due to their DIY character. While artists and groups that display their work at these spaces do exhibit at more established galleries like Sangkring, it is not important if their work is sold or even received by such galleries. What is important is constant participation within groups to which they pledge allegiance such as the SURVIVE! or street art community.

Another important characteristic of Sholette’s creative dark matter is its ephemeral nature. Considering ephemeral art, one might immediately think of street art. However, art created for exhibitions such as those of the Underworld Youth Movement are not necessarily intended to be preserved; rather, they are often as ephemeral as the work these artists create in public space. Created from simple found objects like skateboards or spray paint cans and highly perishable materials, (for example, thin paper in a humid climate like Indonesia), the art created by artists in these communities is made in a low-cost manner, reducing the concern or necessity of preservation. In order to maintain a database or portfolio, photos and sharing on Facebook have become important. Sholette argues that in the last decade creative dark matter has become increasingly visible:

As never before, producing, copying re-mixing, printing, uploading, and distributing images and information has become (almost) everyone’s privilege, even their social responsibility. Digital technology functions like a prosthetic memory permitting the excluded to document and narrate ephemeral, everyday activities and overlooked forms of expression and resistance.\(^{105}\)

For Indonesian street artists this statement is particularly relevant. Documenting work and sharing it in virtual contexts has allowed for greater visibility. Further, it has allowed for participation in what Sholette describes as a new “e-collectivism.”\(^{106}\) While street art or other types of alternative practice have always existed in some context, with its increased visibility, practitioners are beginning to work together in new ways. In Indonesia, this is seen through collaborative projects such as Berbeda dan Merdeka 100% or Roda-Roda Soundystem at SURVIVE!. Further, the increased documentation of such art has led to greater interest in archiving as well as attention from international media. Street artists in both Yogyakarta and Jakarta are currently working on projects with MOCA LA in order to share their work, focused on political commentary and public discourse, with a global audience. Knowledge of these artists’ work would not have been possible without Internet and social media.\(^{107}\)

Thus while the idea of creative dark matter may at first elicit ideas of art or groups that oppose mainstream practices, in Indonesia it is significant in helping to understand


\(^{107}\) Street artists from both Yogyakarta and Jakarta were commissioned by the Museum of Contemporary Art of Los Angeles (MOCA LA) in February 2013 to create short YouTube videos that will be part of a series on global street art. This series of YouTube videos will be part of MOCA LA’s YouTube channel.
the peer-to-peer network that has formed between alternative communities both outside of and within the art world, alternative spaces that support these communities, and collectives that focus on the production of art that engages with a wider audience outside of the art world. The increased creative activity of such artists and groups as well as a desire to hold discussions and confront issues relevant to Indonesia’s history and contemporary situation indicate the significance of this type of artistic production in post-Reformasi Indonesia. Art communities serve as a critical site for discourse amongst young people. It is through the support of an increasingly wide network throughout Indonesia and abroad that the individuals and groups discussed here legitimate their work and imagine the possibility of art to have an impact on Indonesian society, thus becoming socially engaged artists.
GLOSSARY

**Apotik Komik.** A group of mural artists from Yogyakarta formed in 1997.

**ASRI.** An abbreviation for *Akademi Seni Rupa Indonesia*. Translated as “Indonesian Academy of Fine Art” this institution was founded in Yogyakarta in 1950.

**Distro.** Refers to small independent clothing stores that generally sell T-shirts and other merchandise often designed by young Indonesian artists. These stores are frequented by high school and university students and have become associated with indie culture.

**DIY.** An abbreviation for *do-it-yourself*.

**G30S.** An abbreviation for *Gerakan 30 September*. Translated as “30th September Movement,” G30S refers to the communist coup of 1965 that led to mass killings throughout Indonesia.

**Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru.** Translated as the “New Art Movement” this movement was formed in 1975 by art students from ASRI and ITB in rejection of aesthetic standards of that period.

**ISI.** An abbreviation for *Institut Kesenian Indonesia*. Translated as “The Indonesian Institute of Fine Art,” ISI was the new name given to ASRI in 1997 when the art academy’s campus was moved.

**ITB.** An abbreviation for *Institut Teknologi Bandung*. Translated as “Bandung Institute of Technology,” ITB is home to one of Indonesia’s most prestigious art departments, formed in 1947.

**ketjilbergerak.** An artist collective from Yogyakarta that was formed in 2006.

**LEKRA.** An abbreviation for *Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat*. Translated as “Organization of People’s Culture,” founded in 1950, LEKRA was the cultural organization of the Indonesia Communist Party.

**PERSAGI.** An abbreviation for *Persatuan Ahli Gambar Indonesia*. Translated as “Indonesian Painter’s Association,” PERSAGI was the first sanggar formed in 1938.

**PKI.** An abbreviation for *Partai Komunis Indonesia*, translated as “Indonesian Communist Party.”

**POETERA.** An abbreviation for *Pusat Tenaga Rakyat*. Translated as “Center for People’s Power,” this sanggar was formed in 1943 during the Japanese occupation.
**Rakyat.** Translated as “community,” *rakyat* refers to the people of Indonesia.

**Reformasi.** Translated as “Reformation,” *Reformasi* refers to the period that followed the fall of Suharto’s New Order regime.

**Sanggar.** This term refers to artist collectives or organizations that were formed during the early years of Indonesia’s modern art history prior to the establishment of formal art academies.

**SIM.** An abbreviation for *Seniman Indonesia Muda*. Translated as “Young Artists of Indonesia,” SIM was a sanggar formed in Yogyakarta during the revolutionary period.

**Pelukis Rakyat.** Translated as “People’s Painters,” this sanggar was formed in Yogyakarta during the revolutionary period.

**Taring Padi.** Translated as “the fang of the rice plant,” Taring Padi is a political art collective from Yogyakarta that was formed in December 1998.

**TIM.** An abbreviation for *Taman Ismail Marzuki Cultural Center*, a cultural center that opened in Jakarta in 1968.
REFERENCES


