



Autonomous Art of Uncertain Life in Yogyakarta

A Podcast by Wok The Rock and Gunawan Maryanto

Chapter 1: Me, Art, and the World

My name is Wok The Rock. 45 years old. My art practice spans from art, design and music. I am also a member of the artist collective, MES 56. I also distributed digital music for free download in Yes No Wave Music, initiating the Indonesia Netaudio Forum and co-curator of Nusasonic, a music and sound art platform in Southeast Asia and beyond. I used to work as a curator for Biennale Jogja in 2015. I am interested in experimenting with cross-disciplinary collective work and contemporary cultural interventions using curatorial aesthetics and speculative approaches.

I am Gunawan Maryanto. 45 years old. Actor, writer, theatre director and Artistic Director for Teater Garasi/Garasi Performance Institute. I think openness is an important asset in performing arts these days. The ability to continue to learn and work with artists from various art disciplines. In theater I am used to working in groups, this makes it easier for me when I have to collaborate with many other artists. Moreover, the creative approach developed at Teater Garasi is a collective creation in which themes and forms are arranged based on the contributions of all the artists involved.

«My fellow artists that I am proud of, every person who claims to work as an artist will always be faced with financial uncertainty, as is the fate of the vagabond. A handful of shrewd and ambitious artists climbing the ladders of the elite commercial art world may well become rich. But for the majority of artists, the luxury of the art world can only be enjoyed momentarily at the afterparty of a big exhibition opening.

At this point we all have to think together about how to make sure the economic means necessary to support life as an artist are not in contradiction with our aspirations to sustain a critical art practice. Experiments in alternative economies must be tested by us with all the opportunities and limitations that exist today. Alternative economies aren't just a way to achieve individual financial success, but also a just and collective mode of distributing resources.

We then need to step outside of the narrow confines of the art world ecosystem, to realise that the economic system of international art projects is not disconnected from the discipline produced by a neo-liberal work ethic.»

*(«The Mobility of the Vagabond Cosmopolitan Artist and Our Cultural Strategy»
Brigitta Isabella, 2018)*



«If I were a Dutchman, I would not celebrate an independence ceremony in the country where we ourselves, are denied their rights of freedom.

Consistent with the way of the mind, it was not only unfair, but also inappropriate to ask the *Inlander* (native Indonesian) to provide funds for such festivities.»

(«*Als ik eens Nederlander was*», Soewardi Soerjaningrat, 1913)

Chapter 2: Art Ecosystem Challenges

Pulang ke kotamu
Ada setangkup haru dalam rindu
Masih seperti dulu
Tiap sudut menyapaku bersahabat
Penuh selaksa makna

*Going back to your hometown
There is a bit of emotion in longing
Still the same as before
Every corner greeted me friendly
Full of meaning*

Terhanyut aku akan nostalgia
Saat kita sering luangkan waktu
Nikmati bersama
Suasana Jogja

*I will be carried away with nostalgia
When we often make time
Enjoy together in
Jogja scene*

(Yogyakarta, KLA Project)

(Yogyakarta, KLA Project, 1991)

Jogja terbuat dari rindu, pulang dan
angkringan

*Jogja is made of longing, of coming
home and angkringan¹*

(Jogja, Joko Pinurbo)

(Jogja, Joko Pinurbo)

Dalam secangkir teh
ada hati Jogja yang lembut meleleh.
Dalam secangkir kopi
ada hati Jogja yang alon-alon waton
hepi.
Dalam secangkir senja
ada hati Jogja yang hangat dan
berbahaya.

*In a cup of tea
there is a Jogja's soft heart melting.
In a cup of coffee
there is the heart of Jogja which is
always
alon-alon waton hepi (slowly, just be
happy).
In a cup of twilight
there is a warm and dangerous heart
of Jogja.*

(Hati Jogja, Joko Pinurbo)

(Jogja's Heart, Joko Pinurbo)

¹ A small street food vendor with a wooden cart, typically found in Yogyakarta.



Hidup di kota pendidikan, menatap
beton perhotelan
Melata gagap di tengah kemacetan,
tertunduk resah seorang
pengangguran

30 30 tahun
30 30 tahun pengangguran

Teringat balada di masa lalu, saat
tangan masih menengadah uang saku
Kukenakan toga di atas mimbar, turun
tersadar ku tlah di trotoar
Hidup bosan sebagai karyawan
swasta, tanpa jaminan dan berakhir
dengan PHK

(30th Pengangguran, DOM 65)

*Living in the city of education, staring
at the concrete jungle of hotels
Crawling stuttering in the middle of a
traffic jam, looking down restlessly an
unemployed person*

*30 30 years
30 30 years of unemployment*

*Reminiscent of ballads from the past,
when hands were still upward asking
for pocket money
I put on a graduation gown in the
podium, going down I realized I was
already in the sidewalk
Bored with living as a private
employee, without collateral and ends
in layoffs*

(30 years of Unemployment, DOM 65, 2020)

Tradisi adalah kebiasaan yang turun-
temurun dalam sebuah masyarakat. Ia
merupakan kesadaran kolektif
masyarakat. Sebagai kebiasaan
kolektif dan kesadaran kolektif, tradisi
merupakan mekanisme yang bisa
membantu memperlancar
pertumbuhan pribadi anggota
masyarakat.

Namun demikian, nilainya sebagai
pembimbing akan merosot apabila
tradisi mulai bersifat absolut. Dalam
keadaan serupa itu ia tidak lagi
menjadi pembimbing, melainkan
menjadi penghalang bagi
pertumbuhan pribadi dan pergaulan
bersama yang kreatif.

Fitrah hidup itu bertumbuh dan
berkembang. Tradisi yang tidak
mampu berkembang adalah tradisi
yang menyalahi fitrah hidup.
Fanatisme yang menghalangi
perkembangan tradisi adalah sikap
yang menghalangi hidup dan memihak
kepada kematian.

(Mempertimbangkan Tradisi, WS Rendra)

*Tradition is a habit passed down from
generation to generation in a society. It
is the collective consciousness of
society. As a collective habit and
collective awareness, tradition is a
mechanism that can help facilitate the
personal growth of community
members.*

*However, its values as a guide will
decline when tradition begins to be
absolute. In such circumstances it's no
longer a guide, but a hindrance to
personal growth and creative
association.*

*The nature of life grows and develops.
Traditions that are unable to develop
are traditions that violate the nature of
life. The fanaticism that hinders the
development of tradition is an attitude
that blocks life and favors death.*

(Considering Tradition, WS Rendra)



Chapter 3: Art and Society

Warung Owner: Hey, what are you busy with, Mas?

Artist: Well, just regular stuff. Staying at home. It's covid time. Cannot perform or exhibit. Online only. How about you? The *angkringan* busy?

Warung Owner: Also quiet. Because of the pandemic. The students all went home. But it still runs little by little. Only neighbours buying. If I want to take a pre-work card is really a hassle, Mas. Must take new online courses to get a monthly allowance. It's better to run *angkringan*. I don't have to be online.

How do you make income in a pandemic time, Mas?
Is there government assistance for artists or not?

Artist: Whether there is pandemic or not it's the same, Mas. Sometimes it sells, sometimes it doesn't. But it did drop dramatically. Most of the exhibitions are online but also cannot expect to get money from there. Can not do residency as well because we cannot go anywhere, right.

For government assistance, I registered for it. Filling out the form already. But until, now, I haven't got any news. Some of my friends said they got it. But still, it's not enough to eat and make art.

Warung Owner: Wow, it's great, Mas, to be able to travel abroad. The money must be a lot too.

Artist: Yes, if you can save money, you can bring the money home. The money is actually only enough for daily meals and transport. It seems good to be able to travel abroad. But actually the money is not that big. That's why I often bring instant noodles and cigarettes from home. I often try to find additional money from the cultural office as well. But it rarely works. It can't be sudden, they said. In fact, the invitations from abroad are often sudden too and it works.

Warung Owner: Is it not enough from selling your work? I heard there are lots of paintings that are selling well. How can it sell so expensive, Mas? Even though it's only a painting. The capital is only canvas and paint.

Artist: Artwork such as painting is one and only, so the value is high. Well, sometimes the price can be good, sometimes it's down. It's uncertain, Mas. That's why it's called art. The measurement is not fixed. Just like the antique business. There are mysterious people who arrange them. So you have to really understand the economic system of the art market. One little mistake you can fall down completely.

Warung Owner: Wow, it's different from my *sego kucing* (small portion of rice with small side dish/*sambal* wrapped in banana leaves). Nonetheless. It doesn't change



unless the basic material goes up and then I can increase it a little. But maybe if I make this *angkringan* artsy, instagramable, maybe the price could go up.

By the way, what is the use of art besides making things beautiful, Mas? Is there a direct function for the general public like me? Will it solve the problem? If its politics, economics, and religion there is, right? I often think about it. Especially in difficult times like this.

Artist: Wow, your questions are tough. You sound like an art critic!

Warung Owner: Ah, Mas, it's not like that. I'm just wondering whether art can contribute to solving our problem.

Artist: Look, it's like this, artist is an obscure profession. What is certain is just the same as citizens in general. It's not like politicians or religious leaders who have power in policy. Generally, art is seen as something that can beautify something, which is entertaining. But actually art is the creative power and imagination to see things in a different way, experimenting with something that has never been done. Almost the same as technology, the difference is that art is more fluid and full of uncertainty. Everyone has that power.

Warung Owner: Wow, does that mean I can become an artist?

Artist: Of course you can! As long as you are patient in doing it because it takes a long process. you need to daydream a lot, Mas, hahaha

Warung Owner: No way, if I daydream, my customer will flee without paying, Mas!

Artist: Hahahaha

Warung Owner: Jogja is special, right, Mas? Many students and scholars. Many artists. Many smart people. Many tourists came. We also have a sultan too. Living costs are also cheap here. No other city is as special as Jogja.

Artist: Well, I never think whether it's special or not. The economic gap in Jogja is high, you know. There are still many poor people, hotels are everywhere and making residents' water sources dry. It's true that the living cost is cheap but the standard wages in Jogja are very low. If the students graduate, they will definitely look for money in other cities. Not here. The special status is only a symbol. Part of the history of the city of Yogyakarta during the revolution. But in reality it's just the same as other cities. The problems faced are the same.

Warung Owner: Wow, Mas, you are critical. You are not a pro with special status.

Artist: It's not that I don't like it. Special or not special, it's up to you. But what is it for? The Sultan automatically became the governor. Special status funds are obtained every year. What's more? What does the special status contribute to common people like us? If the governor is not right, we just give up,



Mas. Because we can not choose. I can't find a governor who is smart and really knows the needs of his citizens.

Warung Owner: The Sultan has a *wahyu keprabon*, a blessing from the ancestor and the universe. He is God's representative in this world. So yes, he must be true and wise, definitely love the people in Yogyakarta.

Artist: Yes, it's okay if you believe like that. If I want the governor to be a sultan or not, the important thing is to really work for the people. Like Sultan HB IX, the throne for the people. Not to enrich his own family!

Warung Owner: Yes. For me, the important thing is that we as citizens, stay connected and get along well. After all, if something happens, the people must be active.

Artist: With that, I agree, Mas. We don't depend on the big man above. If there are problems around, we must find the most appropriate solution together. The government doesn't want to lockdown, so we lock down the neighborhood by ourselves.

OK, mas... I have to go. Want to continue daydreaming, who knows might get the idea to eradicate poverty.

Warung Owner: Hahaha... if you get the idea, let me know, Mas, I'll definitely help!



Chapter 4: Art and Social Change Now and Future

narrator 1	narrator 2
<p>The commuting between the individual and the collective is not easy. But I still believe that the collective is a learning space that grows me as an individual artist. Especially in the midst of a poor artistic ecosystem, collectives can be a safety net for creativity. And also the economy.</p>	<p>Each individual in the collective must have a strong open and independent nature to strengthen egalitarian and fair collective work.</p>
<p>Collective can also be used to build economic sustainability. Together we can create programs or activities that can support ourselves. Trying to let go of dependence on donor agencies and the government. Finding a donor is also getting more difficult. Moreover, hoping for support from the government.</p> <p>Building a business unit with existing artistic capital is perhaps the way to survive. Collaboration with the community is also one way, making art a part of society. By itself this survival will last.</p>	<p>With the principle of profit to both sides that does not harm others and elaborates creative resources without sacrificing the essence of life ethics, as a result we can have an independent and responsible welfare.</p>
<p>There are many issues that cannot be discussed openly. Art spaces can become common spaces to talk about it. Not only between artists but also with other elements of society. The art room can become a laboratory for residents to read and talk about their problems.</p>	<p>We need to learn to critically understand the social construction that has been constructed unfairly so far, so that we can be sure that creating a safe space is our collective struggle.</p>
<p>I cannot clearly imagine what will happen after the pandemic. Will our arts and ways of doing arts change? It must have changed. but like what? Taking place in small safe spaces? Or do you have to go back based on your immediate environment?</p>	<p>The vulnerability and uncertainty of life have engulfed the artist, that's why we always work out creating new things throughout life. Whatever the tragedy, keep improving. The doomsday is over!</p>