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Critical Recycling:

Post-Consumer Waste as Medium and Meaning in Contemporary Indonesian Art

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Abstract

This paper sets out to investigate how and why Indonesian contemporary artists invoke the materiality of post-consumer waste as an art medium. To do so, I look back on the history of environmental art and the found object in Indonesia, and the exhibitions and practices of artists and critics contemporary to that history. From the present day I analyse specific works by Tisna Sanjaya (b. 1958), Tita Salina (b. 1973) and I Made Bayak (b. 1980), drawing on conversations with the artists to understand the intentions and resonances of post-consumer waste as art medium in Indonesia. Understanding the historical precedents to this increasingly dominant practice in Indonesian demonstrates a continuity of concern among artists, and a drive to innovate on past practices.

Introduction

In the recent National Gallery of Australia exhibition *Contemporary Worlds: Indonesia*, artist Tita Salina (b. 1973) brought a tonne of plastic waste, collected from the Jakarta Bay, into the sanitised space of the gallery. This work was a physical trace of a participatory, research-based art project that she and

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other artistic collaborators have been developing since 2015. In doing so, Tita joined a long tradition of artists repurposing waste as a means of engaging with the troubled history of environmental degradation in the Indonesian archipelago. Like Tisna Sanjaya (b. 1958), who exported three tonnes of plastic waste from recycling plants in Indonesia to pristine Singapore for an exhibition, and Made Muliana Bayak (b. 1980), who repurposes plastic detritus as canvas and sculptural material, Tita draws attention to both the environmental and social impact of our discarded packaging. This paper sets out to investigate how and why Indonesian contemporary artists invoke the materiality of post-consumer waste as an art medium. To do so, I will look back on the history of environmental art and the found object in Indonesia, the exhibitions and practices of artists and critics contemporary to that history. From the present day I will analyse specific works by these three artists and draw on conversations with the artists to understand the intentions and resonances of post-consumer waste as art medium in Indonesia.

Cataclysmic Regimes: Art, Environment and Society in the Archipelago

Writing on the influence of environmental catastrophes on art traditions in Indonesia, James Bennett and Muchaddan draw attention to the close ties between the form and function of art in Indonesia and the conditions and events of the surrounding environment.¹ Describing the global impact of the eruption of Mt Tambora in 1815, which resulted in the “year with no summer” in the northern hemisphere, they speculate that the devastation wreaked on Lombok and Bali may well have led to the loss of the knowledge, tools and skills required to create the figurative patterns then found in Sasak *usap* weaving. Subsequently, figurative forms were replaced by strictly geometric patterns, an evolution commonly attributed to the influence of Islam. The authors argue for a more open reading of this change, pointing out that the “history of *usap* is a reminder that the study of Indonesian art cannot be separated from environmental factors that may have an even greater influence on art styles than spiritual values”.² Bennett focuses on natural disasters, but in the decades that followed Mt Tambora’s eruption, Dutch rule over the East Indies increasingly exposed the islands and its peoples to industrialised agriculture and factory-produced goods for consumption and export. The effects of this large-scale industrialisation had, of course, a profound impact on all areas of social life, including cultural and artistic practice. Matt Cox has observed that not only did the new train lines stimulate new designs and collaborative practices between batik industries in different provinces and

ethnic groups, it also contributed to the unionisation and political awakening of many communities in the Dutch East Indies, which in turn led to a movement for independence.³ Benedict Anderson, too, has tied the emergence of print capitalism in Indonesia to the utilisation of creative practice—in his analysis, through literature—as a catalyst for imagining connections to people we have never met. This phenomena is inseparable from the rise of nationalism in the 20th century and, in our present day, global activist movements.⁴

The connection between social activism and art in Indonesia has long been established. The earliest treatises and artworks from artists and art workers, such as Raden Saleh's (1811–80) subversive 1857 painting *The Arrest of Prince Diponegoro*, Soedjojono's (1913–86) 1946 essay "Art, Artists and Society" and Kartini's (1879–1904) 1898 essay "Handschrift Jepara" on women's work in the batik industry, among others, saw art as inherently connected to emancipation.⁵ Kartini is widely recognised in Indonesia as an archetypal mother figure, but she and her sister Roekmini were both artists and arts managers. Their advocacy for the visual arts of Java maintained strongly political overtones; Kartini's essay accompanied an exhibition she organised in the National Exhibition for Women's work in The Hague in 1898. In this, we see evidence of an emerging sense of arts' potential as an integral link to social change in the archipelago, as Kartini argues for the arts as an avenue for the employment, and therefore enfranchisement, of Javanese women. Artists of the independence era were employed in an attempt to generate a sense of national unity, as evident in the paintings of Emiria Sunassa (1894–1964), which celebrate a diverse range of cultural rituals across the islands.

But the vital role artists took as political players in the struggle for independence was interrupted by the fall of first President Soekarno's government, and the rise of Suharto's developmentalist and business-oriented New Order. In this new regime, artists, along with students, writers, media and all fields of social practice, were subject to the regime's goals of "depoliticisation".⁶ While the ramifications of this strategy were felt differently in regional and urban areas, and across different periods of the regime, the overall effect was the deployment of creativity in the service of development.⁷ Artists and arts collectives were tasked with designing the aesthetic presence of this emergent Asian power. Recent scholarship has pointed out the extent to which commercial art and design firm Decenta was involved in formulating and representing a national culture directly at the behest of the *Orde Baru* regime, taking commissions for private and government-owned building interiors and public art that referenced ethnic material culture from (often contested) regions of Indonesia.⁸



I Made Bayak Muliana, *Alien Who Try to Build New Island of Sunset And Sunrise*, acrylic, permanent ink and plastic waste on canvas, 2013. Courtesy of the artist.



I Made Bayak Muliana, *Plasticology* workshop at Ubud Readers and Writers Festival, 2014. Photograph by the author. Courtesy of the author.



I Made Bayak Muliana, *Legong II*, acrylic, permanent ink and plastic waste on canvas, 2014. Private collection. Photograph by the author. Courtesy of the author.

The establishment of arts councils, grants and centres such as the Taman Ismail Marzuki allowed the government to endorse certain artists and exclude others; in its officiation it promised to “promote instead the socioartistic climate that knows no political occupation”.⁹ Many artists worked in the service of the state and its agents, in their capacity to normalise and reify the rapid development Indonesia was experiencing at the time. The 1974 exhibition *Paintings of the World of Oil Mining*, for which the state-owned oil company Pertamina invited 14 well-known painters to depict the operations of Indonesia’s oil refineries, attests to this role. The exhibition was jointly held by Pertamina and the Jakarta Arts Board (Dewan Kesenian Jakarta, DKJ) and the resulting artworks were acquired for the DKJ collection, where they remain. There was considerable discussion at the time of the exhibition about artists’ choices to accept or reject the invitation, and the nature of the resulting artworks. Sudjoko, in particular, expressed his disappointment that the artists had declined the opportunity to challenge their established practices with this material, lamenting that the resulting works seemed to be little more than landscapes.¹⁰ His text, like that of Umar Kayam, quickly moved on to the more philosophical question of “*maecanisme*”, or whether artists’ autonomy is compromised by patronage—or to be precise, in both authors’ arguments, why artists’ autonomy is not compromised by patronage. In 2006 the issue was revisited by the Jakarta Arts Board (with a different board

membership), through the exhibition and publication of *Seni: Pesanan (Art: By Order)*, which exhibited a nuanced variety of works from the exhibition and associated with the relationship between Pertamina, the Board and artists during the New Order.

Anti-Lyricism, Social Change and the Found Object

In spite of the New Order regime's attempts to control artistic discourse, the sense that artists had an important, and indeed inextricable, social role in the defence of the marginalised in Indonesia persisted, even throughout the New Order.¹¹ Over the 1970s and 1980s, Indonesian artists continued to explore and experiment with the form and function of the artwork in ways that led, seemingly inevitably, to the use of post-consumer waste as an artistic medium. In executing these conceptually-oriented, critically-conceived works, Indonesian artists were part of a large global movement that included 'land art' by US and UK artists who worked on a monumental scale in and with the environment; the Japanese Mono-Ha or 'school of things'; as well as the socially-oriented 'happenings' of Allan Kaprow and the pop-art movement's preoccupation with vernacular and interdisciplinary mediums.

By the 1970s, the side effects of rampant over-development, lack of environmental regulation and increasingly corrupt relations between business, government and the military was impacting heavily on the Indonesian people and their environment. In 1975, the emergence of the *Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru* (New Art Movement, or GSRB), preceded by the dramatic efforts of signatories to the Desember Hitam statement protesting the stagnation of Indonesian art in 1974, presented the Indonesian public with a series of experimental art works that used found objects to invoke an accessible, vernacular visual culture to be found in "the everyday".¹² These ordinary objects, repurposed for the gallery space, flew under the radar of the agents of repression and commented on social phenomena such as violence, consumerism and sexuality. In 1976 Yuliman described a shifting focus in "new Indonesian painting" which allowed for artists to abandon the symbolic and poetic potential of traditional art materials:

If lyricism filters and transforms experiences and emotions into the world of the imaginary, then through this tendency we see artists avoiding this filtering and transformation. It is not a picture of the objects on display, but rather the objects themselves. It is not the feeling of disgust that is drawn out and into the imagination, but an actual feeling of disgust, presented without distance, which makes

people turn away in disgust ... They want to present the experience as concretely and genuinely as possible ... These artworks are not a slice of the imaginary world contemplated at a distance, but rather the concrete object which physically involves the viewer.¹³

Yuliman identifies three primary elements of the ‘background’ to the development of this new “anti-lyricism”, namely, the cultural legacy of an unformulated connection between intuition, emotion and reality; the social and historical context of the struggle for nationhood and the destruction of traditional and communal ways of living; and the influence of, and resistance to, the West from colonisation through to mass communications.¹⁴

The artists of the 1970s pushed the boundaries of accepted artistic materials and sites of production and exhibition. In 1974, Bonyong Munny Ardhie (b. 1946) installed a kilometre-long strip of plastic traversing the sand of Parangtritis beach like a freshly laid footpath for the “Konsep Alam Terbuka” (Concept for an Open Environment) project. Since that time, Parangtritis beach—which holds considerable ritual and spiritual significance for central Javanese culture and, in particular, the Sultanate of Yogyakarta—has regularly been the site of artistic interventions, festivals and gatherings of global environmental movements.¹⁵ In 1977, the PIPA collective of which Ardhie was a member alongside other members of GSRB, held a challenging exhibition in Yogyakarta, which was banned by the police after just two days. It featured installations of found material designed to protest the increasing encroachment of globalisation and big business on the city better known for its culture and arts. In 1982, again on Parangtritis beach, FX Harsono (b. 1949) installed a one kilometre long series of standing plywood panels with an image of a tree screen-printed on one side, and data relating to deforestation on the other.¹⁶ Like other emerging art movements around the world at this time, these artists strove for interdisciplinarity, experimenting with form and medium and focusing on concept over form.

During the 1980s, artists began to reach even further into the ‘outside world’ by developing art projects in collaboration with non-governmental organisations. The *Proses 1985* exhibition marked a turning point in artists’ attempts to use visual art as a catalyst for social change, or at least a shift in engagement from that of anti-elitism and vernacular design to a conscious effort to engage with field research, interdisciplinary expertise and the burgeoning environmental catastrophes that were already affecting marginalised communities. Rather than rejecting the role of the educated elite, the artists aimed to be “part of an exchange of information, which bridges broader society and environmental experts, environmentalists, environmental artists

and other interested parties”.¹⁷ The artists—FX Harsono, Bonyong Munny Ardhie, Moelyono (b.1957), Gendut Riyanto (b.1955) and Harris Purnama (b.1956)—created their artworks as tools for communication, re-presenting data and information and attempting to remove their own personal responses to the environmental issues they were investigating. These investigations, crucially, were carried out in cooperation with key non-governmental organisation, the Indonesian Forum for the Environment, known as WALHI. Harsono’s confronting photographs of a smiling mother nursing a daughter crippled by mercury poisoning from the waters of Jakarta Bay provides an exemplar of their efforts to use their creative skills to “present facts without manipulation”.¹⁸ Moelyono’s extensive written account of development projects around Tulungagung was featured in the catalogue as his artist’s statement. It included population and geological data, project funders and technical details, demonstrating a dualistic methodological approach to writing, documentation and art-making that he has carried through his practice until today. Reflecting on this shift in artists’ processes nearly two decades later, Harsono wrote:

They understand the problems of society to be quite complex, drawing on their critical observations of the reality of existence and their interactions with society and groups outside the arts ... this awareness meant they no longer identified the problems of the people as limited to the problems experienced by the *wong cilik* (little people/peasants), rather with more diversity ... environmental pollution, eviction, workers, war, cultures of violence, the clash between modernity and tradition, and so on.¹⁹

In 1987, GSRB’s exhibition at Taman Ismail Marzuki, “Pasar Raya Fantasi” (Fantasy Supermarket) attempted to simultaneously elevate vernacular design whilst critiquing the mass consumer culture it was drawn from. While the group had long investigated the cadence of the found object as a sign, “Pasar Raya Fantasi” took as its subject matter the rising prominence of branding and packaging in the marketplace. They utilised “every day art products; advertisements, magazine covers, (this is an illustration of the tastes of the upper middle-class) stickers, pin-up calendars, comics, plastic accessories that are sold by street vendors (imagery from the lower middle-class).”²⁰

We can observe over the course of the 1970s and 1980s artists’ rapidly converging interests in found materials, concerns about consumerism and development, and interdisciplinary engagement with practitioners in other fields. By 1992 a coalescence had emerged which saw post-consumer waste

appear as the very fabric from which artworks addressing these concerns were made, a “concrete” reference which shifted materials from a connotative into a denotative function of the kind Yuliman described as “not a picture of the objects on display, but rather the objects themselves”. The 1992 *Pameran Binal Eksperimental* (Wild Experimental Exhibition)—a rebellious event held to counter the formalist and formalised Yogyakarta Painting Biennale (1992)—saw perhaps the first instance of artists adopting plastic and cardboard packaging as the primary vehicle for their expressive intentions. For his work *Terror Products*, Hedi Hariyanto (b. 1962) covered his rented house and the alley in front in plastic and paper packaging from the ever-increasing range of products readily available across Indonesia, as a critique of the packaging industry’s role in environmental damage. Documentation from the *Binal* also shows traditional dancers performing on the covered alleyway. This work provides an early example of the ways in which artists utilised post-consumer waste as symbolic of resistance to its very source, in this case “as effort to ... make us aware of the dangers of collective mechanisms that have been created by the economic systems to encourage people to adopt consumerist attitudes”.²¹ It is also an indication of the importance artists place on the accessibility and legibility of these works to the broader public and the integral conceptual value on the active participation of other individuals in their artworks “to reject the impression that modern art is an ivory tower and re-instate its place in the midst of the praxis of social life”.²² In Indonesia today, there remains a strong connection between creative practice, political consciousness and the desire, if not always the effect, of awakening ‘the people’ to the most urgent issues of the day. Increasingly, in a society where the global issue of waste management is a much more visible, and often visceral, challenge than in many other places, artists are drawn to repurpose the detritus of our overpackaged, over-discarded and over-recycled consumption.²³ In the following section, I will examine some more recent manifestations of this direct transplantation of waste into the realm of art-as-signifier, and the different significances assigned to discarded packaging by three artists.

Tisna Sanjaya's Cigondewah Cultural Centre

Tisna Sanjaya’s environmental activism is expressed through intricate etchings, performative interventions on public space, large-scale ‘body paintings’, video and participatory art. Cigondewah represents a lost utopia of Tisna’s youth—the suburb was home to his extended family and the site of his early understanding of a Sundanese Islam intrinsically linked to the environment. This was later further informed by his studies in theatre and



Student visiting Cigondewah recycling facility, 2013.
Courtesy of the author.

art in Bandung and also in Germany, where he was formatively exposed to social realist printmakers like Kathe Kollwitz during his postgraduate course. In his practice, this coalescence of religion, environmentalism, social responsibility and art have led, perhaps inevitably, to the establishment of the Imah Budaya or Cultural Centre (usually shortened to IBU, which is also the word for mother). Set amongst plastic recycling facilities in Cigondewah, IBU has conventionally been positioned as a place of environmental healing and utopian imaginings, but it also describes a more antagonistic role within Tisna's practice: a site from which materials can be gathered that amplify and transmit the confronting realities of the post-consumer phase of the industrial cycle. By adopting the recycling process itself as a medium for his art, Tisna brings together many of the strands of practice that artists in Indonesia and abroad experimented with in the 1970s, yet also pushes the boundaries of acceptable social and artistic norms.

Unconsciously echoing Yuliman's observations of art new Indonesian painting in the 1970s, Grant Kester points to Singaporean artist Jay Koh's recognition that:

complex social and political issues ... cannot be adequately addressed simply by fabricating physical objects (sculptures, paintings and so on) but require polyvalent responses that operate on multiple levels of public interaction.²⁴

Tisna too is clearly conscious of this imperative, and utilises diverse media, from popular television to 'high' art, as didactic platforms for environmental and social activism. Imah Budaya (IBU), often referred to simply as Cigondewah after the industrial suburb where it is located in Bandung, extends this polyvalent response further into the realm of community engagement, particularly through the geographical nuances of the site's history. Situated on the far south-western side of Bandung, where textile factories have long dumped their waste into local water supplies, turning them multi-coloured hues, Cigondewah farmers have over the past two decades sold land to plastic recycling warehouses and factories. While IBU is pitched as a community centre ostensibly for the benefit of local residents and factory workers, Tisna's primary material reference from the site is the plastic piles that tower metres into the air. This plastic takes various forms as it moves through the recycling process; hand chopped by poorly paid workers, washed with water taken from and returned to the river, melted into lumpen clods in large outdoor vats that belch smoke and ash into the atmosphere, broken into small granular parts ready for export.

Tisna assigns these forms various roles—he occasionally substitutes the grains of rice exchanged in ritual Sundanese greeting with plastic grains—or recreates the entire process and/or site in performance and exhibition.²⁵ Escorting a study tour to the site in 2013, we were welcomed by a group of musicians playing traditional instruments, offered handfuls of the coloured plastic beads from a large wok, then taken on a tour of the surrounding warehouses and workhouses. On our return to IBU, we were greeted by local officials whose task was to implement the environmental and labour legislation that should protect the people and place, but who were patently failing to do so. Together we shared an incongruous celebratory *tumpang*, the traditional mountain of yellow rice and other symbolic side dishes served at all special occasions in Java. Tisna excels in exposing the cognitive dissonances we construct to shield ourselves from the reality of our consumption; the students left IBU exhausted, frustrated and confused, shattered by the confronting reality of the recycling process that has been ingrained in them.

For an exhibition at the NUS Museum, Tisna brought three tonnes of plastic waste into pristine Singapore from Cigondewah. In the installation, one wok contained unprocessed plastic waste, another its post-processing state, black and lumpen. On the floor between the two woks, “Viva Neo Mooi Indie” was written in chalk on the grey floor. The link back to the *mooi Indië* (beautiful Indies) demonstrates Tisna’s ongoing dialogue with the social responsibilities embedded in early Indonesian art discourses. The IBU project fulfils the exhortations of the father of Indonesian modernism, painter Soedjojono, against art focused only on Indonesia’s beautiful landscapes, in which he repurposed the phrase *mooi Indië* (beautiful Indies) as a derogatory term. He wrote:

The new artist would not only paint ... romantic or picturesque and sweetish subjects, but also sugar factories and the emaciated peasant, the motorcars of the rich and the pants of the poor youth ... Because high art is worked based on our daily life transmuted by the artist who is himself immersed in it.²⁶

Certainly, Tisna avoids “sweetish subjects” and draws heavily on the social and environmental issues he has observed in the field. His work is often a visceral manifestation of the “actual disgust” that Yuliman described as a feature of new Indonesian art in the 1970s and, indeed, pushes Soedjojono’s imperative further, discarding the very materials of art and replacing them with the products of the factories, filth created as the by-products of our consumption. Simon O’Sullivan describes the role of affect in art thus:

we, as spectators, as representational creatures, are involved in a dance with art, a dance in which through careful manoeuvres the molecular is opened up, the aesthetic is activated, and art does what is its chief *modus operandi*: it transforms, if only for a moment, our sense of ourselves and our notion of our world.²⁷

The affective nature of the materials, which often also include more corporeal elements such as tears or the water with which named individuals’ feet have been washed, forces us as viewers into direct contact with realities they might otherwise avoid, generating emotional responses.

Sustaining community engagement is a difficult commitment, especially within a practice as polyvalent as Tisna’s, in which he is drawn to defend so many issues and to speak to such diverse levels of society. His leadership of environmental campaigns directly engaging bureaucrats has resulted in such



Tisna Sanjaya, Collaborative performance and performative painting with plastic in various states of the recycling process at the opening of Art Moments Jogja, 2015. Photograph by the author. Courtesy of the author.



Tisna Sanjaya, Photo Album with images from the opening of the Cigondewah Cultural Centre (IBU), 2009. Photograph by the author. Courtesy of the author.

successes as the revocation of a mall development permit for the green area known as ‘Bandung’s lungs’, Babakan Siliwangi. As his alter ego, Kabayan the Eccentric, he was for many years the star of socially-engaged commercial television programmes, which gained him recognition amongst the broader public rather than the art-loving elite. Inevitably IBU’s grand aspirations are at times put aside for more urgent issues, but Tisna’s continued engagement with the materiality of Cigondewah and its intimate relationship with both the environment and the people who live within it, brings to the fore the uncomfortable reality of the international export of post-consumer waste disposed of for recycling. The explicitly denotative function of the installations Tisna creates—plastic detritus merely transported into a gallery space rather than transformed or transmuted into high art objects—compels the attention of audiences who would otherwise never encounter the damaging recycling processes in which they are complicit.

Made Bayak’s Plasticology project

In a different vein, artist Made Bayak’s ongoing work in participatory pedagogy, studio practice and public performance, under his self-defined discipline *Plasticology*, aims to intercept waste before it is discarded, by utilising plastic packaging as his canvas and teaching tool in his individual artworks and pedagogic practices. In his paintings from the series, Bayak analyses, critiques and attempts to mitigate the degradation of the Balinese landscape as a result of plastic litter; he also voices his concerns about the exoticisation of Bali’s culture for the purposes of tourism:

The icons displayed in his work evoke Bali’s exotic past which, from the Dutch colonial era to the present day, are exploited by the cultural propaganda of the tourism industry ... Related to such issues, Bayak cynically constructs “new propaganda,” chiefly to rebuild the image of exotic Bali from plastic debris.²⁸

Dewa Putu Bedil After Rudolf Bonnet (2013) appropriates Rudolf Bonnet’s famous 1947 drawing of the Padang Tegal painter Dewa Poetoe in his youth. Bonnet’s pastel drawing is rendered on paperboard. This painting has been composed on top of a layer of plastic shopping bags from local Indonesian franchises and KFC, stretched over a board. The head and shoulders are rendered in pointillist style with monochromatic spray paint and permanent ink; floral motifs create a frame around the figure. Floral patterns recur in many of the *Plasticology* paintings, echoing the teeming background motifs

of both modernist and traditional Balinese paintings. In Bayak's works, these stencils of tendrils and petals are a strategy to evoke the exoticisation of the painting's subject, an ironic ornament to the waste produced by commodification and capitalist modernisation. Although Bayak insists that his use of plastic is a pragmatic attempt to exemplify the repurposing of waste, Bantono interprets the appearance of specific brands as signifiers of the encroachment of global foods and markets on local models.²⁹

Bayak's use of plastic as an art material has dominated his practice since his studies at the Indonesian Institute of Art (ISI) Denpasar from which he graduated in 2005. During his studies he joined a student collective called *Klinik Seni Taxu* (Taxu Art Clinic, shortened to Taxu, a cynical play on the word *taksu*, a mystical skill attributed to artists and artisans in Bali), and the group was formed around disenchantment with the exoticised, commercial direction of contemporary art in Bali. Bayak proposed, in a 2001 exhibition, that humankind has entered into an age he called Plastilicium, dependent not on stone as in the Neolithic era, but on plastic.³⁰ It is possible, therefore, to interpret Bayak's use of plastic not only as a measured protest against waste, but also as an active engagement with the age of plastic, a natural conversion to the use of plastic in the way that artists used precious metals in the Bronze Age, and iron was used by artists in the Iron Age.

In his philosophy of reuse, Bayak bases not only his own artistic practice on plastic, but also activates plastic as a performative and pedagogic tool. For Bayak, as for Tisna, the artist's social role is also imperative to their practice. Bantono writes:

The involvement of people is very meaningful for Bayak, because his Plasticology is intended not only to represent himself through his works of art, but also as a consciousness that has implications for the broader community.³¹

Bayak designs workshops specifically for children because he believes they are the generation that will be most able to effect change in the future. Although developed from his own painting methodology, *Plasticology* communicates a simpler message: plastic waste is a problem. Bayak deliberately avoids bringing any further layers of meaning to the workshops to avoid diluting the primary message:

I don't tell them anything about art discourse or concepts ... I just want them to have fun and understand that plastic is dangerous, it's in our environment everywhere, and this is a small thing they can make from it to hang up in their home.

In the early years of *Plasticology*, Bayak noted that “most of those who appreciated it were foreigners who had been living in Bali for a long time”.³² However, since 2015 he has been increasingly invited to implement workshops in Indonesian schools.³³ But what might be challenging messages in other contexts (such as if the works are in the proximity of government or corporate offices) are less so when displayed in a gallery setting attended by expatriates already immersed in an alternative lifestyle.³⁴

Bayak’s work is not only concerned with environmental mismanagement, exoticisation and moral and political corruption. In his own statements and often in his works, he makes explicit the links between the unchecked tourism-oriented development that began in the 1970s under the New Order government and the mass killings that inaugurated the regime’s control of the archipelago in 1965, the toll of which was particularly heavy in Bali. These massacres, Bayak argues, wiped out much of Bali’s strong and rebellious intellectual class and cowed the remainder into silence. In this understanding, Bali’s current state of environmental degradation and socio-cultural decline is built on the violence and human rights abuses of the *Order Baru*. Like the artists of the 1970s and 1980s, Bayak also works across interdisciplinary boundaries, collaborating with activists and NGOs working to protect Bali’s environmental and socio-cultural legacies from the essentialising and exoticising effects of tourism and development. He was an instrumental figure in the *Tolak Reklamasi* movement which, over many years of protests led by artistic and cultural figures, succeeded in its lobbying to prevent a massive resort and entertainment island from being built in the middle of the Bali Bay.³⁵ Unlike the artists featured in “Proses ’85”, Bayak’s use of plastic is not intended as a vehicle for “concrete” representation that coolly depicts or “communicates” environmental issues. Instead he returns the poetic and lyrical potential to plastic waste as an art material and “cynically constructs ‘new propaganda,’ chiefly to rebuild the image of exotic Bali from plastic debris”.³⁶

Tita Salina and the 1001st Island—The Most Sustainable Island in Archipelago

In 2015, Tita Salina looked at the same bay that featured in FX Harsono’s work for “Proses ’85” and its continuing environmental crisis. Tita, who was born in Palembang in Sumatra, originally studied graphic design at the Jakarta Arts Institute. After 16 years running the Ahmett Salina design studio with her partner in practice and life, Irwan Ahmett (b. 1975), Tita and Irwan shifted their practice into highly conceptual interventions on public space.

As part of their 10-year collaboration looking at sites of crisis within the Pacific Ring of Fire, conducted since 2010, Tita worked with a fishing community at Angke Estuary to make a work responding to the proliferation of waste that flows down 13 rivers into the Jakarta Bay, and its impact on the communities that live there. The intense pollution in fishing grounds has been exacerbated by the development of a giant sea wall in the form of a series of islands shaped like a Garuda. The wall is intended to protect the megalopolis of Jakarta, much of which sits below sea level and continues to sink, from the rising sea. This fraught development project has drawn strong opposition from environmental and fishing groups who doubt the fiscal responsibility, scientific and social value of the exercise.³⁷ After various phases were completed, it was shut down by the Jakarta government in 2018, although recent media reports suggest activity continues.³⁸

The video work that was created from documentation of the project places the audience as an active eye, initially soaring above the bay, then dipping down into inlets populated by colourful boats with jovial fisher-folk turning out their catch. We descend past this apparently quaint and peaceful scene into the murky water, grasping and dragging plastic to the surface. Tita and a community of fishers worked for two weeks to bring a tonne of plastic up in this way, before bringing it together as a mass of colourful packets, noodle cups, straws, and all manner of miscellaneous, discarded consumer product packaging—the equivalent of the plastic waste generated by one person over 50 years—held together with the mesh of a fishing net. This was hauled back out onto the bay, first by a group of men carrying it on bamboo poles, then dragged behind a fishing boat, buoyed by steel drums. As the video draws to a close, our view rises slowly above to watch Tita clamber out on to the island, to stand alone in the middle of the bay, right between the 1000th island of the famed Thousand Island archipelago and the new islands reclaimed from the bay.

Tita's project grew out of her engagement with environmental activists and also drew on research conducted in the region by non-governmental organisations, just as Harsono and his artistic colleagues did in the 1970s. By contrast, Tita vocalises an intent to maintain her artistic autonomy rather than seeing herself as a political voice. At an artist talk in 2019 at the National Gallery of Australia where *1001st Island* was exhibited as part of the *Contemporary Worlds: Indonesia* exhibition, Tita was asked whether she works with local environmental activists to try and influence Jakarta government policy. She replied that although she consults with activists, she feels it is important to retain her independence so that she can be free to respond to the research in a way that allows for “surreal or maybe crazy imagination”.



Tita Salina, *1001st Island—The Most Sustainable Island in Archipelago*, 2015, single-channel video: 14:11 minutes, colour, sound; installation view at the National Gallery of Australia (loan from the artist). Image by the artist. Courtesy of the artist.



Tita Salina, *1001st Island—The Most Sustainable Island in Archipelago* 2015, single-channel video: 14:11 minutes, colour, sound. Still image from the video. Courtesy of the artist.



Tita Salina, *1001st Island—The Most Sustainable Island in Archipelago*, 2015, work in progress image. Photograph by Yopie Nugraha. Courtesy of the artist.

Tita has taken the *1001st Island* project to various locations, working with communities in Sharjah and Copenhagen to build new islands from the specific waste found in those locations. In contrast to Made Bayak's practice and its focus on the materiality of plastic and the potential for his art to remove it from the cycle, Tita's utilisation of plastic waste is not a creative decision specific to plastic itself, but part of a broader responsiveness to the social, environmental and geographic conditions she encounters in her research. In response to an audience question during the artists' talk at the National Gallery of Australia, curator Carol Cains explained that on the conclusion of the exhibition, the work would be disassembled and "disposed of responsibly". Alarming, given what we now know of the chain of recycling of plastic waste from Australia, this may well mean the work is returned to Indonesia, perhaps even to Cigondewah.

Tita's research-based artistic practice continues to drive her to collaborate not only with communities but also with NGOs and research organisations. Her most recent work, a 42-km work along Jakarta's northern coastline, took place under the auspices of an artists' residency at Rujak Centre for Urban Studies in Jakarta, in collaboration with Irwan and Australian artists and geographers Hannah Ekin and Jorgen Doyle. The annual walk, *Ziarah Utara* (*Pilgrimage to the North*) involves measuring and documenting, through both artistic and scientific methods, the ground they traverse over their journey. In this journey they raise again the spectre of the anti-lyricism of the 1970s, responding with a scientific eye to the changing environment. But the art that

results from these works aims not only to represent these problems, but also to reinterpret them in ways that invite the audience to imagine new solutions.

Conclusion

By looking at the ways in which Indonesian arts have taken post-consumer waste as an artistic medium, we can see how artists engage with material and medium conceptually, physically and socially, in an attempt to reconcile the growing number and diversity of issues related to the production, marketing, consumption, disposal, recycling and reuse of plastic. In recent times, this has taken on increasing urgency, shaded with overtones of neo-colonialism, as it becomes clear that Indonesia will no longer tolerate becoming the literal dumping ground for the waste of Western nations.³⁹

The significance of the repurposing of post-consumer waste as art medium, meaning and form is explored in different ways by each of the three artists addressed in detail in this article. In analysing their methodologies and intent, Sanento Yuliman's concept of "anti-lyricism" is a useful tool that draws attention to how artists' work can generate emotion, rather than merely being descriptive. In this, Yuliman shares the perspective of many philosophers who link aesthetics and affect, positioning affect as resistant to the subjectivity that is inherent in representation, and locating the aesthetic experience as a rejection of the normative functions of the "sphere of imitation".⁴⁰ However, while the anti-lyricism Yuliman conceived in the 1970s was positioned in opposition to representation (recalling his statement "not a picture of the objects on display, but rather the objects themselves"), contemporary artists in Indonesia do not necessarily eschew representation and interpretation, nor do they necessarily regard a "slice of the imaginary world contemplated at a distance" in binary opposition to the "concrete object which physically involves the viewer". In contemporary works, post-consumer waste has become a valuable medium from which these two positions are often melded, for instance, by incorporating documentation with creative interpretation as in Tita's work, by bringing reality into uncomfortably close and concrete experiential range as in Tisna's interventions, or by recasting the waste as resource, as in Bayak's imagining of an age of plastic.

Tisna Sanjaya engages directly with the political and visceral ramifications of plastic recycling, exporting the waste imported into Indonesia as part of countries like Australia's 'out-of-sight-out-of mind' recycling, whatever the local environmental and social costs. His work is perhaps the most aligned with Yuliman's formulation of anti-lyricism, generating affect by activating the audience's sensorial, emotional and physical responses through direct

exposure to uncomfortable—and disgusting—realities. Made Bayak links plastic to a long history of colonisation, political repression and socio-cultural marginalisation on his home islands, and turns it into a positive force for creativity, consciousness and critical thinking; in his work the problem is not plastic itself, but rather the human behaviour that surrounds it. Bayak's representational, richly symbolic performances, participatory workshops, paintings and sculptures are multi-layered, part of a long tradition of art which re-presents the world in a way that draws attention to the structural institutions that have allowed post-consumer waste to become such a destructive force. Tita's long-term engagement with the effects of plastic waste in Jakarta Bay and in communities around the world, reflects the temporal intensity of the social and environmental issues that she examines. Like Bayak, Tita's use of the 'concrete' object of plastic waste is simultaneously a trace of conceptual, research-based processes, but also a representation of these temporal concerns. In doing so she symbolically highlights the enduring impact of our waste over millennia, and the parallels between this and the eons over which the environment itself has demanded human activity to re-shape itself in response to crises. Like the Sasak weavers and the batik artists of the 19th century, Indonesian artists continue to adapt their practices to their surrounding challenges, resources and demands, setting an example for their communities and those they meet as they travel the world.

BIOGRAPHY

Elly Kent is a translator, writer, artist and editor of the Australian National University's New Mandala blog on Southeast Asia. She is a Visiting Fellow in the ANU's Centre for Art History and Art Theory, researching contemporary and historical art and design practices across Indonesia. Her most recent publications include essays in the National Gallery of Australia's catalogue to the exhibition *Contemporary Worlds: Indonesia*, *The Asian Art Society of Australia Review* and the *Encyclopedia of Women in Islamic Cultures*. In 2012 Elly received a Prime Minister's Australia-Asia Postgraduate Award and the 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art's Emerging Artist award.

NOTES

- ¹ James Bennett and Muchaddan, “The Influence of Environmental Catastrophes on Art Traditions: An Indonesian Case Study”, *The Asian Art Society of Australia Review* 28, 2 (2019).
- ² Ibid., p. 9.
- ³ Matt Cox, “In the Public Domain: Tiga Negeri Batik Cloths at the Agnsw”, *The Asian Art Society of Australia Review* 28, 2 (2019): 25.
- ⁴ B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, revised edition, London and New York, 1991.
- ⁵ On Kartini, see Pramoedya Ananta Toer, *Panggil Aku Kartini Saja*, Vol. 1, Bukittinggi, Jakarta: NV Nusantara, 1962; on Raden Saleh, see Werner Kraus, “Raden Saleh’s Interpretation of the Arrest of Diponegoro: An Example of Indonesian Proto-Nationalist Modernism”, *Archipel* 69 (2005); on Soedjojono, see Soedjojono, *Seni Loekis, Kesenian Dan Seniman* (Yogyakarta: Penerbit Indonesia Sekarang, 1946).
- ⁶ Enin Supriyanto, “Lorong Lorong Alternatif”, in *Sesudah Aktivisme: Sepilihan Esai Seni Rupa Enin Supriyanto 1994–2015*, ed. Grace Samboh (Yogyakarta: Hyphen, 2015).
- ⁷ Tod Jones, *Culture, Power, and Authoritarianism in the Indonesian State: Cultural Policy across the Twentieth Century to the Reform Era Southeast Asia* (NL: Brill, 2013), pp. 127–30.
- ⁸ Decenta comprised of abstract artists and designers Adriaan Palar, A.D. Pirous, G. Sidharta, Sunaryo, T. Sutanto and Priyanto Sunarto. In 1981, Semsar Siahaan’s performance work *Oleh-Oleh dari Desa II* (Souvenirs from the Village) involved setting fire to a sculpture made by Sunaryo, in an act designed to criticise the appropriation of material culture from ‘other’ Indonesian ethnic groups.
- ⁹ “Peresmian Pusat Kesenian Jakarta Taman Ismail Marzuki” (Jakarta: Dewan Kesenian Jakarta, 1968).
- ¹⁰ Originally published in *Pameran Lukisan-Lukisan Dunia Minyak Indonesia (Artists’ Impressions of the Indonesian Petroleum World)* (Jakarta: Dewan Kesenian Jakarta dan PERTAMINA, 1974). Republished in Sudjoko et al., *Seni: Pesanan* (Jakarta: Dewan Kesenian Jakarta, 2006).
- ¹¹ Several texts describe this social imperative among Indonesian art workers before and during the New Order, including B. Miklouho-Maklai, *Exposing Society’s Wounds: Some Aspects of Contemporary Indonesian Art since 1966* (Adelaide: Flinders University of South Australia, 1991); F.X. Harsono, “Kerakyatan Dalam Seni Lukis Indonesia Sejak Persagi Hingga Kini”, in *Politik Dan Gender: Aspek-Aspek Seni Visual Indonesia*, ed. Adi Wicaksono, et al. (Yogyakarta: Yayasan Seni Cemeti, 2003); Keith Foulcher, *Social Commitment in Literature and the Arts—the Indonesian “Institute of People’s Culture” 1950–1965* (Monash University, Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, 1986).

- ¹² Sanento Yuliman and J. Supangkat, "Seni Rupa Sehari-Hari", in *Seni Rupa Baru Proyek 1 Rasar Raya Dunia Fantasi*, ed. J. Supangkat (Jakarta: Gramedia, 1987).
- ¹³ Sanento Yuliman, "Seni Lukis Indonesia Baru (Dewan Kesenian Jakarta, 1976)", in *Dua Seni Rupa: Sepilihan Tulisan Sanento Yuliman*, ed. Hasan Asikin (Jakarta: Yayasan Kalam, 2001), p. 101.
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ Parangtritis beach lies along the mystical north-south axis that runs from the active volcano Mt Merapi to the north of Yogyakarta, and bisects the city travelling south to the coast. Ritual offerings to the Queen of the South Sea (*Nyai Roro Kidul*), who is said to bestow great power on leaders who consort with her, continue to play an important part in the Javanese calendar. Purwadi, *Nyai Roro Kidul Dan Legitimasi Politik Jawa/[Dr. Purwadi]* (Yogyakarta: Media Abadi, 2004). Further details of transnational art and environmental events held at Parangtritis can be found in Yoshi Fajar Krisnomurti, "Reka Alam: Praktek Seni Visual Dan Isu Lingkungan Di Indonesia", in *Seri Katalog Data IVAA*, ed. Indonesian Visual Arts Archive (Yogyakarta: Indonesian Visual Arts Archive, 2011).
- ¹⁶ The artwork, titled *Pagar Triplek dan Hutan Kita (Plywood fences and Our Forests)*, was later recreated for a retrospective exhibition *REPETISI/POSISI* at Langgeng Art Foundation in Yogyakarta, 2010.
- ¹⁷ Exhibition Catalogue "Proses '85", Gendut Riyanto, Moelyono, Harris Purnama, Bonyong Munni Ardhie and FX Harsono.
- ¹⁸ Ibid., p. 8.
- ¹⁹ FX Harsono, "Kerakyatan dalam Seni Lukis Indonesia Sejak PERSAGI Hingga Kini", in *Politik dan gender: aspek-aspek seni visual Indonesia*, ed. Adi Wicaksono, et al. (Yogyakarta: Yayasan Seni Cemeti, 2003), p. 70.
- ²⁰ J. Supangkat et al., "Seni Rupa Baru Proyek 1: Pasaraya Dunia Fantasi ", ed. Taman Ismail Marzuki (Jakarta: Percetakan Gramedia, 1987), p. 11.
- ²¹ Franki Raden, "Menempatkan Seni Di Masyarakat", *Kompas*, 16 Aug. 1992. Page unknown.
- ²² Ibid.
- ²³ A summary of the ways in which different countries are affected by current paradigms of global waste management can be found in David C. Wilson et al., "Global Waste Management Outlook: Summary for Decision-Makers", ed. David C. Wilson (Japan: United Nations Environment Program, 2015).
- ²⁴ Grant H. Kester, *Conversation Pieces : Community and Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), p. 102.
- ²⁵ Elly Kent, "Traditions of Dissent: Contemporary Artivism in Indonesia", *The Asian Art Society of Australia Review* 28, 2 (2019).
- ²⁶ Quoted in Claire Holt, *Art in Indonesia: Continuities and Change* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967), pp. 195–6.

- ²⁷ Simon O'Sullivan, "The Aesthetics of Affect: Thinking Art Beyond Representation", *Angelaki: Journal of Theoretical Humanities* 6, no. 3 (2001): 128.
- ²⁸ Yudha Bantono, "Bali Dalam Sekantong Plastik: Seni Rupa Plasticology Made Bayak", Facebook, 2014.
- ²⁹ Ibid.
- ³⁰ Edwin Jurriens, "Art, Image and Environment: Revisualizing Bali in the Plastiliticum", *Continuum* 33, 1 (2019): 126.
- ³¹ Bantono, "Bali Dalam Sekantong Plastik: Seni Rupa Plasticology Made Bayak".
- ³² Dwe Rachmanto and Made Muliana Bayak, *Wawancara dengan Made Bayak, Proyek Pemetaan Seniman Modern dan Kontemporer Indonesia* (YouTube: Galeri Nasional Indonesia, 2013), <https://youtu.be/VHohyatPcUI>.
- ³³ See, for instance, Cisilia Augustina, "Made Bayak Ajak Siswa Sd Olah Sampah Menjadi Karya Seni", *Tribun Bali* (2015), <http://bali.tribunnews.com/2015/12/09/made-bayak-ajak-siswa-sd-olah-sampah-menjadi-karya-seni>; Raiza Andini, "Puluhan Pelajar Di Singaraja Melukis Di Atas Sampah Plastik", *Okezone.news* (2016), <http://news.okezone.com/read/2016/04/25/65/1372058/puluhan-pelajar-di-singaraja-melukis-di-atas-sampah-plastik>; Dewi Rachmayani, *Plasticology Made in Bali Lentera Indonesia* (YouTube: NET. Documentary, 2015), 30 mins.
- ³⁴ See Kester for an interesting perspective on how political artworks confirm the audience's self-perceived progressive attitudes without engendering social change. Grant H. Kester, *The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 63.
- ³⁵ For a comprehensive description of PT Tirta Wahana Bali International's plans, government permission processes and the *Tolak Reklamasi* movement, see Johnny Langenheim, "Battle for Bali: Campaigners Fight Back Against Unchecked Development", *The Guardian* (2014), <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/the-coral-triangle/2014/oct/22/battle-for-bali-campaigners-fight-back-against-unchecked-development>. For more recent developments, see <https://coconuts.co/bali/news/bali-legislators-claim-benoa-bay-reclamation-project-will-not-be-implemented-activists-demand-proof/>.
- ³⁶ Wayan "Jengki" Sunarta, "Plasticology: A Tale from the Island of the Gods" (Bali: Yayaa Art Space and Management, 2013), p. 1.
- ³⁷ Carol Cains, "Your Place, My Place: Landscape in Contemporary Indonesia Art", in *Contemporary Worlds: Indonesia* (Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 2019).
- ³⁸ The development, strongly opposed by environmental and fishing groups, has undergone various phases and was shut down by the Jakarta government in 2018, although recent media reports suggest activity continues. See <https://news.mongabay.com/2019/03/business-as-usual-on-a-reclaimed-islet-off-jakarta-despite-closure-order/>.

- ³⁹ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/jul/09/indonesia-sends-rubbish-back-to-australia-and-says-its-too-contaminated-to-recycle>.
- ⁴⁰ O'Sullivan, "The Aesthetics of Affect: Thinking Art Beyond Representation"; Jacque Ranciere, "The Aesthetic Revolution and Its Outcomes", *New Left Review* 14 (March/April 2002).

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