

# Sub-Cult

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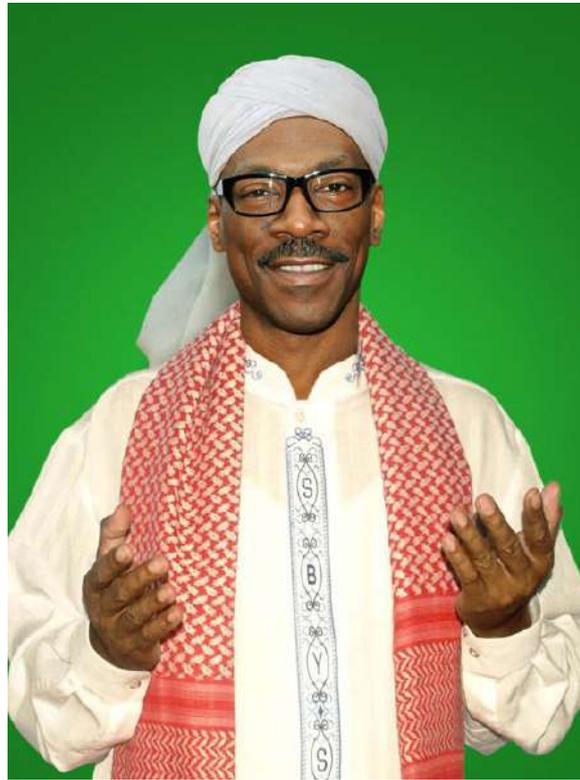
## Agan Harahap

ART, LIFESTYLE, PHOTOGRAPHY / 23 OCTOBER 2014

Contemporary art. It's pretty hard to explain, because it has no limit. Everything seems broader and possible; it is a part of pop culture. This phase is still happening until the very second you read this article. So yes, it is complementary to the era we've been living in. Well, it actually started around 1970's. Now, we're talking about the biggest innovation ever in technology: internet. For God's sake, the internet has become an era where not only people become citizens, but also netizens. Is that a bad thing? Well, not really. There's something awfully important from internet, it makes us needy somehow. We wish we could live without it, say you want to have a vacation and detach from everything, a "me time". But when you go to grab a bite somewhere, you probably still have the urge to ask the waiter "what's the wifi's password?" just to get updated in your social media accounts. You post everything in Facebook, Twitter, Path, Instagram, Tumblr, etc. as long as you're connected with your "friends".



This phenomenon is eventually creeping into every aspect in this world. We don't need to bare it all here, because you know it all. But the internet also happens to affect visual arts. It makes it possible for someone or artists to exhibit their work on the net, other than galleries. It's easier, faster and cheaper. It also makes it possible for something to be called art without the need of galleries. At least that work (of art) could give people an awe of shock and delight. There's an excitement or even a tremendum in everyone who sees it. Imagine if you can see and consume art any day, anytime, anyhow and anywhere. And you know how wide our access to anything in this world within the internet. And remember, the artist can get any response too. There's an indirect human interaction that we can't deny.



But then, as consuming as it could be, someone needs to make an effort to make it (more) intriguing because, you people are hard to satisfy. **Agan Harahap (A)** did that tremendously. He uses *Photoshop* and internet technology, something that we can also use, wisely. Agan has spent 6 years working in the world of commercial photography industry and said that he wants to try something else by making manipulated photos. He came in the right moment and processed the moment into something that we are sure is never gonna happen, at least not in the near future. He shakes things up by making some series of it and he spreads it onto social media and received and still receiving tons of responses since it became metadata on the net. We've seen it everywhere! Agan made his works accessible and humorous to anyone, it's easy to understand and yet still blow us with wenders. It creates an interaction between strangers and makes it possible to discuss it. Ace!

So we did ask some people if whether or not they are familiar with Agan Harahap. Shockingly, the answer is no. But when we showed them one of his photos, they instantly say yes, they know his works. So, Sub-Cult wants to get to know him better through this interview below.



Hola Agan, how are you? Safe and sound?

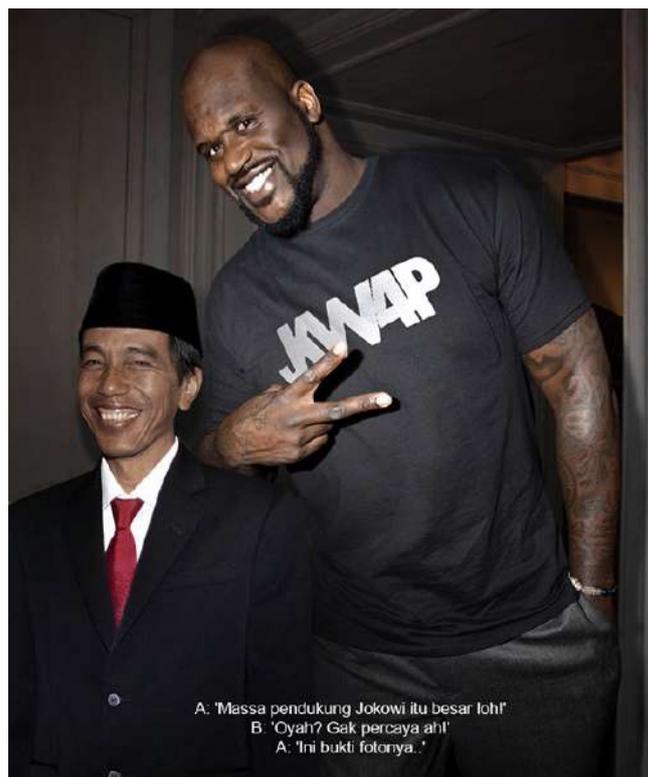
A: Yes, so far I'm still in God's bless.

So congratulations! You're a married man, a husband and father, and all you need is to have grandchildren. I heard you moved to Yogyakarta, huh? Why?

A: The reason I moved is to make me closer to go to **Dagadu** or some *bakpia*.

*\*lol\** So, you're better known as a photographer, I often see you in several concerts as well. Why don't you do some stage photography? Because in my opinion, photographing a live performance is very interesting; you must be able to capture the emotion between performers and viewers.

A: Really? Is that what stage photography is? *\*lol\** I'm still in the realm of photography anyway. But what I do now probably was not in the realm of popular photography industry. I already spent 6 years working in the world of commercial photography industry and I want to try something else.



Other than photography, you can also draw, and you're good at it. I also have seen your work at Sotheby's, sort of print on metal with incredible detail. With all that you've done so far, are you still looking for "the right one" as the hallmark of your work?

**A:** I do drawings to refresh and it makes me feel happy. In creating work or something, I just do it freely. There's no specific benchmark or target that I should pursue. I just have fun with the medium, whether it's photography, Photoshop or drawing.

You're well-known through photo manipulation. Starting from the subtly edited to roughly edited, and it is actually very entertaining. What is your motivation in creating such work?

**A:** My motivation in making and spreading these kinds of work is basically to entertain people.

What makes your works different and fresh compared to the others? If I try to edit some photos and get a lot of response, could I be like you, Agan Harahap?

**A:** I never try to create something different and fresh. Everything sort of just happens like that. What I do is actually a normal and common thing. And I'm sure, everyone can do it.



**By making your works humorous, does it mean you want to emphasize that visual arts can be digested and enjoyed by everybody without exception? Because from all of your photos, people can react in one glance, people laugh or even cursing. It's that easy and that fast.**

**A:** Actually, the form of humor in my works is more in the technique. I'm more targeted in the distribution of it, when people *repath*, *regram*, *retweet*, *share*, etc. I deliberately make entertaining works to provoke the reactions and responses from people. And visual comedy is one way of telling.

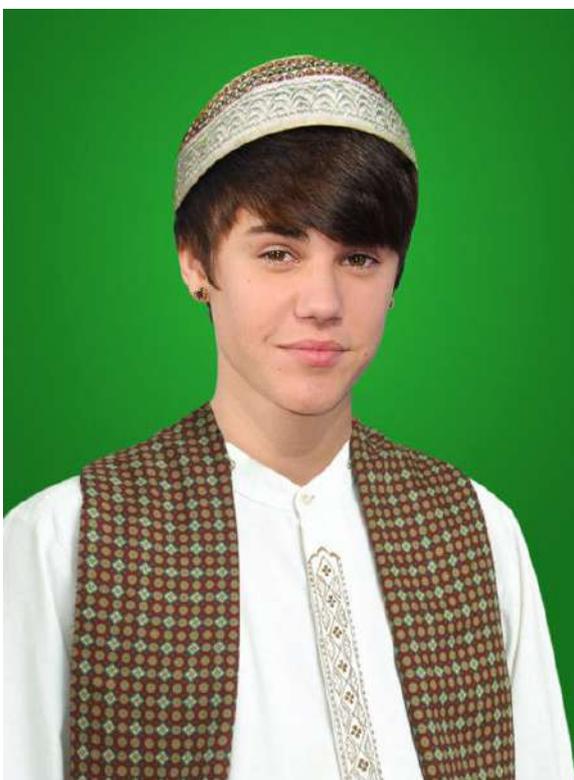
**How so? Other than just to have fun, did you on purpose, make these works so that people can see something way beyond the visuals?**

**A:** the series that I made, like *My Celebrity Friends*, *Visit Indonesia 2014* and other series which I've spread in various social media is deliberately aimed to make wider dialogue space, sometimes it's even far beyond the work I made. With the ability to *regram*, *repath*, *retweet*, etc. or just by simply mentioning to friends, consciously and/or eventually, my work has opened a variety of social interactions that take place in the media.

In my opinion, basically it's just a form of visual arts. The point is how that work can reach a lot of people and can build diverse interactions of viewers.

**Do you know and deliberately create and upload your photos to become viral?**

**A:** Yes. I do that on purpose. And I really enjoy the response from hundreds or thousands of people toward my work.



**Your series are notorious. But for some who don't get how you show it to public by putting them on social medias, doesn't it make your work "ordinary"? Because it's accessible; it's easy to see in a click. We can download your photos by ourselves. Don't you feel aggrieved?**

**A:** We can't talk about exclusivity anymore if work already alluded to the realm of social media. Everything is exposed, everyone can enjoy, laugh and have fun and share the fun with friends. So why should i feel aggrieved?

**However, it is fun though; we really enjoy your photos. How come you have such a minor behavior? Hahaha! I get really upset when I see Miley Cyrus photo squatting near a chicken coop.**

**A:** \*lol\* I don't know how to respond to this

**Anyway, you also made a photo series *Superhistory* where superheroes in a frame among the world leaders or in an important event. Black and white photos, I love it. Do you like it better than the *Teman-teman Selebritis series* (Miley Cyrus, Paris Hilton, Rihanna, etc)?**

**A:** **Iwan Fals** probably will have the same difficulties if he's asked, "which songs do you like best, Bento or Kemesraan?" \*lol\*

Both of them have different concepts and background. They can't be equated. So, each one must be addressed with a different perspective.

**Hmmm, talk about the idea / concept of this manipulation, no matter how hilarious it is, the outcome still has manipulation techniques that have a negative nature. My friend and I have been questioning this, what's the meaning of "manipulation", to you?**

**A:** Really? Perhaps it's because of the origin of the word manipulation, eh? It has a negative impression \*lol\*

Without realizing it, the development of technology has been shifting slowly or even changing a lot of things in all aspects of human life. Something can be good / bad, depending on its purpose. My work of manipulation is clearly different than the one that produced by **PKS Piyungan**, for example \*lol\* Manipulation is just one of my ways to have fun.

**Then what's the meaning of "reality"?**

**A:** I remember when **Rhoma Irama** got interviewed in one of the TV station about the racist accusation against **Jokowi-Ahok** when they ran for Governor and Vice Governor Candidates in Jakarta. Rhoma said that, he got that racist accusation over the internet.

It became evident, that many people are still too naive in looking at reality (truth) in cyberspace. Whatever that's in accordance with the heart and purpose, is regarded as truth. In the other hand, anything that does not fit with our hearts will be opposed. This is what's happening in the 'realism' in social medias.

Today, thousands of medias compete to present reality in any kind of social media. And at the same time, millions of people can easily interpret and disseminate the reality in social media as they please. So, the elements of reality and its factual are shifted or even disappear altogether.

**Then what about the meaning of “manipulating reality” in your work?**

**A:** Until now, photography is still believed to be valid evidence to show the truth. Hence the term: **No pic = HOAX**. What I do is simply responding to the current social phenomenon by creating a new reality. And it's not impossible that in the future, my work would be considered as truth. \*lol\*

**\*lol\*** Ironically, it means that people can easily make history, huh? Because there's the internet, and we are netizens. We can upload and spread it and immediately it becomes “data” on the internet and then it has a story in/behind it. A history.

**A:** Yea. Precisely. All people have and can even form their own personal history. Or even further, suddenly 'his/her story' (intentionally or not) fits into a larger narrative, so that in the future, 'his/her story' can be justified by the public, because they have become part of a history. This reminds me of **Diaries of Anne Frank**, all of a sudden.

**Internet and Photoshop is part of the technology. We're in the goddamn digital era. Is the existence of technology for you and all artists, actually proven to be more helpful or troublesome? It seems that everything is exposed to technology. Have you ever feel confused or out of ideas?**

**A:** I never see the acceleration of this technology as a specter for producing works. The progress in technology is what actually inspires my work. To me, this is the challenge to continue, to adapt and innovate in producing works when the technological acceleration occurs.

**If there's somebody who manipulates your photos and then it became a work of art, what would you do?**

**A:** Why not? There have been a lot of people who did exactly that. And I am looking forward to it.

**Hmm, as an artist, is there any Indonesian artist that you admire and why? Lately I'm intrigued by Ardi Gunawan because his work can't be sold. But he's always busy or so, it sucks.**

**A:** Ardi is my best friend. In the end, a work of art does not always exist as a mere economic commodity. Work of arts can stand up and speak far beyond the numbers and logic in the economy.

I do not have a particular idol because I idolize the work. Not the artist. I would prefer some works from Ardi, I also like some of the works from **Mes 56, Ace House Collective, Agung Kurniawan, Jompot Kuswidananto, Tromarama, Mela Jaarsma, Agus Suwage**, etc.

**Anyway, what's your upcoming grand project? Will it be anytime soon or are you still taking it easy, with having a family and stuff?**

**A:** I'm still happy to play in the realm of reality and its distribution in social media network. This October, my photos that you've seen in my **Instagram** will be exhibited at an institution in Singapore. And quite frankly, now I'm pretty overwhelmed in preparing for it.

**I can't wait to see something new from you. Thank you for your time and best luck to you, Agan!**

**A:** Thank you... thank you...

For more info, other than his Instagram, you can check out his blog or his Behance. Or maybe if you're in Yogyakarta, you can find him somewhere in the south strolling around with his family.

Interview by Febrina Anindita

Photos Doc. Agan Harahap