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Art-In-Sight

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indieguerillas in
conversation with
Elliat Albrecht &
Aisha Johan

The Unlucky Generation

INDONESIAN ARTIST DUO INDIEGUERILLAS, comprised of husband and wife Dyatmiko ‘Miko’ Lancur Bawono and Santi Ariestyowanti, was formed in 1999 in Yogyakarta as a graphic design firm. If the ‘indie’ of their name is an allusion to both Indonesia and their artistic self-determination, the reference to a lawless fighting strategy denotes a defiant, unconventional approach to their work. Both born in the 1970s, Bawono and Ariestyowanti are alumni of the School of Visual Arts at the Indonesia Institute of the Arts in Yogyakarta, and began their partnership as a graphic design team after graduating. Their studio’s philosophy was centred around a combination of work and play—professional design for clients and the personal pursuit of their art, respectively. However, the balance swung towards play in 2007, leading the duo to become full-time artists. They are now best known for using folklore, graphics and interdisciplinary mediums to explore traditional values and contemporary capitalist culture.

indieguerillas belongs to a generation with far different views on Indonesian contemporary art than their predecessors. Responding to their sense of a public preference for increasingly uniform painting in Indonesia (a trend often attributed to a burgeoning art market with limited tastes), the duo’s works aim to communicate various issues faced by Indonesians, many of whom, they feel, are becoming removed from their culture in an increasingly urbanised, capital-istic and technological society. Through artworks that co-opt the language of commerce, indieguerillas’ goal is to remind young people to preserve their history and culture. Their practice encompasses fashion, product design, animation, painting, sculpture, installations and assemblages that pair unconventional objects with highly graphic and colourful imagery. The duo frequently incorporates icons of traditional and popular culture into their works. On 13 January, as part of *Cities for People* NTU CCA Ideas Fest (13 November 2016–22 January 2017), indieguerillas (in collaboration with fashion designer Lulu Lutfi Labibi, and music director Ari Wulu) staged a performance involving model-performers moving along a route from NTU CCA Singapore to various locations in Gillman Barracks, before ending at Mizuma Gallery. The performance, titled *Datang untuk Kembali (Arriving to Return)* (2017), mimicked the traditional Javanese ceremony component of *Sekaten*, a celebration of the birthday of prophet Muhammad. The performers wore upcycled secondhand clothes from ‘_hyP3<y<lu5_’, indieguerillas’ collection of garments inspired by incessant consumption and a constant desire for whatever is ‘hype’ at the moment.

indieguerillas, *Chicken Noodle Carpet* (2016).
Installation view: _hyP3<y<lu5_, Mizuma Gallery,
Singapore (13 January–19 February 2017).
Courtesy the artists and Mizuma Gallery.

ELLIAT ALBRECHT & AISHA JOHAN **How has the meaning behind your collaborative name, indieguerillas, influenced the principles of your collaboration process, as well as your way of producing work?**

INDIEGUERILLAS Our name, indieguerillas, is a fusion of two words: ‘indie’ and ‘guerillas’. We try to work and think independently, without representing anyone’s interests, except for what we think and feel. We work according to the principles of guerillas: fluid, sporadic in choice of medium and free from any restrictions.

Many of your works utilise iconography from popular and traditional culture—not only Indonesian, but also Southeast Asian. Your 2016 work *Chicken Noodle Carpet* features one of the most iconic staple foods in the Southeast Asian region, chicken noodles, and the rooster from the ubiquitous Chinese-style bowl they’re often eaten from. How important is it for you that your artworks serve as reminders for the younger generation—which now lives in a vastly consumerist and fast-changing society—of their own culture and history?

INDIEGUERILLAS We believe that history is an accumulation of collective experience and an important part of our lives. In the local or regional contexts, everything that has happened in Southeast Asia over the last few hundred years, and which now shapes Southeast Asian culture, is a collection of ideas for us as the inhabitants. An example of this can be seen in the traditional architecture along the Ring of Fire in the Indonesian archipelago. Our ancestors created houses that had no underground footings, contained flexible joints that allowed room for movement, and were made of relatively light materials. Why? Because the region where we live is prone to earthquakes. We should be adaptable to our current situation and conditions. The local values, complemented by global values, can enrich experiences. They are not narrow and outdated, as their essence is more than that. Dig into your roots and you will find plenty of treasures waiting for you.

Although it can be argued that the internet and various social media platforms have created a surge of materialistic behaviour in modern society, it has also opened a new breed of business opportunities. For the exhibition *_hyP3<y<lu5_* (13 January–19 February 2017) at Mizuma Gallery, you presented a selection of artworks that are rich in local wisdom and creativity, as well as made in collaboration with fellow local craftsmen. Were you aiming to introduce these local craftsmen to the new openings in online commerce and expose the public to the economic value of their practice? Would you care to elaborate more on that?

INDIEGUERILLAS This was actually an exercise in preserving experience. The new business opportunities that may arise for the local artists, crafters and craftsmen after working with us are, in our view, a positive collateral effect. We work with artists who maintain the slow process of their production mainly to experience the value of the process. Process teaches us to value life. In the future, we plan to continue with this creative work pattern, as the process of art making can also be experienced as a collective practice based on mutual respect, and not necessarily as an individual’s explosion of expression.

indieguerillas, *Taman Budaya: Goyang Cukur* (2015). Public installation. Metal, fabric, rubber, glass, terracotta, mirror, wood, lamp, electrical components, neon bulb, leather, digital print on stainless steel. 233 × 85 × 264 cm. Courtesy the artists and Mizuma Gallery, Singapore.



indieguerillas, *Datang untuk Kembali (Arriving to Return)* (2017). Performance in collaboration with Lulu Lutfi Labibi and Ari Wulu, Gillman Barracks, Singapore (13 January 2017). Part of *CITIES FOR PEOPLE*, NTU CCA Ideas Fest (13 November–22 January 2017). Courtesy the artists and Mizuma Gallery.





indieguerillas, *Seasoning the Issues I* (2016). Automotive paint on brass, mahogany wood. 128 × 106 × 4 cm (left); 152 × 81 × 4 cm (right). Installation view: *_hyP3<y<lu5_*, Mizuma Gallery, Singapore (13 January–19 February 2017). Courtesy the artists and Mizuma Gallery.

1 Pangeran Diponegoro was a prince of the Yogyakarta Sultanate who opposed Dutch colonial rule in the early 1800s. Believing he had been divinely chosen to lead a rebellion against the sultanate and the court’s pro-Dutch policies, he launched guerilla warfare and was summoned to negotiate a truce with Lieutenant Governor-General de Kock having been promised safe passage. However, Pangeran Diponegoro was captured and exiled to Makassar, where he died in 1855.

I am very drawn to your digital print *This Hegemony Life* (2012), which recasts Raden Saleh’s Romantic painting *The Arrest of Pangeran Diponegoro* (1857) as a Hergé-style cartoon. In depicting the 1830 capture of the Javanese prince’ who rebelled against the Dutch colonisers in such an instantly familiar and relatable fashion, was your intention to raise discussion among the younger generation of Indonesians about the nation’s past? Or was it simply to portray the historical event with a parodic angle?

INDIEGUERILLAS This is a good question. This work is indeed a parody of the situation and condition that we experience personally: losing touch with history. As part of a generation that witnessed history becoming a commodity reproduced for the benefit of the ruling party, we created this work as a reminder for us to not always believe what we see—that reading is not merely an attempt to understand the text. When we were studying, history was always about boring, heroic stories. The real stories that we were interested in were covered by popular culture at that time: Hollywood films, European New Wave bands, American heavy-metal music, mecha-genre anime series, and comics from Belgium, France and the Netherlands.

In the 2015 series ‘Taman Budaya’, you reference and incorporate daily aspects of Indonesian life like the subculture of DIY bicycle modification, an activity that is also seen throughout Southeast Asia. By merging art and everyday elements, can one challenge the boundaries of what art can be? Furthermore, what makes art from Southeast Asia distinctive when compared with contemporary art from other regions in Asia?

2 The term New Order refers to the second Indonesian president Soeharto’s regime from 1966 to 1998, known for its powerful, military-dominated government and strong economic growth.

INDIEGUERILLAS When we created these eight installation pieces based on bicycles, we thought about bicycles being technological inventions that still made the human body move. This movement occurs less and less now. The bicycle also has a close relationship with urban issues that are now affecting Yogyakarta. Traffic jams and pollution, for example, are no longer the myths of major metropolitan cities; they have arrived at our doorstep. Combining everyday objects with art is common now, and we believe that art-making is not always about creating something sacred, untouchable and distant, but also about intimate and familiar objects that create certain psychological impacts or serve as a foundation for constructive thought processes and questions.

Most countries in Southeast Asia are developing countries. In this context, what stands out is the effort in responding to limitations and turning them into something strong and valuable. Artworks from Southeast Asia are flexible. They are artworks with narratives so fundamentally anxious and rich, and indeed there are many fundamental things we should be anxious about.

You have described yourselves as ‘happy victims’ of the global consumerist market and your work portrays this particular position. Does the current contemporary art scene in Yogyakarta reflect this sentiment? How does your generation of artists differ from the artists of the early 1990s?

INDIEGUERILLAS The spectrum of the contemporary art scene in Yogyakarta is very wide. Every artist has their own issue that they translate into artworks: politics, identity, spiritual values, bewilderment. There are even those who use the issues of the art market as their ammunition. How each artist interprets each of these issues varies according to their experience. For example, if we look at the early-90s generation, many of them are more political than us. Because of the influence of the New Order², their perspective remains politically tuned when they see the current situation. We view our generation as the ‘unlucky generation’ which has to continuously run and adapt with our rapidly changing world, though at the same time, we see this confusion as something interesting to be explored. ●

Translated by Theresia Irma.