

Angki Purbandono An object, a flatbed scanner and a darkroom

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Just recently I visited the solo exhibition of photographer Angki Purbandono at Vivi Yip Art Room 2 in Jakarta, and was struck by the inventive dynamics and the thrill some of his images evoked. I learned that these were images made with a scanner, a devise that enables unusual precision, sharpened details, and heightened color shades. Combined with personal creative imagination, cultural awareness, professional skills, and a neon light box, Angki's works in this exhibition, "*Two Folders from Fukuoka*", were fascinating and thought-provoking.

Angki studied photography at ISI, the Indonesian Institute of Art. But he did not finish his studies. While his name card says artist of contemporary photography, Angki's restless nature led him to seek, explore and experiment with ways of image-making that would take him out of the conventions of photography.

As many other photographers abroad, he tried making a photographic image without a camera by placing objects directly onto the surface of a photosensitive material, such as photographic paper, which he then exposed to light. However, the result, a negative shadow image, did not satisfy him. Then he tried his luck with the scanner, a device that used to be an extension to photography, and one he knew as well as he did the camera.

The scanner then came to function as his camera lens previously, but different from the camera which makes pictures at a distance from its object, with the scanner, the object is put right on its glass plate.

"I was surprised how red the color of my papaya slice was." More than the camera, the scanner has the ability to captivate the finest details of the object due to its light from within and the limited depth of field.

Making images with the scanner is nothing new, he said. The medical world has done it for ages with X-rays that capture the finest of details in the human body. However, the use of a scanner to make images of art is fairly novel, though a rising number of photographers in Europe and America are frantically applying scannography, or scan art with the discussion about scanning techniques ongoing. Some take a scanner along in the car to capture traffic in motion, or the buildings lining a street; others seek to find the finest scanner available, and there are also those who paint right onto the glass plate. Angki, however, is less concerned with technical complexities.

"I use a simple, inexpensive flatbed scanner, he says, and play with objects, considering light as important and employing a darkroom to print my works."

For him, what matters most is to blow life into the objects he plays with, and while playing evoking a narrative that may be roguish, comical, and fun, but may also be provoking or bring out a sense of memory and history, or just a thrill of the unknown. This very personal approach, his intimacy to his objects, reached its momentum in Fukuoka, where he was awarded a 40-day residency.

His affinity with old pictures of unknown persons whose background was shrouded in the mist of the past and a beloved memory of toy soldiers and weapons from his childhood came together in Fukuoka and culminated in his exhibition *"Two Folders from Fukuoka"*, presented at Vivi Yip Art Room 2 in Jakarta.

Particularly striking was the work *Japanese Soldier and Large Fish of the Memories* series. Set in neon light boxes, the images appeared like fantastic photographs evoking a sense of both the absurd and the beautiful. But while part of the image, the Japanese soldier, is indeed a photograph, the entire work, the photograph and the box of large raw fish, was made using a simple flatbed scanner.

Angki, who likes to collect old photographs as part of memory, which he usually buys at a flea market, has done the same during his residency in Japan.

For the *Memories* series, he slipped an old photograph into a box of raw fish commonly sold in the supermarket in Fukuoka, thus bringing together the past with the present. Printing the lot with the scanner's lid kept open, the result is a stirring image as seen in *Japanese Soldier and Large Fish*. The illusionary in this image is also seen in *The Circus of Doraemon*, where toy cars seem to be floating in the air. Another kind of image is seen in the work featuring a photograph of a Japanese soldier against a flowerbed, which could evoke memories of war and peace. Plainly absurd as they may appear, the picture of the Japanese soldier against the raw fish, however, also evokes a sense of history against the present time, as does the picture of Japanese women against the raw fish. Here hairdo and dresses denote culture and the tenor of a time long past.

To honor his Japanese environment, Angki also included elements from the Japanese Manga, such as *Crayon Shin-chan* created by Yoshito Utsuno and *Doraemon* by Fujiko F. Fujio, which he used as funny accessories to fruit and vegetables.

Putting the object(s) on the glass plate of the scanner, and then pushing the print button with the scan lid open is one method used to visualize his intents. Another one is using the scanner as a camera and creating a theatrical field with toys arranged to give an illusion of performance as achieved in the works of the *Trilogy of Knowledge*, where *Doctoral Degree*, *Master of Degree* and *Out of Degree* are meant as parodies.

Angki's affair with the scanner began in 2005, when he spent a year in Seoul on an Asian Artist Fellowship from the National Museum of Contemporary Art, which he describes as a 'life experience'. His scannography practice gained its first acceptance when it was exhibited under the project of *"Space and Shadows-Contemporary Art from Southeast Asia"* at Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin (Germany) later in 2005. In the same year, his first scan series was also exhibited at Pocheon Asian Art Festival, Pocheon (Republic of Korea). In 2008, his works were included in the exhibition *Cut 2 Photography from Southeast Asia* at Valentine Willie Fine Art in Kuala Lumpur. The same gallery showed the subsequent *Cut 2 Photography from Southeast Asia* in Singapore in which

Angki was invited to participate. Thereafter, he had his solo exhibition titled "*Happy Scan*" at Biasa Art Space, Bali.

Further nurtured by his participation (2007) in the Anonymous project under Landing Soon, a Residency Project conducted by Cemeti Art House (Yogyakarta) and Artoteek (now Heden, an art gallery based in The Hague), photo research on old photographs bought in the flea market, his scan art culminated in the Memories series bringing together notions of past and present.

Angki Purbandono is very humble when speaking about his unique scan art. "A collage and a scanner device are both methods and techniques that are widely used in photography. I just play with objects, considering light as important and employing a darkroom to print my works."