

SISA

re-use, collaborations and cultural activism from Indonesia
UTS GALLERY, 6 NOVEMBER – 7 DECEMBER 2007



'Sisa' is the Indonesian word for 'remains' or 'leftovers'.

This is not meant to be an exhibition of political art, but an exhibition of what remains when culture is divided into art and politics.

What is left when creative people don't fit into the categories of 'artist' or 'activist.'

What is left when waste is not separated from consumption.

What is left when creative expression occupies a space of abjection.

The climate of greater political and social freedom in Indonesia over the last decade has prompted the formation of a number of collectives that produce culture with the aim of changing social or environmental conditions. This exhibition brings together the visual culture of some of these collectives: *Taring Padi*, *anakseribupulau*, and *Tanam Untuk Kehidupan*.

Sisa: public program: November 30th

3.30-4.30pm Artist slide presentations (in the Gallery)

Join artists Ayok (Salatiga) and Deni (Yogyakarta) in the gallery space as they speak about their work and the collective context of its production.

4.30-5.30pm Facilitated roundtable discussion (in the Gallery)

Chair: Suzan Piper (Transforming Cultures Research Centre, UTS) with guest speakers.

5.30-6.00pm Break with refreshments (Gallery foyer)

6.00-6.50pm Film Screening (DAB Lvl 3 Lecture Theatre 6322)

Gangways is a feature-length documentary by Carli Leimbach that takes us to the cities of Jakarta, Bandung and Jogjakarta in Indonesia and back to Sydney where the exchange artists from the GANG festival congregate. The film follows the development of the creative relationships between Australian and Indonesian arts communities.

7.00-8.00pm Sydney Indonesian Study Circle Seminar (DAB Lvl 3 Lecture Theatre 6322)

Speaker: Alexandra Crosby

Topic: Seni Kampungan: Collaborative Cultural Practices of Activists in Contemporary Indonesia

All events are FREE - no bookings required

Presented in association with Transforming Cultures Research Centre, UTS.

Supported by INSEARCH UTS

collective biographies:

Taring Padi

Dusun Sembungan, RT. 02,
Desa Bangunjiwo, kecamatan Kasihan,
Kabupaten Bantul, Yogyakarta 55184

Taring Padi is an independent, non-profit cultural collective based in Yogyakarta, Central Java. *Taring Padi* in *Bahasa Indonesia* literally means the sharp fang of the rice plant. The name implies an annoying agitation, an 'itch'. *Taring Padi's* work stems from the concept of people's culture or *seni kerakyatan*, which is articulated by the group in their manifesto as "a commitment to using its artistic and cultural pursuits to contribute actively to the democratisation process in Indonesia and elsewhere."

Since it was formed in 1998, the collective has created innumerable posters and murals, published and distributed the independent newsletter *Trompet Rakyat* (The People's Trumpet), performed at festivals and street demonstrations, and collaborated with other groups of activists in hundreds of cross-cultural projects. But perhaps more importantly, *Taring Padi* has developed as a community that is inextricably linked to its local environment. While the group has exhibited widely internationally, *Taring Padi* has focused more on their ethos of art-making which involves collective, process-oriented production, rather than particular material outcomes. The work *Taring Padi* has made for 'Sisa' - a compilation of 48 individual pieces - is evidence of this inclusive process.

Tanam Untuk Kehidupan

Jl Butuh No.4
Salatiga 50716
Central Java Indonesia

TUK formed in 2006 in Salatiga, a small city at the foot of Mount Merbabu in Central Java. The collective is the initiative of a new generation of young people, frustrated by their restricted political voice and the lack of exhibition spaces, study opportunities, and employment prospects in creative industries. Many of *TUK's* most active members are 'craftspeople' without formal art educations. They earn their living either carving and painting intricate designs into wood furniture or screen-printing promotional material for small businesses in Salatiga.

The name has several levels of meaning. First of all, 'tuk' means 'water source' in Javanese. As ancient springs face depletion and contamination, water has become an urgent environmental and social issue for mountainous areas of Java such as Salatiga. The group looked for an acronym that could also give meaning in *Bahasa Indonesia*, and came up with *Tanam Untuk Kehidupan*, which translates literally as 'Planting For Life.'

TUK describes their practice as “art that sidesteps artists’ egos through a collective process of design and implementation.” Inspired by a growing culture of environmental activism in Indonesia, *TUK* members have adapted a festival model to address their own ecological problems, namely water shortages and rubbish disposal.

They created the *Festival Mata Air*, which has been held twice to date, in November 2006 and September 2007. ‘*Sisa*’ shows some of the outcomes and documentation of this festival. The toys were made in workshops with local communities, using discarded household materials.

anakseribupulau

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anakseribupulau emerged in the town of Randublatung, Central Java in 1999. Part of the *Kabupaten* (Regency) of Blora, Randublatung is a small town located at the border of the provinces of Central and East Java. The name ‘*anakseribupulau*’, literally ‘child of a thousand islands’ refers to the vast archipelago of Indonesia and its cultural and ecological diversity. It also expresses a desire to be connected to a multitude of localities in the world despite the tight control of their Indonesia’s national borders.

Several members of *anakseribupulau* were activists in cities (Jakarta, Surabaya, Yogyakarta) during the political uprisings of 1997 and 1998. It was felt that some of the energy and experiences of this period could be harnessed to make change on a local village level. The primary industry in Randublatung is teak timber. The group aimed to raise awareness about destructive forestry practices, such as illegal logging, particularly as these were increasing with the unstable economy.

In 2005, *anakseribupulau* began concentrating on issues of corruption in the local government, namely the lack of transparency regarding the exploitation of natural gas by Exxon-Mobil. The small group of activists met with community leaders, wrote articles, made posters, staged street performances, and took school groups on tours of the natural gas fields and forested areas.

anakseribupulau describes itself as a broad network of activists. Many members lead a nomadic lifestyle when there is no work in Randublatung. They travel to other cities and villages in Indonesia, telling stories of the environmental destruction in their homeland and of community resistance. Many members are also artisans, producing teak objects for commissions by city clients. The work presented in ‘*Sisa*’ is made with leftover wood and leftover time.

1. Indra Yanti, *Awas Banjir 2: Beware of the Flood 2* (Yogyakarta, 2006), costume consisting of skirt, shirt, sandals, necklace, earrings, basket, and floor mat made from discarded materials.
2. Aris Prabawa, *Death By The Waste* (Lismore, 2007), scrap metal, aluminium, tin, silicon, resin and wood.
3. Aris Prabawa, *Mr Greedom* (Lismore, 2007), scrap metal.
4. Ireenius Pungky, *Oleh-Oleh: Souvenirs* (Yogyakarta, 2006-2007), 94 ball point drawings on cardboard.
5. A A o Season, *Bimo Tarung* (Salatiga, 2007), scrap metal and appliances.
6. Acongonyen, *sepermatologi* (Yogyakarta, 2006-2007), 99 drawings on canvas scraps.
7. S. Teddy D, *Untuk Tere Ini Cara Kalian Mengusirku Terima Kasih: For Tere this is the way i say 'thankyou'* (Yogyakarta, 2007) 7 acrylic paintings on found paper.
8. Taring Padi, *Untitled* (Yogyakarta, 2007), mixed media on 48 canvases.
9. Toni Volunteero, *Journey#1* (Yogyakarta, 2007), 11 pen drawings on cardboard.
10. Dodi Irwandi, *Tak Tersisa: Nothing left* (Yogyakarta, 2007), indigo batik painting.
11. Aris Prabawa, *General Kill More* (Lismore, 2007), metal, aluminium, tin and plastic.
12. Deni Pancatriatna, *Man in the City*, (Yogyakarta, 2007), paper sculpture.
13. Bob Sick, *Kill You* (Yogyakarta, 2007), stickers and drawing on found vinyl print.
14. anakseribupulau, *Secret Shoe* (Randublatung, 2007), carved teak.
15. anakseribupulau, *Tanganku: My hand* (Randublatung, 2007), carved teak.

16. anakseribupulau, *1/4* (Randublatung, 2007), carved teak.
17. Agus Budi Cahyono, *Factory*, (Yogyakarta, 2007), wood sculpture.
18. Agus Budi Cahyono, *Magpie*, (Yogyakarta, 2007), carving and acrylic on found wood.
19. Ade Darmawan and Rebecca Conroy, *Rp62,685 and AUS\$44.76* (Jakarta and Sydney, 2007), digital prints on paper.
20. Arya Jalu, *Roda Roda Gila; Crazy Wheels* (Yogyakarta, 2006), video and print on canvas.
21. Tanam Untuk Kehidupan, *Main-main; Just playing* (Salatiga, 2007), toys made from discarded material.
22. Mark Taylor, *Festival Mata Air* (Salatiga, 2007), video documentation.
23. Tanam Untuk Kehidupan, *Art for Earth* (Salatiga, 2007), woodcut posters.
24. anakseribupulau, *Sisa Kayu, Ambil Aja; Wood Scraps, Just Take Them* (Randublatung, 2007), carved teak.
25. Rio, Djuadi, anakseribupulau, *Create New World* (Randublatung, 2007), carved teak.
26. Imam Bocah, *Untitled series* (Semarang, 2007), carved wood.
27. Duto Hardono, *Untitled series* (Bandung, 2005), mixed media and found frames.
28. Duto Hardono, *Untitled series* (Bandung, 2005), ink, coca-cola and thread on paper.
29. Alexandra Crosby, *For Jade and Aris* (Indonesia and Australia, 2004-2007), patchwork of punk patches and scrap fabric.

Sisa: playing with refus(e)al

by Kirsten Seale

Sisa is a site where refuse overlaps with refusal. The artists represented in this show refuse standardised models of cultural production in their local Indonesian contexts, and also at the global level. In doing so, they constitute themselves as the refuse of society. Moreover, the artists in this exhibition use the rejects of consumer culture, its refuse, to *refuse* the imperatives of consumer culture and the attendant fetishism of commodities.

However, this conscious negation through willful identification with refuse should not, in any way, be construed as a negative act. Despite mainstream disapproval, critical neglect and the lack of commercial reward, the artists in *Sisa* refuse the perception of art as an unproductive 'pastime.' In opposition to the idea that this artistic scene represents an aversion to labour, their work speaks of constant activity. In fact, their output *parodies* capitalism, transforming production from something 'rational' into something playful. In this way, artists productively deploy the ludic by playing with the ostensibly sacrosanct in capitalist society: work and the commodity.

Play is hardly extraordinary. It is ubiquitous, quotidian, democratic. It is inclusive in that it is a productivity in which we can improvise, making and learning the rules as we go along. 'Play,' explains sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, "has no other aim but itself. ... It serves no 'sensible' purpose ... This is perhaps why play remains so stubbornly non-functional. Play is the ultimate *autotelic* phenomenon." To hegemonic interests it may seem gratuitous, but play is politicised activity precisely because it is of little, or no, utility to consumer culture, (or in the particular case of *Sisa*, the art market). The teleology of work and production is metamorphosed into something autotelic, and thus becomes a critique of capitalism and its compulsive need to reproduce itself.

Cultural historian Johan Huizinga points out that play "is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it." Yet, to say that the ludic is gratuitous does not mean that it produces nothing in a material or social sense. What is designated as play because it "has no material value" can still rehearse the tendencies and traits of 'work' while being produced from very different economic and social conditions. The ad-hoc, do-it-yourself aesthetics of the works in *Sisa* are a refusal of the technical perfection of the commodity, while the communal aspect of their cultural production is a move away from the alienated, atomised culture of work all too prevalent today.

According to the regime of work, play is extraneous, incidental. It is considered the preserve of children, self-indulgent, unproductive. Huizinga tells us that "efforts to define or devise a use for play cast it as an "abreaction." ... These hypotheses have one thing in common: they all start from the assumption that play must serve something else which is *not* play." *Sisa* offers us a contrary reading of play by showing us that it is the very qualities denigrated by capitalist ideology and practice that make play meaningful. This exhibition allows us to reassess those practices that are dismissed as 'playing' for the reason that capitalism considers them value-less, redundant, and/or supererogatory.

Play's autotelic impulse directs us to the primary condition for play's alterity: it is autarkic. It may take place within the space of the everyday, yet it is nonetheless demarcated as separate. Play evades the regulation of disciplinary apparatuses because it needs no licence, nor does it need special conditions or tools for its enactment. *Sisa's* artists use what's at hand: deconstructed cardboard boxes, the debris of consumer culture. In this way their work can provide a forum for what cannot be expressed or performed otherwise. A further feature of its autarkic character is its ambivalence: it can encompass seriousness and levity, wisdom and folly. Ultimately, play refuses binary logic, the very system which marks the delineation between 'play' and 'work.'

At this point a problematic presents itself: for the very reason that play has no other goal outside the production of itself, how can it refuse the logos of capitalism? Its ambivalence cannot constitute a refusal in itself. Ultimately, the critique of capitalism that play offers proves to be immanent to capitalism itself. It is the antipathy dominant discourse directs towards play that politicises it, producing the effect of refusal and thereby generating radical and resistant practice.

Play's refusal lies in its potential to exist externally to capitalist formations. Huizinga maintains that a defining characteristic of play is an awareness of those playing that their spatial practice exists in a space removed from the centre. This location on the outer is not merely self-imposed, nor is it a poetic, imaginative fancy. It is enforced through the penury, stigmatisation and persecution which result from refusing dominant ideas of work. Playing can have serious consequences, with real penalties for those who refuse to conform, as the life narratives of the artists here testify.

The exhibition, by emphasising collaboration and community, is a refusal of the increasing imperative of individuated social practice epitomised in the capitalist ideality of the sole author. *Sisa* shows us that vibrant, potentialised, heterodox models of cultural production are possible, even necessary. As Herbert Marcuse says "Art has ...magic power only as the power of negation. It can speak its own language only as long as the images are alive which refuse and refute the established order."

Kirsten Seale is a doctoral candidate in the department of English at the University of Sydney. Her research is on the intersection of refuse and refusal.

References:

- Zygmunt Bauman, 'Desert Spectacular' in *The Flâneur*, ed. Keith Tester (London: Routledge, 1999).
Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955).
Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* (London & New York: Routledge, 2002).

UTS Gallery
Level 4, 702 Harris Street
Ultimo Sydney NSW 2007
Monday - Friday 12 - 6pm

cover image from by Irennius Pungky, from the series *Oleh-Oleh: Souvenirs* (Yogyakarta, 2006-2007), 94 ball point drawings on cardboard.

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