

# Why is Yogyakarta the center of arts in Indonesia?



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In this Art in Design section of Indonesia Design, **Deborah Iskandar** shares her knowledge and love for art. Regarded as a pioneer in the auction world in South East Asia, she knows how to navigate the current evolving market trends of the Art World.

After more than 20 years' experience collectively, within the art world, she founded her own advisory firm, ISA Art Advisory® in 2013. Being widely respected in Indonesia and Singapore ISA Art Advisory®, aims to aid buyers, sellers and collectors to approach the art world with ease and to build collections that will retain value over time.

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## S. Sudjojono, Affandi, and Hendra Gunawan

are some of Indonesia's leading painters who founded and participated in the early associations of Indonesian art. Persagi, initiated by Sudjojono in Jakarta was followed by LEKRA, in Yogyakarta, Both of these societies were concentrating on art for people and supporting the revolution and the founding of the Republic of Indonesia. These associations went on to become the seeds of the modern art establishment that contributed so significantly to Indonesia's modern art identity.

In January 1950, ASRI (Akademi Seni Rupa Indonesia/ Indonesian Academy of Fine Art) – now known as Institut Seni Indonesia/ Indonesian Institute of The Art was formed through a government initiative to support the development of national culture after Indonesia's independence. At that time, ISI only consisted of five divisions – painting, sculpture, handicrafts, graphic arts, and training courses for art teachers. Concurrently, LEKRA was still active until the 1960's when it was disbanded as being part of the Communist party. Artists suffered because of their association with LEKRA and Djoko Pekik and Hendra were jailed because of their roles in the movement.

Beginning in 1955, Affandi, the Indonesian maestro started teaching at ISI. Following overseas travel as a painter and a teacher in the 1960's, he finally settled in Yogyakarta, and officially inaugurated his gallery (now a museum) 1974. The Affandi Museum, with its unique banana shaped roof personally designed by Affandi, is a must see during any

## WHY IS YOGYAKARTA THE CENTER OF ARTS IN INDONESIA?

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE

- Ark Gallery
- Cemeti Gallery
- Alun-Alun Kidul by Jim Allen Abel (Jimbo)

OPPOSITE PAGE

- Semar Petruk by Yuswantoro Adi



visit to Yogyakarta. During ArtJog, the Lippo Group opened an exhibition of Affandi's works at Lippo Plaza. Showcasing 27 works by Affandi from the Lippo Collection, this exhibition was one of the most important Affandi exhibitions in Yogyakarta.

Artists from all over Indonesia, as well as from abroad have flocked to Yogyakarta to attend the academies or to pursue their artistic career. American contemporary artist Aaron Taylor Kuffner is one of the ISI alumni who has been strongly influenced by the culture of the city. His piece, the Gamelatron Gelombang Dewa-Dewi was influenced by traditional Gamelan music, which was exhibited as an interactive piece at the most recent ArtJog.

ArtJog is one of the biggest art fairs in Indonesia. Since its inception in 2008, the

exhibition now attracts thousands of visitors every year. Yoko Ono, indiguerillas, and Aditya Novali are some of the famous names that are featured at this year's fair. The week of ArtJog has propelled Yogyakarta to become one of the major art centers in South East Asia. In addition to ArtJog, the galleries and pop-up exhibitions numbered 109 separate events during that week. It is this combination of factors, the museums, galleries, university, artist studio visits and ArtJog that has firmly established Yogyakarta as the center for contemporary art in Indonesia.

Over the years, more and more Indonesian artists have been making their names and proving their worth in the international art world. Here are a few examples of well known artists from Yogyakarta.

Since the beginning of the Republic of Indonesia, the island of Java has held a central position in the story of Indonesian art history. The island is home to the country's two most dynamic art centers: the art academies of Bandung and Yogyakarta. The difference between the two is the result of the contrasting experiences they both went through during the colonial occupation. The art scene that first emerged in Bandung was the result of Dutch initiatives to import foreign teachers to instruct young artists, while the art scene in Yogyakarta was born from nationalist ideas due to the city's position as the center of revolution at that time. In this issue I am going to focus on Yogyakarta, the city that has given birth to many of the country's most celebrated artists.



## AGUS SUWAGE

Born in 1959 in Purworejo, Agus Suwage can be regarded as one of Indonesia's most important contemporary artists. He has been actively engaged in the development of the Indonesian contemporary art scene since the 1980's. During the local art market boom in the 1990's, Suwage was among the first generation of Indonesian contemporary artists who were invited to participate in art events outside Indonesia. Suwage has now participated in more than 150 museum and gallery exhibitions around the world. Still living in Yogyakarta, Suwage originally trained as a graphic designer at Institut Teknologi Bandung. Throughout his career as an artist he has been exploring many mediums to create his art, including drawing, painting, sculpture and 'installations'.

Suwage's best known works are his self-portraits that he started in the mid 1990's. The strong personal tone emanating from this series makes it very compelling and easy for people to relate to. Suwage invites the viewers to contemplate the act of living and the various problems that surround it. However, potent socio-political critiques are also often apparent in Suwage's work, as seen in some of the artist's more recent output.



## EKO NUGROHO

Eko Nugroho is arguably one of the most acclaimed members of the new generation of Indonesian contemporary artists. He came into mainstream popularity after participating in the luxury brand Louis Vuitton's "art series" project, where his whimsical drawing of the "Republik Tropis" was made into the brand's exclusive limited edition of its 180 cm silk scarf.

Eko, who was born in Yogyakarta in 1977, started his artistic career at the height of the Reformation Era in Indonesia, an era of crisis when the whole country experienced socio-economic and political chaos. The experience of living under the New Order regime and the Reformation Era made a strong impact on Eko's work. One of the most extreme changes after the post-Soeharto era that influenced Eko's work was the arrival of freedom of expression.

Deeply rooted in the culture of his time, Eko's expertise lay in his ability to combine elements of traditional Indonesian culture such as *batik* patterns or *wayang* (shadow puppet) figures with the global popular culture while consistently dropping in a socio-political commentary about his surroundings. He has been working with various media from embroidery works, public murals, paintings, drawings and video animation, to contemporary *wayang* shows.



## HERI DONO

Heri Dono has been a leading figure in the Indonesian art scene since the early 1980's and is now one of the most prominent contemporary South-East Asian artists. Dono was the recipient of the Prince Claus Award for Culture and Development in 1998, the Unesco Prize in 2000, and the Anugerah Adhikarya Rupa (Arts Award) from the Indonesian Government (2014). Earlier this year, Dono was also chosen to represent Indonesia at the prestigious 56th Venice Biennale in Venice, Italy. Together with Agus Suwage, FX Harsono, and Dadang Christanto, Dono is among the group of artists that have been at the forefront in shaping the Indonesian contemporary art scene since the Reformation era.

Dono is best known for his works that are heavily influenced by traditional Javanese culture, particularly *wayang*, the traditional Javanese puppet theatre. Dono combines the elements of *wayang* with popular cartoons, comics, and daily situations to present a commentary on Indonesian social and political issues. For him, art is not just about mere beauty or aesthetics, but it also has to have the ability to bring education and awareness to the public, to point to injustices or problems in society. What is interesting in Dono's art is his ability to fuse elements from several different eras into one beautiful representation of both the past and the future.



## UGO UNTORO

Ugo Untoro was born in 1970 in Purbalingga, Central Java, and graduated from the ISI in Yogyakarta, where he lives and works. Ugo is best known for his signature raw and spontaneous technique. While confessing that he doesn't want to be limited to a certain style or technique, his themes seem to revolve around the issues of existence. These issues are often illustrated through a very simple object that is a part of our daily life.

One of the artist's most renowned works is his depiction of horses on canvas. Through his paintings, Ugo developed his own approach towards this animal that is often seen by humans as a symbol of freedom and passion. Through his horses, Ugo explores the cycle of human life, and breaks with usual norms with a presentation of facts in a way that people may have not considered before.

Ugo has exhibited widely in Indonesia as well as Malaysia, China, Singapore and France. He has also participated in group exhibitions in USA, France, Singapore, Vietnam and Indonesia.



## HANDIWIRMAN SAPUTRA

Together with Jumaldi Alfi, Yusra Martunus, Rudi Mantofani, and Yunizar, Handi Wirman Saputra is a co-founder and member of the Jendela Art Group, one of Indonesia's most prominent contemporary art collectives. Born in 1975 in Bukittinggi, Sumatra, Handi Wirman has established himself as one of the most popular Indonesian contemporary artists in recent years.

As an artist, Handi Wirman was initially known for his installations of discarded objects which he arranged into a single entity that challenged the viewers' common perceptions of those objects. Thread, wire, hair, paper, and plastic were among the daily discarded objects that he often used for his work. Since the mid-2000's, as his work evolved, he began producing series of paintings and installations which were very ordered and magnificently realistic. However, his concept of "beauty" remained the same.

The element of wonder and the ability to subtly provoke is what defines Handi Wirman's work. His installations present a new interpretation of beauty of the most mundane objects that often escape our attention. His paintings provoke us to rethink about our way of seeing things.

Handi Wirman has participated in many exhibitions – local and abroad. The most recent ones are "Collectors' Stage: Asian Contemporary Art from Private Collections", at Singapore Art Museum, Singapore (2011), "Made in Indonesia", at Galerie Christian Hosp, Berlin (2010), and Contemporaneity: Contemporary Art of Indonesia, at Museum of Contemporary Art, Shanghai (2010). Last June, Handi Wirman had his first international solo exhibition in Tolo/Heuristic Shinonome, Tokyo, Japan.

## ENTANG WIHARSO

Entang Wiharso's work draws you into a vivid mural-scale painting, a cast metal relief, or an installation of sculptures. Executed in a great realist manner, his works exude the complexity between human relations and social systems and norms.

Entang Wiharso is one of Indonesia's most prominent contemporary artists. Spending time between Rhode Island, United States, and Yogyakarta his work appeals equally to eastern and western tastes. Born in Tegal, Indonesia, Entang studied painting at ISI in Yogyakarta. Entang has been a recipient of many awards throughout his career as an artist. His work is included in public collections around the world, such as the Carnegie Mellon Institute and the Rubell Family Collection in USA, the Singapore Art Museum, and the National Gallery of Victoria, Australia.

Entang's works heighten the issues of communication between humans that are often divided by the complex system of society, be it for political, ethnic, or religious reasons. He interprets how these systems control the way the different elements of society co-exist but at the same time limit their communication with each other. Entang's seemingly distorted figures are the embodiment of this observation. Most of the time, these figures are depicted connected by various kinds of linkages that take the form of ornamental vegetation, body parts, fences,



or detailed landscapes, adorned by the use of popular slogans, signs, or phrases collected from newspapers, political campaigns, or quotes from TV or movie characters.



## YUSWANTORO ADI

Born in 1966 in Semarang, Yuswantoro Adi is best known for his photo-realist paintings that pose various social critiques of society. In making his work, Yus often plays a contradictory visual game in order to ridicule the socio-political facts of the society around him. Money, humanity, and governmental activities frequently become the themes of his paintings.

Many of his works feature children as the main characters, although in an ironic kind of way. This triggers various questions from his viewers. Yus's fondness of children is deeply influenced by his side profession as a teacher at the Yogyakarta Cultural Park where he teaches drawing to children. As an artist, Yus transports the image of the children, which are a symbol of pureness and innocence, into his medium to express his critiques and hopes for the future.

## JIM ALLEN ABEL (JIMBO)

Born in 1975 in Makassar, south Sulawesi, Jim Allen Abel is another distinguished photographer on the Indonesian art scene. Also a member of Ruang MES 56, Jimbo aims to change the popular convention of photography in Indonesia, which considers the photographer as merely a commercial professional who works purely on commissions.

His father's occupation as a history teacher strongly influenced Jimbo's work as an artist. Growing up surrounded by history, this scholarly approach made Jimbo aware of the importance of education in our development. In his series 'Uniform\_Code', Jimbo investigated the role of uniforms and its relation to the identity of people who have to wear them.

Jimbo's works have been widely exhibited in Australia, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, France, UAE as well as museums such as the Musee du Quay in Paris (2011) and The National Gallery in Jakarta (2003 and 2012).



## WIMO AMBALA BAYANG

Wimo Ambala Bayang is a rising contemporary artist. He was born in Magelang in 1976. He received his art education from the Interior Design Program at the Modern School of Design and the Photography Department at ISI in Yogyakarta.

Although dubbed as a photographer, Wimo is an artist who has also been exploring many mediums. Many of the objects in his photos, Wimo creates himself. Wimo's work reflects a fresh perspective in seeing our culture. For Wimo, history and the specifications of any object are an important aspect to be considered in producing a work of art. This idea leads Wimo to always try to look from a different perspective at daily life.

Wimo is also a member of Ruang MES 56. In recent years, Wimo has participated in many international artists exchanges, such as in China, Australia and the Netherlands.



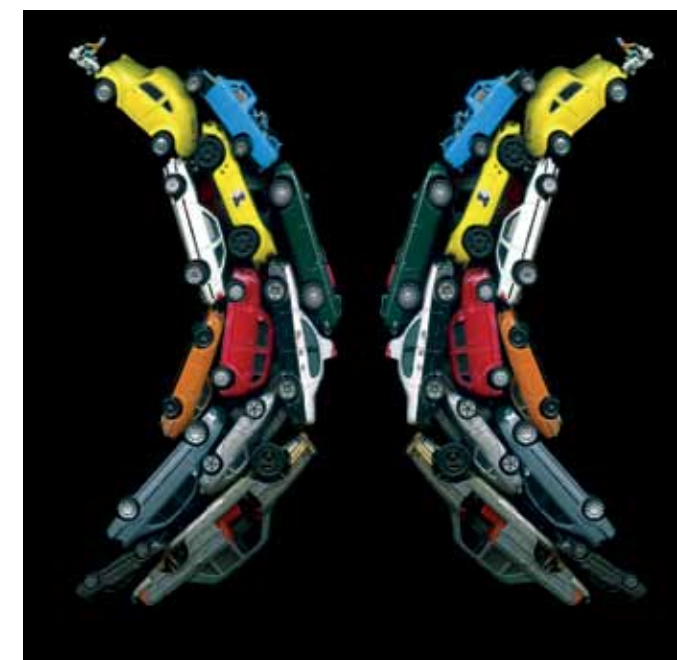
## ANGKI PURBANDONO



Angki Purbandono, who works and lives in Yogyakarta, is a leading contemporary photographer. Born in 1971 in Kendal, Angki constantly challenges and re-questions general perceptions in the world of art-photography. One of his interpretations is whether or not a photographer must always use a camera to take a picture of an object. This question led him to the discovery of scanography, in which Angki substitutes the camera with a scanner; a breakthrough discovery which has become his signature style.

Angki's scanned images reveal a combination of small mundane objects that we often see in our daily life against a solid black background. The immense dark space then later accentuates the expressiveness of the objects, drawing the viewers to stare solely at the object. Angki's scanography technique gained its first major recognition after the exhibition of "Space and Shadows – Contemporary Art from Southeast Asia" at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Germany in 2005.

Since the early 2000's, Angki has participated in many exhibitions – locally and abroad. In 2002, Angki, together with a group of fellow photographers, initiated Ruang MES 56, a non-profit institution that focused on the development of art photography in Indonesia and Southeast Asia.



## AGAN HARAHAP

Agan Harahap's practice consists of photo manipulation of images created with photoshop. This practice, started in 2012, has made Agan Harahap's name viral across the internet. His work has probably flashed across the screen of your mobile phone, whether through Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or other social media platforms. The photos of Paris Hilton in the Indonesian public lavatories, or Salma Hayek and Angelina Jolie being protected by Indonesian police officers are part of his narrative.

Born in 1980 in Jakarta, Agan Harahap began his career as a digital imaging artist and photographer for a number of magazines before committing himself as a full-time artist. His "Super Hero" series that incorporated the figures of super heroes and villains from popular comic books onto World War II scenes alongside the world's most noted political figures marked the beginning of his career as an artist.

Most of Agan's work breathes the tone of dark comedies and satire, combining fantasy and reality to pose a commentary on the social issues within society. Agan has participated in a number of exhibitions in Southeast Asia, Korea, Japan, Portugal, Colombia, and Australia. His next show will be in the Netherlands. 