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The Unsung Museum – highlighting issues challenging Indonesia’s on-going struggle for democracy

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The *Unsung Museum (Museum Tanpa Tanda Jasa)* is a landmark, travelling exhibition that is currently crisscrossing the country and features miniature artworks that are **big** on cultural significance. The exhibition highlights the most important issues challenging Indonesia’s ongoing struggle for democracy since the nation’s colourful, fledgling journey began. These issues include tolerance of minority groups, along with ethnic, ideologically and religious diversity, and collective harmony.

Taking a series of chronologically banned, destroyed, removed or censored artworks the *Unsung Museum* displays them in scaled-down miniature versions of the real things. Accompanying these mini-masterpieces are news articles from the time, together with amusing parodied public reactions and news media video installations.*

Read Richard Horstmann’s [article](#) on the Unsung Museum in Life As Art Asia.

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Unsung Museum highlights Indonesia's democracy challenges



RICHARD HORSTMAN

ARTIVIST, OBSERVES AND REPORTS ON DEVELOPMENTS IN THE BALI AND INDOONESIAN ART SCENES

Jakarta | Fri, September 22, 2017 | 08:01 am



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A miniature work *They Gave Evidence* by Dadang Christianto, collected by the Unsung Museum. (Wirya Satya Adenatya/File)

The Museum Tanpa Tanda Jasa (Unsung Museum) is a landmark, traveling exhibition that is currently crisscrossing the country and features miniature artworks that are big on cultural significance. The exhibition highlights the most important issues challenging Indonesia's ongoing struggle for democracy since the nation's colorful, fledgling journey began. These issues include tolerance of minority groups, along with ethnic, ideological and religious diversity and collective harmony.

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"Art is no stranger to controversy; throughout its history it has presented works that have irked the moral guardians of the day," said Yogyakarta-based curator Grace Sambuh, one of many members of the Indonesian contemporary art community who have initiated the Unsung Museum in an event that characterizes the social conscience and synergy of some of the country's most relevant and motivated artists and activists. "Sometimes to see why an artwork is deemed controversial, we need to see it from a different perspective, and what better way is there than to see it in miniature?"

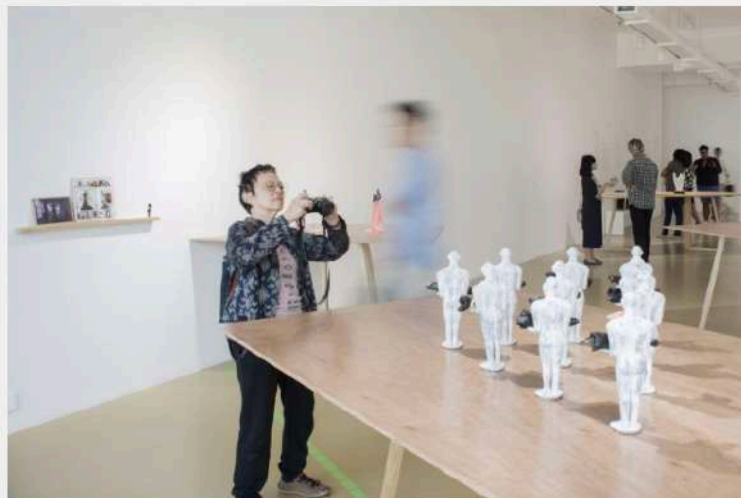


An visitor attends the opening of the Unsung Museum at ROH Projects, Jakarta. (Wirya Satya Adenatya/File)

Beginning September 2016 at Jakarta's ROH Projects, for three weeks the exhibition sets out to inform, not only citizens but also members of the Indonesian art industry, about the relevance of these pressing issues. The exhibition will be next showcased at Yogyakarta's Kedai Kebun Forum from late October running into November, then opening in West Java, at Bandung's Ruang Gerilya, 15 December until 7 January 2018.

"We are retelling stories of several artworks that were once considered a 'public nuisance' during the Reform Era because of three recurring reasons related to pornography, communism and SARA [ethnic, religious, racial and inter-group relations] by three elements in society [citizens/individuals, mass organizations and government]," Samboh said. "Based on these assumptions, several artworks attracted a variety of problems ranging from threats, restrictions and even destruction."

The country with the largest Islamic population on the planet, with Christian, Buddhist and Hindu religious minorities, however, is currently undergoing one of its most turbulent and disruptive periods. The May 8 controversy at the Indonesian Islamic University's Center for Human Rights Studies in Yogyakarta with the censorship of paintings and poetry carried out by members of the youth organization Pemuda Pancasila who enforced the closure of artist Andreas Iswinarno's exhibition, *Tribute to Wiji Thukul: Saya Masih Utuh dan Kata-kata Belum Binas* [I'm still complete and words have not yet been destroyed] on suspicion the works contained communist ideas, highlights the urgency of the *Unsung Museum*.



An visitor photographs part of the *Unsung Museum*. (Wirya Satya Adenatya/File)

"Bearing in mind a number of concerns about the stability of [ideas within] democracy, as well as democratic behavior in today's society, our main question is: What does democracy mean to each and every one of us today, as part of society, as citizens, and as someone who works in the arts?" Grace said, reflecting on the inspiration behind the exhibition. "We have adopted the concept of a mobile museum for the exhibition because of its informative nature and educational aspects, as well as its openness to the public."

The mini works collected by the Unsung Museum include versions of: “Pinkswing Park”, a walled photomontage by Agus Suwage and Davy Linggar, exhibited at the 2005 Jakarta CP Biennale, it was deemed to be blasphemous by Islamic fundamentalist group the Islam Defenders Front (FPI) who forced the closure of public access to the work, while demanding prosecution of the artists, and They Gave Evidence exhibited in 2002 in Jakarta by Dadang Christanto, a major series of standing, naked ceramic figures, in their outstretched arms holding the remnants of burnings, drownings, beatings and other human mutilations, victims of oppression, social injustice and political violence.

Also collected are a miniature of a public artwork by Nyoman Nuarta that Islamic organizations protested against stating it was representational of Christian iconography and which was consequently dismantled from its site in West Java in 2010. Also, an work by Galam Zulkifli that was removed in 2016 from the new Terminal 3 complex at Soekarno-Hatta International Airport. Zulkifli’s enormous 12-square-meter painting included iconic figures in the development of the Indonesian nation. *Seri Ilusi # The INDONESIA IDEA* was taken down in order to avoid a polemic on social media as one of the portraits in the painting featured DN Aidit, the former chairman of the Indonesian Communist Party.



An visitor to ROH Projects, Jakarta examines the Unsung Museum. (Wirya Satya Adenatya/File)

“Within conversations surrounding these artworks, the conclusion is often misunderstanding,” Grace explains. “The arts community believes the dismissal of these artworks was due to some people having misunderstood or failed to understand altogether. In fact, quite often the misunderstandings come not only from those who dismiss the artworks but also from the arts community itself.”

“The Unsung Museum is not an attempt to point out rights and wrongs. In light of democracy, we want to poke people’s awareness of equality of knowledge about rights and obligations of the various elements in the arts community—within the art disciplinary context.”

Along with Grace the Unsong Museum has been initiated by Aliansyah Chaniago, Fajar Abadi RDP, Jim Allen Abel, Julian Abraham "Togar", Maryanto and Tamara Pertamina, while inviting other people, and aspires to continue inviting more people over time. "The Unsong Museum has already received a strong public response," Samboh said. "We are now compiling the feedback, and the topics are being discussed in the hope that we can publish a book on views of our recent democracy through the art public's perspective."

"Our mission is to rekindle discussions about democracy in the Reform Era with the arts community while not closing itself off from the involvement of other members of the community."

The Unsong Museum is scheduled to continue in Medan, North Sumatra, and Makassar and Manado in Sulawesi early in 2018. (asw)

...

Richard Horstman, a cultural observer with over 25 years' experience in Indonesia, has supported the Bali and Indonesian art scenes for more than nine years as a journalist, writer, art tourism presenter and advisor at Cata Odata Art Space in Ubud. A bridge between the art world and the public, he has been published in The Jakarta Post and various other newspapers.

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Tags : [Democracy](#), [Indonesian-Politics](#), [Contemporary-Art](#), [Exhibition](#)

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Beranda · Online · MENDISKUSIKAN KEMBALI SENI YANG MERESAHKAN

Online Pameran Exhibition

MENDISKUSIKAN KEMBALI SENI YANG MERESAHKAN

Penulis Renjana Widyakirana · 20 September, 2016 · 1496



Miniaturn lukisan Jalan Salib Lurung Kamulyan karya Petrus Agus Herjaka. (Foto: Renjana Widyakirana)

Tanggal 12 Agustus 2016 lalu, keberadaan sosok DN Aidit di antara tokoh-tokoh pahlawan nasional dalam lukisan *Seri Ilusi # The INDONESIA IDEA (Ide/ID)* oleh Galam Zulkifli menggemparkan Indonesia. Lukisan yang dipajang di Terminal 3 Soekarno-Hatta akhirnya terpaksa diturunkan.

Kejadian penurunan karya seni tersebut bukanlah yang pertama kali terjadi dalam dunia seni Indonesia. Pameran "Unsung Museum (Museum Tanpa Tanda Jasa)" di ROH Projects, SCBD Jakarta, 17 September-8 Oktober 2016, mencoba menghidupkan perbincangan mengenai persamaan pengetahuan akan seni rupa dan demokrasi dalam era Reformasi dengan publik, baik bagi peminat seni maupun publik awam.

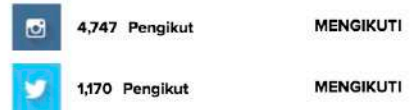
"Unsung Museum" adalah museum keliling yang diinisiasi Aliansyah Caniago, Fajar Abadi RDP, Grace Samboh Jim Allen Abel, Julian Abraham 'Togar', Maryanto, dan Tamara Pertamina.

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Miniat instalasi *Special Prayer for the Dead* karya Tisna Sanjaya. (Foto: Renjana Widyakirana)

Pameran yang dikuratori Grace Samboh ini memang bukan pameran seni rupa yang menampilkan karya-karya seni, melainkan menampilkan berbagai jenis dokumentasi, baik dalam bentuk klipng berita, fotografi, maupun miniatur karya seni yang pernah dianggap ‘meresahkan’ masyarakat dalam era Reformasi oleh beberapa pihak, yakni organisasi masyarakat, aparat negara, dan perorangan, dalam berbagai isu, yang di antaranya bergulat dengan komunisme, SARA, dan pornografi.

Contoh kasus yang terlibat dalam pameran ini adalah pameran tunggal Pius Sigit “I Feel Fine, Thank you” di Kedai Kebun Forum Yogyakarta, *They Give Evidence* karya Dadang Christanto, instalasi *Special Prayer For the Dead* karya Tisna Sanjaya, dan instalasi *Pinkswing Park* karya Agus Suwage dan Davy Linggar.

Selain itu, juga *Patung Peminta Hujan* karya Marta Jiraskova di Istana Bogor yang merupakan hadiah dari pemerintahan Yugoslavia, *Tiga Mojang* karya Nyoman Nuarta, pameran *Lurung Kamulyan* karya Petrus Agus Herjaka, dan *The Indonesian Idea* karya Galam Zukilfi yang baru-baru ini menjadi bahan pembicaraan.



Arsip *Special Prayer for the Dead* karya Tisna Sanjaya
Arsip *Special Prayer for the Dead* karya Tisna Sanjaya. (Foto: Renjana Widyakirana)

Jika kejadian-kejadian tersebut didiskusikan lagi, biasanya kembali ke masalah kesalahpahaman. Dari sudut pandang publik seni rupa, mungkin penolakan seni rupa ini terjadi karena kesalahpahaman banyak orang. Tetapi, ada kemungkinan publik seni rupa, yang lebih berpengetahuan mengenai seni rupa, kurang mengkomunikasikan makna dan pesan akan karya seni tersebut kepada publik.

“Unsung Museum” tidak dimaksudkan untuk menunjuk siapa yang benar dan siapa yang salah. Seperti yang tertulis dalam katalog pameran, “Kami justru ingin menggugat perihal kesetaraan pengetahuan akan hak dan kewajiban beragam elemen dalam publik seni rupa dengan landasan disiplin seni rupa – tentunya seturut dengan azas demokrasi sebagai konteks ruang hidupnya.”

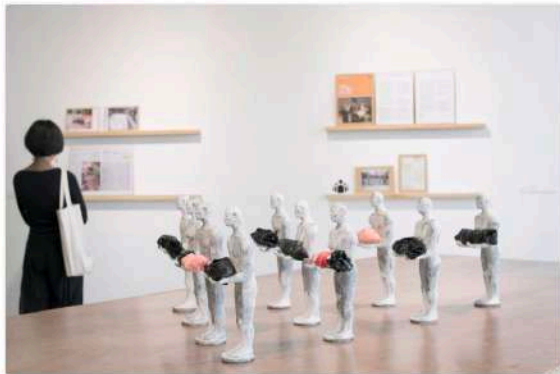
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the Unsung Museum – highlighting issues challenging Indonesia’s on-going struggle for democracy

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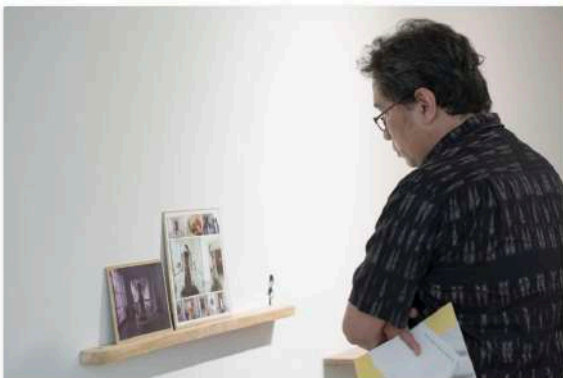


A miniature work "They Gave Evidence" by Dadang Christianto, collected by the Unsung Museum. Photo by Wirya Satya Adenatya

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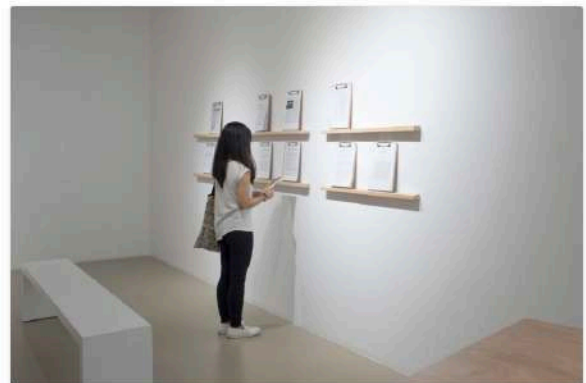


An audience member at ROH Projects, Jakarta during the Unsung Museum – Photo Credit/ Wirya Satya Adenatya

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The country with the largest Islamic population on the planet, with Christian, Buddhist and Hindu religious minorities, however, is currently undergoing its most turbulent and disruptive period. The recent 8 May controversy at the Indonesian Islamic University's Center for Human Rights Studies in Yogyakarta with the banning of paintings and poetry by members of the youth organization Pemuda Pancasila who enforced the closure of artist Andreas Iswinarno's exhibition, *Tribute to Wiji Thukul: Saya Masih Utuh dan Kata-kata Belum Binasa* (*I'm still complete and words have not yet been destroyed*) on suspicion the works contained communism ideas, highlights the urgency of the *Unsung Museum*.



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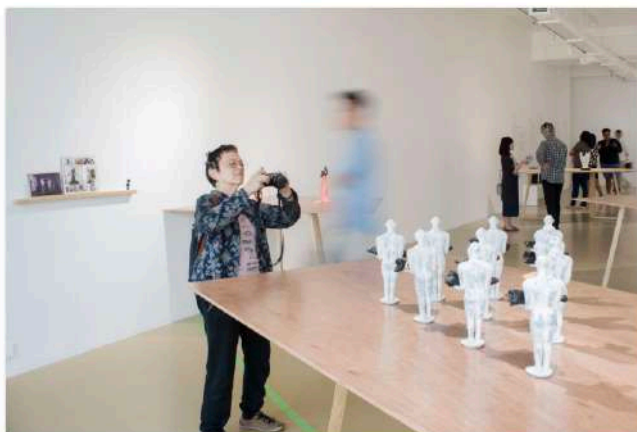
An audience member during the opening of the *Unsung Museum* at ROH Projects, Jakarta – Photo Credit/ Wirya Satya Adenatya

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Words: Richard Horstman

Images: Wirya Satya Adenatya

Julian Abraham

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Museum Tanpa Tanda Jasa



Foto pameran oleh Reza Zefanya. Foto milik ROH Projects.

Museum **Tanpa Tanda Jasa** (MTTJ) adalah sebuah proyek seni rupa yang bercita-cita untuk memantik perbincangan mengenai demokrasi dalam era Reformasi dengan publik seni rupa sembari tidak menutup diri untuk keterlibatan disiplin lainnya.

Bermula dari sejumlah keresahan akan stabilitas gagasan dan (peri)laku demokrasi dalam kehidupan bermasyarakat hari ini, kami ingin bertanya lagi: Apa artinya demokrasi bagi kita hari ini? (Sebagai bagian dari kehidupan bermasyarakat, sebagai warga negara, maupun sebagai orang-orang yang bekerja dalam ranah seni rupa.)

MTTJ adalah sebuah museum keliling. Bentuk museum dipilih karena aspek informasi dan edukasi yang merupakan sistem operasinya, sekaligus karena keterbukaan dan kesiapannya untuk publik dari beragam kalangan masyarakat.

The **Unsung Museum** is an art project that aspires to ignite discourse about democracy in the Reformation Era with the arts community whilst not closing itself from the involvement of other disciplines.

Having in mind a number of concerns about the stability of (ideas within) democracy as well as democratic behaviour in today's society, our main question is: What does democracy mean to each and every one of us today? (As part of the society, as citizens, and as someone who works in the arts.)

The **Unsung Museum** is a mobile museum. Museum as a form was chosen due to its informative nature and educational aspects, as well as its openness and readiness to the public from various communities.

Peresmian museum/officiation of the museum
ROH Projects, 40th f. Equity Tower, SCBD, Jakarta
17 September – 8 Oktober 2016

Kedai Kebun Forum, Yogyakarta
27 Oktober – 12 November 2016

Ruang Gerilya, Bandung
15 Desember – 7 January 2017

Links

<https://artsequator.com/unsung-museum-indonesia/>

<http://www.thejakartapost.com/life/2017/09/22/unsung-museum-highlights-indonesias-democracy-challenges.html>

<https://sarasvati.co.id/exhibition/09/mendiskusikan-kembali-seni-yang-meresahkan/>

<https://lifeasartasia.wordpress.com/2017/11/06/the-unsung-museum-highlighting-issues-challenging-indonesias-on-going-struggle-for-democracy/>

<https://julianabraham.net/2016/09/19/museum-tanpa-tanda-jasa/>