



left: Joko Dwi Avianto's bamboo sculpture scaffolding the entrance to Taman Budaya, Yogyakarta, the host venue for ART/JOG 12; photo: Naima Morelli

right: Karyadi, Garuda Pancasila: 'Unity in Diversity', 2012; wood, paint, electric guitar components, 110 x 55 x 10cm. Images this article courtesy the artists and ART/JOG12

ART/JOG12: 'Montmatre of the east'

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Some European-at-heart expat said that Yogyakarta is the Montmatre of the east. The studios are shabby and full of creativity, and the sensation on the streets is that Indonesian art is best brewed here. It's also where a very intriguing fair takes place. On my way to ART/JOG12, aboard a flashy-coloured *becak* – a widespread cycle rickshaw service – with the pedalling driver sweating and cursing at the traffic, I was trying to figure out what an art fair would be like in an 'unconventional' country like Indonesia. Actually, until I walked through Joko Dwi Avianto's bamboo-structure adorning the entrance, I didn't know what to expect at all.

In Jakarta, FX Harsono, a socially engaged artist not joining the fair, told me: 'I'll go there to take a look, but anyways for me fairs are pain. It's the supermarket of art. I like this, I like that, I'll buy this one because the colours match with the sofa in the living room. The appreciation of art is shallow!' On the other hand, everyone in Yogyakarta told me that the fair is something totally different from other fairs. 'It's more about showing work than selling. Of course, if you want you can buy it', Heri Dono told me, another socially engaged artist.

What I expected from ART/JOG12 was big-bellied collectors and their wives with dyed hair, some students looking concerned at the art, plenty of bored gazes from the socialites, and gallery assistants up-selling their goods with a pedantic air. I was wrong. Imagine instead dozens of teenagers taking pictures in front of the artwork in Art Basel; or people in the Hong Kong Art Fair actually reading the descriptions of the work diligently, one by one. There were a lot of art students and collectors as well, but the main audience ART/JOG12 attracted was everyday people. Of course, most of them were there perhaps just for 'the event', but couldn't that

be a first step to make contemporary art something that isn't just for the elite?

Second remark. There were no gallery assistants because there are no galleries at ART/JOG. The difference here is that the artists can propose their work themselves, to a commission, which means fewer filters between artist and collector. As Dono told me a few days later, while visiting his studio:

ART/JOG sees the issues of an art biennale and an art fair. As an art biennale organisation, ART/JOG invites the artists, not the galleries. Now there's some conflict of interests between an art biennale and ART/JOG. An art fair has a budget to create a good quality of show, a sureness that a biennale has not. You know, an art biennale is for selling as well, but for 'selling the discourses'.

Also ART/JOG cares that people appreciate art, and makes them learn about it; it makes symposiums, conferences ... Actually ART/JOG is something in the middle between a regular art fair and a biennale.

The third remark is regarding ART/JOG's title: 'Looking east, a gaze upon Indonesian Contemporary Art'. The question is, east of what? To sit on Pulo Aceh, the western border of Indonesia, and look east to see the entire island to scan its art? Or rather, to take a Western perspective and gaze at these artists becoming more and more interesting in the rising Asian panorama?

Everyone knows that contemporary Asian art is deeply influenced by the West; Indonesia is no exception. At the same time you can tell that in the core of the strongest work there's something that comes from a unique cultural background.

It is interesting that ART/JOG's curators decided not to orient themselves just to an Indonesian range, but



clockwise from top left:
 1/ Sri Astari, *Skeleton with Woman and Dragon*, digital print
 2/ Muhamad 'Ucup' Yusuf, *Trilogi*, 2012, woodblock print on canvas; triptych, 185 x 222cm
 3/ Marco Cassani, *Sex War, OOC*, 2011, digital print, 200 x 130cm
 4 / Mella Jaarsma-a, *Indra 1*, 2012, from the series *Animals Have No Religion*, costumes, wood, deer feet; variable dimensions

Montha pop-surrealist painting, it seemed a key feature in most Indonesian art is that it does not take itself too seriously. This was true of Angki Purbandono's 'scanner

to widen the discussion with Western culture. In this perspective, Indonesian contemporary art seems to question the Western public for an alternative answer to the origin of their art, while asking themselves: 'Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going?' – the same old philosophical questions.

In the ART/JOG12 catalogue, Thomas Berghuis, researcher and lecturer at the University of Sydney, expresses his own point of view on the matter:

I think the problem lies in the perception of the West, not being able to bridge the gap within one century, a hundred years of modern art development across other parts of the world in Europe or in North America. It's not copying [...] it's actually exchanging.

A ready example of this exchange was in artist Karyadi's electric guitar in the shape of the Indonesian coat of arms. Or in Sri Astari's *Skeleton with Woman and Dragon*, an amazing installation comprising a skeleton in batik (a red komodo dragon print) set in front of a wall painting of a beach fit for a tour guide's brochure; dramatic music supplied. One could also easily find Indonesian influences in paintings by expat artists shown in the fair: Ashley Bickerton, Filippo Sciascia and Marco Cassani – all based in Bali. Elbowing through youngsters striking their best Facebook pose in front of the Oky Rey

photos', shown in a black room reserved for commissioned artists. Evident also was a sharp irony both in the socially engaged art by artists like Agung Kurniawan (board member of ART/JOG as well) and in the more commercial paintings.

Talking of commercial paintings, the Asian market is saturated, the art fair a little less. Sure, ART/JOG showed a couple of really bad paintings, didactic and illustrative, but at least you could see something growing in the 'Montmartre of the east' satisfying both the young Indonesian collector, and the art critic in the market for 'discourses'; something that is going to influence the Asian market and catch the interest of the West – maybe, one day, even the attention of the *becak* driver.

ART/JOG 12 was shown 14 to 28 July, Taman Budaya Yogyakarta, Indonesia. www.artfairjogja.com Last year's Jogjakarta Biennale XI, co-curated by Alia Swastika (Jogjakarta) and Suman Gopinath (Bangalore), was titled *Equator #1*, and took the theme: 'Shadow Lines: Indonesia Meets India'.

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