

## Indo Pop Painting: Is It All Just About The Market? | COBO Social

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Riono Tanggu, You must do something, 2010, Acrylic on canvas, 150 x 180 cm, courtesy of Primo Marella Gallery





Oky Rey Montha, *Idrolisi*, 2010, Acrylic on canvas, 200 x 150 cm, courtesy of Primo Marella Gallery



Installation view of “Jogja Agro Pop” at Equator Art Projects, Singapore. Courtesy of Equator Art Projects





Uji 'Hahan' Handoko Eko Saputro, 'In The Name Of Youth', 2013, acrylic, silkscreen on canvas, edition 1 of 2, 300 x 200 cm. Courtesy the artist and Equator Art Projects.

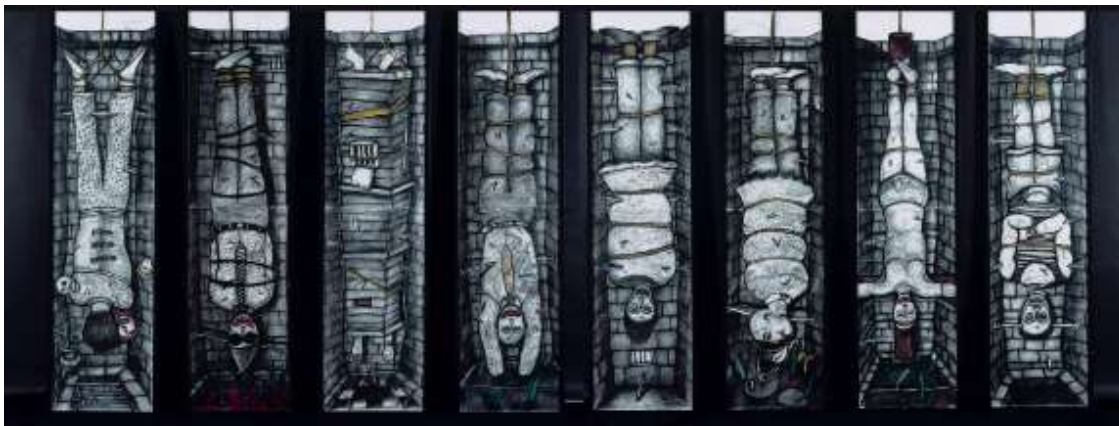


Nyoman Masriadi, The man from Bantul (The final round), mixed media on canvas, 250 x 435 cm, Mixed Media and Canvases, courtesy of the artist





Heri Dono, The Presidential Candidates, acrylic on canvas, 200x150cm, 2008, courtesy of the artist



Agung Kurniawan, Very Very Happy Victims, 1996, 158 x 40 cm each, Collection of Singapore Art Museum





Eddie Hara, Neo Ethno Electro Trash, acrylic on wood, 40 x 30 cm, courtesy of Element Art Space

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Indo Pop Painting draws influences from comics and graffiti. From the “fathers” of the style, such as [Eddie Hara](#), [Heri Dono](#) and Agung Kurniawan, to the “older brothers” Uji ‘Hahan’ Handoko and [Eko Nugroho](#), and the plethora of younger 20-something artists, we retrace the genealogy of Indo Pop Painting.

TEXT: Naima Morelli

IMAGES: Courtesy of the artists and galleries



Riono Tanggu, You must do something, 2010, Acrylic on canvas, 150 x 180 cm, courtesy of Primo Marella Gallery

Indo Pop Painting has a problem. It is the kind of art which people like and critics snub. Too cartoonish, too blatantly ironic, irreverent and catchy like a pop song. "It's superficial. It's just about the market," critics might say. "It might go down well with skaters and it might make it into Sotheby's, but certainly not the history books!" Well, chances are Indo Pop will make it into both.

Endorsed by commercial galleries and public institutions, promoted locally as well as internationally, Indo Pop Painting is here to stay. It is the preferred style of a young generation of artists, both sceptical of and operating in connivance with the market.

Indo Pop is an Instagram-friendly mishmash of subcultures, stemming from television, movies, comics and the internet. In the artists' studios of Yogyakarta, Bandung and Jakarta, these influences emerge completely transformed. Punk is chosen for its aesthetic form and its ethos adapted to local culture and conditions. Hip hop, rock and pop aesthetics can be seamless sewn together, with a pinch of Wayang puppets and local references here and there. This is not a new way of operating in Indonesia, an archipelago which has mastered syncretism way beyond religion.





Oky Rey Montha, *Idrolisi*, 2010, Acrylic on canvas, 200 x 150 cm, courtesy of Primo Marella Gallery

The contours of a well-defined Indo Pop Painting trend started appearing back in 2011, in the exhibition *The Alleys of a City Named Jogja*, curated by Jim Supangkat at Primo Marella Gallery, Milan. The show featured paintings by [Eko Nugroho](#), Janu Satmoko, [Farhan Siki](#), Andre Tanama, Uji “Hahan” Handoko, Eko Didyk Sukowati, Iwan Effendy and Oky Rey Montha, alongside artists mainly working in installation such as [S. Teddy Darmawan](#) and Eddi Prabandono.

In his curatorial statement, Jim Supangkat points out that the work “comes across as loud, with various expressions ‘shouting’ together. The storylines in these works are mostly hidden.” In *Idrolisi* (2010) by Oky Rey Montha, we are shown a group of animals, dolls and weird creatures on a pirate ship sailing within a Starbucks cup. It is a self-contained image in terms of meaning, but it can also be the point of departure for a story, like a single frame from a comic book. The adventure is all for the viewer to imagine. Conversely, in works like the ones by Farhan Siki, there is no narrative. It is all about addressing consumerist society through striking images.

The exhibition *Jogja Agro Pop*, held in December 2014 at the now defunct Equator Art Projects at Gillman Barracks, Singapore, was crucial to cementing the style. Curated by Rain Rosidi, it featured Arwin Hidayat, Decki ‘Leos’ Firmansah, Farid Stevy Asta, Krisna Widiathama, Nano Warsono and Wedhar Riyadi, alongside familiar names such as Andre Tanama, Uji ‘Hahan’ Handoko and Farhan Siki.



Installation view of “Jogja Agro Pop” at Equator Art Projects, Singapore. Courtesy of Equator Art Projects

The “agro” part of the exhibition referred to the changing landscape of Yogyakarta: “The artists explore the effects of urbanisation, balancing

ogyakarta: The artists explore the effects of urbanisation, balancing opposing values: rural and urban, tradition and modernity. Although not directly engaged in politics, the works are often a satirical commentary on society and issues faced by contemporary artists today.”

After its launch by commercial art spaces, public galleries started acknowledging the value of Indo Pop. From February to March 2016 the Gold Coast City Gallery in Australia held Indo Pop: Indonesian Art from APT7, helping to create a critical framework for the movement. The works in this exhibition came from the 7th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, now part of QAGOMA’s collection, one of the most significant collections of contemporary Indonesian art in the world. The show included works by the omnipresent Uji ‘Hahan’ Handoko, Wedhar Riyadi and Edwin Roseno.







Uji 'Hahan' Handoko Eko Saputro, 'In The Name Of Youth', 2013, acrylic, silkscreen on canvas, edition 1 of 2, 300 x 200 cm. Courtesy the artist and Equator Art Projects.

In the exhibition text, curator Tarun Nagesh recognized the role which the art market had played in establishing the style. He described the contemporary Indonesian art boom of 2007, which broke sales records for Southeast Asian art and tripled its market value in the space of a year. This change was mainly driven by auction houses and art fairs in Singapore and Hong Kong and resulted in very young artists being in great demand virtually overnight.

Because of the lack of strong public and institutional support, Indonesia was unable to balance the market necessities with a critical apparatus. This is evident from the lack of interest in the contemporary art discourse shown by most Indo Pop painters, who tend to draw their inspiration directly from pop culture.



Nyoman Masriadi, *The man from Bantul (The final round)*, mixed media on canvas, 250 x 435 cm, Mixed Media and Canvases, courtesy of the artist. Another turning point for Indonesian painting was the sale of Nyoman Masriadi's *Man from Bantul (The Final Round)* at Sotheby's Hong Kong in 2008 for HK\$7.82m (US\$1m), then an auction record for a living Southeast Asian artist. Masriadi caught the imagination of young artists not only with his financial success, but also with his cartoonish figures and speech balloons.

It must be noted that, tracing the lineage of contemporary art, these young

Indo Pop painters have top-notch artists as stylistic forefathers. In the 1980s, a second wave of contemporary artists elaborated on the pop-culture influence introduced by the first cohesive Indonesian contemporary art movement, the Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru. They had unprecedented opportunities to soak up mass culture from around the world thanks to the freedom to travel and rampant globalisation. Many artists who started working during that period are self-declared comic book lovers: Heri Dono, Eddie Hara, Agung Kurniawan, not to mention the group Apotik Comics.



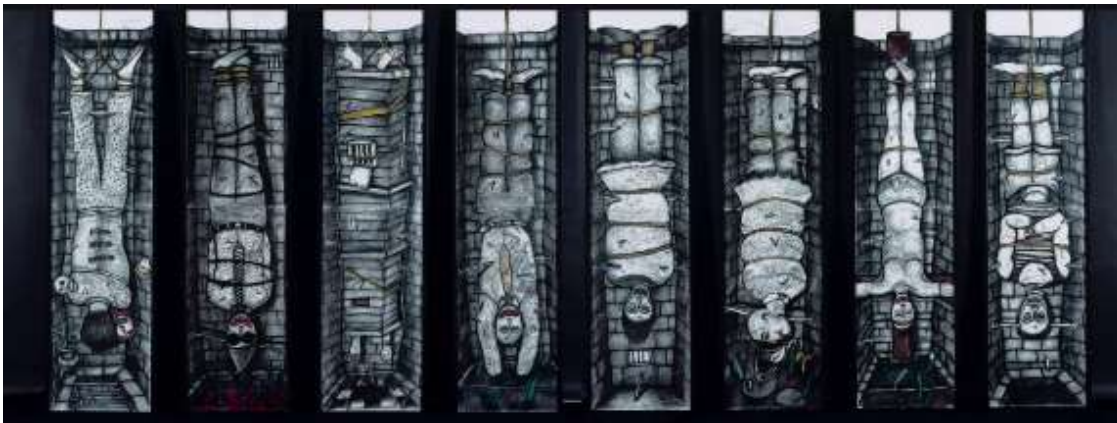
Heri Dono, *The Presidential Candidates*, acrylic on canvas, 200x150cm, 2008, courtesy of the artist

“As an art student in Yogyakarta, I came into contact with the work of Walt Disney, Hanna-Barbera and local comics like Panjia Comics, Kompasicon, Metukaren and many others,” I was told by Heri Dono. “At first, my art was solely inspired by masters like Paul Klee, Picasso, Mirò and Gauguin; then I also started looking at comics and cartoon figures.”

Agung Kurniawan, founder of the Kedai Kebun Forum, shares the same passion: “Comics are my first love. My generation was the first which grew up reading comic books. They were my bible. I was raised a Catholic, and comics were the prize promised by my mother to convince me to go to the church. Furthermore every church had a library with a big collection of comic books, from local titles to French ones like Tintin and Asterix.”

In the '90s, during the boom of Surrealist painting in Indonesia, Agung and his colleagues found that comic books were an easy, do-it-yourself format for sharing: “We could draw comics and make copies for the public. I love comics because they are so much more democratic than paintings, and have subjects you can't find in painting, like nonsensical stories, eroticism,

pornography... you can do whatever you want.” Today, in the work of the new generation of Indo Pop painters, the distinction is increasingly blurred and all sorts of themes appear in the canvases.



Agung Kurniawan, *Very Very Happy Victims*, 1996, 158 x 40 cm each, Collection of Singapore Art Museum

Artists from the '80s and '90s, however, used comics in a much more militant way, conveying strong socio-political messages. In works like *Happy Happy Victims*, Agung Kurniawan depicted comic-like figures hanging upside down from a well. He was denouncing the self-contented attitude of people under the Suharto regime, who were mindlessly forgoing their freedom.

The *Kedai Kebun Forum* was one of the first spaces in Jogja to promote the introduction of gadgets and merchandise to an art show. The idea was to support young artists who were not attracting rich collectors (yet). The new generations bask in this *modus operandi*. What goes for the more established names such as Eko Nugroho and Uji “Hahan” Handoko, who are today in their 30s, also goes for up-and-coming artists, who look at the previous generation in terms of marketing strategies.

Belonging to the latest wave of Indo Pop artists, Muchlis Fachri also runs a gadget company with Puji Lestari called *JUNK NOT DEAD*, producing a range of edgy and offbeat products, from posters to bags and dolls. His ties to the previous generations are both formal – the influence of Uji “Hahan” Handoko is evident – but also direct, as the young artist assisted Eddie Hara in a project at *Artotel Jakarta*.

Eddie Hara is indeed a strong reference point for Indo Pop painters. The artist’s work bridges comics, graffiti and international art tendencies. A fan of American comics from the '80s and early '90s, he has always absorbed visual cues from street art into his work: “All the good street artists have been educated in art academies, which is why all the stickers are very well composed. The boundaries between highbrow and lowbrow are becoming more and more indistinct.” Indo Pop artists might be seen as the most blatant illustration of this maxim.





Eddie Hara, Neo Ethno Electro Trash, acrylic on wood, 40 x 30 cm, courtesy of Element Art Space

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**Naima Morelli** is an arts writer and curator with a focus on contemporary art from the Asia Pacific region. She has written for ArtsHub, Art Monthly Australia, Art to Part of Culture and Escape Magazine, among others, and she is the author of “Arte Contemporanea in Indonesia, un’introduzione” a book focused on the development of contemporary art in Indonesia. As a curator, her practice revolves around creating meaningful connections between Asia, Europe and Australia.

[#Agung Kurniawan#Eddie HARA#Eko Nugroho#Equator Art Projects#Farhan Siki#Heri Dono#Indonesian art#Naima Morelli#Nyoman Masriadi#Primo Marella Gallery#S. Teddy D.](#)

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