

Agung Kurniawan

Artist Statement and Biography

Artist Statement

Almost all of Agung Kurniawan's trellis works begin from a photograph, whether it is from his personal collection of photos or from the mass media, which is then transferred into line drawings. These line drawings become the blueprint for the form through the medium of wrought iron.

Agung's trellis works also often use photographs that he finds in the mass media. Pictures that help in the formation of perceptions of Indonesia's history and the world. Even before the development of digitised photography that broadened the possibilities of distorted visual recordings, photography already had a tendency to pre-construct perceptions. Location, figure, expression, and forms that the photographer chooses to capture, all deliberately arranged or recorded in such a way to create a perception with a particular objective, whether personal or communal.

Although photography has become categorical proof, the whole truth of the picture can only be known by those who were in the room at the time the photograph was taken. In the photographic process there is a selection of reality. What occurred before and after the moment the lens opened and closed may be far from the perception that the photographer succeeding in capturing. When it is placed in the mass media, this practice forms opinions and can change the collective memory of a particular event.

Agung captures this in this work, *Jakarta 1998* – a series recollecting the memories of the riot during the fall of Suharto, a catharsis in a not-so-distant past in the collective memory of Indonesian society.

Artist Biography

Agung Kurniawan Indonesia

b. 1968, Jember, East Java, Indonesia
Currently lives and works in Yogyakarta, Indonesia

Agung Kurniawan has developed his work as an artist within the field of concrete socio-cultural activism. He believes that the role of an artist is more than simply to produce work and that there are larger social responsibilities to meet. Both studio artist and art activist, he takes clear positions and his approach often take him down to street level or into intervening in bureaucratic structures.

Kurniawan is known as fairly 'coarse' due to his utilisation of themes of violence, politics and taboo in his work. He started out with book illustrations, drawings and comics that put a harsh, often satirical critique to the Indonesian society at that time. With his drawing *Happy Victim* (1996), depicting people hanging upside down while laughing like cheerful victims, he won the Philip Morris Art Award 1996 and gained international recognition. The artist stated then in an interview: "My main theme is violence. I want to point out how society can live in the centre of violence and repression that is so suppressive they are not even aware of it."

Kurniawan's drawing *Holy Family* (1997) was included in the controversial *Slot in The Box* exhibition at Cemeti Art House that was heavily imbued with political subtexts. The drawing depicted a family of clowns that resembled the family of President Suharto, who was still in power at the time – causing attention from the authority that almost got the exhibition shut down.

Kurniawan's work in the 1990's is an example of an artist's practice from the generation that signified the zeitgeist of the time, a generation which had grown up with the New Order and at the time formed a movement for change culminating in the reformation of 1998. This issue was continued and critiqued again by Kurniawan after Reformasi, with his installation *Souvenirs from the Third World*, (1998). The work, which was currently presented in the exhibition *Global Art 1989–Now* at the ZKM in Karlsruhe, curated by Hans Belting, reflects Kurniawan's unease with the phenomenon of Indonesia's expulsion from the forum of world politics. He felt the political events in Indonesia were a kind of exotic artifact that was easily pawned off to other people.

After Reformasi, Kurniawan focused more on taboo subjects such as sexual politics and personal guilt, which he explored through Christian analogies, as he did with the work *Lapendos* (2011, *Lapendos* is an abbreviation of 'Laki-Laki Penuh Dosa' / A Man Full Of Sins). In this installation he presented a human figure based on his own body-cast, accompanied by monstrous and grotesque figures. This work is meant as an auto-critique after the trend of artists taking on as well as commodifying political issues after 1998.

Around 2006, he started his *trellis* series, exploring issues of memory, both collective and personal. The series was inspired by an old family photo album from 1974, consisting a photo diary of his mother during the last days of her dying father, who died in 1975. The photo diary

works like sequences of comic book panels that he tried to recreate in a series of trellis. Hung on the walls the trellis and the shadows they cast represent the blurred memory recorded in the photo album (Family Photo 1974, 2012). The interweaving of lines, shadows and memory he explored in the trellis was further developed in works carrying social commentary such as Jakarta 1998 (2012), in which he depicted historical events and figures photographed in the media.

Currently, he is working on a series of 'drawing machines'. Artist is Beautiful Machine (2012), for example is meant to engineer the various drawing styles of several Indonesian artists he regards as having their own particular characteristics. The drawing machines are embedded with an ironic commentary characterizing today's artists as 'drawing machines' producing for the market's demand.

Exploring drawing, both conceptual and practical, in the end, becoming his main premise as an artist – becoming the basis of his creative processes. As Agung Kurniawan says, "The strongest element of drawing is its documentary nature. In spite of this, it is unlike photography, which records what is there; drawing is a kind of mental documentation. The most honest archives are those that note events before they occur. The process of making already tells a story about how drawings are given meaning."

Education and Experiences

- 1987-1991 Archeology, Faculty of Literature, Gadjadara University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia (not graduated)
- 1991-1995 Graphic Art, Faculty of Fine Art, Indonesian Institute of Arts, Yogyakarta, Indonesia (not graduated)

Solo Exhibition

- 2013 *Milik Nggendong Lali*, Richard Koh Gallery, Singapore
- 2012 *Actus Contritionis*, Umahseni @ Mentengartspace, Jakarta, Indonesia
- 2011 *The Lines that Remind Me of You*, Kendra Gallery, Bali, Indonesia
- 2006 *Budiman Project*, Artipol Gallery, Amsterdam
Mural Project: Could I entertain you sir, Esplanade, Singapore
- 2003 *Sex, Lies, and Drawing*, Goethe Institute, Jakarta
- 2001 *Lick me, please!*, Cemeti Art House, Yogyakarta
- *Lapendoz*, Centre Culturel Française (CCF) Yogyakarta, Indonesia
- *Lapendoz*, Barak Gallery, Bandung, Indonesia

- 1998 *Ironi dan Parodi*, Galeri Lontar, Jakarta, Indonesia
- 1995 Cemeti Contemporary Art Gallery, Yogyakarta, Indonesia
- 1994 Cemeti Contemporary Art Gallery, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

Selected Group Exhibitions

- 2013 *SIP, Cotemporary Indonesian Art*, Mathias Ardnt gallery, Singapore
Once Upon a Time, The Collection Now, Van Abbe Museum, The Netherland
Masya Allah transgenic. Performance at Jogja Bienalle XIII, Yogyakarta, Indonesia
- 2012 *Penumbrae*, at Art Stage Singapore 2012, presented by Umahseni Art Space, Marina Bay Sands, Exhibition and Convention Center, Singapore
Legacy: The Trace of Civilization, Esa Sampoerna Art Museum, Surabaya, Indonesia
Michael Jansen Gallery, Berlin, Germany
Domestic stuff, Cemeti art house Yogyakarta, Salihara jakarta
Looking East, Art Jog 2012, Yogyakarta
Gwangju Bienalle, Roundtable, Gwangju South Korea, 2012
SIP, Cotemporary Indonesian Art, Mathias Ardnt Gallery, Berlin
- 2011 *Art Amsterdam*, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
New Mythology, Louis Vuitton Gallery, Paris, France
Global Art From 1989 till Now, ZKM, Karlsruhe, Germany
Beastly, Cemeti Art House, Yogyakarta, Indonesia
- 2010 *Art Amsterdam*, Amsterdam, the Netherlands
Space & Image, Ciputra World Marketing Gallery, Jakarta, Indonesia
Crossing and Blurring the Boundaries: Medium in Indonesian Contemporary Art, Andi's Gallery, Jakarta, Indonesia
Manifesto In the New Aesthetic, ICA, Singapore
- 2009 *Beyond the Dutch*, Central museum Utrecht, The Netherlands
Jogja Art Fair II, Jogjakarta Art Centre, Yogyakarta, Indonesia
The Living legends, National Gallery Indonesia, Jakarta, Indonesia
Jogja Bienial X, "One Minute Mute"; Performance Project, Yogyakarta, Indonesia
- 2008 *Be(com)ing Dutch "The dutch day Dreaming"*, Van Abbe Museum, Netherlands
The Scale of Black Drawing Exhibition, Valentine Willie Gallery, Singapore
Grafis Hari Ini, Bentara Budaya Jakarta, Indonesia

Work Experiences

- 2008 Artistic Director, Yogyakarta Art Festival 2008
- 2007 Artistic Director, Yogyakarta Art Festival 2007
- 2003 – now Artistic Director, Kedai Kebun Forum Yogyakarta, Indonesia
- 2004 – now The Chairperson of Cemeti Art Foundation, Yogyakarta, Indonesia
- 2000 – 2004 Research and Development in Cemeti Art Foundation, Yogyakarta
- 1999 – 2003 Project Officer of the publication of *Aspects of Indonesian Visual Arts*
- 2002 Editor and Illustrator of *Marginal Sites*, published by Enrique Publishers, Jakarta, Indonesia
- 1996 Project officer of the publication of *OUTLET, Yogyakarta within Indonesia Contemporary Art Scene*
- 1995 – 2000 Domestic Art Program at Cemeti Art Foundation, Yogyakarta, Indonesia
- 1994 – now Freelance Illustrator