

Farah Wardani

Upon her return to Jakarta in 2000 after completing an MA in 20th Century Art History in London, Farah Wardani, an inspired young art enthusiast with a passion for writing successfully applied for an art internship in Yogyakarta. Working at the renowned Cemeti Art House she was able to meet figures influential in the development of Indonesian contemporary art during some of its formative years. After some months Wardani returned to Jakarta to assist at Ruangrupa Art Space and began teaching Western & Indonesian art history and Art Appreciation at Paramadina University.

“I took my students out a lot to see exhibitions, visit galleries and hung out with them at cafes. I found it a better way to connect with them and get them interested in art,” Wardani explains. “I believed they gained a greater understanding and appreciation of creative thinking and artistic sensibilities.”

From 2002 Wardani’s writings were published in journals and mass media such as Kompas, The Jakarta Post, The Jakarta Globe and Art Asia Pacific. Her career in the Indonesian art world began taking shape and in 2003 her first opportunity came to curate an exhibition at the respected Edwin’s Gallery in Jakarta. During 2004-2006 she was a part of the editorial board of the Indonesian art magazine *Visual Arts*. An invitation to return and work in Yogyakarta at the Seni Cemeti Foundation eventually led to Wardani’s participation in the development of a vital institution within the inadequate Indonesian art infrastructure.

“When I ask people most of them say they are aware of the importance of art archiving,” says Wardani (b.1975 Jakarta). “Yet it is often a boring, endless and thankless task that few have prioritized. Archiving doesn’t promise instant outcomes compared to selling artworks in an exhibition or auction. The value is built over time.”

From 2006 onwards Wardani has been the director of Indonesian Visual Art Archive (IVAA) in Yogyakarta, the first digital archive of Indonesian contemporary art. Other accolades to come include consulting curator for the exhibition ‘Indonesian Eye: Fantasies & Realities’ at Saatchi Gallery, London, 2011, and the Artistic Director of the Biennale Jogja in 2013.

“The goal of IVAA is to provide an educational tool about Indonesian art and its practices open to both Indonesians and foreigners,” she says. Opened in April 2007 IVAA functions as a library and online portal fulfilling roles in research, documentation, digital archiving, public services, promoting issues of art history preservation, distributing resources and reproducing documents while working with many art institutions across the archipelago to preserve Indonesian art. A non-profit organization evolving from Cemeti Art Foundation (1995-2007) the facility, which manages a collection of over 16 million items, includes a reading and community space where a variety of workshops, discussions and events are regularly held.

“Due to the lack of art education the Indonesians are unaware of the fact that we have such a great, long history of art development and how it relates to the national/cultural identity,” Wardani says. “It has inseparable relations to society’s evolution from tradition to modernity, yet unfortunately the art and culture infrastructure has been treated like a secondary or marginal need by the national and regional governments. Private independent initiatives have over time built networks and created niches, yet only recently has art and the creative scene been taken more seriously as a public sector – meaning it has ‘economic/profitable’ value.”

“IVAA plays an important role as a part of a new generation in the Indonesian art scene that takes on new approaches in creating broader access and networks of the arts, along with new artists’ initiatives, collectives, cultural/urban activists and so on, that connects to new establishments in the regional and global art scene such as residencies, biennales and art fairs.”

Wardani’s contribution to Indonesian art has gained her international attention and the burgeoning regional international art hub of Singapore has recently become her new home, now appointed as the Assistant Director of the Resource Center of the National Gallery of Singapore (NGS). Under major renovation for more than 5 years the NGS will open in November 2015 and is the largest national gallery in the S.E. Asian region.

“The Resource Center is a library and archive center much like IVAA but with a S. E Asian scope. Many NGS curators have been in good contact with IVAA since 2009 for research and network building. With NGS’s strong interest in Indonesian art history this will enable the international public to learn more about Indonesian art history and my position is to encourage that, collaborating with the Curatorial and Publications divisions.”

The growing Singaporean art infrastructure is in need of knowledge and collaborations in the educational and cultural development sectors Wardani states. “There are possibilities for Indonesian art practitioners and experts to participate in the dynamics of the rapid developments in Singapore. We have experts but not much recognition has been given them, nor strategies or support are being built from the local art scene for them to shine and expand onto the regional and international stage.”

Wardani’s response to the growing trend of art as a commodity is straightforward. “It’s about emphasizing and showing the relevance of the art practice to social and cultural development. When many people hear the word ‘art’ they tend to think it is about beautiful paintings and some skillful technique while it is actually the content and messages of good art practice that relates to the development of the society itself that has to be promoted.”

While Wardani has become a unique Indonesian “export” she will continue to serve as an executive director of IVAA. Lets trust her example may inspire Indonesians while creating new doors for their participation on the regional and international scene, and of course increased attention to Indonesian art and its wealth of potential.

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