

Ceramic Art in Indonesia

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Abstract This article is about the past, the present, and the future prediction about ceramic art in Indonesia. It will discuss the Brief History of Ceramic in Indonesia, Indonesia Ceramic Art Today, and Future Prediction of Indonesia Ceramic Art.

We have to admit that Indonesia's ceramic was influenced by the West, who separated the craft and art into low art and high art. The purpose of this article, is not to discuss the detail about such dichotomy, but this article merely to describe the development of Ceramic Art in Indonesia.

The research methodology is literature research and field observation through visiting some artists studio and visited the exhibition.

As the observation and research, author found, that Indonesia Ceramic Art is very well developed. We can see from the continuity of many ceramic art exhibition held in Indonesia. Future example is Indonesia Contemporary Ceramic Biennale, which will be held in Jatiwangi Art Factory, Majalengka.

For further research, it is suggested that the research topic is about development of South East Asia Ceramic.

Keywords ceramic art, Indonesia ceramic, ceramic biennale, ceramic exhibition

1. Introduction

Indonesia's ceramic was noted to begin when the Hakka Chinese immigrants from the Kwantung and Fukien provinces migrated to Indonesia around the first half of 18th century. They came as a gold and tin miners. As the immigrants who used ceramics for their table ware needs, then they built the long tunnel, the dragon kiln (tungku naga) for high fired ceramics. Later they were presume as the pioneer builder for the high fired kiln site in Singkawang (San Keuw Jong, 山口洋, West Kalimantan), Indonesia. During that period, it was believed that such kiln was only found in Singkawang, until the Dutch colony instigation, about early 20th century, then high fired ceramics were introduced to another part of Indonesia.

Indonesia modern ceramic art, was began to start when in 1963, the art school of Bandung Institute of Technology (Institut Teknologi Bandung, ITB), opened its ceramic studio,

under the supervision of two painters, **Edie Kartasubarna** and **Angkama Setjadipradja**, who then took ceramic training for about one year in Alfred University, United States. Later a female arts student, **Hildawati Soemantri** (1945-2003), who graduated from ITB in 1971, continued her ceramic study to United States in 1973. After gain her MFA from Pratt Institute, then in 1976, she come back to Indonesia and held her first solo exhibition at IKJ (Institut Kesenian Jakarta-Jakarta Arts Institute) showing installation objects which are shocking to Indonesia's art world at that time. She was then well known as the **Pioneer of Contemporary Ceramics in Indonesia**.

2. Research Methodology

The research methodology used are literature research and field observation by visiting some artists studio and ceramic exhibition

3. Indonesia's Ceramic Today

Indonesia's Ceramic Art is 'in between' the contemporary art and contemporary craft. Ceramic Art in Indonesia has its own heritage, whose influence came from the West. This is because the pioneers of its ceramic arts, gained their knowledge from the West. The West influence which separated the hierarchy of art into high art (painting, sculptures, installation, video, multimedia) and low art (handicraft, decorative objects, functional art) also affect the situation of ceramic art in Indonesia. No wonder in art universities ceramic is under the craft department, and (generally) the artists are categorized as individual ceramic artists who developed their own studio, who create both functional and non-functional objects, and some of them work in a commercial ceramic company at the design and production department. When the students took fine art as their academic major, and have interest in ceramic, later they will be leaded as contemporary (ceramic) artist, whose artworks show conceptual thinking.

The development of ceramic art in Indonesia in present time is become better, but not the 'hot' issue, it moves so slowly. If I flash back from this millennium year, in 2004, we held The first **INDONESIA YOUNG CERAMIC ARTIST EXHIBITION**, held in National Gallery of Indonesia, curated by Asmudjo Irianto (lecturer, artist, arts curator) and Nurdian Ichsan (artist, lecturer, arts writer), they both are from ITB. This exhibition invites all ceramicist from all over part of Indonesia, displaying nonfunctional modern ceramic such as sculptures, modern vessels, and installation art. Then, we have to wait about five years to held another ceramic art exhibition (long period right?), whereas another media such as painting, photography, installation art, video art, multimedia art, are almost every year, and in a year, such exhibitions are a lot. This time the exhibition broaden to an international scale: **THE FIRST JAKARTA CONTEMPORARY CERAMIC BIENNALE EXHIBITION** (JCCB#1-2009), curated by Asmudjo Irianto and Rifky Effendy, including internatioanl artists from Southeast Asia, USA, Europe.

The artworks were vary from pottery, sculpture, installation, video, performance. What became interesting was, artist from non-ceramic background were invited. They are painter, video artist, multimedia artist, and performance artist. The curators, challenged them to create artworks from ceramic, the medium they are not familiar

with. Surprisingly the result was very interesting, as a non ceramicist who made artworks from ceramic as their new media, we can see a different perspective from them.

Let see **TROMARAMA**, a group of three artists who usually works on video art (animation). They present a range of commercial (industry) tablewares, partially arrange on the cupboard shelves and the other spread on the floor. A glance we can only see untidy tablewares, but when we watch their video, these tablewares are moving like animation art.



Figure 1. Ting*
Stop motion animation with porcelain tableware
2 min 47 sec
2008
Sound by Bagus Pandega
Source: <http://tromarama.com/site/works-year/2008/>

Handiwirman Saputra, a quite prominent Indonesian artist, who mostly works on installation and painting, this time he used porcelain showing the inverted skin (leather), the same object that he made from resin. Another non-ceramicist was **Wiyoga Muhardanto**, who never tied to one medium, but in this exhibition he presents the food and drink made from ceramic, the medium that entirely new for him. whilst, the Singaporean leading ceramic artist, **Jason Lim**, who also an internationally acclaimed performance artist, combines the pottery (craft), installation, and performance art in "Still/Life2". He presents range of uniform thin vessels (cylinder like) made from raw clay, arranged aesthetically in a glass tank (aquarium) and audiences' eyes spoiled by the harmony appeared from the color combination between the lighter color from stoneware and darker from terracotta. At the opening night, he gently poured water into the glass tank. The raw clay interacted with water, then slowly cracking and decomposing. We can see a dramatic and touchy process of decaying every minute until the end of the exhibition (about one month), then the vessels become clay again; ephemeral tells. He is smart in manipulating the craft into the conceptual

work. It is easy to recognize the vessels as the craft work, but when it intertwined with a strong concept, then it will tickle audience's interpretation. As a ceramicist, he against the clay tradition which has to be fired to become ceramic art.



Figure2. Title: Still/Life series 2
Dimension: Variable
Duration: 2 months
Medium: White and Terra Cotta clay
Year: 2009

Source :
<https://jakartacontemporaryceramic.wordpress.com/history-of-the-jccb/jccb1-2009-2010/artists-2/jason-lim/>

The first Indonesia's ceramic Biennale was in 2009. The second Biennale is supposed to be in 2011, as a Biennale is an every two-year event. Unfortunately, according to the organizer, North Arts Space, the lack of fund is the problem. The organizer plans to expand the artists which also involving international artist, so they postpone this event until 2012, and this coming December is scheduled for the 2nd Ceramic Biennale. This is a good news.

The development of ceramics art in Indonesia is not supported by magazines, journals, special galleries, and events such as ceramic competition or festivals and ceramic communities. Besides books about ceramics published in Indonesia are very rare. Discussions and seminars about ceramics also very rare. We have a ceramic art museum, but the condition is bad, unlike the ceramic museum in another Asia countries such as Japan, China, Korea, Taiwan. Those weakness is a blessing in

disguise. Because we do not have exclusive treatment for ceramic art, then it will be easier for Indonesian ceramic artist to be well accepted in the Indonesia's Contemporary Art world. We can see in some art exhibitions, such as biennials held in Indonesia, involved ceramic artists to perform their work, mostly installation art. The artists use ceramic merely as a medium to express their idea in order to deliver the message. Some artists who are not a ceramic artists, nowadays use ceramic as part of their work.

The recent Biennale was **Jakarta Biennale XIV** (December 15, 2011 – January 15, 2012), curated by two journalist, **Seno Joko Suyono** and **Ilham Khoiri**, and an art writer, **Bambang Asrini Widjanarko**, including **Donna Prawita Arisuta**, **Jenny Lee**, and myself-**Nia Gautama**. Another one was **Jogja (Central Java) Biennale XI** (November 26, 2011-January 8, 2012), curated by **Alia Swastika** (Indonesia) and co-curator, **Suman Gopinath** (India), including **Albert Yonathan** and **Nurdian Ichsan**. The Jakarta Biennale XIV theme is Jakarta Maximum City, so the artists were challenged to response the urban life in the hectic city. Donna presents paper bag made from stoneware clay attached with branded items to show consumptive urban life style. Jenny Lee, presents faceless fat figurines made from stoneware clay, with fancy colors titled 'Show Off'. I myself, shows mixed media installation art, showing architectural form (floor display) made from ceramic, hanging object house like made from coconut leaves, and floor display made from aluminium. Artwork title is "One Way Ticket", displayed in a room which separated into two by natural screen made from arranged jackfruit leaves installed in threads hanging from the ceiling.

In Jogja Biennale ('The Equator' as its theme), **Albert Yonathan** presents mixed media and performance art, **Cosmic Labyrinth series: The Stupas** (Ceramics, Metronome, Video channel, Installation and performance, variable dimension) and **The Bells** (Terracotta, wooden beads, engraved acrylic sheets, bells, video channel, installation and performance, variable dimension). These mould objects repetitively arranged orderly following certain patterns, to convey meditation visual impression (aura), but the artwork process mostly in meditative way.

Another established artist and lecturer, **Nurdian Ichsan**, presents a life-size clay sculpture, representing himself as the model. The legs' of the clay sculpture were planted and blended to the lump of the raw clay that covering the floor,

showing a metamorphose process from clay to human and vice versa. Probably he wants to deliver the spiritual and religious message : “..... till you return unto the ground; for out of it were you taken: for dust you are, and unto dust shall you return.” (Genesis:3:19)(King James 2000 Bible @2003).

4. Future Prediction

As I mentioned above, that Indonesia’s Ceramic Art is not ‘a hot’ issue and do not supported by appropriate infrastructure, but we have some universities which produce emerging and established ceramic artists who gain the international reputation. Those are ITB (Institut Teknologi Bandung-West Java), ISI Jogja (Instiut Seni Indonesia-Central Java), and IKJ (Institut Kesenian Jakarta-Jakarta)⁷. Some of those artists are loyal to use ceramic as their main medium, but some of them decided to free themselves to explore another material for their creative expression.

Indonesia doesn’t have ceramic art community. There is a HKI (Himpunan Keramik Indonesia-The Ceramic Society of Indonesia), but their main focus is for research and excavation of ancient ceramics. Another one is ASAKI (Asosiasi Aneka Keramik Indonesia-The Various Ceramic Asociation of Indonesia) focusing on ceramic industry. In Bali, there is Gaya Ceramic Arts Center, but unfortunately it belongs to Italian and American. So I can not say that this ceramic art center is Indonesia’s.

Books about ceramic arts produced in Indonesia are very limited. There are some books published by The Ceramic Society of Indonesia, aiming to increase knowledge of ancient ceramics and precious heritage, unfortunately supporting contemporary ceramic is not their interest yet. It will be easier to find books about painting and contemporary art of Indonesia (limited though) but not for ceramic.

5. Conclusion

Those limitation mentioned above caused the development of contemporary ceramic in Indonesia (out of contemporary art) runs so slow. Ironically the creativity of Indonesian ceramic artist may compete to international artist. It is the JCCB#1, who lights up the spirit of Indonesia’s ceramic arts soul.** We are not ‘*searching for the light*’ again (as stated in my previous article in 2009), but we finally find the light, little light still, flaming softly but strong, and **The Light Still On.**

6. Reference

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