

## Art in The Midst Of Environmental Conflict: On Tisna Sanjaya's IBU Cigondewah

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**Abstract.** In this paper, author will examine the work of artist Tisna Sanjaya titled IMAH BUDAYA (IBU CIGONDEWAH) / CIGONDEWAH CULTURAL CENTER. Created in 2011, this work can be regarded as one of the breakthroughs done by Tisna Sanjaya as an artist. By posing as a building, this work has shown Sanjaya departure's from previous approach which put the issue of politics and the environment as mere inspiration for his artworks, to become directly involve within the vortex of political and environmental conflict. To analyse IBU CIGONDEWAH as an artwork and its impact on the environment and society, author examine the symbolic aspects of this building and its physicality and functionality as a building. In order to explore its impact upon people and ecology, author also explores the programmes run by IBU CIGONDEWAH. The author also conducted interviews with stakeholders in the Cigondewah area (including Tisna Sanjaya himself, people of Batu Rengat, and the local authoritative) to get wider perspective on the artwork's impact upon environment where the artwork is located. Cigondewah itself is well-known as centre of textile industries which regularly dumped their waste into its river, namely Cikendal-which also serves as a tributary of Citarum river. The latter recently become the centre of attention because of its pollution and how the river itself increasingly attracts political interests. This paper ultimately aimed to reconsider and dissect artistic practice as one of possible alternative approaches in solving the issue of ecology and political issues. This paper could be seen as an effort to evaluate artistic practice in comprehensive manner, not only for its artistic/symbolic merit but also to dissect how the artwork or artistic/speculative practice could play a role in the conflict of everyday life.

**Keywords** Environmental art, architecture, Cigondewah

### 1. Introduction

The question of how art could contribute or functioning to the wider community has been consistently present throughout the history of the Indonesian art, both during the Pre-Independence period, throughout the New Order and Reformation, even until nowadays. During the New Order period, the Indonesia New Art Movement (GSRBI) emerged as a form of resistance created by young artists towards the dominant aesthetics style derived from the "Kebudayaan Nasional" (National Culture) ideology of the government at that time. Ahead of the fall of Soeharto, art became alternative way to voice inequality among society and the repression carried out by the regime at that time.

Tisna Sanjaya's pieces are part of stream latter discussed. His career as an artist has been built since he was student in IKIP and ITB by his bleak sense of humour and political charged artworks. He is often praised by critics in regards to his ability to his affective communication, the way he crosspollinate between partition within the arts with his contemporary art practice, and his ability to trigger emotion of the viewers through his works. Considering how varying

media he used, Tisna Sanjaya is known as an artist that utilized a lot of approaches, namely graphic art, painting, performance art, and many more. Although his personal expression could still be clearly felt. To give example, I would like to compare briefly his two works namely "32 Tahun Berpikir Dengan Dengkul" and "Art and Football for Peace" (2000). At first glance, these two works have different characteristics, however I would like to argue that Tisna Sanjaya's typical expression style is actually clearly seen. In the first piece, Sanjaya expressed his disappointment toward New Order regime through installation consist of paintings, texts, and found objects. Whilst in the second piece, Sanjaya invited local residents to compete in his alternate friendly football competition in football field that fully covered by his drawings. In these two works, Sanjaya was seen as if he created his kind of dystopian world through his drawings also texts created with his expressive brushstroke dominated by black colour, not to mention his deformed objects, and his way to install found objects. Sanjaya's critical view toward political situation at that time, his experience as a part of theatre community when he joined Studiklub Teater Bandung, and his previous intensive work in etching medium could be viewed as his rationale behind this tendency. Moreover, his works often rely on Tisna Sanjaya's

affective and communicative skill which elevated viewer's experience to empathise in Sanjaya's point of views towards his issues.



Figure 1 Tisna Sanjaya, "32 Tahun Berpikir Dengan Dengkul", variable sizes (source: Widyaevan, 2017)

However, political themed artworks are often followed by the question of how the work itself really has such a political impact. As pointed out by Guattari, art would have "double finality", which have to be successful within both art and social field and also consistently testing and revising the criteria to both domains (1). This also applies to the works of Tisna Sanjaya. Following two works briefly reviewed in the previous paragraph, previous Sanjaya's efforts tend to put political situation as the background theme of his works, rather than intending to have a direct political impact.

In 2010, IBU (Imah Budaya) Cigondewah (in English could be translated as Cigondewah Cultural Center, for this paper I will call this piece as IBU Cigondewah) was built. With its appearance as a building, IBU Cigondewah shows striking shift in Sanjaya's artistic approach. This piece does not explicitly symbolize the political situation in the Batu Rengat area, the location where the piece was erected. This work also does not show directly Tisna Sanjaya's typical visual tendency. However, the Batu Rengat area which crossed by the Cikapundung River is a problematic vicinity from the perspective of the environment. Therefore, it might be assumed that the work of the IBU Cigondewah, like another Tisna Sanjaya's pieces have political intention. Posing as permanent building, IBU Cigondewah cannot fully rely on symbolical reading from its physical entity, thus this paper will also examine how this building functioned socially. By examining this work, this study will further examine the relationship between socio-political charged art and the politic of space through various cross-disciplinary perspectives, namely through a descriptive review approach to the work as a building, as well as symbolic interpretation of the entire piece and process from the beginning until

now, as the process could be regarded as integral part of the piece.



Figure 2 IBU Cigondewah in 2018

## 2. IBU Cigondewah as Building

IBU Cigondewah is a complex consists of two buildings, firstly multi-purpose building typically could be used as a gallery, Tisna Sanjaya's working studio, room discussion, and more. Whilst the other building serves Tisna Sanjaya's own or visitor's personal use, the building itself consists of bedroom, kitchen, and toilet. Moreover, in its yard there are various plants growing. The seeds are voluntarily given from local residents and IBU Cigondewah's visitors.

The form of building itself borrows from Sundanese traditional architecture called *Julang Ngapak*. This kind of building can be easily recognized from the form of its sloping roof pitch in its both sides. From the front view, this kind of roof resembles bird called *julang* spreads his wings. *Julang Ngapak*-styled roof has four rooflines. Under those rooflines, there are low roof pitches that usually called *leang-leang*.

The façade itself took the short part of the building. In Sundanese architecture terminology, this kind of façade called *Buka Pongpok*. With this type, the ridge board cannot be seen so that the form of roof pitch become more visible (2).

From its physicality which borrowed from traditional architecture, it could be argued this piece implies Sanjaya intention to revitalize lost culture in the vicinity. In his written dissertation he said, "Once the previously clear Cigondewah river flowed lovingly into the rice fields, grew rice, grew until harvested and was celebrated with various arts imbued by Sundanese traditional wisdom values, namely *Bring-Brung*, *Lais*, *Benjang*, *Pencak Silat*, and *Syukuran Salawatan*."(3). This nostalgic intention actually the theme that consistently appears in Sanjaya's previous pieces. For instance, in his piece called *Sujud* (2018) which performed in his latest solo exhibition in 2018, he brought a group of Sundanese traditional musicians to accompany him doing performance.

### 3. IBU Cigondewah as Process

The efforts to bring back forgotten everyday activities, including those from Sundanese traditional culture, could be interpreted as Sanjaya's effort to purge the social-politic of everyday life in a lyrical way. "Lyrical", in this case, could be mean as an artist's effort to bring artist's imaginary world or fantasy in his works limited by certain dimension (4). Although if we see previous Sanjaya's pieces, his tendency to use found objects could make his pieces seem leaning into being characterized as "anti-lyricism" pieces, however all of his found objects or readymades ended up being elements of Sanjaya's poetic realm. In other words, in Tisna Sanjaya's pieces, "anti-lyrical" parts were constructed into "lyrical" type of artworks.

With its appearance as building, IBU Cigondewah could be seen as a bridge for Sanjaya's nostalgic realm into spatial conflict of everyday. Here we can look back into the concept of "space as social product" coined by Henri Lefebvre. This concept believes that space is created by human, in turn human would be sculpted by the very space he is created. Therefore, to interpret IBU Cigondewah, we cannot merely rely on its physicality but further we have to consider how IBU Cigondewah itself affects the social-politic condition in Batu Rengat area.

#### 3.1. Batu Rengat Pre-IBU Cigondewah

The area where the IBU Cigondewah stands, namely Batu Rengat, in the Cigondewah Kaler district, began to transform massively since the late 1970s, where the textile industries began to grow in the region. In 2011, there were approximately 1687 small and medium enterprises, 432 trading businesses, 65 stalls and shops. The rice paddies that used to dominate the land in 1960s, were less than 16 hectares in 2011. The Cikapundung River that flows through the area is also exposed to pollution from industry and activities surrounding the Batu Rengat area (5).



Figure 3 The documentation of IBU Cigondewah's landscape in 2009 (source: Kent, 2016:208)

The transition of economic activities which was previously focused on agriculture turned into a support for the industry. One of the choices is to be a worker in an industry that develops in the region, another option is to form small industries that accommodate a variety of factory waste. The pattern of the activity of industrialized people of Batu Rengat as well as the condition of the river damaged by pollution has encouraged Tisna Sanjaya to build "a centre of river culture to inspire citizens to rethink river and its water." (5)

#### 3.2. The Building Process of IBU Cigondewah

The IBU Cigondewah development process was carried out in several stages, namely:

##### a. The location selection of IBU Cigondewah

The location selection of this work stems from the intensity of the interaction between Tisna Sanjaya and the previous landowner, namely Ir. Antonius Sunaryo, who happened to be a painting collector. Sunaryo, which previously keen on landscape paintings, become more aware of Tisna's intensive activities in Cigondewah and become drawn in Sanjaya's idea to make cultural centre in the area. Therefore, the area of 520 m<sup>2</sup> which was previously used as a dumping place and garbage was obtained by exchanging 8 paintings of Tisna Sanjaya (3).

#### 3.3. IBU Cigondewah's Development Preparation

The preparation for the construction of the IBU Cigondewah includes a ceremonial feast for the purchase of land, conducting some surveys on communities within the area, and making sketches and models. Sanjaya's crews also cleaned up the obtained land that previously filled with garbage in order to restore soil fertility.

##### b. The Construction of IBU Cigondewah

From the process written in Tisna Sanjaya's thesis, there is no particular symbols from the materials or the process of IBU Cigondewah's construction itself. Nonetheless, Tisna Sanjaya occasionally invited local people to do Pencak Silat (martial arts) training session during the construction of IBU Cigondewah or sometimes Sanjaya did some presentations of his concepts there, especially when main building was finished.

##### c. The Inauguration of IBU Cigondewah and Its Early Years

After its completion in February 2010, Sanjaya held an inauguration ceremony marked by planting trees. Sanjaya's promoters for his doctoral programme, Setiawan Sabana and Dwi Marianto, also participated in this process by brought *Gayam* (*Incarpus fagifer sp.*) tree seeds from Yogyakarta (3).

Thus Sanjaya embarked some projects involves other parties in conjunction with the inauguration of IBU

Cigondewah, to name a few are mural project by FSRD ITB students and he invited Pencak Silat community to do demonstration in Taruna Bakti High School. The effort of his activities to In May 2010, he initiated performance art event called “ENVIRONMENTAL ART” which involved young performance artists and musicians from Bandung, along with that event, Sanjaya also invite local people to take part in pigeon racing. All of these intensive events culminated in his solo exhibition held in NUS Museum, Singapore, titled “*Cigondewah: An Art Project*”, in February 2011 and a temporary installation in National Gallery of Indonesia, Jakarta.

#### 3.4. *The Opinions on IBU Cigondewah*

This project gained good reviews in its early years and ultimately has boosted Tisna Sanjaya’s artistic career in international art circuit. Nevertheless, how is this project successful fulfilling Sanjaya’s intention “to inspire people to rethink its river” or to switch people’s behaviour that more keen on playing video games in their leisure times? How far has “IBU Cigondewah transformed the area’s culture and environment” (6)? Asmudjo Irianto, pointed out the inherent consequences of this project, in his essay for Tisna Sanjaya’s solo exhibition in 2009, “interactions that must be fostered and continuously developed with the neighbouring community” (7).

However, Elly Kent shows her divisive opinion towards her visit in IBU Cigondewah in her dissertation on participatory art practice in Indonesia. She found that activities embarked in IBU Cigondewah’s early times are not well-maintained. The only activity endured during her visit was martial arts (pencak silat) session for kids on Sundays (7). On later occasion, Tisna Sanjaya did performance art in IBU Cigondewah to greet ANU undergraduate students. It involved traditional musicians, local authorities, and local people. Visitors, including ANU students and Kent, become disturbed and confused while figuring out whether visitors actually a participant or merely a viewer. She then concluded, while she is actually sympathetic toward Sanjaya’s intention, she saw IBU Cigondewah has failed to enacted his idea to convert local people behaviour, and she noted that Cigondewah remains underprivileged, polluted and poorly-represented by its leaders (7). On the other hand, Edwin Jurriëns in his writing on IBU Cigondewah, see the visit as an artistic gesture by Sanjaya to expose Batu Rengat to foreign people in order to trigger local resident to immediately rethink the area and its river (8). Nevertheless, he did not mention further on how the visits actually affected local people in Batu Rengat.

#### 3.5. *IBU Cigondewah and Batu Rengat Recent Condition*

Comparing the photograph portraying area near IBU Cigondewah circa 2009 and the newer one in 2018,

Batu Rengat area now has transformed become even more crowded. There are a lot of new buildings and factories squeezed the area nearby the piece, and with fence installed in IBU Cigondewah, the piece has become more narrowed than when it was erected in 2009. Whether IBU Cigondewah has a role in defending Batu Rengat from such transformation or not, rapid development in Batu Rengat area seems unstoppable. It is not yet known whether this development has an impact upon its river, however the relation between people and its river does not change much. The river is not yet consider as a basis to build their own culture-something Sanjaya aspire through IBU Cigondewah, it is merely a facility to irrigate the remaining rice fields and it remain become the main channel to dump pollution and waste.

IBU Cigondewah was empty when I visited the site in mid-2018. It just filled by few stacks of books with its floors covered by dirt and mosquitos. The second building that used to be functioned as pavilion for visitors has altered to become Sanjaya’s storeroom. After several attempted thefts, Sanjaya decided to build fence in IBU Cigondewah in 2017. These changes ultimately has prevented local resident’s interest to make activities there or just to sit around. Moreover, martial arts sessions that previously routinely held there has stopped for a year. After I conducted interview with some local people, it is noted that there are not so much activities there after 2011, except when there are foreign people occasionally visit around the site.

There was one exhibition held there in 2017, titled “Happy Balangsaks#2” showcased works made by artistic collective called Invalid Urban. This exhibition was held in conjunction of Seni Bandung, an annual art event held in Bandung. Nevertheless, there are not any activities other than those mentioned. Sanjaya actually installed new clean water system with water tap facing the street, intended to be used freely by local residents. However, when I visited there the water tap was no longer worked.

#### 4. **Conclusion**

To conclude this paper, I would like to refer back to ‘double finality’ for art addressed by Felix Guattari which underlining the relation between art and social field. He said that art has to be able to be successful within art and social field, in the same time testing and revising the criteria applied to both domain (1). Therefore, I would like to see IBU Cigondewah has to be seen in those two perspective. Firstly, regarding the building’s physicality, whilst at glance seems different with previous Sanjaya’s oeuvre, yet it contains similar tendency: it contains his spontaneous yet affective gesture and his longing for Cigondewah’s past time. By making it concrete in the form of building, he attempt to channel his tendency with the political process oc-

curs in everyday life in the area of Batu Rengat. Thus, one of the main mark of its success of this piece is how could art could have social impact, or in Sanjaya's term to divert people's habit from playing video games to start thinking about the river that flows through their neighbourhood or start doing some more productive activities (3).

In regards to the efforts to bring Cigondewah become more "eco-friendly" which requires significant transformation of local people residents, it seems IBU Cigondewah is facing some difficulties in maintaining its activities. IBU Cigondewah has become dormant for a while, there were only few activities held there and it was limited by foreign people or people from art world that acknowledge Sanjaya's stature in the field of art-world. It even become more restrained with its neighbors. Furthermore, it has also lost its function as social space where local residents can gather around and embarks projects or activities.

Kent assumed the lack of activities in IBU Cigondewah is due to Sanjaya's wide interests both artistically and politically. This assumption was later confirmed by Sanjaya himself when I interviewed him in 2018. Furthermore he conveyed that he saw the needs of hiring full-time manager to run programme in IBU Cigondewah, at the other hand there is possibility he would flatten the building once he feels it doesn't relevant or work anymore. He also showed his frustration over people's hesitance in changing their behaviour and their attitude towards river. Whilst IBU Cigondewah could be regarded as unsuccessful project in terms of developing alternate cultures in the vicinity, could it mean that this piece has to be judges as merely failure? Does the arts not meant to have direct social impact?

One of the important task for the arts in current days is to help people to sense the ecological transformation around them that happened so quickly that people become anaesthetized (9). The core intention of IBU Cigondewah itself is to make people see the change in Batu Rengat area, inspire people to change their behaviour and activities, eventually build a river-based or river-friendly culture in the area. One of interesting point is the argument over the village tour that usually Sanjaya arranged to greet people (especially foreign people) to Batu Rengat area. Whilst Kent quite divisive over the tour, on the other hand Jurriëns argued by exposing the area to foreigners through arranged tour would inspire people to convert. He later mentioned the TNI intervention in observing the river as one of the IBU Cigondewah's indicator of success. Whilst on certain degree I agree that the act of exposing could trigger some political action, it is well known that TNI intervention was direct order from Joko Widodo as a part of the attempt to cleanse Citarum river after it was dubbed as one of dirtiest river in the world.

Whether IBU Cigondewah aspire to trigger social impact or to make people stay alarmed with the ecological change within Batu Rengat area, it could be concluded that IBU Cigondewah, for now, is in dire needs of maintaining its programme and consistency. Batu Rengat become more packed with buildings and factories and people become wear off for its swift changes, IBU Cigondewah's position is actually become more important than ever.

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6<sup>th</sup> Bandung Creative Movement International Conference in Creative Industries 2019 (6<sup>th</sup> BCM 2019)

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