Indonesian Illustration Open the World: Challenge for Underground (Punk) Illustrator of Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Illustration as part of art works has often been considered a form of low art, but as it has progressively become more developed, it has established a decent place in the art community. Through this paper, the authors have tried to apply a primarily participatory research method, including participant observation, deep interview, and literature studies to prove that statement. This paper focuses on how Indonesian punk artist succeed expanding the art of illustration in Indonesia as well as building local and global networking through the art of illustration, with Kenterror as a role model. He did well in elaborating his punk identity and everyday issues (social, politics, and economy) either local or global scale, and then transform these subjectivities through his own imagination into the art of illustration. As a consequence, he is not only able to share his works to the public and being appreciated, but also able to shift people opinion about illustration, Indonesian artists in particular, which was known as low art becoming more valuable art. Furthermore, he can also build local and global networking as well as internationally acknowledged as a competent illustrator.

In this paper, the authors will describe Kenterror’s life and his commitment to build networking in Indonesia and other countries through his works. The first section of this paper, the authors will discuss the early development of Indonesian illustration, the pressures that compelled Indonesian illustrators to move on, and the influence of punk. Then, the next section will describe Kenterror’s life history, his work in local (Indonesia) and global (international) scope which influenced by his identity as a punk. Finally, this paper will discuss what made Kenterror’s works become so highly appreciated worldwide, and what other Indonesian illustrators can do to improve the quality and global position of Indonesian illustration.

Keywords: illustration, illustrator, punk, underground, DIY, community, local and global, Indonesia
INTRODUCTION

Mirzoeff (1999) states that visual culture cannot be separated from its history and this also apply to the development of illustration in Indonesia. Its modern history began in the period of 1920 until 1950, with the emergence of Dutch artists as illustrators of books for schoolchildren (e.g. W.K.de Brun, Van der Zee, C. Jetsest, Arnoli, H.van Ingen, M. Beuning Eland, A. Bochhorst, Wolters van Blom and Menno). This phenomenon became more familiar during this era, and influenced the emergence of Indonesian illustrators who also started their careers as illustrators for children’s books and text books (e.g. Angkama, Barli, Ardi Soma, Baharudin, Nasru AS, and Abdul Salam; Haryadi, 2000). As a consequence, illustration seems to have become a form of mass culture, and was thought of as ‘low art’. This opinion was also supported by the fact that almost all of these illustrators were uneducated and often self-taught artists (__,2002). In contrast to much ‘high art’, illustration is often perceived as functional, intended to convey a particular idea, clarify a message, or emphasizing the narration of the text. Moreover, illustration also serves as a striking element to create public interest.

In 1998, with the end of the Suharto period and the beginning of the Reformation era in Indonesia, art was often used as an alternative medium in order to articulate people’s thoughts about existing political, social, and economic conditions. Artists took part in this action through their works, such as illustrations, posters, comics, installation art, graffiti, and street theater. Public space was the preferred venue for such art, as its function was as a public activity or expression, so that it was considered a perfect place to share the message behind the artworks. However, during that time illustration was not only intended to create public awareness of existing issues, but also as a deliberate rejection of the formal sphere of art, which was in the grip of elitism, labeling, and excessive materialism in the Suharto period.

The confrontational approach adopted by these radical Indonesian artists brought them into an alliance with the developing punk movement in Indonesia. Indeed, most of the artists who were involved in this “street art” faction were punk artists. Punk culture can trace its origins to the Dada art movement in 1916-1922 (O’hara, 1999). It then began to emerge and evolve in Indonesia since the 1990s. This punk culture was considered to be a new phenomenon within the scope of youth culture in Indonesia, one of the centers of which is the city of Bandung. This cultural activity has existed in Bandung for a long time, and has contributed to its distinctive urban character. Bandung has therefore developed the sociological potential to produce artistic practices that differ from those of other cities or a market because of it is seen to represent the “image makers”.

The emergence of punk illustrators in Indonesia is therefore a very interesting phenomenon. Not only were punk illustrators “off the map” in the dominant art system, but they also created a unique visual movement in order to convey many implicit meanings. For example, Jacques Derrida’s concept of deconstruction was adopted by many within punk culture, in order to break down the barriers to freedom of expression (__, 2002). These reasons also influenced their conviction to always be honest and assertive in the activities they carried out. Furthermore, punk society usually brings up socio-political, power, military, and globalization issues in a very confrontational way, making use of a lot of icons and images that are satirical, provocative, minimalist and generally subversive and uncensored; punk art is not commercial, and often cannot be easily accepted by the general public, because people think that it is illogical, in violation of common rules and the dominant culture of the established system (Susilo, 2009). That’s why punk society and its activity seem to be exclusive and closed to the public. On the other hand, the use of those images is intended as a kind of “shock therapy” and to raise the sense of empathy from the audience.
Through this paper, the authors will describe the transformation of the value of illustration in Indonesia, in particular through the biography of Kenterror as an Indonesian illustrator as well as his identity as punk. The authors will elucidate Kenterror’s life story and his career as an illustrator, which was heavily influenced by punk culture, as it is shown through his artworks. Furthermore, the authors will explain how Kenterror’s artworks came to be appreciated by people in his own social environment, in his society and community, and finally how he reached an international audience as well as the reason why Kenterror’s artworks represent local and global issues and its distribution through his networking. For this study, the authors have adopted a participatory method, combining participant observation with deep interviews and literature studies (Mikkelsen, 2005). Finally, the authors hope to convey how the public opinion of illustration in Indonesia has changed through time.

**KENTERROR LIFE HISTORY**

Kenterror was born as Ivan Nugraha on July 26th 1978, in an urban area at Muhamad Toha, Bandung, and lived there until 2008, when he then moved to Cimahi. He is the youngest child in the family, with two older brothers. Since elementary school, little Ivan really liked to draw. He realized that he was very shy and he could only express his thoughts through drawing. However he could not engage in his hobby every day, because his family was poor, so only after several days of saving his money could he buy the cheap black markers he required. At the very beginning, Ivan would draw anything he found interesting, but he soon started to focus on punk illustration as soon as he became interested in punk music when he was in secondary school. However, he was also interested in drumming, and became a drummer for several punk bands. Since then, the progress of his illustration has been significantly influenced by punk style.

In high school (SMUN 11 Bandung), Ivan’s friends noticed that due to his facial features and skin tone, he looked Japanese, and so they started calling him Kenji or Ken. Ivan liked that given nickname, so he began to introduce himself as Ken to everyone. However, as his father passed away and his brother had no job at that time, Ken had to work to help support his family after he graduated from high school in 1996. He worked as a freelancer for several years, until he got accepted into the production division of a pharmaceutical factory in Bandung around 2004. However, he was unable to secure a permanent position at the factory, and after two years his contract expired. Eventually he found some work as a designer at Airplane System clothing (2008-2009) and Petersaydenim (2010-2011), before he decided to become “the real” illustrator he is acknowledged as today.

Ken started his career life in secondary school as an illustrator for his own bands, i.e. Radio Riot, Hard to Find, Domestik Doktrin, Tuberculosis, Hark! It’s A Crawling Tar-Tar and Kontrasosial. Apparently, his punk-influenced work was seriously built up when he was involved in the band Domestik Doktrin, starting in early 2000. He designed the album covers for Domestik Doktrin (figure 1), and subsequently he not only made illustrations for his own bands, but also merchandise for other bands, flyers for Do It Yourself (DIY) collective events (gigs), and zines, which he continues to this day.

In 2003, Ken and his friends from the band Domestik Doktrin were part of the Balkot collective, which met in a park in the Balaikota (district government office) in Bandung every Wednesday evening. The Balkot collective is known as a DIY punk collective who actively produce album, zines, merchandise, organize gigs, and conduct discussion on various themes of punk literature. Furthermore, the Bandung underground community also recognizes Balkot as a DIY punk collective with a straight edge commitment – that
is, a personal commitment against smoking, drinking alcohol, or taking other drugs, and some of them are also against eating animal products (vegetarian). His interaction with the Balkot collective has been a continuous influence on Ken’s mind, direct or indirectly. As a consequence, Ken decided to add Terror after his nickname; the reason was probably because Ken wants to show the public that his works could be a form of visual terror for them. Therefore, he produced a lot of illustrations and made these available to the public. Through these works, the punk underground community in Bandung became familiar with him as an illustrator; and after some time Kenterror also became acknowledged as an illustrator worldwide, although only within the global underground community.

**THE WORKS OF KENTEROR AS A FORM OF EXPRESSION AND ITS APPRECIATION**

In a global community with complex patterns of life and social interaction, it is important to understand the meaning of identity or local genius, in order to broaden information as an asset to global interaction. Kenterror chose being punk in Indonesia as his identity and we need to try to understand this choice. The cultural absorption of punk in Indonesia has various advantages and drawbacks. Hence, it was not always easy for Kenterror to come to understand his own chosen identity as an Indonesian punk, which has been influenced a lot by surrounding opinions. His thought about the meaning of punk was also prejudiced by these opinions, and this has been expressed in every single illustration he has made during his life.

Kenterror’s works are considered very exclusive because of its limited distribution, being initially produced only for the underground community in Bandung, and subsequently distributed around Indonesia and internationally. In addition, it is his way to confront the hegemony of industrial design which tends to be capitalistic. Ken also continued to use the A4 HVS paper and cheap black marker for his works, as he has always done since he was a little child. These materials are very cheap and easy to get. In addition, the cheap black marker gives a unique effect on the paper; it has a sharp end point which makes it easy to tick so many dots and connect them to draw an image in detail. This advantage is usually associated with specialized drawing pencils, but unfortunately the price is quite expensive. Moreover, these markers produce dark black colors which make the image look sharp and sturdy. The quality of illustration produced with this cheap black marker is obviously just as good as the expensive markers used by professional illustrator. Unfortunately, it is not waterproof, so the image could easily wash away instantly.
Kenterror’s works usually go beyond the aesthetic tradition of public art. Wild imagination together with high technique creates a unique integration between deviance and craftsmanship on every single one of his artworks. His work thus integrates low and high art, in order to provide an ‘outsider’ view of ‘insider’ artistic techniques. Nonetheless, Kenterror’s position as a drummer and punk seems to be the key personal attribute which influences his identity as well as his thought and works. Usually, he draws on his own life experience as a good source to improve his works. He also expresses several values through his works, i.e. education, satire, politics, provocation, suggestion, advice, or even humiliation and laughter directed at anything he has seen and experienced in his daily life and imagination.

As explained earlier, the first stage of Kenterror’s career began while he was involved as the drummer for Domestic Doktrin in early 2000. His works began to be published for a public audience since then as well. Kenterror made illustrations for his band’s album covers (figure 1) and also uploaded them on the internet along with the launching of his band’s album. The internet made his first work not only accessible for Indonesian people, but also internationally. As a consequence, the public began to become more familiar with him and his works. He began to establish an international audience when the online Attack Zine from Sweden was willing to interview him in 2001, and then asked him to make an illustration for their next edition (figure 2). Afterward, many more people became interested in Ken’s illustrations.

However, Ken thinks of his illustration as his passion and a job, because he really is devoted to the art of illustration but he also realizes that he needs to fulfill his economic needs. Kenterror is very happy to be able to share his work with everyone for free, because he has heard that illustrators in other countries are often paid very well (which is quite expensive for punk society). For example, the American band R.A.M.B.O had to pay Mike Bukowski, an illustrator from USA who came to Bandung in 2004 and 2008, quite a lot of money for his illustration on R.A.M.B.O.’s album cover. On the other hand, as an ordinary person who needs to fulfill his daily needs, later on Ken terror also decided that he wanted to get paid for his work, but he has never mandated a specific price for his works. Kenterror prefers to uphold the ethic of friendship to build his networking and distribution connections, because he realizes that his friends are the perfect market for his product. He has learned this ethic through his persistence as a punk, since the ethic of friendship and Do It Yourself (D.I.Y.) are the basic principles for punk society. DIY is the principle that everybody must do everything by themselves, or helped by their friends, but without making any corporation with other parties. However, the friendship ethic emphasizes the important meaning of friendship, so you should not employ your
friends in profit and loss concerns. However, he does not always follow this principle one hundred percent, because he realizes that he cannot fully do everything by himself, but sometimes he needs to compromise with some relevant problem. Kenterror conceives of punk as his habitat, and not a refuge from the disappointment in his normal life, as well as a way to play music and produce illustrations which represent his irreplaceable idealism. He believes that this friendship ethic will be a strong foundation to build a personal and collective base of networking and distribution for both ideas and artifacts.

Several illustrations made by Kenterror are shown in these following figures. Figure 3 and 4 shows album covers and merchandise for several bands in Indonesia and overseas made by Kenterror. Most of his work can be found through this media, because this is how he has become best known to the public. Moreover, Kenterror has also made several illustrations for gigs flyers for several band concerts in Indonesia and abroad (figure 5). These examples show that Kenterror’s work has received an excellent reception from the public, although limited to punk communities. Kenterror’s success lies in the originality of his works as well as his distinctive personality. He always works professionally, regardless of whether his illustration is being produced for free or not. Kenterror’s illustrations represent his personal thoughts and experiences about Indonesia, with the strong influence of the D.I.Y. principles on his own character and his work identity. That is why people like and appreciate his works, and do not judge his background at all.

Figure 3 Album covers made by Kenterror: A Barackca (Hunggary) in 2004, and B. I Object (USA) in 2006

Figure 4 T-shirt merchandise illustration for band from Bandung made by Kenterror
This great appreciation from international punk bands has lead to the transformation of Kenterror’s career stage to a higher scope, enabling him to hold his first exhibition entitled Ken Terror Attack at Pitch Black Café, Singapore in 2008. Afterward, the Indonesian public art world realized Ken’s position as a world recognized artist, and began to invite Kenterror to conduct exhibitions in the “established” and “high class” art galleries in Indonesia. This kind of gallery usually will not invite artists like Kenterror, and previously judged him as unworthy because of his punk background. It is true that in Indonesia, people still tend to have very negative opinions about punk. The first Kenterror exhibition in Indonesia was held in 2009 at Selasar Sunaryo Bandung (Bandung New Emergence II). After that, Kenterror has exhibited in several galleries in Indonesia, with over ten exhibitions to date. Apparently, Kenterror’s works are not only appreciated by illustrators, but also by other artists. For example, for the “high art” poster for the Art & Resistance exhibition (2006) in Sanggar Luhur Gallery, Bandung (figure 7), F. A. Prasetyo made use of a Kenterror illustration as a supplementary design to complete his idea on this poster.
THE WORKS OF KENTERRO as REPRESENTATION OF LOCAL AND GLOBAL ISSUES

Appadurai (1996) stated that the transformation of everyday subjectivities through media and imagination is not only a cultural fact, but deeply connected to politics, through the new ways individual interests crosscut those of the nation-state. Kenterror interpret this opinion as the role of an illustrator as a person who could transform everyday subjectivities through his own imagination into the art of illustration. This illustration should be able to mediate global issue to attain public appreciation and lead social critics under the control of the illustrator. In this case, Kenterror try to bring up everyday issues (social, politic, and economy) in local and global scale through his work and share it via his network to be appreciated by public and provoke them having the same opinion with him. Moreover, his identity as a punk influence his work, either style or the utilization of certain punk attributes (material, linguistic, or territorial) in order to create new semiotic and alternative which represent contemporary art of illustration.

As we have seen on previous section, each illustration made by Kenterror’s work has implicit meaning related to everyday issues, either local or global. These following are the example of several issues raised in Kenterror’s works. In figure 3, Kenterror try to criticize capitalism and American embargo as global issue. He illustrates how people can deal with any problem under the control of money (left). In addition, figure 3 (right) describe the USA President at that time accused as the person who was responsible for many children in the world who had no more future. In figure 4, Kenterror bring up peace as his illustration theme which applies on punk band merchandise. Skull and other punk attributes were chosen as general punk identity wherever punk culture adopted. In contrary, Ken also raise up local issue as we can see on figure 5B about farming and agrarian. In this figure, Ken use Indonesian farmer as local icon who try to break the wall of any factor which limit his farm production. Youth culture and public health issues also can be seen in Kenterror's work (figure 6). In general, those illustration themes always chosen as response of up to date issues (local and global).
CONCLUSION

These days, illustration is no longer considered as a form of ‘low art’, but is as well appreciated as any other high art. Kenterror has made a significant contribution to raising the value of Indonesian illustration from a ‘low art’ to a ‘high art’, as explained above. Through his hard work, he has shown people that illustration is not only a common form of mass culture, and also that high art is not only for educated elite. Moreover, he has also convinced people not to judge artist by their educational or socio-economics and politics background. It is better to judge artists by their artwork (originality, concept, and techniques). Kenterror, as an uneducated and self-taught artist who did not have access to an academic art education, nevertheless proved that he could be acknowledged as an artist on a global level, through his original ideas, good concepts, and appropriate techniques for his work.

Kenterror’s identity as a band drummer and punk also has a positive impact on people’s opinions about punk society. People in Indonesia have started to believe that punk society is not always negative. Indeed, they can also make an excellent contribution to society, and especially to their own communities. On the other hand, the ethic of friendship and D.I.Y. principles has a strong effect on building up social networking and product distribution. The impact of these principles has been to break down the barriers between low and high art.

Furthermore, Kenterror succeed elaborating his punk identity and everyday issues (social, politics, and economy) either local or global scale, and then transform these subjectivities through his own imagination into the art of illustration. As a consequence, he is able to share his works and build local and global networking.

However, this is not the end of the story of Indonesian illustration, which has become acknowledged as high art. Only a very few people have had success like Kenterror’s, in becoming a notable (or notorious) illustrator throughout the world, even though he was uneducated person and has never had formal training in illustration techniques. Indonesia still needs people like Kenterror to be able to maintain the position of illustration within the world of Indonesian art.

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