ALEXANDRA CROSBY
Gang re:Publik, Indonesia-Australia creative adventures
2008 | Gang Inc., Sydney

Gang re:Publik is a collection of original creative writings and images focusing on exchange and collaboration between Indonesia and Australia. The research for this book was undertaken during the Gang Festival, an artist-led initiative celebrating the deep links between Indonesian and Australian community arts.

I edited and art directed the book, wrote an essay on the Jakarta artist group ruangrupa, conducted a series of interviews and contributed photographs.

Gang Festival took as its theme the Indonesian word for alleyway. It straddled a dual reference to small roads and particular social groupings; referring to the space between more permanent and conventional roads and roles. In Indonesian communities, ‘gang,’ forms a critical artery in Kampung (neighbourhood) culture, where local trade and communities thrive in close proximity to one another. Gangs also evoke images of crevices, margins, and a rich density of peripheral culture. Gang Festival formed part of my PhD field work on cross-cultural collaboration between artists and designers who situate their work on the margins of commercial creative practice in Australia and Indonesia.
We love spontan:
Reflecting on the collaborations of Gang Festival 2006

The first Gang Festival in 2006 was an ambitious adventure involving over fifteen artist-run spaces. We worked together in ways that were often spontaneous and intangible, in galleries, lounge rooms, streets, studios, and warehouses in Indonesia and Australia. In February 2006, still recovering from the kampung street festival, the gangart in the alleyways of Chippendale, and many trips to Sydney airport, seven artists reflected on the outcomes of the festival and described their approaches to collaboration.

Ariani Darmawan

Festivals are usually assessed by their outcomes, or ‘product’, but the meaning of the term ‘product’ shifts over time. Right now I think good art produces good relationships, provocative networking, and a deeper understanding of other cultures, i.e. of other people. Art opens its door to be social commentary for all kinds of people. Art no longer separates the medium, the maker, the idea, and the audience – collectively they all envisage, and build the ‘product’. Artists don’t alter form, they change the way people look at it. (truly, madly, deeply) I think that Gang achieved its ‘production of art’ in that sense. It made me laugh, it made me sad, and it made me cry.

There are artists who live communally in Sydney, but most of them work individually. It’s the other way around in Bandung, where I live. But I see the same spirit. There are small torches, lighting the cul-de-sacs. Yes, I think it’s the cul-de-sacs that we give light to. It will always be. And the reason is obvious, that main roads already have their lighting.

Now at least next time I visit Sydney I don’t have to worry about accommodation. And that applies to all the Gang artists too when they visit us. So, there is an equation, good relationships – low budget – efficiency – more fun. I guess in that way, Gang was about new outcomes. There are some still missing links, but we’ll fix them in our next collaboration, because the easiest way to make anything happen is to gather round two or more dirty artists in a dirty warehouse.

Aris Prabawa

Many collaborations were part of Gang. We (Taring Padi) worked at May’s Lane on a hand painted mural. There were so many hands I can’t count, both Australian and Indonesian. We worked with Mekanarhi at Turrell. We worked with dancers and performers for the closing performance. And also we worked with the staff at Pine Street to make our exhibition.

I think everyone learned a lot. We would have liked a lot more time though, as we had so much to do. And we would like to work more with Indigenous artists in Australia. For Taring Padi members, it was a lot more rushed than our normal practice and we were working with more techniques than we had before, particularly with Mekanarhi who work to very large scales with very advanced materials and technologies. Taring Padi doesn’t limit what we do to one particular artistic medium, but we needed time to make the best of those opportunities.

Gang was kind of like the collective processes at Taring Padi in Yogyakarta, where anything is doable, and ideas and enthusiasm take precedence over resource constraints.
Claire Conroy

I think spending time with someone is the very simple first step to collaboration and cultural exchange. Working with other people on a creative and culturally critical pursuit can challenge you and does require effort, but it is fun, and deeply resonant. The pinhole photograph ‘spending time together, a three hour exposure’ embodied this idea in an exchange with Jakarta artist Reza Afisina. Sitting still for three hours is painful and requires a lot of effort but the conversation, the photograph, and the experience shared are all worth it.

The collaborative experience had many outcomes. I haven’t done any endurance work before. This influence came from Reza’s practice. The material outcome of pinhole photography is from my practice, so this work was a unique collaboration. Working with Reza on ‘spending time together...’ did renew optimism about working with other artists. The Gang Festival also opened up the creative possibilities of working with a team to achieve a large-scale creative goal that benefits many people. It was particularly rewarding to make this happen outside the regular models of employment and institutions.

Hosanna Heinrich

As a side project of the festival, I made a still life/video collaboration with three other women, Ariani (Rani) from Indonesia, Fieke from Holland, and Malenie from France. We jokingly called it ‘cross breeding the dirty artist’. The idea arose during a casual nongkrong (hanging out) session at Giulia, a local café in Chippendale, play-fighting over breakfast. After further developments it looked like this: four women of different cultural backgrounds are seated at a table laid with a lavish Dutch still life. Their attempts to communicate, each in their own language, escalate into violence before they resume their original positions.

The experience of improvisation with four very different women can be likened to the broader processes of working across cultural differences. We put ourselves in an intuitive performance situation, without a common language. There were awesome and unexpected results.

This was my first video work. My main practice involves painting and drawing. Rani is a video artist which was an advantage. The main differences I encountered with Rani were perhaps more on a personal organisational level than cultural. Rani is an extremely organised producer. Where I would lean towards physically workshopping a performance from the outset, Rani preferred to sit in a clear space and discuss ideas, to conceptualise the piece first and realise it with the support of lists, clocks and timetables. A beautiful intersection occurred.

I feel inspired by many of the collaborations that occurred during the Gang Festival, and particularly by this one. It is very likely that our exchange will continue with the help of our trusty computers. A collective adventure is one that we have been actively seeking and is sometimes sadly lacking in the general artistic ambience of Sydney. The collision of minds, especially across cultures is guaranteed to yield original and unexpected results.

James Hancock

Travelling in Indonesia, I learned a lot about working together across mediums because basically there are a lot of things you can’t do solo. Music video makers, filmmakers, musicians, designers, artists, curators and writers hang out together and support each other to create independent projects and economies.

While Reza Afisina was in Sydney for Gang, we made a video together called ‘nangkrong’. We wanted to explore and document the idea of ‘hanging out.’ We stood in front of a chalk board and presented ideas in drawings, the final piece involved speeding up parts and overlayering different pieces of our conversation with different times of the visual, so the presentation became chaotic and layered.

It largely came out of showing Reza my city and him responding to things we saw as we worked together setting up shows, minding galleries, and delivering equipment. He responded to different signs to me but I found he had a similar comic/conceptual/re-interpretive process of looking at the world and playing with words and conversation. The video was successful in documenting a part of our experiences, but as two artists, we really needed more devoted time together, more hanging out. The whole experience of working across cultural differences was amazing though. There were moments where I was so proud of what I was doing, utilising the networks and space I had access to in Australia in order to facilitate the exchange and creation of ideas with an international artist.
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TV and working on a book about her experiences in the town of Yogyakarta.

Rebecca Henschke was born in Sydney, Australia. Rebecca fell in love with radio journalism when she was just nine years old. Her brother and sister were her co-hosts in DIY radio shows. She now works as the Editor of Asia Calling, a regional current affairs program from Indonesia’s largest independent news agency Radio 688 in Utan Kayu, Jakarta. On top of that, she is an Indonesian correspondent for the BBC World Service, Public Radio International in America and SBS back home. Right now, she is passionate about reporting on environmental stories and the food and energy crisis across Asia. When not working she is dancing, traveling and exploring Jakarta after midnight.

Sam Icklow is an emerging filmmaker and video artist currently living in Sydney. When not busy emerging, he enjoys three months in Australia as part of Gang Festival. He now lives in either Yogyakarta or Randublatung.

Ezi Agus Wijaya was born in Randublatung in Central Java. He is a founding member of the collective anakseribuplua, a community of artists/activists that emerged from creative collaborations working against corruption and the destruction of the environment spread across Indonesia. He is also active with the cultural agitators Taring Padi, based in Yogyakarta and a member of the radical folk band Dendang Kampungan. Ezi is a writer, musician, performance artist, and story teller. In 2008, Ezi spent three months in Australia as part of Gang Festival.

Sue Ingham obtained her PhD at the University of NSW, College of Fine Arts. Sue’s research into the history and theory of art in TAFE schools of fine arts. Sue’s research is based on the development of an alternative visual arts and infrastructure in Indonesia in the 1990s. Sue’s research is based on the development of an alternative visual arts and infrastructure in Indonesia in the 1990s.
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