

Mella Jaarsma

15 years of Cemeti Art House, time for chewing the cud

Cemeti hits the horse – Cemeti in Sanskrit means whipping a horse. Off they go, the artists and the audience, let them run in different directions, bumping into each other, falling, neighing (whinnying) and getting up again. Now it is time for ruminating and re-thinking direction and speed.

From the moment Cemeti Gallery first opened its doors on the 31st of January 1988, until its name was changed to Cemeti Art House early 1999, its policy was generally focused on promoting and discovering artists (actively working artists) including in terms of concept, the idioms they articulated, the techniques used and choice of media. In practice, this was effective and contextual for the 80s generation. A wave of tourism, internationalism and global issues, which at that time spread like a welcome mat, helped give the gallery's curatorial policy room to function.

With the lack of an established art infrastructure in Indonesia, working without clear criteria and boundaries, visual artists work relatively autonomously; not so much ensnared by the criteria of museums, curators, the media and government support. But this independent situation creates the urgent need for 'private initiatives' and is partly the foundation for the lively art-scene we are working in, especially in Yogyakarta. Whilst it started as a small artists' initiative (Nindityo and I are still practicing artists), Cemeti is often no longer seen as the 'alternative', but as an established art institution, due to our long breadth of 15 years existence. What are we alternative to, if there is no establishment except commercial galleries?

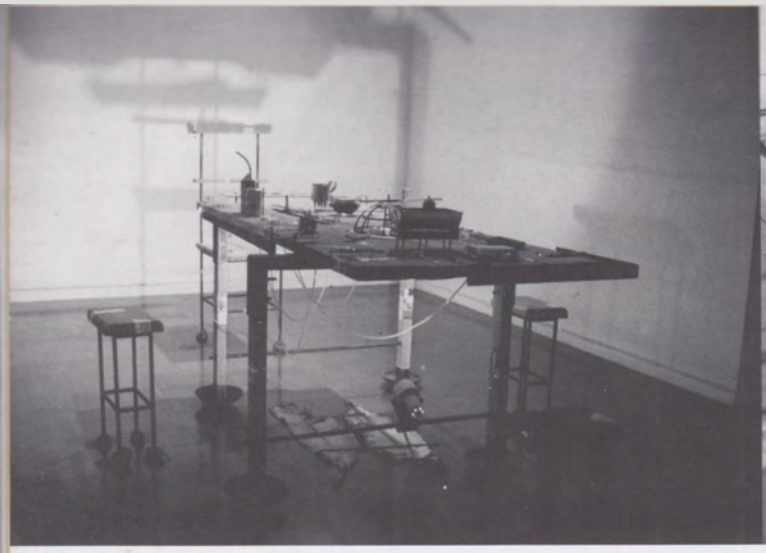
At least eleven exhibition projects have been organized each year, including solo exhibitions and group exhibitions; add to this performances, site-specific and art happenings, discussions, presentations, and artists' talks, as well as exhibitions and projects in other venues and abroad. Something that started as a very locally oriented art concern developed into an international art network. Our broadening of the circle of networking was parallel to technical developments of the communication system available in Indonesia.

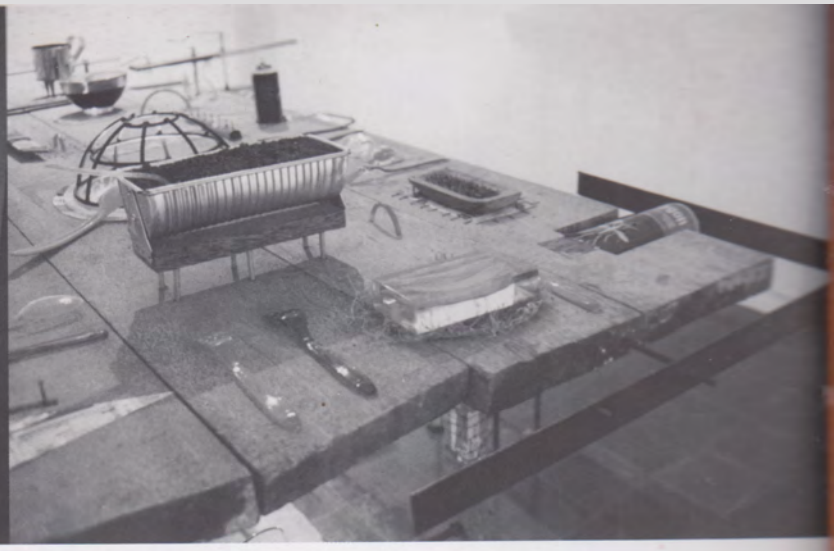
Some romantic reviews:
When we started in the Ngadisuryan location we printed silkscreen invitations by hand and delivered them by bicycle. The first three years that we managed the gallery we didn't have a telephone. Besides that we couldn't afford it, there was also nobody to call, because very few had telephones at that time! Communication was through letters or if urgent by telegrams. In 1991 we got
a telephone connection as did many others in Yogya; in 1992 a fax machine; in 1995 our first computer and finally internet connection in 1999.
Very significant changes have taken place in these 15 years of art discourse in Java, Asia and globally. The essays in this book reflect these changes from so many interesting references.

Given that art is an unstable system, the self-image of the artist and his/her role in society is always changing, and has more to do with reactions to this society rather than valuing art in itself. Cemeti operated for exactly 10 years in the Suharto era and we are now 5 years on. Many artists exhibited by Cemeti grew up in the Suharto era and were very much concerned with the political situation that they critiqued through their art practices. The days of a common enemy have passed and commenting on the social and political circumstances through revolt or provocation is no longer the only way. The recent discussions and art discourses show us very clearly the need to comment and react on a sensible level, with awareness / consciousness of current problems related to the local situation and seen in the perspective of the global market / neo-liberal developments. Artists are no longer only studio workers but are looking for ways to empower themselves and some work relative to specific communities. Education, research and historical methodologies are questioned and reinvented. Non-artists are also using 'art tools' for bridging social activities from different perspectives. The local art field we are working in, and that set up by Cemeti Art House, can be furthered by not only operating as a platform for the latest movements, but going into more depth by stimulating and facilitating specific projects and connecting artists with other professionals. This means in the realization of these changes, we need more people to conceptualize and guide these projects.

We are also reconsidering the necessity of our main objective of monthly changing exhibitions. Is it still relevant to expect the audience / public to take the initiative to come to an exhibition place, or does the artist have to create their own space and projects on the spot where the audience is? This means in the extreme; the artists have to go to the public instead of

Agus Suwage, Perjalanan tamat / The final journey, 2001, pigskull, leather, rollerskate, wood (detail) | Opening exhibition Edy Sukarno, 1988





waiting for the public to experience a specific art space. Another change would be different durations in time of exhibitions and events, recognizing the change in media / art tools. As in the last Yogyakarta Biennale (2003), the younger generations of artists are using more (costly) technical equipment for their work, concentrating on the opening event only. After the opening, the equipment doesn't work, the performers and the excitement is gone. Art nowadays is not only about producing objects to exhibit and sell, but the creating and organizing of activities and happenings in which the public is an active part. The traffic of communication, discussions, presentations and meeting points are as important as the object.

We couldn't have survived 15 years of Cemeti if we weren't compelled by artist colleagues, our staff, the Yogya art community, writers, collectors, researchers and everybody who is involved. We want to thank all for their intense and energetic cooperation.

Our special and sincere thanks go to the contributors of the essays in this book, which show the need for communication through art from very personal stories, to more global perspectives.

We also thank the artists and everybody involved in the two 'Exploring Vacuum' projects, which open up an awareness of aspects outside the regular opportunities and strategies.

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Mella Jaarsma, "15 Tahun Rumah Seni Cemeti, Saatnya berpikir dan menimbang-nimbang", 15 years Cemeti Art House Exploring Vacuum, 2000, eds. Saut Situmorang, Elly Kent, Mella Jaarsma & Wiyanto AP (Yogyakarta: Cemeti Art House), hlm 8-12

Hedi Hariyanto, Perjamuan / Progress, 250 x 350 x 120 cm, 1996, mixed media | Hedi Hariyanto, Yang menindas & yang ditekan / The oppressor and the oppressed, 500 x 300 x 300 cm, 1995-1996