

HAHAN

Hack The Market

By Mariam Arcilla
Photography courtesy of Hahan





Although Hahan tells me he's tired from his turbulence-riddled red eye flight, he looks like he's hiding it well. The Indonesian artist is a fireball of energy when we meet up in Sydney, and it's no surprise—he is known for his lively performances and paintings of visually explosive cartoons with loud attitude.



Born Uji Handoko Eko Saputro, the 33-year old renegade, who goes by Hahan, is on a mission to hack into the art market by making art an affordable, inclusive and accessible affair—with a dose of high spectacle. His last 'art experiment' at Sydney Contemporary in September involved slicing up his painting and selling the fragments for the cost of an art fair ticket, resulting in spectators who became instant art collectors.

Is your latest project an attempt to democratise the art market, at the same time satirising it?

Yes, I want to give people an opportunity to feel like they can be a part of the art machine. But I also want to break down the social status of art fairs. Not everybody can get VIP treatment, and big-time collectors get this. Art fairs are open to the public, and people can see exhibitions and take pictures of art, but not everyone can buy the art. Why? Because this object value is created by a system of curators, art critics, dealers, brokers and museums. By hacking up my painting into small pieces and selling them at affordable prices, I give people—from a high-school student to a 'serious collector'—the same opportunity to own art.

You have exhibited *Speculative Entertainment No. 1* in art fairs in Yogyakarta, Hong Kong, and recently, Sydney. You've obviously nailed the routine—can you walk me through it?

I make colourful cartoon images and words on a big canvas with acrylic and spray paint. My team installs the canvas on a wall and divides it into 2,002 square pieces or lots. We turn the exhibition into an auction, and a Master of Ceremonies uses a megaphone to hype up everyone walking past. If we catch your attention, you queue up and get a paddle. We call your number, you choose a section of art that you like—maybe it's the colour red, or a funny face, or dollar signs everywhere [laughs]. Our assistant slices the canvas with a knife and puts the lot on a silver platter. A cashier takes your money and gives you a Certificate of Authenticity. You're free to come back and buy more lots, and if you decide to resell my art later on, you can speculate on a price. I take a small commission for helping you sell it. Put this all together, and the art fair becomes my medium.



What's the response been like from art fair-goers?

Usually, people are curious about the spectacle of it all, but most treat it like a fun experience. A guy heard about my project at Art Jog in Yogyakarta, but he couldn't come, so he hired a Go-Jek motorbike driver—which is like Uber—and paid the driver to go to the fair and choose a piece from the canvas to bring back to him. It was fun for the driver because he experienced buying art for once. At Sydney Contemporary, a 15-year old boy rode a bus for an hour to come to the fair alone. He'd never heard of me, but when he saw my exhibition he wanted to join in. He bought eight lots, and hopefully he will widen his art collection because of this moment. All this positive feedback from Sydney people gives

me more spirit and pushes me to develop more. I'm thinking of taking this project to London next.

I'm guessing there's another edition to this series?

Yeah, for *Speculative Entertainment No. 2*, I plan to roll up my paintings into a sealed transparent pipe, and exhibit them in a way so you can't see inside the work. You're only able to imagine the idea of it. I will also add an aroma in the gallery that reminds you of freshly printed dollar bills. I'll develop it more, but basically I want this work to show the intangible value built by the artist, and the demystification of the artist when they become a brand.

That said, what are your favourite words from the art world?

Sold Out. Name Card. Discount.

"By hacking up my painting into small pieces and selling them at affordable prices, I give people—from a high-school student to a 'serious collector'—the same opportunity to own art."

You grew up in the Magelang region of Indonesia.

What creative exposure did you get back then?

There were no art museums around me when I was a kid, so the creative environment accessible to me became punk music, comics and graphic art. I started reading magazines like *Juxtapoz* and *Beautiful Decay*. I watched *M.A.S.K.* cartoons, then I got into skateboarding. Doing these things made me want to create a specific language that was visual. So I learned how to draw and paint, and I moved to Yogyakarta to study at the Indonesian Institute of the Arts.

What drew you to punk music?

While I was in high school, my cousin introduced me to the Ramones, Green Day, and the Sex Pistols—he said alternative music was all the hype in Jakarta.



IT'S
TOO HARD
TO REINTERPRET
UNPOLITICAL
ARTWORK



I'd never heard this music before, and I had no idea what they were singing about, because it was in English. But I thought, "Whoa, they have a cool sound!" And I loved the zine-style graphics on their cover albums. So, I started hanging out with the punk community and we learned the lyrics to what they were saying—or screaming. That's when I discovered the spirit of DIY alternative culture and street attitude.

You ended up playing in a few bands yourself.

Yep, I'm in PUNKASILA, Henky Strawberry, and Black Ribbon. There's eight members in PUNKASILA; we're a progressive punk-rock band that exposes the social context of what's happening in Indonesia. During the apartheid a few years ago, political parties and local citizens did motorbike parades to reclaim street power. So, for the 2016 Jogja Biennale,



PUNKASILA turned that statement into instruments. We called the composition *Rock Machine/Soft Power* and combined the vroom vroom engine sound with dancing and organised noise.

Indonesian choreographer Fitri

Setyaningsih transferred the chaos and soundwaves of street culture into our performance. Actually, PUNKASILA was formed ten years ago by Australian artist Danius Kesminas while on residency in Indonesia, and I got to visit Australia for the first time in 2011, when we toured Melbourne.

Australians are great, you guys respond to my art and music with lots of energy.

That's good to know! By the way, I can see how the DIY culture from your youth seeps into your creative process.

Well, I'm not a professional musician, can I tell you that? [laughs]



I don't play instruments *well*, but I can create sound. I'm not aiming for something mainstream; I'm more interested in finding the possibilities behind a song. Punk is about turning the alternative into my normative, and that's why I like making art and music with my underground friends. My art may not have a presence in the wider contemporary art mindset, but it's okay, because it's about inviting art into real life. That's why I sell vinyl toys, play in alternative bands, perform with street hooligans, and work with brands like IKEA and Hurley to turn my illustrations into merchandise. I'm also helping to expand Ace House Collective, a community hub that provides creative outlets for young people.

In my opinion, there is no 'high art' and 'low art' anymore at the moment, every kind of art is important. There is a place for everybody.

@ujihahan