



Museum MACAN: A Case Study of a Jakarta Art Museum

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The Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Nusantara (Museum MACAN) is a private museum, founded by Haryanto Adikoesoemo in 2017 to house a collection of modern and contemporary art built up over 25 years.

Located in Jakarta, Indonesia, Museum MACAN occupies a unique position both within the museum landscape in Indonesia and South East Asia. In Indonesia, it is one of a few private museum initiatives developed since the year 2000, but it differentiates itself by focusing on art education and appreciation, with an overall goal of serving the broader general public. In a landscape where cultural infrastructure is lacking and requires improvement, this makes Museum MACAN a relatively new but vital institution in Jakarta.

With examples from Museum MACAN's experience, this essay explores the role that a private museum can play in stimulating greater engagement with the arts. Specifically, it will address issues of affordability, accessibility and sustainability, answering difficult questions like "who pays" and "what counts?" in the context

of the specific demographics in Indonesia, and modulated by 21st century opportunities.

Indonesia at a glance

Indonesia has nearly 263 million people, at least 20 million of which reside in Jakarta, and is the fourth most populous country in the world. The proportion of youths and people of working age is larger than that of seniors and children (Central Bureau of Statistics 2018), making it a demographic with extraordinary potential.

It also has a growing middle class. In fact, with one in five Indonesians belonging to the middle class (World Bank 2017), Indonesia now has the world's fourth largest middle class with 19.6 million households (Euromonitor 2017), numbers that are projected to continually rise until 2030.

The communications industry is a rapidly growing category due to rising penetration rates of internet services and digital devices like laptops, smartphones and tablets amongst the expanding middle class. Today, there are

over 130 million active social media users (Kemp 2018), growing at a rate of around 10 per cent a year, and over 350 million SIM Card subscriptions (Katadata 2018). These basic statistics illustrate that Indonesia is a country which not only craves communication, but also actively embraces social media.

There is also room for growth in the cultural sector. As of 2016, there were 428 registered museums in Indonesia and as of 2019, 64 of these were in Jakarta. This puts Indonesia in a favourable position to join the global conversation about art and culture.

As such, while Museum MACAN is a private museum, its activities must still take into context of the public sphere—accounting for the religious, ethnic and economic diversity, the role of social media and digital engagement and as well as the traffic and infrastructure in the city. As a pioneer in art education, human resource development and cultural exchange, the museum provides a context for people to understand their role in much larger networks and to see how Indonesia fits into this global world.

Museum MACAN's work

In the very first year of opening, Museum MACAN welcomed over 350,000 visitors, of which there were close to 80,000 children and students and 109 school groups.

We were recognised by TIME as one of the 100 World's Greatest Places in 2018, and according to Google, the museum was the seventh most popular search term in Indonesia, under the category of culture (Google Year in Search 2018). This is a remarkable achievement, considering the

diversity and breadth of culture. This penetration confirms many of our observations about the role of technology in society, reinforcing how important cultural institutions are in a vastly developing nation like Indonesia, where the middle class is rapidly growing and over 140 million of its population has access to internet.

These are some of our notable exhibitions:

The role of artists in Indonesia

Art Turns. World Turns. Exploring the Collection of the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Nusantara was designed to introduce the relationship artists have with the local and international community. Around 90 pieces were exhibited at the inaugural exhibition, tracking the role artists have played in the emergence of the nation-state of Indonesia and its international relationships, both in the modern and contemporary periods, and telling stories of nearly 200 years of artistic practice,

The exhibition was visited by 130,000 people between November 2017 to March 2018, and was able to provide an international outlook by including narratives from North America, Europe, Korea, Japan, and China, in addition to Indonesia. The hope is that Museum MACAN's location in Indonesia will allow us to explore more narratives that are specific to the historical, economic and political context of the Southeast Asian region.



Figure 1. Visitors at Museum MACAN's inaugural exhibition, *Arts Turns. World Turns. Exploring the Collection of Museum MACAN*, on view from 4 November 2017 to 18 March 2018. Photo courtesy of Museum MACAN.

Collaboration with the international community

Yayoi Kusama: Life is the Heart of a Rainbow, held in 2018, was presented in collaboration with the National Gallery Singapore (NGS) and Queensland Art Gallery & Gallery of Modern Art (QAGOMA).

The exhibition, focusing on the works of Yayoi Kusama, one of the most important artists in 21st century, successfully attracted over 200,000 visitors, drawing not only art and culture enthusiasts, but also museum first-timers. It marked the start of our inter-museum collaboration initiatives, and we hope to be able to regularly embark on such projects with other organisations and museums in the region.



Figure 2. Visitors at *Yayoi Kusama: Life is the Heart of a Rainbow*, an exhibition held between 12 May and 9 September 2018. Photo courtesy of Museum MACAN.

Celebrating artists across the region

In celebration of Museum MACAN's first anniversary in November 2018, we opened three solo presentations by three artists in Asia: Arahmaiani, from Indonesia, Lee Mingwei, from Taiwan and the late Japanese artist, On Kawara.

Arahmaiani, an Indonesian mid-career artist, was selected for her experimental approach, social activism, and strong political underpinnings in her works since the 1980s. We felt she consistently incorporated the issues of cultural syncretism, pluralism, consumerism, spiritualism, and environment into her work, and was able to deliver across a vast array of mediums, including painting, drawing, installation, video, and performance. Her survey exhibition in Museum MACAN comprised over 70 works, dating from the 1980s to recent projects, including a few seminal performances: *Memory of Nature*, *Breaking Words* and *Shadow of the Past*.

Lee Mingwei graced the museum with an exhibition of seven major works—including *Guernica in Sand*, *Sonic Blossom* and *Our Labyrinth*. It was an opportunity for the museum to learn about the different ways of engaging the audience through contemporary art.

For On Kawara, we conducted a reading of *One Million Years*, a seminal work covering the passing and passage of time. The public reading involved over 400 members of the public, including actors, presenters and radio DJs.



Figure 3. Visitors at the solo exhibition of Arahmaiani: *The Past has not Passed*, on display at Museum MACAN from 17 November 2018 to 10 March 2019. Photo courtesy of Museum MACAN.



Figure 4. Visitors at the solo exhibition of Lee Mingwei: *Seven Stories*, on display at Museum MACAN from 17 November 2018 to 10 March 2019. Photo courtesy of Museum MACAN.

Who pays, and what counts?

Which brings us to the next point, about answering questions about who should pay, and what should count in a museum. The fact is that museums have a strong civic responsibility. However, offering opportunities for knowledge building, for history and human connection, just to name a few, while extremely valuable, is not always economically measurable.

Being a private museum means that Museum MACAN was initially developed through private capital through a foundation. Although much of our work focuses on civic goals like building art education and appreciation in a landscape where infrastructure is lacking, the maintenance of our facilities and support of our programmes is still largely funded by the private sector.

The question of “what counts” is far more difficult to answer. Despite being a private museum, Museum MACAN still functions within the public sphere. As demonstrated in the examples provided earlier, we take our exhibitions, education, and even our professional staffing, seriously.

The challenge is in keeping this not-for-profit organisation sustainable, not just in terms of drawing crowd, but also financially. As our offerings are unique in Indonesia, and to some extent, also across South East Asia, the public is likely unfamiliar with our activities and organisational principles. We have limited benchmarks to compare ourselves with and are dealing with a public that is not accustomed to visiting museums. To be sustainable, we must overcome the lack of benchmarks, while still ensuring our activities are aligned to the specific cultural and economic context of Jakarta.

When planning programmes at Museum MACAN we often draw back to the civic responsibility of museums and are guided by this: Museums should provide intellectual, aesthetic and emotional experiences which give visitors insight into history, themselves and the world around them.

We may contend that there is both an emotional and rational experience to be had with the encounter between oneself and a work of art. Art speaks to us in ways which are both factual and fantastic, in fact, great works of art can generate conversations and research for centuries, giving us endless perspective and insights into the world around us or the world at a particular moment in time. An encounter with art may also be personal, transformative, expansive and indescribable. Sometimes a single work of art can bring about both types of experience. Yet, while these descriptions may be well understood by many, we cannot assume this holds in a country where art appreciation has been limited.

Who is the public?

Museums require people as much as they require art. But who are these people? Tracing the history of museums in many parts of the world will show us countless stories of social class and exclusion. When we look at the representation of the indigenous, women, and the handling of race and migration in the narratives of museum collections, it occurs to us that maybe the definition of “the public” is not aligned with the realities in society.

Of course, the practice of artists and the current practice of museums is to disassemble these silent institutional privileges. It is fair to say that museums nowadays are well aware of the

diversity of their audiences, and are actively reflecting on and revising the latent inequalities in their structures. It is an age-old problem that museums—in fact all institutions, for that matter, must tackle: How to increase diversity and embrace more expansive understandings of their constituencies.

Returning to the question about who the public is, we have found that in Museum MACAN:

- over 70% of our visitors are female;
- most of our visitors are young and between 18 to 29 years old;
- most of them belong to the middle class and have above average income; and
- a big portion of our visitors are first-time museum visitors.

These results show that as a cultural organisation, Museum MACAN attracts millennials and can pave the way for a museum-going culture among Indonesians. The museum could even become a weekend destination for young families and make it to the travel lists for regional tourists visiting Jakarta.

Ultimately, there is hope. To date, our exhibitions and choice of artists have allowed the museum to think through many of its latent ideas about programming and its attitudes towards audiences. It has encouraged participation, whilst also encouraging contemplation, opening up avenues for conversation about what role Museum MACAN, and art for that matter, should play in our society.

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