



Amna Kusumo, Director of "Kelola"



"Kelola"
<http://www.kelolaarts.or.id/>

Presenter Interview プレゼンターインタビュー Training arts managers to support the activities of the multi-cultural, multi-ethnic artists of Indonesia Jakarta's art NPO Kelola

2008.4.28

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Made up of some 17,500 islands including Java, Sumatra and Bali, with approximately 300 distinct ethnic groups and 600 dialects, Indonesia is truly a multi-cultural nation. Amidst this great ethnic diversity, Kelola was established as an NPO in 1999 and has since brought a breath of fresh air to the arts world in Indonesia through programs such as arts manager training. Kelola's founder and director, Amna Kusumo, spoke about her organization's activities with **Norikazu Sato**, the representative of JCDN, a dance NPO in Japan that has had frequent cultural exchange programs with Ms. Kusumo for more than 25 years.

Sato: I first met you in 1981. You organized Indonesian tour for my company Byakkosha in 1982, which was hosted by the Indonesian Arts Council with your partner Sardono, and the dance critic Sal Murgiyanto. We have met many times since then, both in Japan and Indonesia.

We also worked together on the Triangle Project in 1997 supported by Saison Foundation and the Asian Cultural Council (ACC), and later we met again at the Asian Arts Conference. In 2007, JCDN had an Indonesian tour "We are gonna go dancing!" which was organized by you. As long as I have known you, you have been a pioneer of the Indonesian performing arts community and your partner, Sardono became President of Jakarta Arts Institute (Institut Kesenian Jakarta), and the two of you have been leaders of the Indonesian performing arts community, both domestically and internationally. Would you please tell us about your career as a performing arts presenter in Indonesia?

Kusumo: Actually, I started working as what is now called an arts manager by accident. I went to see a performance and met Sardono in Paris, France. It was in the mid-70s. The performance was quite successful and he was offered to do another work in Paris again. So there were a lot of administrative work to be done, but Sardono was not good at those things. So I helped him out. These things were simple to me, but he didn't know how to handle them. That's actually how I started working as an arts manager. I like to think of arts management still in these terms, the actual essence is "supporting artist friend," so that they can achieve what they want to achieve. I still want to keep that spirit in all the work I do as an arts manager or producer. In those days, there was no such term as arts management. So when people asked me what I do, I had a difficult time explaining. Even though arts management was used as a term since the 70s in the United States in Indonesia people didn't talk about arts management until the 80s. Even artists usually did not think they needed a manager.

Sato: In those days, you, Sardono and Matheus Sal Murgiyanto were trying to create a new movement in Indonesia through the Jakarta Arts Council.

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Kusumo: The Jakarta Arts Council founded in 1969 was part of the Jakarta Art Center built by Ali Sadikin, the visionary governor of Jakarta at the time.

The Art Center was, I believe, the first facility in Southeast Asia, even before Singapore. It had many theaters, including an open-air theater with 2,500 seats, one proscenium with 300, an arena with 300, and studio for rehearsals. It was very artistic. The Center is linked to the Arts Council, which has an office in the same complex. So the Arts Council decided the programs and the Center implement the programs. Interestingly the Center also hired professionals from the business world to run it. The 70s was a golden age for the Jakarta Art Center because the governor at the time really supported it. He came to see many performances. It is also interesting because he was a marine general, but he had a vision about Jakarta as a cultural city. Many performances came to Indonesia during that time. Pina Bausch performed in 1976, and Martha Graham, Merce Cunningham; many prominent artists came in those days. Indonesian artists in dance, theater and visual artists were always at the Art Center. It was not just an art center, it was a hub, and people met there and saw each other's work. It is very different from now, when visual artists don't go to see performances, and theater artists don't go to see exhibitions. In those days everybody saw everything. It was a time full of energy. Many of Indonesia's prominent artists came from that time.

After the governor Ali Sadikin resigned, it was very different. The next governors did not understand the vision at all, and everything went downhill. Now the Art Center is quite run down. There are not enough funds to program interesting events, so the Art Center programs whatever it can and rent its space to anybody who is willing to pay. It is sad that the Art Center has now become a rental space. Since the last couple of years The Arts Council has gotten more funds from the government so they can program interesting had so little money to do anything.

Sato: Pina Bausch's first performance in Japan was in 1981, so she came to Jakarta long before she came to Japan. Was there any government support or special social environment that enabled the invitation of such prominent international artists in those days?

Kusumo: There is government support during that time. The theaters were always given for free, and the technical equipment was quite good for that time. There were many performances from the West because the Art Center was active, and when foreign governments sent artists on tour, they made Jakarta one of their tour venues because it was an exciting place. Tickets for the performances were cheap and the Art Center always had very good audience. I remember when Sardono performed at an open-air theater with audiences of 2,500 for full two days. It was an inspiring time.

Sato: When Byakkosha toured around Indonesia in 1982, including Jakarta, Bandung, Solo, Yog Jakarta, and Bali, I also felt strong passion from the Indonesian audience, as they welcomed not only traditional but also contemporary arts. Some of it was controversial, but I still remember how much people enjoyed it.

Kusumo: It was because people were very open then. People wanted to experience new things. Sal Murgiyanto saw your performance in 1981 in South Korea and was excited that it was a Japanese contemporary dance like we had never seen before. So we were interested in bringing your group to Indonesia. All the performances were sold out and successful, and all the newspapers wrote about it.

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Sato: Despite the controversy, people still talk about the big response we got from the people at each venue around Indonesia during that tour.

Kusumo: Byakkosha was the only Japanese butoh group to perform in Indonesia until Sankai Juku in 1995. In Indonesia at the time there was still censorship that prevented nudity, so I had many nights of discussions with your company leader about the costumes. Finally he had wonderful costumes made.

Sato: Does Indonesia still retain that type of passion from the 80s?

Kusumo: It has changed dramatically for many reasons, one of which is that the Art Center after all has not kept up with the changes in time. The Art Center is anything but artistic. The facilities have deteriorated, and never renovated or maintained well. So it is no longer a cool place to be for young people. It was my generation that came to hang out there because it was interesting and you could see many things. They never upgraded to meet the changing needs. The other reason is Jakarta's change and growth. From then to now, the population of the province of Jakarta has increased four times. Traffic is impossible. People are living very far away from the Center. Public transportation is not good. If you go to the theater, how do you get back home in the evening after the buses stop running? One of the theaters, Jakarta Performing Arts Theater (Gedung Kesenian Jakarta) is located in the center of Jakarta, but 85% of their mailing list (audience) has addresses in the city of South Jakarta. The city has changed and a lot of people have moved to South Jakarta, two hours from the Center, but the government never built any theater in South Jakarta. I think that's what should be done.

Sato: Could you tell us about the theaters in Indonesia?

Kusumo: Every provincial capital has what they call Taman Budaya, which is translated "cultural space." We have around 32 Taman Budaya throughout the country and each facility usually has two theaters. Jakarta has three theaters in the Art Center, the Jakarta Performing Arts Theater, the Goethe Institute Hall, one theater at Jakarta Arts Institute (Institut Kesenian Jakarta), and a small theater at Utan Kayu, and one theater in Salihara which will open in October this year. .

Sato: You began by managing for Sardono and have now been a producer for Indonesia's leading performing artists for more than 30 years. Where does your passion come from to continue working in this way for so long?

Kusumo: It goes back to my spirit to "support artist friends," as I mentioned earlier, and I would like to think that is what I am doing. In the "good" days of the Art Center, support from the Arts Council and the Art Center was enough for an artist to do a production or more. For example a prolific theater director Arifin C. Noor could sometimes do four productions a year and as the promotions were very good, there was always good audience, but the support has been decreasing gradually, and the Arts Council does not give enough support any more. So artists started to look for funding and sponsorship.

During my career in the arts I saw so many talented artists who had difficulty in producing their own work because they didn't have a person or manager who could get support for their work. Some of them finally stopped working. You see so much talents not been fulfilled because of the enormous obstacles. I was probably more

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successful than others at producing and getting support. After so many years of producing, I want to do something else, something which could benefit more people.

I think there is growing concern about how less and less young people are interested in pursuing the arts. For example, in dance, nobody after Sardono's generation. There is only Boi Sakti, who has not done any work in a while, Martinus Miroto and Mugiyono but there are only a few.

Indonesia has very rich cultural heritage and so much to offer. If we don't do something about this state, that culture will be lost—just like Indonesia has lost a lot of its tropical rainforests. Thirty-five years ago, many environmentalists started to say that the cutting of trees has to stop, if not the rainforests will be lost. But nobody paid attention, including the government and now they are almost gone. I think Indonesia's diverse cultural heritage is just like that. If we don't do something about it, it will go away in 25 years.

Sato: Did your concern lead to the founding of the nonprofit organization Kelola in 1999?

Kusumo: It was not exactly like that. The concern was there, but our initial thoughts were about how some artists are more successful than others. A lot of it was due to the management of the group. If you have a good producer and manager, you can get funding and work. So our initial concern was how we help to build the capacity of managers who can work together with the artists because artists cannot do everything. Kelola initially did a lot of workshops in management all over the country. We started really small, and offered workshops on arts management. Some people still think we focus just on arts management. For us management is a tool that when used well can increase the vitality of the arts. Kelola's work is to promote arts and culture

Sato: How does the government evaluate Kelola?

Kusumo: We are an NPO and the government does not disturb us, but they are not helping us either. Kelola has no support from the government. There is some communications with the government. When they do something, sometimes I am invited as a panelist or advisory board member.

Sato: Could you explain about the arts management programs Kelola offers?

Kusumo: In 1998 we did a pilot project. There is no formal education in arts management in Indonesia, no art university offers an arts management program. So what we wanted to do was provide arts management training. So I started to talk to trainers for business management and asked if they would be interested in collaborating with us to develop a module for arts management training. A positive response came from an organization called PPM, and together we went to many arts organizations. It was a learning process for them and for us. We met and talked with many leaders of arts organizations in Indonesia. Out of these interviews, the model for training was conceived and developed. The first arts management workshop was launched in February 1999, where the first module was tried and then revised.

Now we have done many arts management workshops, and over 900 people have participated. A training session lasts about one week for a total of 48 hours.

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Training is quite interactive. We would present a concept and people work in groups to draw up and present a report by the next morning. It is more hands on and the aim is to provide a tool which will allow artists and managers to work. Our workshops are open to the public, and people interested in learning more about arts management can apply people from all over the country apply and a maximum of 24 people will be invited to join the workshop. One of the good things that has come out of these workshops is that people coming from different regions get to know each other. In Indonesia people don't travel so much because travel is expensive. So when all these managers meet in one place, a lot of networking goes on. Through the workshops we know people all over the country. These people become part of our network, which after 9 years is quite a lot. Now people will call and ask us "I would like to go to this city. Do you know anybody in the area that we can work with?"

Sato: That is how you came to publish the directory book containing arts organizations, companies, and artists in every region of Indonesia?

Kusumo: Yes, it was around the time when we started our workshops. It was really difficult to find out who were working in the many different parts of the country. Indonesia is such a big country, it is difficult to make any artistic judgment, as we cannot see all of their work. The criteria for the directory was whether the groups are active, not about the quality of their work. Once we had the information, we thought we should share it.

The directory includes traditional and contemporary artists, all art forms, from dance, music and theater to puppetry. It took us two years to complete the work. We started research in 1998 and the directory of Indonesian Arts and Culture was first published in 2000. There were 3,600 organizations in the directory. The updated version published in 2003 has only 2,600 groups. So 1,000 groups have disappeared. I think a part of the reason was that when we made the directory in 1998 there was a big political change in Indonesia. Suharto had been president for 32 years. There had been strong control, but after that everything became free. You could do whatever you wanted. I think the change in the number is a result of that. But when we updated it in 2003, a lot of the groups were no longer active. We don't make any more printing versions but publish it on CD-ROM and put it up on our website. So the most updated version is now on our website.

Sato: When did Kelola start to give grants to artists?

Kusumo: That was in 2001. It's like a development of what we have been doing. We started with giving workshops to train arts managers, but where would they go? There is no institution in the country where they can apply for support. It doesn't make any sense. So we started to give small grants. Through the arts grants artists put the things they have learned in the arts management workshop into practice. They not only have to write a proposal, but also have to do a report both narrative and financial. For many artists in Indonesia, it was their first experience.

Corporate sponsorships don't really ask you to write a report because they are not interested in reading the report. They are more interested in the size of the audience a production can bring. I think the process of the arts grants has been an interesting learning curve and an important educational process for the artists.

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Sato: Knowing there is so little grant money from the government in Indonesia, what was the hardest thing you had to go through to start such an organization as Kelola?

Kusumo: It was easier when we started because at the time we had full support from the Ford Foundation I think it is harder to keep it going to sustain it. This will be the challenge of Kelola in the future. Support from the Ford Foundation is decreasing steadily, so we always have to diversify our sources of funding. We have also been working hard to create interest in the work we are doing and getting financial support from within Indonesia. Since last year, we have had some success on this side, and one of our programs is now supported by funds from Indonesia individuals and corporations. It is a big challenge for us because if we want to survive into the future, we need to broaden our support base from within Indonesia.

Sato: Do you have any other funds from abroad?

Kusumo: Besides the Ford Foundation, Kelola is supported by HIVOS, Asian Cultural Council, and Asialink Center affiliated with University of Melbourne. We work in partnership with ACC and Asialink for our international residency. The program offers fellowships for Indonesian artists or arts managers to do residency in the United States or Australia from two to six months. For the international residency, we have many visual artists and curators. There are also people from film.

Sato: About the grant giving, is the financial support coming mainly from Ford Foundation?

Kusumo: It started only with Ford, but now the Arts Grants funding is 50% from Ford and 50% from HIVOS. But arts management workshop is only supported by Ford. We have workshop only once a year now. We used to do seven times a year. But for other workshops, we collaborate with different people like ACC, Asialink, and Goethe Institute, depending on the type of workshops, who would be the biggest support. We also have a national internship program, which was started to support young managers, but now we include some artists as well. Because when young managers learn something new through a week-long workshop, they only have knowledge but there is not much place to put such knowledge to work. Initially Ford supported this, but for the last three years, it has been supported by individual donations from Indonesia. What it does is to give fellowships to fourteen Indonesians every year to work with an art organization for three months. The fellowship includes transportation fees, living expenses, insurance and an allowance to see performances and buy books, etc.

Sato: Why do you think international supporters like Ford Foundation became interested in supporting Indonesian arts?

Kusumo: Ford Foundation has had an office in Indonesia for the last 50 years, so they have had a long interest in the country. In the beginning what they funded was not culture but scholarships for people to study in the United States. Many scholars in the 70s, who then became ministers actually studied on scholarships from the Ford Foundation. I think Ford started to fund the arts in Indonesia around 1988. Many Indonesian arts groups went to perform and toured around the United States.

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Sato: You and Sardono have also interacted with Japanese artists and art organizations. Do you think that such collaborations could be a key for the Indonesian performing arts community to develop further?

Kusumo: Sardono came to Japan so many times. So far, working with Japanese artists has been a very good experience. We have worked with Yas-Kaz, Yuji Takahashi, and Hiroshi Teshigawara. One time Hiroshi Teshigawara did the artistic design, Yuji Takahashi was music director and Sardono choreographed and together they did a performance in Kumano. And we have also coordinated Indonesian tours for such Japanese companies as Byakkosha, Sankai Juku and contemporary dancers in collaboration with JCDN, etc. But I don't think it is enough. We need to see more Japanese artists come and perform in Indonesia because now things are changing so much in the world. Seeing what other artists are doing is a very important learning process. I think more artists should be able to travel, not just to perform, but to work for longer periods of time with artists from outside of their own culture. I think we should do more on this side. Not enough collaborative work has been done between Japanese and Indonesian artists. Collaboration takes time. It is not easy. You have to understand them first. That takes time.

Sato: In 2006 when I was invited to your workshops in Indonesia, I realized a lot of the difficulties people face Indonesian performing arts are facing. One thing is the Indonesian currency value in the world and how it influences the arts. I also felt technological problems due to financial difficulty.

Kusumo: I think one problem is that people don't know how to access information. That is why we try to provide information. Sometimes there are opportunities for artists that they don't know about. The Internet is still difficult because many people do not have computers. The Internet is still slow in many parts of the country, even in Jakarta. Within the country, mobile phones have made connecting with people much easier. People communicate more with SMS because it is fast and cheap. Now when people have performances, information about the show is done through by short text messages. It is very effective.

Sato: Indonesian identity seems to be based on a "unity in diversity" with the country's wide spectrum of languages and ethnicity. How do you see that as an arts manager in performing arts?

Kusumo: I think Indonesia is still more of a political concept because what we call Indonesia today is the land that was formerly occupied by the Netherlands. Culturally it is still hard to talk about Indonesia because the culture of central Java is different from west Java, Bali is different, South Sulawesi and North Sulawesi is different and so on. They are all different. If you ask, "what is Indonesian art?" it is hard to answer. The richness and diversity is a unique part of our cultural heritage, and always makes Indonesia vibrant and interesting

Sato: Do you have a vision for your management based on such diversity?

Kusumo: From my experience of working with different people, the most important thing is to respect their ways. Thus it is important that you give yourself time to understand the context in which they are working, before you try to work with them. I think in Indonesia this is the only way to approach it.

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As many arts form is often closely linked to a certain community, it will be very difficult to work with an artist from a community if you do not understand and respect the unwritten rules of the community.

Sato: Recently the term “Asia” has become very important among Asian arts communities. Do you also have some ideas and hopes concerning Asia as a member of Asian arts community?

Kusumo: I have high hopes as an Asian. For a long period of time we have been more oriented to the West than to Asia. We can get grants to visit Europe, we are invited to America. You see many Japanese artists or Chinese artists go to New York. There are less Asian artists going to other Asian countries. Why? I think part of it is the funding. I think it is structured that way. It is not good or bad. It is how it is. Something in place to allow Asian artists to visit another Asian country. Finding support to go to Vietnam is more difficult than finding support to go to the United States. I have hopes that some people working in Asia can start talking about this, and look at ways to make inter-regional exchange possible.

This is the first step. We have to know each other first because we cannot collaborate or do something if we do not know each other. I would like to plan a week-long event and invite colleagues and artists from other Asian countries. During this week they will get a chance to see exhibitions, performances, meet artists, go to their studios and see how they live and work. Hopefully through this process people will have a better understanding of what artists in Indonesia are doing, and the challenges they are facing. I am confident that once we have better knowledge of each other something will develop.

Sato: Maybe it is good timing to start now. So I hope there will be more interaction between Asian countries.

Kusumo: I think it is a good time. I hadn't traveled much in Asia actually, but when I started working for Kelola, I became interested in cultural exchanges. That prompted my first trip to many Asian countries. I got a grant from ACC to travel in Asia and went to Malaysia, India, Cambodia and several other countries. It is ironic that an organization based in New York was supporting my visit to other Asian countries.

Japan is economically strong in Asia, so I hope that in the future Japan will take a bigger role in promoting understanding through cultural exchange between Asian countries.