

Small Group Discussion

Group 5

Participants: Lee Mei Ling (LML), Ann Wizer (AW), Lyra (L), Eko Nugroho / Daging Tumbuh (EN/DT), Flores Man (F), one other man (OM), Jeannie Park (JP)

Moderator: Aisyah Hilal (AH)

Secretary: Anggi Minarni (AM)

Topics: Fiber Art and Its Relationship with the Social Context

AH: Is there really any relationship between fiber art and the social context?

AW: There has to be explanations on fiber itself in this case because fiber has broad meaning. Fiber is at least can be separated in two terms, the natural fiber and the synthetic one. They are absolutely different. Fiber in the traditional term can be related to agricultural world also called fiber made by nature, or natural fiber. The example of this kind of fiber is textiles. Fiber on the urban context will be of synthetic fiber, such as plastics, telephone wire, or electronics elements, as the products of modern industry. Both in the village and in the city fiber has its social context which can be seen as to compare in traditional textile and the electronics products. As an artist I will not see fiber as material but as media for my artistic expressions.

LML: If you come from a country which still see fiber as material then you will not know what to do when you have to use fiber as your artistic media. I come from Singapore where people still apply fiber on the traditional meaning, natural fiber, fiber as material. Then I studied in the US where art education fiber is a vehicle to express the artistic concept. You have to make a written concept to explain your artistic ideas before you start working. In the eastern art education, the material concept is more important, and you do not even have to make the written concept. Fiber artists should not stick on the raw or natural fiber as material. I do not use fiber as material for my fiber art because I do not want to stick on the material, but I want to develop it, for instance on the weaving, etc.

ENDT: The context of their work on this exhibition is the content of DT's mission. The DT publishes a kind of bulletin or newsletter covering comics art created by anyone interested to express his/her ideas on comics. They do not have to be visual artists, even a pedicab driver is welcome to send his comics expression. It is also called as copied art work for the work sent the newsletter is the photocopied version. Therefore there is no question on the copy rights.

The mission is to make a research and publish the critical ideas or opinions or views on the situation of the public. It can be local context, national and even international contexts. The newsletter is published very 6 months. The research is to see the social context before the volume is published, so that in every single edition DT can show the turbulence happening among the artists or in the public.

Somehow there are also some issues not approved to be elaborated on the newsletter, such as sexual exploitation and violence, particularly those without any social context to the situation of the public or without any social mission. Such indirect censorship is

applied by making personal approaches to the person who wants to open the prohibited issues. By such approaches the person is convinced to express his ideas on the issues without leaving the social context of the public.

For EN/DT fiber is just a medium for their artistic expression. In this exhibition they present their work embroidered on some pieces of cloth. They also sell the copied version with cheap prices so that anybody interested on their work are able to buy it. The reason to sell with cheap prices is:

1. to freshen their mind as artist; they do not need to deal with money all the time in all contexts
2. to please other people interested in their work
3. low profit is enough as long as they can buy another book from it
4. this is also to keep their playing spirit clear, free from any disturbances related with money

Talking about piracy on their newsletter, EN/DT has been aware of it and they just let it happen with a reason that the more it is done, the more popular the group will be. As matter of fact, the piratical books can easily be recognized from its outer appearance.

LML: Do they (EN/DT) have any problems with the government related to their work especially on political matters?

En/DT: So far they have no problem with it.

LML: In Singapore, the government provides a huge amount of fund arts every year in millions Singaporean dollars. It is meant more as political advertisement to the well developed countries that Singapore opens towards any ideas expressed by the artists. It is only the surface. The government and the Council have indeed many requirements towards the artists who want to get the fund. Some requirements are including the political terms. When the requirements are broken, then the artists will be black listed no matter how famous they are. Only the minority of the artists who can get the fund particularly those who can get along with the views of the government and the Art Council. As an artist who does not want to have any trouble with the government and the Art Council, I choose women issues as to be expressed on my art. This issue is safe at this time in Singapore.

F: I join in this discussion with my own frame about fiber. In Flores where I come from, people think about fiber as the fiber of meat, particularly the hard part of the meat which we always do not like when it is eaten. Therefore people in that area have their own expression to show that they do not like certain meat by saying 'fiber of the (particular) meat'. As the discussion goes on I find out that there is no explanation about fiber art as that I know. Here is totally different fiber that we are talking about. Yes, I saw the exhibition and I did not find any fiber as my own term. The fiber we are talking about here is irrelevant with the one I know.

Am: It is not a matter of relevancy on fiber, it is matter of increasing our knowledge about it. When you come to this discussion, you know only one kind of fiber. Here in this discussion you know more kinds of fiber.

AH: What is then the relationship between fiber and the social context?

JL: Fiber has something to do with the history of labour.

LML: That is right. In my view fiber can be listed as material, something closer to women, showing a process, and as a vehicle for artistic expression.

AM: In Indonesia, or let us say in Java, we can easily find that fiber has a long history with labour, particularly the natural fiber. People make us of it as economic products, functional products. Until now, we still can easily find such product even in our homes, both the traditional and modern house equipment items. When it is related to labour, we know that the natural fiber as the main material of the functional products, usually handmade. Women take also big parts on that labour to produce those functional products made of fiber, which means that they participate on the economic and social life of the family and in the society.

AW: Artists have to really know the material they are working with. They have to know what they choose, everything about the material or media they work on, the cultural aspects of the material, the meaning, and everything, because everything applied on their work has a long history before it comes to them, whether it is painting or sculpture, etc. Artists have to be responsible towards the material they choose. You know what you are using. You have your own art, not just copying.

L: Is this exhibition going to travel?

AI: No, it is not, although in the beginning we had the idea to travel it to Jakarta but we do not have enough budget for that.