

# How Important the Role of Curator in Determining a Success of Performing Art Events

Irawati Kusumorasri, Nanik Sri Prihartini and Bambang Sunarto  
*Institut Seni Indonesia Surakarta, Ki Hajar Dewantara Street 19, Surakarta, Indonesia*

**Keywords:** Assessment, Curatorial, Performing Art Events.

**Abstract:** In globalisation era, performing art event is necessarily conducted for multiple purposes, either for entertainment or business oriented events. In order to determine the success of this event, the role of curator is very important, although the study of curatorial in art performing still get less attention. Therefore, this paper explains: (1) how curator works in assessing the performing art for an event; (2) what criteria the curator used in assessing performing art. This qualitative research design with a case study was conducted. Data were collected through two instruments, namely interview and documentation analysis. Two curators were involved as the subjects of the study. The findings reveal that the curators so far worked conventionally without thinking some curation models, such as self-reflexive, sampling, traditional, decentralisation curation, virtual curation, artist-curation, and collaborative curatorial platform. In addition, they also claim that some criteria for performing art assessment were not utilized yet in doing their jobs since they only assessed and selected any art works as they wanted to without thinking whether their assessment results met the spectators' expectation and suitability with the event theme.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is one of tourism countries in the world which popular with Dewata Island and its traditions, Javanese traditions and their dances. Although there are still many other interesting traditions should be taken into consideration by tourists, such as Toraja, Lombok, and other parts of Indonesia. In line with this, performing art is becoming an exhibition which accommodates artists to perform their creation. It is conducted annually in some cities, namely Jakarta as the capital of the city and Surakarta in Central Java.

The city of Surakarta (Solo) was originally born from Javanese cultures embedding to symbolism and expressed in the form of art. Regarding this, Solo was then known as one of the cities in Indonesia that has rich of traditional art heritage consisting fine art, traditional Javanese music, as well as other performing arts. Since 2005, the number of performing arts in Indonesia has prompted the government to build the city and make it as the ultimate pillar. According to the data from the Ministry of Indonesian Tourism and Surakarta Cultural Service reveal that in 2018, there were around 61 performing arts done in this city. Some of them highlight on the local culture genius of Solo as

its foundation. The increasing number of performing arts events significantly encouraged the government of the Solo City start preparing the other resources and facilities to support the success of those events through empowering local industries, such as foods, fabrics, souvenirs, *batik*, toys, tokens, etc. This policy purposes to raise income to the people and build a multiplier effect that synergizes the arts and social life community.

The various activities involve festivals, carnivals, exhibitions, and workshops which were then used as a means of city branding that may support the development of this city, one of the program is Solo International Performing Arts (SIPA). SIPA is an International performing arts conducted yearly in Solo which aims to promote the city and generate income for all stakeholders. As mentioned by Jokowi as a former city major of Solo highlighted that SIPA propose to promote the city to be well known in cultivating the tradition and explore to develop the local business people to sell their products. By doing so, the local people can be aware to improve their quality in producing something and creating their arts to be performed in that program.

SIPA has run for six years concentrating on performing arts in many kinds of creation under one

selected theme. Every year the theme is different depends on the goals of the program which is in line with the government policy. So, SIPA aims to support the programs through promoting Solo art heritage for audiences which is completed with many other displays such as traditional foods and drinks, handicrafts, etc.

Therefore, some themes performed deal with the local city policy such as Go-Green program, cultivating traditional and local product to art in globalization era. To conduct that program is not that easy for several reasons particularly in selecting the curators. This is due to the routines done the committee that the invited artist in that event are usually selected based on their close relationship. They do not consider some factors in handling their tasks, such as their educational background, art reputation, popularity, experience, talents. As a result, curators are invited as the committee like to invite. In fact, this is required for curators to consider some points as guidance to do their job, namely: (1) using theoretical frameworks in assessing the artists and arts performed; (2) identifying the needs of visitors to the arts; (3) creating an innovation combining the philosophy of the arts with the trending issue.

Considering this phenomenon, this paper presents a research paper dealing with some points to select curators as an effort to optimize the results of performing arts events. It emphasizes on how the curators work in selecting the proposed art, preparing the performance/events, writing the literary review of the art, and evaluating the events to create meaningful events.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on performance art refers to textual studies that put performance art not only limited to the essence of art, but also how the art correlates with the socio-cultural life in society. Solo International Performing Arts (SIPA) as one of the activities that facilitates performance arts investigates how performance art can be related to the socio-cultural context of society including history, politics, economics, social, culture, education, etc. Sedyawati (1981) mentions that performing art is an art that has been found in later pre-historic times and it has been developed into some purposes, such as educational purposes, affirmation of social integration, entertainment, etc.

By definition, the word curator comes from the absorption of English "curation" which was later developed into curate, curator, curatorial and

translated into Indonesian into curation, curator, and curatorial. According to Webster's New 20th Century Dictionary, the word "curation" itself comes from the Lati language 'cura', 'curatum' which means keeping, caring for, or someone who is in charge of maintaining, caring for, caring for, and watching over things like public libraries, museums, art collections and the like.

With regard to the procedure of work, the curator goes through several stages, including making an exhibition / show proposal, submitting a contract with the gallery and other artists, proposing a draft budget needed for a show or interest in the exhibition. Meanwhile, according to Hujatnikajennong (2015), the way of working and the approach taken by the curator in reducing an exhibition or show are different. However, their scope of work still has similarities, including introductory writing in catalogues, leaflets, exhibition halls, and giving lectures or introductory speeches at the opening of exhibitions or shows. Although this field of work has long been carried out, the presence of introductory writing in the name of "curator" in an exhibition is a new tradition that emerged in 1990 in Indonesia (Hujatnikajennong, 2015).

Furthermore, Hujatnikajennong (2015) elaborated in the past ten years, the term curator has often been used in the context of art in Indonesia. However, at the same time, several other absorption terms appear that refer to the curator, namely: (1) verbally "taking care" means being a curator; (2) nouns are "curated" which means the results of the act of curing; (3) "curatorial" adjectives relating to curators and / or mitigating actions. In contrast, Paul O'Neil cited in Rugg and Sedgewick (2007) indicates that the use of verbs to curate in English is actually a new subject that is still debated.

In the context of art, the term curator and literacy today has developed far into the broader connotations of practice. This is supported by a number of facts that show the expansion of the notion of curators. Hujatnikajennong (2015) defines that the use of the word is pinned to people who work to select or select something, not only for exhibition purposes, but also for other types of spectacle, such as performing arts (art performance).

## 3 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Referring to the data analysis results from three research instruments, it was found that curators should manage their jobs according to the guidance suggested by some experts. The findings also reveal

that the curators so far worked conventionally without thinking some curation models, such as self-reflexive, sampling, traditional, decentralisation curation, virtual curation, artist-curation, and collaborative curatorial platform.

Self-reflexive curation deals with doing curation based on the assumptions and knowledge of the curators (Hujatnikajennong, 2015). It is developed from the notion that the role of curator was to take care of a collection of the objects (Bismarck, 2003). In addition, it emphasizes that art practices have moved away from a focus on static objects and the role of the curator has become similarly dynamic. This is also supported by O'Neill (2007) who claims that the curator is no longer simply a career and behind the scenes aesthetic arbiter, a curator should be creative and active in the production, mediation, and dissemination of art. In contrast, this point seemed not to be identified yet in the field because the curator did not consider it as one of the requirements in doing curations. One of the factors noted was the power owned by the curators as if they could do everything as they wanted without involving others as recorded from the interview with one of the curators as below:

*Kami merasa sudah biasa melakukan pekerjaan ini dan semuanya berjalan baik-baik aja. Jadi, refleksi diri tidak begitu penting manfaatnya, bahkan terkesan berlebihan yang malah terkadang terkesan kami kurang pengalaman dalam melakukan tugas ini.*

(WN/12/AGU/18)

In line with this, the curators also act as the central for many artistic developments as they concern on the role of the audience. In interactive media art, the audience is playing the main roles so that the curator should bring them in the moment of the events and increase the dynamic situations. The curators should also become the facilitator of encounters between audience and artwork (Jonathan, 2001). Data analysis results from observation reveal that curators to some extent has included needs from audience that were gained either directly or from the written requests. It was notified long time before the events begin and it came from individual suggestions and comments for their familiar relationship with the curators. This finding was also investigated from document analysis showing that curators played roles as audience although the pictures were taken when curator watch the performance art events in other places.

In regard to the collaborative curatorial platform, the curator deals with social and collaborative practices. It means the curating process should be based on brokering the relationship between an artist's process of making and the audience's process

of experiencing. In this case, the curator also has to deal with the introduction to complex technologies to exhibitions and museums and the audiences' rapidly developing literacy in technological interaction.

However, what it was investigated in the event, technology, especially digital technology usage was not yet utilized optimally. It is indicated from the way the committee communicate to the artists either orally or using mobile phone. So, the media of technology used was only in a simple way as stated by one of the chair committee.

*Kita tidak terlalu urgent menggunakan teknologi digital komunikasi untuk mengundang seluruh artis justru lebih efektif menggunakan telepon seluler, langsung terjawab dan bisa bernegosiasi tentang banyak hal, baik biaya, waktu, maupun program yang akan dilakukan dalam event pertunjukkan.*

(TI/1/JUN/18)

In addition, they also claim that some criteria for performing art assessment were not utilized yet in doing their jobs since they only assessed and selected any art works as they wanted to without thinking whether their assessment results met the spectators' expectation and suitability with the event theme. It commonly happened that what will be served in performing art events is what the curators like. As a result, it is difficult for them to release from their personal art selection even they avoided them as stated in the interview below:

*Saya memilih artis, ya berdasarkan yang saya sukai. Kalau saya gak suka, gak mau saya memilih karena kepuasan nanti akan berpengaruh terhadap kinerja saya dalam menyiapkan event berikutnya.*

(ES/10/JUL/18)

Furthermore, the data analysis results from the observation reveal that the performing art events runs well and entertain the audience. It was indicated from the audience enjoyed watching the performance and celebrated the moment. This entertaining event could also be seen from the supporting program, such as traditional food exhibition, Batik material exhibition, and other local product exhibition. In contrast, the audience did not think that the event could be used for other purposes, for instance to support the local and central government in conducting their programs and promoting the traditional collections to be a commodity for global market and participate in globalization era. Otherwise, the stakeholders still need some supports to get their potential in promoting the government program as mentioned by the participants as the following:

*We need some parties, especially the government to concern on our products such as traditional crafts of Central Java, Javanese cuisines, and batik as our pride. I do really hope that there will be more events like this which allows us to promote Indonesian heritage not only in Central Java, but also all-around Indonesia.*

*(JR/25/DEC/19)*

## 4 CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on the explanation above, some point can be concluded as the following:

First, curators have to follow the guidance in doing curation, such self-reflexive, collaborative, and technology-integrated curator. They all help them in clarifying their main jobs as an assessor of the artist as well as the connector between the audience and the performers.

Second, the events conducted should support the local governments program and policy not only to entertain the audience but also strengthen the commitment of Solo people to realize the local government goals.

Third, in determining the theme of events, the curator should be critically aware to the impact of the arts watched by the audience, particularly related to the social and political issue.

Therefore, it is suggested that to conduct performing art events, the curators should carefully consider many aspects not only the entertainment one, but also all life aspects which support realizing the local government program. By doing this, the events are not only beneficial for the audience but also for the society surroundings.

## REFERENCES

- Hujatnikajennong, A. (2015). Kurasi dan kuasa: kekuratoran dalam medan seni rupa kontemporer di Indonesia. Marjin Kiri.
- Harris, J. (2002). The new art history: A critical introduction. Routledge.
- O'Neill, P. (2007). Curating subjects. Open Editions.