Some ideas on Collaborative Artistic Research and Creative Innovation between Indonesian and Australian artists

I am going to speak about a particular collaboration between VCA and ISI, Yogyakarta that began with a visit by two academics from Indonesia Institute of the Arts, Jogjakarta in 2013.

Let me say at the outset that this talk was meant to be a bit of background and opportunity for a catch-up with Megan, so let me emphasise please that everything I will speak of here is very much at a developmental stage. And I ask therefore for your forbearance with lack of specific detail. Let me also acknowledge at the outset the background work done my colleague Assoc Prof Barbara Bolt (VCA) and Professor Djohan (ISI) in developing the Research methodologies ideas that here are only sketched in.

The development of artistic research in the Asia Pacific is directly related to the development and refinement of Higher Research Degree programs across the region. For example, in Australia, the University of Melbourne’s Victorian College of the Arts and Melbourne Conservatorium of Music have played a major role in the development of artistic research through the work of the Director of the VCA, Professor Su Baker (through the ALT funded project Future-Proofing the Creative Arts in Higher Education (2009) and in her leadership in the formation of the peak body, the DDCA to represent the creative arts sector) and the work of A/Professor Barbara Bolt (through her various publications on Artistic Research).

In Indonesia, the Graduate School at the Indonesia Institute of Arts (ISI) at Yogyakarta, through its Director, Prof. Djohan, has paved the way for the development of artistic research through inaugurating the International Conference for Asia Pacific Arts Studies (ICAPAS). The aim of this forum is to create an international and cross-cultural platform for research and knowledge sharing across Asia and the Pacific. This annual conference offers scholars engaged in artistic and creative arts research the opportunities to relate practical application of artistic research, processes and creative strategies that shape the potentials of the artistic studies. This conference is about relating practical application of research with creative ideas and to develop new platforms for creative arts education and artistic research. ICAPAS also publishes the International refereed Journal, the International Journal of Creative and Arts Studies (IJCAS), ISSN 9772339 191001. This journal focuses on the important efforts of input and output quality in art education and artistic research through the experiences exchanged among educators, artists, and researchers, each with their very own background and specializations.

ISI and VCA have begun a good friendship that has so far seen a number of exploratory visits by academics and a showcase of student films to ISI from VCA in 2013. Assoc Prof Barbara Bolt last year was invited to give a keynote address at ICAPAS.
In essence the track record of each institution gives a unique opportunity we think to properly examine and measure creative research outcomes with greater inter-cultural clarity. We are aiming to ultimately build a network of collaborative cultural and creative research across the Asia Pacific region through initial on-ground observation and dialogue between ISI and VCA as project leaders. There has never been between Australia and Indonesia a collaborative research project between Universities seeking to measure and qualify outcomes in the creative arts. Nor has there been much meaningful argument about equivalences when cultural parameters are taken into account. So we are aiming to initiate a deeper understanding by asking:

i) What constitutes artistic research within the University sector in Indonesia and the differences from Australia’s paradigm?

ii) In what ways can these differences be measured and interrogated from the perspective of each nation’s culture and history and with a view to encouraging innovative outcomes?

iii) Can a deeper understanding of respective university research methodologies in the creative arts foster innovation in the creative arts between Indonesia and Australia?

iv) Can the study of our respective university research methodologies assist in clearer identification of creative goals for respective students wishing to pursue further study or research or innovative collaboration in each other’s countries – how can this be developed?

**What has happened this far to develop this aim**

A few weeks back through a Dyason grant from Melbourne University, we were able to host Professor Djohan the Head of the Graduate school at ISI. Djohan, Barbara Bolt and I, in essence worked through a ten-day programme of observation/activity/workshop/ seminars with PhD students in creative arts at VCA and Barbara Bolt will follow this up with a reciprocal visit and ICAPAS conference presentation in October at ISI. So, through these organised periods of field investigation, seminar observations, interviews and formal discussion of identified issues in conducting creative research within each programmed visit we feel there will be, and indeed with Djohan’s visit have been, opportunities for this project’s researchers to understand the broader dialogue, scope and management of creative research in each other’s country.

An immediate issue that has was raised with Djohan whilst he visited Melbourne was the desire need at ISI to develop a more enhanced research methodologies unit- bearing in mind that at present most of the graduate cohort are masters students, but the aim is to grow the PhD program.

We work-shopped what happens at VCA as a weekly 2hr seminar over the first semester of the PhD program. Using this as a starting point between us we drafted a subject that examines the relationship between research and practice within the
context of practice-led research. This program of seminars would acquaint students with a range of research methods and research paradigms, key issues and practical skills relevant to the creative arts in Indonesia and of course globally. We all felt that direct methods of showing students how refine their research question/proposal and how to develop a research methodology appropriate to their discipline and project was paramount. Importantly something that seems to be desirable at ISI and is well developed locally is exemplifying research skills, techniques and methodologies through actual pertinent creative example. I should perhaps clarify here that at ISI as at VCA a practice-led research degree involves both a written dissertation and a creative body of work – and the two things together make the thesis.

The draft paper speaks of all the graduate research methodologies we already recognise here in Australia - To introduce and provide students with key research concepts and skills relevant to their chosen project; To introduce students to an overview of contemporary debates and methodological traditions in the field of arts-based research; to enable students to develop a research methodology appropriate to their discipline and project; to train candidates in preparation for research activities involved in higher research degrees; and to facilitate discussion of research ethics, including codes of conduct and ethical frameworks governing research. My colleague Barb Bolt will further develop the draft in collaboration with Djohan and his colleagues at ISI.

So as you can see we are right at the start of things. But we believe that if this starting point – that is to say graduate research equivalences – proves fruitful, we can launch then into student experiences at each other’s institutions as a next step. ISI for example offers its graduate students what they call a Sandwich-lite experience at another institution (one semester) – at present students are electing to go to Europe mainly, and we feel perhaps we may be able direct some of them toward an experience in Melbourne. Likewise we would like to think that our own students might take up a similar experience in Yogyakarta. The aim in all this is to slowly build towards collaborative practice-led research projects and creative outcomes that are regionally relevant and self-sustaining. With a little luck and some perseverance we will move beyond the research experiences generated out of ISI and VCA and might then ultimately push the creative practices of Indonesian artists and Australian artists into closer collaborative considerations of our respective cultures and indeed the broader cultures of the Asia Pacific.

Jon Cattapan, August 2015