

Published on The Jakarta Post (<http://www.thejakartapost.com>)

# Old comic strips enjoy a creative revival

The Jakarta Post | Thu, 03/05/2009 6:44 PM | Life

files/images/p26-b\_8.jpg ID Nugroho



**Another look:** The comics at Cergambore have attracted a lot of attention, and comics lovers are seeing something of a revival. (*JP/ID Nugroho*)

There's no need to seek out Japanese manga such as Naruto, Crayon Shincan, Dragon Ball, Neon Genesis Evangelion or Pokemon.

And don't bother looking for American comics such as Superman, the Fantastic Four, Green Lantern, or even Spider Man.

Indonesia has its own comic-book heroes.

They can be found at Cergambore in the French Culture Center (CCCL) in Surabaya, East Java. Cergambore, the Festival of Comics and Surabaya Urban Art, is showing that the local comic fans' movement is back.

At this event, 19 comics producers and urban artists from across Indonesia exhibited their works. Among them were Beng Rahardian, Azizah Noer, Tita Larasati, the Comic Gangster Group, the Suicide Group, the Sungsang Imaji Group, the National Child Work Group and the False Comic Group.

Other groups who took part were Nasi Putih, Neo Paradigm Neo Group, the Outline Reborn Group, the Syndicate Group, the Virgin is Suck Group, the Wind Ryder Group and the Wipe Group. The most interesting participants were two French comic-book artists, Silvain Moizie and Alfi Zackyelle.

Looking at the Indonesian comics on display at Cergambore is like going back in time to the 1970s and 1980s when Indonesian comics were king in this country. Just mention *Ko Ping Ho*, Gundala Putra Petir and *Jaka Sembung* to people from that era. Of course, there is a striking difference in the visual quality of the modern comics, and the print quality of modern comics is better.

Now Indonesian comics have spawned their own souvenir industry that includes pictures of their comic-book heroes. These range from bags and key rings to necklaces. Beng Rahardian, one of the Indonesian comics artists, said that in

many cases, Indonesian local comics had only recently started to advance.



(JP/ID

*Nugroho)*

This advance isn't just in the artwork, but also in the packaging. Another positive development is the courage being shown in expressing ideals.

“It can be seen again that national comics show the most courage in increasing freedom in expressing individual style, and it's not just the comics that are booming,” Beng Rahardian told *The Jakarta Post*.

Beng observed that the situation was quite different some time ago. Moreover, he pointed out, in the era before Japanese manga entered Indonesia, Indonesian local comics tended to be in a manga-like style. These came from Surabaya and two industry leaders in particular, Calista Takarai and Anzu Hazawa.

But slowly things started to change, as originality in the national comics scene began to return. Beng saw that things were starting to move in Yogyakarta, with the comic lovers' community, called Daging Tumbuh, becoming a pioneer of originality.

More recently, when the comic strip Benny and Mice was published, receiving a great response from the market, it seemed that originality was back and getting noticed.

The presence of Benny and Mice, a leading comic strip in Kompas newspaper, provides a reminder that, as well as displaying originality, the strip must be easy to understand.

“Comics can become famous when they keep faith with the original idea,” said Beng Rahardian.

In Surabaya last year, a number of original comics were signed up to the Romance Surabaya Comic group, a group comprising members of the film community, the Indie music crowd and, of course, that community of comics aficionados.

“We were surprised by the extraordinary response to Romance Surabaya,” Broky, a Surabaya comics lover who is also a member of the comics community Outline Reborn, told *The Jakarta Post*.

That's why this year they will present the second edition of Romance Surabaya to be launched on Nov. 10 to coincide with

## Heroes' Day.

The comics lovers' community in Jember, around 190 kilometers east of Surabaya, also has a history of creating original local comics. A group called Nasi Putih periodically publishes comics and a bulletin that bears the same name.

The community, which consists of young people from various educational backgrounds, actively initiates art events in the city, which is known as Suar Suir City after a local snack, made from a kind of sweet cake with slightly fermented rice.

“We want to provide space for the spirit to develop without having to consider other issues apart from work,” Gunawan, one of the Nasi Putih activists, told The Jakarta Post.

It doesn't stop with Outline and Nasi Putih; the 19 artists and comics lovers who took part in Cergambore have almost all worked on Indie comics.

“Indie comics were the original strength of Indonesian comics, but, at the same time this has become a weakness,” said Beng Rahardian.



**Comics galore:** A visitor looks at some of the comics on display at Cergambore at the French Cultural Center in Surabaya, East Java. *(JP/ID Nugroho)*

This weakness lies in the fact that messages delivered through the Indie line can transform society in a very limited way only.

“So it’s better if comics producers don’t stop with developing their works in the Indie area only, but also move to the industry area,” said Beng Rahardian, who has initiated a comics class at the Samali Academy.

Kathleen Azali, a friendly woman known as Kat, is an observer of the Surabaya comic scene and has a different perception. The owner of a library, cinema and the Café H2O believes Indie line local comics should survive as a proper place for creative people to express their ideals.

Kathleen’s advice to comics artists is to continue with the old comic culture while maintaining Indie comics on the side. “While the comics on the side are really a breath of fresh air in the industry ... the money from the industry comics that make

a profit can finance Indie comics, which are idealistic,” she said.

She gave as an example the Wind Ryder Studio, which has a comic titled Wind Ryder. But Wind Ryder also publishes an Indie work called Komikugrafi, which is printed in black and white.

Work by the Neo Paradigm group, which publishes full-color comics, includes the title *Aquanus, Benua ke Tujuh* (The seventh continent). The same community publishes black and white comics under the title *Defragment*.

“Black and white comics are made with minimum cost and reprinting can be done with a photocopier,” said Kathleen.

Whatever the design, Kathleen said, Indonesian local comics had to remain original if they were going to be appreciated. Apart from needing to support many people, these types of comics needed space to survive, which might mean holding a special comics exhibition.

“It’s my belief that one day local comics known as Indie will be accepted like Indie bands,” she said. “We’ll just have to wait for that time.”

— JP

Copyright © 2010 The Jakarta Post - PT Bina Media Tenggara.  
All Rights Reserved.

**Source URL:** <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2009/03/05/old-comic-strips-enjoy-a-creative-revival.html>