

Wedha's Pop Art Portrait (WPAP): The Emergence of WPAP and its Origins

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Abstract

Pop Art has always been a part of the history of art in the world. With his passion, Andy Warhol offered a fresh idea about art that are different from the Abstract-Expressionism which was popular at that time in America and Europe. Pop Art also took off in Indonesia through one of the popular styles in 2010 known as Wedha's Pop Art Portrait or WPAP, which sets a new milestone towards art style in Indonesia. The spirit of pop art raised by Wedha Abdul Rasyid is a new alternative in the world of fine arts in Indonesia. This article discusses the emergence of WPAP and its origins as a style of Pop Art, and how it became one of the styles loved by designers. Using the historical approach of Giorgio Vasari and Benedetto Croce, this article aims to explain the history of WPAP based on its original creator, Wedha. The conclusion shows that Wedha's experience in dealing with art is able to bring up WPAP its milestone as a repertoire, while making technical artworks in the world of graphic arts in Indonesia. Strong patron support has also increased the popularity of WPAP by forming loyal WPAP communities to continue developing WPAP as an original Indonesian Pop Art style, it become fusion in Wedha's experience, and how he create new style of Indonesian spirit. Although this paper argues that WPAP is not exactly an original Indonesian Pop Art, WPAP has become a graphic art technique that is loved by many young designers who are developing their repertoires in the digital world.

Keywords: *pop art, WPAP, Wedha Abdul Rasyid, wedha's experience*

INTRODUCTION

The history of art has always been a marker of an age, leaving the shape of its existence in the world. As a discipline that has many schools, styles, and followers, art continues to change and develop. In the western world, these changes bring about the schools which become a main reference to today's fine arts such as the Renaissance, Cubism, Dadaism, Baroque, Realism, Expressionism, and Abstractionism (Sugiharto, 2013: 49-75). These changes also happened in Indonesia as a country that has a rich history of art and culture. Indonesia is a home to *wayang* puppets which is a form of high fine art, traditional masks, pottery, and arts that incorporate the western knowledge which shows the development of fine arts in Indonesia.

Expression of art is an artistic practice that has existed since humans existed in the world. The oldest artistic expressions, especially fine arts, can be seen from cave paintings in various parts of the world. Even in Indonesia, artistic expression in caves is found in Sulawesi to Irian / which gives rise to symbols of the human hand, circle symbols, firm lines, lizard men, and various other visual expressions (Yuliman, 2001:11-13). Evolved towards art forms, which are legitimized, defined by certain art groups who give it the label that this is art. Art expressions in caves, temples, which can be seen up to now using the senses of the eye, are part of art in the visual art area. However, the impact of Pop art development is still living strong to this day. Its development reached Indonesia. This movement influenced Wedha Abdul Rasyid to create *Wedha's Pop Art Potrait* or WPAP as one of the Pop Art that develops in Indonesia.

The influence of Pop Art is also incorporated in the works produced by artists in the world and in Indonesia. Pop Art also affects WPAP. Besides the "Pop Art" name embedded in the WPAP, they also share similarities in the use of colours in creating the artworks. It all started from Wedha Abdul Rasyid's solo exhibition on October 28, 2008 using WPAP style, which also became the official introduction of WPAP (Rasyid, 2009: 8). Before developing WPAP, Wedha started with *Foto Marak Berkotak* (FMB) which then transforms according to Wedha's view of fine art style, following his own intuition.

Wedha wrote in his book "Wedha and WPAP" with the tagline of "Original Indonesian Pop Art". The train of thoughts that can be seen from experiencing the process of WPAP formation until now are visible from the existence of the community of WPAP supporters to this day. It provides an interesting figure to be seen again as an existence of a visual movement in Indonesia. The emergence of WPAP as a technique, style, and as a work of art, received tremendous appreciation

in the community. Many young designers feel that they are preserving original Indonesian pop art using the WPAP style. Wedha's Pop Art Portrait (WPAP) can be categorized as one of the visual arts (visual art) in the form of design which is currently loved by many young designers, especially in Indonesia in the last decade. Through a community that has been active since 2010, the creative industry base promoted by WPAP departs from the popular visual arts paradigm.

The WPAP style is not only used by established visual artists, but also by the general public. Even those who have no experience in the realm of art and design could eventually also become WPAP artists or enjoyed the WPAP movement as connoisseurs. Since WPAP has become such a phenomenon, this paper aims to provide a better understanding horizon of WPAP on the emergence of WPAP and how it was originally conceived by Wedha Abdul Rasyid using a historical approach of Benedetto Croce.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

The history of WPAP is discussed using the historiography of Benedetto Croce. Benedetto Croce (1886-1952) is a thinker from Italy who discussed radical philosophical history at the beginning of the twentieth century. His discussion of history has contributed to the thought of previous historical approach which is based on universality towards the particular which has its own characteristics, in which pointed out that historical facts do not point to permanent truths (Croce, 1921: 61; Croce, and York, [1938] 1941: 103-104). The writings of history according to Croce provides insight in approaching the emerging development of WPAP which is a particularity within the universal history of art. Because there is no fact that is not known at the moment of it is being done, by means of the consciousness that germinates perpetually upon action; and there is no fact that is not forgotten sooner or later, but may be recalled, just as speaking about dead history revived at the touch of life from its past, by means of contemporaneous becomes again contemporaneous (Croce, 1921: 54). Historical awareness written by means of contemporaneous will provide historical awareness in accordance with the circumstances of the time when historical facts took place, reducing the bias on primary and secondary data obtained by historians. WPAP that developed from 2009 until today is worth seeing by using the perspective of art historians who are also living in contemporaneous, accustomed to using software to operate things, born as a millennial generation, and still continuing to develop further.

To support the analysis of the history of WPAP, this paper uses the theory of art history from Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574). Vasari's art history analysis concentrates

on the artist's 'biography', patronage and supporting documents, the importance of individual genius, the centrality of the work of art and the connoisseurship, quality assessment, style definition, source identification, naturalistic representation criteria, and a model of artistic progress through quasi-biological cycles of development and renewal internal to art (Fernie, 1995: 28). The description of the origins of WPAP is elaborated in accordance with the classification of art which can be written as history through methods, manners, style, behaviour, and ideas from the artist, in this case Wedha Abdul Rasyid as the creator as well as the one who introduced WPAP.

FINDINGS/RESULTS

The Childhood of Wedha Abdul Rasyid

The discussion on the history of WPAP begins by discussing the biography of the artist who sparked the WPAP style, namely Wedha Abdul Rasyid, in accordance with Vasari's art history in starting the discussion of artists from their past. Wedha is the sixth son of eight siblings who were born on March 10, 1951 in Pekalongan, Central Java from the couple named R. Abdul Syukur and Sarini Winih. Wedha enrolled to kindergarten and elementary education in Cirebon, while spending his junior high, high school, and teenage years in Pekalongan, adjusting with the needs of his family who moved to support his father's work.

Wedha's interest in art begun when he was still living in Cirebon, displaying a habit in drawing which then continues in Pekalongan. This habit turns into an achievement for Wedha in the form of a number of awards from the results of his work as a child, who later contributed in his experience and shaped his existence in working as a visual artist. During elementary school, Wedha received support from his teacher, who at all times gave directions and teachings that made his enthusiasm to draw ever greater. Wedha reinforced this by saying:

This award (while pointing to the page in his book on WPAP) was for a drawing demonstration. At that time, the Elementary School was called the People's School. Mr. Gonto and Mr. Dimiyati strongly encouraged my interest in drawing (interview with Wedha Abdul Rasyid, 27 December 2015).

Little Wedha is a child who likes to draw and paint. There were many drawing competitions that Little Wedha often wins in. Wedha's fondness for drawing led to his rise later on in becoming a well-known illustrator for a private magazine in Jakarta. Along with Arswendo Atmowiloto, one of the prominent writer in Indonesia, Wedha created comic illustrations that were enjoyed by many fans in the 1980s until the early 2000s. The experience gained during his childhood years

honed Wedha's viewpoints about drawing, supported by the approval of his family who fulfilled his passion for drawing.

In his high school years, Wedha was attracted to the lesson in stereometry. This lesson led to Wedha's thinking in imagining the human face as a collection of flat geometric shapes formed by imaginary lines. The earliest works of the concept of human face consisting of geometric shapes by Wedha were in the form of free strokes using crayon medium. This is what ultimately made Wedha, unconsciously, choose to work with straight lines, rather than curved lines (interview with Wedha Abdul Rasyid, 28 October 2015).

During high school, Wedha also joined the studio of LEBAH (*Lembaga Budaya Angkatan Hijau* or Green Generation Cultural Institute) which concentrated on the works of art, especially on fine arts. After high school, Wedha chose to major in architecture, where at that time, his family was in a state of economic collapse (interview with Wedha Abdul Rasyid, 28 October 2015). According to Wedha, architecture is a blend of science and art. Seeing and demonstrating diagonal line hemispheres, technical science in which initially took hold a majority of the lesson, gradually became less and more dominated by art. "Initially, the science and arithmetic took hold of the majority of the lesson and only a handful of artful intention. Over time, it's more about the artful intention and creativity and the arithmetic became less," (interview with Wedha Abdul Rasyid, 15 April 2016).

The experience that shaped Wedha is still consistent even until he was attending the college lectures; the fondness to straight lines and geometric shape in the form of a framework. Wedha can be seen as someone who is really into lines which also influences the way he conceives the WPAP by using many straight lines (interview with Wedha Abdul Rasyid, 15 April 2016). In the field of architecture, Wedha always believes that he is indeed suitable in working with straight lines, especially when completing his majors in college. Although in the end, college graduation is something that can not be obtained by Wedha.

Fulfilling daily needs makes Wedha fight for himself, thinking about a job that is in accordance with what he is passionate at, which is drawing. Wedha found a way to survive by becoming a "Toserba" artist (Toserba means *Toko Serba Ada* or convenience store. In this case, it means that Wedha drew by imitating various drawing styles such as cartoon, realism, and so on according to requests). This made Wedha become oriented to fulfill the market of illustration in magazines and newspapers, which at that time were dominated by illustrators who only had one particular style of illustration. From this "Toserba" principle, Wedha found his way

to become a part of Selecta magazine and Hai magazine. He illustrates many of the covers at that time as seen as Figure 1.



Figure 1. Wedha's illustrations on the cover of Hai Magazines
Source: <https://scontent-yyz1-1.cdninstagram.com/v/t51.2885-15/>
accessed on 7 December 2019

On his education life at the undergraduate level, Wedha chose to drop out of his lecture in order to explore his illustration techniques in the 'Selecta' group, which publishes Selecta magazine (Rasyid, 2009:13). At that time, with the help of Harto, the letter sorter, Wedha succeeded in becoming an illustrator. His illustrations was covered along with the other similar illustrators in Selecta, such as: Pakne Wiwit, Abdul Khamid, Roy Ario, As Utama, Sriyanto, and Dwi Koendoro. This is where Wedha then proceeded to explore his true identity. He remained in Selecta until the next 3 years where Wedha decided to enter Gramedia which publishes Hai Magazine. This is in accordance to what Vasari says (1550: xi), that skills in design originate not only from the experience of working with master teachers; it also depends on the artist's technical knowledge. Wedha's experience with illustrations has generally been learned as a part of him forging of skills in his work as a

magazine designer. He shares a common experience with Warhol who started his career as an illustrator in the 1950s in *Vogue*, *Harper's Bazaar*, and *The New Yorker*.

DISCUSSION

Towards WPAP Style

In the early years before Wedha became an illustrator at a private magazine in Jakarta, Wedha was enrolled as an architecture student at the University of Indonesia. Wedha's fondness for geometric shapes in architecture refine his intuition for images based on lines and planes. This supports his ability to work using geometric shapes, although he devoted to work with all the styles to draw his illustrations in the end.

Wedha always believes that the need to express one's passion for art is endless. Beginning in early 1992, Wedha began to get bored with realism in painting human faces because he found it to be a great difficulty. Choosing and mixing colours becomes such a hard task for Wedha in his forties. Under these circumstances, Wedha thought of ways to paint faces more easily, searching for a way to make it possible to avoid having to illustrate the skin. Then Wedha thought of a technique which made it easier to paint human figures, especially facial portraits by tinkering with points, lines, and shapes. This is the starting point of the emergence of WPAP.



Figure 2. Freddie Mercury, 1992-Wedha Abdul Rasyid,
The first generation of FMB
Source: a repro from Wedha & WPAP (2011:27)

This starting point towards WPAP is later be named as *Foto Marak Berkotak* (Various Squared Photo) or FMB (Rasyid, 2011: 32). The example of FMB can be seen in Figure 2. FMB as the starting point towards WPAP was born when Wedha worked as an illustraator in Jakarta.



Figure 3. (from left) Freddy Mercury, Jack Nicholson, Whoopie Goldberg-
by Wedha Abdul Rasyid
Source: A repro from “Wedha & WPAP” (2011:29-31)

In Figure 3, the shapes with lines emphasized by Wedha were prominently developed to further solidify the images made during the FMB period from 1991 to 2008. This was done until the FMB was transformed, initiating the beginning of WPAP on 28 October 2008, coinciding with the solo WPAP exhibition by Wedha Abdul Rasyid at Bentara Budaya Jakarta (BBJ). WPAP was not developed by coincidence. Wedha gave rise to lines and shapes in WPAP construction as we know today. He dedicated his time to think about and pursue this new style of illustration which we now call as WPAP.

The Emergence of WPAP and its technique

Wedha admitted that the initial concept of WPAP was formed from the appreciation of his personal experience since childhood. Wedha also said that since childhood, he was happy to see the stark framework of a house or building compared to seeing the finished ones. He often even makes toy cars with only the framework intact and prefers that to completed toy cars that already have 'skin'.

Wedha remembered that when he was a child living in Cirebon, near his home there was a paper cutting area. He was joyed to see pieces and remnants of the papercuts.

He admitted that every time he saw the straight cut papers he wondered, "What can these straight papers be made into?" Questions like this often arise when Wedha discovers used items which was deemed by others are of little use, but is an opportunity to be transformed a new item for Wedha.

Before the initiation of WPAP at an exhibition at Bentara Budaya Jakarta, Wedha had a tendency not to publicly display this WPAP work. His reading of the book History of Modern Art by Soedarso SP made Wedha confident that the style he was initiating was a Pop Art style that was also in tune with Andy Warhol. So, on October 28, 2008, Wedha initiated his own WPAP solo exhibition at Bentara Budaya Jakarta with the invitation as seen in Figure 4. This moment marks the beginning of the emergence of WPAP style and its rise to popularity.



Figure 4. Invitation to WPAP exhibition by Wedha Abdul Rasyid
Source: Documented by Wedha Abdul Rasyid, 2009

Wedha tried as much as possible in explaining about WPAP, about what he raised and the thought process behind WPAP. To some extent, Wedha's past has many roles on his works, influencing the birth of WPAP style. It was discussed previously about the evolution of style from *Foto Marak Berkotak* (FMB) to Wedha's Pop Art Portrait (WPAP). His fondness in straight lines, geometric shapes, and architectural design sparks the idea behind the rise of WPAP. The description of the basic WPAP technique is not as difficult as it seems. WPAP has the principle of space for each image created, but the curved lines on the face must be replaced with straight lines. According to Wedha, the use of WPAP techniques, can be done as follows:

1. **Sourcing.** Choosing the face portrait as a base material, which has to be not too dark or too bright.
2. **Tracing** or **faceting.** Developing the shape of the face. This is accompanied by aligning straight lines so that each line will meet and cross at each other between one line with another line, forming the right meeting point between the vertical and the horizontal. In this second stage, the addition of shapes can be added according to the author's intuition, but still follows the way that Wedha has determined.
3. **Colouring.** The rules are clear in this colouring stage. Whether manually or digitally coloured, it is not permissible to use gradations as WPAP style put an emphasize on solid colours. The colour used cannot be exactly the same as the original colour in the photo. The contrast has to be apparent in order to create a different 'taste'. In the selection of colours, everything is left to the WPAP makers but the concept of the direction of the light becomes an important thing that must be considered.



Figure 5. The technique behind WPAP

Source: www.wpapcommunity.com, accessed on 17 Juni 2019 17:36

Figure 5 shows the technique behind WPAP. Wedha made WPAP according to what he wants, which emphasizes the techniques, colours, and different nuances. The WPAP exhibition at BBJ, supported by the book "*Wedha & WPAP (Wedha's Pop Art Potrait), Pop Art Asli Indonesia*" published in 2009, spearheaded the first movement of WPAP in Indonesia. In Wedha's book which is a brief review of the autobiography, history, and the technique in making WPAP, Wedha wrote two short chapters which ended with the hope for WPAP in Indonesia. This strengthen Vasari's understanding that, writing an artist's biography will be a strong enough basis to understand his artistic works now.

WPAP Patronages

WPAP started to emerge when Wedha worked as an illustrator. He developed a symmetrical style and continued to experiment on it by using different arrays of tools and materials from the salary he received as an illustrator. In the following phase, Wedha made WPAP patronized at Kompas Gramedia company. WPAP style will not be as large as today if there are no patrons overseeing it. So Wedha also admitted that without the help of Jakoeb Oetama, the founder of Kompas Gramedia, WPAP would not be as large as it is now. Gramedia provides a field to dive into its talent for drawing up until the emergence of WPAP. For Wedha, this gave him a needed experience to learn deeper knowledge on illustration since many famous illustrators take shelter under the Kompas flag, like GM. Sudarta, Raharjo, and Adi Permadi. Later on, Wedha had the opportunity to formally joined the Kompas Gramedia Group (KKG) as an illustrator in the magazine "Midi", which at that time changed its name to "Hai" under the editor in chief Arswendo Atmowiloto.

Books and exhibitions supported by Kompas Gramedia become a starting point to initiate WPAP communities throughout Indonesia. Until this day, WPAP communities continued to be a patron with an organizational structure filled with WPAP artists who live and depend on sales from WPAP illustrations to support WPAP as a style, as well as a work of art. Wedha did not have any intention to make a profit and patronizing the artists who use his style. Wedha said that, "Let it go, I'm done with WPAP. Let the people of Indonesia develop WPAP further" (Interview, 26 December 2016).

CONCLUSION

In accordance with Vasari's historiography, the writing of history about WPAP needs to be seen from the biography of the artist. Wedha Abdul Rasyid had the ability to draw since he was a child. This led him to become an illustrator and sparked a style which is called as WPAP. WPAP pursued its path as a milestone in the journey of visual arts as graphic techniques that existed in Indonesia in the 2000s. Wedha's experience in art made him able to bring up his WPAP milestone as a repertoire, between making works with techniques and working in the field of graphic arts in Indonesia. Strong patron support has raised the popularity of WPAP by forming loyal WPAP communities to continue developing WPAP as a native Indonesian Pop Art style. Although this paper argue that WPAP is not an original Indonesian Pop Art, WPAP as a graphic art technique is loved by many young people who are developing in the digital world that carries the discourse of "Indonesianness", as WPAP is a style born from an Indonesian.

The history of the emergence of WPAP, though, if it is looked carefully, will not be much different from the emergence of cubism technique in Western art. It has its own uniqueness with the banner of Indonesian original Pop Art. Wedha as the creator of WPAP gives an overview and explanation on how WPAP is made, the rules behind the use of colour, the way to start, and the way to choose the base materials. WPAP could become a milestone for the history written on this era, when Wedha initiate WPAP. This also became one of the historiography that can explain the emergence of WPAP in the period of the 1990s to 2009, where his solo exhibition was held and the rise of WPAP popularity started.

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