

## ART OR THERAPY? A TROJAN HORSE IN THE ART SCHOOL GALLERY

**DR. PAMELA ZEPLIN**

PHD, MA, BA (HONS)

*Dr Pamela Zeplin is a writer and artist based in Adelaide. At the University of South Australia she holds the positions of Senior Lecturer in Art and Design History and Theory (South Australian School of Art) and Portfolio Leader: Research Education in Art, Architecture & Design.*

### KEYWORDS

Artist Residency; Wellbeing; Art Education; Collaboration; Heri Dono; Sustainability.

### ABSTRACT

*This discussion examines relationships between art academies, residency programmes and wellbeing, using the case study of Indonesian artist Heri Dono who completed a seven-week residency at The South Australian School of Art in 2007, concluding with a major exhibition. However, because of an 'adverse aviation incident' in Yogyakarta which suddenly rendered Dono's proposed exhibition work unavailable, the project took on unexpectedly new dimensions. Paradoxically, these adverse circumstances expanded the scope of conventional artist residencies by creating a cross-institutional and cross-cultural enterprise involving four art institutions.*

*Abandoning the unhealthy ethos of individualism and emotional detachment characterising studio art education, students transformed the gallery into a site of spontaneous collaboration and creative risk-taking that robustly addressed socio-political ills, including issues of human rights. This challenged and subverted art institutional mores as well as university health and safety bureaucracy using the form of a giant Trojan horse constructed with sustainable materials and practices. 'Life changing' for some participants, the project created a healthy, if temporary, space of community wellbeing and belonging.*

## INTRODUCTION

Visual art education does not readily come to mind in discussing issues of communities and health. Indeed, the romantic concept of the artist starving in the garret and isolated from society has provided a more familiar image throughout the last two centuries of Western culture (Nickson & Colonna 1977). This stereotype and the broader 'health' of the visual arts and crafts sector in Australia has come under recent national scrutiny in a report revealing that University art schools have, over the past decade, been assiduously addressing the conventionally negative and 'unhealthy' stereotypes of artists (Moore et al. 2005, p.4). At a literal level, attempts at improving artists' 'wellbeing' within a 'safe and healthy working environment' (Australian National University 2009) at university art schools have been directly addressed by university Occupational Health and Safety regulations (University of New South Wales 2006). Indirectly, the introduction of vocationally oriented professional studies and curatorial courses, as well as the continuation of artist residency programmes, have sought to ameliorate artists' wellbeing, particularly the depressing facts of artists' chronically low incomes and low self-esteem (Throsby & Hollister 2003, p.45).

The following discussion suggests that these recuperative strategies nevertheless tend to be undermined by traditional reliance on (unhealthy) art world practices of rugged, or even pallid, individualism. In this way the relationship between art and health in Australian art schools often contrasts with growing acknowledgement in the broader community of the positive nexus between art, health and therapy (Angus 2002; Phillipp 2003; Mill & Brown 2004; Macarow & Samartzis 2008). Ironically, these isolating 'revelation[s] of creative selfhood' (Schwabsky 2008) persist, despite a current theoretical vogue throughout the visual arts community for post-structural approaches that explore states of indeterminacy, networking, identity politics, affect (Ross 2002) and Relational Aesthetics (Bourriaud 2002; Bishop 2004; Pennings 2005). Moreover, despite artists' hard won professionalisation through the academy, the wider art world still thrives on a Eurocentric bias. Consequently, the Western cult of the individual reigns supreme within the hyper-competitiveness engendered within art school and, increasingly, within university culture (Tower & Ridgewell 2006).

Such attitudes are often exemplified in, or at least unchallenged by one of the most significant art education developments over the last two decades, the artist-in-residence programme. While these programmes are generally considered to have positive, or at least benign, effects on individuals, the visiting artist and the body corporate, scant research is available in critical art literature or academic research. There is a dearth of detailed information about the internal dynamics of residency experience in terms of the interaction and learning processes that occur. What tends to be institutionally valued are career oriented 'outputs'; the physical art works and, where relevant, a published exhibition catalogue and/or critical review.

These issues, together with the managerialist 'hazards' that increasingly confront University art schools in terms of enforced bureaucratic compliance (including Occupational Health and Safety regulations, shrinking resources, rationalised courses, increasing stress, and diminished governance and identity through amalgamation), compound the exhaustion of an already fragile art education sector. This study does not address the broad and literature-rich field of community and/or individual connections between art and medical and health sectors. Instead, it presents a story about aspects of deterioration in tertiary art education's 'wellbeing' – actual and metaphorical - in Australia, using a narrative case study that focuses on a particular artist-in-residence and exhibition program at the University of South Australia's South Australian School of Art in 2007. It seeks to reveal through this 'tale' how the 'health' of Australian artists' learning and artistic practices, particularly in art school

environments, have been further impacted upon by corporatist university policies. It also reveals how disheartening, even harmful, situations may be effectively challenged by the resilience and creativity of visiting external artists working with students and staff. Amidst such a highly regulated environment in Adelaide a collaborative residency project was created over seven weeks by eminent Indonesian artist, Heri Dono. This took the form of an enormous Trojan horse, crammed full of work by insubordinate artists, art students and diverse members of the public. The wood, string and cardboard monster literally and figuratively entered the academy, critiqued its shortcomings and triumphed over a bulwark of Occupational Health and Safety and other bureaucratic restrictions to create an unusually healthy, holistic and optimistic environment – at least for a few weeks.



*Figure 1: Heri Dono and workers: The Dream Republic, SASA Gallery, Adelaide, 2007. Photo: Tok Basuki*

Visual arts practice-based research is a relatively new area within Australian Academe since art schools became absorbed into universities as late as the 1980s and 1990s (Tower & Ridgewell 2006). In presenting this qualitative study of a practice-based project of unorthodox parameters and methods – or indeed, in presenting studies of traditional residency programmes – more appropriate methodological frameworks than those provided by social science based models are required. Since residency studies offer a new field of research, and because this particular project itself proceeded within a fluid model of action research, the most appropriate ways to address this kind of artistic project are to be found in case and grounded theory methodologies, which inductively generate theory from detailed data gathered across everyday experiences (Jannetti 2005; Byrne 2001). Complementing these methodologies are narrative theory (White & Epston 1990) and the emerging and contested discipline of organisational storytelling theory which is usually associated with the field of management, strategy and organisation studies. The story telling process of ‘narrative knowledge’ in and about institutions questions the orthodoxy that quality data must always be ‘objective, reliable, accurate, etc.’ and that ‘[u]ltimately the truth of a story [may lie] not in its accuracy but in its meaning’ (Czarniawska-Joerges 2004, p.10). Because of a dearth of published research on the subject of residencies, data has been collected from regular observation, direct experience through day-to-day project management, correspondence and discussions with artists

(including Dono), students, administrative and academic staff and management from four art institutions, members of the wider university and the public. The author's position in this scenario was that of a member of the school's lecturing staff acting as co-co-ordinator (with colleague Olga Sankey) and project manager of the residency as well as curator of Dono's exhibition, *The Dream Republic*.

## HEALTH, SOCIETY AND TERTIARY ART EDUCATION

When considering the nexus between art education and health we confront a dilemma. On one hand, research over the last decade increasingly demonstrates important connections between art, creativity, wellbeing and community (Angus 2002; Phillipp 2003; Mill & Brown 2004; Macarow & Samartzis 2008), reminding us that 'the arts are central to our culture and sense of self and belonging and thus need to be nurtured and explored early in life' (Bott 2004, p.1). In terms of formal education, the World Health Organisation defines 'a health promoting school' as one that is:

*... constantly strengthening its capacity as a healthy setting for living, learning and working. Schools can have a significant impact on the social, emotional, physical and spiritual well being of young people (Health in Schools through the Arts n.d.).*

On the other hand, while this democratic potential of art as a powerful agent of healing and connection compulsorily entered Australia's national primary and secondary school curriculum in 2009 (Garrett 2009), this function is, ironically, actively discouraged in tertiary art academies as a kind of anti-intellectual and populist 'therapy', a term that ranks with 'theatricality' as the worst possible condemnation of a student's work; in the specialised *milieu* of the art academy, a longstanding 'disdain [is harboured] for the aesthetics of mainstream mass culture' and amateurism (Schwabsky 2008). This elitist attitude persists despite students' enduring enthusiasm for 'cooler' aspects of mass culture in the work of Warhol and the current popularity of photography and screen culture courses. Within the conceptually dominant paradigm of art practice, community arts, art therapy and expressionistic or other affective approaches take on the mantle of derision as substandard and/or sentimental. Meanwhile, other lingering art world attitudes encourage divisiveness and competition, played out against (not entirely unfounded) myths about artists' social role (Moore et al. 2005, p.8).

Art education and, indeed, the lives of artists have not been historically characterised by vigour, fitness or wellbeing. Rather, what has pervaded popular imagination has been the image of the myopic, depressive artist, the addictive personality suffering alone with (typically, his) brooding genius. Worse, this myth has long populated the romantic and perennially cited links between art and psychiatric illness which are still subject to reductionist investigation in the new field of 'neuro-aesthetics' which seeks to explain creative impulses as predominantly determined by biology and states of neuroses (Flinders Medical Centre et al. 2007; Hyman 2008). Other scientific research, however, reveals connections between artists and mental health to be more complex and indirect, with Nettle (2006,p.876) making the observation that:

*[t]he results suggest that artistic creatives and psychiatric patients share a tendency to unusual ideas and experiences, but creative groups are distinguished by the absence of anhedonia [the inability to experience pleasure] and avolition [the inability to persist in goal directed behaviour].*

This said, a 1998 report on South Australian School of Art students with a disability, while not providing statistical data, indicated a high level of concern with teaching and learning practices at that time (Hill 1998). The relatively high percentage of enrolments by students disclosing a disability at the school (currently between 15% and 20% ) (Haselton 2009) is not to suggest that artists are more prone to mental disorders but that students with a range of disabilities may well be attracted to visual modes of study and expression. Nevertheless, books promoting the artist as romantic anti-social genius are well worn in University art libraries.

Artists occupy a 'precarious' position in the Australian popular imagination (Moore et al 2005, p.33) and their endeavours are generally considered marginal in a society entrenched in economic rationalism and pragmatism (Woodrow 2007; Moore et al. 2005). In terms of income, this fringe position is borne out in occupational and income statistics, revealing that 'nearly two thirds of all professional artists work at more than one job' and '[t]hree-quarters of artists undertaking arts-related work are involved in teaching' (Australia Council for the Arts 2004. p.10). Visual artists have every reason to feel chronically depressed, earning as at 2003 less than \$5000 per annum from their professional skills out of a total income of \$20,000 from other arts related income (Throsby & Hollister 2003, p.45). With steadily declining government support, including Australia Council funding, the private sector offers even less support, arts and culture receiving only 0.6% of private philanthropic sponsorship in 1997 (Moore et al. 2005, p. 44-45) .

It is perhaps little wonder that many artists – and art institutions – have developed defensive mechanisms in regard to their perceived social and economic status, which inevitably lowers self esteem. As a reaction to the 'dumb' and/or emotionally unstable artist stereotype, university art schools robustly distance themselves from the old atelier form of 'fine arts' training, wherein the ['born'] artist was constructed as a 'driven, alienated and silent individual...adept in manual craft skills' (Singerman 1999, p.8). Within the university, the professional artist now 'fashion[s]...individual works as experiments, researches, proofs...rather than visionary inspirations' (Singerman 1999, pp.6-8). However Woodrow (2007) notes this has been at the expense of craft practice: 'Clearly, in Academe', he opines, 'craft is the art that dare not speak its name' and notes that, despite growing student demand, there is a 'lingering suspicion of mere technical virtuosity' in universities that have 'refused to accept artefacts as valid research' (Woodrow 2007, pp.4,7). The contribution of creative research is currently being trialled by the Federal Government initiative, Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) (Australian Research Council 2009). However, these results may prove too late as the seductively cost effective, vocationally oriented, and digitally focused 'cultural industries' mantra, led in this country by Queensland University of Technology, begins to supersede studio-based art programs despite widespread critique of this economy driven ideology (Moore et al. 2005, p.60; Alanen 2007).

The introduction of vocationally oriented professional studies, internships and curatorial courses also offer practical pathways towards improved economic wellbeing through career development (McConchie 2008) but these are not taught 'consistently across all the art schools' (Ostling in Moore et al. 2005,p.37

Elitist preciousness, however, is far from dead on the studio floor, as Singerman explains:

*Among the tasks of the university program in art is to separate its artists and the art world in which they operate from 'amateurs' or 'Sunday painters', as well as from a definition of the artist grounded in manual skill, tortured genius, or recreational pleasure. Moreover, art in the university must constitute itself as a department and a discipline, separate from public 'lay' practices and equal to other studies on campus.*

Because 'visual arts practice based research is very ego-centric [and] personal' in nature (Tower & Ridgewell 2006), tertiary art curricula rarely develops expertise in working collaboratively, confidence building or encouraging social – as distinct from communication – skills. More often than not, struggle, self-doubt and low self-esteem pervade the art academy, just as uncertainty and anxiety haunts the art world. These factors invariably result in a high degree of individualism, competitiveness and mutual mistrust amongst staff and students (Bovell 2005). Influential as successful models for emerging artists, the Chapman brothers, for example, claim:

*... that a critical practice of art is dependent on the cultivation of a distance between art practice and the social world in which it circulates; they argue that if art is assumed as a badge of sociality and social being...its potential for introducing moments of critical difference ... will be lost (Quinn 2006).*

Commonly, therefore, it is the cooler and more strategic emerging artists who attain art institutional recognition, at least in the short term. The sulky, bad-boy/girl-rock-star model with its romantically morose aura is still successfully cultivated within the art world. Artistic success notwithstanding, such loneliness and social isolation can cause severe mental and emotional health problems in an increasingly fragmented world. 'The biggest disease today', noted Mother Theresa, 'is not leprosy or tuberculosis, but rather the feeling of being unwanted, uncared for and deserted by everybody' (van Ravesteijn, Lucassen & van der Akker 2008, p.973).

Not surprisingly, much successful work by emerging artists and studio curricula throughout Australia still aspire to models with a familiar, strongly Eurocentric focus, in spite of the intensely multicultural nature of society and two decades of theoretical discourses devoted to difference, post-colonialism, Indigenous Australian, Asia-Pacific and other non-Western practices (Leong 1996; Crouch 2002). This lack of confidence in exploring the more immediate cultural 'neighbourhood' accords with a more widespread tendency in Australian universities to adopt a provincialist 'cringe' in favour of northern hemisphere exemplars (Papstergiadis 2003; Connell 2007), instead of considering, for example, those from Indonesia, South Africa, the Pacific – or even Australia.

## **HEALTH, THE UNIVERSITY AND ART EDUCATION**

Adding another ironic layer to the 'pathology' of art education is the relatively recent arrival of university Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S) – also known as Industrial Hygiene – legislation. Implemented in the 1990s (Spickett 1999, p.419), this has compounded the 'ill health' of struggling art schools. OH&S compliance has recently loomed large throughout Australian society and the development of a 'safety culture' has been identified by a former Chief Justice of the High Court, Sir Harry Gibbs as the increasingly litigious nature of society which has led to an 'unhealthy culture of blame, with [an] emphasis on rights rather than responsibilities' (Gibbs, in Hopkins 2005, p.5) and an 'unwillingness to accept that life is inherently risky' (Hopkins 2005, p.5).

While health and safety measures are intended to ensure corporate responsibility and improve, or at least maintain, the health and wellbeing of all, their effects are already impacting negatively upon teaching and learning in university art schools. A 2005 survey of twenty eight heads of Australian university art schools identifying 'issues of concern' revealed that '[r]isk aversion within universities' ranked fifth in a field of eighteen while eighty percent of respondents believed that, combined with diminishing funding, it is likely or highly likely that there will be markedly fewer art and design schools in Australia in 10 years' (Frankham 2006, p.4).

How this stringently regulated environment of restricted choice will affect the health of those students disclosing disabilities at the South Australian School of Art – most commonly mental health issues – remains to be seen, but already, Occupational Health & Safety paperwork is creating high levels of anxiety for staff required to regularly undertake regular, tedious online examinations. Studio equipment considered essential often fails increasingly unrealistic compliance demands to be ‘highly efficient’ and ‘state-of-the-art’ (Spickett 1999, p.420). In some schools open footwear has been prohibited in studios (despite blistering summer temperatures) and any form of mess or music is now potentially reportable. At the South Australian School of Art fixative sprays have been outlawed, effectively banning charcoal, the most ancient of drawing materials. Is it any wonder that when a former Head held a school-wide party to celebrate OH&S audit results, almost no-one attended? At Griffith University in 2007 a well maintained sculpture studio was summarily and temporarily closed down for minor OH&S ‘infractions’ (Woodrow 2008) while, despite South Australian School of Art’s exemplary safety record, the ubiquitous bogey of risk – no matter how unlikely – requires expensive equipment upgrades and prevents after hours access to studios and workshops by undergraduate and postgraduate students; this creates particular problems for students with disabilities (Hill 1998) and those with daytime employment and/or other responsibilities.

Combined with seriously reduced studio contact hours and courses, increased fees and larger class sizes, there is little time or capacity for developing a sense of community or deep questioning; even worse, opportunities to instigate the ‘what if’ factor; to take a chance and perhaps fail – so important to art education – are no longer a valid option. And isn’t risk taking essential for the production of speculation, of new ways of seeing in art education?

On a broader front, Frankham (2006, pp.10-11) warns of future:

... reduction in the range and quality of studio offerings available in Australian art schools, to the point where we are no longer able to claim ‘traditional studios’. ...thereby ultimately restricting artists’ capacity to utilise the full range of media, materials, techniques and processes traditionally associated with art, craft and design practice, we are not able to sustain studios as they were originally envisaged.

He asks: ‘Have we finally starved the 1970s studio teaching model to a point beyond which an alternative is the only option?’ (Frankham 2006, p.11). Certainly, Woodrow’s (2007, p.3) response, notes that:

... over the past decade, or since art and design schools were amalgamated with the university sector, workshops specialising in glass, textiles, wood, ceramics, jewelry [sic] and printmaking have been closed throughout Australia at an alarming rate.

Compounded by fifteen years of ‘chronic’ university funding cuts (Moore et al. 2005, p.27, Woodrow 2007, p.3), an atmosphere of ‘reductive economic rational[ism]’ (Moore et al 2005. p.13) increasingly restricts course choices and skills. Beyond the domain of OH &S, a managerialist miasma of apprehension pervades all areas, effectively disempowering art-school governance through amalgamation and enforced corporate identity. Such an economically, socially and creatively depleted environment cannot engender confidence, communality or a sense of belonging – conditions necessary for artists and their practices to thrive. In such situations, which are by-products of universities’ market driven ethos, we are also witnessing a seriously diminished capacity for social or political engagement, let alone radicalism, among students, in favour of competence in art world savvy and

celebrity aspiration (Grierson 2005). The steady adoption of 'cultural industries' models may well exacerbate this tendency.

## **ART SCHOOLS AND RESIDENCIES**

One important form of 'antidote' to the widespread shrinkage of university resources, curricula, contact hours and potentially, creativity, has been in the form of artist-in-residency programmes (Menzies 2005, p.14). 'Since the 1960s ...[this] display of the exemplary artist – has been crucial to teaching artists', notes Singerman (1999, p.3). Within a wide spectrum of residency opportunities, from local graduates negotiating studio space to internationally acclaimed artists like Heri Dono whose highly mobile practices involve commuting between exhibitions and residencies around the world (Supangkat 2007). As well as providing the benefits of time, space, professional development and usually a paid stipend, these programmes are widely considered integral to the enrichment and wellbeing of tertiary arts education and the visiting artist. Released from the institutional constraints imposed upon academic staff and students, independent visitors can offer models of what it is to be a professional artist, and presumably, stimulate student aspiration and provide some form of hope.

And yet little information about how this system actually operates in relation to either the long- or short-term visitor is available. Menzies (2005, p.14) suggests: 'Given the extensive support for the arts in Western society and the commitment to expanding the connection between education and the arts, residency programmes in schools invite examination.' In general they are regarded unproblematically as 'a good thing' and the past few decades have seen artist-in-residence programs in Australian art schools and abroad constitute a vital component of tertiary art education (Holmes in Hutch 2003). However, the phenomenon of educational institutions hosting artists remains largely undefined and unresearched in critical literature or academic research. Such information rarely appears beyond summarised reports or anecdotally, in the memory of participants, whereas specific examples of what did or didn't occur, where, why, and with whom, might be usefully shared. This data could include those 'residencies from Hell' (Broker 2007) that endanger emotional health - as well as higher order experiences.

At very least, residencies provide relief from the rigours of timetable and administration but, more importantly, they potentially model a more desirable artistic role than familiar (and harried) lecturers can supply. Providing a link between the professional community and the art academy, the visitor-participant thus helps to 'construct' the art school community, frequently through the shared language of current art magazines and exhibition catalogues (Singerman 1999, p.3). Apart from residencies that happen through coincidence, art academies generally aim to attract conventionally successful, high profile artists who can enhance institutional prestige. As a result, the status quo is maintained, pedagogic and ideological structures tend to remain unchallenged and conventional role modelling is re-affirmed by the privileged visitor. Typically reinforced are familiar, Euramerican-derived theories and practices, including those by practitioners of non-Western heritage selected from privileged transnational 'tribes' inhabiting (Western-style) biennales and triennials (Schneider 2003). In this way the highly individualised and strategic artist-guru-in residence can further embed careerist values in the minds of impressionable artists. Pedagogically, new knowledge obtained during the residency tends to be transmitted hierarchically, from the visitor down to a passive community while the (informal) residency studio and (formal) gallery sites remain separated and frequently off limits to the art school community until the exhibition opening – unless student labour is required for the production of work.



While this model may represent one 'normal' and perfectly acceptable artistic pathway for some, the perpetuation of grand artistic myths around celebrity encourages in emerging artists unrealistic and/or ethically evacuated aspirations. Similarly, large numbers of art students and lecturers declare their 'exploration of' fashionable topics 'dealing with', for example, indeterminacy, flow, networking and identity but often manage to bypass the social and political dimensions underlying such theories; these days turgid prose rarely translates into socially committed practice.

With only physical outcomes deemed of lasting value following a residency - exhibition artefacts – perhaps a catalogue and hopefully, printed reviews – pertinent questions remain for the next artist-in-residence: on which criteria will s/he be selected? What kind of space – and funding – is available? What values will s/he bring? How will s/he interact with the school or wider community? Documentation could play an important future role here. Increasingly, opportunities for artistic diversification are opening up (Papstergiadis 2006), most commonly as residencies in the field of health and community work and, for this reason, a variety of residency programmes at art schools can constitute a vital, if informal, part of the curricula and the arts economy. These could represent a variety of current artistic movements and practices, including 'artisan-craft-worker, celebrity performer, issue-based activist, ...conceptual thinker... and creative facilitator' (Sekules 2003, p.135). Understandably, not a few artists regard residencies as opportunities for retreat, where they can focus, virtually uninterrupted, on their individual practice. The following study represents one among many possible and valid scenarios. Less commonly, artists launch themselves energetically into the life of the school and/or community and this proved to be the case with Heri Dono who, as a 'celebrity performer', also assumed the pedagogical role of 'creative facilitator'.

## HERI DONO AND THE ART SCHOOL; A RESIDENCY PROJECT

An international art 'star' and the second most invited artist to major biennial and triennial events (Britton 2005), Heri Dono is based in the Indonesian city of Yogyakarta and spends much of his life commuting between residencies and exhibitions from Shanghai to Dubai, Venice and Berlin, as well as having spent considerable time in Australia. However, unlike many art celebrities, his practice embodies many of the qualities discussed in the preceding pages that contribute to a healthy art educational environment; Dono remains committed to critical social intervention and collaborative processes within and outside of a Eurocentric agenda. Despite a humble disposition, he is rarely daunted by the forces of university bureaucracies and is open to the chance and the 'what if?' factor. What interested Olga Sankey and myself in inviting Dono to the South Australian School of Art (SASA) as an artist-in-residence in 2007 was not so much his eminent status or his strong connections to Adelaide, established over the twenty years since he participated in Alison Carroll's 1994 *Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art, Adelaide installations: Beyond the material world*. Not only was this sculptural work acclaimed (Murray 1994) but his spectacular performances which encouraged accessibility were long remembered within and beyond the School of Art. Neylon (2008) recalls that Dono:

*... originally made his mark in Adelaide with his Fermentation of Minds (a clacking satire on education brainwashing; automated heads bowing in subjugation installation within the 1994 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art).*

*Fermentation of Minds'* nodding heads on school desks exposed the chronic ill health of Indonesia's education system, but the work was also interpreted as 'nodding rigidly at Dono's message about the corruption of Western

culture' (Murray 1994). The 'open winding mechanism[s]...spectral feel' in this installation would haunt his next Adelaide residency thirteen years later.

Our residency choice was primarily based on Dono's unique ability to combine the professional role of making high quality work in a temporary location with the ability to engage a range of communities within the art institution and further afield, including local Indonesian groups. His approach to residency is unusual in that teaching and learning are not regarded as separate activities from art practice but considered within a holistic creative enterprise. In this way Dono's 'productive pedagog[y] .. connect [s] student work to their biographies and the world outside of the classroom' (Menzies 2005, p.38). Embedded in principles of connectedness, this artist develops a 'supportive ... environment and recognition of difference' (Menzies 2005, p.15). These qualities were particularly important since the artist would be required, while based in SASA, to work across three local art schools funded under the 'umbrella' of the Helpmann Academy for the Visual and Performing Arts. As it turned out, the Asian Studies department of Flinders University also became closely involved.

In 2006 SASA postgraduate and Honours students had already sampled the artistic, philosophical and pedagogical 'baggage' accompanying the internationally mobile Dono when he gave a masterclass on 'Alternative Technologies' while visiting Adelaide for a Flinders University performance. Ironically, when all SASA's equipment – video projector, video, even slides –malfunctioned, he continued unfazed, demonstrating effective techniques of visual communication using sustainable low technologies. This approach had an empowering effect on his hi tech- enslaved audience who enthusiastically suggested a residency be arranged; Dono subsequently re-scheduled his 2007 itinerary to include Adelaide.

This 'humble' attitude of using and gaining inspiration from local conditions, materials and issues is a key to the success of Dono's many and varied projects. As Bjerkem (2006) explains:

*Heri Dono stands out as one of the most prolific [sic] contributors to what the international art community over the last 25 years has chosen to coin New Internationalism; Being understood as a new generation of artists challenging the Western hegemony to contemporary art. He is also an internationally successful representative of a new generation of Indonesian artists respecting and representing the local, while fusing it with the contemporary [sic].*

A highly skilled and versatile maker, the artist is also a trained *dalang* (master puppeteer) of Wayang shadow puppets and Javanese dance, endowing him with high cultural status in Indonesia (Polansky 1997). Eliding adherence to a particular religion – 'My religion is art', explains Dono (2007) – he is steeped in Javanese mysticism and draws freely on animistic beliefs while combining the cut and thrust of contemporary political activism with village folklore. Simultaneously, retro-style Western cartoons like Flash Gordon feature strongly throughout his work. All these elements are firmly embedded in a holistic but highly fluid approach, rendering his form of contemporary art accessible as well as challenging for many audience levels. 'Dono's increasingly impressive opus of installations', notes Carroll (2002), is 'always so human, witty, humorous, and politically deadly.'

It would be easy to romanticise this artist, who is frequently described as 'whimsical', a 'magician', 'folk artist' or 'shaman'. These terms are anathema to serious Western art audiences (except for Joseph Beuys-as-shaman), especially those in art academies. However delightful and charming Dono's reputation may be in working with various communities, including children, his work is anything but naïve. Dono's output is dynamic and prolific and

he is renowned for his consummate and critical professionalism but also, paradoxically, for letting things happen. Dono *appears* to operate without a fixed, pre-conceived visual solution or at least, any firm ideas he may hold are not always verbalised. The following interview excerpt encapsulates this artist's concept of collaboration:

*HD: ...[L]ike people playing together on the Internet, [collaboration] is very important, where artists or people from one place can communicate with people in another...*

*LP: In your artwork and installation, you use your ideas, pikiran kamu [your thoughts], but it takes many people to make it. Do you consider them artists?*

*HD: Yes. I think that all people are artists. And also that all the members of the audience are artists, if they can participate, and not only look at the work (Polansky 1997).*

Dono was due to arrive in Adelaide on March 10 from Berlin via Jakarta and Yogyakarta. Fortunately, the night before March 7 Dono postponed his early morning ticket on the ill-fated Garuda Flight GA200 that crashed at Yogyakarta airport. Although relieved our guest was safe, as curator I quietly went into meltdown on seeing his lighter-than-expected luggage. The crash prevented collection of the Yogyakarta artworks for the Adelaide exhibition but the artist remained curiously unperturbed. Gallery director, Mary Knights and I subsequently devised a contingency exhibition plan using DVDs from his extensive repertoire. But this proved unnecessary; Heri would, it turned out, deliver.

But this was only a harbinger of problems to come. Despite negotiating a studio before Dono's arrival, late postgraduate over-enrolments left no appropriate space available. Even worse, external funding for the residency deposited months before in a university cost centre months before could not be accessed because of the 'engineering' of a new finance system that could only likened to the nineteenth century Indian civil service. 'Thinking sideways' (Dono 2007), we solved the studio crisis by creating a studio-cum-public work-in-progress exhibition but financial issues would remain.

Within two days of his arrival Dono's public lecture attracted a large crowd, after which twenty five students and staff from four Adelaide art schools, and local artists met to collaborate on what would become a Trojan horse project. Superbly organised by a SASA Honours graduate mentee, Margo Clark, most volunteers continued enthusiastically working until the final day of the residency. This unusual situation was due to Clark's sign-on roster system where people chose to work on particular project details. Networking among participants was further strengthened by planned and 'organic' social occasions; these reinforced the centrality of sociality within the working situation.



Figure 2: Artists creating *The Dream Republic*, 2007. Image: Pamela Zeplin

Like the initial structure of his cardboard, bamboo and string horse, Dono's collaborative arrangements were subtle and quite different from many artists such as, for example, Lee Mingwei who conventionally directs assistants, as in *Gernika in Sand*, at the Queensland Art Gallery (Porch 2008). Such conventional approaches to collaboration benefit students through work experience and supply the artist with free labour. Dono's methodology, however, is less defined and organically seeps into 'the practices of living' which, as Papastergiadis explains:

*offer ... a model for making art. When artists draw from the everyday, then the space between themselves and their subject begins to assume levels of intimacy and attachment that are fundamentally different to the more remote and oppositional stances of earlier phases of the avant-garde (Papastergiadis in Quinn 2006).*

Collaborators were given a free 'rein' in determining aspects of the Trojan horse's form and materials and everyone seemed to be having a good time, most of the time. If you observed closely however, you could sense Dono's professional vision subtly in operation without the prescriptive manner of a visiting 'master' working with 'apprentices'.

Dono's method of 'upside down logic' (Dono 2007) was strategically employed in response to bureaucracy-bound 'challenges'. The pristine SASA Gallery became a public studio and instead of an opening night, the exhibition culminated with a huge closing celebration, which Dono (2007) likened to a 'mini-APT' (*Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art*). This kind of lateral thinking responded creatively to the immediate (and difficult) residency circumstances, simultaneously reducing potential stress levels. These strategies were further employed in response to managerialist impasses. Clogged University finance systems might be unable to release funds but donated and scrounged materials (cardboard, wood, plastics etc.) came pouring in, transforming – or perhaps

'trashing' (Knights 2007) – the gallery which became an industrial work site of ever-increasing workers, visitors, mess and noise. It must be stated, however, that basic safety was maintained by Dono's organisational methodology; no-one died or was injured.



*Figure 3: The Dream Republic, 2007. Image: Pamela Zeplin*

Singerman (1999, p.20) reminds us that, in general, 'the artist was an institutional problem for the university – and perhaps has remained one ...'. Dono's approach created new problems for university administration but these were creatively overcome, hurdled or subverted – sometimes without the authorities noticing. I still don't understand how the energy and dynamism all kept going, abuzz with electric saws and drills and amidst continual nay saying by University administrators. 'No construction will be permitted until after Easter' (The artists worked through the Easter break). 'Removal of sturdy (unused) sculpture studio tables is forbidden'. (These were required for reinforcing the floor of the gallery-within-the 'horse' so the artists removed these without designated university 'shifters').



*Figure 4: Moving tables for 'Trojan Horse' floor, The Dream Republic, 2007. Image: Pamela Zeplin*

'Cash payments do not represent best financial practice'. Nor, apparently did the requested alternative, gold bullion. (Money was loaned from within the community and reimbursed by finance 'engineers' many months later). 'A garbage skip is forbidden in the adjacent laneway.' (Obliging employees unofficially carted rubbish across campus). And students and staff learned there was always 'another way' to get things done. At one point, an outsourced removal company staged a stand-off with University property unit staff about work practices in the gallery while everyone else worked on and ignored them – until the removalists, intrigued with the project, joined the artists! Yet amidst our constant apologies on behalf of the institution, the artist remained calm and bemused, explaining this was 'no problem, I live in Indonesia!' Apparently no-one does bureaucracy like Indonesia.

Somehow this approach worked. Too hard, even for the indomitable enforcers of Occupational Health & Safety compliance, the Trojan horse 'warriors' became officially 'invisible'. Working day and night, we crashed through regulations while the university community and a curious public streamed in to watch this monstrous hybrid creature emerge and fill the cavernous gallery space. Because of collaborative decision making, this horse eventually spawned wings and wheels. Was it a horse, a plane or a train? And did it matter?





*Figure 5: View from street, The Dream Republic, 2007. Image: Pamela Zeplin*

What visitors to this site over six weeks witnessed was a new (or perhaps old) kind of art 'school' as groups from ceramics and textiles set up studio-based 'camps' around the installation, photographers and painters tried their hand at sculpture, and other unlikely pairs and groups worked together. Activity was organically generated between artists, art and crafts students from three local art schools as well as Dono's existing local Indonesian networks. For a time this blended community was able to dissolve disciplinary boundaries and demonstrate what an art school could be. This included the artist's advice to students to regard failure as a 'gift' (Sperou 2008).

For Adelaide artists and students new and humble 'Asian' construction methods using cardboard string and other detritus, gave new meaning to 'sustainability'. In the evenings a collaborative wayang performance rehearsals developed between Flinders University, Dono and Greek Australian artist Niki Sperou, creating a hybrid of ancient Greek and Indonesian myths which collided with harsh Australian politics; this was staged to great acclaim at the gala closing event.

Issues of mistreated asylum seekers, US-Australian relations and the fascist bureaucracies spawned by John Howard's conservative government were subverted outside and inside the Trojan horse by artists, students and members of the public. The belly of the beast's mini gallery featured fiercely articulate and socially critical expressions in visual and verbal form; contributions were in Arabic (illustrated with martyrdom tulips), Cambodian, Indonesian, Greek, Latin (poetry) and English.



*Figure 6: Interior gallery of 'Trojan Horse' (under construction), The Dream Republic, 2007, SASA Gallery, Adelaide. Photo: Pamela Zeplin*





*Figure 7: Interior gallery, 'Trojan Horse', The Dream Republic, 2007. Image: Pamela Zeplin*

Paradoxically, the final day of the exhibition was even more exciting than the closing event of the previous evening. Demounting an exhibition with *élan* is rare but this final stage climaxed the entire project. At the point of demolition, while properties unit and occupational health and safety officials stood about, debating how to 'manage' the situation, the Trojan horse came down and was disposed of in less than an hour. In the frenzy of destruction around their feet and bewildered by the dynamic chaos of materials and tools flying everywhere, the forces of compliance hastily retreated.

In those few weeks of residency Dono, with his colleagues, had managed to discombobulate these seemingly inflexible forces of university restraint, as well as confound fixed notions of nation and community, volunteers and artists, art practice and teaching, tradition and modernity, and the role of high flying global artists. At a time of contracted hopes and dashed dreams during the Howard era, this project expanded a robust sense of what is

possible through art. In this way the residency created a necessary and therapeutic space for those involved. What resulted was firstly, a fantastic if bizarre sculpture, the likes of which had never been seen in Adelaide. More important was learning how an art school might also function - as a community of interest sustained intensely, materially and voluntarily, albeit over a number of weeks. All this hinged on a temporary but structurally sturdy installation built of shoddy materials with dodgy methods where collaborators assumed ownership of a grand and crazy community project.



*Figure 8: Trojan Horse' in construction, The Dream Republic, 2007, SASA Gallery, Adelaide. Photo: Pamela Zeplin*

Collaboration is, of course, never without challenges (Macarow & Samartzis 2008, p.1). One problem involved heart-stopping inter-University rivalry when a senior academic-cum-guardian-of-the-gamelan at another university threatened to cancel the public performance hours before the closing ceremony because, as had been previously agreed, the instruments were leaving their home turf. This issue highlighted another Dono modification to 'sacrosanct' tradition. And not everyone wished to be involved in the residency. Some of the more diffident art dudes around town adopted a mildly contemptuous attitude to this 'third world artist' and the decidedly uncool atmosphere of fun, daggy-ness and laughter pervading the School of Art. That was, until news of the project began filtering into the surrounding community. Finally, intrigued by the gigantic construction taking place at the University, the 'local heroes' googled 'Dono' on the internet and were, finally, sighted warily entering his ludicrous machine of war. What they may not have anticipated was an electronic fart machine alarm installed in the doorway of the beast's hindquarters. A crucial 'found object', this device offered the ultimate comment on pretentious 'arty farties' so ubiquitous in the art world, as well as the 'horse feathers'/hot air expelled by University bureaucracy (Dono 2007).

Certainly Dono's deployment of cross-cultural differences injected some badly needed community-based concepts and strategies for those involved, but the collaborators' individual – as well as collective – efforts also could be witnessed on and within the completed horse structure. It is too easy to ascribe this recuperative project

– which could be likened to a mental, emotional and perhaps spiritual health tonic – to the artist's so-called 'charisma' as other factors were literally 'at play'. Unsolicited emails by *The dream republic* participants testify to remarkable and even 'life changing' experiences (Lawrence 2007), with one student affirming:

*the whole collaboration [as] incredibly rewarding...[revealing] glimpses of what can be achieved' ... this collaborative (or communal) way of working is an incredibly important but increasingly neglected aspect of our lives (Huppatz 2007).*

Another student noted:

*I was truly engaged in the project as if it's part of me the whole installation sicne [sic] it allowed me to express my views and incorporate it within the project...I haven't worked on such a scale before...the whole idea of collaboration was great. I have made great friends whom [sic] made the atmosphere quite enjoyable... it was an honour to meet with Heri...I was so committed to the whole project...it was exciting, and to see people kids etc walking around the Trojan horse had made me feel proud of myself and of my efforts (El-Youssef 2007).*



*Figure 9: The Dream Republic, 2007, SASA Gallery, Adelaide. Photo: Pamela Zeplin*

For students and staff, the residency continues to live on in various forms. At least one Architecture staff member paid 'homage' to *The Dream Republic* by incorporating its salvaged materials in the following SASA Gallery exhibition. The subsequent SASA artist in residence, Julie Gough, whose practice had not included collaboration, was swamped by *The dream republic* participants, eager to collaborate on a new project. Despite her initial apprehension, Gough's exhibition took a different, collaborative direction –to general acclaim. A growing band of art students across three schools is now experimenting with art practices and social skills that reach beyond the conventional – and often competitive – solitude that is still fostered in tertiary art education and the contemporary art scene. Although not perhaps measurable in this case, it would be interesting to study this phenomenon more in depth as in the future, collaborative learning will become increasingly crucial for attuning art students to improved interpersonal and international understanding.

Dono returned to Adelaide in 2008 to complete an *OZArts Festival* residency, *Ose Tara Lia* (Indonesian for 'Australia' and 'I see nothing') at the Adelaide Festival Centre, and again in 2009 for a Hepatitis C Foundation health workshop and performance. Here Dono was able to re-connect with various *The dream republic* artist-volunteers, as well as a range of new collaborators, including children. Both these shorter residencies and exhibition/performances critically interrogated social and health issues while revealing the power of sociality, collaboration and improvisation to create wellbeing and confidence through continuing associations between people.

## CONCLUSION

Like other artists, I retain a healthy cynicism towards feel-good 'Pollyanna' projects masquerading as art and remain convinced that Dono's SASA residency could not be described merely in terms of therapy, although its effects can be considered therapeutic. To some extent a curative process was in operation during the residency which enriched students' and others' experience of art making but such therapy eschewed the conventional scenario of a psychotherapist conducting clinical 'diversional activities' (Rubin 2005). The integrity of the artworks and their makers remained paramount, even though therapeutic results from the residency arose organically through confrontation with, and creative overcoming of, negative institutional circumstances.

In a particularly risk-averse educational environment this residency project demonstrated how, together, diverse artists can create alternatives to predominant learning models of cynicism, detachment and competition. Despite some of these health-averse practices being still at large in university art education, many graduates manage to turn out to be reasonably healthy, if not always confident people. They are typically committed and socially aware individuals, lateral thinkers at the forefront of environmental and political issues who are able to extend themselves beyond art school's rarefied values to develop holistic strategies for their often diverse and entrepreneurial practices. While many thus 'survive' art school, too many others with impaired confidence fall by the wayside.

Therefore, the 'healthy' educational environment still has a significant role to play. This is widely acknowledged in Australian health and primary and secondary education sectors:

*The school setting provides a unique opportunity to promote health across demographics, cultural, religious and social boundaries.... Partnerships are encouraged between students, families, staff, professionals and the community (Health in Schools through the Arts n.d.).*

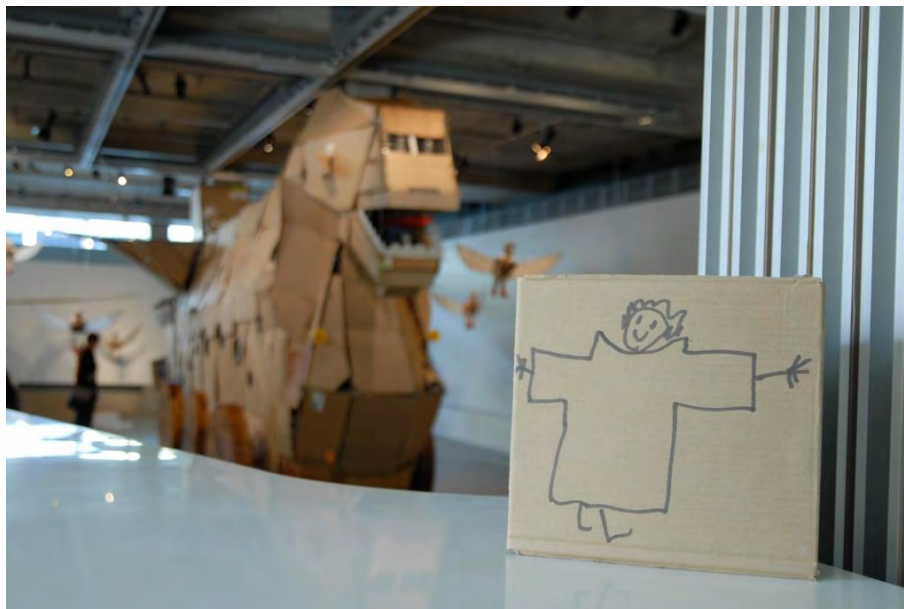


These principles equally apply to the tertiary art sector where Grierson (2005) also reminds us that:

*... an art school is a political institution as much as a cultural one ... a place where the investigation of ideas about the social, cultural and political are not only possible but may be explored with vigour.*

Heri Dono and his collaborators found such ideas may also include dealing with the excesses of Occupational Health and Safety regimes and other bureaucratic hindrances to the creative – and healthful – *play* of ideas, actions and dreams. If openness to the unexpected can be thus maintained, Grierson (2005) affirms that '[e]ngaging ethically with indeterminacy and difference... might then be possible as a condition of practice'.

For art education to regain its role as a catalyst for transformation, staff, students, and occasional artists-in-residence need to 'maintain a robust interrogation [and] exploration ... while at the same time... invigorat[ing] and strengthen[ing] relations between art and community' (Grierson 2005, p.6). As Dono's Adelaide sojourns have demonstrated, art has the power to temporarily suspend the might of bureaucratic systems, even in universities. While neither cure nor remedy can be guaranteed, art institutional health may yet improve, at least partially, through re-thinking the role of residency programs and their relation to pedagogy. 'Convalescence', then, may well begin with the recording of stories that recount the complex, internal dynamics at work within the residency enterprise as it intersects with art education, even if these tales are less reportable as official, institutionally sanctioned outcomes.



*Figure 10: Alexander Waite, Heri Dono, The Dream Republic, SASA Gallery, Adelaide, 2007. Photo: Toby Robertson*

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