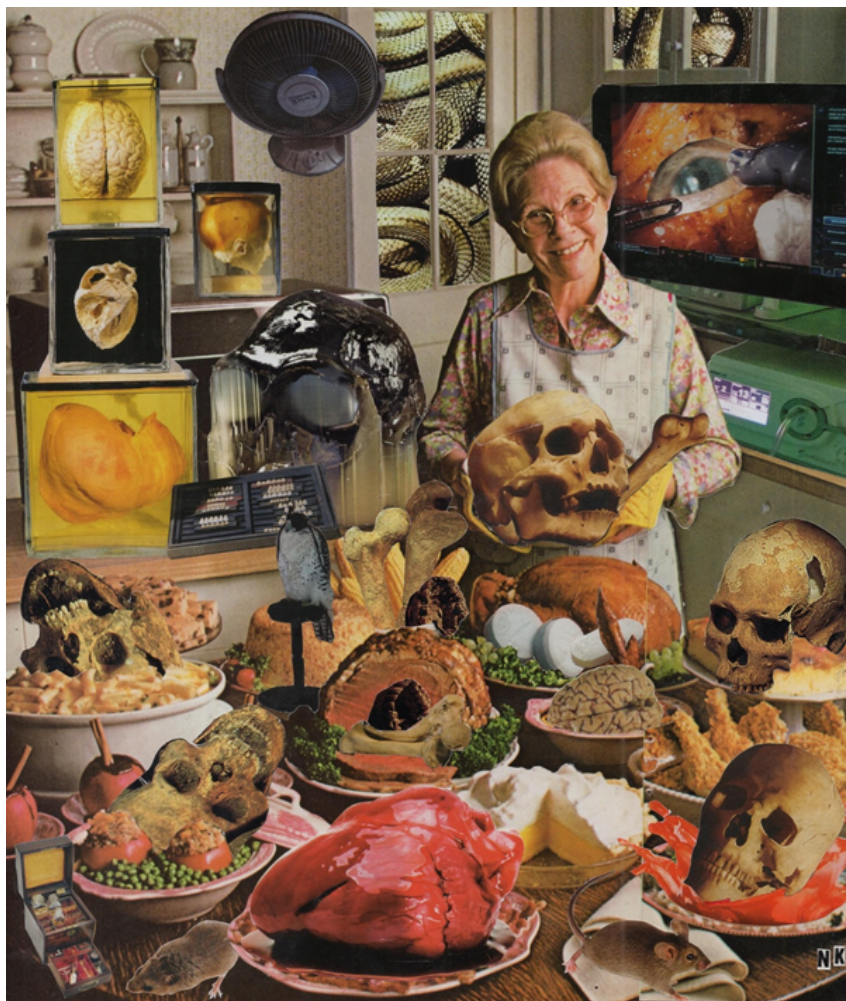


# CUTTING PAPER, STRINGING IT INTO *A Piece Of Art*

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That evening, before sunset on the 25th November 2020, I met Nova Kusuma at Taman Baca Kesiman, Denpasar. Our conversation finally happened in between his hectic schedule after his exhibition Artisan Day Out at Plataran Canggu. That afternoon he interrupted the long awaited conversation with a sentence that goes something like this, "If I didn't work on collages and become who I am now, maybe I would still be working in a hotel and have no idea about places like Taman Baca Kesiman, Paw" he said to me with a laugh.

Nova was the first collage artist that I got to know. His natural friendliness to everyone made him very approachable. Besides being friendly, he is also very explorative. Full of imagination, he is always very enthusiastic when conveying his crazy ideas, at least that is my impression when we are chatting together.

In 2015, Nova had the chance to attend Komunitas Pojok's exhibition. When he was busy playing the cassette, he saw someone cutting paper and creating a new visual work. Later he recognized the figure as a collage artist. His nickname is Billy Anjing, and Nova was even more surprised when he found out that Billy was the collage artist who made the album cover for the band Homicide.

Meetings between him and Billy happened repeatedly, their second meeting occurred when Nova was at an art event in the Sakenan area, Denpasar. With an abandoned restaurant as a backdrop, many art activities were held, such as murals and music. It was during that year, 2015, that Nova decided to pursue collage. His first experiments making artworks began with using materials at home, including using a kitchen knife and a razor blade lined with duct tape.

Nova's work is influenced a lot by the art collectives he meets, one of which is the Denpasar Collective (Denkol). Denkol has quite a big influence on Nova's work, he began to see

that zines born from punk culture also used collage techniques in all of their publications. Collages become something he could find everywhere.

Besides that, his first exhibition was held during the Markipat Denpasar Kolektif event. At that time Nova began to be more known in the collage scene, and many people were surprised by what Nova was doing, because the visuals that Nova presented were unique and unusual – sticking large lips on the forehead of the object that he responded to for example.

While working, Nova began to realize that collage is his home. He feels more comfortable and more confident when working with paper, scissors and cutters. The works that he produced made him love collage. To this day, he has been working on collage art for about 5 years.

Even though Nova is active and part of a hip-hop music group, he is more interested in collage than graffiti, which is usually associated with hip-hop culture. Regarding this, Nova had another answer. According to him, hip-hop is a mix of cultures. In fact, hip-hop embodies the many ways of making art, not limited to just one way of working. For him, daily activities like cooking have collage in them. Existing ingredients are arranged in a way so that they become dishes that form new visuals. Collage is part of our daily life.



Pak Wira's Store on Jalan Kedondong, (writer's documentation)

Nova is always enthusiastic when he talks about his works and artistic process. He does not want to be discouraged by his work, because every work he created makes him happy and that is enough for him. Nevertheless, Nova does sometimes get restless while undergoing the work process.

Right at the beginning of 2020 he began to think about the randomness of his work because there was no specific character that he tried to highlight. When I asked about his concern, he seemed to immediately convince himself that what he was doing was part of the journey itself (character searching). Because he is constantly producing works, Nova may think that he does not have a special character or characteristic in his works,

but Nova's exploration of different forms and media could become the hallmark of his works.

Regarding this restlessness, he also recalls his conversation with a writer named Juli Sastrawan. Nova said that the two of them often exchanged ideas, until one point where Juli disturbed his thoughts by saying that there was nothing new in this world, and that all the arts in the world are just a form of repetition. Nova was quite influenced by this thought, he also said that the process of creation actually started during the renaissance (enlightenment) period; the rest of the works are just a form of repetition and modification of what has been created.

Even though art is a form of repetition, Nova often improvises by exploring and combining the inspiration he gets from his friends. In addition, he also explores magazines as his ammunition for creating works. The magazines he collects are mostly used magazines, he even is a regular at an old magazine kiosk at Jalan Kedondong, Denpasar. The store is called Kios Wira Kesuma, which sells various types of magazines, books and stationery. It was not uncommon for Nova to find hidden treasures there, providing him with ammunition for his artworks. Nova also built a good relationship with the store owner, Pak Wira, and every time he visits, Pak Wira knows what Nova is looking for. Pak Wira also shared a little about Nova to me. "For Nova, he usually looks for arts magazine, that's where his passion lies," he said.

### **Collage Artist in Bali's Fine Arts Ecosystem**

Nova Kusuma is a young man born in Denpasar, Bali. Growing up and living in Denpasar made him grow into a known collage artist. With tourism being so popular in Bali, Nova actually studied tourism at the Tourism College (STP), Nusa Dua. It never occurred to him to dwell more on art work that he is currently doing. He has produced many works in the form of collages and music. He also has other current activities such as working in a tattoo studio in Canggu.

Bali is famous for its rich arts scene, including fine art, performing arts, music and so on. Fine arts in Bali developed rapidly through the presence of famous painters and sculptors in Bali. Fine art is something that will never die and only continue to grow in Bali.<sup>1</sup>

The art ecosystem in Bali is more or less influenced by the traditions and culture of the people who are close to art, for example through handicrafts made as offerings in religious ceremonies. Although painting and sculpture have received more attention in society, the culture and ecosystem of art in Bali has expanded into a new spectrum among Balinese youth. The spread of art among Balinese youths has made one of fine arts - collage - one of the things that enriches the arts ecosystem in Bali today.

Personally, my first introduction to collage art was when I got to know Nova in 2019. This was also a moment where I got the chance to enjoy collage art in Bali - having previously only known about art that is more commonly displayed in public such as paintings. When I first met Nova Kusuma in 2019, he was running a workshop and initiating a collage tour with the community that he is familiar with, the result of which will then be displayed on World Collage Day.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://balitribune.co.id/content/bali-megarupa-membaca-peta-baru-seni-rupa-bali>

## Tracing the History of Collage Art

Looking back into history, the emergence of collage art can be traced back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century in Venice, Italy. The emergence of collage as an art form dates back to the Synthetic Cubism period by artists Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque, in 1912-1914.<sup>2</sup> Collage also appeared during the period of Dadaism in 1916-1923. Collage is a form of fine art which involves combining artistic compositions from various materials (found objects), such as paper, magazines, cloth, glass, metal, wood, and other objects which are then affixed to an image surface.

Collage art has actually been present in Indonesia through the daily lives of its people. In Bali itself, an art method similar to collage can be found in offerings banten<sup>3</sup> and traditional snacks pulogembal<sup>4</sup> which are taped in such a way that it forms a pattern. These daily practices make collage an art that is close to the community. In addition, the presence of collage art in Indonesia has developed from the ground up, it is not produced or introduced through the mainstream art scene like most other fine arts. Roughly speaking, collage art is an art that doesn't get much attention because fine arts such as paintings have captured the hearts of the audience too much.

The existence of collage as an art form has actually developed quite progressively. This development emerged from the spirit of collage that is friendly to the community; art that is cheap and can be done by anyone. In addition, collage art is inclusive because it does not have such specific rules for people who want to create a collage, plus the tools and materials used are everyday items such as magazines, newspapers, dry leaves, grain or other objects that can be stuck onto the artwork's surface.

## Collage As Daily Life And an Alternative

As a collage artist, Nova Kusuma also departed from this passion. He said his enthusiasm working with the collage medium grew because of his lack of confidence in his drawing skills. Billy Anjing, a collage artist and friend was the person who started to get him interested in working with paper, glue, and scissors. Nova chose to try analog collage. Some of Nova's works are also derived from the spirit of friendship mentioned earlier, their work was looked at by various friends with different backgrounds. When he first started collaging, his work was used as an album cover for the music group Cyclops. After that, he initiated a touring collage workshop which aimed to share the spirit of collage with his friends and how collage can be done by anyone, anywhere.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://kreativv.com/seni-rupa-dan-desain/seni-kolase-adalah/>

<sup>3</sup> Banten (sesajen) <https://phdi.or.id/artikel/bali-banten-dan-santun>

<sup>4</sup> Banten Pulagembal memiliki komponen berbagai bentuk jajan yang tersusun sesuai dengan fungsinya masing-masing. <https://baliexpress.jawapos.com/read/2017/11/05/24604/ini-mak-na-dan-fungsi-17-jajan-dalam-banten-pregembal-atau-pulogembal>



Nova's movement gathered more attention when he held a collage workshop with Sumba cloth at the Wastraku Gallery, Canggu. Many collaborations were born, one of which was when he worked at a tattoo studio in Canggu. The collaboration was exploring new mediums such as combining polaroid tone photos with magazines through the cut-and-paste method so as to produce fresher works of art.

Nova's background as a collage artist cannot be separated from his love of music. Nova along with a few friends also initiated the hip-hop group Madness On Tha Block (MOTB). From there, Nova began to explore many things and became quite a productive collage artist. He once told me that collage, which he started as a hobby, has now been able to provide him with profit through turning his works into calendars, t-shirts, album covers, and backdrops.

Even though he started from musical background, Nova's skill in collage was also influenced by his culture in Bali. As a Hindu youth in particular, Nova often witnessed parents, especially mothers at home, making offerings 'banten' from young coconut leaves called lamak<sup>5</sup>. According to him, Lamak also applies collage techniques, only that the materials used are natural ingredients. This cultural background cannot be separated because this inherent quality is one of the things that has shaped Nova's journey to this day.

## Creative Process

Since 2015, Nova has been active in the collage scene. He exhibited in personal and group exhibitions with other artists, and was involved in many single and interdisciplinary projects, such as theater. Nova's creative process is relaxed, he let it flows because the most important thing for him is his own satisfaction, technique is not as important. This statement became valid when I asked another question regarding works that he wanted to make. According to Nova, his concept when making artworks is not set in stone, instead, Nova always takes one visual object which he then responds to with other pictures. Inspirations for his works also vary, from recently watched films, objects he has seen on the internet, or from his hip-hop background.

Other than daily life, Nova also takes inspiration from his friends such as Billy Anjing and Irene Febry who also work in the collage scene. Nova is inspired by other artists and often explores what his friends are doing. At this moment Nova is also starting to explore mix media techniques with everyday materials such as shopping receipts, duct tape, and sewing techniques.

Even though he has uncertainty regarding the characteristics of his work, Nova believes that his own unique character will be created from his consistency in creating works. Consistency in exploring new forms and media, because Nova also realizes that consistency can be seen as stagnation of the artist.

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<sup>5</sup> Lamak adalah semacam taplak dari daun enau yang dirajut dengan lidi bambu. <https://baliexpress.jawa-pos.com/read/2017/09/29/16298/begini-makna-lamak-dalam-pelaksanaan-upacara-di-bali>

Until now, many things have changed. In between his work at the tattoo studio, Nova actually creates more collages at work instead of at home. He finds a lot of inspiration through meeting new people, including at his work place.

## Networking in Communities

As a collage artist, Nova is actively involved in collage communities in Bali and Indonesia. This community grows from a spirit of togetherness. In Bali itself, Nova is actively involved with the collage community that has been present since April 2020. This community calls itself Ejakolase<sup>6</sup>, and they have a vision to spread the spirit of collage by conducting workshops in the Denpasar area. The first agenda for Ejakolase came to fruition last September – despite the pandemic, the offline workshop ran successfully.

Being based in Pemogan, Denpasar makes it easy for him to join the music and art communities in Denpasar. On a daily basis Nova works at a tattoo studio in Canggu, giving him more opportunities to meet new people and be known as a collage artist in Bali.

The prominence of collages from the community built by Nova and his friends is interesting, how in the midst of the digital world collage art is still favored, especially by young

people in Denpasar. The spirit of collage is mostly carried by young people, which is important because the collage technique indirectly upcycles used

Meanwhile, to continue his vision of developing collage as an inclusive art, Nova also networked and joined the Collage ID<sup>7</sup> community, a community initiated by collage practitioners from various regions in Indonesia. Collage ID also responds to the celebration of World Collage Day. The hope is that there will be camaraderie between fellow collage artists. Other than that, the presence of this community makes collage art more and more attractive to the public at large. In 2020, Collage ID also initiated a digital exhibition and printed postcards from collage artists in various regions – including the release of a zine called Kolazine. In the Kolazine, works by Balinese collage artists were showcased — Nova was one of the contributors along with Savitri Sastrawan who contributed in the article column for the zine.<sup>8</sup>

In addition to self organisation and joining the community, Nova also promotes his work by doing independent publication through his Instagram account @novakusuma\_\_\_<sup>9</sup>, which indirectly helps him in archiving his works in the digital world. These publications and archives help Nova in compiling his works and introducing his work to the wider public.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.instagram.com/ejakolase/?hl=id>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.instagram.com/collage.id/?hl=id>

<sup>8</sup> Collage.id. Mei 2020. Kolazine. Vol 1. 96 hal. Collage Id: Indonesia.

<sup>9</sup> [https://www.instagram.com/novakusuma\\_\\_\\_/?hl=id](https://www.instagram.com/novakusuma___/?hl=id)

## Sustainable Art

So far, Nova's works are still focused on the medium of old paper and magazines utilizing the analog method of scissors and cutters. Nova's work is dominated by dark colors with a slightly eerie aesthetic. He often combines everyday life with things that are opposite. For example, in one of his works he combines the image of two dogs wearing wedding costumes. He also presented a work with a picture of a grandmother serving food, but on her plate was a skull and internal organs. Although only in a few series, he also experimented by pasting several papers to create curves and textures using different colors that are stacked in different ways.

In the works that are produced, I see quite a lot of Nova's daily activities that he tries to include in his work. For example, he made a T-shirt design with Reject the Reclamation of Benoa Bay (Tolak Reklamasi Teluk Benoa) for the Tegal Darmasaba Youth Fighters community.

I inferred that this work was created because he also participated in activism and voiced the Bali Tolak Reklamasi movement. It is no exaggeration to say that an artist's work is a description of himself and his life in a different medium. His experience and self will remain in his work, whether seen clearly or in passing. In my opinion, a work of art conveys

Overall, collage art evokes my passion and experience in enjoying art differently, it comes from things that are so close to our daily life yet many people are not aware. This art form presents a new perspective that art is not necessarily exclusive, art can also be created with objects that we encounter every day. Collage is a breath of fresh air for those of us who have doubts in our ability to paint or draw on paper. The enthusiasm that comes from the collage artist is also worth noting, how they use items that are no longer used to make new works that express passion and activism.

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## ABOUT Denpasar 2020: REGENERATION

These writings are part of writing workshop which is a series of activities of Denpasar 2020 program: Regeneration. This program gives free course to 8 young people to participate in the series of workshop which focused on writing and creative review about artistic and cultural activities. These 6 weeks workshop includes broad topics, from art curatorship, citizen journalism, photography, review and critics to performing art. 4 invited mentors are well known culture and art figure in Bali and Indonesia, namely Anwar 'Jimpe' Rachman, Farah Wardani, Made Adnyana 'Ole', dan Syafiudin Vifick.

DenPasar is an annual program organized by CushCush Gallery (CCG), an alternative creative platform located in downtown Denpasar that dedicates itself to multidisciplinary collaboration by bridging various creative fields including arts and design.

