

UMAM AL MAUDUDY

Dissemination of Knowledge through Comics

By : Bram Adimas W.

Translated by : Sherrene Chua

In art discourses in France there are terms that classify ten types of art first popularized by Ricciotto Canudo and then constantly updated and refined by the French Ministry of Culture. The first, or le premier art (not the same meaning as l'art premier) is architecture. The second is sculpture. The third is painting. The fourth is the art of music. The fifth is literature. The sixth is the performing arts. The seventh is film and cinema.

The eighth type is les arts médiatiques, or art that utilizes media such as radio, television, and photography. I don't agree with the media's understanding of the eighth art because if Marshall McLuhan's idea is that "the medium is the message", then sculpture, letters, and lights are the medium as well because they emit a message. But perhaps the context of the media here is narrow, in the sense of what we usually think of as the media.

There are two other types of art, the ninth type of comics and the tenth art of video games. Debate continues over what should be worthy of an eleventh art classification and beyond.

I'm going to focus on the ninth art. Last October I attended the Academy of Journalism Against Corruption organized by the Corruption Eradication Commission. 35 participants from all over Indonesia with various backgrounds gathered and studied together with the aim to disseminate education about corruption to the public through their own methods. One of the 35 participants was Umam Al Maududy, a librarian at a Tsanawiyah Madrasah (a muslim junior high school) in Jembrana district as well as a comic artist.



Umam Al Maududy

In addition to being a librarian, Umam also helped to teach several classes and became the junior high school olympiad coach in his Madrasah for the last five years. “I teach for 12 hours (a week),” he said. This Master of Biology graduate from Malang State University uses comics to disseminate knowledge, especially in the field of biology, to his students.

This can be seen from the works he uploaded to Academia.edu which include “Plant Growth and Development”, “Genetics”, and most recently “Corona Comic” explaining the phenomena that happened and changed our lives this year (2020). There are also comics about molecular biology that are still about 60 percent finished and being worked on.

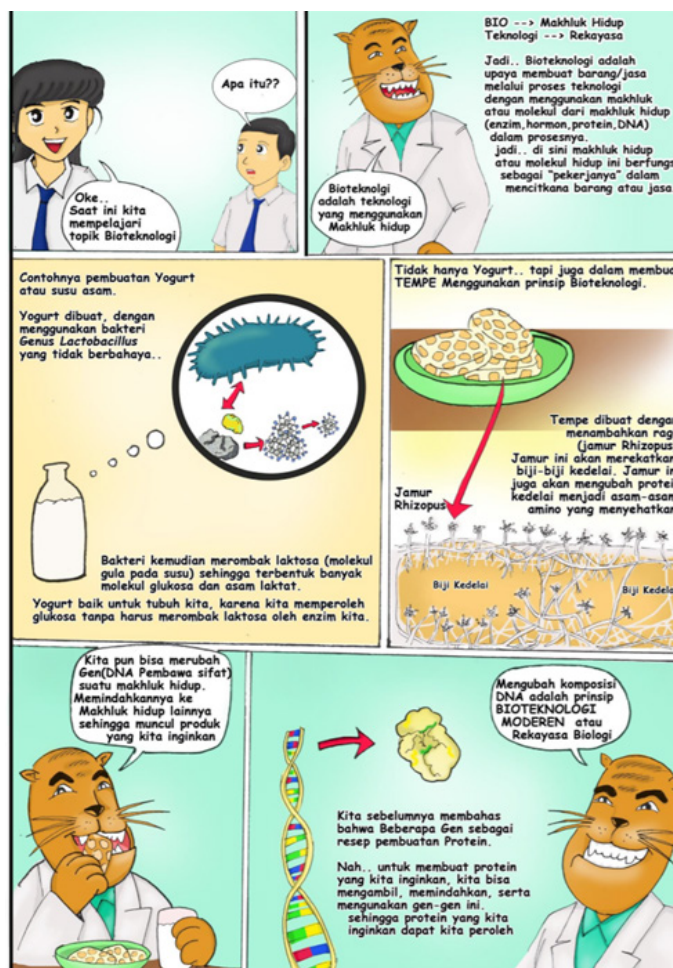


Kisah dalam komik Loloan

Umam believes that comics have the power to simplify and visualize difficult concepts and make them interesting so that they can motivate children to learn. He thinks that teenage children tend to have more difficulty understanding too many oral messages so it is necessary to convey ideas in other ways to them, one of them through comics.

Truth be told. Reading is not something that is entrenched in Indonesian society. When I was in junior high school there was one subject that required me to read and analyze novels. My grades were poor for those subjects because I

didn't like reading novels and the story was not relatable to me. At that time I preferred to read second hand Archie comics and foreign-language newspapers or magazines to improve my language skills rather than read novels.



Karya lainnya tentang bioteknologi

"I don't expect their grades to be high just by reading my comics," Umam explained. "Each child has their own skills. I just hope that from my comics they learn to like reading or gain new information."

So far, Umam has received positive responses from both the students and Madrasah in using comics as teaching aids. Other teachers at his madrasah have already downloaded his comics. However, his comics are not yet widely printed and there are rules that prohibit students from bringing mobile phones to school, so some students have to read the comics at home.

Umam has enjoyed drawing since he was a child. Initially he made comics just to spread his ideas on a non-commercial basis, but soon he got offers to make comics. The comics he creates are drawn by hand, and some are drawn with the help of technology such as Photoshop and drawing tablets.

There are several comic artists who are his role models: Scott McCloud, Larry Gonick, author of *Safe Area Goražde* Joe Sacco (one of the comics that I have read), and Aji Prasetyo whose compilation of works is recorded in *Hidup Itu Indah* (Life is Beautiful). "They present works that communicate knowledge, criticism, and journalism," he explains. The two titles mentioned earlier are also among his favorite comics.

LOLOAN COMICS AND FUTURE PLANS

A few years ago I wrote an article titled “Suku Melayu Bali” on the Indonesian Wikipedia page for a competition titled Wiki Jelajah. Apart from not winning because I didn’t complete all the challenges, I learned things about Balinese history that I never knew before even though I was born and raised here, and visited home at least twice a year during the years that I was away.

I experienced a bit of nostalgia when reading Loloan comics: Merajut Harmoni yang Tergerus Roda Zaman among the science-themed comics Umam uploaded on his Academia profile. Both the Wikipedia article that I wrote and loloan comics explain one of the stories behind multiculturalism in Jembrana. The only difference is that the comic consists of eight pages so the summary of events contain less detail.

“I want it to be longer and more detailed,” Umam said. “But only if there’s time.” Another obstacle he experienced in developing Loloan comics was the limited funds to cover operational costs and limited bibliographies. This is a pity because there are still many regional and national historical stories that are not widely known by the

public. What we learn in school are historical stories that have been curated, and many are designed to be memorized, not to be analyzed deeper or questioned.

Umam confessed that he is pessimistic about completing other works that he had planned, discussing other topics like evolution and philosophical studies. “Maybe when I had retired from my job.”

“In Indonesia there are actually many comic artists, but they work more on overseas projects, such as drawing and coloring, rather than developing their own characters and stories,” said Umam. “It’s hard if we want to compete with Western comics and manga.”

Back to the Academy of Journalism Against Corruption. As part of the academy’s final assignment, Umam held an anti-corruption caricature competition for high school level last November. On the announcement poster he shared on his Instagram account @ideartlisme, he illustrated a dead rat carrying cash captured in a trap. The medium is the message, says Marshall McLuhan. From the illustration it clearly confirms that corruption is a latent danger

that has long threatened this country. Indeed, anti-corruption education should be spread to all parts of the country so that corruption can be eradicated. Hopefully, Umam's small steps can start a change in behavior on a large scale in the future.

There are two things I learned from this encounter. First, I believe that art can be an agent of change in a society. But, the second point, as a person who is not involved in art activities, I increasingly believe that art needs adequate support and funding in order for creativity to thrive in our lives. This is what I think is still lacking, not only in Bali or Indonesia but around the world.

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ABOUT DenPasar2020: REGENERATION

This article is the product of a writing workshop which is part of a series of activities from the DenPasar2020: Regeneration program. DPS2020 writing workshop provides free mentorship to 8 young people to participate in a series of workshops that focus on writing and creative reviews about artistic and cultural activities. The 6-week workshop covered a wide range of topics from arts curatorial, citizen journalism, photography, reviews and critique of performing arts. The 4 invited mentors are art and cultural figures known in Bali and Indonesia, including Anwar "Jimpe" Rachman, Farah Wardani, Made Adnyana "Ole", and 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.

