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From Kowangan to Bundengan: Community collaboration as conservation of a musical instrument

Presenter: Rosie Cook

Co-authors: Luqmanul Chakim, Sa'id Muhammad, Dr Nicole Tse and Prof Margaret Kartomi

ABSTRACT

This paper reflects upon the conservation of objects relating to performance -- particularly from world cultures -- not only through documentation of experiences, but through the creation of living links which enable human-to-human knowledge transmission.

Using a time-based media approach, the conservation and documentation of a rare Javanese musical instrument from the Music Archive at Monash University (MAMU) has led to the development of a network across disciplines and communities in Australia and Indonesia. Through collaboration with archivists, ethnomusicologists, musicians, instrument-builders, audiences, school-teachers, historians and film-makers, to better understand the significance of the MAMU's Kowangan (including the complexity of its classification as "*kowangan*" when it is locally known as "*bundengan*"), conservators meaningfully participated in a community-led revival program. This approach highlights the role of conservators as creators of meaning and public benefit, as well as the integration of intangible cultural heritage practices within materials conservation. As a result of this collaborative experience, a series of public workshops were designed and are being facilitated in Indonesia and Australia.

This paper examines the richness of knowledge uncovered through collaborative experiences which transcend the ascribed roles of "participant observation" and "consultation" during fieldwork to "knowing within". Particular focus is given to the impact of this project within the community and the non-conventional ways in which its significance was explored and expanded upon, supported by social media, government and university programs, and traditional journalism. Knowledge flows between the different collaborators, and participants have integrated conservation concepts within their own day-to-day practices. As a consequence, both the conservation of the MAMU Kowangan and its associated music revival movement acknowledge the larger community that surrounds a performative artform, and that 'the realness of a drum' depends not only on the drummer (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture*, 1998), but also on the audiences, raw materials, history

and continued significance of the drum.

BIOGRAPHIES

Rosie Cook, recipient of the 2016 Alexander Copland Award for best conservation thesis, and 2017 Asialink Arts Resident, has over 15 years of involvement in projects across Asia Pacific. Her conservation practice focuses on world cultures, performance and community engagement, with current projects in Indonesia, the Philippines and Taiwan.

LuqmanulChakim received a BA in ethnomusicology from the Indonesian Institute of the Arts Surakarta. For his 2015 scientific paper entitled "The Potential of TrompetNgomong as a Communication Tool for Mute People", he was awarded as one of Indonesia's "Top 15 Outstanding Students" at national level.

Muhammad Sa'id received a BA in ethnomusicology from the Indonesian Institute of Arts Surakarta. Expanding upon his 2016 research project and his resulting skripsi on the topic of "Organological Study of Bundengan Music in Wonosobo", he has become a bundengan musician and activist based in Wonosobo, Java.

Dr Nicole Tse is part of the teaching and research team at the Grimwade Centre for Cultural Materials Conservation, The University of Melbourne. She has a long term research interest in cultural materials conservation in tropical climates, and is a founding member of APTCCARN (Asia Pacific Tropical climate Conservation Art Research Network).

Professor Margaret Kartomi is an internationally known researcher with a track record in ethnomusicology. She is the founding director of the Music Archive of Monash University /MAMU (founded in 1975) and a leading organologist. She is Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities and Corresponding Member of the American Musicological Society.