

Art with a Conscience

■ PHOTOS DISSY EKAPRAMUDITA

With an eye to the future, Ika Vantiani creates new works with old materials.





Cutting and pasting may bring back childhood memories but for Ika Vantiani, it is her job.

Ika, 37, a collage artist, jumped ship and quit her advertising job in 2009 to turn her hobby into a career.

Prior to the switch, Ika only thought of her collages as a pastime and created them along with her hobbies such as sewing, drawing, making art and crafts with other media, and running workshops.

But that all changed when she created a series of collages for an exhibition she was presenting with two other friends.

“That was the first point when I said to myself, ‘I know I want to do this,’” Ika said. “Right after my exhibition I thought that I should open my own shop and try to sell my art.”

Wanting to gain international exposure, Ika started an online store on Etsy.com. Known for its artistic community and handmade crafts, Etsy was an obvious choice and Ika quickly garnered positive feedback and started receiving invitations to join exhibitions in the United States.

“Some people on Etsy would say ‘Let’s do some collaborations, Ika,’ ‘Let’s do some wholesale,’ and such. Since then, my exposure to these artists and craftsmen through Etsy has been amazing, and it is because of that, that I have become really confident and positive about making arts and crafts,” she said.

Getting inspired and inspiring others

Ika was inspired to become a collage artist after seeing the work of American artist and illustrator Lisa Congdon. Ika was doubly inspired by Congdon because, like Ika, she started her artistic career later in life.

“Lisa Congdon started when she was 34, and I realized that you can start anytime, and so I started when I was 32,” she said. “At that time I said to myself that I could be like

her in that way.”

Not only inspired by Congdon’s career, Ika said she was inspired by the artist’s emphasis on inclusion, learning from other artists and developing a community with like-minded people.

“I think I’m also [like that] because I started everything myself, using my own hands and learning,” Ika said. “[Congdon] has been my biggest inspiration, not only as an artist but as a person.”

In addition to making her own art, Ika also holds workshops for children, teenagers and adults who have an interest in art, especially “green” or sustainable art.

Although she helps others create their own artworks through these workshops, Ika often finds herself being inspired by these unrestricted environments as opposed to her usual work process, which is based on custom orders.

“I noticed that the kind of pieces I make during the workshops tend to be very different from when I make collages at home by myself. Maybe it is because I have no direction in the workshops and I’m free to do whatever, and it often turns out to be very interesting,” she said. “At home, I’m like ‘OK, this piece has to have a story and requirements from the orders,’ and there are lots of things like this that I have to consider.”

Stay sustainable

Ika said two major factors in her work were a do-it-yourself aesthetic and being environmentally friendly.

The DIY aspect is Ika’s way of exploring her art and includes a trial-and-error creation process, discussions with new people, brainstorming and receiving feedback. She sums up this aspect as a “learning-by-doing spirit.”

Ika is also an environmentalist. She makes an effort to incorporate sustainable and recycled products into her art. While working on pieces for an exhibition focused



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on the economic downturn called “Recession Proof,” Ika started by gathering packs of discarded scrap paper to use as art materials.

“The requirement of the project was that your collage could not include new materials apart from the background, which could be bought,” she said.

The scrap paper quickly became part of Ika’s signature style. Her recycled craft brand, “Recycle Retro,” includes even more found materials such as second-hand and vintage fabrics, and even rice sacks in its products. Ika also tries to be environmentally sustainable in her life in general.

“I believe that the amount of

consumption also affects us, so I often feel that the amount [I consume] every day has to equal to the amount of recycling,” she said. “It’s been very hard, but small things require a willingness to keep doing it and for other people to keep doing it.”

Small things Ika has taken up to reduce her material consumption include carrying a reusable tote bag and using handkerchiefs instead of tissues, which many of her friends find strange.

“When someone sees me using [a handkerchief] they find it different because it is not common, and people ask me ‘Why do you do that?’ They are also the ones who

want to help the environment, but find [the handkerchiefs] too weird,” she said.

Branching out

Ika is now working on expanding her artwork to incorporate more topics.

“If you notice, all of my collages do not have any Indonesian aspects to them,” Ika said. “When people see me for the first time after seeing my work, they’re surprised that I’m Indonesian. So I’d like to use more Indonesian characteristics.”

After noticing that a lot of Indonesia’s past and stories have been lost over time, Ika said she wants to bring back some historical figures and characters.

“The old stories and figures are what I’m trying to remind people about, something like, ‘Once upon a time, there was this heroine from Aceh,’” she said. “Lately I’ve been thinking about bringing back old Indonesian heroines.”

Where to find her

Currently, Ika’s merchandise is available at Dia.Lo.Gue Artspace, which is holding an art market this month, and her framed originals are available at Komunitas Salihara.

In the upcoming year, Ika is planning solo exhibitions in Yogyakarta and Bali so she can concentrate on the local market.

She will also be part of a group exhibition in February with two other artists who work in different media. Ika said she wanted to use this opportunity to work with new materials and expand on the direction of her art.

When asked what kind of materials she’d like to use, Ika exclaimed, “Styrofoam!”

“Imagine Styrofoam, man! Imagine people throwing it around!” she said. “I want to move towards this direction and I think it will be very interesting.”

Jassmyn Goh