



Sneakers are the theme and subject matter in Dodit Artawan's paintings. If we find ourselves stand face to face with Dodit's paintings, we will immediately suspect that Dodit is crazy for sneakers. Such suspicion proves to be correct. Dodit is indeed a lover of sneakers; one can say that he is a "sneaker-freak" or a "sneaker head". The range of sneakers that we see in Dodit's canvases actually represents his personal collection. Scores of pairs of sneakers are neatly stored in a glass case in Dodit's bedroom, like treasures. When he was still a high-school student, Dodit had the desire to collect branded sneakers. Branded sneakers, with their many kinds of designs, exert a strong appeal on Dodit—and to other sneakerheads in general, of course. In this case, we can say that they have a fetishist attitude toward sneakers.

# SNEAKERHEAD PAINTING: DOUBLE FETISHISM

A SOLO EXHIBITION BY DODIT ARTAWAN

SNEAKERHEAD PAINTING: DOUBLE FETISHISM  
A SOLO EXHIBITION BY DODIT ARTAWAN

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# **SNEAKERHEAD PAINTING: DOUBLE FETISHISM**

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DODIT ARTAWAN'S SOLO EXHIBITION

SIGIarts

A SIGlarts Book

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# Sneakerhead Painting: Double Fetishism

Asmudjo J. Irianto

“‘I challenge any art lover,’ exclaimed Bataille, ‘to love a canvas as much as a fetishist loves a shoe.’”<sup>1</sup>

Sepatu memang alas kaki, namun demikian bisa dikatakan gengsi sepatu lebih tinggi dari pada penutup kepala. Sepatu bahkan dikenal menjadi salah satu obyek *fetish* yang cukup menonjol: *shoe fetishism*—walau memang *shoe fetishism* biasanya menyangkut sepatu yang ada kaitannya dengan *sexual fetishism* atau hasrat/fantasi seksual, macam *stiletto heel shoes*. Tentu saja, sepatu juga merupakan perangkat *fashion* yang penting. Jenis dan merek sepatu juga menjadi penanda kelas sosial pemakainya, sebagaimana ungkapan, “*You are What on Your Feed*.” Karena itu sepatu juga merefleksikan gaya hidup dan identitas pemakainya, dan kerap menjadi penanda bagi komunitas dan gerakan *subculture* tertentu, macam para *punkers* yang umumnya menggunakan sepatu *boot*. Namun rasanya tak ada sepatu yang sepenting *sneaker* sebagai penanda aspek kebudayaan masa kini, dikenal dengan *sneaker culture* atau sebut saja “kebudayaan sepatu keds.”

*Sneaker* berawal dari sepatu bersol karet dengan harga murah yang diproduksi tahun 1830-an oleh Liverpool Rubber Company. Sepatu tersebut awalnya disebut *plimsoll* berupa sol karet sederhana dengan kain kanvas di bagian atasnya. Tahun 1892 U.S. Rubber Company membuat versi yang lebih berkualitas dan menamainya sepatu *Keds*. Sejak tahun 1900-an permintaan terhadap sepatu bersol karet meningkat tajam karena nyaman dipakai. Sepatu bersol karet hampir tidak menimbulkan bunyi ketika dipakai berjalan, sang pemakai dapat menyelinap (*sneak up*) diam-diam, karena itu sepatu bersol karet kemudian populer disebut *sneaker*.<sup>2</sup> *Sneaker* kemudian berkembang menjadi sepatu *sport*, seperti sepatu basket dan tennis. Namun *sport sneaker* juga dikenakan dalam aneka kegiatan yang tak berhubungan dengan olah raga. Sifat *informal*, *casual*, nyaman dipakai dan “bergaya” menjadikannya *sneaker* sebagai sepatu pilihan kaum muda. Karenanya *sneaker* menjadi penanda *fashion style* dan identitas kaum muda urban. Seperti jeans, *sneaker* merupakan *fashion statement* yang berkait dengan semangat kebebasan, egaliter, budaya populer, kehidupan urban kosmopolitan. *Sneaker* juga menjadi bagian dari



2 kehidupan jalanan serta *underground*, itu sebabnya *sneaker* juga kerap dikaitkan dengan budaya *hiphop*.

Para produsen *sneaker* cukup lihai untuk mengangkat pamor *sneaker*. *Passion* dan sikap *fetish* para penggemar *sneaker* tentunya tidak lepas dari konstruk identitas *sneaker* yang kerap dikaitkan dengan aspek-aspek *sub-culture* yang berkarakter *counter culture*. Namun seperti biasanya pada saat kapital terlibat, maka komponen-komponen *counter culture* akan terkooptasi dan berubah menjadi *mainstream culture*. Karena itu *branded sneaker* saat ini justru menjelma menjadi representasi gaya hidup menengah atas. Harga *branded sneaker* tak murah, apalagi untuk ukuran kebanyakan orang Indonesia.

*Sneaker* adalah tema dan *subject matter* pada lukisan Dodit Artawan. Siapapun yang berhadapan dengan lukisan Dodit tentu akan menduga bahwa dia tergila-gila pada *sneaker*. Dugaan tersebut benar adanya, Dodit memang seorang maniak *sneaker*, biasa disebut sebagai *sneaker freaker* atau *sneakerhead*. Kumpulan bermacam *sneaker* yang tampil di kanvas Dodit adalah koleksi pribadinya. Berpuluh *sneaker* tersimpan rapi dalam almari kaca di kamar tidur Dodit, layaknya barang berharga. Pada saat masih di sekolah lanjutan atas, Dodit sudah mengidamkan memiliki koleksi *branded sneaker*. *Sneaker* dengan bermacam desain dari merek-merek yang terkenal memiliki daya tarik luar biasa bagi Dodit—dan tentunya para *sneakerhead*. Dalam kaitan ini bisa dikatakan mereka memiliki *fetish* terhadap *sneaker*. *Fetish* sendiri diartikan sebagai berikut,

*“Fetish is a familiar word for an exotic thing. In ordinary usage everyone knows that it means an object of irrational fascination, something whose power, desirability, or significance a person passionately overvalues, even though that some person may know very well intellectually that such feelings are unjustifiable excessive.”*<sup>3</sup>

Dari apa yang dijelaskan oleh William Pietz tersebut tampak bahwa istilah *fetish* (-object) awalnya ditujukan pada patung pemujaan—pada masyarakat primitif—yang dianggap memiliki tuah karena adanya roh yang bernaung di dalamnya. Tentu saja istilah tersebut memiliki

*bias antropologis/etnografis, awalnya hanya berlaku pada benda-benda dari masyarakat pedalaman/primitif menurut kaca mata pengamat Barat. Namun beberapa pengamat kebudayaan kemudian menyatakan istilah fetish juga seharusnya berlaku pada pemujaan benda/artefak pada masyarakat Barat—yang juga jauh dari rasional, sebagaimana ditunjukkan dalam kutipan di atas. Bahkan sosiologis Pierre Bourdieu menyatakan bahwa dalam masyarakat modern manifestasi fetish dapat dilihat dalam puncak seni rupa modern, “While a sociologist like Bourdieu might well have written ‘Greenbergian modernism was an apotheosis of fetishism in the visual arts in the modern period.’”<sup>4</sup>*

Berpangkal pada pendapat Bourdieu tersebut, maka lukisan Dodit dalam pameran ini adalah *double fetish*, menggambarkan *fetish object* (=sneaker) melalui “lukisan”, yang juga merupakan *fetish object*. Dodit seperti menyatukan dua jenis *fetish* yang diutarakan oleh George Bataille “to love a canvas as much as fetishist loves shoe.” Kedua hal tersebut memang tampak pada lukisan Dodit. Lukisan itu dengan sangat meyakinkan menunjukkan betapa Dodit merupakan *sneaker fetishist* sejati. Lihat bagaimana dia hampir tenggelam dikerumuni segerombolan *sneaker* kecintaannya dalam karya “Colourful Sneakers”. Sneaker warna-warni tersebut tampak sangat mencolok dan seperti sesungguhnya, hampir-hampir kita tak sadar berhadapan dengan lukisan. Dengan teknik foto-realis yang sangat canggih dan rinci lukisan tersebut seakan “hidup”. Sneaker sebagai *fetish object* dalam “kanvas” Dodit menghasilkan citraan yang “menggoda.”

Lukisan Dodit menarik sebab menjelaskan pada kita dua perkara yang sesungguhnya tidak atau belum bercampur yaitu wilayah *high art* dan saingannya: *popular art* atau *popular culture*. Sementara banyak pihak yang berpendapat bahwa batas kedua wilayah tersebut semakin kabur, bahkan cenderung menyatu. Tetapi, bagaimanapun mekanisme produksi konsumsi lukisan Dodit jauh berbeda dengan *sneaker*, sebagaimana diutarakan oleh Julian Stallabrass,

*“The art market is still dependent upon the buying and selling of rare or unique objects far removed from the mass-produced commodities found in ordinary shop. In most markets a few*

*dominant companies control production, but there are few in which consumption is regulated. The commercial art world tries to hold both reins tight, for the buyers of these objects are few and known to the sellers, production is often artificially limited, and patronage often has a personal dimension.”<sup>5</sup>*

Satu hal yang tampaknya justru kerap mengaburkan batas-batas seni populer dengan seni tinggi—sehingga sering dipercaya batas seni populer dan seni tinggi telah lebur—adalah dorongan *fetish* yang dapat dibangkitkan oleh keduanya. Hal ini kerap dimanfaatkan oleh para produsen produk fashion. Sifat *fetish* terhadap *sneaker* dibangkitkan dengan mengindividualisasi *sneaker*, misalnya melalui produk edisi spesial yang didesain atau dikaitkan dengan nama atlet atau selebriti terkenal. Produk *sneaker* edisi spesial yang *limited edition* tersebut memiliki nilai lebih dan menjadi *collectible* yang bernilai tinggi. Hal ini menggambarkan apa yang diutarakan oleh Karl Marx sebagai *commodity fetishism*.

*“The theory of commodity fetishism therefore suggest that capitalism reproduces itself by concealing its essence beneath a deceptive appearance. Just as quality appears as quantity, so **objects** appear as **subjects** and subjects as objects. Things are personified and person objectified.”<sup>6</sup>*

Sneaker edisi khusus seperti Nike Air Jordan—yang merupakan kerjasama antara Nike dengan Michael Jordan—sangat sukses di pasar, dan merefleksikan apa yang dikatakan oleh Marx, *“things are personified.”* Namun tak ada yang lebih kuat merefleksikan *“things are personified”* dibandingkan karya seni, seperti yang ditunjukkan oleh lukisan Dodit. Karya Dodit tidak bisa dipisahkan dari senimannya. Karya tersebut eksis karena dianggap mewakili senimannya, demikian pula senimannya mendapatkan kredit dalam medan seni melalui karyanya. Sebagaimana yang diutarakan dalam *commodity fetishism*, *“things are personified and person objectified.”*

Sebagaimana telah diutarakan, tetap ada demarkasi antara seni tinggi dengan seni populer, antara seni dengan bukan seni—kendati kadang

diwakili oleh citraan atau metode visual yang sama. Hal itu kembali ditegaskan Stallabrass,

*“Above all, while ordinary commodities live or die by millions of individual decision to buy or not to buy, the feedback mechanisms which determine the track of contemporary art are regulated and exclusive, and the ordinary viewer of art is permitted no part in them.”<sup>7</sup>*

Lebih lanjut Stallabrass menunjukkan bahwa antara *branded consumer good* dengan karya seni memiliki ruang konsumsi dan produksi berbeda. Demarkasi di antara keduanya tetap terjaga, bagaimana pun kuatnya upaya untuk mengaburkannya,

*“Separated from the full rigour of the market, art can flirt with consumer culture while remaining assured of its safe demarcation. Indeed, those works that appear to threaten such a merging of art and the commodity actually reinforce the boundary by making it visible.”<sup>8</sup>*

Nike Air Jordan merupakan sneaker yang diproduksi secara massal. Sementara setiap lukisan Dodit—seperti juga karya seni lainnya—merupakan “produk” unik yang hanya satu-satunya di dunia. Atlet atau selebriti dari dunia seni populer mendapatkan pengakuannya berdasarkan ukuran-ukuran prestasi yang lebih pasti. Terutama para atlet mudah diukur prestasinya. Sementara seniman populer dapat dilihat peringkatnya dari penjualan albumnya. Sedangkan untuk seniman cukup sulit menetapkan parameter kualitasnya. Kendati belakangan, sukses di pasar dengan harga yang tinggi dianggap sebagai salah satu tanda keberhasilan seniman.

Dalam seni, mitos tentang seniman menjadi penting. Seni rupa modern menempatkan seniman penting sebagai jenius kreatif. Pengakuan dan penghargaan merupakan hal yang sulit didapat dalam seni rupa modern. Karena itu kita hanya mengenal segelintir seniman modern dunia (semuanya berasal dari Barat). Kadang pengakuan tersebut merupakan *posthumous*. Hal itu contohnya dapat kita lihat mengenai mitos Van Gogh,

“In this family of artists, figures whose ‘art and life are one,’ Van Gogh is the absolute champion, in all categories. Madness, the severed ear, unlucky in love, unsuccessful commercially—Vincent was no winner, and not even a moral example. But he did suffer, and that is a serious point in his favor. You can imagine the high priests of the artist cult having replace Christ’s words “for this is my body” with “for this is my canvas.”<sup>9</sup>

Seperti ditunjukkan oleh Judith Benhamou-Huet fetish terhadap lukisan-lukisan Van Gogh tak lepas dari mitos kehidupan Van Gogh yang nestapa. Penderitaan van Gogh merupakan mitos yang bisa “menjual” dan menjadi “iklan” bagi karya-karya Van Gogh—setelah kematiannya. Kanvas Van Gogh merupakan “reifikasi” (pengkonkritan) penderitaan Van Gogh. Apa yang berlaku pada lukisan-lukisan Van Gogh adalah “*things are personified*” dalam *commodity fetishism*.

Tentu saja hal ini berbeda dengan “mitos” para seniman kontemporer. “Mitos” para seniman kontemporer harus dibangun semasa mereka hidup dan hasilnya juga langsung mereka rasakan—bahkan sebisanya sejak muda. Hal itu ditunjukkan oleh para seniman Young British Artists (YBAs) yang dimotori oleh Damien Hirst. Kesuksesan YBAs menunjukkan bahwa mitos kehebatan seniman muda kontemporer berkait dengan kesuksesan di pasar dan keselebritian. Situasi yang sama juga berlaku secara global. Para seniman kontemporer muda Indonesia saat ini menikmati sukses karir kesenimanannya—di pasar—melebihi prestasi para seniorinya—pada saat mereka berusia muda.

Apa yang ditunjukkan oleh para seniman muda yang sukses di penjuru dunia menunjukkan pluralitas seni rupa kontemporer toh tetap membutuhkan “hero.” Medan seni rupa kontemporer bagaimanapun merupakan kelanjutan pola produksi dan konsumsi seni rupa modern—dengan menghilangkan parameter absolut modernisme formalis. Maka hero-hero dalam seni rupa kontemporer muncul dengan beragam parameter yang berbeda satu sama lain. Namun satu hal tetap sama, bahwa karya seni merupakan obyek fantasi kaum elit.

“Sotheby’s, Christie’s and, now, Phillips, take twofold approach to their key customers. They arouse the desire to possess a painting or sculpture by transforming it into fantasy object, ... If such an excessive price was paid for this lot, then there must have been good reason. And that can only be the quality of the work. The work, it is assumed, is unique and irreplaceable, and, therefore, priceless.”<sup>10</sup>

Tentu saja obyek fantasi tak lain adalah obyek *fetish*. Dalam kaitan ini, maka lukisan Dodit memberikan jalan bagi kita untuk memahami perkara *fetish* yang berbeda antara karya seni dengan obyek *fetish* lain—seperti *sneaker* misalnya. Lukisan Dodit—dan juga umumnya seni lukis modern/kontemporer—berupa cat minyak di atas kanvas merupakan penanda keberadaannya sebagai karya seni. Saat ini, serbuan budaya massa sangat spektakular. Tampilan visual teknologi digital macam layar LCD atau baliho iklan raksasa tentu saja mengancam potensi visual karya seni. Seni harus bersaing dengan hal itu. Arah yang diambil Dodit adalah kebalikan dari kemudahan teknologi digital, yaitu dengan menghasilkan citraan foto-realis melalui seni lukis, yaitu satu teknik yang bisa dikatakan kuno—bahkan primitif. Kekaguman kita pada karya Dodit terutama bukanlah pada aspek rupanya—yang dengan mudah dihasilkan oleh foto—namun pada kenyataan bahwa citraan tersebut dihasilkan oleh tangan. Sebuah citraan yang tampak fotografis tetapi sesungguhnya lukisan tentu menarik perhatian pemirsanya. Dalam hal ini lukisan Dodit mampu “merayu” para pemirsanya untuk mengamati kumpulan sepatu dalam kanvasnya. Tampaknya metode foto realis merupakan pilihan paling masuk akal, bahkan menjadi semacam konsekuensi logis yang harus dimanfaatkan oleh Dodit. Hanya dengan metode itu, karakter dan kualitas *sneaker* sebagai obyek yang didambakan bisa muncul.

Tema *sneaker* dalam lukisan Dodit merupakan “alibi” semata, agar Dodit bisa menciptakan (=menghasilkan) lukisan (=karya seni). Bukankah seni lukis kontemporer harus berkenaan dengan “sesuatu”? Tentu saja agar sebuah lukisan dianggap penting, maka kontennya atau alibinya juga merupakan hal penting. Sesuatu yang penting tersebut yang nantinya dilihat sebagai representasi dari

8 sebuah lukisan—yang akan “dibaca” oleh para pengamat seni. Kualitas pembacaan—dan penikmatan karya—ini terutama ada kaitannya dengan pilihan metode perupa. Dalam hal ini Dodit memilih menampilkan *sneaker* dengan teknik foto-realis. Karena itu lukisan *sneaker* Dodit jauh berbeda—baik konteks maupun tampilannya—misalnya dengan lukisan-lukisan sepatu Van Gogh—yang sangat ekspresif.

Tetapi tentu saja di samping tampilan lukisannya yang menggoda hasrat visual, lukisan Dodit sebagai karya seni menyimpan makna dan pesan untuk ditanggung—yaitu “perkara” dipresentasikan melalui lukisan-lukisan Dodit pada pameran ini. Lihatlah karya berjudul “Footwear and Fashion” jelas bicara bahwa identitas dan “nilai” seseorang kerap dianggap bergantung pada apa yang dikenakannya. Untuk menekankan hal itu, maka Dodit sengaja menghilangkan wajah figur dalam lukisannya, seperti semacam pernyataan yang penting bukan orangnya, tetapi atributnya. Atau, seseorang menjadi “penting” karena atribut yang dikenakannya. Pada karya “Low Rider,” *sneaker* tampak menjadi komponen paling menonjol dan sentral. Si pemakai tampaknya bangga dan sadar betul mengenai keistimewaan *sneakernya*. Kembali pada karya ini wajah si pemakai tak tampak—karena yang penting adalah *sneaker* keren yang dikenakannya.

Karya “Purple” menunjukkan betapa fungsi sepatu—seperti umumnya fashion—seringkali jauh melewati fungsi fisiknya, dan masuk pada wilayah simbolik. Itu sebabnya sepatu pada karya ini tampak digantung pada leher penggunanya. Lagi-lagi wajahnya dihilangkan, yang tampak adalah tato yang memenuhi lengan sosok dalam lukisan. Seperti hendak mengatakan bahwa fungsi tato dan *sneaker* sama saja, yaitu pembentuk identitas dan karakter pemiliknya. Sementara karya “Look up” menjadi menarik, karena sepertinya kita berada di bawah sekumpulan *sneaker*. Yang dapat kita lihat adalah sol beraneka *sneaker*. Apakah Dodit sedang bicara mengenai superioritas *sneaker*? Karena itu *sneaker* berada di atas kita? Tidak lagi sekadar sebagai alas kaki. *Fetish* pada benda-benda bermerk buatan pabrik nyata telah mempengaruhi pola pikir dan persepsi kita mengenai barang-barang. Manusia modern adalah

manusia yang kerap membanggakan rasionalitasnya. Namun seperti dikatakan di depan, sikap *fetish* menunjukkan bahwa manusia modern juga kerap menjadi irasional demi mendapatkan kesenangan. Atau, jangan-jangan kecenderungan *fetish* merupakan “pelarian” manusia masa kini dari kesumpekan kehidupan modern. Salah satu tempat melarikan diri paling mudah adalah pada “barang-barang” yang dihasilkan oleh peradaban modern itu sendiri. Dunia kapital dengan senang hati menyediakan dunia mimpi pada produk yang mereka hasilkan. Atau, secara agak terbatas “lari” pada karya seni. Kedua hal tersebut terepresentasi dalam karya Dodit pada pameran ini, yang saya sebut *double fetishism*.

---

#### Catatan akhir

<sup>1</sup> William Pietz, “Fetish,” dalam *Critical Terms For Art History*, ed. Robert S. Nelson dan Richard Shiff, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003, hlm. 312.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.chevroncars.com/learn/art-culture/the-history-of-sneakers>

<sup>3</sup> Pietz, *op.cit.*, hlm. 306.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, hlm. 310.

<sup>5</sup> Julian Stallabrass, *Art Incorporated: The Story of Contemporary Art*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, hlm. 90.

<sup>6</sup> Andrew Edgar dan Peter Sedgwick, *Cultural Theory, The Key Concepts*, London: Routledge, 2007, hlm. 56.

<sup>7</sup> Stallabrass, *op.cit.*, hlm. 91.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>9</sup> Judith Benhamou-Huet, *The Worth of Art, Pricing the Priceless*, New York: Assouline Publishing, 2001, hlm. 93.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, hlm. 9.



**TRAVELLING**  
2010  
150 cm x 200 cm  
Oil on canvas



**LOW RIDER**  
2010  
150 cm x 200 cm  
Oil on canvas



**SIMPANG SIUR SKATEPARK**

2010

150 cm x 200 cm

Oil on canvas



*Previous page*

**LOOK UP**

2010

150 cm x 200 cm

Oil on canvas



**CLEANING OUT MY CLOSET**

2010

150 cm x 200 cm

Oil on canvas



**THE COOL HUNT**  
2010  
150 cm x 200 cm  
Oil on canvas



**PURPLE**

2010

150 cm x 200 cm

Oil on canvas

**BACKYARD**

2010

150 cm x 280 cm

Oil on canvas



**BACKPACKER**  
2010  
260 cm x 200 cm  
Oil on canvas



**FOOTWEAR AND FASHION DESIGNER**

2010

260 cm x 120 cm

Oil on canvas

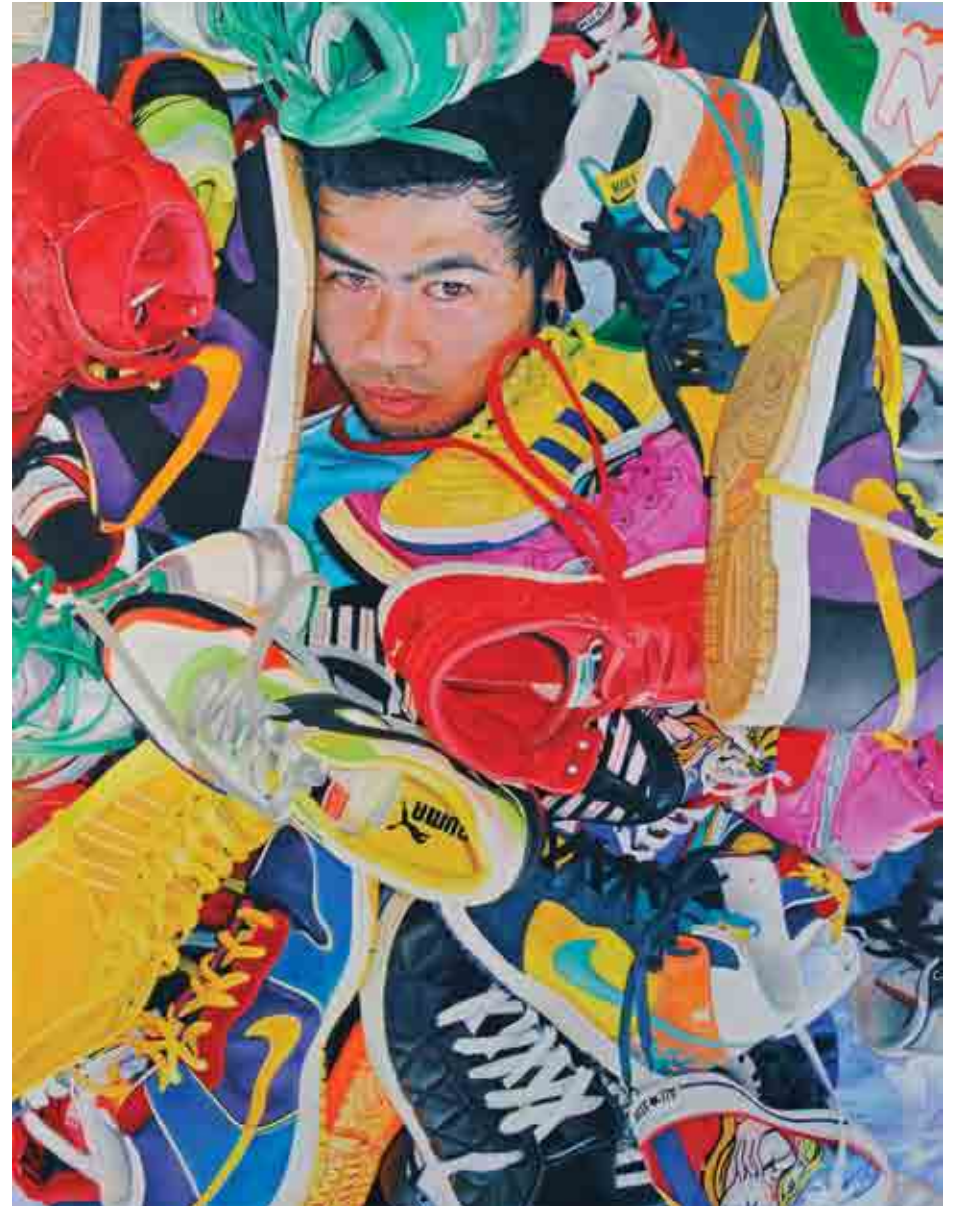


**COLORFUL SNEAKERS**

2010

260 cm x 200 cm

Oil on canvas



**Double Pedal**  
2010  
200 cm x 200 cm  
Oil on canvas



# Sneakerhead Painting: Double Fetishism

Asmudjo J. Irianto

*"I challenge any art lover," exclaimed Bataille, 'to love a canvas as much as a fetishist loves a shoe.'"*

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Shoes are indeed made for our feet, but one can say that their prestige is higher than that of head coverings. Shoes are even known as one of major fetish objects, as we know that there are cases of shoe fetishism, although it usually has to do with the shoes that are often linked with sexual fetishism or fantasy, such as the stiletto high heel shoes. Shoes are also a significant fashion item. The kind and brand of shoes signify the wearer's social class, as insinuated by the expression "You Are What's on Your Feet". Shoes, therefore, also reflects the wearer's lifestyle and identity, and often function as signifier for certain communities or sub-cultural movements, such as the boots-wearing punkers. However, no other shoes are perhaps as important as the sneakers in serving as marker of the contemporary culture known as the sneaker culture.

The story of sneakers began from a pair of rubber-soled shoes sold cheaply and produced in 1839 by Liverpool Rubber Company. The shoes were initially called "plimsoll" and were in the form of simple rubber soles with coverings of canvas cloth. In 1892, the US Rubber Company made a higher-quality version and called it "Keds". Since the 1900s, demands for the rubber-sole shoes increased rapidly due to the comfort they offered. The rubber-soles shoes almost never made any sounds whenever they were used, and the wearer could thus sneak in and out. That was why the rubber-soles shoes are subsequently known as sneakers.<sup>2</sup> Sneakers then grew to become sport shoes, like basketball and tennis shoes. Sport sneakers, however, are also used in myriad of activities that have nothing to do with sport. The informal and casual nature of the shoes, as well as the comfort and "style" they provide, make sneakers the shoes of choice for the youth. Sneakers become a mark of identity and the preferred fashion style for the urban youth. Like the jeans, sneakers have grown to become a fashion statement related to the spirit of freedom, the egalitarian and popular culture, and urban cosmopolitan lifestyle. Sneakers also become a part of the underground and street lives, and therefore often linked with the hip-hop culture.

Producers of sneakers shrewdly promote and heighten sneakers' prestige. The passion and the fetishist attitude among lovers of sneakers are of course related to the identity construction surrounding the shoes, which are often linked to sub-cultural elements with the spirit of the counter culture. As usual, however, when huge capitals are involved, elements of this counter culture become co-opted and transformed into parts of the mainstream culture. Branded sneakers, therefore, have become representation of the middle- to upper class lifestyle. They do not come cheap, especially for most Indonesians.

Sneakers are the theme and subject matter in Dodit Artawan's paintings. If we find ourselves stand face to face with Dodit's paintings, we will immediately suspect that Dodit is crazy for sneakers. Such suspicion proves to be correct. Dodit is indeed a lover of sneakers; one can say that he is a "sneaker-freak" or a "sneaker head". The range of sneakers that we see in Dodit's canvases actually represents his personal collection. Scores of pairs of sneakers are neatly stored in a glass case in Dodit's bedroom, like treasures. When he was still a high-school student, Dodit had the desire to collect branded sneakers. Branded sneakers, with their many kinds of designs, exert a strong appeal on Dodit—and to other sneakerheads in general, of course. In this case, we can say that they have a fetishist attitude toward sneakers. The term 'fetish' itself is defined as such:

"Fetish is a familiar word for an exotic thing. In ordinary usage everyone knows that it means an object of irrational fascination, something whose power, desirability, or significance a person passionately overvalues, even though that same person may know very well intellectually that such feelings are unjustifiably excessive."<sup>3</sup>

From the above explanation by William Pietz, we understand that the term "fetish (object)" was initially used for objects of worship in primitive societies, which are seen as having certain powers due to the spirits that reside within them. The term has a strong anthropological/ethnographic bias and at first only applied to

objects in primitive societies according to the Western observers. Some observers, however, went on to say that the term "fetish" should also apply to the worship of objects or artifacts in the Western society, an act that is also far from being rational, as the above quote explains. The sociologist Pierre Bourdieu even said that in the modern society, manifestations of this fetish attitude can be observed in the peak of modern art: "While a sociologist like Bourdieu might have well written, 'Greenbergian modernism was an apotheosis of fetishism in the visual arts in the modern period'."<sup>3</sup>

Using Bourdieu's opinion above as our basis, we can say that Dodit's paintings displayed in this exhibition are a form of double fetishism, as they depict fetish objects (i.e. the sneakers) while the paintings are themselves fetish objects. Dodit seems to combine two kinds of fetishism, just as George Bataille has once commented, "to love a canvas as much as a fetishist loves shoes". The two aspects are evident in Dodit's paintings. They strongly reveal how Dodit is a true sneaker-fetishist. Observe how he is almost drowned in a sea of his beloved sneakers, in *Colourful Sneakers*. The colorful sneakers appear strong and life-like, and we almost forget that we are actually looking at a painting. With highly sophisticated and detailed photo-realist techniques, Dodit is able to make the paintings look "alive". Sneakers, as fetish objects in Dodit's canvases, make for enticing images.

Dodit's paintings are interesting as they explain to us two matters that are actually separate or detached: the territory of high art and its rival, i.e. that of popular art or popular culture. At the same time, many parties are of the opinion that the boundary between the two realms has become increasingly blurred; in many cases they even seem to merge. The mechanism involved in the production and consumption of Dodit's paintings is nevertheless far removed from that found in the production of sneakers, as Julian Stallabrass explained:

"The art market is still dependent upon the buying and selling of rare or unique objects far removed from the mass-produced commodities found in ordinary shop.

In most markets a few dominant companies control production, but there are few in which consumption is regulated. The commercial art world tries to hold both reins tight, for the buyers of these objects are few and known to the sellers, production is often artificially limited, and patronage often has a personal dimension.”<sup>4</sup>

One thing that often seems to obscure the boundary between popular art and high art—so much so that many often believe that the two territories have merged—is the fetish drive that the two regions of art can create. Many producers of fashion products often take advantage of this fact. The fetishist attitude toward sneakers is brought up by giving personal touches on the sneakers, for example by means of special-edition products or limited edition linked with certain famous athletes or celebrities. The limited edition sneakers gain thus higher values and become precious collectibles. This is reflective of what Karl Marx has explained about commodity fetishism.

“The theory of commodity fetishism therefore suggests that capitalism reproduces itself by concealing its essence beneath a deceptive appearance. Just as quality appears as quantity, so **objects** appear as **subjects** and subjects as objects. Things are personified and person objectified.”<sup>5</sup>

Special edition sneakers like Nike Air Jordan—a product of collaboration between Nike and Michael Jordan—are highly successful in the market and reflects what Marx said, “things are personified”. Nothing, however, beats works of art in reflecting how “things are personified”, as obvious in Dodit’s paintings. One cannot separate Dodit’s paintings from the artist himself. The works exist because they are seen as representing the artist, while at the same time the artist gains credits in the world of art through his works—just as explained in the quote above about commodity fetishism: “things are personified and person objectified.”

However, there is still separation between high art and popular art; between art and non-art—although the two are sometimes

represented by the same images or visual methods. Stallabrass further confirms:

“Above all, while ordinary commodities live or die by millions of individual decisions to buy or not to buy, the feedback mechanisms which determine the track of contemporary art are regulated and exclusive, and the ordinary viewer of art is permitted no part in them.”<sup>6</sup>

Stallabrass goes on to show that there are different spaces of consumption and production between branded consumer goods and works of art. The separation between the two remains, no matter how strong the efforts are to obscure it.

“Separated from the full rigour of the market, art can flirt with consumer culture while remaining assured of its safe demarcation. Indeed, those works that appear to threaten such a merging of art and the commodity actually reinforce the boundary by making it visible.”<sup>7</sup>

Nike Air Jordan refers to mass-produced sneakers, while every one of Dodit’s paintings—just like any other work of art—is a unique “product”, the only one of its kind in this whole wide world. Athletes or celebrities from the territory of popular art gain their recognitions based on certain standards of achievements, and this is especially true for athletes. Meanwhile, we can judge how popular artists perform by observing their record sales, for example. For artists like Dodit, however, it is rather difficult to determine the parameters with which we can assess their qualities—although lately their financial or market success, with their works being sold in high prices, has been considered as one of the hallmarks of a successful artist.

In art, myths about the artist becomes important. Modern art considers important artists as creative geniuses. Recognition and awards are hard to come by in modern art, and that is why we know only a few modern artists in the world (all of them coming

40 from the West). Sometimes the recognition is given posthumously. This, for example, is obvious in the myths about van Gogh:

“In this family of artists, figures whose ‘art and life are one,’ Van Gogh is the absolute champion, in all categories. Madness, the severed ear, unlucky in love, unsuccessful commercially—Vincent was no winner, and not even a moral example. But he did suffer, and that is a serious point in his favor. You can imagine the high priests of the artist cult having replaced Christ’s words ‘for this is my body’ with ‘for this is my canvas.’”<sup>8</sup>

As Judith Benhamou-Huet points out, the fetish for van Gogh’s paintings has been inseparable from the myths regarding van Gogh’s torturous life. Van Gogh’s suffering became a myth that could “sell” and “advertise” van Gogh’s paintings—after his death. Van Gogh’s canvases serve as the reification of the artist’s suffering. What we see happening with van Gogh’s paintings is the example of how “things are personified” in the context of commodity fetishism.

Of course, the myths regarding the contemporary artists are an altogether different thing. The “myths” of the contemporary artists must be constructed while they are still alive, and they can immediately perceive the results—while they are still young, if possible. This is evident in the case of the Young British Artists (YBAs), with Damien Hirst as its “forward propeller”. The success of the Young British Artists show that myths regarding the “greatness” of young contemporary artists have to do with their market success and celebrity status. The same is true on the global level: the Indonesian contemporary artists today enjoy the fruits of their artistic career—in terms of successful market reception—more so than their seniors, and earlier, too.

The success of many young artists all over the world reveals that the plurality of contemporary art still requires “heroes”. The world of the contemporary art is nevertheless the continuation of the patterns of production and consumption of modern art—but without the absolute parameters of formalist modernism. Heroes in

the contemporary art thus appear with many different parameters, but one thing remains the same: the artwork is the object of the elite’s fantasy.

“Sotheby’s, Christie’s and, now, Phillips, take twofold approach to their key customers. They arouse the desire to possess a painting or sculpture by transforming it into fantasy object... If such an excessive price was paid for this lot, then there must have been a good reason. And that can only be the quality of the work. The work, it is assumed, is unique and irreplaceable, and, therefore, priceless.”<sup>9</sup>

Fantasy object, of course, is none other than fetish object. In this case, Dodit’s paintings open the path for us to understand the kind of fetishism that is different from other kinds of fetishism that are related to fetish objects such as sneakers. Dodit’s paintings—like many other modern or contemporary paintings in general—are works of oil paints on canvas and exist as works of art. Today we are sustaining a massive assault by elements of the mass culture. The visual appearance of digital technology such as the LCD screens or the gigantic advertising banners naturally threaten the visual potentials of works of art. Art must compete with all these elements of mass culture. Dodit, however, takes the path that goes in the opposite direction from that of the ease offered by digital technology, by creating photo-realist images through paintings. This is an old technique—some even say primitive. Our foremost fascination with Dodit’s paintings do not originate from the visual aspect—which we can easily produce using photography—but from the fact that the images were hand-made. An image that looks like a work of photography but is in fact a painting surely catches people’s attention. In this case, Dodit’s paintings are able to “entice” the audience to keep on looking at the collection of shoes in his canvases. Apparently the method of photo-realism is the most logical method to take. One can say that it is even the logical consequence of his choice, and one that he must take advantage of. It is only by employing this method that the characteristics and the quality of the sneakers as the object of desire can be brought to the fore.

The theme of sneakers in Dodit's paintings is an "alibi" for him to create (or to produce) paintings (i.e. works of art). Isn't it true that contemporary painting always has to deal with "something"? Of course, for a painting to be considered significant, the content, or the alibi, is also important. This significance (the content or the meaning) is what the audience will "read" in the work. The quality of such an effort of reading—and how well the audience enjoys the work—mainly has to do with the selection of visual methods. In this case, Dodit has chosen to present sneakers with the technique of photo-realism. That is why Dodit's sneaker paintings are far removed—in terms of the context and the appearance—for example with Van Gogh's shoe paintings that are highly expressive in nature.

Apart from the appearance of his paintings that entice the viewers, as works of art Dodit's paintings contain rich meanings and messages, and are especially important in terms how the issues are presented. Observe, for example, the work *Footwear and Fashion* that clearly speaks of how identity and "value" of a person are often seen as depending on what the person wears. To stress upon this fact, Dodit deliberately does away with faces in his paintings, presenting a statement of sorts that what is important is not the person, but rather the attributes, or that someone becomes important because of the attributes he or she is wearing. In *Low Rider*, sneakers take a central position. The wearer seems proud and keenly aware of how special the sneakers are. Again, the wearer's face is invisible, because what is important here are the cool sneakers that he or she is wearing.

The work *Purple* reveals how shoes—like other fashion items in general—often have far more important functions than merely their physical functions. They often have symbolic meanings. That is why the shoes here seem to be hanging from the user's neck. Again, the face is not shown; what we see are only the tattoos that run through the person's arm. It is as if Dodit is trying to say that tattoos and sneakers have similar function: to shape the wearer's identity and character. Meanwhile, the work *Look Up* becomes interesting because it makes us feel as if we are standing under

a cloud of sneakers. We are seeing the soles of a multitude of sneakers. Is Dodit actually talking about the superiority of sneakers? Is that why these sneakers are present above us, instead of existing merely as foot covers? Fetishism for mass produced objects has affected our frame of thoughts and our perceptions about objects. The modern human is one who is often proud of his or her rationality. The fetish attitude, however, reveals how the modern humans often become irrational simply because they want to have fun. Or perhaps the fetishism tendency constitutes an "escape" by the contemporary modern humans to run away from the burdens of modern life. One of the most accessible havens to which we can escape would be the "objects" produced by modern civilization. The world of capitalism gladly provides the fantasies that they attach to their products—or run toward works of art. The two aspects are present in Dodit's paintings, which I think are representatives of the "double fetishism".

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#### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> William Pietz, "Fetish," in *Critical Terms For Art History*, ed. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003, p. 312.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.chevroncars.com/learn/art-culture/the-history-of-sneakers>

<sup>3</sup> Pietz, *op.cit.*, p. 306.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p. 310.

<sup>5</sup> Julian Stallabrass, *Art Incorporated: The Story of Contemporary Art*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 90.

<sup>6</sup> Edgar and Peter Sedgwick, *Cultural Theory, The Key Concepts*, London: Routledge, 2007, p. 56.

<sup>7</sup> Stallabrass, *op. Andrew cit.*, p. 91.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>9</sup> Judith Benhamou-Huet, *The Worth of Art, Pricing the Priceless*, New York: Assouline Publishing, 2001, p. 93.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, p. 9.

# Dodit Artawan: Profile

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## Dodit Artawan

### Born

1978 Batubulan, Bali

### Education

1997 Indonesian Art Institute, Denpasar, Bali

### Solo Exhibition

- 2009 “(De)fermented Spaces”, Semarang Gallery, Semarang
- 2008 “The Pleasure of the Eye”, Langgeng Icon Gallery, Jakarta

### Group Exhibition

- 2010 Bazaar Art Jakarta 2010, Pacific Place, Jakarta
- “Reality Effects”, Galeri Nasional Indonesia, Jakarta
- “Percakapan Masa”, Galeri Nasional Indonesia, Jakarta
- “Super Imposed”, D Gallerie, Jakarta
- “Contemporary Art Turn”, SBin Art Plus, Singapore
- “The Birth of Colors”, Syang Art Space, Magelang
- “Pose Historia”, Vannesa Art Link, Singapore
- “Indonesian Art: Pleasure of Chaos”, Primo Marella, Milan, Italy
- “Halimun”, Lawang Wangi Artsociates, Bandung
- 2009 “Common Sense”, Galeri Nasional Indonesia, Jakarta
- “Art Singapore 2009”, Singapore
- “Objective Border”, Srisasanti Art House, Jakarta

- 2008 “Taxu 2008: Painting Rejuvenation”, SIGlarts, Jakarta
- “Tekstur Dalam Lukisan”, Jogja Gallery, Yogyakarta
- “Space/Spacing”, Semarang Gallery, Semarang
- “Manifesto”, Galeri Nasional Indonesia, Jakarta
- “Survey”, Edwin’s Gallery, Jakarta
- 2007 “Domestic Art Objects & Stillife”, Jogja Gallery, Yogyakarta
- 2006 “Langgeng Contemporary Art Festival”, Langgeng Gallery, Central Java
- 2005 “Consciousness of Here and Now”, Biennale Jogja VIII 2005, Yogyakarta
- “Apakah Kita Berbeda”, Nusantara Exhibition 2005, Nasional Gallery, Jakarta
- “Trans-it”, Biasa Art Space, Bali
- “Urban Culture” CP Biennale II 2005, Museum Bank Indonesia, Jakarta
- “Initiation”, Gaya Gallery Ubud, Bali
- “Membaca Realisme”, Nava Gallery Denpasar, Bali
- 2004 “Cooking & History”, Cemeti Art House, Yogyakarta
- “Rememoration”, Klinik Seni (Art Clinic) Taxu, Denpasar, Bali
- 2003 “Caution! There Is A Taxu Ceremony”, Klinik Seni (Art Clinic) Taxu, Bali
- 2002 “Retrofigure”, Sanur, Bali
- “On Human”, The Association of Visual Art Students of Indonesian Art College, Denpasar, Bali
- 2001 The 23rd Bali Art Festival, Art Center, Denpasar, Bali
- With Pis Bolong Group, Ndag Studio, Ubud, Bali
- With Silang Group, Art Center, Denpasar, Bali
- “Sesari”, Kuta News Anniversary, Denpasar, Bali

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