

# CHOREOGRAPHED KNOWLEDGES

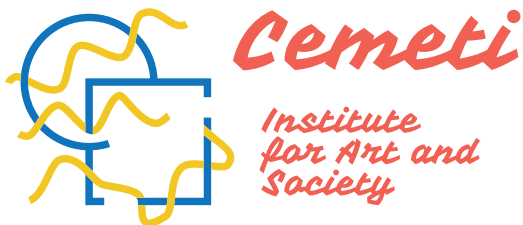
A project by:

*Julia Sarisetiati*

Curated by:

*Grace Sambok*

19 January—9 February 2019







2010

Pendapatan Domestik Bruto  
USD 700 milyar  
Pendapatan per Kapita  
USD 3.000

2025

Pendapatan Domestik Bruto  
USD 4-4,5 triliun  
Pendapatan per Kapita  
USD 14.250 - 15.500 (negara  
berpendapatan tinggi)

Masterplan Percepatan dan Perluasan Pembangunan Ekonomi Indonesia





# INTRODUCTION

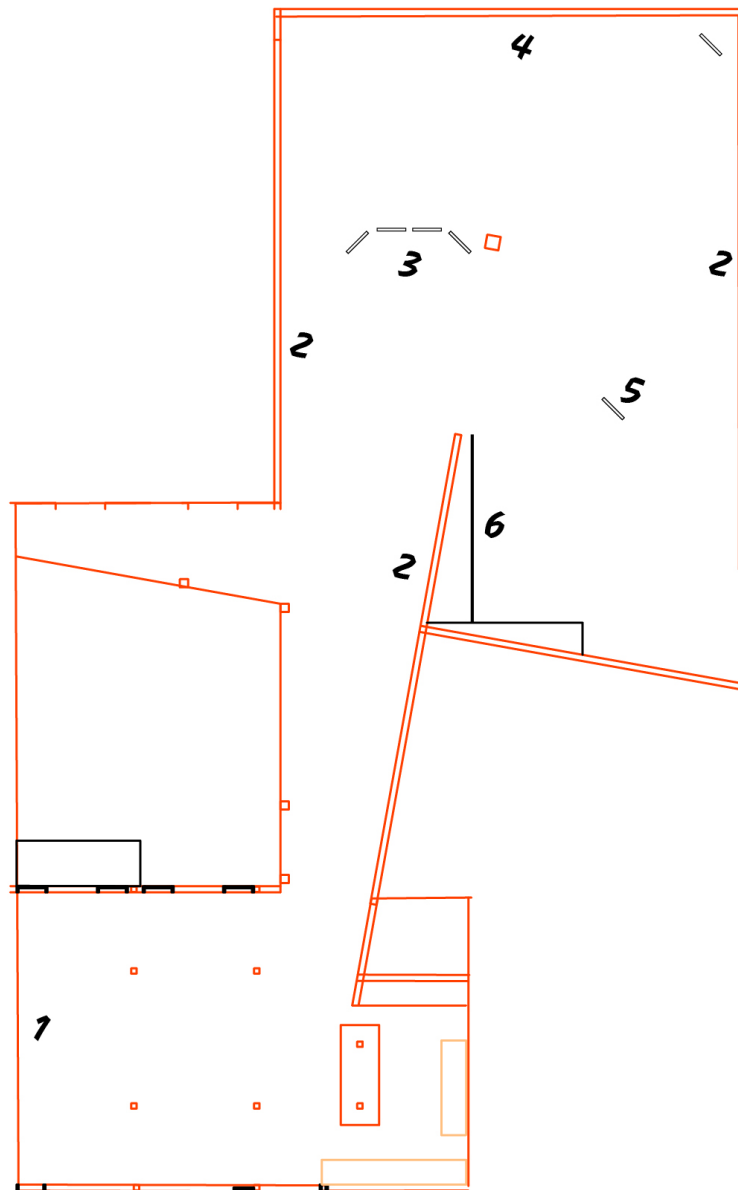
*Choreographed Knowledges* is a project by artist Julia Sarisetiati (Sari) at Cemeti-Institute for Art and Society, curated by Grace Samboh. The project builds on the artist's long-term research and engagement with Indonesian migrant workers. During a residency at Seoul Art Space Geumcheon, Korea (2011), Sari met fellow Indonesians who were working abroad, their fields ranging from manufacturing to construction, agriculture, fisheries, caregiving and domestic work. Starting from her own skills and interest in photography and videography, Sari was fascinated with the way her new friends maintained relationships with their families and friends using the most up-to-date smartphone technologies. Sari being an active member of ruangrupa, an artists' initiative in Jakarta, she had to remain in contact and be present in decision making processes by means of online conference platforms. Working in Korea with the same passport and common situations manoeuvred them into a sense of camaraderie. Since 2015, Sari has been working towards a mobile application that functions as a community-based resource centre for the Indonesian migrant workforce, be it those who are working abroad, those are about to go abroad and those who have returned.

The Indonesian government uses the term "migrant workforce" (BMI in Indonesian) to describe Indonesian people working abroad, the majority of which is considered low skilled, inadequate and ill equipped for promotion in the labour market. According to statistics offered by the Indonesian government, in 2018, the country's migrant workforce consisted of 265 million people. At least two-thirds of this number did not get a higher education, while more than half only went to elementary school. This is the "baggage" that gives them the status of "low skilled workforce". Meanwhile, many developed countries are facing a huge decline of workforce for jobs that are classified as dirty (cleaners, caregivers, etc.),

dangerous (working with machineries, at sea, etc.) and at times demeaning (due to people's attitude towards the worker). This means that within the global labour market there is a growing demand for "low skilled workers". Yet, countries that host migrant labourers have strict limitations for their period of work and re-entry circumstances. It is as if nobody wants to take full responsibility for these people's development as human beings and their advancement as a type of workforce. Sari relates this precarious position of Indonesian migrant workers to herself, and to artists and art workers in general.

For this exhibition, *Choreographed Knowledges*, she focuses on one particular aspect: vocational education, which in the field of migrant labour translates to training centres. During this past year, Sari did research into Indonesia's educational policies and visited various training centres in Indonesia, where soon-to-be migrant workers are equipped with the skills they will need for the industry they will work in, from fisheries to care labourers, from factories to boating. The title of this exhibition refers on the one hand to the practical and social skills ("knowledges") that are taught, acquired and embodied, and on the other to the training centres itself: highly staged sets where soon-to-be migrant workers perform, rehearse and repeat tasks with the use of props before an audience of fellow students ("choreographed"). The title finally refers to the invisible hand of the government that "choreographs" bodies across the globe as a migrant workforce, asking what politics underlie the need to work abroad?

The exhibition presents a wide variety of viewpoints and perspectives, hovering over the intersection of migrant labour, national politics and education like a panning camera, whilst zooming in and out from the state and the private into the personal. *Choreographed Knowledges* furthermore challenges us to consider our own position as workers (or human resource) in a time of hyper-globalization, as well as the politics and values we embody as human beings.



**1-2.**

## **Reading Room and Timeline (2019)**

Printed materials, archival photos and videos of training centres, video works on iPads

### ***How to bathe the elderly: PT Sukses Bersama Yatfuari Cirebon, 2017***

YouTube video, courtesy of Faris Gimbal

### ***How to bathe a baby: PT Sukses Bersama Yatfuari Cirebon, 2017***

YouTube video, courtesy of Faris Gimbal

What do you want to be when you grow up? Starting from childhood, we are taught to answer this question with a particular profession: a doctor, an astronaut, a teacher, a soldier, a police(wo)man, a painter, etc. This shows that humans are workers. If you are a doctor, wherever you will go, people will ask you about their health. Our work has an affect on our roles in our social lives. In fact, what do we accomplish by working? Does your job match your ideals? How do you choose the path of education you will travel? Does education limit or expand your choice of occupation? What is the attitude of the state towards education and employment to guarantees the continuity and welfare of the lives of its people?

The timeline [2] that intersperses this exhibition is informed by Sari's on-going artistic research and serves as a backdrop and base for the works in





this exhibition. The reading room [7] functions as an underlying resource where you can read more about the topics addressed in the timeline and in the exhibition at large. Both stem from a curiosity, suspicion, and questioning about the fact that there are people who go and work abroad. In the last decade, Indonesia became a member of the G20 (2008) and the initiator of the ASEAN Economic Community (2009); the amount of and access to higher education (universities or academies) has grown significantly with the support of various central government policies; in fact, the number of migrant workers (or BMI's in Indonesian) has increased because of the myriad of vocational schools and training centres that prepare them. What is the cause? What is our involvement in these changes?

This reading room and timeline invite you to delve into Indonesia's human resources from the perspectives of manpower and education. Feel free to copy, take notes and take pictures of all the materials at your disposal here. You are also invited to add personal experiences or stories you have heard about higher education, scholarships, migrant labour or working abroad, and the role of state infrastructure in your life as a human resource in Indonesia.

### 3.

#### ***First physical examination. Interview for Taiwan*** (2018)

4-channel video, colour, sound, 4' 07"

This video installation highlights the educational phase of the Indonesian migrant workforce cycle: the activities in the training centres. The work consists of an assemblage of found YouTube videos (yes, much like found objects) produced by RR Manpower, a training centre where Indonesian

migrant workers are taught the skills required to work in particular industries abroad. These videos operate on many levels: as a manual for future workers, as a video profile of the worker (which can be presented to companies that will hire them), and as promotion materials for the training centres. The standardization of human bodies and capabilities shown in these videos challenges us to rethink how we value ourselves, our bodies, our ideas of who we should and want to be. These bodies are taught to perform the needs of global capital. The fact that they willingly enact these roles, are willingly recorded and uploaded; leaves us with a big question: What roles do we enact? Are we conscious of it?

### 4.

#### ***Why knot? (Squid fishing gear)*** (2018)

Rubber screen print, gold acrylic on paper

Set of 11 prints (9 pcs @ 20 x 20 cm; 1 pcs @ 90 x 60 cm; 1 pcs @ 40 x 60 cm)

#### ***Why knot? (Rope splicing)*** (2018)

Rubber screen print, with gold acrylic, on paper

Set of 19 prints (1 pcs @ 97.5 x 65 cm; 3 sets of 6 @ 20 x 20 cm)

#### ***Why knot? (Net making)*** (2018)

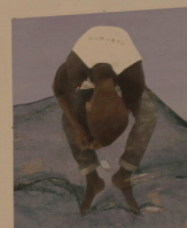
Rubber screen print, with gold acrylic, on paper

Set set of 5 prints (@ 60 x 60 cm)

#### ***Why knot? (Net mending & patching)*** (2018)

Rubber screen print, with gold acrylic, on paper

Set of 2 prints (@ 67.5 x 67.5 cm)





### ***Meet the student* (2018)**

HD video, colour, sound, 6'

### ***Must-know vocabulary* (2018)**

HD video, colour, sound, 3' 14"

**5.**

### ***Meet the instructors* (2018)**

HD video, colour, sound, 22' 07"

**6.**

### ***Why knot? (Tying up boats/mooring basics)* (2018)**

HD video, colour, sound, 11' 02"

These works (4, 5, 6) are all related to the act of recording (or taping) as a form of documenting, a way of taking notes. It is one of the most important research tools. The two interview videos *Meet the instructors* (5) and *Meet the student* (4), offer you a way into Sari's vast curiosity towards the personality traits of Indonesian migrant workers. While the instructors once worked abroad, the student is about to leave for their new job. A sense of eeriness is bound to spike as the hopes of the returnees are still somehow aligned with those who are about to embark on their journey.

The video *Why knot? (Tying up boats/Mooring basics)* (6) shows a rope skills class in which the instructor has created a competition for the students

to simulate teamwork, sorting out a situation they will likely encounter once they are on a ship. Meanwhile, the series of prints titled *Why knot? (Squid fishing gear; Rope splicing; Net making; Net patching and mending)* (4) is a step-by-step guide on how to tie knots used for fishing, zooming in on the hands of a soon-to-be fisherman who has rehearsed, memorized and embodied the script that will prepare them for their new job abroad.

The seed for the video work *Must-know vocabulary* (4) was sown in 2015-2016, when Sari created a prototype of the mobile application mentioned in the introduction, which includes a feature for workers to share a wide range of vocabularies used in daily (working) life. The vocabulary they learnt during the Korean Language Course in the training centre is very different from the reality they encounter in Korean factories. With 19 people from different industries, Sari generated *Factory vocabulary* (2016, currently also accessible on YouTube). For its 2018 continuation, presented here (4), Sari investigated training centres for Indonesians who are about to depart to Korea and other parts of the world. Aside from wanting to know how the training centres imagine what is needed abroad, Sari is also interested in the technologies that the soon-to-be-migrant workers are being equipped with—language being but one of them. It leaves one to wonder what other skills, surprising or unexpected, workers will find themselves in need of once they settle in their new lives, and what skills they will develop on their own, out of necessity or desire.

It may be clear that Sari's exploration will not end anytime soon, it will continue to grow and expand after this exhibition has finished. There will be new iterations and projects (the next exhibition coming up in Mongolia), deepening of research and friendships, adaptations to changing realities, and questioning of those in power. Meanwhile, the camera is still panning...





# BIOGRAPHIES

**Julia Sarisetiati** (b. 1981, Jakarta) is an artist and curator based in Jakarta. She graduated from the Arts and Design Faculty of Trisakti University with a major in Photography. She is a part of *ruangrupa* an artist collective based in Jakarta that now co-runs *Gudskul*—an informal educational platform for art practitioners. Recent exhibitions include TACTICS Jakarta Biennale, Indonesia (2013); *Hacking Urban Reality Series*, Copenhagen (2016); *11th Gwangju Biennale*, Korea (2016); *We're in this, together*, The Factory Contemporary Art Space, Saigon (2018, with Grace Samboh). In 2017, she curated the media art festival *OK. Video* with a focus on food. As a curator, she is currently working on *RETURNS: Migration Narratives* in Southeast and East Asia with Goethe Institute.

**Grace Samboh** (b. 1984, Jakarta) is a curator and researcher based between Yogyakarta and Medan, Indonesia. Aside from curating exhibitions and writing for various publications both in Indonesia and abroad, she is a member of Hyphen research collective ([hyphen.web.id](http://hyphen.web.id)) with whom she is working towards a publication about *Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru Indonesia* ['The Indonesian New Art Movement'] (1975-1989). She is furthermore program manager of the Equator Symposium (2012-2022, with Yogyakarta Biennale Foundation), with the next edition coming up on this month. [sambohgrace.wordpress.com](http://sambohgrace.wordpress.com).

In 2018, Grace and Sari also worked together in the context of the *Equator Symposium* (Yogyakarta Biennale Foundation) and *POLLINATION* (The Factory Contemporary Arts Center & SAM Fund for Art and Ecology). Some of the artworks presented in this exhibition were previously exhibited as part of the group exhibition *We're in this, together* at The Factory, Ho Chi Minh City (14 December 2018 -27 January 2019).

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Last but not least, naturally we would like to thank the artist, Julia Sarisetiati and the curator, Grace Samboh for their in-depth research, knowledge, commitment and care that is at the core of this on-going project, and for working tirelessly on the development of this exhibition.



**Cemeti-Institute for Art and Society** is the oldest platform for contemporary art in Indonesia, founded in 1988. Cemeti offers a platform for artists to develop, present and practice their work, in close collaboration with curators, researchers, activists, academics, other practitioners and communities. This takes the shape of exhibitions, workshops, talks, symposiums, publications, research threads, residencies and more. Together, we aim to explore the possibilities for a gallery to act as a site for civic action.

This exhibition is part of **Bodies of Power/Power for Bodies**, Cemeti's on-going programming thread that explores the social role and political agency of cultural practice; how we can speak to (bodies) of power, as well as directly support our individual and collective bodies. More info via [www.cemeti.org](http://www.cemeti.org).

For more information about Cemeti - Institute for Art and Society and our programme, please ask us in person in the gallery or visit our website: [www.cemeti.org](http://www.cemeti.org).

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#choreographedknowledges

#bodiesofpower

#powerforbodie

