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Art toy as a tool for engaging the global public on the city of Surabaya

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ABSTRACT

Art toys, often called designer toys, are three-dimensional figures of hybrid and stylised characters that are reproduced and commonly customised in limited quantities and sold among segmented hobbyists and collectors. Within this niche, however, there is an unexplored territory of art toy character design that is based on a city's symbols. Such is the case with the city emblem of Surabaya, Indonesia, which already has the iconic images of a shark and a crocodile (*Suro* and *Boyo*). As Surabaya continuously focuses on its image, art toys based on the city's symbols prove to be a potential platform and asset for engaging the public towards the city. If aligned and integrated well with tourism activities, licensing, branding, and various marketing communication media, it is a prospective resource and intellectual property for the city's public diplomacy in local and global settings. This article traces and conveys the design process and investigates the possibilities and concerns of designing and promoting an art toy platform character named Subo, based on Surabaya's city symbol.

World of toys

The history of the toy business follows the lines of the development of the commodities industry. First, toys were the handiwork of guild members, but as the techniques of production developed, they could be produced in larger volumes. Innovations in science and raw materials, such as plastics, significantly impacted production as well as play patterns (Heljakka 2013, 107). During the 1970s and 1980s, electronic and computer-based toys became prevalent and changed the market for toys all over the world. By the 1980s and 1990s, the computer game industry had taken over the toy market. Most houses had a game console, and as technology has developed, so has the style of game. Nowadays, there is an abundance of toys available on the market, with hundreds of toy companies competing against each other for new and exciting designs. There has also been a return to classic toys in recent years, with retro designs coming back in fashion

(Turner 2013). The real boom of toys in the media age occurred in the twentieth century, along with the proliferation of the moving image. By the late 1980s, as much as 70% of gross toy sales consisted of licensed toys: 'those plastic replicas of television characters'. The toy industry as a commercial provider of play is one of the most prominent examples of a subcategory of the creative economy (Kline in Heljakka 2013, 105–106).

Toys, in general, have been one of several creative sectors recognised in the creative industries. The global toy industry is a billion-dollar industry dominated by five leading players: Mattel, Namco Bandai, Lego, Hasbro and Jakks Pacific. The U.S. is the leading importer in the global toy industry, and China is the leading exporter (Statista Research Department 2018). The global toy market is significant, having reached US$89 billion in annual revenue in 2019. As such, the opportunities for toy manufacturers are significant if they can overcome stiff competition. That competition comes from other toy makers as well as other forms, including children's entertainment such as video games. As toys can be expensive, they are a luxury good for many families around the world. Therefore, higher incomes help to explain the dominance of North America, Asia and Europe with regard to regional revenues from the toy market (O'Connell 2019b).

Market growth is being fuelled by video, console and computer games, with the industry also benefiting from a growing adult consumer base as this group takes a greater interest in games as a popular leisure pursuit. Industry leaders are focusing their marketing efforts on older children and adults, with small children no longer considered the industry's main target demographic (O'Connell 2019a). The toy industry also recognises collectors, hobbyists, or builders, as the mature audience for toys. These individuals can spend more and are expected to invest in collector's items, often more expensive, more limited and, in many cases, more fragile toys. These adults are sometimes also referred to as 'kidults', to convey the feeling of kid-like enjoyment or childhood memories they have towards these toys.

The art toy niche

From the many types of toys adults collect, art toys have gained popularity due to their manipulable (or modifiable) quality that differentiates them from 'proper' works of art. Art objects are usually not allowed to be toyed with, whereas an art toy is moveable (poseable, displayable) and thus allows playful engagement. The art toy is a three-dimensional (3 D) figure based on the design and pattern of a particular artist or graphic designer collective. It is usually made from rotocast vinyl, but sometimes also resin, plush, and wood material (Jeremyville in Steinberg 2010). They are mostly character design figures that are created from mixing simple or stylised forms of everyday objects or commercial icons that exist in our pop culture psyche. They are considered collectables that are produced in limited editions and are relatively expensive because they are aimed at niche collectors. They hover in the grey area between artistic idealism and commercial venture of mass-marketed products. To their consumers, art toys are more like precious works of art, and they are enjoyed as we appreciate sculptures, but in a more personal and intimate way.

Art toys are sometimes called designer toys, urban toys, or urban vinyl. They are sometimes also called indie toys, which the terminology refers to the independent status

of their designers, who do not have to follow guidelines for 'appropriateness' mostly dictated by the big toy companies. They represent an 'underground subculture', but it is continuously getting exposure to the mass market. Many art toys include features that persuade their owner to further develop their narrative on visual, tactile, and narrative levels. Collectors of these toys like to share their images through social media platforms as a way to 'play' with them. The category of art toys seems to be far more sympathetic to bold ideas than the orderly western mass-market of toys. It is in the category of art toys that the freshest fashions are being utilised. They embrace the cute, as well as current fashion's fondness of the dark and bizarre (Heljakka 2013, 79–80, 180–182).

The art toy phenomenon can be seen as a movement that blends art, graphic design and toys to create original items that come from a personal sensibility rather than the direct result of merchandising from television or film spin-offs, comics, or video games (Phoenix 2006, 11). Art toys have mainly been around since the 1990s. However, there has been little critical discourse surrounding them, despite their importance as a source of artistic and commercial activity (Steinberg 2010). According to researchers, this phenomenon may have appeared simultaneously in Japan, China and also Hong Kong, with the work of Michael Lau in 1999. The historical roots of the trend are in Japan, with their *manga* (comics) and *kawaii* aesthetics that influence the characteristics of the toys. It may have its roots, however, in the character or mascot merchandising of the 1950s America, but further thrived in Japan in the 1970s, when Hello Kitty was first launched.

Art toy character creation

Creators of these toys usually have backgrounds in graphic design or illustration. Some of them are classically trained in art and design, while others are self-taught. They rely on other artists and communities for the toys' production, customisation, sales, promotion, and collection. Toy designers exchange images of their works on social media and connect with other designers, artists, and collectors. Sometimes collaborations happen between them through contacts in social media. Collaborations can be in the form of customising or painting the other's toy, and even for production. Most will eventually meet at exhibitions and conventions either in their area or abroad.

Art toy creation begins with experiments in the field of character design and production. Subsequently, its promotional marketing encourages its consumer to be a collector of the art toy. The basic concept is producing it in a limited number: in tens, hundreds, or sometimes thousands. Figures of these art toys then emerge together with vibrant graphic design and expression language. They sometimes also come supported with merchandising. Each of them has its own story and personality. They are also authentic because they are independent of TV, movies, commercials, electronic games, or other familiar characters. They include a visual aesthetic and expression language created with the personal sensitivity of the designer (Atılgan 2014).

Traditionally, however, character creation and its merchandising are forms of cultural production and marketing that use a character (or multiple characters) to drive the consumption of media forms. These forms can include television programmes and video games, objects such as plush dolls and plastic toys, and products like car

insurance and financial services. Most associated with Walt Disney's empire of characters and Japanese anime's global expansion, this practice has been adopted in various forms around the world, instituting character-driven networks of images and things (Steinberg 2010). Star Wars is one of the biggest commercial successes in contemporary toy culture. The toys licensed for the first film outsold the film (del Vecchio in Heljakka 2013, 105). Its continuing success can still be seen today.

As characters take centre stage in the art scene and on the canvas, they seem to import their logic of consumption into the art world. At the same time, these characters also become a site of experimentation and transformation. The character does not, however, operate in a vacuum. A fundamental element of the character merchandising is the character's relation to the 'world' to which it belongs. Characters are positioned in relation to the worlds to which they belong, worlds that are developed through narrative and non-narrative means. However, the distinction between the character and its world is maintained: the world is never inscribed on the character, but only implied. The character provides a means of accessing the world—this being one of the reasons for its consumption—but does not contain the world in itself (Steinberg 2010). This article will explore the creation of a character that reinterprets a city's symbol and narrative then forms it into an art toy, and how it becomes a medium of public engagement or interaction and communication globally.

Surabaya, the city of *Suro* and *Boyo*

Surabaya is the capital of East Java province and the second-largest city in Indonesia. Surabaya is also the oldest city, being settled on 31 May of 1293. It is located on the northeast of Java island, with a total area of 330.45 km^2 and a total population of more than 3 million people at night and more than 5 million people during work hours. Surabaya is a seaport with Tanjung Perak Port as its chief port, serving as the hub for inter-island shipping in the eastern regions of Indonesia. Surabaya has been a port town since the Majapahit Empire (1293–1500). Therefore, Surabaya has become an area of convergence of various humans in trading activities. With this development, Surabaya has become the centre of the regional economy in eastern Indonesia, with a variety of business and trade activities (Surabaya City Government 2018a).

People from different ethnicities who come from the eastern part of Indonesia (such as Madurese and Balinese) have been visiting and living in Surabaya. In addition to the two ethnic groups, people of Chinese, Arabian, and Indian descendants also inhabit the city along with the native Surabayans (Javanese), making Surabaya a multi-ethnic and multi-religion city. Each ethnicity and culture over the years have been mingled in peace and harmony, and form a distinctive blend that is known as the culture of Surabaya (Surabaya City Government 2018b).

Surabaya has a unique and peculiar name that conveys two animals: *Sura* (or sometimes spelled *Suro*), a mythical shark-like fish, and *Baya* (or sometimes spelled *Boyo*), a crocodile (see Figure 1). The two animals are legendary characters that tell the story of the beginnings of the city and have become the city's symbol, pictured on the city's emblem. Historians determined 31 May 1293 as the day a Javanese army defeated a Mongol invasion near Surabaya and that this event should mark the birth date of Surabaya. These events explain the symbol's connotations of combat, bravery,

Figure 1. The iconic Surabaya sculpture [Photograph, n.n.]. Retrieved from https://dewailmu.id/kota-di-jawa-timur-dengan-sejarah-panjang/.

and danger. In linguistic terms, *suro* in the Javanese language can mean 'brave' or refer to the mythical shark-like fish. The word *boyo* means 'crocodile', while the similar-sounding Indonesian/Malay word *bahaya* means 'danger'. With these meanings, 'Surabaya' can mean 'brave in the face of danger' (Peters 2013).

The legend of the fighting shark and crocodile derived from local folk etymology has been used since colonial times and told through generations. A long time ago, Suro, the shark, and Boyo, the crocodile, were always in constant dispute over their quest for prey. They always fought when they met, and both were equally strong, agile and tenacious. Since both felt fed up with the constant fight, Boyo, the crocodile, suggested an idea to Suro, the shark. 'Suro, in this world, there is more water than land, and you can swim better than me. In water and land, we both can get prey. From now on, how about the deep waters of the sea will be your territory, and the waters above the land will be mine. Besides that, let us decide together that your territory borders are during low tide,' said Boyo. 'It's a deal!' said Suro. It seemed that this agreement went well for a while, until one day Suro started to question things about it. 'Wasn't the agreement talked only about sea waters but not about the rivers? So, therefore, it shouldn't be a problem if I swim around the estuaries and to the rivers,' thought Suro. Note that only legends can let sharks swim into the rivers.

So, one day as Boyo was looking out for prey in Kali Mas (Golden River), as it was understood as his territory, he met Suro. Boyo instantly accused Suro of violating the agreement. After a long dispute, they again struck a considerable fight. Kali Mas became red from their blood; thus it was known to have reddish coloured water. A bridge called Jembatan Merah (Red Bridge) was also built there to recall the legend (Widodo 2008, 9). Some would describe that Boyo finally was successful in driving away Suro, but then when it was high tide, Suro would come again and fight with Boyo. The story ends with the continuous fight but not with a winner. Therefore, people often conclude that the fighting is never-ending. This story describes and becomes the symbolic name of Surabaya.

Figure 2. From left to right: oldest symbol of Surabaya, coat of arms of Surabaya, official seal of Surabaya (Widodo 2008; Surabaya Public Relations 2018).

In 1918, L.C.R. Breeman suggested to the *Soerabaiashe Gemeente* (Surabaya Municipality) to use Suro and Boyo as the symbols of the city. The design of the emblem or coat of arms of Surabaya was then finalised by *Genealogish-Heraldisch Genootschap de Nederlandsche Leeuw* (Association of Symbol Art Experts). It was then announced officially by the city government as the city emblem in 1920. The new design, as it is used now with a hexagonal armour, was sanctioned by President Soekarno in 1956 (Widodo 2008, 11–12; see Figure 2).

This uniqueness offers the city and its citizens an excellent resource for having a vivid image to represent and symbolise the city, especially for any visual communication purposes. The shark and crocodile have been conveyed many times as two entities, in varying styles, from cartoons to sculptures for many different purposes relating to the city. There are also two mascots for the Persebaya football team of Surabaya. They are named Zoro and Jojo (Ismunanto 2017). With this circumstance, however, comes the opportunity for exploration in the area of design that can be pushed further and broader. Art toys become a perfect medium that is still rarely explored and can provide new opportunities for the city that has not been done before.

Designing the Subo art toy platform

Subo reinterprets Suro and Boyo and combines them into one entity or one character, hence the name Su-Bo. As with most art toys, it tries to play into the creative activity of mixing and merging to create new ideas and offer new concepts. As a new concept, Subo offers a more contemporary engagement towards the city, especially for its local citizens. As an art toy or a designer toy, Subo finds a niche segment where such a hybrid character can be accepted and reach a wider audience outside Surabaya and even abroad through social media and followers of art toys. This potential, in a way, helps to introduce Surabaya to the world as can be seen in Subo's Instagram account (@subosuroboyo).

The design process began with identifying Surabaya's symbol, which are the icons of the shark and the crocodile. The study of the legend of Surabaya and the origins of the two icons from several resources also comprised the initial process. These aspects provided a candid understanding of the subject. The next step was to gather visual references of sharks and crocodiles. Many art toys were also examined to better grasp the general artistic simplification and stylisations of the characters' shapes and

Figure 3. Finalised character design of Subo in outline drawing from different angles (Personal documentation 2017).

forms. Many references come from established and more famous art toy creators, such as Kidrobot, Michael Lau, Frank Kozik and many others. The typical nature of designing art toys is to combine existing forms of objects or even other characters. This conjoining and mixing of forms add to the characteristics of art toys as expressions or comments to the mass consumer products. They become hybrids of familiarity and symbols playing against and with each other in a new personified character. They become new symbols from common symbols of contemporary popular culture.

While designing the character, we should also be aware of the principles of crafting a memorable and engaging character. Some of these principles include the uniqueness of forms, balance, the appropriate visual language of shapes and expressive face that represent the concept of the character (Steinberg 2010). These principles, along with the references, are explored together to create sketches of the combined character of Suro and Boyo or between the shark and the crocodile. The resulting sketches of mixes between Suro and Boyo result in a '*sharkodile*' crossbreed character with simplified shapes. It has the upward nose of a crocodile, eyes and teeth that resemble both the shark and the crocodile, gills, fins and tail of a shark, backbone scales and lower legs and claws of a crocodile. They go through several stylistic modifications and simplifications to have just the necessary forms and more of a friendly character, but with a mischievous smile to show off its sharp teeth of both a shark and a crocodile (see Figures 3 and 4).

A character then needs a unique and memorable name that mirrors the character's concept. This name was taken from the first syllables of each name, Su of Suro and Bo of Boyo, and combined the two to create Subo. The name is almost universally easy to pronounce and had not already been used for a similar product or brand. Deciding on a catchy name that is universal is essential in the long run, with considerations of its availability in terms of intellectual property, licensing, marketing usage, and existing meanings in different languages. Figure 5 presents Subo's logo design. An example of successful use of a toy's name that has become universal is 'Lego', which is originally an abbreviation of two Danish words, '*leg godt*' meaning 'play well'.

In a typical art-toy-making process, after getting the final sketches of the character in turnaround views, the designer usually sculpts the character to make a 3D master with epoxy clay. Depending on the artist, this process today is sometimes replaced by digital sculpting with 3D software. Both methods require fundamental sculpting skills along with manual tools, or software skills, depending on the method used.
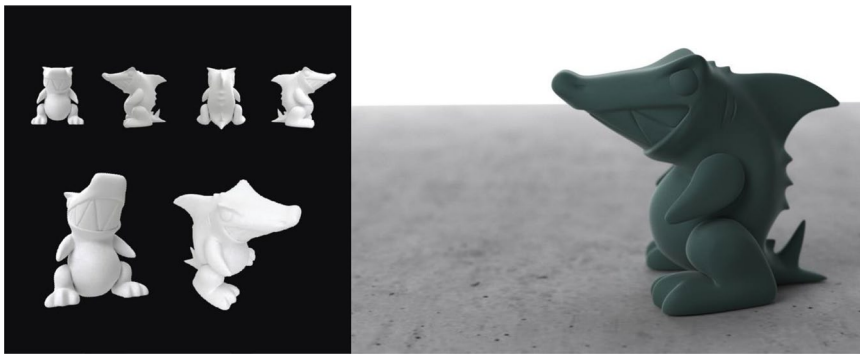
Figure 4. Subo turnaround views in 3 D digital sculpture render (Personal documentation 2017).

Figure 5. Subo logo design with the tagline "Asli Suroboyo", which means both, 'originally from Surabaya' and 'really a Sura-Baya' (the combination of both) (Personal documentation 2017).

Sizes for art toys commonly vary from about 7 to 15 centimetres, but sometimes a lot larger. The final output is projected for production in resin and for a specific price range, thus the first Subo is created to be 10 centimetres tall. This size is ideal for a small production scale, reasonably priced collectable art toy moulds, and as platforms or what is often called blanks, which can be painted.

Since the process of making these art toys with resin requires extensive handwork and time, the production quantity is always limited. There are more expensive ways to produce them, such as using vinyl. These objects are considered vinyl toys, which are a more large-scale production, but also limited. Free manufacturing facilities and lower labour costs for this kind of production are dominated by China, which plays ever-increasing importance in the production phases of the global toy industries (International Council of Toy Industries 2017). These single colour, everyday art toys that are produced are then offered as blanks or platform do-it-yourself (DIY) toys to art toy hobbyists and collectors, to be further painted on or modified. Several popular famous platform toys include Be@rbrick by Medicom Toy, Co. and Dunny and Munny by Kidrobot.

Local novelty for a global audience

Subo was designed in May 2017 for an exhibition celebrating the 724th anniversary of the city of Surabaya. The exhibition was at The House of Sampoerna Museum Gallery in Surabaya and was entitled 'Kotakukotakita' (translated to 'my city is our city' without spaces) conducted by a group of faculty members of Visual Communication Design Department of Petra Christian University Surabaya. The exhibition concept for Subo was to be an interactive piece that introduces the character in 3D sculptural form while also providing many two-dimensional (2D) images rendered on posters and sheets of illustrated or cartoon outline versions of Subo to be coloured with coloured pencils and markers. These items were provided next to the 3D art toy so people could get a sense of how the character looks like in 3D and can then express any kind of thoughts, feelings, or reactions onto the colouring sheets provided. The results of the coloured or written sheets were then hung on the wall next to the display exhibit to then be also a part of the exhibition itself. This kind of interaction provided a generated art piece (see Figure 6). The exhibit served as an introduction of the character to the public and a starting point for Subo's social media content on Instagram.

The interaction created from the exhibition provided more personal touches towards the Subo character. It provided space for people to express themselves on the character's image through colouring, writing, displaying and taking selfies, which is the concept of platform toys, but on much more 'forgiving' and 'friendlier' media, which are paper and digital photos. The hashtag '*#subosuroboyo*' was also provided for people who would like to share their work on Instagram for others to see. The use of paper served as an introduction of platform toys, inviting people to create

Figure 6. Subo exhibited in "Kotakukotakita", Visual Communication Design of Petra Christian University Group Exhibition at House of Sampoerna, Surabaya, May 2017 (Personal documentation 2017).

art on top of another artwork. People enjoyed taking a short break in the gallery and colouring in the Subo drawings. Subo became the canvas on which people could 'paint', to express their feelings about the city of Surabaya and their perception and projection on the Subo character. Hundreds of people of all ages contributed to the colouring of Subo, from local visitors to tourists. The generated coloured Subos from people over the period of the exhibition, for a month, slowly became the centrepiece and backdrop for the art toy. Documentation on this event appeared on Subo's Instagram.

Subo's Instagram has become the medium for further exposure and introduction to a wider audience. It quickly spread and received attention from the Indonesian Art Toy (IAT) community, whose members come from all over Indonesia. By joining a community or communities of the specific field, the artist gains the benefits of abundant information and knowledge of contacts, techniques, problems and solutions, as well as a wider global community. Through a community, we can deepen our involvement in the field and become better informed through the sharing of information, such as exhibitions, conventions, what we are doing, what others are doing, what others are collecting, new art toys, artists, collaboration opportunities, and so on. Through the community and social media, Subo has also been purchased by hobbyists and collectors in Indonesia and abroad. People abroad have also been introduced to the city of Surabaya through Subo. Explanations of the character concept are always attached to the packaging of the art toy as well as on Instagram. The labelled description reads: 'Subo is a mutant hybrid between Suro (or Sura, a shark) and Boyo (or Baya, a crocodile) from the city symbol of Surabaya, East Java, the second-largest city in Indonesia. Legend has it that these two creatures were in never-ending fights in both their territories, the swamplands and the sea, which then formed the terrains that make up the city.' Subo portrays itself as the first art toy that specifically represents and comes from the city of Surabaya.

Subo has been given a logo and packaging design. The logo depicts a shark or a crocodile's eye on the last letter 'o', as both creatures also have similar looking eyes. There is a tagline below the logo that reads 'Asli Suroboyo', which means both, 'originally from Surabaya' and 'really a Sura-Baya' (the combination of both). All the exhibition materials and packaging of Subo show the logo to consistently promote the name and tagline, as they cannot be attached to the body of Subo. Designing toy packaging is almost as important as the design work behind the toy itself. It is the packaging that attracts the player to a new toy. It is also on the packaging that the toy designer can possibly communicate information about the designer, the toy company, and the back story of the toy. Besides the interactivity in the first exhibition, Subo was also introduced in an art market shortly thereafter, to gain even more presence and awareness. Merchandise has been added to provide liveliness and attention to the character, such as stickers, key chains, postcards and magnets. It is also sold in the museum and gallery store of The House of Sampoerna that is regularly visited by tourists coming to Surabaya.

Currently, Subo has gone into several limited productions as platform or blank art toys. It also has had several form redesigns and versions to maintain the livelihood of the art toy. Different versions include a smaller-sized Subo with revamped form, a sleeping Subo, and a rounded form called Subo Pomelo for a more *kawaii* or cute, adorable version. Further stylistic explorations of forms from one-character concept can thus be

Figure 7. Subo resin art toy production, implemented logo, and labelling on various types of packaging for sale online and at art markets (Personal documentation 2017).

achieved, shown just from these examples. By being a platform toy, Subo invites the consumer or collector to participate in expressing him/herself onto the toy by painting or modifying it. It becomes an interactive and engaging medium (see Figure 7). People from different countries who have painted on Subo have shared their creations online, creating further communicative interaction with what the art toy represents globally.

The character design, as an intellectual property, has prospects for further development into merchandising, story-telling, animation, games, public attractions, and so on. This project has become an example of local-based character design that can offer a new way of rejuvenation or expansion to a city's brand and has the potential to be aligned with its marketing and tourism. It serves as a novel destination branding concept for new audiences of a niche market that has the potential to also be implemented in other cities. Other cities can create the same art toy concept of combining novelties that do not have to be necessarily from the city's symbol but can focus on their unique selling points, such as their primary products or attractions. The design principles should be carried out as mentioned in this article. Local citizens and communities should be the driving force for the exposure of the art toy. The government and the private sector can play important roles in utilising this to be successful communication media.

Conclusion

The Subo project has explored the prospects of intellectual property of an art toy platform character design based on a city's symbol, namely Surabaya. It embodies local attributes that can connect with local consumers as well as a wider global audience. Citizens will immediately recognise and quickly understand the character as it resembles and communicates something already familiar to them; they can relate to it. Non-citizens who are art toy collectors or hobbyists will realise the character's representation of the city once it is introduced to them as a collectable art toy. With an easily spelled and pronounced name, Subo can reach out to an international audience. As an intellectual property, Subo's copyright has been registered at the Directorate General of Intellectual Property, Ministry of Law and Human Rights of the Republic of Indonesia, which is a good practice for future protection and formal legitimation for the artist, since it is the first art toy character that is based on the mixing of Suro and Boyo. Kudrowitz (2014, 241) mentions, however, that deals of toy ideas from independent inventors to a licensing company sometimes is based more on trust than on concerns over protecting

Figure 8. Subo variations: Subo Sleeps, Subo Pomelo line drawing, Subo Pomelo art toy, Subo Pomelo sculpture concept image [Suramadu Bridge photograph, Midori S. 2009] (Personal documentation 2017).

intellectual property. It is also noted that the toy industry is a bit like the fashion industry, where tastes change rapidly and products have a short life cycle of one to three years. Therefore, there should be a continuous effort in developing the character further into various forms, stories, and products.

The role of the toy designer is changing. In the past, toy designers were likely to come from Industrial Design Bachelor of Arts programmes, trained to make drawings and foam models. These are still valuable skills, but in today's society, the industrial designer is also expected to know how things work, how things are manufactured and how to incorporate technology (Kudrowitz 2014, 253), as well as marketing and sales.

The design result proves to be a potential asset towards the city's promotion. It could be a further advantage if aligned well with the city's branding, tourism activities, with good integrated marketing communication that focuses on the character (see Figure 8). It should, however, have strong support from investors, dedicated creative teams, and manufacturing licensing plans to fully develop the character into many different media. Subo can become a unique iconic character to find and buy when in Surabaya. It can be implemented on various products, such as souvenirs and even attractions. It is a more contemporary alternative to the city's icon to reach a new, different, and broader segment of the audience. It also needs support from the local city government to integrate it with the creative industry to be successful.

Even though Subo has been well accepted by people from inside and outside the city thus far, there may be some concerns that are in people's or the government's minds. There may be certain people who view the two entities of the legendary Suro and Boyo as more than an ordinary symbol, but a sacred symbol, and believe that they should not be changed, modified or combined. They may perceive Subo as unethical or even sacrilege. Until now, however, there have been no complaints. Most likely because of its introduction to the market as an art toy. Nevertheless, through the exposure of Subo in social media and its gain in popularity, people are starting to see prospects in designing their own character based on their city's symbol. It can at first rejuvenate the city's brand and reconnect with its younger citizens. Second, it can introduce the city's important features or products to a wider audience. For example, the Sidoarjo district, with its fish and shrimp products that happens to be in their emblem, can also create something with the same concept of mash-up, like Subo. A global audience should still be an important aspect to keep in mind in designing the character. It can also be organised into a competition event. The best character should resonate not only with the citizens but also non-citizens. This intellectual property of

character design would exemplify the city's novelty and engage it with the global audience. The character in its art toy platform provides a medium for an introduction and global public engagement towards the city. Continuous interactions with the character should be established and maintained with social media and assorted product sales. Further exploration of the character into various versions, stories, and media will keep the character alive and develop it further.

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Notes on contributor

Aris Kuntjara is an artist, a designer, and an educator teaching at Petra Christian University, Surabaya since 2004. He has a background and research interests in the visual arts, art practice, as well as visual and digital culture.

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