Indonesian comic Toni Masdiono is best known for his silent comic "*Karimata* 1890."

Toni Masdiono, who recently released the silent comic *Karimata* 1890, is someone I'd like to interview. He was born in Malang on March 25, 1961, and is a well-known illustrator in Indonesia. He graduated from Bandung Institute of Technology's Art School and published five papers in IJOCA (International Journal of Comics).

I: Could you tell me when you got into comics?

T: For the past 20 years, I've been illustrating novels for Gramedia (Indonesia's largest publisher), focusing on detective fiction and *Intisari* magazine. I chose to produce 14 ways of making comics when I was 30 years old, and they became best sellers and are still used as references in many colleges.

I: Why have you started developing 14 ways to make comics when Indonesian comics have been disappearing since the 1980s?

T: Indonesian comics were in their golden age in the 1970s, and have been dying for ten years since the 1980s, when American, Japanese, and European comics dominated the Indonesian market. Many Indonesian comic artists did not make comics at the time, therefore I devised 14 ways to make comics for regenerations.

I: Many new comic artists I spoke with said they were inspired by your book. When are you going to be an international comic judge?

T: Yes, I am aware of this when I lead a comic workshop. I was asked to go to the Philippines, and all I know is that Prof John Lent was introduced to me by Dwi Koen, a well-known Indonesian cartoonist. I was asked to offer a workshop under the title *Cergam*. I've been invited to be an International Judge since 2008. Before then, I'd already served as a judge in Comic in Bandung and Yogyakarta.

I: What is the difference between *cergam* and comic?

T: *Cergam* is an Indonesian phrase that has a connotation that is comparable to the graphic novel. The phrase "graphic novel" has been used in Indonesia since the 1960s. Will Eisner was the first to establish the graphic novel, and John Lent suggested that I introduce the name graphic novel Indonesian version. *Cergam* has a more comprehensive nomenclature because it combines comic and books graphics into one.

John Lent taught comic in Asia (Malaysia) and was aware that Indonesian tradition includes pictorial storytelling, particularly on temple walls (Borobudur and Prambanan temples). Following that, APAKA appointed me as a member of the Chinese Comic Association. The Association of Comic Artists is a non-profit organization that promotes the art of comics. Every year, Singapore, Malaysia, and the Philippines comic artists are invited to China for a

conversation. Before the 1970s, the Philippines produced comic books that were influenced by Spanish culture and had a realistic style.

Cergam is an abbreviation of the words "image" and "story." *Cergam* is an image that tells a tale or a story with a picture, and it can be reversed. *Cergam* uses techniques that are comparable to those used in comic books. The word balloon is frequently present in a comic, however, it is not always included in *cergam*. Sam Nurdin was the first to coin the term "*cergam*" in 1967. In the 1970s, comic professionals rarely studied Indonesian *Cergam*'s sequence. *Cergam* had a vertical format with two panels at the time; above and below. The *cergam* format evolved and was primarily available in two sizes: horizontal and portrait. The golden age comic artist is more impulsive when it comes to creating comics. I and other Indonesian comic artists have agreed to use the term *cergam* for comic art (fine art) and the term comic for the industry. One artist was responsible for drawing, writing the tale, and selling our *cergam* to the publisher during my time. The comic industry, on the other hand, employs a large number of artists with a variety of skills to create a single story.

All of their forefathers appear in cartoons, thus comics and cartoons are intrinsically intertwined. Sequences are the most significant comics. *Cergam* encompasses both graphic novels and comic books in one package. Comics can be done by one person, but they can also be done by a group. Comic books are a part of the creative industry.

I: Many young comics are going digital, with American influences like superheroes and cosplayer clothing and character. What kind of story is best for Indonesia?

T: In Indonesia, *cergam*'s readers are interested in both mystic and horror stories. Singapore and Malaysia have fewer comic artists than the United States, but they enjoy horror fiction. Legend stories such as *bawang merah dan putih*, which fall outside of the first two genres, are the third option. Which tale plot should we use? For example, similar stories to *Romeo and Juliet* may be found in China and Indonesia, where love did not survive long and there were no happy endings. Miyazaki Hayao's *My Neighbor Tatoro* is a film that is comparable to *Alice in Wonderland*. Mystic anime is popular among Indonesians. We should dig the story out of ourselves; for example, my stories always begin with water. I started drawing the ocean at the beginning of *Karimata*. The tale of *Laosam* began with *hujan-hujanan* (*hujan-hujanan* is someone who plays with rainwater). I was unwell in the 1990s and couldn't draw for a long time. Then I began to construct a tale. I made a three-page *cergam* about a person who made stamp prints within a muddy tiny roadway. I added a river to Karimata's story after acquiring the concept from Baduy Village in Banten, West Java (the Baduy people are natives who lived without electronics similar to the Amish in the USA). I created *Cergam* Eyang Sobur (2015) with my own children's stories and realistic illustrations.

Despite the success of *Candy Candy* (an overseas comic), most Indonesian publishers refused to print realistic drawings for children. I told the publisher that children are open to many types of art, including realistic drawing. The publisher follows popular belief and asks the comic artist to simplify their drawing. Many Indonesian comic artists, such as Troy TS, are also painters. Teguh

Santosa's hatching has influenced me, and he was an excellent illustrator, as well as a skilled draughtsman. What did I notice in Troy's drawing? When Troy creates his drawing's background, he tries to convey the beauty of Indonesian landscapes and culture. I was motivated by a true story when I created Eyang Sobur's *cergam* for children.

After finishing Nomik for Mizan Publisher in 2010, *Karimata*'s idea began. The possibilities for making *cergam* from the Indonesian terrain will be endless. I'd like to make a *cergam* in the style of Teguh Santosa's Sandora, which depicts life at sea during Dutch colonial days. I admired Frank Bellamy's *Garth,* which was based on true events and fashioned into a historical epic. Teguh advised, 'Incorporate historical truths into your fantasy.' Teguh Santosa of *Cergam Sandora* is unsure about the timeline. I'm looking for the dark side of the colonial era around 1890, which I define as occurrences that never happened or are unclear.

I: Why did you choose the Karimata strait, which is close to Singapore?

T: At first, I wanted to utilize the Karimun Strait in Java, so I studied the map and saw that the Dutch had used the Karimata Strait as a major commercial route since Cheng Ho. *Karimata*'s characters do not represent a single tribe, but their names come from throughout Indonesia. This *cergam* represents many different civilizations, and a plurality (*kebhinekaan*) is one of the story's key messages. Even though there are 1340 ethnic groups in Indonesia, such as the Javanese and the Sundanese, I didn't try to sketch each one individually or even the largest groups. I only utilize a few of their emblems, including their headband and martial arts. I attempt to depict the diversity in Nusantara or Indonesia rather than promoting the identity of any particular ethnic group. I'd like to continue our drawing tradition in great detail. The terrain has changed, and the city has changed as well. I wanted to draw an Indonesian-themed comic, and I was inspired by Malaysian comic artists who kept mentioning Nusantara Comics. Indonesian territory makes up the majority of Nusantara. Unfortunately, Indonesian comic artists are increasingly emulating the styles of Japan and the United States.

We are not a particularly nautical nation, and many tribes live in mountainous areas and rarely see the sea...finally, I discovered the image of head ties (Javanese *udeng*). From time to time, the size of the object fluctuates. During Dutch colonial times, the Karimata strait was the busiest. Oil exploration in Serawak had already begun at the time. The United States company has already begun to look for oil. The native war has already begun. The traders cross the strait via Bangka Belitung on their way to Batavia (present Jakarta)

I: What is the significance of silent *cergam*?

T: I was invited to Singapore in December of last year. I wasn't ready and it was only half-finished; fortunately, I didn't teach at the university any longer. Cheng Chu is a comics curator who gave me the nickname Liquid City. Gurnity and Karimata are two characters from an artwork folder that I brought to Singapore. I never sketch with text. Because Cheng Chu is familiar with the story, he advised me against using text because the order and time can be read. I

was hesitant at first, but I eventually finished drawing *Karimata*. Until now, no one has complained about the *cergam* without a text. I wanted to use two languages at first, but I thought it would be tough to draw with balloon words. I'll leave it up to the reader to make their interpretations.

I: After Karimata, what are your plans?

T: I'm going to make a tetralogy. *Laosam* is the second title. 1896. I included a timeline, but *Laosam* remains quiet in the comic. I went to Lasem, which was an important harbor during the Dutch Colonial period. The living Karimata characters will return, but the story will begin in the middle of Java. As a result, I'm following Teguh's Santosa story. *Sandora*'s narrative begins in Java and ends in the Philippines. Sandora's family travels from Java to Thailand in the third part. I have not yet prepared the third half of *Karimata*
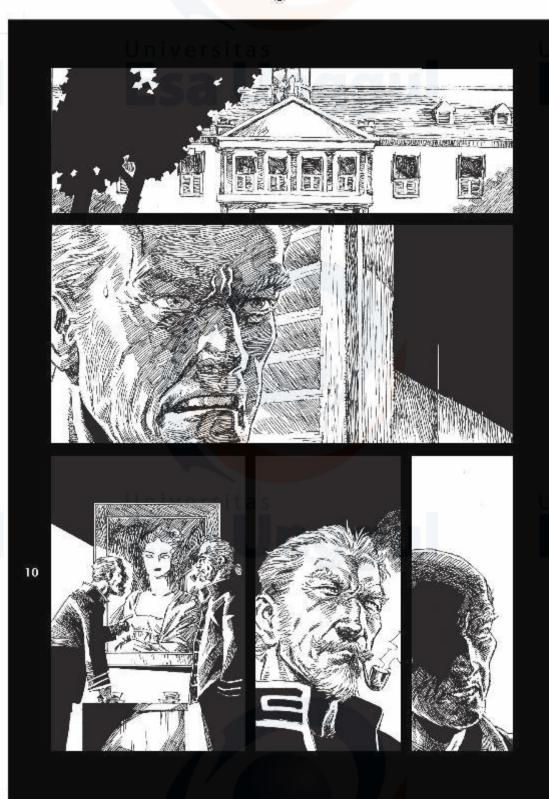
TONI MASDIONO

Karimata
1890