Behind the Scene(s): Collaborative Visual Ethnography in Indonesia’s Do-it-yourself Punk Rock Scene

The funds provided by the SVA Robert Lemelson Foundation have facilitated my exploratory research project in the DIY punk rock scene in Bandung, Indonesia. During the summer of 2017, I used the fellowship funds to travel to Bandung with the intention of initiating a collaborative visual protocol with the punks at the Rumah Pirata Anarchist Collective. Over the course of 3 weeks, I built relationships with key informants and used camera equipment purchased with the Fellowship funds (a Canon 7D equipped with a Sigma F-1.8 lens) to collect visual data centered on punk’s involvement in transnational networks. Additionally, I was able to provide several cameras to collaborators at the collective that were capable of producing both still and video images. Having saved money on airfare, I was able to provide the collective with one higher-end Canon mirrorless system with a low-light capable lens. The camera is also capable of being synced to participants phones and can be controlled remotely, which is something that the punks at Rumah Pirata were particularly interested in. Before my departure, my collaborators and I discussed the sharing of imagery and also the potential for long-term collaboration. Because of the access to capable camera equipment, the punks are interested in collaboratively producing what they refer to as a ‘fanzine’ which highlights the activities happening at the collective. Rather than a print fanzine, the punks want to produce a multimodal DIY publication which incorporates photography, video, and
music—all produced using the SVA/RLF equipment. They will be providing the media and I will facilitate the technical aspects of putting the fanzine together. The format is still being negotiated. The Rumah Pirata punks retain ownerships of the media produced with the equipment I was able to provide; however, part of the collaborative process is that they are allowing me to use images for my research purposes. Participants have shared hundreds of images and videos taken both at Rumah Pirata and elsewhere whilst the punks were on the road. This highlights punks’ mobilities and their images have provided robust visual data on the intricate transnational networks they are apart of. More importantly, though, the community buy-in to this project has completely shifted the theoretical approach I will be using for the larger dissertation project. Collaborating with Rumah Pirata in producing a fanzine has revealed the deep-seated anarchist principles which guide the punks’ interpretation of DIY. Essentially, this DIY ethnographic method has highlighted previously unseen ethos and principles that will be central to my dissertation. Lastly, I used part of the SVA/RLF funds to present my preliminary findings at the AAA conference in Washington D.C. I presented both at the Visual Research Conference at the Smithsonian and a paper at the regular meetings. I garnered significant feedback which will continue to guide this ongoing collaborative project.

Testimonial about Benefits of Fellowship

The SVA Robert Lemelson Foundation Fellowship funds provided me an opportunity that, simply stated, would not have been possible any other way. Coming from a relatively small anthropology program, I have limited access to visual research equipment and even more limited opportunities for fieldwork funding, especially for exploratory work. The exceptional part of this fellowship is that there is an emphasis on using the funds for visual equipment. While other funding opportunities may allow for the procuring of some equipment, the SVA Robert Lemelson Foundation Fellowship is primarily a visual research funding opportunity which means my methodology was not a mere side-note but rather the focus of the project. Because of this, I was able to facilitate a collaborative visual ethnographic project with the punks at an anarchist collective. This has proved to be highly successful in both making and maintaining relationships with key informants and in shifting the way I am theoretically approaching this intricate community. This will undoubtedly be highly valuable to me as I continue with my dissertation work. Additionally, funds provided by the SVA Robert Lemelson Foundation Fellowship facilitated me presenting my research at the Visual Research Conference and American Anthropological Association’s Annual Meeting. Both of these opportunities have already proven to be extremely valuable as I garnered feedback on project and suggestions for future work.