

## REVITALIZING THE SPIRIT OF THE PEOPLE'S CULTURAL INSTITUTE: ART AS A MEDIUM FOR SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ACTIVISM OF STUDENTS ON CAMPUS

**Silma Hanifa, Yudi Juniadi**

Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, Jawa Barat, Indonesia

\*corresponding author E-mail: [silmakhansa01@gmail.com](mailto:silmakhansa01@gmail.com)

*Received: Mei 8, 2024; Revised: 5 June, 2024; Accepted: 25 June 2024*

### ABSTRACT

This study explores the enduring legacy and contemporary relevance of cultural activism initiated by the People's Cultural Institute (Lekra), established in Indonesia during the politically dynamic post-independence era. Lekra pioneered the integration of socialist realism into artistic practice, systematically utilizing arts and culture as instruments for socio-political critique, consciousness-raising, and mobilization of marginalized communities. Recognizing growing political apathy among contemporary university students, this research examines the strategic adaptation of Lekra's principles by SRD (Unit Kegiatan Mahasiswa Seni Rupa dan Desain) at UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, the research analyzes primary archival sources from Lekra's historical documentation (1950–1965), alongside in-depth interviews with current SRD leaders and historical cultural activists. The findings demonstrate how SRD successfully revitalizes Lekra's activist legacy through structured cadre formation, ideological education, and socially engaged collective artistic projects. SRD's cultural activism offers a credible and engaging alternative to traditional student political structures characterized by pragmatism and disengagement. By emphasizing realism, collective artistic expression, and disciplined ideological clarity, SRD effectively bridges historical and contemporary socio-political realities, stimulating renewed political consciousness among students. Ultimately, this study argues that structured cultural activism, rooted in Lekra's historical methodology and principles, remains critically relevant and strategically significant for overcoming student apathy, revitalizing democratic participation, and fostering long-term socio-political transformation within contemporary Indonesian university campuses.

**Keywords:** *Cultural Activism, Socialist Realism, Student Political Engagement*

## INTRODUCTION

Global cultural movements have historically been affiliated with capitalist-driven rational humanism, often promoting the interests of privileged classes rather than reflecting genuine societal concerns (Mosco, 2005). Within this paradigm, culture frequently serves concealed ideological agendas benefiting a select few rather than society at large. However, this dominant model is critically challenged by alternative cultural activism rooted in socialist ideologies, aiming explicitly to represent the interests of the broader populace (Buser et al., 2013).

In Indonesia, the People's Cultural Institute, better known as Lekra (Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat), embodies such socialist cultural activism, formally established in 1950, but with ideological roots traceable back to the anti-colonial nationalist spirit that flourished around independence (1945). Lekra arose from an intellectual and artistic response to colonial repression, as Indonesian intellectuals and artists engaged in active resistance, using culture as a strategic medium to counter oppressive colonial narratives (Buser et al., 2013). Significant figures, including literary icon Chairil Anwar and literary critic H.B. Jassin, highlighted the power of artistic expression as a weapon of intellectual liberation, laying foundational principles for future cultural movements.

Lekra's emergence was notably a direct reaction to the cultural suppression prevalent during Japanese occupation, particularly the establishment of institutions such as Japan's Kulturkammer, designed explicitly to control and censor intellectual freedom. During this repressive era, artistic expressions faced severe constraints, becoming tools for ideological indoctrination rather than liberation. Lekra directly challenged this repression by establishing itself as a critical platform for intellectual and artistic freedom, promoting art and culture as robust alternatives to mainstream political discourse, allowing artists to voice social critique and challenge political authoritarianism (Widariyanti, 2022).

Historically, Lekra's activism represented an essential intervention within Indonesia's liberal-democratic period, articulating alternative political discourses via culture and the arts. The organization succeeded in operationalizing culture as a political instrument, engaging actively both domestically and internationally. Through cultural diplomacy, Lekra effectively positioned Indonesia within the global cultural dialogue, participating in international forums in cities like Berlin, Beijing, and Amsterdam, thereby reinforcing the global relevance of Indonesia's cultural-political voice. Lekra's approach positioned art and literature not merely as aesthetic practices, but as politically conscious, socially engaged forms aimed explicitly at empowering and educating society (Woolgar, 2020).

Despite Lekra's historical achievements, contemporary political engagement within university campuses faces significant challenges. Current student politics frequently reflect pragmatic and transactional behavior, leading to growing student apathy toward political issues. Student organizations, both intra-campus (student councils, departmental associations) and extra-campus, increasingly struggle to maintain authentic political engagement, characterized instead by strategic opportunism and lack of genuine ideological commitment. Consequently, students often perceive political participation negatively, creating widespread apathy and disengagement from critical socio-political discussions.

Recognizing this challenge, a new cultural approach becomes essential as an alternative form of activism. Artistic and cultural mediums possess the inherent potential to transcend traditional limitations of political discourse by providing fresh, stimulating, and relatable platforms for political awareness and dialogue. Renowned poet WS Rendra encapsulates this necessity, emphasizing art's essential connection to societal struggles and human suffering. Art, as he suggests, cannot and should not detach itself from societal realities; instead, it must intimately reflect and actively engage with prevailing social injustices and struggles.

This alternative cultural approach has manifested notably at UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung through the establishment of SRD (Unit Kegiatan Mahasiswa Seni Rupa dan Desain). SRD exemplifies a contemporary adaptation of Lekra's legacy, emphasizing collective action, critical consciousness, and socially engaged artistic activism. Drawing explicitly upon Lekra's foundational ideals, SRD utilizes art not merely as a form of aesthetic exploration, but as a deliberate instrument for political activism, mobilizing student awareness toward current socio-political issues. Through various creative initiatives and artistic productions, SRD actively nurtures political consciousness among students, effectively revitalizing the spirit of Lekra in a contemporary campus setting.

The success of Lekra during the liberal democratic era underscores how politics significantly catalyzed cultural activism in post-independence Indonesia. The political urgency of the period served as the primary stimulus, intensifying Lekra's cultural endeavors into widespread social movements. Lekra effectively leveraged the societal momentum created by democratic transitions, translating political urgency into cultural narratives that resonated with the masses, hence popularizing and democratizing cultural discourse across different strata of society (Haryanto, 1986).

Nevertheless, contemporary political developments have introduced complexities that threaten historical memory and diminish student interest in political activism. Today's political consciousness remains deeply tethered to historical roots marked by unresolved issues such as inequality, power dynamics, and intellectual colonization. The persistence of these unresolved socio-political tensions has fostered apathy among students, distancing them from understanding societal realities and cultivating widespread indifference toward democratic participation, thus demanding fresh mediums to rekindle student interest and engagement (Zulfikar et al., 2021).

Given the fading resonance of traditional political activism among students, cultural engagement emerges as a vital alternative, metaphorically comparable to an oasis amid political stagnation. Citing WS Rendra's poignant assertion—"What is the meaning of art when detached from environmental suffering?"—the imperative arises for arts and cultural practices to closely align with socio-political concerns. Art thus transitions from merely aesthetic expression to meaningful political participation, enabling students to authentically connect with social realities beyond conventional political structures.

SRD UIN Bandung embraces precisely this model, positioning itself as an artistic medium to reconnect students with political activism through creative expression and socially responsive art. The organization's approach diverges from traditional student activism by emphasizing collective artistic engagement and critical reflection, encouraging deeper exploration of socio-political issues affecting both the campus and broader society. SRD explicitly positions itself as a cultural mediator, bridging student apathy through meaningful artistic practices that critically respond to contemporary political and social challenges.

The research thus aims to critically assess the potential of cultural activism, exemplified by SRD UIN Bandung, as a legitimate alternative to mainstream political frameworks within campus life. This inquiry investigates whether art-based activism can effectively rival traditional political movements, drawing from Lekra's historical successes in mobilizing cultural expression toward political and social transformation. Ultimately, this research seeks to understand the capacity of contemporary campus cultural movements to foster political awareness, actively engage student participation, and inspire transformative social change through artistic expression.

Given the pressing concerns surrounding student political disengagement and the erosion of substantive activism within the university context, this study acquires considerable urgency. Exploring alternative activism through culture and art provides crucial insights and innovative strategies for revitalizing student political participation. As Indonesia's democracy continues to grapple with deep-seated historical and socio-political challenges, identifying effective avenues for nurturing critical consciousness among students becomes not only academically significant but vital for the nation's democratic health and future intellectual leadership.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study utilizes a descriptive qualitative research approach aimed at analyzing how SRD UIN Bandung embodies its commitment to socio-cultural activism and explores the convergence between artistic movements and the trajectory of Indonesia's democracy, inspired by the historical spirit and activism legacy of Lekra. A qualitative approach was selected due to its effectiveness in describing phenomena and exploring complex conceptual realities through textual and interpretive analysis (Jabrohim, 2001). Primary data for this research was collected from archival documents, notably *Cerpen-cerpen Lekra (1950–1965) sebagai strategi perjuangan politik PKI*, *Lekra Menurut Pihak Ketiga*, *Lekra vs Manikebu: Perdebatan Kebudayaan Indonesia 1950-1965*, and *The Legacy of Lekra: Organising Revolutionary Culture in Indonesia*. Additionally, in-depth interviews were conducted with key respondents, including current members and leaders of SRD UIN Bandung as well as cultural activists historically affiliated with Lekra, to gain deeper insights into contemporary applications of Lekra's artistic-political strategies.

Secondary data was obtained through a comprehensive literature review and historical document analysis. Further analytical emphasis was placed on evaluating selected artworks and extensive intellectual discourse produced by SRD UIN Bandung artists. These individuals actively engage in

artistic practices grounded in socialist realism, simultaneously fulfilling their roles as socially-conscious intellectuals. The interpretive thematic analysis was applied systematically to both primary and secondary data, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics between historical and contemporary cultural activism, and strengthening the research arguments with robust conceptual reasoning.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The role of art as a medium for social and political activism is actively shaped by artists who, through their practices, both move and are moved by social conditions. Art becomes not merely an aesthetic pursuit but also a powerful vehicle capable of generating social awareness, critique, and change. Lekra (Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat), historically exemplifies this role, positioning cultural creativity as a significant alternative political discourse. According to Ariel Haryanto (1986), Lekra deliberately engaged in revolutionary art, merging creativity and aesthetic expression into concrete social activism aimed at addressing real-world political and social inequalities.(Suyatno, 2012)

An in-depth conversation with Danial Indrakusuma, an activist historically involved in Lekra, further highlights the profound ideological foundations underpinning this movement. Danial underscored the importance of epistemic structures, specifically dialectical materialism (MDH - Materialisme Dialektika Historis), as central to Lekra's ideological framework. His reflections illustrate the critical connection between Lekra's ideological consistency and its effectiveness in cultural activism, emphasizing that a robust epistemological foundation is essential to sustaining meaningful activism and socio-political transformation.(Woolgar, 2020)

Furthermore, socialist realism, adopted by Lekra as both an ideological stance and artistic method, established art as a critical platform for addressing class struggles, social injustice, and political repression. Socialist realism



provided Lekra's artists with clear guidelines for interpreting societal realities and representing the voices of marginalized and oppressed communities. This artistic philosophy enabled Lekra not merely to reflect but to actively engage with Indonesia's political and social upheavals, fostering a structured approach to cultural activism grounded in collective societal experiences (Junaidi et al., 2023).

In an insightful conversation with Danial Indrakusuma, a prominent Lekra cultural activist, it emerged clearly how Lekra embedded artistic endeavors deeply within everyday social advocacy. Danial recounted the routine activities Lekra undertook, such as visiting hospitals every weekend to perform poems, songs, and theatrical performances aimed at offering emotional relief and social solidarity. He further highlighted Lekra's role in composing influential organizational anthems, illustrating Lekra's tangible commitment to integrating art and culture within broader social and political advocacy (Zulfikar, 2023).

Reflecting on current campus political dynamics, there is an observable disconnect and pervasive apathy among students toward traditional forms of political participation. Mainstream student organizations often appear excessively pragmatic, failing to resonate with broader socio-political concerns that genuinely affect student lives. It is precisely within this context that the legacy of Lekra offers compelling relevance, positioning cultural activism—such as the initiatives conducted by SRD UIN Bandung—as essential alternatives. SRD UIN Bandung strategically aligns itself with Lekra's historical legacy, utilizing artistic activism to provide students with a more meaningful, engaging, and socially-conscious form of political involvement.

### **Lekra and Its Legacy as A Model of Cultural Activism**

The People's Cultural Institute, widely known as Lekra, first emerged in 1950 amidst Indonesia's politically dynamic post-independence era. This organization was conceived and driven by intellectuals, artists, writers, and



cultural practitioners who consciously used arts and culture as instruments to challenge existing political frameworks. Lekra's formation was neither spontaneous nor purely artistic; rather, it was a calculated cultural response to the broader ideological confrontation between socialist and capitalist paradigms shaping post-colonial Indonesia.

Ideologically, Lekra embraced socialist realism, a philosophical approach grounded in Marxist principles emphasizing the representation of social realities and class struggle. Unlike other art movements that primarily celebrated aesthetic innovation or individual creativity, Lekra explicitly insisted on arts' role as social commentary. Its works frequently critiqued economic inequalities, political injustices, and the ongoing societal struggles of marginalized classes, highlighting the organization's unwavering commitment to political activism through cultural practice (Artika, 2017).

Practically, Lekra's activism went beyond mere theoretical discourse. The institution actively conducted cultural and educational initiatives across various regions in Indonesia, systematically promoting socialist consciousness among the masses. These activities ranged from literature, theatre performances, poetry recitals, painting exhibitions, to musical compositions, all deliberately employed to foster collective awareness about social inequity and advocate for revolutionary social transformation.

Through these strategies, Lekra successfully positioned itself as a robust alternative voice within Indonesia's political discourse, particularly during the liberal democracy era (1950-1965). It notably distinguished itself by emphasizing collective rather than individual artistic expression, insisting that effective social critique could not emerge from isolated creativity but required disciplined collaboration within clearly defined ideological frameworks. This collective emphasis significantly differentiated Lekra from other contemporary art movements, underscoring the organization's innovative blend of culture and political activism (Setiadi et al., 2023).

Moving beyond the historical era of Lekra in the 1950s, artistic activism

initiated by Lekra's intellectuals and artists has left a significant legacy characterized by collective action and a strong communal ethos. This legacy persists in contemporary activist-artistic movements, reflecting a shared commitment to collective responsibility and socially engaged creativity. Lekra's standpoint on collective artistic practice and ideological discipline is encapsulated in a critical statement emphasizing the necessity of organization and ideological clarity in artistic expression:

*"Seorang Seniman yang menciptakan karya-karyanya dengan fantasi liar, bebas, tak terbandung, tak terkekang, suka kepada eksperimen pribadi, tak ikut organisasi, dan hanya bertumpu pada humanisme merupakan gelandangan tanpa arah." (An artist who creates their work through wild, free, uncontrollable imagination, favoring personal experimentation, refraining from organizational involvement, and solely depending on humanism, is essentially a directionless wanderer.) - (TEMPO Magazine titled Lekra dan Geger 1965)*

This perspective articulated by Lekra reflects a fundamental critique of individualist and universalist conceptions of art, emphasizing instead the necessity of collective organization and ideological consciousness in artistic practices. Lekra explicitly rejects the notion of art as merely a domain of personal aesthetic exploration or subjective experimentation, advocating instead for art as an integral part of structured political and social activism. Lekra underscores its assertion that art achieves its fullest potential only when firmly rooted in collective social experiences and clearly articulated ideological frameworks. Thus, for Lekra, art transcends mere self-expression, becoming instead a socially accountable act grounded in collective consciousness.

Moreover, this critical stance addresses the inherent risks associated with depoliticized or purely humanistic approaches to artistic production. Lekra's perspective implies that art created without social responsibility or disciplined ideological clarity risks becoming socially ineffective or trivial, reducing its role merely to aesthetic consumption rather than active socio-political engagement. By labeling unstructured artistic experimentation as

directionless, Lekra highlights the urgency for artists to position themselves within clearly defined ideological and social contexts. Consequently, this viewpoint underscores the essential role artists play as cultural educators and political advocates, stressing the imperative that artistic practices should actively contribute to broader societal transformations rather than merely pursuing individual creative fulfillment (Zulfikar et al., 2021).

Lekra's activism was also reflected through its international cultural diplomacy, particularly evident during the Cold War period. The organization's efforts transcended national borders, illustrating its global outlook on culture and political activism. Notably, in 1951, Lekra actively participated in the International Youth and Students Festival for Peace in Berlin, where Indonesian youth and artists were showcased, not only projecting Indonesia's post-colonial cultural aspirations but also strengthening transnational socialist solidarity (Kartikasari, 2014).

Another significant example was Lekra's artistic delegation to China, where about twenty Indonesian visual artists visited to exchange cultural practices and ideas. These delegations served a dual purpose: introducing Indonesian socialist-oriented cultural identity abroad and simultaneously absorbing international influences, which further enriched Lekra's cultural production domestically. The resulting global engagement elevated Lekra's ideological and artistic reputation, situating Indonesia within an international socialist cultural dialogue (Susanti et al., 2019).

Domestically, Lekra solidified its ideological influence through notable events such as the Second Cultural Congress held in Bandung in 1951. This congress was pivotal as it outlined clear strategies for developing socialist-oriented art that was socially relevant and accessible to broader audiences. These congresses not only consolidated internal cohesion but also symbolically projected Lekra's commitment to democratic ideals, peace, and cultural progressivism both within Indonesia and abroad.

Integral to Lekra's identity was its adherence to socialist realism, an

aesthetic and ideological framework developed initially within the Soviet Union, prioritizing artworks that depicted societal realities and class struggle with clarity and precision. Lekra advocated art that directly mirrored Indonesian social conditions, utilizing realism as a means of consciousness-raising, educational outreach, and political mobilization among Indonesia's populace.

Socialist realism within Lekra's praxis explicitly rejected individualistic or abstract artistic endeavors detached from social realities. Instead, Lekra artists created art embedded within tangible social contexts, ensuring their cultural products resonated deeply with the lived experiences of ordinary citizens. Through literature, theatre, visual arts, and music, Lekra provided platforms for voicing critiques of social injustices and encouraged solidarity across class boundaries, significantly influencing Indonesia's socio-political dialogue (Sulistyo, 2018).

Moreover, Lekra was rigorous in its ideological commitment, emphasizing art's social utility rather than merely aesthetic sophistication. Artists associated with Lekra, such as Joebaar Ajoeb, often stressed popularization (*meluas*) and elevation (*meninggi*) of art. Popularization meant making art accessible and meaningful to the masses, while elevation referred to the simultaneous pursuit of high artistic and ideological quality. Thus, Lekra viewed artistic production as inseparable from disciplined ideological cultivation and community involvement (Zulfikar, 2023).

Lekra's unique organizational philosophy was also reflected in its institutional critique toward individualistic artistic practices. A notable case involved Lekra's critical stance against H.B. Jassin and the literary group Pudjangga Baru. Lekra strongly opposed individualist, universalist, or detached notions of artistic expression that failed to address concrete social conditions. Lekra's critiques often emphasized the collective responsibility of artists toward social realities, positioning itself firmly as an advocate for socially engaged collective cultural production.

Lekra's legacy is evident today through its continued influence on contemporary cultural movements. The organization's historical emphasis on collective artistic practice, political awareness, and critical realism persists within contemporary cultural groups, particularly among students and youth activists, who view Lekra's legacy as foundational in challenging existing political apathy and fostering new forms of socially engaged artistic activism.

Lekra's legacy further demonstrates how cultural activism can powerfully shape collective consciousness and stimulate public discourse on political and social issues. By integrating cultural production and political engagement, Lekra created a lasting model illustrating how art can transcend its aesthetic boundaries and actively engage with pressing social realities. This fusion of art and politics remains influential, continuing to inspire contemporary cultural groups committed to social justice and political advocacy (Julianti & Jannah, 2021).

The ideological principles and practices pioneered by Lekra remain relevant for contemporary activists and artists navigating similar socio-political challenges. Lekra's insistence on art's collective responsibility toward social issues continues to resonate today, especially as artists and cultural practitioners confront ongoing challenges of inequality, injustice, and political disengagement within contemporary societies (Wisetrotomo & Pramastuti, 2022a).

Ultimately, the historical legacy of Lekra reveals a successful blueprint for integrating artistic creativity and political activism within a unified cultural movement. Its philosophical commitment to socialist realism, combined with concrete international cultural diplomacy and domestic socio-political engagement, highlights Lekra's enduring importance as a pioneering model for cultural activism. Understanding this historical model provides contemporary cultural and political activists with valuable insights into effectively using art to inspire meaningful social change.

### **Contemporary Student Politics and The Problem of Political Apathy**

The People's Cultural Institute, widely known as Lekra, first emerged in 1950 amidst Indonesia's politically dynamic post-independence era. This organization was conceived and driven by intellectuals, artists, writers, and cultural practitioners who consciously used arts and culture as instruments to challenge existing political framework (Wisetrotomo & Pramastuti, 2022b).

Contemporary student politics, particularly within Indonesian universities, has become increasingly characterized by apathy, disengagement, and a pragmatic orientation. Traditionally, campus politics has been dominated by established extra-campus student organizations which have historically played significant roles in political education and activism. Internally, organizations like student councils (DEMA/BEM) and departmental associations (HMI) have often mirrored the external groups' political practices, further shaping students' political perspectives and behaviors. However, the political discourse within these organizations has increasingly become detached from broader ideological commitments, reducing the effectiveness of political engagement among students.

This transformation in student politics emerges from various interrelated factors, including the prevalence of pragmatic political strategies aimed primarily at short-term organizational gains or individual career ambitions rather than genuine socio-political activism. Such pragmatism tends to alienate many students who find conventional political discourse overly transactional and disconnected from pressing social realities. Consequently, student participation in campus-based political activities has significantly declined, reinforcing a broader sense of apathy and detachment from political and social concerns among students, which poses significant challenges to fostering critical citizenship and democratic participation.

The dominance of pragmatic politics within campus organizations has contributed significantly to this climate of student apathy. Organizational discussions frequently prioritize internal power struggles, electoral competition, and short-term institutional objectives, overshadowing deeper

ideological engagements or critical reflections on broader societal issues. As a result, political discourse among students often becomes repetitive, predictable, and stagnant, failing to stimulate genuine intellectual curiosity or meaningful political consciousness among the student body (Sarwoto, 2018).

Furthermore, the pragmatic orientation of traditional student political organizations creates an atmosphere of skepticism, as students increasingly perceive campus politics as a mere stepping stone toward individual advancement rather than as genuine avenues for societal change. This perception is compounded by organizational dynamics characterized by factionalism, patronage, and a lack of transparency, further deepening student distrust toward campus political structures. As such, many students consciously choose to disengage from traditional forms of political participation, viewing them as inherently compromised or ineffective.

The broader implications of student political apathy extend far beyond campus environments, ultimately influencing the quality and future of democratic participation in wider society. As universities traditionally serve as vital incubators of political consciousness and democratic practice, the prevailing student disengagement represents not merely a campus-specific issue but a significant societal concern. If left unaddressed, persistent apathy could profoundly weaken the potential for critical political engagement among future generations, diminishing civic participation and democratic resilience more broadly.

Responding to the limitations of conventional political structures, a shift toward alternative mediums of political expression is increasingly observable within campus contexts. Cultural and artistic activism, in particular, has begun to emerge as a compelling alternative to traditional political forms, offering a means to re-engage politically disenchanted students. Art and culture present opportunities for students to express political and social concerns creatively, critically, and innovatively, transcending the limitations and stagnation inherent within traditional



campus political paradigms.

This turn toward cultural activism is theoretically aligned with Lekra's foundational intent, which historically sought to utilize artistic expression as a transformative tool for socio-political awareness. By revisiting Lekra's principle of socialist realism, contemporary student groups employing cultural activism similarly prioritize the clear representation of socio-political realities and injustices through creative practice (Faruk, 2019). Through art exhibitions, street performances, installations, and community engagements, students find new avenues to explore and communicate critical political messages, challenging existing narratives and stimulating renewed political discourse.

Within this context, cultural activism addresses student apathy by providing emotionally resonant and intellectually stimulating alternatives to the often-abstract or bureaucratic forms of conventional political activism (Heinschke, 1996). Artistic practices, inherently interactive and dialogical, facilitate meaningful connections between personal experiences and larger socio-political concerns. Through participation in art-based activism, students experience direct involvement in political issues, effectively fostering deeper and more lasting political engagement.

Ultimately, the embrace of cultural mediums as alternative political platforms represents a crucial response to the contemporary challenges of student political apathy. Drawing from Lekra's historical legacy, contemporary campus cultural movements provide students with meaningful, creative, and intellectually compelling pathways for re-engaging with socio-political realities. Recognizing and expanding the role of cultural activism within campus environments thus emerges as an urgent educational and political imperative, essential for revitalizing democratic consciousness and fostering critical civic engagement among students.

## **SRD UIN Bandung's Implementation of Lekra's Activist Legacy and Comparative Analysis of Artistic Activism**

SRD (Unit Kegiatan Mahasiswa Seni Rupa dan Desain) at UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung represents a contemporary embodiment of the cultural and ideological spirit historically pioneered by Lekra. Central to SRD's mission is the adoption of Lekra's foundational principles, notably collectivism, social realism, and unwavering cultural commitment. Like Lekra, SRD explicitly positions itself as a politically conscious art collective, emphasizing collaborative practices rather than individual artistic endeavors, viewing collective cultural production as essential for addressing social issues effectively and authentically.

In line with Lekra's philosophy, collectivism within SRD is operationalized through structured group projects, collaborative exhibitions, and communal artistic interventions. These initiatives reflect an intentional rejection of isolated artistic practices, instead fostering group dialogue and consensus-building among students (Ismail, 1972). Such practices ensure that artistic outputs are deeply connected to collective experiences, facilitating more profound reflections on socio-political realities that directly resonate with the student community and wider society.

Further mirroring Lekra's legacy, SRD has explicitly embraced social realism as a foundational artistic methodology. Artistic works created by SRD members consistently strive to represent and critique tangible social injustices, inequalities, and struggles experienced by marginalized communities. Through extensive research, artists ground their creative processes in accurate depictions of reality, ensuring their works carry authentic socio-political messages. This fidelity to realism ensures their art remains accessible, relevant, and impactful to broader audiences.

SRD's cultural commitment extends beyond mere artistic production, reflecting Lekra's historical approach of embedding art within social movements. Through active engagements such as workshops, dialogues, and

exhibitions, SRD explicitly seeks to stimulate public discourse around critical societal issues, from economic injustice to political disenfranchisement. These public activities position art not simply as an aesthetic pursuit, but as a proactive catalyst for social awareness and mobilization, closely aligning SRD's contemporary cultural activism with Lekra's original transformative ambitions.

One illustrative example of SRD's continued commitment to Lekra's principles can be observed through their culturally rooted activism addressing global injustices, such as the artwork titled "Lapar Palestin" by Afaaq Nur Khaerani. The work directly engages with complex international political issues, symbolizing solidarity, resistance, and humanism. Through explicit political commentary communicated artistically, SRD revitalizes Lekra's legacy, emphasizing that artists bear a fundamental responsibility to reflect upon and respond critically to social suffering and injustice.

However, SRD does not merely replicate Lekra's historical practices; rather, it adapts these ideals within contemporary contexts. While Lekra emerged in a highly polarized Cold War environment, SRD operates within a context marked by widespread political disillusionment among students. As such, SRD's implementation of Lekra's cultural activism involves creatively navigating student apathy, employing artistic practices that reawaken students' political consciousness in accessible and relatable forms, thereby making art-based activism relevant and meaningful for contemporary audiences.

In comparing Lekra's historical approach with SRD's contemporary practices, several key similarities emerge. Both organizations share a deep ideological commitment to socialist-inspired ideals emphasizing collective responsibility, community engagement, and artistic activism as vehicles for social change (Bodden, 2018). Moreover, both utilize art explicitly as a platform for raising awareness of societal injustices, rejecting abstract or disconnected forms of creativity in favor of direct engagement with social

realities.

Yet critical differences between Lekra and SRD are also evident, particularly regarding the political and social environments in which they operate. Lekra's activism historically unfolded amid clearly defined ideological confrontations between socialism and capitalism within national and international frameworks (Huda et al., 2022). Conversely, SRD faces the challenge of engaging students within a largely depoliticized or pragmatically oriented campus environment, necessitating more nuanced and creative strategies to inspire meaningful political engagement.

Artistically, Lekra historically prioritized realist approaches grounded explicitly in class struggle narratives and Marxist theory. SRD, while influenced by similar realist principles, incorporates greater flexibility in artistic styles, recognizing the diversity of contemporary cultural forms and modes of expression. This approach allows SRD to maintain ideological consistency while simultaneously appealing to broader student interests and artistic preferences, maximizing impact within a more diverse cultural landscape.

Regarding methods of social engagement, Lekra focused significantly on direct educational outreach, structured ideological training, and cultural diplomacy on an international scale. In contrast, SRD primarily leverages artistic exhibitions, community dialogues, interactive workshops, and digital media platforms as contemporary channels for social critique and political communication. SRD's contemporary methods thus reflect an adaptive response to the realities of student culture and digital communication, facilitating broader engagement among technologically savvy students.

Furthermore, SRD's activism is often characterized by immediate responsiveness to contemporary local and global issues, such as environmental degradation, human rights violations, and economic injustices affecting student communities. In contrast, Lekra's activism was rooted predominantly in ideological battles of its time, often addressing broader revolutionary aims and systematic class struggles. Thus, SRD's approach

represents a pragmatic yet politically conscious adaptation of Lekra's legacy, directly addressing contemporary student concerns through focused and timely artistic interventions.

Despite these differences, both Lekra and SRD consistently emphasize the transformative power of art in mobilizing social and political consciousness. For Lekra, this transformative potential was explicitly structured through socialist realism's emphasis on collective class struggle and revolutionary consciousness. For SRD, the transformative potential emerges from culturally responsive artistic engagements that reflect contemporary realities, effectively reconnecting students with political activism through culturally meaningful expressions.

Through its distinctive blend of tradition and innovation, SRD exemplifies how contemporary cultural movements can adapt and sustain historical legacies, ensuring their relevance in changing socio-political environments. The continuous dialogue between past and present practices underlines how Lekra's foundational principles—collectivism, realism, and cultural engagement—remain robust models for contemporary artistic activism within student communities today.

Ultimately, the comparison between Lekra and SRD highlights both the enduring relevance and necessary evolution of culturally engaged activism. By strategically employing Lekra's foundational ideals in contemporary forms, SRD successfully repositions art and culture as meaningful alternatives to conventional student politics, effectively addressing student apathy and disengagement. This comparative analysis not only demonstrates the continued significance of Lekra's legacy but also emphasizes the critical role cultural activism plays in revitalizing political awareness among today's students.

### **Artistic Activism as A New Political Medium In Campus Life**

In contemporary campus environments marked by political disengagement and pragmatic apathy, SRD UIN Bandung has adopted artistic

activism as a compelling alternative medium for political engagement. Through its dynamic cultural activities, such as thematic art exhibitions, installations, visual storytelling, and interactive performances, SRD redefines how political consciousness can be fostered among students. These cultural expressions become powerful entry points, inviting students to engage in reflective dialogues concerning socio-political issues that traditional political organizations often fail to address meaningfully.

SRD's artistic activism effectively challenges the narrative that political engagement must always manifest through conventional mediums such as formal organizations or protest movements. Instead, art emerges as a highly accessible, engaging, and emotionally resonant tool, connecting with students on deeper intellectual and affective levels. By embedding political commentary within culturally relatable and aesthetically appealing forms, SRD successfully bridges the gap between personal experience and broader socio-political realities, drawing previously apathetic students into meaningful political discourse.

One prominent example of SRD's impactful artistic activism is its creative intervention on critical socio-political issues such as human rights violations, social injustice, and international conflicts. Through works such as "Lapar Palestin" by Afaaq Nur Khaerani, SRD explicitly integrates political consciousness with cultural expression, stimulating both empathy and intellectual engagement among students. These artistic endeavors catalyze deeper discussions about global injustices, thereby cultivating a nuanced political awareness that surpasses the superficial and often disengaged conversations typical of mainstream campus politics.

Furthermore, SRD's activities serve not merely as aesthetic presentations but as critical platforms for student-led dialogue and community-building. By hosting public forums, panel discussions, and informal dialogues around the artworks exhibited, SRD provides an open space for critical reflection. This participatory approach not only stimulates

intellectual curiosity but also actively encourages collective dialogue, fostering a sense of community and shared political consciousness among students.

Importantly, SRD's use of artistic activism is strategic in confronting the root causes of student political disengagement, including the perception of traditional campus politics as overly pragmatic and uninspiring. Artistic activism inherently disrupts conventional political norms, offering students creative freedom and intellectual autonomy often lacking in traditional political organizations. Through art, students can challenge existing power structures, question prevailing ideologies, and articulate alternative visions of social justice and democracy, thus revitalizing campus political culture.

Additionally, SRD's focus on realism and collective consciousness as core principles underscores its strategic alignment with Lekra's historical approach. By foregrounding realism, SRD ensures that its artistic productions maintain relevance and authenticity, directly reflecting contemporary socio-political conditions experienced by students. This methodological rigor positions SRD as a significant cultural force capable of meaningfully shaping student perceptions of their political realities and responsibilities.

SRD also effectively integrates digital platforms and multimedia into its activism, extending its cultural impact beyond physical campus boundaries. The strategic use of social media and digital exhibitions amplifies the reach and resonance of SRD's messages, facilitating broader engagement with student communities across different campuses. This digital approach significantly enhances the potential of artistic activism, further demonstrating its viability as a sustainable and effective political medium within contemporary student life.

SRD's artistic activism presents a valuable model for revitalizing campus politics by creatively re-engaging students who have become disenchanted with traditional political forms. Through culturally responsive, critically informed, and artistically innovative approaches, SRD successfully reconnects students with meaningful political discourse. Its activities



underscore the potential of art as a transformative force within campus politics, capable of inspiring renewed political consciousness and active civic participation.

### **Principles and Practice of Contemporary Cultural Activism by SRD UIN Bandung**

Given the increasing political apathy among students and pragmatic stagnation within traditional campus political structures, cultural regeneration emerges as an urgent and strategic imperative. Recognizing this challenge, SRD UIN Bandung explicitly positions itself to confront the prevailing student disengagement by revitalizing Lekra's historical model of artistic activism. This strategic revival emphasizes structured and disciplined collective artistic practices, ensuring continuity and renewed relevance of Lekra's core ideals. SRD's approach underscores that meaningful political engagement within student communities requires both cultural creativity and ideological clarity.

Philosophically, SRD UIN Bandung explicitly embraces the foundational belief that cultural activism should originate from conscious action and truthful expressions, ethically responding to social realities, consistent with Lekra's ideological tradition. This guiding philosophy underscores that artistic endeavors cannot be detached from societal issues; instead, artists must actively reflect collective concerns and truths, aligning creativity with social justice. Consequently, SRD positions itself not merely as an artistic group, but as a politically conscious collective dedicated to meaningful social critique and transformation.

To operationalize this philosophy, SRD integrates structured cadre formation as a central pillar of its cultural activism strategy. Reflecting Lekra's practices, SRD's cadre training programs emphasize intensive theoretical grounding in socialist realism, comprehensive historical awareness, ideological discipline, and practical skills essential for artistic activism. These training modules include interactive workshops, collaborative art projects,

critical dialogues, and group discussions designed to produce culturally informed, politically conscious, and artistically capable activists. Through this structured educational process, SRD effectively counters the absence of systematic ideological training common in pragmatic-oriented campus political organizations, positioning cultural activism as a credible, sustainable alternative.

The structured approach employed by SRD further prioritizes collective artistic practices, firmly grounded in socialist realism methodologies inherited from Lekra. SRD members undertake meticulous research and critical reflection prior to producing artworks, ensuring that their creations authentically represent the complexity and diversity of contemporary socio-political realities. This methodological rigor guarantees that artistic activism within SRD remains deeply connected to tangible experiences of injustice and inequality, thus ensuring the cultural productions resonate effectively and authentically with broader student and public audiences.

Moreover, SRD emphasizes the integration of critical reasoning and moral sensitivity into artistic production, underscoring that technical proficiency alone is insufficient without intellectual depth and ethical awareness. The artworks produced within SRD aim to invoke critical consciousness and emotional engagement among students, deliberately disrupting apathetic or disengaged attitudes toward socio-political realities. Through this thoughtful combination of aesthetics, critical reasoning, and emotional resonance, SRD successfully reconnects students with their broader social responsibilities, effectively challenging the prevailing pragmatic stagnation within traditional student political circles.

Additionally, SRD's structured cultural regeneration initiatives strategically encourage inclusivity, actively engaging students from diverse backgrounds to foster broader participation beyond traditional political divides. This inclusive approach enriches campus political discourse by bringing varied perspectives, experiences, and disciplinary insights into

collective artistic projects. SRD's strategic inclusivity ensures that its activism resonates across diverse student populations, thereby fostering a politically vibrant, socially inclusive, and democratically engaged campus community.

Ultimately, SRD's systematic alignment with Lekra's ideological and methodological heritage represents both continuity and innovation, effectively addressing contemporary political apathy and pragmatic stagnation. By systematically educating and mobilizing students through structured cultural regeneration, SRD ensures the sustainability and longevity of politically conscious artistic activism, transcending the limitations of traditional campus politics. Recognizing and supporting these structured cultural initiatives is therefore critical to fostering a politically conscious, critically engaged, and socially responsible student body, revitalizing campus politics as a meaningful platform for democratic activism.

## CONCLUSION

This study underscores the enduring relevance and transformative potential of cultural activism as pioneered historically by Lekra and revitalized contemporarily by SRD UIN Bandung. Lekra successfully demonstrated how art and culture could be systematically mobilized to foster socio-political awareness, actively challenge oppressive power structures, and advocate for social justice through structured ideological principles of socialist realism. This legacy reveals the strategic significance of cultural practices, emphasizing collective artistic expression, disciplined ideological frameworks, and deep engagement with tangible social realities as powerful tools for political critique and activism.

SRD UIN Bandung effectively inherits and adapts Lekra's cultural-political legacy, integrating its foundational principles into structured contemporary cultural activism. By employing collective practices, critical realism, and disciplined cadre formation, SRD addresses prevailing student apathy and pragmatic stagnation within campus political dynamics. The strategic emphasis on socialist realism provides SRD's artistic practices with

ideological clarity and relevance, ensuring the organization's cultural activism resonates authentically with contemporary socio-political issues, ultimately revitalizing student interest and engagement in meaningful political discourse.

Moreover, the structured approach adopted by SRD, characterized by intensive ideological education, artistic training, and inclusive participation, ensures continuity and sustainability of its cultural activism. SRD's systematic cadre regeneration creates an enduring framework for nurturing politically conscious artists who engage critically and authentically with social issues. This structured approach also ensures ideological continuity across generations, effectively transforming campus political culture by cultivating a politically vibrant and socially inclusive student community, capable of addressing contemporary challenges with clarity and commitment.

Ultimately, the comparative analysis between Lekra and SRD UIN Bandung reaffirms the vital role of cultural activism in fostering meaningful political participation and social consciousness. The legacy of Lekra and its contemporary adaptation by SRD illustrate a successful model through which art transcends aesthetic boundaries, becoming a powerful medium for social critique, community solidarity, and democratic engagement. Recognizing and expanding the role of cultural activism within campus environments is thus not merely an academic interest but a crucial step towards sustaining and revitalizing democratic consciousness among future generations.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Artika, I. W. (2017). Lima Cerpen Propaganda Lekra (1950—1965). *Aksara*, 28(2).

Bodden, M. (2018). LEKRA WOODCUTS IN THE EARLY 1960S: SOCIALIST REALISM, NATIONAL CULTURE, AND COSMOPOLITAN PATRIOTS. *Indonesia*, 2018(106). <https://doi.org/10.1353/ind.2018.0013>

Buser, M., Bonura, C., Fannin, M., & Boyer, K. (2013). Cultural activism and the politics of place-making. *City*, 17(5). <https://doi.org/10.1080/13604813.2013.827840>

- Faruk, F. (2019). HUMANISME KARYA-KARYA SASTRA PRAMOEDYA ANANTA TOER: SEBUAH PERGULATAN DISKURSIF. *ATAVISME*, 22(1). <https://doi.org/10.24257/atavisme.v22i1.507.1-14>
- Heinschke, M. (1996). Between Gelanggang and Lekra: Pramoedya's Developing Literary Concepts. *Indonesia*, 61. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3351367>
- Huda, N., Amni, W., & Fitriah, F. (2022). Lembaga Seniman dan Budayawan Muslimin Indonesia: Perannya Dalam Pengembangan Budaya Islam di Indonesia Era 1962-1967 M. *Tanjak: Sejarah Dan Peradaban Islam*, 2(1). <https://doi.org/10.19109/tanjak.v2i1.11979>
- Ismail, Y. (1972). Pertumbuhan, Perkembangan dan Kejatuhan Lekra di Indonesia: satu tinjauan dari aspek sosio-budaya. In *(No Title)*.
- Julianti, U., & Jannah, R. (2021). KEKERASAN REZIM ORDE LAMA TERHADAP SENIMAN DALAM ANTOLOGI PUIS TIRANI DAN BENTENG KARYA TAUFIQ ISMAIL. *Jurnal Sasindo UNPAM*, 9(1). <https://doi.org/10.32493/sasindo.v9i1.1-10>
- Junaidi, A. S., Wasono, S., & Zulyeno, B. (2023). Cerpen-cerpen Lekra (1950—1965) sebagai strategi perjuangan politik PKI. *Diglosia: Jurnal Kajian Bahasa, Sastra, Dan Pengajarannya*, 6(4). <https://doi.org/10.30872/diglosia.v6i4.789>
- Kartikasari, D. (2014). Pelarangan Buku-Buku Karya Sastrawan Lekra Tahun 1965-1968. *Avatara, e-Journal Pendidikan Sejarah*, 2(3).
- Mosco, V. (2005). Culture in the Age of Three Worlds. *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 30(3). <https://doi.org/10.22230/cjc.2005v30n3a1610>
- Sarwoto, P. (2018). The construction of modernity in pre-independent indonesia and its ensuing manifestation in critical discourse and literary theory. *Kritika Kultura*, 2018(30–31). <https://doi.org/10.13185/2819>
- Setiadi, D., Priyatna, A., & Rahayu, L. M. (2023). The Portrayal of Women in the Works of Sugiarti Siswadi as the Manifestation of Lekra and Gerwani Ideology. *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 31(2). <https://doi.org/10.47836/pjssh.31.2.04>
- Sulistyo, H. (2018). Representasi Konflik Politik 1965 dalam Cerpen Susuk Kekebalan karya Han Gagas. *Jurnal POETIKA*, 6(1). <https://doi.org/10.22146/poetika.35611>
- Susanti, N., Supriatna, N., & Sumantri, Y. K. (2019). Lekra Vs Manikebu: Perlawanan Majalah Sastra terhadap Politik Kebudayaan Pemerintah Masa

- Demokrasi Terpimpin (1961-1964). *FACTUM: Jurnal Sejarah Dan Pendidikan Sejarah*, 8(1). <https://doi.org/10.17509/factum.v8i1.20121>
- Suyatno, S. (2012). Sajak-sajak Realisme Sosialis Lekra: Kajian Tematik. In *Humaniora* (Vol. 23, Issue 1).
- Widariyanti, C. (2022). EKSISTENSI LEKRA DALAM PUSARAN MANIFESTO KEBUDAYAAN DEMOKRASI TERPIMPIN. *ISTORIA: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Ilmu Sejarah*, 18(1). <https://doi.org/10.21831/istoria.v16i1.31408>
- Wisetrotomo, S., & Pramastuti, P. R. (2022a). Drama Politik dalam Ingatan dan Visualisasi Seorang Pelukis. *Panggung*, 32(2003).
- Wisetrotomo, S., & Pramastuti, P. R. (2022b). Drama Politik dalam Ingatan dan Visualisasi Seorang Pelukis Kajian Kritis Terhadap Trilogi Lukisan Karya Djokopekik. *Jurnal Panggung*, 32(2).
- Woolgar, M. (2020). A 'cultural Cold War'?: Lekra, the left and the arts in West Java, Indonesia, 1951–65. *Indonesia and the Malay World*, 48(140). <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639811.2019.1682316>
- Zulfikar, Moh. F. (2023). Bentuk Resistansi Tertutup Kaum Tani dan Buruh dalam Cerpen-Cerpen Sastrawan Lekra di Koran Harian Rakjat. *Narasi: Jurnal Kajian Bahasa, Sastra Indonesia, Dan Pengajarannya*, 1(2). <https://doi.org/10.30762/narasi.v1i2.2102>
- Zulfikar, Moh. F., Saryono, D., & Syahri, Moch. (2021). Bentuk Resistensi Terbuka Kaum Tani dan Buruh dalam Cerpen-Cerpen Sastrawan Lekra di Koran Harian Rakjat. *Jurnal Pendidikan: Teori, Penelitian, Dan Pengembangan*, 6(9). <https://doi.org/10.17977/jptpp.v6i9.14984>