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NEGOTIATING ARTISTIC INDEPENDENCE: DESIGN DISCOURSE IN THE ARTJOG 2026 SPONSORSHIP DEBATE

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ABSTRAK

Artikel ini mengkaji bagaimana diskursus desain membangun sekaligus mempertentangkan konsep independensi artistik dalam kontroversi sponsorship yang menyertai ARTJOG 2026, festival seni kontemporer terkemuka di Indonesia. Ketika Didit Hediprasetyo Foundation, sebuah lembaga filantropi yang didirikan oleh putra Presiden Indonesia Prabowo Subianto, diumumkan sebagai mitra strategis penyelenggaraan edisi ke-19 festival tersebut, para seniman, kurator, dan pengamat budaya secara terbuka mempertanyakan legitimasi kemitraan itu. Kontroversi tersebut mendorong penyelenggara untuk menghapus nama yayasan dari materi visual resmi serta mengganti tokoh yang semula dijadwalkan membuka pameran. Dengan menggunakan analisis dokumen dan analisis wacana kualitatif terhadap korpus yang terdiri atas dua puluh dokumen yang tersedia untuk publik, meliputi pernyataan resmi, pemberitaan media nasional dan regional, pernyataan tandingan dari kelompok aktivis, serta dokumen latar belakang institusional yang diterbitkan antara Juni hingga Juli 2026, penelitian ini menganalisis bagaimana pilihan bahasa dan keputusan desain visual yang terdokumentasi, termasuk penempatan kredit sponsor, penggantian poster, dan pernyataan publik, berfungsi sebagai arena negosiasi atas sponsorship, legitimasi institusional, dan otonomi artistik. Dengan memanfaatkan teori diskursus desain yang dipadukan dengan kajian desain kritis, teori komunikasi visual, kritik seni, kajian budaya, dan semiotika, penelitian ini menemukan bahwa strategi komunikasi krisis ARTJOG mengandalkan diskursus netralitas kolaboratif yang secara visual menghapus afiliasi politik, sementara secara tekstual tetap menegaskan independensi kuratorial. Di sisi lain, para aktor protes memobilisasi taktik desain yang bersifat material dan performatif untuk menantang narasi tersebut. Artikel ini menawarkan kerangka analisis diskursus desain untuk mengkaji apa yang dalam penelitian ini disebut sebagai *political artwashing*. Kerangka tersebut memperluas kajian mengenai *artwashing*, yang selama ini lebih banyak berfokus pada sponsorship korporasi di institusi seni Eropa dan Amerika Utara, ke dalam konteks Asia Tenggara, di mana modal politik yang berdekatan dengan kekuasaan negara, bukan semata-mata modal korporasi, menjadi sumber utama yang dipersoalkan.

Kata kunci: Otonomi Artistik; Artwashing; Politik Budaya; Wacana Desain; Sponsor; Komunikasi Visual

ABSTRACT

This article examines how design discourse constructs and contests the concept of artistic independence in the sponsorship controversy that accompanied ARTJOG 2026, Indonesia's leading contemporary art festival. When the Didit Hediprasetyo Foundation, a philanthropic body founded by the son of Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto, was announced as a strategic partner of the festival's nineteenth edition, artists, curators, and cultural commentators publicly contested the legitimacy of the partnership, prompting the organizers to remove the foundation's name from official visual materials and to replace its principal, who had been scheduled to open the exhibition. Using qualitative document and discourse analysis of a corpus of twenty publicly available documents, comprising official statements, national and regional news coverage, activist counter-statements, and institutional background sources, produced between June and July 2026, this study analyzes how textual choices and documented visual design decisions, including sponsor-credit placement,

poster substitution, and public statements, functioned as sites where sponsorship, institutional legitimacy, and artistic autonomy were negotiated. Drawing on design discourse theory in dialogue with critical design studies, visual communication theory, art criticism, cultural studies, and semiotics, the study finds that ARTJOG's crisis communication relied on a discourse of collaborative neutrality that visually erased political affiliation while textually reaffirming curatorial independence, and that protest actors mobilized embodied and material design tactics to contest this narrative. The article contributes a design-discourse framework for analyzing what this study terms political artwashing, extending artwashing scholarship, previously concentrated on corporate sponsorship in Euro-American institutions, to a Southeast Asian context in which state-adjacent political capital, rather than corporate capital alone, is the contested resource.

Keyword: Artistic Autonomy; Artwashing; Cultural Politics; Design Discourse; Sponsorship; Visual Communication

INTRODUCTION

Indonesian contemporary art has, since the political opening that followed the end of the New Order in 1998, developed an increasingly assertive public voice. Artists based in Yogyakarta, Bandung, and Jakarta began using painting, installation, and performance to interrogate power, memory, and social inequality, building on a longer lineage of politically engaged practice that runs from the revolutionary-era painters through the New Art Movement of the 1970s. Yogyakarta in particular consolidated its position as a national center of art education and production, anchored by the Indonesian Art Academy (ASRI) and later the Faculty of Fine Arts at Institut Seni Indonesia, and supported by a dense ecology of independent galleries, artist collectives, and alternative exhibition spaces that positioned the city as a laboratory for experimentation outside Jakarta's commercial art market.

Within this ecology, ARTJOG has emerged as Indonesia's most prominent recurring contemporary art event. Founded in 2008 as the Jogja Art Fair under the Yogyakarta Arts Festival, the event was rebranded as ARTJOG in 2010 and has since been staged annually at the Jogja National Museum under the direction of founder and CEO Heri Pemad. Unlike conventional art fairs that operate through gallery representation, ARTJOG has distinguished itself by inviting artists directly, a structural choice that its organizers frame as an expression of artistic openness and egalitarian access. Over nearly two decades the festival has grown from a modest regional exhibition into an event popularly described as a barometer of Indonesia's contemporary art scene, drawing collectors, critics, and international visitors, and generating a wide penumbra of associated programming under the Jogja Art Weeks initiative. Its financial model, however, has always depended on a mixture of ticket revenue, government support, and corporate sponsorship, a dependency that first became publicly contentious in 2016, when the festival's acceptance of sponsorship from the mining company Freeport Indonesia drew criticism from artists concerned about the symbolic cost of associating art with extractive industry.

The nineteenth edition of the festival, ARTJOG 2026, opened at the Jogja National Museum on 19 June 2026 under the curatorial direction of Farah Wardani, inaugurating a new three-year curatorial cycle titled *Ars Longa Trilogia* and themed, for its first chapter, *Ars Longa: Generatio*. The opening was overshadowed by public controversy surrounding the involvement of the Didit Hediprasetyo Foundation as a strategic sponsor. The foundation was established by Didit Hediprasetyo, the only son of Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto, who had additionally taken on an advisory role within the company that organizes the festival. Days before the opening, a promotional poster circulating on social media announced that he would deliver the opening remarks. The announcement generated sustained criticism from artists, cultural workers, and activist coalitions who characterized the arrangement as an instance of what commentators, following earlier debates about corporate

sponsorship of the arts, termed artwashing. Public pressure led the organizers to withdraw the poster naming Didit Hediprasetyo as opening speaker, to substitute GKR Bendara, head of the Yogyakarta Palace's Culture and Heritage Office, in that role, and to remove the foundation's name from the festival website and physical signage. At the opening itself, members of an artist coalition calling themselves ArtJokes staged a theatrical protest, scattering flowers and invoking funerary imagery, and were physically restrained by event security, an incident that generated a second wave of controversy concerning the use of force against dissenting artists.

This sequence of events constitutes a contemporary design discourse in the fullest sense: a dispute conducted not only through spoken and written argument but through the deliberate design and redesign of sponsor listings, event backdrops, promotional posters, and public statements, each functioning as a text through which institutional legitimacy and artistic autonomy were asserted, defended, and contested. A research gap exists at the intersection of three literatures that have developed largely in isolation from one another: design discourse studies, which theorize how communication design constitutes and is constituted by professional and cultural context but have rarely been applied to festival sponsorship controversies; artwashing and institutional critique scholarship, which has theorized sponsorship as reputational strategy but has concentrated on corporate rather than state-adjacent political capital; and Indonesian cultural-industry scholarship, which has recently begun to theorize artists' autonomy as a negotiated rather than fixed condition within market and institutional pressures, but has not yet examined a visual-arts festival's crisis-communication design as a site of that negotiation. The ARTJOG 2026 controversy, in which the contested sponsor was neither a fossil-fuel major nor a property developer but a foundation bearing the name of a sitting president's son, further introduces a variant that existing artwashing scholarship has not yet theorized: sponsorship whose reputational stakes are explicitly political rather than commercial.

The novelty of this article lies in extending design discourse as an analytical framework to this variant of artwashing, and in treating the visual erasure of a sponsor's name, the substitution of an opening speaker, and the textual hedging of organizational statements as design decisions with discursive consequences, rather than as incidental crisis-management footnotes. Accordingly, this study pursues three objectives: first, to examine how design discourse constructs the concept of artistic independence in the ARTJOG 2026 sponsorship debate; second, to analyze how the visual and textual communication produced by ARTJOG, artists, media, and the public negotiate meanings of sponsorship, institutional legitimacy, and artistic autonomy; and third, to explore the interaction between design, cultural identity, public criticism, and power relations within contemporary Indonesian art festivals.

Theoretical Framework: Design Discourse and Its Supporting Theories

This study uses design discourse as its primary analytical framework, integrated with five supporting theoretical strands. Table 1 summarizes how each strand informs a specific analytical task undertaken later in this article, in order to make the connection between theory and method explicit rather than additive.

Design Discourse as the Primary Analytical Framework

Design discourse, in the sense employed here, refers to design practice understood as a discursive act: communication design does not merely transmit pre-formed meaning but actively participates in the production of cultural values, professional identities, and power relations. Buchanan's foundational account of design as a form of rhetorical, indeterminate problem-solving, rather than a

neutral technical service, positions design outputs as arguments addressed to an audience, arguments that can be examined for the values and assumptions they embed. Julier extends this position by situating design within a wider culture of design, in which design objects and communications circulate as carriers of economic and symbolic value within specific institutional and market contexts. Kelly's methodology for analyzing communication design as a discursive practice, developed within critical design pedagogy and presented at the Cumulus design education conference, explicitly combines micro-level analysis of designed texts with macro-level analysis of the professional and cultural resources that condition their production and interpretation, an approach this article adapts to ARTJOG's sponsorship communications. Because Kelly's contribution is a conference proceeding rather than a peer-reviewed journal article, it is used here strictly for its methodological framing rather than as an empirical precedent.

Critical Design Studies, Institutional Critique, and Artistic Autonomy

Critical design studies extends design discourse by foregrounding the political stakes of design decisions within institutions, asking whose interests a given design choice serves and what alternatives it forecloses. Within art institutions specifically, Mahony's peer-reviewed analysis of the Liberate Tate and Art Not Oil coalitions demonstrates how corporate sponsorship agreements structure the visual and spatial identity of a museum, and how activist collectives contest that structuring through unauthorized interventions operating, in her terms, at an interstitial distance from the institutions they target. Ruck's peer-reviewed study of artwashing in the English education system extends the concept beyond museums to demonstrate its applicability wherever cultural or creative practice is deployed to manage the reputational needs of an institution facing scrutiny.

This structural view of artwashing converges with a distinct but complementary literature on artistic autonomy as a negotiated, rather than binary, condition. Banks's account of the art-commerce relation in cultural work argues that autonomy is continuously produced through practitioners' and institutions' situated responses to commercial pressure rather than secured once and guaranteed thereafter. Wikström's recent theorization of the social form of contemporary art's autonomy similarly reframes autonomy as an ongoing social accomplishment rather than a fixed property of the art field. Most directly relevant to the Indonesian setting, Rianto, Wahyuni, and Wahyono's 2025 study of art workers in the Indonesian cultural industries similarly finds that autonomy is negotiated against both market and non-market institutional pressures rather than lost or preserved outright, a finding this article extends from broadcast television to the festival context, and from interview-based to discourse and design analysis.

Visual Communication Theory and Semiotics

Visual communication theory provides tools for analyzing the compositional and interactive meanings of the sponsorship materials at the center of the controversy. Kress and van Leeuwen's grammar of visual design distinguishes representational meaning, the depicted participants and their relations, from interactive meaning, the relation constructed between image and viewer, and compositional meaning, the way information value is distributed across a visual field through placement, framing, and salience. Barthes's semiotic account of myth as a second-order signifying system, in which a sign is emptied of its historical specificity and refilled with a naturalized ideological meaning, offers a complementary lens for reading the erasure of a sponsor's name as an attempt to restore the festival's mythic self-image of artistic purity and gotong royong, or collective self-reliance, once that image had been destabilized.

Discourse Theory, Cultural Studies, and Sponsorship Legitimacy

Fairclough's critical discourse analysis, distinguishing textual, discursive-practice, and social-practice dimensions of any communicative event, structures this article's approach to organizational statements. Foucault's account of discourse as inseparable from power, in which what can be said and by whom is regulated by institutional position, informs the analysis of whose statements were amplified, ignored, or physically suppressed during the controversy. Bourdieu's theory of the field of cultural production, and in particular his distinction between the autonomous pole, governed by the internal logic of artistic recognition, and the heteronomous pole, governed by external economic and political power, provides a sociological account of why sponsorship by an actor closely tied to state power carries a distinctive symbolic cost. Hall's account of cultural representation as a site of struggle over meaning supports the treatment of ARTJOG's public materials, and the counter-materials produced by protesting artists, as competing representations rather than as one accurate account set against distortions. The concept of artwashing, first used to describe the reputational function of corporate sponsorship of cultural venues, names the mechanism by which a sponsoring actor converts financial support for culture into diffuse public legitimacy; the ARTJOG 2026 case extends this literature to a context in which the sponsoring actor's capital is primarily political rather than commercial, a variant the existing literature has not directly addressed.

Table 1. Theoretical framework and its analytical application.

Theoretical Strand	Key Source(s)	Analytical Task in This Study
Design discourse	Buchanan (1992); Julier (2014); Kelly (2015)	Frames sponsorship materials and crisis statements as designed, rhetorical texts rather than neutral information
Critical design studies / institutional critique	Mahony (2017); Ruck (2020)	Interprets sponsor-name removal as an institutional design response to activist pressure
Artistic autonomy in cultural work	Banks (2010); Wikstrom (2025); Rianto et al. (2025)	Reframes autonomy as negotiated rather than fixed, structuring the central claim in Section 3
Visual communication theory	Kress & van Leeuwen (2006)	Analyzes documented compositional shifts in the opening-speaker poster and sponsor signage
Semiotics	Barthes (1972)	Reads sponsor-name erasure as second-order myth restoration
Discourse theory / cultural studies / field theory	Fairclough (1992, 2003); Foucault (1972); Hall (1997); Bourdieu (1993)	Structures coding of statements and explains the symbolic cost of heteronomous sponsorship

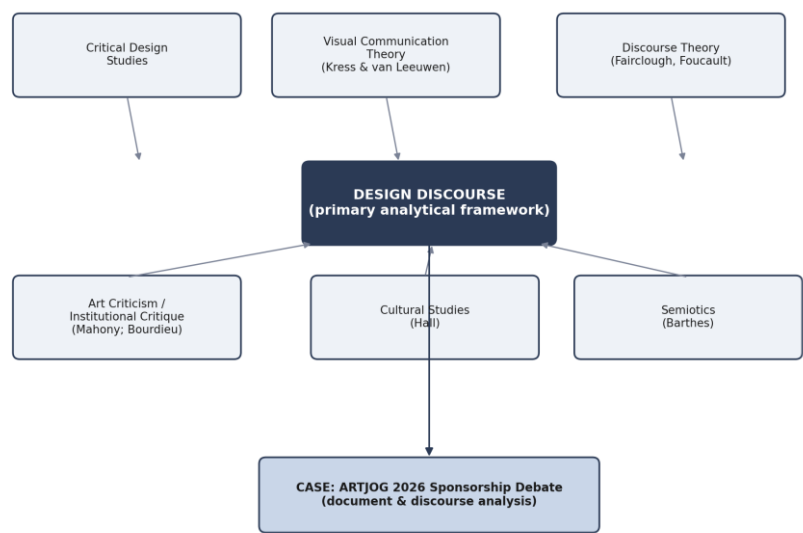


Figure 1. Conceptual framework linking design discourse, its five supporting theoretical strands, and the ARTJOG 2026 case.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach combining document analysis and discourse analysis, appropriate to a research problem concerned with how meaning is constructed and contested through text and reported visual design rather than with measurable outcomes.

Data Corpus and Sampling

The data corpus was assembled through purposive sampling of publicly available materials directly concerned with the ARTJOG 2026 sponsorship controversy, supplemented by a smaller set of institutional background sources needed to contextualize the festival's funding history. The sampling window ran from 11 June 2026, the date of ARTJOG's pre-opening media announcement of its 2026-2028 curatorial cycle, to 30 June 2026, the date of the last primary statement identified in the corpus. The final corpus comprises 20 distinct publicly accessible documents, detailed by category in Table 2.

Table 2. Data corpus summary (N = 20 documents).

Category	n	Description	Representative Sources
Mainstream news coverage	9	National and regional news articles reporting the controversy with direct, attributed quotations	Tempo; Kompas.id; CNN Indonesia; IDN Times; KalderaNews; Harian Jogja; TheStance; Ruang.id; TrenAsia
Activist / counter-discourse statements	3	Statements issued by protest actors and independent commentary	Indoleft (ArtJokes coalition); anarchistnews.org/anarchistfederation.net (Forum Kuratorial Anarkis); Medium op-ed
Institutional / historical background	6	Festival profile and history pieces used for institutional context, not coded for controversy content	NOW! Jakarta (2024, 2025); Indonesia.travel; Glasstire; RRI; The Art Journal

Category	n	Description	Representative Sources
Documented visual materials	2 pairs	Before/after descriptions of the opening-speaker poster and sponsor signage, reconstructed from textual reporting	Described independently in 6 of the sources above

Official organizational statements (by CEO Heri Pemas and curator Farah Wardani) and activist statements are embedded within the mainstream and activist-source categories above rather than counted separately, since each statement was accessed only as reported within a specific news article or published statement; no direct, unmediated transcript or press release was independently available for this study.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Documents were included if they (a) were published between 11 and 30 June 2026, or, for background sources, at any point between 2024 and 2026; (b) directly reported, quoted, or issued a statement concerning ARTJOG 2026, its sponsorship, or the associated protest; and (c) were publicly accessible without a paywall or registration barrier at the time of data collection. Documents were excluded if they (a) merely aggregated or reposted another outlet's reporting without adding attributable statements or independent framing; (b) could not be independently verified against at least one other source in the corpus for factual claims regarding dates, quoted statements, or described visual materials; or (c) addressed ARTJOG's general artistic or curatorial program without reference to the sponsorship controversy, unless required for institutional background.

Coding Procedure

Coding proceeded in two stages, following Fairclough's three-dimensional model of discourse, supplemented by Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar for the subset of data concerning documented visual materials. In the first stage, two coding passes were conducted manually across the full corpus: an open, inductive pass identifying recurring lexical, rhetorical, and narrative patterns, followed by a focused pass in which open codes were consolidated into the deductive category structure derived from the theoretical framework in Table 1. In the second stage, coded excerpts were organized into the six thematic categories presented in Table 3, and each category was cross-checked against the full corpus to confirm that supporting excerpts were drawn from at least two independent sources where the corpus permitted.

Table 3. Coding framework.

Dimension	Code	Operational Definition	Illustrative Indicator
Textual	Hedging / mitigation	Modal or distancing language minimizing sponsor influence	"does not influence the artistic decisions or curatorial direction"
Textual	Collaborative framing	Metaphors of collective self-reliance applied to sponsorship solicitation	gotong royong (mutual cooperation)
Textual	Legitimation via continuity	Appeals to curatorial tradition or generational continuity	Ars Longa ("art is long") framing
Discursive practice	Source attribution pattern	Which actors are quoted, how frequently, and in which outlets	Pemas quoted in 6 of 9 mainstream articles

Dimension	Code	Operational Definition	Illustrative Indicator
Discursive practice	Register of counter-discourse	Moderate versus structurally radical critique	ArtJokes (moderate) versus Forum Kuratorial Anarkis (radical)
Social practice	Institutional consequence	Material or organizational action following discursive pressure	signage removal; poster substitution; public apology
Visual (documented)	Compositional substitution	Reported change in salience or represented participant	poster swap from Didit Hediprasetyo to GKR Bendara
Visual (documented)	Erasure / absence	Reported removal of a previously present sponsor mark	DHF name removed from website and backdrop

Trustworthiness

Credibility was addressed through source triangulation: each factual claim used to support a finding was checked against a minimum of two independent outlets wherever the corpus contained more than one report of the same event, and claims supported by only a single source are explicitly flagged as such in Section 3. Dependability was addressed by documenting the full inclusion and exclusion criteria, sampling window, and coding categories above, so that the analytic procedure, though inherently interpretive, is auditable and could be reapplied to an expanded or updated corpus. Confirmability was addressed by anchoring every interpretive claim in Section 3 to a specific coded excerpt or documented pattern, rather than to unattributed impression.

A specific and consequential limitation concerns the visual-communication analysis. This study did not have direct access to image files of the withdrawn opening-speaker poster, its replacement, or the sponsor signage before and after removal; consequently, the compositional and representational analysis presented in Section 3 is a text-mediated reconstruction, built from descriptions of these visual materials in six independent news sources, rather than a direct application of Kress and van Leeuwen's grammar to the original images. This constraint is stated here rather than obscured, and researchers with access to the original visual materials could substantially strengthen this component of the analysis.

Second-Level Heading (Roboto, 10pt, Bold, Align Left)

Heading level dua memiliki ketentuan penulisan dengan text Bold 10 pt dengan menggunakan huruf besan maupun huruf kecil. Untuk Heading menggunakan rata kanan kiri (Justify)

Third-Level Heading (Roboto, 10pt, Bold, Align Left)

Heading level tiga mengikuti dari heading kedua. Sebagai perhatian, hindari menggunakan heading yang lebih dari tiga level.

HASIL DAN PEMBAHASAN (ROBOTO,11PT,BOLD, ALIGN LEFT)

This section presents findings organized around the six coding categories in Table 3 and, in the same subsection as each finding, connects that finding directly to the theoretical framework in Table 1, compares it with prior artwashing and design-discourse scholarship, and specifies where it constitutes this study's novelty. A chronological overview of the events analyzed is provided first in Table 4 to orient the thematic findings that follow.

Table 4. Timeline of the ARTJOG 2026 sponsorship controversy.

Date (2026)	Event
11 June	ARTJOG announces the Ars Longa Trilogia curatorial cycle and the ARTJOG 2026 theme at a pre-opening media gathering
Days before 19 June	A promotional poster naming Didit Hediprasetyo as opening speaker circulates on social media; public criticism begins
19 June	ARTJOG 2026 opens at Jogja National Museum; the Didit Hediprasetyo Foundation's name is removed from festival materials; GKR Bendera opens the exhibition in place of Didit Hediprasetyo; the ArtJokes coalition stages a theatrical protest; security personnel physically restrain the protesting performer
20 June	Heri Pemad and Farah Wardani issue press statements; CNN Indonesia, Kompas.id, IDN Times, Indoleft, and TheStance publish coverage; ArtJokes coalition publicly requests an apology for the use of force
21 June	KalderaNews, Harian Jogja, and an independent Medium op-ed publish further coverage and analysis
30 June	Forum Kuratorial Anarkis publishes a statement characterizing the events as "direct action" against artwashing, republished on two activist platforms
30 August (scheduled)	ARTJOG 2026 concludes, per its originally announced closing date

Constructing Independence Through Organizational Discourse

Across multiple press statements, Heri Pemad consistently constructed artistic independence through a two-part discursive strategy: acknowledging the financial necessity of sponsorship while denying any influence of the sponsor over curatorial content. In his most widely quoted formulation, reported independently by Tempo, he stated that the foundation's support did not influence the artistic decisions or curatorial direction of the festival, a fourteen-word claim repeated with only minor variation across several outlets. Pemad further naturalized the sponsorship search through the recurring metaphor of gotong royong, framing the solicitation of support as continuous with the festival's founding ethos rather than as a departure from it, and, as reported by Tempo, declined to disclose the exact monetary value of the foundation's contribution.

Read against the theoretical framework in Table 1, this pattern functions as an ideological partition in Fairclough's sense: a linguistic move that allows the organization to acknowledge one form of vulnerability while foreclosing scrutiny of a second. This is consistent with Bourdieu's account of the field of cultural production, in which actors positioned toward the heteronomous pole routinely deploy a rhetoric of autonomy precisely because their structural position makes autonomy most vulnerable to challenge; the intensity of ARTJOG's insistence on curatorial insulation is itself evidence of the reputational stakes the organizers understood to be in play. This finding also directly corroborates Rianto, Wahyuni, and Wahyono's (2025) finding, in the different institutional setting of Indonesian local television, that autonomy is continuously negotiated against both market and non-market institutional pressures rather than secured once and for all; the present study extends that finding from a broadcast to a festival context and from interview-based to discourse- and design-based evidence.

Documented Visual Materials: Erasure and Substitution

The most consequential design act reported in the controversy was not a statement but a subtraction: the removal of the Didit Hediprasetyo Foundation's name from the festival website and from the physical backdrop at the Jogja National Museum, independently reported by KalderaNews, Kompas.id, and the anarchist collective's statement. Table 5 summarizes the two documented before/after comparisons, coded according to Kress and van Leeuwen's categories, with the qualification that these are text-mediated reconstructions rather than direct image analyses.

Table 5. Documented visual communication changes (text-mediated reconstruction).

Artifact	Before	After	Coded Shift	Sources
Opening-speaker poster	Didit Hediprasetyo (president's son) named as opening speaker	GKR Bendara (Head, Yogyakarta Palace Culture and Heritage Office) named as opening speaker	Represented legitimating figure shifts from national political to hereditary cultural authority	3 independent sources
Sponsor credit line	Foundation listed among named sponsors	Foundation name absent from listing	Compositional field reorganized to remove the contested participant	3 independent sources
Facade artwork (Roby Dwi Antono)	Intact installation on opening night	Defaced with red paint by protesters	Celebratory register disrupted by protest iconography connoting mourning	2 independent sources

The organizers' own account of the credit-line removal, when reported, emphasized respect for concerns raised by artists and the public rather than any admission that the sponsorship itself had been a misjudgment, a framing consistent with the hedging code identified above. This finding extends Mahony's (2017) account of corporate sponsorship as a visually inscribed relationship that institutions can choose to make legible or illegible to the public. Where Mahony's case studies center on activist coalitions forcing visibility onto sponsorship relationships that institutions preferred to keep unmarked, the ARTJOG case inverts this dynamic: the sponsorship had already been made visible, and public pressure instead forced the institution to actively erase a relationship it had initially been willing to display. This inversion is the article's central theoretical contribution: whereas corporate artwashing, as documented at the Tate, typically depends on sustained visibility of the sponsor's name as the very mechanism of reputational transfer, the ARTJOG case suggests that political artwashing may instead depend on visibility only up to the point at which public contestation begins, after which strategic invisibility becomes the institution's discursive strategy, even as the underlying financial relationship persists unannounced. Read through Barthes's account of myth, this erasure operates less as transparency than as a restoration of naturalized meaning: the sign of political proximity is withdrawn from view precisely so that the festival's founding myth of artist-led, collectively sustained independence can continue to circulate unchallenged. Because this claim rests on the text-mediated reconstruction flagged as a limitation in Section 2, it is offered as a theoretically motivated interpretation rather than a confirmed finding from direct image analysis.

The documented substitution of the opening speaker further illustrates how visual communication negotiates cultural politics through compositional choices rather than explicit argument. Replacing a nationally prominent political figure with a representative of Yogyakarta's court culture did not remove external legitimation from the event; it relocated that legitimation within a register of traditional cultural authority long associated with the city's identity as an art center, a shift that Hall's theory of

representation would characterize as a strategic re-encoding of the same structural need into a less politically charged sign system.

Artist and Activist Counter-Discourse

The ArtJokes coalition's protest at the opening ceremony constituted an embodied design intervention operating through the same semiotic register as the festival's own visual materials, but redirected toward critique. According to Indoleft's reporting, a performer scattered flowers around the museum's entrance in a manner explicitly coded as a funerary rite, while Tempo separately reported that red paint was thrown across a commissioned artwork on the museum's facade. The chanted phrase attributed to the performer by Indoleft, invoking the death of literature, art, and intellect, functioned as a compact verbal counter-narrative directly inverting the festival's *Ars Longa* theme. Security personnel's physical intervention against the performer, characterized by the coalition as repressive and acknowledged with an apology by the organizers according to Kompas.id, shifted subsequent coverage from a debate about sponsorship appropriateness toward a debate about the treatment of dissent.

A separate, more radical counter-discourse was articulated by the Forum Kuratorial Anarkis, published via anarchistnews.org and republished via anarchistfederation.net, which characterized the controversy as an instance of what the statement termed the extractive industrialization of art, drawing an explicit continuity between the festival's 2016 Freeport controversy and the 2026 case while asserting that the latter represented a qualitatively different, more directly political form of artwashing. This framing, circulated primarily through activist and alternative media, reached a narrower but more polemically committed audience than the ArtJokes coalition's mainstream-reported grievance. Read through Foucault's proposition that discourse is inseparable from power, this asymmetry shows concretely how unequal institutional power shaped whose counter-discourse reached which public: the more moderate, negotiation-oriented critique secured broader circulation and an organizational apology, while the analytically sharper structural critique circulated exclusively within alternative media. The physical restraint of the protesting performer further illustrates that discourse operates through material as well as linguistic mechanisms of regulation.

Cross-Media Framing

Coverage across the nine mainstream outlets in the corpus converged on the same sequence of events but diverged in framing emphasis, summarized in Table 6.

Table 6. Media comparison across the corpus's mainstream and activist sources.

Outlet	Type	Principal Voices Quoted	Framing Emphasis
Tempo	National, investigative	Heri Pemad	Organizer explanation; funding-transparency gap
Kompas.id	National broadsheet	Heri Pemad; ArtJokes coalition	Balanced dual-voice; protest grievance
CNN Indonesia	National broadcaster/digital	Heri Pemad; Gading Paksi	Organizer responsiveness; apology
IDN Times (Jogja)	Regional digital	Heri Pemad; Farah Wardani	Resolution narrative; "cancel culture" framing

Outlet	Type	Principal Voices Quoted	Framing Emphasis
KalderaNews	Regional digital	Event description	Political controversy framing
Harian Jogja	Regional	Heri Pemad	Continuity / harmony narrative
TheStance	National digital	General reporting	Protest emphasis
Ruang.id	Regional/culture	Heri Pemad; Farah Wardani	Dual voice; festival legacy
TrenAsia	Business/culture	Heri Pemad (2016 retrospective)	Analytical; introduces "political artwashing" framing
Indoleft	Left-alternative	ArtJokes coalition	Repression framing
anarchistnews.org / anarchistfederation.net	Activist/alternative	Forum Kuratorial Anarkis	Systemic critique; anti-state framing
Medium (op-ed)	Independent commentary	Author's own analysis	Comparative framing (2025 Pestapora sponsorship debate)

Across outlets, curator Farah Wardani's public comments consistently reframed the controversy through the register of curatorial continuity, at one point, as reported by IDN Times, characterizing the episode as symptomatic of contemporary digital-era cancel culture while insisting that artists' freedom of expression remained uncompromised, a formulation that simultaneously validated public criticism as a feature of a healthy art ecosystem and relativized its substantive claims. Organizational voices appear in eight of the nine mainstream articles in the corpus, while the ArtJokes coalition appears in three and the Forum Kuratorial Anarkis appears in none of the mainstream corpus, reaching Indonesian audiences only through alternative channels.

Novelty and Theoretical Contribution

Considered together, these findings support extending artwashing scholarship, and design discourse as its analytical companion, beyond the corporate contexts in which both bodies of literature have primarily developed. Where Ruck (2020) demonstrates artwashing's applicability beyond museums to any institution using creative practice to manage reputational exposure, the ARTJOG case demonstrates its applicability beyond corporate capital to political capital operating within a young democracy where the boundaries between state power, family wealth, and cultural patronage remain comparatively porous. Political artwashing, as distinct from corporate artwashing, appears in this case to depend less on sustained public display of the sponsoring relationship and more on the institution's capacity to design its way toward strategic invisibility once that relationship becomes contested, while nonetheless preserving the underlying material relationship. This distinction has not, to this study's knowledge, been articulated in the existing artwashing literature, which has developed primarily around cases of sustained rather than withdrawn sponsor visibility. Because the underlying financial relationship between ARTJOG and the foundation was not reported as terminated, only its visual markers were withdrawn, this novelty claim is offered with an explicit caution: visual and textual erasure can index unresolved rather than resolved contestation, and the removal of a name should not be read as evidence of institutional accountability rather than as one further move within an ongoing discursive negotiation.

CONCLUSION

This article has examined the ARTJOG 2026 sponsorship controversy as a case of design discourse in which artistic independence was constructed, contested, and provisionally repaired through specific textual and documented visual choices rather than settled as a fixed institutional attribute. Its principal theoretical contribution is to propose political artwashing as a variant of artwashing distinguished from the corporate cases established in prior scholarship by its reliance on strategic visual withdrawal, rather than sustained visibility, as the institution's primary mechanism of self-protection once sponsorship becomes contested. A second contribution is to extend recent Indonesian scholarship on negotiated artistic autonomy from broadcast media to the festival context, and from interview methods to discourse and design analysis, showing that the same negotiated, non-binary character of autonomy documented in local television also structures a leading visual-arts festival's public communication.

For Indonesian art festival governance, the findings suggest that transparency policies addressing the disclosed source and scale of sponsorship, rather than only the visual display or removal of sponsor names, may be necessary to address the underlying public concerns that visual erasure alone cannot resolve. For festival communications and design practitioners specifically, the case illustrates that crisis-communication decisions, including what to remove from a backdrop or a website, are not merely administrative but carry the same discursive weight as public statements, and should be approached with the same reflexivity that design discourse theory recommends for any other communication design task.

This study is limited in three specific respects. First, the visual-communication analysis relies on text-mediated reconstruction rather than direct image analysis; future research should obtain the original poster files, archived website captures, and photographic documentation to permit a full application of Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar. Second, this study relies on published statements and media coverage rather than direct interviews with festival organizers, sponsors, or protesting artists; semi-structured interviews with these actors would allow future research to test whether the discursive strategies identified here were deliberate or emergent. Third, this study examines a single case observed over a short period immediately surrounding the controversy; comparative research examining other Indonesian and Southeast Asian cultural events that have negotiated politically proximate sponsorship, for example the 2025 Pestapora festival sponsorship debate referenced within this study's corpus, would help establish whether the dynamics identified here constitute a broader regional pattern or a configuration specific to ARTJOG's particular institutional history.

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