

MARTIN SURYAJAYA

Aesthetics and Politics
in Indonesian Art:
*And the Interconnection
Between the Artwork of
FX Harsono and the
Mass Killings of 1965-66¹*



The massacre of communists and ethnic Chinese that followed the failed military coup in 1965 radically changed Indonesia. According to conservative estimates no less than half a million people were killed, from October 1965 until the early months of 1966. As stated in the documentary film *The Act of Killing* (2012), directed by Joshua Oppenheimer, the figure may even be somewhere between one and two million lives. In addition, around 1.5 million people were detained without trial, becoming the subjects of socio-political discrimination. This violent purge was decisive in the development of the political transition to General Suharto's "New Order", leading to the downfall of President Sukarno and the eradication of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) as a political force. In March 1966, associated civil organisations were dismantled, among them the Institute for People's Culture (*Lekra*), a populist-leaning arts and cultural organisation that had more than one hundred thousand members throughout Indonesia. With such a high number of victims there were, of course, drastic changes in Indonesian society, as well as in its artistic expressions.

In Indonesia the killings of 1965-66 remain a sensitive topic, glossed over in the public memory by three decades of the Suharto regime, and a further two since his fall in 1998. In public attempts to confront this history in 2015, the fiftieth 'anniversary' of what is also referred to as the 'Indonesian Massacres', or simply '1965', there were demands for an "official public reckoning" from the government and especially the President Joko Widodo, who expressed, while running for election, a commitment to resolving past human rights violations, including the 1965-66 mass killings. In September 2015, with the expectation that he would make such a profound gesture, he refused to apologise for what had occurred. For Indonesian artist, FX Harsono, this impasse has become his artistic catalyst.

Art academic Bambang Bujono wrote that the dissolution of *Lekra* was the most important event in Indonesian art since the formation of the Draughtsman's Association of Indonesia (*Persagi*) in 1938, which ushered modern art practices into Indonesia. With the murder of communists after the events of 1965, the aesthetic tradition of painting related to explicit socio-political concepts and approaches ended. The rise of the New Order also necessitated an aesthetic regime that valorised vagueness and ambiguity on political issues; this imperative was largely fulfilled by abstract painting. Of course, the traditions of abstract painting, or at least abstraction, did not begin in Indonesia during the New Order, but could already be found in the work of But Muchtart, Mochtar Apin and Srihadi Sudarsono, whose paintings moved from cubism to geometric abstraction in the 1950s. However, in abstract painting, we still find figures, representative illusions and hence, subject matter. This was not the case with pure abstraction, such as in the work *Komposisi Abu-Abu (Composition in Ash)*, (1966) by G. Sidharta or *Komposisi Dengan Emas (Composition with Gold)*, (1967) by Sadali.

Along with the growth of abstract painting styles in Indonesia in the 1960s and 1970s, there emanated an aesthetic tradition art critic Sanento Yuliman called "lyricism". All abstract paintings in which this lyrical style appeared, wrote Sanento, "constituted expressive fields, a place where the painter could 'project' emotion and the vibe of his feelings, recording the life of his soul." Painting itself was seen as a "world of imagination with its own nature".² In this, we must differentiate between lyricism in the kinds of abstract paintings Sanento identified with expressionism, that were generated by the early modern painters in Indonesia, like Sudjojono and Hendra Gunawan. The foundation of the thinking behind the expressionist style, as Sudjojono stated, was that painting should express the soul, a "visible soul" (*jīwa ketok*). In spite of that, this "soul" would only be visible once it was faced with reality.

The soul, in the understanding of expressionist artists, was a lens through which to read reality. That is why Sudjojono could still speak of *truth* in painting. It was a different consideration in abstract painting from the 1960s and 1970s. In the lyrical tradition, what is important is not the intuitive truth of reality, but rather the wealth of the universe of the imagination, which is self-sufficient.

Thus, it was not surprising that Sudjojono vehemently opposed abstract painting. In one of his articles which appeared in a magazine published by the Indonesian Institute of Art in 1985, Sudjojono called abstract painting “hypocritical”, “sanctimonious” and “the more difficult it is to understand, the prouder it is”.³ His article declared that this kind of abstract lyricism was intended to erase the link between art and reality, turning painting into a self-referential and self-sufficient two-dimensional field with no connection to external realities. He saw abstract painting as an escape into a private world, ignoring the context that assisted the birth of Indonesian modern painting, namely the experience of colonisation and the struggle against it. This context was strongly characteristic of the expressionistic paintings of Sudjojono’s generation, and differentiated it from the individualistic tendencies of abstract painting at the beginning of the New Order. Sudjojono constantly questioned this aesthetic framework for abstract painting—the aesthetic framework of Modernist art. This tendency to aesthetic formalism also existed in the art public’s responses; for instance, in the criticisms of painting exhibitions held at the beginning of the New Order. Popo Iskandar, for instance, wrote about an exhibition by Sadali in a daily newspaper owned by the armed forces, *Berita Yudha*, in December 1972: “Sadali’s art has lost the element of narrative, so the artworks are an encounter between the artist’s contemplation and the material seeks its form on the canvas, so it is a sensation for the eye which arouses a sense of physical beauty. Sadali’s paintings are beautiful, pleasantly decorative, which alone requires a working process that is concentrated, patient and observational.”⁴

The New Order’s victory over the previous regime also meant the victory of aesthetic formalism over other aesthetic understandings that had developed in Sukarno’s era (social realism, didacticism and functionalism). The aesthetic formalism reflected in abstract painting was quickly seen as conforming to the political project of the New Order. In his book titled *Strategi Kebudayaan*, Ali Moertopo wrote that the “New Order is a cultural process”.⁵ The consolidation of capitalism and state during the New Order strengthened national culture. In the context of art, the New Order required artistic practice that was not critical of the government or involving itself in political issues—rather, concerned with itself. Formalist aesthetics answered this need precisely. By occupying artists with “medium specificity” itself, formalism legitimises the alienation of the world of art from the political universe. Meanwhile, communist and nationalist art studios were dissolved, artists were arrested and forced underground, and other artists outside that school were directed to engage themselves with the mysticism of formal beauty. From here, abstract painting quickly came to be identified as “development painting”: painting that conformed to the developmental spirit of the New Order, which immediately filled the homes of the middle class, government offices and private businesses.

However, Modernism was not the only valid aesthetic mode for painting at the beginning of the New Order. There was also a mix of aesthetic tendencies that in the terminology of European aesthetic history, is called “expressivism” (which differs from “expressionism”). When Oesman Effendi defined modern painting in his controversial paper of 1969 that triggered a debate about the existence of “Indonesian painting”, he interpreted it within that framework, known in Europe as “expressivism”. He defined it as, “painting that results from an individual person’s expressions, full of desire to express the impulse of the heart, the desire for declarations or manifestations of an ego that exists in the midst of society, without the influence of any will other than his own.”⁶

In the annals of Indonesian painting, the definition that Oesman gave was not rooted in Sudjojono's legendary statement as *Persagi's* spokesperson. This formula is often quoted: "If an artist makes an art object, then that artwork is actually nothing less than the visible soul of the artist. Art is the visible soul. So art is the soul."⁷ However, Oesman's formulation is not just a fragment of Sudjojono's statement; Oesman deflects his definition. If Sudjojono rooted his "expressive credo" in the perspective of the anti-colonial world, thus containing the political impetus (so that he can speak of "truth" in painting), Oesman isolated that "expressive credo" by sidelining its political dimension and emphasising the individual importance. If for Sudjojono the battle was between painter-and-activist, for the colonised nation versus storming its cultural citadel, for Oesman the battle was narrowed to being just between I-the-artist versus society. In the same paper, he criticised the political tendencies of painting in the lead up to the New Order.

Indonesian painting has begun from the wrong direction. If thus far—separate from its value—it began with the impulses of the heart, from the movements of the feelings of the soul, recently external factors have often determined its direction... The first test of painting... is how it resolves itself in the constellation of an art that has come to be coloured by politics... Because he must portray particular motifs and must even resolve them in particular styles, consciously or unconsciously, the painter has betrayed his own impulse to declare his egoism as a product of his times.⁸

Sudjojono didn't speak of "egoism". In one of his classic essays, he revealed the close connection between the "soul" and "*nationaliteit*", or more generally the aspect of the artist's self and socio-political horizons. He didn't distinguish art from politics; he knew no distinction between the "aesthetic attitude" and the "political attitude". Oesman, on the other hand, emphasised that separation. In Oesman's position we discover an expressivism that, on the surface, more closely resembles the perspectives of the post-Romantic European aestheticians: an expressivism that is nurtured in the individualist world-view.

Oesman's individualist expressivism can be traced back to its roots in Romantic thinking about the artist as a sublime genius who cannot be understood by society. Thus, this kind of expressivism relies on the preconception of the figure of the artist as a fundamentally different entity to the layperson, or 'ordinary' person. This is a tendency that has long existed in the history of Indonesian painting. In his article in the *Budaya Jaya* magazine in 1975, Sudjoko problematised the issue, which he called "romantic individualism". He quoted the work of Dutch poet Herman Goter to describe the credo adopted by many Indonesian painters; "Art is an individual expression of the individual's emotions."⁹ This kind of expressivist mode fits with the existentialist pathos that beset Indonesian intellectuals and artists during the 1960s and 1970s. The result is a moralist perspective on art, namely that art is honesty to one's self and thus demands distance from politics, that politics is contaminating, that artists who are involved in politics or who take up political issues are not honest with themselves. From this perspective the expressivist mode is in line with the formalist aesthetics explained earlier. Here emerges a synergy between "egoism", "composition" and "development".

Images of establishment were cultivated through harmonic relations between painting at the beginning of the New Order and the "developmentalism" that was quickly embraced by the Suharto regime. So much so that at the beginning of the 1970s all painting practices produced politically muted abstract or decorative painting (based on traditional decorative forms). Discussions around art—no longer monopolised by issues of painting—were filled with endless debates about colour, texture, form and other formal-compositional aspects. There was no space to discuss the relationship between art and

society, much less political issues. In the 1970s, Indonesia participated in the twenty-fifth anniversary celebrations of the United Nations in New York, exhibiting a number of artworks chosen by a government appointed jury. Their decision generated disappointment, as many of those chosen were older rather than new works. This demonstrated the dissolution that had emerged as a result of the stagnant establishment suffered by Indonesian art.

Embarrassment over this listless atmosphere exploded in the controversy surrounding the *Pameran Besar Seni Lukis Indonesia (Grand Exhibition of Indonesian Painting)* in 1974, which was held by the Jakarta Arts Board. All the works selected as winners for that event were by senior painters practicing the same style, namely A.D Pirous, Aming Prayitno, Widayat, Irsam and Abas Alibasyah. This decision was criticised in the Black December Statement signed by fourteen artists, mostly students from the Indonesian Academy of Fine Arts (ASRI) and the Jakarta Institute of the Arts (IKJ). This statement declared that the theoretical framework embraced by the jury, which represented the existing art regime, was obsolete; further emphasising the importance that artists should reflect a range of social, cultural, political and economic issues. This was a declaration of resistance to the aesthetic regime of the New Order, rejecting the formalistic theoretical framework by reinstating art in the socio-political reality.

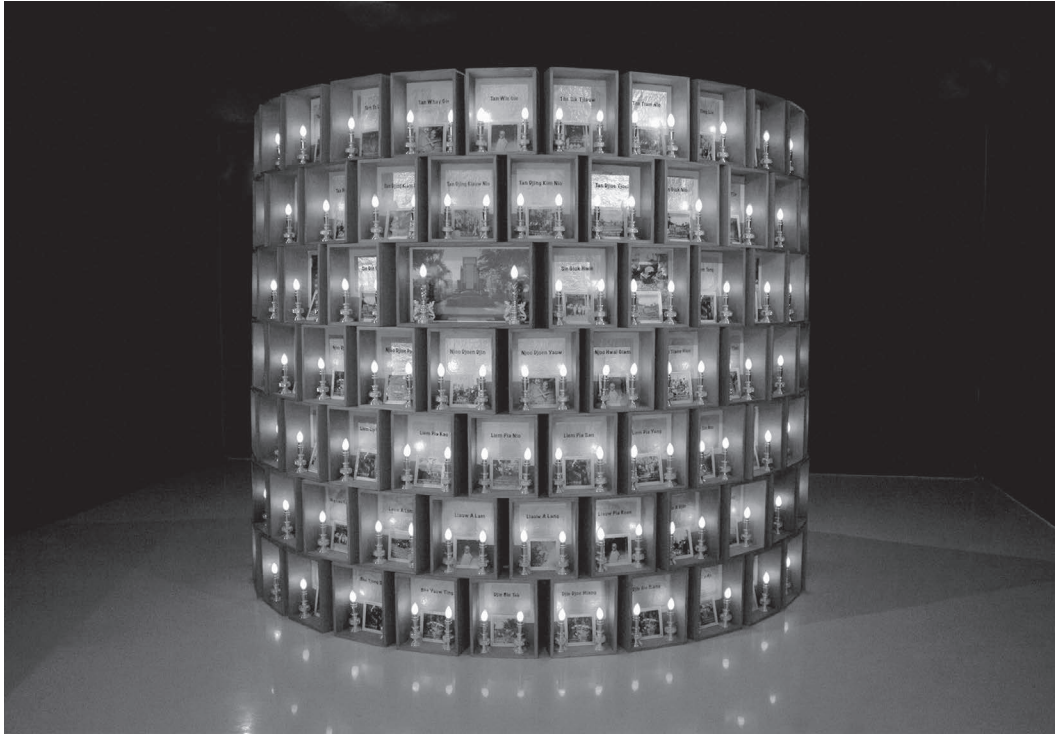
This unexpected resistance provoked a harsh reaction at ASRI. All students who were involved in signing the statement were suspended. ASRI director Abas Alibasyah, a decorative painter who had also been a winner in the exhibition, declared that such an orientation to socio-political issues in the Black December manifesto should be expressed by students in the socio-political department, and not by art students. He further stated that the students' actions were in opposition to "national development" and could endanger "national unity, integrity and stability".¹⁰ Rumours also circulated that the Black December statement contained "latent communist dangers", with the Commander of the Java-Madura Detention Area acknowledging he was concerned about the developments at ASRI. Eight months after the Black December controversy, the New (Indonesian) Art Movement (GSRB) was declared, with membership including Jim Supangkat, FX Harsono and Muryoto Hartoyo, with support from pre-eminent Indonesian art critic Sanento Yuliman. Here began what Supangkat would call the "art of rebellion".¹¹ The controversy that GSRB created had a crucial impact on the development of Indonesian art, in that the realm of art was no longer alienated from the political. Artists no longer positioned themselves as morally external to the political sphere, like holy recluses removed from the clamour of worldly life, inwardly focused on aesthetic contemplation of pure form. Artists began to actively interrogate the reality of their surroundings. In this mood a further controversy emerged around the exhibition *Kepribadian Apa? (What Individuality?)* in Yogyakarta, in 1977. Involving young artists from Black December and GSRB, it critiqued the ideological constructions of the New Order around "national identity". On the first day, the police immediately closed the exhibition on the basis of reports of it containing pornographic work; the next day they indicated there were two "dangerous" works: *Hotel Tower of Asia* by Bonyong Munny Ardhi and *Kartu Remi Indonesia* by Slamet Ryadhi. This first was an installation that took issue with the gap in the economy by showing a vagrant sleeping on the porch of a four star hotel, while the second depicted a deck of playing cards featuring President Suharto's face.

In 1979, Jim Supangkat listed five main principles declared by the exponents of GSRB, presenting a new world perspective that renounced the writing and work of painters at the beginning of the New Order. These five principles can be summarised as 1.) Rejecting the specificity of art as painting, sculpture and printmaking, and any opposing constrictions on the crossover of medium; 2.) Rejecting avant-gardism that positions the artist as profound genius who “cannot be understood by society”, while “believing that actual social problems are more important subjects of discussion than personal sentiments”; 3.) Rejecting patronage and the subjugation of young artists to older artists (*cantrikism*), while opening up the “possibilities of making” as far-reaching as possible; 4.) Rejecting the dictum that stated, “art is universal” by re-engaging an investigation into Indonesian art history and its specific historical context that cannot be understood through the classifications of Western art theory; and 5.) Defending art that exists at the heart, or core, of society.¹²

These five points articulate a fundamental paradigmatic change. The first point is nothing less than a severe blow to the formalist faith that was a pillar of Modernist art. Thus, GSRB rejected the puritanical doctrine of “medium specificity” proposed in formalist and modernist aesthetics, and implemented by abstract and decorative painters. The second point is the rejection of expressivism that underpinned modern Indonesian art after Sudjojono. In this, GSRB positioned itself in opposition to the “romantic individualism” which, among other aspects, was prominent in Oesman Effendi’s constructions. The first two points already represent a fundamental about-face thinking on art in Indonesia. This was exacerbated further with the emphasis on experimentation (point three), on re-reading Indonesian art history (point four), and the involvement of art in the socio-political realm (point five). With this last point, GSRB became a ‘nightmare’ for the New Order’s regime of aesthetics.

GSRB dissolved itself in 1979, due to differences in the visions of its exponents; primarily the struggle for the position of spokesperson between Supangkat and Hardi. In spite of this, GSRB opened new horizons in the artistic imagination of Indonesian artists, especially amongst youth. It opened the door for new aesthetic awareness; for instance, a consciousness of painting not being the central arts paradigm, and the notion that artists are not a different entity to society in general. And although a radical new consciousness had developed among young artists, campus bureaucracy still clung to the old aesthetic conventions. Conflict between these two and the absence of spaces for young artists to show their works propelled the emergence of alternative galleries like Cemeti Art House in Yogyakarta, in 1988.

Among the proponents of GSRB were two artists who were able to systematically establish their opinions into written form—Jim Supangkat and FX Harsono, though both had differing aesthetic perspectives. This difference in opinion appeared at various points, including in the lead up the *New Art Project Exhibition 2* in 1989, when Harsono stated that he wouldn’t be involved in the exhibition that Supangkat was organising. If the latter emphasised intrinsically formal dimensions when looking at contemporary art, Harsono preferred to emphasise socio-political elements. Harsono maintained a commitment to the rejection of high art and an alignment with the people, while Supangkat foregrounded explorations of form and set aside the relationship with socio-political issues. Harsono’s political attitude is consistently reflected in his artistic practice from the beginning of his involvement in GSRB, and since.



A second consequence of the 1974 Black December event was a statement that Harsono signed; “That for development that guarantees the continuation of our culture, we painters are called on to provide spiritual guidance based on humanist values and oriented to the reality of our social, cultural, political and economic existence.” In GSRB’s initial exhibition in 1975, Harsono exhibited *Paling Top ’75* (*Most Popular ’75*), an installation using a toy M-16 gun placed in a box with a white cloth background and enclosed with simple chicken wire, taking issue with the seemingly popularisation of a culture of violence and militarism. Also in the same exhibition, *Rantai yang Santai* (*The Relaxed Chains*), an installation of mattresses, pillows and cushions tied up with chains, seemed to criticise the repressive apparatus of power, while even touching on the most private of realms (mattresses, cushions and pillows). In particular, Harsono seemed to want to deconstruct the ideological apparatus that operates in every recess of society’s existence. He achieved this without any reference to Marxist doctrine, usually found in the politically styled artistic approaches of his predecessors, the *Lekra* artists.¹³

Political disposition and environmental awareness are also reflected in Harsono’s subsequent works. His installation *Power and the Oppressed*, presented at ARX 3 in Perth (1992), further engaged the working logic of power. This work comprised symbolic objects that depicted power, such as a throne surrounded by barbed wire against a background that portrayed ceremonial daggers and fireballs like those in the traditional shadow puppet narratives, facing a row of twigs placed on a white cloth spattered with red. Through this work, Harsono took issue with Suharto’s mobilisation of Javanese metaphors for feudal power, with all their supernatural mystification, positioning the people as if they were no more

than frail and bloody twigs. In the installation *Suara yang tak Bersuara (Voices That Make No Sound)* (1994), Harsono foregrounded the same issue from the perspective of the victims. This work was made from nine 1.2 x 1.8 metre panels on which images of hands formed letters in sign language, mutely spelling out the word “*d-e-m-o-k-r-a-s-i*”, an allegory for the atmosphere of oppression of the ordinary person whose voice was silenced by the New Order regime. This voice motif continues in the work *Suara Dari Dasar Bendungan (Voices From the Bottom of the Dam)* (1994), an installation that involved found objects—Madurese clothing, a chilli plant, a pot and pottery utensils each facing a microphone and accompanied by recordings of Harsono’s interviews with villagers from Sampang, in Madura, who were evicted from their land by government plans to develop a dam.

The May 1998 riots targeting ethnic Chinese (known as ‘The 1998 Tragedy’, which also led to the fall of Suharto and his New Order government) left a deep mark on Harsono, following which he began to re-examine his own identity as an Indonesian of Chinese descent. Themes of alienation began to appear in his work, especially in his exhibition *Displaced* at Cemeti Art House, in 2003.¹⁴ Harsono presented the uncertainty of ambiguous identity through a series of images depicting violence and relations between power, history and humanity. These themes are also present in his most recent works, especially the *Proyek nDudah (Excavation Project)* (2013), a reconstruction of the massacre of ethnic Chinese around 1946-49, working with photographs of the exhumation of victims his father took in the 1950s. In *Memelihara Hidup, Menghentikan Hidup (Maintaining Life, Ending Life)* (2009), Harsono juxtaposes paintings of scenes from his family history (wedding and family photos) with those from the photographs of the exhumation of massacre victims. What emerges here is a “manual reproduction” of the aura of history¹⁵—Harsono has never forsaken his aesthetic commitment to issues around power, history and humanity. For him, artistic practice has never been, and must never be, alienated from the socio-political universe.

Before *Reformasi* (the post-Suharto era), Harsono did not make any work with a direct thematic connection to the mass killings of 1965-66 perpetrated by the anti-communist military and civilians. In an interview, he said that it was too risky to talk about the mass killings, let alone exhibit a work with expressed intent of protest or outcry.¹⁶ Consequently, Harsono chose to deal with other pressing socio-political issues. But with the fall of Suharto’s regime, he began to plan a series of works concentrating on the issues of 1965-66 mass murders. There are three of Harsono’s works of the past decade that directly relate to ‘1965’. In 2006, Harsono presented an installation entitled *Yang Berkorban Tak Menikmati (They Who Made Sacrifice Do Not Enjoy)* (2006), a series of portraits and biographical texts printed digitally at the surface of a dozen cakes. The portraits are those of the six generals allegedly killed in the coup by the PKI in 1965, which became the pretext for the subsequent mass murder of the members of PKI-related organisations and suspected members. The biographical texts are those of several human right activists whose murders remains unsolved to this day. This work was exhibited at Cemeti Art House, 2006, where the audiences were invited to eat the cakes. Harsono said in an interview; “The work is about sacrifice, or people sacrificed in a power struggle and about those who achieve political power at the expense of other people’s lives.”¹⁷ In this work, the victims were presented as delicacies to be enjoyed by the victors (Suharto and his accomplices) or, in this instance, the audience. Thus, Harsono invited the audience to partake in the very process described in the work: of transformation from victim to the object of enjoyment. The audience was given an ambiguous status, that is, both as (presumably sad) witnesses of national tragedy and as (presumably happy) consumer of cruel history. By inviting the audience to eat the cakes, Harsono in a sense invited them to recognise their historical burden to deal with this past massacre.

A second work is the video performance *Rewriting The Past* (2009), in which Harsono, seated in front of a table, writes his Chinese name—Oh Hong Boen—in Chinese characters on a piece of paper, which he then places on the floor. He does this one hundred times. In this work, Harsono directly challenges the impact of the mass killings of 1965-66. Suharto and his state apparatus saw the Chinese Indonesians as disguised communists, partly because since the early 1960s the PKI had a close connection to the Communist Party of China. This suspicion became one of the motives for the mass killings and subsequent policies to suppress any suspected communist activities. The Chinese language press was prohibited in the aftermath of Suharto's rise to power. Chinese schools and organisations were disbanded. All Chinese Indonesians were forced to give up their Chinese names and assume an Indonesian name in accordance with the local custom. Thus Harsono, on his eighteenth birthday, was forced to abandon the name Oh Hong Boen and adopt a Catholic and Javanese name: Fransiskus Xaverius Harsono. In performing *Rewriting The Past*, Harsono presents this dilemma faced by Chinese Indonesians in the aftermath of '1965', having a split identity as both Indonesian and Chinese Indonesian, and as a survivor of the 1965-66 political upheaval.

His third work, related to the second, is another video performance *Writing in The Rain* (2011) in which Harsono writes his Chinese name in Chinese characters with brush and black ink on a sheet of glass. At a certain point in the performance, water flows down the glass, erasing his name. In the midst of this symbolic 'rain', Harsono repeatedly writes his name, which is constantly erased by the flow of water, as an attempt to capture the fragility of Chinese Indonesian identity in post-1965 Indonesia. This 'rain' can be read as historical allegory—it erases everything, blurring every character, or identity and, in the specific Indonesian context, captures the inundation of society in this history of violence.

The mass killings of 1965-66 remains one of the underlying motives of Harsono's works throughout the post-*Reformasi* era. Its interweaving with the motive of identity (especially Chinese-Indonesian) and political violence is marked in several of his recent works. His practice therefore, is an artistic challenge to the Indonesian government's reluctance to revisit the past and make amends with its historical crimes. Harsono is undeniably a pioneer in rehabilitating the political dimension of Indonesian art after 1965, closely bound to civil movements formed between NGOs, human rights activists and pro-democracy political movements during the New Order authoritarian regime, and community-oriented practices initiated by the post-GSRB generation of artists, eg. Moelyono, Semsar Siahaan and Dadang Christanto.

Harsono's contribution to contemporary Indonesian art is further validated by his successful formulation of a balance between formal experimentation and socio-political dimensions. In an essay presented during *Pameran Binal Eksperimental (Wild Experimental Exhibition, Yogyakarta, 1992)* it became apparent that Harsono was quite conscious of the aesthetic consequences of his and other contemporary artists' practices conducted post-GSRB, commenting upon a number of primary understandings, including the rejection of lyricism and of perspectives that prioritise form over the work's social aspects. He emphasised that, "aesthetic values are not the only important values when creating an artwork. There are still other values that are more important, for instance humanist values or social values."¹⁸ This aesthetic concept relied on participatory working methods, involving dialogue between artists and society, such as those implemented by Moelyono in East Javanese villages; exemplified by Harsono with his 'live-in' at Sampang village in Madura when he made his installation *Suara dari Dasar Bendungan* in 1994. Like the *Lekra* artists who tapped into real problems and issues of the community as the impetus for their creative process, Harsono concurred that "political, social, economic and cultural problems are a legitimate orientation when seeking ideas" and that "creativity is conceptual".¹⁹

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Harsono is one of the first artists to restore a political dimension to Indonesian art after the events of 1965-66. In focusing on the politics of the people, he has pursued visual forms that evince the increasingly complicated reality of everyday exploitation and individual struggle. In this sense, he can be located as an important figure in the dialectical conflict between art and politics—an approach that was opened up by Sudjojono in the 1940s and beginning to be abandoned as the Suharto's New Order was established. Harsono's pioneering role in creating a political and participatory work ethic for contemporary art, along with Moelyono and several other community art activists post-GSRB, is indisputable. However, the art historical reference points have shifted. If Moelyono's generation often referred to a framework of social awareness rooted in the aesthetics of Augusto Boal and the pedagogy of critic Paulo Freire, the new generation of participatory art these days refers more often to the “relational aesthetics” that Nicolas Bourriaud speaks of.

Today, the political aesthetic is quite common among contemporary Indonesian artists, both in spontaneous and relational collective performance works, and in the paintings that sell for over ten billion rupiah. An inclination towards the political is no longer seen as a betrayal of the ‘purity’ of art, nor as a violation of art's ‘natural formalism’; rather, its restoration to the realm of aesthetic contingency.

There is an additional aspect that has been on the rise in Indonesian art over the last decade, being the focus on the participatory dimension—ie. “relational aesthetics”—that artist-run-initiatives like ruangrupa, Forum Lenteng and Jatiwangi Art Factory (JaF) have been experimenting with. The two principles to have emerged within this development are that the artist no longer functions as the creator but as an organiser of social relationships; and the artwork is no longer the main object or artefact, but rather its social relationships. Ultimately, the biggest challenge for participatory art is then to consider and experiment with truly fundamental, rather than the merely superficial, practices of social change. This is such that it is not just social relations that change on the surface, but rather the basic social relations that structure other social relations in a society. What those social relations are, how to change them and in what aesthetic form that change will be articulated, are three challenges faced by participatory artists in Indonesia today.

From the beginning of his art practice, FX Harsono's socio-political imperatives were never realised as a member of an institution or organisation, but rather through interacting with communities, NGOs and other activists. With the positive shift in politics and society after the fall of the Suharto regime, his association with both the social and political developed through researching archives and collections, and meeting with witnesses to, and victims of, political persecution. Subsequently, the focus of his art practice is motivated by the historical misfortunes suffered by the Chinese living in Indonesia, and the discrimination exacted upon them by the New Order regime and anti-Chinese communities.

Translated from the Indonesian text by Elly Kent.

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Notes

¹ Sections of this text were presented as a discussion paper for the OK Video Symposium titled 'The New Order' which was held by ruangrupa at the National Gallery of Indonesia on 15 June, 2015. Some sections have also been published on the Indoprogress website, 16 March, 2016: <http://indoprogress.com/2016/03/estetika-orde-baru/>

² Sanento Yuliman, *Seni Lukis Indonesia Baru: Sebuah Pengantar*, Jakarta: Dewan Kesenian Jakarta, 1976, p. 40

³ For the West, which has already mastered this material, then become bored and fed up with it and run it to abstraction and so on, that I understand. But then why does Indonesia, which has just emerged from 350 years of violence, join in this run to abstraction, what could the reason be? When we have just got this material, why are we already bored with it? I more often see and read of those who are greedy for material... In practice, I have rarely ever seen those who are fed up with [the] material, but in painting, the sense of being fed up with the material is what is hardest to bear. So, if there is a theory that art is a picture of its age, then the only conclusion can be that painting in Indonesia now reflects a hypocritical existence... Sometimes I even hear painters talking themselves up: "I'm modern, I'm contemporary." S. Sudjojono, 'Seni Rupa yang Menjawab Tantangan Masa Kini', *Dalam majalah SANI*, 28 June, 1985, pp. 35-38

⁴ Popo Iskandar, 'Seni melalui virtuositas: suatu potret tentang Ahmad Sadali', in Bambang Bujono and Wicaksono Adi eds, *Seni Rupa Indonesia dalam Kritik dan Esai*, Jakarta: Dewan Kesenian Jakarta, 2012, p. 203

⁵ Ali Moertopo, *Strategi Kebudayaan (Cultural Strategy)*, Yayasan Proklemasi, Centre for Strategic and International Studies, Jakarta, 1978

⁶ Effendi Oesman, 'Seni Lukis in Indonesia: Dulu dan Sekarang', in Ugeng T. Moetidjo dan Hafiz (ed.), *Seni Lukis Indonesia Tidak Ada*, Jakarta: Dewan Kesenian Jakarta, 2007, p. 9

⁷ S. Sudjojono, *Seni Loekis, Kesenian dan Seniman*, Yogyakarta: Indonesia Sekarang, 1946, p. 69

⁸ Effendi Oesman, op cit., pp. 11-14

⁹ Sudjoko, 'Kita Juga Punya "Romantic Agony"', in Bambang Bujono and Wicaksono Adi eds, *Seni Rupa Indonesia dalam Kritik dan Esai*, Jakarta: Dewan Kesenian, 2012, p. 217

¹⁰ Sumartono, 'The role of power in contemporary Yogyakarta art', in *Outlet: Yogyakarta within the Contemporary Indonesian Art Scene*, Yogyakarta: Cemeti Art Foundation, 2001, p. 24

¹¹ Jim Supangkat, 'Seni rupa era "80"', *Dalam Katalog Biennale Seni Rupa Jakarta IX 1993*, 1993, p. 13

¹² Jim Supangkat, 'Lima jurus gebrakan Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru Indonesia', in Ugeng T. Moetidjo and Hafiz eds, *Seni Lukis Indonesia Tidak Ada*, op cit., pp. 125-26

¹³ Harsono admitted that during his time as an artist with GSRB, he had yet to encounter Marxism; or even the NGO's that had just begun to emerge in Indonesia in the 1980s. Interview with FX Harsono, 11 July, 2016.

¹⁴ "After Suharto's regime fell, a culture of violence became more apparent in our society... In the time afterwards, I felt I had lost my foundations and felt alienated in my own society. Previously I had felt that this society was one that I should fight on behalf of through art." FX Harsono, 'Transisi: Pernyataan Seniman', in *Displaced* (exhib. cat.), Galeri Nasional Indonesia & Cemeti Art House, 2003, pp. 19-20

¹⁵ Harsono defined his recent inclination to return to painting as the result of the contemplation of "mechanical reproduction" triggered by Walter Benjamin's text 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (1936), in which mechanical reproduction engenders the absence of the aura or singularity of the artwork. Departing from this consciousness, Harsono actually seemed to want to re-attach an aura to his artwork by entering into manual reproduction (painting) of mechanical reproduction (photo). In this, the aura that emerges is from the history of massacres of ethnic Chinese in Indonesia. Interview with FX Harsono, 11 July, 2016

¹⁶ Interview with FX Harsono, ibid.

¹⁷ Interview with FX Harsono, 15 August, 2016

¹⁸ FX Harsono, 'Perkembangan Seni Rupa Kontemporer di Indonesia: Tinjauan Problematik', in *Seni Rupa, Perubahan, Politik: Himpunan Tulisan*, Magelang: Galeri Langgeng, 2009, p. 76

¹⁹ Ibid. p. 78