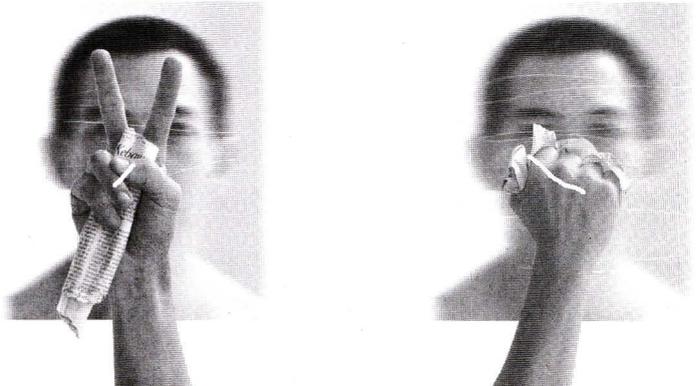


exposed a fascinating meaning of fragmentation. Working in the afternoon and enjoying the night are carried out by the same body, as in the case of the bureaucrat of the afternoon and the lover of the night time who are the same person existing in different social spaces. Fragmentation is the multiplication of relations and so the more fragmented, the richer the person. At the opposite end of the spectrum is the reduction of various fragments sucked into a single fragment that boasts of totality. Reduction is a simplification of relations. Critics of mass culture lament over fragmentation reduction and forget the fact that fragmentation steers the observer away from the 'terror of wholeness'. Wholeness is fictive, because no person is ever genuinely whole, only pretending to be whole sometimes or at least wanting to be whole. There is nothing more spine chilling than some wholeness that claims itself as reality because there reduction occurs. Religious fundamentalism and totalitarianism are compounds of fragments in one fragment that boasts of totality. Even fragmentation must be seen as fictive, because no person is ever genuinely fragmented. The horror dished up by critics of mass culture, virtual cannibalism, is their version of the fiction. Ego in its various episodes (as user, audience, enjoyer etc.) is still the one and the same ego. Through the production of form the ego pieces the fragments together, just as it divides up the wholeness through the production of form.

It is the fragmentation of the body that makes exploitative relations of the body's spaces possible, as painted in the work entitled "Tubuhku adalah Lahan" (2002) (My body is a cultivated field). Here an attack of space occurs: as in an attack of sex, the body moving between active and passive

opens the space for sex for the attacker, so that the ego no longer controls the body's space; in an economic-technological attack the body prepares its space to be alienated from the ego. The gloomy vision served up by critics of mass culture is that the body is not adept at facing that attack of space and allows itself to be dragged into the spaces it controls. The keen body of a model is as if fragmented from the nervous ego and left hanging to be enjoyed by the focused eye and only with this kind of fragmentation does the body become the means to nurture to capital. The heart of a patient on death's door has already been sought by the buyers and sellers of human organs on the internet. In the art of mutilation, where the body is dismantled not virtually but physically, fragmentation of the body has reached radical actuality.

That's horror! - say the advancers of wholeness. The fragmented body is exposed as a 'decentered body', because the ego -which is also comprised of fragments- is absent there. But perhaps horror is not the right word. Whether it is horrifying or heartening, we appear to be in the midst of an age where the whole-



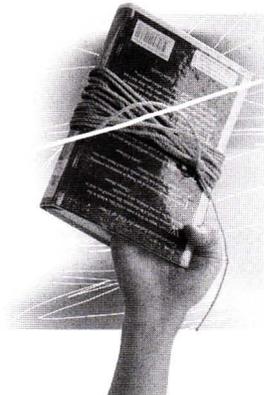
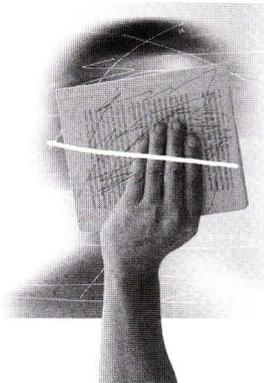
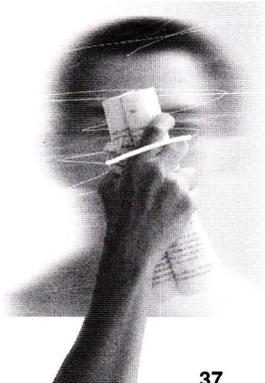
ness of the ego and its body are increasingly known as a bundle of perceptions. The body and the ego are the result of a natural painting full of improvisation, formed of the contingency networks. Perhaps the gloominess of the critics of mass culture may be overcome if fragmentation is seen as the chance to 'reorganize enjoyment': the ego is here in its little lonely room, let the body be there on its noisy stage enjoying the attacks on itself. In producing the continual energized space, the body is not the victim of the attack of space, but rather the skilled enjoyer. In order for this to be so -within mass culture- there needs to be a sensory intelligence to recognise the body's spaces for enjoyment.

#### Moral Perplexities

The loss of the wholeness of the ego and the body has run in tandem with the drama of the loss of moral wholeness. Harsono as a social-political critic reappears in the following works: "Blank Spot on My TV" (2003), "Bintang itu Mulai Redup" (2002), "Open your Mouth" (2001), "Api 1" (2000), "Api 2" (2000), "Wear Masks" (2001), "Super Woman" (2001), "Harga Diri" (2001) and "Pig or Angel? So what?" (2002). The key to understanding these works is

in my opinion to be found in "Pig or Angel? So what?" (2002): the naked pig bears wings, while the winged angel is naked. The concept of 'pigness' is arrested by the existence of the wings, just as the concept of the 'angelness' is put off by the way of the body as presented. Should the observer glimpse a pig and an angel there, jumping into the idea illuminated within the frame, the observer will behold that what is being presented is actually a moral perplexity. That which is defiled, disgusting, rotten and heretical attains the emblems of all that is glorious, sacrosanct and pious, while the latter are 'stained' by the former. The shifting borderlines separating what is good on top and what is bad below in the work appears as a gradation full of tension. The perplexity here is not a matter of establishing good or bad valuations, but rather the stuttering in that valuation process, because the opposition between the good and the bad is never clean it is polluted, bastardized.

The perplexity is partly produced by the technology of imagery. In "Super Women" there is a contamination between the real and the virtual in the concept of the hero. Women workers, who the artist suspects are the real heroes, lose their persona and are overlaid with compu-



ter-generated images ala Lara Croft. In the media, recognition is not attained through moral action (ala labor activists such as Marsinah, for example) but through the techniques of imagery. The radiance blinding the public has caused a blurring in differentiating the pig and the angel, Santa Claus and the prostitute, the corrupter and the benefactor. Or, as presented in "Bintang itu Mulai Pudar", the symbols that once expressed a bond with the people have metamorphasized into emblems that frighten the people because those that once fought for them have sold out on poverty in the interest of their own lifestyles. And finally, in the sequence of works entitled "Blank Spot on My TV", a different kind of perplexity is presented: speaking

doesn't say anything at all. It is a kind of miniature about the kind of democracy that stabs itself. Storytellers are various and stories are numerous but it's all one and the same: empty like a blank spot. It's not just a criticism of the arrogance of verbalism or distrust in the substance of the words revealed here, it's also a description of the vanishing of the storytellers' subject in the heap of empty words. All speak of it all and so there is no longer the need to be responsible for what is said. The moral subject vanishes under the heap of 'people say' in the dictatorship of not a single person.

The art space created by the works of Harsono is not merely the

locus of his personal strivings for understanding. Assembled beings, fragmented bodies and moral perplexities may be met in the social spaces outside this gallery. We are not just invited to enter into this exhibition gallery, but more than that, to interact with the artist in entering his art space. Only in this way will we be made to hear the harpings outside. And now if I am asked to open this exhibition, I am aware that I am opening it with my own key and through my own door. You too possess your own key and your own door. And for this reason alone, I open this exhibition by saying happy traveling into the art space hidden in this exhibition!

Jakarta, 26 May 2003

# 'displaced': fx harsono

curatorial preface

Hendro Wiyanto

After the 1970s, we need to see the development of FX Harsono's work to learn how an Indonesian artist perseverantly and tirelessly voices critics to various things. We know that FX Harsono has placed himself and his works since mid 1970s in Indonesian modern visual art. The place for his initial works and became known lies in the resistance against the mainstream of painting looking for nationalistic personality in the 1970s.

As a young artist, a student of the academy of art, he formed a visual art group that later proved to be the pioneer of a pluralistic aesthetic and judgement within the arts. This group afterwards realized the tendency and goals within their group as a "movement", that is, *Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru/GSRB* (The New Art Movement).

We generally could understand the difference between "movement" as this group's tendency intended and what is called a 'school' that shape the development of visual arts in previous periods. In the interpretation of avant garde art (ists) a movement tends to show aggression or agitation towards a tradition, whether a tradition originating from a master or a teacher, academy, or even a form of collective called society or public. The teachings or thoughts coming from those being opposed were considered to be disadvantageous or even hindering development. The tendency to agitate is a spirit can be said attached in the character-

istics of a movement that is antagonistic in nature.

A movement is definitely different from a 'school' (we know 'schools' such as Bandung group or Yogyakarta group) that sees it is important to maintain and pass on a system of working or the school itself; that has vitality but "immune to a change", while requiring a number of apprentices. A movement – and the followers – do not understand culture as a kind of encyclopedia as schools do, but rather as a creation, or as "the center of activity". In sentences we often hear lately, a school tends to see culture as a noun, while a "movement" sees it as a "verb" thus more dynamic.

Other schools work within and for transcendental aims, that often are not determined or made by the school itself. While movement rationally have an immanent aim as its base, inherent in the movement itself. Obviously, a school tends to teach or pass something on, but what, for example, could have been taught or passed on from a movement?<sup>1)</sup>

Another thing to add to a movement is the temporariness of the movement itself. In GSRB (1974-1979) for example, the statement during dissolving the groups in the movement was consciously and rationally and with particular considerations showed a part of the original movement they believed in.

The current in painting that FX Harsono and his friends was going against was the

painting that tries to search for national identity in visual arts, in line with national personality, formulated during the New Order.

Visual art trying to search for national identity could be seen as an inseparable part of the argumentation of political culture that was marked by the efforts to handle “cultural politics” that insists on determining how (national) culture has to be formulated and practiced according to political aspirations. If national politics wants to search for its identity in national unity, then national culture tries to search its identity in cultural unity. Cultural unity is none other than Indonesian national culture, formulated by some people as the summits of cultures originating from the regions. <sup>2)</sup>

May be the painters trying to search for national identity in their works through sources of tradition they have scavenged will consider the selected sources as summits needing to be unified.

For Harsono, resisting a mainstream in visual arts at that time may be easier to understand, at least internally within the environment of the artist themselves. But how this resistance was prevented from becoming an exclusive resistance or a pseudo-intellectual, for example, is a question nevertheless important to be asked. At least, how the resistance can be meaningful and can be understood by the society? Even though these thoughts generally does not exist among the resisters and innovators, Harsono’s questions will spark a further debate on the relations of art and society.

If the resistance of art and artists have a social rationality, how would this rationality be understood by society that they imagined? In other words, would the rationality of resistance in the arts – to certain level – will also consider the society’s rationality and take it into account?

As an artists in a such a situation, FX Harsono seems to be struggling to formulate his own thoughts. He writes in a short essay – his first – about two basic patterns of thinking in Indonesia’s visual art development he and his friends have proposed.

Their two basic thinking was first, the search for stagnation of Indonesia’s “dependent, unqualified” and “identity-less” visual arts. The second way of thinking is the concern to yield new works that never existed in Indonesia.

Both ways of thinking that tends to be the base of the movement and the reason of development believed by GSRB according to Harsono contains danger. The first danger is the excessive obsession for tendency of conceptualism or intellectualism for the sake of bringing up something new. The second danger is newness for the sake of newness itself (this certainly is one of the tendency in avantgard-ism), that never brings advantage unless an aspiration of improvement “to leave the old”, and “push themselves to keep up with other nations’ visual arts”.

In Harsono’s thoughts, by observing, integrate and criticize both ways of thinking and became a new consciousness (both for the artist as well as for a movement) the danger of being too ‘extreme’ can be avoided and will at last bring newness, not only with solid ground but also useful. <sup>3)</sup>

