

INDONESIA TODAY : TALKING CULTURE ABROAD THROUGH ART

Farah Wardani



Exhibition view of *Have We Met?* at the main gallery, The Japan Foundation Forum, Tokyo.

By the end of last year, December 2004, three Indonesian art events were held in foreign countries – in this case across Asia-Pacific areas in particular. All three display a number of artworks – mostly have been presented before in previous exhibitions locally – of today's Indonesian contemporary artists, many of them relatively are still of young age. What follows is a summary of the author's conversations with a number of related sources on what and how the events were being done.

At Sichuan Art Museum, China, 10-24 December 2004, Edwin's Gallery in cooperation with Hanart Gallery and Coutts Bank held an exhibition of Indonesian contemporary paintings, titled *Equatorial Heat*. Curated by Enin Suprianto, this exhibition is thrown in a relatively great scale, presenting 58 works of 21 Indonesian artists: Heri Dono, Agus Suwage, Ugo Untoro, S.Teddy D, Samuel Indratma, Eko Nugroho, I Nyoman Masriadi, Rudi Mantofani, Febri Antoni, Adi Kaniko,

Agapetus AK, F Sigit Santoso, Sugijo Dwiwarso, Budi Ubrux, Budi Kustarto, Indra Widiyanto, Sekar Djatiningrum, Bunga Jeruk, Ay Tjoe Christine, Ayu Arista Murti and Astari Rasjid.

According to the organizer, Edwin Rahardjo, the exhibition which was successfully attended by 500 audiences in the opening night, is meant as an effort to present many sides of this country's contemporary art development, especially after the reformation period.

In his curatorial introduction, Enin Supriyanto briefly describes the chronology of Indonesian art history, particularly focusing on the socio-political function and position of art and artists, which then culminated in the period of 1997-2000, where there was a 'political art' euphoria that eventually became a kind of a trend in itself until it finally wore off not long afterwards. The works selected here are the ones made after that period up to the latest.

Through this exhibition, it is expected that the audiences in China can obtain significant references and information on Indonesian paintings of today as well as the artists. Apart from that, it can also be seen as a kind of 'exchange' towards the many art events of Chinese artists in Indonesia recently.

Not long after the opening of *Equatorial Heat*, in another part of the earth, further down in the southern hemisphere, the exhibition *TRANSINDONESIA – Scoping Culture in Contemporary Indonesian Art* was opened at Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth, New Zealand. The exhibition that was started on 18 December is still running until 27 February. It is held after an initiative of Govett-Brewster Art Gallery with a number of art institutions in New Zealand, inviting Indonesian curator Rifky Effendy, in collaboration with local curator Greg Burke. The premise of this exhibition is in fact not much different with *Equatorial Heat*, an attempt to present a representation of various phenomena and developments in the Indonesian contemporary culture. What makes it more different is the broader range of medium in the selected works, from paintings, photography to new media like video art. The selection comprises the works of Heri Dono, kelompok seniman EAT, Iswanto Hartono, Mohammad Iqbal, Angki Purbandono, Agus Suwage, Titarubi and Valentijn Gabriel Van Dijk (Tino Djumini).

According to Rifky, international art audiences and appreciators like the ones in New Zealand are highly interested in knowing more of the latest developments of Indonesian contemporary art practice nowadays, including the cultural issues and artistic explorations, especially related to the new generation and the connection with technology and social cultural changes. As can be seen in the works displayed, the characteristics of the visual explorations of the artists' works no longer dwell in the matter of 'political activism' or illustrations

of crisis like what had been often conducted in the reformation era. Rather, they display various reflections of changes, from medium, ideas, thoughts, social formations, questions of existing esthetics and also the shifting values within society in transition.

Meanwhile, a not much different effort but done in a smaller, yet unique format was done in Tokyo, Japan, held at the Japan Foundation Forum from 11 December to 30 January this year. The Japan Foundation invited four art practitioners from four Asian countries, namely Japan, India, Thailand, and Indonesia. Ade Darmawan, forerunner of Ruangrupa artists' initiative in Jakarta was chosen as the Indonesian representative. He collaborated with Haruko Kohno from Japan, Pooja Sood from India and Prabda Yoon from Thailand, in a curatorial project entitled 'Have We Met?', in which the idea-gathering process had been conducted in correspondence and residential format months before.

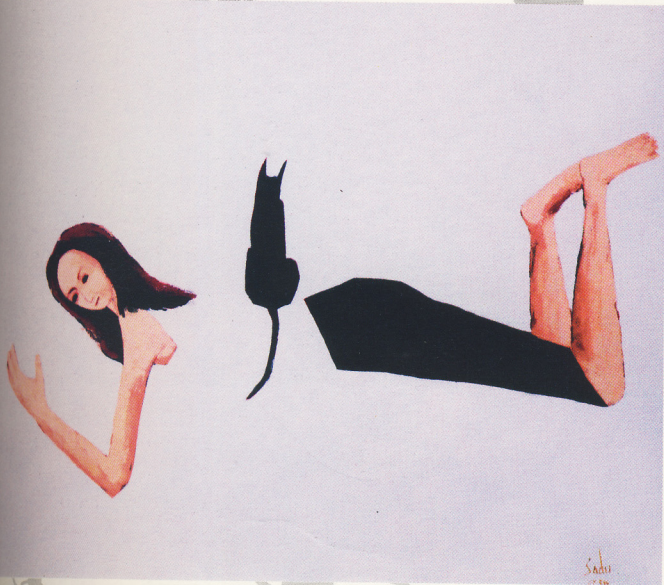
The process of exchanging ideas was done in a series of meetings in an 'old friends'

gathering ritual feeling. The title of 'Have We Met?' was taken from the four participants' impression of having a feeling like old friends who had met way before, apart from the fact that their four countries of origin are historically related. Ade and the three other curators set up a compilation of works that – for them – sufficiently reflects the most recent tendencies of the new generation of young artists' practices in the four countries. The works chosen are of the artists Eko Nugroho, Rudi Mantofani, Sigit Pius, Anggun Priambodo that are encountered with the works of the artists from the three other countries. The four works, according to Ade, are reflections of today's young artists' approach in articulating their world, which includes the relations with technology, responses toward economical fluctuations, subcultures and pop culture.

Looking at the growing numbers of Indonesian art exhibitions (in this case within the so-called 'contemporary art') abroad and also based on the initiatives of the institutions of the related countries, this can be seen as something to be proud

of. Visual art practice is one of the medium of socio-cultural representation that has potential to provoke thoughts and rich with aspects to be explored, as well as a part of historical documentation – the history of the art practice itself and the history of cultural changes.

For sure, this also has to be taken into critical account, noticing the fact that when speaking of representation it also relates to the problems of interest, different perspectives and the issue of identity politics. Yet, apart from that, another basic problem that has to be reconsidered is: seeing the highly-spirited initiatives of foreign institutions in taking visual art of this country to be seen by their society, what about the initiative from the local institutions to develop local infrastructure, from the government, let's say? [V]



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Wayan Sadu-Wayan Sumantra

O, Miracullum Diptera!

One galeri seni rupa

Jl. Panjang No. 46, Kebon Jeruk, Jakarta Barat 11530 Telp. 021-5321267 Fax 021-5321269 Email: onegallery@yahoo.com