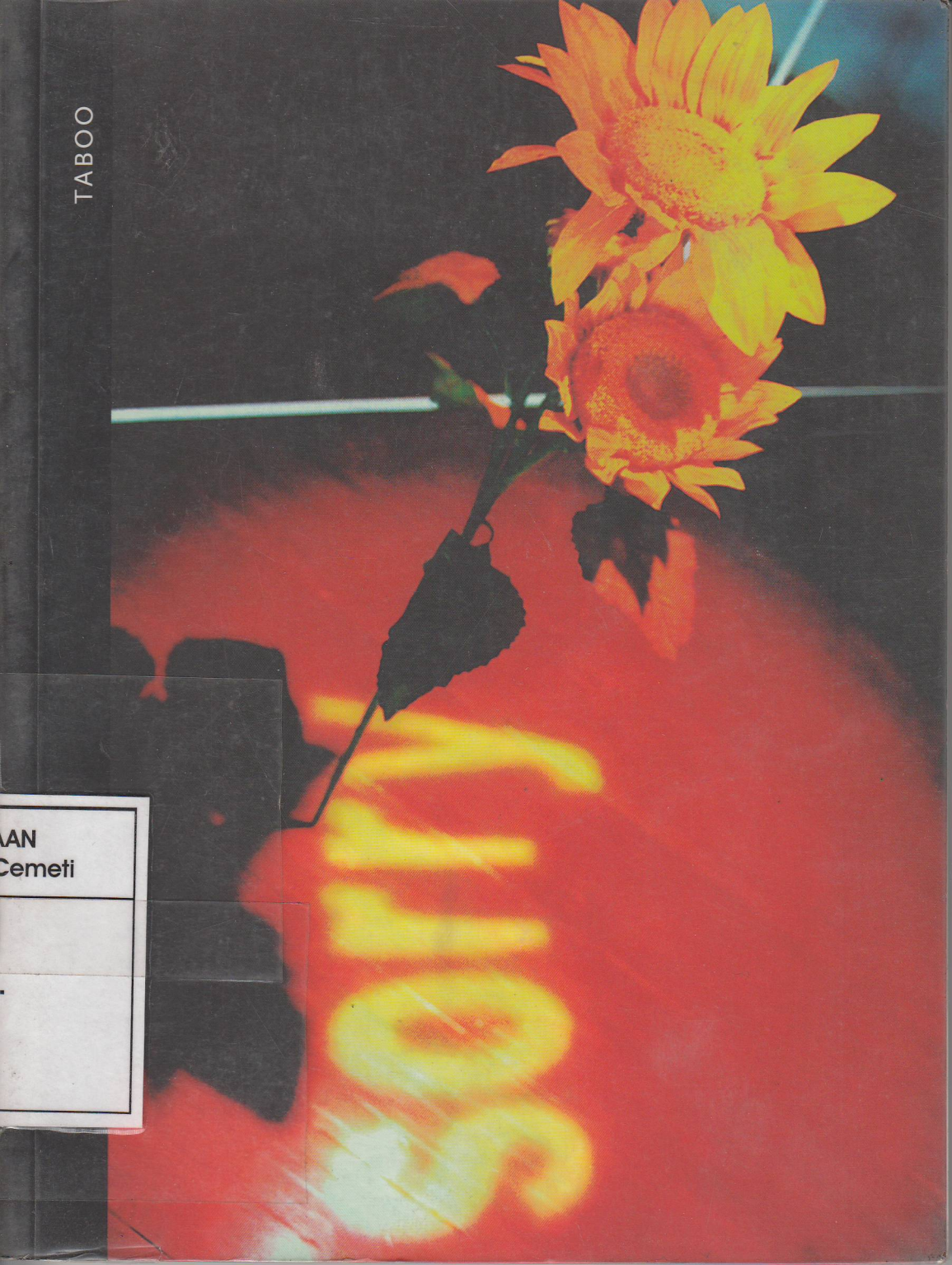


TABOO

AN  
Cemeti



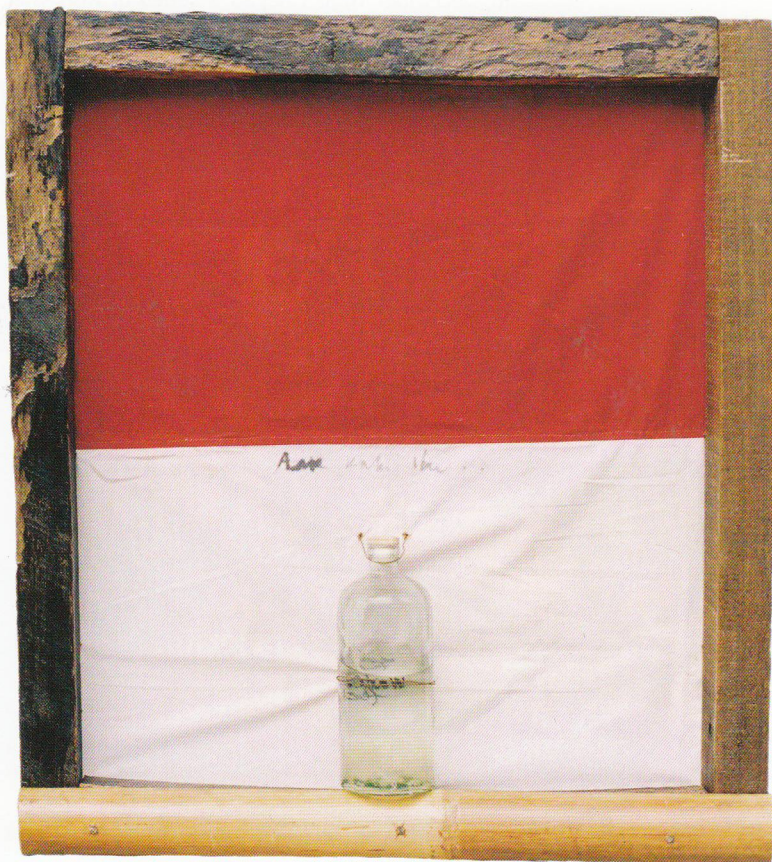
no stranger to making political statements through his art, is also one of the few artists who make direct reference to his Muslim faith, its spirituality, rituals, and acts of devotion. These are often directly articulated in his work, both to admonish and to help heal human transgressions against humanity itself.

Consisting of such simple elements as discarded and singed wood, bamboo, the Indonesian national flag, and a bottle of water, *Air Kaki Ibuku* marks the beginning of a long process and a series of works that Tisna has translated into a variety of media during the last decade (fig. 3). In the following edited excerpt, Tisna explains *Air Kaki* and his philosophy behind the overall project:

Violence in the history of the world, and recent cases such as what has taken place in Dili (East Timor), Situbondo, Tasikmalaya (Kalimantan), Ujung Pandang (South Sulawesi), Medan (N. Sumatra), Banjar Masin, as well as violence in America, Palestine, Bosnia, everywhere... for me, denies the relationship between human beings, nature, God, and the soul. [Those who carry out] violence in any form, have forgotten the essence of human existence: *pengabdian* [dedication and devotion on both a spiritual and humanitarian level].

According to my family's tradition, one way of articulating one's *pengabdian* is through the obligatory washing of our feet while praying.<sup>4</sup>

My mother advised me to never to forget to pray, to always practice ritual cleansing, especially the final part which is the washing of the feet. She



CAT. 1

TISNA SANJAYA

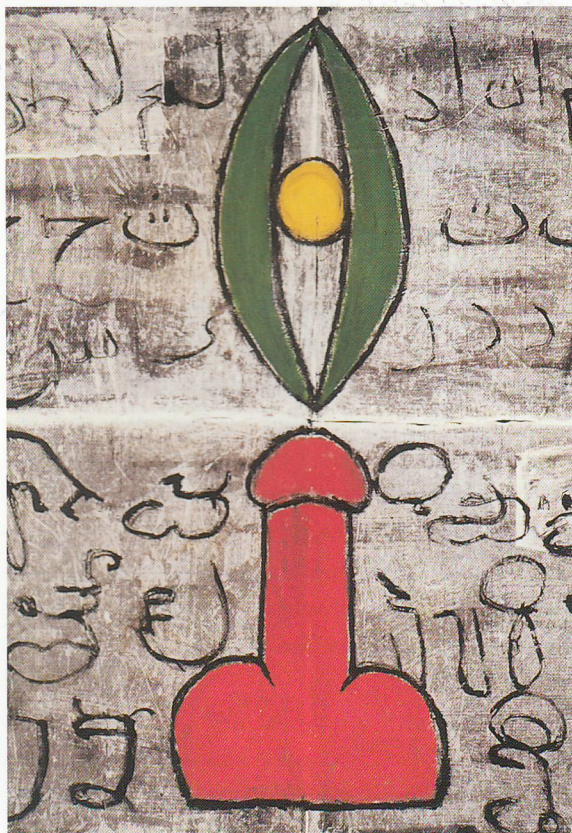
*Air Kaki Ibu*, 1996

Wood, bamboo, water, glass bottle, and  
Indonesian national flag

80 x 70 cm

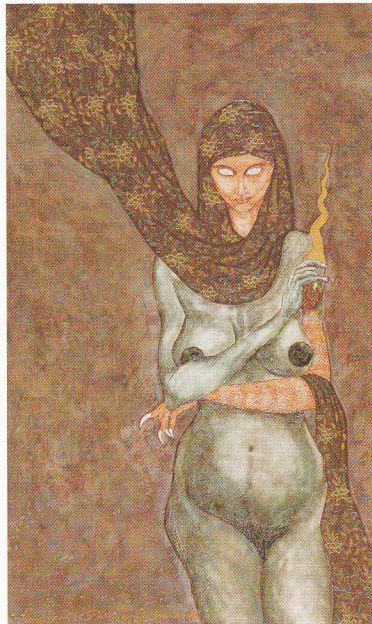
Courtesy of the artist

FIG. 36  
ARAHMAIANI  
*Linga/Yoni*, 1994  
Oil on canvas  
Courtesy of  
the artist



the color of decay, and eyes staring out at the viewer yet empty – wears a flowing and floral piece of cloth traditionally worn by Muslim Javanese women as a head covering. Her arms cross over her chest below heavy breasts. Her stomach protrudes as if pregnant. Her left arm is that of a demonic animal. Questions of gendered bodies and absence pivot around not only the nude female body, but also the absence of the male body represented symbolically in the form of the *kris*, or dagger, that is held in the woman's right hand. In Javanese culture, the *kris* is thought not only to consist of supernatural forces of the universe, but to be those very forces incarnate, and possession of such power belongs to the domain of Javanese patriarchy. According to legend, the first *kris* was created

FIG. 40  
LAKSMI  
SHITARESMI  
*Cheater/Pengecoh*,  
2000  
Mixed media  
on canvas  
125 × 75 cm  
Collection of  
Dr. Oei Hong Djien



from the severed penis of the founder and first king of the great Javanese kingdom of Majapahit. Traditionally associated with male sexual and spiritual power and sexuality, it serves as a surrogate for the absent male in idea and physical form.<sup>98</sup> In this constellation of signifiers, who or what is the cheater: the woman herself, an absent man present in the *kris*, or a hypocritical woman who wears the veil but whose body belies such outward signs of piety?

In this exhibition, *Presiden 2003* (2003) (cat. 16) shows Laksmi's recent work which marks a more optimistic shift. This painting also represents her political and spiritual hopes for the future in the guise of *Ratu Adil*, or "Just Ruler." The concept of *Ratu Adil* is centuries old and refers again to Javanese syncretism in its reference to Hindu concepts of a just king who is both god incarnate and messianic warrior. *Ratu Adil* descends to the earthly realm at the end of the *Zaman Edan*, or the time of madness, a period in which overall social chaos, spiritual and religious entropy, amorality, and corruption reaches its peak. The Javanese *Ratu Adil* finds its mirror image in the Islamic messianic concept of *Al-Mahdi* or *Imam Mahdi* ("The Awaited One").<sup>99</sup> Javanese-Muslim beliefs in *Ratu Adil/Al-Mahdi* historically have inspired popular people's movements against those in power (especially during the colonial era).<sup>100</sup> This is because as the Just and Ideal leader, the messianic figure puts an end to amoral human acts, and brings the world and human existence into *Tata Tentrem Karta Raharjo*, the ideal and future world of harmony, prosperity, and social justice.<sup>101</sup>

*Presiden 2003*, as a representation of a contemporary *Ratu Adil/Al-Mahdi*, comprises a complex layering of symbols in the form of a multiarmed figure that is



CAT. 16  
LAKSMI SHITARESMI  
*Presiden 2003*, 2003  
Acrylic on canvas  
190 x 145 cm  
Collection of  
Dedy Kusuma

at once animal, human, and messianic savior. The head is in the form of a goat, referring to the Year of the Goat according to the Chinese horoscope. The Year of the Goat is an auspicious one that portends good fortune. The standing figure also refers to Hindu religious statuary in which the various attributes associated with the deity manifest cosmic powers in the material world. These attributes are commonly depicted as material objects in the physical world held simultaneously in arms divided into symmetrical multiples of two – 2, 4, (not 6), 8, or 10. Yet, according to her own iconography, Laksmi has added an eleventh arm, perhaps as a way of moving such an image out of its religious context and into personal fantasy. Each hand holds objects symbolic of the various powers in the possession of the ideal leader, such as the ability to enact just and humane laws, bring spiritual and material prosperity to society through wisdom and sound economic judgment free of corruption, protect the nation from external and internal dangers, and to see and hear the plight of the people.<sup>102</sup>

*Presiden 2003* presents another perspective of Indonesian society, politics, and religion during uncertain times. However, in this case, salvation is not found from within society but from outside society as an absolute Rule of Law responsible for cleansing all of the world's ills, as if human beings are children who have been thrust out of Eden, and have created hell on earth.



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