CHAPTER FOUR

SENI PEMBERONTAKAN - THE ART REBELLION IN THE 1970S

In this chapter, I am interested in pemberontakan or rebellion as a crucial mechanism in the development of contemporary art in Indonesia. [...] sections edited out] In most discussions of the period, the written discourse is largely ignored except for decontextualized quotes that travel from one text to another like floating topoi. While not completely ignored, the ideas expressed in these texts generally have been underrepresented in the standard versions of art history of this period. [...]

Artists engaging in the rebellion, and calling for reforms within arts education were participants in the debate over national cultural identity and art’s role in its construction. They did not reject the idea of a national culture, but rather, borrowing from John Clark regarding an Asian avant-garde’, entered into the ongoing ideological debate “about the authority to choose what is relevant to a local discourse’s needs” (1998, 225).

Desember Hitam and the discourse of the Pesta Seni 74

Throughout this dissertation, I have pointed to the important role that institutions play in forging and disseminating official aesthetic and standards of ‘serious’ and ‘good’ art, distinguishing art that serves the good of the nation and that which does not, and that instills notions of artistic freedom and responsibility. One of the primary means of disseminating a New Order ‘art of living’ [discussed in previous chapter] was the institution of the Pameran Besar Seni Lukis Indonesia (The Grand Painting Exhibition of Jakarta), organized by the DKJ and held at TIM [explained in Chapter1].
The second *Pameran Besar* was held between 18 and 31 December, 1974, as part of the larger *Pesta Seni '74* (Art Festival '74) that also encompassed the annual art seminar, *Seni Rupa Indonesia Masa Kini* (Art in Indonesia Today), and the annual Literary Congress. 81 artists participated, with 240 painting and sculptural works in all. At base, the Grand Exhibition was two exhibitions in one; the works by older or senior artists, including former and current members of the DKJ, were exhibited in one space separate from those of artists younger than 36 years of age. Among the younger artists were recent graduate and ASRI tutor, Nyoman Gunarso (1944), and ASRI students Bonyong Munni Ardhe (1946), FX Harsono (1949), Hardi (1951), Nanik Mirna (1951), Siti Adiyati (1951), and Sudarisman (1948). These younger artists exhibited collages and other forms of mixed media that did not neatly fit into the conventional category of painting (Figure 4.1).

![Figure 4.1 View of ‘unconventional’ work by unknown artist, Pameran Besar, silk screened prints on canvas and wooden box, 1974. Illus. in Taman Ismail Marzuki 25 Tahun.](image)

While such types of work had already been exhibited in lesser venues (not many) and at TIM, it had yet to gain acknowledgment in an exhibition designed to represent national artistic identity. In the eyes of the establishment students were *belum matang* (not yet mature)
artistically. Mature artists make serious art, and serious art is good art; good art follows established rules of painting and sculpture. The DKJ jury dismissed the work of the younger artists as mere experiment for experiment’s sake, *main-main* (child’s play, not serious), too reliant on current foreign trends, and hence did not meet the criteria of what signifies as good art for a national exhibition. […]

On closing day ceremonies (31 December), the five participating ASRI students joined nine other participants in staging the *Desember Hitam* (Black December) protest. They sent a funeral wreath to the awards ceremony that read “Ikut berduka cita atas kematian seni lukis kita” (condolences on the death of Indonesian painting). They also attempted to hand out their *Pernyataan Desember Hitam* (Black December Proclamation) bearing each of their signatures before they were forced out of the room.¹ Little attention has been paid to the importance of the list of signatories or to the statement’s overall rhetoric, and this in relation to the larger ongoing discourse against New Order aesthetics. Aside from the ASRI students and recent graduates, the list of signatories of the Black December Pronouncement consisted of poets, writers, and theater playwrights and actors. Filmmaker and painter, D.A. Peransi (1939-1993), was also among the first membership of the DKJ. From artists’ statements after the fact, it is likely that the ASRI students did not necessarily have a hand in writing the entirety of the *Pernyataan* and some claim that they did not really grasp the meaning or ramifications of what they were signing.² Regardless, they were willing participants in a much larger protest.

The *Pernyataan* read:

Remembering that for some time now, art and cultural activities have been carried out without a clear cultural strategy, we therefore draw the conclusion that those entrepreneurs in cultural art (pengusaha seni budaya) who produce high culture show not even the slightest insight into the most fundamental problems of our culture. This is a sign that a spiritual erosion has for many

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² Interview with Bonyong, August, 2002, Yogyakarta.
years been destroying the development of cultural art. Because of this, we therefore feel it necessary in this black month of December of 1974 to declare our stand regarding the apparent tendencies in recent forms of painting in Indonesia.

1) That the diversity in painting in Indonesia is something that cannot be denied. However, such an array does not in itself demonstrate a good development.

2) That for a type of development that would ensure the perpetuation of our culture, painters are called upon to bring spiritual guidance that is grounded in values of humanism, and oriented toward the social, cultural, political and economic realities of life.

3) That creativity is a God given nature of painters, who must take the necessary steps to achieve new perspectives of Indonesian painting.

4) That with this, the identity of painting in Indonesia is in itself clear in terms of its existence.

5) That which has hindered the development of Indonesian painting for far too long is the obsolete concepts that are still adhered to by the ‘establishment’, by entrepreneurs in culture, and already established artists. For the sake of saving Indonesian painting it is time to give our respects to this establishment, namely to bid farewell to those who were once engaged in the battle for cultural art (reproduced in Hasan 1992, Appendix 5). 

In most writings that deal with the art rebellions of the 1970s, the above Pernyataan is usually taken as given, particularly as an indictment of the lack of a clear cultural strategy in the development of Indonesian modern art that was ‘too reliant on Western models’.

[...]

The sentiment behind Pernyataan was one of dissent that had been brewing in the art world for the past few years. On the other hand, it echoes ideas about art and artist that demonstrate a line of continuity with past sentiments regarding the relationship between the artist as individual ‘creator’ and art’s social mission, as well as the modern artist’s relationship to traditional culture and hierarchies.

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3 For the Indonesian version of Pernyataan, see Appendix I.

4 Jim Supangkat, for example, typically isolates this passage as forerunner to the sentiments put forward by the GSRB.
Such ideas and counter-arguments were reflected in the seminar “Seni Lukis Indonesia Masa Kini” (Indonesian Painting Today) held in conjunction with the Pameran Besar on 21 December, ten days prior to the Desember Hitam event. The main theme of the seminar was the question of what signifies as ‘Indonesian’ art, the major obstacles in achieving it, and the problem of Westernization of the art field (Dewan Kesenian Jakarta 1974, 171-213). A primary argument put forward was that an Indonesian artistic identity was greatly in doubt, largely because of a persistent colonization of an Indonesian art history too influenced by Western art history and expectations of Modernism, and an imbalanced support for ‘high’ traditional cultural forms. This condition excluded many forms of cultural production that would otherwise give substance and sustainability to an ‘Indonesian’ art.

It would seem that the Desember Hitam, and later manifestations discussed below, reflects many of the themes put forward in that seminar, most particularly those broached by American trained (MA and PhD) ITB faculty member, Sujoko, in his presentation Kita juga Punya Romantic Agony (We too have Romantic Agony). I read his argument against ‘romantic agony’ in conjunction with his earlier remonstrations of modern art in Indonesia in “Masalah-Masalah dalam Seni Modern Indonesia” (Problems in Modern Art in Indonesia). In this piece, he argues that there had yet to be a modern Indonesian art because it demonstrated little relation to the cultural reality lived by most Indonesians at the time; a population that was still largely small rural or kampung communities. Accordingly, an ‘authentic’ Indonesian art was that which was lived, produced and enjoyed by the masses of people in these highly diverse, yet collective, communities throughout the nation.

The same is true in “Romantic Agony”, in which Sujoko derides what had become a romanticized overblown idea of artist, yet also supported the recuperation of the lower class

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5 This article was published shortly after the Jakarta seminar in the culture journal Budaya Djaya, VIII, No. 81 (1975), 192-203, and was repeated in a presentation at ASRI the following month. "Nilai budaya Indonesia sebagai sumber inspirasi" (Indonesian cultural values as a source of inspiration) was the topic of discussion organized to accompany ASRI’s 25 year anniversary celebrations.
traditions. Here, he accuses artists of arrogance, of feeling themselves superior in sensibility and therefore ‘needed by society’. In expressing one’s own personal emotions and in styles difficult for anyone but an elite class to understand, artists placed themselves above society itself. Such self-interest placed the artist in the position of guide and teacher to the ignorant rather than the artist guided by the needs and interests of society. Traditional art, on the other hand, was more egalitarian and, therefore, should serve as the basis of an ‘Indonesian’ art. He qualifies the site of ‘the traditional’ when he argues that it is not enough to refer to the most agung or noble forms of the court traditions often cited as the site of Indonesian values and championed as ‘official’ culture. Art had a function only if it was contextual. Sudjoko calls for in-depth research about traditions that are typically denigrated, belittled or ignored by the dominant aesthetics as a way of developing cultural values which have a mental, intellectual, spiritual, and ethical ‘Indonesian’ character.

As will be shown in the remainder of the dissertation, such ideas were never resolved and often resurfaced in a number of artistic projects and discussions, especially in the ideas expressed in the manifesto of GSRB [explained earlier in Dissertation and further analyzed in this chapter].

Sujoko’s position requires further differentiation in that it is embedded in the long-standing ideology of social egalitarianism underscored above [previous chapter], as well as represents a kind of neo-traditionalism. Sujoko’s traditionalism, itself the product of modernity, is not one that assumes the museumized forms of the past but traditions that are just as much a part of Indonesian modernity as the modern artist. Referring to what he frames as traditional notions of ‘art’, art was a skill not an object. In this sense, Sujoko’s attempts to reposition discussions of art beyond content or style that are indelibly linked to Western traditions. […]

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7 For a discussion of this traditional idea of art as skill in regards to Sujoko’s concept of egalitarian artistic production, see Moelyono, "Sebuah Proses Seni Rupa Kagunan (a Process of Kagunan Art)," Dialog Seni Rupa 5 & 6.11 (1991).
Certain aspects of Sujoko’s arguments regarding rethinking ‘Indonesian’ art, artist and art history did appear to have a perceptible impact on some artists involved in the growing dissent against institutions. It would seem, however, that they were reluctant to see themselves included in his accusations of artistic ‘romantic agony’. This is implied in the *Pernyataan Desember Hitam*, proclaimed ten days after the seminar, in which the artist takes a singularly central position as one with a ‘God given calling’ to bring spiritual renewal to the art world that had stagnated under the jealous guardianship of an older generation and the commercialization of art and cultural production. In this, the *Pernyataan* demonstrates continuity with a romanticized notion of artist rearticulated pejoratively by Sujoko.

Certain elements of *Pernyataan* also point to D.A. Peransi’s own philosophy of art and artist as a correction to modern art’s ills that he formulated by as early as 1972/73 in which he does not forfeit the role of artist as creator. Among the members of the Black December protest, Peransi was the only one [double check] that had already served as one of the first generation of DKJ members. He also was one of the presenters alongside Sudjoko in the Seni *Lukis Indonesia Kini* seminar. In his presentation, “Lee? Levi? Amco? Texwood?,” he advocates a return to the spiritual foundations of artistic creativity over and against the dehumanizing demands of the still developing art market and the instrumentalization of human creativity by the forces of modernity and capitalism. An abstract painter and (later) documentary film maker, and trained in both Indonesia and the Netherlands in philosophy and social theory, Peransi borrows certain key themes of the Frankfurt School’s distrust of the democratization of art and the erosive force of the cultural industry on art. In this regard, he maintains a fundamental opposition between art

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8 His presentation repeats much of what he argues in his exhibition catalogues and newspaper articles between 1973 and 1974. See also his seminar paper given at the 1975 seminar for the Biennale entitled "Merasa Aman dengan apa yang Sudah ada Adalah Ancaman Bagi Kebudayaan [Feeling Secure with what already is is a Threat to Culture]"
and rationality, between the ‘serious’ artist and the ‘entrepreneur’.\(^9\) Peransi, at least in his writings on painting, gives little or no attention to the socio-political or socio-economic issues in art or art’s social mission.\(^10\)

From the above, we can see a connection between his philosophy of art and certain aspects of past conceptions of art and artist. He, like the artists and poets involved in *Gelanggang* [explained in other section of Dissertation], believed the aesthetic way of thinking was a counter and even corrective to what he perceived as an increasing functionalism in Indonesian society. Regarding *Gelanggang* literature, art was seen as “best suited to strengthen the position of the individual in society and counterbalance the impact of technology, rigid norms, and power structures” (Heinschke 1996, 152). Peransi’s aesthetic approach and that declared in the *Desember Hitam Pernyataan* argue that the artist’s spiritual calling is to rectify such a situation. This places the artist in a superior position in which the creative process is paramount.

Similar to arguments put forward in Peransi’s writings, the artist as singular creator with a God given calling is given a high degree of moral authority in *Pernyataan*.

[…]

The spiritual and moral calling of the artist should not be taken as a claim confined to the aesthetic sphere, but as also tapping into a rich tradition in Indonesian activism. However, with New Order assumptions of limited artistic freedoms under an enforced ‘autonomy’, artist-as-

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\(^9\) By that time, the art market was beginning to develop beyond primarily a tourist trade and governmental commissions. It was not until the 1970s, with the opening up of the national economy to foreign capital, and the emergence of large private corporate bodies, that a shift in patronage began to take shape from state and state institutions as the primary patron to an emerging middle class collecting and private galleries attached to banks and hotels.

\(^10\) This is somewhat puzzling as Peransi trained as a documentary filmmaker in the Netherlands, and most of his films dealt with controversial subjects such as corruption and politics. However, in his discussions of painting and his conception of his own art, he takes a fairly opposite view, arguing that art should be nothing other than the product of pure spontaneity.
moral-conscience had to be reinvented ideologically and formally, using different modes of representation.

**New Tradition of Dissent in ASRI**

There was little repercussion for the artists who were not students at the time for their participation in staging Desember Hitam. This was in stark contrast to the fallout regarding the ASRI students’ participation. Beyond the reality of academic censure and expulsions, the fact that the Governor of Jakarta and the Ministry of Education and Culture got involved meant that this was perceived as a national and potentially disruptive matter: “artists should not associate themselves or their work with such socio-political issues. These should be left to the ‘experts’. Combining art and politics is a dangerous thing to do” (Staff 1975).

Governmental involvement reflected a more significant distrust of student group behavior outside of campus. As Indonesian sociologist, Arief Budiman (1976) explains, with the New Order and the rapid changes and improvements in education, mahasiswa or ‘students’ were no longer considered as traditional pemuda (youth activist(s)) in their revolutionary role. Instead, they served as future intelligentsia poised to take up the mantel of kekuatan moral or moral force, “with the express desire to participate in reaching the nation’s goals” (Budiman 1976, 57-58). As a moral force, students saw themselves as a critical voice responsible for revealing social injustices and corruption as part of working with the government to advance the nation.

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11 The students’ actions were condemned as kurang sopan, kurang ajar, and tidak biadab (uncivilized). While these adjectives literally mean that their actions were rude and ignorant, they have a deeper meaning in Javanese society to categorize the actions of a person as tidak diajab or acting in an arbitrary and uncivilized manner. It denotes a person who is too immature or not yet ‘formed’ enough to know their proper place in society and, hence, cannot act accordingly for the sake of social harmony.

12 Supposedly quoting Ali Alibasyah in a public statement. Alibasyah led the committee responsible for interrogating the students, as the Rector of ASRI. At the time, he also held a post in the Directorate General of Culture within the Ministry of Education and Culture, and was a member of the DKJ-TIM, as well as was one of the artists awarded prizes in the Grand Painting exhibition in question. Not only was he called to Jakarta to answer for the students’ actions, the Ministry of Education and Culture was sent to the ASRI campus to underscore the government’s policy.

This was a cornerstone of the Angkatan 66 mandate [explained in another chapter of Dissertation].

At first, the government welcomed such activities. However, while initially the New Order state provided a semblance of economic, social, and political confidence, by 1972/73 student criticism against development policies and corruption had increased. Such criticism culminated in mass demonstrations against perceived neo-colonial economic practices at first lead by students and which came to be called the Malari incident in Jakarta on January 15–16, 1974. After which, President Suharto ruled all student organizations disbanded and placed them under military jurisdiction. Student protests were still allowed, but not beyond the confines of the campus grounds and not in statements that went beyond the limits of ‘responsible’ political behavior established by the government. Students, artists, and intellectuals perceived this as direct political intervention in extracurricular activities and social activism. Asrul Sani, senior author and essayist, stated that this marked the end of “freedom to question and dialogue about the various social problems, and the voicing of opinions that differed from official evaluations” (Sani 1997, 690; see also, Yuliman 1986).

As an arm of government policy, the ASRI administration exercised the New Order government’s prerogative to set the limits of what can be said in public and how its students can

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14 Malari is an acronym for “malapetaka lima belas Januari”, or “the 15th of January disaster”. It was the culmination of weeks of mass student demonstrations in Jakarta and elsewhere against the visit of Japanese Prime Minister Kakue Tanaka. Similar protests took place in Malaysia as well. Such demonstrations were against the growing dominance of Japanese industry and economic power in Indonesia and Malaysia respectively. In Indonesia, at the height of the demonstrations, chaos had broken out leading to Japanese cars being torched and large scale looting. While the demonstrations were driven by students, they were eventually taken over by factory workers. The demonstrations led to several arrests and lengthy prison sentences for those thought to be the student instigators.


16 “kebebasan untuk mempertanyakan dan mengkomunikasikan pelbagai masalah sosial, dan mengemukakan pendapat yg berbeda dari penilaian resmi.”
say it. In the end, Harsono and Hardi were expelled, while Bonyong and Purnama were given six months probation after submitting letters of apology to the committee.\textsuperscript{17} Ardyati was immune from academic censure as she had already graduated by the time the committee handed down their judgment. However, this did not put an end to artistic dissent in and against the academy.

Prior to their involvement in \textit{Desember Hitam}, FX Harsono, Hardi, Bonyong Munni Ardhie, Siti Adiyati, and Nanik Mirna had already been part of a growing opposition on campus against dominant conceptions of art and the prevalence of lyrical abstract painting among its faculty and enforced in the curriculum. Students in general were attempting to rethink ideas of experience and its relation to the social fabric, and by extension art’s and artist’s social function. In this regard, they publicly called for the older generation to allow them to find their own points of reference in constructing their artistic identities, even if this meant turning their backs on the traditions of the past that for them as members of a younger generation had little relevance (See for instance Adiyati 1975).

\textsuperscript{17} Besides Alibasyah, the committee consisted of student representative Kadi, Abdul Kadir (the Director’s representative), Soedarso Sp (as lecturer), and Fajar Sidik (head of the painting dept.).
Before 1972, the five artists (Figure 4.3) had become one of the main groups driving the call for *pembaruan* or renewal and innovation in both thought and production of art, becoming the core “agents of debate and discussion” among ASRI students at the time (Sumartono 2000, 27). They were the main organizers of a student group on campus that had close connections with the literature students and lecturers, and other intellectuals from the Gajah Mada University (UGM) in Yogyakarta. Through this study club, they shared ideas and had access to books and ideas that the academy neither possessed nor taught. Many new ideas and recent trends in Western contemporary art circulated through the series of talks they organized on campus, for which they often invited Indonesian and foreign speakers (28). In addition, they acted as editors of the campus *Jurnal Seni.*
Between 1972 and 1974, they exhibited together under the name of *Kelompok Lima* (Group of Five) and *Pelukis Lima* (Five Painters). As a group, they did not develop a common style as much as a common attitude about art and artistic individuality. Harsono and Bonyong, for instance, worked toward the elimination of personal style, precluding individual expression and display of ‘talent’ by adopting geometric painting as a form of disinterested rationale. Hardi painted in a flat, comic book style, and in several of his works, he lampooned figures of authority by combining generic imagery of authority and/or national figures with sexual references in imagery and text. However, the group was yet unable to break away from conventional assumptions of the art object, particularly from the medium of painting itself. This is partly due to the overwhelming dominance of painting as a discipline in the art academy.

Four months following *Desember Hitam* and the subsequent expulsions, another group of ASRI students staged *Pameran Nusantara-Nusantara* (Exhibition of the Indonesian Archipelago-Homeland) at the Indonesian-Dutch foundation Karta Pustaka (24-29 March). Like their fellow *Desember Hitam|Kelompok Lima* cohort, they exhibited works of collage, montage, and other mixed media, while also mocking the established styles of their ASRI instructors. Their statement is also remarkably similar to that of the *Pernyataan Desember Hitam*, particularly in its suggestion that painting had sold out to the market (small though it was), producing “softly sweet, promotional, over-traditional, commercial, touristic, and watered down” painting of the Nusantara. Yet, the first sentence of the exhibition’s statement points to a key aspect of the New Order aesthetic regime that was also incorporated into ASRI’s mandate: “Nusantara (Indonesian archipelago)! The womb that once gave birth to an *adiluhung* culture” (quoted in Hartoyo 1975, 271).

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18 *As Lima Pelukis Muda*, they exhibited together three times between 1972 and 1974 in Solo, Surabaya, and Jakarta. This group had the support of a young art critic and faculty member at ASRI. He helped organize their last exhibition called *Pameran Seni Lukis 74*.

19 It was organized by Samikun, I Gusti Bagus Widjaja, Wardoyo, Kristianto, Sudarisman, Suatmadji, Augustinus Sumargo, and Agus Dermawan T.

20 The full statements reads:
Adiluhung is a part Sanskrit and part old Javanese concept, a form of noble sublime or original value. According to Hughes-Freeland (1997), adiluhung encompasses social institutions, thus suggesting the practice of art as a moral and ethical activity of an artist possessing a mature and halus or refined character. As such, not all objects or practices are considered adiluhung, but all adiluhung objects are considered or categorized as possessing a high status or ranking and are beautiful, thus morally correct. Adiluhung aspects of culture reside in the domain of ‘high’ culture, that is, a series of cultural values handed down by members of the dominant class (Hughes-Freeland 1997, 481). The objects of this class may change. One aspect of such an aesthetic is abstraction, which, in a figurative sense, is a matter of mediating the appearance of the ‘natural’ as a means of separating it from the real, from the baser senses, from the kasar (Florida 1995; Hughes-Freeland 1997; Pemberton 1994a). In other words, there is an expected

Nusantara! (Indonesian archipelago) It is the womb which once gave birth to a culture that is adiluhung. Nusantara is the mother of millions of human beings, lovers of that culture… Therefore, are these paintings the result of an old fashioned perception of civilization? Softly sweet, promotional, over-traditional, commercial, touristic, and watered down – is this a good thing? This is the painting of our Nusantara… [T]his is probably faulty thinking in our world of painting today; creativity has already been emasculated by erroneous advice and funneled through the very mouths of the ‘big influencers’ in this field. As we dim-wittedly accept this, what else can we do if that which is not dim-witted can find no place?


21 Hughes-Freeland borrows from Bourdieu in suggesting that adiluhung is the “aristocracy of culture”, a series of cultural values, and not objects, handed down by members of the dominant class. While the objects of this class have changed, the position of art retains its position as adiluhung in the domain of the dominant class. Hughes-Freeland’s analysis also suggests that objects considered adiluhung are high culture because their qualities are high and perfect, not because the form or medium in the way art itself is considered ‘high art’ and ceramics are ‘low art’. Things that today are categorized against art as craft may also be categorized as adiluhung. Things that are adiluhung are not necessarily or would not necessarily be categorized as art. Her analysis counters Supangkat’s notion that adiluhung encompasses only those practices thought ‘high’ as in ‘high art.’ Although adiluhung encompasses what might be considered art, it also includes practices that fit general class of tradition or custom. There are also non-art practices and objects that are not included in adiluhung such as daggers, cloth, and traditional marriage gifts.

22 In his study of Javanese court culture during the Dutch period and into the modern era, John Pemberton suggests that adiluhung is neither ancient nor essentially Javanese but a marker of the coming of modernity. According to Pemberton, adiluhung is a term arising from the colonial discourse of Javanese-ness which has more in common with Dutch codes of order and social control than with an ancestral legacy couched in the legendary past.
mimetic distance between the actual and the way it is signified. Hence, in this sense, abstract and decorative, or what in Indonesia is also frequently called *lyris* or lyrical painting, and certain modes of Western modernism, would be seen as amenable to such a dominant taste.

The very concept of *adiluhung* was written into the ASRI charter in 1967 (Tashadi and Sularto 1981). As a concept, it simultaneously describes the student’s moral responsibility and determines the standards by which works are to be judged. *Nusantara-Nusatara!* suggests that these high ideals are not only outdated but have been corrupted by the influence of a culture industry fueled by capitalism. It also comes dangerously close to insulting traditional aesthetic principles and by extension the taste of those who uphold them. As already pointed out, certain forms of traditional culture, namely Javanese court culture, were treated as something sacred during the New Order. To insult them was to insult the sanctity of a certain level of officialdom and national culture and identity. Although the exhibition took place off campus, it is perhaps not surprising that *Pameran Nusantara-Nusatara* ended badly in that Agus Dermawan T. was expelled from ASRI mainly for his writing of the exhibition’s introductory text.23

**Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru Indonesia (The Indonesia New Art Movement)**

From the above handful of events, we can see a pattern of dissent growing within the ASRI student community. It took up a number of themes and issues being discussed in the larger public and intellectual discourse discussed above. Bonyong and Harsono believe that this was the beginning of *Seni Rupa Baru* (New Art) or *SRB*, instigated by ASRI students and graduates, including themselves, who already knew and had experienced the risks of going against the tide.24 However, it can also be argued that different perspectives of a ‘new art’ were shared by and developed among other artistic communities in other cities at the time.

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23 After which, he was not very active making art, but went on to become one of Indonesia’s most respected art critics. For Dermawan’s version of these events, see Agus Dermawan T., "Yang Sempat Saya Catat, Sebelum Dan Sesudah Pagelaran Seni Rupa Baru, 1977," *Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru Indonesia*, ed. Jim Supangkat (Jakarta: Gramedia, 1979).

The art academy in Bandung also played a key role in the development of an alternative mode of artistic practice. Perhaps because of its traditionally more internationalist outlook and support for a Universalist approach to modern art, student experimentation with new aesthetic propositions was met with less antagonism from the ITB faculty than in ASRI. Initially overseen by abstract sculptors Gregorius Sidharta, Soegijo and Rita Widagdo, the experimental art course, established in 1974, was designed to give vent to the student’s desire to explore mixed media and other non-conventional practices that did not fit into the categories of seni rupa modern.

Bandung was also the site of the first so-called alternative art galleries. Decenta, a faculty cooperative gallery, was originally designed to showcase experimental graphic art, including the new media of silk screen. Galeri Pop Art Aktuil, later called Galeri Aktuil, was established in 1975 under the leadership of the late art critic and ITB faculty member Sanento Yuliman, and supported by the French Cultural Centre. However, such experimentation had not yet touched on the contentious issues associated with the dominant aesthetic regime of the New Order as did the ASRI dissent discussed above. Nor did it touch on socio-political issues that would become the hallmark of much of the later experimental or, more precisely in this context, alternative art.

With the assistance of Sanento Yuliman, the ASRI cohort involved with Desember Hitam, along with Martoyo Hartoyo (1943) (another ASRI graduate and Pameran Besar ’74 participant), joined like-minded ITB students Bachtiar Zainul, Pandu Sudewo, Prayinto, and Jim Supangkat in forming what they initially called the Kelompok Seni Rupa Baru (New Art Group). They would exhibit together four times between August 1975 and October 1979, three times at TIM. Over the course of its existence, the group lost members and took on others, such that by the fourth exhibition it consisted of 28 members. Although they did not call themselves Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru Indonesia (The New Indonesian Art Movement) or GSRB until their final

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25 Their first exhibition at TIM was restaged in Bandung in the Galeri Aktuil. Their 1977 exhibition was held at Balai Seni Rupa, Indonesia’s first museum of modern art. Sudarmadji, ASRI graduate, art critic, and supporter of the New Art, was its first director.
exhibition, I use this name throughout to refer to this specific group of artists as distinct from what would become a general *seni rupa baru* (new art) constellation of practices and attitude.

*GSRB* did not publish a type of manifesto until 1979, just when the group was ready to disband. Nonetheless, their *Lima Jurus Gebrakan Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru* (Five Lines of Attack of the New Indonesian Art Movement), published in the book *Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru*, delineate the group’s long held conceptions of the basis for a new ‘Indonesian’ art. Below is a brief summary of their Five Lines of Attack.²⁶

The boundaries between the different modern (Western) artistic fields and between traditional and modern are no longer relevant. Art is no longer separated into specializations, but instead exists as a ‘totality’ consisting of “visual elements which can be linked with elements of space, movement, and time. Art no longer possesses its own rules, but enters into a dialogue with the real world. Therefore, all activity which can be categorized in Indonesian art, although based on different aesthetics [are thus] considered legitimate as living art.”

If the divisions of aesthetic fields and between the traditional and modern are to be eradicated, then so too should the idea of artist as specialist be rejected as elitist. The artist as sole creator making art has become increasingly isolated even from the small group of elites who support it. Art should not be the sole domain of a certain group, nor based on the laurels of personal expression. Rather, it should be universal in its humanist concerns. Hence, “social

²⁶ For the Indonesian-language of this manifesto see Appendix 2. The fact that the manifesto consisted of five points begs discussion. In Javanese culture, the number five has many linked associations between the mundane and the sacred landscapes. The number is associated, for example, with the cardinal points (North, East, South, West and Nadir), each of which is associated with a particular color; each color is associated with a particular point of the harvest and human life cycles; each cardinal point, color, and cyclic phase have associations with the macrocosm of cosmological forces. In other words, the number five is something like a ‘perfect’ number of a cosmological map that has been inscribed onto the material world. It would be a stretch, however, to assume that the number five in the manifesto takes on these residual attributes. It should be noted, nonetheless, that the number five figures prominently in what is considered a balanced, and rhetorically and structurally correct, mode of argumentation in Javanese culture. It is perhaps this aspect of the number’s significance that has traveled in this particular case. See Th. G. Th. Pigeaud, "Javanese Divination and Classification," *Structural Anthropology in the Netherlands*, ed. P. E. de Josselin de Jong, Translation Series 17 (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1977 (1928)).
problems rather than personal emotions expressed through art should be the basis of a new Indonesian art.”

While rejecting illusionistic practices and emotional and gestural bases of art, GSRB also argue “there should be no limit to the possibilities of art and artistic exploration in artists discovering their own style, thus enriching the ‘style’ of Indonesian art.” This includes setting Indonesian artistic production within an indigenous framework, one built upon “the development of its own theories relevant to the situation in Indonesia, as well as the study of its own art history, rather than relying on imported texts.” In this way, Indonesian artists would not be dependent for their development and history on the West whose problems are not the same as those in Indonesia. So far, the Lima Jurus Gebrakan argues for ‘contextualist’ work similar to that envisaged by Sujoko above.

In the above, GSRB artists set themselves as the harbingers of a ‘new tradition’, a seni rupa baru or ‘new art’. It was a rejection of modernism and what it repressed. They rebelled against the elevation of traditional ‘high’ culture as the supposed sole basis of Indonesian culture. On the other hand, they also joined in the larger protest against what many saw as an over-reliance on Western categories and forms of modern art. Both issues must be tackled, according to the manifesto, if only by way of throwing them out altogether; thus allowing art to regain its ideal freedom from interference, yet also free to recuperate its social mission. In this regard, we cannot discount the role of Sudjojono’s conception of art [explained in an other section of Dissertation], allegedly without his romantic view of the artist as genius and as singularly important creative force in cultural production.

**Use of traditional or regional culture**

In response to the New Order cultural intent and as part of its consolidation of national culture and identity, many artists from every discipline during the 1970s engaged in what Hatley (1993) describes as an almost detached appreciation and appropriation of indigenous culture, taking
from it according to their own needs. Others, feeling that Indonesian modernism was alienated from and alienating to the public, sought deeper elements from within pre-modern court and local folk traditions that retained relevance and resonance for the times. Bodden (1997) and Foulcher (1978, 1990) also examine ways in which this invocation and appropriation of regional culture was often as a counter to that same hegemony, a counter narrative to the nation and its official contents. They separately contend that this was always from within the discourse of ‘Indonesian’ culture, and from a middle class position and understanding of social change. In many respects, this could include the GSRB, as their appropriation and engagement with certain elements of ‘traditional culture’ also signals the artist’s own ambivalent relationship to the processes of modernization and modernity, and all that this implies both socially and culturally.

Within GSRB, it seems that the ASRI cohort especially positioned themselves as antagonists to neo-traditionalism and an official idea of kelIndonesiaan (Indonesian-ness, national identity) that had been developing during the New Order. They felt the horizons of which had become quite narrow and that art was being manipulated by this. FX Harsono stated in interview that at the time, “tradition was upheld as the cultural apex of the past and the past was held up as sacred. In such an environment, experimental art, art not based on these traditions, had no place.”27 Siti Adiyati similarly argued that the younger generation no longer related to the ‘glorious’ past of the Javanese court traditions (Adiyati 1975). Instead, they wanted the right to seek out new traditions more in keeping with their own experiences. This does not mean that they dismissed traditional forms outright. GSRB artists engaged traditional culture by either elevating its populist roots or appropriating ‘high’ culture traditions in order to parody their meaning within official constructions of national culture.