

A New Perspective

By: Sanento Yuliman.

Creating a work of art for Muryoto Hartoyo is a form of 'play', an ordinary activity similar to any other such as breaking a couple of eggs in order to make *martabak* batter. Jim Supangkat, on the other hand, doesn't even make the work himself: he gets other people to do it. In this New Art Movement '75 exhibition there are many forms, many figurative qualities, that determine the works, that if not wholly then in significant parts, are created not by the artist, but by carpenters, toy factories, and even plastic and aluminum manufacturers.

Anyool Subroto doesn't hesitate in working earnestly and rigorously. Not only does he diligently attend to his "paintings", he also stubbornly avoids any signifier that may illustrate emotions and temperaments. Ris Purwana utilizes a soft colour palette that one usually finds evocative, but what stands out in the paintings is the arrangement of straight lines that cut through each other systematically. Pandu Sudewo: the clarity of a diagram by creating lines with equal thickness and in flat colours.

It seems that for these artists, a person may have ideas, and an idea may be of emotional value, but the process of creating the physical manifestation of the work of art does not necessarily have to be emotional. A person could obtain an 'emotional distance' between the process of producing an artwork and himself, or even this production could be placed in the hands of other people under the artist's instructions.

But if this is the case then a work of art is no longer the "jiwa ketok" (sound of the spirit) as Sudjojono conceives it to be.

According to this conception, a painting as the visible manifestation of the artist's soul means that a painting is made up of brushstrokes, scratches and marks that record the movements of the artist's hands, akin to the sensitive needle of a seismograph, noting down the temperaments and emotional tokens of the artist. A painting is the extension of handwriting and fingerprints (in clay sculptures), chiseling (wood), the motion of contours and areas; the creation of the delicate hands of the artist.

The soul becomes visible through the brushstrokes, Sudjojono said, unable to deny this. "Hij is de vinger afdruk van den dief" ("He is the fingerprint of the thief."), he even quoted the words of a poet. But the "young thieves" of the present day make use of a variety of techniques and do not leave behind the trace of a fingerprint.

Turning away from the artist's angle to that of the spectator, we come to think about how to observe a work of art as put forth by Basuki Resobowo in 1949, from the point of view of most, if not all artists. Looking at a painted pot is certainly different from looking at a real, concrete pot. In the painting, the pot turns into something else, into the arrangement of lines and colours that express a sense of unity. All concreteness dissolves. We are even asked to forget the concrete pot that we may touch: we must summon up a perceptual sensitivity and emotion subtlety, so that the lines and colours stir the depths of our feelings. The tactility of the pot, just like the tactility of the paint used in painting, disappears and transforms into a world of forms in the field of the canvas. An imaginary world with its own destinies and "natural laws" as is often said,

different to – and therefore distanced from – the concreteness of the objects in the real world. The work of art is concealed by the presence of the “unreal”, the “illusory”, the “imaginary”, or call it what you will.

Let us discard this talk about pots, and we will find a set of theories about “abstract” art that has developed since the 1960s. However, just as the artists from the period between 1940-60 did not in fact discard their “pots” – because, in any case, the meaning of art lies in the emotional responses one has towards one’s surrounding environment, from the sailboat to the seated lady, from the beggar to the negotiating guerillas, from human fate in general to more specific social situations, from an appreciation of nature to nightmares about chaos in the community – abstract art is certainly not totally free from any of these.

Abstract art, with all its experimental forms, increases our sensibilities and expands our observations, leading us to pay attention to the wealth of forms that nature bestows. If it is not people, animals or gardens that we are looking at, we perceive nature under a microscope. If not hills, trees and stones, we are able to perceive the richness of their textures, the cracks, mould, and various consequences of physical and chemical processes on the surfaces of things we find in nature. If not a view of natural landscape as seen from the earth, then we are able to view it from an airplane. If not stems, fruits, and leaves, then we are able to feel the growth, movements, and rhythms of life. All of these may evoke our emotional thoughts, for all our observations are rooted in our experiences as a living beings amidst nature.

But for all artists, from Persagi to abstract art, however varied the patterns of their relationships with their surrounding world are, however diverse the experiences they wish to express, one thing that they all do: objects, emotions, thoughts from real, concrete, experiences must be transformed into a world of forms, a poetry of forms, where anything and everything – pots and brushstrokes, sailboats and cracked, peeled, thick paint, human torso and wooden fibres – leave their tangibility, their concreteness, and morph into an imaginary world with its own powers, an imaginary or unreal world, or any other term we may use here. Even dense, concrete emotions that involve the body as well as physical acts, must transform into clear “aesthetic emotions”, into rhythmic forms, as experienced by an observer lost in a quiet, distant reflection. The observer forgets his concrete environment, focuses his attention to the imaginary world offered by the square area that hangs a few steps in front of him or a sculpture in a corner: keenly contemplating each line, each mark, every inch of the painting or surface of the sculpture, following its movements, its rhythms, their relations to one another, how these elements are bound by a main element and come to be unified as a whole. An adventure in a rich experiencing of forms, exciting and sublime. As if to emphasize the imaginary presence that is different to the real world that surrounds, a painting is limited by a frame. A sculpture isolates itself not only with its solid and closed form, but also with its rules and regulations, with its base, in order to underline the “unreal space” in which it lives.

A poetry of forms is the only experience of art that is offered by our paintings and our sculptures to this day. The Indonesian New Art Movement Exhibition '75 shows a clear tendency to escape this tradition.

Towards the sublime experiences of forms, where each scratch and each mark are the transformation or evocation of emotions, the participants of this exhibition offer identical units arranged in a tight system or even individual objects, which results in the redundancy of close and detailed observations. It is absurd, for instance, to scrutinize the seams and creases of Harsono's plastic objects, or to examine the details in Munni Ardhi's windows, or every span of a hand of Jim Supangkat's sculpture or Nanik Mirna's cross. It is also futile to follow each part of Ris Purwana's geometric composition or Muryoto Hartoyo's slots, or to contemplate every lane of colour in Anyool Subroto's work, for they are all the same.

Towards "unreality", the illusions of an artistic experience, they offer concrete objects.

If Anyool does not painting "anything" at all, does not even aim to stir up emotions, then he creates two-dimensional objects. Colours are used in order to unleash physical effects: to shake up our optics. If Bachtiar Zainoel uses aluminum sheets, rolls of wire cords among other things, pressing them and pulling them, tearing them apart to put them back together, he does not aim to transform it into something else: the physicality of these materials, the physical properties attached to them, become more striking. In his own words: creating things out of things.

But that is also the case with Muryoto Hartoyo, creating things out of things.

Are we able to say, that in this exhibition we are being introduced to a new experience of art where *the emotion towards concreteness* is a basic aspect that subsumes the quality of that experience, creating a different experience, in a qualitative way, with a more "conventional" experience of art? Some of the artists involved here "play" with this sentiment about concreteness, mixing it up with other "conventional" elements, as if aiming to shock us with that concreteness and making it even bolder. This is so with, for instance, the concreteness of the bookshelves in Hardi's painting, or the mailbox in Munni Ardhi's work. Other works like Harsono's "Plastic gun, Plastic flower in a Plastic bag", or the fake moon and arrow in Nanik Mirna are "real objects". We are even able to enter "The Bedroom of a Woman and Her Child" by Jim Supangkat. Siti Adyati places the exhibition space and its visitors inside her work, by using a mirror.

What does this business about objects and concreteness mean? Isn't the prerequisite for "an experience of the arts", "an artistic experience", or "an aesthetic experience" is to create a distance from concreteness, to create "disinterestedness" (Immanuel Kant), "physical distance" (Edward Bulloch)?

Perhaps, an experience of art given by "conventional" artworks, an experience alienated inside the "inner world" of imagination and reflection, appears pale and anemic to these young artists. Perhaps we are witnessing the beginning of a new art practice that provides us not with an imaginary experience that we ponder from a distance, but an experience that engages our bodily presence as well the physical environment that surrounds us, in which both we and the work are located. A new kind of engagement and involvement between art and the concreteness of our physical presence, the concreteness of our surroundings, the concreteness of experience.

The reality that these artists have different ways of thinking - there are even those who found their own way without communicating with one another - perhaps emphasizes even more the tendency that we put forth. The problem may be beyond personal interests, as well as thoughts that may be formulated.

At any rate, most of the participants involved here were born around the 1950s (the eldest, Muryoto Hartoyo and Bachtiar Zainoel, were born in 1942). A social environment that is different to the one that artists older than they grew up in, shapes their personalities. They did not go through the nationalist resurgence of those artists who were born in 1910-1920 (Affandi, Sudjojono, Hendra, Rusli, Trisno Sumardjo, Oesman Effendi, Kusnadi, Widayat, Mochtar Apin, Sadali, Zaini, Kartono Yudhokusumo, among others). They did not go through the chaos that the revolution created, and the social disorder that took place around the time of the artists who were born in the 1930s (Nashar, Handrijo, Popo Iskandar, Abas Alibasyah, Suparto, Gregorius Sidharta, A. D. Pirous, Kaboel Suadi, among others). They came of age in a socio-psychological climate that is entirely different. Their personal development (that still occur now that they are still in their 20s) takes place within, even if it is not a situation without friction and tension, it is certainly a situation that is calmer in comparison. Even in a social life that has grown increasingly technical in its organization, economy, education, communication system, and development. In front of us we have noted down all the symptoms that led to this 'emotional distance' from the process of art making. We may also add: a kind of 'spirit of play'. They also show a passion for construction (even painting, it seems, is also made up of "construction"). There is a kind of impulse to look around them, to pick up objects from everyday life, and to construct. The previous generations of artists were satisfied with creating artworks that isolate themselves in a world of imagination and reflection, in an "inner world". The artists in this exhibition break out of this tradition, and readily, if not aggressively, invade the "outside world", the "concrete world". It is as if they demand artworks that provide a fuller, more complete, experience.

There is also other common ground for these artists, which is most important for this generation. They feel truly distinct from their predecessors. Implied in this sentiment, if I understand it correctly is this: the opinion that every generation of artists is able to find and uphold their own artistic principles, and have the right to redefine art itself.