



All images: courtesy of Nadi Gallery

Trashy-Arty-Farty, 2011  
Acrylic on canvas, 150 x 200 cm

# Eddie Hara's still going strong

an interview with Carla Bianpoen

**E**ddie haRA (this is how he writes his name) is one of Indonesia's senior artists who led the path of street art, cartoons and comic paintings now seen as typical of the younger generation. Now in his mid 50s, while showing an interesting consistency,

Eddie Hara remains open to new inputs, new techniques and new material. The following electronic interview reveals what has informed his art, how developments in Europe, and Asia have had an impact and how he ultimately works between Basel and Jakarta.

1. Eddie, you are one of those artists that has had quite a following among the younger generation. Would you share with us what has inspired you to make those bizarre albeit childlike images?

Many things around me inspire my work. From political TV news to primitive art, from rock

music to science fiction movies, from children's drawings to MTV, from art brut to Fluxus, graffiti, big city life, my own personal experiences, sub-culture, modern comics, the tattoo world, robotic toys, and those bold colorful designs printed on surf and skateboards.

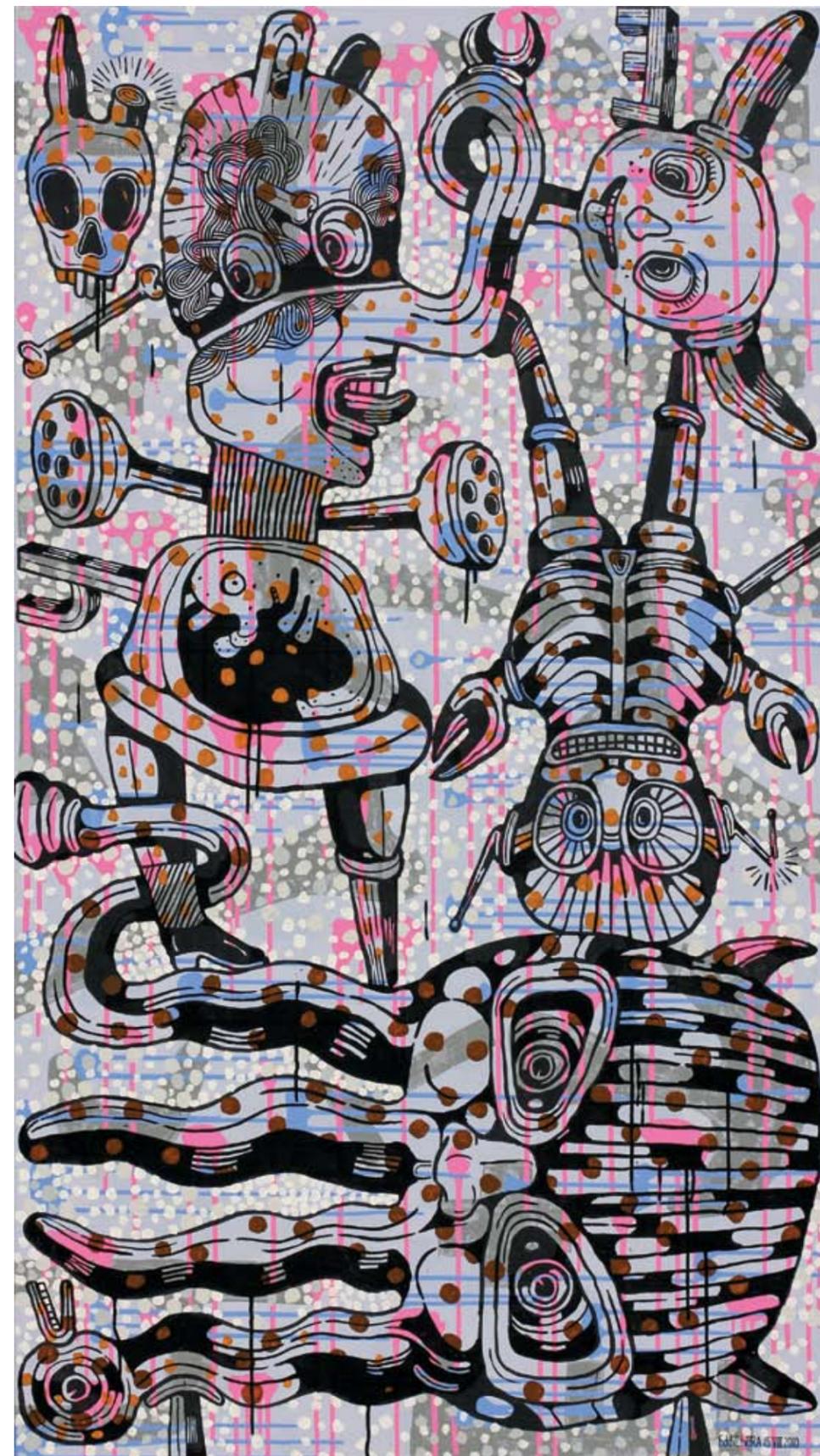
To be honest I don't think my work is bizarre, only the titles could sometimes be. But the works are rather playful though sometimes a bit diabolic.

2. Any reference to childhood experiences?

My childhood was a happy one although I was a rather shy boy who only made friends with boys. We had a small group of five boys who did adventurous stuff (swimming in the river, stealing neighbor's fruit, playing hide and seek at night in a market building, and of course doodling with chalk or coal on the wall or street—creating our favorite figures like cowboys, American Indians, rockets, robots and animals.

I remember when I was in the fourth year at the academy when everyone is should find their unique personal style. I chose children's drawing as my main source of inspiration that slowly occupied me with a rather naive and narrative style. After three months living in Switzerland in 1984 and later on in 1989 until 1990 in Holland, my style gradually changed to be more expressive, not to say raw, and using more texts. Living for six months in Los Angeles in 1991 I became familiar with what they call "lowbrow", street art, mural, graffiti and yes, modern comics. And my figures really suit this kind of art. Since then I have been busy with skulls and dead Mickey. But of course Yogya in the 90s was too busy with Widayat, Djoko Pekik and more of the decorative and socio-political or pure surrealistic kind of art. I just kept on doing my own style until early 2000 when younger artists and galleries were becoming interested in such comic and cartoon like expressions.

Mami, Ich Bin Schwanger!, 2010  
Acrylic on canvas, 180 x 100 cm





▲  
The Happy Love Victims #3, 2011  
Screen print on acrylic, dimension variable

3. Would you elaborate on your recent works shown at Nadi gallery Jakarta (Carnival of the FUNtastic, 26 July-9 August 2011)?

*Goodmorning, Mr Jetlag!* depicts my own very personal daily experience. As my show and art fair schedules are getting tight these days, I have to fly more often to Asia. And of course after being abroad for at least two weeks I always get jetlagged and have difficulty in adjusting to the rhythm of life in Switzerland again. My wife often makes jokes about this especially when I can't sleep at night but sleep very deeply in the day time.

In *Mami! Ich bin schwanger* I try to describe one of the problems of modern families. There are quite a number of young Indonesian girls who get pregnant because of lack of sex education. But of course it happens in the West as well, although statistically it happens less and less. However, the painting does depict happy news too—for the young married couple who is expecting a baby.

*Trashy Arty Farty* is my and my friends's term for snobby dudes and women during ArtBasel time. We see them at the opening, art parties and other events wearing their luxury fancy goods (shoes, bags, hats and all)

to show off what they have. Their snobby attitude of course cracks us up. So in my little art circle in Basel the "trashy arty farty" words are becoming an expression for anything unusual, chic, artistic, trendy, fashionable—in a cynical way. Visually I used many colorful big round dots all over my canvas and people might think I was inspired by Damien Hirst's recent paintings or prints. They are wrong...hahaha. I was simply inspired by our bathroom shower curtain we bought at a design shop in Stockholm.

*Post Decorative Syndrome* is my cynical way of laughing at all those very decorative styles in Yogya in the 80s and 90s with Pak Widayat as the master. That was why I use dots as background and rather brown colors.

*Destroy-Rebuild* depicts my anarchy theory of "you must destroy to build".

4. The work in the light box and the toy works seem to indicate a momentum of new inspirations.

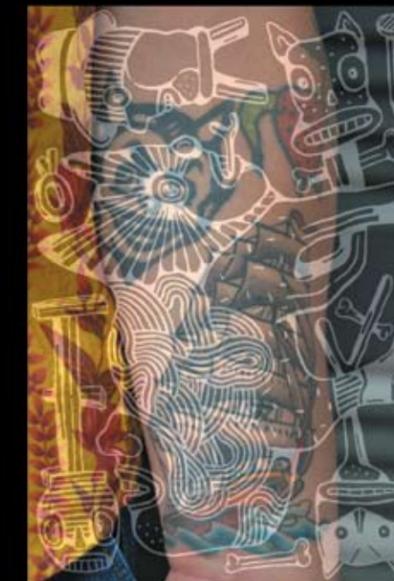
Yes, the light boxes is indeed new material I have never used before. But when the neon box dealer visited Nadi gallery, Biantoro (of Nadi gallery) challenged me to explore technology.

So here they are: *The Happy Love Victims No. 1 and 2* and *A Broken Hearted Sailor*. It wasn't easy and it requires a combination of my ideas and the material itself (neon light, galvanized steel, plexiglass sheet). Indeed, I sometimes feel like I am a happy love victim of my wife...haha. *A Broken Hearted Sailor* shows my dream of becoming a sailor when I was 14. I thought as a sailor I could travel and see the world for free. That was the reason why I had my left lower arm tattooed with a three mast sailing ship.

*The Holy Fish No.1 and 2* are more of experimenting with aluminium plates with a rather playful cut and paste technique. This is not a new technique as many children's toys use such techniques. They depict six legged winged fish with some little flames on their legs. It symbolize four elements of the universe: water (fish), earth (legs), air (wings) and fire (flames). For some people these objects remind them of sacred objects or offerings released at sea in some north coastal area of Java.

5. Tell us something about your background.

I was born in Salatiga in 1957 as the third of six children in a middle class family. My father was a military officer and my mother was a housewife. Both spoke Dutch fluently as they could afford to go to Dutch schools in the 30s



▼  
Destroy/Rebuild, 2010-2011  
Acrylic on canvas, 150 x 250 cm

▲  
A Broken Hearted Sailor, 2011  
Digital print on acrylic, light box, 80 x 160 cm

and 40s. Even my great grandfather from my mother's side was a *bupati* (sorry, cannot find the English word for that word) of Banyumas region in the southern area of Central Java. Of

course he was working for the Dutch-Indie government. But the funny thing was at the end of 40s my father joined the guerilla soldiers fighting the Dutch military who tried to come

back to Indonesia after our Independence in 1945. My father was a strict dicplined kind of person. It might be either from his military training or his Dutch school period.



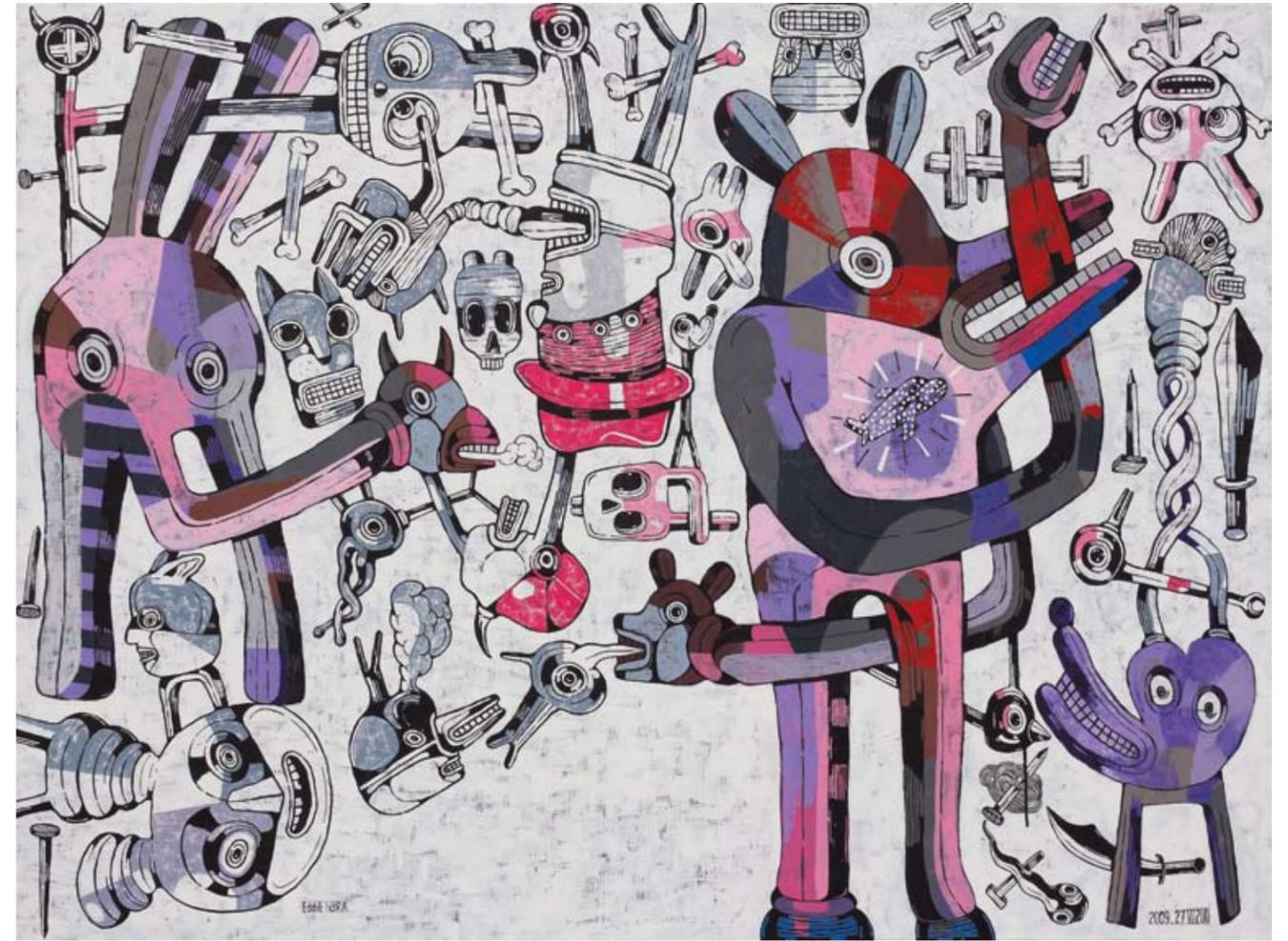


6. What evoked your interest in the arts? What triggered me or inspired me to become an artist was Affandi. He was a creative person, he was an eccentric, he was a true artist, and he could enjoy his fame. And yes, he was the first Indonesian artist who built a private museum. All the photos of him having shows in foreign countries and of him meeting important persons from different countries (presidents, prime ministers, kings, queens, etc) were really inspiring. Of course the hard bitter lonely life of Van Gogh was also inspiring, but to be honest, I don't wanna be a second Van Gogh who died in poverty and insane.

7. Was it easy for you to become an artist? I started doing art seriously when I was at SMP (junior high school) where I chose painting as my extra curricular activity. Our drawing teachers then taught us oil painting technique which interested me the most. At one of our school anniversary fests, I even sold my first oil painting.

But when I told my father I wanted to join the art academy in Yogyakarta, he was furious, saying artists were people who wasted time and ended up dying of tuberculosis. He said artists were insane, many were drunkards and did not care about their family. So I studied at a teachers training college (IKIP) majoring in English for two years (1978 and 1979), after which I decided to apply anyway at ISI Yogyakarta. My father was so upset with me that we had a really bad relationship ever since. However, just a week before he died of cancer he totally changed his behaviour toward me and asked me how I enjoyed the art school and wished me luck for what I was dreaming of. Life went on and deep in me I swore I would prove that an artist could live a normal life just like an economist, a doctor, an engineer and even a military officer like him. That

Post Decorative Syndrome, 2010  
Acrylic on canvas, 180 x 100 cm



Good Morning Mr. Jetlag!, 2009-2011  
Acrylic on canvas, 150 x 200 cm

an artist also could finance his/her family and live a healthy ordinary life. My mother always supported me although as a housewife she didn't show it in front of my father.

I have always been an eccentric in the family, being the only one interested in art or cultural stuff. But seeing how my father educated us with a military-style discipline, I swore never to repeat the same mistake with my kids. What I always appreciated a lot in my late father was how he tried hard to help us do our English and math homework. From my mother I could learn how to cook well...hahaha

8. So what does art making mean for you? Art making or art creating means a lot to me. It's not only a profession. It's simply a life choice. My wife was rather shocked when I

said before marrying her "Art will always be my first priority in life". What a statement! But I'm glad that she was able to finally accept and understand how important art is to me and to my entire life.

9. How would you describe how your life view has evolved and how this has had an impact on your work over the years? As I mentioned at my opening I have experienced three important periods in my career as an artist and my art development. First was the **80s** when I was studying at ISI. It was a struggle in those years to find my very early style, which was rather naive and surrealistic. Children drawings, artbrut, Cobra movement, the Transavantguardia (Italy) and the Neue Wilde (German) and Basquiat/Keith Haring (U.S.) were my main

sources of inspiration. I was also witnessing what was going on in the whole world (not only art!) in the 80s. The fall of Berlin wall in 1989 for instance, the Chernobyl catastrophe, Solidarnosc revolution in Poland, the birth of Greenpeace, Asian tigers economic growth, and many others. That was quite a hectic decade, but it was dynamic as well

My first trip abroad to Switzerland in 1984 and to Holland in 1989 was quite an experience, not only because going abroad in those days was an unheard of luxury for people like me, but more so because of what I learned. Anti-art and anti-aesthetic was at the time the prevailing trend in Europe, which was a shock for me, as in ISI we were trained to create only aesthetic works. But since then I gradually came to understand



Ikan Suci #2, 2011  
Aluminium sheets, auto paint, 175 x 195 x 110 cm



The Happy Love Victims #2, 2011  
galvanized steel, polyurethane paint, acrylic sheet, light  
box, 100 x 200 x 10 cm

what installation and performance was all about (as I saw work of Joseph Beuys and Marina Abramovic at some big museums in Amsterdam, Basel and Zuerich). Moreover, I managed to apply at an art academy in Enschede (East Holland) and finance myself from my two solo shows in Basel and Enschede in 1989 and 1990.

My first solo exhibition at Bentara Budaya Yogyakarta in 1987. was a giant step for me and a starting point of my career.

The **90s** for me was a period of more travelling, more shows in Indonesia and abroad, my failed first marriage, my (big) decision to emigrate to Switzerland, my second marriage, and getting more international careerwise. Plus the ups and downs in my career. But visually my work got stronger and I carried on with my style with some changes here and there. Some works were more political and indeed global issues were slowly penetrating my work. The most important thing was the birth of my *Postcards from the Alps* series where I recycled used Swiss envelopes (standard A5 envelope format) and created various drawings on them using Chinese ink mostly, watercolors, acrylics and sometimes collage and color

pencils too (Please check out the book *Outlet* published by Cemeti Art House). These envelope drawings mainly represent my daily experience in my new second hometown Basel with a touch of political, environmental and personal issues in it.

Yes, I indeed reflect my personal views very often in my creative work as I am an immigrant in Switzerland.

The **2000s** or the new millenium was also an important step in my career as I decided to look back to Asia. I could feel in the mid of 90s that there was a big wave of change in Asian art with China and Korea especially as I saw some big Chinese names were gaining international exposure and were shown at big important European museums and artfairs. So I started to go back and forth beetwen Basel and Jakarta and Yogyakarta to do shows and deal with art buyers. "Awas! Recent Art from Indonesia" travelling show which I joined connected me with a gallery in Berlin (Pruss and Ochs Galerie) who took me to some European artfairs like Art Frankfurt, Art Cologne, Art Zuerich and KunstForum Berlin in 2002 - 2004.

And now Nadi and Canna gallery involved me at some Asian artfairs (Art Singapore,

CIGE Beijing, Art Asia Miami, Art Hong Kong and Art Stage Singapore) from 2007 until 2011.

With a new gallery in Basel (Isabel Balzer Art Project) I joined Shanghai Contemporary starting on the 3rd Sept, and hopefully I will join Artissima Torino Italy.

**10. You are now very often in art fairs, how important do you find art fairs as compared to bienales?**

Since ArtBasel2000 opened an exhibition platform for projects that transcend the classical art-show stand—including video projections, large-scale installations, massive sculptures and live performances. which is being emulated by other art fairs as well, the art fair has become much more than just an art market, with many art critics and curators considering the works as strong as those shown at many important bienales.

**In conclusion, can I say that while you were formerly looking West, now, you are looking East again?**

Yes, indeed, though Basel remains my home base. I feel that in Switzerland, a serious artist is, like other academics, part of the intellectual society. 