



**The Cloning Angel** (2002)  
Photoetching on Paper, 60 x 120 cm

# Celebrating Disintegration

## Or On The Fragmented Ego

F. Budi Hardiman

Entering an art gallery does not necessarily mean that one enters into the space of art. A person may easily go into an exhibition space, view the paintings, but that space of art remains closed. Entering into that art space is surrendering oneself to the goings on captured inside the frame, letting oneself dissolve into them and settling there. It's as if a person must be brave enough to 'jump' into the frame for a while leaving the outside world and enjoy art's realized, illuminated form. That art space is open whenever the part of the ego, which makes mimesis possible and alive, rules. The ego becomes something else within the dictates of the beauty of the artwork: it may be transformed into what it beholds.

Where shall we place the beauty of works of art post-auratic? The aura glowing in the singularity of a work -as seen by Walter Benjamin- experiences a kind of erosion because the aura of the work of art withers in the age of mechanical reproduction. People observe the works produced by FX Harsono exhibited here today. The photographs, film clippings and down loads from the internet assembled into a single form or a sequence. In the midst of the collages and heaped-up images that are now far removed from their initiator, the artist no longer appears in the traditional guise as the one

scratching out the soul's deepest reflections into the medium but rather as 'a painter of scenarios'. May the pictures then be called paintings? They appear more like a drama, a theater of images that blurs the boundaries between narration and argumentation. Beauty may appear, if we answer the question; what has Harsono honestly created? Entering the space of art post-auratic must be through the openings that are the field of tension between thinking and the artist's complete inner experience. He creates meaning, apparently not to present it but instead to suspend it.

### Assembled Ego

Let us cast an eye over the works presented. There is no auratic singularity in the individual fragments of the pictures. The more a person believes in the fragment, the more they are alienated from the meaning. The fragment is merely an episode, a drama of meaning, put on by the painter of scenarios. There is no individual identity radiated from the fragments. And one can neither resist the reality that each fragment is a totality of units each foreign from the others. These units, for example the pictures cut from kresak bags, flowers, body parts, scribble, in the piece entitled "*Displaced*" (2003), are 'forced' to settle in one space and 'forced' to



cry forth the one idea. Is this the work of a tyrant or a democrat? It's not clear. But one thing is clear: the work is actually not re-presenting the *displaced* phenomena, but rather represents a deconstruction of *displaced* itself. The various and differentiated fragments settle in one meaning-space, namely, a space that may only be entered through the openings of tension between complete inner

experience and thinking.

What is *displaced*?

Installing a toilet in the dining room, sex in a place of worship or a minority in the midst of a tyrannical majority are misplaced or the 'wrong-place'. The misplaced is a fragment of a foreign space entering into a space that pretends to be total and homogenous. Harsono, who in this stage of his work explores much of the problem of identity, continues to appear as a sharp social critic: the ego of the artist experiences a kind of 'exposure of the inner spaces' after being closed off.

Closed by whom? By two kinds of regime: the political regime (the New Order), which banned the expression of Chinese culture in Indonesia, and the psychological regime centered in the ego, namely, in the ego occupied by a subject that enforces self-censorship. It is the collaboration of these two regimes that closed the inner spaces. What is exposed after the two regimes

are deemed fallen is extremely surprising: a salad of elements of the everyday industrial (kresek bags), the West (flowers and gloves), China (batik encasing thighs) and eroticism-consumerism (naked bodies) can no longer claim the authenticity of the ego. The ego turns out to be less whole than we perhaps imagined. The ego is fragmented like the displaced pieces of a mosaic.

What of the fate of the fragmented ego? There is a metaphor game in that displaced sense: In the wrong-place of ethnic-religious pluralism, it is not only the minority but all and right from the beginning that are misplaced. Why? First, because the ego always contains these wrong-place fragments. Second, the conditions that make the wrong-placement possible, namely, the hierarchal order and ethnic-religious homogeneity are no longer all-powerful. Our people are no longer fully feudal, but neither are they fully democratic, rather representing a salad, a social wrong-placement. If this is true, then the concept of displaced is itself displaced. The work entitled "Displaced" deconstructs itself; let us say it rattles its own idea. The antimony between 'in its place' and 'wrong-place' - to use an expression of Derridaís - has been bastardized.

In the series of images entitled "*Cogito ergo sum*" (2002), the situation of the ego is clearly that it has become unclear. The Cartesian Ego, the result of circulating doubts that then find their place in the foundation of consciousness, is a fiction about the ego in the space of consciousness. The artist understandably paints the process of the darkening of consciousness as the backlash of the Aufklaerung/insight, as poignantly analyzed by mass psychosis theorist Hermann Broch. Perhaps the opposite occurs too: The darkening is



a metaphor discovered by a new consciousness in which the light of the ego is fictive.

The ego has been of the 'wrong-place' since the very beginning because it has always been besieged by the contingency networks that comprise it. It is thrown into placeless space which it must occupy through taking over the non-ego. The ego never only contains just the ego. From the beginning the ego is a bastard! It is wrong-place outside and inside its own spaces. And in order to become itself, the ego must clarify its wrong-placeness as its place. And that is identity. The arts post-auratic celebrate the birth of a new identity as a kind of 'placement of wrong-placeness'. It is *Ja-Sagen* (say yes) to fragmentation. The painter doesn't paint but rather assembles, and the result of this assembly process is an assembled ego, which is a picture of every ego because every ego is the result of the assembly of - to borrow Rorty's term- the 'contingency network' that is at once genetic, historical, cultural, political and so on.

### The Body and Attack of Space

The fragmented ego is an inner space of the fragmented body. If humankind is a house, the body and the ego are the basic spaces that contain the rooms ñ an architectural vision able to explain the fate of the body in mass culture. Fragmentation of the body occurs through the 'attack of space', or an attack which brings forth (or fragments) the spaces. In a sexual assault, the body faces two choices: whether to make a whole through attaching to the space of the ego or to let the self be just a body-space. Virginity in tatters is wholeness disintegrated, but also perhaps an opportunity to enter into a new space, a fragmented space: the ego space here and the body space there, the love space here and the sex space there. Can the body enjoy or

suffer without the ego? If it is true that the ego isn't always the master of the body, the question must be answered in the affirmative. The body possesses grounds the ego cannot understand. Hedonism may just be hedonism because the body's thirst has dragged the ego into its own spaces.

Harsono presents the fate of the body in his work "Tubuhku Bukan Tubuhku" (2002) (I am not my body). Here fragments are arrayed: headless body, faceless head, series of bodies stretched out, an image of a women's body downloaded from the net, and all this made meaningful through the clipping of the price label marked 'reduced'. The body has truly lost its aura; the observer is made incapable of desiring it because the erotic is killed off through the act of fragmentation. The body is fascinating in its wholeness and disgusting in its fragmented state, but the wholeness is fictive because the eye that objectifies the body only takes fragments. Beauty deceives the eye with illusions of eternity so the eye is made as if to stop fragmenting the object. In this work, Harsono appears more of a critic of mass culture - there are no moments of suspended meaning here that mark the deconstructionism of "Displaced". The artist has decided upon wholeness as the *Ur-Sinn* (original meaning) and so we see fragmentation as a reduction. The tension in meaning is gone and the work becomes instructive as such. The meaning will expose itself further, only if the artist does not take a decision like that, rather not choosing whether it be wholeness or fragmentation, purposely hanging suspended between the two. The ghost envisaging this state imbues a post-auratic work with the illumination of meaning.

If the creator of the work does not exercise this ghost, in front of our faces there will be