



Djoko Pekik: *My Train Doesn't Stop Here Too Long*, 1989, oil on canvas, 59 inches square.

range of painting styles with abstracted codes for ideas, feelings and behavior.

Beginning in the 1940s and '50s, Yogyakarta, an ancient Javanese center of culture, became the scene of intense debates about how artists could participate in defining a national identity. Choice of subjects was one means of addressing identity questions. Important references include Hindu dances, *wayang kulit* (shadow puppet theater) and the great Buddhist and Hindu monuments, as well as Islamic calligraphy reproducing texts from the Koran—still-vital symbols of religious, social and cultural beliefs. All expressions of national identity inevitably reflect the social hierarchy. Because the aristocracy developed and controlled certain cultural forms and their meanings—such as the movements and costumes of certain dances, batik patterns, designs for the flat leather puppets of the *wayang kulit*—these modes are today associated with refinement and sophistication. Other rituals and entertainments—the “horse dances” (trance dances), *wayang berber* (storytelling scrolls) and street theater—evolved in the villages and urban neighborhoods. Stylistically cruder and more direct, these are associated with the lower classes.

Some artists, such as the influential painter Widayat¹ (b. 1923), embrace aspects of the “traditional/decorative” style as a vehicle for mysticism and symbolism, which have always been strong elements of Javanese culture. Widayat and his followers also have been influenced by the work of Western artists such as Henri Rousseau and Jean Dubuffet (both artists appeal to Indonesian preferences for imagination and fantasy), and they have developed an energized, cartoonlike figurative drawing style superficially resembling Art Brut as well as Chicago Imagism.

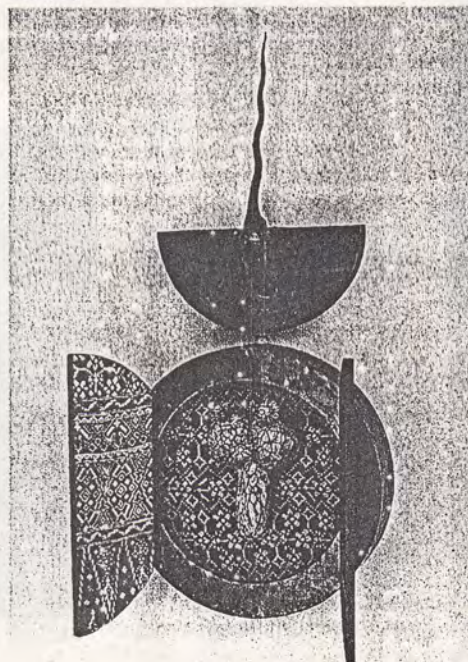
Widayat's drawing of a *wayang* character signifies a whole set of associated traits, stories and lessons. His landscapes carry both private and public meanings, and his figurative elements evoke mythological or historical beings and events. His oil *Watching a Free Soccer Match* (1991) depicts children perched on the branches of a centrally placed tree that resembles the *gunungan*, the leather puppet which begins and ends the scenes of the *wayang kulit*. The *gunungan*'s traditional shape and symbolism are amalgams of the sacred mountain and the tree of life, filled with animals and

birds. Widayat's tree is surrounded by other landscape elements, abstract forms and enlarged leaves that are themselves shaped like smaller *gunungans*. While Widayat's earlier paintings are nuanced and elegant, the most recent works break away from tradition with harsh acrylic colors, angular, violent drawings and contemporary sociopolitical references.

In conjunction with early debates on the establishment of new nationalistic images, a group of influential artists including Affandi, Soedjojono and Hendra Gunawan, whose ideas had been influenced during the War of Independence in which they participated as artist/witnesses and as fighters, proposed highly charged symbolic figuration and landscape painting as appropriate idioms. They rejected both the “traditional/decorative” and naturalistic styles because of their association with colonialism. Previously valued romantic landscape paintings were labeled “Mooie Indies” (“Beautiful Indies” in Dutch) and damned for presenting an Indonesia of Western fantasy. These artists rejected the bright, cheerful colors of “Mooie Indies” painting (today cranked out for tourists) and used dark colors and active brushwork to express the brooding seriousness of their esthetic goals and the hard lives of the common people they depicted.

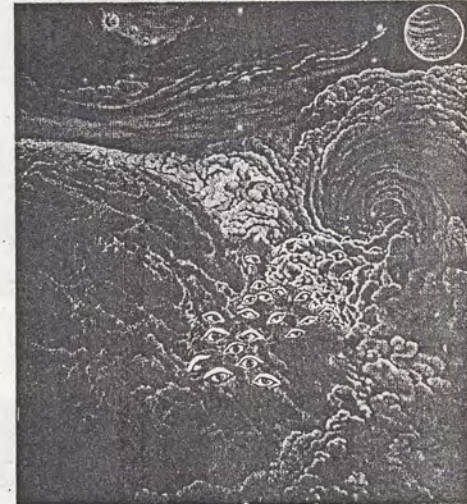
The exquisite, emotionally gripping, expressionistic paintings of Affandi (1907-1990) are highly revered by his peers. Clearly influenced by Western expressionism, Affandi painted landscape and genre scenes which varied widely from naturalism to expressive abstraction, culminating in a series of powerful self-portraits. Yet his oeuvre exemplifies the dilemma that recent Indonesian art can pose to Westerners. To an outsider, the wide variety of styles and subjects of his oeuvre seems idiosyncratic and arbitrary. In international terms he shows neither stylistic innovation nor a distinctive approach to subject matter, and his paintings

Wall piece from *Nindityo Adipurnomo's installation and performance* *Lingam and Yoni*, 1992.



would not seem to explain his stature. But his art was innovative in the Indonesian context because it introduced new and personal styles, techniques and approaches to themes which helped to change Indonesian art and to convey national identity. His technical and expressive abilities were and are esteemed.

Sudjana Kerton (b. 1922, lives and works in Bandung) and Djoko Pekik (b. 1938, lives and works in Yogyakarta) paint the lives of the common people in villages and urban neighborhoods: farmers and prostitutes, bicycle ricksha drivers and street performers. Kerton's humorous, expressive figures have a cartoonlike quality which can be linked to the Javanese propensity for stylized draw-



Lucia Hartini: *Eyes That Watch But Do Not See*, oil on canvas.

ing as well as to his exposure, during the 25 year that he lived in New York City, to the work of the Pop artists, Kienholz and others.

In contrast, Djoko Pekik's paintings are far more sober, even tragic. With distorted figures in simplified and flattened landscapes, his genre scene depicts the difficult economic conditions of ordinary people today. His 1989 painting of a trance dancer portrays one of many extraordinary moments when the dancer performs superhuman feats, such as eating glass without being hurt. Since the tourism industry is beginning to use trance dances as exotic attractions, this work may also refer to the commodification of Javanese culture.

His *Girl at the Crossroads* reveals the perplexing junction where tradition and urbanization meet. In this 1992 oil, a barefoot girl stands with her bicycle at a street corner, looking frightened and confused. A red car is stopped behind her. She faces away from it toward empty streets leading out of the picture frame to the unknown. Her simple dress and bicycle suggest ordinary life, while the car symbolizes Western modernization and technology. Djoko Pekik's landscape paintings differ from Western concepts of “landscape” or “pure nature.” He regards those as commodities for esthetic pleasure or what Soedjojono calls “the mental world of the tourist.” For Djoko Pekik the countryside's beauty is irrelevant. His mountains and ocean are not plac-