

MULTI SUB KULTUR

Two Dimensional Indonesian Fine Arts

JANUARY, 8 - 25, 2004

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MULTI SUB KULTUR
ZWEI DIMENSIONEN DER INDONESISCHEN BILDENDEN KUNST



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I.

From then until now, Indonesia has been a multicultural country with its subcultural diversity of numerous tribes and ethnicities. Concerning the condition of its cultural complexity, Indonesia has its own difficulty in formulating its national cultural identity. Except that, at least, the name "Indonesia" is very suitable for a country with an "Indo" or mixed nation (indo-nation). Efforts concerning the unity of the diversity of localities in Indonesia can only be achieved through a socio-political strategy, known as the motto, "Bhinneka Tunggal Ika" (Unity in Diversity). In accordance with the strategy, the idea of unity needs also be struggled for in concernment with the ideals of the nation-state, which was introduced since the political power system and should be adequate in anticipating the vastness of Indonesian area which covers thousands of islands. This diversity in unity is politically beneficial, especially for importances concerning arts and culture. Thoughts that motivate unity are thoughts that glorify diversity. And diversity is where the art is¹. Art takes sides on and stands upon the pattern of diversity.

The dimension of multi-culture in Indonesia can be translated as an effort of general description of interaction process and the building of communication process which results in Indonesia, in a smaller scale, as a miniature of the world's multicultural reality. Multiculture is formed through interaction process and interindividual communication in a culturally diverse society ranged from communal microculture, ethnic subculture, national macroculture, to the global superculture². Images of the forming of Indonesia can be traced from studies of anthropology, history, and

demography. Those studies are applied into the process of mapping and diffusion, especially when they are concerned with the paths of other countries arrivals that also construct the plurality of culture in Indonesia. The coming of the Mongolians, Africans, Chinese, Indians, Arabians, and Europeans spreads and forms the paths of Indonesia's demography establishment, making Indonesians expose their mixed nature. This establishment process reflects itself on the patterns of culture and tradition which base the subcultural nature and its heterogenous art. Basis of this reality has been congealing for centuries that when discourses of multicultural resurface, it is suitable that the matter of subculture will also become a part of discussions.

Multi-culture as a matter of cultural diversity and subculture as its supporting factor inherently become the firestarters of discourses in the entity of intercultural discussions. Multiculturalism is intent on creating a socio-political context which enables an individual to develop identity health and to interactively develop positive intercommunity traits³. Art, as a part of the discussion, altogether inherits this inevitable subject. Even the world of art, in itself, breathes life to a power in the intercultural context because art is a world which always deals with experience and knowledge that penetrate into the heart of society. Along with the attributes of the importances of society, art efforts to interpret global view and always wills to achieve the dynamic meaning of the newness of culture in its entirety. Multi-culture is a process of transaction of knowledge and experience utilized by members of society to interpret their different

global views to aim for the newness of culture⁴. Every participative act concerning intercultural will be an agenda and enrich the repertory of intercultural interaction even though basically, every effort of intercultural development has its own risk that leads to tremendous migrational moves. International migration for purposes of career betterment, spare time, and business; professional and individual moves outside the country's borders has been turning every citizen into a more multiethnic and multicultural entity⁵.

II.

This two dimensional art exhibition held by the Indonesian Art Foundation is principally expected to be a reciprocal program. The risk it bears must consider the juxtaposition of the issue and the quality of the works and the ideas, along with the conditions of art in certain countries. However, there must rise an awareness that the issues in multiculturalism are the issues that concern about being different for a quality of equality⁶. This exhibition intentionally centers on the theme "*Reading...Multi-Sub-Culture*" –with an emphasis on the element of *reading* – as a process of attempting to understand the matters of multiculture and subculture at once. The contemporary art in Indonesia, in its context of entering the constellation of international communication, has always been looking outward and inward.

Looking outward is when it touches intercultural matters, as if it had a burden of reading and understanding global issues and phenomena, concerning that this world's problems are macrocultural stimuli that need to be absorbed as an adaptation process to the entire information. The awareness that soon rises is that the contemporary art in Indonesia is a part of the international contemporary art. Looking inward is when it enters internal matters, it faces certain complex microcultural realities. It also realizes that the condition of the development of the international contemporary art always greatly

influences the contemporary art in Indonesia in its development. Nevertheless, the intercultural process resembles a dialogue that must be faced, not only in its generalization of visual language idioms, but also in its juxtaposition of the visual language itself even though in the end, a universal visual language can omit the tensions in a process of intercultural dialogue. Actually, in the constellation of the recent world of art, there is no significant difference between nations except the existence of subcultural realities which forms the diversity of artworld in each nation.

Concerning what has been elaborated above, it is thought relevant to summon the matter of subculture in the process of introducing the presence of different diversities. In the contemporary works of art displayed in this exhibition, the matter of subculture in the middle of the cultural reality in Indonesia is fittingly worth to be introduced as a subject of study even though actually, the subculture that colors the visual appearance of the contemporary art in Indonesia is interfered merely by some importances of locality, ethnicity, and thin personal identity because those elements do not fully mark the predominant visual characteristic, except if they deal with the cosmological visual importances which build the basis of subcultural images. This reality can be recognized through the diversity of traditions that serves as a background for each artist in this exhibition who also comes from different ethnic environments. This diversity often hides behind visual appearances and is also invisible if read from the visual surfaces. Moreover, most of contemporary artists in Indonesia are members of urban society who have been uprooted from their ethnic root.

It is also important to note that some of the participants of this exhibition originates from certain Javanese, Sundanese, Balinese, dan Sumateranese subcultures although ethnic aspects do not emerge clearly and hide themselves behind the traits of visual language. Some can clearly capture them, but public will not immediately understand.

Contemporary artists in Indonesia are individuals who are in touch with global experience and knowledge. They are human beings who always read and follow the discourses of the world, with their own personal traits which sometimes refer to their nearest environment, their locality and ethnicity. Furthermore, there will actually be many interesting issues if in this discourse of multiculturalism is also enclosed the bases of subculture which also enrich the bank of visual images.

Reading... Multi-Sub-Culture is not only a reading process of being, but also a reading process of to be. In its forming, it is also accompanied by a process of creation that no longer copes with cultural monotonicity, but deals with the eclectics. For the process, society is not a monolithically united entity, but it is a fragmented, plural, and heterogeneous one. The works themselves are unconfined. They are in touch with the world and reading it. They enjoy the ecstasy of playing, especially playing about themselves, their objects, their myths, and their pluralistic culture. At the very least, they possess their own consciousness in the historical time and space, although sometimes they are also playing with that consciousness. Can it possibly be touched by the existence of a post-modern consciousness? As is known that what is called 'post-modern consciousness' is a consciousness, in which the definition of a human of himself or herself and the definition of the world where he or she lives in are significantly determined by the position of that human in the history –at one time and space- in associations with a mythical basis and a pluralistic and primordial culture.⁷ The answer lies on the achievement of visual idioms which is narrated using all elements of narration that it lifts to the surface.

III.

Reading... Multi-Sub-Culture as the theme of this two dimensional works exhibition is still, of course, a part of an extensive process, because there is something that has been and is still going on implied in it; that the present contemporary art in Indonesia is undergoing a process of

reading and following the global phenomena with their own various bases of conditions that construct them. One of the bases of conditions is the multi-dimensional phenomenon and reality of the Indonesian culture, whether in its cultural, ethnic, social, political, or economical views. It is unsurprising that the works exhibited do not only display the plurality of visual language, but also display the things that are connected with the elements that construct meaning. Intentionally, the works of artists who own the tendency of reading both the multiculturalism and the subculture are chosen, especially works of those who have been actively working from the 1980s. Mostly, the chosen works represent portrayals of the last ten years, precisely the past two or three years from the main tendency of contemporary art in Indonesia.

Those works, actually, are only a small part of the existing reality, based on the implications resulted from the reading of the meaning of the multiculturalism and the subculture. The matter of multiculturalism is implied in the works that raise global issues through transformations of mediation; as resulted from the reading of trip journals, mass media, and internet. Some artists have gone on trips to different parts of the world, unfolding areas of information in the world, and making relation with thoughts or works of artists in other countries. Beside that, the matter of subculture is eventually still becoming a quite interesting area of reading for a number of artists. They are conducting a process of study and research of the reality of local culture in their own environments. The reality of local culture as an entity of expressional spirit, can apparently trigger the passion of artists in every area in Indonesia. They are not only intent on offering issues of local culture and emphasizing on their own internal matters, but also learning to conduct a counter-attack against the process of acculturation dominated by foreign culture (read : West).

It is a decent thing experienced by artists of the third world, post-colonial countries, or countries under the hegemony of the West that they ever feel a pressure and an inferiority. Globalisation, positively, is like a widely open gate for them to enter a broader world. But negatively, globalisation becomes 'another trauma' for artists in post-colonial countries. That is why, the issue of globalisation increases artists' intelligence to carefully strategize in facing the process and impacts of globalisation. Globalisation can be defined as an intensification of worldwide social relations that limits the localities of distance by perceiving the local occurrences that are formed by occurrences in different time and vice versa.⁸ This statement has altogether created a new spirit on how people face numerous problems, big or small, as a reality that has to be faced with certain wisdom. Like what has been said by Danny Bell in Anthony Giddens that in the conditions of the acceleration of globalisation, states have become too small for enormous problems of life and too enormous for small problems of life. In the same time, because the social relations have been extended in the same process, we see the power of pressures on local autonomy and identity of regional culture.⁹

The Indonesian contemporary artists who seemingly ignore the matter of globalisation, have actually been involved in the discourse, and secretly expressing it in their works. Due to the fact, a thorough reading process is required. Efforts of reacting to the pressures of Western hegemony can not be merely read as an act of counter-attack, but can be positively read as a both local and regional power of mediation as a way of self-expression. The result of this power, in the beginning, centers on strategies of building identities, but in the end, it dissolves into a togetherness in order to make a relation among identities. If the exhibited works have not fully displayed the endurance of the identities relation process, once again, it is because they are still going on a trip of process. Whereas in this exhibition, the works

display an act of reflection that has not yet ended. Although modern art in Indonesia had been born since the dawn of the 20th century, it cannot escape from traces of the hegemony of the international art which now has become a reflective partner. Apparently, post-colonial discourses is still spreading the blurring process of the traces. Besides post-colonials that are trying to promote the mutual transculturation between the colonizer and the colonized, the appreciation of hibridity generally refers to destabilization of the colonized culture. The West still constantly acts as an exclusive meeting place for all the pretend cross-cultural dialogues.¹⁰ It is hoped that this exhibition can be a meeting place for intercultural appreciation, even though it is using a visual language filled with metaphoric and symbolic idioms. The curation of this exhibition summons three parts of reading, namely : Intercultural Dialogue, Multicultural Dialogue, and Subcultural Dialogue.

Intercultural Dialogue

The works of the intercultural dialogue entirely carry the issues that emphasize on the reading process of cultural matters as a commonly understood meaning that can be approved by different cultures. These works often present a dialogue process that is attached to cultural areas in its universal meaning. Largely, they are talking about human beings and their most essential life, for example, they are including a grand narration about human ideals, dreams, and hopes for peace.

Multicultural Dialogue

The works of the multicultural dialogue usually summon a certain issue, although there are different versions in their narrations due to different perspectives. These versions construct a power of connotation. The power is the cause why there can be done both acts of controversion and subversion, but actually all of the versions come from the same issues. For example,

narration about dimensions of understanding the power that certainly possess different perceptions and interpretations.

Subcultural Dialogue

The works of the subcultural dialogue always attempt on reading the map of the wealth of cultural reality that grows, lives, and develops in one large cultural area. Indonesia is abundant in subcultural pluralities that are spread in various groups of islands, ethnicities, and touches of religious values. Nowadays, each of the areas democratically revives as a cultural power after the reverberation of reformation discourse, regional autonomy, and a sudden rise of primordiality. Impacts of this revival can be positive and negative. Positive value is shown by the condition of awareness that the power of subculture has obviously contributed cultural wealth. While the negative value shows if the discourses that start the revival of subculture suddenly turn into tensions, frictions, and explosions of the autonomy of power.

IV.

The present map of contemporary art in Indonesia cannot be grasped by a homogenous observation, especially when it comes to deal with aesthetic perspective. The plurality of the appearance of contemporary art in Indonesia has entered an artistic phase of visual language, building signs of utterance that emphasize more on meaning. By reason of the phase, a reading process of meaning of the group of signs is needed. The signs can project the presence of phenomenon of thinking effort or abstraction of visual language that leads to the current of multicultural and subcultural tendency. The tendency that leads to multicultural is triggered by the will to globalize, that the contemporary art in Indonesia is a part of the contemporary art of the world. In reverse, the tendency that lead to subculture is the will to bring the eyes of the world to inspect on local powers. These two currents will always meet in an atmosphere of dialogue,

which will inevitably result in very creative tensions, frictions, and explosions.

There is a new parable that is going on in the process of that dialog, that is the efforts to globalise locality and to localise globalisation. Seen from the point of view of creativity, the contemporary art in Indonesia resembles a field where the immense current of the challenges of the creative world flows back and forth. If realized, this reality can possibly be an interesting discourse to be noticed. At least, it takes us to a learning process in the reality of *Reading...Multi-Sub-Kultur*.

Mamannoor

Endnote

1. Look up Albert Camus in his essay "Kreasi Yang Fana" in the book *Menulis Itu Indah*, Jendela, Yogyakarta, 2002, p. 6.
2. Read Andrik Purwasito in *Komunikasi Multikultural*, Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta, Solo, 2003, p. 96.
3. John W. Berry et al., *Psikologi Lintas-Budaya*, Gramedia, Jakarta, 1999, p. 576-577.
4. Look up James P. Spradley in Andrik Purwasito, *Komunikasi Multikultur*, Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta, Solo, 2003, p.138.
5. Yasraf Amir Piliang, *Sebuah Dunia Yang Dilipat*, Pustaka Mizan, Bandung, 1998, p.214.
6. Ubed Abdilah S., *Politik Identitas Etnis*, Indonesitera, Magelang, 2002, p.179.
7. Look up, like Nietzsche and Heidegger, as written by Deleuze and Guattari in Yasraf Amir Piliang, *Hiper-Realitas Kebudayaan*, LKiS, Yogyakarta, 1999, p. 29.
8. Read about "Globalisasi Modernitas", Anthony Giddens in *Tumbal Modernitas*, IRCISoD, Yogyakarta, 2001, p. 92.
9. Ibid, p. 93. This Daniel Bell's statement is in "The World and the United States in 2013", *Daedalus* 116 (1987).
10. Read the hyperbolic claim in the discourse of hybridity and diaspora in Leela Gandhi's statement in *Teori Poskolonial*, Qalam, Yogyakarta, 2001, p. 181-182.

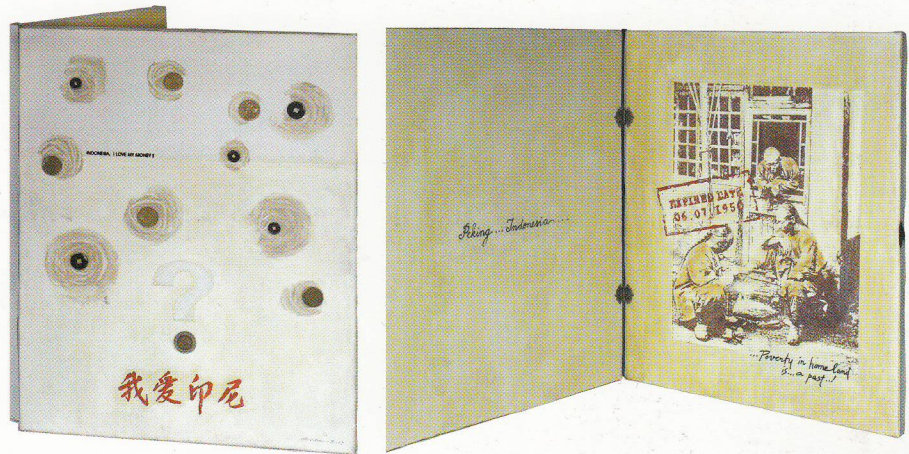
Alfi



Diary Series (41 panels), -
acrylic on canvas, 30 x 25 cm

Anna Zuchriana

Indonesia I Love You My Honey, 2003
oil and colase, 40 x 50 cm



Jujum and Mei Mei, 2002
oil & Colase, 40 x 120 cm



J Nyoman Erawan



Kepalaku I, 2003
acrylic and oil on canvas, 130 x 130 cm



Kepalaku II, 2003
acrylic and oil on canvas, 130 x 130 cm



Pesan Budaya I, 2003
oil on canvas, 145 x 200 cm

Ojite (Budi Sutarno)



Begini 062000, 2003
acrylic on board, 90 x 120 cm



Begini 052003, 2003
acrylic on board, 70 x 105 cm



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