

**The Problematic Rupture of  
'Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru':  
The Indonesian New Art Movement of the 1970s**

**Sophia Susanto**

**200467221**

**April 2012**

## **Abstract**

Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru Indonesia (GSRB) or the Indonesian New Art Movement of the late 1970s was a rather controversial and misunderstood group of artists which attempted to revolutionise art in Indonesia. This dissertation aims to evaluate the aesthetics and practices of GSRB to discover if the movement did caused a rupture. The materials I have used in my research consists of a 1979 book publication containing the manifesto and collection of essays by the GSRB members, other contemporary critique from Indonesian and foreign writers, as well as an interview with one of the founding members of GSRB, artist FX Harsono. The analysis led to a conclusion that despite flaws in their manifesto, the introduction of some good practices in the country allows GSRB to deserve proper tribute in the timeline of Indonesian art history.

Title Page	1
Abstract	2
Table of Content	3
List of Illustrations	4
Acknowledgements	5
Introduction	6
Chapter One: Indonesian 'Art' or ' <i>Seni Rupa</i> ' as Colonial Legacy	11
Chapter Two: Aesthetics, Practice and Reception of <i>Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru</i>	25
Conclusion	38
Appendix A: Five Groundbreaking Moves of the Indonesian New Art Movement (In original <i>Bahasa Indonesia</i> with English translation)	40
Appendix B: FX Harsono Interview Transcript (In original <i>Bahasa Indonesia</i> with English translation)	45
Appendix C: List of Indonesian art academies	53
Illustrations	54
Bibliography	57

## List of Illustrations

### Figure 1

Jim Supangkat, *Ken Dedes*, 1975

Mixed media, 180 x 40 x 30 cm

Collection of the Singapore Art Museum

Knol, Meta, Remco Raben & Kitty Zijlmans, *Beyond the Dutch: Indonesia, the Netherlands and the Visual Arts, from 1900 until now* (Amsterdam: KIT Publishers, 2009) p. 147

### Figure 2

FX Harsono, *Rantai Yang Santai (The Relaxed Chain)*, 1975

Installation with cushions and chains, 67 x 97 x 56 cm

Artist collection

*FX Harsono: Testimonies*, exhibition catalogue, 4 March to 9 April (Singapore: Singapore Art Museum, 2010)

### Figure 3

Example of drawings in Pameran Konsep (Concept Exhibition), 1976

*Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru Indonesia - Kumpulan Karangan* (Jakarta: PT Gramedia, 1979), p. 50

### Figure 4

Example of drawings in Pameran Konsep (Concept Exhibition), 1976

*Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru Indonesia - Kumpulan Karangan* (Jakarta: PT Gramedia, 1979), p. 51

## **Acknowledgement**

I began the dissertation project rather naively with almost no academic knowledge of Indonesian art, whether traditional or modern. My simple wish was to put to use the lessons learned at the University of Leeds by engaging with a specific point of my national history. I would like to especially thank Ashley Thompson for her advice and supervision throughout the year. Her invaluable suggestions have given my writing better focus and direction. I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to FX Harsono, who has very generously granted me an interview. It was an absolute pleasure and honour to learn about *Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru* from one who has lived through it. Special tribute goes to National Library Board of Singapore for its extensive libraries where I conducted most of my research. It was in its special collection that I found the rare *Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru Indonesia* book that is central to my dissertation. As an Indonesian citizen who has a limited knowledge of the Indonesian art scene due to my years abroad, I hope I have treated the subject with respect and done it justice.

## Introduction

It was 18 December 1974 in Jakarta, Indonesia. The Indonesian Arts Council has set up the inaugural *Pameran Besar Seni Lukis Indonesia* (Large Exhibition of Indonesian Paintings) in the cultural centre of *Taman Ismail Marzuki* (Ismail Marzuki Garden). In attempt to encourage the growth of art and promote friendly competition, a panel of judges had been selected to give out awards to paintings they considered to be the best. A group of participants consisting of young students from art academies were very displeased by the choice of awarded paintings. They asserted that the winning paintings by the likes of Widayat and AD Pirous tended towards being merely decorative, typical of artworks of the time that were mostly created for commercial purposes. These artists subsequently wrote, signed and circulated a public statement entitled *Desember Hitam* (Black December). The artist-activists fiercely criticized the lack of content, creativity, and socio-political consciousness in Indonesian art, which were supposedly indicative of an artistic decline. A flower arrangement was sent to the award ceremony with the words “Condolences for the Death of Indonesian Painting.”<sup>1</sup>

The Indonesian art world has always been a rather narrow and exclusive circle, with many of the leading figures having fluid and multiple roles. One may act not only as an artist, but also as an art critic, and a cultural observer, and an educator, typically holding a senior position in one of the three most prestigious art academies in cultural centres of Bandung, Yogyakarta and Jakarta. Therefore, the young artists’ gestures of defiance against the organisers of the exhibition could be read a personal attack of the students against their teachers. This was exactly what occurred at *ASRI* (*Akademi Seni Rupa Indonesia*), the art academy of Yogyakarta. Immediately following the

---

<sup>1</sup> Agus Darmawan T., *Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru Indonesia*, chapter Yang sempat saya catat, sebelum dan sesudah pagelaran Seni Rupa Baru 1977

exhibition, there was a clash of heated arguments and accusations among the university teachers and students. Eventually, four students who signed the Black December Statement were 'suspended indefinitely', and a few lecturers who tried to side these students faced the threat of being dismissed.<sup>2</sup> It came as no surprise that the suspended students in Yogyakarta decided to quit the academy and started their own. While the students of art academies in Bandung and Jakarta did not suffer any punishment at all, the treatments towards their fellow students in Yogyakarta troubled them, reportedly generating a climate of unease.<sup>3</sup>

The student-artists across different cities later joined in solidarity to form an art movement called *Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru Indonesia*, otherwise known by the acronym 'GSRB' or 'GSRBI'. It is internationally known as the *Indonesian New Art Movement*, although a more accurate direct translation of the name is *New Visual Art Movement*. Three exhibitions were organised by the GSRB group of artists in August 1975, February/March 1977 and October 1979. They shaped their works to be the antithesis to the works produced by art academies, making a point to reject traditional Western art history and methodologies. They lamented the local art practice which they considered to be dictated by the hegemony of traditional Western art values, and the art market dominated by the tastes of Western expatriates and tourists. GSRB's manifesto aimed to create a rupture in the aesthetics of Indonesian fine art, trying to move towards plurality and hybridity, eliminating any authoritative interpretation of art. In subject matter they likewise distant themselves from the pursuit of formal beauty, dealing instead with the unpleasant reality of the people under President Suharto's dictatorial rule in the decades following his rise to power in 1965. The artists' ultimate aim is for art to be able to relate to the general Indonesian public, rather than having art only as the preserve of the privileged and wealthy upper class as was the situation

---

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

then. They endeavoured to achieve this by using concrete political, social and economics problems as the raw material of their art.

Not unexpectedly, the elite members of the Indonesian art world, desiring to maintain the aura of their prominence and control of various institutions, countered the challengers by criticising them for being radical amateurs, using the fact that some of them did not finish their art academic education as an excuse to dismiss GSRB as an act of juvenile insolence. Such reaction exacerbated the existing tension in the art world in the late 1970s. With some simplification, battle lines could be said to have been drawn between two groups of artists, each distinguished in terms of age: the old versus the young, occupation: the teachers versus the students, qualifications: the graduates of inherited Western art education system and recent drop-outs, social status: the elites versus the underdog, and artistic influence: the relatively older Western academic styles versus the relatively recent new media with Dadaist tendencies. While these contrasting characteristics were not directly relevant to the aesthetic discourse, the division highlights certain mechanisms of the art industry in Indonesia that resulted in the generational differences.

However, these differences disguised a fundamental similarity between the two groups of artists. Both sides actually intended to reach out and relate to the Indonesian people by creating art that has an 'Indonesian flavour and character'. Noteworthy is that both parties often criticise the other to be *kebarat-baratan*, a derogatory term that means 'Western-like' and implies not only a tendency to copy or follow and be subordinate to the West but also being unpatriotic. This mutual accusation makes a very interesting phenomenon to analyse.

In 1979, the movements' core beliefs were propounded through the book *Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru Indonesia*, an exhibition catalogue containing their manifesto and a



collection of essays. Its over-arching goal was to expand the boundaries of art beyond painting, sculpture, graphic art, even beyond new forms and styles towards a greater perspective that encompasses the use of free imagination to view art as a totality rather than as separate elements bound by different media and styles. The desire to communicate with the general public is a constant emphasis. A publication such as this would normally be seen as a sign of strengthening group cohesion that should increase public understanding of it. Yet surprisingly in the case of GSRB, there was no further activity from the group as a whole from that point on. The short-lived movement thus ceased as abruptly as it began, to the bewilderment of many. GSRB is known to have existed only from 1975 to 1979.

GSRB was not the first organised artist group, nor was it the first Indonesian manifesto produced which work against the hegemony of conventional Western art history. Studied in the context of the evolutionary history of modern and contemporary Indonesian art, it is often a controversial and misunderstood episode. At best not much is remembered other than its short manifesto and Jim Supangkat's famous artwork *Ken Dedes* (see Fig. 1) GSRB has sometimes been viewed as a failure or a tragedy of a group of people who tried their best to appeal to the grassroots, but were in fact full of dreams typical of idealistic youth.<sup>4</sup> There are occasionally some rare mention of GSRB as the threshold which modern Indonesian art passes through to become contemporary Indonesian art,<sup>5</sup> although such views tend to be propagated by exponents of GSRB. Local literature concerning GSRB were sometimes full of irrelevant arguments that attack the individual artists' personas rather than their artistic practices or aesthetics, associating the young with radical new ideas, the old with dusty stuffy bureaucratism. It is the purpose of this dissertation to focus on a way

---

<sup>4</sup> Yusuf Susilo Hartono, 'GSRB dan Virus Lima Jurus', *Visual Arts*, November 2010, pg 35-37

<sup>5</sup> *FX Harsono: Testimonies*, exhibition catalogue, 4 March to 9 April (Singapore: Singapore Art Museum, 2010)

to approach this chapter of art history with aesthetic criticality and socio-historical sensibility.

My research seeks to assess the importance of GSRB and whether it was indeed a rupture and a turning point in the history of Indonesian modern art, by peeling away misguided public perception and vague history that surrounds it. In addition, my particular interest is to view this struggle within the larger context of Indonesia as a nation grappling with its Western art historical influence and legacy in its art production and to gauge how successfully GSRB broke out of the hegemony and linearity of conventional Western art history to set up an 'independent' Indonesian art history. Chapter One explores the colonial history and influence that causes the import and growth Western art media and aesthetics, how it survived major political and social changes in the country and remain embedded in language today. Chapter Two investigates the aesthetics of GSRB as was encapsulated in the collection of essays in the movement's 1979 exhibition catalogue to outline the philosophies and concerns that were central to their aesthetics and practices. Throughout my analysis, I would draw from the writings of contemporaries, whether Indonesian or international and construct a fair picture of the art activities of the time.

Simply put, I would like to suggest a better way to remember GSRB, to honour its achievements, to point out its flaws, to understand its legacy and to learn the lessons from its artistic exploration.

## Chapter One: Indonesian 'Art' or 'Seni Rupa' as Colonial Legacy

Art, as it is known in the multibillion-pound global industry today, is a concept imported into Indonesia through Dutch colonisation and begun to take hold towards the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century. At that time, Indonesia was merely a geographical label for the collection of islands in the vast equatorial archipelago containing diverse ethnic groups. It was nowhere close to being a nation.

Traditionally, art in Southeast Asia was intimately tied to the courts, ethnic livelihood or religious practice. In Indonesia, material art manifested in diverse forms of practices across time, from carvings of stone, wood, bone, horn, to textile art of *batik* dyeing and *ikat* weaving, to ceramics, jewellery, metalwork, pottery, basketry, et cetera. Each artform is an expression of a local culture and community, its purpose typically reflects cosmological belief of animistic societies, or as an embodiment of status, power and potency.<sup>6</sup> Such traditional arts slowly evolved through the cultural mixture of local elements with foreign influences brought over by sea trade. Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana wrote in 1966:

“In its cultural development, Indonesia... does not belong to the cradle of the first high culture. ... Indonesia belong to the second phase of cultural development, which created a synthesis of the various achievements of the first high culture on the basis or at least with the use of, elements of native local cultures. ... High cultures of China, India and the Arabian Peninsula met on Indonesian soil.”<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Fiona Kerlogue, *Arts of Southeast Asia* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2004) p.46

<sup>7</sup> S. Takdir Alisjahbana, Benedict R. Anderson (trans.), *Indonesia: Social and Cultural Revolution* (Kuala Lumpur, London, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1966) p. 78

Within a set of cultural framework, individual local artists and craftsmen would absorb influences of foreign cultures, Hindu-Buddhist, Islamic, Chinese, and others, to form the variously diverse artistic practices in Indonesia. They became the basis of regional ethnic groups and arts, of which Javanese, Bataks, Dayaks, Minangkabaus are some examples of the more prominent names. It is to be noted that these foreign influence took many years, even centuries to blend and be absorbed into the existing indigenous culture. Likewise important is the fact that the synthesis between the local and the foreign was never and could never be uniform across the geography of the islands.

Unlike previous cultural contacts, colonisation by Western empires caused a power shift that created unequal footing between the incoming Europeans and the indigenous Indonesian, causing the former to assume a cultural supremacy over the latter. Today, at only about one hundred and fifty years since local Indonesians first tried their hands at Western media, it can be said that Western cultural presence is still rather young. Indonesia is still experiencing the processes of adaptation and syncretism of the latest significant foreign cultural force, the dynamics of which is arguably more interesting than the earlier Indian, Chinese and Islamic ones, due to the colonial politics involving both cultural imposition and denial.

GSRB as a movement is only one way of engaging, reacting and digesting the European raw cultural import. Before I begin to analyse GSRB's place in Indonesian art history, it is first necessary to trace the roots of the European contribution to the Indonesian art scene and the lasting legacies that steered the course of development in modern Indonesian art. The following account and analysis is organised in a chronological order for ease of understanding.

The arrival of various European traders particularly the *Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* (VOC), the Dutch East India trading company, in 17<sup>th</sup> century, followed by the Dutch colonial government in 19<sup>th</sup> century, were different from previous arrivals in that for the first time, the very foreign people, rather than mere ideas and philosophies, wrested for control over Indonesia. Through military might, the Dutch managed to gain control over a vast majority of land and resources in Indonesia. This was followed by a strategy of indirect governance, which changes the social and cultural hierarchy. The local nobility no longer occupied the top-most tier in the social order and was instead subordinate to the colonial masters. Among the old group of nobility, the Javanese *priyayi* or aristocrats became the most influential in Indonesia considering the Dutch made Batavia (modern-day Jakarta) the centre of its colonial empire. Such was the historical setting when the art and aesthetics of Europe were introduced to the archipelago now known as the Dutch East Indies.

Dutch artists who visited Indonesia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century marvelled at the natural landscape of Indonesia. Local Indonesians were in turn impressed by the realism inherited from the strong Flemish tradition and technique of painting. In Indonesia, painted surface as an object was known to have existed only once in recorded history. During the existence of Kingdom of Majapahit in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, a painting of great beauty was reportedly presented to the Portuguese explorer, Albuquerque, as a gesture of welcome, implying that there might once have been a culture of painting. However, paintings were never popular because the hot and humid tropical climate meant that long-term preservation was difficult. Artists and craftsmen preferred more lasting material such as stone. Indonesia has a long tradition of sculpture but the Western introduction of painting as the highest form of art was novel and significant. Likewise new was the idea of art as a self-sufficient object not immediately tied to ritualised daily life or work of the community in Indonesia.

In the early stage of the spread of Western painting to the locals, the aristocrats were the only ones to have the leisure and means to learn the unfamiliar medium of oil on canvas. The Javanese *priyayi* naturally had the most cultural contact with Dutch colonial settlers. Among them, Raden Saleh (1807-1880) was the most well known of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, painting the romantic style popular in Western Europe at the time. He travelled to Europe, exhibited internationally, had his work acquired by European museums, and even became a court painter to Ernst I, Grand Duke of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha. He is widely known in local and international histories to be the father of modern Indonesian art.

The significance of bequeathing Raden Saleh such a status is that it became generally recognised and accepted that he is a local pioneer and champion of a new artistic medium, painting. But the medium came with its baggage of Western aesthetics that is to henceforth define the 'modern' Indonesian art. This is problematic in more than one sense. First, Western influence became the axiom of what makes art in Indonesia 'modern'. The word 'modern' came to define not only the beginning of new era in art production history, the colonial and early post-colonial, but also the kinds of art made on the basis of Western media and aesthetic. As a result, there was and still is a danger of modern Indonesian art being considered a derivative of Western European art. Secondly, by allowing Western artform and aesthetics to characterise the modern, it becomes more difficult to bring out the local characteristics in the art production. This problem would increasingly come to the fore particularly when nationalist movements began to strengthen later in the 1930s.

In 1914, the Dutch set up an institute called *Bataviasche Kunstkringen* (Batavia Art Circles) to promote European culture in Indonesia. It was the only venue to see modern artworks by masters like Picasso, Gauguin, Matisse and other European impressionist and avant-gardists. Needless to say, any person aspiring to be an artist

worthy of recognition by the colonial masters, the leaders of taste, would see these paintings and emulate them. *Bataviasche Kunstkringen* used public exhibition as a platform for education and exchange of ideas, another colonial practice which was to persist in Indonesia. The popularity of such events went hand in hand with the increase in artists interested in Western-style individualist pursuits. This in turn implied the waning of court patronage that traditionally created the mainstream arts of crafts of traditional Indonesian community. Yet some Dutch circle of artists, such as those belonging to *Dutch Bond van Kunstkringen* (Union of Dutch Art Associations) denied opportunity and acknowledgment to local artists. Others were known to be sympathetic to such local aspirations, transferring their knowledge and skill in method that would later become the foundations of Indonesian art academy. Meanwhile, some native Indonesians preferred to create their own alternative education system and facilities, the first of which was made possible by the *Taman Siswa* (Garden of Students) education movement.<sup>8</sup>

Up until the 1920s, the paintings produced locally still tended towards being naturalistic and romantic, capturing scenes of beautiful Indonesian landscape and rural scenes. These kind of paintings are known under the category of *Mooi-Indie* (beautiful Indies) which were popular among Western tourists and settlers but were considered increasingly unsuitable to the rising local aspirations which were inclined towards activism and socialism. Regional nationalist movements embodying different philosophies, youth groups, artist and writer groups mushroomed during this period, one of the most prominent being *PERSAGI* (*Persatuan Ahli-Ahli Gambar Indonesia* – Association of Indonesian Picture Experts).<sup>9</sup> One of the founders of PERSAGI and a

---

<sup>8</sup> Soemantri, Hilda, *Visual Art*, Indonesian Heritage Series Book 7 (Singapore: Archipelago Press, 1998) pp. 56-7

<sup>9</sup> Others include: POETERA – Poesat Tenaga Rakyat (People's Activity Centre), Keimin Bunka Shidoso (Japanese government's cultural centre promoting the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere), Pelukis Front (Painter's Front), SIM - Seniman Indonesia Muda (Young Indonesian Artist), GAPI - Gabungan Pelukis

leading artist of his time, Sindudarsono Sudjojono, famously sums up the art scene of his time and wrote to give new direction to Indonesian art in the following oft-quoted words of 1938:

'The new artist would then no longer paint only the peaceful hut, blue mountains, romantic or picturesque and sweetish subject, but also sugar factories and the emaciated peasant, the motorcars of the rich and the pants of the poor youth: the sandals, trousers, and the jacket of the man on the street. ... This is our reality. And the living artist... who does not seek beauty in antiquity – Majapahit or Mataram – or in the mental world of the tourist, will himself live as long as the world exists. Because high art is work based on our daily life transmuted by the artist himself who is immersed in it, then creates. ... Art may not follow some group of moralisers or become the handmaid of this or that party. It must be absolutely free, liberated from all moral bonds or tradition in order to be fertile and vital.'<sup>10</sup>

Sudjojono encouraged artists to '*tjari sendiri*', a slogan that can be loosely translated into 'search it yourself'. What he was encouraging the artists to do was to be original and find their own individual style and inspiration. As Indonesian painters began substituting the subject matter of fantastical landscape with hard reality and a hint of socialist spirit, the seeds of local aesthetics discourse were planted. Within the above passage are embedded themes such as whether art should be politicised or not, whether art should be purely formal or socially involved, and whether there exists a division between 'high' art versus 'low' art. However, for decades following such impassioned writings, no other person entered the arena of Indonesian aesthetic

---

Indonesia (Federation of Indonesian Painters), Pelukis Indonesia (Indonesian Painters), LEKRA – Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat (People's Cultural Institute)

<sup>10</sup> Holt, Claire, *Art in Indonesia: Continuities and Change* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1967) p. 196



discourse such that Indonesian art world remained without the support of formal art literature.

Meanwhile, Sudjojono's hope for Indonesian artists to not be subservient of any political party did not come true. With the heightened activity among all nationalist groups, the Japanese Occupation of 1942-45, and the Dutch post-World War II reoccupation and struggle for independence, there was a boom in political expression. In the politically charged years between the 1930s and 1960s a great many art associations were set up, each offering studio space, art materials, and the benefits of camaraderie. Some organisations required artists to subscribe to political ideologies in exchange for career support, others encourage paintings of dramatic battle scenes to motivate fighters and evoke patriotism, yet others were more directly propagandist in their approach. Art became the vehicle of political rhetoric, predominantly that of anti-colonisation and anti-Dutch sentiment. Up until then, it was the closest the Indonesians have ever been to taking a Western medium and made it their tool. Such trends meant that the subject matter of Indonesian paintings became more localised towards native politics and military struggle, a distancing from the typical Western subjects of landscape, portrait and still-lives. Yet even at this time, it has already become clear that the Java islands – as the centre of power struggle between the Dutch, Japanese and Indonesia, and the most developed part of Indonesia – has begun to dominate the artistic and political climate. Often times, what was defined to be Indonesian was often really Javanese. The Javanese command of national identity would be diminished as independence brought an end to the unification of purpose to rid the foreign invaders. Modern art would enter a period during which regional identities fought for presence and acknowledgement in the national stage dominated by Javanese personalities.

The proclamation of independence of 1945 ushered a new era of confidence and order, despite the fact that the news of this declaration took years to reach all remote corners of Indonesia and that afterwards the Dutch post-World War II military force reconquered Indonesia such that the new government had to go into exile. Art academies were established in Bandung in 1947 and Yogyakarta in 1949. The climate of opinion in this period was that art has universal values and art academies were necessary to develop local scene in order to participate in the global industry. Bandung was a city that colonial settlers favoured due to its cool mountain climate. Its art academy likewise carried a strong Western legacy, with Dutch academic system, teachers who had studied abroad in the West and a prominent Dutch abstract painter Ries Mulder. The Bandung school's focus on abstract and formalist approach to art was despised by the art academy in Yogyakarta, who claim to have a social realist focus inherited from the war period. The Yogyakarta art academy was set up when the Indonesian government was in exile in that city as a result of the Dutch Police Action<sup>11</sup>, therefore pride itself for possessing the legacy of defiance against the foreign. The clash between the two academies over the next two decades became known as the Great Debate. The most scathing and famous remark came from Trisno Sumardjo who accused the Bandung school of being 'The Laboratory of the West' and significantly contributed to the academy's unpopularity in the eyes of the people.<sup>12</sup> Yogyakarta school might pride itself for having teachers who were actively painting images of the revolution during the struggle, however the truth was that its art production was not much different from the Bandung school. While Bandung figurative paintings was ridiculed as derivative of Western portraits, those in Yogyakarta were simply scenes of Indonesian people; Bandung abstract paintings were considered copies of Western expressionist paintings, while similar ones in

---

<sup>11</sup> The First and Second Dutch Police Action in were military aggressions executed without a formal declaration of war with the intention of securing key facilities and towns in Indonesia for recolonisation.

<sup>12</sup> Claire Holt, *Art in Indonesia: Continuities and Change* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1967) p. 239

Yogyakarta were deemed as aesthetic explorations. Jakarta art academy entered the scene in 1968, missing most of the period of conflict and was consigned to the position of neutrality. It appears that accusations were based more on stereotypes rather than thorough observation.

Perhaps the artistic output of all academies at this time was comparable, with the most popular being painting, followed by sculpture. It is clear that Indonesian art could not claim to have progressed from their colonial times if its artistic value system was still the same as the conventional Western one without further local development or contribution. Artists and critics would like to think that Indonesian modern art was participating in the global art world which goes to explain why Indonesian artworks have similar trends to its Western counterpart. However, without any established local critical discourse nor local art market, the Indonesian art world at this point was barely a complete industry, let alone an established one that could participate in and influence the global scene. Nevertheless, the establishment of art academies meant that Indonesia now have their own artistic legitimising body, similar to the art academies of Europe. The artist has become a profession and to become one, an individual had to go through education in art academies, which was and is essentially a university education. This gesture limited the art profession to the upper class, considering that most of the nation's demographic are poor, illiterate and lived in the rural countryside. Moreover, the existence of art graduates hierarchised the art production in the country. Formal and institutionalised modern art was distinguished from traditional arts, the producer of one may earn the prestigious status of being a fine artist, while the other, a craftsmen of artefacts. *Pengrajin* or craftsmen, were distinguished from *seni rupawan*, and the former no longer had the protection and mutual dependence of the traditional courts which have been dismissed and replaced by one government of the newly democratic republic. In the immediate post-independence years, *de facto* patronage mainly came from the art-loving President

Sukarno who assembled most of the national collection by collecting and commissioning. Formally, the *Dewan Kesenian* (Arts Council) was the government body responsible for encouraging growth in the arts. Cultural authority was essentially passed from the colonial masters to governing Javanese upper class – it was one hegemony of taste replaced by another, a rather mixed progress in terms of redefining a colonial legacy to suit the nation as a whole.

Shock came in September 1965 with a sudden political change. The increasingly influential communist party was claimed to have staged a coup by murdering key military personalities. Led by Suharto, the national military retaliated by exterminating every communist suspect and, following Sukarno's resignation, took over the government. Suharto's New Order and Guided Democracy from 1965 to 1998 was a dictatorial leadership that began with forceful depoliticisation of all aspects of life. Having just emerged from traumatic massacres, most people willingly complied to the new policies, trading freedom for political stability. Uniformity was encouraged and the art industry suffered the ban of political undertones in all artworks. Centralised control and the longevity of President Suharto's rule allowed him to lay down five-year development plans that brought about economic proliferation. The underside of the triumphant story of national progress was much social disruption caused by abrupt industrialisation and urbanisation, realities that were suppressed from general public. A climate of fear also existed as any political expression that was hostile to the government of the day would cause the perpetrator to suffer imprisonment, death or disappearance in other forms. Hendra Gunawan was among those imprisoned due to the political rhetorics of his work, despite his fame as an established nationalist artist during the war. The limitation of non-political subject matter further limited artistic exploration to formal and decorative aesthetic experimentation. The result is a general sense of ennui that artists claimed to have felt at the time. 'Indonesian art has

become *mandeg* (stuck),’ this was a common complaint. The stage was set for groundbreaking GSRB to call out for expansion of definition of fine art.

Perhaps, upon hindsight, a tendency towards decorativism is not too objectionable. Newly independent nations often try to find distinctive characteristics of their modern and contemporary art. Traditional ethnic arts in Indonesian do share a love for the decorated surface. Lines, colours, and patterns cramming every inch of canvas may not be an agent of change in Indonesian society, neither could it revolutionise the medium of painting but it does share the decorative quality with traditional arts. Decorativism captures one aspect of ‘Indonesian-ness’ by virtue of the traditional motifs that artists employ to create ornamentation, whether by copying, adapting, stylising or improvising. Indonesian ethnic cultures across the country do appear to have a love for decorated surface, whether on textile, wood or others, so minute detailing on canvas could potentially be read as an ‘Indonesian’ tendency. This is an example that finding what is ‘Indonesian’ need not always mean rejecting all that is Western; self-discovery is possible through a foreign medium.

Thus far in this chapter, I have related the various causes that led to the Indonesian traditional arts to lose its importance, replaced by the rise of modern art. Throughout the game of power play – onset of colonisation, the waning of court power, the setting up of cultural hierarchy, the Dutch’s staged superiority, the local reaction, the war and struggle for independence – Western media and aesthetics have survived and taken hold in Indonesia. The establishment of art institutions (academies, museums and galleries), the increase in number of public exhibition and the beginning of commercialisation beyond the expatriate clientele demonstrated the growth and formalisation of this colonial legacy. Yet the clearest sign of the direct aesthetic lineage of Indonesian modern art from Western art lies in the use of the word *seni rupa* to denote ‘fine art’.

Language and words are often strong ideological markers and the word *seni rupa* is a colonial inheritance. No discussion of the basis of modern Indonesian aesthetic would be complete without tracing the etymology of the word. It is not known who was first to research into the subject in this manner but both art critic and lecturer Sanento Yuliman and his protégé, artist and critic Jim Supangkat, wrote in detail about it.<sup>13</sup> In essence, the *Bahasa Indonesia*<sup>14</sup> term *seni rupa* is not an equivalent to the European connotation of 'fine art' and that the disconnection of meanings between them has caused prolonged confusion and debate in the discourse on Indonesian aesthetics. *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* (The Great Indonesian Language Dictionary) gave two definitions to *seni rupa*, the first one is the more literal meaning of 'visual art' an all-encompassing category without distinction between the high and low; and the second, 'visual art' that comes with the connotation of being 'high' or 'fine'. It would appear that *seni* is an unusual choice of word, because until late the 19<sup>th</sup> century, *seni* was only use in context of *air seni* which can be loosely translated to 'fine or delicate water', an euphemism for 'urine'. It is certainly curious how a word that was associated with 'urine' came to denote finer things in life.

It appears as though native Indonesians has taken the mature European 'fine art' concept whole, and loosely translated into local language without understanding or

---

<sup>13</sup> See:

- Yuliman, Sanento, 'Tangan yang Melambai di Dinding Batu', *Pelukis Rakyat*, 28 September 1983

- Supangkat, Jim, 'Wawancara saya dengan saya' in *Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru Indonesia*, (Jakarta: Gramedia, 1979) pp.70-80

<sup>14</sup> *Bahasa Indonesia* or 'the Indonesian language' is a language that evolved out of Classical Malay<sup>14</sup> used in trading centres in Indonesia for centuries before the independence. It was decided to be the official language of native Indonesians in *Sumpah Pemuda* (Youth's Vow) event of 1928 while the nation was still under colonisation. *Bahasa Indonesia* aspired to be the amalgamation of various indigenous ethnic languages to truly become a 'national language' of the Indonesian people. However, the truth is that most of the added words came from Javanese and European languages.

digesting the historical baggage that comes with it. Both Yuliman and Supangkat has observed that it would have been wiser if Indonesians have chosen the Old Javanese word *kagoenan* to represent art instead. *Kagoenan*, which according to *Baoesastra Jawa* (Dictionary of High Javanese) represents the artistic activity such as sculptural carvings or poetry, has the root word of *goena* or *guna*. That word, like the Greek root word *techne* that forms the basis of Western notion of 'art', contains the connotation of function and use, which makes sense in a society where art activity serves a function in traditional court and daily life. To choose a word of greater historical and linguistic depth such as *kagoenan* as the Western equivalent of 'fine art' and develop its notions and nuances locally would mean that Indonesian artists would then have a better foundation on which to build its art history, free from Western hegemony and without guilt of being unpatriotic. The Platonian search for metaphysical absolute Truth that forms the basic concern of Western 'fine art' is not mirrored in Java, whose idea of 'fine' is to be morally righteous. Yuliman and Supangkat observed that the Western definition of art is indeed incompatible with local, pre-colonial idea of art. In the immediate future, any attempt to capture 'Indonesian-ness' in modern art could only come from overthrowing the stifling Western definition. The belief that artistic values are universal should likewise be abandoned.

Time and again, local art critics have found that Indonesian modern art is unsuitable for the identity of the nation. *Mooi Indie* was an orientalist objectification and unrealistic romanticisation of Indonesia, said Sudjojono. The subsequent politicisation of art, by Sudjojono's standard, was likewise a corruption of what should be high art raised above mundane life. Sumardjo declared that geometric and abstract expressionist exploration were Western formalist technique that was unpatriotic and 'un-Indonesian'. Black December statement despises the emptiness of meaning in decorativism. These are simply few famous cases. With a series of writers despairing over the degradation or even the non-existence of 'Indonesian' art, it was difficult to

even say that modern art truly was alive and present in Indonesia. Amidst the confusion and disagreements regarding what Indonesian modern art should be, GSRB came up with the suggestion that for once, all kinds of art should be embraced and the definition of art should not be pinned down. It is, indeed, a much-needed rupture to re-engage Indonesian modern art with the source of its aesthetics.



## Chapter Two: Aesthetics and Practice of Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru

Perception can be deceiving, especially when it is on a subject in the past that one could only be learnt only from documents. In the case of GSRB, written documents are truly scattered and difficult to get hold of. I have observed for years that Indonesia does not have a strong literary tradition. In a country where acclaimed literary books easily go out of print regardless of its historical importance, book publication on art writing is almost non-existent. Essays and articles on art and aesthetics were scattered in forewords to coffee-table books, essays for exhibition catalogues<sup>15</sup>, or worse, magazines articles<sup>16</sup> where the more academic writing would be mixed among standard expository essays and reports of commercial activity in the art market. Journals were and still are scarce and rarely touch on art production of the day. Even as the foremost art critic such as Sanento Yuliman, during his active career from 1970s to 1992 had to published most of his writings through magazines such as *Pikiran Rakyat* and *Tempo*, as those cultural magazines were already the best channels Indonesia could offer in terms of formality and exposure. In such light, the reader might thus better appreciate the importance and rarity a collection of essays compiled into a book, such as *Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru Indonesia*, published as early as 1979. Being the definitive GSRB publication, it contained scribbles by both artists and art critics, along with the photographic record of works by members of GSRB from 1975 to 1979.

---

<sup>15</sup> Werner Kraus in a recent lecture *Curating in Indonesia* (part of the *Curating in Asia* conference in cooperation with Goethe-Institut on 10 December 2011) criticises Indonesian curator essays to be mostly unrelated to the work of the artist. The trend is that a curator would take a look at an artist's work and spinned an essay out of it, typically crammed with sophisticated Western concepts, which the artist himself would be clueless about. Curator's essay is more a marketing tool meant to augment an artist's credibility than a useful addition to aesthetic discourse.

<sup>16</sup> Today, the best example of one such Indonesian art magazine today is *Visual Arts*. There has also been a recent trend of private artist-owned galleries, such as the Cemeti Art Gallery, which publish annual collection of essays. These galleries would also organise informal talks and meetings to spark public interest and allow exchange of ideas. Aesthetic discourse, whether written or verbal, is still young.

Before I explore the content of book, it would be useful to first illustrate the inner workings of GSRB as a movement. It is one aspect of GSRB that is rarely covered in written documents. I have therefore sought to uncover it through an interview with one of the founding members of GSRB, FX Harsono,<sup>17</sup> from whom I gleaned the following account.

On the most basic level, GSRB was a gathering of artists who meet regularly to share and exchange their thoughts and aspirations. It is more an informal platform than a formal organisation. These people are mostly young artists, either recent graduates from local art academies or drop outs from the scandalous affairs of Black December Statement. Among them were well-known figures of the Indonesian art world today, Jim Supangkat, Dede Eri Supria, Nyoman Nuarta, Nanik Mirna, Hardi, et cetera. Contrary to popular belief, GSRB was not only limited to artists or young people of the same generation; Sanento Yuliman, then a lecturer in Bandung art academy was reportedly part of the group too, mingling with some of his students.<sup>18</sup> GSRB members agreed from the start that they would not interfere with each other's philosophy, artistic direction or working methods. The gathering and labeling of themselves was based on a shared dislike for the state of art production in the 1970s.

To analyse what it was exactly that GSRB objected to and seek to revolutionise, I quote from the manifesto printed on the first page of their book. It consisted of five 'ground-breaking moves' or 'lines of attack'. For the purpose of the paper, I hereby

---

<sup>17</sup> Interview transcript is available as Appendix B.

<sup>18</sup> *FX Harsono: Testimonies*, exhibition catalogue, 4 March to 9 April (Singapore: Singapore Art Museum, 2010) p. 13

present the translated and summarised points of the manifesto,<sup>19</sup> followed by my evaluation of them.

**“ Lima Jurus Gebrakan Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru Indonesia**

**(Five Ground-Breaking Moves of the Indonesian New Art Movement)**

1. ... to throw away as far as possible the image of ... ‘old art’ which is art that is only limited to painting, sculpture and graphic art. ... artworks that cannot be categorized into the above forms, is considered ‘legitimate’ (“New Art”) ... all activities which can be categorised as art in Indonesia, despite being based on a different ‘aesthetics’, for example those originating from traditional arts, is by common sense considered legitimate art that is alive.
2. To throw away as far as possible the ‘specialist’ attitude in art which tends to build ‘elitist language’ based on ‘avand-gardist’ attitude ... it is more important to discuss actual social issues than personal sentiments. ... (and that) the wealth of ideas or notions is more crucial than the skillfulness of ‘the master’ in developing formal elements.
3. To dream of ‘creative possibilities’, ... stylistic variety in Indonesian art. ... acknowledging all possibilities without limit, as a reflection of the ‘searching’ attitude... to challenge the shrinking of possibilities, such as the ‘*cantrikisme*’ teaching attitude in which the style of one teacher is followed by all his students.

---

<sup>19</sup> The original document in Bahasa Indonesia and my English translation of can be found in Appendix A.

4. To dream for the development of art that is 'Indonesia' through a way which prioritises knowledge of New Indonesian Art History starting from Raden Saleh. ... based on writings and theories of Indonesian people, whether critics, historians or thinkers. ... To completely reject the view that Indonesian art development is part of World art history, which states that art is universal.
  
5. To dream of art that is more alive, whose existence is not doubted, common, useful, and thrives within society."<sup>20</sup>

The tone of the text is passionate and defiant, as one would expect from a manifesto forged out of the dissatisfaction towards a *mandeg* (stuck) art world. Yet the choice of words and use of punctuation has a hint of informality<sup>21</sup>. Granted, the use of simple and accessible language is performative of GSRB's line of belief in non-elitism, however this gesture also limits the depth of content such that the manifesto is riddled with vagueness, lapses of logic and paradoxes. I would now assess and analyse the validity and effectiveness of the manifesto in relation to the essays within the *Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru Indonesia* book and compare it to the GSRB practices.

With regards to the first clause of the manifesto, it is well and fair to voice out the need to expand art beyond the three formal and pure categories of fine art, to free art from dogmatic rules. It is a novel notion at least in Indonesia, although not so in the West, one that opens up possibilities in all directions, embrace plurality of aesthetics and ideology, eradicating the divisions between 'traditional' and 'modern', or eliminating the use of labels altogether. The statement, taken as a new foundation of the term *seni rupa*, would have broken the definitional constraints of *seni rupa*, with all

---

<sup>20</sup> Supangkat, Jim (ed.), *Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru Indonesia - Kumpulan Karangan* (Jakarta: PT Gramedia, 1979) p. XIX

<sup>21</sup> This is most notable in the peculiar use of a question mark at the end of the first paragraph of the second point of the original text in *Bahasa Indonesia* available in Appendix A.

its connotations of 'high' (higher than the everyday mundane) and 'fine' (pure in a disciplinary sense). However, liberating it would also mean disregarding or erasing the weight of colonial legacy embodied in the etymology of the word. In later years, Supangkat would later try to champion the word *kagunan*<sup>22</sup> instead as an alternative solution to the attempt to expand *seni rupa*.

Aside of that, the main weakness of this first clause, as critics pointed out, lies in the fact that by abolishing existing paradigms, an absence of rules and frame of reference would mean that anything with visual qualities could be considered art. GSRB may despise the art academies' rigid and uncompromising control of what is and is not art. However, to destroy the legitimising authority is a self-destructive gesture. A GSRB artist would then be no less superior than the potter or the basket weaver in the village, the words and opinions of the former no less valid than the latter. Nevertheless, that was not the situation in 1975. The unwritten and unmentioned legitimiser was, in fact, preserved in the form of the art exhibition. Works by GSRB artists were deemed as art because they were presented in the exhibition in 1975, no less in the very venue in which the Large Exhibition of Indonesian Paintings of 1974 was held, in Ismail Marzuki Garden. The institutional venue so steeped in historical and cultural significance definitely lent its gravity to the anti-establishment movement.

The manifesto's second clause deals with the tendency of art to become elitist and glorify the skills of a formalist painter. It instead evokes the need for art to draw its inspiration from social problems which supposedly has a greater ability to relate to the common people. This idea is clearly not new for it resembles Sudjojono's evocations many years ago, so it might not deserve its place as a 'ground-breaking move'. The encouragement to adopt social issues and observations of hardship was not new either. It was contained in the agenda of many art associations during the struggle for

---

<sup>22</sup> *Kagunan* is a modern spelling of the old term *kagoenan*.

independence during which artists lived side-by-side with the guerilla fighters and painted whilst among them.<sup>23</sup> Arguably, the post-independence establishment of art academies had caused a backward step in the project of having an Indonesian art that lives among the people, so the attempt by GSRB to put the project back on track was credible.

Assuming a repetition of an earlier idea can be overlooked, this point still contains a few oversimplifications. The second clause of the manifesto contains the implied desire to be able to relate to the average citizen as the following quote from the back of the book's cover page proves:

*'One of the main things to be introduced here is the question of how the artist as a member of society can visualise real social problems through art as an expression of solidarity towards fellow members of society.'*

As such, a few words need to be said regarding the credibility of the logic contained. The masses may never understand the reasoning behind the pursuit of beauty or perfect proportions, however, depending on the angle the artist takes on a social problem, beauty could potentially relate more to the masses than a sharp or intellectual commentary. The downtrodden poor may be the ones experiencing actual hardship, but it would be blind to assume that they fully understand the cause of their situation. Understanding social problems often requires acute insight, one which the less educated class might not understand. An artwork subtly criticizing Suharto's iron-fisted rule, such as FX Harsono's *Rantai yang Santai (The Relaxed Chain)*<sup>24</sup> (see Fig. 2) would have less to present to a farmer than a *Mooi Indie* painting of natural

---

<sup>23</sup> Paintings during these era are characterised by a yellow and brownish tinge. This is apparently the case because there was white paint was expensive and in very short supply during the war.

<sup>24</sup> The artwork is a commentary on how Suharto's brutal and oppressive policies were so terrible it could haunt as nightmares in sleep. Alternatively, it could be read as a metaphor for restrictions being so common that it has become a familiar part of life that one takes for granted, letting the case rest.

landscape. Artist Moelyono observed that Indonesian artists who have made poverty the subject of their painting often later sell these works to upper class buyers for high prices. The result is a painful irony of such paintings of the poor being hung in air-conditioned private galleries of the rich, 'mute... reified and alienated.'<sup>25</sup> It should not be too severe to criticise this second clause for being guilty of at least a middle class mindset for assuming social problems are readily understood by the masses. There is also the problem of the geographical vastness and the cultural diversity of Indonesia. The social hardship in one island, or city, or village, may not be known, let alone experienced, by another. However, the years 1970s and 1980s did present a unique opportunity in that Suharto's forced standardisation had created a series of shared experience which the artists from any province could tap on it to communicate and relate to every person within the national boundary. Within the brief window during Suharto's rule, a more uniform set of social problems may be able to unify the nation and appeal to the masses, but it remained true that most people were in fact blind to Suharto's oppression, such that the second clause probably prove more ineffective than otherwise.

The third clause again echoes the slogan 'search it yourself' of Sudjojono and borders on plagiarism, although its intention, like the second clause, was perhaps more on reviving a forgotten goal than to claim it as original. The additional criticism regarding the mechanical passing down of style from teachers to students helps redeem it. In practice, however, GSRB's choice of media and style is far from well-accepted. Senior members of the art circle appears to be expecting a well-formed, perfectly served series of artworks with faultless ideology. Most of them refused to treat GSRB artworks as a daring work-in-progress based on principles that were not the norm at that time. Imperfections were immediately blamed as a childish move by a group of

---

<sup>25</sup> Moelyono, 'Seni Rupa Kaganan: A Process' in *Imagining Indonesia: Cultural Politics and Political Culture* (London: Ohio Univ. Monograph Int. Stud., 1997)

delinquents, a gesture that is really meant to preserve their own credibility and reputation in the art circle. These critics were delighted to know that the new, radical art that was promised by GSRB eventually proved to manifest as installation and mixed-media art, employing the use of 'found object' or the technique of appropriation. They argued that because these media were pioneered in the West, GSRB was still not escaping from the clutches of Western artistic hegemony, instead only updating the scene with introduction of new Western elements. Although GSRB use of Western new media did put them in the line of fire by sceptical seniors, it would be false to assume that GSRB was not aware of their conscious choice. Supangkat understood the strong claim to originality that an inventor of a new medium would have. He sketched the foundations of a new medium christened *Wabon Senrabu*, that is *Wayang Boneka Seni Rupa Baru* (New Art Puppet Dolls). Although it was not eventually realised, the article did showed an attempt from GSRB to pioneer a new art medium. However, it would be too harsh to say that they were copying the West in art making, for few among them knows English such that plagiarising Western concept would be quite a feat for most. While they did look at the images of the type of art circulating in the West, conceptually GSRB members would have to work it out themselves.

It is ironic that the senior critics accused the GSRB artists for *being kebarat-baratan* (Western-like), something which they were themselves guilty of, albeit more subtly. The conventional medium, styles, values of Western art has had almost a century to adapt and synthesise by the 1970s. It is unfair to claim that they did not themselves inherit Western influences, as Chapter One has to established. It was easy but cruel for critics such as Kusnadi to harness public's horror at artworks such as *Ken Dedes* (see Fig. 1) to voice mainstream comments of the artwork's 'vulgarity' and 'inadvertent prostitution of a the nation's legendary figure', avoiding instead to learn the true message behind the shock factor. In truth, *Ken Dedes* can be interpreted in



many ways, at once a critique of sculpture as a medium championed by art academies, of the frequent disconnection between events in the past and a modern reading of history, and of the fatal attraction of women and Western consumerist culture.<sup>26</sup> In retaliation, GSRB would claim that their artworks could not be judged using the old ideology because they are based on a different ideology.

Yet to pick on the problem of having Western influence in the art production is to miss the point of GSRB's gesture. While GSRB did try to distance themselves from Western influence and direct colonial legacy (as implied by the fourth clause to be discussed later) nowhere in the manifesto did they state their rejection. The main focus was to encourage a stronger emphasis on concept and this was proven by a unique informal exhibition set up in 1976 called the *Pameran Konsep* (Concept Exhibition). Although it was not a formal exhibition similar to those of years 1975, 1977 and 1979, it was, in my opinion, the most important exhibition by GSRB. The exhibition contains large sheets of paper on which each member of GSRB has drawn a graphic mind-map or flow charts of sorts to express their view on various issues concerning the status of art and artists in Indonesia. Fig 3. and 4. are two examples of such drawings. Such sheets of paper could be regarded as discourse in action, with contrasting ideas displayed within the same room on an equal playing field, inviting viewers to participate. In Fig 3. Entitled 'Cycle', 'society' is a group of huddled people and 'aspiration' rises from above their heads into a cloud of thoughts; the cloud drifts and builds up to finally electrify the artist with 'inspiration' and, upon his 'romantic heartbeat', is channeled through 'sensitivity', 'skill' and 'technique' to become a work of art; unfortunately the cycle breaks because there exists a gap between art and society's ability to understand it. Fig 4. caricaturises the dual role that an artist is required to play, as a disheveled street painter of a romantic disposition as opposed

---

<sup>26</sup> Patrick D. Flores, 'Ken Dedes' in *Beyond the Dutch: Indonesia, the Netherlands and the Visual Arts, from 1900 until now* (Amsterdam: KIT Publishers, 2009)

to being a sophisticated, image-conscious salesman and popular philosopher with a diplomatic smile, sporting branded goods; the artwork is itself torn between two extremes of being weird, aggressive, surprising, emotion and original or sweet, visually pleasing, sleek, 'semi'-abstract with high class colour. Such reflections on the Indonesian art world may employ stereotypes, however, it could potentially brought about awareness that is essential to development.

The fourth clause of the manifesto contains a lofty hope and a problematic paradox. GSRB recognizes the need for art to be built atop aesthetic discourse. The lofty hope consists of the belief that Indonesian artists could rely on local thinkers, their observations, literary publication, philosophies and thoughts, which could, GSRB claimed, potentially supersede anything available abroad. It is a feasible dream, but one that would not occur for a least a century. At the moment, the rejection of glorification of the Western and international art is an acceptable suggestion that might indeed direct the gaze inwards and develop domestic talents. However, it is self-contradictory to set up an 'Indonesian Art History' that starts with Raden Saleh. To do so would be to acquire within that history traces of unprocessed Western art history. Colonial legacy and the advancement of Western art industry should be regarded with criticality rather than antagonism. The intention to be freed of Western influence by rejecting it is in fact to still be influenced by it, by virtue of a negative mold. There is also the problem of the possibility of the New Indonesian Art History becoming a canon over time. The fixed starting point of Raden Saleh hinted at inflexibility of perspective to create one version of history, rather than allowing various histories to exist. An art history dominated by Michelangelo, Rembrandt and Picasso could well be substituted by one dominated by Sudjojono, Affandi, Harsono. Although GSRB continuously promoted pluralism and hybridity in art production, acceptance of diverse art would not be realised until regional artists and traditional craftsmen did not suffer the stark difference in economic condition and reputation. On this respect,

GSRB artists would need assistance from cultural historians, anthropologists, to construct a system in which traditional crafts would not be limited in definition to an artefact or a commercial object, sold to tourists or private gallery owner, instead deserving a chance to be considered art. Of course, such cross-disciplinary problem is one that puzzles academics worldwide even today. To focus only on the writings of local thinkers would also miss out on the useful perspective that foreign writers may be able to provide. The issue extends not only to a question of definition of art and Indonesian art history, but also a question of identity in relation to capabilities to contribute discourse in Indonesia.

However, GSRB has again proved itself to be commendable in the actual practice of a flawed premise. It has been often observed that *Bahasa Indonesia* as a language that has a unique, more noticeable difference between the informality of daily speech and formality of verbal and written official use. In accordance with their intention to cater to the grassroots and not be elitist, members of GSRB have demonstrated that in writing their essays for the book, they have adopted a more simple language, even throwing in an occasional use of colloquial words. Jim Supangkat's article *Wawancara Saya Dengan Saya* (My Interview with Me) is an interesting case in point. The article has a question-and-answer structure, which makes reading it more accessible by breaking up to sections one of the longest essays in the book. The 'interviewer' is constructed to voice the widespread concerns of people at that time, the 'interviewee' would then patiently and artfully answer his questions. Instead of having a dry essay with arguments and counter arguments, Supangkat instead presents a script of 'two' people having a regular conversation, the realism of which is increased by the use of verbal expressions such as 'huh', 'ha..., ha, ha', 'O', 'wah', and 'Waaah...'. However, embedded within this article is the serious effort to explain what GSRB was trying to achieve, in addition to a long account of the history of the word *seni rupa* in Indonesia and 'fine art' in Europe.

Indeed there is another example in which GSRB did practice what they preach. The open way in which GSRB was willing to treat opinions, arguments and oppositions in order to pave the way for Indonesian art discourse was demonstrated in the reprinting of articles by senior artist and lecturer, Kusnadi, and the young GSRB member Sudarmadji in the *Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru Indonesia* book. The two figures famously argued through the public media, back and forth in a total of seven articles.<sup>27</sup> Much of the argument is actually personal insults, disguised as attacks on old fashioned and outdated rigidity the art academies, or criticisms towards inept artists who created copies of Dadaist artworks. Each would quote the other's public statements out of context with the purpose to vilify the other. Despite this rather questionable quality of argumentative essays, it was included in the book for the public to thus judge for themselves. This gesture could be read as good practice of accumulation of material to construct an Indonesian discourse.

The fifth and final clause is a vision of a future which does not specify the methods required to reach it. Every movement requires a goal, but an aim is not exactly a 'ground-breaking move' and as such remains as a rather vague statement, despite its being a hopeful and positive way to end a manifesto.

Having thus scrutinised the GSRB manifesto and compared it with their practices during their existence, I would now elucidate the mysterious ending of the movement

---

<sup>27</sup> See: *Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru Indonesia - Kumpulan Karangan* (Jakarta: PT Gramedia, 1979) for the following chapters:

Supono Pr., *Seni Rupa Baru menurut Kusnadi, interview*

Sudarmadji, *Visi masa lampau Kusnadi*

Kusnadi, *Menilai pembelaan Sudarmadji pada Seni Rupa Baru Indonesia*

Sudarmadji, *Seni Rupa Baru memancing perdebatan*

Kusnadi, *Pengingkaran dan pengelakan Sudarmadji sekitar nilai*

Sudarmadji, *Kusnadi nan buruak sangko*

Kusnadi, *Terakhir untuk Sudarmadji*

by drawing again from the interview with FX Harsono for insights. He recounted that in 1979, two factions of differing philosophies began to form within GSRB, each vying for power and influence within the group. Perhaps the time spent together by the members has resulted in individual ideological maturity within the diverse group which led to cracks in the unity of the group. Knowing that if continued, the purity and focus of GSRB would be compromised, Harsono suggested that the 1979 exhibition was to be their last. GSRB voluntarily disbanded afterwards and each artist went in his own direction. I agree with Harsono that the movement was rather successful. GSRB has accomplished some of their aims, if rather indirectly, and provided Indonesian art with a fresh perspective and a new way of experiencing art, as Sanento Yuliman sums up.<sup>28</sup> The final act of disbanding GSRB, in fact, showed the strength and courage of GSRB as a self-reflexive movement whose deeds should be remembered in years to come.

---

<sup>28</sup> Sanento Yuliman, 'Perspektif Baru' in *Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru Indonesia - Kumpulan Karangan* (Jakarta: PT Gramedia, 1979)

## Conclusion

Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru as a movement caused a rupture in art practice on a national level. Through a combination of the use of manifesto and practices, they have successfully opened up new ways of creating and experiencing art, as well as expanding the use of the word *seni rupa* to media that were previously unacknowledged in Indonesia. A number of the clauses in the manifesto were flawed and others were revivals of Sudjojono's ideals, such that despite its sincere efforts, it is at times problematic for GSRB to claim itself 'new'. Despite that, GSRB managed to ameliorate possible aesthetic confusion through a series of good practices such as a relentless focus on concept, a commitment to fair and open discussion as well as freedom of thought. The movement's honourable and timely self-dismissal is one of the best demonstrations of their worth.

Reception of GSRB was generally not positive, but controversy was probably caused mainly by disagreements on a human level rather than real aesthetic objections. The Black December Statement, the flower arrangement, the formation of GSRB were very public and radical acts of defiance against senior members of a narrow art circle. Thus it is understandable for them to defend their credibility by attacking GSRB's weak points with polemical remarks, inadvertently creating an inaccurate image of the movement.

It is a common practice for writers, curators and art critics today to commemorate GSRB by quoting its manifesto. It is my personal belief that the manifesto is the least admirable aspect of GSRB. Instead, the group should be remembered for its practices, particularly its emphasis on concept and ideas which is in line with most of the global contemporary art practice today.

Art has often been said to be one of the rare platforms in which sharp political commentary could be made with considerable liberty. Internationally, Indonesia have always attracted substantial interest either as the Emerald of Equator, as the nation with the greatest size of Muslim population, as a secular and democratic country, as the unofficial 'big brother' of Southeast Asia, as an emerging economy, et cetera. Art with strong conceptual focus dealing with domestic issues might be one way to capture 'Indonesian-ness' and present it to an international community curious for an insiders' take into the country. Should Indonesian art reach that stage one day, it would have GSRB to thank for creating that first reckless, imperfect initiative of conceptual focus.

## **Appendix A**

A note on translation: I have personally done the translation of the manifesto from *Bahasa Indonesia* to English, and as such it may not be perfect. I have attempted to capture the slight informal tone of the manifesto as close as possible to the original by keeping to the same use of simple language, choice of punctuation and capital letters.

### ***Lima Jurus Gebrakan Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru Indonesia***

1. Dalam berkarya, membuang sejauh mungkin imaji “seni rupa” yang diakui hingga kini, (gerakan menganggapnya sebagai “seni rupa lama”) yaitu seni rupa yang dibatasi hanya di sekitar: seni lukis, seni patung dan seni gambar (seni grafis).

Dalam Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru Indonesia, penetrasi di antara bentuk-bentuk seni rupa di atas, yang bisa melahirkan karya-karya seni rupa yang tidak dapat dikategorikan pada bentuk-bentuk atas, dianggap “sah” (“Seni Rupa Baru”).

Dalam berkarya, membuang sejauh mungkin imagi adanya elemen-elemen khusus dalam seni rupa, seperti elemen-elemen lukisan, elemen-elemen gambar dan sebagainya. Keseluruhan berada dalam satu kategori, elemen-elemen rupa yang bias berkaitan dengan elemen-elemen ruang, gerak, waktu dan sebagainya.

Dengan begitu, semua kegiatan yang dapat dikategorikan ke dalam seni rupa di Indonesia, kendati didasari “estetika” yang berbeda, umpamanya yang berasal



dari kesenian traditional, secara masuk akal dianggap sah sebagai seni rupa yang hidup.

2. Membuang sejauh mungkin sikap “spesialis” dalam seni rupa yang cenderung membangun “bahasa elitis” yang didasari sikap “avand-gardisme” yang dibangun oleh imaji: seniman seharusnya menyuruk ke dalam mencari hal-hal subtil (agar tidak dimengerti masyarakat, karena seniman adalah bagian dari misteri hidup?).

Sebagai gantinya, percaya pada segi “kesamaan” yang ada pada manusia dikarenakan lingkungan kehidupan yang sama. Percaya pada masalah-masalah social yang aktual sebagai masalah yang lebih penting untuk dibicarakan daripada sentimen-sentimen pribadi. Dalam hal ini, *kekayaan ide atau gagasan lebih utama daripada ketrampilan “master” dalam menggarap elemen-elemen bentuk.*

3. Mendambakan “kemungkinan berkarya”, dalam arti mengharapkan keragaman gaya dalam seni rupa Indonesia. Menghujani seni rupa Indonesia dengan kemungkinan-kemungkinan baru, mengakui semua kemungkinan tanpa batasan, sebagai pencerminan sikap “mencari”. Dari sini, menentang semua penyusutan kemungkinan, antara lain sikap pengajaran “cantrikisme” di mana gaya seorang guru diikuti murid-muridnya, yang sebenarnya dapat berbuat lain, memperkaya kemungkinan “gaya” seni rupa Indonesia.
4. Mencita-citakan perkembangan seni rupa yang “Indonesia” dengan jalan mengutamakan pengetahuan tentang Sejarah Seni Rupa Indonesia Baru yang berawal dari Raden Saleh. Mempelajari periodisasinya, melihat dengan kritis dan tajam caranya berkembang, menimbang dan menumpulkan perkembangan

selanjutnya ke situ. Percaya bahwa dalam Sejarah Seni Rupa Indonesia Baru ini terdapat masalah-masalah yang sejajar bahkan tidak dimiliki buku-buku impor, dan mampu mengisi seni rupa Indonesia dengan masalah yang bisa menghasilkan perkembangan yang bermutu.

Mencita-citakan perkembangan seni rupa yang didasari tulisan-tulisan dan teori-teori orang-orang Indonesia, baik kritikus, sejarawan ataupun pemikir. Menentang habis-habisan pendapat yang mengatakan perkembangan seni rupa Indonesia adalah bagian dari sejarah seni rupa Dunia, yang mengatakan seni adalah universal, yang menggantungkan masalah seni rupa Indonesia pada masalah seni rupa di Mancanegara.

5. Mencita-citakan seni rupa yang lebih hidup, dalam arti tidak diragukan kehadirannya, wajar, berguna, dan hidup meluas di kalangan masyarakat.

## **English Translation**

### **Five Ground-breaking Moves of the Indonesian New Art Movement**

1. In creating art, to throw away as far as possible the image of 'art' that has been acknowledged so far, (the movement considers it as 'old art' which is art that is *only* limited to painting, sculpture and graphic art.

In Indonesian New Art Movement, the penetration into the above forms of art, which can give birth to artworks that cannot be categorised into the above forms, is considered 'legitimate' ('New Art').

In creating art, to throw away as far as possible the image of special elements in art, such as painting elements, graphic elements, et cetera. Everything in its entirety is in fact in one category, visual elements, that is related with the elements of space, movement, time, et cetera.

As such, all activities which can be categorised as art in Indonesia, despite being based on a different 'aesthetics', for example those originating from traditional arts, is by common sense considered legitimate art that is alive.

2. To throw away as far as possible the 'specialist' attitude in art which tends to build 'elitist language' based on 'avant-gardist' attitude which is built on this image: that artists should dive in to search for subtleties (which is not understood by society, because artists should be part of the mysteries of life?).

Instead, to believe in the 'similarity' aspect of humans which is caused by similar living environment. To believe that it is more important to discuss actual social

issues than personal sentiments. In this case, *the wealth of ideas or notions is more crucial than the skillfulness of 'the master' in developing formal elements.*

3. To dream of 'creative possibilities', meaning to hope for stylistic variety in Indonesian art. To bombard Indonesian art with new possibilities, acknowledging all possibilities without limit, as a reflection of the 'searching' attitude. From here on, to challenge the shrinking of possibilities, such as the '*cantrikisme*' teaching attitude in which the style of one teacher is followed by all his students, who can actually do something else, adding wealth of 'stylistic' possibilities to Indonesian art.
  
4. To dream for the development of art that is 'Indonesia' through a way which prioritises knowledge of New Indonesian Art History starting from Raden Saleh. To study the periods, to observe critically and astutely how it developed, to consider and build over subsequent developments on it. To believe that in this New Indonesian Art History, there are equivalent problems that might not be found in imported books, which can fill Indonesian art with problems that can result in quality development.

To dream of art development that is based on writings and theories of Indonesian people, whether critics, historians or thinkers. To completely reject the view that Indonesian art development is part of World art history, which states that art is universal, which makes problems of Indonesian art depend on problems of World art.

5. To dream of art that is more alive, whose existence is not doubted, common, useful, and thrives within society.

## **Appendix B**

### ***FX Harsono Interview Transcript***

***12 April 2012***

#### **Original Transcript in Bahasa Indonesia**

*1. Apakah GSRB punya daftar anggota resmi, regular meeting, sharing studio, atau sejenisnya? Atau GSRB sebenarnya nama grup yang lebih informal?*

- GSRB bukan organisasi formal dengan daftar anggota dan sebagainya. Kami berkumpul dan berdiskusi dengan landasan pemikiran bahwa kami berkumpul tanpa ikatan dan penuh dengan kebebasan terutama dalam membuat karya seni, berpikir dan beraktifitas lainnya. Kami berkumpul dengan alasan adanya kesamaan pandangan atau visi bahwa kami tidak ingin mengikuti jejak dan pikiran seniman sebelumnya yang menganggap bahwa seni rupa (fine art) hanya terdiri dari seni lukis, seni patung dan seni grafis (print making). Kami menganggap bahwa dengan memakai media yang sudah biasa digunakan dalam batasan fine art seperti yang diajarkan di universitas dimana kami belajar adalah mengikuti pemikiran arus besar dari barat (mainstream). Pada waktu itu kami belum tahu apa itu ideologi modernisme dan postmodernisme. Kami juga menolak universalitas yang pada waktu itu di suarakan oleh seniman senior dan dosen-dosen yang kami anggap itu adalah bagian dari arus besar dari barat. Kita tidak pernah akan menemukan identitas Indonesia kalau kita memakai media dari mainstream dan visi dari barat.

*2. Bagi bapak pribadi dan GSRB secara menyeluruh, seberapa penting atau tidak pentingnya situasi sosial/politik/kultural dalam negeri tahun 70an dan tulisan-tulisan*

*pemikir Indonesia, dibanding dengan ide dari buku-buku impor, karya-karya artist luar negeri dan situasi sosial/politik/kultural internasional masa itu?*

- Penciptaan karya seni yang dilandasi oleh pemikiran sosial, politik dan kebudayaan akan menjadi landasan penciptaan yang mengutamakan pencarian identitas yang berakar dari masyarakat disekitar kita. Penciptaan yang berakar dari tradisi masa lampau dan tradisi lokal tidak cukup untuk mewedahi pencarian ke-Indonesiaan. Kita menganggap bahwa tradisi Jawa tidak merepresentasikan Indonesia, begitu pula Bali, Sumatra atau etnik manapun tidak bisa merepresentasikan Indonesia secara baik. Tetapi permasalahan sosial, politik dan kebudayaan pada saat itu di Indonesia sama, yaitu masyarakat yang tertindas oleh kebijaksanaan politik pemerintahan Soeharto yang represif.

- Buku impor dan informasi seni rupa dari barat pada waktu itu hanya bisa kita lihat di perpustakaan. Itu pun kita hanya bisa melihat gambar. Hanya sedikit sekali dari kita yang bisa bahasa Inggris. Jim Supangkat bisa bahasa Inggris lumayan. Jadi informasi dari barat sangat sedikit.

*3. Beberapa pemikir seperti Kusnadi berpendapat bahwa karya-karya di pameran tahun 75 kebanyakan bersifat "dramatis" dan "caper". Pada saat itu apakah bapak setuju? Melihat kembali masa itu apakah bapak ada perubahan pendapat? Kalo tidak salah Sanento Yuliman pernah menulis bahwa karya-karya tahun 79 lebih dewasa dan jitu. Apakah bapak merasa begitu juga?*

- Saya tidak setuju dengan pemikiran itu. Begini, seni rupa pada masa sebelum GSRB tidak bisa dibandingkan dengan karya GSRB. Mengapa, karena paradigma dan ideologi yang mendasari penciptaan karya seni sama sekali berbeda. Sehingga

analisis dan penilaian yang dilandasi oleh ideologi modern tidak bisa dipakai untuk menilai suatu karya yang berbeda ideologinya. Contohnya, karya-karya sebelum GSRB mengagungkan emosi, karakteristik dan ego seniman, semua di representasikan melalui tangan seniman yang langsung membuat karya itu. Mereka menganggap bahwa tangan adalah jarum seismograf dari rasa. Sujoyono mengatakan jiwa ketok (jiwa yang nampak). Kami sama sekali tidak percaya itu. Kita membuat karya dengan menampilkan found object yang kita dapat dari kehidupan sehari-hari. Karya instalasi yang saya buat, yang judulnya "Paling Top 75", terdiri dari kotak kayu yang dibuat oleh tukang kayu, di dalam kotak diberi toys gun yang saya beli ditoko dan kain dengan teks yang disablon. Jadi karya-karya kita lebih pada ide, konsep dan bukan sekedar emosi, ego, karakter dari jiwa seniman. Dengan landasan dan proses penciptaan yang berbeda, maka sebuah karya seni tidak bisa dinilai dengan penilaian yang dilandasi oleh ideologi yang berbeda.

- Saya tidak tahu apa yang dimaksud dengan lebih dewasa oleh Sanento. Tetapi yang saya tahu Sanento menjelaskan perbedaan karya perupa GSRB dengan seniman sebelumnya dengan sangat baik. Itu bisa dibaca di dalam buku "Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru".

*4. Apakah GSRB pernah resmi bubar? Atau publik hanya berpendapat begitu karena setelah tahun 79 tidak ada lagi pameran bersama? Lalu mengapa pula tidak ada pameran bersama lagi? Perasaan saya, pameran tahun 79 cukup sukses bukan?*

- GSRB resmi membubarkan diri. Perkembangan GSRB sampai pada tahun 1979 mulai nampak terjadi tarik-menarik antar anggota untuk menguasai GSRB. Pada hal sejak semula kami anggota GSRB berkumpul dan sepakat untuk tidak saling menginterferensi dalam pemikiran, cara berkarya dan sebagainya. Kami berkumpul

berdasarkan kebebasan berpikir dan dalam menciptakan karya seni. Ketika saya mulai merasakan ada dua kekuatan yang saling ingin mendominasi GSRB, artinya ada suatu yang tak sehat di dalam GSRB sendiri. Sehingga pada suatu pertemuan saya mengusulkan agar pameran GSRB tahun 1979 adalah pameran terakhir dan kami membubarkan diri. Karena sebagai gerakan saya merasa cukup berhasil dan apabila diteruskan tidak lagi murni sebagai gerakan tetapi sudah akan menjadi organisasi dan itu bukan tujuan kami. Maka, kalau tidak salah bulan Desember tahun 1979 pameran GSRB yang terakhir kami membubarkan diri. Jadi bukan dibubarkan atau dianggap bubar karena tidak pernah berpameran.

- Tetapi tahun 1987 beberapa eksponen GSRB mencoba untuk berkumpul dan mengadakan pameran lagi. Judul pameran itu adalah "Pasar Raya Dunia Fantasi". Kami mengangkat tema kebudayaan urban. Tetapi setelah itu kami menyadari bahwa kami memang tidak perlu lagi berkumpul, karena masing-masing telah mempunyai ideologi yang berbeda-beda. Maka upaya untuk berkumpul kembali gagal.

- Pameran tahun 1979 cukup berhasil sebagai sebuah gerakan dan peserta pameran GSRB semakin banyak. Beberapa perupa muda dari ITB dan Sekolah Tinggi Seni Rupa Indonesia "ASRI" (sebelumnya namanya ASRI dan sekarang ISI). Tetapi sebagai sebuah gerakan saya rasa cukup sampai disitu saja, jangan sampai diteruskan.



## ***English Translation of the Interview Transcript***

*1. Does GSRB have formal membership, regular meeting, sharing of studio, or anything of that sort? Or is GSRB actually a more informal group?*

- GSRB is not a formal organization with membership list and all that. We gather and talk, on the basis that we meet without strings attached and with full freedom, especially in relation to art-making, thinking and engaging in other activities. The reason we gather is because there are some similarities in opinion or vision, that we do not wish to follow the footsteps and ways of thinking of the artists that came before us, those who consider *seni rupa* (fine art) as only consisting of painting, sculpture and graphic art (print making). We think that to use media that has always been used within the limits of fine art as taught in the universities where we studied is to follow the mainstream mindset from the West. At that time, we did not know what modernist and postmodernist ideologies are. We also rejected the universality of art that was voiced by the senior artists and teachers whom we consider to be part of the mainstream West. We will never find Indonesian identity if we use mainstream media and Western visions.

*2. For you personally and GSRB as a whole, how important or unimportant is the domestic social/political/cultural situation of the 1970s and the writings of Indonesian thinkers, as opposed to ideas from imported books, artworks by overseas artist and the international social/political/cultural situations of that time?*

- The creation of artwork that is based on social, political and cultural thinking will be the basis of creation that prioritises the search of identity and stems from local society and surroundings. Creations that stems from past traditions and local

traditions are not enough to support the efforts to find 'Indonesian-ness'. We consider Javanese tradition not as a representative of Indonesia; likewise Bali, Sumatra or any other ethnicity cannot be a good representative of Indonesia. However, the social, political and cultural problems of that time in Indonesia is the same; it was a society that was downtrodden by political policies of the repressive Suharto government.

- At that time, imported books and art information from the West could only be seen in the library. Even so, we could only view the images. Very few among us knew English. Jim Supangkat had a rather acceptable English capability. So information from the West was very little.

*3. A few thinkers such as Kusnadi opined that artworks in the 1975 exhibition tend to be 'dramatic' and 'attention-seeking'. Did you agree with it at that time? On hindsight, have you have changed your opinion? If I am not mistaken, Sanento Yuliman once wrote that artworks in the 1979 were more mature and effective. Did you feel that?*

- I did not agree with that thinking. Artworks before GSRB cannot be compared with GSRB artworks. Why? Because the paradigm and ideology that is the basis of the creation of artworks are completely different, such that the analysis and value judgement based on the modernist ideology cannot be used to judge another artwork that is based on another ideology. For example, the artworks before GSRB worship emotion, character and artist's ego, all of which is represented through the hand of the artist that directly makes the artwork. They consider the hand as the seismographic needle of sensation. Sujoyono talks about *jiwa ketok* (the visible soul) [explanation: the soul of the artist that becomes visible through the creation of art]. We completely do not believe that. We create works that features the 'found object' from everyday life. The installation art that I made, the title of which is 'Paling Top 75'

[translation: The Most Top 75], consisted of a wooden box made by carpenter, inside of which is a toy gun I bought from a shop and a cloth with printed text. So our works tended towards an emphasis on ideas, concepts, and not simply emotion, ego, and character of an artist's soul. Therefore with a different foundation and process of creation, an artwork cannot be judged by another value system based on another ideology.

- I do not know what Sanento meant by 'more mature'. However, I do know that Sanento explained the difference between GSRB artists with previous artists very well. It can be found in the *Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru* book.

*4. Has GSRB ever formally disbanded? Or did the public only have such an opinion because there was no other group exhibition after 1979? What was the reason for the group exhibitions to stop? After all, it appears to me that the 1979 exhibition was a success.*

- GSRB formally disbanded itself. The development of GSRB reached a point in 1979 where there was power play between the members to try and rule GSRB, despite the fact that since the beginning it had been agreed that we would not interfere with each other's thinking, working methods, et cetera. We came together on the basis of free thought and creation of artwork. When I began to feel that there were two power factions trying to dominate GSRB, it meant that something unhealthy is happening in GSRB itself. At last, in a meeting, I suggested that the 1979 exhibition would be the final exhibition after which we would disband. Because I feel that as a movement it was successful enough and if it is continued it would not be a pure movement any longer and becoming an organization instead, but that was not our aim. So, if I'm not mistaken, it was in December 1979 that our last exhibition was held, and we

disbanded afterwards. Thus it was not due to the fact that we did not exhibit that we disbanded or was considered to be disbanded.

- Yet in 1987 a few exponents of GSRB tried to gather and do an exhibition again. The title was *Pasar Raya Dunia Fantasi* [translation: Fantasy World Market Fair]. We took the urban culture as a theme. However, after that we realised that we did not need to gather anymore as each of us already have different ideologies. So the effort to come back together failed.

- The exhibition of 1979 was a rather successful move because exhibition participants increased in number. There were a few young artists from Bandung art academy (used to be ASRI, now ISI). I feel that as a movement, it has done enough and it is best to not prolong it.

## Appendix C

### *List of Indonesian art academies*

I have refrained from using the original Indonesian names of art academies in the text for two reasons. First, the full names in *Bahasa Indonesia* are long, the translation of which would be equally long and may potentially distract the reader from the content of the paper if they have been spelled out in full in the main text. Secondly, the names of the academies also changed considerably, more than once throughout history. This list is created for the benefit of readers who may want to know the original names in Bahasa Indonesia and the year in which they officially established themselves.

#### Bandung

Balai Pendidikan Universitas Guru Gambar - 1947

Bagian Arsitektur dan Seni Rupa - 1956

Fakultas Seni Rupa dan Desain, Institut Teknologi Bandung (FSRD-ITB) - 1984

#### Yogyakarta

Akademi Seni Rupa Indonesia (ASRI) - 1949

Sekolah Tinggi Seni Rupa Indonesia (STSRI) - 1968

Fakultas Seni Rupa, Institut Seni Indonesia (ISI) -1984

#### Jakarta

Lembaga Pendidikan Kesenian Jakarta (LPKJ) - 1968

Institut Kesenian Jakarta (IKJ) - 1981

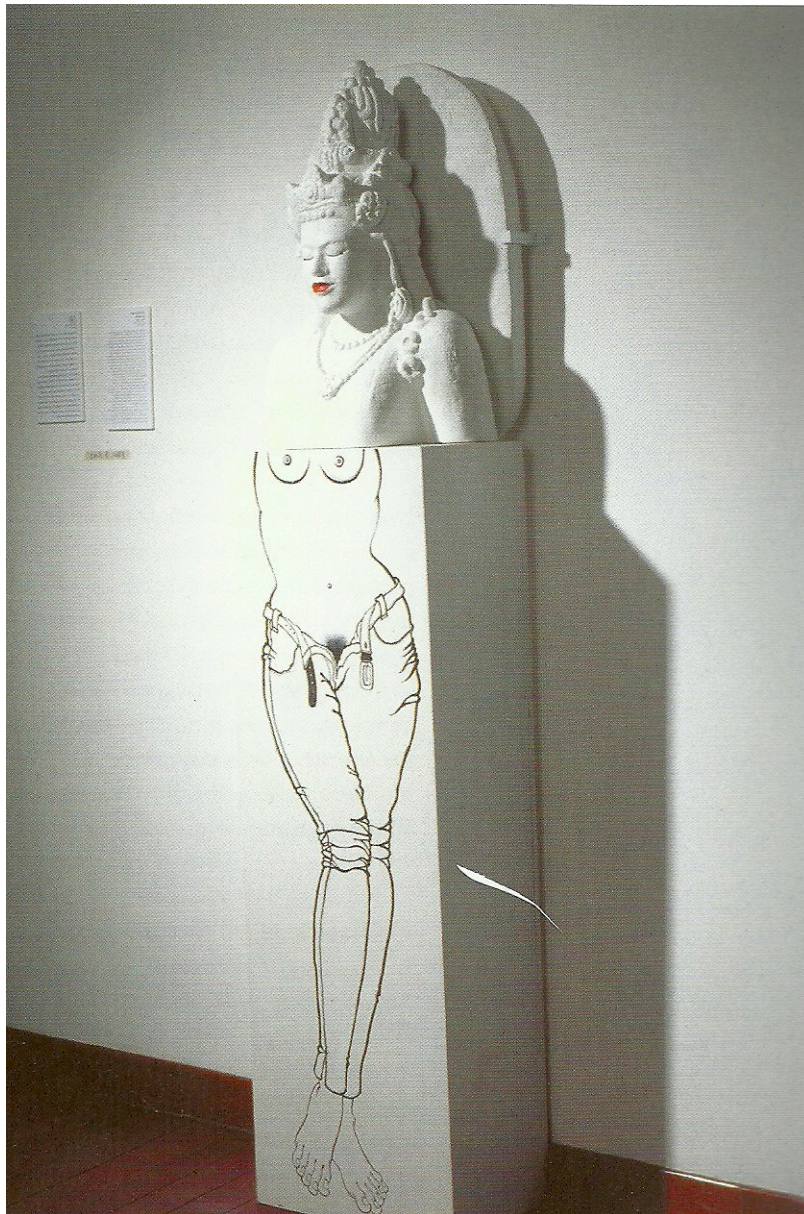


Figure 1  
Jim Supangkat, *Ken Dedes*, 1975  
Mixed media, 180 x 40 x 30 cm  
Collection of the Singapore Art Museum



Figure 2.  
FX Harsono, *Rantai Yang Santai (The Relaxed Chain)*, 1975  
Installation with cushions and chains, 67 x 97 x 56 cm  
Artist collection

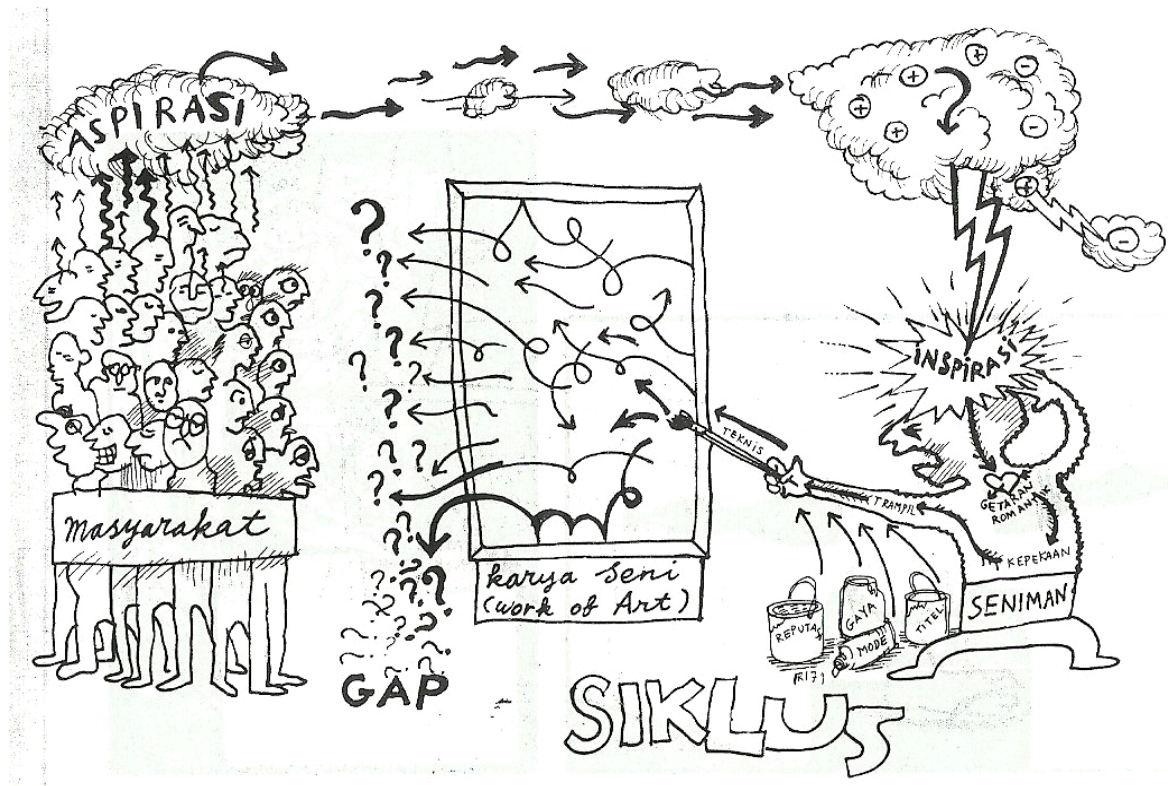


Figure 3  
 Example of drawings in Pameran Konsep (Concept Exhibition), 1976



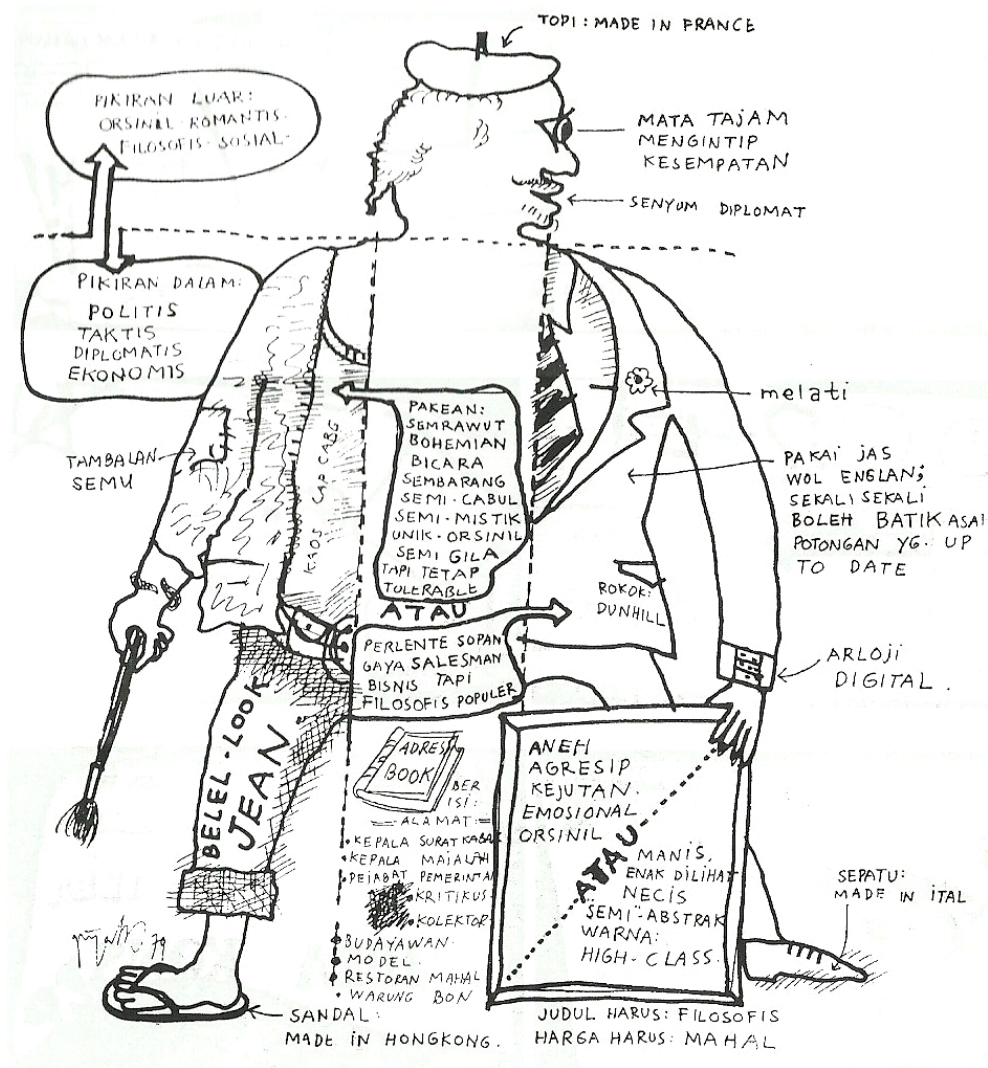


Figure 4  
Example of drawings in Pameran Konsep (Concept Exhibition), 1976

## Bibliography

Alisjahbana, S. Takdir, Benedict R. Anderson (trans.), *Indonesia: Social and Cultural Revolution* (Kuala Lumpur, London, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1966)

Bollansee, Emeraldalda & Marc, *Masterpieces of Contemporary Indonesian Painters* (Singapore: Times Editions, 1997)

*Budaya Indonesia: kunst en cultuur in Indonesië; arts and crafts in Indonesia* (Amsterdam: Tropenmuseum, 1987)

Ciric, Biljana (ed.), *Contemporaneity: Contemporary Art in Indonesia* (Shanghai: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2010)

Fischer, Joseph (ed.), *Modern Indonesian Art: Three Generations of Tradition and Change 1945-1990* (Jakarta and New York: Panitia Pameran KIAS and Festival of Indonesia, 1990)

*FX Harsono: Testimonies*, exhibition catalogue, 4 March to 9 April (Singapore: Singapore Art Museum, 2010)

Hartono, Yusuf Susilo, 'GSRB dan Virus Lima Jurus', *Visual Arts*, November 2010, pg 35-37

Holt, Claire, *Art in Indonesia: Continuities and Change* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1967)

Kerlogue, Fiona, *Arts of Southeast Asia* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2004)

Knol, Meta, Remco Raben & Kitty Zijlmans, *Beyond the Dutch: Indonesia, the Netherlands and the Visual Arts, from 1900 until now* (Amsterdam: KIT Publishers, 2009)

Koh Buck Song (ed.), *Southeast Asian Art: A New Spirit* (Singapore: Art & Artist Speak, 1997)

Larner, Melissa (ed.), Landung Rusyanto Simatupang & Ruth Mackenzie (trans.) *Outlet, Yogyakarta Within the Contemporary Indonesian Art Scene* (Yogyakarta: Cemeti Art Foundation, 2001)

Lee, Joanna (ed.), *Widayat Between Worlds: A Retrospective* (Singapore: Singapore Art Museum, 2007)

Richter, Anne, *Arts and Crafts of Indonesia* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1993)

Roxas-Lim, Aurora, *Southeast Asian Art and Culture: Ideas, Forms, Societies* (Jakarta: ASEAN Committee on Culture and Information, Art Post Asia Inc., 2002)

Royle, Nicholas, Jacques Derrida (London: Routledge, 2003)

Sabapathy, T. K. (ed.), *Modernity and Beyond: Themes in Southeast Asian Art* (Singapore: Singapore Art Museum, 1996)

Sasaki, Ken'ichi (ed.), *Asian Aesthetics* (Singapore: NUS Press & Kyoto University Press, 2010)

Schiller, Jim & Barbara Martin-Schiller (ed.), *Imagining Indonesia: Cultural Politics and Political Culture* (London: Ohio Univ. Monograph Int. Stud., 1997)

'Skors di Asri', *TEMPO*, 15 February 1975 <<http://majalah.tempointeraktif.com/>> [12 January 2012]

Sneddon, James Neil, *The Indonesian Language: its history and role in modern society* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2003)

Soemantri, Hilda, *Visual Art*, Indonesian Heritage Series, Book 7 (Singapore: Archipelago Press, 1998)

Spanjaard, Helena, *Exploring Modern Indonesian Art* (Singapore: SNP International, 2004)

Supangkat, Jim (ed.), *Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru Indonesia - Kumpulan Karangan* (Jakarta: PT Gramedia, 1979)

Supangkat, Jim, *Upside Down Mind: Welcome to the World of Heri Dono* (Washington DC: CP Foundation, 2003)

Tarling, Nicholas (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia, Volume Two: The nineteenth and twentieth centuries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992)

Turner, Caroline (ed.), *Art and Social Change: Contemporary Art in Asia and the Pacific* (Canberra, Pandanus Books, 2004)

Van Fenema, Joyce (ed.), *Southeast Asian Art Today* (Singapore: Roeder Publications Pte. Ltd., 1996)

Yuliman, Sanento, *Dua Seni Rupa: Sepilihan Tulisan Sanento Yuliman*, ed. by Jim Supangkat (Jakarta: Yayasan Kalam, 2001)

*36 Ideas from Asia: Contemporary South-East Asian Art* (Singapore: Singapore Art Museum, 2002)