



From Left to Right: Lingga-Yoni (1992), *Beban Eksotika Jawa* (The burden of Javanese Exotica, 1993), *Hiding Ritual of My Own Hairpiece*, *Portrait of a Javanese man* (2000).

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# the konde condition

NINDITYO ADIPURNOMO'S FASHION OF KONDE – THE TRADITIONAL JAVANESE HAIRPIECE

**R**ooted in the realms of Javanese tradition, the *konde* continues to be an inseparable part of the formal Indonesian dress code. 'Nationalized', the Javanese hairpiece did undergo a transformation, particularly following a free flow of fashion. While most women wearing this specific hairpiece will only think of how to abide by 'tradition' and fashion, the *konde* has become a metaphor to visualize burdensome and repressive strategies in real life.

Nindityo Adipurnomo, an artist of note, identifies with the *konde*. His feelings, comments and critique are put in a variety of *konde* forms while using a variety of materials.

Born and raised in the Javanese culture

and traditions, the *konde* was close to his daily life. He saw how his mother wore the bun that made her look even more lovely, but he also saw her collect her 'waste hair' to use it as a fill-in to make her *konde* large and beautiful, and when there was enough waste-hair, she had a hairpiece made. Sometimes the 'waste hair' was sold to a vendor who used to come by to collect hair to make hair pieces for sale.

As he admired the beauty of the *konde* that completed his mother's and grandmother's attire, he often let his imagination wander into realms that wonder about the real contents of the hair bun.

Little did he foresee then, that it would be his major tool of expression. Early in his

artistic life he became fascinated with the culture in which he was born and raised into manhood. Initially he was drawn to dance. He followed instruction in *Bedoyo*, a Javanese dance that is said to symbolize the highest achievement during *samedi* (meditation) by closing nine human orifices and deflating all bad desires. "All I wanted was actually to know in depth and understand the ground plan of the dance", he revealed.

He came to understand that this mythical court dance, usually performed by nine girl dancers of advanced spiritual attainment, required a high level of introspective ability. In fact it was a major feature of the dance. As he started painting, he found he could not very well visualize the element of





'introspectiveness'. One of the Bedoyo dancers told him that the sacred classical dance was actually a symbol of intimate communication between the dance's sole designer and the nine dancers. While Nindityo tried to visualize that in his work titled *Lingga-Yoni* (1992), he was not satisfied as he perceived that as being too formal.

This was the point when the *konde* began to become a metaphor for his creative works. In the *konde* he found the same element of privacy that marked the dancers of the Bedoyo, whose introspective, introvert-ness, indicate the personal, the 'private'.

Preliminary sketches for his work titled *Beban Eksotika Jawa* (The burden of Javanese Exotica, 1993) carried notes like 'Sanggul Jawa = *konde* = introvert' and 'Konde = Sanggul Jawa, Introvert = Ballast'. The actual work consisted of five large wooden *kondes*, placed on typical Javanese tables in a way that makes the *konde* appear like a lid. Opening the lid does not immediately reveal the content. It needed a mirror to see the junk inside, metaphors of taboos that hide behind the appearance of beauty and harmony.

Javanese culture and traditions have

often been 'blamed' for being the source of the repressive strategies of the past. A number of artists have taken elements from that tradition as metaphors to comment on or critique prevailing issues in society.

But traditional elements to denote disparities in traditional gender relations have only marked the works of two Indonesian artists, one of which is Nindityo Adipurnomo, for whom the *konde* is a metaphor for the fallacy of harmony as practiced in traditional life and continued up to this very day. Besides that, however, the *konde* for Nindityo is also a tool of communication, a mediation to see realities that go deeper than the surface.

Nindityo did not wish to be only an observer of the *konde*. He grew his hair, wearing it in a bun, albeit much smaller than the traditional Javanese, and felt the heat it caused on his head and neck. Like his mother and his grandmother, he combed his hair day after day, collecting the fallen hair. This way he experienced how that daily habit had ultimately become a ritual, performed in the private sphere. In the case of *konde*, he saw in it a ritual that a woman performs privately for the sake of a beautiful appearance before the male gaze.

As well, the changing times with chang-

ing needs, have not changed much in basic attitudes. One continues to beautify oneself, if not for the male gaze it's still for the gaze of others, and the small scale industry of hair piece production has grown into a mass industry. This is revealed in several of Nindityo's hair pieces made of rattan in the period of 1997-1998, sculpted in a paradox of private and public. A particular accent is found in *Hiding Ritual of My Own Hairpiece*, in which his hairpiece is 'covered' with wires shaping the outer *konde*, decorated with flowers, while the *Hiding Rituals of the Mass Production* (1999-2001) presents a gigantic hairpiece made of rattan, with his public hair wrapped in little packages hang on some rattan frays. In the latter piece, Nindityo compares the vendor that used to pass by to collect women's hair and make new hair pieces to sell, with the mass production of hair pieces often made of artificial hair.

In a twist of the male gaze, Nindityo places a *konde* covering a man's face, and titles it *Portrait of a Javanese man* (2000). In fact the hairpiece here is a symbol of imprisonment, a metaphor for intolerance and the absence of communication. In the same series he has made an abstract painting in oil on canvas, in which the