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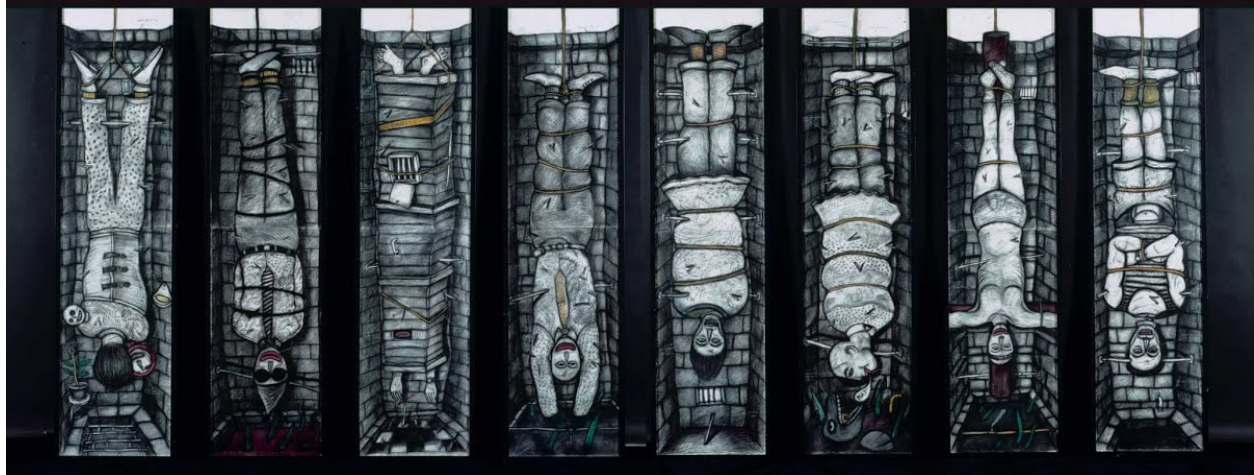
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SOCIO-POLITICAL CRITICISM IN CONTEMPORARY INDONESIAN ART



Isabel Betsill

Project Advisor: Dr. Sartini, UGM

Sit Study Abroad Indonesia: Arts, Religion and Social Change

Spring 2019

CONTEMPORARY INDONESIAN ART

ABOUT THE COVER ART

Agung Kurniawan. *Very, Very Happy Victims*. Painting, 1996

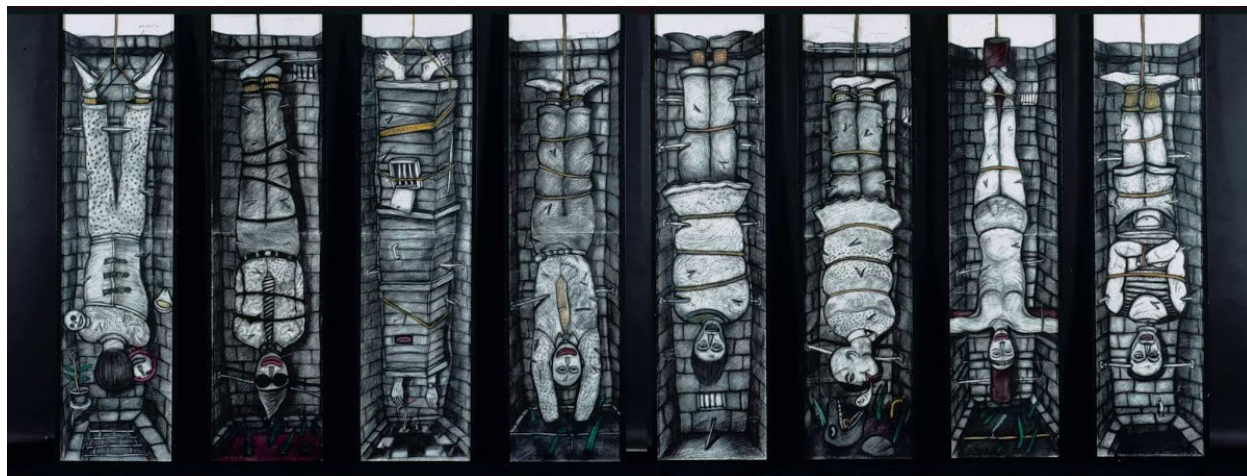


Image from the collection of National Heritage Board, Singapore

Agung Kurniawan is a contemporary artist who has worked with everything from drawing and comics, to sculpture to performance art. Most critics would classify Kurniawan as an artist-activist as his art pieces frequently engages with issues such as political corruption and violence.

The piece *Very, Very happy victims* is about how people in a fascist state are victims, but do not necessarily realize it because they are also happy. Thus, it is a social commentary about “the unrest generated by the country’s rigidly controlled political system and economic boom that had led to large income inequality” (“Very, Very Happy Victims”)The piece would have been banned had it not received the Phillip Morris award in 1996, giving it international attention (“Agung Kurniawan”, 2015). For more about Agung Kurniawan, see Figure 8.

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INTRO

The objective of this paper is to understand the connections between contemporary art and politics in Indonesia both in terms of how politics has shaped art practices, and in terms of how art influences politics. Questions I was interested in exploring include how contemporary art practices have changed considering the political changes over the past 30 years; if and how contemporary art is being used to facilitate political dialogues in the country; if and how contemporary art is being used to criticize and invoke change regarding social issues; and what the role of art spaces, collectives and foundations is in enabling the success of Indonesian artist's socio-political criticism.

My interest in this subject was sparked by a contemporary art book, *Contemporary Indonesian Art: Artists, Art Spaces, and Collectives*, by Yvonne Spielmann. The book said that during the Suharto Dictatorship, from 1966 to 1998, all visual art other than state-supporting realism and apolitical abstraction was strictly censored (Spielmann, 2017, p. 51). Therefore, it was not until the *Reformasi* era starting 20 years ago after the fall of Suharto that Indonesian art and artists were able to freely create, express and criticize (Jurriëns 2013). Today, Yogyakarta is home to an art scene where art practices are "social critical in intention, using expressive and realistic styles... to embed political criticism in a broader, widely familiar, and unsuspecting traditional cultural context" (Spielmann, 2017, p. 54). I was interested in learning more about how Indonesia's brand-new contemporary art scene is able to start dialogues, spread information, and criticize society and politics; how the artists create the work; and how it is received by the public. For me, an artist, this topic is part of an important global discussion about the power of visual art as a tool for radical change.

This paper will conclude my findings about the factors that both pushed and allowed artists to make contemporary art that addressed social and political problems. In this paper, I will analyze eleven pieces of art made between 1994 and today, which I have chosen because I feel that they successfully represent both the breadth of methods artists have employed to make political art, and the ways artists'

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practices have changed over the last decades. To understand any piece of art, it is important to understand the context in which the piece was made. Therefore, the eleven pieces of art presented in this paper will be woven together with the narrative of art and politics in Indonesia beginning with the de-politicization of art under the New Order beginning in 1965, continuing through the creation of the New Art Movement (GSRB) in 1974, the fall of Suharto in 1998, and the 2007 Asian Art Market Boom, and concluding with the issues that contemporary artists are most impacted by and interested in exploring today: globalization, history, and education.

Despite all that has changed politically from 1965 until today, one thing has remained constant: the drive of artists to create art that responds to socio-political situations even when doing so puts them in danger. Censorship laws under Suharto and today make it risky for artists to speak out against social and political problems (Jaarsma 2019), so one of the other questions I hoped to explore in this paper is why artists do what they do and why art is important in the world.

Many of the artists whom I talked to do not necessarily think about the impact their art will have. Although they were able to talk about the importance of art in the world to “refresh the mind, to make people think out themselves, the other... to reflect” (Harahap, personal communication, 18 April 2019) and for “maintaining culture, individual expression and critical thinking” (Jaarsma, personal communication, 10 April 2019). A lot of the artists said that the reason they do what they do is for themselves; because they feel like they have to. Agan Harahap described art as his personal “survival system” (Harahap, personal communication, 18 April 2019) and Ucup from the collective *Taring Padi* said that the reason he makes art is because he has a “spirit of must” (Ucupbaik, personal communication, 11 April 2019). Art is a way for artists to process and respond to things that are happening in the world; to do something with their feelings. The amazing thing about art is the extent to which the feelings and opinions of artists can inspire others to think more critically about their experiences and feelings. It creates questions, provokes critical thinking and can inspire action and change. I hope that the findings in this paper are representative of how important art is in the world. Ucup told me that “art cannot choose

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the situation, but it can inspire people the change the situation” (Ucupbaik, personal communication, 11 April 2019).

This paper is not a complete catalogue of contemporary Indonesian art, nor does it intend to be. Due to the restrictive length of this paper only a handful of artists, art pieces, and art spaces will be talked about at length. Eleven art pieces are talked about in detail in boxes throughout this paper. These select few pieces are ones I came across by happenstance or which I was told about by informants, that I think demonstrate my points well. It would be impossible to give this amount of attention to every contemporary Indonesian artists or every piece of political contemporary art. Therefore, there are several artists, art pieces, and art spaces which may be famous and monumental, but which have been left out of this paper.

METHODOLOGY

All of the research in this paper was conducted in Yogyakarta, Java, Indonesia. Yogyakarta is recognized to be the art and culture capitol of Indonesia, and it is where Indonesia’s contemporary art scene has flourished. This is due to the proximity to *Institute Seni Indonesia* (ISI), Indonesia’s Art University, which has produced many famous contemporary artists, as well as its central geographic location (Jaarsma, personal communication, 10 April 2019). A contemporary art space map of Yogyakarta, published by the art space Kedai Kebun Forum in 2018, listed 47 art spaces including galleries, collectives, museums, studios and art shops in the special region of Yogyakarta (“Yogyakarta Contemporary Art Map”, 2018).

Interviews, reading articles and ephemera, and analyzing the visual qualities of art pieces were the three methodologies used to obtain the information that makes up this paper. I conducted formal interviews with thirteen artists, curators, and art-space-founders. Interviews allowed me access the minds and opinions of artists. My interviewees played a crucial role in helping me understand what it was like to be making art during The New Order and why artists felt it was important to make art even when doing so put them at risk of imprisonment or worse. I was fortunate to be able to get to talk to many very

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prominent Indonesian artists about why they think art is important and what role they feel art plays in society. Each informant was also able to connect me to other artists or tell me about additional art pieces and art spaces to explore in my research. Through this, I was able to engross myself in a network of artists who have largely shaped Indonesian contemporary art practices in the past 30 years. I chose to include the names of all the artists whom I received permission from because there was no risk associated with the information included in this paper. Artist's names are already attached to the pieces of art discussed in this paper and use of names may benefit the artists for publicity reasons. One artist's name has been excluded due to the fact that I did not receive consent to use their name

A lot of the information obtained through my interviews would not have been available otherwise due to lack of government interest in archiving art and funding art-related research projects (a problem which will be talked about at great lengths later). Privately funded initiatives like the Indonesian Visual Art Archive (IVAA) were invaluable in helping me find secondary sources. IVAA, which was founded by Mella Jaarsma and Agung Kurniawan in 1995, has collected an impressive collection of art books and exhibition catalogues, and has created an online database of archived art pieces and articles. Such sources include articles published by a handful of academics and ephemera such as exhibition catalogues and guide books from art fairs like the Jogja Biennale and Asia-Pacific Triennial. Written documentation of contemporary art in Indonesia was useful for understanding how to translate the meanings of many visual images into words.

Through these secondary sources and from IVAA, I was also able to find visual documentation of many of the art pieces, performances, and installations mentioned to me by my informants. I used these images to understand not only the types of social and political issues artists have been interested in representing but *how* artists have used a visual language to comment on and be activists against certain issues. I was interested in the methodology artists use to make political art. For example, what metaphors, icons and images artists used, especially while Suharto was in power, to share their message without getting in trouble.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to first thank the staff of SIT Bali for encouraging us to take on such ambitious research projects, especially when it requires pushing comfort zones. Thank you to Bu Ari for being a queen always, and for connecting me to my advisor, Bu Sartini. Thank you to Bu Sartini for keeping my research and this paper grounded in academia. It is pretty easy for us artsy types to take our art and just fly. I needed you to keep me grounded.

I want to give a huge, huge thank you to the wonderful artist, and my now dear friend, Mella Jaarsma. I met Mella on only my second day in Yogyakarta and she was hugely instrumental in connecting me with other artists and curators to interview. As the co-founder of Cemeti, the first contemporary art gallery in Jogja, and co-founder of IVAA, she is also extremely knowledgeable about my subject so I am grateful for my interviews with her. She also invited me to an art show opening in Jakarta about the democratization of the media during the *Reformasi* era, where I got to meet other artists including Heri Dono. I am forever grateful for her help and friendship. This project would not have been one tenth as successful as it was without her.

Thank you also to all the other artists, curators and art-space founders who graciously shared their time, art, and stories with me. Thank you also to everyone at The Indonesian Visual Art Archive (IVAA) for the important work you are doing. This research would not have been possible without all the art, articles, and books that have been saved and archived by you.

ART UNDER SUHARTO: 1965-1998

Socially and politically charged art may seem like a default to the Western viewer who is used to artists being protected by things like America's First Amendment, which grants artists, like all other citizens, freedom of speech to liberally share opinions, be profane and provocative, and criticize society and politics without fear of prosecution. Indonesian artists have not always had such freedoms due to a combination of censorship laws under President Suharto as well restrictions by galleries and art fairs which strongly favored apolitical painting (George, 1997). The fear of prosecution and lack of arenas to display political art made it difficult for Indonesian artists to make their work public, but that is not to say that political art was not being made. The fact is that art always has and always will be connected to social and political conditions regardless of how apparent it may be.

Social and political conditions under Suharto's New Order regime provided artists with an excess of inspiration to create anger-fueled, politically-charged art. Suharto's regime began in 1965 with the killing and imprisonment of thousands of people of Chinese decent, artists, and anyone with actual or assumed connection to the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) (Jurriëns, 2013). In the name of modernization and progress, Suharto implemented the "guided development" of cultural life, banned the Institute of People's Culture (LEKRA), and heavily censored art and media that attempted to be politically and socially-engaged (George 1997, Jurriëns 2013).

The history of Suharto and the New Order's thirty-year regime had a significant impact on the development of Indonesia's political contemporary art scene. Traumatic events such as the 1965 massacres and mass violence which broke out in 1998 are topics which artists even today are still attempting to grapple with in their art. Additionally, Suharto's commands made international and decorative styles "the officially approved creative practice, while socially and politically engaged art and media were discredited, censored, or banned" forced artists to seek out more creative methods and new arenas for displaying their work (Jurriëns, 2015, p. 15).

GSRB New Art Movement

Put simply, Indonesian modern art was in its second phase when Suharto took power. The first phase, which lasted from the start of the twentieth century until the 1930s, took inspiration from romanticism and Dutch painters (Buhan, n.d.). Painters of this movement, called *Mooi Indie*, painted natural and beautiful landscapes in naturalist and impressionist styles (Burhan, n.d.). During the second phase, from 1938 until 1956, artists began to integrate the spirit of nationalism into their paintings by depicting Indonesian life and culture (Burhan, n.d.). Until this time, art was largely a-political and painting was the dominate medium. This remained the case until 1974 when the New Art Movement was founded with the intent of using more diverse mediums to engage social and political awareness.

In 1974 a group of artists had grown tired of their inability to engage with and express social and political concerns in public art exhibitions in their own country. The founding of a new art movement began with a protest called “Black December” in which artists including FX Harsono, Anyool Subroto, Bachtiar Zainoel, Pandu Sudewo, Nanik Mirna, Jim Supangkat, B Munny Ardhy, Hardi, Ris Purnama, Siti Adiati and Muryotohartoyo wrote a letter to the committee of the Indonesian Painting exhibition expressing their dissatisfaction with the award decision in which all the winners were art academy lecturers who worked exclusively with abstract and decorative styles (Hujatnikajennon, 2012). The group was frustrated with the monogamy of Indonesian art under Suharto, given that academic and politically-accepted universal styles such as abstract modernism, post impressionism and classical realism were the only art that was “allowed” (Jurriëns 2013, p. 15). These artists sought to diversify Indonesian art practices even if the consequence meant being expelled from their art academy.

Eight months after “Black December”, the group started the *Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru* (GSRB) New Art Movement with the intent of deliberately distancing themselves from the other, state-supported art of the time (Jurriëns, 2013). In their “Black December” declaration of intentions, the artists spoke about their frustration with the extent to which “high art” is out of touch with culture (Black December) They felt that it was the spiritual calling of artists to be in touch with “the realities of social, cultural,

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political, and economic life” (“Black December”, 1974). The New Art Movement drew inspiration from US and UK Pop-Art Movements, as well as Dadaism and Surrealism (Jurriëns, 2013). In the following years, GSRB artists “adopted reinvented genres such as performance art, happenings, instillations, mixed media, found objects, and photorealism” (Jurriëns, 2013). The members of GSRB worked with a broader idea of people’s issues than the previous generations of socially-engaged artists, according to FX Harsono himself (Jurriëns, 2013, p. 15). The group was monumental in Indonesia’s political-art history as they were the first group to use their art to address uses of national and international concern such the environment, labor rights, violence, and conflicts between east and west and traditional and modern. They believed it was important to “criticize the decreasing value accorded to socio-political commentary in Indonesian art, which has been set apart from the development of actual socio-political conditions in this country” (Hujanikajennong, n.d., n.p).

The impact of the GSRB on the Indonesian art scene was the emergence of “socially engaged artworks, environmental arts, unspecialized arts, unconventional arts, communicative arts, social art, art that calls for general thoughts, and art that demands a passion for experiments” coming out of Indonesia (Hujanikajennong). The impact of these artists on society, however, was limited due to the fact that their art was only being displayed in select art arenas, mostly outside of the borders of Indonesia. The contemporary art scene in Indonesian remained “‘desolate’ due to the shadow of the New Order regime, and the economic boom of commercial painting” (Hujanikajennong).

CENSORSHIP

During the New Order, censorship of the arts was very serious and frequent. Artists risked imprisonment or even execution for daring to speak out against the state or about sensitive issues such as the 1965 incident (Heri Dono, personal communication, 30 April 2019). Artists had to submit detailed exhibition proposals including photographs of all the works to the government board, and failing to do so meant the artist’s exhibition posed the risk of being shut down at the very least (Jaarsma 2019, Swastika 2019).

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One of the most famous examples of an exhibition which was shut down by police shortly after opening was *Seni Rupa Untuk Marsinah* in 1993 by the artist Moelyono (See Figure 1). The exhibition was a response to the mysterious death and supposed murder of worker-activist, Marsinah after she went on strike from the Catur Putra Surya company (“Wiji Thukul”, 2014). The piece, which was a collaboration with other workers from Surabaya, involved the making of numerous wooden statues (Khoiri, 2009). The objective of the installation piece was to call attention to the murder of this woman who now serves as a symbol for worker’s rights. One of the purposes of art is to raise questions and Moelyono hoped that the questions raised by this exhibition would provoke further investigation into the murder, thus making it difficult for the government to cover up their crime. The exhibition was shut down by the military shortly after it opened, which has only contributed to its legacy as a pinnacle of art for resistance and awareness (Khoiri, 2009).

Censorship laws, of course, did not stop artists from making art, it just forced them to work in more creative ways. Artists self-censored by working with strong metaphors and by blocking out faces (Jaarsma, personal communication, 22 April 2019). One thing that worked to artist’s advantage is the fact that none of the members of the government censorship board were artists—no one who really understood contemporary art. The thing about visual art, which makes it different from media, theatre and literature, is that one cannot point exactly at the political commentary; it is something that is just inferred. This makes it much harder to censor.

The Cemeti House was also able to avoid censorship laws by registering their business as a shop, rather than a gallery, which has looser restrictions (Jaarsma, personal communication, 22 April 2019). This allowed them to put on controversial and provocative exhibitions such as *Slot in the Box* 1997, in which artists from across Indonesia were invited to make art engaging with the New Order’s electoral fraud. The exhibition was held during the ‘silent week’, a period prior to the election when public assembly of more than five people is illegal (FX Harsono Testimonies). FX Harsono’s contribution to the exhibition was a performance piece entitled *Destruction* in which he, dressed as the powerful demon king,

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Ravan, but wearing a business suit, set fire to and destroyed three chairs which represented the only three political parties Suharto allowed to contest in the elections (See Figure 2) (“FX Harsono Testimonies”).

FIGURE 1**Moelyono. *Seni Rupa untuk Marsinah*, 1993-4**

Moelyono, - 'Seni Rupa Untuk Marsinah' - 1994
Various Dimension, Patung jerami, Lempengan,
campuran semen, kawat, meja, pohon, dan daun jati
at Dewan Kesenian Surabaya
(courtesy of Cemeti Art Foundation, Yogyakarta, Indonesia)



Image courtesy of IVAA

Moelyono is an artist-activist who has made a career out of using art as a tool for community empowerment. He started in Brumbun in the 1980s but since has worked with rural village communities in Pacitan, Surabaya, Lombok, Kupang, Aceh, Papua and Wamena (Khoiri, 2009). He invites people living in each community to take part in the arts and uses this art a tool to reveal problems, facilitate dialogues and find solutions, and encourage freedom of thought, critical power, and independence (Khoiri, 2009).

One of Moelyono’s most famous projects is *Seni Rupa untuk Marsinah*, a collaborative art project which embodies Moelyono’s objectives to use art as a tool for community empowerment, trauma healing, and activism. The exhibition marked the 100 day anniversary of the rape and murder of local worker-activist Marsinah (Jurriëns, 2013)

For the instillation, Moelyono and community members to build dozens of wooden statues which were then displayed at the Surabaya Arts Council. The exhibition was closed by the military shortly after its opening which has only enhanced its legacy (Jurriëns 2013, Khoiri, 2009). Moelyono also got a second chance to display this instillation at Cemeti in 1994 (Jaarsma, personal communication, 22 April 2019).

FIGURE 2

FX Harsono, *Destruction*, 1997.

FX Harsono was one of the founding Members of the GSRB New Art Movement. He was expelled from his art academy after his involvement with “Black December” and because he was more interested in making political performance art than the apolitical painting that was being taught in academies.

From the 1970s until the 1990s, Harsono made pieces that spoke against the corruption and violence of the New Order. His performance piece *Destruction* was part of the Slot in the Box exhibition at Cemeti, in which artists from across Indonesia were invited to make art engaging with the New Order’s electoral fraud. For the performance, Harsono is dressed up in a business suit and his face is painted to make him represent the power demon king, Raven. In this outfit, Harsono sets fire to and destroys three chairs using a chainsaw and movements which make him look as if he is out of control. The three chairs are symbolic of the three political parties allowed to contest in the election. Chairs are a symbol that Harsono uses frequently in his art. Chairs are representative of the people in power as they are like a throne where a sultan might sit.

Since the fall of the New Order in 1998, Harsono has shifted his focus to exploring his Chinese heritage and the erasure of traumas faced by Chinese-Indonesians (See Figure 4)



Image compilation from “FX Harsono: testimonies part 1”

ROLE OF FOREIGN INSTITUTIONS

Globalization and economic boom in the ‘nineties made Japan and Australia dominant forces in the Asian Pacific Region. This impacted Indonesian art because support from foreign governments and institutions provided Indonesian artists with the ability to display works internationally; thus also providing artists an arena in which to display works for which they would be punished if they tried to

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show them in Indonesia. In 1993, Indonesian artists Dadang Christanto, Heri Dono and FX Harsono were invited to partake in the first Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art in Brisbane, Australia (“The first Asian Pacific Triennial”, 1993). Indonesia’s participation in the triennial was sponsored by Australia’s Indonesian Institute, not by the Indonesian government (“The first Asian Pacific Triennial”, 1993). The venue provided the perfect opportunity for the artists to openly speak out openly against the social and political oppression of the New Order. Christanto’s piece, entitled *For those who have...*, attempted to evoke sympathy for the victims of violence, which he believes is a result of economic development (See **Figure 3**). By looking at the types of art works that Indonesian artists were displaying in international arenas and under the support of international funding, it is clear that, “the emergence of the Indonesian socio-political art of the international arena during the 90s would not have been possible had the Indonesian government been involved” (Hujatnikajennong, 2012, p. 185).

FIGURE 3

Dadang Christanto. *“For those: Who are poor, Who are suffer(ing), Who are oppressed, Who are voiceless, Who are powerless, Who are burdened, Who are victims of violence, Who are victims of a dupe, Who are victims of injustice”*, Installation accompanied by Solo Performance. First Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, 1993

When Dadang Christanto was eight years old, his father was brutally taken from him. He was abducted by army-sanctioned thugs for his supposed allegiance to the communist party. Christanto’s father was a communist sympathizer, not a member of the party, but that made little difference in 1965. Christanto’s father was just one of thousands to disappear or be murdered in 1965 under the commands of President Suharto. This trauma that Christanto underwent at



Courtesy of the Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art and Suhanya Raffell

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such a young age has had a deep impact on his work. According to an interview with ArtAsiaPacific Magazine, “this wound... continues to inform every one of his works, from the graphic, stylized paintings of disembodied heads carrying dears of brood to reflective, site-specific installations and performances that quietly act as memorials to victims of violence in all its forms” (Michael Young, ArtAsiaPacific)

Two such pieces include Christanto’s instillation and performance at the First Asian-Pacific Triennial (APT1) in 1993, respectively titled *For those: Who are poor, Who are suffer(ing), Who are oppressed, Who are voiceless, Who are powerless, Who are burdened, Who are victims of violence, Who are victims of a dupe, Who are victims of injustice* and *To those who have been killed*. The instillation was made out of 37 pieces of bamboo and cane of varying lengths hanging from the ceiling with nails haphazardly sticking out of them. The performance piece involves Christanto sitting in a public space or under his instillation and covering his body, naked except for a pair of white briefs, in clay. The aesthetic of the piece is on brand with Christanto’s belief that violence occurs as a result of development.

Christanto says, “I try to infuse my works with primitive touch: it is meant as a symbol of my empathy: an epigraph for the victims of oppression... and those who have been waylaid by the process of history and development. With my works I hope to encourage a more comprehensive view, with a humanistic dimension, towards the age of development” (Christanto, cited by Jim Supangkat, in the APT1 catalogue). His work attempts to express his concern that violence is an effect of power pressures that result in poverty, injustice and development.

1998: A PIVOTAL YEAR

The next pivotal moment that brought socially and politically-engaged art to the forefront of Indonesia’s art scene came in 1998. In May 1998 riots, demonstrations, and civil unrest swept throughout Indonesia, triggering the fall of Suharto and the New Order government. The catalyst for this violence was an economic crisis which caused the value of the rupiah to drop seventy-percent in less than a year (“Indonesian Students Stage Anti-Suharto Protests”, 1998). Indonesian people of Chinese descent became the target of a lot of this violence. Racism towards the Chinese was a trademark of Suharto’s regime but what triggered this particular wave of destruction was the economy crisis (Smith, 2015). The perpetrators of the violence were motivated by the belief that the Chinese Indonesians “both benefit from, and work to maintain, Indonesia’s wage gap”, a gap that had been made more palpable during the aforementioned economic crisis (Smith, 2015). During this time, an unrecorded number of people of Chinese descents were raped or murdered and their properties and businesses were vandalized or destroyed (Smith, 2015).

The violence of 1998 inspired politically-engaged artists to use their art as a way to grapple with and understand both trauma and identity. One of the most prominent artists to do such work is FX

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Harsono, an artist of Chinese-Indonesian descent, who creates work that seeks to “understand that acts of ethnic violence Indonesian in terms of affect” (Smith, 2015, p. 124-5). Previously, Harsono had made work that spoke against the political corruption of the New Order, but after the trauma he experienced in 1998, he shifted his focus to exploring his Chinese identity and making the violence that Chinese-Indonesians have faced since the 1940s more visible. FX Harsono’s video performance, *Writing in the Rain* 2011, for example, is a commentary on the erasure of Chinese-Indonesian culture and identity especially after the closing of many Chinese schools (See Figure 4).

The other location of violence was on university campuses where students were taking to the streets demanding that President Suharto step down and accept responsibility for the major economic crisis (“Indonesian Students Stage Anti-Suharto Protests”, 1998). Such unified opposition was rare in Indonesia due to the suppression of anything countering the political norm for the past thirty years. After a few weeks of protests on student-campuses throughout the country, Suharto gave security forces the green light to use force (“Indonesian Students Stage Anti-Suharto Protests”, 1998). These events led to the creation of new politically-charged art by inspiring a wave of artists to take their art to the street and use it as an act of protest. One such example is Mella Jaarsma who staged the performance piece, *Pribumi-Pribumi* (See Figure 5). After watching students risk their lives in protests, she felt like she also had an obligation to use her art to comment on the racial hate crimes that were happening against the Chinese.

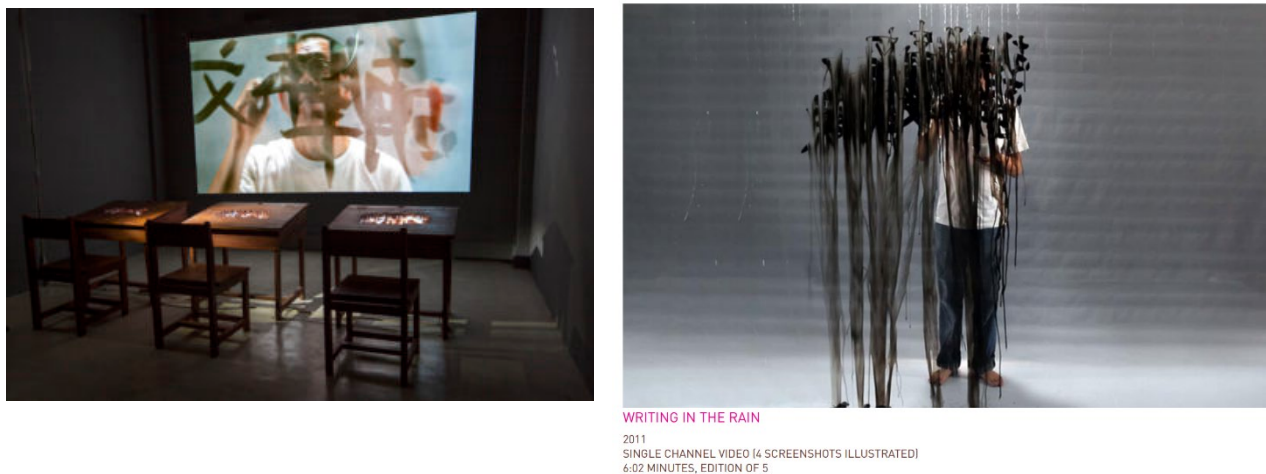
Taring Padi is a collective of artists that also arose in the wake of the 1998 chaos with a mission of using art as a means for political education and peace-building. The first piece signed by Taring Padi was a piece in response the chaos and political tension of the first democratic election (See Figure 6). There were fifty political parties running and the artists of Taring Padi felt that all the conflict was making people forget that they are all brothers, who “all need to give love to each other” (Ucupbaik, personal communication, 11 April 2019). An analysis of this work and its impact can be found in Figure 6.

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The events of 1998 are evidence of how Indonesian artists have made political art to serve as a form of protest, a method to deal with trauma, and a means to provide education about political atrocities. Artists working during this time also demonstrate the obligation that artists feel to use their art to productively respond to social and political events.

FIGURE 4

FX Harsono, *Writing in the Rain*. Video Performance and Installation. 2011



FX Harsono, born with the name Oh Hong Boen, is a Chinese-Indonesian artist who makes risky political satire works predominately responding to Indonesia's history of racism towards people of Chinese ethnicity. He studied at the Akademi Seni Rupa Indonesia until he was expelled for his involvement with GSRB, of which he was a founding member. FX Harsono has transformed trauma described as being "so intense and shattering as to issue a challenge to his capacity for expression" and transformed it into something cathartic that seeks to educate people about atrocities that otherwise may remain relatively unknown to the general public (Smith 2015).

Harsono's video performance, *Writing in the Rain*, involves the artist writing his Chinese name over and over in thick black ink on a glass wall only to have rain wash the surface clean. The artist continues to write as the rain falls until his brush strokes do more erasing than writing. The piece provokes feelings of frustration in any viewer but the specific frustration Harsono hopes to invoke is towards the literal erasure of Chinese-Indonesian's lived history, and the fact that the closing of Chinese schools in Indonesia means that the possibility of the next generation of Chinese-Indonesians to learn their native language has been washed away.

FX Harsono was one of the founding members of the New Art Movement. He displayed work at the Jogja Binal 1992, which inspired the Jogja Painting Biennale to change its name to the Jogja Biennale, and he was among the first Indonesian artists to partake in the Asia-Pacific Triennial in 1993.

FIGURE 5Mella Jaarsma. *Pribumi-Pribumi*. Performance, 1998

Images
courtesy of
the artist

Some of the acts of hate to come out of the 1998 riots included the destruction and vandalism of Chinese-owned shops as well as raping and killing of people of Chinese-decent. Jaarsma explains that “Chinese people are the black sheep of Indonesian society and in times of chaos, like during the riots of 1998, anger was redirected onto this ethnic minority.”

Jaarsma remembers watching students risk their lives in the 1998 protests at UGM and feeling like she, as an artist, had a large responsibility to society to do something. The performance piece Jaarsma consequently orchestrated, *Pribumi-Pribumi*, which translates to “natives”, involved herself and seven other white expats sitting on the street and frying frog legs. Frog legs were a strategic choice as they are seen as a delicacy for the Chinese, while they are considered to be unclean (haram) by Muslims. Because of this, the piece was a commentary on how different cultures bring different perceptions and relate to taboos in different ways.

The question she hoped the piece would spark is “why fry frog legs in such sensitive times”? Although this piece was not a direct attack on the Suharto regime, it still engaged with political and social situation of the time by forcing those who viewed and engaged with the piece to have a deeper level of consciousness about the actions they carry out, how their background influences the meaning behind their actions, and what actions are appropriate to take in “sensitive times”.

Much of Jaarsma’s other work also uses animals. She frequently uses animal hide to make wearable art that comments on themes such as cultural identity and “skin”, the self versus the other, and showing versus showing off. She says she sees her work as “bodily modifications of the social space in between layers of skin, clothing, sartorial inhibition and housing/ architecture” (Mella Jaarsma website).

FIGURE 6

Taring Padi, *Berikan cinta pada sesama* (“give love to others”), 1998



Image courtesy of IVAA

Taring Padi is a collective of print makers who have become well known for their distinctly styled wood cut prints that combine art political education and activism. Beginning during their time as students at ISI, the members of the collective have always been enthusiastic about using art to encourage changes in the socio-political system (*Taring Padi*, 2011).

This piece was made in response to the political chaos of the first democratic elections in which 50 parties were running. The artists felt that all of the competition and conflict was making people forget that they are all brothers. Ucupbaik, one the founders of Taring Padi, told me that this peace is about “peace for our brothers... all religions are the same” (Personal communication, 11 April 2019).

One of the benefits of working with print making is that images can be mass produced and thus messages can be spread very quickly and widely. Ucupbaik told me a story about a high school girl getting a hold of this image, photocopying it, spreading it around her school, and using it as a way to inspire harmony within her class (Personal communication, 11 April 2019).

REFORMASI ERA: 1998- Present

The decades after the fall of Suharto and the New Order marked a period of rebuilding and confusion both politically and for artists. While the new government worked to build a democracy, artists were using their new found freedoms to run wild in a number of different directions. First of all, the *Reformasi* era witnessed the rise of new technologies such as digital and video art, which became popular new mediums (“Dunia Dalam Berita”, 2019). There was also the breadth of new social and political subjects that artist could now explore. One example is the interest of artists to use their art to explore

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aspects of Indonesia's history which until this point were either too painful or too censored to talk about. Other artists felt tired of making politically-charged art for so long and took this time as an opportunity to experiment and have fun with their art. Regardless, the new freedoms artists had resulted in the art scene in Indonesia growing much larger, more diverse and more complex.

A new generation of artists was emerging after the fall of the New Order. A number of these artists "found that a heavy emphasis on social and political themes, as well as international curators' preference for works on these subjects, limited their artistic practice" ("Visual Art After Suharto", 2018). This generation of artists included Eko Nugroho, and the collective *Ruangrupa*. They were more interested in exploring personal identities and local issues than large-scale political issues.

In 2007, Cemeti organized an exhibition of the young artists who claimed to be fed up of talking about politics and just wanted to be playful and have fun with their art. The Exhibition was called *Small Talk*. Mella Jaarsma told me though that while the art aesthetically looked more playful, it still ended up being political (Jaarsma, personal communication, 10 April 2019). Thus, a lot of evidence remains that this group of artists did not "entirely abandon the politically engaged work of their predecessors" ("Art after Suharto", 2018, n.p.). As the *Small Talk* exhibition demonstrates, even artist's best attempt to make non-political art failed because politics ultimately always finds its way into art.

A lot of existing artists also continued to work with political and social issues but began approaching it in a different manner. The collective, Taring Padi, for example, continued to highlight social and political concerns but had more of an interest in working collectively with and for the people, rather than simple speaking on their behalf ("Visual Art after Suharto", 2018).

THE ART MARKET BOOM

In 2007 and 2008, the Asian Art Market boomed; impacting the Indonesian art scene by creating a generation of artists who saw the ability to make a living from their art, and creating a market for political art. The combination of these two factors meant that a generation of artists was making political

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art in mass quantities not necessarily to draw attention to issues or spark change, but with the primary purpose of making money.

The impact of the art market boom on Indonesian artists perhaps began in 2008 when a political painting by Indonesian artist, Nyoman Masriadi, sold for \$269,800 at Sotheby's auction house in Hongkong ("Visual art after Suharto", 2018). This was a monumental moment for Indonesian artists as it marked the moment when Indonesian artists realized it was possible to use their art to make a living. It also resulted in a boom in interest in political art from Indonesian art collectors who had a large amount of power in controlling art market demand. Due to the lack of government sanctioned art infrastructure like museums, the roles of establishing the value of art pieces, setting trends, and showing art that is "important" falls on collectors (Jaarsma, personal communication, 22 April 2019). The role the collectors played was at times problematic, such as during the New Order, where Indonesian collectors avoided critical work because of their political content. By 2008, after the sale of Masriadi's painting, political art was considered "trendy" and the next generation of Indonesian artists was there to meet their demand. (Jaarsma, personal communication, 22 April 2019)

While the art market boom increased the number of artists interested in making political art, it also changed the manner in which they worked. Artists' preoccupation with meeting demand diminished their ability to think critically about many of the social and political issues which their pieces addressed. One art critic noted that this art boom, "diminished the intellectual engagement of many Indonesian artists" ("Visual Art after Suharto", 2018). Mella Jaarsma also talked about the extent to which the art market changed the mindset of Indonesian artists. She said,

Before, we never even thought about selling our works, especially the critical ones because there was not market for it. We just made the things we felt we had to make, but since the art boom, you know the 2007/8 art boom, everything gets translated to dollars. Now it becomes trendy to make critical works. That also makes the sharp edge disappear (Jaarsma, personal communication, 22 April 2019).

The other way the art market boom impacted artists in Jogja was by changing the amount of public engagement with the arts. For example, Jogja's annual art fair, *Art Jog*, was started in 2008 with

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the mission of bringing the art of established and emerging artist to the general public (“Visual Art After Suharto”, 2018). The new market and blossoming public interest in arts provided established artists and collectives more opportunities for publicly displaying their work. One collective to benefit greatly was Ace House Collective: a collective of 21 artists who share the same visual language of DIY art, punk art, street art and comics. They were founded in 2002 but for their first six years were just referred to as “those guys” or “that group” (Uma et al., personal communication, 24 April 2019). They credit the art market boom with providing them more opportunities for exhibitions in Indonesia which in turn increased the public’s appreciation for their art.

NEW ART SPACES, NEW FRONTIERS

New freedoms during the *Reformasi* era allowed a number of new art spaces, galleries, foundations and collectives to open in Jogja, which was becoming the arts and culture capital of Java. Examples include Kedai Kebun Forum which opened in 1996 but was renovated and made more public in 2001; Graffis Minggeran, a printmaking laboratory which opened in 2001; Ace House Collective, an artist’s collective and gallery started in 2001; MES 56, a cooperative photography space which houses workshops, a gallery, and a residency program, and which was founded in 2002.

The opening of so many new art spaces allowed the Cemeti Art House, which for so long had served as the only contemporary art gallery in Jogja, to explore new projects and frontiers. While their focus in the nineties had been on promoting Indonesian art nationally and internationally and encouraging artists to make critical work, their focus at this point shifted to “providing artists with the opportunity to work independent of commercial forces” (Bruch, 2013). One of the ways they did this was by launching residency programs which provide artists space and time away from all the chaos of the art market boom to think (Jaarsma, personal communication, 22 April 2019). Mella Jaarsma felt that Cemeti’s residency program was essential for young artists because,

In that period of time, with all those curators demanding and selling, it made the young artists very confused and they did not build up their body of works because they just followed the

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themes curators were demanding. They never had time to think, to experiment (personal communication, 22 April 2019).

From 2007 until 2010, Cemeti had a separate place for residents to live and work so they could host four residency programs each year while also keeping up their regular schedule of monthly exhibitions. By 2010, because of the large number of other art spaces and galleries that had opened, they changed their business model to focus more exclusively on residencies (Jaarsma, personal communication, 22 April 2019)

Two of the residency programs by Cemeti also have an objective in globalizing Indonesian arts and in connecting Indonesian artists with artists from abroad; thus building bridges between Indonesia, the Netherlands, Australia, and other Asian countries. Their *Landing Soon* residency program, which was started in 2006, was a collaboration with Heden in the Hague, Netherlands to bring together Indonesian and Dutch Artists and provide both the opportunity for international shows (*Turning Targets*, 2014). Today, Cemeti is conducting a series of residencies called *Hot Wave*, which connects three artists from three different countries (*Turning Targets*, 2014). These residency programs by Cemeti are also representative of the growing interest in globalization and globalizing Indonesia's art scene during *Reformasi*.

GLOBALIZATION

Globalization has been a topic of increasing interest in the past decade. Increasing art globalization, such as the globally-minded residencies by Cemeti, has been influential for contemporary Indonesian art; especially with regards to the social and political issues it pushes Indonesian artists to work with. Globalization has forced a lot of artists to consider the role their art plays not only in Indonesian society, but also in the world, and to engage with issues of more global importance.

Due to globalization, an increased number of Indonesian artists have begun to display their work internationally. In 2013, Indonesia was invited to have a pavilion at the Venice Biennale, one of the most famous international art festivals, for the first time ("Visual Art After Suharto", 2018). The Indonesian

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government provided financial support for Indonesian artists' participation. Alia Swastika, a curator, told me that she believes it is good that the government has been supporting Indonesia's participation in the Venice Biennale, but it is also not good because what they really need to be funding is international Biennales right here in Indonesia (Swastika, personal communication, 20 April 2019). She believes that the government is too concerned with promoting Indonesia to outsiders but continues to fail to support art initiatives happening in the country.

Alia Swastika is the head of the Jogja Biennale, an international art Biennale in Yogyakarta which has played an important role in connecting Indonesian artists with the rest of the world. It was started in 1988 and carried the title "Painting Biennale" until 1992 when Dadang Christanto, Heri Dono, Agung Kurniawan, Ogi Hari Wahyi and FX Harsono (the same group that led the *Black December* protest) protested the restrictions and created their own exhibition called the *Jogja Binal* (Asian Culture Station, 2018). *Binal* means wild, and the artists used public spaces for installation and performance art. The Jogja Binal of 1992 was how Dadang Christanto, Heri Dono, and FX Harsono received the international attention that got them invited to the Asia Pacific Triennale in 1993 (Asian Culture Station, 2018).

One of the biggest initiatives of the Jogja Biennale today is to question the position of Indonesian arts in an increasingly-globalized world (Asian Culture Station, 2018). The Jogja Biennale is encouraging artists to tackle such questions through their *Equator Series*. The purpose of the series, which will be the theme of each Biennale from 2011 until 2022, is to connect Indonesian art and artists with those from other countries located along the equator ("About the Equator Series", 2011). Together Indonesian artists and artists from India, Egypt, Nigeria, have explored topics ranging from "Shadow lines" to "hacking conflict". One example of a piece of art displayed in the Jogja Equator series was an installation piece called *Komisi Nasional Pemurnian Seni* (National Committee for Art Purification) by Ace House Collective. The piece comments on arts function as a detox tool to explain and cleans many complex issues in society (See **Figure 7**).

FIGURE 7

Ace House Collective. *Komisi nasional Pemurnian Seni (National Committee for Art Purification)*. Performance activities in a site-specific installation @ Biennale Jogja 2015



Images courtesy of Jogja Biennale 2015

Ace House Collective is a collective of 21 artists, united by their shared visual style which combines DIY art with punk art and street art. In their early years and when they were in art school at ISI, most of their exhibitions were DIY exhibitions in public spaces because of the fact that there were no galleries interested in showing their work. In 2015 though, though were invited to partake in the Jogja Biennale.

The collective created a site-specific installation with performances entitled *Komisi Nasional Pemurnian Seni (National Committee for Art Purification)*. The idea of the piece was to use the idea of medical purification and detoxing as a metaphor for the function of art in society. In their artist's statement, they said that "art becomes a tool for explaining and 'cleansing' many complex issues society faces today" (Biennale Jogja, 2015).

This piece by Ace House is also an example of artists being self-critical about the role of their art in society. They are critical about the extent to which art exhibited in bureaucratic systems such as biennales can be "capable of representing the ideological position of art in society" (Biennale Jogja, 2015) By creating an official-looking building called "*Komisi Nasional Pemurnian Seni*", the viewer was encouraged to imagine what such an organization would look like and what function it would have in regards art and art's impact on society. The other question this piece raises is what the role of the government should be in art.

EXPLORING HISTORY

Globalization meant artists were giving more consideration to the extent to which they exist as part of a global system. There is an obvious link between the way that artists were beginning to think about how their art had been shaped by a global exchange of ideas, and the rekindled interest of artists in exploring Indonesia's largely-untouched history. During the Suharto era, many aspects of history, especially the 1965 incident, were either too painful or too taboo to talk about. Censorship under Suharto

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also resulted in a number of historical facts and stories being strategically cut out of education and history books (*Masa Lalu-Masa Lupa*, 2007). Therefore, artists in the past decade have played a really important role in shaping Indonesia's collective memory of history.

There are several reasons why artists feel it is important to use their art to explore history. One of the powers art has is to provide education; especially education that schools fail to provide. There are many aspects of Indonesia's history which have been forgotten, falsified, or censored in history books. The artist Agung Kurniawan believes it is essential for people to understand their own history because history is like a shadow and shadow is evidence that you are alive (personal communication, 27 April 2019). One of the problems with the study of history is that history always seems to be written by the winners. Art provides the opportunities for the losers, the small and forgotten people, to share their stories. Lastly, art can be used as a way to heal trauma.

All three of these are the objective of Agung Kurniawan who has always worked with issues of violence, controversial politics, and taboo subjects in history. He studied archaeology at UGM for three years because he knew he was interested in history but dropped out after that time to pursue a career as an artist (Kurniawan, 2018). He feels that artists have more freedom and power than civil servants (Agung, personal communication, 27 April 2019). One of Kurniawan's most recent projects dealing with history, trauma, and education is *Gejolak Makam Keramat (Sacred Grave Unrest)*, a performance piece he created with survivors of 1965 as a way to help them share their stories (Agung, personal communication, 27 April 2019) (See **Figure 8**). 1965 is a topic that has become more popular in Indonesian artworks and exhibitions both at home and abroad for "artists who are second or third generation survivors of 1965 violence who have inherited stories of trauma from their family members or communities" ("Art after Suharto", 2018).

The exhibition *Masa Lalu-Masa Lupa* at Cemeti in 2007, is an excellent example of artists using their power to reexamine and "correct" history. Alia Swastika, the curator of the exhibition wrote in the exhibition synopsis that "For thirty-two years, history texts had been used by the ruling regime to

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reinforce their authority: providing a way to indicate who was right and who was wrong... History became something distant in inaccessible to the common man” (*Masa Lalu-Masa Lupa*, 2007). This is why artists felt they had an imperative role to play. The exhibition was a collaboration with the KUNCI Cultural Studies Center. Artists were asked to “reinterpret” the results of research on a specific topic from the project “Indonesia across Orders: The Reorganization of Indonesian Society, 1930-60” (*Masa Lalu Masa Lupa*, 2007)

Eko Nugroho was one of the six artists who was invited to partake in the exhibition (**See Figure 9**). He created a series of comic ad embroideries which display his findings about a neighborhood, Kotabaru, which was created by European residents to isolate themselves from indigenous people who they hyperbolically viewed as sick and dangerous. Nugroho uses his distinct comic style to talk about this issue with a touch of parody and comedy; ultimately leading the viewer to the conclusion about how Dutch colonizers have always segregated and marginalized native populations. This history is important for understanding race relations in Indonesia today.

Exploring history is an essential part of understanding social and political conditions as they are Indonesia. Artists have been able to use their art to comment on the extent to which history has been censored. They have allowed stories which have never had the opportunity to be shared, to be heard. And through that, they have allowed people to talk about and thus heal trauma.

FIGURE 8

Agung Kurniawan, *Gejolak Makam Keramat (Sacred Grave Unrest)*, Performance 2017

Agung Kurniawan’s recent project has been working with a group of 1965 survivors, who each spent between four and fourteen years and jail, to help them share their stories. Kurniawan, who has worked with every medium from drawing, to painting to sculpture, chose to use performance art for this specific



Photo courtesy of Arya Suksma and Agung Kurniawan

project. The performance involved thirteen performers who recited an old adapted script about a cemetery which was destroyed to build a factory. The story is thus a commentary on the use of capital strength to undermine social structures. It is also a story of grief and loss. The performance was an attempt to use art as a method to “heal the traumatic memories of 1965 survivors as well as make the young generation aware of the tragedy” (Kurniawan 2018).

Kurniawan feels that this project is important because there still has not been any reconciliation for the trauma of 1965. The fact that the incident is still very taboo is evidence of the fact that people feel it is

best to hide or forget this important piece of Indonesia’s history.

The performance was only performed once at UGM last year. This is a limitation of working with performers who are in their seventies and eighties. To keep the show and stories alive, Kurniawan has created an instillation piece in which videos of the survivors, from the performance, are projected on top of their clothes which are hanging in a dark room, creating the allusion of ghosts. He calls them “hauntings”. The instillation is on display in an underground space at the Beaux Arts in Brussels. Unfortunately, the ministry of culture from Indonesia saw the exhibition, which was scheduled to move to the national gallery in Jakarta, and cancelled it, also putting Agung Kurniawan on “the black list”. This is evidence of how censorship of the arts still exists in Indonesia today.

FIGURE 9

Eko Nugroho. *Anjing dan pribumi dilarang masuk*. As part of the exhibition *Masa Lalu- Masa Lupa. Cemeti*, 2007.

Eko Nugroho was one of the 6 artists invited by Cemeti to partake in an exhibition called *Masa Lalu-Masa Lupa* (the Past-The Forgotten Time). Nugroho is an Indonesian artist who predominately uses the format and aesthetics of comics in his work. He does so because comics can be processed into other expressive visual forms such as merchandise, videos, murals, and instillations; thus making the audience of his work incredibly wide. Nugroho’s work is usually humorous and imaginative and he uses these two techniques to guide his viewers into thinking more deeply about a lot of the ironies of their existence, daily life, and history.

For this exhibition, Nugroho worked with the topic of the Kotabaru fortress. Nugroho found in his research that Kotabaru was a residential area built at the beginning of the 20th century to “answer the fears of Europeans about the spreading of an ‘illness’ because of the closeness of their homes with indigenous neighbors” (telefoongids, 1938). Every aspect of the neighborhood’s design was a purposeful attempt by the white people to distance themselves from the “unhealthy” indigenous people of the land they invaded.



Image courtesy of Cemeti Art House

the real threat. In a comedic twist, the real threat is a dragon. Either way, the image represents the over-zealous imagination of the Europeans and the way that European perception of natives has shaped Indonesian identity-creation and social organization until today.

The title of Nugroho's contribution to the exhibition was "Kotabaru fortress: between its existence and the rejection of the post-colonial period". The word "rejection" makes me think about the extent to which Indonesians have attempted to "reject" or ignore the impact of their traumatic colonial history. The objective of this movement in art of reexamining history, which for too long was too painful to talk about, is to open up old wounds in order for them to heal properly, and to come to terms with the extent to which history has shaped society as it is today. Nugroho learned in his research, for example, that it was the influence of the European settlers that transformed the social organization of the indigenous population from being communal to being individual.

One of Nugroho's pieces for this exhibition carries the caption "Anjing dan Pribumi dilarang Masuk", which translates to "dogs and natives are prohibited from entering". The caption satirically connects natives to dogs, bringing natives down to a subhuman level. The image shows a white man facing a wall. Through the holes in the wall, the viewer can see a dragon. I think this image can be interpreted in a couple of ways. On one hand, the dragon may represent the European's perception of the natives: they imagine them to be much more scary and dangerous than they actually are. Another interpretation is that neither dogs nor natives are

ART AS PRE-ELECTION EDUCATION

One of the biggest movements of contemporary art in Indonesia has been to make art public and accessible so as to increase viewership and thus impact. Social media and street art are two outlets which have been explored by contemporary artists in recent years. Both are effective mediums for spreading ideas to mass quantities of people and thus have been used for spreading ideas and education, especially in pre-election times.

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Artists feel that art is an important and necessary tool for spreading educational properties such as critical thinking and awareness of social, political and global issues. Mella Jaarsma expressed the importance of art to fulfill this role as “the education system is very bad. My god... it’s very uncritical, uncreative” (Jaarsma, personal communication 2019) and Alia Swastika said that emphasizing the importance of education is one of the things that drives her curatorial practice (Swastika, personal communication, 22 April 2019).

Artist collective Taring Padi has always used their art as a tool for political education. They created a piece last year which is a series of circular prints each representing a different issue that people should keep in mind during the upcoming election in April 2019 (**See Figure 10**). Issues included corruption, human rights, tolerance and environmental issues. The prints are currently displayed on a wall near Marlioboro mall in Jogja (Ucupbaik, personal communication, 11 April 2019). Similarly, many street artists are interested in addressing issues impacting the 2019 presidential election. A wall around the stadium Kridosono in central Jogja is entirely covered in murals reminding people to vote on the seventeenth of April, 2019 and to not fall victim to money politics or hoax (fake news).

Hoax is an issue that digital artist Agan Harahap addresses in his work. Harahap creates fake narratives and scenarios using Photoshop and spreads them using social media (**See Figure 11**). The objective of his work is to educate people to think more critically about things that are shared on the internet. This type of work is important “because of the election, on social media everyday there is a war” (Harahap, personal communication, 18 April 2019). Not only is it not healthy but there is also so much false information and propaganda that gets shared when people don’t have the education to know how to think critically about what they believe when it comes to news and politics.

FIGURE 10Taring Padi, *Seri Poster*, 2018

Image taken by Isabel Betsill

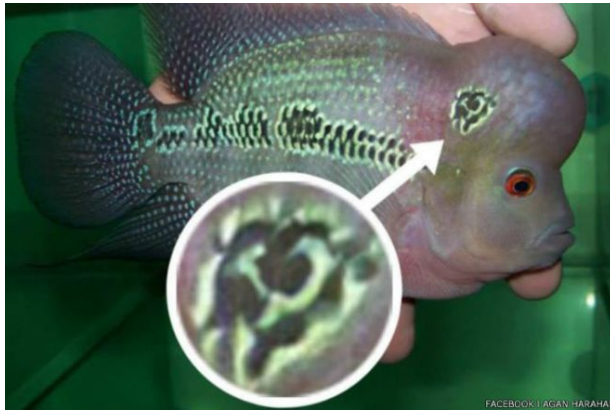
FIGURE 11Agan Harahap, *Sejarah X*, Photographs 2014

Agan Harahap, a photographer without a camera, has mastered Photoshop. He uses humor and his perfected photo editing skills to create realistic looking scenarios in an attempt to “educate people in [his] way”. What he means by this is educating people to be less gullible and to think more critically about what they believe, as well as educating people to be more responsible about what they share on social media. One of Harahap’s pieces which I believe does this very clearly is a photo of a fish with markings that look like a hammer and cycle. Harahap posted the photo, which he made in about 5 minutes, to his Facebook along with a made-up story about a pet shop owner who was caught by



Images courtesy of the artist

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the police for having this fish. The story is a parody of a real story about a store owner who was taken by police for selling a t-shirt for the band *Kreator* which had a hammer and cycle on it. Agan Harahap hoped to use this piece to make people think about the absurdity of communism paranoia. The image and the fake story was shared more than 4000 times in one day and was eventually picked up by news sources like the BBC.

In 2014, before the presidential election, Harahap created a series of photo shopped images of Soekarno, who is always holding a glass of orange juice, partying with Celebrities such as

Marilyn Monroe and Jackie Kennedy (Shown above) as well as figures like Fidel Castro and Bob Marley. The series was a commentary on all the ‘black campaigns’ that haunt the internet before elections which spread gossip and rumors about candidates. This series was shown at the 2015 Jogja Biennale along with a book he wrote that is the fictional biography of a fictional official presidential photographer.

CONCLUSION

It should be noted that not all Indonesian artists between 1974 and today have made political art. The truth is that it has only been a small group but the work they created has received a lot of attention. One anonymous interviewee told me that political art gets written about the most in academia because it is a lot easier to write about and analyze than art with less clear subject matter. I think that the subject of art and politics is important to study though because political art exemplifies the power of visual art as a tool for healing, education, and change.

During the New Order, artists had to acknowledge the risk they were putting themselves in by making critical, political art. However, the fact that they continued to do so is evidence of the importance of art as a tool for coping, healing, and survival. Art is especially important during and after periods of violence, corruption and trauma as, “the use of cultural and artistic approaches seems to be the only option available for addressing this traumatic past” (Visual Art after Suharto 2018). The creation of the New Art Movement in 1974 recognized the need and importance of art that engages with social and

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political content. The involvement of foreign institutions in providing space and funding for political artists granted them the freedom to do so without fear of prosecution.

The political situation during the New Order, from 1965 to 1998 shaped artistic practices in a number of ways. First of all by providing artists with a common enemy to make art against. Secondly because of the implications of censorship laws, artists were forced to work more creatively; employing stronger metaphors and symbolism. The fact that there were censorship laws targeted at artists only legitimizes the fact visual art is a powerful medium which can inspire critical thought and radical change: two things which are threatening to an authoritarian government. Although the New Order government fell in 1998, “artists remain wary. Recent years have seen an increase in censorship of works that challenge the dominant narrative in public spaces by certain civil society groups, such as the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI)”. (“Visual Art after Suharto”, 2018)

Political and social situations during the *Reformasi* era have continued to shape artistic practices and the types of political issues artists choose to address in their work. Violence during 1998 inspired artists to use their art as a tool for peaceful protest and is evidence of the fact that artists feel they have an obligation to use their art for something productive. Since 1998, the Indonesian art market has experienced a lot of change due to factors like the Asian art market boom and interesting in globalization. Artists today continue to use their art to critique society and politics with specific interests in the topics of history and political education.

I think that the lens of art history is one of the best ways to study history, society and politics because it gives insight into how events and situations get manifested into real people’s emotions and mindsets. People always have and always will be making art, and art will inevitably always be linked to politics.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

This paper was a broad overview of contemporary Indonesian art and the way it has been influenced by and impacted social and political problems. It covered both a broad scope and expansive time period: from 1965 to present. For further study, I would recommend taking a deeper dive into some of the issues or artists which were addressed in this paper. FX Harsono and Heri Dono are two artists who have been especially prominent in the Indonesian contemporary art scene and who created art that was both revolutionary and impactful. Entire ISP papers could be written about either of these artists.

APPENDIX A: Interview with Alia Swastika, 20 April 2019

- Can you tell me about how your career started? How did you become interested in becoming a curator?
 - Studied communication at UGM
 - Curatorial studies is part of the social and political studies faculty at UGM
 - She wrote a lot about art while she was studying communication, because she has always had an interest in art
 - Started working at Clementi in 2003 or 4
 - Curated between 10-12 exhibitions a year at Cemeti
 - Did not have any background education in curating but didn't find it too hard to pave her own path
- What is your favorite part of being a curator?
 - Visiting artist's studios
 - "In Jogja there is so much diversity in artist's studios. I love being able to get to visit studios in so many different villages. It's a really neat experience"
 - "I also love seeing how works change over time. You go one time and there's some painting, and then you go again and they've done more work on it, and then you go again and they've completely painted over it. You get to witness the whole process right along with the artist".
- What is the biggest challenge of being a curator?
 - Being a curator in Indonesia is different from being a curator somewhere else because there are no big organizations, museums, etc. There is no government support so in addition to organizing exhibitions, you also have to run an institute, and do everything.
 - But the government is trying to provide more funding. But it only goes to a select few organization
 - They fund part of the biennales but I still must do so much fundraising for the Jogja Biennale
- Can you tell me about the process of fundraising? Who are you asking for money and who is providing the bulk of it
 - We rely a lot on the support of foreign institutions
 - But really every artist is struggling.
 - "sometimes we (artists) survive by magic"
- Are artists frustrated by the lack of government support/ funding?
 - Not really because we never really think of the government as being there in the first place
- So what other role does the government have in supporting Indonesian art and artists?
 - Since 2013, the government has been providing support for the Venice Biennale. Which is good but also not good because what they really need to be funding is International Biennales right here.
 - It's important to have art HERE!
- Why is it important to have Indonesian art on display in Indonesia and not just abroad?
 - The government is too concerned with promoting Indonesia and making us look good in a global context
 - ...

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- I want to talk about censorship. Part of my paper is about how the government under Suharto influenced art that artists were making through strict censorship. I'm struggling to understand exactly what this looked like though and to what extent artists listened
 - It wasn't really censorship, it was just that you had to submit your exhibition for government approval before you displayed it
 - But exhibitions were rarely rejected because the people on the committee didn't really know anything about art, so most of the art could fly under the radar because they didn't understand it
 - So really, the censorship is not like in Vietnam or anything
- So are there any examples of exhibitions that *did* get censored?
 - Yes. The most famous example is Moelyono's exhibition in like 1992
 - He was making works that were responding to the killing of a female laborer and the motive of his exhibition calling the government to investigate her death.
- What role do you feel you, as a curator, have in the development of Indonesia's contemporary art scene?
 - One of the things that really drives my practice is emphasizing the importance of education
 - I'm really interested in how art is connected with wider social and political contexts so as a curator, I create a lot of workshops and discussions. For example for young curators or for students to come together and talk about an exhibition.
- How has Indonesia's art scene changed since you first entered the industry (2004)? In terms of like the issues artists address and art infrastructure?
 - I think that artists today are a lot more market driven
 - This is probably because of global commercialization of the arts
 - It used to be impossible for an artist to be full time. So they used to work as an artist part time but also have another job. Now artists make commercial art so they can support themselves working as an artist full time
 - The arts community is getting bigger but it is also getting more secluded
 - Artists are working with less connection to academic, journalism, etc.
 - "I don't believe artists change from period to period" but they way they articulate changes and the way academic talk about their art changes
 - For example, in the 90s, not everyone was making political art. It's just that those were the only ones that academics focused on. Because it's a lot easier to write about political art than abstract art.
 - I don't believe that there is any more or less political art now than there was in the 90s
- You said in an interview with Apollo that you believe "art can change the mindset of society." Can you elaborate on this a little bit more and explain how you implement this mindset into your curatorial work?
 - I don't think that art actually has that power
 - But I think that education does. So for example, my programs for students
 - But the Equator series of the Jogja Biennale is a good example of how we use art to change people's mindsets
 - When I talk to students at the Biennale, you can so clearly see that their perceptions of these other countries is based on what they hear in mainstream media.

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- Art can speak to you with a one-on-one connection so you can get to intimately know these countries for real and change your perception about that
- Can you talk to me a little bit about SOAP: a research platform on Indonesian contemporary art? Why do you think it's important for there to be more research on contemporary Indonesian art?
 - Well SOAP actually is not so active right now. I've been too busy for the last 2 or 3 years
 - But it was a journal and we published 5 editions
- Do you still believe that research on contemporary art is important?
 - Research is important, yes, but what's more important is spreading the findings
 - We need to find a better way to share the findings
 - Because Indonesia is really an oral society so people don't really like to read
 - The act of learning to write research is important, but it's also important to think about more creative ways of knowledge distribution.
- I want to return to the central theme of my research which is about how art is talking about political issues. Do you have any examples of artists or art exhibitions who deal with this topic that you could tell me about?
 - Well the definition of politics is always changing. Thus "political art" is always changing.
 - Political art used to mean that that spoke against the government. But now it's more nuanced things like power relations and rewriting history. Are you familiar with FX Harsono?
- Me: Yes, of course. He certainly is interested in rewriting history? He even has a piece by that name doesn't he? Where it's all the names written out in Chinese characters? What about other artists?
 - S Teddy D
- Can you tell me more about the work you do for the Jogja Biennale? Why are biennales like this one important?
 - "we are critical about global work" and about exploring relationships. For example, "east" vs "west"
 - Interested in how artists position themselves in the global world
 - Interested in reconstructing the past

APPENDIX B: Interview with Agan Harahap, 18 April 2019

- tell me about your art practice
 - begins in college, 1999. Theatre and painting
 - 2001- interest in photography. But at that time I do not have a camera because photography at that time was very expensive. It was still film, not digital. So I discover a new technology called photoshop. Since then I am learning and working in Photoshop
 - First exhibition, 2009, MES 56
 - “new photography”
 - 2010: Superhero series
 - Right now, interested in social media
 - “I am of course still working in photoshop, and then I share on social media and it become... (Makes whooshing noise)... it become viral”
 - Photoshop is cheap in Indonesia because in Indonesia everything can be hijacked
- What does your daily life look like?
 - Still working for exhibitions. One this week and one in 2 months in Singapore
 - “My daily life is like, you know, browsing the timeline, social media, what’s up today. And then I respond”
 - Maybe 10 exhibitions a year
- How do you display your work?
 - Depends on the artwork
 - Usually does not do solo exhibitions
 - Social media artwork, he doesn’t like printed so he displays using a slideshow
 - He has a few pieces that are a collection of many small photographs, maybe 30. He will print them out small and display them together
 - Mostly displaying in galleries and on social media
- How did you become interested in making art?
 - “I don’t know”
 - “I went to school to study to be a graphic designer”
 - “Since before social media era, I’m still like searching here and there. But after social media, I just started like ‘okay I want to make this I want to make this’”. I can’t say it’s easier but there is a lot more to respond to. But as an artists, there is a lot to reflect on/ respond to
 - “my recent art work, I get inspiration from social media, of course” For example...
- The hammer and cycle fish
 - “Here. This is a fish. At the time people in Indonesia are very afraid of the come back of communism”
 - The band ‘Kreator’, a heavy metal band from Germany, made a t-shirt with hammer and cycle. “This of course has no relation to the rebirth of communism in Indonesia, but at the time, people are paranoid and police come and put... there’s a shop in Jakarta that sells merchandise like this t-shirt, and the police come and catch the seller. Like why you so crazy? Why you so paranoid? Because like, the rebirth of communism is just an issue, not a real thing. Some politicians use that issue to attack the opener”
 - “The man that get by police is my friend”

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- “So I make this to respond to the situation. It’s a fish with a hammer and cycle. It’s like a 5 minute photoshop and I put in on my facebook and for one day it’s shared more than like 4000 shares. Because like, my friends who really know me, they think it’s funny. But their friends who don’t know me, they think it’s serious”
- I made this whole story that there’s a guy who owns a pet shop and he gets caught by the police for having the fish that has a mark that looks like a hammer and cycle.
- The story was even picked up by the BBC (he shows me the article)
- Me: “I guess that’s one of the benefits of using social media: things go viral so quickly”
 - “Yeah yeah yeah I really love to educate people with my way”
- Favorite thing about being an artist?
 - “I don’t know. I can express how I feel and stuff like that. If you talk about financial, it’s not good. Of course it’s not good. But I can express how I feel and when people appreciate my artwork, that’s priceless for me”
- Me: “your art work has a real sense of humor. Do you consider yourself a ‘funny’ person?”
 - “No im a very serious person. But sometimes when my wife is angry with me. I have to do this, some funny things... to you know, for defense... for survival”
- Do you think that humor is an effective way of communicating your ideas?
 - “Sure... I think that it’s a very classic way for artists, and of course, like comedians: comedians can say anything about god, about jesus, about religion, about president. Same like me”
- Why is art important for you?
 - “I will die without art. I cannot express what I’m feeling”
 - I see what’s happening on my timeline, on social media. The reactions of people. And I have to do something. Because, I’m using photoshop and I’m using social media. It can become viral. It can become national news in just one click”
- Why is art important in the world?
 - “Art important in the world because art is for... you know... like I said before, for survival, for survival system. If there’s no art, I don’t know what would happen to the world. It’s for refresh your mind, for make people think more about themselves, the other, that’s the true function of art: to reflect”
- What kinds of issues do you address in your art? I know you respond to things you see on social media, but what kinds of things specifically?
 - “Recently, I talk a lot about religion and politics. For Indonesians. In this country, they use religion to get power. And I think that that’s very... stupid, stupid way. Because most people in indonesia are very religious. We are the biggest Muslim country in the world. But they use religion to direct people and that’s not good”
- So do you think it’s problematic that all of Indonesia’s presidents have been Muslim?
 - “I don’t have a problem about that. They are all Muslim. I am Christian. It’s okay for me. I don’t care. It’s no problem for me. But PLEASE, do not use your religion to get people to follow you. That’s not good. That’s a very stupid idea”
 - “Because of this election, people get separated. Even families hate each other. Both candidates declared themselves as nationalists but other candidates use religion to get power. My wife’s parents, they send a whats app text like ‘hey, choose this. Think about heaven. Choose this candidate’. It’s crazy!”
 - “Religion should be for personal use only. If you use religion for politics, we will become like Syria or Afghanistan or Iraq. It’s not good”

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- Who is the audience of your art? Who do you make it for
 - People in indonesia
 - 89,000 instagram followers
 - I don't get money, but its fine for me
 - "Yesterday, you know, election day, I made this tshirt...."
- "Jokowo Punk" T-Shirt
 - "this is my candidate. (Jokowo) and I make some hoax about this president. He looks like he's from 'Sex Pistol'", (points to the shirt Jokowi is wearing). Even the president himself responded to this on his personal account saying 'This is not me!'" I said "okay, thank you mister president". And then I made it into a shirt."
 - It became national news for like 3 days!
- What social and political issues are people most concerned about right now
 - "Because of this election, on social media everyday there is a war. And it's not healthy"
 - "So I always respond about this current situation. Many media talk about this. I post this. I make a story about this. And then people just straight believe! 'Oh wow! This is the teenage of our candidate! His punk! Like us! Wow!'"
- People will believe anything they see in a photo
 - "10 years ago, we believe that photo is representation of the truth. But I try to change that"
- So you want people to be less gullible?
 - "I want to educate people with my way"
 - "because, you know, here in indonesia... for example, even my mother, she started using smartphone just last year. When I go visit her in Jakarta, I see all these things in her whatsapp that's not true"
 - People need to be educated to be more careful about what they're sharing on social media. "because when they share my artwork and they believe my artwork, it may lead to them being bullied by their friends. 'why you so stupid? Why you believe this?'"
 - "Here it is so cheap to get a smart phone! You can get a smartphone from china and then you can do whatever you want. The whole world is in your hands. It's so dangerous. It would be like giving a knife to my son. Here in indonesia, people do not get the education. They follow all the celebrities and gossip accounts"
- So you think people need to be educated more about what to believe?
 - "Of course, but it's about *how* we educate the people. It takes time. People have to learn for themselves"
- "*Membidi Sejarah*" (Appointing a History) –Project for Yokarta Binale 2013
 - "this is my first Binale. I make this. This is the first president of Indonesia. His name is Sukarto. He has 9 wives. So I make this:"
 - This is him with Marilyn Monroe, Elizabeth Taylor, Jackie Kennedy
 - Sukarno is holding orange juice because he is Muslim.
 - (he shows me more photos of him mingling with various celebrities at a party, including young andy Warhol, a Rastafarian, fidel castro)
 - "and I make a book. Actually, it's not in my name. I make a fictional character. He's a photographer in the 60s: the official presidential photographer. His name is Amrizal Chaniago. He is from west Sumatra, and he is teaching photographer for the youngsters but in 1965 the military wright him. He comes back and ordinary guy. It's like a

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biography of him. He learned photography from a Chinese guy, had the first photography studio in his village”

- He has to apologize all the time, but he thinks it's funny and it makes him proud

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