

by circumstances that are completely different from theirs... ? [11].

First of all I would like to pose the same question with a slight "change of focus" [12]: have Asian observers – and why not those of Africa and the Middle East – had to adapt their vision to the objects created and shaped by circumstances completely different from theirs ? It is just that, for the purpose of saving this question from any unproductive dogmatism, I would prefer to aspire to recognise a casuistic appropriation of what humanity contributes to itself by dint of universal progression.

Irrespective of the possible answers Me Evilly has found, I believe that the actions of recent times – some found in the very limits of subordination, others aimed overtly at removing prejudices and objectively specific in penetrating the boundaries established by extremes – trigger a necessary result that is related to the changes in contemporary views of art, to the same extent that conceptions of the organisation of events and exhibitions change and the wish to exchange is enriched by the knowledge and understanding of something that exists regardless of centrist or peripheral classifications, by values that take expressions beyond what their place of origin could pre-establish.

Whatever the case may be, the most important thing should be the possibility of producing a work in consonance with specific concerns about contemporary life, the complexities of contexts. All this does not have to be caught up within the boundaries of national maps; rather, like a complex plot, it can provide discourses and common narratives, even when a particular event or episode, a seemingly extemporaneous experience, is taken as a pretext.

NOTAS

[1] Shiriashi Takashi: "The Modern in Southeast Asia", from *Asian Modernism Diverse Development in Indonesia, The*

Philippines and Thailand. The Japan Foundation, Asia Center, Japan, 1995, p. 257.

[2] *Op. cit.*, p. 258.

[3] Catalogue for *Contemporary Art of the Non-Aligned Countries*, 1995, Jakarta, Indonesia, April-June, pp. 6-7. Rediscussed by Hilda María Rodríguez in "La espiritualidad del Oriente. Síndrome de la diferencia", in *Atlántica Internacional*, Centro Atlántico de Arte Moderno, July 1997, p. 856. Also, reflections on confrontation between East and West may be analyzed in essays by: Jim Supangkat, "A brief History of Indonesian Modern Art", in *Tradition and Change. Contemporary Art of Asia and the Pacific*, Brisbane, Queensland University Press, 1993, p. 47; "The Emergence of Indonesian Modernism and Its Background", in *Asian Modernism, Diverse Development in Indonesia, The Philippines and Thailand*, The Japan Foundation, Asia Center, Japan, 1995, pp. 204-213.

[4] Hou Hanru, Consultant to the Rijksakademie van Beeldende, Amsterdam, published in *Third Text, Art and Asia Pacif, Flash Art*, etc.

[5] Tatchata Akira: "Art as Criticism", in *Asian Modernism Diverse Development in Indonesia, The Philippines and Thailand*, The Japan Foundation, Asia Center, Japan, 1995, p. 280.

[6] Apinan Poshyananda: "Roaring Tigers, Desperate Dragons in Transition", from the *Tradition/Tensions* catalogue, 1996, p. 29. These reflections by the author also discuss commentaries and criteria dealt with by Anderson, "Census Map, Museum", in *Imagined Communities*, Clifford, "Histories of the Tribal and the Modern" and "On Collecting Art and Cultures", in *The Predicament of Culture*, Sally Price, *Primitive and Civilized Places*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1989. Annie Comber, "Inventing the Postcolonial: Hybridity and Constituency in Contemporary Curating", *New Formations*, 15, winter 1992, pp. 39-52. And Craig Clunas: "Oriental Antiques/Far Eastern Art", *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 2, autumn 1994, pp. 318-55. In this essay, Apinan Poshyananda comments on the criteria vis-à-vis "...reinterpretation of productions in the East does not mean its destruction... as expressed by the French writer and painter Eugène Fromentin, who, for Poshyananda, does not take observations distorted or used out of context into account.

[7] Preface to the catalogue *Traditions/Tensions. Contemporary Art in Asia*, Asia Society Galleries, New York 1996, p. 15.

[8] *Op. cit.*, p. 15.

[9] *Op. cit.*, p. 27.

[10] Thomas McEvelly, "Exhibitions Strategies in the Postcolonial Era, from the catalogue for *Traditions/Tensions. Contemporary Art in Asia*, Asia Society, New York, 1996, p. 53.

[11] *Op. cit.*, p. 59.

[12] Taken from the title and conception of the curator of the *Cambio de foco* exhibition, Anteamérica, Banco de la República, Biblioteca Luis Ángel Arango, Colombia, October-December 1992. (Project curated by the critics y curators Carolina Ponce de León, Gerardo Mosquera and Rachel Weiss).

TRADITION VERSUS MODERNITY IN THE CONTEXT OF CONTEMPORARY INDONESIAN ART

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HILDA M. RODRÍGUEZ
ENRÍQUEZ

Although the axiom that Indonesia has a many-faceted culture may sound commonplace, it is prompted by the fact that there are more than three hundred ethnic groups with different traditions and five hundred dialects. Likewise, there are many religions, including Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity, although Islam has been recognised as the predominant religion ever since its introduction in the 12th century. Indeed, Muslims constitute a majority of the population in this country.

To this vast multiplicity of ethnic groups and religions was added the Dutch presence in the 17th century, in the form of a "civilising" power represented by the army and scientific expeditions.

In addition to the structural transformations in power relations, the influence of Western culture weighed heavily on the "indigenous" cultures: in this case, colonisation by the Netherlands produced many expressions of a hybrid culture. Of course, in art also, new concepts and techniques were adopted,

such as oil painting. Oil painting was introduced following voyages by some Dutch painters to what would henceforth be called the East Indies.

The change in the country's physiognomy – i.e., urban development and the prominence of Dutch families, especially after the beginning of the 19th century, created the conditions for a demand for pictures. The market reflected a developing taste for landscapes and portraits. As a result of this "civilising" process, exhibitions were held, and through them came the gradual influence of European styles and Western standards of beauty and aesthetic theory.

Among the Indonesian artists, the best known in the second half of the 19th century was Raden Saleh who, according to historians, marked the beginning of modern art in Indonesia. This artist remained constantly in contact with Europe following his travels to the old continent and his long stays (particularly in Paris), and he followed Western styles in his work.

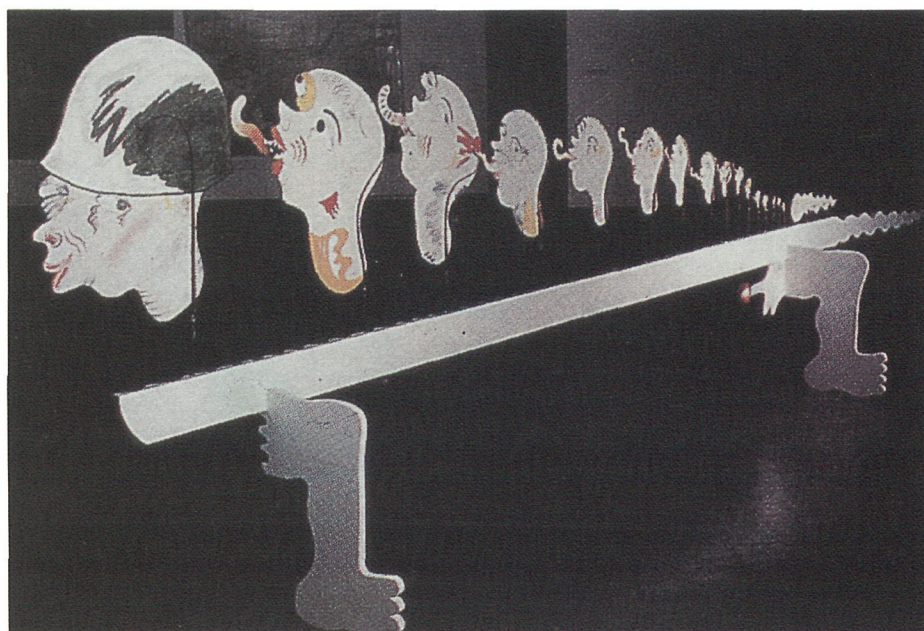
Modern art appears to have penetrated between 1930 and 1940 – a decade during which exhibitions of European works were organised. At the same time, the first association of Indonesian painters, Persagi, was founded between 1937 and 1938. This had an influence in defining art with different principles. Since then, and especially after Independence (1949), continuous changes took place that made it extremely complicated to achieve a synthesis. The fifties and sixties fertilised the seed for new types of expression, for continuous debate about what should represent the national identity, for questions about what came from the West, and for asserting a will to become part of the international art circuit. The academies of Yogyakarta (ASRI) and Bandung (SENI RUPA) even took the lead in formulating the criteria, and this lasted until the second half of the sixties.

The climate in art circles in the

seventies acquired considerable dynamism following the holding of controversial exhibitions that encouraged deeper debate. The Second Biennale of Painting in Jakarta (1974), for example, was the scene of protests by artists from Yogyakarta about the prizes awarded. The latter, according to them, were oriented towards decorative styles, and placed a ceiling on expressions that were neither painting nor sculpture. [1]

To my way of thinking, all these

Jim Supangkai, this new movement was influential in stressing the need to redefine art, and revolutionised the basic idea of what constitutes it. It defended its diversified nature and at the same clarified the positions of contemporary and traditional art. [2] Its members proclaimed the real possibility of blending together elements of art from different contexts through creating new expressions, as well as adopting a new approach to the debate on cultural



Dadang Christanto, *Bureaucracy*, 1991.
Acrylic on canvas on plywood, 535 x 140 cm. Photo: Totok Basuki.

occurrences and drives constituted a platform for stimulating new and more problematizing phases of art in Indonesia. The use of elements of local culture, traditional motifs and techniques, or those linked to them, were gradually introduced, and the conditions were created for the subsequent emergence of the SENI RUPA BARU (Indonesian New Art Movement) in Jakarta (1975). With this movement – together with the possibility of renewed and forceful reference in art to social realities, to daily life and to the promotion of social criticism – new mediums and new theories of poetry made their appearance.

In the words of critic and curator,

identity and the East/West confrontation. Of course this movement was not easily assimilated. Its exhibitions, held mainly in Bandung and Jakarta, were not understood, and nor did the group achieve a determining influence. Nevertheless, Indonesian artistic production as of the fifties appeared renewed and more dynamic [3]. Pluralism in art served to join together many links that hitherto had only been attached at the ends.

In this process of assimilation of different orientations, many young artists (whether connected or not to the SENI RUPA BARU movement) started to use traditional themes, motifs and techniques

based on their personal experience, insofar as they were related to their local contexts, as in the case of Nindityo Adipurnomo, Dadang Christanto, Nyoman Erawan, Heri Dono, Arahmalani and Marinian Sirak, among others. This does not mean to say that other trends, more directly linked to abstraction, or artists who remained more “purely” associated with symbolic art, calligraphy or landscapes, did not exist, but merely that many of them already belonged to the art establishment. However, some of these creative artists showed the contemporary spirit by contributing interesting views and messages that enriched the diverse art scene in the country. Here we could mention the work of A.D. Pirous, who cultivated an interest in calligraphy and Islamic motifs.

With regard to the presence of tradition in contemporary artistic production in Indonesia, I would like to point out the criterion adopted by different critics to the effect that traditionalism must not be assumed to be the opposite of modernism. Furthermore, it must be borne in mind that many traditions form part of current social behaviour, or have undergone change with the passage of time and the adoption of mediums chosen to achieve progress [4], but have not been rejected or cast aside in art. Rather, they have been reinstated, given a fresh approach, but also renewed, to the same extent that they have been subject to questioning in an attempt to strip them of convention.

In reality, the conflict with modernisation has been discussed in terms of mimesis. It has already been remarked that the modernisation phenomenon has brought problems to these Asian countries that interfere with the proper development of their economic and politico-social models. These deformities are those that have provoked – to my way of thinking – well-founded arguments and doubts in art as well. It is not a matter of accepting the imposition

of culture complacently, nor of consenting uncritically to assimilation, just as it is not reasonable to be contemptuous of the identity of current art in general, together with its contributions and its vocation for change.

Thus, among the artists who successfully combine the contributions of international artistic forces, local and traditional motifs and subjects, and the materials in keeping with their contexts, are Nindityo Adipurnomo, Dadang Christanto, Heri Dono and Nyoman Erawan. Apart from the fact that these artists have different strategies, they are distinguished as a whole by their special view of the world of art, as well as of the world of reflection that surrounds them.

The background to Nyoman Erawan’s art is Hindu ritual, the ritual cycle of life, the “philosophy” of cremation, and those elements and expressions that form part of it - earth, fire, water, time. More than adopting the ritual itself, Erawan attempts to reflect about the changes in life’s processes, natural conflicts and the conflicts created by men. In this context, there is an explanation for his interest in everything that occurs in connection with cremation ceremonies, which change continually. Of course, as the artist himself has remarked, although life and the traditional Bali cosmogeny exert the greatest influence in his conceptions and work, his aim is to incorporate that traditional world into the contemporary forms and ways of viewing and understanding life.[5] The medium nearly always used by Erawan is an installation, into which he incorporates materials and elements that support his theory that “...installation is a way of returning to nature...”, and, “...in an installation people are able to touch the work and be part of it...”[6].

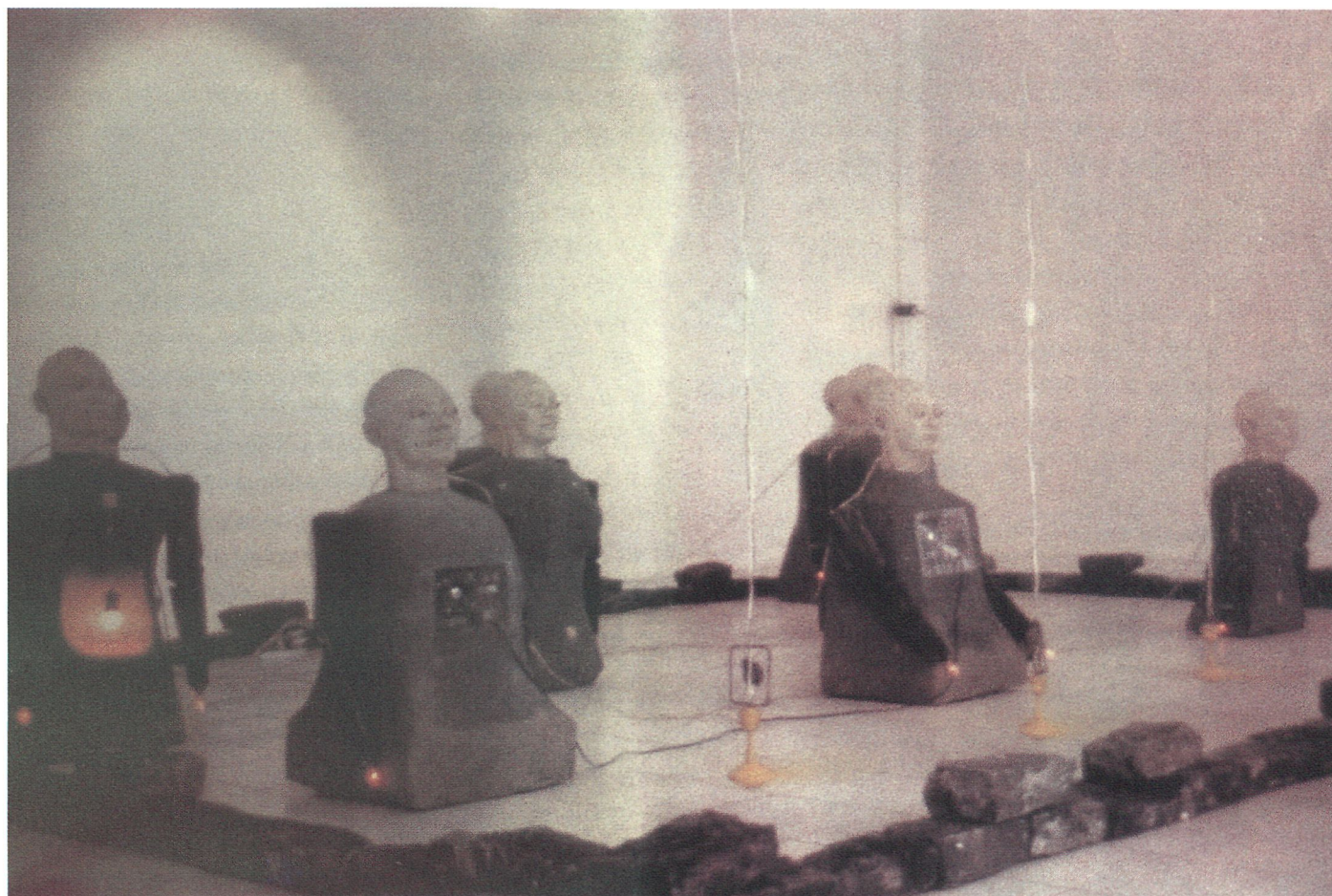
Also linked to material elements and a recognisable symbolic universe is the work of Dadang Christanto. His installations, mostly made with terracotta

(a material used by the inhabitants of Bantul), and other “poor” elements, are almost always related to the surroundings of the population in rural areas and to the traditional forms of life of large social groups that continue to live under the limits imposed by survival.

Even when he incorporates his cultural heritage into contemporary forms and mediums, his vital concern is communication that transcends art circuits. Hence his interest in linking to his workshops and performances people who have little or nothing to do with the art world. His work – which is more radical in its conceptual approaches than that of Nyoman Erawan – alludes to the expropriation to which nature and men are subject, to violence, repression and fear. His characters – nearly always mutilated or deformed – show the deterioration of their circumstances as a result of control and the impossibility of attaining higher living standards. One of his paradigmatic works is *Violence* (1996).

Dadang’s discourse, like that of most young Indonesian artists, is eminently satirical; through it he appeals to the spectators’ ability to think. His installations are generally conceived (especially on account of the material) to be placed in natural surroundings, with which a special communion is established.

Similarly to Nindityo Adipurnomo and Heri Dono, Christanto created works inspired by wayang shadows. His figures, made out of plywood and cut in the traditional form of the “wayang”, are a parody of the current socio-political scene, and the criticism is directed at all spheres of life. Thus, *Bureaucracy*, 1991, refers to the military bureaucracy and the hieratic nature of power. The heads cut in profile appear with caricaturised and deformed features, in units in which the same model is constantly repeated, as if to lend support to the central message. Likewise, he uses Javanese phrases and expressions, the meanings of which



Heri Dono, *Selamatan para roh*, 1995. Installation.

clarify the gist of his visual discourse. The resulting fusion also reveals the strength of language in Indonesian culture and its effectiveness in directing dialogue and communication.

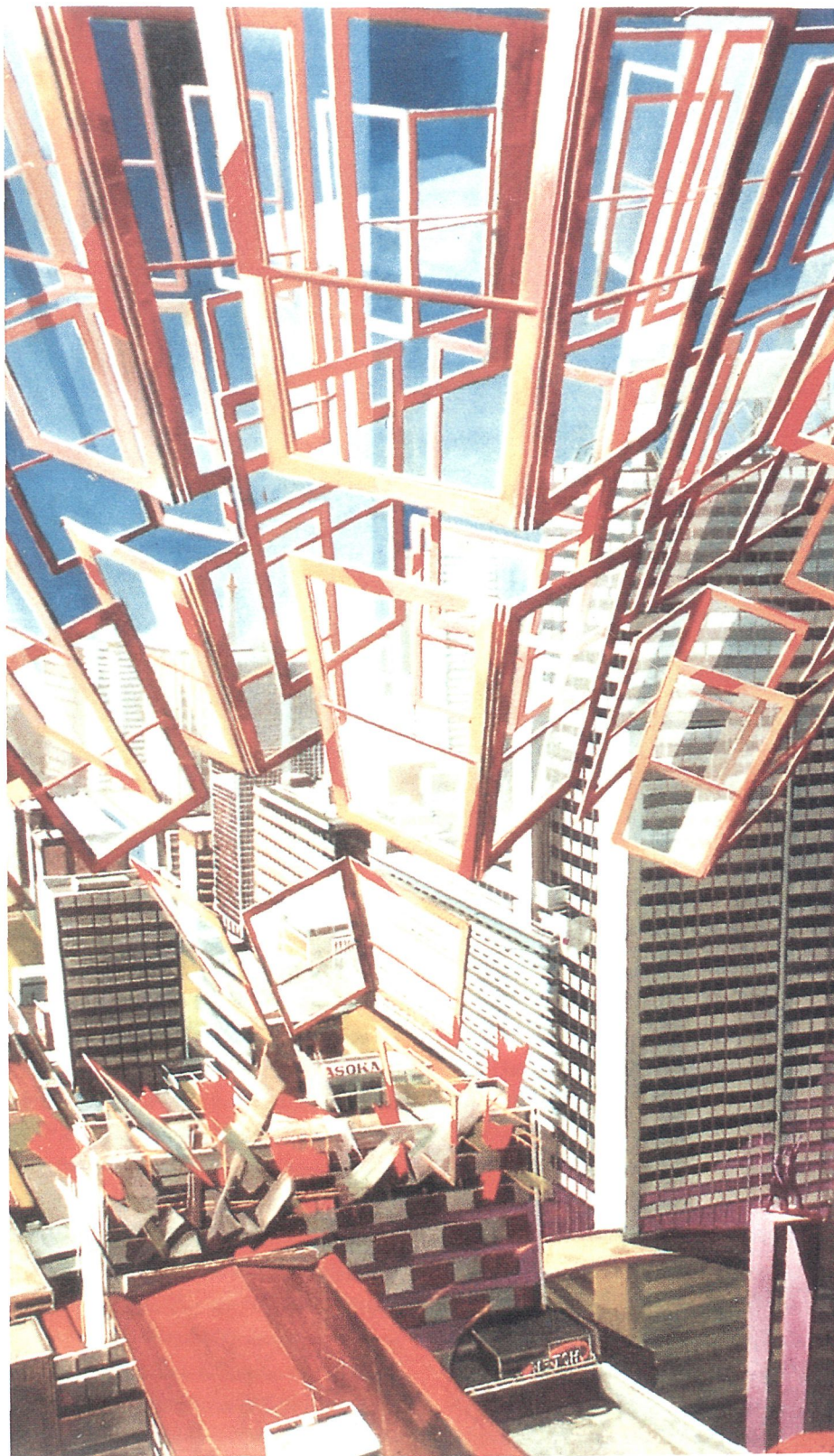
Nindityo Adipurnomo and Heri Dono get their inspiration from expressions of Javanese culture, whose substantial historic presence in Indonesia has clearly marked the work of many creative artists. Both started by using wayang shadows – a traditional art form that combines visual arts, music and literature. In the case of Nindityo, he avails himself of his experience in classical dance and uses symbolic and choreographic figures. Indeed, his personal interpretation and critical view have enabled him to do work with a renewed conceptual format. He also repeatedly uses the “Sanggui” and the “Konde” – a hair- do typical of the

women of Java, the forms of which have complex symbolic meanings related to sex, religion and their status in traditional society. The konde is taken up again by Adipurnomo as a sort of metaphor in Javanese society; the artist shows that whereas the outside is beautiful and harmonious, the inside hides the taboos – and not only the values and customs. [7]

It is interesting to see how, by manipulating the meanings and connotations of the objects that he takes as a pretext, the artist leads us to recognition of several conceptual levels immersed in or summarised by a symbol. In this sense it is like witnessing the effectiveness of intertextuality. For Adipurnomo, the final goal consists of opening suitable gaps in and on whatever has been presented in terms of harmony or distinction. Therefore his

deconstruction is also the bearer of a conscious devaluation of what should be interpreted as imperfectible qualities – not only with reference to objects in themselves, but also to how they operate historically and socially between the hieratic and the ambiguous.

I previously mentioned the artist Heri Dono who, like Nindityo, uses wayang shadows (wayang kuit) in his painting, except that in his case the tone is even more satirical and also more humorous. His characters, taken from the traditional universe of wayang, undergo a caricaturised and even grotesque transformation and relate different stories. It is curious to discover that the stories sometimes come from tales of folklore of the Batak people (Sumatra), and even the writing is in this language and not in Javanese. [8] Heri Dono presents his points of view on life,



Dede Eri Supria, *Townscape of Jakarta*, 1984. Oil on canvas.

relations between people, and between people and the power structures. He denounces violence, control and exploitation, as well as repression and superficiality in social behaviour. His interests and wide-ranging powers of

reflection have enabled him to use other approaches. Thus he moves between performance and installation or resorts to inter-disciplinary expressions, demonstrating a complex discourse interlaced with ethical and political

messages. Titles and scenes share the limelight; simulation and subversion are elements of Heri Dono's work, which has in fact become a constant challenge.

In reality his work is a kind of social exploration that does not remain restrained within the bounds of local affairs; his concern reaches global levels that interest people irrespectively of their place of origin. Hence he expounds on the consequences of modernisation or industrialisation or the excessive influence of the media: propaganda, the creation of false needs, as well as the impossibility for common people to attain better material living conditions, and the lack of balance between the new forms and manners of development and the spiritual values of the different social groups, which are subordinated to sometimes irrational projects.

For Heri Dono art is like an alternative to equilibrium, through which another analysis can be offered: that of focusing attention on those matters that run the risk of being diluted in mega-speeches or, on the contrary, are oversized and have been converted into unchanging "monuments". Hence his study of traditional expressions that have become vulnerable to extreme manipulation: oblivion as a result of being considered old and disused, or conversion into stereotypes destined for consumption and allegedly harmonious education. Hence also his observations on the exacerbated wave of development that like an "ism" runs the risk of leaving behind the true concepts of balanced progress for the human species.

The work of artist Arahmalani is precisely about contrasts and imbalances. It is accompanied by his own manifestos

or “declarations” on man’s conflicts: the state of imbalance between feminine and masculine energies, between spirit and matter, nature and culture, the superposition of powers, the manipulation of economic, political and cultural structures. He asserts that the consequence of all this imbalance is reflected in the confusion and disorder of spiritual life, leading to the impoverishment of creativity, the loss of freedom, suffering, the lack of solidarity, etc. [9]

His background and training within the context of Islam enabled him to investigate the problems that he discovered in it. He then addressed the subject of religion and in it discrimination against women, as well as the declared obscurity regarding sexual matters. Critic and curator Apinan Poshynanda has commented on this, “...Arahmalani usually unravels the power of language and signs that connote repression and dogmatism...” [10]. He goes on to say that in his works he combines the sacred and the profane: Buddha and the condom, the juxtaposition of Islamic symbols: copulation and symbols of which he considers imperialist strategy in relation to culture a part, thereafter reflecting upon the superfluous and marginalisation – especially the exclusion of women in a patriarchal society.

In his performances he insists on expounding on the negative consequences of westernisation in countries such as Indonesia, where changes bring with them the expropriation of many values, and cracks in the processes themselves. In his performance of *Sacred Coke-Cosmology of Mutilation* (1996), put on during the sixth Havana Biennale, Arahmalani summarised many of these thoughts that absorb the complex essences of men’s actions, politics, ideology, and culture. Combining corporal expression, symbolic objects – such as a coca-cola bottle crowned with a condom, the traditional

dress (altered by the “imposition” of elements of technology and accessories typical of superfluous consumption), the use of likewise traditional music in contrast with the sounds produced by “innocent” toy soldiers who fire and move about around him, he reproduces the chaos of which global society in these times supposedly consists, which he represents with the greatest solemnity that goes beyond the caricaturised sense of a demented scene and transcends the



Arahmalani, *Sacred Coke-Cosmology of Mutilation*, 1993. Installation-performance. Detail.

very limits of irony. Perhaps the most interesting part of his work and artistic displays is the versatility and explosion of multiple questions that, like philosophy, do not attempt to provide finite or absolute answers, but rather emphasise, set bounds to, transgress and subvert what is handed over already digested, so that it may invariably be accepted.

For his part, artist Dede Eri Supria, inspired by photographic realism, recreates city life, but in terms that are also critical, insofar that he exalts the marginalisation of people who “live”, in contrast to the alleged new view of

modernity in the city. His architectural structures describe implausible Utopian spaces, and into them he inserts his characters who wear traditional clothes and whose faces reflect uncertainty and waiting – all of which comprises a contrast that is seemingly irreconcilable. The juxtaposition of the planes shows the disparities in a society that is growing disproportionately. Perhaps his works are today, more than before, a documentary of the most recent events taking place in Indonesia, characterised by popular protest as a reaction to the economic crisis that is widening the distance between the majority destined to bare survival and the wealthy minorities.

From a formal standpoint, Dede Eri Supria is distinguished by his penchant for photorealism, in which an apparent remoteness is suggested by means of his scenographic decor. However, his work develops into alarm about an uncertain future that will emerge from the impressive technological progress and the technological “leap forward”, although the false or omitted “steps” in the latter have in fact already been revealed, as well as the ambiguity resulting from foreign makeshift remedies.

Dede Eri Supria enters the fray between traditional and modern mainly in conceptual terms; he uses in an unusual way the same symbols of rhetoric created visually, availing himself of the effects of the wide propaganda screen of these times and the impact of a brilliant and aggressive palette, in recognition of the events that are moulding contemporary society. Examples of this are his works *In the Concrete Jungle* and *The Horseman* (1992).

Also linked to subjects of the environment and urban contexts is the work of F.X. Harsono – perhaps the artist with the most incisive power of reasoning, which he combines with his work as an activist in organising debates, drafting documents, etc. in protest against bureaucratic attitudes.

Harsono criticises the nature of industrial development in Indonesia, that has led to the destruction of rural areas and social impoverishment. He denounces censorship and the restriction of expression, allegedly meant to safeguard security and social harmony. Like Nindityo Adipurnomo, he reflects on the power of language in Indonesia and its effective influence at a social level. Thus he exploits the possibility provided by the use of easily recognisable symbols or a clear transgression of them, according to specific speeches. Hence the literal nature of most of his works.

His questions also touch on the area of art and its institutions, especially related to schemes in curatorial and promotional spheres, as well as the organisation of events that attempt to show idyllic scenes devoid of problems. *Harsono does not seem too concerned about adopting a specific language or mediums. Thus he uses photography, makes installations and puts on performances. The most important thing is the content of his aesthetic proposals, although that does not prevent his works from enjoying a good reputation. According to critic Apinan Poshyananda, Harsono has likewise taken as a reference the forms of the wooden masks used in the wayang topeng, reinterpreting the rituals of traditional theatre, but also reflecting on their exploitation for the purpose of tourism. [11] In every case he analyses the socio-political situation and the strings that are pulled in power circles.*

It is obvious that the end of the millennium has been diagnosed in terms of illnesses that are almost endemic to mankind, such as intolerance, depredation and moral turpitude, as a result of depression and the imbalance in socio-economic structures of most countries, as well as the challenge and excessive alteration in the essential principles aimed at preserving the human species. Such is the uncertainty

surrounding tensions caused by the complex situation now prevailing in the world, that it is no longer hazardous to question these macro-problems within art. However, there are also many artists who concentrate their powers of reasoning on what an apocalypse of the spirit can mean. Among those creative artists who describe existential conflicts, matters belonging to the private domain, or define with great clarity the spiritual confusion originated by the different institutions responsible for "order" are, in my opinion, Andar Manik, Marintan Sirait and Agus Suwage.

Andar Manik is concerned with matters related to time, the past, the present, life and destruction – all seen in a cycle. He likes to build his thoughts around ethical principles, to stimulate feelings of respect, faith, communion or conciliation among men; he considers that art, and in art all those elements that form part of life, constitute a possible way to do this. So he states that art is able to break down the barriers between people and countries, as long as ... "the language of art has been used to penetrate the frontiers of politics and diplomacy or of official relations between nations." [12].

The basic material that he uses is clay, the docile properties of which enable him to use a process that transcends formal interests. Generally his art is oriented through installation and performance. The latter affords him the opportunity to materialise his intention of establishing a dialogue among the public, and getting them to participate.

Andar Manik's work is full of symbols that he re-creates or subverts, but they always come from the life of some individual and, strangely, as well, they are associated with the natural elements of pottery. But beyond the symbology of the macro-cosmos, he comes to individual and family experiences, to feelings, to the circuit of the individual "I", through which the

universe of the collective "I" can be built.

Andar Manik introduces dance and corporal expression into many of his performances and installations, such as in the work exhibited at the 9th Biennial in Jakarta in 1993, in which artists such as Marintan Sirait had a part. She belongs to the theatre and dance group and usually participates in projects of collaboration of a multidisciplinary nature.

Sirait is another of the artists basically interested in performance. This enables her to establish an interesting relationship with a heterogeneous public, to which she directs her reflections on man's existential conflicts: alienation, loneliness, an unbalanced relationship with the environment, contradictions in social communication and, in this context, matters linked to women's lives, including their aspirations and frustrations. But above all, she avails herself of certain modes of expression to formulate a complex system of ideas about feminine identity within a patriarchal society and within the Indonesian contemporary art scene.

She touches on the spiritual crisis of individuals, based on analysis of the banal content of the media and the false expectations they arouse in people, as well as the distortion of events that affect people's integrity. In her work, her writing and corporal expression operate as effective means to achieve a more intimate dialogue with the observer.

Agus Suwage also talks about human existence. His work is a kind of reminder of the ethical principles that were degraded as a result of their manipulation by man himself: manipulation of religion and knowledge, the bewildering application of technology, and the repression of human rights and security.

In his drawings he refers to works on the history of universal art and incorporates images of paradigmatic artists who interact with characters of his scenes in order to relate human tragedies

about what is supposedly unalterable. Using intertextuality, already so common in the most recent poetics, this artist juggles skilfully with apparently distant references and the restrained ambiguity obtained from the mixing of symbols. So it is not surprising to find scenes of paintings by Van Gogh or Frida Kahlo or their self-portraits, parodying situations that could appear extemporary, or reinterpreting passages from universal literature or the Bible, etc. These recontextualisations are accompanied by visual or textual references that – placed precisely and contrasting with each other or in dialogue – suggest the essential message that he wishes to convey, notwithstanding recognition of excessive subjectivity and recurrent use of a complex code of symbols. Throughout his work, writing plays an important role, and through it he juxtaposes or relates the significant facts. In reality Suwage avails himself, free of prejudice, of the icons and symbols of universal culture, which like a vast platform surrounds the contemporary artist.

For him, artistic creation can be an alternative to “cure”; that is why he says that, “... creating a work of art is like medicine for the diseased soul... and ... it would be better, and better still, if these works of art had an opportunity to provide inspiration to the whole of human existence” [13]. In this sense, art for Suwage seems to be understood as a Utopia and a medium, through which can be expressed what at other levels of human activity is liable to be restrained or even omitted.

In attempting to summarise some of the basic features of the art produced in Indonesia, it is by no means idle to consider again the view that the hybrid nature – speaking culturally – of the conditions “imposed” by insularity, and even the need and the will to open up to interaction, have encouraged the profusion of diverse expressions and promoted exchanges that have given so

much substance to the discussions and soul-searching as to whether the ways are valid and the directions genuine or imposed. But also, and precisely because of the complexity of a situation exposed to so many convulsions in the course of its history, it is possible to find artistic forces in which we discover the interstices and tensions that underlie the established assumptions within the representational, as well as conceptual and linguistic frameworks.

Beyond the idealism and imported prescriptions, many creative artists attempt to introduce (and not a few succeed in doing so) imaginary elements that become valid sources for thought and enjoyment. A subject for meaty disquisitions has been the difficult relationship between tradition and modernity, with their respective doses of romanticism in the search for answers, solutions and formulas. However, as a result of development not devoid of controversy and mistakes, a large part of contemporary art, and specifically that of recent times (the eighties and nineties), has been able to circumvent the classifications invented by theory and criticism. Not without reason, the artists mentioned in this paper have attempted to draw sustenance from what is known, but above all what from what in the final analysis serves the purposes of a dynamic biographical sketch for art, whose contributions are valid for the time and the contexts in which it was their lot to play their part.

NOTAS

[*] Taken from the essay of the same title.

- [1] Tatehata Akira, “Art as Criticism”, in *Asian Modernism Diverse Development in Indonesia, The Philippines And Thailand*, The Japan Foundation, Asia Center, 1995, p. 201.
See also Helena Spanjaard, “Modern Indonesian Painting: The Relation with the West”, in *Indonesian Modern Art, Indonesian painting since 1945*, Gate Foundation, Amsterdam, 1993, pp 18-38;
Rita Widagdo, “Tradition and Modernity in Contemporary Indonesian Art”, in *The*

Aesthetics of Asian Expression, Second Asian Workshop, Exhibition, and Symposium on Aesthetics, Philippines, 8-21 October 1993, pp. 142-159.

- [2] Jim Supangkat, “The two forms of Indonesian Modern Art. Indonesian painting since 1945”, Gate Foundation, Amsterdam, 1993, p. 75.
[3] See by the same author: “A Brief History of Indonesian Modern Art” in *Tradition and Change. Contemporary Art of Asia and the Pacific*, Brisbane, University of Queensland Press, 1993, pp. 53-54.
[4] Section I: Confrontations, Questions, Quets; Section II: Tradition/Convention, from the *Contemporary Art of the Non-Aligned Countries* catalogue, 1995, Jakarta, Indonesia, April-June 1995, pp. 6-7 and 12-13. See also reflections by Jim Supangkat: “A Brief History of Indonesian Modern Art” in *Tradition and Change. Contemporary Art of Asia and the Pacific*, Brisbane, Queensland University Press, 1993, p. 47: “The Emergence of Indonesian Modernism and its Background” in *Asian Modernism. Diverse Development in Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand*, Japan Foundation, Asia Center 1993, pp. 204-213 and Apinan Poshyananda. Preface to the catalogue *Traditions/Tensions. Contemporary Art in Asia*, Asia Society Galleries, New York, 1996, p. 15.
[5] “The Artist’s Voice”, in *Asian Art News/Supplement Indonesia*, vol. 4, no. 2, March-April, 1994, p. 16.
[6] *Op. cit.*, p. 16.
[7] Esther de Charon de Saint Germain, Nindityo Adipurnomo, in the catalogue of selected works for The Gate Foundation/The Cemeti Art Foundation, Stedelijk Museum, Lakenhal, 1995, p. 50.
[8] See the essay written by Esther de Charon de Saint Germain in the catalogue of selected works for The Gate Foundation/The Cemeti Art Foundation, Stedelijk Museum, Lakenhal, 1995, pp. 54-55.
[9] Ahramaiani. Statement by the author. Artist’s portfolio, in the Centro Wifredo Lam Archives, 1995.
[10] Apinan Poshyananda, “Roaring, Desperate Dragons in Transitions”, in the *Traditions/Tensions. Contemporary Art in Asia* catalogue, Asia Society Galleries, New York, 1996, p. 43.
[11] *Op. cit.*, p. 33
[12] Andar Manik. Fragment of the artist’s declarations (1995) and interviews by the curator Esther de Charon de Saint Germain (1993). In Catalogue *Orientation*. The Gate Foundation/The Cemeti Art Foundation. Stedelijk Museum de Lakenhal 1995–96. P. 56–58.
[13] Agus Suwage. Artist’s declaration. In Artist’s Dossier. Archivo Centro Wifredo Lam 1996.