

ご招待

このたび、国際交流基金アセアン文化センターでは、現代美術シンポジウム1994「アジア思潮のポテンシャル」を開催する運びとなりました。

近年、さまざまな分野において

アジア諸国に対する関心が高まっていますが、

現代美術の分野においても、

アジアのアーティストが注目をあびています。

今回のシンポジウムでは、インドネシア、タイ、中国、フィリピン、マレーシア、そして日本を代表する美術評論家、作家たちが、共に、アジア美術における近代の意味と現在を検証しつつ、現代美術におけるアジアの可能性を探ります。

ご多忙中とは存じますが、本シンポジウムに

ぜひともご参加いただきたく、ご案内申し上げます。

1994年9月吉日

国際交流基金アセアン文化センター

現代美術シンポジウム1994

アジア思潮の ポテンシャル

日時＝

1994年10月14日[金]

セッション I 18:00-20:00

レセプション 20:00-21:30

1994年10月15日[土]

ご挨拶 10:00-10:15

セッション II 10:15-13:00

セッション III 14:00-16:30

セッション IV 16:45-18:30

パーティー 18:30-20:00

*日本語・英語・中国語の同時通訳が付きまゝ。

会場＝

国際交流基金会議場

東京都港区赤坂1-12-32 アーク森ビル20階

主催＝

国際交流基金アセアン文化センター

東京都港区赤坂2-17-22 赤坂ツインタワー1階

TEL.03-5562-3892

★定員(150名)になり次第締め切らせていただきますので、お手数ですが、ご出欠のお返事を同封の葉書にて、9月26日(月)までにお知らせください。

Invitation

The Japan Foundation ASEAN Culture Center has the pleasure of inviting you to attend the Contemporary Art Symposium 1994 "The Potential of Asian Thought."

In recent years, interest in Asia in the various fields has been growing. In the field of contemporary art as well, Asian artists has been drawing much attention. It is in this climate that we gather, for this Symposium, top art critics and artists from China, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand, and, together with their Japanese counterparts, identify the meaning of "modernism" in the context of Asian art, as well as the present situation. We will also explore the potentialities of contemporary art in the future Asia.

We sincerely hope that you can join us.

September 1994

The Japan Foundation ASEAN Culture Center

Contemporary Art Symposium 1994

The Potential of Asian Thought

Date and Time:

Friday, October 14, 1994

Session I 18:00-20:00

Reception 20:00-21:30

Saturday, October 15, 1994

Opening Address 10:00-10:15

Session II 10:15-13:00

Session III 14:00-16:30

Session IV 16:45-18:30

Party 18:30-20:00

*Simultaneous interpretation (Japanese-English-Chinese) will be provided during the Symposium.

Place:

The Japan Foundation Conference Hall

ARK Mori-Bldg. 20F, 1-12-32 Akasaka, Minato-ku, Tokyo
(Next to Suntory Hall and ANA Hotel)

Organized by

The Japan Foundation ASEAN Culture Center

Akasaka Twin Tower 1F, 2-17-22 Akasaka, Minato-ku, Tokyo
TEL.03-5562-3892

R.S.V.P. with the enclosed card by September 26.

The Other Side of the Other : Asian Artists in the West

Kuroda Raiji

1. Introduction: On the Framework of Discussions of Asia in Today's Japan

"But you always talk about *other people's* cultural identity. You should talk about your own!"

Rasheed Araeen¹

I have some reservations about the structure of this symposium on "Contemporary Asian Art." My concern is with the way "Asia" and "contemporary art" are defined. Since the definition of Asia is related to the main theme of my presentation, I would like to deal with that first. One thing that bothers me is that there are curators, critics, and artists here from Japan, Southeast Asia, and China, but no participants from Southwest Asia. However Asia is defined, whether from a geographical or cultural standpoint, it would seem strange to most Japanese to exclude participants from India and neighboring countries. This sort of problem did not appear in the exhibition "New Art from Southeast Asia 1992" organized by the Japan Foundation in 1992. The content of the exhibition was clearly defined by the political grouping of ASEAN if not delimited by cultural categories. When the word Asia is spoken today it should be an international word, going beyond the Euro-America-centrism which it has implied in the past. We should use a concept of Asia which is agreed upon first of all by Asians, but also by Americans and Europeans; by Africans and Latin Americans, who, as inhabitants of Third World countries have much in common with Asians; and by Australians, who would like to be active participants in Asian affairs.

While I am happy to see a growing interest in recent Asian art in Japan, which has taken concrete form in this symposium, I am very much afraid that a Japan-centered view of Asia is being presented here. The Japanese respond psychologically to Asians, I believe, as *familiar others*. The relationship between Asians living in the West and Westerners, like the relationship between the Japanese and Indians or Africans, is characterized mainly by *otherness*. Compared with this relationship, the people of the Korean peninsula, the Chinese mainland, and Taiwan who live in Japan are seen more as *familiar* than *other* because of similar racial characteristics. Naturally, this kind of psychological relationship is not based only on a cultural or geographical relationship. There are other factors: first, the political and historical relationship, and, second, the relationship between different races influenced by this relationship. While there is a strong sense of Asia's *familiarity*, there is almost no awareness of its *otherness*, or of the political and historical relationship which would support such an awareness, in recent discussions of contemporary Asian art in Japan. This lack of awareness is reflected by the absence here of

representatives from the Indian region, which is perceived as racially distant by the Japanese, or from the Korean peninsula, which was under the colonial rule of Japan (present conditions in South Korea are to be presented in this symposium by a Japanese, Ono Ikuhiko). That is why I make this reproachful observation, fully aware that it may be offensive. It is no excuse to say that "Asia is a cultural concept," because suppression of politics itself is a political act, and the tragedies of history are most quickly forgotten by the perpetrators.² An awareness of these concealed relationships between Japan and Asia is very important in discussing the art work of Asians working in the large cities of Europe and North America.

For example, we might consider the way the Japanese look at the contemporary art of South Korea and China, the countries with the closest political and historical relationship to Japan. There are Korean artists working in Japan who are explicitly recognized as Korean because of their names. The work of these artists, with the exception of Cho Yang-kyu in the fifties, which has been accepted here has generally been minimal in style, made of natural materials, entirely esthetic, or characterized by an "oriental" look, and lacking in ostensible political content. The political *Minjoong Misul* (People's Art) which flourished in South Korea in the eighties was very different, but it did not attract the interest of the contemporary Japanese art world. Chinese artists based in Japan gain recognition easily when they produce art which comfortably fits Japanese stereotypes of Chinese ideas — a philosophical outlook, cosmic scale, and a certain amount of violence. The problem lies in the perceptions of the audience rather than the artist's intentions. The Japanese do not see the Chinese and Koreans as people who are oppressed and marginalized by the dominant culture within the geographical and political boundaries of Japan, *others* who challenge the majority culture of Japan and make us feel uncomfortable. Rather, they are *familiar others* who fulfill our expectations and can ultimately be praised as examples of expanding the possibilities of contemporary Asian art.

Other is a term used in cultural anthropology which, like the word outsider, requires care when applied to Japanese society. As observed by Junichi Shioda, the most important "outsider" for modern Japan is Europe rather than Asia. At the same time, Japan maintained its "inside" but "without definite identity."³ Indeed, in the course of modernization, Japan did not eliminate the outsider or the other, but pretended that they had been assimilated, in the guise of "familiarity," or tried to conceal them.⁴

Japan still has many taboos. There are almost no works of art which deal, for example, with the emperor system, the problem of the *burakumin* underclass, religious issues, or the problem of Korean residents in Japan.⁵ If a Korean resident in Japan showed work dealing with problems which are close to being taboo, could I, as a curator of a public museum, support it? Could I face the social consequences to which this work might lead? Will the Japanese begin learning to associate with "others" in response to the recent increase in number of resident foreigners who are not "familiar," people of color who are not from East Asia? Another perverse phenomenon occurs when art from Southeast Asia, which deals with the invasion of Asia by the Japanese and protests the destruction of the natural environment and communities in Asia by Japanese business, is seen here as

"contemporary art with a social relevance not found in Japanese art," appreciated only as the "culture" of a country with a history unrelated to Japan.

2. Issues Raised by Asian Artists Living in the West

The significance of introducing Asian artists who work in Europe and North America in this symposium is that they present us, in a clear manner, with three topics for debate which are not included in current discussions of Asian art in Japan. These are, first, the subject and the grounds for a definition of Asian art (who defines it for whom, whether it is based on geography, race, history, culture, etc.); second, the ruler/ruled relationship of the West and Asia as part of the Third World (the issues of colonialism, orientalism, racial discrimination, exclusion from mainstream culture, etc.), and third, the Japanese attitude toward Asian residents of Japan. I do not mean that Asian artists in Asia lack an awareness of these issues but that the work of Asian residents of the United States and Europe provides a convenient point of reference for clarifying them.

During a three month period from February to May in 1993, I studied the activities of Asian artists working in Europe and North America under the auspices of the Japan Association of Art Museums. I carried out my survey in London and other locations in the United Kingdom, and in Paris, New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Vancouver. I met 63 artists, of whom 28 were of Chinese extraction, 13 Indians and Pakistanis, 11 Southeast Asians, 8 of Korean extraction, and 3 from other countries (a Palestinian, an Iranian, and a third-generation Japanese). The range of this study was skewed toward English-speaking countries because of my linguistic limitations. I use the word extraction since Chinese artists come from Taiwan and Hong Kong as well as the People's Republic of China, and there are other cases of second-generation or racially-mixed Asians born in the United States.

Naturally, there are some problems with this classification. For example, to determine that a person is Japanese, one might use the criteria of (1) Japanese descent, (2) internalization of Japanese culture, and (3) Japanese citizenship, but many cases can be imagined, which fall somewhere between the extremes of "pure Japanese" and "pure non-Japanese." Some examples are Japanese raised overseas, third-generation Japanese residents of foreign countries, Korean residents in Japan, and the *Ainu* (indigenous people of Hokkaido and adjacent islands).⁶ Furthermore, these cases are not found midway on a straight line which connects the two end-points of total purity. They must be assigned positions at points in a multi-dimensional space (in cases, for example, of mixed blood or groups like the Okinawans who are raised in a unique culture). Since this is true for the limited case of the Japanese, it is even more so for individuals from countries like India where there are many different ethnic groups, languages, and religions within the same region (even if only first-generation foreign residents are included). Factors like the artist's age, time of arrival in the West, political and economic circumstances of the artist's family, and the environment in which the artist received his or her education result in a diversity which precludes any stereotyping of individual

experience, thought, or sensibility for Asian artists working in Europe or America. On the other hand, as I point out in the final section, too much emphasis on the individual quality of artists' experiences effectively prevents mutual understanding of different cultures and makes it impossible to establish relationships between the art history centered on Europe and America and the history of modern art in Asia. Therefore, at the risk of some stereotyping, I will attempt to divide the artists into categories in the following section.

3. Rough Classification of Asian Artists Working in the West

Group 1. Artists Who Combine Asian Culture with Western Modernism

These are artists who happen to be working in Europe or America but differ little from artists living in Asia in their sensibility or the type of work they produce. By absorbing Western modernism and combining it with elements taken from their own culture, they tend to believe that they are producing work which differs from the art of the West. Many of them show their work in both their own country and in the West. While most of them cannot participate (or do not choose to participate) in the mainstream art history of the West, many are recognized in art history and by the public in their own countries. Some examples are the Indian masters of modernism, S. H. Raza (1922, India/Paris (artist's date of birth, place of birth, and site of present activity)) and Francis Newton Souza (1924, India/New York), Kwak Hoon⁷ (1941, Korea/Los Angeles), Kim Chan-yul (1929, Korea/Paris), and Kamol Tassananchalee (1944, Thailand/Los Angeles). Zao Wou-ki (1921, China/France) is recognized in the West as an Informalist artist, but his style places him close to this group. Dhruva Mistry (1957, India/England) is influenced by modernism and has earned a certain reputation in the United Kingdom, but he belongs more to India in his sensibility and the reference to Indian sculptures in his work.

Group 2. Avant-garde Artists with an International Outlook

"International" here refers to the European and American context. Most of these artists have contributed to the development of Western contemporary art at the same level as Europeans and Americans and they are given their due in the art history of the West. Some of them have never been recognized in their home countries. The representative figure of this group is Nam Jun Paik (Paik Nam-jun in Korean style, 1932, Korea/New York). One might also mention Alfonso Ossorio (1916, the Philippines/New York), who worked in the style of Art Brut. There are also avant-garde artists who did not gain the recognition they deserved in Euro-American art history like David Medalla (1942, the Philippines/London), who made bubble sculpture, kinetic art, and audience-participation sculpture, and Rasheed Araeen (1935, Pakistan/London), who developed his own form of Minimalism at an early date.⁸ Unlike the next group of Asian artists, who emphasized their marginality and the difficulty of accommodating or adapting to European or American society, this second group has accepted modernism in the broad sense and trusted in the

universalist idea that they can contribute to the mainstream culture of Europe and America with experimental works even though they are not European or American.

Internationalism does not necessarily prevent many of the artists in this group from often referring to the culture of their home country in their work. Some of the artists of this kind who have emerged in recent years are Anish Kapoor (1954, India/England), Huang Yong-ping (1954, China/Paris), Chen Zen (1955, China/Paris), and Gu Wen-da (1955, China/New York).⁹ It is well-known that Kapoor dislikes being referred to as an Indian artist, and these artists share a brilliant talent for absorbing Minimal and Conceptual approaches which makes it difficult to stereotype them or see their work in terms of exotic ideas of "Indian" or "Chinese" taste. Whether working in Western cities or in their own countries, they deal with philosophical themes which transcend particular geographic or temporal limitations. On the other hand, unlike the artists in group 3, they do not often refer to their own families or their experience of immigration. For example, they do not raise issues like T'ienanmen or British colonialism.

Most of the artists mentioned above are not modernist (abstract) artists in a narrow sense; perhaps they should be referred to as avant-garde artists. We should not, however, overlook the work of Asian artists who are actively participating or exploring the development of orthodox modernism within strict limits, for example, David Diao (1943, China/New York), Zhao Suikang (China/New York), and Byron Kim (1961, America/New York), who has made a series of minimal paintings using the skin color of actual people. More study is needed in this area, and there are probably other cases of interesting work.

Group 3. Immigrant Artists Searching for Their Identity and Questioning European and American Society

This group will be discussed in the next section.

Group 4. Artists with a Multicultural Orientation

Like the second group, these artists are recognized by the mainstream art world in the United States and Europe but there is a great difference in the type of work they make. The work of these artists clearly contains quotations from non-European, non-American cultures although they do not claim to belong permanently to a particular culture. They deliberately and strategically express the conflicts and juxtapositions of multiple cultures, including those of Europe and America. For example, the second-generation Chinese artists, Ken Lum (1956, born and living in Vancouver) makes paintings in the format of advertising signs, using various styles of printed words and constructed photographs arranged in scenic landscapes. He makes strange combinations of the languages and urban customs of Caucasians, Chinese, Indian, and Native American peoples. Since the multiplicity of cultures as such is not his theme, he, like Kapoor, dislikes being discussed in terms of his Chinese origins. The paintings of Manuel Ocampo (1965, the Philippines/Los Angeles) are based on the domination of the Philippines by Spanish Catholic culture. They combine the iconography and style of Christian church painting with vulgar materials and employ the style of

American underground comics. Ocampo uses subject matter related to the racial problems of the United States, combining it with strange words which cannot be identified as the language of any particular country, to create pictures of indeterminate nationality. Mel Chin (1951, America/New York), an artist of Chinese origin who makes sculpture on a grand scale which quotes freely from a number of cultures, might also be placed in this group.

Group 5. Others

There are other artists who do not fit in the above categories, for example, artists who deal with problems of translation and language and video artists. Some of the artists who made a particular impression on me were the Thai artists, Rirkrit Tiravanija (1961, Argentina/New York), Zhang Hong-tu (1943, China/New York), Paul Wong (Chinese, lives in Vancouver). The survey I made last year did not include video artists.

4. Portraits of Asians as Immigrants

Group 3 was the most important in my survey, cast the most light on recent conditions in European and American society, and presented the most interesting problems. Circumstances are quite different in America, the United Kingdom, and Vancouver,¹⁰ but the artists in this group stood out in each of these areas, with the exception of Paris.

Artists in the first group belong psychologically to the traditions and communities of their country of origin while working in Europe and the United States. Artists in the second group attempt to contribute to the American and European art world as individual members of American and European society while occasionally revealing their own cultural background. The decisive difference between the first two groups and group 3 is that the artists in this group have lived both in their own country and in Euro-American society and they do not belong to either world. In other words, they base their work on the process of their own immigration/assimilation/differentiation in European and American society. Most of the artists I met were born in Asia but had lived in the West longer than a short period of overseas study; their level of cultural assimilation was quite high. However, they did not aspire to internationalism or universality in the same way as the artists in group 2 and they continued to protest or express doubts about the mainstream culture of the West. This mainstream culture and society is Eurocentric, white, and phallogentric, characterized by colonialism and orientalism, intentionally or unintentionally relegating Asians to the margins of society, excluding them from art history, stereotyping them under the Euro-American gaze. The first and second groups share some of the tendencies of the third group, but the difference is an intentional questioning of the Euro-American mainstream culture, the fact that this questioning is the *central* theme of their work.

Some of the typical stereotypes are described in an essay by the third-generation Japanese painter Margo Machida, who curated an "Asia/America" exhibition held by the Asia Society in New York in February 1994.

Certainly, in a cursory survey of recent reviews and catalogs from around the nation, one can easily find art by Asians — no matter how contemporary in form — fancifully described as "Zenlike," "chanting like mantras," "expressing the *Yin* and *Yang* of their subject," or "rooted in memories of nature." Alternatively, Asian artists are also dismissed for not meeting preconceived notions of "Orientalness" (commonly encoded as exotic, serene, hyperaesthetic, or meditative), or for not being sufficiently "authentic." Such stereotypic assumptions not only belie the pace of change in an increasingly industrialized and urbanized Asian but also raise disturbing questions about whether contemporary visual art by Asians can be esteemed by Westerners only if it mirrors and confirms their desires and expectations.¹¹

Next is an interview with an Indian artist Chila Kumari Burman, who was born in England and studied at the Slade School of Art in London.

The teachers expected me to paint Indian-style pictures and praised works with bright colors, saying things like, "Yes, those vivid Indian colors are wonderful." There were white students who also painted in bright colors, but they were not told their works were Indian.

We Japanese, who are also an audience for Asian contemporary art, note things like "an Indian color sense" and "Buddhist serenity" and think we have understood the work, do we not? When a work is obscure, are we satisfied to conclude that it is an example of "Asian chaos?" Even if there is a logic in the work which is sufficiently rational for the culture to which the artist belongs, do we make an attempt to understand it?

These are examples of stereotypes applied to "Asian artists." We should not forget that stereotyping by the mass media has long been a serious problem for Asians living in America. These stereotypes commonly appear in the images of Chinese or Japanese in American Hollywood movies or television programs, for example, the evil Chinese woman who seduces white males with a mysterious eroticism, the Japanese soldier or businessman, the Japanese spy M. Moto, the evil emperor Fu Man Chu, etc.¹³ The Asians who appear in television or movies are carefully checked by the Asian-American community in recent years, but the mass media has not become completely free of these stereotypes. A recent example is Michael Crichton's novel, "The Rising Sun." If we think about it, the Japanese in Japan also laugh at the image of the short, bespectacled, buck-toothed Japanese man in American movies and are amused at photographs of Marlon Brando or Alec Guinness

playing a Japanese role.¹⁴ For Japanese-Americans it is not a laughing matter. Are we Japanese completely free from these preconceptions or do we unconsciously apply them to Asian artists?¹⁵

We should note here that artists who are familiar with Postmodernist ideas in the West are aware that it is impossible for a "true" self to exist without the intervention of "image" or "representation" even if one tries to escape from racial prejudice and stereotypes. If one desires to show his or her "true self," it is necessary to use a different representation. This is done by quoting the existing representations of Asians produced by Euro-American society and transforming and subverting them.¹⁶ A typical example is the work of Chi Tseng-kwon (1950-1990, Hong Kong/New York). In his photographic works, the figure of the artist himself appears in the guise of "the suspicious Chinese." Sometimes bold, sometimes small and sad, he stands in the midst of tourist landscapes representing the scenic wonders which are the pride of America and Europe.

Many of the artists in this group make historical investigations of the position of Asian citizens now living in Europe and North America. The first example is the recent work of Rasheed Araeen, who was quoted at the beginning of this paper and included in the second group in the last section. He relates the history of Asian residents of foreign countries to colonialism and orientalism. In his work, he goes back to the colonization of Third World countries by the British Empire as a factor in today's political and psychological relations between different races and disturbs the grid structure of Western modernism with representations of the "other" in white European society.¹⁷ Other interesting artists with a different background are Min Yong-soon (1953, Republic of Korea/New York) and Hanh Thi Pham (1956, Vietnam/New York). Min Yong-soon raises doubts about the stereotyping of Asians, compiling her own personal history and a modern history of the Republic of Korea, including the imperialistic rule of Japan, the subsequent split between the north and south, and American military influence.¹⁸ Pham refers to her own fate and that of her family during the Vietnam war which followed French rule. It is not accidental that these artists' countries were the most direct victims of the Cold War.

Resistance to the political, cultural, and economic values of America and Europe does not always take an aggressive or provocative form. It is natural for many artists to focus on the phenomenon of immigration in recent years rather than the connection with colonies. May Sun (1954, China/Los Angeles), who compares the history of immigration into the United States with her own intellectual development, is a somewhat special case. More common are the artists who use bitter humor in revealing their personal experiences, their feelings of alienation, and their struggle to adapt to American society. The experience of alienation resulting from the attempt to adapt to life in American cities without being able to do so completely is found in the works of Ken Chu (1953, Hong Kong/New York), Y. David Chung (1959, Korean, born in Germany/America), Kim Hyung-su (1959, Korea/Los Angeles), and Kim Jin-soo (1950, Korea/America). Choi Sung-ho (1954, Korea/America) and Mo Bahc (1957, Korea/New York) express the gap between reality and their expectations of a free country full of opportunities for economic success (the American Dream).

With some artists, political concerns do not appear on the surface but are submerged in the inner being of the individual as they attempt to reaffirm weakening bonds with their home towns and

families and look on the weakening of these links with frustration and sadness. Sutapa Biswas (1962, India/London), Kim Young (1955, Korea/San Francisco), and Vongphrachanh (Vong) Phaophanit (1961, Laos/England) present disintegrating or fading photographic images of their families and countries. Zarina (1937, India/America) quietly reveals complex feelings for an eternal home family with surprisingly minimal formal elements. But it is not true that these artists deal only with individual memory, because their work contains a rational examination of the attenuated condition of their connections with the communities and culture of their former countries and their selves as well as questioning the world dominated by Europe and North America.

There are plenty of reasons for the works of Group 3 artists to incorporate self-portraiture as an important element. The physical body represents the self as close to truth and free of stereotypes as possible. It is also the site where the artist's background (history of home country, current situation of Euro-American society, history and process of immigration, everyday perceptions) is accumulated and imprinted. Also, it is a way of directly visualizing the theme of racial characteristics. Self-portraiture has been used by Chi Tseng-kwon and Sutapa Biswas, who have already been introduced, as well as Marlon Fuentes (1954, the Philippines/America) and Chila Kumari Burman (1957, Indian born in England/London).

Sexuality is an extremely interesting subject which is particularly related to the revelation of an individual's body. It is a subject which is taken up naturally because of the large influence of Feminist criticism and the Gay liberation movement in Europe and America and strong connection between the issue of sexuality and colonialism and orientalism. Euro-American civilization has been identified with masculinity, the observing subject, the ruler, and reality while Asia has been identified with femininity, the observed object, the ruled, and fantasy. Now this hierarchy is being reconsidered and challenged by women of the Third world who are doubly marginalized and alienated. For example, Zarina Bhimzi (1963, Indian born in Uganda/England) shows the physical and mental pain associated with the immigration experience using fragmented photographs and objects associated with the body such as hair and clothing. Liu Hung (1948, China/San Francisco) reveals the gaze directed by Europeans and Americans toward Chinese women with photographs of Chinese child prostitutes and images from traditional art. Even more complex issues are raised by gay and lesbian artists. Although immigration to Europe and America has meant personal liberation for Asian homosexuals, they have been alienated in many ways from the heterosexual ruling culture and the traditional family concepts of Asian society. These issues have been dealt with by Sunil Gupta (1953, India/England), Hanh Thi Pham, already mentioned, Shani Mootoo (Indian born in Trinidad/Vancouver), and others.

From the examples given above it is easy to identify some very important differences between the artists of group 3 and Asian artists living in Asia. These artists have something in common regardless of their specific concern, whether it be protesting against the dominant culture, subjectivizing an objectified self, sharing a difficult experience of being unable to adapt to society, distance from the culture and community of their home country, or expressing an awareness of their

own sexuality. This is a sense of anxiety or uneasiness about their present position in European or American society. When artists deny the dominant political or cultural values which are determined by Americans and Europeans, where do they look for the ground of their being? Unlike artists living in Asia, there are very few who can rely on a sense of belonging to the tradition or community of their own country. They are lucky if they can return to their countries, even temporarily, to reaffirm their roots. If they do return, however, after a long experience in Europe or America, they are likely to be seen as "Westernized" or "Americanized" by the those who have stayed within an Asian society, and they feel alienated. There are even sadder examples in which the artist returns home but finds it difficult or impossible to work or show or, in some cases, is not even guaranteed fundamental human rights. In short, the artists in group 3 suffer from a multiple identity crisis. They are alienated from the values, ways of life, and language of Europe or America, alienated from the art system, alienated from the original culture of their home country, and alienated from other people of non-white races. Therefore, they come to depend more and more on their ethnic communities in European and American cities as places of refuge, and mutual cooperation between Asian groups becomes more important.

It can be expected that uncertainty in cultural identity will only increase. Indeed, the Chinese and Japanese artists beginning to work in North America today are members of the third or later generations. Because of efforts made over the generations by East Asian immigrants, their chances of achieving a higher social and economic position are much greater. But what will be the cultural position of the second and third generations and their descendants? What will happen, not just to those immigrants in communities like Chinatown, but the children of more isolated families and mixed marriages between Asians and Europeans or Americans? Even if racial discrimination were eliminated as much as one would desire and third-generation Asians have adapted economically and culturally to European or American society, they will no longer be able to speak the language of their country of origin and they will have lost knowledge of their family's culture. They will not, however, lose the different physical characteristics which separate them from the dominant white culture.

Can the practice of art help solve this identity crisis? This is the most fundamental problem of Asian artists in Europe and the United States.

5. Questions Alone Are Coming Home

I have given a general description of certain types of Asian artists in terms of their relationship to European or American society, focusing on the problem of identity raised by group 3. I have yet to compare them with Asian artists living in Asia. Briefly, while most Asian artists in the West use contemporary, progressive means of expression, much like those used by their European and American counterparts, most artists working in Asia would have difficulty understanding the nature of an installation in Western contemporary art and very few make use of photographs or video in

their work. Likewise, very few Asian artists working in the West make contemporary works linked to the traditional art forms and styles, a common practice in Asia. There is a tremendous difference between the concerns and the subject matter of the two groups. Under present circumstances, there seems to be little possibility of Asian artists in Asia and their compatriots in Europe and America ignoring these difference and joining together for personal contact, joint exhibitions, or the development of new audiences or communication networks.¹⁹

However tenuous the links between Asian artists abroad and the current situation inside Asia, it would be wrong, as I said to begin with, to ignore their activities in establishing a concept of "Asian contemporary art" which pretends to any sort of accuracy from an international point of view. But it would be a mistake to hold up Asians working in the West as a model for those who remain in Asia just because Asians in Asia have failed to adopt the new artistic approaches sharply critical attitude toward European and American society of their fellow countrymen living overseas. The opposite attitude, rejecting Asian artists in the West for "losing Asian purity and being excessively Westernized and politicized" and praising Asian artists in Asia for "honesty and faithfulness to tradition," would be a form of orientalism and would ignore the realities of Asia.

I am not simply advocating that equal attention be paid to Asian artists in Asia and in the West. Most of the Asian residents of Europe and North America whom I have introduced make work which is difficult to understand without an explanation of the artist's background and the subject matter. Even with such an explanation, much of the work is not physically or formally convincing as art. Therefore, one should not shrink from admitting that many of the works are no more than illustrations of the artists' ideas. Many curators, of both Asian and non-Asian extraction, make a serious effort to avoid conceptual and political stereotypes of Asia and to carefully describe the individual circumstances of the artists, but, unfortunately, they often fail to look for correspondences and make comparisons with mainstream Euro-American art history and are not sufficiently aware of problems and misperceptions which arise when making comparisons with internal circumstances in Asia.²⁰ The result is a different sort of stereotype, that of a "minority art."

So then, can the internationalists in group 2 be called "better" artists than those in group 3 because of their superficial universality? Certainly, one cannot deny the pioneering achievements and the wide-ranging influence of Paik. And we cannot help feeling tremendous admiration for the almost brutal strength of spatial structure in the works of Kapoor and Huang Yong-ping, a logical and universal appeal which does not represent the narrow interests of any particular community. Does this mean that it is desirable to restrain expression which is based mainly on individual experience or is obscure to an audience with a different cultural background? Is there something wrong with art works which are effective only in a particular community, society, or culture?

I am not attracted, for example, to a Chinese artist in Los Angeles who looks only at the history of Chinese immigration, not considering relationships with other Asian peoples, blacks, and hispanics and giving a privileged position to the dichotomy Chinese/white. As I mentioned critically at the beginning of this paper, this is a fictional dualism which opposes the simplistic

equation of Europe/North America and the white race to Asia and Asians. So should an artist avoid being limited to his or her own racial and cultural background? Should all Asian artists be asked to observe a variety of cultures equally? Why should an artist have to master a number of different cultures, as if an artist who speaks only one Asian language could not possibly become "international?"

Should the practice of modernism by artists in group 1 be classified as an "imitative" or "derivative" of something Western? Should the difficult-to-classify artists of the fifth group be ignored because they do not fit the conceptual framework we are using?

Right now it is difficult for me to answer these questions. I can say for certain, however, that the questions Asian artists are asking in the West have begun to reach us here in Asia, even if the artists themselves are unable to return home even in spirit or thought.

May 1995

(Curator, Fukuoka Art Museum / JAPAN)

(Translated by Stanley N. Anderson)

Notes

1. Guy Brett, "The Limits of Imperviousness," *The Third Text*, no. 18, Spring 1992, London, p. 51.
2. While this essay was being written, a newly appointed Japanese Minister of Justice resigned under angry criticism by Japanese, Chinese, and Koreans of his statement that the Nanking massacre was a fabrication.
3. Shioda Junichi, "Inhabitants of Another World: Japanese Outsider Art," *Parallel Visions: Modern Artists and Outsider Art*, Japanese Outsider Art, exhibition catalogue, Setagaya Art Museum, 1993, pp. 7, 13. For criticism of this exhibition, see Yamamoto Ikuo, "Parallel Visions: Modern Artists and Outsider Art," *Bijutsu Techo*, January 1994, pp. 206-209.
4. Likewise, there are almost no works dealing with the problem of discrimination against women which remains strong in Japan or with the issue of homosexuality. As is indicated later, this is an important difference from art made by Asian artists working in the United States and Europe.
5. Just as important is the problem of exhibition curators. Japanese curators, since they are in an economically superior position, divide the world into curator and curated in the process of selecting Asian artists according to their own standards for an exhibition, recreating the relationship of the "exploiter and exploited" and the "colonizer and colonized." This issue was raised by Gerard Mosquera at the "New Internationalism" symposium sponsored by the Institute of New International Visual Arts (INIVA) at the Tate Gallery, London, April 28, 1994. In my own opinion, the Japanese approach of selecting only "avant-garde art which is not imitative of the United States and Europe" from Asia may seem at first to be completely opposite from the approach of selecting Asian works for their "Indian mysteriousness" or "naive taste," that is, their "primitive" qualities, but, in fact, there is little difference. By focusing on the two extremes of "native art unpolluted by the West" and "art which is just as progressive as that of the West," the curators fail to see the overall picture of art practice, the function of art, or the inevitable difficulties in modernizing in each Asian society. They fall into the trap of a conceptual framework in which all art other than these two extremes is seen as an imitation of Western art.
6. Fukuoka Yasunori, *Zainichi Kankoku/Chosen-jin, Wakai Sedai no Aidentiti* [North and South Korean Residents in Japan: Identity of the Younger Generation], Chuko Shinsho 1164, Chuokoronsha, 1993, pp. 2-20.
7. As much as possible, I have indicated the names of East Asian artists' family name first, as is customary within their native languages. In cases where I did not know the original order or a Western surname was combined with an Asian family name, I used the Western order of family name last.
8. His recent work, as is explained later, puts him in group 3.

9. Although not an Asian, the Palestinian Mona Hatoum (1952, Lebanon/London) is an excellent artist who belongs in this group. In terms of theme, especially in her early works, she belongs to group 3.
10. In England, non-European artists are commonly thought of as persons of color from India, Africa, and the Caribbean, and artists of these races are generally referred to as "black artists." There are very few artists from East or Southeast Asia in the United Kingdom. Since artists of Indian or Pakistani origin have been segregated and discriminated against like other non-Western artists, they tend to participate in a joint struggle under the name of "black artists," rallying around a journal called *The Third Text* and an organization called the Institute of New International Visual Arts. See Rasheed Araeen, *The Other Story: Afro-Asian Artists in Post-war Britain*, Hayward Gallery, 1989. In North America, by way of contrast, there are many artists of Chinese, Korean, Philippine, and Vietnamese origin, and they are beginning to develop a common consciousness as Asian-Americans. There is an Asian-American Arts Center and an Asian American artists' group with the name Godzilla in New York, and there are many other Asian-American groups and publications in other American cities. Unlike England, art-related cooperation between different non-Caucasian groups—Asians, Africans, Hispanics, etc.—is rare. They live in separate communities, such as Chinatown, and there is potential for conflict between them as seen in the Los Angeles riots. On the American situation, see Lucy R. Lippard, *Mixed Blessings: New Art in a Multicultural America*, Pantheon Press, New York, 1990.
11. Margo Machida, "Out of Asia: Negotiating Identities in America," *Asia/America: Identities in Contemporary Asian American Art*, The Asia Society Galleries, New York; The New Press, New York, 1994, p. 88.
12. Hagiwara Hiroko, *Kono Mune no Arashi: Eikoku Burakku Josei Atisuto wa Kataru* [The Storm in My Breast: Black Female Artists in England Speak Out], Gendai Kikakushitsu, 1990, pp. 163, 164.
13. On American films, see Murakami Yumiko, *Iero Feisu: Hariuddo Eiga ni Miru Ajiajin no Shozo* [Yellow Faces: Portraits of Asians in Hollywood Movies], [Asahi Sensho 469, Asahi Shuppansha, 1993. On the various media images of the Chinese since the nineteenth century, see John Kuo Wei Tchen, "Believing Is Seeing," *Asia/America*, pp. 12-25.
14. Murakami, "Yellow Faces," p. 87.
15. Many Japanese think that Chinese artists working in America must be exiled artists who participated in the Tien-an-men demonstration or anti-government intellectuals, like the American immigration official who asks Chinese immigrants if they are communists!
16. According to Sarat Maharaj, there are two ways of handling this "representation," the "oppositional mode," in which the text is attacked externally, and the "persuasive mode," in which the text is infiltrated from within. Sarat Maharaj, "The Congo is Flooding the Acropolis: Art in Britain of the Immigration," *The Third Text*, no. 15, summer 1991, London.
17. *Asian Artists Today (Fukuoka Annual) IV: Rasheed Araeen*, exhibition catalogue, Fukuoka Art Museum, 1993. See also *From Modernism to Postmodernism, Rasheed Araeen: a retrospective*, Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, 1988.
18. In this respect, Min, in her background and interests, seems to have much in common with the *Minjoong Misulin* the Republic of Korea. This is rather unusual for an Asian-American artist.
19. For an example of an unusual exhibition joining Korean artists living in Korea and in America, see *Across the Pacific, Contemporary Korean and American Art*, Queens Museum, New York, 1993. This exhibition traveled to the Kumho Gallery in Seoul in 1994.
20. Japanese in Japan cannot help but feel perplexed by the work of Japanese-American artists (not included in this survey) selected by American or European curators because of its simplistic social criticism and motifs which appear to us as grotesque kitsch, however serious the intentions of the artist. Examples are Nagai Takako (1960, Japan/America) and Teraoka Masami (1936, Japan/Hawaii), who were selected for the "Asia/America" exhibition cited above, and the third-generation Okano Haruko (1945, Canada/Vancouver). This suggests a question. Does the work of other Asian-American artists also appear as grotesque kitsch to other Asian audiences? What about the works of Asian artists working in Asia chosen by a Japanese eye?

Asian Art in the Posthegemonic World

Apinan Poshyananda

Camel→Goat→Pigeon→Camel's Eye

It is an enormous pleasure to be in Tokyo once more and a great honour to be invited by the Japan Foundation to participate in this symposium.

This session which follows "History: Steps towards the Present" has been entitled "Proposals from the Present" which is designed to let speakers discuss how artists from Asia express themselves, analyze what ideologies they hold, and the mutual exchanges among these artists.

Before I make any proposal or get carried away by showing endless slides for the enthusiastic Japanese audience to assimilate, absorb a deeper understanding of selected works by Asian artists, there is a small matter which needs to be raised.

What is the real purpose of this gathering? Why are we here?

Let me give an analogy in order to get a clearer picture of how I interpret the motives and intentions of this Contemporary Art Symposium 1994.

A well-known celebrity from Southeast Asia makes a visit to Saudi Arabia and is invited to an official banquet dinner. He sits next to the host who snaps his fingers for the cuisine to be served. It is a special national dish. A dead camel is brought on the table. It is sliced open to reveal a dead goat inside its stomach. Similarly, the goat's stomach is slit and inside it a lifeless pigeon has been placed. Then from the belly of the pigeon the camel's eyes, which are revered as the most delightful delicacies, are removed onto the plate. The host smiles and kindly offers one of the animal's eyes to his honourable guest. Being Asian, politeness, decorum, and table manners are most essential so the guest takes the spoonful of camel's eye and swallows it. The host waits anxiously and asks how it tastes. Being extremely polite, the Asian nods and lies that it is delicious. So the happy host snaps his fingers once more for the other camel's eye to be served to his pale-faced guest.

An exciting tale for the gourmets who love delicacy. Eating can be the most exquisite art form but the consumer of that particular dish must appreciate its artistry and ostentatiousness. This reminds me of the first time I was offered *iki zukuri* at a small restaurant near Fujiya Hotel in Japan. As I touched the piece of fish with my chopsticks the fish quivered and wriggled as it was still alive. Its eyes stared blankly at me with its mouth gaped open grasping for air. Being a polite Asian, I continued to eat so as not to upset my host.

For many Westerners whose bland taste buds have been numbed by their national dishes such as hamburgers and fries, Kentucky Fried Chicken, fish and chips, corned beef sandwiches, and baked

beans may be horrified by the barbaric acts of these Asian "heathens." They may be glad that these foreigners are far away on the other side of the globe. In contrast, these so-called Asians may defend themselves by saying that such gastronomy is like a traditional form of art which would take much time to educate the Western palatal taste for full appreciation. While those Asians who envy Western culture may simply opt for succulent well done Big Macs.

I will come back to the Asian position in relation to the Western world later on but for a moment let me continue my analogy in a fraternal manner among us Asians. Guided by our Japanese hosts at this Symposium the invitees deliver in a linear sequence tracing a historical development of art in Asia to the present. Like moving from camel to goat to pigeon we reach the climax with the present, the camel's eyes. And all of us being polite Asians are expected somehow to come to a point of agreement where "Asian spirit" can be characterized or compartmentalized like some sort of scientific equation.

This expedient exercise as I will discuss in the Session "The Potential of Asian Spirit" brings forth numerous problems. But before leaving my analogy of gastronomy, let me stress that too often at international art symposiums and conferences, over politeness (especially by Asian participants to their hosts) become the art of side stepping. For many Asians still hold the philosophy of non-confrontation in order to save "face." And this "face-saving" syndrome can become evasiveness which in turn leads to misinterpretation by those who decipher wrong messages.

Let me now present a panoramic picture of contemporary art in terms of power and hegemony.

Art and Hegemony Japan=Asia, U.S.A.=the West?

The dissolution of the Soviet Union has left a lasting impact on the transformation of the global framework. A dramatic shift from hostility to friendly cooperative policies among Western allies and Soviet successor states has been most obvious. To create warmth in the Post-Cold War era the United States has become the self-appointed super friendly Uncle Sam/Santa Clause/Fred Flintstone who goes around promoting peace and joy to all mankind throughout the globe. To maintain peace in the new world order, fictitious brotherly love invented by the United States and her powerful allies sometimes turn into forceful and aggressive world policing. For instance, threats, embargoes, and sanctions have been forced on troubled countries such as Iraq, Iran, Rwanda, North Korea, Lebanon, Haiti, Myanmar, Cuba and Bosnia Hersegovina.

The concept of hegemony no longer implies only to its original Greek meaning, "leadership," particularly in the area of military dominance but a set of relationships surrounding the dominant power.¹ The dominant power commands efficient military forces as well as strong producer of goods in the world economy. Therefore, competition between the nation-states to be hegemons does not always imply the flexing of military "muscles." On the contrary, competition for powerfulness may consist of trade wars.

During the past few years, economic friction between the United States and Japan has markedly

increased. The end of the Cold War has transformed the Asia-Pacific region, especially newly industrializing countries (Nics) in Southeast Asia, into economic zones for trade and investment for both Western and Japanese investors. Although the capitalist-communist ideological conflict has disappeared, both Japan and the United States want to play pivotal roles in stabilizing regional security. As a result, the changing security atmosphere has caused much antagonism between these two hegemonies in the areas of economic superiority.²

Towards the latter part of the Reagan government attempts were already made to use contemporary art as a medium through which cultural binding between U.S.-Japanese relations could be increased. For instance, in 1986 a group of American museum directors and curators were invited by the Japan Foundation to Japan to see museums, galleries, and meet distinguished Japanese personalities in the art scene.³ The purpose was to throw new light on Japanese contemporary art. Indirectly, it must have also aimed to change America's view of Japan as a country of threat and hostility.

During 1989-1991, two important travelling exhibitions of contemporary Japanese art toured the United States. "Against Nature: Japanese Art in the Eighties" was co-curated by Kathy Halbreich (then curator of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts), Thomas Sokolowski (director of the Grey Art Gallery, NYU), Kohmoto Shinji (curator of the National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto), Nanjo Fumio (Director of ICA, Nagoya).⁴ "Primal Spirit: Ten Contemporary Japanese Sculptures" co-organized by Howard Fox (curator at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art) and Hara Toshio (president of the Hara Museum, Tokyo).⁵ The intentions were quite obvious: to promote contemporary Japanese art to the American audience; to display the high standard of Japanese artists whose works are far from provincial or derivative of Western art; to educate the Americans how some Japanese artists successfully integrate the rich heritage of tradition with contemporary art and technology in a changing society.

The art system designed to create warmth and thaw icy tensions between these two superpowers were turned on full blast. Promotion programmes, announcements, advertisements, interviews, articles in leading American art magazines were aplenty. One advertisement sponsored by AT&T, a leading tele-communication company, shows a *geisha* in elegant *kimono*, her hair lacquered in a cone juxtaposed next to Funakosi Katsura's wooden sculpture entitled *Sand and City* (1986). The advertisement reads, "Japan is having a change of art. And the United States is having its first look at the latest developments as AT&T brings you the tradition-breaking creations of Japan's brightest young artists."⁶

In return, it was the opportunity for Japanese artists to be exposed in the mainstream art world which undoubtedly opened more channels for recognition, exhibitions, and sales. Names such as Morimura Yasumasa, Kawamata Tadashi, Ohtake Shinro, Endo Toshikatsu, Toya Shigeo, Miyajima Tatsuo, Funakoshi Katsura soon became recognized by the interested Americans as leading artists from Japan. The time has finally arrived, it was thought, Asia is moving up into the major league of superpowers in the art world.

Not surprisingly, the themes and contents of these exhibitions were hardly offensive to

American audience. *Portrait (Twin)* (1988) and *Portrait (Boy II)* by Morimura Yasumasa or *Silent Explosion* by Maemoto Shoko might have raised a few eyebrows but there was no unpleasantness of Japanese view on the Americans.⁷ Nothing about trade frictions or racial tensions. Nothing about the abuses and atrocities committed by both sides during World War II. On the contrary, many works selected had a "flavour" of expected convergence with the international art world. After all, the important aim was to reveal to America, Japan's most important strategic partner, that not only has Japan caught up in economy but also in art and culture.

Recently, Japanese artists definitely received increasing exposure in America and Europe. For example, Kawamata Tadashi was invited (for the second time) to create site-specific works at the Documenta IX in Kassel, Germany, as well as a project of complex wooden web partially surrounding a derelict Gothic Revival hospital on Roosevelt Island in New York's East River.⁸ In contrast, Takashimaya Department Store on the Fifth Avenue opened art galleries on the first two floors and showed works by American artists in the exhibition "Reorientations: Looking East."

If success in artistic achievement is measured by the numbers of biennales and triennials or articles written by American art critics in *ARTnews* and *Art in America* then Japanese artists such as Kawamata Tadashi, Morimura Yasumasa, and Yanagi Yukinori lead in these fields among their Asian counterparts. This is because the infrastructure which controls the contemporary Japanese art scene is far more efficient and effective than, say, the ones in Southeast Asia, China, or India. Therefore, the mechanism in Japan which transforms art into vehicles of promotion and propaganda can be made to compete aggressively with the West just as easily as in economic competition. Once the professions of art promotion, art marketing, and art dealing are seen as business then it must be realized that the Japanese can be extremely good at thriving to win.

Despite the contraction of Japan's "Bubble Economy"⁹ in 1991-1992, Japanese artists are still receiving much interest through the appropriate channels of promotion and propaganda. It should be noted, however, that Western interest is beginning to shift to other Asian countries such as China and South Korea. These rivalling countries are fast becoming the Asian economic powerhouses of tomorrow. Yet, there is genuine desire for Western art curators and critics to learn about "exotic" Asian countries other than Japan. It should be added that the focus of attention on China has been triggered by the bustling art activities after the Tiananmen Square massacre in June 1989 and the increasing impact of Chinese diaspora due to the retrogression of the British Crown Colony of Hong Kong occurring in July 1997.¹⁰ While South Korea is attracting headline-grabbing news not because of sales of Hyundai Motors or Samsung Electronics but from threats by her neighbour, North Korea, the last Stalinist regime which thrives on building nuclear weapons.¹¹

Participation by Chinese artists in "*Magiciens de la Terre* (Magicians of the Earth)" in Paris, France, the 45th Venice Biennale (1993), in Venice, Italy, "*Silent Energy*" (1993) at the Museum of Modern Art, Oxford, England, individual shows by Gu Wenda and Xu Bing aroused critical attention among Western audience.¹² At the same time, Korean-born artists have been featured at art institutions in New York including the Queens Museum, the Brooklyn Museum, and the Grey Art Gallery.¹³ These art activities demonstrate clearly that the potentials of contemporary art from

Asia do not lie solely in Japan.

Squinting at the Sun

"Imagine an Asian-Pacific region in which robust and open economic competition is a source of jobs and opportunity without becoming a source of hostility and instability,"¹⁴ said President Bill Clinton at the summit of APEC forum in Seattle late in 1993. The 15-member group stood in a row in the cold and smiled bravely for the press. They tried hard to imagine President Clinton's romantic suggestion.

In Seattle, Prime Minister Hosokawa Morihiro stood tall among his Asia colleagues. He symbolized Japan's new breed: eager, confident, charming, challenging, and incorruptible. (It was just as well that Hosokawa's height helped his country's image. Had it been Miyazawa Kiichi, Japanese presence would have been even smaller than Thailand's Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai.) Hosokawa only had a few months to imagine the making of super friendly and stable Pacific Asia. His rise to power was a rapid one. His fall was even faster. By April 1994 his position as prime minister prematurely came to an end. Hata Tsutomu succeeded Hosokawa as the third prime minister in a year and the sixth in five. Hata's own position as Japan's leader has become extremely precarious. Like the game of musical chair he too takes turn to leave. The long recession in Japan is having enormous impact on the country's political stability and economic growth.¹⁵

Political and economic contradictions are proving that the global responsibility of both Japan and America in constructing a framework of a new world order of peace and democracy are full of difficulties. The balancing act of American military power and Japanese economic supremacy nicely complementing each other may not be that rosy after all.¹⁶

If Japan is to prove her regional and global leadership in economic and political affairs then she might be expected to lead in art and culture as well. There have been numerous opportunities for Japan to seriously push herself as leader and instigator for international art projects, conferences, symposiums related to contemporary art in Asia. Surprisingly, there have been relatively few major art events on contemporary Asian art organized by the Japanese which create impact on deeper understanding and appreciation of artists from this region. There have been noteworthy group and individual shows with involvement of Asian artists including Tang Da Wu, Montien Boonma, Agnes Arellano, Tan Chin Kuan, Kamol Phaosavasdi, Dadang Christanto, Rasheed Araeen, Cai Guo Qiang, and extensive survey Asian Art Shows at the Fukuoka Art Museum. However, "New Art from Southeast Asia 1992"¹⁷ exhibition was probably one of the few in depth attempts by Japanese curators to seriously interpret contemporary art by their Southeast Asian neighbours.

When Japan was trying to catch up and compete with Western art scenes in the late 1980s and early 90s she overlooked the importance of contemporary art from the Asia-Pacific region. A major international exhibition on contemporary art from Asia and the Pacific organized by Japanese

curators and art administrators should have been realized long ago. This could have easily been made possible when economic growth in Japan was still on the rise. Asian art shows at the Fukuoka Art Museum and a few group exhibitions attempted to survey and collect information but they lacked convincing thematic curatorial approach.¹⁸

In 1993, the Australians and not Japanese took up this challenge and launched the First Asia-Pacific Triennial at Queensland Art Gallery in Brisbane.¹⁹ Although this event had its faults and criticism and did not make much impact in America or Europe, there is no denial that it was one of the most ambitious and enlightening art exhibitions ever organized in the Asia-Pacific region. The Australians gave a rare lesson for the Japanese as well as other Asian participants, the powerfulness and potentials of contemporary art from this side of the globe.

Pan-Asian Ring Around the Roses (Stuffed Coconut Milk Chicks)

Let's for a moment return to food. There is a Thai dish which may be slightly different to the typical *tom yam goong* or *tom kha kai*. It is called *kai kathi*. A chick is buried under the sand leaving its head and neck protruding. It is continuously fed with dripping coconut milk for several days until its stomach is bloated. Then its gross body is removed from the sand to be cooked.

Organizers for ASEAN art events are not unlike *kai kathi*. Overfed by resources and information they have become smug, contented, immobile, and unimaginative. Over the years the travelling ASEAN art exhibitions reeked with nationalistic propaganda which reconfirm the falsehood of attempting to create ASEAN fraternal binding through contemporary art.²⁰ The ASEAN spirit of homogenous societies working in harmony is merely a mirage designed to give a sense of security for some Southeast Asian countries that feel threatened by communism.²¹ Now that the dominoes have collapsed the other way and the Cold War has become Lukewarm War ASEAN no longer serves its original purpose. ASEAN must develop in step with changing situations around the world. In case of making policies related to contemporary art ASEAN organizers must avoid becoming the ultimate *kai kathi* ready to be cooked.

ASEAN stands for the Association of Southeast Asia with six members consisting of Thailand, the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, and Brunei. ASEAN's purposes and activities are associated mainly with economics and politics among these countries. Not surprisingly, ASEAN does not consider countries like Burma, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Nepal to be in its own league. Likewise, India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh which are so near are regarded at a distance. When one talks about ASEAN art it is almost impossible to see a clear picture of artistic activities within this region because ASEAN consists of imagined geopolitical boundaries. ASEAN-ness only allows certain topics and contents to be included in its vocabulary. Seamless homogenous societies with selected neighbours working in unity are insisted by the pertinacious organizers. ASEAN likes to project the illusion of lands with prosperity and peace.²² Therefore, artists whose work divert or subvert this grand scheme of ASEAN-ness may find themselves sidelined or ostracized. Like caged

ostriches, these artists hardly get the chance to "get off the ground" as their wings have little support from the local authoritative bodies.

Drifting Toward the New Centres

Recently, worldwide discussion on issues of centre/periphery, mainstream/marginality, white/non-white, straight/queer, politically correct/cultural whining have been spreading like a contagious disease. Conferences, symposiums, talk shops by artists, scholars, critics have inevitably drawn attention on art and artists previously ignored from the New York–Paris–Berlin axis. Newly designated de-centred centres such as Bombay, Baguio, Singapore, Brisbane, Johannesburg, Havana, Barcelona, and Stockholm have hosted various art activities which hope to draw a new perspectival view on art within those geopolitical confines. Consequently, many doors are ajar for the so-called artists from the Third World.

Postcolonial governments in Southeast Asia are inclined to generate nationalistic programmes to promote emerging nations liberated from old colonial boundaries. Contamination of the West has become a strategic device to create state fatherhoods in "nation building" where traditional culture has a seamless narrative of continuity and cohesion.

Singapore is an example of a place where leadership and power equate male, Chinese, and the socioeconomically and educationally privileged. National ideology which preserves prosperity and identity consists of promotion of Chinese-ness — Confucian essence and Mandarin dialect of the ruling class.²³ When images of phallogocentric toughness becomes synonymous with "Confucian Chinese-ness" there is limited space for individualistic expression.²⁴ Marginalization begins at home.

Tang Da Wu whose art revolves around his deep commitment to the struggle against human destruction, animal abuse, entropy, and authoritarian rule is a rare breed in the Singaporean art scene. For instance, his performances and installations such as *Tiger Whip* (1991) and *They Poached the Rhino, Dug out its Horn and made this Drink* (1989-1991) have in one way or another challenged and embarrassed those who hold dogmatic beliefs in Chinese superiority and virility through delicacies and aphrodisiacs.²⁵

In 1993, Tang Da Wu made performances in Manila and Baguio, the Philippines which criticized strongly on abuse of animals in blood sports as well as machismo and hegemony.²⁶ In *Who Owns the Cocks?*, Da Wu clad in a red cloth with the headband of the Philippine flag mimicked a cockfight owner with cockerels made of papier maché under his arms. "Hold my cock please!", he shouted at random to the audience. Da Wu then held out the map of the Philippine archipelago which has been transformed into outlines of two cocks fighting viciously. Criticism not only on sadistic sports but aggressive male desire for hegemonic dominance which has been transformed into nationalist propaganda.

Who Owns the Cocks? performed during the Baguio Arts Festival was warmly received. On the

contrary, there was uneasiness and tension when the similar act was seen by officials, dignitaries, and viewers at the reception of the Second ASEAN Workshop, Exhibition, and Symposium on Aesthetics at the Cultural Center of the Philippines in Manila. Da Wu's performance revealed contradiction, disruption, violence, and dislocation. Characteristics which have been continuously suppressed in the doctrinaire art programmes of ASEAN.

As an inspiring figure Da Wu has encouraged young Singaporean artists to seek freedom of expression. Vincent Leow, Lee We, Josef Ng have found ways and means to make art in various unconventional manners to the point that rights of expression became seriously tested.

Vincent Leow drank his own urine as part of his performance in order to violate the bounds of what is socially acceptable and what is art in the country which tries to project itself as the art centre in Asia. Leow's action has been wiped aside by the art authority as bad taste and lack of decorum. He has even been warned not to use his (or other people's) body fluids if funding for his art proposals are to be considered in the future. Lee Wen painted himself yellow and made performances in India, Singapore, and Thailand. Like an aimless wanderer his naked yellowness becomes the epitome of so many displaced Asians in diaspora. Josef "Brother Cane" Ng shaved his pubic hair during his performance as a protest to the Singaporean method of punishment by caning. Ng placed twelve bags of red liquid with tofu and splattered them with a cane. This was symbolic of the beating of twelve Singaporeans during anti-gay operation. Then with his back to the audience he pulled down his pants and shaved his pubic hair.²⁷ Ng was later arrested. From this incident the National Art Council of Singapore condemned such a vulgar act and announced that in the future scripts have to be screened by the Public Entertainment Licensing Unit.²⁸ Ng's performance and arrest occurred before the much publicized caning of the American teenager Michael Fay who was punished for vandalism.²⁹

No doubt these artists are the thorns in the side of the Singaporean art mainstream. Outside Singapore, their messages reveal tensions beneath the façade of "Asian spirit" of happiness and harmony in the land of many cultures. Their art and action reflect anxiety and struggle between the oppressor and the oppressed. These angst-filled performances and images go beyond farcical playfulness of deviant, unhealthy youths who merely want to attract public attention. Their subversiveness mark the inevitability of desire for freedom of expression within the strict authoritative system.

Despite lack of financial and institutional support the members of the Baguio Arts Guild (BAG), which was founded in 1987, have continued tirelessly to organize the Baguio Arts Festivals in the Philippines.³⁰ With diversity of creative disciplines BAG aims to discover new ways of harnessing its collective talents and skills. Like the Artists Village in Singapore, BAG has attracted numerous artists from Asia and the Pacific. While the invited artists have to pay for almost all expenses including travel and materials, there has been enormous incentive to work as an art community.³¹ Something which goes beyond the imagined communities of brotherhood created within the exclusive membership of ASEAN.

The 4th Baguio Arts Festival was staged in December 1993 with the subtheme of "Cross

Currents." BAG placed emphasis on the use of indigenous materials as the means to express cultural identity. One might argue that the choice of bamboo, pine, beads, and earth instead of Western media like oils or acrylic on canvas is nothing novel to demonstrate the desire to resist "Western modernism." Surprisingly, the strongest works in the Festival were not about the use of indigenous materials but themes related to threat of the body, migration, political suppression, local myths, and postcolonialism.

FX Harsono's silkscreen images of Indonesians with bull's eye targets printed on them like the piercing eyes of the authority are continuously at watch. Ann Wizer's *The Lost Language of Flight* comments on the condition of the refugees and asylum seekers in Bataan and Palawan. Installation by Alwin Reamillo and Juliet Lea in the dark, damp room ironically praises the future of the Philippines with rifles and icons of former President Ferdinand Marcos and President Fidel Ramos. Santiago Bose sprayed his footprints during his labyrinthine journey as he performed *Imagined Borders* in search for his own maps and borders. Utami Hitomi, after interviewing numerous residents of Baguio, created countless clay houses with strings attached to them symbolizing closely-knit family ties and community. Art Manila Group defied the taboo of sex and Catholicism by showing images of fear, trauma, and angst related to AIDS. Yong Soon Min, Luis Francia, and Allan de Souza created an installation called *Geography of Desk* which criticizes language and signs as vehicles in colonizing process.

The Baguio Arts Festival managed to blur the borders of nationalities by mixing the displays at random and allowed the viewers to work with minimum preconception. In many ways the problem of crossing over boundaries became less important as many artists were eager to deal with more pressing issues facing societies within this region.

"Chiang Mai Social Installation, the Second Art Festival — Temples, Cemeteries, Private Residences, Public Buildings, Walls, Rivers, Canals, Open Spaces" at Chiang Mai, the urbanized town in northern Thailand was an ambitious event. Organized by Thai artists, the exhibition aimed to deal with problems including local and global issues and art activities which might lead to an appreciation of art, life, and Buddhism.³² This exhibition followed an earlier environmental art project consisting of works situated at various temples and cemeteries in Chiang Mai which caused much critical attention. "Chiang Mai Social Installation" comprised of numerous site-specific art all over the town.³³

For example, Montien Boonma placed stacks of rice bowls with chopsticks and red napkins in the woods of Temple Wat U-Mong as a comment on the Chinese infatuation with food which in turn is evolved around ceremonies related to life and death. Suphachai Satsara stuck numerous licence plates of vehicles with painted silhouetted figures by the pavement of a busy street near Noparat Bridge. The used car plates, the quotidian objects, are signifiers of the process of consumption and commodification in a society facing irrecoverable changes due to industrialization. The painted crowd with no faces are like a mass of anonymity witnessing materialism and death. However, Suphachai did not trace how many of these plates belonged to Toyota, Mitsubishi, Isuzu, Honda, and Datsun. Navin Rawanchaikul's installations are related to the theme of identity and

migration. Stereotypes cause fixity and borders where cultural identities are confined rigidly according to specified characteristics of nationhood. Navin depicts the countless faces of citizens from the vicinity of Chiang Mai. Here, speech, dialects, local costumes identify the roots of these people. By placing photographs of these anonymous faces in empty bottles or glass cases, Navin questions the stereotypical views of race, identity, and gender.

Japanese Way

In 1992, Japanese curators and art administrators from the Japan Foundation scanned and selected artists for the exhibition "New Art from Southeast Asia 1992." The exhibition was part of the programme of the Southeast Asian Festival to promote art and culture from this region in Japan. Although this exhibition has been limited to geopolitical boundaries, at least there was a sense of commitment, dedication, and professionalism which recent ASEAN art shows have failed to produce.

However, one could detect from the overall presentation and catalogue essays that certain impositions were made by the Japanese organizers. It was the way Japanese curators viewed, selected, and interpreted contemporary art and artists not so much from Southeast Asia but members of ASEAN. Advices were asked, information gathered, local artists interviewed. In a rush, the Japanese came, saw, and went. When the catalogue essays were published by the Japanese organizers, hidden agendas were made clear of how Japanese views have been expressed on art works by the selected countries. Emphasis was made on the Japanese discovery and contribution in "exploring recent Southeast Asian art, about which almost nothing is known.... In the future, Southeast Asians will probably become conscious of themselves as Asians"³⁴ and that "it is our responsibility as Japanese to examine Southeast Asian art and increase our interaction to promote its development."³⁵

Unlike "Against Nature," "Primal Spirit," or the First Asia-Pacific Triennial, "New Art from Southeast Asia 1992" allowed restricted room for local scholars, critics, and art historians to interact. It was a Japanese organized show for Japanese audience by Japanese curators. Similar kinds of imposition were repeated in exhibitions such as "Facing the Infinite Space" and "Beyond the Border" where Japanese artists were shown in juxtaposition with Singaporean and Thai artists, respectively.³⁶ Again only views and interpretations by Japanese curators were expressed.

It is hoped that in the future there will be a more reciprocal working partnership between curators from Japan and those in Southeast Asia, South Asia, and Indochina. Efforts in transporting Asian artists over to Japan to have exhibitions or work with Japanese artists and curators are most commendable. But to make Japanese intervention in contemporary Asian art more plausible a better understanding in art infrastructure between these countries and Japan must be realized. After all Japanese views may be further enriched and enhanced if organization, selection, and exhibitions are not always dictated from Japanese view points. Otherwise, the Japanese attempts to convert

"the Other into the Self" or "the Self as the Other"³⁷ will not reach full fruition because these projects will merely serve as self-deception. It should be reminded that to many Asians, the Japanese still remain very much the Other.

Desperately Seeking for the "Asian Spirit"

"The British and Americans go around the world saying, 'You too, can be like us,' " commented Singaporean Senior Minister and former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew. "The Japanese," he said "go around the world saying, 'We're unique. No one can be like us.' "³⁸ Lee Kuan Yew also expressed that, "... Asian nations from Korea to Indonesia, while tolerant of Japanese investment, remain basically bitter and hostile to the Japanese — and that sentiment is growing. Among Americans, reaction to the Japanese may range from admiration to envy; among Asians they range from fear to hatred."³⁹ These words may be rather harsh on the Japanese but if there are elements of truth in them then something must be done to improve this tarnished image.

If Japan thinks that in contemporary art, like in economy and investment, she should be the natural leader in Asia then it must be noted that she has only achieved in specific areas. Take for example Japan's economic "weapon" of financial aid to promote Japanese cultural links in Thailand. Japanese contribution through fellowships and exhibitions have resulted in all kinds of cultural exchanges. The "Inspiration from Japan" exhibition displayed works by Thai artists who sojourned in Japan and were inspired by Japanese design, composition, texture, and *Zen* gardens.⁴⁰ Many Thai art students who studied in Japan learned enormously technical virtuosity especially in the field of printmaking. Japanese printmakers have exhibited regularly in Bangkok while several Thais have made their mark at prestigious print competitions in Japan.⁴¹ Notably, the impact of Japanese art and culture on Thai artists have been clearly emphasized. On the other hand, there are few Japanese artists who express inspiration or sources of materials from Thailand or Southeast Asia. This is hardly surprising because their gaze is fixed on America and Europe.

To imagine the "Asian spirit" in contemporary art is rather like emphasizing on the "pan-Asian age"⁴² with Asian unity forming leading economic power through the Asian bloc. Precautionary steps must be taken. First, it is necessary not to fall into the trap of Asian exoticism through Western gaze where the culture myth of tradition and heritage become determinant forces over fragmentation, dislocation, heterogeneity alienation, racism, and fractiousness. Secondly, the rising tide of nationalism will be likely to frustrate attempts at regional cooperation under the umbrella of "Asian spirit." Exploiting art the same way as sports to act as a catalyst to promote regional security has become repetitive and worn-out propaganda. Asian Games in Hiroshima cemented many friendships but also brought unpleasant memories of "black rain" caused by American atrocity. At the same time, there are many Asians, especially Chinese, Koreans, and Taiwanese who still resent Japanese aggrandizement during the Second World War. Evidences confirmed discontentment in protests and demonstrations during state visits by Emperor Akihito and

Empress Michiko to America and China.⁴³ Thirdly, Japan-led or Japan-determined "Asian Spirit" will have to be scrutinized closely by her neighbours and cousins. Japan as the dominant power in the Asian art scene will have to rely enormously on the relationships with the surrounding countries. This is crucial especially at the time when Japan is becoming a "normal nation."⁴⁴ Many developing Asian countries' sense of loss of their own heritage in the society of late capitalism and have created potent nationalistic forces as a form of protection. They have become weary of Nippon-ism through daily overexposure of Toshiba, Mitsubishi, Isetan, Sony, Sanyo, and so on. Many are resisting Japanese-ness. Many are suspicious of this new colonizing force. While in the art scene the pertinent question which needs to be raised is that: Is Japan a member of the Western contemporary art scene or does she envision herself as being Asian? Can she be both? Fourthly, it should be realized that cultural exchanges are one of the more subtle ways of imposing cultural imperialism. The display of cultural hegemony to exhibit superiority of one culture over another through art exchange programmes should be scrutinized closely, as frequently these activities are hidden with propagandist intentions which involve censorship and self-censorship.

Japan can further contribute to the art scene within this region without having to be the isolated hegemony. Like her expanded political-security role, Japan realizes that hegemony no longer means single country dominance but collective international relationship especially with Southeast Asia's importance to Japan.⁴⁵ Japan must accept that not all Southeast Asian countries can or want to catch up with the West like she does. The development in contemporary art is inconsistent between countries while conditions in some societies are breeding grounds for violence, corruption, sex industry, gender/class discrimination, entropy, political disruption. Dispirited characteristics and anomalies which contradict the romanticized version of "Asian spirit." To tackle these pressing regional problems, which have increasingly become global issues, Asian artists, critics, curators, scholars must attempt to find solutions together. To ignore these problems for the sake of cultural promotion and national propaganda will only produce art exhibitions which serve expedient exercises.

The search for "an Asian School of Contemporary Art" does not necessarily have to comply with "Japanese flavour" which tends to be extending the tradition of austere beauty, textural surface, harmonious composition, and subtle balance. Moreover, the framework of previous Asian modern art which is often a compromise between Western modernism and Eastern tradition may have become outdated and superficial to reflect art created within rapidly changing industrializing societies.

Symposiums such as this one should be scheduled at regular intervals with speakers speaking openly about artists dealing with problems at particular nodal points within Asia. Asia, here, should cover places such as India, Tibet, Pakistan, Vietnam, and Myanmar and not just ASEAN and East Asian countries. Debates and discussions should be taken seriously on most pertinent issues which may not be necessarily the most politically correct.

I will continue in Session IV to discuss the possibilities of interpreting the "Asian Spirit" and make suggestions for future art exhibitions and conferences in this region. For the moment I will end here and let other distinguished invitees the chance to speak. Thank you for your attention.

(art critic/Thailand)

How Far Can an Artist's Work Be Affected by the West? Cultural Aspects of Western and Asian Arts

Zulkifli B. Yusoff

In reality, when we talk about the problem of influence, it does not depend 100 percent on where we study or where we live. Actually an influence can occur from reading or using audio-visual equipment or watching television. The development of Western orientation has been influencing my artwork since I was in school, where most of my lecturers are Western oriented. Imported magazines sold in Malaysia also expose me to the Western orientation. Nevertheless, since I've been involved in artwork only from the end of the 1980s, the Western orientation has less impact on my artwork. A revolution in Islamic art and exposure to the problem of identity through related forums control the influence of Western orientation on Eastern art. Students who are sponsored by the Malaysian Government are prohibited from exhibiting works based upon Western culture. This regulation is consistent with the concept of an Islamic state in which people practice a piece of life.

The control of the Western influence is not focused only on the visual arts but also on music. As an example, sales of tickets to a rock concert performed by Scorpion were terminated by the Malaysian Government. Indeed, if there's an art connected with drugs or writing that reveals the wild influence of violence and sex, that art is strictly prohibited.

I've spent two years in the United Kingdom, and during my stay I distinguished between bad and good influences from an Asian viewpoint. In the United Kingdom, I've often discussed a good art performance and I've also explored the contemporary aspects in art, whether from the aspect of choosing material or utilizing space. I do not deny that previously I was a step behind in creating an artwork, but this matter has opened my mind. I do not rely on traditional methods in creating an artwork involving space, and do not use a pedestal or special material to make the artwork be viewed as a work of art on display.

The use of space is very important, and I've been taught to attract an audience by using the space successfully. Choosing the material is also very important in doing the artwork. So, in making the artwork, I focus only on the formal aspect by rejecting an artwork that has no purpose or emotional control and that has freedom in all aspects.

The most important considerations in creating the artwork are skill, formal aspect, and theme. Without one of those matters, the artwork is retarded and it is shameful for a well-known Asian artist if he creates artworks with too much emotional freedom.

Actually, we should be proud of what we have and we should stand on our own two feet, moving a step ahead and sewing as a reference to others. A soft soul and thinking do not mean we are weak either physically or mentally. Japan, which is known for its soft manner, for instance, once

conquered half the world in a short time during the Second World War. Hence, we should not be ashamed or depress ourselves and should furthermore understand that we actually are clever.

It is not wrong for us to explore the West again, but this time it should be with a reason and with deep research on the development of modern art in terms of performing and techniques, which we can adapt from what we have. Indeed, we can develop an interesting artwork by using the intersection between two different cultures. I believe that as long as we stick to our religious beliefs and our own traditional culture, we can avoid making such undesirable artwork as that done with no mental control and too expressive feeling. For myself, I feel pity that though our government has spent so much money in bringing the problem of identity to the front, some people are still proud of the Western influence. For example, during the First Triennial in Brisbane, Australia, there were a few performers who looked for publicity and tried to become well-known artists by leaving their original identity behind, and some of them indulged in nasty behavior before audiences. On the other hand, we artists should think of the sensitivities of other people and should always remember who we are.

In making the artwork, I do not deny that I have been using both Western and Eastern art techniques. Personally, I prefer to construct my artwork via the Western style, which includes the concept of activating the space, choosing the materials and techniques, and other matters. Those matters are strictly controlled by careful considerations and wise thought. The aspect of beauty is also not left out because of the natural desire toward the meaning of art itself. Nevertheless, all content refers to our identity, and the surrounding community is privileged to have the displayed performance that energizes everyone's minds through intellectual development. Even though certain issues touch on aspects of violence or other matters, the issue is delivered with gentleness and in symbolic form. In conjunction to that, I am certainly not attracted to an excessive expression of emotion.

The sculptor's or artist's sensitivity toward the traditional image in surrounding is definitely examined and it not only refers to visual images but also to the old Malay literature. We should explore our history, which contains thousands of stories about the surrounding community, including cultural, economical, political, and social aspects. Sometimes, the result of the old literature is just an illusion, but there is no problem with this, since an artist uses literature as a metaphor that shows an identical life between a story and a reality in several aspects. I feel that my role is to be sensitive to the surroundings and to issues involving the community. Why is that important? Because an artist is an asset to his community. An artist is not a virus that should infect the community's thought with his own illusion. The artist should avoid expressing himself in nonsensical emotions.

When comparing both Western and Asian art, we seem to humiliate the outsider's culture. Actually, it is not true, and what's being brought up is only that is not related to Asian culture, and this does not mean "wrong" to a foreign view. This factor occurs because of the difference in ideology, including religion. The natural behavior of Asian communities with a craft orientation nurture the attitude of an artist or sculptor so that he comes to know the importance of beauty,

intermediate behavior, much patience, and good iconography. The beautiful works of Asian art are not really "creations," since they are inherited from their ancestors. The control upon artwork is based on the artist's background including his religious belief, whether he is a Muslim or a Buddhist or something else.

One of the matters that should be taken care of in Asian art is the appearance and the reliability to work. Every sequence of creation is definitely followed with patience and willingness. The beauty of the artist's attitude sometimes emerges from, or can be seen in, his artwork.

Asian art developed centuries ago. The creation of ancient artwork was influenced by several factors such as religion, economy, politics and so forth. Most of the artworks were formed to be consuming products but then were decorated with symbolic elements to help people remember God and worship the beauty of the God's creations. We should look at two examples of contemporary artworks formed by Asian artists Zulkifli Yusoff from Malaysia and Montien Boonma from Thailand. Both artists can form their artworks such that they strictly control their disciplines, they do not have too much freedom in their artworks, each of their working plans is well organized, and they each have their own beliefs. Both of them also often discuss the life and future or their society.

Westerners have their own perspectives on art and we can see the changes in Western art from time to time. They have too much freedom in their sound and movement and their emotions are very expressive. One thing that differs from the Eastern way of life is that they do not bother so much with the moral aspect, whereas morality is a very important aspect to Asian artists. The idiom "Art-for-art's-sake" becomes the guideline for most Western artists. Because of too much freedom in Western arts, we can see that they often leave out the aspect of skill, formal sequence, and theme.

Western arts, however, are more opened in terms of performance and space activation, especially in 3-dimensional works. This different aspect has focused our attention on Western arts. The development of Eastern arts has not yet reached the level of Western arts, and because of that we should accept the matter as a new prospect. We should not set any limits in creating artwork. For example, we often arrange flowers in a vase, but we seldom do a similarly artistic job on our hair or even on a wall. Here, we can see that arranging flowers in a vase is an old method, but in reality, we can do this simple job anywhere, as long as we give attention to the aspects of skill, formal sequence, and so forth.

In conclusion, I would like to say that it is time for us to discover ourselves, to see that we already have, and to believe in our own ability and worth, so that our art will spread to each of the world. From time to time, we should be Asian artists who are not only intelligent but also sensitive to our own traditions; let us be beacons to guide others in making successful artworks.

(artist/Malaysia)

On Thought and Action

Cui Guo Qiang

The Search for a Methodology

Since around the time of my "Primeval Fireball" exhibition, I have executed a series of works under the title "Project for Extraterrestrials" that involved primarily the use of gunpowder as their medium and the earth as their canvas. These works sought to explore the concepts of people venturing out into the universe and also the idea of extraterrestrial eyes watching the earth as methods of communicating with the universe. In several works since my "*Lóng Mài* — the Dragon Meridian" exhibition (including works at the Museum of Modern Art, Oxford, and the Iwaki City Art Museum) in which I used methods such as burning medicinal herbs and having people drink herb teas with the aim of treating both the body and the mind, I have created a form of communication between humankind and the universe and, in doing so, have deepened my awareness of life as an integral part of the universe. By directly connecting these works to biological life, I sought to create a bridge between the internal and external universes. In the end, art, like life processes, is not something that can exist independently. It exists in relation to a wide range of natural, social, cultural and historical factors. Often these factors stand in contradiction of each other, and it is the fundamental monistic tenet underlying all Eastern culture to accept these contradictions and seek harmony and coexistence within them. Clearly this Eastern way of thinking demands that we seek a new methodology for art. The search for a "unifying force" that integrates art with the universe, nature, life and civilization, can certainly be said to be similar to the long-held dream of scientists to find a "universal ground" of interrelationship for all things in the Universe. So, the presentation of a series of works based on this kind of methodology is not an attempt to return to a narrow Eastern world but an attempt to travel in time, like the *feng shui* masters and alchemists of ancient times, from the very origins of mankind into the future; to move freely back and forth between the East and West, from micro to macro realms, and between global and local worlds.

The Feng Shui Concept and Contemporary Asian Art

Feng shui is the ancient art of searching out the flow of *qi* (the vital force, energy permeating all things) in an environment and attempting to manipulating it in ways that promote the prosperity of the people living in that environment. What was done with the Mito project was to display in the ATM Contemporary Art Center a model based on *feng shui* concepts with a *yang* home (a city plan

and photos) and a *yin* home (graveyard) and pine trees, etc. Even after this exhibition was over, outside the art center, study is to be made with specialists using ancient *feng shui* concepts and plans are to be submitted for urban development projects aimed at encouraging even greater prosperity for the city in the future and carried out in cooperation with city development experts. In this way, a work of art becomes connected to the future of the city, much like inserting an acupuncture needle in one of the therapeutic points of the living organism that is a city.

By traveling across many lands, people learned long ago how to recognize the "acupuncture points" of the earth. With this knowledge, they have sought to build their cities in places where heaven, earth, humankind and the forces of *yin* and *yang* stand in balance and where the flow of *qi* is strongest. Furthermore, in order to encourage the prosperity of these cities they have sought out the vital "points" as sites to build pagodas and temples, or else palaces, government buildings and other important cultural buildings. In this way, man-made structures became organic entities standing in a relationship of mutual contemplation with heaven, earth, humankind and the gods.

The Eastern way of building cities is similar to Eastern medicine in that they both make full use of the physical conditions of the natural environment and the materials at hand and go even beyond that to tap the naturally occurring vital energy of the life forms, buildings and the city as a functioning entity. Behind these disciplines lies a philosophy of unity based on a dialectic sense of mutual interdependence expressed in Chinese by such terms as "harmonizing view" (balance with nature), "true form view" (perception of unity with all things in the universe) and "essence-seeking view" (ignoring superficialities in the search for the essential). This kind of synthetic philosophy did not stop with an application of the universe and *yin* and *yang* concepts to such things as ancient medicine and city planning, and it has also functioned dynamically in both micro and macro realms, developing with exceptional freedom as a practical, expressive methodology with as much variety as the myriad things of the natural world. Of course, I will not deal here with the question of what practical value the methods of the ancient art of *feng shui* have in the presence of today's highly developed scientific technologies. However, with regard to cultural activities like constructing buildings or planning city development, the ancient philosophy of *feng shui* aims at grasping human activities in broad perspective by searching for positive interaction with heaven and earth and a sense of unity between humankind and nature, as well as seeking for temporal and special unity in choosing auspicious times and directions for action. In this way man-made structures, including works of art, can have a direct relation to the land, its life forms and the culture and history that develop there. Thus, what results is an active involvement in and shaping of society.

Today, as we begin to perceive the limitations of 20th-century Western-style Modernism, we are reluctant to adopt Western forms of expression and thought as they are, leaving us to view the world with Eastern eyes and reason with an Eastern methodology of thought. Considering the present lack of dynamism of Asian art as a means of expressing the world we live in, there is certainly good reason for us to reevaluate the significance of *feng shui* in the contemporary context. This process would be an application of a world view that grew out of the historical context of the land in which we live by means of an effective methodology.

As Asians today, isn't it our task to take the courage and spirit with which we have tried to devote ourselves to the West over the past one hundred years and redirect them toward the East once again by liberating our way of thinking, our methodology and our systems and looking at our land and traditions with new eyes? Not only does this mean a return to and revitalization of our traditions, but also bringing creative energy and a renaissance approach to the problems that confront the world community today.

(artist/China)

(Translated by Robert Reed/Kuzuha Translation)

The Possibilities and Impossibilities of Asia

Miyajima Tatsuo

I have visited eighteen different countries in connection with art exhibitions. I have learned about the situation of art in different places, made many friends throughout the world, and gained a great deal of information through real experience. As a contemporary artist I have constantly tried to maintain a global approach, but have never forgotten my Japanese origin. Therefore, this symposium holds great interest for me, and I believe that the fact that it is being held is highly significant. Thinking about contemporary art in terms of Asia is a realistic first step in the gradual process of reaching the final destination of a global art which I am seeking. The chair, Mr. Shimizu, has given me a list of questions, and I will address them as I attempt to organize my thoughts on the possibilities and impossibilities of Asia.

I. No Single Artistic Standard Applies to All Countries

We may think simplistically that contemporary art is international, but the ideas, values, and standards of art differ with region, ethnic group, language, religion, culture, education, and era. At the present time, from a rational point of view, contemporary art is not international at all.

The people of Papua New Guinea do not see the art of the world as art. They do not even discriminate between the artificial and the natural.¹

Steven Feld, cultural anthropologist, Univ. of Texas

The question of whether contemporary art is truly international was examined in the exhibition, "*Magiciens de la Terre* (Magians of the Earth)" held at the Pompidou Center in Paris in 1989.

The world of contemporary art is composed of a very limited number of regions and people. It only functions within a certain context. Understanding this context is a necessary premise for understanding contemporary art. What then are the conditions which determine this context?

II. Conditions Determining the Context of Contemporary Art

- It appears in industrial, economically advanced regions.

- It has an urban function.
- It flourishes in an environment with widespread education and access to information through the mass media.
- Naturally, there are some people even in advanced, industrial countries who do not belong to this context.
- There are also people in countries which are not advanced or industrialized who are connected to it.

Contemporary art functions in places with the conditions I have described. In these countries and regions, people's perceptions tend to be unified by the dissemination of the news media, technology and education. This process creates certain common foundations, and these countries and regions can be thought of as belonging to the same context. Naturally, people living in other regions who have the sort of perception described above may be linked with this context on an individual basis. The world of contemporary art itself is much smaller than this overall context. Naturally, the countries of Europe and North America are a part of the environment which produced contemporary art, but even in these countries the most popular art is Impressionism. I have been told that only one or two percent of the people in America and Europe have an appreciation for contemporary art even though these countries are the most advanced in this area. In other words, the world of contemporary art is a minority group made up of very small numbers of people from different countries who are linked together by a common interest. From a global point of view, it is an extremely "small world" and can hardly be described in terms of a common language.

What are the possibilities, then, of this small world of contemporary art in the larger world?

III. Future Field of Action for Contemporary Art

"Originality" of particular peoples and regions did not exist at the beginning of history. Their differences were "natural," and they existed in an undefined, chaotic state. People were not aware of their distinguishing characteristics until they saw themselves in comparison to others and their cultural characteristics took the definite form of art. That was when "originality" was discovered.

For example, the view of nature found in ink landscape paintings which is considered to be "original" to Japan was not Japanese in the beginning. It was first discovered in China and Korea. When Japanese artists looked at these ink landscape paintings they saw qualities similar to Japanese nature and developed them further. Eventually, artists like Sesshū and Tōhaku created a Japanese style of landscape painting. It was a "frame" through which artists observed Japanese nature. It is interesting that this artistic frame (in which the Japanese view of nature is identical to the view of nature found in Chinese landscape paintings) has determined the Japanese look at nature even today.

Thus, a certain frame was produced in art, and certain "original" qualities which were quite

vague to begin with, certain concepts of nature and of human life, were given form within this frame as if they had always existed. And these concepts still have a decisive effect on us.

The completely random cannot be conceived of or function as such. Some sort of frame is necessary to make the random conceivable or capable of functioning. This, however is not truly random.²

Gian-Carlo Rota, mathematician, M. I. T.

A state (nature) and observation are not the same.³

Udagawa Takeshi, physicist, Univ. of Texas

The Copenhagen hypothesis

The object exists only as it is observed.

Neils Bohr, physicist

So what is the frame of the contemporary artist, the horizon which we seek? Since contemporary art functions within the context outlined above (advanced industrial country, urban function, access to education and media information), regional and ethnic frames are no longer of any use. Although the group of people encompassed by the frame of contemporary art is quite small, it is made up of individuals who have many differences. Also, in the modern urban context, there is a tendency toward mixing of culture and original qualities (due to uniformity of technology and information). Eventually, under these circumstances, the "original" characteristics of different ethnic groups and regions lose its meaning. Within this frame, similarities take on more meaning than differences.

This frame is the place (field) where contemporary art seeks to operate, and contemporary artists are trying to create a global frame that takes in all of humankind, to make works which function within the context of the entire human race. While the world of contemporary art is small, the creation of such a global frame could be extremely important and meaningful in the world of the future.

IV. Limited Possibilities of the Frame of Asia

We often use the category of Asia when discussing contemporary art, as we are doing in this symposium, but I experience vague feelings of anxiety as soon as this category is introduced. Why? Because of three fundamental limitations on the category of Asia.

1. Impossibility of an exact definition of Asia

In cultural anthropology it is necessary to define the category one is working with in order to investigate the particular features of a region. However, it is impossible to define the

region of Asia precisely in terms of language, race, religion, or as an ecological area.

2. Impossibility of maintaining a purely Asian culture

If it is assumed that there is a region known as Asia, is there an "original" culture preserved in that region? Asia has been mixed with Western culture through the colonial policies of the Western nations and the active industrialization of the Asian countries in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. There are very few regions where any sort of original Asian culture is preserved and it is difficult to characterize it.

3. Impossibility of limiting contemporary art to Asia

As I have stated, it is the task of contemporary art to mount a continual challenge against conventional values, cultural ideals, and standards of beauty. That is, the reason for being of contemporary art is to transcend particular regions or cultures and become global. Its purpose is to imagine and create a new cultural region and world image, not a particular region or culture.

The same points can be made with respect to the "West." Considering these limitations, the category of Asia or of the West has little meaning in contemporary art. Does this mean that it is impossible to use the category of Asia at all?

V. Methodological Role of Asia in Achieving a Global Frame

1. The limits of Eurocentrism

The evolutionary, deterministic, and reductionist thinking of the West has led to contradictions even in the world of mathematics. That means that we have arrived at the point where things cannot be solved by these methods.

People have supposed that visible matter is assembled from units smaller than itself, and that if one goes on dividing it as far as possible one arrives at the minimum units which Democritus called "atoms" and which today are called "particles," e.g., "protons" and "electrons." However, this idea may be entirely mistaken. That is, a minimum constituent particle which cannot be divided further may not exist at all. Or it may be possible to go on dividing up matter forever, but since it is ultimately energy and not particles which is transformed into matter, the parts are no longer smaller than the original substance which has been divided. If that is the case, what was the beginning?⁴

Werner Karl Heisenberg, physicist

Our view of nature is fundamentally changing toward something multiple,

temporal, and complex. For a long time a mechanistic world view has dominated the West. In this world view, the world was seen as a great automaton. At present, we understand that we live in a pluralistic world.⁵

Ilya Prigogine, physicist

2. The role played by Asia

Asian philosophy and culture has played an important role in breaking through the limits of Western thought. A holistic rather than reductive view of the world has existed in Asia since ancient times. This wisdom has often proved useful in transcending the limits of the West. In art history as well, there are many "happy marriages" like that between *ukiyo-e* and Impressionism. However, these "happy marriages" are isolated instances and eventually have been incorporated into the evolutionistic art history of the West. In these cases, Asia is still just an object of consumption. And for the West, there is no revolutionary change in the frame itself which would take it beyond its basic limitations.

3. East x West = Global Frame

The future relationship of Asia and the West must be complementary. Neither side's position can be clarified without the existence of the other and neither can transcend its own limits alone.

Gödel's indeterminacy theorem

For any mathematical system which contains the natural number system, the consistency of the system cannot be proved within the system.

Kurt Gödel, mathematician (1906-1978)

In order to build this expanded frame and complementary relationship for the future, Asia and the West must enter into a more intimate marriage to create a global frame including all human beings. This would be an completely new experimental undertaking.

4. The role of Asia in creating a global frame

Here are some of the things which might be done by Asia in conducting this new experiment.

- Raising serious doubts about the previous monistic, reductive, evolutionary art history of the West.
- Speaking to the West about limitations (since Asia has much experience with limitations).
- Accelerating the growth of understanding of other cultures (by creating more similarities in the basic conditions of life).
- Exploring the possibilities of joint projects (already taking place in the field of science).
- Proposing holistic approaches to creating a global frame.

5. Asia as part of the process leading to the final goal

Today, there are few people who deny the basic ideals of the United Nations. However, many mistakes are made in carrying out these ideals. If one focused on these mistakes in methodology and denied the United Nations itself, human ideals would never be achieved on a global scale.

I have discussed the possibilities and impossibilities of Asia in contemporary art. That is because I believe that the possibilities can only be discussed after the "impossibilities" are truly understood. I believe that the final destination of contemporary art is close to the ideals of the United Nations. This new territory is still far away. It would be impossible to get there immediately, even if one wanted to. I believe that Asia can contribute realistic methods for achieving the ultimate goal. However, Asia will fail in performing its role in this process and may even harm it if it loses sight of the ultimate goal and becomes overly involved in domestic concerns. To me Asia is nothing more than a methodology, a stage in a process.

(artist/Japan)

(Translated by Stanley N. Anderson)

Notes

1. Quoted from an interview with Steven Feld on April 26, 1994.
2. Quoted from an interview with Gian-Carlo Rota on April 20, 1994.
3. Quoted from an interview with Udagawa Takeshi on April 25, 1994.
4. Werner Karl Heisenberg, *Bubun to Zentai* (Der Teil und das Ganze), trans. Yamazaki Kazuo (Tokyo: Misuzu Shobō, 1991), p. 214.
5. Ilya Prigogine, *Konton Kara no Chitsujo*, trans. Fushimi Kōji, Fushimi Yuzuru, Matsueda Hideaki (Tokyo: Misuzu Shobō, 1993), p. 27.

Indonesian Contemporary Art, a Continuation

Jim Supangkat

As a matter of fact, none of the thinking or ideas in Indonesia put forth had a clear basis in framing Indonesian modern and contemporary art. Up to now every concept broached in relation to modern art has always circled back to a never ending dilemma. Like in many developing countries, modern and contemporary art practised in Indonesia based on an "unidentified" basis. Is it part of the modern and contemporary art of the world which doesn't consider national boundaries? Is it part of an International contemporary art which shows a national identity? Is it a continual development of a traditional art already existed?

The confusing condition could be seen through the argument over whether it would be best to use the expression "modern Indonesian art", or the phrase "Indonesian modern art." This debate aptly illustrates the great extent of uncertainty over whether there even is such a thing as an Indonesian modern art — also, Indonesian contemporary art.

There has been an effort to adapt and apply the framework of world modern art through theories based in the history of art. Using this approach, a number of art critics have applied the categorization of styles in world modern art. This application has given rise to the use of terms like realism, naturalism, expressionism, surrealism and hyper-realism in Indonesian modern art. It is already widely known that the result of the application of this system of categorization ended with a great deal of confusion.

No doubt the observation of Indonesian modern and contemporary art cannot be done within an aesthetic framework alone. Basically, the observation requires a holistic approach which, among other things, takes into account the pattern of its development and discourse of modern and contemporary art practiced in Indonesia. This type of approach has the most potential to succeed as a framework which might be fits to the terms Indonesian Modern Art and Indonesian contemporary Art.

The Interpretation of Modernism in Indonesia

Although it cannot be debated that Indonesian modern art constitutes an adaptation of (world) modern art, the lack of information, interpretation, differences in backgrounds and geographic setting have resulted in a "different" kind of modern art. There is no reason to deny this fact, though this statement has the risk of being perceived as to lay stress on otherness. In fact there are in Indonesian modern art a number of backgrounds of thought that contradict the concepts of

modernism and universalism altogether. For example, the faith in "identity," the belief in the validity of interaction with traditional forms of art, and the advocating of high levels of community values.

The presence of the principles of modernism in Indonesian art is reflected in the statements of the painter Sudjojono. The thinking and the writing of this artist in the 1940s provide a clear look at the basis laid for modernism in Indonesia. Within the *Persatuan Ahli Gambar Indonesia* (Persagi) movement established in 1937 — whose activities marked the beginning of modern art in Indonesia — Sudjojono was the one thinker to fully understand the background of modernism. Therefore, Sudjojono's thinking and interpretations can be used as material through which to observe just how deeply the understanding of modernism influenced Indonesian modern art.

In 1947, he said, "Art must be as independent as possible from all moral ties and traditions in order to grow fruitfully, freshly and freely."¹ This view shows clearly that the type of painting that Sudjojono advocated was based in the concepts of modernism, and conceptually not related to any Indonesian traditional visual art.

However, did this modernism also have its roots in the avant-garde tradition? This is a major question. The reason behind Sudjojono's concept of painting which rejected his predecessors' tendency, painting of landscapes which based on the aesthetic principles of naturalism, is a clear example. What he disliked about the theme of landscapes was that painting them could be interpreted as serving the tastes of the Dutch Colonial Society who saw the natural environment of Indonesia as beautiful — cynical he called the style *Mooi Indie* (beautiful Indie).

Sudjojono's reaction then was rooted in a matter far removed from art. As a matter of fact he never really denied the aesthetic principles of naturalism. It has been noted that he returned to realistic imagery after previously promoting the idea of spontaneous and expressive painting, with the aim of producing paintings that could be understood by the public.

He proclaimed the artists within the Persagi Movement as "New Artist". This statement was not related to a spirit of exploration or seeking a breakthrough. The conception was meant for differentiating the indigenous artists from the established Dutch painters and Indonesian pro-Dutch painters of the time. Sudjojono said in 1939, "Do not just paint only tranquil village scenes full of huts, and blue-tinted mountains. New artists also draw the sugar cane processing plants and the emaciated farmers."²

It is difficult then to see Sudjojono's principles of art as fully connected to the spirit of the avant-garde. The freedom that Sudjojono was advocating was not the freedom of the individual, but the freedom frequently identified with the struggle against suppression. He also made no effort to explore, to seek out breakthroughs in art through the rejection of set rules and general standards. On the other hand, he placed the morality and the interests of the masses in the most respected place in his creative process. This emphasis on social concern can be seen in all of his canvasses.

It was, therefore, a matter of course that Sudjojono would not object to the concept of national identity. And it is very difficult, if not impossible, to note any indication of universalism in Sudjojono's statements. This kind of stance would automatically group Indonesia and the Dutch

together as one people.

If this was the case, just how strongly can Sudjojono's modernism, which was not based in the spirit of the avant-grade, be interpreted as being a part of the modernism? This question cannot be answered on the basis of aesthetics alone because the fact is that the modernism born in Indonesia through political ends was not intended to uproot the basis of established thinking in order to achieve the ideals of progress.

The emergence of modernity worldwide was marked by three major incidents: The Industrial Revolution, the French Revolution, and the birth of democracy in the United States of America.³ Within the development of modern art in the mainstream (modern art in Europe and the United States), progress of mankind, became the supreme expression. This can be seen in the basic thinking behind movements in the very beginnings of 20th century modern art.

In Indonesia, modernity, was shadowed more by the French Revolution and the birth of democracy in America. The perception of these events led to the development of nationalism. Therefore, it should not seem strange that the kind of individual freedom, independence and the right to advancement that Sudjojono advocated was a far cry from the progress among mankind reflected in the development of modern art.

The differences apparent in the thinking of Sudjojono have shadowed the entire development of modern art in Indonesia. While modern art in the mainstream was marked by a series of significant changes in styles, the development of Indonesian modern art exhibited only few changes in artistic styles. What controversies did emerge followed the line of thinking of social and political groupings as can be seen in the views of Sudjojono.

The Debate: Yogya School and Bandung School

Sudjojono's stance, which placed the masses in a high position reflected in the development of Indonesian modern art in the city of Yogyakarta. Some critics named this genre as the Yogya School. Although the painters here split up into a number of political organizations, their paintings were heavily influenced by the aesthetic principles outlined by Sudjojono. He once commented:

"... the artist must paint the sugar factories and the thin farmers, as well as the expensive cars of the wealthy and the trousers sported by the youths This is our situation, this is our reality. And paintings done with a realistic spirit, processed in the life of the artists' themselves, and related directly to this experience of daily routine, and created and set out (on display) ... are motivated by a forceful internal pressure"⁴

Indonesian leading art historian the late Sanento Yuliman saw two poles interacted within the process of painting based on Sudjojono's principle. The "objective" pole, or the world around the artists, led to the development of images and the drawing of conclusions. The "subjective" pole, on the other hand, was psychological in nature, involving the processing of impressions and

assumptions.

In his book on *Seni Lukis Indonesia Baru, Sebuah Pengantar* (Indonesian Modern art history), Sanento Yuliman wrote, "From the interaction between these two poles of thought, the most influential concept of Sudjojono's emerged: "A painting is the soul made visible." This concept provided the basis for paintings full of emotion, painted directly from the object in a great emotional outpouring. Spontaneous lines and brushstrokes were characteristic of this approach, as were the dull colors resulting from the mixing of the paint on the canvas. And because most of the artists were interested in expressing their feelings about the problems existing in society, their works were full of ferocious tension."⁵

Most works of the major artists of the Yogya School — Affandi, Hendra Gunawan, Agus Djaja, Henk Ngantung, Solihin and Hariyadi — could be said as showing the scenery of the people's every day life in heavy brushstrokes (this is then the "objective" pole, the world around the artist). None of them had ever made abstract paintings. Despite the spontaneous lines often resulted deformed images, the scenery as a whole were always clear. This is then the style which had dominated the Indonesian modern art in the period of the 1940s and 1950s and continued within the Yogya School. Works of several contemporary artists in Yogyakarta, like Bagong Kusudiardjo, Kartika Koberl, Sudjana Kerton and Djoko Pekik, still showed this expressionistic tendency.

Within the Yogya school, there was also no discernible confrontation between modernism and tradition. In fact, the development of modern art in Yogyakarta was touched frequently by a number of traditional aesthetic principles and resulted in the decorative tendency. Sanento Yuliman saw this tendency as the dominance of the "subjective" pole.

He wrote "Among the tendencies to emerge in the period between 1940 and 1950, was the trend toward the decorative in which the objective pole was completely left behind. This style of painting was characterized by the use of line. Each form depicted was converted into carefully organized two dimensional shapes. It was in line with this trend that Kartono Yudhokusumo painted a corner of a guerrilla battlefield in Wonosari (1947)."⁶

Kartono's paintings started to show the decorative tendency when he and a number of his followers stayed in Bali between 1947-48.⁷ He consciously adapted this style because in his opinion, the decorativeness shows an Indonesian identity.

In 1950, Hendra followed in the steps of Kartono, and combined his spontaneous line with decorative patterns. Through this particular painter, the tendency toward the decorative spread to a number of important artists in Yogyakarta and became an important genre within the Yogya School. The most important among them were Widayat, Abbas Alibasyah, Mulriyadi W, Kusnadi and Ida Hajar.

Of course there is a part of Indonesian modern art development which based on the freedom of expression was once proclaimed by Sudjojono — this should be considered as an adaptation of modernism. This segment of the development, which could be seen as more related to modern art, showed in Bandung, within the Department of Fine Art and Design, Bandung Institute of Technology. It was here that modernism principles was most apparent, though it should be seen as

adapted modernism which followed by interpretation and selection (not the entire modernism was adapted). In Yogyakarta signs of modernism were hard to see because of the localness and also lack of knowledge on modern art basic principles.

Though The Bandung School also showed localness and only took modernism principles as basis of its development (it could not be denied that this kind of visual art, which spread out all over the world, was based on Western art tradition). The Bandung School was accused by the Yogya School as Westernized. The accusation in one side was based on the rejection of Westernization, proclaimed by the artists of The Yogya School, but in the other side was a result of a confused perception in framing modern art practiced in Indonesia.

Because of its tendency, the development of modern art within The Bandung School has come to be referred as the results of the laboratory of the West, which produced works of art usually difficult to be understood. This criticism which expressed mostly by Yogyakarta-based critics, started especially when artists in Bandung introduced abstract paintings and sculptures.

However, the trend toward abstraction was a unique development because it occurred by chance. It cannot be determined conclusively where the artists got the idea and how it was passed on. In Indonesia the tendency toward abstraction, which in some way exhibits the principles of modernism, can be seen to have occurred through formal, academic art education, both in Yogya and in Bandung.

In the 1940–1950 period of growth, there were no fine art academies because the artists were decidedly anti-academic. This had its roots in the conflict between Sudjojono and the painters who had graduated from academies, whom Sudjojono accused of favoring the Dutch. When the self taught artists in Yogya formed an academy — Akademi Seni Rupa Indonesia (ASRI) — in 1950, Sudjojono anti-academic principle could still clearly be seen. Then modernism and basic principles of modern art never seriously considered here.

The adaptation of modern art could not clearly be seen until the development of art education emerged in Bandung, in 1947, through the *Universitaire Leergang tot Opeiding voor Tekenleraren* (Higher Education Institute for Drawing Teachers), which was directed by a Dutchman, Ries Mulder. In 1951, this school became a fine art academy, and is the basis of The Bandung School.

The emergence of this academy fueled the tendency toward abstraction. And there were several factors providing a basis for this trend. Among them was the influence of modernism introduced through Dutch teachers and a number of Indonesian painters who returned home after having studied abroad. This abstract tendency originated with Ahmad Sadali in 1953. He broke up the objects depicted on the surface of his canvases through the cutting up of structure with both straight and curved lines. Then he would fill the resulting geometric shapes with color. In this way, his paintings focused on the placement of line and color fields. The depiction of objects was thus submerged in this network of line and color.

Although the academies played a role in this tendency toward abstraction (all of the pioneers in abstraction were teachers) this trend, in Sanento Yuliman's opinion⁸, did not occur suddenly. The basis for the tendency toward the abstract had been laid long beforehand. This could be seen in the

"ideology of art" embraced by the artists who set forth its outline in the 1940s.

Within this ideology of art, there appeared a sense of respect toward artists as individuals who are free to create their own forms and styles. There was also a belief that the aesthetic elements and their organization were independent of the object being depicted. As early as the Persagi period, — and into the years that followed — Sudjojono said that brush strokes, colors, and forms, the aesthetic elements and their composition, were vital to producing important works of art.

From 1960 on, abstract painting developed significantly. In that year, Srihadi Soedarsono involved himself in two types of experimentation. He explored the possibilities of splashes of bright color, as well as combining scraps of paper and spontaneous brush strokes. Through this experimentation, Srihadi produced abstract paintings. But Srihadi only touched on this exploration momentarily. In 1962, he returned to producing expressive figurative paintings.

Then in 1963, Ahmad Sadali left behind his geometric patterns. And in his artistic exploration he used muted colors such as ocher, deep blue and black. Texture also played a significant role, expressing the processes of nature through depressions, wrinkling, cracking, peeling, scraping and disintegration.

There were no wide, emotional brush strokes to be found on Sadali's canvasses. All of the cracks and created texture were set into place carefully and deliberately. The structures emerging were squares reminiscent of the Kabah. And the triangular forms he used followed the outline of mountains or the tree of life. And in the midst of this abstraction on his canvasses, Sadali would set excerpts from the holy verses of the Al Quran.

In Bandung 1970s A.D. Pirous, has embraced Arabic Calligraphy as the central element of his paintings. His sources of Arabic Calligraphy are the manuscripts and tombstones of Aceh, the place of his birth. Pirous records a verse from the Al Quran and sets forth its meaning in the context of expression of the elements of nature.

Popo Iskandar also began with objects from nature, but in a lyrical manner, with the least possible use of the tools of expression; minimal color and minimal line. Thus bamboo trees became curving lines on a white color field. And further down the line his experimentation, Popo became preoccupied with putting forth lyrical expression through the subject matter of cats.

Although the abstract painting, which emerged thus, took on many forms and styles, it was unified and characterized by one common element: lyricism. All of this abstraction was a result of the expression of the emotions and artistic feelings of the artists.

The Emergence of the Discourse

As a result of openness, the spirit of modernism existed more clearly in Indonesia after the 1970s. More attention was given to the development of art. One important sign of this was the establishment of the Taman Ismail Marzuki Art Center in Jakarta in 1968. At this center, artists, for the first time ever, had the chance to express themselves as fully as possible. Their activities were

paid for, without any concern for whether the public understood what the artist was doing or not.

This art center was built upon the tradition of protecting the freedom of expression of artists, adapted from modernism principle. The Jakarta Municipal Administration under the governorship of Ali Sadikin — a very liberal figure — consciously became a patron of The Arts. Needless to say most of the activities here reflected avant-gardism. And within a short period of time, the "art-for-art's-sake" principle became a very popular issue among the mass media debates.

However, the development which could be seen as closer to modernism principles was perceived as strangeness. People rejected most of the art activities at the Taman Ismail Marzuki Art Centre. It was at this center that the theorist Dr. Soedjoko, a lecturer at the Department of Fine Art and Design, Bandung Institute of Technology, read his accusation at the Art Festival in 1974. In his speech entitled "We Too Have Romantic Agony,"⁹ he sharply reprimanded artists who felt they were of greater value than other people.

Soedjoko's cynical criticism, like that of other critics of avant-gardism, contained a rejection of the principle of "art-for-art's-sake." He was of the opinion that the works of Indonesian modern art of the time were trapped in a tradition of the bourgeois and could only be understood by a small segment of the elite populous of the larger cities. This modern art, which got a great deal of attention at the Art Center had shoved out the traditional arts which he viewed as the possession of the general public.

In the same speech, Soedjoko promoted Indonesian craft tradition with its wide range of forms. He took the extreme stance that it was craft that should be recognized as the visual art of Indonesia. He rejected the idea that there was any use for a Indonesian modern art. This emphasis on applied art and the function inherent in it indicated Soedjoko's critical attitude toward the accepted definition of art which divided art into pure art and applied arts. This definition, for all intents and purposes, was based in the high art frame of reference. Soedjoko was certain that the high art conception need not be adhered to any further. Applied art also could be expressive and hold values.

Within Soedjoko's views one can perceive the birth of a tendency for the critical view toward modernism in Indonesia to take on International dimensions with the stance that the tradition of modernism should be dismantled all together. Soedjoko's statement could be seen as the emergence of discourse (*wacana*) of Indonesian contemporary art, which in one side shows the rethinking of adaptation of modern art principles, and the other side shows the search of localness. The discourse, by coincidence, shows similarities with the discourse of (international) contemporary art, and art in postmodernism sense.

This is perhaps the important tendency in Indonesian contemporary art: to become a part of the currents of opposition to the tradition of the modernism in the mainstream in the international art world. Not only become followers, but actively contribute critical points of view based on local affairs.

The tendency toward rethinking of adaptation of modernism principles can also be seen in the principles set forth by the New Art Movement, which was introduced at the Taman Ismail Marzuki

Art Center in 1975. As is the case with most contemporary art movements, this movement manifested a "new art" and stepped out of the boundaries of art which was shadowed by the tradition of modernism. But the "new art" introduced here was not only a new art conception. The redefinition also showed an attitude against the adaptation of universalism and the High Art frame of reference, which again showed the search of localness in the sense the local perception on art.

Sanento Yuliman, who was involved in this movement stated that the aesthetic framework of High Art was not the only set of principles that could be applied to art. He was certain that the traditional art, which was considered a thing of the past, which was based on a different frame of reference was actually still developing. Here, the search of localness in the discourse of Indonesian contemporary art, then, became more clearer.

Indonesian Contemporary Art

The art revolution of the 1970s burst forth in 1974, through a controversy arising from the protest of a number of young artists. They were protesting the Second Jakarta Painting Biennial of 1974, which was presented at the Taman Ismail Marzuki Art Center. The outcry, known as the "Black December Statement" questioned the presentation of prizes for the best five paintings displayed in that biennial. The paintings selected all tended toward the decorative.

To the protesters, the selection of the five decorative paintings reflected the judges' concept of the Indonesian identity. The protesters viewed decorative art which lacked socio-political aspects as uncharacteristic of the true face of Indonesia. They felt that the decorative image was being forced upon the public through the power of an institution of art. The protesters were of the opinion that to develop the painting of Indonesia required a spirit which covered the value orientation toward the people's social life, politics and economy.

The protesters also viewed the decorative style of painting as a sign of the stagnation of creativity in Indonesian art. They saw this genre as reflecting the outdated concepts embraced by the establishment. The concept they countered with was strongly critical as if they were tearing the established concepts apart and "playing around." A year before the controversy in Jakarta, the protesters, known as rebels in Yogyakarta, had held an exhibition of collages there, which included one canvas onto which underpants were glued. This was viewed as a blatant insult toward the art of painting.

The team of judges viewed the rebels counter concept as unfortunate foreign influence. In their official announcement, the judges declared the young artists' statement as a sign they had swallowed in entirety a concept that they did not even understand. In their announcement, the judges noted: "The effort to play about with just about anything, as long as it is new and strange, should be viewed as only explorative experimentation for the sake of experimentation, all of which indicates a lack of creativity."¹⁰

The reaction of the team of judges only served to further spur on the rebellion. In 1975, the young artists of Yogyakarta and Bandung formed the New Art Movement. The principle of opposition of this movement was not limited to the criticism of the creative stagnation of decorative art, but was much more basic than that: it constituted the rejection of the entire tradition of modernism which was the basis for the developments in Indonesian art in the 1940-1960 period.

This movement declared a "new art" that no longer believed in the code of painting and the code of sculpture. In a statement released in 1975, the movement noted: "When creating a work of art one must throw out the accepted image of 'fine art' in place up to now (the group viewed it as 'old art'); that being art that is limited to the forms of painting, sculpture and print making."¹¹

A large segment of the artworks exhibited by this movement between 1975 and 1979 were installations, ready-mades, photographs, found objects and paintings done in the photo-realism genre. In 1976, this movement presented the "Exhibition of New Art Concepts" in Jakarta, which was a display of texts setting forth the views of the movement in opposition to modernism: avant-gardism, the purity of expression, the individualism of the artist, the tendency toward the decorative as acceptable or formal art.

The polemic emerging between two critics, Sudarmaji and Kusnadi, concerning the New Art Movement Exhibition of 1975, strengthened the New Art Movement's rejection of modernism. Kusnadi, a member of the team of judges for the 1974 exhibition, severely criticized the New Art Movement Exhibition as having left behind the principles of art. Kusnadi wrote: "The principles which blur artistic values and aesthetics, which are articulated by the participants or appear in their creations, are simply signs of their fleeing from their failure to create serious works in the field of pure art."¹²

Sudarmadji's response clarified Kusnadi's position as a modernist and the stance of the New Art Movement as rejecting modernism. This critic wrote that Kusnadi was mired down in intrinsic criticism, while the type of critical approach required to evaluate the creations of the New Art Movement was that of contextual criticism.

In 1977, the art rebellion emerged once again in Yogyakarta in the "What is an Identity?" exhibition. The basic thinking behind this show was the criticism of the imposition of an Indonesian identity in art by formal institutions. This exhibition questioned the formulation of an Indonesian identity, both that which constituted the "Indonesianization" of styles adapted from the West and the "Indonesianization" of traditional ethnic artforms.

At this exhibition the participants displayed paintings done in the photo-realism genre that contained references to the symbols of mass culture. To the artists, these symbols reflected contemporary Indonesian society, without dealing with the issue of a conceptual background in the West or the East or Indonesia itself. No single object was depicted in these paintings. Each of the artists mixed a variety of images into their compositions, with some even resorting to collage, or including advertising symbols.

The result of this was first noticeable in Yogyakarta in the collages produced by the painter Suatmadji at the time, which involved the gluing on of all kinds of pictures and photographs.

Within the development of his works, Suatmadji made "collage paintings," which were not the result of pasting on the photographs, but rather painting the photographs in a collage-like arrangement.

In 1978, the art rebellion made itself felt again in the "Presentation Exhibition" in Jakarta. This exhibition criticized the depolitization of Indonesian art, a factor considered out of step with the social and political conditions. This exhibition was linked to the political situation at that time, in which confrontations between students and the government were frequent. The idiom of the exhibition was photo-journalistic in nature, with texts as a part of the original documentation.

As a matter of fact, the art uprisings of the 1970s in Indonesia had a direct relationship to the depolitization of Indonesian art that occurred in the late 1960s. The decline in the political aspects of art was a result of the 30 September 1965 rebellion movement, in which the Indonesian communist party made a bid at political domination. Almost all sectors were suddenly depolitized in the wake of the failed coup.

The depolitization of art was most apparent in the disappearance of the large number of groups of artists that had existed in the 1950s and the 1960s. Because these groups were affiliated with the communist party, they had been highly influential art institutions during those decades.

With the disappearance of these art organizations the art academies gained influence as gathering places for artists which were not affiliated with political parties. Out of these conditions emerged official art institutes due to the fact that the academies were state-run art bodies. And from these institutions arose a tendency to develop a "formal art" which sought legitimization through support from the government. The style of art thus engineered as an official form was to meet the following requirements: to achieve a uniquely Indonesian image or characteristics, to display the superiority of Indonesian culture and to convey a sense of nationalism bordering on the sacral.

This depolitization resulted in shifts in the basic premises of Indonesian modern art away from contextual art (related to local conditions) to art oriented to internationalism. This tendency spread out even within the Yogya School, who had been known as always expressing localness. This constituted a major change in the development of Indonesian modern art.

From the beginning of the 1940s until the 1960s, Indonesian modern art had always had links with the local social and political conditions. This created an unquestionable place and function for modern art in Indonesian society. At the time, differences or similarities between Indonesian art and international art was never an issue since the relationship of art to the people provided a strong base for its development.

When, at the end of the 1960s, art began to distance itself from social and political issues, that strong basis was lost. In its place emerged an ambiguous foundation, that being the effort to adapt modernism. This adaptation, which constituted an abrupt shift, not only felt shallow, but it also gave rise to a number of questions.

The New Art Movement which emerged in the 1970s questioned the lack of clarity in the adapted foundation. This was the beginning of the analysis of the definition of *seni rupa* (a

translation from "fine art") in the Indonesian language. This questioning resulted in the redefinition of *seni rupa* in the manifesto of the New Art Movement, which not only attempted to eliminate the borders of *seni rupa* (decoding the arts of painting and sculpture), but also made an issue of the translation of the term "fine art" into the Indonesian language.

The Indonesian language is a modern language adapted from Malay and became a national language in 1928. There are many terms in Indonesian which do not exist in any dialect. *Seni rupa* is among those new terms, and only exists in Indonesian. This phenomenon is related to the reality that visual art, as a specialised, distinct activity, never existed in any Indonesian traditional culture. As a new term, *seni rupa* should be categorised as based on a new conception. Its definition suggests adaptation to a new context. This concept concerns the definition of The 'arts' in classical Javanese culture, known as "*kagunan adiluhung*" (which literally means: 'high art').

There are strong possibilities that the Javanese classical culture already adapted the High Art conception in the eighteenth century. This culture is different from other Indonesian traditional cultures, since it was created by Javanese feudal families and the Dutch colonial government in colonial times at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Consequently, it was a culture with many Western influences, amongst which were its identification in what is conceived of as art activities.

The word *kagunan* is derived from the root "*guna*," which denotes use, or merit, or the ability to create. *Kagunan* is defined as skilled work that is beautiful; a reflection of morality and spiritual character through beauty in painting, music composition, poems, and carving. The word *kagunan* might be derived from an idea analogous to "*mousike techne*," since it is derived from the Sankrit root *guna*, which has a meaning close to "*techne*."¹³

The remarkable thing about *kagunan* is that this definition of the 'arts' sustains a local perception in which a sense of esthetics exists in properties that do not know hierarchical expression. They could be present in a variety of products, whether functional or non-functional. Their values, apparent in paintings or ornaments, derive from the thoughts, character and skills of their creator. In Javanese classical culture many functional products were treated as works of art, and were believed to have a spiritual power. These works, though strongly decorative, have many sophisticated symbolic meanings.

So far nearly none of the thinking of the term *seni rupa* put forth, considered the conception of *kagunan*. This is the main reason why *seni rupa* was usually directly connected with the definition of fine art and seen as a translation. On the other hand, with the inclusion of the conceptions underlying *kagunan*, the term *seni rupa* (visual arts) could be seen as no longer a mere translation. It has acquired a meaning, a concept and an esthetic basis not entirely related to the frame of reference of High Art.

It was from this basis that the New Art Movement evaluated the frame of reference of High Art and the tradition of High Culture. The Movement viewed the esthetic framework of High Art — which was adapted to become the esthetic framework for *seni rupa* — as a disavowal of the existence of "other" art.

The rebellion of the '70s could be seen as the emergence of Indonesian contemporary art. No doubt

the rebellion principles were based on reactions against modernism and adapted modernism altogether. The redefinition of art was not only based on the discourse of contemporary art (in international sense) but also showed the rethinking of the meaning of the word "*seni rupa*" translated from "fine arts", through considering local perception of visual art.

The rebellion also reacted against the development toward formalism. Not only through introducing alternative idioms, but also by criticizing the denial of social influences in art expression.

From National Identity to Cultural Identity

The tendency to promote a redefinition, which issued by Dr. Soedjoko and the New Art Movement, continued through the 1980s. In 1983, Sanento Yuliman, introduced a theory which re-evaluated the understanding of the term "*seni rupa*" in the Indonesian language. He criticized the definition of *seni rupa* as being a stumbling block, as he wrote, "The sole view which assumes that there is only one art, with one system of reference, and only one society, a society assumed to be homogeneous, unified and concrete. A view that prioritizes painting, sometimes along with sculpture, while belittling the other kinds of art. This view has been handed down from the European history of fine art and esthetics. It is this link with the information from advanced industrialized nations that gives rise to the nationalistic issue of 'Indonesianism', which has no end."¹⁴

Within in the framework of his theory, Sanento Yuliman, viewed Indonesian art within its socio-cultural context, as entirely separate from the esthetic principles, which have influenced the definition of fine art. Sanento divided art in Indonesia into two major groups: "high art" and "low art."

The contradiction between high art and low art was not based on the conflict between high culture and mass culture which has been widely discussed. The issue was more than just that of the difference between pure art and applied art. The division between high art and low art in this theory was based on the observation of production and distribution within the Indonesian economic development of the last two decades, as well as analysis of cultural background.

Within this view, fine art is seen as having gotten special attention in Indonesia, including within the understanding of high art. At the same time, low art has the character of the rural areas. Sanento wrote of low art: "This art is related to the economically weak with low living standards and is practiced by the needy and poorly educated (within the understanding of former, modern school education). This art is produced with modest technology, hand-made tools and local materials."

Within this theory, Sanento saw a relationship between low art and traditional art. He wrote: "Low art is related to tradition even though this relationship takes a variety of forms. The term 'traditional' has become confusing because the unadulterated socio-cultural fabric of tradition is

now very difficult to find in Indonesia. The independent, self-reliant common people of the past, who once constituted the largest segment of our society, now only account for one segment of the populace."

Sanento Yuliman's theory clarifies the discourse of Indonesian contemporary art. His criticism, which was a clarity of the cause of most rebellion in the 1970s, reflected the basic principle of the new breed.

The exhibition entitled "*Pasaraya Dunia Fantasi* (Fantasy World in a Supermarket)" which was held at Taman Ismail Marzuki Art Centre was one clear example. The exhibition, which was organized and sponsored by members of the New Art Movement, proclaimed that low art includes the art forms of daily life in a metropolitan (urban) environment.

The exhibition constituted a collaborative effort which featured mass culture symbols — advertisements, comics and magazine art — and items of the low art found in daily life. Besides presenting parodies of advertisements, this exhibition included a number of mass culture and low art products. The processing of this exhibition displayed decided signs of the semiotic — all objects and representations exhibited were organized in a manner based on research.

The *Pasaraya Dunia Fantasi* exhibition no doubt reflected the developments of the 1980s. The emphasis was shifted from the development of art to societal problems which viewed in the larger context of culture. A new tendency could be observed in these collaborative artworks: a shifting from the concept of "national identity" to that of "cultural identity."

The issue of national identity was a matter whose discussion had no end within the context of the development of Indonesian art. National identity was believed to be an identity linked to nationalism, an abstract concept about a people also frequently viewed as a sign of post-colonialism. However, within the development of this concept, the impression arose that it was an "official" matter, identical with the statements being made by the government.

In the decade of the 1970s, this identity was questioned, and in the 1980s it began to shift into that of a societal identity, which involved social and economic dimensions, as well as the aspects of educational levels, cultural backgrounds and shifts in culture. The identity of the society was viewed as being an Indonesian identity. This not being a formulation, but rather a collective representation of cultural reality.

The representation of cultural reality in the art of the 1980s can be viewed through Sanento Yuliman's theory about high art and low art. This means that the artists of the 1980s, who were actually a part of the world of high art, were making an effort to get in touch with low art.

Heri Dono, an artist who emerged into the limelight in the 1980s, made an effort to mix his personal expression with a number of traditions and cultures from among the lower classes. He explored a number of various communities in order to become familiar with their traditions and beliefs and the ways in which they adapted modernity and tradition in the creation of all sorts of projects. And within this environment he would create his own art.

Within this exploration, Heri Dono discovered, among other things, that low art products often do not have an intrinsic value. The products are simply tools which assist within a given tradition

or ritual, and are not media of expression of a given meaning. Within a tradition such as this, the sensation created through art is that of imagination, communication and spiritual conditions. A number of Heri Dono's performance pieces follow this principle.

Heri Dono also tries to mix low art with the symbols of mass culture, which are the signs of a metropolitan society. The results of Heri Dono's observations indicated that when low art touches mass culture, a number of the symbols of mass culture are "decontextualized" and their meaning pluralized. These symbols of mass culture, which create homogeneity in a modern society, take on totally different interpretations within the various communities. This is why the mass culture symbols in Heri Dono's artworks do not exhibit a semiotic approach, but rather a multicultural approach which is extremely diverse.

The efforts to delve into low art can also be observed in the works of several other artist of the 1980s like Anusapati, Hedy Haryanto and Krisna Murti. Their artworks exhibit the modest techniques which are used in the production of low art. They also exhibit the processing of local materials. Within Anusapati's artworks, which focus on the processing of wood, can be observed a way of life characteristic of a very modest environment.

Low art products, a sizable segment of which are functional objects, are largely a part of the people's tradition of making the tools they need in their daily lives. Within a traditional way of life, these objects exhibit personal expression, the characteristics of a given community, and beliefs that have been handed down from generation to generation. The simplicity of the technology used to create these objects reflects traces of the techniques of the past, which in fact are not at all modest. This simplicity is related to any number of meanings, expressions and beliefs.

Biennale Seni Rupa Kontemporer Jakarta 1993 (The Ninth Biennial of Contemporary Art) which was held at the Taman Ismail Marzuki Art Center in 1993 exposed the developments occurring within Indonesia's contemporary art in the 1980s. The participants constituted a new generation of artists, all of them being under 40 years of age. It was the first time that the national biennial showed a curation based on a contemporary point of view.

Up to 1993, the national biennial had been known as the National Biennial of Painting. This tradition points out the fact that in the past, the development of art in Indonesia was dominated by painting. The biggest names in art were those of painters. And the issues and controversies apparent in art circles, were issues focusing on the art of painting.

However, in the last 10 years, the development of painting suddenly seemed to flatten out. The establishment of a network of commercially oriented private sector galleries and art markets led to paintings being viewed as commodities. These galleries absorbed the extensive potential of painting in Indonesia and many artists began making market trends a priority.

In the midst of this development in the painting sector, in the middle of the 1980s, artists began leaving that form of art behind. Alternative idioms were sought out in installations, video, performance art and mixed media. This trend is highly apparent in the Ninth Biennial of Contemporary Art, 1993.

Heri Dono, presented a work entitled *Menonton Orang-orang Marjinal* (Looking at the Marginal

People). This piece, which was attached to the wall, consisted of wooden carvings of heads with movable eyes that were hooked up to an electronic system that moved them, while emitting a variety of sounds. This piece represented the business executives and idols of the current metropolitan culture observing the villagers that flow into the city due to the economic difficulties in the rural areas.

Dadang Christanto, another leading artist of the 1980s, presented a work entitled *Monumen Dari Desa* (Monument from a Village). This six-meter high construction displayed on the veranda of the Main Gallery was made of the branches of the *ketela* (a sort of sweet potato), whose roots supply edible tubers which the people depend on as part of their diet. The 30 centimeter segments of *ketela* branches were first soaked in water and then coated with wax, a process that induced sprouting. This sprouting process continued over the period of a month allotted for the biennial display.

Erwin Utoyo, a new promising young artist who first made his presence known in the 1980s, set up a *supermarket* in the lobby of the main gallery, with a large segment of the display taken up by a meat counter. The theme of this installation was the exploitation of the rain forests as could be seen in the fact that all of the products, such as hams, sausages and hamburger, so neatly packaged and displayed on counters, were made of wood.

Besides installations, paintings done in a style reminiscent of the photo-realist genre were also displayed. Among these were works by Dade Eri Supria, Agus Kamal, Sudarisman, Sutjipto Adi, and Asri Nugroho. This genre constituted the major trend observable in contemporary Indonesian art, beginning in the 1970s and developing throughout the 1980s.

The presence of this style of painting became an issue which has drawn forth a number of questions because within the last few years this genre has been criticized as following the precepts of surrealism or realism. Some critics even went so far as to classify these paintings under the label of super-realism or hyper-realism.

And yet, these works were not entirely surrealistic. The painters producing them believed that they were not adapting surrealism. The objects they painted were depicted highly realistically in a sharply focused photographic manner; constituting depictions done from photographs, factors that took them well beyond the techniques of realism. The collage materials introduced, along with the images from mass culture, indicated that the basic approach was semiotic.

In light of Douglas Crimp's commentary in the essay "Pictures"¹⁵, these paintings clearly cannot be categorized through the ideology of modernism: realism or surrealism. On the contrary, these paintings did damage to the ideology of modernism, at least in terms of the elimination of the factor of emotion. The realistic images of these paintings were not linked to any of the theories within modernism — mimesis or automatism.

In terms of the possibility that Indonesian painting was influenced by the styles of hyper-realism and super-realism, it is more likely that the hyper-realistic images of advertisement had an impact. The above mentioned trend first emerged in the middle of the 1970s when Indonesia opened up to multinational corporations, which began advertising their products. Previously the

advertisements, printing and graphic design in Indonesia had been of poor quality. This unplanned input opened up a new visual experience for the artists.

The Continuation

The development of Indonesian contemporary art in reality is a continuation tendency already shown in Indonesian modern art. Though contemporary art usually perceived as contradicts to modern art, from a certain point of view Indonesian modern art and Indonesian contemporary art show similarities. Both show localness and are different development from the development showed in (internaitonal) modern art and contemporary art. To gain an understanding of Indonesian contemporary art, then, one should start by observing the development of Indonesian modern art.

(art critic/Indonesia)

Notes

1. Expressed in the collected writings of S. Sudjojono, entitled *Seni Loekis Kesenian dan Seniman* Published by Indonesian Sekarang, Yogyakarta, 1946.
2. SS 101 (Soedjojono's acronym) "Kesenian Meloekis di Indonesia, Sekarang dan Yang Akan Datang" an essay published in *Keboedajaan dan Masyarakat*, No.6, October 1, 1939.
3. Followed H.W. Janson's opinion, see *History of Art* (second edition, revised), Abrams Inc. New York, 1977.
4. SS 101, "Kesenian Meloekis di Indonesia, Sekarang dan Yang Akan Datang". *ibid.*
5. Sanento Yuliman Hadiwardoyo, *Seni Lukis Indonesia Baru Sebuah Pengantar*, published by The Jakarta Art Council, Jakarta, 1976.
6. Sanento Yuliman. *ibid.*
7. As told by Batara Lubis, one of Kartonds followers.
8. Saneto Yuliman. *Opcit.*
9. "Kita Juga Punya Romantik Agony", a speech, Jakarta Art Council Documentation, 1974.
10. An explanation of the Letter of Decision of the judges of the 1974 Jakarta Painting Biennial, Jakarta Art Council, January, 1975.
11. Jim Supangkat (ed) *Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru Indonesia 1975-1979*, Gramedia, Jakarta, 1979, p. XIX (Statement of the movement).
12. The polemic actually appeared in Yogyakarta in 1975, in a local newspaper, *Kedaulatan Rakyat*. All of the articles involved in the polemic were quoted in complete version in *Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru Indonesia 1975-1979*.
13. Jim Supangkat "Bobot" (Content), thesis, Faculty of Design and Fine Art, Bandung Institute of Technology, 1975.
14. This theory was first announced in a paper entitled "Seni Rupa Atas, Seni Rupa Bawah" (High Art, Low Art) presented in a seminar on Contemporary Art at The Faculty of Design and Fine Art, Bandung Institute of Technology, in 1983. Nine years later, this paper was published in *Kalam* a special section on cultural issues of *Tempo Magazine* (January, 1992).
15. Published in *Art after Modernisms, Rethinking Representation*, Brian Wallis (ed) The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, 1992, p. 175.