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The third avant-garde : contemporary art from Southeast Asia recalling tradition

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The Third Avant-garde

Contemporary Art from Southeast Asia Recalling Tradition

Leonor Veiga
Leiden University
Center for Arts in Society

The Third Avant-garde

Contemporary Art from Southeast Asia Recalling Tradition

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Installation, Photograph by Alfred Stieglitz (1917). Source: Wikipedia.org

Chris Burden, *Shoot* (1971)
Performance. Source: www.theartstory.org

Dinh Q Lê, *Cambodia: Splendor and Darkness* (2004)
C-print. Source: Artist

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The Third Avant-garde

Contemporary Art from Southeast Asia Recalling Tradition

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To my mother.
Lisbon, June 18 2017

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Introduction

The Third Avant-garde theorizes and analyzes the postmodern introduction of *traditions* and traditional arts and crafts within contemporary art practices from Southeast Asia. Since the 1990s, the artworld has witnessed an increase of display of multi-temporal works in which past and present coeval. This apparent anachronism is, I convey, these works' most striking and appealing attribute. As spectators, when looking at these works our mind diverges and fluctuates between associations of ethnography and art. Interestingly, these works seem to exist in the sphere of biennials and large-scale exhibitions but are not equally integrated in art museums or in academic books. This reveals a strikingly contradictory aspect: they are present in the most important venues such as the Venice Biennial and yet absent from the institutional system of museum, academia and the archive. Thus, the general aim of this dissertation and the formulated research question inciting it is: *how are these contemporary artworks negotiating definitions of art and tradition?* These artworks (seem to) play with long established notions of museums and academia and notably penetrate the scope of art and ethnography. Equally, they propose new modes of understanding what art is, and demonstrate how diverse art making can be in accordance with the geographical and cultural context of production.

This dissertation distinguishes two sets of postmodern practices that recall tradition: firstly, a current that emerged in the 1980s, remarkably critical to modernism (especially in its formalist attributes), which employs traditions in a rather revivalist attitude; and secondly, a group of avant-garde practices that arose roughly in the 1990s, equally containing a postmodern element, equally rejecting the imposed modernist model, but also opposing 'invented traditions'. This study recognizes the former as an initial attitude toward a search for 'national'[1] cultures but deriving from local culture(s). The latter, which I have termed as 'Third Avant-garde', as a double-reaction. It reacts first against the search for the 'national', which was using traditions 'for their surface value' without equipping them with new vitality, and second, against the totalizing discourse of modernism, that was also manipulating traditions. As a movement, the Third Avant-garde constitutes a new event—born out of the contextual conditions of the places where it emerged, it includes the presence of traditional arts, an (in-depth) understanding of conceptualism,

1. Traditions refer to fluid territories. They do not necessarily coincide with the borders of nation states, which are modern constructions, and used traditions to legitimize and gather populations together.

and a combative attitude towards the imposed models. Its origins must be traced to the mid-1970s, when the double prejudice—both at a state and an academic level—led to students' protests in the Southeast Asian nations that participated in the Western side of the Cold War divide (Indonesia, Thailand, The Philippines, Malaysia and Singapore). The students' claims for intellectual and artistic independence freed from outdated models was, despite their unrelatedness and limited contact, similar in form and content. Each student group wrote statements in which they claimed the need for a new artistic direction. They declared that a research for a cultural dimension should start from one's own references (namely traditional arts); advocated an art practice that was more approximate with life; included those that remained invisible (such as craftspeople) in artistic discourse; and recognized the importance of the medium of installation, considered autochthonous.[2] These initial considerations would be short-lived and this avant-gardism ended in the late 1970s. It, however, left a mark that would eventually bear fruits in the early 1990s when non-confrontational practices, which had been conjured since the mid-1980s, reached the international arena through several exhibitions, especially in the Asia-Pacific region.[3]

The reasons for using traditions in the 1990s were multiple: firstly, they constituted a form of protest against the superficial manner traditions were being employed by some local artists; secondly, because as artists witnessed traditions being frozen by totalitarian regimes and boxed in newly constructed museums[4] they decided to restore their discursive and revolutionary capacities. In this context, I argue, an *avant-garde* emerged. For the first time, avant-garde practices reacted against modernism and its dogmatic attitude. They were equally attentive to the burden of the taxonomical classificatory system that kept art from so-called 'non-Western' countries hostage and classified as 'ethnographic material'.

This avant-garde movement, that I term the 'Third Avant-garde', does

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2. See Patrick D. Flores, "First Person Plural: Manifestos of the 1970s in Southeast Asia," in *Global Studies: Mapping Contemporary Art and Culture*, ed. Hans Belting et al. (Karlsruhe: Hatje Cantz, 2011), 224–271.

Author's note: in this dissertation, whenever I paraphrase an affirmation, I precede the quote with "see". For simple quotations, no reference is added.

3. Examples of important exhibitions in the Pacific region: the Fukuoka Asian Art Show since 1984 (it would be replaced by the Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale in 1999); the Artists Regional Exchange, in Perth, Australia, since 1987; the Jogja Biennial, which started in 1988, the same year of the opening of Cemeti Art Gallery in Yogyakarta; the Asia Pacific Triennial in Queensland, Australia, since 1993; the Japan Foundation shows since 1995; the Singapore Biennial since 1996, among others. Another contributing show for the emergence of non-Western art in the workd stage is the Havana Biennial, which has included a selection of Southeast Asian artists since its second edition in 1996. Interestingly, all participating artists in the Bienal de la Habana of 1986 belonged to the non-Western side of the cold War divide.

4. Some examples are the Taman Mini Park, in Indonesia and the Centre for National Culture, in Manila.

not allude to an avant-garde from the 'Third World', which is now an outdated nomenclature. Instead, the terminology derives from a third premise against the classificatory system of the 'modern art museum', more precisely its neglect of traditional materials which did not contribute to the evolvement of Western art.[5] The Third Avant-garde tackles this aspect and proposes traditional arts as integrant of radical art.

To the Western eye, the Third Avant-garde's most striking feature is the presence of fragments of traditions. While the presence of traditional materials may be regarded as anachronistic, it reflects the reality of Southeast Asian societies which lived in a context of 'multiple temporalities'. Through fragments from traditional arts the Third Avant-garde practices use material to manifest a contextual reality.

The Third Avant-garde meets the avant-garde premises as defined by German literary critic Peter Bürger in his seminal work *Theory of the AvantGarde* (German edition 1974; English translation 1984).[6] Bürger defined the avant-garde gesture as a tripartite stance which blurs the divide between 'high' and 'low' cultures, attacks the art institution and academicism, and performs a rapprochement between art and life. These general propositions equally converge in Third Avant-garde works through the presence of traditional arts. Traditions, as mentioned, mirror the multi-temporal reality of Southeast Asian nations. Their employment denotes not only identity and origin (to differentiate from Western mainstream art), but equally serves to reject the locally promoted attitude that reduced vibrant cultures into frozen invented traditions. Similarly, artists used traditions' creative capacities to overcome the totalizing neglect

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5. It is interesting that because of Modernism, so-called 'Primitive Art' had already entered the art museum in the 1930s, after being revaluated as an important aspect of modern art. Thomas McEvilley briefly explains this dynamics in Thomas McEvilley, "Exhibition Strategies in the Postcolonial Era," in *Contemporary Art in Asia: Traditions/Tensions*, ed. Apinan Poshyananda (New York: Asia Society, 1996), 56–57. The show *Primitivism*, in MoMa, in New York, in 1984, celebrated this narrative, leading to Susan Vogel's critical exhibition Art/Artifact, in the Center for African Art, in New York, in 1988.

But for traditional art from societies such as the Javanese, that had its own classificatory system of high and low art, the situation maintained itself unaltered, as these traditional arts remained outside the sphere of the art museum because they had not contributed to the evolvement of Western art. In fact, it is widely known that wayang shows have influenced Brechtian theatre. This discourse is extendable to the avant-garde: in referring to the book Art Since 1900 (2005), Indian art historian Partha Mitter observed that it failed to enlarge the canon because all the inclusions of Asian avant-garde movements owed their presence more to what their impact on the West was than for their intrinsic worth. In sum, "non-Western artists are brought in primarily on account of their compatibility with the avant-garde discourse in the West." See Partha Mitter, "Interventions: Decentering Modernism: Art History and Avant-Garde Art from the Periphery," *Art Bulletin* XC, no. 4 (2008): 531.

6. Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw, 13th ed., vol. 4, Theory and History of Literature (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

that modernist practices, which bleached out a variety of local culture(s), had performed for decades. Through traditions, Third Avant-garde artists expressed notions of discontent about everyday events and the political conjuncture of their home countries, as well as ridiculed state-sponsored readings of traditional arts as products to promote tourism.

In the 1990's when the Third Avant-garde practices emerged, notions of a 'Third Space' were also unfolding. This opened up possibilities residing in the interstices between two spaces, such as art and ethnography. Yet, the Third Avant-garde is not solely a negotiation between these two realms. In fact, the Third Avant-garde extrapolates Bürger's postulations: it is a locus of contestation of the taxonomical system that divides fine arts and culture. Among other things—such as the (re)introduction of the tension between art and craft—the emergence of these artistic practices has provoked Western ethnographic museums to rebrand themselves as world art museums.[7] This change is significant—it enables practices that have historically been refused the status of art to be included in its realm.

I want to argue that the Third Avant-garde differs from the two prior avant-garde moments. While it revisits some of their lessons, it equally serves as an extension of what one could call 'the avant-garde project'. If one of the aspects the 'historical' avant-garde was to question was what art was by declaring the readymade as art,[8] the 'neo-avant-garde' of the 1960s and 1970s questioned whether art had to exist inside the museum institution, and instead reclaimed the world a site for artistic expression. This was done, for instance, through the introduction of practices such as performance art and happenings. In following this line, the Third Avant-garde claims that the division between art and ethnography that framed so-called 'non-Western art', initially in Curio Cabinets and later in museums with the purpose to study mankind and worlds' peoples in anthropological and ethnographic museums, was largely a system complicit with colonialism. These peoples asserted not only their capacity to make art but, they equally claimed that they could do art on their own terms. With the Third Avant-garde, I propose that they also demand their own avant-garde.

Interestingly, avant-garde remained until the late twentieth century largely a Western construct, predominantly white and male. According to Indian art historian Geeta Kapur, the "feminist-led extension of the conceptual

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7. See James Clifford, "Thinking Globally: Museums, Art and Ethnography after the Global Turn" (Collecting Geographies, Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, 2014), https://vimeo.com/89998837.

8. The 'historical avant-garde' was not confined to the use of ready-mades as art. It equally suggested the 'object-trouvé'; photo montage and collage; the use of pamphlets to arouse public and call for a 'new world order'; hold public meeting and 'actions'; provoke the (bourgeois) citizen; react against academic art among its gestures. Its mission was to change the world order, fight repression and break with the status quo.

art movement [was necessary] to give the avantgarde some bite in the 1970s."[9] Considering this accommodation of women requires that one regards, as I do, that the second avant-garde was an original event, not a derivative copy of the historical avant-garde. Thus, the Third Avant-garde which has arisen 'elsewhere' (to paraphrase Nigerian curator Okwui Enwezor), comes to claim the rightful participation of the subaltern.

Historically, Western artists have used living knowledge from other cultures acquired through *transfer*.[10] These imports have supported the Western definition of art as a space where the new takes place: from the seventeenth-century Chinoiseries, to the nineteenth-century Impressionist and Symbolist paintings. The appropriative character of Western art has remained undisputed in the twenty and twenty-first centuries. Famously, the 'historical avant-garde' introduced African masks into Cubism through Picasso's work *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* in 1907 and, in 1989, at the first world exhibition, *Magiciens de la Terre* curated by Jean-Hubert Martin at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris. On that occasion, Italian artist Alighiero Boetti showcased world maps embroidered by Afghan people whose manufacturing process he had no contact with. His gesture shows how 'appropriation art' has been a recurrent recourse for Western artists. But, it is regarded differently when the appropriating agent is from the 'non-Western' world: "The problem... for many Third World artists is that they appropriate from cultures which at the same time are, and are not regarded as their own."[11] In this study, appropriation and reappropriation are understood as critical features of the avant-garde, whenever and wherever avant-garde may occur. Still, I consider the Western model of art making global, and trace its origin to colonialism, at the time when modernism was introduced within colonially-founded art academies. This allows me to propose that Third Avant-garde artists regard Western art 'ethnographically'.

Due to constraints to evaluate and describe a region as vast as Southeast Asia, the purview will encompass some selected, exemplary cases from five locations—Indonesia, Timor-Leste, Thailand, Vietnam and Macao[12]—examples

9. Geeta Kapur, "Dismantled Norms: Apropos Other Avantgardes," in *Art and Social Change: Contemporary Art in Asia and the Pacific*, ed. Caroline Turner (Canberra: Pandanus Books, 2005), 59.

10. See John Clark, *Modern Asian Art* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998), 49–69.

11. Arnd Schneider, "Appropriations," in *Contemporary Art and Anthropology*, ed. Arnd Schneider and Christopher Wright (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2006), 37.

12. I propose Macao as part of this region before 1999 (the period analyzed). This reasoning stems from my experience as a citizen of Macao (1980-1996). Macao was part of the West side of the Cold War, which meant that the relations with Southeast Asia (and Taiwan) defined the dynamics of the city, with large diasporas from Thailand and The Philippines residing in the territory. Similarly, considerable amount of Macao's inhabitants spent holidays in Southeast Asian countries, except for Indonesia (for Portuguese passport holders). Nowadays, Macao seems to have entered definitively the

that I have researched locally, and in most cases aided by exhibition viewing. As an area study, Southeast Asia is relatively new, dating approximately to the 1950s.[13] This newness nevertheless does not stop scholars from considering it as whole in which the relation to maritime culture is a primal factor. It is certain that Southeast Asian nations' histories of migration, trade, religion, and political ideas transformed countries differently, which in turn resulted in internalized pluralisms and different preoccupations with local particularities.[14] In accordance, the study of a Southeast Asian avant-garde through traditional arts from the region aptly confirms variations but equally reveals regional commonalities such as the making of the avant-garde through its social functions (or the presence of similar traits in different locations). This is what this study aims to elucidate.

I. The Deferred Temporality of the Third Avant-garde

Writing about an avant-garde event that emerged roughly in the 1990s in the 2010s appears contradictory with the presentness of the avant-garde gesture. By definition, an avant-garde work must be, in a sense, untimely; it must be out—meaning ahead—of its own historical moment and more appropriately placed in the future which it envisages. Avant-garde works problematize the 'here' and 'now' and their function is to go a step further. Yet, I argue that this temporal discrepancy constitutes a relevant aspect of the avant-garde: like the other avant-gardes, the Third Avant-garde of the 1990s also experienced "the dialogical space-time of avant-garde practice and institutional reception" through the phenomenon of deferred temporality.[15]

The Third Avant-Garde that took place in Southeast Asia emerged concurrently with the increasing presence of Southeast Asian artists in international exhibitions, especially in the Asia-Pacific region. The exhibition of these contemporary practices 'in exile', as Indonesian curator Jim Supangkat puts it, has led to mixed interpretations.[16] This circumstance was famously addressed in the seminal exhibition *Traditions/Tensions*, held at the Asia Society in New York in 1996, and has been reassessed in recent writings by Filipino art historian Patrick D. Flores and Australian art historian Pat Hoffie.[17]

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area of East Asia. This change shows how classificatory systems remain biased (and are artificial).

13. Donald K. Emmerson, "'Southeast Asia': What's in a Name?," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 15, no. 1 (1984): 4.

14. Cynthia Chou, "Reconceptualizing Southeast Asian Studies," in *Southeast Asian Studies. Debates and New Directions*, ed. Cynthia Chou and Vincent Houben (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2007), 128.

15. Hal Foster, "What's Neo about the Neo-Avant-Garde?," *October* The Duchamp Effect (Autumn, 1994), no. 70 (1994): 11.

16. Jim Supangkat, "The Third Avant-garde," unpublished interview by Leonor Veiga, Leiden, 18 April 2016.

17. See Patrick D. Flores, "Revisiting Tradition and the Incommensurate Contemporary,"

The Asia Society director at the time, Vishakha N. Desai, affirmed that *Traditions/Tensions* aimed to demonstrate how "these highly dissimilar elements [traditional and ultramodern forms] stimulate startling new expressions."[18] The show, curated by Thai art historian Apinan Poshyananda, demonstrated that tradition should not be opposed to modernity, but rather tradition offers inspiration for creative acts. It targeted overly simplistic dichotomies such as East and West, traditional and modern, centre and periphery.

I believe that many of the works exhibited in *Traditions/Tensions* display the avant-gardist stance that Indian curator Geeta Kapur announced in the exhibitions' catalogue as the mission of what I term the Third Avant-garde: art practices that could perform a double-dismantle against national conservative forces that held firm to imported notions of high and low art, while disputing Western art's supremacy.[19] Yet, at the time of their initial exhibition, these works were not identified as such. This circumstance resulted from the fact that the majority of Western exhibitions before *Traditions/Tensions* were developed by Western curators who maintained "preconceived notion[s] of exotica... and [a] desire to rescue authenticity."[20] If contemporary manifestations were shown, they would be introduced through the perspectives of Western anthropology or notions of cultural purity.[21] As a result, Western audiences, particularly the American one, remained unprepared for the varieties of the "politically oriented, with a bias toward installation."[22] The works' unconventional appearance—an aspect relating to the iconoclastic attitude towards old art boundaries, such as Asian and Western, High and Low—was highly contrasting with Western imaginations of Asian 'timeless cultures'. Besides the curatorial blind spot, I argue that the works in *Traditions/Tensions* faced misrecognition because of what American art historian Hal Foster declares as the avant-garde's deferred temporality, i.e., the temporal distance between making, display, and recognition characteristic of these expressions.[23] For the Third Avant-garde, the main aspect contributing to its under-theorization relates to the presence of traditions.

Broadsheet 41, no. 4 (2012): 234–239; Pat Hoffie, "The Irreverent Contemporary and Radical Tradition," in *Contemporary Asian Art and Exhibitions: Connectivities and World-Making*, ed. Caroline Turner and Michelle Antoinette (Canberra: ANU Press, 2014), 109–128.

18. Vishakha N. Desai, "Foreword," in *Contemporary Art in Asia: Traditions/Tensions*, 13.

19. See Kapur, "Dismantling the Norm," in *Contemporary Art in Asia: Traditions/Tensions*, 67.

20. Poshyananda, "The Future: Post-Cold War, Postmodernism, Post-Marginalia (Playing with Slippery Lubricants)," in *Tradition and Change: Contemporary Art of Asia and the Pacific*, ed. Caroline Turner (Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1993), 6.

21. See McEvilley, "Exhibition Strategies," 57.

22. Holland Cotter, "The Brave New Face of Art from the East," *The New York Times,* September 29, 1996, sec. Art in Review, http://www.nytimes.com/1996/09/29/arts/the-brave-new-face-of-art-from-the-east.html.

23. Foster, "What's Neo about the Neo-Avant-Garde?," 11.

II. Avant-garde and Tradition: general outcomes

Avant-garde's disruptive language is the most used discursive aspect in these practices. But, tradition's presence, as observed, impeded its identification. While its origins can be traced to the 1970s, the Third Avant-garde's most important decade was the 1990s, when it entered the international art world.

The internationalization of Southeast Asian artists within the region and beyond its borders was conducive to the emergence of the Third Avant-Garde. Yet, this emergence was made almost exclusively in exile: these works were sometimes met with indifference and other times with shock in their countries of origin but largely dismissed. The Indonesian (and Timorese) situation widely manifests this, with art shows being closed and/or artists being prosecuted. The outer world, therefore, provided the stage to manifest their existence. But, when reaching foreign audiences, the legitimate value of these practices were not immediately recognized by the global art world. I argue that the main problem resided in the fact that these works were not interpreted as constructing an avant-garde. More commonly, they have been regarded as activist art or political art. One example is Indonesian artist FX Harsono's *The Voices are Controlled by the Powers* (1994), as it has been discussed by Australian art historians Melissa Chiu and Benjamin Genocchio. Chiu and Genocchio focused on the contextual conditions of production in which the work originated.[24] Even if theirs is a plausible analysis, if the interpretive gaze is shifted toward the materiality of the artwork then the presence of fragments of traditional arts becomes the work's preeminent attribute.

Another aspect that contributes to preventing calling these practices avant-garde, is their exclusion from art historical narratives. Are these objects works of art or works of tradition? I propose that they do not conform to an evolutionary rhythm *traditional-modern-contemporary*. These works result from a historical blend, defined by the coexistence of modern and traditional. I reject the traditional-modern-contemporary linear progressive narrative because I identify an avant-garde program in these practices: as Portuguese art historian Sérgio Coutinho proposes, the avant-garde is constituted by a common *language* and a common *mission*.[25] In the Third Avant-garde, the mission is to wreck the taxonomical system that divides art and tradition. The avant-garde language infused in these manifestations remains militant and combative and the stance behind their production remains one of activism. Yet, I argue that the incorporation of traditional arts confers works with a subtlety

24. See Melissa Chiu and Benjamin Genocchio, *Asian Art Now* (New York: The Monacelli Press, 2010), 78–79. Their interpretation follows the reading by Australian art historian Caroline Turner. See Caroline Turner, "Art and Social Change," in *Art and Social Change*, 9.

25. See Sérgio Coutinho, "A Vanguarda Europeia: Entre a 'Globalienação' e a 'Unidade Humana'" (Universidade Nova de Lisboa, 2015), 4.

unknown to the prior avant-gardes. The spectator who looks at a woven photograph by Vietnamese artist Dinh Q. Lê from his series *Cambodia: Splendor and Darkness* (1996) cannot but marvel with the image's beauty. The brutality of his message regarding the slave work lying behind the edification of Angkor Wat and the more recent Khmer Rouge genocide, is utterly hidden to the uninformed spectator. The beautification of horror, I propose, is an important feature of most Third Avant-garde works I selected. These aspects—the constant reading of the works as political art, and the unfinished character of the reception—make Third Avant-garde works deterritorialised in art historical terms. This in turn, makes traditional arts remain hostage of taxonomical classificatory systems that do not correspond to the Southeast Asian reality.

The Third Avant-garde has not ceased in the late 1990s, a decade I consider as a twelve-year decade, from 1989 and 2001.[26] Instead, it has remained a vibrant reality in the post-2002 era. This continuity of procedure—the use of fragments of traditions—confirms that the avant-garde remains important and relevant, as different problems arise. To understand avant-garde events this way, one should regard the phenomenon as a historical force, bound within aspects of everyday life while recognizing that its novel character always meets resistance, both institutional and popular.

In a way, these fused artworks keep appearing in part because institutionalization remains ongoing. This is why some artists have been criticized of Othering themselves for the West.[27] Such accusations were frequent in the 1990s: British art historian Jean Fisher reveals the resistance the art of Brazilian Hélio Oiticica (1937-1980)—a white, male, and Western-oriented artist—met when his retrospective was showcased in Rotterdam in 1992.[28] Instead, I concur and follow Brazilian art historian Ana Letícia Fialho affirmations that the world was largely exhausted of Western Modernism, and

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26. I propose the 1990s as a long, twelve-year decade (from 1989 until 2001). The two dates seem to mark a specific period between two major events: the end of the Cold War in 1989 and the 9/11 attacks in 2001. From a dynamic of two blocks, the world revolves now around the rise of fundamentalisms. So, the 1990s can be considered an interstitial decade of a longer duration than the habitual ten-year period. The 1990s marked an encounter and opening of the world's civilizations toward each other, but the 9/11 attacks would destroy this notion of meeting, by introducing the globe to a dynamic of multiple centers and multiple hegemonic cultures. If regarded from the standpoint of Third Avant-garde artworks produced in Southeast Asia, then the 1990s should be considered a sixteen-year decade, starting in 1985 when the Pilipino artist Roberto Feleo produced *Pintado* and terminating in 2001, when FX Harsono produced *Wear Mask*. These temporal boundaries are nevertheless open to change, as I gather more information on the subject.

27. See Gerardo Mosquera, "The Marco Polo Syndrome: Some Problems around Art and Eurocentrism," in *Theory in Contemporary Art since 1985*, ed. Zaya Kocur and Simon Leung (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 218–25.

28. Jean Fisher, "The Syncretic Turn: Cross-Cultural Practice in the Age of Multiculturalism," in *Theory in Contemporary Art since 1985*, 233–34.

thus open to "the discovery" of these startling new expressions.[29] To Fialho, the augment of 'non-Western' art exposure followed from the collapse of the Iron Curtain. As a result, these practices were immediately catapulted to the realm of large scale shows, especially in Japan, Australia, Singapore, and the United States of America. Unlike with the Asia-Pacific region, the representation in the US has not been conducive to an artist network. The results of the American early enterprise are nevertheless of extreme importance today, with several American galleries representing Southeast Asian artists. At an international level, the 'non-Western' world representation began within major biennials and triennials. The Biennale/Triennial circuit has grown exponentially in the past two decades (from the mid-1990s until the mid-2010s biennials appeared all over the world), some of which inspired by the *Bienal de la Habana* and others by the Venice Biennial model.[30]

An indirect outcome of these fused practices, largely overlooked, is the ascension of several traditional elements to the sphere of 'high art'. This is something that would have been impossible, as American art historian Thomas McEvilley remarks, in the "colonial or modernist period, [when] the idea of cultural identity became a weapon or strategy used by the colonizers both to buttress their own power and to undermine the will and self-confidence of the colonized."[31] But this adaptation remains unfinished; the continual relegation of traditional materials to the sphere of ethnographic museums in the West and 'civilization' museums and theme parks in the region, is still the norm. This shows how complex and profound the problem is.

So, it appears, contemporary art practices being made in the postcolonial era have allowed traditional elements to be tentatively uplifted. Oftentimes, this action relates to an artist's personal choice, because artists self-consciously accept and work on their multi-angled identities. Through their role as cultural citizens,[32] they produce work reflecting the various forces conducive for their formation as individuals. Overall, these practices

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29. See Ana Letícia Fialho, "As Exposições Internacionais de Arte Brasileira: Discursos, Práticas e Interesses Em Jogo," *Sociedade e Estado, Brasília* 20, no. 3 (2005): 689–713.

30. Kapur, "Curating in Heterogeneous Worlds," in *Contemporary Art: 1989 to the Present*, ed. Alexandre Dumbadze and Suzanne Hudson (Malden, MA: Willey-Blackwell, 2013), 178–91; Jasmine Chohan, "The Havana Biennial: Changing Agendas" (The Courtauld Institute of Art, 2013). Turner affirms that the Asia Pacific Triennial of Brisbane was inspired in the Venice Biennial. Turner, "Asia-Pacific Triennial," unpublished interview by Leonor Veiga, Canberra, July 5, 2017.

31. McEvilley, "Fusion: Hot or Cold?," in F*usion: West African Artists at the Venice Biennale*, Focus on African Art Series (Munich: Prestel Verlag GmbH & Co KG, 1993), 11. McEvilley equals the modern period with the colonial times and I continue this reading. After the withdrawal of the colonizer, the process of self-reflection commenced and a hybrid quality has emerged.

32. Homi K. Bhabha, "Towards a global cultural citizenship," interview by Sachidananda Mohanty, July 3, 2005, http://www.thehindu.com/lr/2005/07/03/stories/2005070300020100.htm.

support the preservation of past legacies while bestowing them with new strategies for continuation.

III. Aims

This dissertation proposes that contemporary art, especially that of the 'Global South', has witnessed a tendency of fused practices which merge traditional elements with modern art constructs. The intent is to underline what Australian art historian John Clark proposes in the seminal work *Modern Asian Art* (1998)—that this occurrence in the contemporary does not constitute a new behavior but, rather, continues historical manifestations of selection and adoption of transferred and translated modes of making by so-called 'non-Western' societies. As Clark proposes, local circumstances have always penetrated the arts and it should be acknowledged that instead of rejecting modernity, these peoples have historically looked for a creative adaptation. They draw on their own solutions of the cultural resources of their own traditions. In their own terms, they have followed the Western canon, but have not copied it. Instead they have integrated its lessons in their own way. The region's history of contact with Western modernity is ancient; Clark dates it as far back as the sixteenth-century, when contacts were initiated through exchange of prints and materials. Other possible dates to pinpoint these events have been the 1830s in Indonesia, when Raden Saleh carried out his early excursions in Europe, the 1890s as the emergence of academic training in Bandung, the 1910s in Thailand, when the first attempts toward a Western modernity were construed atop of a preceding period of sinicisation that occurred in the nineteenth century.[33] Examples are abundant, and histories are diverse.

In addition, this dissertation aims to go beyond the usual rubrics of 'syncretism' and 'hybridism,'[34] that have characterized the analysis of these objects. While I regard these contributions as necessary steps towards a reflection, I prefer to identify these works as avant-garde because it allows them a strength and a mission that discourses from religion (syncretism) and biology (hybridism) do not seem to match.

Another important aspect that this study intends to demonstrate is that modern and postmodern practices belong as much in these countries as they belong in Europe and the US. I raise the question of belonging to address that it is no longer acceptable to view these geographic centers

33. See Poshyananda, *Modern Art in Thailand: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1992).

34. British art historian Jean Fisher advocates a 'Syncretic Turn,' in opposition to Homi K. Bhabha's ideas of hybridity. See Fisher, "The Syncretic Turn." Similarly, German anthropologist Arnd Schneider prefers the use of 'originary syncretism.' See Arnd Schneider, "On 'Appropriation'. A Critical Reappraisal of the Concept and Its Application in Global Art Practices," *Social Anthropology* 11, no. 2 (2003): 215–229.

as producers of ethnographic objects or as makers of classical arts, which are displayed in specialized galleries of several museums. Modern Asian art was created from the translocation of a certain form of thinking which was combined with local perceptions. It is precisely in this relationship with the past that tradition comes in, since traditional arts were and continue being practiced today (and their disappearance is not foreseeable, as they will be continuously transformed).

Traditional is an imprecise term, bound in a loaded discourse. It can be applied to antiques made in the past (many of which are displayed in museums), but it also applies to antique objects currently in use. In addition, traditional is also used to refer to objects recently produced in a 'traditional style' and way, a common feature of so-called tourist art,[35] and individual creations modified by contemporary artists—those that this analysis focuses on.

Starting in the 1990s, scholarship about worldwide contemporary art that fuses 'fragments of tradition' and 'aspects of modernity' in artworks emerged. This dissertation proposes to reflect and build on discourses elaborated, especially within curated practices which many times fostered academicism through representative artworks. Such a procedure will permit new insights and hopefully answer some questions, while posing others.

The phenomenon of merging contemporary art and local traditions is wider than the region of Southeast Asia—it exists on a global scale. It is interesting that this *tendency* shows characteristics of a movement, although of unrelated people—and this is one of the aspects of its uniqueness. While geographical disparity (practices existing within a network, in various centers) has been a characteristic of the avant-garde, the Third Avant-garde introduces *local idioms* to the discourse, an aspect that equally contributes to the deferral of its identification. So, this study focuses on a selection of Third Avant-Garde practices: those who introduce local traditions, which, through the analytical language of contemporary art, aim to expand social consciousness. These constitute civic practices that at a taxonomical level will ultimately expand the scope of art history and anthropology, by finding the meeting point between the two. This way, boundaries of theorization may be opened and theorization replicated to other world regions.

IV. Working Method

I refer to my working method as a tripartite system. The first part is mainly local, and I term it 'curatorial anthropology'. This means I have on the one hand devoted some time to experiment making the crafts I am referring

35. The subject of traditional arts' capitalization through cultural tourism is thoroughly covered in John L. Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, *Ethnicity, Inc.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

to.[36] This particular experience provides me with an understanding of the making process behind the artworks and the traditions behind the crafts. On the other hand, I have visited artists' studios and attended several important exhibitions in Europe in Southeast Asia.[37] The exhibitions have not only helped me find new artists and artworks for research, they also provided me with a panoramic vision of the Third Avant-garde's impact, especially from the viewpoint of a Southeast Asian representation on a wider scale.

The second part of my process was mainly conducted at Leiden University. It consists in doing archival research, reading literature on the field, locating materials that appear relevant, and writing. These two complementary parts of the procedure are necessary for two main reasons: firstly, I am conducting research on a region which is far from the university I work in, and secondly, artworks made by Southeast Asian artists do not abound in Europe (which lead me to visit several biennials, art fairs, and major shows between 2008 and 2015). Paradoxically, the representation of China, India, South Korea and Japan is much more consistent in Europe, albeit the extensive network created with the region of Southeast Asia by several European colonial powers between the sixteenth and the twentieth centuries.

The third part of my procedure has been to discuss with artists the pertinence of my observations. Except for Indonesian I Wayan Bendi and FX Harsono, all artists have given feedback and useful comments upon my observations. In some cases, the artists gained new insight from them. This is a dissertation about their art works, which I selected, and later analyzed based on curatorial and scholarly literature. Working with living artists is a major advantage: it allows a more comprehensive reading of their intentions.

The resulting text prioritizes artworks and artists over exhibitions practices. This mode of analysis results from the fact that I have not been physically present in several of these events and thus focused on keeping a working relationship with these artists.

V. Theoretical Frame of Reference

This dissertation revolves around three main concepts: tradition, avant-garde, and agency. Agency in this study is the motor that gives

36. I was between 2006 and 2012 an active batik, tie-dye and *ikat* maker, having taught internationally workshops on these techniques between 2007 and 2014 to children and adults. In addition, I have some notions of *anyam*, a grass mat weaving technique worldwide used for everyday utensils. Other aspects of traditional arts from the region are not foreign to me, as I lived in Macao between 1980 and 1996 and later in Indonesia between 2006-2007 and 2011-2012.

37. I can refer to Yogyakarta Biennial (2009 and 2011), Singapore Biennial (2011), Art Basel and documenta in Kassel (2012), Venice Biennial and Lyon Biennial (2013), Art Stage Hong Kong (2014), several exhibitions in Singapore, Bangkok, Macao, Bali and Yogyakarta between 2011 and 2014, among others.

momentum to the artists' gesture, one which conflates cultural identity with cultural citizenship. This duo corresponds to the twofold dimension that defines an artist as an individual. Through this framework, I read practices that are simultaneously individual and communal, coexist and belong in the art museum and in the ethnographic museum, in art history and anthropology, hopefully leading toward the end of such distinctions.

The text is organized chronologically but supported in specific artworks I selected through exhibition viewing. This approach helps understand the phenomenon's discrepancies, while providing the reader a suitable frame of reference to guide his understanding. There are some artists—e.g. Indonesian FX Harsono, Arahmaiani, I Wayan Bendi, Timorese Maria Madeira, and Vietnamese Dinh Q. Lê—that appear as Third Avant-garde artists during the 1990s and reappear in the period post-2002. So, the chronological narrative appears adequate to communicate the changes that also occurred in their practices, while reiterating their continual use of traditional arts. This is not a linear narrative, but rather a conscious attempt to communicate in a sensible manner.

I refer to the combination of cultural identity and citizenship because an artist with an intention, with a message that simultaneously is local and global, is performing an act of citizenship (in and outside the country). As such, they depart from their own 'national' identity(ies), because it is the one (or more) they know. In any case, the notion of national identity is progressively more fluid, with artists globetrotting to exhibit their (installation) works. So, I both take note of an artist's individuality, and thus notions of identity, selfhood and autonomy come to place, as well as, regard their sense of collectivity—the place where traditions reside within communities that many times artists feel attached to. It seems that for these artists there is no possibility of separating the two spheres of the individual and the collective. In this unique coexistence of factors enters the inquisitive spirit of the avant-garde artist, who breaks with conventions, questions authoritative dogmas, and opens new territories. It is my understanding that this set of occurrences has not yet been studied from the standpoint of traditional arts and the materiality they confer to works.

The duo of the languages employed by the artists—that of traditional culture and that of international art—constitutes the artists' *voice*. This aspect demonstrates important notions of belonging, identity, and citizenship, which signal difference in a globalizing era. In this study, categories of fine arts, tradition, and craft are combined with discursive notions that originated in Western academic perspectives and introduced in the region from the onset of colonization. They have more or less uninterruptedly continued throughout modernization and globalizing trends. This does not mean that the process has been harmonious and continuous; rather, it has been prone to clashes and

hiatus. So, Western academic discourse in this dissertation is regarded as one of the available local languages.

These works apparently transmit the historical dilemma of choice between a need to be modern and a desire to preserve national identity, as Poshyananda observes for the context of modern art in Thailand.[38] Nowadays, it is possible to affirm that artists moved beyond the national, and make work to gather a sense of self—often anchoring this intention in traditional values. They use what is familiar to them and to their audiences. What is striking is the fact that while local audiences more promptly recognize the 'traditional' ingredients, global audiences relate to the tradition through associations with artefacts residing in ethnographic museums, and more promptly grasp the 'art' factor of the work. These possibilities (and their combinations) stem, in my regard, from the artist's will to relate with local and global audiences.

Regarding the art historical paradigm, these works remain *deterritorialised* objects, as their placement in art historical discourses is incomplete. In which museum paradigm can these works be accommodated, since they merge notions of ethnography and art? A concern of the Third Avant-Garde is to structure these discourses, anchored by their gradual and increasingly obvious representation in the art world. Pursuing this enterprise is to perform what American art historian Douglas Crimp refers to as the *institutionalization of the avant-garde*, a gradual process that mirrors the initial appearance of works in exhibitions and follows up with their inclusion in museums and academic theories.[39] For these specific art practices, the process of representation started regionally, especially in Japan and Australia, and almost concurrently in worldwide periodic art shows, including those that have been largely Western, like the Venice Biennial, the São Paulo Biennial and the documenta of Kassel.[40] While the growth of possibilities for display has allowed changes in the regional art scene (locally and internationally), only now theorization is catching up, notably through academic journals such as the *Southeast of Now*.[41] Third Avant-Garde works are being collected, exhibited and theorized, and a regional Southeast Asian narrative undergoing development, especially by Singapore-based scholars.[42]

This art historical research and visual analysis draws from the art historical and anthropological domains, postmodern, and postcolonial studies. I suggest that this combination allows a more comprehensive understanding of

38. See Poshyananda, *Modern Art in Thailand*, 191.

39. See Douglas Crimp, *On the Museum's Ruins* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1993).

40. documenta is traditionally written with low case 'd'.

41. Editorial Collective, "Editorial: Discomfort," *Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia* 1, no. 1 (2017): 1–9, https://doi.org/10.1353/sen.2017.0000.

42. Some Southeast Asianists are: Singaporean art historian T. K. Sabapathy; French

the reasoning behind these Southeast Asian practices. To perform the task, I refer to Western and Asian theory: as an example, for the *avant-garde*, I follow the ideas of American art historians Hal Foster and Douglas Crimp for the Western side, and I follow Indian curator Geeta Kapur and art historian Partha Mitter, for the Asian side of analysis. Without considering both realities of academicism, I could not have a full picture of artists' intentions and curators' discourses.

Today, artists share their interests and interpret in a very personalized and individual way manifestations from community cultures existing in Southeast Asia. Thus, artists become individual interfaces between cultures inserted in a globalizing process. It is probable that due to the ongoing globalizing trend, artists feel motivated to construct the artistic self in both global and local idioms. Their work is incomplete without the possibilities opened by the system of fine arts that encompasses scholarship produced by curators, displays in institutional spaces such as museums and the growing global art market, where Southeast Asia has witnessed an increase of attention and importance in the last decade.

VI. Plan of Dissertation

Chapter 1, **Recalling Tradition**, revolves around the concept of tradition and its emergence within contemporary art practices. It proposes that the unequivocal presence of fragments of traditional crafts, rituals, and customs in contemporary art practices has not yet been conveniently addressed by art historical discourses, albeit the attempts made. These works connect two worlds that were regarded as oppositional and disparate—that of the past and the ethnographic museum, and that of the present and the (modern) art museum—ultimately questioning the system that divided the fields of culture and art. It demonstrates that unrelated artists from diverse locations of the world, including Southeast Asia, reprocess fragments of traditions to make sense of their *cultural identity* and *citizenship*: this is done through an *avant-gardist* discourse that conjures both rupture and continuation. Artists use sources from the two worlds—the academic and the traditional—and thus negotiate the past in the present. Tradition is presented as the material and conceptual aspect of the works, avant-garde as the method (or "a formula, or practice," as affirmed by American art historian Hal Foster[43]) for their manifestation, and cultural citizenship and identity constitute the motivation for agency leading to social change. It proposes that in the contemporary, traditions are made, unmade and remade through the selection of fragments from traditional art. This enterprise results from the new roles that traditions play in the contemporary: they

curator Iola Lenzi; American art historian Nora A. Taylor; Singaporean art historian Isabel Ching and Singaporean art historian Simon Soon.

43. Foster, "What's Neo about the Neo-Avant-Garde?," 26.

constitute a cultural legacy that has undergone changes within increasingly modern and secularized societies.

Chapter 2, **The Third Avant-Garde**, conceptualizes the evolution of the Third Avant-garde. It departs from the theory of the two earlier avant-garde events, proposing that the avant-garde should be first and foremost regarded as a historical force. After finding its contemporary language and mission, it springs to form artistic manifestations aiming at changing the status quo. The Third Avant-garde embodies claims for the end of Western hegemony on this art historical category, and simultaneously opens the discourse toward the accommodation of 'non-Western' practices. To fully illustrate its program and intentions, I provide some examples of artworks by artists from the region. Yet, the intention is not to do a survey-like kind of analysis (because it would always remain incomplete) but rather to identify and define the Third Avant-garde in its various aspects, especially its features, the characteristics of its works, and the agency of its artists.

Chapter 3, **The Third Avant-garde: Early Days (1970s-80s)**, proposes that even though the Third Avant-garde in Southeast Asia happened most prominently in the 1990s, its roots can be traced back to the mid-1970s. At that time, several unrelated artist groups from Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and The Philippines published written statements proposing a rapprochement between art and life. It equally proposes the first Southeast Asian Third Avant-garde artwork: *Ken Dedes* (1975), by Indonesian artist Jim Supangkat.

The chapter evolves to suggest the 1980s as an interstitial decade, in which the radicalism verified in the 1970s undergoes reformulation toward non-confrontational practices. Starting in 1985, works imbued of social preoccupations and grounded upon local sensibilities and histories emerge in the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Singapore. All these works constitute initial manifestations of what eventually will happen more concretely in the 1990s, when local practice and international exposure coincide. The 1980s are extremely relevant because they witnessed initial curatorial undertakings: in Southeast Asia, exhibitions promoted by ASEAN since 1972 kick-started an artistic regional network; in Japan, since 1980, the Japan Foundation and the Fukuoka Art Museum promoted interregional shows which included contemporary practices from Southeast Asia.

Chapter 4, **The Boom of the Third Avant-garde (1990s)**, starts by introducing exhibition practices from the 1990s, when a vast expansion of historical shows in the region, Australia, Japan and the United States took place. More importantly, during this decade, the topic of tradition was paramount: following from the *Third Habana Biennial, Tradition and Contemporaneity*, and the *Magiciens de la Terre* exhibitions in 1989, the 1990s observed the continuation of practices and conversely, the introduction of several pioneering

gestures (in an Asian context) by the Fukuoka Art Museum through the *Asian Art Show*, in Fukuoka, Japan; the three initial editions of the *Asia Pacific Triennial*, in Queensland, Australia; the seminal *Traditions/Tensions* in 1996, in New York. The subject was topical but, the lack of temporal distancing deferred the full theorization of artworks. Generally, curatorial projects proposed to demonstrate the contextual circumstances of artistic production in (Southeast) Asian countries but, failed to conveniently address the imbedded avant-garde stance. Thus, by the end of the decade, curators and international venues moved beyond the topic. The chapter posits the Third Avant-garde of the 1990s as a phenomenon clearly differentiated from preceding avant-gardes for its lack of a written manifesto. Artistic practice is not sustained in a program but, rather, is grounded on individual acts of social agency. It is observable that the main theme of 1990s Third Avant-garde works is the local, revealing artists' attempts to communicate with their close community(ies). This, in turn, has resulted in works which are materialized through very localized traditional arts.

To explain the contextual conditions of the Third Avant-garde of the 1990s, I borrow a reading from Supangkat, who proposes the phenomenon as an avant-garde 'in exile'. This circumstance stems from the few available local spaces to present contemporary art, which resulted in the extreme dependency of international venues for works to be presented. Additionally, the Third Avant-garde artist is himself an artist in exile: be it because the country is occupied (like Timor-Leste), and/or the artist had to move to another location so that he could pursue with his investigations, or because the artist lives under a dictatorial regime; the Third Avant-garde artist worked under severe conditions. Thus, one of the attributes of the Third Avant-garde artist is his spirit of sacrifice. To better frame and combine these two aspects—the life of the artist and the life of the curated artwork—I enumerate works by some selected Southeast Asian artists that I have contacted with. By observing their relationship with traditional arts, I suggest that each artist has acted upon the local tradition he related most closely to. This is an aspect of Southeast Asian art: the panoply of references to choose from, and a circumstance that is equally visible in the following chapter 5.

Chapter 5, **The Third Avant-garde Addresses Global Issues (after 2002)** starts by introducing a panoply of exhibitions and literature produced worldwide to demonstrate that Southeast Asian art, including Third Avant-garde artists reached global recognition. Since roughly 2006, regional artists are increasingly getting attention by museums, biennials, art galleries and art fairs. The chapter evolves into displaying facts that prove that the topic of tradition was theoretically reenacted in the 2010s. This temporal gap provided artists, curators, and art historians a necessary distance for an integrated reading. As artists continue to use traditions available—as mentioned, in Southeast Asia,

they are almost infinite—curators have recognized that tradition remains a relevant and topical aspect of local sensibilities. Since 2002, Third Avant-garde artists have experienced new contextual, socio-political conditions that call for creative solutions. The critical stance remains, but the motives differ from the 1990s. Ultimately, what the period 2002-2016 shows is that the avant-garde is indeed a force which bound to the now and aims to project a better future.

The **Conclusion** demonstrates the Third Avant-garde achievements—namely its discursive contribution and its urgency. It proposes the Third Avant-garde is conducive to a new way to understand tradition—as a living archive—as well as the mode of making art from 'non-Western' countries. Thus, it demonstrates that the avant-garde, as an art historical category, could be expanded. The Third Avant-garde, with its emphasis on traditions, is used differently by each artist, and this use may change over time (this is the case of Harsono and Arahmaiani, for instance). And thanks to the work of some notable curators, who were attentive to the needs of the artists from their countries of origination, the Third Avant-garde—which is done by cosmopolitan people—fights against the superficial look that postmodernism was advocating for traditions and, equally questions divisions between center and periphery, art and ethnography.

Recalling Tradition

This chapter introduces the problematic of contemporary art practices that recall tradition, by terming them a 'third object'. It starts by defining contemporary art according to existing definitions and demonstrates how, despite several theoretical attempts, these practices remain outside of existing discourses. Then, it proposes that several Southeast Asian artists continue to work on the recall of traditions without being considerate of the lack of institutional and theoretical territory for their practices due to an inflicted modernism, to an extent that 'a tendency becomes the norm'. I argue that this is done because on the one hand, these artists do not separate the individual and their communal cultural values, and on the other hand, they are as familiar with Western art constructs as with traditional ones. These are cosmopolitan people who demonstrate a critical voice originating in their personal histories, and who feel driven to act as cultural citizens whose identity and status are in constant negotiation.

The chapter evolves to debate the discourse of traditions: no longer fluid and fully functional like in the past when traditions gathered societies together, it proposes that on the onset of independence in Southeast Asian countries (and arguably in many others), traditions' intrinsic value was appropriated by governing elites which have transformed them into frozen entities. This phenomenon was designated by British historian Eric Hobsbawm as 'The Invention of Tradition'. I argue that the process of invention deprived traditions of their avant-garde stance, which artists recover through these practices. But, because traditions' wholeness is largely a fictitious consideration—the invention of tradition builds on fragments—artists, like the governing elites, build their work on fragments of traditions they cherish.

Through their art practices, contemporary artists make, unmake, and remake traditions. Their works provide social commentary on current aspects of reality, while they demonstrate their disregard for patronizing forces of their local academic and artistic circuits, as well as toward an increasingly open art world that regards them as originating from territories historically considered makers of traditions and thus incapable of art making. This processing is done largely by the re-appropriation of the same procedures: artists invent, deconstruct, and reassemble traditions that remain living archives.

1.1 A New Paradigm that Resists Definition: the Third Object

In art, any tendency can coexist with another in the same period.[1]
Kumada Yumiko

Thinking about contemporary art immediately projects us to the art produced 'now', in this instant moment. This is a valid thought but contemporary art seems to be a more specific construction. It is, as Australian art historian Terry Smith defined on several occasions,[2] distinguishable for the existence of three specific traits: firstly, for being contemporaneous, which means it has been produced since the 1980s, up until our time;[3] secondly, for its contemporaneousness, which relates to the fact that it has become an expanded space of enquiry, penetrating several spheres of life (including national identity, tradition and ethnicity and their impact in society, religion and spirituality, as well as gender issues, and preoccupations of political, social and environment nature), ultimately leading to it becoming closer together with life; and thirdly for its co-temporality, manifested through "the coexistence of distinct temporalities, of different ways of *being* in relation to time, experienced in the midst of a growing sense that many kinds of time are running out."[4] As Smith affirmed, "Works of art, before they are anything else, are testimony of these contemporalities."[5] This is what Japanese art historian Kumada Yumiko transmits in the quote above.

In the coexistence of different temporalities resides the most relevant purpose of this dissertation: to analyze a selection of contemporary art works

1 Koizumi Shinya, "Tenshin (Okakura Kakuzo)'s View of Asia and the Position of the Ideals of the East," in *Asia in Transition. Representation and Identity*, ed. Furuichi Yasuko, trans. Stanley N. Anderson (Tokyo: The Japan Foundation Asia Centre, 2002), 238.

2 See Terry Smith, *What Is Contemporary Art?* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009) and Smith, *Contemporary Art: World Currents* (London: Laurence King, 2011); Jeffrey J. Williams, "The Contemporist: An Interview with Terry Smith," Symploke 22, no. 1–2 (2014): 361–385.

3 Smith explains that the shift from modern into the contemporary art is unmistakable since the 1980s. See Smith, *What Is Contemporary Art?*, 5. The 1980s is an important decade because of a series of world events that changed the world order into one of multiple centers. Already in 1979, the Iranian revolution that deposed the Shah Reza Phalavi marked a resistance against Western domination. The year 1989 is equally considered a hinge year, for it was marked by a succession of international events: the *fatwa* issued against Salman Rushdie and his publishers after the publication *The Satanic Verses*; the Tiananmen events in China; the fall of the Berlin Wall. In the arts, 1989 witnessed the first exhibition of art from all over the world, *Magiciens de la Terre*, in the Pompidou Centre in Paris; the third edition of the Havana Bienal, which since its second edition in 1986 represented Third World Countries beyond Latin America and the Caribbean; the first postcolonial exhibition, *The Other Story: Afro-Asian Artists in Post-War Britain* took place in the Hayward Gallery, in London. In Southeast Asia, the opening of Cemeti Art House in Yogyakarta in 1988 is significant, as this was the first space to house alternative practices in Indonesia.

4 Smith, 3–4.

5 Smith, 4.

which incorporate the three core meanings of the word 'contemporary' (as defined by Smith): the now, the same time/period, and different times (which result, in his view, from the double force of the processes of decolonization and more recently, globalization). This means that in general terms, the works in question were produced since 1980, articulated their reality (both in time and space), and present attributes from a historical past, many times regarded as 'traditional'.

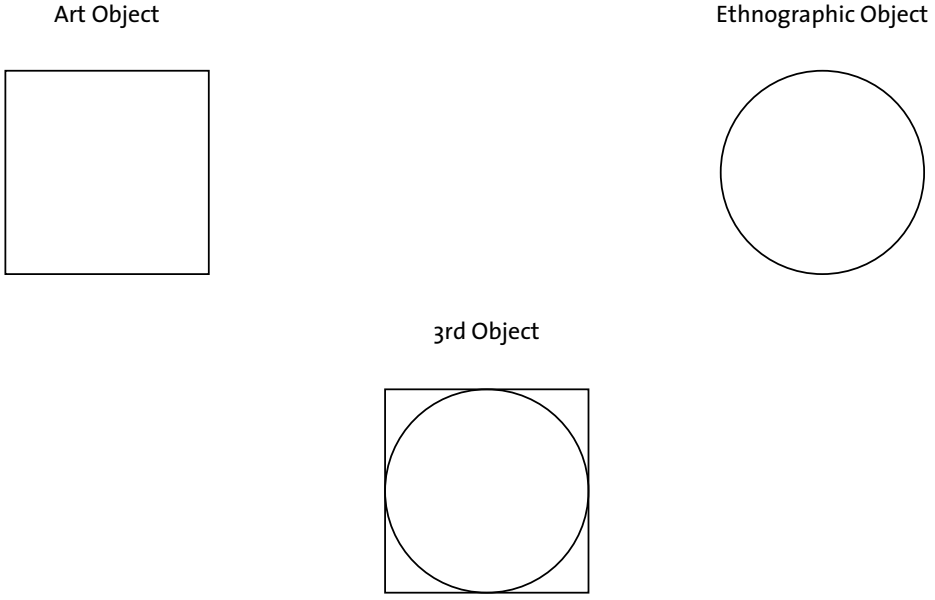

Figure 1.1
Diagram of the Third Object.
Image edited by Leonor Veiga, 2016

The presence of traditional fragments may be experienced as anachronistic, because it provokes an oscillation between different temporalities: past and present, traditional and modern, hand-made and machine-made. And, because, the analysis resides on locations outside the West, which were termed producers of traditional arts. The diagram [Fig. 1.1] summarizes the event: the coeval of binaries—art and craft; art history and ethnography; art museum and ethnographic museum—into one object. How can this be defined, termed, and understood? As American art historian Anna Brzyski recognizes, "we are still experiencing the consequences of the initial segregation"[6] between these two realms. And despite these practices' importance being felt, institutionalization (both at a museum and at an

6 Anna Brzyski, "Introduction: Canons and Art History," in *Partisan Canons* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 6.

academic level) remains underway. The emergence of the 'Third Object' was signaled by Indian postcolonial theorist Homi K. Bhabha:

> In an age in which the global world picture is increasingly identified with the digital impulse of acceleration and immediacy ... many artists today resort to slower traditions of manufacture, such as painting, embroidery, calligraphy, weaving and portraiture. Meanwhile some combine these aesthetic traditions with more contemporary processes, such as video, animation and cartoons. The more traditional forms can be seen as slower, or time-lagged in themselves; and another kind of time lag appears in works that combine the slower and faster forms.[7]

What Bhabha is suggesting is that fast and slow do not have to be equaled with past and present. Instead, these temporalities constitute the material and conceptual dimensions of artworks. So, the interest in 'slow', crafted art does not (always) associate with the celebration of tradition or the revival of the past. In fact, many times artists refute they are using tradition, preferring to address the contemporary aspects imbued in their works.

In the early 1990s, Indonesian artists such as FX Harsono and Heri Dono used *wayang topeng* (masks) and *wayang kulit* (shadow puppets) in various works. They did not intend to reference their veneration for Javanese dances and shadow theatres. Rather they were critically addressing the social and political hegemony around these two art forms. These arts were being used as propaganda by the regime to unify extremely diverse ethnicities of the archipelago (through Javanese culture), but at the same time were being systematized and consequently devoid of their capacity of reinventing themselves.[8] The use of traditional elements for political formulations was very intense in the 1990s. Yet this practice has not ceased, because state-sponsored tendencies toward homogenization and systematization continue. This led Dono to recently reprise one of his historical works, the performance *Wayang*

7 Homi K. Bhabha, "Ethics and Aesthetics of Globalism," in *The Urgency of Theory*, ed. António Pinto Ribeiro (Manchester: Carcanet Press Limited and Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 2007), 11.

8 The systematization of traditional arts leads to the phenomenon of 'inventing traditions', as described by Eric Hobsbawm. Regarding Javanese *wayang*, the phenomenon can be traced to several moments: the Hindu development in the fifth-century which incorporated the local shadows; the East Javanese period since the tenth-century, which saw resurgence of Javanese elements; and the significant cultural change in the fifteenth-century that caused *wayang* to adapt to meet Islamic iconographic requirements. See Ninus Anusapati, "Wayang in Java: An Ongoing Development Process of a Traditional Visual Art Form" (Second ASEAN Workshop, Exhibition and Symposium on Aesthetics, Manila: ASEAN, 1993), 1–8. More recently in the 1930s, *wayang* witnessed other forms of accommodating the spirit of changing times, such as *wayang revolusi*, when the revolution against colonial independence took place. The process of renewal remains to this day.

Legenda (1988). In the painting *Wayang Legenda Indonesia Baru* (2008) [Fig. 1.2], the Indonesian archipelago is depicted as a large *wayang* 'country': the representation of the islands as shadow puppets alludes to the ongoing and persistent *Javanization* of the country; the green sea—which may denote a relation to 'mother earth' or allude to Islam's hegemony within the republic—unifies the islands; the planes and ships display coexisting modes of living at a variety of speeds. The depiction of traditional *wayang* puppets in a Western style of painting on canvas embodies the problematic of the 'Third Object'.

Figure 1.2
Heri Dono
Wayang Legenda Indonesia Baru
2008 | Acrylic on canvas | 200 x 150 cm | Image courtesy of Walsh Gallery

The 1990s were a decade in which notions of a 'Third Space' were primal, and indicated possibilities residing in the interstices between two places (such as art and ethnography). Bhabha's influential theory of the Third Space generated denominations such as Third Cinema: "The principal characteristic of Third Cinema is really not so much where it is made, or even who makes it but, rather, the ideology it espouses and the consciousness it displays."[9] Devoid of a better denomination, the term 'Third' remained uncontested, but surprisingly it was not applied to contemporary art practices from the same period. This dissertation recovers the term 'Third', albeit for a different reason:

9 Jim Pines and Paul Willemen, eds., *Questions of Third Cinema* (London: BFI Publishing, 1989), vii.

it proposes that the practices of the 1990s (and few from the 1980s) constitute a form of avant-garde—hereafter termed as Third Avant-garde. This project corresponds to a third phase of the avant-garde contestation toward art's institutionalization, and from now on applied toward the taxonomy of fine arts (see Chapter 2).

In 1994, Bhabha proposed the concept of hybridity "as a contesting agency functioning in the time-lag of sign/symbol, which is a space in-between the rules of engagement."[10] While Bhabha's reading of the third possibility as a contesting territory is logical, agreeing with its state of in-betweeness is problematic because it disallows third possibilities to be considered final. In 1996, British art historian Jean Fisher challenged Bhabha's notions of 'hybridity', a term relating to the notion of Third Space. She mentioned the usefulness of Bhabha's model, but contested it based on the problem of the origin that "two discrete entities combine to produce a third that is capable of resolving its 'parental' contradictions."[11] So, she rehabilitated the notion of syncretism, which "has the advantage of implying not fixed elements but a contingent affiliation of disparate terms capable of shifting positions depending on circumstances, and whose boundaries are permeable."[12] While the shifting positions identified by Fisher are noticeable (in Third Avant-garde works), as observed by American anthropologist Arnd Schneider, "syncretism, like hybridity, presupposes an earlier non-syncretic state."[13] Yet, another aspect (besides the question of origins) that renders these early nomenclatures unsatisfactory is, their rootedness in spheres outside of art history (where the Avant-garde may be situated), notably the spheres of biology and religion. To these two designations, another one from the realm of philosophy must be mentioned: synthesis, the act of placing together and terminating the dialectic through an *a priori* process (as Bhabha refers, this is an unconscious behavior), seems the most adequate.

Anthropologists have also contributed with important insights because, they consider artistic production as emerging in a certain social context. This regard originated discourses such as appropriation theory, which seems problematic because it maintains the distinction of art and tradition. Dutch anthropologist Pieter ter Keurs theorized the notion of material complex.[14] Its importance resides in it admitting that physical objects (such

10 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 277.

11 Jean Fisher, "The Syncretic Turn: Cross-Cultural Practice in the Age of Multiculturalism," in *Theory in Contemporary Art since 1985*, ed. Zaya Kocur and Simon Leung (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 237.

12 Fisher, 237.

13 Arnd Schneider, "On 'Appropriation'. A Critical Reappraisal of the Concept and Its Application in Global Art Practices," *Social Anthropology* 11, no. 2 (2003): 217.

14 See Pieter ter Keurs, *Condensed Reality. A Study of Material Culture, with Case Studies*

as artworks) concentrate several meanings within them. This theory considers not only the matter and meaning of a certain object, but also considers the changes in time and context that objects undergo, which may originate the presence of traditional materials in contemporary works. Yet, the question remains: can art history provide a designation?

More recently, an approximation to art historical discourses was attempted. In 2003, American art historian Amanda Katherine Rath referred to the terminology used by some Indonesian artists to define their practice: Contextual Art.[15] *Seni Kontekstual* demands artists to be knowledgeable of local conditions (both socially and politically) and acquainted with the visual and material symbols from their cultural context. This useful description falls short for not including these artists' deep understanding of "the sobriety of an analytic discourse"[16] introduced by conceptual art.

In 2011, Smith designated art practices which merge art and ethnography as a 'second current of contemporary art', one that prevails in former colonies and on the edges of Europe.[17] According to him, this current stems from the after-effects of postcolonialism and is "too diverse, uneven, contradictory, and oppositional to amount to an art movement."[18] He acknowledges that these practices "often evoke traditional imagery, but also register the new," and concludes that this "content-driven art [is] concerned above all with issues of nationality, identity and rights."[19] While these are certainly important aspects, as an explanation it remains incomplete because, for one thing, these practices contain a postmodern agency—one which relativizes historical transformations and contests the lapses and prejudices of epistemological grand narratives including nationalism—, and for another, they are part of the postcolonial project, one that "seek[s] instead to sublate

from Siassi (Papua New Guinea) and Enggano (Indonesia) (Leiden: CNWS Publications, 2006).

15 See Amanda Katherine Rath, "The Conditions of Possibility and the Limits of Effectiveness: The Ethical Universal in the Works of FX Harsono," in *Re:Petition/Position* (Magelang: Langgeng Art Foundation, 2010), 4–8.

16 Gerardo Mosquera, "The Marco Polo Syndrome: Some Problems around Art and Eurocentrism," in *Theory in Contemporary Art since 1985*, 221.

17 See Smith, *Contemporary Art: World Currents*, 10–11. Smith separates a diversity of contemporary art practices in three currents: the first current, "Contemporary art," can be found in the Euroamerican world, and in most contemporary art museums. It extends the lessons of Modernism such as the avant-garde project. These are, according to Smith, the most celebrated forms of art today for their fashionable and cutting edge character. The second current, "The Postcolonial Turn," is too diverse in terms of style, medium and content, and geographically disperse to talk about a movement. Made in sites in volatile states of transition, these practices require translation to be negotiated. The third current, "The Arts of Contemporaneity," which can be understood as the art of the millennial generation, is even more global and diverse, and more concerned with the shortcomings of the political struggles of the 1960s and 1970s.

18 Smith, 10–11.

19 Smith, 11.

and replace all grand narratives through new ethical demands on modes of historical interpretation."[20]

In 2013, in the publication *The Global Contemporary and the Rise of New Art Worlds*, the German art historians Andrea Buddensieg and Hans Belting proposed these practices as 'global art', a current within the contemporary.[21] They posit the emergence of 'new' players within the contemporary, and observe their active replacement of "colonial history of world art."[22] Here I am in dissonance, as I do not identify these art worlds as new, nor am I content with placing their practices under the overarching events of the globe. In contrast, I find these practices extremely localized, and thus, do not comply with the heterogeneity of worlds.

It is my understanding that whether these practices constitute art and simultaneously ethnography (this is agreed on), their consequent categorization, as American art historian Susan Vogel advocates, remains a Western issue.[23] Artists work unconcerned with issues of categorization, whereas art historians, puzzled with the coevality of art and ethnography, avoid addressing this unorthodox materiality. To overcome the theoretical bias, art historians have resorted to study the contextual conditions of art production and have largely left the task of categorization and definition to anthropologists. These, in turn, have adapted the institutions where they work—the ethnographic museums—and rebranded them as world art museums.[24]

Meanwhile, Asian authors including Kapur, Poshyananda, and Supangkat concur that since the 1980s, art orientation started containing a postmodern agency: art no longer was devoted to the search of national ideals, but shifted toward the search for a cultural identity.[25] Nevertheless, I observe that these practices remain deterritorialised, deriving from their positioning outside of art-historical trajectories that follow the lessons of Modernism, in which avant-garde must be included. In this dissertation, these practices will be discussed as extensions of Modernism (Smith's first current), that often evoke traditional imagery (Smith's second current) and are primarily concerned

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20 Okwui Enwezor, "The Black Box," in *Documenta 11_ Platform 5: Exhibition Catalogue*, ed. Heike Ander and Nadja Rottner (Stuttgart: Hatje Cantz, 2002), 45.

21 See Andreas Buddensieg and Hans Belting, "From Art World to Art Worlds," in *The Global Contemporary and the Rise of New Art Worlds*, ed. Hans Belting, Andreas Buddensieg, and Peter Weibel (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013), 28–31.

22 Buddensieg and Belting, 29.

23 See Susan Vogel, "Introduction," in *Art/Artifact: African Art in Anthropology Collections,* ed. Arthur C. Danto (New York: The Center for African Art and Prestel Verlag, 1988), 17.

24 See James Clifford, "Thinking Globally: Museums, Art and Ethnography after the Global Turn" (Collecting Geographies, Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, 2014), https://vimeo.com/89998837.

25 See Jim Supangkat, *Indonesian Modern Art and Beyond* (Jakarta: Indonesia Fine Arts Foundation, 1997), 78.

with a "search for a sense of locality within situations of constant disruption, dispersal and displacement, their resistant awareness of the pervasive power of mass and official media ... [and] their interest in acting in ways that will improve the situation" (Smith's third current).[26]

To propose these artworks as extensions of modernism is principally to say that they contain notions of novelty and discontinuation of traditional practices. In fact, these artworks have established a novel mode of art making since their emergence in the late 1980s. To this day, despite having populated the international circuit of biennials, these works (still) resist definition, resulting from the ambivalence between what were considered oppositional categories—art and ethnography. This surprising aspect leads to the question: how did two separate domains of knowledge come together in an artwork?

In 1996, Kapur provocatively suggested a hypothesis: "whether is it time for avant-garde initiatives in the non-Western world to place qualifiers around Euro-American art and treat it as ethnographic source material for *their* production."[27] This thought posits Asian artists in a different perspective which has historically been refused to them: as makers of alterity. What does it mean to treat a system of thinking ethnographically? Generally, to Western viewers, West has meant modern, and 'elsewhere' (in Enwezor's words) has meant 'traditional'. In consequence, art from the 'elsewhere' should accordingly be traditional. But developments like Dono's painting question this reading. Artistic practice from 'elsewhere' has historically employed notions and modes of making that have been regarded as belonging to the Western modern paradigm—one which persists in denying its global condition. In fact, the general definition of 'non-Western art' as traditional results from long established discourses within Western museums and academia. So, if Asian artists, as suggested by Kapur, treat Western perceptions and modes of making ethnographically, then it is expected that they devote themselves to the description of difference, which is the realm of ethnography.

Currently, the ethnographic model follows the legacy of Polish anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski, author of *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922), and known as the father of modern anthropology. Malinowski and German-American anthropologist Franz Boas were advocates of fieldwork practice defined by long residence and participant observation. In fact, some artists from Southeast Asia have, in the last decades, followed their academic studies in diasporic contexts—e.g. Nindityo Adipurnomo in Amsterdam, Ninus Anusapati in New York, Dinh Q. Lê in Los Angeles, Maria Madeira in Perth, etc.—, which might suggest that the Western academic system was absorbed

26 Smith, *Contemporary Art: World Currents*, 11.

27 Geeta Kapur, "Dismantled Norms: Apropos Other Avantgardes," in *Art and Social Change: Contemporary Art in Asia and the Pacific*, ed. Caroline Turner (Canberra: Pandanus Books, 2005), 61.

ethnographically. But there are other circumstances involved: Madeira and Lê were exiled from their countries of origin (having recently returned); Adipurnomo and Anusapati went abroad by choice and after pursuing graduate education in Indonesia.

This difference has implications: according to Australian art historian Melissa Chiu, artists in diaspora have traditionally tended towards a more celebratory relation with the homeland. Oftentimes, this is done through traditional arts, which in turn favors their outdoor fixity, in the form of *clichés* about the homeland culture resulting from the idiosyncrasies caused by memory.[28] Dutch art historian Kitty Zijlmans equally observes that "diasporic cultures tend to be conservative, and given to treasure cultural values, customs, traditions and the vernacular,"[29] which can lead to the 'invention of traditions'. Bhabha explains that this process of identification with the homeland always demands "the production of an 'image' of identity and the transformation of the subject in assuming that image."[30] Their remarks explain why it is different to reinterpret a culture inside and outside its geographical borders; artists that remain inland have a more organic relation to culture, and contribute differently for its evolvement.

Still, Kapur's suggestion goes beyond this possibility. What she is conveying is that artists from Asia, who live in contexts that are by definition bicultural (in the sense of having both Western and Eastern systems of knowledge intertwined for nearly two centuries), and multicultural (in the sense that Indian culture itself is highly diverse, a circumstance that equally happens to Thai or Indonesian cultures), if not a completely constructed reality, may treat the Western art paradigm as if they were observers and its privileged interpreters. Clark affirms that this has happened throughout history. To him, the transfer, albeit intermittent, of Western artistic styles to Asia between the 1850s and the 1930s has had implications, both for art and for art history.[31] He mentions that if the discipline moves beyond the code of origin of Euroamerican styles, it may open the possibility to examine what these transfers meant and which results they had. For Clark, modernity results from the double process of transfer and reception of methods (including the Euroamerican modernist styles). He considers that artistic styles—ranging from academic realism to late impressionism, followed by formal practice, and the introduction of

28 See Melissa Chiu, "Theories of Being Outside: Diaspora and Chinese Artists," in *Contemporary Art in Asia: A Reader,* ed. Melissa Chiu and Benjamin Genocchio (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011), 342–343.

29 Kitty Zijlmans, "East West, Home's Best: Cultural Identity in the Present Nomadic Age," in *GRID: A Project by Tiong Ang, Fendry Ekel, Mella Jaarsma, Remy Jungerman* (Yogyakarta: Cemeti Art House, 2003), 82.

30 Bhabha quoted in Chiu, "Theories of Being Outside," 343.

31 See John Clark, *Modern Asian Art* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998), 16.

critical functions for the art object (which have been termed modernist)—were transferred to the Asian context, assimilated and developed at least until the 1960s in relative autonomy from the Euroamerican centers of their origination. This relative autonomy resulted from restricted information flows, which have lessened since the mid-1990s, when artists from the region started being constant players in international shows. To Clark, these circumstances made Asian artists create a method of work definable by the selection of those aspects they wanted for their investigations. This procedure is commonly referred to as the inherent *syncretism* of Southeast Asian cultures, which have historically been subject to several waves of acculturation, without being fully immersed in them. So, according to Clark, while being transferred, artistic styles underwent change.

Locally, transfer has often been concurrent with modernization and commercialization, and threatened several local aesthetic traditions: despite the permanence of traditional Chinese landscape painting and calligraphy, these impacts prompted the alteration of these genres into more individual manifestations. Yet, the sense of keeping one's identity amid a changing environment shows that artists in the homeland have historically treated Western culture ethnographically. Meanwhile, for artists immersed in diasporic contexts, the ethnographic behavior of being a privileged translator and selector of the transferred knowledge is prone to happen. This circumstance is often referred in literature—that after going away, artists turn into their identity(ies). Indonesian curator Asmudjo Jono Irianto reflects:

> One thing is certain: the attempt to rediscover tradition by young Yogyakartan artists occurred after they had been exposed to the Western hemisphere. But the search for national identity conducted by these artists is substantially different from their predecessors... The artists of the 1990s, however, wished to re-adopt their traditional heritage in order to present themselves internationally as exemplary Indonesian artists with a national identity.[32]

So, Kapur's hypothesis—treating Western art ethnographically—is a behavior that can be detected in the work of diasporic and non-diasporic artists. The anthropological intent of these alterity discourses built in and outside of the homeland may also have other reasons besides contemporary nomadism. Another significant aspect relates to Western education, which was globalized in the colonies (and protectorates) since the nineteenth century. This situation

32 Asmudjo Jono Irianto, "Tradition and the Socio-Political Context in Contemporary Yogyakartan Art of the 1990s," in *Outlet: Yogyakarta within the Contemporary Indonesian Art Scene*, ed. Melissa Larner (Yogyakarta: Cemeti Art Foundation, 2001), 78.

remains unchanged in the postcolonial momentum.[33]

Today in Indonesia, graduate studies in art institutions follow curriculums that can be termed 'Western'. Courses are distributed taxonomically, with little or no connection between them.[34] The curriculum offered to an aspiring artist—be it a painter, a sculptor, a print maker, or a multimedia artist (the most common specializations offered)—is extremely similar to the curriculum of the Fine Arts School in Lisbon. Indonesian artists equally study European philosophers and European art history, though not extensively.[35] They have life-model classes (without nudes), and painting classes are taught with recourse to Western materials such as canvases and acrylics. One might ask: why do such similarities exist when both cultures are so distant from each other? The reason lies in the foundation of Indonesian academies by the Dutch colonial system in the late nineteenth-century.[36] The introduction of a Western educational system also took place in Siam, Malaysia, Singapore, Vietnam, the Philippines and Timor-Leste (with chronological discrepancies, related to the colonizers' agenda). This introduced (and translated) academicism left a 'thin layer' of concepts such as individualism (which would manifest more forcefully during the revolutionary period) and new forms of representation such as linear perspective (in which the artist occupies the center of the image, an aspect that contributed for the awakening of a critical sense of self).

Thus, the postmodern/contemporary shift towards an indigenous art discourse results from a deliberate move away from Euroamerican typifications of modern art discourses. This conceptual movement denotes exploration of how to construct an artistic discourse that uses modern concepts and simultaneously articulates indigenous tastes from one's own cultural background. The procedure, according to Clark, has an 'early' and a 'late' position: the early, characterized by the academic media of oil painting, had local mythologies as subjects matters. This is debated in Astri Wright's book *Soul, Spirit and Mountain: preoccupations of contemporary Indonesian painters* (1994). The late position used modernist

33 In an interview with Indian artists Prasad Raghavan and Aji VN in Rotterdam, in 16 April 2015, both manifested their understanding of art as based on Western perspectives because of education. They added that Western art books present at the library were colored, in clear contrast with black and white reproductions of Indian art books. This aspect contributed for their fascination toward Western art. Meanwhile, they feel the ingredient of 'Indianess' in their work as natural, but maintain it does not constitute an end.

34 See Ninus Anusapati, Memory and Contemporaneity, interview by Leonor Veiga, Yogyakarta, January 12, 2010, 20, http://repositorio.ul.pt/bitstream/10451/2039/3/ULFBA_TES356_ANEXOS.pdf.

35 FX Harsono explained that artistic curriculum in Indonesia only includes one semester of Aesthetics. To him, this is insufficient to incite critical discourse on an aspiring artist. See FX Harsono, Memory and Contemporaneity, interview by Leonor Veiga, Yogyakarta, January 10, 2010, 11.

36 See Joseph Fischer, ed., *Modern Indonesian Art: Three Generations of Tradition and Change 1945-1990* (Jakarta: Panitia Pameran KIAS, 1990), 10.

self-referentiality to foreground the qualities of the materials themselves.[37] Poshyananda also refers the flux of Western artists to the former colonies as a contributing factor and affirms that this circumstance was used by some local powers to legitimize the taste of authoritarian regimes. One such example is the embracement of Western art in the nineteenth-century kingdom of Siam.[38]

Systematic (or methodical) education is a Western invention that in a Southeast Asian context constitutes a legacy from colonization. But now we might ask: what about the legacies of Javanese, Siamese or Chinese art, which originated in the region? Are these local forms of knowledge also integrated in education? In the Indonesian context the answer is yes, and arguably in other locations, such as Pakistan, or Vietnam, local traditions do impact art.[39] But departmental separation is physical; buildings for the departments of Fine Arts (Seni Rupa) and Applied Arts, or Crafts (Seni Kriya) are different, resulting in little communication. Furthermore, not all long-standing traditions enter fine arts institutions: the highly collectable traditional Javanese glass paintings on mirror are only taught in technical schools. This situation maintains hierarchies between traditional arts, a situation Supangkat relates to the preexisting Javanese (hierarchical) taxonomical system.[40] Depending on the craft practiced, an artist operates within layers of categorization of crafts themselves.

The production proposed by the artists in this dissertation, which is the conflation of both academic systems, is not possible to find at an educational level. So how does this happen? I argue these practices stem from an *avant-gardist* spirit that refutes simultaneously the hegemony of the Western canon of art and the conservatism imposed by local intelligentsia. As Clark and Supangkat advance, these conditions contain a historical provenance. Meanwhile, Western academicism remains ongoing.

During the 1970s, the modern Western canon of art was totalizing artistic production in the region. In defiance against the situation, unrelated groups of students from Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, and The Philippines rebelled because they felt unrepresented (see chapter 3). It is agreed that the 1970s avant-gardes precepts left a major legacy in the region.[41] I suggest that the theme of the traditional is one such case. Throughout the 1990s,

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37 See Clark, *Modern Asian Art*, 16–19.

38 See Apinan Poshyananda, "Modern Art in Thailand in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries" (Cornell University, 1990), 23-35.

39 See Salima Hashmi, "Radicalising Tradition," in *Contemporary Art in Asia: A Reader*, 2000, 285–294, where the author exemplifies the contemporary teaching, since the 1980s, of miniature painting, a dying genre, in Lahore. For the Vietnamese case, see Nora A. Taylor, *Painters in Hanoi: An Ethnography of Vietnamese Art* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), 22–41.

40 See Supangkat, *Indonesian Modern Art and Beyond*, 84.

41 See T. K. Sabapathy, "Intersecting Histories, Thoughts on the Contemporary and History in Southeast Asian Art," in *Intersecting Histories, Contemporary Turns in Southeast Asian Art*, ed. T. K. Sabapathy (Singapore: Nanyang Technological University, 2012), 53.

artists started 'going global', displaying art practices containing traditions, thus invalidating hegemony of taste following the Western paradigm and simultaneously rejecting what Poshyananda calls "the predictable and self-censored art of ethnonationalism."[42]

1.1.1 A Tendency Becomes Norm: the 1990s Up Until Today

Already in 1992, Cuban art historian and curator Gerardo Mosquera observed that Cuban artist José Bedia was making what was then a novelty:

> His work intelligently takes advantage of openings, resources and sensitivities from current art from the centres, to confront us with a different vision. This syncretism also occurs in his technique, effortlessly integrating technological, natural and cultural elements, drawing and photography, ritual and mass-cultural objects, all within the sobriety of an analytic discourse. He also appropriates 'primitive' techniques, but not in order to reproduce their programs: he creates elements with them that articulate his personal discourse and iconography. Bedia is making Western culture from non-Western sources...[43]

Mosquera observes the emergence of the 'third object', a conflation of disparate systems of knowledge that was not provided in any museum or academic studies. The question remains: how did it come to be, and why did this mode of making endure? All these practices constitute transcultural signs; if in the 1990s they responded to ethnographic sentiments related to "conservation, of an art-historical desire for a traditional aesthetic, of national appropriations, of imperialist robbery," their continuation throughout the 2000s shows that "the representational projects are now accompanied by strategies of future survival."[44] In the midst of an increased globalization, and under different political circumstances, artists today equally reflect on aspects of their cultural landscape that have been repressed, ignored, neglected, or undervalued. What all the works offered then and now is what Kapur terms as the works' *cumulative critique*: a rejection of the hegemonic Western model of art and simultaneously the consequences of coercive globalization.[45] This is how avant-garde processes and methods come in, as critical manifestations against established discourses—within and outside the countries of origin.

Generally, avant-garde in Europe and in America is regarded as a rupture

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42 Poshyananda, "The Future: Post-Cold War, Postmodernism, Post-Marginalia (Playing with Slippery Lubricants)," in *Tradition and Change: Contemporary Art of Asia and the Pacific*, ed. Caroline Turner (Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1993), 17.

43 Mosquera, "The Marco Polo Syndrome," 221.

44 Kapur, "Dismantled Norms," 61.

45 See Kapur, 62.

with the past. Meanwhile, contemporary art from Southeast Asia has been disruptive and simultaneously protective of past characteristics. This apparent conservatism originates in a conflation of notions of individuality (inherited from the process of colonization) merged with valued notions of cultural continuity.

Dono's and Harsono's installations from the early 1990s appropriated aspects of Javanese tradition of puppetry [Fig. 1.3 displays the famous Panji masks], and in so doing, they converted theatres into conceptual, politically charged installations because, as Canadian art historian Astri Wright observes, "the Indonesian government [of Suharto] invest[ed] in the past and encourage[d] traditional forms of art in order to counter new ones. So [they] decided to exploit the situation,"[46] by using the exact codes the regime promoted.

Figure 1.3
FX Harsono
The Voices Are Controlled by the Powers
1994 | Wooden masks and cloth | 350 x 350 x 30 cm
Source: *Traditions/Tensions* (exhibition catalogue, p. 158)

Schneider explains the dynamic of appropriating—in these cases, the appropriated materials are simultaneously local traditional arts and the Western mode of art making—as a mimicking process. In its root, the aim is to know more about the other.[47] It seems unlikely that artists in Indonesia, in the 1990s (up until today) that work with *wayang* while making conceptual

46 Gianni Simone, Astri Wright, and Deborah Iskandar, "Contemporary Art in Indonesia: From Solo to Mass, Spiritual to Social," *San Francisco Art Quarterly* (SFAQ) 17, no. 3 (2014): 52.

47 See Arnd Schneider, "Appropriations," in *Contemporary Art and Anthropology*, ed. Arnd Schneider and Christopher Wright (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2006), 34.

installations, are trying to understand the West better. Instead, as affirmed by American art historian Thomas McEvilley, they are trying to go beyond narratives of influence, and express this act through whatever blends of Asian and European influences they feel entitled to.[48] These are artists who have a full understanding of Western art, and are merging its notions with local concerns through the reprocessing of their foundations.

This, I argue, is where the ethnographic attitude comes in: alike within the modern art idiom, Southeast Asian artists have gone beyond notions of simple nationalism toward notions of localism merged with globalism. Art plays a leading role in this course: this enterprise does not mean "the adoption of some neutral international style that bleaches out cultural particularities, as it did in the Modernist period. The postmodern invitation is... to balance one's identity with the various global demands of the moment."[49]

That was the situation then—in the 1990s—yet why do these conflated works (that for instance recall *wayang*) persist today through the practice of younger Indonesian artists such as Eko Nugroho, Jummadi, or the duo Indieguerilas today? American anthropologist James Clifford suggests that within these articulated practices resides the possibility of being 'native' in more than one place, to feel rooted, without being localized.[50]

Figure 1.4
Indieguerillas
Tempus Fugit Resistance is Futile
2014 | Mixed media | Dimensions unknown
Source: http://indieguerillas.com/work/indieguerillas-at-art-basel-hk-2014/

48 See Thomas McEvilley, "Fusion: Hot or Cold?," in *Fusion: West African Artists at the Venice Biennale*, Focus on African Art Series (Munich: Prestel Verlag GmbH & Co KG, 1993), 11.

49 McEvilley, 18.

50 See James Clifford, "Indigenous Articulations," *The Contemporary Pacific* 13, no. 2 (2001): 470.

In 2010, while researching for an article on Indieguerillas' practice, Indonesian artist Agung Kurniawan was debating with himself this same question. Indieguerillas are known to devote their practice to making wayang attractive to younger generations who are increasingly distant from its traditional look. In the work *Tempus Fugit Resistance is Futile* [Fig. 1.4], they juxtaposed atop a skateboard local symbols such as the *wayang* character Petruk (on the left), with global symbols such as a Campbell's Tomato Soup (alluding to Andy Warhol), a Coca-Cola bottle (this one merged with a Hindu deity with multiple arms, commonly used to reference the deity's various powers) and a reference to fast food chain Kentucky Fried Chicken, through the portrait of Colonel Sanders.

As the title mentions, 'time flies', and it is pointless to resist its passage: it is inevitable that *wayang* is abhorrent for younger generations "who readily discard their traditional heritage for the allure of Western/Global" culture.[51] So, traditional elements are present, yet the overall aesthetics relates to pop culture, especially that of computer games. Indieguerillas are actively updating *wayang* through millennial culture. While he recognizes the extreme beauty of this traditional art, Kurniawan posits markets' influence on its contemporary genres, especially because these practices have not ceased after 2000. He found a hegemony of taste since the 1990s—*if it is from Indonesia then it must display* wayang (despite the fact that there are so many other ethnicities in the country)—and remembers that "a lot of curators [in the 1990s] came to Indonesia from Japan, Australia, in search of the 'Other'."[52] Kurniawan and I discussed if *wayang* remained or became fashionable, as in the context of the Bienniale Jogja X—2009, *Jogja Jamming, an Art Archive Movement*, various works on display contained references to Javanese traditional arts (*wayang*, batik and the like). For Kurniawan the use of *wayang* stems from a desire "to approach [an] international arena, [because] for the internationalisation of the work, you need identity."[53] Instead, I propose that for Indonesian artists this persistence meant that *traditions are locally perceived as living archives*.

Certainly, the fashionista reading is plausible because, as Mosquera pointed out, "Many artists, critics and Latin American [and Asian] curators seem to be quite willing to become 'othered' for the West."[54] The preposition *for* is relevant; it posits the local artists as makers of exotic works. It might indeed be market-driven, but how else can an artist maintain being Javanese-Indonesian in a global context? The constant employment of *wayang*—which is one among so many Javanese traditions—nevertheless mirrors the efficacy of Suharto's

51 Ema McGovern, "Ignorance Is Bliss," in *Happy Days* (Singapore: Valentine Willie Fine Art, 2010), http://www.vwfa.net/indieguerillas/essay.html.

52 Agung Kurniawan, Memory and Contemporaneity, interview by Leonor Veiga, Yogyakarta, January 18, 2010, 54.

53 Kurniawan, 54.

54 Mosquera, "The Marco Polo Syndrome," 220.

New Order (1966-1998) preference for this medium. And while a selected few artists actively research Indonesian culture (e.g. Jompet Kuswidananto while researching the Java War (1825-1830), produced several faceless sculptural installations [Fig. 1.5] referencing Javanese *kraton* soldiers traditional attire, one in which various civilizational layers—Buddhist hats, Dutch boots and instruments, Javanese coats made from *tenun lurik*, an important Javanese woven cloth associated with ritual practices—are represented) this artistic approach towards art is uncommon, allowing *wayang*'s hegemony to persist.

Figure 1.5
Jompet Kuswidananto
Java's Machine: Phantasmagoria
2008 | Installation | Dimensions variable | Image courtesy of the artist

I agree that the artworld was receptive and discreetly demanded these fused practices—especially after decades of a hegemonic modernism that tired the art world and its audiences, as observed by Brazilian art historian Ana Letícia Fialho.[55] So, I suggest that preconditions result from a combination of factors: graduate education, the growing international exposure of these artists, and the local material reality. Then, imported goods (such as acrylic paint) were difficult to gather and expensive for students. It is significant that, as recently as 2013, contemporary Timorese artist Gelly Neves confirmed the currency of this factor. It shows that Southeast Asian realities remain uneven.

As Kurniawan admits, the notion of identity is paramount whenever Indonesian artists encounter Western institutions and audiences through art

55 See Ana Letícia Fialho, "As Exposições Internacionais de Arte Brasileira: Discursos, Práticas e Interesses Em Jogo," *Sociedade e Estado, Brasília* 20, no. 3 (2005): 690.

events. Indeed, oftentimes traditions have significantly played a role in this dynamic because they are regarded as honoring particular cultural identities.[56] So, I concur with Kapur when she advances the importance of recapturing the avant-gardist stance that existed in traditional discourses during the decolonizing process. She suggests once more regarding tradition through "a less monolithic, a less formalistic, indeed a less institutional, status so as to at least make it what it was once, a vanguard notion leading to a variety of experimental moves."[57]

To explicate the employment of traditions in contemporary art then, several notions must be taken in consideration: *tradition*, and its impact on contemporary life, *identity* and its constant changing nature in progressing and changing societies, and *avant-garde*, as a procedure permeating these groundbreaking practices which contain aspects that enforce institutional change (within academia and museums). Yet these definitions are not conducive to change without *agency*, here understood as "the capacity of an individual to operate, make decisions and effect choices."[58] In this dissertation, agency is the motor behind artists' creative acts, their right and duty to, 1. Correct traditions' conservatisms, and 2. To talk globally through notions of their local culture.

In line with British anthropologist Alfred Gell, I place "all emphasis on *agency, intention, causation, result and transformation*... [and propose] art as a system of action, intended to change the world."[59] Gell's 'action-centered approach' is more preoccupied with artworks mediatory role than with their interpretation as objects. This procedure serves to countermand much "art criticism [that] downplays... artistic agency... and concentrates on the visual-aesthetic properties of art objects."[60] Yet, in this study the action-centered approach and the visual-aesthetic properties are equally significant. This double regard stems from two causes: first, these works merge disparate systems of thought—art and ethnography. Seen from its visual-aesthetic standpoint, this constitutes a new kind of agency of the artwork, which I termed 'Third Avant-garde'. Second, artists, without whom this material agency would not exist, are also envisioned as *social agents*: they voice individual concerns that have both local and global relevance. Reading agency this way implies that artists overcome difficulties and, through their practice, voice their peers' concerns while inviting them to absorb their messages. I am suggesting that artists be

56 See McEvilley, "Fusion," 19.

57 Kapur, "Contemporary Cultural Practice: Some Polemical Categories," *Social Scientist* 18, no. 3 (1990): 56.

58 Alexandre Dumbadze and Suzanne Hudson, eds., "Agency," in *Contemporary Art: 1989 to the Present* (Malden, MA: Willey-Blackwell, 2013), 265.

59 Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 6.

60 Gell, *Art and Agency*, 72.

regarded as fostering relations with local and global audiences: the art objects they produce 'speak' to immediate and distant publics. So, how should we look at these objects? I propose to shift the interpretative gaze toward the materiality of the artwork, one which is intimately tied to traditional arts.

1.1.2 Agency: Cultural Identity and Cultural Citizenship

In the age of a globalized world, the concept of cultural identity is losing geographic pertinence.[61] In contrast, the cultural aspect has never been so important. As affirmed by Jamaican-born postcolonial theorist Stuart Hall, identities are always *in process*, never fully developed:

> Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact... we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside representation.[62]

Peoples and goods circulate at a rhythm never known before; recent decades made this circulation become available to most populations. Following significant migration waves that occurred after the end of colonial empires when large portions of native populations dislocated to the countries of former colonizers (or after conflicts such as the American-Vietnam War) many southern Vietnamese, such as the artist Dinh Q. Lê in 1979 fled to America, only to return to reside in Vietnam in 1996. Equally, Timorese Maria Madeira was exiled in Portugal after 1975, and later in Australia, only to return to her homeland in 2000. During exile, their identity gained new cultural referents which they articulate in artworks. Clifford advances articulation as the main procedure behind artistic practices that bring to the present "Very old cultural dispositions [which] are being actively remade."[63]

Partly Portuguese, partly Australian, Maria Madeira feels her identity as Timorese. This is the reasoning behind Madeira's canvases where three languages—Tetun (the local dialect, now official language), Portuguese and English—were used to convey messages of despair and hope. In *Reconciliation* (2007) [Fig. 1.6] she collaged several strips of *tais* (now Timor-Leste's national textile) onto the canvas. The crosses she created possibly allude to the Catholic religion that is practiced in Timor-Leste, one of the defining traits which distinguished the Timorese from the Indonesian occupier. Atop this background, Madeira wrote messages in the three languages: words such as *Justice*, *God* and *Ancestors* convey her preoccupations and show her attempt to reconcile with her own history.

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61 See Zijlmans, "East West, Home's Best," 81.

62 Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora (1990)," in *Diaspora and Visual Culture: Representing Africans and Jews*, ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff (London: Routledge, 2000), 21.

63 Clifford, "Indigenous Articulations," 475.

Figure 1.6
Maria Madeira
Rekonsiliasaun
2007 | Mixed media on canvas with *tais* | 121 x 91 cm | Image courtesy of the artist

Madeira's case aptly illustrates how identities are always in process: as an artist in (forced) diaspora, through language additions she manifests her relation both to the "native land and culture and to the current place of residence,"[64] mirroring a dynamic involving, as Zijlmans argues, "processes as exchange, association and resistance."[65] This affirmation connects to Hall's proposition of two major approaches regarding cultural identity. He states:

> The first position defines 'cultural identity' in terms of one, shared culture ... which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common. Within the terms of this definition, our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as 'one people,' with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning ... This 'oneness,' is the truth, the essence ... which [an Asian] or diaspora must discover, excavate, bring to light and express... There is, however a second, related but different view of cultural identity. This second position recognizes that, as well as the many

64 Zijlmans, "East West, Home's Best," 81–82.
65 Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," 22–23.

> points of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant difference which constitute 'who we really are'; or rather—since history has intervened—'what we have become.' ... Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past.[66]

These two propositions—the *essential* and the *hybrid* cultural identity—are many times at play in a single artwork. It is interesting to realize that in post-independence Timor-Leste, in the midst of a global society, artists are actively searching for 'their true identity' as Timorese. It is equally relevant that some Indonesian artists such as Arahmaiani and Harsono, who originate in two distinct ethnic groups in Java (Arahmaiani is of Sundanese ethnicity from west Java, whereas Harsono is of Chinese ethnicity from north central Java) have, after 1998, turned their gaze inwards to understand the nature of their cultural identities. Arahmaiani's search focuses on her position as a Muslim woman and artist in a Muslim-phobic world; Harsono's regard has concentrated on what it means to be ethnically Chinese amidst a society that has historically been repressive toward this ethnicity. Despite the essentialism of these personal projects, both artists feel respectively Indonesian-Sundanese, Indonesian-Chinese, and global.

The Indonesian archipelago is composed by more than 17,000 islands, so ethnical differences are common among its citizens. In fact, this became the motto of the country, *Unity in Diversity*. All islands have different resources, languages, and histories of contact which have had large repercussions on artistic trajectories. Both artists—Arahmaiani and Harsono—were anti-Suharto prior to 1998. Then, first and foremost, they were acting as Indonesians. After the beginning of the Reformation era, they started a personal journey towards the (re)collection of 'pieces' of their identities. Still, their works have retained an avant-gardist spirit in making and reception.

Interestingly, the trajectory of Arahmaiani and Harsono is opposite to that of Lê and Madeira, who remained 'essentialist' during exile, and opened their identity to a hybrid condition after returning home. This discrepancy shows that identities are extremely unfixed, and throughout one's life perception can also change. This leads to Bhabha's proposition of 'cultural citizenship'.

In the Indian Art Summit in Delhi, 2011, I heard Bhabha proposing the concept of cultural citizen. Citizenship is most commonly understood as a set of rights and obligations of a certain individual toward the place where he

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66 In the Timorese case, depending on which generation the gaze refers to, the plurality of identity might be partially Portuguese (until 1975) or partially Indonesian (from 1975 until 1999). More recently, especially between 2002 and 2013, Timor-Leste became a highly diverse society, since the United Nations Peacekeeping Forces, along with Australian and Portuguese military, have resided in the country.

resides. Undoubtedly a problematic aspect of the age of globalization because, obtaining citizenship is everyday more complex and difficult. Citizenship differs from identity in the aspect that while identities are personal (and thus various identities coexist in one nation-state), citizenships are obtained by legal right. Typically, citizenship is regarded in its social, legal, and political aspects but, Bhabha's interest resides in the context of a global citizenship. He says: "I believe cultural works ignite the issue of the cultural citizen."[67] But how does this come into being?

As noted by American cultural anthropologist Renato Rosaldo, the system which admits citizens is far from perfect and marginalizes minorities: "nationalism as an ideology simultaneously includes and excludes by defining certain people as full members and others along a spectrum raging from second-class citizens to non-members."[68] This is why some artists' works "demonstrate that citizenship in the national community is a contract in a continual process of renegotiation."[69] The relations between an individual (artist or not) and the power system is oftentimes problematic. This aspect is visible for instance, in Harsono's and Arahmaiani's work: as citizens, their acts contribute for the betterment of their communities—Chinese and women—showing that many times "official citizenship is at odds with cultural citizenship."[70] Thus, they propose the revising of history (and traditions), and proceed to its rewriting. And, as is expected from art, their acts of citizenship break with repetition and convention. Like other artists included in this dissertation, their work demonstrates that acts of citizenship "are also ethical (as in courageous), cultural (as in religious), sexual (as in pleasurable), and social (as in affiliative) in that they instantiate ways of being that are political."[71]

To be consequential, acts of citizenship must find creative solutions. And contemporary art—due to its contemporaneousness, which relates to its expanded field of enquiry—offers much ground for the expression of creative acts. Like acts of citizenship, contemporary art expressions also "emerge from the paradox between universal inclusion in the language of rights and cosmopolitanism, on the one hand, and inevitable exclusion in the language of community and particularity on the other."[72] From here, I suggest, originates the artist as cultural citizen: because she or he find himself in a paradoxical position, she or he decides to participate in community life and voice concerns.

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67 Bhabha, "Towards a global cultural citizenship," interview by Sachidananda Mohanty, July 3, 2005, http://www.thehindu.com/lr/2005/07/03/stories/2005070300020100.htm.

68 Renato Rosaldo, "The Borders of Belonging: Nation and Citizen in the Hinterlands," in *Cultural Citizenship in Island Southeast Asia: Nation and Belonging in the Hinterlands*, ed. Renato Rosaldo (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 6.

69 Rosaldo, 7.

70 Rosaldo, 9.

71 Engin F. Isin and Greg M. Nielsen, *Acts of Citizenship* (London: Zed Books Ltd, 2008), 2.

72 Isin and Nielsen, 11.

This is what British sociologist Kate Orton Johnson calls 'Do It Yourself citizenship'[73]—a set of creative acts aimed at changing the status quo.

What does it mean to be a cultural citizen? A citizen must perform duties toward their community; she or he must behave according to an established order. Yet, a citizen is simultaneously an individual with rights within that community. Culture, as remarked by Gell, "has no existence independently of its manifestations in social interactions."[74] In this double-position of rightful citizen and participant, and the need to manifest for culture to exist, originate acts of cultural citizenship through artistic intervention. Artists become social agents, who proceed to a 'do-it-yourself citizenship' gesture to transmit current matters. Their works exercise social agency, and attempt to overcome local and global resistances (this is evidenced through case studies).

So, I propose that acts of cultural citizenship constitute a form of individual agency through which artists address their disquiet and concerns. They examine the increasingly complex articulations of the local and the global and respond through self-made acts—the artworks. The individual drive to perform derives from their identities in process, and from a need to construe fairer relations with the nation and the global art community. In addition, artists refer to the inherent complexity of their identity and act as community voices. This is done largely through the sense of duty originating in their citizenship. So, alike with the political connotation, cultural citizenship is equally a status (that is acquired by law) and a practice (which may be volunteer, like within creative acts).

1.2 Traditions, Museums and Art

By definition, each culture has its own individual traditional resources. Traditions' transition into modernity is related to their classification by modern anthropologists as ahistorical, fixed entities. This lack of historicity granted them a universal value. Yet, the opposition made between tradition and modern was so strongly associated to geographical divisions, that *traditional* knowledge became associated to cultures in the periphery. *Progress* was then associated with cultures in the center, that seemed to have broken definitively with the past. These geographical divisions ultimately extended into the museum realm, which was divided in ethnographic and art museums, paralleling the West for art and the *rest* for the realm of the ethnographic. In consequence, material cultures from traditional societies were perceived as

73 See Kate Orton-Johnson, "DYI Citizenship, Critical Making, and Community," in *DYI Citizenship: Critical Making and Social Media*, ed. Matt Ratto and Megan Boler (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2014), 141.

74 Gell, *Art and Agency*, 4.

rooted in the absence of rationality and interpreted as inferior. In contrast, material cultures from progressive societies were read as superior, ever changing and varying, and were displayed in modern art museums. In addition, all cultures considered as classic—meaning, contributors to the Western civilization[75]—were introduced into art museums that, in most cases, were termed as national, while they (re)presented disparate areas of the world. Such is the case of the Louvre museum in Paris, where we can find Egyptian art in the same building as the Mona Lisa, both symbolizing European culture.

While traditions were read as fixed, in most cases, traditions do change. Javanese *wayang* aptly exemplifies transformative occurrences. Dutch anthropologist Walter H. Rassers defends it as constituting a ritual ceremony rooted on the spiritual life of tribal people:[76] the arrival of Hinduism caused the tradition to adapt to the new tales (the Indian epics) and, the arrival of Islam caused some forms of *wayang* to disappear (e.g. *wayang beber*, or scroll *wayang*),[77] while the shadow plays witnessed a recoding that persists today.[78] Javanese *wayang* became highly stylized, leading Latvian-American art historian Claire Holt to say that Javanese wayang "is a shadow of a shadow."[79] *Wayang*'s reformulations have not ceased, and remain an important aspect of contemporary art. In consequence, the essentialism that has characterized most of the discourse on tradition must be contradicted. Thus, I concur with Hobsbawm's claim that traditions, more prominently in the modern era, should be understood as 'invented'. They are often 'instrumentalised' by the state, the tourism industry, and local political agendas.

As *wayang* demonstrates, modernization is a recurrent process. Equally, 'traditional arts' have remained frozen within ethnographic museums in the West and 'civilization' museums and theme parks in Southeast Asia. This rehearses the perception we have of them—one which transports us to the realm of the premodern, or simply the non-modern.[80] This is why looking at traditions through the lens of the contemporary artworld seems at first glance a paradox: art is in most cases about the present and possibly comments on

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75 James Elkins, *Stories of Art* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 1–38.

76 Walter H. Rassers, P*anji, the Culture Hero: A Structural Study of Religion in Java* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1959), 60.

77 Benedict Anderson, "The Last Picture Show: Wayang Beber," in *Proceedings from the Center for Southeast Asian Studies* (Conference on Modern Indonesian Literature, Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin, 1974), 33–55.

78 Anusapati, "Wayang in Java," 5.

79 Claire Holt, *Art in Indonesia: Continuities and Change* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967), 123.

80 Some activities like knitting or cross-stitching are not perceived as ethnical or indigenous because they are regarded as patrimony of the Western civilization, thus are just considered old-fashioned crafts. They are nevertheless considered non-modern, even though

the future, and traditions represent the 'static' past. I propose that through the conflated practices this study focuses on, this inherent paradox is broken and argue that this tendency came from those once peripheral centers of production.

1.2.1 Invented Traditions and Traditions-In-Use

What do we mean by tradition? And why would it matter? In 1989, Kapur stated that the persistence of the term tradition within the contemporary alludes to its essentialist nature, but traditions should be understood as highly pragmatic features of nation building. Drawing energy from an imaginary resource (the 'ideal' tradition), the invention of traditions by nationalists was an attempt to restore conceptual wholeness to lost communities.[81] Thinking of traditions solely as symbols of wholeness (material and timewise) is largely a fictitious enterprise. This circumstance stems from the fact that traditions have gained new functions in the modern era.

In 1983, Hobsbawm advanced his highly important theory of the invention of tradition. As he explains, traditions are not necessarily timeless. He instead proposes that traditions "which appear or claim to be old are often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented."[82] He recognizes that the phenomenon includes two distinct senses of invented traditions: firstly, those formally instituted by a societal cultural vanguard, and secondly, those emerging from the grassroots of society. Both cases happen whenever societies undergo significant changes and constitute attempts to restore conceptual wholeness to lost communities. For the former, Hobsbawm identified the birth of the modern nation-state as a 'trigger' for the invention of tradition. For this reason it has "been particularly significant in the past 200 years."[83] When nations are *mapped*, inventions take place (a national flag, a national anthem), and conventions are agreed on (e.g. national holidays, national heroes and historical events). Yet, this mapping also introduces some 'ownership' problems, such as who has the right to affirm the invention and the making of certain cultural products. Traditional arts, and notably textiles, exemplify this problem.[84] He equally recognizes the role 'secularization' plays

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they made a successful transition to the industrial age, which many times does not permit their regard as timeless legacies.

81 Kapur, "Contemporary Cultural Practice," 49.

82 Eric J. Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions," in *The Invention of Tradition,* ed. Eric J. Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger, 20th ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1.

83 Hobsbawm, "Introduction," 5. The formation of modern states continues: Timor-Leste, declared a sovereign state in 2002, is the Southeast Asia's youngest nation; the world's youngest nation, declared sovereign in 2011, is South Sudan.

84 Batik, *ikat* and other kinds of textiles have been exchanged within (Southeast) Asia through sea fare before the arrival of the Europeans in the sixteenth-century, leading to conflicts. Until 2009, when Indonesia was distinguished with batik's intangible heritage ownership by

in the invention of tradition: because life is no longer bound to the community but rather around the nation, rituals tied to national celebrations are formed. So, says Kapur, while traditions "are used... as essential categories... in fact they are largely pragmatic features of nation building."[85]

Kapur agrees with Hobsbawm that traditions, as we know them, have largely been created. Consequently, the word tradition becomes less tied to the premodern that is commonly equated to the primitive: traditional arts exist in developed societies that, despite being premodern, cannot be classified as tribal or primitive. Also, indigenous traditions have migrated throughout time between populations. In this sense, traditional arts and rituals have been exchanged in globalizations prior to the Western one (from the sixteenth century onward).

Tradition, Kapur argues, is a loaded term, not a disinterested civilizational legacy. It is not simply an anthropological phenomenon as it was conceived by Western modernists when they first contacted primitive cultures.[86] Tradition seems to be a badge of authenticity—albeit an anonymous authenticity—frequently used to describe groups or communities. This describing capacity, coupled with their aggregating nature, made them important in the project of the newly founded nation-states. As capital of the past to be preserved in the modern era, traditions are capable of legitimizing social practices which explains why they have been so frequently recourse in transitional moments (such as resistance from colonization or postcolonial nation building). And, because traditions were experienced as revolutionary in transitional moments, they have served the society's cultural vanguard in the course of a struggle.[87]

Both authors distinguish invented traditions from other manifestations: the so-called 'customs' or 'traditions-in-use'. These, in turn, are *in process* and continue to nurture contemporary existence. Hobsbawm notes that customs are not invariant, because in 'traditional' societies life is not so. Custom "does not preclude innovation and change to a point...[but] it must appear compatible or even identical with precedent imposes substantial limitations on it."[88] Kapur notes that post-modern artists engage in the task of making traditions-in-use nurture contemporary existence. Through this involvement, tradition "is turned into a critique and culture into a matter of practice and both together into a civilizational discourse that goes beyond the nation-state

UNESCO, batik was object of a cultural dispute between Indonesia and Malaysia. See Peter Gelling, "Score One for Indonesia in the War Over Batik," *The New York Times*, September 14, 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/15/world/asia/15iht-batik.html.

85 Kapur, "Contemporary Cultural Practice," 49.

86 Kapur, 56.

87 Kapur, 49.

88 Hobsbawm, "Introduction," 2.

and third wordlist dogmas."[89]

Traditions, both scholars contend, are polemical categories. And the fact that they have been conceived as an anthropological phenomenon, conceals the fact that they are largely schematic and formalized. This leads to the fact that invented traditions use ancient materials (the past is their resource) of a new type and for novel purposes. This is visible in various forms, which I enumerate below.

First, traditions are frequently equaled to ethnographic collections which were assembled during the colonial era and transferred to Europe. This means that not only the living contexts were destroyed but, that the gaze originating the collection was not neutral. Meanwhile, the attempt to translate these collections from site to museum space allowed the creation of a new context: the exhibition space, which is a context of its own. Most commonly, art museums use the 'white cube' display. In these settings, works appear as if they were created in isolation, outside the sphere of life.[90] Yet, this is equally a usual form of display within ethnographic museums, which have been subject to extreme modifications since the 1990s: from the initial exhibitions containing large quantities of specimens, displays became increasingly minimal. An interesting recent development was the reversal of the white cube into a black space, as famously practiced in the Musée du Quai Branly. Here, French architect Jean Nouvel inserted the collections from the former Musée de l'Homme and the Musée Nationale des Arts d'Afrique et d'Océanie in the darkness, creating a theatrical atmosphere that continues discourses of the 'exotic.'[91] Meanwhile, some ethnographic institutions started receiving so-called 'non-Western' contemporary art in larger numbers, and thus rebranded themselves as world art museums. These developments mirror necessary revisions and a progressively higher respect for traditional arts, while perpetuating divisions between the West and the 'rest'.

Second, several traditions were systematized during the colonial era (and after). One example is the Balinese *kecak* dance. Today promoted by the tourism industry as a timeless manifestation,[92] but acknowledged by scholars—Western and Indonesian like Supangkat—as a Western invention. In 1930s Bali, German artist Walter Spies choreographed *kecak* dance [Fig. 1.7] when he acted as adviser for the shooting of the now classic American film *The Island of Demons*:

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89 Kapur, "Contemporary Cultural Practice," 58.

90 See McEvilley, "Introduction," in *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, ed. Brian O'Doherty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 7–12.

91 See Clifford, "Quai Branly in Process," *October* 120, no. Spring (2007): 3–23; Anthony Alan Shelton, "The Public Sphere as Wilderness: Le Musée Du Quai Branly," *Museum Anthropology* 32, no. 1 (2009): 1–16; Enwezor, "Topographies of Critical Practice: Exhibition as Place and Site," *The Exhibitionist* 2 (2010): 46–52.

92 "The Kecac Ramayana" (Ubud, 2012).

> This was the occasion for which he remodeled kecac, to so-called monkey-dance. He increased the number of participants to more than a hundred young men sitting in a circle, and also introduced the figure of the dance-narrator who recites, in the light of a central standing lamp, tales from the Ramayana involving the exploits of Hanoman, the monkey-general.[93]

Figure 1.7
Kecak Dance
Source: http://www.balitoursbooking.com/bali-sight-seeing-tours/denpasar-city-tour/

For this spectacle, which is exclusively performed by men, Spies took the musical accompaniment of the centuries-old sacred *Sanghyang* dance out of its religious realm and developed it into its current form, known as *Kecak Ramayana*. Widely known to tourists by the chorus sound 'cak cak cak', kecak remains a deterritorialised cultural product, unrecognized in relevant publications, such as Holt's *Art in Indonesia: Continuities and Change* (1967). Probably motivated by the narrative capacities of Javanese *wayang*, which he knew from his long stay in Javanese palaces, Spies introduced the figure of the *dalang*, the master-puppeteer, in the dance. So, most probably the performance that arrived at our time contains only remnants, fragments, from the original ritual dance that he observed. What I argue is that he *chose* some of these aspects for this now curated performance. While provoking 'an invented tradition', his gesture kept certain aspects of Balinese culture alive: the act of choosing is closely related to modern art principles which enable an author the

93 Hans Rodhius, "Walter Spies: A Short Study of His Life and Work," in *Walter Spies and Balinese Art*, ed. John Stowell, Tropenmuseum Amsterdam (Amsterdam: Terra Zutphen, 1980), 37.

capacity to discern what is relevant for him/her. It equally demonstrates how an invented tradition becomes a tradition-in-use because the two concepts alter positions interchangeably.

Third, traditions changed their role in modern societies. The *kecak* story enables the understanding that traditions are not solely part of the past (this case is apt to demonstrate their problematic relation with the tourism industry), and leads to the conclusion that modern societies equally create them. As it appears, "No society is able to live without traditions, and the challenge of modernization is to build and develop traditions of modernity."[94] Hobsbawm advances that the process of the invention of tradition is employed to face a modern challenge: the social voids caused by secularization. A process that gradually took place in Europe having started circa four hundred years ago,[95] secularization is, according to Supangkat, the most important factor for the use of traditions in contemporary art. Devoid of their ritualizing integrity, traditions became idioms which individuals freely use. This transmutation is significant: it means that each person can make judgments and recover ideas from the communal past, and express them in an individual way.

Forth, invented traditions continue to emerge, reflecting changing times and communal interests. In the early 1980s, Bali witnessed the debut of the *ogoh-ogoh* (giant effigies of demonic look) [Fig. 1.8], equally created by groups of young men as part of the annual *ngrupukan* rites which take place in the night preceding *Nyepi* (Day of Silence). These ephemeral sculptures (some of which are biodegradable) are erected one month prior to the event, and displayed, carried, and then transported to the village's temple where they are finally burned. Rapidly accepted by local communities, the Bali Arts Festival does not give any information on its origins, implying a timeless invention.[96]

Both *kecak* and *ogoh-ogoh* demonstrate how new traditions can quickly develop, particularly when they become entangled with religious life. Both *kreasi baru* (new creations), *kecak* and *ogoh-ogoh* reflect government-sponsored intentions. Kapur proposes that these manifestations are commonly implemented by influential members of a society's cultural vanguard, and are many times tied to liberation movements. This may be the case: *kecak* was created when Bali was undergoing cultural rejuvenation, supported by

94 Audrey Cantlie, "The Concept of Tradition," in *Tradition and Politics in South Asia*, ed. R.J. Moore (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1979), 3.

95 See Rita Widagdo, "Some Contemporary Expressions in the Visual Arts of Indonesia" (Second ASEAN Workshop, Symposium and Exhibition, Manila, 1993), 3.

96 Laura Noszlopy, "Ogoh-Ogoh: A 'new Tradition' in Transformation," in *Performing Objects: Museums, Material Culture and Performance in Southeast Asia*, ed. Fiona Kerlogue (London: The Horniman Museum, 2004), 153–54.

the Dutch colonial government that was "yielding, by the 1930s, a positively glowing ideal of Bali as a paradise"[97]; *ogoh-ogoh*'s "rise to prominence ... as a feature of 'Balinese culture' reflects a wider process of homogeneisation that was supported by the New Order regime's (1966-1998)."[98]

Figure 1.8
Two *ogoh-ogoh* effigies being transported by men in *Nyepi* celebrations, in Prambanan, Yogyakarta
Photograph by Leonor Veiga, 2011

Fifth, Hobsbawm also notes breaks and recoveries of traditional practices. He upholds that whenever traditional practices are recovered, after being prohibited or simply abandoned, this implies invention. This is the case of many Chinese rituals in Indonesia, following from the end of prohibitions in 2000. After that time, restrictions were lifted and Chinese could once again profess their religion and use their Chinese names.[99]

British writer T. S. Elliot said that traditions, if exclusively handed down from the prior generation, should be actively discouraged. To him, traditions were a matter of wider significance: they involve a perception of the past, a historical sense of the past's presence in the contemporary.[100] Thus, tradition is a *conflation* of a sense of the timeless with the temporal together. This, I believe, is possible to

97 Adrian Vickers, *Bali: A Paradise Created*, 2nd ed. (Singapore: Tuttle Publishing, 2002), 113–14.

98 Noszlopy, "Ogoh-Ogoh," 159.

99 The Indonesian national slogan *Bhinneka Ika Tunggal*, Unity in Diversity, celebrates difference among ethnicities. Yet, it is limited to ethnic groups who claim a territory of origin in the archipelago. Being migrants, the Chinese have no claims to any specific territory.

100 See T.S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," in *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism*, 1920.

associate with their fragmentation, and relates to German philosopher Walter Benjamin foreseeing of the future: the transmissibility of the past would be replaced by its citability.[101] From this constant cycle of construction, destruction, and reconstruction, much of human production is made, and not all has been classified. As Benjamin argues, "for every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably,"[102] many things were actively destroyed. To a certain extent, some artefacts that have been dislocated to museums have been allowed cultural continuation, as Clifford reported in the essay 'Museums as Contact Zones', when a tribe used the space of the Portland Art Museum to perform its ritual ceremony around a worshiping statue.[103] For Clifford, museums seen as contact zones does not immediately imply a dialogue; the relations can be widely problematic, full of pain and contestation. Many traditional cultures suffered brutally from the systematization that led to the destruction of much knowledge (some of which nowadays sees resurgence). To Clifford, the appearance of tradition (and of vanishing traditions) in contemporary art denotes a feeling of a "strong continuity through changing times."[104]

Despite being fragmented, it is precisely traditions aggregating nature that allowed their invention in moments of abrupt social change. So, the crucial element for the invention of traditions has been the *foundation of symbolically and emotionally charged signs* with binding social purposes. Hobsbawm considers them authoritative and vague due to the values they proclaim—such as patriotism, loyalty and duty, concepts he perceives as weak and abstract.[105] He declares that despite much invention, new traditions are not able to fill the gaps resulting from secularization which cornered old traditions and *traditions-in-use*, which bound life and communities together. Still, premodern customs remain and if changes occur, they are slow, slight, and made in accordance to its adherents. Both invented traditions and traditions-in-use *provide clues to history* without being it; in here resides the continuity of the past in the present.

Thus, it is important to distinguish custom, or *tradition-in-use*, and *invented tradition*: as Hobsbawm observes, custom is a living and flexible entity, usually transmitted through social interaction, and has in most societies been transmitted orally.[106] Custom is variable, and it serves as a differentiating marker

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101 See Hannah Arendt, "Introduction: Walter Benjamin: 1892-1940," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (London: Pimlico, 1999), 43.

102 Walter Benjamin, "Thesis on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, 247.

103 James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 188–219.

104 See Clifford, 199.

105 See Hobsbawm, "Introduction," 10.

106 See Hobsbawm, "Introduction," 2.

for Third World societies, says Kapur.[107] Customs vary because each person can work on his/her own interpretation. Traditions, on the other hand, were subject to categorization and scrutiny and as a result are more rigid, because their change depends on the agreement of several members of a community or society. Together, traditions-in-use and invented traditions keep fragments of the past alive, since they quote the past in the present. This makes them both *living archives* that evolve and change according to social needs.

1.2.2 Traditions as Living Archives

As argued by Kapur, since tradition relates to the collective, it is in many ways authoritarian and is meant to be followed. Tradition may be regarded as a play of given attributes (handed down, passive, immutable) but its contemporary aspects (or functions), keep it going. It is in the functional aspect, which originates in their customary use by peoples, that we must trace their presence in contemporary art.[108] Functional traditions, or customs, retain a practical value for communities: they are flexible towards change and simultaneously adhere formally to their precedents.

So, how do contemporary artists process these living archives? Artists do not start from the premise to 'reconstruct' historical artefacts. Rather, they transform material objects from historical periods into something new. They operate on the level of meaning, provide a comment on history, and challenge authoritative reconstructions of narratives. Through their works, artists negotiate notions of art and of tradition. Through disparate elements—fragments, quotations—traditions activate difference as well as sameness that articulate artists' multi-angled cultural citizenships, a direct result from a worldwide tendency toward nomadism. Artists "are consciously creating styles that simultaneously honor particular cultural identities and make gestures of mutual incorporation with the Western tradition."[109] As a result, their multi-referential artworks do not mean to be representative expressions of a certain culture, rather they provide the artists' individual interpretation of notions pertaining to the collective. The combination might seem paradoxical at first glance because tradition lies in continuity, and many times it relates to ethnicity (and indigenousness), which alludes to the collective. This situation is radically different to that observed in Western contemporary art, which has developed a discourse of rupture most times related to notions of autonomy and made by individuals.

To arrive at the current situation, a long sequence of events took place:

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107 See Kapur, "National/Modern: Preliminaries," in *Contemporary Art in Asia: A Reader*, ed. Melissa Chiu and Benjamin Genocchio (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2011), 25–26.

108 See Kapur, "Contemporary Cultural Practice," 51.

109 McEvilley, "Fusion," 19.

the art world expanded, the number of artists increased, more infrastructures—cyclical like biennales, or stable like museums—were developed. In addition to this, artists are more than ever conveying their 'agency', speaking about a constantly changing reality resulting from the process of globalization which promotes deterioration of difference. *Tradition* appears to be a natural locus to refer to such issues; its double-sided *changing* and *static* character allows the artist's agency to be conveyed, because the artist's relation to these issues and to communal values resides in the action itself. So, to analyze tradition, the context in which individuals reason and act has to be regarded to grasp the artist's agency. *Agency*, or the individual capacity to act, embodies the role played by artists in these processes. In coalition with tradition, it is vital to understand the unique relationship of the individual artist to his social inheritance and immediate situation.

Supangkat refers to the advent of a new tendency within art of the 1970s: the colonial project of looking for a national identity, as the revolutionary period waned, lost its force.[110] In its place, the desire to recover one's cultural identity gained momentum. In changing contexts such as these, *invented traditions* and *traditions-in-use* emerge, because their condition of local constructs appears more apt to define an artist's identity than national ones. Thus, values once regarded as incompatible, became sources of expression: community and selfhood, preservation and change, past and future, tradition and modern. These binaries, which seemed opposite, became fuel for critical art in the region as the work of Dono, Indiguerillas, Kuswidananto and many others shows.

In the 1990s, Third World countries, which still maintained agrarian communities, achieved an unprecedented recognition (albeit only on the metropolis). Several fracturing themes such as marginalization, minority, and otherness entered postcolonial and identity politics discourses. In 1988, Indian critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's published the essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?'. There, she reclaimed that subaltern communities be heard, otherwise they would remain dependent upon Western intellectuals and scholars to speak about their condition. Notions of center and periphery started to dilute, blurring the still established system of power relations. Here Mosquera made an interesting point about the relations between centers and peripheries. He says that peripheries "have developed a 'culture of resignification' out of the repertoires imposed by the centres. It is a transgressive strategy from positions of dependence."[111] For contemporary art, this culture of resignification contradicts the discourse propagated by Western views, which follows a linear narrative of progress, from traditional to modern and postmodern. In 1995, Kapur alerted for the need of India to theorize its own civilizational constructs:

110 See Supangkat, *Indonesian Modern Art and Beyond*, 71–78.

111 Mosquera, "Spheres, Cities, Transitions: International Perspectives on Art and Culture," in *Belonging and Globalisation: Critical Essays in Contemporary Art and Culture*, ed. Kamal Boullata (London: SAQI, 2008), 89–90.

> It is crucial that we do not see modern as a form of determinism to be followed... to a logical end. We should see our trajectories crisscrossing the western mainstream, and in the very disalignment from it, making up the ground that restructures the international. Similarly, before the west periodizes the postmodern entirely in its own terms and in that process characterizes it, we have to introduce from the vantage point of the periphery the transgressions of uncategorized practice. We should reperiodize the modern in terms of our historic experience of modernization and mark our modernism so that we may enter the postmodern at least potentially on our own terms.[112]

Tradition is usually seen as connected with ethnicity and indigenousness, originating in societies without writing, in which the past is continued and remembered in terms of the present. In contrast, societies with written traditions constantly re-interpret texts instead of remembering them.[113] This is why tradition has been frequently used to describe the way of thinking and living in the premodern era. They have remained in collective conscience as constructions from societies without systematized knowledge because their handing down is done through orality and not based on written texts. Meanwhile, notions of modernity (which has been used interchangeably with Westernization, development, industrialization and progress) have permeated all spheres of knowledge and traditions were no exception. But, rationalism kept criticizing tradition as a mindless repetition of inherited lines of thought and conduct, devoid of individuality and criticality. Thus, tradition has usually been opposed to all those concepts relating to the modern such as the individual, the avant-garde, change, and has been equated with resistance and the past. However, I argue that the act of selecting fragments is extremely linked to modern thinking and to avant-garde practices. So, it appears, many traditions are in fact modern inventions, and as Hobsbawm points out, the older they trace their existence, the more recent they in fact are.

1.3 Making, Unmaking and Remaking Traditions

Drawing on Clifford's assumption that "cultural forms will always be made, unmade, and remade,"[114] this dissertation uses this premise to demonstrate not only that traditions constitute a valid source for the *modus*

112 Geeta Kapur, *When Was Modernism: Essays on Contemporary Cultural Practice in India*, ed. Geeta Kapur (New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2000), 297–98.

113 See Cantlie, "The Concept of Tradition," 13.

114 Clifford, "Indigenous Articulations," 479.

operandi of art, but also the variety of actions an artist may perform on traditions. I propose that more forcefully since the 1990s, traditions started being used critically through methods and strategies most commonly attributed to avant-garde practices. Such an approach within contemporary art denotes that the project of the avant-garde remains unfinished and that local traditions, values, and indigenous ethos correspond to a 'third' layer of avant-garde criticism. And because *tradition is a process* that remains in use today, it can be implicated in contemporary art practices, which may actively transform them.

Whenever the topic of interest is *tradition*, it is in most times associated with ideas of the nation-state and/or ethnic minorities that have survived the process of modernization and remain 'intact' in the present. I refute this reading, and aim to demonstrate that it refers to an 'ideal tradition' (in the platonic sense of the word) and is largely a modern conception. In this case, the notion of tradition corresponds more to a living entity, a current way of making, which fights against fixed narratives arranged during periods of nation building. As shown, Hobsbawm proposed that ideas of *nation-ness* were in most cases fabricated from fragments of the past and vigorously repeated for nation-building purposes. In clear accordance, Kapur confirmed that in India the manipulation of traditions by the ruling elites was and remains a very pragmatic feature of nation building.

Since contemporary artists construe mainly through installations—which consists in a montage of fragments introduced by the historical avant-gardes—they combine fragments from reality. Thus, the focus of analysis resides in traditions' fragmented nature and in accordance with Hobsbawm's observations that the invention process largely depends on certain selected fragments, that after being manipulated and through constant repetition, transpire an idea of longevity and wholeness. Here, the gaze focuses on traditional fragments that individual artists chose to use in their critical discourse. These fragments do contain particularities most commonly associated with traditions. On the material side, handmade crafts and ritualized modes of making are reassessed. On the conceptual side, certain religious rituals, activities such as storytelling of ancient epics are (re)introduced within contemporary life. This gesture entails what Indian social anthropologist Arjun Appadurai named as 'coeval flows' resulting from the globalizing process, and characterized by relations of disjuncture.[115] In addition, attention is given to what Kapur designated as *traditions-in-use* and the dynamics of their relationship with invented traditions.

While some of these heritage components have made the region of

115 See Arjun Appadurai, "Grassroots Globalization and the Research Imagination," *Public Culture* 12, no. 1 (2000): 5.

Southeast Asia famous throughout history, the fixity of the readings has not permitted a critical assessment of the specificities from each nation-state and the region (albeit the reductive character of such an enterprise). In the last twenty years, Southeast Asia as a region has grown in understanding. Resulting from several academic works, today Southeast Asia is regarded and accepted as active participant in modernist and postmodernist enterprises, then *why not also within the avant-garde?*

Nevertheless, the intent to preserve unique craftsmanship skills should not be discarded as a legitimate critical stance towards the effects of computer aided designs and extreme dependency of machine-labor. On another regard, this material legacy explains why various international contemporary artists choose to live in Southeast Asia: American artist Ashley Bickerton (b. 1959, Barbados), and Australian artist Rodney Glick (b. 1961, Perth), are just two examples of artists that reside on Bali because the production of their works profits from the highly skilled craftsmanship available there. This shows how much the artworld demands skill—which remains time consuming, being achieved either through teamwork or through a long individual journey of learning a craft. The maintenance of several traditions and customs, in some cases for exploitative touristic motivations and in other cases for the reinforcement of community ties, remains a source of inspiration for many (local) artists who find in these particularities fascinating aspects for the materialization of their artworks. However, as I will demonstrate, this is not always done for traditions' glorification.

Through contemporary art practices, traditions have been continuously *reprocessed*,[116] understood as the act of selecting fragments, that are later transferred into different (not necessarily new) contexts. Subsequently, they are recombined through three overarching actions on traditions: making, unmaking and remaking.

Generally, contemporary art practices from Southeast Asia can be roughly distributed into three approaches: firstly, there are contemporary artists who can be considered *makers*. Their artworks combine one (or various) traditional crafts with a modern discourse. This combination, added to the critical voice of the artist, situates them in the contemporary, seen as a time of conflation and coexistence of different time lags.[117] This approach is relatable to the phenomenon of invented traditions, while it differs from it for its claim for its aim to break with its inherent artificial constructs. Secondly, there are artists that pursue a bolder activism. Their work proposes to adapt, modernize, even correct, some politically and socially charged traditions. They strategically 'pick and choose' from authoritative traditions those that contain extremely

116 See McEvilley, "Fusion," 9.

117 In accordance with Smith's definition of contemporary art. See Smith, What Is Contemporary Art?, 3–4.

loaded significations, some of which artists find unacceptable. These artists are actively *unmaking* traditions, by means of analysis they *deconstruct* them, ultimately destroying their authoritarian aspects—those that keep several injustices ongoing (in the name of tradition). While deconstruction might seem problematic, in fact for traditions to remain *functional*, it is necessary. The third trend seems to offer traditions new vitality: the *remaking* of traditions bridges these two prior behaviors, by offering to *fixed* traditions, both invented and in-use, new terrains of intervention while fostering new interpretations. The remaking aims to their completion, because there are fragments that were not considered by the invention process. This not only frees the traditions from their authoritative aspects, it recovers their lost vitality, which is, according to Kapur, what makes them functional.[118]

1.4 Conclusions

Traditions, as explained, emerge within contemporary art for several reasons: first and foremost, they belong in the everyday of Southeast Asian artists; second, they contain ingredients of locality that an artist may wish to address to voice some concern; third, they contain an aggregating value which allows communication to their communities. Similarly, Western art manifestations appear in contemporary art first because they are firmly rooted in 'non-Western' communities' understanding of art, a direct consequence of colonialism; second, for the most part, the educational system remains Western-based; and third, because to play in the global sphere, the analytical language of modern art Mosquera identifies allows an artist working with a tradition to be regarded an artist instead of a craftsman. In this combination of factors—the local reality, and a good understanding of modern art precepts—originate contemporary art practices that merge material culture from the realm of the ethnographic and the artistic.

The third object, termed in this dissertation as Third Avant-garde, emerged in the 1990s and remains theoretically deterritorialised. It is my contention that this under-theorization stems from the presence of traditional arts, which are regarded as of the sphere of ethnography, and from the belief that it constitutes a paradox to think of tradition as revolutionary. In fact, the phenomenon of invented traditions constitutes an endorsement of tradition. It always implies a rejection of the immediate past in the interests of something 'purer'. This act can be experienced as a revolution, if endorsed traditions are engaged in cultural praxis, as Kapur proposes. This renders fragmented traditions functional, and means they can contribute to the building of a different future. This is an important aspect, not only within the agency of creative acts, but it is

118 Kapur, "Contemporary Cultural Practice," 51.

a fundamental aspect of the avant-garde (see Chapter 2).

Adopting tradition can (although this is not always the case) put an artist in the position of being avant-garde, as an originator of a different future, and the starter of various possibilities (see Chapter 2). This avant-garde artist acts as an emancipatory hero, who sacrifices his interests in the name of the *arrière-garde*, that is, the group that remains behind or out-of-date, and the one he directs his acts of cultural citizenship toward.

Yet, adopting continuously the revolutionary character of tradition may diminish its avant-garde stance. I recognize this possibility, but propose that the Third Avant-garde works not only on tradition, but simultaneously constitutes a critical response to the European and the American avant-gardes: it includes their elements and processes, and goes beyond their agenda. It is precisely in this inclusion of avant-garde traits—the enunciation of ethnicity, the use of everyday stories and connotations, the blurring of high and low culture, the disruption with established discourses—that resides the Third Avant-garde capacity to reflect on the previous two. As such, the Third Avant-garde proposed could be possibly named local, decentered, transnational, etc., but these adjectives limit the possibilities I aim to broaden. It would frame it as oppositional to the first and the second avant-gardes, instead of displaying the natural connection that it claims with both. As such, the contemporary artists' mission is to proceed with the deconstruction of the avant-garde as much as with the taxonomical system of the fine arts that persists on opposing art and culture, East and West. This is an extension of what has been suggested as treating Western culture ethnographically.

The Third Avant-garde

The idea of a Third Avant-garde proposed in this dissertation follows from theoretical discourses which suggest the avant-garde project as unfinished and as a historical force. Building on these premises, I propose that an avant-garde was conjured in Southeast Asia and that its most striking feature is the presence of fragments from traditions.

The Third Avant-garde phenomenon is defined by several aspects. First, it employs fragments of traditional arts. This is done not solely to convey origin but, also to manifest a need for social cohesion with local and global communities. Second, the Third Avant-garde complies with avant-garde's fundamental features as defined by German literary critic Peter Bürger—anti-institutionalism, the liaison with life, and the blurring of high and low cultures. Third, the Third Avant-garde has its own institutional program—the recapturing of traditions' vanguard stance and the end of taxonomical divisions that refuse the contact between art and ethnography. And fourth, the Third Avant-garde attacks the Western monopoly of the avant-garde, which had yet to allow 'non-Western' societies to participate.

This complex phenomenon took place in Southeast Asia (and in other regions of the world) roughly since the early 1990s, when 'non-Western' artists started 'going global' to exhibit in large scale shows in the region and beyond. Without exposure, these practices would have remained undetected. Yet, despite great visibility, avant-garde's critical characteristic of deferred temporality has contributed to the Third Avant-garde's deficient understanding. This shortage relates to the (Third) avant-garde's inherent unorthodoxy which results in the deferral of its theorization.

Like the previous two avant-gardes,[1] the Third Avant-garde uses decontextualisation and appropriation as conceptual strategies, and the ready-made and montage as its material expressions. Thus, while the Third Avant-garde comments on the earlier events, it transcends them. This is done because the disciplines of art history and anthropology had not yet found common territory within (modern/conceptual) artistic practice. The Third Avant-garde thus contributes to the meeting of these two disciplines, and simultaneously engenders tensions in the taxonomical division between art and ethnography, art museum and ethnographic museum and proposes that traditional and conceptual can coeval.

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1 I consider that there were two prior manifestations which it continues and simultaneously contests.

2.1 The Avant-garde

In every era the attempt must be made to wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it.[2]
Walter Benjamin

In this dissertation, I propose to apply Benjamin's words to what may seem an antinomy: to combine tradition, a category (most commonly) associated with reactionary forces, and avant-garde, a model rooted in radicalism. This combination exists despite avant-garde's customary insurgence against the traditional. The apparently antagonistic pair has come together in the space of contemporary art in Southeast Asia since the 1980s, when the principal energies of modernism started to wane and were replaced by postmodern tendencies.[3] Trying to explain postmodernism, Poshyananda said:

> Often postmodernism has referred to contradictory definitions associated with a certain constellation of styles and tones in cultural works: pastiche, kitsch, a mixture of forms and styles, cultural recombination, a relish for copies and repetition, revivalism as well as a rejection of history, and a combination of high and low art.[4]

Poshyananda's description alludes to some attributes of the avant-garde, especially in avant-garde's undermining of individual authorship and authenticity (relevant to tradition) and the recombination, or blur, of high and low art (tradition found in the latter). In fact, these avant-garde practices—those that merge art and tradition—were critical to postmodern practices that celebrated tradition. In terms of the relation to history, postmodernism and avant-garde diverge; avant-garde denies history, acts in the now and works toward projecting a better future, while postmodernism is said to recuperate the past in a non-critical way.

So, the introduction of tradition *through* avant-garde attributes and *within* postmodern practices demonstrates that traditions constitute one of the most concrete and tangible kinds of co-temporality,[5] and for that reason, remain issues of the present. It also demonstrates that there are multiple reasons for traditions' (re)introduction: this ingredient is present in both cases, but the two currents have different programs.

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2 Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (London: Pimlico, 1999), 247.

3 See Apinan Poshyananda, "Modern Art in Thailand in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries" (Cornell University Press, 1990), 576-577.

4 Poshyananda, Modern Art in Thailand: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1992), 191–92.

5 In accordance with Smith's definition of contemporary art.

How can the event of avant-garde through tradition be explained? On the one hand, traditions' presence in avant-garde practices relates to the "postmodern logic of renovation rather than radical innovation" because postmodernism is characterized by a "willingness to revisit the past."[6] On the other hand, traditions' use is in itself a critique of the avant-garde: it can be proposed as an avant-garde continuation, an extension, because it "affirm[s] some of [avant-garde's] characteristics while critiquing others."[7] This conjuncture is reinforced by the fact that, as affirmed by Flores, "artists belonging to post-colonial cultures are involved in negotiating both Western modernism and the indigenous traditions of art,"[8] which they perform as innovating agents, and not just as traditions' passive recipients.

In 1997, Supangkat proposed that to analyze so-called 'non-Western' contemporary art—which he situates regionally after the developments in the mid-1970s—two aspects would have to be taken into consideration: the presence of postmodern ideas of diversity, difference, localness and traditions, and an opposition to Western modernism that was regionally becoming an institutional style, due to official academic and state support.[9]

Likewise, in 1996, Kapur observed for an eventual avant-garde in Asia to take place, it was imperative that it would be simultaneously a critical voice of internal and external conservatisms:

> In order for an African or Asian avant-garde to come to its own, it must make two moves simultaneously: one, dismantle hegemonic and by-now-conservative features of the national culture itself; and two, dismantle the burdensome aspect of Western art, including its endemic vanguardism.[10]

The two aspects advanced by Supangkat correspond to Kapur's positions: first, the attack on internal conservatisms which was largely done through the postmodern ideas Supangkat addressed, and secondly, the opposition to Western modernism rooted in an internal and an external relevance. Modernism (in art and architecture) was hegemonic in the region since the early-1970s. It was being disseminated internally as a stable assertion of nation and identity, and externally as the evidence of belonging in the contemporary

6 Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism*, 2nd ed. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987), 276.

7 Ann Gibson, "Avant-Garde," in *Critical Terms for Art History*, ed. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 156.

8 Patrick D. Flores, "Revisiting Tradition and the Incommensurate Contemporary," *Broadsheet* 41, no. 4 (2012): 238.

9 See Jim Supangkat, *Indonesian Modern Art and Beyond* (Jakarta: Indonesia Fine Arts Foundation, 1997), 65.

10 Geeta Kapur, "Dismantling the Norm," in *Contemporary Art in Asia: Traditions/Tensions*, ed. Apinan Poshyananda (New York: Asia Society, 1996), 67.

world of free trade and liberalism.[11] This is the context which spurred the student protests in Southeast Asia, specifically in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand between 1974 and 1976. Flores notes that Western art, "as interpreted by an elite of tastemakers," conduced to modernity: the "policy [was] to foster modernism as a trajectory to an international world."[12] If the major claim of these artists' groups was to end subordination to the Western canon, the redemptive gesture proposed was to connect art with life, "a recovery of art from the death machine of the state and the art establishment,"[13] which also condemned traditional arts to the status of 'invented traditions'. Thus, "The avant-garde's appropriation of the indigenous or the native was a way of proposing modernity of postcolonial subjectivity."[14] This is why Supangkat affirmed that contemporary art (post-1970) shifted towards the formation of a cultural identity in detriment of the national one.[15] Still, Supangkat continued, while the search for a national identity continued, the way it was constructed changed. This shift also marked the emergence of critical thought towards the whole tradition of modern art and thus,

> This [contemporary art] discourse on low art attempts to demystify the situation [the separation of high and low art] by pointing out that the actual traditional culture has been marginalized, not only by high art, or Western art, modern art and international art, but also by the (locally formed) concept of 'traditional culture' itself.[16]

I propose that the 'programmatic vanguardism' of Western art pointed out by Kapur was, due to postmodern relativism, being questioned. All these considerations lead to the following question: *can postmodernism in a Southeast Asian context be seen as an avant-garde?* To give a preliminary answer to this question: not precisely, although postmodernism (which contains traditions, because it questions Modernism's hegemony), used avant-garde *premises* (e.g. the immersion of art in life by means of traditions), and avant-garde *techniques* (such as appropriation, quotation, assemblage and montage to name a few). Later, these aspects contributed to the emergence of another kind of avant-garde—one that attacked postmodernism's uncritical position towards traditions.

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11 Flores refers to state sponsored construction of buildings such as cultural centers and thematic parks that fostered modernism as a trajectory to the national and the ethnic. Flores, "First Person Plural: Manifestos of the 1970s in Southeast Asia," in *Global Studies: Mapping Contemporary Art and Culture*, ed. Hans Belting et al. (Karlsruhe: Hatje Cantz, 2011), 224–27.

12 Flores, 225–26.

13 Flores, 263.

14 Flores, 263.

15 Supangkat, *Indonesian Modern Art and Beyond*, 80.

16 Supangkat, 84.

In fact, artists from Asia have effectively put forward an avant-garde—which I termed Third Avant-garde—that significantly corresponds to Poshyananda's, Supangkat's, Flores's and Kapur's considerations. The artists' strategy is somewhat surprising, especially if one takes the European and the American avant-gardes as starting points. While for the aforementioned the rejection of tradition was vital, in a Southeast Asian context such is not the case because, as Flores argues, "The definition of visual art was adapted without conceptual thoughts, without consideration of aesthetic acculturation."[17] Thus, the Third Avant-garde responds to this lack of criticality while it relies heavily on traditions' discursive capacities.

2.1.1 Proposing another Avant-garde

In the opening essay for *Documenta11*, the artistic director Okwui Enwezor advanced the question: "What is an avant-garde today?" To determine this, and given that avant-garde today is, affirms Enwezor, "so thoroughly disciplined and domesticated [that] a whole different set of regulatory and resistance models has to be found."[18] So, one should look not into the field of contemporary art, but into the field of culture (i.e. traditions) and politics. He argues that the history of the avant-garde (especially those of the past like Futurism, Dada and Surrealism) was disseminated through institutionalized discourses that have especially focused in its conflicting relation with bourgeois society, reason for a unified vision. He admits, "the history of the avant-garde falls within the epistemological scheme of grand narratives."[19] I agree with Enwezor; the avant-garde remains a Western construct/monopoly, where 'non-Western' practices have yet to be included.

Similar claims of Western domination of the avant-garde and its residence outside the field of art have been made by Kapur. In 1996, when advancing an eventual avant-garde for Asia, Kapur mentioned "that the model for the avant-garde may have to come from social studies."[20] Equally, she accused American art historian Hal Foster of Western centrism, especially because he was informed that (by then) Latin American cultures had developed a radical agenda and a cultural dynamic independent from their Euro-American antecedents.[21] To her, Foster's position on the postmodern avant-garde, which he legitimized as neo-avant-garde in 1994,[22] could permit the

17 Flores, "First Person Plural," 233.

18 Okwui Enwezor, "The Black Box," in *Documenta 11_ Platform 5: Exhibition Catalogue*, ed. Heike Ander and Nadja Rottner (Stuttgart: Hatje Cantz, 2002), 45.

19 Enwezor, 45.

20 Kapur, "Dismantling the Norm," 65.

21 Kapur, "Dismantled Norms: Apropos Other Avantgardes," in *Art and Social Change: Contemporary Art in Asia and the Pacific*, ed. Caroline Turner (Canberra: Pandanus Books, 2005), 57–58.

22 See Hal Foster, "What's Neo about the Neo-Avant-Garde?," *October* The Duchamp

opening of avant-garde's spectrum to 'non-Western' initiatives. She affirmed that his position could be "extended to speak about avant-garde initiatives in the non-Western world,"[23] and went on proposing an avant-garde for Asia, but addressed some conditions:

> [S]uch an avant-garde would have to treat the avant-garde principle itself as an institutionalised phenomenon, recognising the monstrous assimilative capacity of the museum, the gallery, the critical apparatus, the curators and the media.[24]

This is the initial premise of the proposed Third Avant-garde: that the theoretical discourses on the avant-garde (the historical and the neo-avant-garde) have so far remained Western-centric, and its protagonists have been predominantly white men. Meanwhile, as pointed out by American art historian Anne Gibson, women and the people of "non-European descent [remain] art's 'object-matter' [rather] than its makers."[25] These authors' affirmations serve to remind us that (Southeast) Asian artists have had to establish an avant-garde that equally combated the hegemony of Western dogma and the artworld: here resides an iconoclastic attitude toward the Western avant-garde, which is 'being treated as ethnographic source material' for their production (see Chapter 1).

It is thanks to its postmodern emergence—postmodernism was preoccupied with relativizing historical narratives, by contesting the lapses and prejudices of grand narratives—and its immersion in a postcolonial climate—postcolonial theories, which replace grand narratives with new ethical demands on historical interpretation, introduced the discourse of the 'Other'—that the Third Avant-garde introduced traditional arts in artistic discourse. What failed to be detected was that traditions were used critically: for the first time, 'non-Western' peoples were makers of avant-garde *through* their own cultural legacies. As will be demonstrated, even *traditions* (i.e. 'invented traditions') are subject to avant-garde's transgressions.

It is possible that artists did not have full conscience that avant-garde discourse was in itself a metanarrative, bound in ideas of the superior capacity of making new that has characterized Western civilizing discourses. In 2008, Indian art historian Partha Mitter suggested the existence of a historical critical consciousness in India:

> [T]he modernist revolution... gradually spread to other regions throughout the twentieth [century], shaping global perceptions of contemporary art

Effect (Autumn, 1994), no. 70 (1994): 5–32.

23 Kapur, "Dismantling the Norm," 67.

24 Kapur, 67.

25 Gibson, "Avant-Garde," 156.

> and literature, a transformation that has left few societies untouched.... One of the favorite projects of the colonial powers in the nineteenth century was to inculcate 'good taste' in the subject nations through the introduction of academic naturalism and classic standards. Therefore, the revolt of the Western avant-garde against academic naturalism and its attendant ideology was openly welcomed by the subject nations, who were concerned with formulating their own resistance to the colonial order.[26]

In Kapur's opinion, the national cause of resistance to colonial order deviated and deferred the event of an Indian avant-garde.[27] In its place, activity was concentrated on the effort to build a sense of nationalism, many times by recuperating traditions. Every time this phenomenon takes place (see Hobsbawm's theory of invented traditions), traditions were experienced as revolutionary precisely because they contained resistance to colonial supremacy. So, the artist that used traditions during the colonial period can in fact be considered as avant-garde.[28] One such example is the activity of Indian artist Jamini Roy (Beliatore, 1887-1992), who according to Mitter, used Bengali primitivism as modern critical discourse. His ruralism belongs to a current that emerged in 1920s India, a particular expression of a global response to modernity. This current creatively used the dynamics of modernity's dialectical relations: rural/urban, rural honesty/urban decadence. With his gesture, Mitter says, "Jamini Roy created an avant-garde art of a monumental simplicity and deep social commitment."[29] Fig. 2.1 shows Roy's depiction of a mother with her child, a universal topic, that he localized. Roy is suggesting the art world to accommodate the depictions of the 'Madonna' by Indian artists.

To propose a 'Third Avant-garde' I followed three procedures: first, I analyzed local circumstances; second, I revisited and extended the term 'avant-garde'; and third, I propose a program within the broader frame of avant-garde. With this, I hope to continue Kapur's and Mitter's claims for inclusiveness. To Mitter, the failure to recognize this possibility resides in the fact that relations between center and periphery are not resolved, only dissolved.[30] In my opinion, this negligence stems also from avant-garde's deferred temporality. So, I follow John Clark's remark that, when applied

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26 Partha Mitter, "Interventions: Decentering Modernism: Art History and Avant-Garde Art from the Periphery," *Art Bulletin* XC, no. 4 (2008): 532.

27 See Kapur, *When Was Modernism: Essays on Contemporary Cultural Practice in India*, ed. Geeta Kapur (New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2000), 300.

28 See Thomas Docherty, ed., "Crisis in the Avant-Garde," in *Postmodernism: A Reader* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), 217.

29 Mitter, "Interventions," 543.

30 See Mitter, "Interventions," 531–32.

to contexts other than the European and American where it emerged, the concept of "avant-garde must be theorised flexibly."[31] In my perception, the mission to open the discourse of avant-garde to 'non-Western' peoples' is plausible. The Third Avant-garde continues some aspects, like the attack on institutional discourse, while it also puts forward new ones.

Figure 2.1
Jamini Roy
Mother and Child
No date | Gouache on canvas | 76 x 41 cm | National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi

2.1.2 What Does Avant-garde Signify?

In general terms, the term avant-garde came to be understood with artistic practices proposing new directions and breaking with past conventions in order to change society. As Romanian literary critic Matei Calinescu suggested,

> [T]he moderns favoured for the application of the agonistic metaphor of the 'avant-garde' (or 'advanced guard,' or 'vanguard') to various domains, including literature, the arts, and politics. The obvious military implications of the concept point quite aptly toward some attitudes and trends for

31 John Clark, *Modern Asian Art* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998), 217.

> which the avant-garde is directly indebted to the broader consciousness of modernity—a sharp sense of militancy, praise of nonconformism, courageous precursory exploration, and, on a more general plane, confidence in the final victory of time and immanence over traditions that try to appear as eternal, immutable, and transcendentally determined.[32]

Calinescu's description includes aspects of avant-garde as a practice—like the spirit of sacrifice, a non-conformist attitude, revealed in the constant (re)search for new with the intent to change life and society—but it says little about strategies developed by avant-garde artists, particularly Dada.

There are two main theoretical currents on avant-garde as phenomenon: the first, introduced by American art historian Clement Greenberg in 1939, regards anti-historicism as one of avant-garde's main features.[33] This vision was recovered in 1984 by Belgian film theorist Paul Willemen, who defined the avant-garde as "Tomorrow's art today."[34] He proposed an avant-garde for the 1980s as follows:

> [T]he new nascent avant garde... consists of precisely those films—and theories—which seek to challenge both the ossification of certain artistic procedures... together with the anti-historical tendency within the avant garde.[35]

Willemen recognized the importance for artistic discourse to combat conformism and fixity (that also characterizes invented traditions), while addressing the avant-garde project as related to history. In his view, "the very concept of avant-garde implies a set of historical relations."[36]

The second current regards the avant-garde as a method, a value, "a formula of practice,"[37] and regards its program as unfinished. This reading has several defenders: in 1994 Foster proposed that the 'neo-avant-garde' (also known as the American avant-garde) was symptomatic of the emergence of postmodernism;[38] Australian art historian John Clark understands that "Rather than ask what is avant-garde, it may be better to inquire into where avant-garde functions take place."[39] He situates an Asian avant-garde in mid-nineteenth

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32 Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity*, 95.

33 See Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," *Partisan Review*, 1939, http://www.sharecom.ca/greenberg/kitsch.html.

34 Paul Willemen, "An Avant Garde for the Eighties," *Framework* 0, no. 24 (Spring 1984): 55.

35 Willemen, 67.

36 Willemen, 55.

37 Foster, "What's Neo about the Neo-Avant-Garde?," 13.

38 See Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1996), 205.

39 Clark, *Modern Asian Art*, 217.

century Japan, in early-twentieth century India, or in contemporary Thailand, perhaps to demonstrate that avant-garde occurrences throughout time are not linear nor coincidental and result from local circumstances.[40] The author I am most interested in is Kapur, who in 1996 conflated both readings within *Traditions/Tensions*, thus refusing the Western monopoly on this (art historical) category. She contested its exclusiveness, observing that although Foster expanded on his definition of the neo-avant-garde in 1994,[41] his "own (Euro)Americanism, his indifference to non-Western ideologies of plural modernities/alternative vanguards,"[42] remained unabated. On this occasion, she advanced the mission of what I termed Third Avant-garde and formulated the artists' contribution for change: a double-dismantle against internal and external conservative forces. She proposed an Asian avant-garde as an agency born from history, a dialectical synthesis (practice) where contradictions are solved, thus allowing a conceptual move beyond the eclectic. That, she argues, constitutes a "defensive rearguard action."[43]

An important aspect of the avant-garde is its questioning of institutions, notably the museum of art. In Europe and America, where Modernism reached the museum and academia and became mainstream via the culture industry, avant-garde emerged as a revolt against this domination. In Asia, where museum culture remains incomplete (although it is following its own *parcours*), avant-garde has a different role. It directs its force to support the formation of a local art practice. This is what the Third Avant-garde proposes. If regarded as a series of historical events, the avant-garde brings us to renowned manifestations: Cubism emerged in reaction to the emergence of photography changing several painting conventions; Russian Constructivism called for the formation of a new society and integrated art at service of the revolution; the Dadaists and later the Surrealists revolted against expressionism in art.[44] The more prominent impact of Dada and Surrealists is bound to fundamental changes in the notion of art, the value of the art object, the process of art making, and the attack of art as an institution, including its organizational structures such as the museum, the exhibition and the market. The fact that the 'historical' movement introduced so many changes made its most renowned theorist, German literary critic Peter Bürger, affirm it as the one and only avant-garde, relegating all subsequent

40 See Clark, *Modern Asian Art*, 217.
41 See Foster, "What's Neo about the Neo-Avant-Garde?"
42 Kapur, "Dismantled Norms," 57.
43 Kapur, "Dismantling the Norm," 63.
44 See Dietrich Scheunemann, "From Collage to the Multiple: On the Genealogy of Avant-Garde and Neo-Avant-Garde," in *Avant-Garde/Neo-Avant-Garde*, ed. Dietrich Scheunemann (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), 17–28.

events to the realm of repetitions.[45] In fact, *repeating* is not contradictory to avant-garde's premises, as the remaking of some of its most important artworks attests.[46]

Since 1945, Dada activities re-emerged, after a twenty-year interruption in a politically troubled period in Europe. This period had seen World War I, the 1930s depression (that opened the path to the fascist campaign against 'degenerate art'), and the exile of many artists. Thus, the post-World War II avant-garde's recovery must be addressed as an historical operation: "What the neo-avant-garde of the 1950s and 1960s achieved, even if it were merely repeating the deeds and gestures of 1917, was to reconnect the contemporary development of the arts with the lost practice of the early decades."[47]

These initial considerations lead to the second way to conceive the avant-garde, as a historical force and with its own mission. If considered conceptually, it is possible to identify other avant-garde events (by definition, the avant-garde breaks with conventions, so it must be identified). Famously rejected by Bürger as a repetition "that is void of sense,"[48] his critics such as Foster affirm "the value of the construct of the avant-garde and the need for new narratives of its history."[49] His claim continues, as demonstrated by Enwezor's, Kapur's, Mitter's and Gibson's notations.

I approach avant-garde functionally, as a method, a creative practice deriving from locally contextualized historical forces: it emerges in moments of conformism and oppression, and it reveals a (re)searching attitude. Therefore, Kapur affirms, and I concur:

> I will argue that if the avantgarde is a historically conditioned phenomenon and emerges only in a moment of real political disjuncture, it will appear in various forms in different parts of the world at different times.[50]

So, what political disjunctures are these? I contend that in the 1990s, artists in an Asian context were still consistently regarded as belated makers in the international scene. Kapur continues:

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45 See Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw, 13th ed., vol. 4, Theory and History of Literature (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

46 It is significant that Marcel Duchamp's Fountain (1917) was reedited in the 1960s, and Jim Supangkat's *Ken Dedes* (1975) was reedited in 1996. Similarly, FX Harsono's *The Voices are Controlled by the Powers* (1994) was reedited in 2011. This demonstrates that behind the avant-garde gesture resides a thought that does not depend as much on craft and the original, as modern art addresses.

47 Scheunemann, "From Collage to the Multiple," 36.

48 Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 61.

49 Foster, *The Return of the Real*, 5.

50 Kapur, "Dismantled Norms," 57.

> I am suggesting that we extend the argument by a deliberate deflection: the successive forms of the vanguard are extended to include hitherto unlogged initiatives. Initiatives taken outside the West and vetoed out of modernist and avantgarde histories on the ground that these initiatives are belated and repetitious.[51]

Kapur was clearly attacking Bürger's proposition that contemporary attempts to continue avant-garde movements were ineffective because, a newer edition "can no longer attain the protest value of Dadaist manifestations,"[52] and Foster's Western-centrism. In the 1990s, voices against the prejudice inflicted on post-colonial communities were very prominent: the fact these communities were presented as belated makers of (post)modernism in the 1989 *Magiciens de la Terre* show in Paris, transpired that they were regarded as not capable to 'make new'. Third Avant-garde practices, which already existed at the time of *Magiciens de la Terre*, constituted an answer to that *framing*.[53] So, avant-garde has a *mission*—to disrupt conformism, categorization, and dogma—and this project did not exhaust itself in the historical avant-garde events.

In 1940, Walter Benjamin declared: "In every era the attempt must be made to wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it."[54] While this is an important remark about the genesis of the avant-garde, in this case the *tradition* is the *avant-garde*. Proposing a 'Third Avant-garde' is insisting on Bürger's invalidation of its importance (due to repetition), but it is to validate avant-garde as a *method*. It is to concur with Kapur's affirmation that the avant-garde principle must be regarded as an institutionalized phenomenon. The major problem with such an enterprise resides in the fact that 'avant-garde as a method' is in danger of being systematically (re) utilized, ultimately leading to it becoming an 'invented tradition'—fixed and unchanging. But history does not happen equally everywhere; if regarded as a historical force, conditions for avant-garde, such as repression and neglect (which lie behind manifestations, as will be demonstrated in the following chapters), continue to rise in different locales, at different times. It is probable that other avant-gardes are being defined today.

In 1994, Foster refuted Bürger: he accused him of projecting "the historical avant-garde as an *absolute origin*", in a logic that "presents history as both *punctual and final*", leaving every reprise of the category as a mere

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51 Kapur, "Dismantled Norms," 57.

52 Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 57.

53 See Thomas McEvilley, *Art & Otherness: Crisis in Cultural Identity* (New York: McPherson & Company, 1992), 154; McEvilley, "Exhibition Strategies in the Postcolonial Era," in *Traditions/ Tensions*, 57.

54 Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 247.

rehearsal. Foster concluded that this view enclosed "the neo-avant-garde as riven repetition."[55] While he accepted that in part this reasoning is true, he nevertheless claimed that "this is not the entire story of the neo-avant-garde, nor does it end here [and] despite his grounding in Benjamin, Bürger affirms the values of authenticity, originality and singularity"[56] to the avant-garde. Foster was addressing that, regardless of his important avant-garde assessment, Bürger was looking at it through modern principles. So, Foster advances, and I concur: the avant-garde "is in fact a formula of practice,"[57] and this justifies its continuation.

Bürger also claimed that while neo-avant-gardes proclaimed the same goals as the historical avant-gardes, these neo-avant-garde practices claimed to be accepted by the (art) museum, while the historical avant-gardes attempted to destroy that institution. This difference turned, in his opinion, avant-garde into its opposite. In fact, the opposite happened: the institutionalization of the historical avant-gardes was addressed by American art historian Douglas Crimp on *On the Museum's Ruins* (1993), notably through the example of photography.[58] Here Crimp claims that the modern art museums began their decay with this introduction in the 1970s. He argues that the survival of modern art museums depended on, and was largely done, through a gradual accommodation of art (through artworks) that historically has been refused that status (notably the avant-garde). Nevertheless, there are other accommodations of interest for the 'Third Avant-garde': the famous addition of Primitive art to art's realm through modernist appropriation, leading to the transfer of many objects from ethnographic to art museums,[59] is one such example.

2.1.3 Historical Assessment of the Avant-garde

In 1974, Bürger wrote the influential *Theory of the Avant-garde*. Here, he described the historical avant-garde through some key characteristics: 1. The expansion of the 'artwork' category resulting from the negation of its dependency to the institution, 2. The attack of the institution, which included bourgeois culture enshrinement of autonomous art, 3. The reconnection between art and life, and 4. An encouragement for the integration of high and low cultures [Fig. 2.2].[60]

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55 Foster, "What's Neo about the Neo-Avant-Garde?," 13.
56 Foster, 13–14.
57 Foster, 26.
58 See Douglas Crimp, *On the Museum's Ruins* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1993).
59 See McEvilley, "Exhibition Strategies," 55; Susan Vogel, "Introduction," in *Art/Artifact: African Art in Anthropology Collections*, ed. Arthur C. Danto (New York: The Center for African Art and Prestel Verlag, 1988), 12–13.
60 Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 62.

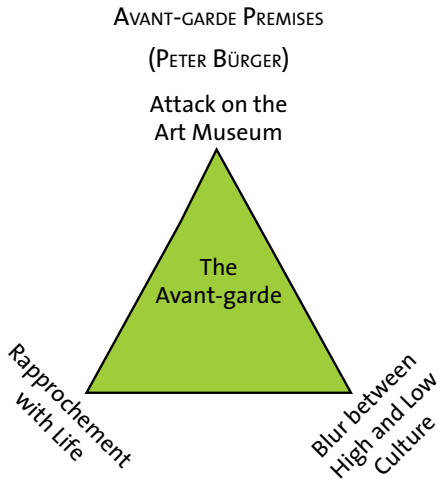

Figure 2.2
The Avant-garde Premises, according to Peter Bürger (1974)
Image edited by Leonor Veiga, 2017

While these propositions appear to enable the emergence of other avant-gardes, Bürger denied this possibility based on the fact that repeating the procedure would turn "the avant-gardist protest into its opposite."[61] Bürger defends a certain vein of the avant-garde, the so called "anarchic wing,"[62] which is characterized by extreme nihilism and negativism, leading Calinescu to say that avant-garde's first victim was art itself.[63] The avant-gardes changed the way art was made, displayed, and received forever. In spite of his denial, these premises are met by all avant-garde events of radical vein (see Appendix I).

It is commonly accepted that there were two avant-gardes in history. The first avant-garde was called European or 'historical avant-garde' (by Bürger), and it took place in the 1910s and 1920s. It is recognized by various movements although specialists are divided in what to include[64] (see Appendix I). For some authors, an avant-garde of modernist vein that which occurred from the nineteenth century up until the 1960s, must be considered.[65] One of its most renowned movements is Cubism, another is Expressionism. Most commonly called modernism, because it used some

61 Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 109, n.4.
62 Gibson, "Avant-Garde," 158.
63 See Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity*, 140.
64 Critics of Peter Bürger such as Dietrich Scheunemann point to his neglect of expressionism, and his preference for Dadaism in detriment for instance, of Cubism. Bürger explains his position in 109, n.4.
65 Calinescu commenting on Poggioli's definition of the avant-garde, in Gibson, "Avant-Garde," 157.

avant-garde aspects and strategies,[66] it has been placed under the same banner. Says Gibson, "the heroic avant-garde... represents as avant-garde as optimistic traditionalism, to which some would deny the title 'avant-garde' altogether, calling this aspect of the avant-garde 'modernism'."[67] Still, she continues, this modernist vein remains of interest because it "held out the hope that the disruption caused by modern progress in the arts and sciences will result in the end not only in the control of nature to humanity's benefit, but will also promote universal justice, moral progress and happiness."[68] Calinescu considered that there is a significant difference between modernism and the avant-garde that is "in every respect more radical than modernity."[69] Nevertheless, he acknowledges that the modernity's project centered in novelty and change opened way to the emergence of rebellious avant-gardes.[70] More prominently, the avant-garde is recognized through "that other anarchic and even nihilist wing... rooted in elements of Dada and Surrealism typified in the Ready-mades of Duchamp and Man Ray... [until] Brecht, and Warhol."[71] It emerged in a context of insurgence against retinal art: "Duchamp himself stated that he was 'interested in ideas—not merely in visual products. 'I wanted to put painting once again at the service of the mind'."[72]

Avant-garde is also renowned for its interest in real life and in its proposal to re-establish this relation, it suggested objects from daily life, such as a urinal, a bicycle wheel or a bottle rack as art (later the art museum would accommodate these gestures). So, it indeed broke with elitism in art, which has historically remained in the possession of few privileged classes. Within this anarchic stream, Bürger included other movements such as Italian Futurism, Russian Constructivism, Dadaism and later Surrealism. This anarchic vein emerged in Europe but it had an international scope, being present in Japan,[73] and in the United States (because of the exile of artists Francis Picabia, Marcel Duchamp and others).[74]

The second avant-garde is commonly referred to as 'American' or 'neo-avant-garde' and took place in the 1960s and 1970s.[75] It had several significant

66 See Willemen, "An Avant Garde for the Eighties," 57.

67 Gibson, "Avant-Garde," 156. Similarly, Calinescu recognizes that Americans do not distinguish avant-garde and modernism. See Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity*, 96–97.

68 Gibson, "Avant-Garde," 158.

69 Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity*, 96.

70 See Calinescu, 3.

71 Gibson, "Avant-Garde," 158.

72 Marcel Duchamp quoted in Rudolf E. Kuenzli, "Introduction," in *Marcel Duchamp, Artist of the Century*, ed. Rudolf E. Kuenzli and Francis M. Naumann (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1990), 6.

73 Clark, *Modern Asian Art*, 217–20.

74 See Rudolf Kuenzli, ed., *Dada* (London: Phaidon Press, 2006), 22.

75 Some authors situate the neo-avant-garde in the 1950s and 1960s. See Scheunemann,

movements, such as Op art, Pop Art, Conceptual art, Site-specific art, the practices of the Gutai group, and the Fluxus movement. It appeared in reaction against the hegemony of a 'Greenbergian Abstractionism'[76] that regarded painting as an expression of the personal, persisting on easel painting's capacity to capture the eye.[77] The neo-avant-garde recovered the historical avant-garde's claim of an art at the service of the mind and embodying an active signifying role.

Since the 1960s, when an 'anti-art' and 'anti-aesthetic' sentiment entered artistic discourse, many young artists chose Duchamp as their precursor. American art historian Rudolf E. Kuenzli observes that art critics, art historians, and museums matched artists' interest much later.[78] For Foster, this resurgence was an indication of postmodernism's emergence.[79] By the late 1970s, Postmodernism was becoming an all-encompassing term.[80] Then, the medium of photography—which, according to Crimp, is essentially modernist—was revaluated and entered the museum space.[81] To Crimp, this *accommodation* marked the shift between modernism and postmodernism in the museum's realm evident by the postmodern photographic practices that refused authorship and authenticity by American artists Robert Mapplethorpe and Sherry Levine being integrated in collections. So, the postmodernist claim "that originality and authenticity are discursively produced by the [modern] museum"[82] was introduced in the institution, resulting in its collapse. Notions of 'originality' and 'authenticity', essential to the museum's discursive integrity, were being undermined. Interestingly, these have also been avant-garde's claims.

Even though there is a certain hegemony concerning these two movements, the concept of avant-garde has been proposed (even) more times: in 1981, the Italian art critic and curator Achille Bonito Oliva declared a new movement, the 'Transnational Avant-garde', to refer to the work of a small group of Italian artists,[83] a 'bold claim' according to Terry Smith.[84] Oliva proposed that these artists were united by a rejection of Conceptual art: "The trans-avant-garde rejects the idea of an artistic process aimed entirely at conceptual abstraction [and

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"From Collage to the Multiple," 36.

76 See Scheunemann, 17.

77 See Kuenzli, "Introduction," 6.

78 See Kuenzli, 1–2.

79 See Foster, "What's Neo about the Neo-Avant-Garde?," 31.

80 Homi K. Bhabha, "Postmodernism/Postcolonialism," in *Critical Terms for Art History*, 307.

81 See Crimp, *On the Museum's Ruins*, 2.

82 Crimp, 16.

83 The 'Transavantgarde Constellation' was formed by a small group of Neapolitan artists such as Sandro Chia, Francesco Clemente, Enzo Cucchi, Nicola de Maria and Mimmo Paladino. See Achille Bonito Oliva, *Art Beyond the Year Two Thousand* (Bali: BIASA Artspace Little Library, 2011), 187–88.

84 See Terry Smith, *Contemporary Art: World Currents* (London: Laurence King, 2011), 53.

proposes the return] to hand craftsmanship and to a pleasure of execution."[85] His description of the artists' intentions was markedly postmodern:

> [Artists are] opting for attitudes that take into account languages that had previously been abandoned. This recovery does not entail identification with the styles of the past, but the ability to pick and choose from their surface, in the conviction that, in a society in transition toward an undefinable end, the only option open is that afforded by a nomadic attitude and transitory mentality.[86]

His concept would be further extended internationally to latitudes such as Israel, Latin America, much of Europe, and Canada. But he adverts: "Not all new painting situations are necessarily identifiable with the term trans-avantgarde."[87] Oliva's remarks point to some aspects of the proposed 'Third Avant-garde', although they do not entirely define it. In 'An Avant-garde for the Eighties' (1984), Willemen defined the avant-garde gesture as 'tomorrow's art today', declared it as a force which challenged arts' ossification and addressed the avant-garde project as profoundly related to history. And, although he recognized a superficial resemblance between modernism and avant-garde, he declared them as two simultaneous but antagonistic tendencies:

> The avant garde, as a concept, is not prescriptive about the precise characteristics of any given art practice, [whereas] the notion of modernism reduces artistic practice to a set of formal characteristics, a set of procedures frozen into a generic practice, suggesting that modernism is a period style, as was impressionism or expressionism, or any of the other 'historical styles'.[88]

All these authors agree on the premise that the avant-garde consists of a counter-culture against normalizing and totalizing views, that it tries to connect the present with the future, while rejecting the historical past. The construction of a new reality seems to have been successful, despite avant-garde's failure to destroy the art museum—one of its main purposes. This is an aspect the Third Avant-garde builds on, equally without success: not only was the Third Avant-garde of the 1990s institutionalized through its appearance in high-profile exhibitions and its accommodation in art museums (especially in the regions where it acts), like the two prior manifestations, it didn't disrupt the binary of art and ethnographic museum. Nevertheless, the Third Avant-garde has equally contributed *to change the way art is made, displayed and received forever* (see Appendix II).

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85 Oliva, "The International Trans-Avant-Garde," in *Postmodernism: A Reader*, 257.
86 Oliva, 257.
87 Oliva, *The International Trans-Avantgarde* (Milano: Giancarlo Politi Editore, 1982), 151.
88 Willemen, "An Avant Garde for the Eighties," 65.

2.2 The Third Avant-garde

In this study, I propose to define another avant-garde event termed The Third Avant-garde. My gesture pertains to the fact that if regarded as a *historical force*, the concept of avant-garde remains useful for theorization, especially in new contexts. Yet, as observed, though expanded on by Foster, Oliva, and Willemen, the avant-garde remains a Western-centric legacy. In 1996, on the occasion of the seminal exhibition *Traditions/Tensions*, at the Asia Society in New York, Kapur advanced the project that I came to term the Third Avant-garde. Its main premise included an effort to perform the dismantlement of conservatisms of local culture with a national patina (including traditions), as weel as to break with Western hegemony, including its attachment to notions of novelty (including avant-gardism) [Fig. 2.3].

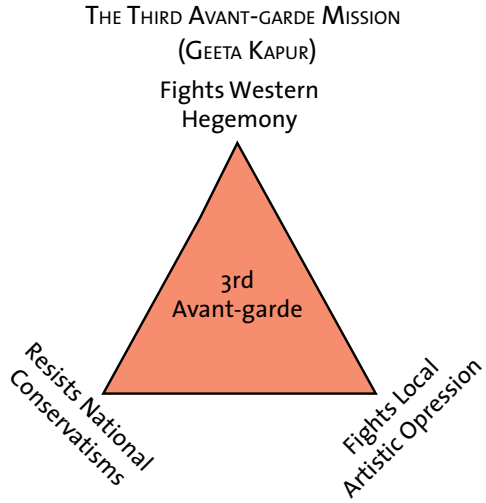

Figure 2.3
The Third Avant-grade Mission, according to Geeta Kapur (1996)
Image edited by Leonor Veiga, 2017

Interestingly, Clark identifies an avant-garde function already in 1930s China which would be reenacted in the 1980s. By the 1990s, these practices had become mainstream.[89] Chinese art historian Wu Hung has also recognized this Chinese avant-garde in the 1980s.[90] Now, we might ask, does Southeast Asia remain outside of avant-garde discourses? I propose it does not, and build on the demonstrations by Southeast Asianists including Flores and Singaporean T.K. Sabapathy to make my point. These two authors both trace the emergence

89 See Clark, *Modern Asian Art*, 229.
90 See Wu Hung, "A Case of Being 'Contemporary': Conditions, Spheres, and Narratives of Contemporary Chinese Art," in *Contemporary Art in Asia: A Reader*, 391–413.

of an avant-garde to 1970s Southeast Asia, tough each through different lenses (see Chapter 3).

In the essay 'First Person Plural', Flores described the emergence of an avant-garde 'agenda' by unrelated artists from Indonesia, The Philippines, Malaysia and Thailand working between 1974 and 1976. As a commonality, these groups were formed by students discontent with the hegemony of and certain governmental subservience towards the West which in fact impacted the arts. Through their written manifestos, a discourse was formed and partisanship was elicited. Artists were claiming an attentiveness to the overlooked diversity and peoples that characterized their native cultures in contrast to a uniform modernism: they proposed new media, rejected invented traditions, claimed the primacy of concept over form, opted for a (re)searching attitude, gave priority to the national in all its variations, and claimed the relation between art and life.[91] Installation art was equally claimed as an autochthonous medium that urged its use in order to express identity.[92] Their programs seem similar to those of the founding avant-gardes. Nevertheless, their distance from 'the center' and lack of resources must be considered. Avant-garde should be acknowledged *as a force*, not as a self-imposed model.

Such were the circumstances in the mid-1970s, when students revolted against a Western modernism that was being inflicted on them via the circuit of academia, the patronage of the state, and from outside. The question remains: *how can we identify a Southeast Asian Third Avant-garde?* I propose that Kapur's hypothesis of a double dismantle was effectively met through an incorporation of *traditions*. To her, avant-garde emerges cyclically which connects with Foster's idea that the avant-garde remains an unfinished project, which explains its return. Thus, he regards it as a formula of practice. I concur: since the avant-garde's attack on the art institution remained alien to the problematic of the *traditional*, critique had to continue. It is my belief that this project would have to emerge from the cultures that have remained outside avant-garde's discourse.[93] The two declared conditions united: Kapur's cyclical forces of history and Foster's not yet dismantled metanarratives. So, I argue that the Third Avant-garde resides in this space of interference—one that simultaneously disputes the modern metanarrative of the avant-garde and the metanarrative of fine arts. It questions the veracity of these projects, while it extends the main premise of the avant-garde—the ideology of the transgressive.[94]

Throughout history, all avant-garde movements have shared an external

91 See Flores, "First Person Plural," 238.

92 See Flores, 259.

93 While these peoples entered the discourse of modern and contemporary art since the 1990s, the discourse of avant-garde remains Western-centric.

94 See Gibson, "Avant-Garde," 156.

commonality—a rebellious attitude against a dominant culture, or normative model to follow. Artists rejected the norm and thus, the template handed down to them. The Third Avant-garde follows this trend. It emerged in reaction to another event of forced academicism (this time in the form of formalism and abstractionism), which was cornering some artists' production. Dissatisfied with the uncritical acculturation of modernist principles which emerged through academies and museums which was supported by nation-states that negotiated close ties with the West,[95] artists responded. They reacted to internal circumstances by questioning the veracity and validity of inherited Orientalist legacies: the perception that 'non-Western' peoples are traditional and their activities regarded as belated events resulting from a wider contact with American culture. As a result, traditional culture was engaged and the avant-garde gesture, especially since 1988, is characterized "not [by] nostalgia, but a 'critical assessment' of the 'present' and the 'historical past'."[96]

I contend that the 'seeds' planted in the mid-1970s through groundbreaking works such as Supangkat's *Ken Dedes* (1975) [see page 104] would 'blossom' as the Third Avant-garde in the 1990s.[97] In this respect, exhibition making is very relevant, because international exhibitions provided the only platform for global exposure and for the fostering of an inter-regional contact between Southeast Asian artists. The drawback of this model was that most international exhibitions were curated by overseas curators, who were not fully aware of local contexts despite using collaborative curation.[98] Collaborative curation is another aspect which contributes to the relevance of *Traditions/Tensions*: it was the first exhibition to present contemporary Asia to the West through the works of its own artists and selected by local curators without any Western interference.[99] Here we can recognize that the 1990s remains an extremely significant decade because it marked the early stages of (current) globalization.

The claims for an Asian avant-garde are also significant for the

95 These countries are Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia and Malaysia. The other nations—Laos, Cambodia, Burma, Vietnam—entered the dynamics of the artworld after the collapse of the Iron Curtain. Timor-Leste was an occupied state from 1975 to 1999, so it does not enter any of these categorizations.

96 Flores, "First Person Plural," 239.

97 I situate the Third Avant-garde in three main phases: the 'Early Days: the 1970s-80s', the 'Boom Years: the 1990s', and the 'Global Phase: the 2000s' (see Chapters 3 to 5). My attempted periodization does not preclude the fact that each country has reacted differently to the times. Similarly, I consider the 1980s (1980-1988), the 1990s (1989-2001) and the 2000s after 2002. In consequence, Third Avant-garde's periodization remains incomplete and is subject to alterations, as my research advances.

98 The Fukuoka Art Museum (FAM) introduced 'collaborative curation' as methodology since the first edition of the *Asian Art Show*, in 1979. This procedure was later adopted by the curators of the *Asia-Pacific Triennial* (APT) of Brisbane.

99 McEvilley, "Exhibition Strategies," 57.

affirmation of a Southeast Asian avant-garde: Kapur recognizes that an Indian avant-garde project was deferred, or deviated during the revolutionary period; Clark locates several avant-garde events throughout Asian history, ultimately destroying it as a Western construction and event. To him, an Asian avant-garde must be carefully analyzed, as avant-garde's critical functions produce different outcomes. He observes its particularities and differences:

> [A]n important feature of avant-garde practice found elsewhere in Asia is that artists who adopt avant-garde positions feel free to explore indigenous artforms alongside—rather than in opposition to—the discourses they operate on. [In addition], avant-gardism always arises in a situation of discursial critique or debate [and] this can be externally provided. [100]

Kapur argues that this observed freedom to use traditions recovers their functionality and maintains their aggregating nature. In consequence, it appears, traditions can contribute to cultural praxis.[101] And because tradition has most commonly served to stabilize societies undergoing political, social and/or economic struggle, another intervening space for traditions is opened: their activation as a *critique*, which is where avant-garde comes in. In other words, "it is what is done with 'tradition'... that qualitatively marks the continuity of tradition, rather than anything substantive which in content or style can be used to mark tradition as such."[102] Yet, the Third Avant-garde is not the only artistic manifestation to engage with traditions. Thus, it is important to distinguish its radical gestures from its contemporary 'other': postmodernism.

2.2.1 Third Avant-garde and Postmodernism: Two Sides of a Coin

Postmodern artistic practices are generally traced back to around the 1980s,[103] when the term *modern* lost most of its critical resonance, and globalization and new media's impact began to appear in art. In general terms, postmodernism has been described as an eclectic approach, in which liking of pastiche is ever present. In this sense, it definitely abandoned the notion of single authorship which was so vital to modernism. American philosopher Peter Barry proposes that to distinguish clearly between modernism and postmodernism, one should look at the notion of *fragment*. During postmodernism, this definition gained a positive regard, as it conveyed liberation from a system of fixed sets of

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100 Clark, *Modern Asian Art*, 219.

101 See Kapur, "Contemporary Cultural Practice: Some Polemical Categories," *Social Scientist* 18, no. 3 (1990): 51.

102 Clark, *Modern Asian Art*, 75.

103 See McEvilley, *The Triumph of Anti-Art: Conceptual and Performance Art in the Formation of Post-Modernism* (New York: McPherson & Company, 2005), 49.

beliefs.[104] The notion of fragment is as relevant for postmodern practices as it is for Third Avant-garde practices. Both build on traditions that were displaced and compartmentalized in Western museums, and yet continued to be systematized during the post-colonial period in regional specialized museums. Within a context in which traditions' wholeness is compromised, both tendencies build on traditions 'bits and pieces'. Like postmodern artists (the trans-avantgarde of Oliva sets an example) Third Avant-garde artists also use fragments from traditions but, their gestures went beyond the postmodern ones because they performed traditions' critical revision. As a result, during the 1980s, it appeared as if traditions were omnipresent in art. This is one major aspect that I identify as contributing to the deferral of Third Avant-garde's identification (Chapters 3, 4 and 5 demonstrate the in-depth analysis of traditional arts by Third Avant-garde gestures).

Postmodern aesthetics contains fundamental differences from everything that has preceded it. It disregards the key criteria of modern aesthetics—the new, the rupture and the avant-garde. It is no longer necessary to innovate nor to be original, and repeating past forms is not only tolerated, it is actively encouraged. But a Third Avant-garde artist acts as an instigator of conscience: moved by a spirit of mission and a will to relate, he cites old forms and simultaneously embraces the need for change. This is particularly visible in the practice of Chinese artist Mio Pang Fei (see Chapter 4), who devoted his life to a self-imposed journey to merge the Western references studied in school with Chinese traditional painting, a mode in which he found refuge to continue practicing art. Mio is an artist who procured and ultimately created a new language and space for contemporary artists' intervention.

The two events—the postmodern revival of traditions, and the Third Avant-garde—must not be equated, since they have different programmatic ends. For postmodernism, the accommodation of 'low arts' corresponds to "the need to return to tradition."[105] The 1980s adherence to traditions was so significant that Poshyananda declared that "If Thai society is experiencing a 'postmodern' condition, then one of its most significant features or practices is pastiche... a practice of mimicry without the satirical impulse."[106] During this time, several Thai artists had started working on traditions' transformation within the medium of painting (see Chapter 3). Observing the lack of satire and criticality, Poshyananda suggested a return to traditional Thai painting, which he considered far more interesting than the mere following of Western models. Furthermore, during this period, the variety of movements employing the rhetoric of postmodernism—based on the promise to return

104 See Peter Barry, *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*, 2nd ed., Beginnings (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 82.

105 Foster, ed., "Postmodernim: A Preface," in *Postmodern Culture* (London: Pluto Press, 1985), ix.

106 Poshyananda, "Modern Art in Thailand," 1990, 580.

and reinvent—was immense, and the term started being equated with *contemporary*.

The first event of radical practices through vernacular elements took place in Latin America (see Appendix I). This emerging avant-gardism in peripheral countries differed from their counterparts in the centers precisely because it penetrated into the local environment. During the mid-1960s, Hélio Oiticica (Rio de Janeiro, 1937-1980) started deconstructing conventional Western easel painting through a Brazilian experience:

> [H]e invited the public to abandon passivity in front of an artwork, especially by entering his *Penetráveis*, by dressing his *Parangolés*, smell coffee in his *Bólide*... He announced that the frontiers between painting, sculpture, drawing, were increasingly blurred... He drew with cocaine. He danced (*samba*), wrote and reflected. Without getting into classifications. He accepted an artist's value didn't reside in his manual capability but instead in his capacity to think and translate that visually. As such, he left detailed orientations so that anyone could remake his pieces... All following generations—of artists at least—on one way or another suffered his influence.[107]

Oiticica's work was in accord with his American counterparts of the political transformation based on the participation of the spectator. Yet, in 1992, in his retrospective in Witte de With in Rotterdam, his work was ridiculed. British art historian Jean Fisher remembers:

> [An] European art critic was overheard commenting that Oiticica's work was 'incoherent' since it covered a plurality of practices and thus 'wasn't art'... Other critics recognized Oiticica's relation to conceptualism, but dismissed this as 'inauthentic'—his practice was merely a reflection of Euroamerican tendencies and therefore wasn't authentically 'Brazilian'.[108]

This was 1992, in the early years of globalization following the Iron Curtain's collapse, when the Third Avant-garde possibility was yet to be recognized. And yet we can see now that methods were already being employed. Between 1994 and 2001, Harsono used Panji masks as ready-mades in his art (he had very little intervention in them) conferring them a significant and multivariate critical value (see Chapter 4). His messages could

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107 Gisele Kato, "Penetráveis: Três Motivos Para Prestar Atenção Em Hélio Oiticica," May 19, 2010, http://www.artefazparte.com/2010/05/penetraveis.html.

108 Jean Fisher, "The Syncretic Turn: Cross-Cultural Practice in the Age of Multiculturalism," in *Theory in Contemporary Art since 1985*, ed. Zaya Kocur and Simon Leung (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 233.

be perceived by an informed viewer, while a non-informed viewer could still grasp a localized critical message. In my opinion, the use of traditional arts by modern and contemporary artists must be regarded in this light—*for their creative and symbolic potential*. In many cases, artists are not the makers of these objects, but they inform them with new meanings. In consequence, traditional objects, which remain interpretatively confined into the realm of the ethnographic, can be elevated to the sphere of art.

A concern, which is central to the whole idea of avant-garde, is the elimination of the idea of an autonomous art, which is divorced from the everyday world (see Appendix I and Appendix III). The Third Avant-garde works reprocess both traditional referents and modernism. They are not evolutionary instances of both: in Southeast Asia, modern did not follow traditional, because traditional has historically penetrated the modern.[109] This historical tendency in art practice mirrors the multi-temporal reality that Southeast Asian nations lived in. From here, one can grasp why Kapur affirmed that if understood less rigidly, the vanguard notion tradition once carried could be recuperated and lead to a series of experimental moves (see Chapter 1). What she was suggesting is that 'traditions-in-use' retain flexibility and thus can adapt to environmental changes without losing their recognizability. So, the Third Avant-garde's gesture of using traditions, as well as other strategies from former avant-garde events, denotes rapprochement to real life.

It is precisely the possibility of recovery and adaptation that allows traditions to remain important for artistic practice. This explains why Asia Society director during the time of *Traditions/Tensions*, Indian scholar Vishakha N. Desai, mentioned that a viewer expecting to find timeless manifestations from the five selected Asian countries devoid of contemporary interventions would be disappointed.[110] Her words indicate the degree to which traditions remained important and relevant in (rapidly) developing societies and already in 1989, the third edition of the *Bienal de la Habana* entitled *Tradition and Contemporaneity* implied the urgency of this relation in the Third World.

Kapur further proposed to regard traditions as a play of attributes (handed down, containing a passive and immutable side) and functions (features responsible for their contemporary vitality). But, she did not affirm that all traditions retained this functional aspect, thereby declaring that if traditions were to maintain a space of intervention, it was fundamental that *they find one*.[111] The Third Avant-garde occupies this space of interference, by turning traditions into a critique and thus contributing to cultural praxis.

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109 See Joseph Fischer, ed., "The Traditional Sources of Modern Indonesian Art," in *Modern Indonesian Art: Three Generations of Tradition and Change 1945-1990* (Jakarta: Panitia Pameran KIAS, 1990), 16.

110 See Vishakha N. Desai, "Foreword," in *Traditions/Tensions*, 13.

111 See Kapur, "Contemporary Cultural Practice," 51.

Due to traditions' lack of wholeness—traditions, both 'invented' and 'in-use' are most times contained within *fragments* from the historical past—these radical gestures "include fragments of tradition that serve to question nationalistic aesthetics and bigotry."[112] So, Kapur asks, "the artist that pulls out fragments of Otherness and clads the self... Is this, then, a no-norm artist?" She then advances the "need to find ways to conceptualizing this oddly symbolic, various displaced art practice that manifests itself in the stark gestures of civilizational avatars, dismantled."[113] I suggest every Third Avant-garde artist is a critical thinker who deliberately chooses to refer to Western art and traditional arts ethnographically. This is not a no-norm behavior, but rather a pragmatic use of available materials.

2.3 Third Avant-garde's General Features

The Third Avant-garde is a scattered phenomenon, both in time and place, which is comprised by a set of practices which play with sets of binary oppositions including art and ethnography, conceptual art and traditional art, art and craft, etc. It introduces these tensions in the realm of art, precisely because of its materiality, one which is characterized by the presence of fragments of tradition. It impresses by the variety of its responses (see chapter 3, 4 and 5), while it contains very specific attributes that may help its identification. As with every avant-garde event, the Third Avant-garde works comply with the fundamental premises of the avant-garde (as defined by Bürger)—anti-institutionalism, the liaison with life, and the blurring of high and low cultures[114]—and reaffirm the definition of avant-garde as force,[115] imbued with a conscience of its own time,[116] that after electing its contemporary language and mission,[117] propels a change in the course of art history. And, like previous avant-gardes, the Third Avant-Garde equally manifests notions of discontent. One of its most relevant messages pertains to the avant-garde event itself, as suggested by Kapur. Not only do Third Avant-garde artists resist patronization—internal, via the academic circuit and external, via prejudice in their reception—they equally resist the institutionalization of the avant-garde, as it has been performed by the museum and academia. This in turn, is done by employing fragments from traditional arts, the Third Avant-garde's most striking feature [Fig. 2.4].

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112 Poshyananda, "Roaring Tigers, Desperate Dragons in Transition," in *Traditions/Tensions*, 29.

113 Kapur, "Dismantling the Norm," 62.

114 See Bürger, Theory of the Avant-Garde, 62.

115 See Kapur, "Dismantling the Norm."

116 See Willemen, "An Avant Garde for the Eighties."

117 See Sérgio Coutinho, "A Vanguarda Europeia: Entre a 'Globalienação' e a 'Unidade Humana'" (Universidade Nova de Lisboa, 2015), 4.

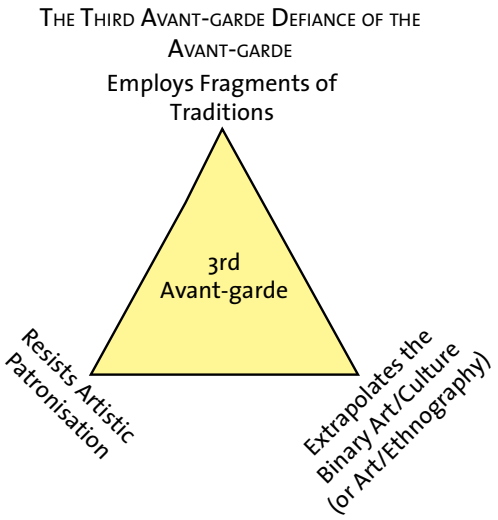

Figure 2.4
The Third Avant-garde Definace of the Avant-garde
Image edited by Leonor Veiga, 2017

2.3.1 The Third Avant-garde: Material, Method, Mission and Motivation[118]

As advanced, Third Avant-garde's most striking feature is the presence of fragments of traditional arts. This aspect is, in my estimation, responsible for its art historical deferral. In 1996, Poshyananda warned that traditions were being reprocessed and used as *material*:

> Artists who live in Asian countries with complex and multilayered cultures are fully aware of the burden of negative traditions that might be associated with their work. The persistence of stereotypes means that any of these artists may be prejudged on the basis of his nationality, race, or religion. But artists such as N. N. Rimzon, Heri Dono, Roberto Feleo, Ravinder G. Reddy, FX Harsono, Dadang Christanto and Agnes Arellano are not primarily concerned with self-reflection. Instead, they attempt to reveal the complexity of contemporary Asia through the revival or resurrection of traditional forms. *But, again, they do not simply restage the past as a consensual process of invention of tradition. Rather their works include fragments of tradition that serve to question nationalistic aesthetics and bigotry*.[119] (italics LV)

118 See Apendix III.
119 Poshyananda, "Roaring Tigers," 29.

I argue that artists use tradition as material through avant-garde's *methods*—they pick, they choose, and they appropriate,[120] to explore their postcolonial identity and negotiate their position on the world stage. This begs the question, why would artists' use avant-garde methods, which contain a warfare connotation, in their practice? The reason resides in the need to perform a necessary double-move, the double-dismantle that Kapur advanced. But, she mentions that to do so, artists must go beyond the primitivist trope and treat vanguardism as an institutionalized Western phenomenon: they must deconstruct the avant-garde and equally demonstrate the injustice caused by the persistence of the taxonomical system that opposes art and culture, West and the 'rest'. This is their mission. And with equal weight is the *motivation*: as proposed, artists behave as social agents, who act on behalf of their peers, and voice collective concerns. Traditions constitute indicators that artists use to better relate to their audiences, both global and local.

The notion of *fragment* is not only relevant for postmodern practices, but equally for avant-garde ones. This was advanced by Benjamin through the concept of allegory and Bürger built on this to explain that *allegory* "could serve to illuminate certain aspects of the aesthetic effect of avant-gardiste works."[121] The procedure can be described as follows: first, the allegorist pulls one element out of the totality of life context, isolates it, and deprives it of its function (this described action is reminiscent of the treatment towards traditional arts which were transported to ethnographic museums, where they have no life context). Second, the allegorist joins isolated reality fragments, thus positing meaning. Third, he/she rejoins elements. In sum, to Bürger, the avant-garde artist starts by dividing and later reunites. This thinking corresponds to McEvilley's definition of traditional arts' *reprocessing*,[122] which provides traditions with a novel critical function. Bürger's explanation builds on Supangkat's gestures in the work *Ken Dedes* and is extensible to all other works analyzed (see Chapter 3, 4 and 5).

Through traditional arts, the Third Avant-garde continues certain avant-garde procedures, such as the ready-made, the decontextualization of objects, and montage. Each of these techniques and tactics were useful for the transmission of messages to the audience. Meanwhile, the Third Avant-garde introduces new tensions in artistic and simultaneously museum discourses: it (re)introduces the problematic of craft in art's realm, and dismantles the fixed taxonomic institutionalization effectuated through museums and disciplines, especially the (problematic) compartmentalization between art history and anthropology [Fig. 2.5].

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120 Appropriation in terms of taking something into a new context, this time the art context, not in the sense to make one's own.

121 Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 68.

122 See Thomas McEvilley, "Fusion: Hot or Cold?," in *Fusion: West African Artists at the Venice Biennale*, Focus on African Art Series (Munich: Prestel Verlag GmbH & Co KG, 1993), 9.

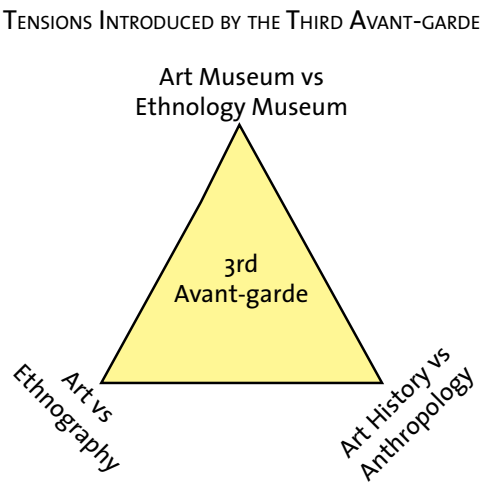

Figure 2.5
Tensions Introduced by the Third Avant-garde
Image edited by Leonor Veiga, 2017

While avant-garde has a fondness for the scandalous, in a Southeast Asian context, contemporary artists act in a non-confrontational way. I propose that because they behave like a voice of their close communities, they can be compared to the *dalang* of past. Javanese *dalangs*, or master-puppeteers, were extremely important members of their close communities. During the colonial revolution period, they delivered messages of discontent through metaphorical language. As such, they became an essential part of the resistance. This disposition, I convey, is maintained by artists such as Maria Madeira or FX Harsono, whose works do not immediately provoke sentiments of hatred: the message is delivered in a sharp yet subtle, multi-meaning way. The artist, seen as a *dalang*, refers to his condition of unique thinker who embodies various qualities. Interestingly, Kapur also identifies the artist as spokesperson for the Indian context.[123]

When Maria Madeira conceived *Silence at What Price?*, she was referring to the violent death of a resistance member at the hands of Indonesian military (see Chapter 4). The young boy was being interrogated and his unsatisfactory answers were punished with a severe form of torture resulting in his death. This is why Madeira entitled the work as *Silence at What Price?* [Fig. 2.6]; it alludes to the sacrifices the Timorese endured to protect each other. Her work provides an explanation as to why I do not consider these practices solely through the prism of identity: while she was saying 'I am Timorese' by employing a full piece of *tais* cloth (a traditional

123 See Kapur, "Dismantling the Norm," 60.

weaving that came to be elevated to national art in the post-independence era), she was affirming her discontent with human rights violations in the country she was uprooted from after occupation in 1975. Heri Dono's and Harsono's installations from the 1990s referencing Javanese traditional puppetry equally intended to materialize themes of genocide, censorship, and oppression. This procedure is radically different from that practiced by neo-avant-garde artists including Chris Burden (1946-2015), who performed *Shoot* (1971) [Fig. 2.7] to address his discontent with the armed conflict in Vietnam. Censorship coupled with local historic-social conventions make Third Avant-garde artists conceal their strong messages of discontent. This is what was proposed as 'do-it-yourself' cultural citizenship (see Chapter 1).

Figure 2.6
Maria Madeira
Silence at What Price?
1996 | Installation with *tais* | 200 x 100 x 30 cm | Image courtesy of the artist

Their efforts would not be noted without their participation in exhibitions abroad—Madeira was exiled in Australia; Harsono and his peers were practically confined to overseas exhibiting, a circumstance that led Supangkat to designate the 1990s as a decade of 'contemporary art in exile'[124] (see Chapter 4). Yet, contemporary practices equally suffer from an exiled condition. Just recently, Thai artist Jakkai Siributr [Fig. 2.8] produced a series of self-portraits wearing Thai official uniforms ornamented with talismans linked to superstitious animistic practices, demonstrating a variety of deep-seated beliefs underlying current conventions (of a top-down inflicted

124 Supangkat, Ken Dedes, unpublished interview by Leonor Veiga, Leiden, March 7, 2016.

Theravada Buddhism, Thailand's official religion). His analysis is relevant because it targets the politicians who dress in these uniforms on official occasions. This is the reason for exhibiting these particular works outside Thailand, in New York or Istanbul. So, in the 1990s and today, whenever artists feel uncomfortable, they voice their discontent but, they do so grounded in their cultural values, which value non-confrontation. This is, in my view, another contributing aspect for Third Avant-garde's deferral.

Figure 2.7
Chris Burden
Shoot
1971 | Performance | Video Stills
Image source: http://www.theartstory.org/artist-burden-chris-artworks.htm#pnt_1

As advanced, the main premise of the Third Avant-garde is the introduction of the traditional art object in the realm of radical gestures. This can be regarded as an appropriation, but in fact constitutes a pragmatic way to practice contemporaneity. Contemporary art's expanded space of inquiry penetrates issues of national identity, tradition and ethnicity and their impact in society, religion and spirituality, gender issues, and preoccupations of political, social and environmental nature. This allows for visibility and freedom to use local cultural traits and elements. This situation is further enhanced in locations such as (Southeast) Asia, which were previously deprived of self-criticality.

Figure 2.8
Jakkai Siributr
C-11
2014 | Digital Print | 102 x 76 cm | Image courtesy of Tyler Rollins Fine Art

Historically, one of the most important strategies of avant-garde practices has been "the procedure of creation-by-designation,"[125] which comes tied to the ability 'to pick and choose' that Oliva identified as an important aspect of postmodern gestures. When he addressed that trans-avantgarde artists chose the 'surface' value of all referents available to them, he was referring to a postmodern behavior, in which appropriations were not critical or conducive to social critique. In contrast, within avant-garde practices, traditions are chosen for their effectiveness in communicating. This is in line with tactics introduced by the historical Dada, like construction through montage and collage, which was many times coupled with an appropriation of the language of the media. It was precisely through the parody of several mediated messages—in an attempt to convince their audiences of the arbitrariness of social order—that Dada practices were particularly effective. Whenever they used familiar codes to reveal the myths created by the mass media, their audiences were much more apt to comprehend. I think that like their Dada precursors, Third Avant-garde artists have a deep desire to communicate with their peers. The root of such behavior resides not in the deliberate import of Western avant-garde practices, but rather

125 McEvilley, *The Triumph of Anti-Art*, 27.

in this historical legacy—the (artist as) storyteller. Thus, the Third Avant-garde artists' reliance on familiar codes stems from a contextual situation of intense repression, and in the midst of heavily depoliticized societies.[126] And to transmit messages, they turned their gaze to their surrounding reality. This is where the traditional object comes in, as Southeast Asian societies were in transition and differentiable from other societies for their circumstance of having multiple and overlapping temporalities.

The ability to 'pick and choose' has other implications when traditional arts are introduced: from a totalizing relation between inventor and maker, the possibility of nominating introduces a new genre. In consequence, within the Third Avant-garde traditional arts are *used and (re)appropriated* by artists, who often are not their makers. Instead, they are used in a secular way. In the second field trip to Timor-Leste in 2013, I confronted artist Ino Parada with the fact that he was depicting a portrait of a woman on *tais*[127] but this woman was wearing a *belak*—a silver crescent, which is part of men's traditional warrior costume. The artist responded the work was commissioned this way. This flexibility is intricately related to the use of cultural aspects as mere symbols, in response to market needs. It equally reveals a subversive attitude towards the rigidity of traditional values. Clearly, traditions are liberated from regulations when included in contemporary practices. Similarly, in 1994, in the work *The Voices are Controlled by the Powers* [Fig. 2.9], Harsono employed all masks featuring in the Panji tale. He did so to represent the variety of Indonesian people.

Since Raden Panji (Prince Panji) is a symbol of nobility of character, its association with the Indonesian people informed the audience of Harsono's respect, while he understood (and shared) their incapacity to communicate. The Panji masks are said to have carved on them the perfect smile and rightful expression, a circumstance that equally happens in Siam (nowadays Thailand), where the smile and has been also criticized by Thai artists, notably Chatchai Pupia (b. 1964, Mahasarakam). The Siamese smile has constituted an important sign of etiquette and hospitality and has become renowned through records of the past by foreigners who travelled there.[128] Harsono's recurrent use of this mask in the 1990s confirmed their inherent potential, but equally declared

126 In Indonesia, the New Order promoted total depolitisation of life since the coup in 1965, when LEKRA (Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat) artists, the only radical group prior to the GRSB, were jailed. Along with the prohibition of expressing different political views, the regime also prohibited Chinese cultural manifestations. In addition, Timorese society was heavily guarded and quasi-isolated from the outside world.

127 The *tais* woven cloth is nowadays the country's national cloth. Historically, *tais* have been made for ceremonies and for rituals. In the mid-1990s, *tais* were introduced in avant-garde practices, and contextualized as canvas. After independence in 2002, the use of *tais* as canvas became frequent, bordering an 'invented tradition'.

128 See Poshyananda, *Traces of Siamese Smile* (Bangkok: Bangkok Art and Culture Centre, 2008), 56–67.

the prominence of *wayang* above other traditions. This aspect stemmed from a process of 'Javanization' promoted by Suharto, which was annulling and destroying cultural difference. In his hands, the masks came to represent the present, not the timeless past promoted by Suharto. Harsono used the mask until the early 2000s, when his work changed into profound reflections of his Chinese ethnicity and ancestry within Indonesia.

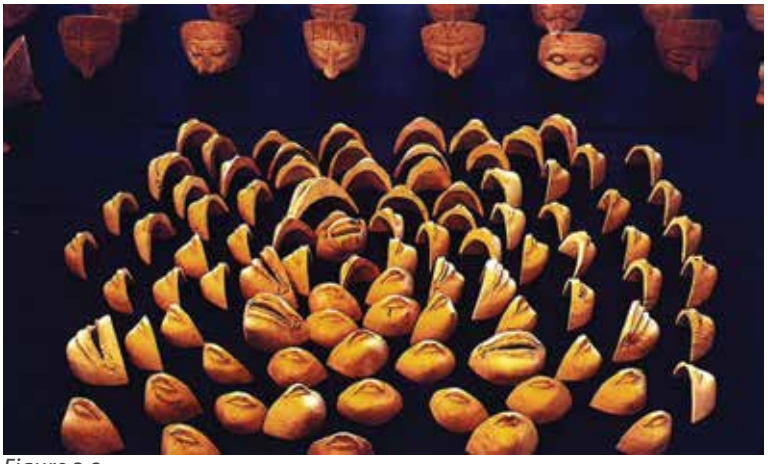

Figure 2.9
FX Harsono
The Voices Are Controlled by the Powers (detail)
1994 | One hundred wooden masks and black clothe | 350 x 350 x 30 cm
Image source: *Re:Petition/Re:Position*, p. 209

In 'The Artist as Ethnographer' (1995), Foster described the new paradigm of avant-garde as undergoing an *ethnographic turn*, traceable since the 1960s. In this new paradigm, the object of contestation remained the art institution and its partisan definitions of art and artists, identity, and community. But the subject of contestation changed: it was the cultural or ethnic Other. While he considered the shift from the economic relation to one of cultural identity significant, he continued a certain *primitivist fantasy*: the 'Other' remained a person of color, one that had no access to the fundamental fantasies of modernism. Despite claiming 'the world as a site' solely for the "white subject,"[129] Foster's position opened way to understand the behavior of Third Avant-garde artists who advanced the construction of a cultural identity in detriment of a national one. In this intention resides an ethnographic behavior, this time toward surrounding diversity, and neglected by High Modernism. This is also why Third Avant-garde artists opted for traditional art as an object of contestation and discourse making.

129 Foster, *The Return of the Real*, 175.

2.3.2 Avant-garde Impacts in the Third Avant-garde

Originality—a concept that implies a sense of coming first or doing first—and *authenticity*—a viewers' perception of truthfulness from the practicing artist—are two vital concepts for both art and art history. This is why avant-garde practices such as the found object and the readymade, with their claimed critical power, have shaken these concepts irreversibly. These are equally problematic concepts for traditional arts, because of the understanding that artisans solely followed procedures, with no permission for difference, novelty and uniqueness. And with the 1920s additional taxonomical division of art, traditional arts saw their space of intervention diminish even more: now, the pursuit of beauty belonged to art, and the pursuit of purpose was resigned to design.[130] This inadvertently contributed to traditional arts' absence from the fine arts, which became increasingly secularized.

After having his Cubist painting *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2.* refused from the *Salon des Independants* in 1912, Duchamp proceeded to invent an 'anti-art' practice. Ever since, the critique of dominant culture has been used by radical groups. And like him, other Dada artists refused authority: "We don't accept any theories. We've had enough of the cubist and futurist academies: laboratories of formal ideas."[131] Duchamp's anti-art strategy was articulated in three main pillars: chance, the ready-made, and the procedure of creation by designation (the urinal is a case point; Duchamp manipulated it and changed its meaning. Everything could be art).[132] In doing so, Duchamp attacked what was termed as art, challenging collective perceptions of its meaning and the role art plays in life. With *Fountain* (1917), he established that art is also constituted by its setting, and not solely by the art object. This is an equally important aspect of the Third Avant-garde, because it uses ritual objects and introduces them in the realm of non-traditional or conceptual art, *enabling the transformation of traditional symbols into secular objects*. Duchamp's gesture had several consequences: if on the one hand, the originality of Fountain was a paradoxical result, on the other hand, its lack of uniqueness was also firmly imbedded in its possible replication, something that several avant-garde works have equally demonstrated. Thus, the work's validity resides in its idea, not in its form (Supangkat's *Ken Dedes* was reassembled in 1996, and Harsono's *Voices Are Controlled by the Powers* was remade in 2011).

In accordance with Duchamp's practices of *displacing* objects from their usual context, the introduction of traditional materials in avant-garde gestures results in the loss of their ancient ritualistic function. Now appearing

130 See Peter Dormer, "The Salon de Refuse?," in *The Culture of Craft: Status and Future*, ed. Peter Dormer (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 6.

131 Kuenzli, *Dada*, 20.

132 See McEvilley, *The Triumph of Anti-Art*, 19.

largely secularized, despite the maintenance of their symbolic value, traditional objects' presence in contemporary art deprives them of their entirety and opens the way for their *fragmentation*. Because of their intrinsic historical value, each fragment—like the bust or the mask—conveys to the audience an individual artist's intention. And the avant-garde's introduction of the new skill—the "ability to choose and select, not the ability to make"[133]—has implications for contemporary art. It conflates traditional crafts with the analytical language of modern art: when an artist posits a traditional idiom, the artwork is initially interpreted through this vocabulary and, only after 'we' realize the work might contain other significations. This equally has implications for traditional arts, that have been regarded as devoid of critical consciousness and as testimonies of a continuation of modes of seeing and acting—their turn into a *critique*. Yet, traditions do change to accommodate the spirit of the time, and there were always periods of selection and adaptation (also for the original customs).[134]

An aspect introduced by the neo-avant-garde (and tried by the Dada artists) was *communal authorship*. This belief in collective production was equally tested by Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru (New Art Movement Group) artists in Indonesia (see Chapter 3). The Third Avant-garde takes this aspect a step further, as traditional arts are many times collectively made. Even though they can be solely made by one craftsman—*wayang* is a case point, as traditionally, puppets are made by the *dalang* that performs them—the integration of traditional arts, made by a person who is not considered an artist within an artist work, results in different behaviors by Third Avant-garde artists: they may act as curators, sometimes as makers, and other times as collectors, and archivists.

The inclusion of these cultural artefacts in contemporary art practices paved the way for problematizing the binary set of 'high' and 'low' art, art and artifact, and the divisions between art and ethnography. "Scholars have noticed that the term 'Art' with capital 'A' in its modern sense... originated in all probability in the eighteenth century,"[135] and has remained undisputed up until the postcolonial moment. Brzyski adds:

> [T]he material culture from the West, enshrined by the designation 'art', became the domain of art history, while the material culture of the rest of the world, classed under the rubric 'artifact', was relegated to the domain of ethnography and later anthropology, from which it did not emerge until well into the twentieth century.[136]

133 Dormer, "The Salon de Refuse?," 3.

134 See Rita Widagdo, "Some Contemporary Expressions in the Visual Arts of Indonesia" (Second ASEAN Workshop, Symposium and Exhibition, Manila, 1993), 2.

135 Paul Oscar Kristellar quoted in Paul Greenhalgh, "The History of Craft," in *The Culture of Craft*, 27.

136 Anna Brzyski, "Introduction: Canons and Art History," in *Partisan Canons* (Durham:

Brzyski points to a current paradigm shift, marked by the rise of the artifact from ethnography's domain, but maintains: "we are still experiencing the consequences of the initial segregation."[137] While Third Avant-garde works respond to this problematic, artists do not seem busy with these considerations. Artists are simply exploring and re-discovering cultural and political boundaries. It is as if they (re)affirmed Susan Vogel's observation: "Whether the [Panji] is art, whether the [*ikat*], or the [batik] are art or artifact is strictly our problem... The question and the categories are ours."[138]

Supangkat noticed that in most cases, whenever a regional artist employs a traditional idiom, the artwork is interpreted through this vocabulary. Like Brzyski, he equally points the origin of this attitude to modernism's opposition between traditional and modern:

> Based on the history of development of western society, which has its roots in post-enlightenment western thinking, modernism made the contradiction between traditional and modern an absolute. Besides that, modernism also caused both the concepts of breakthroughs and of renewal to become absolutes within the development of art. These two beliefs make it impossible for modernism to understand works of modern art that are influenced by tradition.... When works of modern art created by artists from outside Europe and America exhibit signs of [tradition] these artworks are immediately viewed as 'not modern works of art,' but, rather, as 'traditional works of art'. In totality, the works are 'not works of art'.[139]

By definition, an avant-garde work must be out—meaning ahead—of its own historical moment, more appropriately placed in the future which it envisages. Thus, it problematizes the 'here' and 'now'. The avant-garde is caught in an event, it happens and refuses assimilation into a system of ordering according to which the world is oriented. The moment of its occurrence is one of dislocation from the 'here and now' to the 'then and there'. Its function is to go a step further. But with time, its *deferred temporality* is transformed, and integrated in a narrative of sequences that make it 'make sense', and consequently diminishing its radical force. This is what I propose as avant-garde's *institutionalizing process* (see Appendix II). Yet, the avant-garde denies this possibility.

Yet another level of institutionalization—which I call intermediate—is

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Duke University Press, 2007), 6.

137 Brzyski, 6.

138 Vogel, "Introduction," 17.

139 Jim Supangkat, "Art With an Accent," *CP Open Biennial 2003: Interpellation*, accessed January 7, 2009, http://biennale.cp-foundation.org/2003/essays01.html.

the integration of these works in exhibitions. This has been largely successful for the Third Avant-garde: (Southeast) Asian practices are constantly present in regional shows since the late-1970s, in worldwide exhibitions since the late 1980s, and more prominently in the experimental circuit of biennials since the early 1990s.[140] The most significant institutionalization is the one which follows, the works' accommodation in the museum. Formerly, entering a museum collection signified that a work achieved a canon of expertise enabling its classification. Since these works contradict the taxonomical system, their accommodation has been slow, and has largely resulted from: 1. commissions for exhibitions taking place in the wider Pacific region, especially those promoted by the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum and the Queensland Art Gallery in Brisbane, and 2. from acquisitions made by the Singapore Art Museum (where *Ken Dedes* is located). The moment artworks enter an institution's discourse, certain formalization and conformism ultimately happens: this can, although not by the time this dissertation was written, promote traditions fixity. But, as Poshyananda proposes, traditions have always been essential to accommodate change.[141] They constitute legacies that allow individuals the functions of assimilation, adaptation, and resistance to change. And the contemporary is no different.

2.4 The Third Avant-garde Artist

One of the most significant aspects artists retained from their historical culture was the participatory role of the artist as a member of their communities.[142] Kapur's reflection for India—where the artist is asked to articulate a national, integrated identity, along with being a spokesperson for the people—is equivalent to the situation in Southeast Asia, where the individual artist is immersed in a community. As mentioned, the Third

140 1989 was the year of the Third Havana Biennial, entitled Tradition and Contemporaneity, when the spectrum widened to artists from the entire world. This was the second edition to include Southeast Asian artists (in 1986, only Vietnamese and Cambodian artists were shown. In a total of 136 Asian works, ninety were from India.) See Bruce Altshuler, ed., "The Second Havana Biennial," in *Biennials and Beyond—Exhibitions That Made Art History 1962-2002* (New York: Phaidon Press, 2013), 252.

Regionally, a network of exhibitions started developing slowly in the late 1950s; in the late 1960s, ASEAN started promoting exhibitions every two years. Japan came in early in the game: the first Asian Art Show in the Fukuoka Art Museum (FAM) took place in 1979 (*Asian Art Show: Part II,* which focused on contemporary art and included practices from five Southeast Asian nations, was in 1980). Australia would follow in 1987 with the first edition of *Artists Regional Exchange* (ARX), in Perth; in 1993 opened the first *Asian Pacific Triennial*, in Brisbane, Queensland. See Simon Soon, "Maps of the Sea," *Search: Southeast Asian Art Resource Channel*, accessed April 10, 2013, http://search-art.asia/attachments/files/MAPoftheSEA.pdf.

141 See Poshyananda, "Preface," in *Traditions/Tensions*, 15–16.

142 See Kapur, "Dismantling the Norm," 60.

Avant-garde artist shoots out from the *dalang* (puppet master) of the past: like his predecessors, the contemporary artist tells stories, comments on reality and conveys political opinions through metaphor and allegorical language. Sometimes, he equally entertains people.[143] This aspect of entertainment is particularly visible in performance art which is widely used by regional contemporary artists.[144] My suggestion of the artist-*dalang* reminds Poshyananda's proposal of the contemporary artist as a shaman.[145] Regarded this way, contemporary artists continue the social role played by these past figures, while recovering their importance.

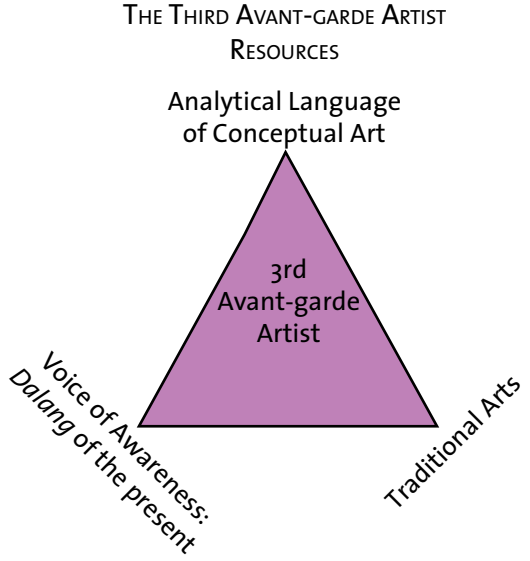

Figure 2.10
The Third Avant-garde Artist Resources
Image edited by Leonor Veiga, 2017

Generally, a Third Avant-garde artist acts upon a triad of resources [Fig. 2.10]: 1. his surrounding reality, which is defined by the presence of traditional arts from which he picks and chooses fragments, 2. his educational background (from which he acquired fluency in the analytical language of

143 See Johannes Jacobus (Hans) Ras, "The Social Function and Cultural Significance of the Javanese Wayang Purwa Theatre" (Conference on Asian Puppet Theatre, London, 1979), 1; Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 263.

144 See Iola Lenzi, "Negotiating Home, History and Nation," in *Negotiating Home, History and Nation: Two Decades of Contemporary Art in Southeast Asia 1991-2001*, ed. Iola Lenzi (Singapore: Singapore Art Museum, 2011), 11–13.

145 See Poshyananda, *Playing with Slippery Lubricants: Apinan Poshyananda Selected Writings 1993-2004* (Bangkok: Office of Contemporary Art and Culture, Ministry of Culture, 2010), 193–200.

conceptual art that Mosquera identified for Bedia's work, see Chapter 1), and 3. circumstances that he comments on as a voice for the community. Because of this positioning of a communal voice, the avant-garde artist can be said to act as an *emancipatory hero* who sacrifices his interests in the name of the *arrière-garde*—that is, the group that remains behind or 'out-of-date'.[146] Being first, many times, results in not being understood: how could Indonesian people in 1975, including prepared and lectured art critics, apprehend Supangkat's *Ken Dedes*? They could not, unless they would engage with the artist. That would have required a (re)searching attitude, a procedure that critics, with the exception of Sudarmadji and Sanento Yuliman, did not follow (see Chapter 3). The Indonesian 1975 event recalls Duchamp's claim: "It's the posthumous spectator [who matters] because the contemporary spectator is worthless."[147] By saying this, Duchamp suggested that those who he witnessed rejecting *Fountain* and littered his intervention were not capable of thinking beyond categories (his genius would be recognized by artists in the 1960s). So, while he waited to be understood—this is the *deferred temporality* of the avant-garde—he was actively exhibiting the work of his friends.

In the European avant-garde of anarchic vein, the artist acted as an emancipatory hero. Foster also rendered the neo-avant-garde as heroic.[148] In the Third Avant-garde, the artist has a double function: first, the social framing, in which he continues the role of the spokesperson—the *dalang*; second, the artistic framing, in which he destroys the myth of the individual artist, promoting instead the artist as a thinker that acts radically by employing traditional arts from his surrounding culture(s). This double-position makes the Third Avant-garde artist conflate both positions: heroic and anarchic. Traditional arts make this a concrete possibility (see Appendix I).

Regarding his behavior toward reality and the employment of traditional arts as part of an I discourse of innovation, activism and archival functions, the Third Avant-garde artist may act in three distinct ways: the first group acts primarily as innovators, and searches for novel territories for traditional arts. This is for instance, the case Chinese Mio Pang Fei, or Timorese Maria Madeira or Indonesian Jumaadi, who foster new solutions for the art of Chinese calligraphy, Timorese *tais*, and Indonesian *wayang*, respectively. Their innovations make visible the resilience which is inherent to traditions, that they adapt according to the spirit of the times [Fig. 2.11].

Second, there are the artists-activists who employ traditional arts as idioms that aptly convey messages of discontent. In this group, I include Jim Supangkat, Harsono, Arahmaiani, the duo Brahma Tirta Sari, I Wayan

146 See Docherty, "Crisis in the Avant-Garde," 217.
147 Kuenzli, "Introduction," 3.
148 See Foster, "What's Neo about the Neo-Avant-Garde?," 25.

Bendi, all from Indonesia, and Redza Piadasa from Malaysia, Norberto Roldan from the Philippines, and Jakkai Suribitur and Kamin Lertchaiprasert from Thailand. Their activism targets not only frozen traditions (sometimes to imbue them with their avant-garde capacities), but equally uses them to convey extremely politicized messages.

Third, there are some artists who are themselves repositories of traditions. This is an important aspect of exiled artists such as Vietnamese Dinh Q. Lê and Madeira, who practiced their essential identity as a form of survival within the dominant culture they were immersed in. Similarly, Harsono (along with other artists) contains an 'archive of pain' of Chinese history in Indonesia. In other cases, artists act as they themselves are living archives. This is the case for instance of Lê and Harsono and Indonesian Albert Yonathan Setiawan and Entang Wiharso. Through their personal memories—recent or old—they make visible personal and communal histories.

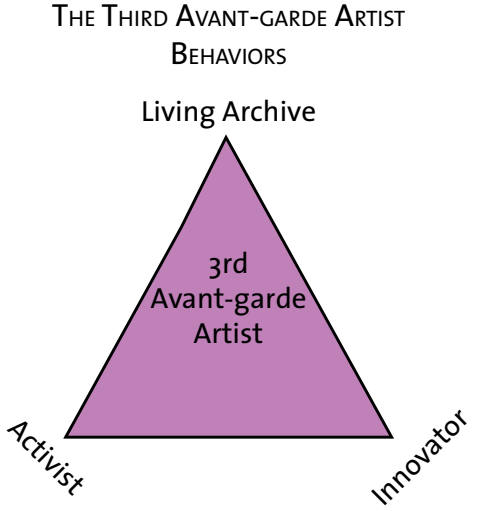

Figure 2.11
The Third Avant-garde Artist Behaviors
Image edited by Leonor Veiga, 2017

The Third Avant-garde artist equally acts upon traditions by making, unmaking, and remaking them [Fig. 2.12]. Their attitude breaks with the status quo, not solely on traditions, but also on bourgeois art and collective culture. What is most striking is that even if the artist has one program in mind—making, unmaking and remaking a certain tradition—his actions result in a conflation of all these possibilities. So, even if the artist acts as an originator of a new tradition, what ultimately happens is that the traditions they act upon are simultaneously made, unmade, and remade.

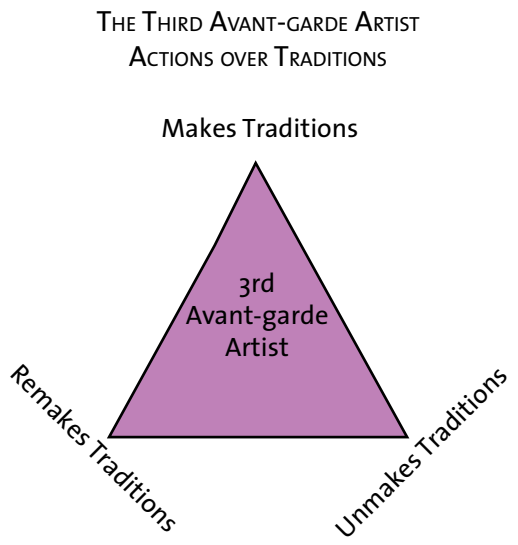

Figure 2.12
The Third Avant-garde Artist Actions Over Traditions
Image edited by Leonor Veiga, 2017

In general, the Third Avant-garde artist who quotes traditions does not start by making a deliberate choice to engage with traditional culture, especially that which is prominent among tourist brochures and spectacles. Instead, they are reluctant to pay attention to these particularities, often the reason for many artists refusing to concede their engagement with traditional arts. Whenever an artist addresses the impact of tourism, traditions are employed in a satirical way. I propose that the choice to engage with traditions is intimately tied to a sense of belonging, and conveys an intended act of citizenship (see Chapter 1).

In sum, the Third Avant-garde artist who manipulates traditions may have different reasons to do so. Nevertheless, they do not abstain from being an active voice of their community or from trying to project a better future. They work on traditions according not only to their personal needs, but also to the needs of their audiences. Therefore, it is possible to say that they resist state patronization—via for instance the continuation of discourses on *wayang*—, rebel against artistic oppression and act locally. Now, moving toward explaining the internal dynamics of the Third Avant-garde work, I hope to make these possibilities clear.

2.5 The Third Avant-garde Artwork

Generally, avant-garde works cause an initial discomfort in the spectator, precisely because of their social commentary and aptness for sarcasm. Third Avant-garde works equally produce such feelings in the spectator (see Chapters 3, 4 and 5), who undergoes two moments of interpretation: firstly, when they see the a recognizable idiom and secondly when they identify the its displacement and understand that the work carries other significations. This is what Foster's deferred temporality means in relation to the work (and is one of avant-garde's main attributes): the temporal gap between production and reception.

As suggested, the avant-garde gesture acts upon the present and envisages a different future. This is one of the reasons why political messages are so frequently present in artworks. Such is the position taken by Vietnamese artist Dinh Q. Lê, whose works span beyond Vietnam's borders, many times commenting on Burmese and Cambodian realities: "Vietnam turmoils happen constantly and shape our lives. That is why our works are political. Not because we are political artists."[149] The avant-garde artist who acts as an emancipatory hero conveys this envisioned constructed reality. Within every Third Avant-garde artwork, three events happen simultaneously: through fragments of traditional arts, the wholeness of traditions is (apparently) conveyed. Every time an Indonesian artist uses one aspect of wayang theater—be it the stories, the puppets or the masks—he addresses aspects of the traditional arts that are of use to him in a given circumstance (see Chapters 4 and 5). Second, as proposed by Clifford, traditions employed are made, unmade and remade. And finally, social commentary is advanced through the artists' actions. By acting as a voice of and for his close communities, the work becomes a repository of social agency [Fig. 2.13].

Kapur states that historians in India have anchored their work in the notion of *fragment* to convey three aspects: one, that the part can take the significance of the whole, two, that in the fragment resides the ability to split off from the pressure caused by hegemonic culture, and three, to manifest the inclusion of new elements which have never been assimilated into discourse. As stated above, the notion of fragment has also been considered by Benjamin through the concept of allegory and Bürger explained that Benjamin's concept of allegory was useful to understand the fragmented nature of the avant-garde work: because of the deconstruction performed by the artist, the work no longer accomplished its (ritual) function. This 'taking out of context' practiced by the Dada artists resembles traditional arts that remain deprived of a clear reading stemming from their inclusion in

149 Dinh Q. Lê, Splendour and Darkness, unpublished interview by Leonor Veiga, Leiden, April 14, 2016.

ethnographic museums. Thus, the Third Avant-garde artist that works with traditional arts further extrapolates this aspect, because he equally takes traditional objects out of their local and institutional contexts.

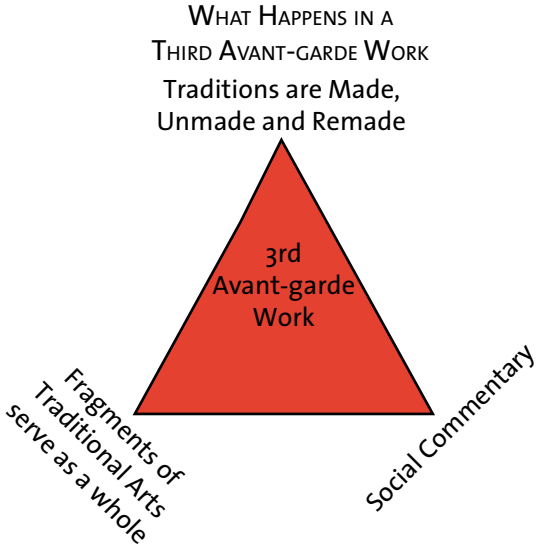

Figure 2.13
What Happens in a Third Avant-garde Work
Image edited by Leonor Veiga, 2017

Lets take Supangkat's work *Ken Dedes* [Fig. 2.14] as an example to demonstrate the conflation of events happening in a Third Avant-garde work. Reading the work through the Third Avant-garde lens, it is possible to say that it was conceived to pay tribute to a woman, to produce social commentary on gender inequality, and to resist national subservience towards foreign models. Here, the artifact chosen is material and appears separated from its context: *Ken Dedes*'s bust served as material and as reference to a certain historical past. But the fact that *Ken Dedes* was a symbol enabled a multitude of associations. While in the act of choosing an artifact, a process of fragmentation commences (because the ritualizing end is lost) but is continued through the act of recombining, resulting in new meaning(s). Thus, for the avant-garde artist, artifacts can be separated from their context and still serve as reference.

Supangkat's gesture relates to what McEvilley designated as 'reprocessing', an act that derives as much from a sense of replenishment as a need for transformation, with the past providing fuel for the future. Thus, the first move of the reprocessing act is the selection (that includes fragmentation and division), and the second move is elements' re-joining. This is how processes of montage—one aspect of avant-garde works—come to be

and are articulated. McEvilley meets Bürger's description on the making of an avant-garde work,[150] but differs from him regarding the context of production since when he wrote about reprocessing, McEvilley was dealing with the first participation of West African artists in the Venice Biennial.

Figure 2.14
Jim Supangkat
Ken Dedes
1996 (artist's reconstruction from the 1975 original) | Mixed media | 61 x 44 x 27 cm
Collection of the National Gallery of Singapore | Image courtesy National Gallery Board, Singapore

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Third Avant-garde artworks are made from material fragments which are chosen (the traditional artifact or story). So, this fragmentation (also) symbolizes disjuncture of our time, where past and present coexist. Thus, a totality is denied. Fragmentation is further enhanced by the medium of installation, which lacks the wholeness of traditional media including sculpture and painting. The high degree of autonomy of fragments—the mask, the bust or the story can live by themselves—also permits the readings of works through their parts and not necessarily in their wholeness. I think this is a very

150 See Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 55–82.

important aspect of Third Avant-garde works, as oftentimes traditional (or foreign) societies are not (fully) knowledgeable of the production context. Just as most people do not know *Ken Dedes*'s story, most people do not know that it was the closing of *TEMPO* magazine that triggered Harsono's installation *The Voices are Controlled by the Powers*. In my opinion, this involuntary unawareness resulted in the deferral of the works' recognition as avant-garde.

Processes of montage claim from artists' little interference. The unsubstantial modification also denotes it is a fragment from reality as avant-garde claims. So, using fragments originating in traditional societies (most times studied by anthropologists, another reason for their deferred reception) confirms their role in everyday life. Thus, these works should not be judged as performing acts of self-exoticization. In consequence, new territories of intervention were opened to traditions and to art, without losing their recognizability. Still, the preference for combining traditional materiality and analytical discourse, as posited by Mosquera, is evident.[151] I believe it results from the performed ethnographic analysis of cultures, in which rationality is more linked to the Western frame of reference. For Harsono, the masks alone served the purpose and for Supangkat, the Dedes's bust was enough. So, the choice for certain *curated* fragments is both method and ideology conducive to conveying the artist's message. Within Third Avant-garde works, one example may contain several positions: in *Ken Dedes*, the bust symbolized a national narrative, the opposition to Western modernism, while it introduced classical Javanese culture into the discourse of (contemporary) high art.[152]

Poshyananda also referred to 'fragments of traditions' as the active ingredient of contemporary art practices. McEvilley pointed to the South African artists' acts of reprocessing both the legacies of a Western modernism (that had been forced onto them, a similar situation to that of Asian artists) and simultaneously their attentiveness to their surrounding culture. In his opinion, and I concur, artists reprocess both instances—local and global. When they do so, an artwork is born, but a new, invigorated tradition is also created. This leads to Clifford's affirmation that traditions articulate the disjunctures of our time and are being actively made, unmade, and remade [Fig. 2.15].[153] He argues that even though cultural continuity was more discernible in earlier periods then today, examples can be found in the contemporary. So, traditions that persist must be seen through a prism of heterogeneous elements, old and new, indigenous and foreign.

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151 See Gerardo Mosquera, "The Marco Polo Syndrome: Some Problems around Art and Eurocentrism," in *Theory in Contemporary Art since 1985*, 218–25.

152 Ken Dedes and Singosari sculpture are part of High Art discourses since the nineteenth-century. Yet, Western scholars did not continue the narrative, relegating the art from 'non-Western' countries to a past immemorial.

153 Clifford, "Indigenous Articulations," *The Contemporary Pacific* 13, no. 2 (2001): 479.

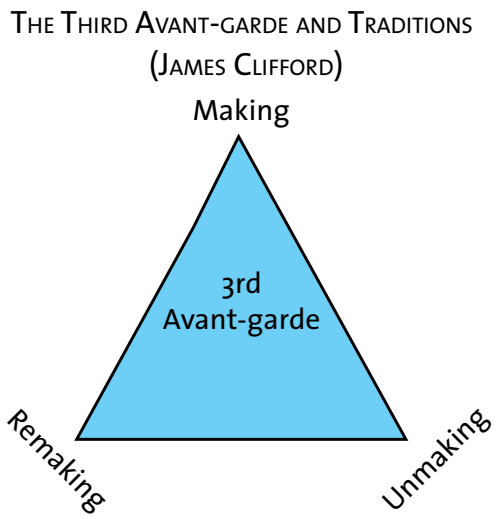

Figure 2.15
The Third Avant-garde and Traditions, in accordance to James Clifford (2001)
Image edited by Leonor Veiga, 2017

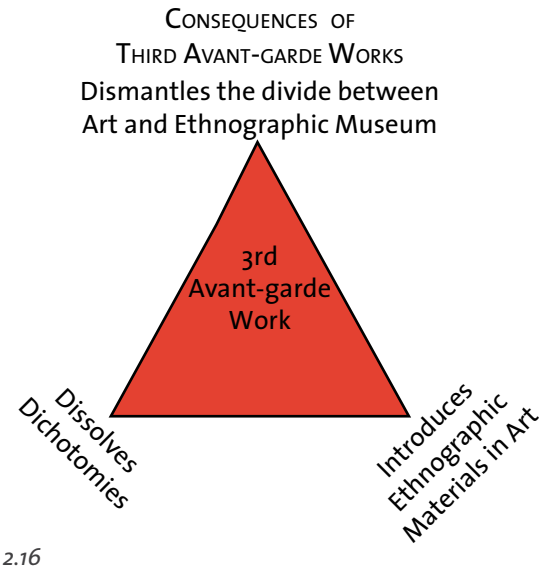

Figure 2.16
Consequences of Third Avant-garde Works
Image edited by Leonor Veiga, 2017

Because Third Avant-garde works equally introduce new tensions, they also provoke consequences in to the field(s): through its repudiation of the taxonomical division between fine art and low art, it introduces traditional

arts in art's realm; because it dismantles the art/culture divide identified by Clifford, it enables their meeting [Fig. 2.16]. In consequence, Third Avant-garde practices equally dissolve dichotomies such as East and West, traditional and modern. The Third Avant-garde emerged to propose new trajectories for Art History and Anthropology and their respective museums (see numerous possibilities in Chapter 3, 4, and 5). It not only promotes their meeting, it equally continues avant-garde's disruptive discourses.

2.6 Conclusions

In this chapter I debated the significance of the avant-garde and proposed that it consists of a contemporary gesture that, after finding its language and mission, propels a change in the course of art history and art's institutionalization. If regarded as a force, avant-garde has not lost significance and can happen in several places, in several times. Through these conditions, I advanced an avant-garde for Southeast Asia, which I termed the Third Avant-garde. Such an initiative seems to be a valid project because avant-garde has, so far, remained almost a Western-centric construct. Thus, my nomenclature signifies the continuation of an unfinished project. Many authors, from Kapur and Mitter to Enwezor, have pointed to the persistence of avant-garde's metanarrative, one that relates to its Euro-American centrism. They argue it should be subjected to a dismantlement process and propose to identify avant-garde's gestures outside the field of art.

The Third Avant-garde continues Bhabha's proposition of a Third Space, as it dismantles a third layer from the modernist partisan system of classification, which has been questioned since the historical avant-garde. If the first avant-garde refused to do retinal art, and questioned what art was—thus shacking the structure of the museum (here, Duchamp's urinal is a case-point)—, the neo-avant-garde proclaimed art as a possible existence outside the modern art museum and expanded the field of intervention (Burden's *Shoot* embodies these preoccupations). Both questioned the originality of the work and the notion of author. In this respect, avant-garde's radical gestures are paramount: the ready-made proposed that a work can be a machine-made piece selected by the artist, with little or no interference in its composition; neo-avant-garde movements questioned ideas of authorship and originality by means of collective participation in the making of an artwork, and by reprising several former practices. Through traditional arts, the Third Avant-garde continues these projects, the notion of loss of authorship and use of the ready-made and appropriation, while it extrapolates the two. This is done by contradicting the compartmentalization between art and ethnography (or art and craft). Instead of, but in continuation with preceding

events, the Third Avant-garde project takes all these proposals—origin or circumstances enabling an avant-garde event, mission of the artwork, attack on institutionalization and conformism, notions of authorship, authenticity and originality—one step further. And, in consequence of its denial of the artificial divide between art and culture, the *local* becomes a ready-made element of the artwork.

So, like the previous avant-gardes, the Third Avant-garde introduces new zones of tension (tradition, art, craft), thus promoting its own questioning of what can be termed as art. The placement of traditional objects into art's discourse results in their elevation to the status of art—a circumstance that equally happened four decades later to *Fountain*—and, as a result, it requests a significant change in art categorization. Meanwhile, the Third Avant-garde does not *per se* attack the art museum. Instead, its aims at annihilating the partisan taxonomical division between art and culture. This is a project of a wider scope, which ultimately dismantles and ruins the art museum and the ethnographic museum. In this regard, ethnographic museums have, as Clifford observes, been faster to adapt: "ethnographic museums are rebranding themselves as world art museums."[154]

Deriving from their postmodern inception, Third Avant-garde works contain simultaneously an avant-garde and an anti-avant-garde vein. When in 1995 Kapur proposed to use traditions to "make postmodernism in our own terms [because] it is what renders us distinguishable,"[155] she suggested traditions as a space of transgression. So, Third Avant-garde artists presented in the following chapters demonstrate the phenomenon's particularities, namely its 1970s-80s early manifestations (see Chapter 3), its boom in the 1990s (see Chapter 4) and its globalization throughout the 2000s (see Chapter 5).

154 Clifford, *Museum Realisms: What Does Realism Mean in Museum Contexts, Especially Those Concerned with Cross Cultural Translation?* (Leiden: Research Centre for Material Culture, 2016), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eQL09kUTUes.

155 Kapur, "When Was Modernism in Indian Art?," in When Was Modernism: Essays on Contemporary Cultural Practice in India (1995), ed. Geeta Kapur (New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2000), 297–98.

Plate 1. Jim Supangkat, *Ken Dedes*, 1996.
Artist's reconstruction from the 1975 original.
Mixed media, 61 x 44 x 27 cm.
Collection of the National Heritage Board, Singapore.
Courtesy of the National Heritage Board, Singapore.

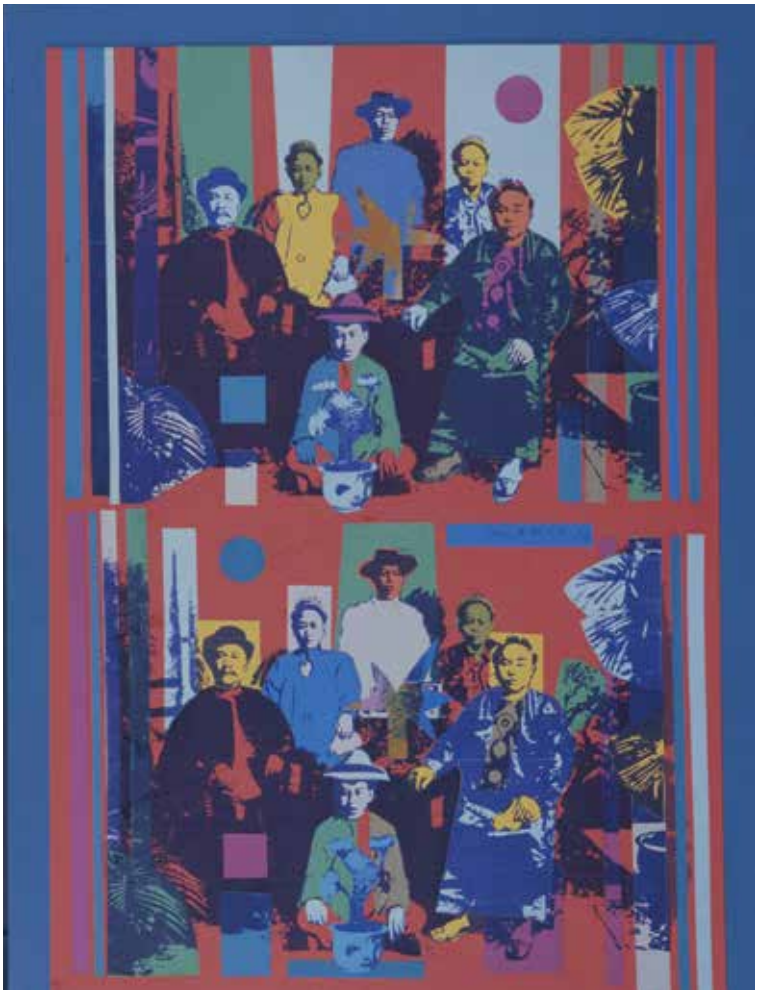

Plate 2. Redza Piyadasa, *Baba Family*, 1987.
Photocopy on colored paper, 101.3 x 75.8 cm.
Collection of the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum.
Courtesy of the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Fukuoka.

Plate 3. Norberto Roldan, *Langgoni Nine*, 1989.
Textile, 157.5 x 97.5 cm.
Collection of the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum.
Courtesy of the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Fukuoka.

Plate 4. Mio Pang Fei. *Wu Yong of Shui Hu*, 1996.
Mixed media on wood, 200 x 135 cm (each).
Images by Leonor Veiga, 1996.

Mio Pang Fei. *Bandits of Marsh*, 1996. Installation view.
Source: *Path and Adventure* (exh. cat.).

Plate 5. Maria Madeira. *270+ Massacre Santa Cruz Nian*, 1996.
Mixed media with *kaibauk*, 350 x 350 x 30 cm.

Maria Madeira. *Silence at What Price?*, 1996.
Mixed media with nails and *tais*, 200 x 100 x 40 cm.
Courtesy of the artist.

Plate 6. Dinh Q. Lê. *Cambodia: Splendour and Darkness*, 2005.
C-print, linen tape, 160 x 120 cm.
Courtesy of the artist.

Plate 7. I Wayan Bendi. *Revolusi*, 1991.
Acrylic and ink on canvas, 146 x 266 cm.
Source: *Traditions/Tensions* (exh. cat.).

Plate 8. FX Harsono. *The Voices Are Controlled by the Powers*, 2011
Remake of the 1994 original. Installation with one hundred masks and black cloth, 350 x 350 x 30 cm.

Destruction, 1997.
Performance and documentation. Courtesy of the artist.

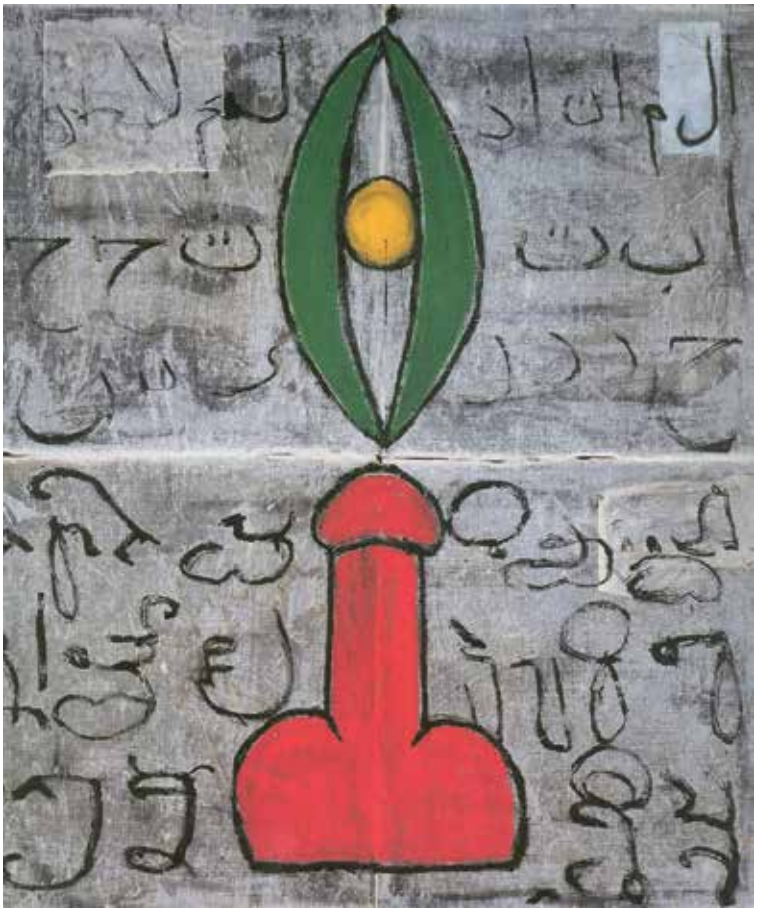

Plate 9. Arahmaiani. *Lingga-Yoni*, 1993/4.
Acrylic on canvas, 182 x 140 cm.
Courtesy of the artist.

Plate 10. Maria Madeira. *Rei e Labele Koalia (Kiss and Don't Tell)*, 2007.
Mixed media with *tais* on canvas, 61 x 76 cm.
Courtesy of the artist.

Plate 11. Arahmaiani. *I Don't Want to be Part of Your Legend*, 2004. Still images from 12' video.
Courtesy of the artist.

Plate 12. FX Harsono. *Writing in the Rain*, 2011. Performance and video documentation, 6' 12". Courtesy of the artist.

Plate 13. I Wayan Bendi. *Terror*, 2010.
Acrylic and ink on canvas, 500 x 200 cm.
Courtesy of the artist.

Plate 14. Dinh Q. Lê. *Untitled (Columbia Pictures)*, 2003.
C-print, linen tape, 97 x 183 cm.
Courtesy of the artist.

Plate 15. Jakkai Siributr. *78*, 2014.
Steel scaffolding bamboo, fabric and embroydery,
350 x 350 x 350 cm.
Courtesy of the YAVUZ Fine Art, Singapore.

Plate 16. Brahma Tirta Sari. *Sarung*, 2009. From left to right, clockwise: *Sarung West*, *Sarung North*, *Sarung East*, *Sarung South,* and *Sarung Center*. Installation with batik on silk, hand stitched, variable dimensions. Courtesy of the artists.

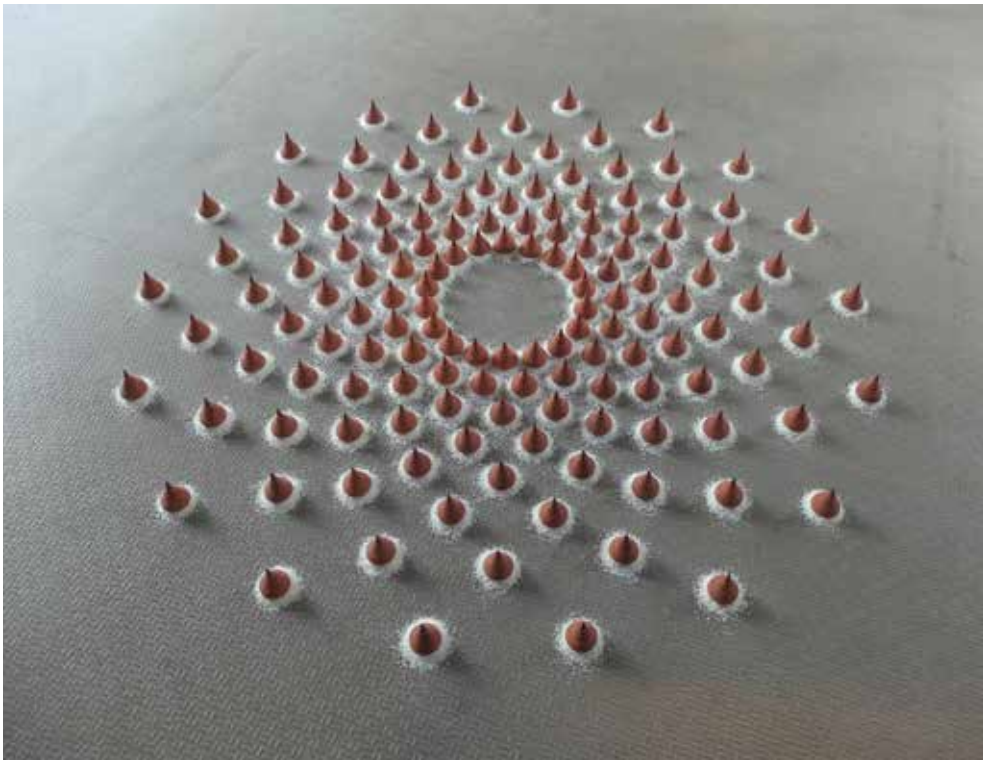

Plate 17. Albert Yonathan Setiawan. *Mandala Study #4*, 2015. 650 terracotta pieces atop marble sand, 300 x 300 x 10 cm. Courtesy of the Sundaram Tagore Gallery, New York.

Plate 18. Kamin Lertchaiprasert. *Lord Buddha Said 'If you see dhamma, you see me'*, 2003-4.
Papier machê (shredded Thai Bath bank notes), Head 244 x 73 x 73 cm; Torso 206 x 83 x 79 cm; Feet 70 x 79 x 78cm.
Courtesy of the artist.

Plate 19. Entang Wiharso. *Borderless: Floating Island*, 2011-12.
Graphite, resin, steel, brass, color pigment, thread, 350 x 750 x 140 cm.
Courtesy of the artist.

Plate 20. Jumaadi. *The Life and Death of a Shadow*, 2015-16.
From left to right, clockwise: West view of the installation; leather and paper cutouts; Mix of found and produced *wayang* materials and overhead projector; performance.
Images by Leonor Veiga, 2016.

The Third Avant-garde: Early Days (1970s-80s)

This chapter evaluates the contribution of the 1970s and the 1980s to the formation of the Third Avant-garde. It proposes that an avant-garde emerged in the mid-1970s in the Southeast Asian countries aligned with the Western nations during the Cold War—Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines. This event was unconventional in its provenance, scale, form, and timing. Regarding provenance and scale, it was confined to the urban centers of these five Southeast Asian nations and made exclusively by young generations of artists who were studying in local academies or abroad. In terms of form, all these manifestations used the important avant-garde feature of the written manifesto.[1] And in terms of timing, the striking similarity is the advent of these radical groups in the mid-1970s, specifically between 1973 and 1976.

The avant-garde of the 1970s does not fully relate to the Third Avant-garde boom that would come to characterize the 1990s. One notorious difference is the absence of the written manifesto of the latter. However, it can be said that it announced its preoccupations, including: the freedom to choose local forms of expression, including indigenous forms; the resistance to state and academic patronization that promoted the procurement of a national identity through Western models in detriment to an art that conveyed life; the artist as a free-thinker, freed from the task of making beautiful representations of an idealized reality (e.g. 'Mooi Indië' painting in Indonesia); and the procurement of a cultural identity through local modes of making. The similarity of the claims between the avant-gardes has been observed by Southeast Asianists working on the construction of a Southeast Asian art discourse. Subsequently, the chapter proposes *Ken Dedes*, an installation made in 1975 by Jim Supangkat, as the earliest Third Avant-garde manifestation known. I suggest *Ken Dedes* because it constitutes a breakthrough in Indonesian art and simultaneously talks about Southeast Asian history, which is the reason for its current inclusion on the Southeast Asian contemporary art collection housed in Singapore.

In the 1980s, Southeast Asian artists turned to social preoccupations and non-confrontational activism surged. They used traditions to demonstrate the variety of peoples and modes of making. This decade equally witnessed the first steps toward internationalization, especially within Southeast Asia and the Pacific: a series of rotating events, especially those promoted by the ASEAN and in Japan, kick-started a regional network between regional artists.

1 The Singaporean case is slightly different, but it can be included in this trend.

3.1 The 1970s (1973-1979): Artists' Steps

To exemplify the early days of the Third Avant-garde, I am going to guide my study through the writing of Singaporean art historian T. K. Sabapathy and Filipino art historian Patrick D. Flores.

Sabapathy is one of the first Southeast Asianists, and most probably the first residing in the region. His is one of the longest academic contributions for a local acceptance of Southeast Asia as a field of enquiry, and since the 1990s he has been very active in conjuring and creating a network of specialists in the region (this endeavor has bared fruits in recent years, with an increasing network of specialists based in Singapore). Sabapathy's activity as a curator is key to historicizing the region's modern and contemporary art. His seminal exhibition *Modernity and Beyond: Themes in Southeast Asian Art* (1996) remains one of the most comprehensive contributions Southeast Asian scholarship to this day.[2] One of the aspects that did not escape his analysis was the presence of traditions in art practices. In addition, Sabapathy has been an active academic in Singapore since the 1980s, which means his activity is marked by an extensive collaboration with Singaporean museums and universities. Another aspect that makes his work relevant is his extensive studies on individual artists.

The choice for Flores relates to his interest in the region, traceable through important publications such as *Past Peripheral: Curation in Southeast Asia* (2008), but most importantly for his preference for the theme of the avant-garde in recent years.[3] Flores' analysis of a Southeast Asian avant-garde in the 1970s has focused on its attributes and on its collective stance. He has enumerated the avant-garde of unrelated groups from the region through their written manifestos. The manifesto as a text itself, is a prominent characteristic of the Avant-garde and something which rendered the historical avant-garde so important. Interestingly, one of the Third Avant-garde's particularities is the absence of a written manifesto. Like the neo-avant-garde (and the transnational avant-garde of Oliva), the Third Avant-garde has relied on the written works of curators and art historians who have established a close relationship with artists through curatorial practice. The consequence is that historicization remains deferred, perhaps resulting from the lack of temporal distance that characterizes the immediacy of the relationship between artist and curator.

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2 See T. K. Sabapathy, *Modernity and Beyond: Themes in Southeast Asian Art* (Singapore: Singapore Art Museum, 1996), 7.

3 See, for instance, Patrick D. Flores, "First Person Plural: Manifestos of the 1970s in Southeast Asia," in *Global Studies: Mapping Contemporary Art and Culture*, ed. Hans Belting et al. (Karlsruhe: Hatje Cantz, 2011), 224–71; Patrick D. Flores, "'Total Community Response': Performing the Avant-Garde as a Democratic Gesture in Manila," *Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia* 1, no. 1 (2017): 13–38.

The choice for these two authors does not invalidate the importance localized specialists for each country (including Supangkat for Indonesia and Poshyananda for Thailand) remain the most significant contributors toward the delineation of a Southeast Asian avant-garde project. Their work communicates commonalities, such as the importance of the idea of the modern (in which the avant-garde must be placed) and the relevance of the *local* in artistic manifestations. They, nevertheless differ in one aspect: for Sabapathy, Singapore has equally contributed to a regional avant-garde discourse, while he discards the Thai event, a reading which Supangkat follows.[4]

3.1.1 The Emergence of an Avant-garde in Southeast Asia through its Social Fucntions

In the mid-1970s, most countries of Southeast Asia were under the control of dictatorships. The region was divided in two blocks, reflecting the Cold War divide. On the West side of the Cold War, Indonesia and the Philippines had established longstanding dictatorial regimes with Suharto's New Order and Ferdinand Marcos enduring presidency (1965-1986). In these countries, the chiefs of state constructed 'sanctuaries' of national identity—the Cultural Centre of the Philippines (1966) and the Taman Mini in Indonesia (1975) are two examples—meant to convey national identities, uniting extremely diverse populations under one single banner.[5] These constructions were modern in form, and their content based on inclusion/exclusion systems of categorization was mirrored at an academic level. The situation for Singapore and Malaysia was somewhat different. Following from the separation in 1965, both countries dedicated the next decades to the betterment of life conditions of their citizens.[6] In Malaysia, the Barisan Nasional coalition government instituted the New Economic Policy (NEP), which concentrated its efforts toward the needs of the Bumiputera (or indigenous) peoples who were offered a degree of 'positive discrimination' against the Chinese. These measures served to counter racial antagonisms.[7] In Singapore, Lee Kwan Yew's People's Action Party (PAP) fostered a program of nation building, while maintaining economic ties with Malaysia aimed at the nation's survival. Simultaneously, Yew advanced a regional agenda: in 1963, Singapore held the first edition of the Southeast Asian Cultural Festival—conceived and timed for the inauguration of the National Theatre of Singapore. Observes Sabapathy, this gesture "signaled Singapore's claim that it was a formative site for showing, representing Southeast Asia (and Asia) as a cultural field."[8] Singapore's culturalgenda for the region has not ceased ever since.

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4 Jim Supangkat, Ken Dedes, unpublished interview by Leonor Veiga, Leiden, March 7, 2016.

5 See Flores, "First Person Plural," 227.

6 See Peter Church, ed., *A Short History of South-East Asia*, 4th ed. (Singapore: John Wiley & Sons, 2006).

7 See Church, 95.

8 T. K. Sabapathy, "Intersecting Histories, Thoughts on the Contemporary and History in

From the end of World War II until 1973, another member of the West side block, Thailand, lived under several unchallenged military dictatorships—commonly called the 'strongman' era—which were marked by US patronage and aid, a relation that enabled a great deal of social and economic developments. But, by the early 1970s, the educated young precipitated the downfall of the regime.[9] Student protests originated political activism, affecting even the Buddhist *sangha* (or monks) and resulted in horror. "In October 1976, the military resumed power, unopposed, and permitted right-wing organisations to torture and kill student radicals gathered at Thammasat University in Bangkok."[10]

The Cold War divide between two blocks equally contributed for the enforcement of dictatorial regimes: fearing the expansion of communism, these countries (Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines) signed the foundation of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1967. This event, in conjunction with local realities, supported the emergence of a regional avant-garde through its social functions. As suggested by Kapur, if understood as a force, the avant-garde emerges in moments of social disjuncture, which we can see relevant here. It is interesting to note that the phenomenon of the 'invention of tradition' finds the exact same reasons for its emergence. So, I hypothesize, that these national building projects (by means of dictatorial regimes), and aimed at modernizing nations toward an increasing Westernization, were coupled with governments' sponsoring of invented traditions (in Kapur's words, a civilizational hubris).[11] These in turn, were classified and placed within buildings and parks such as the modern sanctuaries referred to. Sabapathy mentions: "there were movements featuring modern and traditional arts in the region in the 1960s and the 1970s. These were largely... diplomatic enterprises springing from ambitions for representing emerging states and claiming regional prominence as well as worldly status for them."[12]

Following the Late Modern developments in Europe and America, within each academic mentioned above, painting was a persuasive medium.[13] The mode of making favored towards formalism resulted in regional artists' attempts to conjure an avant-garde: they openly claimed resistance and

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Southeast Asian Art," in *Intersecting Histories, Contemporary Turns in Southeast Asian Art*, ed. T. K. Sabapathy (Singapore: Nanyang Technological University, 2012), 49.

9 See Church, *A Short History of South-East Asia*, 172.

10 Church, 172.

11 See Geeta Kapur, "Dismantled Norms: Apropos Other Avantgardes," in *Art and Social Change: Contemporary Art in Asia and the Pacific*, ed. Caroline Turner (Canberra: Pandanus Books, 2005), 48.

12 Sabapathy, "Intersecting Histories," 48–49.

13 Supangkat, Ken Dedes.

rejection against official art made in a Western style. Thus, they proposed a new turn into local art forms, which were cornered by the imported 'High Art' establishment. As a result, the 1970s witnessed the emergence of the avant-garde manifesto: unrelated artists from Singapore in 1973, Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand in 1974, and the Philippines in 1976, published writings in which they expressed the desired new trajectory for artistic practice. They proclaimed "the necessity of the new and the urgency of the now."[14]

In 1973, Singaporean artist Cheo Chai-Hiang wrote from London to his Singapore-based colleague Ho Ho Ying the seminal text 'Written for the Occasion of the 8th Modern Art Exhibition', where he surveyed artistic practice in Singapore. Cheo advanced that the art of the 1970s should embrace "[o]ther media, formats and technologies [which] are capable of producing images that are visually far more compelling and seductive." Painting, he insisted, was an "inconsequential register."[15] Cheo's new paradigm advocated "the rejection of formalism, inclusion of the personal, an emphasis on the process, and use of indigenous materials."[16] He equally proposed that a work "need not be determined as 'finished' for it to qualify as art... [and] may be created collaboratively."[17] Sabapathy observes while Cheo's text is not precisely a manifesto, he nevertheless claimed the need for change, because he recognized that modern art had failed, declaring the 1970s a "testing time for artists."[18]

In 1974 Malaysia, the artists Redza Piyadasa and Sulaiman Esa inaugurated the exhibition *Towards a Mystical Reality* in the National Agency for Language and Literature in Kuala Lumpur. The project, which included a written manifesto and a set of co-authored installations, was advanced as "A documentation of jointly initiated experiences by redza piyadasa and sulaiman esa."[19] Objects such as two half-emptied bottles of Coca-Cola were exhibited in pedestals and accompanied by captions describing their temporal and spatial emergence. Despite the introductory text in the catalogue by Krishen Jit rendering their work as "nothing less than a revolution in Art,"[20] and the public gesture of Salleh ben Joned of placing a copy of the publication on the floor and subsequently urinating on it (this can be interpreted as a performative act), the exhibition *Towards a Mystical Reality* largely met public indifference.[21] a"It is the publication that is remembered and esteemed until the present,"

14 Flores, "First Person Plural," 227.
15 Sabapathy, "Intersecting Histories," 36–37.
16 Iola Lenzi, "Negotiating Home, History and Nation," in *Negotiating Home, History and Nation: Two Decades of Contemporary Art in Southeast Asia 1991-2001*, ed. Iola Lenzi (Singapore: Singapore Art Museum, 2011), 4.
17 Sabapathy, 38.
18 Sabapathy, 39.
19 Sabapathy, 39.
20 Flores, "First Person Plural," 240.
21 See Sabapathy, "Intersecting Histories," 40.

discerns Sabapathy.[22] Their manifesto declared the artist as a maker of ideas, advanced a trajectory for Malaysian art freed from Western influences, and a call to turn attention to Oriental sensibilities which nurture and emphasize "the 'spiritual essence' rather than the outward form!"[23]

In 1974, the Artists' Front of Thailand was formed. Its embodied political agenda was tied to the sentiments of the period between 1973 and 1976, which, according to Poshyananda, signal the beginning of activist art in the country.[24] In 1975, the group's manifesto was published. It started with a reflection of social power relations declaring that for centuries the powerful few had deprived most the population of satisfactory life conditions. Its interest in traditional arts was evidenced in its various proposals:

> To reform Thai traditional arts for the 'big groups of little people'... To change public attitudes towards traditional arts' use from serving imperialist capitalists or elite individuals to serving the 'big groups of little people'... To treasure the good traditional arts throughout Thai history for the public... To promote the application of the traditional arts treasured in the world to social and mankind development.[25]

Thai students promoted a reading of traditional arts according to Thailand's current political and social circumstances, thus declaring the need for art to connect to life, and far "from the death machine of the state and the art establishment."[26] However, on October 6, 1976, students from the Thammassat University "protested against the return to the country of Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn, who had been in exile in disguise as a Buddhist monk,"[27] originating what became known as the '6th October Massacre'. On that morning, students were shot, beaten, burnt, and their bodies mutilated. "According to the official count, 46 people died in the attack but the number of deaths has been questioned."[28]

In December 1974, the *2nd Jakarta Biennial of Painting* opened in the Taman Ismail Marzuki (TIM).[29] Following from the rejection of their paintings which tended "toward geometrism and abstractism"[30] from the prized

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22 Sabapathy, "Intersecting Histories," 39.

23 Piyadasa and Esa quoted in Flores, "First Person Plural," 258.

24 See Flores, 260.

25 Artists' Front of Thailand 1975 manifesto quoted in Flores, 262.

26 Flores, 263.

27 Thanavi Chotpradit, "Revolution versus Counter-Revolution: The People's Party and the Royalist(s) in Visual Dialogue" (University of London, 2016), 131.

28 Chotpradit, 131.

29 The TIM is an institution that houses the Jakarta Biennial committee, etc. It remains an important place for art events. At the time, it was the only place housing exhibitions in Jakarta.

30 Supangkat, *Indonesian Modern Art and Beyond* (Jakarta: Indonesia Fine Arts Foundation,

paintings, a group of students from the academy in Yogyakarta sent a floral wreath adorned with the message "Our Condolences to the Death of Indonesian Painting."[31] They contested the overall tendency toward decorativism, which they interpreted as mirroring the "judges' concept of Indonesian identity."[32] The incident, which became renowned as December Hitam (Black December), was received as a shock by the local art world. The effects of the radical gesture were immediately felt: the group of signatories was punished with expulsion from the art school.[33] The Black December Manifesto stated the diversity of Indonesian art and called artists to offer a spiritual direction based on humanitarian values and oriented towards reality so that Indonesian art could achieve a positive identity.[34]

On the wake of the events, the students from Bandung academy (among which was a young Supangkat) met with their fellow colleagues from Yogyakarta (among which was a young Harsono) and formed the Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru (GRSB), or New Art Movement Group. In 1975, the GRSB exhibited for the first time at the exhibition hall of TIM, and presented works which could not be classified as painting, sculpture, and/or drawing.[35] For Supangkat, the group's collaborations in 1975, 1977, and 1979 is considered the debut of contemporary art in Indonesia, one which "was concerned over the various social issues in the midst of a very non-democratic condition."[36] In 1979, they published the manifesto entitled 'The Five Lines of Attack of the Indonesian New Art Movement' in which they openly rejected the concept of High Art which cornered popular and traditional forms widely present in the country. They equally posited that art existed beyond the categories of painting, sculpture, and drawing, as well as the primacy of concept over form and intellect over skill, and declared the need for a (re)searching attitude (which would allow the development of more individual styles) and the obligation to be attentive to the history of Indonesian art as well as the exigency to be attentive toward reality.[37] The movement was dismantled in 1979, even if in 1987 some of its members organized another joint exhibition, *Pasarya Dunia Fantasi* (Fantasy World in a Supermarket), in which collaborative work was tested.[38]

In 1976, the Kaisahan Group, formed by some students in the Philippines, issued their declaration of intentions. Their manifesto declared the group's

1997), 68.

31 Hendro Wiyanto, ed., *Re:Petition/Position* (Magelang: Langgeng Art Foundation, 2010), 70.

32 Supangkat, *Indonesian Modern Art and Beyond*, 68.

33 Sabapathy, "Intersecting Histories," 43–44.

34 Flores, "First Person Plural," 230.

35 See FX Harsono, Memory and Contemporaneity, interview by Leonor Veiga, Yogyakarta, January 10, 2010, 5, http://repositorio.ul.pt/bitstream/10451/2039/3/ULFBA_TES356_ANEXOS.pdf.

36 Supangkat, *The People in 70 Years* (Magelang: OHD Museum, 2015), 45.

37 Flores, "First Person Plural," 232–33.

38 See Supangkat, *Indonesian Modern Art and Beyond*, 78.

commitment to "the search for national identity in Philippine art."[39] That meant, first, that local expressions should distance themselves from Western orientations that tended to maintain Filipinos hostage of foreign tastes and foreign ways of making. They recognized the importance of pursuing the endeavor of finding a national identity but declared its social commitment: art should be "firmly based on social realities and on a critical assessment of our historical past so that we may trace the roots of these realities."[40] To this day, this Manila-based collective is credited with having launched the social realist movement in the Philippines.[41]

This short account shows that the similarities within the region's movements "undeniably demonstrate the influence of conceptual art, minimalism and Pop Art that appeared in the 1960s to the 1970s in the late modern era, in Europe and in the United States."[42] These student groups of avant-garde artists proposed to correct the situation by engaging more with grassroots populations and communities: they declared a new art and no longer believed in the coding of art as painting or sculpture, and stated that these categorizations had to be vehemently discouraged in art production. Instead, they proposed continuing the journey toward a national identity, but through communal values. This intended move away from Western-oriented culture also reflected their willingness to remain independent countries, not hostage of new forms of imperialism.

The commitment toward searching more adequate expressions of national identity—through traditions in Thailand, the Phillippines and Indonesia, and through conceptualism in Singapore and Malaysia—does not denote, says Flores, "nostalgia, but [it rather constitutes] a 'critical assessment' of the 'present' and the 'historical past'."[43] Appearing in all manifestos, this commitment was armed by a rejection of invented traditions, seen as idealized projections of the past that had little relation with the reality of these grand national narratives. The work of Jim Supangkat, *Ken Dedes*, is a good example of an artist's opposition to the appropriation of traces of history by the nation state, while he reintroduces social commentary, an aspect that had been lost after the neo-avant-garde.

Most artists belonging to these groups were already immersed in ideas from outside, an aspect that related from their overseas education (this is the case of Piyadasa and Sulaiman). As such, they were already highly acquainted with post-modern practices. Even the student Supangkat who conceived

39 Flores, "First Person Plural," 237.
40 Flores, 237.
41 Norberto Roldan, Langgoni Nine, interview by Leonor Veiga, Lisbon, January 22, 2018; Flores, "'Total Community Response,'" 31.
42 Supangkat, *The People in 70 Years*, 38.
43 Flores, "First Person Plural," 239.

Ken Dedes was acquainted with American art, making installations since his early days he was probably influenced by the information and magazines his grandmother who lived in San Francisco regularly sent him. And through Supangkat, installation art emerged in Bandung, as a means to reject art schools' conservatism. While in Yogyakarta, Harsono kick-started a minimalist tendency in painting.[44] Supangkat was also concerned about the primacy of Western art history and the lack of Indonesian art history and theory at school.[45] Together with GRSB artists, he rejected formalism that made art for the eye, and integrated elements previously considered non-art (found objects, photographs, images from the mass media) into the discourse. He equally disagreed that Indonesian identity was only represented by traditional 'high' arts that Suharto's regime proposed (e.g. *wayang* theatre and *ikat* weaving). So, he decided to follow Indonesian art critic and professor at the Bandung Institute of Technology Sanento Yuliman's concept of a coexistence of two realities that would be eventually outlined in the essay 'Two Fine Arts: High and Low' (1984). In consequence, the art produced in this period embodied the confrontation of modernism and tradition, to integrate an expressive language that allowed voicing of socio-political ideas. These artists proposed to make ideas, not solely forms: they viewed art as a space for a development firmly rooted in social realities, reflecting society's true conditions. *Tradition*, with its local identity effect, appeared to them as a privileged space to criticize Western ascendency. These groups equally rejected elitism in art and promoted art through self-discovery: artists should not follow the demands of the teacher. Instead, they should focus on getting their own individual style.[46]

These 1970s manifestos were vehicles of agency. They were a mode to address audiences that set the foundation of contemporary art, by promoting a consciousness of the current world and eliciting a simultaneous clear, local response. They marked a shift away from formal conventions and embraced change: many instances were sparked by engagements with aspects of Dada, Conceptual, and Pop art, although the degrees of their impact are different. These 1970s insights involving approaches to art making were, in many ways, anticipatory to what came in the 1990s: the rejection of formalism, the inclusion of the personal, the emphasis on the process, and the use of indigenous materials. These are all criteria that can be termed as avant-gardist in this context.

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44 Supangkat, Ken Dedes.

45 Ingham, "Powerlines: Alternative Art and Infrastructure in Indonesia in the 1990s," 179-180.

46 Flores, "First Person Plural," 231.

3.1.2 Proposing the First Third Avant-garde Work: *Ken Dedes* (1975)

Figure 3.1
Jim Supangkat
Ken Dedes
1996 (artist's reconstruction from the 1975 original) | Mixed media| 61 x 44 x 27 cm
Image courtesy: National Heritage Board, Singapore

Figure 3.2
Marcel Duchamp
Fountain
Installation view
Dimensions Unknown
Photograph by Alfred Stieglitz
Source: http://icons.canalblog.com

I suggest that *Ken Dedes* (1975) [Fig. 3.1] be considered among the earliest and most prominent manifestations of the Third Avant-Garde in Southeast Asia.[47] This is for two compelling reasons: firstly, Ken Dedes monopolized the critical discourse about the GRSB exhibition, an outcome which Supangkat claims was unintended. *Ken Dedes* was placed by GRSB members at the exhibition's entrance, a decision that transformed it into "some kind of statement"[48] and was interpreted as expressing the group's positioning against Suharto's nationalistic discourse. Secondly, the work itself relates to the rewriting of history. It aptly demonstrates the paradoxes and shortcomings of national/regional frames and invokes the ongoing debate about whether it is reasonable to continue inherited Orientalist discourses which regard the Hindu-Buddhist era as the height of local and regional

47 I am aware that other artists of GRSB and from the region used traditional arts in their installations, but access to this information is scarce. Locally, *Ken Dedes* became so influential due to the polemic it caused that it practically monopolized discourse on GRSB's early activity.
48 Supangkat, Ken Dedes.

civilization(s). The work's formal similarities with Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917) [Fig. 3.2]—an object of everyday life resting on the top of a wooden plinth—make it plausible to say that Supangkat's radicalism departed from it but, went beyond it by integrating a highly important local and regional symbol from Indonesian and Southeast Asian history.

The original statue of Ken Dedes [Fig. 3.3] was produced during the kingdom of Singosari (1222-1292 AD), which was spurred by the marriage of Ken Dedes with Ken Arok. Singosari was the predecessor of Majapahit, the most powerful empire in Southeast Asia to date. It remains in the realm of hypothesis that this statue constitutes a commemorative effigy of Prajñāpārāmita, the Buddhist goddess of transcendental wisdom, and regarded by Dutch Orientalists as its most refined depiction dating from the East Javanese period (10th—14th centuries).[49] In popular belief, the statue is believed to depict Ken Dedes, a queen known for her transcendental beauty, and daughter of an important Mahayana Buddhism clergyman.[50]

Figure 3.3
Prajñāpārāmita statue, found in East Java, is believed to be the portrayal statue of Ken Dedes
Singosari period (1222-1292 AD)
National Museum of Indonesia
Source: http://www.wikiwand.com/id/Prajnaparamita

49 "Ken Dedes, the Javanese Princess," Singosari: the origins of Majapahit, accessed December 10, 2016, http://singosari.info/node/1047.

50 Museum Volkenkunde, "3.6 Prajnaparamita and Other Buddhist Deities," Singosari: the origins of Majapahit, 6, accessed March 27, 2015, http://singosari.info/en/node/1049.

The creation of *Ken Dedes* in 1975 is significant for its resonances with contemporaneous debates. The original thirteenth-century statue was at the time of Supangkat's creation, housed in the Museum Volkenkunde, in Leiden, the Netherlands. And during this time, Indonesian demands for its repatriation were intensifying. The statue was eventually returned in 1977 and is now housed in the National Museum of Indonesia, in Jakarta.[51] The postcolonial claim for its return transpires notions of nation building albeit perpetuating Orientalist discourses that value Singosari's art as classic.

As a student in art school who "read history books on the side,"[52] Supangkat aptly employed Ken Dedes's bust to manifest his discontent with a lack of postcolonial revisionism, as the historical figure's importance remained largely confined to her role as Ken Arok's wife, and not as the true enabler of Singosari. Supangkat was discontented with the program of Bandung's academic study that enforced the copy of old statues devoid of critical analysis. His work accuses the New Order's intrumentalisation of a "great past."[53]

Supangkat's analysis included the idea that as historically important, their marriage represents the coming together of Hindu and Buddhist Javanese sects—Ken Arok was a Shivaite Hindu and Ken Dedes was the daughter of a Mahayana Buddhist clergyman—that enabled Singosari. This union was fundamental for the subsequent formation of the powerful Majapahit kingdom. In today's tradition, Majapahit is considered the origin of modern Indonesia, having been elevated to national narrative and doctrine.

But history is partial. Historical records, most notably the *Pararaton* (also called *The Book of Kings*, written after 1489, well into the Majapahit period) kept Ken Dedes in relative obscurity. Half of *Pararaton* is dedicated to Ken Arok's life (first king of Singosari, between 1222 and 1227, in East Java) before marrying Ken Dedes, leaving her in relative obscurity. The partisan nature of the manuscript has also caught the attention of Indonesian artist Arahmaiani, who writes and investigates the subject. Arahmaiani affirms Ken Arok as a commoner who reached the highest status by killing Ken Dedes's husband and marrying her. In addition, she observes his current position as a national hero, while Ken Dedes, despite being labeled important, was transformed by history into a mere supporting character: she is described as a trophy, and as a special woman because whoever is born from her womb will be king. So, Arahmaiani concludes, "She is seen as equipment to produce leaders.... the woman is positioned as a sub-ordinate, unless she supports a man to make

51 Marieke Bloembergen and Martijn Eickhoff, "Exchange and Protection of Java's Antiquities: A Transnational Approach to the Problem of Heritage in Colonial Java," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 72, no. 4 (2013): 907.

52 Jim Supangkat, Ken Dedes's repatriation, interview by Leonor Veiga, Lisbon, September 8, 2017.

53 Supangkat, Ken Dedes.

him strong."[54] From these considerations Arahmaiani made a performance in 1996, *Handle Without Care* (see Chapter 4).

Supangkat's gesture claims her rightful status:

> In my vision, Ken Dedes was a powerful woman, because she was attractive... I made Ken Dedes to talk about the power of women. She was clever and an intellectual from a high caste. She started Singosari and in my view, she set Ken Arok to power. Then history wrote about him.... But it's unfair, how can a lower-ranked man become clever and important? It's to make an epic of the story... her importance is negated as much as his importance is highlighted... I saw the statue and thought she must have been a very intellectual woman. She was represented as a knowledge goddess.[55]

Supangkat's "interest stemmed from gender issues...[but] the work was analysed as a critic to traditionalism, which I didn't intend. [Prominent Indonesian art critic] Kusnadi said the work humiliated a 'great past'."[56] Initially, Supangkat's placing of the image of the deity atop an unrefined pedestal on which he drew a woman in a provocatively sexual pose was received as blasphemy. Yet, in retrospect, this gesture can be understood as embodying a double stance, addressing both local and international discourses. Locally speaking, the depiction of the suggestively posed woman underneath the image of Ken Dedes is an allusion to the *Pararaton*'s report, in which Dedes's glowing pelvis is said to have been revealed by a gust of wind.[57] In international terms, by placing the thirteenth-century style bust above the plinth adorned with an image of 1970s fashions (the existing work updated the fashion to the 1990s), Supangkat literally positioned the national above the international. Viewed in these ways, *Ken Dedes* demonstrates an unsubordinated position toward Westernisation, which is a common attitude within artists of the 1970s and equally of the Third Avant-Garde. So, the work performs the double dismantle that Kapur proposed: it defies local invented traditions (including national building discourses) while also refuses subservience to international models of art making.[58]

With this appropriation, Supangkat equally suggests that Indonesian women have been neglected from the construction of Indonesian society and its history. The effectiveness of his gesture resides in the usage of this national symbol; avant-gardism is brought by his rejection of an 'invented tradition'.

54 Arahmaiani, "Seeking the Traces of Prajnaparamita" (Yogyakarta, 2014).

55 Supangkat, Memory and Contemporaneity, interview by Leonor Veiga, Yogyakarta, January 14, 2010, 37.

56 The heated debate between Kusnadi and Sudarmadji (who authorized the exhibition in TIM) went on for some time in newspapers.

57 See Museum Volkenkunde, "3.6 Prajnaparamita and Other Buddhist Deities."

58 Kapur, "Dismantled Norms," 67.

The work refers to fetishisation of female gender, regarded as subservient, both intellectually and sexually: in line with the *Pararaton* script, Supangkat depicted Dedes's pelvis, which in the context of an Islamic society immersed in Javanese non-confrontation values was considered rude.

This fragmented artwork also constituted a critique toward the medium of sculpture. Within Indonesian academia, students learned from pre-existing models, handed down through the narrative of the excellence of classical culture, often uncritically.[59] The bust represents the sculpture of Hindu tradition still made on Bali, the bottom part projects one into the space of the museum and pop-art's comic strip formats. All these aspects clashed with the political context of Suharto's New Order (1966-1998), which revered the Majapahit age as a source of ideological continuity and legitimacy.[60] The conflict between the two halves makes the piece surprisingly dialectical; as opposing forces from the past and present show how a society in transition debates with itself the willingness to keep its own values and identity, and simultaneously embraces change. Suharto's regime continued its programmatic depolitization of life, while it homogenized the nation through Javanese constructs.[61]

Kusnadi saw *Ken Dedes* as a work that tarnished Indonesian history and visual culture and, considered the copy an act of cultural vandalism. Sudarmadji, in the artist's defense, asked "why would he mention copying and not look at it [the ready-made] as an art medium?," adding that the artist did not vandalize the original since it remained in the Netherlands. For Sudarmadji, Kusnadi's views were too old fashioned (Kusnadi was one of the juries impeding young artists' participation in the 1974 Jakarta Biennial that originated the Black December 1974 protest, and resulted in the GRSB formation). So, he said that albeit Kusnadi's extensive travelling to foreign countries to see art (including the second edition of the São Paulo Biennial), this didn't guarantee him an understanding of or a capacity to anticipate art's developments. For Sudarmadji, Supangkat's copy of the statue was not merely a copy, rather he reaffirmed its contemporaneousness: "that's the media, the language form of the now," criticizing his opponent, who was so fixated in a past that he could not understand media art disclosure.[62]

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59 The construction of Javanese classical culture as resulting from the Hindu-Buddhist period dates from the eighteenth century, when Stamford Raffles wrote his History of Java. This discourse would be continued by Dutch scholars, and recast as Southeast Asian art by the influential work of George Coèdes, *The Indianized States of Southeast Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1968).

60 See Flores, "Ken Dedes," in *Beyond the Dutch: Indonesia, the Netherlands and the Visual Arts, from 1900 until Now*, ed. Meta Knol, Remco Raben, and Kitty Zijlmans (Amsterdam: KIT Publishers and Centraal Museum Utrecht, 2009), 146–47.

61 See Supangkat, "Two Forms of Indonesian Art," in *Modern Indonesian Art: Three Generations of Tradition and Change 1945-1990*, ed. Joseph Fischer (Jakarta: Panitia Pameran KIAS, 1990), 158–62; Supangkat, *The People in 70 Years*, 12–52.

62 Sudarmadji and Kusnadi, "Kusnadi Dan Sudarmadji Soal GSRBI," *Http://Hyphen.Web.Id*

Ken Dedes symbolizes artworks consciously made within an art discourse framework (in a Western sense) but produced with vernacular languages. And, as in most cases, these works use fragments from traditional sources originating in their societies. The work then performs the reprocess of several elements as it represents disjunctures of the time (which remain ongoing), where past and present coexist but whose totality is denied. The operation of montage articulates materials as the artist's idea. For the avant-garde artist, *material* is just material, it can be a crafted material, that the artist gives a new context. *Ken Dedes*'s bust served as material: it references historical facts, but it establishes new associations springing from the artist's combination. As Bürger defended, the avant-garde work is constituted by a series of adjoined fragments that ultimately will posit meaning. Thus, the avant-garde work is no longer an organic whole, but rather a combination of fragments.[63] In consequence, the avant-garde work does not hide its artificiality: it is clearly man-made and proclaims it. That is why montage is one of its founding principles, and installation becomes a much-utilized medium. Installation's elements, in every avant-garde artwork including *Ken Dedes*, have a high degree of autonomy. Here resides the different receptions it can lead to.

During the 1980s, these radical intentions as articulated in Supangkat's *Ken Dedes* were continued, though found in different forms and degrees of intensity. According to Supangkat, Indonesian painting became mainstream and highly valuable commodity. The art market experienced a boom, which led to the emergence of political art in the fringes of more commercially oriented activity.[64] Like artists in the Philippines or Malaysia, Indonesian artists started a searching for a societal identity.[65] The Third Avant-Garde that would boom in the 1990s was born from this evolvement.

3.2 The 1980s (until 1988): The Emergence of Non-Confrontational Activism

The 1980s in Southeast Asia were marked by three main aspects: first, the commencement of institutional steps toward a Southeast Asian artistic identity. This decade witnessed a crescendo of exhibitions, conventions, and publications on Southeast Asian art. One aspect that led to the effectiveness of these initiatives was the travelling nature of the events. To demonstrate preoccupation with equal representativeness, ASEAN nations rotated hosting the regional exhibitions. Despite the evident growth, these were

(blog), 1975.

63 See Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw, 13th ed., vol. 4, Theory and History of Literature (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 82.

64 See Supangkat, "Art and Politics in Indonesia," in *Art and Social Change*, 218.

65 See Supangkat, *Indonesian Modern Art and Beyond*, 78.

still early days, and amateurism was evident. Masahiro Ushiroshoji, then Chief-curator of the Fukuoka Art Museum (FAM), recalls his experience when organizing the seminal Asian Art Show, Asian Artists Exhibition Part II, in 1980:

> [W]hen it came to organizing the exhibition, we had no alternative but to rely completely on the countries that were participating in it. We recklessly set out to organize an exhibition without having any background whatsoever and it was all we could do just to solve the problem of how to bring contemporary art from the 13 countries to Fukuoka. Hence we entrusted the selection of artists and works to the art museums, government agencies, and artists' associations in the participating countries. At first, most of our effort was exerted finding reliable partners in other countries to handle the task.[66]

To demonstrate the lack of references available to the Japanese curatorial teams—an aspect that renders the Fukuoka (Asian) Art Museum (FAAM) pioneers in discourse-making—, he defines the period 1979/80 until 1989, when the FAM showcased the 3rd Asia Art Show, as a "Journey without a guidebook."[67] To him, the 1989 edition marks the beginning of a genuine dialogue between the FAM and Asian nations.[68]

Second, the decade was significant for the commencement of new attitudes towards artistic practice, especially in its space of intervention. Social preoccupations penetrated artistic discourse and art became a locus of activism. Publicly, the force of the radical movements of the mid 1970s waned but, the contestation against depolitization remained. Artists concentrated their efforts in procuring a societal identity, more in touch with the reality of local peoples and the conditions they lived in.[69] This new inclination, affirms Supangkat, was felt among "the educated upper class society, who were

66 Masahiro Ushiroshoji, "The Birth of the Asian Art Museum: The Asian Collection and Two Decades of Asian Art Shows," in *Asian Art*, trans. Janet Goff (Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, 1999), 6.

67 Masahiro Ushiroshoji, "How to Look at Asian Art: From the Collections of the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum," in *Asia Collection 50: From the Collection of the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum*, trans. Martha J. McClintock (Fukuoka: Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, 2000), 4. The *Asian Art Show Part I* took place in 1979 and its focus resided on modern art from India, China and Japan. Its reception was so positive that the Fukuoka team set to promote a second encounter, this time turning the gaze to contemporary practices by young artists that had not been showcased. *Part II* amounted 13 countries, five of which from Southeast Asia (Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore and the Philippines). By 1989, the Fukuoka Art Museum (FAM) had collected such a significant number of post-1980s contemporary art, that it was partitioned and the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum (FAAM) came to exist.

68 Masahiro Ushiroshoji, From FAM to FAAM and Beyond, interview by Leonor Veiga, trans. Fumio Iwamoto, Fukuoka, November 20, 2017.

69 See Supangkat, *Indonesian Modern Art and Beyond,* 78.

making an effort to get in touch with the grassroots, the traditional group of people and the almost 'uneducated' society."[70]

Third, installation art widely replaced modern sculpture (which was practically abandoned since the late 1970s).[71] While installation's first steps originate in the 1970s, in the early 1980s it was assessed as "'developmental art' [aimed at] stimulating public minds and at the same allowing the artists to question and investigate their work. [This would lead toward a] 'total community response'."[72] The new technology, says Flores, proved to be a key vehicle for mediation between audiences and the 'new' and 'now' that characterized the post-colonial spirit of Southeast Asian nations. It equally served "as an index to the local... taking bits of both the gritty and the cool, the authentic and the self-conscious, the 'anthropology of the far' and the modernity of the familiar through the performance of the ethnographic and the universal."[73]

3.2.1 Non-Confrontational Practices in Southeast Asia: Some Examples

As mentioned, during the 1980s, Southeast Asian artists resorted to installation art. Flores notes that this disposition relates to a sense of entitlement to 'Western' modes of making (albeit the recognition of installation as vernacular, and thus part of a "certain authenticity of local expression perceived from a postcolonial perspective."[74]) Equally, artists' "insistence on socially relevant art clearly indicated [their] desire to communicate, indeed to reconnect with their 'immediate community'."[75]

In Indonesia, where depolitization was growing under Suharto's rule, Harsono—one of the participants in the Black December uproar of 1974, who was expelled from the Yogyakartan academy after the Black December hearings[76]—continued to demonstrate a spirit of contestation and call for justice. He turned to the environment and particularly, its depletion. Harsono

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70 Supangkat, 80.

71 This observation results from the study I conducted at the FAAM in November 2017. By analyzing the museum's holdings, this trend became noticeable, and covers all Southeast Asian nations: the sculpture atop a pedestal which was paramount until the late 1970s practically disappears since the early 1980s.

72 Flores, "'Total Community Response,'" 25.

73 Flores, 26.

74 Flores, 25–26.

75 Kristina T. Subido, "New Art, Old Meanings," in *3rd Asian Art Show: Symbolic Visions in Contemporary Asian Life* (Fukuoka: Fukuoka Art Museum, 1989), 247.

76 Jim Supangkat, "FX Harsono," in The First Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, ed. Suzanne Grano (Brisbane: Queensland Art Gallery Publishing, 1993), 15; HG Masters, "This Is History: FX Harsono," *Art Asia Pacific*, no. 85 (October 2013): 118. After the expulsion, he moved to Jakarta, studied graphic design, and established his own company in 1984. Supangkat notes that aside his graphic career, Harsono remained involved in art by joining experimental exhibitions. Through them, his activist side transpired.

recalls, "From 1985 onward, I started to make works based on research."[77] He nurtured genuine preoccupation with grassroots people, which he envisioned as "the victims of development," leading him to play a double-role of artist-activist.[78] A relevant work from this period is *Plywood Fence and Our Forest* (1982) [Fig. 3.4], presented in the Parangtritis beach in the South of Yogyakarta.

Figure 3.4 and 3.4 A (detail)
FX Harsono
Plywood Fence and Our Forest
1982 | Text, screen print on plywood | 600 m in total length; each plank 120 x 15 cm
Source: Tyler Rollins Fine Art

The installation was compounded by numerous wooden planks on which he printed statistics of environmental devastation: in one of the planks it can be read "every minute 13.6 hectares of world's tropical forest are destroyed."[79] Amanda Katherine Rath notes that the artists called these expressions under the term *Seni Kontekstual* (Contextual Art), a disposition that "should be able to bring across awareness about the plight of society and their suffering through artistic means."[80] One of its defining aspects, which distinguishes contextual art from Euro-American conceptualism, is the employment of local materials imbued with culturally specific meanings. Singaporean curator Seng Yu Jin notes: "Dematerialization of art did not occur in Seni Kontekstual,"[81] because the result is obtained largely through the agency of these (local) materials. This process of

77 Masters, "This Is History," 119.
78 Wiyanto, *Re:Petition/Position*, 98–99.
79 Wiyanto, 99.
80 Amanda Katherine Rath, "The Conditions of Possibility and the Limits of Effectiveness: The Ethical Universal in the Works of FX Harsono," in *Re:Petition/Position*, 4.
81 Seng Yu Jin, "Exposing the Unseen: Strategies of Conceptualism in Indonesian Art,"

recontextualizing materials borders Dada experiments, while at the same time, it differs from it through the novelty of local ingredients. This triad of aspects, a research-approach method; an attention to contextual conditions; and the role of artist-activist, had lasting effects in Harsono's career, and it could be said that all the experiments of these formative years are felt in his current practice.

In 1987-8, the work of Heri Dono (b. 1960, Jakarta) around Indonesian *wayang* surged. His attempts, alongside with those of Anusapati (b. 1957, Surakarta), focused on 'making simple', i.e. producing a critical discourse around the notion of 'low art'. The discourse these two artists (among others) elicited attempted to demystify the local situation of neglect that traditional arts faced by pointing to the fact "that the actual traditional culture has been marginalized, not only by high art, or Western art, modern art and international art, but also by the (locally formed) concept of 'traditional culture' itself."[82]

Figure 3.5
Heri Dono
Wayang Legenda
1988 | Performance | 2 screens, 2 *dalangs*, 60 unique puppets
Source: Tyler Rollins Fine Art

In 1987-8, Dono conceived his seminal work *Wayang Legenda* [Fig. 3.5]. Here, he represented the country's islands as puppets to allude to the 'Indonesianization/ Javanization' that Suharto's government had invested so heavily in. Looking at the work through the lens of *wayang* (as an art form), Dono broke several rules:

in *Re:Petition/Position*, 207. Seng follows German-born Uruguayan artist and academic Luis Camnitzer's conception of non-Western conceptual art. He proposes that Latin American conceptual art did not eliminate the object as Euro-American conceptual art did, but instead focuses on the significance of local and regional contexts while challenging a seamless global history of art as a singular master narrative. Yu Jin, 203.

82 Supangkat, *Indonesian Modern Art and Beyond*, 84.

1. The full set of sixty *wayang* characters he created were larger and rougher than the traditional ones (the first aspect being a result of his guru Sukasman, with whom he established a give-and-take relationship[83] and the second his own aesthetics which can be seen as a sign of rebellion); 2. It contained non-traditional and cheap materials such as cardboard and bamboo; 3. Some of the characters came from a lower stratus of society; 4. The tale he appropriated (and gave a new course) is Batak, from Sumatra; and 5. The performance was acted by two young dalangs from Yogyakarta.[84] All these elements make *Wayang Legenda* significant, leading Dutch art historian Helena Spanjaard to consider it a key-work that "contain[s] the essence of a new direction in the artist's career."[85] In fact, Dono's work has not only influenced his career path, but has served as motor for the expression of many other Indonesian artists.

Also in the 1980s, a new realism emerged as one of the dominant forces within Indonesian painting. Under the auspices of the government who saw in these expressions a display of nationalism, the Indonesian art world experienced a boom of 'beautiful paintings' which "continued the search for a national identity."[86] This art was successfully being sold in auction sales. But, at the same time, a counter tendency emerged, photorealistic paintings most notably by artist Dede Eri Supria (b. Jakarta, 1956). His genre has been described as surrealist, however Australian art historian Brita Miklouho Maklai takes it further and considers that Supria "uses some of the techniques of surrealism... to dismantle the constructions of Indonesian culture and offer a new perception of society."[87]

As Indonesian alternative practices were mostly directed toward the wellbeing of society and aimed at improving human life, in occupied Timor-Leste, a similar tendency was taking place. Deriving from strict isolation, art practice in the area was almost confined to political graffiti and murals which started appearing in the derelict walls and street facades of Dili, Baucau, Suai and Lospalos. This "phenomenon of critical expression" remained restricted until self-determination in 1999, but contributed to the construction of a critical self that would bear fruits after independence in 2002.[88]

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83 Christine E. Cocca, Post-wayang, unpublished interview by Leonor Veiga, Lisbon, November 2, 2016.

84 Amanda Katherine Rath, "Shadow Stories: Wayang in the Work of Heri Dono," *Prince Claus Fund Journal The Future is Handmade: The Survival and Innovation of Crafts*, no. 10 (2003): 48; Helena Spanjaard, "Angels and Demons: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly," in *The Dono Code,* ed. Helena Spanjaard and Wouter Welling (Amsterdam: KIT Publishers, 2009), 17–18.

85 Spanjaard, "Angels and Demons," 17.

86 Supangkat, "Art and Politics in Indonesia," 222.

87 Brita L. Miklouho-Maklai, *Exposing Society's Wounds: Some Aspects of Contemporary Indonesian Art since 1966* (Adelaide: The Flinders University of South Australia, 1991), 85.

88 Joanna Barrkman and Abílio Conceição Silva, "A Contemporary Art Movement Timor-Leste," in *From the Hands of Our Ancestors*, ed. Joanna Barrkman (Darwin: Museum and Art

In Thailand, Poshyananda observes, the 1980s saw the emergence of postmodern practices. He acknowledges that if the postmodern condition was being experienced by Thai society, it was being done through a transformation of traditions.[89] Yet, he notes that most Thai artists who created artworks invoking traditional Thai scenes did it without a satirical impulse. In this respect, Montien Boonma (1953-2000) can be considered one of the first Third Avant-garde artists of Thailand. His international recognition began in the 1980s, when he exhibited several installation works fusing aspects of Thai Theravada Buddhism with conceptual sensibilities. Poshyananda states: "Boonma's use of Thai consciousness in shaping his installations serves the need for the construction of national imaginaries in the context of international events, like biennials and triennials."[90]

In 1987, Piyadasa conceived of a series of Pop-like (or Pop-inspired) works in which the subjects of attention were the ethnic Malay-Chinese minority people of Malaysia [Fig. 3.6]. Historically knowns as Peranakans, these multi-ethnic communities are spread in the entire region of Southeast Asia, most notably in Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia. What strikes the observer is the combination of century-old imagery with the international aesthetics of American artist Andy Warhol's colored prints. Piyadasa comes from a minority group—the Sinhalese who originate in Sri Lanka and are mostly Theravada Buddhists—in multiracial, Muslim Malay majority Malaysia. So *Baba Family* (1987) evidences his concerns of assimilation, references his own experience of marginalization, and calls for full integration of minorities. In a 2004 interview with Danish academic Malene Grøndhal at the University of Malaya he said:

> I am still an outsider... In a bus stop most people will look and think "Ah, he is an Indian from India", you know?... I think the richness of Malaysia is its truly Asian flavor... We are rare... You have Chinese newspapers, you have Tamil newspapers, you have Malay newspapers... You open the radio in the evening and there is news in Tamil, there is news in Chinese, in Malay... Which other country has that?... [That is why] I approach my art not as [means for] self-expression; I approach my art more as a sociologist.[91]

Gallery Northern Territory, 2008). Barrkman says: "these expressions echo the nation's rock art heritage, which was similarly painted on walls."

89 Apinan Poshyananda, "Modern Art in Thailand in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries" (Cornell University Press, 1990), 576–77.

90 Apinan Poshyananda, "Contemporary Thai Art: Nationalism and Sexuality à La Thai," in *Contemporary Art in Asia: Traditions/Tensions*, ed. Apinan Poshyananda (New York: Asia Society, 1996), 108.

91 Redza Piyadasa, *Malaysian Notes by Redza Piyadasa*, interview by Malena Grøndhal, December 12, 2004, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=glFLhpVka5I.

His work must be contextualized as a response to "the rise of a new Malay ethnic supremacy [that] led to a 'movement among Malay artists that explored the question of cultural identity'."[92]

Figure 3.6
Redza Piyadasa
Baba Family
1987 | Photocopy on colored paper | 101.3 x 75.8 cm
Collection of the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum | Image courtesy of the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum

The 1980s in the Philippines were marked by the continuation of Marco's rule, one in which censorship went hand-in-hand with human rights violations resulting from the Martial Law years (1972-81). Born out of the assassination of Benigno Aquino Jr. in 1983, the Concerned Artists of the Philippines (CAP)—a broad coalition of filmmakers, visual artists, writers, musicians, film and theater actors and cultural workers—was formed in Manila. The group's founder filmmaker Lino Brocka, a social activist who was "often vocal against censorship and other restrictions,"[93] went to Bacolod City (capital of Negros

92 Kataoka Mami, "Sunshowers in Southeast Asia: A Premise for an Exhibition," in *Sunshower: Contemporary Art from Southeast Asia 1980s to Now* (Tokyo: Mori Art Museum, 2017), 282.

93 John A. Lent, "Southeast Asian Independent Cinema: Independent of What?," in *Southeast Asian Independent Cinema: Essays, Documents, Interviews*, ed. Tilman Baumgärtel (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2012), 13.

Occidental[94]) where he spoke to the local artist community.[95] Bacolod artists decided to establish the delegation of CAP-Negros. The two groups shared the same manifesto but, their membership differed and each group reflected the quests of its local of insertion.

In the late years of the Power Revolution (1983-1986), several Bacolod artists, feeling uncomfortable with what they perceived as propaganda for the National Democratic Front, broke away from CAP-Negros and formed the Black Artists in Asia (BAA). Although the core membership of the BAA came from the CAP-Negros, these artists aimed to establish their own legitimacy as a visual arts organization with its own cultural, social, and political agenda. In retrospect, CAP-artist Norberto Roldan (b. 1953, Roxas City) observes:

> After twenty-five years, I can say that we [CAP-Negros] served the propaganda machine of the National Democratic Movement. When Cory Aquino rose to power in 1985, in 1986 the Black Artists in Asia was formed as a way out of the Concerned Artists and be recognized. We are historically grounded as a response to history... The nomenclature BBA is a reference to the island, it is a metaphor: people know there are no Blacks in Asia! We wanted to acknowledge the initial inhabitants of Negros. The Spanish decided to call the island that way—Negrito, which alludes to small people of dark skin. We wanted to make them a tribute.[96]

In 1980, Roldan moved with his wife at the time to Bacolod. Like his birth-island of Panay, Negros is part of the region of Visayas, the entry point of the Spanish colonizers in the sixteenth-century. As the husband of a six-acre sugar-farm owner, during his seven-year stay Roldan resorted to academic life. He admits his personal involvement with the century-old sugar industry developed by the Spanish changed him: "When I came to Bacolod, I was politically naïve. No activist blood in my veins. But slowly I was politicized."[97] What he found was an ingrained feudal system, because "for the ones working in the sugar farms, life never changed."[98] In 1989, with his marriage nearing the end, Roldan resorted to self-imposed exile in Sydney.

Between 1986-92, Roldan conceived a series of twelve textile-based

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94 The Island of Negros is part of the region of Visayas, in Central Philippines. Visayas is known for its cultural traditions, customs and local languages and compounded by Panay, Negros, Cebu, Bohol, Leyte and Samar. The region's history is marked by a long narrative of (colonial) exploitation that left strong marks on its peoples and lands.

95 Roldan, Langgoni Nine.

96 Roldan.

97 Dodo Dayao, "Past Lives, Lost Time and Future Rituals," *Rogue Magazine*, July 2017, http://rogue.ph/lost-time-future-rituals-journey-artist-peewee-roldan/.

98 Roldan, Langgoni Nine.

works in which the homage to the island of Negros is intertwined with local politics. First exhibited in Negros in 1986, the series was showcased in Roldan's first international solo show, Images of the Continuing Struggle, in Artspace Sydney, in 1989. The Japanese curator Tani Arata observes: "Near the end of my research in the Philippines, I discovered a work by Norberto Roldan... I came across a textile collage at the Second ASEAN Travelling Exhibition of Painting and Photography."[99] In November 2017, I saw *Langgoni Nine* (1989) [Fig. 3.9] in the FAAM. The work captured me for its silence and loudness.

Figure 3.7
Norberto Roldan
Langgoni Nine
1989 | Textile | 157.5 x 97.5 cm
Collection of the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum | Image Courtesy of the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum

Langgoni Nine reports a tragic episode that took place in Southern Negros on May 14, 1984. These were Marcos's last years; demonstrations against the "absolute power that Marcos would secure upon the declaration of Martial Law in 1972" were recurrently smashed with assassinations.[100] The

99 Arata Tani, "Norberto Roldan," in *New Art from Southeast Asia 1992*, ed. Yasuko Furuichi (Tokyo: The Japan Foundation, 1992), 68.

100 Flores, "'Total Community Response,'" 20. It is estimated that 75.000 people died between 1972 and 1985. History remembers the Escalante Massacre of September 20 1985 in Negros, when protesters sought to demonstrate against the 13th anniversary of the Martial Law,

Langgoni massacre is one such incident. Mistaken as communists, ten young men playing basketball were abducted by the army, tortured for days, their bodies were herded in a military truck and un-loaded in the town's public plaza. "Luckily, one man was able to escape and tell the whole story," he adds.[101] The piece aptly critiques state-sponsored violence under the martial law. His medium of choice, *patadyong* textiles, a traditional woven textile used by women in the Visayas region of the Philippines, also features in the dark history of Negros. Nicholas Loney, an English trader who settled in Iloio in 1851, became British Vice Consul in 1856, and is remembered as the father of sugar industry in the region (it would become the second wealthiest of the country after Manilla), is equally remembered as responsible for the wrecking of the local textile industry.[102] Loney exported sugar to Europe and imported cheap British cloth from Manchester, in England, to the islands of Negros and Panay. The availability of a cheaper alternative affected local demands for patadyong textiles and eventually slowed down their production. *Patadyong* textiles are multi-purpose garments that serve covering, ritual practices, and celebratory purposes. Today, the local fabrication of *patadyong*—ready-made material used in *Langgoni Nine*—remains confined to small communities and is a commercially unviable product.[103]

Roldan's gesture not only serves as reminder to the decline of the weaving industry in Visayas, it constitutes a deliberate political gesture that aims to stimulate revisionism. He concedes that his art was deeply affected by these formative years, thus remaining active as an organizer for his community (the Green Papaya Art Projects in Manilla is one of his long-lasting initiatives) and as an artist. Roldan's recognition as a leading Southeast Asian artist is exemplified by his frequent presence in historical shows, including the seminal *New Art from Southeast Asia* at the FAM in 1992, Singapore based Iola Lenzi's acclaimed *Negotiating Home, History and Nation: Two Decades of Contemporary Art from Southeast Asia 1981-2010* (2011), June Yap's *No Country: Contemporary Art for South and Southeast Asia*, in Singapore and New York (2014) and *Sunshower: Contemporary Art from Southeast Asia 1980s to Now*, in Tokyo and Fukuoka (2017). His practice continues the BAA 1993 manifesto, which announced artist's participatory role: "We hold that artists are citizens and must concern themselves not only with their art but also with the issues and problems confronting the country.

escalated in violence and thirty were killed. See Carla N. Canet, "Martial Law Victims to Stage Protest vs Marcos Rule," *SunStar Bacolod*, September 15, 2016, sec. Local News, http://www.sunstar.com.ph/bacolod/local-news/2016/09/15/martial-law-victims-stage-protest-vs-marcos-rule-497799.

101 Roldan, Langgoni Nine.

102 Mark Segador, "Nicholas Loney, Lonely and Forgotten," *Iloilo I Love*, 2011, http://iloiloilove.com/nicholas-loney-lonely-forgotten/.

103 Roldan, Langgoni Nine.

We stand for freedom of expression and oppose all acts tending to abridge that freedom..."[104]

3.3 Institutional Steps in the Asia-Pacific Region

As mentioned, the 1980s were a time in which institutional steps in the form of establishing a greater network for the exposure of regional artists took place. This is evidenced not only by the increasing number of events, but equally for the greater number of publications and conference gatherings in which Southeast Asian art was discussed.

In this period, Japan recognized its responsibility as a promoter of culture and thus decided to host international exhibitions. Its growing interest in Asia results from its long-standing experience as an international player and simultaneously the understanding that it "can no longer depend its sense of values on the adoration of the West... We can no longer ignore the new art of China and Southeast Asia, countries with high economic growth."[105] The *Asian Art Show* (AAS), organized in 1979 by the Fukuoka Art Museum (FAM) to mark its birth, is born out of this recognition. The *Asian Art Show, Part II: Contemporary Asian Art Show* that took place in 1980, would be "the first ever attempt to at a global level to offer a comprehensive introduction to contemporary art in the Asian region... of unprecedented scale featuring nearly 500 participating artists from 13 countries from Pakistan eastwards, including Japan."[106] Five Southeast Asian countries were featured: Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines, Singapore, and Malaysia. The success of these two editions dictated the museum's future, leading to the show's recurrence every five years. Titled generally Asian Art Show, each subsequent edition was given a main theme. The 1980 AAS was accompanied by a symposium entitled "What must be done for the future of Asian tradition and art which have been changed under the influence of Western art?" As Mr. Michiaki Kawakita noted, in Japan modernization coexisted with Japanese traditional elements and "in this way, traditional things were allowed to be influenced by the new and new things swallowed nuances from tradition."[107] During the symposium, Piyadasa noted that Malaysian artists of all ethnicities had, at least since the 1930s, started searching for a Malaysian identity through traditional art forms. Mostly beginning in watercolor, these works would evolve into modern forms after 1945. And as many artists went overseas to study, the 1960s and

104 Roldan, "Norberto Roldan," in *New Art from Southeast Asia 1992*, 125.

105 Raiji Kuroda, "Exhibiting Art Shows for Asians, by Asians, and Some Associated Problems" (INIVA Symposium: A New Internationalism, London, 1994).

106 Ushiroshoji, "The Birth of the Asian Art Museum," 4.

107 Michiaki Kawakita, "Keynote Speech," in *Asian Artists Exhibition Part II: The Contemporary Asian Art Show* (Fukuoka: Fukuoka Art Museum, 1980), 11.

1970s witnessed a growing interest in cultural forms, especially in the practice of artists who had studied in Paris, London and New York. To Piyadasa, this was a symptom that Malaysian artists "had decided to go into modern art with problems peculiar to the country."[108] Yet, he admitted that the process was unfinished and thus, criticism and theorization had to continue and be divulged. He noted that the ignorance that (Southeast) Asian artists had of their counterparts' practice was problematic, thus the Fukuoka Art museum "historic move" was of extreme value.[109]

The Japanese attention to the problem of tradition would be formally embodied in the *2nd AAS*, in 1985. Held under the theme 'Cultural Identities in Asian Art', the exhibition focused on artists actively engaged with protecting existing cultural identities.[110] According to Soejima Mikio, Acting Director of the FAM at the time, the show's focus was an inheritance of the of the 1973 resolution passed in Bulgaria at the 7th Congress of the International Association of Art (IAA), a UNESCO organization which "would put into effect all the projects aimed at encouraging protection of cultural identity possessed by each country." He adds: "The fact that such statement sprouted from a system composed of artists alone calls for much attention," because it signifies that artists "bravely stood up to give visual expression to their traditions and philosophy."[111]

The *AAS*(s) enabled the creation of a network of specialists inside and outside Japan that mutually supported each other. But, this working method of 'collaborative curatorship' came with its own limitations: "we were rather passive in curation," admits Raiji Kuroda, Curator of the FAM.[112] This passivity resulted partly from local governments' interference in the selection process, as "Even if one found an excellent curator he/she had to be acceptable to the government of the country."[113] In addition, recognizes Ushiroshoji, the collaborative also provoked generational conflicts between curators since the older generation focused on the possibility of encounter, while younger curators were more concerned with the show's overall quality.[114] As a result, for the 1989 edition of the AAS, the FAM adopted new curatorial strategies (see Chapter 4).

Meanwhile, since 1981, major ASEAN cities received displays of Southeast

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108 Piyadasa, "Malaysia," in *Asian Artists Exhibition Part II*, 20.

109 Piyadasa, 21.

110 *Outline of the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum* (Fukuoka: Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, 1999), 23.

111 Mikio Soejima, "Cultural Identities in Asian Art," in *2nd Asian Art Show*, Fukuoka (Fukuoka: Fukuoka Art Museum, 1985), 9.

112 Kuroda, "Exhibiting Art Shows for Asians."

113 Kuroda, "Practice of Exhibitions in Global Society for Asians, by Asians and Some Associated Problems," in *Global Visions: Towards a New Internationalism in the Visual Arts*, ed. Jean Fisher (London: Kala Press, 1994), 145.

114 Ushiroshoji, FAAM and Beyond.

Asian art.[115] Travelling exhibitions of photography, sculpture, painting, and other media were increasingly present in the founding ASEAN countries. In 1987, the *Artists Regional Exchange* (ARX) was founded in Perth, Australia. The ARX was an extremely relevant step toward the expansion of Third Avant-garde practices, as it created contacts between artists from Southeast Asia and Australia. It equally contributed to the establishment of the Asia-Pacific Triennial in Queensland, Australia, in 1992. The ARX is especially significant for artists; Harsono acknowledges his participation in ARX3 in 1992 as a step into an increasing international exposure. In this show, he showcased the installation *Power and the Oppressed*, probably his first work revolving around the theme of power through ready-made materials pertaining to Javanese culture.

In 1988, after his return from London in 1986, Singaporean artist Tang Da Wu (b. 1943, Singapore) established the The Artists Village (TAV). The initiative lasted only fourteen months in its physical installations at Lorong Gambas. In March 1990, the government claimed the building for military use. As observed by Singaporean artist and the country's most reputed art archivist,[116] Nguang How Koh's (b. 1963, Singapore), from this moment the TAV became a nomadic initiative and in 1992, it became an Art Community. Despite its short-lived existence, the TAV is regarded today as a "hotbed of activity in Singapore's art history."[117] Koh's significant number of contributions to TAV's archive, including correspondence and invitations, are today objects of scholarly and curatorial scrutiny, having been showcased in the travelling *Sunshower* (2017).

In Indonesia, the opening of the Cemeti Art Gallery in Yogyakarta in 1988 is a significant event both for the country and the region. Cemeti positioned itself as a space devoted to expose and promote collective understanding on alternative art (including Third Avant-garde gestures). At the time of its foundation, it constituted a response by Dutch artist Mella Jaarsma and her Indonesian husband Nindityo Adipurnomo to the increasing marginalization of non-commercial art. In Indonesia, the painting art boom was confined to commercially-oriented galleries, solely attentive to decorative and formalistic painting and Indonesian masters. Cemeti established a new trend in Indonesia: it "dared to present works in a different vein from mainstream tendencies of the time (the decorative and the Surrealist)."[118] As conceptually-oriented art remained unrepresented and underground, Cemeti accommodated and

115 See Simon Soon, "Maps of the Sea," Search: Southeast Asian Art Resource Channel, accessed April 10, 2013, http://search-art.asia/attachments/files/MAPoftheSEA.pdf.

116 See "Koh Nguang How: Singapore's One-Man Museum," *BBC News Asia*, January 28, 2017, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-38754054.

117 See Vera Mey, "Koh Nguang How in Collaboration with Lim Shengen," in *Sunshower*, 92.

118 Asmudjo Jono Irianto, "Tradition and the Socio-Political Context in Contemporary Yogyakartan Art of the 1990s," in *Outlet: Yogyakarta within the Contemporary Indonesian Art Scene*, ed. Melissa Larner (Yogyakarta: Cemeti Art Foundation, 2001), 74.

represented it, while giving opportunities to young artists. This gallery inspired the birth of similar projects in Jakarta and in Bandung during the 1990s—an aspect that captured Roldan's attention when he founded the BAA.[119] Nevertheless, its most important contribution for Indonesian art has been the effectiveness with which it actively established a network with artists and institutions overseas. Rapidly, Jaarsma and Adipurnomo became gatekeepers of Indonesian contemporary art abroad, and Cemeti became the institution that overseas curators contacted when in search for Indonesian contemporary expressions.[120]

The results of the 1980s were more forcefully felt in the 1990s, the fundamental decade of the Third Avant-garde. Especially since the hinge year of 1989—the year of the Third Biennial of Havana, *Tradition and Contemporaneity*, the all-globe show *Magiciens de la Terre* in the Pompidou Center in Paris, and the first postcolonial show, *The Other Story* in the Hayward Gallery in London—international attention toward 'non-Western' art became prominent but equally a site of political correctness. The fall of the Berlin Wall, the protests of Tiananmen in Beijing, and events such as the fatwa issued against Salman Rushdie because of his publication *The Satanic Verses*, marked the beginning of a new decade, one in which openness and tensions went together. It is in this decade that international exposure for Southeast Asian artists became a definite reality, especially through the introduction of a new player: the United States.

3.4 Conclusions

The origins of the Third Avant-garde can be traced to the mid-1970s, when student protests emerged to face the indoctrination that regional artists were subjected to. With an iconoclastic and unsubordinated attitude, young artists from the region defied the establishment through exhibitions and demonstrations. More importantly, through written statements, they declared their intention: the need for a new route for Southeast Asian art. As Sabapathy observes, "The tone in all of these manifestations was militant and combative; the stance was that of activists."[121]

Through the diminishment of their force, and after the dismantlement of these groups, the activist tone remained throughout the 1980s. In this decade, while artists went underground and started non-confrontational

119 Roldan remarks: "I was looking at models like Indonesia where distinct dynamics in the art scene are recognized not only in Jakarta but also in Bandung, Yogyakarta and even in Bali." See Roldan, Interview Questions for Norberto Roldan, interview by Gina Jocson, March 30, 2012.

120 It is telling that English curator Shaheen Merali referred this institution to me in 2006, before my first trip to Indonesia.

121 Sabapathy, "Intersecting Histories," 44.

practices imbued with messages of discontent, the local art system remained attentive to the needs of a capitalistic market which consumed paintings showing no tendency toward a critical position. As a result, various artists groups were formed and, alternative spaces such as Cemeti opened their doors. In the process, Southeast Asian artists were increasingly exhibiting abroad, especially through annual exposés organized by the ASEAN and the FAM. This, in turn, allowed them to establish a network, exchange ideas, and created a space of familiarity. During the 1990s, Southeast Asian artists would increasingly meet within important events organized in Japan, Australia, and in the emerging biennials of the region.

The avant-garde of the 1970s proposed to look at indigenous manifestations. Yet, not many of these works are known to me. So, I propose Ken Dedes as the first Southeast Asian Third Avant-garde manifestation because, not only does it constitute a cornerstone for the formation of a conscience for the future Third avant-garde discourse in Indonesia, but it equally talks about the tradition of Southeast Asian history which regards the Hindu era as the region's most important expression of magnificence. The fact that Supangkat adjoined to a symbol of classic culture a body of a provocative contemporary woman, denotes the transitional states that Southeast Asian societies found themselves amidst increasing modernization. We can see here that the work does not solely talk about Indonesian reality and Southeast Asian history, it equally proposes that in a Southeast Asian context the new emerges in the middle of ancient symbols and the now is expressed through them—and this is one aspect that the Third Avant-garde aptly demonstrates.

The 1980s can be proposed as an interstitial decade from two aspects: first, due to lack of knowledge, the FAM promoted the initial attempts of 'collaborative curating'. This working method was characterized for relying on local expertise consecrated by local authorities. The system would be questioned after the *2nd AAS* in 1985 and eventually abandoned in 1989, when the third edition took place. Second, during the 1980s, artists turned toward social preoccupations. Immersed under dictatorial regimes, they resorted to non-confrontational practices, in which local life and traditional arts gained prominence. Yet, the effectiveness of Third Avant-garde gestures only reaches maturity during the 1990s, when practice and overseas exhibitions supplied artists with an effectual visibility.

The Boom of the Third Avant-garde: (1990s)

The 1990s, witnessed the old world order change into a decentralized reality. So, I consider this time a twelve-year period as following the events of 1989, and the feeling of proximity ended abruptly in 2001 with the 9/11 attacks. This suggestion may be regarded as Western-centric, but I argue that 1989 was eventful in other parts of the world, and that it was a hinge year for art worldwide. 2001 serves as a temporal indicator for a new Southeast Asian reality that starts in 2002 (see Chapter 5). If the Third Avant-garde constituted a complete discourse—which I maintain it was, due to its unorthodoxy, deferred in art historical terms—during this decade, it emerged as a 'boom'.

The 1990s were a crucial decade. While attempting to "catch up" with a developed West, Asian cultures strove to preserve their cultural heritage, and in most cases resorted to standards of cultural purity that resulted in "invented traditions".[1] Kapur's call for a double dismantle was effectively met. During this time, artistic and curatorial practices converged, making this tendency known to the world. While artists negotiated their local cultural sensibilities and personal histories by means of investing in the traditions that allowed them a contributing voice, curators showcased these works in real time, especially in international events. By doing so, they fostered new frameworks to promote dialogue with (inter)national audiences. Immersed in a cycle of constant growth, and engaging with various communities worldwide, Southeast Asian artists integrated art and culture in a single artwork, and curators extended their gesture through exhibitions. But the process proved tortuous and Third Avant-garde practices were largely met with mixed interpretations. In addition, Third Avant-garde gestures proved confusing also because of the absence of written manifestos. Instead of the communal voices that characterized the 1970s and 1980s, the Third Avant-garde was effectuated by individual artists and curators who supported their work.

The decade equally witnessed the emergence of several important exhibitions, such as the Asia Pacific Triennial of Brisbane, in Australia (since 1993) and *Traditions/Tensions*, at the Asia Society of New York, in 1996. The two exhibitions focused on the relation between tradition and the contemporary, but they conveyed contrasting readings of what tradition meant in early globalization days. After Traditions/Tensions, the theme ceased to be topical.

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1 Apinan Poshyananda, "Roaring Tigers, Desperate Dragons in Transition," in *Contemporary Art in Asia: Traditions/Tensions*, ed. Apinan Poshyananda (New York: Asia Society, 1996), 26–27.

4.1 The 1990s (1989-2001): An Avant-garde Without a Manifesto

During the 1990s, Third Avant-garde practices appeared in full force in Southeast Asia and abroad. The radical gestures tested in the mid-1970s were continued throughout the 1980s by means of non-confrontational gestures which reflected a unprecedented social engagement. As such, the tone remained activist, but artists' concerns changed toward the betterment of the life of local communities. Dono's *wayang* works aptly show signs of this tendency. Meanwhile, painting had abandoned the universalism of modern art and turned postmodern by means of quoting fragments of tradition: artists started employing traditional elements, often uncritically.

In the 1990s, tradition was a topical element of discussion, and addressed within several important curatorial practices. The interest in discussing a polemical category such as tradition was stimulated by Jean-Hubert Martin's 1989 show *Magiciens de la Terre*, in Paris. The curator included all the world's regions in the show, and in the catalogue each country was placed as its own center, but as critics remarked: "Works that attempted to conflate various traditions—Indian and European for instance—were not included; only works that arose directly from their own tradition, without incorporation of external elements were shown... This had the effect of reconstructing or reinforcing old boundaries that are now dissolving."[2] Writing in 1996, Thomas McEvilley's remark of the curator's outlook toward the purity of each tradition was enforced by the fact that *Magiciens* and other exhibitions appointed Western curators that "had little familiarity with the traditions involved".[3] In 2013, Kapur noted that "*Magiciens* was based on an (ethnographic) anachronism...[which] set up a binary of the *indigenous* and the *avant-garde*... between *individual agency* (of northern artists) and *timeless consanguinity* (of artists from the south)"[4] and had largely dismissed what was then designated as 'hybrids'. Their remarks have, in my opinion, been addressed by Third Avant-garde artists more forcefully throughout the 1990s, when large-scale international shows took place in the West, especially Australia, the US and in (Southeast) Asia. Also in 1989, the Third Havana Biennial, *Tradition and Contemporaneity,* addressed the urgency of this connection (in reality, a tension) in the context of the Third World to demonstrate that "Our contemporary art is fought for within this dialectical relationship."[5] The Havana Biennial was the first

2 Thomas McEvilley, "Exhibition Strategies in the Postcolonial Era," in *Traditions/ Tensions*, 57.

3 McEvilley, 57.

4 Geeta Kapur, "Curating in Heterogeneous Worlds," in *Contemporary Art: 1989 to the Present*, ed. Alexandre Dumbadze and Suzanne Hudson (Malden, MA: Willey-Blackwell, 2013), 178.

5 Luis Camnitzer, "The Third Havana Biennial," in *Making Art Global (Part 1): The Third*

biennial forthrightly dedicated to radical 'Third World' art (which Gerardo Mosquera notes was part of Cuban tradition since the early twentieth century). This initiated the display of contemporary art from the global south: "Thus the Bienal created a new space, acting as a gigantic 'Salon des Refuses' that involved most of the world, born from a spirit of action."[6] When it began in 1984, the Havana Biennale's first edition only displayed Latin American Art. It was in 1986 that its anti-imperialistic rhetoric was further realized by including artists from Africa and Asia, a move that paved the way for the presentation of the subaltern. Havana's most renowned edition is the third: in 1989 it was decided to include artists with 'Third World' backgrounds residing in Europe and North America. In so doing, the danger of westernizing the biennale was evident, but it had a positive effect on opening up the discourse towards minorities' art who would largely become responsible for the emergence of multiculturalism. These advancements made Kapur say: "To this day, all Southern biennials owe a debt to Havana for advancing the potential of a decentralized art world; for proposing that alternative avant-gardes do not need to affix a 'neo' to gain acceptance in the canon."[7]

It is within this context of contrasting curatorial strategies with the same aim—to open the discourse to 'non-Western' art—that Southeast Asian Third Avant-garde practices emerge in the 1990s through some important exhibitions in the Asia-Pacific region. The Asia Pacific Triennial (APT) that opened in Brisbane, Australia, in 1993 is a case in point. The first three editions curated by Australian art historian Caroline Turner functioned as a trilogy that aimed at connecting Australians with Asia.[8] Australian curators partnered with the Fukuoka Art Museum, a museum which had advanced contemporary art from Asia since 1979.[9] Turner mentions that the first edition, *Tradition and Change*, referred to tradition in a broad sense but, the published collection of essays with the same title established it as the exhibition's concept. Advised by Malaysian artist Redza Piadasa of the need to engage local expertise to countermand flawed curatorial practices by Western curators, the Australian team followed the procedures tested by the FAM's teams and worked collaboratively with local advisors, such as Supangkat and Sanento Yuliman from Indonesia, and Apinan Poshyananda from Thailand.[10] These exhibitions

Havana Biennial 1989, ed. Rachel Weiss (London: Afterall Books, 2011), 215.

6 Gerardo Mosquera, "The Third Bienal de La Habana in Its Global and Local Contexts," in *Making Art Global*, 74.

7 Kapur, "Curating in Heterogeneous Worlds," 181.

8 The trilogy was compounded by *Tradition and Change* (1993); *Present Encounters* (1996) and *Beyond the Future* (1999).

9 The first exhibition including Southeast Asia countries was *Asian Art Show Part II: Contemporary Asian Art Show*, in 1980.

10 Caroline Turner, Asia-Pacific Triennial, unpublished interview by Leonor Veiga, Canberra, July 5, 2017.

were revelatory of Southeast Asian practices, but their viewing in foreign contexts prevented Third Avant-garde works from being fully comprehended. In retrospect, Australian art historian Pat Hoffie observes that the first three editions of APT created a "discursive space within an imprecisely defined region where two impulses—that of tradition and of change—collided and morphed."[11] This in turn, resulted in an uncritical reading of traditions, which relegated their use to the realm of "memory, history and place," whereas change was perceived as associated with the "here and now."[12] With this remark, Hoffie recalls McEvilley's observation that oftentimes the artist's "aim is invalidated or countermanded by the additional aiming that a curator gives the work in exhibiting it."[13] Because curators were unfamiliar with contexts of production, the traditional appeared to foreign audiences (curators included) as a mere sign of identity and provenance. Traditions' cultural agency remained undetected.

In my opinion, the incomplete reading by curators of the three editions of APT—which included the use of materials and themes that were indigenous to their regions—not only prevented them from identifying the critical and potential of traditions, it equally deferred the definition of a specific avant-garde trend in these artworks. Hoffie notes: "the insistence on indigenous materials and themes in the work practice of a number of artists from the Philippines [and other countries, as shown] had, for at least a decade, been embraced as part of a resistance to the aesthetic and economic demands of an international art world dominated by Western values."[14] Writing in the twentieth anniversary of the APT, Patrick Flores also observes that the category of tradition complicated a project that aimed to be contemporary. He asks: "Is tradition not change and, therefore, not contemporary?... Or is the contemporary forged in conjuncture of 'tradition and change', an assemblage that may well be cognate of the Asia-Pacific?"[15] The idea that tradition had a location or a region was in his opinion, a continuation of Orientalist discourses and equally behind Poshyananda's seminal *Traditions/Tensions* of 1996.

During this decade, important exhibitions took place. In Japan, the 1989 *3rd AAS*, titled 'Symbolic Visions in Contemporary Asian Life', was a turning point on curatorial practices. A growing sentiment of dissatisfaction emerged: on the one hand, Asian nations started to criticize the FAM for being

11 Pat Hoffie, "The Irreverent Contemporary and Radical Tradition," in *Contemporary Asian Art and Exhibitions: Connectivities and World-Making*, ed. Caroline Turner and Michelle Antoinette (Canberra: ANU Press, 2014), 111.

12 Hoffie, 111.

13 McEvilley, "Exhibition Strategies," 55.

14 Hoffie, "The Irreverent Contemporary," 113–14.

15 Patrick D. Flores, "Revisiting Tradition and the Incommensurate Contemporary," *Broadsheet* 41, no. 4 (2012): 235.

the sole owner of discourse,[16] and on the other hand, the FAM's team growing unease with local choices originated a reform in the museum's curatorial strategy. Three main aspects were reassessed: one, taking responsibility for the selection of artists from the representative institutions and further evaluate them in Japan; two, selecting the works according to a theme (a strategy introduced in the 2nd edition of the AAS) without the preoccupation of outlining each country's current artistic situation; and three, to reduce significantly the number of artists of each country to a maximum of seven, thus giving the possibility of greater exposure to outstanding artists.[17] Raiji Kuroda observes: from 1994, year of the *4th AAS*, titled 'Realism as an Attitude', two additional procedures adjoined: to invite artists over so that they produced large-scale works, and to abolish national classifications.[18] In 1992, the FAM was involved in the seminal New Art from Southeast Asia 1992, organized by the Japan Foundation. This exhibition cast light on seventeen third-generation practitioners whose installations revealed layers of "folk culture" openly displaying strong non-Western tendencies.[19]

In 1993, Supangkat curated the 9th Biennial of Jakarta. There, he showcased unconventional media such as installations, a gesture that triggered an intense debate in Indonesia. The alternative stance of works presented by artists such as Dedi Eri Supria, Dadang Christanto, Mella Jaarsma, Nindityo Adipurnomo, Anusapati and Heri Dono was met with skepticism. Yet, soon they were constant presences in APT, *Traditions/Tensions*, and in every international exhibition. Their growing exposure overseas contrasted with few local possibilities. For this reason, in March 2016, Supangkat suggested that Indonesian contemporary art (of the radical kind) was developed 'in exile'.[20] Not only did these practices get little or no attention in Indonesia (in this regard, Cemeti was an exception), artists had to be careful in how to convey strong political messages. An artist who suffered direct consequences from her bold criticism is Arahmaiani, against whom a *fatwa* was issued in 1993. Supangkat's observation pertains to an atmosphere of censorship but it can be extended to the significant number of artists that in the 1990s lived in exile. So, not only did the Third Avant-garde affirmed itself *in exile*, the Third Avant-garde artist of the 1990s equally suffered from exile conditions. Writing

16 Masahiro Ushiroshoji, From FAM to FAAM and Beyond, interview by Leonor Veiga, trans. Fumio Iwamoto, November 20, 2017.

17 Raiji Kuroda, "Exhibiting Art Shows for Asians, by Asians, and Some Associated Problems" (INIVA Symposium: A New Internationalism, London, 1994).

18 Raiji Kuroda, "Practice of Exhibitions in Global Society for Asians, by Asians and Some Associated Problems," in *Global Visions: Towards a New Internationalism in the Visual Arts*, ed. Jean Fisher (London: Kala Press, 1994), 146.

19 Hideki Nakamura, "The Self-Awareness of Human Beings in Flux," in *New Art from Southeast Asia 1992*, ed. Yasuko Furuichi, trans. Janet Goff (Tokyo: The Japan Foundation, 1992), 13.

20 Jim Supangkat, Ken Dedes, upublished interview by Leonor Veiga, Leiden, March 7, 2016.

in 2005, Turner mentions: "We do need then to acknowledge the significance of historical contexts... Indonesian artists, for example, have over the past decade produced a powerful body of work opposing human rights abuses in their country, and have often faced personal danger in so doing."[21] Their testing of the limits of tolerance and free-speech must be acknowledged as an act of bravery and commitment. To avoid the scrutiny and censorship of authorities, artists resorted to the use of "codes, symbols and signs to convey veiled and indirect political messages in their work,"[22] or what I proposed as non-confrontational practices.

The main difference of the Third Avant-garde from the earlier two events is the absence of written manifestos. While artists possessed strong convictions regarding their production, they left the mission of its dissemination to the curators, who engaged in numerous exhibitions, but also conferences and debates. Roldan observes:

> By exploring the use of indigenous materials, traditional references, and contemporary imagery, I intend to project a proud Asian character in my work while breaking away from deeply rooted Western influences. It is likewise a conscious effort to make a statement of protest against the West, which, in many ways, contributed in institutionalizing unjust and oppressive systems in our land.[23]

Regionally, the 1990s were marked by the 1997 upsurge of the Asian economic crisis: the Thai baht crisis spread an economic depression in the entire region, lead to Suharto's downfall in 1998 and the 1999 independence referendum in Timor-Leste. 1999 equally marked the handover of Macao from the Portuguese administration to the People's Republic of China. With the end of the casino monopoly in 2002, Macao would change its strong ties with Southeast Asia toward East Asia (this is a personal reading of the situation).

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21 Caroline Turner, ed., Art and Social Change: Contemporary Art in Asia and the Pacific (Canberra: Pandanus Books, 2005), 9.

22 Melissa Chiu and Benjamin Genocchio, *Asian Art Now* (New York: The Monacelli Press, 2010), 78.

23 Norberto Roldan, "Norberto Roldan," in *New Art from Southeast Asia 1992*, ed. Yasuko Furuichi (Tokyo: The Japan Foundation, 1992), 125.

4.2 Artists in Exile

4.2.1 Mio Pang Fei: Making Neo-Orientalism[24]

Mio Pang Fei's work deserves to be exhibited as a rare example of a deliberate move towards cultural encounter.[25]
Sílvia Chicó

Born in Shanghai in 1936, Mio Pang Fei has lived in Macao since 1982. Although this is not usually the case, he could be regarded as an artist in exile. Mio's migration circumstances resemble those of a refugee, even if the reasons leading to him leaving Mainland China relate more to those of an economic migrant. He recalls: "If it was not for the art, I would not have left [China]."[26] Mio's education was overtly Western until 1966, when the Cultural Revolution cut all contact with the West, and Western modernism was abruptly disrupted. This event changed the course of his career, and provoked the beginning of a personal journey into Chinese cultural heritage. From 1966 onwards, Mio made a deliberate choice—Neo-Orientalism. This is a form of expression which would fuse the two traditions, Western modernism and Chinese traditional painting, but this project was deferred until 1985, when he exhibited for the first time in Macao. Today, after facing many obstacles which served to postpone Neo-Orientalism, Mio is considered an exceptional artist, in Macao, Mainland China, and overseas. Recognition from Mainland China followed his inclusion in several international group shows, and more importantly his first solo exhibition in Shanghai and in Beijing, in 1992-1993.[27] On this occasion, the Chinese art critic Shui Tian Zhong (at the time Director of the China Art Research Institute) recognized:

> Mio's post-abstract art is a very special phenomenon. It makes us realize how much an artist can achieve if he has intimate knowledge of both traditional Chinese art and modern Western art.[28]

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24 Special thanks to Cristina Mio U Kit, Mio Pang Fei, Pedro Cardeira, and Joana Ling for their valuable insights.

25 Sílvia Chicó, "II," in *Exhibition of Paintings by Mio Pan Fei*, ed. António Conceição Júnior (Macao: Fundação Oriente, 1992), 24.

26 Pedro Cardeira, *Mio Pang Fei*, Documentary (Inner Harbour Films, 2014), https://vimeo.com/96661921.

27 Mio's exhibition (1992-1993) toured from his hometown Shanghai to Beijing. Between 1990-1993, Mio was present in several group exhibitions: Taichung Museum of Fine Arts, Taiwan (1990); *5th Asian International Arts Exhibition*, Kuala Lumpur (1990); with Carlos Marreiros, Brussels City Art Gallery, and Cultural Exhibition Hall in Lisbon (1991); *6th Asian International Arts Exhibition* Fukuoka City Art Museum (1991); *1st International Art Expo*, Hong Kong (1992); *7th Asian International Arts Exhibition*, Bandung (1992).

28 Shui Tian Zhong, "Mio Pang Fei and His Neo-Orientalism," in *Mio Pang Fei* (Macao:

His first years in Macao were difficult; busy with several odd jobs to sustain his wife and daughter who remained in Shanghai, he did not paint. In 1985, Mio met Sun Xi Kun, of Macao's Yiyuan Calligraphy and Painting Association, and showed him photographs of artworks he had left in Shanghai which had been rejected by border officials when he entered the territory. Sun directed him to António de Conceição Júnior, at the time director of Camões Museum. After looking at Mio's photographs, Conceição Júnior approved an exhibition one month later. Mio soon found his artworks had perished: kept inside a plastic bag, all his neo-orientalist experiments from the mid-1970s were irreplaceably damaged because humidity had glued several works together. Hence, his Neo-Orientalism as a practice starts in 1985. As a project, the origins of Neo-Orientalism date back to the 1950s, when Mio was still a student in the Fujian Faculty of Arts, leaving with an excellent academic record. The curriculum at the school was Western and while he did paintings in Soviet style, he soon realized he was not learning European art after 1850. He remembers asking the teacher 'What happened after 1850?' to which he was replied 'Nothing'. He soon discovered that post-Courbet and post-realist art were followed by Impressionism, Post-Impressionism, Cubism, Matisse, but nobody mentioned it: "It was forbidden in China."[29] So, he ventured into self-learning Western art movements:

> The libraries had little to offer; as a result he had to piece together fragments of information. Once, in an architectural magazine, he came across the picture of an European villa in which through the window he could see a modernist painting on the wall, as small as a postage stamp. He copied it and put it in his files. A few days later, he was able to infer from another source that the tiny painting he had copied was a work by the Swiss painter, Paul Klee.[30]

Mio's education in modern Western art remained fragmented until 1986, when he toured several European museums, supported by a scholarship from the Macao Cultural Institute (ICM) partially organized by architect Carlos Marreiros (b. 1957, Macao) [Fig. 4.1], himself an important Macanese artist.

Macao Polytechnic Institute & Macao Foundation, 1999), 359. Shui Tiang Zhong (b. 1935, Lanzhou, China) is a researcher and former director of Graduate School of Fine Arts of China Academy of Arts, and a renowned art critic from China.

29 Cardeira, *Mio Pang Fei*.

30 Xue Yao Xian, "Entering Purgatory: A Brief Biography of Mio Pang Fei," in *Mio Pang Fei*, 1999, 232.

Figure 4.1 A and B
Mio Pang Fei Studio Visit
A) Mio Pang Fei close to a painting from *Water Margins* series
B) The architect Carlos Marreiros
Photograph by Leonor Veiga, 1996

Upon his graduation from the Fujian academy in 1958, with China already immersed in the Great Leap Forward period (1958-1961), Mio was assigned a job at an exhibition hall in Fujian Province where he worked designing posters. During this period, he continued his secret study of Western modern art. Once he decided to make a living from art he, in 1962, returned to Shanghai where he lived a double life, studying Western modernism and painting abstract art while hiding at home at night. He remembers: "I first started thinking along the lines of Neo-Orientalism in the early 1960s at the time of the Cultural Revolution in China."[31] He would paint and immediately destroy the work. This is the reason for his choice of the easily perishable Chinese rice paper and opaque watercolor as a medium. Except for later paintings, all his production between the 1960s and 1970s was destroyed (mostly by the artist), or damaged. The only remains are archival photos he used in the 1990s to repaint some works.

In 1966, during the early days of the Cultural Revolution, Mio was once hauled before a crowd within the Red Guard struggle sessions—a form of public humiliation and persecution. Mio was held in captivity for forty days.[32] After being tortured, visibly scared, and fearing hostilities, he destroyed his entire production: "Of course, I destroyed the artworks because I couldn't keep them. Even ordinary paintings were denounced, not to mention

31 Mio Pang Fei, "Neo-Orientalism," *Review of Culture*, no. 30 (1997): 175; Mio Pang Fei, "Neo-Orientalism," in *Above & Beyond: Neo-Orientalism Art Exhibition Mio Pan Fei*, ed. Joey Ho Chong I (Macao: The CAC–Círculo dos Amigos da Cultura, 2012), 78.

32 Rie Yamanaka, "The Special Era," in Path and Adventure: Works by Mio Pang Fei, *The 56th International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia 2015* (Macao: Macao Museum of Art, 2015), 27.

mine."[33] Subsequently, Mio was put to work in a factory to 'be educated' and he stopped painting. "It was too dangerous," he recalls.[34] He thought more than he practiced. Seeing the work by Huang Binhong (1865-1955) made him hopeful that finding a path of abstraction within Chinese traditional painting was possible: "There was something abstract in it... but how to develop a Chinese abstract art?"[35] He intended to create a modern path for Chinese art, while respecting its particularities: "Chinese paintings have to be done step-by-step."[36] His program substantiates the fact that Chinese artists (and others) retained aspects of their cultural legacy while selecting imported ones. John Clark equally defends this behavior, describing processes of *transfer* from one culture to another as a *four-step process* of reception, assimilation, selection and translation.[37]

Not practicing art, Mio searched for a path to follow. So, he asked master Liu Haisu (1896-1994), a renowned painter in both Chinese and Western traditions, for guidance. Liu advised him to take Chinese calligraphy and traditional painting lessons (a practice he maintains). In the 1960s, Liu proposed the 'endless variation' concept that became a Shanghai school principle. During this tumultuous period, Liu's integrity represented a haven of stability for Mio, who came to realize this as an essential quality of an intellectual. Under his influence, and in virtue of the barriers that impeded his study of Western art, Mio immersed himself in studying the calligraphy and painting of China [Fig.4.2]. So, between the mid-1960s and the mid-1970s, under Liu's supervision, Mio studied traditional Chinese art: he started with seal characters, moved on to official script, and running hand. Then he studied painting of the four major schools of the Yuan or Mongol dynasty (1271-1368) tradition—this includes the southern tradition, the Han tombs murals, and folk art.[38] Still working in the factory, at night Mio began experiments in which he blended Chinese and Western techniques (e.g. abstract art with calligraphy ink). This phase led to what would become Neo-Orientalism since the mid-1970s—his personal pursuit toward making a Chinese modern art anchored in Liu's prime guidance. He believed that he was starting something new that needed to be continued.

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33 Cardeira, *Mio Pang Fei*.

34 Cardeira, *Mio Pang Fei*.

35 Cardeira. Huang Binhong was a painter and art theorist who, faced with the challenge of a new society in 20th-century China, incorporated fresh ideas into traditional Chinese painting. Trained in ancient modalities, some of his painting techniques, especially his experiments with the effects of light and his autonomous use of brush and ink, converged with those of Western Impressionism and Modernism.

36 Cardeira.

37 John Clark, Modern Asian Art (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998), 49–69. In his analysis, Clark distinguishes transfers according to colonial modalities.

38 Xue, "Entering Purgatory," 235–36.

Figure 4.2
Mio Pang Fei
Untitled
Chinese ink on rice paper | Installation | Dimensions unknown
Source: still from *Mio Pang Fei,* https://vimeo.com/96661921

Figure 4.3
Mio Pang Fei
Nightmare
1975 | Gouache | 368 x 68 cm
Source: *Above and Beyond* (exhibition catalogue, p. 35)

In 1975, while Mio was professor at an art academy in Shanghai, he conceived *Nightmare* [Fig. 4.3], an abstraction with Chinese calligraphy outlines. *Nightmare* "integrates Western and Chinese culture flawlessly," says Pun Kim Ou, who mentions: "At that time, the character of Mio's art began to be shaped."[39] Without formal permission, Mio moved with his family to

39 Pun Kim Ou, "Above & Beyond: Neo-Orientalism Art Exhibition by Mio Pang Fei," in *Above & Beyond*, 30.

the art school where he was teacher, empty at that time due to summer holidays. There, he continued his experiments, blending Chinese and Western techniques, mixing materials such as oil with ink and water, trying to discover a suitable primer to enhance his artworks.[40] Years later, in December 1982, Mio crossed the border alone to Macao. And it is here that his Neo-Orientalism gained full expression, establishing itself as practice and as theory: in 1997, Mio published the essay 'Neo-Orientalism' in the *Review of Culture*. His choice for this terminology stems from the belief that its predecessor Orientalism had superficial knowledge of the East. So, Neo-Orientalism also acts as a correcting theory that fills Orientalism's theoretical gaps. He advances:

> 'Neo-Orientalism' is an examination of Eastern culture from a Western perspective. It absorbs and reforms tradition, transforming it into artistic language. It uses calligraphy, signs, brushstrokes and colour (ink) of Oriental art. It contains the 'vital spirit' of Chinese tradition, is filled with the inspiration of enlightenment and it is expressed through Western concepts. It uses the most effective media, materials and methods, such as displacement, separation and reconstruction, to arrive at many different layers of meaning. It is filled with a concern for humanity and the meaning of life. Orientalism, as a global art form, will bring East and West together in cultural harmony, engineering a new path to enlightenment and thus challenging the superficiality of today's popular art. It is an art bridging the gap between past and present. It is destined to become the common spiritual expression of mankind in the future.[41]

His choice for a Western examination is relevant as it allows a distance from the object of study. Yet, he affirms, his theory does not use the European perceptions of the past which based Orientalist readings of Asia through "preconceived notions of Asian culture."[42] Instead, says Shui, it "demonstrates a greater respect and understanding of oriental culture... the neo-orientalist begins with a profound understanding of Asian culture and then, seeking to surpass ethnicity, adopts certain Western aesthetic ideals in an attempt to revitalize oriental art."[43]

Mio conceives Neo-Orientalism as "more than just a cultural attitude, but also a cultural strategy."[44] As an artist, he was confronted with a dilemma, whether to consider his art by historic or personal considerations. If using art

40 Cardeira, *Mio Pang Fei*; Xue, "Entering Purgatory," 237.
41 Mio, "Neo-Orientalism," 1997: 181.
42 Mio, 178.
43 Shui, "Mio and His Neo-Orientalism," 359.
44 Luo Yi Pin, "Realm of Poetic Mind: Mio Pang Fei and His Neo-Orientalism," in *Above & Beyond*, 17.

historical discourses, he had to regard himself either as a Western modern artist or as a Chinese traditional artist.[45] Thus, he created Neo-orientalism to eliminate limitations of ideological nature. His contribution for art historical discourse is revolutionary: the cultural perspective of Neo-Orientalism contains a response from the East towards the contradictions originated by the West. He posits it as a new language, which merges two cultural influences and, resides above nationalisms. He equally declares it a global form of artistic practice bridging East and West, past and present. Mio envisions that while this theory sustains his art, it also guides and upholds the practice of contemporary artists in the East. But he alerts: "Creating Neo-Oriental art requires study and practice of both Oriental and Western culture."[46] This condition originates in his analysis of contemporary culture, Western and Eastern. He equally witnesses changes in Asia, now withholding a more significant political and economic role. So, he finds this as the propitious moment for Asian culture to claim its righteous place and assert its identity. By East, Mio refers primarily to China, because "China alone has maintained a cultural tradition spanning five thousand years."[47] He recognizes that exchanges with the West had an effect in Chinese culture since the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties, but notes that due to the strength of local culture, there was little impact. This situation changed during the Opium Wars, when Western ideas of economic reform, politics, philosophy, science, art and literature gained importance in China. He posits: only in the 1980s "Chinese artists re-discovered the dignity and the individuality they had lost during the Cultural Revolution."[48] Yet, he declares the postmodern attempt by Chinese artists (both inside and outside China) as 'suicidal', because it "seeks to rebel further, again defining a new cultural attitude... with 'anti-cultural' content."[49] Simply put, postmodernism can be putatively overruled by "Neo-Orientalism [that] seeks to... adopt a more rational cultural and social stance."[50]

Because official art lost its authority and audience, present generations find themselves in a difficult position. Mio recognizes that Chinese culture is in need of transformation and declares that this will not be done through official art but rather through a "new cultural system... [which] cannot be established if Chinese painters do not understand and practice traditional art."[51] He explains:

> Tradition is a fact. Some people consider it an overburdening presence, but I personally see it as an enlivening influence.... Change transforms

45 Mio, "Neo-Orientalism," 1997: 175.
46 Mio Pang Fei, "Neo-Orientalism," in Mio Pang Fei, 1999, 354.
47 Mio, "Neo-Orientalism," 1997: 176.
48 Mio, 176.
49 Mio, "Neo-Orientalism," 1999, 352.
50 Mio, 352.
51 Mio, "Neo-Orientalism," 1997, 180.

> tradition into a relevant entity. Studying and analyzing the styles from the past from a modern perspective permits them to be revaluated and reassessed. Tradition can teach us many things once it has been redefined according to new concepts.[52]

Shui observes that while "other Chinese 'new wave' artists are saddened by the East-West divide in the world of art... and feel trapped in a no-man's land formed between the two cultures... Mio Pang Fei... moves comfortably and confidently between the two kinds of art..." and praises the practicability of his attitude, "because no matter how novel or shocking a creation may be, in reality that creation is almost always rooted in more than one culture."[53] Mio, in turn, mentions that his involvement in the modernist movement has always been slight, but he always rejected being confined by Chinese cultural traditions:

> I personally, am not inextricably bound to modernism, nor am I bored by traditional Chinese culture. I stand against a vast Chinese cultural background, above nationalism, and there I decide the nature and content of my art, which is modern and even western. This is my response to the alternative given by history, and I call it 'Neo-Orientalism'.[54]

Mio's supranational positioning denotes refusal to be domesticated, that we know is characteristic of the avant-garde artist, while his act of cultural citizenship is one which envisions generating new artistic interventions beyond inherited schemes and traditions. He recognizes that rigidity in form and style remain the biggest problem with Chinese painting, and thus "attempts to reorganize chaos through... spontaneous techniques, such as dripping, calligraphic reliefing and collage.... His gestural expression is rooted in the desire to overcome the inertia and passive contemplativeness of Chinese culture."[55] To him, Chinese art must learn "the ideas and techniques of Western art... [or] Finding modern expression would then become an impossible task."[56]

"Neo-orientalism did not fall from the sky," admits Chinese artist and art critic Chen Chuang Luo.[57] The artists' gestures break free from the nationalizing quest of Chinese oil painting, and instead find their mission in the quest to extend and develop Chinese styles. Mio's explorations, Chen

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52 Mio, "Neo-Orientalism," 1997: 178.

53 Shui, "Mio and His Neo-Orientalism," 358–59.

54 Mio, "Neo-Orientalism," 2012, 76.

55 Eurico Gonçalves, "Mio Pang Fei–The Audacity to Be Modern in the Orient," in *Mio Pang Fei*, 1999, 254.

56 Mio, "Neo-Orientalism," 1997: 180.

57 Chen Chuang Luo, "Neo-Orientalism: The Trend of Chinese Oil Painting towards the 21st Century," in *Mio Pang Fei*, 1999, 376.

contends, build on preceding generations such as Liu Haisu, Lin Fengmian, and Zhao Wuji—who ventured into the art of oil painting grounded in Chinese culture. Chen is suggesting that Mio's Neo-Orientalism already has ancestry. And interestingly, Mio does not see himself as the last neo-orientalist: this is a legacy for the future, which requires an artist observing the world from the vantage point of a contemporary Chinese, informed by historical legacies and possessor of a universal perspective on things. In line with this thinking, Chen announces that "Neo-Orientalism will be the trend of modern Chinese oil painting in the twenty-first century."[58] As if concurring, Mio advances:

> I propose this is a job for several generations. Neo-Orientalism is not a model. It is an idea. People should use it to develop different models. You should walk your way. We have different thoughts and we live in different environments. So, we will probably develop different solutions within Neo-Orientalism. As such, there is no model. It is unlike Impressionism that had a model to follow. [Neo-Orientalism] is just guidance, an idea.[59]

An aspect of Neo-Orientalism, beyond knowledge of the two systems Mio which Mio finds essential to the pursuit of this endeavor is the value of abstraction. Abstraction, he says, allows "expressing my longing for Oriental ideas and humanity... [It] forms the essential style of Neo-Orientalism in the language of modern art."[60] So, he concludes: "If dialogue is to be achieved between art from the East and the West, then it will undoubtedly be based on the recognition of abstract elements."[61]

Mio is frequently recognized as an avant-garde artist. This is evident in Chinese art critic Dong Xing Bing who divides artists in two groups: the creators and the perpetuators (or more specifically the pioneers and the perpetuators), reading of Mio's avant-gardism as *innovation within continuation*. To him, perpetuation is the basis for creation, thus every creation finds its origin in perpetuation. In this sense, being an avant-garde artist does not denote creating something in a vacuum, but instead to create new paths for existing realities. This is precisely what Neo-Orientalism proposes.[62] In sum, Mio's avant-gardism searches for a meeting point between tradition and the contemporary and is tied to a continual dismantle of Chinese painting traditions' through abstraction. Chinese art critic Li Chao agrees; he says that while Mio's art gives both feelings of familiarity and unfamiliarity due to its methodological search on Western abstract art, Mio has effectively explored new paths for Chinese art.

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58 Chen, 377.
59 Cardeira, *Mio Pang Fei*.
60 Mio, "Neo-Orientalism," 2012, 90.
61 Mio, "Neo-Orientalism," 1997: 181.
62 See Dong Xing Bing, "The Abstractionism of Abstract Art," in *Mio Pang Fei*, 1999, 324–25.

Water Margin Series (1990s)

Water Margin is probably Mio Pang Fei's most effective Neo-Orientalist demonstration. Developed as a series of works throughout the 1990s, *Water Margin* constitutes his own review of the thousand-year-old Chinese classical novel *Tales of the Water Margin* (Shui Hu Zhuan).[63] This story from the late northern Song Dynasty is part of Chinese collective consciousness. It describes a peasant rebellion of 108 men who start a revolt against the government in the Liang Mountains, by the Yellow River. Their intent is to rob from the rich to give to the poor, to kill corrupt bureaucrats, redistribute the wealth, etc. Eventually, the Chinese Emperor grants them amnesty. The group of men unites through a justice based on principles of loyalty and brotherhood. But, as the story develops, these fundaments are corrupted. As a result, every one of the 108 heroes has his own tragic story, making *Water Margins* a bloody story of rape, death, betrayal, loyalty and justice. Mio used some of the marsh's bandits, including the educated man Wu Yong (or Wu Song) [Fig. 4.4, pp. 157], the warrior Lung Chun-yi (or Lu Junyi), and the monk Luo Tsu-sun (Lu Zhishen). Through them, he questions mankind's slaughtering and metaphorically addresses his own reflections on the human condition and the meaning of life. This thinking process on humanity would lead him to develop another Neo-Orientalist series, *On Human Condition*, after 2000.

These three paintings demonstrate different stroke possibilities: when applying calligraphic gestures to figural representation, the Chineseness of traditional classic painting is implied, yet this constitutes a new form of representation. The three depictions of Wu Yong show common attributes: the hair and apparel, his hand gesture in sign of command, and his pose, with a right foot to the side, are all similar. This is Mio's way to communicate with a vast Chinese audience by applying codes that are known to them. His representation is completely new. The drawing scale, but more importantly the size of brushstrokes that reminds one of Spanish artist Antoni Tàpies's (1923-2012) paintings. What Mio is doing is not a simple rejection of tradition, as the painting is very Chinese in form and content. Instead, he is actively transporting the viewer to the realm of mural art, graffiti, and etchings made into archaeological sites by disrespectful contemporary men or tourists, which degrade a fading, yet present past. While these works may live in isolation, Mio presented them alongside others within a large-scale installation entitled *Bandits of Marsh* [Fig. 4.5]. Fig. 4.5 A shows part of the installation: a large-sized mural painting is sided by wooden planks resembling bamboo slips (another traditional art form), and a central floor installation contains wooden boxes, plaster hands and lamps.

63 *Water Margin* (Shui Hu Zhuan) is also translated as *Outlaws of Marsh*, *Tale of the Marshes*, and *All Men Are Brothers*. See "Water Margin," Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, 2015. Interestingly, all these different nomenclatures entitle Mio's installations.

Figure 4.4 A, B, C
Mio Pang Fei
Wu Yong of Shui Hu
1996 | Mixed media on wood | 200 x 135 cm (each)
Photographs by Leonor Veiga, 1996

Figure 4.5 A
Mio Pang Fei
Bandits of Marsh, Water Margin Series
1996 | Installation view
Source: *Path and Adventure* (exhibition catalogue, p. 42)

The portraits series of the heroes inhabits the walls on the side [Fig. 4.5 A]. Separate by long scrolls of textiles, each hero is given its own throne and space for the viewer's contemplation. The longest painting of the installation [Fig. 4.5 B] reports their story, now viewed as 108 heavenly stars destined to the noble tasks of implementing divine commandments, and upholding justice, by rescuing the deprived and subduing the corrupted. "One cannot but accept that this theme is universal in its significance and that it touches

on social connotations," says Portuguese artist António Andrade.[64] The social commentary is imbedded, and the choice of an impactful theme show Mio's angle—the human side of the story. This is substantiated by the central installation [Fig. 4.5 A], where several hands, out of the grave, come to surface claiming for justice. Mio says that the installation also refers to those who supported the 108 heroes. Close to the longest painting of the installations, there is an empty chair [Fig. 4.5 B] referencing the empty throne of general Chao Gai, who died before the 'Grand Assembly of the 108' took place. He nevertheless remains present as a spiritual guardian of the outlaws, and ceremonial sacrifices are made in his honor.

Figure 4.5 B
Mio Pang Fei
Bandits of Marsh, Water Margin Series
1996 | Installation view
Source: *Path and Adventure* (exhibition catalogue, p. 42)

Showcased in Macao in 1996, this large-scale installation comprises several media, including paintings with calligraphic strokes, ready-made items, cloth scrolls, lamps and altars. The *Bandits of Marsh* was also displayed at the Shanghai Art museum in 1999. On the occasion, Feng Yuan, Director of the China National Museum of Fine Arts, said that without dispute, Mio's works are contemporary in form, yet contain a deeply traditional Chinese spirit.[65] Reviews were good; Andrade expressed that the program of these paintings was the most inspired by a local artist in Macao to date:

64 António Andrade, "On Mio Pang Fei's 'Tales of the Water Margin' Paintings Series," in *Mio Pang Fei*, 1999, 344.

65 Feng Yuan and Ung Vai Meng, "Preface," in On Human Condition, Artworks by Mio Pang Fei, ed. Hou Seng Chan (Macau: Macau Museum of Art, 2004), 7.

> Everything about this exhibition is amazing: the program, its organization, the association of the painting with the text, the vocative installation on the death of heroes and its dimension, the civil courage, the aesthetic quality, the technical and conceptual maturity, everything![66]

During the 1990s, as Mio worked on this series, the installation evolved. *All Men Are Brothers* (another possible translation for the novel's title) [Fig. 4.6], shows scrolls and hanging hands claiming justice surrounding the empty general's chair. The malleability of the installation is also consistent with the artist's intent "to go against the trends by carrying out his belief that ideas can be put into aesthetic practice."[67] Through the variations within *Water Margins*, "he has managed to both deconstruct and integrate, to combine painting with installation; and to amalgamate intricate and diverse abstract forms with Chinese calligraphy."[68] *Bandits of Marsh* serves for him to analyse the culture he inherited, and the Chinese through a markedly contemporary display. In all its elements, this installation demonstrates the extent to which history can penetrate modern art, as its Chinese components are present both at a conceptual and material level. In so doing, and in accordance with his Neo-Orientalist principles, Mio transcended Western modernism and Chinese traditional paintings.[69]

Figure 4.6
Mio Pang Fei
On Human Condition–All men Are Brothers
2000 | Installation view | 575 x 985 x 98 cm
Source: *Above and Beyond* (exhibition catalogue, pp. 60-61)

66 Andrade, "Mio's 'Tales of the Water Margin'," 343.
67 Andrade, 345.
68 Luo, "Realm of Poetic Mind," 17.
69 Ai Qing Fen and Li Sheng Wu, "Mio Pang Fei and His New Orientalism," in *Mio Pang Fei*, 1999, 366.

4.2.2 Maria Madeira: Claiming Timor-Leste

I don't know how this happened. But I can guarantee to you that I could never run away or chase myself from my roots.[70]
Maria Madeira

Born in Timor-Leste, Maria Madeira (b. 1969, Gleno) and her family were uprooted from the country in 1976. Throughout her exile,[71] and probably resulting from it, Madeira celebrated the culture of Timor-Leste. For example, she sang in Coro Loro Sa'e (Rising Sun Choir) as a teenager, to overcome her longing. Later, in the 1990s, during her exile in Australia, Madeira became more overtly political, voicing internationally her love for the country. Without hesitation, she began making politically and socially charged art through Timor-Leste's traditional arts, most notably through what would become recognized as Timor-Leste's national textile fabrication, the *Tais*—woven pieces of cloth, dyed with natural dyes, and used ritually in the entire country. This inclination was instinctive; defending Timor-Leste's cause was not a choice, it was a duty. Her artistic practice contrasted with the country's inexistence: it was urgent to preserve "a culture that was being destroyed and dismantled through genocide."[72] Timor-Leste being an independent state is now a reality, but for decades this seemed impossible. This country's story is the living example of a community's resilience and refusal to disappear in the hands of a brutal occupant, Indonesia. Today, Madeira affirms her love for Indonesia and recognizes that Indonesia and Indonesians "suffered from our cause."[73] She prefers to point the responsibility of atrocities at the military and the New Order. In September 2014, Madeira was the first Timorese artist invited to exhibit in the important Taman Ismail Marzuki, in Jakarta (TIM).[74]

In my opinion, the Third Avant-garde approach I recognize in Madeira's work is unique for its grounding on cultural emblems from a non-existing country. Through her activity, she actively helped build Timor-Leste's national culture, an aspect that renders her singular. Throughout the 1990s, Madeira's source material was solely comprised of fragments from memories, materials she guarded, and news broadcasted in international media. *Children of Timor* [Fig. 4.7] shows one example of a 1990s work in which she voiced her preoccupation with the wellbeing of Timorese children: she applied onto the canvas a newspaper portrait of a young boy while framing him jailed within a net made from fragments made from *tais*.

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70 Maria Madeira, Festival da Lusofonia, interview by Filipa Queiroz, June 10, 2011.
71 Madeira was exiled in Portugal (1976-1983), and in Australia (1983-2000).
72 Madeira, Maria Madeira's Art, unpublished interview by Leonor Veiga, Dili, July 3, 2011.
73 Madeira.
74 Madeira, *Ina Lou: Maria Madeira* (Jakarta: Taman Ismail Marzuki, 2014).

Figure 4.7
Maria Madeira
Timor Oan
1994 | Mixed media with *tais* on canvas | Dimensions unknown
Image courtesy of the artist

Timor-Leste's Struggle for Independence

Our victory is just a matter of time.[75]
Nicolau do Reis Lobato

Situated in the Indonesian archipelago's East Nusa Tenggara region's most eastern point, Timor-Leste is Southeast Asia's youngest nation (it was declared sovereign on May 20 2002). Located in a region known for its global contacts, Timor's history includes Chinese and Malay presences dating back to the thirteenth century. The arrival of the Portuguese in the sixteenth century brought Catholic faith to the territory (it remains dominant today). Nevertheless, the Timorese still hold fast onto their traditional animist beliefs, thanks to a post-World War II policy that combined direct and indirect rule.[76] Timor remained under Portuguese occupation for circa 450 years until Estado Novo, Salazar's dictatorship, fell in April 25, 1974:

75 *Resistir é Vencer!* (Dili: Resistência Timorense Arquivo & Museu, 2012), www.amrtimor.org. Nicolau dos Reis Lobato (1946-1978) was Timor-Leste's prime minister from November 28, to December 7, 1975. Upon the arrival of the Indonesian military, Lobato and some FRETILIN (Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor) leaders fled into the Timorese hinterland. He was killed by the Indonesian military in 1978, and made into a national hero. Today, Dili's airport is named after him.

76 *Discover Timor-Leste* (Dili: Ministry of Tourism, 2013), 5. According to this publication, the combination of direct and indirect rule (managing the population along the lines of traditional power structures rather than by using colonial civil servants) left traditional Timorese society almost untouched.

> In 1974... 'the transition to democracy' in Portugal had a sudden impact on all of its colonies. A decolonisation process began in Timor; in august 1975 a civil war broke out ... on the 28th November, Timor-Leste proclaimed unilateral independence from Portugal. Ten days later, on December 7, 1975, Indonesian troops invaded.[77]

It is significant that Timor-Leste's independence from Indonesia is equally tied to the end of Suharto's New Order regime. Suharto's resignation in 1998, amidst a severe social and economic crisis, is viewed as the turning point for Timor-Leste in its fight for independence. It was Suharto's successor, Bacharuddin Jusuf Habibie (b. 1936), who served as interim, that requested a referendum to the Timorese.[78] Held on August 30, 1999 and monitored by the United Nations Mission in East Timor (UNAMET), a staggering percentage—78.5% of the population—opted out but yet, the motion was passed. Pro-integration militia gangs and the Indonesian military responded with extreme brutality, destroying most of the country's infrastructure (circa 80% of the capital Dili was destroyed), and claiming about 1,400 lives from a population already devastated by extreme suffering. In October 1999, Indonesia recognized the result, and the United Nations (UN) acted as a caretaker through a transitional administration—UNTAET—until full independence in 2002. After the first free elections in 2001, the country's constitution was written.[79] At midnight on May 19, 2002, the new flag of Timor-Leste was raised, and the national anthem was sung. Timor's long fight for freedom was finally over.

Timor's struggle for independence is marked by a history of oppression. During Japanese occupation in World War II (1942-1943), around 50,000 Timorese died.[80] But the most oppressive campaigns were in 1978 at the hands of Indonesian occupants. After "'clean-up' operations (*Pembersihan*), in March 1979 the Indonesian military announced that Timor-Leste had been 'pacified'."[81] In the first four years of Indonesian occupation, Timor lost about 150,000 people, and nowadays it is believed that during the 24 years of occupation, an estimate of 200,000 people died, 300,000 were exiled and 600,000 displaced (today, the population of Timor-Leste is estimated on one million people). Human rights abuses perpetrated by Indonesian military included violent

77 *Resistir é Vencer!*

78 The referendum gave the population choice between greater autonomy within Indonesia, or full independence.

79 Michael Leach, "Longitudinal Change in East Timorese Tertiary Attitudes to National Identity and Nation Building, 2002-2010," *Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences of Southeast Asia* (BKI) 168, no. 2–3 (2012): 223.

80 Leach, "Difficult Memories: The Independence Struggle as Cultural Heritage in East Timor," in *Places of Pain and Shame: Dealing with "Difficult Heritage,"* ed. Keir Reeves and William Logan (London: Routledge, 2009), 147.

81 *Resistir é Vencer!*

killings, enforced starvation, and violence against women.

All the suffering the country endured during successive occupations kept Timor-Leste united until independence. Yet, as observed by Australian political scientist Michael Leach, "Since independence, maintaining this unified sense of a common national identity has proven a more challenging task."[82] Major 'fault-lines' have arisen, especially between the two generations of nationalists'—the older, that were "instrumental in the rise of East Timorese nationalism in the 1960s and early 1970s,"[83] and which is largely Portuguese-speaking, and the younger, responsible for *in loco* resistance during Indonesian occupation, and largely Indonesian-speaking. The most dramatic result of these tensions was the "April 2006 crisis, the political-military crisis (often referred to as the 'east-west' conflict within the army, police and between *Lorosa'e* (eastern) and *Loromonu* (western) youth gangs in Dili."[84]

International attention to the Timor plight started in 1991, after two American journalists and an Australian cameraman covered the Santa Cruz Massacre. Present in the local, their tape was smuggled to Australia, and broadcasted globally. This massacre is believed to have taken at least the life of 270 people, mostly from the underground civilian resistance (dominated by youth and student groups). On November 12, 1991, the population was gathering to mourn the death of Sebastião Gomes, an 18-year-old pro-liberation student who was killed inside the Motael church on October 28, 1991. About 3,000 students gathered in the cemetery, but the Indonesian army was there and fired at them. In dedication to the massacre victims, the Timorese have recognized November 12 as a national holiday only since 2004. While this event's and site's significance for the independence struggle "cannot be overstated,"[85] says Leach, the government's neglect in monumentalizing the massacre—for instance, through a memorial monument—contrasts, not only with annual on-site informal commemorations with votive candles on the cemetery's front gate, but also with monuments erected in remembrance to 1999 killings (e.g. massacre sites of Suai and Liquiça, when following the independence referendum in 1999, 260 people were killed). Writing in 2009, Leach observed: "it is surprising that there is still no formal monument on or near the Santa Cruz site, or elsewhere in Dili."[86] By 2012, a monument had been erected but it caused controversy:

> [It] was installed without consultation with the 12 November committee led by Gregorio Saldanha; and there is still no progress on a memorial

82 Leach, "Difficult Memories," 145.
83 Leach, 145.
84 Leach, "Longitudinal Change," 223–24.
85 Leach, "Difficult Memories," 158.
86 Leach, 158.

> at Santa Cruz itself, despite a government-announced design competition co-sponsored by the 12 November committee in 2010.[87]

Contrarily to tradition, the monument itself contains no inscriptions: everyone guesses this is a memorial to the massacre, because it depicts the massacre's most mediated image. The sculpture depicts two men, one nurturing and comforting a wounded compatriot, and recalls famous Pietà depictions of Mary holding Jesus after crucifixion [Fig. 4.8]. This monument is located far from the cemetery; instead it was placed close to the church of Motael (where Gomes died). Leach concludes that the neglect to address the youth's participation in the *funu* (fight)—notably through the Santa Cruz's memorial—shows a "pattern of misrecognition relat[ing] strongly to other cleavages in post-independence politics, which contributed directly to the crisis of 2006."[88]

Figure 4.8 A and B
A) The Memorial of Santa Cruz, in Dili
Image by Leonor Veiga, 2013

B) Santa Cruz Massacre November 12, 1991
Source:https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PasfPrn5S90

It is this combination of human rights abuses and her exile in Australia that led Madeira to reference the Timor plight in her work. Until self-determination in 1999, Timorese art was practically confined to wall art scattered on public or private spaces, most of which against Suharto's regime. While in Timor propaganda posters, banners, painted canvases and images of resistance flourished, Madeira worked in exile. In this respect, I suggest taking 1996 as a hinge year for the Third Avant-garde in Timor-Leste.

The Genesis of 'Movimentu Kultura'

Timor-Leste's Third Avant-garde also acquired a nomenclature: Movimentu Kultura. I propose this tendency surged in the mid-1990s, both

87 Leach, "The Politics of History in Timor-Leste," in *A New Era? Timor-Leste after the UN*, ed. Lia Kent, Sue Ingram, and Andrew McWilliam (Canberra: ANU Press, 2015), 53.
88 Leach, "Difficult Memories," 159.

within and outside the territory. Yet, this designation was deferred until 2013, when I did field work in Dili and spoke to César, leader of *Sanggar* Dejukdill. I enquired about the reason behind the persistence of references to Timorese traditional culture in the practice of his studio's members. His response: "This is Movimentu Kultura."[89]

In 1996, the Indonesian artist Yahya Lambert (b. 1972, Bandung), who lives in the territory since 1982 (due to *transmigrasi* policies), displayed the first painting on *tais* ever shown in the Becora Culture Centre in Dili. Shortage of available canvas led to this development; New Order regime officials' promptly considered this occurrence an "alternative and distinctly East Timorese medium of art."[90] It can be argued that here a *tradition was invented*: the regime formally instituted a cultural happening that used "ancient materials to construct invented tradition of a novel type for quite novel purpose."[91] Hobsbawm also proposes these invented traditions establish themselves with great rapidity, in a matter of few years. This too, would prove correct for painting on *tais*. A major cause for this event's continuation relates to post-independence Arte Moris School, where students were encouraged to paint on *tais* cloth. Traditionally, *tais* cloth are used as a garment, but they came to be used in traditional ceremonies (like weddings and funerals) and were later accommodated within Catholic ceremonies.[92] *Tais* cloth are solely made by women; as with other traditional textiles from Southeast Asia—e.g. embroideries from Laotian Hmong tribes—women who demonstrate greater skill marry better. Thus, *tais* not only are an important element of Timorese symbolic universe, they equally embody local social relations. Their use in contemporary art discourses denotes increasing secularization. Through this classificatory mechanism—an alternative and distinctly East Timorese medium of art—Indonesia's 27th province gained a regional repertoire that distinguished it from other East Nusa Tenggara region communities (*tais* are widely present here, and points of commonality, including designs and motifs exist). *What was new was the gesture to paint on tais*. In this regard, Lambert continued experiments in *Sanggar Matan* (Eye Group), the oldest in Timor, which he founded in 1996 (still existing).

Also in 1996, Madeira exhibited for the first time in Perth's Institute of Contemporary Arts (PICA). She presented a historic solo exhibition, *East Timor—Land of Crosses*. The exhibition was granted wide attention by Australian

89 César, Movimentu Kultura, unpublished interview by Leonor Veiga, Dili, April 7, 2013.

90 Barrkman and Conceição Silva, "A Contemporary Art Movement Timor-Leste."

91 Eric J. Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions," in *The Invention of Tradition,* ed. Eric J. Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger, 20th ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 6.

92 See Fernanda Ximenes, "O Tais: Desde Os Primórdios à Contemporaneidade" (Timor-Leste: Memórias e História da Antropologia, Timor: Universidade Nacional Timor Lorosa'e, 2012), 1–14, http:/www.historyanthropologytimor.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Ximenes-TAIS.pdf.

media, as the local community had grown in sensitiveness toward Timorese cause after the Santa Cruz massacre. Madeira's showcased two important installations in which she used Timorese traditional emblems: *270+ Massakre Santa Cruz Nian* and *Silensiu Folin Hira?* were direct references to two of the most tragic events Madeira learned from exile.

Figure 4.9
Maria Madeira
270+ Massacre Santa Cruz Nian
1996 | Mixed media with *kaibauk* | 350 x 350 x 30 cm
Image courtesy of the artist

In *270+* [Fig. 4.9], Madeira directly addresses the estimate number of East Timorese murdered in the massacre. The lack of clarity of the exact number of victims (addressed as 270+), is shocking to Madeira, who envisions the '+' as a possible rise to 279. In this installation, she enshrined each victim by representing them through a traditional *kaibauk* (a crescent-shaped crown which is used in ceremonial apparel, both for women and men) which was placed on the top of a black squared cross. The cross not only symbolises the Catholic religion of the mourners, it equally addresses the artist's discontent with media's lack of precision regarding the number of victims. The laying of the 270 crowns on a cross reminds viewers that the massacre took place in a Catholic cemetery, while recalling the need for international aid. Australian journalist Ron Banks says: "When massed together on the floor of PICA they resemble a graveyard echoing the death of Timorese at hands of the Indonesian military."[93] *Silensiu Folin Hira?* (Silence at What Price?) [Fig. 4.10] is another impressive installation, in which her approach is more brutal. It shocks for its straightforwardness and crudeness, yet a certain softness remains. This aspect derives from message's concealment.

93 Ron Banks, "Protest in Paint," *The West Australian*, June 25, 1996, sec. Arts.

Figure 4.10
Maria Madeira
Silensiu Folin Hira?
1996 | Mixed media with nails and *tais* | 200 x 100 x 40 cm
Image courtesy of the artist

Through this work readymade work with *tais*, Madeira addressed the brutal death of the young East Timorese Fernando Boavida on December 27, 1992:

> During his interrogation he was made to lie on a plank of sharp nails, while another plank was laid on top of him. A heavy tyre was placed on top of the second plank. When Fernando failed to give his torturers 'satisfactory answers', another tyre was added. Fernando lost consciousness and died, three days after his arrest (Amnesty International to United Nations, 13/7/1993).[94]

The installation shows a bed of nails, covered by a full-length *tais* cloth. The integrity of the *tais* denotes it represents the body; this is a ritual practice for the deceased in Timor-Leste.[95] It equally shows that Madeira conceives *tais* cloth as sacred. Her approach contrasts with her fellow compatriots, including Lambert, who use them secularly. In my opinion, this difference stems from her exiled circumstance. To this day, she does not paint on *tais*, but rather applies fragments in her work.

These two 1996 events in Lambert's and Madeira's works, possibly happened simultaneously. While Lambert explored a local alternative, "*tais*, instead of canvas, which was scarce... Madeira's work began to incorporate

94 Madeira, "List of Works 2003-2011" (Dili, 2011).
95 See Ximenes, "O Tais," 11–12.

fragments of tais, emblematic of her culture."[96] This is why I propose that Movimentu Kultura emerged in two streams, both within and outside the country's borders, and they share similarities, such as the presence of *tais*. Since independence in 2002, Movimentu Kultura has aggregated all practitioners, from senior artists who sustain a solo practice, to younger ones who live in *sanggars* (artist communities) that proliferated in the country's main cities.[97]

4.2.3 Dinh Q. Lê: Negotiating Archives and/with Memories

Vietnamese-American Dinh Q. Lê (b. 1968) was born in Hà Tiên, south of Vietnam, next to the Cambodian border. Born during the height of the American-Vietnamese conflict, Lê's family was directly affected by the instability and violence that erupted following the American dropout of Vietnam in March 1975.

In May 1975, the Khmer Rouge regime founded the Democratic Kampuchea, a region on the south of Cambodia. Despite having cooperated during the American-Vietnamese conflict, by 1975 the Khmer Rouge feared that Vietnam would become the dominant force in the region. To preempt an attempt by the Vietnamese, in 1975 the regime began a war against Vietnam, which was marked by an attack on the Vietnamese island of Phú Quôc. This invasion would be followed by another in 1977 and on this occasion Lê's hometown was invaded and many people were killed.[98] As his father feared for the family's safety—"My father, once the headmaster of a school, and my mother, a dealer in gold and dollars, were considered capitalists" by the Vietnamese regime—they escaped by boat to Thailand, and lived in the refugee camp of Songkhla for one year.[99] In 1978, as the crisis in the region was striking, the UN forced the US to open their Southeast Asia immigrant quotas. An enormous amount of 'boat people' that fled Vietnam was relocated to other parts of the world and in the fall of 1979, Lê's family was transferred to California.[100]

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96 Barrkman and Conceição Silva, "A Contemporary Art Movement Timor-Leste."

97 Senior artists generation includes Gabriela Carrascalão (b. 1949, Dili), Manuel Justino "Bosco" Alves do Rego (b. 1965, Dili), Angelino "Gelly" Neves (b. 1971, Dili), Maria Madeira (b. 1967, Gleno);,Yayah Lambert (b. 1972, Bandung) and Sebastian Silva (who is no longer active). Younger artists, contacted inside studios are around 30 years old (or younger). The group includes Iliwatu Danabere, Tony Amaral (b. 1884, Dili), Ino Parada (b. 1983, Dili), Cesario (b. 1983, Los Palos), Casimiro (b. 1981, Los Palos), Abe (b. 1984, Ossu) and Alfeo (b. 1984, Los Palos). Madeira and Lambert, in different ways, bridge the two generations.

98 Allan deSouza and Dinh Q. Lê, "Interview," in *Dinh Q. Lê: The Headless Buddha* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Center for Photographic Studies, 1998), 4; Dinh Q. Lê and Carolee Thea, "Elephants and Helicopters: Dinh Q. Lê with Carolee Thea," *The Brooklyn Rail*, September 3, 2010, sec. Art, http://brooklynrail.org/2010/09/art/elephants-and-helicopters.

99 Lê and Thea, "Elephants and Helicopters."

100 Thu-Huong Ha, "Forty-One Years Ago, the US Took a Big Gamble on Vietnamese Refugees," *Quartz.Com*, accessed April 30, 2016, http://qz.com/670921/

In the US from the age of ten, Dinh Q. Lê was practically educated in the American system. He started to study computer science but was soon bored: "I took art and art classes and began making art."[101] It was while studying his Bachelor of Fine Arts in Santa Barbara that he began to think more critically about the wartime experiences of his youth and how they framed his American life. His first socially engaged work, The Destruction Was Mutual (1988), was a site-specific work made from photographic archival images from the Vietnam war that he illustrated with Vietnamese statistics: '800,000 South Vietnamese children lost one or both parents,' or '2,000,000 Vietnamese were killed in the war'. This body of work was done in protest for what he felt was a one-sided view of the conflict in university classes he attended. On the following year, he started weaving images as a form of mediating his multilayered identity and dual citizenship, and chose the informal education he had acquired in Vietnam to do so: *đan lát* (weaving grass), an art based upon old plaiting techniques. This has granted him attention from his tutors, who recognized in this reprocessing a viable way to negotiate his cross-cultural roots: being a Vietnamese-American meant that he was constantly changing positions, as if in transition.[102] This mode of acting left a mark: "There is a whole generation of artists of color in America that look at traditions. My teacher showed my work to them. I would like to think that they were influenced by my work."[103]

Lê's career has been marked by dissatisfaction with written history; his woven photographs (4.12—4.14, see further on) dispute historical revisionism(s). His works conflate opposing views of Southeast Asian history, especially relating to the conflict between Vietnam and America. He explains that like many other Southeast Asian artists, he feels an urge to produce the archive:

> There is an urgency to report, because the Cold War allowed the governments [in the region] to be dictators that defined what the populations could or not know. We still have a communist government in Vietnam—a remnant of the Cold War—with the power to sensor voices. That is why I see the artists of the region desperately trying to keep these [Cold War] stories, because the generations that went through them are dying.[104]

A resident of Vietnam since 1997, Lê openly defends free expression and constantly challenges the Party's version of Vietnamese history. What is

forty-one-years-ago-the-us-took-a-big-gamble-on-vietnamese-refugees/.

101 Lê and Thea, "Elephants and Helicopters."

102 Melissa Chiu, "Interview with Dinh Q. Lê," in *Vietnam: Destination for the New Millenium, the Art of Dihn Q Lê* (New York: Asia Society, 2005), 21.

103 Lê, Splendour and Darkness, unpublished interview by Leonor Veiga, Leiden, April 14, 2016.

104 Lê, Splendour and Darkness.

problematic for historians (who mainly work for the state, and thus must follow rules) becomes artists free-space of intervention: they address those stories that censorship renders prohibited. "Contemporary art language has a certain freedom,"[105] observes Lê. He explains that the Western idea of 'art for art's sake' is not applicable for a Vietnamese context, where theory and practice are not separated. As art is about life, crafts and politics can coexist in an artwork.

Plaited Arts and the Contemporary

While living in Vietnam as a child, Lê watched his aunt weave grass mats. Not only he learned how to weave by looking, he would also assist her in mat-making.[106] This is the traditional practice he introduced to the art world: *dan lát*. Even if the artist refers to his education as grass mat weaving, the craft has a wider scope. It includes everyday utensils, like baskets and ritual objects, some of which with narrative functions. "Basically, basketry construction is like flat weaving."[107] The practice of plaited arts (or plaited basketry) is one of the oldest art forms of the world, dating back possibly 10,000 years.[108] Reported all the way back to the Neolithic age, these objects, their function and meaning are seldom studied by specialists. Conversely, they are practiced in disparate locations including the southern regions of the US, Central America and South America, East Africa and Southeast Asia (inland and insular Southeast Asia).[109] French anthropologist Bernard Sellato postulates that the functional character of the objects, as well as the perishable nature of the materials are the main reasons for their reduced visibility. These aspects tie the objects to their craft status (as opposed to art). Plaited art objects are regarded as fragile, because of the organic materials in which they are produced, and they are objects of daily use. This double circumstance leads to the consideration of plaited arts as "the humblest of crafts."[110] Czech art historian Jan Mrázek observes: "Art objects are permanent and static; nothing perishable may become an art object."[111] This

105 Lê, Splendour and Darkness.

106 deSouza and Lê, "Interview," 7; "Dinh Q. Lê," *The Days of Yore*, 2011, http://thedaysofyore.com/2011/dinh-q-le/; Lê and Thea, "Elephants and Helicopters."

107 Jane Patrick, "Tapping Ancient Roots: Plaited Paper Baskets," *Arts and Activities,* December 2011, 16, www.artsandactivities.com.

108 Patrick, 16; Bernard Sellato, "Art and Identity in the Plaited Arts of Borneo: An Introduction," in *Plaited Arts from the Borneo Rainforest*, ed. Bernard Sellato (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2012), 4.

109 John M. Goggin, "Plaited Basketry in the New World," *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 5, no. 2 (1949): 166; Sellato, "Art and Identity in the Plaited Arts of Borneo," 4; Susi Dunsmore, "Traditional Basketwork Techniques in Borneo," in *Plaited Arts from the Borneo Rainforest*, 54.

110 Sellato, "Art and Identity in the Plaited Arts of Borneo," 4.

111 Jan Mrázek, "Ways of Experiencing Art: Art History, Television, and Javanese Wayang," in *What's the Use of Art? Asian Visual and Material Culture in Context*, ed. Jan Mrázek and Morgan Pitelka (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008), 277.

is a fundamental reason for considering Lê's work avant-garde—through his practice, the artist defies these classifications.

In 2012, an extensive volume on Borneo's plaited arts was published, *Plaited Arts from the Borneo Rainforest* and in 2015, the Honolulu Museum of Art revaluated plaited arts through a curatorial undertaking, *Shifting Values of Plaited Power*, which covered plaited arts from the Pacific region.[112] Sellato observes: historically, academic studies have prioritized ethnic arts made from 'noble materials' (bronze, stone, jewelry) and hardwood statuary and "This was true of exhibition catalogues as well."[113] Yet, he admits: the inferior quantity of literature dedicated to plaited arts may result from the fact that these objects do not age and are torn apart by use. The interest in plaited arts sparked in the 1970s, when shortage of antiquities and other 'precious' objects redirected Western collectors attention, especially in the US and Japan. But, he observes the 1990s upsurge of interest in Southeast Asian basketry.[114] I hypothesize that Lê's work originated this new dynamic.

Southeast Asia is one of the world's most prolific zones for basketry production, where almost all known techniques can be found.[115] It is believed the technology arrived there from the southeastern coast of China circa 2500 years ago.[116] Today, this art form reveals analogies in the whole region, a circumstance deriving from the abundance of rainforests: plaited arts are found in insular Southeast Asian locations such as Timor, Borneo, Sulawesi and the Philippines, but also in inland Southeast Asia, namely Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. Made from simple plant materials, such as rattan or bamboo (ferns and grasses are also used), the plant choice is directly linked to the context of production—it results not only from local availability, but also reflects the coastal or inland locations of its makers. Other aspects, namely the ease of processing and dyeing, are also taken into consideration when choosing materials. Sometimes, rattans and bamboos are applied in walls, ceiling panels, footbridges, rafts, but also in heavy-duty carrying baskets, objects commonly made by men. Decorated objects and household mats—like the ones that Lê learned to weave—are normally made by women.

The knowledge of basketry creation encompasses three aspects: first, botanical expertise of the local plants and their uses, second, technical expertise related to the processing and dyeing of the fibers, and third, knowledge of decorative patterns. Transmission is made through word and gesture and it

112 "Shifting Values of Plaited Power," Honolulu Museum of Art, 2015, http://www.honolulumuseum.org/art/exhibitions/14795-shifting_values_plaited_power/.

113 Sellato, "Art and Identity in the Plaited Arts of Borneo," 4.

114 Sellato, 4.

115 Sellato, ed., "Plaited Arts from the Borneo Rainforest," in *Plaited Arts from the Borneo Rainforest*, 9.

116 Sellato, "Art and Identity in the Plaited Arts of Borneo," 10.

is both *vertical*—from elder to youngster, within the household—and *lateral*, through contact between communities. Many times, transmission leads to reinterpretations which include new materials, such as plastic [Fig. 4.11] or new motifs.[117] Today, this traditional practice is facing serious threat, due to material shortage and as other traditional art forms, it relies on its habitat, the rainforest. And across Southeast Asia the depletion of habitats by massive fires or their flattening to give space to farming or the construction of dams is unstoppable. Yet, the introduction of new materials proves the technique's resilience.

Figure 4.11
Plaited basketry made with plastic (detail)
Source: www.dreamstime.com

Lê's work can be placed within this tendency of reinterpretation, but it goes beyond the mere inclusion of new materials, in this case, photography. In his hands, the woven object loses its traditional utilitarian function and gains further narrative capacities. Lê started weaving photographs while he was in art school in 1989, when he combined images of himself with some of the most iconic pictures of Western art he viewed at the school's library. He recalls: "I literally wove myself into Italian and Flemish paintings I was so enamored with."[118] This was his way to negotiate and reconcile the idea of being a Vietnamese-American interested in this kind of art. The time was ripe; multiculturalism was becoming widely accepted at an institutional level. He would garner attention "in the late 1990s for his 'photo-weavings' that interlace journalistic images from the Vietnam War with the skewed renderings of the conflict created by Hollywood."[119] A few years later, in 2003, this body of work was showcased at the 50th Venice Biennial curated

117 The origin and name of the motifs relates sometimes to the surrounding nature, the name of a craftsman, and to the devices they represent, like a hook. See Sellato, "Art and Identity in the Plaited Arts of Borneo," 26.

118 Lê and Thea, "Elephants and Helicopters."

119 Denise Tsui, "Dinh Q. Lê," *Art Asia Pacific,* 2016, http://artasiapacific.com/Magazine/Almanac2016/DinhQLe.

by Francesco Bonami: *Dreams and Conflicts—The Viewer's Dictatorship*, in the show "Delays and Revolutions"[120] (see Chapter 5). The fact that he uses a contemporary medium (photography) has allowed his work to be placed outside of the stigma of 'craft', but initially he was regarded as "a minority artist who uses what is seen as an ethnic technique."[121] While recognizing that craft may be one of the work's pitfalls, he reminds us:

> I don't think my work has such an ethnic label. It's able to cross borders because, essentially, I am using photography. The technique of weaving is old, but the medium is contemporary—that jarring difference brings it art acceptance. My work has also been reprinted in FiberArts magazine and I've been included in a quilt show, as well as photography and painting shows. I'm glad it can cross those boundaries.[122]

Lê explained the importance of weaving for contemporaneity, and reminded me that it constitutes one of the earlier forms of languages known: weaving is "the father of binary structure that we have in computers nowadays."[123] Despite its correspondence with a timeless structure, Lê's application of *đan lát* is unique and borders an invention. Technically, his work relies heavily on the 'star motif' (also called flower, fruit or tiger foot print motif[124]), but his compositions do not follow the primacy of the material and object's function. Instead, Lê's woven photographs follow the primacy of the image.[125] As a result, the star motif appears in different shapes (tall, short, narrow, wide), as shown in Fig. 4.12. Here, we see a photograph of a boy who was killed at Tuol Seng prison during the Khmer Rouge regime, interwoven with reliefs of Angkor Wat temple, in neighboring Cambodia. Sometimes the motif is contained inside the image, other times it fills backgrounds. As a result, there is little resemblance between his woven photographs and the mats he learned to weave with his aunt as a child:

> When I went back to Vietnam [in 1996], I asked my aunt and others to work with me on the weaving. They couldn't do it because the weaving I do is completely different now from how they do it. They work with fairly rigid patterns whereas my patterns are based on the

120 The show was presented in the Giardini, in the Italian pavilion, and curated by Francesco Bonami and Daniel Birnbaum. "Dreams and Conflicts. The Viewer's Dictatorship," Universes in Universe, 2003, http://www.universes-in-universe.de/car/venezia/bien50/e-dreams-conflicts.htm.

121 deSouza and Lê, "Interview," 6–7.

122 deSouza and Lê, 7. Lê's work was covered by American textile artist Jeff Glenn, on *FiberArts* 5, March 1992, p. 18.

123 Lê, Splendour and Darkness.

124 Sellato, "Art and Identity in the Plaited Arts of Borneo." 25-26.

125 In traditional plaited arts, décor follows function, and function follows material. Here, the relation is reversed: image determines the motif.

> images, on what I want to come through. They couldn't work that way. I gave up after a while (laughter).[126]

To this day, Lê weaves his photographic series on his own. In addition to using photographs he prepares, he also uses found images retrieved from the Internet. His weavings have changed throughout time, both in scope and technique. His early works used more complex motives but later, he realized that the complexity of patterns interfered with his loaded messages and contributed to the already convoluted and time-consuming technique. "As I get busy, everyone keeps telling me that I should hire people to do the weavings for me." But his weavings rely and depend on a very personal employment of the technology because of "the spot-on decision to bring forth or hide images."[127]

Cambodia: Splendour and Darkness (1994-1999)

Undoubtedly one of Lê's most compelling series, *Cambodia: Splendor and Darkness* is compounded by a black-and-white body of work made from archival images of heritage sites he visited in his first trip to Cambodia, in 1996. This trip awoke his suppressed memories of his hometown's 1977 invasion.[128] As part of his creative process and method, Lê frequently photographs places he visits. On this voyage, he photographed two sites, Tuol Seng prison's archives and Angkor Wat temple figures. Only later did he decide to weave these pictures together. He realized the two sites share a violent history: Tuol Sleng was one of the prisons of the Khmer Rouge, and Angkor Wat was evidence that the "Angkor period Cambodia, depended on a hierarchical system of serfs and slaves to build the great stone edifices that have survived to today."[129] In the work, Lê is asking the viewers to think beyond the UNESCO narrative of Angkor as a heritage site renowned for its beauty and scale.

On Fig. 4.13, one of the famous tower-heads of the Khmer temple of Bayon in Angkor Wat appears in the background sprinkled with twenty-seven portraits of Tuol Sleng inmates. Tuol Sleng was a high school that was converted into a prison and torture chamber and is today the Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocide. It is believed that around 14,000 inmates were tortured to death there, and only half a dozen were known to survive.[130] The genocide,

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126 deSouza and Lê, "Interview," 6-7.

127 Lê, "The Artist as Maker," interview by Leonor Veiga, Leiden, April 11, 2014.

128 Moira Roth, "Of Memory and History: An Exchange between Dinh Q. Lê and Moira Roth," in *Dinh Q. Lê: From Vietnam to Hollywood*, ed. Christopher Miles and Moira Roth (Seattle, WA: Marquand Books, 2003), 13.

129 Robyn Maxwell, in *Sari to Sarong: Five Hundred Years of Indian and Indonesian Textile Exchange* (Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 2004), 72.

130 Seth Mydans, "The World: Khmer Rouge Photography, Smiles Were Rare," *The New York Times*, 1999; Seth Mydans, "Out from Behind a Camera at a Khmer Torture House," *The New York Times*, 2007.

perpetrated toward the population between 1975 and 1979, is believed to have caused the death of 1,7 million Cambodians (the prison of Tuol Sleng remains one of the most important archives of these massive killings, and most of the pictures result from the work of a single photographer, Mr. Nhem En).[131] When in 1996, Lê connected the two sites/periods of Cambodian history through woven images, he did not immediately realize the relation between the two, even if in present time they are linked through tourism. Through the combination, the artist asks the viewer not to look at splendor without realizing that it comes at cost. While at the temples, he "constantly came back to this horror [of the prison's impact and its archival remnants]. It was an extreme of emotions, and so the work is pretty much about the contrast between the two places, their contradiction and their coexistence."[132]

Figure 4.12
Dinh Q Lê
Cambodia: Splendor and Darkness
2005 | C-print, linen tape | 160 x 120 cm
Image courtesy of the artist

All woven images [Fig. 4.12—4.14] from the temples and from the inmates, appear in a frontal angle, in what could be understood as an accusation of human rights violations. Yet, while the inmates who were photographed before execution seem tense and troubled, the deities appear serene, as seen in figure 4.13. In Fig. 4.14], the movement of Angkor Wat reliefs is opposed to the stiffness of the full-sized body portraits of two young boys of different ethnicities, side

131 Mr. Nhem En was the chief of six photographers at Tuol Sleng and photographed the prisoners before they were sent to interrogation. He is believed to have photographed 7,000 prisoners. Mydans, "Out from Behind a Camera at a Khmer Torture House."

132 deSouza and Lê, "Interview," 4.

by side (I am considering that each portrait was one photograph). The fluidity of the carvings, with its dancing deities, once again contrasts with the rigid body language of the two youngsters, while the full woven image weight is distributed in two halves—the white top, corresponding to the boy's portraits, and the dark bottom, in which the carvings become predominant.

Figure 4.13 and 4.14
Dinh Q Lê
Cambodia: Splendor and Darkness #3
2005 | C-print, linen tape | 160 x 120 cm
Image courtesy of the artist

One of the aspects Lê recalls from his trip to Cambodia is the omnipresence of Angkor Wat's five towers, bordering what he considers 'an obsession'. He notes that images are everywhere, showing stereotyping. When the Angkor Wat temple complex became a world heritage site in 1992, for Pol Pot (1925-1998) Khmer Rouge leader, it symbolized the victories and magnificence of the glorious Khmer kings. During his time, Angkor Wat's large scale was conveyed as a symbol of a glorious past that the regime urged to return to. Thus, by mixing the monuments with regime's victims, Lê attempted to "turn these monuments into memorials"[133] of the slaves who perished during its construction, while he questioned the amplified narratives of history and their integration in modern nation building. Hence, through *Splendor and Darkness*, Lê's warp and weft was transformed into socially and politically charged art, or

133 Roth, "Of Memory and History," 15.

what American art historian Moira Roth called "obdurate history"[134]—a history that will never disappear.

Dinh Q. Lê's Woven Photographs: a Third Medium

American art critic Christopher Miles considers that Lê makes "anxious tapestries."[135] This is an interesting observation, which relates both, to the narrative capacities of the work, and equally refer to its technical features. Lê's photographic weavings are not prone to easy codification: with its overlays and superficial material manipulations, they act more as painting than photography. The combination is not only unique because of the resulting image, but from the creation of a new medium—a 'third medium', between photography and painting, between painting and mat weaving. His work confronts issues of history and identity in a personal and political way. His weavings force the spectator to engage with these distortions through images of war, conflict and destruction. As Miles mentions, Lê has "hit a way of working that function[s] as both an effective method and a powerful metaphor"[136] to address mythological and historical representations, while conveying his own experiences. In addition, through these works, he articulates the voices of victims. His negotiation is obtained through the pairing of familiar and unfamiliar codes, images versus craft:

> [T]hese majestic and anxious tapestries offer a glimpse into the artist's process of weaving his own personal history within a larger fabric of history and myth, but they also ask you, indeed compel you, as a viewer to consider your own interwoven status. It is difficult to look at one of these pieces without becoming in some way a participant.[137]

The complexity of Lê's works also results from the sources he uses, which combine personal, historical and fictional imagery. His photo weavings open new possibilities for the living memory of traumatic events, precisely because they are coupled with images of ancestry and heritage. As Miles affirms, his use of photographs relates to photography's inner capacity to stimulate the sensitivity in the viewer, even if he has not personally experienced these facts. His large-scale compositions resemble pixelated images; the viewer oscillates between warp and weft and mentally combines the two in the hope to get a coherent image. By weaving these photographic documents, Lê refuses the alleged preciseness of the photographic medium, while he emphasizes that

134 Roth, 15.
135 Christopher Miles, "Dinh Q. Lê: Anxious Tapestries," in *Dinh Q. Lê: From Vietnam to Hollywood*, 5.
136 Miles, 7.
137 Miles, "Dinh Q. Lê: Anxious Tapestries," 7.

history is constantly being created and is in constant revaluation. The result is that multiple images fight for dominance of the overall composition, as they reveal and hide one another. This is where Miles finds the anxiety, on the internal dispute between elements. This disruption caused by the weaving also relates to the grid ordering system, which is challenged. Viewers can either enter the narrative or refuse to do so, as they look uncomfortably to a challenging composition.

As in an epic, Le's woven images are not chronological or obedient to the units of drama—time, place and action.[138] Australian film theorist Laleen Jayamanne explains that in the epic mode time gains a certain kind of freedom impossible in drama because of drama's need to connect everything into one causal, central narrative line. The epic, on the other hand, has the power to create differential rhythms, multiple centers and does not need to converge in one main story. This disjunction destabilizes time discourses—because of the premodern manufacturing of weaving—and is *attuned with fluctuating meanings*.[139]

Lê's Third Avant-gardism consists of introducing a humble craft made by women, i.e. an outsider from the anthropological realm, into art and it equally appropriates loaded images freely. Photography appealed to him because of its contemporary twist, and because it felt more universal than (Western) oil painting. Yet, it is a limited medium, as photography can capture moments but, is unable to transmit the whole story. This is an aspect that is overcome by the weaving process. As through weaving, at least in part, narratives are completed. Lê's post-2002 work continues this quest, but due to his move to Vietnam in 1997, his post-2002 production also implies the Vietnamese side of the question. Further into the 2010s, his work started to address humanity's lack of collective memory (see chapter 5).

4.3 Artists under Dictatorships

4.3.1 I Wayan Bendi: Contemporary Batuan Style from Bali[140]

Balinese art has continuously been considered a separate field of knowledge within Indonesian art history, especially since the inception of modernism in the early twentieth-century. Indonesian curator Asmudjo Jono Irianto recognizes the situation: "Indonesian modernism and Balinese modernism are commonly seen as two distinct and separate events."[141] Australian

138 See Laleen Jayamanne, *The Epic Cinema of Kumar Shahani* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), 10.

139 Jayamanne, 19.

140 I would like to thank I Wayan Bendi and Bagus Darma Putra for their time and availability.

141 Asmudjo Jono Irianto, "Tradition and the Socio-Political Context in Contemporary

cultural historian Adrian Vickers addresses two reasons for this circumstance: first, between the 1950s and the 1970s Balinese art became closely subordinated to tourism, and second, due to the presence of tradition, it remains difficult to distinguish traditional and modern Balinese art.[142] Indonesian art historian Hilda Soemantri explains that Balinese art evolved differently from modern art in Java, as a result of the strong traditional background and the unique artistic capabilities of Balinese people, and this instigated separate analyses. She adds, "Conversely, Balinese art did not affect that of Java or the rest of Indonesia as a whole."[143] While Soemantri's discourse recalls other discourses of modernism that exclude 'non-Western' practices from the avant-garde, it allows me to analyze a Balinese avant-garde event separately.

There are other aspects disallow an easy examination of Balinese art. For one thing, "What is often presented as art of Bali... is art depicting Bali by visitors and expatriates."[144] As well as the fact that most narratives of Balinese art has been written by Western scholars. Miguel Covarrubias, Margaret Mead, and Claire Holt were the first; John Darling, Adrian Vickers, Jean Cocteau are very important contemporary names. While this does not constitute a problem *per se*, it demonstrates that the situation persists: foreigners work on Balinese art, while Indonesian specialists remain focused on Java. The consequence has been that Balinese art in general—and the Batuan style in particular—remains separated from the broader scope of Indonesian art. While this cannot be addressed here to the fullest extent, I argue that the contact between the two streams, albeit intermittent, remains overlooked. I Nyoman Ngendon (1903-1946), one of the founders of the Batuan style, and a highly skilled artist (also in Western representation techniques) who was curious and open to foreign influence.[145] As the main teacher of the 1930s generation, he enjoyed close relations with foreigners, namely German artist Walter Spies (1895-1942) and Dutch artist Rudolf Bonnet (1895-1978). Ngendon explained to his peers how foreigners painted, and what they would buy.[146] His role was so important that after I Nyoman Patera's death in 1935, he became Bonnet's representative in the Pita Maha association in 1936. During the Japanese occupation (1942-1945), Ngendon moved to Yogyakarta, Java, where he had intense contact with

Yogyakartan Art of the 1990s," in *Outlet: Yogyakarta within the Contemporary Indonesian Art Scene*, ed. Melissa Larner (Yogyakarta: Cemeti Art Foundation, 2001), 66.

142 Adrian Vickers, "Balinese Art versus Global Art," *Jurnal Kajian Bali* 1, no. 2 (October 2011): 34–36.

143 Hilda Soemantri, ed., Visual Art, *Indonesian Heritage* 7 (Singapore: Archipelago Press, 1998), 7.

144 Vickers, "Balinese Art versus Global Art," 22.

145 Klaus D. Höhn, *Reflections of Faith. The Art of Bali: The History of Painting in Batuan 1834-1994*. (Wijk en Aalburg: Pictures Publishers, 1997), 45.

146 Bruce Granquist, I*nventing Art: The Paintings of Batuan Bali* (Denpasar: Satumata Press, 2012), 47.

Javanese painters Affandi and Sudjojono (both would later live on Bali and represent it through their 'Indonesian' eyes).[147] He equally met Sukarno, who would become Indonesia's first President. After the Japanese capitulation in 1945, the struggle for independence from the Dutch (re)gained momentum. Ngendon returned to Batuan with strong feelings of nationalism. He helped the rebels set up literacy schools, became leader of a group of independence fighters, and in 1948 was brutally executed in public.[148] In my opinion, Batuan style's recurrent manifestations of themes such as the Independence War since the 1950s originate from Ngendon's nationalistic legacy.

Since that time, the contact between Indonesian artists from different islands has grown; the number of Balinese studying in the academies of Yogyakarta and Bandung has increased alongside art structures' development.[149] However, the divergence remains. Supangkat's pioneering book, *Indonesian Modern Art and Beyond* (1997), by Supangkat, contains an analysis of nationalism within modernism. Yet, it does not give references to modern art styles emerging in Bali, despite his support of I Wayan Bendi's practice and his interest in Balinese modern and contemporary artistic expressions. Consequently, when looking at the catalogue of the 1993 exhibition in Amsterdam, *Indonesische Moderne Kunst*, artists from Bali figure alongside artists from Java, but the catalogue texts do not contextualize Balinese works, and the discourse is monopolized by Javanese events.[150] Thus, it can be said that Balinese art has been constantly asked to represent the country, but has failed to penetrate the broader narrative of Indonesian modern and contemporary art. I suggest that the major difference between the two streams is perhaps not the introduction of tradition, but rather the Balinese constant reemphasis on *regionalism within nationalism*.

In *Traditions/Tensions* in 1996, Poshyananda included Bendi's work, with Supangkat's acknowledgement, in the Indonesian representation; a bold move, not often repeated. Bendi, alike the other artists, was included in the exhibition because:

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147 *Bendi: Pelukis Kontemporer?* (Ubud: Arma Museum, upcoming); Höhn, *Reflections of Faith*, 51.

148 Hildred Geertz, *Images of Power: Balinese Paintings Made for Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1994), 18–19.

149 Because of their older inception, Javanese academies (especially Yogyakarta and Bandung), receive most Balinese students. This has resulted in the Balinese academy being regarded as of lesser importance. Yet, the current reputation of Javanese cities largely relates to a greater presence of alternative art spaces, where artists and curators develop a world-renowned contemporary art scene. Nevertheless, the last five years have witnessed Bali's resurgence as local avant-gardism (re)appears within a community tired of exploitation of natural resources and land for the sole profit of real estate developers.

150 Ken Vos, ed., *Indonesische Moderne Kunst: Indonesian Painting since 1945* (Amsterdam: Gate Foundation, 1993). The catalogue features renowned specialists, including Supangkat, Helena Spanjaard, Astri Wright and Kusnadi.

> Bendi's paintings question the transformation of Balinese culture into a culture industry as well as the division between fine art/high art and tourist art/low art. This dichotomy produces contradictory readings of material culture of Bali.[151]

This is a very important observation concerning the boundary between fine art and tourist art, and it is not exclusively bound to Bendi's work. American art historian on Africa, Ruth B. Phillips, observes that while markets are essential to tourism industry, the products sold usually integrate features belonging to buying cultures. This, she says, makes them intercultural objects which blur boundaries between cultures, that high art and museums strive to maintain.[152] This has been an important aspect of Batuan style since its inception. From this perspective, Bendi appears as an avant-garde artist who disrupts art practices that serve the tourist, and instead empowers the Batuan style through local Balinese constructs.

What is the Batuan Style of Painting? Is it an Invented Tradition?

Batuan tradition is kept alive.[153]
Richard Horstman

Writing in 2014, Richard Horstman's words appear to enunciate that the Batuan style of painting underwent a near-death. Developed before World War II, the Batuan style has been handed-down from generation to the next, and always in relative proximity with foreigners. Since its early days, the style had moments of intensity, dismal, and revival. There are three main periods of vitality since its inception: First, the 1930s (precisely 1932, the date of the style's emergence, marked by the first produced painting *Tropical Forest*, by I Nyoman Ngendon[154]) in which paintings were defined by a single narrative model, compositions were black and white, and a significant portion of the image was devoted to black space. Second, the 1950s, when new colors were introduced, and the style underwent a multi-narrative period (sometimes bordering encyclopedic narratives), evolved to crowd the totality of the surface—initially with vegetation, and later with smaller stories (this is Bendi's trend)—and formal teaching began. Third, the contemporary, post-1990s, in which a variety of personal styles is visible and clashes with growing orthodoxy increase. Today, many options are viable, and some works do not immediately remind

151 Poshyananda, "Roaring Tigers," 39.

152 Ruth B. Phillips, "Why Not Tourist Art? Significant Silences in Native American Museum Representations," in *After Colonialism: Imperial Histories and Postcolonial Displacements*, ed. Gyan Prakash (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 111–14.

153 Richard Horstman, "Batuan Tradition Is Kept Alive," *Jakarta Globe*, August 23, 2013, http://jakartaglobe.beritasatu.com/features/batuan-tradition-is-kept-alive/.

154 See Höhn, *Reflections of Faith*, 6; 44.

past's practices.[155] For the present discussion, the third period is the most relevant, because it coincides with Bendi's practice. This is even though his training, and particular features of his practice (the presence of many colors, and multiple narratives) can be traced to the style's second phase, in the 1950s [Fig. 4.15]. The image shows the east coast of Bali being invaded by a large boat, and the islanders in revolt. Yet, in closer inspection, the work shows many other kinds of actions (which I will describe later).

Figure 4.15
I Wayan Bendi
Revolusi
1991 | Acrylic and ink on canvas | 146 x 266 cm
Source: *Traditions/Tensions* (exhibition catalogue, p. 124)

In the late-1990s, German author Klaus Höhn wrote the monograph *Reflections of Faith: The History of Painting in Batuan 1834-1994* (1997). He was motivated by what he considered an art at risk. Interestingly, it was during this difficult period that Batuan emerged as a contemporary art style through Bendi's participation in several overseas exhibitions. In a matter of a few years, Bendi participated in the 2*nd Asian Art Show*, at the Fukuoka Art Museum (1985), within the 'Art of Bali' section; in the travelling *Pameran Kebudayaan Indonesia di Amerika Serikat 1990-1991* (Festival of Indonesia in USA, 1990-1991); in the *Indonesische Moderne Kunst* (Indonesian Modern Art), at the Oude Kerk Amsterdam (1993); in *Traditions/Tensions: Contemporary Art in Asia*, at the Asia Society New York, and *The Power of Imagination: Balinese Paintings*

155 I am referring specifically to the final images in Höhn's book. See Höhn, 179–91.

from Batuan, in Warsaw, both in 1996. However, his inclusion in both modern and contemporary art exhibitions, as well as national/regional exhibitions is symptomatic of the confusion 'post-traditional' art causes when exhibited according to Western art classifications.[156] It equally transpires how national divisions and associations were continued outside of Indonesia.

Vickers advocates that when the Batuan style emerged in the 1930s "Balinese painting underwent a radical transformation... and was genuinely modernist in that it involved experimentation and searching for new styles and modes of art."[157] Its origins coincide with the construction (or 'invention') of Bali as a paradise and as a living-museum.[158] This impetus of this in the 1930s was nevertheless lost after World War II (after 1946), mostly through the direct interference of Dutch artist Rudolf Bonnet. French writer and film and theatre maker Jean Cocteau and Indonesian art historian Sudarmadji call this circumstance 'The Bonnet Manner'. Höhn also contends that for the Batuan style, Bonnet is more problematic than Spies, as he attempted to set himself as teacher and intermediary, representing his own European version of art, and transmitting it to the Balinese.[159]

Figure 4.15 A (detail)
A helicopter flies over and we see a westerner avidly taking pictures of Balinese warriors adorned with the Indonesian flag and holding traditional daggers, the *keris*
I Wayan Bendi
Revolusi
Source: *Traditions/Tensions* (exhibition catalogue, p. 126)

Vickers notes Bonnet's lack of interest in modernism and his preference for the colonial mentality of Western artists that viewed Bali as idyllic—what

156 See *Bendi: Pelukis Kontemporer?*
157 Vickers, "Balinese Art versus Global Art," 35–36.
158 Vickers, *Bali: A Paradise Created*, 2nd ed. (Singapore: Tuttle Publishing, 2002), 18; Adrian Vickers, "When Did Legong Start? A Reply to Stephen Davies," *Brijdragen Tot de Taal-, Land- En Volkenkunde* 165, no. 1 (2009): 4; Vickers, "Balinese Art versus Global Art," 35–36.
159 Höhn, *Reflections of Faith*, 21.

Sudjojono, "derisively called 'Mooi Indië' or 'Beautiful Indies' art."[160] He remarks that despite the interest by Batuan artists to depict interaction between Balinese and Westerners, Bonnet actively discouraged the topic. So, Vickers says: "The Pita Maha story doesn't include Balinese who want to be modern."[161] For Hildred Geertz, the absence of Westerners in Batuan was "a strong taboo... held until the 1980s"[162] when Bendi became one of two artists who started depicting Westerners. Such interferences, according to Vickers and Holt, resulted in a loss of modern impetus since the 1950s, when painting was put at service to Sukarno's agenda.[163] In addition, during the 1950s the image of Bali as a paradise became fixed through its promotion as a tourist destination and as a presidential vacation site—an image that would serve Balinese tourism industry well.[164]

Figure 4.15 B (detail)
The Ramayana couple, Rama and Sita, appears surrounded by *kecak* male dancers who sit on a circle in the floor while tourists, left and right, take pictures of the scene. Meanwhile, women carry offerings to the temple.
I Wayan Bendi
Revolusi
Source: *Traditions/Tensions* (exhibition catalogue, p. 126)

160 Vickers, "Balinese Art versus Global Art," 37.
161 Vickers, 42.
162 Geertz, *Images of Power*, 17.
163 Claire Holt, *Art in Indonesia: Continuities and Change* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967), 180.
164 Vickers, *Bali: A Paradise Created*, 226–32.

Most authors—e.g. Höhn, Vickers and Granquist—agree that Westerner's interference on the Batuan's emergence is overemphasized. Only Geertz goes further by affirming it as a new art which "did not draw directly on older Balinese painting styles... Batuan paintings were novel in manner even when they depicted old folktales and myths."[165] In addition, even if its rules are traceable, a canon for Batuan paintings has not been defined. Granquist explains this impossibility; to him Batuan paintings are "Non-ritualistic [and] based on a non-dogmatic set of guidelines."[166] This is one of the styles' legacies, since its inception: the possibility of individual agency. It is within this context that Bendi surged as paradigmatic.

Inner and *Outer* Aspects of the Style

The Batuan style is an extremely singular style of painting. It results from a combination of *inner* aspects which render it intrinsically Balinese (geographical and ideological roots; local fluxes that contributed to its invention and maintenance; morphology; ornamentation; and spatiality) and *outer* aspects which contain much of its global history (relation of Balinese artists with foreigners resulting in the debut of secular art in Bali; its reliance on foreign purchasers.[167] In regards to the inner features of the style, Batuan paintings did not appear in a vacuum: the village is renowned as a cradle for the arts, a locus of famous *dalangs* and Brahmana priests.[168] *Kamasan/Wayang* style directly relates to the East Javanese style which decorated the surface of the walls of the temples (in Java) since the 14th century. These paintings served ritual purposes and are used inside the temple's interior. Due to their inherent functionality, and fragile materiality (made in cotton cloth), they are constantly remade. Under Dutch patronage, since the late 1920s, several campaigns took place all over Bali; Kamasan artists were commissioned to work in various Balinese village temples, spreading the style. Batuan was one of such locations.

Batuan springs from the *Kamasan/Wayang* style of painting but it breaks with some of thise conventions. For one thing, *Wayang* was traditionally practiced by the Brahmana priestly caste (those with names prefixed with *Ida Bagus*), the Batuan style was, since its inception open to non-priestly castes. *Wayang* depicted sacred stories and Batuan introduced everyday life (Geertz argues contact with Western-style pictures on paper triggered their curiosity). Finally, *Wayang* is recognizable by its white backgrounds, Batuan is recognizable by its black backgrounds [Fig. 4.16 and 4.17].

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165 Geertz, *Images of Power,* 1.

166 Granquist, *Inventing Art*, 96.

167 Granquist, 38.

168 Batuan is famous for its dance arts: gambuh ensembles (classic dance opera), wayang topeng actors (mask dance), and legong dancers (dance of the divine nymphs). See Höhn, *Reflections of Faith*, 27.

Figure 4.16
I Wayan Suparta
Goddess Saraswati
2016 | Acrylic, ink and natural stone color on cotton | 77,5 x 99 cm | Location unknown
Source: https://www.novica.com/itemdetail/?pid=218281

Figure 4.17
Ida Bagus Togog
Ranghda in Dance Pose
1936 | Ink on paper | 40 x 26,5 cm
Volkenkunde Museum, Leiden
Source: http://www.rmv.nl/collections

Regarding composition, Batuan's most identifiable characteristic is its density. Scholars[169] agree that compositions are crowded, but they have different readings for the reasons. Looking at the Mead-Bateson collection, Geertz describes Batuan paintings as intricate, often referencing Balinese anxieties. She proposes these pictures must be read as personal documents which mirror Balinese beliefs of the mystical powers of sakti (mystical power). Formally, there are variations: the blank/black space of the 1930s, a reminiscence of the Wayang style, disappeared in the 1950s (though today all options are possible). Writing in the 1960s, Holt formulated a hypothesis over the crowdedness I find applicable to Bendi's practice: "perhaps the Balinese artists who live inland, where no grand vistas or far horizons open to the eye, are more prone to crowd their paintings than those that live by the sea."[170] In her understanding, within a Batuan painting, no single element is allowed to dominate the visual field. This obliges the spectator to let his eye wander while observing a piece. There is no station-point, no position of the

169 I.e. Geertz, Holt and Granquist
170 Holt, *Art in Indonesia*, 187.

imaginary viewer, and this aspect disallows Batuan artists to use perspective. In fact, whenever artists apply these notions, they do it in a rather cavalier way. Here resides a Balinese way of painting that constitutes *a journey, a process, rather than a method*.[171] Besides horror vacui, love for detail is detectable [Fig. 4.15 B]. All elements are outlined; each shape is enclosed and defined; each outlined form holds transitions from dark to light; and darkness and light are manipulated to make an optical effect. This is evidenced in the treatment of nature: mountains, trees, foliage and water are represented in a stylized way.

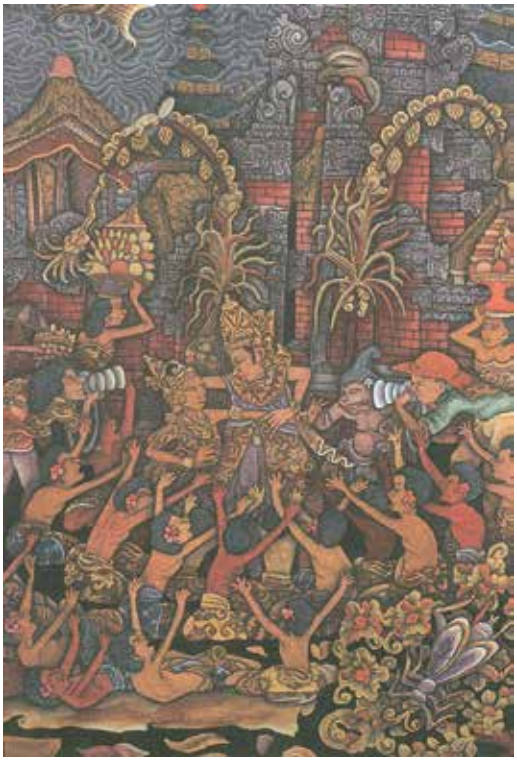

Figure 4.15 B (detail)
The Ramayana couple, Rama and Sita, appears surrounded by *kecak* male dancers who sit on a circle in the floor while tourists, left and right, take pictures of the scene. Meanwhile, women carry offerings to the temple.
I Wayan Bendi
Revolusi
Source: *Traditions/Tensions* (exhibition catalogue, p. 126)

Batuan's geographic location also impacted the style's development. Batuan is located within a cluster of villages in Southern Bali, on the main road between the capital Denpasar, and the village of Ubud [Fig. 4.18]. This main

171 Granquist, *Inventing Art*, 75–84.

road divides Batuan in two halves and since the 1930s, artists have opened shops on both sides of the street. The style's singularity derives from Batuan's location in relation to touristic circuits—neither cosmopolitan like Ubud or Denpasar, neither provincial like Kamasan.

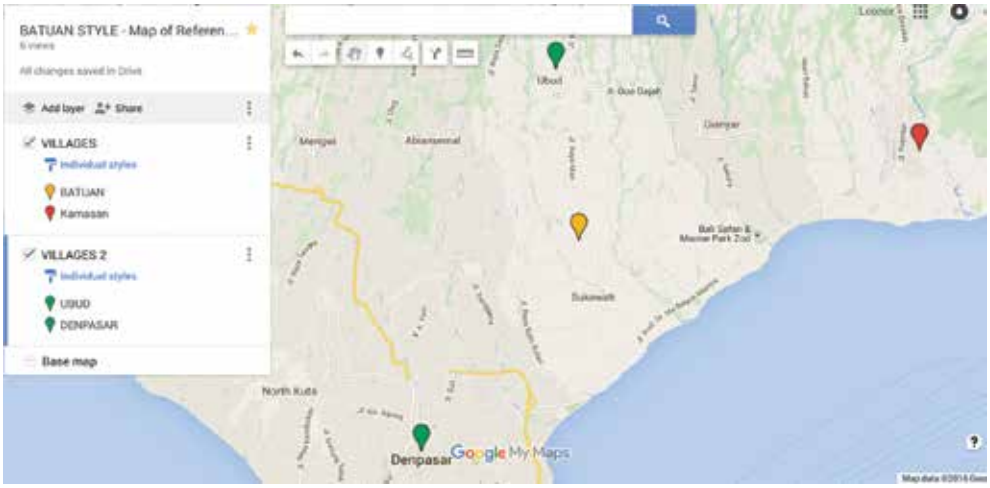

Figure 4.18
The location of Batuan (yellow) in relation to Denpasar and Ubud (green) and Kamasan (red)
Source: Google maps. Edited by Leonor Veiga, 2013

Because of the villages' relative isolation, Western attributes have been embraced to a lower extent, than that in Ubud. Batuan remains more 'sketchy', less detail-oriented, with overcrowded compositions along the Balinese aesthetic criterion of *ramè* (joyful crowdedness). As there is no direct source of light and gradations are done in layers, separated by heavy lines which divide the composition, contributing to the painting's organization. Composition is organized from the bottom upward, a strategy called *memedeg*, in which elements are arranged one over another or juxtaposed [see Figs. 4.19 and 4.20]. *Memedeg* finds its roots in *wayang kulit* performances, especially in the way puppets are layered atop each other during the shows. In decorative terms, the style can be considered traditional and overelaborate: every part of the painting is intensely ornate in shades and gradation tones. All overlaps, even within a certain object are shaded, in an attempt to create depth.

An aspect most authors do not address, but piqued my curiosity, is the overarching dominance of a single color on a canvas. Many compositions, including Bendi's, contain a predominant shade of green, ochre, or blue [Fig. 4.21]. This harmony contrasts with the multiplicity of colors incorporated in the Ubud style [Fig. 4.22].

Figure 4.19 A and *B*
I Wayan Bendi's initial work phases: the drawing is organized according to *memedeg*, from bottom up
Photograph by Leonor Veiga, 2010

Figure 4.20
I Wayan Bendi (left) and I Made Surya Dharma (right) close to a complete sketch, before the colouring phase.
Photograph by Leonor Veiga, 2010

Figure 4.21
I Wayan Bendi
Photograph by Leonor Veiga, 2010

Figure 4.22
I Ketut Soki
Rice Harvest | 1980 | Oil on canvas | 50 x 40 cm
Photograph by Leonor Veiga, 2010

In terms of the style's outer aspects, authors agree it emerged from the cohabitation with Westerners—expatriates, researchers and tourists—on the island. Granquist affirms that the style is first and foremost "made to sell," most notably to tourists.[172] Here, Geertz agrees, declaring the 1930s paintings precursors of today's tourist art.[173] During the 1930s, there were Westerners in Sanur, Ubud and Batuan.[174] They "helped promote the art to newly-arrived tourists, and provided insights into the techniques of the West."[175] Yet, "only the artists of Batuan experienced the direct influence of two other foreigners... [the] anthropologists, Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead."[176] The couple's presence for about two years was crucial for the style, as thanks to their commissions, production increased. Their ethnographic interest led them to date and take notes on many specimens—a record that, with few exceptions, had largely one

172 Granquist, *Inventing Art*, 40–41.
173 See Geertz, *Images of Power,* 1.
174 Spies and Bonnet lived in Ubud since 1927 and 1928 respectively; Theo Meier lived in Sanur since 1933; the British-American couple Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead stayed in Batuan between 1936 and 1938 and returned for a brief visit in 1939.
175 Vickers, *Balinese Painting and Sculpture from the Krzysztof Musial Collection* (Warsaw: Polish Modern Art Foundation, 2016), 9.
176 Granquist, *Inventing Art*, 52.

absentee: themselves. Introduced to Batuan artists by Spies, the couple collected samples reflecting the backgrounds of painters (priestly or non-priestly castes, including dancers and musicians). Interestingly, they treated 'ethnographic material' as art: "the anthropologists refused to buy any pictures that they knew were copies."[177] This forced Batuan artists to stop duplicating, try out new ideas and possibly contributed to the major shift in the secularization of content.

Batuan Art as Avant-garde: the Global and the Individual

In my opinion, the two most relevant aspects of Batuan which have maintained since its inception pertain to Bali's increasing global positioning in the world, as well as each individual artists' agency. These two contrasting forces, coupled with the traditional elements of *memedeg*, crowdedness (*ramè*) and love for detail, make Batuan often regarded as a traditional style. Although, it is more rightfully explained as a *transcultural art form* that crosses tradition and modern. These aspects are important to understand Bendi's contemporary uniqueness. Granquist declares: "surprisingly, this 'traditional art form' was actually a result of globalization. Its catalyst was provided by people outside Bali."[178]

Höhn recognizes Batuan is simultaneously modern and *traditional*, in the sense that to this day the Balinese "have not made a break with tradition necessary,"[179] continuing the master-apprentice education methodology and working in groups (*sanggars*). Two learning stages are necessary: First, *ciplak*, when the apprentice learns technical skills (how to handle ink, pen and brush), and Second, the *meniru* phase, in which the apprentice replicates his masters' works. Traditionally, after mastering these two phases, the artist can innovate. In this regard, Bendi belongs to one of Batuan's most radical lineages.[180]

From its inception, the Batuan style should have been regarded as a *modern style with traditional ornamentation*. Its development so attests; the first Batuan black and white creations have little in common with Bendi's art in size, color, and theme. What remains from the past is stylistic, especially in terms of gradation. In my opinion, the Balinese artists' resilience in transforming the style within the traditional language of the culture has been confounded with excessive conservatism and traditionalism. As a result, the modernity and avant-gardism of Batuan remains overlooked. Like the avant-garde(s) proposed, Batuan paintings broke with elitism in art making and reception, changing these relations both locally and globally. All these ingredients make the Batuan an exemplary 'Third Avant-garde' style and I Wayan Bendi is one of its major contributors.

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177 Geertz, *Images of Power*, 17.
178 Granquist, *Inventing Art*, 30.
179 Höhn, *Reflections of Faith*, 19.
180 Granquist, *Inventing Art*, 105.

I Wayan Bendi (b. 1950, Batuan): Batuan with Political Commentary

I Wayan Bendi comes from a family of Batuan painters. His brothers and his son I Wayan Eka Budi (b. 1968) are contemporary artists. Bendi's family has been, since the style's beginning, one of the most radical lineages of the Batuan School due to their active encouragement for individual expression. Bendi started to paint in the Batuan style in 1963. He went through the usual apprentice period, having assisted his father, I Wayan Taweng (1926-1996), and uncle, I Ketut Tomblos (b. 1917). Still, Bendi is largely self-taught.[181] His *parcours* is classical: "His first works were mono-subject, black and white pieces not unlike those made by his father... and uncle, the famous I Ketut Tomblos, [one of the founders of the style] in the Pita Maha heyday."[182] Taweng, Bendi's father, strongly insisted that his students discover their own vision. As a student of Ngendon, Taweng kept from his master a decidedly independent inclination. And as a teacher expressed it by only teaching his students basic techniques, and how to work with materials. Then students were encouraged to discover for themselves how to proceed. In addition, he actively forbade his students to imitate his forms.[183] Bendi's short second learning phase, *meniru*, originates in Taweng's teaching style and may elucidate why Batuan artists accuse him of being 'too sketchy'. Nevertheless, when compared to his son's practice, Bendi's work appears as very detailed, due to his miniaturist style.

Bendi can be considered an ambassador of the style. He emerging locally in the 1980s, and in the early 1990s, he catapulted to international prominence. This renders him singular, as he is one of the few Balinese artists practicing a 'traditional' style *in his own terms* that penetrated international contemporary art circuits. Yet, for the same reason—Batuan lineage—he remains outside of Indonesian contemporary art circuits, which mostly incorporate Balinese artists residing in Java. Bendi's self-owned museums serve as his platform to channel his art to the world.[184] In Bendi's hands, Batuan paintings continue their historical and global interactions.

Bendi started painting everyday life scenes throughout the 1970s. Eventually, he mixed Balinese life—cockfights, markets, offerings, and dances—with that of tourists, providing a comment on a reality in transition. Initially, in line with Batuan's tradition, his style was naïvist, with no gradations and paying little attention to realism. He would later develop it into unconventional and impossible representations of reality, demonstrating that Batuan remains obstinate against a strict rational and realist approach, a reason why Granquist affirms the impossibility of a canon. While some artists turned to

181 Poshyananda, "Roaring Tigers," 38.
182 *Bendi: Pelukis Kontemporer?*
183 Granquist, *Inventing Art*, 115.
184 I visited the original museum in 2010 and 2011, and the current museum in 2014.

perspective—introduced by Spies and Bonnet—in order to facilitate their work, Bendi positioned objects in space according to his needs: "masks would be painted anywhere he needed suitable, fish would be painted outside the water, a surf board would be made to look like a mask, lintels would be decorated with primitive masks, flags and writing would be anywhere he liked."[185]

The standard account of Pita Maha is that Balinese artists depict 'everyday life' but do not comment on 'history'. In contrast, Vickers observes that Bali has always had painters of history: in the 1940s and 1950s revolution against the Japanese and the Dutch were popular topics and under Suharto's repressive regime (especially in the 1980s and 1990s) Balinese painters who remained interested in politics learned to hide direct messages. After the Reformation era (post-1998), artists resumed to be more explicitly political. Vickers concludes that: "The Pita Maha image never quite succeeded in smothering the stream of history painting."[186] In the 1990s, Bendi has shifted to express social and political commentary, albeit in a hidden fashion. Any political content was concealed through allusion. Works referencing political history such as *Revolusi* (1991) [Fig. 4.15], in which he depicted the independence war between the Balinese and the Dutch, could more freely express his political views. This was a nationalist topic was accepted by Suharto's regime. Poshyananda observes the painting's agency:

> In his series called 'Independence War' or 'The Fight for Independence' (1991), I Wayan Bendi arouses a similar mix of indignation and nationalistic feeling through his adaptation of traditional Balinese painting. Simultaneously, Bendi's paintings raise critical issues regarding the 'selling' of culture through tourism in exotic Bali... Bendi depicts a panoramic view of Bali in calamity and chaos... [These paintings] serve to remind viewers... of [historical] incidents... [Meanwhile] Bendi includes the sightseers as an integral part of Balinese life...[187]

Many things are happening in this painting. The Dutch and Balinese engage in a dialogue while Balinese religious creatures fight in the sea [Fig 4.15 C], as well as an allusion to the puputan events of 1906 and 1908 [Fig. 4.15 D], in which Balinese sacrificed themselves to death.[188] We can propose that implicitly, through history, he is reminding the Balinese to fight for freedom again, adapting the story to the message he tried to convey.

185 *Bendi: Pelukis Kontemporer?*
186 Vickers, "Balinese Art versus Global Art," 42.
187 Poshyananda, "Roaring Tigers," 38–39.
188 Vickers, *Bali: A Paradise Created*, 60.

Figure 4.15 C (detail)
Two Naga (dragon-snakes) populate the sea, while unarmed locals and Dutch armed officials have an argument. The Dutch are identified by the standing flag.
I Wayan Bendi
Revolusi
Source: *Traditions/Tensions* (exhibition catalogue, p. 126)

Figure 4.15 D (detail)
A helicopter flies over and we see a westerner avidly taking pictures of Balinese warriors adorned with the Indonesian flag and holding traditional daggers, the *keris*
I Wayan Bendi
Revolusi
Source: *Traditions/Tensions* (exhibition catalogue, p. 126)

If, historically, Batuan paintings provided a lens to understand how the Balinese felt in a modernizing world, Bendi's recent works (after 2000) provide a window for self-reflection. More openly political after Suharto's fall, he frequently comments and references global events, including endemic corruption, famine and terrorism (see Chapter 5).

4.3.2 FX Harsono: the Mask as Voice of Resistance

As one of the Black December protesters and founding GRSB members, FX Harsono has voiced his concerns through art since the 1970s. He continues this practice today (see Chapter 5). During the 1990s, voice became the main theme of Harsono's work. He used a Javanese cultural icon to convey this: the Panji mask.[189]

This practice began already in 1994, with his first solo show in GalNas (National Gallery of Indonesia),titled *Suara* (voice). He displayed an installation work referencing the theme. Harsono employed voice not to express his condition, but rather to make known the silencing of Indonesian people as a transversal reality. Amanda Katherine Rath observes:

> Harsono uses art to criticize oppression of not only 'his own middle class and artistic/intellectual formations, but also that of other groups and classes which have been marginalized: workers, ethnic minorities and women. Harsono's concern and ethical position and site of commentary is 'oppression as a condition.'[190]

The installation *Voice of the Dam* (1994) [Fig. 4.23, pp. 197] was made after he went to Madura (East Java) for research. This work is comprised of local objects (Madurese apparel, chilly plant, mosque window, pots and decorative panels) that were 'voiced' with the support of microphones and three vases 'airing' interviews to local population. Made to verbalize the Sampang community's concerns (who were scheduled for relocation to make room for a dam), this work contradicted the official rhetoric referring the local need for water supply. In fact, protesting voices among the local community led to the execution of some of its members.[191] Harsono interviewed members of the population "and asked them what happened in the place in 1992 and 1993."[192] He made audible voices of contestation expressing relations to land, space and memory, in a journalistic fashion.

Harsono's work *The Voices are Controlled by the Powers* (1994) (which I will return to) also falls into the theme of voice by responding to another government-related matter—the closing down of TEMPO magazine by the New Order regime following the exposure of corruption scandals. At the time, Harsono notes, Indonesia had three government-sponsored newspapers,

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189 The Panji is not the only cultural icon Harsono utilized: in the 1990s he also used the *keris* (Javanese dagger), and chairs. Nevertheless, I find in Panji's deconstructions' a relevant exercise.

190 Amanda Katherine Rath, "The Conditions of Possibility and the Limits of Effectiveness: The Ethical Universal in the Works of FX Harsono," in *Re:Petition/Position* (Magelang: Langgeng Art Foundation, 2010), 4.

191 See Masters, "This Is History: FX Harsono," *Art Asia Pacific*, no. 85 (October 2013): 120—21.

192 Masters, 121; Rath, "The Conditions of Possibility," 10.

TEMPO, *Sinar Harapan* and *Detik,*[193] a promiscuity that conditioned media's informative role. His works emerged within a cultural framework that has "long valued understatement, allusion, covert and indirect expression of all kinds, and finely pointed paradoxes, the ability to allude to and not directly state one's message has become an accepted convention."[194] These principles (which became conventions) forced artists to display messages through metaphor. We can read that Harsono, by addressing 'high' Javanese culture's main features, expressed feelings of justice that the New Order had appropriated.[195] Within this rubric of voice, framed by Western art historians as 'political art',[196] Harsono deconstructs Javanese culture and the Panji mask is its protagonist [see Fig. 4.25]. Between 1994 until 1998, in at least four installations, Harsono used this mask—sometimes coupled with other icons—to unveil his disaccord with Javanese (high) culture dominance in Indonesia.

Figure 4.23 D (detail)
FX Harsono
Voice of the Dam
1993 | Installation with Madurese artifacts and clothes, chilli trees, water pots, microphones, and voice recordings | Dimensions variable
Source: http://archive.ivaa-online.org/artworks/detail/10731

The New Order regime of General Suharto framed art differently from his predecessor Sukarno, observes Spanjaard: "During the Orde Baru government, the development of art and craft was promoted to strengthen

193 Masters, "This Is History," 120.
194 See FX Harsono, Memory and Contemporaneity, interview by Leonor Veiga, Yogyakarta, January 10, 2010, 8, http://repositorio.ul.pt/bitstream/10451/2039/3/ULFBA_TES356_ANEXOS.pdf.
195 Virginia Matheson Hooker and Howard Dick, "Introduction," in *Culture and Society in New Order Indonesia*, ed. Virginia Matheson Hooker (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1993), 5.
196 See Matheson Hooker and Dick, 5.

Indonesian identity."[197] The politically left-oriented years of Sukarno (1950-1965) witnessed the stimulus of socially engaged art; "After 1965, socially engaged art was discredited."[198] Suharto's depolitisation policies endorsed non-figurativeness, gave ample room to abstract arts (notably in Bandung) and traditional arts, which were considered less problematic. Within this context, Javanese 'high art' became predominant:

> While the prescriptive attitude of New Order cultural policies has succeeded in creating a recognizable national culture, vitality and creativity can only be sustained by recognizing the richness of the plural traditions of Indonesia's ethnic groups. The traditions of Java, Bali, Sumatra, Sulawesi, and parts of Kalimantan are rich not only in artifacts and oral material but also in written documentation which is centuries old. The political dominance of the Javanese, however, has meant that Javanese culture has received more prominence than most others.[199]

Javanese culture is not alien to Harsono. Raised in Blitar, in a Chinese Peranakan enclave in northeast Java, he would come to live in Yogyakarta, the capital of Javanese culture during his studies. Both his grandmothers were of Javanese descent, a clear indication of mixed origins, and he would also eventually marry a Javanese woman.[200] In 1966, he was further 'Javanized' when he changed his name to FX Harsono.[201] In 1977, Harsono conceived *This Century's Sacrifice*, an installation work resembling a Javanese celebration, as part of the GRSB exhibitions. He laid a woven grass mat on the ground and disposed four earthenware vases containing offerings. Instead of the traditional rose petals and traditional cakes, these vases were filled with colorful plastic toys shaped as planes and weapons.[202] Harsono was directly addressing locals, who were familiar with these codes. His use of found objects denoted endemic violence, grounded in local Javanese constructs. His astute knowledge of the culture allowed him a way to address Suharto's repressive power. This is what Anderson defines as "symbolic speech,"[203] a gesture of interpretation of the

197 See Chapter 2, *Political Art*, in Chiu and Genocchio, Asian Art Now.

198 Helena Spanjaard, *Artists and Their Inspiration: A Guide through Indonesian Art History (1930-2015)* (Volendam: LM Publishers, 2016), 83.

199 Matheson Hooker and Dick, "Introduction," 4.

200 FX Harsono, Are you Peranakan?, unpublished interview by Leonor Veiga, Lisbon, November 8, 2016.

201 See Hendro Wiyanto, "FX Harsono and the Development of His Work (1972-2009)," in *Re:Petition/Position*, 131.

202 Wiyanto, 76.

203 Benedict Anderson, "Cartoons and Monuments: The Evolution of Political Communication under the New Order," in *Language and Power: Exploring Political Cultures in Indonesia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 157.

current political situation through public monuments, rituals and popular culture. Instead of using large constructs, Harsono opted for the 'Javanese culture hero', proving his understanding of its idiomatic value.

Panji, a Javanese Epic?

> *— I would like to know, why does the Panji mask look like this?*
> *— It has to do with Javanese character. They avoid confrontation, they reach a compromise. In* wayang*, they don't finish the war. It continues next time.*[204]
> *Leonor Veiga and Iwan Tirta*

Panji is a love story related to the initiation rites of two youngsters, Raden Panji and Candra Kirana, who undergo several trials before marrying. According to Dutch anthropologist Walter Rassers's analysis of its theme, it is "a myth covering the spiritual life of the whole tribe."[205] Its main characters, Panji (sun, right clan) and Kirana (moon, left clan), are twin brothers who were separated at early age.[206] Marriage impediments reflect a possible incestuous relation.

The Panji is extremely important for Javanese culture. It reveals fundamental aspects of the country's ancestral peoples and the art of *wayang*, which are reflected in Indonesian nationalism. It is on this aspect that Harsono builds. Panji stories originate in the "East Javanese period which began in the tenth century."[207] Its main character is the prince Erlangga.[208] Several authors, among which is Dutch anthropologist Josselin de Jong, propose that the East Javanese period was time of a cultural revolution, in which a rejuvenation of Javanese elements took place, and now assuming the new forms of Hindu culture.[209] To further this, Dutch philologist Hans Ras hypothesizes that the tale was written between the eleventh and twelfth centuries, when an intense cultural activity coinciding with the prominence of Wisnuism (the cult of god Vishnu, Wisnu in Javanese) in Java and the invention of many *kakawin* (narrative poems), took place. Yet, he reminds us: the Panji as it is known

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204 Iwan Tirta, Memory and Contemporaneity, interview by Leonor Veiga, January 3, 2010, 3.

205 Walter H. Rassers, *Panji, the Culture Hero: A Structural Study of Religion in Java* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1959), 4–5.

206 Johannes Jacobus (Hans) Ras, "The Panji Romance and W.H. Rassers Analysis of Its Theme," *Brijdragen Tot de Taal-, Land- En Volkenkunde* 129, no. 4 (1973): 416; 434.

207 P. E. de Josselin de Jong, "The Malay Archipelago as a Field of Ethnological Study," in *Structural Anthropology in the Netherlands: A Reader*, ed. P. E. de Josselin de Jong, 2nd ed., Translation Series 17 (Leiden: Foris Publications, 1983), 175.

208 The king Erlangga is an incarnation of Wisnu—from Vishnu, in Javanese Wisnu—who divided his kingdom between his two sons, Kediri and Jenggala, reason why Kirana represents Kediri and Panji represents Jenggala. See Ras, "The Panji Romance," 437; Francine Brinkgreve and Itie van Hout, "Java: Gifts, Scholarship and Colonial Rule," in *Indonesia: The Discovery of the Past,* ed. Endang Sri Hardiati and Pieter ter Keurs (Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum Volkenkunde / National Museum of Ethnology, 2005), 109.

209 Jong, "The Malay Archipelago," 177.

today also results from Islam's influence since the early sixteenth century.[210] Notably, the Panji poem decorates the walls of the temples surrounding "Mount Penanggungan, just north of Mount Arjuna, in East Java."[211] From here, and considering the emergence of new styles, Holt concluded that the story spread throughout Southeast Asia, to other regions of Indonesia, and to Malaysia, Thailand and Cambodia.[212] Holt adds that Raden Panji, prince of the Janggala kingdom, could be considered the "Javanese Arjuna, the ideal noble prince, unconquerable in battle and irresistible in love."[213] While this is untrue, Suharto's New Order embraced this reading—of Panji as a virtuous, polite and moral man—and used it as an Indonesian symbol.

The tale revolves around the life of Panji, his disappeared bride (Princess Kirana), and his efforts to find her. An impostor, Durga, comes to replace Kirana, and soon Panji resumes wedding preparations. Meanwhile, Kirana who is alone is the forest, is advised by gods to go to the palace disguised as a man to stop the marriage. Before leaving and vanishing in the forest again, she writes him a note revealing the situation. Panji then rushes to the forest to find his real princess. The climax of the story is reached when Kirana—now ruler of Bali, a monarch renowned for his courage, as well as for his feminine embroidery skills—and Arjuna encounter each other in the battlefield as two men. After injuring Panji, she reveals her identity and the couple reunites.[214]

Figure 4.24
Mask of Raden Panji
After 1940 | Unknown materials, possibly wood and natural dyes | 19 x 14,5 cm
Object number TM-1772-645, Collection National Museum of World Cultures, Leiden
Source: http://collectie.wereldculturen.nl/default.aspx?lang=en

210 Ras, "The Panji Romance," 442–43.
211 Ras, 420.
212 Holt, *Art in Indonesia*, 274–75.
213 Holt.
214 Holt.

In Java, Panji stories most commonly serve as themes for *wayang topeng* (or *wayang gedog*[215]) plays—a kind of theatre performed by human characters covering their faces with a mask [Fig. 4.24]. Even in war scenes, Panji's smiling and serene mask stays present. "[P]ractically all Javanese masks have taut faces, tapering toward a delicate chin, sharply ridged and pointed noses, and relatively small mouths."[216] From all the *topeng* characters, Panji is the most known: it presents an overall peaceful expression, the narrow eyes look down, and the smile is composed. Because of the nobility of its character, the Panji has been considered the most *halus* (refined, pure) of all characters. Harsono used this mask most consistently, even if in some cases he equally introduced more *kasar* (worldly or coarse) characters, which are easily recognized by opposite attributes: round, wide open eyes (as in defiance), and with an upturned and protuberant nose.

To conclude, the Panji is a love story (of agricultural relevance) that unites two sides of tribal clans, which has spread in the wider Southeast Asian region. It is a rite transformed into a play which started by integrating Hindu repertoire's influences,[217] becoming a counter-current (a kind of avant-garde) alongside Indian repertoires, during a fecund cultural rejuvenation in East Java.

Harsono: the Panji Mask as Idiom

Between 1994 and 1998, Harsono used the Panji mask insistently. The idiomatic quality of this mask—a symbol easily recognizable by Javanese people, tourists and museumgoers (internationally)—is behind his choice. In his hands, the mask surprisingly acquired a tremendous capacity to address politically charged messages. While this body of work may not be fully comprehended, the agency of its political message is effectively conveyed, and has become a curse: Harsono's avant-garde gestures are frequently reduced to political art practices.[218] Comprised by one-hundred masks, *The Voices Are Controlled by the Powers* (1994) [Fig. 4.25] is a floor installation in which he used various characters (including prince Panji) as ready-made materials to represent the silencing of TEMPO journalists and, in effect, readers. In an interview, he recalled:

> The idea came about 2 or 3 weeks before my solo exhibition, in 1994... I was making work about the New Order. The political concept of New Order is very Javanese. Suharto was from Java and he always used

215 The functional meaning of both words, *topeng* and *gedog*, is mask. Nevertheless, the origin of the term *gedog* is unknown.

216 Holt, *Art in Indonesia*, 154.

217 Jong, "The Malay Archipelago," 176.

218 Chiu and Genocchio, *Asian Art Now*, 78.

> Javanese philosophy to repress people. So, that is us, the people, but we can't control our mouth. All their voices were controlled by the power. The people could see their mouth talking, but they could not express what they were thinking. That is why I used Javanese masks.[219]

Possibly his most famous work, *The Voices Are Controlled by the Powers* was showcased in *Suara*, at GalNas, Jakarta, in 1994, in Galeri Cemeti, Yogyakarta, and in 1996 both at the seminal *Traditions/Tensions* in New York. The work consists of one hundred masks which he bisected under the nose displayed atop a black squared cloth. The installation is distributed in two areas: the eyes and foreheads around the edges of the cloth, and the mouths and chins at its centre. Thus, it appears as if perhaps the eyes are looking at the mouths in a controlling fashion, or that they are looking toward each other, in a manner that suggests surveillance. This work, which was made to protest the banning of *TEMPO* magazine in 1994, was again exhibited in Harsono's 2011 solo show *FX Harsono: Testimonies*, at the Singapore Art Museum (SAM). For this occasion, the work was remade.[220]

Figure 4.25
FX Harsono
The Voices Are Controlled by the Powers
2011 (remake of the 1994 original) | Installation with one hundred masks and black clothe | 350 x 350 x 30 cm
Image courtesy of the artist

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219 Harsono, Memory and Contemporaneity, 8.

220 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WpFeWp-XNE8, accessed May 2016. Because the 1994 specimens deteriorated (tropical weather does not favor survival of perishable materials), Harsono went to a shop in Bantul area, in Yogyakarta, and asked the same mask maker to sell him one hundred new masks.

Figure 4.26
FX Harsono
The Voices Are Controlled by the Powers
Source: *Re:Petition/Re:Position*, p. 209

Mosquera values a certain "sobriety of [art's] analytical discourse"[221] in practices such as those I term Third Avant-garde. In fact, sobriety is one of Harsono's hallmarks. In this work, sobriety is achieved through a set of binaries: black/white, eyes/mouth, inside/outside, mask/cloth, all contained within the square's geometrical perfection. Rath posited an interesting hypothesis:

> [T]he structure of this piece seems very much like a Javanese cosmological map in which the center representing the heavens, the powers of kerajaan and the king, as well as the awesome void of nothingness into which we will all be absorbed. Now, I am not certain to what extent Harsono used this form for its cultural foundations. But as a possibly unconscious gesture, Harsono has chosen two objects from a cosmological and historical/mythologized temporality of the Javanese (Hindu order). Harsono states that he chose this square within a formal device to mirror a conference room hence; this formal devise obviously can be read from a number of different vantage points.[222]

I find Rath's interpretation compelling. It is very likely that Harsono unconsciously addressed Javanese cosmology: while he cannot be considered a Javanologist, his immersion in Java's cultural landscape is major. Yet, I

221 Gerardo Mosquera, "The Marco Polo Syndrome: Some Problems around Art and Eurocentrism," in *Theory in Contemporary Art since 1985*, ed. Zaya Kocur and Simon Leung (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 221.

222 Rath, "The Conditions of Possibility," 10.

interpret the square as a jail—an extremely guarded locale, common in highly policed environments. Overall, this is a disturbing piece, and it is appropriate to say that the work has not lost relevance: the dominance of Javanese culture in Indonesia, especially within the circles of the political elite, military and state officials persists. In addition, these masks are omnipresent in tourist shops, brochures, and tourist-oriented traditional villages.

In 1997, for his participation in Cemeti's exhibition *Slot in the Box*, Harsono performed *Destruction* [Fig. 4.27 A, B, C].[223] The gallery had invited Indonesian artists to respond to "new order's electoral fraud through such diverse forms as installation and performance art."[224] *Destruction* is both a very aesthetic and aggressive work; this affect is obtained by the intimacy of Harsono's face paint, his impeccably ironed and tailored suit, the presence of fire, and the minimalism of the installation of chairs and masks. The destructive character is visible in Harsono's evident unease while handing the chainsaw. After the performance, the wooden remains were collected, and the video recording was screened in a small television.[225]

Destruction took place in a famous semi-public field in Yogyakarta, the *Alun-alun Selatan*—the southern open space of the kraton (the local equivalent of the Greek agora), inside the Sultan's Palace. The Javanese palace contains two open square spaces—the northern and the southern—which have historically had different functions. To this day, this area of the ruler's residence stages several everyday life events: in 2010, some Jogja Biennal[226] works were exhibited here; in 2011, I attended there *wayang kulit* public performances showcased to celebrate the fifth centenary of Islam's arrival in Java. This location is highly promoted among tourists. They enjoy the local folklore that says that anyone who passes blindfolded between the two twin-trimmed centuries-old banyan trees (visible in Fig. 4.27 B and C background) wins luck. Regarding the local art scene, this square is located in the proximity of the *kraton* fortification southern exit. Cemeti Gallery lies precisely in this street, Jalan Panjaitan [Fig. 4.28].

223 The exhibition *Slot in the Box* took place between 6 April and 31 May 1997.

224 "Fx Harsono: Testimonies Part 01," April 20, 2010, http://www.designboom.com/art/fx-harsono-testimonies-part-01/.

225 *Performance Art: Destruction,* by FX Harsono, 1997, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QxMcKm74lRU.

226 The Biennial of Yogyakarta, but not exclusively, follows Dutch scripture, Jogjakarta, which is often shortened to 'Jogja'.

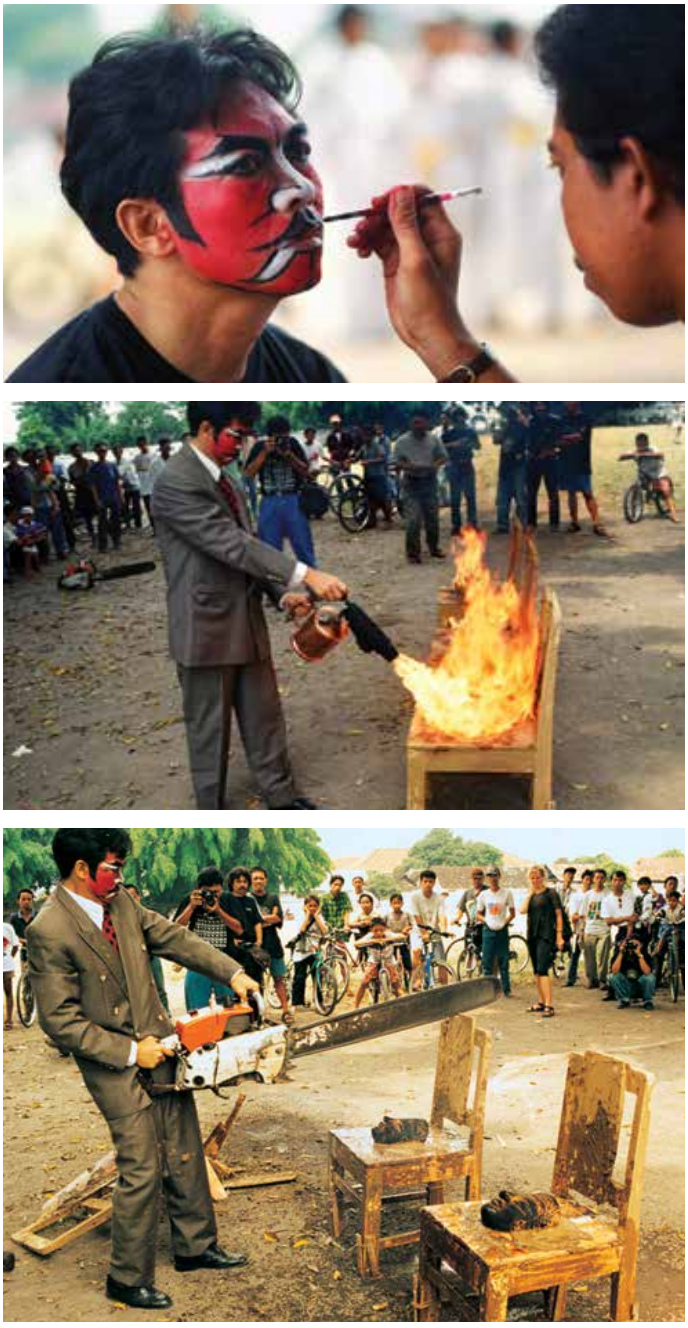

Figure 4.27
FX Harsono
Destruction
1997 | Performance and documentation | Video 6' 18"
Images courtesy of the artist

In the performance documentation, the totality of the work can be accessed: Harsono starts by having his face painted as Ravana by a local artist (Ravana is Ramayana's evil character who abducts Sita as an act of vengeance for having cut off the nose of his sister Shurpanakha). Then, Harsono dresses as a white-collar worker, with shirt, suit and tie. He then places three Panji masks on the top of three wooden chairs and sets fire to them. Finally, with a chainsaw too powerful for its task, Harsono destroys the burnt masks and chairs. Here, the masks represent powerful faces as the three parties Suharto allowed to contest the elections—"his own golkar party, the islamist united development party (PPP), and the democratic party of Indonesia (PDI)."[227] Chairs serve to denote attachment to power. Historically, chairs "often function as the symbol of power, as its familiarity is used in terms such as *kursi kekuasaan* (the chair of power) or *kursi jabatan* (the chair of prestige)."[228] For artists participating in Slot in the Box, it was intolerable that chairs had been distributed and popular vote was of no consequence. In the following year, Suharto's regime fell. On his use of chairs, Harsono remarks:

> Our ability to evoke chairs as the symbol of a ruler is not merely an ability to interpret a symbol, but the ability of our imagination to find symbols to articulate an accurate social critique.[229]

In retrospect, doing this performance was an act of courage. Taking place during *minggu tenang* (silent week)—a New Order convention prohibiting any meeting of more than five people at the time, one week prior to elections[230]—Harsono feared consequences:

> When I made that performance, I was very worried about the police... If the policemen had seen it—also there were a lot of passers-by that came and stayed—I would have had a problem... During minggu tennang, people could not make activities or gather in groups... and in this work I was criticizing the government.[231]

The combination of the public's presence, location of choice, and tradition's destruction were sufficient ingredients for an arrest.

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227 "Fx Harsono: Testimonies Part 01."

228 Enin Supriyanto, *The Temple: Pacifism Monument of S. Teddy D.* (Bantul: Art Merdeka Publisher, 2009), 13.

229 Wiyanto, "FX Harsono (1972-2009)," 110.

230 Seng Yu Jin, "Exposing the Unseen: Strategies of Conceptualism in Indonesian Art," in *Re:Petition/Position* (Magelang: Langgeng Art Foundation, 2010), 213.

231 Harsono, Memory and Contemporaneity, 9.

Figure 4.28
Section of Yogykarta's map
The main square, *Alun-Alun Utara* is marked blue; *Alun-alun Selatan*, where Harsono held his performance, and Galeri Cemeti are marked red.
Source: Google Maps; Edition: Leonor Veiga

In the following year, Panji gained yet another meaning: it became the signifier to express those who went missing. In the work *Disappeared* (1998) [Fig. 4.29], Rath explains, the Panji icon "serves a universal function" of claiming the memory of regime victims.[232] Harsono's intention to fill historical gaps will returns his post-2000 practice (see Chapter 5). This installation is equally comprised by two halves: the wall, which includes six screen prints in two rows of three, and the floor, where forty-six Panji specimens lay on the ground. Once again, Harsono plays with polarities: wall/floor, paper/wood, white/black, order/disorder. The connecting element is his intervention on the masks that appear blindfolded (need for anonymity). The blindfolding procedure is common in featuring public photographs to protect victims of abuse as well as defenseless people, such as children. The masks substitute lost faces, a clear reference to its idiomatic potential. The newspaper attached to the masks relates to the need to report their disappearance.

232 Rath, "The Conditions of Possibility," 11.

Figure 4.29
FX Harsono
Disappeared
1998 | Installation with photocopy paper, forty-six burned masks and newspaper | Dim. variable
Image courtesy of the artist

Here, Harsono is addressing the New Order's responsibility to counter terror, while disguising its own terrorist gestures. Similarly, it reveals normalization, as the regime considered all Indonesians instruments of its own doctrine. The vanished people, through Panji, represent virtue, grace and kindness, just like in the story. But the surprising effect is that they are victims of such conceptions. Harsono's experimental moves with Panji were practically abandoned after *Disappeared*. Yet, between 2001 and 2003 the symbol returned in the form of smaller entries (there is no longer the physicality of his installations) especially in photo etchings, silk-screen prints and photography artworks.

Wear Mask (2001) [Fig. 4.30, pp. 209] was produced in the aftermath of violence against ethnic Chinese between 1996 and 1998. The mask serves as a protective disguise, hiding the artist's identity. In the image, Harsono rides a bicycle and the mask serves as his shield against endemic violence.[233]

233 Wiyanto, "'Displaced': FX Harsono," in *Displaced: FX Harsono* (Jakarta: Galeri Nasional Indonesia, 2003), 43.

Figure 4.30
FX Harsono
Wear Mask
2001 | Photo-etching on paper | 62 x 57 cm
Source: *Re:Petition/Re:Position*, p. 11

Harsono's experiments with the Panji reduce official significations—virtue, grace and humility—to rubble. From here on, Panji serves to voice censored journalists, disappeared people and political elite. It becomes an icon to express silencing, murder and power. These are strong, yet simple notations. They demonstrate the idea that by looking at the same symbol repeatedly, the visual artist becomes the maker of new significations. The Panji, from having its meaning regulated, becomes a *floating signifier.* Harsono's use of familiar materials expresses his will to relate (see Chapter 1). Interestingly, the works originating from the period 1993/8—2001/3, result in very aestheticized installations, where the sobriety of conceptual art merges with longstanding tribal traditions. Ultimately, Harsono comments nationalistic representations which derive from a state-sponsored "official culture [that] draws heavily from elements of 'high' Javanese culture, or has appropriated Javanese traditions and invested them with new meanings."[234] The use of the Panji story is a case of appropriation that "affirm[s] the dominant, state-defined image of Javanese culture," leading Harsono to actively "challenge and subvert it."[235] This is why he coupled 'voice' as a theme with notions of identity and citizenship. It is these aspects which define his minority status as an ethnic Chinese.

234 Matheson Hooker and Dick, "Introduction," 7.
235 Matheson Hooker and Dick, 10.

4.3.3 Arahmaiani: Dismantling Patriarchalism

Something I consider important in Javanese culture
is the critical thinking.
Most of the traditional culture has elements to support this.[236]
Arahmaini

Indonesian artist Arahmaiani (b. 1961, Bandung) has an extensive body of work in which she defies the overpowering patriarchalism that affects Indonesian society. In the 1980s and 1990s, she established herself as a pioneer in the field of performance art in Southeast Asia. Beginning during the New Order, her work has used *fragments* of tradition to express her criticism toward a repressive culture:

> Javanese believe in harmony, non-confrontation, discretion, especially if you are a woman. If you look at Javanese culture, it has developed throughout time with critical elements present, but always suppressed by the ruling powers. This is important even for today. I have been promoting and reminding other people that this critical culture has always been present in Java. This is what I do.[237]

The New Order regime (1965-1998) had its ideas of women's role in society. According to the Australian scholars Virginia Matheson Hooker and Howard Dick, the New Order emphasized women's dual role: "the government seeks to define women's private as well as public roles by stressing that women are primarily wives and mothers, but they should also serve the nation as skilled or semi-skilled professionals."[238] Indonesian women, most which live within a Muslim society, have always been empowered through work. An important case is that of women who historically made batik to generate additional income for their families' livelihood. Muslim Indonesian women have since the mid-1960s founded women's mosques and women's associations to kick-start independence in religious affairs and emancipation in social and educational fields, recognizes Dutch anthropologist Josselin De Jong.[239] During the New Order, and especially in the 1990s, Indonesian women occupied leadership positions, most notably in the cultural field (as museum directors, for instance). But contemporary artists constitute a case of needed emancipation, as women artists remained just a few. Indonesian art historian M. Dwi Marianto recalls:

> Arahmaiani's experience of being under military house arrest in 1983 while studying at the Bandung

236 Arahmaiani, Memory and Contemporaneity, interview by Leonor Veiga, Yogyakarta, January 24, 2010, 71.
237 Arahmaiani, 71.
238 Matheson Hooker and Dick, "Introduction," 11.
239 See Jong, "The Malay Archipelago," 180.

> Institute of Technology helped shape her views. Arahmaiani was arrested while creating an installation work in the street with three other friends because the artwork was considered subversive.[240]

Indonesian art critic Carla Bianpoen says that Arahamaiani's defiance toward "any form of repression or hegemonic power structures probably goes back to the childhood."[241] Thanks to Arahmaiani and the curators that convey her messages (she famously was "under death threat by the radical Muslims" on one occasion,[242] in 1993), the art of Indonesian women has crossed borders since the early 1990s. She left a mark on Southeast Asian art that overrides solely the region, having been included in historic exhibitions, such as the seminal *Traditions/Tensions* (1996) in the Asia Society of New York, the travelling *Cities on the Move* (1999) curated by Hans Ulrich Olbrist and Hou Hanru, *Global Feminisms* (2007), in the Brooklyn Museum of New York, and *In and Out of Context* (2016), also in the Asia Society of New York.

Her driving force has been to rescue the criticality of Javanese culture,. She regards the culture as unified but divided in "two versions—the supported and the suppressed."[243] Her reading meets avant-garde premises which act on the here and now towards building a better future. She always departs from archival research; because of her interest in history, she tries to trace the origins of antagonisms. Reluctant to be termed a feminist, she confirms her works are largely based on her own experiences. Therefore "she has approached art as a form of political activism, and shaken up orthodoxies of faith, gender and class in a country that has experienced increasingly political repression and bloody religious sectarianism," says American art critic Holland Cotter.[244] She makes accusatory works towards many societies, not exclusively her own. And she addresses global conflicts with ease. Much of her work causes disturbance, both within and outside Indonesia, proving that her work affects local and global concepts of women, and particularly Muslim women.

During her early career days in the 1990s, Arahmaiani frequently travelled overseas. Going out meant questioning the society she was brought up in, and she found sources of knowledge in Indonesian traditional culture. She then directed her focus toward the legacies of Buddhism, Hinduism,

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240 M. Dwi Marianto, "Arahmaiani (Iani)," in *The First Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art*, ed. Suzanne Grano (Brisbane: Queensland Art Gallery Publishing, 1993), 81.

241 Carla Bianpoen and Heather Waugh, *Indonesian Women Artists: The Curtain Opens* (Jakarta: Yayasan Seni Rupa, 2007), 46.

242 Arahmaiani, Memory and Contemporaneity, 73.

243 Arahmaiani, 72.

244 Holland Cotter, "Arahmaiani: 'Fertility of the Mind,'" *The New York Times*, January 31, 2014, sec. Art in Review, http://www.nytimes.com/events/art/galleries-chelsea/arahmaiani-fertility-of-the-mind-17188.html.

and animism in Indonesia, and how they affected her position as a Muslim woman in Indonesian society. While she addressed herself as Muslim, defining Indonesian Islam presented challenges, both in and outside of her country. This stems from, as Clifford Geertz notes, the fact that Indonesian Islam "has been, at least until recently, remarkably malleable, tentative, syncretistic, and, most significantly of all, multivoiced."[245] Poshyananda's writing for *Traditions/ Tensions* in 1996 confirms Geertz's affirmations: "Arahmaiani confronts the interpretation of morality within the context of the confusing and contradictory Islamic society she inhabits."[246] Her analyses were sustained by in-depth immersions: initially, she devoted time to study traditional dance—especially Balinese, Javanese and Sundanese[247]—coupled with peregrinations to locations she identifies important. She accessed features of Indonesian society by immersing herself in Balinese Hinduism and we see that these findings were revealed in the performance *Handle Without Care* of 1996.

Arahmaiani is not the only artist mentioning partisanship of the national, but she is significant for addressing gender inequality. While researching traditional Indonesian culture since the 1990s, she found that differentiation of the gender is largely a modern construct with no parallel to ancient times.[248] This is what informs her work.

Retrieving Gender Parity

Arahmaiani finds that classical Javanese culture (and its materialization in monuments for instance) philosophically coordinates a balance between feminine and masculine energies, but she recognizes this character has been lost. In a recent writing, she remembers the past when "These seemingly opposing poles [we]re considered to be an inseparable unity."[249] She affirms that balance between dichotomies is not achieved by choosing one of two options (the modern approach). Instead, she argues it is mandatory to embrace ancient philosophical teachings' holistic approach.

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245 Clifford Geertz, *Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 12.

246 Poshyananda, "Roaring Tigers," 43.

247 Arahmaiani is of Sunda ethnicity. The Sundanese are mainly concentrated in West Java, and their culture differs from Javanese, rooted in Central Java. In their mannerisms, the Sundanese are different from all other ethnicities from the archipelago, having their own cuisine, religion, rituals and arts.

248 Arahmaiani, Dismantling Patriarchalism, unpublished interview by Leonor Veiga, Leiden, June 7, 2016.

249 Arahmaiani, "Menolak Tragedi Kekerasan / Rejecting the Tragedy of Violence," trans. Suzan Piper, *KOMPAS*, March 12, 2016, http://print.kompas.com/baca/2016/03/12/Menolak-Tragedi-Kekerasan.

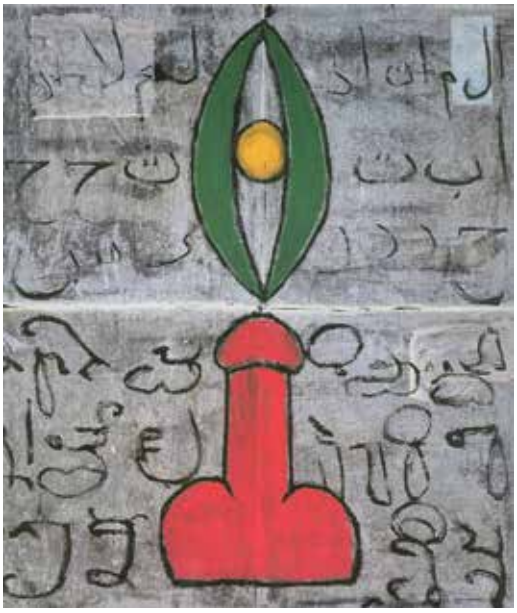

Figure 4.31
Arahmaiani
Lingga-Yoni
1993/4 | Acrylic on canvas | 182 x 140 cm
Image courtesy of the artist

Lingga-Yoni (1993) [Fig. 4.31] is one of Arahmaiani's most important works. Here, she addresses oppositions through a provocation: the symbol's traditional order was reversed to a *yoni-lingga*. She observes this work has been receiving growing international attention since her exhibition *Arahmaiani: Fertility of the Mind*, at Tyler Rollins in New York, in 2014.[250] Recently, she revisited it and applied contemporary insights. Lost for many years, the work is nowadays housed the recently opened Museum MACAM, in Jakarta.[251]

The usual representation of lingga-yoni as an object of worship "makes it a perfect parallel to the tree of life," says Hans Ras.[252] A symbol of sexual union, *lingga*'s tip rises from its most sacred part—the *yoni*—usually taken to represent women's genitals. Indonesian batik expert Hardjonagoro (1931-2008) equally addresses *lingga-yoni* as a symbol of unity, with the father sky visualized in the *lingga*, and the mother earth visualized in the *yoni*.[253] In 2010,

250 Arahmaiani, Lingga-yoni, unpublished interview by Leonor Veiga, Leiden, June 20, 2016.
251 Jewel Topsfield, "New Modern: Australia's Aaron Seeto Leads Indonesia's Embrace of Contemporary Art at Museum MACAN," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, July 14, 2017, sec. World, http://www.smh.com.au/world/new-modern-australias-aaron-seeto-leads-indonesias-embrace-of-contemporary-art-at-museum-macan-20170714-gxb7de.html.
252 Ras, "The Panji Romance," 450.
253 K.R.T. Hardjonagoro, "The Place of Batik in the History and Philosophy of Javanese

Arahmaiani explained why she devoted attention to this symbol:

> You know about the lingga-yoni, right? Lingga is a phallus. You see it in many temples. In Candi Sukuh, in Temanggung, you see the most naturalistic form of lingga-yoni. I have been going to temples, looking at this symbol that lies on the entrance floor. This is a brilliant conception: in Candi Sukuh we can see the changing of the position of the lingga-yoni when we go in and out. And commonly, lingga is always on the top and yoni is the supporter, always. The yoni is the woman, of course.[254]

She says the traditional significance of *lingga-yoni* has been manipulated through its representation: instead of symbolizing unity between genders, it has been taken literally to signify male dominance. Present in the seminal *Traditions/Tensions* exhibition, in 1996, this work was so controversial in Indonesia that Arahmaiani was sentenced to death by the radical Muslims (the future Islamic Defenders Front, or IDF[255]). There were various reasons for this punishment: firstly, the naturalism with which she represented male and female genitalia, secondly, the combination of Arabic inscriptions with symbols of copulation, and thirdly, for reversing the traditional order. The painting's blasphemous content for the Muslim group resided in the combination of "Malay-Arabic Palawa scripts with sexual organs."[256] She corresponded the union of male and female in color, through Javanese philosophical precepts: red meaning earth and fertility, thus positioned below, was associated with men; green, the synthesis of monca-pat compass colors—mankind—was attributed to women.[257] Not only were women placed on the top, they were also positioned as central. The color combination may denote other aspects, such as red's association with war and green's association with life. Arahmaiani is actively asking men to be supporters, and by extension, the neglected.

Included in the *2nd Asia Pacific Triennial* (APT2), in Brisbane, Australia, the performance *Handle Without Care* (1996) [Fig. 4.32] is another hallmark of Arahmaiani's career. In this performance, she appears dressed as a modern

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Textiles: A Personal View," in *Indonesian Textiles*, ed. Mattiebelle Gittinger, trans. Holmgren (Washington, D.C.: The Textile Museum, 1979), 231.

254 Arahmaiani, Memory and Contemporaneity, 71.

255 Arahmaiani, Dismantling Patriarchalism. The Islamic Defenders Front (IDF) was formalized in the dawn of Reformasi Era, in August 1998. Notably, some of its members, now more moderate, occupy positions in the Indonesian government.

256 Poshyananda, "Roaring Tigers," 43.

257 J. L. Swellengrebel, "Some Characteristic Features of the Korawasrama Story," in *Structural Anthropology in the Netherlands*, 89. There are other readings on Javanese interpretations of colors. See for instance, J. E. Jasper and Mas Pirngadie, *Indonesian Batik Designs* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 2006).

version of a traditional Balinese deity, in a defiant gesture. Why is this? Arahmaiani is referring specifically to the interpretation of Ken Dedes's story by historical narratives. She considers that the *Pararaton* script has nullified the deity's importance, meeting Supangkat's observations (see Chapter 3). Both Supangkat in 1975 and Arahmaiani in 1996, claim a revision of Ken Dedes's story. Yet, Arahmaiani also points to the fetishization of Ken Dedes: in the story, Ken Arok murders her husband and forces her to marry. Already pregnant from her first husband, Ken Arok re-impregnates her. Ken Dedes was considered a powerful woman because whoever married her or was born from her womb would become ruler of the world. So, Arahmaiani addresses her status as trophy and her role as submissive.[258] By manipulating a gun, she is correcting the story: if Ken Dedes had been armed, the outcome would probably have been different. This Balinese queen recaptures the importance and power Ken Dedes (and women) have been refused. Her reading of state-sponsored interpretations contradicts the New Order's notion of a 'great past'. It equally rejects women's status today as sole passive members of society whose main role is supporting their husbands.

Figure 4.32
Arahmaiani
Handle Without Care
1996 | Performance
Image courtesy of the artist

258 Arahmaiani, Dismantling Patriarchalism.

Handle Without Care invites women to hold power in their hands and without restraint. Made in the continuation of her performance *Nation for Sale* (1993)—made to accuse the burdens of tourist culture, which objectify women—this classic queen references tourism through "This already iconic costume; you see it in tourist brochures."[259] Thus, she wears sunglasses and a belt around her waist where usually tourists guard money and other utilities. Her defiant attitude is revealed through the camera she holds on her left hand (only the string is visible in the image) and the gun she holds on her right hand. This gun—a fake gun, a toy that replaces the local *keris*, a traditional dagger—is also part of Balinese and Javanese traditional costumes. The gun she holds is long, in a reference to the male dagger (its feminine version is short and exclusive for the woman "to kill herself, when she is desperate,"[260] after her husband dies). So, in this performance, Arahmaiani is empowering women. The crown symbolizes her status, as much as it refers to the responsibilities deriving from powerful positions. In all, the costume communicates with local and global audiences, whom she addresses. With Arahmaiani, the *lingga-yoni* and the Balinese are (re)manipulated: these symbols show that she denies the positioning of women as passive and subordinate members of society, while conveying her refusal to be non-confrontational. Her observations on women's empowerment continue in the installation *Etalase* (1993/4) [Fig. 4.33], one of her most polemical works. It was equally presented in *Traditions/Tensions*, but was deemed problematic and removed from the show. Like with *Lingga-Yoni*, Muslim radicals issued a death threat in her name because of it.

Figure 4.33
Arahmaiani
Etalase
1994 | Display case containing personal photograph, icon, Coca-Cola bottle, Al-Qur'an, fan, Patkwa mirror, drum, box of sand, and pack of condoms | 95 x 147 x 67 cm
Image courtesy of the artist

259 Arahmaiani, Memory and Contemporaneity, 71.
260 Arahmaiani, 70.

Etalase is an assemblage of found objects. It is made up of a nineteenth-century Western vitrine (probably a colonial antique), inside which she strategically positioned items of consumer culture. She recalls:

> I show you: this is an Al-Qur'an, and next to it there is a box. In 1993, the biggest condom factory in Southeast Asia was in Indonesia. This was during Suharto's time; the factory belonged to his family... He had a family program in Indonesia—families were supported to have two children... So, I put the box next to the Al-Qur'an. The radical Muslims were upset... They were upset with the combination and gave me a death threat... Anyway, when this piece was brought to New York by Apinan it also had a problem. The Americans didn't want it in the show. This piece causes problems with people's feelings. But this was not because... of the Al-Qur'an next to condoms, rather because of the combination of the Al-Qur'an and Coca-Cola.[261]

The work ridicules Western methods of preserving valuables, which are safeguarded inside cabinets protected inside institutions (such as museums). To move the idea forward, she performed the gesture of 'keeping for posterity', items which she found representative of current values. The work's title derives from the French word *étalage* (display case), possibly a remnant from the short period of French domination of Indonesia (1808-1811). If Arahmaiani was addressing the currencies of her time, why did she display them inside a museum vitrine? The vitrine is an object known for its preservation capacities but looks fragile in its integrity. I believe that she is simultaneously indicating the strength and the transversality of Western methods of archive and display while conveying its limitations and fragility(ies). I also identify subtext in her choice of what is safeguarded. Each object refers to a category: Al-Qur'an represents religion; condoms indicate sex; Coca-Cola denotes commercialization and globalization; a photograph of the artist voices the beauty myth; a Buddha statue represents spirituality; a Patkwa mirror (used in China for protection against evil forces) indicates superstition; a Fan (a Japanese Samurai fan containing a weapon inside) conveys a culture of violence masked by beauty,;a drum represents music; and finally a box with sand refers to the commercialization of land.

In this work, Arahmaiani is voicing her right to decide what to include for posterity. First, by recognizing that displays "are not passive containers, but are active vehicles in producing, sharing, and giving meaning to popular understandings of the past,"[262] she affirms her empowered position as producer of heritage. She is conscious that "heritage... is inseparable from the displays

261 Arahmaiani, Memory and Contemporaneity, 73.

262 Steven Hoelscher, "Heritage," in *A Companion to Museum Studies*, ed. Sharon Macdonald (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 203.

that represent it."[263] Second, aware that museums and canons are inseparable constructs, by placing those selected items inside the vitrine, Arahmaiani actively invests in canon formation, which "has always been determined by the interests of the more powerful."[264] Third, through *Etalase* she claims—as a woman artist from Indonesia—her rightful position to the authority commonly refused to women and especially 'non-Western' women. Her gesture corroborates American art historian Carol Duncan's definition of the art museum as ritual, a place which is not neutral, but instead "a dramatic field... a stage setting that prompts visitors to enact a performance of some kind" whether they recognize and describe it as such, or not.[265] Not only has Arahmaiani reproduced the museum's preservation and education role, she exposed its ritualistic stance.

On the occasion of *Traditions/Tensions*, Poshyananda observed: "As a Muslim woman artist, Arahmaiani has placed herself in a challenging position."[266] Arahmaiani's legacy stretches the borders of feminist discourses, for she has also pioneered socially engaged performance in Indonesia and in the region. Arahmaiani's avant-gardism stems from her relationship with the everyday, with a special incidence of women's subordinate position in (Indonesian) society. Furthermore, her avant-gardism acts upon local idioms, which have been read literally—the *yoni* supports the *lingga*, the queen is an instrument of the king, the exotic dancer conveys a paradise created, the objects inside the museum convey power relations—framing women's role as non-confrontational members of societies (undergoing change). Her post-2002 artistic production continues these intents, but freed from Suharto's New Order, she starts looking within and globally (see Chapter 5).

4.4 *Traditions/Tensions*, Asia Society in New York, 1996 and the Abandonment of the Topic of Traditions by Curators

Some participating artists of *Traditions/Tensions* figure into this study;. At the time, their radicalism was detected but not defined in art historical terms and the selection presented here is nevertheless confined to those I know. In my opinion, Poshyananda's gesture with *Traditions/Tensions* was so effective in demonstrating the circumstance of multiple temporalities that (Southeast) Asian nations lived on during the 1990s that after this exhibition the topic was largely abandoned. By 1996, the theme of 'tradition' had been tried by Western curators in Europe and Australia, by Japanese curators attentive to (Southeast)

263 Hoelscher, "Heritage," 204.

264 John Guillory, "Canon," in *Critical Terms for Literary Study,* ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 234.

265 Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (London: Routledge, 1995), 1–2.

266 Poshyananda, "Roaring Tigers," 43.

Asian developments, and it had been equally explored by its own practitioners. Poshyananda's project aimed at demonstrating that tradition should not be interpreted as the opposite of contemporaneity. To do this, he selected work of artists that are inspired by traditions or use traditions to redefine and renegotiate their identity. He observed that, as societies undergoing intense transition toward globalization and industrialization, (Southeast) Asian nations lived intense "dislocations... disorientation and cultural dysfunction in capitals and megacities where cultural heritage and tradition are under threat."[267] He traced two major responses through traditions' employment: first, those artists that express nostalgia or resistance towards a 'poisonous' West (such as Bendi) and secondly, those that react negatively to the stereotypical notion that Asian nations must use traditional elements for their work to be of importance (such as Harsono or Mio). This double burden, says Poshyananda, "has been a source of inspiration for them to work against the cultural grain."[268]

I believe that many of the works that were showcased in *Traditions/Tensions*—such as Arahamaiani's L*ingga-Yoni*, Bendi's *Revolution* and Harsono's *The Voices are Controlled by the Powers*—display the avant-garde stance that Kapur suggested in the exhibitions' catalogue. That is, practices that performed a double-dismantle against national conservative forces that held firm to imported notions of high and low art and were equally tendentious against political art (specially in Java and Bali, where the ambience was one of intense scrutiny), while disputing Western art's supremacy (through local traditions). Yet, at the time of their initial exhibition, these works that I came to term Third Avant-garde were not immediately identified as such. This circumstance results from the fact that the majority of exhibitions organized in the West before *Traditions/Tensions* were developed by Western curators who maintained "preconceived notion[s] of exotica... and [a]desire to rescue authenticity."[269] Whenever contemporary manifestations were showcased, they were introduced through Western anthropological perspectives and in relation to notions of cultural purity.[270] As a result, Western audiences, and particularly the American one, remained unprepared for the varieties of the "politically oriented, with a bias toward installation"[271] kind presented in *Traditions/Tensions*. The works' unconventional appearance—an aspect

267 Poshyananda, "Preface," in *Traditions/Tensions*, 16.

268 Poshyananda, 16.

269 Poshyananda, "The Future: Post-Cold War, Postmodernism, Post-Marginalia (Playing with Slippery Lubricants)," in *Tradition and Change: Contemporary Art of Asia and the Pacific,* ed. Caroline Turner (Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1993), 6.

270 See McEvilley, "Exhibition Strategies," 55.

271 Holland Cotter, "The Brave New Face of Art from the East," *The New York Times,* September 29, 1996, sec. Art in Review, http://www.nytimes.com/1996/09/29/arts/the-brave-new-face-of-art-from-the-east.html.

relating to the iconoclastic attitude towards old art boundaries, such as Asian and Western traditions of making, High and Low art—was highly contrasting with Western imaginations of Asian 'timeless cultures'.

Reviews were positive; in the exhibition's catalogue, McEvilley's text praises the exhibition for its Asian organization in a Western context (the US), and for its address of Asian-American audiences that remained cornered by museum shows. He equally designated the exhibition as a trigger for a different future, in which former "colonized societies come to experience themselves as their own centers (again), their arts will serve the function of both integrating them around expressions of their won selfhood and evincing new attitudes toward the West."[272] *Traditions/Tensions* was "the first rigorous manifestation of the manifold languages at work in Asian art through the 1990s"[273] says Kapur, because the category was put to work as part of the new, and art historical discourses were effectively problematized. And while the sample was effective and representative of three Asian regions—South Asia was represented by India; Southeast Asia was represented by Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines; East Asia was presented by South Korea—in my opinion, Lê's photo weavings are the most noticeable absence from the show. This situation probably relates to his nationality: Vietnam belonged to the Iron Curtain countries which were not considered by the curatorial scheme. Nevertheless, his photo weavings clearly display the tensions between past and present, and were topical in their criticism toward Western and (Southeast) Asian discursive narratives that the show addressed.

I contend that *Traditions/Tensions* marks the end of the topical relation between tradition and contemporaneity. The practices do not cease; what ends is the intent to understand and problematize the coevality of traditional and the contemporary. Theoretically, as a polemical category, tradition is again reassessed after 2010. During the interlude of the 2000s, it was read by scholars as part of political art expressions—an aspect which is effectively true—but originates from readings which prioritize the contextual conditions of art making. In my opinion, curators and art historians framed the works this way to avoid referring to other polemical categories such as craft and decoration (also taboos in the art world). The negative consequences are that on the one way, traditions' agency remained undetected and their avant-garde stance deferred, so that the Third Avant-garde works' accommodation within art historical discourses remained incomplete. In this regard, it can be said that artists were more successful than curators, as they maintained their practice without having in consideration questions of categorization and, their works continued to feature the growing network of biennials that boomed since the 1990s. Through

272 McEvilley, "Exhibition Strategies," 59.
273 Kapur, "Curating in Heterogeneous Worlds," 179.

Third Avant-garde practices, whether indoors or in exile, whether within art circuits or anthropological circuits, traditional arts effectively became part of the vocabulary of contemporary art.

4.5 Conclusions

This chapter offers a sample of Southeast Asian Third Avant-garde practices from the 1990s which I had contact with, either by exhibition viewing, or by talking with the artists. It starts by suggesting that during 1990s, artistic practice and curatorial practice coincided in time and space, both in Southeast Asia and abroad. As these were the early years of the current globalization, with multiculturalism in its hey-day, these artistic practices were welcomed, especially overseas. Yet, because these artists were members of societies undergoing dictatorships, their works were taken as manifestations showcasing notions of identity and origin. Instead, the locality of the codes they used reflected their will to relate to their audiences (both local and global) while kept their strong messages of discontent undetected by authorities.

The deficient reception of these practices stimulated responses such as *Traditions/Tensions* in 1996, in New York. In that same year, the Singapore Art Museum showcased *Modernity and Beyond: Themes in Southeast Asian Art*, curated by T. K. Sabapathy. This exhibition continued the emerging field of Southeast Asia (which had been tested by the Japan Foundation and the FAM through *New Art in Southeast Asia 1992*), but its focus on modern art was new. In 1997, the FAM presented *The Birth of Modern Art in Southeast Asia: Artists and Movements*. While these exhibitions announced the emergence of the field, they proposed and highlighted Southeast Asia as a fluid region, one that has been touched by several waves of acculturation which arrived by sea. Equally attentive to the question of tradition, works by regional artists were interpreted as demonstrative of a historical agency of negotiation between new imports and old modes of making.

The artists of this chapter are divided by their personal, political circumstances, immersed in dictatorial regimes or exiled from them. Their arts differ as much from, as they resemble each other: resulting from a different relation with their own locality, the tradition used changes, but they coincide in the use of capacities that modern art language introduces (mostly through installations in which these traditional arts gain a totally new existence). These are practitioners to whom the two streams of thought are equally important and familiar, and who perform their blend with ease, as suggested in chapter 1.
The Third Avant-garde came to be because of the conflation of artistic practice, (inter)national curatorial and institutional attention. Without these coincidental factors, these practices would not only have been deferred in art historical terms, they could have not yet achieved recognition.

The Third Avant-garde Addresses the Global (2002-Now)

Chapter 5 looks at post-2000 Third Avant-garde practices, proposing that, in a Southeast Asian context, they remain fundamental to negotiate notions of the self, the local community, and the world. I suggest that the decade starts in 2002—a hinge year for the region because of the Bali bombings and the declaration of independence of Timor-Leste (after a three-year UN peace-keeping force through the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET)). Politically, the region remains in transformation: while Timor-Leste and Indonesia offered more freedom for the expression of personal views, Thailand and Vietnam became increasingly guarded societies, with its artists undergoing scrutiny by authorities.

The main difference from the precedent periods is that artists are expressing more forcefully global concerns. Their employment of local codes come tied to notions of the collective that know no national borders. Thus, this chapter is divided thematically: questions of heritage, women's quest for gender parity or interpretations of episodes of war, and genocide and human rights abuses appear intertwined with local cultural constructs. The Third Avant-garde artists of the post-2002 period persist in the absence of a written manifesto, while showing increasing confidence when exploring 'low art' media such as textiles and ceramics. Now, they use these media *per se*, showing greater inattentiveness to Western modalities. Other practices denote continuity, such as those that use *wayang*, demonstrating the wealth of possibilities it confers.

Theoretically, the topic of tradition reemerged after 2010. The temporal gap since *Traditions/Tensions,* in 1996, allowed distance from the phenomenon's early days and permitted revisionism (including the proposed in this study). This is the embodiment of the deferred temporality of the avant-garde.

The case studies included here reveal how Third Avant-garde practices evolve, and its program—the blend of art and ethnography, West and East, the rejection of invented traditions and their postmodern use for decorative purposes—remains important, topical, and incomplete. Southeast Asian artists do not cease to be inspired and, fueled by the living traditions that they nurture, showing that every time a tradition is (re)worked, they create an act of invention as much as an act of subversion.

5.1 The 2002s (2002-2016): New Conditions

If the 1990s witnessed the advent of global exhibitions, the 2000s were the decade of local periodic exhibitions of import. From this time, the region of Southeast Asia added some significant exhibitions of regular occurrence to the panorama: in 2003, Jim Supangkat opened the CP Biennale in Jakarta (it lasted only two editions[1]); the Singapore Biennale and the Saigon Open City Biennial in Vietnam started in 2006; the Art Stage Singapore art fair opened in 2010; for its eleventh edition in 2011, the Jogja Biennale suffered a restructuring that devoted its focus to the arts made in the Equatorial line; the Art Basel Fair expanded to Hong Kong in 2013; headed by Apinan Poshyananda, 2018 will have the first Bangkok Art Biennale. The combination of art fairs and biennales has allowed established and emerging Southeast Asian artists a significant representation. In this respect, Yogyakarta houses a unique exhibition: ART|JOG, an art fair founded in 2008 for artists, instead of the common focus on commercial galleries.[2] The *Fukuoka Asian Art Show*—which took place every five years since 1979—was reformulated into the *Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale* in 1999 to mark the birth of the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum. The number of exhibitions is significant; in addition to these events, the greater representation of Southeast Asian artists in Western events such as the Venice Biennial (mostly in national pavilions, since the number of artists exhibiting in the curator's show remains minor[3]) and the documenta in Kassel, makes some selected regional artists globetroters. This led Poshyananda to designate artists including Gu Wenda and Cai Guo Qiang from China, Montien Boonma, Rirkrit Triravanija and Manit Sriwanichpoom from Thailand, and Lee Wen from Singapore as 'shamans', who offered audiences with sensational experiences through their inventiveness and thus symbolized trademarks of contemporary Asian art.[4]

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1 The biennale closed amidst controversy around the work by Agus Suwage and Davy Linggar, *Pinkswing Park*, in which the nudity of two famous Indonesian actors could be partially seen. Following a protest by the fundamentalist group FPI, Supangkat refused to remove the work and cancelled the show. See Leonor Veiga, "Memory and Contemporaneity, Indonesian Contemporary Art: A Curatorial Project" (University of Lisbon, 2010), 26, http://repositorio.ul.pt/handle/10451/2039.

2 See Richard Horstman, "ART|JOG|10: Changing Perspective," *The Jakarta Post*, May 15, 2017, sec. Art & Culture, http://www.thejakartapost.com/life/2017/05/15/artjog10-changing-perspective.html.

3 In 1954, Indonesian Affandi (1903-1990) was the first Southeast Asian artist to participate in the curated show. The second would be Indonesian Heri Dono, who participated in *Zone of Urgency*, curated by Hou Hanru in 2003.

4 See Apinan Poshyananda, "Asian Art and the New Millennium: From Glocalism to Techno-Shamanism," in *Playing with Slippery Lubricants: Apinan Poshyananda Selected Writings 1993-2004* (Bangkok: Office of Contemporary Art and Culture, Ministry of Culture, 2010), 197. The number of artists is extensive, thus I confined to artworks I saw and artists I spoke with. While it would be a valid project, this dissertation does not aim to survey the Third Avant-garde, but

Shortly after the establishment of these shows, publications followed. The Milanese publishing house SKIRA has developed a set of survey-like books about regional nations: *Indonesian Eye* (2011), *Malaysian Eye* (2014), *Thailand Eye* and *Singapore Eye* (2015), *Vietnam Eye* (2016). While these books constitute a good reference toward the recognition of trends, the alphabetical order of display, and their development in close contact with commercial galleries has not revealed to be conducive to an in-depth understanding of local artistic practices. And, academic publications do not abound; the Cornell Southeast Asia Program has published two volumes to date, of which *Modern and Contemporary Southeast Asian Art, an Anthology* (2012) is most relevant. The recent launch of the academic journal by the National University of Singapore (NUS), *Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia* (2017) acts upon a highly-felt void in theorization.

However, Third Avant-garde practices have benefited extremely from Southeast Asian curatorial practices since the 1990s. Attempting to demonstrate the intimate relation between the two, in 2008, Patrick Flores launched the book *Past Peripheral: Curation in Southeast Asia* (NUS). Regarding exhibition publications, the region is witnessing an expansive growth since the 2010s, mostly by Singaporean institutions. Significant titles include *Negotiating Home, History and Nation: Two Decades of Contemporary Art in Southeast Asia 1991-2001*, by the French curator Iola Lenzi (Singapore Art Museum, 2011) and *Intersecting Histories: Contemporary Turns in Southeast Asian Art*, by Singaporean art historian T. K. Sabapathy (Nanyang Technological University, 2012). Since the early 1980s, the Japan Foundation (sometimes, in conjunction with other Japanese institutions) has contributed widely with the publication of ASEAN exhibitions' catalogues, and continues historicizing efforts.[5] In 2017, it partnered with the National Art Center and the Mori Art Museum to co-organize *Sunshower*, an exhibition devoted to the development of post-1980s Southeast Asian practices. In November 2017, *Sunshower* toured the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, which also held *Welcome to Art in Myanmar!* and *Peaceful Chaos: Thai Contemporary Art through the Lens of Fukuoka*. The conflation of three exhibitions devoted to Southeast Asian Art transpires the region's importance, while reflects the results of consistent and continued research practices.[6]

These publishing efforts have been coupled with an expansion of

rather to open its field.

5 See "Recommended Readings," SEA Project, n.d., http://seaproject.asia/en/recommended_readings/.

6 See Leonor Veiga, "Kuroda Raiji: 'We Collect Asian Art in Which We Detect Contemporaneity,'" *Leiden Arts and Society Blog*, January 5, 2018, http://www.leidenartsinsocietyblog.nl/articles/kuroja-raiji-we-collect-asian-art-in-which-we-detect-contemporaneity.

Southeast Asian art overseas since the 2000s. In recent years, regional nations established pavilions in the Venice Biennial, the only venue that maintains national representations: Singapore in 2001, Thailand in 2003, and Indonesia in 2013 (the Philippines maintains a pavilion since 1964[7]). Why participate in Venice? There are several reasons. First, recognition in an international forum has proved to be a boost to careers when opportunities at home were/are limited. Second, Venice sponsors and validates a country's culture, thus raising the profile of artists, and equally legitimizing countries.

Generally, the region has widened in scope and in representativeness: artists such as Dinh Q. Lê were invited for important shows such as Documenta (2012) and Carnegie Hall (2013). Meanwhile, the national focus remains significant: in 2009, the Centraal Museum in Utrecht, the Netherlands, presented *Beyond the Dutch: Indonesia, the Netherlands and the Visual Arts, from 1900 Until Now*; the 2017 edition of Europalia in Brussels focused on Indonesia, and Indonesia was Guest of Honor in the Frankfurt Book Fair in 2015. Other exhibitions, such as *Enlightened Ways: The Many Streams of Buddhist Art in Thailand* (2012) were showcased in the Singaporean Asian Civilisations Museum. While the topic pertains to a longstanding tradition, the exhibition conferred contemporary artists with participation. This curatorial attitude denotes that Buddhism in a Thai context is a living reality, acknowledging that the past helps understand the present while being fuelled by it.

Regionally, greater visibility has been followed by more sales. Nowadays, several Southeast Asian artists feature solo shows in commercial galleries in the region (first in their home countries, then in Singapore where important art galleries concentrate) and in the United States.[8] Europe remains slow in representing the region, despite centuries of colonial contact which contributed to a significant presence of Southeast Asian minorities in its soil—with only two galleries representing regional artists: Arndt Fine Art, in Berlin and Rossi and Rossi, in London. To this day, only one show devoted curatorial attention to Southeast Asian art—*Spaces and Shadows: Contemporary Art from Southeast Asia*, at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW), in Berlin, in 2008. The curatorial team worked in partnership with local advisors, and performing arts such as Indonesian *gamelan* were included in the exhibition's program. It looked at the diversity of media, without creating barriers that have historically not existed.

Interestingly, the political changes which occurred in the late 1990s contributed to an expansion of Third Avant-garde practices. Following the start of the Reformation era in Indonesia and the independence of Timor-Leste,

7 "Past Participation," Philippine Arts in Venice Biennale, n.d., http://www.philartvenicebiennale.com/past-participation/.

8 While small, Southeast Asian representation is increasing in New York, especially through Tyller Rollins Fine Art. See http://www.trfineart.com.

several artists resorted to a more internal analysis of their circumstances as second class citizens (in the case of Harsono and Arahamaiani, among others), or as full citizens of their countries (in the case of Maria Madeira). And, they did so through traditions that pertained to their personal histories. The greater freedom artists have experienced has allowed for in-depth investigations which have resulted in world peregrinations to trace fragments of histories: Arahmaiani goes to Tibet, Harsono consults Dutch archives, Indonesian Albert Yonathan Setiawan found in Thailand the root of Indonesian Mahayana Buddhism he was searching for.

However, in contrast, Thailand has during this time become a more safeguarded society, with exhibitions being censored or artists exhibiting explicit political messages (through traditional arts) solely overseas since the coup of September 2006. Recently, the Thai army has removed three works from two shows in Bangkok that paid tribute "to the 2010 military crackdown on Redshirt protests which left more than 90 people dead."[9] And meanwhile, Vietnam remains a nation of communist values, in which freedom of speech and human rights abuses target voices of dissent.[10] As Lê affirmed in a recent interview,

> There is an urgency [to archive voices], because the Cold War allowed governments to dictate what the populations can and cannot know. We still have a communist government in Vietnam, a remnant of the Cold War. It is the flipside of Indonesia, their power of censoring voices. That is where I see artists from the region desperately trying to keep these histories, because these generations are dying. Vietnamese archives are in France and in the US... Artists are protesting and contributing in the way we think best. Censorship is still very strong.[11]

This shows that Third Avant-garde practices remain useful and important after 2000, demonstrating that they arise from contextual conditions and constitute responses of discontent—be it for the search of a (cultural or religious) self, be it for the voicing of collective concerns. For regional artists, traditions are a practical locus of contestation, proving that not only they continue to nurture contemporary existence, but they contain an avant-garde stance.

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9 Teeranai Charuvastra, "Soldiers Remove Artworks from Bangkok Gallery," *Khaosod English*, June 16, 2017, http://www.khaosodenglish.com/politics/2017/06/16/soldiers-remove-artworks-bangkok-gallery/.

10 See "Vietnam's Quiet Human Rights Crisis," *The Diplomat*, April 17, 2017, http://thediplomat.com/2017/04/vietnams-quiet-human-rights-crisis/.

11 Dinh Q. Lê, Splendour and Darkness, unpublished interview by Leonor Veiga, Leiden, April 14, 2016.

5.2 Artists in Exile

5.2.1 Women

Both female artists, Maria Madeira and Arahmaiani have taken their feminist approach to a global level after 2002. Their works refer mostly to their personal codes and experiences (which in turn reflect their local and religious-social condition) while speaking globally.

Maria Madeira: Working with Timorese Traditions

After 2000, Madeira returned to Timor-Leste. Imbued with the spirit of reconstruction and armed with English proficiency, she worked with International Aid until 2005. An independent state since 2002, Timor-Leste presently delves into national building quests. As Hobsbawm stated, an essential element of nation-building is the production of unifying elements, such as traditions. And Timorese artists, including Madeira have largely contributed to this endeavor. For instance, Timor-Leste's wall art has been significant since pre-historical times. Madeira has commented on this reality through a contemporary 'twist'. After returning to the country, she visited the Comarca Balide (Balide Jail, as existed from 1975-1999) where graffiti of desperation, pain, and torture are preserved, but she equally observed marks inside private homes. She was terrified to learn that Timorese women who were abused by the Indonesian military in torture rooms were forced to kiss walls. To pay tribute, in *Kiss and Don't Tell* (2007), she tackled this subject [Fig. 5.1].

Figure 5.1
Maria Madeira
Rai Labele Koalia (Kiss and Don't Tell)
2007 | Mixed media with *tais* on canvas | 61 x 76 cm
Image courtesy of the artist

In this image, Madeira's representation alludes to a wall. To mention rape, she placed victims of abuse in an underdog position. The fibers from tais denote Timorese women (who are their makers), while the dripping may relate to humidity, and damage in wall paint. Of the many traumas the Timorese have endured, this is clearly the least spoken of, and remains taboo. Michael Leach corroborates: "Women's contribution to the Resistance is also notably absent in official commemoration and memorial landscapes."[12] The situation is intimately related to the fact that women live(d) a silent resistance, one that did not migrate out of the village. They sustained the militia, took care of the children, and as easy targets, many times victims of human rights abuses. So, Madeira's redemptive gesture asks for their recognition and aid.

Since Madeira's return to Timor-Leste in 2000, Madeira devotes time to learn more about the country's cultural background. This is done through working alliances with international aid organizations and as well as an active engagement with local art communities. Recently, she started collaboration with women weavers from Bobonaro, who explain to her "how they identify each other's woven cloth, by their 'fingerprints' left on *tais*, a metaphor for stylistic and technical individuality."[13] The weaver's claims for individuality widely contrasts with traditional textiles experts, and the exhibitions and monographs they produce. *Tais* were originally done for self-supporting purposes; later the technique developed to allow the making of special ornamental designs for events such as feasts, wedding ceremonies, funerals, etc. Traditional weaving mirrors tribal culture and is the reason for the diversity of motives. Timor-Leste consists of thirteen regions [Fig. 5.2]. From these, there are twelve or all thirteen regions (depending on the analysis), that produce *tais* weaving: Timorese specialist on *tais* Cecília Fonseca, researcher at Alola Foundation in Dili, considers twelve regions;[14] through her research, Madeira came to identify thirteen. Motives, materials, and colors differ, reflecting location and intertribal culture. In 2010, Madeira produced *Fatin Hasoru Malu* (Meeting Point), a painting in which she collaged fragments from Timor's thirteen regions [Fig. 5.3].

Tais have functional uses. They are used asbody protector, as payment within *adat* (traditional law) to restore balance, as a monetary value (medium of exchange), as well as symbol for social functions, such as conveyors of ethical values, prestige gods, and cultural refinement indicators. To this multiplicity of roles, cloths also accumulate a mythological function: "certain shapes are

12 Michael Leach, "The Politics of History in Timor-Leste," in *A New Era? Timor-Leste after the UN*, ed. Lia Kent, Sue Ingram, and Andrew McWilliam (Canberra: ANU Press, 2015), 42.

13 Joanna Barrkman, "Foreword," in Ina Lou: Maria Madeira (Jakarta: Taman Ismail Marzuki, 2014).

14 Cecília Fonseca, "Tais Weaving: Local Knowledge and Specialization," in Local Knowledge of Timor!, ed. Demetrio Amaral de Carvalho (Jakarta: UNESCO Jakarta, 2011), 23.

believed to give protection against natural disasters, bad luck, evil spirits and others."[15] This is why *tais* are seen as valuable investments, and thus, are offered to distinguished guests by the country's President, as a sign of endorsement. As uncovered in Chapter 4, *tais* weaving can be used as ready-mades, fragments, or in their entirety as canvases. Madeira does not use the latter because she aims to preserve the integrity of women's work.

Figure 5.2
Timor-Leste political map, with thirteen regions
Source: mapsoftheworld.com/timor-leste/timor-leste-political-map.html

Figure 5.3
Maria Madeira
Fatin Hasoru Malu
2010 | Mixed media with *tais* on canvas | 110 x 50 cm
Image courtesy of the artist

15 Jes A. Therik, *Ikat in Eastern Archipelago: An Esoteric Beauty of Ancestral Entity*, trans. J. V. Inkiriwang (Jakarta: Pustaka Sinar Harapan, 1989), 18.

Another aspect of local culture Madeira learned upon arrival in 2000 is the tradition of chewing the betel nut. According to British anthropologist David Hicks, this practice relates to ancestry, and is an important feature of Timorese traditional culture: "The long departed souls of former clansfolk, ancestral ghosts, crave regular prestations of betel-chew, palm-wine and food from their living descendants."[16] Nowadays it is used as a greeting between families as this habit promotes relaxation and laughter. Since 2000, also in virtue of material shortage, the artist applies betel as paint on canvas. Here, Madeira's unconventional approach becomes evident: betel is most commonly chewed and as such, this practice promotes red teeth, and is addictive, thus hazardous for health (like tobacco). Yet, locally it is tolerated even for women, which is reason here for its use. Madeira spits it onto the canvas, in a 'pollockian' fashion [Fig. 5.4].

Figure 5.4
Maria Madeira
Moris Faun (Renascent)
2007 | Mixed media with betel juice on canvas | 61 x 76 cm
Image courtesy of the artist

16 David Hicks, "Art and Religion on Timor," in *Islands and Ancestors: Indigenous Styles of Southeast Asia*, ed. Jean Paul Barbier and Douglas Newton (New York: Prestel Verlag GmbH & Co KG, 1988), 143.

Arahmaiani: (Re)searching the Self

Since 2002, Arahmaiani has turned inwards. The 9/11 events had staggering consequences for her. Triggered by a personal event, she has tried to understand her multicultural background. The work *11 June 2002*, presented at the 50th Venice Biennial, in 2003, recreates, in a spectacular fashion her experience at the hands of American immigration [Fig. 5.5]. During a one-night stopover in Los Angeles (on transit to Canada, where she was expected to work at the University of Victoria) she experienced a situation where "California Dreaming turned into Hotel California nightmare."[17] At the immigration stop and after several hours of interrogation, Arahmaiani was allowed to enter a private room, accompanied by a male immigration officer. He remained in the room and spend the night alongside her while she washed, dressed, undressed, and slept. The (re)production of the locus of events, addressed her thoughts on this occurrence: "I just realized that being a Muslim and a woman today means my position is of the lowest in the hierarchy. I am a pariah of the world society."[18]

Figure 5.5
Arahmaiani
11 June 2002
2003 | Installation and performance
Source: Tyler Rollins Fine Art

German curator Werner Kraus, affirms:

> In Indonesia her work is threatened by Muslim extremists. In the United States she was humiliated, humiliated as a woman, humiliated as a Muslim. But not as an artist! The exhibited installation is the result of her artistic reflection of this experience.[19]

17 Werner Kraus, *Arahmaiani, 11 June 2002: 50th Venice Biennale 2003* (Berlin: Pruss & Ochs, 2003), 3.
18 Kraus, *Arahmaiani, 11 June 2002*, 26.
19 Kraus.

Krauss mentions the disturbance her work causes, in and outside Indonesia. This proves that her work affects local and global conceptions of women, and particularly Muslim women. Bianpoen notes that she has probably questioned Indonesian Islamic culture all her life. But, since 2010, Arahmaiani has focused on Buddhism. She explains that, despite having addressed Hindu-Buddhist and animistic roots of Indonesian culture (and Indonesian Islam) in the past, she still sensed a missing piece to explain the origin of Indonesia's syncretic approach. So, in 2010, Arahmaiani arrived at the Tibetan plateau, the highest and largest plateau on Earth.

Since her first trip to Tibet, Arahmaiani has returned whenever possible. She observes a certain rootedness of Indonesian Islam in Tibetan Buddhism. One aspect that may corroborate her observation stems from the fact that both Tibetan Buddhism today and Indonesian Buddhism in the past are of Mahayana tradition. Another one refers to a revered monk, the Bengali Atisha Divankara Srijanana (982-1052 CE), who came to study scriptures in Indonesia and later went teaching in Tibet.[20] These historical relations stimulated her socially engaged work in the Tibetan Plateau. In the *Lab*,[21] Arahmaiani conducts environment related community work that is later displayed in international art exhibitions such as the 2013 Art Stage Singapore [Fig. 5.6]. Working with local communities represents a new interpretation of Buddhist teachings on reconciliation of opposites.[22]

Figure 5.6 A, B
Arahmaiani
Memory of Nature
2013 | Installation A) Art Stage Singapore B) Sangkring Art Space, Yogyakarta
Images courtesy of the artist

20 Arahmaiani, "Concept Note: The Path of Atisa Dipankara Srijnana (982 -1054 CE)" 2016; Arahmaiani, "Atisha" (Jakarta, December 30, 2010).

21 Lab is a village in the Kham region of Tibet. See Arahmaiani, "Artist Statement," http://www.grace-exhibition-space.com/performance.php?event_id=569

22 Peter Hylands, "Arahmaiani: Return to Lab," *Creative - I*, January 2015, 65, http://magazine.creativecowboyfilms.com.

'Why am I treated like this?'
Sita had to go through suffering because of Rama's honor.
So, why is she the only one to go through the test?
Why wasn't the test replicated on him? (laughing)[23]
ARAHMAIANI

The work, *I Don't Want to Be Part of Your Legend* (2004) [Fig. 5.7] is a performance, but one which can only be experienced through video. This *de facto* video work is based on earlier thoughts about women's position as submissive and disempowered members of society. The sole persona of the work is Sita, the main female character of the Ramayana epic story. Arahmaiani voices Sita's reflections through a monologue 'sang' in Javanese, as if it belonged in a theater performance. The message is clear: Sita asks for equal treatment of men and women. In the story, Sita is abducted by Rawana, and later saved by Rama. To testify her purity, Sita walks through a fire. As she does, flames turn into flowers, affirming her integrity. What Arahmaiani finds intolerable is the currency these differentiations maintain in Indonesian society as well as in the others where the Ramayana assumes a major cultural role).

Figure 5.7
Arahmaiani
I Don't Want to be Part of Your Legend
2004 | Still images from 12' video
Image courtesy of the artist

23 Arahmaiani, Memory and Contemporaneity, interview by Leonor Veiga, Yogyakarta, January 24, 2010, 70.

At the time of making, Arahmaiani was thinking critically about shadows and reflecting on *wayang*'s meaning in the global era. So, she analyzed the tradition and traced some overlooked technical and narrative aspects. Practically speaking, she recovered an almost lost practice, *wayang rumput* (grass puppets), the humblest *wayang* format.[24] Traditionally, *wayang rumput* is made from vegetable fibers, later interwoven to make flat figures. Alongside *wayang kertas* (paper puppets), these formats are used to entertain children. To create the figures, first, she carefully outlined Sita's profile in leaves. This proved a hard task because of material fragility. After mastering this manufacturing process, she performed her own (re)reading of Sita's story. Trying to be as traditional as possible, she recovered the oil lamplight that was superseded by electrical ones. She noticed that video remained outside of *wayang* artistic discourses (despite it being televised). Therefore, she proposed a new *wayang* space and medium. Her traditional intent is also verifiable in the creation of certain three-dimensionality: the video shows the corner of a room, where the performance takes place. If on the stage the setting itself enhances physicality, here it had to be performed through the play of light and shade, and the object's physicality on the foreground.

Arahamaiani finds the fact that only Sita performs a fire test unacceptable. Why is that? We have to consider that the artist understands that in contemporary societies, men's entitlement to women's purity is no longer acceptable as a rule. The legend *as it is* does not fit today's needs, thus women and men's role must be updated.

All these recent works achieve global pertinence. While Arahmaiani remembers that no single religion is correct (thus making a call for the embracement of unorthodox perspectives), she equally speaks to various societies that use wayang, perform the Ramayana, and where gender differentiation rules. Her messages of justice are transnational, and are not annulled by her use and research of local issues.

5.2.2 Terrorism and Genocide

The artists Harsono, Bendi and Lê were all active on the 1990s, and Thai artist Jakkai Siributr appears mainly in the post-2002 era. Each of these four artists, after 2002, changed the course of their work and their messages assumed global pertinence. Harsono tackles the problem of second (or third, fourth, fifth) generation of diasporic communities in Indonesia through his own experience as a Chinese Indonesian. Bendi comments on contemporary history through the Batuan style of painting. Lê's weavings "probe history and

24 Edward C. van Ness and Shita Prawirohardjo, *Javanese Wayang Kulit: An Introduction* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1980), 5.

memory so as to counter mass amnesia and dispute historical revisionism."[25] And Siributr comments on Southeast Asian conflicts through Thai incidents.

FX Harsono: Peranakan Archive in the Making

Born in Indonesia of Chinese descent, Harsono has spent half of his artistic career suppressing his Chineseness (1975-1999), and the other half recovering it (1999-2016). This change of course was triggered by, for one thing, the violent incidents of 1998 that left Harsono in disbelief about the country he had adopted (and to which he felt he belonged), as well as, the other hand, the death of his father in 1999 which triggered interest in a family photography album. These two major circumstances were cumulated with the fall of Suharto's regime in 1998 and the lifting of prohibitions to practice Chinese culture (namely calligraphy, religion and use of given names) in 2000. After 2000, Harsono started a journey of recovery of his Chinese identity.

Hardly an Indonesian phenomenon (Chinese diasporic communities in Southeast Asia have a long history) the so-called Peranakan communities are present today mainly in Singapore, Malaysia, as well as in Indonesia. As Indonesian-born Dutch cultural theorist Ien Ang says, Peranakans are exemplary of communities "which interrogate the privileged homogeneity of the nation-state [based on] essentialist and totalitarian conceptions of 'national culture' or 'national identity' which are firmly rooted in geography and history."[26] The term Peranakan means offspring, and it is used to refer to the descendants of mixed ethnic origins in diaspora. Deriving from the Malay word for child, anak, the term has most notably been related to ethnic Chinese communities that migrated to other parts of Southeast Asia and mixed with local populations. Other terms to designate the members of this community are *Baba* (for the males), *Nyonya* (for married females) and *Nona* (for unmarried females).[27] along with the most prominent Chinese, there are several smaller communities recognized as Peranakan: the *Jawi* Peranakans, who descend from Indian Muslims, and the *Chitty Melaka* community, which descends from Hindu traders.[28] Traditionally, the Peranakan Chinese practiced the religion that their forbearers brought from Southern China, but as communities evolved, the Peranakans also incorporated beliefs from local communities.

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25 Bharti Lalwani, "Ghosts at a Dinner Party: Conversation with Dinh Q. Lê," *Eyeline*, 2015, 31.

26 Ien Ang, "To Be or Not to Be Chinese: Diaspora, Culture and Postmodern Ethnicity," *Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science* 21, no. 1 (1993): 12–13.

27 The term *baba* was used for the Peranakan Chinese community as well as specifically to the men from this community.

28 This differentiation is not as present as one would think; the collections of the Peranakan Museum in Singapore are mainly devoted to the Chinese communities (although some objects from the other communities are also exhibited). In an Indonesian context, the term is mostly associated with ethnically Chinese communities.

The history of Chinese Indonesian communities has its own particularities. On the one hand, the "universal equality before the law [a fundamental principle of British colonialism] was conspicuously absent in the Dutch system,"[29] which meant that they were regarded as foreign 'Orientals' (thus not Dutch citizens), and on the other hand, "the economic and political system created by the Dutch encouraged Chinese to fulfill the role of a merchant middle class."[30] This ambivalence—a mixture of social prejudice and special treatment (based on ethnicity)—has left marks on the Chinese Indonesian community, and cyclically caused resentment among Indonesian 'natives'. During the New Order years of General Suharto (1965-1998) this rancor would be highly felt. It was in fact reawakened through an ambivalent policy of identical characteristics: discriminatory measures, such as compulsory name change coupled with their positioning as agents of businesses through government guarantees.[31] Indonesian historian Ariel Heryanto refers to this strategy as a "glaring paradox."[32]

Some myths have persisted throughout the ages. The strongest one is that Peranakans are wealthy. This is not the case, for instance, of Harsono's family who lived at number 10, Tjoe Tien alley, in a house rented to Tjoe Tien, a man of Dutch-Chinese descent.[33] The anti-Chinese sentiment among Indonesian nationals were not born in a vacuum; as mentioned, its origins can be traced to the colonial period. What is certain, says Australian human rights scholar Jemma Purdey is that "Chinese Indonesians have periodically experienced violence across various regimes, rules and political models."[34] This violence, in the form of riots and massacres, has often coincided with moments of social, political, and economic change (but it equally arises from localized conflicts). Chinese Indonesians have been, and are, differentiated from other sectors of society by their engagement in trade and commerce, as well as for their religious practices

29 Ang, "To Be or Not to Be Chinese," 15 (n.5).

30 Adrian Vickers, *A History of Modern Indonesia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 66.

31 Chinese Indonesians were asked to change their names into 'Indonesian' ones since the Sukarno era. This was legislated in 1976 under Suharto's rule. Yet the investigatory climate did not cease: "Every time they needed to process official documents... they were required to attach their Certificate of Indonesian Citizenship, as well as the Certificate of Name Change. And in cases when these certificates were not required, the request forms they had to complete included questions about their grandparents' names." See Widjajanti Dharmowijono, "Kongpo," in *Toekar Tambah: Natural and Forced Assimilation* (Semarang: Semarang Contemporary Art Gallery, 2012), 21. On the subject of government guarantees, see Vickers, *A History of Modern Indonesia*, 164.

32 Ariel Heryanto, *Identity and Pleasure: The Politics of Indonesian Screen Culture*, Kyoto CSEAS Series on Asian Studies 13 (Singapore: NUS Press, 2014), 139.

33 See Wiyanto, "A Brief Biography," 125.

34 See Jemma Purdey, *Anti-Chinese Violence in Indonesia 1996-1999* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2005), 1–37.

as most of the community professes a minority religion—Christianity, Buddhism and/or Confucianism—instead of the religion of the majority, Islam.

Dutch writer Ay Mey Lie traces the origin of this prejudice to the eighteenth century, when "scientists invented the concept of race" which substituted prior divisions based on religion.[35] Yet, the Chinese were particularly subjected to several forms of surveillance and control which included using differentiating dress codes and living in separate residential areas,[36] and "were kept under tight restrictions on their legal access to landowning, residence and education."[37] Thus, in the colonial state,

> 'Europeans' were the king of the hill, 'Foreign Orientals' and 'Natives' (that included 'Chinese') resided below... After Indonesia gained its independence, the colonial hierarchy was partly inverted and continued. Now 'Natives' ruled the hill. 'Chinese' remained second class citizens. Perhaps second hand citizens—as an inconvenient element of the colonial legacy.[38]

Purdey notes that the 1945 constitution declared that all native Indonesians, and those of other provenances that would be recognized as such by law, were citizens of Indonesia. This represented a problem for the Chinese, who were by lineage tied to China and lacked the same legitimacy as the native Indonesians to belong to the nation.[39] Indonesia became independent in 1945; between 1945 and 1949, during the Revolution Period, the Dutch tried to regain the colony. During that time, several Chinese and Eurasians were killed at the hands of Indonesians. Targeted due to differences of religion and higher economic status, the Chinese who were spread throughout the colony, fled to the Dutch-controlled towns and thus, were interpreted as pro-Dutch. Harsono tackles this story in some of his most recent work.

In 1951, the People's Republic of China (PRC) and Indonesia attempted to resolve the Chinese-Indonesian situation by signing an agreement on citizenship. This would take effect only in 1962, when two-thirds of the Indonesian Chinese community choose to reject their ties to China.[40] Meanwhile, under Sukarno's presidency, industry was nationalized, military power was increased, and Chinese Indonesians were removed from the rural economy through Regulation no.10/1959[41] in a move which intended to give

35 See Ay Mey Lie, "Three Hundred Parking Lots," in *Toekar Tambah*, 31.
36 See Ang, "To Be or Not to Be Chinese," 6.
37 Purdey, *Anti-Chinese Violence in Indonesia 1996-1999*, 6.
38 Lie, "Three Hundred Parking Lots," 32.
39 See Purdey, *Anti-Chinese Violence in Indonesia 1996-1999*, 8–9. China follows the rule of *jus sanguinis*; Indonesia follows the right of the soil, *jus soli*.
40 Purdey, 9.
41 See Hendro Wiyanto, *Erased Time* (Jakarta: Langgeng Art Foundation, 2009), 17.

so-called indigenous entrepreneurs an opportunity to start businesses, while removing the dominance of the Chinese from the economy.[42] Several Chinese left the country; Harsono's family prepared to flee. Meanwhile, "Those Chinese who remained [among which Harsono] were also encouraged to change their names to 'Indonesian' ones."[43]

On 30 September 1965, a military coup was induced (but soon controlled), and the PKI (the communist party of the Indies) was blamed for it. Soon, violent incidents with the political objective of destroying the PKI followed. Communists, Chinese, and leftists were targeted indistinctively, ultimately generating a correspondence of the Chinese ethnicity with communism.[44] These violent events became known as the 'Indonesian Killings of 1965-66'. The PKI was dismantled and in 1965-1966, the Chinese press and all Chinese schools were closed, anti-Chinese riots expanded all over the country.[45] In 1967, following the break of diplomatic relations with China, the use of Chinese written characters in Indonesia was outlawed and most Chinese newspapers were formally abolished.[46] Culturally, Chineseness was eliminated in the pretext that the nation was committed to assimilating the minority. Chinese Indonesians were forced to change their names; the New Order envisioned full assimilation "to the extent that it needed to be erased."[47]

During the New Order, political stability was paramount. So, any episode of violence was rapidly annulled. The booming economy again granted access to the ethnically Chinese, while the army retained control of the land [48]—the 'glaring paradox' that Heryanto refers to. Every time discontent with the government would emerge, the regime would instigate anti-Chinese violence—a form of institutionalization of racist violence. This procedure kept public outrage away from the ruling elite, while Chinese business elites were protected under extortion fees. In effect, the New Order was producing a series of stereotypes about Chinese Indonesians to use as their agent of suppression; they acted as a buffer between the elite and the public in commerce, and whenever necessary, the elite used them as scape goats to keep population distracted.[49] Yet, it should be stated that violence between the two groups was not the norm, but the exception. Chinese Indonesians recognize the benefits of assimilation but consider that they are still treated differently, and that their

42 See Vickers, *A History of Modern Indonesia*, 144–45.

43 Vickers, 145.

44 Numbers diverge, but an estimate of half million people are believed to have been killed in this period. See Purdey, *Anti-Chinese Violence in Indonesia 1996-1999*, 14–15.

45 See Purdey, 19.

46 Philip Smith, "Writing in the Rain: Erasure, Trauma, and Chinese Indonesian Identity in the Recent Work of FX Harsono," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 46, no. 1 (2015): 122.

47 Purdey, *Anti-Chinese Violence in Indonesia 1996-1999*, 27.

48 See Vickers, *A History of Modern Indonesia*, 164.

49 See Purdey, *Anti-Chinese Violence in Indonesia 1996-1999*, 25.

ethnicity remains problematic. As such, they have learned that their security comes at a price, and that their position is vulnerable. The deliberate inaction of authorities means that their position is second class.

In 1998, the violence against the Chinese erupted, in a scale and intensity unheard of before. It included the gang rape of Chinese women, looting and the destruction of Chinese properties, confirming that violence against this community tends to surge in transitional times.[50] While the Chinese were not the only targets of violence, the large number of victims, added to popular the anti-Chinese sentiment, made it appear that these violent incidents had been racially motivated.[51] In the wake of these events, Harsono made an extremely realistic installation. In *Burnt Victims* (1998) [Fig. 5.8] he reports how the violence against Chinese and others actually transpired: people died inside their homes people died inside their homes after they were set on fire.[52] The work is compounded by what resembles burned wooden torsos, as they would be displayed in a morgue.

Figure 5.8
FX Harsono
Korban (Burnt Victims)
1998 | Performance—Installation component | Burnt wooden torsos, metal frames, burnt footwear | Dimensions variable
Image courtesy of the artist

50 See Purdey, 36–37.

51 See Wiyanto, "In the Victim's Shadow: The Heart Is Not as Vast as Oceans," in *Re:Petition/Position*, 147–48. See Tan Siuli, "Broken Bodies, Absent Selves: Representing the Body in FX Harsono's Art," in *Re:Petition/Position*, 220–38.

52 See Tan Siuli, "Broken Bodies, Absent Selves: Representing the Body in FX Harsono's Art," in *Re:Petition/Position*, 220–38.

It is telling that Indonesia's famous miniature park Taman Mini Indonesia Indah (Little Indonesia), which covers Indonesia's heterogeneity from Sumatra to Papua, bears no trace of the lives of non-indigenous ethnicities:. In essence, descendants of Arabs, Europeans and Chinese are all absent from the visual narrative of the Indonesian nation, because they were regarded as migrants.[53] Since its foundation in the 1970s and until in 2005, it made no reference to any Chinese minority in the archipelago. "Put simply, Chinese did not fit in the fantasy of the Indonesian nation."[54] Eventually, a Chinese Cultural Garden was started. Nevertheless, contrarily to all other cultural pavilions, the Chinese section had to be financed privately. Heryanto concludes: "old habits die hard."[55]

"In my birth certificate I am Chinese," says Harsono.[56] In retrospect, he remembers that in 1966-1967, when he opted for Indonesian citizenship, he was forced to forget and discard his birth name Oh Hong Boen. With the help of a Chinese Javanologist, he changed it for 'Harsono'.[57] Thus, in his post-2000 practice, he has tried to recover his Chinese name.

Figure 5.9
FX Harsono
Rewriting the Erased
2009 | Performance and video documentation | 17' 18''
Image courtesy of the artist

53 Purdey, *Anti-Chinese Violence in Indonesia 1996-1999*, 2; Lie, "Three Hundred Parking Lots," 29.
54 Lie, "Three Hundred Parking Lots," 29.
55 Heryanto, Identity and Pleasure, 142.
56 FX Harsono, Memory and Contemporaneity, interview by Leonor Veiga, Yogyakarta, January 10, 2010, 9, http://repositorio.ul.pt/bitstream/10451/2039/3/ULFBA_TES356_ANEXOS.pdf.
57 See Wiyanto, "A Brief Biography," 130.

In 2009, Harsono performed *Rewriting the Erased* (2009) [Fig. 5.9]. Here, he uses Chinese script to convey a lost identity. He had already used the concept of erasure in earlier works, but in this one he asks the public to witness the effects that the Presidential Instruction 14/1967—when Chinese calligraphy was banned—had on him.[58] Back then, he had no other option but to follow the decree. Now, through the simple gesture of writing, he realized the decree's lasting effects. Curator Hendro Wiyanto recalls:

> [FX Harsono] Today, the only Chinese words I know are those in my Chinese name. I can only write my name. [Hendro Wiyanto] He then tried to re-write his name. Again and again. He went on, seemingly unstoppable. He tried to recall how to write the characters that today felt so alien to him. The characters that he, scores of years ago, had learnt and mastered.[59]

In the performance, Harsono picks up a calligraphy brush, writes his name and then places the paper on the floor, repeatedly. He appears as himself—no mask, no costume—as if he was assuring the audience that his address is sincere. Through it, he reclaims a lost language, and a lost identity, and tries to create a record of fragments from memory.[60] In 2011, in the performance *Writing in the Rain* [Fig. 5.10 A, B], he reinforced the topic. Here, Harsono stands in front of an audience, with a glass window separating them.

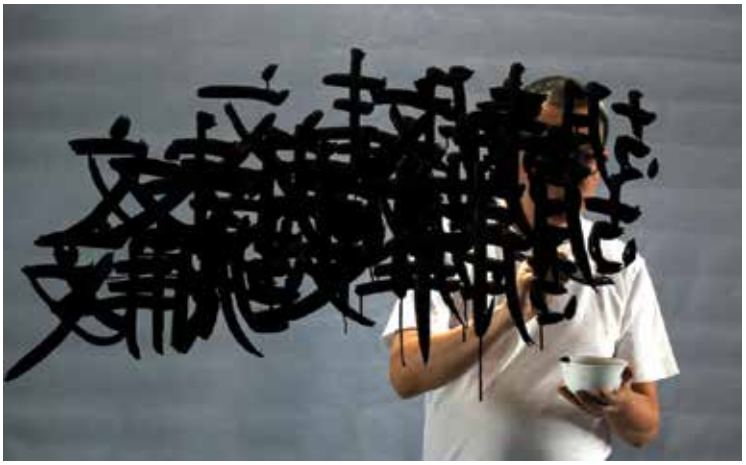

Figure 5.10 A
FX Harsono
Writing in the Rain
2011 | Performance and video documentation | 6' 12"
Image courtesy of the artist

58 See Smith, "Writing in the Rain," 120.
59 Wiyanto, *Erased Time*, 16.
60 See Smith, "Writing in the Rain," 126.

As a child, by decision of his father, Harsono went to Chinese school and there, he learned to write his name in Chinese script. His attempt to convey the effect of the Presidential Instruction is refused by the rain that washes off his inscriptions. By performing the writing of his name, Harsono refuses his identity to be fully erased. In my opinion, the rain also refers to the archive's resilience, and serves as an indication that despite attempts to destroy evidence, not all vestiges are lost. It is to these traces that Harsono's next future works would be directed—to find the missing pieces of the puzzle.

Figure 5.10 B
FX Harsono
Writing in the Rain
2011 | Performance and video documentation | 6' 12"
Image courtesy of the artist

As a young photographer and until 1959, Harsono's father owned the only photography studio in the town. Then came Sukarno's regulation No.10/1959 which prohibited Chinese living in remote Indonesia to own businesses.[61] The family suffered a big blow and resumed preparations to leave for China. Harsono remembers this episode with perplexity, as he was conscious that no family members could speak Chinese.[62] In 1999, after his father's death, Harsono recovered an album of photographs from the family house in Blitar. Among family pictures, this album contained around eighty black and white photographs of exhumation—*ndudah*, low Javanese word for digging—of Chinese mass graves in the early 1950s [Fig. 5.11]. The remains captured by the lens, belonged to victims of 1946-1948 mass killings identified only by several written inscriptions on the photographs themselves. His father, Oh Hok Tjoe (later Hendro Subagio), joined the Chung Hua Tsung Hui

61 See Wiyanto, *Erased Time*, 17; Wiyanto, "A Brief Biography," 128.
62 See Wiyanto, "A Brief Biography," 128.

organization as its photographer. During the investigations, they recorded the number of victims, contacted family members, and gave them a proper burial in sites the community referred to as *Bong Belung*.[63] The album photographs date from October to December 1951, when ndudah took place. Harsono soon realized he had in his hands an important piece of archive.

Figure 5.11
Archival photographs from Ndudha album project
On the bottom left indicated by a red circle, Harsono's father. Oh Hok Tjoe (Hendro Subayo)
Image courtesy of the artist

Since the artist started researching this archive more attentively in 2009, his work changed. Now, Harsono uses his personal and familiar history (including the photo album) as a catalyst to investigate Indonesian recent history. There may be other aspects of Indonesian history which need questioning, but for now, Harsono chose to dedicate his attention to the period

63 See Agung Hujatnikajennong, *Things Happen When We Remember* (Bandung: Selasar Sunaryo Art Space, 2014), 32; FX Harsono, "NDudah," FX Harsono, 2009, http://fxharsono.com/videowork_view-ndudah.php.

1946-1949. He links this period's history to the subsequent killings of 1965-1966 and the incidents of 1996-1998. Even if none of these incidents had the Chinese as the main target, as an ethnicity that was regarded as 'alien', 'communist' and 'wealthy', they suffered several retaliations. The linkage Harsono makes between 1946-1948, 1965-1966 and 1996-1998 transpires familiar bonds; Harsono was born in the first period, was impeded by his father to participate on the second (he was a teenager), and witnessed the third, while he was already a father himself. His interest in the first episode originates in the photos. As he recalls, his father told him little about the *ndudah*—possibly because it was dangerous.[64] In retrospect, it is incredible that his father did not destroy those pictures; this may indicate his intention to set history right. From these circumstances originates Harsono's recent work.

A relevant aspect of the *ndudah* project is the archive Harsono keeps compiling, both in Indonesia and in the Netherlands. This body of work has granted Harsono wider international recognition, and he was a laureate of the Prince Claus Award in 2014. This distinction is linked to the "attention [he grants] to the experience of ethnic minorities and incisively critiquing discrimination and the exclusionary nature of 'national' history and identity; for reclaiming memories and repressed stories that are central to Asian history; and for contributing significantly to the development of socially engaged art in Indonesia."[65] While Harsono calls for justice and the rewriting of history through his works, the Chinese community—in line with the government's policy to overwrite history—has responded with superficiality to the revocation of interdictions. So, he feels that his work is directed towards them as well. He observes that because the "Indonesian government has facilitated a (perhaps superficial) revival of Chinese language and culture,"[66] Chinese culture [became] artificially commodified. He expresses:

> I have great concern for the Chinese in Indonesia right now. They only see and represent an image. Extraordinary images: the lion dance, the dragon dance, massive ceremonies where they are very enthusiastic. However I doubt that they care about the meaning and function of the culture and its artifacts...[67]

Harsono's disappointment led him to collect material artifacts which had been hidden. Abandoned by the younger Chinese, who discard remnants that their families conserved with such vehemence, Harsono collects them. This results in works such as *Nyonya* (2014) [Fig. 5.12], an installation that pays

64 Wiyanto, *Erased Time*, 15.

65 "FX Harsono Receives Prince Claus Award in Indonesia," Prince Claus Fund, 2014, http://princeclausfund.org/en/news/copy-of-fx-harsono-receives-prince-claus-award-in-indonesia.html.

66 Smith, "Writing in the Rain," 120.

67 Hujatnikajennong, *Things Happen When We Remember*, 43.

tribute to Peranakan married women. It is composed of found objects (on the left) which were juxtaposed with the photographic portrait of a Peranakan Chinese woman, wearing traditional attire—*kebaya* and *sarong*—printed on a glass surface (on the right).

Figure 5.12
FX Harsono
Nyonya
2014 | Mixed media installation | 270 x 270 x 21 cm
Image courtesy of the artist

The wooden objects on the left are traditional votive plaques that have auspicious poems inscribed and painted in (the equally auspicious) gold which were used as vehicles to bring prosperity to a house. Usually placed on the sides of doors or hanging inside the households (I think this is these specimens case), these poems have gradually lost applicability in the post-Suharto era. It is a paradox to think that now that Chinese culture can be practiced, it no longer serves Chinese Peranakan descents. This is a direct consequence of the politics of erasure. Ideally, couplets are concise, possess the same number of characters, are written in Chinese classical calligraphy and in different tones. The meaning of the pair must be related. The element repeated—existing on the wooden object and in the print—contains the character 'Peace' on the left, and 'Light' on the right. It is as if Harsono is trying to heal the Chinese-Indonesian community.

These local women, as Peranakan scholar Peter Lee notes, were slaves and most of them were poor. This circumstance made them available as a commodity to the newcomers that arrived in Java by sea.[68] With the passing of time, they came to be the first Indonesians to embrace Chinese culture and would eventually become this syncretic culture's transmitters. During the years of prohibitions, women equally were the main guardians of Peranakan culture inside households. Thus, with this tribute to Indonesians who married Chinese men, the artist is equally making visible the role of native communities of keeping the archive (through material goods).

Thus, *Nyonya* constitutes Harsono's attempt to safeguard ready-made materials of Peranakans. The work demonstrates that forgetfulness is unavoidable, but it equally exemplifies the consequences of freedom, such as dissolution of identity. *Nyonya* and *Ndudha* acknowledge the urgency to produce the archive, claim the need for historical revisionism, and point to intergenerational clashes. The ignorance that younger Indonesians have of Peranakan history led Harsono to create *Digital Souls* (2016), a Google online platform which is constantly updated with his findings. Since his investigations started, some sites were demolished but through Harsono's *Digital Souls*, their existence is claimed. In sum, Harsono is acting like his father: he is creating a document and leaving it for the next generation. And his journey is manifold: he delved into his memory's flaws, he entered his father's emotional and working space, he entered the community's space and finally he was globally recognized for his efforts. The material fragments he collects, along with his father's album and the Google project, demonstrate the persistence of the archive and the importance of his work.

I Wayan Bendi: Making Contemporary History

As mentioned in Chapter 4, Batuan has seen a resurgence in the last decade. This, I argue, is also linked with Bendi's practice, that reached a monumentality previously unknown to the Batuan style. Today, Bendi prepares to open a new museum and to launch a new publication—*Bendi, Pelukis Kontemporer?* (Bendi, contemporary painter?)—about his career and practice. Bendi's post-2000 practice is characterized by a new kind of monumentality, both in scale and theme, which were unknown to the style (a frequent size is 150 x 250 cm). In one painting, he covers the totality of the surface with drawings that belong in all his earlier phases: classic Batuan (when he was an apprentice), everyday life scenes (when he started), tourist life and socio-political commentary (since the early 1990s). This conflation not only means he is working through his own tradition, but equally requires the viewer to spend time, wandering over the canvas. While this is an aspect of Batuan paintings, it is even more so in Bendi's work.

68 Peter Lee, "Good Girl, Bad Girl," in *Toekar Tambah*, 12.

Figure 5.13
Entrance of Museum Batuan
Photograph by Leonor Veiga, 2014

Figure 5.14
The façade of I Wayan Bendi nem musem
Photograph by Leonor Veiga, 2014

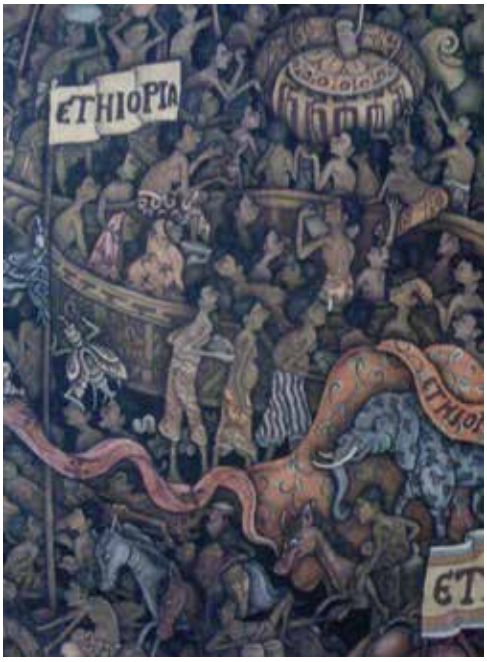

Figure 5.15
I Wayan Bendi
Poor Ethiopia
2000 | Acrylic and ink on canvas | Dimensions unknown
Photograph by Leonor Viega, 2014

His choice of themes of global relevance caught Supangkat's attention. In 2011, some of these works were showcased in *Ethnicity Now*. Supangkat chose Bendi's notations on the famine in Ethiopia in *Poor Ethiopia* (2000) [Fig. 5.15], possibly his first global theme; the 9/11 events in 2001 *Tragedy* (2002), and the Kuta Bombings in *Tragedy Kuta* (2003) [Fig. 5.16]. While social commentary is ever-present in Batuan paintings, the depiction of global themes is completely new. It is equally relevant for the style that this phase remains in Bendi's collection in Batuan.

In *Tragedy Kuta* [Fig. 5.16 A, B, C], Bendi mixed Balinese ceremonies and daily life alongside the event. The Kuta bombings of 2002 killed several tourists, identified in image C by the national flags attached to a plane leaving the island. The central image reveals horror, flames, and the demonic image of a Balinese *barong*. The image on the left shows victims, ready to be buried or cremated. Made in the aftermath of the bombings, the painting shows everyone agitated, mirroring his own feelings. In 2010, Bendi would eventually connect the horror of the 9/11 in New York to the Kuta bombings of Bali. And after producing two canvases on these individual events, in 2010 he produced his most monumental work to this day—*Terror*.

Figure 5.16 A, B, C
I Wayan Bendi
Tragedy Kuta
2000 | Acrylic and ink on canvas | Dimensions unknown
Photograph by Leonor Veiga, 2014

Terror (2010) [Fig. 5.17] is a conflated story: it combines the destruction of the World Trade Centre in New York on September 9, 2001, with the Kuta bombings on October 12, 2002, in Bali. This coming together of the two events

must be acknowledged as a personal reflection on terrorism and its implications for the world. The 9/11 effects were cruel for the Balinese, as Bali was the second place to experience Al-Qaeda's actions both in horror and in tragedy. The bombs created many victims of multiple nationalities and faiths, and fear among local populations. Damage was transversal to American, Balinese, and global societies alike, making the debut of the new millennium a traumatic one.

Figure 5.17
I Wayan Bendi
Terror
2010 | Acrylic and ink on canvas | 500 x 200 cm
Image courtesy of the artist

The left side *Terror* is dedicated to the WTC events, the right side of the painting is dedicated to the Kuta bombings. The composition demonstrates his discontent with world leaders' incapacity to find solutions. In 2010 (when the painting was done), Bendi was feeling frustrated with the lack of results from the Afghan war.[69] Despite campaigns and efforts, Osama bin Laden remained free and active as Al-Qaeda's leader. So, he depicted Bin Laden imprisoned, but placed him inside a cloud to allude to his invisibility. Meanwhile, an American soldier inside a protecting bubble tries to catch him. Around this main story, smaller stories complete his desire for harmony: Balinese make offerings and attend processions, Muslims listen to the imam, Buddhists listen to the bodhisattva, soldiers fight, tourists take pictures or are evacuated. By conflating the American events with the Balinese, Bendi makes free associations, includes globalization's effects, and underlines his belief in the Balinese "principles of Karma-Pala, according to which every action generates its consequence and hence, each wicked action will eventually get proportionate punishment."[70] As suggested, Bendi made a reflection on global suffering reason why in this painting Buddhists,

69 I Wayan Bendi, I Wayan Bendi Batuan Style, interview by Leonor Veiga, trans. Bagus Ari Saputra, September 9, 2014.
70 *Bendi: Pelukis Kontemporer?* (Ubud: Arma Museum, upcoming).

Muslims, and Hindus are all sitting around their major leader. Similarly, he shows airplanes as weapons (against the WTC) and as symbols of freedom, rescue and hope (the airplane on the right rescues international tourists).

Concerning the application of traditional codes, the painting can be read in two major ways. First, from right to left. Here, Bendi applies the codes of *sekala* and *nikala*—the seen and the unseen—in the image. In Balinese view, good and evil (*Barong* and *Rangda*) are believed to be ever-present. Bali also maintains Javanese art conventions, namely *wayang*. In this regard, Bendi followed norms: the piece has a center—traditionally the *Kayunan*, oftentimes read as a tree of life and occasionally as a mountain, that stands in the center of the screen at the beginning and end of *wayang* performances—here represented by the WTC towers, which emerge from the bottom (probably) denoting the origin of terror. Good characters were placed on the *dalang*'s right side, while those representing evil appear on his left. Here it is relevant to remember: "the demonic look of a being [Barong] does not necessarily mean that it is malevolent."[71] So, this painting can be interpreted as a *wayang* show, in which the cowboy actively chases Bin Laden, who escapes in the clouds. While this happens, a plane crashes into the Twin Towers, and a big Balinese temple, eaten by *Rangda*, falls, while several fires burst in the sky.

Second, the painting, *Terror*, can be read from left to right, following the events' chronology. I would like to hypothesize the relation of this artwork to linear-narrative traditions, such as that of the *Kamasan/Wayang* style of (single) narrative, and the rarer *wayang beber*, or scroll *wayang* that depicts the whole story in a long scroll. Indonesian art historian R. M. Moerdowo mentions:

> Though the Wayang Beber is almost non-existent as an art now, a painting technique similar to that of the Wayang Beber may still be found on the island of Bali. It is known as the Kemasan or Klungkung style.[72]

Moerdowo meets Indonesian *wayang* expert Raden Mas Sayid's affirmation that "The pictures drawn [ca. 1316 AD in East Java] resembled the *wayang* pictures which may still be seen today in Bali."[73] My reading of this work as a scroll originates in their affirmations that beber resembles a painting. But because there is no possibility of affirming that Bendi made this connection, it remains in the realm of hypothesis. In 1974, British political scientist and historian Benedict Anderson (1936-2015) suggested that beber was older than

71 Laura Noszlopy, "Ogoh-Ogoh: A 'new Tradition' in Transformation," in *Performing Objects: Museums, Material Culture and Performance in Southeast Asia*, ed. Fiona Kerlogue (London: The Horniman Museum, 2004), 162.

72 R. M. Moerdowo F. R. S. A., *Wayang: Its Significance in Indonesian Society* (Jakarta: PN Palai Pustaka, 1992), 20.

73 Raden Mas Sayid, *Wayang Encyclopaedia*, trans. Errington (Surakarta: Reksa Pustaka, 1980), 26–27.

wayang kulit (shadow puppetry), but this can't be proven.[74] Yet, he observed that it was a courtly art, for the entertainment of the selected few and that it was virtually dead by the end of nineteenth century.[75] Its demise is related to three main factors: one, Javanese courts' inability to continue its patronage following Majapahit collapse; two, separation of its two key components—poetry (that embraced newer languages), and painting (that went underground, stopped being an aristocratic practice, and was transferred to paid artisans); and three, its incapacity to compete with *wayang kulit* for entertainment, because of its stillness. Thus, reading this painting as *beber* suggests Bendi's will to recover a lost practice, one characterized by the presence of the full-length story, and more "colorful [and naturalistic representations] packed with objects and decorations, as well as human figures."[76] I trace Anderson's words in Bendi's painting, and suggest that his dense working style is closer to this account [Fig. 5.18] rather than to Balinese narrative paintings of *Wayang* or *Kamasan* styles [Fig. 5.19], both in content and style.

Figure 5.18
Wayang Beber
Mid-19th century, Java | Painting on cotton | 200 x 50 cm
Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Wayang_Beber_at_Mangkunegaran_Palace.jpg

In terms of representation, Bendi's crowdedness seems closer to the scroll painting [Fig. 5.18] because it fills the whole space and contains more than one action. In any case, this second reading remains a hypothesis, since it may not have been Bendi's intention to refer to *beber*. And, as Australian historian and Kamasan specialist Siobhan Campbell explains,

> Basically, *ider-ider* paintings (long scroll) made in Kamasan are similar to *wayang beber* but there is no

74 Benedict Anderson, "The Last Picture Show: Wayang Beber," in *Proceedings from the Center for Southeast Asian Studies* (Conference on Modern Indonesian Literature, Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin, 1974), 35.
75 Anderson, "The Last Picture Show," 36.
76 Anderson, 43.

firm material base to show a direct link of how they moved from Java to Bali. *Ider-ider* don't use a narrator but are very long (say 20m) viewed from right to left or left to right depending on the narrative.[77]

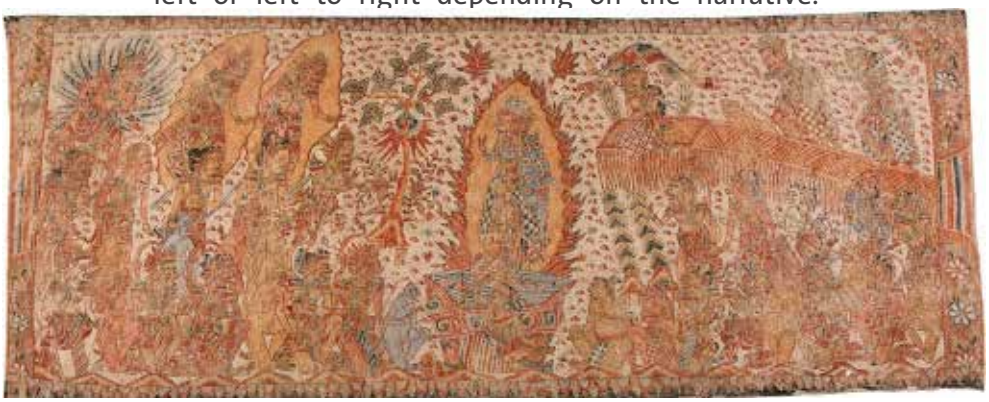

Figure 5.19
Kamasan/Wayang style
Kak Lui (1850 to 1860–1920 to 1930)
Ramayana
Date unknown | 93 x 208 cm | Painting on cotton
Source: http://heurist.sydney.edu.au/ Inv. AM E074160 Ramayana

In *Terror*, Bendi merged two events of global relevance, added narrative and pictorial traditions which remained in Bali after the demise of the Majapahit Empire, and thus confirmed the Balinese resilience towards traditional arts. Here we can say that Bendi's avant-gardism is made evident through his individual utilization of local codes and notations: on the one hand, Batuan constitutes a means to manifest his disdain for newer imports of art through globalizing forces, and on the other hand, Batuan allowed him to find a language that breaks free from normalizing impacts. Bendi is a case of an artist who confirms Kapur's proposal for an Asian avant-gardism, for his life-long dedication to a slow manufacturing tradition that relies heavily on Balinese crafts.

Dinh Q. Lê: *From Vietnam to Hollywood* and Beyond

Lê moved to Vietnam in 1997. Since then, he has produced an extensive body of work in which he tackles several aspects suppressed in Vietnamese society, namely the effects that Agent Orange had on local populations. To this day, his works match sensibility and discomfort with extreme accuracy. Regarding his woven tapestries, his post-2002 work reveals a new aspect of his contemplative gesture: the changing relation with time and memory. In

77 Siobhan Campbell, Wayang Beber, unpublished interview by Leonor Veiga, Leiden, May 15, 2015.

2003, Lê was invited by Francesco Bonami to exhibit his woven photographs at the 50th Venice Biennial. Lê took the series *From Vietnam to Hollywood* (2003-6) [Fig. 5.20 and 5.21], a work that allowed him to negotiate memories from the war with his post-conflict life in the US. As time passed, he became increasingly aware that his memories from Vietnam were unreliable, blurred, and fragmented. Thus, this work "addresses how personal memory can be manipulated over time, particularly by popular entertainment."[78] Conscious of the fragile and volatile character of his war memories, because of his immersion in a world flooded with American representations of Vietnam as a war zone, Lê's strategy of weaving charged stills from Western cinema representing Vietnam is effective. In these compositions, he juxtaposed anonymous Vietnamese figures with famous European stars such as Catherine Deneuve (*Indochine*) or Hollywood actors like Marlon Brando (*Apocalypse Now*), indicating how cinematographic representations perpetuate power relations.

Figure 5.20
Dinh Q. Lê
Untitled (Columbia Pictures)
2003 | C-print and linen tape | 97 x 183 cm
Image courtesy of the artist

This series of weavings brings together, not only these discrepancies, but also disparate perspectives that challenge the American (and Western) collective understanding of Vietnam as a tropical land. *From Vietnam to Hollywood* consists of multilayered compositions resulting from the juxtaposition of various images. The composition generates an optical and

78 Kate Palmer Albers, *Uncertain Histories: Accumulation, Inacessibility, and Doubt in Contemporary Photography* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2015), 78.

psychological disturbance in the viewer, as the implications of the weaving unfold. Sometimes dualities such as East/West, and victims/abusers appear, but the artist also defines these dichotomies through memory and imagination. Whether obtained through photojournalism, popular culture, or propaganda, these powerful photo weavings are significant because of their ability to generate intense reactions and to question lasting memories.

Figure 5.21
Dinh Q. Lê
From Vietnam to Hollywood
2006 | C-print and linen tape | 100 x 170 cm
Image courtesy of the artist

The understanding that photography is an unreliable media to tell personal or collective history has informed many of Lê's weavings. In the series From Vietnam to Hollywood this aspect gained wider importance, as he combined digitally enhanced stills from iconographic Hollywood with prevalent black and white photojournalistic images shot during the conflict. In doing so, he wove fiction and reality, while commenting on his personal history. There is no single viewpoint in these works; they contain multiple aspects and perspectives on the same subject. Lê himself holds several standpoints on the conflict: the American, the Vietnamese, and his own. *From Vietnam to Hollywood* merges "fact, fiction, and personal recollections to create a tapestry of memories that is relative unstable".[79] This instability, I argue, rests on what can be defined as an incongruent usage of time, place, and action. The pictures he takes, or the stills he appropriates, are made now, whereas the genocides or conflicts happened before and are geographically situated elsewhere. Lê

79 Melissa Chiu, "Interview with Dinh Q. Lê," in *Vietnam: Destination for the New*

does not always weave; he produces different works, in various media. Yet, the idea of fading memory has made him revisit his early series of weavings. His latest photographic works series, *A Quagmire This Time* (2007-2008) and *Remnants, Ruins, Civilization, and Empire* (2012) [Fig. 5.22] refers to the fragility of personal archives, as Lê reflects on how Vietnam war memory is collectively being replaced by the Iraqi conflict. For these projects, Lê wove remnants he photographed while visiting museums in Europe and Angkor Wat and coupled them with images of Khmer Rouge's genocide and the Iraq war, alluding that past greatness was substituted by present suffering. So, he reused materials from the series *Cambodia: Splendour and Darkness* of the 1990s. This gesture of revaluation shows how movement and signification are intertwined and negotiated in his photographic work. The images which he captured from the Angkor Wat sites in 1996 reappeared; now the Cambodian monument appears interwoven with images of the ancient civilization of Sumer, today Iraq. What was engendered was a change in the meaning of the base image (referencing Angkor Wat) changed: in this newer body of work, Lê's intention was no longer to "turn these monuments into memorials"[80] by referencing the lives of Khmer Rouge victims, but rather to address striking similarities between the suffering of Cambodians and Iraqis. This moving of significations demonstrates that one image may convey different histories and different artists' messages.

Figure 5.22
Dinh Q. Lê
Sumerians 1 (detail)
2012 | C-print and linen tape | Dimensions variable
Image courtesy of the artist

Millenium, the Art of Dihn Q Lê (New York: Asia Society, 2005), 21.

80 Moira Roth, "Of Memory and History: An Exchange between Dinh Q. Lê and Moira Roth," in *Dinh Q. Lê: From Vietnam to Hollywood,* ed. Christopher Miles and Moira Roth (Seattle, WA: Marquand Books, 2003), 15.

Jakkai Siributr: Towards Regligious Acceptance

Based in Bangkok, the Thai artist Jakkai Siributr (b. 1969, Bangkok) divides his time between the hectic metropolis and the quieter Chiang Mai, where he built a home to retreat from the agitation he feels in the capital and to find peace and mediation time. A practicing Buddhist, one of his goals in life "is to find that path to enlightenment."[81] His fifteen-year old practice can be divided into two phases: between 1998 and 2005, he searched for a medium of expression and as such, was more focused on formalist concerns. After 2005, already armed with his newly found 'third' medium, Siributr "gradually moved to cultural critique."[82] Siributr has persisted in his material of preference: textiles. This unconventional choice led him to study BA in Textiles/Fine Art from Indiana University (1992) where he was encouraged to work with textiles as medium,[83] and a MS in Printed Textile Design from Philadelphia University (1996), where his creative freedom was straitjacketed. Upon his return to Thailand in 1998, he oscillated between working in textiles and painting, and for a period maintained two separate activities. Today, he affirms: "my work is a combination of the opposite views of the two different schools."[84] In 2003, British curator Steve Pettifor defined Jakkai Siributr as a 'weave artist'; in 2008 journalist Simon de Burton referred him as a 'textile-painter'.[85] These nomenclatures convey the struggle curators and writers felt not knowing how to frame him. Today Siributr is considered an artist: this is a major evolvement, because it shows how his practice, rooted in craft, became accepted as art. He says:

> I don't see the term textile artist as negative, I don't see decorative as negative either... It depends on whether, as an artist, I can make it decorative and interesting, and as conceptual as possible.[86]

He confirms his embroiders reference northwest and northeastern Thai

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81 Chao-yi Tsai, "Jakkai Siributr," in *Viewpoints & Viewing Points: 2009 Asian Art Biennial* (Taiwan: National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts, 2009), 114.

82 Iola Lenzi, *Transient Shelter* (New York: Tyler Rollins Fine Art, 2014).

83 The artist refers that Budd Stalnaker, his teacher at Indiana, advocated experimentation but didn't want students to emulate painting. He used to say "If you make a quilt of someone's portrait, it is inferior to a painting, so why do it?" Jakkai Siributr, Evolution of my work, unpublished interview by Leonor Veiga, Bangkok, August 14, 2014; Gregory Galligan, "The Fabric of Memory," *Art in America*, October 30, 2014, http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/magazine/the-fabric-of-memory/.

84 Jakkai Siributr, Recent works of Jakkai Siributr, unpublished interview by Leonor Veiga, Leiden, July 30, 2016.

85 Steven Pettifor, "Jakkai Siributr," in *Flavours: Thai Contemporary Art* (Bangkok: Thavibu Gallery, 2003), 72.

86 Simon de Burton, "South-Eastern Promise," *Financial Times*, October 25, 2008, sec. Life & Arts, 16.

traditional ones, respectively rooted in Burmese and Khmer culture [Fig. 5.23 A, B]. In Thailand, textiles are most commonly woven (Thai silk is considered the most beautiful in the world) but the overriding presence of 'shining' embroideries, decorated with metallic yarns and small stones, is not minor. It results from an assimilation process which permits these textiles to be discursively referred to as Thai. He recalls: "It took me a long time to get to the imagery I wanted."[87] He spent seven years making embroidery that included figuration "And then the three-dimensional (installations, etc.) came about."[88] The artist does not hold a fascination for traditional Thai textiles but admits his interest in the vernacular Thai "which is very folkish-kitschy."[89] Some of his embroideries [Fig. 5.24] make direct references to that aspect.

Figure 5.23 A, B
A) Traditional Vintage Thai Burmese embroidery (detail)
B) Kohn Khmer embroidery used in Thai Classical Dance (detail)
Source: A) http://www.vintageasian.com/104-vintage-souvenirs/;
B) https://nl.pinterest.com/pin/444378688208642925/

Figure 5.24
Jakkai Siributr
Ganga (detail)
2012 | Glass beads, sequins and embroidery on canvas | 150 x 170cm
Photograph by Leonor Veiga, 2014

87 Siributr, Evolution of my work.
88 Siributr.
89 Siributr.

In 2007, Siributr's career experienced a significant shift: he started referencing Theravada Buddhism principles[90] to address his unease with the current ultra-conservative Buddhist government.[91] His critical observations contain "a sarcasm that is very un-Buddhist,"[92] merging a lack of knowledge of Buddhist principles with anthropological insights of Thai society's changing behaviors that preannounce a post-Buddhist era.[93] His critical eye has targeted society, monks, the military and government officials alike. Siributr's choice to use Buddhist insights must be understood as part of a unified understanding of society, religion, and life. As Lester observes, Therava Buddhism is a total social phenomenon:

> Theravada countries of Southeast Asia own a long-standing tradition of close association and cooperation between government and expressly Buddhist organizations and leadership [and] government itself rightly viewed is a Buddhist institution. Inasmuch as all life is understood in terms of Buddhist values, everything is 'sacred'.[94]

His conduct presents risks; Irish art critic Brian Curtin says that "Art that is overtly oppositional to the dominant, conservative and normative understandings of Thai culture and society... is atypical in Bangkok," a situation that probably originates from the fact that the last ten years have seen an increase of lese-majesty cases.[95] Siributr was fortunate that his recent critical shows—*Transient Shelter* (2014), *Karma Cash and Carry* (2010) and *Plunder* (2013)—took place outside Thailand, in New York and Singapore, respectively. In a recent interview, he mentioned:

> I could be in trouble with Buddhist extremists and conservatives but they don't come to see the show. I have a show now in Singapore with uniforms. I don't know if I'd be able to show that in Thailand because it's a little bit sensitive with authority [who wears these uniforms as official garment]... I think it was a good decision to show that work with uniforms in Singapore because I wouldn't want to censor myself in Thailand—that's the worst thing for an artist. If they want to censor my work, I'll deal

90 Siributr, Evolution of my work.

91 Siributr.

92 Tsai, "Jakkai Siributr," 114.

93 Pattana Kitiarsa, "Beyond Syncretism: Hybridization of Popular Religion in Contemporary Thailand," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 36, no. 3 (2005): 465.

94 Robert C. Lester, *Theravada Buddhism in Southeast Asia* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1973), 3.

95 Brian Curtin, "Jakkai Siributr," Frieze Magazine, October 28, 2011, http://trfineart.com/pdfs/reviews/0000/0335/Frieze_Magazine___Shows___Jakkai_Siributr.pdf.

with it but I wouldn't want to censor my work.[96]

It is difficult to be an artist in today's Thailand. Siributr observes that this has always been the case: if the past was characterized by a lack of opportunities and spaces, today the impact of Thai politics and its interference in all aspects of life is the reason. In any case, Thai artists enjoy no support. Siributr contests the totalitarian vision of Thailand as 'Buddha Land' [Fig. 5.25].

Figure 5.25
Bangkok airport banner informing tourists of proper behavior
Photograph by Leonor Veiga, 2014

In a recent conversation, Siributr mentioned that the Rohingya crisis in Burma triggered his work *78* [Fig. 5.26]—a large-scale installation in the form of the Ka'aba, the holy site at the center of the mosque in Mecca, in Saudi Arabia—in which he pays a tribute to the victims of the 25 October 2004 incidents with the police.[97] *78* refers to the number of Muslim protesters who died of suffocation and organ collapse while being transported to an internment camp. Viewed by the government as separatists, during the protests circa 1300 men were arrested, ordered to strip, had their hands cuffed, and were stacked inside a truck. Placed 'as cargo' with their faces down, *78* died. The work calls for the embracement of diversity in Thailand: this conflict originates in the British recognition of the Malay kingdom of Pattani as part of the kingdom of Thailand in 1909. Since then, there has been little government

96 Elif Gül Tirben, "Conversation: Jakkai Siributr and Elif Gul Tirben," *M-Est.Org* (blog), 2014, https://m-est.org/2014/03/25/an-interview-with-jakkai-siributr/.

97 Jakkai Siributr, Rama Dynasty, interview by Leonor Veiga, Bangkok, 23 October 27, 2017.

sympathy for their condition as a minority.[98] To convey his call for unification and pacific cohabitation, he embroidered in an 'Arabized' Thai script messages of reconciliation. As he explains, "these people do not communicate, they do not speak the same language. So, by Arabizing Thai I was attempting to promote a dialogue that remains impossible."[99]

Through Siributr's Third Avant-gardism several technical aspects of Thailand's textile traditions (such as embroidery, sometimes with metallic yarns as in *78*) are quoted, while he comments on a religion extremism under totalitarian surveillance. The work *78* constitutes a 'wake-up call' towards diversity and his attempt to pacify the country (and the world).

Figure 5.26
Jakkai Siributr
78
2014 | Steel scaffolding bamboo, fabric and embroidery | 350 x 350 x 350 cm
Image courtesy of YAVUZ Fine Art

98 Jakkai Siributr, *78*, unpublished interview by Leonor Veiga, Leiden, March 10, 2016.
99 Siributr.

5.2.3 Heritage Issues

Southeast Asia is as abundant in ethnical diversity and traditional arts as it is in cultural heritage sites. This situation has not escaped artists' attention and has prompted significant responses. This section includes the work of artists that deal frequently with notions of Intangible Cultural Heritage which are viewed as the monopoly of institutions such as UNESCO. In most cases, the artists reflect on the phenomenon of 'invented tradition' associated with such classifications. This section presents installation works including the American-Indonesian duo Brahma Tirta Sari unorthodox displays of Indonesian batik; the analysis of Indonesian Albert Yonathan Setiawan on Southeast Asian Buddhism through a deconstruction of Borobudur and Ayutthaya; the reflection of Thai Kamin Lertchaiprasert on heritage looting; and finally Indonesian Entang Wiharso and Jumaadi's deliberate self-exoticization through *wayang*, which has become clichéd among contemporary art exhibited worldwide.

Brahma Tirta Sari: Batik with Cultural Agency

Indonesian batik is one of the country's most important cultural forms: collected by major international museums including the Tropenmuseum, in Amsterdam, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, in New York and the Victorian and Albert, in London,[100] on October 2nd, 2009, Indonesian batik was inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.[101] While this inscription could indicate popularity, batik, as observed by Indonesian artist Agung Kurniawan, is widely overlooked by Indonesian contemporary artists.[102] Their neglect follows from a long narrative of a practice that has, throughout centuries, experienced several episodes of threat. Yet, the Javanese transformed these events into calls for experimentation. For instance, technological advancements such as the advent of cap (cooper block stamp, an art in itself) in the mid nineteenth-century, almost destroyed the tulis (written) form but democratized the its use as personal garment; during the Japanese occupation in WWII (1942-1945), severe material shortages gave place to specimens in two shades (dark and light), making each artifact multipurpose. Batik has, since Indonesia's independence, been elevated to a national art form: together with Hardjogenoro, President Sukarno promoted a new style: 'Batik Indonesia'.

100 See Fiona Kerlogue, "Museum Collections of Batik," in *Batik: Design, Style & History* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2004), 184.

101 "UNESCO Jakarta Marks 'Batik Day' by Wearing Batik to Work," UNESCO Jakarta, October 3, 2017. Interenstingly, the Tropenmuseum's permanent display of batik was removed precisely in 2009.

102 Agung Kurniawan, Memory and Contemporaneity, interview by Leonor Veiga, Yogyakarta, January 18, 2010, 18.

Symptomatic of the country's Javanization, this nationalistic project was continued during Suharto's presidency.[103] Today, this handcrafted form rivals with modern technologies, such as screen printing.[104]

It is in this context that the duo Brahma Tirta Sari (BTS), (translated to 'creativity is the source of all knowledge'), emerged in the 1990s. While they affirm having no political intent in their work, Supangkat finds a discourse of resistance in their practice.[105] Their installations challenge state-sponsored notions which have kept batik a courtly art for centuries. In the past, its use as "a vehicle for meditation"[106] was highly regarded among the elite. Similarly, many of its most important ornaments—the *larangan*, so-called 'forbidden motifs'—were exclusive of courtly classes. BTS not only use batik secularly (while they are not royals, they practice its meditative properties), they equally remember that their constant use of 'forbidden motifs' results from Sultan Hamengku Buono IX's (1912-1988) *larangan* release in the mid-twentieth century.[107] Their practice also combats the way batik is exhibited in (inter)national venues. The works are always flattened; the long pieces of cloth (normally more than 2 meters), are displayed in a way that cancels its anthropological use—in tubular form. From these observations comes their installation work *Sarong* (2009).

BTS art studio was founded by Agus Ismoyo and Nia Fliam in 1985, in Yogyakarta. They bridge distinct knowledge cultures (Ismoyo is Javanese; Fliam is American of Native American descent) with contemporary pathways.[108] I propose BTS practices as a synthesis and their artworks as Third Avant-garde, as they resist strict definitions of traditional, neotraditional, or modern-contemporary. Agus Ismoyo (b. Yogyakarta, n/d) is a self-taught artist who was trained in Industrial Management (1985). Ismoyo's ancestors were batik makers in Solo, so his interest in batik is rooted in his familiar background. In

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103 Michael Hitchcock and Wiendu Nuryanti, "Introduction," in *Building on Batik: The Globalization of a Craft Community*, ed. Michael Hitchcock and Wiendu Nuryanti (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), xxix.

104 Simon Soon, "Batik and Grand Design for Modern Art," in Love Me in My Batik: Modern Batik Art from Malaysia and Beyond, ed. Rahel Joseph (Kuala Lumpur: Ilham Gallery, 2016), 6.

105 Nia Fliam and Agus Ismoyo, Brahma Tirta Sari and ISNIA, interview by Leonor Veiga, Lisbon, November 20, 2016.

106 K.R.T. Hardjonagoro, "The Place of Batik in the History and Philosophy of Javanese Textiles: A Personal View," in *Indonesian Textiles*, ed. Mattiebelle Gittinger, trans. Holmgren (Washington, D.C.: The Textile Museum, 1979), 229.

107 Nia Fliam and Agus Ismoyo, Sarung, unpublished interview by Leonor Veiga, Leiden, May 31, 2016.

108 Astri Wright, "Titik Pertama, Titik Utama - First Dot, Main Dot: Creating Connections in Modern / Indigenous Javanese / Global Batik Art," in *Modern and Contemporary Southeast Asian Art: An Anthology*, ed. Nora A. Taylor and Boreth Ly, Southeast Asia Program Publications (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012), 134. Wrights considers their approach hybrid. I, on contrast, use synthesis to refer to the end of a dialectic.

the early days of his career, Ismoyo spent long periods with his contemporary art peers and explored Western oil painting.[109] Holding a BFA in Textile Design from New York's Pratt Institute (1981) and driven by an interest in Asian and African textiles, Nia Fliam (b. Denver, CO, USA, n/d) arrived in Indonesia in 1983 to learn batik.[110] She studied with modern batik artists from Yogyakarta as well as under the guidance of batik artisan Ibu Dutu, in Gedongkiwo. Because they had no common language to communicate, Fliam learned *batik tulis* (hand-drawn batik) by copying. In 1985, Fliam and Ismoyo started working collaboratively and formed BTS. Their choice was received with resistance by the local art community: Fliam recalls that "Ismoyo was advised not to make batik, because his reputation would drop."[111] Deciding to work collaboratively, with batik as their medium, the duo professed to research its old intangible dimension. But the non-traditional outcome of their work—neither painting nor batik, neither contemporary nor textile art—resulted in a journey of neglect, especially in Indonesia, where their synthetic approach, based on research and mutual participation was difficult to accommodate. As a result, they fostered international alliances and worked collaboratively with Australian Aboriginals, American Indians and various Asian, American, African and European artists.[112] These partnerships catapulted them to the art world: in 1996, they participated in the 10th Sydney Biennial, a show where textiles were predominant;[113] in 1999, their collaboration project with Australian women batik artists Utopia Urapuntja was showcased in the Third Asia-Pacific Triennial (APT3), in Queensland. The impact of these representations was positive, and kick-started Indonesian acceptance resulting in 200, with their first solo exhibition, *Segaragunung*, at the Jakarta National Museum.

The installation *Sarong* is named after the most visible aspect of Indonesian batik: how it is worn. *Kain sarong* is a significant garment since Dutch colonial times and covers the body from waist to the ankles. Initially only worn by women, today men also wear the tubular cloth for relaxation at home or mosque attendance.[114] Australian curator Robyn Maxwell says sarong's main symbolic message is asexual, but "cloths being wrapped to left or right depending on the

109 Wright, Soul, *Spirit and Mountain: Preoccupations of Contemporary Indonesian Painters* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1994), 82.

110 Wright, 83.

111 Nia Fliam and Agus Ismoyo, Memory and Contemporaneity, interview by Leonor Veiga, Yogyakarta, January 13, 2010, 26. The journey of rejection is documented in Wright, "Titik Pertama, Titik Utama," 147.

112 Christine E. Cocca, "Profile," Brahma Tirta Sari, May 30, 2016.

113 "10th Biennale of Sydney (1996)," Biennale of Sydney, November 22, 2016, https://www.biennaleofsydney.com.au/about-us/history/1996-2/. Fliam recalls that Jim Supangkat introduced their work to the curatorial team.

114 Fraser-Lu, *Indonesian Batik*, 20.

gender of the wearer" may offer distinction.[115] In BTS's installation *Sarong*, on display at the Biennale Jogja X (2010), the tubular cloth was regarded as 'second skin', suggesting exactly the way Javanese (men and women) connect to them. Not only do they wear *sarongs*, they also sleep wrapped inside one—the reason why sarongs were installed in a fetal position.[116]

Figure 5.27 A, B
Brahma Tirta Sari
Sarong
2009 | Installation with batik on silk, hand stitched | Dimensions variable
Photograph by Leonor Veiga, 2010

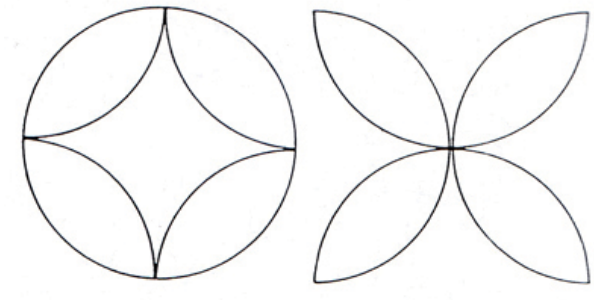

Figure 5.28
Monca-pat simplest form: *kawung* motif
Source: https://nl.pinterest.com/pin/271341946270204646/

When I saw *Sarong* [Fig. 5.27 A, B] in Taman Budaya Yogyakarta (TBY) I noticed these fluctuating and transparent cloths incorporated different batik procedures, color gradations and an overarching presence of the *kawung*

115 Robyn Maxwell, in *Sari to Sarong: Five Hundred Years of Indian and Indonesian Textile Exchange* (Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 2004), 73.
116 Fliam and Ismoyo, Memory and Contemporaneity, 25–26.

motif. Fliam considers this an initial edition of the work; a more complete version was showcased at Esplanade, in Singapore, in 2011. There, *Sarong* was combined with the work *Putri Alam* (Mother Nature) of 2008. Even if the concept behind these installations originates in *semen larangan* motifs,[117] in *Sarong,* the *monca-pat* symbol takes primal importance. This is due to Javanese ideas of spatial orientation (which are reflected in Javanese temples[118]) from which it derives from it being 'a kind of compass-card structure', the simplest of which is seen in the *kawung* motif [Fig. 5.28].

Figure 5.29 A, B
Brahma Tirta Sari
A) *Sarong* East; B) *Sarong* West
2009 | Installation with batik on silk, hand stitched | Dimensions variable
Images courtesy of the artists

Monca-pat (and consequently the *kawung*), follow the sun's trajectory: East, South, West, and North. According to Dutch philologist Theodore Pigeaud, East represents the rising sun [Fig. 5.29 A], South its zenith, West the setting sun [Fig. 5.29 B] and North the sun's death (night).[119] The sun's trajectory is corresponded in elements: earth, fire, wind and water. These elements are matched in colors: white, red, yellow, and dark blue/black, respectively.[120] At the center of the *monca-pat* (*monca* stems from Javanese *ponca* which derives from the Sanskrit *panca* (five); the Javanese term *pat* means four[121]) resides

117 *Semen* means to sprout; some *semen* belong to the so-called forbidden motifs.

118 See Alit Veldhuisen-Djajasoebrata, "On the Origin and Nature of Larangan: Forbidden Batik Patterns from the Central Javanese Principalities," in *Indonesian Textiles*, 204.

119 See Theodore G. TH. Pigeaud, "Javanese Divination and Classification," in *Structural Anthropology in the Netherlands: A Reader*, ed. P. E. de Josselin De Jong, 2nd ed., Translation Series 17 (Leiden: Foris Publications, 1983), 73.

120 In batik, black is obtained by the layering of colors.

121 F. D. E. van Ossenbruggen, "Java's Monca-Pat: Origin of a Primitive Classification System," in *Structural Anthropology in the Netherlands*, 49.

the center of the cross (in green), inhabited by mankind. Therefore, the center, the synthesis of cardinal points, also contains all the colors and elements, and is represented by green and ether (in Fig. 5.27 B, green occupies the middle point of the installation). Thus, it indicates that "the true point of orientation, the geometrical origin, is the self."[122] This 'pocket of knowledge', as BTS put it, manifests Javanese philosophical notions of microcosmos and macrocosmos, which are linked to the reproductive system of mother earth (that gives us food) and father sky (that gives us breath).[123]

Through *Sarong*, BTS performs the double-dismantle enunciated by Kapur. First, Ismoyo and Fliam work as a team, contradicting locally conservative practices that divided the labor of batik between men and women (women practice the waxing whereas men perform the dyeing process). Working together means losing the artist's individuality, a tenet of modernism. Second, they have liberated batik from the space of the human body. Third, they challenge way batik is exhibited in museums: always flattened. Their critique is topical because it transpires how established conceptions move globally, how knowledge is institutionalized, and how museums tell the story of waist cloths. Museums take primacy on the decorative aspects over the utilitarian ones, denoting unease to present objects in a multimeaningful way. This, ultimately, detracts the object from its entirety. And fourth, in counter-current with state-sponsored constructs, they affirm the freedom to research through these motifs, thus use them secularly to convey messages such as the need for self-orientation in a convoluted world.

Albert Yonathan Setiawan: Mandala as Method

The mandala is not important, but the mandala happens.[124]
Chögyan Trungpa Rinpoche

Mandala is a meditative technique to discover meaning; it considers all the difference the world can generate, posits Indian scholar Charu Sheel Siungh.[125] Indonesian Albert Yonathan Setyawan (b. 1983, Bandung) has delved into this possibility between 2007 and 2015, before starting his practice-based PhD in Kyoto, Japan. His mandala works on ceramics have allowed him to continue testing the possibilities that these ancient yet fragile materials—clay

122 Andrew Beatty, "Javanism," in *Varieties of Javanese Religion: An Anthropological Account* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 162.

123 Nia Fliam and Agus Ismoyo, Brahma Tirta Sari: Rasa and Tribawana, interview by Leonor Veiga, Leiden, June 2, 2016.

124 Chögyan Trungpa, "Mandala of Unconditioned Energy," in *Orderly Chaos: The Mandala Principle*, ed. Sherab Chödzin (Boston: Shambala Publications, 1991), 8.

125 Charu Sheel Singh, *Concentric Imagination: Mandala Literary Theory*, New World Literature (New Delhi: B. R. Publishing Corporation, 1994).

and porcelain—both conceptually and graphically. His mission became to "remove ceramics from the realm of utility,"[126] especially from the context of architecture (and decoration). Yet, his works inhabit the floor and the wall. He explains:

> When people put ceramics on the wall, it becomes the whole wall. I try to break that. In addition, ceramics is associated with the pedestal, and I want to explore the space. So, I refuse the rubric of the single object. I start with one motive, then one shape. Then I fabricate the mold and develop a pattern. Then the installation emerges.[127]

Between 2007-2015, Setyawan explored Buddhist teachings in his work. In clear reference to the Indonesia's famous Buddhist temple Borobudur [Fig. 5.30], he produced several mandalas and, after a trip to Ayutthaya in Thailand in 2014 [Fig. 5.31], his research also focused on stupas. He looks at Buddhism's contemporary aspects: fragility, fragmentation, depletion of heritage sites and teachings, with each installation referencing different aspects.

Figure 5.30
Borobudur temple (top view)
Source: www.thehistoryhub.com

Figure 5.31
Ayutthaya (partial view)
Source: www.easteasy.com

In 1992, following elevation to a World Heritage by UNESCO in 1991, the monument of Borobodur was declared "as a 'dead' monument."[128] This event did not influence Setyawan's Buddhist incursions, but it may have contributed for his feeling that Buddhism was being neglected in Indonesia. Dutch historian Marieke Bloembergen describes the consequences of the decree: it "means it can no longer be revitalised, transformed back to fulfill the functions

126 Albert Yonathan Setyawan, Geometry in Albert Yonathan Setyawan's work, unpublished interview by Leonor Veiga, Leiden, June 4, 2016.

127 Yonathan Setyawan.

128 Marieke Bloembergen, "Lonely at the Top: 15 Minutes of Privacy at Borobudur," KITLV Blog (blog), July 21, 2016, http://www.kitlv.nl/lonely-top-15-minutes-privacy-borobudur/.

for which it once was built."[129] The site is still used for Waisak, a religious ritual that brings thousands of people to Magelang every year. Borobudur itself challenges classifications: as Thai art historian Nandana Chutiwongs observes, "The structure and material of Borobudur refers in a symbolic manner to the cosmos," and despite it being "first and foremost a stupa,"[130] scholars have also defined it as a temple and a mandala. Through his metamorphic installations, Setyawan aptly plays with all these meanings.

Figure 5.32
Albert Yonathan Setyawan
Cosmic Labyrinth: The Bells
2012 | Terracota | Performative installation | Variable dimensions
Image courtesy of the artist

The works *Cosmic Labyrinth: The Bells* (2012), *Mandala Study #3* (2015), and *Mandala Study #4* (2015) explore the concepts of orderly chaos (that defines the mandala) through the stupa. Not only he is actively promoting a meeting through Southeast Asian sites, Setyawan is trying to access "contemporary spirituality... to transform something ordinary into something considered divine."[131] Through *Cosmic Labyrinth* [Fig. 5.32], he refers to the cycle of life and death. First, he transforms the small squared pyramid into three concentric circles. Second, he performs their distribution in a labyrinth (that a person may imagine entering but may not exit). The redistribution of the same element (stupa-like miniatures) evokes the Buddhist concept of finding order in chaos.

129 Bloembergen.

130 Nandana Chutiwongs, "Pieces of the Borobudur Puzzle Re-Examined," in *Indonesia: The Discovery of the Past*, ed. Endang Sri Hardiati and Pieter ter Keurs (Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum Volkenkunde / National Museum of Ethnology, 2005), 42.

131 Elizabeth Shim, "Geometry and Repetition: Indonesian Ceramic Artist Albert Yonathan in Singapore," *Art Radar Journal*, May 8, 2015, http://artradarjournal.com/2015/05/08/geometry-and-repetition-indonesian-ceramic-artist-albert-yonathan-setyawan-in-singapore/.

Third, the artist breaks the towers by pressing them with his feet (recorded on video). With this performance, Setyawan actively changes the energy flow—from square to labyrinth, from installation to crushed fragments. He explains, "Back then, I was really inspired by the Buddhist teaching about life cycles."[132]

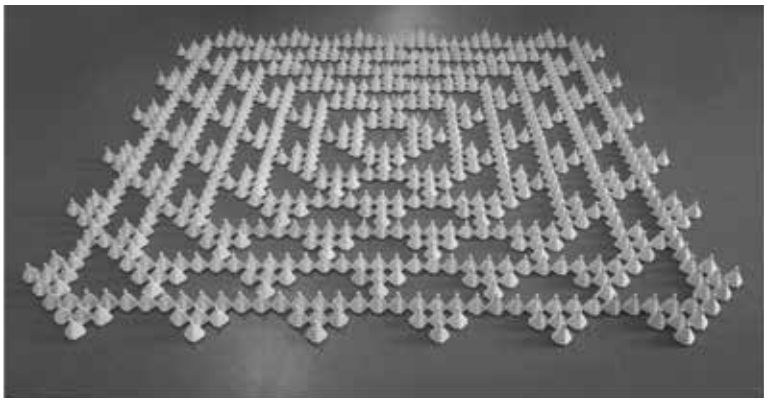

Figure 5.33
Albert Yonathan Setyawan
Mandala Study #3
2015 | Ceramics | Variable dimensions
Image courtesy of the artist

Mandala Study #3 [Fig. 5.33] is made from 700 white stoneware stupas. In a clear reference to Borobudur's square base, its squared floor shape alludes to the bases that form most mandalas—a square with four gates containing a circle with a center point. Singh explains: "one can enter into a mandala from any of the four gates depending upon one's own consciousness repertoires active at a particular time."[133] With its 800 terracotta stupa miniatures, *Mandala Study #4* is a clear reference to Ayutthaya [Fig. 5.34]. Resting atop small piles of white marble sand, the stupas form a "hypnotic pattern of a sprawling sunflower-seed head [which results in a] contemplative interpretation of myth, nature and spirituality."[134]

Setyawan's floor installations are made from repeated motives; repetition serves to convey the idea of mantra for daily life. His compositions are quiet—elements sometimes show off their raw colors, other times are glazed, but he deliberately reveals defects such as cracks or fissures.[135] This procedure is not immediately discernible, as the surfaces created seem perfect and candid.

132 Albert Yonathan Setyawan, Albert Yonathan Setyawan's installation art, unpublished interview by Leonor Veiga, Leiden, March 23, 2014.

133 Sheel Singh, *Concentric Imagination*, v–ix.

134 Marybeth Stock, "Apotheose: Albert Yonathan Setyawan," *Art Asia Pacific*, May 2015, http://artasiapacific.com/Magazine/WebExclusives/Apotheose.

135 Stock, "Apotheose: Albert Yonathan Setyawan."

His sculptures morph into installations which may become performances with sound and incense, making the act of producing and presenting coincide. This constitutes his avant-garde gesture: to free ceramics from their traditional space and provide a metaphysical experience to the audience through his active meditations.

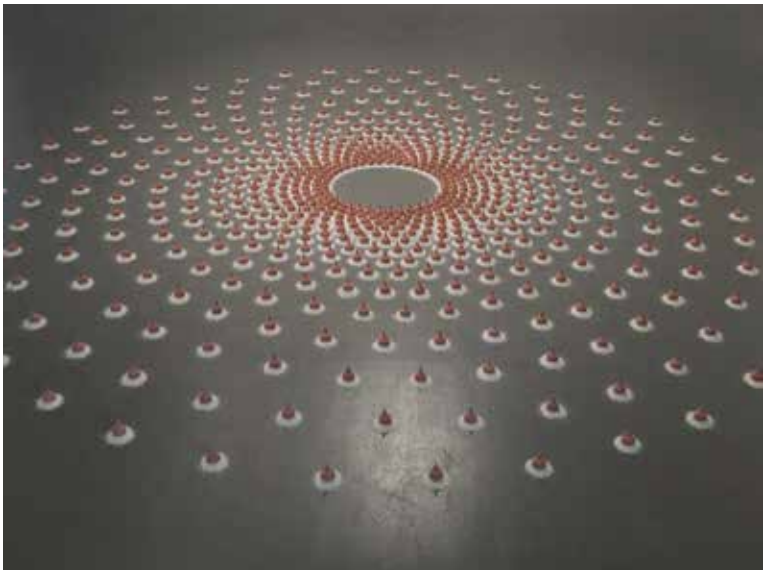

Figure 5.34
Albert Yonathan Setyawan
Mandala Study #4
2015 | 650 terracotta pieces atop marble sand | 300 x 300 x 10 cm
Image courtesy of Sundaram Tagore Gallery

Kamin Lertchaiprasert: Heritage Looting

My work is changing all the time, as I learn about life.[136]
Kamin Lertchaiprasert

In Thailand, Kamin Lertchaiprasert (b. 1964, Lop Buri) is considered a continuator of a strategy started by Montien Boonma (1953-2000). Boonma used Buddhist teachings as core concepts of his later work, and integrated them with readymade and found objects. Thai curator Gridthiya Gaweewong states that Lertchaiprasert pushed Boonma's idea (of Buddhism embedded in conceptual art and personal experience) further "by hybridizing it in both

136 Kamin Lertchaiprasert, My Work, Life Everyday, unpublished interview by Leonor Veiga, Chiang Mai, August 17, 2014.

theory and practice."[137] Thai art historian Uthit Atimana says Lertchaiprasert became an artist when, in the early 1990s, inspired by the passing of one of his relatives, he produced work about life and death.[138] Atinama considers Lertchaiprasert's incursions into Buddhist principles unsurprising, as Thai society still holds strong to a conservatism continuously enforced by a media exposing and (re)producing Buddhist philosophy. In this context, Buddhism has emerged as a contemporary site of production and contestation.

Throughout his career, Lertchaiprasert has actively employed Buddhist teachings and practices to his life/work. He does this most notably as a daily practice of Vipassana meditation, which he couples with diary-works entitled *Life Everyday* (to him, life and work are one and the same; working is a human need as much as eating or sleeping).[139] In 2004, he introduced Chinese calligraphy in these diary-works (he is second-generation Chinese in Thailand).[140] These diary-works became a distinctive aspect of his creation.[141] This working method results in compounds of 365 or 366 works, depending on the calendar year, which are later displayed as large-scale installations. From them, sculptural works also emerge [Fig. 5.35].

Figure 5.35
Kamin Lertchaiprasert
Drawing of Everyday Life Practice (three installations)
2016
Image courtesy of Sundaram Tagore Gallery

137 Gridthiya Gaweewong, "An Intersection of Buddha and Duchamp," in *Nothing: A Retrospective by Rirkrit Tiravanija and Kamin Lertchaiprasert* (Chiang Mai: Chiang Mai Art Museum, 2004), 17.
138 Uthit Atinama, "Life Is Arts?," *Room, Ideas for Practical Living*, 2010, 1.
139 See Atinama, 1.
140 Lertchaiprasert, My Work, Life Everyday.
141 Josef Ng, *Kamin Lertchaiprasert: Lifeveryday* (Bangkok: Numthong Gallery, 2007), 46.

After his formational years (1987-1992), Lertchaiprasert lived in New York. The involvement of Buddhism in his art making also results from this cultural exchange: in the 1990s, affirms Gaweewong, many artists interpreted and integrated Buddhism ideals with those of conceptualism and contemporary globalization to "negotiate our position in the international context." He proposes Lertchaiprasert as one of the artists "who broke the stereotype of the dichotomy of center and the margin."[142] Due to his unique method and practice, he has been named "an invented tradition artist,"[143] and referred to as attempting "not to separate philosophies of life from art creation."[144] This relationship is evidenced in his calligraphic work; he often writes Thai script with Chinese ink and brush, as if making a 'third calligraphy'.

Figure 5.36
Kamin Lertchaiprasert
Sitting (Money)
2004-6 | Papier Mâché (shredded Thai Bath bank notes) | 366 parts; 30 x 20 x 10 cm each
Image source: www.guggenheim.org

The installation *Sitting (Money)* (2004-6) [Fig. 5.36] features 366 small figures in meditating sitting positions. Made from papier-mâché created with outdated Thai Bath from the 1997 financial crisis, it was produced to refer money's importance: once a medium for exchange, today money symbolizes power and God—it became everything.[145] He uses money as artistic material to remind us that money is an illusion (this is a Buddhist teaching). From this diary, resulted a compelling Third Avant-garde work, *Lord Buddha Said 'if you see Dhamma, you see me'* (2003-4) [Fig. 5.37], which belongs to the Southeast Asian

142 Gaweewong, "An Intersection of Buddha and Duchamp," 16; 28.
143 Atinama, "Life Is Arts?," 3.
144 Atinama, 1.
145 Ng, *Kamin Lertchaiprasert: Lifeveryday*, 39.

collection of the National Gallery in Singapore. Lertchaiprasert's application of money in this work is disruptive: at first glance, the work resembles stone, but when reading the work's caption, one is informed that it is made from bank notes (from the 1997 crisis).

Figure 5.37
Kamin Lertchaiprasert
Lord Buddha Said 'If you see dhamma, you see me'
2003-4 | Papier Mâché (shredded Thai Bath bank notes) | H 244 x 73 x 73; T 206 x 83 x 79; F 70 x 79 x 78 cm
Images courtesy of the artist

His critique of history—Western and Eastern alike—is also not immediately perceptible. Why fragment a deity like lord Buddha? In my opinion, he is referencing to the global depletion, and rape, of heritage sites which have undergone all sorts of fragmentation. It is a compelling reminder to local and global audiences alike of centuries of regional depletion that enabled grandiose museum collections in the West.[146] In many cases, the heads and torsos are displayed in these important museums, while the feet remain at the original site (and continued to be worshiped). A famous case of such lootings pertains to the French writer André Malraux who stole Khmer statues in 1923, which he intended to sell.[147] In fact, the Western perception that considers

146 Tom Hall, "Met to Return Looted Khmer Statues to Cambodia," *The History Blog* (blog), May 5, 2013, http://www.thehistoryblog.com/archives/25111.

147 "Review of 'The International and National Protection of Movable Cultural Property: A Comparative Study'," *The International Journal of Museum Management and Curatorship*, no. 3

the feet as minor contradicts some Eastern traditions which worship the feet. Resulting from historic and ongoing episodes of pillage, for many Thais (and Cambodians, and Burmese alike), history is fragmented; Lertchaiparsert's work resonates not only with contemporary claims for repatriation of important specimens (like *Ken Dedes*), it equally alludes to the need for heritage recovery.

As mentioned, Lertchaiprasert's work appears to be a stone ready-made in which the three fragments of Buddha's body are tentatively put together (to no success). The viewer accesses the wholeness and/or fragmentation of the statue in accordance with his spatial placement. This makes her/him grasp differently the two sides of the problem—local sites and Western museums. His references to stone conjure ancient civilizations; in this regard, the fact that he is Thai may explain further the tripartition of the artwork. He is commenting on Thai Theravada s system, which honors the Triple Gem—the Buddha, the Dharma (his teachings) and the Sangha (the community of monks).[148] Nationally, this triade is enforced through the Thai state pillars, symbolically included in its equally tricolored flag, in which red symbolizes nation, white represents the purity of Buddhist religion, and blue stands for the monarchy. While Lertchaiprasert's straightforwardness is evident, the fact that the work depicts a Buddha does not immediately awake these notions. This is one of the aspects of his avant-gardism: the deferral of (our) reception.

Entang Wiharso and Jumaadi: Post-*Wayang* as Self-Exoticizing Practice

The art of *wayang* is spread throughout Southeast Asia, but the Javanese kind is the most renowned. While it is not possible to prove Java as the location for its provenance, Indonesian artist Ninus Anusapati observes that all terminology relating to it is in Javanese, and thus proposes wayang as Indonesian.[149] When wayang penetrated contemporary art in the late 1980s, Suharto's New Order and its "general process of 'Indonesianisation' [that] ha[d] been underway since 1965" certainly had already bared fruits.[150] The etymological root of word *wayang* is the word *bayang*, which means 'shadow' in Malaysia and Indonesia, and 'country' in the Philippines. In Indonesia, *wayang* came to signify the 'classic' shadow play (most commonly designated as

(1984): 211–12.

148 Heidi Tan, "The Many Streams of Buddhist Art in Thailand," in *Enlightened Ways: The Many Streams of Buddhist Art in Thailand*, ed. Alan Chong (Singapore: Asian Civilisations Museum, 2012), 10; Steven Piker, "The Problem of Consistency in Thai Religion," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 11, no. 3 (1972): 219.

149 The art of shadow puppetry is present in Turkey, India, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Cambodia, China and Indonesia. See Ninus Anusapati, "Wayang in Java: An Ongoing Development Process of a Traditional Visual Art Form" (Second ASEAN Workshop, Exhibition and Symposium on Aesthetics, Manila: ASEAN, 1993), 2.

150 Helena Spanjaard, *Modern Indonesian Painting* (Singapore: Sotheby's, 2003), 121.

wayang purwa[151])—the flat, highly decorated *kulit* (leather) puppets used on the plays, and simultaneously the character of the puppets.[152] This has meant that both expressions, *wayang* and *wayang kulit*, came to be used interchangeably.

One very important aspect of *wayang* performances is the relation that the tradition has kept with the spirit of its time. The stories are routinely adapted to incorporate new values that are urgent to share with the population. One famous example is that of *wayang revolusi*, that conveyed the national quest to severe ties with the colonial power. Acting in secrecy, the Javanese *dalang* (puppeteer) applied allegories to their narration. This feature, called *pasemon*,[153] remains fundamental for contemporary art practices also.

Wayang makes people quiet, because it is simply an enormous, marvelous work of art.[154]
AGUNG KURNIAWAN

Kurniawan's words express the grandiose atmosphere of *wayang* spectacles: these performances indeed appeal to the senses for they are extremely visual and cognitive shows. For this, and many other reasons, they have at many times been regarded as the 'essence' of Javanese culture. American historian Laurie J. Sears deems this vision as Orientalist and inherited from the British rule of Java (1811-1816) and continued during the subsequent era (post-1816) of Dutch colonial period.[155] Her research focused on wayang performance per se, here the intent is to grasp how this performance is enacted now. I have termed this event as post-*wayang*.

Recently, when commenting the way ethnographic museums are evolving toward post-ethnography, Clifford proposed: "Post doesn't mean simply after. Post refers instead to something emergent, something we can't name yet. Post means 'following from,' but with a difference, still very much entangled in the tradition it seeks to displace."[156] His words resonate with contemporary practices featuring *wayang*, as they contain a spirit of rupture

151 *Wayang purwa kulit* is the shadow puppet theater that recites parts of the Ramayana and Mahabharata stories.

152 Czech art historian Jan Mrázek explains that the lack of distinction between the object and the 'living being' that results from the performance resides in Javanese language. See Jan Mrázek, "Ways of Experiencing Art: Art History, Television, and Javanese Wayang," in *What's the Use of Art? Asian Visual and Material Culture in Context*, ed. Jan Mrázek and Morgan Pitelka (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008), 282.

153 See Laurie J. Sears, *Shadows of Empire: Colonial Discourse and Javanese Tales* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 7.

154 Agung Kurniawan, Memory and Contemporaneity, interview by Leonor Veiga, Yogyakarta, January 18, 2010, 56.

155 Sears, *Shadows of Empire*, 24.

156 James Clifford, *Museum Realisms: What Does Realism Mean in Museum Contexts, Especially Those Concerned with Cross Cultural Translation?* (Leiden: Research Centre for Material Culture, 2016), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eQL09kUTUes.

as much as they retain a spirit of entanglement. It is difficult to situate in time the debut of post-*wayang* practices; what is certain is that *wayang* remains an art in transformation. In 1979, Hans Ras stated: "The creation of new varieties of *wayang* has in recent years repeatedly been advanced as a proof of the vitality is the Javanese shadow theater [demonstrating] that this theater is not a fossilized remainder from by-gone times [even if most of these attempts have been] rather short-lived."[157] I argue that one of the reasons artist have paid so much attention this art form resides in their knowledge of the language of modernism and conceptualism. Armed by it, artists keep opening new paths and places of interference for it. A significant example is *wayang*'s arrival inside the art museum, as most Indonesian artists, especially from Java, refer to *wayang* in its performative trend. This is expected, as this mode has been the most revered by scholars since the colonial period. It is equally a global form, as many museums worldwide own significant collections of *wayang*.[158]

In Indonesia, *wayang*, batik, and the sound of gamelan music "form an integrated art complex expressing largely *prijaji* values," says Geertz.[159] Geertz's reference to the Javanese bureaucratic class (who often worked alongside the Dutch during colonial times and became the post-colonial white collar class) is significant; in line with Hobsbawm's discourse on invented traditions, it is probable that the elevation of *wayang* as national symbol results from their interference. This distinction (*wayang* as national symbol) was recently corroborated by its 2008 inscription (originally proclaimed in 2003) as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO.[160] According to Dutch historian Sadiah Boonstra, this classification proved fruitful for conservatives: because *wayang* was regarded as in the verge of extinction, the Indonesian candidature was accompanied by a 'Five Action' preservation plan that included establishing a code of ethics of *dalangs* (puppeteer)—enforced in 1996—and the transmission of the art in formal educational institutions, such as the art institutes of Surakarta, Denpasar, and Bandung.[161] The classification lists twenty-four types of *wayang*, including Heri Dono's works and equally classifies non-performing types like *wayang komik* (comic *wayang*) and the lesser known *wayang batu*,[162] or stone *wayang* [Fig. 5.37].

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157 Johannes Jacobus (Hans) Ras, "The Social Function and Cultural Significance of the Javanese Wayang Purwa Theatre" (Conference on Asian Puppet Theatre, London, 1979), 15.

158 The Linden-Museum, in Stuttgart; the Yale Peabody Museum, in Boston; the Tropenmuseum, in Amsterdam; the British Museum, in London; the Orient Museum, in Lisbon and the Sonobudoyo Museum, in Yogyakarta, are some examples.

159 Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 288.

160 Sulebar M. Soekarman, *Wayang Indonesia Performance* (Jakarta: UNESCO Jakarta, 2004), 1–2; Sulebar M. Soekarman, *The Development of Wayang Indonesia as a Humanistic Cultural Heritage* (Jakarta: UNESCO Jakarta, 2004), 2.

161 See Sadiah Boonstra, "The Paradox of UNESCO's Masterpieces. The Case of Wayang," *IIAS The Newsletter* 69, no. Autumn (2014): 28.

162 See Soekarman, *The Development of Wayang Indonesia as a Humanistic Cultural*

Figure 5.38
A detail of*wayang batu* (or *wayang* style), in Candi Jago, East Java
Photograph by Leonor Veiga, 2006

Wayang batu relates to the Hindu-Buddhist architecture of Java. Defined by Claire Holt as 'wayang style' in the seminal *Art in Indonesia: Continuities and Change*,[163] *wayang batu* consists of temple reliefs telling episodes of Rama's and Buddha's life depicted on the architectural surfaces of important temples in Central Java and East Java. Holt proposes a "new chapter in Indonesia's cultural history," when a new center of political power arose in East Java in the tenth-century.[164] During the so-called East Javanese period (tenth to fifteenth-century), new trends in the art styles of Java emerged, in a constant dialogue with neighboring Bali (that retains its impact to this day). The architecture of East Javanese sanctuaries is, according to Holt, less complex than that of the temples of the prior period, such as in Central Java (eight to tenth-centuries), that has in Prambanan and Borobudur its greatest examples. The East Javanese *candi* (temples) acquired narrower bodies, taller roofs and new narrative relief styles:

> The narrative reliefs on East Java's tjandi walls are executed in styles heretofore unknown. Two main trends develop: on the one hand, an idyllic depiction of scenes from tales like *Arjuna Wiwaha* or the Pandji cycle is presented with soft grace in an almost romantic mood. The forms of human beings are very

Heritage, 9.

163 See Claire Holt, *Art in Indonesia: Continuities and Change* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967), 66–93.

164 Holt, 66.

> delicate, with slender limbs and simple attire. Details in the landscape retain natural forms. On the other hand, a "wayang" genre develops, a style in which human and superhuman beings are depicted in almost two-dimensional manner, their highly stylized shapes approaching those of shadow-play puppets. Surrounding these figures, nature becomes increasingly stylized, providing a magical, supernatural setting.[165]

Its lesser relevance in literature is mirrored by its minor presence in contemporary art. Only Entang Wiharso addresses *wayang batu* in his practice. His singular journey into *wayang* started in 2007; his living proximity with Candi Prambanan (he literally lives 500 meters away from it) [Fig. 5.39], triggered a sort of 'dialogue' with the temple. I suggest seeing his most recent work as a contemporary form of *wayang batu*, even though he works mainly on metals and resins.

Fig. 5.39 A, B
A) A view of Prambanan temple, Yogyakarta, Central Java
B) Free-standing sculptures inside the main towers
Photographs by Leonor Veiga, 2011

Entang Wiharso: Self-Exoticization through *Wayang Batu*

Born in 1968, in Tegal, Entang Wiharso has always been an outsider in some circuits of the Yogyakartan art community. Married to American Christine Cocca, Entang's career has been marked by a practice both in the US and in Indonesia. This has resulted in self-critical work, in which he plays with his situation of being an outsider in both countries. From these experiences of deterritorialization and neglect, Wiharso created an alter ego: the Black

165 Holt, *Art in Indonesia*, 72–73.

Goat. The Black Goat, he says, is "a form of self-portrait I embraced many years ago [2000s] to investigate the position of being both an outsider and a scapegoat."[166] Black Goat can be explained as Wiharso's heteronym,[167] a state of occupancy by another living self on one's existence thus giving birth to a new personal story. Certainly more than a pseudonym—the Black Goat protects his (and his family's) integrity—it constitutes the living soul rooted in his life's memories and experiences. It became Wiharso's form of addressing society(ies), and simultaneously turned into the most effective way to protect his selfhood—his own self-encapsulating fence.

Not wanting to make *wayang* literally, Wiharso journeyed aspects of the art between 2007 and 2011, when his *batu* series came to be. His initial works referenced most directly *wayang kulit*: he started by making embossed prints, silhouettes from small aluminum cutouts that he later pressed onto paper, thus creating an embossed effect. So, they functioned like *negatives*.[168] Upon a decision to exhibit these negatives, Wiharso noticed that they conveyed "a narrative arrangement widely recognized as the base for most Indonesian traditional art works."[169] The negative became the object, and this opened a myriad of options: first the scale was enlarged, then caste relief was added.[170] Later, ornamental planes were arranged in three-dimensional structures and as a final element the flattened surfaces gave room to free-standing sculptures cast from real trees and people (in some recent works, aluminum surfaces are painted). By 2011, Wiharso's work had developed into complex, highly naturalistic sculptural installations, which I relate to *wayang batu*. If looking at his creative process chronologically, Wiharso's approach is anachronistic; if, on the contrary, the process is regarded technically, then his modus operandi is synchronistic, following a natural progress line of complexity. His anachronism, I suggest, derives from Holt's observation that, the classic period of Javanese sculpture of Prambanan and Borobudur, which emphasized an idealized naturalism and narrativity (and tending more toward tridimensionality), is prior to the East Javanese style which substituted it (which tends toward flattening of surfaces). In her opinion, the new taste did not approach the

166 Entang Wiharso quoted in Ashley Bickerton, "Force of Nature," *Art Asia Pacific*, 2014, 81.

167 Term coined by the Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa (1888-1935) to describe an alter ego from which poets and authors create work. "In terms of authorship, the heteronym presents a kind of authorial mental disorder, when the personality is divided among more than one authorial consciousness," in "Heteronymous," *Autorship* (blog), accessed June 1, 2011, http://shalleauthor560.wordpress.com/heteronymous/.

168 Amanda Katherine Rath, "The Vibrating Harrow: Love and Loathing in Entang Wiharso's Recent Work," in *Love Me or Die*, ed. Christine E. Cocca (Yogyakarta: Galeri Canna, 2010), 134; Jim Supangkat, "Zuhud: Protecting the Heart, Surrendering the Self to Ecstasy," in *Love Me or Die*, 46.

169 Supangkat, "Zuhud," 47.

170 Entang's process is technically described in the following steps: first, he works in clay, second, he makes a resin mold, and thirdly he pours liquid aluminum onto the mold.

grandiose scale of Central Javanese monuments, because figuration no longer possessed classic proportions or the adornments that characteized the earlier period.[171] In terms of ornamentation—one of his hallmarks and an intrinsic aspect of his avant-gardism—Wiharso's trajectory is equally anachronistic, as ornament intensifies and becomes increasingly salient in his work. He affirms:

> I use ornament in some of my work not because it means anything to the piece itself, but because it is hated in the art discourse; it is considered decadent, meaningless, without purpose. I am bothered by this and so want to make waves, to deliberately bother the eye of the artworld.[172]

His non-conformist attitude towards simplification (in detriment to ornate visuality) has permeated all his production—from his large-scale paintings to his more recent works that recall the classic Hindu sculpture from Central Java. His choice of aluminum as base material emanates from his need to distance his practice from the loaded art historical discourses of stone reliefs: aluminum contains a domestic resonance, as well as a contemporary look (from its shininess and polished finishing) that appeared more appropriate in contrast to bronze, another art historically loaded metal, both in Indonesia and abroad.[173]

The work *Borderless: Floating Island* (2011-2012) [Fig. 5.40] is perhaps the one in which Wiharso explores these aspects in a most autobiographical and direct fashion. It belongs to his large-scale project, *Untold Stories* (2011-2012) [Fig. 5.41]:

> *Untold Stories* aligns the artist's personal experiences with historic events... Entang uses personal objects like clothes, shoes, daggers and plants from his garden as archival material embedded in the work. *Untold Stories* features images of a man and woman (the artist and his wife) against fertile, verdant landscapes that simultaneously suggest natural or man-made disasters.[174]

Personal references are uncommon among Indonesian artists. Wiharso deliberately works with them to address himself critically, an aspect originating in his long practice of self-portraiture, in which "He doesn't hide behind any morality; instead he presents himself openly for other's critical observation."[175]

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171 See Holt, *Art in Indonesia*, 74.

172 Rath, "The Vibrating Harrow," 121.

173 Christine E. Cocca, Post-wayang, unpublished interview by Leonor Veiga, Lisbon, November 2, 2016.

174 Christine E. Cocca, "Preface," in *Entang Wiharso: Trilogy*, ed. Christine E. Cocca (Yogyakarta: Black Goat Studios, 2014), 23.

175 Suwarno Wisetrotomo, "Signs in Entang Wiharso's Work," in *Entang Wiharso: Trilogy*, 152.

This openness is exalted in *Floating Island*. H ere, the artist and his family appear dressed in traditional Javanese attire to create a record of certain life episodes, such as the marriage. The work recalls family archival photographs of bygone times. He explains: "I was consciously working on my heritage... Artists do not address (sometimes they even deny) tradition, or ornament. This makes both become subversive. I on purpose use ornament and reference tradition."[176]

Fig. 5.40
Entang Wiharso
Borderless: Floating Island
2011-12 | Graphite, resin, steel, brass, color pigment, thread | 350 x 750 x 140 cm
Image courtesy of the artist

This monumental and highly naturalistic work recalls the grandiose sculptures of Central Javanese period in its earthiness and classic proportions. Except for the scale of Java (which appears reduced), "Looking from above, the 'stage' takes the shape of Java as we usually see it on the map."[177] Java is compounded by three parts which mutually interlock each other.[178] Each island serves as the stage for episodes of couple's life (in clear relation with Javanese stories such as the Panji): a 'Pietá' representation (left), a wedding day (middle), and a

176 Entang Wiharso, Temple of Hope, interview by Leonor Veiga, Lisbon, September 29, 2016.

177 Carla Bianpoen, "Entang Wiharso Exhibiting in Berlin," *The Jakarta Post*, July 5, 2012.

178 This tripartite division consists of a technical solution that permits the large installation to be transported, amounted and dismounted with greater ease. In addition, it can be regarded as West Java, Central Java and East Java, its three political regions.

deformed man with a woman lying on his elongated neck (right). The vignettes depict scattered moments; as in the epic structure, there is no attempt to be chronological or to narrate. Conversely, the painting *Untold Stories: Floating Island* depicts a love story. This work, for its flatness and reading from left to right recalls the tradition of *wayang beber*. Wiharso's avant-gardism is highly metaphorical; he deliberately incurs into art's taboos—such as decoration—and conveys intimate stories born out of religious and emotional discrimination. His journey into Javanese *wayang*—from *wayang batu* to *beber* scrolls—in a singular one and retaliates the attempted categorization by UNESCO.

Fig. 5.41
Entang Wiharso
Untold Stories Project
2011-12 | Triptych, oil and acrylic on linen | 300 x 600 cm
Image courtesy of the artist

JUMAADI: *WAYANG* OF LOVE

People consider oil painting is always new.
So why not wayang?[179]
JUMAADI

Indonesian-Australian artist Jumaadi (b. 1973, Siodarjo) approaches the performance of *wayang* in a unique way: he is a *dalang* of love. A poet since childhood, he started making art at around 24 years of age. Raised in Sidoarjo,

179 Jumaadi, The Life and Death of a Shadow, unpublished interview by Leonor Veiga, Sydney, July 12, 2016.

a small town in the proximity of Surabaya, in East Java, he has had contacts with *wayang* since childhood. Surabaya's 'Eastern *wayang* tradition'—which Dutch anthropologist Victoria M. Clara von Groenendael was surprised to learn alluded so frequently to transvestism and homosexuality[180]—can be apprehended in his work: his puppets astonish for their open references toward sexuality and affection, uncommon among artworks by Indonesian artists. He explains:

> There are sexual paintings in Bali, or in Chinese art. It is quite normal. I see [the idea that East *wayang* tradition is present in his work] that as colonial stereotyping. In the temples, pornography is everywhere. Porno-action is a historical discourse. Marc Chagall and Majapahit are references to these works. I think not many contemporary artists are talking about love. It is absent in contemporary art and I do it because I am not interested in political discourse. I do not follow the news, read newspapers or anything.[181]

Living in Australia since 1996 and educated at the National Art School of Sydney (2008), Jumaadi is a self-defined modernist visual artist who works with dichotomies—concepts such as pull and push, positive and negative space, light and shadow are present in his practice, and remain influential to the language he developed for *wayang*.[182] Because his *wayang* performances revolve around human condition, he frequently works collaboratively: participants help writing, creating, composing and performing. His performances are composed of three main features: 1. the use of a by-now historical object, the overhead projector; 2. the combination of traditional puppets with his own creations, and 3. his involvement in the characters' stories.

Jumaadi has, throughout his career, been developing a lexicon and in his case, it is an extremely ornate outline playing a significant role. Most of his human figures are shaped through simple and condensed forms, have short and wide bodies, appear mostly in profile, sometimes embracing, and at other times carrying heavy sacks on their back, as if they were carrying burdens [Fig. 5.42]—his own way of addressing human condition.[183] To these fundamentals, Jumaadi adds the representation of animals, plants, and composite half human/half tree creatures.

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180 Victoria Clara van Groenendael, "Is There an Eastern Wayang Tradition? Some Dramatis Personae of the Murkala Myth of the 'eastern' Tradition," *Brijdragen Tot de Taal-, Land- En Volkenkunde* 148, no. 2 (1992): 309–15.

181 Jumaadi, Post-wayang, unpublished interview by Leonor Veiga, Lisbon, November 2, 2016.

182 Jumaadi, The Life and Death of a Shadow.

183 Lee Donaldson and John Reynolds, *Jumaadi* (Charleston SC, 2014), https://vimeo.com/107959268.

Fig. 5.42
Jumaadi
The Life and Death of a Shadow (detail)
2015-16 | Leather cutouts | Dimensions unknown
Photograph by Leonor Veiga, 2016

To him, art plays a role in self-understanding: "shadows are present in all cultures; *wayang* is particular to Java."[184] He knew that being an artist and an Indonesian would make the art world expect his to practice *wayang*. Yet, he resisted this form of stereotyping, the reason for his modern and candidly minimal works. In Jumaadi's case, the practice of *wayang* surged to countermand his isolation whenever he returned to Java, where his activity as a multimedia visual artist was not understood. *Wayang* enabled him a space of contact with others initially in Sidoarjo, and later in Australia and overseas, where he exhibits widely. His first incursion in *wayang* dates from 2008, when he converted figures from his paintings into flattened aluminum silhouettes which he disposed as wall installations: "A lot of my work is a window to another thing."[185] He demonstrates a researching attitude, and lets the creative process unfold to reveal the following work. After 2014, he started studying *wayang* more deeply with craftsmen from Sidoarjo. Vickers notes: "to move into making and performing *wayang* puppets has been a return to the origins of Jumaadi's art."[186]

Jumaadi rapidly realized that his daily life observations could become stories to be performed. His acute lexicon migrated into *wayang*, where it was expanded. Most of his puppets are not articulated; movement is obtained by fading-in and fading-out the puppets on the overhead projector's screen. The images on the wall are still very much tied to the notion of projection yet the overhead projector implies a total restage of the show: the *dalang* shares the

184 Donaldson and Reynolds, *Jumaadi*.
185 Jumaadi, The Life and Death of a Shadow.
186 Vickers, "Jumaadi: Poet of Place," in *Telling Tales: Excursions in Narrative Form* (Sydney: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2016), 30.

space with the public, which allows the puppets to be appreciated as shadows and simultaneously as objects in their own right.

Fig. 5.43 A, B, C, D
Jumaadi
The Life and Death of a Shadow
A) West view of installation; B) East view of the installation
C) Leporello notebooks, relatable to *wayang beber*; D) Some leather puppets made by the artist
2015-16 | Archival materials: video; watercolors; leather and paper cutouts
Photographs by Leonor Veiga, 2016

I have followed Jumaadi's work since 2014;[187] first we met in Leiden, and later in Java. Then, in his Imogiri studio I experimented *wayang* making. This is a difficult craft; the leather hardness hinders good finishing. Like in batik, correcting mistakes is difficult, one reason for Jumaadi to use paper, card, and less refined materials for his work (another reason is scarcity of buffalo

187 I would like to thank Indonesian artist Lenny Ratnasari Weichert for introducing Jumaadi to me.

leather and its expensive price). In 2016, I attended the performance *The Life and Death of a Shadow* (2015-2016) which was showcased at the exhibition *Telling Tales: Excursions in Narrative Form* at the Museum of Contemporary Art of Sydney (MCA) in Sydney. As a participating artist, he was commissioned to produce a wayang installation, which included a series of live performances.[188] The work comprised two distinct parts that, although exhibited separately, complemented each other: the archival installation [Fig. 5.43 A, B, C, D] and the performance [Fig. 5.44 A, B, C, D].

Fig. 5.44 A, B, C, D
Jumaadi
The Life and Death of a Shadow
A) Mix of found and produced *wayang* materials; B) Filters used to add color to the projection
C) Two *dalangs*; D) How narration is conveyed
Performance materials: overhead projector; leather and paper cutouts; colored filters
2015-2016 | Archival materials: video; watercolors; leather and paper cutouts
Photographs by Leonor Veiga, 2016

188 Rachel Kent, "Introduction," in *Telling Tales: Excursions in Narrative Form* (Sydney: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2016), 11.

The archival installation includes "concertina-like, fold-out books in glass cabinets"[189] (that I relate to *wayang beber*), a video of the performance, watercolors, and several cutouts, mostly in paper and leather (painted and unpainted). This body of work not only reads like a story and makes the viewer enter "the world of folk tale,"[190] it also provides an overview of the artist's methodology, flow of ideas and aesthetics, which culminate in the video presented (the exhibition room was closed, enhancing the video's sound and providing a view on the work's totality).

Like in traditional *wayang*, human puppets are the main characters. These are accompanied by smaller figures—elements like a fire flame, a fish, a volcano or a cloud add detail to the narrative chosen. *The Life and Death of a Shadow* is based on a real story from Sidoarjo (here referenced as 'Durian Village') of a very poor, deaf musician, a father of a blind child, who manages to teach the son how to fly (in reality, the father could make his infant appreciate *wayang*). Jumaadi created around 200 cutouts made from leather and paper and performed with them accompanied by a team of five elements: two *dalangs* (one of them himself) manipulated the puppets in front of the main screen, while a group of three elements remained in the background playing music and singing. This work, which I understand as Third Avant-garde, originates in real life, uses fragments from traditional *wayang*, and introduces aspects alien to the art such as the overhead projector. Jumaadi extends and expands the possibilities of the art because he focuses on the possibilities of the shadow, instead of the *wayang* as spectacle. This is his contribution.

5.3 Perspectives for the Future

The region of Southeast Asia is not defined by Third Avant-garde practices. The variety of artistic manifestations is as diverse as the ethnicities, languages and traditions that define its peoples. There are other tendencies, such as minimalism, conceptualism, and realism in painting that are equally as important. Yet, it is my contention that Third Avant-garde works continue to manifest in a much more profound way while Southeast Asia negotiates its position in an increasingly globalized world. The artists included in this chapter are not the only ones that merge vernacular culture with art. There are numerous practitioners who feel this urgency, including expatriates in the region who, after an intense cultural immersion, equally negotiate their status as artists who opted to live away from the Western centers of production. The

189 Barbara Hatley, "The Life and Death of a Shadow: Jumaadi at the MCA," TAASA Review: *The Journal of the Asian Arts Society of Australia* 25, no. 3 (2016): 13.

190 John McDonald, "Drawing on Experience," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, September 10, 2016, sec. Visual Art, 16.

artists I selected must be regarded from the lens of my capacity to create a working relationship, and my accessibility to their works in exhibitions I viewed. This is not a survey, because doing so would always remain incomplete.

The Third Avant-garde will not cease; it has become a concrete and tangible way to manifest notions of identify, self and communal values that may be under threat or just in need of new readings. These manifestations propose that traditions are indeed alive and living entities, and that they play a significant cultural role in the contemporary. What will happen is that, if not made to convey notions of discontent and to comment on reality—preconditions that define Third Avant-garde practices, coupled with a resistance to follow the patronizing forces of Western art—the Third Avant-garde risks becoming a flat discourse. The risk is high, and it is certainly visible on some occasions. For instance, in 2009, the tenth edition of the Biennale Jogja, entitled *Jogja Jamming, an Art Archive Movement*, proposed to look at the archive. Yet, many participants failed to apprehend what archival art is and resorted to mere quotations of traditional arts without imbuing them with any critical stance. As a result, many traditions used were not subject to reprocessing. Thus, their inherent avant-gardism remains undone.

The recovery of theoretical discourses on traditions since 2011 denotes a need for clarification of Southeast Asian practices in an increasingly globalized world. I find this aspect extremely important, and hope that the definition of the Third Avant-garde contributes to clarity and fosters new practices.

5.4 Conclusions

Chapter 5 discusses the continuation of the Third Avant-garde in the 21st century as artistic and theoretical practice. It starts by demonstrating an increasing presence of Southeast Asian art through exhibitions, and proposes that publications equally followed suit. As a discourse, Southeast Asia gained momentum after 2002. Meanwhile, shows focusing on a single nation persist, but are more attentive to the living relation of the past with the present, which in turn confirms that contemporary art is fuelled by traditions.

While the issue of tradition ceased to be topical after *Traditions/Tensions* of 1996, they witness an increasing number of participants as younger generations penetrate its discourse, thus confirming greater acceptance in and outside of Southeast Asian borders. Third Avant-garde artists are increasingly (inter)national; the greater value attributed to their works is evidenced by their greater exposure in commercial and periodical shows, as well as their institutionalization in major museum collections. But, as the issue of tradition lost currency—possibly denoting a move beyond the debate—these practices have remain theoretically deterritorialised. This is the reason of this study.

Locally, socio-political circumstances have changed. Some countries have grown into free societies, others have become despotic (or remain such). This has had different results: first, artists that found new freedoms like Harsono, Arahmaiani and Madeira act upon notions of the self and the group they address (the Chinese Indonesians, Muslim Indonesian women and Timorese women, respectively); others like BTS experience favourable reception and participate alongside artists showcasing traditions such as *wayang*. While the media of choice deeply affected 1990s practices, since the late 2000s Third Avant-garde practices are increasingly accommodating, and media that were regarded inferiorly (because of their relationship with craft), definitely entered the discourse. As a result, artists Siributr and Yonathan no longer struggle to gather attention. Second, artists that found themselves in repressive contexts such as Siributr and Lê remain resilient, but the political conjuncture has forced them to mainly exhibit overseas, which in turn increases their reputation.

Generally, post-2002 practices show a greater attention to personal views: from Bendi to Wiharso, from Jumaadi to Arahmaiani, artists include more notions of the self in their work. This is done without refuting the Third Avant-garde program of social commitment through traditional arts. Thus, the Third Avant-garde continues proposing new possibilities for traditional arts, while it persists making known those viable and relevant for our time.

Conclusion

Ideology disrupts. It closes our eyes.
Instead of finding boxes to put things in,
we tried to find things to put in boxes.[1]
Henrique Barros

The Third Avant-garde was a journey toward finding a frame for Southeast Asian contemporary art practices that recall tradition. As the frame proposed, the Third Avant-garde expands a category that largely remains untouched and resistant to (r)evolution: the previous, mostly male, white, and Western avant-garde. Despite Hal Foster's reassessment of the neo-avant-garde, Kapur's and Partha Mitter's attempts to open it to 'non-Western' peoples, the avant-garde remains a 'sacred' locus of artistic production.

As Portuguese epidemiologist Henrique Barros notices, 'boxes' are not used to accommodate things: we have art, we have tradition, and we have craft, and objects such as a painting, a leather puppet, or an embroidery are put inside. The occurrence of the 'Third Object'[2] disintegrates these divisions because it is simultaneously art, tradition, and craft. Thus, when considering art history's available boxes—style, movement (the so-called 'isms') and the avant-garde—and asking the question incited by the Third Object—'what am I seeing?'—our mode of thinking changes from 'this is art', 'this is ethnography', and we arrive at 'this is both'. This study proposes that to look at new resistance models, such as the Third Object, we should look at the materiality of the objects, which is revealed in the presence of fragments of traditional arts. This dissertation argues that this occurrence constitutes the Third Avant-garde's hallmark. Only then, avant-garde's features (according to Bürger) can be traced—the blurring of high and low cultures, the attack on art's institutionalization, and the relation with everyday life. While these features are present in all previous avant-garde episodes, *premises change according to time, place, and circumstance*. In its blurring of art and ethnography, in its negotiation of different traditions of making (the traditional and the analytical) and in its addressing of the individual and his/her community(ies), the Third Avant-garde meets avant-garde's major achievement: the introduction of new regulations and resistance models.

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1 Henrique Barros quoted in Miguel Carvalho, "Homens Vítimas: A Face Oculta Da Violência Doméstica," *VISÃO*, November 17, 2016, 51.

2 See Chapter 1, *Recalling Tradition*.

As with its earlier manifestations, the Third Avant-garde emerged in contexts of real political disjuncture. Thus, its features must be acknowledged as tied to notions of discontent born out of complex situations. The (Third) Avant-garde must be comprehended as a force imbued with a conscience of its own time; then, after electing its contemporary language and mission, propels a deferred change in the course of art history. This is why expanding the avant-garde may solve the problem: the avant-garde performs the blurring of categories, works on uncategorized and unorthodox objects (which in turn question art's institutionalization and stimulates deferred theorization), and connects art with (contemporary) life.

As shown, traditions are largely invented. They are often recent (we can even trace their birth date, as shown for Balinese *kecac* and *ogoh-ogoh*) and tied to notions of nationalism. Interestingly, during the Indonesian (and Indian, as Kapur notes) nationalist revolts in the colonial era of the mid-twentieth century, traditions were experienced as revolutionary because they contained a sense of difference with the colonizer. Later in the 1970s, Southeast Asian (but not exclusively) post-colonial totalitarian regimes promoted traditions as fixed entities, thus precipitating a recapture by regional artists. The significance of the 1980s up until today (because conditions of disjuncture keep emerging) resides in a programmatic change: from the formation of national discourses, artists moved toward generating a cultural identity, that in the 1990s, would help them negotiate their position in an increasingly globalized world. This meant attacking local and global discourses on traditional arts, and simultaneously working beyond Western and local conceptions of art. As such, this international, postmodern, and post-colonial tendency does not constitute a movement, nor does it conform to an evolutionary rhythm 'traditional-modern-contemporary'.

Traditions are largely modern constructs; distinguished from traditions-in-use or customs (whose vitality contributes to cultural praxis and for the shaping of cultural identities), during the modern era traditions were formulated as the 'other' of the modern. This gesture of categorization has concealed traditions as fragmented entities that rely on the modern concept of quotation. So, in the postmodern era, fragments of traditions are being reenacted, initially for their surface value (this is postmodernism's celebratory stance), and, after, for their critical value (this is the Third Avant-garde). Affirms Kapur, "a sensitive handling of living traditions helps maintain the sense of a complex society which informs and sometimes subverts the modernisation that the very institution of the nation-state inaugurates (and the market promotes)."[3] It is through the recovery of traditions' inherent critical value that

3 Geeta Kapur, "Dismantled Norms: Apropos Other Avantgardes," in *Art and Social Change: Contemporary Art in Asia and the Pacific*, ed. Caroline Turner (Canberra: Pandanus Books,

the avant-garde emerges and acts upon this polemical category. Thus, when Third Avant-garde artists build on traditions, they use them as analytical tools, they operate in them, and show that the "Western assumption that assertions of 'traditions' are always responses to the new may exclude local narratives of cultural continuity and recovery."[4] This is why Clifford mentions that "the pure products go crazy,"[5] and instead we should assume "that cultural forms will always be made, unmade and remade."[6]

For this dissertation, the discipline of anthropology was called in as the two disciplines, art history and anthropology, meet within Third Avant-garde practices. Through them, the art/culture divide Clifford identifies as "two avenues [that] are still separate zones of valuation and display" for non-Western constructs,[7] is being combated. The greater outcome is that the binary art museum/ethnographic museum is losing pertinence. To quote Crimp, we are *On the Museum's Ruins*.

As mentioned, Third Avant-garde practices emerged in various places, and were performed by unrelated artists—in the 1960s Latin America, and in the 1970s Southeast Asia (a period which I came to represent by the seminal work *Ken Dedes*), through non-confrontational gestures that started in the 1980s in many parts of Asia and Africa. Since the 1990s, Third Avant-garde practices achieved prominent recognition. This is what I called a 'boom'. The main difference of Third Avant-garde practices since the 1980s (at least in a Southeast Asian context) is the absence of a written manifesto that characterized earlier events. Now, amidst more professionalized conditions, artists widely left these aspects to curators that closely accompanied their production. In many cases, these first generation of curators (among which Poshyanada and Supangkat), were themselves practicing artists who changed their space of intervention by being in the forefront of international curation.

After the seminal *Traditions/Tensions* in New York, in 1996, the issue of tradition ceased to be topical. The world was left with largely ineffective and incomplete discourses towards Third Avant-garde practices, especially because art historians left these artworks deterritorialised. In the meantime, anthropologists grasped the momentum[8] and continued theorization. Theories such as *appropriation* gained new impetus (even though distinctions between

2005), 49.

4 James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature and Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 15.

5 Clifford, 1.

6 James Clifford, "Indigenous Articulations," *The Contemporary Pacific* 13, no. 2 (2001): 479.

7 James Clifford, "Thinking Globally: Museums, Art and Ethnography after the Global Turn" (Collecting Geographies, Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, 2014), https://vimeo.com/89998837.

8 Art has always been a topic of discussion among anthropologists through the sub-discipline *Anthropology of Art*.

art and tradition were maintained), *material complex* (which is attentive to changes in perception according to time and place), and *agency* (which examines the mediatory role of artworks, while it considers both artworks and artists as social agents of this mediation) came to the fore. These scientific contributions have resulted, as Clifford notes, in ethnographic museums rebranding themselves as 'world art' museums. These changes are significant because they elevate practices that have historically been refused the status of art to its realm, and have equally fostered the (re)reading of ethnographic and civilization collections through contemporary artworks.[9]

Still, when talking to artists such as Dinh Q. Lê, or curators such as Indonesian Alia Swastika, they express discomfort and discontent every time 'non-Western' contemporary art is exhibited inside ethnographic museums in the West and in 'civilization' museums and theme parks in the region. All Southeast Asian artists with whom I spoke expressed their preference to be exhibited within art institutions, albeit acknowledging the difficulty inherent to such recognition. Their fondness is at odds with museums' institutionalization, because art museums remain boxed in their own conventions. Meanwhile, they have actively embraced the post-2001 opening that biennials, art fairs and commercial galleries have manifested towards their practices, and thus are increasingly renowned.

As shown throughout the chapters, Third Avant-garde manifestations ground themselves in material fragments of traditions. Traditions are simultaneously appropriated and reappropriated; they perform avant-garde's methods of montage, collage, decontextualisation, and the ready-made. In their mission of wrecking the taxonomical division between fine arts and traditional arts they blur the two, always imbued with a motivation to perform social agency. This is why the avant-garde is relevant; its true radicalism is manifested in its capacity to bring back the notion of art making as part of social production. So, the avant-garde constitutes a politicized aesthetic with social and disciplinary implications, and this aspect justifies the need for a deeper, and 'third' rupture with modernism. Now, the disruption is performed through traditions, and coupled with an intensified critique of art's institutionalizing forces.

From here, the Third Avant-garde emerges outside the West (and/or through practices by 'non-Western' artists residing in the West), and is made by those communities that have been designated traditional, unchanging and ritualistic in their modes of action. Equally, the Third Avant-garde is produced by choice, to convey social agency, and according to one's individual

9 Leonor Veiga, "Anke Bangma: 'Renewal Can Also Be Found in Reinterpreting the Historical.,'" *Leiden Arts and Society Blog* (blog), September 20, 2016, http://www.leidenartsinsocietyblog.nl/articles/anke-bangma-renewal-can-also-be-found-in-reinterpreting-the-historical.

histories. This in turn may lead to the reversal of categories and gender roles: practices traditionally made by women such as *đan lát* (weaving grass) and batik, are made by men; museum curation and *dalang* storytelling, which are traditionally male territories, are penetrated by women. And, in continuum with earlier avant-garde movements, oftentimes Third Avant-garde artists lose individuality, because their works are made by artists and artisans alike (sometimes they are even aided by computers, something that denotes how traditions adapt to times).

Mirroring Southeast Asia's diversity, Third Avant-garde manifestations accommodate all local expressions possible, and the multitude of results within. For instance, *wayang* denotes freedom to act socially as well as freedom to act upon traditions, which are increasingly secularized by Third Avant-garde interventions. If this study (also) aimed at showing variety of Southeast Asian traditions, it equally recognizes that the making, unmaking, and remaking of traditions provided Third Avant-garde artists with an opportunity to learn about their (local) cultures, while their artworks kept offering a space for self-questioning and/or self-assertiveness.

In continuum with former avant-garde artists, postmodern Third Avant-garde artists also claim that originality, authenticity and purity of traditions are produced by the museum (art and/or world art museum alike) and continued by the discursive structures of the two disciplines (anthropology and art history). Thus, they act upon what was regarded as a polarity, Western 'modern' art and Eastern 'traditional' arts, and reshuffle both by making, unmaking and remaking them. This provocation is nevertheless natural for Third Avant-garde artists, as they belong to communities that have been subject to several waves of acculturation. They actively show how their reality is shaped, and provide useful information to convey its non-linearity, operate on the level of meaning, and show the complexity of their locus of production, while providing a comment on history. In short, Third Avant-garde artists are inherently cosmopolitan beings, who "live tenaciously in terrains of historical and cultural *transition*."[10] They often find themselves "in the interstices of the old and the new, confronting the past as the present."[11]

"Cosmopolitanism is infinite ways of being";[12] it may be traditional, modern, and contemporary; it includes past and present, and possibly announces a different future, like the prior avant-gardes. Third Avant-garde artists show resilience too, and can articulate the past in the present, revealing the burden attached to notions of (inter)national constructs (such as art and tradition), comment on the injustice of traditions, and express their discontent

10 Sheldon I. Pollock et al., "Introduction: Cosmopolitanisms," *Public Culture* 12, no. 3 (2000): 580.

11 Pollock et al., 580.

12 Pollock et al., 588.

with current occurrences and all forms of dogma imposed on them and their society(ies). And it is through the presence of fragments of traditions that blunt messages (which are paramount of the avant-garde since its 1917 inception with *Fountain*) are conveyed. In the Third Avant-garde, those bold messages demonstrate a subtlety that was unknown of before. This is what I called 'non-confrontational' practices.

The Third Avant-garde protest thus not only connects art with (contemporary) life, it continues the unfinished character of the avant-garde in a radical way, which had yet to be fully carried out. The initial attempts of the 1970s rapidly waned, in many cases because these artist collectives were silenced by authorities). Through traditions, the Third Avant-garde (which came into being in its full expression in the 1990s, as a result from the meeting of artistic and curatorial practices) provides unorthodox notions of art and tradition, and by questioning their validity, instigates a debate on the (inter) national attachment to these heritage constructs. To do so, in their works, Third Avant-garde artists quote fragments of those traits and symbols which were regarded as (their) cultural emblems: 'I am Indonesian, therefore I use *wayang*'. What was necessary to make this radical move was to learn how to apply the lessons of the avant-garde and transport it to traditions. And this process, as argued in chapter 4, has largely been incomprehensible because the emergence of the works was concurrent to their global display. During the 1990s, Third Avant-garde artworks were largely received as manifestations of continuity with the past, and devoid of a radical stance. Meanwhile, traditions were not taken as a fundamental ingredient of the present. This is why *Traditions/ Tensions* of 1996 was important: it promoted the reading of traditions in the midst of a changing world, it identified their fragmentary nature, and the spirit of contestation they contained. What failed to be discerned was the *radicalism* of these gestures, an aspect this dissertation aimed to accomplish.

While Third Avant-garde artists were actively playing with what was perceived as two antagonistic forces, initially they were shamed. On the one hand, they were accused of 'othering themselves' for Western consumption. And on the other hand, they were condemned for copying the West, because they were appropriating notions of the exotic that the West itself had created through Orientalist discourses, which remained active in collective Western and Eastern consciousness on the onset of decolonization. To quote Kitty Zijlmans, they were "wrong both ways".[13] Moreover, in their countries of origin, the situation was no different: they were not understood, either because they were using a medium that was perceived as flawed for lacking originality (like batik for Brahma Tirta Sari, or textiles for Siributr), or because people did not

13 Kitty Zijlmans, "An Intercultural Perspective in Art History: Beyond Othering and Appropriation," in *Is Art History Global?*, ed. James Elkins (New York: Routledge, 2007), 290.

grasp the analyses they performed, and the modern art language that they were imbuing traditions with. As a result, it was difficult to make their space in the artworld, but it has happened, because curators, mostly local, have beenvery attentive and active.

Among its consequences, the Third Avant-garde has introduced another important and largely ignored aspect of art making: decoration, possibly the last taboo of art. Art demands craft but abhors decoration, which is regarded as superfluous, and minor. Yet, not only artists such as Wiharso, Lê, and Siributr use decoration freely and abundantly (this is a major disparity with their Western counterparts), it is largely within decoration that the time lagged or temporal dimension of these slow crafted artworks resided. In addition, the discursive sense of time introduced by modernity is destabilized. By working on premodern forms and methods, the vitality of these constructs is reenacted. And, because fragments from traditions diverge from place to place, and are elected by artists according to their individual preoccupations, different aspects are selected, leading to great variety. Thus, in his double role of heroic and anarchic artist, the Third Avant-garde artist is an inventor as much as he is a continuator. He or she is an individual who (re)shuffles, (re)formulates, and (re)positions what history has provided, while acting upon his or her current moment. Through social agency, they proclaim the right to use all elements at their disposal, even if that means going against established discourses. Thus, Third Avant-garde artists show that the combination of art and tradition is valid, and that these two forces are not oppositional, but rather mutually enrich each other. So, it is fair to propose that just as painting and sculpture found new spaces of intervention in the modern era, by being relieved of their earlier functions of indoctrination, so can traditions. I find this positive, because avant-garde is promoted by art history as art's most esteemed and illustruous category. As John Clark mentions, "The notion of being avant-garde gives the artist confidence as a member of a new intelligentsia marked by access to the new wave of progress that would change the world."[14] This recognition is relevant for artists that, despite being constantly asked to represent their cultures in high-profile exhibitions across continents, are still cornered by art history. As such, giving them this space is not only needed, it is urgent.

An avant-garde work acts in the 'here' and 'now'. It must be out—meaning ahead—of its own historical moment, more appropriately placed in the future, which it envisages. Avant-garde works problematize the status quo; their function is to go a step further. The selection of artworks presented in this study (which is limited by my own capacity to meet artists and see artworks) demonstrates not only artists' refusal to make art along Western

14 John Clark, *Modern Asian Art* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998), 231.

constructs, but equally it conveys unsettling realities of collective trauma and pain, which artists express through familiar codes. What makes an impression in the works of Roland, Lê, Madeira, Harsono, Mio, Siributr, and Arahmaiani is the messages of genocides and human rights abuses, all through local examples. Their works transcend the national and speak globally. An example is Siributr's *78*, which was motivated by the Rohingya crisis. And what makes an impression in the work of Supangkat, Piadasa, Mio, Bendi, Wiharso, Jumaadi, BTS, Lertchaiprasert, and Yonathan is the cornering they felt as members of their societies for no other reason besides the values which they held, and their questioning of local dogma, including 'how art should be made'. Their introduction of traditional arts within contemporary art practices is not contradictory to artmaking, but rather demonstrates (individual) resilience in making "postmodernism in our own terms," as Kapur suggests, before the West defines it.[15] Using traditions, Kapur suggests, is vitally important because "it is what renders us distinguishable."[16]

Third Avant-Garde artworks selected for this study, from Supangkat's *Ken Dedes* to Jumaadi's *Life and Death of a Shadow,* convey locality through traditions, as much as they report on issues of (inter)national relevance, including economic downfalls, corruption, and genocide. This is what makes the Third Avant-garde so unique: the impact of these manifestations is equally significant for nearby and broader communities, because its formal features (including the use of ready-mades, slow crafting and assemblage) are merged with the documentation of regional histories that know no borders. But as Flores observes, while "the avant-garde [is] a valorized rubric of transformation... The new life will not come."[17] No matter how much social engagement is put into an artist's practice—take Roldan as an example—the consequences of these acts are null.

The Third Avant-garde is thus a highly cosmopolitan avant-garde, that plays with what is no longer possible to define as antagonistic forces: the local and the global. In an increasingly globalized world in which distances are shortened, Third Avant-garde practices enable (local) artists a comment

15 Geeta Kapur, "When Was Modernism in Indian Art?," in *When Was Modernism: Essays on Contemporary Cultural Practice in India* (1995), ed. Geeta Kapur (New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2000), 297–98.

16 Kapur, 297–98. Many other artists could figure this study. I am aware that this selection mirrors my own organic trajectory, thus it should not be considered final. This study emphasizes the possibility of meeting the artwork and the artist, and this is a difficult endeavour especially because I was located in the Netherlands, where Southeast Asian contemporary art representation is deficient (like in the rest of Europe). In this respect, internet has proved to be an extremely useful tool and a major player, as it reduced distance.

17 Patrick D. Flores, "'Total Community Response': Performing the Avant-Garde as a Democratic Gesture in Manila," *Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia* 1, no. 1 (2017): 15–18.

on their reality(ies). This is done by uniting local symbols with a universal language that has been transmitted to them through (a globalized) education since the colonial period. As Jean Fisher notes, their practice

> [C]oncerns agency—the ability to initiate a swerve away from the conventional pathways of thought, to engage with, and open up different ways of thinking ethically and collectively that are responsive to the way each part is intricately woven into an indivisible wholeness. This can only happen if all entities are included as equal participants in the conversation.[18]

This is, in my opinion, what happens in Third Avant-garde works: the conflation of elements is balanced, and there is no sense of making one discourse more relevant or more prominent than the other. Following their inherent complexity, Third Avant-garde works must be analyzed considering all possible elements—the traditional, the modern, and the contemporary alike. So, Third Avant-garde works not only continue Duchamp's initial claim that art is a value, construed in and by the (art) museum, they also continue its open-ended discourse. This, in turn, makes Third Avant-garde practices contain a potential to change, not only the course of theorization but equally to ruin the modern art museum *a step further*. This is the Third Avant-garde's direct achievement: it resolves the dialectic, as much as it precludes progress by means of understanding and resolving what were regarded as binary sets of oppositions of us and them, high and low art, West and East, art and ethnography. And as Thomas McEvilley detects,

> [I]t is not the individual who speaks... but Language that speaks through the individual. In the same sense, it is not the individual who makes images, but the vast image bank of the individual... the artists [is] a channel as much as a source, and negates or diminishes the idea of Romantic creativity and the deeper idea on which it is founded, that of the Soul.[19]

McEvilley's remark confirms that artists largely make Third Avant-garde works unconsciously. And while this study aims to go a step further into the understanding of other ways of art making, the Third Avant-garde (which was theoretically deferred because of its coincidental emergence with postmodern

18 Jean Fisher, "Thinking, Weaving: Another Approach to Cosmopolitanism," in *All Our Relations: 18th Biennale of Sydney*, ed. Catherine de Zegher and Gerald McMaster (Sydney: The Biennale of Sydney, 2012), 87.

19 Thomas McEvilley, "On the Manner of Adressing Clouds," in *Capacity: History, the World, and the Self in Contemporary Art and Criticism* (Amsterdam B. V., 1996), 226.

practices) claims that we need to look at artistic practice "simply [as] a process of bringing out into the open all modes of expression."[20]

Thus, we must continue to display and theorize, as much as the artists must keep producing artworks. And, as Mio Pang Fei suggested for his Neo-Orientalism, this is a task for future generations. Because, as Flores quotes in this affirmation by Bürger, the avant-garde "remains an alternative we must continue to suggest."[21]

20 McEvilley, "On the Manner of Adressing Clouds," 225.
21 Flores, "'Total Community Response,'" 18.

Postface

This investigation, *The Third Avant-garde*, results from what I consider a remarkable and unacceptable void in Western theorization, which has wide repercussions in education, academic curricula and museum practices. No matter how much is done to resolve this century-old inheritance that divided world's populations into makers of arts and makers of ethnography, it remains largely undone and unresolved. Art is made in the West, whereas art made outside the West is always preceded by a modifier that locates its origin. This is why we have Latin American art, Chinese Art, or Indonesian art.

I grew up in Asia, more concretely in Macau, between 1980 and 1996. During this time, I contacted Asian communities daily, listened to their languages, visited Buddhist and Hindu temples, Catholic and Protestant churches, and contacted Muslim and Sikh communities. I also saw much beautiful and outstanding art, the kind that historically originated Western imaginations of Asia as a place of luxurious material culture. I grew to admire the splendor and refined character of Chinese, Thai, Indian or Pilipino arts and crafts, and to be interested in their philosophies and collective culture.

Being a Third Culture Kid fascinated with these legacies, I decided to study art. Yet, throughout my academic life, I was struck by what seemed incomprehensible to me—that I was repeatedly studying the arts from Sumer, Egypt, Greece, Rome, and later Europe and America. I kept waiting for the introduction of cultures surrounding me in art historical lessons or even on visual arts curricula. Even if I was in contact with Buddhism every day, I remained ignorant what a Thai Buddhist temple in Thailand implied, and what its architecture denoted. I was surrounded by things I had no access to. But more importantly, I never saw traces of complex, large scale jade or ivory sculptures made in China, or extremely beautiful and intricate embroideries from India in any art historical book. Why was art history not referring to Asia? I also travelled to the West; for instance, I visited important museums such as the National Gallery of Art in Washington D.C. in 1991. Despite much European and American art presented, again, I saw no traces of Native American or Asian art. Why, alongside art history books, art museums were only showing art pertaining to the European canon, and were neglecting all Asian art, or art originating from autochthonous communities?

Later I understood that these cultures were considered ethnographic—an aspect that for me, was incomprehensible. How could magnificent, highly crafted classical arts from Asia be generally considered as pertaining to the

realm of the uncivilized? Living as I was in a quasi-colonial place where the two cultures coexisted, this was impossible to grasp. After all, during the 1990s, Macau and Hong Kong (and arguably many parts of Asia) were much more high-tech, modernized, and developed than many places in Europe. Certainly, there were many places that seemed untouched by modernity, but the same happens in European locations. Then, what was the difference? Why this discrepancy? If these communities were in fact only making traditional arts—Chinese calligraphy, Indonesian batik, Thai embroideries, Indian ivory sculpture—and these fascinating materials were not considered art, what could I do? Later I learned that maybe I should have opted for anthropology instead of fine art studies if I wanted to understand the material culture of these populations.

This dissertation allowed me to go back to these questions, but instead of accepting that there was nothing I could do, it forced me to find a solution. I remembered what I had witnessed in 1995 and 1996 Macau, when a group of talented artists, mostly Chinese but also Macanese, were making art merging lessons of Chinese calligraphy with Western modernism. The art of Chinese artist Mio Pang Fei remains with me since then. In order to analyse his art, I had to ask: 'What am I seeing?'

Fortunately, in 2006 I returned to Asia, this time to study Arts and Crafts from Indonesia. Later I pursued an MA in Curatorial Studies in Lisbon with a strong focus on contemporary art. This aspect triggered me to trace contemporary expressions of Indonesian artists that worked upon the traditional arts of batik, gamelan and *wayang*. This thesis, entitled *Memory and Contemporaneity: Indonesian contemporary art, a curatorial project*, was fundamental to confirm that, despite the contemporariness of these works, they remained outside of art historical narratives. In 2010, when I went to Indonesia to pursue fieldwork for my MA research, I was criticized for having an orientalist gaze toward the arts I was looking at. After all, I was looking at traditional arts, like so many (Western) curators did since the 1990s. While this is valid, and must be considered a natural attitude coming from Indonesian people, it only proved that my angle was problematic also for them. I had to act upon several considerations and notions of discontent. Meanwhile, living in Europe, I continued to observe the success that the exact same Indonesian artists were getting, by being showcased in high profile exhibitions such as the Venice Biennial, the documenta of Kassel, and curated exhibitions such as *Beyond the Dutch*, at the Utrecht Centraal Museum in 2009, or *The Global Contemporary. Art Worlds After 1989*, at the ZKM Museum of Contemporary Art, Karslruhe, in 2011. Thus, while they were actively curated, their creations remain(ed) outside art historical books, and confined to catalogues and literature that regard the specificity of local expressions.

The attempts to frame these works in the mid-1990s through notable exhibitions such as *Traditions/Tensions* at the Asia Society, in New York, in 1996, had waned and were eventually abandoned. The topic had lost relevance for academics, museums, and was largely deserted. My mission with The Third Avant-garde was to recover these fundamental insights, and give these artists a territory by defining their work in art historical terms (see chapter 2 for a detailed description of the phenomenon I termed as Third Avant-garde). This meant finding within the discipline already existing categories. Arguably it was possible to create a new category, but the avant-garde revealed to be a force, which emerges unannounced, and provokes necessary major changes, so that theorization can be elicited. To arrive at this solution, I had to unlearn and relearn art history, because this time I was combining it with anthropological insights. While anthropology looks at objects in their social relations, and I find this correct, before the 1960s and the 1970s' studies on the avant-garde, art history looked to objects in isolation and mostly focused on the description of styles and formal attributes. Thus, this dissertation represents a double endeavor: on the one hand, it tries to convey the social conjuncture of the art works' emergence, and on the other hand, it tries to apprehend art historical discourses, and use them to complete this major blindspot I always identified within art historical narratives. Meanwhile, I had to change the way I thought about science-making; Portugal follows the French tradition of descriptive analysis, while the Netherlands applies the Anglo-Saxon tradition, which values critical thinking. This programmatic shift also contributed to personal growth.

The Third Avant-garde revealed itself as an epiphany: deferred like the prior ones, because the avant-garde is not immediately grasped and identified, when I understood the mix the artists were positing, and how they were positioning themselves, it became clear that distance was necessary to trace their artistic gestures. Finally, I had the right to understand the material culture and artistic expression of the communities from where I lived, and simultaneously was giving them a place within the discipline I chose to contribute to: art history. The result pays tribute to existing science developed by talented scholars.

This work will hopefully help change schoolbooks by including art beyond the Western canon on the spotlight, or by looking at art as a pan-human phenomenon without necessarily referencing specific geographical locations of emergence which seem increasingly less pertinent in the context of globalization. Meanwhile, the Third Avant-garde can be identified for other locations. This way, art history might be a discipline where we identify who we are through local concerns, and who we have become through historical global interactions. Only then, we may become more complete and cosmopolitan.

Abbreviations

Bal.	Balinese
Budd.	Buddhism
Dut.	Dutch
Hind.	Hinduism
Ind.	Indonesia
Jav.	Javanese
Mh.	Mahayana
P.	Pali
SEA	Southeast Asia
Skt.	Sanskrit
Tet.	Tetun
Th.	Theravada
Thai.	Thailand
v.	*vide*

Glossary

adat the traditional religious and social village laws and regulations.

Arjuna middle brother of the five Pandawa brothers, major shadow play character; refined hero of the Mahabharata cycle.

ASEAN the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

Astronesia Austronesia refers to the homeland of the people who speak Austronesian languages. It also means the regions on which the Austronesian languages are spoken.

bangsa family, group or nation.

Barong a mythical beast of great magic power; most frequently identified with Raja Banaspati, Lord of the Jungle.

Batara Guru another name for the god Siwa (Shiva).

batik a method (originally used in Java) of producing colored designs on textiles by dyeing them, having first applied wax to the parts to be left undyed.

Batuan refers to a village on Bali, Indonesia and simultaneously the painting style that originated there.

blencong oil lamp or electric light bulb used to illuminate the shadows on the white cotton screen in a shadow play performance.

Brahma Lord and creator of the universe and of all beings, one of the three main Hindu deities. The religion originating from the worship of Brahma is called Brahamanism.

Brahamana (Bal.) a member of the priest (Brahmin in India) caste, highest of the aristocracy, the *triwangsa*.

Bodhisattva (Skt.) 'enlightened being' For the Th. sect, each being resolved to reach the state of Buddha and all the successive Buddhas up to enlightenment. For the Mh. order, he is a legendary layman of exemplary virtue and compassion who attempts to reach nirvana.

Borobudur the largest Buddhist structure in the world, Borobudur is located in the surrounding area of Magelang, in Central Java, Indonesia. Older than Prambanan, Borobudur was built by the Shailendra king Samaratunga between 750 and 850 C.E. The original and sacred name Borobudur of the monument was probably bhumisambharabhudhara, indicating the many steps the aspirant had to climb to reach Enlightenment. The Borobudur has been identified as a stupa, a sanctuary (or temple) and as a mandala. In fact, it bears all the three definitions within itself.

Buddhism one of the world's religions. Its development led to its internal division between Mahayana and Theravada sects.

Mahayana Buddhism, or 'Greater Vehicle' (more literally 'Great means of progression') is the name given to the doctrine born of early Buddhism by its adherents who consider it provides the most efficacious path to salvation by according a vital role to the Bodhisattvas and to the transference or sharing of their merits.

Theravada Buddhism, or 'Doctrine of the Elders,' is the expression used to refer both to the Buddhist sect whose adherents follow the teaching contained in the Pali canon and to the doctrine expounded in this canon.

candi (Indo.) temple, sanctuary-tower or funerary monument of Indo-Javanese style.

Cirebon famous court city in West Java.

Cloisonné decorative work in which enamel, glass, or gemstones are separated by strips of flattened wire placed edgeways on a metal backing.

CPLP Community of Portuguese Language Countries

dalang the animator of the puppets and the narrator of the story.

desa an independent community; rural areas of Java and Bali.

dewa (Bal.) a deity

dharma the teaching or religion of the Buddha. One of the fundamental elements of which the world is composed.

Gamelan generic name for bronze gong ensemble orchestras and music that accompanies shadow play performances.

garuda mythical bird that generally combines the features of a bird, a feline and a human being (SEA); king of the birds.

Guru (Skt.) used in Java and Bali for teacher; in Java and Bali may refer to god Batara Guru, the creator.

halus (Jav.) refined.

Inlander (Dut.) Indies native.

Kamasan a village on Bali, Indonesia. It is used interchangeably with the painting style, which for disambiguation purposes has been termed as classic.

kasar coarse or rough.

kebatian Javanese mysticism.

keris Javanese and Balinese dagger. A weapon as much as a ritual object with supernatural powers.

Kecac is a form of Balinese dance and music drama that was developed in the 1930s in Bali, Indonesia.

kidung Old and Middle Javanese

Kidung Interactif Kidung Interactif is a development from the traditional practice of *mabebasan*, e.g. the vocalizing and interpreting of traditional Balinese poetry. The interactivity of *kidung* has rescued *mabebasan* from elitist circuits (which would ultimately lead to its extinction) and demonstrates the Balinese desire to revive their long-standing traditions. Carried out in the radio and in television programs, *kidung interactif* has continually attracted a wide audience, demonstrating the ability of traditional arts to embrace new media.

kongsi mutual aid associations created by the Chinese during the colonial period.

Korawas collective name of the 100 sons of the blind king Drestarata. They belong to the 'left hand party', i.e. the wicked, in *wayang* plays.

Kraton (Jav.) word for a royal palace.

kulit hide, leather.

lakons the story narrated by the *dalang*; these moralizing dramas require one full night for their performance.

Layty class of people that serves the monks and the life inside the monastery, enhances his merit status, and cultivates a quality of life characterized by 'giving.' Without laymen, monks and monastery cannot function. Both monks and laymen are on the path of the Buddha.

lontar a manuscript, a book written on dried leaves of the lontar palm.

Macao SAR Macau Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China.

Mahabarata a pan-Asian cycle of stories dating back to ca. 400 BCE which tells of the events leading up to and including the Bratayuda War between the five Pandhawa brothers and their cousins, the ninety-nine Korawa, over the rights to the kingdom of Ngastina. The stories are known in countless oral and written tellings throughout South and Southeast Asia.

Majapahit East-Javanese empire that colonized the Malay Archipelago during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

Mandala (Skt.) literally means circle, center or 'what surrounds,' implying a sacred place or space. Mandalas formalize space; give it a name and habitation. The mandala principle is of orderly chaos: it is orderly because it comes in a pattern; it is chaos because it is confusing to work in that order. Mandala may also refer to a meditation technique that unites the two orders of nature to produce the best poem imaginable. The conception of phases is determined by the number of concentric circles of the mandala, and these stages correspond to various Buddha—bodies, cycle of seasons, literary modes of production before the final Buddha-image is produced. A mandala is usually represented by a diagram with a central deity, a personification of the basic sanity of Buddha nature. The constructed form of a mandala has as its basic structure a palace with a center and four gates in the cardinal directions.

mantra (Skt.) recitation of holy words or syllables for mystical purposes; cabalistic words with magic power.

Mara one of the greatest gods in the Domain of Desires and of Death; he is regarded as the Tempter, as Satan.

Mataram Shivaite lineage of kings that ruled in Indonesian islands until the first quarter of the tenth century.

memedeg (Bal.) the act of organizing a Batuan painting through chromatic gradation. Composition starts being organized at the bottom and working up; this strategy finds its roots in *wayang kulit* performances, especially in the way puppets are layered on top of each other during a performance.

mudra (Skt.) mark, seal, a gesture of the hands and fingers to which a mystical significance is attached. The term is used to signify a hand-gesture that is designated as a mark of a specific transcendent Buddha (Mh.).

Nyepi (Bal.) a Balinese 'Day of Silence' that is commemorated every Isakawarsa (Saka new year) according to the Balinese calendar.

ogoh-ogoh (Bal.) these are ephemeral statues built for the Ngrupuk parade, which takes place on the eve of Nyepi day in Bali, Indonesia. Ogoh-ogoh normally have form of mythological beings, mostly demons.

Pancasila the five principles that

undergird the constitution of the Indonesian state.

pasemon allusion; type of shadow play where events in everyday life or court intrigues.

pasisir the north coast areas of Java.

Pali the 'sacred language' of Theravada tradition.

Panji Panji was a legendary prince in East Java, Indonesia. His life formed the basis of a cycle of Javanese stories, that, along with the Ramayana and Mahabharata, are the basis of various poems and a genre of wayang (shadow puppetry) known in East Java as *wayang gedog*. The hero of *wayang gedog*. Panji tales have been the inspiration of Indonesian traditional dances, most notably the *topeng* (mask) dances of Cirebon and Malang.

Pedanda (Bal.) a high priest, generally of the Brahmana caste.

Pendawas Pendawas are the five acknowledged sons of Pandu who are the famous five hero brothers—Yudistira, Bima, Arjuna and the twins Nakula and Sadewa.

Peranakan Other terms used for identifying sectors of the community include peranakan and totok. The former, traditionally used to describe those born locally, is derived from the root Indonesian word anak ("child") and thus means "child of the land". The latter is derived from Javanese, meaning "new" or "pure", and is used to describe the foreign born and new immigrants.

Pita Maha was an important art organization founded in 1936 in Ubud. Lasting until 1942, it was probably the major impulse to the creation of a local art market for artists from the Ubud area. Formed in response to gallerist protests complaining about works' sales in the recently opened Bali Museum in Denpasar, Pita Maha was formed by Prince Cokorda Gde Agung Sukawati and the artists I Nyoman Lempad, Walter Spies and Rudolf Bonnet. It acted as intermediary, selling the paintings through exhibitions in major cities of Java, the Netherlands and the United States. Few Batuan works from the 1930s remained in Bali. Pita Maha lasted until 1942, when the Dutch Indies was invaded by Japanese troops. Recognition in Pita Maha provided artists a regular income, which may have contributed to artists' resuming to sign their works. This individualization (caused by Pita Maha) was unknown to Balinese culture: Spies and Bonnet supplied watercolors and crayons with which the artists started adding color to their black and white compositions. The first colored paintings can be traced to their influence; both Spies and Bonnet believed colored works sold better than the predominantly black and white ones. Eventually, Pita Maha developed into a kind of artistic school, and as such played a role in forming a new style—the 'Ubud style' of painting. Meanwhile, Batuan artists worked in relative isolation.

Pura (Bal.) temple.

Prajñaparamita (Skt.) 'Perfection of Wisdom,' a Bodhisattva of female appearance sometimes looked upon as the spiritual Mother of all the Buddhas (Mh.)

Priyayi Javanese bureaucratic class who often worked with the Dutch in colonial times; white-collar class in postcolonial Java.

puputan (Bal.) term that refers to a mass ritual suicide in preference to facing the humiliation of surrender. Notable puputans occurred in 1906 and 1908 when the Balinese were being subjugated by the Dutch.

puri the palace of a prince.

Purwa literally means 'past' as well as 'beginning' or 'origin', thus the term *wayang purwa* could be translated as 'shadows of the

past'; late tenth-century prose texts of Mahabharata and Ramayana stories in Old Javanese, interspersed with Sanskrit sloka (the metric of the epic verses).

Qi (Chin.) vital energy; the circulating life force whose existence and properties are the basis of much Chinese philosophy and medicine.

Ramayana a pan-Asian story cycle dating from to ca. 200 BCE, about the noble prince Rama whose wife Sita is abducted by the demon king Rawana. The stories are known in countless oral and written tellings throughout South and Southeast Asia.

ramè (Bal.) boisterous, crowded, lively, animated and busy. Geertz identifies it as copiousness and suggests it can be translated as plenitude or as busy, crowded sociability or excitement and fun.

sakti (Bal.) mystical power; can be described as 'sorcery'. Capacity to join in combat the competing forces of the universe to secure an envelope of safety around oneself and those near one.

Samadhi (Skt., P.) concentration, religious meditation; together with a perfect way of life, this is indispensable for attaining the highest wisdom.

Sanskrit Indian literary language used frequently for religious, poetic, and dramatic texts. Language of ancient inscriptions in South and Southeast Asia. Sacred language of the Buddhist Mahayana tradition.

sanggar (Ind.) informal learning environments, these fluid collectives are composed of ad hoc groups whose membership shift and changes. Present in Java, Bali and Timor-Leste.

Sangha the monastic order of Theravada Buddhism in Thailand. Traditionally, the monks live an ascetic ideal.

sawah (Ind.) a rice field.

Shailendra a Buddhist dynasty that ruled in Indonesian islands between the 8th and the 9th centuries CE, and ruled Shrivijaya during the 8th and 13th centuries CE.

Semar clown servant to Pandawa heroes; in reality, the god Ismaya, older brother of Batara Guru.

Sidoarjo town in East Java

Solo famous court city in Central Java—also known as Surakarta.

stupa (Skt.) quintessential Buddhist monument; the original meaning being 'remains of a burial mound.' This traditional solid structure takes on different forms in the regions where Buddhism has been practiced. They can be domed, cylindrical or pyramidal. The pagodas in China and Japan are an extension of these ideas.

Sukarno nationalist leader during the colonial period and independent Indonesia's first president (1945-1966).

Suharto Indonesian general, second president of the Indonesian state who ruled under the Orde Baru (New Order) between 1967 and 1998.

Surakarta famous court city in Central Java, founded in 1744 AD—also known as Solo.

Tais (Tet.) also designated as *ikat*, this weaving technique is present in most of the Indonesian archipelago, and especially in East Nusa Tenggara, where Timor is located. It is nevertheless a global form of textile decoration, and probably one of the oldest in the entire world. One of its characteristics is the apparent 'blurriness' of the design. *Tais* is a woven textile, which is part of Timor-Leste's classified intangible heritage. Spread everywhere in the country, each locale has its own variations. It has been used in cultural ceremonies

like weddings or funerals, but also it has served as a gift to personalities that visit the country. Historically, the *tais* depicted the narrative that the weaver must tell, which has originated several ornaments and colors.

transmigrasi (Ind.) transmigration policies that were enforced and stimulated during the New Order.

Trimuti Hindu trinity; constituted by lord Brahma (the creator), Vishnu (the preserver) and Shiva (the destroyer/transformer).

Totok A term used for identifying sectors of the community deriving from Javanese, meaning 'new' or 'pure,' and is used to describe the foreign born and new immigrants.

Ubud Ubud is a town on the Indonesian island of Bali in Ubud District, of the Gianyar regency. One of Bali's major arts and culture centers, it has developed a large tourism industry.

UNESCO an agency of the United Nations set up in 1945 to promote the exchange of information, ideas, and culture.

Wayang (Jav.) Literally means shadow. Javanese marker of dramatic genres. The term came to also mean puppet, even when the puppets are not used.
—***wayang batu***: stone *wayang*; same as *wayang* style. Defined by Claire Holt, It consists on the temple reliefs that decorate the facades of sanctuaries in East Java from the tenth to the fifteenth centuries.
—***wayang beber***: a form of *wayang*; a long scroll of cotton in which the episodes are painted. *Wayang beber* comes from the Javanese word *ambeber*, which means 'to open by spreading.'
—***wayang gedog***: a type of *wayang kulit*; the meaning of the word *gedog* is not clear. *Wayang gedog kulit* represents characters from the cycle of Panji stories.
—***wayang golek***: a form of wooden puppet, which is tridimensional, the clothing being of cotton batik.
—***wayang kulit***: shadow puppet theater.
—***wayang orang***: Indonesian language term for the Javanese theatrical tradition modeled after the shadow puppet theater but using human actors.
—***wayang purwa kulit***: the performance representing the cycle of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata stories.
—***wayang*** style: stone *wayang*; same as *wayang batu*. Defined by Claire Holt, It consists on the temple reliefs that decorate the facades of sanctuaries in East Java from the tenth to the fifteenth centuries.
—***wayang topeng***: a form of *wayang* performed by actors wearing masks.
—***wayang wong***: theatrical tradition nurtured in the courts of Solo and Yogya modeled after the shadow puppet theatre but using human actors.

Yantra Magic diagrams that serve as Buddhist talismans in the form of a piece of cloth bearing sacred symbols and inscriptions. They draw on the power of Pali language, of cabalistic configurations of syllables and mysterious geometries of power.

Yogyakarta famous court city in Central Java—also known as Yogya and Jogja.

Zen a Buddhist sect which was introduced into Japan from China in the middle of the 12th century. It exerted a considerable influence on Japanese art.

Appendix I

Avant-garde Events	The Historical Avant-garde	The Neo-Avant-garde	The Third Avant-garde	(The Next Avant-garde)
What	Anarchic: Surrealism Constructivism Futurism Dadaism (Some authors e.g. Renato Poggioli consider an Avant-garde of heroic vein, e.g. Cubism)	Anarchic: Performance Art Happenings (Some authors, e.g. Clement Greenberg consider Abstract Expressionism as avant-garde)	Combination of Anarchism and Heroism The artist acts individually (heroic gesture); the artist acts for the community (anarchic gesture)	Not identified
When	1910s – 1930s (resurged after WW II in the US)	1950s-1970s	Latin America: since the late 1960s Africa and Asia: since the mid 1980s.	Since 2001 WTC attacks and the 2008 financial crisis
Where	Europe Japan Exported to the US because of the exile of Duchamp and Picabia	United States Japan Europe	Latin America African continent Asian continent	The entire world
Why	Against academicism, the bourgeois culture and romanticism	Reaction against academicism and formal aestheticism	Reaction against academicism and the neglect of traditional arts and cultural diversity	Political neglect Political repression
Who	Surrealists (James Clifford) Constructivists Dadaists Modern Art	FLUXUS Abstract Expressionists Conceptualists Minimalists	Hélio Oiticica (BR) Yinka Shonibare (NG) YBA (UK) (Southeast) Asian artists	Especially prominent among neglected communities
How	Rapprochement with life Blur of high and low culture Attack on the institutionalization of art	Rapprochement with life Blur of high and low culture Attack on the institutionalization of art	Rapprochement with life Blur of high and low culture Attack on the institutionalization of art	Rapprochement with life Blur of high and low culture Attack on the institutionalization of art

Appendix II

Avant-garde Events	The Historical Avant-garde	The Neo-Avant-garde	The Third Avant-garde	(The Next Avant-garde)
Museum Behavior (considered contemporarily to the events. Accommodation is always deferred)	Denial of all avant-gardes besides the Avant-garde of Heroic vein, which rapidly becomes paramount.	Accepted the Historical avant-garde. Photography enters the museum reassessed as a modern medium.	Accepted the Neo-avant-garde. The Museum "becomes a stage" with the introduction of performance art, happenings and installation art in its realm.	Accepted the Third Avant-garde, that enters the ethnographic museum. This in turn, changes its nomenclature to World Art Museum.
Art History Behavior (considered contemporarily to the events. Accommodation is always deferred)	Neglect of the Avant-garde of anarchic vein. Famous rejection of Duchamp's Fountain (1917) Accepts the Avant-garde of Heroic vein (Cubism, etc)	Accepted the Historical avant-garde of Anarchic vein (Dada).	Accepted the American avant-garde as contributing for the evolvement of art.	Has devoted some attention to the relation between art and science; to the relation between art and nature.
Avant-garde's Deferred Temporality (the temporal distance between production and reception)	**Avant-garde of Anarchic Vein came unannounced.** Reception: was neglected, repressed and ignored. (The Avant-garde of Heroic equally emerged unannounced but was rapidly apprehended)	In the 1960s, neo-avant-garde artists understood the value of the Historical avant-garde of Anarchic vein. **The Neo-avant-garde came unannounced.** Peter Bürger wrote the *Theory of the Avant-garde* (1974). Photography enters the museum, after being revaluated	In 1994, the Neo-avant-garde was reassessed by Hal Foster who argues it constitutes a valid contribution for the evolvement of art. 1990s Installation art enters the museum. **Third Avant-garde came unannounced** (Theorization deferred until 2010s.) Regional museums (like SAM) start building their collections.	Theorization of the Third Avant-garde. Regional museums start canonizing the Third Avant-garde. Some works are considered historical, especially if they were present in APT, Havana, Venice, Fukuoka. The system of classification is transferred to the local reality. **The Next Avant-garde came unannounced.**

APPENDIX III

AVANT-GARDE EVENTS	THE HISTORICAL AVANT-GARDE	THE NEO-AVANT-GARDE	THE THIRD AVANT-GARDE	(THE NEXT AVANT-GARDE)
MATERIAL	New formats: Collage Montage Ready-made Found object Industrial object Pamphlets Slogans Performance	Performance Events Happenings	Introduction of fragments from traditional arts The notion that local culture penetrates and can be included in art making	Eco-green revolution
METHOD	Appropriation Reappropriation Montage Ready-made	Appropriation Reappropriation Montage Ready-made	Appropriation Reappropriation Montage Ready-made	Appropriation Reappropriation Montage Ready-made
MISSION	Dismantle the dependency of art from the eye Art is inspired on reality	Art is inspired on reality "The world as stage" Ethnographic behavior	Destroy the binary Art/Culture Dismantle the binary art/ethnography Art is inspired on reality	Destroy the status quo Remove power from corporations
MOTIVATION	Citizenship	Citizenship	Cultural Citizenship	World Citizenship
MUNDIALIZATION / GLOBALIZATION (where the message arrived)	In terms of making, mundialization was partial. In terms of appropriation, it is wordily	United States of America Europe	World phenomenon of unrelated people . 1960s Brazil (ex. Hélio Oiticica) . 1990s Nigeria (ex. Yinka Shonibare) . 1980s UK & USA (ex. Black artists Faith Ingold) . 1980-90s India, Asia, Australia (ex. Aboriginal painting)	World phenomenon of unrelated people

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Summary

The Third Avant-garde investigates radical art manifestations in Southeast Asia, which took place around the mid-1980s, when postmodernism started to gain force in the region. It proposes that the advent of postmodernism in Southeast Asia is anchored in the materiality of traditional arts, an aspect that renders it different from its Western equivalent. The dissertation distinguishes two sets of postmodern manifestations: first, practices that use traditions in a celebratory way, and second, another set of postmodern works which use traditional arts in a radical way. This study proposes to regard the employment of traditional arts of the radical kind as manifesting a double dismantle—first, against local patronizing forces that were enforcing artists to practice academic art and Western media (such as painting and sculpture), and second, a distancing attitude from Western art intelligentsia, who acted as 'owners of the discourse', and regarded 'non-Western' practitioners as followers rather than as trendsetters. To investigate this, the discipline of anthropology was called in, as was the art historical category of the avant-garde. By combining the two approaches—anthropology of art regards the object as related to a certain context, a view I agree with, and avant-garde, which is an essential category for the evolvement of art history as a discipline—I propose that contemporary art from Southeast Asia that reprocesses traditional arts can be regarded as manifesting discontent with local and global (inherited) forces. These radical gestures are novel, and result from practicing art in a certain location and which is bound to a certain socio-political context.

The Third Avant-garde emerged unannounced in the art world in the 1990s, when the meeting of artistic practices and curatorial undertakings occurred. In this period reception proved ineffective; the use of traditions was received as a sign of provenance—'I am Indonesian, therefore I use *wayang*'—and thus the socio-political messages imbedded in the works were not fully apprehended. The result of this was that the avant-garde's agency over traditions remained undetected until the 2010s. I argue that this situation stems from the 'deferred temporality of the avant-garde'—the temporal discrepancy between making and reception that characterizes radical gestures, and that American art historian Hal Foster refers to as one of avant-garde's most significant attributes.

The dissertation follows the teachings contained in the *Theory of the Avant-garde* (1984) by German literary critic Peter Bürger and combines its insights with those by American art historian Hal Foster and Indian art historian

Geeta Kapur (among others) to propose another avant-garde moment, this time occurring in Southeast Asia. The most striking feature of what I call 'The Third Avant-garde' is the presence of traditional arts, especially if one considers the avant-garde from a Western point of view, where avant-garde marked a break with tradition. Thus, the avant-garde is proposed here as force, linking to the moment of its occurrence—the 'here and the now'—and proposing a different future. These practices can be considered *multi-temporal* works, ones in which past and present coeval. The apparent anachronism (as spectators when looking at these works our mind diverges and fluctuates between associations of ethnography and art) is, I convey, what makes these works most striking and appealing. Interestingly, these works exist in the sphere of biennials and large-scale exhibitions but are not equally integrated in art museums or in academic books on art and art history. This contradictory aspect—their presence in the most important venues such as the Venice Biennial—contrasts with their absence from the institutional system of museum, academia and the archive. These artworks (seem to) play with long established notions of museums and academia, and notably penetrate the scope of art and ethnography. Equally, they propose new modes of understanding what art is, and demonstrate how diverse art making can be—in accordance with the geographical and cultural context of production.

Chapter 1, *Recalling Tradition*, revolves around the concept of *tradition* and its emergence within contemporary art practices. It puts forward a new reality—initially termed as the 'Third Object'—and proposes that the unequivocal presence of fragments of traditional crafts, rituals and customs in contemporary art practices has not yet been conveniently addressed by art historical discourses, albeit attempts were made. 'Third Objects' are works that connect two worlds that were regarded as oppositional and disparate—that of the past and the ethnographic museum, and that of the present and the (modern) art museum—ultimately questioning the system that divided the fields of culture and art. It demonstrates that unrelated artists from diverse locations of the world, including Southeast Asia, reprocess fragments of traditions to make sense of their present-day *cultural identity* and *citizenship*: this is done through an *avant-gardist* discourse that conjures both rupture and continuation.

Chapter 2, *The Third Avant-Garde,* elaborates on the conceptual and theoretical evolvement of the avant-garde. It proposes that when regarded conceptually, it is possible to break with the Western hegemony on the avant-garde discourse—an aspect that has caught the attention of numerous scholars, including Kapur. I suggest regarding the avant-garde generally as a historical force, that after finding its contemporary language and mission, springs to form artistic manifestations that aim to change the status quo of society and art. In order to fully understand the event of the Third Avant-garde, I discuss a number

of examples of important artworks by artists from Southeast Asia.

Chapter 3, *The Third Avant-garde: Early Days (1970s-80s)*, proposes that even though the Third Avant-garde in Southeast Asia has happened most prominently since the mid-1980s, its roots can be traced back to the mid-1970s. At the time, several unrelated artist groups from Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and The Philippines published written manifestos that announced the need for a rapprochement between art and life (which included looking at the diversity of peoples and cultures). It then describes the proposed first Southeast Asian Third Avant-garde work, *Ken Dedes* (1975), by Jim Supangkat, on his student days. The chapter then suggests that since the mid-1980s the radicalism of the 1970s underwent reformulation: through non-confrontational practices, works imbued with social preoccupations and grounded in local sensibilities and histories emerge in Southeast Asia. The 1980s are extremely relevant because this decade witnessed the emergence of curatorial undertakings in various locations in Southeast Asia and Japan.

Chapter 4, *The Boom of the Third Avant-garde (1990s)*, refers to exhibition practices that occurred in the 1990s worldwide. In the 1990s, the topic of tradition was exalted on the *Third Habana Biennial Tradition and Contemporaneity* and *Magiciens de la Terre* exhibitions in 1989, in the three initial editions of the *Asia Pacific Triennial*, in Queensland, in Australia, Generally, curatorial projects proposed to demonstrate the contextual circumstances of artistic production in (Southeast) Asian countries but did not completely address the avant-garde stance that was imbedded in the works through the employment of traditional arts. Thus, the seminal *Traditions/Tensions* in 1996, in New York responded to these limited readings, by giving local experts a voice. Still, the Third Avant-garde remained undetected, due to the temporal coincidence of production and exposure. So, by the decade's end, curators moved beyond the topic.

The chapter equally observes that Third Avant-garde practices clearly differ from preceding avant-garde moments in their lack of a written manifesto. Now, artistic gestures do not follow a group intention, but rather are done by individual artists and contain personal acts of social agency. During the 1990s, the main theme of Third Avant-garde works is the local, which in turn reveals desire to communicate with local community(ies). As a consequence, works are materialized through very localized traditional codes.

The 1990s in Southeast Asia were marked by the persistence of dictatorial regimes. Thus, in many cases, the Third Avant-garde artist acted in exile. To better frame and combine these two aspects—the life of the artist and the life of the curated artwork—I enumerate works by a number of selected, relevant Southeast Asian artists, who I contacted and with whom I discussed these issues.

Chapter 5, *The Third Avant-garde Addresses Global Issues (after*

2002) refers to a panoply of exhibitions and publications that contributed to global recognition of Southeast Asian contemporary art, with artists enjoying attention by museums, art galleries and art fairs. The chapter then demonstrates that tradition, as a topic, has been theoretically reenacted in the 2010s: this temporal gap provided artists, curators and art historians a necessary distance for an integrated reading. Southeast Asian artists continue to use available traditions, and curators recognize that tradition remains relevant and topical for local sensibilities. Since 2002, Third Avant-garde artists experience new contextual socio-political conditions, which call for creative solutions. Whereas the critical stance remains, the motives differ.

The *Conclusion* demonstrates the achievements of the Third Avant-garde—namely its discursive contribution and its urgency. It proposes that the Third Avant-garde is conducive to a new way of understanding tradition—*as a living archive*—and that tradition may be an integrant aspect of art making. Thus, it demonstrates that the avant-garde, as an art historical category, could be expanded. And thanks to the work of some notable curators, who were attentive to the needs of the artists from their countries of origination, the Third Avant-garde fights against established international norms which appear in the majority of art books, and equally questions divisions between center and periphery, and between art and ethnography.

Samenvatting

The Third Avant-garde bestudeert een radicale hedendaagse kunst die zich omtrent het midden van de jaren 1980 in Zuidoost-Azië manifesteerde toen in die regio het postmodernisme aan kracht begon te winnen. De centrale these van deze dissertatie is dat de oorsprong van dit Zuid-Aziatische postmodernisme geworteld is in de materialiteit van de traditionele kunsten, een eigenschap waarin zij verschilt van haar westerse tegenhanger. Twee groepen postmoderne kunstwerken worden hier onderscheiden: ten eerste praktijken die tradities 'vieren' en op die manier gebruiken en ten tweede een groep postmoderne werken die traditionele kunst radicaal inzetten en daarmee de eerste soort kritisch bevragen. Het onderhavige onderzoek stelt tot doel de tweede groep te benaderen als een dubbele poging tot ontmanteling. Ten eerste, los te komen van lokale krachten die kunstenaars in de richting duwden van 'academische kunst' en het gebruik van westerse media (zoals schilderen en beeldhouwen), en ten tweede zich te distantiëren van de westerse kunst-intelligentsia, die de rol van 'eigenaars van het discours' op zich namen en ertoe neigden de 'niet-westerse' beoefenaars eerder als volgers dan als trendsetters te zien. Om dit te onderzoeken wordt gebruik gemaakt van antropologische methodiek en het kunsthistorische concept van de avant-garde. De antropologie van de kunst beschouwt het kunstobject als gerelateerd aan een specifieke context, een zienswijze die ik hier wil volgen. Het concept van de avant-garde is een fundamentele categorie binnen de kunstgeschiedenis. Door beide te combineren argumenteer ik dat in het 'hergebruik' van traditionele kunst de moderne Zuidoost-Aziatische kunst uiting gaf aan haar onvrede met lokale en globale (overgeërfde) krachten. Deze radicale uitingen waren vernieuwend en kunnen gezien worden als het resultaat van een kunstbeoefening binnen een specifieke geografische ruimte en socio-politieke context.

The Third Avant-garde maakte onaangekondigd haar opwachting rond de jaren 1990, op een moment dat binnen de kunstwereld allerlei artistieke praktijk en curatoriële werkzaamheden elkaar kruisten. De ontvangst van deze kunst verliep in deze periode niet altijd even gladjes. De verwijzing naar tradities werd bijvoorbeeld vaak geïnterpreteerd als een benadrukking van afkomst—'ik ben Indonesisch, dus ik gebruik *wayang*'—waardoor de socio-politieke lading verankerd in de kunstwerken niet goed werd aangevoeld. De diepgaande avant-gardistische agency van het traditionele bleef bijgevolg tot de jaren 2010 nagenoeg onopgemerkt. Het is mijn overtuiging dat deze situatie wortelt in een zogenaamde 'deferred temporality' ('opgeschorte tijdelijkheid') van de

avant-garde—d.w.z. de discrepantie in tijd tussen de creatie en de receptie van avant-garde kunst, die volgens de Amerikaanse kunsthistoricus Hal Foster als meest belangwekkende eigenschap van de avant-garde kan gezien worden.

Deze dissertatie volgt de inzichten van de Duitse literaire criticus Peter Bürger in zijn *Theory of the Avant-garde* (1984) en combineert ze met (onder andere) ideeën ontwikkeld door de Amerikaanse kunsthistoricus Hal Foster en de Indiase kunsthistorica Geeta Kapur. Voortbouwend op deze theorieën stel ik voor een nieuwe, tot nu toe niet opgemerkte avant-garde te onderscheiden, een die zich ditmaal ontwikkelde in Zuidoost-Azië. De meest markante karakteristiek van deze avant-garde, die ik als 'The Third Avant-garde' betitel, is haar opnemen van traditionele kunsten. Dit is ongebruikelijk zeker wanneer men het bekijkt vanuit een westers oogpunt, waar avant-garde juist een breuk met de traditie betekent. In deze studie wordt avant-garde dus voorgesteld als een kracht die verbonden is aan haar moment van ontstaan—het hier en nu—en die een andere toekomst suggereert. De kunstuitingen van deze 'Derde Avant-garde' kunnen dan beschouwd worden als multi-temporele werken, waarin verleden en heden samenkomen. Dit ogenschijnlijke anachronisme (de beschouwer pendelt tussen associaties met etnografie en kunst) vormt juist—zo is mijn these—de aantrekkingskracht en de essentiële eigenheid van deze avant-garde werken. Daarbij is opmerkelijk dat zij wel een plaats vinden binnen biënnales en grootschalige tentoonstellingen, maar niet op gelijkaardige wijze vertegenwoordigd zijn in musea of kunsthistorische studies. Hier is een tegenstrijdigheid in het spel: hun aanwezigheid op belangrijke tentoonstellingen als de Biënnale van Venetië contrasteert met hun afwezigheid in het institutionele circuit van musea, academies en archieven. Zo lijken deze kunstwerken te spelen met gevestigde noties als museum en academie en breken ze door op zowel het terrein van de kunst als de etnografie. Tegelijkertijd stellen ze nieuwe manieren voor om te definiëren wat kunst is en tonen—in overeenstemming met de geografische en culturele context van hun productie—hoe divers kunstcreatie kan zijn.

Hoofdstuk 1, *Recalling Tradition*, behandelt het concept 'traditie' en haar verschijning binnen eigentijdse kunstvormen. Het hoofdstuk stelt een nieuw scenario voor—hier aangeduid als 'the Third Object'—en stelt dat binnen de eigentijdse kunstpraktijk de onmiskenbare sporen van en referenties aan traditionele ambachten, rituelen en gewoontes nog niet grondig zijn geadresseerd, enkele pogingen daargelaten. 'Third objects' zijn werken die twee werelden, met elkaar verbinden die als tegengesteld en ongelijksoortig worden gezien: die van het verleden en het etnografische museum met die van het heden en de moderne kunst. Daarmee stellen deze kunstwerken de structuren ter discussie die het veld van de kunst en de cultuur van elkaar scheiden. Ook laten ze zien hoe los van elkaar werkende

kunstenaars, afkomstig uit verschillende delen van de wereld waaronder Zuidoost-Azië, aspecten van hun traditie herwerken om beter greep te krijgen op hun huidige culturele identiteit en burgerschap. Dit gebeurt op basis van een avantgardistisch discours dat zowel breuk als continuering oproept. Deze kunstenaars laven zich dus aan zowel het academische als traditionele en trachten zo een weloverwogen positie tussen verleden en heden in te nemen.

Hoofdstuk 2, *The Third Avant-Garde*, gaat dieper in op de conceptuele en theoretische ontwikkeling van het concept van de avant-garde. Ik zal hier laten zien dat door gebruik te maken van dit conceptueel perspectief het mogelijk is te breken met de westerse hegemonie binnen het discours van de avant-garde—een kwestie die reeds de aandacht heeft gekregen van verschillende onderzoekers, onder wie Kapur. Ik beschouw hier de avant-garde in het algemeen als een historische kracht, die, zodra ze haar eigentijdse taal en missie heeft gevonden, artistieke uitdrukkingen vormt die erop gericht zijn de maatschappelijke en kunstzinnige status-quo te doorbreken. Om het fenomeen van de 'Third Avant-garde' ten volle te begrijpen wordt aantal belangrijke kunstwerken van Zuidoost-Aziatische kunstenaars diepgaand besproken.

Hoofdstuk 3, *The Third Avant-garde: Early Days (1970s-80s)* toont hoe de wortels van de 'Third Avant-garde', die vooral vanaf het midden van de jaren 1980 opkomt, teruggaan tot in het midden van de jaren 1970. Op dat moment publiceerden verschillende niet aan elkaar gelieerde groepen kunstenaars uit Indonesië, Maleisië, Thailand en de Filipijnen een aantal manifesten waarin werd gepleit voor een verzoening tussen kunst en leven en waarin ook aandacht werd besteed aan de diversiteit van volkeren en culturen. Het hoofdstuk gaat vervolgens in op wat ik beschouw als het eerste Zuidoost-Aziatische 'Third Avant-garde' werk: *Ken Dedes* (1975), gemaakt door Jim Supangkat tijdens zijn studentenjaren. Ik laat vervolgens zien dat vanaf het midden van de jaren 1980 er een herformulering van het radicalisme van de jaren 1970 valt op te merken. In Zuidoost-Azië zien we kunstpraktijken opkomen met een sterk sociaal karakter en niet gericht op confrontatie, geworteld in lokale contexten geschiedenis. De opmars van allerlei curatoriële praktijken op verschillende plaatsen in Zuidoost-Azië en Japan maakt een bespreking van de jaren 1980 des te relevanter.

Hoofdstuk 4, *The Boom of the Third Avant-garde (1990s)*, gaat dieper in op de wereldwijde tentoonstellingspraktijken van de jaren 1990. In dat decennium kwam 'traditie' als thema op de voorgrond in de derde *Biënnale van Havana, Tradition and Contemporaneity*, in het *Parijse Magiciens de la Terre* (beide tentoonstellingen uit 1989) en in de drie eerste edities van de *Asia Pacific Triennial* (1993, 1996, 1999), in Queensland, Australië. Deze tentoonstellingen wilden vooral de aandacht vestigen op de contextuele omstandigheden van de kunstproductie in (Zuidoost) Aziatische landen. Toch slaagden ze er niet geheel in om de avantgardistische portee, die door het opnemen van traditionele

kunsten vervat lag in het tentoongestelde werk, naar voor te halen. Door lokale experts meer expliciet een stem te geven zou de baanbrekende New Yorkse tentoonstelling *Traditions/Tensions* (1996) hier wel aan tegemoet komen. Toch bleef de 'Third Avant-garde' onopgemerkt, ook omdat productie en presentatie hier te veel samen waren komen te vallen en tegen het einde van het decennium de aandacht van curatoren voor het onderwerp al weer tanende was.

Ook wordt in dit hoofdstuk ingegaan op hoe de 'Third Avant-garde' verschilt van haar voorgangers, mede door het ontbreken van geschreven manifesten. De kunstenaars in kwestie opereren veel minder als groep, de individuele kunstenaars geven in hun kunst vooral uiting aan persoonlijk sociaal handelen. In de jaren negentig werd het 'lokale' het hoofdthema in de kunst van de 'Third Avant-garde'. Daarin komt het verlangen tot uitdrukking om het gesprek aan te gaan met lokale gemeenschappen en de voorkeur voor traditionele, lokale idiomen.

De jaren negentig werden in Zuidoost-Azië gekenmerkt door een hardnekkig voortbestaan van dictatoriale regimes en veel 'Third Avant-garde'-kunstenaars werkten derhalve in ballingschap. De relatie tussen leven in exil en de kunstwerken wordt verder geëxpliciteerd aan de hand van een selectie relevante Zuidoost-Aziatische kunstenaars met wie ik deze onderwerpen ook heb besproken.

Hoofdstuk 5, *The Third Avant-garde Reaches the Global (after 2002)* behandelt een aantal tentoonstellingen en publicaties die bijdroegen aan de wereldwijde erkenning van de Zuidoost-Aziatische hedendaagse kunst, met kunstenaars die erkenning genoten in musea, kunstgaleries en -beurzen. Het hoofdstuk toont hoe 'traditie' als thema in de jaren 2010 op theoretisch niveau aandacht kreeg. Die tijdspanne had de noodzakelijke afstand gecreëerd voor kunstenaars, curatoren en kunsthistorici om een geïntegreerde kijk te vormen op deze kunstproductie. Kunstenaars uit Zuidoost Azië zijn tradities blijven gebruiken en curatoren hebben erkend dat traditie nog steeds relevantie heeft omdat het deel uitmaakt van de lokale situatie. Sinds 2002 worden 'Third Avant-garde' kunstenaars geconfronteerd met nieuwe socio-politieke ontwikkelingen zoals de opkomst van meer democratische samenlevingsvormen. Deze veranderende context vraagt om nieuwe creatieve oplossingen. Een kritische houding kan dan bijvoorbeeld tot uitdrukking komen in andere onderwerpen, thema's of motieven.

De *Conclusie* laat de verwezenlijkingen van de 'Third Avant-garde' zien en gaat meer specifiek in op haar discursieve bijdrage en urgentie. Betoogd wordt dat de 'Third Avant-garde' een nieuw begrip van traditie aandraagt—namelijk als levend archief—en dat deze een wezenlijk deel van hedendaagse kunstcreatie kan zijn. Ze toont, met andere woorden, dat avant-garde als kunsthistorisch concept kan worden uitgebreid. Dankzij het

werk van een aantal spraakmakende curatoren die ontvankelijk waren voor de noden van hun landgenoten-kunstenaars, heeft de 'Third Avant-garde' als kosmopolitische groep kunstenaars met succes het idee bevochten dat het postmodernisme slechts oppervlakkig tradities najoeg. In één beweging stelt ze daarmee meteen ook de opdeling tussen centrum en periferie en tussen kunst en etnografie aan de orde.

Curriculum Vitae

Leonor Veiga (Lisbon, 1978) received in 2003 a diploma in Industrial Design at the Faculty of Fine Arts, Lisbon University. Between 2004 and 2007, she was project manager for the "New Permanent Exhibition" of the *Maritime Museum of the Island of Mozambique* for *Arqueonautas Worldwide, SA*. Veiga assisted Dr. Maria Antónia Pinto de Matos on the display of a 16th century Chinese Ming porcelain recovered from the Portuguese wreck *Espadarte* of 1588. Also in 2004, Veiga followed an internship with Portuguese designer Marco Sousa Santos, for whom she curated a collection of circa 1000 specimens of global "Food Tools". In 2005, Veiga completed an internship at *Fundão City Council*. There, she acted as researcher for the display of the permanent exhibition of the *Municipal Archaeological Museum José Monteiro*. In 2006, Veiga enrolled in a MA in Curatorial Studies in *Lisbon University/Gulbenkian Foundation*. In 2006, she went to Indonesia to study Seni Kriya (Traditional Crafts) at the *Institut Seni Indonesia* Yogyakarta through a "Darmasiswa Scholarship" from the Republic of Indonesia. Between 2007 and 2012, she gave several public lectures, wrote essays and tutored workshops of batik in schools and museums, among which the Macau Art Museum, the Orient Museum and the National Ethnological Museum in Lisbon. In 2008, Veiga acted as assistant researcher for the curatorial team of "Baroque 1620-1800: Style in the Age of Magnificence," at the *V&A Museum* in London. After, she curated "Raul Indipwo's African Art Collection" at the *Ouro Negro Foundation* in Sintra. In 2009, Veiga worked in the *Water Museum of Lisbon*, where she acted as tour guide, designer and researcher. In that year, she was awarded ex-aequo *New Curators Exhibition Prize* with Adriana Delgado Martins and Marisa Vinha with the exhibition "Women on a verge of a nervous breakdown" at *Galeria ArteContempo* in Lisbon. In 2010, Veiga was awarded a Short Term Scholarship from the *Orient Foundation* in Lisbon to pursue field work for her MA thesis in Indonesia. Veiga received a *cum laude* for her thesis entitled "Memory and Contemporaneity: contemporary art from Indonesia, a curatorial study" submitted at the *University of Lisbon*. Also in 2010, she was project manager and assistant curator to Shaheen Merali for "Tough Love: a Series of Promises" at *Galeria Plataforma Revólver* in Lisbon. Between 2011 and 2012, Veiga acted as an independent curator and writer in Indonesia. Then she co-curated with Sujud Dartanto the exhibition project "Crossing Signs, 14 artists from Germany and Indonesia experiencing the 'liminal zone'," organized by *Kersan Art Studio*. She equally published the essay "Suddenly we arrived: polarities and paradoxes of Indonesian contemporary

art," in *Indonesian Eye: Contemporary Indonesian Art*, ed. by Serenella Ciclitira (Milano: SKIRA, 2011, 29-32). In 2012, Veiga started her PhD at Leiden University on contemporary art from Southeast Asia. Her research interests broadly include institutional critique, especially concerning museums and academic discourse on non-Western art. She aims to disentangle the dichotomy of art and ethnography and to contribute to equal representativeness of all art forms.

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