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

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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.

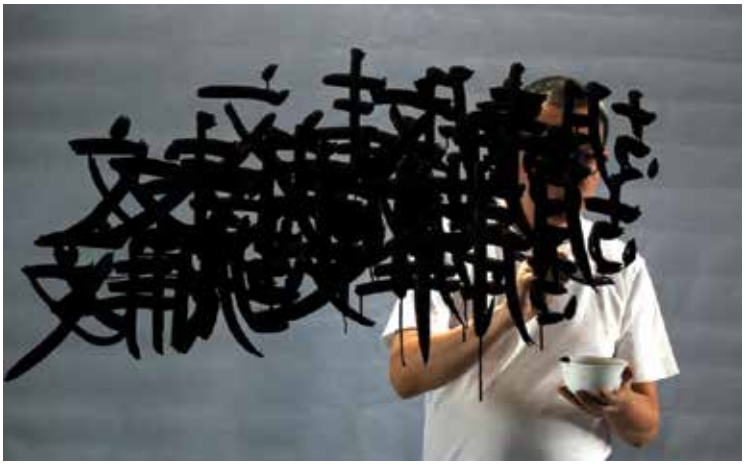

Figure 5.10 A
FX Harsono
Writing in the Rain
2011 | Performance and video documentation | 6' 12"
Image courtesy of the artist

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

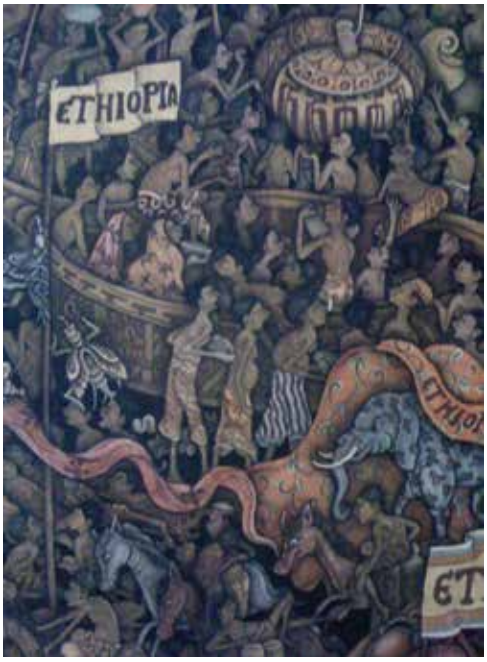

Figure 5.15
I Wayan Bendi
Poor Ethiopia
2000 | Acrylic and ink on canvas | Dimensions unknown
Photograph by Leonor Viega, 2014

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]

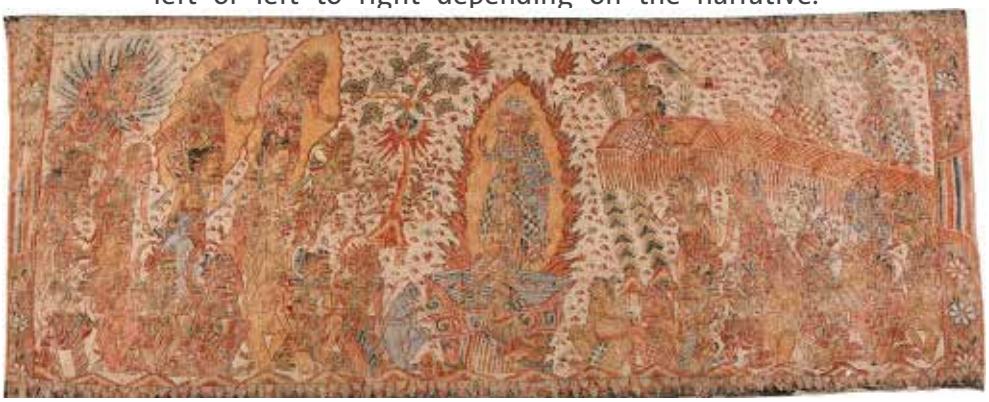

Figure 5.19
Kamasan/Wayang style
Kak Lui (1850 to 1860–1920 to 1930)
Ramayana
Date unknown | 93 x 208 cm | Painting on cotton
Source: http://heurist.sydney.edu.au/ Inv. AM E074160 Ramayana

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

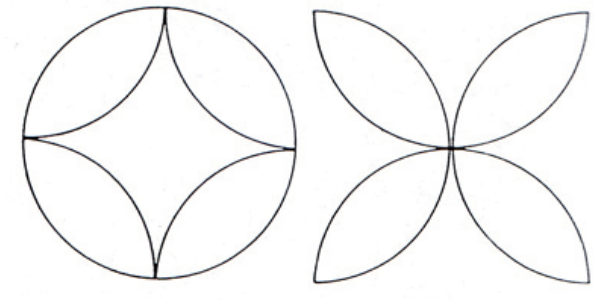

Figure 5.28
Monca-pat simplest form: *kawung* motif
Source: https://nl.pinterest.com/pin/271341946270204646/

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]

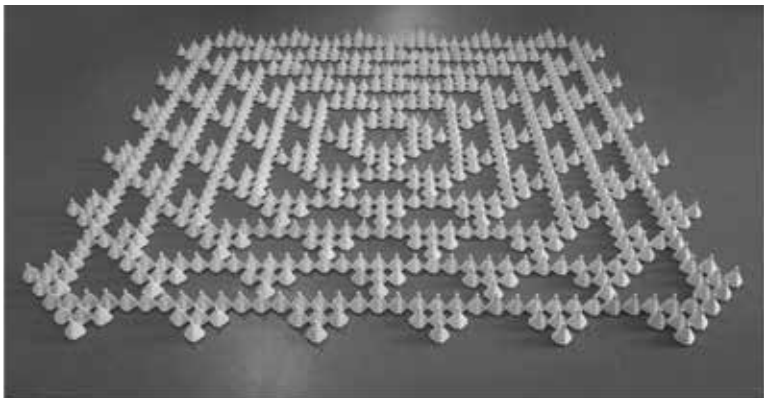

Figure 5.33
Albert Yonathan Setyawan
Mandala Study #3
2015 | Ceramics | Variable dimensions
Image courtesy of the artist

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.

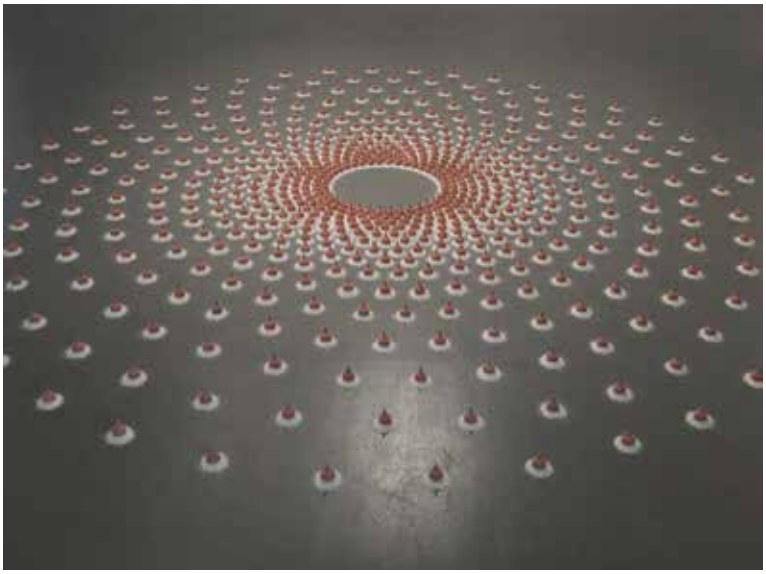

Figure 5.34
Albert Yonathan Setyawan
Mandala Study #4
2015 | 650 terracotta pieces atop marble sand | 300 x 300 x 10 cm
Image courtesy of Sundaram Tagore Gallery

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.