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Indonesian modern art historiography: national and transnational perspectives

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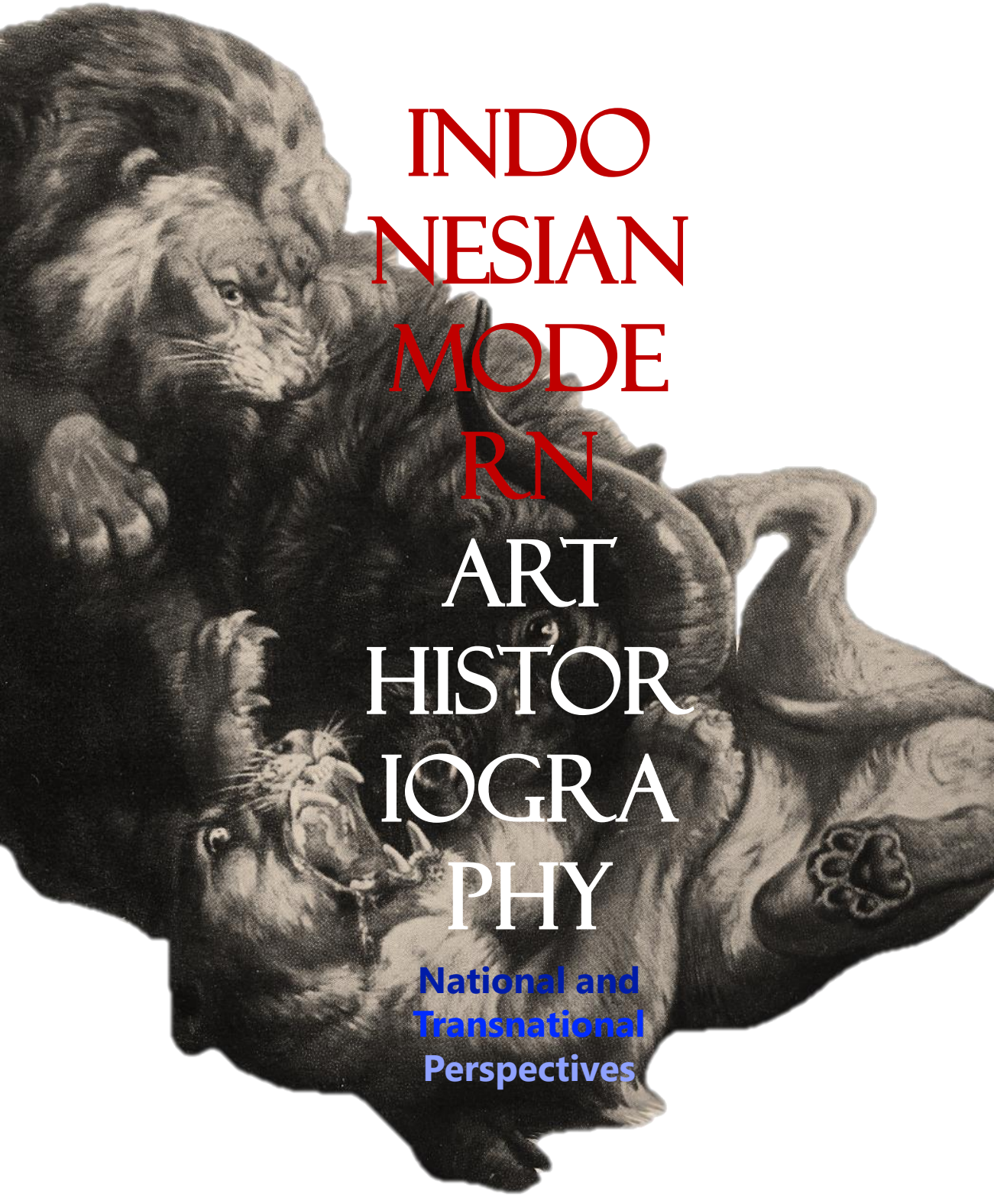

INDONESIAN MODERN ART HISTORIOGRAPHY

National and Transnational Perspectives

Aminudin TH Siregar

In 1976, President Suharto called for a history of Indonesian art to be written. Some years later, the Indonesian government published *Sejarah Seni Rupa Indonesia* through the Ministry of Education and Culture (History of Indonesian Art).

The book, issued in 1979, is an essential reference for teaching Indonesian art history and is the first and only one to use the word 'history' in its title. Nevertheless, there are many problems with this book and other publications on the same subject. One is the dominance of the nationalist perspective, which denies the role of transnational actors and their historical development.

Using this nationalist perspective leads to poor disclosure of historical sources, which affects their historical continuity and discontinuity. In turn, it obscures the understanding of changes in the development of modern Indonesian art. To this day, this 'art historical canon' is gradually being 'modified' and 'updated' by Indonesian and international scholars, art critics, and curators. However, the current scholarship does not add new insights or perspectives. This leads to a stagnation in Indonesian modern art historiography, meaning that no new history has been generated, and old stories have been recycled. There is, therefore, an urgent need to broaden the narratives.

How do we mitigate the rigid linearity inherent in national canonical narratives? What are the consequences of excessive nationalism in the writing of art history? How do we challenge discourses by reintegrating the voices of marginalized or overlooked individuals into historical accounts? These are the questions addressed in this research.

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