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Indonesian modern art historiography: national and transnational perspectives

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National and
Transnational
Perspectives

Aminudin TH Siregar

INDONESIAN MODERN ART HISTORIOGRAPHY

National and Transnational Perspectives

Cover: Raden Saleh, *Een strijd op leven en dood*, 1848.

(Source: H. Colijn, *Neerlands Indie, Land en Volk, Geschiedenis en Bestuur, Bedrijf en Samenleving*, (Amsterdam: Uitgevers-Maatschappij-“Elsevier,” 1913 - Repro by Aminudin TH Siregar)

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National and Transnational Perspectives

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Aminudin Tua Hamonangan Siregar
geboren te Jakarta
1973

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Leonie ten Duis & Annelies Haase, *Ouborg: schilder, 's-Gravenhage: SDU; Amsterdam: Openbaar Kunstbezit*, 1990.

S. Sudjojono, *Cap Go Meh*, 1940.

Collection of National Gallery of Indonesia – Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar.

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Since I started living in the quiet city of Leiden in February 2017, this dissertation has been in the making for at least eight years. If I think even further back to when this work was still a raw proposal, it has been in the making for at least 15 years. Therefore, I will never forget that this dissertation is a consequence of 'perjuangan' - a term that, according to the historian Benedict Anderson, has almost no direct equivalent in English and lies between the words 'struggle' and 'resistance.'

There are several reasons why I use the word 'perjuangan.' I am not an art historian and have never formally studied art history. Furthermore, the study of art history does not yet exist in Indonesia. Throughout the writing of this dissertation, I have 'struggled and resisted' to investigate and analyze the issues surrounding Indonesian art historiography, especially during the so-called 'modern art period.' I hope this dissertation will contribute to further developing modern Indonesian art historiography.

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Leiden, 2024 –2025

ATHS



Figure 1.1.
Catalogue *Pameran Se-Abad Seni Rupa Indonesia 1876-1976*, 1976.

Collection of Leiden University Library
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

Chapter One

Introduction

During the 1970s, many publications that contributed to the historiography of modern Indonesian art emerged.¹ Around the same time, a retrospective exhibition, *Se-Abad Seni Rupa Indonesia* (A Century of Indonesian Art), triggered the initial basis for an official book on art history published by the state. This was at the request of President Soeharto, who, at the opening of that exhibition in August 1976, called for an Indonesian art history to be written. As reported by *Tempo* magazine, Soeharto encouraged artists to create a thorough framework for Indonesian art history, considering the distinct style that had evolved. Furthermore, Soeharto also stated that art had played a part in igniting the blaze of national struggle.²

The exhibition featured a historical periodization system, with Raden Saleh painting as the milestone figuring on the cover of the exhibition catalogue (Fig.1.1). I argue that this exhibition is linked to the return of two of Raden Saleh's paintings, *Fighting with Lions* (1870) and *Bulls Hunting in Java* (1851), which had been gifted to Soeharto by Queen Juliana in 1970.³ The restitution of the paintings constituted a pivotal juncture in the historiography of contemporary Indonesian art, in addition to affording the Indonesian populace their very first opportunity to behold them.

After receiving Soeharto's request, in 1977 the Ministry of Education and Culture completed the manuscript entitled *Sejarah Seni Rupa Indonesia* (History of Indonesian Art) without any reproduced images. Two years later,

¹ Some notable works, include Baharudin Marasutan's *Raden Saleh, 1807-1880: Perintis Seni lukis Indonesia* (Raden Saleh, 1807-1880: Pioneer of Indonesian Painting) (1973), Sudarmadji's *Dari Saleh sampai Aming: Seni Lukis Indonesia Baru dalam Sejarah dan Apresiasi* (From Saleh to Aming: Indonesian New Painting in History and Appreciation) (1974) and *Seni lukis Jakarta dalam Sorotan* (Jakarta Painting in the Spotlight) (1974), and Sanento Yuliman's *Seni Lukis Indonesia Baru: Sebuah Pengantar* (Indonesian New Painting: An Introduction) (1976).

² "Satu Abad Satu Balai" in *Tempo*, 11 September 1976, p.11. "Presiden kemudian menyerukan agar para seniman menyusun kerangka sejarah seni rupa yang sempurna. Kata Presiden, seni rupa Indonesia telah memiliki corak tertentu sejak lama. Dia juga menyatakan bahwa seni telah mengambil bagian menyalakan api perjuangan."

³ "Soeharto nodigt koningin uit" in *De Tijd: dagblad voor Nederland*, 4 September 1970, p.3.

in 1979, the manuscript was published as a large and extensive book with a considerable number of black-and-white photo reproductions of artworks (Fig.1.2). The book *Sejarah Seni Rupa Indonesia* is divided into four mega chapters, each representing a setting of the historical period: *Pra-Sejarah* (Pre-History), *Seni Rupa Zaman Klasik di Indonesia* (Classical Art Period in Indonesia), *Seni Rupa Indonesia-Islam* (Indonesian-Islamic Art), and *Kedudukan Seni Rupa Baru* (Position of the New/Modern Art).



FIGURE 1.2.
Publication of *Sejarah Seni Rupa Indonesia* by the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture, 1976-1977.

Collection of Perpustakaan s.14 Bandung
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

The last chapter, which is the subject of this research, is further divided into six sub-periods: *Masa Perintis Seni Rupa Kontemporer Indonesia* (The Pioneering Period of Indonesian Contemporary Art), *Periode Seni Lukis Hindia Molek* (The Period of Mooi Indië Painting), *Berdirinya PERSAGI* (The Birth of PERSAGI), *Seni Lukis Indonesia pada Masa Pendudukan Jepang, 1942-1945* (Indonesian Painting in the Japanese Occupation Period, 1942-1945), *Periode Pendirian Sanggar-Sanggar Antara Tahun 1945-1950* (The Period of Studios

between 1945-1950), *Perkembangan Seni Rupa Modern di Indonesia dari Pengamatan Sesudah 1950* (Development of Modern Art in Indonesia After 1950), and *Seni Patung Baru Indonesia* (*The Indonesian New Sculpture*).⁴ To date, this period's comprehensive sequence and nomenclature have attained canonical status within the historiography of Indonesian modern art.

According to this book, the emergence of modern art - the book called it *Seni Rupa Baru* - is a significant phase characterized by artistic novelty within the dynamics of Indonesian culture. This "category of Art" would have evolved independently without any connection with earlier development. The book's authors assumed that Raden Saleh began this art style as a 19th-century phenomenon. Beyond the discourse of modernity, which needs a separate discussion, it is vital to pay attention to the rationale behind publishing books. As outlined in the introductory chapter authored by the representative of the Ministry, the principal aim of the book's publication was to foster art historians' engagement with and reinforcement of the "nation-centric paradigm" in advancing the discourse on the country's art history.

Bambang Suwondo, the representative from the Ministry, mentioned three reasons behind the publication of the book: (1) The reality shows that books about Indonesian arts still need to be improved, especially books written in Indonesian and by Indonesian authors; (2) A book about Indonesian art in foreign languages, written by foreign authors, is quite expensive. Even though the material and presentation are of very high quality, the book is primarily illegible and inaccessible for the wider community; (3) Art books written by foreign authors need to adequately represent the spiritual aspirations contained in Indonesian fine art itself.⁵

⁴ See Bambang Suwondo (ed.), *Sejarah Seni Rupa Indonesia*, (Jakarta: Proyek Penelitian dan Pencatatan Kebudayaan Daerah - Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, Tahun Anggaran 1976/1977), p. 141-228. The manuscript for this publication was written by a team consisting of Kusnadi, Hasan M. Ambari, Sujatmi, Popo Iskandar, Fadjat Sidik, Wiyoso Yudoseputro, and Bintarti. Interestingly, in 1978, under the same Ministry, a book entitled *Seni Rupa Indonesia dan Pembinaannya* (Indonesian Art and Its Development) was published, written by Kusnadi and Nyoman Tusan. However, the contents are similar to the previous ones, especially the discussions on the modern period. See Suwandono (ed.), *Seni Rupa Indonesia dan Pembinaannya*, (Jakarta: Penerbitan Proyek Pembinaan Kesenian Departemen P dan K, 1978).

⁵ Bambang Suwondo (ed.), 1977, p.i. 1) Kenyataan menunjukkan bahwa buku-buku mengenai seni rupa Indonesia masih dan sangat kurang, apalagi buku-buku yang ditulis dalam bahasa Indonesia dan dikarang oleh penulis-penulis bangsa Indonesia sendiri; 2) Buku-buku seni rupa dalam Bahasa asing, yang ditulis oleh para penulis asing, meskipun materi dan penyajian cukup tinggi mutunya, tetapi kebanyakan tidak terbaca dan tidak terjangkau oleh masyarakat luas, baik bahasanya maupun harganya yang agak tinggi/mahal; 3) Buku-buku seni rupa yang ditulis oleh penulis asing belum cukup mewakili aspirasi kejiwaan seperti yang terkandung di dalam seni rupa Indonesia itu sendiri."

Based on my findings, this weighty book represents a significant and authoritative publication endorsed by the Indonesian government. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that compared to the other publications, this book was the sole publication up to then that discussed art from the point of view of its history and used the term "history." Moreover, the book still serves primarily as a scholarly resource for national education at the secondary level and within art colleges in Indonesia. The government published other significant bilingual books in the 1990s, such as *Perjalanan Seni Rupa Indonesia: Dari Zaman Prasejarah Hingga Masa Kini* (Streams of Indonesian Art: From Pre-Historic to Contemporary). This book's structure and content are the same as the previous one.

I want to emphasize some significant points regarding how art historians wrote these two publications, especially the need to acknowledge the substantial influence of colonialism on the worldwide migration of artists and art objects. This particular aspect is worth considering in the context of art historical analysis.

The initiative for an art history publication may be prompted by external factors, which art historians frequently refrain from openly acknowledging, such as the repatriation of Raden Saleh paintings to Indonesia. Furthermore, it is essential to recognize the substantial participation of diverse individuals, groups, and institutions, including the contribution of the *Bataviaasche Kunstkring* in coordinating the Pierre Alexander Regnault collection exhibition. The two books mentioned above failed to accomplish that. On the contrary, *Sejarah Seni Rupa Indonesia* and *Perjalanan Seni Rupa Indonesia: Dari Zaman Prasejarah Hingga Masa Kini* strengthened the dominant position of nationalist artists and effectively normalized the nation's state art by establishing a relationship between art and national identity. Apart from that, this book - and many others - provides only a general overview of the activities in the art scene under the Japanese Occupation and during the Revolution between 1942 and 1950.

Indonesia, a nation that has experienced the effects of colonialism, has undergone notable transformations within its artistic landscape. However, the nationalistic viewpoint - as shown by the books above - refutes Indonesia's creative progress by asserting that artists' comprehension of modernity stems from indigenous creativity and cultural endurance. The argument fails to acknowledge the interconnectedness of global art movements and artists as integral members of a worldwide network that facilitates the exchange of ideas within a networked and linked imperial

space. Hence, negating the inheritance of colonialism in writing Indonesian art history undermines its artists' agency and contributions.

With regard to the issues mentioned above, it is conceivable that the depiction of Indonesian art as a mechanism for constructing a national-state identity within historiography has engendered a distortion and constriction of individuals' comprehension of art and its historical trajectory. If this is the case, what steps are needed to establish a balanced art history? How do we examine discourses by reintegrating the voices of individuals marginalized or overlooked in historical accounts and by re-evaluating the roles of individuals and institutions in the creation of art history? How do we mitigate the inflexible linearity inherent in national canonical narratives? Is there a strategic approach to fostering the emergence of contextually suitable modes of historical writing that actively contest and counteract nationalistic biases? What are the consequences of using nationalism excessively in writing art history? Why is writing art history that goes beyond nationalism significant? These questions will be addressed in this research.

Research Aims

This research was motivated by these and similar questions and my dissatisfaction with the modern Indonesian art history publications I had read over the years. My discontent stems from the fact that most art historians have overemphasized a rigid nationalism in their writings. In response to these questions, this research offers a critical investigation of various publications, which have become the primary references for modern Indonesian art history, by concentrating on the way they were written, emphasizing three factors: the utilization of “historical sources,” issues on “connections and disconnections” (or continuities and discontinuities), and the use of an “Indonesia-centric perspective.”

Locating “historical sources” from internal and external sources within Indonesia presents a formidable challenge. In addition, the limited availability of historical sources significantly hampered the research process. It is postulated that most previous writers faced comparable challenges, including linguistic barriers that hindered their ability to access primary sources from diverse cultures and regions. Despite these challenges, this

study attempts to present a critical compilation of multiple underappreciated sources, including significant texts and images that have not yet been accessed or observed by the general public.

“Historical sources” include artwork, memoirs, notes, manuscripts, photographs, books, catalogs, newspapers, magazines, and art journals. It takes a lot of time and effort to put together a collection of these sources, access relevant content, and identify suitable links and justifications. However, despite the efforts being made to this end, creating a comprehensive account of modern Indonesian art is still challenging due to the many historical sources dispersed across different locations or lost over time. For example, we may not be able to find Raden Saleh's painting exhibited at the Paris Colonial Exhibition in 1931 or other sources that were lost during the war, as explained in Chapter 2 and 6.

The factor of “connections and disconnections” in this research shows that a broader understanding of artwork requires knowledge of its historical circumstances - that art cannot be divorced from its time and place; it is shaped by its era's ideas, events, and values. The publications of Indonesian modern art historiography often obfuscate the interconnections among events, thereby concealing the roles and interactions of individuals and institutions that extend beyond national borders. In many cases, I found that art historians often tend to make connections between events, even though they are not proven to be related or vice versa.

Furthermore, this factor also determines the periodization system; for example, the books above need to be more consistent in naming modern art periods. Why did the “modern art period” start with the name of a person (Pioneering Period: Raden Saleh), then continue with the metaphor of the natural beauty of the Indies (Mooi Indië Period), then to the name of a group of artists (PERSAGI Period), followed by military terms (Japanese Occupation) and then to a specific period using the word “Sanggar” (Studio Period)? What is the reason behind the naming? Unfortunately, the books do not provide arguments. In addition to displaying inconsistency, the terminology of the periods mentioned above remains ambiguous.

This study will not delve into the inconsistencies in periodization naming. However, for this research, I divided those periods into three simple continuations shaping modern Indonesian art history: the *Dutch Colonial Period* including *Raden Saleh*, *Mooi Indië*, and *PERSAGI*; the *Japanese Occupation Period*; and the *Revolution Period*. In addition to their straightforward nature, I assume the three periods symbolize the evolutionary trajectory of Indonesia's

nation-building process. All three contain critical discourses that also influence historical narratives. In addition, all three also have issues related to interconnections, disparities, and broader contexts and differentiations - as will be discussed more broadly in this research.

In the subsequent sub-chapter, I will analyze the third factor regarding the “Indonesia-centric perspective,” concentrating on specific cases. In short, most publications on the history of Indonesian modern art adopt a view that places Indonesian actors in the foreground while neglecting to consider external factors such as non-Indonesian ones. This view also marginalizes individuals in historiography by accusing them of being unpatriotic. As a result, the subject of art history concentrates exclusively on Indonesian artists who are considered nationalists by presenting them as heroic figures who resisted the dominance of European painters and triumphed in a sacred conflict.

Today, more is required than a nationality-based historiographical legacy, considering the presence of broad perspectives that transcend national space and scale as an analytical category. Considering all these issues, this study aims to uncover global connections and marginalized artists to provide a broad understanding of the development of modern Indonesian art.

Western Scholarship on Indonesian Art

There are numerous publications on the history of modern Indonesian art aside from the publications by Indonesians previously mentioned. Many international authors have written and published texts covering this subject and have made significant contributions through wide-ranging research on specific topics or artists' biographies since the early 20th century. These publications come in various forms, such as articles, book chapters, monographs, and albums, and construct connections and exchange references between metropole and colony, especially during the colonial era. The following is a brief review of significant authors and publications on Indonesian modern art historiography.⁶

⁶ Of course, several essential publications enrich the dynamics of modern Indonesian art and its historical context. For example, Astri Wright, *Soul, Spirit, and Mountain: Preoccupations of Contemporary Indonesian Painters*, (Kuala Lumpur; New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Tibor Bodrogi, *Kunst van Indonesië*, (Den Haag and Budapest: W. Gaade N. V. & Corvina Press, 1971).



FIGURE 1.3.
S. Kalff, *Inheemsche Schilderkunst op Java*.
(Source: *Oedaya*, No.20, January 1925)

Collection of Leiden University Library
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

First of all, I would like to introduce Samuel Kalff⁷ as a pioneer since he studied and published an article about Raden Saleh in 1909.⁸ However, Kalff's main contribution was an article titled "Inheemsche Schilderkunst op Java" (Indigenous Painting on Java), published in 1925 in *Oedaya*, a monthly magazine owned by Noto Soeroto (Fig.1.3). For the first time, this groundbreaking essay provides fundamental periods in art history from the classical period to Raden Saleh. Kalff continues the history by mentioning two influential post-Saleh artists, Raden Mas Pirngadie and Raden Mas Jodjana.⁹

⁷ Samuel Kalff, who lived from 1851 to 1932, spent 25 years in the Dutch East Indies, initially as a soldier and later as a journalist. He served as a corporal in the Indies Army but eventually pursued a career in journalism. He became editor-in-chief of the *Soerabajaasch Handelsblad*, but it only lasted a few years and marked the end of his career in the Dutch East Indies. Two years after his employment with the *Soerabajaasch Handelsblad*, Kalff left the Indies and settled permanently in the Netherlands. See Joop van den Berg, "Eerherstel voor S. Kalff - Samensteller van de eerste bloemlezing van de Indisch-Nederlandse letterkunde" in *Indische Letteren - Documentatieblad van de Werkgroep Indisch-Nederlandse Letterkunde*, Jaargang 1, Werkgroep Indisch-Nederlandse Letterkunde, 1986, p. 39-40.

⁸ See S. Kalff, "Een Javaansch Schilder" in *Eigen Haard*, No.51., 18 December 1909, p. 807-813.

⁹ See S. Kalff, "Inheemsche Schilderkunst op Java" in *Oedaya*, No. 20, January 1925, p. 190-192 and *Oedaya*, No.21, February 1924, p. 202-203.

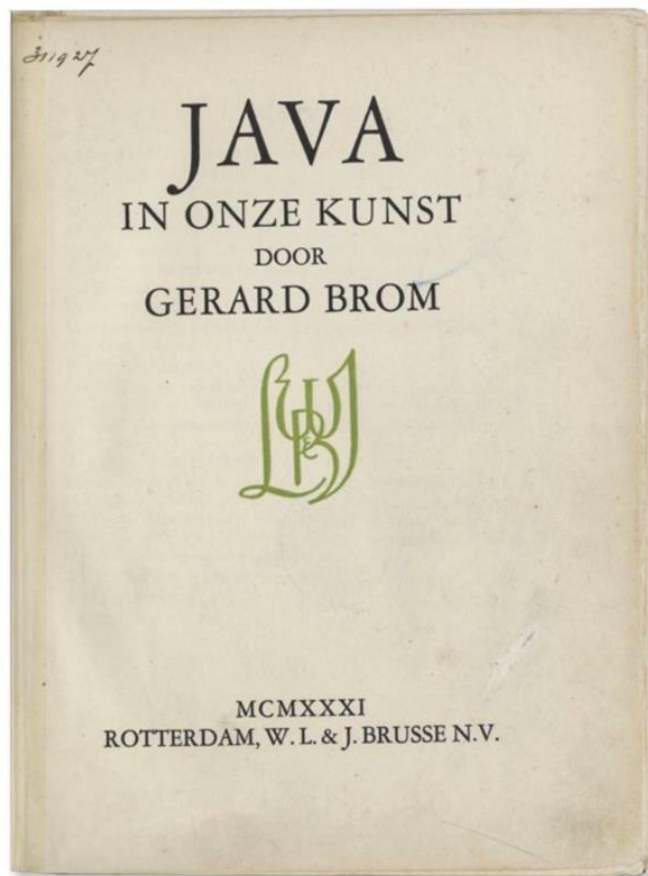


FIGURE 1.4.
Gerard Brom, *Java in Onze Kunst*, 1931.

Collection of Leiden University Library

Published in 1931, Gerard Brom's book, *Java in Onze Kunst* (Java in Our Art) (Fig.1.4) also narrated the contemporary artists. He suggested a new period called *Een Nieuwe Geest* (A New Spirit) and identified Kartini and Noto Soeroto as "new-era artists." Unfortunately, the book did not specifically address the fine arts.¹⁰ Brom was a professor of art history at the University of Nijmegen, the Netherlands. He was invited to Java in June 1930 by the *Bond van Nederlandsch-Indische Kunstkringen* (Association of Netherlands-Indies Art Circles) to deliver lectures on art history at various *Kunstkring* locations in significant cities such as Medan, Jakarta, Bandung, Sukabumi, Semarang, Surabaya, and numerous others for two months.¹¹ Unfortunately, I cannot trace what topics Brom discussed in his lectures at the institution.

¹⁰ Gerard Brom, *Java in Onze Kunst*, (Rotterdam: W. L. & J. Brusse N.V, 1931).

¹¹ See "Prof. Dr. Gerard Brom. Zijn reis over Java." in *De Locomotief*, 25 June 1930, p.1., "Prof. Dr. Gerard Brom" in *Soerabaijasch handelsblad*, 26 June 1930, p. 2., "Kunstkring te Soekaboemi" in *Het nieuws van*

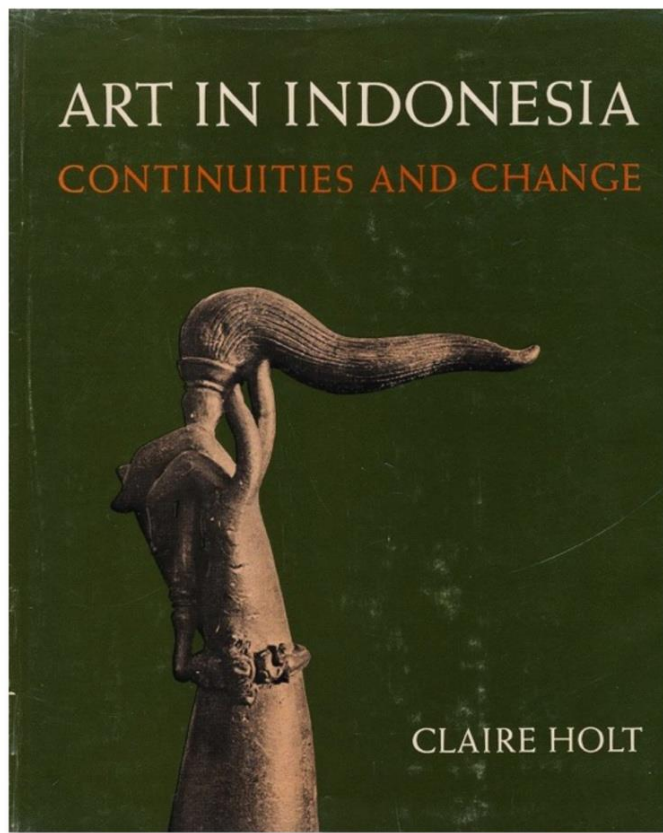


FIGURE 1.5.
Claire Holt, *Art in Indonesia-Continuities and Change*, 1967.

Collection of Perpustakaan s.14
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

Latvian-born American cultural researcher, Claire Holt, contributed much to art historical writing for the next three decades. In 1955, Holt went to Indonesia after her proposal *The Roles of the Arts in Modern Indonesia* received support from the Rockefeller Foundation and Cornell University. She wrote: "It is therefore assumed that the study of the arts in Indonesia today may prove not only a contribution to its art history but may also be relevant to the study of social change in general and to knowledge of Indonesian society in transition in particular."¹²

For about two years, 1955-1957, Holt conducted extensive research in Indonesia and met with many Indonesian artists and intellectuals, collecting sources and photographing many paintings and sculptures. It took decades from Rockefeller approving her research proposal until Cornell University

den dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië, 27 August 1930, p.3., and "Agenda" in *Deli Courant*, 5 September 1930, p.7.

¹² Claire Holt, *Research Project: The Role of the Arts in Modern Indonesia*, (1955), Claire Holt Papers 1927-1970/Box 10, Carl A. Kroch Library collection, Cornell University.

published it as *Art in Indonesia: Continuities and Change* in 1967 (Fig.1.5) – translated and published in Indonesian in 2000. The book received enthusiastic praise from artists¹³ and intellectuals¹⁴ immediately after its release, particularly "Part III: Modern Art." This chapter provides a broad platform for Indonesian artists ranging from Raden Saleh to the post-Sudjojono generation, including But Muchtar, a young Bandung painter who began his career in the mid-1950s. Since its publication, *Art in Indonesia: Continuities and Change* has become an international reference for studying Indonesian art, particularly the modern period.

Furthermore, given that *Art in Indonesia: Continuities and Change* was published before the book *Sejarah Seni Rupa Indonesia*, the Ministry of Education and Culture's claim in its introductory chapter, that books by foreign authors are not nationalistic, is unfounded. In fact, by describing the tensions surrounding the identity discourse among Indonesian artists, *Art in Indonesia: Continuities and Change* has profoundly contributed to the perspective of nationalism. As a result, this book provides an extensive platform for Indonesian artists. Also, comparing the two texts reveals how the structure of *Sejarah Seni Rupa Indonesia* is similar to *Art in Indonesia: Continuities and Change*. This similarity raises questions about how Holt's book influenced the country's official publication. Despite this, there is room for revision regarding how historical events are depicted in Holt's book.

In 1968, the Hague-born art historian, Jeanne de Loos-Haaxman,¹⁵ who had experience in colonial Indonesia, published *Verlaat Rapport Indië* (Exit

¹³ In his letter to Claire Holt, artist and art academic But Muchtar confessed that "up to present there is no book written on Indonesian art so intellectual and humanitarian as was written by Claire Holt. The world will look at Indonesian culture from the right angle by reading the book." "Surat But Muchtar ke Claire Holt" in Claire Holt Papers 1927-1970, Box 10, 23 August 1967, Carl A. Kroch Library Collection, Cornell University. The artist and art academic Abas Alibasyah expressed the same thing. According to Alibasyah, the book *Art in Indonesia* will be very useful for objectively developing Indonesian art because a foreign observer wrote it. "Surat Abas Alibasyah" in Claire Holt Papers 1927-1970, Box 13, 5 October 1967, Carl A. Kroch Library collection, Cornell University. I read through Claire Holt's archives after conducting a month-long research study at Cornell University's Carl A. Kroch Library collection in November 2016. The Getty Foundation covered the expenses for this research.

¹⁴ Soedjatmoko wrote to Claire Holt that *Art in Indonesia* would receive an award from the Jakarta Arts Council and Culture Center in the category: "The most important foreign contribution in the field of arts related to Indonesia." "Surat Soedjatmoko ke Claire Holt" in Claire Holt Papers 1927-1970, Box 13, 17 September 1968, Carl A. Kroch Library collection, Cornell University.

¹⁵ For further reading about De Loos-Haaxman, see Yvette Marcus-de Groot, *Kunsthistorische vrouwen van weleer – de eerste generatie in Nederland vóór 1921*, Doctoral Thesis, Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam, 2003, p. 357-385.

Report Indies) (Fig.1.6) in Dutch about a year after Holt's publication.¹⁶ Unlike Holt, who provided a short narration of colonial roles and tried to present Indonesian modern art rather as a continuation from Indonesian classic art, De Loos-Haaxman began her narrative by emphasizing the roles of European painters in the Dutch East Indies. She argued that Western art had been introduced to the region in the early 17th century and played a significant role in the colony. However, since she was involved with the *Kunstkring*, it was understandable that she devoted much of her book to narrating the institution's activities.

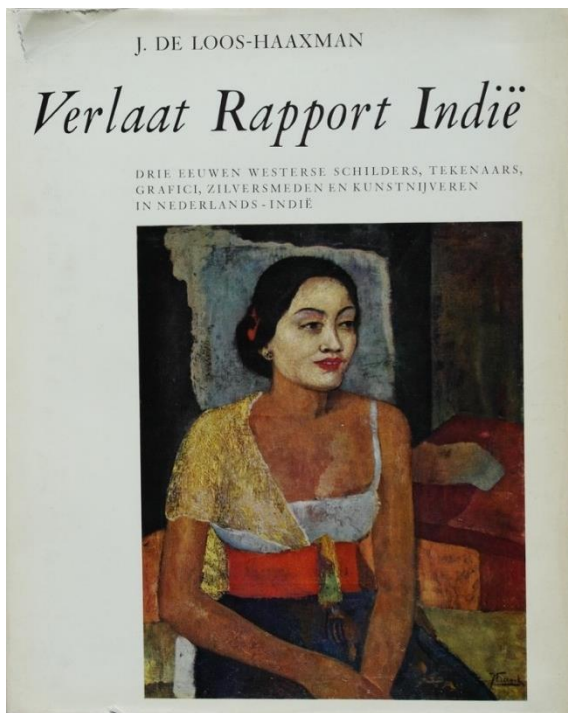


FIGURE 1.6.
J. De Loos-Haaxman, *Verlaat Rapport Indië*, 1968.

Collection of Perpustakaan s.14
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

Although De Loos-Haaxman stressed her “Neerlando-centric perspective,” it is interesting that she gave a platform to Indonesian painters by describing Raden Saleh's work in specific chapters and mentioning the involvement of Sudjojono's generation in Batavia's art scene.¹⁷ Nevertheless,

¹⁶ J. De Loos-Haaxman, *Verlaat Rapport Indië: Drie eeuwen westerse schilders, tekenaars, grafici, zilversmeden en kunstnijveren in Nederlands-Indië*, ('s-Gravenhage: Mouton & Co., 1968).

¹⁷ J. De Loos-Haaxman, 1968, See page 64-74 for Raden Saleh and page 98 for Indonesian artists such as Sudjojono and his contemporaries.

while the book contains certain limitations, it undeniably provides valuable insights for understanding the writing of art history. The use of this book as a scholarly reference in the field of historiography is, however, rare. Scholars within this discipline should accord it greater attention. This is because the distribution of this book is relatively restricted, in addition to its being written in Dutch.

Helena Spanjaard - I will call her – is a post-Holt-Haaxman art historian. In 1998, she presented her doctoral dissertation, *Het ideaal van een moderne Indonesische schilderkunst 1900-1995: de creatie van een nationale culturele identiteit* (The Ideal of a Modern Indonesian Painting 1900-1995: Creating a National Cultural Identity).¹⁸ Spanjaard strengthens some historical aspects of the emergence of Indonesian modern art after 1900 by combining Dutch and Indonesian sources. Her study is the first to look at the evolution of Indonesian art up to the 1990s. Nonetheless, this study reinforces the Indonesia-centric perspective by imagining the attainment of national identity in modern art.

Nationalism in Modern Indonesian Art Historiography

It is crucial to examine the emergence and establishment of an Indonesian-centric perspective - or nationalist perspective - in art historiography. The state shaped and solidified this perspective, as elaborated upon in the subsequent discussion. During the postcolonial era, Indonesia experienced significant advances in multiple cultural domains, including art history. Nevertheless, it is crucial to recognize that this progress has been enabled by a complex and often hierarchical relationship between historians operating at the national level and the governing authority. While the perspective above may have resulted in a view predominantly centered on Indonesia, it also raises concerns about the vulnerability of historical accounts to political manipulation. It is paramount to ensure that national artistic productions in art history not only serve as propaganda tools but also genuinely embody the diverse voices and experiences of all the artists involved.

The Soekarno and Soeharto regimes played an essential role in developing art history in Indonesia. As discussed previously, President

¹⁸ Helena Spanjaard, *Het ideaal van een Moderne Indonesische Schilderkunst 1900-1995: De creatie van een nationale culturele identiteit*, PhD dissertation, Leiden University, 1998. This manuscript was translated into Bahasa and published in 2018 with the title *Cita-cita Seni Lukis Indonesia Modern 1900-1995: Sebuah Kreasi Identitas Kultural Nasional*.

Soeharto's speech triggered the publication of an art history book to strengthen national cultural identity. In 1976, he distributed a memorandum to the general public, emphasizing the potential of art history to outline and define the cultural identity of a nation. Shortly after this, the Ministry of Education and Culture published a history book. The action above exemplifies the government's acknowledgment of the influential role that art history plays in shaping the collective memory and cultivating a feeling of national pride. It is therefore apparent that the Government acknowledged and employed the discipline of art history as a tool to enhance its authority over cultural narratives.

Official state publications for art history flourished during the Soeharto era (1966–1998). However, the foundation of the narrative and perspective began during the previous Soekarno government (1945–1966), which aggressively decolonized history. In these circumstances, scholarly discussions on art history emphasize nationalism as an unquestionable ideological framework. Likewise, art was widely understood to have played a significant role in cultural development and served as a means for artists to demonstrate their loyalty to the nation or their active involvement in establishing a cohesive national identity.

In the 1950s, Soekarno's government facilitated the need to develop a pioneering and autonomous national historical narrative that would support the prevailing ethnocentric and “Neerlandic-centric” accounts, which most historians believe to have been influenced by colonial perspectives. To establish a national history that positioned Indonesians as active participants, the Government organized a significant event in 1957 called the *Seminar Sejarah 1957* (Seminar on History 1957) in Yogyakarta.¹⁹ However, in the context of art history, it is pertinent to also consider the *Seminar Ilmu dan Kebudayaan* (Seminar on Science and Culture) that occurred in June 1956, coinciding with its location in Yogyakarta.

¹⁹ For further reading on this topic, see Sartono Kartodirjo, *Periodisasi Sejarah Indonesia dalam Panitia Seminar, Laporan Seminar Sejarah 14 – 18 Desember 1957 di Yogyakarta*, (Yogyakarta: Penerbit Ombak, 2017), p.198 -216. See also Sartono Kartodirjo, “Sekali Lagi Pemikiran Tentang Sejarah Nasional: Meneruskan Langkah Ke Arah Dekolonisasi Historiografi Indonesia” in Sartono Kartodirjo, *Pemikiran dan Perkembangan Historiografi Indonesia*, (Yogyakarta: Ombak, 2014), p. 38-58, and Kuntowijoyo, *Metodologi Sejarah*, (Yogyakarta: Tiara Wacana Yogya, 2003), p.1. Today, the Indonesia-centric paradigm is still being debated and is still suspected of being stuck because something has yet to develop in national history writing, as evidenced by a lack of publications resulting from nation-centric research. Given this, historian Bambang Purwanto declared that the Indonesia-centric approach had failed. For more on this topic, see Bambang Purwanto, *Gagalnya Historiografi Indonesiasentris*, (Yogyakarta: Penerbit Ombak, 2007).



FIGURE 1.7.
Kusnadi (standing on the podium to the right) acted as the main speaker for Art History session in a Seminar 1956.
(Source: Laporan Panitia Seminar Ilmu dan Kebudayaan, *Laporan Seminar Ilmu dan Kebudayaan Sidang ke II: Sejarah Seni Rupa Indonesia*, 26 Juni 1956, Jogjakarta: Universitas Gadjah Mada, 1956)

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The *Seminar Ilmu dan Kebudayaan* presented such topics as: Reciprocal Influence between Gadjah Mada University and the Community,²⁰ Crafts, Dance and Gamelan, Indonesian Village Development and Agriculture, Indonesian Language Development,²¹ Javanese Folklore and Ideas (Philosophy), and Art History. Kusnadi (Fig.1.7) acted as the main speaker for the last topics, while artists such as Affandi, S. Sudjojono, Hendra Gunawan, Sudjoko, Subagija, Widayat, Trisno Sumardjo, Amrus Natalsja, and scholars such as Sardjito and S. Bradjanegara were among the hundreds of those who attended. There were also participants from the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture and observers from UNESCO, who collaborated to produce this seminar.²²

UNESCO Paris, the institution that initiated and provided funding for the seminar, claimed that the program was a continuation of the "UNESCO Conferences" series with the theme of Studies of Traditional Cultures in Southeast Asian Communities previously in New Delhi, India. UNESCO

²⁰ Panitia Seminar Ilmu dan Kebudayaan, *Laporan Seminar Ilmu dan Kebudayaan Sidang ke I: Pengaruh Timbal balik Antara Universitas Gadjah Mada dan Masyarakat*, 25-30 Juni 1956, Jogjakarta: Universitas Gadjah Mada, 1956.

²¹ Panitia Seminar Ilmu dan Kebudayaan, *Laporan Seminar Ilmu dan Kebudayaan Sidang ke V: A. Bahasa dan Tulis Indonesia, B. Perkembangan Bahasa Indonesia di Daerah Yang Berbahasa Djawa*, 25-30 Juni 1956, Jogjakarta: Universitas Gadjah Mada, 1956.

²² Panitia Seminar Ilmu dan Kebudayaan, *Laporan Seminar Ilmu dan Kebudayaan Sidang ke V: A. Bahasa dan Tulis Indonesia, B. Perkembangan Bahasa Indonesia di Daerah Yang Berbahasa Djawa*, 25-30 Juni 1956, Jogjakarta: Universitas Gadjah Mada, 1956.

expressed an interest in researching post-colonial Indonesian culture. In doing so, some inquiries were made, such as how people adapt to modern influences and comprehend cultural transformation. Seminars on a similar topic were also planned for locations with contemporary names, now Myanmar and Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Pakistan.²³ UNESCO's involvement suggests that the impetus to write art history was triggered by external factors, similar to the impact of the return of two of Raden Saleh's paintings in 1970, which I previously discussed.

Given that the seminar was initiated by UNESCO, Minister of Education and Culture S. Mangoenpranoto urged seminar participants to be critical. Mangoenpranoto reminded attendees of the seminar's strategic position amid the changing post-war world order, in addition to emphasizing the nation's dignity. Being aware of international political interests, Mangoenpranoto predicted: "The world has shrunk in size. We are conveniently located near New York, Washington, Amsterdam, Russia, and China." In his perception, the consequence of the post-war era is that the countries of the world will affect each other, and people will cross paths, operating global conversation or cross-cultural dialogue.²⁴ By saying this, Mangoenpranoto's statement signals audiences to pay attention to external factors in writing art history.

The presentations during the *Art History* session did not follow the interest in the "global temper" highlighted by the Minister. Kusnadi's art history paper promoted a limited perspective in this context. In the scholarly article titled "Sejarah Seni Rupa" (History of Art), the author presents a periodization framework encompassing various epochs, namely Indonesian Primitive Art, Indonesian Classical Art, Realistic Painting, Art in the period of Dutch East Indies, Japanese Period, and The Post-1945 Era. Kusnadi has established that art's history progresses linearly from the pre-modern to the contemporary through these sequences. "Realistic Painting", pioneered by Raden Saleh, is described as a period that abandoned flatness, seen as characteristic of *wayang*, temple reliefs, and ornaments from the "Indonesian Classical Art" period.

Interestingly, Kusnadi refrained from discussing the significance of terms such as "the Dutch East Indies" or "the Japanese Occupation" period,

²³ "Salinan Surat Herbert W. Schneider" in Panitia Seminar Ilmu dan Kebudajaan, *Laporan Seminar Ilmu dan Kebudajaan Universitas Gadjah Mada*, 25-30 Juni 1956, Yogyakarta, p. 14 - 15. See also "Salinan Surat Edaran UNESCO", pp. 16-18.

²⁴ S. Mangoenpranoto, "Pidato Sambutan Jang Mulia Menteri P.P.& K" in Panitia Seminar Ilmu dan Kebudajaan, 1956, pp. 39-43.

utilizing them solely for categorization. He failed to acknowledge the contribution of the *Bataviaasche Kunstkring* and the significance of the exhibition featuring Pierre Alexander Regnault's collection to the Indonesian public. He also neglected to recognize the contributions of Dutch artists and writers during the respective eras. Moreover, he blamed the Dutch colonial era because, at that time, Indonesian people were introduced exclusively to European art sources, exemplified by the magnificence of Rembrandt and Frans Hals.²⁵

During the seminar's discussion, critic Trisno Sumardjo suggested a more nationalistic and radical approach focusing on the modern period in art. In contrast to Kusnadi's ambiguous proposal, Sumardjo's scheme highlighted the steps historians must take to adopt an Indonesia-centric perspective in art history writing. Sumardjo, for example, opposed acknowledging Raden Saleh's role, claiming that the colonial system facilitated the painter's historical appearance.²⁶ Sumardjo, unlike Kusnadi, avoided using the term "Japanese period".

Furthermore, Sumardjo went a step further by developing his periodization system based on the "artist group or movement" PERSAGI, the acronym for *Persatuan Ahli-ahli Gambar Indonesia* (Association of Indonesian Drawing Experts or The Union of Indonesian Drawing Experts). He offered a more consistent periodization system than Kusnadi: *the PERSAGI era*, *the Post-PERSAGI Period until 1946*, and *the Period After 1946*. He separated modern art from its past because he believed that post-war artists created new art for the new Indonesian culture. This art is disconnected from the classical period. Sumardjo continues that 1946 was a watershed moment because it was at that time that the Young Indonesian Artists (*Seniman Indonesia Muda* - SIM), the first post-war artist collective, was formed.

Of course, PERSAGI had previously contributed to accelerating art practices. However, Sumardjo stated that SIM was responsible for the artist's movement, which involved people's participation, not PERSAGI. Aside from concerns of periodization, Sumardjo reminded Kusnadi of the importance of "a spiritual background" (*latar spiritual*) in historical writing. Sumardjo wanted to

²⁵ See Kusnadi "Sedjarah Seni Rupa Indonesia" in Panitia Seminar Ilmu dan Kebudayaan, *Laporan Seminar Ilmu dan Kebudayaan Sidang ke II: Sedjarah Seni Rupa Indonesia*, 26 Juni 1956, Jogjakarta: Universitas Gadjah Mada, 1956, p. 5-28.

²⁶ In his article published in 1956, Trisno Sumardjo criticized Raden Saleh, who was nothing but a painter who was educated by the West and failed to uphold his national identity. See Trisno Sumardjo, "Kedudukan Seni Rupa Kita" in Zaini (ed.), *Almanak Seni 1957*, (Jakarta: Badan Musjawarat Kebudayaan Nasional, 1956), p.125.

convince the audience that the “spirit of nationalism” (*semangat nasionalisme*) reflected anti-colonial sentiments among artists and intellectuals in creating modern Indonesian art.²⁷

S. Sudjojono was the only person at the seminar who advocated inclusiveness for art history by including the roles of European painters. He mentioned Rudolf Bonnet's involvement in Balinese painting. Sudjojono also recommended the dedication and role of entrepreneur and art collector Pierre Alexandre Regnault who presented his significant collections to people in the colony. Conclusively, S. Sudjojono suggested that artists and the general public be open to accepting the influence of Western art, saying, "The West and East are insignificant to me. We take what is beneficial to us."²⁸ By saying that, Sudjojono proposed writing art history with a perspective beyond the international binary, non-hierarchical approach, not from the West or the East. It seems to him that art from the two poles has spread worldwide and influenced each other. He suggests a reappraisal of the West-East (non-Western) opposition which is, in his view, not the primary determinant of the geographical perspective of modernity.

However, in later times, Sudjojono's progressive recommendations for open art historical writing was not given any space in historiography, also because he himself changed his mind on this. Trisno Sumardjo's radical nationalist periodization also became unpopular. For example, the book *Sejarah Seni Rupa Indonesia* 1979, in which Kusnadi was a team writer and which continued the spirit of the 1956 Seminar, showed no desire to modify the recommendations.

The Impact of Indonesia-Centric Historiography and the Necessity to Examine Connections: Several Instances

The following concise examples pertain to the consequences of adopting an Indonesia-centric viewpoint, which leads to the omission of an individual's important contribution - specifically, that of Noto Soeroto - in the historiography of Indonesian modern art. Another example pertains to the *Bataviaasche Kunstkring*, S. Sudjojono-PERSAGI, and Raden Saleh, highlighting the significance of scrutinizing the interconnections among

²⁷ Kusnadi, 1956, pp. 66-70.

²⁸ Kusnadi, 1956, pp. 70-75.

events that influenced the artist's professional trajectory. These examples underscore the interconnectedness of ideas, texts, artworks, and artists, highlighting their propensity to transcend geographical boundaries and mutually impact one another.



FIGURE 1.8.
Noto Soeroto by Vermeulen, C.J.L., circa 1915.

Leiden University Libraries Digital Collections

The Forgotten Noto Soeroto

Discussing the impact of Indonesia-centricity on writing art history, first and foremost, I would like to introduce Noto Soeroto. In my opinion, he was the first Indonesian art historian (Fig.1.8). Soeroto was known as a prolific writer interested in humanism, aesthetics, cultural history, and symbolism, all heavily infused with Eastern philosophy. His thoughts were profoundly affected by those of Rabindranath Tagore, his teacher and his close friend.²⁹ Regrettably, his name has never appeared in many publications, nor has anyone analyzed his contribution to modern art historiography, and he was completely forgotten because of nationalistic bias.

²⁹ For further reading about Noto Soeroto, see R.B. Karels, *Mijn aardse leven vol moeite en strijd: Raden Mas Noto Soeroto, Javan, dichter, politicus, 1888-1951*, (Gouda: in own collection, 2008) and H.G. Cannegieter, *Raden Mas Noto Soeroto*, (The Hague: Servire, 1926). The only Soeroto biography in Indonesian is a book by historian Rosa M. T. Kerdijk, published in 2002. See Rosa M T Kerdijk, *Wayang-liedereen: Biografi Politik Budaya Noto Soeroto*, (Jakarta: Komunitas Bambu, 2002).

VAN KUNST EN KUNSTENAARS RADEN MAS JODIANA

door NILO OOSTERDIJK

Een Indonesische kunstenaar, die zowel hier als in zijn geboorteland, maar vooral toch in Holland waar zijn kunstenaarschap zich ontpopte en ontwikkelde, de aandacht op zich gevestigd heeft en deze nog veel meer verdient en zal vinden is Raden Mas Jodiana. Bij wiens portret men in de Februarifiguur (No. 21) van dit tijdschrift reeds een enkele opmerking over zijn persoon en zijn werk heeft aangetroffen. Gaarne maak ik van de gelegenheid gebruik hier, naast enige reproducties van zijn kunstwerken enz., wat inwijzerij stil te staan bij de prestaties en mogelijkheden, bij den aard en de betekenis van dit opmerkelijk en onmiskenbaar talent onder de jonge Javanen, die in onzen tijd met bruisende en bewustheid de grondslagen leggen voor een zuiver moderne Javanische kunst.

Geboren uit Djidjaka in Jodiana, na zijn burgerrecht-onwikkelding gestroomd te hebben, als voorste zoon van een landbouwer naar Holland gekomen, waar hij zich aan de Handelshoogeschool te Rotterdam de kennis dacht te verwerven, welke hem eindelijk in staat zou stellen op economisch gebied zijn volk te dienen en te leiden. Lot en leven evenwel, d.w.z. de materiële driften, waarvan men zich aanvankelijk niet of nauwelijks bewust is, maar die ten slotte het menselijke bestaan bepalen, hadden het anders niet hem voor en van de voorgeschiedenis en begroten studie in dat ook weinig gekomen. Al spoedig na het been hier te lande, waar hij door zijn vriendschap met Noto Soeroto



Cylisma (houster)

Raden Mas Jodiana



R. M. A. Soeropatra (houster)

Raden Mas Jodiana

maakt of als werping volgendes te zijn, zijn bijzonder karakter verraadt. Wij geven hier van zijn werk, van enkele jaren terug, eenige voorbeelden, waarom men zien zal hoe zich het specifiek Oosters-zuiverend karakter aan hem toedient en specifiek Oosters-aardigheid te volgen. Men vindt hier Westersche middelen aangewend zonder dat in weten van Westersche navolging sprake is. Dit kenmerk de gelukkig wijze waarop het werk van Jodiana zich onderscheidt van het tegenwoordig, merkwaardig genoeg en toch eigenlijk ook wel begrijpelijk, wordt voortgezet door Indonesische schilders als Kiki en Pingsidi, die hun geboorteland nimmer verlaten en het tropische landschap weergeven naar Westersche maat, daarmede schiet het trakkend aan den d'opren vindingen van de klassieke Javanische kunst. T of deze boden juist heeft Jodiana de gevoeligste geestengaren vol eerbiedig verlangen gericht en het zijn weten vindt daar zijn oorsprong in Javanische maat. Maar het Westen heeft zijn persoonlijk zieleleven berekend, gelukkig zonder het te verstaan, en zo is in hem het geestelijke gekomen, het pogen naar nieuwe vormen, dat de moderne creaties eigen is en tijdelijk tot excessen mag voeren om ten slotte echter bevredigende rust te vinden in een heroveren hanteeren tusschen inhoud en versiering. Niet zozeer in hetgeen Jodiana tot nu toe heeft voortgebracht schuilt mijn inzien in de eerste plaats zijn verdienste, maar in den geest van zijn kunst, in het streven, dat hem van hooghartigheid af en waarvan mijns meesters voor het hoogste leven der menscheit, ook in onzen tijd, gelijk in alle periodes van innerlijke herleving en verdieping, de zijner resultaten te wachten zijn.

De vraag waarvoor wij hier staan is hoe Jodiana zich verder zal ontwikkelen. De grootsheid van zijn persoon en de kloofte wilschuld die uit zijn hoonenden spreekt mogen ons naast de verdienstelijke zorgvuldigheid zijner tekeningen een waarschuwing zijn dat de ingehouden weg naar het begrip dood zal voeren. Toch dat de ingehouden weg aan moedwilligen en belevenissen niet ontbreekt. Sinds hij zijn studie heeft opgegeven en de strijd



Nanyama (houster)

Raden Mas Jodiana



Makderusa (houster)

Raden Mas Jodiana

Daarom eigenaardigheden die Jodiana als plastisch kunstenaar zoo aantrekkelijk en bijzonder maken, kenmerken ook zijn evolutie op grafisch gebied. Portretten en personae hebben hem reeds op jongeren lertijd aangetroffen, doch eerst de bevestigende inwerking van hetgeen hij op dit gebied in Holland zag en bewonderde hebben hem doordringend tot naar de toekomstenschiedskunst doen grijpen om uiting te geven aan hetgeen te ontploeg en gestalte samen in zijn ziel.

Een woord van waardering mag hier niet achterwege blijven voor zijn vriend en kunstbroeder Noto Soeroto, die in de vughten en versterken welke Jodiana voor zijn uitgang levende, de mogelijkheden van een persoonlijk ausing opentekte en door zijn weloverwogen en op zuiver begrip berustend advies oomskenbaar heeft bijgeleiden tot de ontwikkeling van Jodiana tot een overvloedig Javanisch maestre vromdschheidsschap antist. In welke richting dit advies wees mogen wij met het oog op de in velerlei geschriften van Noto Soeroto, o.a. in een opstel over „Wangseboekisme als grondslag eener Javanische schiedschool“ (opgenomen in het Gedenkboek van Boedi-Oetomo) vangevonde en verduidelijde begrippen, als beledend veronderstellen. Hetgeen Jodiana ons later als grafisch kunstenaar heeft te zien gegeven is het beste bewijs dat de daat gelukrijke opvatting eener Javanische kunst ook de zijne is.

Aanvankelijk vooral schilderdend onder de aanmoedigende leiding van Isaac Israëls, vond Jodiana op den duur meer voldoening in de teekenaars en het tekenen, waarvan hij de techniek, leerde van onze bekenden beeldhouwer Jan Alfard. Al spoedig wist hij in deze materien iets te bereiken, dat, zonder technisch vol-

in contact kwam met vertegenwoordigers van het geestelijk en artistiek levende Nederland, dusdijk gevoelen, dat zijn roeping niet lag in de wetenschappelijk beheerschte versnoodering van de materiele welvaart van zijn land, maar dat in hem de kien aanreuring was van een geestelijk scherpheid en zuiverheid versnoodend vermogen waardoor hij wellicht een rol zou kunnen vervullen in de herleving der oude, geestelijke, maar in versnoodte tradities verlaten latere voorbestaannde culture van zijn volk. Het eent is deze drang in hem tot uiting gekomen in zijn dansen. Hij was de typische Javanische danskunst meester, gelijk iedere ontwikkelde Javanen, vooral uit de Vastelanden, die versnoodt. Naast Jodiana heeft vooral zijn zoon als architect in Indonesië werk zane langzaam Soerjo Witoeso er veel toe bijgeleiden de Westersche geestesdrift toegankelijk te maken voor de gelidestijmige bekering en plastische schoonheid van deze nationale Javanische kunstvorm. Jodiana echter bewaakte, na zijn eerste optreden ter gelegenheid van een in 1916 ter lering van den watersnood op Java in Den Haag gegeven galaavertelling meer dan een houter door het esthetische gelidigen, opvoerdijk wij wees, doordat in hem iets persoonlijk en onpersoonlijk school, dat bij zonder de strenge traditie en den geestelijken oorsprong der Javanische danskunst ontwaas te worden, op steeds meer beheerschte en treffende wijse tot uiting wist te brengen. Hij heeft door zijn scherpheid talent de versnoodte schoonheid van een in een oode en electie door heldervulde studie te benademen bettere kennis wettendend spel van gebuende actie en minnek tot een hietstetiek levende en magisch versnoodde verbeelding gewiki, die de aan geen natieslouter gebonden al-menscheijke ontvankelijkheid in ruimen kring heeft getroffen.

FIGURE 1.9.
Van Kunst en Kunstenaar column in *Oedaya*.

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Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

Trisno Sumardjo accused Soeroto of not creating Indonesian art. Sumardjo regarded Soeroto as akin to colonialists due to his exclusive focus on preserving classical arts, neglecting to foster innovation.³⁰ Despite Noto Soeroto's prolific output of poetry and widespread recognition during his era, his name and works are almost unfamiliar in the historiography of modern Indonesian literature. Bakri Siregar, a cultural scholar with leftist leanings, characterizes Noto Soeroto as "even more Western than Westerners themselves."³¹

Below, I will briefly present arguments to counter Sumardjo and Siregar's lack of objectivity in assessing Noto Soeroto. They seem to have forgotten – or have never thoroughly observed – Soeroto's monumental work while living in the Netherlands (1909–1932), namely *Oedaya* – *Geïllustreerd maandblad voor Indonesië*.³² *Oedaya* (Raising) is a symbol of Indonesia's revival struggle, which appears calm, gradual, and natural.³³

³⁰ Trisno Sumardjo, *Kedudukan Seni Rupa Kita* in Zaini (ed.), *Almanak Seni 1957*, (Jakarta: BMKN, 1956), p.125.

³¹ Bakri Siregar, *Sedjarah Sastra Indonesia Modern*, (Jakarta: Akademi Sastra dan Bahasa Multatuli, 1964), p. 85.

³² The *Oedaya* magazine was founded in April 1923, which was marked by the publication of a trial number for the magazine. See Harry A. Poeze, 2014, p. 177. Another version is May 1923. See R.B. Karels, 2008, p. 67.

³³ Rosa M. T. Kerdijk, 2002, p. 35.

Oedaya is significant because it reflects the breadth of Soeroto's connections, ranging from Javanese aristocrats and ministers to the Governor General of the Dutch East Indies and artists. Furthermore, *Oedaya* covers health, technology, economics, history, and social and political issues and has a column called *van Kunst en Kunstenaars* (art and artists) (Fig.1.9). This column frequently features The Hague artists from Soeroto's circle of friends, such as Jan Toorop, Johan Altorf, and painter Isaac Israels. Furthermore, Hein van Essen, a graphic artist born in Surabaya, contributed to the rubric in several publications. Finally, his proximity to the *Haagse Kunstkring* (The Hague Art Society) and the Wigwam Club facilitated meetings between fellow artists in The Hague,³⁴ which demonstrates the breadth of Soeroto's social circle among artists.

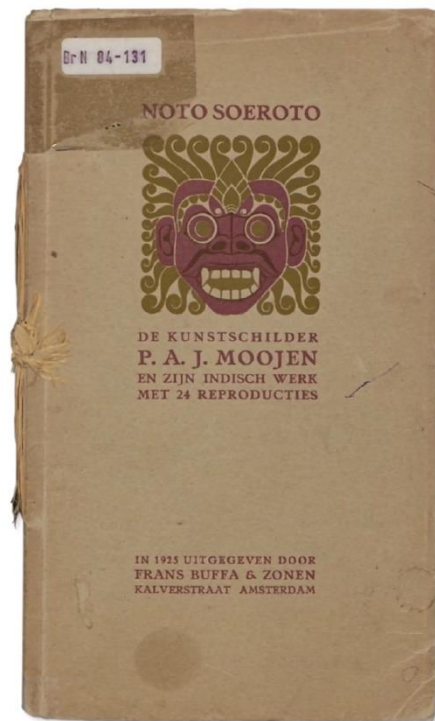


FIGURE 1.10.
The Moojen catalog for exhibition in Frans Buffa
en Zonen Kunsthandel, Amsterdam.

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Soeroto also made friends with Pieter Adriaan Jacobus Moojen, a painter, writer, and architect. Moojen lived and worked in the Dutch East Indies from 1903 to 1929. He was one of the first architects in the Dutch East

³⁴ R.B. Karels, 2008, p.244.

Indies to implement Modernism. He founded the *Kunstkring* in Bandung (1904) and Batavia (1906). In addition, he was a prominent member of the *Bataviaasche Kunstkring* and actively participated in exhibitions as a painter. In 1925, Soeroto contributed an essay for the Moojen catalog for exhibition in Frans Buffa en Zonen Kunsthandel, Amsterdam (Fig.1.10). Moreover, Soeroto's ability to analyze Moojen's works demonstrates how advanced he had become in writing on art.³⁵



FIGURE 1.11.
First pages of Noto Soeroto's article about Iko.
(Source: *Het huis, oud & nieuw: Maandelijksch prentenboek gewijd aan huisinrichting, bouw en sierkunst*, 1910)

Collection of Leiden University Library
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

Soeroto used *Oedaya* to assimilate and disseminate concepts about modern Western art and artists to his readers in the Netherlands and the

³⁵ For further reading, see Noto Soeroto, "De Schilder P. A. J. Moojen en zijn Indisch Werk" in *Eigenhaard*, Volume 51, Number 4, 24 January 1925, pp. 53-60.

Dutch East Indies. *Oedaya* indicates in each edition that the modernization of Indonesian art will occur if artists are able to think objectively and not favor one method over another. In other words, as agents for the advancement of Indonesian art, artists must master diverse artistic techniques from various cultures. Furthermore, Soeroto's belief that if art is not bound by its past, it will inevitably grow was fueled by his exposure to a diverse social environment in Europe. As a result, Indonesian art must be naturally receptive to Western techniques and aesthetics while remaining in balance with the East. Soeroto then cited Raden Saleh's proficiency in European painting techniques as an example. Nonetheless, despite his admiration for Raden Saleh, Soeroto believed that the painter should have paid more attention to the characteristics of Eastern art.

In 1910, Soeroto published a text from The Hague, the Netherlands, as he prepared to commence his law studies at Leiden University. The text explored the phenomena surrounding artists and the gradual disappearance of art history, and pertains to the artistic endeavors of Sundanese sculptor Iko. Iko's artistic repertoire primarily consists of wood carvings and stone sculptures (Fig.1.11). Soeroto admired Iko, who is from Cimahi, West Java, and has natural talent. Despite not having a formal art education background, Iko is skilled at sculpting stone and wood. Iko is a simple man who was previously unknown, had low self-esteem, and had no formal education. He worked for years following his artistic and aesthetic instincts until he was noticed by European lovers of art.³⁶

Iko's unforeseen emergence as an artist catalyzed Soeroto's realization regarding the existence of unrecorded artists within cultural history. He concluded that Indonesians needed to be more familiar with their artists from past centuries. Soeroto wrote:

The hymns, epics, sculptures, and temples defy the ages and tell us of times long past, but of the poet, sculptor, and master builder, we know but little, nay, next to nothing." To strengthen his argument, Soeroto then poses a challenging question: "Who was the creator of Prajñāpāramitā?"³⁷

³⁶ Noto Soeroto, "Iko" in *Het Huis Oud & Nieuw, Maandelijksch prentenboek gewijd aan huis, inrichting, bouw en sierkunst*, (Amsterdam: Ed Cuypers, 1910), pp. 148-153. See also H. van Meurs, "Iko - De Soendasche Beeldsnijder" in *Cultureel Indie III, Derde Jaargang*, (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1941), pp. 101-106.

³⁷ Noto Soeroto, 1910, pp.148 - 150. "De gezangen en heldendichten, de beeldhouwwerken en de tempels, zij trotseeren de eeuwen en vertellen ons van lang vervlogen tijden; maar van den dichter, van den beeldhouwer en den bouwmeester weten wij slechts luttel, ja, zoo goed als niets... Wie b.v. is de

Some of Soeroto's propositions regarding the importance of art history are stimulating to examine in more depth. However, in this regard, despite expressing the significance of Iko as an artist in his writing, Soeroto tends to question the absence of art historiography in Indonesia and discusses its constraints.³⁸

Soeroto's texts are an ideal example to illustrate how the role of artists and writers resonated and intertwined. For instance, he acknowledged that the emergence of an artist on the historical stage is linked to a complicated network. He consequently understood that he was not the person who "discovered" Iko. Instead, Soeroto asserted that the first person who notified him of Iko's talent was a Dutchman, C. Den Hamer, who at the time was an inspector of indigenous education (*Inspecteur van het Inlandsch Onderwijs*).³⁹ Additionally, Soeroto noted that Dutch writer Th. J. A. Hilgers had been writing about Iko and his works since 1905.⁴⁰ Such links in Soeroto's texts shed light on the complex relationships between actors in the colonial art field of the early 20th century.

Noto Soeroto's commitment and dedication to the advancement of Indonesian fine arts can also be observed in the following case. He was

schepper van de Prajna Paramita?" This refers to the Prajñāpāramitā statue (ca. 1300) from Singasari Temple, East Java, which is now in the collection of the National Museum of Indonesia. The statue of Prajñāpāramitā, the Buddhist deity of transcendental wisdom, has been called "arguably Java's greatest single stone sculpture." See Natasha Reichle, *Violence and Serenity: Late Buddhist Sculpture from Indonesia*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), pp.51-83.

³⁸ Iko's fame grew even further when the *Boeatan* gallery in The Hague showed 12 of his works in August 1930. *Vereniging Oost en West* (Foundation of East and West), founded in 1899 by G.E.V.L. van Zuylen, managed the gallery *Boeatan* to strengthen ties between the Netherlands and the colonies. The *Boeatan* gallery in The Hague actively sells art and crafts from various archipelago regions. See "Kunst: Iko in Holland" in *Het nieuws van den dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, 22 September 1930, p.7.; "Boeatan: Expositie van Indische Kunst" in *De Indische courant*, 27 September 1930, p.8.; "Kunst in Den Haag: Indische Kunst in Pulchri en in Boeatan," in *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 2 September 1930, p. 9.; "Boeatan" in *Haagsche courant*, 26 August 1930, p.3.; "De Soendaneesche Beeldhouwer Iko" in *De Maasbode*, 27 August 1930, p.5.; and "De Soendaneesche Beeldhouwer Iko" in *De koerier*, 26 September 1930, p.2. In 1932, for instance, the widow of Jacques Henry Abendanon proposed to the head of "Boeatan" to hold a small exhibition in memory of Kartini, a woman who loved the folk art of her country and was an expert in batik and wood carving. This plan was well received, especially since "Boeatan" had just received a letter from Koedoes from Kartini's younger sister, Raden Ajoë Sentoso, who asked for help publicizing the revival of Jepara wood carving art. See "R.A. Kartini Herdenking in Boeatan" in *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 27 October 1932, p.8.

³⁹ In 1903, with B. Kersjes, Hamer wrote a book titled: *De Tjandi Mendoet voor de restauratie*. See B. Kersjes & C. den Hamer, *De Tjandi Mendoet voor de restauratie*, (Batavia & Den Haag: Albrecht and Co. - M. Nijhoff, 1903).

⁴⁰ Th.J.A. Hilgers published an article in *Weekblad voor Indië* that included two pages of Iko's photographs. See Th.J.A. Hilgers, *Een Inlandsche Kunstenaar* in *Weekblad voor Indië*, No.37, 1905, p.661-664 and *Uit den Archipel in De Sumatra post*, 31 January 1906, p.5.

connected to the famous nationalist movement Boedi Utomo in Java because Soeroto's father, Ario Notodirodjo, facilitated the relationship. Certainty dictates that in 1914 Boedi Oetomo initiated the "Raden Saleh Fund" to commemorate "100 Years of Raden Saleh". The fund will establish an art school to "arouse the concern and interest of Javanese people in national art".⁴¹

Several years later, the notion of glorifying Raden Saleh continued to reverberate. The report of *Boedi Oetomo*, 1917-1918, also mentions this fundraising effort. This initiative was implemented when Ario Notodirodjo served as the second *President of Hoofdbestuur Boedi Oetomo* (President of Boedi Oetomo). The report also stated that the purpose of the fundraising was to distribute reproductions of Saleh's works to Indonesian people, as suggested by Soeroto in his writings. Unfortunately, as the First World War in Europe started to rage, and following the resignation of Ario Notodirodjo as a leader due to illness, the plan to glorify Raden Saleh also evaporated.⁴²

During those years, Soeroto conceived numerous ideas to nurture art in Indonesia that no others did. He even planned to establish an art school in Java in the spirit of Raden Saleh. Noto Soeroto, Sostrokartono, and Soewardi Soerjaningrat were editors for the publication commemorating the 10th anniversary of Boedi Oetomo: *Soembangsih: Gedenkboek Boedi-Oetomo 1908-20* in May 1918. Soeroto wrote *Wayangbeeldkunst als Grondslag eener Javaansche Schilderschool* (Visual Art of Wayang as the Starting Point of a Javanese Art School) in this publication. He envisioned wayang as the foundation of art education in Java.

According to Soeroto, Raden Saleh could serve as a model for the project of art education, and a student could emulate him. However, continued Soeroto, such an education would not give Javanese painting an identity. Using Balinese painting as an example, Soeroto believes that a solid foundation and heightened awareness are required to create images with character and individuality. As a result, Soeroto provided an abundance of wayang forms as the primary source.⁴³

The neglect of Noto Soeroto and his contribution from Indonesian art historical publications supports the view that the discipline of art history in

⁴¹ See Noto Soeroto, "Wayangbeeldkunst als Grondslag eener Javaansche Schilderschool" in Noto Soeroto, Sostrokartono, and Soewardi Soerjaningrat (ed.), *Soembangsih: Gedenkboek Boedi-Oetomo 1908-20*, (Amsterdam: Tijdschrift Nederl. Indië Oud & Nieuw, 1918), p.103 and *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, 13 March 1914, p.2.

⁴² See Hoofdbestuur BO (ed.), *Verslag Boedi - Oetomo Tahoen Kesepoeloeh 1917-1918*, (Solo-Madioen: N.V. Mij. Albert Rusche & Co, 1919), p.8.

⁴³ For further reading, see Noto Soeroto, 1918, pp.93-103.

Indonesia has predominantly prioritized national viewpoints, thereby overlooking the interrelatedness and global character of artistic practices and the documentation of their clear analysis and conclusion. As previously stated, Indonesia-centric insularity highlights only "nationalist actors" while downplaying the significance of external parties or those criticized for not aligning with nationalist ideals. Supporters with an Indonesia-centric perspective tend to overlook the contributions of Soeroto and instead elevate, for instance, Sudjojono as a nationalist figure - as an artist and art critic.

The Links Surrounding the Kunstkring and Sudjojono - PERSAGI

The idea of linkage or interconnectedness has significantly impacted the colony's development of art and artists. These interconnections prevented the isolation of art, allowing it to play a significant role within the colony's cultural context. In this matter, Java is considered an island with a network, as it is the center of government and the location of an art circle. Large cities on this island at the beginning of the 20th century showed modernity that grew according to colonial needs. Cities such as Batavia and Surabaya have incorporated essential elements of traditional Indonesian cities to exhibit a European look: train stations, hotels, banks and post offices, schools, theaters and cinemas, shopping areas, a network of major and subsidiary roads, and crowded traffic flow because of trams, horse-drawn carriages, Europeans in cars and Indonesians on bicycles.⁴⁴

The city of Batavia, which was previously quiet, had now become a city full of upheaval and also a political activity.⁴⁵ The composition of the modern art scene was still simple because it only consisted of a handful of exhibition halls, art material shops, dozens of painters, and a few patrons/collectors. Contributions came from magazines⁴⁶ and newspapers⁴⁷ activeness in presenting exhibition reviews.

In the first two decades of the 20th century, the artistic life of the Dutch East Indies experienced drastic changes that differed from those of the previous century. A Dutch writer known as B.M. wrote in *Wereldnieuws*

⁴⁴ Doris Jedamski, *Mabuk modern and gila barat - Progress, modernity, and imagination Literary images of city life in colonial Indonesia*, paper from the first conference of the European Association for South-East Asian Studies (EUROSEAS) "Keys to South-East Asia," Leiden, 29 June - 1 July 1995, pp.168-169.

⁴⁵ Susan Abeyasekera, *Jakarta: A History*, (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1989), p.88.

⁴⁶ For instance *Het Indische Leven*, *De Taak - Algemeen Indisch Weekblad*, *Actueel Wereldnieuws*, *d'Orient*, *Keboedajaan dan Masjarakat*, *Poestaka Timoer*, *Poedjangga Baroe*, *Medan Prijaji*, and *Bintang Hindia*.

⁴⁷ For instance *Java-Bode*, *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, *de Preanger Bode*, *de Indische Courant*, and *Sin Po*.

magazine comparing the 20th-century Dutch East Indies with the previous century. The Dutch East Indies in the 19th century was not where art developed. Instead, this era is only concerned with finance, trade, cinema, bridge outings, and Chinese food.⁴⁸ Developing arts and culture in the colonies was not the colonial government's main priority. On the other hand, people spent more of their free time on recreation and entertainment. A significant change occurred when the *Nederlandsch-Indië Kunstkring* was founded.⁴⁹

The *Kunstkring* emerged from a series of processes. Its founders saw an opportunity to develop fine and decorative arts because music and drama activities with regularly scheduled programs increased in Batavia. Seeing this disparity, the organizers felt compelled to promote the fine and decorative arts.⁵⁰ The initiators finally inaugurated the *Kunstkring* on 1 April 1902 in Batavia after consolidating and merging the previously existing music and theatre associations. As stated in the book *Statuten van de vereeniging van Bond Nederlandsch-Indische Kunstkringen te Batavia* (Articles of Association of the Association of Dutch-Indonesian Art Circles in Batavia), this institution aims to collaborate and promote visual and decorative arts practices, and stimulate and preserve the sense of art among the population of the Dutch East Indies.⁵¹

Within a few months of its inauguration, on 31 August 1902, this institution had produced the *Nederlandsch-Indische en Europeesche meester* exhibition.⁵² After 1916, this institution was better known as the *Bataviaasche Kunstkring*.⁵³ Batavia is the center of the *Kunstkring* which was supported by activities in various branches in Bogor, Bandung, Blitar, Cirebon, Jember, Yogyakarta, Jombang, Kediri, Magelang, Makassar, Madioen, Malang, Medan, Mojokerto, Palèmbang, Pasuruan, Purwokerto, Purworedjo,

⁴⁸ B.M., "Montparnasse de Batavia: een schildersgroep studeert" in *Wereldnieuws*, 29 November 1941. See Koos van Brakel, "For Evidently, the Fine Arts do not Thrive in the Indies" in Marie Odette Scalliet, et.al., *Pictures from the Tropics: Paintings by western Artists during the Dutch Colonial Period in Indonesia*, (Amsterdam: Pictures Publishers, Wijk en Alburg, 1999), p.103.

⁴⁹ Koos van Brakel, "Beautiful Indies Paintings: A Colonial Medium?" in Meta Knol, et.al., *Beyond the Dutch*, (Amsterdam: KIT Publishers, 2009), p.50.

⁵⁰ Establishing an art museum has always been an ideal of the *Kunstkring*. At the board meeting on 3 March 1905, the possibility of considering collectors' donations as the fundamental step for museum collections was discussed. For further reading, see *Gedenkboek Nederlandsch-Indische Kunstkring Batavia 1902-1927*, (G. Kolff. & Co Batavia, 1927), pp.57-60.

⁵¹ *Statuten van de vereeniging van Bond Nederlandsch-Indische Kunstkringen te Batavia*, (Weltevreden: Gedrukt Bij Albrecht & Co, 1918), p.4. Regarding the membership system, the rules within the institution can also be seen in this book.

⁵² *Gedenkboek Nederlandsch-Indische Kunstkring Batavia 1902-1927*, 1927, pp.1-2.

⁵³ J. de Loos-Haxmaan, 1968, p.84.

Probolinggo, Salatiga, Semarang, Sukabumi, Surabaya, Solo, Tanjung Enim, Tanjungkarang, Tegal, Cepu, and Cilacap (Fig.1.12)⁵⁴

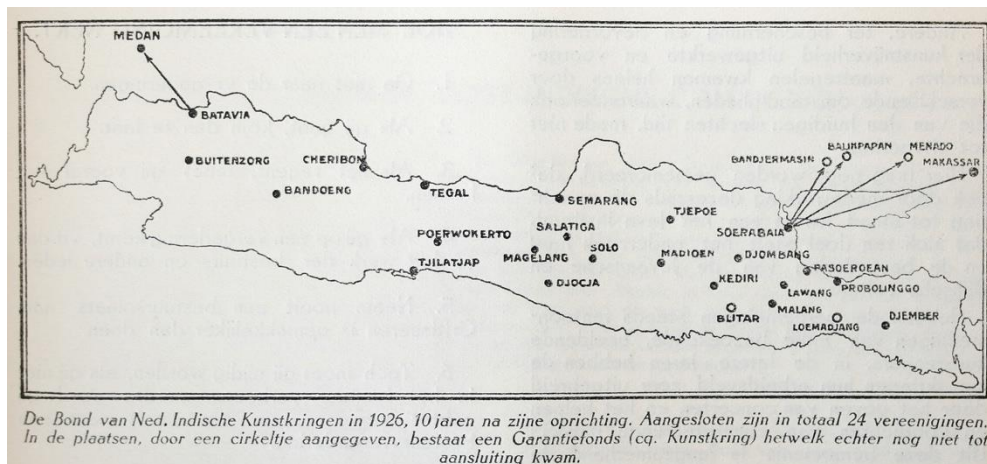
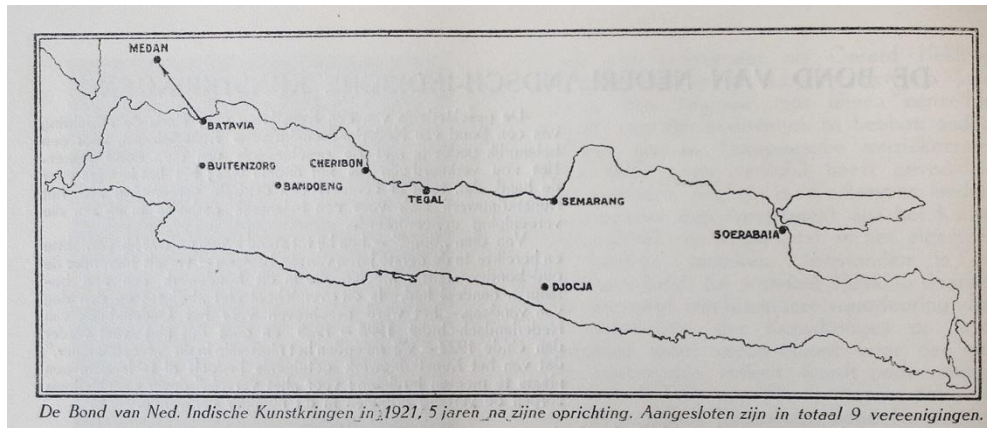


FIGURE 1.12. Kunstkring developed in 1921 (above) and in 1926 (below), with its branches in and outside Java.
(Source: *Ons Kringnieuws*, Jaargang I, Nummer 22, 1929)

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Repro by Aminudin TH Siregar

⁵⁴ D. G. Stibbe & J. Strommberg, *Encyclopaedie van Nederlandsch-Indië*, ('s-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoof), 1932, pp.673-674.



FIGURE 1.13. Drawing rooms in the *Kunstkring*.
(Source: *Gedenkboek Nederlandsch-Indische Kunstkring Batavia 1902-1927, 1927*)

Collection of Leiden University Library
Repro by Aminudin TH Siregar

The *Kunstkring* branches in Solo (*Soerakartasche Kunstkring*) and Cirebon (*Cheribonsche Kunstkring*) were opened in 1918, the same year that an advisory committee for art and drawing education was established in the Netherlands.⁵⁵ The *Kunstkring* then opened drawing courses to improve fine art quality in the Dutch East Indies. Besides teaching art, the painters in the *Kunstkring* envisioned establishing art academies in the future (Fig.1.13). Quoting a report from *Kunstkring* architect P.A.J. Moojen, these courses systematically followed the principles of modern drawing education in the Netherlands.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ *De locomotief*, 19 June 1918, p.3.

⁵⁶ Helena Spanjaard, 1998, p.58.



FIGURE 1.14. Photo documentation taken on the opening day of the Regnault collection's first exhibition at the *Bataviasche Kunstkring* in 1935.
(Source: *De locomotief*, 12 January 1935)

The core of the arts (dance, theater, and music) and modern art was centered in the *Kunstkring* institution. Historians such as Burhan and Spanjaard endorse this, saying that the conducive terrain situation in the Dutch East Indies cannot be separated from the *Kunstkring* programs.⁵⁷ Meanwhile, De Loos-Haaxman even emphasized that the *Kunstkring* carried out a revolution in the artistic order in the colonies. The reason is that this institution has changed the art domain of the Dutch East Indies, which was initially isolated far from Europe, into an internationally networked field. The new building, erected in April 1914 in Batavia, increased confidence in the progress of art. So, to welcome a bright future, the *Kunstkring* administrators planned a fine arts museum.⁵⁸

In January 1935, the *Bond van Nederlandsch-Indische Kunstkringen* (Association of Netherlands East Indies Art Circles), organized an exhibition on the second floor of the *Kunstkring* building in Batavia, now Jakarta (Fig.1.14). This institution introduced people in the city to modern European

⁵⁷ M. Agus Burhan, *Perkembangan Seni Lukis Mooi Indie sampai Persagi di Batavia, 1900-1942*, (Jakarta: Galeri Nasional, 2014), p. 22-23 and Helena Spanjaard, 1998, pp.44-50.

⁵⁸ J. de Loos-Haxmaan, 1968, p.80.

paintings for the first time through the collection of Pierre Alexander Regnault, composed of three groups: Dutch, Belgian and French painters. The collections would broaden public knowledge of international modern art, considering Batavia did not yet have a modern art museum.⁵⁹ The city mayor confessed that the Netherlands-Indies Government tried for many years to open up this prospect in cooperation with the Netherlands Government. However, circumstances made it impossible to carry out this plan. Thanks to a private initiative, the museum plans were spontaneously taken up again from Holland, and Batavia still received its museum, albeit in a modified form, namely the Loan Museum.⁶⁰

Art historian Hans Jaffé wrote in his article, "P. A. Regnault en zijn collectie" (P.A. Regnault and his collection), as follows: "Pierre Alexandre Regnault (1868 - 1954) can be considered the most progressive and pioneering private collector in the Netherlands during the period between the two world wars: a collector of modern art with a clear preference for the avant-garde."⁶¹ Jaffé also stated that Regnault was more than just a collector of avant-garde works; he was also a pioneer in the field. He was the first to pave the way for art enthusiasts in the Netherlands and the former Dutch East Indies to gain access to the exciting developments in the field that had been taking place since the turn of the century.⁶² Regnault was the owner of a successful paint factory. He established the factory in 1925 and expanded it. He began producing paints in the Indies in 1927 and managed factories in Batavia, Semarang, Surabaya, and Singapore under the name *P.A. Regnaults Verf-Inkt-en Blikfabrieken* until 1938. As a result, the paint products became better suited to tropical climates than imported paints.⁶³

⁵⁹ Van onzen correspondent te Batavia "Het Museum voor Beeldende Kunsten. In het Kunstkringgebouw te Batavia met de Collectie Regnault - Bruikleen-museum gesticht door Initiatief van den Bond van N.I. Kunstkringen" in *De Locomotief*, 12 January 1935, p. 2.

⁶⁰ E.A. Voorneman, "Voorwoord" in *Museum van den Bataviaschen Kunstkring - Collectie Regnault*, catalogus, 1935, p. 3.

⁶¹ H. L. C. Jaffé, "P. A. Regnault en zijn collectie" in *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek (NKJ)/Netherlands Yearbook for History of Art*, 1981, Vol. 32, Verzamelen in Nederland (1981), p. 279. "Pierre Alexandre Regnault (1868 - 1954) mag als de meest vooruitstrevende en baanbrekende particuliere verzamelaar in Nederland gedurende het tijdperk tussen de beide wereldoorlogen worden beschouwd: een verzamelaar van eigentijdse kunst met een stellige voorkeur voor de avant-garde."

⁶² H. L. C. Jaffé, 1981, p. 290. "P. A. Regnault heeft niet alleen avant-gardistische kunst verzameld, hij is als collectioneur zelf avant-gardist geweest: hij was de eerste, die voor de belangstellenden in Nederland en in het voormalig Nederlands-Indië de mogelijkheid heeft geschapen om van de vernieuwingen in de kunst sinds het begin van deze eeuw kennis te nemen."

⁶³ Caroline Gerda Roodenburg-Schadd, *De Collectie Regnault in het Stedelijk - P.A. Regnault (1868-1954): verzamelend ondernemer en ondernemend verzamelaar van moderne kunst*, thesis, Universiteit van Amsterdam, 1995, p.42.



FIGURE 1.15. Various editions of *Verf en Kunst* and reviews on Vincent van Gogh.

Collection of National Archives the Hague
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

The paint manufacturer published *Verf en Kunst* monthly, combining paint promotions with articles reviewing modern European painters and their work, including photo reproductions. Regnault also actively wrote for this magazine. It was possible that the magazine circulated in several big cities and could be read by artists (Fig.1.15).

Apart from Regnault as the collector whose collection was displayed, The Hague-born art historian J. de Loos-Haaxman, who settled in Batavia in 1921, also played a significant role in curating this exhibition - and subsequent shows of the Regnault collection (Fig.1.16).⁶⁴

De Loos-Haaxman reflected on this event in 1936, writing that the collection exhibition aimed to bring artists from the Dutch East Indies into contact with Western modern painting. According to De Loos-Haaxman, this is the only way to connect the region's art scene to the rest of the world. Overall, these efforts by the *Kunstkring* laid solid foundations for fostering artistic growth and cultural exchange between nations through these

⁶⁴ N.N., "Schilderkunst in Indië en de Rijkseenheid" in *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 17 September 1935, p.9.

initiatives. By envisioning and actively working towards showcasing Batavia internationally, the *Kunstkring* set a precedent for future endeavors in this field. The prioritization of supporting facilities, such as updated lighting standards and improved exhibition management, exemplified their commitment to advancing the *Bataviaache Kunstkring* (Fig.1.17). The *Kunstkring* laid solid foundations for fostering artistic growth and cultural exchange between nations through these initiatives.⁶⁵ Of course, it would not be an exaggeration to say that the exhibition of Regnault's collections (from 1935 to 1940) that De Loos-Haaxman organized met her objectives and forever altered art history in the colony.



FIGURE 1.16. From left: P.A. Regnault, Governor General De Jonge, De Loos-Haaxman, and Alex Regnault in PAR office in 1936.

Collection of National Archives the Hague
Repro by Aminudin TH Siregar

⁶⁵ J. de Loos-Haaxman "Kunstkringen en de Bevordering der Beeldende Kunsten" in M. A. E. van Lith- van Schreven & J. H. Hooykaas-van Leeuwen Boomkamp, *Indisch Vrouwen Jaarboek*, (Jokjakarta: Druk Kolff Buning, 1936), p.96.



FIGURE 1.17.
Gallery's view of *Bataviaasche Kunstkring*.

Collection of Leiden University
Repro by Aminudin TH Siregar

Furthermore, at the fifth collection exhibition (1940), S. Sudjojono enjoyed the displays in the *Kunstkring*. He expressed his respect by observing the paintings of Johan Jacob Voskuil, Massimo Campigli, Georg Grosz, Marc Chagall, Constant Permeke, Wassily Kandinsky, and his favorite painter, Vincent van Gogh. Sudjojono also compared the materials of the fifth exhibition with those of the earlier exhibitions and concluded they were better. He wrote that the artists had brought *api modernisme* (the blaze of modernism).⁶⁶ Instead of opposing them, he suggested that Indonesian painters attend the exhibition because these European painters are *anak-anak djantan* (true gentlemen) – who deserve to be role models.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ SS.101, "Loekisan-loekisan Collectie Regnault ke-5" in *Keboedajaan dan Masjarakat*, No.10, February 1940, p.257. "Mereka hanya oetoesan-oetoesan dari waktoe tadi jang haroes membawa api modernisme ke moeka boemi ini."

⁶⁷ SS.101, 1940, pp.257-263. "Dan pada collectie ini kita bisa lihat pekerdjaan beberapa achli-achli meloekis dari benoea Eropah jang mengerti akan kewadajiban mereka sebagai anak-anak djantan dari waktoe dan masjarakat sana. Kalau kita lihat loekisan-loekisan mereka kita akan terperandjat barangkali, sebab loekisan-loekisan tadi tidak meloekiskan barang-barang atau hal-hal yang sama dengan apa-apa jang kita lihat sehari-hari."

Sudjojono and several other painters founded PERSAGI in 1938. The exhibitions of Regnault's collections in the *Bataviaasche Kunstkring* undoubtedly were a trigger behind PERSAGI's stance. However, many historians consider the year of PERSAGI's establishment as the beginning of modern Indonesian art with little credit to the events in the *Kunstkring*. They argue that PERSAGI was founded due to a growing sense of nationalism and a critical attitude towards Western art. As shown in Chapter 4, this outlook is partly accurate. Nationalism, rather than facts, have heavily overshadowed the historiography of PERSAGI.

The Raden Saleh Networks

Seeing Regnault's collections was one of many opportunities for Indonesian painters to gain access to modern European paintings. In addition, about a hundred years earlier, Raden Saleh experienced the same while in Europe (Fig. 1.18). He settled on the continent for more than two decades. He had an affluent network throughout his entire life. Raden Saleh was a child in Java when his drawing ability brought him into contact with A.A.J. Payen, C.G.C Reinwardt, and R.L.J. Baron van der Capellen.⁶⁸ Thanks to this circle, in March 1929, Raden Saleh was included later in the Jean Baptiste de Linge family group, who returned to the Netherlands.⁶⁹ In these Low Countries, Jean Chretien Baud, one of the founders of the *Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-Land- en Volkenkunde* (KITLV), would serve as a patron.

Raden Saleh not only studied painting techniques but also met other painters. He joined Cornelis Kruseman's circle in The Hague, among others.⁷⁰ Raden Saleh's painting exhibition was already advertised in the newspapers by

⁶⁸ Raden Saleh's entry into the circle of Dutch officials is also inextricably linked to his uncle, Raden Adipati Sosrohadimenggolo, Regent of Terbaya (Semarang), with whom he had a long association. See Baharudin Marasutan, *Raden Saleh (1807-1880): The Precursor of Painting in Indonesia*, (Jakarta: Dewan Kesenian Jakarta, 1973), pp. 11-10. According to Marie Odette Scalliet, there is no accurate information about the time and location related to the first meeting between Payen, who taught the young Raden Saleh. For further reading, see Marie-Odette Scalliet, *Antoine Payen, Peintre des Indes Orientales : Vie et écrits d'un artiste du XIXe siècle (1792-1853)*, Dissertation, Research School CNWS, Université de Leyde, Pays-Bas, pp. 72-75. Meanwhile, according to Herman F.C. ten Kate, the meeting between Payen and Raden Saleh occurred around 1826. See Herman F.C. ten Kate, "Schilder-Teekenaars in Nederlandsch Oost en West-Indië en hun Beteekenis voor de Land en Volkenkunde" in *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, 1913, Vol.67 (1), p. 454.

⁶⁹ "Scheepsberichten – Batavia" in *Javasche Courant*, 24 March 1829, p.1.

⁷⁰ *Letterkundig magazijn, van wetenschap, kunst en smaak voor het jaar 1833, Eerste Stuk 1833*, G van Dijk, Amsterdam, p.28. Further reading for Raden Saleh period in The Hague, see Jeanne de Loos-



FIGURE 1.15. Raden Saleh – lithography by Carl Wilhelm Meiling, circa 1865.

Collection of Municipal Archives of The Hague
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

Haaxman, "Raden Saleh in Den Haag" in *Jaarboek vereniging*, ('s-Gravenhage: Vereniging Die Haghe 1965), pp. 62-75.

1839.⁷¹ He returned to Java in 1852, having been the first trans-imperial painter to live in both Eastern and Western cultures. Raden Saleh traveled to Europe in the 1870s, taking advantage of his European network. It is undeniable that Raden Saleh has a genuinely unique artistic identity. He stands out as the sole painter from Java to be featured by Christiaan Kraam in Dutch art history. Not only is his name included in the annals of Indonesian art history, but Raden Saleh is also registered as a Dutch painter.⁷² Over a hundred of years later, his name was established in Indonesian art history as a pioneer in modern Indonesian painting⁷³ - just like Sudjojono and PERSAGI.

Essentially, the cases of Noto Soeroto, Sudjojono (PERSAGI), and Raden Saleh illustrate how artists and writers consistently engage in international collaborations and artistic exchanges. The cases examined also indicate the dissemination of ideas, texts, and artworks between cosmopolitan urban centers during the colonial era, demonstrating that modern paintings were not limited to isolated environments. The interactions occur due to the movement and relocation of both humans and objects and the transportation and mobility that extended beyond territorial boundaries. Hence, it is imperative to investigate this aspect in the historiography of contemporary Indonesian art.

The Urgency for a New Approach to Indonesian Art Historiography

Art history is a complex and multifaceted field that requires a comprehensive understanding of various categories of space, sources, origins, and perspectives. Relying on just one category or view to write art history would limit our experience and hinder the exploration of different narratives. Considering multiple categories of space, such as geographical locations, cultural contexts, and social environments, can give one a more holistic view

⁷¹ "Annonces" in *Journal de La Haye*, 17 March 1839, p.4. A possible exhibition location was Diligentia theatre, The Hague. See Advertentie in *Dagblad van's Gravenhage*, 4 March 1839, p.3.

⁷² See Christiaan Kraam, *De levens en werken der Hollandsche en Vlaamsche kunstschilders, beeldhouwers, graveurs en bouwmeesters, van den vroegsten tot op onzen tijd*, (Amsterdam: Gebroeders Diederichs, 1857-1864), p. 1337. See also Alb. Plasschaert, *Korte Geschiedenis Der Hollandsche Schilderkunst van af de Haagsche School tot op den Tegenwoordigen Tijd*, (Amsterdam: Nederl. Bibliotheek, 1923), p. 302.

⁷³ See Werner Kraus, *Raden Saleh: The Beginning of Modern Indonesian Painting*, (Jakarta: Goethe Institut, 2012).

of art history. Each category offers unique insights into the development and evolution of artistic movements. Similarly, relying on one source or origin would limit the understanding to a single viewpoint. It is crucial to explore art history in the case of Indonesia by encompassing diverse voices and perspectives to provide a well-rounded analysis and by incorporating multiple sources - including texts, interviews with artists, and archival materials - to create a more comprehensive narrative that reflects the complexity of artistic production.

In today's interconnected world, it is crucial to take a new approach by considering how ideas, texts, artworks, and artists move across countries and regions. This approach allows for the enrichment of cultures and promotes global understanding. Embracing the exchange of ideas and artistic expressions allows societies to break down barriers and foster creativity. Furthermore, this cross-cultural interaction encourages dialogue and empathy among different communities. Through this process, anyone can challenge stereotypes, promote diversity, and create a more inclusive society. It is therefore imperative to recognize the importance of embracing the movement of ideas, texts, artworks, and artists across borders.

After identifying several areas for improvement in art history writing, it is compulsory to find a way to critically examine the existing historiographical heritage. One way to challenge the dominant myopic Indonesian-centric perspective is by unearthing neglected historical sources that have been purposefully ignored to promote nationalist sentiment. The approach I will be taking can be summarized as "transnational art history". Only a few references directly offer this approach, in art history.⁷⁴ More references are found in history, where some proponents, however, argue that "transnational history" is an umbrella term encompassing well-established tools and perspectives such as historical comparison, (cultural) transfers, connections, circulations, entangled or shared history, and a modern form of international history. International history suggesting that "transnational history" refers to a point of view that has never been claimed to be an approach.⁷⁵

According to Ann Curthoys and Marilyn Lake, the interest in transnational history has increased during the 1990s and 2000s, and there is

⁷⁴ For instance, Rex Butler and A.D.S. Donaldson, *UnAustralian Art: Ten Essays on Transnational Art History*, (Sydney: Power Publications, 2023).

⁷⁵ Bernhard Struck, Kate Ferris & Jacques Revel, "Introduction: Space and Scale in Transnational History" in *The International History Review*, Vol.33, Issue 4, 2011, p.573.

now significant literature discussing what it is, why we need it, and how to approach it. Transnational history studies how past lives and events have been influenced by relationships and processes beyond nation-state borders. It involves understanding the ideas, things, people, and practices that have crossed national boundaries. Transnational history is often related to the national narrative but may seek to challenge, surpass, or avoid it altogether. Many of those who embrace transnational history use metaphors of fluidity to describe the movement and exchange of people, ideas, and goods across borders. They also use metaphors of connection and relationship to describe the interactions between different cultures and societies.⁷⁶

As commonly discussed among scholars, art history is often viewed through different lenses, including transnational, global, and national perspectives. In these circumstances, transnational art history examines artistic production - and its historiography - as a fluid process transcending national boundaries and engaging with various local, national and international cultural contexts. Unlike global art history, which focuses on broad patterns and connections across the globe, or national art history, which emphasizes the specificities of one nation's artistic heritage, transnational art historiography seeks to uncover relations and exchanges between different cultures and nations.⁷⁷

Of course, in this regard, some terms intersect with each other. Scholars Toshio Watanabe and Eriko Tomizawa-Kay suggested that the transnational is related to terms like transcultural, global, cross-cultural, cosmopolitan, multicultural, multinational, universal, world, etc. It may be noted that the term “transcultural” has a much broader applicability than

⁷⁶ Ann Curthoys and Marilyn Lake, *Connected Worlds: History in Transnational Perspective*, (Canberra: ANU E Press - The Australian National University, 2005), p. 5.

⁷⁷ For further reading regarding this subject, see for instance Kitty Zijlmans and Wilfried van Damme (eds), *World Art Studies: Exploring Concepts and Approaches*, (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2008); Kitty Zijlmans, "Pushing back frontiers: Towards a history of art in a global perspective" in *International Journal of Anthropology*, Volume 18, pp. 201–210, October 2003; Hans Belting, Andrea Buddensieg and Peter Weibel (eds), *Contemporary Art and the Museum: A Global Perspective*, (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2007); Hans Belting, Jacob Birken, Andrea Buddensieg and Peter Weibel (eds), *Global Studies: Mapping Contemporary Art and Culture*, (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2011), James Elkins (ed.), *Is Art History Global?* (New York: Routledge, 2007); James Elkins, Zhivka Valiavicharska and Alice Kim (eds), *Art and Globalization*, (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010); Matthew Rampley, Thierry Lenain, Hubert Locher, Andrea Pinotti, Charlotte Schoell-Glass, C. J. M. (Kitty) Zijlmans. *Art History and Visual Studies in Europe: Transnational Discourses and National Frameworks*. Boston: BRILL, 2012. Marcus Verhagen, *Flows and Counterflows: Globalisation in Contemporary Art*, (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2017); and Doris Bachmann-Medick (ed.), *The Trans/National Study of Culture: A Transnational Perspective*, (Berlin/Boston: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2014).

transnational, as it is not defined by modernity or any other periodization. The term transcultural has a much wider remit and is less historically bound by the concept of the national, while the transnational has a much narrower focus.⁷⁸ Similar to how Van der Vleuten and Feys define transnational history, I would propose seeing transnational art history as an approach that examines artistic production from a global perspective, considering how artworks and artists transcend national boundaries and engage with diverse cultural contexts. Unlike traditional approaches to studying art history that focus on individual nations or regions, transnational art history seeks to uncover connections and influences that span different cultures and geographies.⁷⁹ Transnational art history is designed as a perspective to examine (cultural) transfers, links, circulations, and entangled or shared history in particular networks.⁸⁰ In short, studying transnational art history provides valuable insights into the interconnectedness between cultures and nations that involve individuals. It emphasizes its significance in promoting inclusivity and interconnectedness by looking at artworks and artists from different angles, including their historical and cultural context and current reception.

A transnational approach is advantageous for challenging the monolithic canon as constructed and aimed by national perspectives. Therefore, according to some commentators, transnational history as an approach focuses on "coalitions and interactions across state boundaries",⁸¹ which concerns the movement of peoples, ideas, technologies, and institutions across national boundaries.⁸² However, applying a transnational art historical approach in this study does not mean ignoring national interests. As Akira Iriye, a Japanese historian and a leading commentator for the groundbreaking transnational approach to history, points out, "the nation as the critical unit of analysis remained."⁸³

⁷⁸ Eriko Tomizawa-Kay and Toshio Watanabe (eds.), *East Asian Art History in a Transnational Context*, (New York: Routledge, 2019), p.5.

⁷⁹ E. van der Vleuten and T. Feys, "Borders and Frontiers in Global and Transnational History. Introduction." in *Journal of Modern European History*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2016, p.31.

⁸⁰ For example, Clare Harris's study of the works of Tibetan-born-British artist Gonkar Gyatso. See Clare Harris "The Buddha Goes Global: Some Thoughts Towards a Transnational Art History" in *Art history*, 2006, Vol.29 (4), p.698-720, Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

⁸¹ Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye (eds.), *Transnational Relations and World Politics*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), p.xi and Akira Iriye, "Transnational History" in *Contemporary European History*, Vol. 13, Issue 2, 2004, Cambridge University Press, p.213.

⁸² Ian Tyrell, "What is transnational history?" in <https://iantyrrell.wordpress.com/what-is-transnational-history/>, accessed in 25 December 2022.

⁸³ Akira Iriye, *Global and Transnational History: The Past, Present, and Future*, (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p.12.

Therefore, following Iriye, although the transnational approach is prioritized, this research adheres to the national perspective - especially in using available resources within the national scope. As previously discussed, a transnational approach is more comprehensive and inclusive, while a national approach allows for a deeper understanding of cultural context. Proponents of transnational art historiography argue that it breaks down boundaries and provides a broader perspective. To achieve this, I argue that by examining the interconnectedness of different cultures, this approach highlights the shared influences and exchanges between artists across borders. Conversely, some supporters of national art historiography contend that focusing on specific countries or regions allows for more nuanced analysis. Art historians can better understand how political, social, and economic factors shape artistic production by delving into local contexts. This research therefore aims to take a transnational approach but not lose sight of national Indonesian art historical perspectives.

In summary, transnational and national art historiography have strengths and advantages. Transnationalism provides a more expansive perspective on artistic advancements, allowing for a broader understanding of the global interconnectedness of art movements. It emphasizes the exchange of ideas, influences, and collaborations across borders, enabling scholars to trace the development of artistic styles and techniques across different cultures. On the other hand, nationalism offers valuable insights into distinct cultural environments. Focusing on specific nations or regions allows a deeper exploration of local traditions, customs, and historical contexts that shape artistic production.

Both perspectives indeed contribute to art history writing. Therefore, this research aims to integrate elements from both views to generate a holistic picture, as far as possible. In addition, I assume that combining transnational and national perspectives creates a balanced understanding of artistic advancements within specific cultural contexts while recognizing global connections to develop more of the diverse factors that have shaped artistic production throughout history.

Research Structure

This study is organized into eight chapters representing three significant historical periods: the Dutch Colonial Period, the Japanese Occupation

Period, and the Revolution Period. Chapters 2-4 will cover the first period, Chapter 5 will examine the second period, and Chapters 6 and 7 will delve into the historiography issues of the last period. Chapter 8 will serve as the concluding chapter of this research.

Chapter 1, **Introduction**, this chapter presents the rationale for conducting the research, outlines the research questions, reviews existing literature on contemporary Indonesian art history, articulates the objectives and scope of the study, examines specific instances of national perspectives, and discusses the adoption of a transnational history approach.

Chapter 2, **On Raden Saleh**, elucidates the discourse surrounding the question of who was the real pioneering artist within the artistic community by focusing on Raden Saleh. There were two distinct camps. The initial advocate of Raden Saleh's work argued that the artist exhibited a strong sense of nationalism and, therefore, warranted recognition as a pioneering figure. The concept was met with scepticism and opposition from other centres. Instead, S. Sudjojono was selected as the pioneer due to his extensive national acclaim. This chapter additionally emphasizes the artistic contributions made by post-Raden Saleh artists who can bridge the gap between the generation of Raden Saleh and Sudjojono. The inclusion of this narration serves as a counter-history, challenging the prevailing notion propagated by numerous art historians that the Indonesians did not engage in any artistic endeavors for fifty years after the passing of Raden Saleh.

Chapter 3, **On Mooi Indië**, critically analyses the concept of Mooi Indië as both a term and a historical period. Most publications that adopt nationalist perspectives have portrayed Mooi Indië as a colonial painting style and have deemed it worthy of opposition. Discrimination can be attributed to the reliance of art historians on interpreting S. Sudjojono's texts published in 1939, rather than engaging with the historical evidence. Sudjojono criticized the Mooi Indië painters for their exclusive focus on portraying Indonesia's natural landscapes, neglecting to address the issues of oppression and colonialism within the country. This chapter will also elucidate Sudjojono's misinterpretation of Mooi Indië, initially the title of Ferdinand Du Chattel's watercolour album. Furthermore, this chapter critically examines the peculiarities surrounding art historians who have designated Mooi Indië as an art historical period while failing to present substantial arguments supporting this classification.

Chapter 4, **On PERSAGI**, unveils the fallacy surrounding the PERSAGI and critically examines prevailing misconceptions surrounding

this group, presenting a more impartial and balanced account of its historical trajectory. It also presents evidence that highlights significant flaws in the historical formation of PERSAGI. The revision of PERSAGI necessitates a more suitable alignment concerning the historical context of its establishment, the artistic endeavors undertaken by its members, and the nature of its exhibitions. Regrettably, there is a shortage of literature on PERSAGI despite its significant role as a celebrated and influential collective within the annals of modern Indonesian art. Art historians frequently encounter inaccuracies in its presentation of basic information, such as the list of group members or the year of establishment, often resorting to the uncritical replication of information from other sources. Furthermore, numerous art historians have constructed a narrative depicting this collective as a nationalist artistic movement that actively contested the prevailing dominance of the Mooi Indië style. This group is also portrayed as heroic in its resistance against the discriminatory practices of the *Bataviaasche Kunstkring*, thus solidifying its status as a nationalist art movement.

Chapter 5, **On the Japanese Occupation Era**, explores significant occurrences in art between 1942 and 1945 during the Japanese Occupation period in Indonesia. The primary objective of this chapter is to address the omissions present in canonical narratives, which tend to provide only concise and ambiguous accounts of this particular period. Consequently, the art produced during the Occupation has been subjected to marginalization and misinterpretation. This chapter explicates the imperative for heightened cognizance regarding the Japanese occupation era within Indonesian art history, explicitly elucidating how this period facilitated the progression of Indonesian contemporary art. Moreover, this chapter aims to expand upon the overarching national narrative by discussing networks, performances, and artistic transformations while also scrutinizing the significance of POETERA and *Keimin Bunka Shidosho* for the arts.

Chapter 6, **On Narrating Revolution Calling**, explores the complex relationship between artists and their involvement in Indonesian independence through chronological sections. It uses historical sources like newspapers, magazines, and memoirs to construct narratives about artists' activities during the revolution. The chapter emphasizes the importance of systematic searches and chronological analysis in understanding the era comprehensively.

Chapter 7, **On Debating Indonesian-ness**, addresses the shortcomings in the discourse surrounding the revolutionary period in art history. Consequently, this chapter endeavors to reconstruct pivotal

occurrences by drawing upon various sources, including the memoirs of artists and less commonly available resources such as news articles and art critiques published in magazines or newspapers. Numerous historians have thus far approached the study of the revolutionary period with a pronounced inclination towards fervent nationalism, thereby neglecting the contributions and involvement of non-Indonesian actors. This chapter exposes the interconnections, ramifications of military aggression, and discourses among Indonesian artists.

Chapter 8, **Conclusion**, reiterates the critical inquiry's objectives to examine the prevailing influence of the nation-centric paradigm in shaping the discourse surrounding post-colonial Indonesian art history. This paradigm has influenced the trajectory of art historical writing for a considerable time. Due to numerous national art historical frameworks, it is imperative to tackle this matter by examining a transnational perspective or integrating the two approaches by looking at a transnational perspective in conjunction with nationalist discourses. This particular viewpoint presents a novel approach to the study of art history, and its inventive and dynamic nature has significantly enhanced historical research in various aspects. Furthermore, this chapter presents suggestions for promoting a more comprehensive and inclusive approach to write an Indonesian art history.





FIGURE 2.1.
The cover of *Tempo*, 11 September 1976. Illustrator: Cahyono.

Collection of Leiden University Library
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

Chapter Two

On Raden Saleh

The cover of the 11 September 1976 issue of the Indonesian weekly magazine *Tempo* depicted a "hidden contest" between Raden Saleh and S. Sudjojono, two well-known painters in Indonesian art history (Fig.2.1). The latter is seen warmly putting his arm around Raden Saleh, as if they are engaged in conversation or simply joking. Raden Saleh sits upright and proud, his gaze suspiciously fixed on S. Sudjojono. Both artists have medals on their chests, but unlike Raden Saleh, S. Sudjojono's chest only has a badge that says "Seni Rupa Indonesia (Indonesian Art)." Their clothing is also eye-catching. S. Sudjojono appears to be on a beach picnic in his rose motif shirt. In contrast, Raden Saleh is dressed in his official, elegant black attire. His chest is adorned with symbols of the glory of the Dutch kingdom. Despite its appearance, the illustration has a serious recommendation because it represents one of Indonesian art history's latent debates concerning pioneer figures: who deserves to be regarded as a forefather in the history of Indonesian modern art?

The illustration of *Tempo's* front cover, including the reviews in the magazine, published in association with the *Se-Abad Seni Rupa Indonesia* (A Century of Indonesian Art) exhibition, opened up a heated debate concerning the pioneering artist in art history. Art critic Jim Supangkat evaluated this later as follows: "In 1976, the view that Raden Saleh should be placed at the beginning of the development of Indonesian painting suddenly emerged."¹ Supangkat's indication can be justified, considering that Raden Saleh was inducted as a pioneer on the opening day of the 1976 exhibition.

Having a role as Chairman of the Selection Board for the exhibition, Kusnadi even designated Raden Saleh as a period in art history. He commented, "The show historically begins with the Raden Saleh (1807 – 1880), which was around 1876 – 1937. This period was filled with Raden

¹ Jim Supangkat, *Titik Sambung: Barli Dalam Wacana Seni Lukis Indonesia*, (Jakarta: Etnobook, 1996), p.11.

Saleh himself."² To *Tempo*, critic and painter Baharudin Marasutan stressed that modern Indonesian painting should start with Raden Saleh, considering he was the first person from Java to "paint canvas with oil paints."³

In contrast, as quoted by *Tempo*, Sudjojono insisted on not acknowledging Raden Saleh as a pioneer. For him, PERSAGI - the group of artists formed by himself with Agus Djaya and several others, deserves to be the first milestone of modern Indonesian painting. The reason is that the spirit and soul of PERSAGI departed purely from the Indonesian people. As for Raden Saleh, stated Sudjojono, he did not consciously make art for his people.⁴ In other words, Raden Saleh has no "national consciousness."

Several years after the exhibition, Sudjojono reiterated in 1984 that Raden Saleh "did not deserve to be a pioneer of modern Indonesian painting because he was a coward." He expressed: "I do not agree, if a native painter from Indonesia paints his hero (Diponegoro) at the moment of his capture by the Dutch in a state of resignation, sluggish, without energy. Moreover, this hero and the other figures are portrayed in disproportionate anatomy, in an ugly state. It is not appropriate to turn a coward into a leader, let alone a pioneer."⁵

Sudjojono's attitude toward Raden Saleh is ambiguous, if not inconsistent. On another occasion, Sudjojono criticized most of Raden Saleh's paintings for being subdued; everything was as "happy" as heaven. However, "in a state of calm, safety, and comfort, a passive soul, an old soul, falling out of the wickedness of its time, has neither a motorbike nor a battery to propel it forward, nor an adventurous life." In turn, Sudjojono accused Raden Saleh of lacking the courage to "revolt to destroy the chain."⁶ For him, Raden Saleh

² *Tempo*, "Mengapa Sebuah Balai Pajang" in *Tempo*, 11 September 1976, p.15. Kusnadi's reference to determine the centennial (1876-1976) could have been more specific. I found no clues regarding peculiarities related to the year 1876 that could warrant functioning as the starting point for this period, not in the life of Raden Saleh, nor concerning a particular work connected to that date.

³ *Tempo*, "Suara Sekitar Balai", *Tempo*, 11 September 1976, p.14.

⁴ *Tempo*, "Suara Sekitar Balai" in *Tempo*, 11 September 1976, p.13-14.

⁵ Ipong Purnomo Sidhi "Komitmen Pak Djon pada Sang Penyanyi" in *Kompas*, 25 May 1993, p.16. "Saya tidak sependapat, bila seorang pelukis pribumi yang berasal dari tanah Indonesia melukiskan pahlawannya (Diponegoro) pada saat ditangkap Belanda dalam keadaan pasrah, loyo, tidak bertenaga. Apalagi pahlawan itu, beserta figur-figur yang ada digambarkan dalam anatomi yang tidak proporsional. Dalam keadaan yang jelek. Tidak pantas seorang pengecut dijadikan tokoh apalagi pelopor." From this quote, I think Sudjojono's assessment tends towards Pieneman's painting, not Raden Saleh's.

⁶ S. Sudjojono, "Djaman Raden Saleh Dibandingkan dengan Djaman Pelokis-pelokis Angkatan Moeda" in S. Sudjojono, *Seni Lukis, Kesenian, dan Seniman*, (Yogyakarta: Penerbit Indonesia Sekarang, 1946), p.47.

serves "as a reflection of Indonesia's historical past." By saying that, he wants to underscore the obsolescence of Raden Saleh's era.

Nevertheless, Sudjojono also acknowledged the figure of Raden Saleh, "who stands alone as a painter in the midst of the dark life of our nation."⁷ S. Sudjojono once even confirmed that Raden Saleh is "an Indonesian" who deserves high respect because he has carried the baton of art that the next generation must continue. Sudjojono wrote:

And every time I hear the name of *Taman Raden Saleh* (the Raden Saleh Garden) mentioned by people, or written in the newspapers because what's in the park, can say in their heart: my blood. Likewise, for every Indonesian son who likes to paint or draw, the name will be alive in his soul and the name is still vibrating as a living statue in the fantasy to be used as a measure of work, harder, more powerful, because the first stone that is what must be surpassed to rise to the top of Indonesian art.⁸

Given the difference in time between their colonial periods, it is highly problematic, if not unfair, to thoroughly compare these issues. Raden Saleh lived in the nineteenth century before the awakening of nationalist movements, and the concept of Indonesia as a political ideology had not yet emerged. In contrast, S. Sudjojono grew up in the twentieth century, coinciding with a new phase in the Dutch East Indies with "progress" as its motto. Words signifying "progress," like *voortgang*, *opheffing* (elevation of the people in the sense of education), *ontwikkeling* (development), and *opvoeding* (education), filled the language of the times, together with *bewordering van welvaart* (advancing prosperity).⁹

⁷ S. Sudjojono, 1946, p.46. "Raden Saleh hanya katja dari hidoep djamannja. Raden Saleh sebagai peloekis memang besar. Dan Raden Saleh sebagai katja doenia Indonesia didjaman jang lampau tetap menetapi djandji pekerdjaannja dan berdiri sendiri sebagai peloekis ditengah-tengah hidoep gelap bangsa kita."

⁸ S. Sudjojono, 1946, p. 55. See also S. Sudjojono "Taman Raden Saleh" in *Pandji Poestaka*, 9 January 1943, p.43. "Dan tiap-tiap kali kalau mendengar nama Taman Raden Saleh diseboet-seboet orang atau ditoelis dikoran-koran sebab ada apa-apa ditaman tadi, bisa berkata dalam hatinja: "Darahkoe." Begitoe djoega bagi tiap-tiap poetera Indonesia jang gemar meloekis atau menggambar, nama tadi akan lebih hidoep disanoebarinja dan teroes nama tadi menggetar sebagai patoeng hidoep dalam angan2 oentoek bisa dipakai sebagai soeatoe oekoeran bekerdja, lebih keras, lebih hebat, sebab baroe batoe pertama itoelah jang haroes dilampaui oentoek naik kepoentjak goenoeng seni-loekis Indonesia."

⁹ See Takashi Shiraishi, *Zaman Bergerak: Radikalisme Rakyat di Jawa 1912-1926*, (Jakarta: Pustaka Utama Grafiti, 1997), p. 35

The artistic concepts of S. Sudjojono were inspired by the era of national consciousness, specifically during the prevalent acceptance of the term "Indonesia," marked by the Youth Pledge (*Sumpah Pemuda*) in 1928.¹⁰ In the 1930s, he joined the political movement as a member of *Gerakan Rakyat Indonesia* or GERINDO (Indonesian People's Movement) - a left-wing and nationalist political party.¹¹ Raden Saleh was likely aware of the name Indonesia, as by 1850, the term "Indonesia" had already been mentioned in an ethnology journal by G.W. Earl and J.R. Logan. In this journal, "Indonesia" was used as a geographical term that meant the same as "Indian Archipelago." The term "Indonesia" is attributed to the two English scholars recognized as originators. Nevertheless, it was not until the initial twenty years of the 20th century that the name Indonesia became an "active community" imagined as a unity hoping to become a nation.¹² Consequently, it stands to reason that, in colonial literature, he was frequently denoted as a "Javanese Painter."

This chapter comprises two sub-chapters: *Debating the Pioneer* and *The Missing Chapter*, which ends with *Concluding Remarks*. The first sub-chapter emphasizes the need to critically analyze beliefs held by some that Raden Saleh is a nationalist, proven by how he composed resistance marks in his paintings. This is an essential aspect of his identity, and understanding it is crucial for a balanced view. Meanwhile, other opinions tend to reject it, arguing that the painter has expressed his loyalty to the Dutch Government on various occasions. Apart from these disputes, this sub-chapter suggests a broadened perspective on studying Raden Saleh, considering that he lives at the intersection of two distinct spheres: The Western and Eastern worlds.

The second sub-chapter analyzes the period following Raden Saleh's era, called an 'empty period.' Art historians believe it dates from Raden Saleh's demise in 1880 until the emergence of the next Indonesian painter in the 1930s. Is this devoid period accurate? Were there no painters after Raden Saleh passed? Did he have students? If so, did they learn directly from him?

¹⁰ The Youth Pledge propagated the ideal of 'One Archipelago, One People, One Language' (Satu Nusa, Satu Bangsa, Satu Bahasa). The threefold declaration of unity of nation, homeland and language, was made at a congress of nationalist youth organisations in Jakarta at the end of October 1928. See Keith Foulcher "Sumpah Pemuda: The Making and Meaning of a Symbol of Indonesian Nationhood" in *Asian Studies Review*, Volume 24 Number 3 September 2000, pp. 335-34.

¹¹ See Gunseikanbu, *Orang-orang Indonesia Jang Terkemoeka di Djawa*, (Djakarta: Gunseikanbu, 1943), p.426.

¹² For further discussion regarding these matters, see Jan B. Ave, "Indonesia," "Insulinde" and "Nusantara": Dotting The I's and Crossing the T*, *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 145 (1989), No. 2/3, Leiden, pp.220-221.

Beyond Raden Saleh's circle, who else could be noted to fill the void? This subchapter will elaborate on these questions by presenting a compilation of narratives from various sources.

Debating the Pioneer

The narrative on Raden Saleh following his return from Europe needs to be expanded upon. He arrived in Java in February 1852.¹³ Based on a letter from 1849 that I found in the Leiden University Library, Raden Saleh once mentioned his return. He declared, "*Tahoen 1850 saya maoe balik ke Java* (In 1850, I want to return to Java)" - without mentioning the reason (Fig.2.2). From the letter, he seemed to have planned his return about three years in advance.

After returning from a long peregrination in Europe, Raden Saleh lived in 19th-century Java, where the creative environment was not yet developed and being an artist as a career was not a priority among people at the time. There were no art events or talks. Instead, as Raden Saleh complained to his guests who came to his house, in French: "*Café et sucre, sucre et café, sont tout-ce qu'on parle ici. C'est vraiment un air triste pour un artiste* (Coffee and sugar, sugar and coffee, is all we talk about here. It is a dreary atmosphere for an artist)."¹⁴

Despite expressing discontent regarding the prevailing conditions, it is noteworthy that Raden Saleh, in May 1862, managed to organize his successful exhibition within the Weltevreden Palace in Batavia. According to the *Java Bode* newspaper, the people of Batavia were so enthusiastic to see the two paintings¹⁵ that the exhibition had to be extended.¹⁶ The editor of *Java Bode* praised the show as a watershed moment in history because it captured the pulse of art in Batavia.¹⁷ This first solo exhibition created by the

¹³ "Aangekomen Vreemdelingen te Batavia" in *Javasche courant*, 25 February 1852, p.9.

¹⁴ W. Basil Worsfold, *A Visit to Java - With an Account of the Founding of Singapore*, (London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1893), p.48.

¹⁵ One of the paintings portrays a moving humanitarian drama enacted by the Javanese people during a flood disaster, while the other captures the serene landscape of Megamendung in West Java. The paintings are *De Watersnood in 1861 op Java* and *Een gezigt op den Megamendung (het gebergte tusschen Buitenzorg en Tjiandjoer)*. See "Kolonien" in *Dagblad van Zuidholland en 's Gravenhage*, 29 June 1862, p.2.

¹⁶ *Nederlandsch-Indië: Batavia* in *Java-bode: nieuws, handels-en advertentieblad voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, 14 May 1862, p.4.

Dan lagi lain tahun 1850
saja, mave balik ka Jawa
dan saja. nanti datang
sama. Tera. Gaset kasji
tate adang

Daris Tera sweng
sabat janyanet guta
dan Horuat Nama
Cama

Raden Saleh
Luzern 29. Aug.
1849.

FIGURE 2.2.
Raden Saleh's letter, 1849.

Leiden University Library Collection
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

¹⁷ Java Bode, 1862, p.4.



FIGURE 2.3.
Raden Saleh standing with his hands on his hips on the second-floor terrace of his Batavia house circa 1865.

Leiden University Library Collection
Photo by Woodbury & Page

local painter has received limited attention from historiographers, excluding Werner Kraus. According to Kraus, the exhibition occurred at Raden Saleh's home (Fig.2.3), as mentioned in *Kunst op Java* (1863).¹⁸ However, after thoroughly examining the article, it is critical to note that the precise location of the exhibition is not explicitly indicated.¹⁹ In addition, some local newspapers reported that the show was held at the "Paleis te Weltevreden." I assume it was the Governor General's residence rather than Raden Saleh's.²⁰ The assertion is supported by the album *Vues de Java: Photographies par Woodbury & Page* (1863 - 1866). The Weltevreden palace is depicted in this album as the residence of Herman Willem Daendels²¹, the Governor General, whom Raden Saleh once painted (Fig. 2.4).

¹⁸ Werner Kraus, *Raden Saleh: His Life and Work*, (Jakarta: KPG Gramedia, 2018), pp.405-406.

¹⁹ See Gerard Keller (ed.), "Kunst op Java," *Kunstkronijk*, Nieuwe Serie-Vierde jaargang, Te Leyden: A.W. Sythoff, Directeur der Houtgraveerschool, 1863, p.16.

²⁰ "Advertentie" in *Bataviaasch handelsblad*, May 10, 1862, p.6; "Advertentie" in *Bataviaasch handelsblad*, 17 May 17, p.3; and "Advertentie" in *Java-bode: nieuws, handels-en advertentieblad voor Nederlandsch-Indie*, 24 May 1862, p.3.

²¹ See *Advertentie Woodbury & Page* in *Bataviaasch handelsblad*, 3 June 1863, p.2.



FIGURE 2.4.
Paleis te Weltevreden.

Leiden University Library Collection
Photo by Woodbury & Page

Several authors suggest Raden Saleh experienced identity uncertainty. De Loos-Haaxman portrayed Raden Saleh's arrival in Batavia as "becoming a Javanese who did not live in Java nor did he become a European and reportedly lonely and failed to be a 'European'."²² However, Harsja Bachtiar called him a modern man²³ who was not 100% Javanese,²⁴ Werner Kraus writes that he was not prepared to live a new life in his homeland as an "inlander."²⁵ The testimony of José Emilio Pardo, a Spanish sailor who encountered Raden Saleh at his residence in Batavia in early 1867, presents an additional intriguing perspective to consider. Pardo acknowledged, "*El Raden habla mucho de Europa, y todo su afán y todo su anhelo tiraba á demostrarnos que él era más europeo que javanés*" (Raden talks a lot about Europe, and all his eagerness and longing for him tended to show us that he was more European than Javanese).²⁶

²² J. De Loos-Haaxman, *Verlaat Rapport Indië*, ('S-Gravenhage: Mouton & Co. Uitgevers, 1967), p.74.

²³ Harsja Bachtiar, *Raden Saleh: Bangsawan, Pelukis dan Ilmuwan* in J.J. Rizal (ed.), *Raden Saleh: Anak Belanda, Mooi Indië dan Nasionalisme*, (Jakarta: Komunitas Bambu, 2009), p.45.

²⁴ H. J. de Graaf "De Tentoonstelling: Nederlandse Schilders en Tekenaars in De Oost" in *Tong Tong*, 17 November 1972, p.6.

²⁵ Werner Kraus, 2005, p.277. See also G.H. von Faber, 1949, p.4.

²⁶ Thebussem (ed.), *José Emilio Pardo de Figueroa y de la Serna: Algunos escritos del teniente de Navio*, (n.p.), 1873, p.182.

The assignment of Raden Saleh as the "King's Painter" by King Willem III in 1849 may have been motivated by a particular reason related to this matter. Harsja Bachtiar interpreted that the assignment of this honorable title was not based solely on Raden Saleh's extraordinary mastery in painting but also on the King's intention of aiding the painter's seamless reintegration into the social structure of his Javanese relatives.²⁷ Raden Saleh can now live his new life in Java without any embarrassment as a native, thanks to this title. On the other hand, this title reflects Raden Saleh's comfort in being privileged as "more European than Javanese."

Nevertheless, one may question the rationale behind Raden Saleh's decision to return to Java despite being aware of his homeland's underdeveloped and financially unrewarding artistic environment. Historians have not yet properly investigated the precise reason for this matter. Soekanto assumed that the return of Raden Saleh was because the Diponegoro War (1825-1830) was over, where Raden Saleh's family was involved in the war. Therefore, Raden Saleh was no longer a "dangerous figure" because he was surrounded by "Europeesche Kringen (European Circles)."²⁸

Scholar I Ketut Winata has a different opinion. According to him, the painter's decision to return was related to a deep yearning and affection for his homeland.²⁹ However, Winata quotes French historian Bernard Dorleans³⁰, which is worth questioning because Dorleans does not disclose the source's origin. Apart from these factors, Werner Kraus assumed that the Dutch government wanted Raden Saleh to return to Java for administrative work in the government office, perhaps as a map draftsman. At the same time, to continue with Kraus, Raden Saleh developed a longing for his land of birth. His mother was still alive and sent him several letters. Raden Saleh also received letters from his other relatives urging him to return home.³¹

Raden Saleh returns home to face new challenges and ambiguity in various areas. His adventures over the years have shaped him into a man who thinks like a European but lives in Java. Because of his dualistic attitude and

²⁷ Harsja Bachtiar "Raden Saleh: Aristocrat, Painter, and Scientist" in *Indonesian Journal of Cultural Studies*, No.3, Volume VI, Agustus 1976, p.44.

²⁸ Dr. Soekanto, *Dua Raden Saleh*, (Jakarta: N.V. Poesaka Asli, 1951), p.18.

²⁹ I Ketut Winata, *Lukisan-lukisan Raden Saleh - Ekspresi Anti-kolonial*, (Jakarta: National Gallery, 2007), p.97.

³⁰ See Bernard Dorleans, *Orang Indonesia Dan Orang Prancis: Dari Abad XVI sampai dengan Abad XX*, (Jakarta: KPG, 2006), p.47.

³¹ Interview with Werner Kraus, Electronic E-mail, Saturday, April 8th, 2017, 10:53 PM.



FIGURE 2.5.
Zuber Usman, "Sedikit Pembitjaraan Tentang Seni Lukis Indonesia,"
Mimbar Indonesia, 16 October 1948.

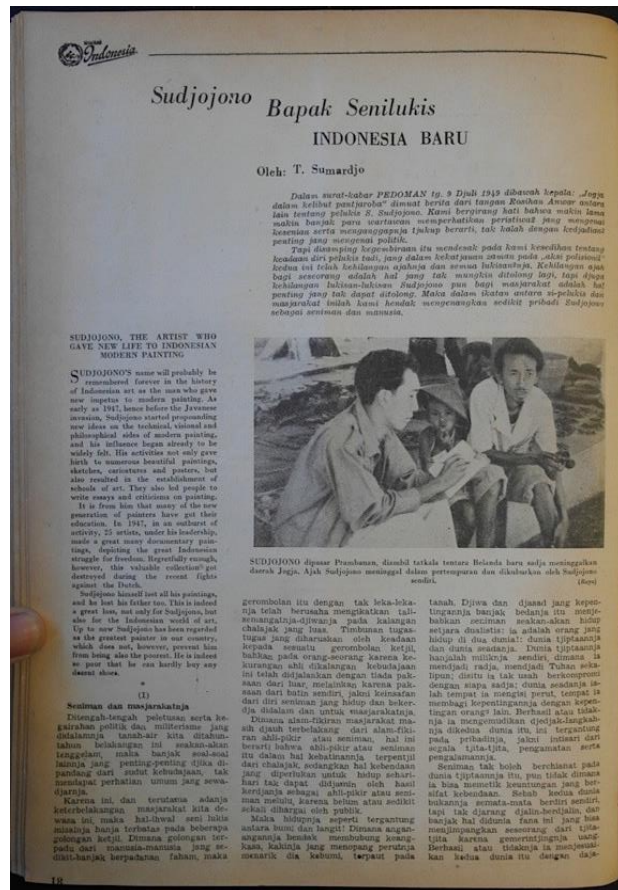
Leiden University Library Collection

Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

his self-focus, nationalist art critics question his patriotism. They set the standard that the ideal Indonesian pioneer artist should inspire future generations and leave a lasting impression in their fields. Raden Saleh only partially embodied these characteristics, while S. Sudjojono was considered the ideal artist.

Figure 2. 6.
Trisno Sumardjo's article on *Sudjojono Bapak Seni Lukis Indonesia Baru*
(Source: *Mimbar Indonesia*, 8 October 1949, p.18)

Leiden University Library Collection
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar



Raden Saleh or S. Sudjojono?

The need for a hero in post-colonial Indonesia grew amid the spirit of decolonization, encouraging artists and art critics to formulate recommendations for pioneers of Indonesian art history. Two candidates, Raden Saleh and Sudjojono, have been considered to have made significant contributions. There were three successive articles in *Mimbar Indonesia's*

magazine³² on this subject. The first is an article by critic Zuber Usman in the October 1948 issue, where he writes about three phases of Indonesian modern art history and places Raden Saleh as a pillar: *Raden Saleh*, *Generation After Raden Saleh*, and *New Generation* (Fig.2.5). Usman argued that "Raden Saleh Syarief Bustaman started the history of Indonesian painting" even though "he at his time was unable to encourage the emergence of new generations of Indonesian painters." However, Usman continues, Raden Saleh is credited with introducing his nation to the art of painting and representing it on the world stage.³³

A few months later, in the July 1949 issue of the same magazine, artist Suromo offered his version of the pioneering work in art history in the same magazine. He stated that new Indonesian painting originated in the pre-World War II era by young, modestly educated youth living in Jakarta and Bandung. Despite being poor and coming from various regions, they struggled to make a living and had limited access to art tools. Despite the absence of educational institutions, these artists persevered in pursuing art despite the challenges they faced at that time.³⁴ Suromo's statement targeted PERSAGI painters, contrasting their lower-class struggle for painting equipment with Raden Saleh's aristocratic upbringing and his opportunity to explore Europe for artistic exploration.

The third article in the *Mimbar Indonesia* magazine, in the issue of October 1949, published three months after Suromo's, holds immense historical significance as it unequivocally credits Sudjojono's unparalleled prowess in pushing the boundaries of Indonesian art (Fig.2.6). Interestingly, the article opens with paragraphs in English, perhaps to attract international readers to Sudjojono's role in developing Indonesian modern painting:

"S. Sudjojono: the artist who gave new life to modern Indonesian painting. S. Sudjojono's name will probably be remembered forever in the history of Indonesian art as the man who gave new impetus to modern painting. S. Sudjojono started propounding new ideas on the technical, visional and philosophical sides of

³² Further reading about *Mimbar Indonesia*, see Els Bogaerts, "Whither Indonesian culture? Rethinking 'culture' in Indonesia in a time of decolonization" in Jennifer Lindsay and Maya H.T. Liem (eds.), *Heirs to World Culture: Being Indonesian 1950-1965*, (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2012), pp. 223-248.

³³ Zuber Usman, "Sedikit Pembicaraan tentang Seni Lukis Indonesia" in *Mimbar Indonesia*, No.42, 16 October 1948, p.17.

³⁴ Suromo, "Timbul dan Tumbuhnya Seni Lukis Indonesia" in *Mimbar Indonesia*, No.27, 2 July 1949, p. 19.

modern painting and his influence already began to be widely felt. He also resulted in the establishment of a school of art, also led people to write essays and criticisms on painting under his leadership made a great many documentary paintings, depicting the great Indonesian struggle for freedom. Up to now, S. Sudjojono has been regarded as the greatest painter in our country.”³⁵

According to Trisno Sumardjo, who wrote the article, the attribution of Sudjojono as the “Father of New Indonesian Painting” can be seen as a recognition of his innovative approach to painting techniques within a contemporary context. Sudjojono's influential impact on other painters stems from his unwavering perspective in promoting Indonesian painting by portraying distinctly Indonesian subjects. Furthermore, he founded a studio, which can be considered a non-formal educational institution, under the auspices of PERSAGI to nurture aspiring painters. Sumardjo continues:

“S. Sudjojono 101 - so he calls himself - is a person who consciously understands the essence of art in general and painting in particular, and the first person in Indonesia who produces the fruits of painting according to new techniques and styles and visions according to the spirit of the times. At a time when the Indonesian people fell asleep in the arms of colonization, when Indonesian artists mostly sold and claimed to be artists, when some talented young men hesitantly groped the slippery art path, Sudjojono's soul grew and grew, as the fruits that open a new page in the history of Indonesian painting.”³⁶

A month after Sumardjo glorified Sudjojono as a father of modern Indonesian art, painter Soemarno Soetosoendoro made a provocative statement in *Indonesia* - a cultural magazine, claiming that Indonesian painting is merely a process of imitating Western painting. Consequently, Raden Saleh's designation as a pioneer makes more sense. Soetosoendoro overlooks the contributions of new-generation artists such as S. Sudjojono and PERSAGI. Soetosoendoro concluded, "We need to mention an Indonesian, Raden Saleh,

³⁵ Trisno Sumardjo “S. Sudjojono: Bapak Seni Lukis Indonesia Baru” in *Mimbar Indonesia*, III/4, 8 October 1949, pp.18-21.

³⁶ Trisno Sumardjo, 1949, p. 18.

who at the beginning of the history of new Indonesian painting, because at that time he was not only famous among the Indonesian people, but also famous among Western society in Indonesia (and in the field of painting in Europe)."³⁷ Soetosoendoro used Raden Saleh's popularity as a central argument. He went on to say that for a long time, reproductions of Raden Saleh's paintings such as *The Flood in Java*, *Boschbrand*, and *Op Leven en Dood* served as references: "Every Indonesian child who has attended school will still remember those reproductions," Soetosoendoro recalls.³⁸

The debate did not occur again until later, in 1954, when the critic Rivai Apin strengthened the idea to promote Sudjojono as "a pillar of Indonesian painting." Apin opens his writing by saying: "In Indonesia the person who started painting is Sudjojono." He argued that, compared to Raden Saleh, Sudjojono succeeded in sublimating Western techniques to encourage Indonesian painting "as a new understanding (*sebagai sebuah pemahaman baru*) for Indonesian painters." In addition, Sudjojono is considered to have successfully created the art of painting as a matter of life by placing historical awareness as a reference to advance the circumstances around him. In other words, Sudjojono's persona and his works have strongly influenced other painters.³⁹

The influence of recommendations provided by critics and artists in magazines on shaping opinion is significant, although it is challenging to ascertain how far it influences public decisions. What is interesting is that the state later took its stance in this debate. Seminar 1956 was the pinnacle of the "formal legalisation" of the pioneer, as described in Chapter 1. Kusnadi, from the government, classified Raden Saleh as a novice in modern art. Simultaneously, Sumardjo proposed PERSAGI (or Sudjojono) in a discussion session of that seminar, which did not appear to be well received. Trisno Sumardjo then wrote his critical version of art history in 1957, potentially motivated by his discontentment with the seminar's outcomes. The article, titled *Kedudukan Seni Rupa Kita* (The Position of Our Art) was published in

³⁷ Soemarno Soetoesoendoro, "Seni Lukis Kita dalam Mencari Jalan" in *Indonesia*, No.10, November 1949, p.589. "Seorang Indonesia yang pada permulaan sejarah seni lukis Indonesia baru, perlu kita sebutkan, karena pada waktu itu tidak hanya termasyhur dikalangan bangsa Indonesia, akan tetapi terkenal pula di kalangan masyarakat Barat di Indonesia (dan dilapangan seni lukis di Eropa) ialah Raden Saleh."

³⁸ Soemarno Soetoesoendoro, 1949, p. 589. See also G.A. Warmansjah, *Raden Saleh: The Well-Known Forgotten Artist*, (Jakarta: Government of DKI Jakarta Museum and History, 1979), p. 15. Warmansjah says that the name of Raden Saleh has been introduced to children at the elementary school level since Dutch, Japanese and Independence times because the reading is available to them.

³⁹ Rivai Apin, "Catatan-Catatan di Malam Tenang" in *Siasat*, 14 March 1954.

the *Almanak Seni* (Art Almanack). Sumardjo firmly denies Raden Saleh's role as a pioneer of modern Indonesian art in this lengthy essay. Instead, he put forward S. Sudjojono and his group PERSAGI.⁴⁰

Fast forward to 1979, when the Government finally published the authoritative book *Sejarah Seni Rupa Indonesia* through the Ministry of Education and Culture. The outline of historical periodization in this first official history book has changed very little from the text that Kusnadi once gave at the seminar. This book places Raden Saleh as a pioneer, not S. Sudjojono nor his group PERSAGI.

The debate continued between Sudarmadji and Dan Suwaryono. In his book, *Seni Lukis Jakarta dalam Sorotan* (Jakarta Painting in the Spotlight), Sudarmadji paraphrased Suwaryono's statement regarding his proposition to place Raden Saleh as a pioneer. According to Sudarmadji, Suwaryono established Raden Saleh as the pioneer of modern Indonesian art since he was the first Indonesian painter to express his ideas and thoughts in a Western way, painting realistically by taking on new techniques and styles. In contrast, Sudarmadji expressed his disagreement. Considering the magnitude of S. Sudjojono's influence in the effort to lay the foundations of modern painting in Indonesia, Sudarmadji argued that the pioneering of Indonesian art began with S. Sudjojono.⁴¹

However, if I look closely at Suwaryono's texts published in 1970, he offers a fundamental argument suggesting inclusivism in historical writing. According to him, the perspective for studying Raden Saleh and his works must be broadened by uncovering "complex and problematic relationships and influences."⁴² Reading Suwaryono's thoughts on Raden Saleh, I assume he was trying to offer a historical perspective not entangled by nationalism. Instead, he provided ideas to assess Raden Saleh from a broader art historical framework since the painter lived in an international network. At that time, Suwaryono's ideas - which I interpret today as a transnational art history perspective, were still unfamiliar to the art world.

⁴⁰ Trisno Sumardjo, "Kedudukan Seni Rupa Kita" in Zaini (ed.), *Almanak Seni 1957*, (Jakarta: BMKN, 1956), pp. 127-132.

⁴¹ Sudarmadji, *Seni Lukis Jakarta dalam Sorotan*, (Jakarta: Dewan Kesenian Jakarta, 1974), p. 8. In a previous instance, Sudarmadji tried to persuade the art community to acknowledge Sudjojono as a pioneer in modern Indonesian art, as opposed to Raden Saleh or Affandi. Sudarmadji formulated the proposition above as a reaction to the Government's exclusion of Sudjojono from the list of artists to be awarded. See "Jang Dilupakan: S. Soedjojono - Peletak Dasar Seni Lukis Indonesia Modern" in *Sinar Harapan*, 10 December 1969.

⁴² See Dan Suwarjono "Eksistensi Seni Lukis Indonesia (Penghampiran Historis)" in *Kompas*, 23 February 1970.



FIGURE 2. 7. Raden Mas Pirngadie, circa 1925.

Leiden University Libraries Digital Collections.

Apart from the contestation among artists and art critics to determine the pioneering nature, either Raden Saleh or Sudjojono, an exciting and essential offer to ponder was offered by Sutan Takdir Alisyahbana in *Mas Pirngadie: Ahli Gambar Bangsa Indonesia* (Mas Pirngadie: An Expert Draftsman of the Indonesian Nation). Alisyahbana wrote that the role and contribution of Mas Pirngadie (Fig.2.7) as a painter deserved to be a historical milestone, as he put his mark on Indonesian painting in the early 20th century, which, according to Alisyahbana, "struggled to leave the darkness and move towards the glittering dawn" and because Pirngadie's

significant contribution to Indonesian painting is "a movement in the arts that is no less important than a political movement."⁴³

In his writing, Alisyahbana did not explain in detail what "a movement in the arts" meant. But I suspect it relates to Pirngadie's popularity in the colonial art scene since the beginning of the 20th century compared to his contemporaries such as Abdullah Suriosubroto. For example, in 1904, Pirngadie's name was already known because he had the honorable task of accompanying J.E. Jasper on various trips around remote areas to collect materials for standard works on indigenous arts and crafts that the government published as monumental books under the title *De inlandsche kunstnijverheid in Nederlandsch Indië* (The Indigenous Arts and Crafts in the Dutch East Indies) in five volumes between 1912 and 1930. For this project, Pirngadie produced around two thousand drawings. Besides this project, he was known as a member of the prestigious institution *Koninklijke Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen* (Royal Batavian Society of Arts and Sciences) and actively exhibited his artworks in various mediums, such as etching, painting, and watercolor.⁴⁴ Especially for etching, I argue that he should be considered a pioneer, considering that he had already exhibited this print technique in 1920.⁴⁵

Alisyahbana was quite reasonable when he named Pirngadie as a pioneer. Throughout his career, Pirngadie's name was very well known for the many awards he received for the achievements of his works and the exhibitions he organised.⁴⁶ Ironically, as discussed in the next chapter, later art historiographers mostly placed Pirngadie into the antagonist frame with the label "Mooi Indie painters" and gave way to his student, Sudjojono, as the protagonist.

Was Raden Saleh Patriotic?

A central point of discussion in deciding whether Raden Saleh could be considered the pioneer of modern Indonesian art was whether he was sufficiently patriotic – or nationalist in the Indonesian sense. In addition to

⁴³ S.T.A., *Mas Pirngadie: Ahli Gambar Bangsa Indonesia in Poedjangga Baroe*, Th. 1, July 1933 – July 1934, p. 161-166 and No.2, Juli, p. 236 – 248.

⁴⁴ See "Mas Pirngadie" in *De Indische courant*, 8 April 1936, p.14.

⁴⁵ See "Kunst en Letteren - Schilderkunst. Het Indisch pallet op de Jaarbeurs te Bandoeng" in *De locomotief*, 22 May 1920, p.2.

⁴⁶ For further reading about Pirngadie, see H. Van Meurs "A Javanese Artist Painter" in *Sluyters' Monthly – East Indian Magazine*, Number 2, February 1922 pp.134-135.

his prominent position in Indonesian art history, Raden Saleh is registered as a Dutch painter and this attribution to two worlds cast doubt on his “nationalism.”⁴⁷ Werner Kraus, for instance, believed that uncertainty (about his identity) permeated Raden Saleh's existence and during his time in the Netherlands, France, and Germany, the painter thought he could blend his East and West identities while merging the values of his native Java with those of Europe.⁴⁸ However, Kraus believed that a few years before his death, a drastic change in attitude indicated that his spirit was leaning towards Europe. In a correspondence addressed to his friend Ernest II, Duke of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, Raden Saleh expressed his uncertainty about staying physically in Java, whereas his consciousness remains rooted in Europe. He encountered stunning natural landscapes, but he felt uncomfortable with the people.”⁴⁹

Up to this point, I think Raden Saleh experienced tension due to inhabiting two realms, East and West, which is difficult for him to overcome. Therefore, discussing him necessitates understanding and embracing the complexities of these contrasting worlds. He may know that traditional Javanese art has been intricately linked with spirituality and a deep respect for customs. As the heir apparent to this lineage, he may have been confronted with the ethical quandary of reconciling individualistic artistic manifestation with compliance with societal norms and expectations. Conversely, he must have had a profound understanding that throughout history, European painters have embraced individualism and the liberty to defy conventions, presenting them with an opposing array of ethical dilemmas centered on genuineness and innovation.

The tension of identity as a painter living in two worlds is a complex matter since it influences the artist's sense of self. Furthermore, this aspect must be investigated more deeply rather than confining it to the cage of nationalism. When an artist lives amidst two opposing artistic worlds—one might consider societal norms and the other considering artistic freedom—

⁴⁷ See Christiaan Kraam, *De levens en werken der Hollandsche en Vlaamsche kunstschilders, beeldhouwers, graveurs en bouwmeesters, van den vroegsten tot op onzen tijd*, (Amsterdam: Gebroeders Diederichs, 1857-1864), p. 1337. See also Alb. Plasschaert, *Korte Geschiedenis Der Hollandsche Schilderkunst van af de Haagsche School tot op den Tegenwoordigen Tijd*, (Amsterdam: Nederl. Bibliotheek, 1923), p. 302.

⁴⁸ Werner Kraus, “Raden Saleh di Jerman” in *Jurnal Kebudayaan Kalam*, No.21, 2004, p. 9.

⁴⁹ Werner Kraus, 2004, p.9-10. „Percayalah Yang Mulia, hanya tubuh kami yang berada di Jawa, jiwa dan pikiran kami masih tertinggal di Eropa. Di Jawa kami dapati alam yang indah, tapi mencintai masyarakat seperti ini tidaklah alamiah, bertentangan dengan alam.”

their sense of self inevitably faces conflicts and contradictions. The cultural dichotomies that artists must navigate further intensify this tension. Artists often struggle with different values, aesthetics, and cultural expectations. Their artistic identity simultaneously merges and confronts the diverse perspectives of their upbringing, their education, and the communities they belong to. This negotiation of cultural influences and artistic inclinations can lead to fragmentation within an artist's identity, as happened to Raden Saleh, making it difficult to establish a coherent creative expression rooted in their two worlds.

Moreover, the emotional aspect of this struggle cannot be overlooked. This constant assessment of their work and personal identity can instigate an intricate range of emotions, such as self-doubt, anxiety, and even confusion about their place within the art world - a world that Raden Saleh did not discover while in Java. The resulting emotional turmoil further adds to the tension of the artists' identity as they grapple with their perceived inadequacies and the need to establish their artistic voice among societal expectations. I think Raden Saleh's writers seem to have paid little attention to these issues. Soekanto, for example, asserts in his book *Dua Raden Saleh* (Two Raden Saleh) that Raden Saleh, despite his prolonged residence in Europe, possesses a patriotic spirit. He suggests that Raden Saleh's persistent awareness of the plight of his people can be attributed to his ancestral ties to a revolutionary dynasty and his familial relationship with Prince Diponegoro.⁵⁰

Of course, Raden Saleh knows that his family played a role during the Java War, just as he is also aware of the risks of being part of a family that is indicated to have joined the rebellion. Nevertheless, Soekanto's assumptions do not necessarily confirm Raden Saleh's loyalty towards his origin, the Indies (or Java), or Europe since there is little evidence to support one of the two directions.

The lack of clarity in Raden Saleh's stance on colonialism was a significant factor leading to reluctance on the part of opponents of his candidacy for pioneers to acknowledge him as a prominent figure in modern Indonesian painting. Art critic Enin Supriyanto stated, "First of all, Indonesia does not yet exist, so where would such nationalism refer to? Second, how can we claim that Raden Saleh was a nationalist just by looking

⁵⁰ Dr. Soekanto, *Two Raden Saleh/Dua Raden Saleh*, (Jakarta: N.V. Poesaka Asli, 1951), pp. 9-20.

at one painting and not observing his possibly hundreds of others? How can we make a comparison?"⁵¹

In the same tone as Supriyanto, Agus Dermawan T. challenges Raden Saleh's notion of nationalism on the grounds of anachronism. Dermawan contends that the national awakening in Indonesia can be traced back to the early 20th century, specifically with the emergence of Boedi Oetomo's movement in 1908. It is important to note that Raden Saleh's demise predates this significant historical development by several years.⁵² In contrast, to underscore Raden Saleh's lack of patriotism, Dermawan bases his argument on Raden Saleh's admission of loyalty to the Dutch when he was accused by the court of instigating a riot in April 1869 in Bekasi or *De Bekassische onlusten*. *De Bekassische onlusten* requires examination here, considering that there were accusations of Raden Saleh's involvement in the bloody riot, which led to him being questioned by the authorities.

In his paper "Agrarian Radicalism in Java: Its Setting and Development", social historian Sartono Kartodirdjo begins the riot story with someone named Arpan, who discovers that his ancestors owned land in the Bekasi regency of West Java. To prove his claim, Arpan refers to copper plates. He then meets Bapa Rama, who also claims the land. Both agreed that the land would be divided between them. To substantiate their claims, they asked the famous Raden Saleh for help through the intercession of a certain Bapa Kollot. However, it turned out that the copper plate had nothing to do with the land they claimed. Arpan disappeared from the scene, while Bapa Rama and Bapa Kollot (or Bassa Kollot) united in upholding the claim namely of Bapa Rama). For that, they went to visit Raden Saleh in Surakarta. The story of this visit spread widely among the local farmers and increased their prestige. An older man from Bekasi confirmed Bapa Rama's claim on the land. At the end of 1868, Bapa Rama and Bapa Kollot gathered many followers who believed in them. They declared that the land between the Tjitarum and Tjidani rivers belonged to these two men and that the lease on land that the government had used had expired.

Kartodirdjo continues that some meetings then took place. This group grew more prominent and vowed to forcefully take back the land between the

⁵¹ This quote is from the interview of Budi N.D. Dharmawan with Enin Supriyanto. See Budi N.D. Dharmawan, "Pionir di Celah Dua Loka", in <https://nationalgeographic.co.id/feature/2012/05/pionir-di-celah-dua-loka/6>, accessed on 17 March 2017.

⁵² See Agus Dermawan T., "Indonesian Fine Arts and Economic Waves" in *Paradigm and Market: Aspects of Indonesian Visual Art*, (Yogyakarta: Cemeti Art Foundation, 2003), p.57 and Tempo (ed.), *What and Who Some Indonesians*, (Jakarta: Grafiti Pers, 1981), p.97.

Tjitarum and Tjidani rivers. All adherents of the movement were promised exemption from compulsory service (*kerdja kumpeni*) and taxes (*tjukai*). It was decided to simultaneously raid the towns of Tambun, Bogor, and Depok. The leading insurgents would attack Tambun, set free any prisoners held there, and head for Bekasi. From there, they would proceed through Putjang Bay to Meester Cornelis (Djatinegara), where they would wait for the other rebel groups from Bogor and Depok, headed by Bungsu, Arsain, and Bapa Kollot. Then, they would all head straight for Batavia and overrun the city.⁵³ The local authorities were aware of the rebellion's plot. Despite this, the farmers continued to attack, with several Dutch people being killed as a result. Meanwhile, the uprising had been crushed. Some were apprehended and sentenced to death by hanging.⁵⁴

From the description above, one might conclude that Raden Saleh was involved in the Bekasi insurrection because of his alleged support. Indeed, he and Bapa Kollot knew each other. However, the purpose of their encounter was not to strategize a rebellion but rather to engage in the pursuit of antiquities. Unfortunately, Sartono does not explain this critical context, which places his description in another light.

Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsch Indië publishes articles written by Raden Saleh himself. On pages 306-313 of the magazine, published in 1873, Raden Saleh conveyed his chronology and clarification regarding the Bekasi incident (Fig.2.8). In introducing Raden Saleh's writing, the magazine's editor acknowledged that the article's publication aimed to express sympathy and appreciation for the painter. The editorial team disclosed that Raden Saleh was distressed by the riot as he was under grave suspicion due to accusations from multiple irresponsible individuals.⁵⁵

Raden Saleh begins his writing by elucidating that, in 1867, he received authorization from the *Koninklijke Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen* (Royal Batavian Society of Arts and Sciences) to undertake scholarly investigation and acquisition of antiquities for this Society. Raden Saleh graciously accepted the assignment. On one occasion, he received a visit from someone who had been informed about his pursuit of antiquities. He extended his assistance to Raden Saleh. Raden Saleh wrote: "Sometime before

⁵³ Sartono Kartodirdjo, "Agrarian Radicalism in Java: Its Setting and Development" in Claire Holt, et al., *Culture and Politics in Indonesia*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972), pp. 103-105.

⁵⁴ See also Mulyawan Karim, "Cerita Eksekusi di Alun-alun Bekasi" in *Kompas*, 23 April 2009, p.21.

⁵⁵ Editor "Raden Saleh en de Bekassische onlusten" in *Tijdschrift voor Nederlands - Indië*, 1 October 1873, p. 306.

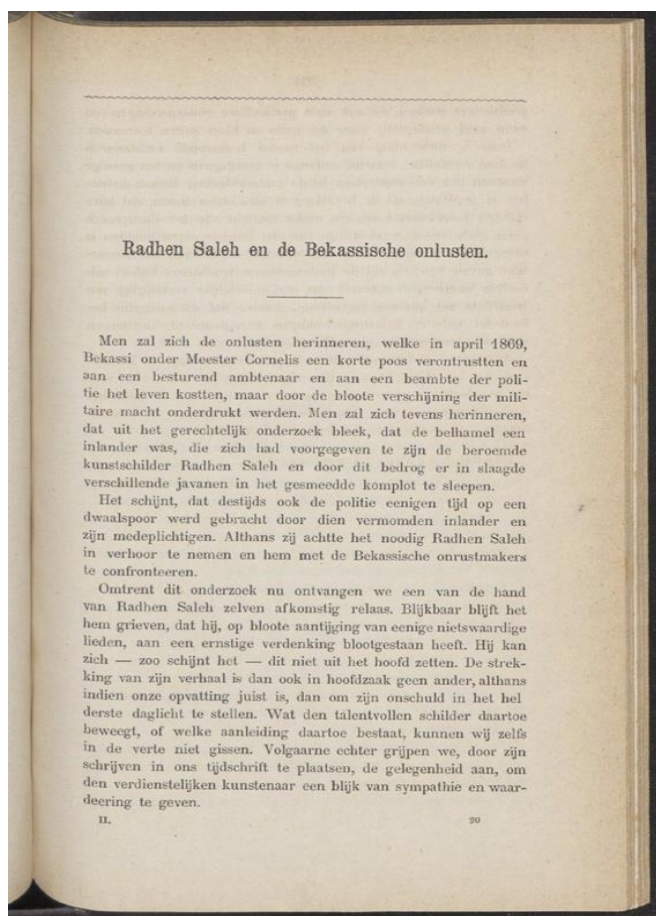


FIGURE 2.8.
First page of *Raden Saleh en de Bekassische onlusten*, 1873.
Leiden University Libraries Digital Collections.

I departed for Java, Djogja, the place where I was to be married, a native came to me and told me that he had heard that I was looking for antiquities and, if I would make use of his help, he was willing to cooperate)."⁵⁶

It is clear that Raden Saleh was willing to acquire antiquities from local inhabitants through purchase or replication, for it is known that shortly afterward, Raden Saleh received numerous offerings for acquisition, for instance, manuscripts and banners. He engaged in restitution by returning various objects while concurrently endeavoring to procure artifacts in manuscripts or bronze inscriptions. Raden Saleh continued that an individual, accompanied by two others, appeared and presented him with three bronze plates adorned with inscriptions in "Buddha script." Raden Saleh expressed satisfaction with this generous gesture. Regrettably, the

⁵⁶ *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, 1873, p. 306. "Eenigen tijd vóór mijn vertrek naar Java, Djogja, de plaats waar ik in den echt zou treden, kwam zekere inlander bij mij en zeide mij dat hij had vernomen, dat ik oudheden opspoorde, en, zoo ik van zijn hulp gebruik wilde maken, hij bereid was daartoe mede te werken."

proprietor did not have the intention to sell the item. Raden Saleh subsequently sought consent to borrow the item for replication, a task undertaken by the grandson of his nephew, Raden Salikin.⁵⁷

One of the proprietors of the bronze plates, namely Bapa Kollot, informed Raden Saleh that he was permitted to acquire more antiquities. To facilitate the search and collection process, Bapa Kollot subsequently requested the preparation of an authorization letter in the name of Raden Saleh. Raden Saleh then wrote a letter: "Below, I, Raden Saleh, a draftsman from the King of the Netherlands, instruct a Muslim named Bassa Kollot to look for Buddhist objects or writings to draw or buy for the needs of the Batavian Society of Arts and Sciences. The Honorary Member of the Batavian Society of Arts and Sciences. Signed Radhen Saleh."⁵⁸

Raden Saleh then left for Yogyakarta, intending to get married, and he returned to Buitenzorg (Bogor) in 1868. On certain occasions, Bapa Kollot visited Raden Saleh's residence in Bogor, presenting a collection of antiques, one of which was a cannon. Approximately three days later, he returned accompanied by his offspring. Bapa Kollot expressed his intention to hold a gathering to commemorate his son, who had recently recovered from a severe illness. Raden Saleh recalls paying little attention to Kollot's story, mainly due to his preoccupation with creating paintings depicting tigers and other subjects he had envisioned extensively during that period. Approximately ten to twenty days after the period mentioned, Raden Saleh stated he was informed about the riots in Bekasi by someone - Raden Saleh did not mention the name - who came to his residence.⁵⁹

Raden Saleh expressed, "Nevertheless, owing to my limited agency, I diligently persisted in the pursuit of my artistic endeavor, dedicating extensive hours from dawn to dusk. Subsequently, as a consequence of excessive strain, I experienced a debilitating headache, impeding my creative output for a duration of six days. On the seventh day, I underwent a therapeutic treatment involving the application of leeches."⁶⁰ On that day, as

⁵⁷ *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, 1873, p. 307.

⁵⁸ *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, 1873, p. 307. "*Die bawa inie, Saija Radhen Saleh, Juroe Gambar dari 'Srie Maha Radja Wolanda, Mengakoe Soeroe pada sa orang' Islam, bernama Bassa Kollot, mentjarie barang atawa tulissan Buddha, boewat di Gambar atawa die blie boewat Batavian Society of Arts and Sciences. Het Eerelid van het Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen. w.g. Radhen Saleh.*"

⁵⁹ *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, 1873, p. 308.

⁶⁰ *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, 1873, p. 308. "Aangezien ik echter aan dergelijke zaken niets kon veranderen, zoo bleef ik vol lust van den morgen tot den avond aan mijn schilderij doorwerken, tot dat

mentioned earlier, as stated by Raden Saleh, the representative of the Resident of Batavia arrived bearing a letter as follows: "Radhen Saleh! Kindly inform me of a note you gave to a native and bears 'your signature.' The Resident of Batavia, signed Hoogeveen."⁶¹

In the courtroom, the authority then asked all the witnesses whether Raden Saleh was the same as Raden Saleh, who was present on the night of the rebel's meeting. However, all witnesses stated that Raden Saleh in the courtroom was different from the one who attended the rebel's meeting. Raden Saleh was declared innocent after being examined and confronted with several witnesses. Moreover, he was a victim of identity theft committed by Bapa Kollot or Raden Malan.⁶² Ending his letter, Raden Saleh expressed his loyalty to the King:

After twenty-three years in civilized circles in Europe, would I stoop here to mingle with bandits and rioters and, what's more, conspire with such rabble to pit myself against the government, that, to this day, still showers me with mercies. Anyone who knows me intimately cannot possibly believe this. Nay, to my last gasp, till I lie prostrate on my bed to appear before the judgment seat, my motto will always be: "Reverence to God and faithfulness, obedience and gratitude to my King, the government, and the Dutch nation."⁶³

ik eindelijk, door te vele overspanning, duizelingen kreeg, die gedurende 6 dagen aanhoudend mij in mijn werk verhinderden, zoodat ik mij den zevenden dag bloedzuigers liet zetten."

⁶¹ Raden Saleh Letter in W. R. Baron van Hoëvell, "Raden Saleh en de Bekassische onlusten", *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, 1 October 1873, p.308-309. "Radhen Saleh! "Wees zoo goed mij inlichting te geven wegens een briefje dat U aan een inlander gegeven hebt en dat voorzien is van "uwe handteekening. De Resident van Batavia, w. g. Hoogeveen."

⁶² Kollot wore several medals or coins, imitating the royal badge that adorned Raden Saleh's chest. "Nederl. Oost-Indië (Per Overlandmail), Batavia, 20 April 1869" in *Het Dagblad van Zuidholland en 's Gravenhage*, 1 June 1869, p.3., "Nederlandsche Kolonien – Batavia, 20 April" in *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 1 June 1869, p.1.

⁶³ See the statement in W. R. Baron van Hoëvell, "Raden Saleh en de Bekassische onlusten", p.313, "Raden Saleh en de Bekassische onlusten" in *De locomotief: Samarangsch handels-advertentie-blad*, 26 November 1873, p. 3 and Harry A. Poeze, C. van Dijk, and I. van der Meulen, *In het land van de overheerser I: Indonesiërs in Nederland 1600-1950*, (Leiden: Brill, 1986), p. 15. "Zou ik na 23 jaren lang in Europa in beschaafde kringen te hebben verkeer, mij hier verlagen om mij in gezelschap te mengen van bandieten en oproermakers, en wat meer zegt, samen te spannen met zulk gespuis om mij op te werpen tegen het gouvernement dat mij tot den huidigen dag nog steeds met weldaden overlaadt? Ieder die mij van nabij kent, kan zulks onmogelijk gelooven. Neen, tot mijn laatsten snik, tot ik uitgestrekt zal liggen op mijn sponde om voor den rechterstoel te verschijnen, zal nog steeds mijn leus zijn: "Eerbied aan God en trouw, gehoorzaamheid en dankbaarheid aan mijn Koning, het gouvernement en de Hollandsche natie."

atawa die gantug, seperti Pacan R. 16.
 apa sebab? tida ada lain sebab saya poe-
 nja nama die Europa banyak Orang taoc
 dan denger, tambahkan saya pake banyak
 bintang ja' darie adjaranya bangsa Belanda
 dan Gouvernemend banyak toeloeug dan
 piyara sama sama saya. jadi tida ada
 lain bentiunya sama saya i perkarade-
 ri saya poenja Reputasien dan bintang
 bintang, sebab tida biyaka denger dan liat
 nyang saya begitoe bentoeng sebab dia Orang
 poenja mase Orang yawa biar tinggal
 yawa
 Tetapi saya poenja attie slamanya pegang
 tetep banyak trima kasih dan hormat
 kapada Gouvernemend dan bangsa
 Belanda sampe mattie tida lah bole
 loepa. dan slamanya saya ada die yawa
 23 tahun tida lah ada satae Orang nyang
 bole bilang apa apa darie saya poenja dia
 hat attie sama satae Orang apa lagi ke-
 rang trima kapada kita poenja Gouver-
 nemend dan bangsa Belanda apa lagi
 tida taoc Octang wang satae Cent. R.
 saya dan badenya Mimim banyak
 tabe
 En Geloeft mij te zijn
 Voor u welkom te zijn
 Raden Saleh
 Coburg 8 Januari 76.

F.R.H. menggoer-
 waang saya gambar
 (Sareu)

FIGURE 2.9.
 Raden Saleh expressed his loyalty to the
 Dutch in his letter written in 1876.
 Haags Gemeentearchies, BNR.8007-01, inv.nr.85
 Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

Reports in the news mention Raden Saleh's commitment to preserving his integrity and honor by abstaining from involvement in the rebellion.⁶⁴ In the subsequent years, Raden Saleh continued to experience profound distress in response to the grave allegations against him. The accusations and the compelling sequence of legal proceedings remained firmly ingrained in his thoughts.⁶⁵ In one of his letters in 1876, Raden Saleh emphasized his loyalty to the Dutch. He wrote: "Saya poenja attie slamanya pegang tetep banyak trima kasih dan hormat kapada gouvernemend dan bangsa wlanda sampe mattie tidaklah bole loepa. (I always thank and express my respect to the Dutch government and the Dutch people. Until I die, I won't forget it)." (Fig.2.9).

⁶⁴ "Overzicht van den inhoud der Indische bladen" in *De locomotief: Samarangsch handels en advertentieblad*, 21 April 1869, pp.1-2.

⁶⁵ W. R. Baron van Hoëvell, "Raden Saleh en de Bekassische onlusten", p.305-306.

Raden Saleh's patriotism towards his country - whatever that country was, considering that at that time it was not yet called Indonesia - or, at least, the painter's firm anti-colonial attitude represents an aspect that is always the subject of debate rather than his artistry. To this day, I have not found definitive historical evidence that has reached a consensus to validate the painter's patriotism. Raden Saleh's expression of loyalty to the King of the Netherlands in the courtroom regarding the riots, or as contained in his letter as discussed above, still cannot be used to determine the level of his patriotism. Of course, if he were proven to have been involved in the riot, prejudice against him would become more accessible. However, his expression of loyalty in the courtroom strengthened the perceptions of those who doubted the painter's patriotism. On the other hand, those who believe in his patriotism will argue that Raden Saleh was defending himself because he was not involved in the riot. He expressed his loyalty as his self-defense mechanism and reminded local authorities that he was, in fact, the King's painter.

Nationalist Prejudices

Art has long been a medium through which individuals express their identity, culture, and experiences. However, as commonly understood, the interpretation of art can be influenced by various factors, including nationalist prejudices. After examining some Indonesian fine arts literature, I can feel how nationalist prejudices are deeply ingrained beliefs and biases that promote and prioritize one's nation or culture over others. In this part, I will explore how nationalist prejudices can impact the interpretation of artworks and the implications of such biases.

Nationalist prejudices often lead to the misinterpretation of artworks, perpetuating cultural appropriation and stereotyping. A striking example is the interpretation of buffalos in Raden Saleh's painting as "people of Indonesia," and lions as "Europeans - or the Dutch colonialism." In my extensive review of various publications, I have found numerous interpretations of the animals depicted in Raden Saleh's paintings. However, it is noteworthy that only a few of these interpretations offer convincing arguments backed by art history research, casting doubt on the prevalent notion that certain Raden Saleh paintings are motivated by anti-colonial expressions. On the other hand, the motives for interpreting Raden Saleh's paintings are primarily nationalist prejudice.

One of the few is the study shown by Marie-Odette Scalliet when analyzing *Boschbrand's* paintings. For example, Scalliet offers views related to the issue, namely Saleh's representation of a burning forest, the starting point of his inspiration, the implications of the animals selected, and his choice of such a subject within the context of his European studies. Scalliet hinted at the possibility that Raden Saleh was inspired by the Renaissance artist Piero di Cosimo (1461–1522), who painted a work with the same title: “The Forest Fire” (c. 1505). However, Raden Saleh emphasizes a theatrical and spectacular composition, while Cosimo's realization is entirely undramatic; the flames are not threatening, and the animals amble away.

Scalliet also delved into other potential relationships. When Raden Saleh settled in Dresden, where he resided and pursued his studies for over four years, he may have encountered the landscape and animal painter Johann Friedrich Wilhelm Wegener (1812–1879). Wegener, a pupil of the renowned landscape painter Johan Christian Clausen Dahl (1788–1857), coincidentally became Saleh's mentor. One of Wegener's paintings, a depiction of a forest fire with fleeing animals in North America's interior landscapes, was exhibited at the Dresden Salon in 1846 and received praise. This connection to Wegener, and by extension, Dahl, could potentially provide insights into Saleh's artistic journey. However, as Scalliet pointed out, the painter's motivations remain a tantalizing enigma beyond these artistic relationships, even though 'Forest Fire' could be interpreted as symbolizing the forces of evil unleashed by a colonial system.⁶⁶

Several cases of this interpretation below show that most interpreters view the images through the lens of nationalism and only focus on elements that reinforce their own beliefs that Raden Saleh was patriotic. Interpretation based on his painting is rarely done with a view to the contrary. Hence, Raden Saleh was forced to sign into the frame of Indonesian nationalism.

The two painting images discussed are the most frequently used by artists or historians to interpret Raden Saleh's patriotism among his many works: *Een Strijd op Leven en Dood* (Fighting Between Life and Death) or also known as *Buffle d'Afrique attaqué par deux lions* (African buffalo attacked by a pair of lions) and the only historical painting that Saleh ever made titled *Historisches Tableau, die Gefangennahme Des Javanischen Hauptlings Diepo*

⁶⁶ One of them is the study shown by Marie-Odette Scalliet when analyzing *Boschbrand's* paintings. See Marie-Odette Scalliet “The Javanese Painter Raden Saleh (c. 1811– 1880): A Star in the Firmament of Indonesian Modern Visual Art” in Low Sze Wee and Patrick D. Flores (eds.), *Charting Thoughts: Essays on Art in Southeast Asia*, (Singapore: National Gallery Singapore, 2017), pp. 60-77.

Negoro (A Historical Tableau, the Capture of the Javanese Leader Diepo Negoro).⁶⁷

In 1851, Raden Saleh presented *Een Strijd op Leven en Dood* to Dutch King Willem III. Painted in 1848, this artwork was considered to date from "the Algiers time; where he made numerous studies and sketches concerning desert life."⁶⁸ Regrettably, in 1931, half a century after its creation, the Dutch pavilion in which the renowned painting was housed caught fire during the Paris Colonial Exposition. Alongside numerous other esteemed works by Dutch masters, this legendary painting met its demise.⁶⁹ It is worth noting that a newspaper at the time dismissed the artistic significance of the work, asserting its lack of substantial artistic merit.⁷⁰ Interestingly, it was believed that there was a copy of the painting, which means that Raden Saleh had painted *Op Leven en Dood* twice. Historian S. Kalff suspected that the burned painting was from a collection from Edam, and another painting is still stored in the Rijksmuseum or vice versa.⁷¹

One thing I want to emphasize is that nowadays photo reproductions of *Op Leven en Dood* are easily found and have circulated across diverse media platforms, including magazines, newspapers, books, academic papers, and search engines. However, the availability of photos of the painting is unsatisfactory because it is black and white and of low-quality photo reproduction. From this standpoint, it can be questioned how far a painter's patriotism can be evaluated by relying on such materials.

⁶⁷ See I Ketut Winaya, 2007, pp. 84-95 and pp.126-127. See also Werner Kraus, 2005, p. 288. Kraus assumed that Harsja Bachtiar failed to read the symbolic meaning of the painting. See Kraus, *ibid.*, P. 287. See also A.D. Pirous, *Seni Pariwara sebagai Alat Propaganda Perjuangan*, 1964, Fine Arts Department, Institut Teknologi Bandung, pp.24-25.

⁶⁸ See Si Omong "Raden Saleh: Een Merkwaardige Inlander" in *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 22 April 1930, p.17. Some biographies claim that Raden Saleh traveled to Algeria with Horace Vernet without providing any evidence of their claims. However, Claude Guillot and Pierre Labrousse denied this belief. There is no historical evidence that Raden Saleh had ever been to Algeria. See Claude Guillot and Pierre Labrousse "Raden Saleh, un artiste-prince à Paris" in *Archipel*, Volume 54, 1997, *Destins croisés entre l'Insulinde et la France*, p.144.

⁶⁹ "Een Nationale Ramp" in *Nieuwe Langedijker Courant*, 30 June 1931, p.2, "Indrukken van de Parijsche Koloniale Wereldtentoonstelling" in *Vlissingsche Courant*, 28 mei 1931, p.2, and "Hoe het was" in *Leeuwarder nieuwsblad: goedkoop advertentieblad*, 30 June 1931, p.10.

⁷⁰ "De ramp te Vincennes" in *Twentsch dagblad Tubantia en Enschedesche courant*, 3 July 1931, p.21.

⁷¹ See S. Kalff "Eene Schilderij van Raden Saleh" in *De Indische Verlofganger*, 17 July 1931, p.3. See also "De Schilderijen van Raden Saleh" in *De koerier*, 7 August 1931, p.6, "Kunst en Wetenschap. De Schilderijen van Raden Saleh" in *Het nieuws van den dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, 27 August 1931, p.17, and "De Schilderijen van Raden Saleh" in *Soerabaijasch handelsblad*, 5 August 1931, p.5. In connection with Kalff's assumption, I have traced them by contacting the municipality of Edam-Volendam and the conservator of the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam. Both declared they didn't keep the painting.



FIGURE 2.10. Raden Saleh, *Een strijd op leven en dood*, (1848) painting's reproduction in H. Colijn, *Neerlands Indie, Land en Volk, Geschiedenis en Bestuur, Bedrijf en Samenleving*, (Amsterdam: Uitgevers-Maatschappij-"Elsevier", 1913).

Repro by Aminudin TH Siregar

During my research for this chapter, curiously, because I always found black and white reproductions, I finally found a color reproduction of the painting *Op Leven en Dood* in H. Colijn's book entitled *Neerlands Indie, Land en Volk, Geschiedenis en Bestuur, Bedrijf en Samenleving*, published in 1913. This finding is essential in the study of Raden Saleh for the reasons above, considering that the original painting was destroyed by fire at the 1931 Paris Colonial Exhibition (Fig. 2.10).

At first glance, *Op Leven en Dood* depicts an ongoing battle in the desert between a bleeding "African buffalo" - I think it is not an "Indonesian buffalo" - and a pair of lions. The buffalo's eyes glare as it thrusts one of its horns into the body of a roaring lioness sprawled out with its body leaping. The other lion charges. The fangs and nails dig into the shoulders of the buffalo to maintain the speed. Raden Saleh painted the blood from the buffalo's ribs as pouring profusely. The deadly combat took place in balance, and both were equally strong - even though the buffalo seemed to be grunting toward death. The three animals dominate the entire canvas and create a narrow space. With this perspective, Raden Saleh wanted to express the colossal effect of the fight frontally attacking the viewers.

Using black and white reproductions in his research papers, art scholar Abdul Djalil Pirous interpreted the painting as having a nationalist motif through the images of "lions" and "buffalo." Pirous claimed that these

animals represented the struggle of the Indonesian people. Consequently, the painting could not be considered a typical and ordinary reflection of European romantic themes because Raden Saleh, as an Eastern painter, indeed conducts his symbolic values when creating works of art. Pirous argued that the bull in the painting is *Banteng Ketaton* (a wounded wild buffalo), which has long been a symbol of manhood in the Indonesian wayang.⁷²

Similar to Pirous, the author of *Raden Saleh (1807-1880): Pioneer of Painting in Indonesia*, Baharuddin Marasutan, proposes almost the same interpretation concerning the painting by saying:

“Saleh captured the climax of the fight between life and death with colors that matched the extraordinary tension. The tendency to judge this picture from a symbolic political standpoint is that the lion (the colonizing Dutch emblem) and the bison (the colonized) here are acceptable. However, no more important than the full artistic appraisal of the work. Whatever, we have only one opinion, namely [about] the creative ability; if it cannot be said to surpassing the capacity of Western painters, it is [in any case] equal to it.”⁷³

Marasutan believed that the painting marks the flames of the French Revolution that Raden Saleh reportedly experienced. He restated that the image represents "the symbols of the great acts between the colonizing party and the colonized."⁷⁴

Pirous and Marasutan's interpretation is that the painting contains Raden Saleh's anti-colonial expression, symbolizes lions representing the West, and the buffalo is Indonesian, which requires more exploration. Indeed,

⁷² A. D. Pirous, 1964, p.24-25.

⁷³ See Baharudin's commentary in Sudarmadji, (1974), p. 8. "Saleh di sini berhasil mengabadikan klimaks dari pertarungan antara hidup dan mati dengan warna yang sesuai dengan ketegangan luar biasa. Kecenderungan untuk menilai lukisan ini dari sudut politis simbolis ialah karena singa (lambang Belanda yang menjajah) dan bison (yang dijajah) disini sebenarnya dapat diterima. Tetapi, tidak lebih penting dari penilaian mutlak artistik karya tersebut. Bagaimanapun sifat cerita yang terjalin dalam lukisan ini, namun hanya satu saja pendapat kita, ialah kesanggupan daya cipta seorang Indonesia di kala itu: kalau tidak dapat dikatakan melebihi, sejajar dengan kesanggupan pelukis Barat." I have not found evidence of whether Marasutan ever saw the *Op Leven en Dood painting* in color reproduction, so he mentioned "colors that matched the extraordinary tension" in his assessment.

⁷⁴ Baharuddin Marasutan, "Revolusi Februari di Paris: Menginspirasi Raden Saleh?" in *Sinar Harapan*, March 29, 1975.



FIGURE 2. 11.
Raden Saleh, *Wild Bull Hunt*, 1855.
(Sources: <https://www.gazette-drouot.com/en/article/raden-saleh-3A-a-francophile-indonesian/4897>)

Raden Saleh was familiar with the images of the lion and the buffalo, having spent decades in Europe. Furthermore, he had seen and studied European romantic paintings depicting hunting in the wild African nature – primarily through visiting painter Horace Vernet's studio in Paris. In addition, the specific "Banteng Ketaton," as Pirous interpreted it, referred to the proverb "like Banteng Ketaton," which means a bull (or buffalo) that is injured and then goes on a rampage, fighting to defend itself.

Pirous interpreted the bull in the *Op Leven en Dood* painting into a particular meaning to emphasize the symbol of Indonesia's struggle against colonialism. Nonetheless, applying a nationalistic bias to art interpretation can be a risky endeavor. While viewing artworks through one's cultural lens is natural, it is critical to approach paintings with an open mind and avoid imposing preconceived notions based on nationality. The meaning of the bull in Raden Saleh's paintings could be more stable. He not only painted bulls in that painting but also in various situations in his hunting-themed paintings. He once painted two scenes of buffalo hunting in the savanna in which Javanese hunters surrounded a drooping buffalo (Fig.2.11). Thus, if the term "buffalo" here also refers to "Banteng Ketaton," which translates as "Indonesian people," doesn't this imply that Raden Saleh is describing "Indonesian people" hunting "Indonesian people"?

Despite this, lions have been symbols in Asia, Africa, and Europe for centuries. They are referred to as the "king of the jungle" or "king of animals." This animal symbolizes strength, bravery, and nobility, so it frequently appears in national symbols, particularly those of royalty. This

ancient symbol represents strength, bravery, and majesty in Arabic literature, as it does in the literature of other languages.⁷⁵ The "conquering lion" concept dates back to ancient Mesopotamia and Iran, and has acquired numerous meanings over the centuries. The lion fights with a large animal, typically a buffalo but sometimes a stag or a deer of the lion's size, to create the illusion of a battle between two equal powers, symbolizing the summer-winter cycle. In Byzantine art, the motif is slightly modified to depict a lion attacking a large horse.⁷⁶

The lion is a universal symbol across cultures and civilizations, known for its majestic presence and assertive demeanor. From ancient times to today, this magnificent creature has captured the imagination of humanity and held a significant place in art, literature, mythology, and religion. In European painting, the lion has been a recurring motif throughout history, representing various meanings and interpretations. Painters like Eugene Delacroix, admired by Raden Saleh, used lions to illustrate exoticism and adventure in their paintings.

The depiction of lions engaged in hunting or resting emerged as a widely embraced theme among Romantic painters, who endeavored to encapsulate the untamed splendor of the natural world. Hence, it is worth contemplating whether it is more logical to regard *Op Leven en Dood* broadly as Raden Saleh's portrayal of the existential challenges' individuals encounter universally rather than exclusively about the Indonesian people. Ultimately, an intriguing perspective to transcend the nationalist paradigm comes from the Jakarta Museum and History Service:

"Our tendency to judge this painting from a political-symbolic point of view as a rise in conflict between the colonizers (the lions) and the colonized (the bison) is acceptable. However, another aspect that is not less important is the judgment based on the artistic quality of the work that relates to how the stories intertwined in the painting. In turn, the picture represents the creative abilities of Indonesians at the time that exceed or at least equal the artistic qualities of Western painters."⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Doris Behrens-Abouseif, "The Lion-Gazelle Mosaic at Khirbat al-Mafjar", *Muqarnas*, 1997, Vol. 14 (1997), p.15.

⁷⁶ Doris Behrens-Abouseif, 1997, p.13.

⁷⁷ Dinas Museum dan Sejarah, *Raden Saleh: Pelukis Terkenal yang Dilupakan*, (Jakarta: Pemerintah DKI-Jakarta Dinas Museum dan Sejarah, 1979), p.19.



FIGURE 2.12.
Raden Saleh, *a historisches Tableau, die Gefangennahmen des Javanischen Hauptling Diepo Negoro*, 1857.

Collection of Presidential Palace - Jakarta



FIGURE 2.13.
On 15 August 1977, the painting "The Arrest of Prince Diponegoro" by Raden Saleh was handed over from *Stichting Historische Verzamelingen van het Huis van Oranje Nassau*, to the Ambassador of the Republic of Indonesia, Mr. Sutopo Yuwono, at the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia in The Hague.

Collection of Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia
Repro by Aminudin TH Siregar

Below, I will discuss the next painting, *Ein Historisches Tableau, die Gefangennahme des Javanischen Hauptling Diepo Negoro*/A Historical Tableau, the Capture of the Javanese Chief Diepo Negoro painted in 1857 (Fig.2.12), abbreviated below as *Gefangennahme Diepo Negoro*. This is the third painting that returned to Indonesia in 1978 after *Fighting with Lions* (1870) and *Bulls Hunting in Java* (1851), which had been gifted to Soeharto by Queen Juliana in 1970 – as mentioned in Chapter 1. The return of *Gefangennahme Diepo Negoro*'s paintings to Indonesia in 1978 was inseparable from the role of the former Indonesian cultural attaché to the Netherlands, Koesnadi Hardjasoemantri. The story began when Indonesian Minister of Foreign Affairs Adam Malik sent a letter to Soetopo Joewono, Ambassador of the Republic of Indonesia. The Minister wants the historic painting, which belonged to the House of Orange Nassau, to return to his homeland. Coincidentally, Hardjasoemantri is a friend of Robert Hotke, director general of cultural affairs at the Ministry of Culture, Recreation, and Social Work of the Netherlands. Hotke helped to realize the repatriation of the painting (Fig.2.13).⁷⁸

The absence of archives telling us about the creation of this painting poses a challenge in ascertaining the intended message of Raden Saleh. The picture, nonetheless, has elicited a deliberate interpretation to assess Raden Saleh's level of patriotism. In 1953, the *Gefangennahme Diepo Negoro*, which was located in the Netherlands at the time, was officially inducted by the Minister of Education and Culture of Indonesia, Muhamad Yamin, as a testament to Raden Saleh's nationalistic sentiments towards the country.⁷⁹ Ultimately, the painting, which had long been regarded as a myth, made its inaugural public appearance before the Indonesian populace in May 1978, when it was showcased at the National Museum in Jakarta.⁸⁰ Historian M.C. Ricklefs believed that *Gefangennahme Diepo Negoro*'s painting is “the first history-themed painting in the world” that represents the final scene of the so-called Java War (1825-1830). The bloody conflict claimed the lives of 8,000 European soldiers, 7,000 natives, and 200,000 Javanese.⁸¹

⁷⁸ Koesnadi Hardjasoemantri, “An Observation of Raden Saleh’s View” in *Raden Saleh Bulletin*, No.1 / 1996, (Bandung-Berlin: Peter Sternagel and Machmud Buchari, 1996), pp.38-39.

⁷⁹ “Raden Saleh, kunstenaar, nationalist en idealist, geëerd door nageslacht” in *De nieuwsgier*, 10 September 1953, p.3.

⁸⁰ See “Setelah 150 Tahun Lebih Sang Putri Kembali” in *Tempo*, 6 May 1978, pp.46-47.

⁸¹ M.C. Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia: C. 1300 to the Present*, (Stanford (Ca.): Stanford University Press, 1993), pp. 116-117. Ricklefs does not seem to consider Nicolaas Pieneman's painting as the first one depicting the Java War's climax.



FIGURE 2.14.
Nicolaas Pieneman, *The Submission of Prince Diponegoro to General De Kock*, ca.1830-1835.
Collection of Rijksmuseum – Amsterdam

Raden Saleh attempted to decipher the war drama depicted in this painting by directing his attention away from the tangible elements of the conflict and instead focusing on the decisive moment that ended the struggle. The decision to select this aspect may be deemed less heroic, given the vast magnitude of the war and the substantial amount of time it would entail. Raden Saleh may have intended to respond to Nicolaas Pieneman's painting, which depicted the arrest of Diponegoro many years before. Nevertheless, there is a lack of compelling historical evidence to elucidate this motive.

Could Raden Saleh, for example, have produced a superb painting depicting the intense conflict? Undoubtedly, he possesses the capability to accomplish that. However, he needed to carry out research to achieve this objective, considering that he had no personal experience of the war that had long passed. In his review of the Java War, historian Peter Carey revealed that Raden Saleh prepared a proposal to return to Europe a year after returning to Java to make sketches for the painting surrounding Diponegoro's capture. Then, in 1857, he submitted his proposal and promised to present the picture to King Willem III of the Netherlands, but the authorities rejected Raden Saleh's proposal. As a result, Raden Saleh allegedly created the *Gefangennahme Diepo Negoro* in his Batavia studio.⁸²

⁸² Peter Carey, 2001, p.153. I have not found strong evidence to explain why Raden Saleh went to Europe to make sketches. It is also uncertain whether the plan to go to Europe was related to his intention to study Pieneman's paintings.

As mentioned earlier, in *Gefangennahme Diepo Negoro*, Raden Saleh painted his version of the drama even though still in correspondence with Nicolaas Pieneman's painting, *De onderwerping van Diepo Negoro aan luitenant-generaal baron de Kock/The Submission of Diponegoro to Lieutenant General Baron de Kock*, c. 1830-1835 (Fig.2.14) - currently on display at the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, it was a commissioned painting. The painting was in the collection of Baron F.L.W. de Kock in The Hague and was gifted to the Rijksmuseum in 1907. Soon after the Java War ended, Lieutenant General Baron de Kock asked Pieneman to compose the triumph of the Dutch in the war. Meanwhile, many years after Pieneman, Raden Saleh created his version in 1857 after he arrived in Java. When Raden Saleh finished the painting, he sent it to King Willem III in the Netherlands as a present. Some questions are difficult to answer here regarding when, where, and how Raden Saleh saw Pieneman's painting, to trigger him to allegorize or parody it.⁸³

If the two paintings of Raden Saleh and Pieneman are compared, as Kraus and Carey did, quite a lot of differences can be seen immediately. In the Raden Saleh version, the drama depicts the arrest of Diponegoro more critically and appears utterly opposite to the earlier version of this theme by Pieneman. Raden Saleh flipped the perspective, altered De Kock's anatomy, and portrayed Diponegoro as angry. Moreover, Raden Saleh removed the Dutch flag that flies colonially on the roof of the building in Pieneman's version. Concerning the mood, the morning's bright, orderly, and controlled atmosphere in Pieneman's painting has now turned sad, confused, and tense. In short, Raden Saleh wished to invert all impressions and perceptions derived from Pieneman's version - if indeed he saw that painting.⁸⁴ Moreover, in contrast to Pieneman, who emphasizes the attribute of "submission" or "surrender," Raden Saleh gives his painting a bold and political title with the word "capture" - as commonly interpreted among scholars.

Peter Carey argues that Raden Saleh presented *Gefangennahme Diepo Negoro* to King Willem III as a token of gratitude for his education and

⁸³ According to Werner Kraus, Raden Saleh had probably seen Nicolaas Pieneman's pictures in the Netherlands and had even known him. See Werner Kraus, "Raden Saleh's Interpretation of the Arrest of Diponegoro" in *Archipel*, No. 69, 2005, p. 282 and 285. Peter Carey also conveyed the same on this issue. See Peter B. R. Carey, "Raden Saleh, Dipanagara and the Painting of the Capture of Dipanagara at Magëlang (28 March 1830)" in *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1982, Vol. 55, No.1 (242) (1982), p.1. However, I think, these opinions are still speculative.

⁸⁴ Kraus is quite certain that Raden Saleh did, mainly, it seems, on the basis of an earlier drawing that is even more in line with the painting of Pieneman.

training as an artist for 23 years in Europe.⁸⁵ Harsja Bachtiar interpreted the gift as a sign of Raden Saleh's unpatriotic attitude. Bachtiar wrote: "The death of Diponegoro inspired Raden Saleh, the man who had seen many historical scene paintings while in Europe, to paint *Ein Historisches Tableau, die Gefangennahmen des Javanischen Hauptling Diepo Negoro*, painted specifically for the King of the Netherlands, a unnationalistic attitude, but in essence in accordance with an artist's relationship with the patrician who is his patron, the relationship between a palace man and his king."⁸⁶ However, John Clark has a different opinion. According to him, Raden Saleh's anti-colonial expression is contained in this painting and received its context when he gave it to King Willem III. By providing the painting, Clark argued, Raden Saleh conveyed a message: "You did this to us, but we are still us."⁸⁷

There are a few indications that point to Raden Saleh's anti-colonial attitude before making this painting. While still in Europe, Raden Saleh was blamed for the sensational accusation that appeared in a French newspaper in January 1848 while Raden Saleh was in Paris. It revealed a complaint about the bad treatment of Diponegoro by the Dutch government after the Java War. According to Carey, after Diponegoro was arrested, exiled to a small prison, tortured, and denied access to his family, Raden Saleh stepped in to defend and sympathize with the Javanese prince. In January 1848, a report in the French press revealed a complaint about Diponegoro's inhumane treatment in exile by Dutch officials. According to the information presented to the king by Dutch Colonial Minister J. C. Baud (1840-1848), Diponegoro was imprisoned in a small room within a fortress in Maluku.⁸⁸

Baud was enraged and flatly denied the French press report.⁸⁹ He immediately wrote to the Dutch King, who informed him that Diponegoro had been placed in a massive fortress, Rotterdam Fort in Makassar, with his family rather than in Maluku. Diponegoro was also provided with the needs of everyday life. Baud directed that the Dutch ambassador in Paris sue the press. Carey is convinced that the "fake news" spread by the French press in

⁸⁵ Peter Carey, *The Origins of Java War: Sepoy Rebellion and Raden Saleh Painting* (Yogyakarta: Publisher LKiS, 2001), p. 149-150.

⁸⁶ Harsja W. Bachtiar, "Raden Saleh: Aristocrat, Painter and Scientist" in A. Day and A. Lopian (ed.), *Papers of the Dutch-Indonesian Historical Conference*, p. 48. See also Harsja Bachtiar, "Raden Saleh: Aristocrat, Painter, and Scientist" in *Indonesian Journal of Cultural Studies*, No.3, Volume VI, August 1976, p. 45.

⁸⁷ John Clark, *Modern Asian Art*, (Sydney: Craftsman House, 1998), p. 241.

⁸⁸ Peter Carey, 2001, p.150.

⁸⁹ Minister J. C. Baud once wrote in 1838: "This child (Raden Saleh) can make a mess when holding office in the colonial bureaucracy." See Kraus, 2005, p.14.

1848 had come from a specific source, someone who was aware of Diponegoro's whereabouts after his arrest. Carey is suspicious that Raden Saleh spread the fake news because "only a candidate, Raden Saleh himself, has raised the possibility of doing so."⁹⁰

Baharudin Marasutan adds to the ranks of those who believe that the painting about the climax of the Java War, which changed the colony's political landscape, clearly reflects Raden Saleh's anti-colonial attitude. It is important to note that the Dutch government did not commission the historical painting; rather, it prevented Raden Saleh from visiting Yogyakarta in 1852 to make study sketches.⁹¹ Baharuddin confirmed:

"The association of the title, through the word "arrest," truly suppresses our feelings as Indonesian. In essence, Raden Saleh does not perpetuate the Dutch 'victory,' nor the Indonesian nation's total surrender at the time. Raden Saleh, on the other hand, has psychologically imposed the event in the composition of a scene that departs from the mind of a national painter who can no longer be questioned. Raden Saleh has succeeded in recreating the dramatic atmosphere through reasonable attitudes and friendliness emanating from the emotion of Prince Diponegoro's loyal followers, in stark contrast to their leader, who in no way shows an inferior but superior attitude challenging Dutch pride - the Dutch who had tricked him through deceitful duplicity. Raden Saleh portrayed the Dutch as dolls in terms of expression and anatomy."⁹²

⁹⁰ Peter Carey, 2001, p.152. Carey's suspicion underlies the assumption that since 1845 Saleh has been pacing between Dresden and Paris.

⁹¹ Baharuddin Marasutan "Mencari Identitas Raden Saleh" in *Sinar Harapan*, 24 April 1976. See also J. De Loos-Haaxman, 1967, p. 66.

⁹² Baharudin, 1976. "Asosiasi yang ditimbulkan oleh judul itu, melalui kata 'penangkapan', sungguh menekan perasaan kita sebagai bangsa Indonesia. Pada hakikatnya Raden Saleh (di lukisan itu) tidak mengabadikan 'kemenangan' Belanda, juga tidak penyerahan total dari bangsa Indonesia dimasa itu. Akan tetapi, Raden Saleh secara psikologis telah menegaskan peristiwa (pengkapan itu) itu dalam komposisi sebuah adegan yang benar-benar bertolak dari batin seorang pelukis Nasional yang tidak usah disangsikan lagi. Dalam karya itu, Raden Saleh telah berhasil menciptakan kembali usasana dramatis itu melalui sikap dan kemasygulan yang wajar, memancar dari rasa keterharuan para pengikut setia Pangeran Diponegoro, yang sangat kontras dengan sikap pemimpin mereka, yang sama sekali tidak menunjukkan sikap yang inferior, tetapi superior memantang keangkuhan Belanda-Belanda, yang telah menjebaknya melalui tipu daya yang licik. Hal itu dilukiskan Raden Saleh bagaikan boneka-boneka, baik dalam ekspresi maupun dalam anatominya."

The word "arrest" in the title, according to Baharudin, indicates that the painting was not a Dutch glorification of the Java War. Instead, the image represents the psychological environment that rages around Raden Saleh, manifesting his "sympathy, loyalty, and patriotic attitude" toward Diponegoro.⁹³

I Ketut Winata added some detail to this discussion. He speculated that Raden Saleh may have depicted Diponegoro's turban in red and white colors, although only slightly visible and more dominated by green, to represent the Javanese struggle against colonialism. Raden Saleh, Winata suspected, had known the sacred meaning of the two colors since the Hindu and Islamic eras in the archipelago. Winata posits that Raden Saleh was aware of the utilization of red-and-white hues by the troops of Prince Diponegoro during the Java War. To understand the meaning behind the red-white color on this turban, Winata referred to the research conducted by historian and politician Muhammad Yamin. In his famous book *6000 Tahun Sang Merah Putih*, Yamin asserted that the red-white Indonesian flag has a historical background dating back 6,000 years.⁹⁴ Nevertheless, due to the lack of compelling historical evidence presented by Yamin, the assertion that red and white served as national symbols in the archipelago for 6,000 years becomes highly ambiguous.

It is necessary to consider the possibility of anachronism in Winata's interpretation, given that red and white had not yet become a color combination that symbolized Indonesia as a nation and state during the Java War. Aside from that, Winata left his interpretation of the green color on the turban - which reminds the turban colors from Muslim countries in Africa, South Asia, or Turkey in the 19th-century orientalist painting. This green color cannot be ignored, considering that it appears dominant on Diponegoro's head rather than the red and white, which only appears slightly on the back. Also, if I look closely, the color of Diponegoro's turban in Raden Saleh's painting is no different from Pieneman's. Therefore, Raden Saleh kept the color of the turban the same, as if he did not want to create a new meaning.

Werner Kraus's interpretation focuses on the heads of Dutch officers enlarged by Raden Saleh as slightly out of proportion. For Kraus, "this 'error' is not an error but a message: the heads of the Dutch officers are the heads of

⁹³ Drs. Koesnadi Hardjosoemantri, 1996, p.40.

⁹⁴ I Ketut Winata, 2007, p.112. See Muhammad Yamin, *6000 Tahun Sang Merah Putih*, (Jakarta: Siguntang, 1954), p.157.

raksasas, of monsters." Therefore, Kraus continues, "The painting has two levels, two meanings: an upfront meaning for the Dutch viewer and a second clandestine meaning for a Javanese public. For Dutch eyes, De Kock is painted as a polite and almost fatherly officer. For Javanese eyes, De Kock is a female *raksasa*, a monster with a monstrous head. Since the Dutch could not comprehend the hidden meaning, the big heads revealed to them the artists' incompetence." According to Kraus, historian H.J. de Graaf fell into this trap by saying the painting lost its beauty because of the overwhelming depiction of the Dutch heads.⁹⁵

It is evident that, unlike Nicholaas Pieneman's rigid and formal paintings, Saleh's paintings feature a thrilling psychological atmosphere when Prince Diponegoro is asked to enter the horse-drawn carriage. Raden Saleh has romanticized the event by incorporating a tragic drama. But, which version, Raden Saleh's or Nicolaas Pieneman's, is historically correct? De Graaf believed that the Raden Saleh version was mistaken in describing the location of the arrest. Prince Diponegoro was apprehended in the room, not on the terrace of the building.⁹⁶ Peter Carey supports the historical inaccuracy. He proposes that Raden Saleh fails to successfully capture and illustrate Diponegoro's attitude of resignation and calmness. Saleh's version depicts Diponegoro's head as challenging the commander who arrested him, Hendrik Merkus de Kock. Inaccuracy also can be seen in that Raden Saleh presents himself through two figures.⁹⁷

The sole historical painting executed by Raden Saleh, the depiction of the significant conflict between the Dutch and Javanese that transpired in the 19th century, continues to be shrouded in enigma. The question of challenging his patriotism remains subject to varying interpretations. I think Saleh has effectively conveyed his opposition by reversing Pieneman's version's painting format - if when and where he saw Pieneman's painting can be ascertained. Apart from that, as Kraus has suggested, it is likely that Raden Saleh adapted the composition of the painting *Abdication of Charles V* from the Belgian painter Louis Gallait. Kraus, in his study on *Die Gefangennahme Diepo Negoro*, believes that Raden Saleh saw the painting in Dresden. Kraus then linked it to nationalism by saying, "The abdication of Charles V was the turning point of Dutch/Belgian history. Shortly after

⁹⁵ Werner Kraus, 2005, p.285. See H.J. De Graaf, "Raden Saleh's leertijd in Holland" in *Moesson*, 22, 1 (1978), p.15.

⁹⁶ H.J. De Graaf, 1978, p.15. See also Werner Kraus, 2005, p.285.

⁹⁷ Peter Carey, 2001, p.148.

Phillip II ascended the throne, the Dutch revolt against Spanish rule began. It was the beginning of the end of foreign law."⁹⁸ Thus, Kraus wants to emphasize that the Gallait painting aroused the national and revolutionary spirit in Raden Saleh.

Moreover, assuming Carey's assertion suggests that Raden Saleh's rendition of the image lacks historical accuracy compared to Pieneman's, it would bolster the notion that Raden Saleh conveyed a "patriotic message." Raden Saleh's artistic endeavors can be interpreted as a form of resistance against the prevailing narrative, as he employs deconstruction techniques to challenge the established structures and shed light on the perceived injustice surrounding the arrest of the esteemed Javanese Prince.

Many important issues are overlooked whenever Raden Saleh is discussed since the discussion is always focused on the issue of the painter's patriotism. As has been discussed, this issue of patriotism is critical because it impacts its pioneering position in modern Indonesian art history. It is pretty impossible to guess Raden Saleh's patriotism through his minimal paintings and letters - as several scholars have done. I want to contribute to the discussion of Raden Saleh by looking at the figure of the painter who once lived between two realms, West and East, which he did not want to oppose but instead wanted to unite in harmony. Whether this harmony is successful or not, since there are no accurate parameters to measure its success, perhaps it is crucial to consider Raden Saleh's identity outside of a nationalist framework. It is not impossible; he was a painter who always sought experience and challenges, a 19th-century painter who wanted to break through and open new perspectives by encouraging himself to embrace universal themes such as historical painting and engage with various artistic influences such as Romanticism, Realism, etc., blurring reinforced boundaries by his nationalism.

As an artist, it was natural that Raden Saleh saw an opportunity to create historical paintings by using the famous Java War as his background. He certainly understands the opportunity to contribute to the art world constellation through historical paintings that originate from contexts he knows intimately. Even though it had been over for more than 25 years, The Java War is an important theme and deserves to be expressed through painting. Raden Saleh may want to provide his perspective there, and it is clear that courage is needed, considering that war is a sensitive issue. But he

⁹⁸ Werner Kraus, 2005, p.292.

did this, which shows an attitude that does not necessarily have to be confined within the framework of nationalism. Courage is related to his desire to establish himself as an autonomous artist by expressing his freedom to create concepts, aspirations, and perspectives. His artistic approach, characterized by depicting people in specific scenes, allows him to explore the breadth and depth of human emotion, further enriching his paintings with meaning.

The painting *Die Gefāngennahme Diepo Negoro* reflects Raden Saleh's attitude of freeing art from all forms of restraints or limitations, advocating a creative process not limited by rules or regulations. Therefore, in discussing Raden Saleh, we must look beyond his nationalism to reach a broader interpretation.

The Missing Chapter

Upon Raden Saleh's demise, concerns arose among the populace regarding the absence of a suitable successor to fill his void. The sudden death of the painter in Buitenzorg, Dutch East Indies, in 1880, was documented by the daily newspaper *Dagblad van Zuidholland en's Gravenhage* in The Hague. There are allegations that the housekeeper may have administered poison to the maestro. The physician arrived and conducted a thorough examination, yet no evidence of poisoning was detected. However, the maestro was pronounced deceased due to a ruptured blood vessel. What is interesting about the news of Raden Saleh's death is the pessimistic expression of the newspaper editor with a prediction, "*Met hem sterft de Indische schilderkunst* ('Indonesian' painting dies with him)."⁹⁹ This prediction seems to have been widely accepted by numerous historians in subsequent centuries.

The period between 1880 and the 1930s, or the "post-Raden Saleh period," has been widely recognized by art historians as the "empty period." This period refers to the time between the passing of Raden Saleh and the rise of the subsequent Indonesian painters in the 1930s. For example, Kusnadi declared: "The chain of successors to modern Western painting since Raden Saleh's death in 1880 has discontinued and was only continued decades later through Raden Mas Pirngadie, Wakidi and Abdullah Suriosubroto."¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ "Nederlandsch Oost-Indië" in *Dagblad van Zuidholland en 's Gravenhage*, 2 June 1880, p.5.

¹⁰⁰ See Kusnadi, et al., *Sejarah Seni Rupa Indonesia*, (Jakarta: Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 1979), p.148. See also Sudarmadji, *Dari Saleh Sampai Aming: Seni Lukis Indonesia Baru dalam Sejarah*

Like Kusnadi, Claire Holt suggested the same expression by saying that Indonesian art took more than fifty years after Raden Saleh's death for the next generation to emerge: "Raden Saleh died without having initiated a new school of Indonesian painting. Nonetheless, no Indonesian writings fail to mention him as the solitary precursor of those now regarded as the "fathers" of the present modern art movement, and more than half a century elapsed after Raden Saleh's death before such a movement got underway." Holt also mentioned the rise of the famous trio, namely Abdullah Suriosubroto (1879-1941), Raden Mas Pirngadie (1875-1936), and Wakidi (1889-1979), fifty years after Raden Saleh.¹⁰¹

This assertion was supported by M. Agus Burhan and Agus Dermawan T. Burhan, among others, who found in their research that "when Raden Saleh returned to Java and died in 1880, there was a lengthy absence of native painters."¹⁰² In the meantime, Dermawan declares dramatically that after Raden Saleh, "Indonesian painting entered a period of darkness and emptiness."¹⁰³ Conversely, Dutch historians Ruud Spruit and J. de Loos-Haaxman endeavored to fill the historical void by centering on European or Dutch artists.¹⁰⁴ Is it true that no one could mention any Indonesian artists between 1880 and 1930?

Raden Saleh's Pupils

When Agus Dermawan T. stated that after Raden Saleh, "Indonesian painting entered a period of darkness and emptiness," Sanento Yuliman appeared to refute this viewpoint. In his writing, Yuliman suggests Raden Mangkoe Mihardjo (Miardjo) and Raden Soma (Somo) as candidates for Raden Saleh's throne. They were both considered to be "Raden Saleh's

dan Apresiasi, (Yogyakarta: STSRI-ASRI, 1974-1975), p.8.

¹⁰¹ Claire Holt, *Art in Indonesia: Continuities and Change*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), pp. 192-193.

¹⁰² M. Agus Burhan, *Perkembangan Seni Lukis Mooi Indie sampai Persagi di Batavia 1900-1942*, (Jakarta: Galeri Nasional Jakarta, 2014), p.2.

¹⁰³ Sanento Yuliman, "70 Tahun Seni Lukis Indonesia di Mon Décor" in *Kompas*, 16 April 1989, p.10.

¹⁰⁴ See J. de Loos-Haaxman, *Verlaat Rapport Indie*, (Den Haag: Mouton & Co, 1968); Marie Oddet Scalliet, et al., *Pictures from the Tropics: Paintings by western Artists during the Dutch Colonial Period in Indonesia*, (Amsterdam: Pictures Publishers, Wijk en Alburg, 1999); Ruud Spruit, *Artists on Bali*, (Amsterdam: Pepin Press, 1996); Ruud Spruit, *Indonesische impressies. Oosterse thema's in de westerse schilderkunst. Indonesian impressions. Oriental themes in western painting*, (Wijk en Aalburg: Picture Publishers, 1992); then Jeanne Terwen-De Loos, *Nederlandse schilders en tekenaars in de Oost. 17de-20ste eeuw*, catalogue, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, 1972.

students."¹⁰⁵ Nevertheless, Yuliman did not provide a comprehensive account of their personal experiences or the creative output they had generated. Undoubtedly, the scarcity of information regarding Mihardjo and Soma has likely resulted in their relative obscurity within the historiography of modern Indonesian art.

Yuliman was not the sole believer in the existence of Raden Saleh's students—historians such as S. Kalff, Victor Ido van der Wall, Herman F. C. Ten Kate and Werner Kraus examine the ongoing nature of history following the passing of Raden Saleh. According to Kraus, Raden Saleh adopted another individual named Raden Salikin, who was considered his "student" in addition to Mihardjo and Soma. Raden Salikin was the nephew of Raden Saleh. The two had such a close relationship that Salikin was suspected of being involved in the Bekasi riots (*De Bekassische onlusten*).¹⁰⁶

Nevertheless, as elucidated in this chapter, Salikin replicated artifacts, including manuscripts that Raden Saleh acquired from the local inhabitants. Regrettably, additional information regarding Salikin is required, similar to the case of Mihardjo and Soma. Why are these "disciples" so unknown that information about them is limited? S. Kalff hypothesizes that the lack of popularity among Raden Saleh's students could be attributed to the subpar quality of their artwork. Conversely, Van Der Wall maintains a perspective contrasting Kalff's.¹⁰⁷

Van der Wall's writings and activities offer limited insight into Mihardjo and his work, without fully disclosing the entire story. He curated an exhibition in 1942 featuring prints, watercolors, and sketches by West European and Dutch East Indies painters who had been active since the nineteenth century. He exhibited three landscape paintings by Mihardjo in the *Oost en West op z'n Best* exhibition.¹⁰⁸ In his article *Oost en West*, published in *Onze XIX de Eeuwse Teekenkunst*, he asserted that Mihardjo was Raden

¹⁰⁵ Sanento Yuliman, 1989, p.10. See also Sanento Yuliman, *Genese de la Peinture Indonesienne Contemporaine: le Role de S. Sudjojono*, Thesis, Ecole Des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, 1981, pp.52-53.

¹⁰⁶ Werner Kraus, *Raden Saleh Kehidupan dan Karyanya*, (Jakarta: KPG, 2018), pp.189-190.

¹⁰⁷ S. Kalff, "Een Schilderijmuseum ook voor Indië " in *Vragen van den dag: maandschrift voor Nederland en koloniën*, jrg.41, vol. 8, 1926, p. 489. S. Kalff had questioned why Mihardjo and Soma's careers were less bright than their teacher's in an article published a year earlier (1925). It is also worth noting that this is the first time Mihardjo and Soma have been mentioned. See S. Kalff, "Inheemsche Schilderkunst op Java" in *Oedaya Geïllustreerd Tijdschrift*, No.21 February 1925, p.202.

¹⁰⁸ See Victor van der Wall, "Oost en West geteekend op z'n best – Tentoonstelling van prenten en schetsen uit de XIX eeuw", Koloniaal Museum Amsterdam, 16 Augustus – 16 October 1942, p.10. See also "Oost en West getekend" in *Het volk: dagblad voor de arbeiderspartij*, 14 August 1942, p.2.

Saleh's most exceptional pupil. Although Mihardjo did not have a formal academic education, he adeptly showcases his proficiency in drawing techniques and methods. Van Der Wall also provides a monochrome reproduction of Mangkoe Mihardjo's landscape painting to offer readers a comprehensive depiction.¹⁰⁹

In *Schilder - Teekenaars in Nederlandsch Oost - en West - Indie en hun Beteekenis voor de Land- en Volkenkunde* (Painter - Draftsman in Dutch East and West - Indies and their Significance for Land and Ethnology), Herman ten Kate verified the details regarding Mihardjo's works that depict trees and landscapes to serve educational objectives.¹¹⁰ This statement aligns with the newspaper report stating that Mihardjo was employed as a drawing instructor for secondary education.¹¹¹ Subsequently, I searched and successfully located three artworks by Mihardjo that corresponded to the descriptions provided by Ten Kate and Van Der Wall. The works have been incorporated into the collection of the Tropen Museum (Wereldmuseum Amsterdam). The paintings portray the anatomical structure of trees and their fruits in detail, skillfully rendered by Mihardjo with exceptional craftsmanship akin to that of his teacher (Fig. 2.15).

Additional information can be found in newspapers printed in Java, which contain concise accounts of Mihardjo and Soma's involvement in activities related to Raden Saleh. In 1889, the Java Bode newspaper suggested that the teacher's impact on his two students could have been more significant.¹¹² Similarly, Mihardjo and Soma possess expertise in depicting plants and animals through their drawing abilities, just like the teacher. One year later, a newspaper analyzed the subjects of Mihardjo's and Soma's artworks, which depict a peacock displaying its plumage, a slumbering tiger, and a leaping squirrel. In addition, Mihardjo and Soma were notified of their involvement in the International Colonial and Export Exhibition in 1883 in Amsterdam, where several of Raden Saleh's artworks were also showcased.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ V.I. van de Wall, "Oost- en West-Indië in Onze XIX de eeuwse teekenkunst" in H. Hoogenberk, *Cultureel Indië: Bloemlezing Uit de eerste zes jaargangen 1939-1945*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1948), pp.177 and 175 for the reproduction.

¹¹⁰ Herman F.C. ten Kate, "Schilder - Teekenaars in Nederlandsch oost - en West - Indie en hun Beteekenis voor de Land-en Volkenkunde" in *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde van Nederlandsch-Indië*, 1 January 1913, Vol.67(4), p.475.

¹¹¹ See "Nederlandsch Indië" in *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, 2 July 1889, p.1.

¹¹² "Eene bladzijde kunstkroniek" in *Java Bode*, 18 Januari 1889, p.1. "Raden Saleh had een paar leerlingen, raden Mihardjo en raden Soma, maar diep is zijn invloed niet gegaan."

¹¹³ "Schetsen uit Oost-Java", in *Java Bode*, 15 Juni 1892, p.5. See S. Kalff, 1926, p.489.



FIGURE 2.15. Raden Mangkoe Miharjo, *Fruits De Java*, watercolor on paper, before 1900.

Collection of Stichting Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

A little information regarding Raden Soma and his works was written in Dutch newspaper *Algemeen Handelsblad*. It provided a concise review of Soma's paintings, although it did not include any photo reproductions. The newspaper detailed Soma's adeptness in painting, capturing the ambiance of a tea plantation with an imposing residence on a mountainside. The artwork depicts a breathtaking farm landscape located in the Preanger region of West Java. Another image portrays a meticulously rendered scene of a factory room. *Algemeen Handelsblad* states that Soma's painting accurately depicts a machine used for making tea, milling coffee, and operating a sawmill. Soma was reputedly adept at showcasing the intricacies of the sculptures in the chamber.¹¹⁴

Raden Saleh's followers were not only Salikin, Miharjo, and Soma. Other painters like Raden Kusuma di Brata and Lie Kimhok also painted. I found only a few sources about Raden Kusuma. He participated in the 1883 colonial exhibition in Amsterdam with Miharjo and Soma.¹¹⁵ Kusuma's oil

¹¹⁴ "Nederlandsche Koloniën" in *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 23 January 1883, p.5.

¹¹⁵ "Bekrooningen van indische inzenders op de Amsterdamsche tentoonstelling, 1e afdeeling" in *De Nieuwe Vorstenlanden*, 29- October 1883, p.2.

painting, *Portrait of Bandung Patih Raden Wangsajoeda* (1888), adequately describes his technical skills in painting portraits, which are now stored in the collection of the Tropen Museum (Fig.2.16). Furthermore, several sources revealed that Raden Kusuma was once recorded as a drawing teacher at a teacher training school for natives (*kweekschool voor Inlandsche onderwijzers*) in Bandung.¹¹⁶

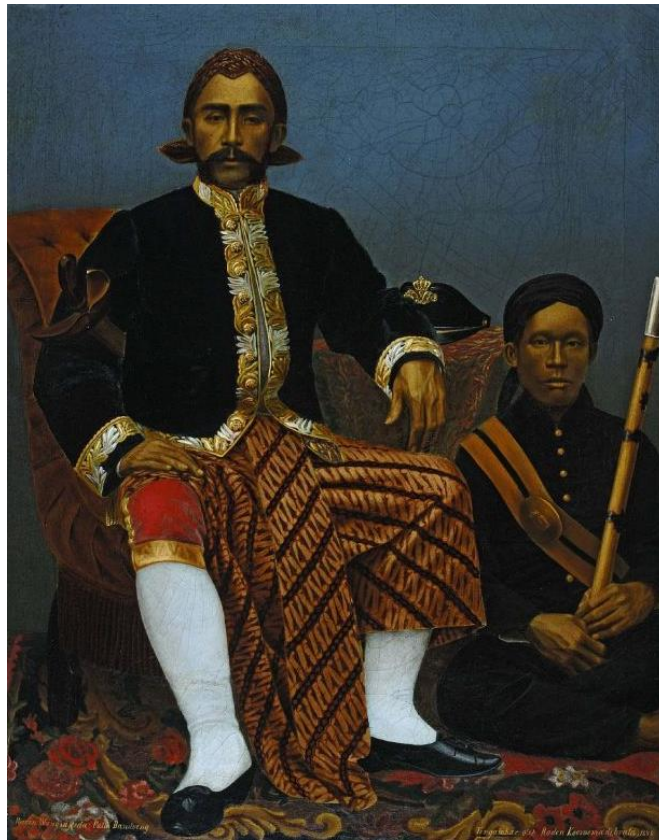


FIGURE 2.16. Raden Koesoema di Brata, *Raden Wangsajoeda Patih van Bandoeng in gala kleding*, oil on canvas, 1888.

Collection of Stichting Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen
(Sources: <https://collectie.wereldculturen.nl/?query=search=&TM=1846-1#/query/8b00edee-acb8-4f51-afd0-932c3bb1e7a2>)

¹¹⁶ "Personalialia" in *De Telegraaf*, 3 March 1897, p. 1., "Officiëel" in *De Preanger-bode*, 16 November 1905, p. 3, dan *Regeerings Almanak voor Nederlandsch-Indië 1890 - Twedee Gedeelte: Kalender en Personalialia*, Batavia, 1890, p.351. Sumber lain menyebutkan bahwa Raden Kusuma di Brata juga terdaftar sebagai guru di sebuah sekolah untuk pegawai negeri sipil (*Opleidingsschool voor Inlandsche Ambtenaren*) di Bandung. See *Gedenboek M.O.S.V.I.A. 1879-1929 uitgegeven ter herdenking van het 50-jarig bestaan der middelbare Opleidingsschool voor Inlandsche Ambtenaren te Bandoeng*, 1929, p.44.

Lie Kimhok (1853-1912) was a talented painter, but he is better known as a pioneer of Chinese-Malay literature in the Dutch East Indies. People in Bogor know Kimhok because of his ability to paint, according to Tio le Soei, Kimhok's biographer. His paintings were attached to the walls of his house until, one day, they caught the attention of Raden Saleh, who lived in the same city at that time. When Raden Saleh saw two paintings of portraits of Chinese emperors and a still life with a golden banana comb on a plate, he recognized Lim Kimhok's talent. Raden Saleh was then eager to accept Lie Kimhok as a student. Furthermore, Saleh was willing to assist Kimhok in traveling to Europe to study painting. However, this plan failed. Kimhok's mother, Lie Han Tjouw, opposed the idea because she did not want to part with her eldest child.¹¹⁷

In light of the preceding explanation, it is pertinent to include some additional remarks. As information regarding the timing, location, and manner in which Raden Saleh imparted his teachings is lacking, I contend that labeling the individuals as "Raden Saleh's students," as some scholars have done, maybe somewhat inaccurate. Instead, I propose considering them as the cohort of painters succeeding Saleh, active during the 50 years between 1880 and 1930. Beyond Raden Saleh's circle, unidentified painters in the 19th century were engaged in artistic pursuits, drawing on wayang characteristics and narrative styles. Likewise, artists who veered away from the wayang motif in their art likely operated during the late 19th century. Thus, identifying these individuals presents a challenge in art historiography (Fig.2.17).

As a final point, I want to highlight the work of Balinese painter I Ketut Gedé—only a few pieces of information about him. However, several of his works, dating to the 1880s, can be found in the prestigious H.N. van der Tuuk collection at the Leiden University Library (Fig.2.18). Van der Tuuk had been a resident of North Bali since 1870. One of his main interests was amassing dictionaries, in pursuit of which he visited various locations in Bali and Lombok. He would give local artists commissions for new works whenever he came. The images Ketut Gedé created depicted commonplace Bali occurrences rooted in traditional tales. His paintings indicate that he had a vast knowledge of stories, was probably a puppeteer, and was literate since he added identifications of characters in Balinese to his images.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ Tio le Soei, *Lie Kimhok - 1853-1912*, (Bandung: L.D. Good Luck, 1958), p.41.

¹¹⁸ Adrian Vickers, *Balinese Art – Paintings and Drawings of Bali 1800-2010*, (Tokyo-Vermont-Singapore: Tuttle Publishing, 2012), p.100.



FIGURE 2.17. Unknown painter, *Soenan Mas delights in the sight of the punishments and cruelties ordered by him*, 1703, Collection of Leiden University Libraries



FIGURE 2.18. *I Ketut Gedé, An Offering to Appease the Demons*, circa 19th Century.

Collection of Leiden University Library



FIGURE 2.19.
Two landscape paintings by the Kartini sisters with
Jepara carved frames were given to Queen
Wilhelmina in 1898.

(Sources: Rita Wassing-Visser, *Royal gifts from Indonesia: historical bonds with the House of Orange-Nassau (1600-1938)*, (Zwolle: Wanders, 1995), p.188.)

Repro by Aminudin TH Siregar

The Kartini Sisters and Their Brother

Art critic Enin Supriyanto provides an alternative viewpoint to address the absence resulting from Raden Saleh's demise. In contrast to Sanento Yuliman, who put forward Mihardjo and Soma, Supriyanto proposed Raden Ajeng Kartini in his article from 2007. Supriyanto, I believe, needs to be made aware of the roles of Mihardjo, Soma, Koesoema di Brata, and Lie Kimhok as Raden Saleh's successors. It seems that Supriyanto's observations specifically focus on the lack of "female artists" in post-Saleh art historiography. Consequently, Supriyanto maintains that Kartini's name merits

remembrance. Supriyanto suggested that Kartini be given the title "the Mother of Indonesian art" due to her efforts in promoting art in Java.¹¹⁹

Supriyanto reached this conclusion upon perusing *Panggil Aku Kartini Saja* (Just Call Me Kartini), a literary work authored by the renowned novelist Pramoedya Ananta Toer. In that book, Ananta Toer asserts that Kartini was an artist. Ananta Toer explores the theme of Indonesian women's liberation from a unique and lesser-known viewpoint, that of a painter, by drawing upon Kartini's correspondence.¹²⁰ Kartini once depicted a pond adorned with flowers and graceful swans gliding through its waters. In 1898, Kartini and her two sisters, Rukmini and Kardinah, gifted Queen Wilhelmina two landscape paintings (Fig.2.19).¹²¹ It was not just Kartini who was interested in art. Rukmini, her younger sister, also expressed a liking for art. Her works are conveyed to have attracted the attention.¹²² She was enthusiastic about continuing her art education in the Netherlands.¹²³ Kartini also backed this aim by commenting, "Roekmini has a good intellect and is capable of learning how to draw; her ambition has always been to become a good artist. This employment required her to study in Europe, but she was unable to do so." Rukmini failed to go to the art academy. However, Sosrokartono, their brother, attended normal education in the Netherlands later on.¹²⁴

Sosrokartono was the first Indonesian student to arrive in the Netherlands. He enrolled at the Polytechnische School Delft on 19 September 1896. Due to his growing interest in language and culture, he subsequently transferred to Leiden University. His reputation soared in 1899 after delivering a lecture at the Dutch Language and Literature Congress in Gent, Belgium.¹²⁵ Unfortunately, I have not uncovered any evidence of

¹¹⁹ Enin Supriyanto, "The Mother of Indonesian Art?" in Carla Bianpoen, et al., *Indonesian Women Artists: The Curtain Opens*, (Jakarta: Yayasan Seni Rupa Indonesia, 2007), pp.15-20.

¹²⁰ For Kartini's letters F.G.P. Jacquet, *Kartini: Surat-surat kepada Ny.R.M. Abendanon-Mandri dan Suaminya*, (Jakarta Penerbit Djambatan, 1987).

¹²¹ Pramoedya Ananta Toer, *Panggil Aku Kartini Saja*, (Jakarta: Lentera Dipantara, 2003), p.179 and 186. See the reproductions in Rita Wassing-Visser, *Royal gifts from Indonesia: historical bonds with the House of Orange-Nassau (1600-1938)*, (Zwolle: Wanders, 1995), p.188.

¹²² See M. Vierhout, *Raden Adjeng Kartini: 1879-1904 Een Javaansche over de nooden en behoeften van haar volk*, (Den Haag: N.V. Uitgevers-Maatschappij "Oceanus", 1944), p.30.

¹²³ The letter of Surat Rukmini dated 23 Juni 1902 in F.G.P. Jacquet, 1987, p. 284. See also Werner Kraus, 2018, p.192.

¹²⁴ Empat Saudara, *Habis Gelap Terbitlah Terang: Boeah Pikiran Raden Adjeng Kartini*, (Weltevreden: Balai Poestaka, 1922), p. 147. See also Hurustiati Subandrio, *Tjerman Kehidupan: Kartini*, (Amsterdam-Jakarta: Penerbit Djambatan, 1950), p.9.

¹²⁵ For an introduction of Sosrokartono in Europa, see H. Bouman, *RMP. Sosrokartono di Eropa*, 1989,

Sosrokartono's artistic involvement. Nonetheless, between 1915 and 1916, Sosrokartono posed for painter Isaac Israels, who painted this Javanese aristocrat several times.¹²⁶



FIGURE 2.20. Raden Ngabehi Sastrowisardjo in his studio.
(Sources: *Inter-Ocean-A Dutch Indian Magazine Covering Malaysia-Australasia*, Volume 7, Number 9, September 1926)
Repro by Aminudin TH Siregar

Others Filling the Void

Abdullah Soeriosoebroto, son of the national movement leading figure Wahidin Sudirohusodo, came to the Netherlands after Sosrokartono. There are not many references available regarding Abdullah. He studied at STOVIA (*School tot Opleiding van Indische Artsen*) in Weltevreden, Batavia, because his father wanted him to become a doctor. Instead of listening to lessons in the classroom, Abdullah often painted his teacher. His father then sent Abdullah to the Netherlands to attend art school.¹²⁷

unknown publisher. I found the copy in the Leiden University Library. For Sosrokartono's lecture in Belgium, see *Het Nederlandsch in Indie: Redevoering uitgesproken door Radhen Mas Pandji Sosro Kartono op het XXV Nederlandsch Taal en Letterkundig Congres*, Neerlandia, October 1899, pp.1-3.

¹²⁶ See Kartono's portrait in J.P. Glerum, *De Indische Israels*, (Zwolle: Uitgeverij Waanders b.v., 2005), p.63.

¹²⁷ See Soebaryo Mangunwidodo, *Dr. K.R.T. Radjiman Wediodiningrat: Perjalanan Seorang Putra Bangsa 1879-1952*, (Jakarta: Yayasan Dr.K.R.T. Radjiman Wediodiningrat, 1994), pp. 22-23.

In the historiography of modern Indonesian art, Abdullah's name was later "denigrated" as an exponent of the Mooi Indië painters. Helena Spanjaard stated that Abdullah continued his studies at the Hague Art Academy¹²⁸, although this information still needs to be proven. Without mentioning the exact name of the academy, another source stated that Abdullah had studied at an art academy in Amsterdam. Another source noted that Abdullah attended Leiden's "*voorbereidende teekenschool*" program. However, more in-depth information about the academy and program has not been found.

According to historian Harry A. Poeze, Abdullah arrived in the Netherlands in 1898 and lived with the Petit family - employees of the Leiden University Library. From here, Abdullah's story is connected with Abdul Rivai, a doctor and journalist who founded the magazine *Bendera Wolanda*. Together with Sosrokartono, Abdullah worked at the magazine as an illustrator. His works appeared in several numbers. However, this job as an illustrator lasted only a short time. After the eighth edition, his name was no longer listed in the magazine's editorial ranks. Abdullah left his job as an illustrator and possibly returned to his homeland, although evidence has yet to be found precisely for when this happened.¹²⁹ He was asked to return to his homeland at the insistence of his father, who was worried that Abdullah would lose his spirit of patriotism and customs. Abdullah is estimated to have lived in the Netherlands for approximately nine years.¹³⁰

The relationship between Sosrokartono and Mas Abdullah continues in Java through his son Basuki Abdullah, who is a talented artist. Once, before continuing his studies in the Netherlands in 1933, Basuki showed his painting to Sosrokartono, who praised it. Sosrokartono favored Basuki's decision to attend an arts academy in the Netherlands - the Catholic Mission then funded Basuki Abdullah's studies at the Royal Academy of Art in The Hague.¹³¹

As previously stated, after Raden Saleh's death, Indonesian painters such as Mas Pirngadie, Abdullah Suriosubroto, and Wakidi emerged in the 1930s. However, it's essential to acknowledge that other names, often excluded from the standard narrative, may not be familiar to all. Raden

¹²⁸ Helena Spanjaard, 1998, p. 36.

¹²⁹ See Harry A. Poeze, *Di Negeri Penjajah: Orang Indonesia di Negeri Belanda 1600-1950*, (Jakarta: KPG-KITLV-Universitas Leiden, 2014), pp.38-39.

¹³⁰ Taman Siswa, *Almanak Pergoeroean 1942*, (Jogjakarta: Perpoestakaan Taman-Siswa, 1941), pp.128-129.

¹³¹ Solichin Salam, *Biografi R. Basoeki Abdullah Sang Maestro*, (Jakarta: Keluarga Basoeki Abdullah, 1994), p.37.

Ngabehi Sastrowisardjo, Raden Bekel Atmo Sadewo, and Frederik Kasenda are among these lesser-known painters, and their stories are equally important to the history of Indonesian art. There are not many references to Sastrowisardjo (Fig.2.20). He etched as well as painted.¹³² Sastrowisardjo, born in Surakarta, also participated in the *Bandung Jaarbeurstentoonstelling* in 1920.¹³³ *Bintang Hindia* magazine had a reproduction of Atmo Sadewo's painting of Javanese sultans (Fig.2.21). I have not yet found any information about him.



FIGURE 2.21.
Sultans of Yogyakarta painted
by Raden Bekel Atmo Sadewo.
(Sources: *Bintang Hindia*, No.13.,
TH.III, 1905)

Repro by Aminudin TH Siregar

Little information is available about Frederik Kasenda (Fig.2.22.), a painter from North Sulawesi's Minahasa. Kasenda was actively exhibiting in the 1920s, and his paintings were primarily landscapes. His short biography was published in the magazine *Bintang Hindia* in 1925. The editor revealed that Kasenda studied under A. J. Lassut and W. Kindangan, whose identities are unknown. They taught Kasenda drawing and perspective. J.E. Jasper, known for his book *De inlandsche kunstnijverheid in Nederlandsch Indies* (1912), illustrated by Mas Pirngade, played an essential role in Kasenda's career because he brought the young painter from Sulawesi to Java in 1908. Kasenda then worked as a painter in this new location, explicitly receiving orders to enlarge portraits of figures. One commission was to paint R.A. Kartini.

¹³² "Advertentie Kunsthandel Artistorakel" in *De Preanger-bode*, 15 February 1922, p.11.

¹³³ "Kunst en Letteren-Schilderkunst:Jaarbeurstentoonstelling" in *De locomotief*, 18 May 1920, p.2.



FIGURE 2.22. Frederik Kasenda and his exhibition in Batavia in 1925.
Source: *Bintang Hindia*, 31 October 1925, p.690.

Collection of Leiden University Library
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar



Kasenda relocated to Surabaya in 1911. He established his career as a painter in this city by participating in several exhibitions. He then returned to North Sulawesi in 1915, holding a solo exhibition in Manado, a large town in the region. He also constructed his studio there. The Kasenda exhibition in Manado represented the city's artistic life at the time. As far as can be determined, this was the first exhibition in Eastern Indonesia. According to an editor at *Bintang Hindia*, Kasenda's career as a painter in Manado was well-established. Kasenda, on the other hand, wanted to find new challenges to progress his career. He decided to return to Java in 1920. His solo exhibition in the city of Solo in 1923 was a success. He had a further success two years later when he exhibited in Cirebon. The Editor emphasized that, despite the scarcity of Indonesian painters, Kasenda should be remembered as someone who "has made the Indonesian nation proud."¹³⁴ His painting ability has "connected the traces left by Raden Saleh."¹³⁵

It is noteworthy to present other stories here. Chapter One delves into Noto Soeroto's pivotal role in *Oedaya* magazine. This publication, with its diverse sections, including '*van kunst en kunstenaars*' (art and artists), serves as a testament to the Noto Soeroto network's significance among Dutch and Javanese artists. A prime example is Raden Mas Jodjana, a celebrated dancer whose name, despite his talent as a printmaker, remains largely unknown in the history of modern Indonesian art.

¹³⁴ M.G.T., "Kunstenaar Indonesia: Frederik Kasenda" in *Bintang Hindia*, 24 October 1925, p. 676.

¹³⁵ M.G.T., "Frederik Kasenda" in *Bintang Hindia*, 31 Oktober 1925, p.690.



FIGURE 2.23.
Woodcut by Jodjana
(Source: Noto Soeroto, *Lotos en Morgendauw*, 1920)

Repro by Aminudin TH Siregar

Jodjana, who initially went to the Netherlands in 1914 to study economics in Rotterdam, made a significant shift in his career path. Not long after, he decided to leave his studies and visit The Hague more often to immerse himself in art. In that city, Jodjana formed a friendship with Isaac Israels, became an artist's model, and learned to paint from him. He also studied woodcuts from the anarchist artist Joris Johannes Christiaan Lebeau.¹³⁶ Jodjana's woodcut works, in particular, hold a significant place in his artistic journey. These works, characterized by their intricate details and bold use of lines, were instrumental in shaping modern Javanese art. Unfortunately, references to Jodjana's works of art are still minimal. However, one representative source is the four reproductions of Jodjana's woodcuts, which appear in Nico Oosterbeek's article in the *van kunst en kunstenaars* column of *Oedaya* magazine. In his writing, Oosterbeek introduced Jodjana as an "Indonesische kunstenaar (Indonesian artist)" who succeeded in attracting the attention of the Dutch public because his inspiration and awareness laid the foundation for pure modern Javanese art (*een zuivere moderne Javaansche kunst*).¹³⁷ Several of Jodjana's woodcut works can also be seen in the book by Soeroto *Lotos en Morgendauw* (Fig.2.23).¹³⁸

¹³⁶ For further reading, see Marcel Bonnef & Pierre Labrousse "Un danseur javanais en France: Raden Mas Jodjana (1893-1972)" in *Archipel*, 1997, Vol.54(1), pp. 225-242. For Chris Lebeau, see Rudolf de Jong, *Chris Lebeau: kunstenaar en anarchist*, (Amsterdam [etc.]: Ferdinand Domela Nieuwenhuisfonds, 2011).

¹³⁷ See Nico Oosterbeek, *Raden Mas Jodjana* in *Oedaya*, No.25, June 1925, pp.4-5.

¹³⁸ See Noto Soeroto, *Lotos en Morgendauw*, (Amsterdam: Hadi Poestaka, 1920).



FIGURE 2.24.
Iko and J. Schmutzer.
(Source: J. Schmutzer, J.J. Ten Berge and W. Maas, *Europeanisme of Katholicisme*, (Utrecht: De Gemeenschap Xaveriana-Leuven, c.1929)

Repro by Aminudin TH Siregar

Soeroto wholeheartedly commended Jodjana, a Javanese artist residing in Europe, for innovatively synthesizing Eastern and Western art while steadfastly upholding his cultural heritage. Through Jodjana's works, Soeroto has established a definitive standard for achieving a harmonious balance between the two artistic influences.¹³⁹

During the 1920s and 1930s, art-making in Indonesia experienced significant growth with the support of religious channels. This aspect offers an intriguing and often overlooked dimension in the canon narrative, as I will examine below. It relates to the Catholic mission networks in Java, which fostered the development of "Javanese Christian Art."¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ See Oedaja, Nr.21, February 1925, pp. 202-203.

¹⁴⁰ For further reading, see Volker Küster, Karel Steenbrink, et al., Jan Sihar Aritonang and Karel Steenbrink, *A History of Christianity in Indonesia*, (Leiden: Brill, 2008), p.925-949, J. Schmutzer,

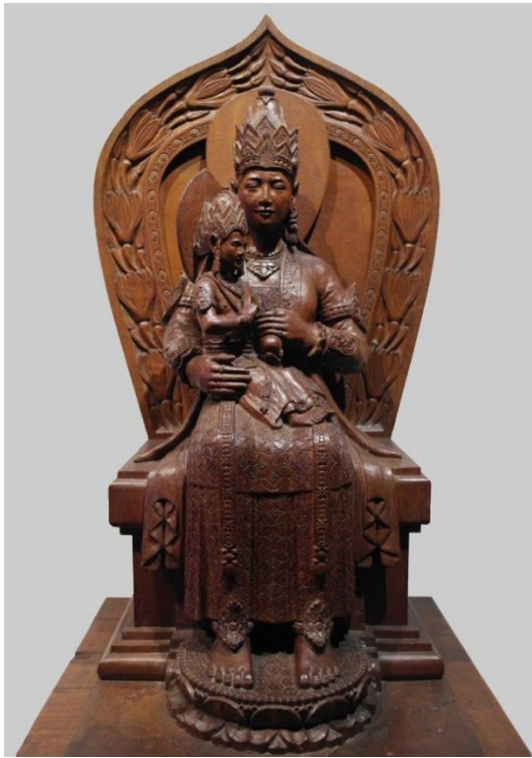


FIGURE 2.25. A-B. Iko's sculptors in the Mission Museum in Steyl.

Collection of The Mission Museum in Steyl
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

The Sacred Heart Church in Ganjuran Yogyakarta is a captivating example of the fusion of Catholic (Western) and Javanese art. Both the architecture and the statues in the interior evoke a unique syncretism. Joseph Schmutzer, a geologist, politician, and art enthusiast, played a crucial role in this artistic blend.¹⁴¹ He collaborated with Iko to create statues for the church's decoration (Fig.2.24).¹⁴² This blend can be seen in Iko's works, some of which are now in the Mission Museum in Steyl (Fig.2.25. A-C). In his article "Christelijk-Javaansche Kunst," which became a reference for this art genre in the colonial period, Schmutzer observed and believed that the richness of classical art in Java was a source of inspiration. He underscored the importance of examining and utilizing these old cultural elements to give rise to new life in Javanese art, which was gradually becoming modern.¹⁴³

"Christelijk-Javaansche Kunst" in J. Schmutzer et al., *Javaansche Kunst*, n.p., n.y., p.59-89. Another version of *Javaansche Kunst*, published in 1929, has exactly the same author and written material. It is entitled *Europeanism of Catholicism*. See J. Schmutzer, J.J.Ten Berge and W. Maas, *Europeanisme of Katholicisme*, (Utrecht: De Gemeenschap Xaveriana-Leuven, c.1929). See also Joh's article. Hellings and Sepp Schuller, in a special issue on the development of Christian art in *Het Gildeboek, gewijd aan kerkelijke kunst en oudheidkunde*, XXle Jaargang, Aflevering 2, April 1938, pp. 42-62.

¹⁴¹ Djoko Soekiman, 2011, p. 57.

¹⁴² See J. Schmutzer et al., 1928, pp. 68-71.

¹⁴³ J. Schmutzer et al., 1928, p. 60.

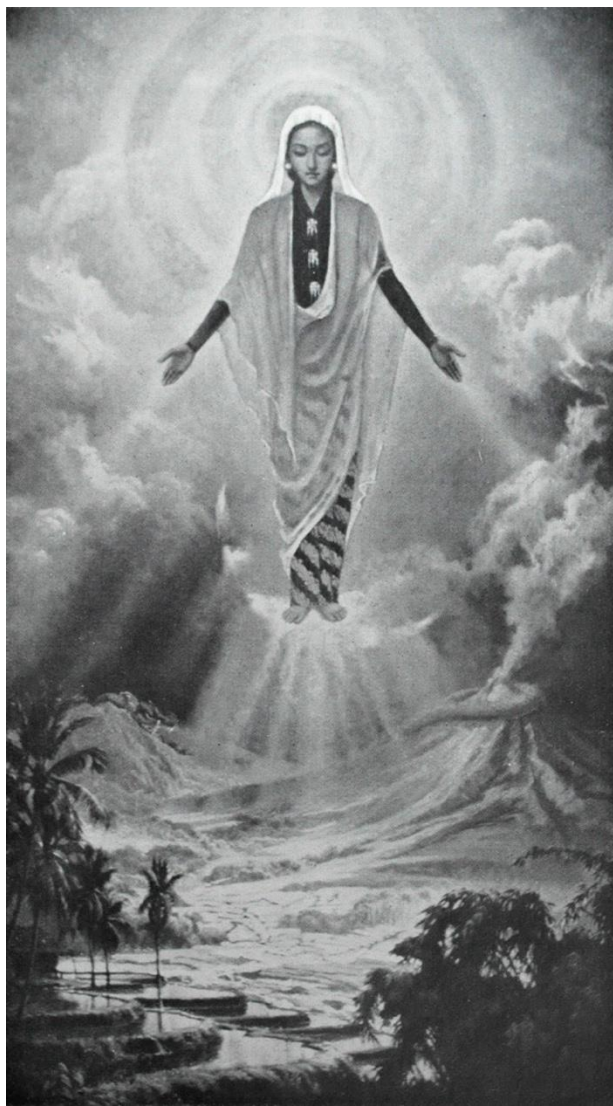


FIGURE 2.26. Basuki Abdullah, *Maria Assumpta*, 1935.
(Source: Magazine Sint Claverbond: uitgave der Paters Jezuïeten ten bate
hunnen missie op Java, Nijmegen : Centrale Drukkerij, 1935, p.221)

Repro by Aminudin TH Siregar

One of the early specimens of Catholic expression using conventional Javanese techniques is the image of the Trinity executed by Raden Mas Joesoef Poerwodiwirjo. He entered Schmutzer's Gondang Lipoero sugar plantation elementary school - which opened in 1920. After completing elementary school, he converted to Catholicism. He continued his courses in religion and became a catechist. According to Schmutzer, Poerwodiredjo drew on his initiative.¹⁴⁴ Several names emerged from this Catholic mission circle who created, as Schumtzer called it, “Christelijk-Javaansche Kunst (Christian Javanese Art),” including Basuki Abdullah (Fig. 2.26)¹⁴⁵, Father

¹⁴⁴ Volker Küster, et al., 2008, pp. 926.

¹⁴⁵ The Catholic mission provided Basuki Abdullah with a scholarship to study in the Netherlands. A recommendation from Pastor Koch, S.J. plays an important role here. Departing for the Netherlands in

M. Reksaatmadja¹⁴⁶, Fr. X. Djoemingin, and Raden Mas Joesoef Poerwodiwirjo.¹⁴⁷ Their works artistically appear to offer novelty by showing depictions of the Catholic Holy Trinity in physical form and Javanese cultural imagery.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter has shown various issues surrounding Raden Saleh, which are related to the doubt or belief of a group of artists and scholars in his patriotic attitude. It also discusses his successor painters, who have filled 50 years that are believed to be empty in the history of modern Indonesian art. The rejection of Raden Saleh's status as a post-colonial symptom has become a contentious issue for nationalist critics and artists. They dismissed Raden Saleh, citing his letter of loyalty to the Dutch king and the privileges he enjoyed. However, the painting *Die Gefangennahme Diepo Negoro* has effectively challenged this narrative. With its reversal of Pieneman's composition, this work has not only sparked a reevaluation but also significantly altered the narrative. It suggests that Raden Saleh may have been more than just a painter; he was a patriotic and partisan figure in his country. In this chapter, I propose that Raden Saleh should not only be confined to the frame of nationalist ideology but reassessed as a painter who drew inspiration from his long journey and transcended geographical boundaries.

Of course, anyone could rank him as "the first modern Indonesian painter" at any time. Instead, I would like to place him similarly to how we place Picasso globally: based on his artworks without bothering about where he came from. In the end, what matters is the works of art he created. More often, the writers' preoccupation with determining the status of Raden Saleh's nationalism and his pioneering in modern Indonesian art history obscures

1933, Abdullah studied at the *Koninklijke Academie van Beeldende Kunsten Den Haag* for two years and two months (1935-1937). See Solichin Salam, 1994, 39. Abdullah was preparing to establish a "Javanese Christian art school" as part of the mission's goals. However, upon his return to his homeland, Abdullah pursued a more conventional artistic path, deviating from the mission's original intentions. See Volker Küster, et al., 2008, p. 931.

¹⁴⁶ For reproduction photos of works, see *ST. Claverbond - Uitgave der P.P. Jezuiten Ten Bate Hunner Missie op Java*, Jaargang 47, Afl. 2, February 1935, Nijmegen: N.V. Centrale Drukkerij, p.57 and 59.

¹⁴⁷ For reproduction photos of works by Raden Mas Joesoef Poerwodiwirjo, see Volker Küster, et al., 2008, p. 926.

the significance of Raden Saleh's artistic achievements and how his works link to the global painting constellation, a term I use to refer to the interconnectedness and influence of various art movements and artists across different countries and cultures. Thus, broadening his networking is essential for future studies on Raden Saleh. In line with this, I want to quote what former Indonesian Minister of Education and Culture Muhammad Yamin declared when he made a speech at Saleh's grave in Bogor in 1953. At that time, Yamin believed, "Raden Saleh was first seen as a painter and artist, then as a nationalist and finally an idealist."¹⁴⁸

Raden Saleh is not a painter who only became known or established as a pioneer in 1976, as Jim Supangkat mentioned above. For a long time, he had become a phenomenon during his lifetime and became a myth after his death. No painter from Java has received as much attention as him, a clear testament to his pioneering recognition in the history of modern Indonesian art. His transnational popularity soared in the early 20th century, surpassing his contemporaries. His enduring impact is evident in the numerous writings from his admirers, who have elevated him to a position of honor as a beginner in art history.

In an article titled "Schilderkunst in Indië" (Painting in the Indies), published in 1902, the writer and musician Hans van de Wall (Victor Ido) expressed his eagerness to begin art history with Raden Saleh, stating, "If I were a writer of this part of art history, I would start with Raden Saleh, the man who only painted his own country and people with such artistic sensibility."¹⁴⁹

Some Indonesian writers also contributed to constructing Raden Saleh as a myth. After Van de Wall's writings were published in 1902, publications about Raden Saleh began to appear. Among these, I discovered M. Adiwidjaja¹⁵⁰, who holds a significant place as the first Indonesian to write

¹⁴⁸ "Raden Saleh, kunstenaar, nationalist en idealist, geëerd door nageslacht" in *De nieuwsgier*, 10 September 1953, p.4.

¹⁴⁹ Hans van de Wall, "Schilderkunst in Indië" in *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, 7 May 1902, p.5. "Ware ik een schrijver van dit deel der kunstgeschiedenis, ik zou beginnen met Raden Saleh, den man die uitsluitend zijn eigen land en volk op doek bracht met zoo veel kunstzin."

¹⁵⁰ I have not found any further information about this author. However, there was a connection between Adiwidjaja and Tirta Adhisurjo through the *Soenda Berita* newspaper, published in the early 20th century. In this magazine, founded by Tirta Adhisurjo, Adiwidjaja has written several articles on geography, housing, history, and Islamic issues. See M. Adiwidjaja, "Roemah" in *Soenda Berita*, 11 April 1904, p.6, M. Adiwidjaja, "Perasa-Pikiran" in *Soenda Berita*, 24 April 1904, pp.5-6, dan M. Adiwidjaja, "Ilmu Boemi" in *Soenda Berita*, 1 Mei 1904, pp.3-6. For further reading of the Tirta Adhi Surjo as the pioneer nationalist, see Pramodya Ananta Toer, *Sang Pemula*, (Jakarta: Hasta Mitra, 1985).

Raden Saleh, marhoem.

NJATALAH ta⁵ ada pematja „B. H.“, jang beloem perenah mendengar nama: „Raden Saleh“.

Siapakah Raden Saleh itoe? Raden Saleh ialah seorang boemi-poetera Poelau Djawa, jang mashoer didalam Doenia-gambaran.

Kepandaiannya itoe diperolihnja dari pada „hidajat“, disertakan dengan „toentoetan“. Katanja koenoe: kepandaiannya menggambar itoe sangatlah adjaib.

Oepamanya: ada orang menjeroeh menggambar soeatoe hoetan atawa padang, tetapi Raden Saleh loepa, betapa keadaan jang hendak digambarkannya itoe. Maka Raden Saleh poen meroep pasir dengan tangannya dan dilontarkan keatas.

Dengan segira djoea dapatlah ia menggambar sebagai jang dikendaki olih orang tadi.

Banjak koenoe kabarnya handai-tolan „Raden Saleh“, jang atjap kali dipermain-mainkannya dengan gambarannya.

Diboeatnja gambaran seekor lalat, jang sebagai lalat hidoep roepanja. Maka olih tetamoenja dioesir lalat itoe, kerena disangkanya, behoea sesoengnjalah ada lalat pada tempat itoe. Beberapa kali koenoe dioesir-oesirnja lalat itoe, tetapi tidak djoea ia terbang. Baroelah diketahoeinja jang lalat itoe hanjalah gambaran.

Boekan mata menoesia sadsja, jang dapat didaja R. S. dengan kepandaian gambarnya, tetapi mata binatang poen dapat dikitjoehnja. Diboeatnja gambaran setangkai boeah anggoer, seperti boeah anggoer jang masak roepanja. Maka boeroeng² poen mengampiri gambaran itoe, kerena disangkanya, behoea penglihatannya itoe sesoenggoehnjalah boeah anggoer.

Banjaklah lagi kemashoeran Raden Saleh. Saja serahkan kepada ankoe² pematja „B. H.“, kerena kemashoerannya itoe tidak tersemboeni, tetapi diketahoei orang semoea.

M. ADIWIDJAJA.

RADEN SALEH SARIEF BASTAMAN. DE BEKENDE JAVAANSCH E SCHILDER.

Raden Saleh Sarief Bastaman, geboren te Semarang omstreeks 1814, overleden te Buitenzorg 23 April 1880, stamde uit een voorname regentenfamilie. Op jeugdigen leeftijd kwam hij in kennis met den schilder Payen, die zijn aanleg voor de teekenkunst opmerkende, hem uit eigen beweging onderricht gaf. In 1830 ging R. Saleh met den Inspecteur van Financiën, de heer De Lange, naar Europa, waar hij zijn aanleg kon ontwikkelen. Daarna doorreisde hij een groot gedeelte van Europa, woonde 5 jaar in Dresden, vergezelde Horace Vernet naar Algiers en was in 1848 te Parijs getuige van de Februari-omwenteling. In 1851 of '52 keerde hij naar Java terug. Ter koloniale Tentoonstelling van 1883 te Amsterdam was een aantal schilderijen van Raden Saleh aanwezig, dieren en dierengevechten, jachten en landschappen. (Zie Encyclopaedie van N. I.). In 't Rijks-Museum te Amsterdam bevindt zich een schilderij van R. Saleh, een leeuw voorstellende. Door ons buitenlandsch verblijf is het ons thans niet mogelijk, een nadere aanduiding van de plaats dier schilderij te geven.



P. j. m. Raden Saleh, marhoem.
(Kiriman M. Adiwidjaja.)

itoe kami wartakan didalam soerat-tjerita kami.
Didalam karangan toean Schmalhausen

FIGURE 2.29.
M. Adwidjaja, *Raden Saleh, Marhoem in Bintang Hindia*, 15 June 1903.

Collection of Leiden University Library
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

about Raden Saleh. His writings, although brief, were published bilingually in the *Bintang Hindia* magazine in 1903 under the title "Raden Saleh, Marhoem - Raden Saleh Sarief Bustaman: De Bekende Javaansche Schilder" (Fig.2.29). This article aims to introduce readers to the artist's miracles. Raden Saleh, for example, can paint anything with a handful of sand sprinkled in the air. Raden Saleh is believed to have once drawn a fly on a plate for his guests to eat until he realized it was just a "picture."¹⁵¹

The newspaper *Medan Prijaji*'s turn came after *Bintang Hindia*. In its 1910 edition, *Medan Prijaji* published Tirto Adhi Surjo's essay about Raden Saleh to highlight the painter's reputation, which made the country proud.¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ M. Adiwidjaja, "Raden Saleh, Marhoem (Raden Saleh Sarief Bustaman: De Bekende Javaansche Schilder)" in *Bintang Hindia*, 15 Juni 1903, p.123.

¹⁵² See Tirto Adhi Surjo, "Raden Saleh" in *Medan Prijaji*, 26 February 1910, p.11.

Eventually, in 1913, Noto Soeroto came with his writings “*Bij het 100ste geboortjaar van Raden Saleh* (On the 100th Birthday of Raden Saleh)” in Dutch about Raden Saleh with some primary photo reproductions of his paintings such as *Boschbrand*, *De Tijger en Zijn Prooi*, *Een Jagt op Java*, *Overstroming op Java*, *Op Leven en Dood*, Raden’s Saleh portrait and his palace in Batavia.¹⁵³

Unlike Adiwidjaya and Adhi Soerjo's, Soeroto's writing was more structured and had broad dimensions. Interestingly, Soeroto wrote specifically for educated people, particularly those involved in the national movement at the time, since he suggested Raden Saleh's intellectual maturity made the painter an ideal national role model. Unlike critics or artists who doubt Raden Saleh's nationalism, in this article, Soeroto even proposes Raden Saleh as a role model for the nationalist movement. He knew that information about Raden Saleh was scarce among ordinary Indonesian people and intellectuals. Meanwhile, as national consciousness grew, movements such as Boedi Oetomo required someone to instill confidence. Soeroto suggested that the figure should be someone who commands respect and is well-known in the community. Therefore, according to him, Raden Saleh deserves to be recognized as someone who has the ability and has contributed to establishing Indonesians on an equal footing with people of other nations. With Raden Saleh as a generator of national awareness, Soeroto also wants to "help Javanese interests to awaken national art from the doom of indifference."¹⁵⁴

Soeroto's writing emphasizes the importance of respecting Raden Saleh and suggests a few ideas for achieving this goal. He proposes printing the painter's works in an album, organizing an exhibition of his works, and building a museum dedicated to Raden Saleh. Soeroto also suggests investigating Saleh's hidden or dispersed works to ensure they are properly preserved.¹⁵⁵

All of the above findings indicate that Raden Saleh has been acknowledged and debated for two centuries. Thus, the claim by Monika

¹⁵³ Noto Soeroto, *Bij Het 100ste Geboortjaar van Raden Saleh: Javaansch Schilder Geb. Te Semarang 1814, Gest.te Buitenzorg 1880*, Reprint from *het Nederlandsch-Indische Huis Oud en Nieuw*, 1914, p.219-229.

¹⁵⁴ Noto Soeroto, “Bij het 100ste geboortjaar van Raden Saleh: Javaansch schilder geb. te Semarang 1814, gest. te Buitenzorg 1880” in *Het Nederlandsch Indische huis, oud en nieuw*, November 1913, Weltevreden: Architecten-bureau Hulswit, p.221. “Dit opstel wil mede helpen wekken de Javaansche belangstelling in de nationale kunst uit den dommel van onverschilligheid.”

¹⁵⁵ Noto Soeroto, 1913-1914, p.221.

Griebeler and Werner Kraus several years ago that "Raden Saleh was underappreciated or forgotten by his nation" is only partially accurate.¹⁵⁶ I also want to underline that the period following Raden Saleh's death in 1880 until the 1930s was not as devoid of artistic activity as some historians believed. The accounts mentioned above indicate that various painters were involved in political, educational, and religious missions during these years, demonstrating that artistic activities continued.

¹⁵⁶ See Monika Griebeler, *Indonesian artist is finally honored in his homeland* dalam <http://www.dw.com/en/indonesian-artist-is-finally-honored-in-his-homeland/a-16038975>, accessed on 20 September, 15.27 PM. See also interview between the journalist Niken Prathivi with Werner Kraus in *An Encounter with Raden Saleh*, The Jakarta Post, 13 January 2013, p.6.





FIGURE 3.1. The painting of Raden Mas Abdullah Soeriosoebroto portrays mountains, coconut (or palm) trees, and paddy fields (*sawah*). These components are commonly contained in landscape paintings depicting the beauty of colonial Indonesia, also recognized as “Mooi Indië.”

Private Collection
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

Chapter Three

On Mooi Indië

The Tropenmuseum Amsterdam defined Mooi Indië (the Beautiful Indies) on its exhibition wall as follows:

A typical colonial art form, featuring paintings of landscapes full of volcanoes, rice paddies and palm trees that presented an idealized image of the country: peaceful, calm, and cultivated. A landscape in which violence and exploitation did not seem to exist. The sight of workers in this overwhelming, sun-drenched natural setting also underlined the idea of a traditional farming society which needed to be 'modernized' by the Dutch.¹

When I read it, I assumed that most visitors who came to the museum would not be aware that the description above demonstrates a subjective tone and incorporates satirical elements reminiscent of S. Sudjojono's critique of landscape painting in 1939, as manifested by his famous lines: "Everything is wonderful and romantic, paradisiacal. Everything is very pleasing, calm, and peaceful. These paintings convey a singular interpretation, namely 'Mooi Indië'."² He then continues sarcastically that Mooi Indië's paintings obscure the lived reality of colonialism and imperialism by saying:

We must not respect these painters who casually draw the valleys and the tall mountains reaching the clouds and the dream of heaven on Earth while saying, 'Oh, the romance of Priangan,' but refuse to listen to the complaining, moaning, and

¹ Wall texts printed on the walls of the Tropenmuseum, now is Wereldmuseum Amsterdam. Field notes, 14 February 2018.

² S. Sudjojono, *Seni Loekis Indonesia: Sekarang dan Yang Akan Datang* in S. Sudjojono, *Seni Loekis, Kesenian dan Seniman*, (Yogyakarta: Penerbit Indonesia Sekarang, 1946), p.5. "Semoea serba bagoes dan romantis bagai disorga, semoea serba énak, tenang dan damai. Loekisan-loekisan tadi tidak lain hanya mengandoeng satoe arti: Mooi-Indië."

crying of the farmers behind him as he bleeds, his foot struck by a hoe. The image may be perfect, but it lacks humanity, probably hanging on a cloud, pecked dry by eagles or struck by lightning."³

The phrase "needed to be modernised by the Dutch" in the museum caption satirically suggests the civilizing mission of constructing infrastructure such as road networks, bridges, canals, and ports in their colonies. The phrase aligns with Sudjojono's outlook by questioning why painters do not depict the modernization that has transformed the landscape of Indonesia on their canvas. Instead, they focused on portraying the already beautiful natural scenery – as he named it: "artistieke plekken (artistic places)."⁴ Ultimately, for Sudjojono, the natural Indonesian beauty was deliberately constructed to lull the people into the deception of colonialism.

The Tropenmuseum's definition of Mooi Indië unveils a complex interplay of discursive links between the museum's wall text and Sudjojono's critique. This complexity underscores the fact that Mooi Indië is not a simple term but requires a comprehensive approach in its discussion. The term is intricately connected to a range of spatial and temporal historical factors that are constantly changing. In this complexity, it is crucial to emphasize the importance of delving into the historical context of Mooi Indië, including its emergence and dual connotation, to gain a more nuanced understanding of the term.

This chapter will examine the origins of Mooi Indië (Fig. 3.1), traced back to two painters from separate periods and origins, each with particular objectives. They were Fredericus Jacobus van Rossum du Chattel and Sudjojono. However, in both perspectives, Mooi Indië represents a stereotype of Indonesia. Mooi Indië was first employed in 1913 as Du Chattel's watercolor album title. Du Chattel's works depicted the landscape as an enduring utopian realm characterized by abundant tropical sunlight, thriving bamboo trees, cascading waterfalls, women engaging in bathing activities within the river, and meticulously arranged terraced rice paddies. For

³ S. Sudjojono, 1946, p. 25. "Kita haroes tidak bisa hormat kepada seseorang yang enak-enak sadja menggambar lembah-lembah dan goenoeng-goenoeng tinggi mentjapai awan dan mimpi soerga doenia berkata, 'Oh, romantisch Priangan,' tetapi ta' maoe mendengarkan dibelakang dekat dia pak tani mengeloh, merintih, menangis sebab kakinya kena patjoel, berdarah, loeka parah. Gambarnya tadi barangkali bagoes, tapi hati kemanoesiaanja ta' ada, barangkali tergantoeng di awan, soedah habis dipatoek elang atau dihantam petir melajang."

⁴ S. Sudjojono, 1946, pp. 17-18.

Sudjojono, Indonesia symbolizes transformation and hardship, encompassing "obscurity, impoverished agricultural workers, opulent vehicles, the emission of thick smoke from industrial facilities, and electrical infrastructure."⁵ When Du Chattel employed the term, it is plausible that the artist intended to express his profound appreciation for the sensory experiences evoked by the natural environment. S. Sudjojono, in turn, exploited this approach to criticize the ideological stances of both Indonesian and European painters.

Nationalist art historiography has framed Mooi Indië as a stigma associated with the way certain artists, artworks, or artistic practices have been negatively stereotyped or discriminated against based on factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, or socio-economic status. The stigmatization of Mooi Indië is not a simple matter but a complex and multi-faceted issue. It can also be related to certain styles, movements, or representations marginalized, misunderstood, or undervalued within modern Indonesian art history. The origins and perpetuation of stigma in art history, particularly regarding Indonesian landscape painters, is a significant topic that warrants a thorough investigation, especially considering the lack of efforts to revive and recontextualize their roles in art history.

The stigma of Mooi Indië, a complex and nuanced concept involving Dutch critics and Indonesian painters, has a rich history. It was Johannes Tielrooy who initially formulated this stigma, a process that Sudjojono later continued. However, Sudjojono's definition of Mooi Indië, which has gained significant popularity, is a primary reference for the historical foundation of modern Indonesian art. This chapter delves into how, since Sudjojono penned his influential article in 1939, nationalist art historiography has framed Mooi Indië as a stigma. This framing has profoundly impacted the categorization of Mooi Indië painters, such as Mas Pirngadie, Abdullah Suriosubroto, Wakidi, Ernest Dezentje, and Leo Eland. They have been perceived as not contributing to the development of modern Indonesian art within this framework. Mooi Indië is also stigmatized as a representation of colonialism. Based on this viewpoint, a belief emerged in nationalistic art historiography that generalized all European painters who came to the Dutch East Indies as Mooi Indië painters. Sudjojono added a new label to these painters by saying they were just tourists who wanted to use their free time painting and brought their paintings back to the Netherlands as souvenirs from the Indies.

⁵ S. Sudjojono, 1946, pp. 5-9.

Scholars nowadays express a notable level of contentment with the stigma inherited from Sudjojono's viewpoint, as it is widely regarded as the most suitable, stimulating, and promising approach to studying national art history. The book published by the National Gallery of Indonesia in 2014 shows the dominance of Sudjojono's perspective. It is the book *Perkembangan Seni Lukis Mooi Indië sampai PERSAGI di Batavia 1900-1942* (The Development of Mooi Indië Paintings until PERSAGI in Batavia 1900-1942), a scholarly study by M. Agus Burhan, that directly uses the term Mooi Indië in the title.⁶

Like other Indonesian historians, Burhan was also involved in stereotyping Mooi Indië using Sudjojono's perspective. He identified Mooi Indie paintings as capturing a spirit of exotic norms and tastes as the painters took too much of a distance from real life. Furthermore, the exotic colors of Mooi Indië paintings from Indonesian painters grew from a feeling of feudalism which emphasized harmony and softness.⁷ Concerning "harmony," another publication that follows this trend, not from Indonesia, is Susie Protschky's *Images of the Tropics*. It adds, "The Mooi Indië scene thus provided a canvas upon which to project colonial ideals. On its surface, coercion, modernity, and resistance were passed over by the surveying gaze of benevolent colonizers intent on demonstrating that they worked harmoniously with nature and tradition."⁸

The most recent publication on Indonesian art, *Contemporary Indonesian Art: Artists, Art Spaces, and Collectors* by Yvonne Spielmann, also shows the inclination of scholars of art to generalize Mooi Indië without providing substantial arguments or historical evidence. Spielmann, for example, wrote: "European painters traveled to Java and especially Bali when Indonesia was still a Dutch colony to paint Mooi Indië (Beautiful East Indies), and this has influenced Indonesian art. Against this early touristic glorification of the archipelago's oppressed peoples in painting, which served as a colonial medium, Indonesian painters in the 20th century strove for independence. Sudjojono provided the definitive criticism of the saccharine landscape painting of the Mooi Indië style even before Indonesia's independence."⁹ Through the various quotes from the latest publications

⁶ See Agus Burhan, *Perkembangan Seni Lukis Mooi Indië sampai PERSAGI di Batavia (1900-1942)*, (Jakarta: Galeri Nasional Indonesia, 2014).

⁷ Agus Burhan, 2014, p. 132.

⁸ Susie Protschky, *Images of The Tropics: Environment and Visual Culture in Colonial Indonesia*, (The Netherlands: KITLV Press, 2011), p. 86.

⁹ Yvonne Spielmann, *Contemporary Indonesian Art: Artists, Art Spaces, and Collectors*, (Singapore: NUS

above, it is clear that Burhan, Protschky, and Spielmann have helped perpetuate the stigma of Mooi Indië painting and its painters.

In line with Mooi Indië as a stigma in art history, this chapter uncovers a significant aspect: Mooi Indië as a period in the history of modern Indonesian art. The establishment of Mooi Indië as a period was driven by its crucial role in serving the needs of nationalism in art history. This period, often perceived as a “common enemy” due to its association with “colonial painters”, stands as a “monument” to be critiqued and parodied – a status that even extends to the painters who are mistakenly categorized as such and even those do not truly belong to this period. Similarly, all European painters who worked in the Indies during that period are considered Mooi Indië painters.

The Mooi Indië period has been framed as a “dark time” due to the oppressive grip of colonialism. However, it is considered to have ended in 1938 due to the transformative emergence of nationalist artists who were members of PERSAGI - which will be explicitly discussed in Chapter 4. With the spirit of nationalism, the paintings of PERSAGI painters are believed to have broken the establishment of the colonial Mooi Indië style. Thus, an odd perception emerged in the canonic narrative: the continuation of the Mooi Indië period was the PERSAGI period - as stated in, for example, M. Agus Burhan's book. This narrow lens narrative, however, fails to fully capture the complexities and nuances of the period.

This chapter challenges the dominant narratives surrounding Mooi Indië through the prejudiced lens of nationalistic historiography. It will respond to several questions: When and how did "Mooi Indië" become a historical period? Was it true that the natural landscapes were created to rally public support for the colonial administration's leaders? Did artists and colonial powers collaborate to hide the atrocities of colonialism and imperialism, leading to the Mooi Indië concept? Was Sudjojono the only person criticize the beauty of Indian paintings?

As previously stated, Mooi Indië is a complex subject involving multiple countries due to its historical context and transnational nature. Thus, Mooi Indie's studies must be conducted from at least two perspectives, and extensive data is required to avoid oversimplification. Nonetheless, this chapter is structured to address key and pressing issues in Indonesian modern art history.

Press, 2017), p. 4

The first sub-chapter, *Discoursing the Arrival*, focuses on the different narratives presented by Indonesian and Dutch scholars regarding the arrival, role, and contribution of European (specifically Dutch) painters in Indonesia. The second, *Mooi Indië as a Stigma*, discusses the shifts in perception of Mooi Indië, from a term used to describe the beauty of the Dutch East Indies to a negative connotation associated with colonization because of Sudjojono. Moreover, this sub-chapter also explores the role of Johannes Tielrooy's involvement in stigmatizing the term to prove that Sudjojono was not the only person responsible for this issue. The third sub-chapter, *Mooi Indië as Period*, investigates the story of Mooi Indië as a period within art history. The genesis of this notion arose from my observation that the rationale behind the terminology of the period had not been subject to scrutiny. Consequently, the period in question has assumed a canonical status within the annals of Indonesian art history.



FIGURE 3.2.
John Bastin and Bea Brommer, *Nineteenth Century Prints and Illustrated Books of Indonesia*, 1979.

Collection of Leiden University Library
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

Discoursing the Arrival

Mooi Indië can be discussed by observing the factors of "arrival" and "the role of artists" in the colony. These two factors have been studied since the early 20th century. Numerous seminal articles have been published to examine and deliberate on these subjects. As a result, the progression of these subjects has experienced significant advancements since the latter half of the 1960s, as evidenced by numerous books published and exhibitions curated in the Netherlands. In the 1990s, the motive behind these publications was inseparable from the increased demand among art collectors, particularly those from Indonesia. This surge in interest in the Netherlands can be attributed to the increased accessibility and comprehensibility of art historical information about European painters during colonial times. In contrast, this study has received little attention in Indonesia because of the slow circulation of publications from the Netherlands to Indonesia. The Indonesia-centric point of view's dominance in the history of modern Indonesian art also plays a decisive role in fostering an undeveloped understanding of Mooi Indië.

The Story of the Sources

The knowledge about the arrival and role of European—mainly Dutch—painters was disseminated among the Dutch public through publications and exhibitions. These events played a crucial role in gradually revealing this knowledge to the public. One such important book that represents a valuable resource for gaining insight into the artistic endeavors of these painters is *Nineteenth Century Prints and Illustrated Books of Indonesia*, authored by John Bastin and Bea Brommer (Fig.3.2). The book discusses various topics, including an analysis of the comparatively reduced attention given by Dutch art historians to the importance of illustrations and prints in art historiography. According to Bastin and Brommer, this was because prints and illustrations were positioned lower in the art hierarchy than paintings and drawings. Nevertheless, these two art forms played an important role when the Dutch began to explore the Netherlands Indies, especially during the first part of the nineteenth century when photography was not yet invented. As Bastin and Brommer mention, Pieter Johannes Veth (1814 -

1895), an ethnologist and historian, has already acknowledged the significance of Indies images (Fig.3.3).¹⁰



FIGURE 3.3.
Portrait of Pieter Johannes Veth by Jan Veth.
(Source: <https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/nl/collectie/RP-P-1926-1016>)

Bastin and Brommer supposed that the examination of the topography and geography of the Dutch East Indies, particularly Java, as suggested by Veth, can be accomplished by utilizing Frans Junghuhn's publication titled *Java, Zijne Gedaante, Zijn Plantentooi en inwendige Bouw* (The Hague, 1853-1854) (Fig.3.4), in combination with the topographical illustrations found in Abraham Salm's work *Java* (Amsterdam, 1865-1872) (Fig.3.5), along with other comparable sources. Veth's extensive reviews of several plate collections, focusing on Indonesia's paintings, drawings, and prints, as presented in the *Catalogue of the Colonial Exhibition in Amsterdam* in 1883, marked the initial scholarly discussions on Dutch colonial art. Consequently, when Herman F. C. Ten Kate published his influential article

¹⁰ Veth also argued that only a few painters in the 19th century worked in the Dutch East Indies, so “art made little contribution to the knowledge of colonial society.” Veth further noted that no significant artist had visited Indies—amateur artists had created many drawings and sketches. See the discussion of this issue in Anne Leussink and Wyke Sybesma, *Op reis met pen en penseel: Frans en Jan Hendrik Lebrecht als toerist naar Java 1863*, (Zutphen: WalburgPers, 2017), p. 58 - 61.

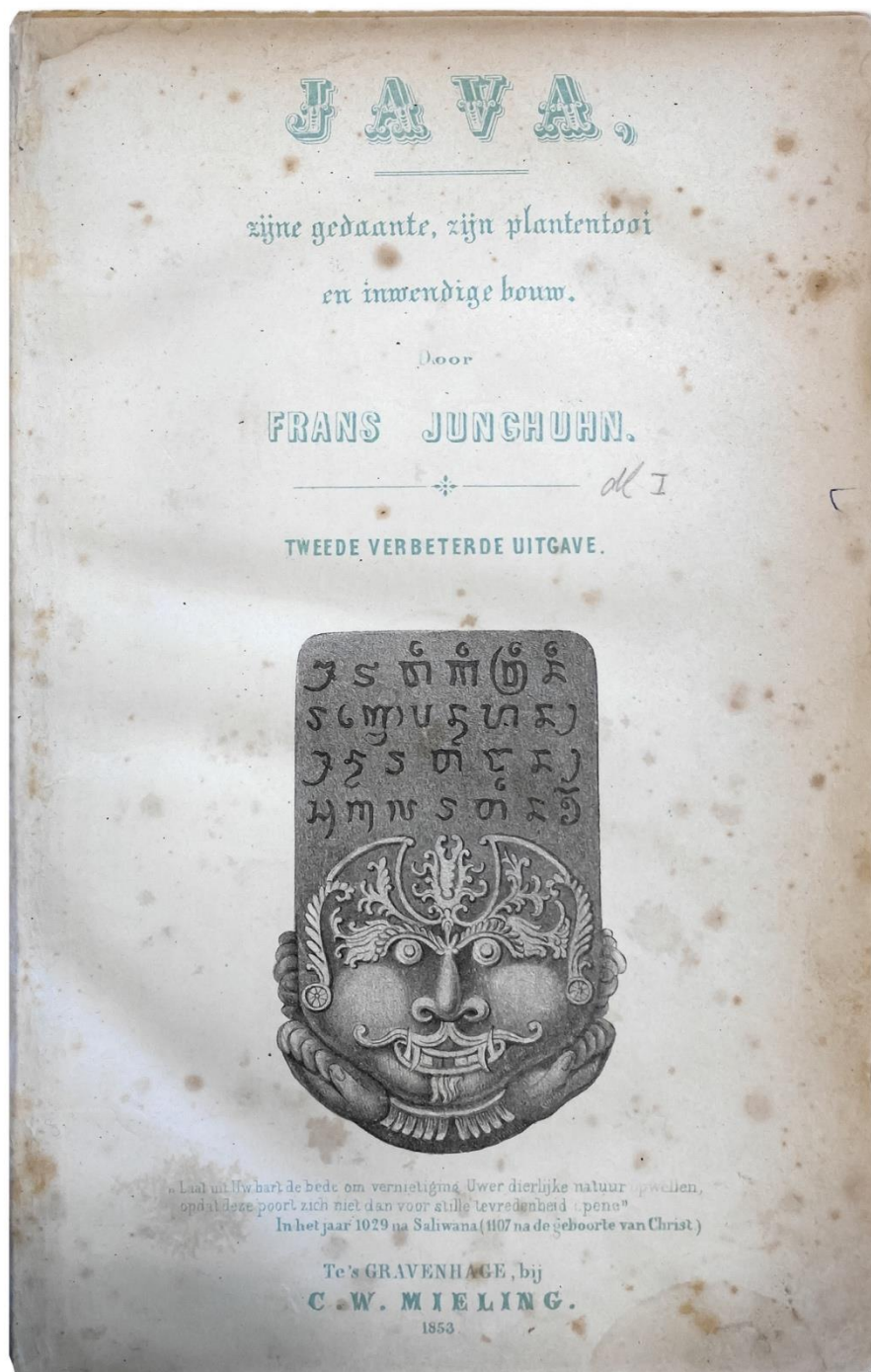


FIGURE 3.4.
Frans Junghuhn, *Java, Zijne Gedaante, Zijn Plantentooi en inwendige Bouw*, 1853-1854.

Collection of Leiden University Library
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

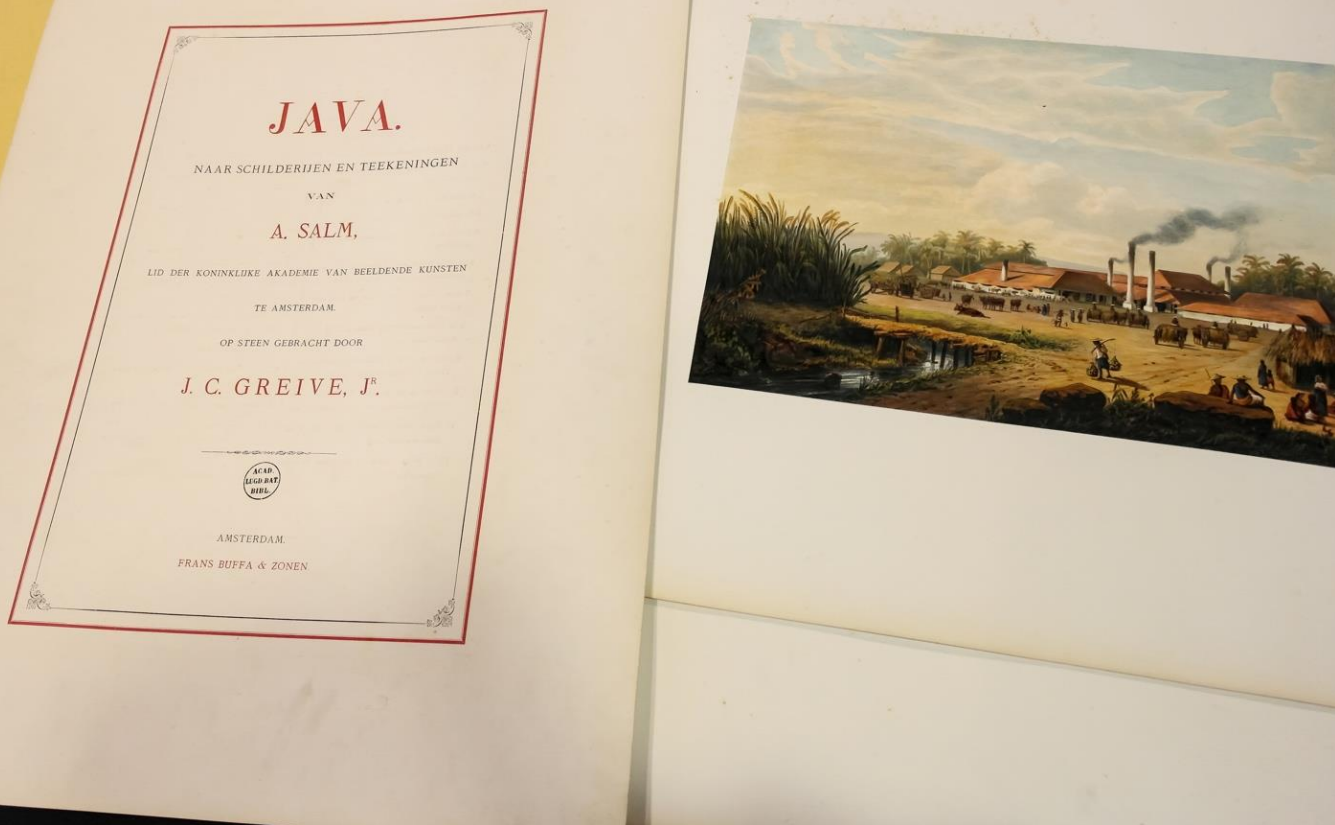


FIGURE 3.5.
Album of Java. *Naar schilderijen en teekeningen van A. Salm.*

Collection of Leiden University Library
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

on the artists of the Netherlands East (and West) Indies in 1913, he appropriately dedicated it to the memory of Veth. Ten Kate's article explored late nineteenth-century Dutch artists in Indonesia, incorporating subjective aesthetic evaluations. The article proved to be thought-provoking, albeit with certain constraints, as it aimed to articulate a significant theme that remains largely uninvestigated in contemporary scholarship.¹¹

Bastin and Brommer's book, published in 1979, is a comprehensive study of art historiography. Their meticulous exploration of images created to record natural and human life in the colony is unparalleled. The book's research is not limited to images alone; it also includes thoroughly identifying historical sources. These sources have created a substantial timeline and bibliography and provided a solid foundation for further research on the archipelago's topography, nature, and ethnography through illustrations and prints. The book's scope extends to understanding the perception, preconception, and prejudice about the beauty and exoticism of the Indies.

¹¹ John Bastin and Bea Brommer, *Nineteenth Century Prints and Illustrated Books of Indonesia with Particular Reference to the Print Collection of Tropenmuseum Amsterdam: A Descriptive Bibliography*, (Utrecht: Spectrum, 1979), preface.

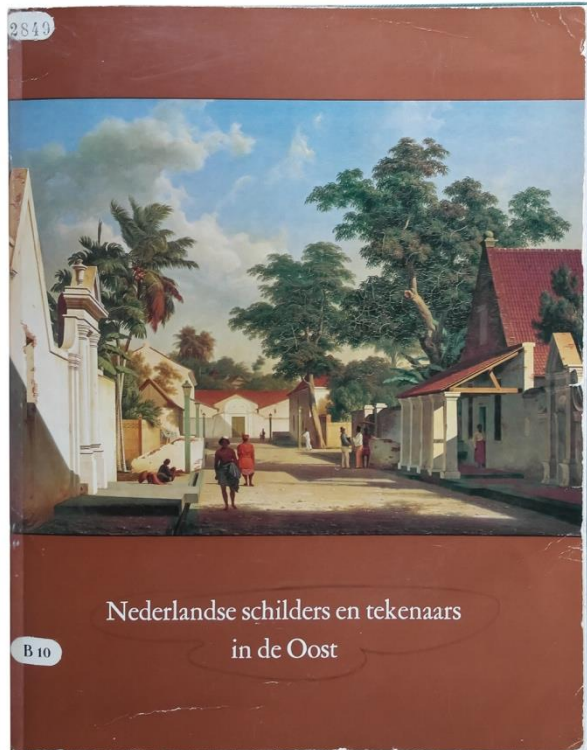


FIGURE 3.6.
Catalogue of Nederlandse Schilders en Tekenaars in De Oost exhibition.

Collection of Leiden University Library
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

In addition, Bastin and Brommer also mention the influence of scholars such as G.P. Rouffaer, G. Brom, J. H. Maronier, J.C. van Eerde, V.I. van der Wall, H.J. de Graaf, J. Tielrooy, and P.H. Pott. Apart from them, Bastin and Brommer identify De Loos-Haaxman as the preeminent transnational art historian for both the Dutch and Indonesia. This distinction is attributed to her efforts to foster a broader recognition and understanding of Western art in Indonesia and art produced in Indonesia in the Netherlands.

De Loos-Haaxman is recognized as an influential pioneer on this subject. Her *Verlaat Rapport Indie's* book (1968) and the exhibition entitled *Nederlandse Schilders en Tekenaars in De Oost*, which was held in 1972 at the Rijksmuseum based on the book, served as an essential introduction to explore European painters' involvement, particularly those from the Netherlands, in the colony (Fig.3.6). This effort by *Stichting Cultuurgeschiedenis van de Nederlanders Overzee* (CNO)¹²— of which De Loos-

¹² Regarding the foundation, see Th. H. Lunsingh Scheurleer "Stichting Cultuurgeschiedenis van de Nederlanders Overzee 1961–1986. Terugblik en perspectief" in *Bulletin van het Rijksmuseum*, 1987,

Haaxman is one of the exponents - is a fundamentally ground-breaking study never previously carried out. The book and exhibition - which took a long time to complete¹³ - have served as catalysts for illuminating and stimulating discussions regarding artists' interplay, impact, and interconnectedness during the colonial era. Until then, this subject had been shrouded in obscurity and was inadequately documented.



FIGURE 3.7.
Brochure of Tempo Doeloe exhibition at
Westfries Museum in Hoorn, 1972.

Collection of Leiden University Library
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

De Loos-Haaxman's book and the exhibition undoubtedly stimulated research interest regarding the role of Dutch painters in the colonies. Since then, the eyes of the public in the Netherlands have been opened more fully, and they realized that the Dutch painters and drafters in colonial times served as the visual storytellers of society. They have preserved the heritage by depicting scenes from everyday life, historical events, and cultural traditions that might otherwise have been forgotten or overlooked. By capturing these moments on canvases and paper, they ensured that the collective memory remains intact. Hence, De Loos-Haaxman wanted to emphasize these messages in her book and through the exhibition.

Jaarg. 35, Nr. 1 (1987), pp. 4-9, Stichting het Rijksmuseum and "Stichting Cultuurgeschiedenis van de Nederlanders Overzee" in *Contact*, November 1968, pp. 20-21.

¹³ Field notes, 2018. The archives on the exhibition can be seen in Algemeen Rijksarchief Tweede Afdeling – Collectie 273: De Loos-Haaxman, Nr. 22 in National Archives Den Hague, The Netherlands.

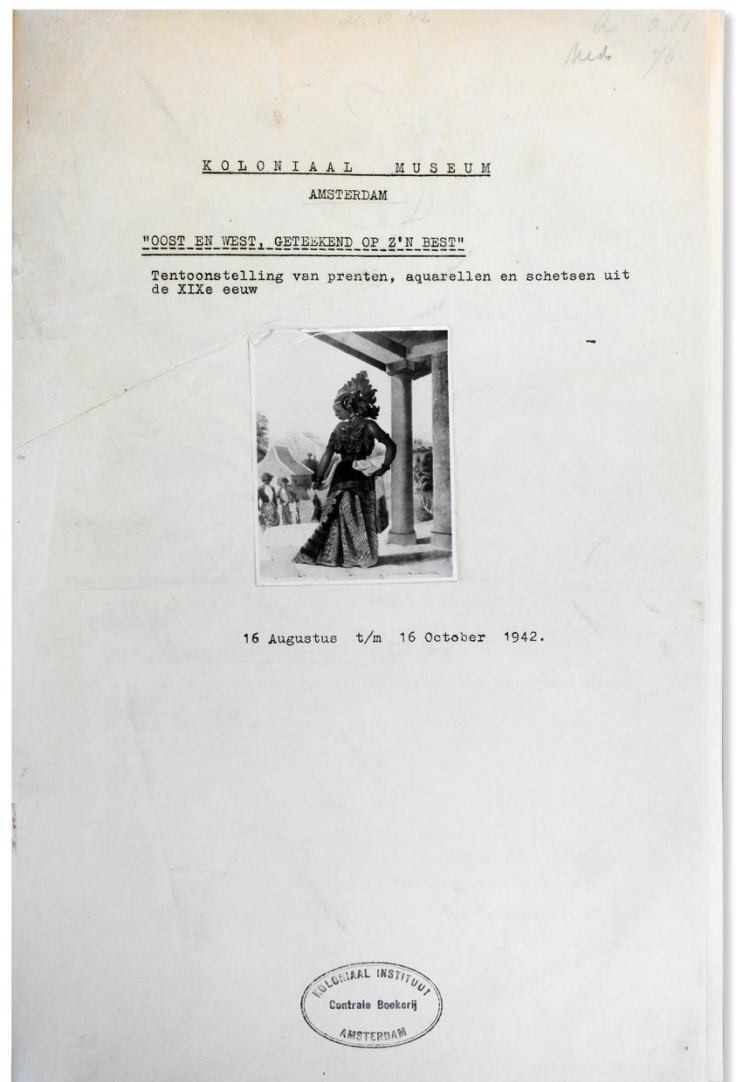


FIGURE 3.8.
Brochure of *Oost en west –
Geteekend op zijn best* exhibition at
the Tropenmuseum, 1942.

Collection of Leiden University Library
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

The exhibition held at the esteemed Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam does not mark the inaugural occasion of presenting the artistic endeavors of painters residing in the colony. Previously, in July 1972, a *Tempo Doeloe* (The Old Times) exhibition was held at the Westfries Museum in Hoorn (Fig.3.7).¹⁴ Also, in August 1942, the Tropenmuseum curated a presentation titled "Oost en West – Geteekend op zijn best," which showcased artworks from the 19th century depicting ethnological, zoological, botanical, and geological topics (Fig.3.8).¹⁵ This indicates that the museum had been

¹⁴ Showing works from the 19th century only including such artists as Adrianus Johannes Bik, Abraham Salm, Ernest Hardouin, Franz Wilhelm Junghuhn, J.C. Rappard.

¹⁵ See Kolonial Museum Amsterdam, *Oost en west – Geteekend op zijn best, Tentoonstelling van prenten, aquarellen en schetsen uit de XIXe eeuw*, exhibition brochure, 16 August-16 October 1942 with foreword by V.I. van de Wall.

actively presenting such collections for several decades. In contrast to its preceding exhibitions, the exhibition hosted at the Rijksmuseum distinguishes itself by encompassing a broader temporal scope, extending until the 20th century.

However, since the works of art that were created in that period also relate to colonial supremacy, considering the painters contributed to developing a distinct identity for the colony, criticism of the exhibition at the Rijksmuseum surfaced. In the "Tempo Doeloe in het Rijksmuseum" article, H. Redeker emphasized that the collection reflects colonialism that has been unable to move on.¹⁶ A voice that is relatively neutral but also implies an inability to understand the world of art in colonial times comes from another source expressing that "the exhibition at the Rijksmuseum at least offers charm from the complicated colonial past."¹⁷ Another review comes from Paul van't Veer, who believes that the exhibition is incomplete because it neglected the 20th century.¹⁸

Two other publications discussing the roles of Dutch/European painters in the 1990s are *Indonesian Impressions: Oriental Themes in Western Painting* by Ruud Spruit, published in 1992, and *Pictures from the Tropics: Painting by Western Artists during the Dutch Colonial Period in Indonesia* by Marie-Odette Scalliet and others, published in 1999. The former provides brief introductions to artists and their works, while the latter offers a more comprehensive historiographical analysis and more extensive information.

The book *Pictures from the Tropics* was published during the eponymous exhibition at the Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam. As if to complement the previous exposition at the Rijksmuseum, as mentioned above, the Tropenmuseum intended this as a climactic exhibition by presenting more paintings. Combining text and pictures, *Pictures from the Tropics* soon played its part in completing the art historiography of the region. The book extended the story of the arrival and activity of Dutch painters from the V.O.C. era until the early 20th century.

A few years later, the *Lexicon of Foreign Artists Who Visualized Indonesia (1600-1950)* by Leo Haks and Guus Maris was published as the first systematic reference work on the archipelago and was ordered chronologically from 1600 to 1950, including 3000 European artists'

¹⁶ See H. Redeker "Tempo Doeloe in het Rijksmuseum" in *Cultureel Supplement NRC Handelsblad*, 20 October 1972.

¹⁷ "Rijksmuseum kijkt terug op 300 jaar kunst in de Oost" in *Tubantia*, 19 October 1972, p.11.

¹⁸ Paul van't Veer "Gemiste kans in Rijksmuseum" in *Het Parool*, 26 October 1972, p. 13.

biographies and over 800 illustrations. As reflected in the title, this book acts as a "dictionary" and has become a valuable index for those who want to know about the artists who visualized Indonesia.¹⁹ The publication of *Lexicon* cannot be separated from the role of D.H. Dhaimeler (Didier Hamel), a French artist based in Jakarta. In 1986, he and Basuki Wiwoho founded the Duta Fine Art Foundation in Kemang, South Jakarta. The foundation has been displaying and publishing a multitude of texts on European artists in Indonesia since the 1990s.²⁰ Predictably, one interest of this foundation is to reach the art market behind the *Lexicon* publications as inferred in the book's foreword: "Buy paintings with your eyes, not with your ears or wallet."²¹

Koos Van Brakel expressed some cynicism in saying that the reason behind the publication of artist monograph books and *Lexicon* books was to fulfil market interests, which had started to be lucrative in the 1990s. During these years, a new international art market was developed with Indonesians as the predominant customers. Indonesian art collectors have started buying art at auctions in Amsterdam, Jakarta, Singapore, and Hong Kong, where the prices reflect the increased demand.²²

This situation also emphasizes that art history acts as an intermediary in market mechanisms. However, despite the art market context, Van Brakel saw several omissions in the *Lexicon*: "Unfortunately, the number of errors in it make it advisable to exercise some caution."²³ I found that Van Brakel's concerns were confirmed when the Indonesian historian Agus Burhan

¹⁹ Leo Haks and Guus Maris, *Lexicon of Foreign Artists who Visualized Indonesia*, (Utrecht: Bestebreurtje, 1995).

²⁰ For instance, D.H. Dhaimeler, et.al, *W. Dooijewaard: Dutch Artist in Indonesia*, (Jakarta: Duta Fine Arts Foundation, 1992); D.H. Dhaimeler, *Mies Carsten (1893-1982)*, (Jakarta: Duta Fine Arts Foundation, 1992).

²¹ See *Preface* in Leo Haks and Guus Maris, 1995, p.8.

²² Koos van Brakel, *Charles Sayers 1901-1943: Pioneer Painter in the Dutch East Indies*, (Amsterdam: KIT Publisher, 2004), p. 7. In other publications, Koos van Brakel also claimed: "The price now paid by collectors from Indonesia or Singapore for works by famous painters such as Walter Spies, Rudolf Bonnet, Willem Hofker, and Theo Meier, are often fetched by comparable non-oriental works. See Koos van Brakel, Introduction in Koes van Brakel et al., *Pictures from the Tropics*, (Wijk en Allburg: Pictures Publisher and KIT-Amsterdam, 1998-1999), p. 9. See also the notes by the Tropenmuseum's director at that time, H.J. Gortzak, who affirmed that "A renewed interest in the Netherlands' colonial past has happily coincided with a love of the arts. Connoisseur continues to grow in the Netherlands, Indonesia, and Singapore. Scientific interest has increased along with public interest. This has not, however, been a positive experience. Along with the increasing number of collectors has come a pretty significant rise in prices, to the extent that today museums are virtually unable to fill the gaps in their collection." See H.J. Gortzak, "Foreword" in Koos van Brakel, 1998-1999.

²³ Koos van Brakel, 1998-1999, p. 9.

referred to the book. In stating that Fredericus Jacobus van Rossum du Chattel's watercolor album was published in 1930, Burhan repeated the *Lexicon's* mistake. As will be discussed later, the album was published in 1913.²⁴

Ruud Spruit offers a different opinion. According to him, interest in the arrival story and activity in Indonesia of European painters increased in the 1980s. In that decade, Indonesia and the Netherlands developed different perceptions of colonialism and the Dutch occupation of Indonesia. Spruit argued that Indonesia had long ceased to restrict its attention to celebrated artists like Rudolf Bonnet and Walter Spies, who had already, in pre-war days, consolidated the reputation of Bali as an international artists' paradise and had embraced a prominent contingent of painters such as Willem Dooijewaard, Roland Strasser, Willem Hofker, Carel Dake Jr., and Charles Sayers. Meanwhile, Spruit continued to maintain that the role of these painters was underestimated in the history of Dutch art. After all, the "art of the Indies" had been traditionally undervalued in this country, for which the public in general and certain art critics must take the blame.²⁵

In contrast, publications on this topic have yet to experience significant development in Indonesia. The first and only exhibition, "Orientalisme dalam Gambar-gambar Kolonial" (The Orientalism in Colonial Images), at the National Gallery of Indonesia, was held in 2000 and initiated by Edwin's Gallery.²⁶ The exhibition displayed approximately 500 works from the 17th to 19th centuries, including C.W.M. van de Velde, Frederik Charles Theodorus Deeleman, C.W. Mieling, Johan Nieuhoff, and J.C. Rappard. The exhibition was only accompanied by a small, thin catalog with brief texts, underscoring the urgent need for more comprehensive knowledge about the past of European painters for Indonesian contemporary readers (Fig. 3.9).

Were They Tourists?

Images have a profound influence on how we perceive the world. They are not just aesthetic objects but powerful tools that can shape our understanding

²⁴ See footnotes used by Agus Burhan quoting *Lexicon's* book in Burhan, 2014, p. 35. Also see Leo Haks and Guus Maris, 1995, p. 227.

²⁵ Spruit, 1992, chapter introduction.

²⁶ Edwin's Gallery is a Jakarta-based contemporary art gallery initiated by photographer and art collector Edwin Rahardjo in 1984.

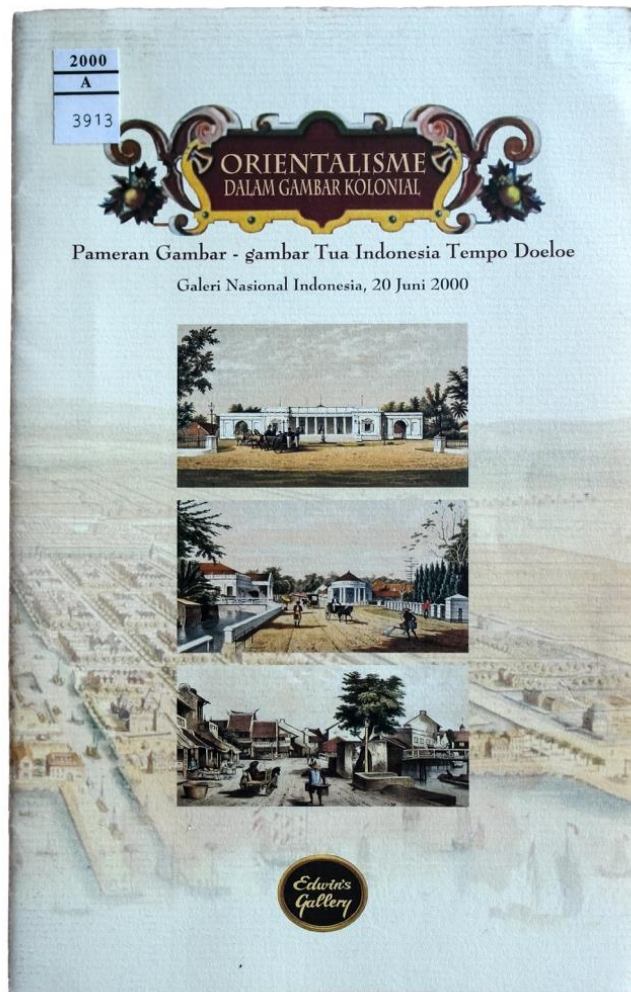


FIGURE 3.9.
Catalogue of the "Orientalisme dalam Gambar-gambar Kolonial" exhibition in the National Gallery of Indonesia.

Collection of Leiden University Library
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

of cultures, landscapes, and historical events. For instance, the way the Indies were depicted in paintings and historical publications underwent significant changes over time, greatly influencing Western societies' perception of Eastern countries such as Indonesia. Beyond their artistic value, these visual representations also served as educational resources, offering a window into the territories and populations of diverse Asian regions. They played a pivotal role in establishing a comprehensive understanding of the East. The evolution of these visual representations is a testament to the changing perceptions and attitudes toward the world beyond one's immediate surroundings.

Images such as illustrations from travel books contribute significantly to the imagination of the Orient. In *Europe's Myths of Orient: Devise and Rule*, the Syrian cultural critic Rana Kabbani wrote that the idea of travel as a means of gathering and recording information is commonly

found in societies that exercise a high degree of political power. The travellers begin their journey with the strength of a nation or an empire, sustaining them militarily, economically, intellectually, and, as is often the case, spiritually.²⁷ Several art historians have noted that, over the centuries, some publications accompanied by images have shaped people's perceptions of far countries.

Art historian Marie-Odette Scalliet stated that it was the publication of Joan Nieuwhof's book, *Gedenkwaerdige Lant en Zeereise* (1682), and François Valentijn's *Oud en Nieuw Oost-Indies* (1724-26), as well as Jan Huygen van Linschoten's extensively illustrated work, that genuinely illuminated the Eastern countries such as Indonesia for Western societies. These authors were historians, explorers, and diplomats, giving their works a unique perspective. Linschoten's publication, *Itinerario: Voyage ofte Schipvaert van Jan Hygen van Linschoten naar Oost ofte Portugaels Indien*, published in 1596, was a watershed moment that significantly influenced the Dutch authorities. This book's primary merit resides in its copious collection of information about the territories and populations of diverse Asian regions, a wealth of knowledge that shaped the understanding and depiction of the Indies. Throughout the 19th century, a consistent stream of publications and artistic works aimed to establish a comprehensive understanding of the East, mainly through depicting the Indies, a testament to the enlightening impact of historical publications.²⁸

De Loos-Haaxman noted that painters and draftsmen who traveled to the Dutch East Indies had diverse backgrounds, but most were there for scientific purposes. For example, in 1816, C.G.C. Reinwardt went to Java with a commission from the King to conduct a scientific exploration of the archipelago. He was accompanied by the Belgian painter A.A. J. Payen and the Dutch draughtsmen A.J. and J. Th Bik, who made drawings of the country, its people, flora, and fauna. Reinwardt established the Botanical Garden at Buitenzorg and became its first director. When he returned to the Netherlands in 1822, he was succeeded by C.L. Blume, who collected flowers and plants and later published the *Rumphia* in Holland (Fig.3.10). His drawings illustrated the publication and included excellent work by Payen, showcasing trees in their scientific and natural contexts in a vibrant style. It was superbly reproduced on stone by the Belgian artist Lauters.²⁹

²⁷ Rana Kabbani, *Europe's Myths of Orient: Devise and Rule*, (London: Pandora Press, 1986), p. 1.

²⁸ Marie-Oddet Scalliet in Koos van Brakel, 1998-1999, pp. 13-14.

²⁹ J. De Loos-Haaxman, 1968, p. 202.

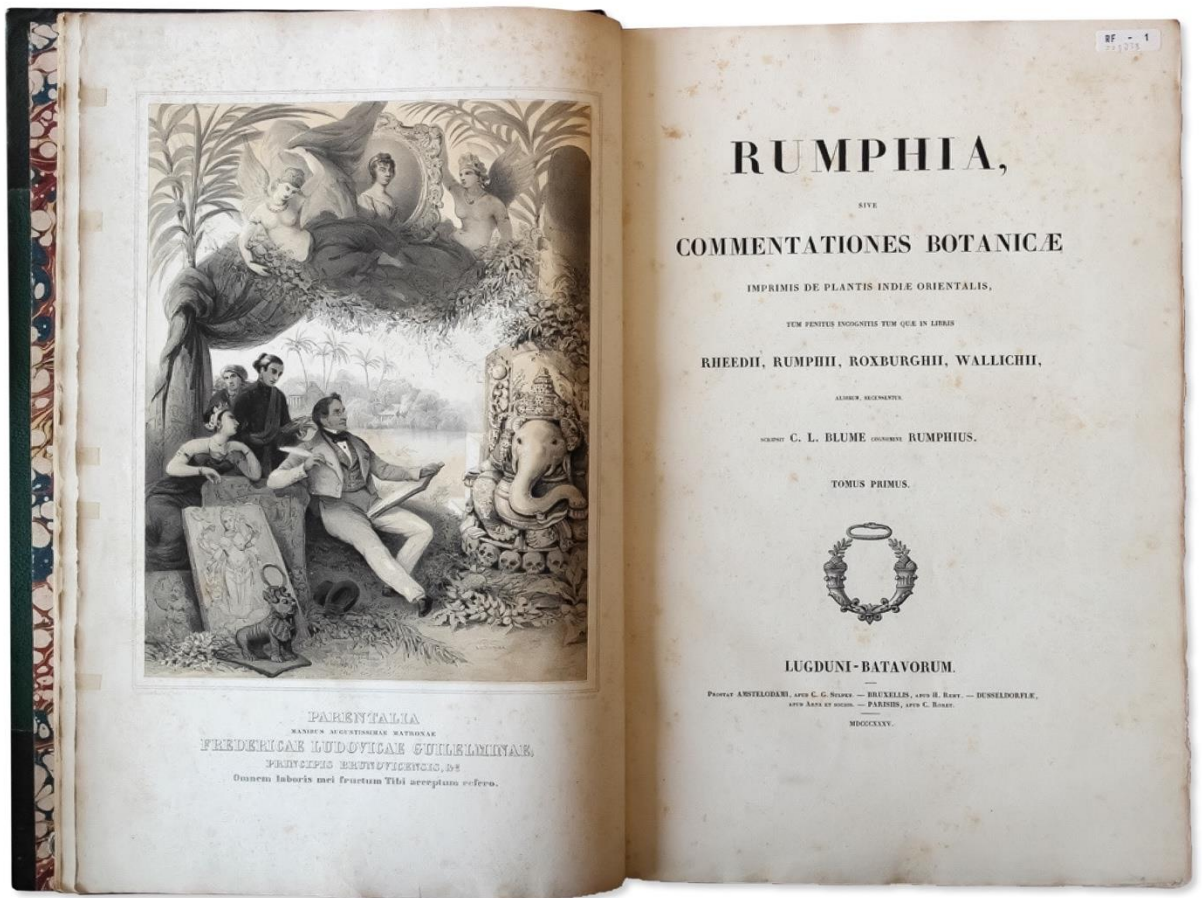


FIGURE 3.10.
Rumphia, sive Commentationes botanicae, imprimis de plantis Indiae Orientalis, tum penitus incognitis, tum quae in libris Rheedii, Rumphii, Roxburghii, Wallichii, aliorum recensentur / scripsit C. L. Blume cognomine Rumphius, Vol. 1, 1835-1848.

Collection of Leiden University Library
 Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

These facts underscore a complex interplay between artists, power interests, and science that shaped the allure of the Indies. Yet, the prevailing discourse of nationalistic art historiography, influenced mainly by Sudjojono's perspective, simplistically labeled European artists in Indonesia as mere tourists. Sudarmadji's assertion further reinforced this narrative, highlighting the perceived lack of standing or recognition of these "tourist painters" within the European artistic community, suggesting that the artists who journeyed to Indonesia were not mere tourists but individuals with no significant creative contributions. An intriguing aspect of this conclusion is Sudarmadji's preliminary step of conducting a study by utilizing relevant literature on the history of Western art as references. The author arrived consequently at the following conclusion in pejorative tones: "Upon examining art history literature pertaining to Indonesia, such as works

authored by H.H. Arnasson, John Canaday, Werner Haftmann, Sarah Newmeyer, and Herbert Read, it becomes evident that Western painters residing and creating art in Indonesia did not attain global recognition."³⁰

This "tourist artists" issue has attracted the attention of some scholars for proposing arguments. Koos van Brakel, for example, attempts to explain this issue based on a book that, in his view, stimulates the wave of tourist arrivals in Indonesia. He mentioned the significant role of the book *Bali* with text by Karl With and photographs by Gregor Krause, published in 1920. He stated, "During the late colonial period, the Indies became a popular destination for Dutch and other European artists in particular. The enthusiastic stories of earlier travelers and popular publications such as the volume *Bali* were a significant factor in the non-stop flow of artists, film directors, and movie stars that visited the Indies, and Bali in particular, in the 1920s."³¹

Van Brakel referred to a German language book that was published in two volumes. The first volume, *Bali: Land und Volk* (Country and People), contains 168 photographs, and the second, *Bali: Tanze, Tempel, Feste* (Dances, Temples, Festivals), features 170 black-and-white reproductions. Throughout 1912-1914, while working as a doctor in the Netherlands Indies, G. Krause had taken about 4,000 photographs. This book seeks to objectively present all aspects of the life, culture, and religion of the people of Bali and the island.³² However, assuming that a single publication could cause a wave of "painter tourists" to visit the Indies—or, in this case, Bali—is debatable because, once again, there were many factors and reasons why artists came to Indonesia.

The canon book *Sejarah Seni Rupa Indonesia* (History of Indonesian Art) in 1979 provides a broader viewpoint, albeit lacking specificity. It suggests that the motivations behind the influx of European painters to Indonesia were driven by the desire to explore artistic talents in tropical regions and intertwined with administrative duties for the colonial government: "After Dutch colonialism controlled the entire archipelago and the Dutch began to settle in Indonesia, some of them brought with them the paintings of their country's artists. Some Dutch painters were then attracted

³⁰ Sudarmadji, 1974, p. 10.

³¹ Koos van Brakel, "Beautiful Indiës paintings: a colonial medium?" in Meta Knol, et al. (ed.), *Beyond the Dutch: Indonesia, the Netherlands, and the visual arts from 1900 until now*, (Amsterdam & Utrecht: KIT Publishers and Centraal Museum, 2009), p. 54.

³² See Karl With "Vortwort" in *Bali: Land und Volk (I); Bali: Tanze, Tempel, Feste* – Verfasser: Gregor Krause, Folkwang – Verlag G.M.B.H., Hagen i.W., 1920.

to settle in Indonesia by the beautiful tropical nature, and were eager to work as administrative officials in the Dutch East Indies government.”³³

Critic Sanento Yuliman went further. He stated: “One of the most important factors is the existence of some Dutch painters, both imported by the Dutch Indies government with official duties (for example, to paint such images as the state of nature and the urban environment in Indonesia) and who, motivated by a spirit of adventure and interest in nature, ventured upon the Pacific Ocean. Some Dutch painters were born and raised in Indonesia.”³⁴ Yet, before Yuliman, De Loos-Haaxman had discussed the same issue, adding that painters born in the Dutch East Indies typically pursued further art studies in the Netherlands and then returned to the Dutch East Indies to further their careers. De Loos-Haaxman cited the example of Jan Daniel Beynon, who was born in Batavia.³⁵

In the present day, a multitude of publications exist that provide a wealth of information on the arrival, activities, and perspectives of European painters in Indonesia. It is now widely understood that European painters have been coming to Indonesia for various purposes over the years. This group includes not only amateur painters, but also those with a background in art academies. These resources, with their academic rigor, offer a comprehensive view of the subject, inviting a critical re-evaluation of the perspective inherited by Sudjojono, who saw these artists as mere tourists. A passage from the story below sheds light on the diverse motivations that brought these artists to Indonesia.

Joining Reinwardt's commission, as mentioned above, the Belgian painter A.A.J. Payen embarked on a journey to Java to seek employment as an artist skilled in capturing diverse subjects and landscapes. This occupation held significant appeal during the early 19th century, as it remained in high demand despite the ongoing advances in photography. Apart from that, employment was of the utmost importance for Payen because he was the eldest of four brothers and sisters and lacked parental guidance, making him responsible for providing for his younger siblings.

Another painter who came to Java seeking employment was Pieter Ouborg, a prominent Dutch abstract expressionist painter of the post-war era. He embarked on a journey to the Indies in 1916 for reasons resembling

³³ Kusnadi, *et.al*, *Sejarah Seni Rupa Indonesia*, (Jakarta: Proyek Penelitian dan Pencatatan Kebudayaan Daerah - Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 1979), p. 143.

³⁴ Sanento Yuliman, 1976, pp. 5-7.

³⁵ See J. De Loos-Haaxman, 1968, p. 53.

Payen's. His primary motivation for this endeavor was his obligations and responsibilities. Before relocating to Padang in West Sumatra, Ouborg underwent the process of civil service registration and afterwards assumed the role of a teacher in Serang, West Java. In the next phase, Ouborg even played a role in increasing Sudjojono's confidence in artistic matters.³⁶

The narrative surrounding the artistic career of Arie Smit serves as a counterargument against the prevailing notion that European painters merely functioned as tourists. Smit received his education at the Rotterdam Academy of Arts and relocated to Batavia in 1938 to pursue a career as a lithographer within the topographic service of the Dutch colonial army. During this period, Smit contributed to the cartographic representation of the islands within the archipelago. Following the war's conclusion, he deliberately chose to acquire Indonesian citizenship. During the 1950s, Smit was employed as a Bandung Fine Arts Academy faculty member.³⁷

William Dooijewaard, who completed his studies at the *Rijksschool voor Kuntsnijverheid* in 1911, came to Indonesia inspired by Paul Gauguin's retrospective exhibition in 1906 in Paris. He wanted to follow in Gauguin's footsteps and travel to the East until he made it to Sumatra in 1913, thanks to his father's help. On the island, Dooijewaard received a contract to work on a rubber and tobacco plantation. From 1919, he was acquainted with the Austrian painter Roland Strasser, who had previously lived on Bali. In 1922, the two painters exhibited in Batavia and were successful.³⁸

The story of the arrival of Frida Holleman to Indonesia, a female painter from Leiden, a graduate of the Art Academy in The Hague and who exhibited with S. Sudjojono in 1938 at the *Bataviaasche Kunstkring*, began with an invitation from her brother, who worked as a chemist in Bogor. Holleman, who left the Netherlands in 1936, drew inspiration from nature and life in Indonesia, which she felt was different from her homeland.³⁹

In 1920, Dolf Breetvelt, a painter born in Delft who graduated from the Hague Art Academy, set out to practice his new career in the Indies. In Batavia, he worked as a teacher. Several years later, he began painting and exhibiting at the *Bataviaasche Kunstkring*. His paintings received praise

³⁶ See *Introduction*.

³⁷ Garret Kam, *Poetic Realisms: The Art of Arie Smith*, (Jakarta: CSIS | Ubud: Neka Museum, 1990), p. 11.

³⁸ D.H. Dhaimeler, et.al., *W. Dooijewaard: A Dutch Artist in Indonesia*, (Jakarta: Duta Fine Arts Foundation, 1992), pp. 105-109.

³⁹ Leo Haks and Guus Maris, *Frida Holleman: Memories of Indonesia 1937-1945*, (Amsterdam: Haks & Maris, 1992), pp. 3-4.

among art critics. Later, as a prominent colonial painter, Breetvelt's name was alongside Piet Ouborg, Jan Frank, Charles Sayers, and Walter Spies.⁴⁰ Of course, apart from the painters above, there are many more stories that can still be told, illustrating the various backgrounds that led to someone becoming a painter in the Indies.⁴¹

Payen, Ouborg, Smit, Dooijewaard, Holleman and Breetvelt were fortunate to go to Java – or to other parts of the archipelago. Meanwhile, Vincent van Gogh could only imagine Java and the tropics from afar. He knew the island from Paul Gauguin.⁴² In correspondence with his brother, Van Gogh expressed his desire for Java: “What Gauguin has to say about the tropics seems terrific to me. There, indeed, is the future of a remarkable renaissance of painting. Just ask your new Dutch friends if they’ve ever thought how interesting it would be if a few Dutch painters were to found a colorist school in Java. If they heard Gauguin describe the hot countries, they’d feel like doing that immediately. Not everyone is free and in a position to be able to emigrate. However, what things would there be to do? I regret not being ten or twenty years younger; I would certainly go.”⁴³ Interestingly, about a month before he died, in another letter, Van Gogh expressed his vision on Java: “Certainly, the future is very much in the tropics for painting, either in Java or in Martinique, Brazil or Australia, and not here, but you feel that it has not been proved to me that you, Gauguin or I are those people of that future.”⁴⁴

This section has provided evidence that the painters and drafters who travelled to Indonesia did not fit the tourist profile described in the canonical narrative. Considering the variety of their motivational factors, art historians need to avoid generalizing narratives that downplay the significance of their roles and contributions.

⁴⁰ Rob Delvigne, *Dolf Breetvelt: Modernist in Indie en Nederland*, (Amsterdam: KITB Publishers, 2008), pp. 17–19.

⁴¹ Several prominent painters, such as Jan Daniël Beynon and Willem Christian Constant Bleckmann, were born in Batavia. For Byenon, see J. de Loos-Haaxman, *Verlaat Rapport Indië: Drie eeuwen westerse schilders, tekenaars, grafici, zilversmeden en kunstnijveren in Nederlands-Indië*, ('s-Gravenhage: Mouton & Co., 1968), p. 53–63. For Bleckmaan, see W.A. Brasseme “Een drie-oog in het land der blinden: W.C.C Bleckmaan (1853-1942)” in W.C.C. *Bleckmann (1853-1942) “Schilder van het oude Java,”* Tentoonstelling Ethnografisch Museum Delft, Mei 1971 – December 1971, exhibition catalogue.

⁴² Letter to Theo in 3 November 1888 in <https://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let135/letter.html>.

⁴³ Letter to Theo in 28 October 1888 in <https://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let714/letter.html>.

⁴⁴ Letter to Theo in 17 June 1890 in <http://www.vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let889/letter.html>.

Mooi Indië as a Stigma

The origin of Mooi Indië and the year this term was used in the Indies art scenes created confusion among art scholars. Most scholars thought that the term Mooi Indië appeared in the 1930s. In the book *Seni Lukis Indonesia* (2000), Agus Dermawan T. stated that Sudjojono claimed his role as the first person to use the term Mooi Indië in the 1930s. Dermawan further asserts that Basoeki Abdullah had previously employed the term during his frequent discussions with his father, Abdullah Suriosubroto, before 1935. Omar Basalamah, an artist specializing in landscape painting, acknowledged the term through F.A. Kivtis, a Dutch painter. Kivtis claimed that the term had been used before 1935.⁴⁵ In another publication, Dermawan T. and Mikke Susanto stated that it was the painter Abdullah Suriosubroto who coined the term "Mooi Indië" in the 1920s.⁴⁶

In defining 1930 as the beginning of Mooi Indië, Agus Burhan referred to the book *The Lexicon* by Haks and Maris. Furthermore, Burhan argued that the term Mooi Indië had already been used as the poem title by P.C. Boutens, published in 1919. However, P.C. Boutens never produced a poem under the title Mooi Indië. The fact is that Mooi Indië is the name, since 1919, of the rubric for *De Reflector* magazine, usually for displaying photographs.⁴⁷

This sub-chapter will examine the historical origins of the phenomenon under study and its subsequent transformation into a stigmatized concept. Before being stigmatized by Sudjojono, as previously mentioned, the term Mooi Indië was initially employed to convey the inherent aesthetic appeal of colonial Indonesia through paintings or landscape drawings. The originator of this term remains unidentified. However, I contend that the term's popularity, either in the colony or in the Netherlands, can be attributed primarily to the publication of Du Chattel's watercolor album in 1913. Since then, "Mooi Indië" has frequently appeared in the media to promote Indonesia's natural beauty.

⁴⁵ Agus Dermawan T., *Seni Lukis Indonesia*, (Jakarta: Pemerintah Propinsi DKI-Jakarta Dinas Museum dan Pemugaran, 2000), p. 11. Dermawan T. mistakenly stated "the year 1937". S. Sudjojono's article criticizing Mooi Indië happened published in 1939.

⁴⁶ See Agus Dermawan T. and Mikke Susanto, *Maestro Seni Rupa Modern Indonesia*, (Jakarta: Kementrian Pariwisata & Ekonomi Kreatif Republik Indonesia, 2012), p. 19.

⁴⁷ See *De Reflector*, 4 October 1919, pp. 800-817.



FIGURE 3.11.
Fredericus Jacobus van Rossum du Chattel, *Garoot (Preanger)*, c.1908.

Private Collection
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

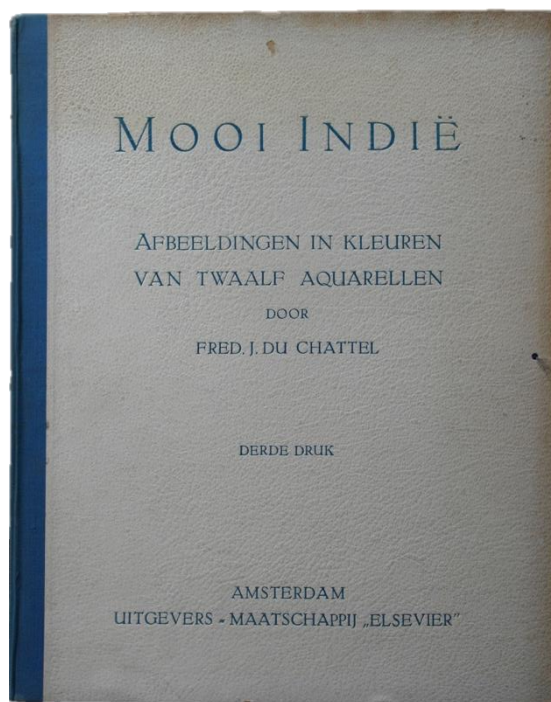


FIGURE 3.12.
Fredericus Jacobus van Rossum du Chattel, *Mooi Indië: Afbeeldingen in klur van twaalf aquarellen door Fred.J. du Chattel*, 1913.

Private Collection
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar



FIGURE 3.12.
Fredericus Jacobus van Rossum du Chattel, ca. 1890,
(Source:https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fredericus_van_Rossum_du_Chattel)

Photo by Adolphe Zimmermans

The Du Chattel Album

Du Chattel's watercolor (Fig.3.11) album using the term "Mooi Indië" effectively captures and portrays the collective perceptions of many individuals about a beautiful region characterized by majestic mountains, azure seas, and lush rice fields. More than that, his album introduced a new frame to the colonial art world, thereby changing the narrative of modern Indonesian art.

Limited information is available concerning the album. I have yet to find any evidence why the famous landscape painter Fredericus Jacobus van Rossum du Chattel (Fig.3.12) affixed the title *Mooi Indië: Afbeeldingen in kleuren van twaalf aquarellen door Fred. J. du Chattel* (Fig.13) to his later printed watercolor reproductions, published by Elsevier in Amsterdam as an album in 1913⁴⁸ - at a time when the recognition of Du Chattel's latest works among Dutch and colonial society was still not completely solid.⁴⁹ Nonetheless, after it was published, the album, which contained 12 natural panoramas of locations in Java and Sumatra, was widely distributed and sold in the Netherlands and its colonies, with several newspapers heavily promoting the album for sale.⁵⁰ It is said that since the bookshop and publisher N.V. Mij. Vorkink in Bandung distributed the album, these reproductions could be found on the walls of many houses in the Indies.⁵¹

Born and raised in Leiden, Du Chattel began his career when the painting of the Hague School (De Haagse School) was developing. Due to the close proximity of the two cities, Du Chattel tried his luck in The Hague and was soon accepted among the city's painters. He gained popularity and was viewed by his contemporaries as an essential representative of the

⁴⁸ Some writers differ on the publishing year, 1910 and 1930. See the comparison on the following footnote from the various sources: *Mooi Indië: Afbeeldingen in kleuren van 12 aquarellen du Chattel* was published in 1913. See Fredericus Jacobus van Rossum du Chattel, *Mooi Indië: afbeeldingen in kleuren van twaalf aquarellen (1856-1917)*, (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1913) Leiden University Library collection. See Brinkman's, *Alphabetische Lijst van Boeken, Landkaarten, en verder in den Boekhandel Voorkomende Artikelen die in het jaar 1913*, (Leiden: A. W. SIJTHOF'S UITG.-MIJ, 1913), p.60. See also Koos van Brakel, "Beautiful Indies paintings: a colonial medium?" in Meta Knol, et al. (ed.), *Beyond the Dutch: Indonesia, the Netherlands and the visual arts from 1900 until now*, (Amsterdam & Utrecht: KIT Publishers and Centraal Museum, 2009), p. 54.

⁴⁹ J.G. van Rossum du Chattel, *F.J. van Rossum du Chattel-1856-1917*, (Venlo: Van Spijk Art Projects, 2006), p. 46.

⁵⁰ See *De Preanger-bode*, 7 May 1916; *De Preanger Bode*, 25 July 1916; *De Preanger Bode*, 9 August 1916; *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, 10 February 1914, *Het Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, 15 September 1916; *De Sumatra Post*, 7 March 1914.

⁵¹ Koos van Brakel, 2009, p. 54.

Hague School.⁵² During the periods spanning 1908 to 1911 and 1914 to 1917, Du Chattel undertook visits to Indonesia, during which he created a substantial body of artwork depicting the country's natural landscapes. At first, he went to Sumatra to try his luck as a farmer in Deli.⁵³ He became associated with the intellectual circle of J.E. Jasper and Raden Mas Pirngadie, who had previously received instructions from Du Chattel and taught a young Sudjojono sometime in the early 1930s. Jasper, who formerly held the position of governor in Jogjakarta, in collaboration with Pirngadie, compiled and published a mammoth volume on Indonesian arts and crafts entitled *De inlandsche kunstnijverheid van Nederlands Indië*, in 1912.⁵⁴

The Mooi Indië album was released after Du Chattel exhibited the original watercolor paintings in multiple cities across Indonesia during 1908, garnering significant promotion and receiving appropriate acclaim.⁵⁵ J.E. Jasper provides comprehensive exhibition coverage in the publication *Op de Hoogte*. Jasper's role in the show is widely regarded as instrumental in effectively elucidating the essence of the Eastern region. Du Chattel's watercolor paintings were considered distinctive because they utilized soft hues reminiscent of tropical skies, the tranquil depiction of scenes, the presence of verdant undulating hills, the description of flowing water, and other similar elements. In his review, Jasper employed the term "Indisch mooi," which can be considered synonymous with the concept of "Mooi Indië." Jasper expressed the following viewpoint:

The painter also knew well how to make much of modest subjects. There, under a gloomy, cloudy sky, one sees a piece of motionless water framed by a border of wood, which bends larger and more clearly towards the foreground and suddenly changes into a grassy green hill, which slopes down to the dark shores of the lake. There are small figures of men and

⁵² J.G. van Rossum du Chattel, 2006, p. 7.

⁵³ J.G. van Rossum du Chattel, 2006, p. 43.

⁵⁴ See J.E. Jaspers & Mas Pirngadie, *De inlandsche kunstnijverheid in Nederlandsch Indië*, 5 Volume, ('s-Gravenhage: V.H. Mouton, 1912).

⁵⁵ See *Soerabaiasch Handelsblad*, 9 May 1908; *De Sumatra Post*, 10 March 1916; *De Sumatra Post*, 15 May 1909; *Het Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, 20 July 1909.

cows drinking. There is a lovely mood in the piece. The design reveals a feeling for the beauty of the Indies (*Indisch mooi*).⁵⁶

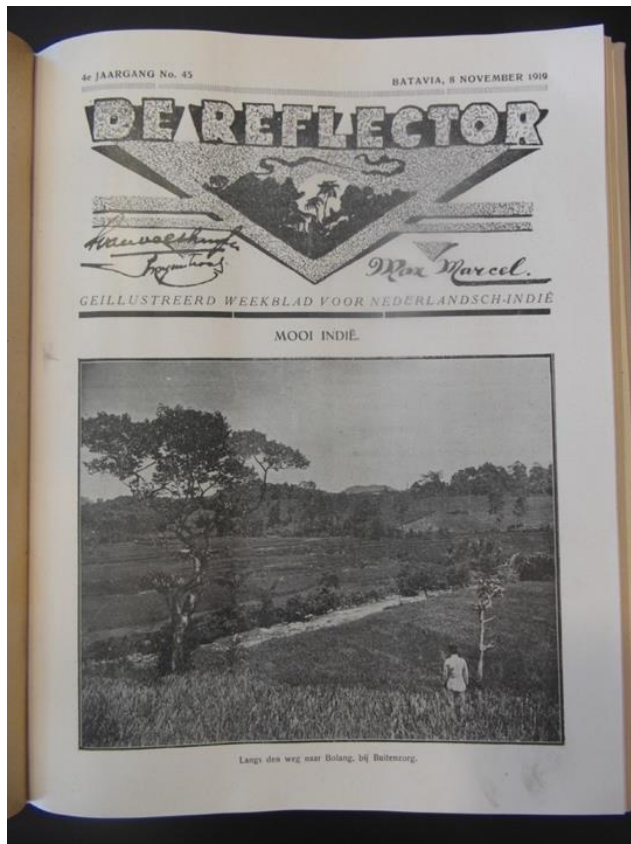


FIGURE 3.14.
"Mooi Indië" was a caption for a photo in *De Reflector* magazine in 1919.

Collection of Leiden University Library
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

In 1911, the *De Preanger Bode* newspaper in Java published concise texts, titled "Mooi Indië in Beeld," that reviewed Du Chattel's successful exhibition organized by Pulchri Studio in The Hague.⁵⁷ Based on my research, this is the most definitive and earliest use of the term Mooi Indië compared to Jasper's version (*Indisch Mooi*) or even before Du Chattel's

⁵⁶ J.E.Jasper, *De Schilder F.J. du Chattel in Indie, Op de Hoogte*, Nr. 7 (15 February 1910), p. 74. *Dat de schilder ook van de soberste onderwerpen veel te maken wist. Daar ziet men onder een sombere wolkenlucht een stukje roerloos water, geëncadreerd door een lijst van bosch, dat zich al groter en duidelijker naar den voorgrond buigt en plots overgaat in een grasgroenen heuvel, welke neerglooit naar de donkere oevers van het meer. Er zijn figuurtjes op van mannetjes met drinkende koeien. Er zit een lieve stemming in het stuk. De opzet verradt het gevoel voor Indisch mooi.*

⁵⁷ *De Preanger Bode*, 5 May 1911, p. 2.

watercolor album in 1913. When Du Chattel's exhibition was displayed in Amsterdam, it received criticism from Nardus Henri Wolf, a journalist and art critic, as documented in *De Kunst* magazine. Wolf wrote that Du Chattel's main strength lay in his watercolor painting skills, but he found the impressions of the Indies in the paintings to be less successful and disappointing. Wolf believed photography offered a deeper insight into the Indies than Du Chattel's watercolors. Besides that, there are no differences in whether Du Chattel painted landscapes of the Indies or the Netherlands, as the paintings' impressions, colors, and atmospheres seemed very similar.⁵⁸

The term *Mooi Indië* gained significant attention in the media following the release of du Chattel's album, increasing its popularity. Numerous newspapers in the Netherlands and its colony frequently employed the term *Mooi Indië* to endorse products by highlighting the allure of natural landscapes, cultural richness, and the local populace.⁵⁹ In certain instances, media outlets would refer to their photographic category as "*Mooi Indië*" (Fig. 3.14). During the 1920s, promotional materials for painting and photography exhibitions showcasing the aesthetic allure of the *Nederland Indies* employed terminology as in the case of a renowned *Nederland Indies* artist, Leonardus Joseph Eland, who presented his works in Amsterdam.⁶⁰ These facts offer a counterargument to those individuals who erroneously claimed that the album was released in 1930.⁶¹

⁵⁸ N.H.Wolf, "Indische Aquarelle" in *De Kunst*, No.171, 6 May 1911, p.6.

⁵⁹ For instance, an advertorial for the beauty of the roads in the city of Garut, West Java, in *Het nieuws van den dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, 24 March 1923. See the calendar promotion in *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, 17 February 1921; *The Sumatera Post*, 16 December 1922; *Het nieuws van den dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, 27 March 1924; *De Preanger Bode*, 9 September 192, and *Het Centrum*, 28 November 1922. See promotion of Bali's nature in *Haagsche courant*, 22 February 1932.

⁶⁰ See the newspaper *Vaderland: staat- en letterkundig nieuwsblad*, 04 August 1922; *De Telegraaf*, 26 May 1924; *De Telegraaf*, 24 June 1921. See *Tijd: godsdienstig-staatkundig dagblad*, 18 September 1937 which advertised a *Mooi Indië* photography exhibition.

⁶¹ The confusion about the publication year of Du Chatell's album can be seen in Agus Burhan, 2014, p. 35. Burhan referenced remarks about 1930 as the year of publishing for du Chatell's album from Leo Haks and Guus Maris (1995). In their book, Haks and Maris wrote it as "ca. 1930" marking it as an "approximation". See Leo Haks and Guus Maris, *Lexicon of Foreign Artists Who Visualized Indonesia (1600-1950)*, (Utrecht: Gert Jan Bestebeurtje, 1995), p. 227. See also M. Dwi Marianto and Bramantyo, 1997-1998, p. 62. Both write "the term *Mooi Indië* began to be used in the art world approximately when it was used as a title for the preproduction of eleven watercolor paintings by du Chattel published as a portfolio in Amsterdam in 1930." Marianto and Bramantyo referenced this information based on Agus Burhan's research report. See also Nasbahry Couto in his personal blog, as follows: "We can confirm that the term '*Mooi Indië*' is a term surfaced from a watercolor painting exhibition by Du Chattel in Amsterdam, in 1930. This term may have also surfaced among Indonesian artists, specifically PERSAGI." See <http://visualheritageblog.blogspot.nl/2014/05/sambungan-hal-2-keterangan-gambar-pada.html>, accessed on 16 February 2018, 3.08 p.m.

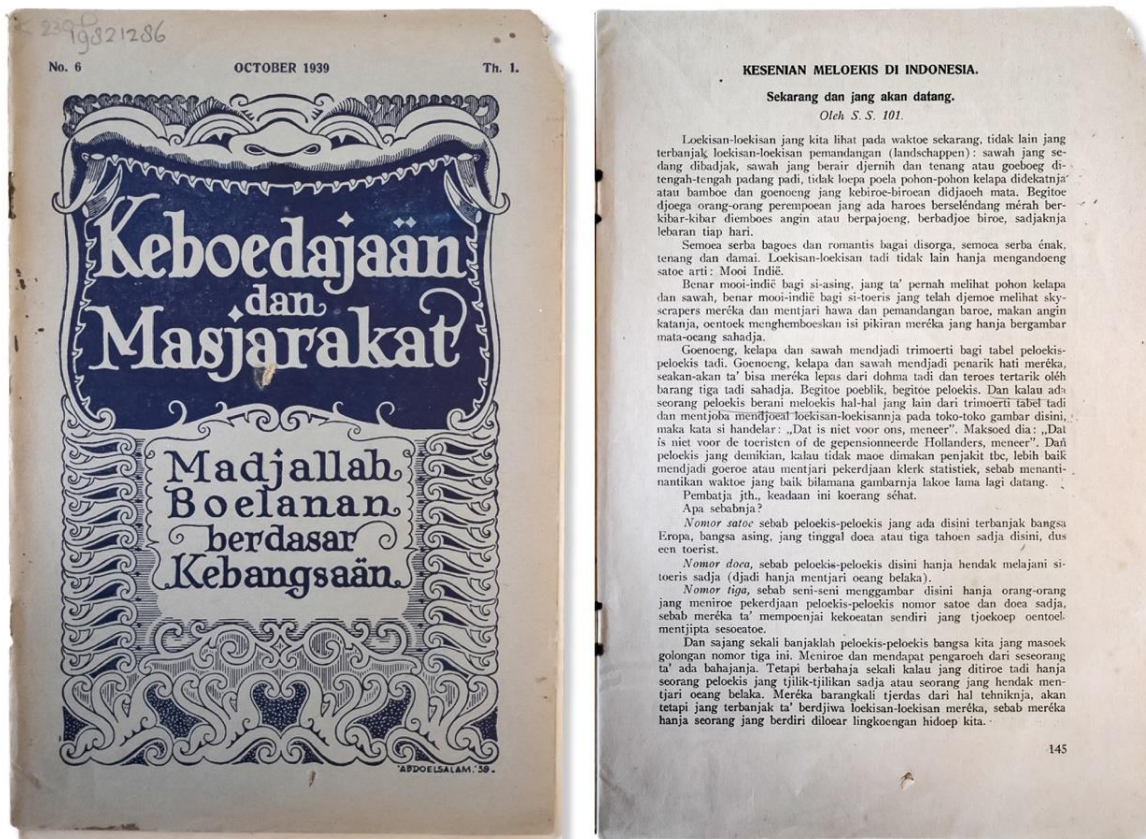


FIGURE 3.15.

In the monthly *Keboedajaan dan Masjarakat* of 1939, the front cover and first page feature Sudjojono's renowned article.

Collection of Leiden University Library
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

Shifting the Meaning and the Rise of Stigma

Throughout history, landscape painting has been highly esteemed for its ability to capture the beauty and tranquillity of the world. However, not everyone shares this perspective. Some argue that landscape painting replicates reality without offering any innovative insights. Critics claim that artists often rely on clichéd compositions and struggle to convey messages through their art. Another criticism revolves around the romanticization of nature in landscape painting and the perpetuation of a viewpoint. Additionally, there is a viewpoint that suggests artists prioritize gain over expressing their vision, resulting in a proliferation of standardized landscapes designed to appeal to a broad audience, thus diminishing the genre's artistic value.

The points above became the focus of Sudjojono's criticism of Mooi Indië, which he expressed satirically and sarcastically in his writing in 1939 in the nationalist magazine *Keboedajaan dan Masjarakat* (Fig. 3.15). He described Mooi Indië as: "Paintings of natural landscapes; rice paddies being

ploughed; clear-watered and calm rice paddies or a small hut in the midst of the paddies; not forgetting coconut trees along the side, or bamboo trees; and blue mountains in the distance.”⁶² Art historians have often cited excerpts from his critical writings regarding colonial art.⁶³

In the 1940s, in another review, Sudjojono criticized an exhibition and stigmatized Basuki Abdullah into the Mooi Indië painters’ group, and this stigma is still attached. Looking at the exhibited paintings, Sudjojono accuses Abdullah of not understanding the meaning of “becoming Indonesian,” which is impossible to implement only through images of a bridge over a river or the mountains coloured blue.⁶⁴ Sudjojono stated that Abdullah was a painter who did not understand how to “be Indonesian.” Instead, Abdullah’s paintings tend towards what S. Sudjojono calls “artistieke plekken” – a place that is already beautiful in itself. S. Sudjojono also questioned the meaning of “Indonesia” for Basuki Abdullah. “He did not understand at all how our people live. He could not understand that the word ‘Indonesia’ must contain these meanings: united, building, working, falling, sacrificing, and continuous struggle.”⁶⁵ According to S. Sudjojono, Basuki Abdullah is not an artist, but a trader. “Empty, soulless, consumed by the pursuit of money. This is very dangerous as, if the desire for money runs deep, he must follow the will of the public. And when you follow the will of the public, all artists become traders.”⁶⁶

The publications mentioned above instigated the Mooi Indië stigma, which continues to resonate up to the present day. Trisno Sumardjo – the most aggressive critic attacking this subject - underestimated the style of Mooi Indië as only presenting the natural beauty of the Indies. However, instead of using Mooi Indië, Sumardjo called it the “*Oost Indische style*,” mostly adopted by European painters. Sumardjo repeated Sudjojono by saying,

⁶² S. Sudjojono, *Seni Loekis Indonesia: Sekarang dan Yang Akan Datang* in S. Sudjojono, *Seni Loekis, Kesenian dan Seniman*, (Yogyakarta: Penerbit Indonesia Sekarang, 1946), p.5. The excerpt from that book was taken from a previous S. Sudjojono article published in *Keboedajaan dan Masjarakat*, No. 6. Th.I, October 1939. “*Lukisan-lukisan pemandangan; sawah yang sedang dibajak, sawah yang berair jernih dan tenang atau gubuk di tengah padang padi, tidak lupa pula pohon-pohon kelapa di daratnya, atau bamboo dan gunung yang kebiru-biruan di jauh mata. Begitu juga orang-orang perempuan yang ada harus berselendang merah berkibar-kibar diembus angin atau berpayung, berbaju biru, layaknya lebaran tiap hari. Semua serba bagus dan romantik bagai di sorga, semua serba enak, tenang dan damai.*”

⁶³ For instance, see Claire Holt, 1967, p. 195; Helena Spanjaard, 1998, pp. 92-93; Sudarmadji, 1974, p. 10; and M. Dwi Marianto, 2001, pp. 45-46.

⁶⁴ S. Sudjojono, 1946, pp. 16-21.

⁶⁵ S. Sudjojono, pp. 17-18.

⁶⁶ S. Sudjojono, 1946, pp. 20-21.

“The *Oost Indische* painters do not fully understand the essence of Indonesia. They only create objects for foreigners, the results of which convey more to colonial and tourism interests.”⁶⁷

In another article, in 1953, Sumardjo followed Sudjojono’s criticism of Basuki Abdullah: “The *Oost-Indische Kunst* style, consciously or not, is only the shallow fulfilment of common taste, quasi-romantic and forced eroticism. Beauty is inserted into a ‘painting template’: soothing rice paddies, mountains representing Indonesia’s nature, and specifically with Basuki Abdullah, curvaceous and beautiful women, sometimes half naked à la Hollywood ‘representing’ the Indonesian person.”⁶⁸

The stigma then spread to the names of other painters as art critic Rivai Apin added: “As with those who use Western tools and techniques, the application here is that the poetic energy did not advance towards sublimation, but regressed towards rudeness. Paintings by Wakidi and Abdullah Sr still retain that poetry. Yet, Raden Saleh was limited by his youth, and in Basuki Abdullah rudeness developed.”⁶⁹ Later on, an exhibition review in *Star Weekly* magazine added to the stigmatization describing Sudjono Abdullah – Basuki Abdullah’s brother – with the following: “Our eyes are somewhat dazzled, as Sudjono Abdullah’s paintings from a technical perspective are intelligently done. Indonesian landscapes are praised as heaven filled with idyllic tranquillity and beauty. The ideal [painting] to attract the attention of foreigners... paintings with the perfect technique will eventually become boring.”⁷⁰ Another text from the 1960s maintained the stigma of Mooi Indië as “romantic is sometimes sentimental, shallow and fake to the point of nausea.”⁷¹

Sudarmadji, representing the 1970s, even dramatized S. Sudjojono’s view by saying those landscape paintings do not have a nationalistic spirit, failing to awaken the spirit of struggle and its dynamics, “the shepherd was playing his flute while riding a water buffalo, among yellowing rice paddies and the soft afternoon breeze. Or small waves on the northern Javanese coast

⁶⁷ Trisno Sumardjo, *Kedudukan Seni Rupa Kita* in Zaini (ed.), *Almanak Seni 1957*, (Jakarta: Badan Musyawarah Kebudayaan Nasional, 1957), p. 119.

⁶⁸ Trisno Sumardjo, *Kedudukan Seni Lukis Kita*, Zenith magazine, No.9.Th.III, September 1953.

⁶⁹ Rivai Apin, “Catatan-Catatan di Malam Tenang” in *Siasat*, 14 March 1954. “Demikian halnya sampai orang mempergunakan alat dan teknik melukis Barat, tetapi pada pemakaian ini tenaga kepenyairan tidak mengalami kemajuan kearah sublimasi, malah menuju kekasaran. Demikianlah pada lukisan Wakidi, Abdullah Sr masih kelihatan adanya iklim kepenyairan itu, tetapi Raden Saleh tersekat pada kemudaan dan pada Basuki Abdullah menjadi kekasaran.”

⁷⁰ Oei Sian Yok, “Gaya Naturalis dalam Dua Pameran” in *Star Weekly*, 13 October 1956.

⁷¹ Oei Sian Yok, “Pameran Lukisan S. Djupriyani” in *Star Weekly*, 1 June 1961.

brushing the grey-brown sand, while tall coconut trees wave to the sea, as though as in waiting for the arrival of Cornelis de Houtman.”⁷²

In her paper published in the 1980s, painter and art historian Farida Srihadi mentioned the appearance of the "Mooi Indië School" without revealing the names of European painters and only mentioning the Indonesian Abdullah Suriosubroto. Farida underestimates "The emergence of a group of Mooi Indië's school in Bandung founded by Abdullah Surio Subroto (1878-1941)", which "is no more than a group of Indonesian painters who like to paint beautiful scenes. This is because of the influence of Western painters at that time. They were hobbyist painters.”⁷³

Some sources perceived Mooi Indië as colonial and mythalized as an enemy that the nationalist PERSAGI staunchly fought against. Artist F.X. Harsono, for instance, believed: “PERSAGI reacted to Mooi Indië art that did not care about the realities in society at that time, which forgot that the suffering of the people was part of the beautiful landscape.”⁷⁴ Art academic Setianingsih Purnomo proposed: “Mooi Indië itself consisted of European painters who came and resided in Indonesia, and several respected Indonesians. Divorced from reality, these painters ‘served’ the Dutch. To this end, the PERSAGI artists formed a group to push back the domination of Mooi Indië. According to PERSAGI, paintings should depict the lives of the common people.”⁷⁵

After years of ridicule and being trapped in stigma, Mooi Indië paintings suddenly grew in dignity in the 1990s. This occurred when Indonesian art collectors pursued paintings created when Indonesia was still called the Netherlands Indies. This development also influenced the Dutch art scene because the region was once their colony. The increasing interest from within Indonesia also led to growth in the attention of collectors, galleries, auction houses, and museums in the Netherlands. Articles were

⁷² Sudarmadji, *Dari Saleh Sampai Aming: Seni Lukis Indonesia Baru Dalam Sejarah dan Apresiasi*, (Yogyakarta: ASRI-Yogyakarta, 1974-1975), p. 11. "Seorang penggembala yang sedang asyik meniup seruling di punggung kerbau, sedang sawah menguning meliuk halus ditiup angin senja yang sepoi. Atau ombak kecil-kecil di pantai laut Jawa yang selalu datang-datang lagi mengusap pasir pantai yang coklat-coklat kelabu, sedang nyiur yang semampai selalu melambai ke arah laut, seperti mengelukan datangnya Cornelis de Houtman."

⁷³ Farida Srihadi, *Perkembangan Seni Rupa Bandung dan Sekitarnya (1945-1983)* in Sudarmadji (ed.), 1984, p. 50.

⁷⁴ F.X. Harsono "Tema Kerakyatan dalam Seni Lukis Indonesia: Perbandingan Masa PERSAGI dan Orde Baru" in *Kalam*, Edition 5, 1995, p. 24.

⁷⁵ Setianingsih Purnomo, *Kelahiran Seni Rupa Indonesia Baru* in Amir Sidharta Amir Sidharta (ed.), *From Mooi Indië to PERSAGI*, (Jakarta: Museum Universitas Pelita Harapan, 1997-1998), p. 12.

published on Netherlands Indies paintings and monographs on some of the most important painters, as explained above, and some museums, including the Tropical Museum, set up an exhibition about this colonial painting.⁷⁶ Mooi Indië's paintings are hunted and their prices skyrocket at auction.⁷⁷

The increasing interest in Mooi Indië paintings coincided with an enthusiasm to destigmatize Mooi Indië in history. During the 1990s, several writers a generation after Kusnadi and Sudarmadji began criticizing the Mooi Indië doctrine of S. Sudjojono. Not only the newer generation, but also others increasingly questioned the stigmatization of Mooi Indië. Among them was Agus Dermawan T, when he reviewed an exhibition titled *Indonesia Si Jelita* (The Beautiful Indonesia) which was held in Galeri Santi in April 1991 to rehabilitate the inappropriate perception of Mooi Indië. In his review of the show, Agus Dermawan T. regretted the missing links in Indonesian art history, that were not only missing but forgotten. Dermawan stated:

This slice of history was ignored because S. Sudjojono's group suppressed them with (the label) Mooi Indië. The works of these Netherlands Indies painters were called touristy, and only served the common public taste.⁷⁸

Interestingly, both M. Dwi Marianto and Bramantyo took the issue much further. They thought that S. Sudjojono needed to account for his ancestors in Java, who had expended energy and effort in building rice paddies, plantation fields, and village farms. Therefore, S. Sudjojono's criticism of the natural harmony represented in Mooi Indië is just the same as his insulting the agro-forestry knowledge of Indonesians. This knowledge had an essential role in safeguarding the sustainability of the variety of flora and fauna, resulting in farmland as a green, fertile space.⁷⁹ Marianto and Bramantyo also wrote this reminder:

What is equally important to note is that the reality of the Mooi Indië 'spirit' is not lost, but is incarnate in the works of many.

⁷⁶ Koos van Brakel, 2009, p. 59.

⁷⁷ See Jop Ubbens & Cathinka Huzing, *1880-1958, Adrien Le Mayeur, Painter-Traveller*, (Wijk en Alburg: Picture Publisher, 1995), p. 5.

⁷⁸ See Agus Dermawan T. "Si Jelita Hindia Belanda," 1991, newspaper clipping without name and date in <http://archive.ivaa-online.org/files/uploads/texts/Agus%20Dermawan%20T%20-%20Si%20Jelita%20Hindia%20Belanda-web.pdf>, accessed on 19 February 2018, 3:04 p.m.

⁷⁹ M. Dwi Marianto dan Bramantyo, 1997-1998, p. 62.

It is true that scholars and critics 'deride' and complain about Mooi Indië. However, what Mooi Indië brings has been absorbed by many familiar artists, adopted into its language, and expressed with local flourishes in various shapes and mediums of painting, such as: on the fenders of *becak*; on trucks; on village paintings especially on Independence Day celebrations; on show decorations; on photo studio backgrounds; and many others.⁸⁰

The fact that Mooi Indië paintings are accessible to the lower levels of society contradicts S. Sudjojono's criticism. As with the article by M. Dwi Marianto and Bramantyo, Supangkat observed that landscape painting is often made by the general public, unsurprisingly garnering the name "street painting." It is therefore essential to question the object of S. Sudjojono's stigmatization since it is the same as S. Sudjojono criticizing his people. Supangkat wondered: "As a socialist artist who is concerned with the life of his people, it is impossible that S. Sudjojono directed his criticism towards Mooi Indië painters who are from the elite, but common people making ends meet."⁸¹

Supangkat also suspected that S. Sudjojono's criticism of Mooi Indië caused obfuscation of assessment and understanding by Indonesian art historians towards landscape painting in Indonesia. According to Supangkat, the discussion of Mooi Indië became complicated when historians also used the term to refer to famous landscape painters like Abdullah Suriosubroto, Mas Pirngadie, and Wakidi without solid arguments. He continues:

Together with the cynicism of Mooi Indië attached to their paintings, the reputation of landscape paintings is ruined, and has stigmatized the discourse of landscape paintings within Indonesian art history, even up to the present day.⁸²

Landscape paintings of the natural beauty of the Indies were a common phenomenon in colonial art in the early 20th century, and criticism of them had taken place before Sudjojono's writings. Thus, the Mooi Indië stigma is more than a contribution from Sudjojono alone. This issue concerns the

⁸⁰ M. Dwi Marianto dan Bramantyo, 1997-1998, p. 64.

⁸¹ Jim Supangkat, *Menghadapi Stigma Mooi Indië*, katalogus Pameran Tunggal Bunawijaya, Bale Tonggoh Selasar Seni Sunaryo Art Space 10 – 26 November 2018, p. 3.

⁸² Jim Supangkat, 2018, p. 4.

debate about what image best represents the Indies. Is it through the beauty of the landscape? Painters Dolf Breetvelt and G.P. Adolfs once debated this topic.⁸³ On this issue, the earliest critique directed towards the practice of landscape painting in the Dutch East Indies can be found in the writings of Hans van de Wall. This critique was articulated in 1902 through an article titled *Schilderkunst in Indië*.

De Wall talks about a sense of pessimism regarding the state of the nation's art scene. Although there may be other types of artwork, the predominant genre of paintings exhibited is usually landscapes. According to De Wall, most painters in the Indies considered their images to be representative of the Indies only if they depicted views of multiple coconut trees against a mountainous backdrop. He regards this approach as a big mistake, in the same way as imagining that a few windmills and willow trees by the ditch represent Holland's identity. All of these stereotypes are only appropriate for illustration and advertising. De Wall then emphasized that art demands a higher achievement. An artist will always want to explore character, the soul of things, to depict it precisely as he feels and understands it.⁸⁴ Apart from that, regarding writing art history, de Wall emphasized an exciting statement to balance his prejudice by saying that: "The art form that the painters in the Indies prefer is the landscape. This peculiarity may be due to the immediate impression of the environment and the feeling of powerlessness to represent the heterogeneous elements of society in these regions."⁸⁵

This aspect is also related to the suspicion among painters in the Netherlands about the low artistic tastes of the colonial people in the Indies, who thought that a "good painting" was a painting that depicted the beauty

⁸³ See the argument between G.P. Adolf and Dolf Breetvelt in Eveline Borntraeger-Stoll and Gianni Orsini, *Gerard Pieter Adolfs, The Painter of Java and Bali*, (Wijk en Aalburg: Picture Publisher, 2008), p. 186. See also Koos van Brakel, 2009, pp. 53 and 56 - which discussed the criticism of Henry van Velthuisen (anti-modernist painter) towards exhibitions and paintings by Jan Frank.

⁸⁴ Hans van de Wall, "Schilderkunst in Indië" in *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, 7 May 1902, p. 5. "De meeste schilders hier meenen dat hun schilderij al zeer gelijk op een Indisch landschap, wanneer daarop een paar klapperboomen met een bergketen op den achtergrond te onderkennen zijn. Een dwaling even groot als de verbeelding dat een paar molens en wilgen aan een slootkant een gezicht in Holland voorstellen. Deze gegevens zijn wel voldoende voor prenteboeken en reclameplaten, maar de kunst stelt hooger eischen. Zij wil vóór alles het karakter, de ziel der dingen vorschen om die uit te beelden, geheel zooals de kunstenaar haar waarneemt en opvat."

⁸⁵ Hans van de Wall, 1902. "De kunstvorm, dien de schilders in Indië zich bij voorkeur kiezen is het landschap. Deze eigenaardigheid kan een gevolg zijn van den onmiddellijken indruk der omgeving zoowel als van het gevoel van machteloosheid om de heterogene elementen der samenleving in deze gewesten weder te geven. "

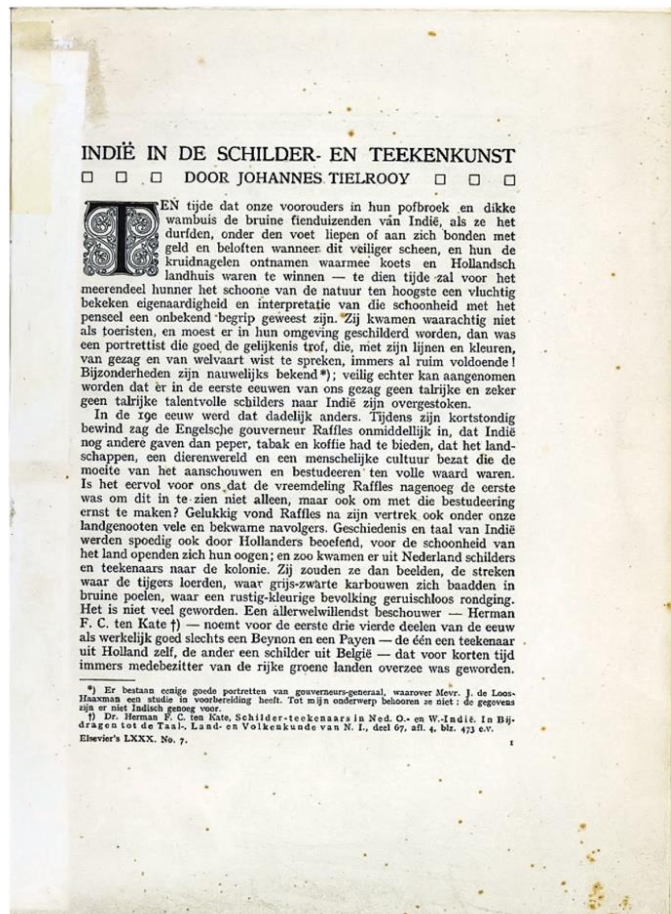


FIGURE 3.16.
First page of Johannes Tielrooy's *Indië in de Schilder- en Teekenkunst*, 1930.

Collection of Leiden University Library
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

of mountains, green rice paddies, and coconut trees. Most Europeans living in the East Indies were “deficient in aesthetic insight,” this being devastating for any artistic development. Once, painter Piet Ouborg – who was inaccurately categorized as a Mooi Indië painter by Burhan, Supangkat and Sudarmadji⁸⁶ – complained regarding these matters. In his letters, Ouborg often grumbled about the lack of culture in this society, the artistic taste, and the absence of “the desire to make something indifferent to higher values.”⁸⁷

⁸⁶ For instance, Agus Burhan. See Burhan, 2014, p. 3. See also Supangkat, 1997, p. 33. Supangkat wrote: “Some of them also showed the influence of the Orientalist point of view. Prominent Dutch artists of that time were Jan Frank, Piet Ouborg, Jules Pascin, Charles Sayers, A. Breetvelt, Rudolf Bonnet, and WG. Hofker. W. Dooijewaard and Walter Spies (a German artist), among others.” See also Sudarmadji, 1974, p. 9. Compare to Koos van Brakel, 2009, p. 53 and p. 56. He says that Piet Ouborg and Dolf Breetvelt are exceptions because their paintings deviated from the artistic trends of the time. Van Brakel also mentioned other names like Anita Daponten Rambonnet. Several other painters also displayed different artistic tendencies, which could not be generalized as Mooi Indië painters, including Jan Frank, Charles Sayers, Willem Dooyewaard, and Isaac Israel.

⁸⁷ For Further reading, see Leonie ten Duis and Annelies Haase, *Ouborg: Schilder-Painter*, (Amsterdam: SDU – Openbaar Kunstbezit, 1990), p. 12.

Long before S. Sudjojono and his followers criticized the art scene of the Netherlands Indies by associating Mooi Indië as “tourist souvenirs,” Tielrooy, by principle, had already started this. After criticizing several works by painters from the Netherlands Indies, which tended to depict beauty, Tielrooy offered the term *Souvenirs van Indië*. In his 1930 article titled “*Indië in De Schilder- en Teekenkunst*” (Fig.3.16), he satirized:

Souvenirs from the Indies, after all, are the only things that make such a painter. Their eye is sharp, but it does not differ from the eyes of everyone; their hand is indeed industrious but knows only how to copy, not to interpret. They lack personality, and the few times that their canvases attract attention, it is only because of the topic!⁸⁸

Tielrooy extended his pessimism and cynicism towards the development of painting in the Indies, - which quickly reminds us of S. Sudjojono’s articles. Even Tielrooy had already used the so-called “Trimurti principle” (rice paddies, mountain, coconut trees) before S. Sudjojono repopularized that principle. Tielrooy mocked the famous landscape painter Ernest Dezentje. For him, Dezentje paints sawahs (paddy fields) and the water glistens like silver, the little dykes are green, he puts a mountain in the background and this mountain – you can count on that – is dark blue, the mandatory palm trees are in the picture too, and in the heavens in the distance yearning yellows melt into poetic red. Thus, much thought has gone into creating a soft, tender mood and should an attribute still be required, such as a palm tree or a little native home, it can be supplied.⁸⁹

Henry van Velthuysen, a renowned landscape painter, strongly disagreed with Tielrooy's arguments. Besides being accused of being

See also J. De Loos-Haaxman, *Verlaat Rapport Indië*, ('s-Gravenhage: Mouton & Co., Uitgevers, 1968), p. 83.

⁸⁸ Johannes Tielrooy, “Indië in de Schilder – en Teekenkunst” in *Elsevier's Geïllustreerd Maandschrift*, 4e jg. No. 7, July 1930, p. 7. “Souvenirs van Indië ziedaar tenslotte het enige wat zulke schilders maken. Hun oog ziet wel scherp, maar richt zich niet anders dan op? de ogen van een ieder; hun hand is wel nijver, maar weet slechts te kopiëren, niet te vertolken. Het ontbreekt hun aan persoonlijkheid en de enkele malen dat hun doeken bekoren is het door het onderwerp alleen!”

⁸⁹ Tielrooy, 1930, p. 6. “*Dezentje schildert sawah's en het water is zilverig-blinkend, de dijkjes zijn groen; op den achtergrond zet hij een berg en de berg, men kan er vast op rekenen is donkerblauw; de vereischte palm is aanwezig, en aan het uitspansel in de verte smelten smachtende gelen met poetisch rood tezamen. Aan een weeke, teedere stemming is dus behoorlijk gedacht en mocht er nog een enkel attribuut gewenscht zijn, een palmboom meer of een inlandsch stulpje het kan geleverd worden.*” Koos van Brakel also saw the relationship. See Koos van Brakel, 2009, p. 54.

superficial and one-sided, Van Velthuysen also accused Tielrooy, a French literature teacher who taught in Surabaya, Batavia, and Bandung, of thoughtlessly attacking landscape painters and presuming to know more about the direction of Modern art that was suitable for the Indies.

Tielrooy's statement that "buying paintings was only done by a handful of wealthy Europeans, while the Indo-European is generally only interested in the gramophone, watching movies, and dancing; these are often the only things he can afford. Besides, wealthy Indo-Chinese could only buy grotesque plaster lions for their gardens." Van Velthuysen responded that the allegations were "incorrect, exaggerated and offensive." He continued: "Has Mr. Tielrooy never heard of the rich collection of paintings of Mr. Gonsalvez, who recently passed away, the splendid collection of Mr. Muller, which was exhibited at the *Kunstkring* a few years ago, and about ten beautiful and valuable paintings of the Van Delden villa? We know, for instance, that the 'Draw Oxen' by Jan Frank was bought by Mr. Maclaine Pont – they are all names of 'Indische' families. And does Mr. Tielrooy not know that a very wealthy Chinese man in Semarang has had the reception room of his villa painted by Carel Lodewijk Dake and Hendrik Arend Ludolf Wichers (landscape painters), which has cost him tens of thousands? Doesn't he know that Dake is currently staying in Saigon on behalf of these wealthy Chinese?"⁹⁰

Due to the many prejudices in Tielrooy's writings, Van Velthuysen finally urges the reader that Tielrooy's writings should not be interpreted as "the Gospel that Indian artists and their viewers must obey" in the sentence:

Mr. Tielrooy, of whom we have never heard anything in the field of art in the Indies, and whose presence has not been noticed by anyone here, must suffer from overconfidence if he imagines himself to be one of those called upon to take *Indische* painting and drawing a step further. I will point you in the

⁹⁰ H.v.V "Indië in de Schilder- en Teekenkunst. Een Verguizend Oordeel" in *Het nieuws van den dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, 22 August 1930, p.5. "Heeft de heer Tielrooy nooit gehoord van de rijke schilderijen verzameling van den onlangs overleden heer Gonsalvez, de schitterende collectie van den heer Muller, welke eenige jaren geleden in den Kunstkring werd geëxposeerd en een tiental mooie en kostbare schilderijen op de villa Van Delden? Het is ons bijvoorbeeld bekend, dat de 'Trekossen' van Jan Frank aangekocht is door Mr. Maclaine Pont het zijn allemaal namen van Indische families. En weet de heer Tielrooy niet, dat momenteel een zeer gefortuneerde Chinees te Semarang de ontvangstzaal van zijn villa heeft laten beschilderen door Dake en Wichers, wat hem tientallen duizenden heeft gekost? Weet hij niet, dat momenteel Dake in Saigon verblijft in opdracht van dezen rijken Chinees?"

right direction. Mr. Tielrooy 's article is, therefore, not regarded as the gospel in art, neither by the *Indische* art practitioners nor by the public.⁹¹

Mooi Indië as a Period

This sub-chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the establishment of Mooi Indië as a period in the historiography of Indonesian modern art. This period, recognized as the 'Dutch colonial period' or 'the period after Raden Saleh's death' until the arrival of the Japanese in 1942, was not a mere chronological division but a classification system identified by historians. I argue that the determination of Mooi Indië as a period is not only based on several content aspects of formal, stylistic, and thematic features that appraise the meaningful relationship between a work of art and its context but is more political. Due to the need to strengthen the Indonesia-centric point of view, this political aspect is more prominent than other aspects. This sub-chapter wants to answer questions such as: Who were the initiators of Mooi Indië as a period, and when did this intellectual endeavor begin?

There is a lack of consensus among historians regarding the boundaries of the Mooi Indië era. According to historian Denys Lombard, "Mooi Indië" was commonly used to refer to the islands during the colonial period.⁹² The mention of Lombard's rendition of the Mooi Indië era is relatively limited in scholarly discourse, as it lacks a precise delineation of the commencement of colonialism. In contrast, there was an outlook address among art historians positing that the Mooi Indië era can be delineated as spanning from 1930 to 1942.⁹³ Kusnadi, for example, identifies the year 1930 as the starting point.⁹⁴

⁹¹ H.v.V, 1930, p. 5. "De heer Tielrooy, van wien wij in Indië op kunstgebied nooit iets hebben gehoord, en wiens aanwezigheid door niemand hier is opgemerkt, moet wel aan zelfoverschatting lijden, als hij zich verbeeldt tot de geroepen te behoren, die de Indische schilder- en teekenkunst een stap in de goede richting zullen brengen. Het artikel van den heer Tielrooy wordt dan ook niet als het evangelie op kunstgebied beschouwd, noch door de Indische kunstbeoefenaars, noch door het publiek."

⁹² See Deny Lombard, *Nusa Jawa: Silang Budaya, Batas-batas Pembaratan*, (Jakarta: PT Gramedia, 2005), p. 43.

⁹³ For instance, Helena Spanjaard. See Helena Spanjaard, 2016, p. 15. In other publications, Helena determined 1900-1942 as Mooi Indië period. See Helena Spanjaard, 1993, p. 21. See also Helena Spanjaard, 1998, p. 34.

⁹⁴ See Kusnadi, 1993, p. 14; Kusnadi, *Perspektif Seni Rupa Indonesia*, Majalah Analisis Kebudayaan, No. 2, Tahun Ke-1, 1981, Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan-RI., p. 53; Kusnadi "The Naturalism of Mooi Indië" in Hilda Soemantri (ed.), *Visual Art*, (Singapore: Archipelago Press, 1998), p.48. In other

According to some scholars, this particular time frame can be considered a period that witnessed a resurgence in the realm of painting following the passing of Raden Saleh in 1880, extending until the establishment of PERSAGI in 1938. Onghokham, on the other hand, holds his own perspectives. If one were to generally consider the beginning of the Mooi Indië period to coincide with the passing of Raden Saleh, Onghokham would assert that Raden Saleh was the trailblazer of Mooi Indië.⁹⁵ If one accepts his assumption, it could be argued that the Mooi Indië period started during the 19th century.

The determination of Mooi Indie as a period of art history is a new phenomenon in the post-colonial Indonesian art terrain. Nobody used "Mooi Indië period" between 1930 and 1945. However, in 1939, Sudjojono published his article "Seni Lukis di Indonesia, Sekarang dan Yang Akan Datang" (Painting in Indonesia, Now and the Future); there are solid reasons for determining the use of Mooi Indië as a period in this article, which I will attempt to explain below.

In his texts, Sudjojono indirectly endorsed it as a "period" when he discussed the artistic orientations of his generation in contrast to the general trend of the painting style of that time, which he called Mooi Indië. The opinion is quite reasonable and also strengthened by the article's title. Whether on purpose or not, with such a title, Sudjojono had already divided Indonesian art history by using the words '*sekarang*' (now) and '*yang akan datang*' (in the future). Afterwards, this division came to define the start of the Indonesian national art era ('*yang akan datang*' - beginning with Sudjojono and his generation) and the end of the colonial art era ('*sekarang*' - or the "Mooi Indië era"). It can also be interpreted that Sudjojono determined that he (as well as his contemporaries) represent "now" as a counter to the past - namely, Mooi Indië painters. Therefore, I suspect this article triggered later scholars to name or define the Mooi Indië period as having started in the 1930s because it refers to the years the Sudjojono article was published.

I observe that Mooi Indië as a period had not been firmly recognized during the Japanese occupation (1942-1945). However, even though it is still vague, I think that efforts to conceptualize the period – referring to Mooi Indië – have already been made during this Japanese period. At that time, artists tended to classify art history into two periods: the previous period (the

publications, Kusnadi wrote 1925-1938 for the period. See Kusnadi in Mochtar Kusumaatmadja (ed.), 1990-1991, p. 61.

⁹⁵ See Onghokham, 1994, pp. 37-43.

Dutch colonization) and the current period (Japanese). For example, this is reflected in the article from 1943 when the painter Agus Djaya compared the differences between the two periods. According to him, the earlier period was when the government did not provide opportunities for the Indonesian people to develop their culture. Conversely, during the Japanese period, opportunities abounded for the development of culture, especially the formulation of an identity of Indonesian painting.⁹⁶

Another perspective comes from Sudjojono. During the Japanese period, he wrote an article entitled “Zaman Raden Saleh Dibandingkan Dengan Zaman Pelukis-Pelukis Angkatan Muda” (The Age of Raden Saleh Compared to the Age of Young Generation Painters), which emphasized the fundamental difference between his generation and the Raden Saleh era. In other words, Sudjojono placed Raden Saleh in a colonial classification (the past), with himself and his generation representing the present as cutting edge.⁹⁷

Shortly after the 1945 issuance of the Declaration of Independence, artists and writers actively engaged in the composition of literature pertaining to art history, disseminating their works through various publications, including newspapers and magazines. Numerous individuals made significant contributions to delineating national art's fundamental principles. During the period from 1945 to the mid-1950s, however, the term “Mooi Indië period” did not yet exist. Nonetheless, this particular period has been conceptualized and fabricated under various names, as the following analysis explains.

Published in 1948 in *Mimbar Indonesia*, Zuber Usman wrote an article titled “Sedikit Pembicaraan Tentang Seni Lukis Kita” (A Short Conversation about Our Art), which divided art history into three periods: *Raden Saleh-The Generation after Raden Saleh-The New Generation*. When examining the landscape painting trend from the early 20th century, Usman named the period “The Generation after Raden Saleh.” Usman stated that the painters of that period such as Abdullah Suriosubroto, Adam, Mas Pirngadie, Wakidi, and Moh. Syafe'i were painters who “attempted to move the beauty of nature to the canvas.” Despite the mention of merely “painting the beauty of nature,” instead of criticizing, Usman gave a positive judgment upon the achievements of these painters, as “they already have the desire to spread the

⁹⁶ Agus Djaya, “Seni Rupa dan Bangsa” in *Soeara Asia*, 26 May 1943.

⁹⁷ S. Sudjojono, 1946, p. 47.

wings of painting to their nation."⁹⁸ In naming art from that Dutch colonial time, Usman did not explicitly use the term *Mooi Indië*, but called it "the beauty of nature."

Responding Zuber Usman, a year later Soemarno Soetosoendoro wrote "Seni Lukis Kita dalam Mentjari Jalan" (Our Painting in Finding Its Way). In defining the art periodization, Soetosoendoro covered more extensive periods compared to previous writers. The classification system he made was more detailed and touched not only a sociopolitical but also an aesthetic dimension. Generally, he organized Indonesian art history into four development periods: Original Indonesian Art - Raden Saleh - After Raden Saleh - Art of 1942 (the Japanese era) - Art since 1945.⁹⁹

Moreover, like Usman, Soetosoendoro named the period of art during the early 20th century as the "after Raden Saleh" era. He characterized the era as a void of deep emptiness since the death of Raden Saleh. The unique aesthetic of the period was "natural beauty as the teacher of painters." Painters of the time not only painted landscapes but also painted portraits and still-life objects. The only painters he used as examples as playing big roles during this period were Abdullah Suriosubroto and Basuki Abdullah. As with Usman, Soetosoendoro also did not judge the aesthetic achievements of both Abdullachs negatively. He defended the two painters because they, like Raden Saleh, had spread the spirit of academic-style painting in Indonesia. Other than that, Soetosoendoro thought that several Indonesian painters of that time also displayed developments in technique and quality, although "many of them only painted for pleasure."¹⁰⁰

Moving forward, in the early 1950s, the cultural magazine *Indonesia* published a special edition on the theme of New Indonesian Painting as part of a modern nation's awakening towards documenting art artifacts and their history. It was from this point that the stigma against *Mooi Indië*'s painting style began.

A relevant article in that edition which discussed the issue of periodization of Indonesian art history was "Seni Lukis Indonesia Baru" (Indonesian New Painting), written by M. Balfas. In classifying time, Balfas did not make any changes compared to previous writers. However, he

⁹⁸ Zuber Usman, "Sedikit Pembicaraan Tentang Seni Lukis Kita" in *Mimbar Indonesia*, 16 October 1948, p. 17.

⁹⁹ Soemarno Soetosoendoro, "Seni Lukis Kita Dalam Mentjari Jalan" in *Indonesia*, No. 10, November 1949, pp. 580-593.

¹⁰⁰ Soemarno Soetosoendoro, 1949, pp. 590-591.

thought that new Indonesian painting is not a continuation of traditional painting, but something new that resulted from intersections with the West. Consequently, he did not discuss the importance of Indonesian art from ancient times. Since the death of Raden Saleh, Balfas thought that Indonesian art entered an empty, quiet phase, which was filled with paintings of reproduction work from Europe. Other than that, there were also the works of Dutch painters that did not contribute anything, "which were no more than nice pictures. A sleeping heart could not see the bitter reality. Closed eyes still within a buoyant dream, resulting in landscape paintings of nothing but beauty."¹⁰¹ M. Balfas did not classify this "empty period" as Mooi Indië. However, by quoting Sudjojono (1939), Balfas indirectly implies the period as such.

The awareness and necessity for constructing Indonesian art history increased in 1950, together with efforts to document historical data through manuscripts and paintings.¹⁰² In that decade, the evaluation of developments in art post-war continued and received close attention from artists and writers. One of the writers who also actively stigmatized Mooi Indië was nationalist art critic Trisno Sumardjo. However, instead of naming the period "Mooi Indië," Sumardjo used the term *Oost-Indische Kunst* to describe the art activity of the early 20th century – which essentially has the same meaning. He wrote, "In the early years of this century, the school known as *Oost-Indische Kunst* emerged. Typical of this group were Kasenda, Adolfs, and Dezentje, who attempted to depict Indonesia as a land of exotic romance and untroubled beauty. Verdant rice paddies and purple mountains, palm trees and picturesque villages and alluring, smiling, half-naked girls. These were favorite subjects. There was little attempt in the *Oost-Indische* school to go beyond an easy pictorial appeal."¹⁰³ With the phrase "paddies, mountains, and

¹⁰¹ M. Balfas, "Seni Lukis Indonesia Baru" in *Indonesia*, Nomor (Khusus Seni Lukis), No. 4. TH.II, April 1951, p. 3. In its 6 September 1952 edition, the magazine *Waktu* published in Medan, North Sumatra, republished the article. This means that Balfas's version of the period of art history has the opportunity to be read more widely while *Indonesia's* magazine published in Jakarta.

¹⁰² See the *Kata Pengantar* (Foreword) written by the editorial staff of *Indonesia* Nomor (Khusus Seni Lukis), No.4 TH.II, April 1951.

¹⁰³ Trisno Sumardjo, "The Tendencies of Indonesian Art: Folk, Traditions, and Western Influence" in *Perspective of Indonesia: An Atlantic Monthly Supplement*, Intercultural Publications, New York, 1956, p. 33. See also the use of the *Oost-Indische Kunst* term in Sumardjo's other articles. See Trisno Sumardjo, 1956, p. 119 and Trisno Sumardjo, "Kedudukan Seni Lukis Kita" in *Zenith*, No. 9. TH. III, September 1953, p. 514. Like Sumardjo, Koos van Brakel uses the same category, namely "East Indies" paintings. Brakel mentions the time frame: "This genre encompasses the entire period during which Indonesia was a Dutch colony, from the seventeenth century until 1945." See Koos van Brakel, 2004, p. 13.

palm trees," it was apparent how Sudjojono's version of Mooi Indië influenced Sumardjo's statement when he was describing the *Oost Indische* school.

As discussed in the *Introduction*, the writing of art history gained momentum in the Seminar 1956. At that time, driven by a high spirit of nationalism, the Indonesian government and intellectuals believed that writing national historiography, especially to oppose the colonization of historical knowledge, was a crucial necessity. Through its ministries, the government aimed to shift the historiographical approach, which tended to be Dutch-based (Netherlands-centric) towards an Indonesian-centric approach in its place.

As a representative from the government, Kusnadi, who at the time worked for the government under the Ministry of Culture and Education, delivered his proposal for Indonesian art periodization. He named one of the periods the "romantic phase, where painters made many landscape paintings."¹⁰⁴ However, he did not use the term Mooi Indië as a period; Kusnadi used a metaphor, "romantic phase, which only painted natural beauty," substantially the same as Mooi Indië. Since then, the beginning of Mooi Indië as a period was officially decided.

Referencing the differences in his book, published in 1976, Sanento Yuliman was quite careful in defining the period from 1900 to 1940 as the First Period, when landscape painting grew, supported by the arrival of painters in the Netherlands Indies.¹⁰⁵ Yuliman never used the term Mooi Indië as a historical period. However, he revealed the story about Sudjojono's resistance to his teacher Mas Pirngadie's suggestion that Sudjojono painted with brush strokes that were rough and had dirty colors. According to Yuliman, Sudjojono strongly rejected the tyranny of the techniques, style, and aesthetics of landscape painting. This attitude opened a new chapter in the development of Indonesian modern painting.¹⁰⁶ In his other writings, in the 1990s, Yuliman gave the period a new name, The Colonial Period, still with the same year span.¹⁰⁷

Like Sanento Yuliman, art critic and painter Oesman Effendi did not use the term. In his article from 1976 about the history of painting in West Sumatra, Effendi used the word "Wakidi school" to refer to landscape

¹⁰⁴ Kusnadi, 1960, pp. 127-136.

¹⁰⁵ Sanento Yuliman, 1976, pp. 3-5.

¹⁰⁶ Sanento Yuliman, 1976, pp. 7-9.

¹⁰⁷ See Sanento Yuliman, "The Modern Art of Indonesia 1900-1970" in *Art and Asia Pasific*, Vol. 1, No. 3, 1994, pp. 38-45.

painting in the colonial era.¹⁰⁸ Effendi used the term following the context in West Sumatra. If the name Abdullah Suriosubroto is regarded as an influential pioneer of this style in Java, then in West Sumatra, it was the painter Wakidi who fulfilled this role. The Wakidi's way of painting landscapes is Effendi's suggestion of Mooi Indië.

Differing from Yuliman and Effendi, in the 1970s, Kusnadi – still actively writing art history and working for the government – suggested the period by naming it Periode Hindia Molek (Beautiful Indies Period). Without clarifying his argument, he stated that this period was the "missing link" since the death of Raden Saleh in 1880.¹⁰⁹ Meanwhile, Sudarmadji had a similar reason to Kusnadi in placing Mooi Indië as a period in art history. He assumed that Abdullah Suriosubroto marked Mooi Indië after the passing of Raden Saleh.¹¹⁰ In his other writing, Sudarmadji positioned the "Mooi Indië Period" between "the Raden Saleh Era" and "the PERSAGI and Revolution era."¹¹¹

I argue that the ultimate use of the word Mooi Indië as a period of Indonesian art history took place in 1976 when President Soeharto opened the exhibition on A Century of Indonesian Art – as discussed in the *Introduction*. Kusnadi, and especially Sudarmadji (who, in his 1974 book, already used the term as a period), were the two historians cum bureaucrats who played a significant role in the inauguration of this term.¹¹²

Furthermore, through its ministries, the state published the book *Sejarah Seni Rupa Indonesia* (History of Indonesian Art) which was distributed as a handbook for the Indonesian education world.¹¹³ When categorizing art

¹⁰⁸ For further reading, see Oesman Effendi, "Gerakan Seni Lukis Di Sumatera Barat" in *Budaya Jaya*, No. 100, Tahun Ke-Sembilan, September 1976, pp. 513-524.

¹⁰⁹ Kusnadi (et al.), *Sejarah Seni Rupa Indonesia*, (Jakarta: DepDikBud, 1979), pp. 148-153. See also Kusnadi, *Seni Rupa Modern* dalam Mochtar Kusumaatmadja (ed.), *Perjalanan Seni Rupa Indonesia*, (Jakarta: Panitia Pameran KIAS 1990-1991, 1990-1991), p. 61.

¹¹⁰ Sudarmadji, 1974-1975, p.8.

¹¹¹ Sudarmadji, "Seabad Seni Rupa Indonesia" in *Pameran Se-Abad Seni Rupa Indonesia 1876-1976*, (Jakarta: Balai Seni Rupa Jakarta – Pemerintah DKI Jakarta, 1976), no page reference.

¹¹² See Sudarmadji, *Dari Saleh Sampai Aming: Seni Lukis Indonesia Baru Dalam Sejarah dan Apresiasi*, (Yogyakarta: Sekolah Tinggi Seni Rupa Indonesia/ASRI Yogyakarta, 1975-1975), p. 8. See also Sudarmadji, *Seni Lukis Jakarta Dalam Sorotan*, (Jakarta: Pemerintah DKI Jakarta, 1974), p. 9. See Kusnadi, *Seni Rupa Modern* in Mochtar Kusumaatmadja, et al. 1990-1991, p. 60. Considering that both Sudarmadji publications had already been published before the Indonesian Art Centennial, and based on my own investigations, I think that Sudarmadji is the most active historian - if not the first - that established Mooi Indië as a period.

¹¹³ Interview with Yustiono, 16 August 2018. According to academic Yustiono, since the 1980s, higher education institutions like Institut Teknologi Bandung used *Sejarah Seni Rupa Indonesia* as a reference.

in the early 20th century, this book announced the "Mooi Indië Period."¹¹⁴ Yet, instead of revealing historical facts by referring to Du Chattel's album, for instance, the writing teams of both books defined Mooi Indië following the "S. Sudjojono doctrine": *Hindia Molek* (Mooi Indië) is a term given to describe types of works by the "Indische schilders" school or by Dutch Indies painters from the 1920s to 1938 that only intend to convey beauty. They consist of two groups, the smaller group of Indonesian painters and the larger, European contingent of painters in Indonesia."¹¹⁵

Several publications published between the 1990s and the 2000s, while not making significant changes or criticizing the period's establishment, have preserved Mooi Indië as a period with different names. In his book chapter, published in 2001, M. Dwi Marianto, for instance, named the Mooi Indië period "Seni Lukis Periode Penjajahan dan Perlawanan terhadap Penjajahan Belanda" (The Period of Colonial Painting and the Struggle against Dutch Colonialization).¹¹⁶ This term, at first glance, offers a dramatic conflict between Indonesian and Dutch artists. However, upon closer examination, it becomes clear that this conflict is a construct of the author's imagination, lacking support from historical sources. Another example is an art history book published by the Indonesian government entitled *Maestro Seni Rupa Modern Indonesia* in 2012, which indirectly refers to Mooi Indië as a period. However, the authors propose a relatively new yet odd period to replace Mooi Indië, namely "Indonesian Art and the Dutch." Unfortunately, the authors do not clarify this naming.¹¹⁷

Agus Burhan's latest academic publication, published in 2014, contributes to preserving Mooi Indië as a historical period. As an affirmation of nationalistic historiography, his book, *Development of Mooi Indië Painting Until PERSAGI in Batavia 1900-1942*, confines the Mooi Indië period—which ended when PERSAGI was founded in 1938.

¹¹⁴ See Kusnadi et al., 1976-1977, p. 148.

¹¹⁵ Kusnadi et al., 1979, p.152. See also Kusnadi, et al., 1978, p. 18. The word of 'molek' synonym with 'beautiful'.

¹¹⁶ See M. Dwi Marianto, *Surrealisme Yogyakarta*, (Yogyakarta: Rumah Penerbitan Merapi, 2001), pp. 44-46.

¹¹⁷ See Agus Dermawan T. and Mikke Susanto, *Maestro Seni Rupa Modern Indonesia*, (Jakarta: Kementrian Pariwisata & Ekonomi Kreatif Republik Indonesia, 2012), pp. 16-20.

Conclusion

Nowadays, on its exhibition wall, the Wereldmuseum Amsterdam provides a different description of Mooi Indië but essentially has the same meaning as the one I saw in 2018 – as quoted above – proving the museum still perpetuates the stigma associated with Mooi Indië paintings and painters. The museum has only changed the word “Mooi Indië” to “Cliché Landscapes” with the following description:

Landscapes as they were painted by colonial artists of the 19th and 20th centuries are full of clichés. They depict idyllic rural scenes of farmers working in hillside rice fields, with buffalos and smoldering volcanoes in the background. Or they show neatly tended plantations, with sturdy palm trees and with barely any workers to be seen. There is no war, resistance, poverty, or industrialization in this imaginary world. And yet, perhaps, the smoke from the volcano points to an ever-present danger of a natural disaster or a potentially rebellious population.

Mooi Indië holds significant historical value, and this term must be de-stigmatized, primarily because it has been subject to a biased assessment system and a stigma perpetuated by nationalistic historiography. As shown in this chapter, this historiography, inherited more from Sudjojono, tends to oversimplify these perceptions mistakenly within the context of tourism, the painters solely as tourists instead of professional artists with academic backgrounds. Therefore, this term should be restored to its original meaning, which was a way for artists to express their adoration of Indonesia's natural beauty in colonial times in the context of the Dutch East Indies. It mainly encompasses works on canvas and paper, some appearing in lithography, etching, drawing, and photography by European and Indonesian artists that depicted and documented the colony's landscape, people, and culture with an attitude that was generally antiheroic and unpretentious. They were painted in a simplified manner and received most of their inspiration directly from nature.

This chapter has illuminated the pivotal role of Sudjojono, one of many critics who denounced the style of Mooi Indië. Sudjojono, a prominent figure in modern Indonesian art history, was not the only painter who used the term to criticize European painters and the Indonesian painters painting

in this style. Before him, critics like Johannes Tielrooy had expressed their critical views on this subject, which he termed *Souvenirs of Indië* paintings. However, Sudjojono's role shines through—or is deliberately highlighted—and he emerges as the central hero. His critique of the style of *Mooi Indië* was a significant departure from the nationalist narrative, and his perceived success in liberating Indonesian painting from the clutches of colonialism is a myth that resonates among art historians and researchers.

This chapter has shown that nationalistic historiography was ultimately limited to perpetuating a stigma as a ridiculed historical period. This historiography, born out of a lack of access to historical sources and an unwillingness to examine the *Mooi Indië* issue critically, has led to misunderstandings over the years. The consequence of this historiography is the generalization that all European and Indonesian painters who painted natural landscapes were denigrated as *Mooi Indië* painters and associated with preservationists of colonialism. However, this contention overlooks the diverse contributions of painters such as Piet Ouborg, Jan Frank, Dolf Breetvelt, Charles Sayers, and Mas Pirngadie, who were more than landscape painters. Their works uniquely reflect the results of artistic experiments on nature, culture, light, and the people they encountered while working in Indonesia. They have significantly advanced modern painting in the Dutch East Indies.

The *Mooi Indië* School, a part of a specific historical context involving various parties, mainly Indonesian and European painters, is a school of art related to the Barbizon School or the Hague School. However, it is important to note that the *Mooi Indië* School was not a deliberate art movement driven by a group of painters in reaction to previous styles. Instead, its unique characteristics stem from a blend of a nostalgic and romantic view of nature, where landscapes, forests, rice fields, and tropical villages were not only painted directly but also embellished with fictional elements. The *Mooi Indië* School is a distinctive blend of the spirit of Romanticism, Barbizon, and the Hague School, brought to the Indies by European painters, marking their significant and global influence. Of course, more in-depth studies are needed in the future to define *Mooi Indië* School.

Accordingly, opportunities to expand *Mooi Indië* beyond the mere “colonial landscape paintings” are very open for future study. For instance, spiritualism has a meaning that departs from the Javanese concept, namely *kagoenan* - a result of aesthetic transcendental experiences related to poetic

feelings. In his book *Indonesian Modern Art and Beyond* (1997), Jim Supangkat offers the importance of assessing Mooi Indië – especially paintings created by Indonesian painters – from the spiritualism concept that nature is connected with spirituality.¹¹⁸ Tony Day also expands on this study by discussing that the landscape in Javanese culture is not a new representation. Literature and reliefs on some temples show how the landscape existed from the 9th to the 15th century. In “Landscape in Early Java” (1994), Day explores a different way of seeing “the history of the landscape in Java.” He concludes, “The landscape of ancient Java is a record of where its kings have set foot eternally. What kings make appear to be ‘landscape’, they claim to be a world that naturally belongs to them.”¹¹⁹ Responding to Tony Day, Adrian Vickers in “Is There Landscape in Indonesia?” (1999) questions whether “landscape” is an original Indonesian concept or a Western imposition on Indonesian art. Vickers then enriched this issue by filling in the aspects left out by Day, namely the Islamic view of living nature.¹²⁰

In light of Vicker's statement, we can revisit the existence of relief pieces from the Majapahit kingdom, which are now housed in the Trowulan Museum in Mojokerto, East Java. One image depicts a rural scene with a flowing river, mountains, coconut trees, and farmers plowing rice fields. This image shows how Majapahit artists painted the landscape (Fig. 3.17). A similar vista is depicted in long reliefs on the walls of the Jago, Jawi and Surowono temples in East Java.¹²¹ This evidence demonstrates that landscape images were inherited from Indonesia's past, even though they were interrupted centuries before reappearing strongly in generations of painters like Abdullah Suriosubroto in the 20th century.

Furthermore, it is crucial to reemphasize that the discourse surrounding Mooi Indië will advance through research that uncovers the painters' artistic creations, intellectual perspectives, and personal experiences. These explorations about them present avenues for facilitating destigmatization and evoke a sense of empathy for their struggles. In certain

¹¹⁸ Jim Supangkat, *Indonesian Modern Art and Beyond*, (Jakarta: Yayasan Seni Rupa Indonesia, 1997), p. 28.

¹¹⁹ For further reading see Tony Day “Landscape in Early Java” in Andrew Gerstle and Anthony Milner, *Recovering the Orient: Artists, Scholars, Appropriations*, (Switzerland: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1994), pp. 175-202.

¹²⁰ Adrian Vickers “Is there Landscape in Indonesia?” in Earl Lu, et al., *Soul Ties, The Land and Her People, Art from Indonesia*, (Singapore: Singapore Art Museum, 1999), pp. 35 - 42.

¹²¹ For further reference, see Marijke J. Klokke, “On the orientation of ancient Javanese temples : the example of Candi Surowono” in *International Institute for Asian Studies*, 1995, IIAS yearbook, pp.73-86..



FIGURE 3.17.
Relief pieces of landscape.

Collection of Museum Trowulan, East Java
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

instances, Dutch and European scholars have showcased their noteworthy findings through the publication of monographs, as explored in this chapter. However, the study of painters stigmatized as Mooi Indië, such as Abdullah Suriosubroto, Wakidi, and Mas Pirngadie, has not yet delivered satisfactory outcomes in Indonesian art history. This highlights the potential for change and inspires hope for a more inclusive history. In this instance, I want to exemplify Abdullah Suriosubroto (Fig.3.17), an artist subjected to stigmatization within the field of historiography.



FIGURE 3.16.
Abdullah Suriosubroto in his studio in Sumedang in 1925.
(Source: *Pandji Poestaka*, 26 June 1925)

Collection of Leiden University Library
Repro by Aminudin TH Siregar

Amid the scarcity of resources, I found that one of the references worth quoting here is Ki Tjokro Soeharto's writing in the *Almanak Pergoeroean Taman Siswa* in 1941. Ki Tjokro reveals the story of the painter Abdullah Suriosubroto, his relationship with the Indonesian national movement figure Wahidin Sudirohusodo, and the narrative about the plan of the painter to attend the Dutch Academy of Art. Interestingly, Ki Tjokro Soeharto quoted Suriosubroto's short statement that conveys his nationalist sentiments through his landscape paintings, asserting that: "No one but me and my own people can understand my mountains, nature and air. (*Tidak ada yang bisa mengerti goenoeng dan alamkoe dan oedarakoe, melainkan aku dan orang-orangku sendiri*)."¹²² Based on this assertion, Suriosubandrio maintains a distinct interpretation of his homeland and a mode of expressing his patriotism. Therefore, it is essential to underscore that painting the Indonesian landscape beautifulness does not denote the preservation of colonial painting, nor does it imply that the painter lacks nationalist sentiments.

¹²² See Ki Tjokro Soeharto "Dokter Wahidin Sudirohusodo dan Djoeroe Gambar Abdullah" in *Almanak Pergoeroean Taman Siswa 1942*, (Jogjakarta: Perpoestakaan Taman Siswa Mataram), pp. 127-130.



B E T A W I

Persagi. Pada tanggal 23 Oct. j.b.l. diseboeah sekolah dikota ini oléh beberapa ahli menggambar di Betawi dan Bogor diadakan pertemoean oentoek membentoek perkoempoelan diantara meréka dengan nama *Persatoean ahli-ahli gambar Indonesia* atau dengan singkat *Persagi*. Boeat sementara jang doedoek dalam pengeroes ialah toean² S. Soedjojono, Rameli dan Damsik. Maksoed Persagi itoe ialah: memperdalam kesenian menggambar dalam faham jang seloeas-loeasnja, baik dengan djalan toelis me-noelis maoepoen dengan mengadakan pedato. Orang akan ber-oesaha mendirikan tjabang ditempat lain.

FIGURE 4.1.

Pandji Poestaka magazine announced a week after the forming of PERSAGI in Jakarta, *Pandji Poestaka*, 1 November 1938.

Collection of Leiden University Library
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

Chapter Four

On PERSAGI

On 11 October 1977, the Jakarta Arts Council invited S. Sudjojono to present his thoughts on the identity of Indonesian art. Sudjojono intentionally chose "Indonesian Painting" as the title (or topic) for his paper instead of "Painting in Indonesia" to emphasize that Indonesia already has the art of painting. According to him, the latter term refers to the concept of Western painting as understood and practiced in Indonesia. That evening, Sudjojono endeavored to demonstrate the extensive historical lineage of painting in Indonesia, from classical to modern Indonesian times.

The presentation by Sudjojono, one of PERSAGI's founders, was an exceptional opportunity for those interested in discussing issues in art historiography. Baharudin Marasutan, a painter and art historian, wanted to make the most of the opportunity. During the question-and-answer session, Marasutan raised inquiries regarding the correlation between the exhibitions of the Regnault collection and the establishment of PERSAGI. Before inquiring, Marasutan revealed that Sudjojono frequently attended displays showcasing the Regnault collection at the *Bataviaasche Kunstkring*. Additionally, Marasutan conveyed Sudjojono's specific fascination with the artworks of Vincent van Gogh. Marasutan then asked: "Was the impetus for the founding of PERSAGI due to the exhibition of Regnault's collection or was it its national aspirations?"

Those who attended the lecture that night or listen to it today via the audio archive may have been disappointed. Sudjojono responded to Marasutan's question briefly. He answered that exhibitions of Regnault's collection were only part of the impetus for the founding of PERSAGI. It is just that, he continued, "the character of the painters in Regnault's collection coincidentally has similarities with the character of young, modern Indonesian painters."¹ With the phrases "coincidentally they have similarities" and "young modern Indonesian painters," Sudjojono seems to

¹ The Jakarta Arts Council's audio archive of Sudjojono's lecture can be heard at <http://archive.ivaa-online.org/khazanahs/detail/532>.

want to construct a perception that the quality of Indonesian painters is on a par with European painters and developed independently. Apart from that, the modernity of Indonesian painters was achieved due to hard work, not because of encouragement, inspiration, or a helping hand from anyone. In other words, he wanted to emphasize that nationalism was the main factor behind the founding of PERSAGI.

Sudjojono's view of the influence of the Regnault collection exhibition that evening was quite different from what he had conveyed twenty years earlier. In Seminar 1956, he related Regnault's contribution and the significance of his collection to the growth of modern Indonesian art by saying: "Brothers and sisters, Regnault is a millionaire. He has helped a lot in the development of new Indonesian painting with a series of exhibitions of his collections." Sudjojono even appealed to those writing the history of Indonesian art to remember Regnault's meritorious exhibitions.²

Marasutan knew the significance of PERSAGI's clarity in historiographical writing. That evening, he wanted a thorough explanation of the historical obscurity or deliberate concealment surrounding the intricate triangular relationship between PERSAGI, *Bataviaasche Kunstkring*, and the Regnault collection exhibition. However, Sudjojono's answer to Marasutan's question was not satisfactory.

It is of the utmost importance to emphasize that during Sudjojono's lecture in the 1970s, the existing literature offered only a limited number of references that clarified the relationships between the three entities. Furthermore, these references were still general, such as in De Loos-Haaxman's book *Verlaat Rapport Indie* (1968) or Claire Holt's *Art in Indonesia: Continuities and Changes* (1967). In her book, De Loos-Haaxman primarily highlights the significant impact of the Regnault collection exhibition on fostering a deeper understanding of Western modern art within the context of the Dutch East Indies.³ Holt's assessment of the effects of the Regnault collection exhibition could have been more extensive.

However, she only wrote, "It is to be assumed that at least some of the Indonesian painters gained access to these exhibitions, for by 1938 the

² See "Sedjarah Seni Rupa Indonesia" in Panitia Seminar Ilmu dan Kebudayaan, *Laporan Seminar Ilmu dan Kebudayaan Sidang ke II: Sedjarah Seni Rupa Indonesia*, 26 Juni 1956, Jogjakarta: Universitas Gadjah Mada, 1956, pp.71-72. "Sdr2, Regnault adalah seorang miljuner, dia banyak membantu perkembangan seni lukis Indonesia baru jang sekarang sebab ia membuat eksposisi-eksposisi jang banyak sekali."

³ See J. de Loos-Haxmaan, *Verlaat Rapport Indië: Drie eeuwen westerse schilders, tekenaars, grafici, zilversmeden en kunstnijveren in Nederlandsch Indië*, (Den Haag: uitg. Mouton & Co, 1968), pp. 87-92.

Kunskring began admitting Indonesian artists to its events."⁴ In addition to the absence of explicit information, it is noteworthy that the distribution of these two books within Indonesia is minimal, even within the realm of art academies.

Empirical facts hold significant importance in art history, as they serve as tangible evidence substantiating various interpretations and assertions. Art historians are compelled to rely solely on conjecture and subjective viewpoints without empirical evidence, if these are lacking, and there is a potential for perpetuating myths, misconceptions, and biases. Regrettably, such elements are inherent in the study of PERSAGI, a circumstance that Marasutan, on that particular evening, sought to elucidate to ascertain the true motivations underlying the establishment of the association.

PERSAGI, or *Persatuan Ahli-ahli Gambar Indonesia* (The Association of Indonesian Drawing Masters), is renowned as the pioneering association of nationalist artists in Indonesia. Predictably, this group holds a higher status in all publications discussing the history of modern Indonesian art compared to the *Bataviaasche Kunstkring* and the Regnault Collection exhibitions. The issue arose when the glorification of PERSAGI was established without sufficient empirical evidence to substantiate its claims. The prevailing discourse surrounding the significance of PERSAGI is the result of the limited perspectives adopted by historians, who aim to construct a nationalistic narrative.

The *Routledge Encyclopedia of Modernism*, for example, offers the heroic role of PERSAGI as follows:

The artists of PERSAGI saw themselves as cultural workers within this nascent nation-state, making them part of a broad socialist-nationalist front aimed at the creation of a new national consciousness out of the inheritance of a colonial past. They also sought divergence from the deeper history that divided this archipelagic country with its vast geography and a variety of ethnic, religious, and linguistic differences.⁵

⁴ Claire Holt, *Art Indonesia: Continuities and Change*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), p. 198.

⁵See Chaitanya Sambrani "PERSAGI (Persatuan Ahli-Ahli Gambar Indonesia)" in <https://www.rem.routledge.com/articles/persagi-persatuan-ahli-ahli-gambar-indonesia>, accessed 15 September 2023.

The following statement by M Agus Burhan illustrates that PERSAGI was perceived as a progressive artists' movement: "PERSAGI is a nationalist arts association that was successful in carrying out a movement against the hegemony of Western colonial art."⁶

Meanwhile, in the following quote, PERSAGI's heroic role is increasingly dramatized: "PERSAGI refuses elements of foreign painting. Apart from that, PERSAGI also raises attitudes to reject the hegemony of foreign tourist tastes."⁷ PERSAGI's heroism and patriotism are also glorified in these lines: "In 1937 PERSAGI (Persatoean Ahli-Ahli Gambar Indonesia) artists raised their voice in nationalistic spirit against feudalism and imperialism."⁸

The resistance of PERSAGI to "aesthetic colonialism" appears to have become the romantic fantasy of numerous historians. The following quotation demonstrates the author's imagination regarding PERSAGI. For example, art academic Imam Boechori Zainuddin stated:

PERSAGI has opposed the colonial-era falsehoods. Especially in artistic expressions, it has resisted the romanticism that appears to have lulled certain segments of Indonesian society.⁹

In this fantasy, PERSAGI is also acknowledged as "an organization that can be considered an early turning point in the burgeoning contact between art and politics, when art (painting) collided with social issues, nationalism, and even internationalism."¹⁰

In the canonical narrative, PERSAGI is also established as a period that is presumed to have lasted from the founding of this association in 1938 to the Japanese occupation of the Dutch East Indies in 1942. The title of M.

⁶ M. Agus Burhan, *Perkembangan Seni Lukis Mooi Indie sampai PERSAGI di Batavia 1900-1942*, (Jakarta: Galeri Nasional Indonesia, 2014). "PERSAGI adalah perkumpulan seni nasionalis yang sukses dalam melakukan gerakan melawan hegemoni kesenian kolonial Barat."

⁷ Agus Dermawan T and Mikke Susanto, *Maestro Seni Rupa Modern Indonesia*, (Jakarta: Kementerian Pariwisata dan Ekonomi Kreatif, 2012), p. 22. "PERSAGI melakukan penolakan terhadap unsur-unsur seni lukis asing. Selain itu PERSAGI juga melakukan penggalangan sikap untuk menolak hegemoni selera turis asing."

⁸ Setianingsih Purnomo, "Kelahiran Seni Rupa Indonesia Baru" in Amir Sidharta (ed.), *From Mooi Indie to PERSAGI*, (Jakarta: Museum Universitas Pelita Harapan, 1997-1998), p. 8.

⁹ Imam Boechori Zainuddin, *Latar Belakang Sejarah dan Pembinaan Seni Lukis Indonesia Modern (1935 - 1950)*, Skripsi, Bagian Seni Rupa, Departemen Perencanaan Seni Rupa Institut Teknologi Bandung, 1966, p. 21.

¹⁰ Suwarno Wisetrotomo, "PERSAGI: Perlawanan Terhadap Eksotisme Beku" in Amir Sidharta (ed.), 1997-1998), p. 58.

Agus Burhan's book mentioned above indicates that "the continuation of the Mooi Indië period was PERSAGI.¹¹ The pinnacle of the exaltation of PERSAGI is not solely based on its association with attributes such as nationalism and anti-imperialism¹² but also on the recommendation of this group, often misconstrued with Sudjojono's involvement, as the "vanguard of contemporary Indonesian painting" or "innovator of Indonesian modern art."¹³

It appears that Trisno Sumardjo is responsible for overestimating PERSAGI's role. He, among others, penned that modern painting emerged with the founding of PERSAGI, which aimed to fill the spiritual void in culture. Sumardjo formulated his reasons. Firstly, he claimed that PERSAGI's role in feudalistic colonial society lay in the group's ability to break down elitism. With the support of the colonial government, the elite always received special privileges, both in education and economics, as well as in social status. The progress of the "nation" at that time, according to Sumardjo, seemed the prerogative of this group of elites:

In the hands of these elites, art and culture were then interpreted as merely ancient items or mere legacies of the past. Indonesian art and culture are considered to be at a dead end because they cannot give birth to new forms.¹⁴

Sumardjo then criticized the results of the elite's research on Indonesia's cultural heritage, which was deliberately not broadcast to the public and was limited only to themselves. "Regarding modern art," stated Sumardjo, "their attitude is limited to a few people such as Raden Saleh and Noto Soeroto.

¹¹ See M. Agus Burhan, *Perkembangan Seni Lukis Mooi Indie sampai PERSAGI di Batavia 1900-1942*, (Jakarta: Galeri Nasional Indonesia, 2014). See also, Bambang Suwondo (ed.), *Sejarah Seni Rupa Indonesia*, (Jakarta: Proyek Penelitian dan Pencatatan Kebudayaan Daerah - Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, Tahun Anggaran 1976/1977), p. 157.

¹² See for instance, Sudarmadji, *Dari Saleh Sampai Aming: Seni Lukis Indonesia Baru dalam Sejarah dan Apresiasi*, (Yogyakarta: STSRI-ASRI, 1974-1975), p. 8. See also M. Agus Burhan, *Seni Lukis Indonesia Masa Jepang sampai Lekra*, (Surakarta: UNS Press, 2013), p. 3.

¹³ PERSAGI is widely regarded as the vanguard of contemporary Indonesian painting, as numerous claims posit. Several sources provide information on the subject, including Popo Iskandar, "Pelukis-pelukis Pra PERSAGI" in *Berkala Seni Rupa*, No. 1, June 1984, (Jakarta: Dewan Kesenian Jakarta), p. 24; Imam Boechori Zainuddin, 1966, p. 20; and Jim Supangkat, "Sudjojono Sang Perintis" in *Tempo*, 10 January 2000.

¹⁴ Trisno Sumardjo, 1957, p. 122. See also Trisno Sumardjo, "The Tendencies in Indonesian Art: Folks Traditions and Western Influence" in Faubion Bowers (ed.), *Perspectives of Indonesia - An Atlantic Supplement*, The Atlantic Monthly, New York, 1956, p. 127.

Regarding folk arts (carving, playing, etc.), they only try to conserve something based on classical art, without paving the way for creation for the future."¹⁵ Sumardjo acknowledges that PERSAGI represents ordinary people who independently exercise their artistic abilities. The emergence of PERSAGI from the lower classes has broken the establishment of the elite.

Second, according to Sumardjo, after breaking through the colonial cultural establishment, PERSAGI's next fundamental step was to establish a new personality to fill a new, healthier Indonesian culture. This personality, continued Sumardjo, is vital as a critical attitude towards old cultural heritage that no longer needs to be continued. Sumardjo emphasized, "We didn't have the understanding of modern art until created by PERSAGI's painters, so they pioneered a new tradition, even though it had not been completed at that time."¹⁶

As concerns the third, final step, Sumardjo emphasized: "The characteristic of PERSAGI is the placement of individualism in artistic expression, by releasing the influences of existing traditions. The first thing that is thrown out is the spirit of collectivism caused by religion, philosophy and the state structure of the feudal and colonial era. It turns out that collectivism has killed individual ideals and talents, because it forces them to adhere to a system of order, morals and education that is required by the ruling minority."¹⁷ Ultimately, he proposed a historical periodization system based on PERSAGI, as follows: "the PERSAGI era starting in 1937", "the era after PERSAGI starting in 1946", and "the era after 1946."¹⁸

The myths surrounding PERSAGI, characterized as a force that disrupted the established colonial painting order, has gained widespread

¹⁵ Trisno Sumardjo, 1956, p. 119. "“Terhadap kesenian yang lebih modern sikap mereka terbatas pada beberapa gelintir manusia seperti Raden Saleh dan Noto Suroto. Terhadap kesenian rakyat (seni ukir, sandiwara, dll.) mereka hanya berusaha mengkonserver sesuatu yang berdasarkan seni kuno, tiada membuka jalan mencipta bagi masa yang akan datang.”

¹⁶ Trisno Sumardjo, 1956, p. 125. "“Ruang hidup atau tradisi seperti inilah tadinya belum ada pada kita mengenai seni rupa modern dan barulah tercipta oleh orang-orang PERSAGI, sehingga telah mereka pelopori suatu tradisi baru, meskipun belum diselesaikan ketika itu.”

¹⁷ Trisno Sumardjo, 1956, p. 122. "Karakteristik bagi PERSAGI ialah penempatan tenaga perseorangan dalam pernyataan seni, dengan melepaskan pengaruh-pengaruh tradisi yang telah ada. Pertama-tama yang dilemparkan ialah jiwa kolektivisme yang disebabkan oleh agama, filsafat dan susunan tata negara dari zaman feodal maupun kolonial. Kolektivisme itu ternyata telah mematikan cita-cita serta bakat perseorangan, karena memaksanya menganut sistim tata tertib, tata susila dan pendidikan yang diperlukan oleh minoritet yang berkuasa.”

¹⁸ Trisno Sumardjo in Kusnadi "Ceramah Sejarah Seni Rupa Indonesia" in *Budaya*, 4-5 April-May 1960. Th. Ke-IX, p. 200.

recognition as a national conviction. However, are the roles of PERSAGI in modern Indonesian art history listed above accurate? Was PERSAGI a revolutionary art movement that steadfastly opposed colonialism in painting, as represented by the *Bataviaasche Kunstkring*? Then, what is the objective historical position of PERSAGI? Between 1935 and 1940, did Regnault's collection exhibitions play a direct or indirect role in forming PERSAGI? Is it possible that the significance of PERSAGI's contribution to history has been confused with that of Sudjojono?

This chapter challenges PERSAGI's established position in the history of modern Indonesian art based on the factors mentioned above. This chapter comprises three subchapters: *Dismantling PERSAGI*, *The PERSAGI Exhibitions*, and *PERSAGI and Sudjojono*. The first sub-chapter consists of several parts, including an exploration of the origins of this association and multiple versions of its founding year. *The PERSAGI Exhibitions* explores the group exhibition, which is never discussed in the canonical narrative. I will also explain *PERSAGI and S. Sudjojono* as explained in the subchapter with that heading to emphasize the different roles between PERSAGI as a group and Sudjojono as an individual.

Dismantling PERSAGI

Art has been a powerful form of cultural expression throughout history, often intertwined with mythologies that represent and support national identities. The field of art history has played a vital role in shaping narratives that promote a sense of national heroism. In Indonesia, authoritarian regimes have used art history to spread their ideologies and promote national heroism, perpetuating specific nationalistic stories and maintaining the focus on heroes - as seen in the narratives of PERSAGI. This group's story was often romanticized for its heroism rather than analyzed in its proper historical context. This section will thoroughly examine the myths surrounding PERSAGI in the context of nationalistic art history.

Was PERSAGI Formed in a Revolutionary Way?

We know very little about PERSAGI, including about the archives, to reveal its activities, works, and the reasons behind it. I found a piece of news

published in a 1938 *Pandji Poestaka* magazine a week after the formation of PERSAGI in Jakarta (Fig.4.1):

On October 23, at a school in this city, several drawing experts in Betawi and Bogor met to form an association between them under the Association of Indonesian Drawing Experts or, in short, PERSAGI. Messrs. S. Soedjojono, Rameli, and Damsik are currently in the management. The purpose of PERSAGI is to deepen the art of drawing in the broadest possible sense, both by writing and giving speeches. People will try to set up branches in other places.¹⁹

According to the news, the purpose of establishing PERSAGI was to develop drawing or painting skills in the broadest sense. Aside from that, this organization aimed to promote writing activities and host art-related lectures. According to Sudjojono, the most significant activity of PERSAGI was "to gather, consult, and practice at least once per month by drawing a dressed or undressed model."²⁰ This demonstrates that PERSAGI's founding objective did not contain any revolutionary expression. This organization neither resisted colonialism nor participated in practical politics.

Sudjojono even admitted that the idea behind PERSAGI was mundane. In an interview in the 1980s, he asserted:

Actually, the person who founded PERSAGI was Mr. Yudhokusumo together with me. Mr. Yudo liked painting, and I happened to be studying painting with Mr. Pirngadie and Mr. Hendradi. So, every day, there were often discussions on the art of painting. Then, among them, Agus Djaya Suminta, a teacher from a school at that time who taught art, also enjoyed painting. So, we all brainstormed and had an idea, and then an

¹⁹ "Kroniek" in *Pandji Poestaka*, 1 November 1938, p.1668. "Pada tanggal 23 October j.b.l. diseboeah sekolah dikota ini oleh beberapa ahli menggambar di Betawi dan Bogor diadakan pertemoean oentoek membentoek perkoempoelan diantara mereka dengan nama Persatoean Ahli-ahli Gambar Indonesia atau dengan singkat PERSAGI. Boeat sementara jang doedoek dalam pengeroes ialah toean2 S. Soedjojono, Rameli dan Damsik. Maksoed PERSAGI itu ialah: memperdalam kesenian menggambar dalam faham jang seloeas-loeasnja, baik dengan djalan toelis menoeis maoepoen dengan mengadakan pedato. Orang akan beroesaha mendirikan tjabang ditempat lain."

²⁰ See S. Sudjojono, *Cerita Tentang Saya dan Orang-orang Sekitar Saya (Stories About Me, and People Around Me)*, (Jakarta: KPG Gramedia dan S. Sudjojono Center, 2017), p. 57.

agreement was reached: let us establish a painting arts association, which is further known as PERSAGI, that's all.²¹

Sudjojono then emphasized an important point: "With this association so that they can gather, the aim is not to soar into the sky; that's not the case. It's just that we wanted to paint together, and please note that at that time we didn't have a budget; because the real intention is just to get together with a mutual agreement to gather."²²

An additional impetus for the establishment of PERSAGI was to tap into the painting art market in the Dutch East Indies. On a separate occasion, Sudjojono acknowledged this fact. According to his statement, it is indisputable that painters require financial resources to sustain their livelihood through their artistic endeavors. According to his perspective, selling artistic creations is not considered socially unacceptable.²³ The statement made by Sudjojono is substantiated by the presence of supporting evidence found in the PERSAGI exhibition catalogue of 1941, specifically within the confines of the *Bataviaasche Kunstkring*. This catalogue provides a comprehensive list of the selling prices of various paintings (Fig. 4.2).

None of the PERSAGI members have an arts academy background. Their ability to paint relies on natural talent and reflects limitations in understanding art and creating works of art.²⁴ The main activity in the first

²¹ Mustika, *Percakapan Dari Hati Ke Hati Pelukis Indonesia*, (Jakarta: Penerbit Sanggar Krida, 1983), p. 156. "Sebenarnya (yang mendirikan PERSAGI adalah) Pak Yudhokusumo bersama saya. Pak Yudo yang senang pada seni lukis dan saya yang kebetulan sedang belajar melukis bersama Pak Pirngadie dan Pak Hendradi. Jadi, setiap harinya sering rembukan tentang seni lukis. Kemudian di antaranya Agus Djaya Suminta sebagai guru dari suatu sekolah pada waktu itu yang mengajar seni lukis, ia juga senang melukis. Nah, kami semua merembug dan punya ide, terus terjadilah kesepakatan: marilah kita mendirikan perkumpulan seni lukis yang lebih lanjut dikenal sebagai PERSAGI, cuma begitu saja."

²² Mustika, 1983, p. 156.

²³ See *Budaya*, No. 4-5 April-May 1960, p. 203. "Persagi berdiri sebab apa dan latar belakangnya apa. Latar belakang ini ialah kemarin. Dan kemarin ini berpengaruh pada yang akan datang. Bahwa latar belakangnya adalah kerohanian dan kebatinan saya setuju. Dan kalau ini juga dipengaruhi oleh penjajahan, saya setuju. Tetapi jangan lupa bahwa ini tidak lain terutama dipengaruhi oleh penghidupan materi. Mengatakan bahwa ini tidak penting dalam kesenian, saya bertanya, janganlah menangis kalau nasi kita terlalu mahal. Sebab mahal itu ada sebabnya. Tidak jatuh dari begitu saja dari langit. Dan ini terang berpengaruh kepada perut, apa boleh buat si seniman juga punya perut, dan perut ini terang berpengaruh juga, disamping hidup materi, kepada pikiran kita."

²⁴ Suromo, *Timbul dan Tumbuhnya Seni Lukis Indonesia (I)*, *Mimbar Indonesia*, 2 Juli 1949, p.19. "Lain-lain kawan belum bisa mengerjakan pekerjaan sebagai pekerjaan seni. Pengertian seni masih terlalu samar dan teknik masih jauh amat dari tangan. Umumnya pekerjaannya bersifat coba mencoba saja, atau meraba-raba kebetulan dalam gelap – mencari udang di balik batu – yang dapat dianggap sebagai penjelmaan pikiran, perasaan atau angan-angannya. Diputarnya otak untuk tahu, apa arti lukis-melukis, apa arti kebudayaan, apa manusia itu."

28. Citra (zangeres uit Sidharta's Hof)	f 300.—
29. Meisje met viool	" 50.—
30. Boom	" 25.—
31. De kleine Waschmeid	" 50.—
32. Gebeente	" 30.—
33. De Rooker	" 30.—

HERBERT HOETAGALOENG.

34. Eenzaam bamboevlot	" 55.—
35. Kampong aan de Tjiliwoeng	" 85.—

ITON LASMANA.

36. Terug van de weide	" 75.—
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SJOEAIB SASTRADIWIRJA. geb. 1894 te Baros (Bantam), autodidact.

Deelgenomen aan Tentoonstelling Indisch Werk 1939.

37. Oebroeg	" 75.—
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RADEN SOEDIARDJO. geb. 28 November 1914 te Den Pasar (Bali).

In 1939 deelgenomen aan de Vrije Tentoonstelling van Indische Schilders in de Bat. K.K.

38. Bede om zielenheil	" 100.—
39. Kunstenaar en Critici	" 100.—
40. Javaansche verbazing. (Europeaan)	" 50.—
41. Javaansche indruk. (Europeesche schoone)	" 50.—

S. SOEDJOJONO,

kreeg schilderlessen van Mas Pirngadi en van Chiayi (Yazaki), met welken schilder hij een reis door Java maakte. Deelgenomen aan tent. Indisch Werk 1938, Vrije Tent. Ind. Schilders 1939 en tent. Ind. Schilders Weerbaar 1940.

42. Depan kelamboe terboek (Voor de open klamboe) ..	" 300.—
43. Portret Td. Dp.	n. t. k.
44. Mainan. (Spelende kinderen)	" 100.—

FIGURE 4.2.
Price list of PERSAGI's painters in the exhibition catalogue.

Collection of Leiden University Library
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

year of PERSAGI therefore involves practicing painting techniques. On the sidelines of this activity, they discussed the world of painting. So, to overcome this gap, they studied the various reviews or reproductions published in newspapers and magazines.²⁵ One of the popular magazines because it intensively spread the understanding of modern European art - is *The Studio*, which was available at the G. Kolff & Co. bookstore in Batavia.²⁶

PERSAGI members were thus familiar with European artists such as Vincent van Gogh, Paul Gauguin, Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, Edvard

²⁵ Suromo, 1949, p.19. About newspapers in the early 20th century that preach modern art, see Tom van den Berge, *Picasso in the Tropics: European Modern Painting in Indonesia, 1920-1957* in Susie Protschky & Tom van den Berge (ed.), *Modern Times in Southeast Asia 1920s-1970s*, (Leiden: Brill, 2018), pp. 88-102.

²⁶ In addition to *The Studio*, magazines circulating in the Dutch East Indies such as *d'Orient*, *Woord en Beeld* and *Het Indische Leven* also several times featured writings on modern European painting and exhibition reviews, especially at *Bataviaasche Kunstkring*. The influence of essays on art in *De Taak's* journal - though not pictorial - is also worthy of consideration. Research notes in the Special Collection Room, Leiden University Library, November 2019. However, I cannot be sure how deeply Indonesian painters studied these magazines and shaped their art.

Munch, Salvador Dali, Paul Cézanne, Marc Chagall, Käthe Kollwitz, George Grosz, and Otto Dix.²⁷ PERSAGI invited painter Jan Frank, Henry van Velthuysen, and J. De Loos-Haaxman to lecture on the modern development of European painting. PERSAGI also invited Indonesian intellectuals such as Sanoesi Pane and Ki Hadjar Dewantara as a counterweight.²⁸ Therefore, from its founding, PERSAGI opened itself to anyone as long as their membership benefitted the development of the association.

PERSAGI's Founding Year and Membership

Art history is a meticulous discipline that necessitates close attention to detail. The importance of the exact years and contributions of the exponents is a critical aspect of this field. Inaccuracies in writing art history can have serious consequences, resulting in misinterpretations, a distorted historical narrative, and a barrier to academic progress. Art history preserves artists' legacies and establishes their rightful place in the canon. When art historical writings contain inaccuracies, deserving artists may be overlooked or misrepresented, resulting in an imbalance in the appreciation of their contributions. Inaccurate narratives also risk perpetuating biases, underrepresenting marginalized artists, and stifling diverse perspectives in art historical discourse. The case of PERSAGI's founding year and membership, written in several versions as discussed below, demonstrates the inaccuracy of long-term art historical study in Indonesia.

Differences in the founding years of PERSAGI are found in various publications on the history of modern Indonesian art, for example, 1935, 1937, 1938, and 1939. However, the years that are most frequently written about are 1937 and 1938. Claire Holt, Trisno Sumardjo, Sanento Yuliman, Kusnadi, and Jim Supangkat represent those who mention 1937.²⁹ Meanwhile, Helena Spanjaard, M. Agus Burhan, Sudarmadji, and Imam

²⁷ Suromo, 1949, p.19.

²⁸ See S. Sudjojono, "Seni Lukis di Indonesia" in *Budaja Djaja*, III/28, September 1970. See also Sanento Yuliman, 1980, KKS. I think Sanoesi Pane's lecture occurred when PERSAGI celebrated one year of its founding. See Antara "Malam Perajaan PERSAGI" in *Kebangoenan*, 26 October 1940, p. 3.

²⁹ See Claire Holt, *Art in Indonesia: Continuities and Change*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), p. 197. Sanento Yuliman, *Seni Lukis Indonesia Baru: Sebuah Pengantar*, 1976, p. 11; Jim Supangkat, *Indonesian Modern Art and Beyond*, 2000, Jakarta: Yayasan Seni Rupa Indonesia (YSRI), 33; Kusnadi, "Sejarah Seni Lukis Di Jakarta (1945-1983)" in *Berkala Seni Rupa* No. 5, Maret 1984, (Jakarta: Komite Dewan Kesenian Jakarta), p. 82. See also Trisno Sumardjo, "Kedudukan Seni Rupa Kita" in Zaini (ed.), *Almanak Seni 1957*, (Jakarta: BMKN, 1956), p.122 and Trisno Sumardjo, "Dokumentasi Lukisan" in *Indonesia*, No. 4, TH.II April 1951, p. 9.

Boechori Zainuddin specified the founding date of PERSAGI as 23 October 1938.³⁰ Spanjaard claimed that Agus Djaya had written to her to clarify the year of PERSAGI's founding.³¹ The role of Agus Djaya's letter is significant because it becomes a node that connects references between scholars of art history. In his book, Agus Burhan, for example, mentions Sudarmadji, who previously obtained confirmation of the date, month, and year of PERSAGI's founding based on Agus Djaya's letter.

Sudarmadji explained the reason behind Agus Djaya's letter. In a letter dated 3 January 1977, Agus Djaya protested against Sudarmadji and Kusnadi when both mistakenly wrote the year of PERSAGI's founding in the catalogue of the exhibition *A Century of Indonesian Art's* exhibition. They wrote that PERSAGI had been founded in 1937.³² Agus Djaya, in his letter, emphasized that the founding of PERSAGI was not 1937, but "According to group files, even I, who helped establish it and even acted as PERSAGI's chairman, stressed that it should be 1938, 23 October 1938."³³ Before sending the letter to Sudarmadji, Agus Djaya had launched his protest to the exhibition committee on the eve of the grand exhibition's opening. He regretted the exhibition committee's carelessness in writing the year of PERSAGI's founding incorrectly - considering that the show raised issues about essential milestones in the history of modern Indonesian art. Agus Djaya's complaint that night was not taken seriously by the exhibition committee on the pretext that: "preparation time is very limited so mistakes are normal."³⁴ This disappointment explains why Agus Djaya then took the initiative to write letters to some parties, including Sudarmadji - the exhibition curator. Because he felt he had made a fatal mistake, Sudarmadji finally revised the confusion regarding the year of PERSAGI's founding in the mass media.³⁵

³⁰ See Helena Spanjaard, *Het Ideaal van een Moderne Indonesische Schilderkunst 1900-1995: De Creatie van een Nationale Culturele Identiteit*, Ph.D. Thesis, Leiden University, 1998, Sudarmadji "PERSAGI" in Mochtar Kusumaatmadja, dkk., 1990-1991, p. 78 and Imam Buchori, *Latar Belakang Sejarah Pembinaan dan Perkembangan Seni Lukis Indonesia Modern (1935-1950)*, Skripsi, 1966, Bagian Seni Rupa-ITB, p. 23.

³¹ See Helena Spanjaard, 1998, p. 91.

³² See Kusnadi and Sudarmadji, *Seabad Seni Rupa Indonesia dalam Seabad Seni Rupa Indonesia (1876-1976)*, Balai Seni Rupa Jakarta, Katalogus, (Jakarta: Pemerintah Daerah Khusus Ibukota Jakarta, 1976), no page.

³³ Sudarmadji's letters, *PERSAGI dan Kelompok Lima Bandung*, Desember 1988. Archives of Sanggar Luhur Sudjana Kerton, Bandung. "Menurut berkas kami yang notabene turut mendirikan, bahkan ketuanya, seharusnya 1938. Tegasnya, 23 Oktober 1938."

³⁴ "Satu Abad Satu Balai" in *Tempo*, 11 September 1976, p. 11.

³⁵ See Sudarmadji, "Peranan Aspirasi PERSAGI di Masa Penjajahan" in *Sinar Harapan*, 26 Maret 1977.

In contrast to Spanjaard and Sudarmadji, who obtained PERSAGI's founding year through Agus Djaya, Imam Boechori stated that he obtained PERSAGI's founding year from literary critic H.B. Jassin.³⁶ H.B. Jassin, as a librarian who meticulously archived Indonesian arts and culture documents such as artists' correspondence, magazines, and newspapers, is likely to have kept his notes from this PERSAGI year. As a keen observer and literary critic, on the other hand, he quickly learned about PERSAGI from writings in the literary magazine *Poedjangga Baroe*. The article "Pertoendjoekan Loekisan-Loekisan Indonesia di Kunstkring Djakarta" (Indonesian Paintings Show at Kunstkring Jakarta) in the magazine, which was published in 1941, reviewed the PERSAGI exhibition at *Bataviaasche Kunstkring* as well as confirming the date, month, and year of its founding - which followed Agus Djaya's document.³⁷ Ultimately, the year of PERSAGI's founding can therefore be determined using these sources.

Apart from the differences in years, there are also several versions indicating differences in terms of membership. Sudarmadji, for example, mentioned the names L. Setijoso, Rameli, Abdul Salam, S. Toetoer, Sindusisworo, T.B. Ateng Rus'yan, Syoeaib Sastradiwirdja, Sukirno, and Suromo.³⁸ According to Sudarmadji, they are members who live in Jakarta. Meanwhile, painters Wakidi and Hendrojasgoro are registered as members from outside Jakarta. Writer Ajip Rosidi gives another version by mentioning S. Toetoer, Abdul Salam, Soetijoso, Surono, and Otto Djaya as members of PERSAGI.³⁹ Meanwhile, Claire Holt did not record in detail who the painters were. However, according to her, PERSAGI already had 20 members when it was founded.⁴⁰ Meanwhile, Mustika recorded the names of the members of the association as follows: S. Toetoer, Otto Djaya, Rameli, Soerono, Herbert Hoetagoeng, Toebagus Syoeaib, Soekirno, Mugni, and Abdul Salam.⁴¹ On the other hand, Sanento Yuliman issued a list including Agus Djaya, S. Sudjojono, Abdul Salam, Soemitro, Soedibio, Soekirno,

³⁶ Imam Boechori Zainuddin, 1966, p. 23.

³⁷ See S., "Pertoendjoekan Loekisan-Loekisan Indonesia di Kunstkring Djakarta" in *Poedjangga Baroe*, No.11, Mei 1941, p. 315.

³⁸ Sudarmadji in Mochtar Kusuma Atmadja, 1990-1991, p. 78.

³⁹ Ajip Rosidi, *Pelukis S. Sudjojono*, (Jakarta: Pustaka Jaya, 1977), p. 16.

⁴⁰ Claire Holt, 1967, p.197.

⁴¹ Mustika, *Percakapan Dari Hati Ke Hati Pelukis Indonesia*, (Jakarta: Penerbit Sanggar Krida, 1983), p. 449.

Soeromo, Soerono, Setijoso, Herbert Hoetagaloeng, Toebagoes Syoeaib and Emiria Soenassa.⁴²

In his book *Seni Lukis Indonesia Baru: Sebuah Pengantar* (Indonesian New Painting: An Introduction), published in 1976, Sanento Yuliman added: "Affandi was born in approximately 1910 in Cirebon. He started as an image maker for cinema advertisements in Bandung in around 1933. In 1938 he joined the PERSAGI association."⁴³ But in his dissertation in 1981, Yuliman later corrected the list by saying that Affandi, Soeromo, Soemitro, and Emiria Soenassa were not members but were artists who sympathized with and participated in PERSAGI activities. Sanento obtained this information through an interview with Sudjojono.⁴⁴ Before Sanento, Popo Iskandar - who wrote Affandi's biography - had confirmed that Affandi was not a member of PERSAGI.⁴⁵

The potential implications arising from variations in the writings of PERSAGI members may not significantly hinder the field of historiography. Nonetheless, this phenomenon engenders historical perplexity, thereby diminishing the recognition of each constituent's distinctiveness and individual contributions. Apart from that, as has been mentioned, the case of differences in PERSAGI members shows the carelessness of Indonesian art history writers.

On the Myths of Rejection

As discussed in Chapter One, the *Bataviaasche Kunstkring* played a pivotal role in the cultural development of Indonesia by organizing frequent art exhibitions that contributed to the enrichment of the local art scene (Fig.4.3). The shows presented various artistic styles, encompassing traditional Indonesian batik and European avant-garde paintings. With these exhibitions, the institution facilitated the introduction of Indonesians to diverse artistic movements while promoting the amalgamation of indigenous art traditions with global influences. However, in the canon narratives,

⁴² Sanento Yuliman, *Seni Lukis Indonesia Baru-Sebuah Pengantar*, (Jakarta: Dewan Kesenian Jakarta, 1976), p. 11.

⁴³ Sanento Yuliman, 1976, p. 13.

⁴⁴ Sanento Yuliman, *Genese de la Peinture Indonesienne Contemporaine : le Role de S. Sudjojono*, Ph.D. thesis, Ecole Des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, 1981, p. 102.

⁴⁵ See Popo Iskandar, *Affandi: Suatu Jalan Baru dalam Ekspresionisme*, (Jakarta: Akademi Jakarta dan Dewan Kesenian Jakarta, 1977), 26. See also Ajip Rosidi, "Beberapa Catatan tentang Pameran Seabad Seni Rupa Indonesia (1876-1976)" in *Budaya Jaya*, No.101.Th.IX, Oktober 1976, p. 580.

Bataviaasche Kunstkring is often associated with colonialism in art. Moreover, this institution was also accused of practicing discriminatory politics against Indonesian painters, as can be read in this line: "PERSAGI had to fight against prejudices and the exclusivism of Kunstkring, a body in Indonesia founded in 1901 to assist and promote art, but not for Indonesian artists."⁴⁶



FIGURE 4.3.

The *Bataviaasche Kunstkring* building in Batavia.

(Source: *Gedenkboek uitgegeven bij gelegenheid van het 25-jarig bestaan van de Vereeniging de Ned.-Indische Kunstkring te Batavia, 1902-1927*)

Collection of Leiden University Library
Repro by Aminudin TH Siregar

Negative perceptions of the *Bataviaasche Kunstkring* arose because this institution reportedly rejected the PERSAGI exhibition proposal for reasons that insulted the feelings of Indonesian painters. As stated above, following the establishment of PERSAGI, its members actively honed their painting skills. Thus, their works still indicate that the study process needs to be

⁴⁶ The Indonesian National Committee for Expo 1970, *Modern Indonesian Art*, catalog of Indonesian Pavilion, 1970, p. 9. The author is unknown. Note the misspelling of 1901 for the founding of the *Kunstkring*.

improved. Of course, it would be too difficult to assess objectively, considering that only a few of PERSAGI's paintings can be seen in the state or private collections. Interestingly, during the process, between 1938 and 1939, PERSAGI dared to send an exhibition proposal to one of the *Bataviaasche Kunstkring* board members, J. de Loos-Haaxman. Sudarmadji believed that PERSAGI's portfolio was rejected by De Loos-Haaxman because "Indonesians are only suitable to be farmers."⁴⁷ In Sudjojono's version, De Loos-Haaxman rejected the proposal without first seeing the painters' work because the *Bataviaasche Kunstkring* only exhibited works by famous painters. At that time, recalled Sudjojono, De Loos-Haaxman stated: "We will only make stories about people who already have a name."⁴⁸

In this section, I will dismantle the rejection by De Loos-Haaxman (or *Kunstkring* as an institution), which some historiographers used as an excuse that the colonial authorities had discriminated against Indonesian painters. The valid sources surrounding "the rejection of PERSAGI" still need to be explored, considering its significant myth in the historiography of modern Indonesian art.

In his biography, I found that Sudjojono mentioned the requirements the *Bataviaasche Kunstkring* imposed on those who wished to exhibit their works. Among other things, he reiterated that at that time, *Kunstkring* did not want to rent out its space for exhibitions to anyone before "they knew that the paintings to be exhibited were really considered by them to be of good quality." This statement is crucial to underline and discuss first because it has uncovered the veil, proving that, as an institution, the *Bataviaasche Kunstkring* has the privilege of determining or selecting artists and works for the exhibition program. While there may be concerns about bias or exclusion in the selection process of prestigious art galleries, it is essential to recognize its role in maintaining high standards and promoting artistic growth. The selection process in a prestigious institution such as *Bataviaasche Kunstkring* is crucial in determining the quality and reputation of the artworks displayed. It would therefore be inaccurate to say that the rejection of the PERSAGI exhibition proposal was purely a discriminatory act. However, implementing a strict selection process by a prestigious and well-established art institution

⁴⁷ Sudarmadji, "PERSAGI" in Mochtar Kusuma Atmadja, dkk., *Perjalanan Seni Rupa Indonesia Dari Zaman Prasejarah Hingga Masa Kini*, (Jakarta: Panitia Pameran KIAS, 1990-1991), p. 77.

⁴⁸ "Informatie dalam Seni Lukis" in *Brochure Kesenian*, Kementerian Penerangan Republik Indonesia, 1949, p.20. "Kita akan membuat tentoonstelling hanya dari orang-orang yang sudah mempunyai nama."

such as the *Kunstkring* would sooner or later draw a critical response from the Indies artists' communities.

Kunstkring, for example, was criticized by *Vereeniging van Beeldende Kunstenaars* (VBK) - an artists' association in Bandung chaired by Wolff Schoemaker, a leading architect in the colonial period. In 1936, as reported by several newspapers, VBK protested that the criteria of the *Kunstkring* for selecting artists were too subjective, biased, and arbitrary. This institution was also accused of not helping promote Indië's artists' potential in art.⁴⁹ The protest also targeted the discrimination shown by the *Kunstkring*. It was thought to want to dominate the understanding of modern art, with a focus only on changes and strangeness of form and color while regarding realist paintings as something from the past. *Kunstkring* was therefore accused of using its authority to spread antagonism towards realist art.⁵⁰

For VBK, *Kunstkring* demonstrated an exclusive artistic standard in determining artists representing the art of the Indies to the Netherlands. It is also conveyed that the *Kunstkring* ignored the meaning of "truly *Indische*" painters who had been working for many years and were generally well-known.⁵¹ This fact is essential because PERSAGI never launched a protest against *Kunstkring* indicating it would like to be included in the canon of art historiography. Besides, the protests from VBK show that the *Kunstkring* was establishing its authority over anyone and was not explicitly aiming at Indonesian artists.

Still related to the VBK protests, I will use the three illustrations of the exhibition program below to emphasize that the *Bataviaasche Kunstkring* has acted inclusively. Furthermore, one of the *Bataviaasche Kunstkring* programs on the theme of *De Indische Bondscollectie*, which had produced and exhibited paintings by several Indonesian painters, including Sudjojono, had indirectly stimulated the birth of PERSAGI.

⁴⁹ "Het Uitverkoren Vijftal. Een brief aan het bestuur van den Kunstkringen-Bond" in *De locomotief*, 19 May 1936, p. 3. "Welk een subjectiviteit spreekt uit deze uitsluiting, welk een vooringenomenheid met een bepaalde manier van weergave was hier het criterium voor de kunstwaarde!" See also "Critiek op de Kunstkringen" in *Deli courant*, 17 August 1936, p. 3.

⁵⁰ "Moderne Schilderkunst in Indie: Reactionnaire beeldende kunstenaars" in *De Indische courant*, 13 August 1936, p. 13.

⁵¹ "Kunstenaars zijn gegriefd: Het uitverkoren vijftal" in *De Indische courant*, 18 May 1936, p. 17. "Tot het uitverkoren vijftal schilders, waarvan werk op bedoelde nationale tentoonstellingen is ingezonden, behooren geen van de hier jarenlang werkzame en algemeen bekende o.z.t.z. "echt Indische" schilders."

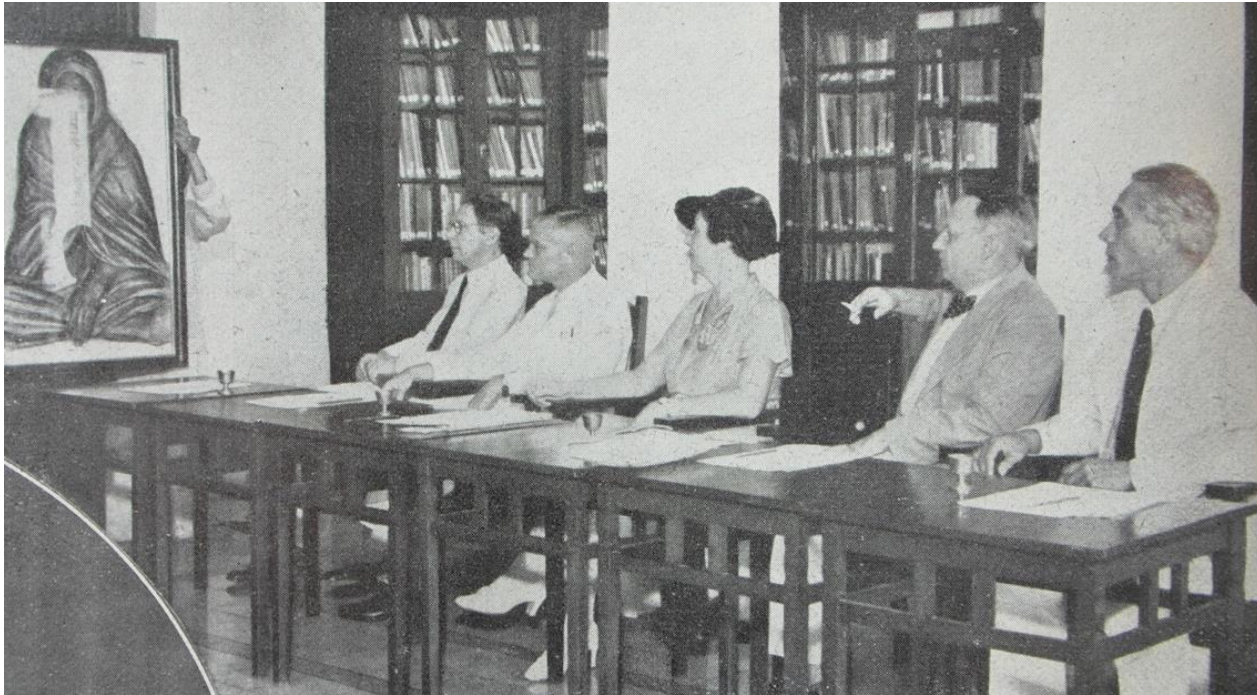


FIGURE 4.4.
Jurying painting at the *Kunstkring*. From left: P. Ouborg, N.E. Burhoven Jaspers, J. de Loos-Haaxman, P.H.W. Sitsen, and Jan Frank.
(Source: *Actueel Wereldnieuws – En Sport in Beeld*, 1 May 1937)

Repro by Aminudin TH Siregar

Since 1936, every May, the *Bataviaasche Kunstkring* held a prestigious annual program entitled the *Indische Bondscollectie*, an art exhibition aimed at providing an overview of the state of art in the Indies by compiling a collection of paintings, drawings, graphic works, and sculptures by artists of every kind and nationality residing in the Indies. J. de Loos-Haaxman, P.H.W. Sitsen, M.P. Callenfels-Carsten, Jan Frank, P. Ouborg, and N.E. Burhoven Jaspers were judges and would continue to play a role in the following programs (Fig. 4.4).⁵² Around 24 artists took part in the first *Indische Bondscollectie* program. As for the second program, in 1937, the exhibition featured the works of 20 artists, including three prominent Chinese-Indonesian painters, Siau Tiek Wie, Lee Man Fong, and Kho Wan Gie.⁵³

However, critical reactions began to emerge after the second *Indische Bondscollectie* program, which included questioning the jury's motivations in determining selection criteria and the representation of Indies painters. The newspaper *De Indische Courant* wrote, among other things: "That this exhibition, disregarding the quality of the work, could only be moderately satisfying. The first thing that is striking is, as we have already pointed out,

⁵² "De Bondscollectie - De Jury" in *De Indische courant*, 3 April 1936, p.14 and "Derde Bondscollectie Te Batavia in Mei" in *Het nieuws van den dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, 6 January 1938, p. 7.

⁵³ See *Indische Bondscollectie 1937 - schilderijen, teekeningen en prenten, Tentoongesteld in de Theosophische Loge 5 Juni 1937*, catalogue Bataviaasche Kunstkring.

that several painters in the Indies are not represented at this exhibition. This may be due to these painters themselves because they kept aloof for one reason or another, but the cause may also lie with the Federal Board and the Jury. Some painters think that the Jury is too strict in its judgment and orients itself too exclusively in a modern direction. Anyone who sees this latest Federal collection will certainly not be able to support this last view.”⁵⁴

In the *Javabode* newspaper, the writings of Henry van Velthuysen, a Bandung painter who at this time was also active as secretary of the VBK and produced many paintings of natural landscapes, were full of suspicion, questioning the representation of the Indies painters in this second *Indische Bondscollectie* exhibition. According to Van Velthuysen, the collection did not represent the Indies painters because it did not include several of them. He should have mentioned which other Indies painters he was referring to. In any case, he seems to suspect that, whether oriented toward modern painting or not, painters seem to refrain from sending their works to the *Kunstkring*. He blamed the jury selection process. He wrote that many painters in the Indies were dissatisfied with the jury's decision regarding the artists and their works for the second *Indische Bondscollectie* exhibition. In deciding the selection, writes Van Velthuysen, the jury seemed to be ambivalent: on the one hand, applying the selection strictly, while on the other hand, trying to be flexible. In Van Velthuysen's eyes, a selection system like this is problematic because the jury could entirely reject six paintings by a famous painter, and yet the *Kunstkring* accepted a piece of work from an amateur who had only studied oil painting for three months.

According to Van Velthuysen, many painters in the Indies complained because the *Kunstkring* chose only one of the five paintings they submitted, even though most of the painters had worked all year to prepare their work. The painters in this group - Van Velthuysen did not say who they were - regretted that the *Kunstkring* jury's assessment parameters were too harsh. As a result, the painters withdrew all their work from the judging

⁵⁴ Van onzen redacteur te Batavia, "Bevordering der Schilderkunst - Het Bondsheleid. — Aandeel der jury. — Ruimer doelstelling noodzakelijk" in *De Indische courant*, 19 May 1937, p. 12. "Dat deze expositie, de kwaliteit van het werk buiten beschouwing latend, slechts matig kon bevredigen... 't Eerste wat opvalt is, we wezen er reeds op, dat verscheidene Indische schilders niet vertegenwoordigd zijn op deze expositie; dat kan aan deze schilders zelf liggen, omdat zij zich om een of andere reden afzijdig houden, maar de oorzaak kan ook te vinden zijn bij het Bondsbestuur en bij de jury. Er zijn schilders, die van meening zijn, dat de Jury te streng is in haar oordeel en zich te exclusivistisch oriënteert in moderne richting. Wie deze jongste Bondscollectie ziet, zal dit laatste zeker niet kunnen toegeven."

process, significantly affecting their careers and the Indies art scene. Van Velthuysen believes this judging problem has been a rumor since the first *Indische Bondscollectie* program. He reported: "We heard grumbling everywhere. It is a fact that many painters who already have a reputation in the Indies, distanced themselves, because they refused to comply with the judgment of this modern-oriented jury doing harm rather than good to their name." Due to this unfavorable situation, Van Velthuysen appealed to the *Kunstkring* to establish good relations with the painters. However, the *Kunstkring* unfortunately acted as if painters needed this institution more than the *Kunstkring* needed the painters.⁵⁵

Still related to the *Indische Bondscollectie* program, in the *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, Van Velthuysen seems dissatisfied and continued his criticism. Among other things, he wrote: "It is a fact that there are many painters who, although invited by the Association, do not want to submit, because they know that the existing jury is not unbiased towards some *Indische* painters and painting movements and they do not want to expose themselves to a refusal. This is a sober, indisputable fact [...]"⁵⁶

Van Velthuysen's disappointment with the *Bataviaasche Kunstkring* received sympathy from the painter Gerard Pieter Adolfs, who diligently painted themes of natural beauty and the *Indische* society. In his letter to the *Indische Courant* newspaper, Adolfs even satirized the arrogance of the *Bataviaasche Kunstkring* fine arts committee, which seemed to have authority and control over the development of fine arts in the Indies. He wrote:

For several years now, the visual arts department of the *Bataviaaschen Kunstkring* has been striving for complete control over art. This interference is not only limited to an attempt to only and exclusively import, adore, and encourage 'modern art'; this interference even goes so far that the artist, whose only

⁵⁵ Vn. "Bevordering van de Schilderkunst" in *De Java Bode*, 21 May 1937, p. 2. "Zoo hoorden wij overal mopperen. Een feit is dat vele schilders, die in Indië reeds naam hebben, zich afzijdig hebben gehouden, omdat ze weigeren zich te onderwerpen aan de uitspraak van deze, modern georiënteerde, jury, waarbij hun naam eer kwaad dan goed zou worden gedaan."

⁵⁶ Henry van Van Velthuysen, "Men Schrijft Ons: Booze Schilders" in *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, 3 June 1937, p.3. "Het is een feit, dat er vele schilders zijn die, ofschoon door den Bond uitgenoodigd, niet willen inzenden, omdat zij weten dat de bestaande jury niet onbevooroordeeld is jegens enkele Indische schilders en schildersrichtingen en zij zich niet aan een weigering wenschen bloot te stellen. Dit is een nuchter, onomstootelijk feit dat door geen ingezonden stuk of naschrift kan worden ontkend."

salvation is the *Bataviaasche Kunstkring*⁵⁷, sees himself deprived of the luxury of having his own personal expression, conviction and feeling. Another point is: What right does the art circle have to dare to prescribe a "direction" to an audience necessary to support art? The *Kunstkring* does not have to be a store where you can get everything - even "cheap junk" - but nor does it certainly have to be a monopolistic company serving modern art enthusiasts. Thirdly, those who work here in the Indies can learn a lot from what older people have created before us - but the first necessary thing is a basis for our own artistic views. Should we now unthinkingly regard everything from Europe and exhibited by the art circle as the only salvation?"⁵⁷

Dolf Breetvelt, a Delft-born painter who came to Java in the 1920s and was one of the foremost modern painters in the Netherlands Indies, sent a letter to the same newspaper in response to Van Velthuysen and Adolfs, who protested at the *Kunstkring*'s the lack of representation of the Indies painter in the *Indies Bondscollectie* exhibition. In his letter, Breetvelt, among other things, questioned the true meaning of "Indies paintings/painters." He disagrees if the term is only understood as paintings depicting beautiful natural scenes and those selling well on the market. Breetvelt, I assume, wanted to be ironic because he knew that Van Velthuysen and Adolfs were famous for their paintings depicting the natural beauty of the Indies. In his letter, he, for instance, called the lovers of beauty "flamboyant-voluptuous" (*flamboyant-wellustelingen*) painters. Besides, they were very productive painters in the Indies. Even with this, Breetvelt wondered whether the

⁵⁷"Letter of G.P. Adolfs - De Schilderkunst" in *Indische courant*, 26-05-1937, p.6. "Er is sinds eenige jaren door de afdeeling beeldende kunst van den Bataviaaschen Kunstkring gestreefd naar een algeheele zeggenschap inzake kunst. Die inmenging bepaalt zich niet alleen tot een streven om alleen en uitsluitend „moderne kunst" te importeeren, te adoreren en aan te moedigen; die inmenging gaat zelfs zoover, dat den kunstenaar wiens eenig heil is de Bataviaasche Kunstkring', zich de weelde van een eigen uiting-overtuiging en gevoel ziet ontnomen worden. Een ander punt is: Met welk recht durft de kunstkring een publiek, dat toch noodig is om de kunst te steunen, een „richting" voor te schrijven. De kunstkring heeft niet te zijn een toko, waar alles te krijgen is — tot „goedkoope rommel" toe — maar ze behoeft allerminst te zijn een monopoolbedrijf ten dienste van moderne Kunstwellustigen. En ten derde dit: Zij, die hier in Indië werken, kunnen veel leeren van hetgeen ouderen vóór ons gecreëerd hebben — maar het allereerst noodige is een fundament voor onze eigen kunstopvattingen. Moeten wij nu voetstoots alles wat uit Europa komt en door den kunstkring geëxposeerd als het eenig zaligmakende beschouwen?"

artistic achievements and productivity were primarily eligible to be brought to the attention of the art-loving public by the *Kunstkring's* Board.⁵⁸

Regarding Adolfs's insinuation that all things from Europe exhibited by the *Kunstkring* are the only salvation, Breetvelt denies this. Instead, Breetvelt wanted to suggest that the painters of the Indies open their minds through the European art shown in the *Kunstkring* by encouraging a critical evaluation rather than accepting them unquestioningly. Breetvelt then defended that exhibitions of European paintings in the Indies had significant value, especially for the people in the Dutch East Indies, who were isolated from cultural centers in Europe, especially for getting to know new art movements, even though the interest in benefiting from them was relatively small. Nevertheless, it is crucial for Indies painters always to be aware of what has been achieved in Europe in various fields, he suggested.

Breetvelt noted that Adolfs' letters not only expressed desperation but also contained cruel accusations against *Kunstkring*, which had exerted great effort to introduce European painting to the Netherlands-Indies public. Breetvelt continues with a scathing satire on Adolfs and the painters who only beautified the Indies with the following sentence: "The Bondsbestuur (of the *Kunstkring*) should not have done this [exhibit European painting] because, as a result, the public woke up from a peaceful slumber and became aware of painterly views that turned out to be wholly opposed to the sweet, self-satisfied, and business-oriented painting that has flourished here for many years and which has set it as its task to produce pleasant souvenirs from the Indies."⁵⁹

Even though protests haunted it, the *Bataviaasche Kunstkring* continued its *Indische Bondscollectie* program. In the third program, the jury selected two paintings by Sudjojono, *Kinderen en een Kat* and *De Djogjanees*, to be exhibited. Also, the painting *Kinderen en een Kat* makes an honorable appearance on the front cover of the exhibition catalogue

⁵⁸ Dolf Breetvelt, "Een antwoord van Breetvelt" in *Indische courant*, 29 May 1937, p. 2. "Zou ik willen vragen wat de heer Adolfs denkt van zovele Indische schilders die we met recht "flamboyant-wellustelingen" zouden willen noemen. Dit vooral met het oog op de enorme productiviteit van bedoelde schilders in dit gangbare artikel. Komen deze soort schilderijen wellicht in de eerste plaats in aanmerking om door Kunstkringbestuur onder de aandacht van het kunstminnend publiek gebracht te worden?"

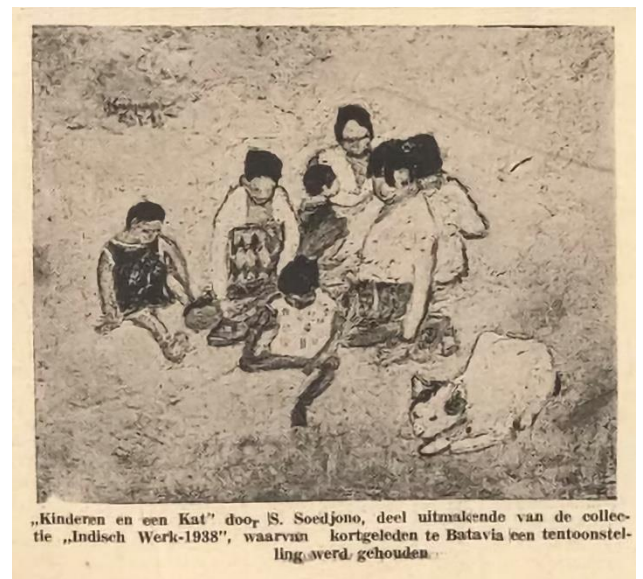
⁵⁹ Dolf Breetvelt, 1937, p. 2. "Dit nu had het Bondsbestuur niet moeten doen, want hierdoor is het publiek uit een rustigen dommel ontwaakt en kreeg kennis van schilderkunstige opvattingen die volkomen tegengesteld bleken met de zoetelijke, zelfgenoegzame en zakelijk ingestelde schilderkunst zoo als die hier lange jaren van bloei gekend heeft en welke zich tot taak gesteld had, het fabriceren van aangename souvenirs uit Indië."

Figure 4.5.
Kinderen en een Kat in as a cover of the
Indische Bonds Collectie catalogue exhibition.

Collection of Leiden University Library
 Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar



Figure 4.6.
 S. Sudjojono, *Kinderen en een Kat* in *Algemeen
 handelsblad voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, 14 May 1938.



(Fig.4.5). This painting was also published in the newspapers *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad* and *Algemeen handelsblad voor Nederlandsch-Indië* (Fig.4.6).⁶⁰

Apart from Sudjojono, paintings by several other artists such as Henk Ngantoeng, Lee Man Fong, Siau Tik Kwie, Dolf Breetvet, Rudolf Bonnet, Frida Holleman, and Otto Cramer appeared in the exhibition. This exhibition also received positive reviews in the newspaper *De Indische Courant*. The editor acknowledged, among other things, that Sudjojono's painting *Kinderen en een Kat* is worthy of attention even though it is still influenced by the Japanese painter Chioyi Yazaki. The newspaper editor also suggested that Sudjojono could find his own style.⁶¹ Praise for Sudjojono also came from A., a reviewer in *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad* who called *Kinderen en een Kat* a painting "which has a special charm due to the strongly central grouping and the fine coloring." Sudjojono's other work, *De Djogjanees*, was considered brilliant, although it was a shame that he was careless in using the medium. Because it is made from cardboard, the paint warps and peels off.⁶²

With such compliments, as a young painter who had just entered the Indies painting scene, in his biography, Sudjojono admitted that the *Indische Bondscollectie* exhibition had raised his confidence. He confessed he first read the open call for a show in the Java Bode newspaper and took the initiative to send his paintings to the *Bataviaasche Kunstkring*. Unexpectedly, the image passed the selection of the jury - who, according to Sudjojono, were authoritative people. "My self-confidence as an Indonesian started to become stronger; I felt like I had risen from the position of "inlander," recalled Sudjojono.⁶³ In addition, apart from being proud of being selected and exhibited, as reported in a newspaper, Sudjojono's painting *Kinderen en een Kat* was sold during the show.⁶⁴ Another critical point to note from

⁶⁰ See *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, 3 May 1938, p. 13 and *Algemeen handelsblad voor Nederlandsch-Indië* 14 May 1938, p.3. In other newspapers, the painting *Kinderen en een Kat* was reported to have been sold. See *Het nieuws van den dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, 12 May 1938, p. 7.

⁶¹ See Editor, "Kunst de Indische Bondscollectie" - De tentoonstelling in Batavia's Kunstkring in *De Indische courant*, 4 May 1938, p. 13. "Opmerkelijk is het werk van Soedjojono, die naar de catalogus ons inlicht schilderlessen kreeg van Mas Pringadi en van Chiayi Yasaki; de Japansche invloed van den laatsten is maar al te duidelijk; vooral in "Kinderen en een kat." Soedjojono zal zich zijn weg naar een eigen stijl nog moeten zoeken."

⁶² Bd., "De Indische Bondscollectie Kunst In den Soerabaiaschen Kunstkring" in *Soerabaijasch handelsblad*, 19 September 1938, p.6. "Soedjojono exposeert een studie van een Djokjanees; geschilderd op karton is dit stuk kromgetrokken, en d verflaag dientengevolge gescheurd. Zijn werk lijkt ons te goed voor zooveel onverschilligheid ten opzichte van technische details."

⁶³ S. Sudjojono, 2017, 55.

⁶⁴ See the news in short article "Bondscollectie Indisch Werk" in *Het nieuws van den dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, 12 May 1938, p.7.

Sudjojono's confession is how this feeling of self-confidence then gave rise to the idea of forming PERSAGI.⁶⁵

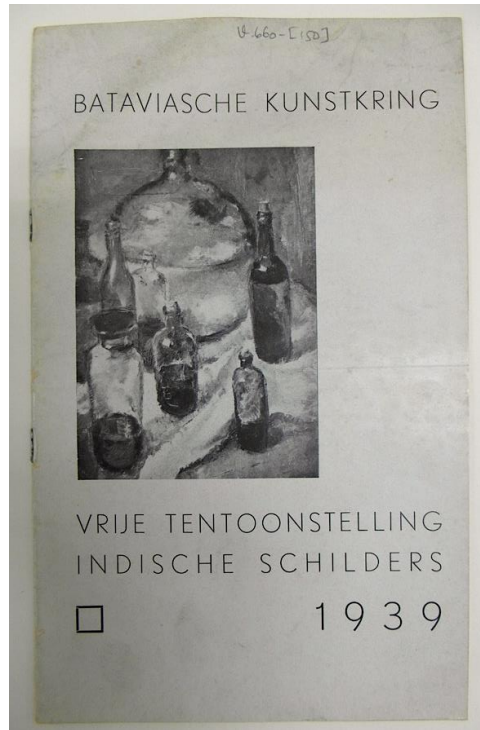


FIGURE 4.7.
The catalogue of *Vrije Tentoonstelling Indische Schilders*.

Collection of National Library of Indonesia
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

The opportunity to exhibit Indonesian painters at the *Bataviaasche Kunstkring* is not only within the *Indische Bondscollectie* program. Another program entitled *Vrije Tentoonstelling Indische Schilders* (Free Exhibition of Indies Painters) also opened up vast possibilities for all painters (Fig.4.7), because, unlike the previous *Indische Bondscollectie*, for the *Vrije Tentoonstelling* program, this time the *Bataviaasche Kunstkring* did not conduct a selection process. In a press release at the end of 1938, this institution planned to invite around eighty painters, each of whom could submit three paintings or drawings. Two hundred and fifty works were expected to be displayed in all rooms of the *Bataviaasche Kunstkring* building. The exhibition was planned to be held in early 1939.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ S. Sudjojono, 2017, 56.

⁶⁶ "Schilderijen-Tentoonstelling - Werk van Indische Schilders" in *Het nieuws van den dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, 13 October 1938, p. 11.

Bataviaasche Kunstkring created this program in response to previous protests. This is implicitly reflected in the introduction to the exhibition, which says: "In response to the many requests from interested parties, painters, and the press, the *Bataviaasche Kunstkring* decided to organize a so-called *Vrije Tentoonstelling*, whereby the submitted works would, therefore, not be selected nor subjected to the judgment of a jury. There was complete freedom in the choice of the subject and the nature of the material, and the only restriction that the Board had to impose on the painters in connection with the available exhibition space was that no more than three canvases could be exhibited from each entrant. In this way, the Board believed it could put together a representative exhibition that, in addition to work by the most famous Indies painters, would include paintings by less prominent and even wholly unknown artists. This would make it possible to obtain a good overview of the current state of Indies painting.

Fifty painters were involved in the *Vrije Tentoonstelling*. This is a major exhibition showing the diversity of painting styles and techniques. Several names with a reputation in the Dutch East Indies, like Jan Frank, Charles Sayers, and Piet Ouborg, joined the show. The Indonesian painters were represented by Henk Ngantoeng, Soemardjo Notodiningrat, Soehargo, Sudjojono, Soedihardjo, Sjoea'ib, and G.A. Soekirno – the last four were PERSAGI members. Apart from them, painters who appeared in the *Kunstkring* program several times, such as Lee Man Fong and Siauw Tik Kwie, also participated. The exhibition took place from 24 February to 5 March 1939, just a few months after the formation of PERSAGI. This exhibition depicted the brotherhood between painters in the Dutch East Indies and, in particular, the flexibility of the *Bataviaasche Kunstkring* in operating their exhibition programs. The newspaper *De Indische Courant* welcomed this exhibition, which was said to be of "an international scale." The editor wrote: "In our opinion, this exhibition derives its importance precisely from the fact that it also shows how modern trends are already having an impact here, regardless of how far this work has been successful. The contemporary work gives this exhibition a character of expressive power and a particular degree of interest."⁶⁷

⁶⁷ "De vrije schilders-tentoonstelling" in *De Indische courant*, 25 February 1939, p. 14. "Deze tentoonstelling ontleent o.i. juist haar belang hieraan, dat zij tevens laat zien, dat en hoe moderne richtingen ook hier reeds doorwerken; daargelaten nu in hoever dit werk geslaagd is. Wel kan in het algemeen dit worden gezegd, dat het moderne werk aan deze tentoonstelling een karakter van expressieve kracht en haar een bijzondere mate van belang-" wekkendheid geeft."



FIGURE 4.8. Circular of *Indische Schilders Weerbaar* exhibition.
(Source: *Soerabaijasch handelsblad*, 13 August 1940.)

The Nazi invasion of the Netherlands in May 1940 prompted a reaction in the colony, with a strong desire to show support for the fatherland. This led to the organization of a patriotic exhibition titled *Indische Schilders Weerbaar* (Indies Painters Resilient) (Fig.4.8) by the *Bataviaasche Kunstkring*.⁶⁸ The involvement of painters such as Ida Bagus Kembang, Sudjojono, Agoes Djaya, Lee Man Fong, Rudolf Bonnet, Jan Frank, and Ernest Dezentje in this program politically shows the broad support of painters from various ethnic backgrounds for the Dutch East Indies government. According to reports, the collection was intended to be exhibited in Jakarta and Surabaya. Additionally, *Indische Schilders Weerbaar*

⁶⁸ "Da Bataviaasche Kunstkring herinnert" in *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, 16 August 1940, p. 6.

aimed to generate funds to bolster the national defense of the Dutch East Indies (*Weerbaarheidsfonds*) in light of external invasions.⁶⁹ In his speech on the opening night, the chairman of the *Kunstkring*, Van Hasselt, stated: "Indies painters also want to contribute to the great campaign for the revival of the Netherlands. Painters may not have money, but they have art."⁷⁰

Indonesian painters' participation in three *Kunstkring* programs—*Indische Bonds Collectie*, *Vrije Tentoonstelling Indische Schilders*, and *Indische Schilders Weerbaar*—proved that the institution was not discriminatory. On the other hand, it is essential to ensure that, as an official institution, the *Kunstkring* had the authority and internal policy to select works of art by exercising judgement. Of course, the jury's assessment criteria are were not free from criticism. However, as has been explained, if there was any criticism, this came from VBK, not the PERSAGI painters. Thus, it can be stated that the myth about *Kunstkring's* arrogance and discrimination towards Indonesian painters is unfounded. It also indicates that the heroism of PERSAGI against colonial power associated with the *Bataviaasche Kunstkring* is more of a nationalism-based myth than a historical fact.

Regarding the Father-in-Law Contribution

Apart from dismantling the myth about the rejection of the *Bataviaasche Kunstkring*, the explanation above also reveals another historical veil related to "father-in-law's help" in Sudjojono's career, which was then connected to PERSAGI's opportunity to exhibit at the *Kunstkring*. It has been previously stated that his debut in the *Indische Bondscollectie* exhibition paved the way for Sudjojono's career. Apart from that, through Baharudin Marasutan's testimony above, it is clear that Sudjojono was used to watching shows of the Regnault collection at the *Kunstkring* building. In short, Sudjojono's name was well known and networked in the Dutch East Indies art field and among the *Kunstkring's* people. However, as discussed below, several Dutch writers tried to construct the impression that Sudjojono's connection to the *Kunstkring* was due to family factors through his father-in-law.

In *Verlaat Rapport Indie*, when giving information about the figure of Sudjojono, De Loos-Haaxman wrote the following: "Sudjojono was the son-

⁶⁹ See "Indische Schildes Weerbaar" in *Soerabaijasch handelsblad*, 13 August 1940, p.6.; "Opening Weerbaarheids-tentoonstelling" in *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, 17 August 1940, p.3.

⁷⁰ *De Indische courant*, 30 November 1940.

in-law of Raden Sasmojo, our concierge. He will not have missed a single painting in the *Kunstkring*, especially the Regnault collection."⁷¹ De Loos-Haaxman did not explain how Sudjojono could enter the exhibition space due to their "familial relationship." For example, did Raden Sasmojo open the building door outside visiting hours or through the back entrance?

However, with reference to De Loos-Haaxman, Helena Spanjaard referred to and developed this familial relationship in another context. Spanjaard wrote, "Sudjojono's father-in-law, Sasmojo, worked as a janitor for the *Bataviaasche Kunstkring*. This allowed the young painter to see modern art with his own eyes."⁷² With this assertion, Spanjaard wants to generate a perception among readers that Sudjojono is a fortunate person because, as Sasmojo's son-in-law, he can visit the exhibition in the *Bataviaasche Kunstkring* building. Because "The opportunity to see an exhibition of the Regnault collection is a privilege limited only to members of the *Kunstkring* and Europeans."⁷³ With this sentence, Spanjaard also wanted to suggest that there was discrimination from the *Bataviaasche Kunstkring* towards Indonesian painters.

Furthermore, Spanjaard imagined that there had been tension between the *Bataviaasche Kunstkring* and PERSAGI by saying: "There was generally a significant divide between the *Kunstkring* and PERSAGI members. This distance cannot be explained only from an artistic viewpoint but should instead be considered as a consequence of the tense colonial situation of the time. Sharper contradictions are mirrored in Sudjojono's articles."⁷⁴ Spanjaard did not mention which of Sudjojono's articles expressed tensions with the *Kunstkring*. Apparently, there is no evidence for this

⁷¹ See J.de Loos-Haaxman, 1968, p. 127." Sudjojono was de schoonzoon van Raden Sas Mojo, onze concierge. Hem zal geen enkel schilderij in de Kunstkring, zeker niet uit de Coll. Regnault ontgaan zijn."

⁷² As noted in the "footnotes," Helena Spanjaard referred to the book *Verlaat Rapport Indie*. See Helena Spanjaard, 1998, p. 95. "'De schoonvader van Sudjojono, Sasmojo, werkte immers als concierge voor de Bataviaasche Kunstkring. Daardoor kreeg de nog jonge schilder een optimale kans de moderne kunst met eigen ogen te aanschouwen.'" In another section, Spanjaard also believed that the situation experienced by Sudjojono at that time (because of his father-in-law) made it possible for him to study the Regnault collection. See Helena Spanjaard, 1998, p. 63.

⁷³ See Helena Spanjaard, 1998, p. 96.

⁷⁴ See Helena Spanjaard, 1998, p. 96. "In het algemeen bestond er een grote afstand tussen de Kunstkring en de leden van Persagi. Deze afstand laat zich niet alleen vanuit een artistiek oogpunt verklaren, maar was veel meer een gevolg van de toenmalige gespannen koloniale situatie. De verscherpte tegenstellingen komen naar voren in de teksten van Sudjojono." Spanjaard's remark about "the divide between Kunstkring and Persagi" is a little perplexing. Meanwhile, she did not explain the "tensions," and the "Sudjojono article" demonstrated the contrast referred to. Aside from that, if the "difference in artistic perspectives" Spanjaard referred to was Sudjojono's criticism of Mooi Indië landscape paintings, the argument is moot because Sudjojono's complaint has a different context.

statement. As discussed in the next section, I did not find evidence in Sudjojono's texts indicating the pressures alleged by Spanjaard.

From De Loos-Haaxman (1968), which was later expanded by Spanjaard (1998), Tom van den Berge in *Picasso in the Tropics* (2018) helped perpetuate *Bataviaasche Kunstkring's* perception of discrimination against PERSAGI and also about Sudjojono's opportunity to see the exhibition there only because of his father-in-law's role. Referring to De Loos-Haaxman and Spanjaard, Van den Berge continued that this family relationship had given "Sudjojono the opportunity to see the Regnault collection, even though the majority of visitors to the exhibition at that time were Dutch." Van den Berge also quotes Spanjaard about "the split between the *Bataviaasche Kunstkring* and the PERSAGI members." From this point onwards, Van de Berge added a new impression that the "split" or tension between the two caused PERSAGI to be prohibited from exhibiting at the *Kunstkring*. He wrote: "Generally, there was a distance between the Batavia Art Society and the members of PERSAGI. Initially, the Society forbade Sudjojono and PERSAGI members from displaying their paintings in the museum. Still, in May 1941, the Indonesian painters had their first exhibition in the Indies' most prestigious venue for modern art."⁷⁵

I have several arguments to challenge the confusion in the Sasmojo-Sudjojono-*Kunstkring* relationship. First, as already mentioned, Sudjojono's name was already well known at least since the third *Indische Bondscollectie* exhibition in 1938, and, of course, had been connected with the *Bataviaasche Kunstkring* several years before he became Raden Sasmojo's son-in-law. It should be noted here that the marriage between Sudjojono and Mia Bustam (Raden Sasmojo's daughter) only took place on 20 April 1943. The two met at the beginning of the Japanese occupation⁷⁶ when exhibition activities at the *Bataviaasche Kunstkring* began to decline.⁷⁷ Apart from that, the indication that there is tension between *Kunstkring* and PERSAGI needs to be proven, considering that several PERSAGI members had previously participated in exhibition programs at that institution.

⁷⁵ See Tom van den Berge, 2018, p. 88.

⁷⁶ Interview with Tedjabayu, 4 June 2020 via WhatsApp messenger. Tedjabayu is Sudjojono's eldest son. To read a depiction of the relationship between Sudjojono, Raden Sasmojo, and Mia Bustam, see Mia Bustam, *Sudjojono dan Aku*, (Jakarta: Pustaka Utan Kayu, 2006), pp. 4-36.

⁷⁷ The Regnault collection exhibition was last held in October 1941. See *De Indische courant*, 24 October 1941.

The PERSAGI Exhibitions

Two significant PERSAGI exhibitions took place, the first in 1940 at the Kolff & Co. bookstore and the second in 1941 at the *Bataviaasche Kunstkring* - which toured several cities on Java. PERSAGI's works in these two shows received critical responses. Most reviewers regretted the solid Western influence of technique and style in PERSAGI's paintings instead of exploring classical Indonesian art to strengthen painters' personalities. This section will argue that it is essential to stress these assessments, considering that PERSAGI has been mystified as "a nationalist arts association that was successful in carrying out movements against the hegemony of Western colonial art," – as previously discussed. If this is the case, how can PERSAGI counter the West if their artistic aesthetics have been Westernised? In the meantime, it is interesting that Sudjojono did not deny the Westernised tendencies of PERSAGI's paintings. He even doubted the appearance of the "Indonesian style" in PERSAGI's artworks. The PERSAGI exhibition is also essential to investigate since it has never been discussed in canon historiography.

Let us commence from this point. Following the rejection of PERSAGI's proposal by De Loos-Haaxman, a unanimous decision was reached by all members to unite their efforts. Subsequently, the funds were utilized to secure the rental of an exhibition venue.⁷⁸ The inaugural presentation of PERSAGI's significant exhibition was held in March 1940 at the Kolff & Co. bookstore in Batavia. It is crucial to underscore that the exhibition venue should not be misconstrued as "an emergency space," as Sudarmadji may imply.⁷⁹ Instead, it is a distinguished gallery that frequently hosts numerous European and Indonesian painters.⁸⁰

In the newspaper *Het nieuws van den dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, a reviewer welcomed PERSAGI's debut. He affirmed this exhibition had given rise to young painters with extraordinary talents who were also seen as knowing how to express their vision in paintings. According to the author,

⁷⁸ *Brochure Kesenian*, 1949, p.20.

⁷⁹ Sudarmadji, for example, wrote that the exhibition took place "on the terrace of the bookstore" to dramatize that the Persagi exhibition was not well accommodated. See Sudarmadji, 1981, p. 129.

⁸⁰ The exhibition space opened with an exhibition of works by Jan Frank and Rudolf Bonnet on 2 September 1933. The Batavia mayor Voorneman carried out the inauguration. See "Kunstaal Kolff en Co. Burgemeester Voorneman spreekt een openingswoord" in *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, 4 September 1933, p. 3.

the PERSAGI painters accepted Western influences without conflicting with their Eastern ones. "Some are still complete naturalists, and others have taken expressionism's direction under Western art's influence. I already expressed that this exhibition was a surprise because it shows us that effects and movements are also at work among Indigenous painters, which promise to evolve in this latest branch of Western-oriented art by Easterners."⁸¹ The reviewer suggested that painters should be selective in choosing works to exhibit.

The *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad* newspaper also welcomed PERSAGI's debut by saying that the exhibition represented the latest developments of indigenous painters and emphasized that all painters were inspired by Western painting. PERSAGI painters learned oil painting techniques and drew in Western ways. Among other painters, Soediardjo, whose images offer flat and decorativeness, is an exception. The reviewer considered his paintings to have personality and strength - having an Eastern nuance. Apart from that, the reviewer also praised Sudjojono's paintings, which were conveyed to have surpassed the artistic achievements of other painters. The *Djoengkatan* by Sudjojono is a painting that stands out for its electrifying subtlety of color and its pure placement of image components. The reviewer was impressed by the artistic achievements of Agoes Djajasoeminta's watercolors and Saptarita Latif's painting because her harmonious color scheme is soft and sensitive. As the reviewer advises, painters must carefully select the works before exhibiting them to demonstrate their strengths.⁸²

Sudjojono was the only PERSAGI member who responded to the debut of the PERSAGI exhibition. With the title "Menoedjoe Ke Tjorak Seni Loekis Indonesia Baroe" (Towards an Indonesian New Painting Style), Sudjojono's writing did not express a defense. Instead, he confirmed that Indonesian painters painted using Western painting rules in terms of "feel"

⁸¹ W. "Inheemsche Schilders - Een onrecht goedge maakt" in *Het nieuws van den dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, 8 March 1940, p. 7. "Duidelijk treden reeds enkele grootere talenten op den voorgrond. Als wij de korte notities met bijzonderheden omtrent vooropleiding in den catalogus lezen, dan zien wij daaruit, dat verscheidenen der inzenders gewerkt hebben onder leiding van Indische schilders. De meesten zijn nog jong, zeer jong zelfs, en enkelen weten reeds een eigen visie tot uitdrukking te brengen. Er zijn er die nog volkomen naturalist zijn, anderen die onder den invloed der Westersche kunst de richting van het expressionisme zijn ingeslagen. Daarom zeide ik reeds dat deze tentoonstelling een verrassing was, omdat zij ons doet zien dat ook bij de Inheemsche schilders, invloeden en stroomingen werkzaam zijn, die een evolutie in dezen jongsten tak van Westersch georiënteerde kunst van Oosterlingen beloven teweeg te brengen."

⁸² A. "Schilderijtentoonstelling van Inheemsche schilders" in *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, 8 March 1940, p.3.

and "color." Sudjojono even firmly stated that the PERSAGI painters had not discovered "the style of Indonesian painting." He writes "Indonesian painting styles" are not "Javanese and Balinese painting styles." The style of Indonesian painting is still transforming because Western culture is still strong. It is unsurprising, according to Sudjojono, for "we have no way to create a pattern that suits the feeling of Indonesian unity. We do not have a mark that suits our *zelfbewustzijn* (self-awareness)."⁸³

Furthermore, continues Sudjojono, Indonesian culture was moving without direction, "One person follows Java-ness, another follows ancient-ness and the other the new-ness of Java and yet another follows Western-ness with all its good and bad. But new Indonesia-ness which is suitable for this era does not exist." Sudjojono then evaluated PERSAGI's achievement at the shows: "All of you have seen the paintings of the PERSAGI exhibition at Kolff, Jakarta. Can we already say that the show was an exhibition of Eastern and Indonesian paintings? No! The subject matter and themes that they used may be subjects, landscapes, and topics from Indonesia. But, the brush characteristics and the sense of colours used are still the characters and colours of the West and their creation method is that of the West."⁸⁴

Sudjojono did not deflect indictments of Westernism as expressed by newspaper reviewers. Likewise, his writing did not attack the "West" frontally or harshly. What he wanted was to get out of this tension of West-East discourse. Western painting, emphasized Sudjojono, should be studied. He even imagined the possibility of creating "something new" from the ongoing Westernization process, which he later imagined as "new styles of Indonesian painting." Sudjojono stated the importance of learning Western painting techniques, and combining "our indigenous and foreign sense." He continued: "This does not mean that we must discard Western influences; no, not at all. We must study their great techniques; currently, we even need to

⁸³ See SS.10 "Menoedjoe Ke Tjorak Seni Loekis Persatoean Indonesia Baroe" in *Keboedajaan dan Masjarakat*, No.5. Th.II, September 1940, 104. "Kita tidak bisa mempoenjai soeatoe tjara mewoedjoedkan (*uitdrukkingwijze*) jang tjotjok dengan perasaan persatoean Indonesia. Kita tidak mempoenjai tjorak jang tjotjok dengan *zelfbewustzijn* (*self-awareness*)."

⁸⁴ SS. 101, September 1940, p. 104. "Yang satoe ke ke-Djawaan, jang satoe ke-koeno-an dan jang satoe ke ke-baroean Djawa dan jang satoe lagi ke-Baratan dengan baik dan boeroeknja. Tetapi ke-Indonesiaan baroe jang tjotjok dengan djamannja ini tidak ada." And "Toeian lihat sadja stéléng loekisan-loekisan "PERSAGI" (Persatoean Ahli-ahli Gambar Indonesia) jang telah diadakan di Kolff, Djakarta. Soedahkah kita bisa mengatakan bahwa stéléng tadi stéléng loekis-loekisan ke Timoeran dan stéléng loekis-loekisan ke-Indonesiaan? Tidak! Barang-barang dan thema-thema jang mereka boeat barangkali barang-barang, pemandangan-pemandangan dan thema-thema dari Indonesia, akan tetapi tjorak-kwas (*penseelvoering*) dan rasa warna mereka masih tjorak dan rasa warna Barat, dan tjara mewoedjoedkan mereka masih tjara mewoedjoedkan Barat."

turn to the West to go to the East. And we must open our souls to include the influence of foreign feelings in life, provided that we do not cripple our original emotions. So, cultivate our authentic taste and that foreign taste so that we will gain a new Indonesian taste that suits our era."⁸⁵

In response to reviewers' suggestions saying that PERSAGI painters must return to their authenticity by exploring Indonesian classic art, Sudjojono disagreed. According to him, Indonesian classical art is an inanimate object stored in the Jakarta Museum.⁸⁶ Sudjojono appealed to Indonesian painters: "You must remember that you will not find much success in studying the art museum, as the soul of the art there smells of incense, covered in mildew, buried in the eras of Majapahit, Mataram, Sri Widjaja and the magnificent Indragiri. It no longer lives. See its greatness of soul as a charm and spirit, which can only remind us of our old creation-process, but with no connection to our lives today."⁸⁷

At this point, I want to briefly discuss the quote above, which clearly shows Sudjojono's attitude towards the new Indonesian art, which is disconnected from its past values. Sudjojono had no desire to "regenerate" Indonesian classical art. Regarding this matter, critic Trisno Sumardjo's view in interpreting Sudjojono's spirit is reasonably correct. Sumardjo once affirmed that through Sudjojono, Indonesian art did not experience a Renaissance, but rather a "réveil" –because it formed something that did not initially exist.⁸⁸ In contrast to Sumardjo's view, Helena Spanjaard – who reminds me of the reviewers of the PERSAGI exhibition in the newspapers – is inaccurate when interpreting the context of Sudjojono's writing as quoted above. According to Spanjaard, Sudjojono, at that time, advised painters to look at art from the past as a source of inspiration for the search for new

⁸⁵ SS. 101, September 1940, p. 106. "Ini tidak berarti bahwa kita haroes memboeang pengaroehnja rasa Barat itoe, tidak, sama sekali tidak. Kita malah haroes mempeladjar tehnik mereka jang bagoes itoe dan kita malah pada waktoe ini terpaksa ke Barat dahoele oentoek ke Timoer. Dan kita haroes memboeka djiwa kita akan memasoekkan pengaroeh rasa asing oentoek hidoep, akan tetapi kita ta' boleh meloempoeahkan rasa aseli kita sendiri. Olahlah rasa aseli kita dan rasa asing tadi, dan kita akan mendapat rasa Indonesia baroe jang tjotjok dengan djaman kita."

⁸⁶ The Jakarta Museum that Sudjojono referred to at that time is now the National Museum of Indonesia.

⁸⁷ SS. 101, September 1940, p. 105. "Anda ta' akan berhasil banjak mempeladjar kesenian Museum itoe, sebab djiwa kesenian disitoe soedah berbae kemenjan, berontjom, terbenam di djaman Madjapahit, Mataram, Sri Widjaja dan kebesaran Indragiri. Dia ta' hidoep lagi. Lihatlah kebagoesan djiwa itoe sebagai djimat dan unicum sadja, jang hanja bisa memperingatkan kita akan tjara-mewoedjoedkan kita dahoele, tetapi tidak memberi kita pertalian langsoeng dengan hidoep kita sekarang."

⁸⁸ Trisno Sumardjo, 1957, p. 127.

Indonesian paintings.⁸⁹ As previously stated, however, Sudjojono wished for the new Indonesian art to be untethered from its past, allowing him and other Indonesian painters to explore uncharted territory and challenge accepted norms. Abandoning historical influences had (in his view) become synonymous with innovation, creativity, and pushing the boundaries of artistic expression.



FIGURE 4.9.
PERSAGI's exhibition catalog, 1941.

Collection of Leiden University Library
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

⁸⁹ Spanjaard, 1998, p. 101.



FIGURE 4.10.
PERSAGI exhibition press release in newspapers.
(Source: "De Bataviaasche: Schilderijtentoonstelling" in
Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad, 7 May 1941)

I will go back to the PERSAGI exhibition. According to Sudjojono, De Loos-Haaxman showed her interest in the debut of the PERSAGI exhibition. She attended more than once, indicating she saw the potential in PERSAGI's artworks.⁹⁰ However, apart from that, I did not find any archives that provide detailed reasons for organizing the PERSAGI exhibition at the *Bataviaasche Kunstkring* a year after its debut at Kolff & Co. In the exhibition catalog, there is also no information explaining the ins and outs of holding the exhibition (Fig.4.9). What is apparent is that PERSAGI's second exhibition in the *Kunstkring* building was opened from 7 to 30 May 1941, featuring around 60 works by Abdulsalam, Raden Agoes Djajasoeminta, Herbert Hoetagoeng, Iton Lasmana, Sjoaib Sastradiwirja, Raden Soediardjo, S. Soedjojono, G.A. Soekirno, Raden Mas Soemitro, Raden Mas Soeromo, Raden Mas Soerono, Rameli, S. Toetoer, and Emiria Soenassa Wama'na Poetri Al'alam (Fig.4.10).⁹¹ In the following month, as reported in some newspapers, this PERSAGI exhibition traveled to the *Soerabaiaschen Kunstkring* in Surabaya.⁹²

⁹⁰ Sudjojono claimed that De Loos-Haxmaan came to the exhibition seven times. See S. Sudjojono, 2017, p. 63. From other sources, Sudjojono provided information that Loos-Haaxman came three times. See *Brochure Kesenian*, 1949, p. 20.

⁹¹ "De Batavische Kunstkring: Schilderijtentoonstelling" in *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, 7 May 1941, p.3.

⁹² *Soerabaijasch handelsblad*, 25 June 1941.

PERTOENDJOEKAN LOEKISAN-LOEKISAN INDONESIA
DI KUNSTKRING DJAKARTA.

(7 sampai 30 Mei 1941).

14 pelokis bangsa Indonesia, antaranja 13 orang yang terkemuka dari perkoempoelan „Persagi“ *) (Persatoean Ahli Gambar Indonesia) di Djakarta, mempertoeendjoekkan boeah tangannja digedoeung Kunstkring di Djakarta. Dari 60 loekisan yang diperlihatkan, ada 30 dari tangan pelokis Agoes Djajasoeeminta. Pelokis-pelokis lain hanja memperlihatkan 2 atau 3 loekisan sadja.

Agoes Djajasoeeminta: soenggoeh seorang pelokis yang radjin benar, penoech nafsoe melokis, terboekti pada banjaknja loekisan yang dikirimkan ke Kunstkring.

A. gemar sekali menggambar figuren. Pada loekisannja yang ditjari garis-garis yang permol. Warna koe-rang diperhatikan: demikian djoega dengan watak benda yang dilokis. Gerak badan yang banjal: ditjiptakannja tidak selaloe dapat memperlihatkan apa yang dikehendaki oleh pelokis. Figureur yang digambarnya universeel, artinja tidak memihak bangsa.



Cliché Balai Poestaka.
Agoes Djajasoeeminta.

*) Persatoean Ahli Gambar Indonesia didirikan tanggal 23 October 1938 di Djakarta. Boelan April 1940 mengadakan pertoeendjoekkan yang pertama di gedoeung Kolff. Pertoendjoekkan ini ialah pertoeendjoekkan yang kedoea dan diika dibandingkan dengan yang pertama sangat banjak madioenja tentang kwaliteit. Sekr. Red. P. Baroe.

FIGURE 4.11.

A review of PERSAGI's exhibition in the *Poedjangga Baroe* magazine by S.

Collection of Leiden University Library
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

The second PERSAGI exhibition elicited a more substantial response than the previous one. A review in the *Poedjangga Baroe* magazine (Fig.4.11) by S. stated that the works of the PERSAGI painters have character or personality, although he still needs to determine whether the artworks have an Indonesian style. I believe the review aims to discuss that painting has long been regarded as a powerful form of expression, capable of capturing the essence of a character or national personality. Through the artist's brushstrokes and choice of subject matter, a profound visual narrative emerges, shaped by cultural influences, historical context, and personal experiences. The writer S. seems to want to explore how painters can imbue their works with character and national identity and how their artistic endeavors provide an intelligent and comprehensive reflection of the world around them. Nevertheless, he scrutinized Agoes Djaya, who showcased 30 paintings featuring diverse styles, which proved that Agus had yet to discover a style that resonated with his inner being. S. then recommended that Agoes Djaya prioritize his originality.⁹³ Conversely, S. commended Sudjojono's accomplishments, emphasizing more character on canvas.⁹⁴ S.

⁹³ S., "Pertoendjoekan Loekisan-Loekisan Indonesia di Kunstkring Djakarta" in *Poedjangga Baroe*, No.11, Mei 1941, p.316.

⁹⁴ S., 1941, p.317.

also praised Soeromo's themes, which he described as actively seeking "oriental aesthetics."⁹⁵

De Loos-Haaxman also commented on the PERSAGI exhibition with a brief review in *De Fakkel* magazine. Her writing highlights areas for improvement in painting techniques which she considered below standard compared to European painters and European painters working in the Indies. De Loos-Haaxman compared the achievements of PERSAGI painters with the works of Raden Saleh, which she evaluated as artistically more successful.⁹⁶ De Loos-Haaxman also regrets that PERSAGI's orientation moved too far to the West rather than exploring artistic results from closer regions, such as Balinese art. She criticized this orientation by writing, "all these young painters are oriented towards the West though Indonesia has enchanting painting art like that found in Bali. However, it seems that the PERSAGI painters feel closer to Europe than to the Balinese people."⁹⁷

De Loos-Haaxman was quite cynical when she stated that the paintings of Abdoel Salam, Herbert Hoetagaloeng, Soemitro, Soerono, and S. Toetoe followed the epigones of Impressionism in the Indies, such as Van Velthuysen, Dezentje, and Adolfs. She also questioned Agus Djaya's weak technique in drawing, even though his paintings had the strength of lines. However, Rameli's two paintings were praised for presenting simple compositions and carefully capturing objects. Meanwhile, Soediardjo was advised to return to his hometown in Bali and open himself to the influence of Balinese art.

The painting entitled *Mainan* (Fig. 12) from Sudjojono, a painter who, according to De Loos-Haaxman, was familiar with the *Kunstkring* environment, received praise for his flexibility in painting the objects. Among other painters, De Loos-Haaxman, in her writings, paid attention to and hoped for the artistic achievements of Emiria Soenassa, who had traveled to Papua and Kalimantan. Although appearing quite odd, Sunassa's efforts to combine the beautiful patterns and colors of Dayak and Papuan art, De Loos-

⁹⁵ S., 1941, p.318.

⁹⁶ J.d.L., "Indonesische Schilders" in *De Fakkel*, 1 Juni 1941, pp. 686-687. "Moet gezegd worden dat dit eerste resultaat nog ver beneden peil is, niet alleen in verhouding tot wat in Europa en door de Europese schilders in Indië gemaakt wordt, maar ook in vergelijking tot de 19e-eeuwse Javaanse schilder Raden Saleh, die ofschoon wel hopeloos vereuropeest en zonder enige originaliteit en vol 19e-eeuws formalisme, een voortreffelijk vakmanschap had, wat zijn 20e-eeuwse opvolgers ten enemale ontbreekt."

⁹⁷ J.d. L., 1941, p. 677. "Al deze jonge schilders richten zich naar het Westen, en niet zoals men verwachten zou van Indonesiërs, die vlak bij huis, op Bali, een vitale en boeiende schilderkunst hebben, waaraan zij zich bepaald meer verwant moeten voelen dan aan Europa, naar de Baliërs."



FIGURE 4.12. S. Sudjojono, *Mainan*, 1938.

Postcard – Private Collection
 Repro by Aminudin TH Siregar

Haaxman wrote, still show an authentic personality. De Loos-Haaxman concluded her review by saying she wanted to wait for the next surprises from Emiria Soenassa.⁹⁸

A review in *Indische Courant* by M. presents a different assessment. The author appreciates Soeromo's artistic achievements "that are finished work, stylish, simple and powerful in expression." Meanwhile, the works of Soerono and S. Toetoer are considered very promising. Then, several of Agoes Djaya's paintings were considered attractive and encouraged people to visit the exhibition to see them again. Apart from praise or criticism on technical aspects, the exciting part, in my opinion, is how the author indicates the epigonism to the West through the following statement: "There is the influence of the West on the inspiration of the artists represented here; the

⁹⁸ J.d. L., 1941, p. 688. "Van deze kunstenaar met zijn lange naam zou ik graag meer zien en vooral illustraties van volksverhalen van zijn hand moeten boeiend zijn."

mastery of the material; the fashion/trend specifically; the desire to imitate, which in many cases has led to pernicious imitation, which has led to so much incapability/inability in our contemporary art-poor art."⁹⁹

Nevertheless, the reviewer admitted that he or she did not understand modern art, the indications of which they saw in the PERSAGI exhibition: "the absence of beauty because it was covered by lumpy paint colors, disharmonious composition, deliberate distortion of perspective, and speculative arrogance."¹⁰⁰ Because of this, using "a boat" as a metaphor for a vehicle to find a direction, the reviewer regretted that the PERSAGI painters chose "a boat that is not suitable and does not give hope." The choice towards modern art was dangerous. M., the reviewer, closes the article with a challenging sentence: "There is strength in Indonesian painters, but who will lead them?"¹⁰¹ At this point, Indonesian artist leaders such as Sudjojono are essential. He proved this when responding to criticism of PERSAGI's debut exhibition (see above). His response to the criticism shows that he possessed a unique intelligence allowing him to navigate the complexities of the art world and create safe spaces for dialogue, where different perspectives could be shared, valued, and incorporated into a more collective understanding. Sudjojono hoped that all Indonesian painters would create without paying attention to technique because only through this strategy would the new Indonesian painters be able to develop.

Like De Loos-Haaxman, the editor of the *Indische Courant*, who extensively analyzed the PERSAGI exhibition, expressed disappointment about the significant impact of Western modern painting, ranging from Impressionism to other modern art movements. The newspaper editor found these facts remarkably astonishing. The editor questioned why the PERSAGI painters preferred not to associate their artwork with classical Indonesian art. The editor noticed that only a few paintings exhibit remnants

⁹⁹ M., "Indonesische Schilders" in *Indische courant*, 20 June 1941, p. 13. "Daar is dan de invloed van het Westen op de inspiratie van de hier vertegenwoordigde beeldende kunstenaars; de beheersing der materie; de mode vooral; de zucht tot navolging, welke in vele gevallen heeft geleid tot verderfelijk nadoen, van wat in onze hedendaagsche kunstarme kunst, heeft geleid tot zooveel onmacht."

¹⁰⁰ M., 1941, p. 13. "Hoe kan dat ook anders. Wij, nuchtere wandelaars door de zalen onzer hedendaagsche kunstproducten, begrijpen over het algemeen de hier ten toon gestelde Westersche kunst al lang niet meer! Wij weten wel, dat de natuur een bedriegster is en dat onze moderne schilders pogen de natuur weer te geven, ontdaan van haar schoonen schijn, maar zij zijn helaas nimmer geslaagd in de zinnelijke kern van het geschapene iets schoone te vinden en de pogingen zijn te vaak uitgelopen op bonte klodders verf, onharmonische compositie, opzettelijke vertekeningen van perspectief en speculaties op snobisme."

¹⁰¹ M., 1941, p. 13. "Er schuilen krachten in de Indonesische schilders. Maar wie zal ze leiden?"

of past Indonesia, such as a preference for exaggerated forms, an absence of perspective, and elements of fantasy, which establish a connection between viewers and Indonesia's classical art. The editor believes that the paintings created by PERSAGI painters generally conform to Western modernism. Nevertheless, the editor asserted that aspects of past Indonesia are not unequivocal prerequisites.¹⁰²

To illustrate the imitation of masters of Western painting, the editor gives the examples of Soediarjo, who painted flower arrangements like Vincent van Gogh and the smile of the female figure in Agoes Djaya's image, which is reminiscent of *La Gioconda* (Monalisa). The female figure in Sudjojono's painting, *Di Depan Kelamboe Terboeka* (In Front of an Open Mosquito Net), contains strong suggestiveness. The reviewer also mentioned Emiria Soenassa's achievements with the sentence "still very close to the expression of primitive painting, but has strong characteristics."¹⁰³

The reviewer then divided the tendencies into two groups. Most painters have a strong desire to express themselves through their paintings. Meanwhile, the images of another group tend towards a Western meditative atmosphere. The first group of painters reflected more on searching for a strong Indonesian personality; the other group adapted to Western artistic styles - especially impressionism.¹⁰⁴

Various criticisms that appeared in the media in the context of the PERSAGI exhibition showed dynamics in the Batavian art field at that time in shaping the perceptions and understanding of modern painting. Even though PERSAGI's second exhibition, with the support of the *Bataviaasche*

¹⁰² Editor, 1941, p. 6. "Opmerkelijk is, dat deze schilders in zeer belangrijke mate den invloed van de Westersche schilderkunst hebben ondergaan, van het Impressionisme af tot allerlei moderne richtingen. Van een bewuste poging om aansluiting te zoeken bij de oude Inheemsche kunst, voorzoover nog aanwezig, is geen sprake. Dit zegt natuurlijk niet, dat zich geen sporen van oude inheemsche kunst invloeden doen gelden, men vindt die nog het duidelijkste terug in het karikaturale genre en waar de fantasie, toch ook meest met een karikatuurachtigen inslag, zich kon uitleven. Of het gemis aan perspectief, door zich tot twee afmetingen te bepalen, ook door oude Inheemsche kunsttradities moet worden verklaard, is nog de vraag, veeleer schijnen hier modernistische opvattingen gevolgd."

¹⁰³ Editor, "Indonesische Schilders-Hun werk ten toon gesteld" in *Indische Courant*, 16 June 1941, p. 6. "Een afzonderlijke plaats neemt in het werk van Emiria Soenassa Wama'na Poetri Al'Alam, uit Tanawangko (Noord-Celebes), dat nog zeer dicht bij primitiever uitingen van schilderkunst staat en niettemin een eigen sterke karakteristiek heeft."

¹⁰⁴ Editor, 1941, p. 6 "Bij nadere beschouwing van het geëxposeerde werk blijkt wel, dat de meeste van deze schilders over een sterken uitingsdrang beschikken, terwijl in ander werk een bijna volkomen Westersche meditatieve stemming tot uiting komt. Eerstbedoelden getuigen van een krachtiger persoonlijkheid; de anderen hebben zich bij de Westersche kunststijl — en dan voornamelijk het impressionisme — aangepast."

Kunstkring, was criticized, Sudjojono responded wisely. His essay entitled "Criticus and Peloekis" (Art Critic and Painter) was a response to reviews of the PERSAGI exhibition, which also represented the voices of Indonesian artists from that time.

Interestingly, Sudjojono's writing does not show his defense of the PERSAGI painters, nor does he defend the critics. Instead, he tried to observe the criticism of these critics more openly - although later, he was somewhat sarcastic about the Dutch critics in Jakarta who did not understand painting in depth. In his writing, Sudjojono initially explained the normative position of critics who stand between artists and the public. According to him, the role of critics is significant. Therefore, it would be wrong, wrote Sudjojono, if some artists claimed they did not need criticism just because the artist's work did not receive praise.

In his writing, Sudjojono sets conditions for an art critic to be objective and able to analyze the psychological dimensions of the painter he/she will be discussing. Unfortunately, in the Dutch East Indies, there were not many ideal art critics according to Sudjojono's criteria. Sudjojono wrote: "Art critics must be able to feel the soul in the picture or painting created by the artist. Because without this skill, they only confuse the public and hinder the development of true art. And it's a shame that many Dutch critics in Jakarta, who are suggested to have a lot of knowledge in this matter, don't understand this obligation at all. Instead, they only confuse the public, especially our public here who still lack basic knowledge to be easily guided in the right direction."¹⁰⁵ Sudjojono also advised artists not to reply to critics even if the criticism tends to be derogatory: "Don't reply or make criticisms of a critic's criticism, even if the criticism is nonconstructive."¹⁰⁶

The PERSAGI exhibition was transferred from the *Bataviaasche Kunstkring* to the *Soerabaijaschen Kunstkring* and raised attention. A reviewer in the *Soerabaijasch Handelsblad* with the initial Bd. re-emphasized the significant impact of Western painting. The article begins with the author's

¹⁰⁵ S. Sudjojono "Criticus dan Peloekis" in S. Sudjojono, *Seni Loekis, Kesenian, dan Seniman*, (Jogjakarta: Penerbit Indonesia Sekarang, 1946), pp. 29-30. "Dia haroes bisa meraba djiwa dalam gambar atau loekisan jang diboeat oleh si seniman. Sebab sonder ketjakapan ini dia akan hanja membingoeng-kan poeblik sadja, dan menghambat kembangnja kesenian jang sedjati. Dan sajang sekali banjak criticus-criticus Belanda di Djakarta, jang katanja djaoeh pengetahoeannja hal ini, ta'mengerti sama sekali akan kewadajiban ini. Mereka membingoengkan poeblik kata saja tadi, apalagi poeblik kita disini jang masih koerang sekali pondamennja oentoek bisa moedah dipimpin kedjoeroesan jang benar."

¹⁰⁶ S. Sudjojono, 1946, p. 31. "Djangan membalas atau memboeat kritik terhadap kritik seorang criticus, meskipoen kritik criticus tadi *afbrekend* sekalipoen."

admission of being perplexed despite multiple visits to the exhibition. Confusion arises because the author does not find the proper criteria to evaluate PERSAGI paintings: “Because most of their works imitate Western views, Western visions, Western technology. Moreover, it is also evident that this imitation - due to the inevitable ambiguity - fails to produce works of high quality.”¹⁰⁷



FIGURE 4.13. To illustrate, the photo portrays the atmosphere of the exhibition opening at *Soerabaiaschen Kunstkring*.

(Source: *Ons Kringnieuws*, Jaargang 1, Nummer 21, 1929)

Collection of Leiden University Library
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

The PERSAGI exhibition extended to the *Soerabaiaschen Kunstkring* in Surabaya during June (Fig.4.13).¹⁰⁸ After a month, the exhibition continued at the Blitar Societeit in the town of Blitar.¹⁰⁹ Subsequently, in late August, the PERSAGI exhibition took place at the *Kedirische Kunstkring* in Kediri.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Bd., “Indonesische schilders In den Soerabaiaschen Kunstkring” in *Soerabaijasch handelsblad*, 25 June 1941, p. 2. “Want in hoofdzaak is hun werk: imitatie van Westersche opvattingen, Westersche visie, Westersche techniek. Het ligt bovendien voor de hand, dat deze imitatie door onvermijdelijke tweeslachtigheid niet van hoog gehalte is.”

¹⁰⁸ *Soerabaijasch handelsblad*, 25 June 1941.

¹⁰⁹ *Soerabaijasch handelsblad*, 11 July 1941.

¹¹⁰ *De Indische courant*, 9 July 1941; *De Indische courant*, 27 August 1941.

After the exhibition in Kediri, I found no sources reporting PERSAGI activities. However, in one of his writings, Sudjojono once mentioned the PERSAGI exhibition held in September 1941 in the context of the Kongres Pendidikan Taman Siswa (Taman Siswa Education Congress) in Batavia.¹¹¹ This exhibition appears to be PERSAGI's last exhibition before Japan occupied Indonesia in March 1942.

After examining various reviews of the PERSAGI exhibition, I observed that the reviewers such as De Loos-Haaxman, Bd., M., and some newspaper editors, as mentioned above, predominantly highlighted Indonesian paintings that were influenced by Western art or displayed Western inspirations. They may have expressed this critical perspective to communicate their disappointment with the chosen direction of the PERSAGI painters instead of exploring the traditional origins of their art. However, they also raised a valid concern: the potential risk of perpetuating Eurocentric narratives by adopting modern Western art by painters from colonized nations. This highlights the need for a thoughtful and balanced approach to artistic influences and narratives.

On the contrary, their perspectives might indicate a colonial bias by undervaluing the skills of PERSAGI painters who achieved proficiency in imitating Western art's visual style and traditions. From this standpoint, critics tend to idealize and romanticize Indonesian classical art by emphasizing its innocence or simplicity of form, such as in its decorative styles. It is crucial to note that the colonial art critics of that era categorized and classified Indonesian classical art in a manner that reflected their cultural biases and prejudices. This approach disregarded the unique artistic expression of the PERSAGI painters, underestimated the breadth and depth of art, and undermined the autonomy and identity of the colonized individuals.

I consider that the reviewers provided valuable information to today's readers about the PERSAGI painters' experience absorbing modern Western painting, mainly influenced by Regnault's collection exhibition in Batavia. I can imagine how the PERSAGI painters faced a significant challenge in

¹¹¹ S. Sudjojono, "Herbert Hoetaloeng (1917-1942)" in *Pandji Poestaka*, 24 Oktober 1942, p. 1033. Other sources worth considering to complete this information are the newspapers *Soerabaijasch handelsblad* (24 September 1941) and *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad* (23 September 1941). Both newspapers included congress events, including an arts evening (*kunstavond*). It was reported that various art associations, one of which was probably PERSAGI, enlivened this event.

reconciling the values of Western and Eastern painting and looked for artistic potentiality that would serve their advantage. Specifically, they attempted to master Western techniques such as color usage, composition, perspective, and brushwork. I guess the tension of cultural identity arose due to the desire to integrate Western techniques while they wanted to maintain traditional Indonesian symbols, motifs, and narratives. This was not just an attempt to balance tradition and innovation but a bold attempt to offer a new perspective on their cultural heritage by blending Western elements into their art, showcasing cultural resilience and adaptability.

Due to the unavailability of collections of paintings by PERSAGI members from that time, including reproductions, it is not feasible to thoroughly examine and interpret their artistic accomplishments. Nevertheless, relying solely on exhibition reviews, we can gain insights into how PERSAGI members skillfully employed Western techniques to reinforce and rejuvenate ancestral narratives, symbols, and traditions, thereby preserving cultural customs in an increasingly uniform global context. The outcomes may be perplexing or incongruous with anticipated results - as explicated by the reviewer in *Soerabaijasch handelsblad*. This critical commentary of the reviewer invited an interpretation that what was presented in the PERSAGI exhibition was perhaps an "aesthetic experiment" from "the results of imitating the West."¹¹²

At times, imitation has served as a means of cultural exchange and growth, leading to the development of new artistic styles. However, it has a reason that a reviewer also raised questions about authenticity, cultural appropriation, and the loss of indigenous artistic traditions. But, with a critical lens, it becomes evident that the outcomes of imitating the West in painting are complex and multifaceted.

The PERSAGI exhibition, mainly supported by the *Bataviaasche Kunstkring* network, provides an opportunity to explore the complex dynamics of power, acquisition, opposition, and fusion in the colonial setting. Therefore, it would be unjust to evaluate PERSAGI's historical role solely based on nationalist sentiment, as many art scholars have done. However, it is undeniable that PERSAGI has shown the ability to adapt to the constantly changing circumstances brought about by colonial influence. I argue that its members have offered a unique perspective, expanded cultural horizons, and nurtured a more diverse and comprehensive art community within the

¹¹² See footnote 107.

colonial art scene from its founding in 1938 until its dissolution in 1942.

PERSAGI and Sudjojono

The relationship between Sudjojono and PERSAGI needs to be explained proportionally. The two are frequently viewed as inseparable, or, as Baharudin Marasutan stated, "Sudjojono is synonymous with PERSAGI."¹¹³ Several authors often conflate Sudjojono with the ideology of the association. Sudarmadji, for instance, referred to Sudjojono's ideas when discussing PERSAGI's profile and constructing arguments regarding the association's role in art history.¹¹⁴ Moreover, some art writers assumed Sudjojono was the "spokesman for PERSAGI."¹¹⁵ Sanento Yuliman argues further that Sudjojono's well-known 1939 publication, "Kesenian Meloekis Indonesia: Sekarang dan Jang Akan Datang" (Indonesian Art Painting: Now and Then), is the "PERSAGI Manifesto." Yuliman wrote the following:

The article *Kesenian Meloekis Indonesia: Sekarang dan Jang Akan Datang* published in the periodical 'Keboedajaan dan Masjarakat' in 1939 (republished with the title slightly changed, as the first article in *Seni Loekis, Kesenian, dan Seniman* 1946) took the form of a passionate manifesto. At first, the essay described in a mocking tone the art of painting, which was practiced at that time and which, in his opinion, only served the needs of foreigners. Then, a new generation of painters was announced with joy and enthusiasm. What is meant is the young painters who gathered in PERSAGI, an association formed in early 1938. Then, their ideals and goals are described. The essay ends with a passionate appeal to 'Indonesian painters.' Even though it is not stated explicitly, this is the 'PERSAGI Manifesto.'¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Baharudin Marasutan's statement when responding to Sudjojono's lecture at the Jakarta Arts Council 1977.

¹¹⁴ See Sudarmadji, 1974-1975, pp. 21 - 25.

¹¹⁵ See Jim Supangkat, *Sudjojono Sang Perintis*, Tempo, 10 Januari 2000 and Spanjaard, 1998, 92. See also Suwarno Wisetrotomo in Amir Sidharta (ed.), 1997-1998, p. 59.

¹¹⁶ Sanento Yuliman "Estetika Jiwa Besar" in *Kompas*, 25 Maret 1987. "Artikel 'Kesenian Meloekis Indonesia: Sekarang dan Jang Akan Datang', disiarkan dalam berkala 'Keboedajaan dan Masjarakat' pada tahun 1939 (dimuat kembali dengan judul diubah sedikit, sebagai karangan pertama dalam Seni Loekis, Kesenian, dan Seniman 1946) berbentuk sebuah manifesto yang bersemangat. Mula-mula dalam karangan itu digambarkan dengan nada mengejek seni lukis yang dipraktikkan masa itu dan yang

Regarding Yuliman's opinion, Helena Spanjaard tends to believe that Sudjojono's article was a PERSAGI manifesto.¹¹⁷

This needs to be explained. PERSAGI never printed pamphlets that were announced or distributed as a group manifesto. No recorded documents explain the political motives of art, which reveal their motivations, strategic plans, and ideal artistic views, which are then deliberately aimed to achieve specific revolutionary effects. As discussed previously, PERSAGI was formed with all modesty. The following brief review offers another argument for why Sudjojono and PERSAGI should be examined separately or differentiated.

The progressive thoughts regarding the new art of Indonesian painting, which appeared in the late 1930s to early 1940s, came entirely from S. Sudjojono personally, not on behalf of PERSAGI. In an interview in 1949, Sudjojono once stated, "I, Surono, Sudibio, Agus Djaya, and other friends worked in the Dutch colonial times. I coincidentally wanted to write, but my friends didn't want to."¹¹⁸

In another interview in the 1980s, Sudjojono re-emphasized: "I like writing. If someone says that Persagi has an idea, that is not true. The writings are my ideas. I wrote it. There was never an instruction from the leader of Persagi: 'Hey, Sudjojono you must write!', No. I write because of my intention because of my awareness."¹¹⁹

It is essential to underline the point that Sudjojono emphasized there, that the ideas for his writing did not come from "PERSAGI as orders from its leader" - which in this case was Agus Djaya. Thus, it is clear that Sudjojono wants to differentiate his role from "PERSAGI and Agus Djaya." At this point, I want to correlate the context of Sudjojono's statement with

menurut pikirannya, hanya memenuhi kebutuhan orang asing. Lalu dengan suka-cita dan bersemangat dinyatakan munculnya pelukis-pelukis angkatan baru. Yang dimaksud tentunya ialah para pelukis muda yang berhimpun dalam PERSAGI, perkumpulan yang terbentuk pada awal 1938. Kemudian diuraikan cita-cita dan tujuan mereka. Karangan itu diakhiri dengan seruan berapi-api kepada 'pelukis-pelukis Indonesia'. Meskipun tidak dinyatakan secara tersurat, inilah agaknya 'Manifesto PERSAGI'."

¹¹⁷ See Spanjaard, 1998, p. 91.

¹¹⁸ See Huyung "Informatie dalam Seni Lukis" in *Brochure Kesenian*, Kementerian Penerangan Republik Indonesia, 1949, p. 18. "Pada zaman Belanda, saya, Surono, Sudibio, Agus Djaya, dan kawan-kawan lainnya bekerja. Saya kebetulan mau menulis, tapi kawan-kawan tidak mau."

¹¹⁹ Mustika, *Percakapan Dari Hati Ke Hati Pelukis Indonesia*, (Jakarta: Penerbit Sanggar Krida, 1983), p. 155. "Saya suka dan bisa menulis dan tersebar di zaman Belanda. Kalau ada orang bilang bahwa PERSAGI yang punya ide, itu tidak benar demikian. Tulisan-tulisan itu adalah ide saya sendiri. Saya yang menulis. Tidak pernah ada instruksi dari pimpinan: 'Hei, Sudjojono harus menulis!', tidak. Saya menulis karena niat saya sendiri, karena kesadaran sendiri."

an article by journalist Sides Sudyarto in 1976 that contained Agus Djaya's snide comments regarding awarding the Indonesian Government Arts Award (Anugerah Seni Pemerintah Indonesia)¹²⁰ to Sudjojono. By reading this article, I concluded that a hidden rivalry had occurred between these two PERSAGI figures. This feud also clarifies the meaning of Sudjojono's statement above.

In his article, Sudyarto raises the issue of versions of PERSAGI's leadership in art history writing. In the first version, it was believed that the chairman of PERSAGI was Sudjojono; in the other version, it was Agus Djaya. Sudyarto then speculated that the government might give Sudjojono an arts award based on the first version. However, Sudyarto's arrangements regarding PERSAGI's leadership need to be questioned. Almost no reference mentions Sudjojono as chairman of PERSAGI – except, perhaps, only unjustified rumors. Instead, in the historiography of modern Indonesian art, Agus Djaya's name is always listed as chairman of PERSAGI.

What is clear is that these different versions provoked Agus Djaya's emotions, especially when Sudyarto asked for a response regarding the honor given to Sudjojono. Agus Djaya strongly opposed it, accusing the honor of being an ahistorical act. To Sudyarto, Agus Djaya even admitted that he had sent a letter of protest to Syarif Thayeb, the Minister of Education and Culture of Indonesia, "so that the award was reviewed." For Agus Djaya, the criteria behind the award were unreasonable – if not, it could be stated, "history has been distorted." Because he declared, "Sudjojono is my secretary. The chairman of PERSAGI is myself."¹²¹ In other words, the distinction should be given to Agus Djaya, the former chairman of PERSAGI.

Nonetheless, history says otherwise. Even though he was once chairman of a prestigious association in art history, seen from various angles, Agus Djaya's prestige is not as bright as Sudjojono's as an artist or prolific art critic. For example, Sudjojono's article "Kesenian Meloekis Indonesia: Sekarang dan Jang Akan Datang" in 1939 has become a fundamental reference because it contains Sudjojono's famous criticism of Mooi Indië's paintings. Apart from this writing, while still active at PERSAGI, Sudjojono also produced other groundbreaking essays such as "Basoeki Abdullah dan

¹²⁰ Sudjojono was awarded by the Government in 1970.

¹²¹ Sides Sudyarto, "Ada Pembengkokkan Sejarah PERSAGI: Pembicaraan Kecil dengan Pelukis Agus Djaya" in *Kompas*, 20 April 1976.

Kesenian Meloekis” (Basoeki Abdullah and the Art of Painting),¹²² “Menoedjoe Ke Tjorak Seni Loekis Persatoean Indonesia Baroe” (Towards a New Indonesian Unity Style of Painting),¹²³ and “Seorang Seniman Dengan Sendirinya Haroes Seorang Nasionalis” (An Artist Must Naturally Be a Nationalist).¹²⁴

Sudjojono wrote all his articles not on behalf of PERSAGI, so not on the orders of Agus Djaya. Sudjojono was also not a "spokesperson for PERSAGI," as many art historians writers believe, who would only place him as a subordinate of the chairman or association. The roles of Sudjojono and PERSAGI have to be separated - even though his articles later respired a spirit of nationalism into the association.

Conclusion

This chapter has illuminated how PERSAGI, often framed within the context of nationalism, has unique contributions that have been overlooked. The intricate subtleties, multifaceted interpretations, and interconnections about PERSAGI, crucial to understanding this group's historical context, have been disregarded. The nationalist framework, while it can romanticize and perpetuate preconceived notions, has led to a limited comprehension of PERSAGI. For instance, the canon narrative fails to recognize the significant contributions made by artists and other institutions. In summary, the historiography of PERSAGI has been marred by inaccuracy, prejudice, and excessive glorification.

This chapter has refuted the assertions made by specific individuals who characterized PERSAGI as an adversary of colonial painting or as a collective that purportedly achieved the feat of subverting the dominance of Dutch painters and the discriminatory practices of the *Bataviaasche Kunstkring*. Such views certainly lack a strong foundation. In addition, it is worth noting that several artists affiliated with the PERSAGI movement actively participated in a fundraising exhibition aimed at bolstering the defense capabilities of the Dutch East Indies in anticipation of the imminent

¹²² SS.101., “Basoeki Abdullah dan Kesenian Meloekis” in *Majalah Keboedajaan dan Masjarakat*, No.1. Th.II, Mei 1940, pp. 10-13.

¹²³ SS.101., “Menoedjoe Ke Tjorak Seni Loekis Persatoean Indonesia Baroe” in *Majalah Keboedajaan dan Masjarakat*, No.5. Th.II, September 1940, pp.103-106.

¹²⁴ SS.101., “Seorang Seniman Dengan Sendirinya Haroes Seorang Nasionalis” in *Majalah Keboedajaan dan Masjarakat*, No.8. Th.II, 10 Desember 1940, pp. 182-184.

Japanese invasion. In addition to this particular exhibition, several PERSAGI painters also availed themselves of the opportunity to engage in the exhibition programs organized by the Bataviaasche Kunstkring, among others. It is imperative to emphasize that Sudjojono's artistic trajectory experienced significant advancement through his participation in one of the programs organized by the *Bataviaasche Kunstkring: De Indische Bonds Collectie*.

Sudjojono's success in the aforementioned exhibition was a catalyst for his self-assurance, leading to the establishment of PERSAGI. While Sudjojono's role and contributions to the spirit of PERSAGI are significant, it is important to note that, as previously mentioned, Sudjojono and PERSAGI are not interchangeable entities. Sudjojono's thoughts on modern Indonesian painting were his own, not presented under the auspices of PERSAGI.

This chapter has critically examined the myth surrounding the Bataviaasche Kunstkring's alleged rejection of the PERSAGI exhibition proposal. The prevailing narrative in traditional art historiography suggests that this rejection manifested Dutch discriminatory practices towards Indonesian painters. However, this narrative should be evaluated in light of the piece's artistic merit, considering Kunstkring's discernment process facilitated by a panel of selectors. From this perspective, rejecting fine art is not uncommon in contemporary galleries, museums, and art establishments, challenging the notion of discrimination.

Ultimately, the canonization of PERSAGI in historiography has bestowed upon it a heroic status, often overshadowing alternative viewpoints. This canonization, however, poses the risk of distorting art history writing, promoting exclusion, and preserving biased narratives. Such practices hinder the analysis of the cross-pollination of ideas and the inclusiveness of national art history, calling for a more balanced and comprehensive approach.

Chapter Five

On the Japanese Occupation Period

Between March 1942 and August 1945, the influence of "short, yellow-skinned people from the North"¹ on Indonesian artistic practice was substantial. Nevertheless, Indonesian modern art historiography contains scarcely any information on this particular topic. Many historians downplay the importance of this period by claiming that the Japanese offered "resources for artists' studios and opportunities to exhibit their work" as a conventional narrative. It is important to note that this narrative, undoubtedly accurate, was based on testimonies of those who wrote about experiences from that time. Painter Basuki Abdullah, for instance, excitedly wrote his praises of Japan. He made a comparison:

In this new era, art has received a much higher appreciation compared to the previous period. In relation to that, now there are not only many artworks on display, but also articles written about art, among them about painting. This is due to the attention and appreciation of the Government to art in general, and specifically to painting. Of course, this excellent treatment from the Government is appreciated by us – the artists – with the highest gratitude.²

In his 1943 essay, Agus Djaya expressed similar admiration. Like Abdullah, Djaya made a parallel between the Dutch colonial period and the

¹ The phrase "short, yellow-skinned people from the North" refers to the Japanese from a prophecy by Jayabaya. This prophecy, which counts Soekarno as a firm believer, says that the short people are the ones who would liberate Java. See Peter Kasenda, *Bung Karno Panglima Revolusi*, (Yogyakarta: Galang Pustaka, 2014), p. 223.

² Basuki Abdullah "Sepatah Kata untuk Pelukis-pelukis Kita" in *Asia Raya*, 29 April 1943, p.2. "Dalam zaman baru ini kesenian mendapat penghargaan yang meningkat jauh lebih tinggi dari pada zaman yang sudah lampau. Berhubungan dengan itu, bukan saja banyak dipertunjukkan pelbagai kesenian, melainkan banyak pula ditulis orang karangan-karangan tentang seni, di antara tentang seni lukis. Semua itu berkat perhatian ,dan penghargaan dari pihak Pemerintah kepada seni umumnya dan seni lukis khususnya. Sudah barang tentu sikap Pemerintah sebaik itu kami – kaum seniman – junjung tinggi dengan penuh rasa terimakasih."

Japanese occupation. He held the belief that the former did not afford Indonesians the opportunity to foster and develop their art and culture. In contrast, the current Japanese era has provided ample opportunities for advancing art and culture, specifically by supporting artists in shaping the unique identity of Indonesian painting.

Painter Suromo depicted the same indication. Although the Japanese were adept at manipulating Indonesian art, the effect of these policies on the development of a cultural infrastructure for art was significant. He acknowledged:

The era was more beneficial than detrimental for Indonesian painting, particularly when compared to the era of Dutch rule. The Japanese employed art as a means to accomplish their objectives. Significant urban areas were equipped with "Cultural Centres." These centers catered to diverse artistic interests. They offered both studios and models, which were used as subjects for painting. They arranged exhibition venues or transported artists to major cities on significant Japanese occasions. Additionally, there were prospects for hosting individual or collective showcases featuring artists from Indonesia, China, or Japan.³

Suromo's acknowledgment of the positive influence of Japanese occupation aligns with M. Balfas, who similarly evaluated the merits of the Japanese era compared to the preceding period. He recorded his viewpoint:

Merely with the arrival of Japanese soldiers, painters acquired opportunities and accolades. The Japanese consolidated all Indonesian artists into a single Culture Center with malicious intentions. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that this has become a blessing for Indonesian painting. Sudjojono has fully

³ Suromo, "Timbul dan Tumbuhnya Seni Lukis Indonesia (II)" in *Mimbar Indonesia*, 16 Juli 1949, p.19. "Zaman itu buat seni lukis Indonesia lebih menguntungkan dari merugikan. Apalagi kalau dibandingkan dengan jaman Belanda. Jepang mempergunakan kesenian sebagai alat untuk melaksanakan cita-citanya. Di kota-kota yang penting-penting didirikan badan "Pusat Kebudayaan". Badan ini melayani segala kepentingan kesenian. Diadakan sanggar (studio) model (obyek untuk digambar). Diusahakan eksposisi set tempat-tempat atau dikelilingkan ke kota-kota besar, yaitu pada hari besar resmi Jepang. Juga diadakan kesempatan untuk bereksposisi perseorangan atau gabungan (kolektif) dari golongan Indonesia, Tionghoa atau Jepang."

capitalized on the opportunities offered by the Japanese Government. He has been granted a studio where he can freely instruct his students and maintain his autonomy. The provision of material support from Japan has yielded positive outcomes. Obscure artists now frequently showcase their work in exhibitions. Consequently, the public is exposed to new concepts in painting.⁴

S. Sujojono respected the Japanese commitment to appreciating Indonesian painters for meeting the needs of artists despite being used for propaganda and strict censorship.⁵ He confessed:

Fortunately, the Japanese painters who arrived here as military and as advisors on painting were not the "Mooi Indië" types but were painters who understood the beauty of bamboo pillars, chicken coops, or factory chimneys and dock workers. Their character has proven to help the aspirations of our nation many times over. They know that artists must have the freedom to reject something they feel conflicts with their artistic sense, from those painter meetings at POETERA or *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho*. Or board meetings in preparation for an exposition, if, for example, I rejected an idea, they often accommodated or at the least stood neutral.⁶

⁴ M. Balfas, "Seni Lukis Indonesia Baru" in *Indonesia* No.4, TH.II April 1951, p. 5. "Baru dengan masuknya tentara Jepang pelukis-pelukis itu mendapat kesempatan dan penghargaan. Dengan maksud kurang baik Jepang telah menggabungkan seluruh seniman Indonesia dalam satu badan Pusat Kebudayaan. Tetapi walaupun demikian, tidak dapat disangkal bahwa ia telah mendatangkan kebaikan bagi seni lukis Indonesia. Kesempatan yang diberikan oleh Pemerintah Jepang telah digunakan sebanyak-banyaknya oleh Sudjojono yang mendapat atelier (studio), di mana ia dengan leluasa dapat mendidik muridnya telah berhasil menjaga kemerdekaan. Bantuan material Jepang telah membawa kebaikan. Pelukis-pelukis yang tadinya tidak dikenal masyarakat sekarang sering mengadakan steleng (pameran). Dengan begini orang mulai berkenalan dengan barang-barang yang baru dalam seni lukis. Berbagai-bagai aliran baru tampak dalam steleng: Naturalisme, Impresionisme, Ekspresionisme."

⁵ See Dr. Huyung's interview with S. Sudjojono in *Brochure Kesenian*, (Jakarta: Kementerian Penerangan Indonesia, 1949), p. 20.

⁶ S. Sudjojono, "Pengalaman Saya Pada zaman Jepang dan Di Zaman Revolusi" in *Budaja Djaja*, No.79, Thn.VII, December 1974, p. 717." Pelukis-pelukis Jepang yang datang kemari sebagai militer dan sebagai penasihat dalam bidang seni lukis, untung bukan sejenis pelukis-pelukis "Mooi Indie", akan tetapi pelukis yang mengerti keindahan tiang bambu, kurungan burung atau keindahan corong pabrik dan pekerja galangan kapal. Watak mereka terbukti berkali-kali juga watak yang membantu aspirasi bangsa kita. Mereka tahu sebagai seniman, bahwa tiap seniman harus punya kebebasan untuk menolak sesuatu yang dia tidak cocok dan bertentangan dengan rasa artistiknya. Dari itu, dalam rapat-

The testimonials provided by individuals who experienced the Japanese occupation underscore Japan's influence on the development of modern Indonesian art. However, the absence of detailed information on exhibition opportunities and studio facilities during this period presents a significant gap in our understanding. In modern Indonesian art history publications, the treatment of the Japanese occupation period is relatively brief. The official book *Sejarah Seni Rupa Indonesia* (History of Indonesian Art) from 1979 does not even mention the effects of the Japanese occupation period, which is a notable omission. This lack of coverage in such an authoritative art history book raises serious concerns, given that the book is intended to be a leading publication for art education in Indonesia nationally.

Jim Supangkat, too, limited his analysis of art activities during the Japanese occupation. In his book *Indonesian Modern Art and Beyond* (1997), he wrote concisely:

In 1943, *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho* (Pusat Kebudayaan - Cultural Center) with its facilities for artistic activities, was established. The painters of Indonesia used the institutions to train new, young talent, while introducing Indonesian paintings to public at large. Painting, which was undergoing changes (with the mergence of Indonesian modernism) immediately, experienced a new type of observation based on a totally different point of view.⁷

I found a similar paragraph by Sanento Yuliman, who had written decades before Supangkat. Yuliman stated:

The Japanese military government, in its efforts to "awaken Eastern culture" to "advance the Greater East Asian nation," deemed it necessary to mobilize humanists and artists to "achieve the final victory in war." So, in 1945, the *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho* (Cultural Center) was founded, providing facilities for artistic activities. Indonesian painters took advantage of this

rapat pelukis atau di Poetera atau di *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho*. Atau rapat-rapat juri dalam suatu persiapan eksposisi, kalau saya umpamanya menolak suatu ide, maka mereka tidak jarang mencocokinya atau paling sedikit netral."

⁷ Jim Supangkat, *Indonesia Modern Art and Beyond*, (Jakarta: Yayasan Seni Rupa Indonesia, 1997), p.44.

opportunity to train themselves and train young talents, as well as to introduce a new art of painting to the broader community.⁸

Given the scarcity of narratives documenting artists' activities during the occupation, I deem it imperative to promptly compose and impartially evaluate the dynamics of art during that timeframe. Research on this occupation era is typically examined from multiple angles, such as the youth movement and nationalism, focusing on establishing militias and armies or individuals affected by war violence. Historian William H. Frederick was aware of this deficiency. According to him, scholars have little interest in cultural issues such as media, film, language, literature, music, fine art, and intellectual life. Beyond that, in international publications, this study of art and culture has yet to involve many perspectives and contributions from Indonesian historians.⁹

This chapter presents a narrative that reinforces the argument for the significance of the occupation period to artists and its broader impact on the Indonesian art scene. This chapter will focus on Java as a significant hub due to the establishment of *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho* and POETERA based on the island. The artistic dynamics are also present in Bali, Kalimantan, and Sulawesi.

However, I will limit the investigation solely to Java for the following reasons. The Dutch East Indies, which the Japanese occupied, was divided into three regions: Java and Madura were under the control of the 16th Army Division, Sumatra was under the control of the 25th Army Division, and Celebes (Sulawesi), Borneo (Kalimantan), and West Papua were under the control of the Japanese Navy.¹⁰ The significance of this context lies in its connection to the details regarding the different deployments of Japanese military personnel stationed in Java.

Hitoshi Imamura (Fig.5.1) played a pivotal role in commanding the 16th Army Division and establishing Jakarta as the military headquarters of

⁸ Sanento Yuliman, *Seni Lukis Indonesia Baru: Sebuah Pengantar*, (Jakarta: Dewan Kesenian Jakarta, 1976), p. 11. The year 1945, used as the establishment of *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho* in the quote, is inaccurate.

⁹ See William H. Frederick, "Occupation Culture: Introduction" in Peter Post, et.al., *The Encyclopedia of Indonesia in the Pacific War*, (Leiden: Brill, 2010), p.348.

¹⁰ See Marwati Djoened Poesponegoro dan Nugroho Notosusanto, *Sejarah Nasional Indonesia VI – Zaman Jepang dan Zaman Republik Indonesia*, (Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 2007), p. 14. See also Harry J. Benda, et.al., 1965.

Japan. He played a crucial role in the Kalijati agreement, during which the Dutch East Indies government formally relinquished control of the region to Japanese forces. In addition, a contingent of Japanese intellectuals and artists, known as the "propaganda unit" (*Sendenhan*), arrived on Java under the command of a Lieutenant General for a specific mission. As I will explain below, the significance and impact of individuals within this propaganda unit became evident as they collaborated with Indonesian intellectuals and artists to mold the cultural framework.



FIGURE 5.1. Hitoshi Imamura

(Source: <https://www.history.navy.mil/our-collections/photography/numerical-list-of-images/nhmc-series/nh-series/NH-63000/NH-63353.html>)

This chapter comprises two sub-chapters. The initial section, *Narrating the Early Occupation*, offers a comprehensive account of events between March and December 1942. This particular aspect of Indonesian art history has received minimal attention thus far. When examining this period, art historians primarily present a brief account by highlighting the disintegration of PERSAGI. Here, I disclose numerous notable occurrences during this period that must not be disregarded. The second sub-chapter, *The Propaganda Machines*, elucidates the operations of propaganda mechanisms such as the *Three A Movement*, *Sendenbu*, POETERA, and *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho*, in which Indonesian artists have actively participated.

Narrating the Early Occupation

The opening narrative of the early Japanese occupation, which always focuses on the dissolution of PERSAGI, shows a nationalistic art historical perspective that pays less attention to other important events, as will be briefly explained below.

Scholar Tod Jones discovered that the Japanese compelled the PERSAGI to dissolve.¹¹ Nevertheless, Jones failed to provide details regarding the circumstances that prompted Japan to enforce the disbandment. To comprehend the disbandment of PERSAGI, Jones relied on the writings of Kusnadi and Sudarmadji.¹² However, additional context is required to grasp the situation in its entirety.

Like Jones, Burhan could not ascertain the underlying reason for the disbandment. Burhan found himself in the same predicament as Jones, Kusnadi, and Sudarmadji. However, in contrast to Jones, Burhan did not mention Kusnadi or Sudarmadji. Instead, he constructed his argument relying on "the annotations of S. Sudjojono." Although the term "annotations" gave a genuine impression, Burhan could not discover the underlying cause.¹³ Burhan and Jones are the authors of the latest scholarly works on Indonesian art that emerged during the Japanese occupation. Regrettably, the authors of contemporary Indonesian art history failed to adequately consider the closely associated contexts surrounding the dissolution of PERSAGI.

In the context of their holy war, Japan intended to free Asian nations from Western colonialism to build the Greater East Asia Empire.¹⁴ Japan often spread the propaganda that this empire would create an international order of mutual prosperity: "the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere" (*Dai Tōa Kyōeiken*). Therefore, Japan mobilized and controlled to safeguard

¹¹ Tod Jones, *Kebudayaan dan Kekuasaan di Indonesia: Kebijakan Budaya Selama Abad ke-20 Hingga Era Reformasi*, (Jakarta: Yayasan Obor Indonesia dan KITLV-Jakarta, 2013), p. 74.

¹² See Kusnadi, "The Era of the Japanese Occupation and Early Republic" in Mochtar Kusumaatmadja (ed.), *Streams of Indonesian Art: From Pre-Historic to Contemporary*, (Jakarta: Panitia KIAS, 1990-1991), p. 83; See Sudarmadji, "Persagi" in Mochtar Kusumatmadja (ed.), 1990-1991, p. 78.

¹³ See M. Agus Burhan, 2013, p. 15. Several other art historians, including Sanento Yuliman (1976), Helena Spanjaard (1998), Claire Holt (1967), and Jim Supangkat (1997), made no mention of PERSAGI's disbandment.

¹⁴ The design of the Japanese propaganda program in Java was finalized by the second leader of *Sendenbu*, Mayor Adachi (October 1943-March 1945). In 1942, other than *Gerakan Tiga A*, propaganda emphasized the significance of the Greater East Asia war and prosperity in Asia. For further reading, see Aiko Kurasawa, *Propaganda Media under The Japanese 1942-1945*, in *Indonesia*, No.44 (October 1987), Southeast Asia Program Publications-Cornell University, p. 60 and p. 92.

social and political stability and establish its supremacy in occupied areas. Aiko Kurasawa opined that during the early months of the occupation, Japan paid extreme attention to any effort that could "grasp people's minds" (*minshin ha'aku*) and "indoctrinate and tame them" (*senbu kôsaku*).¹⁵ The implementation of this objective involved the issuance of multiple mandates and regulations as strategic measures. Consequently, the Japanese discredited all aspects of the colonial Dutch legacy and effectively reset the foundations of public life to a state of complete transformation, resulting in the emergence of a new Indonesia.

Among the Japanese mandates and regulations, I argue that Regulation (*Osamu Seirei*) No.2 on *Keamanan Masyarakat* (Public Safety) is critical to examine because it provides context for the "disbandment of PERSAGI." One of the clauses of this regulation, which had been in effect since the end of March 1942, forbade the public from engaging in activities such as uniting, gathering, spreading propaganda for the enemy, and displaying papers with pictures or words (Fig.5.2).¹⁶

Thus, the Japanese did not explicitly or directly dissolve PERSAGI, as historians have documented to emphasize it as a manifestation of PERSAGI's heroism. The disbandment encompassed PERSAGI as well as any associations, institutions, or organizations established during the era of Dutch colonial rule. Regulation No.2 imposed restrictions on individuals' actions, leading to unease among intellectuals and artists.

The Japanese, who seemed aware of the inefficiency, subsequently evaluated the consequences of the counterproductive regulation. Consequently, the rule was revoked after four months and substituted with Regulation No. 23, which restored non-political activities such as the arts, education, and science. Consequently, there was a gradual resumption of public social and cultural activities.¹⁷

Soetardji, a former member of the *Volksraad* (People's Council) during the Dutch colonial era, regarded the change in regulation as favorable. Regrettably, the conventional historiography fails to mention his actions

¹⁵ Aiko Kurasawa, *Mobilisasi dan Kontrol: Studi Perubahan Sosial di Pedesaan Jawa 1942-1945*, (Jakarta: Grasindo, 1993), p.229.

¹⁶ For further reading, see Oendang-Oendang No. 2 *Tentang Keamanan Masyarakat* (Pasal 2) in Ali Sostroamidjojo and Prajogo, *Oendang-Oendang Balatentara Dai Nippon*, (Surabaya: Penerbit D. Arnowo, 1942), p. 7. See also Gunseikanbu, *Boekoe Pengoempoelan Oendang-oendang*, (Jakarta: Balai Poestaka, 1944), p. 6.

¹⁷ *Oendang-Oendang No. 23 Tentang Mentjaboet Sebagian Larangan Bersidang dan Berkoempoel* in Ali Sostroamidjojo dan Prajogo, 1942, p. 118.

during that period. In addition, Soetardjo orchestrated the establishment of *Poesat Badan Keboedajaan Indonesia* (The Indonesian Culture Institute). The primary objective of this institution was to consolidate all cultural associations, foster the growth of Indonesian culture as homage to the formation of a new Indonesia, and, foremost, assimilate Indonesian culture with Eastern culture at large, with a particular emphasis on Japanese culture. This cultural institute also prioritized advancing various elements of Indonesian culture, such as literature, architecture, dance, music, painting, and more. In addition, this institute proactively cultivated cultural infrastructures such as museums and libraries.¹⁸

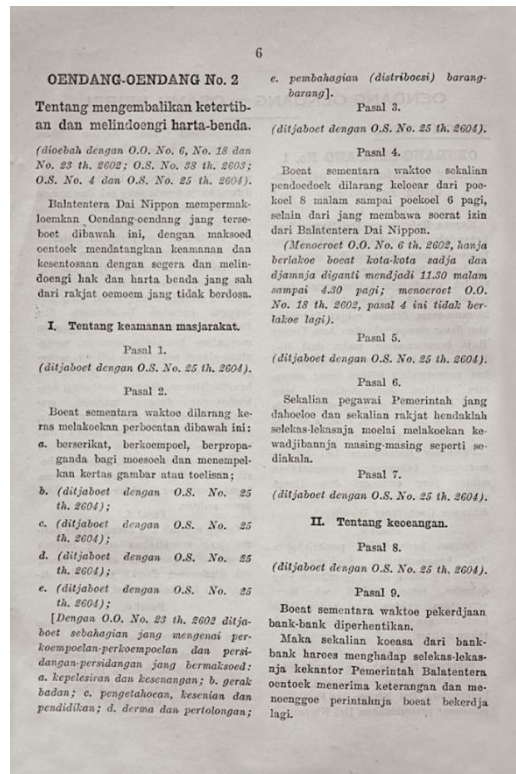


FIGURE 5.2. Regulation (*Osamu Seirei*) No.2 – *Tentang Keamanan Masyarakat* (On Public Safety) - Gunseikanbu, *Boekoe Pengoempoelan Oendang-oendang*, 1944.

Collection of Leiden University Library
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

Despite the authoritarian character of their mandates and regulations, the Japanese propagandists (*Sendenhan*) in the field were free to interact with the intellectuals and artists. The earliest interactions occurred in late March

¹⁸ See *Sinar Matahari*, 27 July 1942. Further information about the founding, membership, or activities of *Poesat Badan Keboedajaan* is difficult to trace.

1942 in Jakarta by invitation.¹⁹ During the meeting, the Japanese expressed their explicit desire to engage Indonesian intellectuals and artists in a propaganda entity, subsequently established as *Sendenbu* (propaganda department). As a precondition, the Japanese set a standard that relied on an individual's occupation during colonization, political beliefs, and position within traditional societal hierarchies. As they were to be involved in propaganda, Japan targeted those who were charismatic and agitative and had public speaking skills. Individuals who held positions as educators and harbored a negative attitude towards the Dutch were given preferential treatment in their selection as members of *Sendenbu*.²⁰

At this point, I have discovered an alternative rendition of the March gathering. To engage in a discussion, it is necessary to acknowledge the significance of two primary sources: the memoirs by Mia Bustam in 2006 and the scholarly research conducted by Imam Boechori Zainuddin in 1966. Although the meeting is not well documented in art history, both sources offer enough information to piece together the story of the early occupation.

Mia Bustam's memoirs highlight the significant contribution of her father, Raden Sasmojo, a staff member at the *Bataviaasche Kunstkring*. On an unspecified day, Bustam observed that the building, previously abandoned by the Dutch, was visited by multiple Japanese individuals. Bustam stated that they intended to utilize the rooms of the building to deliberate on the roles and responsibilities of Indonesian artists. The Japanese tasked Raden Sasmojo with creating an invitation for the artists and organizing a banquet. In addition to Sudjojono, Bustam did not provide details about the other attendees or the subjects discussed during the meeting.²¹ However, Sudjojono's presence suggests the potential attendance of other artists, particularly those previously affiliated with PERSAGI.

While not explicitly mentioning one another, Bustam's testimony and Zainuddin's research align, as Zainuddin acquired first-hand information about the meeting from S. Sudjojono, Mia Bustam's husband. Although Zainuddin did not specify the location, he asserts that the meeting with the artists occurred in April 1942, which he presumed to be the inaugural

¹⁹ *Pandji Poestaka*, 11 April 1942. There was no further mention of who attended that meeting.

²⁰ Aiko Kurasawa, 1993, pp. 233-234.

²¹ See Mia Bustam, *Sudjojono dan Aku*, (Jakarta: Institut Studi Arus Informasi, 2013), pp. 2-3. From all art historians who wrote about the situation during early occupation, only Agus Burhan referred to this memoir. See M. Agus Burhan, 2013, p. 15.

encounter between Japanese and Indonesian artists.²² He believes that this indoctrination session marked the initial stage of the Japanese's desire to exert control over artists. Despite being aware of this covert motive, the artists remained eager to embrace this invitation to collaborate. In addition to recognizing the necessity of this collaboration for advancing art, the artists also empathized with the Japanese approach, which effectively assigned artists based on their societal role.²³

The intellectuals and artists developed a distinct camaraderie during their occupation's initial phase, leading them to collaborate with the Japanese. This attitude was also replicated in the political sphere. Soekarno and Hatta, the nationalist leaders, believed that adopting a cooperative approach would foster unity in pursuing independence. Consequently, they solemnly committed to assisting in implementing the occupying regime's initiatives. These were therefore the occurrences in the art scene starting from March 1942. After this juncture, I encountered no additional noteworthy occurrences until September 1942, when Indonesian artists achieved the feat of organizing their inaugural exhibition amidst the occupation that month. Another comprehensive exhibition took place before the conclusion of 1942.²⁴ The two exhibitions consisted of the September 19th exhibition, held at the night market (the *Rakoetentji Exhibition*), and another exhibition I refer to as the *December 8th Exhibition*.

When interpreting the significance of these exhibitions, Zainuddin and Helena Spanjaard were the only historiographers who saw them through the prism of nationalism. Zainuddin, for example, asserted that the *Rakoetentji Exhibition* served as a "subtle act of defiance" by Indonesian artists, pre-empting the Japanese scheme to exert control over them. The exhibition was intended to pre-empt Japan's wishes, and it was also planned to organize a propaganda exhibition on the theme of "Victory in the Greater East Asia War," which would be held in December 1942.²⁵ Meanwhile, Spanjaard asserted that the *Rakoetentji Exhibition* embodied the artists' sense of nationalism. She also believes that Indonesian artists demonstrated a rebellious attitude despite the efforts of the Japanese to organize the *December*

²² See Imam Boechori Zainuddin, *Latar Belakang, Sedjarah dan Pembinaan Seni Lukis Indonesia Modern (1935-1950)*, Skripsi S1, Departemen Perencanaan dan Seni Rupa, Institut Teknologi Bandung, 1966, p. 34.

²³ Imam Boechori Zainuddin, 1966, p. 35.

²⁴ Except in July, the founding of *Poesat Badan Keboedajaan Indonesia*.

²⁵ Imam Boechori Zainuddin, 1966, p. 36. I think that the "Winning the Greater East Asia War" exhibition and the "December 8th Exhibition" are one and the same.

8th Exhibition. However, as I will elaborate below, neither Zainuddin nor Spanjaard used many sources to develop their interpretations of both exhibitions.

Thanks to the endorsement of nationalist leaders such as Soekarno, the *Rakoetentji Exhibition* achieved success in terms of attendance. Sudjojono, in his article published in *Pandji Poestaka*, paints a vibrant picture of the audience who attended the exhibition on a nightly basis, clearly showing their enthusiasm. Sudjojono also firmly believed that the Japanese saw the crowd, and they were deeply impressed by the intense eagerness exhibited by the public, a testament to the electric atmosphere of the exhibition.²⁶

However, not everyone was satisfied with the exhibition. Before Sudjojono, an article by someone with the initials "St" appeared in the same magazine, criticizing the exhibition. In contrast to Sudjojono's intense nationalism, "St." urged the readers to perceive the exhibition as it was and to focus their criticism on its formal elements and the themes depicted in the paintings. One of his complaints was about the exhibition's venue, which was situated at a night market. He believed that the loud atmosphere of a night market, the cramped exhibition areas, and the inadequate lighting fell short of exhibition standards and hindered the audience's ability to appreciate the paintings fully. "St." also expressed disapproval of the artistic accomplishments of paintings by Mochtar Apin, Soedarso, Soedibio, Abdoel Moeis, Akom, Soetardi, Basar, Sri Retno Poernomo, and S. Yosso, pointing out various deficiencies inherent in their painting techniques. "St." suggested that Agus Djaya and Emiria Sunassa should explore originality in their paintings.²⁷

In the same magazine, Airani, also known as Laurens Koster Bohang, also stated that Indonesian painters had not yet effectively captured the essence of the Indonesian spirit. However, he praised the exhibition's success in re-establishing a connection between painters and their society.²⁸

The Japanese closely scrutinized the potential of Indonesian painters and perceived it as a chance to propagate their political interest. However, the Japanese knew that an art exhibition had limited reach among the public in Jakarta. To honour the significance of 7 December 1941, when the

²⁶ See S. Sudjojono, "In Memoriam Herbert Hoetagoeng - 1917-1942" in *Pandji Poestaka*, 24 October 1942; Helena Spanjaard, *The Development of Modern Indonesian Painting*, in Peter Post, et al., *The Encyclopedia of Indonesia in the Pacific War*, (Leiden: Brill, 2010), p. 385.

²⁷ St., "Pertoendjoekan Loekisan Indonesia di Pasar Malam Djakarta" in *Pandji Poestaka*, 19 September 1942, pp. 848-845.

²⁸ Airani, "Peloekis-peloekis Indonesia" in *Pandji Poestaka*, 31 October 1942, pp. 1057-1058.

Japanese military launched an attack on Pearl Harbour, a year later they arranged for another art exhibition. In addition to Jakarta, this Exhibition was extended to various other cities in Java to reach a broader audience, and was reportedly highly successful.

In his article "Seteleng Gambar" (Picture Exhibition), published on 8 December 1942 in the *Pandji Poestaka* magazine, Sudjojono critiqued the inadequate exhibition venues and raised doubts about the selection criteria. He expressed that some works in the exhibition lacked merit and did not deserve to be displayed. However, Sudjojono remained optimistic, believing that the artworks showcased in the exhibition provided undeniable evidence that the advancement of Indonesian painting was unstoppable, instilling a sense of hope and optimism in the reader.²⁹

Back to Spanjaard. She argued that the *December 8th Exhibition* demonstrated notable resistance among painters to adhere to the propaganda themes propagated by the Japanese. The exhibition therefore marked the painters' nationalism. Spanjaard made a compelling argument that the painters continued to use "the same themes they have always used."³⁰

I believe that Spanjaard's nationalist interpretation of the exhibition is problematic due to the references she used. She cited Sudjojono's articles from the 1946 book edition without considering another source, *Pandji Poestaka* magazine, published in 1942. Additionally, both the 1942 and 1946 versions featured monochromatic photographs showcasing the artworks of Henk Ngantung, Affandi, Agus Djaya, and Kartono Yudhokusumo, which were used as the basis for Spanjaard's analysis. However, there are significant differences between the two versions. The photo reproduction in the 1946 version was of poor quality compared to the 1942 edition. It is therefore difficult to establish a nationalist interpretation from the limitations of photo reproduction. In contrast, the photo quality of the 1942 article is superior but still not representative enough (Fig. 5.3. A-B).

In addition to the print quality issue, Spanjaard's conclusion also lacks objectivity due to the absence of photographs depicting the works of numerous other painters featured in the *December 8th Exhibition*. Hence, it is not feasible to deduce the "nationalism content" of the Exhibition solely

²⁹ See S. Sudjojono, "Seteleng Gambar 8 Desember" in *Pandji Poestaka*, 26 December 1942, n.p. The review was reprinted after the occupation ended. See S. Sudjojono, "Seteleng Gambar 8 Desember" in S. Sudjojono, *Seni Loekis, Kesenian dan Seniman*, (Yogyakarta: Penerbit Indonesia Baru, 1946), pp. 61-68.

³⁰ Helena Spanjaard, 2010, p. 385.

based on the depictions presented in those four paintings. Moreover, this Exhibition is inherently intertwined with the Japanese strategy, which aimed to exert influence over Indonesian artists from the very beginning.

In addition, the Japanese had urged the Indonesian people from an early stage to observe 8 December as the Day of Greater East Asia Development, coinciding with the commencement of the war in the Asia Pacific region. The Japanese then disseminated diverse instructions to the public through mass media platforms. Therefore, the 8 December Exhibition was inherently included in this celebration to showcase the Japanese proficiency in mobilizing and politicizing Indonesian artists by organizing it in multiple cities. Ultimately, the painting exhibition can be considered a form of propaganda.

I argue that the *Rakoetjenti* and the *8 December Exhibition* in 1942 were two exhibitions that marked the initial merging and collaboration between the occupying government and Indonesian artists. Although both parties had propaganda motives, they derived benefits from these exhibitions. The Japanese sought to measure the influence of Indonesian leaders and artists on society. Meanwhile, artists could exhibit and strengthen their social position at the beginning of the occupation.

The Propaganda Machines

Propaganda was instrumental in influencing public sentiment, regulating the dissemination of information, and validating the Japanese imperial presence throughout Southeast Asia during the period of Japanese occupation from 1941 to 1945. This section aims to analyze the mechanisms of the propaganda machines used by the Japanese military regime to control and manipulate the local population. It will investigate *The Three A Movement*, *Sendenbu*, *POETERA*, and *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho*. The Japanese propaganda during the occupation had a multifaceted objective, encompassing enhancing backing for the occupiers, quelling resistance movements, and advocating for collaborationist notions. The Japanese forces employed diverse channels to carry out their propaganda campaigns effectively. They could effectively engage a wide and varied audience through various channels, including print media, radio broadcasts, films, and public rallies.

STÉLÉNG GAMBAR 8 DÉSEMBER



● Atas: Affandi, *Mati sebagai benteng*.
● Bawah: Henk Ngantoeng, *Memamah*.



Melihat stelling tersebut, maka dengan senang hati boleh kita mengatakan. Pemilihan gambar-gambar yang dipertandingkan memberi pandangan, bahwa pemilihan itu tidak kelir, sebagai kami anggapkan moeda-moeda. Moeda-moeda kami taket, kalau-kalau orang yang doedok pada badan diore, orang-orang yang sampai pandangan, sehingga boleh badan tadi mengalang-alang: dijalannya seni-loekis baroe.

Kegirangan kami ini disandarkan pada pemilihan loekisan-loekisan boestan Agoes Djajaseominta, Tan Liep Poen, Otto Djajaseominta, Simandjontak, Emerica Soenassa, Kartono Joedokoessomo dan Kih. liander. Dan pemilihan loekisan-loekisan Basoeki Abdolleh, Affandi, Henk Ngantoeng, Siauw Tit Kwie tentoe saja moedah kita mengerti. Tetapi pemilihan gambar-gambar boestan M. Rosdi, Tetang, Oemer Basalamah, R. Goenadi, S. Yesso, Soekardi, kami tidak mengerti sama sekali. Kalau memang tidak diadakan pemilihan apa boleh boeat. Tetapi kalau ada pemilihan, maka menoreot pendapat kami tidak semestinya orang memilih gambar-gambar boestan M. Rosdi lebih dari satoe oempamanja; begitoe dioega gambar-gambar S. Yesso, Tan An, Goenadi dan lain-lain.

Dan satoe gambar satoe tipekoep oentoek membesarkan hati mereka dan sebagai pemberi nasihat, bahwa tidak saban orang yang bisa menggambar berarti bisa meloekis. Ini barangkali soetoe teori yang pedih, tetapi dalam pembaharuan raman baroe ini ada baling-kalau kita menempatkan orang pada tempatnya masing-masing. Kalau orang berdasar menteri-cekoe, diidiah menteri-cekoe. Tetapi kalau dia memang berdasar pelekis, meskipun tehniknya masih lemah, tempat-lah mereka pada tempat pelekis. Dan tempat yang bisa dikorengkan oleh saudara-saudara yang menoreot pendapat saja salah pilih tadi bisa kita sedakan boeat loekisan-loekisan Affandi, Tan Liep Poen, Emerica, Henk Ngantoeng, Basoeki Abdolleh.

lah, Agoes oempamanja, meskipun loekisan-loekisan mereka lebih dari 3 loekisan dan besarnja sebesar piano. Sebab oentoek menyalpin siapa yang nomor satoe, maka orang tidak boleh melihat satoe-doe gambar sadio dari masing-masing. Dengan gambar yang ada steling, kita tidak bisa berkata Henk Ngantoeng lebih besar dari Basoeki, atau Basoeki lebih besar dari Affandi, dan Affandi lebih ketil dari Simandjontak atau Tan Liep Poen kalah oleh Basoeki.

Semoea ini disebabkan barangkali oleh sebab gedengnja koerang memoeskan. Moedah-moedahan didalam waktoe yang pendek lagi kita akan memoenjai gedeng yang tjotok bagi pertjoendjoekan loekisan apa dioega, teristimewa boeat steling loekisan-loekisan. Kalau kita tidak memoenjaenja, dan dari sekarang kita tidak mengoesahalannja, saja taket kalau nanti loekisan-loekisan Foutje dan pelekis-pelekis lain dari Nippon yang datang kemari akan dipertjoendjoekan (dan loekisan-loekisan ini gambar-gambar dan peperangan Pasifik sekarang loekisan-loekisan tersebut akan tidak mendapat tempat semestinya. Dan pada pandangan saja pada waktoe ini tidak ada gedeng yang "kosong" boeat steling yang akan datang itoe. Hal ini baiklah diperhatikan.

Saja masoek gedeng di Gambar Barat No. 2. Saja kesian pada poster-poster yang digantoeangan. Sebagai anak tiri mereka digantoeangan digang. Ma'afkanlah saudara-saudara pembuat poster, sebab roeangan lain ta' ada.

Kalau kita masoek roeangan loekisan-loekisan, maka tertarik kita oleh kekoetan boestan Henk Ngantoeng. Dari dioega warna brose dan hidjanja memanggi kita dan satoe kwes-nja yang lebar membuat bentoe (yang boeat, platid diidiah lebrine-broessna. Sonder ketjangan, dan meskipun tangan kanan menarik panah yang digambarnya agak salah (anatomis), tetapi hilang ketalahan tadi oleh lebagapan diwa gambar tadi. Henk Ngantoeng melihat kebagoesan sesatoe dibarang yang besar, tetapi ta' lupa tetap sederhana dan biasa. Tjita-tjitanja Rembrandiel, akan tetapi ta' memoeskan.

● Atas: Agoes Djajaseominta, *Buddha ditjora*.
● Bawah: Kartono Joedokoessomo, *Keboron*.



Dan tempat yang bisa dikorengkan oleh saudara-saudara yang menoreot pendapat saja salah pilih ta bisa kita sedakan boeat loekisan-loekisan Affandi, Tan Liep Poen, Emerica, Henk Ngantoeng, Basoeki Abdolleh Agoes oempamanja, meskipun loekisan loekisan merel lebih dari 3 loekisan dan besarnja sebesar piano. Sebab oentoek meretankan siapa yang nomor satoe, maka orang tidak boleh melihat satoe-doe gambar sadio dari masing-masing. Dengan gambar yang ada sekarang, kita tidak bisa berkata Henk Ngantoeng lebih besar dari Basoeki, atau Basoeki lebih besar dari Affandi, dan Affandi lebih ketil dari Simandjontak atau Tan Liep Poen kalah oleh Basoeki.

Semoea ini disebabkan barangkali oleh sebab gedengnja koerang memoeskan. Moedah-moedahan didalam waktoe yang pendek lagi kita akan memoenjai gedeng yang tjotok bagi pertjoendjoekan kesenian at dioega, teristimewa boeat steling loekisan-loekisan. Kalau kita tidak memoenjaenja, dan dari sekarang kita tidak mengoesahalannja, saja taket kalau nanti loekisan-loekisan Foutje dan pelekis-pelekis lain dari Nippon yang datang kemari akan dipertjoendjoekan (dan loekisan-loekisan ini gambar-gambar dari peperangan Pasifik sekarang loekisan-loekisan tersebut akan tidak mendapat tempat semestinya. Dan pada pandangan saja pada waktoe ini tidak ada gedeng yang "kosong" boeat steling yang akan datang itoe. Hal ini baiklah diperhatikan.



AGOEES DJAJASEOMINTA, *BODDHA DITJORA*

loekisan ini gambar-gambar dari peperangan Pasifik sekarang loekisan-loekisan tersebut akan tidak mendapat tempat semestinya. Dan pada pandangan saja pada waktoe ini tidak ada gedeng yang "kosong" boeat steling yang akan datang itoe. Hal ini baiklah diperhatikan.

Saja masoek gedeng di Gambar Barat No. 2. Saja kesian pada poster-poster yang digantoeangan. Sebagai anak tiri mereka digantoeangan digang. Ma'afkanlah saudara-saudara pembuat poster, sebab roeangan lain ta' ada.

Kalau kita masoek roeangan loekisan-loekisan, maka tertarik kita oleh kekoetan boestan Henk Ngantoeng.



KARTONO JOEDOKOESSOMO, *KEBORON*

yang asing. Dan yang menta'djoebkan saja ialah bahwa meskipun dia mendapat didikan dari beberapa pelekis, tjorak Kartono tetap Kartono. Kalau pelekis-pelekis dan seniman-seniman lain melilit-lilit hendak melepaskan diri dari pengaruh orang lain, dia enak sadio, tinggal tetap sebagai dia. Kalau seorang ahli babad (Historicus) bisa



AFFANDI, *MATI SEBAGAI BENTENG*

FIGURE 5.3. A-B. Comparison of images in Sudjojono's writing.

A) *Pandji Poestaka*, 26 December 1942 – Collection of Leiden University Library.

B) From Sudjojono's book: *Seni Loekis, Kesenian, dan Seniman*, 1946 – Collection of Perpustakaan s.14 Bandung.

Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar



FIGURE 5.4. Propaganda poster by the Three A Movement.

Collection of National Library of Indonesia
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

Gerakan Tiga A (The Three A Movement)

Before delving into the roles of *Sendenbu*, POETERA, and *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho*, it is necessary to first examine a significant movement in the historiography of the occupation, commonly referred to as *Gerakan Tiga A* (The Three A Movement) (Fig.5.4). This movement is interconnected with the propaganda movements and organizations that emerged during the occupation. I have not discovered definitive evidence concerning the artists' participation in the organizational framework of this propaganda movement. However, I believe the *Sendenhan* members, Indonesian artists, and the 1942 exhibitions were associated with the Three A Movement. Furthermore, The Three A Movement actively sowed seeds of hatred toward Western culture while exalting the significance of the East. Both elements significantly impacted the discussion and expression of art and culture throughout the occupation.

As the debut movement of *Sendenbu*, the Three A Movement was a Japanese propaganda machine to mobilize, manipulate, and brainwash the

people regarding the intent and purposes of the Japanese. In his coordination briefing, Lieutenant General Hitoshi Imamura emphasized that the arrival of the military was "to rebuild the Indonesian culture which previously was alive and brilliantly progressed."³¹ The same rhetoric was delivered by the leader of *Sendenbu*, Colonel Machida Keiji. In his May 1942 speech, Machida assured the Indonesian people that the arrival of the Japanese was to destroy the influence of Western culture and rebuild the original culture of Asia.³²

Inaugurated in Jakarta on 29 April 1942³³, the Three A Movement is closely associated with the symbol of *Nippon AAA: Ahasi Akari no Asia* (Nippon The Light of Asia), *Asahi Amijiban no Asia* (Nippon The Protector of Asia), and *Asahi Aniki no Asia* (Nippon The Leader/Elder of Asia). The "A" symbol confronted the allied "V" symbol. The three A's are not supposed to be written in sequence like "AAA," but by placing one "A" atop the two others. This arrangement of letters symbolizes the Japanese leadership of other Asian nations. Therefore, the primary purpose of "AAA" is propaganda for Japanese leadership over Asia - as was Japanese policy before the beginning of the war in the Pacific.³⁴ After May 1942, when the Japanese controlled the mass media, all newspaper and magazine publications automatically became a tool for the Three A Movement.

However, even under the management of expert Japanese propagandist Shimizu Hitoshi, the Three A Movement, which also involved conservative nationalists like Raden Samsuddin, K. Soetan Pamoentjak, Mohammad Saleh, S. A. Soebroto, and Slamet Soedibjo, did not experience significant advancement. In various places, the people did not show much passion or sympathy. This reality brought dissatisfaction among the Japanese military brass. On the other hand, the conservative nationalists working with the Three A Movement were not figures widely known by the public compared to Soekarno. When the movement began, Soekarno was still exiling at Bengkulu, Sumatra. Charismatic leaders like Muhammad Hatta - who was released earlier from exile and worked as an advisor for the Japanese military government - declined to join the Three A Movement.³⁵

³¹ "Keterangan Padoeka J.M.Luit.Generaal H. Imamura dalam peringatan Perajaan Tentjoesetsu" in *Oesaha Baroe*, 1942, p. 7.

³² *Pandji Poestaka*, 2 May 1942, n.p.

³³ Other sources say 1 April 1942. See R. De Bruin, *Sense and Non-Sense in The Three A Movement*, Penelitian The XXVII International Congress of Orientalist, Michigan-USA, 13-19 August 1967, p.7.

³⁴ R. Du Bruin, 1967, p. 7 and p. 13.

³⁵ Other sources state that Hatta served as an economic advisor for the Three A Movement. See Bob Hering, *Soekarno Bapak Indonesia Merdeka*, (Jakarta: Hasta Mitra, 2003), p. 336.

The public's passivity towards the Three A Movement was also caused by apparent Japanese interests, which always needed to be served. Historian George Sanford Kanahale assumed that despite involving both parties, the movement was entirely controlled by the propagandists, represented by Shimizu Hitoshi.³⁶ Meanwhile, historian Nugroho Notosusanto viewed the failure of this movement as being due to the tendency of the Japanese to underestimate Indonesian politics - which seemed to be an "empty barrel where one could pour the wine of propaganda so that everyone became intoxicated and happy with the arrival of new masters. There was a national Indonesian movement, led by Western-educated intellectuals, with roots mainly in Java."³⁷

The Three A Movement covered a broad scope, as it successfully embraced people from various levels of society. In multiple cities, the Japanese had already set up branches. Regeneration and indoctrination were also done through formal organizations. On June 25th, 1942, Machida Keiji founded the *San A Seinen Korensko*, or the Three A Institute for Potential Young Leaders, in Jakarta.³⁸ Aside from that, based on permanent membership of around 4,000 people, the movement supported various public activities like arts, youth activities, sports, religion, and female organizations. Yet gradually, the *Gunseikanbu* (Central Military Administration) felt that the Three A movement tended to form a mass organization instead of fulfilling its propagandist obligations. *Gunseikanbu* reasoned that the authority of mobilization should be with them. The *Kempetai* (the military police of the Imperial Japanese Army) found proof that some parties shrewdly took advantage of the movement for personal gain. However, while historians offer these analyses related to the disbandment of the Three A Movement, on September 1942, *Gunseikanbu* dissolved the Three A movement giving vague reasons.³⁹

³⁶ See George Sanford Kanahale, *The Japanese Occupation of Indonesia: Prelude to Independence*, Ph.D. Thesis, Universitas Cornell, 1967, p. 47.

³⁷ Nugroho Notosusanto, *Tentara PETA pada Jaman Pendudukan jepang di Indonesia*, (Jakarta: PT Gramedia, 1979), p. 41. "Indonesia bukanlah tong kosong tempat mencurahkan anggur propaganda agar setiap orang mabuk dan kesenangan dengan datangnya majikan baru. Terdapat suatu gerakan nasional Indonesia terutama dipimpin oleh kaum intelektual berpendidikan Barat dan berakar terutama di Jawa."

³⁸ Bob Hering, 2003, p. 335.

³⁹ George Sanford Kanahale, 1967, 48-49. See also Nugroho Notosusanto, 1979, p. 41.



FIGURE 5.5.A. *Barisan Propaganda* in Jakarta.

Collection of Nationaal Archief Den Haag.
Repro by Aminudin TH Siregar

Sendenbu

I will now briefly review *Sendenbu*, the propaganda body behind the Three A Movement. Few scholars mention *Sendenbu* without explaining its role in activating the art field.⁴⁰ Inspired by Nazi Germany's *Kulturkammer*, the Japanese structured their propaganda strategy for Indonesia.⁴¹ The presence of the Propaganda Unit (*Sendenhan*) in the 16th Imperial Army Division proves that propaganda is a crucial instrument of war to change perceptions and manipulate consciousnesses.⁴² Before it expanded, the task of the propaganda unit initially was to "destroy the enemies' desire for battle; prevent damage to resources in the Dutch East Indies; inspire the fighting spirits of the *Dai Nippon* troops; send news and reports home; monitor the population's passivity; and immediately calm them after the occupation." To achieve these goals, the Japanese sent musicians, cartoonists, writers, critics, and more writers into the battlefield, especially in Java.⁴³

⁴⁰ I only found two writers who mention *Sendenbu*, namely M. Agus Burhan and Imam Boechori Zainuddin. Yet neither clearly describes the role of *Sendenbu*. In his book, M. Agus Burhan slightly covers the role of *Sendenbu* by referring to Aiko Kurasawa. See M. Agus Burhan, 2013, pp. 50-51. Meanwhile, Imam Boechori Zainuddin provides a confusing description by making the analogy that *Sendenbu* is the "information ministry." See Zainuddin, 1966, p. 40.

⁴¹ Ethan Mark, *Intellectual Life and the Media*, in Peter Post et al., 2010, p. 349. See also Grant K. Goodman's foreword in Grant K. Goodman (ed.), *Japanese Cultural Policies in Southeast Asia during World War 2*, (London: Macmillan, 1991), p. 2.

⁴² See Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion*, (California: Sage Publications Inc., 1999). For Nazi Propaganda, see Welch, *The Third Reich: Politics and Propaganda*, (London: Routledge, 1993).

⁴³ *The Java Nen Kan* (1944) in Goto Kenichi, et al., *Sekidōhō; Unabara*, (Tōkyō: Ryūkei Shosha, 1993), p.



FIGURE 5.5.B.
Banner of *Barisan Propaganda*.

Collection of Museum Bronbeek – Arnhem

The *Sendenhan* or *Senden Butai*⁴⁴ consisted of 11 officers, 100 soldiers, and 87 intellectuals - *bunka jin* - or men of culture. Other sources refer to the group as *Tatakau Bunka-butai* (Fighting Culture Corps). In the military system shaped later during the occupation, *Sendenhan* changed into *Sendenbu*. This group's character resembles Germany's Kultur-Korps during World War II. They shrewdly took advantage of the latest technologies, like print and radio broadcasts, to mobilize sympathy and energy, whether among the Japanese or the Indonesian people. Historian Ethan Mark suggests this unit served as cultural intermediaries and informal advisors during the occupation.⁴⁵

The *Sendenbu* department was formed in August 1942⁴⁶ and was known by its Indonesian name: *Barisan Propaganda* (Propaganda Front) (Fig.

28.

⁴⁴ See Ethan Mark, 2010, p. 349.

⁴⁵ Ethan Mark, 2010, p. 349.

⁴⁶ Aiko Kurasawa, 1993, p. 229.

5.5.A. and 5.5.B.) and led by Colonel Machida Keiji, who led, among others, Ohya Soichi (critic-intellectual), Tomizawa Uio (artist), Iida Nobuo (composer), Ohki Atsuo (poet), Yokoyama Ryuichi (cartoonist), Kouno Takashi (artist-designer), Abe Tomoji (writer), Matsui Suisesi (film narrator), Kitaharu Takeo (cartoonist), Ono Saseo (cartoonist), Hinatsu Eitaro (film director) Hinatsu Eitarō (DR. Hu Yung), and Kurata Fumindo (film director). Not all personnel stayed long in Java, and in the middle of the occupation, several reportedly returned to Japan, including Machida Keiji.⁴⁷ After the end of the war, Hinatsu Eitarō or Dr. Hu Yung chose to remain in Indonesia and significantly contributed to the development of film and theatre.⁴⁸

Despite being part of the military, the propagandists ran *Sendenbu* independently. They smartly put forward idealism, aspiration, and their own rules, which more or less differed from the guidelines of the Japanese military.⁴⁹ In this structure, *Sendenbu* had three sections: the administration section, the news and press section, and the propaganda section (*Sendenka*). Shimizu Hitoshi led the latter section with the support of Ohya Soichi, Abe Tomoji, Takeda Rintaro, Iida Nobuo, Kouno Takashi, Hinatsu Eitaro, Yokohama Ryuichi, and Saseo Ono. Several of them would then hold essential positions in the *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho*, especially Ohya Soichi who acted as general administrator before *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho* was formed, *Sendenka* was tasked in developing systematic programs for art and culture activities.⁵⁰ Other than monitoring the movements of the populace, the *Sendenbu* also held a role in designing strategies for countering Dutch and Allied propaganda.⁵¹ *Sendenbu's* next task was to straighten out behaviour in society that deviated from Japanese policy. The various slogans, prohibitions, regulations, instructions, and so on distributed through mixed mass media, posters, or leaflets were all issued – or at least were approved by *Sendenbu*.

⁴⁷ Peter Post, et.al, 2010, p. 541.

⁴⁸ Okada Hidenori "The Rise and Fall of the Nippon Eigasha Jakarta Studio" in Peter Post, et.al., 2010, p. 365.

⁴⁹ Mitsuo Nakamura, *General Imamura and the Early Period of Japanese Occupation*, Journal Indonesia Vol. 10, (Ithaca: Southeast Asia Program Publication Cornell University, October 1970), p. 9.

⁵⁰ Okada Hidenori, 2010, p.364.

⁵¹ *Sendenbu* often found anti-Japanese propaganda pamphlets in public areas like restaurants, stores, offices, and hospitals. This reality forced the *Sendenbu* to frequently remind the populace to remain vigilant. In May 1942, the *Sendenbu* threatened harsh action to anyone proven to keep pictures, books, and other printed material that encouraged anti-Japanese sentiment. See *Pandji Poestaka*, 23 May 1942.

POETERA (Centre of People's Power)

While quite a few Indonesians were involved with the Three A Movement or *Sendenbu*, a more extensive, more massive involvement of the people only happened after the forming of a movement known as Poesat Tenaga Rakjat or POETERA (Centre of People's Power) or *minshū sōyoku kesshū undō* (the total mobilization of the Javanese people). Like a "state within a state," the leaders of this large organization "managed their own government" within the Japanese military government.

Considering the breadth of POETERA's scope, I will not discuss the exploits of this organization beyond the context of art. It is important to note that POETERA's efforts to encourage the development of art cannot be separated from the work of one of its sections, the *Seksi Kebudayaan* (Culture Section). In this section, painters like Sudjojono, Basuki Abdullah, and Affandi trained young artists in painting and sculpture.⁵² In addition to that, they also organized and supervised exhibitions. The Culture Section most likely collaborated with other POETERA departments, such as the Propaganda Department. This collaboration is demonstrated by the dissemination of public announcement posters printed using the printing technique employed by the artists in the Culture Section. By implementing this collaborative framework and allocating specific tasks, the Culture Section ensured that art exhibitions were not burdened with any "propaganda responsibilities" and instead solely emphasized the artistic accomplishments of the artists.

On the subject of POETERA, I found several irregularities about their positions in the organizational structure. For instance, Burhan and Kusnadi confirmed that "Sudjojono was the leader of the culture section of POETERA,"⁵³ while Claire Holt stated that Sudjojono was "the leader of the art section."⁵⁴ Sudarmadji had a differing explanation, saying that Sudjojono and Affandi led "the painting section."⁵⁵ Aside from these irregularities, not many art historians emphasized the role of POETERA in encouraging the development of Indonesian art. Among them, only Zainuddin maintained

⁵² Prospective student registration was usually announced through newspaper. See *Asia Raya*, 30 December 1943.

⁵³ See M. Agus Burhan, 2013, p. 51 and Kusnadi, 1990-1991, p. 83. See also Kusnadi, et.al., *Sejarah Seni Rupa Indonesia*, (Jakarta: DepDikBud, 1979), p. 168.

⁵⁴ Claire Holt, *Art in Indonesia Continuities and Change*, (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1967), p. 200.

⁵⁵ Sudarmadji, *Seni Lukis Jakarta dalam Sorotan*, (Jakarta: Pemda DKI-Jakarta, 1974), p. 16-17.

that POETERA was an organization that "controlled the direction of Indonesian art."⁵⁶ Kusnadi believed that through POETERA, the artists' sense of nationalism grew stronger.⁵⁷ Sudjojono, who was directly involved in POETERA programs, remembered in reflective articles about the Japanese occupation that POETERA was "the people's political lighthouse." The organization's appeal extended beyond politics, as the militancy and idealism of art and culture workers captivated society. Sudjojono stated that despite the financial and military support of the Japanese military through their *Sendenbu* and *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho*, they could not match the influence of POETERA on the general population.⁵⁸

Indonesian art history writers are generally limited in telling the story of POETERA, and even then, almost without references. The tale of POETERA is fascinating to reconstruct as it is a large, complex organization with many branches. Before discussing that, I would like to begin with a short chronicle.

The forming of POETERA began when Soekarno put forward an idea for a new people's movement after the failure of the Three A Movement. In late December 1942, Colonel Nakayama invited Soekarno, Muhammad Hatta, Ki Hajar Dewantara, and Kyai Haji Mas Mansoer (known as the Empat Serangkai, more or less the Famous Four) to explore Soekarno's idea further. They then agreed to form a non-political movement funded by the Japanese. The movement committee would comprise these four persons and would report directly to the Gunseikanbu. It is said that the first grand meeting of POETERA, which was held on the anniversary of one year of the Japanese victory over the Dutch, was attended by many people.

On 9 March 1943,⁵⁹ at 5 in the afternoon, tens of thousands of people⁶⁰ from many cities flocked to the *Lapangan Ikada* (Ikada Square) in Jakarta. Soekarno did not waste this opportunity to ignite the people's nationalism.

⁵⁶ Zainuddin, 1966, p. 49. Despite this, we can judge that this statement came from Zainuddin's main informant, S. Sudjojono.

⁵⁷ Sudarmadji, 1974, p. 17. See also Kusnadi in Mochtar Kusumaatmadja (ed.), 1990-1991, pp. 83-84.

⁵⁸ S. Sudjojono, *Tentang Affandi*, in Ajip Rosidi, et al., *Affandi 70 Tahun*, (Jakarta: Dewan Kesenian Jakarta, 1978), p. 25.

⁵⁹ There are several versions on the year of POETERA's forming. Several sources say 1942, and other sources say that POETERA was formed on March 1st, 1943. See *Djawa Baroe* magazine, No.5, 1 March 1943. However, in *Djawa Baroe*, No.1, 1 January 1943 it was written as 8 December 1942, the first anniversary of the Greater East Asia War.

⁶⁰ Other sources noted that the Ikada field was filled with 100,000 people. See Shigeru Sato, *War, Nationalism and Peasants: Java under the Japanese Occupation 1942-1954*, (London: M.E. Sharpe, 1994), p. 54. Shigeru Sato quoted it from newspaper *Asia Raya*, 6 March 1943. See also *Asia Raya*, 7 March 1942.

He reminded the audience that the ongoing war was not merely the Japanese business but was also the responsibility of the Indonesian people. Since the Pacific War broke out, Indonesia and Japan were "one blood, one flesh, one bone, one backbone, one soul towards victory," Soekarno's propaganda stated.⁶¹ The Japanese then assigned a building on *Jalan Sunda No. 18* to be the main headquarters of POETERA. The office officially opened on April 16th, 1943, with Hatta as director general, Ki Hajar Dewantara as the head of education, Kyai Mas Mansoer as the head of public safety, and Soekarno as the chairman. According to Hatta, office hours were from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.⁶²

POETERA comprised four departments overseeing twelve sections, with only a subset of them being addressed in this discussion. Under Hatta's rendition of POETERA's framework, the culture segment was positioned within the Cultural Affairs Department, supervised by Ki Hajar Dewantara. This department oversaw the management of three distinct sections: Education, Culture, and Women.⁶³

In the *Osamu Group 16th Army Division's* documents, the culture section was part of the Operations Department. This department oversaw three sections: Information, Culture, and Women.⁶⁴ Soewandhi was designated as the leader of the Culture Section, with S. Sudjojono serving as his deputy.⁶⁵ Hatta stated that the main objective of this division was to rejuvenate the emerging Indonesian culture. POETERA perceived this assignment as a valuable chance for Indonesia following centuries of Dutch colonial domination. In the accountability reports submitted to the *Gunseikanbu*, Director General Hatta emphasized that the Culture Section must respond to each program, specifically addressing the question: What cultural direction will POETERA (Indonesia) pursue? Will it be through cultural assimilation or constructing a distinct cultural identity rooted in its national heritage?⁶⁶

Following the establishment of POETERA, Hatta provided a report on the activities of the Culture Section, which included the completion of a

⁶¹ *Djawa Baroe*, 15 March 1943.

⁶² Mohammad Hatta, *Memoir*, (Jakarta: Yayasan Hatta, 2002), p. 420.

⁶³ This structure is based on the POETERA program report, written by Hatta for the *Gunseikanbu*. See William H. Frederick, 1971, p. 40.

⁶⁴ Harry J. Benda, et.al, 1965, pp. 140-141.

⁶⁵ *Poesat Badan Keboedajaan Indonesia* which was previously founded by Soetardjo was merged into this Culture Section. See footnote no. 12.

⁶⁶ William H. Frederick, 1971, p. 40.

comprehensive roster of prominent art figures from Java,⁶⁷ the acquisition of valuable paintings,⁶⁸ the organization of entertainment shows for Japanese troops, discussions on the potential organization of diverse arts in Java, collaboration with *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho*, and the hosting of art and design exhibitions at the POETERA headquarters or night markets. Hatta documented the visitor count for exhibitions hosted at POETERA headquarters during the initial three months, although the artists and specific exhibitions were not mentioned. His records show that the number of exhibition attendees amounted to 8,773.⁶⁹



FIGURE 5.6.
Affandi's solo exhibition at POETERA's office.
(Source: *Pandji Poestaka*, 1 July 1943)

Repro by Aminudin TH Siregar

POETERA organized solo art exhibitions featuring renowned artists such as Affandi, Basuki Abdullah, I Nyoman Ngendon, Emiria Sunassa, and Kartono Yudhokusumo. In July 1943, Affandi began his debut solo exhibition at the POETERA office under the encouragement of S. Sudjojono. This exhibition is claimed to be the most successful in the occupation period (Fig.5.6).⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Records of intellectuals and artists in art and culture can be seen in the book *Orang-orang Jang Terkemoeka di Djawa*. See Gunseikanbu, *Orang-orang Jang Terkemoeka di Djawa*, (Jakarta: Gunseikanbu, 1944), pp. 417-429.

⁶⁸ Criteria for selection was not explained.

⁶⁹ William H. Frederick, 1971, pp. 46-47. The exhibition meant by Hatta most likely was Affandi's solo exhibition.

⁷⁰ See Ray Rizal, *Affandi: Hari sudah Tinggi*, (Jakarta: Metro Pos, 1990), pp. 26-27. See also S. Sudjojono in Ajip Rosidi, *et.al.*, 1978, pp. 22-23.



FIGURE 5.7.
Affandi, *Tiga Pengemis*, 1944.

(Collection of Museum Affandi Yogyakarta)

However, the Japanese maintained strict control over the exhibition programs organized by the Culture Section. Censorship was implemented during the section's solo exhibition for Affandi due to a specific painting that overtly depicted the anguish experienced by the people. Affandi portrayed the emaciated, filthy, and destitute physique of a beggar). These bodies did not conform to the desired physical standards of Japanese fascism, which sought muscle that was prepared for labor. The *Kempeitai*, the military police of Japan, issued an instruction for the removal of the painting from the exhibition wall. Remembering the censorship of Affandi's painting at that exhibition under his responsibility, S. Sudjojono expressed "This ugly beauty was considered by the Japanese an obstacle for the Greater East Asia development machine. We pushed this beautiful painting (namely that by Affandi) yet it was still prohibited. We lost, even though we were right."⁷¹

Another version of the censorship incident regarding Affandi's watercolour painting entitled *Tiga Pengemis* (Three Beggars) began when *Gunseikanbu* wanted artists to exhibit artwork depicting *romusha* workers (Fig.5.7). Affandi offered this painting, but the selection committee rejected

⁷¹ Ajip Rosidi, 1977, p. 35. "Keindahan yang jelek ini dianggap oleh pemerintah Jepang sebagai hambatan jalannya mesin pembangunan Asia Timur Raya. Kita pertahankan lukisan bagus ini tetapi dilarang. Kita kalah, meskipun benar."

it.⁷² Sudjojono confirmed this version. He believed that certain selection committee members, such as Yamamoto, Yoshioka, and Saseo Ono, were captured by the paintings' artistic excellence but could not resist the influence exerted by the *Kempeitai*.⁷³

The artists featured in POETERA's second exhibition gained more recognition from the public thanks to the diverse promotion and reviews they received from mass media outlets. Painters like Raden Saleh, Mas Pirngadie, Abdullah Suriosubroto, Henk Ngantung, Basuki Abdullah, S. Toetoe, Affandi, Emiria Sunassa, G.A. Soekirno, Dullah, Soetijoso, Subanto Suriosubandrio, Kartono Yudhokusumo, Sukirno, Suromo, Albert Hutagalung, and Kusnadi took part in POETERA's second program exhibition titled *Naturalistis dan Realistis* (Naturalistic and Realistic) from 19 to 20 August 1943. That was the first show that gave viewers a comprehensive understanding of the evolution of Indonesian painting from the naturalist style, represented by Raden Saleh, to the contemporary era.⁷⁴

The influence of POETERA expanded, and organisationally, it became more extensive, merging several professional, youth, sports, and other organizations.⁷⁵ Taking advantage of the mass media and the government network, the heads of POETERA continued to seed nationalism into the minds of the public. Soekarno wanted to make POETERA a place to prepare the minds of the Indonesian public to achieve their independence.⁷⁶ The relationship between the Japanese and POETERA eventually developed into mutual suspicion. The Japanese realized that they had failed to control POETERA as a propaganda machine according to their needs.

On 8 January 1944, the high command (*Saiko Sikikan*) announced a diplomatic plan that would merge *Himpunan Kebaktian Dokter* (Izi Hokokai, Doctor's Union), *Himpunan Kebaktian Pendidik* (Kyōiku Hokokai, Educator's Union), *Organisasi Wanita* (Fujinkai, Female Organisation) and *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho* into one organization. *Saiko Sikikan* affirmed that this plan would be discussed with the *Empat Serangkai*. Of course, this was an intelligent strategy on the part of Japan to disband POETERA, as though it were at the

⁷² Claire Holt, 1967, p. 198.

⁷³ S. Sudjojono in Ajip Rosidi, *et al.*, 1978, pp. 25-26.

⁷⁴ S. "Seteleng Loekisan Naturalistis dan Realistis" in *Pandji Poestaka*, No.23, September 1943, pp. 827-828.

⁷⁵ For instance, *Pengurus Besar Persatuan Guru Indonesia*, *Pengurus Besar Istri Indonesia*, *Ikatan Sport Indonesia*, *Barisan Banteng*, and others that had tens of thousands of members. See Marwati Djoened and Nugroho Notosusanto, 2007, p. 34.

⁷⁶ Muhammad Hatta, 2002, p. 23.

request or with the support of the *Empat Serangkai*. Shortly after the announcement, while other regions were eager to establish a POETERA branch, the Japanese decided to shut down POETERA.⁷⁷ On 1 March 1944, the Japanese launched a new organization called *Djawa Hookoo Kai* (The Service Union of Java).⁷⁸

Unlike POETERA, *Djawa Hookoo Kai* was an official governmental entity directly overseen by the *Gunseikan*, who served as the leader of the military government under *Saiko Sikikan*.⁷⁹ From then on until its closure in September 1945, the *Hookoo Kai* maintained authority over civil activities. I will not discuss the activities of this organization in detail. Instead, I will explore the role of *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho* within the *Hookoo Kai*.⁸⁰

Keimin Bunka Shidōsho

Even though POETERA already had a Cultural Section that actively held exhibitions and painting training, Japan felt it should build a cultural infrastructure that was easier to direct. For this reason, approximately a month after POETERA was founded, *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho* was launched. Since, *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho* was proclaimed active from 1 April 1943, at their offices on Jalan Noordwijk No. 39 in Jakarta. Magazine *Keboedajaan Timoer* reveals that the officiation was only affected on 18 April 1943 (Fig.5.8).⁸¹

One of the *Sendenhan*, Ohya Souichi, was appointed as administrator. With a headquarters in Jakarta, *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho* also held offices in Bandung, Malang, Semarang, and Surabaya.⁸² A few months later, the newspaper *Tjahaja* in Bandung reported a branch opening in the regency of Garut, West Java.⁸³ Acting as the leader of *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho* and

⁷⁷ See Noerhadi Soedarno, *POETERA (Poesat Tenaga Rakjat)*, (Jakarta: Tinta Mas, 1982), pp. 76-79.

⁷⁸ Before POETERA's disbandment, Sudjojono joined *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho*, while Affandi chose to work under *Djawa Hookoo Kai*.

⁷⁹ See Marwati Djoened and Nugroho Notosusanto, 2007, p.35. The Indonesian nationalists initially objected to the seemingly "local" name. They suggested the use of a word that would unite the people: *Indonesia*. See Shigeru Sato, *War, Nationalism and Peasants: Java under the Japanese Occupation 1942-1945*, (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1994), p. 71.

⁸⁰ See the structure of *Djawa Hookoo Kai* in Harry J. Benda, et al., 1965, p. 159.

⁸¹ *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho*, *Keboedajaan Timoer Djilid I*, (Djakarta: Keimin Bunka Shidōsho, 1943), p. 105.

⁸² Further reading about the opening of the branch and the leader's name, see *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho*, *Keboedajaan Timoer Djilid I*, 1943, pp. 105-107.

⁸³ *Tjahaja*, 27 January 1945, p.2.

management in the Film Section, Ohya Souichi reiterated the objectives of the organization in his reception speech:

The efforts of the Culture Centre in leading the general culture are meant to elevate the stature of the people, especially to preserve the classical and native art of Indonesia; aside from that, the organization will put efforts into seeding and spreading Japanese art and culture. In addition, it is also meant to teach and train artists from various fields and appreciate and reward the work of artists. Efforts will be made so that they can be sent to Japan.⁸⁴

This was not limited to a political context, as the Japanese saw Indonesian culture as an untouched "blank sheet of paper." The head of the Visual Art Section, Takashi Kohno, used that metaphor to delegitimize Dutch contribution to conserving and advancing Indonesian art. In his speech officiating the opening of *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho*, Kohno marked:

If we study the situation of painting and carving in Indonesia today, many shortcomings could be said are a result of Dutch politics in occupation. The Western influences that have held root in several layers of Indonesian society cannot be said to have infiltrated the world of painting and carving techniques. I also explained that Java's painting and carving technique is like a white sheet of paper, for better or worse. One field in culture that has not been cultivated during Dutch times leading the culture here is the culture of painting and carving. From here on, we will provide authentic leadership in this field.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ *Djawa Baroe*, 15 April 1943." Usaha Pusat Kebudayaan memimpin kebudayaan umum yang maksudnya untuk meninggikan derajat penduduk, terutama bermaksud untuk memelihara kesenian klasik dan kesenian-kesenian asli Indonesia, dan disampingnya badan itu akan berusaha pula menanam dan menyebarkan kesenian dan kebudayaan Nippon. Selain daripada itu, dimaksudkan juga untuk mendidik dan melatih para ahli kesenian di segala lapangan, serta menghargai dan menghadihi pekerjaan ahli-ahli kesenian yang utama. Pun diusahakan agar mereka dapat diutus ke Nippon."

⁸⁵ *Djawa Baroe*, 15 April 1943." Jika ditilik keadaan kesenian lukisan dan ukiran di Indonesia pada masa ini maka terdapat banyaklah kekurangan yang boleh juga dipandang sebagai akibat politik penjajahan Belanda dahulu. Pengaruh Barat yang telah meresap benar dalam sebagian lapisan masyarakat Indonesia belum dapat dikatakan masuk meresap juga dalam dunia teknik kesenian melukis dan mengukir. Saya pernah juga menerangkan bahwa kesenian lukisan dan ukiran di Jawa masih sebagai kertas putih walaupun dalam arti baik atau buruk. Satu lapangan dalam dunia kebudayaan yang belum



FIGURE 5.8. The *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho* inauguration took place in Jakarta in April 1943. Sanusi Pane can be seen taking the oath on the left.
(Source: *Pandji Poestaka*, 29 April 1943)

Repro by Aminudin TH Siregar

Kohno's statement reflected the outline of *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho*'s mission, which was: to elevate the quality of life of the people; guide and safeguard (Eastern) arts and traditions; erode cultural powers that have the potential to damage; uplift pure culture-based on a new ideology; introduce the culture and situation of Japan; provide entertainment for the people and the soldiers; enlighten civic life; guide art and culture associations; encourage a cultural self and a strong cooperation with the *dai-to-a-kyoeiken* (the Greater East Asia co-prosperity sphere).

Western art and culture, which was constructed as a common enemy by the Three A Movement, returned as a theme in the opening of the *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho*. At that event, the head of *Sendenbu* reminded the administrators to address three main issues, which, in short, are: First, erase the Western culture of "art for art." This paradigm was viewed as not suitable for Eastern culture. The art workers were warned: "No honoring or paying homage to their culture, not even for a day." Second, to advance Greater East Asia culture; the only culture that must be acknowledged,

dikerjakan dalam masa Belanda memimpin kebudayaan di sini ialah kebudayaan kesenian lukisan dan ukiran. Sekaranglah kita akan memberikan pimpinan yang sesungguhnya dalam lapangan ini."

promoted, and developed is Eastern culture itself. This made sense: "Our forefathers have bequeathed this culture to us for 5,000 years." The third point relates to the Japanese request that artists strengthen their commitment and concentration to reach the final victory and that they are instrumental in determining the rise or fall of a nation.⁸⁶ This spirit of returning to the East or advancing Indonesian art based on the nation's character was consistently implanted in various meetings.⁸⁷ Therefore, by involving the intellectuals and artists, the anti-Anglo-American propaganda – associated with Western art/culture – echoed everywhere.

Notably, *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho* served as the inaugural art academy in Indonesia and fostered collaboration between Indonesian and Japanese artists during the war. The Visual Art Section of this academy provided education and graduation opportunities for young artists but also actively organized exhibitions, facilitated art discussions, conducted competitions, and presented art awards.

The perception of an academy did not surface as the *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho* was often narrowly translated as a "Cultural Center,"⁸⁸ despite a literal translation as follows: *keimin* = enlightenment for all; *bunka* = culture; and *shidōsho* = a place for guidance, center. The meaning of *keimin* here is not merely "to enlighten or educate" the Indonesian people on how they must do art and culture but also implies the strategic legitimization of Japanese superiority in civilization. Compared to Indonesian sources, English-language publications steered perception towards "art academy." For instance, *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho* was translated as Institute for People's Education and Cultural Guidance or Popular Education and Cultural Direction Center.⁸⁹ These translations made the scope of the *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho* seem broader and more formal.

Keimin Bunka Shidōsho had sections such as Literature, Theater, Film, Music, and Visual Art.⁹⁰ Every section had a supervisor, chairman, and members. The supervisors were generally Japanese, yet several Indonesian historiographers understood the personnel structure differently. For instance, Agus Djaya was even said to be the chairman of *Keimin Bunka*

⁸⁶ *Keboedajaan Timoer Djilid I*, 1943, pp. 2-3.

⁸⁷ *Djawa Baroe*, 15 March 1943, p. 8.

⁸⁸ For instance, see Zainuddin, 1966, p. 40; Sudarmadji, 1974, p. 16; Claire Holt, 1966, p. 198.

⁸⁹ For instance, see Harry J. Benda, et al., 1965, 159. See also Peter Post, et al., 2010, p. 370.

⁹⁰ In Aiko Kurasawa's version, the programs of theatre, dance, and movie was placed under the "Performance Department". See Aiko Kurasawa, 1987, p. 61.

Shidōsho.⁹¹ I think it would be more precise to say that Agus Djaya was the head of the Visual Art Section, which operated under the supervision of Takashi Kohno, Yamamoto, and Saseo Ono. Meanwhile, in describing the personnel structure, Zainuddin wrote that R.M. Subanto Suryasubandrio was the leader representing the Indonesians, with Setioso Emiria Sunassa, Sukirno, Moch. Saleh, S. Tutar, Surono, Abdul Salam, and Sastradiwirya as members. Zainuddin also mentioned that Takashi Kohno, Yamamoto, and Saseo Ono were the leaders of the Visual Art Section representing the Japanese.⁹² I argue that the persons mentioned by Zainuddin had other duties, namely as conservators for Indonesian art, a function which was only formed on 26 December 1943.⁹³ However, I have not found other sources that explain their assignment during the occupation.

Each division within the framework of the *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho* was assigned distinct duties, programs, objectives, and propaganda obligations.⁹⁴ The Visual Art Section was responsible for various tasks, including showcasing paintings and photography, producing works that could enlighten individuals, and conducting active research on the accomplishments of Eastern art. In addition to overseeing two art studios, this department was also responsible for organizing regular monthly events, such as art lectures, to enhance the understanding of aspiring artists. In October 1943, Agus Djaya and Yashioaka Ken delivered a lecture on the responsibility of artists to contribute to the historical development of modern art on Java. During the event, a discussion took place regarding the ideal characteristics of an artist. It was concluded that genuine artists could not prioritize the pursuit of luxury. Art is impervious to the influence of money.⁹⁵

During a later event in June 1944, S. Sudjojono, upon joining *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho*, delivered a lecture on art titled *Menoedjoe Seni Loekis Indonesia Baroe* (Moving Towards New Indonesian Painting).⁹⁶ To disseminate knowledge and showcase artists' works, this division also

⁹¹ See Hilda Soemantri (ed.), *Indonesian Heritage: Visual Art*, (Singapore: Archipelago Press, 1998), p. 52. Solichin Salam, the biographer of Agus Djaya, even provided confusing information like the following: "Agus Djaya was the Chairman of the Indonesian Culture Centre, Visual Art Section (*Keimin Bunka Shidōsho*)." In other words, Salam could not differentiate between the Visual Art Section as a unit and the *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho* as the larger organisation. See Solichin Salam, *Agus Djaya dan Sejarah Seni Lukis Indonesia*, (Jakarta: CSIS, 1994), p. 15.

⁹² Imam Boechori Zainuddin, 1966, p. 44.

⁹³ See *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho, Keboedajaan Timoer III*, (Jakarta: Keimin Bunka Shidōsho, 1943), p. 155.

⁹⁴ Further reading, see Aiko, 1993, pp. 237-258.

⁹⁵ *Asia Raya*, 13 October 1943, p.2.

⁹⁶ *Asia Raya*, 30 June 1944, p.2.

produced an art magazine,⁹⁷ organized broadcasts, and oversaw traveling exhibitions to major cities such as Jakarta, Bandung, Semarang, Yogyakarta, Solo, Malang, and Surabaya. The Visual Art Section implemented regulations mandating that all artists enrol in the recurring biannual exhibition program.

To attract interest from prospective artists, the director of *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho* requested the Visual Art Section to proactively publicize the criteria, including one specific requirement pertained to age, through various mass media channels. The individuals who were encouraged to participate in the section were those aged under 20.⁹⁸ Regarding the facilities, the department arranged two (studio) classes to accommodate many students.⁹⁹

However, if fewer students completed the examination, they would be employed in “Studio Two” and then “Studio One” would be used for experienced artists. It has been documented that, within a few months after the commencement of the class, over 40 individuals were engaged in the pursuit of art within the Visual Art Section.¹⁰⁰ In addition to academic activities and exhibitions, this section has been reported as having made donations of paintings. On behalf of the *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho*, esteemed artists such as Subanto Suriosubandrio, Otto Djaya, Agus Djaya, Henk Ngantung, S. Sudjojono, Affandi, Emiria Sunassa, Kartono Yudhokusumo, Baharuddin Marasutan, G.A. Sukirno, and Surono generously contributed their artworks to the Army Hospital (*Rumah Sakit Balatentara*) in Jakarta.¹⁰¹

The *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho* remained under the jurisdiction of the *Sendenbu*.¹⁰² However, the *Sendenbu* did not control propaganda activities directly once multiple propaganda organizations were established, which created propaganda strategies and materials to be distributed among relevant work units.¹⁰³ This was beneficial, as it granted artists a certain degree of

⁹⁷ On February 1945, the Visual Art Section published a magazine titled “Loekisan”, with news and articles about art. S. Sudjojono, Chairil Anwar, and Agus Djaya wrote in this inaugural edition. Aside from that, the magazine also featured reproductions of paintings from Indonesian and Japanese painters like Affandi, Yamamoto, and Otto Djaya. See *Asia Raya*, 14 February 1945, p.2. I had not found the “Loekisan” magazine when this chapter was written.

⁹⁸ *Asia Raya*, 14 December 1943, p.2.

⁹⁹ *Asia Raya*, 23 December 1943, p.2.

¹⁰⁰ See footnotes on p. 67. See also *Asia Raya*, 23 December 1943, p.2.

¹⁰¹ *Asia Raya*, 18 December 1943, p.2. The article displays the title of each painting, yet there is no information about the reason for the donation, nor the address of the hospital. This note is important to track how the paintings circulated outside of exhibitions.

¹⁰² *Djawa Baroe*, No. 3. Th. 2603. See also *Djawa Baroe*, No. 6. Th 2603.

¹⁰³ Aiko Kurasawa, 1987, p. 61.

autonomy to convey their artistic expression. Conversely, the Japanese artists employed in the Visual Art Section of the organization upheld the independence and integrity of art, free from any influence of propaganda. According to their perspective, artists must be able to harmonize their work's artistic, entertaining, and sloganistic elements.¹⁰⁴

As time went on, the Japanese continued to demand the loyalty of Indonesian artists. In commemorating the Greater East Asia Day, the Japanese put forward a question that had to be discussed in the *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho*: "How can the elements in the art field be strengthened to reach the final victory?"¹⁰⁵ Several days later, a serious meeting was held to respond to that question. Led by Sanusi Pane, the meeting resulted in a loyalty oath of the artists:

We, the art experts, including the journalists who have met at the Commemoration of Greater East Asia Development, repeat our oath of loyalty to the Military Government of Japan and promise to fight in support of the Japanese Military with all our power until we reach the final victory.¹⁰⁶

The artists also convincingly stated their willingness to erase Western influences to commemorate the development of Greater East Asia culture. The Japanese were quite happy in response to the oath and promised not to stand in the way of the development of Indonesian culture, as the Dutch had done.¹⁰⁷

Following the dissolution of POETERA, the *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho* became the sole institution responsible for organizing multiple exhibitions showcasing Indonesian and Japanese artists between April 1943 and July 1945. In contrast to the exhibition themes of POETERA, which leaned towards a nationalistic sentiment, the Japanese, through the *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho*, enjoyed greater latitude in shaping propaganda themes. These exhibitions encompassed themes such as *Meijisetsu*, *Seni Rupa Djawa Baroe*

¹⁰⁴ S. Sudjojono, *Catatan tentang Saya dan Orang-orang Sekitar Saya*, (Jakarta: KPG – Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia, 2017), p. 63.

¹⁰⁵ *Asia Raya*, 4 December 1943, p.2.

¹⁰⁶ *Asia Raya*, 7 December 1943, p.2. "Kami ahli-ahli seni termasuk joega wartawan-wartawan yang berapat dalam Perajaan Pembangoenan Asia Raya mengoelangi soempah setia kepada pemerintah Balatentara Dai Nippon dan soempah toeroet berdjoeng membantoe Balatentara Dai Nippon dengan seloeroeh dan segenap tenaga hingga kemenangan achir tertjapai."

¹⁰⁷ *Asia Raya*, 7 December 1943, p.2.

(New Javanese Art), *Peringatan Laut* (Commemoration of the Sea), *Semangat Prajurit* (The Spirit of Military), *Gerakan Hidup Baroe* (The Movement of New Life), *Romusha*, and *Membela Negara* (Defending the Country). In addition to the exhibitions officially organized by Sendenbu through *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho*, an exhibition of great significance was held to commemorate the birthday of the Japanese Emperor Hirohito (*Tencosetsu*) (Fig.5.9). This grand exhibition took place at the end of April 1943 in Jakarta, displaying works of painters such as S. Sudjojono, Subanto Suriosubandrio, Emiria Soenassa, G. A. Soekirno, I. Parera, Evi Spuit, Baharudin Marasutan, Basuki Abdullah, Kartono Yudhokusumo, Dullah, Henk Ngantung, and Soediahhardjo. In addition to paintings, posters, and sculptures were also exhibited.

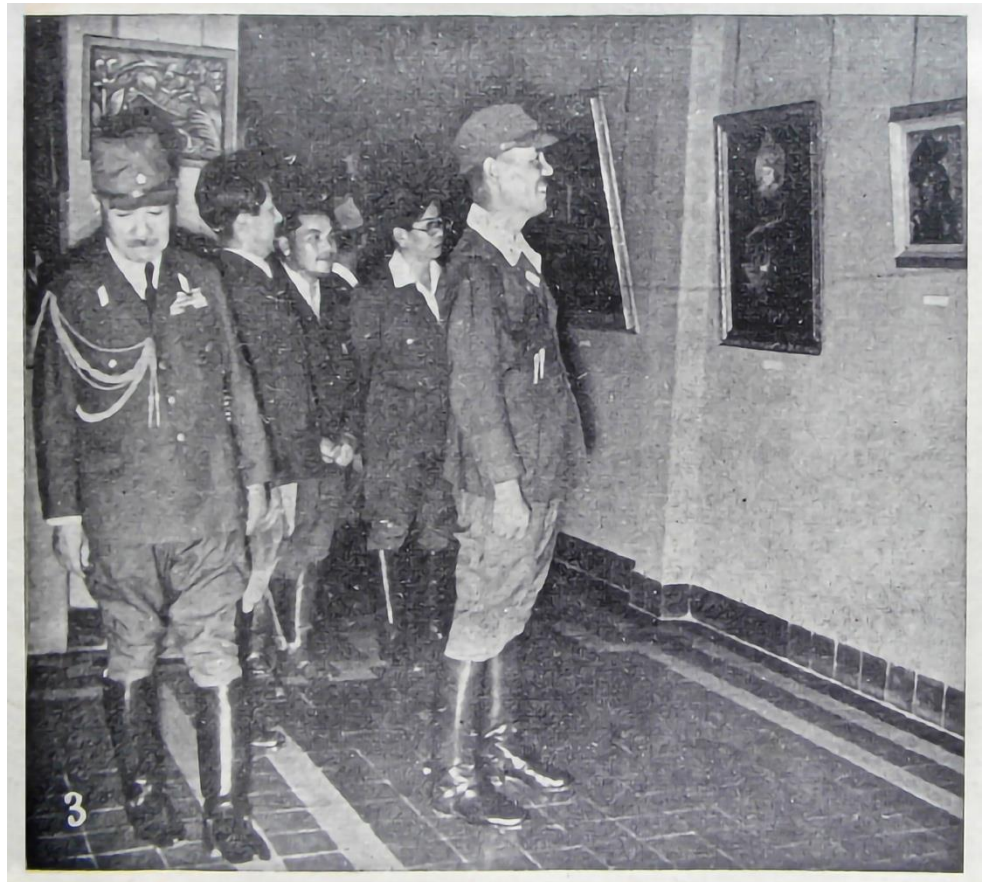


FIGURE 5.9.
Seiko Shikikan - the supreme commander – visited the *Tencosetsu* Exhibition in Jakarta.
 (Source: Pandji Poestaka, 15 May 1943)

Repro by Aminudin TH Siregar

Pertoendjoekan Seni Roepa Meidjisetsoe



FIGURE 5.10.
Paintings by award winners in the prestigious Meiji Setsu exhibition.
(Source: *Djawa Baroe*, 1 December 1943)

Pandji Poestaka magazine reviewed the enthusiasm of painters who tried to portray Eastern characteristics on their canvases. The magazine reviewer identified three styles from this exhibition: Basuki Abdullah, Sudjojono, and Emiria Soenassa. The first tends toward naturalism, the second is more toward realism, and the third is more concerned with the painter's inner sensibility in portraying nature and humans.¹⁰⁸ Below is a concise analysis of how artists incorporated propaganda requirements into their creations through exhibitions.

The *Meijisetsu* exhibition, held on 20 November 1943, commemorated the Japanese Empire's Culture Day (*Bunka No Hi*), with a promise of a cash prize for those whose work was selected. This extensive exhibition is fascinating (Fig. 5.10). It developed a "new standard of aesthetics" in presenting propaganda following Japanese wishes. To mobilize all creative potential, the exhibition expanded the categories to be limited to artwork and design work (the term "design" was already in regular use in those days).

¹⁰⁸ See reviews of this exhibition in S. "Seteleng Loekisan Pada Tentjoesetsu" in *Pandji Poestaka*, 15 May 1943, pp. 585-587.



FIGURE 5.11. A-B.
Subanto Suriosubandrio won the *Saiko Sikikan* category.

A) The painter poses in front of his winning painting (Source: *Asia Raya*, 22 November 1943).
Repro by Aminudin TH Siregar

B) Painting 12 'clock in the Rice Fields (Collection of Presidential Palace Yogyakarta).
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

Due to the significance of the exhibition, from September 1943, newspapers like *Asia Raya* and *Soeara Asia* had already announced the planned exhibition in an article titled *Seteleng Seni Roepa Nasional* (National Art Show). The aim within this framework was to accommodate and rally all groups of artists. Anyone without exception, as long as they could meet the requirements requested by the committee, could submit their works of art or designs to be selected and exhibited. The exhibition covered the following categories (according to the newspaper article): painting, propaganda art, carving art (sculpture), design work including an example of their work or model, covering buildings, gates, commemorative statues, housing, and stadiums.¹⁰⁹ The exhibition committee also accepted works from the art/design category using ceramics as a medium.

In October, *Asia Raya* newspaper reported the selection process of works submitted by participants. It was also reported that in the Visual Art Section office, the head of *Sendenbu*, Major Adachi, Machida's replacement, was present during the selection process. The jury eventually selected 70 out

¹⁰⁹ *Asia Raya*, 22 September 1943.

of 250 paintings, 8 out of 70 posters, and 1 out of 27 sculptures. The resulting selected works were not reported.¹¹⁰ Out of these, the jury selected five painters whose work deserved awards. The mass media frequently published about the award recipients and photographs of the works to prove that the artists supported Japanese propaganda.

I will now examine the artwork created by Subanto Suriosubandrio, entitled *Jam 12 Di Tengah Sawah* (12 o'clock in the Rice Fields), which was honored with the top prize in the *Saiko Sikikan* category (Fig. 5.11. A-B). The painting appears unassuming at first glance, yet it is laden with propaganda. The painting depicts a contented farmer quenching his thirst from a ceramic pitcher during the scorching midday. The artist shows the wife in the painting standing near her husband, wearing worn and unkempt clothing. Her head is lowered, seemingly in admiration for her husband's exhaustion from working in the arid rice fields, which is also evident in the background of the artwork.

On the other hand, the boy in the painting is depicted looking up proudly at his father. He is grasping a bamboo rice hat (*caping*) with both hands, giving a broad smile, indicating his pride in his father's profession. The boy seems promised to pursue his father's future path diligently. The yellow hue mirrors the intense, scorching beams of sunlight. This painting accurately depicted Japanese propaganda promoting the engaged family, the unwavering loyalty of a wife to her husband, the enthusiastic child prepared to emulate his father, and patriotism towards the homeland.

The painting by G.A. Sukirno, a former member of PERSAGI, was honored with the Sendenbucu category award by the head of the Sendenbu (the Sendenbucu). The whereabouts of Sukirno's painting are still unknown - unlike Suriosubandrio's painting, which is currently part of Soekarno's collection in the Presidential Palace Yogyakarta. The sole document for analyzing Sukirno's painting is the monochromatic photograph featured in the *Djarwa Baroe* magazine. Sukirno painted cotton tree with the clear text: *Bapa Tani, Bapa Tani Tanamlah Kapas...Pemerintah Membantu* (Dear Farmer, Dear Farmer, Please Plant Cotton...The Government Will Help). If Suriosubandrio offers a metaphor about the importance of hard work carried out by a low-income family, Sukirno's painting resembles a propaganda poster pamphlet. I assume that the Japanese admired this painting due to its alignment with their call to the public to cultivate diverse crucial crops for

¹¹⁰ *Asia Raya*, 29 October 1943.

Agus Djaya was honored with the *Gunseikan* award for his painting portraying a scene from the renowned wayang story about the *Bharata Yudha* war - a symbolic battle between the virtuous Pandawa brothers and the malevolent Kurawa, their cousins. Agus Djaya's intention in depicting the struggle was to capture the essence of the ongoing Greater East Asia war by envisioning the Japanese as the Pandawas. Viewed from an alternative standpoint, a painting that incorporates wayang as its theme can be linked to Japanese propaganda, which consistently promotes the artist's reinforcement of their Eastern identity.

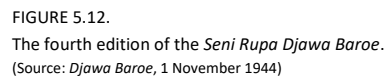


FIGURE 5.12.
The fourth edition of the *Seni Rupa Djawa Baroe*.
(Source: *Djawa Baroe*, 1 November 1944)

The painting titled *Ibu Djoeni* (Mrs. Djoeni) by Barli won the *Djarwa Shinbun* category. It depicts a young woman wearing a *kebaya*. Despite its simplicity, the painting is in line with Japanese propaganda, as Barli contemplates the ethical qualities of Eastern women, including loyalty, determination, tenacity, and tenderness. Simultaneously, the *kebaya*

portrayed in the painting represents the customary attire of Indonesian women and conveys a sense of non-Western cultural identity.

The fourth edition of the *Seni Rupa Djawa Baroe* (New Javanese Art) exhibition took place in November 1944. It showcased a collection of 76 paintings created by notable artists such as S. Toetoer, Subanto Suriosubandrio, and Soehargo Gembira. Their painting themes depicted the subjects of Japanese propaganda. For example, Suriosubandrio portrayed the gallantry of a youthful line of PETA¹¹¹ soldiers, as shown by the flag. This painting displays optimistic expressions, self-confidence, readiness, and bravery. (Fig. 5.12).

Meanwhile, Soehargo Gembira depicted two traditional musicians against a crowded backdrop. The painting naturally incorporated "Japanese influences" to preserve the distinctive artistic traditions of Indonesia (Eastern cultural values).

To welcome the 5th exhibition, in late March 1945, the Japanese government unveiled a proposition for an extensive exhibition that would serve as a platform for promoting the theme of the *Gerakan Hidoep Baroe* (The Movement for New Life) through various categories such as painting, posters, carving, ceramics, architecture, and more. The exhibition was accessible to all individuals, including artists from Japan. The administrators of the Art Section emphasized that the exhibition's goal was to uphold the essence of previous exhibitions by enhancing the nation's artistic landscape.

To improve the accessibility of the selection process and showcase the extensive size of the exhibition, the committee granted permission for individuals outside Jakarta to submit their work to the nearest *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho* office. The selection process, supervised by Saseo Ono, Yasioka Ken, and Yamamoto, was open and accessible to the public. The Japanese authority subsequently bestowed "commendations" and "awards" upon the finest works.¹¹² Approximately two months later, the jury publicly disclosed the identities of the painters who met the commendations and awards criteria.¹¹³ The *Gerakan Hidoep Baroe* exhibition took place from 29 April to 10 May 1945 at the Visual Art Section offices at Jalan Nishiki Door No. 4B in Jakarta.

¹¹¹ PETA is an acronym for Pembela Tanah Air (Defenders of the Homeland), a prestigious volunteer group formed by Japan in 1943 by recruiting young Indonesians.

¹¹² *Asia Raya*, 29 March 1945.

¹¹³ *Asia Raya*, 28 May 1945.



FIGURE 5.13. Hendra Gunawan's painting symbolizes the association of Asian powers.
(Source: *Asia Raya*, 22 September 1944)

Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

The exhibition showcased emerging artists like Sutikna, Derachman, Trubus, Nona Patty, and Lie Twan Hion. The committee aimed to inspire the interest of other prospective young artists and motivate more experienced artists to enhance the artistic caliber of their work. I have not discovered any photographic evidence of this exhibition. The newspaper *Asia Raya* provided a report containing various names and titles of paintings, including Agus Djaya's *Menghias* (Decorate), Basuki Resobowo's *Pemandangan di Senen* (View in Senen), Affandi's *Ibuku* (My Mother), S. Sudjojono's *Pemandangan Tempat Latihan Seni Roepa* (View of the Visual Arts Training Studio), Henk Ngantung's *Sedang Mengaso* (Taking A Rest), and Otto Djaya's *Keboen Sajur* (Vegetable Garden). Shortly after the exhibition's opening, it was reported that an esteemed guest, the military government leader (*Gunseikan*), visited the exhibition and expressed satisfaction with the artists' works.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ *Asia Raya*, 8 May 1945, p.2.

A touring exhibition on the theme of *Membela Negara* (Defending the Country) was planned, employing a mechanism similar to previous exhibitions. According to the *Asia Raya* newspaper, the Visual Art Section had unexpectedly approved approximately 10,000 artworks from different regions for consideration.¹¹⁵ Aside from exhibitions, another way to observe Indonesian artists' involvement in Japanese propaganda campaigns is to examine photographs of their artwork featured in newspapers or magazines. Given the limited collections from the Japanese period currently available in Indonesian national museums or galleries, this is the most reasonable approach. Otto Djaya's painting, which depicts the propaganda theme *Semangat Prajurit* (Spirit of the Soldier) or *Kerja Bakti* (Community Service), was frequently featured in the newspaper.

Aside from Djaya, the same newspaper also featured a photograph of a Hendra Gunawan painting, who worked for the Bandung branch of *Keimin Bunka Shidsho* at the time. The painting depicts a swarm of Asian animals attacking the enemy, seemingly shoulder to shoulder. This painting directly illustrates the propaganda frequently pushed by Soekarno in his speeches: "If the Dragon of China worked together with the White Elephant of Siam, the Holy Cow of India, the Sphinx of Egypt, and the Water Buffalo of Indonesia, illuminated by the rays of the bright Dai Nippon Sun, imperialism will be erased from the earth" (Fig.5.13).¹¹⁶

Support for Japan is not always expressed through bombastic themes, as it could also be channelled through painting portraits of Japanese military officials. Basuki Abdullah is a prominent example, having painted portraits of high-ranking commanders such as Hitoshi Imamura (Fig. 5.14).¹¹⁷ However, it is essential to emphasize that this painting was one of Abdullah's early works during this period. His other painting (Fig.5.15) shows his sympathy for the Indonesian people's suffering due to the forced labor program, also known as *Rōmusha* - a Japanese word meaning an unskilled worker doing temporary construction work.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ *Asia Raya*, 6 July 1945, p.2.

¹¹⁶ *Asia Raya*, 22 September 1944. "“Jikalau Liong Barongsai Tiongkok bekerja bersama-sama dengan Gajah Putih dari Siam dengan Lembu Nandi dari India dengan Sphinx dari Mesir dengan Banteng dari Indonesia dan disinari oleh sinarnya Matahari Dai Nippon yang gilang gemilang niscaya hancur leburlah tiap-tiap imperealisme dari muka bumi.”"

¹¹⁷ This photograph was published in the *Pandji Poestaka* magazine. See *Pandji Poestaka*, 12 September 1942. See also Basuki Abdullah painting the portrait of *Saiko Shikikan* in *Asia Raya*, 26 October 1944, p.2.

¹¹⁸ For *Rōmusha*, see Peter Post, et.al., 2010, p.197-217.



FIGURE 5.14. Hitoshi Imamura by Basuki Abdullah.
(Source: *Pandji Poestaka*, 12 September 1942)

Repro by Aminudin TH Siregar

None of the Indonesian art history texts mention the activities of the *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho* towards the end of the occupation, even though the organization actively arranged exhibitions during this period. In addition, there were rigorous deliberations on the future progress of arts infrastructure in preparation for welcoming Indonesian independence. During that period, the Japanese requested intellectuals and artists to carefully develop a fundamental concept of culture for the future of Indonesia. This encouragement was reiterated to the different divisions of *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho*, prompting them to become actively engaged, and led to a wildly enthusiastic response.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ See *Asia Raya*, 4 July 1945, p.2.



FIGURE 5.15.
Basuki Abdullah, *Too much and not enough rice*, 1943.

Private Collection
Photo by Venduehuis Den Haag

In addition to providing a vision for advancing culture,¹²⁰ this division also proposed that the Japanese government establish "culture schools" on a larger scale.¹²¹ An additional specific proposal entailed the establishment of a "National Culture Building," which would serve as the focal point for Indonesia's cultural initiatives.¹²²

¹²⁰ These recipes for culture abstract also surfaced from the Semarang branch. Further reading, see *Asia Raya*, 4 July 1945, p.2.

¹²¹ *Asia Raya*, 14 July 1945, p.2.

¹²² *Asia Raya*, 21 May 1945, p.2.

Artists were becoming increasingly eager to generate novel ideas in fine arts. Similar to the establishment of an investigation council for Indonesian independence in the realm of politics and nationhood¹²³, the *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho* also created a specialized unit known as the *Badan Penyelidik Seni Roepa Indonesia Baroe* (Investigation Council for New Indonesian Art). This unit demonstrated inclusivity and transparency by actively encouraging public participation. Public members were allowed to contribute suggestions, which internal administrators further discussed in a dedicated forum.¹²⁴

However, the discussion surrounding art abruptly ceased when the United States deployed its nuclear weapons on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The Japanese subsequently capitulated, acknowledging their defeat in the conflict they referred to as the Greater East Asia War.¹²⁵

To conclude this section, I would like to cite the newspaper that reported the termination of *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho*. The quote holds significance as it is the sole record documenting the dissolution of this esteemed cultural institution, renowned for its era. *Asia Raya* newspaper reported the closure of *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho* on 4 September 1945:

The closure of Djawa Hookookai has been announced by Djawa Hookookai Soosai on 30 August, 2605 (1945, *aths*). As a result, Keimin Bunka Shidoosyo, which is a part of Djawa Hookookai, will be closed starting from that date.¹²⁶

The newspaper additionally cited Ki Hajar Dewantara's intention to establish a new cultural institution addressing diverse cultural matters in post-war Indonesia. To assist with this undertaking, the organization wanted to employ the network of *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho* branches located in each

¹²³ They are known as *Badan Penyelidik Usaha-Usaha Persiapan Kemerdekaan Indonesia* or BPUPKI (The Investigating Committee for Preparatory Work for Indonesian Independence). This committee was inaugurated on 29 April 1945 to coincide with Emperor Hirohito's birthday. Japan formed this committee to obtain support for the war from the Indonesian people, along with promising Indonesian independence.

¹²⁴ *Asia Raya*, 24 May 1945, p.2. I have not found what kind of resolutions were issued by this unit.

¹²⁵ For the naming see Kōno Kenji, *Toedjoean Perang Amerika*, in *Pradjoerit* magazine, 1 January 1945.

¹²⁶ *Asia Raya*, 4 September 1945, p.2. "Berhoeboeng dengan pemboebaran Djawa Hookookai atas pengemoeman Djawa Hookookai Soosai pada tanggal 30 Agustus 2605 (1945, *pen.*), dengan sendirinja Keimin Bunka Shidoosyo (Poesat Keboedajaan) sebagai bagian dari Djawa Hokookai moelai tanggal terseboet diboebarkan."

respective area. Additionally, it was emphasized in this news that all previous branch leaders would assume leadership roles in their respective regions within this new organization. The plan failed to materialize due to the significant socio-political changes after the occupation.

Conclusion

This chapter has unveiled a previously undocumented account of the participation of artists during the Japanese occupation, shedding new light on conventional historiography. It has underscored the vast scope of Japan's contribution during the occupation. Notably, *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho*, a pioneering cultural institution established during World War II, played a transformative role in the Indonesian art scene, reshaping its physical and conceptual aspects. This institute spearheaded the advancement of contemporary Indonesian art through many initiatives, including art awards, touring exhibitions, painting and sculpture training, art lectures and discussions, and hands-on experience in cultural organization management. The policy evolved with the successful collaboration between Japanese *Sendenhan* and Indonesian artists and intellectuals.

Undoubtedly, the themes of paintings during this period exhibited a thrilling diversity, albeit under the influence of propaganda. Japan actively encouraged Indonesian artists to engage in social dynamics and changes, redefine their painting style, and immerse themselves in cultural organizations. This period marked a significant shift for Indonesian artists, who, once overshadowed by their European counterparts, were now entrusted with shaping artistic progress and guiding society's artistic consciousness. These experiences, despite the challenging circumstances, proved to be invaluable for their future growth.

I contend that the omission of numerous events occurring between March 1942 and August 1945 in the historical accounts of contemporary Indonesian art suggests a prevailing Indonesia-centric viewpoint that disregards the contributions of non-Indonesian individuals. This argument is further bolstered by the proliferation of divergent perspectives regarding Japan's role during the occupation. Some art critics perceive works of art as being created during that time under the direction of authorities based on their preferences or interests. The purpose of such art is solely to promote a propaganda agenda, which includes promoting the cultivation of *jatropa* or

cotton trees, glorifying the bravery of romusha and soldiers, depicting the atmosphere of diligent labor, showcasing the tenderness and loyalty of women, highlighting the passion for saving money, and exposing the magnificence of Eastern culture, such as dance and music, among other themes. Consequently, the artistic outcomes lacked any spiritual essence and merely served as ornamental embellishments for warfare.

When evaluating the art during the Japanese occupation, critic Trisno Sumardjo stated that this period was just “an intermezzo” in Indonesian art history and had no influence. He wrote:

The intermezzo stage was inserted by the population of Japanese soldiers during three and a half years (1941 – 1945). Despite efforts by the Japanese government to prioritize our artists for dishonest propaganda needs, and despite the camaraderie between the modern painters of both nations, such a short time certainly did not have a spiritual impact.¹²⁷

Prominent intellectual and writer Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana also criticized the occupation period. He conveyed that Japan was no different from the Netherlands, which also liked manipulating artists. He emphasized that “the Japanese and Dutch people like to lull us to sleep, praising us with the glories of the East so that we remain in a dreamy state, remembering the glory of the past, so that we don't try to reconcile ourselves with the modern era. It is in this dream state that it is easier for our nation to become victims of foreign political and economic efforts.”¹²⁸

Interestingly, Agus Djaya, in contrast, voiced his dissatisfaction with individuals who underestimated Japan's contribution. He denounced the inconsistent attitude for failing to represent an unbiased evaluation

¹²⁷ Trisno Sumardjo, *Kedudukan Seni Rupa Kita* in Zaini (ed), *Almanak Seni 1957* (Jakarta: Badan Musyawarah Kebudayaan nasional, 1956), hal. 127-128. “Tara intermezzo dimasukkan oleh penduduk balatentara Jepang selama tiga-setengah tahun (1941-1945). Meskipun Pemerintah Jepang banyak mengedepankan para seniman kita untuk keperluan propaganda yang tentunya tidak jujur, dan meskipun ada pergaulan antara pelukis-pelukis modern kedua bangsa, namun waktu sependek itu sudah tentu tak ada pengaruh keruhaniannya. See also Chairil Anwar's criticism of the emptiness of the soul during the Japanese occupation in Aoh.K. Hadimadja, *Beberapa Paham Angkatan 45*, (Jakarta: Tinta mas, 1952), p. 34.

¹²⁸ See Gadis Rasid, *Di Tengah-tengah Perjuangan Kebudayaan*, (Jakarta: Pustaka Rakjat, 1948), p. 13. “Orang-orang Jepang dan Belanda suka menina-bobokkan kita, memudji-mudji kita dengan keagungan Timur agar supaya kita tetap tinggal dalam keadaan mengelamun, mengenangkan djaya yang lampau, hingga tidak berusaha mentjotjokkan diri dengan zaman modern. Dalam keadaan mimpi inilah lebih gampang bangsa kita menjadi kurban usaha politik dan ekonomi asing.”

accurately. He disapproved of the hypocrisy of artists and intellectuals who initially praised Japan. Still, he later shifted to denouncing and condemning the occupation era as a demonstration of Japan's brutality in annihilating culture and local knowledge. However, he refrained from explicitly naming individuals. In his reflective writings published in 1946, Agus Djaya stated that Indonesian artists may collectively criticize the fallen Japanese nation, but only if they adopt a stance of deliberate insult from the beginning. He observed that artists during that period still possessed the autonomy to make choices: "Some artists now feel annoyed because at that time they were willing to become 'romusha artists', that is their own fault."¹²⁹

Being collaborative, which was also demonstrated by nationalist leaders such as Soekarno and Muhammad Hatta, certainly did not necessarily prostitute the ideals of artists in the face of the occupation regime. Instead, they consciously adopted this attitude as an effective strategy to train and mature artists to achieve long-term goals. They chose to enrich artistic practice and accelerate the emergence of new talents. Studio facilities, art materials, and exhibition opportunities are "luxuries" they would not receive if they were confrontational. With collaboration, they were also free to develop the basis of artistic/cultural thinking to welcome the new Indonesia. In turn, all the experiences from the occupation period provided a solid socio-cultural foundation for facing the challenges of the next period, known as the revolutionary period.

In this regard, the opinion of literary critic H.B. Jassin offers relevant objectivity. Even though he is critical of Japan's promises, which he calls "*balon-balon indah yang hanya berisi angin* (beautiful balloons that only contain air)," Jassin still recognizes the contribution of *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho*. Unlike Trisno Sumardjo, who categorically rejected the impact of that era on the spiritual aspects of Indonesian art, Jassin acknowledged its significance. He stated:

People may ridicule the institution called the Nippon Brand Cultural Center, where all kinds of artistic products were ordered and made, but it cannot be denied that the results of

¹²⁹ Agus Djaya, "Kita Membikin Kita Djuga dalam hal Keboedajaan." *Merdeka*, 26 Desember 1946. "Kami dapat menjetoedjoeinja oentoek mentjatji maki bangsa Djepang, jang telah ambroek, tetapi hanja, kalau sedari permoelaan mengambil sikap mentjatji maki. Bahwa ada beberapa seniman jang sekarang merasa djengkel karena waktoe itu telah sudi menjadi 'seniman roomoesha', itoe salahnja sendiri."

this institution were also useful at that time and in the future to unite all enthusiasm and energy. It is there that our young artists whose work is the same as the romusha, have their souls and minds tortured and their inner beings cooked for the coming revolution.¹³⁰

¹³⁰ See H.B. Jassin, *Kesusasteraan Indonesia dimasa Djepang*, (Jakarta: Balai Poestaka, 1948), p. 13. "Orang boleh mengedjek Lembaga jang bernama Poesat Keboedajaan tjap Nippon, di mana segala matjam hasil kesenian dipesan dan dibikin, tetapi tidak bisa disangkal bahwa hasil lembaga itoe bergoena djoega waktoe itoe dan bagi kemoedian hari oentoek memperpadoe segala semangat dan tenaga. Di sanalah seniman-seniman moeda kita jang pekerdjaannja sama dengan romusha djiwa dan pikiran, disiksa dan dimasak batinnja oentoek revoloesi jang akan datang."



On the Call for Revolution

This chapter offers an alternative narrative of the national revolutionary period throughout 1945-1950 in the history of modern Indonesian art by drawing upon seldom utilized sources. Some stories from this period had not been revealed - or were deliberately left out by historiographers. Some of these are scattered in magazines, newspapers, and memoirs. It took some time to find how these sources intertwined and then construct a chronology. Well-known historiographers like Claire Holt, Sanento Yuliman, Jim Supangkat, and M. Agus Burhan often neglected to include the chronological order of events, thus omitting significant historical contexts when discussing the period.

Claire Holt provided a special section for the revolutionary period, "After Independence." Yet, she did not offer many facts under this part, as if nothing happened after the proclamation of Indonesian Independence or between August and December 1945 and early 1947. Rather, Holt immediately jumped to 1946 by mentioning briefly only the founding of artists' collectives such as the *Tenaga Pelukis Indonesia* or *PTPI* (Center of Strength of Indonesian Painters), *Seniman Indonesia Muda* or *SIM* (Artists of Young Indonesia), and *Pelukis Rakjat* or *PR* (The People's Painters). Holt then skipped to 1948.¹

In his renowned book, *Seni Lukis Indonesia Baru - Sebuah Pengantar* (New Indonesian Painting - An Introduction), Sanento Yuliman also provided the same generalization, writing that: "The move of the government capital from Jakarta to Yogyakarta in 1946 was followed by the migration of painters, and Yogyakarta then became the center for painting activities."² Jim Supangkat also repeats the same narrative in *Indonesian Modern Art and Beyond*. He writes: "When the center of the fledgling

¹ See Claire Holt, *Art in Indonesia: Continuities and Change*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), pp. 200-205.

² Sanento Yuliman, *Seni Lukis Indonesia Baru: Sebuah Pengantar*, (Jakarta: Dewan Kesenian Jakarta, 1976), p. 12.

government moved from Jakarta to Yogyakarta in 1946, the painters moved as well. And this is how Yogyakarta became a center for fine art activities."³ A similar narration can also be found in the following sentences: "In 1946, the center of government temporarily moved from Jakarta to Yogyakarta, and this was immediately followed by the move of painters to Yogyakarta. Because of this event, Yogyakarta later became a base for interesting and important activities and growth of painting."⁴

Such a fragmented plotline can also be seen in Agus Burhan's research, leaving broken trails and discontinuities between events. Burhan is the most recent academic to conduct research in the historiography of post-independence Indonesian art. Like Holt, Burhan focused on the move from Jakarta to Yogyakarta, written with a single line of a simple proposition: "the republic's capital moved, bringing with its political leaders, military, intellectuals and artists." Compared to Holt, Burhan provides a forum for discussion for several of the artists' collectives mentioned above. Furthermore, Burhan also touched on some *sanggar* (artist studios) formed during the revolution such as *Gabungan Pelukis Indonesia* or GPI (Indonesian Painters Association), *Gelanggang* (The Arena), *Himpunan Budaya Surakarta* or HBS (Surakarta Cultural Association), *Sanggar Pelangi* (The Rainbow Studio), and several more. Burhan wrote the names of these artists' collectives, founded between 1945 and 1950, in one paragraph without suggesting a chronicle and context. Although it produces vagueness and repetition, Burhan's efforts were sufficient to provide an overview of the dynamics in the art scene at that time.⁵

The storylines about the move of artists to Yogyakarta in line with the transition of the Republic to Yogyakarta have become familiar narratives but have not yet progressed chronologically. At the same time, most historiographers engage in self-referentiality, resulting in redundant

³ Jim Supangkat, *Indonesian Modern Art and Beyond*, (Jakarta: The Indonesian Fine Arts Foundation, 1997), p. 44.

⁴ Suwarno Wisetrotomo, "Melacak Garis Waktu dan Peristiwa" in Soedarso Sp, et.al., *Pameran Seni Rupa Indonesia: Melacak Garis Waktu dan Peristiwa-Penampang Karya Seni Rupa Koleksi Direktorat Jenderal kebudayaan Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan*, (Jakarta: Direktorat Jenderal kebudayaan Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 1998), p.20. "Tahun 1946 untuk sementara pusat Pemerintahan pindah dari Jakarta ke Yogyakarta dan serta merta diikuti oleh pindahnya para pelukis ke Yogyakarta. Karena peristiwa itu Yogyakarta kemudian menjadi basis kegiatan dan pertumbuhan seni lukis yang menarik dan penting."

⁵ See M. Agus Burhan, *Seni Lukis Indonesia: Masa Jepang Sampai Lekra*, (Surakarta: UNS Press, 2013), pp. 22-24. See also Imam Buchori Zainuddin, *Latar Belakang Sedjarah Pembinaan dan Perkembangan Seni Lukis Indonesia Modern (1935-1950)*, Skripsi Sarjana Strata 1, Departemen Seni dan Perencanaan, Seksi Seni Rupa, Institut Teknologi Bandung, 1966, p. 60.

storylines. For example, Burhan's description of some artists' collectives is a repetition, not a discovery, because Burhan relies on the writings of Trisno Sumardjo, "Kedudukan Seni Rupa Kita" (The Position of Our Indonesian Fine Art), published in 1956 (Fig.6.1).

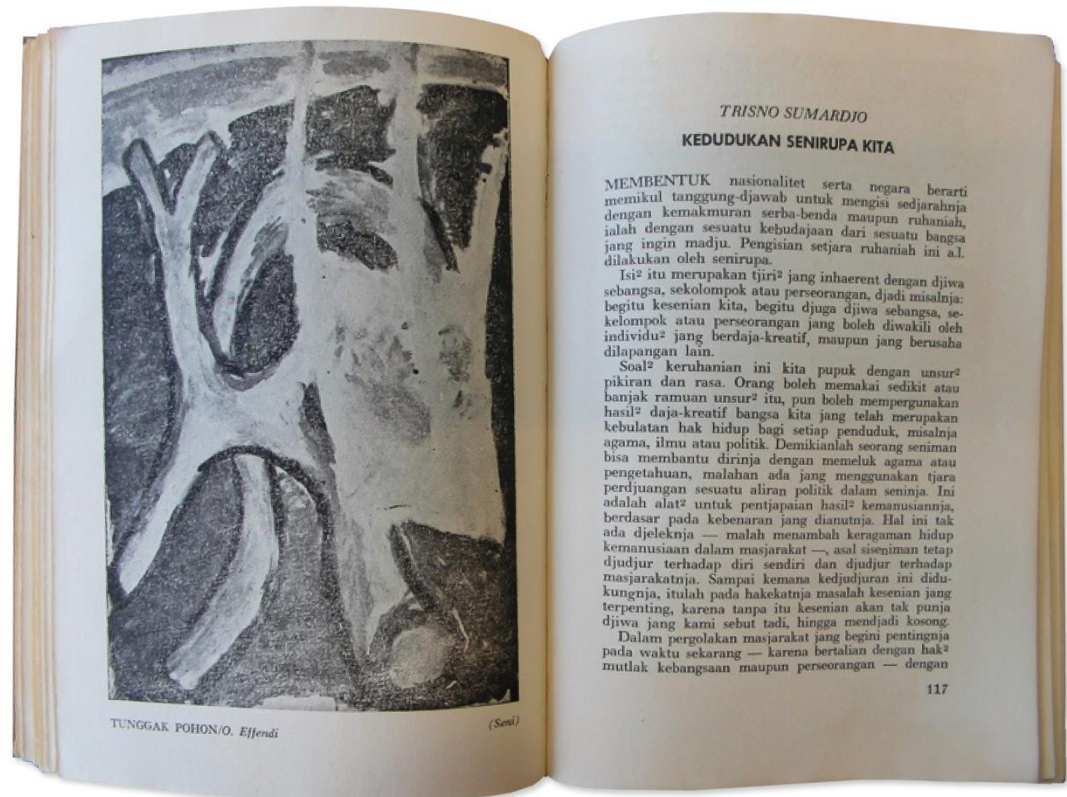


FIGURE 6.1.
Trisno Sumardjo, *Kedudukan Seni Rupa Kita*, 1956.

Collection of Leiden University Library
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

Sumardjo's contribution to historiographic studies is pivotal, as it provided the only comprehensive list of artists and groups that emerged during the revolution. This work, which later became Burhan's primary source and was also used by the authors of the canonical book *Sejarah Seni Rupa Indonesia* (History of Indonesian Art), has had a significant impact on subsequent studies. For instance, the book offers the name of the period as "Periode Pendirian Sanggar Antara 1945 dan 1950" (the Period of the

Studio's Establishment between 1945 and 1950), explaining the emergence of many artists' collectives during the time of the revolution and making "Periode Sanggar" famous in mainstream Indonesian art historiography. Yet, this canon book's focus was limited to the names of artists and studios, and needed a chronicle and context.

However, the Revolutionary Period can be viewed from multiple perspectives, such as artistic production (including propaganda products for example posters, comic strips, and billboards), movements, exhibitions, debates, networks, and affiliations of artists with specific political or ideological forces. Extensive observations are therefore needed to narrate the revolutionary period, considering the number of artists involved during this period and the spread of artistic activity locations in several cities. Nevertheless, this chapter will highlight cities in Java, in particular Jakarta and Yogyakarta. This approach is taken to keep focus and maintain continuity from the previous phases, where artistic activities were more centered in Jakarta.

What activities were artists involved in from the Proclamation of Independence on 17 August 1945 until 1950? How did the move from Jakarta to Yogyakarta take place? What impact did the 2nd Dutch Military Aggression, which occurred from 19 December 1948 to 5 January 1949, have on the art scene in Yogyakarta? What artistic products were produced? What has been inherited from this period?

I have divided this chapter into three sub-chapters and sections to answer these questions. The first *Revolution Calling* followed by several sections chronologically – from 1945 to 1950, namely *Seniman Merdeka*, *Pusat Tenaga Pelukis Indonesia*, *Move to Yogyakarta*, *Gelanggang*, *Seniman Indonesia Muda*, *Revolution Goes to Amsterdam and Accusations of Betrayal*, and *The Making of the Art Academy*. The second sub-chapter is *Impact of Aggression: The Great Loss and Back to Jakarta* and followed by *The Great Loss*, and *The Role of Taman Siswa*. At the end is a *Conclusion*. All sub-chapters and sections provide a chronicle by using neglected historical sources, such as activities after the Proclamation of Independence on 17 August 1945, the move to Yogyakarta, exhibitions, artists' collectives, the destruction of paintings, accusations of betrayal against Agus Djaya, the impact of Dutch military aggression especially as concerns the loss of works of art and archives related to propaganda that artists worked on, and the role of Taman Siswa in Jakarta after the aggression. I will try to weave these topics together in such a way

as to offer a window for viewing the dynamics in the art scene during those years which have never been reviewed.

Revolution Calling

Indonesian artists had gained a heightened awareness of their prominent role in the art scene since the Japanese occupation, owing to their exceptional capacity to convey intricate concepts through artwork. When the call for revolution arose, they efficiently utilized art as a catalyst to incite revolution, rallying individuals and instigating social movements. Artists established groups, exhibited works, composed songs, initiated travelling theatre performances, wrote poetry, released periodicals, designed and spread posters, and much more. Based on historical sources, the revolutionary period was productive even though the legacy of works from this period is minimal. As discussed below, this may in part be because some were destroyed due to Dutch military aggression. From 1945 to 1950, artists were actively involved in artistic activism as a crucial aspect of their involvement with the revolution. This involved using subversive and thought-provoking expressions to instigate social and political transformation. Artists believed their work raised awareness, cultivating revolutions, transforming society, and confronting entrenched racial biases. This sub-chapter presents the actions undertaken by individuals in a revolutionary situation.

Seniman Merdeka/Freedom Artists

A pivotal historical source to initiate the account of art activities in Jakarta following the Proclamation of Independence on 17 August 1945 is the testimony provided by journalist Rosihan Anwar in his brief memoir. At first, he explained the mental changes among artists in line with the rapid changes in society. The Japanese phase suddenly ended, and Indonesia entered a revolutionary phase. Anwar subsequently referred to a historical event that took place "shortly after the Proclamation of August 17th, 1945," at the *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho* headquarters in Jakarta. Unfortunately, he omitted the specific date and the identity of the artist who was present during the dissolution of the propaganda office.

However, he recollected the rapid dissemination of the revolutionary fervor, which led the artists to unanimously cease all their propaganda art

endeavors in support of the Japanese military. Soon after the proclamation, the artists welcomed what Rosihan called the "new era," as he wrote: "We are entering a new era. We all realize that we must continue to fight for the independence of the nation and state that has been proclaimed."⁶

To begin the new era, painters, poets, actors, and musicians immediately involved themselves in the revolution by stirring the spirit of national independence to all corners of Jakarta. The artists, who were mostly former members of *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho*, created a new group called *Seniman Merdeka* or *Seniman Indonesia Merdeka* (the Freedom Artists or the Artists of Freedom Indonesia), under the leadership of Sudjojono, with Usmar Ismail as deputy. Little information exists about the group that seemed to continue the propaganda work of the previous *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho*.

Members of *Seniman Merdeka* included, among others, Usmar Ismail, Cornel Simandjuntak, Suryo Sumanto, D. Djaja Kusuma, S. Sudjojono, Basuki Resobowo, Sarifin, Suhaimi, Rosihan Anwar, and Malidar (the only woman).⁷ Meanwhile, Sudjojono also mentioned in his memoirs that poet Chairil Anwar was involved.⁸ There are also no sources to determine whether this group's status is independent of any other revolutionary movement. One source says *Seniman Merdeka* operated under *Angkatan Pemuda Indonesia-API* (Indonesian Youth Force) with its most nationalist exponents being Wikana, Chaerul Saleh, and Sukarni.⁹

Another source to confirm Sudjojono's role in leading *Seniman Merdeka* in Jakarta is the testimony of writer and art critic Muhammad Balfas. According to Balfas, painters Sudjojono suggested that painting and other art forms were weapons of the Revolution. He had a solid nationalistic mind and extensive knowledge of history, especially about the role of artists in the revolutions in other countries. Because of this, he wanted Indonesia's struggle to become an artistic revolution, not anarchy without calculation. During these times, Sudjojono's leadership, commitment, and dedication to

⁶ Rosihan Anwar, "Sekelumit Kenang-kenangan Kegiatan Sastrawan di Zaman Jepang (1943-1945)" in *Budaya Djaya*, No.65, October 1973, pp. 595-596. See also Tashadi, et al., *Partisipasi Seniman dalam Perjuangan Kemerdekaan Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta*, (Jakarta: Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan RI, 1996), p. 36.

⁷ Tashadi, dkk., 1996, p. 4. Compare with the discontinuity offered by Kusnadi in Kusnadi, 1990-1991, p. 93. and Sidik Kertapati, 1957, p. 27.

⁸ S. Sudjojono, *Cerita Tentang Saya dan Orang-orang Sekitar Saya*, (Jakarta: KPG-Gramedia, 2017), p. 84. See also Rosihan Anwar, 1973, p. 596.

⁹ See Sidik Kertapati, *Sekitar Proklamasi 17 Agustus 1945*, (Jakarta: Jajasan Pembaruan, 1957), p. 27.

the Revolution made a strong impression on his colleagues, leading him to be appointed *Seniman Merdeka's* leader. Balfas testified: "When the embers of revolution started to spread throughout Jakarta, we saw Pak Djon (S. Sudjojono) leave his studio and join in stirring up the spirit of the people with his drawings placed on the street, in the markets, and on house walls."¹⁰

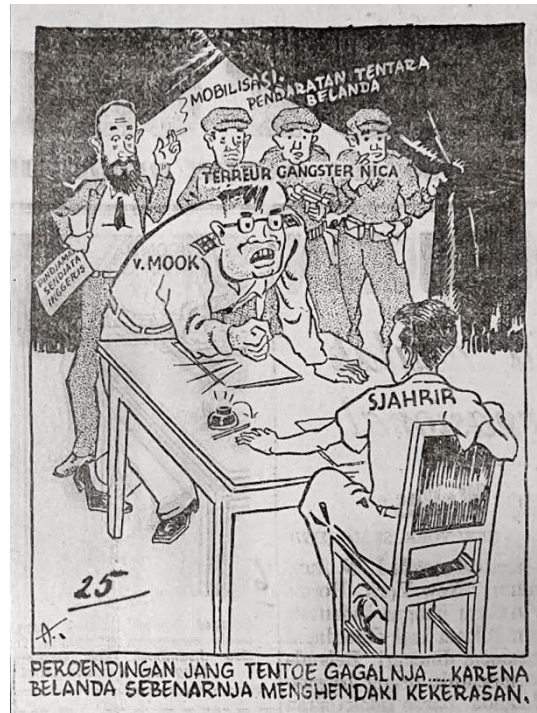


FIGURE 6.2. Abdul Salam caricature: "The bankruptcy of the Dutch is about time."

(Source: *Merdeka*, 17 January 1946)

Collection of Leiden University Library
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

The first step that Sudjojono took as leader was to make sure the logistics were in place for propaganda activities. Then, together with musician Cornel Simandjuntak,¹¹ Sudjojono requisitioned the cash

¹⁰ M. Balfas, "Mendjelang Seniman Sudjojono" in *Masjarakat*, No.1, Th.II, 5 January 1947.

¹¹ After the Japanese occupation, Cornel Simanjuntak composed independent songs. He was known as an "artist and soldier." Some of his popular marches that are still sung today are *Maju Tak Gentar* and *Sorak-sorak Bergembira*. He was reportedly involved in a battle with NICA in Jakarta that left a bullet embedded in his leg. He was then treated in Yogyakarta and passed away not long after. See Binsar Sitompul, *Cornel Simanjuntak: Komponis, Penyanyi, Pejuang*, (Jakarta: Pustaka Jaya, 1987), pp. 51-56.

from *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho* offices. After this, using trucks – just as *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho* did – the *Seniman Merdeka* group toured the city. Rosihan Anwar witnessed that Sudjojono orated on the truck with people gathering around. The topics of Sudjojono's speeches generally contained words that would invigorate the people's spirit to fight for independence.¹² They sang, agitated, made posters, and graffitied the city's walls with provocative statements about the right to autonomy. Dullah remembered that the painters who descended to the streets to do graffiti on walls and trams were Mochtar Apin and Suromo. Painters Abdul Salam, who worked as illustrators for *Merdeka* newspaper during that time, often made caricatures that condemned the Dutch political strategies (Fig.6.2).¹³

In his autobiography, painter Basuki Resobowo revealed why he joined *Seniman Merdeka* later than the others. Resobowo, at that time, had only been released from the Japanese military police (*kenpeitai*) imprisonment due to suspicion of anti-Japanese activities. “I was only released in 1945, two days after the proclamation of independence. So, I did not experience the proclamation and the preparation beforehand,” wrote Resobowo.¹⁴ After his release from prison, he immediately involved himself in the graffiti activities on city walls and passing trams. He claimed that the tram graffiti activities were done together with painter A. Wakidjan.¹⁵

Touring the city with trucks, creating posters, and graffiti did not continue for long. The activities by *Seniman Merdeka* carried out after 17 August only continued for two months, until about October 1945. It is not known precisely when the activities of the artists ended. However, on 1 October 1945, the *Merdeka* newspaper still reported artists' activities that ignited the spirit and instilled an awareness of the meaning of independence and the new state of the Republic of Indonesia.¹⁶ Approaching the end of the

¹² Rosihan Anwar, “Seniman dan Wartawan dalam Perjuangan 1942-1950”, Paper for the Seminar of the Role of Youth in the Nation's Struggle 1942-1950 Yogyakarta, 20-21 December 1989, p. 8.

¹³ Dullah “Mas Affandi” in Ajip Rosidi, et al., *Affandi 70 Tahun*, (Jakarta: Dewan Kesenian Jakarta, 1978), p.43 and Dullah “Teks Pidato Peranan Generasi Muda dan Sejarah Perjuangan Bangsa”, seminar paper, Masyarakat Sejarawan Yogyakarta and Balai Kajian Sejarah dan Nilai Tradisional Yogyakarta, 20-21 December 1989, p. 8.

¹⁴ Basuki Resobowo was imprisoned due to suspicion of conspiracy with groups spreading propaganda of “anti-free Indonesia the Japanese puppet”. See Basuki Resobowo, *Riwayat Hidupku Bagian Ke-Empat*, personally published by Basuki Resobowo, Oosterpark 63, 1092 AR, Amsterdam-Holland, 1987, pp. 26-27.

¹⁵ Basuki Resobowo, *Bercermin di Muka Kaca: Seniman, Seni, dan Masyarakat*, (Yogyakarta: Penerbit Ombak, 2004), p.107.

¹⁶ See “Barisan Seniman Menjerboe Ketengah Rakjat” in *Merdeka*, 1 October 1945, p. 2.

year, *Seniman Merdeka* was scattered. Some of them took up arms and joined the battle.¹⁷

I did not find any sources to expand *Seniman Merdeka's* narrative. However, as explained in Chapter 7, in December 1945, several painters - it is not yet sure whether *Seniman Merdeka* was involved - organised an exhibition that had great significance in art history. The Indonesian government used this exhibition politically to inform the international world that the Indonesian nation is a cultural nation, and not a group of bandits or terrorists who suddenly proclaimed their independence. This exhibition proves that artists have made no small contribution to guarding the national revolution.

Pusat Tenaga Pelukis Indonesia – PTPI
(Center of Strength of Indonesian Painters)

Before addressing the situation in early 1946, characterized by the Republic's relocation to Yogyakarta with the artists following, it is imperative first to acknowledge the artistic endeavors taking place in Yogyakarta. Hence, it is crucial to underscore that *Seniman Merdeka* in Jakarta was not the sole artists' collective established during the early stages of the revolution. In Yogyakarta, on 20 October 1945, artists' collective *Pusat Tenaga Pelukis Indonesia – PTPI* (Center of Strength of Indonesian Painters) was formed that progressively focused on the propaganda of independence and anticolonialism.¹⁸ This organization was led by Djajengasmara, and was strengthened by Indro Soegoendo, Soerjosoegondo, Sindusisworo, Soegiri, Prawito, Sukamto, Harjadi, Tjondro Sangkojo, and Sukrido. They had sixty members in total.¹⁹

Sanento Yuliman thought that PTPI was another version of *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho*.²⁰ Before August 1945, this organization was still named *Badan Perdjuangan Poster Aksi* (Action Poster Struggle Organization), which painted walls and trains to promote independence. The wall-painting, poster making, and slogan painting around Yogyakarta

¹⁷ Rosihan Anwar, 1989, p. 8.

¹⁸ Center for Painter Workers Indonesia.

¹⁹ The list of names involved and their roles in producing propaganda posters in PTPI activities can be found in Djajengasmara, *Perjuangan P.T.P.I.*, papers in preparation for "Reuni P.T.P.I 1978-1979", 10 June 1978, Documents of Djajengasmara, unpublished.

²⁰ See Sanento Yuliman, *Keindonesiaan, Kerakyatan dan Modernisme dalam Kritik Seni Lukis Indonesia*, (Jakarta: Penerbit Gang Kabel, 2020), p. 111.

increased after the independence proclamation was read in Jakarta.²¹ According to Djajengasmara, the Information Ministry officially recognized this organization as part of the *Badan Perjuangan Penerangan Rakyat* (People's Struggle Information Organization), which "fought with paint, pencil and paper together with bullets and words of diplomacy to rid the colonizers from Indonesia."²²

PTPI was an inclusive organization characterized by the slogan "from the people, for the people, by the people." This organization actively engaged individuals in creating propaganda posters utilizing materials such as paper, textiles, and wood. Furthermore, illustrations were created employing stencilling or spray-painting techniques. PTPI anticipated that their propaganda efforts would garner global attention.²³ One of the most attractive PTPI activities was propaganda using a projector projecting images on a wall, accompanied by a speech broadcasted through speakers. They called this the "Projected Poster." This strategy was deemed effective as it attracted public enthusiasm so that PTPI felt it needed to narrate the independence struggle systematically. Djajengasmoro, the founder of PTPI, stated that one instance of propaganda material was the display of thirty posters in sequence narrating the determination of the populace in their struggle to liberate themselves from Dutch colonization.²⁴

PTPI also organised exhibitions. Its debut exhibition was held on 8 June 1946 as part of the 2nd Youth Congress in Yogyakarta. The show featured paintings by its members and reportedly received a comprehensive response.²⁵ PTPI's other significant contribution was its orientation towards education outside its propaganda activities. Later on, several of its exponents would be involved in the founding of an art school known as Indonesian Academy of Art (Akademi Seni Rupa Indonesia – ASRI).²⁶ Unfortunately, I have not found evidence on how the PTPI exponents connected or

²¹ Djajengasmara, *Tjataan Riwayat Perdjoengan P.T.P.I Mulai Tanggal 20 Oktober 1945*, Naskah Pidato Peringatan "Ulang Tahun ke-7 P.T.P.I Jogjakarta", 20 October 1952, Documents of Djajengasmara, unpublished. See also Djajengasmara, *Perjuangan P.T.P.I*, 1978.

²² Djajengasmara, *Perjuangan P.T.P.I*, 1978. See also *Perdjoengan PTPI in Revolusi Pemoeda*, 25 December 1945.

²³ "Seroean P.T.P.I" in *Kedaulatan Rakyat*, 2 July 1946.

²⁴ Djajengasmara, *Perjuangan P.T.P.I*, 1978. Regrettably, I have not discovered any photographic records that more accurately portray the propaganda apparatus.

²⁵ See Hardjito, *Risalah Gerakan Pemuda*, (Jakarta: Pustaka Antara, 1952), pp. 51-52.

²⁶ The story of the founding of an art academy in Yogyakarta can be seen in Tashadi and Bambang Sularto, *R.J. Katamsi Martohardjo: Hasil Karya dan Pengabdianya*, (Jakarta: Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Direktorat Sejarah dan Nilai Tradisional/Proyek Inventarisasi dan Dokumentasi Sejarah Nasional, 1981-1982), pp. 29-54.

intersected with the painters who migrated from Jakarta to Yogyakarta. This intersection happened when ASRI was founded in 1950, where some of them took up roles as educators at the campus.

Move to Yogyakarta

Unlike what is perceived in the standard narrative, every artist had his/her way of moving to Yogyakarta, and this did not happen all at once. Apart from that, not all artists who went to Yogyakarta came from Jakarta, as will be discussed in this section. As with Holt, Yuliman, Supangkat, and Burhan above, a skipping storyline can also be seen with Spanjaard. I will begin this section by quoting a paragraph from Spanjaard. Spanjaard wrote that, when Soekarno decided to move the capital from Jakarta to Yogyakarta in early 1946: "Many artists (painters and writers) followed him. Several of them settled in Madiun, where the revolutionary artist group SIM (*Seniman Muda Indonesia*) was founded by Sudjojono, Trisno Sumardjo, Sunindyo, and Suradji."²⁷

Spanjaard led readers to believe that the artists' names mentioned in the paragraph – "and several others" – joined the migration to Yogyakarta with Soekarno. Did Sudjojono and Trisno Sumardjo also first move together with Soekarno to Yogyakarta? But who was part of Soekarno's entourage? I conducted research to try to answer these questions but found no relevant sources. Yet, I have recently found one document where only one painter was recorded as part of Soekarno's entourage to Yogyakarta: Affandi. The document states, "Affandi left Jakarta with Soekarno by train in early January 1946 and was in Yogya for the rest of the revolution."²⁸

I argue that Sudjojono was not in the train that brought the republic to Yogyakarta; at that time, he was living in Jakarta. On the other hand, Sudjojono's presence was urgently needed to help with propaganda activities to the point that the Government felt it had to summon him through a newspaper. I found evidence of this summoning on the first page of *Merdeka* newspaper in a column titled "Summons to Art Workers," published 3 January 1946 (Fig. 6.3). In the column, S. Sudjojono, Cornel

²⁷ Helena Spanjaard, 1998, p. 117. "Veel kunstenaars (schilders en schrijvers) volgden hem. Een aantal van hen vestigde zich in Madiun, waar de revolutionaire kunstenaarsvereniging SIM (Seniman Muda, Jonge Indonesische Kunstenaars) werd opgericht door de schilder Sudjojono en de schrijvers Trisno Sumardjo, Sunindyo en Suradji."

²⁸ Documents of Robert Cribb, *Algemeen Rijksarchief Tweede Afdeling*, Losse Aanwinsten vanaf 1980, Inv.nr. 188. My gratitude goes to Remco Raben who informed me of this document's existence.

Simandjuntak, Sumanto, and Djojokusumo were summoned by the Government of the Republic to “immediately and with haste arrive in Yogyakarta to help the Information Ministry.”²⁹ Unfortunately, despite the extraordinary and urgent summons, Sudjojono could not immediately leave Jakarta.

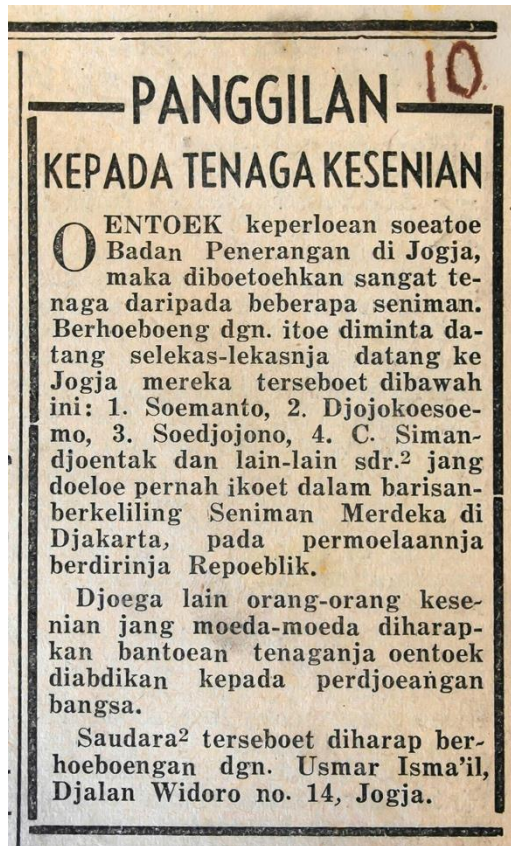


Fig.6.3. *Panggilan Kepada Tenaga Kesenian*.
(Sources: *Merdeka*, 3 January 1946)

Collection of Leiden University Library
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

In early 1946, Sudjojono was still in poor health caused by malaria. Once he had recovered, he immediately left Jakarta, although he did not go directly to Yogyakarta. Instead, he stayed for a while in the town of Cikampek - about 30 km from Jakarta. Then from Cikampek, he continued his journey towards Madiun, which is around 164 km from Yogyakarta.³⁰

²⁹ “Panggilan Kepada Tenaga Kesenian,” *Merdeka*, 3 January 1946, p. 1. The summons was also directed to other artists to help the independence efforts of the Government in Yogyakarta.

³⁰ S. Sudjojono, *Cerita tentang Saya dan Orang-orang Sekitar Saya*, (Jakarta: Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia, 2017), p. 173.

Other sources mention that Sudjojono's move to Cikampek was forced by the rumor that the Dutch planned to bomb several places in Jakarta, including the Sunter area where Sudjojono resided. Hearing of this rumor, Sudjojono and his family decided to evacuate to Wikana's³¹ house in Cikampek. After staying several weeks in Cikampek, Sudjojono journeyed towards Madiun to join the youth movements.³² Painter Sudibio and critic Trisno Sumardjo – whose names were mentioned in Spanjaard's paragraph above – were at that time already residing in Madiun. They could therefore not be in Soekarno's entourage traveling towards Yogyakarta. Their biographical data show that both worked at the Railway Service in Madiun before entering the art world.³³

Dullah had a different experience. From Jakarta, he did not immediately move to Yogyakarta. After witnessing the terrible situation in Jakarta due to armed conflict, Dullah decided to move to his hometown, Solo, about 84 km from Yogyakarta. He was then recorded as a member of *Seniman Indonesia Muda (SIM)* when the artists' organization moved from Madiun to Solo. Later on, when the Yogyakarta branch of SIM was opened, Dullah moved there and worked as the secretary of the organization, chaired by Rusli.³⁴

Rusli had studied art at the Visva-Bharati University in Shantiniketan, India, between 1932-1938, and was a contemporary of Sudjojono and Affandi. After returning from India, Rusli resided in

³¹ Wikana is a left-leaning revolutionary respected for his intense role in youth circles before the Proclamation in 1945. At the beginning of the August revolution, Wikana was one of the founders *Angkatan Pemoeda Indonesia (API)*. He was also a prominent figure of *Pesindo (Pemuda Sosialis Indonesia, Indonesia Socialist Youths)*. Wikana was later appointed as the Minister for Youth Affairs (1946-1948). For more about Wikana and his roles, see A.M. Hanafi, *Menteng 31: Membangun Jembatan Dua Angkatan*, (Jakarta: Sinar Harapan, 1997), Hardjito, *Risalah Gerakan Pemuda*, (Jakarta: Penerbit Pustaka Antara, 1952), and Adam Malik, *Riwayat Proklamasi Indonesia Agustus 1945*, (Jakarta: Widjaya, 1950), pp. 88-89.

³² See Mia Bustam, *Sudjojono dan Aku*, (Jakarta: Institut Studi Arus Informasi, 2013), pp. 61-69. I have not found objective evidence that explains why Sudjojono moved to Madiun. However, I assume the move was related to the *Dewan Penderita Perjuangan* (Struggle Workers Council) that moved to the city. See Hardjito, 1952, p. 48.

³³ For more about Sudibio see Harmonie Jaffar, *Serunai di Alam Damai/Serenade in Serenity: Kisah Hidup dan Karya Pelukis Surrealis Soedibio*, limited print, without year and publisher, p. 6. This very brief biography was written by Jaffar based on direct interviews with Sudibio. For Trisno Sumardjo's profile, see Korrie Layun Rampan (ed.), *Trisno Sumardjo: Pejuang Kesenian Indonesia*, (Jakarta: Yayasan Arus dan BKKNI DKI Jaya, 1985). I have yet to discover biographical sources for D. Suradji and Sunindya.

³⁴ Sudarmadji, 1988, p. 19. According to Daed Joesoef, he served for a while as the head of the Yogyakarta branch of SIM – before being fired by Sudjojono. See Daed Joesoef, "Tino Sidin yang Aku Kenal" in Subroto Sm. (ed.), *Tino Sidin: Guru Gambar dan Pribadi Multidimensional*, (Yogyakarta: Lukman Offset, 2014), p. 20.

Yogyakarta and worked as an art teacher at Taman Siswa.³⁵ Rusli is remembered for his courage in lowering the Japanese flag still flying at the Gedung Agung Yogyakarta when the revolution sparked in Jakarta.³⁶ He raised the Indonesian flag in its place.³⁷ Suromo's story of leaving Jakarta is similar to Dullah's. When the security situation in Jakarta deteriorated, Suromo, who had already actively exhibited with PERSAGI before the Japanese occupation, decided to return to Solo. Not long after, he was involved with other painters in founding the SIM branch in that city.³⁸

There was no mass exodus of painters when Soekarno and his government moved from Jakarta to Yogyakarta. They gradually moved there at different times via different routes. The painter Nashar experienced a different story in evacuating to Yogyakarta. He went to the city with his family due to the deteriorating social conditions in Jakarta. After living in Jakarta, Nashar found out that Affandi had already created in his home an open studio for those who wanted to learn to paint. At Affandi's studio, Nashar again met with A. Wakidjan, Zaini, and Trubus – friends from his youth in Jakarta who studied painting together during the Japanese occupation under the tutelage of Sudjojono.³⁹ Nashar also met more senior painters like Rusli, Surono, Harijadi S., and Sudarso.

Painters from the highland Bandung – 150 km from Jakarta – had their own way of moving to Yogyakarta. In early 1946, a group of painters consisting of Hendra Gunawan, Sudjana Kerton, Soeparto, Abedy, Barli, Toerkandi and Koestiwa agreed to respond to the summons of the revolution to come to Yogyakarta. As reported by the *Lasjkar* newspaper, on the journey they painted directly on the battlefield: "With their painting equipment and each with a colt automatic, these young painters, Kartono, Soeparto, Abedy, Barli, Hendra, Koestiwa and Toerkandi recently joined the battle front in Bandung to paint the clashes in Lengkong, Cicadas, Pasir Kaliki to Lembang."⁴⁰ From Bandung, the group arrived in Tasikmalaya – about

³⁵ Trisno Sumardjo, "Rusli Pelukis Esensi" in *Zenith* magazine.

³⁶ Currently it is the *Yogyakarta Presidential Palace*.

³⁷ Tashadi, et.al., 1996, pp. 50-51.

³⁸ S. Sudjojono, "Memperkenalkan Suromo: Pelukis Rakjat dan Seniman Ulung", *Sunday Courier*, 25 April 1954, p. 19.

³⁹ Muchtaruddin Ibrahim, *Zaini – Hasil Karya dan Pengabdianannya*, (Jakarta: DepDikBud -Direktorat Sejarah dan Nilai Tradisional, 1982-1983), pp. 24-25.

⁴⁰ See Ida Srihadi, *Perkembangan Seni Rupa Bandung dan Sekitarnya 1945-1983* in *Berkala Seni Rupa, Sejarah seni Rupa Indonesia 1945-1983*, (Jakarta: Dewan Kesenian Jakarta, 1984), p. 53. See also M. Dwi Marianto, "Srigala Yang Berjalan Sendirian" in Astri Wright, et.al, *Revolusi dan Evolusi Sudjana Kerton*, (Bandung: Sanggar Luhur, 1999), pp. 94-95.

115km from Bandung – and held an exhibition. Interestingly, the temporary exhibition held between April 24th – 27th, 1946, was conducted thanks to the support of the militia organized under *Gaboengan Perdjoangan Rakyat* (People's Struggle Union). It can be seen from this case how artists assimilated with society. The call of the revolution had united them. The revolutionary situation had also changed the perspective of the painters regarding the function and role of art, as written in a newspaper at that time: "The motto of young Indonesian painters is no longer *l'art pour art* (art for art), but *l'art pour la revolution* (art for the revolution)."⁴¹



Fig.6.4. Soekarno attended the exhibition opening on 1 May 1946 in Yogyakarta.
(Sources: *Pantja Raja*, 15 May 1946)

Photo by ANTARA
Repro by Aminudin TH Siregar

In early May 1946, a group of militia and painters arrived in Yogyakarta. Their arrival was marked with an exhibition highlighting "The Revolutionary Struggle" at the Indonesian National Committee Building. Soekarno, Muhammad Hatta, and other officials were reported to have attended the exhibition opening. The exhibition chairman told of the perseverance of the painters in recording the battles in Bandung and

⁴¹ "Seni Oentoek Revoloesi, Boekan Seni Oentoek Seni", *Kedaulatan Rakjat*, 24 April 1946, p. 1.

surrounding areas and that the exhibition is a true example of the contribution of painters to the revolution: "Our painters went forward into the battle areas to create accurate and real paintings about the conflict between NICA's⁴² capitalism and our socialism." An announcement was made about two painters who perished on the battlefield, Ma'roef and Otto Noerdjihan from Tasikmalaya. These individuals were former members of a paramilitary unit known as *Gaboengan Perdjoangan Rakyat* (The United People's Struggle). Following their participation in an exhibition in Tasikmalaya, they transitioned to becoming painters. During the opening event, Soekarno emphatically praised the painters for their patriotism and active contribution to the revolution (Fig.6.4).⁴³ After the exhibition ended, some painters moved to other cities while others stayed in Yogyakarta.⁴⁴ For instance, Hendra Gunawan joined the *Seniman Masyarakat* (The People's Painters) group – a painting studio founded by Affandi. He did not return to Bandung until many years later.⁴⁵

It has previously been stated that, upon his arrival in Yogyakarta, Affandi settled in a simple house he made into his painting studio. Gradually, many other artists joined and painted there, yet there are not many sources about the activities in that studio. According to Nashar, from early 1946 the studio had a name, *Seniman Masyarakat* or *Seni Rupa Masyarakat* (Community Artists). Those who were involved in its founding included Rusli, Gunadi, Harjadi, and Affandi, who acted as its chair. The existence of *Seniman Masyarakat* only lasted a couple of months after its foundation, after which it merged and became the Yogyakarta branch of SIM.⁴⁶

Representing artists' collectives from outside Java, *Angkatan Seni Rupa Indonesia 1945 -ASRI'1945* (Indonesian Art Force) needs to be mentioned. ASRI'1945 was founded in Medan when the revolution broke out

⁴² The Dutch in Australia set up the Netherlands-Indies Civil Administration (NICA) on 3 April 1944 to reinstate civil and legal governance in the Dutch East Indies, which was under Japanese control. This decision was made as the Netherlands continued to assert its claim over Indonesia as part of its territory. For further reading see W. Preger, *Dutch Administration in the Netherlands Indies*, (Melbourne: Cheshire Pty, 1944)

⁴³ "Pertoendjoekkan Seni Loekis Perdjoengan", *Kedaulatan Rakjat*, 2 April 1946.

⁴⁴ Nashar, 2002, p.21-22. In 1948, Barli returned to Bandung and continued his exploits there. See Jim Supangkat, *Titik sambung: Barli dalam Wacana Seni Lukis Indonesia*, (Jakarta: Etnobook, 1996), p. 46.

⁴⁵ Nashar, 2002, p.18. Other sources say that *Seniman Masyarakat* was founded by Affandi with Sudarso, Hariyadi, and Soedibyo. See Sardjana Sumichan (ed.), *Affandi Vol.1*, (Jakarta: Bina Lestari Budaya dan Singapore Art Museum, 2007), p. 201.

⁴⁶ See "Catalogus Steleng Seni-Lukis", Jakarta: Kementerian Penerangan Republik Indonesia, 1949, p. 1.

on Sumatra island. This group was supported by other painters such as Hasan Siregar, Ismail Daulay, Anwar SB, Syamsuddin MS, Syarif Ismail, Ibrahimsyam, Ragun Sembiring, Bahrum, and RM Aulia, as well as others.⁴⁷

Leaving Medan at the end of 1946, three people from ASRI'45, Nasjah Djamin, Daoed Joesoef, and Sam Soeharto, arrived in Yogyakarta. Their strong interest in art attracted them to Affandi's circle.⁴⁸ Yet, according to Daoed Joesoef, this group did not stay long in Yogyakarta as they had to continue their journey to Solo to help with setting up the SIM branch in that city. More than just a visit, Joesoef claimed that with Nasjah Djamin and Sam Soeharto, he was involved in drafting SIM's statute. In his memoirs, Joesoef wrote: "We are the ones who did the drafting as the senior and junior artists had no interest in organizational life. In general, they lived as bohemians, carefree, and never arrived on time for meetings."⁴⁹

Gelanggang

Not all artists moved to Yogyakarta as is suggested in common narratives. Painters like Mochtar Apin, Baharudin Marasutan, and Henk Ngantung remained in Jakarta. In mid-1946, they joined an inclusive community called *Gelanggang* (The Arena), initiated by Asrul Sani, Chairil Anwar, and Rivai Apin. Apart from them are other names such as Muhamad Balfas and Pramoedya Ananta Toer, Rosihan Anwar, Usmar Ismail, and Ida Nasution (Fig.6.4).⁵⁰

Gelanggang's reputation was widely discussed as they persistently placed universalism and humanism in Indonesian culture, instead of nationalism – as promoted by nationalist artists like Sudjojono – through what would be known as the *Surat Kepercayaan Gelanggang* (*Gelanggang's* Statement of Beliefs). This group believed that, "We are the true heirs of

⁴⁷ Sources that reveal more about this group are limited. For instance, see Amran Ekoprawoto, et al., *Sejarah Seni Rupa Sumatera Utara: Kajian Kehidupan Seni Rupa di Medan Tahun 1945 – 2005 (Sebuah Observasi Historis)*, (Banda Aceh: Balai Pelestarian Sejarah dan Nilai Tradisional Banda Aceh, 2007), pp. 21 and 34.

⁴⁸ Nasjah Djamin, "Affandi" in Ajip Rosidi, et al., 1978, pp. 52-53. For another version, see Lustantini Septiningsih, *Pengarang Nasjah Djamin dan Karyanya*, (Jakarta: Pusat Pembinaan dan Pengembangan Bahasa Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 1996), p. 8. See also Nasjah Djamin, *Hari-hari Akhir Si Penyair*, (Jakarta: Pustaka Jaya, 2013), p.12-13.

⁴⁹ Daoed Joesoef, *Rekam Jejak Anak Tiga Zaman*, (Jakarta: Penerbit Buku Kompas, 2017), p.86-87. To this date I have yet to discover the Constitution of this organization.

⁵⁰ D.S. Moeljanto dan Taufiq Ismail, *Prahara Budaya: Kilas-balik Ofensif Lekra/PKI Dkk.*, (Bandung: Mizan dan HU Republika, 1995), p. 31. See also Si Oema "Perkoempoelan Baroe: Gelanggang" in *Saät*, 18 Mei 1948 dan Sitor Situmorang, "Gelanggang" in *Mimbar Indonesia*, 4 March 1950.

world culture, and we must perpetuate this culture in our own way. We have risen from the masses, and the viewpoint of the masses is a medley from which healthy new worlds can be fashioned. Our Indonesian-ness is not solely due to our tanned skin, black hair, or temple bones that jut forward, but more by what is expressed by our hearts and minds. We will not give one word to sum up the culture of Indonesia. When we talk about Indonesian culture, we don't think about polishing the results of old culture until they are shiny and proud, but we think about a healthy new cultural life.”⁵¹ This manifesto was dated 18 February 1950 and first published on 23 October 1950 in the weekly magazine *Siasat*.



Fig.6.5. The *Gelanggang*, 1948.
(Source: <https://geheugen.delpher.nl>)

Photo by Charles Breijer

⁵¹ “Kami adalah ahli waris yang sah dari kebudayaan dunia dan kebudayaan ini kami teruskan dengan cara kami sendiri. kami lahir dari kalangan orang-banyak dan pengertian rakyat bagi kami adalah kumpulan campur-baur dari mana dunia-dunia baru yang sehat dapat dilahirkan. Ke-Indonesiaan kami tidak semata-mata karena kulit kami yang sawo matang, rambut kami yang hitam atau tulang pelipis kami yang menjorok ke depan, tetapi lebih banyak oleh apa yang diutarakan oleh wujud pernyataan hati dan pikiran kami.”

In the 1950s, *Gelanggang* exponents chose their paths. Mochtar Apin joined Fine Art-ITB, which is known for its modernism. Henk Ngantung, Rivai Apin, and Pramoedya Ananta Toer joined the People's Cultural Institute or LEKRA (Institute of People's Painters), which had a populist ideology. Asrul Sani and Usmar Ismail initiated *Lembaga Seni Budaya Muslimin Indonesia* or LESBUMI (Indonesian Muslim Cultural Artists Institute) under Nahdlatul Ulama - Indonesia's largest Islamic institution. At the start of the 1950s, the humanist universalism recommended by *Gelanggang* would meet with strong opposition from the LEKRA group.⁵²

Seniman Indonesia Muda

This section explains more of the background of *Seniman Indonesia Muda* (Artists of Young Indonesia)⁵³ or SIM as an arts organization that was very influential in its time separately from *Pelukis Rakjat* (People's Painters). In this sub-chapter, I will not discuss *Pelukis Rakjat* at length, as historiographers have already provided sufficient information about this association.⁵⁴

There are not many historical sources about SIM. I will start by emphasizing that conventional historiography has raised the perception that SIM was merely a *Sanggar* (similar to Studio), so the group's movements were limited and domestic. For instance, Spanjaard assumed that SIM was a "studio in charge of documenting the fight for independence in the form of leaflets and paintings".⁵⁵ I argue that SIM's role in art history is more than a studio. It can be seen as an "art institute" with many agendas. The grand scheme of SIM was the decolonization of Indonesia's people, art, and culture to create a new "Indonesian art." The spirit of SIM was to chip

⁵² For instance, see Klara Akustia, "Kepada Seniman Universil" in Aoh. K. Hadimadja (ed.), *Beberapa Paham Angkatan '45*, (Jakarta: Tintamas, 1952), p. 82-91. A general description of the debate between the humanist universalists and Lekra can be seen in Yahaya Ismail, *Pertumbuhan, Perkembangan dan Kejatuhan Lekra di Indonesia (Satu tinjauan dari aspek sosio-budaya)*, (Kualalumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia, 1972), pp. 23-34 and D.S. Moeljanto and Taufiq Ismail, *Prahara Budaya: Kilas-balik Ofensif Lekra/PKI Dkk.*, (Bandung: Mizan dan HU Republika, 1995).

⁵³ When considering how to be more authentic, I followed the editor of *Seniman* magazine's use of the "Artists Association of Young Indonesia" to translate "Seniman Indonesia Muda" (see Figure 6.8).

⁵⁴ See Claire Holt, 1967, p. 201-224 and M. Dwi Marianto "Revolusi dan Evolusi Sudjana Kerton – Srigala Yang Berjalan Sendirian" in Astri Wright, M. Dwi Marianto, and Hilda Soemantri, *Revolusi dan Evolusi Sudjana Kerton*, (Bandung: Sanggar Luhur Bandung, 1999), pp. 93-95.

⁵⁵ Spanjaard, 1998, pp. 117 - 124. See also Burhan, 2013, pp. 55-59, and Kusnadi, 1990-1991, p. 93.

away at the rigid, conservative heritage of feudal culture.⁵⁶ Compared to PTPI, which was focusing on propaganda, SIM could be seen as a cross-field artist movement. Its members produced posters and designed exhibition programs, organized performing arts, created songs, and constructed art discourse by publishing the magazine *Seniman* (Artist).

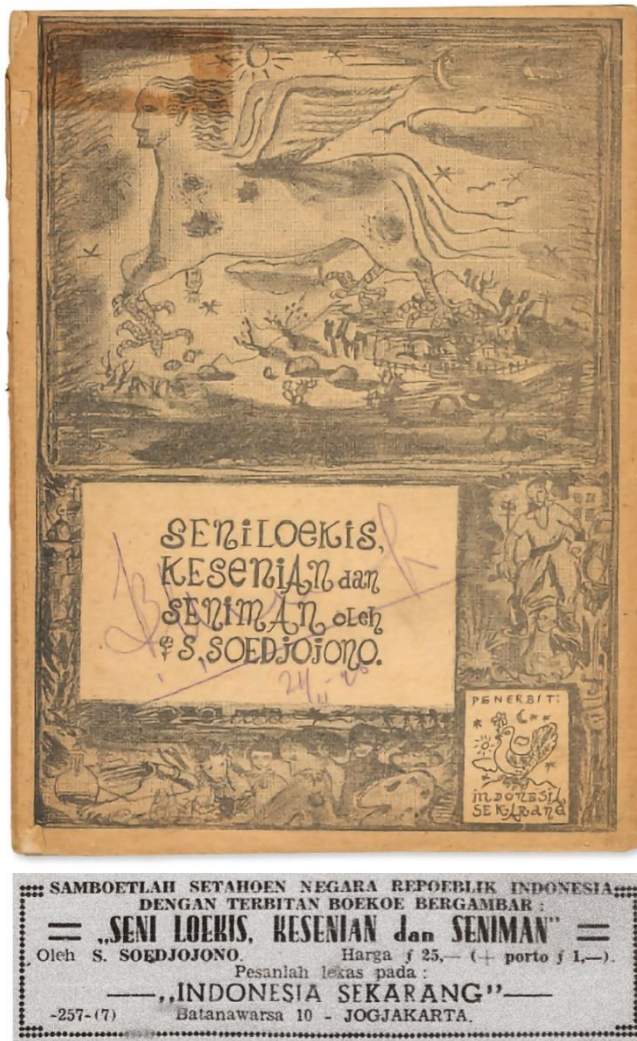


FIGURE 6.6.
Sudjojono book and its advertisement in *Kedaulatan Rakjat*'s newspaper, 31 July 1946.

Collection of Perpustakaan s.14 and Leiden University Library
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

⁵⁶ Aoh Kartahadimadja, "Kesenian Indonesia Sebelum dan Sesudah Perang", *Mimbar Indonesia*, 10 January 1948. Also see Trisno Sumardjo, "Art, Spirit, and People", 1947.

In his opening remarks at a SIM event in May 1946, Sudjojono argued that the development of visual art in Indonesia could generally only occur in conjunction with other literary and performing arts. He was convinced that SIM's strong point was the practice of crossing between creating art collectively and sustaining individual artworks. This was to achieve SIM's goal: Indonesian art is honored on the same level as other nations' art. Sudjojono also stated: "Art as the soul of a nation must be taken care of, especially for the Indonesian nation whose state is still young, so that its art is on the same level as other countries."⁵⁷

From Sudjojono's speech in May 1946, I will continue the SIM story until August, marked by the first exhibition of SIM in commemoration of one year of Indonesia's independence to show its essential role. Unfortunately, we have little information about the details of this exhibition, which was held between 17 and 22 August 1946.⁵⁸ Despite this, the exhibition, which has never been reported in the standard narrative, also offers essential context regarding publishing a compilation book of Sudjojono's writings entitled *Seni Loekis, Kesenian, dan Seniman* (Painting, Art, and Artist). Based on the advertisement I found in a newspaper, the book was published in late July 1946 (Fig.6.6),⁵⁹ revealing that it had been part of the SIM exhibition.

Printed modestly and slightly blurry, today the book *Seni Loekis, Kesenian, dan Seniman* has a vital place in the history of modern Indonesian art. The book, edited by Dullah, is now the primary reference of many historiographers, especially as concerns Sudjojono's artistic credo about "seni adalah jiwa kètok" (Art is a Visible Soul), truth being more important than beauty, his appeal to painters to find the style of Indonesian painting, his criticism of Raden Saleh or his criticism of Mooi Indië paintings - most of which I have quoted in earlier chapters in this thesis. I believe it is essential to pay attention to this book edited by Dullah because he does not explain the origins of the articles. Thirteen articles in this book were published separately and at different times. After conducting research, I discovered that the articles were taken from three periods: Dutch colonization (7 items), Japanese occupation (5 items), and the Revolution (1 article). Therefore, this context of the published texts is crucial for those who will refer to this book to avoid historical anachronisms.

⁵⁷ *Kedaulatan Rakjat*, 6 May 1946.

⁵⁸ "Stelling Seni Loekis", *Kedaulatan Rakjat*, 16 August 1946, p. 2. I have not found other sources to corroborate the exhibition's narrative.

⁵⁹ See the advertisement for this book in *Kedaulatan Rakjat*, 31 July 1946, p. 2.

Another thing that I think is interesting regarding the book's publication is the difference in how it was received. The Dutch magazine *Uitzicht* welcomed the book enthusiastically, while the Indonesian side, through *Inzicht* magazine, adopted the opposite attitude. V.N., a Dutch reviewer in *Uitzicht*, discussed the book enthusiastically and outlined the affirmation. He stated that Sudjojono's efforts to link painting, art, and nationalism are outstanding and will not be in vain in finding Indonesian painting styles, which are still ongoing.⁶⁰ In contrast, the book was reviewed with subtle satire in *Inzicht*, a weekly republican-run magazine competing with *Uitzicht*. The editor criticizes Sudjojono's credo that "truth is more important than beauty" as an over-generalization and repeated proposition, but at least appreciates that Sudjojono is able to influence young people. I suspect that the culture section of this magazine was held by *Gelanggang* artists.⁶¹

The story of SIM can begin with Sudjojono's move from Jakarta to Madiun. It was in this city that Sudjojono, together with Trisno Sumardjo, Sudibio, Sunindyo, and D. Suradji⁶² founded SIM.⁶³ One version says that SIM was founded on 5 May 1946 with Sudjojono as the general chairman.⁶⁴ According to another, written by SIM's co-founder Trisno Sumardjo, it was founded in April 1946.⁶⁵ In his articles written in 1949, Suromo confirmed that SIM was launched on 14 April 1946, which seems to be the more accurate version.⁶⁶ The placement of the word "*seniman* (artist)" before the word "Indonesia" and "*Muda* (young)" in the SIM acronym is a representation of "artists of the new nation and state called Indonesia in its [infancy]." Therefore, SIM was not merely a collective of "young artists", but also included "senior artists" among its ranks.

⁶⁰ V.N., "Kunstenaarschap, Kunstenaar, Nationalisme", *Uitzicht*, 1e Jaargang No. 48, 11 December 1946, pp. 4-5.

⁶¹ N.N., "Een Schilder Schrijft", *Uitzicht*, No.46., 1 January 1947, p. 12.

⁶² Sudjojono, 2017, p. 173.

⁶³ It was a mistake if Tashadi claimed that SIM was founded in Yogyakarta. In his essay on artists and the revolution, Sri Margana repeats the same error by referring to Tashadi when explaining the founding of SIM. Margana was also less careful when writing that SIM was founded in 1945. See Tashadi, et al., *Partisipasi Seniman dalam Perjuangan Kemerdekaan Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta*, (Jakarta: Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan RI, 1996), pp. 89-90. See also Sri Margana, "Corat-corek Revolusi: Seniman dalam Revolusi Indonesia di Yogyakarta" in Sri Margana, et.al., *Gelora Di Tanah Raja: Yogyakarta Pada Masa Revolusi 1945-1950*, (Yogyakarta: Dinas Kebudayaan Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta, 2017), pp. 46-47.

⁶⁴ *Kedaulatan Rakjat*, 6 May 1946.

⁶⁵ Trisno Sumardjo, "Art, Spirit, and People", *Seniman*, Th. I. No.2, May 1947.

⁶⁶ Suromo, "Timbul dan Tumbuhnya Seni Lukis Indonesia" in *Mimbar Indonesia*, 27 July 1949.

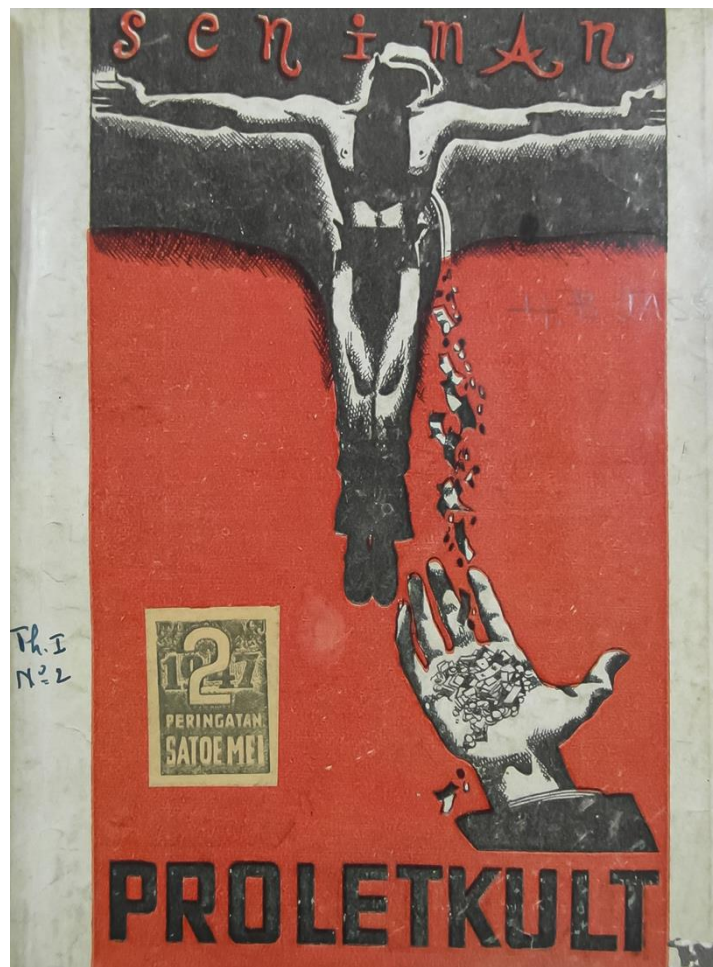


FIGURE 6.7.
Magazine *Seniman*.

Collection of H.B. Jassin's Library Jakarta.
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

Aside from being an organization, SIM can be seen as a collective manifestation of revolutionary artists who, together with the people, would create a new culture for contemporary Indonesia. To a certain extent, according to Daoed Joesoef – he was a member of SIM –, Sudjojono wanted to build SIM along the lines of *Proletkult* in the USSR.⁶⁷ This view is not without basis, considering the close relations Sudjojono had with communist figures in the government like Wikana.

Another ex-member of SIM, Nashar, remembered when all SIM artists received a letter about placing SIM under the Indonesian Communist Party (Partai Komunis Indonesia -PKI). This letter offered to publicise the choice of the artists. The plan to absorb SIM into communism failed because most members disapproved. Because of this, continued Nashar, several changes were instituted in the organization, especially for commissioned work for posters and allowances for artists. These changes occurred because “Sudjojono failed to communize SIM.”⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Daoed Joesoef, 2017, p. 87.

⁶⁸ Nashar, 2002, p. 42.

Amidst the uncertainty, the tensions among painters over “communizing SIM” brought about a transformative shift in the fine arts world. A striking example was in 1947, when Affandi, Soedarso, and Hendra Gunawan, disenchanted with SIM, took a bold step and formed *Pelukis Rakjat* (People's Painters). This new group seemed to be driven by a profound yearning for freedom and a desire to be intimately connected with society, a departure from the confines of ideological elitism.⁶⁹

Later on, when moving from Madiun to Solo – about 60 km from Yogyakarta, SIM published a bi-monthly magazine, *Seniman (Artist)*⁷⁰ which was relatively slim and printed in modest quality (Fig. 6.7). Despite this, the magazine already represented various interests by providing columns for essays, poetry, caricatures, short stories, music, and anecdotes or gossip. The *Seniman* is an essential source for art history today since it provides an overview of artist activities during a period of revolution, despite having not received serious attention from art history writers.⁷¹ Studying the magazine, which was published for around a year (1947-1948), *Seniman* posted the activities of SIM in the various art fields and – in every edition – always displayed reproductions of paintings, drawings, sketches, sculptures, and wood carvings. Therefore, like a “museum without walls,” this magazine has documented the works of many artists. Many of those artworks are now untraceable.

Through *Seniman*, I discovered SIM artists' ability to cover the international orientation, another issue regarding this organization that is neglected in the common narrative. For instance, in the May 1947 edition, the magazine published an article by Basuki Resobowo of the German graphic artist Käthe Kollwitz with two reproductions of her work. In the same edition, Abdul Salam wrote about the life of an artist in Russia.⁷² Naturally, the discussion of international art in the magazine was not to compare Indonesian and overseas art. The artists of SIM were well aware of

⁶⁹ About *Pelukis Rakjat* see Claire Holt, 1967, pp. 217-224. See also documents of the group's Constitution in Burhan, 2013, p.140. Counting Trubus, Soedarso, Kusnadi, Djoni Trisno, Batara Lubis, Itji Tarmizi, and several others in its membership, *Pelukis Rakjat* in the 1950s played an important role not only in painting but also in the development of modern sculpture, monuments, and reliefs.

⁷⁰ Kusnadi was mistaken when mentioning the magazine's name as “Proletkult”. See Kusnadi, 1990-1991, p. 93.

⁷¹ Among historiographers, I discovered that Helena Spanjaard and Imam Boechori Zainuddin attempted to briefly describe the magazine's significance. For instance, Spanjaard quoted Trisno Sumardjo about “SIM's ideology” and the ripping up of a Resobowo painting at an exhibition. See Spanjaard, 1998, pp. 120-121 and Imam Buchoeri Zainuddin, 1966, p. 64.

⁷² See both their articles in *Seniman*, Th.1, No. 2, May 1947, pp. 53-54 and 66-68.

their inability to compare with Western artists. They were targeting to cast a broad intellectual and artistic net and become part of the development of international art. Several articles in the magazine were written in English as a means of furthering this purpose.

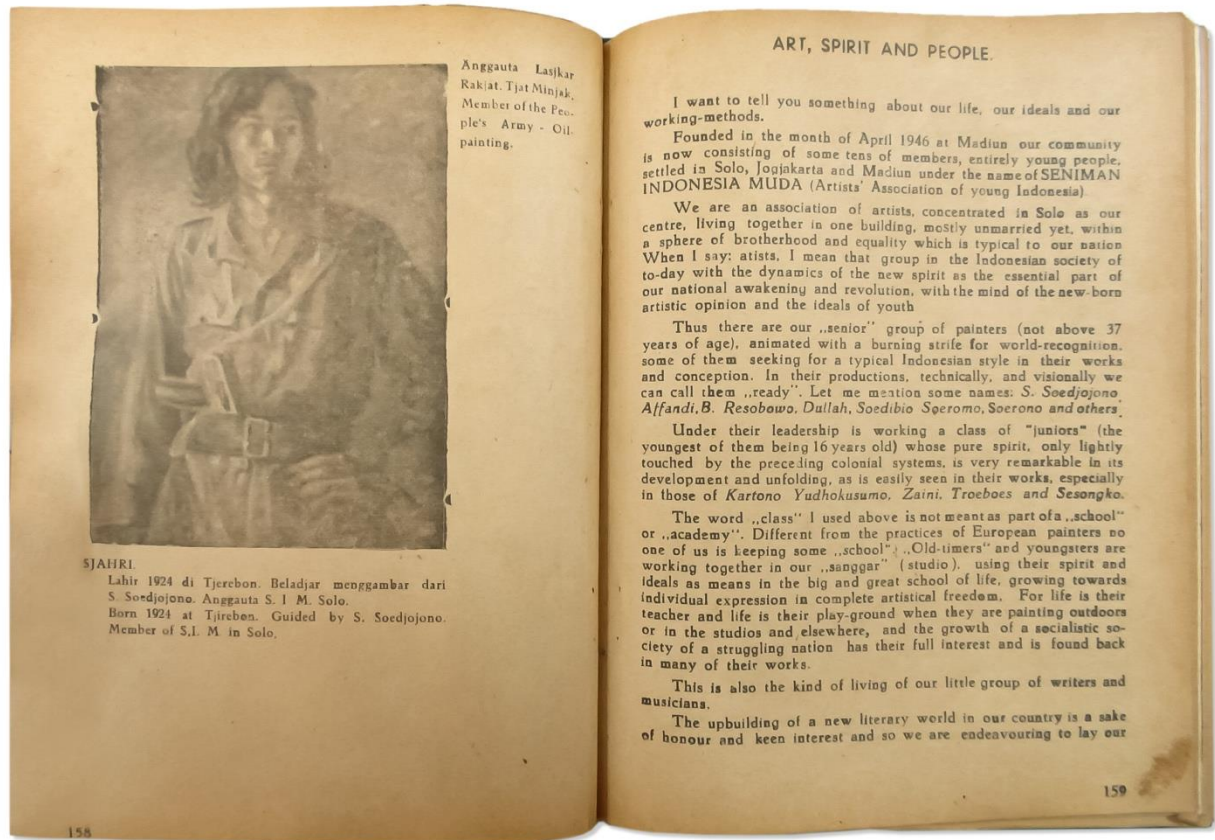


FIGURE 6.8.
Trisno Sumardjo, *Art, Spirit, and People*.
(Source: *Seniman*, November 1947)

Collection of H.B. Jassin's Library Jakarta
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

The editorial staff of *Seniman* once published a special edition welcoming the World Federation of Democratic Youth (W.F.D.Y) conference – a post-war youth organization spreading anti-fascism, anti-imperialism, and leftist beliefs. Written in English, Trisno Sumardjo introduced several names, the vision, and the programs of SIM in an article that was obviously directed towards international audiences (Fig.6.8).

Accompanying this article, a reproduction of a sketch of Olga Chechetkina's face (a Soviet journalist from South East Asia) also indicated the journalist's meeting with the artists. The W.F.D.Y delegation, Olga Chechetkina, Jean Latussier (France), and Rayco Tomovick (Yugoslavia), did indeed visit Indonesia for about three weeks between May and June 1947.⁷³

Still, in the same edition, *Seniman* included a letter by Sudjojono as the chairman of SIM and representative of Indonesian artists via a radiogram. Dated 28 May 1946, the English-language radiogram was sent to Bernard Shaw in the United Kingdom. Sudjojono wished to express the hope of Indonesian artists who wanted to expand their network and sympathy for the revolution from overseas intellectuals, writers, and artists. He also asked Bernard Shaw to recommunicate the radiogram to Charlie Chaplin, Pablo Picasso, Kees van Dongen, Frank Capra, Pearl S. Buck, Ilya Ehrenburg, Tsuguharu Foujita, Walt Disney, Beniamino Gigli, Leopold Anthony Stokowski, Lin Yu Tang, Sarojini Naidu, and Jan Sluyter. Sudjojono revealed his belief that the art circles would sympathize with Indonesia's revolution: "We are convinced every artist in the whole world loves freedom, humanism, and truth. It is strange to us, as artists in Indonesia, why our colleagues in the world as a whole do not protest against those countries that are still oppressing groups of people on this beautiful earth" (Fig. 6.9).⁷⁴

The following copy was a radiogram sent on 17 May 1947 related to sending a package of *Seniman* magazines, watercolors, and poetry to the Indonesia-Australia Association in Australia. Similar to the one sent to Bernard Shaw, the substance of this English-language radiogram to Australia was meant to gain wider sympathy and build a network between Indonesian and Australian artists. The radiogram opened with an introduction of SIM's profile and an expression of gratitude for the moral and material support provided by Australia to Indonesia against "Dutch aggression and imperialism." Aside from the call for solidarity, the exciting part of this radiogram written in English was the firm statement that reflected the openness and progressiveness of Indonesian artists: "It is the duty of all artists in the world to contribute to this struggle in using their art as a medium. For art must be the possession for the peoples again and it is

⁷³ Regarding the visit by the W.D.F.Y delegation, see Larisa Efimova, "Did the Soviet Union instruct Southeast Asian communists to revolt? New Russian evidence on the Calcutta Youth Conference of February 1948" in the *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 40, Special Issue 3: The Origins of the Southeast Asian Cold War, October 2009, pp. 449 – 469. See also Hardjito, *Risalah Gerakan Pemuda*, (Jakarta: Pustaka Antara, 1942), p. 226.

⁷⁴ "From the Archives of *Seniman* Indonesia Muda", *Seniman*, No. 5, 1 November 1947.

only victory in this great fight that will cause the development of art to the utmost degree. So, we are doing in Indonesia and so we hope our Australian colleagues will do.”⁷⁵

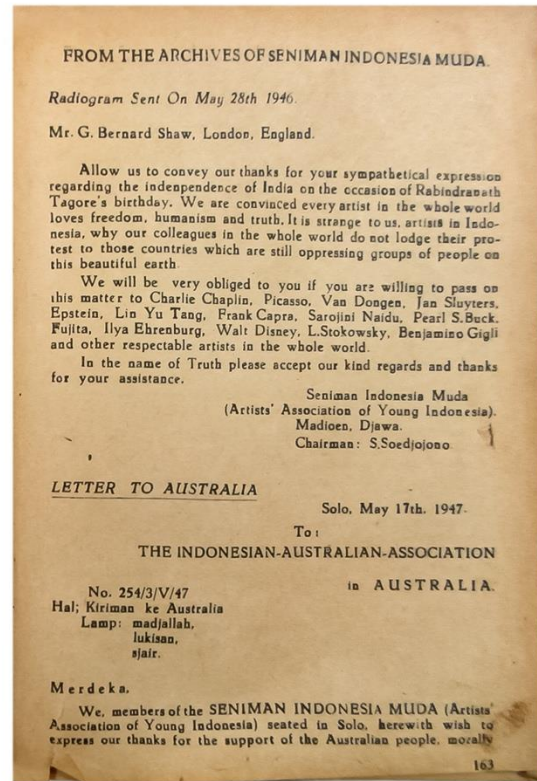


FIGURE 6.9.
S. Sudjojono, Radiogram sent on 28 May 1946 to
Mr. G. Bernard Shaw.
(Source: *Seniman*, November 1947)

Collection of H.B. Jassin's Library Jakarta
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

In about 1947, SIM moved from Madiun to Solo. The only source relevant for when the move to Solo happened is Nashar's memoirs. He remembered that the action occurred around January 1947. Apart from that, I have not found any information about when precisely the SIM headquarters was moving. Nashar's statements align with the information I read in the *Seniman* magazine, where it states that as late as December 1946, SIM still held an exhibition in Madiun. Despite SIM moving to Solo because the call of the *Biro Perdjoeangan* (Struggle Bureau) to support propaganda, art activities at the SIM Madiun branch continued.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ "Letter to Australia", *Seniman*, No. 5., 1 November 1947.

⁷⁶ Nashar, *Nashar oleh Nashar*, (Yogyakarta: Yayasan Bentang Budaya, 2002), p.36.

Very few sources are available to inform what happened in Madiun then. However, I would like to present a momentous event that occurred before SIM moved to Solo. This was the second SIM exhibition held from 4 to 7 December 1946 in Madiun. This following incident is never revealed in the standard narrative.

At that time, SIM was a revolutionary progressive institution, a climax of the artists' collective initiated by Sudjojono and his friends during the Dutch colonial period. They advocated for Government programs, gave performances to the public, and promoted their revolutionary spirit. On the other hand, SIM was committed to bringing art closer to society and inviting participation. Ironically, SIM artists had to confront their Madiun audience, who reacted significantly to one of the paintings exhibited. SIM presented a nude painting by Basuki Resobowo until one day they found the canvas had been repeatedly slashed with a sharp implement. No culprit was found, nor was the reason discovered. The SIM artists could only speculate that the damage was done as nudity remained taboo in certain circles. This first act of art vandalism to modern painting in Indonesia harmed the vision of progressiveness and freedom of art campaigned by the SIM's artists.

Due to this event, the editors of *Seniman* magazine issued an article defending Basuki Resobowo. This magazine also criticized the orthodoxy of culture and regretted the conservatism of society living in false moralism. "Is this not the bent morale, the sham? This kind of morality must be vanquished from Indonesian society now! Artists will take part, and even lead the way!"⁷⁷ *Seniman* eagerly called for the people to not be hypocritical by thinking that the female nude in Basuki Resobowo's painting was meant to induce lust (Fig.6.10). Instead, the woman in the picture represented social issues; therefore, the nudity was about suffering, fragility, poverty, and victimization. Accordingly, continued *Seniman*, society must be capable of discerning art from movie posters that purposefully offer eroticism.

The slashing of Basuki Resobowo's nude painting exposes a fundamental issue with their avant-gardism. While they demonstrated a broad and internationally oriented knowledge of art and painted with a modern passion and ambition on a par with Western artists, they seemingly neglected the readiness of their people for the spirit of openness or autonomy in modern art. The destruction of Resobowo's painting is a stark reminder

⁷⁷ "Seniman Contra Moral Palsae – Perihal Gambar Telandjang", *Seniman*, Th.1. No.1, March 1947, p.14.

that art censorship in Indonesia is a complex process, involving the regulation and control of artistic content, often driven by moral, political, or religious reasons. This recurring tension between artists and society over the interpretation of morality underscores the multifaceted nature of art censorship and its profound implications.⁷⁸



FIGURE 6.10.
Basuki Resobowo, *Telandjang*, 1946.
Source: *Seniman*, March 1947.

Collection of H.B. Jassin's Library Jakarta
Repro by Aminudin TH Siregar

⁷⁸ For instance, in 2005, Agus Suwage and Davi Linggar's installation work entitled *Pink Swing Park* was judged to parade nudity and pornography by the Islamic Defenders Front (Front Pembela Islam - FPI), which demanded the closure of a controversial art installation called *Pink Swing Park* in an official art biennale. This sparked a national debate in the Indonesian contemporary art scene. As a result of the media's disorder, manipulation of facts, and controversy, the biennale's curator, Jim Supangkat, decided to close it. For further reading on the polemic on this case, see Enin Supriyanto, "Salah Paham dan Takut Pada Kebebasan?", *Kompas*, 3 June 2006, p. 42, Jim Supangkat, "Nabi-isme, Ideologi Seni, Kebebasan Ekspresi", *Kompas*, 2 July 2006, p. 26, Jim Supangkat, "Lagi-lagi Tidak Paham" in *Kompas*, 30 July 2006, p. 19, Hendro Wiyanto, "Tentang Manifes Seni Rupa", *Kompas*, 13 August 2006, p. 28, Enin Supriyanto, "Lagi-lagi Salah Paham...", *Kompas*, 16 Agustus 2006, p. 28, Enin Supriyanto, "Memang Tidak (Se)Paham", *Kompas*, 27 August 2006, p. 29.

Back to Solo. At its new location in Solo, SIM became a formal organization supported by the government through the *Biro Perdjoengan*, led by Djokosoejono, under Amir Sjarifuddin's Department of Defense.⁷⁹ In her memoirs, Mia Bustam wrote that SIM's membership in Solo reached around forty art workers with 250 squad guards from *Biro Perdjoengan*. Despite the bureau assigning SIM to produce propaganda works to galvanize the people's spirit, every member had the freedom to create individual work.⁸⁰ When in 1947 Sudjojono left SIM Solo for Yogyakarta, his position as chairman was taken over by Resobowo.⁸¹

As well as being the republic's capital, Yogyakarta seemed to be the only place to have a presentable exhibition space. Therefore, despite SIM having its headquarters in Solo, the artists held their grand exhibition from 26 May to 2 June 1947 at Balai Mataram Yogyakarta. This third SIM exhibition, which displayed many paintings with revolutionary themes, was considered a success, as supported by the *Biro Perdjoengan*.⁸²

As reported by the newspaper *Kedaulatan Rakjat*, the exhibition, featuring around 65 works, immediately captured the attention of international visitors who happened to be in Yogyakarta in those months. Rayco Tomovick, part of the W.F.D.Y. delegation, was impressed and confessed that the works in the exhibition were created by "not only artists but geniuses." Even European artists would find it difficult to create artwork amid battle. Tomovick also did not forget the fact that the Indonesian painters in the exhibition "had no formal art education, and painted in the heat of battle and in a state of deprivation." Olga Chechetkina had an equally inspiring opinion – she declared that "in Europe, artists are isolated from society, but here they have a strong connection [with society]."⁸³ The *Nieuwe courant* covered it as an "excellent exhibition." Despite that, the newspaper regretted how "art was still used to serve specific political goals, and the painters realize the connection between fate and the demands of the

⁷⁹ See Harry Poeze, Tan Malaka, *Gerakan Kiri, dan Revolusi Indonesia Jilid 2: Maret 1946 – Maret 1947*, (Jakarta: Yayasan Obor Indonesia, 2009), p. 39.

⁸⁰ Mia Bustam, 2013, p. 82.

⁸¹ Nashar, 2002, p. 42. In Yogyakarta, Sudjojono worked as the head of the art department at the secretariat for the Ministry of Youth Affairs (SMNUP). According to Srihadi Sudarsono, those involved in SMNUP were Abdul Salam, Kartono Yudhokusumo, Soerono, and Srihadi Sudarsono himself. See Srihadi Soedarsono, "Saya dan Seni Lukis Indonesia", makalah ceramah di Teater Salihara, 15 September 2015.

⁸² "Steleng Seni Loekis", *Merdeka*, 28 May 1947, p. 1.

⁸³ "Sekitar Tentaonstelling Perdjoangan", *Kedaulatan Rakjat*, 2 June 1946, p. 2. See also "Seni Loekis", *Merdeka*, 9 June 1947, p.2.

people.⁸⁴ The success of the SIM 1947 Exhibition was also measured by attendance, reportedly numbering 5,000 people every day.”⁸⁵ The next major SIM exhibition was *Steleng Seni Lukis*, which took place in January 1950 at the Seni Sono Gallery in Yogyakarta (Fig. 6.11).

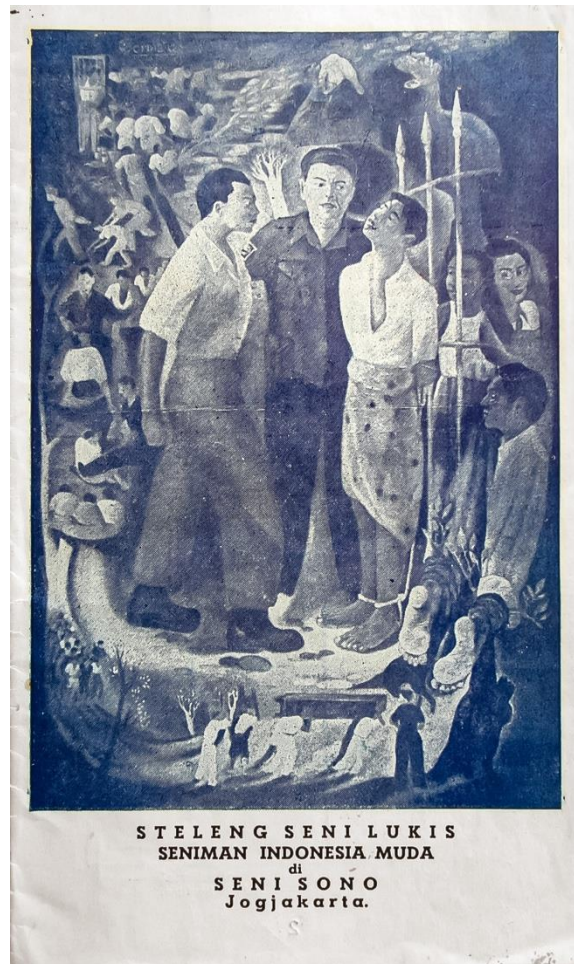


FIGURE 6.11.
Exhibition brochure of SIM.

Collection of Leiden University Library
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

⁸⁴ “Raaklijnen aan de sfeer van Djokja: Men wil vrij zijn, doch men erkent hulp van Nederland nodig te hebben”, *Nieuwe courant*, 3 June 1947, p. 3.

⁸⁵ “Sekitar Tentoonstelling Perdjoangan”, *Kedaulatan Rakjat*, 2 June 1946, p. 2.

Since its formation, SIM had envisioned transcending borders and establishing international solidarity networks during revolutionary periods. So, for this reason, SIM was not just a *sanggar* (studio), as many writers on the history of modern Indonesian art perceive. SIM painters and critics acted as historians and archivists of the process of the revolution, capturing the essence of the transformative period through their artistic activities. Their intelligence and passion enabled them to document the events, emotions, and struggles carefully even though, as will be discussed below, many SIM collections were destroyed or lost because they were confiscated following the second Dutch military aggression. SIM continued to be active until the mid-1950s before declining towards 1960.

Revolution Goes to Amsterdam and Accusations of Betrayal

The roles of Agus Djaya and Otto Djaya must be discussed, as they introduced Indonesian modern art and expanded the struggle for independence to Europe.⁸⁶ Compared to other artists, the Djaya brothers answered the call of the revolution differently. They were not registered in *Seniman Merdeka*, *Seniman Masyarakat*, *Pelukis Rakyat* nor *Seniman Indonesia Muda*. After the proclamation on 17 August 1945, Agus Djaya and his brother Otto moved to Sukabumi – about 112 kilometers from Jakarta. In this city, they joined the national army, as they had ranked in the military. At the time, Sukabumi was a strategic route connecting Jakarta to Bandung. The Allies used this route to free Dutch prisoners from Japanese camps. It was also in the area around Sukabumi that the Djaya brothers were involved in guerrilla operations.⁸⁷ Towards the end of 1945, the Djaya brothers founded the *Balai Kesenian Oemoem* (BKO), or Public Arts Hall, in that city.⁸⁸

BKO was asked to become a coordinator by the National Cultural Conference Preparation Body (Committee for National Cultural Conference

⁸⁶ Aside from the Djaya brothers, the activities of painter Salim representing Indonesia are also important. In October 1949, he held a solo exhibition in Amsterdam. See Yazir Marzuki, *Pelukis Salim*, (Jakarta: Penerbit Djambatan, 1983), pp. 52-54. See also “De Indonesiër Salim”, *De Gooi-en Eemlander: nieuws- en advertentieblad*, 21 October 1949. When revolution broke, Salim wanted to return home, but his financial condition did not permit it. Aside from that, as an Indonesian painter who had long resided in Paris, he felt that he could be a representative of Indonesian artists in Europe. See “Kesan-kesan Salim” in *Konfrontasi*, No. 2, March-April 1956, p. 34.

⁸⁷ Solichin Salam, *Agus Djaya dan Sejarah Seni Lukis Indonesia*, (Jakarta: Pusat Studi dan Penelitian Islam, 1994), p. 20. Agus Djaya’s latest military rank was colonel.

⁸⁸ Willem Sanberg, “Voorwoord” in *Katalog Pameran Agoes Djaya - Otto Djaya*, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, 1947.

Preparation, BPKKN), which planned to hold a large meeting to discuss national cultural issues. They advertised in the *Merdeka* newspaper to call artists, writers, and intellectuals from throughout Java to visit Sukabumi before 30 December 1945. Prominent names expected to be present at Sukabumi were among them: Ki Hajar Dewantara, Abu Hanifah, Armin Pane, Basuki Abdullah, Affandi, Sudjojono, Amir Sjarifuddin, Prijono, Poerbotjoroko, Usmar Ismail, Djajengasmoro, Rusli, Hendra Gunawan, Barli, Popo Iskandar, Adam Malik, Muhammad Yamin, Kusbini, and Mangunsarkoro.⁸⁹

I still have not found a source to reveal what happened to the Djaya brothers after the conference in Sukabumi. However, the available reports say that they came to Yogyakarta and only stayed a while before continuing to Jakarta for their exhibition held in mid-February 1947 at the Gajah Museum (now National Museum of Indonesia).⁹⁰ The show was reportedly a success and received so many accolades⁹¹ that the exhibition was extended.⁹²

The editor of *Uitzicht* magazine praised their exhibition as verification that the East accepted the West without being contradictory. Modern Indonesian painting has shown how artists express themselves with a revolutionary spirit irrespective of traditions and academic rules. Eventually, through the Djaya brothers' exhibition, the development of modern Indonesian painting would find its own way.⁹³

Governor-General Hubertus van Mook and part of his cabinet, K.F.J. Verboeket and P.J.A. Idenburg, visited the exhibition, and each purchased a

⁸⁹ "Seroean Kepada Penggemar dan Ahli Keboedajaan: Berkoempoel di Soekaboemi Tanggal 30 Desember", *Merdeka*, 26 December 1945, p. 2. I am still looking for sources to reveal the activities and membership of the center, and whether Agus Djaya was the only one who had a role there. Moreover, I need confirmation of who could have attended that meeting. However, several days after the announcement, *Merdeka* published the meeting results referred to Abu Hanifah and Armijn Pane's ideas. The Sukabumi's forum urged the Indonesian government to notice and act on the recommendation. Some of the main proposals include establishing a cultural academy, building a national museum and library, organizing a national cultural council, among several others. See "Keboedajaan Indonesia Ditilik dari Soedoet Koeltoer-Politis" in *Merdeka*, 5 January 1946, p. 2.

⁹⁰ "Stelling Seni Loekis", *Merdeka*, 5 February 1947, p. 2. It is reported that the Djaya brother's exhibition was held between 16 – 26 February 1947.

⁹¹ A. W. Smit, "Expositie-Djaya", *Het dagblad: uitgave van de Nederlandsche Dagbladpers te Batavia*, 22 March 1947, p. 2 and "Loekisan Agus dan Otto Djaya" in *Merdeka*, 27 February 1947, p. 2.

⁹² "Agoes dan Otto Djaya: Steleng Diperpanjang", *Merdeka*, 27 February 1947, p. 2. See also G.R., "Impressie Steleng Seni Loekis Agoes dan Otto" in *Siasat*, 8 March 1947, p. 10.

⁹³ Bd., "Indonesische Schilders: Agoes en Otto Djaya", *Uitzicht*, 2e Jaargang No. 8, 19 February 1947, p. 10. See also the Djaya's brother painting reproduction in this issue. In his review on *Pantja Raja*, Rivai Apin praised the work of the Djaya Brothers for "showing the visions, directions and objectives of the people." See Rivai Apin, "Doea Peloekis Moeda Kita", *Pantja Raja*, No. 2, TH. II, 1 April 1947, p. 337.

painting by the brothers. Others, like journalist Henk van Randwijk from *Vrij Nederland*, also bought a painting.⁹⁴ In mid-1947, several months after the exhibition, the Djaya brothers arrived in Amsterdam, bringing with them hundreds of paintings by themselves and other Indonesian painters. They would not return to Indonesia until mid-1949.⁹⁵

The Djaya brothers came to the Netherlands as Malino scholarship recipients.⁹⁶ With this “van Mook scholarship” status, the reputation of the Djaya brothers would, later on, be damaged in the eyes of nationalist artists back home. However, Otto Djaya would say that his journey to the Netherlands was with the support of President Soekarno and the Minister of Defense and not because of the Malino scholarship. Aside from that, the Indonesian government sent the Djaya brothers as painters and art representatives, not as military representatives – although they both had military ranks.

Moreover, their artistic status made it easy to conduct propaganda about Indonesian independence through art. The government also recommended the Djaya brothers to study art and culture during their stay in the Netherlands. They were indeed recorded at *Rijksakademie van Beedende Kunsten*, Amsterdam, as being scholarship recipients.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ “Van Mook Mengoendjoengi Steleng Loekisan”, *Merdeka*, 28 February 1947, p. 2. According to Ada van Randwijk-Henstra, Otto Djaya donated the painting as he sympathized with Henk van Randwijk who opposed Dutch military aggression in Indonesia. See Peter Schumacher, “Het geschenk van Otto Djaya aan Vrij Nederland”, 2015. The article can be accessed at <https://javapost.nl/2015/11/15/het-geschenk-van-otto-djaya-aan-vrij-nederland/>.

⁹⁵ It was reported that Agus Djaya and Otto Djaya arrived in Indonesia on 18 December 1949. See M.M. “Seorang Seniman Pulang dari Merantau: M.M. Menginterview Agus Djaya” in *Madjalah Merdeka*, 21 January 1950, pp. 16-17.

⁹⁶ The purpose of the Malino scholarship was to provide opportunities for Indonesian students to pursue studies in the Netherlands. The scholarship was a result of the Malino conference held in South Sulawesi in 15 – 25 July 1946, led by Governor General Hubertus Johannes Van Mook. Its purpose was for the planning of the formation of a federation state in Indonesia. About the Malino conference, see W.A. van Goudoever, *Malino maakt historie: een overzichtelijke bewerking van notulen en tekstuele redevoeringen ter Conferentie van Malino 15-25 Juli 1946*, (Batavia: Regeerings Voorlichtings Dienst, 1946). The Djaya brothers are recorded to be part of the scholarship in the files of the Commissionaer of Hindia affairs (Commissariaat voor Indische Zaken): “De Malino studenten, waartoe de gebroeders Djaya eveneens behoren, staan onder toezicht van mij en door mij worden alle financiële zaken voor hen behandeld (the Malino students, including the Djaya brothers, are under my supervision, and all financial issues are undertaken by me).” See Britte Sloothaak, “Tempoe Doeloe? Kunstenaars, Guerrillasstrijders en Spijbelaars”, 2018. This article can be accessed at <https://www.stedelijk.nl/nl/digdeeper/tempo-doeloe-agus-en-otto-djaya#slideshow-6778>.

⁹⁷ According to the institute’s records, the Djaya brothers were recorded as students at *Rijksakademie van Beedende Kunsten* between 1947 and 1948. Despite this, information on their activities at the academy remains scarce. See the files at Britte Sloothaak, 2018.

Periodically, they had to write reports to Soekarno and the government about the developments of art and culture in the Netherlands to inspire Indonesians.⁹⁸

Agus Djaya admitted that he and his younger brother were assigned to conduct psychological warfare (psywar) and cultural diplomacy in Europe.⁹⁹ Whatever their assignment from the Indonesian government, their activism during three years in Europe resulted in several important exhibitions, which have not, however, been sufficiently covered in the historiography of art. One historical milestone was the exhibition of the Djaya brothers at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, held from 10 October – 10 November 1947.¹⁰⁰

The appearance of works by the Djaya brothers at the Stedelijk Museum became the discussion of the town. Jakob Willem Hendrik Veenstra wrote some interesting perspectives in culture magazine *Oriëntatie*. He noted that living painters allowed to exhibit their artworks at the museum meant that they were acknowledged and respected. Another factor that was of no less importance was the ongoing political situation. The exhibition of the Djaya brothers took place at the peak of the conflict in Indonesia's struggle for independence from the Dutch.¹⁰¹

Naturally, not all Djaya brother's exhibition reviews were in sympathy. In his article, Veenstra also discussed critics from various media. These art critics, without any exception, always took issue with Western influence, especially from painting techniques. Yet, sharp and superior critique came from J.M. Prange from the *Het Parool* newspaper. According to Prange, the exhibition was merely organized because of "the graciousness

⁹⁸ Inge-Marie Holst, *Dunia Sang Otto Djaya 1916 – 2002*, (Jakarta: Hexart Publishing, 2016), pp. 33-34. R. Samsudin, who was the Minister of Information for Indonesia, assigned the Djaya brothers to "discover a method so that Indonesian art and culture moves forward and is respected on the international stage." See "Letter from R. Samsudin to Agus Djaya dated 19 October 1949", Agus Djaya's personal archive.

⁹⁹ Solichin Salam, 1994, p. 20.

¹⁰⁰ News of the opening of the Djaya brother's exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum was covered by mass media from the Netherlands and Indonesia. Among them, see *De waarheid*, 8 October 1947, *Het Parool*, 29 October 1947, *De Tijd: dagblad voor Nederland*, 18 October 1947, *De vlam: weekblad voor vrijheid en cultuur*, jrg 3, 1947, no 46, 21 November 1947, dan *De locomotief: Samarangsch handels-en advertentieblad*, 13 October 1947. During June- September 2018, Stedelijk Museum held a Djaya brothers' exhibition with the theme "The Djaya Brothers: Revolusi in the Stedelijk". Further reading about the exhibition see <https://www.stedelijk.nl/en/exhibitions/the-djaya-brothers-revolusi-at-the-stedelijk>.

¹⁰¹ J.H.W. Veenstra, "Gebroeders Djaya in het Amsterdamse Stedelijk Museum" in *Oriëntatie; cultureel maandblad*, jrg 1, 1947, no. 3, 22 December 1947, p. 5.

of the Netherlands towards both the painters,” even though the quality of the paintings “het peil van talloze Nederlandse schilders niet te boven gaat (are not at the level of a multitude of Dutch painters).”¹⁰² The promising lines at least comment that “the works of the Djaya brothers are still in the process of discovering aesthetics that suit them.”¹⁰³ At home, a perception surfaced that the works of the Djaya brothers were underappreciated by the Dutch public.¹⁰⁴

I maintain that there are still many aspects that critics failed to see in examining the Djaya brothers' paintings. Otto Djaya's themes are relatively easy to interpret. He painted the guerrillas, rallies representing the people's revolutionary forces, warrior figures, and many more. His paintings convey the message of the Indonesian revolution as he experienced it before he went to the Netherlands.¹⁰⁵

Interestingly, Dutch critics failed to address the Indonesian revolution in their reviews despite the explicit images presented by Agus Djaya. Djaya, drawing from classical Indian themes he had explored before the war, created figurative paintings that symbolized the conflict between Indonesia and the Netherlands. Using wayang characters, he vividly portrays the famous Bharatayudha - a “civil war” scene from the epic Mahabharata.¹⁰⁶ While the media may have missed the messages, the Djaya brothers effectively used their art to broadcast the eruption of a massive revolution in Indonesia, leaving an indelible mark on the political landscape.

Having the Djaya brothers' exhibition in the Stedelijk Museum reflected the progressive political stance of the museum's director, Willem Sandberg. He dared to take an opposing position to that generally taken by politicians in the Netherlands at the time. Sandberg wrote the foreword and

¹⁰² J.H.W. Veenstra, 1947, p. 7.

¹⁰³ “Tentoonstellingen in de hoofdstad Indonesische schilders in Stedelijk Museum Delfts kunstenaar bij De Boer”, *De Tijd: dagblad voor Nederland*, 18 October 1947, p. 3.

¹⁰⁴ M.M. “Agus dan Otto Djaya di Eropah: Kurang Mendapat Penghargaan di Negeri Belanda” in *Madjallah Merdeka*, 20 August 1949, p.16.

¹⁰⁵ Based on the list of works in the catalog, Otto Djaya's “revolution series” paintings were among others: Pemberontak (Revolutionnaires) 1947, Pahlawan Goegoer (Gevallen Strijder) 1947, Rapat di Soemedang (Volksmeeting op Soemedang) 1946, Pemberontakan (Typen uit de Revolutie) 1946, Rapat Raksasa di Koenigian (Volksmeeting op Koenigian) 1946, Lasjkar (Strijders) 1946, Pradjoerit Berbaris (Soldaten op Mars) 1946, and Pradjoerit Pemoeda Sosialis (Type uit de Indonesische Socialistische Jeugdorganisatie) 1946. See Agoes Djaya – Otto Djaya Exhibition Catalog, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, 1947.

¹⁰⁶ The two strongest symbolic paintings in this exhibition were Baratha-Juddha (*Naar de Hindoe-Javaanse epos de Baratha Juddha*) 1945 and Bisma Djatoeh (*Val van Bisma, held uit Baratha-Juddha*) 1945.

designed the exhibition catalog, which, despite its modest design, indicates his sympathies towards Indonesia. The catalog's cover was designed with bright touches of red and white, which obviously represented the Indonesian flag (Fig. 6.12).



FIGURE 6.12.
The exhibition catalogue of the Djaya brothers'
catalog exhibition at Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam.

Collection of Leiden University Library
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

Sandberg's written introduction to the Djaya brothers was sympathetic and respectful. Among other things, he explored the thoughts of Agus Djaya about art and Western influence on Indonesian art. He wrote: "Every true art is timeless, and a true expression of art from Indonesia has its right to exist, separate from Western art."¹⁰⁷ For Sandberg, the debut exhibition of the Djaya brothers in Europe – also as the first post-war exhibition from a nation going through decolonization – must be seen as an "invaluable contribution from the nation and its people: Indonesia."¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Willem Sandberg, 1947, p. 3. "Iedere waarachtige kunst is tijdloos en een waarachtige kunstuiting van Indonesië heeft haarbestaansrecht, los van Westerse kunst."

¹⁰⁸ Willem Sandberg, 1947, p. 4. "Tot slot behoeft het verder geen betoog, dat hun thans tentoongestelde werk, onbewust een enorme bijdrage insluit van de naam van hun land en volk, de

Sandberg's support for the exhibition created the perception that Indonesia as a new nation had modern painters and widened the scope of the "Indonesian Revolution" to Europe.

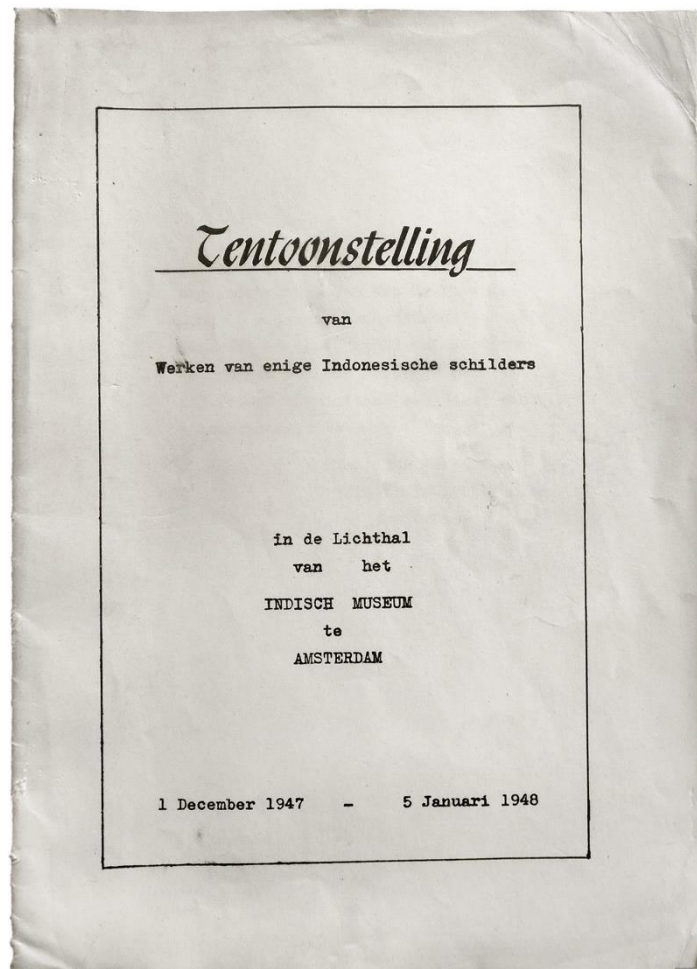


FIGURE 6.13. The exhibition catalog of Indonesian painters in Indisch Museum Amsterdam.

Collection of Leiden University Library
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

Indonesiërs."

Not long after the Djaya brothers sounded the bell of revolution at the Stedelijk Museum, they promoted Indonesian modern art to the Indisch Museum in Amsterdam. This exhibition reportedly received a convivial reception amongst the Dutch public¹⁰⁹ and was livelier as it also featured works by other painters brought over by the Djaya brothers from Indonesia. This exhibition, which took place over a month from 1 December 1947 to 5 January 1948, presented 67 works from Affandi, Basuki Resobowo, Dullah, S. Derachman, Sudarso, S. Sudjojono, Zaini, R.M. Suharto, O. Nurjehan, Kartono Yudokusumo, Mochtar Apin, including the Djaya brothers. In a brief foreword, the museum announced that the exhibition was meant to display the scale of the progress of modern Indonesian painting to the European public (Fig.6.13).¹¹⁰

In his foreword, Agus Djaya emphasized that the collection brought over from Indonesia did not include the best works. He argued that Indonesia's unstable political situation did not allow him to have more presentable artworks. Aside from that, he continued, the war situation decreased his communications with the artists, who were dispersed in several areas. In the same foreword, Djaya told of the short journey of Indonesian new painting and the vital roles of Affandi and Sudjojono as an "unwavering driving force."¹¹¹

Criticism was vented about the exhibition as a whole. An article titled "Indonesische Schilderkunst" stated that all the painters were still searching to express their artistic strengths. "They gained their inspiration from the desire to rediscover their own social and cultural values. Technically, they oriented themselves to Western European art, while still attempting to be connected to the spirit of their own cultural lands." This review expressed great expectations for painters' passion and hard work. However, it ended with the sentence, "Only time will tell whether a unique Indonesian style may be found, or whether it fits with what is called international art."¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ "Expositie Indonesische Schilderkunst", *Nieuwe courant*, 17 December 1947, p. 1.

¹¹⁰ Catalog of *Tentoonstelling van Werken van enige Indonesische schilders*, Indisch Museum te Amsterdam, 1947.

¹¹¹ Agoes Djaya, Voorwoord in the catalog of *Tentoonstelling van Werken van enige Indonesische schilders*, Indisch Museum te Amsterdam, 1947.

¹¹² "Indonesische Schilderkunst", *De Locomotief: Samarangsch handels en advertentie-blad*, 17 December 1947, p. 2. "Uit de begeerte de eigen sociale en culturele waarden te hervinden putten zij hun inspiratie. Schildertechnisch heeft men zich georiënteerd op de West-Europese Kunst, terwijl men tevens voeling poogt te houden met de geest van eigen culturele bodem. Waar zoveel liefde voor de kunst en zoveel noeste arbeid valt te constateren, is er voor de toekomst iets schoons te verwachten. Of een eigen Indonesische stijl zal worden gevonden, dan wel een die zich aan past aan de zogenaamde

While the Djaya brothers tried to propagate modern art and the Indonesian revolution to a broader European public, their Indonesian friends in Java mocked them as dishonest persons, as in the *Seniman* magazine edition of December 1947, published in its anecdote column.

In that issue, the editors published a story directed towards the deceitful personality of Agus Djaya because he “held the principle of *mundus vult decipi, ergo decipiatur* (*the world wants to be deceived, so let it be deceived*).” The writer of the anecdote, not identified, told of Agus Djaya’s agility in handling himself in front of important officials. This was, among other things, reflected in how well he dressed compared to the generally disheveled looks of other painters. The writer of anecdote column stated that when the revolution broke, Agus Djaya pushed the government for authority to form a militia in Sukabumi, which was approved. With that mandate, Djaya received a military rank and a car. According to the writer, the problem was that the militia in Sukabumi was never formed, and Agus Djaya still used the provided car.

Stories about his shiftiness continued – apparently, someone whispered an idea about building an art museum, which interested Agus Djaya. After some hustling, Djaya eventually obtained the candidacy for building the museum from the mayor of Sukabumi. Not only that, he asked for funds from the Indonesian government to support the museum’s collection. In short, with a large sum of money, he collected and purchased paintings from several painters, including “buying his own paintings.” What was promised by Agus Djaya ended in disappointment as the museum remained empty, and thus the Indonesian art museum never came to be.¹¹³

Seniman magazine's editor also set his sights on Otto Djaya as a painter who liked to present himself as someone important and close to circles of power. He was also assumed to be tricky, taking advantage of the situation for his plan.¹¹⁴

These accusations reflect the crisis of trust the artists had towards the integrity of the Djaya brothers in the development of Indonesian modern art. Instead, the brothers were suspected of putting their own careers and reputations first. On the other hand, the wide disparity of opportunity for artist careers could be read as simple envy amongst artists. This reality is quite understandable – when painters in Java were physically in battle while

internationale kunst, zal de tijd moeten uitwijzen.”

¹¹³ *Seniman*, Th.I, No. 6, December 1947, p. 224. Another anecdote described Agus Djaya as ambitious.

¹¹⁴ *Seniman*, Th.2., No. 1, March 1948, p. 35.

upholding the sovereignty of modern art, overseas other painters chased their ambition for a reputation in Europe. The ridicule was not only directed at the Djaya brothers. The way that Basuki Abdullah curried favor with the Dutch, left his nation's revolution, and chose to reside in Europe is a similar case.¹¹⁵

In the *Brochure Kesenian*, Sudjojono openly expressed his disappointment towards Agus Djaya and Basuki Abdullah¹¹⁶ who, according to him, went to the Netherlands "using Netherlands Indies Civil Administration (NICA) money."¹¹⁷ Sudjojono did not believe that Basuki Abdullah achieved success in the Netherlands. However, the newspaper *Nieuwe Apeldoornsche* reported that Abdullah was well received for his exhibition.¹¹⁸

Sudjojono seemed to be at his peak of annoyance towards Agus Djaya. In his eyes, Agus Djaya was a *verrader* (traitor). Sudjojono believed: "Agus wrote in 'Kroniek van kunst en cultuur' on 19 December 1948. Its contents: 'the desire to be led by the West.' I do not know whether Agus has heard or not on the radio about the Dutch attack to the Republic. If he has heard, then he as a son of Indonesia is now a *verrader* in that narrative. If he has not heard, then the universe will make him a *verrader* anyway as he wrote on the same date of the Dutch attack."¹¹⁹

To be branded a traitor in revolutionary times was a serious matter. With such a label, a person would easily be judged disloyal towards his nation and state and risk his life. Did Agus Djaya actually say "the desire to be led by the West"? Did he not, with his brother, bring the spirit of the Indonesian revolution to Europe? What did he write?

¹¹⁵ *Seniman*, Th.1. No.3, July 1947, p. 115.

¹¹⁶ In the Netherlands, Basuki Abdullah received a commission to paint Queen Juliana. News of this can be found in various newspapers, among them see G.H. von Faber, "Naar een Nieuwe Indonesische Schilderkunst: Over Basuki Abdullah en de Jengoren", *De locomotief: Samarangsch handels- en advertentie-blad*, 14 December 1949, "Koningin Poseert voor Jaavanse Kunstschilder", *Nieuwe Apeldoornsche courant*, 3 January 1949, "Koningin Poseert voor Jaavanse Kunstschilder", *Trouw*, 4 Januari 1949, "Koningin Poseert voor Jaavanse Kunstschilder", *Bredasche courant*, 3 January 1949, and "Koningin Poseert voor Jaavanse Kunstschilder", *De Nederlander*, 4 January 1949.

¹¹⁷ *Seniman* magazine, through a caricature made by Abdulsalam, made fun of Basuki Abdullah. It was rumored that in the Netherlands, Basuki Abdullah painted a portrait of Conrad Emile Lambert Helfrich, the commander of the Dutch Navy. The latter was assigned to Indonesia during the revolution. See *Seniman*, Th.I, No.3, July 1947, back cover.

¹¹⁸ See "Raden F. Basoeki Abdullah Exposeert", *Nieuwe Apeldoornsche courant*, 3 February 1947, p. 2.

¹¹⁹ Interview between D.R. Huyung with S. Sudjojono, 1949, p. 21. The "Dutch attacks" in Sudjojono's statement is the "Military Aggression" in Indonesia's historiography or "Operation Kraai" in the Netherlands version. For sources, see the following footnotes.

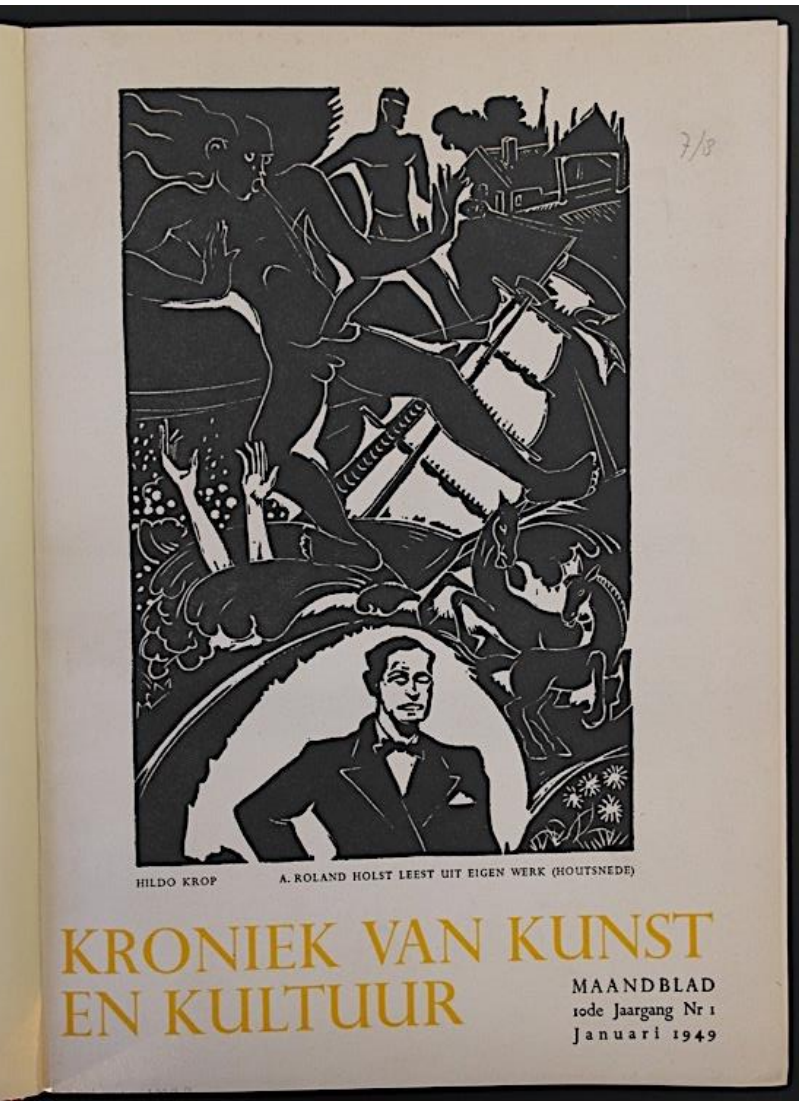


FIGURE 6.14.
Cover of *Kroniek van Kunst en Cultuur*, January 1949 and Agus Djaya's first page of his essay.

Collection of Leiden University Library
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

It is difficult to confirm whether or not Sudjojono had read Agus Djaya's entire article before accusing him of betrayal. After some searching, I found the magazine (Fig. 6.14). Agus Djaya's article was published in the monthly magazine *Kroniek van Kunst en Cultuur* (Chronicle of Art and Culture) January 1949 edition, not on 19 December 1948 as mentioned by Sudjojono. Therefore, Sudjojono's accusation was incorrect to say that "Agus Djaya's betrayal" happened on the same day the Dutch attacked Yogyakarta on the above-mentioned date.

An odd and mysterious line of information is interesting for further analysis. At the end of Agus Djaya's article, I found a footnote that stated: "Dit artikel werd geschreven vóór 19 December 1948 (this article was written

before 19 December, 1948).” This is an odd addition and seems to have been added by the magazine editor to show that Agus Djaya had already written his article before the military aggression. Another possibility is that the paper could only be published in the January 1949 edition despite Agus Djaya having already sent it to the editors long before. I have yet to uncover information to explain this oddity.

Aside from the last oddity, I think Agus Djaya’s article, “*Gedachten over culturele samenwerking*” (Thoughts on Cultural Collaboration), needed to be reviewed. The essence of Djaya’s theme is to explore the possibility of cultural collaboration between Indonesia and the Netherlands. He opened his article with the statement that collaboration between both nations is difficult considering the current political volatility. However, in Djaya’s eyes, cultural collaboration is a sympathetic idea as long as the collaboration between countries is borne from “common needs, as a vehicle to benefit both parties, without any risk of loss for any one party.”¹²⁰

Djaya reminded that Indonesian artists had a cultural collaboration with the Japanese through *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho* (Institute for People’s Education and Cultural Guidance). In the beginning, the collaboration created a force that ended with “a flow of blood and tears (*een stroom van bloed en tranen*).”¹²¹ Would cultural collaboration between Indonesia and the Netherlands emerge as a different, progressive force? How can we depict the beneficial collaborational aspects between the Netherlands, representing European culture on one side, and Indonesia on the other? Will such collaboration be helpful? And what would it offer? Agus Djaya did not provide answers to his own questions. Instead, he estimated that any issue regarding cultural collaboration was still in the “planning stage (*deze samenwerking nog in een stadium van louter plannen*).”¹²²

¹²⁰ Agus Djaya, “Gedachten over culturele samenwerking” in *Kroniek van Kunst en Cultuur*, 10^{de} Jaargang, Nr. 1, januari 1949, p. 16. “Desondanks komt het denkbeeld mij wel sympathiek voor, althans wanneer dit werkelijk een soort samenwerking betreft die voortspuit uit een spontane wederzijdse behoefte, als een middel tot cultureel ge win voor beide partijen, zonder dat één hunner mettertijd de kans loopt er de dupe van te worden.”

¹²¹ Agus Djaya, 1949, p. 16. “Indonesiërs hebben immers nog niet zo lang geleden zulk een ervaring opgedaan tijdens de Japanse bezetting toen met een werkelijk royaal gebaar de ‘culturele samenwerking’ werd beoogd en bekostigd. Slogans als ‘kerdja bersama-sama’ (samenwerken) en ‘Asia kembali ke bangsa Asia’ (Azië terug aan de Aziaten) plus de ‘soedara toea’-complexen (ouderebroercomplexen) hadden toen een magische kracht, althans in de beginphase. Dat deze samenwerking later in de wandeling een ‘Picasso-mop’ werd, is niet te verwonderen (met alle respect voor Picasso). Ze is geëindigd in een stroom van bloed en tranen.”

¹²² Agus Djaya, 1949, p. 16. “Hoe kunnen wij ons nu deze kostbare facet van samenwerking tussen Nederland als representant van cultureel Europa enerzijds en Indonesië anderzijds voorstellen? Er

Published in Amsterdam since 1935, *Kroniek van Kunst en Cultuur* was a prestigious art magazine of its time. It was oriented towards the cutting edge of contemporary art and culture in the Netherlands and beyond.¹²³ Agus Djaya seriously used this opportunity to narrate his ideas to the magazine's readers, for instance, about the Indonesian experience of absorbing Western culture through Dutch colonialism. He felt the need to revisit the dynamics of the colonial art scene in the 1930s when intellectuals argued about the direction of Indonesian culture – whether to return to traditional culture or embrace Western modernity. According to Agus Djaya, this argument did nothing to progress Indonesian culture. “Today, we are limping on both foundations,” he says.¹²⁴ Through his experiences, Agus Djaya himself felt the weaknesses and strengths of both Eastern and Western culture.

Then, seemingly like a postmodernist evangelist, Agus Djaya criticized Western modernism, which he thought to be “in a dilemma as it is dispirited with itself. The pursuit of the West towards science and technology, which was supposed to make society better and more prosperous, is in reality causing chaos with unpredictable results.” This modern disease has made Western men transform themselves into “super robots.”

Interestingly, Agus Djaya reminded his readers that the renowned European intellectuals like Johan Huizinga, Karl Mannheim, Leo Tolstoy, Adriaan Roland Holst, José Ortega y Gasset, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Arthur Schopenhauer already realized the dilemma of modernity. He therefore called for the “West to sincerely acknowledge the chaos they are experiencing.”¹²⁵

With the condition of the disease of modernity, Agus Djaya then questioned, “So, will East and West go head-to-head (confront each other) foolishly and uselessly, culturally gesticulating, or will they slide like two trains together?” Despite sounding pessimistic, Djaya considered that all the

treden twee fundamentele kwesties naar voren: (1) Is culturele samenwerking mogelijk en nuttig? (2) Wat hebben ze elkaar te bieden?”

¹²³ For more about *Kroniek van Kunst en Cultuur*, see Hestia Bavelaar, *Kroniek van kunst en cultuur: geschiedenis van een tijdschrift 1935-1965*, (Leiden: Primavera Press, 1998).

¹²⁴ Agus Djaya, 1949, p. 17. “Wij hinken op twee fundamenten”.

¹²⁵ Agus Djaya, 1949, p. 19. “Deze drang is problematisch geworden, waarvoor moeilijk een bevredigende oplossing te vinden is, sinds de ontdekking, dat het culturele westen in een wanhopig dilemma met zichzelf is gewikkeld. De atomische vlucht der wetenschap en techniek, die redelijkerwijs de Europese gemeenschap een betere, meer welvarende wereld had moeten geven heeft juist een chaos veroorzaakt, waarvan het einde nog niet kan worden overzien. De westerse mens heeft zich omgetoverd tot een 'super-robot' en bezit nog niet de juiste 'mantrams' om zijn 'opmars naar de maan' te bezweren. Eminente figuren in Europa als Huizinga, Mannheim, Tolstoi, Roland Holst, Y Gasset, Nietzsche, Schopenhauer en vele anderen hebben dit aangevoeld. Velen trachten de 'mantrams' te zoeken in het oosten: bezinning. Het westen moet tot bezinning komen!”

changes occurring in the world at that time provided the correct momentum to connect the East and the West in a cultural collaboration. He proposed that UNESCO play a part as a promotor. Despite this, continued Djaya, the success of cultural collaboration between nations naturally cannot solely be dependent on UNESCO. Its success depends on both parties entering the collaboration.¹²⁶

After reading Agus Djaya's article, I did not uncover any assertion that explicitly stated "the desire to be led by the West" – as accused by Sudjojono. On the contrary, Djaya placed himself as an observer in the middle, being equally critical towards the East and the West and the chances of collaboration. The only paragraph that might potentially trigger a perception of "Agus Djaya's betrayal," in my view, is perhaps the following:

I admit that an intensive introduction to Western culture guided by a healthy critical mind is the path for the Indonesia people to come to a reorientation. History has repeatedly shown that the Indonesian people have enough creative capacity to make it possible for them to reach fresh, new conceptions through the knowledge and impressions obtained, as long as there is enough stimulus to do so.¹²⁷

Resonances of Agus Djaya's thoughts regarding Western Indonesia or Dutch-Indonesian collaboration spread to Indonesia. As far as I could uncover, the newspaper *Het nieuwsblad voor Sumatra* once published an article titled "Culturele samenwerking van Indonesië en Nederland" (Cultural collaboration between Indonesia and the Netherlands). By underlining several essential points, the review in the newspaper from Sumatra reacted positively to Agus Djaya's ideas regarding cultural collaboration.¹²⁸ The type of collaboration might be able to be viewed from something that occurred in

¹²⁶ Agus Djaya, 1949, p. 19. "Zullen dus nu oost en west, dwaas en nutteloos, cultureel gesticulerend, lijnrecht elkaar ingaan, of zullen ze als twee rails glad op langs elkaar glijden? Het wordt waarlijk hoog tijd, dat oost en west elkaar vinden, en wel in de culturele samenwerking. De Unesco is in deze geest als promotor opgekomen; of dit goede resultaten afwerpt, hangt uiteraard niet alleen van de Unesco af, maar van ons allen".

¹²⁷ Agus Djaya, 1949, p. 18. "Ik geef toe, dat intensieve kennismaking met de westerse cultuur, geleid door een gezonde critische zin, de weg is voor het Indonesische volk om te komen tot een heroriëntatie. De geschiedenis heeft herhaaldelijk aangetoond, dat het Indonesische volk over voldoende creatief vermogen beschikt, dat het in staat kan stellen om via de verworven kennis en indrukken tot nieuwe frisse concepties te komen, mits de prikkel hiertoe in voldoende mate aanwezig is."

¹²⁸ "Culturele samenwerking van Indonesië en Nederland" in *Het nieuwsblad voor Sumatra*, 19 March 1949, p. 3.

Makassar, West Sulawesi. In March 1949, the city saw the opening of the *Stichting Cultureel Centrum Oost-Indonesië* (Center for Eastern Indonesian Culture Foundation or *Jajasan Pusat Kebudayaan Indonesia Timur* - JPKIT). Among its goals was to build a dynamic landscape of painting. To create a conducive environment, the foundation which collaborated with the Dutch government would facilitate an art museum and gallery. What is also quite interesting was the cosmopolitan vision of the foundation, which “must create relationships with Leiden, Amsterdam, Paris, London, New York, Sidney, Cairo, and New Delhi; become the conservator of old culture, the center of new culture, and be the meeting point of world culture.”¹²⁹

The cultural cooperation of institutions planned for the revolutionary period between Indonesia and the Netherlands did not last long - including JPKIT.¹³⁰ Likewise, STICUSA (*Stichting voor Culturele Samenwerking*), the collaborative model between the two countries which was very active, was dissolved in January 1956.¹³¹ An education-oriented arts institution inherited from this period and still surviving today is the Art Academy in Bandung, founded in 1947.

The Making of the First Art Academy

During the revolutionary turmoil, a well-known art academy was established in Bandung. However, the official book *Sejarah Seni Rupa Indonesia* (History of Indonesian Art) tends to emphasize the founding of the art academy in Yogyakarta, known as ASRI, in January 1950. This emphasis is attributed to Yogyakarta's significance as the center of government during the Revolution, which played a critical role in establishing ASRI. Meanwhile, when talking about the art academy in Bandung, the book only briefly mentions Ries Mulder's name, thus creating the impression that he is the principal founder of the academy.¹³² Another official government book, *Perjalanan Seni Rupa*

¹²⁹ Further on the goals and vision of the foundation, see Badan Penyelenggara Pusat Kebudayaan Indonesia Timur, *Jajasan Pusat Kebudayaan Negara Indonesia Timur Makassar*, (Makassar: BPPKIT, 1949), p. 12.

¹³⁰ Further reading for the development of the cultural foundation, see Barbara Hatley, “Creating culture for the new nation South Sulawesi, 1950-1965” in Jennifer Lindsay and Maya H.T. Liem (ed.), *Heirs to World Culture: Being Indonesian, 1950-1965*, (Leiden: Brill, 2012), pp. 343-368.

¹³¹ For STICUSA, see Liesbeth Dolk, “An entangled affair STICUSA and Indonesia, 1948-1956” in Jennifer Lindsay and Maya H.T. Liem (ed.), 2012, pp. 57-74.

¹³² See Bambang Suwondo (ed.), *Sejarah Seni Rupa Indonesia*, (Jakarta: Proyek Penelitian dan Pencatatan Kebudayaan Daerah - Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, Tahun Anggaran 1976/1977), pp. 194-200.

Indonesia, also offers a more significant portion in narrating the founding of ASRI-Yogyakarta. The book provides only one paragraph about the art academy in Bandung, and even then, it does not explain who the founder was or the information the reader needs to know.¹³³



FIGURE 6.15. Front cover of A Year Book 1949-1950.

Collection of Leiden University Library
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

In his academic research, Agus Burhan wants to update this narrative. However, he mistakenly wrote that Bandung Academy's founders are Simon Admiraal, M.N. Mulder, and Sjaf'e'i Soemardja.¹³⁴ Meanwhile, Claire Holt mentioned only M.N. Mulder - also familiarly called Ries Mulder- although she devotes quite a long page to discussing the academy's role on the national

¹³³ See Agus Dermawan T. "Seni Lukis Kontemporer Indonesia 1950-1990" in Mochtar Kusuma - Atmadja, et.al (eds.), *Perjalanan Seni Rupa Indonesia: Dari Zaman Prasejarah Hingga Masa Kini*, (Jakarta: Panitia Pameran KIAS 1990-1991), p.105

¹³⁴ M. Agus Burhan, 2013, p. 72.

scene.¹³⁵ The story of the founding of the Art Academy in Bandung, which has now become the Faculty of Art and Design at the Bandung Institute of Technology (Fakultas Seni Rupa dan Desain-ITB or FSRD-ITB), is not widely revealed (Fig.6.15). This section briefly talks about FSRD-ITB, which the standard narrative has not touched.

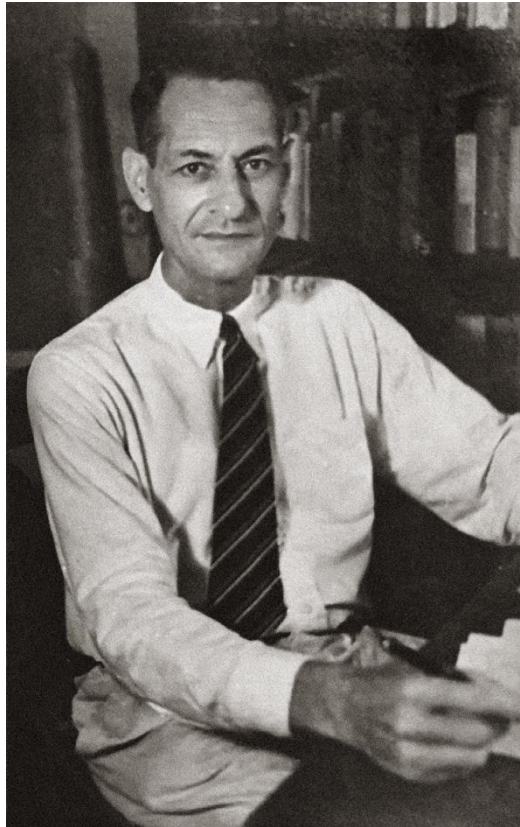


FIGURE 6.16.
Simon Admiraal, March 1947.

Collection of Simon Admiraal Family
Repro by Aminudin TH Siregar

Simon Admiraal was a key person behind the foundation of the academy (Fig.6.16). He proposed to the Dutch authority in Jakarta to meet the need for drawing teachers for secondary schools in Indonesia, which did not yet exist at that time. In June 1947, he was appointed to be a director of the school.¹³⁶ When the academy was officially opened on 20 October 1947

¹³⁵ Claire Holt, 1967, p. 234.

¹³⁶ S. Soemardja, "Sedjarah Pendek Balai Pendidikan Universiteir Guru Seni Rupa dan Pembukaan sampai Sekarang", 1 May 1953, paper, unpublished, p. 1., Special Collections - Leiden University Libraries, Or. 20.2000 R.

in Bandung, he was reported as giving a welcoming speech.¹³⁷ Admiraal served as program leader (1947-1949) and taught art history from classical to modern times. In 1951, his position as chairman was briefly replaced by Jack Zeylemaker, followed by Sjafé'i Soemardja until 1961.¹³⁸

Simon Admiraal has inherited a model of higher education in modern fine arts and design in Indonesia. This campus has produced several leading contemporary artists, such as Ahmad Sadali, Srihadi Soedarsono, A. D. Pirous, and the famous critic Sanento Yuliman. As I will discuss in Chapter 7, since the mid-1950s, because of Trisno Sumardjo's review in a magazine, this campus was labeled a "Western laboratory."

Simon Admiraal was born in Jakarta to an Indonesian mother and a Dutch father. In 1924, he took a course at the Academy of Arts in The Hague. Upon completion, he returned to Batavia and worked as a magazine illustrator, designing advertisements and posters. In the 1930s, Admiraal published a book on technical drawing for school reference. He is a multi-talented figure. Apart from being skilled in drawing, Admiraal is also actively reviewing exhibitions at the *Bataviaasche Kunstkring*. During the revolution, his writings appeared in the Dutch language magazine *Uitzicht*. As discussed in Chapter 7, his writings reflect his enthusiasm for promoting the strength of modern Indonesian artists such as Sudjojono and Emiria Sunassa.

With a proposal entitled *Ontwerpplan Kunstschool Indonesië - Bandoeng* (Design plan Art School Indonesia - Bandung), Admiraal formulated his art education concept (Fig.6.17). Graduates will have formal authority to teach drawing at high school level and have the opportunity to evolve into independent artists.¹³⁹ Students who participate in this program will be equipped with drawing, painting, sculpting, and designing. In addition, knowledge of the history of art, culture, and civilization is taught, including classical Indonesia, Islam, Europe, and Asia.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ "Opleiding Tekenleraren - Verbonden aan Faculteit van Exacte Wetenschap," *Algemeen Indisch dagblad*, 21 oktober 1947, p. 2 and "Academische Leergang Tekenleraren," *De locomotief: Samarangsche handels- en advertentie-blad*, 22 oktober 1947, front cover. Another version about the date is 1 August 1947. See Wiyoso Yudoseputro, et.al., *Pendidikan Tinggi Seni Rupa di Indonesia*, (Bandung: Jurusan Seni Rupa-ITB, 1983), p. 16.

¹³⁸ Wiyoso Yudoseputro, et.al., 1983, pp. 15-18.

¹³⁹ For more about Simon Admiraal's proposal, see Simon Admiraal, *Onwerpplan Kunstschool Indonesië-Bandoeng*, paper, unpublished, not dated, Special Collections - Leiden University Libraries, Or. 20.2000 Q.

¹⁴⁰ See Balai Perguruan Tinggi R.I.S. *Fakulteit Pengetahuan Teknik di Bandung - Programma untuk tahun pelajaran 1950-1951*, book's program, 1950, pp. 83 - 88 dan Balai Perguruan Tinggi R.I. *Fakulteit Pengetahuan Teknik di Bandung - Programma untuk Tahun Peladjaran 1951-1952*, book's

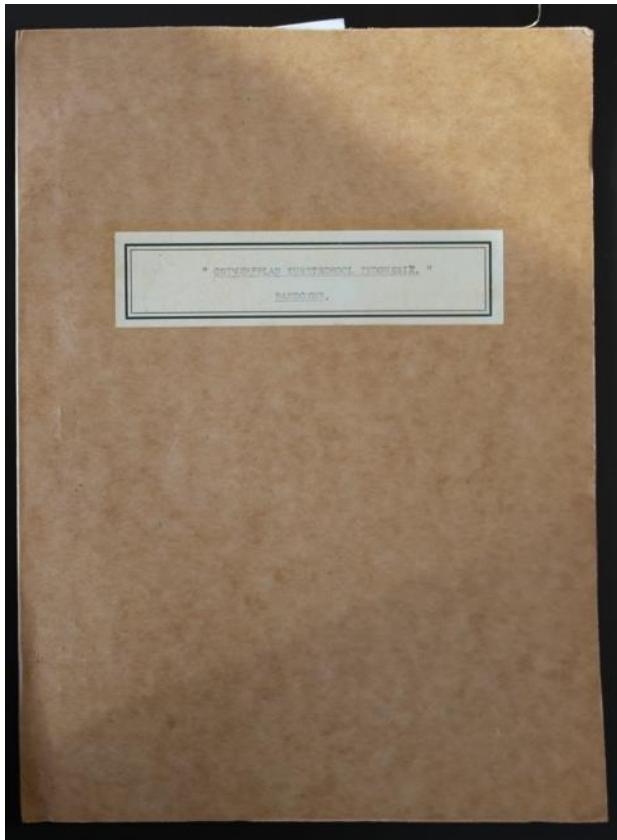


FIGURE 6.17.
School proposal by Simon Admiraal.

Collection of Leiden University Library
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

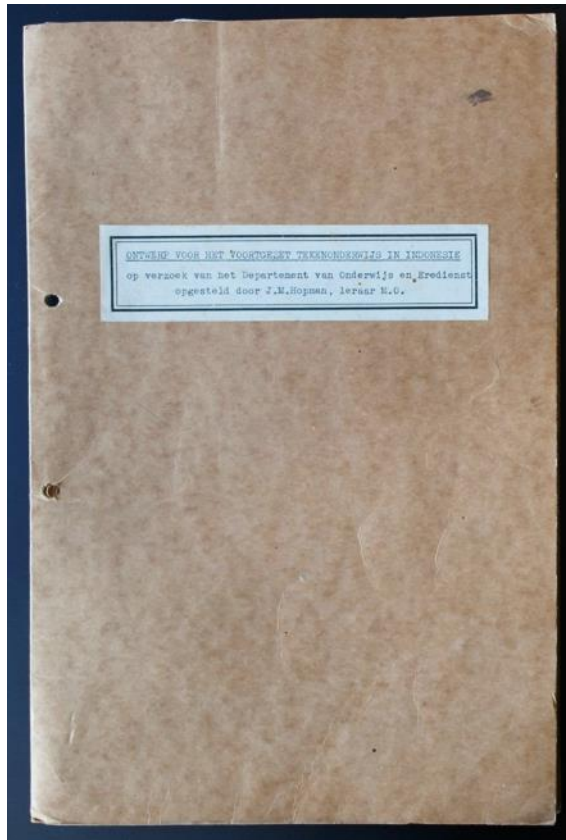


FIGURE 6.18.
School proposal by J. Hopman.

Collection of Leiden University Library
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

At first, Admiraal's idea was not immediately approved by the Dutch authorities in Jakarta.¹⁴¹ Instead, the government appointed J. Hopman, a high school teacher and art historian, to draft a counter concept. In the later process, Hopman's proposal with the title *Ontwerp voor het voortgezet tekenonderwijs in Indonesia – op verzoek van het Departement van Onderwijs en Eredienst* (Design for secondary art education in Indonesia – at the request of the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs)¹⁴² was considered too conventional (Fig.6.18). The proposal generally refers to art education in the Netherlands. The authorities finally acknowledged that Admiraal's idea was more contextual to Indonesia's needs.¹⁴³

program, 1951, pp. 77-85. See also *Universiteit v. Indonesie Universitaire Leergang v. Tekenleraren 1949-1950*, booklet, 1949. These manuals contain a list of lessons and the names of each teacher.

¹⁴¹ Edie Kartasubarna, "Pameran Prof. Edie Kartasubarna," 1980, exhibition brochure.

¹⁴² For more about J. Hopman's proposal, see J. Hopman, *Ontwerp voor het voortgezet tekenonderwijs in Indonesië – op verzoek van het Departement van Onderwijs en Eredienst*, paper, unpublished, undated, Special Collections - Leiden University Libraries, Or. 20.2000 Q.

¹⁴³ Edie Kartasubarna, 1980.

Helena Spanjaard noted that Admiraal was asked by the Dutch authorities to design a concept for art education.¹⁴⁴ However, Sjafel'i Soemardja has another version. According to him, the person assigned to create the program was J. M. Hopman. It is stated that in 1946 talks had taken place between E. A. Kreiken – an official from the Ministry of Education and Religion in Jakarta – and Hopman. Meanwhile, Admiraal also offered his concept. Kreiken suggested Hopman and Admiraal work together to combine their ideas. However, Hopman rejected Kreiken's idea.¹⁴⁵ The Dutch authority then assigned Simon Admiraal to prepare the foundation of the art education while at the same time listing names of candidates who would teach.

Impact of Aggression: The Great Loss and Back to Jakarta

The severe impact of the second Dutch military aggression is not discussed in standard narratives, even though this event scattered the artists' lives. This section will outline the significance of these impacts, especially the return of several artists to Jakarta and the loss of works of art and archives that the artists had created. Detailed records of the archives, primarily paintings, drawings, and sketches lost or destroyed due to the Dutch military aggression, are limited and obscure. There are no studies that measure the value of the losses suffered by Indonesian artists. I reconstructed the following narrative based on historical sources as written in newspapers, magazines, and memoirs.

The Great Loss

In her memoir, Mia Bustam recounts the experiences of her husband, Sudjojono. A few days before the Dutch invaded Yogyakarta, Sudjojono came to the city to prepare his solo exhibition retrospectively. He planned to present dozens of works that he had produced since the PERSAGI era. While in Yogyakarta, news spread that the Dutch would bombard the city. Sudjojono decided to return to his home in the village of Bogem – located on

¹⁴⁴ See Helena Spanjaard, 1998, p.159.

¹⁴⁵ See S. Soemardja, 1953, p. 1. Soemardja's version corresponds to the subtitle of Hopman's proposal, which is written: *op verzoek van het Departement van Onderwijs en Eredients* (at the request of the Department of Education and Religious Affairs).

the outskirts of the city. Arriving home in a hurry, he rolled his paintings into tubes and buried them in the ground. He left some of his sculpture works in the yard of the house. After that, Sudjojono and his family packed up. They fled deep into the hinterland to avoid raids by Dutch soldiers who had already started pursuing Republican guerrillas. Together with other refugees, they then arrived at the remote Kragan Village. Sudjojono and the other refugee families decided to stay there for a while.¹⁴⁶

Gradually the inhabitants of Kragan Village were enlivened by the arrival of groups of guerrillas and student soldiers. Sudjojono decided to join them and advance to the battlefield. The unfortunate incident occurred when the Dutch army went on a rampage by throwing mortars into the village area and almost surrounded it. Amid the chaos, Sudjojono's father, also on the battlefield, was shot dead by the Dutch army. Because he had to save himself, Sudjojono was forced to leave his father's body in the middle of the rice fields.

Misfortune continued to befall him. After the aggression subsided, Sudjojono went back to his house in Bogem, used as a post for the Dutch army. He was devastated when he found his paintings charred. Fragments of canvas were scattered everywhere. Not only that, his stone sculptures in the yard of the house had been destroyed as targets for shooting practice. His paintings from the pre-war period to the early days of the revolution had now been destroyed by fire.¹⁴⁷ Sudjojono recalled that moment of loss that shook him mentally: "Approximately 25 paintings that were ready to be exhibited were burnt and torn apart with the bayonets of the soldiers of General Spoor. The mangled paintings were found in the burnt waste."¹⁴⁸

The aggression paralyzed SIM Yogyakarta's headquarters, which Dullah had defended although it could not last long. Feeling the circumstances were becoming more acute, Dullah was forced to evacuate his family to the safer south of Yogyakarta. Dullah himself then returned to the city. He began to organize some young painters who were also his students to document situations of aggression through small-format paintings. With

¹⁴⁶ According to Mia Bustam, Sudjojono has prepared 45 works for the exhibition. See Mia Bustam, 2013, pp. 109 - 113.

¹⁴⁷ Mia Bustam, 2013, pp. 115-123. See also Tashadi, *Tokoh Seni, Cendekiawan, dan Kebudayaan*, (Yogyakarta: Balai Penelitian Sejarah dan Budaya Yogyakarta, 1919-1980), p. 36, Trisno Sumardjo, "Realisme Sudjojono", *Mimbar Indonesia*, 20 May 1950 and S. Sudjojono, "Sudjojono Tentang Sudjojono", *Mimbar Indonesia*, 19 August 1950.

¹⁴⁸ S. Sudjojono, "Seni Lukis di Indonesia" in *Budaja Djaja*, No. 28.TH.III, September 1970, p.557. According to Mia Bustam, Sudjojono has prepared 45 works for the exhibition, paintings, and sculptures. See Bustam, 2013, pp. 109 - 113.

this measure, Dullah hoped that apart from being easy to do, it would not catch the attention of the Dutch soldiers.



Fig.6.19.
Mohamad Toha's watercolor paintings, 1949.

Collection of Rijksmuseum Amsterdam
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

The young painters are Mohammad Toha (11 years old), Muh. Affandi (12 years old), F.X. Soetopo (15 years), Sri Suwarno (14 years), and Sarjito (14 years old). Employing various tactics, they went around the city of Yogyakarta. While carrying a small box that also held his painting equipment, Toha disguised himself by pretending to sell cigarettes. He traveled around depicting events at close range. Toha's small paintings document bombings, arrests, searches, looting, displacement, and more (Fig.6.19). Sarjito's fate was unlucky. On one particular occasion, the Dutch army managed to catch him. He was also sent to a juvenile prison in Tangerang, near Jakarta.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁹ This book, which contains the stories of Dullah's students describing the situation of the Dutch military aggression, has been published bilingually. Reproductions of their paintings are also featured in the book. In addition, some of Mohammad Toha's works are now in the collection of the



FIGURE 6.20.
Some of PTP's posters were created during the Revolution.
The Dutch army likely seized these during the Second Military
Aggression.

Collection of Nationaal Archief Den Haag.
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

Some artists left the SIM studio when the aggression took place. Instead, they took up arms and went to the mountains with the guerrilla troops. Meanwhile, the Dutch soldiers who carried out search operations arrested other painters, such as Rusli, Sudibio, Abdulsalam, and Rameli, who remained in the studio. As a result, the situation in the studio became

Rijksmuseum Amsterdam. For further reading see Dullah, *Karya dalam Peperangan dan Revolusi/Paintings in War and Revolution*, (Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 1983).

uncertain. Following this incident, Dullah recorded approximately 70 paintings by painters stored in the SIM studio that then disappeared.¹⁵⁰ The paintings were initially intended to be donated as a collection of the "Museum Paintings of Struggle," which was planned to be established in Yogyakarta supported by Sri Sultan Hamengkubuwono IX.¹⁵¹ However, Dullah assumed that painters outside of SIM members also lost a large number of their works.¹⁵²

In May 1949, *Merdeka* magazine also reported on paintings, sketches, and drawings that were lost during the aggression. Later, about one or two of the missing paintings were found but in a badly torn condition. According to *Merdeka*, the artists who suffered invaluable losses included Dullah, Hendra Gunawan, Surono, Sudjojono, Sudjana Kerton, and Rusli.¹⁵³ In his brief autobiography published in *Konfrontasi* magazine, Sudjana Kerton reveals that his paintings were lost due to aggression, but he did not provide any details about the loss.¹⁵⁴

The scale of the loss of valuable collections not only affects artists in Yogyakarta. The aggression by the Dutch soldiers also included an attack on the city of Solo. When that happened, as was the case with SIM Yogyakarta, SIM Solo artists led a chaotic life. As a result, SIM Solo had to disband because many of its members decided to go into battle. Only a few documents, books, and paintings have been salvaged from this branch. Countless works of art were lost or destroyed. Sudjojono wrote: "Books, paintings, and everything important and that could be carried away were evacuated to Suromo's house. That's where he and Sundoro and Trisno Sumardjo stayed and kept the paintings and other things from falling apart. They live with stress and suffering."¹⁵⁵

It should be noted that the loss of essential files is not limited to the SIM alone. The PTPI has also experienced significant losses of historical value. According to Djajengasmara, during the attack on Yogyakarta, the Dutch army randomly searched the PTPI office. They took away so many

¹⁵⁰ Sudarmadji, 1988, pp. 23-25.

¹⁵¹ Dullah, 1989, p. 11.

¹⁵² Dullah, 1989, p. 15.

¹⁵³ "Pelukis2 Jogja Ta' Tentu Nasibnja" in *Madjallah Merdeka*, 21 May 1949, pp. 9-10.

¹⁵⁴ S. Kerton, "Riwayat Hidup" in *Konfrontasi*, No.20., september-oktober, 1957, p.5. See also Astri Wright, "Sudjana Kerton: The Aesthetics of Revolution and the Birth of a Modern Artist" in Astri Wright, M. Dwi Marianto, and Hilda Soemantri, *The Revolution & Evolution of Sudjana Kerton*, (Bandung: Sanggar Luhur, 1999), p. 41.

¹⁵⁵ S. Sudjojono, 1954, p. 19.

vital documents that they had to be transported in three trucks (Fig.6.20). Furthermore, Dutch army opened fire on "the lockers and offices of the PTPI." They even threatened Djajengasmara and other exponents with death if they dared to fight back. Furthermore, after seizing the archives, the Dutch detained several PTPI members.¹⁵⁶

Back to Jakarta and The Role of Taman Siswa

Trisno Sumardjo, Zaini, and Oesman Effendi fled to Jakarta with the republican troops. These painters wanted to leave the uncertainty and insecurity of Yogyakarta.¹⁵⁷ Painter Nasjah Djamin remembered that those who moved to Jakarta besides himself included Affandi, Basuki Resobowo, Nashar, Zaini, and Soedarso.¹⁵⁸ On the other hand, Nashar wrote how, together with Sjahri, A. Wakidjan, and Nasjah Djamin, he joined the national army. Before reaching Jakarta, they traveled a long way, sometimes interspersed with making propaganda posters in several places they visited.¹⁵⁹

Apart from seeking safety due to the uncertain conditions in Yogyakarta, the reason for Affandi's evacuation to Jakarta was in preparation for his departure to Visva-Bharati University in Shantiniketan, India, to continue his studies.¹⁶⁰ Affandi's journey from Yogyakarta to Jakarta reportedly did not go smoothly. In one of the transit cities, he was suspected and imprisoned by the Dutch army for one month.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁶ Djajengasmara, *Tjatakan Riwayat Perdjoengan P.T.P.I Mulai Tanggal 20 oktober 1945, 1952*.

¹⁵⁷ Mia Bustam, 2013, p. 114. I argue that Trisno Sumardjo had not left Yogyakarta (or Solo) until July 1950. This fact can be seen in his correspondence with H.B. Jassin between 1949-1950. In their correspondence throughout 1949, Sumardjo still had his address in Solo. For further reading, see Aminudin TH Siregar, Amir Sidharta & Harm Stevens, "Artist and The Indonesian Revolution" in Harm Stevens, (et.al), *Revolusi! Indonesia Independent*, (Amsterdam-Antwerp: Atlas Contact, 2022), pp.201-223.

¹⁵⁸ Nasjah Djamin, *Affandi Pelukis* (Bandung: Aqua Press, 1979), pp. 70-71. See also Nasjah Djamin and Sides Sudyarto, *The World of Sudarso*, (Jakarta: Hexart Publishing, 2005), p. 144.

¹⁵⁹ Nashar, 2002, pp. 43-54. See also Suhatno, 1985, p. 74.

¹⁶⁰ Affandi went to India in 1951 and continued to journey to Europe, where he is reported to have achieved brilliant results. Later he returned to Indonesia in August 1954 and a year later held a solo exhibition in Jakarta. For the story of Affandi's return and a review of his exhibition, see Trisno Sumardjo, "Affandi" in Ajip Rosidi, et al., 1978 and the same article in *Seni*, No. 10. Th.1., October 1955, pp. 457-461. For stories about Affandi's achievements in India and Europe, see the writings of Bambang Budjono and Helena Spanjaard in Sardjana Sumichan (ed.), *Affandi Volume III*, (Jakarta-Singapore: Bina Lestari Budaya & Singapore Art Museum, 2007).

¹⁶¹ Suhatno, 1985, p. 72.

Steleng Seni Lukis

Dalam perajaan Taman Siswa Djakarta
genap 20 tahun. Gabungan Pelukis Indo-
nesia dan Sin Ming Hui (bag. seni lukis)

TAMAN SISWA

Djl. Garuda 25
DJAKARTA



DARI 11 SEPTEMBER
SAMPAI 18 SEPTEMBER
1949

DJAM

9 pagi — 1 siang

4 sore — 6 sore

FIGURE 6.21.
Exhibition brochure *Steleng Seni Lukis*.

Collection of H.B. Jassin's Library
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

Not long after arriving in Jakarta, Affandi formed an artist group called *Gabungan Pelukis Indonesia-GPI* (The Indonesian Painters Association)¹⁶² which was facilitated simply in the Taman Siswa school complex, Jalan Garuda Jakarta. An extraordinary contribution came from one of the school's teachers, who was progressive even though his name was never mentioned in the historiography of modern Indonesian art. He was Mohammad Said Reksohadiprodjo.¹⁶³ Known as a brilliant nationalist and educator, when many moved to Yogyakarta in early 1946, Said Reksohadiprodjo insisted on maintaining the Taman Siswa Jalan Garuda 25 school complex. This Taman Siswa was known as a "republican school" despite its location within the territory of the Dutch government. Taman Siswa was therefore often the object of intimidation and pressure from the Dutch army. Not surprisingly, to many people, the Dutch writer Dolf Verspoor always introduced the Taman Siswa school complex as "the last Republican fortress in Jakarta."¹⁶⁴

The head of GPI was a Taman Siswa teacher, namely Sutiksna. His representative was Handrio, a painter who would later become prominent with his abstract geometric style. Painters who came from Yogyakarta joined the GPI.¹⁶⁵ The GPI studio soon became a "melting pot" for Jakarta's artists. Poet Sitor Situmorang recalls the charm of the studio formed by Affandi as a "republican spiritual hub, a lighthouse of the spirit of 1945's revolution."¹⁶⁶ Indeed, not only painters, writers, such as Chairil Anwar, Rivai Apin, H.B. Jassin, Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana, Achdiat K. Mihadja, and including Sitor Situmorang himself, often came to the studio to discuss various topics about art and culture.¹⁶⁷

Situmorang admitted that it was in the studio that he met Affandi for the first time and learned the world of art. The experience impressed him so much that he built awareness that "Indonesian art is part of the search and

¹⁶² Trisno Sumardjo, "Affandi" in Ajip Rosidi, et.al., 1978, p. 102.

¹⁶³ For further reading see Moekhardi, *Mohammad Said Reksohadiprodjo: Hasil Karya dan Pengabdianya*, (Jakarta: Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Direktorat Sejarah dan Nilai Tradisional Proyek Inventarisasi dan Dokumentasi Sejarah Nasional, 1982/1983) and Yayasan Idayu (ed.), *Mohammad Said Reksohadiprodjo Di Mata Sahabatnya, Di Mata Pers, Tentang Ide-Idenya, Dalam Foto-Foto*, (Jakarta: Penerbit Idayu, 1979). For Taman Siswa activities during the revolution, see W. le Fèvre, *Taman Siswa*, (Djakarta-Surabaya: Penerbitan dan Balai Buku Indonesia, 1951). In this book, Muhammad Said's profile can be read from pages 58-70. See also Suhatno, 1985, p. 73.

¹⁶⁴ Moekhardi, 1982/1983, p. 26 and W. le Fèvre, 1951, p. 61.

¹⁶⁵ Nashar, 2002, pp. 76-77.

¹⁶⁶ Sitor Situmorang, "Bertemu dengan Affandi" in Ajip Rosidi, et al., 1978, p. 97.

¹⁶⁷ Nashar, 2002, pp. 60-61 and Nasjah Djamin dan Sides Sudyarto, 2005, 144.

communication medium with the Indonesian-ness, which is centered on the maturation of contemporary worldviews." As a result, he became increasingly aware of the emergence of a "new Indonesian culture, through modern art because of individuality."¹⁶⁸

The two exhibitions initiated by Taman Siswa are essential to address because historians have never discussed them. In September 1949, as many as 51¹⁶⁹ painters from GPI and a Chinese association, Sin Ming Hui,¹⁷⁰ held the exhibition titled *Steleng Seni Lukis 1949* (Painting Exhibition of 1949) to celebrate the 20th anniversary of Taman Siswa (Fig.6.21). The exhibition brochure informed that most of the painters were members of the GPI Jakarta and Sukabumi branches. Among the names of painters from Sin Ming Hui are Liu Mei Yung, Tan Niann Ba, and The Fo Hin. This exhibition also displayed paintings by Sudjojono and Suromo representing SIM; Hendra Gunawan and Kusnadi represented the *Pelukis Rakyat* (People's Painter), both of which were based in Yogyakarta. In addition, of course, other famous painters such as Affandi, Henk Ngantung, Salim, G.A. Sukirno, Wahdi, and several others participated.¹⁷¹ According to Said Reksohadiprodjo, the exhibition's significance is that it shows the latest developments in modern Indonesian art.¹⁷²

Reksohadiprodjo was not the only person who regarded the show as a breakthrough in marking the progress of Indonesian modern art. Painter and critic Basoeki Resobowo, through his reflection in *Mimbar Indonesia* magazine, also emphasized that the *Steleng Seni Lukis 1949* succeeded in proposing novel artistic values. According to him, the exhibition confirms that "Indonesia mulai melukis" (Indonesia started to paint). The paintings created by the artists have met the requirements of "becoming art" because

¹⁶⁸ Sitor Situmorang in Ajip Rosidi, et al., 1978, pp. 96-97.

¹⁶⁹ According to *Merdeka* magazine, the number of works on display was 90 out of 248 that the exhibition committee received. See "Steleng Besar Seni Lukis Oleh Gabungan Pelukis Indonesia", *Madjallah Merdeka*, 3 September 1949, p. 16.

¹⁷⁰ Sin Ming Hui formed in 1946 in Jakarta. This association managed painting course for Indonesia-Chinese's. See Dewan Redaksi, *Buku Peringatan Sin Ming Hui Djakarta 1946-1951*, (Jakarta: Badan Pengurus Sin Ming Hui Jakarta, 1951).

¹⁷¹ See brochure *Steleng Seni Lukis 1949 – 20 Tahun Taman Siswa*, Gabungan Pelukis Indonesia dan Sin Ming Hui (Bagian Seni Lukis), 11 – 18 September 1949, Taman Siswa Jalan Garuda 25 Jakarta.

¹⁷² Mohammad Said Reksohadiprodjo, "Merdeka!" in brochure *Steleng Seni Lukis 1949 – 20 Tahun Taman Siswa*, 1949. See also Pedoman, 5 July 1949, "Schilderijen in de Taman Siswa", *Het dagblad: uitgave van de Nederlandsche Dagbladpers te Batavia*, 14 September 1949, and *De locomotief: Samarangsch handels-en advertentie-blad*, 13 September 1949. It is also reported that this exhibition provides a particular space to display a collection of writings by the poet Chairil Anwar - who died in April 1949 - as a tribute to his services for developing new Indonesian literature.

they have "used their sense and artistic sensibility" to substantiate reality to a higher level.¹⁷³ Resobowo also stressed that Indonesian painters managed to break away from the restrictions of "social, religion, morality, science, and state affairs," and that these acts offered modern values.¹⁷⁴

Resobowo's observations are intertwined with those of Oesman Effendi. They exchanged letters published as articles in the cultural magazine *Zenith* in 1951. I think the main subject of their lengthy, difficult-to-understand letters reflects their belief in the modernity of Indonesian art.

Resobowo's first letter was written on 19 October 1949 and opened with the following confession: "For me, at this time it can be said that Indonesia has been painted again and we can name the new Indonesian painting. And by this, of course, I also mean that there is already an Indonesian style." Effendi agreed with Resobowo's declaration. Discussions about the influence of Western painting between both of them certainly cannot be avoided. In his letter, Effendi tried to convince Resobowo that Western influence would not be discreditable for a nation as long as the influence was then "purified with the authenticity of one's own soul." He concludes by writing a prediction: "The East-West difference is relative until at some point in time it becomes mere nonsense."¹⁷⁵ The correspondence between Basuki Resobowo and Oesman Effendi confirmed that the 1949 exhibition made a significant contribution.

It is important to emphasise that the 1949 exhibition continued a previous program. In October 1948, Taman Siswa presented a retrospective exhibition with the title *Lukisan dan Sastra: Dari Masa Lalu hingga Kini* (Paintings and Literature from the Past to the Present) that offered a historical timeline of paintings from Raden Saleh and Mas Pirngadie to the new generation, such as Handrio, Derachman, and Sutiksna, besides well-known names such as Affandi, Basuki Abdullah, Emiria Sunassa, and S. Sudjojono (Fig.6.22).¹⁷⁶

Furthermore, this exhibition left as a legacy a significant paper that set the periodization system of modern Indonesian art history for the first time. Writing for the exhibition catalog (Fig. 6.23), Zuber Usman divided the development of Indonesian art history into three periods: "Raden Saleh,"

¹⁷³ Basuki Resobowo, "Indonesia Sudah Melukis" in *Mimbar Indonesia*, 1 October 1949. See also the short version of the review in Basuki Resobowo, "Steleng Seni Lukis" in *Daya*, 1 October 1949.

¹⁷⁴ S.S.A., "Lepaskan Ikatan: Sekitar Steleng di Taman Siswa" in *Siasat*, 18 October 1949.

¹⁷⁵ See "Perkembangan Seni Lukis Indonesia Baru: Surat Menjurat antar Dua Orang Pelukis" in *Zenith*, 15 February 1951, pp. 65-87.

¹⁷⁶ "Tentoonstelling Indonesische schilderijen en letterkunde" in *De nieuwsgier*, 23 October 1948.

"The Generation After Raden Saleh," and "The New Generation." Usman emphasized that Raden Saleh is only concerned with himself and has not created national unity. The generation after Raden Saleh bloomed in nationalism, which was continued by Affandi and Sudjojono's generation, who wanted to find and achieve an Indonesian style.¹⁷⁷



FIGURE 6.22.
Affandi drew the exhibition flyer of Taman Siswa 1949.

Collection of HB Jassin's Library Jakarta
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

Despite the success and contribution of the two Taman Siswa exhibitions, Muhammad Balfas strongly criticized them. He declared that the two exhibitions had no character because they needed to provide an overview of the struggle of Indonesian painting.¹⁷⁸ According to him, artists only

¹⁷⁷ See the catalog of *Pameran Lukisan-lukisan dan Sastera dari Dulu sampai Sekarang*, 17 – 24 October 1948, Taman Siswa Jalan Garuda 25, Jakarta. This paper was also published in the magazine. See Zuber Usman dan Affandi, "Sedikit Pembitjaraan tentang Seni Lukis Indonesia" in *Mimbar Indonesia*, 16 October 1948, pp. 17 and 21.

¹⁷⁸ Balfas also directed his criticism to another exhibition held in August 1948 by the *Gelanggang* group at the Des Indes Hotel, Jakarta. The exhibition with the theme of *Seni Lukis Indonesia Sekarang*

consider exhibitions as a means to hang their paintings on the walls. Balfas argued that the works showcased in the exhibition were not in line with the struggle for Indonesian painting, as there was a lack of clarity on aspects such as personality and style. For him, the exhibition portrayed a blurry picture of Indonesian art. Balfas also expressed dissatisfaction with Sin Ming Hui's painters for lacking a soulful vibe and offering nothing new. Furthermore, he also stated that a group exhibition cannot be used to assess the newness of Indonesian painting.¹⁷⁹



FIGURE 6.23.
Exhibition catalog Taman Siswa 1948.

Collection of Leiden University Library
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

(Indonesian Painting Now) lasted for one week. Unfortunately, I have not found detailed information about this show. However, see the advertisement in *Keng Po*, 5 August 1948.

¹⁷⁹ M. Balfas, "Steleng Seni Lukis di Taman Siswa: Steleng Tidak Berwatak" in *Indonesia*, No.9. Th.I, October, 1949, pp. 515-517.

For Balfas – and other nationalist critics – expressing Indonesian characteristics or style in paintings was a significant matter debated during the Revolution. At the same time as determining an artist's personality, style, and adherence to a particular artistic movement, this 'Indonesian-ness' value is also shaped by the artists themselves. It is a way to inspire and challenge artists to stay loyal to their cultural identity and show national pride in their work, thereby influencing the concept of 'Indonesian-ness. '

Undoubtedly, the concept of 'Indonesian-ness' can be problematic, potentially leading to oversimplification and the perpetuation of stereotypes. Artists and critics often generalize a nation's personality and cultural traits when analyzing paintings, hindering a deeper understanding and appreciation of diverse artistic expressions. Nonetheless, it is essential to note that different ideologies have different criteria for what should be considered 'Indonesian-ness' in painting. For instance, leftist artists advocated for paintings that accurately depicted the reality of the people, while others rejected this view, championing the freedom of artists to express themselves.

Conclusion

The period from 1945 to 1950 was not just a phase but a crucial epoch in shaping the identity of modern art in Indonesia. Following the preceding Japanese occupation, this era was a significant attempt to document the history of Indonesian art for the first time. This chapter has unearthed many essential events, connections, and contexts that needed to be addressed or given attention in canonical art history, underscoring the importance of re-examining this period for further research.

This chapter has briefly outlined the complex interaction between artists, writers, and intellectuals and their participation in revolution, a topic not typically addressed in a canon narrative. In addition to advancing the narrative of Indonesian art historiography, this chapter has addressed archives, such as specific types of documents, from extensive research conducted across various library collections.

This chapter also highlights the incredible resilience of Indonesian artists during the revolutionary period, which enabled them to establish themselves as prominent figures and strive for international recognition. This represented a significant shift from their prior position of inferiority under Dutch colonialism and Japanese occupation. The chapter also discusses

the artists' mobility as they moved from one city to another. As a result, between 1945 and 1950, a comprehensive national representation of contemporary art emerged, including the Jakarta, Bandung, and Yogyakarta schools, signifying the artists' journey and impact on the art scene.

The revolutionary period was also characterized by communal action, with artists forming collectives to deliberate and debate the artistic values of Indonesian identity—or, as referred to above, "Indonesian-ness." I will delve into this topic further in Chapter Seven.

On Debating Indonesianness

Following the Declaration of Independence, Indonesian artists actively engage in the complexities of their national cultural identity, particularly in painting. They took on the challenge of defining “keindonesiaan dalam seni” (Indonesianness in art) asserting their right to self-determination, advocating for autonomy, and preserving their cultural identities. This “Indonesiannes” was not a new issue, as Indonesian artists had previously formulated a way of incorporating “Eastern values” (Eastern values) into their artworks supported by the Japanese regime. The same issue was discussed when PERSAGI painters' works were reviewed by newspaper critics, sparking a debate on who had the authority to define a nation's cultural identity. In this debate, some contended that postcolonial societies should repudiate colonial influence and revert to their pre-colonial origins.

On the other hand, some advocated for a hybrid culture, openly embracing Western art while seeking artistic opportunities from the past Indonesian culture. The ‘discursive war’ between 1945 and 1950, a period of intense debate, was particularly significant. These years were instrumental in shaping modern Indonesian art and further solidifying the Indonesia-centric perspective when evaluating Indonesian identity in artworks created by Indonesian artists.

This chapter examines the debates between 1945 and 1950, highlighting the overlooked and seldom discussed gap in the historiography of Indonesian modern art during this period. The primary concern revolves around the impact of Western influence on Indonesian painting, specifically in the interactions between Indonesian and Dutch artists and critics. Artists like Sudjojono argued that the Indonesian national cultural revolution compelled Indonesian artists to strive for independence and self-determination. Sudjojono comprehended that preserving and expressing the novelty of Indonesian art was the ultimate phase of decolonization, which had already commenced in the late 1930s. To achieve a new Indonesian art style, nationalist artists endeavored to express ideas separate from and unrelated

to their historical background, which was perceived as the inheritance of Dutch East Indies colonial art and Japanese fascism.

The Dutch critic J.M. Hopman¹ raised doubts about Indonesianness in modern Indonesian painting, whereas Simon Admiraal held a different opinion. In contrast to Hopman, Admiraal provides a discerning analysis that showcases his empathy towards the advancement of Indonesian painting. The debate was initially ignited by three exhibitions critiqued in the Dutch-language magazine *Uitzicht*, published in Jakarta. The exhibitions held in Jakarta included *Seni Rupa Indonesia Hari Ini* (Indonesian Painters Today, December 1945), *Pameran Satu Tahun Kemerdekaan* (The Exhibition One Year of Independence, August 1946), and *Pameran Tunggal Emiria Sunnasa* (The Emiria Sunassa Solo Exhibition, November 1946).

Hopman assertively claimed that Indonesian modern art can be characterized as "art that is derived from the imitation of Western art." Since it is simply a form of "imitation art," its presence is essentially "non-existent" and therefore does not require recognition. By employing Western art as a reference, this provocation was perceived as undermining the accomplishments of Indonesian artists and prescribing the path to follow to attain artistic modernity. The discussion extended from *Uitzicht* to encompass national magazines such as *Revolusioner*, *Indonesia*, and *Daya*. The debate continued among fellow nationalist artists to determine what aesthetics were appropriate to represent the identity of Indonesian painting.

This chapter consists of two sub-chapters and simultaneously reflects two phases of the debate surrounding Indonesian values in Indonesian painting. The first, *Exhibitions Provoking Debate*, explains the Indonesian and Dutch artist and critic debates, which are presented chronologically. The second, *From Realism to Indonesianness*, focuses on the argument between Indonesian artists and critics. In this sub-chapter, I will describe the Sudjojono and Trisno Sumardjo debates regarding "Sudjojono realism." In addition, to strengthen the context of debate, I will clarify the impact of the

¹ Johannes Marie Hopman was an art educator and historian. He was noted to have given a lecture about modern architecture at the *Bataviaasche Kunstkring* before the war. See "Kunstkring – Voordracht", *Het nieuws van den dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, 16 July 1930, p. 2. In 1941, Hopman was reported to be continuing the work of his father, Frits Hopman, an art editor. See "Nagelaten Papieren van Frits Hopman", *De Sumatra post*, 29 October 1941, p.7. In September 1946, Hopman worked as a conservator for the state collection in Jakarta. I came upon this proof in a letter he sent to Leiden for J.D. De Loos-Haaxman. See M. De Loos-Haaxman, archives H.666, No. 103, *Correspondentie en aantekeningen over schilderijen en schilders in Batavia*, Leiden University Library Special Collection.

Second Dutch Military Aggression, which occurred from 19 December 1948 to 5 January 1949 and paralyzed the republic's capital, Yogyakarta.

As discussed in Chapter 6, this aggression changed the art scene and led to several artists migrating back to Jakarta. From this shift, the term "Yogyakarta School" emerged representing the stronghold of nationalist artists whose work fell into the genre of distinctive realism and with Sudjojono acting as the leader. In line with that, the "Jakarta School" was considered a melting pot with more cosmopolitan art. Author Idrus named it "Jakarta-ism" to satirize it, which seemed to place Jakarta as a national measure for artist achievement.² Another school of thought, the "Bandung School," enlivened the art scene. This school of thought art is synonymous with Western laboratories because the artists were forged with Western education. The *Conclusion* presents a concise summary of the discourse surrounding the concept of Indonesianness in art, which persisted beyond the 1950s.

Exhibitions Provoking Debate

The exhibition titled *Works of Indonesian Painters Today* took place for a short period from 27 to 31 December 1945, which was approximately four months after the declaration of independence on 17 August 1945 (Fig.7.1). This was the inaugural exhibition organized by a newly sovereign nation to showcase its contemporary cultural essence and the first post-war exhibition globally. This exhibition was an authorized component of an Indonesian government initiative facilitated by the Ministry of Information. It showcased a collection of 141 artworks created by 19 painters displayed at the Sekolah Tabib Tinggi building in Jakarta. The participants consisted of painters from different generations. Some painters were previously engaged in the Japanese period in POETERA and *Keimin Bunka Shidōsho*: Barli, Basuki Abdullah, Hendra Gunawan, Affandi, Emiria Sunassa, Subanto Suriosubandrio, R.M. Soemitro, S. Sudjojono, Rusli, Soelarko, Kartono Yudhokusumo, Sudjana Kerton, E. Abedy, Baharudin Marasutan, Mochtar Apin, Suromo, Patty, Sumartono, and Kusnadi.³

² See N.N. "Djakarta dan Kegiatan Kesenian" in *Siasat*, 24 December 1958, p. 25 and "Kronik Kebudayaan – Tjeramah Idrus," *Siasat*, 3 December 1958, p. 27.

³ Brochure's exhibition of *Works of Indonesian Painters Today* by the Ministry of Information, 1945.

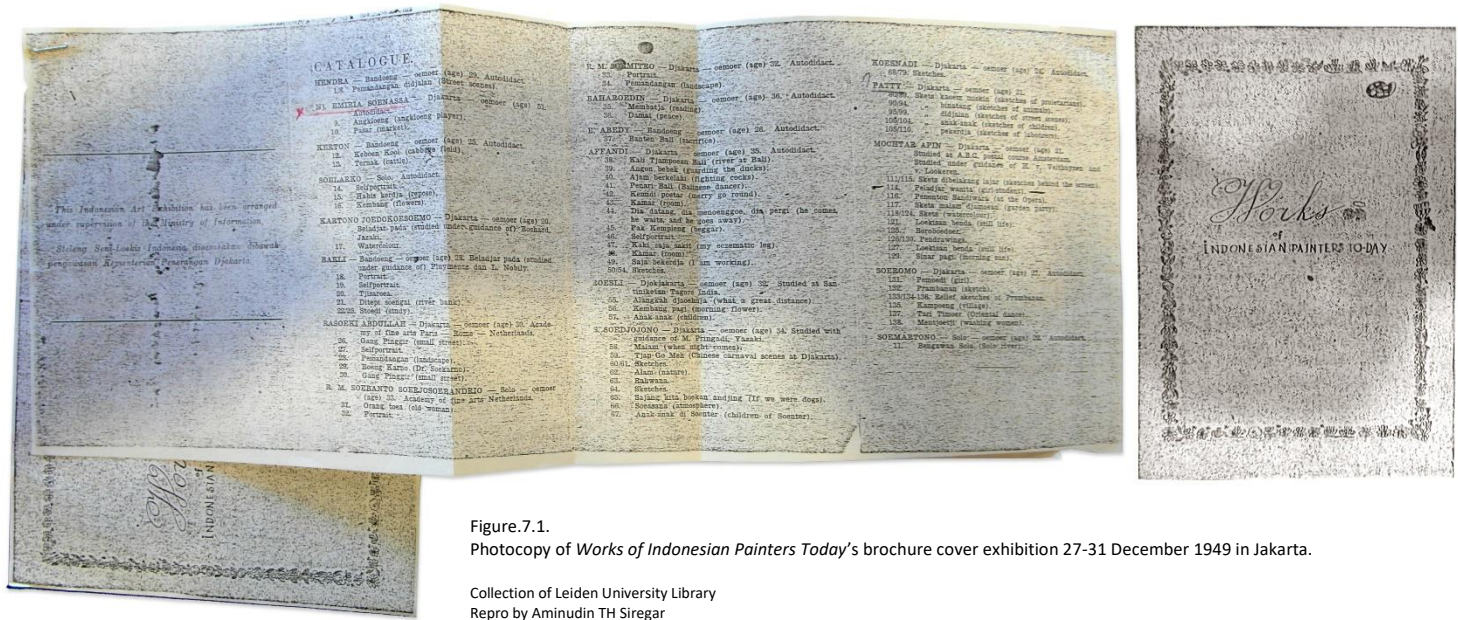


Figure 7.1.
Photocopy of *Works of Indonesian Painters Today's* brochure cover exhibition 27-31 December 1949 in Jakarta.
Collection of Leiden University Library
Repro by Aminudin TH Siregar

Unfortunately, I have yet to uncover a more comprehensive source informing us how this exhibition came to be. Aside from that, it is not difficult to conclude that this state-sponsored exhibition had a political agenda. Sutan Sjahrir, Prime Minister at the time, was the figure who initiated this exhibition.⁴ He cleverly used the exhibition as a representation of the nation and an instrument for diplomacy. He fully understood the power of art, and the art world was familiar to him. In the 1930s, for instance, Sjahrir had already discussed art practice and the artist dilemma of making a career in the Netherlands Indies.⁵ Aside from being close to artist circles, Sjahrir also collected several paintings.⁶ Through this exhibition, Sjahrir delivered the message that the new nation achieved the Indonesian revolution with dignity, intellectualism, and a modern outlook. He wanted to rehabilitate the negative perceptions and demonstrate that the Republic was not a group of terrorists, bandits, or extremists.⁷ The desire for Indonesia to receive international sympathy also explains why the exhibition's brochure was printed bilingually (Indonesian and English). The use of the title *Indonesian Painters Today* also emphasized the spirit of newness and contemporary art from an independent nation.⁸

⁴ See this description in Mochtar Lubis, "*Pejuang, Pemikir, dan Peminat Sastra*" in Rosihan Anwar (ed.), *Mengenang Sjahrir*, (Jakarta: PT Gramedia, 1980), p. 203.

⁵ See Sjahrizad, *Renungan Indonesia*, (Djakarta: Penerbit Kebangsaan Pustaka Rakjat, 1947), pp. 18-20.

⁶ See Rudolf Mrázek, *Sjahrir: Politics and Exile in Indonesia*, (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 2018), pp. 82-83.

⁷ Journalist Mochtar Lubis who came to the exhibition, saw how fascinated the allied forces were when presented with art from "civilized nations," not "terrorists." Lubis wrote: "Indonesian painters have succeeded in speaking about Indonesian humanity to the outside world." See Mochtar Lubis, "*Affandi adalah Affandi*" in Ajip Rosidi, et al., 1978, p. 36.

⁸ I discovered that some works in the exhibition came from the Japanese occupation period and even before that. Based on the list of works on the exhibition brochure, for instance, Sudjojono exhibited

When the exhibition opened, Jakarta was in a critical and worrying state. Papers reported incidents of “shooting, burglary, murder and other acts of violence” between the paramilitaries of the Republic against the NICA⁹ troops in several places.¹⁰ Despite this, the many acts of violence did not diminish the resolve of the Republic's leaders like Sukarno, Muhammad Hatta, and Sutan Sjahrir to attend the heavily guarded exhibition.¹¹ They were not alone – the presence of English military elites at the show raised the exhibition's prestige and signaled unusual diplomacy. Moreover, the friendly atmosphere between visitors, especially the Indonesian and British leaders, was strongly felt, “reinforcing our faith as an independent nation.”¹²

Information Minister Amir Sjarifuddin gave a reception speech, purposefully not mentioning the Dutch. Instead, he shrewdly expressed his happiness regarding the “togetherness of the Indonesian, English and American nations in enjoying this exhibition.” Furthermore, he took advantage of the exhibition opening to gain sympathy by mentioning that “art cuts across all frontiers” and hoped that the exhibition “would be the forerunner of many more functions which will bring together men of good will.”¹³

Sjarifuddin's statements were purposefully directed to a special guest attending the exhibition opening, General Alexander Frank Philip Christison. He was the Commander of the SEAC (Southeast Asia Command) in charge of the recapitulation process in Southeast Asia. In return, Christison served and savored this cultural diplomacy in earnest. On the following day, the presence of the General at the exhibition opening became

Cap Go Meh (1940), *Anak-anak Soenter* (1939), and *Sayang Kita Bukan Anjing* (1944). See the Brochure for *Works of Indonesian Painters Today*, Ministry of Information, December 1945.

⁹ NICA or The Netherlands Indies Civil Administration was established in April 1944 as a quasi-military entity to reinstate civil administration and Dutch colonial law after the ending of the Japanese occupation of the Dutch East Indies in the aftermath of World War II.

¹⁰ “Seteleng Loekisan Indonesia” in *Merdeka*, 28 December 1945, p.1.

¹¹ Before the exhibition opened, Sjahrir even experienced an assassination attempt by some armed people who shot his car. This incident made the front pages of various newspapers. See “Mislukte aanslag op Sjahrir” in *Het Parool*, 27 December 1945, p.1., “Incident op Menteng Sjahrir aangehouden en mishandeld” in *Het Dagblad: uitgave van de Nederlandsche Dagbladpers te Batavia*, 27 December 1945, p.1., “Schoten gelost op auto van Soetan Sjahrir Indonesische 'premier' niet getroffen Moordaanslag of poging tot autodiefstal?” in *De Volkskrant*, 27 December 1945, p.1., “Aanslag op Sjahrir” in *De Tijd: godsdienstig-staatkundig dagblad*, 27 December 1945, p.1. See also See Osman Raliby, *Documenta Historica*, (Djakarta: Bulan-Bintang, 1953), p. 167.

¹² *Merdeka*, 28 December 1945, p.1.

¹³ *Independent*, 28 December 1945, p.1. I haven't found any evidence of who opened the exhibition officially. But according to Mochtar Lubis, this person was Sutan Sjahrir.

news.¹⁴ *Independent* and *Merdeka* even published a photo featuring Sukarno and Christison smiling and enjoying the paintings on the walls. Both exuded a happy and friendly mood (Fig. 7.2).¹⁵



FIGURE 7.2.
Sukarno and Christison enjoying the *Indonesian Painters Today* exhibition.

Collection of National Library of Indonesia
Repro by Aminudin TH Siregar

Quantifying the extent to which Indonesia's political agenda was advanced through this art exhibition is challenging. However, Sjahrir's political strategy, which emphasized diplomacy over warfare, proved effective and provided the Republic with the political support required. Sjahrir's implementation of the "art and diplomacy" strategy in late 1945 was therefore acknowledged as a triumph and garnered global recognition.¹⁶ He realized the global cultural landscape had transformed profoundly following the Second World War.

In his renowned pamphlet *Perdjoeangan Kita* (Our Struggle), Sjahrir astutely analyzed the global landscape, asserting that Indonesia was deeply impacted by the forces of capitalism and Anglo-Saxon imperialism, which held significant sway over its destiny. Benedict Anderson accurately

¹⁴ *Het dagblad: uitgave van de Nederlandsche Dagbladpers te Batavia*, 28 December 1945, p.1.

¹⁵ See the photos on the front cover of *Independent*, 28 December 1945 and *Merdeka*, 28 December 1945.

¹⁶ As observed by Burhanuddin, one of Sjahrir's comrades. See Burhanuddin, "Sjahrir yang Saya Kenal" in Rosihan Anwar (ed.), 1980, p. 68.

interpreted the statement in the pamphlet. He observed that it was necessary to employ delicate diplomacy to prevent the immense influence of American capital from being used to support the efforts of the Dutch to dominate the Indies.¹⁷



FIGURE.7.3. Sutan Sjahrir (right) and Christison (middle) at the opening exhibition.
(Source: *Merdeka*, 28 December 1945)

Collection of Leiden University Library
Repro by Aminudin TH Siregar

Simultaneously, Sjahrir aimed to curb the aggressive actions of young militants targeting white individuals. He sought to establish a political framework and institutions that would be endorsed by Western nations while employing a nationalist rhetoric that did not include any radical elements to garner support and understanding from the international community. The *Indonesian Painters Today* exhibition successfully and gracefully constructed the identity and representation of contemporary Indonesia. Sutan Sjahrir skillfully avoided discordance during the Indonesian Revolution (Fig.7.3).

The republic relocated to Yogyakarta at the beginning of 1946. Nevertheless, Prime Minister Sutan Sjahrir continued his duties in Jakarta. Sjahrir subsequently endorsed a collective exhibition from 7 - 13 August 1946. This *One Year of Independence* exhibition allowed Indonesian artists to serve as "cultural diplomats" during the World Festival of Youth and Students in Prague.¹⁸ Nevertheless, due to legal documentation issues, the

¹⁷ See introduction by Benedict R.O'G. Anderson in Sutan Sjahrir, *Perjuangan Kita: Edisi khusus 90 Tahun Sutan Sjahrir*, (Jakarta: Pusat Dokumentasi Politik Guntur 49, 1996), p. 22.

¹⁸ "Seteling Seni-Loekis", *Ra'jat*, 8 August 1946, p. 2.

artist delegation was unable to commence their journey.¹⁹ The Prague exhibition's materials were subsequently exhibited at the former *Bataviaasche Kunstkring* building in Jakarta as a commemoration of the first anniversary of independence.

An integral piece of this exhibition was a compilation of 19 linoleum sheets crafted by the *Gelanggang* group exponents Baharudin Marasutan and Mochtar Apin. The album was produced in 36 editions, each containing written descriptions in three languages: Indonesian, English, and French.²⁰ Apart from being exhibited, the linoleum albums were distributed by the Indonesian Government to several other nations to represent Indonesian sovereignty.

Locating comprehensive details regarding the *One Year of Independence* exhibition proves arduous. I discovered a critique authored by Rivai Apin, the sibling of Mochtar Apin, published in *Noesantara* magazine in September 1946. He expressed his dissatisfaction with the insufficient attention given to the historical exhibition. "There were only brief news excerpts," he stated. However, Apin emphasized that the exhibition's significance remained essential as it "enlightened the global community about the advancements in our art."²¹ Apin succinctly examined multiple works, acknowledging the artists who took part in the exhibition as much as possible.

Nevertheless, he may not have accurately depicted all the individuals involved. The painters featured in Apin's coverage included Affandi, Agus Djaya, Hendra Gunawan, Baharuddin Marasutan, Henk Ngantung, Kartono Yudhokusumo, Mochtar Apin, Subanto Suriosubandrio, S. Sudjojono, Trubus Sudarsono, Sudihardjo, Surono, and Suromo. Rivai Apin's inventory comprises novel symptoms manifested in specific artworks. However, he did not provide further details or explanations on the subject. Conversely, he concluded the article by asserting that the exhibition provided gratification to the spectators.²²

¹⁹ According to Sudjojono, the Dutch urged the Indonesian delegation to leave using Dutch East Indies passports. In contrast, the delegation insisted on using Indonesian passports. See Mia Bustam, 2013, p. 75.

²⁰ See Rivai Apin, "Membitjarakan Loekisan" in *Noesantara*, Th.1, No. 5-6-7, 20 September 1946, p. 173-174. See also Sanento Yuliman, *Monumen Grafis 17 Agustus 1946*, Tempo, 25 August 1990. It is important to note that Yuliman has never mentioned the linoleum albums ever being exhibited.

²¹ Rivai Apin, "Membitjarakan Loekisan" in *Noesantara*, 20 September 1946, p.173.

²² Rivai Apin, 1946, p.174.



Figure 7.4. Dolf Verspoor, *Indonesische Schilders van Heden*, 1946.
(Source: *Uitzicht*, 11 September 1946)

Collection of Leiden University Library
Repro by Aminudin TH Siregar

Provocation from *Uitzicht*

Rivai Apin had company while reviewing the exhibition in September. I came across an article published in *Uitzicht*²³ in that same month by Dutch author Dolf Verspoor (Fig. 7.4).²⁴ I discovered, for example, numerous resemblances in the names of artists mentioned in the articles both Verspoor and Rivai Apin authored. In addition to Verspoor's written content, *Uitzicht* included two pages featuring reproductions of artworks by Affandi and Sudjojono, accompanied by the caption "from an exhibition held last December."²⁵ The exhibition mentioned is *Indonesian Painters Today*, which occurred in December 1945. The *Uitzicht* editors included two additional pages to facilitate a connection between both exhibitions, as conveyed by Verspoor's review.

²³ The weekly magazine *Uitzicht* was published under R.V.D. (*Regeeringsvoorlichtingsdienst*), The Information Service of the Dutch Government in Jakarta. Indonesian press considers the magazine relatively moderate and objective in reporting the struggles of the Indonesian Republic. See *Pantja Raja*, 15 March 1947, p.310.

²⁴ Dolf Verspoor (1917-1994) was a popular poet and translator. He was in Java when the revolution began. Close to Indonesian political, academic, and artists, Verspoor stood with the Republic. He was also close friends with S. Sudjojono and often gifted him with books. Verspoor was against the military aggression executed by the Dutch. He returned to Holland in 1950 and worked as a translator and a playwright. His articles remained a regular feature in Indonesian cultural magazines. For further reading, see *Yearbook of Society of Dutch Literature*, 1998, p. 181-189. See Rosihan Anwar, *Iseng dengan Dolf Verspoor in Mimbar Indonesia*, 4 February 1950, pp. 19 and 21. See also Mia Bustam, 2013, p. 156.

²⁵ *Uitzicht*, 11 September 1946, pp. 6-7.



Figure 7.5.
J. M. Hopman, *Toekomst van de Beeldende Kunst in Indonesië*, 1946.
(Source: *Uitzicht*, No. 49-50, Kerstnummer December 1946)

Collection of Leiden University Library
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

Verspoor's article, "Indonesische Schilders van Heden" (Indonesian Painters Today) aims to revitalize Indonesian painting and enhance its presence. The emerging painters exhibited a notable departure from their predecessors, who solely depicted the natural beauty of the East Indies. Verspoor argues that Affandi and Sudjojono, who represent the new generation, have introduced a groundbreaking approach characterized by their distinct personalities. Furthermore, this emerging generation has a particular preference for which items they chose to paint. The majority of paintings explore everyday life topics through the use of "intuition" rather than relying solely on "technique." Nevertheless, Verspoor notes that these constraints have not deterred the artists from producing their artworks. Concluding the discussion, Verspoor acknowledged the painters' perseverance as "avant-garde, effectively representing their nation and people (*als avant-garde, hun land en volk tot uitdrukking gebracht hebben*)."²⁶

Three months following Verspoor's evaluation, *Uitzicht* released an extensive article by J.M. Hopman (Fig.7.5). Although this is not explicitly stated, I assert that Hopman's article was a critical response to Verspoor.

²⁶ See Dolf Verspoor, "Indonesische Schilders van Heden" in *Uitzicht*, 11 September 1946, p. 11.

Also, I contend that Hopman's choice of the title *Toekomst van de Beeldende Kunst in Indonesië* (The Future of Art in Indonesia) implies his intention to focus on "Western art in Indonesia," as indicated by the use of the preposition "in." Conversely, Verspoor deliberately chose the title *Indonesische Schilders van Heden* to demonstrate his endorsement of Indonesian painters' inventive work and expertise.

Hopman commenced his article with the bold assertion that "Indonesian painting does not yet exist and for the time being, it will not exist." The basis of his argument was derived from his observation of the accomplishments of Indonesian painters at two exhibitions: *Indonesian Painters Today* (1945) and, notably, *One Year of the Republic* (1946). Hopman observed that the painters' diligent efforts inherently warrant the audience's attention. However, the accomplishments derived from such arduous labor do not necessarily reflect the qualities of contemporary Indonesian art. However, what is evident are artworks demonstrating the Indonesian painters' captivation with Western painting. Hopman proceeded:

The exhibited artwork contained Eastern subject matter, but the presentation style adhered strictly to modern Western art. The occurrence was so atypical of Eastern culture that it elicited astonishment. Without Kokoschka, Klee, Munch, Chagall, Utrillo, and others, artists in Java would never have painted [in the manner] as could be seen at both exhibitions.²⁷

Hopman's statement evoked a sense of revisiting the writings of Dutch authors who had previously covered the PERSAGI exhibition. During that period, the PERSAGI painters were also criticized for deviating from the principles of Eastern painting. The pervasive impact of Western painting resulted in the erosion of Indonesian painting's distinctiveness, it was said,

²⁷ J. Hopman, "Toekomst van de Beeldende Kunst in Indonesië", *Uitzicht*, No. 49-50, Kerstnummer December 1946, p.18. "Het daar geëxposeerde werk was naar de inhoud Oosters doch de uitbeeldingswijze geheel en al in navolging van Westerse moderne kunst. Ze was zelfs zo typisch on-Oosters dat men er zich over verbaasde. Zonder Kokoschka, Klee, Munch, Chagall, Utrillo, c.s. zou op Java nooit zijn geschilderd als beide tentoonstellingen te zien gaven." See also copies that have been translated in Indonesian in D. Suradji, *Bertebaran: Rangkuman Tulisan Menyinari Seni Drama, Film, Lukis dan Sketsa Ibukota R.I.S.* (Jakarta: Haruman Hidup, 1961), pp. 147-148. An Indonesian version of Hopman's article was also published in S. Sudjojono's book. See S. Sudjojono, *Kami Tahu Kemana Seni Lukis Indonesia Akan Kami Bawa*, (Yogyakarta: Penerbit Indonesia Sekarang, 1948).

leading it to adopt an ironically more Western character than Western art itself. Hence, it was thought imperative to provide proper guidance to the Indonesian painters. Hopman shared the same viewpoint - he believed it was essential to acknowledge that Eastern art possesses unique characteristics, particularly in its techniques and precision. He lamented the absence of these qualities in the artworks displayed. Indonesian painters disregarded materials and methods, which is similar to what occurred with European impressionists. Indonesian painters operated with a sense of urgency within this context. Hopman expressed his dissatisfaction with the significant impact of fauvism on Indonesian painters.

Nevertheless, he comprehended that this inclination to exalt unrestrained energy was "congruent with the profound transformations taking place in Indonesia."²⁸ In addition, Hopman openly displayed his stereotypical belief that the exuberant portrayal of freedom on canvas contradicted the conventional expectations associated with the East (Asia). He wrote: "It struck the Westerner that people in Asia never show their feelings except in a carefully considered act performed inconspicuously."²⁹

Verspoor previously hypothesized that Indonesian painting was undergoing a "revolution" in which the painters deliberately abandoned traditional doctrines or principles to generate novel artistic expressions. Hopman objected to Verspoor's rationale, which was considered hasty. Instead of putting faith in the revolution, Hopman proposed that Indonesian painters must comprehend the developmental process "with patience (*geduld*)."³⁰ Following that recommendation, he proceeded to delineate the stages of development. For instance, he evaluated that the achievements displayed by the artists at the exhibition only reflected the "first phase." The artist must attain the other steps, namely searching for the essence of self and something national and regional. Even if an artist accomplishes the "personal phase," the work is still of value to humanity because "in the uniqueness, we find a familiar light."³⁰

Like a master to his pupils, Hopman dispensed advice to "be patient in reaching maturity." He closed his article by saying: "If Indonesian art has reached such a level, then it will be more than a charming attraction; it will

²⁸ J. Hopman, 1946, p. 18. "Het past inderdaad zeer goed bij de grote gisting in de huidige Indonesische wereld."

²⁹ J. Hopman, 1946, p. 18. "Het trof den Westerling dat men in Azië zijn gevoelens niet toonde, behalve in een enkele met zorg overwogen daad onopvallend verricht."

³⁰ J. Hopman, 1946, p. 18. "Omdat men in het bijzondere de glans van het algemeene vond."

be valuable for the entire world. I believe it can reach this point - if one has the patience of wisdom and sincere love because no art or a true civilization grows without this." ³¹

Figure 7.6.
Simon Admiraal, *Nieuwe Indonesische Schilderkunst – Het Werk van Emiria Sunassa als symptom, 1947.*
(Source: *Uitzicht*, 2^e jaargang No.1, 1 January 1947)

Collection of Leiden University Library
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

In the subsequent issue of *Uitzicht*, published in January 1947, Simon Admiraal, indirectly responded to Hopman's article with his piece titled *Nieuwe Indonesische Schilderkunst – Het Werk van Emiria Sunassa als symptom* (New Indonesian art - the works of Emiria Sunassa as a Symptom) (Fig.7.6). The article examines the outcomes of Emiria Sunassa's solo exhibition.³² However, Admiraal directed his propositions towards Hopman. Admiraal

³¹ J. Hopman, 1946, p. 19. "Als Indonesische kunst zover gekomen is zal ze meer zijn dan een bekoorlijke bezienswaardigheid, zal ze van waarde zijn voor heel de wereld. Ik geloof dat zij zover kan komen – als men het geduld der wijsheid heeft en vooral oprechte liefde, want zonder deze groeit geen kunst geen waarachtige beschaving trouwens."

³² Emiria Sunassa's solo exhibition was held on 15 – 22 November 1946 at the old *Batavia Kunstkring*, Jakarta. The resulting sales from this exhibition were donated to the Indonesian Red Cross. See *Merdeka*, 13 November 1946, p.2.



positioned himself as a sympathizer of the new Indonesian painting movement by using the term *Nieuwe Indonesische* (New Indonesian). To embrace the new phenomena, as Admiraal explained, it was essential not to evaluate Indonesian artists based on past accomplishments, particularly in comparison to European art standards. This was how Admiraal criticized Hopman at the start of his article.

Subsequently, he analyzed the vulnerabilities and merits of Sunassa's artworks by carefully dissecting them. In terms of technique, particularly regarding the portrayal of life, the painter still lacked sufficient experience. Admiraal perceived this as a vulnerability. However, he also pronounced that technique alone should not be considered the sole crucial factor. Sunassa's power lies in her ability to compel us to become more intrigued by her spiritual experiences. This provides an enhancement for the person observing. Sunassa's paintings also offered a "new sensation," which expanded her emotional encounters. These strengths subsequently triumphed over Sunassa's limitations.³³

The symptoms of modernity in Sunassa's works are intricately intertwined with her Indonesian background, showcasing her distinctive and sophisticated expression, use of color, personal experiences, sincerity, and subtle artistic sensibility, all of which distinguish her from European painters. Admiraal recognizes the importance of comprehending the varied artistic styles and distinctions in a painter's work. Subsequently, he elaborated on the significance of creative technique. Does Sunassa possess a distinctive artistic manner or characteristic way of expressing herself? Admiraal stated that style is not as pressing as the aspects above. According to him, including these diverse elements enhanced the significance of Sunassa's paintings.

Admiraal noted that the signs of the transition to modernity were apparent in the artworks of Sunassa and other painters. The creation of that painting is not a mere recreational pursuit involving paints and brushes but

³³ Simon Admiraal, "Nieuwe Indonesische Schilderkunst – Het werk van Emiria Sunassa als symptoom" in *Uitzicht*, 2^e jaargang No.1, 1 January 1947, p.10. "Dit alles bepaalt haar levensrythme, waardoor wij nader tot de boeiende inhoud van haar wezen komen. Dan valt het niet meer zoo op dat zij geen handen kan schilderen; dat ze nog vele malen onervaren, haar voor slechts luttel jaren terug geleerde olieverfschilderstechniek, niet behoorlijk genoeg hanteert; geen portret naar het leven kan schilderen, omdat ze dan te veel gebonden is aan het object. Maar zij dwingt ons tot de diepere belangstelling voor wat zij ons van haar eigen doorleefde innerlijke gewaarwordingen heeft te vertellen. En dit is een verrijking voor iederen beschouwer, wanneer hij verwantschap met enkele daarvan kan mede aanvoelen, of hem een nieuwe gewaarwording doet beleven, die een uitbreiding beteekent voor zijn gevoelservaringen."

rather an endeavor imbued with the artist's novel encounters. Equally significant is that Indonesian painters depend on their areas of expertise. Admiraal was ridiculing Hopman, who had previously established a hierarchical set of criteria to assess the advancement of contemporary Indonesian art. Admiraal believed that the creation of new Indonesian paintings should be undertaken independently by the Indonesian people, without the influence of external entities:

If an Indonesian painter wants to reach the heights he dreams of, he only needs to be, in the most profound meaning thereof, in his own greatness and in his own limitation: an Indonesian.³⁴



Figure 7.7.
Simon Admiraal, *Rondom de hedendaagse Indonesische Schilderkunst*, 1947.
(Source: *Uitzicht*, 2^e Jaargang No.14/15, 9 April 1947)

Collection of Leiden University Library
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

³⁴ Simon Admiraal, 1947, p. 10. "Wil de Indonesische schilder de hoogten bereiken die in zijn wenschdroom liggen opgesloten, dan heeft hij slechts te zijn, in de diepste betekenis hiervan, in eigen grootheid en in eigen beperking: een Indonesiër."

Admiraal's perspectives on the advancement of Indonesian contemporary art are featured in the April issue of *Uitzicht*. In this instance, under the title “Rondom de hedendaagse Indonesische Schilderkunst” (Surrounding Contemporary Indonesian Painting), Admiraal approached modernity issues from a more discerning perspective. He recognized the perspective of those who argue that Indonesian painters still employ Western techniques in their paintings (Fig.7.7). Nevertheless, Admiraal also noted the assimilation of the Western approach during the process, thereby diminishing its exclusive significance. Admiraal contended that the artworks created by Indonesian painters during the Japanese occupation differed remarkably from the previous period, which lacked vitality and emotion.

During the Japanese period, most of the paintings showed what Admiraal called "the experience of the East, especially Indonesianness," which accommodates emotional and esoteric experiences that are explosive. In addition, the painters demonstrated the will, confidence, and vision to realize their Indonesian goals. For Admiraal, the results achieved during the Japanese period eventually shaped the character of modern Indonesian painting.

This was the starting point of discovering new Indonesian painting, thanks to the powerful desire of the artists and their explosive self-awareness, to create something that had for centuries been locked in a glasshouse.³⁵

Admiraal criticized Hopman for his point of view – shared with most foreign writers – of associating the achievements of new paintings with classic Indonesia. "There is no point in comparing this young Indonesian art with its own old traditional art. We can assume that it [the young art] has released itself from it [the old traditional art] and fully roots in the now," Admiraal stated.³⁶ He also questions efforts to compare Indonesian and European modern art, as he thinks they are incomparable.

³⁵ Simon Admiraal, “Rondom de hedendaagse Indonesische Schilderkunst” in *Uitzicht*, 2^e Jaargang No.14/15, 9 April 1947, p. 22. “Dit betekende het startpunt van de nieuwe Indonesische schilderkunst die was gevonden, gesteund door het dwingend willen der kunstenaars en aangemoedigd door de losbrekende zelfbewustheid in deze voor hen wezenlijke verrukking, naar een verwerkelijking van wat eeuwenlang sluimerend als in een broeikas opgesloten had gezeten.”

³⁶ Simon Admiraal, 1947, p. 23. “Het heeft geen zin deze jonge Indonesische kunst te vergelijken met haar eigen oude traditionele. Men kan aannemen dat zij zich ervan bevrijd heeft en volkomen wortelt in deze tijd.”

In addition, Admiraal asked why there are still people who confront modern Indonesian painting with European art. In his view, the two are incomparable. At this point, Admiraal wanted to state that Western art is not the only master of narrative that has authority and can make comparisons between itself and the art developing outside it. It was essential to understand that art outside Europe will someday create and construct its history – as seen in the success of Indonesian artists in developing their new art. Therefore, Admiraal wrote:

It is impossible to reach an equal level of art in such a brief time if compared to European art. But guided by a strong will, pushed by the desire to consciously self-express, it [the art] has already achieved results that amaze us and make us veritably interested in its future. To doubt this would be to ignore what has already been achieved.³⁷

We Know Where We Will Be Taking Indonesian Painting

The discourse regarding the presence of the new Indonesian art in *Uitzicht* magazine was short-lived. Admiraal's article in April 1947 marked the final publication on the subject. However, in February 1947, S. Sudjojono's article was featured in the *Revolusioner*³⁸ magazine, explicitly refuting Hopman's arguments. There is no information regarding Sudjojono's reason for not responding to Hopman in the same magazine. Nevertheless, the two engaged in an indirect intellectual confrontation. In a manner reminiscent of the Persagi era, Sudjojono composed his writings in the Indonesian language, envisioning his audience to be fellow Indonesian artists.

In his influential essay titled “Kami Tahu Kemana Seni Lukis Indonesia Akan Kami Bawa” (We Know Where We Will Be Taking Indonesian Painting), Sudjojono emphasized the importance of self-

³⁷ Simon Admiraal, 1947, p. 23. “Het kan op een zo korte termijn, vergeleken met de Europese moderne kunst, onmogelijk zulk een evenwaardig kunstniveau bereikt hebben. Maar geleid door de ontembare wil, gestuwd door de vrij gekomen expressie-drift in eigen zelfbewustheid heeft zij reeds resultaten bereikt, die ons verbazen en wezenlijk geïnteresseerd doen zijn voor haar toekomst. Hieraan te twijfelen zou een miskennen zijn van het thans reeds bereikte.”

³⁸ *Revolusioner* is an Indonesian-language magazine published by PESINDO (Indonesia Socialist Youths). This revolutionary youth organization was anti-colonialist and far-left. For more about PESINDO, see Norman Joshua Soelias, *Pesindo-Pemuda Sosialis Indonesia 1945-1950*, (Tangerang Selatan: Marjin Kiri, 2016).

determination for Indonesian artists (Fig. 7.8). The artists autonomously defined the trajectory of their art and its evolution without any guidance or direction from the colonialists. The colonization process hindered a nation's ability to comprehend its own identity, either independently or from the colonizer's perspective. Colonialism has distorted and amplified biased information in the arts.



Figure.7.8.
Photocopy of Sudjojono book's cover *Kami Tahu Kemana Seni Lukis Indonesia Akan Kami Bawa*, 1948.

Private Collection

When analyzing Sudjojono's article mentioned above, I discovered that he believes that artistic expression is a ubiquitous pursuit of humanity that surpasses geographical and cultural barriers. The belief that art is limited to the Western world dramatically underestimates the abundant traditions, varied narratives, and innovative forms of creative expression worldwide. Sudjojono thus harbors significant doubts regarding assertions of universal truths that assert art as the sole domain of the Western world.

By contrast, Sudjojono asserts that art originated from the East, as did global civilization. He argued, "The most ancient artwork originates from Egypt, rather than Europe." Sudjojono refuted Hopman's patronizing perspective on the presence of Indonesian painting by asserting, "The construction of the Borobudur temple serves as undeniable evidence. Comparing the temple to the dolmen (*hunebedden*) or *Amsterdamse beurs* building is akin to comparing the prophet to the pagans."³⁹ Sudjojono acknowledged Hopman's assertion that Indonesian painting is influenced by and exhibits Western characteristics. However, he emphasized that influence in painting is widespread and does not require exaggeration. Indonesian art and Western art mutually influenced each other during a specific period.

As Indonesians, we acknowledge that our painting style currently exhibits Western characteristics. However, it is inaccurate to claim that it is not Indonesian painting. Firstly, because prior to Raden Saleh, the practice of painting had already been established for a considerable duration, albeit with different stylistic conventions than those employed presently. This exhibited a robust correlation with our perception of life during that period. Secondly, because if we have temporarily abandoned our previous methods, it is important to note that this is not a period of imitating or simply replicating, but rather an immersive experience aimed at uncovering the truth within the theories of da Vinci, Durer, Cézanne, and other artists.⁴⁰

Sudjojono and his colleagues revitalized Indonesian art by drawing inspiration from a fresh historical perspective, distinct from the history shaped by Dutch colonization over an extended period. Thus, Sudjojono strongly advised the Dutch to refrain from intervening, as the cultivation of

³⁹ S. Sudjojono, *Kami Tahu Kemana Seni Lukis Indonesia Akan Kami Bawa*, (Yogyakarta: Penerbit Indonesia Sekarang, 1948), pp. 4-5. "Kita bisa membuat Borobudur yang kalau dibandingkan dengan hunnebedden dan *de Amsterdamse Beurs* Belanda, sebenarnya perbandingan antara seorang nabi dan seorang heiden."

⁴⁰ S. Sudjojono, 1948, p. 3. "Kita bangsa Indonesia mengakui bahwa tiorak seni lukis disini bertiorak Barat sekarang. Tapi untuk dikatakan bahwa ini bukan seni lukis Indonesia, ini tidak benar. Nomor satu sebab kita, sebelum Raden Saleh, sudah lama punya seni lukis, meskipun tioraknya tidak seperti kita sekarang melukis. Dan ini mempunyai sebab2 yang bergandengan erat dengan pandangan hidup kita pada waktu itu. Nomor dua, sebab kalau kita sekarang meninggalkan tjara lama kita sebentar bukanlah ini suatu fase dimana kita mengekor atau mengcopy sadja, akan tetapi suatu belevenis dengan kebenaran yang ada pada teori2 Da Vinci, Durer, Cézanne, dan lain-lain."

Indonesian art is the sole responsibility of Indonesian painters. Sudjojono asserts his authority over Hopman by cautioning him that he and his colleagues had been well aware of how and where they would determine the direction of Indonesian painting: "And how future Indonesian painting will be, we Indonesians will be fully capable of shaping it. From the years of Dutch colonization (in Persagi times) we have already known how and where to direct our painting. And if now the Dutch in *Uitzicht* want to meddle, we have no need or fit. They have never, in a period of 350 years, proven that they are capable of this."⁴¹

In conclusion, Sudjojono assures Hopman that Indonesian artists will consistently demonstrate reverence towards European artists. Meanwhile, Indonesian artists will persist in advancing and perpetuating their revolution and empowering their people to cultivate artistic abilities, as "our revolution encompasses not only intellectual but also artistic endeavors."⁴² Sudjojono's reply to Hopman effectively conveys a robust sense of nationalism and seems to defend Indonesian painting from Western guidance. This is not a novel controversy, as it has been illuminated previously. The distinction lies in that conversations regarding Western influence arose during the revolutionary era within the framework of decolonization, which emphasized the importance of national autonomy. Nevertheless, a small number of Indonesian art writers persist in their efforts to expand their perspectives.

Ida Nasoetion (Fig. 7.9), an essayist and art critic close to the *Gelanggang* group, has some thoughts on the subject.⁴³ Nasoetion was the

⁴¹ S. Sudjojono, 1948, pp. 14-15. "Dan tentang bagaimana seni-lukis di Indonesia jang akan datang, kita bangsa Indonesia tjukup tjakap untuk mengaturnja sendiri. Dari djaman pendjadjahan Belanda dahulu (di djaman "PERSAGI"-Persatuan Ahli-ahli Gambar Indonesia) kami sudah tahu bagaimana dan kemana kami akan membawa seni-lukis kami. Dan kalau sekarang bangsa Belanda mau utik2 tentang hal ini, kita tidak butuh tjampur tangan mereka. Mereka tidak pernah dalam tempo kurang lebih 350 tahun membuktikan bahwa mereka tjakap juga dalam soal ini."

⁴² Sudjojono, 1948, p. 15. "Dan kesalahan2 teman kami di Eropa tidak akan kami maki2 dan kami undat2, tetapi akan kami hormati sebab mereka sudah bekerdja sebisa-bisa mereka dengan tulus ichlas dan korban djiwa untuk tjita2 jang bagus dan pekerdjaan mereka tetap akan kami pakai penundjuk sebagai kapal karam dilautan perdjjoangan masjarakat kita di dunia dan di revolusi kami di Indonesia ini, untuk membuat tidak sadja di seniman mendjadi artistik, tetapi djuga seluruh masjarakat mendjadi artistik bewust sebagi di Indonesia sediakala. Kami akan menjelesaikan revolusi kami tidak verstandelijk sadja akan tetapi djuga artistik."

⁴³ Ida Nasoetion was 26 years old when she wrote the essay. With Chairil Anwar, she was the cultural editor of the *Gelanggang* for the weekly magazine *Siasat*. Nasoetion also worked as an editor for *Inzicht* and later the weekly *Kritiek en Opbouw*, with a mixed Dutch-Indonesian editorial staff. In early 1948, when Dutch painters Wim Schippers and Henk de Vos exhibited in Jakarta, few could review the exhibition, except for Nasoetion. *Oriëntatie* magazine editor Rob Nieuwenhuys hailed Nasoetion's writing as "the only witty critique." Rob Nieuwenhuys "Moderne Schilderkunst in Batavia" in *Oriëntatie- cultureel maandblad*, No.6, 20 March 1948, p. 41.

only postcolonial Indonesian female critic with an astute sharp and broad view of art development during the revolution. Unfortunately, she did not live long.⁴⁴

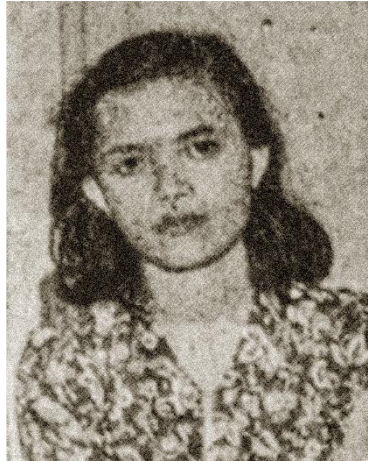


Figure. 7.9.
Ida Nasoetion.
(Sources: *Siasat*, 2 Januari 1957)

Collection of Leiden University Library
Repro by Aminudin TH Siregar

In her 1948 short essay, “Pengaruh Barat” (Western Influence), Nasoetion wrote that the notion of Indonesian art should be freed from burdens, whether it be politics or society. Nasoetion asserted that artists are unable to dissociate themselves from their community. Conversely, artists, according to her, are not subservient to the people or subjugated by a political group. The issue lies in the artist's defensive stance against foreign influences, as well as their emphasis on prioritizing the nationalist milieu. In order to accomplish their objective, they establish boundaries. These limits

⁴⁴ On 23 March 1948, Nasoetion was declared mysteriously missing. She is believed to have been kidnapped and killed. See “Ida Nasoetion vermist”, *De locomotief: Samarangsch handels-en advertentie-blad*, 3 April 1948, p. 1 and “Ontvoerd?”, *Het dagblad: uitgave van de Nederlandsche Dagbladpers te Batavia*, 5 April 1948, p. 2. Nasoetion also worked as an editor for *Inzicht* and later the weekly *Kritiek en Opbouw*, with a mixed Dutch-Indonesian editorial staff. In early 1948, when Dutch painters Wim Schippers and Henk de Vos exhibited in Jakarta, few could review the exhibition, except for Nasoetion. Because of her writing, *Oriëntatie* magazine editor Rob Nieuwenhuys hailed Nasoetion's writing as “the only witty critique.” Rob Nieuwenhuys “Moderne Schilderkunst in Batavia” in *Oriëntatie- cultureel maandblad*, No.6, 20 March 1948, p. 41.

are purely speculative as it is evident in everyday life that everyone in Indonesia is exposed to Western culture. Nasoetion stated that, despite its youthful age and lack of historical background, the nation possesses a distinctive motto and a strong determination to convey the truth. These instruments are sufficient for Indonesian artists to dare to expose themselves to all influences. Thus, Nasoetion is content with Western influence in art. On the contrary, "the thing artists should be concerned about is their own lack of strength."⁴⁵

I think that Nasoetion directed her writing to Sudjojono. On the other hand, in his letter to critic Muhammad Balfas, Sudjojono once expressed his disappointment with Nasoetion, because she accused him of failing to find newness in painting. In that letter (to Balfas), Sudjojono, on the contrary, denies looking for something new. He writes that the so-called new has never existed on earth. Interestingly, he also conveyed Ida Nasoetion's criticism was nonsense (*omongkosong*). Sudjojono assumed that Nasoetion had the ambition to define Indonesian art, and she was too eager to determine what was good or bad. Sudjojono, therefore, objected to Indonesian art taking a particular direction (Western art) - as Nasoetion wanted.⁴⁶

The debate on Western influence in Indonesian art continued and triggered another response. With the title "Seni Rupa Indonesia Sekarang" (Indonesian Art Now), published in March 1949, another *Gelanggang* group exponent, Baharudin Marasutan, revisited Hopman's doubts on Indonesianness in Indonesian painting. For Marasutan, this doubt or even accusation of Indonesian painting copying the West was not a new issue.

If someone says that Indonesian art is a mere copy or imitation of Western art, then this is not a new story for us, let alone for painters, but an entirely stale statement; it would be just as trite if I said that Western modern art came into being because Europe received inspiration and a new soul from Eastern art.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Ida Nasoetion, "Pengaruh Barat" in *Siasat*, 29 Februari 1948, p. 5.

⁴⁶ See S. Sudjojono, "A letter to Balfas," 15 July 1948, Archives of H.B. Jassin Literary Documentation Center, Jakarta, S. Sudjojono folder.

⁴⁷ Baharudin Marasutan, *Seni Rupa Indonesia Sekarang* in *Daya*, 25 March 1949, p. 5. "Apabila ada orang mengatakan seni rupa Indonesia ialah suatu tiruan atau imitasi belaka dari seni rupa Barat, maka ini bukanlah tjerita baru buat kita, apalagi buat seniman-seniman pelukis, tapi suatu utjapan jang sudah basi sama sekali, sama basinja kalau saja mengatakan bahwa seni rupa modern Barat di Eropah mendapat ilham dan djiwa baru dari seni rupa Timur."

However, Marasutan defended the existence of Indonesian painting by saying:

We admit that our current painting does not have a definite and accurate style like Western painting, but this does not mean our painting is uninhabited. We have just renewed our art of painting; in this great endeavor, we are interested in modern European painting because, we found there some excellent gems and references for the development of Indonesian art today.⁴⁸

Marasutan concluded his writing by revisiting Simon Admiraal's perspectives on the advancement of Indonesian painting.⁴⁹ He agreed with Admiraal, who claimed that the style of Indonesian painting was specifically tailored to address the contemporary challenges facing Indonesian society. Moreover, according to Marasutan, Admiraal also acknowledged the existence of numerous fundamental distinctions between Western and Indonesian paintings. Rather than accentuating the disparities, Admiraal elucidated the similarities: "a concerted effort to eradicate outdated customs, employing an ardent approach, in order to supplant them with a novel methodology."⁵⁰ Indonesian artists implemented this modification with fervor and zealous enthusiasm, while maintaining complete focus. Still quoting Admiraal, Marasutan continued that painting encompasses not only the act of self-expression but also the artist's proficiency in manipulating painting materials. This faith is crucial to revert Indonesian painters' artworks from being "adequate replicas of Western painting."⁵¹

In *Brochure Kesenian* (Arts Brochure), an art magazine published by the Information Ministry, Sudjojono reaffirmed his discontent with Hopman following Marasutan in late 1949. Hopman was perceived as having dictated

⁴⁸ Baharudin Marasutan, 1949, p. 5. "Kita akui seni lukis kita sekarang belum punja tjorak jang tentu dan njata seperti seni lukis Barat, tapi ini belum berarti suatu kehampaan dari kesenian kita. Kita baru sadja memperbaharui seni lukis kita dan dalam usaha jang besar ini kita tertarik dengan seni lukis Eropah jang modern, sebab dalam seni lukis Eropah Barat ini kita menemui beberapa bibit-bibit dan bahan-bahan jang sungguh baik untuk perkembangan seni rupa Indonesia sekarang."

⁴⁹ Unfortunately, Marasutan did not reveal the source he was referring to. I think, most likely, Marasutan was referring to Admiraal's writings in *Uitzicht*.

⁵⁰ Baharudin Marasutan, 1949, p. 5. "Tjorak seni lukis Indonesia disesuaikan dengan soal2 jang dihadapi masjarakat Indonesia sekarang"; "Usaha untuk melenjapkan kebiasaan2 jang kolot, dengan tjara jang bersemangat, untuk mengganti dengan tjara jang baru. Mereka melakukan perobahan ini dengan nafsu jang besar, semangat jang bergelora, tetapi dengan penuh perhatian."

⁵¹ Baharudin Marasutan, 1949, p. 6. "Tiruan jang baik sadja dari seni lukis Barat."

the course of development for Indonesian artists. Sudjojono further argued in the publication that the Dutch had relinquished their jurisdiction over the existence of modern Indonesian painting. Retrospectively, Sudjojono asserted that PERSAGI was the forerunner of modern Indonesian painting in the 1930s. Furthermore, he delivered a scathing analogy, expressing that the Dutch failed to organize the life of Indonesian art. He claimed: "During the intervening three centuries, the Dutch were confined to educating Raden Saleh, and that was no accident."⁵²

The discourse surrounding the existence of Indonesian contemporary art expanded. Soemarno Soetosoendoro, an Indonesian writer and painter,⁵³ now supported Hopman's propositions. Soetosoendoro authored an extensive article titled "Seni Lukis Indonesia dalam Mentjari Djalan" (Indonesian Painting in Finding Its Path) in the November 1949 edition of the cultural magazine *Indonesia*. The document encompassed his discerning perspectives on advancements in contemporary Indonesian art. The speaker commenced by providing a detailed explanation of the development of indigenous Indonesian painting, highlighting its convergence with Western painting. In addition, he penned a concise elucidation of the advancements in painting throughout Western civilization.

In the subsequent segment, Soetosoendoro opined that the artworks created by Raden Saleh lacked authenticity as they merely emulated the artistic styles of Western painters. However, Soetosoendoro acknowledged that the participation of Indonesian painters in the Japanese military regime's propaganda led to a significant increase in development. An advantage of this era was that the painters garnered public recognition. However, following 1945 and until Soetosoendoro, Indonesian painters endeavored to find a path appropriate for their people's revolution.⁵⁴

⁵² DR Huyung's interview with S. Sudjojono in *Brochure Kesenian* (Yogyakarta: Kementrian Penerangan Republik Indonesia, 1949), p. 20.

⁵³ There is limited information on Soemarno Soetosoendoro. He is one of the founders of a cultural organization called *Himpunan Budaya Surakarta* (Surakarta Cultural Group, H.B.S.) and Murdowo in 1950s Solo. See Srihadi Sudarsono, *Saya dan Seni Lukis Indonesia*, makalah ceramah, Salihara Arts Center, 15 September 2015. Other sources state that Soetosoendoro taught art history at H.B.S. See Agus Dermawan T., *Dongeng dari Dullah*, (Jakarta: KPG, 2020), p.133. Another authority states that until the 1970s, as the head of H.B.S., Sumarno Soetosoendoro led a group exhibition in Solo. Several artists like Dullah, Kho Pok Gwan, Sumartono, and others participated in the show. See *Kedaulatan Rakjat*, 2 June 1971. On the other hand, there was no evidence to connect Hopman and Soetosoendoro.

⁵⁴ Soemarno Soetosoendoro, "Seni Lukis Indonesia dalam Mentjari Djalan" in *Indonesia*, TH.I, No. 10, November 1949, pp. 580-593.

Soetosoendoro continued with his most controversial writings. For example, he emphasized that the artistic endeavors of Indonesian painters, spanning from Raden Saleh to the era of Sudjojono, resembled "a collective of individuals ensnared in a dense forest, perplexed about finding their way back home." Using this analogy, Soetosoendoro was suggesting that Indonesian painting was in a state of confusion or disarray and was actively searching for a way to break free or find a solution. However, paradoxically, instead of returning to the past Indonesian painters opted for the Western painters' approach, which is characterized by greater dynamism.⁵⁵

Soetosoendoro's perspective offers an uncommon lens. He viewed the Western trajectory as challenging; despite its initial enthusiasm, it failed to deliver the soulful satisfaction that Indonesian artists seek. He employed an analogy to illustrate the irony by stating that contemporary Indonesian painters search for their inner essence while navigating seas of uncertainty. It is a journey that may not necessarily lead them to distinctly Indonesian characteristics in art. In contrast, Soetosoendoro suggested that countries like India, Japan, China, Cuba, Argentina, and Mexico have successfully cultivated a unique identity that stands apart from Western influences.⁵⁶

Through the comparisons, Soetosoendoro concluded that Indonesian painters "did not yet have enough power to forge their own path free from the various genres of Western painting." Furthermore, he perceived that Indonesian painters were plagued by a cognitive inclination to constantly emulate European events and occurrences.⁵⁷ Several Western painting genres, including impressionism, fauvism, surrealism, futurism, and cubism, significantly influenced Indonesian painting without encountering resistance. Regrettably, as stated by Soetosoendoro, this forceful assault resulted in a decline in the alertness of Indonesian painters. This is demonstrated by how the different genres of Indonesian painting could enter the "reception room" without being questioned about their reason for being there. Indonesian painters needed to be more discerning in assessing the influence of these contemporary Western art genres on their inner selves and their society. Soetosoendoro emphasized that these genres represent the culmination of Western art history, an experience that Indonesian painters have yet to encounter. Utilizing these genres in Indonesian painting has yet to result in the desired outcome of promoting harmony and progress; instead,

⁵⁵ Soemarno Soetosoendoro, 1949, p. 594.

⁵⁶ Soemarno Soetosoendoro, 1949, p. 595.

⁵⁷ Soemarno Soetosoendoro, 1949, p. 595.

it has led to a deviation from the intended path and an increase in disorder.⁵⁸ Like Hopman, Soetosoendoro concluded his article by stating that "our new painting is essentially a replication of Western painting."⁵⁹

One can easily envision how Soetosoendoro's scathing critique caused embarrassment among readers, particularly those involved in the art community. The editorial board of *Indonesia* deemed it essential to include an "editor's note" immediately following Soetosoendoro's article. The editors raised concerns regarding the terminology "imitation" and "Western painting" employed by Soetosoendoro.

The editors emphasized the importance of acknowledging the influence of Eastern art in the development of Western painting, mainly starting from impressionism, as mentioned by Soetosoendoro. Furthermore, the editors noted that fauvist painters openly and deliberately examined classical Eastern and primitive art. The editors stated, "Did Vincent van Gogh not also replicate elements from Japanese painting? Starting from Raden Saleh, Indonesian painters have employed a Western technique in their paintings rather than simply imitating or copying." The editors could not conceal their irritation towards Soetosoendoro's accusation regarding Indonesian painters imitating Western Art. The editors continue:

If it is indeed accurate that our painting is simply an imitation, what exactly is being imitated?" What is the technique? What is the method? What are the motifs? What are the characteristics? What are the shapes? If the act of imitation pertains to the soul, what is the definition of an Eastern and Western soul? Where is the boundary between "imitation" and "influence"? Wouldn't "influence" be more appropriate in this context?

The editors subsequently assured the readers of *Indonesia* that a distinguished painter would compose a counterargument against Soetosoendoro.⁶⁰

In November 1949, *Indonesia* fulfilled its promise by publishing a response from the painter Suromo. In the February 1950 edition titled "Tentang Lukisan" (About painting), Suromo opened his paragraph with an abstract discourse on the significance of art for artists and humanity. The

⁵⁸ Soemarno Soetosoendoro, 1949, p. 596.

⁵⁹ Soemarno Soetosoendoro, 1949, p. 597.

⁶⁰ Editor's Note, 1949, p. 598.

readers were encouraged to perceive art through the perspective of a creator or artist who possesses expertise in their work rather than solely relying on the viewpoint of an art critic.

According to Suromo, the spiritual experience that gives rise to artwork in an Indonesian setting is a significant factor for artists formulating their ideas and concepts regarding art. The artist's expression of their modernity is undeniably influenced by national awareness. Suromo attributed his character and artistic taste as an Indonesian artist to this awareness, which he also considered the present reality. Suromo concluded his extensive discussion on historical events and art ideology with a rebuttal directed towards Soetosoendoro and Hopman. He disputed the notion of the universality of Western art, which suggests its superiority over other forms of universal expression. In addition,

Indonesian painting did not copy Western Painting. It is true that European painting traditions heavily influenced the shaping of methods that are now international. Reversely, European methods are heavily influenced by colored tribes: Chinese, Japanese, Egypt, African, Little Asian, and others. So, the accusation that these international methods are Western has no basis.⁶¹

Interaction in the cultural field is unavoidable and natural. Currently, Suromo wrote, the influence of Western culture on art and life has penetrated and worsened the quality of Indonesian society. However, everyone must accept this fact. In the reality of mixed cultures, an artist must be able to develop “character,” “emotional truth,” and “ideas,” which then form the “Indonesian soul.”⁶²

In the April 1950 edition, *Indonesia* furthered the discourse by featuring Trisno Sumardjo's article ‘Seni Lukis Kita Bukan Tiruan’ (Our Painting Is Not Imitation). Sumardjo commenced his paragraphs by employing a satirical portrayal of the jungle, thereby contradicting the earlier stance taken by Soetosoendoro. Sumardjo described the jungle as a habitat

⁶¹ Suromo “Tentang Lukisan” in *Indonesia*, Th.II, No. 2, February 1950, p. 74. “Seni lukis Indonesia tidak mengkopi seni lukis Barat. Memang, tradisi kesenian Eropa banyak memengaruhi pembentukan cara-cara yang kini menjadi cara-cara internasional. Sebaliknya, cara-cara Eropa banyak terpengaruh dari cara-cara suku berwarna: Tiongkok, Jepang, Mesir, Negro, bangsa Asia kecil, dan lain sebagainya. Jadi, tuduhan bahwa cara internasional ini sesungguhnya adalah cara-cara Barat, tidak beralasan.”

⁶² Suromo, 1950, pp.74-75.

for numerous creatures exhibiting diverse behaviors. One of them is inevitably the creature that possesses superior knowledge and is more remarkable and esteemed than others. This sentiment emerged because the beast had an advanced education, perceiving itself as intellectually superior to its counterparts. The creature, characterized by its haughty demeanor, consistently boasted about its Western education.

Undoubtedly, the satire also extends to individuals who believe they can determine the trajectory of Indonesian culture based solely on their higher educational qualifications. Thus, Sumardjo emphasized the disparity in sociocultural existence resulting from the unequal distribution of education. The deterioration of this condition will be exacerbated if individuals who possess knowledge and education compromise their moral principles. According to Sumardjo, the absence of integrity towards the nation will lead people to develop a discriminatory mindset. Education has the potential to significantly alter an individual's character to the extent that it becomes detached from the essence of his or her nation. In this regard, Sumardjo emphasized that art is a distinct discipline, separate from other academic fields. Consequently, an advanced education in art does not guarantee the ability to become an artist.⁶³

Sumardjo persistently criticized Soetosoendoro, even delving into matters of a personal nature. Soetosoendoro's dual occupation as a painter and proprietor of an art supplies store resulted in his soul being likened to that of a merchant, mainly due to the store's provision of subpar paintings catering to tourist and domestic decorative purposes. "Inexpensive artworks pose a threat, inflict damage upon, and undermine the integrity of art and culture. The paintings merely soothe the nation, and only individuals lacking intelligence would purchase them," Sumardjo stated.⁶⁴ The paintings that "lull the nation," he continued are precisely those that merely offer the exoticism of Indonesia's nature and people. Such paintings deny the fact that Indonesia underwent a period of turbulence during its revolution.

Sumardjo also refuted Soetosoendoro's previous proposition: "Indonesian artists did not experience the history of how European art developed." Sumardjo believed this view reflected Soetosoendoro's poor understanding of art history:

⁶³ Trisno Sumardjo, "Seni Lukis Kita Bukan Tiruan" in *Indonesia*, TH. 2, No. 4, April 1950, pp. 195-196.

⁶⁴ Trisno Sumardjo, 1950, p. 203.

For Soetosoendoro, history is not history if it is not written in books. The Great Revolution happening around us apparently has no meaning to him and does not bring any change or awareness to his soul.⁶⁵

Sumardjo posed a forceful question, "Must we wait until the various events in art since 1945 be written down by Westerners first so that Soetosoendoro believes it? Is not the great revolution now occurring in Indonesia no less great than what has become history in European states? Is it not that Indonesian artists are now experiencing and fighting for their art? Why must our painters experience European art history first? " Sumardjo considered that Soetosoendoro did not have the capacity to understand his nation and had failed to understand the essence of reality.⁶⁶

He emphasized to Soetosoendoro that incorporating various Western art concepts into the Indonesian art scene is a simple task that anyone can accomplish. Furthermore, numerous publications on the subject have been released. Sumardjo stated that in Indonesia there is a greater need for writing that focuses on contemporary art practice, rather than simply rehashing what has already been written about modern art in Western books.

Sumardjo's arguments in defense against the accusation of imitating Western art closely align with the previously stated viewpoints of Sudjojono, Suromo, and Marasutan. They asserted that Eastern art had exerted a significant and enduring influence on Western art. Sumardjo challenged Soetosoendoro's claim that the art world is divided into "West and East" solely based on geographical factors. When considering the perspective of "art is universal," such a context is irrelevant. In addition, the issue is why Japanese and Chinese paintings, characterized by impressionistic qualities and serving as inspiration for French painters, are not referred to as "impressionistic." What is the reason for not categorizing Egyptian sculptures as surrealistic? Why are African and Oceanian "primitive" sculptures, which Picasso imitated, not referred to as expressionistic? Why are our wayang performances not described as impressionistic? Do these -

⁶⁵ Trisno Sumardjo, 1950, pp. 199-200. "Bagi Soetosoendoro sejarah tampaknya bukanlah sejarah kalau bukan ditulis ke dalam buku-buku. Revolusi Besar yang sedang terjadi di sekitar kita sekarang rupanya tidak berarti baginya, tidak memberi perubahan dan kesadaran sedikitpun ke dalam jiwanya."

⁶⁶ Trisno Sumardjo, 1950, pp. 199-200.

isms exclusively belong to the West?⁶⁷ Sumardjo concluded his article with numerous unresolved allegations.

From the debate above, I think Sumardjo, Suromo, and Sudjojono are proponents of moderate nationalism as opposed to radical nationalism, which rejects Western art and always considers or suggests that Indonesian classical art styles or forms are the only way to find their artistic identity. I do not have any examples of artists or critics to represent this category, although, to a certain extent, Soetosoendoro's thoughts are somewhat representative. The debate above also indicates an attempt to balance the tension relating to identity at that time. If Indonesian artists follow Western art, it is seen as imitating and not having an individual soul. Therefore, as suggested by Soetosoendoro and Hopman, returning to earlier "indigenous" or "classical" styles or forms is more reasonable. In this discussion, Sumardjo and Sudjojono disagreed that imitation is the right word, considering that this phenomenon occurs in various parts of world culture, such as European art, which the East has also inspired.

For Suromo, Sumardjo, and Sudjojono, the debates on the existence of Indonesian art were not just about asserting their own identity but about challenging the status quo. They opposed anyone, be it Dutch or Indonesian critics, who disowned the sovereignty of Indonesian artists who were in the process of strengthening their artistic identity. Nonetheless, their opposition was not aimed at fostering anti-Western sentiment but at fighting for the equality of Indonesian art in the international arena. Similarly, Dutch critics such as Verspoor and Admiraal, who were part of the debate, shared their goal of driving the discourse of decolonization in Indonesian art practice and advancing parity. Unfortunately, the canonical narratives do not acknowledge the unity and collaboration in their efforts.

Back to Jakarta: The Dispute Spreads

Claire Holt was the first author to appraise the distinctive characteristics in art between the two cities, Yogyakarta and Jakarta. However, she does not

⁶⁷ Trisno Sumardjo, 1950, p. 204. "Mengapa lukisan-lukisan Jepang dan Tiongkok yang njata-njata banjak jang impresionistis dan banjak ditiru pelukis-pelukis Prancis tidak disebut 'impresionistis'? Mengapa patung-patung Mesir tak disebut surealistis? Juga patung-patung Afrika dan Oceania jang 'primitif' serta ditiru Picasso itu tidak disebut ekspresionistik? Mengapa wayang-wayang kita tidak disebut impresionistik? Adakah isi isme-isme ini monopoli Barat?"

reveal that the context of the differences occurred due to the Second Dutch Military Aggression. She merely thought that, since the 1950s, Jakarta has become a space for a large market and a center for the development of science, a place for prominent arts and cultural institutions, and a location where opportunity and conflict occur. With such an environment, Jakarta artists' thinking is more cosmopolitan. Meanwhile, the artists in Yogyakarta have national pride because they feel they have inherited a glorious past whose traditions are still alive among them. Holt further stated that numerous artists in Yogyakarta perceive their art as "national," native, authentic, and typically Indonesian.⁶⁸

This sub-chapter aims to expand upon and address the gaps left by Holt by offering a contextual understanding of the distinctions between the Jakarta and Yogyakarta Schools, which emerged from the debates between S. Sudjojono and Trisno Sumardjo. Additionally, it acknowledges the significant influence of the Second Dutch Military Aggression as a catalyst for these developments.

The debate between Sudjojono and Sumardjo originated from the idea of "returning to Realism," which Sumardjo subsequently referred to as "Sudjojono's Realism." Sudjojono advocated realism in technique and theme as a prerequisite for being recognized as an artist. He argued that realism is essential in a society undergoing a revolution, unlike abstract painting, which is merely decorative, serving its own purpose. Meanwhile, Sumardjo placed high importance on the autonomy of artists. He accused Sudjojono of engaging in a covert mission in alliance with practical politics, particularly with the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI), due to Sudjojono's affiliation with communism and his alignment with the communists. Sumardjo, who held anti-communist views, further alleged that Sudjojono exhibited authoritarian tendencies by seeking to impose specific conditions on artistic practices.

Sudjojono rebutted Sumardjo's allegations, particularly regarding the correlation between the "return to realism" concept and the PKI political campaign. Sudjojono derisively opined that Sumardjo's assault not only lacked pertinence but also exhibited excessive personalization. Sudjojono cautioned Sumardjo about the ramifications of the responsibilities held by artists during the revolutionary era. Artists ought not only to contemplate

⁶⁸ See Claire Holt, *Art in Indonesia: Continuities and Change*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1967), pp.215 – 232, pp. 244-253.

art, but also to incorporate politics into their work." I would prefer to be a regular human being rather than an artist who lacks political involvement and a sense of accountability for the fate of humanity. Hence, I am not merely engaged in the revolution, but am also actively involved in shaping its trajectory." Sudjojono prioritizes the call for revolution over the call for painting, stating, "In the pursuit of independence, I must abandon my pencil and instead take up a gun."⁶⁹

The Conflict Spreads: The New Map Reveals

An in-depth analysis of the Sudjojono and Sumardjo debate is crucial as my research has revealed that the controversy between the two founders of SIM has been insufficiently addressed in art historical studies. The year in which this debate occurred was inaccurately recorded. Agus Burhan, for example, stated that "Sudjojono initiated the concept of social realism in 1953 by advocating for a 'return to realism'."⁷⁰ The term "return to realism" is a well-known term in the history of modern Indonesian art, used not only by Burhan, Sanento Yuliman, and Trisno Sumardjo, but also seemingly referencing Sudjojono's 1949 interview in *Brochure Kesenian*. However, I propose a slight alteration, using the term "progression to realism." This choice is based on the description on the cover of the 1950 *Mimbar Indonesia* magazine, which I believe provides a more nuanced and accurate representation of the artistic movement.

Helena Spanjaard's dissertation contains distinct pages titled "Het debat over de Indonesische kunst: Sumardjo en Sudjojono" (the Debate on Indonesian Art: Sumardjo and Sudjojono). However, Spanjaard failed to provide any information regarding the origins or context of the discussion. Moreover, the Sudjojono vs. Sumardjo debate shifted to another topic when Spanjaard introduced J. Hopman, who is not pertinent to this discussion.⁷¹

⁶⁹ S. Sudjojono "Sudjojono tentang Sudjojono" in *Mimbar Indonesia*, 19 August 1950, pp. 21-22. "Saja lebih baik djadi manusia biasa daripada seniman zonder politik, daripada seniman zonder rasa tanggungdjawab atas nasib manusia jang ada kebetulan di sudut dunia ini jg orang katakan bangsa Indonesia. Saja turut revolusi. Saja tidak turut sadja, tapi djuga turut menetapkan revolusi ini harus kemana. Revolusi dalam arti tidak membantu dalam djalan kesenian sadja, tapi kalau musuh sudah terlalu dekat rumah, dan ini rumah merdeka jang penghabisan di Indonesia, dan saja tidak kober lagi untuk melukis, saja harus lempar pensel saja, atas nama kemerdekaan terpaksa mengambil bedil dan pamit kepada istri saja."

⁷⁰ See M. Agus Burhan, 2013, pp. 94-95. This error occurred because Burhan referred to Trisno Sumardjo's texts, published in 1953, namely "The Position of Our Painting."

⁷¹ See Helena Spanjaard, 1998, pp.124-130.

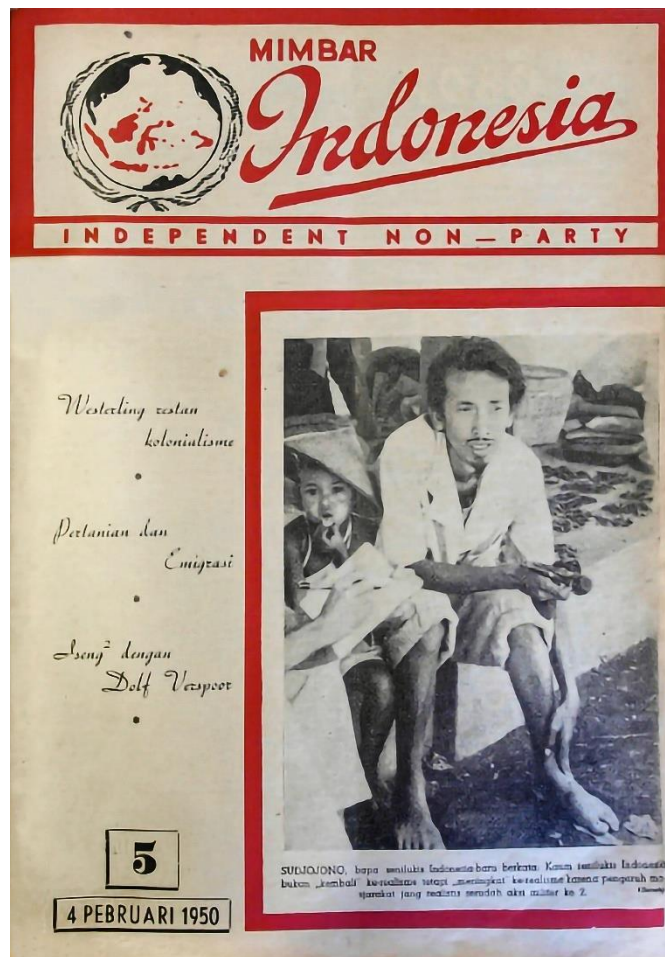


Figure.7.10.
The cover of *Mimbar Indonesia* magazine shows Sudjojono and his son Tedyabayu sitting at a market stall.

Collection of Leiden University Library
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

As discussed earlier, the Hopman and Sudjojono case occurred within another context. Sanento Yuliman is currently the only art historian who provides the contextual details of the debate between Sumardjo and Sudjojono. Yuliman contends that the emergence of the "return to realism" concept was closely linked to the societal transformations that took place following the Second Dutch Military Aggression. Yuliman stated that this incident compelled Sudjojono to resort to violence instead of pursuing his artistic endeavors. He enlisted in the guerrilla militia alongside the army. He directly observed the heinous acts and anguish that individuals experienced as a result of war, which influenced his perspective on reality and led him to express it through art.⁷²

⁷² Sanento Yuliman, *Keindonesiaan, Kerakyatan dan Modernisme dalam Kritik Seni Lukis di Indonesia*, (Jakarta: Penerbit Gang Kabel, 2021), pp. 107-108.

Yuliman appears to have been alluding to the texts written by Trisno Sumardjo. Sumardjo, in the article, disclosed the reason behind Sudjojono's transformation following his involvement in a guerrilla war during the Second Aggression, which subsequently led to a heated debate between the two. Sumardjo stated that Sudjojono was deeply moved by the circumstances he witnessed and personally endured: the plight of the people, their suffering, their struggle, and the torment they endured. He possessed a firearm himself, his biological father was murdered, his personal artworks were misplaced, and one of his sculptures was casually attacked by Dutch army.⁷³

Interestingly, the repercussions of military aggression had a significant effect on Sudjojono's life, which garnered attention at a national level. Sudjojono's photograph was featured on the front cover of the 4 February 1950 issue by the editorial board of *Mimbar Indonesia*. Sudjojono and his young son Tedjabayu were depicted sitting in a market stall in the picture. The caption under the photo reads as follows: "Sudjojono, the father of the new Indonesian painting, declared: Indonesian painters are not *returning* to realism but *progressing* to realism because of the influence of society that has become realistic after the Second Military Action." (Fig.7.10).

The commotion about the concept of "returning to realism" broke out in late 1949 when the *Brochure Kesenian* published an interview between Hoe Yong and Sudjojono. Hoe Yong was a Korean film director who was actively involved in advancing the post-war Indonesian film industry. During the Japanese era, he worked for *Sendenbu*, and after the war, he preferred to stay in Indonesia. To Hoe Yong, Sudjojono explained his new art conception:

Why did I go to Realism? Realism makes me more real. If people take Yogya, I want to seize the real Yogya. If I want to eat, I must eat rice. Real rice. If I seize sovereignty, I want real sovereignty. Symbolism? I do not want. [It is] Not full (satisfying), not real. European painting, before the Renaissance, was also primitive. However, Europe after the Renaissance adhered to realism. In the end, these isms are just a tool to talk. Realism cannot make Indonesian painting bad.⁷⁴

⁷³ Trisno Sumardjo, "Realisme Sudjojono", 1950.

⁷⁴ *Brochure Kesenian*, Kementerian Penerangan Republik Indonesia, Yogyakarta, 1949, p. 19. "Apa sebab saja pergi ke Realisme? Realisme buat saja lebih *reel*. Kalau Jogja diambil orang, saja mau rebut *reel* Jogja. Kalau saya tidak makan, saja mesti makan nasi. *Reel* nasi. Kalau saja rebut kedaulatan, saya mau *reel* kedaulatan. *Symbolisch* tidak mau. Tidak kenjang, tidak njata. Seni lukis Eropa, sebelum renaissance, djuga primitief. Tapi Eropa sesudah *renaissance*, menganut *realistisch*. Achirnja *ism* itu,

Sudjojono not only emphasized his stance toward Realism. He also criticized a then current phenomenon in which, according to him, a group of painters (whom he did not name) painted in an abstract style. He recognized that this group of abstract painters had the ideology of "art for art's sake," as opposed to "art for revolution," which supported the spirit of national revolution and was more needed. Sudjojono then reminded his artist colleagues that the ideology of "art for art's sake" must be critically examined because it was shaped by the context of space, time, and place in Europe. As a result, "art for art's sake" could not be simply applied in Indonesia. Rather than painting with abstract works, Indonesian painters deserve to present Indonesian society's reality and problems.

Hence, painting with realistic techniques became relevant, and a person exhibiting that skill deserved to be called a painter. Why is this requirement essential? Sudjojono stated that people (*Rakyat*) need works of art that they can understand. He argued that realistic paintings, in theme and technique, are more accessible for people to understand. In contrast, abstract paintings have limitations because they only serve personal desires and confuse people because they have no clear meaning. Sudjojono therefore argued that the appropriate way forward for modern Indonesian art was to return to realism based on Indonesian social reality.⁷⁵

After examining numerous sources, I found that the shift in Sudjojono's concept of art from Expressionism to Realism immediately became controversial among artists. On the one hand, they felt the bitterness of the mentor who was facing a new phase of life after the military aggression.⁷⁶ But, on the other hand, they worried about the shift in power that would result from this. Because the statement was made by Sudjojono, it was not just any unimportant statement considering his influential leadership since the pre-war period. Not only was he honored, he also served as a mentor for many painters. Moreover, in early October 1949, Trisno Sumardjo inaugurated him as the "Father of Indonesian Modern Painting." The inauguration, which Sumardjo wrote about in *Mimbar Indonesia*, did not raise any objections from artists, and signified their approval.⁷⁷ As the "father,"

hanya suatu alat untuk berkata. Realisme 'ta dapat bikin buruk seni lukis Indonesia."

⁷⁵ *Brochure Kesenian*, Kementerian Penerangan Republik Indonesia, Yogyakarta, 1949, pp. 19-20.

⁷⁶ "Sudjojono Mau Makan Nasi yang Reel, Symbolisch tidak Kenyang!" in *Merdeka*, 28 Januari 1950, p.17.

⁷⁷ Trisno Sumardjo, "Sudjojono: Bapak Seni Lukis Indonesia Baru" in *Mimbar Indonesia*, 8 and 15 October 1949.

Sudjojono was expected to encourage the atmosphere of diversity in the practice of art. Some artists were disappointed with Sudjojono's change in artistic views, and Trisno Sumardjo was no exception.



Figure.7.11.
Trisno Sumardjo, *Realisme Sudjojono*, 1950.

Collection of Leiden University Library
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

In an essay titled *Realisme Sudjojono* (Sudjojono's Realism), published on 20 May 1950 in *Mimbar Indonesia*, Sumardjo expressed his opposition to the "return to realism" movement (Fig.7.11). It is necessary to analyze Sumardjo's opening paragraphs independently, as this particular section has not received attention from Sanento Yuliman, Helena Spanjaard, or other historians. Sumardjo initially described the post-war Indonesian political scene as being in a state of upheaval due to recent changes. Indonesian individuals and communities were inundated with campaigns that pledged to enhance their social and economic well-being. Sumardjo explicitly referred to the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) in his explanation. However, he

omitted any reference to alternative political factions. He did not directly associate Sudjojono's "realism" movement with the party. Nevertheless, it is adequate to guide the reader in discovering a connection between "Sudjojono's realism" and the "political interests" of PKI. Sumardjo suspected that a concealed political agenda drove Sudjojono's realism campaign due to his affiliation with a communist organization.⁷⁸

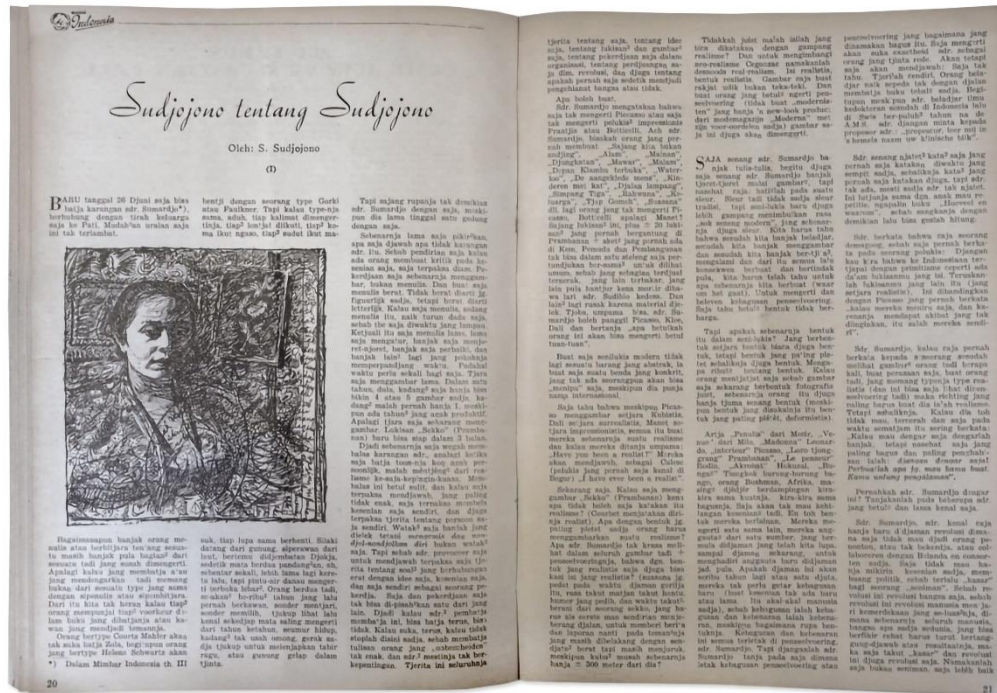


Figure 7.12.
S. Sudjojono, *Sudjojono tentang Sudjojono*, 1950.

Collection of Leiden University Library
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

Sumardjo, in his critique, reiterates the call for diversity in artistic expression, a value that Sudjojono's critique of painters lacking technical mastery seems to undermine. According to Sumardjo, "realism" should not be the sole criterion for attaining the status of an artist. Sumardjo insists that Sudjojono should not force others into the same mold or exert control over the art scene, even if he chooses "realism" as his artistic goal.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Trisno Sumardjo, "Realisme Sudjojono", 1950, p. 21.

⁷⁹ In his letter to H.B. Jassin, Sumardjo regretted the change in Sudjojono's attitude. According to him, "Sudjojono's attitude is actually neo-fascist." See "Trisno Sumardjo's letter to H.B. Jassin", 11 February 1950, Archives of the Documentation Center H.B. Jassin Jakarta, Trisno Sumardjo folder.

After two months, *Mimbar Indonesia* released an extensive rejoinder authored by Sudjojono, titled "Sudjojono Tentang Sudjojono" (Sudjojono on Sudjojono) (Fig. 7.12).⁸⁰ In this article, he elucidates the rationales supporting a "progression to realism." He stressed that the concept was closely tied to his experience as an Indonesian actively participating in his nation's revolution. Consequently, he was summoned to develop his initial idea further, drawing from his groundbreaking expertise.

In response to Sumardjo's proposition that the "return to realism" should be applied to Sudjojono himself, Sudjojono acknowledged, "I was indeed looking for myself, I was looking for my self-expression."⁸¹ Nevertheless, Sudjojono could not refute that he had a foot in art as "self-expression" and "art for serving the people." The intertwining of artistic expression and societal dynamics is an inseparable aspect of his life, which he considers to be of the utmost significance.

Sudjojono felt his ambiguity in assessing the social reality. He wrote, "even though I hate today's society, I also love it." People are like granite, claimed Sudjojono; he hated the hardness of the stone's surface. However, with love, Sudjojono would continue to carve, sculpt, and rub the stone until it brings out its aesthetic value as art, both for those who see it now and those who will see it in the future. Sudjojono argued that the significance of an artist creating art is from the "people's perspective," not only from the artist's point of view. If artists and society develop balance, a powerful coalition will be formed: art that indicates the character of the new Indonesia.⁸²

Sudjojono believed that the progress of Indonesian art could not be achieved in isolation but instead required the active involvement [of the artist] with the community. These thoughts are the foundation for his concept of "progression to realism." However, he felt that post-revolutionary Indonesian society was still naïve and limited in its ability to appreciate a work of art. He believed: "My society is a society that can only understand easy reality. The people do not understand the reality of heaven. Their reality is the 'reality of rice'. A priest's theory is just a theory, but rice to eat is more

⁸⁰ S. Sudjojono, "Sudjojono tentang Sudjojono", *Mimbar Indonesia*, 19 and 26 August 1950.

⁸¹ S. Sudjojono, "Sudjojono tentang Sudjojono", *Mimbar Indonesia*, 26 August 1950, p. 21.

⁸² S. Sudjojono, 1950, p. 22. "Meskipun saja bentji masjarakat sekarang, tapi saja juga tjinta pada masjarakat tadi. Kalau masjarakat tadi umpama granit, meskipun saja bentji pada kerasnja, saja tatah, saja pahat, saja patjal dia saban hari, saja lihat, saja gosok, saja patjal pula berbulan2, sambil maki, sambil gembira, lusa atau besok, tetapi sekarang zeker dalam kenang2an, akan mendjadi dia bentuk jang bagus, dimana saja akan gembira, tetapi djuga dimana tiap2 pelihat akan dapat hidup bahagia. Faktor ini buat saja betul besar."

necessary." Within that framework, realist rather than abstract paintings would be easier to accommodate people's understanding of art.⁸³

The debate between Sumardjo and Sudjojono is extensive in scope. It is therefore crucial to analyze the connection between Trisno Sumardjo's criticism of "Sudjojono's Realism" and the exhibition of the Yogyakarta painters, which took place in early May 1950 and was supported by the Ministry of Information of the Republic of Indonesia. This exhibition showcases the government's aims to encourage the public to delve into the significance of the Indonesian revolution through contemporary art.⁸⁴



Figure.7.13.
Dullah, *Persiapan Gerilya*, 1949.

Collection of Presidential Palace of Indonesia

Several paintings depict battle scenes or guerrilla gangs preparing for the battlefield, such as the artwork titled *Persiapan Gerilya* (Guerrilla Preparation) by Dullah (Fig.7.13). Notably, Sudjojono's painting titled *Sekko* (The Vanguard) is particularly striking. This artwork later gained fame as a representative of that era (Fig.7.15). Harijadi Sumodidjojo's realist painting, *Biografi Malioboro III* (The Malioboro's Biography Part III) (Fig.7.16)," is replete with the artist's discerning contemplations on the progression of the war of independence.

⁸³ S. Sudjojono, 1950, p. 22. "Masjaraat saja ialah masjaraat jang baru bisa mengerti realitet jang gampang. Realitet langit dia tidak ngerti. Realitet dia adalah realitet nasi. Dia djuga barangkali kali ngerti kalau (sesuatu) itu chajal(an), tapi kalau anak bininja lapar, dia akan merampok. Teori kjai tinggal teori, nasi sih perlu."

⁸⁴ See "Steleng Seni Lukis 1 – 10 May", exhibition catalog, Ministry of Information of the Republic of Indonesia, 1950. The artists participating in this exhibition are Abdul Salam, Harijadi S., Hendra Gunawan, Kartono Yudhokusumo, Koesnadi, Ramli, Rusli, Setjojoso, Sudibio, S. Sudjojono, Sumitro, Surono, Suromo, Sucipto, and Trubus Sudarsono.



Figure.7.14.
Harijadi Sumodidjojo, *Biografi Malioboro III*, 1949.

Collection of Presidential Palace of Indonesia
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar



Figure.7.15.
S. Sudjojono, *Sekko*, 1949.

Collection of Presidential Palace of Indonesia
(Source: <https://indoartnow.com/artists/dullah>)

Harijadi, for instance, does not portray the upsurge of revolution but instead explores other sinister aspects. He emphasized the perplexity of the procedure that affected the soldiers, who were observed carrying pistols at their waists, the needy individuals with ruffians afflicted by ulcers on their bodies, the middle class, and subsequently, the youthful individuals engaging in dancing. Harijadi immersed himself in the canvas, experiencing a state of vertigo or an inability to suppress his confusion. Harijadi's painting effectively

depicted the Indonesian realism envisioned by Sudjojono. Based on their paintings, it is evident that Dullah, Sudjojono, and Harijadi view the revolution as a profound exploration of human nature rather than merely a violent conflict or a strategic pursuit of victory through diplomacy. These messages are highly assertive.

An unidentified author (N.N.) assessed the *Steleng Seni Lukis* exhibition in *Mimbar Indonesia*. The text titled “Antara Seni dan Masyarakat” (Between Art and the Society) fervently endorsed Sudjojono's concept of realism. The author highlighted that realism embodies the essence of the independence movement, effectively using the exhibition to affirm Indonesian identity.⁸⁵ While not all the paintings in the exhibition explicitly convey the emotions associated with the struggle for independence, viewers can still discern the essence of the Indonesian people. In addition, N.N. argued that the exhibition has successfully put forth a crucial proposition: “authentic art serves as a reflection of society.” N.N. subsequently examines the notion of a “return to realism” by asserting that Sudjojono's change in perspective can be comprehended in light of the unfortunate events that occurred in the mentor's life, as well as the experiences of other painters like Harijadi and Rusli. The author also cited an additional motive for Sudjojono's transition. Amidst the aggression, Sudjojono experienced a sense of betrayal by his fellow painters.⁸⁶ Regrettably, N.N. failed to provide a more comprehensive description of the traitors. Nevertheless, it is evident that betrayal had prompted N.N. to declare that painting necessitated a novel perspective.

With his essay titled “Bahaja Seteling Realisme Jogja” (The Dangers of the Yogya Realism Exhibition), Oesman Effendi critically assessed the exhibition. He substituted the term “Sudjojono Realism” with “Yogyakarta Realism,” leading to the widespread adoption of this term to delineate the distinctiveness of Yogyakarta.⁸⁷ Effendi characterized it as “an aesthetic movement that Yogyakarta painters admired due to the influence of the charismatic guru: S. Sudjojono.”⁸⁸

I must stop here to emphasize and bridge significant contextual matters that help reveal Effendi's writing complications. I argue that Effendi stimulated the distinction between factions in the Indonesian art scene,

⁸⁵ N.N., “Antara Seni dan Masyarakat: Para Pelukis dan Anak Zamannja”, *Mimbar Indonesia*, 13 May 1950, p. 17.

⁸⁶ N.N., 1950, p. 17.

⁸⁷ Oesman Effendi, “Bahaja Seteling Realisme Jogja”, *Indonesia*, No. 5., TH.II., My 1950, pp. 258-268.

⁸⁸ Oesman Effendi, 1950, p. 260.

mainly when he changed "Sudjojono's Realism" employing the new term "Yogya Realism" – or, in the broad sense, the "Yogya school" – referring to the artistic paradigm of artists from the city that was once the epicenter of the revolution.

In addition, the Yogya School was strongly influenced by the enduring legacy of "Sudjojono's Realism," intersected with several artists who worked as lecturers at the Indonesian Academy of Fine Art (Akademi Seni Rupa Indonesia – ASRI). When ASRI was inaugurated in January 1950, one of its authoritative lecturers was Hendra Gunawan – a key figure who also served as the school's co-founder. In 1947, together with Affandi and Sudarso, Hendra founded *Pelukis Rakjat* (People's Painters), an artist collective whose motto is "not art for art's sake but art for the people"⁸⁹ and whose spirit is still in line with "Sudjojono's realism." In the 1950s, Hendra was closely associated with the Indonesian Communist Party (Partai Komunis Indonesia – PKI) and even admitted to being a communist despite not being a member of the party.⁹⁰ In addition, the Yogya School was also strengthened by the members of SIM.⁹¹ I argue that the other faction depicted in Effendi's writings is Jakarta, which is, to some extent, represented by artists and critics such as Trisno Sumardjo and Effendi himself.

In the subsequent paragraphs, Effendi reminds the readers of the perils of using realism in painting. Nonetheless, he predicted that the term realism was a transient trend in the evolution of Indonesian art. Effendi hypothesized that contextual sensibilities drove the Yogyakarta painters' preference for realism. As a result, he firmly believes that realist-style paintings will undergo ongoing transformation. Effendi then directed his criticism at Sudjojono by challenging the justifications for why realism is needed to serve as the standard while it has no cultural basis. He stated that for a long time, Indonesian art had assimilated numerous non-realist forms, such as wayang and batik. Effendi concluded that those who enforce realism as the official form of new Indonesian art engage in a dangerous act as it suppresses diversity.⁹²

⁸⁹ "Candidaten P.K.I. en partijlozen" in *Indische courant voor Nederland*, 26 August 1954, p. 2.

⁹⁰ Willem Mooyman "De volksschilders wonen aan de rand van Jogja en Affandi is nu bij hen" in *De nieuwsgier*, 9 September 1954, p. 3.

⁹¹ For SIM, see Chapter Six.

⁹² Interestingly, since Trisno Sumardjo took issue with it, the appeal of "Sudjojono's realism" is still being discussed decades later. See, among others, D. Sudiana, "Sudjojono's Realism," *Pikiran Rakjat*, 2 April 1980 and Kevin Chua, "Courbet after Sudjojono," *Art History*, April 2018, Vol. 41 Issue 2, pp. 292-317.

The skeptical perspective towards “Sudjojono's Realism” persisted until the mid-1950s. Trisno Sumardjo, for example, continued to raise this matter while evaluating the Harijadi solo exhibition in Jakarta. Harijadi's display of realist paintings was believed to be influenced by the communal existence of painters in Yogyakarta. The outcome of this collectivism resulted in the artist's work featuring political motifs. According to Sumardjo, Harijadi's paintings with a popular theme are created from excessive pathos, and are too far-fetched. This all happened because, apart from the fact that they both lived in Yogyakarta, Harijadi was strongly influenced by Sudjojono. Sumardjo stressed: "As a result of living in groups in Yogyakarta, Harijadi was very much affected by Sudjojono, who echoed his ideas on Realism in recent years." Thus, Sumardjo advised Harijadi to distance himself from Sudjojono's influence due to the lack of advantages provided by his realism concepts.⁹³

The movement of artists from one city to another and the debates between them - in this case through Sumardjo versus Sudjojono - created new factions of artistic development, especially in Yogyakarta and Jakarta. Claire Holt described it very well by writing that Yogyakarta artists have a sense of authentic national pride because they are heirs to a glorious past whose tradition is still alive in their midst. It makes sense that this feeling has possessed artists, believing their works are more typically Indonesian and represent their people. So, realism in painting became relevant to make it easier for people to understand art rather than abstract art, which was not in harmony with the perception of people undergoing a revolution.⁹⁴

From Jakarta Trisno Sumardjo and Oesman Effendi objected to this standardization and formed opposing factions. Given Jakarta's status as a metropolis and its diverse population and cultural background, artists in Jakarta possess broader perspectives on art and dynamics. In the 1950s, especially since the government moved back from Yogyakarta, Jakarta was a city that offered many career opportunities for artists. Most of the national magazines and newspapers, like the cultural institutions, have their offices in this city. Therefore, as Claire Holt noted during her research in 1955-1957, Jakarta was a cultural hub with influences that radiated across the entire country. These influences significantly impacted the life and work of artists

⁹³ Trisno Sumardjo, “Pameran Lukisan Harijadi” in *Siasat*, 9 May 1956, p. 25. “Sebagai akibat hidup berkelompok di Djogja, Harijadi banjak sekali terpengaruh Sudjojono jang dalam tahun2 belakangan ini menggemakan ide realismenja.”

⁹⁴ Claire Holt, 1967, p. 215.

in other cities. In addition, Jakarta was a place for the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Council for National Culture (Badan Musjawarat Kebudayaan Nasional - BMKN), and the Institute for People's Culture (Lembaga Budaya Rakyat - LEKRA), which played a crucial role in facilitating this cultural exchange at that time.⁹⁵

“The National Cultural Cold War”

The debate on Indonesianness in painting, which began between Trisno Sumardjo and Sudjojono, as discussed above, has evolved and expanded over the years. What was once a personal discourse has become a broader institutional discussion, a cornerstone in Indonesian art historiography. It is now the “Fine Art-ITB (Bandung School) versus the Indonesian Academy of Fine Arts (Indonesian Fine Arts Academy - ASRI or Yogya School).” The critique of the Bandung School's Westernized, pro-American approach, promoting abstract painting and ideas detached from the Indonesian reality, was countered by the Yogya School's realistic tendencies, seen as a proud reflection of the national revolution, advocating for independence, opposing imperialism, and preserving the national identity.

The debate on Indonesianness during that time was under the shadows of the Cultural Cold War (CCW), a significant element of the broader Cold War conflict. The CCW was a complex cultural and ideological conflict involving the United States, the Soviet Union, and their respective allies in the Western and Eastern Blocs. It encompassed a wide range of cultural expressions, such as literature, art, and music, all of which played a pivotal role in promoting the ideologies and values of the parties involved, shaping the cultural landscape of the time. At the national level, conflicts emerged between artists from different factions, with each clique accusing the other of aligning with one of the blocs. While numerous publications have explored specific issues related to the CCW in Indonesia, such as literature, film, performing arts, cultural institutions, and cultural networks⁹⁶, the debate surrounding the fine arts has often been overlooked.

⁹⁵ Claire Holt, 1967, p. 246.

⁹⁶ There are many publications on the topic of the Cultural Cold War. See, for example, Yuka Moriguchi Tsuchiya, *Science, Technology and the Cultural Cold War in Asia: From Atoms for Peace to Space Flight*, (Oxford: Routledge, 2022); Anselm Franke (ed.), *Parapolitics: Cultural Freedom and the Cold War*, (Berlin: Haus der Kulturen der Welt and Sternberg Press, 2021); Tony Day and Maya Liem H.T. (ed.), *Cultures at War: The Cold War and Cultural Expression in Southeast Asia*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018); Bradley R. Simpson, *Economists with Guns: Authoritarian Development and U.S.-*

Was the conflict between Fine Art-ITB and ASRI transpired? Jim Supangkat and Sanento Yuliman wrote in a pessimistic tone that the causes of the dispute between the Fine Art-ITB and ASRI were never clearly revealed because of the confusion about the basic principles of art creation. It is almost impossible to understand the roots of the dispute. Supangkat and Yuliman continued, "What happened was only sarcasm, criticism and insults. Bandung is insulted with the scorn of cheese artists who wear ties everywhere. Meanwhile, Yogyakarta was criticized as a failed educator because it had no theoretical basis, even though neither of them came to a conclusion about Indonesian art."⁹⁷ Supangkat and Yuliman's viewpoints may be reasonably justified, but their arguments would benefit greatly from additional elaboration. What was the real story, and how did the controversy start? This section will not provide complete answers to these questions. Instead, it briefly examines the debate to sharpen the historical context and explore sources that canonical narratives leave out.

I will start the discussion by examining Helena Spanjaard as one of the art historians who popularized the Fine Art-ITB and ASRI debates, especially with her article "The Controversy between the Academies of Bandung and Yogyakarta."⁹⁸ She explains the factors contributing to the dispute between the two factions. She started by comparing three paintings by Sudjojono, Hendra Gunawan, and Ahmad Sadali. According to her, the first two paintings were representative of the Yogyakarta Fine Arts

Indonesian Relations, 1960-1968, (California: Stanford University Press, 2008); and Jennifer Lindsay and Maya H.T. Sutedja Liem, *Heirs to World Culture: Being Indonesian, 1950-1965*, (Leiden: Brill, 2011). See also Yiqing Li "Art diplomacy: Drawing China-Indonesia relations in the early Cold War, 1949-1956" in *Modern Asian Studies*, 2023-11, Vol.57 (6), Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, pp.1707-1742; Giles Scott-Smith "Ivan Kats, the Obor Foundation, and Indonesia: Reframing Cold War Cultural Diplomacy" in *Leidschrift*, jaargang 34, nummer 3, October 2019, pp. 69-86; Giles Scott-Smith "Liminal Liberalism? Ivan Kats, the Congress for Cultural Freedom, and the Obor Foundation in Cold War Indonesia" in *Journal of Contemporary History*, 2022, Vol. 57(4), pp. 1051-1071; and Agus Suwignyo "The American influence in Indonesian teacher training, 1956-1964" in *History of Education (Tavistock) - Journal of the History of Education Society*, Vol.46 (5), 2017, pp. 653-673.

⁹⁷ Jim Supangkat and Sanento Yuliman, *G. Sidharta Di Tengah Seni Rupa Indonesia*, (Jakarta: Penerbit Gramedia, 1982), p. 27. "Yang terjadi hanya lontaran sindiran, kritik sampai cacian. Bandung disodok dengan cibiran seniman keju yang pakai dasi ke mana-mana; sedangkan Yogyakarta disindir sebagai pendidik meleset karena tak punya dasar teori. Padahal keduanya sama-sama tak sampai pada sebuah kesimpulan tentang seni rupa Indonesia."

⁹⁸ Another Spanjaard article that also discusses this issue is "Bandung, Laboratorium Barat?" See Helena Spanjaard "Bandung, Laboratorium Barat?" in Joseph Fischer (ed.), *Modern Indonesian Art: Three Generations of Tradition and Change 1945-1990*, (Jakarta-New York: Panitia Pameran KIAS and Festival of Indonesia, 1990), pp. 204-209. Spanjaard also examined the issue in her 1998 doctoral thesis, *Het ideaal van een Moderne Indonesische Schilderkunst 1900-1995: De creatie van een nationale culturele identiteit*, pp. 133 – 169.

Academy, while the final painting depicted the Bandung School. The two schools of thought are juxtaposed by providing a detailed account of the origins and establishment of the academy. Following Claire Holt's footsteps, Spanjaard subsequently surveyed the distinctive features of Indonesian art in three urban centers: Yogyakarta, Bandung, and Jakarta. She then recounted various art exhibitions, focusing on the 1954 exhibition of works by Fine Art-ITB students in Jakarta. This event, which garnered significant attention, was met with criticism from Trisno Sumardjo, intensifying its controversy.⁹⁹

Upon perusing Spanjaard's article, I identified various elemental issues left unaddressed. She suggests, for instance, that Sudjojono was part of the art academy (ASRI), which is inaccurate. Sudjojono never taught at ASRI. Meanwhile, Hendra Gunawan is quite relevant because he joined the campus and assisted in founding ASRI. In another context as mentioned by Spanjaard, Trisno Sumardjo, who expressed disapproval of the exhibition organized by the Bandung students, aligned more closely with the "Jakarta faction" rather than representing ASRI. Additionally, Spanjaard's sources of the debate concentrate exclusively on the critique by Trisno Sumardjo and Sitor Situmorang, who also reviewed the 1954 Bandung Exhibition. As I will explain below, Sumardjo and Situmorang criticized the Fine Art-ITB. Sudjoko, a student at Fine Art-ITB at the time, and a writer named Eddy shared the critic's response. Unfortunately, their reactions were never included in this issue.

The evidence presented below strongly suggests that there is no actual controversy between Fine Art-ITB and ASRI, and it is undoubtedly not a confrontation as is commonly believed. Instead, what happened is a broader issue concerning more than only these two organizations. The debate involved Fine Art-ITB, Jakarta's art critics, and specific painters from Yogyakarta who were associated with artist collectives such as SIM and Pelukis Rakjat. Some of these painters also held teaching positions at ASRI. The controversy extended to the Institute for People's Culture (Lembaga Budaya Rakyat, LEKRA), which advocated a populist ideology linked to the Indonesian Communist Party (Indonesian Communist Party, PKI). LEKRA promoted social realism, unlike the Fine Art-ITB, which was recognized for its abstract paintings and its affiliation with America due to the grants it received. The stark dichotomy between the two reflected the global aesthetic

⁹⁹ Helena Spanjaard, "The Controversy between the Academies Bandung and Yogyakarta" in John Clark (ed.), *Modernity in Asian Art*, (NSW: Wild Peony, 1993), pp. 85-104. See also Helena Spanjaard, 1998, pp. 133-169.

dispute between America's abstract expressionism and the Soviet Union's Social Realism.

LEKRA's founding has cultural roots and can be traced far back to when certain intellectuals debated which model suited Indonesian culture, West or East, in the 1930s. A literary scholar, Achdiat K. Mihadja, called it "Cultural Polemics."¹⁰⁰ Claire Holt extended the discussion from the 1930s to the Cultural Cold War period in her book and packaged it as "The Great Debate."¹⁰¹ In the 1930s, intellectuals such as Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana, Sutan Sjahrir, Ki Hajar Dewantara, M. Amir, Sanoesi Pane, and several others debated the direction of Indonesian cultural identity, whether to embrace Western modernity or to look back to Indonesian classics. In the subsequent period, this subject develops into various issues such as national culture, national character, education, etc. Because cultural identity was seen as a significant issue for the new Indonesia, the Indonesian Government, from 1948 to 1954, facilitated it with four cultural gatherings, consisting of three Cultural Congresses (held in 1948, 1951, and 1954) and one Cultural Conference in 1950. These programs provided crucial insights into the implementation of cultural policies by influential groups such as elite members, ministers, cultural bureaucrats, and artists.¹⁰²

The Cultural Congress of 1948 established the Indonesian Cultural Institute (Lembaga Kebudayaan Indonesia, LKI), officially inaugurated in March 1950 due to the Second Dutch Military Aggression. LKI's foremost program was organizing the Cultural Conference in Bandung in 1950. LEKRA was established shortly after the Bandung Conference in 1950. It sensed that these guidelines deliberately excluded the passionate revolutionary vision and ideals of the 1945 revolution. LEKRA, a cultural institution that vigorously promoted populism, significantly influenced Indonesian culture and opposed Western cultural imperialism, mainly as

¹⁰⁰ See Achdiat K. Mihadja (ed.), *Polemik Kebudayaan*, (Jakarta: Perpustakaan Perguruan Kementerian PP dan K Jakarta dan Balai Pustaka, 1954).

¹⁰¹ In her famous chapter "The Great Debate," Claire Holt also addresses the polemics. See Claire Holt, 1967, pp. 211-253.

¹⁰² For further reading, see Tod Jones, *Kebudayaan dan Kekuasaan di Indonesia: Kebijakan Budaya Selama Abad Ke-20 Hingga Era Reformasi*, (Jakarta: Penerbit Obor dan KITLV, 2015), p. 89. For the history and details of the Indonesian Cultural Congress, see Nunus Supardi, *Kongres Kebudayaan (1918-2003)* (Jakarta: Penerbit Ombak, 2007). Nunus Supardi acknowledges that seven cultural congresses were held before Indonesia became independent, namely in 1918, 1919, 1921, 1924, 1926, 1929, and 1937. For further reading, see Nunus Supardi, *Bianglala Budaya, Rekam jejak 95 tahun Kongres Kebudayaan 1918-2013*, (Jakarta: Direktorat Jenderal Kebudayaan Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2013).

represented by America, England, and Western European countries. Furthermore, painters such as Sudjojono, Hendra Gunawan, Basuki Resobowo, and Henk Ngantung supported LEKRA. However, the organization faced a significant decline in mid-1965 due to solid suspicions of its affiliation with the Indonesian Communist Party (Partai Komunis Indonesia, PKI), which was subsequently banned after attempting a coup against President Sukarno. This decline marked a turning point in the history of LEKRA.¹⁰³



Figure 7.16. A woodcut by Kusmuljo, Bojolali, 1965 as printed in *Zaman Baru* magazine. (Source: *Zaman Baru*, No. 7, July, 1965)

Collection of Leiden University Library
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

LEKRA prioritizes 'Politics as the Commander' (*Politik sebagai Panglima*) by placing *Rakyat* (People) as the primary domain of creation. The consequence of this attitude is to introduce themes of workers' and peasants' lives into works of art as a novelty and call for resistance to artists who are anti-people and anti-revolutionary, and those who do not have a patriotic spirit (Fig.7.16). Resistance was also directed against the imperialist culture that had infiltrated Indonesia, primarily originating from America and its allies.¹⁰⁴ LEKRA – and artists who align with the leftist movement – associate America with 'Uncle Sam,' a figure wearing a hat with a long coat, similar to a man pointing his finger in James Montgomery Flagg's iconic war recruitment poster: 'I Want You.' The figure of Uncle Sam often appears in newspapers as the subject of ridicule and criticism (Fig.7.17A-C).

¹⁰³ See Tod Jones, 2015 p. 94. See also DS Moeljanto dan Taufik Ismail (ed.), 1995, p. 32, and Keith Foulcher, *Social commitment in literature and the arts: the Indonesian 'Institute of People's Culture' 1950–65*, (Clayton, Victoria: Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, 1986), pp. 16-18. For Lekra, see Rhoma Dwi Aria Yuliantri dan Muhidin M. Dahlan, *Lekra Tak Membakar Buku: Suara Senyap Lembar Kebudayaan Harian Rakyat 1950-1965*, (Jogjakarta: Meraksumba, 2008),

¹⁰⁴ "Membina Seni Rupa Baru dan Sedjarahnja" in *Zaman Baru*, 15-31 June 1961, p. 4.



Figure 7. 17C.
An Indonesian (Sukarno?) strangling Uncle Sam is illustrated on the front page of the *Harian Rakjat* newspaper.
(Source: *Harian Rakjat*, 30 April 1965)



Figure 7.17A.
A woodcut by Harmani, *Ganjang Terus Imperialis AS* printed in *Harian Rakjat*.
(Source: *Harian Rakjat*, 17 January 1965, front page)



Figure 7. 17B.
James Montgomery Flagg, *I Want You for U.S. Army*, poster.
(Source: <https://tile.loc.gov/storage-services/service/pnp/ppmsca/55800/55870v.jpg>)

The Fine Art-ITB, later known as the Bandung School, was the first art academy in Indonesia. As discussed above, it was initiated by Simon Admiraal in 1947 in the heat of revolution. Between 1953 and 1959, several names such as Ahmad Sadali, Sukondo Bustaman, Edie Kartasubarna, Angkama S., But Muchtar, Srihadi Sudarsono, and Sudjoko¹⁰⁵ were registered as students on the ITB campus. All of them, except Sukondo Bustaman, later became lecturers there. Claire Holt reported that during the mid-1950s, the nationalists referred to the Fine Art-ITB campus as "an alien enclave in independent Indonesia." This statement makes sense considering the role and contribution of American donor agencies in promoting the development of human resources on campus. Holt disclosed that "a part of their plans concerned with the immediate functions of the school could be realized because of a generous grant from the John D. Rockefeller III Fund in New York."¹⁰⁶

The Fine Art-ITB was able to thrive thanks to collaborations with American institutions like the Kentucky Research Foundation and Ford Foundation. These partnerships supported young lecturers' studies and visits to the United States. There were also collaborations with Denmark, England, and the Netherlands for faculty training.¹⁰⁷ Sudjoko is one success story of the partnership with America. He completed his undergraduate degree in the late 1950s and received assistance from the Kentucky Research Foundation to pursue further education in the United States. These philanthropic foundations also helped fund the development of an art library at ITB.¹⁰⁸ Overall, these grants have played a crucial role in spreading the ideas of

¹⁰⁵ See Adjat Sakri (ed.), *Dari TH ke ITB: Kenang-kenangan LUSTRUM 4 2 Maret 1979 – Jilid 2: Daftar Lulusan ITB*, (Bandung: Penerbit ITB, 1979), p.100 and Departemen Perentjanaan dan Seni Rupa, *Kurikulum 1967-1969 Bagian Seni Rupa*, Institut Teknologi Bandung, catalogus, pp. 117-118.

¹⁰⁶ Claire Holt, 1970, pp.175.

¹⁰⁷ See Edie Kartasubarna and But Muchtar "Jurusan Seni Rupa Fakultas Teknik Sipil dan Perencanaan (FTSP) Institut Teknologi Bandung" in Wiyoso Judoseputro, et.al., *Pendidikan Tinggi Seni Rupa di Indonesia*, Institut Teknologi Bandung, catalogus, 1983, pp. 20-21.

¹⁰⁸ The Rockefeller Foundation Annual Report, 1956, New York, p. 24. Historian Bradley R. Simpson states that between 1952 and 1956, both Rockefeller and Ford provided financial support for creating various institutions, including the Southeast Asian Study Center and the Modern Indonesia Project at Cornell University and Harvard University's Development Advisory Service. The Southeast Asian Studies Programme at the University of Berkeley and the Center for International Studies at MIT collaborate. Universities like Harvard, Cornell, Berkeley, MIT, and John Hopkins were crucial in formulating and spreading social scientific knowledge regarding political and economic progress in developing nations. Between 1950 and 1964, the Ford and Rockefeller Foundation allocated 20 million dollars to investigate Indonesian society's political, financial, and social circumstances. See Bradley R. Simpson, *Economist with Guns: Authoritharian Development and U.S. – Indonesian Relations 1960-1968*, (California: Stanford University Press, 2008), pp. 28-29.

Western modern art to Indonesian art education, primarily through Fine Art-ITB.

Being founded during a tumultuous national revolution under Dutch rule and strongly affiliated with the pro-Western Bloc, the Fine Art-ITB was an easy target for criticism at that time. In his article titled "Menuju Nirada" (Towards Abstraction), Sudjoko mentioned that since the mid-1950s, this campus has often faced a range of troubling accusations. These include being referred to as an "American servant," "CIA minion," "Dutch stooge," "colonial lackey," "anti-revolutionary," and more. In spite of receiving these insults, Sudjoko persisted, and the situation worsened as numerous groups, including the government, perceived this national cultural conflict in a simplistic and polarised manner. Sudjoko stated that "something with a Dutch scent is of lousy origin. If the painting is abstract, it is also terrible. Expressing opinions is acceptable, but it can carry potential hazards. *Tepaselira*, or the practice of tolerance, is strictly prohibited. Additionally, hacking compromises competition, posing a significant risk to openness. Everything accomplished in pursuing the *Revolusi Belum Selesai* (Revolution is yet unfinished)." During this era, it was difficult to determine who was an adversary and who was an ally, as anyone could be easily branded as an "enemy of the Revolution" – a designation that many sought to avoid. Sudjoko recounted the escalating psychological pressures, which even extended to matters of life and death, with threats such as: "Any art teachers on campus who have received education in a capitalist nation will face fatal consequences and all abstract works must be incinerated in the bonfire."¹⁰⁹

Fine Art-ITB was dragged into the arena of the war on cultural ideology due to Trisno Sumardjo's review of the student exhibition (Pameran Mahasiswa 1954) at the end of November 1954 in Jakarta. The exhibition brochure proclaimed, "This exhibition of young painters, still in their infancy, believe that through 'searching' and conducting 'experiments,' they will be able to dedicate to their Motherland a result that is in keeping with the breath of the times in which they grew up" (Fig. 7.18). The term "experiment," mainly because it was produced in an "educational laboratory," became the focal point of Sumardjo's criticism of the exhibition. In his essay "Bandung Serves as a Western Laboratory" (Fig. 7.19), Sumardjo—who uses the term laboratory inspired by Ahmad Saldi's painting in the show

¹⁰⁹ Sudjoko, "Menuju Nirada" in Sudjoko, *Pengantar Seni Rupa*, (Jakarta: Direktorat Jenderal Pendidikan Tinggi-Departemen Pendidikan Nasional, 2001), pp. 148-169.

"Laboratorium" (Fig.7.20)—condemns it as a mere "Western laboratory" that produces solely artificial arts. It is sobering that individuals who complete their education on campus may fail to develop their unique personality, particularly in creating works of art that reflect national characteristics. In a different publication, Sumardjo coined the term "The Ries Mulder¹¹⁰ School" to refer to the style developed by the laboratory, a style that risks diluting our national identity.¹¹¹

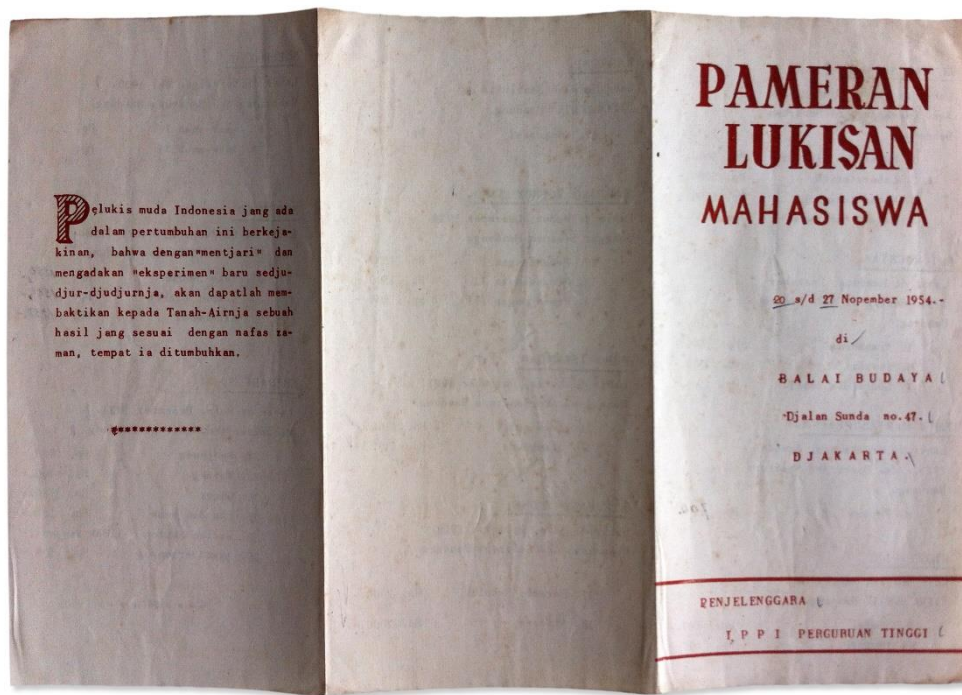


Figure 7.18.
Exhibition brochure of "Pameran Lukisan Mahasiswa 1954".

Private Collection

¹¹⁰ Ries Mulder, born in 1909 in IJsselstein, worked as an assistant on murals and stained-glass paintings under the guidance of artists such as Piet van de Wijngaardt and Charles Eyck. His work attracted attention in the Netherlands and led to an invitation to visit Indonesia. Impressed by the beauty of Indonesia, he decided to emigrate there in 1940. See "Ries Mulder gaat naar Indonesië Hij hoopt daar nieuwe motieven voor zijn schilder-kunst te vinden" in *Utrechts volksblad: sociaal-democratisch dagblad*, 8 August 1940, p. 7. In the early 1950s, Mulder joined Fine Art-ITB. Several years earlier, he was active in forums with other artists, such as Simon Admiraal and Henk de Voos, who discussed the discourse on fine arts education in Java. See "Teknacademie te Soerabaja?" in *Nieuwe courant*, 14 October 1948, p. 2. Mulder left Indonesia in 1959. See Claire, 1967 Cornell University Press, p. 239.

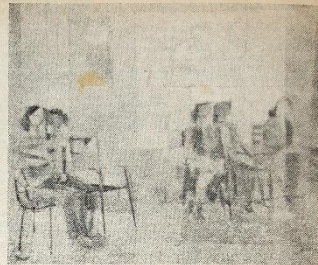
¹¹¹ See Trisno Sumardjo, "Bandung Mengabdi Laboratorium Barat" in *Siasat*, 5 December 1954, pp. 26-27 and Trisno Sumardjo, "Kedudukan Seni Lukis Kita" in *Zenith*, TH.III, No. 9, September 1953, p. 517.

Bandung mengabdikan LABORATORIUM BARAT

Pameran lukisan mahasiswa Akademi Seni Rupa Bandung berlangsung dari tgl. 20 sampai 27 November di Balai Budaya, diselenggarakan oleh IPPI perguruan Tinggi, Jakarta.

Siswa sebagai seniman Indonesia atau kritikus dan peminat lainnya hendak bertolak dari kehidupan di tanah air sendiri dengan masalah dari alam dan manusia, dia akan

KAMAR TUNGGU
Warna: kuning dan
Aiswarya Herga:
Rp. 2.000.—



keluarga melihat pameran ini, karena hampir tak ada yang lolos dengan jiwa dan pengalamannya. Tapi sebaliknya, siapa sudah biasa bertolak dari gedung sekolah dan laboratorium Barat, dimana jiwa dan pengalaman ke-Indonesiaan tak begitu diimbuhkan, karena yang primer adalah hasil synteis, berpedoman jiwa dan pengalaman Barat, maka diolah akan merata senang. Dia akan hanya bahwa banyunya sanggup mempergunakan bahan import itu — rasa, pikiran dan materi — seperti seorang teknikus juga sanggup membuat pesawat radio dengan alat yang didatangkan dari luar negeri.

Kebangsaan itu tidak pada tempatnya, bahkan menjatuhkan lapangan seni, dimana seorang pencipta tidak diwajibkan menanggalkan bahasa import, tapi menipu dengan kekuatan sendiri. Menanggalkan bahasa mustahil bahwa orang dapat membuat sesuatu yang bernilai dengan barang import itu, asal ia tahu bahwa sewadarnya diharapkan dari seorang seniman pemuat sendiri, berdasar kesadaran yang berkembang dari inti kehidupan yang dialami sendiri. Kesulitan yang melalui proses begitu banyak mempunyai daya yang segar karena fitri, tidak di-bikin. Kesulitan yang diproseskan antara dinding sekolah dan laboratorium belaka, bukanlah melalui proses pertumbuhan setajam alam, melainkan setajam kumuh.

Bahan import itu ialah seperti kami sebut tadi jiwa dan pengalaman dunia Barat yang dalam hal ini terjermin dalam buahnisan Modigliani, Paul Klee, Matisse, yang ditiru dalam pameran ini. Tak dapat disangkal bahwa di antara sekelas orang eropawi ini ada yang pandai mempergunakan sebagai teknik dan peladjar yang bertekun, tapi saat dalam tubuh kesenian ini terasa lebih kurang darah, hingga tak hidup. Kami tak heran melihat keadaan begini, karena mahasiswa mereka adalah orang asing, sehingga hal ini patut disesalkan. Menilik hasil para mahasiswa, mahasiswa ini bukanlah ambisior kebudayaan Eropa yang baik, karena terlalu menekankan norma ke-Eropaan pada masalah, hingga ke-Indonesiaan hanya-jang diwawahi. Agaknya ia ingin disebut kelas

telah membentuk masalah di Indonesia, maka untuk ambil ini dikawatirkan dengan anggapan keleshan pribadi para murid serta pengikutnya. Pengaruhnya terlalu berat, hingga walaupun angkatan maritnya diadur, maka kedjuduran ini terlipa oleh ketidakjuduran sang guru yang kemudian menjadi milik mudinya juga.

Ketidakjuduran ini terasa dalam lukisan S i n j a i (no. 9) oleh HETTY UDIT, Komposisi (no. 11) oleh KARDEH Pedicuci (no. 24) dan Gupar (no. 26) oleh SINHAD S, serta hantak lainnya. Kesulitan Sridadi me makai norma, menghasilkan lukisan Anak bertopeng (no. 29) yang kosong. Begitu pula Anak Gadis (no. 15) oleh POPO ISKANDAR, Dalam dua buahbanganya Terlihat (no. 6) dan Gadis dan laki-laki (no. 7) BUT MOCHTAR hanya tiba pada sketsa berwarna, belum selesai. Begitu juga SIP HATW TUNG dalam lukisan, nja Sisevan (no. 18) dan SOEBHAKTO dalam dua lukisannya Anak (no. 19 dan 20), meskipun di situ ada primitivisme yang mungkin bisa berkembang lebih lanjut setajam segar dan halus. Primitivisme bertolak lain ada pula pada SODJOKO, tapi agak reforsed. EDHE KARTASOEBARNA lebih mejinakan kamil dengan buahkerjanya bernama Perukis (no. 8); di situ ia lepas dari maritisme yang menghinngapi sebagian besar kawannya tadi, yang memakai modernisme, terutama kubisme.

Ketujuh Hetty Udit dan Kardeh yang menjadi guru sekolah senilukis „Djwa Mukti“, serta Edie Kartasoebarna dan Sodjoko juga mendiatasi asiten dosen pada Akademi Seni Rupa di Bandung, mereka ini semuanya mahasiswa Akademi tersebut, yang masih menempel pada Fakultas Teknik. Dengan sendirinya ukuran kritik terhadap mahasiswa tak sewadarnya sama tingginya dengan ukuran kritik terhadap seniman yang sudah lepas dari majarakat. Dalam taraf sekarang, mereka tersebut diatas masih belum dapat melepaskan diri dari kungkungan kuliah. Kami berharap mereka tahun depan dia selanjutnya menjadi lebih berpradai. Untuk ini saja dibutuhkan keberontan menjari masalah sendiri dalam kehidupan serta melepaskan diri dari kekafuan sang guru.

MINGGUAN SIASAT — 391

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PEDIJANG GERILA
Herga: Rp 2.500.—



Figure 7.19. Trisno Sumardjo, *Bandung Mengabdikan Laboratorium Barat*. (Source: *Siasat*, 5 December 1954)

Collection of Leiden University Library
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar



Figure 7.20. Ahmad Sadali, *Laboratorium*, 1954.

Collection of Ahmad Sadali Family - Bandung
Photo by Aminudin TH Siregar

The poet Sitor Situmorang was at that time active in the National Cultural Institute (Lembaga Kebudayaan Nasional/LKN), affiliated with The Indonesian National Party (Partai Nasional Indonesia/PNI), concurrent with Trisno Sumardjo's propositions. Nevertheless, Situmorang included a discussion on modernism. I could not follow the purpose of Situmorang in his writing due to its intricacy. At least, according to him, the "Pameran Mahasiswa 1954" embodies the principles of "modernism," which draws heavily from European art in style and emotion. For him, when images become non-figurative, they no longer possess "content" or "story." In the following sections, Situmorang notes that the exhibition paintings "have not been able to overcome modernism." The reason is that "the modernism aspect," as shown in the paintings exhibited, was produced through an art academy rather than developed naturally. He stated, "In the Bandung academy, it seems that modernism has become academic."¹¹²

As I have mentioned, Spanjaard - and other art historians - did not continue the discourse and only stopped at Situmorang's writing. In fact, after Situmorang, a response that was no less critical came from Fine Art-ITB, which was also one of the exhibition participants, voiced by Sudjoko. Sudjoko's response to Trisno Sumardjo was equally cynical. He speculated that Sumardjo had never visited Bandung, conversed with painters, and examined the educational conditions on campus. It would therefore be regrettable if Sumardjo eventually developed a sense of complete knowledge regarding the complexities of art education. Sudjoko then stressed the importance of empirical substantiation in art criticism, questioning the validity of Sumardjo's critique of Bandung painters due to its lack of such evidence. Sudjoko wrote, "On campus, we conduct experiments, investigations, analyses, discussions. Here we work and formulate a healthy foundation for painting. We are thus shaping Indonesian culture." Sudjoko also disparages Trisno Sumardjo as a critic who did not have comprehensive knowledge of art history.¹¹³

Eddy¹¹⁴ also contributed to the discussion with his work titled "Laboratorium Barat?" (Western Laboratory?) (Fig.7.21). He claimed that Sumardjo's criticism was ambiguous as it lacked substantiating evidence. The longstanding disputes between West and East and the challenges related to

¹¹² Sitor Situmorang, "Modernisme" in *Siasat*, 12 Desember 1954, p. 27.

¹¹³ Sudjoko, "Kritik Terhadap Pelukis2 Bandung" in *Siasat*, 19 Desember 1954, pp. 26-27.

¹¹⁴ I have not found Eddy's full name to explain his identity better. Is he Eddy Kartasubarna from Fine Art-ITB or Eddy Sunarso from ASRI?

national identity and personality should not be oversimplified or seen in absolute terms. Instead, a thorough and detailed observation is necessary. Eddy also addressed Situmorang's concept of "modernism," specifically focusing on the fundamental aspects of "line" and "form." For Eddy, Eastern art has long been a foundation for these two aspects.¹¹⁵



Figure 7.21. Eddy, "Laboratorium Barat?" (Source: *Siasat*, 2 January 1955)

The discourse continued. After the "Pameran Mahasiswa 1954," an exhibition reviewer with the initials R.K.H.¹¹⁶ in *Siasat* magazine again brought up the issue of Fine Art-ITB, which did not have an Eastern character and only imitated modern European painters. His article was published to announce the opening of the exhibition of Popo Iskandar - one of the school's exponents. Although R.K.H. seems more directed at accusations at Fine ART-ITB, R.K.H. considered that Iskandar's paintings had succeeded in going beyond the characteristics of his school. Iskandar had found his way out of the dogma of his alma mater.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Eddy, "Laboratorium Barat?" in *Siasat*, 2 January 1955, p. 25.

¹¹⁶ R.K.H. is likely Ramadan Karta Hadimadja, a prominent Indonesian writer and biographer.

¹¹⁷ R.K.H "Popo jang Melepaskan Diri" in *Siasat*, 12 November 1958, p. 25.

In the same magazine, Jusuf Affendy, a Fine Art-ITB student, responded to R.K.H.'s article. With the title "Bandung Fine Art Has No Eastern Breath?" Affendy questions R.K.H.'s ability to understand the ins and outs of education at Fine Art-ITB. Therefore, Affendy challenged R.K.H. to come to Bandung to experience firsthand the lectures on campus and the courses being taught, before spreading an inaccurate perception of Fine Art-ITB. Affendy believes that "painting is not a matter of west and east, but rather whether the artist is competent and capable of saying something." With this belief, Affendy emphasizes that Indonesianness is broader than how it is often perceived, and is not limited to mere "ornaments" or "decorative lines and shapes" in paintings, thereby valuing and respecting the diverse art forms.¹¹⁸

Since his exhibition sparked the debate, Popo Iskandar felt the need to speak up. He wrote a short letter to the editor of *Siasat*, published in the magazine's edition on 17 December 1958. In his letter, Iskandar expressed his concern that some Bandung artists could not accept R.K.H.'s review, which reopened the issue of Fine Art-ITB being westernized. Iskandar should have elaborated on this issue. Interestingly, he instead discussed the issue of "breaking away from educational dogma" and "a person's natural artistic development," a concept that refers to the idea that an artist's style and technique should evolve naturally over time, which R.K.H. had previously hinted at. Thus, Iskandar tended to support R.K.H.'s opinion. He emphasized that it was natural for an artist to be critical of what he had learned from art education. This critical attitude was necessary for the development of the artist's personality as long as he was able to assimilate and internalize the process so as to then be able to offer new artistic values. An artist's character was built through this process, as was his Indonesianness. That is the essence of Iskandar's thoughts in his letter.¹¹⁹

After Sumardjo and Situmorang, criticism of Fine Art-ITB, including anyone who painted in an abstract style, was continued by left-wing painters who actively campaigned that the virus of abstractionism endangered the future of Indonesian fine arts. I take the example of Batara Lubis's writing in 1964 from *Pelukis Rakjat*, where he condemned those who painted in an abstract style. Lubis expressed concern about the rapid growth of abstractionism in fine arts in an article titled "Lukisan Abstrak Bahayakan

¹¹⁸ Jusuf Affendy, "Seni Rupa Bandung Tiada Nafas Ketimuran?" in *Siasat*, 3 December 1958, p. 29.

¹¹⁹ Popo Iskandar, "Surat dan Pelukis Popo" in *Siasat*, 17 December 1958, p. 29.

Perkembangan Senirupa Kita” (Abstract Painting Endangers Our Art Development). He accused imperialists, particularly Americans, of being the masterminds behind a secret plot to eliminate "patriotic and revolutionary paintings." Regrettably, numerous painters remain oblivious to the fact that they have succumbed to the deceitful influence of imperialists and subsequently acted as advocates for their culture. "Abstract painting," Batara Lubis stated, "fundamentally embodies the painter's feminine personality, eroding ethical values and eradicating national identity." Batara Lubis cautions against abstractionism's perils in Indonesian painting by likening it to a disease. He urged the Government to promptly address the art academies in Yogyakarta (ASRI) and Bandung (Fine Art-ITB) by taking appropriate action. The Government must ensure that both academies align with a personable and revolutionary approach to art, regardless of the specific course of action. For him, Indonesian painting will only benefit "the people and our revolution" if it consists solely of these two elements.¹²⁰



Figure 7.22. D.N. Aidit at the opening of the Revolutionary Art and Literature Conference, August 1964.
(Source: *Zaman Baru*, No.2. February, 1965 – Photo by Amrus Natalsja)

Collection of Leiden University Library
Repro by Aminudin TH Siregar

¹²⁰ Batara Lubis, "Lukisan Abstrak Bahayakan Perkembangan Senirupa Kita" in *Harian Rakjat*, 24 October 1964, p. 2.

Massive calumny against abstract art has been carried out since the Revolutionary Art and Literature Conference (Konferensi Seni dan Sastra Revolusioner - KSSR) on 27 August – 2 September 1964. During his speech at this conference, the chairman of the Indonesian Communist Party, D.N. Aidit, cursed: "Abstractionism in the field of literature and art is part of imperialist forms of cultural aggression carried out through agencies such as USIS, the American Cultural Center, Field Service, Peace Corps and others." (Fig. 7.22)¹²¹ Even the state, before the KSSR, officially emphasized through Prijono, the Minister of Education and Culture, that art and literature must serve the people. He declared this at the *Konferensi Kerja Kebudayaan* (Cultural Working Conference) on 22 January 1962. According to him, the concept of "art for art's sake" was an idea that was foreign to Indonesian society and was believed by those with a Westernized soul. Prijono also emphasized that "our modern literature and art must be devoted to the people, to the workers and farmers, in particular." For the people to understand the works of artists, the most appropriate style of modern Indonesian art is realism, Prijono stated.¹²²

The case of Gregorius Sidharta may be a relevant example to present here. Sidharta was a sculptor who joined the *Pelukis Rakjat* artistic collective and registered as the first ASRI student in 1950; when he returned to Indonesia, Sidharta taught sculpture at ASRI and then joined Fine Art-ITB in 1965. According to Supangkat and Yuliman, Sidharta's problem with quitting as a teacher was that his career was hampered because his diploma, which he received in the Netherlands, could not be recognized. However, the real problem is that Sidharta is considered an imperialist stooge by the circles of artists who live under the banner of communism.¹²³ In my opinion, the statement is entirely justified. Because, if we trace contemporary sources, *Harian Rakjat*, a newspaper that became the mouthpiece of LEKRA, in its June 1964 edition, did indeed issue a provocation by demanding that Sidharta be expelled from ASRI because of his involvement in the Cultural Manifesto

¹²¹ D.N. Aidit, *Tentang Sastra dan Seni* (Jakarta: Yayasan Pembaruan, 1964), p. 37.

¹²² "Menteri P.D dan K Prijono: Kesenian dan Kesusasteraan Harus Mengabdikan Rakjat" in *Harian Rakjat*, 25 January 1962, p. 2.

¹²³ Supangkat and Yuliman, 1982, pp. 27-28.

(*Manifes Kebudayaan*)¹²⁴ – a group of intellectuals, critics, poets, and painters who actively campaigned for artistic freedom.¹²⁵

Recalling the heated events throughout the 1950s - 1960s, a period marked by intense debates about the Westernized character of Fine Art-ITB, which created works through a “Western laboratory,” and the campus as a headquarters that spread abstractionism that had no national personality, for academician A.D. Pirous - who also experienced those tense times -, Trisno Sumardjo and Sitor Situmorang were instrumental in popularizing Fine Art-ITB in the Indonesian art scene. Regarding their criticism, Pirous considered both less accurate in understanding aesthetic problems, especially from the Fine Art-ITB faction. Pirous continued that Sumardjo and Situmorang prioritized expressionism as the ideal criteria for Indonesianness in painting. Meanwhile, Fine Art-ITB introduced a new aesthetic principle still foreign to Indonesian artists: Formalism. If the contribution of Fine Art-ITB or the Bandung School to history was because it had introduced this aesthetic, it became mainstream in the Indonesian art scene in the 1960s. Pirous describes Bandung Formalism at that time as “a principle that assesses works of art as a pure arrangement of forms, whose elements consist of lines, colors, shapes and textures. Although in the works of Bandung artists, representational objects such as human figures, landscapes or still life paintings can still be identified, these objects have been treated in such a way that they are subject to the intersection of geometric lines that seem to drown the objects in their own arrangement. At a more advanced level, these Bandung artists no longer need objects, they create solely with pure visual elements. In the history of art, this style is called abstract art.”¹²⁶

Closing this section, I would like to reiterate that the criticism of Fine Art-Bandung as a “Western Laboratory”, which originated from Trisno

¹²⁴ “Pameran Grafika AS Diganjang di Jogja: Keluarkan Dosen Inggris dari AMI” in *Harian Rakjat*, 28 Juni 1964, p. 1.

¹²⁵ Some writers and painters initiated the Cultural Manifesto. When this group declared its ideological views on 19 October 1963, it received support from artists, including some from Fine Art-ITB. Viewed as an American lackey and promoting Western bourgeois culture, the Cultural Manifesto received massive criticism from the left-wing artist camp, especially LEKRA. LEKRA demanded that the Indonesian government disband the Cultural Manifesto group and declare it illegal. In May 1964, Sukarno finally proclaimed the dissolution of the Cultural Manifesto. See *Harian Rakyat*, 17 Mei 1964, p.1; *Harian Rakjat*, 14 Juni 1964, p.1; *Harian Rakjat*, 31 Mei 1964, p.1; *Harian Rakjat*, 12 Mei 1964, p.2; and *Harian Rakjat*, 21 Juni 1964, p.1.

¹²⁶ See A.D. Pirous “Seni Rupa Bandung di tengah Pergolakan Budaya: Dari Masa Awal kemerdekaan hingga Kebangkitan Asia Pasifik” in A.D. Pirous, *Melukis itu Menulis: Kumpulan Tulisan A.D.Pirous tentang Seni Rupa dan Kebudayaan*, (Bandung: Serambi Pirous dan Penerbit ITB, 2003), pp. 170-172.

Sumardjo¹²⁷ – he was more connected with Jakarta – rather than from critics or artists from Yogyakarta, instigated the conflict continued by some some leftist painters like Batara Lubis, and LEKRA. Thus, the debate cannot be generalized as the perception embedded so far, namely Fine Art-ITB versus ASRI. Another essential point to emphasize here is that the root of the controversy of “Indonesianness” or “abstract versus realism” between artist factions cannot be separated from the previous debate between Sudjojono and Trisno Sumardjo. For Sudjojono, realism in the sense of technical and aesthetic ability is the right choice to advance Indonesian painting. As discussed in the previous section, Trisno Sumardjo denied Sudjojono’s vision.

In a broader context, the controversy about Indonesianness reflected the global conflict during the Cold War. This geopolitical rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union significantly impacted various aspects of society, including the art world. The two superpowers' political tensions and ideological differences infiltrated artistic expressions, resulting in a distinct conflict relating to ideology in art. In this period, the United States and the Soviet Union employed art to promote their ideologies. Artists were urged to produce artworks that reflected the ideals and doctrines of their nations. Soviet Socialist Realism emerged as the prevailing artistic movement in the Eastern Bloc, exalting the Soviet regime. Simultaneously, the United States utilized Abstract Expressionism to endorse its cultural autonomy and creative individuality.

The aesthetic clashes were not the only representatives of the cultural cold war years. Between 1950 and 1965, post-colonial Indonesian art underwent substantial growth. Indonesian artists were exposed to international traffic, which expanded their perspectives on art within global contexts and networks. During that time, individuals and groups could travel internationally for various purposes, such as pursuing further education, cultural exchange programs, participating in conferences, cultural missions, etc.¹²⁸ Additionally, domestic events and exhibitions in Jakarta featured art from the two great factions – making Indonesia an extension of the cultural Cold War arena.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ Further reading on Trisno Sumardjo, see Claire Holt, "In Memoriam: Trisno Sumardjo, December 6, 1916-April 21, 1969" in *Indonesia*, No. 8, October, 1969, pp. 212-216.

¹²⁸ Affandi's exhibition in New York was reported to be a success. See "Sukses Affandi di New York" in *Siasat*, 13 September 1958, p. 29.

¹²⁹ For instance, in 1956 an exhibition of a collection of Russian paintings took place in Jakarta. See R.K.H, "Pameran Seni Lukis dan Kerajinan Rusia" in *Siasat*, 12 December 1957, p. 28. Furthermore, Jakarta also exhibited modern European artists such as Wassily Kandinsky, Albert Marquet, Jean Lurçat,



Figure 7.23. T. Sutanto, *Tjap kaki Tiga*, 1977.

Private Collection

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how artists, art critics, and intellectuals, as individuals or associated with particular cultural institutions, disputed Indonesianness, which, in turn, significantly shaped Indonesian art discourse and practice. This chapter also describes how the debate arose by providing its historical context. This protracted debate shows how serious the issue of Indonesianness was for the Indonesian art world. The controversy subsided after 1965, following the violent suppression of communist artists and their associated organizations, such as LEKRA. The bloody incident occurred because of the unsuccessful coup attempt by the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) in September 1965 and the subsequent persecution, disappearance, and killing of leftist artists. The following New Order regime, which replaced Sukarno's regime, distorted historical narratives, including art history, to suit its anti-communist narrative.¹³⁰

and Hans Hartung. This collection, totaling about 226 works (75 oil paintings, 15 watercolors, 87 lithographs, and 49 reproductions), was presented by France to Indonesia as a form of sympathy for independence. See Trisno Sumardjo, "Apa Pentingnya Seni Modern Bagi Kita?" in *Siasat*, 8 July 1956, p. 20

¹³⁰ For a serious study on how the post-Soekarno regime eliminated the communist artists and intellectuals, see Wijaya Herlambang, *Cultural Violence: Its practice and Challenge in Indonesia*, (Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag Dr. Muller, 2011).



Figure 7.24. Priyanto Sunarto, *Peta Bumi Indonesia Baru*, 1977.

Private Collection

However, apart from the new regime's successes in silencing leftist artists, the debate on the identity of modern Indonesian art has continued beyond this period. The controversy started with a lecture by Oesman Effendi on 27 August 1969 at Lembaga Pendidikan Indonesia-Amerika (Indonesian-American Education Friendship Institute). He stated that modern Indonesian painting did not yet exist as no "Indonesian stamp" or identity consisting of national characteristics defined its modernity. According to Effendi, modern Indonesian painting merely imitates Western painting, inherited from the Western art academy curriculum. This provocation was assertive and rather ironic, considering that Hopman and Soemarno Soetosoendoro identified these twenty-three years earlier – as discussed in this chapter.¹³¹

¹³¹ I have discussed Oesman Effendi's provocation. For further reading, see Aminudin TH Siregar, "Conflict and Denial: The Discourse of Identity in Indonesian Art, 1950s-1980s" in Patrick Flores and

Some artists do not accept Effendi's statement. Painter Rusli, for instance, expressed surprise that Effendi was still making an issue of an "Indonesian stamp" in art. He believed one was an Indonesian painter if one had an "Indonesian passport," and stated: "Art must be free. Art should not be held back by ties of tradition, nationalism and so on. Because the existence of such ties will only paralyze the artist to the point [that] he cannot create."¹³² Yet Effendi was not alone. Another artist who questioned Indonesian art's identity was Gregorius Sidharta Soegijo, from the Fine Art-ITB. He elaborated on his concerns in 1971: "Are the thoughts and ways of the West, the only way to reach today's art in Indonesia? I would like to be free of absolute values. I want to search for the local values of Indonesia."¹³³

The repercussions of Effendi's controversy had a lasting impact, significantly shaping artistic responses for years. The establishment of the Design Center Association (Decenta) in 1973 by the Fine Art-ITB lecturers responded to this controversy with their various artistic experiments. Mainly through their use of the silkscreen technique, members of Decenta, including G. Sidharta, T. Susanto, A.D. Pirous, Diddo Kusnidar, and Priyanto Sunarto, explored the local embellishment and imagery from Indonesian popular and mass culture using a Pop Art and Conceptual Art approach (Fig.7.23-24). Decenta actively promoted silkscreen on paper, a well-known printing technique among Indonesians, to challenge the elitism, which glorifies oil painting on canvas.¹³⁴

The controversy surrounding Effendi's statement also gained the younger generation's reactions, leading to a new, progressive movement that significantly reshaped the Indonesian art scene. Notable figures such as F.X. Harsono, Bonyong Munni Ardhi, Hardi, Siti Adiyati Subangun, Nanik Mirna, Bachtiar Zainoel, Jim Supangkat, and Priyanto Sunarto, who were fine arts students from Fine Art-ITB and ASRI at the time, played a crucial role in this movement. With the combination of their school backgrounds, they not only eliminated the myth of the previous Fine Art-ITB versus ASRI but also - like Decenta's experiments, which challenged elitism in art - offered new idioms in Indonesian art practice, such as object art, assemblage, and installation. For them, Indonesianness in art includes any objects familiar to

Low Sze Wee (Ed.), *Charting Thoughts: Essays on Art in Southeast Asia*, (Singapore: National Gallery of Singapore, 2018), pp. 174-187.

¹³² Aminudin TH Siregar, 2018, p.182.

¹³³ Jim Supangkat and Sanento Yuliman, *G. Sidharta di Tengah Seni Rupa Indonesia*, (Jakarta: Gramedia, 1982), p. 29-32 and Aminudin TH Siregar, 2018, p.186.

¹³⁴ Aminudin TH Siregar, 2018, p. 187 and interview with A.D. Pirous in Bandung, 8 June 2023.

the daily lives of Indonesians, which can then be directly displayed in the exhibition space. Their movement is known as *Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru Indonesia* – GSRBI (New Indonesian Art Movement), which took shape in 1974.¹³⁵

¹³⁵ For *GSRBI*, see Jim Supangkat, *Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru Indonesia: Kumpulan Karangan*, (Jakarta: Gramedia, 1979).

Conclusion

This thesis has shown that art history in Indonesia helped provide arguments for constructing national identities. Since President Soeharto mandated the writing of art history, followed by the publication of *Sejarah Seni Rupa Indonesia* (History of Indonesian Art, 1979) by the Ministry of Education and Culture of Indonesia, the Indonesia-centric approach has occupied the central perspective. This nationalistic art history outcome celebrates the myth that modern Indonesian art was born as a result of resistance to the domination of Western art. The content of this historiography prioritizes the role of national artists rather than artists from foreign countries or those who are considered unpatriotic.

Inevitably, using the term "modern art" in these historical products is ambivalent. The limits of modernity are, for example, less comprehensively explained. For example, it is difficult to answer whether modern Indonesian art is a critical reaction to "classical Indonesian art," or is nothing more than a "legacy of experience" from Western art practices in colonial Indonesia. Or, is modern art narrated in the *Sejarah Seni Rupa Indonesia* a combination of the whole inherited?

What is clear is that the book, which acts as the official state publication, creates the impression of discontinuity by, for example, starting the chapter on "Modern Art" (or *Seni Rupa Kontemporer*/Contemporary Art in the book version) with Raden Saleh. Whether or not Indonesia has modern art—a separate study is needed to decide on this—this "art historical canon" contains many problems. These include fundamental issues such as the shortage of historical sources and the narrow narrative, which also determines aspects of continuity and discontinuity.

This thesis has demonstrated that the narrative can be expanded using transnational sources. To this day, this "art historical canon" is being gradually "modified" and "updated" by Indonesian and international scholars, art critics, and curators. However, the existing scholarship does not add new insights or perspectives. This leads to stagnation in Indonesian

modern art historiography, meaning no new history has been written, and old stories have been recycled.

By taking cases from the Dutch colonial (with three chapters: Raden Saleh, Mooi Indië, and PERSAGI), Japanese occupation, and Revolution periods, this thesis has shown that various publications on Indonesian modern art history, written by Indonesians and non-Indonesians alike, need to be revised and supplemented. This thesis has therefore broadened the narrative by expanding the links and sharpening the context using sources that had been overlooked. This research has also shown that adopting a transnational perspective would help us understand the complex relationship between historical sources from Indonesia and, especially, Dutch sources. Moreover, each chapter in this thesis has presented a compilation of overlooked sources, including significant texts and images that have never been included in standard art history.

A nationalistic perspective has become dominant in post-colonial Indonesian modern art historiography. This research has shown that writing about art history from a nationalistic perspective contains various shortcomings. Firstly, it can lead to a narrow and limited understanding of the art of the period, as it tends to focus only on the art produced within a specific country or region without considering the broader cultural and historical context. This approach may ignore the global influences and interactions that have shaped the development of art in that region. Secondly, a nationalistic perspective can sometimes reinforce stereotypes and prejudices about other cultures, leading to a distorted understanding of art and its creators.

The Mooi Indië case, as discussed in Chapter 3, has shown how stereotypes and prejudices have been perpetuated as stigma in Indonesian modern art history. A nationalistic perspective can also lead to a tendency to view the influence of art from different countries and cultures as a threat or form of pressure rather than recognizing its intrinsic worth and contribution to the broader realm of art. Ultimately, a nationalistic viewpoint can hinder our understanding of the intricate and interconnected histories of diverse nations and cultures, leading to a simplistic and inaccurate understanding of their art and its cultural significance.

Adopting a transnational perspective not only helps address nationalistic constraints but also has the potential to transform our understanding of art history. Moreover, a transnational approach is needed since this approach may broaden the links and networks in the writing of

Indonesian art history. Situating art in a worldwide context enables a more refined and all-encompassing comprehension of its historical and cultural importance. With a transnational perspective, Indonesian modern art can be perceived as a global, interconnected system of cultural interchange rather than a sequence of separate regional advancements. This approach enhances our comprehension of the historical and cultural circumstances that mold art and inspires hope for a future where artistic traditions have impacted and engaged with each other throughout history.

Of course, nationalistic approaches still play a significant role today, especially in particular historical periods. In the case of Indonesia, this perspective began to emerge at the end of 1949 and reached its peak in the mid-1950s. A nationalistic perspective in history at that time was needed to create a foundation for the further development of historiography. In addition, this nationalistic art history was an approach to the study of art that emphasized art's role in shaping a nation's identity and culture. This approach is critical in countries with a history of colonization or political upheaval, where art has often been used as a tool for asserting national identity and resistance against external influences. As discussed in Chapters 4 and 7, the identity of Indonesianness in Indonesian art, especially painting, gave rise to controversy.

As discussed in Chapter 1, the significance of the national perspective in writing art history is inevitable. This national perspective allows us to understand how art reflects a particular nation's cultural and social values. It makes it possible to gain insight into the historical, political, and economic factors that influence art creation. The national perspective also helps us recognize the unique qualities of different art movements and styles and their impact on developing the country's artistic traditions. However, it limits our understanding of "our national art," as it does not consider the transnational influences and interconnectedness of artistic movements across borders. Therefore, a balanced approach combining national and transnational perspectives is necessary for a comprehensive understanding of art history, which this dissertation has revealed.

Noto Soeroto's case serves as a poignant example of how the exclusion of those accused of being non-nationalists has turned into a significant loss for art historiography. His works have been overlooked for years and have never been read by art historians, as is proven by the absence of his name from the canon narratives, let alone quotations on his thoughts about art. As this research shows, Soeroto's writings about Iko and Raden

Saleh are essential and ground-breaking texts. His review of Iko in 1910 stands as the earliest historical Indonesian art text written by a non-Western scholar. Taking Noto Soeroto as a case, it is proven that the historical stage becomes more expansive, offering a unique opportunity to reveal transnational relations in art history - as this research intended.

The other case relates to the activities of the Djaya brothers during their time in the Netherlands, which promoted modern Indonesian painting and significantly enriched the public's understanding. However, their activities had almost no meaning in the art historical canon. As discussed above, contemporary sources (*Brochure Kesenian/Arts Brochure*, 1949) even revealed Sudjojono's accusation that Agus Djaya was a "national traitor." The *Brochure* quoted Sudjojono stating that he read Agus Djaya's writings in a Dutch art magazine, which expressed Djaya's desire for the West to lead Indonesian art. This thesis has investigated the magazine Sudjojono referred to and found that the accusations against Agus Djaya were inaccurate.

These cases caused us to become entangled in a national-not-nationalist discourse, which also happened in the case of Raden Saleh, as discussed in Chapter Two. After so many years of relying on art history products with a nationalistic perspective, the most urgent requirement is to escape such an entanglement. Learning from the instances of Iko, Agus Djaya, and Raden Saleh, it becomes apparent that a transnational perspective is beneficial and crucial for writing a new, inclusive history of modern Indonesian art.

Towards an Inclusive Art History

This thesis proposes a rewriting of the existing history of modern Indonesian art, which was subjected to a myopic nationalism once the country achieved its independence. The existing publications are no longer adequate to support the progressive development of art history. Rewriting art history means reducing the dominance of nationalistic perspectives and becoming as open as possible to external factors that have been neglected.

Opening up to the world is a challenge that requires a sincere attitude because it will counter many myths that have been believed for years, such as that Sudjojono is the "Father of Modern Indonesian Painting." As a result, there will no longer be one central figure who plays a role in determining the direction of the discourse. Apart from that, the Indonesian national heroes of the arts will share their roles with so-called "non-Indonesian" artists. As this

thesis has shown, the exhibition of the Regnault collection was not just a possibility but a necessity for the birth of PERSAGI and the emergence of Sudjojono. The significance of Regnault's collection cannot be overstated, as it has left an indelible mark on Indonesian art history.

Another aspect for further research to expand new historical writing is the study of the impact of style in art from one artist to another. Artists bring a unique perspective and technique to their work, influencing their contemporaries and future generations. In Sudjojono's case, for example, given his interest in modern European art as demonstrated by his attending exhibitions of the Regnaut collection and other European painters provided by the *Bataviaasche Kunstkring*, I found that his famous painting entitled *Cap Go Meh* (1940)¹³⁶ cleverly combines images from Johan Jacob Voskuil,¹³⁷ James Ensor¹³⁸, and Piet Ouborg¹³⁹, particularly the presence of the "mask" or "clown" persona (Fig.8.1). Sudjojono must have seen the paintings of the three artists firsthand in the *Kunstkring* building—or at least through the reproductions circulating in Batavia.

As discussed earlier, this research focuses on three mega periods, from the 19th century, represented by Raden Saleh, considered the earliest point in historiography, the Japanese occupation, to the revolution when Indonesia was proclaimed a nation and state. It raises the question of whether there were any historical publications before Raden Saleh and whether Indonesians knew art or painting before him and the existence of artists or painters. These questions are challenging to answer, and even the official state history book in 1979 (*Sejarah Seni Rupa Indonesia/History of Indonesian Art*) still grapples

¹³⁶ I owe these preliminary observations to John Clark. We discussed these things informally in 2011 in Canberra, Australia, and I then explored and sharpened them for this thesis by using *Cap Go Meh* as a case.

¹³⁷ I am still looking for exactly which Voskuil painting Sudjojono saw in the Regnault Collection exhibition 1940. However, the "clown" image is a hint that amazed Sudjojono.

¹³⁸ James Ensor's painting "Carnaval" was displayed at Batavia Kunstkring in the 3rd Regnaut collection exhibition in 1937, and its reproductions appeared in some Dutch East Indies newspapers, indicating that the painting was quite popular at its time. See *De locomotief*, 9 June 1937, p. 3., *Algemeen handelsblad voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, 22 May 1937, p. 2., *De Indische courant*, 22 May 1937, p. II., *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, 24 May 1937, p. 11., *De Sumatra post*, 10 August 1937, p. 11, and *Soerabaijasch handelsblad*, 27 May 1937, p. II.

¹³⁹ In Batavia, the painter Piet Ouborg was famous for his interest in old Indonesian masks. He was involved in the activities in *Bataviaasche Kunstkring*. He advised on exhibitions and served on juries. He showed good judgment as to the work of others, which becomes apparent from, among other things, the fact that he recognized the talent at Sudjojono at a very early stage. See Leonie ten Duis & Annelies Haase, *Ouborg: schilder*, ('s-Gravenhage: SDU; Amsterdam: Openbaar Kunstbezit, 1990), p. 17.



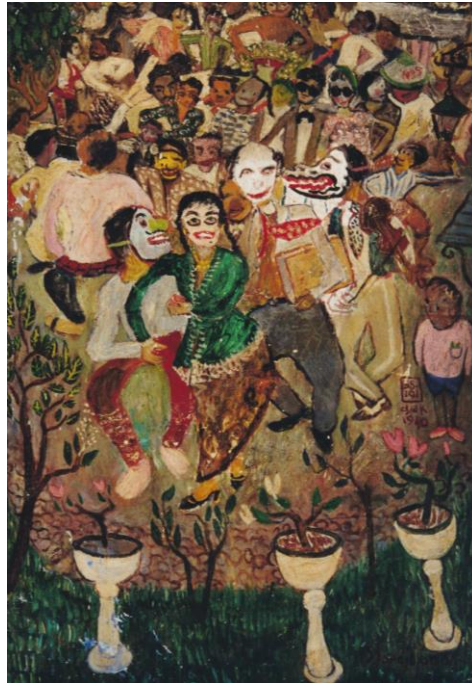
Johan Jacob Voskuil, *Clown*, ca.1940

(<https://rkd.nl/en/explore/images/193268>)



James Ensor, *Carnival in Flanders*, 1929.

(<https://www.stedelijk.nl/en/collection/1419-james-ensor-carnaval-en-flandre>)



S. Sudjojono, *Cap Go Meh*, 1940.

Collection of National Gallery of Indonesia



Piet Ouborg, *Wit Masker*, 1925/1926.

Peter Berger, *Piet Ouborg: van hobbyist tot gewijde*, Den Haag: Gallerie Nouvelles Images, 1979, p.11.



Piet Ouborg, *Two Masks*, 1929.

Leonie ten Duis & Annelies Haase, *Ouborg: schilder*, ('s-Gravenhage: SDU; Amsterdam: Openbaar Kunstbezit, 1990), p. 23.

with this issue. The book jumps from the art of the Hindu, Buddhist, and Islamic periods to modern art represented by Raden Saleh, leaving behind an 'unwritten period' before the painter's appearance.

This 'unwritten period' holds significant importance and warrants further research. Writing about the pre-Raden Saleh period has obstacles, such as the lack of original painting collections dating from the 18th century or earlier in Indonesian museums – compared to European museums. Another issue is the problems of authorship related to the many works of art created without their creators' names. Another matter is associated with the equivalence of the term "Seni (Art)" in the perspective of Western Art with the Indonesian context, considering that Indonesia has several terms that refer to art-making. Researchers such as Claire Holt and Samuel Kalff also faced this obstacle in their attempts to discover artistic traces that could be relied upon to answer these questions.

Claire Holt, for instance, posited that creating art was a well-established and recognized endeavor among the Indonesian populace during the pre-colonial era. She refuted the prevailing belief that painting in particular was introduced to non-European cultures solely through colonialism. Subsequently, Holt referenced authoritative sources such as the *Encyclopaedia of the Dutch East Indies* and scholarly texts authored by C.C. Berg. In her account, the article *Kidung Sunda: Inleiding, Text, Vertaling, en Antekeningen* by Berg is referenced, which discusses a portrait painter hailing from the Majapahit kingdom.

Samuel Kalff challenged Thomas Stanford Raffles' observations. In his epic volume *The History of Java*, Raffles contributed one historical source to view Java. He observes that the Javanese already understood proportion and perspective, although improving their drawing and painting skills is needed. After all, contrary to previously stated stories, Raffles declared there were no previous indications that the Javanese had mastered the painting skill. But unfortunately, Raffles did not mention the names of the drafters or painters from that time.¹⁴⁰ Kalff stated in a lengthy essay for the *Djawa* magazine titled *De Javaansche Schilderkunst* that people in Java already have art-making traditions passed down from generation to generation. However, with the prohibition of Muslims, this tradition faded. Kalff continued his proof by mentioning an ancient Hindu holy book of *Raja Kapa-Kapa*.

¹⁴⁰ Thomas Stanford Raffles, *The History of Java Vol. I*, (London, 1817), p. 472-743. See also Holt, 1976, p.192.

According to this book, the nobility was familiar with *nyungging* - to paint. Paintings that develop in Bali are another source of evidence. Kalff expanded on the evidence-based Chinese travel reports dating to 1416. People had created an artwork known as *Wayang Beber* - the oldest puppet show played by revealing or unfolding a cloth or paper as an image. Another account came from the Portuguese conquest of Malacca in 1511.

Among the tributes paid to the Portuguese by princes of the Majapahit kingdom at the time was a painting made of *beirami*, a type of linen. The images shown are battle-themed and are said to be realistically painted. Other evidence comes from a report by Frank van der Does, who took part in the first Dutch voyage to Banten, West Java, in 1596. Kalff also added that even though Raffles was not aware of these informations, he at least acknowledged that the Javanese had strong talents.¹⁴¹ Kalff added, in the Javanese language, there is evidence that painting was commonplace for people with words such as *ranggajiwa*, *citrakara* (painter), and *citraleka* (to draw or paint).¹⁴²

We can expand on this by imagining that every tribe in Indonesia probably has its own term to describe paintings, drawings, or any skills associated with art. The Bataknese, for example, know the word "Gorga," which has a broad meaning. The term can mean decoration, ornament, pattern, painting, drawing, or statue. Some dictionaries confirm that the *Panggorga* – with the root word “Gorga” – means painter or sculptor.¹⁴³ It is very likely that other tribes, of which there are hundreds in Indonesia, have the same way of giving names to creative work that relies on individual artistic abilities.

The heterogeneity of Indonesia—linguistic, ethnic, and geographic—requires a new conceptualization that no longer relies on the nationalization of the arts formalized and practiced in (mostly) Java. This new conceptualization opens up another area for exploration and is proposed as a site of transnational exchange. Writing this new history of art underscores the importance of sources from various locations, each offering unique and diverse perspectives. Writing new history means targeting the activities of artists, communities, and their work in their transnational networks,

¹⁴¹ See S. Kalff, “De Javaansch Schilderkunst” in *Djawa-Tijdschrift van het Java-Instituut*, Vierde Jaargang, 1924, p. 123.

¹⁴² S. Kalff, 1924, p. 123-124.

¹⁴³ See M.A. Marbun and I.M.T. Hutapea, *Kamus Budaya Batak Toba*, (Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 1987), p. 48-50. See also Richard Sinaga, *Kamus Bahasa Batak Toba-Indonesia*, (Jakarta: Dian Utama, 1995), p. 129.

institutions, and identities, enriching the discourses around nationalism across geopolitical borders. This also means the need to re-map a transnational Indonesian art history.



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Samenvatting

In 1976 riep president Soeharto op tot het schrijven van een geschiedenis van de Indonesische kunst. Twee jaar later publiceerde de Indonesische regering, via het Ministerie van Onderwijs en Cultuur, *Sejarah Seni Rupa Indonesia* (Geschiedenis van de Indonesische kunst). Het boek, gepubliceerd in 1979, is een essentieel naslagwerk voor het onderwijzen van de Indonesische kunstgeschiedenis. Vergeleken met andere publicaties over dezelfde onderwerpen, is dit boek de eerste en enige publicatie die het woord 'geschiedenis' in de titel gebruikt. De Indonesische regering verklaarde dat de reden voor de publicatie van *Sejarah Seni Rupa Indonesia* de schaarste was aan publicaties over Indonesische kunst door Indonesische geleerden. Er werd ook opgemerkt dat buitenlandse auteurs over het algemeen verschillende publicaties over Indonesische kunst schreven, meestal in vreemde talen, waardoor deze voor Indonesiërs moeilijk toegankelijk waren. De Indonesische regering was ook van mening dat boeken over Indonesische kunst geschreven door buitenlandse auteurs de nationale aspiraties niet accuraat weergaven.

Het boek *Sejarah Seni Rupa Indonesia* is verdeeld in vier mega-hoofdstukken, die elk een van de historische perioden vertegenwoordigen: "Pra-Sejarah" (Prehistorie), "Seni Rupa Zaman Klasik di Indonesia (Klassieke Kunstperiode in Indonesië)," "Seni Rupa Indonesia-Islam (Indonesische Islamitische Kunst)," en "Kedudukan Seni Rupa Baru (Positie van Nieuwe/Moderne Kunst)." Het laatste hoofdstuk, dat het onderwerp is van dit onderzoek, is verder onderverdeeld in zes subperioden: "Masa Perintis Seni Rupa Kontemporer Indonesia (De Baanbrekende Periode van Indonesische Hedendaagse Kunst)," "Periode Seni Lukis Hindia Molek (De Periode van Mooi Indië Schilderkunst)," "Berdirinya PERSAGI (De Geboorte van PERSAGI)," "Seni Lukis Indonesia pada Masa Pendudukan Jepang, 1942-1945 (Indonesische Schilderkunst in de Japanse Bezettingstijd, 1942-1945)," "Periode Pendirian Sanggar-Sanggar Antara Tahun 1945-1950 (De Studio Periode, 1945-1950)," "Perkembangan Seni Rupa Modern di Indonesia dari Pengamatan Sesudah 1950 (De Ontwikkeling van Moderne Kunst in Indonesië na 1950)," en "Seni Patung Baru Indonesia (De Nieuwe

Indonesische Beeldhouwkunst).” Tot op heden heeft de uitgebreide volgorde en nomenclatuur van deze periode een canonieke status bereikt binnen de geschiedschrijving van de Indonesische moderne kunst. Door een vereenvoudigde structuur in drie hoofdperioden voor te stellen: “De Nederlandse Koloniale Periode,” ‘De Japanse Bezettingstijd,’ en ‘De Revolutionaire Periode,’ heeft deze studie drie factoren gevonden die bepalen hoe elke periode wordt geschreven, zowel in het boek *Geschiedenis van de Indonesische Schone Kunsten* als in soortgelijke publicaties, geschreven door Indonesische of niet-Indonesische historici. De drie factoren zijn het gebruik van “historische bronnen”, de dynamiek van “continuïteit en discontinuïteit” en het “natiegerichte paradigma.”

Deze studie belicht de uitdagingen van het vinden van historische bronnen, waaronder verschillende kunstwerken, documenten en publicaties. De schaarste en beschikbaarheid van deze bronnen creëren beperkingen voor historici bij het vertellen van de geschiedenis van de moderne Indonesische kunst. Deze narratieve beperkingen leiden tot problemen van 'continuïteit en discontinuïteit' in historische gebeurtenissen. De analyse van beide onderstreept het belang van het plaatsen van een gebeurtenis in zijn historische context door het blootleggen van historische bronnen. Bovendien neigt de canon van de moderne Indonesische kunstgeschiedenis ertoe om internationale interacties en relaties te negeren. Deze studie concludeert dat het schrijven van geschiedenis met een “natiegericht paradigma” te dominant is, met de neiging om niet-Indonesische invloeden te marginaliseren en alleen nationalistische kunstenaars als helden te historiseren.

Dit onderzoek stelt dat we niet langer kunnen vertrouwen op de producten van de moderne Indonesische kunstgeschiedenis die momenteel beschikbaar zijn, zoals het boek *Sejarah Seni Rupa Indonesia*, om maar een voorbeeld te noemen. Een ander argument is dat als kunstgeschiedenis alleen vanuit een nationalistisch perspectief wordt geschreven, het historische product de geschiedschrijving zal beperken en de complexiteit van de uitwisseling van artistieke ideeën over nationale grenzen heen niet zal erkennen. Daarom suggereert dit proefschrift dat een nationalistische benadering gecombineerd moet worden met een transnationale benadering die zich richt op culturele overdracht, verbindingen, circulatie, uitwisseling van ideeën, invloed, grensoverschrijdende samenwerking en onderling verbonden of gedeelde geschiedenissen. Kunstgeschiedenis schrijven met een nationale en transnationale benadering betekent dus ook historische bronnen vinden en onthullen die opzettelijk verborgen zijn gehouden of nooit

gebruikt zijn door kunsthistorici. Het onthullen van nationale en transnationale historische bronnen is cruciaal omdat het de historische context en verbanden tussen individuen (kunstenaars, critici, historici) en instellingen scherpt. Drie korte voorbeelden van Noto Soeroto, S. Sudjojono en Raden Saleh zullen bovenstaand argument illustreren.

Noto Soeroto wordt erkend als de eerste Indonesische kunsthistoricus, wiens geschriften invloedrijk waren maar vaak over het hoofd werden gezien vanwege nationalistische vooroordelen. Nationalistische critici zoals Trisno Sumardjo bestempelden hem als een koloniale stroman, terwijl een andere criticus, Bakri Siregar, hem bekritiseerde omdat hij te veel verwesterde. Een andere belangrijke figuur in de moderne Indonesische kunst is Sudjojono, die vaak de Vader van de Moderne Indonesische Schilderkunst wordt genoemd. Hij speelde een cruciale rol bij de oprichting van PERSAGI (de Indonesische Vereniging van Tekenexperts) in 1938. Er zijn echter andere belangrijke aspecten van Sudjojono's betrokkenheid en de betekenis van PERSAGI in de kunstscène van koloniaal Indonesië die zelden worden besproken. Een van die aspecten is de Nederlandsch-Indische Kunstkring, een instelling die in 1902 in Batavia werd opgericht en later uitgroeide tot de Bataviaasche Kunstkring. Dit centrum voor moderne kunst omarmde verschillende vormen van expressie, waaronder dans, theater en muziek, en leverde substantiële bijdragen aan de Indische kunstgemeenschap.

In januari 1935 organiseerde de Kunstkring de eerste tentoonstelling van moderne Europese schilderkunst, samengesteld uit de collectie van Pierre Alexander Regnault. Deze tentoonstelling presenteerde de collectie van Regnault in vijf afzonderlijke programma's. De collectietentoonstellingen van Regnault hadden als doel om internationale kunst te introduceren bij lokale kunstenaars en zo een brug te slaan tussen Nederlands-Indië en de westerse moderne schilderkunst. Regnault was een verzamelaar en ondernemer met een verffabriek op Java. Hij gaf ook het tijdschrift *Verf en Kunst* uit, dat een medium werd om zijn verfproducten te promoten en artikelen bevatte over moderne Europese schilderkunst. Kunsthistorica J. de Loos-Haaxman leverde een belangrijke bijdrage als conservator van de Regnault-collecties. Via Kunstkring bevorderde zij de relatie tussen Indonesische kunstenaars en moderne Europese schilders. Kunstkring stelde ook het werk van Indonesische schilders tentoon via verschillende programma's. In 1940 beoordeelde Sudjojono de vijfde tentoonstelling van Regnaults collectie. Hij prees de artistieke kwaliteit en

moedigde lokale schilders aan om deel te nemen aan de modernistische beweging. Al met al kan worden aangenomen dat alle tentoonstellingsprogramma's van de Kunstkring een grote invloed hadden op de kunstwereld in Nederlands-Indië en een nieuwe waardering voor het modernisme onder Indonesische schilders stimuleerden.

Aan de andere kant laten Noto Soeroto, Sudjojono en Raden Saleh zien hoe ideeën, teksten en kunstwerken circuleerden in kosmopolitische stedelijke centra tijdens het koloniale tijdperk, waarmee ze aantonen dat de moderne schilderkunst niet beperkt bleef tot geïsoleerde omgevingen. Interacties vonden plaats door de verplaatsing en verhuizing van mensen en objecten en door transport en mobiliteit die territoriale grenzen overschreden. Bij het schrijven van de geschiedenis van de moderne kunst is het daarom cruciaal om het nationale te overstijgen door het transnationale kader uit te breiden.

Raden Saleh, ook erkend als pionier van de moderne Indonesische schilderkunst, toont de invloed van Europese kunstnetwerken op Indonesische schilders. Tijdens zijn twee decennia in Europa knoopte hij relaties aan met Nederlandse en Duitse kunstenaars, ambtenaren en aristocraten, wat hem hielp een artistieke identiteit te ontwikkelen die een brug sloeg tussen Oosterse en Westerse culturen. Via Raden Saleh zien we het belang van internationale samenwerking en creatieve uitwisseling tijdens het koloniale tijdperk.

Zoals hierboven geïllustreerd, geven Noto Soeroto, Sudjojono en Raden Saleh slechts een eenvoudig beeld van de bedoeling en het doel van dit onderzoek, dat een bredere reikwijdte heeft. Bovendien heeft dit onderzoek een bredere reikwijdte. Zoals hierboven vermeld, analyseert het hoe Indonesische moderne kunsthistorici hebben geschreven over drie belangrijke periodes: de “Nederlandse koloniale periode”, de “Japanse bezettingstijd” en de “Revolutionaire periode.”

De bespreking van de Nederlandse koloniale periode is verdeeld in drie casussen: Raden Saleh, Mooi Indië en PERSAGI; elk wordt geanalyseerd aan de hand van de kenmerken van zijn thema's, gevolgd door een onderzoek naar de Japanse bezettingsperiode. De Revolutionaire Periode is verdeeld in twee thema's: de roep om revolutie en het debat over 'een Indonesische identiteit in de kunst.'

Het hoofdstuk over Raden Saleh onderzoekt het debat over zijn identiteit, waarbij de vraag wordt gesteld of hij een nationalist was of een schilder die loyaal was aan de koloniale regering. Het betoogt dat het

schrijven van geschiedenis vanuit een nationalistisch perspectief de neiging heeft om zich alleen op deze tweedeling te richten in plaats van zijn artistieke werk diepgaand te onderzoeken. Het hoofdstuk bespreekt ook de zogenaamde 'lege periode' in de Indonesische kunstgeschiedenis na de dood van Raden Saleh in 1880. Het doel is om de invloeden te traceren van degenen die beschouwd worden als Raden Saleh's leerlingen, maar ook van andere kunstenaars buiten zijn directe kring. Daarnaast beoogt dit gedeelte een uitgebreider verhaal te creëren door inzichten uit verschillende bronnen te verzamelen.

Het hoofdstuk over Mooi Indië verkent de oorsprong van Mooi Indië aan de hand van twee prominente schilders, Fredericus Jacobus van Rossum du Chattel en Sudjojono, die elk een ander perspectief op Indonesië vertegenwoordigen. De werken van Du Chattel, die dateren uit 1913, bezingen weelderige landschappen en idyllische scènes van het plattelandleven, en geven een geïdealiseerd beeld van de archipel. Sudjojono daarentegen benadrukt de strijd en transformaties van het land door thema's als armoede en industrialisatie af te beelden. Zijn beroemde kritiek op de landschapsschilderkunst droeg bij aan het stigma rond de term Mooi Indië in de geschiedschrijving van de moderne Indonesische kunst. Sudjojono was niet de eerste die dit stigma creëerde; de criticus Johannes Tielrooy was hem al voor. De opkomst van de landschapsschilderkunst was nauw verbonden met de komst van Europese kunstenaars naar Nederlands-Indië. Dit hoofdstuk onderzoekt dus ook hun beweegredenen om te komen.

Het hoofdstuk over PERSAGI bespreekt de mythes rond deze vereniging in de geschiedschrijving van de moderne Indonesische kunst. PERSAGI is bijvoorbeeld de eerste nationalistische kunstenaarsvereniging in Indonesië en geniet een prominente status in discussies over moderne Indonesische kunst. Dit hoofdstuk analyseert echter kritisch de karakterisering van PERSAGI als een vereniging die zich agressief verzette tegen het kolonialisme. De studie concludeert dat dergelijke opvattingen worden gepresenteerd zonder empirisch bewijs en worden geuit door kunsthistorici met een nationaal georiënteerde benadering.

Het hoofdstuk over de Japanse bezetting bespreekt de grote invloed van Japan tijdens de controle over Nederlands-Indië van 1942 tot 1945. Dit hoofdstuk belicht het gebrek aan gedetailleerde documentatie van cruciale historische gebeurtenissen gedurende zo'n drie jaar. De geschiedschrijving van de moderne Indonesische kunstcanon neigt ertoe deze periode te negeren. Japan speelde een rol in de ontwikkeling van de Indonesische kunst

door faciliteiten te bieden zoals ateliers en opleidingen, kunstmaterialen en tentoonstellingsmogelijkheden.

Het hoofdstuk over de roep om een revolutie presenteert een herzien verhaal over de betekenis van de nationale revolutie van Indonesië (1945-1950) voor de ontwikkeling van de moderne kunst, waarbij gebruik wordt gemaakt van verwaarloosde bronnen zoals tijdschriften, kranten en memoires. Het hoofdstuk merkt op dat toonaangevende historici van moderne Indonesische kunst, waaronder Claire Holt, Sanento Yuliman, Jim Supangkat, Helena Spanjaard en M. Agus Burhan, vaak de chronologische context hebben verwaarloosd in hun verslagen. In Holts deel over de revolutionaire periode bijvoorbeeld, worden de gebeurtenissen van eind 1945 tot begin 1947 slechts kort genoemd, samen met de vorming van kunstenaarscollectieven. Op dezelfde manier vereenvoudigen Yuliman en Supangkat het verhaal van de migratie van kunstenaars naar Yogyakarta door zich te richten op de verhuizing van de hoofdstad door de regering zonder in te gaan op de implicaties daarvan. Burhan, een nieuwere onderzoeker in het veld, benadrukt ook de migratie van kunstenaars, maar geeft geen gedetailleerde chronologie, wat resulteert in een gefragmenteerd verhaal. Hoewel hij verschillende kunstenaarscollectieven opsomt die in deze periode ontstonden, mist hij een duidelijke tijdlijn en context. In dit hoofdstuk wordt betoogd dat de revolutionaire periode vanuit meerdere perspectieven moet worden onderzocht, waaronder artistieke productie, bewegingen, tentoonstellingen en kunstenaarsnetwerken, om een genuanceerder begrip van het tijdperk te krijgen.

Het hoofdstuk over *Indonesianness* verkent de debatten over de identiteit van moderne Indonesische kunst tijdens de revolutionaire periode, die ondervertegenwoordigd zijn in de canonieke geschiedschrijving. Bij de debatten over Indonesischheid in de Indonesische kunst waren zowel Indonesische als Nederlandse kunstenaars en critici betrokken. Na de Onafhankelijkheidsverklaring definieerden Indonesische kunstenaars actief hun nationale culturele identiteit in de schilderkunst, waarbij ze de nadruk legden op “Indonesianness in art.” Dit maakte deel uit van een breder verlangen naar zelfbeschikking en artistiek behoud. Het discours van de Indonesische identiteit in de kunst werd gecompliceerd door historische invloeden, met name koloniale erfenissen, en interacties met westerse kunst. Tijdens de revolutie, tussen 1945 en 1950, debatteerden kunstenaars en critici over de verdiensten van het terugkeren naar prekoloniale wortels of het ontwikkelen van een hybride cultuur met Indonesische en Westerse

invloeden. Deze periode werd gekenmerkt door fundamentele debatten, in het bijzonder door tentoonstellingen die werden besproken in het Nederlandstalige tijdschrift *Uitzicht*, wat een reeks meningen opriep onder critici zoals J.M. Hopman en Simon Admiraal over de authenticiteit van moderne Indonesische kunst. Dit hoofdstuk bespreekt en verrijkt ook de context van het debat tussen Trisno Sumardjo, Soemarno Soetoesoendoro en Sudjojono en de impact ervan.

Het laatste hoofdstuk bevat de onderzoeksconclusies. Op verzoek van president Soeharto heeft Indonesië zijn eerste publicatie van Indonesische kunstgeschiedenis gehad. Zoals uit het onderzoek blijkt, zijn er echter problemen met deze en andere publicaties die niet het hele verhaal vertellen. Dit afsluitende hoofdstuk bevestigt ook het onderzoeksargument dat de geboorte van de moderne Indonesische kunst niet geïsoleerd plaatsvond, maar werd ontwikkeld via een netwerk waarbij verschillende niet-Indonesische personen en instellingen betrokken waren. De canonisering van de kunstgeschiedenis heeft plaatsgevonden vanuit een nationaal perspectief zonder volledige historische bronnen, waardoor de reikwijdte werd beperkt en het verhaal werd verarmd. Hoewel wetenschappers en conservatoren de geschiedenis van de moderne Indonesische kunst nu voortdurend aanpassen, hebben de daaruit voortvloeiende publicaties de neiging om oude ideeën te recyclen, wat duidt op een stagnatie in de geschiedschrijving. Dit onderzoek heeft aangetoond dat het verbreden van het verhaal met transnationale bronnen en het loslaten van het nationale perspectief nieuwe, bredere inzichten kan opleveren, die de weg vrij maken voor een nieuwe, inclusievere Indonesische kunstgeschiedenis.



Summary

In 1976, President Suharto called for a history of Indonesian art to be written. Two years later, the Indonesian government, through the Ministry of Education and Culture, published *Sejarah Seni Rupa Indonesia* (History of Indonesian Art). The book, published in 1979, is an essential reference for teaching Indonesian art history. Compared to other publications on the same subjects, this book is the first and only publication to use the word 'history' in its title. The Indonesian government stated that the reason for publishing *Sejarah Seni Rupa Indonesia* was the scarcity of publications on Indonesian art by Indonesian scholars. It was also noted that foreign authors generally wrote various publications on Indonesian art, usually in foreign languages, making it difficult for Indonesian people to read them. The Indonesian government also believed that books on Indonesian art written by foreign authors did not accurately represent national aspirations.

The book *Sejarah Seni Rupa Indonesia* is divided into four mega-chapters, each representing one of the historical periods: "Pra-Sejarah (Pre-history)," "Seni Rupa Zaman Klasik di Indonesia (Classical Art Period in Indonesia)," "Seni Rupa Indonesia-Islam (Indonesian Islamic Art)," and "Kedudukan Seni Rupa Baru (Position of New/Modern Art)." The last chapter, which is the subject of this research, is further divided into six sub-periods: "Masa Perintis Seni Rupa Kontemporer Indonesia (The Pioneering Period of Indonesian Contemporary Art)," "Periode Seni Lukis Hindia Molek (The Period of Mooi Indië Painting)," "Berdirinya PERSAGI (The Birth of PERSAGI)," "Seni Lukis Indonesia pada Masa Pendudukan Jepang, 1942-1945 (Indonesian Painting in the Japanese Occupation Period, 1942-1945)," "Periode Pendirian Sanggar-Sanggar Antara Tahun 1945-1950 (The Studio Period, 1945-1950)," "Perkembangan Seni Rupa Modern di Indonesia dari Pengamatan Sesudah 1950 (The Development of Modern Art in Indonesia after 1950)," and "Seni Patung Baru Indonesia (The New Indonesian Sculpture)." To date, the comprehensive sequence and nomenclature of this period has achieved canonical status within the historiography of Indonesian modern art. By proposing a simplified structure into three main periods: "The Dutch Colonial Period," "The Japanese Occupation Period," and "The

Revolutionary Period," this study found three factors that determine how each period is written, both in the book *History of Indonesian Fine Arts* and similar publications, whether written by Indonesian or non-Indonesian historians. The three factors are the use of "historical sources," the dynamics of "continuity and discontinuity," and the "nation-centered paradigm."

This study highlights the challenges of locating historical sources, which include various artworks, documents, and publications. The scarcity and availability of these sources create limitations for historiographers in narrating the history of modern Indonesian art. These narrative limitations pose problems of 'continuity and discontinuity' in historical events. The analysis of both underlines the importance of placing an event in its historical context by uncovering historical sources. Furthermore, the canon of modern Indonesian art history tends to ignore international interactions and relations. This study concludes that writing history with a "nation-centered paradigm" is too dominant, tending to marginalize non-Indonesian influences and historicizing only nationalist artists as heroes.

This research argues that we can no longer rely on the products of modern Indonesian art history that are currently available, such as the book *Sejarah Seni Rupa Indonesia*, to name one example. Another argument is that if art history is written only from a nationalist perspective, the historical product will limit the historiography or not acknowledge the complexity of the exchange of artistic ideas across national boundaries. Therefore, this dissertation suggests that a nationalist approach should be combined with a transnational approach focusing on cultural transfer, connections, circulation, exchange of ideas, influence, cross-border collaboration, and interrelated or shared histories. Thus, writing art history with national and transnational approaches also involves finding and revealing historical sources deliberately hidden or never used by art historians. Revealing national and transnational historical sources is crucial because it sharpens the historical context and links between individuals (artists, critics, historians) and institutions. Three brief examples by Noto Soeroto, S. Sudjojono, and Raden Saleh will illustrate the above argument.

Noto Soeroto is recognized as the first Indonesian art historian; whose writings were influential yet often overlooked because of nationalist bias. Nationalist critics like Trisno Sumardjo labeled him a colonial stooge, while another critic, Bakri Siregar, criticized him for being excessively Westernized. Another significant figure in modern Indonesian art is Sudjojono, who is often referred to as the Father of Modern Indonesian

Painting. He played a crucial role in the founding of PERSAGI (the Indonesian Drawing Experts Association) in 1938. However, there are other important aspects of Sudjojono's involvement and the significance of PERSAGI in the art scene of colonial Indonesia that are rarely discussed. One such aspect is the *Nederlandsch-Indische Kunstkring*, an institution founded in Batavia in 1902, which later evolved into the *Bataviaasche Kunstkring*. This center for modern art embraced various forms of expression, including dance, theater, and music, and made substantial contributions to the Indies art community.

In January 1935, the *Kunstkring* organized the first exhibition of modern European painting, curated from the collection of Pierre Alexander Regnault. This exhibition presented Regnault's collection in five separate programs. The Regnault collection exhibitions aimed to introduce international art to local artists, bridging the gap between the Dutch East Indies and Western modern painting. Regnault was a collector and entrepreneur, with a paint factory in Java. He also published the magazine *Verfen Kunst*, which became a medium for promoting his paint products and featured articles on modern European painting. Art historian J. de Loos-Haaxman made a significant contribution to the curation of Regnault's collections. Through *Kunstkring*, she facilitated the relationship between Indonesian artists and modern European painters. *Kunstkring* also exhibited the works of Indonesian painters through various programs. In 1940, Sudjojono reviewed the fifth exhibition of Regnault's collection. He praised the artistic quality displayed and encouraged local painters to participate in the modernist movement. Overall, it can be assumed that all the exhibition programs by *Kunstkring* profoundly impacted the art world in the Dutch East Indies and fostered a new appreciation for modernism among Indonesian painters.

Raden Saleh, also recognized as a pioneer of modern Indonesian painting, shows the influence of European art networks on Indonesian painters. During his two decades in Europe, he established relationships with Dutch and German artists, officials, and aristocrats, which helped him develop an artistic identity that bridged Eastern and Western cultures. Through Raden Saleh, we see the importance of international collaboration and creative exchange during the colonial era.

Therefore, Noto Soeroto, Sudjojono, and Raden Saleh show how ideas, texts, and artworks circulated in cosmopolitan urban centers during the colonial era, demonstrating that modern painting was not confined to

isolated environments. Interactions took place through the movement and relocation of people and objects and through transport and mobility that transcended territorial boundaries. In writing the history of modern art, therefore, it is crucial to move beyond the national by expanding its transnational framework.

As illustrated above, Noto Soeroto, Sudjojono and Raden Saleh represent only a simple picture of the intent and purpose of this research. In addition, this research expands into a broader scope. As mentioned above, it analyses how Indonesian modern art historians have written about three significant periods: the "Dutch Colonial Period," the "Japanese Occupation Period," and the "Revolutionary Period."

The discussion of the Dutch colonial period is divided into three cases: Raden Saleh, Mooi Indië, and PERSAGI; each is analyzed according to the characteristics of its themes, followed by an examination of the Japanese occupation period. The Revolutionary Period is divided into two themes: the call for revolution and the debate on Indonesianness in art.

The chapter on Raden Saleh explores the debate over his identity, asking whether he was a nationalist or a painter loyal to the colonial government. It argues that writing history from a nationalist perspective tends to focus solely on this dichotomy rather than examining his artistic work in depth. The chapter also discusses the so-called 'empty period' in Indonesian art history after Raden Saleh died in 1880. The aim is to trace the influences of those considered to be Raden Saleh's students, as well as other artists outside his immediate circle. In addition, this section aims to create a more comprehensive narrative by gathering insights from various, partly hitherto unused, sources.

The chapter on Mooi Indië explores the origins of Mooi Indië through two prominent painters, Fredericus Jacobus van Rossum du Chattel and Sudjojono, each representing a different perspective on Indonesia. Du Chattel's works, dating from 1913, celebrate lush landscapes and idyllic scenes of rural life, capturing an idealized vision of the archipelago. In contrast, Sudjojono highlights the country's struggles and transformations by depicting themes of poverty and industrialization. His famous critique of landscape painting contributed to the stigma surrounding the term Mooi Indië in the historiography of modern Indonesian art. Sudjojono was not the first to create this stigma; the critic Johannes Tielrooy had done so before him. The rise of landscape painting was closely linked to the arrival of

European artists in the Dutch East Indies, so this chapter also explores their motivations for coming.

The chapter on PERSAGI discusses the myths surrounding this association in the historiography of modern Indonesian art. PERSAGI is the first nationalist artists' association in Indonesia and enjoys a prominent status in discussions of modern Indonesian art. However, this chapter critically analyses the characterisation of PERSAGI as an association that, for example, aggressively opposed colonialism. The study concludes that such views are presented without empirical evidence and are voiced by art historians with a national-centred approach.

The chapter on the Japanese occupation discusses the significant influence of Japan during its control of the Dutch East Indies from 1942 to 1945. This chapter highlights the lack of detailed documentation of critical historical events during some three years. The historiography of the modern Indonesian art canon tends to ignore this period. Japan contributed to developing Indonesian art by providing facilities such as studios, training, art materials, and exhibition opportunities. In 1942, the Japanese military established the *Sendenbu*, a propaganda corps. Through it, Indonesian artists were encouraged to strengthen their national identity in connection with Asian culture.

The chapter on the Call of Revolution presents a revised narrative of the importance of Indonesia's national revolution (1945-1950) for the development of modern art, drawing on neglected sources such as magazines, newspapers, and memoirs. The chapter notes that leading historians of modern Indonesian art, including Claire Holt, Sanento Yuliman, Jim Supangkat, Helena Spanjaard, and M. Agus Burhan, have often neglected chronological context in their accounts. For example, Holt's section on the revolutionary period briefly glimpses events from late 1945 to early 1947, mentioning only the formation of artists' collectives. Similarly, Yuliman and Supangkat simplify the narrative of an artists' migration to Yogyakarta, focusing on the government's relocation of the capital without delving into its implications. Burhan, a newer researcher in the field, also emphasizes the migration of artists but fails to provide a detailed chronology, resulting in a fragmented narrative. Although he lists several artist collectives that formed during this period, his work lacks a clear timeline and context. This chapter argues that the revolutionary period should be explored from multiple perspectives, including artistic production, movements, exhibitions, and artist networks, to provide a more nuanced understanding of the era.

The chapter on Indonesianness explores the debates about the identity of modern Indonesian art during the revolutionary period, which are underrepresented in canonical historiography. The debates about Indonesianness in Indonesian art involved both Indonesian artists and critics, as well as Dutch ones. After the Declaration of Independence, Indonesian artists actively defined their national cultural identity in painting, emphasizing “Indonesianness in art.” This was part of a broader desire for self-determination and artistic preservation. The discourse of Indonesian identity in art was complicated by historical influences, particularly colonial legacies, and interactions with Western art. During the revolution, between 1945 and 1950, artists and critics debated the merits of returning to pre-colonial roots or developing a hybrid culture incorporating Indonesian and Western influences. This period was marked by fundamental debates, particularly through exhibitions reviewed in the Dutch-language magazine *Uitzicht*, which sparked a range of opinions among critics such as J.M. Hopman and Simon Admiraal about the authenticity of modern Indonesian art. This chapter also discusses and enriches the context of the debate between Trisno Sumardjo, Soemarno Soetoesoendoro, and Sudjojono, and its impact.

The final chapter offers some research conclusions. At the request of President Soeharto, Indonesia had its first publication of Indonesian art history. However, as the research shows, there are problems with this and other publications that are not straightforward. This concluding chapter also reaffirms the research argument that the birth of modern Indonesian art did not occur in isolation but was developed through a network involving various non-Indonesian individuals and institutions. The canonization of art history has been done through a nation-centered perspective without complete historical sources, thus limiting the scope and impoverishing the narrative. Although scholars and curators are now continuously modifying the history of modern Indonesian art, the resulting publications tend to recycle old ideas, indicating a stagnation in historiography. This research has shown that broadening the narrative with transnational sources and moving away from the national-centric perspective can provide new, broader insights that pave the way for a new, more inclusive Indonesian art history.

Ringkasan

Pada 1976, Presiden Soeharto menghimbau agar dilakukan penulisan sejarah seni rupa Indonesia. Dua tahun kemudian, Pemerintah Indonesia, melalui Kemeterian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan menerbitkan buku berjudul *Sejarah Seni Rupa Indonesia*. Buku yang terbit pada 1979 ini berfungsi sebagai referensi dasar untuk pendidikan tentang sejarah seni rupa Indonesia. Dibandingkan dengan publikasi-publikasi sejarah seni rupa Indonesia lainnya, buku ini adalah publikasi pertama dan satu-satunya yang menggunakan kata “sejarah” sebagai judulnya. Pemerintah Indonesia melalui kementeriannya menyatakan bahwa alasan dibalik penerbitan buku *Sejarah Seni Rupa Indonesia* adalah karena langkanya publikasi mengenai seni rupa Indonesia dalam Bahasa Indonesia yang ditulis oleh sarjana Indonesia. Dikatakan pula bahwa berbagai publikasi tentang seni rupa Indonesia umumnya ditulis oleh penulis-penulis luar negeri dan umumnya berbahasa asing. Sehingga, meskipun kualitas materi dan risetnya cukup tinggi, masyarakat Indonesia mengalami kesulitan untuk membacanya. Pemerintah Indonesia juga berpandangan bahwa buku-buku seni rupa yang ditulis oleh penulis asing itu tidak mewakili aspirasi nasional secara akurat.

Buku ini menawarkan sistem periodisasi sejarah yang terbagi ke dalam empat periode besar, yaitu “Pra-Sejarah”, “Seni Rupa Zaman Klasik di Indonesia”, “Seni Rupa Indonesia-Islam,” dan “Kedudukan Seni Rupa Baru.” Penelitian ini menyoroti periode yang disebut terakhir. Tim penulis buku *Sejarah Seni Rupa Indonesia* kemudian membagi periode “Kedudukan Seni Rupa Baru” ke dalam tujuh subperiode sebagai berikut: “Masa Perintis Seni Rupa Kontemporer Indonesia”, “Periode Seni Lukis Hindia Molek”, “Berdirinya PERSAGI”, “Seni Lukis Indonesia pada Masa Pendudukan Jepang 1942-1945”, “Periode Pendirian Sanggar-sanggar Antara Tahun 1945-1950”, “Perkembangan Seni Rupa Modern di Indonesia dari Pengamatan Sesudah 1950”, dan “Seni Patung Baru Indonesia.” Dengan mengusulkan struktur yang disederhanakan menjadi tiga periode utama: “Periode Kolonial Belanda,” “Periode Pendudukan Jepang,” dan “Periode Revolusi,” penelitian ini menemukan tiga faktor yang menentukan bagaimana masing-masing periode tersebut ditulis, baik dalam buku *Sejarah*

Seni Rupa Indonesia maupun publikasi-publikasi sejenis, apakah itu ditulis oleh sejarawan Indonesia maupun non-Indonesia. Tiga faktor itu adalah: penggunaan "sumber-sumber sejarah", dinamika "kesinambungan dan ketidaksinambungan," dan "paradigma yang berpusat pada bangsa."

Penelitian ini menyoroti tantangan dalam menemukan sumber-sumber sejarah, yang mencakup berbagai karya seni, dokumen, dan publikasi. Kelangkaan dan ketersediaan sumber-sumber ini pada gilirannya menyebabkan keterbatasan para historiografer dalam menarasikan sejarah seni rupa modern Indonesia. Efek dari keterbatasan narasi ini menciptakan masalah dalam hal "kesinambungan dan ketidaksinambungan" dalam peristiwa sejarah. Analisis terhadap ke-dua hal ini menggarisbawahi pentingnya menempatkan suatu peristiwa dalam konteks historisnya. Sebaliknya, kanon sejarah seni rupa modern Indonesia cenderung mengabaikan interaksi dan hubungan internasional. Sehubungan dengan aspek tersebut, penelitian ini kemudian menemukan bahwa menulis sejarah dengan "paradigma yang berpusat pada bangsa" terlalu dominan sehingga cenderung meminggirkan pengaruh non-Indonesia dan hanya menghistoriskan seniman-seniman nasionalis sebagai pahlawan.

Penelitian ini menawarkan argumen bahwa apabila kita tidak bisa lagi mengandalkan produk-produk sejarah seni rupa modern Indonesia yang kini tersedia, seperti buku *Sejarah Seni Rupa Indonesia* di atas - untuk menyebut salah satu contoh. Argumen lainnya adalah apabila sejarah seni rupa ditulis hanya bertumpu pada perspektif nasionalistik maka produk sejarah itu tidak akan memperluas historiografi dan tidak mengakui kompleksitas pertukaran ide dan artistik di luar batas negara. Perspektif dari produk sejarah yang dihasilkan cenderung sempit karena menutup hubungan-hubungan atau jejaring yang pernah terjadi antar individu dan institusi dalam peristiwa sejarah. Oleh karena itu, disertasi ini menawarkan bahwa pendekatan nasionalistik selayaknya dipadu dengan pendekatan transnasional yang membidik aspek-aspek seperti transfer (budaya), koneksi, sirkulasi, pertukaran ide, pengaruh, dan kolaborasi lintas batas, dan sejarah yang saling terkait atau bersama. Dengan demikian, menulis sejarah seni rupa dengan pendekatan nasional dan transnasional adalah juga menemukan serta mengungkap sumber-sumber sejarah yang selama ini terpendam - atau sengaja dipendam - atau belum pernah dimanfaatkan oleh sejarawan seni. Mengungkap sumber-sumber sejarah nasional dan transnasional adalah langkah penting karena akan menajamkan konteks sejarah, pertautan di antara individu (seniman, kritikus, sejarawan) dan institusi. Tiga contoh

singkat melalui Noto Soeroto, S. Sudjojono, dan Raden Saleh dibawah ini akan mengilustrasikan argumen tersebut di atas.

Noto Soeroto, misalnya, adalah individu dan dinyatakan dalam disertasi ini sebagai sejarawan seni Indonesia pertama, yang tulisan-tulisannya berdampak tetapi sering diabaikan karena bias nasionalistis. Kritikus nasionalis seperti Trisno Sumardjo menuduhnya sebagai antek kolonial, sementara kritikus lainnya, Bakri Siregar, menggambarkan Soeroto sebagai orang yang terlalu kebarat-baratan. Contoh lainnya adalah Sudjojono. Dia adalah narator utama dalam sejarah seni rupa modern Indonesia dan pernah dinobatkan sebagai Bapak Seni Lukis Modern Indonesia. Dia berperan kuat dalam pendirian PERSAGI (Persatuan Ahli-ahli Gambar Indonesia) pada 1938. Namun demikian, hampir tidak pernah dibahas bahwa terdapat peran-peran lain dibalik kehadiran Sudjojono dan PERSAGI di tengah medan seni Hindia Belanda (kolonial Indonesia). Salah satunya adalah institusi yang dikenal dengan *Nederlandsch-Indische Kunstkring*, yang didirikan pada tahun 1902 di Batavia. Seiring berjalannya waktu, lembaga ini berkembang menjadi *Bataviaasche Kunstkring*, menjadi pusat seni modern, termasuk tari, teater, dan musik, serta memberikan kontribusi signifikan bagi komunitas seni di wilayah tersebut. Sejak Januari 1935, *Kunstkring* menyelenggarakan pameran seni lukis modern Eropa untuk pertama kalinya, berkat koleksi Pierre Alexander Regnault. Pameran koleksi Regnault berlangsung dalam lima program.

Pameran-pameran koleksi Regnault bertujuan untuk memperkenalkan seni internasional kepada seniman lokal, menjembatani kesenjangan antara Hindia Belanda dan seni lukis modern Barat. Regnault, dikenal sebagai kolektor dan pengusaha dengan pabrik catnya di Jawa. Ia juga menerbitkan majalah *Verf en Kunst* yang tidak saja menjadi media promosi produk catnya, tetapi juga menampilkan artikel-artikel seni lukis modern Eropa. Sejarawan seni J. de Loos-Haaxman juga memberikan kontribusi signifikan dalam mengkurasi pameran ini. Melalui *Kunstkring*, dia memfasilitasi hubungan antara seniman Indonesia dan pelukis Eropa modern. *Kunstkring* juga memamerkan karya pelukis-pelukis Indonesia melalui sejumlah program. Pada tahun 1940, Sudjojono merenungkan pameran ke-lima koleksi Regnault. Ia memuji kualitas seni yang ditampilkan dan mendorong pelukis lokal untuk terlibat dengan gerakan modernis yang diwakilinya. Secara keseluruhan, bisa dikatakan bahwa semua program pameran yang dilakukan *Kunstkring* memberi dampak yang mendalam pada dunia seni di Hindia Belanda, dan menumbuhkan apresiasi baru terhadap

modernisme di kalangan seniman lokal.

Pengaruh jaringan seni Eropa terhadap pelukis Indonesia, bisa diamati pada Raden Saleh, pelukis yang juga diakui sebagai perintis seni lukis modern Indonesia. Raden Saleh menjalin hubungan dengan para seniman, pejabat dan aristokrat Belanda juga Jerman selama dua dekade tinggal di Eropa, yang membantunya mengembangkan identitas artistik untuk menjembatani budaya Timur dan Barat. Melalui Raden Saleh kita diperlihatkan akan pentingnya kolaborasi internasional dan pertukaran seni selama era colonial. Pada gilirannya, Noto Soeroto, Sudjojono, dan Raden Saleh memperlihatkan bagaimana penyebaran ide, teks, dan karya seni terjadi di pusat-pusat kota kosmopolitan selama era kolonial, sekaligus menunjukkan bahwa seni lukis modern tidak terbatas pada lingkungan yang terisolasi. Interaksi terjadi karena pergerakan dan relokasi manusia dan objek serta transportasi dan mobilitas yang melampaui batas-batas teritorial. Oleh karena itu, dalam menulis sejarah seni rupa modern, penting untuk melampaui kenasionalan dengan menebalkan kerangka ketransnasionalannya.

Noto Soeroto, Sudjojono dan Raden Saleh dalam hal ini mewakili gambaran kecil saja dari maksud dan tujuan penelitian ini. Lebih jauh lagi, penelitian ini melangkah ke dalam cakupan yang lebih luas. Sebagaimana yang telah disebutkan sebelumnya, penelitian ini menganalisis bagaimana tiga periode besar, yaitu “Periode Kolonial Belanda,” “Periode Pendudukan Jepang,” dan “Periode Revolusi,” ditulis oleh para penulis sejarah seni rupa modern Indonesia. Penelitian ini ditutup dengan Bab Kesimpulan.

Pembahasan periode Kolonial Belanda terbagi ke dalam tiga kasus, yaitu Tentang Raden Saleh, Tentang Mooi Indie, dan Tentang PERSAGI yang masing-masing dibahas berdasarkan karakteristik permasalahannya. Periode Pendudukan Jepang dibahas secara tersendiri. Adapun Periode Revolusi dibagi ke dalam dua persoalan, yaitu: Tentang Panggilan Revolusi dan tentang Keindonesiaan.

Bab Tentang Raden Saleh membahas perdebatan seputar identitas Raden Saleh, apakah dia seorang nasionalis atau pelukis yang setia pada pemerintah kolonial. Bab ini beragumen bahwa penulisan sejarah dengan perspektif nasionalistik hanya akan terfokus pada dikotomi tersebut ketimbang membahas karya-karyanya. Bab ini juga membahas apa yang disebut dengan 'masa kosong' dalam sejarah seni rupa Indonesia setelah kematian Raden Saleh pada tahun 1880. Tujuannya adalah untuk menelusuri eksistensi mereka yang dipandang sebagai murid-murid Raden Saleh juga

seniman-seniman lainnya yang berada di luar lingkaran Raden Saleh. Bagian ini juga bertujuan memberikan narasi yang lebih komprehensif dengan menghimpun wawasan dari berbagai sumber.

Bab Tentang Mooi Indie Bab menelusuri asal-usul Mooi Indië melalui dua pelukis terkemuka, Fredericus Jacobus van Rossum dan Chatteel dan Sudjojono, yang masing-masing mewakili perspektif berbeda tentang Indonesia. Karya-karya Du Chatteel, yang berasal dari tahun 1913, merayakan lanskap yang subur dan pemandangan kehidupan pedesaan yang indah, menangkap visi ideal kepulauan tersebut. Sebaliknya, interpretasi Sudjojono menyoroti perjuangan dan transformasi negara tersebut, menggambarkan tema-tema kemiskinan dan industrialisasi. Ejekan terkenal Sudjojono pada lukisan-lukisan pemandangan menyebabkan istilah Mooi Indië menjadi stigma dalam historiografi seni rupa modern Indonesia. Sudjojono bukanlah satu-satunya pelukis yang menyebabkan stigma tersebut. Sebelum dia, kritikus Johannes Tielrooy telah melakukannya. Popularitas seni lukis pemandangan tidak terlepas dari gelombang kedatangan pelukis-pelukis Eropa ke Hindia Belanda. Oleh karena itu, bab ini juga membahas bagaimana mereka datang dan motif yang melatarinya.

Bab Tentang PERSAGI, atau Persatuan Ahli-ahli Gambar Indonesia, membahas mitos tentang perkumpulan ini dalam historiografi seni rupa modern Indonesia. Misalnya, PERSAGI dikenal sebagai asosiasi seniman nasionalis pertama di Indonesia dan menikmati status menonjol dalam diskusi seni rupa Indonesia modern. Namun, bab ini secara kritis menganalisis bahwa predikat PERSAGI sebagai perkumpulan yang, misalnya, agresif dalam menentang kolonialisme. Penelitian menyimpulkan bahwa pandangan demikian dilakukan tanpa bukti empiris dan dinarasikan oleh penulis-penulis sejarah seni rupa dengan pendekatan nasio-sentris.

Bab Tentang Pendudukan Jepang membahas pengaruh signifikan Jepang selama menguasai Hindia Belanda pada 1942-1945. Bab ini menyoroti kurangnya dokumentasi terperinci mengenai peristiwa-peristiwa penting sejarah yang terjadi selama kurang lebih tiga tahun. Historiografi kanon seni rupa modern Indonesia cenderung mengabaikan periode ini. Padahal, Jepang telah berperan dalam mengembangkan seni rupa Indonesia melalui pemberian fasilitas seperti studi hingga peluang berpameran. Jepang berkontribusi dalam pengembangan seni rupa Indonesia dengan menyediakan fasilitas seperti studio, pelatihan, peralatan/material seni, dan kesempatan pameran. Pada tahun 1942, militer Jepang mendirikan *Sendenbu*, sebuah korps propaganda. Melalui korps ini, seniman Indonesia didorong

untuk memperkuat identitas nasional mereka dalam kaitannya dengan budaya Asia.

Bab Tentang Panggilan Revolusi menyajikan narasi yang direvisi tentang periode revolusi nasional Indonesia (1945-1950) dalam seni modern, dengan memanfaatkan sumber-sumber yang terabaikan seperti majalah, surat kabar, dan memoar. Bab ini mencatat bahwa para sejarawan seni rupa modern Indonesia terkemuka, termasuk Claire Holt, Sanento Yuliman, Jim Supangkat, Helena Spanjaard, dan M. Agus Burhan, sering mengabaikan konteks kronologis dalam catatan mereka. Misalnya, bagian Holt tentang periode revolusi kurang mendalam mengenai peristiwa-peristiwa pada akhir tahun 1945 dan awal tahun 1947, dan hanya menyebutkan berdirinya kolektif seniman. Demikian pula, Yuliman dan Supangkat menyederhanakan narasi tentang seniman yang bermigrasi ke Yogyakarta, dengan berfokus pada pemindahan ibu kota pemerintah tanpa menyelidiki lebih dalam implikasinya. Burhan, peneliti terbaru di bidang ini, juga menekankan migrasi seniman tetapi gagal memberikan kronologi yang terperinci, sehingga menghasilkan narasi yang terfragmentasi. Meskipun ia mencantumkan beberapa kolektif seniman yang terbentuk selama periode tersebut, karyanya tidak memiliki garis waktu dan konteks yang jelas. Bab ini berpendapat bahwa Periode Revolusi harus dieksplorasi melalui berbagai sudut pandang, termasuk produksi artistik, gerakan, pameran, dan jaringan seniman, untuk memberikan pemahaman yang lebih bernuansa tentang era tersebut.

Bab Tentang Keindonesiaan mengeksplorasi perdebatan tentang identitas seni rupa modern Indonesia yang berlangsung selama periode revolusi yang kurang dikaji dalam historiografi kanon. Perdebatan keindonesiaan dalam seni rupa Indonesia ini melibatkan tidak saja kalangan seniman dan kritikus Indonesia, tetapi juga Belanda. Setelah Deklarasi Kemerdekaan, para seniman Indonesia secara aktif terlibat dalam mendefinisikan identitas budaya nasional mereka dalam seni lukis, dengan menekankan “Keindonesiaan dalam seni”. Ini merupakan bagian dari keinginan yang lebih luas untuk menentukan nasib sendiri dan melestarikan budaya. Wacana seputar identitas Indonesia dalam seni menjadi rumit karena pengaruh sejarah, khususnya warisan kolonial dan interaksi dengan seni Barat. Selama revolusi berlangsung, antara tahun 1945 dan 1950, para seniman dan kritikus memperdebatkan manfaat kembali ke akar pra-kolonial versus mengembangkan budaya hibrida yang merangkul pengaruh Indonesia dan Barat. Periode ini ditandai oleh diskusi-diskusi penting, khususnya melalui pameran-pameran yang dikritik dalam majalah berbahasa Belanda

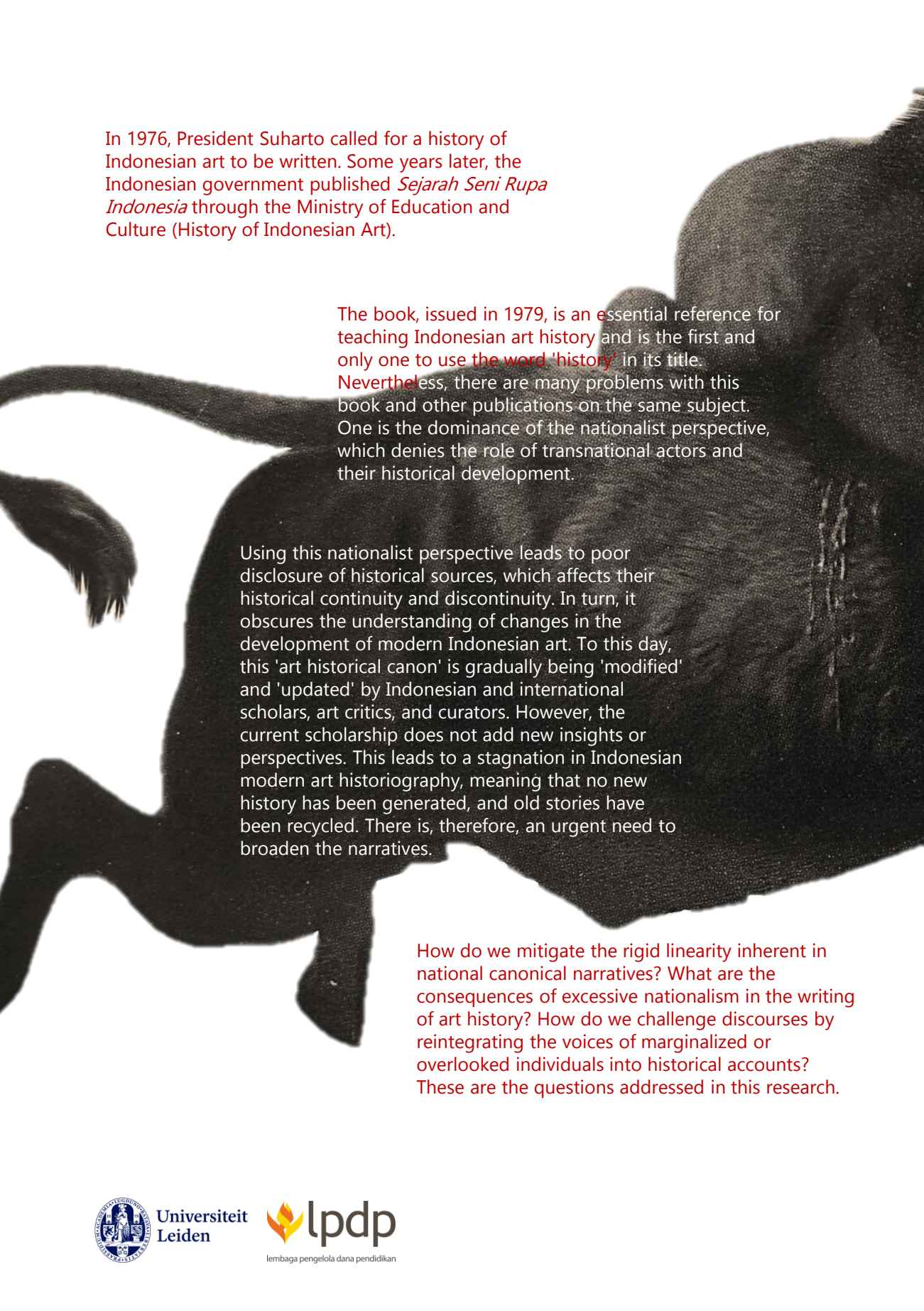
Uitzicht, yang memicu berbagai pendapat di antara para kritikus seperti J.M. Hopman dan Simon Admiraal tentang keaslian seni rupa modern Indonesia. Bab ini juga membahas dan menebalkan konteks perdebatan dan dampaknya yang terjadi antara Trisno Sumardjo, Soemarno Soetoesoendoro, dan Sudjojono.

Bab Kesimpulan menawarkan pendapat bahwa penulisan sejarah seni rupa Indonesia memainkan peran penting dalam membentuk identitas nasional, terutama sejak dukungan Presiden Soeharto untuk menulis sejarah seni rupa, yang berpuncak pada penerbitan "Sejarah Seni Rupa Indonesia" pada tahun 1979. Bab ini menguatkan argumen tesis ini bahwa kelahiran seni rupa modern Indonesia tidak berdiri sendiri melainkan terbentuk melalui jejaring yang melibatkan sejumlah individu dan institusi non-Indonesia. Kanonisasi sejarah terjadi melalui penggunaan perspektif nasio-sentris tanpa kelengkapan sumber-sumber sejarah sehingga membatasi ruang lingkup dan memiskinkan narasi. Meskipun kini ada modifikasi yang terus-menerus oleh para sarjana dan kurator yang menulis sejarah seni rupa modern Indonesia, publikasi yang dihasilkan cenderung mendaur ulang ide-ide lama, yang memperlihatkan terjadinya stagnasi dalam penulisan sejarah. Penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa perluasan narasi dengan sumber-sumber transnasional dan menjauh dari perspektif yang berpusat pada nasional dapat memberikan wawasan baru yang lebih luas yang membuka jalan bagi sejarah seni Indonesia baru yang lebih inklusif.



Curriculum Vitae

Aminudin TH Siregar was born in Jakarta in 1973 and moved to Bandung to earn his Bachelor of Arts at the Faculty of Art and Design, Bandung Institute of Technology, Indonesia. He completed his studies with etchings depicting the peasant struggle in Indonesia. His first solo exhibition was held in Bandung in 1998, followed by a commitment to work as a lecturer in Indonesian modern art history at his alma mater. In 1999, he initiated his first art project called *Blupart!*. From 2004 to 2017, he was the director of the Soemardja Gallery at the Faculty of Art and Design. During this time, he became more involved in art criticism and curated many art exhibitions and projects. He wrote frequently for newspapers, magazines, exhibition catalogs, and books. In 2002, he received curatorial research grants from the Asian Cultural Council in New York and the Gertrude Contemporary Art Space in Melbourne (2004). In 2008, he conducted research at the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum (FAAM) in Japan. From 2014 to 2015, he worked as an adjunct curator at the National Gallery of Singapore. In 2006, he completed his Master of Arts thesis on the discourse of Indonesian modern art, also at the Faculty of Art and Design, Bandung Institute of Technology to discover many problems in historiography. After completing his PhD at Leiden University, he will resume his position at Bandung Institute of Technology and continue researching transnational art history.



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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