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Indonesian modern art historiography: national and transnational perspectives

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

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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 *Soerabaiasch 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 *Soerabaiasch 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.

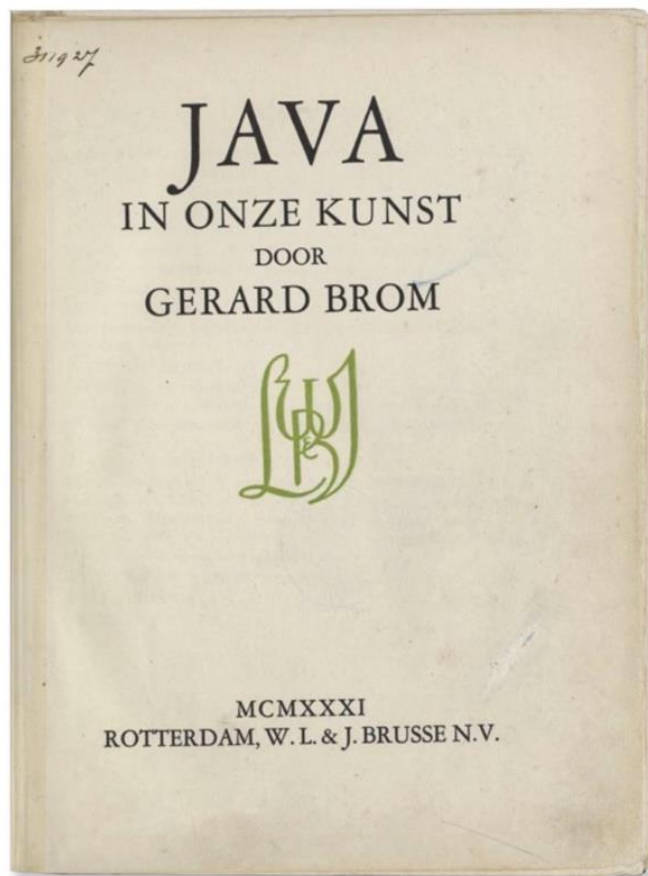


FIGURE 1.4.
Gerard Brom, *Java in Onze Kunst*, 1931.

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*

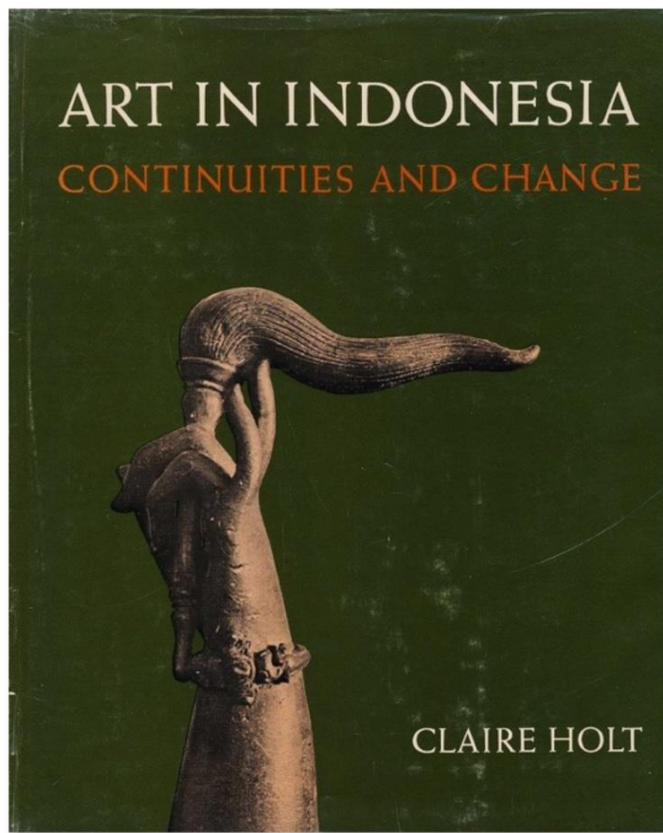


FIGURE 1.5.
Claire Holt, *Art in Indonesia-Continuities and Change*, 1967.

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.

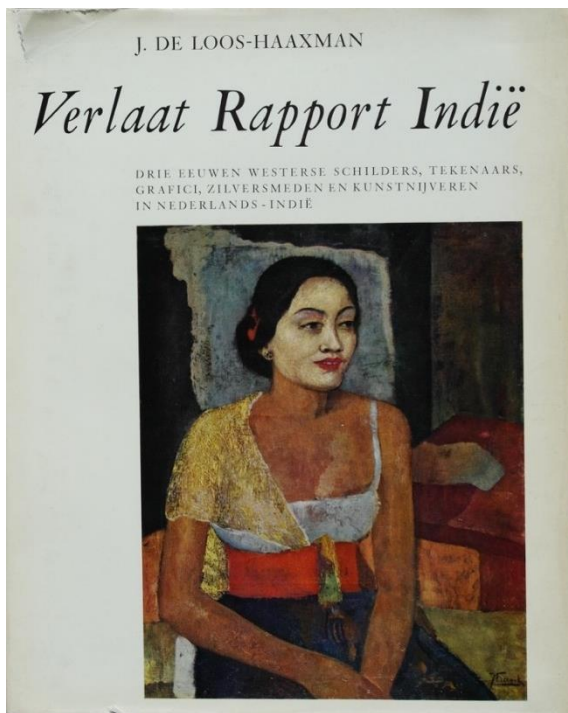


FIGURE 1.6.
J. De Loos-Haaxman, *Verlaat Rapport Indië*, 1968.

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.

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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 maakt ik van de gelegenheid gebruik hier, naast enige reproducties van zijn kunstwerken enz., wat inwijderig 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 zure moderne Javanische kunst.

Geboren uit Djidjaka in Jodiana, na zijn burgerrecht-onwikkelding geresideerd te hebben, als voorste zoon van een landeigenaar naar Holland gekomen, waar hij zich aan de Handels-hoogeschool 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. Soeropoetra (houster)

Raden Mas Jodiana

maakt of als werping volgendes te zijn, zijn bijzonder karakter verandert. Wij geven hier van zijn werk, van enkele jaren terug, een voorbeeld, waarom men niet zal hoe zich het speekel Oosters zoverre uitbreiden kan men zonder een specifiek Oosters aetherie 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, merkwor-dig 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'gpen voorbeeld van de klassieke Javanische kunst. T of deze boden zijn 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 grootheid van zijn persoon en de kleine wel-keits die uit zijn hoesenden spreekt mogen ons naast de ver-derstelijke zorgvuldigheid zijner tekeningen een waarschuwing zijn dat de ingehouden weg naar het begrip niet zal voeren. Toch dat de ingehouden weg aan moedwillen en belevenissen niet ontbreekt. Sinds hij zijn studie heeft opgegeven en de strijd



Nanyana (houster)

Raden Mas Jodiana

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 klein aanreiking was van een geestelijk scherpheid en zuiverheid ver-nieuwend vermogen waardoor hij wellicht een rol zou kunnen vervullen in de herleving der oude, groeniche, maar in verstande tradities verlaten later voorbestaan culture van zijn volk. Het eent is deze dring in hem tot uiting gekomen in zijn dansen. Hij was de typische Javanische danser meester, gelijk iedere ontwikkelde Javanen, vooral uit de Vastelanden, die verstaat. Naast Jodiana heeft vooral zijn dans als architect in Indonesië werk zure langzaam Soeroto Witoeso er veel toe bijgelegen de Westersche gescheiden toegankelijk te maken voor de geliese-stimige bekering en plastische schoonheid van deze nationale Javanische kunstvorm. Jodiana echter bereikte, na zijn eerste optreden ter gelegenheid van een in 1910 ter lering van den waterscood op Java in Den Haag gegeven gala-voorstelling meer dan een toeter door het eerste gelingen, opvallend bij weers, doordat in hem iets persoonlijk en onpersoonlijk school, dat hij zonder de strenge traditie en den geestelijken oorsprong der Javanische danskunst ontwaars te worden, op steeds meer be-heerschte en treffende wijze tot uiting wist te brengen. Hij heeft door zijn scherpheid talent de verstande schoonheid van een in een oede en electie door heldere studie te benutten betere kennis wettend spel van gebuende actie en minnet tot een hetschelijk levende en majestueus verbeelding gewerkt, die de aan geen natuurel gebonden al-menscheitje ontkennelijkheid in ruime kring heeft getroffen.



Makderusa (houster)

Raden Mas Jodiana

Daarlijk eigenaarschap die Jodiana als plastisch kunstenaar zoo aantrekkelijk en bijzonder maken, kenmerken ook zijn evolutie op grafisch gebied. Portretten en personel hebben hem reeds op jongeren lertijd aangetroffen, doch eent de beherende in-werking van hetgeen hij op dit gebied in Holland zag en bewon-derde hebben hem doelloos voort naar de toekomstenschiedwerkst doen grijpen om uiting te geven aan hetgeen te onging en ge-stalte samen in zijn ziel.

Een woord van waardering mag hier niet achterwege blijven voor zijn vriend en kunstbroeder Noto Soeroto, die in de vig-netten en versieringen welke Jodiana voor zijn uitgaaven levende, de mogelijkheden van een persoonlijk ausing openbreekt en door zijn weloverwogen en op zuiver begrip berend advies oomskenbaar heeft bijgelegen tot de ontwikkeling van Jodiana tot een overvloedig Javanen in maet tevens veldschiedheid antist. In welke richting dit advies wees mogen wij niet het oog op de in velerie geschriften van Noto Soeroto, o.a. in een optiel over „Wangbeekdane als grondslag eent Javanische schil-dereschool“ (opgenomen in het Gedenkboek van Boedi-Oetomo) vengende en verdelijde begrepen, als beheld veronderstel-len. Hetgeen Jodiana ons later als grafisch kunstenaar heeft te zien gegeven in het beste bewijs dat de daat gelukhijde opvatting eent Javanische kunst ook de zijne is. Aanvankelijk vooral schilderd onder de aanmoedigende leiding van Isaac Israels, vond Jodiana op den daer meer voldoening in de tekenkunst en het hoesenden, waarvan hij de techniek, ten-de van onzen bekenden beeldhouwer Jan Alfard. Al spoedig wist hij in deze materie iets te bereiken, dat, zonder technisch vol-

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

Collection of Leiden University Library
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.

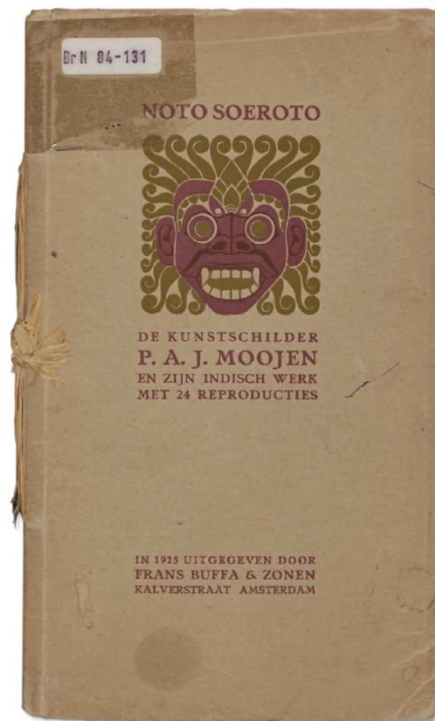


FIGURE 1.10.
The Moojen catalog for exhibition in Frans Buffa
en Zonen Kunsthandel, Amsterdam.

Leiden University Libraries Digital Collections

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

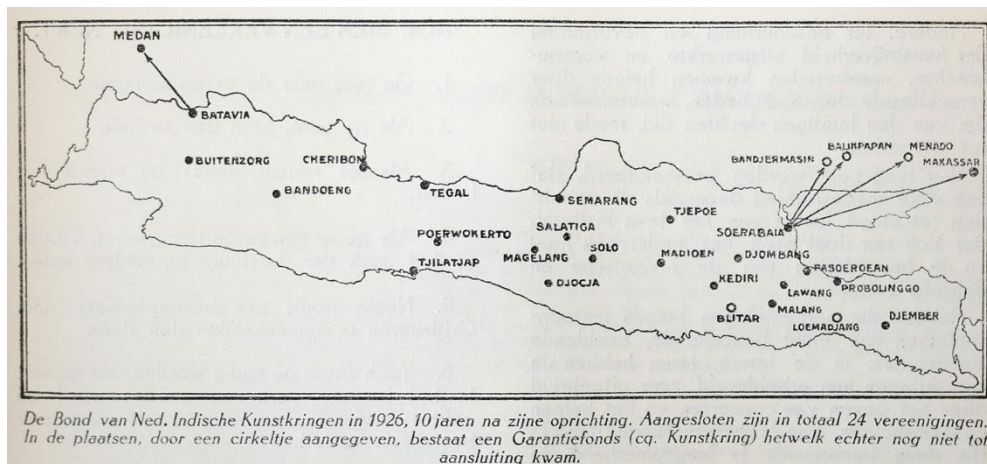
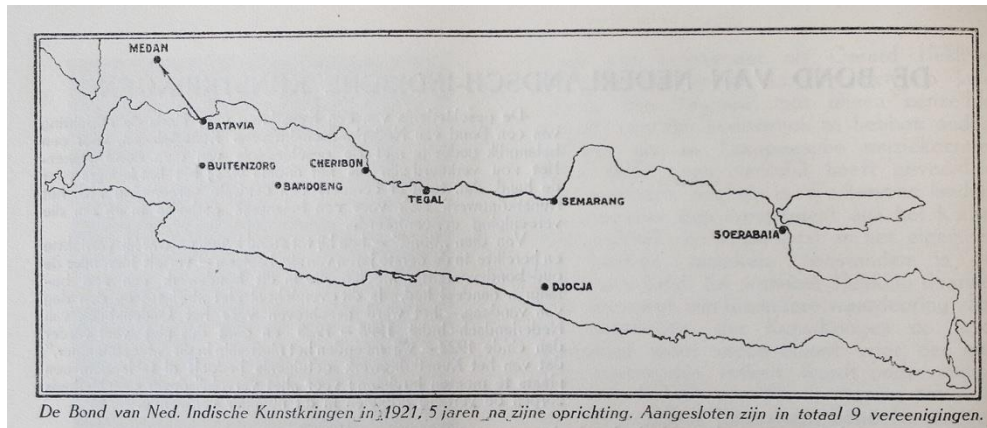


FIGURE 1.12. Kunstkring developed in 1921 (above) and in 1926 (below), with its branches in and outside Java.
(Source: *Ons Kringnieuws*, Jaargang I, Nummer 22, 1929)

Collection of Leiden University Library
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 Mieling, 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.

