ANEXOS

MEMÓRIA E CONTEMPORANEIDADE:
arte contemporânea indonésia – um projecto curatorial

Leonor Veiga de Oliveira Matos Guilherme

MESTRADO EM ESTUDOS CURATORIAIS

2010
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Orientação
Professor Doutor Fernando António Baptista Pereira

2010
## Anexo 1: Calendário

### Janeiro 2010

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ANEXO 2: ENTREVISTAS

Iwan Tirta (IT)

2nd January 2010, Jakarta, 2.00 pm

NV Talking about the contemporaneity of batik is not an easy task; there are not so much options and references to the media in the form of new appropriations.

IT In Bandung there is a man who makes batik with a computer, he draws the pattern with CAD\textsuperscript{1}. So they say it’s modern, but they use the canting to make the pattern. Thus it’s neither modern nor traditional. You should meet Mr. Koman, he calls his batiks «Batik fractal».

NV From your book I understood that you can’t separate batik from wayang and karawitan.

IT Everything is closely connected. But unfortunately contemporary artists don’t know the connection between all these. All modern artists don’t know gamelan music. They have no foundations.

NV Heri Dono, for instance, he knows wayang.

IT But batik, does he know batik?

NV Well, batik is the ceremonial cloth.

IT Yes, I know, but in the character of wayang, does he know which batik designs are represented?

NV I also don’t know.

IT That is the problem with Indonesian art: they don’t know the foundations. It’s like a contemporary ballet dancer without knowing classical ballet. That is why we now want universities to teach batik philosophy. The wayang puppets wear batik according to their character.

NV I never found a book that explained that.

IT There is no book that explains this.

N So, how is it possible to obtain this knowledge?

\textsuperscript{1} Computer Aided Design.
IT From the dalang, the puppet-maker. They have the knowledge and formally, the wayang is done by the dalang. To know this you have to talk with the wayang expert and the keris expert.

NV I would like to know, why does the Panji mask look like this?

I It has to do with the Javanese character. They avoid confrontation, they reach a compromise. In wayang, they don’t finish the war, it continues next time.
FX Harsono (FX)

10th January 2010, Via-Via Café, 4:00 pm

NV Can you speak Cantonese? You are of Chinese origin, right?

FX I am Indonesian-Chinese. I made an exhibition about that subject, called the Erased Time. Why are you interested in Indonesia?

NV Because there is a program, by the Indonesian Republic, to study in Indonesia. In 2006, I applied for arts, and was selected to come. I studied batik in ISI Yogyakarta and with a private teacher in Taman Sari.

My perception is that the sayings of Sudjojono are very important. I will start my presentation with your work, The Voices are Controlled by the Power. These masks are from the Panji epic, I believe they represent Javanese ethnicity and the Javanese way of life. I also have another work by you, Victim/The Burnt Dead. I will also show Jompet that, 15 years after you, made an installation that I relate conceptually to your work.

You are a Professor in Universitas Pelit Harapan in Jakarta.

FX I am just an artist.

NV I also know you are a founding member of GSRB (New Art Movement). This group doesn’t exist anymore, but I understand it was important because the books refer to it constantly. I read that the group wanted to «eliminate the boarders of fine-art and its relationship with kagunan». What is kagunan?

FX Kagunan means function. Crafts were much related to function.

NV How was it possible to make these works in a time of repression? How was the reception of your work?

FX So, first of all, about the New Art Movement. When you say that the movement was a successful representation for the arts, it was mainly for young artists. In Indonesia, artists like Sudjojono said explicitly that art must be made by hand, because the hand is the extension of the heart. The hand, he said, was very close to what you felt – if you are in love, you paint differently than if you are angry. Sudjojono was an expressionist. He represents modernist thinking. Now I understand that Sudjojono was part of modernist ideology. At that time, the art critic Osman Effendi (also a
painter) said that there was no Indonesian painting, because all Indonesian painting was influenced by western ideology.

NV Moie Indie, for example?

FX No, not Moie Indie. He said that what the artists were doing at that time was painting according to the western modernism. And Sudjojono said «no», the spirit of the painting is Indonesian.

NV So with whom do you agree?

FX I don’t agree with any of them.

NV You don’t agree with any of them, so you don’t feel that they made your path possible?

FX Yes, I think they contributed.

As young students, we had a discussion. We were maybe 5 of us. The group was made by 5 artists from Yogya, 5 from Bandung and 1 from Jakarta. We used western references, we also used western media. Since we made art from the West, all the artists made judgments using western references.

NV I understand.

FX The discussions of the group were almost on a daily basis, all 5 of us talking about this problem. «Maybe we must make artworks that people cannot say: this is painting, this is sculpture, or this is a print». We just have to make art that the people cannot indicate by any western categorization.

So how? We were thinking and we tried more experiences. Until one day, we made a new art movement with people also from Bandung. We were also thinking about making art that would not follow the mainstream. Everything from the western world was considered mainstream.

NV Bandung was actually very avant-garde at that time. Now maybe Yogyakarta is more avant-garde. Or Jakarta? I am not so sure.

FX It’s different, now and before.

NV At the time I think Bandung was more avant-garde because of the school there.

FX Yes, more western, because there was a Dutch teacher in Bandung called Ries Mulder.

NV I read about this teacher that influenced a lot of students in Bandung.

FX So, we made an art, mostly the artists from Yogya...

NV And you are from Jogya?
FX  Yes, back then I studied in Yogya. The Jakarta member also studied in Yogya. Our group made an art that was neither painting, sculpture nor print.

NV  Not categorized.

FX  Yes. What happened was that all the art critics said: «This is not art. What is this?» They could not say that it was a painting, a sculpture, so it meant that it was not art. The problem resided in the fact that they always referred to western references. So, the young art critic Sanento Yuliman, he could evaluate and theorize what our entire group was doing. He said that we were not doing art «by hand». We were thinking art. He said that this art was «non-lyric».

NV  Non-lyric?

FX  Yes. The art we made was produced by real objects: a chair, a table, not a canvas hanging on the wall or a piece in a pedestal. Could be on the floor. The position of this art was the same as a chair, a table, or anything in a space. That is different.

The people who came to see the art objects, could experience a new relation between the object and themselves. This was very new. The artists before never made work like this.

NV  So you don't feel that you are a successor of the road that Sudjojono and Effendi opened? Who opened the door?

FX  No, they didn’t open the door. Effendi was just questioning and saying that the paintings made were westernized; they looked like the ones made with western ideology. Sudjojono said «no, this is our spirit», even if we are using the ideology of the west. And we said that we must make everything from our daily life objects. And then, what is that we want to show? If we want to talk about Indonesia, you don’t think about tradition, because it is past. We don’t think about ornament, because it shows only a part of the nation.

NV  You have several ornaments. I studied Ornament In ISI and I really liked it.

FX  So, what must we do now? We must express people’s problems. And our problems. We made research; we knew that the problem was social, political and cultural. We didn’t make a separation, like before. Before us, the artists thought that the problem of art was cultural and we said «no, the background of the art is our life». There is a political, social and cultural background, because that is people’s problem. People in Java maybe have the same problem as people in Sumatra.

NV  Maybe also the same as in Europe?
FX No, the social and political situation was highly different from other nations. We were one nation, and the government was one for all the areas. There was huge repression everywhere in Indonesia. So the political problem was the same.

NV New order, Orde Baru.

FX Yes.

NV It was a very repressive time.

FX Yes.

NV The end of it was a climax of oppression, or was it less than in the beginning?

FX Less repressive in the end, but the problem was not solved.

NV I read that Suharto continued to be powerful.

FX There is nothing more repressive then Suharto. People could not criticize the government. All this time it was impossible to criticize. So until 1975, no artists wanted to make art work related to the political situation. It was very dangerous. We call it ‘political trauma’, because of 1965.

NV Yes, but 1965 was a big event with the Chinese ethnicity, right?

FX Not only the Chinese, it was in all of Indonesia. We call it ‘depolitization’ in all aspects of our life.

NV It was the fall of Soekarno, right?

FX Yes. It was a total ‘depolitization’. No one could express their political views or options. But we, as young people, we didn’t suffer from that trauma. The older people were very afraid to talk about politics in art. But we were young, we could express ourselves. So, mostly all the young artists in Yogya made very radical art work, like the one you saw at PIPA.

NV Yes, even if I didn’t understand the exhibition. I can’t read the labels.

FX Some of the young artists of PIPA were also from the New Art Movement. Some artists still make work like the New Art Movement.

NV So you are still a reference for the young generations?

FX Yes, and I think Cemeti is a very important institution to transfer the ideology of the New Art Movement to the young artists, and practise contemporary art in Indonesia.
So, my work with the masks was much related to the political situation. The idea came about 2 or 3 weeks before my solo exhibition, in 1994. At the time, there were 3 newspapers and magazines.

NV Tempo?

FX *Tempo, DT and Shinahakapan*, if I am not wrong. They were paid by the government; they criticized the government. I was making work about the New Order. The political concept of New Order is very Javanese. Suharto was from Java and he always used Javanese philosophy to repress people. So, that is us, the people, but we can’t control our mouth. All their voices were controlled by the power. The people could see their mouth talking, but they could not express what they were thinking. That is why I used Javanese masks.

NV You can still say nowadays that Java is strong, has a lot of power and controls the country. It appears to dominate the country.

FX Yes, it is still very strong. Some people say «oh, this is Javanization». It’s like the person of the power must be a Javanese.

NV Must be or it still hasn’t changed?

FX Still has not changed. Also, everywhere, Irian, Papua, the Javanese could go.

NV Yes, of course, there was a policy of sending Javanese to other islands. Java has a lot of people and the other islands don’t. When the Javanese go away, do they get influences of the other islands? Throughout its history Java has been, very influenced by several cultures: Indian, Chinese, Arabs… and always something stays. So, are the Javanese influenced by the other islands?

FX No, no. Do you know Suriname? It was an island colonized by the Dutch. Suriname is in America. The Dutch brought Javanese to Suriname. And now, the Javanese became a big colony in Suriname.

NV I didn’t know this. It’s incredible.

FX If you go to Holland you will see, they look Indonesian, they speak Javanese and they are from Suriname. They can’t speak Indonesian, only Javanese and Dutch.

NV And moving on to the video. It’s so strong. It was after the Suharto fall.

FX No, it was in 1997. Before. It was a week before election. In Suharto era, at least two weeks before elections, no one could gather in big groups.
NV  And what you did you do then?

FX  When I made that performance, I was very worried about the police. But fortunately nothing happened. If the policemen had seen it – also there was a lot of passers–by that came and stayed – as it was not allowed, I would have had a problem. During that week Cemeti was making an exhibition about political activities during the silent week, minggu tenang. During the silent week, people could not make activities or gather in groups.

NV  And this was made in minggu tenang?

FX  Yes and in this work, I was criticizing the government.

NV  I have a question regarding your career. Can I say regarding your work that in the 1970’s you were more worried with criticizing national identity, and then you shifted towards your personal identity that is your work nowadays?

FX  Yes.

NV  Can I say that you came from national, then you passed by cultural identity and now you are working on your personal identity? You start by criticizing the established culture, then the Javanese, and now you are talking about your Chinese condition. Can I say that you started from something outside of you towards something within you, maybe also because the situation of the country changed?

FX  Yes, after Suharto’s fall I thought «oh, now the political situation will be changed, the culture will change, the situation will change». Now people can criticize the government on TV. It’s very free.

NV  But you changed.

FX  So I thought «I must do something else». So I asked «Who am I?» I tried to answer very deep questions about myself. I am not really Indonesian; also I am not really Chinese. I have no knowledge of Chinese culture. In my birth certificate, I am Chinese.

NV  But your name – Harsono – is not Chinese, it sounds Indonesian to me.

FX  But that was after 1965, all Chinese had to change their names into Indonesian. Suharto made rules: he prohibited Chinese characters, Chinese schools, Chinese couldn’t speak their language, couldn’t practice their religion, and couldn’t practice their culture. Chinese people should change their names.
They were very repressed. Meela Jaarsma makes performances with Chinese food; also to criticize how Chinese are treated here, because the Chinese are not Muslim, they are Buddhist or Christian. I don’t know so much.

For me, as Chinese, I didn’t know much. For 30 years, the Chinese could not practice their culture, religion or language. So mostly all young Chinese in Indonesia can’t write in Chinese.

You can?

I can’t.

Your father, mother?

They can. And then I was thinking: «Oh, I am not really Indonesian. They call me Chinese-Indonesian». Chinese who was born in Indonesia and became Indonesian.

This Chinese issue has also to do with the fact that the Dutch gave the Chinese more social importance than to the natives. The Chinese controlled trade, etc. I studied this because of the batik. It is also because of the past.

Yes, yes. So I questioned who I was. During the questioning I learned a lot of things about the Chinese around me. So, when I questioned myself, I was in fact questioning more than just me. So I started using the needles as a weapon for the pain.

Is the needle coming from Chinese acupuncture?

No, it’s a metaphor for pain. The idea of the needle came after the first bombing in Jakarta.

When was that? There were bombs last year.

There were bombs in Bali in 2003. After that, the Australian Embassy was bombed by a car. A very big bomb.

Are you afraid?

That is why. People were not feeling safe in Jakarta. Then I thought: «Oh, for a long time I didn’t feel safe in my life». It was not the bombs; it was small bits of pain.

It was the identity and displacement you felt.

Yes, and also the discrimination. The needle is very small, it can’t kill you. But little by little, it hurts you. So I made a poem that I had a dream and I saw the needle and when I woke up I had it in my hand. This was therefore, the pain I had inside my conscience.
NV So, what do you teach at university?

FX I teach Aesthetics.

NV Do you give your students some critical background?

FX Yes, I teach theory. I start with Platon, Aristoteles, Middle Age, Renaissance, Modernism, Post-Modernism...

[...]

NV How was the Biennial during Suharto’s time?

FX The Biennial focused on displaying painting and sculpture, but there was not a lot of criticism. The political value of the works was not very deep, so, it didn’t cause any problems. After the 6th or 7th edition, installation started being shown.

NV This year there is no catalogue.

FX It will be a post-event catalogue. The curatorial concept of the Biennial is the archive of the Yogyakartan Art Movement. They want to refer to the group that made this art current in Yogyakarta and also Indonesia. So, they invited all the New Art Movement, but I could not participate in this Biennial because I was very busy. The individual artists were asked to refer critically to the archive. But they didn’t choose the right names to do research and make their work based on the research. When we talk about the archive, this means that the research is very important. For instance, the works presented by PIPA, CEMETI and IVAA were in fact based on the archive. But the individual artists were very busy with their own career. They didn’t consider the possibility of developing work based on an archival concept. The curators didn’t choose many artists who are normally concerned with the archive. Also, most of the works were shown in the public space.

NV The works that are outdoors that refer to the wayang, for example, do you consider them as part of the archive?

FX No, they come from tradition.

NV In fact I believe I was lucky to find several works referring to tradition.

FX Yes, but you must know that several artists that make works that express, refer or are based on the tradition, they are not research-based works. It’s only a visual base. They didn’t know about the philosophy of tradition.
NV Do you think this happens with the artists I selected?

FX No, no. Nindityo, for instance, is a researcher. He knows a lot about the kondé and the tradition. He knows. But nowadays, the artists don’t work research-based. Naziron, for instance, he is a wayang specialist. He knows wayang very deeply. He deconstructs the wayang, and makes very expressive ones. He is among the few that know the wayang traditions very well.

NV Heri Dono, he started to work after learning wayang.

FX No, Heri Dono doesn’t know much about wayang. But Naziron knows wayang since he was a child. I used to watch wayang performances on a weekly basis as a child. I made wayang.

NV Can you make wayang kulit?

FX No, because at that time it was very difficult to find kulit. We would make wayang from thick paper. It was a play for everyday life. Naziron is one of the contemporary artists that knows and works with wayang. He is very famous in Yogya.

NV Yes, I know his name, I read about him. Do you think this is a trend? To talk about tradition now?

FX Yes, some people say: «If you want to be a famous artist in a global context, do wayang».

NV Heri Dono and Eko Nugroho gained a lot of visibility because of wayang. Eko had much visibility in last year’s Lyon Biennial. I prefer Eko’s tapestry and embroidery; I saw one piece at the Tropen Museum in Amsterdam.

FX Yes, I agree, I prefer his embroidery. When Eko started making his works that looked like a wayang, someone said: «Oh, Eko became a global artist».

NV His wayang figures are from his head. He is just using the Javanese skill, tradition as a media.

FX If you can meet Narizon, that would be better.

NV The motorbikes in Yogya are so noisy.

FX Yogya is much nicer then Jakarta.

NV In fact, I wondered why you are not based in Yogya.
I made some works, like the masks, with craftsmen from Yogya. I will show that work at the Singapore Art Museum in my next exhibition. I had to produce new masks because the 1994 installation was damaged. I didn’t cover the masks properly, so they were not in good condition.
NV I am doing my MA on Indonesian contemporary art that refers to Javanese culture and its symbols. The konde is a symbol, some of the batik motifs are symbols, wayang figures are symbols, the music...

I was here studying batik in 2006 and from Iwan Tirta’s book (I met Iwan Tirta last week) I got to understand that you cannot separate batik, wayang and karawitan.

HW Yes indeed, you cannot separate them.

NV They belong together, especially when you look at the court arts of Yogya and Solo. In these performative arts, people dress in batik, they play gamelan and look at wayang shows. That was the past. So, I started looking at some Indonesian artists that refer to this traditional culture.

HW Yes.

NV In my perspective, I think this is good, because it makes this culture lively, it will not die. It will not stay stagnant like in a museum, it will become more...

HW Fashionable?

NV I am asking you. This is my understanding from the works of artists like Jompet, Anusapati, Heri Dono, Eko Nugroho... I see in their works the potential to re-interpret this art, giving it new meanings...

HW Yes, yes...

NV Do you agree?

HW Is that a question? For me, contemporary art related to the traditional culture, my answer is yes and no. Well, sometimes yes, sometimes no. I think some artists are really good in making new interpretations of their roots.

NV Their roots, Nindityo for instance.

HW No, not Nindityo. For instance, Anusapati is for me the best one. He reinterprets our life with much more independence. If you want to do some new meaning or reading you have to be free first, free and independent enough to make some new meanings. Some artists are not so
successful in that. In one way, it’s ok that they want to make some contextualization but it’s not enough to do it without a critical stance. Anusapati is perhaps the best in that. The rest is maybe...instead of making a new reading, they use traditional culture as a pattern.

NV I think Nindityo researches a lot on the *konde* and the condition of women in Java.

HW Well, researching is not enough; the most significant is *how*, not about *what*.

NV Both Nindityo and Anusapati make sculptures.

HW The question is not the media, I think, but how they read the traditional elements graphically. To talk about the resources is not to talk literally just like moving them from the past into the present. Re-reading again.

NV Yes, re-reading again. This is what I am trying to understand if these artists are doing, because for instance I don’t see people doing this in Europe. They talk about other issues, besides the cultural environment. It’s possible to refer to the cultural environment through art works.

HW Yes.

NV And it is possible to discuss it and do some political criticism, using symbols that maybe you understand but that a person of a lower cultural level also understands. Maybe this broadens the audience, right?

HW Yes.

NV Because for the outside viewer perhaps it looks exotic, but for the inside viewer it looks familiar. What do you think?

HW Familiarity is also something for the artists to think about. Sometimes the artist is too worried about the conditions, with local issues.

NV For instance, from FX, I took the work *The Voices Are Controlled by the Powers*, because it has a very strong traditional symbol to give the message.

HW In the case of FX Harsono, I believe he is not driven by the symbolism, only as a tool. He uses the symbols as tools to say something.

NV For instance, when Jompet makes these uniforms, he is also using them a tool to express an idea.
HW  But the most important of Jompet works is the critical stance of the artist. He is not only driven by the symbol because he represents the symbol itself. You have to be fundamental; the artist knows about the symbol, the audience knows nothing about what is worrying the artist. It’s political to bring the cultural representation. It can be very political and critical.

NV  I am, in fact, basically looking at political works.

HW  Most artists only politicize the symbol. I am not interested in that. It is not independent enough because the symbols are being used only as a pattern. For instance, Nindityo, or so. I don’t see anything in his works. It’s only the konde itself. He has to go beyond the konde, beyond the symbol, beyond the fixed meaning of the symbol.

NV  The more I read about his work, the more I like it. In the beginning, I didn’t know so much and then I started to understand. Maybe I am not at your intellectual level, maybe I will not get there. I also have Mella Jaarsma...

HW  Mella Jaarsma is much more important as an artist. Mella Jaarsma feels free to read the anthropological and the traditional culture that surrounds her. She is very independent as an artist and the works are not politicised as symbols, I think.

NV  Can you give me an example of her work that you feel is not politicized? The burkas she makes are highly political symbols.

HW  Almost all the works she makes are political but not politicised. I agree that they are political, but they don’t make politics of the local issues. As an artist, Mella is still free. She works as an anthropologist, but she is still an artist.

NV  So you think Anusapati is the most free of the artists I referred to?

HW  Yes, and Jompet is also one of the most successful artists.

NV  What about Eko? When he makes his comics characters.

HW  I am still distant from his work; I am not sure whether he takes some traditional elements. Comics are popular culture, it’s mass culture.

NV  It’s daily culture. When he transforms them into the wayang shows he is making a new installation...

HW  Wayang is only a medium for Eko. It’s wayang as a medium, not wayang itself. It is only a way to tell the comics. The problem is how to make something new about the medium of wayang, not wayang itself.
In this project I am undertaking there is also the conflict of high art and low art, craft and modern art, there are also all these conflicts.

Yes, you always have to go beyond the conflicts. I remember one artist, Hendrawan Rijanto for example - he already passed away.

Maybe I have read his name earlier, from the only book I had *Outlet*, maybe he was there.

He was born in Bandung, passed away maybe in 2004.

I have another question for you: in the 1950’s Sudjojono stated that the artist should look to the West in order to be Eastern again.

He said it like that? (laughing)

Well, that was what I read. There was a very strong need to be modern. After 1990’s you see a shift towards cultural identity. In Europe, I think we went through modernism, to conceptualism and we are going through contemporaneity. And here the contemporaneity mixes tradition very well, without any problem. Sometimes I feel that, in terms of art, what is being done in Asia is a step forward, if I compare to the situation in Europe. I think Asia is stating what is right to do now. You go to the Venice Biennial and it’s about making worlds, you go to the Lyon Biennial and the successful artists are those who talk freely about their identity. In terms of discourse, do you think that we can say that, for once, Asia is doing something before Europe? This is when Europe left Asia...

1960’s, 1950’s...

We still didn’t make a re-evaluation after decolonization. And we still read Asia as the ‘other’.

Since the beginning, since the Renaissance, even before, the 4th century, Europe has been Europe and Asia is the rest of the world. Always the ‘other’, but in fact it is still like that. Hegel is, in fact, the father of colonial theory.

According to Karim Raslan, this is happening all over Asia. And due to the current predominance of Asia in art...

Not only in art, in everything. (laughing)
Do you think we have to ‘look East to become West’?

Maybe to become much more, more West. A predominant thought is that East is influenced by the West, but the West can only be inspired by the East. It’s very imbalanced perspective. For example in Yogya, maybe there are currently no studies on Asian art, or South East Asian art. We have to learn history of the West, the Western Art History.

Maybe this is shifting now, right?

Maybe now, yes.

Specially now, after thinkers like Edward Said or Homi Bhabha, it’s shifting. Who is the epitomy of Indonesian history?

Soekarno, our first president. Very naturalistic and, in the first period of his presidency, until 1959, he promoted the return to national identity. He was the promoter of the Asian-African Conference that took place in Bandung, in 1955. He was very strong in his anti-West discourse.

Suharto kept some of this?

Suharto was an agent of the West, totally capitalistic.

It’s a very pluralistic country, but I feel Java rules. In terms of artists, the names I have are almost all Javanese.

That is true and it’s actually not good. Java has always been the centre, the presidents have always been Javanese. They all have the prefix Soe/Su in their names. Soe means good, fine, support, sometimes beautiful.

Is there an explanation why we don’t have a visible artist from Papua, for instance?

Every society has different meanings of fame and public exposure. There are so many Papuan artists, in a different meaning.

Why is Yogya so important in terms of art? So much money is in Jakarta and Bali, but why is Yogya so important?

Because of history, there were a lot of significant moments in 1946, when the capital moved from Jakarta to Yogya. Then the artists founded the sanggars, then ASRI. Until 1949, the capital city was here. So the art moved to Yogya. Sudjojono was based here, and Affandi or Hendra Gunawan too, they all were based here.
NV I am talking about tradition. I am very interested in heritage keeping, both in design and art.

I understand that in Yogya there is always almost no distinction between high art and low art. Since I read Iwan Tirta, who states that you can’t separate batik from the performance arts of wayang and karawitan, I developed a concept.

A It makes sense.

NV Sudjojono is my starting point. I believe this statement is important for what is happening now. He was against the arts imposed by the Dutch Moie Indie and he wanted the artists to start new practices.

A The revolution had to do with the political situation, the colonial era...

NV Therefore I believe that through a new reading proposed in his message, there was a return to tradition in the 90’s. I compare the dalang with the contemporary artist. I am also looking at the epics as references for the arts, and how they are a source of inspiration. The media of the past was performance and installation, and they seem to have been perpetrated in the present. What I am looking at is how to use this legacy in art. Your installation has been very appreciated. In the exhibition «Art-aging» there is a quote by you that says....can you please explain?

A I think my major concern has been the relationship of man and culture, therefore nature, environment and ecological issues. I start from the relationship of the artefacts in the past. By looking at those objects, you can actually feel their relationship with nature, how they use wood as a material. You can feel the connection between the person and nature through these objects.

NV In Indonesia this heritage is protected, isn’t it?

A I don’t think so. There is a recent effort to protect things, but in fact we let many forms disappear. In today’s society, people don’t live with respect for nature anymore, as characterized in past relations.
NV Your work is called «Preserve vs Exploit». Are you condemning exploitation?

A In fact, you always have to deal with these two forces: nature is meant to serve human prosperity, respecting/considering our life. So, in life, we always have to consider these forces. On the one hand, you have to exploit nature, but on the other, we have to preserve it, otherwise we commit suicide. So I show how to reach this balance, how to exploit and preserve.

NV It’s a very global theme, this one of the environment. It’s a contemporary issue.

A I use traditional society as a source to revitalize the values of the past. I think people in the past really possessed an awareness of this balance and it is manifested within the culture and religions. I try to revitalize these traditional values not explicitly, but through these objects that remind people of traditional, old equipments. I work with hope they arise this awareness.

NV I have this object on the catalogue of the ICON exhibition. Can you please introduce me to this object?

A I have been trained in the western tradition, in ASRI, that is western oriented. What is taught here is not traditional. Our approach was western, the art is separated from daily life. You don’t learn tradition: you learn painting and sculpture. Our education was Western. Later in life, I went to the USA for my MA in Sculpture. I studied in Pratt Institute, in Brooklyn. When I returned, I became a Professor of Sculpture in ISI Yogyakarta.

NV I studied in the Craft Department, separated from the Fine-Art Department. It’s very separated. Why?

A It’s our problem. It starts with the design of the building. Therefore, western modern art has always been my language. There has always been awareness for me to find the identity as an Indonesian artist, and that is why the source of inspiration is the traditional culture and its objects.

The idea of that object comes from the kentongan of wood, an object that is still used by many people in the villages for communication. You hip the object to make sound. They have codes for the use of kentongan. They hip it in a certain way that makes different meanings, for instance when someone dies or if there is a thief in the village...

NV So it works like the smoke signs, made by the Indians?
Yes, exactly. In the *kanpong*², if there is a flood, a fire, a wedding, they use the *kentongan*. It used to be quite an important instrument, but now it’s disappearing. Maybe it was replaced by the SMS. But I consider that the disappearance of the *kentongan* has significance within the construction of the society itself. We are going through a big change, people are becoming more individual. It results from the changes within the society.

There is also another tool that was used to peel off the skin off the rice. It’s called *lesung*. People don’t use it anymore. In the past, people used to call their neighbours to gather and work on this process. By helping your neighbours, you would get a little bit of rice. Thus it created certain relationships amongst people in the society of the kampung. It was a moment to gather, to chat. Both objects were made from a single piece of wood.

For instance, in Indonesia everybody has a piece, I don’t know the name that is made from stone.

Yes, to make *sambal*.

I don’t think it will disappear because it is related to eating.

I don’t think that there is a new device to replace it. Sometimes you have a blender, but the result is not the same.

I would like to have one, but it’s heavy to bring back.

Jim Supangkat states here that you – along with other artists – make an effort to find a place to engage traditional materials in contemporary art. «In this sense the interpretation of the low art is an attempt to demystify the situation by printing out that the traditional art has been marginalized not only by the high art and international art but also by the traditional culture itself»³. Why?

There is some social significance. I started working in the 1990s, and back then the political situation was very difficult.

Did they allow modernist practices to take place during these repressive times?

In these terms it was fine, but socially and economically it was really bad. People started to realize that the government, the economy and

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² *Kampong* means village.

welfare were fake. Everything was based on exploitation, the money was used for development, industrialisation but in fact people were very poor, specially the low society. I was very aware of that, most people were very poor.

Now even though there are so many problems, at least you can see the problem is there. It seemed like everything was ok, but everything was so fragile – that’s I how I became connected with the low society.

NV Can you explain to me the work Preserve Vs Exploit? I am aware there are endangered species. You can’t make the Panji masks without the right wood, on the wayang can’t be made without the right leather. This work talks about what we will lose if we don’t stop destroying our environment.

A Of course. It consists of 9 boxes that I made from one block of wood. Then I cut to make the leaves on the body and inside you can see a part of the tree. Inside there were the seeds of the tree.

NV Were they really endangered?

A Well, not all. They were all plants of Java, that I consider my own environment, my own surroundings. Some are very endangered, they are hard to find. I had to do research to find the shape of some leaves, because you can’t find the corresponding tree anymore. This work is both based on environmental issues put in both social and ecological terms. Social, because it has to do with the objects I described and the tradition between people and the nature that surrounded them.

NV Can you tell me why there is so much art here since the 50’s?

A It was to do with history. It was once the capital, in the period between 1946 and 1949. The artists moved with the government and stayed. They established Persagi, ASRI. That is how it became like this.

NV Bandung also has an important role and it was considered more advanced. But now Yogya is more important.

A It has to do with ASRI/ISI. It’s the oldest and largest school in Indonesia. It produced so many artists. That is why it became the centre. Bandung was important in the past because the teachers were western.
NV  I already knew your work and I saw it at the Biennial of Yogya. I would like you to take part of my dissertation.

B (NF)  I think you have to debate whether roots of all of this is Hinduism. The root of Hinduism is actually the indigenous animistic culture of the archipelago. The sacred systems that existed and are found in contemporary Hinduism are rooted in the ancient cosmology that you can find in the indigenous cultures of Kalimantan. This particular cosmology predated Hinduism and was appropriated by Hinduism. So, I think that this should be shown as rooted in Hinduism, in the Mahabarata and Ramayana. The forbidden symbols of *batik* that you referred to were pre-dating the kingships. These are very ancient motifs, that were appropriated by the courts and made into forbidden motifs, but they existed far before the kingships appropriated them as royal, the realm of royal motifs. The *kawung* is one of the most ancient symbols of one cultural world. The *parang* was also from before the kingships.

NV  I thought *parang* was from the Mataram Kingdom.

B (NF)  Sultan Agung is considered the initiator of *parang*, but the motif existed prior to that. These are very ancient symbols. Of course the courts were very important in the protection and development of these, in my opinion. It’s an oral tradition, so it’s difficult to find information.

I think before Hinduism came into Indonesia, there was no religious system like we know, but spirituality existed. In Java before the Hindu religion, there were a lot of local divinities. All this art comes from the spirituality of life and its connection to the world. In Java, we believe that gods make life possible. *Tribawono* means the three worlds. You should also add to your presentation the *keris*, or sacred dagger. The *keris* is part of the costume, it records the energy of the world. It represents the energy of the trinity from the world, body and god.

NV  I was not introduced to *batik* philosophy when I studied in ISI.

B (NF)  We talked very critically about the curriculum of the textile department, but I am afraid nobody is listening to us. We never studied from books, what we are talking about is still on oral tradition. So it’s difficult to see from a Western knowledge point of view.
I understand the nature of your work is very close to heritage keeping. What is the main concept of Brahma Tirta Sari?

We started in 1983. What we are trying is to study the oral traditions.

I would like to understand the history of my ancestors. I try to delve into art all the way into my ancestors. Sometimes I read books, but I want to connect to the oral traditions. You can see this in batik: the history of the semen motives is originated in this ancestral culture. Normally they have two backgrounds for batik: the seen and the unseen life is related to oral tradition. The seen life is related to books. Sometimes they are opposites. I can even disagree with the readings, through the feeling of my ancestors. That is why I make art, to follow my destiny.

I have found in my studio the possibility of knowing more about Javanese cosmology. And in oral tradition, this is referred to Budaya Tirta (culture of water). Through all cultures, water is sacred. This Budaya Tirta predated any religion and is the basis of Javanese cosmology. This system is essentially the root of the creative process that has been transmitted to many generations in this particular place. It is also the creative process that originates the making of the keris, the process of creating the wayang and the performances, in budoyo dance. And these sacred processes are essentially passed down in oral tradition.

So you haven’t written it yet?

We are hoping for Ismoyo’s brother, who is a great writer, to write it. So this is what we have been exploring in the work of Brahma Tirta Sari. This means creativity is the base of all knowledge. In our work, we worked collaboratively and from 1994 we collaborated with other indigenous cultures. This is an exploration to understand the connection of the indigenous cultures to our culture.

Why do you use installation as a preferred media? You participated in Asia-Pacific Triennial and in this edition of the Biennial with installations.

We don’t think about that. It’s a creative process. I studied batik and then I studied the keris and wanted to join them as one. In the oral tradition, from my perspective, it is one. Inside the spirit, it is one. I wanted to join them in the visual. What you see in the keris, in the batik, in the dance, is one spirit. That is the Javanese aura. I want to bring all of these elements together in my batik. Now, it’s already spread. Javanese life is already separate and I want to integrate it again.

For me, the Javanese system is described as wahyu and it was not transmitted to the kingships. The kingships system period is gone, the current courts never received the divine wahyu. The sacred system has
been dissolved from Hamangkubuwono IX. He believed that Yogya should be part of the Republic of Indonesia, no longer a power in itself.

The whole sacred system has been dissolved; there is no integrity in the system of the arts. We still see the budoyo dances, but the women don’t fast for 3 days before performing the dance. That creative process has therefore been dissolved. And we are trying to describe and bring back that energy into the creative process. The ancient creative process we are talking about is based on the Tribawono: the three worlds. It’s the process of integrating the self with the cosmos and the creative source. And this is linked to the creative process that was passed down by the oral tradition. In my relation with this system, as an American, I am trying to study this creative process, because I feel there has been disintegration. This creative process is an eternal process; it is rooted in an eternal cosmology that is important in the world now, and in the future. The relevance for me is that I am an American, a culture without a tradition, and without the important element you can find in Javanese cosmology called Rasa. This Rasa is an essential element that I feel responsible to integrate in the projects or installations we create.

NV In the work you presented in the Biennial – Sarong
– I noticed the presence of the forbidden motifs.

B (NF) We don’t consider them forbidden.

NV But you call the installation Sarong, yet it’s transparent.

B (AI) The concept of the installation is kawung which is one of the sacred symbols. But we don’t see it as forbidden. It’s the protector of the world. It’s the corrector of batik and wayang, the wayang characters wear batik. The art here connects spirit and people: the puppet corresponds to the self, it’s not separated. This installation is still in process, I wanted to put the keris motifs on it, but was short on time. You need time for the process.

I wanted to show the meaning of the connection with ancient life, that is why it’s transparent. Sometimes I am showing the unseen: people see it differently in the morning, day and night. It changes. I can see, but it’s not clear: sometimes I work with 70 layers. The transparencies and the layers are related to the unseen world. It exists on so many levels simultaneously.

NV You call this work Sarong. Are you trying to find a 3rd space for batik?

B (AI) I wanted to show the traditional costume, but through my reading. A keris is difficult to wear nowadays, batik is dying too. Batik as a garment is dying and it’s fine. But I want to show the aura of the Javanese (sarong, batik, hat, keris). Sarong is the earthy experience of the integral and external being. I always used to sleep in one as a young boy. It’s very
warm. So, it’s the connection of the inside and the outside. The *Sarong* concept has to do with the inner being and the outer being.

(NF) As regards to our creative process, we are not working in an intellectual realm at all, we are working in the realm of *Rasa*. In this process of making a *sarong*, we decided to work on the philosophy of the *keplat papat*, which is related to the *kawung* motif. *Keplat* means direction and *Papat* means four. In Javanese philosophy it’s about the micro cosmos, about the centering of the self. It’s the philosophy behind the symbol of the *kawung*.

When we make something based on the *tribawono*, three worlds processes we described, it’s not an intellectual process. For us the process is everything: we have a concept of *sarong*, of *keplat papat*, but from there it is totally *Rasa*, an inner directing and feeling process and we don’t know how this is going to grow. It’s organic. Everything that we do is about the process. We have a concept, but the process determines the artwork. We taught «let’s create a space with *batik*» instead of «let’s move *batik* into the realm of installation art». We don’t work in categories. People told us our home is not art because «*batik* is not art». We work collaboratively.

NV That leads to my last question: as it is considered craft, it means it has a function. Therefore it can’t be put in an art museum, only in an ethnology museum. What do you think about this?

B We went to the Asia Society in New York and said «we have a *batik* exhibition». The assistant of the Director said we should go to the Ethnographic Museum. So, even within Asia in 2005, this happens. For us it has been a struggle. In Indonesia, we have been involved in the Biennials for many years now, at least in Yogya people understand that what we do is categorized as «high art». There is a very big separation here: in ISI you either study craft or art. In 1998, in the 1st Yogya Biennial, Ismoyo’s work was painting. He was advised not to do *batik*, because his reputation would drop. We had to change to exhibit abroad and find recognition in Indonesia because we had the support of Jim Supangkat.

NV Yes, I am aware.

B Because of him, we were invited to the Sydney Biennial, the Asia-Pacific Triennial. That made our recognition possible in Yogya and Indonesia.

(AI) In my creation, there is some hope: *batik* represented with the *kawung*, represents hope for the growth of *batik*. *Kawung*’s ideas comes from the seed. Traditionally it is the recognition of the oral traditions, and honouring them is big, also due to the western traditions that is so mind oriented. We only consider the written cultures, but the oral tradition has equal value. Our world is so mind-oriented right now that the oral tradition is not being honoured at the same level.
ENTANG WIHARSO (E)

13th January 2010, Black Goat Studio, 4pm

NV You mentioned to me your work is based on the Prambanan reliefs.

E This work is related to a story of feelings of love, hate.... I used to take many tourists to Prambanan temple and they were very interested in it. I wanted to make something in my work related to it, but I didn’t know what.

With time, I started cutting aluminium. Later, I moved towards new experiments and started working with clay. Then I thought about making a new version of the reliefs of Prambanan, but in a comic-story. Each panel depicts a part of the story. So, it’s a work that combines popular culture with the art of the reliefs of Prambanan.

NV You said to me that when you make work and are very guided by the dalang. You mentioned an inner dalang and an outer dalang. Can you explain?

E When the artist works, the inner dalang comes out. This happens either when he is working inside the community and outside the community. For me, the community related issues work as a stage, and artists use that stage to interact with the community. When I make a performance, sometimes I feel I am inside the puppet and sometimes outside the puppet, it depends.

NV Beyond the puppet.

E Yes, beyond the puppet. In 2004, I made an exhibition in USA about this, called Puppet Blues.

NV I can’t call them puppets or shadows, can I?

E They are aluminium cuts, but yes, you can call them puppets.

NV Why did you call your exhibition Puppet Blues? It’s a mix between Yogya and United States?

E Blues in terms of sadness. Blues music is sometimes sad, but can also bring political statements, to instigate change.

NV You are working with the concept of the dalang. That is very interesting.

E Normally, I work with one concept at a time. Sometimes I go back to my older ideas.
At this precise moment, I am working about identity, because as a Javanese, as an Indonesian with the change to United States in 1997, I became a different person. Sometimes the clash is so strong, that I call myself «black goat», kambing hitam.

It’s like a dalang: when I talk about my identity, I refer to it as a black goat. That is the puppet. For the Americans, Indonesia is an unclear space. The idea of an Indonesian is unclear: when I go to USA, I always go through immigration. So, I feel displacement, because they judge the unknown beforehand. I feel a victim of these situations. Now, when I come to Indonesia, I feel like an outsider, I became more universal. In my art, there are politics of vision that I also feel.

NV Tell me, did you like the Biennial?

E I liked the concept of the archive very much, but I thought the materialization was poor. Because of the «Jammin’» concept, everybody could participate, so it became chaotic. The quality of some works was poor, and this relates to a lack of management of the quality shown. The works that were inserted in «PUBLIC ON THE MOVE» had several qualities.

NV I heard it was developed by three curators. It’s a pity they didn’t make a catalogue of the exhibition. I thought it would be in the closing ceremony.
NV  Pak Dwi, when I was studying in 2006, I saw an exhibition – ICON – in Jogya Gallery, curated by you. I also have read some of your texts, namely in Outlet. Having that in mind, I started with batik, I got to know that to make one you have to be in the right state of mind. It’s very Javanese. I wanted to go beyond batik now. From reading Iwan Tirta, I got to know that you can’t separate it from the performance arts. I also kept the dalang because I believe he is of major importance. So I compare the dalang to the artist. Entang agrees with me in this, he sees the artist as a dalang.

DM  The dalang can also be compared to a curator or organizer, it’s not only comparable to the artist, because he is a provocateur. The dalang functions as a curator, an organizer. He always plans something, he can be seen as an event organizer. He always tells his ideas in a given situation. He can find any potential in any situation, make his readings from that. Also, dalang is a very cultivated person because he has to be able to speak Javanese in different layers. He has to be a master in kara witan to wayang puppets. He must be like a xamen; in wayang tradition, we have healing performances in wayang. So it’s also spiritual practice.

NV  I was told today by Agus Ismoyo that when a dalang is sick, he asks his students to play for him and he gets better with the music.

DM  We have a performance called Ruatan, it’s a healing performance. Ruatan is a special event. The dalang is invited to heal a person that doesn’t recover. So, the dalang is asked to do ruatan for her, in the hope she will get better.

EW  For these performances, the dalang does a fasting for one month. It’s a kind of xamonic performance.

DM  For materialistic people, this can be understood as ridiculous. But for traditional Javanese, Balinese, Maduranese, it’s still something they believe. You know Madura, Bali and Java had a big Hindu influence.

NV  So this is rooted in Hinduism.

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4 Christine Cocca is an American artist that lives and works in Yogyakarta. She is married to Entang Wiharso.
DM You have to be critical to the artist’s comments. FX Harsono, for instance, he always finds political aspects in any art. It seems like he never changed. You know that many artists here in Yogya are tired of political discourses.

NV FX Harsono is working with identity now, with his Chinese-Indonesian condition.

DM Actually, that is easy to sell. Political art is easy to sell like sex. The Chinese society has one culture of its own, one ideology, one thought. They have changed since the 1970’s. Now, their traditions have also changed. They became more urban, more mixed.

NV Iwan Tirta told me that to find traditions in a preserved state, you must go to Solo.

DM Yes, they are more conservative. It used to be one Mataram Kingdom and then it was split in two, with the Gyanti Agreement. At the time Yogya Kingdom was supposed to reform, to take a new direction. If you study Javanese dances, they are more explorative. In dance and karawitan they are more explorative, more ornamental, Yogyakarta dance is more dynamic.

NV But this has changed recently with the Republic.

DM Solo is still more dynamic. Yogya and Solo is like San Francisco and New York. Yogya is more orthodox.

CC I keep hearing that Solo is more fundamentalist towards Islam. Why is that?

DM They have a big community of Arabic descent, and they are radical. Solo is good for performing arts. If you go to Imogiri, that is a kingdom in the Yogyakartan graveyard, you see baroque ornamentation; in Solo you see a rococo style. Also the food here is less varied.

[...]

NV Christine, can you tell me the legend of Prambanan?

CC Prambanan temple is usually known as Loro Jongrang (slender virgin) based on the myth of its creation. It is believed that the beautiful princess of the kingdom received an offer of marriage from a man she did not want to marry but could not refuse. Thus she said that if he could build 1000 temples in one night before the sun rose she would marry him. With the help of magical creatures he had built 999 temples; the princess saw he would succeed so she had a huge fire built and the roosters started to crow because they thought the sun was rising. The man heard this, believing too that the sun had risen and he had lost the challenge, only to discover that
the princess had tricked him. So in retribution, he turned her into the final temple.
NV In 2006 I was studying batik at ISI Yogyakarta and got quite involved. I met Iwan Tirta there and whilst reading his works, I developed a concept. I have read many of your essays and they have been fundamental for me. I also know about the CP Biennial Project, that doesn’t exist anymore. I did some research so far based on Outlet — that has a preface written by you-, your essays and some internet research. I found nothing else in Portugal.

JS The publications on Indonesia are very poor. Indeed.

NV But the problem is that the Asian exhibitions, Biennials, I don’t have any catalogues in Portugal.

JS Memory and Contemporaneity. I was asked to be the judge of the next Indonesian art award. Previously it was the Philip Morris Art Award, already extinct. Now it is organized by the Indonesian Art Foundation and it is the Indonesian Art Award. I proposed the theme «Contemporaneity».

NV I have been talking to some curators and artists and from my perspective the curators don’t agree with my reading of contemporaneity. That is also why I am very interested in your opinion. From Iwan Tirta, I got to know that batik can’t be separated from karawitan and wayang. I also keep the dalang that I compare to the artist.

JS Indeed.

NV You are the first curator of Indonesia. I compare you to Okwui Enzewor, who gave a lecture in my MA about the post-colonial moment.

JS I have just written a 30-page essay about the Post-colonial and Globalization. It’s only in Indonesian. Of course know Hans Belting, the leading Art Historian.

NV Yes, but I never read his books.

JS He wrote about the end of Art History after Dhanto wrote about the end of art. He renamed the book «Art History after Modernism». He started a global movement; he organizes seminars all over the world. This is a search for the contemporary art after it became the contemporary
global art. This art is raised by the market. This is precisely his discourse. This group has already compiled several thoughts around the world and will launch the thinking next year, in Germany. This is precisely what you are looking at: the idea is to break the boundaries between the Ethnological Museums and Art Museums. This is your problem.

NV West sees the art that comes from the craft as low. The wisdom of the past is erased.

JS If you want to continue studying this theme, there will be a new source of thought coming soon. It will pronounce a new museum model. So, if you talk about global art you need a new global museum. They already named it Global Art Museum and there will be no boundaries between high art and low art. I curated the Manifesto Exhibition in Jakarta and the subtitle was «the beginning of 'art' and the end of 'Art'». It was in 2008.

NV I start with Sudjojono, who proposed a new reading in the 30’s. Maybe it’s because you started this exercise so long ago that now there is a new reading of Javanese culture. And the same is happening with some Asian and African countries that were decolonized. They started new identity readings earlier.

JS Yes, indeed.

NV FX Harsono told me about Osman Effendi, that I should consider him.

JS He is not very clear. He is not very communicative. He is one of the artists who believes in some sort of inner spirit. These people are said to paint after some Indian Shamanic spirit. Too bad they can’t explain their vision so clearly. So, you look particularly at Javanese culture, I see.

NV So, I can keep Sudjojono.

JS Yes, sure.

NV This group of artists are very well represented outside also because of your help. Their use of installation and performance media is very present in Indonesian art.

JS Yes, because of theatricality. Have you read my article about the first terms of art in the 19th century? This has to do with your diagram. The understanding of art started in the 19th century, the term art in Javanese existed in the 19th century already. The word was guna. Seni is bahasa indonesia. Seni, in my perspective, is a translation of the term kaguran, from the Javanese, in High Javanese. The root of kaguran is guna. The explanations are by Taco Rorda, a Javanist, and are compiled in Leiden University. In my opinion, he is an important person that introduced the
mindset and understanding about art, about what is art actually. So, under his influence, kagunan in Javanese is translated, not from English but from the greek «techno», that means guna. Guna in Indonesian means function, technique. Therefore, there are similarities between guna and techne.

NV The epics are ancient narratives that are used as a form of criticism.

JS They are the root of criticism.

[...]

Heri Dono started with wayang. He studied with a master, Sukasman, who just died. Sukasman made new wayangs, he re-designed the wayang. That was the reason why he faced difficulties. The wayang idea of Heri Dono comes from him.

Meela Jaarsma, that is from her burka series.

NV This work by Jompet about power, possibly Indonesian power, is an institution...

JS Rather than tradition. It’s critical to the tradition, I think, to the kraton tradition. It’s an interpretation about the paternalistic society.

NV Are these the kraton officials?

JS Yes, these are the kraton soldiers. It’s the costume of the kraton soldiers. They still show it in a festival that is part of the Upacara, the kraton festival for its traditions. Once a year they put the weapons to show to people. So they have a kind of procession. Every year they hold this event to show that they still wear this. It’s still actual, so you can still it every year. So this is a combination about the western and local costumes. Sometimes they use the old fashioned weapons/pionet, guns from the 19th century along with the keris. The books are European and the cut of the costume is quite western.

NV So this has to do with globalisation back then, like you mentioned before.

JS Yes, indeed. I don’t know precisely the name, but the costume of the sultans of Yogya and Solo were designed by a French designer. It’s not original Javanese, the whole costume.

NV So, can I state that contemporary art uses the past legacy? Can’t the museum objects have new readings?

JS That is Hans Belting’s idea, precisely.
The artists I am referring to also don’t use conventional media. I believe that maybe the conventional media in the west – painting, sculpture, print – are not the same here. Here installation and performance seem to be conventional, since they belong to heritage.

Indeed. It starts back in the 19th century; the traditional western art was quite similar to the non-western traditional art.

I have another name for you, Wayan Bendi, who lives in Bali. He is very original, still traditional and his work on the Bali bombings was purchased by the government of Australia. You have images of the accused terrorists and the flagellation.

You have filled the gap in the panorama of Indonesian art. Do you agree that performance and installation are secular practices in Java?

Indeed. Particularly installation. Installation means you make a composition of spaces you don’t see. It’s just an empty space. Even in the west, when installation started being made – the so called theatricality – when Robert Morris made the first installation. It’s a matter of space, when you see the micro spaces in sculptures. They tend to be more wider and then you have the actual space.

In my vision, most of the Indonesian artists make installation better than people in the West, because they «feel» the space. They still believe in that kind of spirituality, in ghosts...

For example, if you ask a western artist to enter an empty room, and they enter it they will react «What do you want, I don’t see anything», he says. But if you ask an Indonesian artist to enter that empty room, they will think it’s dangerous when they see an empty space. They «feel» the space. That is why it’s so easy for them to make installations. It is also difficult for them to talk and explain. In an installation you make a composition of spaces. In the West emptiness is emptiness. That is the difference. That is why installation is related to some traditions in the past. When they make an installation, Indonesian artists always have these feelings. The performance in my opinion – and that is why theatricality is quite important for Indonesian artists – resides in the theatricality of the artist. You will testify in all of them the idea of «showing». In all their performances, the show becomes a stage. All the works have this kind of «sense». Because the performing arts, you can find them anywhere. They are probably the root of expression. Performance art in Indonesia is therefore, different from the performance art you usually know. The performance artist normally uses the body, but here they also use the space around. It’s more a theatre than only using your body for expression. This is their indicator.
NV Do you think the western hegemony is going to continue being a reality in the future?

JS It depends whether this Global Art Movement becomes paramount of thinking or not. If they become paramount, the dichotomy West-East will face a change. Nowadays it’s still difficult to compare, the fact is that global art is still dominated by the ideas developed in Europe and America.

NV The way ISI is divided – the «fine» arts in one side and the «low» arts in the other side –, is Western based. But somehow there is an indifference in the real life about this division. Do you agree?

JS I agree with you, because it’s my theory.

NV The current prosperity of Indonesian art has to do with the bigger attention of the outside world in the Biennials and the growth of theorization, especially by Western academics?

JS In the 1990s Japan and Australia were quite important. They started creating the triennials, for instance, using above all Asian artists (Japan Foundation and Queensland Art Gallery). It was quite important for the process of development. It was the first time the Indonesian artists had the possibility of displaying their work outside, in Japan and Australia. Afterwards, artists like Heri Dono and Dadang spread around the world, but they started in Japan and Australia. There was a growing interest, in particular from Australia, in seeing Asian artists. All the artists known internationally started either in Japan or in Asian –Pacific Triennial – Arahmaiani, Heri Dono, Anusapati, Dadang, Nindityo and Meela, amongst others. This is another reason why the Indonesian art became international.

NV And then came Venice Biennial, Lyon Biennial, more curators. I am trying to link our two countries. We share a past.

JS Portugal was the first country to come to Indonesia.

[...]

NV From your career, I understand you stopped being an artist for ethical reasons. I even talked about this with curator Shaheen Merali, who was also an artist himself and he stated that he totally agrees with your statement. But this work, Ken Dedes, is important in Indonesian art.

JS It’s very polemic (laughing). I made this work in 1975. It is a combination of our daily life with the Majapahit Kingdom, considered the
most fascinating time of Indonesian art. The background of this: the history of Majapahit is difficult to find in writings. They had writings. They had writings already in the Majapahit era, but most of it is not translated. But one script is translated. It relates the history of Majapahit; the early stages of Majapahit. So, we have information about Ken Arok, husband of Ken Dedes. The script of the history of Majapahit talks about him, the book was written in his favour. This was early stages of Majapahit, still Singosari. The writing of the history focuses only on the heroic aspects of Ken Arok. But even if he was clever, I disagree with this writing. The writer was of course, trying to make an epic of Ken Arok. Ken Arok came from the Vishnu sect at the time and Ken Dedes came from the Shiva sect. Both sects are Hindu, but people tend to give more importance to the Vishnu sect. The Shiva were actually more intellectual, and the Vishnu were more pragmatic. Majapahit started Singosari. Ken Dedes, in my point of view, was a very clever woman. She represents wisdom.

NV Do you believe she could live in our reality?

JS She is actually important, she was very significant for the building of Singosari. That is my vision. She was a very powerful woman, because she was attractive. And everybody fell in love with her. That is why I made Ken Dedes, to talk about the power of women. She was very clever and an intellectual from a high caste. Some people talked about her legs. She started Singosari and in my view, she set Ken Arok to power. Then history wrote about him because of the conditions. That is why Ken Arok became more important. You can feel immediately in the story that Ken Dedes is nothing. But it’s unfair, how can a lower-ranked man become clever and important? It’s to make an epic of the story, and they negate her importance whilst talking about her importance. The work is now kept in Singapore.

NV I believe that like Sudjojono, this work represents a moment to explain what is happening now.

JS Yes, indeed. Now you can see a work of Ken Dedes here, before it was in the Netherlands but it was given back. It’s like a Borobudur piece, completely naturalistic. Most of the artefacts are damaged and this piece is intact. It depicts knowledge. And I saw the work and thought that she must have been a very intellectual woman. She was represented as a knowledge goddess. It’s a beautiful statue.

Nowadays, the Hans Belting Project is evaluating the boundaries of Ethnological and Artistic, between Art and Ethnology. So far, I don’t know any detailed study about the relation of contemporary art and traditional art.

I think you should consider another exhibition for this movement; it’s the *Magiciens de la Terre* and the curator Jean-Hubert Martin. It’s the first time contemporary art and women painters from *utanlesh* come together, it
shows that they refuse to make connections between contemporary art and the tradition. Contemporary art has the same mindset as modern art. It was the start of the Global Art Movement, they say. I have another opinion about the globalization of art. It is the continuation of post-colonialism. Now they found that the core is the division of Ethnology with Art. This is a global issue. You can go to the event in Germany. This is going to be the paradigm of contemporary art of the future. You have to continue.
By reading Iwan Tirta, I got to understand that you can’t separate batik, karawitan and wayang. So, if I could not separate them, I decided to look for everything that surrounds these arts, that is why I have your installation in my research. I compare the dalang with the artist.

In the traditional environment, art is part of the religious activity and the dalang plays an important role. It is almost difficult to take out the art from the traditional entity. In the traditional culture of the past art is part of the rituals, like the dances in nowadays Bali.

Now dalang plays a bigger role, because the environment is changing. In the past he had the responsibility to support the power of the king.

Or not necessarily, as sometimes he would criticize.

Yes, but only formally, however now it’s different. Now there is more contact with society because the power structure has changed.

I read that the dalangs were very critical.

The difference is that dalang used a different language. In the past he used his own language that was a multi-interpretative one.

The artists do the same.

No, they use the people’s language. I mean the role of dalang has changed. Now maybe he is an equal amongst other people, because everybody can criticize the government.

The dalang was inside the monarchy and now the artists also are involved with high circuits of society.

If you say the dalang is like a contemporary artist, yes. Now his role is more relevant. In the past it was part of the ritual. It is true that they always did criticize everything. I think the wayang characters also criticize everything.

But the wayang puppets, don’t they come from the epics?

Yes, but it is multi-interpretative and each character has its own possibilities of criticism.

Do you play with the stagnation of symbols?
I think I start from the history of the kraton that plays an important role in Javanese society. I start from the point that Java has contacts with other cultures.

This is a uniform that is western designed.

Not really western-designed. This is the last artefact I found that shows evidence of how Javanese culture defends mechanism. This costume is firstly used after Java’s war (1825-1830), and after Java lost the war in 1830. That was the last physical war between Java and Dutch. After that we didn’t have any wars in the name of Java’s culture. So, after that this loss, Javanese kingdoms were fully controlled by the Dutch. We had to try to find new ways of defence. We had already lost the physical war, so we needed ways to preserve the dialectics of Java and others. Because when there are no dialectics it means you are forgotten. This royal army was designed only for ceremonial purposes, since they had no military power. At the time, the king together with the Dutch tried to find the new imagination of the army.

And this is the result.

Yes, this is the result. What is important is that this army became a symbol of dialects. The new kingdom made a new strategy to negotiate the new situation. Since they didn’t have military power, and they didn’t want to make more victims, this was the negotiation they achieved. I think this is a war of symbols: they had the European goods, the traditional Javanese cloth, then they started to learn to European marching, but it was adapted to the local ‘tempo’…that is why the music is very slow.

For instance, the hat has a shape of a lotus leaf, which is of Buddhist influence. From this costume you can see the combinations of the history of Java. This was a new defence mechanism: they are an army, but they don’t do military service, they are exclusively representational.

Maybe this is why they are empty.

Well, actually this is everybody’s war. By putting symbols in your body, it becomes a battlefield. After the kingdom era ended, we entered a liberalist era and then we entered the awakening. This kingdom is identifiable with Indonesia: it doesn’t signify power: this is an army of cultural power, and not military.

Do you think these ideas are correct? I am trying to curate art that looks at its heritage.

The third space you mentioned to me, I like the third space. Maybe for my works I’d like to say «Third Body». It’s a main issue in Indonesia, because we are always in a situation of transition. We never experienced stability, well, maybe in the past we did, but now you can see in history that we are always in a dialectic process. The idea of
fundamentalism and globalization does not fit here. This transition has become imagery of the culture. We are always working on a situation where different cultures meet, and it becomes another culture, so it’s constantly alive. Java’s machine is a cultural machine and its fuel is the contact with the other.

NV I keep saying that Java is like a sponge. It absorbs everything.

J Sponge is maybe too metaphorical for me. I like the way the Javanese make dialogues, they make negotiations. The importance is the negotiation capacity that the Javanese show: when they met Islam, they chose what they wanted to retain so it became a different Islam, very different from the Arabic Islam. Same happened with Hinduism. They choose according to the local integrity, it becomes a new form, a new face.
As you know I was studying here three years ago, in ISI Yogyakarta. My root with Indonesia is batik. I studied batik and other subjects for one year and I ran into contemporary art exhibitions then. I also came to KKF. Maybe you would like to talk a little bit about KKF.

AK Do you have our books? We make a book every year about our projects. (...pause...) This is a project we have here.

NV The one you have downstairs?

AK No, it is a project we do every year, about the work of the entire year.

NV A retrospective of the year.

AK Yes. And here is some of my works.

NV You work mainly as a curator.

AK No, as an artist. And this is a book of my work as a curator and as an art director. So, a book as artist, a book as curator and a book as art director.

NV Thank you. I understand that in Indonesia it’s quite common that one person does everything.

AK It’s not about common or uncommon. But as an artist, we work, at least myself, I consider that curating is a media like sculpting, painting. It is a media. If we are depending on a professional curator, we have no development on curating as discourse. Because mostly all curators work for commercial galleries, they don’t create enough projects. That is true. At least in the latest years, they are working mainly for commercial galleries. We have a National Museum, of course. We also have National Galleries. But they don’t work as public infrastructures; they also work like a commercial gallery, because people can rent it.

NV Yes, people can rent the space and make events.

AK That is why many commercial galleries rent a particular month in the national galleries, because they need the “aura”.

NV Institutional “aura”.

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5 KKK é o acrónimo para Kedai Kebun Forum.
Yes, that is why I say that the national galleries are commercial spaces, or pseudo-commercial space, or pseudo-national galleries. So, every curator is working for commercial galleries. This is the reason why some artists – two or three artists – are also working as curators. Certain projects are not possible in commercial galleries.

For instance Cemeti and KKF are not commercial galleries.

Cemeti is not a commercial gallery. We are not a commercial gallery. We don’t live by selling the works. We live by other things. We opened a restaurant; Cemeti sells some works but they look for sponsorship, donation, and fundraising. But a commercial gallery lives by selling works.

But that is more in Jakarta, right?

Yes, more in Jakarta. We also have some commercial galleries here.

Tembi, for instance.

Tembi, or others, but they don’t work like the commercial galleries of Jakarta. So, mostly the commercial galleries are in Jakarta. The money is there. That is why as artists, we are working on the idea of curating as media. Maybe we have the concept that instead of using painting as a work, we use the curatorial project. The project is impossible to make on a canvas.

It has to be made by discourse.

Yes, we make a discourse, a project. And there is also the function of curators as initiators.

But then, what do you think about Jim Supangkat’s (JS) position when he states that he stopped being an artist for ethical reasons? He is only a curator.

Jim Supangkat is one of the pioneers in curating in Indonesia. He is the first person I met that saw himself as an independent curator, in the 90’s. At that time, there were no commercial galleries yet. So he did a lot of projects, internationally and locally. But nowadays Jim is just too old; he can’t work like 20 years ago. So now he is only focusing on commercial galleries because it is the easiest job. The easiest job in Indonesia is to work as a curator for a commercial gallery. Because you only need a laptop and you earn as much money as a lawyer, or a doctor.

Maybe.

It’s true. For Jim Supangkat, one project can give him €3000, €4000. He can make one project per month and make more money than a
lawyer. But he is older, so that is fine. I am younger, I have to do something else. Maybe when I am older.

NV So you have to be dynamic.

AK Yes, dynamic and controversial.

NV In your perception, there are some works that can only be realised through curatorial discourse.

AK Yes, sure.

NV So, I would like to show you this. It is a Power Point Show that I presented to my class. Since we are studying a Masters Degree, each one of us has to make a presentation to the class, to show what we are doing, in what part of the process we are. I showed this to an audience that has no referents about the art scene in Indonesia. I had only one book to research from in Portugal, and from this book I looked further on internet. So you will see that many of the names reflect the fact that I had only one book, which is *Outlet*. Because of the root of my relation to Indonesia being with Batik, and traditional arts – I was studying in ISI, which is very departmentalised: I am in *Seni Kryia*, the other one is in *Seni Rupa*, etc.

AK It’s old way.

NV And this is paradoxal if you compare with reality: in reality performing arts and visual arts are engaged together. Then you go to university and you find them separate. So, what I am trying to do with this research is also try to look at the situation in Indonesia and make the audience in Portugal aware that sometimes it’s possible to engage memory with...

AK With the traditional.

NV I have here some artists that also work with heritage – I don’t want to talk about tradition, I want to talk about heritage – Peyman is from Iran, Yinka Shonibare is from Nigeria and Shezad Dawood is from India. Their art is from the postcolonial period – not in the case of Peyman, because he is from Iran, but you can talk about an equivalent with the revolution of 1979 in Iran. It’s an ongoing process, because until 1979 it was a very westernized society.

AK From secular fascist into religious fascist.
NV Yes you are right. As you know the situation in Iran nowadays is very vivid, maybe they are facing a kind of *Reformasi*. It’s very important what the artists are doing. I looked at some works of FX Harsono that refer to his activism before.

AK Yes.

NV I have some theorists, I would like to have Goenawan Mohamad but I still haven’t found his writing is English. Today I read a very nice chronicle by him in *Tempo*. He mixed the Mahabarata...

AK It’s typical of the syncretic writers.

NV That is actually what I am looking at in terms of art. I have Jyotindra Jain, Edward Said, Homi Bhabha because of the theory of the third space, and Boaventura Sousa Santos because he refers to our own space in the post colonial.

AK You could also read Gayatri Spivak. He is one of the post-colonialists, also from India.

NV I know this name, yes. I read some essays by him. Sometimes I find these books with many authors and that is why I know this name. So, then the art forms I am normally looking at which are performance art, conceptual art, installation and documentary art when the performance needs to be documented. So, this artist list has changed since I came here. I believe I am very influenced by the book *Outlet*. I think that the modernist changes in Indonesia started with the saying by Sudjojono, back in the 50’s, when he states that you need a new look at the self and therefore make a new kind of art with social engagement. I compare the *dalang* with the contemporary artist, I compare the elitism of the past with the elitism of the present – the international shows, and the internationalisation of Indonesian art started with the exhibitions in Japan and Australia, and then Singapore, and then São Paulo Biennial, Venice Biennial and last year Lyon Biennial. What I am trying to say is that the artists look at these references, and based on these classics, which are the local epics – even if you have more – and they use them as symbol of their identity, or identities. The artists are not only Javanese, they are also in contact with the outside world, so the artists himself has multiple identities. The acculturation I refer to has to do with the adoption of western guidelines to do their
work – and this is what is different. In the past, you could be 100% Javanese and now it’s not possible. The social criticism that in the past was done by the *dalang* now is done by the contemporary artist. This results in new narratives. What is also common is the fact that performance and installation are arts of the past. But here you have performance as ritual and now you have performance as...

AK As expressions.

NV As an expression, as a media, yes. Rooted in the epic theatre – and I have been criticized by this.

AK Simply because now we have a gap between us and *Ramayana* and *Mahabarata*. You know, you are the first person I met in the last five to ten years to mention *Mahabarata* and *Ramayana*. It’s true. I am familiar with *wayang*, because of its presence around, but *Mahabarata* is far away. You are the first person in five years to talk about these epics.

NV It’s funny because you go there and you can see the shows every day.

AK You don’t see *Ramayana*. Not every day.

NV I saw both.

AK We don’t. We do not see *wayang*, we prefer to see other things. Maybe *wayang* is in our blood, but we don’t see performances. We consider ourselves as Javanese-Indonesians, Chinese-Indonesians, Batakese-Indonesians. We have a lot of ethnic groups. We consider that we are part of most of Indonesia, not only Java.

NV But I have the impression that Java is a hegemonic culture across the entire archipelago.

AK Not today. Maybe five to ten years ago, yes, because the ruler was very Javanese-centric. But nowadays... nowadays we (the civil society) have more power, the government is weaker. It’s not strong like Suharto. The government cannot rule everything, since it’s supported by a floating opinion that changes every five years. So, more or less, we are not really Javanese anymore. I consider myself more of an Indonesianist than a Javanist. We have a lot of languages. I use a lot of languages. I mostly speak Indonesian with others and Javanese with my family or close ones. As a multicultural country, we have a lot of oral languages. With you I speak in English, with my mother I speak a high Javanese, with the people in IVAA, I speak a good Bahasa Indonesia and so on.

NV Yes, and the Javanese also has many levels.
AK Yes it does, but we never speak with the high levels, only the medium level. It is just so difficult, even for us. Nowadays it’s different. I am 40 years old, and I have experience with the old and the new.

NV So you are an in-between generation.

AK Yes. The young generations don’t see wayang. Wayang is more audio then visual. We tend to hear wayang on the radio, not visually.

NV Not visually.

AK Sometimes really late at night I listen to wayang when I am working. I turn on the radio. But the younger generations never hear or see wayang, at all. So, there is a lack of information, there is a distance from the roots that could be using Ramayana but not really intentionally. So, I prefer to use the idea of syncretism...

NV Syncretism?

AK Syncretism is a kind of acculturation, but acculturation is not to make new things, syncretism is to make new things. Ramayana and Mahabharata that you refer here are actually influenced by Islamic roots.

NV Yes.

AK Wayang is not really Hinduistic in Java, it’s a combination of Hindu, Javanese religion and Islam. So, it’s not really Ramayana and Mahabharata, but rather a syncretic thing. It’s a combination of a lot of influences. It’s like a melting pot, like eating soup - you have vegetables, meatball, everything.

NV Thank you, I actually think this is the weakest part of the whole process I am talking about, also due to my geographical distance. People sometimes say to me that they are not particularly engaged with the Ramayana, but sometimes they say they ‘live’ the wayang. But they don’t say they live the Ramayana epic that much. As an outsider, I looked at them as the root of these arts. But maybe I don’t have to. Then I started picking some projects that I thought expressed some social criticism - like a dalang performing - and that at the same time referring to the collective memory, by using symbols that belong to the discourse of this culture. As you know from FX Harsono work, he tends to be very political in his work. At this time, he was not referring to his own identity, but rather to the national problem.

AK These works are from the late nineties, right (The Voices are Controlled by the Powers – 1994)?

AK 1994 was still Suharto’s rule, the artists tended to work more in black and white. Everybody had a common enemy, which was Suharto and his power.

NV Yes, everybody had the same enemy.

AK Nowadays the artists are looking at more internal subjects, more to the inside.

NV Maybe because now there are more enemies. FX Harsono is now referring to his Chinese-Indonesian condition. He has the same discourse regarding injustice and social injustice. It’s a very beautiful process that Harsono has undertaken, I think throughout his career, but I am referring to these works, Victim I / The Burnt Dead – 1998, that refer to the faces of the power.

AK I think in IVAA you can have the performance of this video.

NV Probably, I will do that tomorrow. The other symbol here is that he painted his face as a Ramayana dancer, and that is why I refer to the epics. I also refer to the Cirebonese sultanate, because in this work by Heri Dono, (Flying Angels -1996) you see the wayang golek, where he mixes, in my opinion, very successfully, the traditional art with his own heroes and his ideas of freedom.

AK You know what I am doing now? I am writing an article about an exhibition of a young artist, born in 1979. He is now working also with wayang. His name is Indieguerrillas. He is working with wayang, but more into popular cultures. I know that in the 90’s, in the beginning of the 1990’s, there were a lot of exhibitions of Southeast Asian contemporary art held by the Japan Foundation, in Japan and they mentioned the “Revisited Memories”, at the time, not only in Indonesia, but in the Southeast Asia Region.

NV It’s not only Indonesian this aspect, it’s also in the region.

AK There are many artists working on the issue of localness, the local cultures. In the 90’s it became a common discourse in Southeast Asia. Indonesia is probably a very good example of this. For instance, Heri Dono, he is from Jakarta, he is Jakartanese. Jakarta doesn’t have a cultural background; it’s a melting pot of everything: Yogyanese, Cirebonese, Sundanese. It’s just a costume. I am going to a party and I am going to wear the Javanese costume. It’s kind of a person choosing a costume party and simply using it. He was there. He just picks what he wants, but as an Indonesian, not as a Javanese. He has a lot of options. Heri Dono has done this successfully in some of his works. He is not trying to be a Javanese,
only a Indonesianist, meaning he creates a distance from the traditional culture. It’s what I mention in *Indieguerillas* works. They are artists, nowadays working with traditional theories. I mean, why work with this issue? I am still researching and working on the article. I am trying to develop these discourse based on the 90’s.

NV Well, I have a theory for that.

AK Ok good.

NV So, you want me to tell?

AK Please.

NV I think you were occupied by the Dutch and I believe the Dutch repressed your art. Indonesia is very engaged with art. They pushed the situation to a limit that was unbearable for some of the people, like Sudjojono and Affandi. And because of this, because of all this stagnation – in the *Moie Indie*, the Batik and the Wayang – I think the thought of Sudjojono has emerged. Because of his influence, a new generation of artists started a new kind of discourse. It was a slow process. And since you started to look at your own self and post-colonially so early, you felt the need to go back to your identity as a country, 30 years later. You made the process of going out of your ‘Indonesianess’, as you said, and that made possible going back to what is Indonesian, but not to the stagnated *Moie Indie*, rather a model after the modernist lesson. Now you have the ingredient of the modernism, and that is why I think these arts started emerging.

AK The problem with your theory is that the Dutch were not really oppressing the culture. The Dutch were really aware that Indonesia had a culture that they could use as a tool of oppression. The Dutch set up a lot institutions to preserve the Javanese culture...

NV Yes, that is true.

AK They had kind of a politics of ethics. *Moie Indie* for instance, was a Dutch perspective influenced by the Romantism of Europe that they brought to Indonesia. They became syncretists, they became Dutch but very influenced by the Indonesian culture.

NV Yes, but Romantism in Europe took place in the 19th century.

AK I am not sure about Sudjojono. He was against *Moie Indie* because it was part and a point of view of the colonial culture. He wanted
to cut ties with the past, typical of the avant-garde movements of the 40’s. But it’s not the case of Heri Dono; he is trying to reconnect and with the past.

NV After learning modernity Heri Dono could this. That is why I believe this was possible, because there was a modernisation process.

AK Could be true. Could be true.

NV So, another work by Heri Dono, where I think he links the rural Indonesia with modern Indonesia and the animals of the forest. I think this reflects the diversity of the country but also maybe the wayang figures could represent one island but also, one culture one ethnicity, one mentality, etc.

AK I didn’t know this work, it’s very recent.

NV I also have other works. I have Linda Kaun, I believe she looks at the reality of Java...

AK Through batik.

NV She uses batik as a new media.

AK That is forgotten now.

NV It’s not so forgotten.

AK In terms of contemporary works, it’s forgotten. As a media it’s forgotten.

NV And that is my root. But I think I find batik in many places. So, she stopped working...

AK Yes.

NV Then I also found Brahma Tirta Sari...

AK Yes.

NV I asked them if they were trying to find a third space for batik. They said they are not worried with conceptual issues. I have one of Mella’s works referring to batik. She has many works I could refer to, but this specific one refers to a Cirebonese batik, Megamendun. She is talking about the fact that these clouds do not belong to Indonesia, rather a very big area of the world. They exist in Chinese painting, in India, in Persia...

AK Yes.
NV I also picked this work because I know Mella is very interested in shadows...

AK Yes, of course.

NV And this is a wayang orang, right? I learned today from Eko Nugroho that this is wayang orang. They are dressed like they were in a Ramayana classic theater. This has a lot to do to what I am trying to talking about...

AK Yes.

NV The fact that the artists need to talk about their heritage. And I have a work by Anusapati that might be a problematic with to relate to the epics. But I am refusing to take Anusapati’s work away, because his work is very solid.

AK Yes.

NV I talked with him, actually he is very rooted in the community knowledge and communication tools. Issues of gender with Nindityo. If nowadays you go to an important ceremony – a wedding for instance – a woman dresses in kebaya, sarong and she wears...

AK A konde.

NV Yes, the konde in her hair. So this is very rooted with beauty and also very linked with beauty’s ritualization. Maybe that is why it is a bit oppressive for women. I also have the kraton soldiers by Jompet, referring to the way power is expressed in these mixed uniforms that are partially European. The cloth is very Javanese, but the cut is very European.

AK Yes, yes.

NV And finally I have Eko Nugroho, with his new wayang and his new way of looking at wayang. I am also considering looking at his embroidery. It is very interesting to see him making wayang based on the characters of everyday life in Java, and maybe even Indonesia. So, what I am trying to say is that in contemporary art, the artists can look at the pre-existing art and, through a new look at the self and heritage, they can use their art forms to create new narratives and ideas, making social criticism. I think this is made in a very effective way, because the pre-existing forms and media are used as memory and media. For the public it’s maybe
effective as a discourse, and I think this is made through a lot of syncretism, like you say, because of the contact with modernisation and the outside world. I think it’s a very rich situation.

AK: Are you aware that sometimes art doesn’t grow naturally, that is also built by the market?

NV: Yes, I...

AK: You have to go back to the 90’s. I remember that a lot of curators came to Indonesia from Japan, Australia, in search of the “Other”. Postmodernism in Europe created this possibility to the others, to go to the centre, to the West. And finally they were trying to find out what is the other, what is Indonesia, what is Southeast Asia, what is Asia. They created this assumption that Indonesian art has to be a little bit related to wayang and to social oppressions. Then, they tried to find this on Indonesian art works – they tried to find what they had in mind. I saw a lot of catalogues and books about Indonesian art shown in exhibitions in Japan and Australia and I found homogeneity of taste. It’s possible that it’s also created by the market. If you are Indonesian and you go internationally, you are asked what part of Indonesia you are representing. And they expect you to show wayang. It might be forced by the market and also about the strategy of how to survive as an artist in the Indonesian art market.

NV: Yes.

AK: By applying traditionality as a tool towards efficiency. Maybe I am being a little bit cynical here...

NV: No, no. You know that I am worried with that also. As I arrived there was a Biennial going on and I would see something relating to wayang all the time, in the streets. So maybe now it’s fashion. But I don’t think it started as fashion.

AK: It didn’t start as fashion. After a couple of years you start seeing homogeneity. When the first international curators came to Indonesia in the 1990s, when the history of postmodernism was arising in Japan, Australia and Europe, they were here looking for otherness for their postmodern theories. Maybe I am a bit cynical. I come from a sceptical generation, the generation of Ruang Rupa, and we were a group of artists trying to refuse traditionality as a fashion. That is why we are creating other spaces, because we believe that alternative spaces are indigenous and very contextual. We created these spaces to bargain positions, and we were called westerners. Alternative spaces are internationally recognized. The South Koreans for instance also founded alternative spaces not for the traditional background, but for the contextual situation, with the economical and social backgrounds. So, I am from a group of artists that refused that, but maybe nowadays we are getting wiser and we start
accepting that tradition can be engaged in art. But we refused this ten years ago, simply because we were against them...

NV Yes, but they were stagnant, so you were looking for a new model.

AK This very same person is working in many international art exhibitions. We were not accepted because we were not considered Indonesian, because of our conceptual art works, that were not Indonesian based. Conceptual art is simply westernized, and you have no Indonesian roots in conceptualism.

NV I think you have a lot of roots for instance in performance art and installation. It belongs to Indonesian identity.

AK Yes, but they simply don’t understand, because the curators came only for three days, two weeks. They have their own concepts, their own mind and they chose something Indonesian simply because of wayang.

NV And the fact that is the “other”. But that might also be because wayang is world heritage, like batik.

AK Yes, but at the time, there was no idea of heritage. This started few years ago. You know what happened after the 90’s crisis? The issue changed to Islam.

NV Yes after 9/11.

AK They changed to Islam. So, I believe this is also fashion. Fashion is fine to me.

NV Yes.

AK As an artist, you have to live in the jungle. You will come across snakes, tigers and elephants. So, you have to consider that you are working with a lot of artists - fashion, conceptual, different approaches and that they are creating their own brands, their own conception of things. I can accept their concerns: you can be fashion-driven, market-driven or political-driven. That is fine, as I get older, I get wiser. That is why I suggest that you look at the fashion side of this issue.

NV Oh yes, and with this Biennial I started to think about it. So many works in the Biennial are referring to this. I know now that the theme is the archive. But before I knew it – it was FX Harsono who told me – I didn’t know, because the curatorial statement is not in English and I could not read it. So, I ended up looking to art that refers to heritage and I ran into a lot of works that related to it.
AK Yes.

NV But there were also other things. Dadang Christanto was not related to wayang, rather social issues related to the archive. I liked his work. And I don’t even consider all the works that refer to BWK.

AK I think fashion has to be considered as a part of the developing process.

NV It is part, yes. I think a lot of this has to do with fashion. But for instance, what Eko Nugroho did was different. He started with his comics and then he ended up using wayang to show his work. So, he uses wayang only as a media.

AK Yes, because he wanted to approach international arena. I think for the internationalisation of the work, you need identity. Wayang makes people quiet, because it is simply an enormous, marvellous work of art. Using wayang is just a ticket to internationalisation.

NV Yes, it became fashion.

AK It’s a ticket. They know nothing and then they look at wayang and think that it is everything: it’s multidimensional, it’s multicultural, and it’s multimedia. Every artist dreams about it. So, if you want to become an international artist, one of the easiest ways is just to use wayang cleverly. If you are doing it banally of course, you are not going to be international. You have to be clever.

NV I think his work is clever.

AK Yes, that is true. But it is a free-ticket. I know Eko because he used to work a lot here. So, from the cynical comic artist, he became a very established shadow puppeteer.

NV But it was a process.

AK Yes.

NV Like FX Harsono’s process form national identity and national enemy to personal identity and personal enemy.

AK What I am did in this project was to bring tradition back to the community.

NV Yes, that is what Anusapati is doing with his work, too.

AK It’s an English-Indonesian book, so you can read it.
NV  Yes, thank you.

AK  I brought back traditionality back to their community, because sometimes they forget about...

NV  The Cycle of Tradition.

AK  Yes, we have divided the project into seven chapters: Everyone is an Artist, When the Stage Crumbles, Intercultural, The Thrive to Look Fashionable, Boundless Network, The Carefree Exchange -Informality and The cycle of Tradition. It’s a picture book of a project that we held here three years ago. So, we talk about everything here, through the artworks, the projects. And you can see the detail in the smaller book. You will find more details about this here, but it is a combination of pictures and photographs.

NV  Tell me one last thing, what do you think about this Biennial?

AK  I think the problem is that we don’t have any curators to set up such a big project like this. The head curator is simply a commercial gallery curator. They don’t have any idea of contextuality. I don’t have anything against the commercial galleries. I have worked with commercial galleries...

NV  I never did...

AK  Just I find that working as a curator for a commercial gallery is the easiest job in the world, with a good salary. So, you don’t need to be an intellectual at all. Curating is simply how to type in a laptop as fast as possible. People don’t read catalogues, books. So, they need your name and signature and that’s it. The curator is not an intellectual. The curator that did the biennial was like this, not an intellectual. We had archival exhibitions. I consider them important.

NV  The PIPA one.

AK  And also others...

NV  The retrospective show...

AK  Yes, in the Bank Indonesia, and in the galleries. Those I considered interesting and important. I go home and I have seen something interesting, I have a new perspective of how to look at contemporary art, by seeing the archive. But if you look at the contemporary works, they represent the expansion of the commercial galleries. Auction is very important in Indonesia.

NV  Yes.

AK  The auction house are even more important than the commercial galleries,. The artists represented and the curators that put this
together are typically curators from the auction houses and commercial galleries. I think it’s a pity.

**NV** For instance, for a foreigner like me, having the biennial contaminating the entire city was very positive. As an experience for a passer-by.

**AK** Yes, but who held the exhibition in the city was not the head curator, it was another curator, who is an artist. He came later in the team and said that if the exhibition was only inside the gallery spaces it would be boring. He stated that the Biennial had to make outside projects.

**NV** There are three curators, I was told.

**AK** Actually they have four. One was head curator, but he doesn’t mention himself as a head curator. The other two work as displayers, how to display the art work. So, the funny thing is that what they are doing is not curating. In my opinion, curating is not only about making concepts, it is also about how to display the work. And in this Biennial they had one curator for the concept and other curators for the display. As a curator, you have to show your expression by displaying the art work, by the art of display. And the artists are also working as organizers. Next Biennial in two years will have to be more organized. In the West, you have everything compartmentalized.

**NV** Well, if you are making an alternative project you become everything.

**AK** Here we see Biennials as alternative projects. What is the difference of the Biennial of Jakarta and the one in Kassel, for instance? Or in Cuba, or Gwangju? What is the difference?

**NV** It’s the local also.

**AK** Yes, the local but you have to see the localness thorough the Biennial. And how do you display the localness through the Biennial? As a curator, you have to think about it, so that you put your signature in every project. The signature of the curator is the project. They didn’t think about it, they were simply curators that work with small projects for commercial galleries. Do you know the salary of a curator in a commercial gallery in Indonesia?

**NV** No...

**AK** A younger one gets €1000 for a project in Indonesia. If you are living in Yogya, you just need €300 for one month and you have a very good life. If you get €1000 you are rich, basically. If in a month you get two, three projects, you are very rich.

**NV** Yes.
AK  It’s very, very easy. In two weeks you can make a lot of money.

NV  It’s even better than in the West.

AK  Yes, it’s true. When I knew my salary as a curator, I thought “Oh my, this is easy money”. I was an artist, and as an artist, you have to struggle. You have to make the work and maybe in the exhibition the work is not sold. The curator always gets the money and it’s easy. That is why I criticize the profession of the curator. This Biennial was organized by very amateur curators. There are a lot of good curators, but they are not asked to do the Biennial.

NV  That is the responsibility of the Committee, maybe.

AK  Yes, of course, it’s part of the responsibility of the Committee. We should form a better committee.

NV  Are you part of the Board of the Biennial? You are part of the Board of IVAA.

AK  Yes, I am part of both. IVAA was also an alternative space when we opened it, around ten years ago. We were only six artists concerned with the documentation and archiving of works. Now, it became established and it is run by an art manager. I only have about four meetings a month. But now IVAA is run by professionals. Farah (Wardani) is a curator, but she quit her job as curator and is only the Director of IVAA. I think this is fine; this is our legacy and now the others can work on the legacy that we built.

NV  And the current exhibition that is downstairs is very rooted in memory, in heritage. You even brought the outside warung... I don’t know how you call it.

AK  We are trying to make documentary exhibitions. We are working the issues of everyday life and Indonesianess. So, that is why it is so related with memories, histories and personal stories. I was obsessed with small histories. That is what we are focusing on. In order to create other kinds of art works with Cemeti, or other non-commercial spaces. And this is impossible in a commercial gallery.

NV  It happens a lot in the commercial galleries of the west, but they are commercial-alternative galleries.

AK  But not in here.

NV  But I don’t think in the West is that easy either to sell this kind of art.
AK: Yes, but the art market in the West is very open. Now it’s changing. I had somebody buying my sketches, paperwork, etc. Normally here people buy canvases.

NV: So, they don’t buy video, for instance. Photography they do.

AK: Video, not so much. Photography they do, but it has to be printed on aluminium, which is very expensive, about a €100. It’s very expensive. So, it’s impossible for young artists to express their idea through this kind of media. It’s just too expensive. They buy objects, sculpture of course. It’s also part of the artists work to confront the market with new things. If the artists always follow the rules, the establishment, there is no new art market. We don’t have any curator that is confronting the market with new things. The curator is following the rule that he must write and exhibit something that people can buy. In my opinion, this is unfair. Art is not only something you can sell, or something you can buy, art is also an idea and an experience. You can’t buy those things. So, this is why we need that kind of galleries.

NV: To develop a critical mass.

AK: I am not using the idea of critical mass. It’s a choice, an option. We develop small projects that you can see in the books. You can see several works about the memories, the communist memories of Indonesia. In the 60’s we were the biggest communist country in Southeast Asia. And that is about these memories. I always look for younger artists and younger art, because I am looking for new fresh blood. It’s difficult with the older artists; they are stuck in their own mind.

NV: People get established and maybe lazier.

AK: Yes, they get established, lazy and boring.

NV: Agung, thank you for your time. I hope you understood my project and the purpose of my visit to Indonesia. I will read the books you provided me, thank you.
Ashley Bickerton (AB)

Bali, 23rd January 2010, 4pm

NV Shaheen Merali said to me that your art changed when you arrived in Bali, that it became even more detailed. He knows your work for a long time. Are you by any chance influenced by the art you see in Bali?

AB It’s a complicated story. I actually don’t like the idea of people coming to a tropical island and painting local scenes, impressionistic colours, old ladies and markets. I am a hard-core downtown New York artist. I am a surfer and that is what brought me here. It’s physically comfortable, I don’t like the cold. So, when I left New York, I didn’t come here to look for answers.

But in 2004, it was only then, after a decade I have been here, that I realized: «Oh my god, no matter how hard I tried, this place has finally influenced me». I show you.

I am going to launch my career book with the publishing company New Criteria, based in London. It was started by Damien Hirst himself.

I took a lot of pictures of these streets in Bali, not because it’s exotic, but because it’s the ultimate exploitation or rape of the culture by its own people. Here you can buy museum quality artefacts on the side of the road. It’s amazing. I was even going to start a shop called «Antiques while you wait».

NV Have you noticed the museums that exist in private houses here? The houses are completely transformed into museums, with labels on the pieces, and all.

AB It has to do with sophistication. They are selling the whole heritage now.

So, this project starts back in 1981.

NV So post-modern.

AB We invented it. That is why we still play the game. There is a definitive point when the post-modern language was going on. I came young for the generation of Picabia or Jeff Koons. A lot of people were dealing with conceptualism and minimalism. And we were putting things in a cultural context.

This was Suzie logo. I was Suzie. No, I worked for Suzie, Suzie was the artist’s logo. These were the first logos I did. I am a surfer since then. Later
the logo became decoration. I refuse to wear a logo on my shirt, except for Singa beer, or something equivalent.

NV In the 1980s everything started being branded.

AB I started using logos then as content. That is why my signature became one. I just named it as a popular name.

[...]

A lot of works are based on classical models of art. So, this is my self-portrait after Van Gogh, my still-life studio after Braque...

My work is sometimes sociological, anthropological, but not political.

*Breaking waves* is the only surf piece I have ever done. My work has absolutely been influenced by the fact that I am a surfer. It was made in 1993, when I moved here.

This work is about the fantasy of the tourists that come here: these guys dream of drinking beer all day, and shag until they die.

In the works there are some rules: always life-size models and things reported could actually happen. Everything could happen, a lot of things could not be photographed, but technically they could happen.

The point of departure of this painting is about what men do when they are alone, even when they are famous people.

Nudes have always been about possession; that is how they started historically.

*Wisdom comes from five sages* is a work that represents something that can’t happen. It’s not surrealism, but it could not happen.

Even if the technique is rather complicated, there are shots indoors and outdoors, these details take about two months to do.

[...]

I like this piece. It’s one of my favourites. It’s about a guy who is obsessed with America. I was doing this piece around the 9/11, and I was kind of freaked. It is meant to be politically incorrect. It is about a guy who is obsessed with America and women with big breasts.

I was going to do it here, but then I decided to shoot it at my parents house, had my mother and father shot.

His life is about masturbating, DVD’s, discs, porno movies, nude pictures on the wall and then he has his little job. And he is happy. This is *LSW2*, the lonely wanker. Everything is pre-done. I was painting this and 9/11
happened. I became freaked about living here and painting the American obsession.

*Mulch,* that is my death. It’s my self-portrait as dead. I like the idea of turning into a fertilizer, to go back to the cycle of life.

**NV** I prefer the idea of being incinerated.

**AB** I think it’s a waste.

Now, this is the point I realized that being in Bali has completely changed my work. What you see now in the colours is this green, brown, grey, all related to the tropical island. So, I realized that sideways, without intention, as I was deliberately trying not to, at this point, I realized the whole palette had changed.

I do work about pollution, I don’t say it’s bad, it’s just our fingerprint. I am never literal, I am rather amoral.

**NV** What is the name of this painting?

**AB** *The Ex-Pats,* of course. It’s the last word about the tropics. Seems like so many times, so often, we see this issue. This could happen in any place in Asia. I wanted to pick up the subject, and all he sees is his beer.

I used Indonesian classical theatre characters but this could happen anywhere in Asia: undressed girls in karaoke places, in private rooms.

It’s amoral, you can have hookers everywhere, but you can’t have a topless dancer. The Hindus and the Muslims go mad with nudity. That is Indonesia.

It’s all under board. Thailand actually has less prostitutes per capita than Sweden or the UK or Germany. It’s just more visible. And the percentage of prostitutes servicing foreign clientele is actually very small. There is a much larger community servicing the local. I just wanted to talk about this subject.

The guys here, all they see is the beer. They are little-heads. This is about the labour of love, it had to be done.
I ran into some contemporary art exhibitions while living here in 2006, such as ICON, curated by Pak Dwi Marianto. I saw what I was studying then (batik) in some of the exposed works.

And that was the last time you were here.

Yes, and this made me decide to write about Indonesian Contemporary Art. My project is about Memory and Contemporaneity. I believe that contemporary art can also be a way to preserve our past and heritage. I have a presentation to make and your works are included in my presentation.

Yes.

Contemporary art can talk about human rights issues, political situations but it can also update our heritage. And this is what I wanted to do, since my background is batik.

So you start with a look at tradition, old works.

Precisely, and it is a bit difficult, because I have to join tradition and look at low art and high art. This is my conceptual tree: the first of the sections refers to the big picture, where I have Batik, Karawitan and Wayang together, as stated by Iwan Tirta in his book. I also keep the dalang because I compare the artist to a dalang. He performs the show, tells the story, makes his inputs.

Yes, mastering for instance, yes. He delivers the message.

I was reading some of the curator’s works; I know there are more but I chose these ones. For instance, Jim Supangkat was the first and actually it was trough reading him that I understood a lot of these issues. I chose Alia Swastika and Enin Supryanto because I feel that they move a lot, and I also wanted to talk about the diaspora of this art. And of course, Okwui Enzewor - that I compare to Jim Supangkat -, the first curator for the African context.

Yes, exactly.
And then inside is the circle of the artists, where you have names such as Heri Dono, the only artist I am not meeting, because he is not here, both of you, Anusapati, Eko Nugroho, Linda Kaun, Jompet, and FX Harsono. The + means that I am coming to Indonesia and the list can be extended and updated.

Have you been with Linda Kaun yet? You know she is not active.

Yes, I have been, and she is not active. As I was studying *batik*, I met Linda at Ardyianto’s house, in his birthday party in 2006. He told me she was a great artist. And then I went to *ICON* and I saw her work there: amazing.

It’s a pity.

I told her I will refer to her work, as it is important for me, but I have another problem: she doesn’t assume herself as an artist. Same things happens with *Brahma Tirta Sari*. They have beautiful work, conceptually it’s very good. I even asked them if they were looking for the third space of batik, since the first space was the body, the second was the wall and the third the installation and the space itself. But they said that they were not worried with such issues. I will refer to them as a paradox of survival: batik takes very long time to make and in a high speed world, they still do something that takes so long.

Meela, this work is by you, I have two works by you. I have *Asal* – also because I made a *megamendum* myself – and I have *Crash Team*. Can you please tell me about them?

I made this work for an exhibition I was invited to do in Iran. Because of this project, I looked at the traditional art from Iran. I saw these miniature paintings, Persian paintings from the 14th century. There you have exactly the same shape, same form for water and clouds in Persian paintings. So I was already looking for images that somehow travel all over the world, not only contemporary images but also traditional images. And I found this, the *megamendum*. It’s between China, Persia and also Indonesia.

And India?

Yes, everything in between too. But the further you can go is China and Persia. And then I tried to look for the origin of the design. Everybody claims it is their original. But of course it is never clear, so it’s like a floating image. Nobody knows where the original comes from; it is obvious it was spread through traders, over land and sea. It’s globalized. I
made another work related to this, that I showed at the Yokohama Biennial, about tattoos. Contemporary tattoos also result from images that were globalized all over the world. So, very often traditions are implicated, these are re-styles, introduced from one person to another and then floating around the world. For me, one of these pictures was *megamendum* as a floating-image, of course for the relation with Iran.

NV So it was site-specific or maybe we should say, a context-specific work.

MJ Yes. And so it was the same with the military uniforms. Every country has its own camouflage style. It is always a bit different all over the world. These uniforms are Indonesian: I brought the piece to Iran.

NV And this is a *burka* for two people.

MJ Yes, exactly (laughing). This was the first time I created a piece where the public could go next to them. There is an Afghan man inside the installation – they had a lot of Afghan workers there. So, it’s about the work of art travelling, travelling motifs.

NV So, actually one that comes to the show can try to fit in?

MJ You can stand behind the left side. In the opening, I had a person standing on the right side – that is three-dimensional. The other part is actually two dimensional.

NV So, you want to give the public some physical experience?

MJ Yes, exactly. *Crash Team* I made in 2002. For this work, I tried to go to my first memory, of when I had just entered Indonesia for the first time, in 1983, and was watching traditional dances performances. I was so disturbed by the flash-lights of the tourists that I decided one day I should use this aspect of the flash-light. With this performance, I invited true trained traditional dancers. Normally they dance with a *keris*. For this dance, I decided to put helmets on, made from buffalo horns.

NV Why?

MJ Because of the tension between the good and the bad, of all the philosophy of the Javanese tradition. One is good, one is bad, and they are in constant debate. So, instead of having them dancing with the *keris*, I decided to make helmets. Every time they crashed, instead of crashing with the *keris*, they crashed with the helmets. And the only way the public would see this performance was through flashing their cameras. I asked some of the people who came to the performance to bring their cameras. I
instructed them to take photographs. So, they would hear the music, but see only through the flashes (laughing).

NV The public experience is the same as if we were in a wayang theater, perhaps? Behind the screen?

MJ Not quite, because normally you see the dance. Here you only see parts of the dance. It was totally dark and you only would see the dance when the flash would be used. The flash is very strong. And the sound of the horns was the most present sound.

NV I might have to rephrase my question. When one goes to a wayang performance, there is a screen and the public stays on the other side, so that it can see the shadows.

MJ But this is not a shadow. The shadows projected are very strong, also due to the flashlight. The photograph was taken in Cemeti. It was not behind the screen, it was in the middle of the space. You could walk around and see the shadows projected in the wall.

NV I am very interested in your relation with the shadow.

MJ It was the reason why I came to Indonesia, actually.

NV From what I read, I understood that shadows are always recurrent in your work, they keep coming back.

MJ It’s true, they are not always present. I was making photographs of my own shadow when I was still a student in the Netherlands. My father got a job in Jakarta and invited me to come, to travel to Indonesia. Then I decided to find a scholarship to study here, just to find out what is the shadow for me, why I am interested in the shadow. I got the scholarship, came here and I started to realize that I was interested because the shadow is a kind of boarder between material and immaterial. It still reflects the object – this is material – but you can only see it through the immaterial, the light.

NV So, it’s like a third space?

MJ Yes, it’s a space in-between. I looked for images while I travelled in Indonesia, of that shadow. I was not studying the wayang puppets. I looked at other cultures, like the one in Bali and Sulawesi. For example, in Bali, I came across the cremations. There, after the cremation, they collect the ashes and they are reshaped into the shape of the figure. After you are burned, your body gets smaller. So the ashes become a baby shape. These ashes images they have in Bali are very much like the shadow for me: it refers to the ones who were alive.

[...]
Nindityo, I understand your work a lot with the *konde*, maybe because it has remained in the Javanese outfit. I recently watched *Opera Java*, the movie by Garin Nugroho. From the movie, I understood that the *konde* is made with your own hair, while you brush your hair. So, anyone can make a *konde*. Please tell me why you step on it. This one is on the wall. Can you tell me further why you use rattan? It is not a very elite technique.

This *konde* is made of rattan. I didn’t make it by myself; I went to a local craftsman in Surakarta. At the time, I was already very much obsessed to blow up the science of the hairpieces. In the beginning, I tried to make drawings and paintings and using the same shape. At that time I was obsessed with making it in giant sizes, using different materials. And this is why I went to this man in Surakarta. I brought my small design. I developed the copy in a scale ten times bigger. It took me around three months, until I was satisfied. Then I realized how different this process was of when my grandmother, even my mother, collected their own hair. They always did it traditionally – all Javanese women do it. The village women would collect their hair, and every morning they would come with the hair collected. Sometimes it was funny, because they would ask my grandmother one thousand rupiah. Later on, I realized that these women would come with hairpieces, very proud telling her «this is all your hair». They managed to make a real hairpiece from my grandmother’s hair. She was very pleased. And this comparison is so different, while I am only busy with this shape of the hairpiece. That is why I tried to make a copy of that ritual by collecting my own fallen hair, not only my hair, but also my pubic hair.

So this is why it says «pubic hair» in the materials.

Yes. For those three months, I collected my hair and made notes on a newspaper. So, every morning I would take a bit of the newspaper, with the date – today is 24, tomorrow is 25 - I would scrap it out to make notes. Then I would put my collected hair inside the newspaper, and put it in a plastic bag.

So, that is why the newspaper is also a material.

Yes. I combined that collection with the hair piece, that is why the name of the piece is *Hiding Rituals and Mass Production*.

Mass Production, why?

This craftsman kept asking me how many pieces I wanted. Of course in the end they carried on with my order, but he kept asking me how many more I wanted. Of course they want to make money, and I kept saying that if I was happy with the result, I would make more. In fact, I ended up working a lot with them.
I saw another piece in *Cemeti*. But this is a piece of art, so it’s not meant to be mass-produced.

Yes, there are a lot of stories behind this. My hair-piece became a tricky kind of shape. For me, it’s not only the shape, it has been there, it is my creation. For instance, if you want to create your own chair: the chair has been out there for years and years. Who designed the first chair? If you want to make your own chair, you hope that people will look at your statement behind the chair. This is difficult sometimes.

During this time, I was regularly seeing these craftsmen in Solo (Surakarta). I would go twice a week by train to Solo to see the development of this order. One day, I arrived there and went to the backyard of the crafts place and I saw a hairpiece, ready, hanging on the wall. It was in the storage, behind the house. I was very shocked. They had finished one piece. I thought «How come? I didn’t order this one». The piece looked beautiful. I asked the man: «You have finished my piece already, or who is that piece for?»

He said: «I forgot to tell you». There had been a man from Solo with a German, a business investor, who was interested in furniture. He saw that one piece, was very interested and asked for one. The man replied that it belonged to an artist from Yogyakarta. But he insisted he was very interested in having one.

So they made one for him.

Yes, they did (laughing). I didn’t know how to handle the situation. I came home by train and I talked to Meela and a friend – who already passed away – and we discussed about this. We decided it was my design. I had to contact both, the man from Solo and the German. If he wanted to have the piece, he would have to pay my design. He paid the material and craftsman costs, but he also had to pay my work.

I talked to the craftsman and he understood. I asked him to evaluate his costs, sent a proposal to the German man, who refused. I asked him to pay the costs, saying that I would destroy the piece after. And he did pay the costs, but didn’t keep the work. It was then destroyed.

Oh, my God, what a story.

So, why do I use this shape as an idiom? At that time I was thinking of introversion in Javanese culture, that I experience from being a Javanese: how you solve problems related with confrontation.

Here there is a non-confrontation culture. Iwan Tirta said this to me.

Do you believe in that, that we have this culture?
Well, my perception is that the confrontation is made by the *dalang*, below the table.

Yes, it is just a different way. Especially when I was studying Javanese traditional dance in Solo – a long time ago – in that period, I would feel something strange. So, I started to observe how people deal with confrontation: they hide their problems, they cover them. I believed that one day they would explode, that they would not control the tension. And how was it possible that they didn’t explode. There is no good term for the word *narimo*, which is a Javanese word for accepting everything. If you have a problem, you just accept it. *Narimo*, I was researching the word. For me it’s easier to say introversion. It was difficult to talk about that. It’s interesting; you can give so many examples in life. Then to talk in visual language, the hair-piece is my way of talking about *narimo*, or introversion.

In the beginning, I was interested in the shape. After, I started to be interested in its meanings. That is why I use that symbol. I ended up using it, researching it for many years, so I produced many interpretations.

I also like the fact that it brings the low-art and the high-art debate, this piece. The *konde* is the Javanese symbol for women’s refinement. The idea you gave me is that in fact, you have so much to say about the *konde*, that you are creating around it.

Every time I use the idiom of the *konde*, I use it to talk about different things: sometimes its feminism, sometimes a burden, sometimes mass-production and copy, the origin of collecting hair. So every time I bring something different.
You are a performance artist, I heard from Agung Kurniawan that you are Sundanese, and that makes you Javanese but not only Javanese.

Well, ok. If you talk about Javanese culture, it’s not only Yogya and Solo. There is Cirebon, others. Many Balinese things are coming from Java, in the old times.

Bali is the keeper of Javanese culture before the arrival of Islam.

Yes.

I start my project with the arts of batik, karawitan and wayang. I also put the dalang that I compare with the contemporary artist.

Yes, sure. It can be.

I choose a group of artists from the book Outlet, the exhibition ICON, in 2006, and the European biennials. I already read about you and considered putting you from the start, but was never sure. The works I am looking at are works that the artists refer to the arts of batik, karawitan and wayang. And I refer to the epics.

I have a video work with Sita which is a wayang with a new concept. For my wayang, I used dry leaves. Traditionally, you have a kind of wayang from leaves (wayang rumput – grass wayang). The leaves are normally used by children. I created a form of Sita from leaves.

Yesterday I watched Opera Java, that I believe to be a very good source of knowledge, especially for those who came here. What is the name of this video?

I Don’t Want To Be a Part Of Your Legend. It’s subtitled in English. I made the wayang figure of Sita from dried leaves……I don’t use screen, and I use just a small oil lamp. This is three dimensional, the figure. Then I play with an oil lamp to create this effect. Philosophically, I come from a different angle somehow – I also wrote a poem that explains my philosophy.

I noticed you write a lot. Your texts were useful to me.
A Yes, I am a writer. You know the legend of *Ramayana*, the centre is always Rama. Sita is like a *décor*.

NV Yes, this reflects the situation of women in the world. The world is highly patriarchal, whereas before it was matriarchal.

A In this work, this is a monologue of Sita questioning: «why am I treated like this?»

I was also thinking about the possible ways for *wayang* to cope with modernization. That is also why I used video. Sita had to go through suffering because of Rama’s honour. So, why is she the only one to go through this test? Why wasn’t the test replicated on him? (laughing) I also wanted to have the three dimensional aspect in the piece. In *wayang*, to see the three dimensional, you have to go to the other side. I put the *wayang* in the front, between the three dimensional object and the shadow, so you can see both the shadow and puppet on the same side. At the same time, the three dimensional object can look like a shadow as well. That is what I want to show. So what is shadow? It is not only what is behind.

I use the dry leaves to bring a message about the life of Sita. A dry leaf falls down on the ground; it becomes humus and will nurture the soil to bring new life. So, it’s kind of a resurrection of nature, the cycle of nature. Java was under the influence of Hindu culture, but it was under the influence of Buddhist culture before. The last religion is actually Islam. Talking about Java is actually not simple.

NV And before Hinduism and Buddhism, there was also animism. Now, there is another way: culture is going through some ‘Arabisation’. The new generations are going through this change.

A Yes, it’s true. This video was shown in Madrid once.

This is the work you saw, *Handle Without Care*. There are some versions of this work. In traditional Javanese or Balinese culture, *keris* seems to belong to men. There is a small *keris* for a woman, but it is for her to kill herself, when she is desperate. But the *keris* you see in the performance is a men’s *keris*. In this performance I want to show the deviation from the norm: I am a woman with a weapon, traditionally women are only given the small *keris*.

NV You have a fake weapon.

A This is to symbolize that I am a woman with a weapon. As a weapon of the modern day, I have a toy. These weapons are toys, they are dangerous, and this woman actually has a weapon that normally can only be used by men.
The costume has to do with the fact that I was studying as a dancer. I studied Sundanese, Javanese and Balinese dance. I wanted to become a dancer, but somehow I became a performer. This costume is already iconic; you see it in the tourist brochures and it’s also a woman. This figure has to be somehow in the memory of people. So, besides my aesthetical consideration, I used those aspects. This performer/figure/icon has to be recognized by the people. The crown represents the importance of the figure, it’s an important one. In Javanese culture, when you have these iconic symbols of importance, you have responsibility. So that is why I go to this philosophical question of the weapon: I have to bring this figure out not just as décor: it has a function, in the traditional way, but somehow brings conceptualism about the awareness that reside behind traditions.

Here you see the coca-cola: I put a condom on the top of the bottle – this is another symbol of globalisation. This figure is circling around the centre; she is not in the centre, just around the centre. So, there are layers of meanings around this piece. You know about the lingga-yoni, right? Lingga is a phalus. You see it in many temples. In candi Sukut, in Temanggung, you see the most naturalist form of Lingga-Yoni. I have been going to temples, looking at this symbol that lies on the entrance of the temples. This is a brilliant conception: you see how sometimes the lingga is on top and sometimes the yoni is on top. When the form is static, the lingga is on the top. The yoni is the woman, of course. Lingga is always on the top and yoni is the supporter, always.

NV Women as a supporter: that is the role of women in Java.

A I found out later that this temple was built by a woman. This was at the time of the decline of Majapahit. It was so decadent that she went to this place Temanggung, that was a very remote place – she was a hermit – to make her temple and statement. This is something that I consider important in Javanese culture: it’s the critical thinking. Most of the traditional culture has elements to support the culture. The Javanese believe in harmony, non-confrontation, discretion, especially if you are a woman. If you look at the Javanese culture, it has developed from time to time with this critical element always present, but always suppressed by the ruling power. This is important even for today. I have been promoting and reminding other people that this critical culture has been always present in Java. That is what I do.

NV Oh, interesting. So, there is a dalang in every Javanese. He always criticized indirectly.

A Through jokes, that is right. Of course the regime always tried to suppress it, to put it aside. As you know, people say that Javanese culture is emphasizing harmony. Now you see that there are two versions of Javanese culture, besides these overlapping influences that you refer to as a «sponge».
NV Thank you for introducing me to all this.

A One character of Javanese culture, but two versions: the supported and the suppressed. This is the other face: a critical culture.

NV And you have been researching it.

A Sure, I studied a lot, in Bali and Yogya.

NV You live between Bali and Yogya, right?

A Yes. Actually, in my first visit to Australia in 1983, I started questioning «who am I?» Before that, I never really questioned. At the beginning, you were talking about Javanese culture. And I asked: «What is Javanese culture?» This is also important, and the role of women in society. If you see the statue of the Queen of Majapahit, she is not different from the king. This means women were not so important.

NV The same happens in the West. We have such a masculine way of seeing things there.

A Well, anyway, Eastern cultures are really in the margin. But of course we are not going to be quiet about this.

NV There are also voices in the West that are also not quiet about it.

A Yes, and I have been working in the West with them.

NV You started your international career with the exhibition Traditions/Tensions, in New York. Was that good? I imagine that exhibition was very important.

A You know, there was a situation then. In Indonesia I was not recognized, my case was a bit extreme. I was chosen by Apinan Poshananda for that exhibition, not by Jim Supangkat. In the opening, there was a symposium and Apinan was talking about me, not Jim Supangkat. Geeta Kapur asked then: «Why is Apinan talking about Arahmaiani and not Jim Supangkat?»

Back then, Jim Supangkat didn’t see my work as interesting. I was viewed as marginal, a crazy woman, and a crazy artist. Apinan had been trying to find me for a year. At that time, I was living like a nomad; it took him one year to find me. Then we met in Jakarta through FX Harsono. He was so kind, he tried to find me and set a meeting in Jakarta for us to meet. Then I was included in the exhibition.

NV Which performance did you show?

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6 Asian Society, New York.
7 International Curator from Thailand.
8 International Curator from India.
Handle Without Care, that we just discussed.

Then I will for sure include it, as a statement.

I also showed the painting Lingga-yoni and the Etalase installation.

So you are a multi-media artist. It is hard to live on performance, right?

It’s impossible, you can’t. Now it’s ok. So, this is the Etalase piece.

It looks like a museum cabinet.

Yes, it is one. It is an important piece by me. It was banned in Indonesia in 1983.

It was banned?

Yes, I was under death threat by the radical Muslims, because of this work. Etalase means display case.

But you are not under death threat anymore, right? Because Salman Rushdie is.

No, not anymore. The reason is – I’ll show you: this is an Alcoran, and next to it there is a box. In 1983, the biggest condom factory in South East Asia was in Indonesia. This was during Suharto’s time, the factory belonged to him.

Suharto built a condom factory?

Yes. He had a family program in Indonesia – families were supported to have two children. This was the largest factory in South East Asia at the time. So, I put the box next to Alcoran. The radical Muslims were upset with it next to the Alcoran. They were upset with the combination and gave me a death threat.

You put it next to the Alcoran, to coca-cola, to a Buddha...

Anyway, when this piece was brought to New York by Apinan, it also had a problem. The Americans didn’t want it in the show. This piece could cause problems with people’s feelings. But this was not because....

The Alcoran.

It was not because of the Alcoran next to the condoms, rather the combination of the Alcoran and coca-cola.

You were not expecting that, were you?
Etalase means display case. So, my intention was to say. «Look, this is the era of commodity». Everything is for sale: religion, culture, sex. Since I put this in a museum case, I was saying we needed to move forward.

NV So, for you, a museum is associated with old readings and statements.

A Yes, it refers to old-fashioned thinking.

NV So what are the other objects? Buddha....

A Buddha represents culture, this is the mirror that the Chinese use for protection; this is a drum, for music; a photo of myself and a Chinese fan that can be used as a weapon. It is a traditional object, very common in Japan, in Samurai culture.

Two years ago, it was shown again in New York for a show on Global Feminism(4). There were 84 women artists from the entire world. [...] And finally this is the Lingga-Yoni I showed in New York. The idea of a Lingga-Yoni is the balance.

NV Like the ying-yang.

A But the ying-yang is more abstract. This is more realistic.

MV Yes, this is naturalistic.

A This work was also banned, in 1993.

NV I can’t imagine what it is like to live during Suharto’s regime under radical Muslims threat.

A Now it is a contemporary threat. The origin of the radical movement in Indonesia was set by the government of Suharto.

NV I thought they were very repressed.

A Very repressed indeed. But the military also created revolutions – in Maluku, for instance, between the Muslims and Catholics. It was manipulated by the government, for their sake. The government was becoming weak. The military created a situation and killed people. It was manipulated by the government: the threat was the military’s oppression; everybody thought it was a religious conflict.

NV I see the Muslims in Indonesia as tolerant people. That is why I believe Indonesia will be so important in the future.

A Yes, of course, this was the beginning. Then Suharto’s military started becoming weak and as the government fell down, this radical group had
nobody controlling them. They started to find their way. On the other hand, the international politics is dividing the world: West against Islam. Since 9/11, I am working on Islam, because Islam is part of me.
1) Do you feel Javanese batik is endangered?


1) Yes I feel batik is in danger. I was born from a family of batik traders in the village near Tegal (Central Java). My mother was a batik merchant. She doesn’t sell batik anymore, because she is already old and nowadays there are no buyers. This means that the number of batik users has shrunk. If I return to my village, it’s already rare, or there are not as much batik makers as before. What I see now are veiled people. Thus, the Muslim dress, the model Gamis, has imposed.

You mention that it has been burnt, therefore, are you referring to its end?


Peristiwa pembakaran itulah yang saya angkat menjadi tema karya. Saya masih ingat (waktu itu saya 7 th), Ibu saya sembari menangis, mengkais-kais sepихan kain dagangannya yang ludes terbakar.
1a) "Batik has been burnt," is my personal theme expressed in paintings. I can refer to batik as my first teacher in painting, because I grew up around my mother, who was a batik trader. From there, I learned shape, colour, composition and the beauty of batik design patterns. In her spare time, my mother tells batik stories. She is a good story-teller. My mother knows very well which ones are fine batik or not fine batik; my mother can distinguish the origin of batik through the design. Batik has been burnt, talks about arson events on our house/batik shop, in the year of 1964. There were race riots. We are a Chinese family. Those who burned our house with everything in it were not residents of our village, but from outside. Starting from my mother’s father, all the family was born in our village (Kemantran village). The Chinese families that live in our village, we all have family ties. And we can’t speak Chinese. My mother used to perform rituals such as the Javanese belief, kejawen/animsists.

I raise the subject of the combustion events in the work. I still remember (back then I was 7 years old), my mother crying, watching the cloth being burnt on the fire.

Batik is now considered World Heritage by UNESCO. What do you expect from this classification?

1b) Sebagai orang yang pernah dibesarkan oleh batik, tentu saja saya sangat senang. Saya terkadang merasa cemburu soal kepribadian berpakai para perempuan India, tidak lekang karena jaman. Ratusan tahun mereka tetap setia dan bangga untuk mengenakan kain Sari. Tapi di Indonesia sendiri, mudah sekali mengabaikan warisan budayanya sendiri. Batik tidak lagi menjadi kebanggaan, mudah-mudahan penghargaan unesco ini bisa memaju orang untuk menghargai pencapaian artistic nenek moyangnya.

1b) As someone who never grew up in a batik environment, of course I am very pleased. I sometimes feel jealous about the personality of Indian women dress, not cracked by age. Hundreds of years and they have remained loyal and proud to wear sari cloth. Unfortunately, in Indonesia, it's easy to ignore our own cultural heritage. Batik is no longer a pride; hopefully this UNESCO award can promote people's appreciation regarding the artistic achievements of their ancestors.

2) Who are the people that inhabit these canvases?


2) Of course, Javanese people wearing batik. The society outside of Java wears different traditional dress, depending on their Indonesian ethnic group. Since the most numerous ethnicity in Indonesia is Java, batik has
been prominent, and *kebaya* (for women) was at one time used as the national dress. This was during the Sukarno era (1946-1965).

3) Your work has been very engaged with social issues.
Cases like *For Those Who Have Been Killed* (1993) or *Survivor* (2008-9) refer to happenings that shocked you and you expressed your concern towards your art.

From human and environmental tragedies, are you shifting towards cultural issues?

3) *Saya kira saya hanya memakai cultural issue. Saya bukan orang yang dibebani harus menjaga warisan budaya tradisional. Seperti pada karya-karya Batik has been burnt missal, sama sekali bukan issue cultural yang saya angkat. Tapi wilayah personal yang dapat dikaitkan dengan issue-issue politik dalam sejarah Indonesia. Saya membuat karya Batik Has been burnt, (2007/2008) sebelum batik diakui sebagai heritage dunia oleh UNESCO.*

3) *I think I just work about cultural issues. I'm not the only one who holds the responsibility of keeping our traditional cultural heritage. For instance, in the works of Batik has been Burnt, I didn’t want to raise cultural issues. But this constitutes a personal feeling regarding political issues in Indonesia's history. I created the work Batik Has Been Burnt, (2007/2008) before batik was recognized as world heritage by UNESCO.*
N nidtyo Adipurnomo

Email enviado a 6 de Maio e recebido a 28 de Maio

Raja Mangalla/Raja Brengalla (2009)

1. The work name is Raja Mangalla/Raja Brengalla, can you translate to English?

*Raja Manggala* is the title of a *gamelan* music instrument in the discourse of traditional Javanese Gamelan music instruments. This is one of the most well known masterpieces, and it as also anonym. Nobody knows who composed this piece. If you remember when you saw this work, you must have had the chance to listen to the gamelan music instrument I used along while I did the editing process on that video.

2. I noticed the presence of the cows. Can you please explain?

‘*Raja*’ means King; ‘*Brenggala*’ is a name of a certain type of cow, which is physically very beautiful, perfect, strong and healthy. It seems to me they wanted to express that a king should have a big, strong and beautiful personality. I am trying to play these two words *Manggala* and *Brenggala*, as if they were connected each other.

3. Where is this located? When was the video shot?

The location of that video performance was a Yogyakarta big landfill, in the southern east part of Yogyakarta. This village area is PIYUNGAN. The video you saw was just a compilation of still photos taken by Mella, Rosalie and Ina during my video performance project that they were helping me with. The video performance called “LETSE DU BARPEKYU”, which is ‘let’s do barpekyu’. The site of this Piyungan landfill is such a beautiful landscape! It is a huge area of unfertile nature surrounded by high dry and Calk Mountains. The local government decided to use it as the last place for landfill, where all garbage from Yogyakarta city is filled. Everyday there are hundreds of trash pickers collecting anything from mountains of garbage for sale; it is the first natural recycle system. These thrash pickers are also living around that area, and they own all these cows. Cows are everyday running around there, trying to survive and eating the rest of so called ‘green garbage’; can you just imagine. Of course every day there are a few cows that get poisoned, and some people try to save them by pouring the cows with green coconut water.

4. Can you please explain why you appear in the movie? What protest are you embodying?

I am not sure if I am doing a certain protest or not. Of course you can read that from many different perspectives, including that ‘perspective of
protest’. The idea came out from a site survey that we did there for a few days with many other artists who decided to work on the issue of ‘recycling’. In the middle of the second day surveying, my colleague was thirsty and offered to get some drinks, on the same time my other colleague found out that all cows were for sale, just for the beef consumption everyday life in Yogyakarta. Since then I decide to challenge myself to one day make a performance of a solo barbeque. I have designed my own barbeque set, and prepared few pieces of marinated beef from the local market. I thought I had to finish grilling all meats and finish eating them all, to see whether I could enjoy that by not formatting too quickly before I finished all meats. I designed the whole scene and asked Ina, to take video shots from the beginning till the end. Then I used them as material for the video performance.

5. Duration of the video, if you may.

The work Raja Manggala/Raja Brenggala is 13 minutes long.

Email enviado a 6 de Maio e recebido a 29 de Maio

1. About the installation Have You Ever Been to Madura, my favourite batik. What year is it?

Have you been to Madura was made in 2008.

2. Those are batik fragments or vinyl installations referring to the motifs?

These motifs refer to the Chinese influence on Madura’s batik that I found out from histories in books. The Chinese who came to Madura were mostly Peranakan Chinese who were running from Semarang because the Dutch tried to clean and localise their growing in Semarang. Later on, I decided to stop learning about Madura and moved forward to learn more about the Peranakan culture of Chinese in Northern Java.

3. Why did you choose Madura? (Madura was named by the Portuguese, by the way. Madeira = wood, and with time madeira became Madura).

Thanks for the information of what Madura means in Portuguese. My intention to learn more about Madura was just because I wanted to examine whether there are any other visual elements that can be 'manipulated' to talk about "syncretism".
I felt it was already enough when everybody thinks that hairpieces really represent 'Javanese Culture'. I just want to provoke people's mind that are starting to believe those habits. The case is as you may have understood; it is I who was manipulating hairpieces in my works to talk and discuss about Javanism. Just like how everybody ordinary simply believes also that the dagger (Keris) also represents Javanese Culture, or the wayang, etc..... Isn't that interestingly exotic?

The work Have you been to Madura in the ends becomes a statement to point to those who have never been to Madura, and believe to Identify Madura just from the first glimpse when you visit an ethnographical museum; that shows you about Java and Madura! The glass boxes are very important in this work! Everybody, as a viewer can touch and turn these boxes around! You will then keep looking at an old Chinese influence of ornaments of that wooden carving through the transparency of batik motifs!

4. Dimensions and materials

Dimension of the work: 360 cm height and 95 cm diameter.

Please, one last question: are you a 'Javanist' or 'Javanologist'? Meaning a Javanist is self-identification and Javanologist is an academic on issues relating to Javanese culture. Correct me if I am wrong.

Am I Javanist or Javanologist? How about both of them? Or maybe an outsider! Of course my parents and their families believe that they are Javanese.
ANEXO 3: MODERNISMO NÃO-OCIDENTAL

O conhecimento começou a ser classificado no século XVIII, com o advento do modo de pensar iluminista.

No século XX, os modernistas asiáticos (e no mundo não-ocidental em geral) não foram reconhecidos no Ocidente. No entanto houve nesta região artistas pioneiros de grande importância, como Amrita Sher-Gil na Índia, Gutai Group e Arishima no Japão, Sudjojono, Affandi, ou Hendra Gunawan na Indonésia, Carlos Francisco e Vicente Manansala nas Filipinas, para apenas enumerar alguns. A falta de conhecimento dos legados da arte do século XX está intimamente ligada à imposição do Ocidente na História da Arte. Esta época coincidiu com a colonização ocidental em muitos destes países e a colonização dependeu, para a sua legitimação, de assumpções de superioridade civilizacional e cultural.

Existe uma percepção de que o mundo não-ocidental adoptou o modernismo depois da 2.ª Guerra Mundial, o que levou a que tenha sido interpretado como uma adaptação ou imitação do ‘ideal’. Mas este argumento não é verdadeiro: países, como as Filipinas, a Indonésia, a Índia, que foram colonizados por nações ocidentais, receberam influência da cultura ocidental desde o século XVI, o que resultou em culturas híbridas. Entre estas culturas, o espírito da modernidade, muitas vezes associado à independência da América, em 1776, à Revolução Francesa de 1789 e à Revolução Industrial a partir de 1850, foi influente naqueles lugares a partir do século XVIII. Através do desenvolvimento evolucionista, uma nova modernidade surgiu. É claro que a Indonésia não estava intocada pela modernização quando o modernismo foi codificado nos anos 1950. As suas raízes remontam ao encontro com o Ocidente no seio das cortes em Java central, a partir de 1755, e quando se inventou a ‘cultura clássica’ javanesa que tem sido ali perpetuada.

A arte contemporânea gera novas e difíceis questões: por um lado, a produção artística, enquanto prática contemporânea, está a expandir-se em todo o mundo; por
outro, «esta explosão recente parece minar a sobrevivência de alguma noção segura do que é a arte, se é que ainda existe [essa noção] no Ocidente».

A relação secular profunda entre o Ocidente e os países asiáticos, desde o advento do modernismo, acarretou da parte dos segundos um interesse cada vez maior pelos movimentos artísticos europeus e americanos: «Todavia, pouco era sabido da arte dos países asiáticos vizinhos e esta situação prevaleceu até 1990», quando começaram a surgir vários certames internacionais – a Asian Pacific Triennial, na Austrália e Trienal de Fukuoka, no Japão, entre outros – em que estas realidades puderam contactar.

«Os artistas modernos japoneses viam-se a si mesmos enquanto legítimos herdeiros da tradição moderna, que legitimamente perceberam, em parte resultante de um encontro entre a Europa e o Japão. Estes artistas viam o mundo da arte moderna como transnacional, visitando exposições de arte europeia que começaram no Japão por volta de 1910, lendo livros e revistas importados, viajando para a Europa e permitindo o interesse europeu pela arte e cultura japonesas». As relações foram de tal forma intensas que, como nos conta Ming Tiampo, professora e investigadora de arte, quando um francês disse ao artista Arishima que ‘os japoneses nunca poderiam perceber Cézanne’, ele refutou dizendo «[...] é um facto que todos os pintores modernos foram influenciados pela pintura japonesa, portanto [...] há certas coisas nela que são relativamente fáceis para nós compreendê-las».

A curadora Catherine David apresentou, no seminário do mestrado, em Outubro de 2008, uma investigação que estava a desenvolver sobre arte moderna no Médio Oriente, nomeadamente no Iraque. Este projecto alertava para a sua existência,

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8 «[...] this recent explosion seems to threaten the survival of any safe notion of art, provided one still exists even in the West» (Hans Belting, «Contemporary art and the museum in the global age», in Beyond the Dutch: Indonesia, the Netherlands and the visual arts from 1900 until now [catálogo de exposição]. Central Museum Utrecht, 2010, 170).
10 «However, little was known about the art of neighbouring Asian countries, and this situation prevailed until the early 1990’s» (Furuichi Yasuko, «Asia: the possibility of a collaborative space», in Under Construction, New Dimensions of Asian Art. Tokyo: The Japan Foundation Asia Center, 2002, 14).
11 «Japanese Modernist artists saw themselves as legitimate heirs to the Modernist tradition, which they legitimately understood as being in part the result of an encounter between Europe and Japan. These artists saw the modern art world as transnational, visiting exhibitions of European art that started in Japan around 1910, reading imported books and magazines, travelling to Europe in their hundreds and enabling European interest in Japanese art and culture» (id., ibid., 98-99).
12 «[...] it is a fact that all modern painters have been influenced by Japanese painting so [...] there are certain things about it that are relatively easy for us to understand» (Arishima, cit. in Alicia Volk, «A unified rhythm: past and present in Japanese modern art», in Japan & Paris: Impressionism, Postimpressionism and the Modern Era. Honolulu: Honolulu Academy of Arts, 2004, cit. in id., ibid., 99).
13 Seminário de 9 de Outubro de 2008.
muitas vezes questionada. ‘Será o Modernismo uma realidade no Médio Oriente?’, pergunta-se.

A resposta de Catherine David é: o modernismo naquela região não só existe como é uma herança da colonização francesa. É preciso reconhecer que: «As tradições da arte moderna, e também o espírito do Modernismo que existem fora do Ocidente não significam apagar a história ou negar o projecto da modernidade; antes querem expor e ler esta história de uma forma diferente, distinta das leituras conduzidas pelo Ocidente»

A curadora alertou para as dificuldades deste projecto: não existe, nos países árabes, uma tradição de documentação; a crítica de arte per se é praticamente inexistente – o crítico é, de uma forma geral, também poeta, havendo muita informação sobre arte imiscuída em poesia, género literário mais apreciado no mundo árabe. O momento em que trabalhava afirmava-se como decisivo, porque era imperioso procurar e encontrar vestígios, que muitas vezes eram pequenos detalhes – uma tarefa árdua num país que fora controlado por uma longa ditadura e fustigado por duas guerras recentes –, para finalmente se documentar os vestígios da arte moderna iraquiana.

Catherine David afirma que o projecto Contemporary Arab Representations. The Iraqi Equation «não se propõe fazer uma ‘exposição’ de arte moderna e contemporânea do Iraque; antes proporciona uma plataforma de informação, encontro e debate aberto a artistas, realizadores, autores, analistas e activistas aptos a lançar alguma luz sobre o contexto histórico, político, social e cultural […] para recolher depoimentos e acções que nos permitam fazer um inventário de uma herança cultural complexa, e para incentivar projectos possíveis com os iraquianos, tanto dentro do país como em outros lugares». Isto permitirá a todos os interessados, no presente e no futuro, a

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14 «The traditions of modern art, and the spirit of modernism as well, that exist outside the West do not mean to erase the history or deny the modernity project; rather, they want to state and read this history in a different way, distinct from the readings conducted by the West» (Rizky Zaelani, «Interpellation: notes on a common language of comparison in international art events», in CP Open Biennale 2003: Interpellation, http://biennale.cp-foundation.org/2003/essays02.html, consultado em 7 de Janeiro de 2009, 08:07).

15 «[…] Contemporary Arab Representations. The Iraqi Equation does not propose an “exhibition” of modern or contemporary Iraqi art; rather, it provides a platform for information, meeting and debate open to artists, film-makers, authors, analysts and activists able to throw some light on the historic, political, social and cultural context […] to gather testimonies and actions enabling us to make an inventory of a complex cultural inheritance and to encourage possible projects with Iraqis, both inside the
possibilidade de construírem discursos baseados numa reinterpretação histórica fundamentada em factos e documentos.

Ainda assim, parece ser necessário que uma curadora proeminente, como Catherine David, tenha de forçar um entendimento do que é uma realidade, o que leva a concluir que o reconhecimento continua a ser validado quando feito por um ocidental prestigiado. Okwui Enwezor diz que «a responsabilidade do curador, na medida em que trabalha com arte e ideias feitas noutros locais, é interpretativa e performativa»16. Ou seja, o curador faz mais do que promover exposições; ele possui um papel de intelectual, de crítico e de criador. Foi esta condição inerente à actividade de curadoria que Catherine David usou para construir o discurso de legitimação da modernidade no Médio Oriente.


16 «[...] the responsibility of the curator insofar as working with art and ideas that are made elsewhere, is an interpretive one, as well as performative» (Okwui Enzewor, in «Curating beyond the canon», in Curating Subjects. Amsterdam: De Appel, 2007, 110).
Portugal e o ‘reconhecimento’ do ‘Outro’

Homi Bhabha fala da metáfora do imigrante, dizendo que «o legado material desta história reprimida está circunscrita no regresso da população pós-colonial às metrópoles»17. A sua presença muda a metrópole, as ideologias culturais e as tradições intelectuais, porque as pessoas, enquanto receptoras de uma experiência colonial, «deslocam alguma das grandes narrativas de progresso, lei e ordem das metrópoles, e questionam a austeridade e a autenticidade das mesmas»18.

Existe em Portugal um vazio de estruturas de cariz multicultural e de iniciativas que tragam arte ou mesmo curadores estrangeiros ao nosso país. Apesar de haver instituições estatais e privadas, não existe um grande investimento na investigação e na criação de produtos e projectos culturais de raiz em Portugal. Quando falamos de arte contemporânea, o deserto aumenta.

Contudo, e devido à actual existência de uma cultura global de turismo cultural, vão chegando lentamente a Portugal eventos de cariz internacional e multicultural. Entre os exemplos recentes contam-se: Arte e cultura do Império russo nas coleções do Hermitage: de Pedro, o Grande, a Nicolau II, que precederia um museu que não veio a permanecer aqui, tendo sido transferida a sua sede para Amesterdão; Singing Pictures: Art and Performance of Naya’s Women, no Museu Nacional de Etnologia, ou Encompassing the Globe: Portugal and the World in the 16th and 17th Centuries, no Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, para apenas nomear alguns.

A Culturgest promoveu, em Lisboa, em 2004, a exposição Zoom! Art in Contemporary India. Em Maio de 2010, esta galeria retomou a presença de arte indiana, desta vez a de Nasreen Mohamedi: Notas, Reflexões sobre o Modernismo Indiana. Índia – Mito, Sensualidade e Ficção esteve patente no Sintra Museu de Arte Moderna Colecção Berardo, o que nos leva a concluir que a Índia, provavelmente por razões históricas, está mais patente nas instituições museológicas em Portugal.

17 «The material legacy of this repressed history is inscribed in the return of post-colonial peoples to the metropolis» (Jonathan Rutherford interview with Homi Bhabha, «The third space, interview with Homi Bhabha», in Identity: Community, Culture, Difference. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1998, 218).

18 (Id., ibid).
Pergunta-se então: será que a vinda de uma exposição a Portugal, em que o país do Oriente fosse a Indonésia, não seria também ela muito visitada? Sente-se que o diálogo com a maior parte do espaço da Ásia – em que tivemos presenças marcantes em diversos lugares – ainda está por fazer.

A exposição Looking Both Ways: Art of the Contemporary African Diaspora, produzida pelo Museum for African Art (Nova Iorque), itinerou na Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian em Lisboa, em 2004/2005, e nela se integraram artistas de países africanos de expressão portuguesa, passando o subtítulo a Das Esquinas do Olhar. É talvez até aos nossos dias um caso único de presença em Portugal de arte produzida pelos artistas naturais do espaço africano que vivem na diáspora europeia, em países que incluíram a França, o Reino Unido, a Bélgica, a Alemanha, a Holanda, Portugal e os E.U.A. Constavam desta exposição trabalhos executados por artistas com origens africanas que vivem nos ambientes da diáspora europeia, a par de um significativo número de ensaios em que se debatia o respectivo contexto político e social deles em territórios do mundo ocidental, escritos quer pelos próprios, quer por curadores ou por críticos culturais.

Apesar de não constituir um aspecto negativo, a quase dependência da importação de exposições desenvolvidas no exterior e que itineram em Portugal – e na maioria dos casos, em Lisboa – não permite a criação de discursos próprios nem de uma crescente esfera pública, mais interventiva.

É importante inserir discursos desenvolvidos por outros países, mas a crescente formação de especialistas nas diversas áreas – Sociologia, História Comparada, Estudos Africanos, Estudos Asiáticos, Museologia e Curadoria – permite a criação de projectos que possam enriquecer o nosso contexto local e possam também ser exportados. À semelhança do que se faz noutras regiões da Europa e do mundo, é positivo ter equipas multidisciplinares para promoverem discursos bem estruturados. Neste sentido, Portugal tem um vasto leque de hipóteses, com muitos lugares interessados em (re)encetar diálogos – Moçambique, Macau, Timor, Indonésia, Índia, – só para citar alguns cujo interesse e vontade tenho tido oportunidade de questionar.
Recentemente, esteve no Museu Central de Roterdão a exposição *Beyond the Dutch: Indonesia, the Netherlands, and the visual arts, from 1900 until now*. A referida exposição fez uma avaliação, através dos actuais estudiosos da arte indonésia, indonésios ou não – Claire Bianpoen, Jim Supangkat, Enin Supriyanto, Farah Wardani, entre outros –, que permitiu uma leitura integrada do momento pós-colonial através de considerações feitas pelos indonésios sobre o legado holandês e a forma como a arte do país evoluiu depois da separação. Esta leitura aproximou os países novamente, (facto que pude presenciar) e pode ser catalizadora para uma convivência mais efectiva no futuro. A arte pode servir de motor ao encontro das civilizações, e projectos de (re)aproximação podem também ser feitos em Portugal. Esta proposta, oriunda do país colonizador é o contraponto à proposta de Hou Hanru, na 2.ª Bienal de Joãoanesburgo, em que o curador se propôs «usar o fim do colonialismo inglês em Hong Kong enquanto metáfora para o fim da história. Foi realmente muito provocador» 19, conforme referiu Okwui Enwezor, Director Artístico da Bienal.

Verifica-se que lentamente o espaço africano está a ser trabalhado. A plataforma digital artafrica.info, resultante do projecto *ArtAfrica (Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian)* e mais recentemente, o projecto *Africa.cont*, ambos dedicados à arte contemporânea, são disso exemplos. O segundo, antes mesmo de abrir as suas portas – a abertura está prevista para 2012 – tomou a iniciativa de promover um ciclo de cinema africano, um festival de música e um ciclo de conferências. Ambos representam um esforço em actualizar, introduzir e aliar o nosso país ao contexto global; em desenvolver novas formas de inclusão, entendimento e diálogo das comunidades africanas no nosso país, por um lado, e dar a conhecer aos portugueses a cultura daqueles países, por outro. Pode afirmar-se que o seu fim último é fazer a ‘catarse’ de um projecto colonial para introduzir um novo contexto e projecto, pós-colonial, em que estamos inseridos.

Crê-se que esta aproximação tem a ver com o facto de a relação temporal, histórica, humana e de memória com os países africanos de língua oficial portuguesa ser muito mais próxima. Percebe-se facilmente que as comunidades africanas oriundas dos países de expressão portuguesa, que foram por nós colonizadas até 1974, nos

19 «[...] use the end of British colonialism in Hong Kong as a metaphor for the end of history. It really was very provocative [...]» (Okwui Enwezor, «Curating beyond the canon», in *Curating Subjects*. Amsterdam: De Appel, 2007, 118).
escolheram, à semelhança dos nossos congéneres europeus, como país de chegada. Tal como o Reino Unido ou a França, mas também a Holanda e a Bélgica, Portugal, país colonizador no passado, foi visto como lugar de prosperidade.

O primeiro olhar das nações europeias à sua condição de nações multiculturais e ao seu próprio multiculturalismo – em França e no Reino Unido – foi através da sua relação/oposição com a África, resultante dos fluxos de comunidades aos países colonizadores a partir do pós Segunda Guerra Mundial, quando se desencadeou o processo de descolonização. O despertar para a questão de inequidade da arte destes agentes fez-se através do grupo young black British artists no Reino Unido, a partir do início dos anos 80, resultante da comunidade das Caraíbas africanas; no caso francês, esta leitura fez-se através do movimento Négritude, iniciado na década de 1930 no Senegal e cuja personalidade mais marcante foi Léopold Senghor.

Portugal, entende-se, está a seguir o mesmo padrão de reconhecimento, aproximação e leitura. A diáspora africana é evidente em Portugal. A arte dos artistas da diáspora luta por ser representada nas nossas galerias, que ainda os mostram com menos regularidade. O panorama das galerias comerciais começou a mudar na viragem de milénio – que mostram em larga medida artistas brancos. A pouco e pouco, as galerias começam a abrir as suas portas a artistas de origem africana, sendo que algumas se dedicam somente a esta categoria de arte.


Esse momento, crê-se, vai surgir: Portugal vai seguir o padrão de comportamento francês e inglês de inclusão de artistas chineses e indianos – os mais imediatos – para
lentamente alargar o espectro ao Japão, à Tailândia, à Indonésia ou às Filipinas – considerados actualmente como os que possuem actividade artística mais interessante no contexto do Sudoeste Asiático.

Os Primeiros Passos

A abertura em 8 de Maio de 2008 do Museu do Oriente em Lisboa veio preencher um vazio da Ásia ‘visual’ no nosso país. O interesse etnográfico da colecção é evidente, permitindo que conheçamos formas de arte tradicional de regiões distantes.

A colecção Kwok Woon, vocacionada para a arte popular, trouxe até nós uma dimensão invulgar da etnografia asiática, e a sua inclusão é uma mais-valia para este acervo. A Fundação Oriente possui, em larga medida, artefactos ligados à herança portuguesa na Ásia desde o século XVI até à contemporaneidade. Lisboa está muito mais rica desde o estabelecimento deste museu, o qual, a pouco e pouco, se vai impondo na realidade cultural de Lisboa, tendo sido distinguido recentemente com o prémio de Melhor Museu Português 2008.

A Ásia, na sua componente económica, é desejada e, em casos modestos, concretizada; a Ásia cultural, criadora de realidades é uma realização recente. Os portugueses – ainda que por razões económicas – começaram a olhar para aquela zona geográfica só nos últimos anos, aventurando-se em viagens de férias a Bali e à Tailândia. Em parte, isto deve-se ao facto de o Brasil ter estado sempre no topo das preferências, mas indicia igualmente falta de vontade e/ou curiosidade em conhecer outras realidades. Aos poucos, o cosmopolitismo de outras cidades europeias vai chegando a Lisboa e é de crer que estas pessoas que conheceram a Ásia estão intelectualmente mais motivadas para conhecer a arte contemporânea desses locais.

A pergunta que se impõe é a seguinte: será que Portugal quer viver a experiência da Ásia através da sua arte? Ou a componente da nossa realidade asiática se resume a produtos baratos de fabrico chinês e/ou indiano? Pretendemos absorver a materialidade da Ásia ou estamos disponíveis para a sua intelectualidade? A minha
vontade pessoal, que pode ser desafiadora, é a de trazer arte daquelas paragens a Portugal.

Em Portugal não existem manifestações artísticas de arte clássica ou contemporânea da Ásia, do Médio Oriente, do Extremo Oriente. Este facto não deixa de me surpreender quando sei, por experiência, que os japoneses nutrem por nós uma extrema afeição, pelo facto de termos sido o primeiro povo europeu a chegar ao arquipélago no século XVI e nele introduzido o mosquete (antepassado da espingarda), cuja utilização possibilitou a unificação política do seu país; que os indonésios se orgulham de ter géneros musicais parentes do fado e de falar cerca de 3000 palavras portuguesas, para além de costumes civilizacionais que deixámos no país; que os chineses sempre nos permitiram ficar, de forma pacífica, em Macau, e continuam a vender o nosso legado histórico macaense como algo único na Grande China; que os indianos da região de Goa se orgulham de terem uma cultura própria, profundamente marcada pela vivência secular que lá deixámos.

Estará a noção de negação por detrás desta realidade? Vivemos num mundo global, em que acedemos a outras realidades através de um click.

Apesar da relação secular que mantivemos, a Ásia continua a ser um espaço pouco presente entre nós: a comunidade indiana de Goa, a chinesa de Macau e a timorense praticamente não nos procuram como ponto de chegada. A questão linguística poderia ser uma razão para este distanciamento, mas o inglês, língua-franca da comunidade artística internacional, é falado pela generalidade dos portugueses e dos asiáticos.

A curadoria na contemporaneidade segue os pressupostos nacionalistas do lugar onde se insere e da sua interpretação da condição pós-colonial e herança multicultural. Assim, estou em crer, que, lentamente, também se alargará o espectro e a curiosidade relativamente ao Próximo Oriente. Os países do Médio Oriente serão porventura os últimos a chegar de forma consistente a Portugal, como o foram quer no Reino Unido, quer em França. Edward Said, no seu livro Orientalismo de uma evasão em relação ao árabe, que já foi nosso conterrâneo.
Por vezes, parece mais simples representar todo o continente africano do que um único país da Ásia. Tanto a designação *Africa.Cont* como *Fundação Oriente* representam ideias culturais hegemónicas.

O que é o Oriente? Vivemos um momento em que o nosso olhar tem de ultrapassar o Orientalismo. O que é África? Será Marrocos uma realidade semelhante à África do Sul? Será Angola comparável a Moçambique?

Estas designações podem representar um problema, porque contêm muitas diferenças no seu cerne e criar leituras hegemónicas, limitadoras e ‘orientalistas’. O caso de Allan de Souza demonstra como todas estas designações são limitadoras: de origem indo-portuguesa, de Goa, nasceu no Quénia e cresceu no Reino Unido. Aparece em exposições como *Africa Remix – Contemporary Art of a Continent* ou *Contemporary Art and Identity: South Asian Diaspora in North America*. O Curador Shaheen Merali também encerra, em si mesmo, as limitações das nomenclaturas, já que nasceu na Tanzânia, de família de origem indiana, e cresceu no Reino Unido. Ambos protagonistas de diáspora, não são, no entanto, casos únicos.

Portugal tem a possibilidade de construir discursos extremamente apelativos devido às ligações que estabeleceu nos continentes asiático, africano e sul-americano. A exposição *Looking Both Ways*, apesar da presença do artista mencionado, podia ter tratado a questão de África nas suas complexidades e também na sua relação com a Ásia, própria da África Oriental, muito influenciada pela cultura indiana, e nunca suficientemente tratada. Portugal pode tornar todos estes discursos mais completos através do seu olhar pós-colonial nos vários continentes, incluindo a questão das raízes migratórias que se geraram entre eles.

É preciso assumir que a imigração não é entre um país e outro (A e B), mas entre vários países (A, B, C, D, …., Z). O que se passa na Indonésia é muito útil para esta percepção, uma vez que resulta de um complexa história de ocupação. O arquipélago foi ‘colonizado’ ao longo da sua história por várias potências/religiões/línguas que chegaram sempre por via marítima:

. Índia – século VII até século XVI: introdução do Budismo, do Hinduísmo e do sânscrito;
Islão – a partir do século XI por via dos comerciantes e pescadores, efectiva-se no século XVI enquanto religião maioria e sempre foi tido como uma forma de resistência da população;

Portugal – entre c. de 1503 e 1605: introdução do catolicismo, da batata, do tomate e de cerca de 3000 palavras, como *gereja* = igreja, *sabtu* = sábado, *jendela* = janela, etc.;


1. França – (1795-1811): devido à ocupação napoleónica da Holanda entre 1795 e 1815, as Índias Orientais passaram a apelidar-se de Comunidade da Batávia. Influências: o estilo *buketan* (de *bouquet*) foi introduzido no *batik*, os uniformes da Guarda do Sultão foram desenhados ao modo francês e mantêm-se em utilização;


«Após a segunda guerra mundial, o desenvolvimento acelerado da economia e da tecnologia americanas significou que o Ocidente e os E.U.A. em particular, se tornaram a fonte central da cultura; consequentemente, a globalização é, em certo sentido, a propagação da cultura americana – estilos económicos americanos, computadores e
internet, cultura de consumo e gostos estéticos que se relacionam com ela, língua inglesa, arte contemporânea»

Mesmo não se tratando de uma colonização física, «existe uma semelhança entre globalização e colonialismo. Ambos são motivados pelo desejo de exportar o mercado colonial/global; de usar a sua força de trabalho, onde os salários são mais baixos do que no país de origem; e de explorar os recursos materiais e humanos do país colonizado».

A Indonésia tem uma história de ocupação, mas também de aceitação do diferente e, por conseguinte, de sincretismo. A história deste país é, em si mesma, muito complexa, permitindo um mapeamento complexo do mundo, visto existirem múltiplos portos. A história de Portugal é, também ela, de múltiplos portos: da nossa condição europeia, passamos à africana, seguindo-se a asiática e a americana (do sul). No entanto, na actualidade estamos alheios a grande parte do mundo para lá do Cabo da Boa Esperança.

A arte moderna, enquanto arte que permitiu pela primeira vez uma linguagem universal do mundo, pode contribuir para que os territórios que se entrecruzaram se conheçam mutuamente. Li Xianting, curador e crítico de arte chinesa contemporânea, considera que: «Um ponto a favor da globalização é que as realizações da cultura e da arte ocidental modernas podem ser compartilhadas por nós e pelo resto do mundo».

Mas, continua, este conhecimento pode desencadear um processo de harmonização: «temos de permanecer atentos contra a hegemonia cultural que poderia transformar a globalização numa centralização da cultura global».

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20 «After the end of second world war, the speedy development of America’s economy and technology meant that the West, and the USA in particular, became the central source of culture; consequently, globalisation is in a sense the global spread of American culture – American style economies, computers and internet, consumer culture and the aesthetic tastes that go with it, the English language, contemporary art [...]» (Li Xianting, «Rebuilding regional culture during the process of globalization», in CP Open Biennale 2003: Interpellation, http://biennale.cp-foundation.org/2003/essays07.html, consultado em 7 de Janeiro de 2009, 08:07).

21 «There is a resemblance between globalisation and colonialism. Both are motivated by the wish to export to the colonial/globalised market; to make use of its work force, where wages are less than those in the home country; and to exploit the colonised country’s resources, material as well human» (Hans Belting, «Art and art history in the new museum, the search of new identity», in Painting in the Age of Artificial Intelligence. London: Academy Group Ltd., 1996, 36, cit. in Asmudjo J. Irianto, «Indonesian urban space and contemporary art», in CP Open Biennale 2005: Urban/Culture, http://biennale.cp-foundation.org/2005/essay_ajirianto.html, consultado em 7 de Janeiro de 2009, 08:15).

22 «A point in favour of globalisation is that the existing achievements of modern Western culture and art can be shared by us and the rest of the world [...]» (Li Xianting, «Rebuilding regional culture during the process of globalisation», in CP Open Biennale 2003: Interpellation, http://biennale.cp-foundation.org/2003/essays07.html, consultado em 7 de Janeiro de 2009, 08:07).

23 «[...]but we must remain on guard against the cultural hegemony that could turn globalisation into a centralisation of global culture» (Li Xianting, «Rebuilding regional culture during the process of globalisation», in CP Open Biennale 2003: Interpellation, http://biennale.cp-foundation.org/2003/essays07.html, consultado em 7 de Janeiro de 2009, 08:07).
Muitas vezes, a história da Indonésia é interpretada em relação às religiões importadas e pouco lida em relação a influências linguísticas, hábitos alimentares ou música, que também fazem parte do legado deixado pelos vários ocupantes. A junção de todos estes factores resulta numa aculturação\(^{24}\) da sociedade, da cultura e de formas de vida. A Indonésia, país colonizado até 1949, desenvolveu-se no período de independência. Por ser um país com especificidades geográficas, históricas, étnicas, religiosas e políticas particulares, a Indonésia é vista pelos teóricos enquanto um espaço sincrético.

\(^{24}\) Aculturação, um conceito introduzido por Okwui Enwezor no seminário de 28 de Julho de 2006, é o nome que se dá ao grupo de fenómenos decorrentes do contacto directo de integrantes de várias culturas, ou seja, é o processo em que a aquisição – através de contacto directo – entre os membros de duas culturas diferentes se dá (http://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aculturação, consultado em 11 de Abril de 2010, 12:50).
Uma história pessoal na investigação do tema

Durante o decurso da parte lectiva do Mestrado em Estudos Curatoriais – o 1.º semestre em 2006 e o 2.º semestre em 2008, com um hiato devido à Bolsa Darmasiswa que me levou a Java – procurei restringir-me ao que de facto tinha tido impacto sobre mim. Este hiato revelou-se positivo por me ter permitido cimentar conhecimento, ver arte em outros lugares, ao mesmo tempo que me ofereceu um tema: o batik.

Em 2006, tive oportunidade de assistir a um seminário em que Okwui Enwezor afirmou: «Muito mudou em 1989; tudo mudou em 1979»25 – referindo-se respectivamente à queda do Muro de Berlim e à Revolução Iraniana; de ouvir Shaheen Merali falar de intolerância e de uma classificação unitária e nivelada26 do mundo árabe – uma intervenção sustentada através dos cartoons da Dinamarca – tomado como ‘terrorista’ por todo o mundo ocidental; de Catherine David demonstrar como a actividade artística e a curadoria de temas da sociedade civil – como as minas antipessoais – podem ser objecto de investigações que posteriormente se transformam em exposições27; de Isabel Carlos explicar o seu conceito de sulismo, característico de personalidades mais emocionais, descontraídas, divertidas, menos metódicas e menos estruturadas e como o transpôs para a realidade mundial e a necessidade que sentiu em dar espaço ao Sul para desenvolver o seu projecto na Bienal de Sydney28.

Shaheen Merali tornou-se, no decurso do desenvolvimento da minha ideia, a pessoa mais significativa, uma vez que tenho lido todos os seus ensaios desde Março de 2009. Actualmente trabalha sobretudo com arte contemporânea da Índia e do Irão, o que é para mim extremamente educativo. Um outro referente que se revelou muito importante foi o curador Jim Supangkat, que se afirmou como introdutor e suporte intelectual da minha compreensão sobre a situação da arte moderna e contemporânea

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25 Seminário de Mestrado a 28 de Julho de 2006.
28 Seminário de Mestrado a 16 de Março de 2006.
da Indonésia. Isabel Carlos, que entretanto regressou a Portugal para assumir a função de Directora do Centro de Arte Moderna da Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, pôde trocar comigo impressões.

Jean Fisher, no seminário de mestrado no dia 20 de Novembro de 2008, teorizou sobre o modo como a globalização e a hibridização da arte estão a abolir hierarquias: «isto é fácil de dizer, e é um pouco verdade, porque novas geografias vieram ter com o sistema da arte. Mas quererá isto dizer que o sistema é livre de racismo étnico?»

perguntou. Falou ainda sobre o funcionamento do sistema da arte, do seu corporativismo e a perda de território da hegemonia ocidental em todas as esferas de intervenção. Charles Merewether, uma presença mais recente, mas nem por isso menos importante, visto que é conhecedor do espaço asiático e da arte ali produzida, encontra-se a desenvolver uma recolha de trabalhos artísticos que tenham partido da investigação arquivística, o que foi revelador para mim.

Encontrei no Coordenador de Mestrado, o Professor José António Fernandes Dias, e no meu Orientador, o Professor Fernando António Baptista Pereira, um eixo para o que trato nesta dissertação. Por um lado, a abertura do meu pensamento através dos nomes já referidos no decurso das aulas; por outro, suporte e confiança de que o projecto surgiria e seria coerente, sempre com um toque de conhecimento académico, de base histórica e aglutinador.

Por sugestão do Professor Fernandes Dias, em Fevereiro de 2009 desloquei-me a Madrid para ver Indian Popular Culture... and Beyond: The Untold (the Rise of) Schisms, comissariada por Shaheen Merali e Jyotindra Jain. Esta exposição histórica de grande escala relata a emergência de políticas nacionalistas e a crescente utilização da cultura popular indiana e das regiões vizinhas para fins propagandísticos, desde o século XIX até aos nossos dias. Através dos objectos, distribuídos em categorias temáticas, passava-se não só pelos momentos políticos da Índia, como pela crescente mecanização e popularização da cultura, que foi encontrando novas esferas de intervenção – o que Walter Benjamin explicou em A Obra de Arte na Era da Sua Reproductibilidade. Na ocasião, pude ver ainda a exposição 21st Century Indian

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29 Seminário de Mestrado em 20 de Novembro de 2008.
Narratives: between Memory and History, no espaço da Casa Asia Madrid, comissariada por Menene Gras Balaguer. Esta exposição reuniu dez artistas em defesa de uma identidade pós-colonial, contra o sistema binário de centro e periferia, civilizado e selvagem, que foi perpetuado pelas imposições ocidentais de representação das culturais não-ocidentais. Memória e história entrecruzavam-se, legitimando os relatos de sujeitos ‘translocais’ que habitam num mundo global.

O acompanhamento constante dos escritos de Shaheen Merali desde a deslocação a Madrid foi fundamental para eu própria conseguir construir o meu discurso. De entre os inúmeros ensaios que revi, destaco a importância do que acompanhava a exposição The Promise of Loss. A Contemporary Index of Iran, que teve lugar na Galeria Hilger BROT Kunsthalle, em Viena, e na Galeria Arario, em Nova Iorque, no Outono de 2009. O método que Shaheen Merali imprimiu ao grupo de dezanove artistas, que subdividiu em cinco secções, foi por mim usado – após pedido de autorização – na minha própria estruturação discursiva.

Este método afigura-se útil e pertinente quando o grupo de artistas seleccionado é grande, já que permite agrupar os trabalhos segundo semelhanças de ordem projectual, que cabe a cada curador discernir e enfatizar.

No decurso ainda do Mestrado em Estudos Curatoriais realizámos em Outubro de 2009 uma viagem de estudo à 11.ª Bienal de Istambul. Esta proposta curatorial, muito voltada para discursos políticos marxistas, teve também uma forte componente de leitura de outros discursos políticos, em que destaco obras relativas ao conflito israelo-palestiniano, que vim a presenciar de seguida. Ver esta exposição contribuiu para o meu conhecimento de arte política e permitiu-me entender que estes projectos são de «uma arte política que dá em vez de acusar».

No decurso desta ‘peregrinação’, surgiu um convite do director artístico da Plataforma Revólver, Victor Pinto da Fonseca, para realizar uma exposição em Lisboa. Victor Pinto da Fonseca foi, durante as visitas de estudo efectuadas em território nacional, o único

galerista que referiu a importância de «atrair a periferia; as comunidades negras ou asiáticas [que] têm de ser expostas para o panorama mudar. A próxima década vai ser muito importante no domínio do multiculturalismo»\textsuperscript{32}, disse. A relação desencadeou-se a partir destas afirmações. De imediato aceitei o convite, mas propus que fosse executado um projecto com um curador internacional, para iniciar o plano da vinda de ‘uma outra Ásia’ a Portugal. O curador Shaheen Merali aceitou e desenvolveu uma proposta que entitulou \textit{Tough Love – Uma Série de Promessas}, a inaugurar no Outono de 2010.

Admi que só seguindo os passos de quem já promoveu a arte do ‘Outro’ – sem fazer distinção ao lado a que pertence, uma vez que observei ambos – é que conseguiria, paulatinamente, construir o meu percurso. Afinal, a relação mestre–discípulo ainda é válida, ainda que a adapte ao meu tempo: agora, a relação faz-se recorrendo a livros, vendo exposições, assistindo a conferências, seguindo a sua actividade na internet e, com um pouco de sorte, através do contacto directo.

A apresentação de um seminário à turma e aos coordenadores do Mestrado no dia 17 de Dezembro de 2009 foi uma oportunidade: pude perceber se conseguiria transmitir uma cultura tão diferente da nossa, através de trabalhos de artistas que selecionei visualmente, após ter construído um conceito.

No período entre 1 e 30 de Janeiro de 2010 regressei à Indonésia, nomeadamente a Yogyakarta, através de uma Bolsa de Estudo de Curta Duração cedida pela Fundação \textbf{Oriente}. Ali, encontrei receptividade em discutir as minhas ideias, o meu conceito de trabalho, mostrei o seminário que desenvolvi para a faculdade a praticamente todos os agentes artísticos com quem falei, e a minha investigação desenvolveu-se a um ritmo muito rápido. Foi uma oportunidade para fazer um exercício de auto-avaliação, de ser sujeita a críticas do outro lado – positivas ou negativas, mas sempre fundamentadas –, de me atualizar em termos de realidade artística, já que o meu conhecimento estava restringido ao que lera na obra \textit{Outlet: Yogyakarta within the Contemporary Indonesian Art Scene}, que adquirira em 2006, e a mais alguns ensaios, \textit{websites} e artigos que encontrei na \textit{internet}.

\textsuperscript{32} Victor Pinto da Fonseca, visita de estudo com Roger Meintjes ao edifício \textit{Transboavista}, em 6 de Fevereiro de 2006.
A opção de ir em Janeiro prendeu-se com o facto de haver em Yogyakarta uma Bienal de Arte nesta época. Para minha surpresa e deleite, o tema era o «arquivo»: a bienal estava a fazer um balanço em que o ponto crucial era a história. A 10.ª edição da Bienal coincidiu com o seu vigésimo aniversário, pelo que se procurou ler a componente histórica nos trabalhos dos artistas contemporâneos, considerados interpretações do espírito de mudança dos tempos. Segundo Arahmaini, o aspecto histórico é importante porque retrata mais do que o mundo artístico desta cidade: «os seus residentes têm uma memória curta da sua própria história»33.

Durante a deslocação à Indonésia, e com introdução de novos nomes no projecto, comecei a desenvolver categorias para o mesmo. Depois de aceites pelo Orientador, propus-me fazer um segundo seminário de mestrado – apresentado a 18 de Março de 2010 – para pôr professores e colegas ao corrente do trabalho.

Este propósito de introduzir outras latitudes nos meus trabalhos já o manifestara enquanto estudante e designer: procurei sempre usar conceitos e/ou tecnologias que de alguma forma citassem o legado cultural que sempre me fascinou. Em termos pessoais, estou modelada pelo passado civilizacional onde vivi – é esse que desperta em mim o fascínio pelo Oriente e foi ele que me motivou a aprender em 2006 o batik de Java, a par de outras disciplinas.

Em termos curatoriais, o meu interesse pela continente asiático – entre outros – assemelha-se. A revisitação do passado é fascinante. Saber um pouco da História, em todas as suas vertentes, e reutilizar esse conhecimento no presente é algo que procuro fazer.

Quando estudei na Indonésia, em 2006, o contacto com a civilização javanesa permitiu-me descobrir uma cultura completamente nova para mim, cujo interesse do

ponto de vista antropológico e artístico é enorme. Durante aquele período, fui a duas exposições de arte contemporânea de grande dimensão. Destas, destaco *ICON: Retrospective*, com curadoria de Dwi Marianto e Mikke Susanto, na abertura da Jogja Gallery, o novo espaço institucional de Yogyakarta. Apontei alguns dos nomes que apreciei na altura e alguns coincidem com o que vim a sugerir nesta proposta curatorial.

É exactamente devido à ausência de outras exposições de arte contemporânea do espaço geográfico da Ásia que esta proposta – que espero possa vir um dia a resultar numa exposição – é uma oportunidade, mas também um risco. Assim, e para não cometer erros desnecessários, procurei olhar o trabalho de curadores mais experientes, pesquisei a história da Indonésia e finalmente confrontei as minhas ideias e concepções com artistas, agentes artísticos e amigos daquele país.

As motivações que levam os curadores a construir discursos são várias: a minha grande ligação à Ásia, e ao seu ensinamento primacial, confuciano, de que devemos respeitar sempre a opinião dos mais velhos, levaram-me a escolher tratá-la de uma forma mais consistente, olhando para a história e para a sociedade que encontrei no ano de 2006, quando residi em Java. Hoje em dia, «toda a gente tem identidades misturadas [...] A proposição de que as coisas são complexas não é, necessariamente, interessante em si mesma. Precisamos de uma forma que nos diga algo da complexidade cultural e artística. O argumento deste ensaio – que é inevitavelmente um rodeio - é que uma perspectiva histórica é necessária. E isto pode parecer uma reivindicação surpreendente, não para a arte do passado, mas para a do presente»

A afirmação de Nicholas Thomas adequa-se ao meu método de trabalho, em que a componente histórica está muito presente. Para compreender a arte contemporânea da Indonésia que emprega, usa, recicla, reinterpreta a memória colectiva, precisei de ler a arte clássica, entender os momentos sociais e políticos porque passou, e estudar alguns autores teóricos para construir o discurso.

34 «[...] everybody has mixed identities [...] The proposition that things are complex is, of course, not necessarily interesting in itself. We need a way into artistic and cultural complexity that tells us something. The argument of this essay – which is unavoidably roundabout – is that historical perspective is critical. And this may be a surprising claim to make, not for the art of the past but that of the present» (Nicholas Thomas, «Reflections on contemporary art, globalisation and history», *The 5th Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art*. Brisbane: Queensland Art Gallery Publishing, 2006).
A História parece-me, continua a ser, para mim, a forma mais válida para perceber o presente e perspectivar o futuro. Em resumo, devemos, conforme diz Okwui Enwezor, «olhar historicamente para o presente»35.

35 «[Is this also what you mean when you say that you are] ‘looking historically at the present’» (Paul O’Neill cit. Okwui Enwezor, «Curating beyond the canon», in Curating Subjects. Amsterdam: De Appel, 2007, 121).