

INDONESIAN CONTEMPORARY ART AND THE RISE OF ASIA

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Abstract: Indonesian contemporary art over its historical range has undergone many dynamics. The most significant has been seen from the contrast between the two, Bandung's and Jogjakarta's cultural phenomenon and sociological environment, which are both dominant in the history of Indonesia's art scene. The differences were seen including in the depiction of the artwork, the creative process and the mechanism formed between the artist and the social field of art in general. This research specifically describes the dynamic in the social field of Indonesia art, which has significantly occurred at the beginning of the new millennium to the present time. The revival of the Asian economic region brings culture including Indonesian art at the most advanced stage in the history. Interdisciplinary phenomenological approach used in this study to analyze the effects of the rise of Asia as an anthropological and sociological phenomenon of contemporary Indonesian art world.

Keywords: *History, Contemporary Art, Asia, Phenomenology*

1. INTRODUCTION

During the last decade, when the world entered the third millennium, art and its scene have kept on changing radically. The paradigm shift, which happened post Pop Art, becomes a thing of the past. This decade, Asian art does not only rule on its land but also is famous around the world. Studies on the development of Asian art are widely available in printed mass media and academic references. Asia has become the new Mecca for art and Asian artists are like rock stars in many international art events as well as in auction houses. Asia moves forward with the post economic method, a condition that happens when the economy of a certain country or continent shows progress, which was even considered radical for Asia. Countries like China, South Korea, and Japan largely contribute to the simultaneous progress of Asian economy. Auction houses, art fairs, and large commodifying of artwork have resulted in the growing of art infrastructure inasmuch as the artists are considered important resources. It creates a significant impact in Indonesia, especially in three main cities, which are thought to be the center of art development: Jakarta, Bandung, and Yogyakarta. Bandung is considered important not only because it has the oldest art institution but also economically strategic being only three hours away from the capital. It also accommodates diverse individuals; a city that enables creativity and its youth to flourish.

Studies in contemporary art has been mainly done in the Faculty of Visual Arts and Design, at Bandung Institute of Technology, and is divided into three main categories: the development of art scene, specific art works, and the practice of art creation. The study in contemporary art focusing on contemporary art scene was done by Agung Hujatnikajenong in his paper titled "Curatorial Practice and Power Relations in Indonesia's Contemporary Art Scene" and by A. Rikrik Kusmara titled "Art Media in Indonesia's Art Scene". In the field of art creation and creativity, there are Irma Damajanti's dissertation titled "Artistic Creativity of Heri Dono: An Interpretation in Sociocultural Dimensions" and Ira Adriati's research titled "Manifestation of Patterns of Self Actualization in Artworks by Indonesian Contemporary Women Artists and Its Implications in the Achievement of Actualization in the Art World".

We can see from the comparison above that the number of research on contemporary art as terminology is over the research on contemporary art as a time period in art history. This research can be regarded as a study on contemporary art as a time period in art history that correlates with the practice of art creation.

In another research on art contemporary as terminology, A. Rikrik Kusmara (2011) in his paper titled "Art Media in Indonesia's Contemporary Art Scene" highlights the significance of art media in the practice of contemporary artists. Kusmara underlines the indication of the shift of the concept of medium, which originated from an aesthetic approach and moved towards the politic of representation, then analyzes that shift from its functions both aesthetically and politically.

When we discuss Indonesian contemporary art as a time period within the history of art, we cannot overgeneralize the global development of art scenes. There is a necessity of a more comprehensive study to pinpoint the beginning of contemporary art period within Indonesia's history of art. Agung Hujatnikajenong (2012) in his dissertation titled "Curatorial Practice and Power Relations in Indonesia's Contemporary Art Scene" states that the term "contemporary art" is difficult to elucidate definitively. There needs to a detailed elaboration from different writings, which concern the problems of concept and terminology of contemporary art. One of the approaches he uses is Arthur C. Danto's statement in his book "The End of Art" in which he describes contemporary art as a diversification of Avant garde art practices post war that is indicated by the deterioration of high modernism associated with abstract artworks.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Indonesian Contemporary Art

Since the end of World War II, art and history of art has changed radically in the way art was perceived and understood. At the end of the 50's in the USA, pop art and conceptual art push away the Greenberg-style high modern art. Greenberg conveys in his book "Theory and Documentation on Contemporary Art a Resource Book of Artist Writings":

"The essence of Modernism lies... in the use of the characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself... What had to be exhibited and made explicit was that which was unique and irreducible not only in art in general but also in peculiar to itself, the effects peculiar and exclusive to itself." (Greenberg in Stiles, 1996:2)

The universal yet exclusive essence of modernism and the significance of medium in painting are the main target of his criticism. Post modernism doubted the establishment of modern art. It redefines art and sees it differently.

"The modernist paradigm is generally understood to reflect rational liberal humanism and belief in progress establish during the Enlightenment... In contrast, a postmodernist perspective views these same constructs as contingent, sufficient, and lacking transcendence, and progress is understood to e a theological concept that lends narrative coherency to change through time." (Stiles, 1996:2)

Objectivity in modernism became apprehensive; identity and subjectivity were no longer determined as whole but as polymorphs, fragments, and without a clear core. Everything that was established in the modern era, such as signs and symbol, were deconstructed by post modernism into something ambiguous, arbitrary, and transmutable. Post modernism sees everything, especially culture, in its adherence, heterogeneity, and multicultural perspective particularly when it comes to problems around gender, sexuality, class, and race. The pinnacle of belief about the truth as the modernists see it was replaced by a radial relativism so that it now becomes negotiable.

In the art world, the significant results of this debate are media expansion or the shift of definition in categories of art. Conventional media like painting and sculpture move towards hybrid forms of

media, even the ones that were unthinkable before. Automatically, old categorization becomes unimportant and media become merely a means of expression.

“... The human body in performance, invisible matter (gases), energy (telepathy), large scale projects, and earthworks in remote landscapes and urban centers, interventions in social and political institutions, and computer and other electronic works, including virtual reality.” (Stiles, 1996:3)

Not only art media that experience expansion, but artists' perspectives also transform alongside. Artists start to consider theoretical strategy as importantly as the artworks they produce. Some with academic background, both undergraduates and masters acquire a more mature understanding of history, philosophy, art scene, and even other correlated subjects. They use it as a strategy in art creation, as a conceptual background or method of creation.

If we compare conditions in Indonesian history of art, the physical post war era began in 1938 with the emergence of Persagi whose artists embed values of nationalism in their artworks. Traces of contemporary art started to surface in the 50's with the birth of two art institutions, ASRI in Yogyakarta (1950) and *Sekolah Guru Gambar* in Bandung (1947) that transformed into Visual Arts Section, Division of Architecture and Visual Arts (1956). Moreover, the peak of the expansion of definition and media in art happened as many movements came up during the New Order era (70's-80's), which continued as new media develop in the 90's.

Etymologically, contemporary art is defined as belonging to the same time, of the present time; modern.

“...Contemporary refers to now – in strong opposition to a moment in some recognized past (which is over)...” (Harris, Art history: The Key Concept).

If we refer to such definition, we will agree that contemporary art is a tendency in the art scene within the last decade or perhaps from art phenomena that happens in the 2000's. In ten years, Indonesian art has experienced a lot of trends. New media and young artists begin to dominate market and Indonesian art scene.

Indonesian contemporary art in its historical timeline has gone through different dynamics. The most significant thing can be seen from the distance between two poles, Bandung and Yogyakarta, which are both influenced by art academic taste, anthropological culture, and sociological environment. It appears in the visual of the artworks, process of creation, and the mechanism that is formed between artists and the general art scene. Each has typical visible patterns in the artworks made by the graduates of both Bandung Institute of Technology and Yogyakarta's Indonesia Art Institute. Those patterns are created from the way they were taught, including their curriculum, history, and culture in general. Both cities cannot be analyzed partially and compared based on weaknesses and strengths. They must be considered as a dynamic that makes the scene of Indonesian contemporary art now.

The second aspect that holds a very important role in the dynamic of Indonesian contemporary art is the centralization of art scene, especially in Java and Bali where art movements thrive. Without sharing anything in common, those movements center in Bandung, Yogyakarta, and Bali, then end up in Jakarta through a market mechanism. Any movement happening out of Java and Bali receives less attention.

Additionally, the development of art institutions, such as galleries, art centers, alternative spaces, and museums is also problematic. It does not happen steadily like in the developed countries, so that it becomes hindered. Such development always depends on fundings, except for galleries that are mostly relied on the general aspect of the global economy. Commercial galleries are dominant in Indonesian art scene due to business motives, so that other alternative spaces and art centers

become minorities because although they depend on fundings, they operate as non-profit institutions. Art takes root in patronage that sees it as a commodity without meaningful feedback to its wider development.

2.2 Crossover between Indonesian and Western Art History

Quoting the introduction in “The Gathering of Histories: International Seminar on Art History and Visual Culture in Southeast Asia” held in 2012 that compared to other Asian countries like Japan, China, and Singapore, Indonesia is one of those that lacks publication and education development, research as well as studies in art history and visual culture. One of the reasons is because there are no institutions such as museum, higher education, and research center that are able to expand the subject well. Furthermore, the global art scene faces new challenges in discourse and studies of recent history. Publications of art history also seem to develop further away from the classic models of historical study, not only in methodology, but also in themes and case studies. As a consequence of unavoidable globalization, recent history publication demands comparative discussion, which does not analyze problems within a specific country. The seminar indeed documents problems in the archiving and publishing of art. In spite of that, some recent Indonesian non-profit organizations such as Indonesia Visual Art Archive, which was once a part of Yogyakarta’s *Yayasan Cemeti*, have actively contribute in digitally documenting artists, artworks, and exhibitions which are held in Indonesia, mainly in Yogyakarta, Bandung, and Jakarta. Indonesia Visual Art Archive (IAA) has so far archived 4.117 artists, 16.008 artworks, 34.223 photographs, 107 videos, 264 audio recording, 1850 pdf documents, 439 events, 8796 publications, from 57 cities. In addition to IAA, some representative galleries such as Selasar Sunaryo, ART:1 New Museum, some alternative galleries, and art spaces have documented artworks and artists since long ago.

Researches on contemporary art as a time period are inseparable from the crossover between what has happened in Indonesian and Asian art scene in general. Art, as we know today, is a manifestation of Western modern culture that was spread widely due to colonialization in Asia and other non-Western countries. Its impact was greatly experienced in the second half of the 19th century by the emergence of art academies. Sanento Yuliman in his book titled “*Dua Seni Rupa*” describes such great impact came from the event when a native Indonesian, named Raden Saleh, had the opportunity to study Western painting in the Netherland. According to Sanento, for twenty years he traveled through the Netherland, Germany, Austria, Italy, and France while living amongst the aristocrats. Additionally, there were a lot of Western painters who came to Batavia, which initiated painting courses, art institution for the colonialized people, *kunstkring* or the art circle in the 1930’s. (Yuliman, 2001:57-58)



Figure 1 Sudjojono, *Kawan-kawan Refolusi*, 1947
Source: <http://archive.ivaa-online.org/pelakuseni/s-sudjojono-1>

Bataviache Kunstkring (Batavia art circle) was one of the influencers who held a lot of events. Back then, there were two sides of exhibitions by modern artists. Firstly, the birth of nationalism

encouraged an art organization for young painters in the first decade of the 20th century namely *Persatuan Ahli Gambar Indonesia* (PERSAGI). They threw criticism at how art was practiced, which they thought did not display the nation's identity. Those young artists thrived swiftly in *sanggar*, including PERSAGI's spokesperson, Sudjojono, Affandi, Hendra Gunawan, Rusli, Oesman Effendi, and Zaini.

Secondly, the westernization of those Dutch art institutions caused formal art academies to emerge in the 1950's. Yuliman in the aforementioned book stated that two of them are what we now know as Faculty of Art and Design at Bandung Institute of Technology, which was established in 1947, and Indonesian Art Institute (formerly known as Indonesian Visual Arts Academy) in 1950. Educational institutions give more prominent directions to future artists, both systematically and consistently, by providing objective knowledge on the any development in the Western art scenes and enabling students to relate it to important issues on environment, social, and culture. Thus, artists from art academies acquire a mature and open mind so that they are able to accept Western influences and integrate it to their personal practice.

"Higher education has an important impact to artists' consciousness (of their practice). We witness more and deeper information on international art, especially from the West. At the same time, those educated artists become sensitive to issues and discussions of the intellectuals about global problems and those of developed countries. Art higher education also encourages a sharper intention about art practice, materials, process, visual aspects and their manipulation, etc., thus prompts explorative, experimental, and critical behavior." (Yuliman, 2001:59)

Furthermore, Yuliman also highlights the era when assimilation of ancient art or traditional decorative patterns happened, which gives a special identity to Indonesian modern art. Such patterns appeared strongly in Yogyakarta, whereas in Bandung it was abstract art that flourished with influences from Islamic patterns and calligraphy. A.D. Pirous and Ahmad Sadali are two examples that combine formal abstraction with calligraphic nuance. The following development was indicated by stronger contacts with Western countries through media, visual references and concepts, which resulted in new forms of art.



Figure 2 Ahmad Sadali, *Tiga Batang-batang Horizontal Bersisa Emas*, 1987
Source: <http://archive.ivaa-online.org/artworks/detail/4847>

Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru (GSRB) or New Art Movement arose from new ideas about environment, installation, popular art, commercial scenes, and mass media. It focuses on how art overlaps life, the celebration on the shallowness of daily life, and critique on government's policies and dominance of art and culture. GSRB emerged with a spirit to experiment, to open new ways and introduce new materials. Their artists, such as Ris Purnomo, S. Prinka, Anyool Soebroto,

Satyagraha, Nyoman Nuarta, Pandu Sudewo, Dede Eri Supriya, Jim Supangkat, Siti Adiyati Subangun, F.X Harsono, Nanik Mirna, Hardi, Wagiono S., Agus Tjahjono, B. Munni Ardhi and Bachtiar Zainoel, radically initiated provocative and critical exhibitions.



Figure 3 *Pasar Raya Dunia Fantasi*, 1987

Source: <http://archive.ivaa-online.org/pelaku-seni/gsrp-gerakan-seni-rupa-baru>

3. THE RESEARCH METHOD

Interdisciplinary phenomenological approach used in this study to analyze the effects of the rise of Asia as an anthropological and sociological phenomenon of contemporary Indonesian art world.

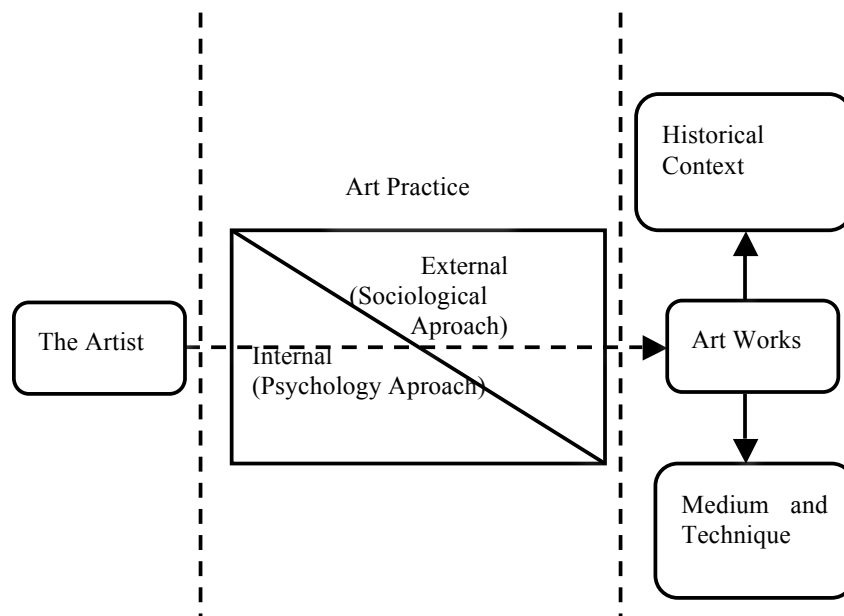


Figure 4 Theoretical Frameworks

Source: personal documentation

4. CONCLUSION

Subsequently, Indonesian art developed towards the end of the 20th century; it experienced the first 'art boom' in the 1980's, which fosters the emergence of commercial galleries in Bandung, Jakarta, Yogyakarta, Surabaya, and Bali. The same 'art boom' happened again in the beginning of the 2000's, which continues until now.

If we trace the global art history timeline over that of the Indonesian, we can see that they do not go along simultaneously. We have never invented the term 'art'. We have adapted it from art that happened in the Western world, especially in the modern era. However, we still experience and have never separated from the influences of tradition and its daily patterns, which encourage significant distinctiveness on the visual of our artworks. Tradition also manifests in the artists' behavior, creation, and art practice. For example, the late Hendrawan who saw his art and practice as a part of traditional ritual; there had never been a clear division between art and tradition as they juxtapose and unite harmonically.

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