VERTIGO THE INDONESIAN UGLINESS

AN ASSEMBLY OF INDONESIAN ARTISTS
Many people in Indonesia believe that art must offer joy or beauty. It seems apparent that these people are averse to all forms of art that do not meet the aforementioned criteria, as they are unaware that not all motives of creating art are based on the aesthetic experiences of the artist. This means that an artist may not always offer beauty in his or her art. We will always find art creation that is inspired by bad experiences, which may result in works that are not easy on the eye.

The dichotomy between ugliness and beauty is one that is age-old. If a work of art is not conventionally beautiful or does not fulfill aesthetic values, is it then not art? If art only conveys beauty, then does ugliness not fulfill preconditions of art? How is the ambiguous connection between both explicable if the beauty of art often fails to compete with real beauty, and unsightliness is not worse than reality? Can a work of art contain a combination of both the beautiful and the grotesque?

Throughout history, it has become orthodox to only accept works of great beauty as art, while “ugly” or disconcerting pieces have always been marginalised. As such, the ugly and the beautiful have traditionally been deeply intertwined in the history of art.

In essence, people define ‘ugly’ as follows: “offensive to the eyes; conflicting with beauty; unpleasant or revolting; not enjoyable to look at; defective”. This “ugly” word also relates to all that is unpleasant; deficiencies in beauty; horror.

It is evident that no art movement in Indonesia clearly rejects beauty, nor can we find any traces of a discernable anti-aesthetics movement. Almost all of art creation in Indonesia was driven by sensitivities toward beauty, and almost all creations are pretenses of morality and spirituality.

Despite this, we can easily find manifestations of artists or groups of artists – reflected in their work – that reject art as beauty; offer ugliness; darkness; horror; terror; and terrifying, invalid shapes.

It could be because of this situation that our aesthetic sensitivities also suffer disturbances, and it is this traumatic disturbance from aesthetic experiences we call “ugliness”. This ugliness is the provocation and projection of unconscious fantasies that reshape the meaning of an aesthetic experience, to the point where the formal quality of the experience – shape, texture, and color – become what we perceive as the source of our most disturbing and revolting feelings.

The relevance of psychoanalytical studies in approaching this problem can be applied so long as the subject sees ugliness as a confrontation towards reality that brings disquieting and traumatic fantasies to the surface. The fantasy may involve the perception of fear, brutality, a disturbance of formal dimensions, or bad aesthetics.

Depiction of the “rotten” human in works by Affandi, Hendra Gunawan, Soedibio, Harjadi S., dan Basuki Resobowo in the late 1940s or Tisna Sanjaya, Moelyono, Dadang Christian-to, Agung Kurniawan, Heri Dono in the 1990s, was followed by Ugo Untoro, Isa Perkasa, Nandang Gawe, Rahmat Jabaril; not to mention Ade Darmawan, Reza Afisina, Bambang “Toko” Witjaksono, Gusmen Heriadi, Wedhar Riyadi, Deden H. Durahman, and Arie
Diyanto. The ugliness in their work represented things that were tough to swallow, and which were shunned — even rejected — by the masses. Their work involved all our emotions, and attempted to tell us what art should not do.

In the context of “ugliness”, the public not only rejects the idea of being represented by “the reality of art”, but also responds in protest. This situation is interesting, considering that the post-war situation (like the art created by Indonesian artists during the Revolution era) caused not just social, moral, political and economic problems like poverty, but also destroyed the wholeness of the ordinary man’s spirit. Post-war conditions often give way to psychological trauma.

In recent times, there has been a gradual but marked shift towards the acceptance of ugly art. Although in certain periods, reactions toward such art are a political reaction not to be ignored. The New Order, for instance, was a regime that enacted a formal system of aesthetic standards to categorise between “beauty” and “ugly”: it decreed which types of artwork were socially and culturally desirable, and which ones were not. Under President Soeharto’s rule, this regime tended to undermine artistic express and reduce the art scene to a state-approved sham. Outside of these constraints, all art expression was silenced.

Yet, the New Order situation was not unfamiliar to Indonesian artists. During the fascist Japanese occupation of Indonesia (1942-1945), any expression featuring the poor rarely passed the censors. This occurred with one of Affandi’s paintings: during a solo exhibition organized by Poetera (Pusat Tenaga Rakyat – Center of People’s Power), it was taken down by the Japanese military. The reason cited by the authorities was that the painting provoked public reaction to the wartime poverty and hardships caused by Japan. We realise this because the Japanese issued propaganda to win the war, including the idea that Japan was a good friend that would never put the Indonesian people in misery. As such, the New Order was not so different from the occupying Japanese. The leaders of the regime thought that there were special, formalised criteria for “how art is supposed to be”. It was no wonder that the standard used for defining the good and the bad was heavily connected to the politics of taste. The ruling class would always eschew and marginalise unauthorised forms of expression, and these attitudes would eventually trickle down to society and become naturalised.

Enforcement of these standards did not always go smoothly. When the ruling class enforced censorship towards art they did not authorise, the consistency of censorship triggered suspicion and anxiety. For artists, the fear of discrimination in art circles also changed the expressions and symbolic representations of art.

Ugliness in art does not only depict the “decaying” man with feet full of pus, diseased skin; bums that we wouldn’t want in our living room. Ugliness is also art that seems out of place and furrows our brows. These are the artworks that deviate from the norm; exploiting media that challenge the existing art paradigms. These are artworks that are not comfortable to enjoy for a long period. Our senses are disrupted, and are offered absurdity.

This exhibition is titled Vertigo, with the hope that it can show not only the journey of Indonesian art during the past decade, but also demonstrate that during that journey, it experienced significant shifts, especially regarding how the “ugly” is presented, and bringing us to a perception that the ugliness shown represents a communal ugliness — a reality in society (corruption, bribery, nepotism, and so on).

This exhibition not only presents how an aesthetic experience of beauty is felt, but also how experiencing ugliness becomes a daily problem that cannot be ignored.

It would not be an exaggeration to call this exhibition a platform to explore and experiment with “ugliness”. By selecting a representation of artists and various tendencies in use of medium and historical periods, this exhibition is a step forward for the Indonesian art scene that is worthy of research, and showcases a hidden facet of Indonesian art history.

We have lately seen the tendency of contemporary Indonesian art towards animation – layers of subconscious, shapes and lines verging on the neurotic. I would like to assume that there is a reason for this new trend.

The artworks presented in Vertigo are those with a flavor of subconscious, with more emphasis on imagined elements, fantasies, wildness, neurotism, or definition in shape or theme. We see these reflections in how the artists stroke their brush; how they create lines and shapes, build themes, taking advantage of material and space. The results are quite diverse. The selection and arrangement of artworks in this exhibition actually offers a metaphor, of things that seem absurd and uncertain, are reflections of fear, anxiety, unconsciousness; a neurotic symptom felt in the artwork within an exhibition room. This metaphor demon-
strates how this ambiguity is somewhat organised, as if it were conceived collectively; a metaphor that relates to our questions about identity.

The basis of this exhibition cannot be separated from history’s perspective (and justification). When Indonesian painting just developed in the 1950s (and perhaps continuing until today), we must take note that our country and nation is still in poverty. Other than that, many important elements in the art-social landscape are not functioning optimally. For instance: art historians, scholars, critics and art lovers continue to be oppressed. In 1951, critic Trisno Sumardjo wrote: “Differing from the progress of art in the Netherlands during its Golden Era (17th century), differing from the Rococo period in France, the development of modern art of Indonesia did not occur in times of opulence, but in times of shortage, in struggle, disaster and suffering; when our nation has long felt poverty, the decline of morality and the low level of knowledge has as though places a difficult job upon its shoulders and demanded tenacity. Therefore, the resulting artworks are the products of suffering.”

Ugly art brings to attention the imperfections of life that have escaped consideration and scrutiny. Art, therefore, never had ambition to define perfection.

*Aminudin TH Siregar*
It brings me great pleasure and delight to present Vertigo, a group exhibition that showcases an eclectic selection of contemporary Indonesian art. Over the past century, Indonesia has gained a burgeoning reputation for being the hotbed of creativity and artistic expression in Southeast Asia. The country’s intrepid spirit of self-discovery, coupled with its artists’ fearless exploration of its recent tumultuous past, has yielded a diverse array of works that will enthrall and intrigue each viewer. As the celebrated Indonesian painter Affandi once proclaimed: “What I get from painting is the satisfaction of individual expression. Whether it succeeds or fails is up to others, but I don’t care. It makes me happy.” I have always felt that this audacious confidence is very much prevalent amongst Indonesian artists, and affords them a rich variety of perspectives on the nation’s socio-cultural issues.

Through my numerous encounters with Indonesian artists, I have been moved and humbled by their idealism and resolute pursuit of technical perfection. One of the artists participating in Vertigo is Heri Dono, whose works I have been observing and enjoying for several years now. Heri is, without a shadow of a doubt, one of the most prominent and highly esteemed Indonesian artists of his generation. His mixed-media installations are inspired by Javanese wayang theatre, and are revolutionary for presenting traditional Indonesian folklore with exhilarating modernity. I am very glad that Heri’s works will be shown at this exhibition and am eagerly anticipating more cutting-edge ideas from him in the near future.

Vertigo challenges the conventional opinion that art is always synonymous with beauty, suggesting instead that the representation of the grotesque can too be of artistic value. The artworks exhibited in Vertigo address difficult sociopolitical issues that many are reluctant to confront: these include nepotism in the government, the weariness and frustration that have become associated with city life, and the emptiness of mass culture. In essence, Vertigo pays tribute to our capacity to maintain mixed feelings of awe and revulsion – an important quality that is testament to the complexities of the human condition. It is precisely this ambivalent perspective towards art and life that this exhibition seeks to explore.

Vertigo does not only demonstrate the unique works of both fledgling and established Indonesian artists, but also strikes a universal chord by delving into the aesthetic ideals shared by people all around the world. I would like to express my profound gratitude to all the artists participating in this show, for they have shown me how their determination, fervour and courage have enabled them to produce works that truly illustrate the concerns of our society. I have learnt a lot from them and I hope that Vertigo will impress upon viewers the abundant strengths and talents of these remarkable artists.

*Jazz Chong*
*Director, Ode To Art*
ADE DARMAWAN

Born 1974, Jakarta

Ade Darmawan first majored in graphic art at the Institute of the Arts in Yogyakarta, before furthering his studies at the State Academy of Fine Arts in Amsterdam. Through his video works, Ade explores the incessantly changing face of Indonesia and conveys excitement, indignance, optimism and desolation simultaneously as the country continues to embrace greater sociopolitical freedom. Having had a wealth of experience in curating, Ade also infuses his short films with a dialectic element that inspires viewers to consider a wide range of perspectives instead of imposing a single idea on them.

Besides having exhibited his own art in Indonesia, the Netherlands, Australia, India, Germany, Denmark, Belgium and the USA, Ade has also played a crucial role in creating awareness of the visual art scene in his home country. He served as the director of the Jakarta International Video Festival in 2005 and 2007; and was a festival programmer for the Southeast Asia Short Film Festival in 2006. Ade is the director and co-founder of the Ruangrupa artist collective in Jakarta; and was a member of the Jakarta Arts Council from 2006 to 2009.

Insya Allah
Book & Stainless Steel, Variable Dimensions
Ade Darmawan, 2011
Obat Ambeien Parah, Insya Allah!

OBAT WASIR TUNITAS


Biji penderita wasir/ambeien/hemorrhoid, saya menjual obat wasir yang bahan-bahan bagus, karena juga dikonsumsi sendiri.

Ada 2 macam yang saya jual, produk TCM (Traditional Chinese Medicine) yang diperkuat oleh penelitian/riset medis. Obat ini tersedia dalam bentuk sedienan pil dan minyak, untuk pil dapat diminum dan yang minyak obat dapat diminum dan dioleskan ke bagian yang sakit. Obat ini aman, tidak menimbulkan efek samping, aman dikonsumsi tua muda, pria, wanita, wanita hamil, sd dan k复活. Menyembuhkan wasir lama ataupun baru, wasir berdarah, menghilangkan rasa nyeri, panas, gatal, perih, mencegah infeksi dan kondisi yang makin parah.

Biji mesra yang tidak mau diminum dapat membeli yang dioleskan saja

- Untuk harga satu pil harga 50 rb / botolnya isi perbotol 60 butuh
- Untuk minyak obat harga satu botol 40 rb/botolnya isi perbotol 60 ml

Pembelian bisa dalam bentuk satu pil atau paket.
Arie Dyanto was born in Klaten, Indonesia in 1974. After graduating from the Faculty of Fine Art and Design at the Indonesia Institute of the Arts in Yogyakarta, Arie continued to live and work in the city, creating artworks inspired by the vibe and movement of metropolitan life. His mixed media artworks are hard-edged and slightly foreboding, comprising images that reference the everyday routines of Yogyakarta residents. The highly stylised figures of Arie’s paintings are reminiscent of the flickering shadows of wayang kulit, drawing from traditional art and culture to represent modern life.

Arie has participated in many group exhibitions as part of the art collective Apotik Komik, which has travelled to different events and spaces around the world including Japan, the USA, Germany, Italy, Hungary and Austria. Since 1996, he has staged solo exhibitions within Yogyakarta, notably at the French Cultural Centre. Arie has also held solo shows in Hamburg, Essen and Passau. In 2009, his works were displayed at the Yogyakarta Biennale.
AyU ARISTA MURTI

Born 1960, Yogyakarta

Ayu Arista Murti was born in Surabaya in 1974 and majored in Fine Arts and Design at the Indonesia Institute of the Arts in Yogyakarta. Early in her career, she was influenced by the childlike wonder of animated cartoons such as Tom and Jerry, Popeye and Doraemon. As Ayu continued to develop her artistic identity, she found inspiration in Yogyakarta’s vibrant urban culture and the tumultuous political history of Indonesia. Ayu’s artworks deform recognisable physical forms to convey the tension of daily life, representing the increasing estrangement of human beings from one another as virtual connections replace interactions in real life.

Aside from staging several solo and group exhibitions in Indonesia, Japan, Singapore, Austria and Australia, Ayu has also showcased her work at the Jakarta Biennale in 2006. In 2007, she served as art director for the Monolog Sungai (River Monologue) project. She has garnered several noteworthy accolades including the 2001 Total Indonesia Award from the YSRI and Total Company; and her entry for the 2003 Philip Morris Indonesian Art Awards placed within the top 5 in the final round of selection.

Intermediate #1
Mixed media on canvas,
120 x 100cm
Ayu Arista Murti, 2012
Intermediate #2
Mixed media on canvas, 120 x 100cm
Ayu Arista Murti, 2012
Recycle Torso
Mixed media on canvas on Board
3 x (40x30)cm
Ayu Arista Murti, 2012
Tumbuh Lumut
Mixed media on canvas on Board
60 x 50cm
Ayu Arista Murti, 2012
CAN'T SEEM TO FIND GT
NOW, EVERYTHING LOOKS L 
Bambang ‘Toko’ Witjaksono is regarded as one of the most prominent Indonesian artists from the late 1990s, and is credited as one of the founders of the revolutionary art collective Apotik Komik. He obtained his Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) from the Printmaking Department at the Indonesia Institute of the Arts in Yogyakarta. He went on to pursue his postgraduate studies at the Bandung Institute of Technology, where he earned a Master of Fine Arts (MFA). Bambang’s childhood fascination with comics and his early career as a comic book creator have profoundly shaped his style, allowing him to convey witty and sometimes acerbic sound bites about socio-political issues in Indonesian society. The narratives embodied within his artworks convey a mischievous sense of humour with a distinctively local flavour.

Bambang has been a lecturer at the Indonesia Institute of the Arts since 1999, and continues to act as the Head of the Institute’s on-campus art gallery. He was the artist-in-residence for the Asialink Residency Programme at Charles Darwin University in Australia, and participated in numerous group exhibitions including the Yogyakarta Biennale in 2003, the Korea International Art Fair in 2010, and the Asian Triennale Manchester in 2011. In addition, he has held several solo exhibitions in Indonesia, Australia and Malaysia.

Bermata tapi tak Melihat
Acrylic on Canvas, 145 x 195cm
Bambang Toko, 2012
Deden Hendan Durahman received his Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) at the Bandung Institute of Technology in 1997. In 2005, he obtained a Diploma in Fine Art from the Braunschweig University of Art in Germany, before going on to graduate with a Master of Fine Arts from the same institution. He then returned to Indonesia where he has lived and worked since, serving as Art Director at the Bandung Design Gallery and lecturing at the Faculty of Art and Design at the Bandung Institute of Technology. Deden’s photography is both mysterious yet comforting: he pays homage to the strength and grace of the human physique by superimposing nebulous images of various body parts, which appear to be drifting gently in space.
Deden's photography is in the collection of various public institutions including the Tama Art Museum in Tokyo and the Print Room of the Art and History Museum in Geneva. His works have been shown in numerous group exhibitions in Indonesia, Ireland, China, Switzerland, Japan, Malaysia, Bulgaria, Croatia and the Philippines. Deden won the Silver Prize in the Polaroid Transfer Photography Competition in 2004 in Hanover, and was also recipient of the Juror Candidate Award at the Tama Tokyo Print Triennial in 2005.

**Inner Memories #2**
Digital Print, 110 x 280 x 5cm
Deden Durahman, 2012
Dedy Sufriadi

Born 1976, Yogjakarta

Dedy, an Indonesian painter, was born in 1976. In 1995, he began painting in Jogjakarta, where he was later identified as a promising young artist. Further on in his life, Dedy joined a thriving creative community in Jogjakarta.

Much of Dedy’s work is inspired by his life experience thus far, and is a symbolism of his own spiritual journey or the essence of a subject that moved him to begin painting. Dedy is well known for producing large-scale abstracts and graffiti art, which can be seen all around Indonesia. Graffiti art has been one of his great influences as an artist, and is often reflected by the addition of words on canvases. These texts are visually derived and have their origins in Dedy’s mind’s eye during his personal creative artistic process. In addition to this, Dedy also expresses his painting through highly graphic images and lines, achieved through the ‘flatness’ of acrylic paint.

Despite the simplicity of his work, Dedy eloquently expresses to the viewer, his spirit as a painter. His works invite an underlying tension, but do not seek to overwhelm. In his “World Under” series, bold lines and black text-like motifs are contrasted with soft warm hues of oranges and browns. A small border of white at the top of the paintings reminds us that this is a representation of the landscape of an alternate universe envisioned by the painter, which although exists in our world, is, at the same time, not of our world.

Chroma is an element Dedy is certainly not afraid of and he employs them liberally in some of his other paintings such as “Lingkaran” and “Flying Object #2”. Although these paintings lack the contrasting elements of his “World Under” series, the tension of his paintings are still evident in the various brushstrokes and techniques he uses in the application of his paint. Geometrically accurate and almost stencil-like circles are offset with a backdrop of fluid brushstrokes and the chaos of an orb of a suspend squiggles and dashes are made distinct by a single strip of colored spectrum.

Dedy first exhibited his works at a tender age of twenty in Indonesia, one year after he began painting in Jogjakarta. It was then that he also accepted his first awards for his abstracts, which was deemed a phenomenal achievement. In 1998, he was honored as a Finalist in the prestigious Philip Morris-Indonesia Art Awards.
House of Mother Rabbits
Acrylic on Canvas, 150 x 200cm
Dedy Sufriadi, 2012
GUSMEN HERIADI

Born 1974, Pariaman, West Sumatra

After graduating from the Indonesia Institute of the Arts in 2005, Gusmen Heriadi started his career as an illustrator for the alternative newspaper Pualiggobat Mentawai. In the course of his work, Gusmen encountered a variety of visual material that he experimented with to create a pastiche of symbols and meanings. His paintings frequently depict objects that emblematise the ever-changing perspectives towards the issues of culture and tradition in modern society.

Books, newspapers and other textual elements are recurring motifs in his work, and Gusmen uses them to communicate his highly reflexive and personal vision of cultural life in Indonesia. Gusmen’s heavily semiotic approach also leads one to realise that art is an essential medium through which one may contemplate human existence. Through the meticulous detail of his paintings, he invites us to celebrate the contributions of important people who have shaped disciplines of the humanities, and piques our interest in their lives as ordinary human beings who have done extraordinary work.

Gusmen’s work has brought him recognition from the international art world. He has increased his profile through various group and solo exhibitions in Indonesia, Singapore, China and South Korea. He was a finalist in the Philip Morris Art Awards in 1998 and 2000, and received the Special Appreciation of Jakarta Art Award in 2006.

News #6
Acrylic on Canvas, 120 x 120cm
Gusmen Heriadi, 2012
News #7
Acrylic on Canvas, 120 x 120cm
Gusmen Heriadi, 2012
HERI DONO

Born 1960, Yogyakarta

Heri Dono is unquestionably one among the Indonesian contemporary artists from the late 1980s generation that are best known to contemporary art international community. Since early in his career up to now he has been around the world to respond to exhibition and workshop invitations in various countries, Heri Dono is known through his installation that results from his experiments with the most popular Javanese folk theater: wayang. In the wayang performance a number of artistic and extra-artistic elements - visual arts, singing, music, storytelling, mythology promotion of a philosophy of life, social criticisms, and humor - merge into a coherent unity to make a generic performance comprising complex elements of multimedia. Moreover all this is coupled with the setting of a wayang performance event that provides space for social interaction among the audience. Heri Dono installations give the best example of the attempts at creatively revitalizing traditional art practice profoundly rooted in Indonesia, In a lot of his installations and performances, Heri Dono effectively makes use of performativity and interactivity potencies so that the works are involved in intense dialogs with their audiences.

In his paintings Heri Dono makes the most use of wild deformations and free fantasies out of which emerge characters of wayang stories. Adding his profound knowledge of children’s cartoon films, animation films, and comics, Heri Dono’s canvas is always filled with highly astonishing characters of intertwined fantastic and absurd stories. In all these Heri Dono will sometimes insert his own critical remarks on socio-political issues in Indonesia and abroad.

The Hunter who Looking for the Revolutions Fund
Acrylic on Canvas, 160 x 200cm
Heri Dono, 2012
Banter Guards
Acrylic on Canvas, 120 x 150cm
Heri Dono, 2012
Like many of Indonesia’s most promising young artists, Hojatul studied at the Indonesia Institute of the Arts in Yogyakarta. His artworks typically centre on the subject matter of fabric dolls, which are characterised as sentient, emotive beings. These anthropomorphic, toy-like creatures lend Hojatul’s works a slightly ominous feel since they appear dormant, but also look as if they have been painted in the middle of actions or movements that are distinctively human. Hojatul’s mastery of light enables him to emphasise the tension between the living and the lifeless, and the startling realism of his technique draws the viewer into an alternate universe where inanimate objects function as proxies for human thoughts and feelings.

Hojatul has begun to garner attention from the regional art community through the display of his paintings at several group exhibitions since 2005. Some of the venues where his work has been shown include the Jogja National Museum, the Ritz Carlton in Jakarta, the Exhibition Hall at the Jakarta Art District, and Art Stage Singapore.

Good Night My Son #05
Acrylic on Canvas, 140 x 160cm
Hojatul, 2011
Prayer Puzzle
Acrylic on Canvas, 160 x 140cm
Hojatul, 2012
Isa Perkasa graduated from the Faculty of Fine Art and Design at the Bandung Institute of Technology. Intensely rooted in the spirit of revolt against Soeharto’s authoritarian New Order regime, Isa’s art commonly adopts images of power and control to illustrate the evils of governmental oppression. His style greatly resembles that of classical Indonesian paintings, yet it has a compellingly modern sensibility that perhaps comes from his background in graphic art. Isa’s works may be interpreted as parables against poor and corrupt leadership, and are especially haunting in their compositional simplicity.

Isa was the artist-in-residence at Nagasawa Art Park in Japan in 1997, and received the Philip Morris Jurors’ Choice Award in Vietnam in 1998. He has also exhibited his works at venues in Indonesia, Japan, Vietnam and the USA.
Reza Afisina graduated from the Jakarta Institute of the Arts in 1999 with a degree in Cinematography. Thereafter, he began direct, shoot and act in short, impactful films as satirical retort to the rampant and wanton violence produced and endlessly re-enacted by the media.

Reza's video works address joy, affliction and sorrow through the emotional experience of inflicting pain. His performance pieces certainly cannot be described as visually pleasing in the conventional sense, and they leave the viewer feeling unsettled but also more aware of the human body's potential for the expression of physical and mental violence.

Reza's provocative video artworks have exhibited at various locations around the world, such as the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art at Cornell Universi-
At a regional level, Reza’s video art has also been shown at many galleries and events in Indonesia and Singapore. From 2003 to the present, Reza has been the programme co-ordinator of Ruangrupa, an artists’ initiative established by some of Jakarta’s brightest talents.

United
Reza Asung Afisina
video sed non credo.
There are many who regard mainstream culture and the mass media with disdain, believing that the consumption of preferred attitudes and ideas is a symptom of a shallow, frivolous milieu. Yet there are others who are not so quick to pass judgement on the widespread disposition towards popular culture, instead taking it as a window through which we may gain insight into the very core of humanity’s strengths and weaknesses. Syaiful A. Rachman is one such person. His paintings reveal his interest in the development of what some might flippantly term “mass culture”, as this “mass culture” that we often carelessly refer to is in fact much more profound and complex than we might think.

Prominent figures such as Elvis Presley, Andy Warhol and Marilyn Monroe are recurrently featured in Syaiful’s paintings. His particular fascination with these celebrities is derived from the conviction that they are the “nodes’ of various things – persona, popularity and even power, [all of] which are manifested in every human subject”. These easily recognisable household names perhaps reify such traits in a more obvious way than the ordinary individual, hence explaining Syaiful’s choice in making them the subject matter of his work. However, lest one be led to believe otherwise, Syaiful’s interest is not only focused on famous figures. Many of his paintings substantiate his passion for the fervour and ebullience of everyday characters as well.

It is only upon a more conscientious scrutiny of Syaiful’s paintings that one might truly catch a glimpse of his artistic inventiveness. It becomes clear that his portraits are composed of hundreds – even thousands – of minuscule, faceless human figures. A peremptory glance at any of Syaiful’s paintings is enough to trick the viewer into thinking that these diminutive people are nothing more than an exceptionally pronounced attempt at pointillism. The scrupulous inclusion of this anonymous crowd is not merely a clever contrivance, as it also serves as an analogy to the roots of popular culture. Amidst our glorification and idolatry of the sought-after crowd, it is easy to forget that it is the power of our favour that holds them aloft. Through his precise brushstrokes that emphasise just the right amount of colours and shadows in the appropriate places, Syaiful leads us to the realisation of the diverse distribution of power between and amongst people from all factions of society.

Albert Einstein
Acrylic on Canvas, 120 x 153cm
Syaiful A Rachman, 2012
Jumping
Acrylic on Canvas, 150 x 210cm
Syaiful A Rachman, 2012
TISNA SANJAYA

Born Bandung, West Java, 1958

Tisna Sanjaya graduated with a Diploma from the Freie Kunsthochschule für Bildende Künste in Germany in 1998; and then received his Master's Degree at the Braunschweig University of Art. Tisna’s works demonstrate a concern for the intricate relationships that bind him to the environment he inhabits and the network of people who surround him. The increasing sophistication of urban culture and the effects of industrial growth are conflated within his artistic practice, and he uses chaotic compositions and gaudy colours to represent these developments that have altered the natural order of things.

Tisna’s illustrious career has been marked by residencies in esteemed institutions such as the Queensland Art Gallery in Australia, the Ludwig Forum for International Art in Germany, and the Gwangju Biennale in Korea. Besides exhibiting his works at various galleries and locations across Indonesia, China, Japan, South Korea, Singapore and Jordan, Tisna has also won several accolades including the Best Artist in West Java Award in 2006, and Tempo Magazine’s Best Artist of the Year in 2008.

Mager
Asphla’s Oil on Canvas,
130 x 100cm
Tisna Sanjaya, 2012
Ugo Untoro graduated from the Indonesia Institute of the Arts in Yogyakarta, where he has since been living and working. He is regarded by many to be one of Indonesia's most established artists, and has received considerable attention for his signature energetic, raw style. His affinity for the street culture and graffiti art of the city has profoundly shaped the development of his artistic philosophy, infusing it with an edgy quality that is manifested through all his works.

Untoro’s papier-mâché heads bear expressions that are disconcerting to say the least: they are masklike pieces of art which appear to bleed, be seized by anguish, weep in fear or gasp in the throes of death. These exaggerated countenances may seem monstrous and are not easy on the eyes, but they also accurately encapsulate Untoro’s belief that ugliness and turmoil are part of reality. His masks portray pain and fury as universal emotions that every single living creature is capable of feeling, hence explaining the horse head and the wide range of faces depicted in his work.

Through the years, Untoro has secured the attention of collectors and critics around the world through his participation in group and solo exhibitions in Italy, Singapore, China, Malaysia, Germany and his home country of Indonesia. His entry to the Philip Morris Art Awards in 1998 was placed within the Best 5; and he was named Man of the Year in 2007 by Tempo Magazine, an Indonesian publication that covers current affairs and politics.
Prolog
Paper and paint
Variable dimensions
Ugo Untoro, 2011
VERTIGO
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