

Art in Changing Reflections at the Margins

BY NGIOM



Maria Indriasari

ALREADY RENOWNED FOR MANY YEARS AS THE CENTRE OF CLASSICAL JAVANESE FINE ART AND CULTURE, AND THE ORIGINAL CENTRE OF BATIK ART, YOGYAKARTA HAS RECENTLY ACQUIRED THE REPUTATION AS THE NEW EPICENTRE OF CONTEMPORARY INDONESIAN ART. IT WAS THE INDONESIAN CAPITAL DURING THE INDONESIAN NATIONAL REVOLUTION IN THE LATE 1940S AND THE SEAT OF GADJAH MADA UNIVERSITY, THE LARGEST UNIVERSITY IN INDONESIA. OTHER THAN ORIGINATING BATIK ART, IT IS ALSO THE CENTRE OF JAVANESE BALLET, MUSIC, POETRY AND PUPPET SHOWS. IT IS ALSO ARGUED THAT WAYANG KULIT ORIGINATED HERE AND ALSO THE GAMELANG MUSIC. TO CAP ITS ARTISTIC HERITAGE, YOGYAKARTA IS ALSO IN CLOSE PROXIMITY TO BOROBUDUR, ONE OF THE WORLD'S MOST IMPORTANT ANCIENT MONUMENTS.

These days contemporary art competes with traditional art in Yogyakarta. 'Underground art' is prevalent, no doubt bolstered by its large, restive student population. It is also home to many independent filmmaking communities, independent musicians, performing artists and visual artists. Among the active 'underground art' communities is a group that calls itself 'Arts Liberation Front', made up mainly of young artists. Many of their art are commentaries of the socio-political conditions of the country, and the artists like to pit themselves in the context of their globalised world.

In the post-Suharto era, art in Indonesia has become relatively free; however, the terminology, 'underground art', echoed a kind of continuous struggle from the 1970s. During that time (in the 1970s) Suharto created cultural institutions in an effort to nurture patterns of art under 'guided

democracy' – ala Suharto-style, which followed prescribed practices of art and culture. Art that were critical or sensationalistic were ignored by the government and they in turn were viewed as marginal by the public. Critical art were not particularly supported by the public who saw these art as elitist. These art faded away in the late 1970s to make way for a more market-friendly art in the 1980s and these art were better patronised in tandem with an economic boom. Experimental art continued to be under-patronised and lived only in the academic circles.

However in the 1990s, Indonesian experimental art drew the attention of foreign institutions which became active in artistic exchanges, particularly, with the Japan Foundation, which sponsored exchanges and discourse in fine art. At the same time, Australia, under Prime Minister, Paul Keating, were leaning towards Asia and

began to exhibit and collect Indonesian (and other Asian art) through the Asia-Pacific Triennials in 1996, 1999 and 2001 in Brisbane. Indonesian art was viewed in the context of political upheavals in Indonesia.

The worldview in the Indonesian art community had somewhat changed again at the turn of the century, especially in the urban setting as artists now see themselves as part of the global community due mainly to the world-wide web network. 'Official agents' like the government-run cultural institutions had diminished in importance. Marginal art groups began to sprout and artistic trends now lean towards contemporary problems of the immediate public and also on existential issues. These groups take advantage of the internet to network among themselves from different parts of Indonesia, especially Jakarta, Bandung, Bali and Yogyakarta.

These new generation of artists are cosmopolitan in their outlook. They come together generally without long-term agenda and without concerted management, but are anxious to take a progressive stance. Paradoxically, these groups are thriving in an art boom under an economic crisis. Their patrons are now mostly art dealers who like to see themselves as 'connoisseurs'.

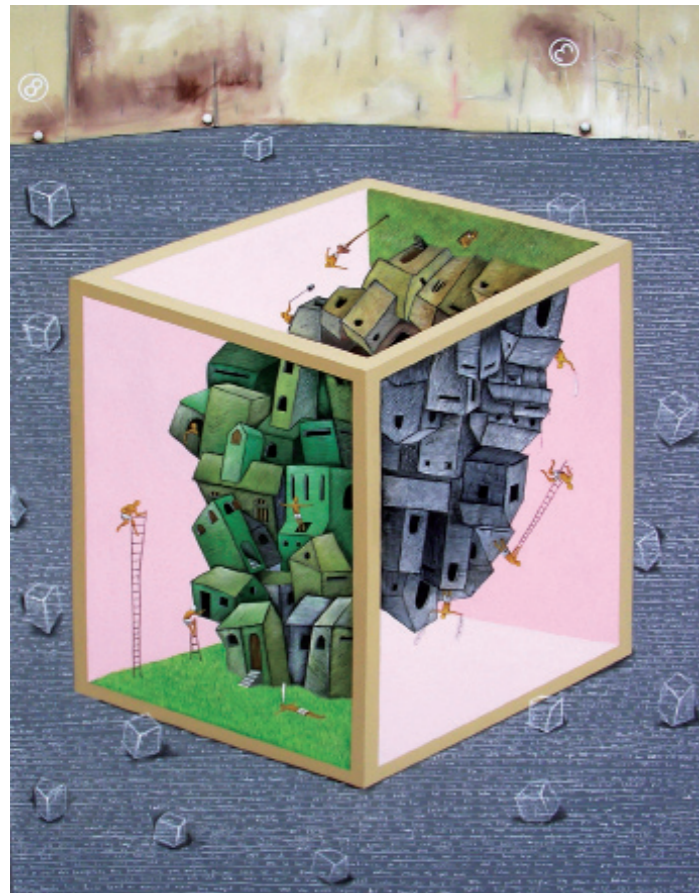
The 'Arts Liberation Front' is one of these art groups, made up of relatively young energetic artists, who saw their connection with a globalised world rather than with Indonesia. Among the artists in 'Arts Liberation Front', Maria Indriasari's work is not particularly Indonesian, and undoubtedly has a global existential nature about it – it could comfortably fit in a Melbourne curiosity art context. The art is feminine, domestic and even biographical. The novelty of the art lies in the use of domestic textile that is associated with psychological comfort and has a generic appeal. All her pieces are one-offs and do not carry possibilities of repetition. Although child-like in appearance, the seriousness of her work lay in the detail and composition and is highly refined. They obviously speak about psychological association and domesticity.



Background illustration by See Shang Hui



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| 1 | 2 | Works by Budi Prakosa
1. Last Of The Land
2. Tinggal Diatas Batu
3. Terkotakkan |
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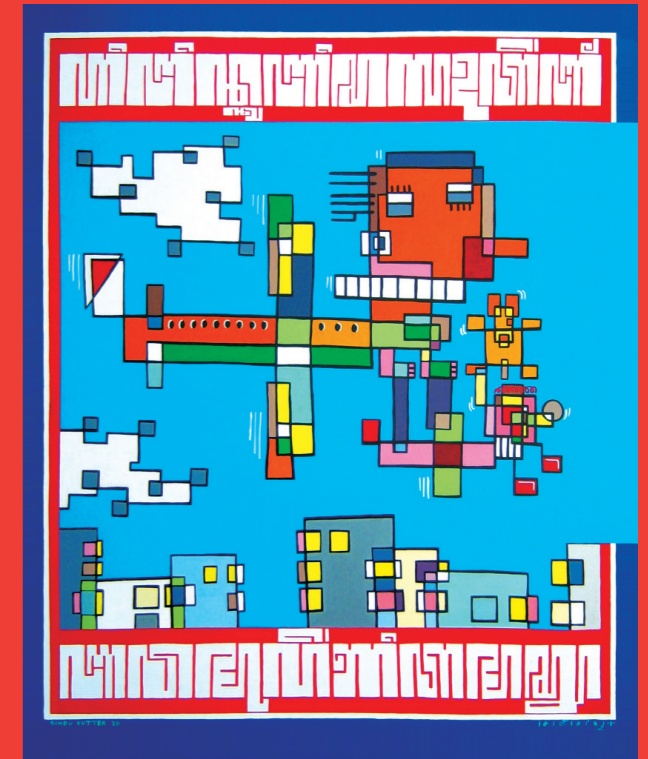


Budi 'Bodhonk' Prakoso's work contrasts in the narrative of urbanity. It is existential and psychological and comment on the effects of urban massing. Hence, the urban mass are clustered together and detached, turned upside down, twisted around and isolated. What if the masses are hung-up in space? How then would it be viewed? What if the percipients are floated away from the masses and are unable to find the way back?

Once again there is a global nature about Prakoso's work, joining in the realm of global existential discourse. The global literary equivalent is Kafka's 'Trial', where the protagonist, 'K' finds himself in a perpetual journey, lost in an urban labyrinth until his death. Or could it be one of Haruki Murakami's dream-like journeys in a world that skirts the edge of reality?

Several other artists in the 'Arts Liberation Front' group including Priyaris Munandar touches on Indonesian semiotics, particularly with the use of mythical figures, but the style and colour of the art pieces are drawn from the global art community and discourse is also a global one.

Work by Sindu Cutter
Inginku bisa terbang



Yogyakarta, the city in which the group is based is also transforming from a centre of national identity to one that becomes part of a global metropolis.

Sindu Cutter, another member of the 'Arts Liberation Front' through his painting expresses a message of 'flight' and 'freedom' for his people.

These are the young people that prompt this surge and the tide now seems irreversible, which is amply demonstrated by the energy given to the new artistic movement. ◉

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| 1 | 2 | 3 | Works by Priyaris Munandar
1. Ruang dan Waktu
2. Negeri di Atas Awan
3. Satu Sisi Tentang Peradaban
4. Negeri di Langit Merah
5. Tarian Anak Naga
6. Ritual Langit |
| 4 | 5 | 6 | |

