

Motif: Ramalan

By Hendro Wiyanto

"My Dear Brother, I only know that there are four kinds of dreams. The first will come true in a literal sense, the second through reflection, the third a reverse dream, and the fourth a prophetic dream." - Centhini.

In the colonial era, a writer in the Dutch East Indies once did a fortune-telling on the future of painting in Indonesia. His words were sharp, "a gloomy past, a hopeless future." No matter how much talent Raden Saleh or Mas Pirngadi have, said the fortune-teller, "Indonesian national art" will not be born. As he said, Bumiputera painters were "misguided and lost"; their art is separate and isolated from Java or Indonesia.

Another fortune-telling was stated by another writer, approximately a quarter of a century later, who saw that Indonesian art – form-wise – seemed to just follow art (in) the West, but its content was Eastern.

Fortune-tellings about the future of art in Indonesia were not only stated by writers in the colonial era. Almost every quarter of a century, a new prediction will appear. For example, as stated by a well-known writer and critic, Oesman Effendi (1969), "Indonesian painting does not exist and will (only) be born in next a hundred years."

Fortune-telling is prediction. People do not predict the past because the past is already behind us. Fortune telling is directed towards the future. But why does one have to do fortune-telling or prediction? Does a fortune teller utilize insight into history? Is prediction a popular version of the future history?

People often interpret Djoko Pekik's series of boar paintings as a prediction. The boar metaphor in three of his famous paintings at the end of the last century is seen as not only describing the turbulent conditions of the era when those paintings were painted. In the midst of the euphoria of the reform period, people are also interested in predicting what will happen in the future. Moreover, the painter himself said that "a good artist is someone who can *weruh sadurunge winarah*" or knows what will happen before the



event occurs. And the common future as a nation, at least according to the painter's vision, still looks dark.

Of course, we also remember Jayabaya's famous fortune-telling or prediction about the condition of an era that will turn upside down, or Serat Kalatidha from the great Javanese poet Ranga Warsita, which describes the madness of the era that will come. Thus, our cultural treasures are full of various forms of fortune-telling: prediction, letters, the science of "titen" (sensitive to the signs of nature), poetry, ballads, teaching, and so on.

So, what is the function of prediction or fortune-telling? Based on what knowledge is fortune-telling made?

Now, predictions about the future of humanity and the universe are made based on enormous data sets that are infinitely large. Such data exceeds person-to-person capacity. This data seems to want to determine what changes will occur in our universe in the very near future. However, with their limited intellectual capacity, humans can still access and utilize it. In the past, people used to say that to collect all the data in cyberspace, a giant computer the size of a city was needed, but now, with the power of artificial intelligence, as if big data is right in front of us, stored in clouds of artificial intelligence that pass by on the devices that we use daily.

However, fortune-telling or prediction is a form of imagination because it has not happened. But, the future "history" predicted by the universe of artificial intelligence is probably not at all imaginary.

How do artists whose role was once ideally described as "weruh sakdurunge winarah (knowing something before it actually happens)" imagine future events and 'history'? Is 'future history' a contradictory term? Do we still need human past history as a reference?

What will artists say or imagine between the knowledge of past history and the 'prediction' about a future that is always full of possibilities, which feels so close before our eyes thanks to the big data that will soon determine everything in our common life?

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Toekomst van de Hedendaagse Indonesische Beeldende Kunst¹

By Aminudin TH Siregar

Nowadays, Indonesian contemporary art is increasingly receiving significant attention on the global art scene. International art exhibitions, biennials, residency programs, collaboration, and various other activities now actively present the talents of Indonesian artists, allowing them to gain wider recognition. These activities allow Indonesian artists to engage in meaningful dialogue with international artists and arts institutions, foster cross-cultural collaboration, and enrich their creative perspectives. However, it is important to study the evolution of fine arts in this dynamic country, and it is also urgent to analyze developments, challenges, and potential future trends.

But how to start it? How do we develop a framework for understanding, especially assessing, the transnational condition of our arts, which involves various factors, challenges traditional boundaries, and encourages cross-cultural dialogue? How do we understand the contemporary art landscape, which has long experienced transformative changes that are influenced, among other things, by technological advances, social dynamics, and an ever-changing global world? Is it possible to make a prognosis based on the “aesthetic trends” now available? How do we contextualize today's historical developments by focusing our observations on the main factors? So, with these uncertain conditions, how do we predict its future?

Apart from the complexities that we face in reading and gazing at the future of Indonesian contemporary art, I think we can trace a brief prognosis for the future of contemporary art based on factors such as the art market, interdisciplinary, technological integration, socio-political involvement, networking, and experiential art below.

Global Art Market

Since the 1980s, this market factor has begun to give life to our fine arts attractively. Now, we certainly need to rethink the art market from the legacy of the 1980s because the

¹ I adapted the title from an article by J.M. Hopman *Toekomst van de Beeldende Kunst in Indonesia*, 1946..



stage has become decentralized, and the emergence of blockchain technology and the digital art market will continue to challenge the gallery system. All of this has given artists a highway to visibility and economic sustainability. This shift has clearly democratized the art world, fostering a market that is more inclusive and accessible to more artists and collectors.

On the other hand, because of the sophistication of the market, ideas about artistry have also changed, and we are no longer used to asking what and who an artist is. In the past, Sudjojono still set the artist's idealism by measuring the complicated and tortuous process of his/her/their artistic journey - how his paintings were only sold at the end of his life. Now, the accessibility of contemporary art has increased significantly. With the rise of social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, artists - or anyone - can reach a wider audience than anyone in the past. On the other hand, this democratization of art allows diverse voices to be heard and marginalized communities to tell their stories through visual means.

Indeed, this market factor is very dynamic and interesting to discuss; however, I have decided not to discuss it at length, considering that it has dominated our fine arts discourse for quite a long time. What is quite clear is that, in the present and the future, contemporary art has become too commercialized. Many artists now prioritize profit over artistic integrity, creating works solely for market appeal.

Interdisciplinary

Interdisciplinary collaboration between artists, scientists, researchers, and technologists has been and will continue to expand. This collaboration will foster innovative projects that bridge diverse fields, resulting in new forms of artistic expression. The future of contemporary art holds great potential for cross-pollination between scientific disciplines, expanding artistic boundaries, and fostering innovative creativity.

Technology Integration

The factor of technological integration in our contemporary art practice is not a new concept. At least at the beginning of this century, works of fine art that offer grafts with technology, such as video fine art, sound art, and so on, have emerged. Fine art is no longer "form" in traditional terms but exists as something immaterial or formless,



spaceless, and any other-less. These kinds of works will continue to develop, and their use will expand in the future, especially supported by virtual reality, artificial intelligence, and various other innovative tools. By utilizing technology, artists will create immersive experiences that blur the boundaries between the real and virtual worlds. In short, these technology-based works will push the boundaries of traditional media and revolutionize visitors' engagement with art.

Networking, Globalization

Because of how the world is becoming increasingly connected, networking has brought cultures close, and this mixture of influences will continue to shape the future of our contemporary art. Artists will draw inspiration from various traditions, blending them into a unique hybrid perspective. Additionally, international collaborations and exchange programs will foster a more prosperous and interconnected global art world, ultimately contributing to the growth and diversification of contemporary art.

Experiential Arts, Activism, Social Engagement

The future of contemporary art lies in the active participation of the visitors. Art that offers performances will likely become more prominent and develop beyond boundaries, whatever they may be, because this type of art always wants to involve the visitor in a profound and transformative experience. Therefore, artists will look for new ways to provoke dialogue and question the power dynamics between artists, artwork, audience, etc. With such involvement, there will be a shift in focus from the artist - as the sole creator - to the visitor as an active participant, thereby fostering a deeper level of personal and emotional connection. The future of contemporary art seems to increasingly emphasize these experiential and participatory elements. The art space, in turn, is transformed into an immersive environment that engages the various senses and invites the visitors to receive the work of art as an experience, not just passive observation – through the eyes.

Likewise, art as a form of protest and activism will continue to develop. The artists will use their platforms to raise awareness about pressing social issues, address systemic injustices, and encourage dialogue. Here, art will catalyze social change, inspiring action and creating momentum towards a more advanced society.

These are my views on (the future of) Indonesian contemporary art.



Fine Arts, Science, and Power

By Sri Margana

In 1995, when Indonesia commemorated its 50th anniversary of independence, it received a surprise gift from the British government: a painting exhibition catalogue entitled *Early Views of Indonesia*, which was put together by the exhibition curator of The British Library London, Dr. Annabel Teh Galop.



More than 200 paintings are featured in this catalogue. Interestingly, these paintings were only produced briefly during the British rule in Java (1811-1816). Two prominent artists from this period were Thomas Horsfield, an American doctor who initially intended to conduct scientific research in medicine and then worked for the Dutch colonial government and continued with the British colonial government. Meanwhile, John Newman was a painter employed by Colonel Colin MacKenzie, a British officer interested in knowledge about the social and cultural life of the Javanese people. Raffles commissioned Mackenzie to write a book about land rights in Javanese society. The works of these two figures later decorated Thomas Stamford Raffles' masterpiece, *History of Java*, which until now has no equal.

The large number of paintings produced during Raffles' time is not surprising because he, as the highest leader in Java, was a bureaucrat who loved science, especially history and



culture. With all his power, he could freely mobilize his subordinates to do anything to help him complete his book writing project. Raffles mentioned dozens of people's names in his book *History of Java* as people who had given him a lot of help in completing his book. In short, artistic production during Raffles' time paralleled the colonial state's project of exploiting science.

The colonial science project involving these rulers continued during the transition period from the colonial government to the Dutch colonial government. The Dutch colonial government's first step after receiving the Dutch East Indies from England was to form a scientific expedition team in agriculture, natural resources and culture. This knowledge project was led by the young German professor Reinwardt, who would later build the Botanical Garden in Bogor. In this scientific expedition, three skilled painters from the Netherlands and Belgium were involved: A.J. Payen, A.J. Bik and his brother Theodore Bik. They were asked to immortalize objects, landscapes, cultural and historical artefacts and plant species. The three of them produced hundreds of works; unfortunately, most of A.J. Bik drowned at sea when the ship carrying his works to the Netherlands sank near the sea in Madagascar. Their remaining paintings are now stored in the Wereldcultuur Museum in Leiden.

Going back to the previously mentioned catalogue of paintings about Indonesia from England, it turns out that early paintings by Indonesian painters are also displayed in it. Both paintings were created independently to support colonial science projects and paintings that decorate ancient Indonesian manuscripts. There are two prominent Javanese manuscripts decorated with many works by Indonesian artists currently stored in the British Library London. The first is *Serat Damarwoelan*, presented by Lieutenant Colonel Raban, who served in Cirebon during the British occupation of Java. This manuscript contains 199 unique colour illustrations. Describes important scenes in the *Serat Damarwulan* Manuscript. The second is *Serat Selaras*, which tells the adventures of the Princes from Champa Country in Java. This manuscript is considered to be the Archipelago manuscript with the most beautiful illustrations in the collection of the British Library London. No less than 50 illustrations adorn the pages of this manuscript.

If we explore thousands of Indonesian manuscripts in England, the Netherlands, Germany and Indonesia itself, we will find thousands of illustrations or paintings of extraordinary



illustrations in ancient Indonesian manuscripts. If we refer to the age of the identified manuscripts, most came from the 18th and 19th centuries. Like the production of paintings by colonial projects, paintings on ancient Indonesian manuscripts were also part of science and an offering for the power of the kingdom period in the archipelago in those days.

Painting production during the colonial period did not stop in the early colonial period. When colonial power increased, artists' deployment in colonial scientific expeditions continued until the late colonial period. The development of the Batavia Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen and the establishment of art schools and *kunstkring* became important sponsors for the productivity of Indonesian artists in colonial art production. This became more lively with the presence of independent Indonesians who came to Indonesia with diverse scientific interests. Indonesian artists were gathered massively to support scientific exploration and colonial state projects.

Considering that the centres of artists and artistic production at that time were within the Javanese monastic palaces, Javanese kings were involved in establishing these arts and culture development institutions. Establishing institutions such as the Java Institute, Sonobudoyo in Yogyakarta, *Radya Pustoko*, and *Rekso Pustoko* in Surakarta resulted in increasingly massive production and reproduction of art in Java.

The main difficulty in reconstructing the history of art in Indonesia, which moves in line with the project of knowledge and power, is the subordination of artists in the colonial and feudal political system. This means that individual artists are not registered as actors who produce art; they are subordinated to power, so those who emerge as artists are the elite in power. Indonesian artists in the current development of science and power are only anonymous instruments exploited for the interests of power and science. This is the main challenge for reconstructing Indonesian art history in an Indonesian-centric way so that it can emerge from the shadow of Eurocentrism in studying Indonesian art history.

