In 1985 Goenawan Mohamad, Indonesia’s internationally recognised journalist and philosopher, wrote: ‘It is art that helps us to revive our crushed feelings. It attacks habit’.¹ This succinct description of the impact of an event at Taman Ismail Marzuki,² Jakarta’s first arts centre, conveyed Mohamad’s tribute to the power of the arts to touch individuals deeply and to provoke change. He concluded his piece with the caution that liberty is a prerequisite for the arts to flourish and that he could not guarantee that prerequisite in Indonesia at that time. He celebrated the power of the arts but linked their wellbeing to Indonesia’s political condition. Mohamad was founder and editor of Indonesia’s respected weekly journal Tempo (Time) in 1971 to which he contributed a weekly column that fearlessly evaluated Indonesia’s politics, society and culture in direct and indirect ways.³ His editorial policy ensured all the arts, but especially visual art,
were reviewed regularly in Tempo. This not only kept his wide readership across the archipelago informed, but also nurtured writing about the arts and made it possible for individuals to develop as professional art critics.

Goenawan Mohamad is a writer and this book is about visual art, but his words can be compared with the visual images of Indonesia’s artists, and, indeed, in Indonesia, the connections between artists and writers are strong and the boundaries are permeable. Most writers are not artists, but many artists were and are also writers. As examples in this chapter illustrate, from the 1930s they shared many of the same concerns—they read the same publications and signed petitions and declarations that publicly stated their positions. They appreciated and criticised each other’s work. In essence, they inhabited the same intellectual landscape. So what kinds of worlds did and do these individuals inhabit? From where did they draw the experiences, emotions, inspirations and motivations that are reflected in their works? To provide a direct experience of the worlds of the artists and writers, this chapter includes quotations from essays, poems and prose, as well as works of art, to show the shared dedication to common concerns and the personal interaction that enriched both.

There is no linear progression in the thinking and ideologies of these individuals. Their successors weighed up their arguments, rejecting many and adopting and developing others. The New Order government of Suharto, Indonesia’s second president (1966–1998), tried to enforce an ideology of art and culture that contributed to the nation. But his concept of what that meant was contested by Indonesian writers and artists who themselves held no single ideology, as the chapters in this book clearly illustrate. If there is any one theme that emerges from an overview of ‘artistic ideologies’ it is this: nothing is out of bounds, ideas come from any time and place, the status quo is there to be contested, injustice must be challenged, and diversity respected and valued.

Writing in 1969, Dr Sanento Yuliman (1941–1992), arguably Indonesia’s premier art theorist, expressed it like this:

> If there was a framework that proposed clear and detailed characteristics of Indonesian-ness, a proud trademark of Indonesian painting, there would still be artists who would deliberately deviate from it, just to prove that they can be different … But why one framework? Why not several frameworks, why
1. CONTEXTUALISING ART IN INDONESIA’S HISTORY, SOCIETY AND POLITICS

not many? Is it not possible that Indonesia contains rich and unknown facets and concerns, increasing numbers of facets and concerns, including those that are mutually oppositional?4

He also wrote:

Like art in general, Indonesia’s new art, which has grown in Indonesia, cannot be wholly understood without locating it in the context of the larger framework of Indonesian society and culture. In other words, without locating it within the whole force of history.5

The sociopolitical and historical overview that follows unfolds chronologically. It is compiled with hindsight and written in the new millennium with access to records and materials that were not available to many of the Indonesian actors of the time. As well, knowledge of Indonesia’s past is a work in progress and is still incomplete. Interpretations of the past change over time in response to new material as well as changing fashions in historiographical and artistic ideologies. Two examples demonstrate this. First, recent reassessments of the contribution of nineteenth-century Javanese painter Raden Saleh to Indonesian art and the responses to that new understanding in contemporary art. Second, the changing nature of artistic responses to the events and consequences of the extreme violence that accompanied the extermination of the Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI) and the rise of General Suharto, as described in Wulan Dirgantoro’s contribution to this book (Chapter 9).

The Region, Its Peoples, Monuments and ‘Living Traditions’

Broadly speaking, the Republic of Indonesia occupies the territory previously ruled by the Netherlands under the name of the Netherlands East Indies. Located at the centre of monsoons that brought trade vessels

---


5 Sanento Yuliman, ‘Seni Lukis Baru Indonesia’ (1976), translated in this volume as Chapter 3: ‘New Indonesian Painting’.
from both sides of the globe to and from its coasts, it is the largest archipelago in the world, with over 13,000 islands that spread across the equator (see Map 1). Its current population of over 270 million is unevenly spread across its 6,000 inhabited islands, with Java, Madura, Bali, Sulawesi and Sumatra home to the majority. The peoples of Eastern Indonesia have been in contact with the indigenous peoples of the Torres Straits and northern Australia for centuries and share elements of their historical cultures.

For the past 2,000 years at least, foreigners have been encouraged to settle in the Malayo-Indonesian archipelago under the protection of local rulers. Many inter-married with local populations, establishing communities that adopted or respected local cultures. The Chinese and Indian presence is centuries old and Arabs from several regions in the Middle East traded, married local wives and spread Islam, with results we shall see below.

Ethnic diversity is one of the classic descriptions of Indonesia, but the number of ethnic groups depends on the criteria used for classification. Estimates range from at least 100 to 1,000. In the 2000 population census of Indonesia’s 30 provinces, single ethnic groups were dominant in only seven provinces. The remaining 23 provinces had mixed or very mixed populations. A breakdown of figures reveals that the major ethnic groups of Java, that is Javanese, Sundanese (West Java), Madurese, Betawi (the local inhabitants of Batavia/Jakarta), Bantenese and Cirebon people together make up 65 per cent of Indonesia’s population.6 The Republic officially recognises six religions: Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism. Indonesia has the largest Muslim population in the world, with about 88 per cent of the population acknowledging Islam as their religion. It is important to acknowledge that, in many areas of contemporary Indonesia, urban or rural, life is fragile and maternal and child mortality remains higher than it should be. In these circumstances, belief in the power of supernatural forces is strong, regardless of religious faith, and that power is reflected in traditional ceremonies and in the arts, including in the work of some contemporary artists.7

1. CONTEXTUALISING ART IN INDONESIA’S HISTORY, SOCIETY AND POLITICS

Figure 1.1: Minimini Mamarika (1904–1972), Anindilyakwa people, Northern Territory, Mitjunga, Malay Prau, 1948, Umbakumba, Groote Eylandt, Northern Territory.

Earth pigments on eucalyptus bark, 43.7 x 86.0 cm (irreg). Gift of Charles P. Mountford, 1960, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide. © estate of the artist. Permission: Aboriginal Artists Agency Ltd. From the eighteenth century until the twentieth, peoples from Sulawesi and Eastern Indonesia sailed to northern Australia to collect trepang (bêche de mer), an item prized by the Chinese. Local indigenous people helped collect, then boil and dry it on local beaches. Material exchanges must have taken place to maintain the seasonal relationship. Records of the contact in the form of rock art and bark paintings are not uncommon.8

The stunning natural beauty of the Indonesian archipelago has been celebrated for centuries and exploited by modern tourism. Dolmens and menhirs from distant prehistoric times and the remains of monumental stone temples from the eighth and ninth century CE, particularly those of the Buddhist stupa Borobudur9 and the Hindu temples at Prambanan in Central Java, testify to well-organised and flourishing centres of regional wealth and culture (see Map 2).10 Nowadays, evidence of the scale and

8 See further James Bennett and Russell Kelty, Treasure Ships: Art in the Age of Spices (Adelaide: Art Gallery of South Australia, 2014), 309, cat. no. 191, note by Elle Freak.
9 Srihadi Soedarsono (1931–2022), one of Indonesia’s best loved painters, painted Candi Borobudur in his ‘lyrical expressionist’ style, which conveys both spirituality and tranquillity (see Chapter 6, this volume). For further details of his life, see Yuliman, Chapter 3 (this volume); Masterpieces of the National Gallery of Indonesia (Jakarta: Galeri Nasional Indonesia, 2014), 198–99.
10 There is evidence of paintings on cloth and paper from sixteenth-century Java. See Claire Holt, Art in Indonesia: Continuities and Change (Ithaca and New York: Cornell University Press, 1967), 191. Beautifully illuminated manuscripts copied in royal courts across the archipelago have survived from as early as the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. See Ann Kumar and John H. McGlynn, Illuminations: The Writing Traditions of Indonesia (New York: Weatherhill, Inc., in cooperation with the Lontar Foundation, 1996). Figure 1.5 in this chapter shows an illuminated Quran from early nineteenth-century Aceh.
complexity of pre-modern Indonesian cultures can be viewed either at the sites themselves or in Indonesia’s National Museum, but until the 1950s during Sukarno’s presidency, they were not widely known outside Dutch scholarly circles.\textsuperscript{11}

After Indonesian independence, the (now) world heritage monuments together with ‘living traditions’ of dance, music, shadow theatre, oral narratives and poetry, weaving, wax-resist and tie-dyed textiles, embroidery, jewellery, metalwork (gold, silver, damascened kris), carving, sculpture, architecture, complex ceremonial events, religious ceremonies, shamanism and specialist cuisines were recognised as expressions of national culture.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure1_2.jpg}
\caption{Traditional Batak tailors making ulos (traditional cloth of the Batak people) in Huta Raja village, North Sumatra, Indonesia.}
\end{figure}

The cloths are used in ceremonies related to significant events such as weddings, births and deaths; traditionally woven by women, different motifs and compositions have specific meanings and functions. In the background, cloths hang on a building in the vernacular Batak architectural style. Photograph by Maula039 on Wikimedia Commons (CC BY-SA 4.0) (see Map 3).

\textsuperscript{11} The majority of Indonesians learned about their own antiquity only after information became available in Indonesian texts (after 1945) or they visited the theme park Taman Mini Indonesia Indah (Beautiful Indonesia in Miniature Park) in Jakarta after it was opened by its patron, Ibu Tien Suharto, in 1975. See a description of the park in Virginia Matheson Hooker, ‘Expression: Creativity despite Restraint’, in Emmerson, Indonesia beyond Suharto, 265–68.
To summarise: the physical landscape of Indonesia has been shaped for millennia by the forces of nature. Earthquakes, tsunamis and volcanic eruptions have swallowed villages and destroyed towns. Powerful floods and landslides have changed (and continue to change) the course of rivers, resulting in severe siltation of coastlines. Small islands come and go, and roads and rail tracks wash away, making travel by water the most efficient means of transport in many places. Since the end of the New Order (1998), political parties regularly change allegiances and new coalitions form and dissolve. As in all nations, competition for power enables opportunities for corruption. Despite all that, or perhaps because of it, during the new millennium—after electoral reforms and voter education—Indonesia has had one of the highest voter participation rates in the world and its elections have been reported by outside observers to have been well run. In such a vast nation with a diverse and massive population, that is a noteworthy achievement.

Life as ‘a Native’ in the Netherlands East Indies

The Portuguese and English left their mark in the archipelago, but it was the Dutch in the mid-nineteenth century who placed their presence on a more formal footing and gradually extended their authority over most of what is now modern Indonesia. Before that time, the Dutch presence was dependent on treaties and contracts established with individual local rulers, who then felt free to call in Dutch firepower to use against each other. By the early twentieth century, the Dutch ruled through a Dutch governor-general in Batavia (Jakarta) with layers of bureaucracy descending through Dutch administrators who were spread across the archipelago. They, in turn, devolved power to local elites, many of whom were highly corrupt and abused their authority over their fellow ‘natives’.

12 Dutch contact with the indigenous peoples of the archipelago began in the early seventeenth century; however, to avoid the expenses associated with direct administration, the Dutch operated through a private monopolistic trading company (Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie, VOC) until it went bankrupt in the early nineteenth century. Reluctantly, the king of the Netherlands assumed power over the VOC’s former territories, which became overseas possessions of the Netherlands. For the complexities of the laws operating under the Dutch, see Peter Burns, ‘The Netherlands East Indies: Colonial Legal Policy and the Definitions of Law’, in Laws of South-East Asia, Volume II, ed. M. B. Hooker (Singapore: Butterworth & Co, 1988), 148–292.
Figure 1.3: Indonesia, rod puppet (wayang klitik), churlish courtier, 1931, Central Java.

Wood, leather, pigment, gold leaf, 53.0 cm (figure including handle). D’Auvergne Boxall Bequest Fund 2013, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide. This puppet is not one of the characters from the Indian epics that provide the plots for the episodes of the Javanese shadow theatre; rather, it is a parody of a member of the Javanese elite who implemented Dutch colonial policy in Java.13

13 For further details see Bennett and Kelty, Treasure Ships, 167.
Under Dutch colonial law, the peoples of the archipelago were divided into a hierarchy of Europeans (including Japanese), ‘Foreign Orientals’ (including Chinese and Arabs) and ‘Natives’. The Dutch offered members of the local elites the opportunity to attend Dutch-run schools and colleges to train as professionals, doctors, lawyers and engineers. The cream of these elites might be sent to the Netherlands for tertiary education. After their return to their homeland, some from that very privileged group organised their fellows into social organisations that ‘played a major role in shaping modern Indonesian social and political history’. These non-government movements were particularly active during the repressive years of the 1970s–90s.

The first ‘Indonesian’ we know of to study Western-style painting was Raden Saleh Syarif Bustaman (1811–1880), who is now widely regarded as the founder of Indonesian art. In his essay entitled ‘New Indonesian Painting’ (see Chapter 3), Yuliman begins his survey with Raden Saleh, identifying him as ‘the first Indonesian painter to take up new techniques and styles and also—in association with this—a new aesthetic’. Raden Saleh studied and painted in Europe between 1830 and 1851, spoke Dutch, French, German and English, was appointed royal painter to the king of the Netherlands and honoured with titles by the German princes for whom he painted. On his return to Java he continued to paint but his works were held in the collections of those who commissioned them and were rarely available for public viewing. A full appreciation of Raden Saleh was to come more than a century after his death when archival material was discovered in Europe that led to a reappraisal of all Raden Saleh’s work, as described at the end of this chapter.

One of the most compelling accounts of life under Dutch rule in the early twentieth century is given in a set of four historical novels written by one of Indonesia’s best-known authors, Pramoedya Ananta Toer (1925–2006). Drawing on archival materials from the early twentieth century—newspapers, Sino-Malay literature, Dutch reports—the ‘Buru quartet’ describes the humiliations and legal discrimination endured by ‘natives’ in Dutch colonial society. The quartet also describes the early stages of Indonesian nationalism and the strength and intelligence of the indigenous population, particularly its main female character.

As a prominent member of Lekra (Institute of People’s Culture), Pramoedya was arrested in 1965 and exiled to the prison island of Buru. Between 1965 and his release in 1979, he composed the novels. The priceless archival materials on which they were based were destroyed at the time of Pramoedya’s arrest in 1965. See further, Pramoedya Ananta Toer, *This Earth of Mankind*, trans. Max Lane (Ringwood, Victoria: Penguin Books, 1982), v–x.
Finding a Language: Proto-Nationalist Activities, 1920s–42

The colonial Dutch administrators are described as ‘probably unique among European colonial powers in limiting the access which the native subjects had to the language of their masters’. The Dutch believed their non-elite indigenous populations should remain as native as possible and ‘they should be only very selectively touched by the achievements of Western culture’. Goenawan Mohamad points out that the Dutch policy of severely restricting access to their language as a means of communication across the archipelago actually encouraged ‘the natives’ to find an alternative. Mohamad notes that by late 1925 there were at least 200 newspapers in the colony, and most used Malay as their medium. Malay soon became a symbol of an archipelago-wide movement for freedom from Dutch rule. In 1928, this was formalised at a mass meeting of representatives of youth organisations. They took an oath, the Sumpah Pemuda (Youth Pledge) swearing to work for one language, one land, one people. The concept of a new nation, Indonesia, free of Dutch rule, had been publicly declared and the date of the oath is celebrated every year throughout Indonesia.

The significance of this acceptance of one national language cannot be overestimated. It enabled any Indonesian, whatever their status, ethnicity or gender, to understand the speeches of nationalist leaders; read the daily news, publications of clubs and organisations, books or translations from foreign languages; and join organisations anywhere in the archipelago. Writers whose mother tongue was not Malay (and that was overwhelmingly the population of Java) had to experiment with developing a style appropriate to writing about social change, the main

---

17 Ibid., 186, quoting Hendrik Maier.
18 Ibid., 187.
theme of the new literature. Artists were also experimenting with style and subject and both writers and artists were trying to connect with new audiences of readers and viewers.19

Writing about the 1930s, Yuliman describes it as the period when ‘a new art that took the form of individual expression’ and ‘shifted the centre of creative energy from society to the individual’ was occurring. These characteristics were apparent, he says, in the literary movement Pujangga Baru (New Poets) in 1933, the art group PERSAGI around 1937 and, ‘to some extent’, in the Balinese art movement Pita Maha in 1934.20

Sudjojono, a founding member of PERSAGI (Persatuan Ahli Gambar Indonesia/Association of Indonesian Draughtsmen) became one of Indonesia’s most influential and revered artists and art theorists.21 In an earlier article (1970), Yuliman noted:

Sudjojono’s view of painting as ‘the visible soul’ implies that painting is not a copy of what is visible externally, but rather making visible what is hidden in the soul.

He went on to argue that ‘the development of Indonesian painting since Persagi has prepared the ideas and sensibilities … for the emergence of abstract paintings’.22 The concept of ‘the visible soul’ is further explored by Elly Kent in Chapter 2 and, from a different perspective, in Ahmad Sadali’s Islam-based philosophy and abstract art described in Chapter 4.

Life for Muslims

Islamic religious education had been available to the indigenous peoples of the archipelago since the first conversions to Islam around the fourteenth century, or even earlier. Local mosques and religious schools taught the

19 As described, for example, by Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism (Norfolk: Verso Editions and NLB, 1983), although Anderson does not include artists in his study.
21 See further Chapter 3 (this volume) where Yuliman describes his work and theories.
22 Yuliman, ‘Seni Lukis Di Indonesia’.
basics of Islam and Quranic Arabic and promising scholars travelled to the holy cities of Mecca and Medina to study and mix with believers from across the Muslim world, establishing links between the holy land and Southeast Asia. In the late nineteenth century, Southeast Asian Muslims also visited Egypt, where the very influential modernist scholar Muhammad Abduh (1849–1905) was writing and teaching about how to live as a Muslim in the contemporary world. His approach was to select the best from the West and from it learn how to strengthen Islam.

Figure 1.5: Illuminated frames decorating opening pages of a Quran from Aceh, c. 1820s.
British Library. Public domain.


Muhammad Abduh and his followers advocated education for all Muslims, including women, and, through a publication delivered throughout the Netherlands East Indies, interested Muslims could learn more about Islam in the contemporary world. Groups of modern-minded individuals met in study groups to discuss how to spread this new understanding of Islam. In 1912, a new organisation named Muhammadiyah was founded in Yogyakarta and its very active women’s wing was established in 1916. Muhammadiyah’s current membership is about 30 million, with branches in every province of Indonesia. It is respected for its practical activities in education (founding kindergartens, schools, universities) and medicine (establishing hospitals).

In response to this modern-minded and forward-looking form of Islam, the traditional Islamic scholars of Java were moved to form their own organisation, Nahdlatul Ulama (Revival of the Religious Scholars) in 1926. Known as NU, and with well over 40 million members, it is the world’s largest Muslim mass social organisation. Particularly strong in Central and East Java, it respects local attitudes to indigenous, popular folk beliefs and has maintained sites of pilgrimage to graves of so-called saints of Java.\textsuperscript{25}

NU has maintained and developed the Javanese traditional style of Islamic teaching conducted in \textit{pesantren} (Islamic boarding schools and colleges), which still attract millions of students—women and men. Abdurrahman Wahid, who became Indonesia’s fourth president, was educated in the \textit{pesantren} system, as were many leading Indonesians, including artists, writers, journalists, entrepreneurs and intellectuals. Learning to recite the Quran is a duty and an act of piety with specialist training required to learn the exacting science and art of Arabic calligraphy.\textsuperscript{26} The visual and creative aspects of Arabic calligraphy, as well as its spiritual significance, have also provided a wellspring for many Indonesian artists, from early modern painters through to contemporary artists. The moral and ethical philosophies embedded in the faith have also underpinned the aesthetic paths pursued by many artists working across fields as diverse as traditional calligraphic practices, abstract painting and community engagement, as Hooker explores in Chapter 4.

\textsuperscript{25} See the readable and authoritative study on this topic by George Quinn, \textit{Bandit Saints of Java} (Leicestershire: Monsoon Books Ltd, 2019).

\textsuperscript{26} For further details on the teaching of Quranic calligraphy in contemporary Indonesia see Virginia Hooker, ““By the Pen!”: Spreading \textit{`ilm} in Indonesia through Quranic Calligraphy”, in \textit{`Ilm: Science, Religion and Art in Islam}, ed. Samer Akkach (Adelaide: University of Adelaide Press, 2019), 81–97, doi.org/10.20851/ilm-1-05.
1. CONTEXTUALISING ART IN INDONESIA’S HISTORY, SOCIETY AND POLITICS

Japanese Rule, 1942–45

In 1941 Japan attacked US forces at Pearl Harbor, landed forces in northern Malaya and started the Pacific War. By 1942, Japan controlled all of Southeast Asia, gaining access to its raw materials and populations, which were then directed to supporting its war effort. In the Netherlands East Indies, Europeans were interned, and the indigenous peoples witnessed the reversal of European fortunes and status at the hands of an Asian people. The compulsory requisition of crops and the shortage of labour to tend the land resulted in widespread famines, particularly in 1944 and 1945. Indonesia at this time has been described as ‘a land of extreme hardship, inflation, shortages, profiteering, corruption, black markets and death’.27 To win over the indigenous population, the Japanese said they would support the independence movement and assist with preparations for full independence. Writing about this period, Goenawan Mohamad described the Japanese occupation of the archipelago as very difficult for all its inhabitants, and for ‘intellectuals and people of the arts it was a time of hard choices’.28

The Japanese established a cultural centre to attract Indonesian intellectuals and artists to support the Japanese cause, suggesting that a Japanese victory would lead to Indonesia’s independence. While ostensibly supporting Japanese propaganda, many of the Indonesians were able to use radio broadcasts, their writings and art to communicate subtle anti-Japanese messages to their fellow Indonesians. In his essay ‘New Indonesian Painting’ (see Chapter 3), Yuliman refers to the cultural centre, Keimin Bunka Shidoso, established by the Japanese and lists the Indonesian painters who began to emerge at this time. Many later became leading artists in the post-independence period.29

27 See M. C. Ricklefs, A History of Modern Indonesia since c. 1200 (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 249.
29 In 2002, even though speaking to a Japanese audience, Goenawan Mohamad made the point that, during their occupation of Asian countries, including Indonesia, Japan was under the illusion that it could redefine relationships between Asia and the West. See Goenawan Mohamad, ‘Indonesia’s Asia’, Asia in Transition: Representation and Identity, Japan Foundation 30th Anniversary International Symposium 2002 (Tokyo: Japan Foundation, 2002), 269.
The young poet Chairil Anwar (1922–1949) is an example of what could be achieved by using Japanese support to achieve nationalist ends. His background also reflected that of many of his peers. Of Minangkabau descent, but born in Medan (North Sumatra), he moved to Java (like so many of his generation) to participate in the more cosmopolitan atmosphere. He seized any opportunity to publish his poetry and spread his views on the future of the arts in an independent Indonesia. In two of his radio broadcasts in 1943 (for Japanese propaganda purposes),

30 Unless otherwise indicated, information on Chairil Anwar is taken from Mohamad, ‘Forgetting’, 195.
he emphasised that ‘[conscious] thought plays a very important part in [the creation of] seni yang tingkatnya tinggi (art of a high standard)’. He did not support ‘the results of improvisational art’.31

During the Japanese occupation, Chairil made a radio broadcast (republished in 1949) entitled ‘Membuat Sajak, Melihat Lukisan’ (Making verse, seeing paintings) in which he compared poetry and visual art.32 Although the materials are quite different, he said, the form and content may be compared. He considered artists superior to poets because poets work with language in an intuitive way and it is the subject of the poem that is of the utmost importance. Artists can work on any subject but what they convey must be determined by the strength of their emotions. A painting of a pair of old shoes can be as ‘good’ as a vase of flowers if it arouses emotion in the viewer.33

Chairil Anwar was in close contact with many of the artists of his generation and Mochtar Apin (1923–1994) painted his portrait in 1947.34 Chairil dedicated one of his poems to the painter Affandi (1910–1990), a doyen of modern Indonesian art, and they were later to write and sign a common declaration of universal humanism.35 But they differed over the relationship between an individual and his or her fellows. As the late Professor A. T eeuw, Dutch scholar of Indonesian literature expressed it: ‘For Chairil, human dignity was contained and expressed in the individual; for Affandi, humanity is achieved by man as a social creature acting in harmony with his environment’.36

In contemporary Indonesia, Chairil Anwar’s name is known to all school children as the writer of the poem Aku (I or me, 1943), a defiant celebration of personal freedom without constraint or inhibition. Its passion and emotion would have been lauded by his contemporary,

33 Jassin, Chairil Anwar, 150.
34 The portrait is reproduced in A. T eeuw, Modern Indonesian Literature, Volume I (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1979), opposite 135.
35 Comparing Affandi and fellow artist Basuki Abdullah, Chairil concluded that ‘Affandi hidup lebih dalam dan benar’ [Affandi lives more deeply and truly], quoted in T eeuw, Modern Indonesian Literature, 125 (original emphasis). See Yuliman’s description of Affandi and his work in Chapter 3.
the artist and theorist Sudjojono, who was urging his fellow artists to paint with feeling, as described in Chapter 3. Translated from Indonesian, Chairil’s poem reads:

I
When my time comes
I don’t want anyone to mourn
Not even you

No need for sobbing

I am a wild creature
Cut loose from its fellows

Let bullets pierce my hide
I will keep raging, kicking

I will run, bearing the wounds and poison
Run
Until the pain has gone

And I won’t give a damn
I want to live a thousand years more.\(^{37}\)

**Independence and Its Aftermath, 1945–55**

Sukarno declared the birth of the Republic of Indonesia on 17 August 1945, immediately after World War II and the Pacific War ended with the surrender of Japan. In the eyes of the Netherlands, however, Indonesia (then ‘the Netherlands East Indies’) remained its colony. The Dutch returned to their ‘colony’ in 1945, thus initiating five years of violent and bloody armed conflict regarded as Indonesia’s war of independence. Hostilities ended in late 1949 and the United Nations recognised Indonesia’s sovereignty in 1950.

The new nation was stronger in theory than in reality. It had been ruled as one entity only for a short period by the Netherlands (Aceh was only finally ‘subdued’ in 1912) and for an even shorter period by the Japanese. There were no laws, and the founding fathers (no mothers) took advice

---

on a constitution that strove for humanitarian ideals and an ideology of five lofty principles known as Pancasila,\textsuperscript{38} which were the touchstone and inspiration for a new nation.

Enshrined in Article 32 of the 1945 Constitution of Indonesia is the statement that the government will develop a national culture as an expression of the personality and vitality of all the peoples of Indonesia.\textsuperscript{39} Article 32 has been taken seriously by all governments of Indonesia and, with some more recent amendments, remains the foundation of official policies and funding of ‘Indonesian culture’. ‘Culture’ has usually been administered with education in a combined Ministry of Education and Culture.

The greatest challenge for the new Republic, then and now, is constructing and then maintaining a physically and ideologically unified nation. Almost as if they were taking turns, exclusivist Islam and socialism have vied to become the ideological underpinning of the state, at the expense of democracy as expressed in the constitution. The 1950s was a period of experimentation with democracy, foreign policy (non-alignment was the final choice) and economic management. Artists and writers were also debating their visions for the new nation.

**Debating a ‘National Culture’, 1950–65**

Asrul Sani (1927–2004) has been described as the writer who ‘recorded more fully than any other writer of the time the collision of ideas that characterized intellectual and creative life’ in Indonesia during the late 1940s and early 1950s. He described Jakarta during this period as ‘a place where values “crash against each other” … and people find “an arena” of new Indonesian cultural values and a new Indonesian life’.\textsuperscript{40}

In this atmosphere, a group of writers and two artists formulated and published one of the most quoted declarations of the purpose of art and culture in the new nation. In 1946, soon after the bloody, armed conflict of revolution against the Dutch had begun, Chairil Anwar pushed for

\textsuperscript{38} Literally, ‘the Five Principles’: Belief in One God, National Unity, Indonesian Democracy, Humanitarianism and Social Justice.


\textsuperscript{40} Mohamad, ‘Forgetting’, 198.
the formation of a group called ‘Artists of Independence’. Between them, the group published a literary supplement Gelanggang (Forum) that came out with the political weekly Siasat (Investigation). Chairil Anwar died of typhus in April 1949, but he had already worked with members of the Gelanggang group to formulate a statement of their vision for a cultural revolution to abandon obsolete values to make way for the new ones that would inspire Indonesia’s national culture. It was published as Surat Kepercayaan Gelanggang (Gelanggang document of beliefs) in October 1950.41

The aims and tone of the Gelanggang document set the benchmark for other cultural statements and manifestos that were to come. The document is expressed in seven concise paragraphs and begins:

We are the legitimate heirs of world culture, and we will perpetuate this culture in our own way. We were born from the ranks of ordinary people, and for us, the concept of ‘the people’ signifies a jumbled hodge-podge from which new, robust worlds are born.

Another paragraph declares:

Indonesian culture is established through the unity of a great variety of catalysts, of voices coming from all corners of the world and then hurled back in the form of our own voices. We will oppose all attempts to restrict or obstruct a proper examination of values.

The final paragraph describes the relationship between artists and society: ‘Our appreciation of the surrounding conditions (society) is that of people who acknowledge the reciprocity of influences between society and the artist’.42

A recent collection of essays entitled Heirs to World Culture: Being Indonesian 1950–1965 analysed Indonesia’s cultural history during those years of the new Republic. The essays reveal the complexity and fluidity of the period and also ‘an overriding common commitment to the future, to the nation, to Indonesian culture and what it might be’.43 In her opening

---

41 Based on Mohamad, ‘Forgetting’, 202–03, in which a full English translation, as well as the original Indonesian, is given.
42 Translation quoted from Mohamad, ‘Forgetting’, 202–03.
chapter, Jennifer Lindsay describes the sense of excitement about the final international recognition of the new Republic of Indonesia in 1950 and the frequency with which the words ‘baru’ (new) and ‘lahir’ (birth) are used in writings of the time. She states: ‘To be Indonesian in 1950 was to be modern’. She summarises the period in this way:

This was a time when Indonesia’s cultural mobility and cosmopolitanism mean that people with very different agendas and points of view could interact with the outside world and each other in a vibrant and vigorous way.

Lindsay identifies ‘[t]he inter-relationship between Indonesia’s cultural traffic abroad and developments at home during the 1950–65 period’ as an essential part of the forging of the new nation and its national culture. Riding this wave of excitement, artists, writers and cultural groups left Indonesia to travel the world, sometimes as official representatives of ‘Indonesian culture’, to experience at first hand the international cultures they had been reading about and discussing. The painters Affandi and Mochtar Apin were overseas for several years or more and others accepted scholarships to study abroad. They went to China, Europe and the US, and some joined the Colombo Plan to come to Australia. Chapter 7 describes the travels of the next generation of artists.

**Art for the People, from the Left**

While some Indonesians were able to travel abroad, they were a tiny minority. For the vast majority of new Indonesian citizens during the post-revolution years, political life was volatile and unstable. The new and independent Republic was centrally governed from Jakarta and the majority of its politicians had rejected an Islam-based nation-state. For these and other reasons, some local, there were armed rebellions in parts of Sumatra, Sulawesi and West Java. It was a hazardous time for the new nation and Sukarno held it together with rhetoric and risky politics.

---

44 Ibid., 15.
46 Ibid., 7.
The Gelanggang document was conceived in the heady days of the revolution but not published until October 1950. On 17 August that year, Independence Day, a group of 15 ‘cultural workers’ (not members of the Gelanggang group) met to form a new cultural group, Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat (Institute of People’s Culture) known by its acronym ‘Lekra’ and to endorse its statement of purpose entitled *Mukadimah* (Manifesto). Also present at the inauguration were two leaders of the PKI, a fact used later to assert that Lekra was a branch of the PKI.\(^{48}\)

Foulcher places the *Mukadimah* in the broader cultural history of Indonesia to show how its proponents rejected the culture of Indonesia’s ruling elite (of the late 1940s) and accused them of pursuing the same colonial culture as the Dutch. The *Mukadimah* stated that the aims of the revolution had not been achieved and that the Indonesian people remained oppressed. To maintain their own position, the Indonesian ‘ruling class’ perpetuated ‘an anti-People, feudal and imperialistic culture’ that the members of Lekra would replace with ‘a people’s culture’. For that to happen, Indonesia needed to establish a popular democracy as the basis for the Indonesian state. Indonesian cultural renewal would rest on nationalism, anti-imperialism and social equality.\(^{49}\)

In 1955, Lekra revised the *Mukadimah* with more emphasis on ‘people-oriented’ (*kerakyatan*) art and supporting a diversity of styles and forms, provided they ‘are faithful to the truth’ and strive for ‘the utmost artistic beauty’. Foulcher points out that many of the ‘great names’ of Indonesian painting were associated with Lekra from the mid to late 1950s (and even into the early 1960s), painters including Affandi, Basuki Resobowo, Sudjojono, Henk Ngantung and Hendra Gunawan.\(^{50}\) At its first national conference in 1959, Lekra resolved on a practice to bring ‘cultural workers’ even closer to the people, through going to villages, living with the inhabitants and working with them. Further details are given by Elly Kent in Chapter 2.

---

\(^{48}\) See Keith Foulcher’s pathbreaking study of Lekra, *Social Commitment in Literature and the Arts: The Indonesian ‘Institute of People’s Culture’ 1950–1965* (Monash University: Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, 1986), 17–18. His study remains the basic source for material about Lekra and its members. See also Chapter 3 (this volume), in which Yuliman repeats the common misunderstanding—promoted by the New Order government—that Lekra was a branch of the Indonesian Communist Party. Yuliman points out that not all artists who joined Lekra followed its prescriptions on appropriate artistic styles.

\(^{49}\) Based on Foulcher, *Social Commitment*, 18–19.

\(^{50}\) Ibid., 30, 41–42.
At the national political level, in 1959–60 Sukarno dissolved parliament and imposed what he termed ‘Guided Democracy’. He engaged in anti-Western rhetoric and behaviour, alarming the West during the tense period of the Cold War. In response to Sukarno’s own 1959 manifesto for national life (MANIPOL), a group of anti-Lekra intellectuals (with whom Yuliman was sympathetic) published their own Manifes Kebudayaan (Cultural Manifesto) in late 1963. Members of Lekra were furious. The economic situation continued to deteriorate, hostility between cultural groups worsened, and Sukarno continued to grapple with appeasing his military and the PKI.

Before WWII, there was no formal art education for adults in the Netherlands Indies. But there was a host of informal artists’ cooperatives or studios (sanggar) that operated on a small scale in many cities and towns, including outside Java (listed by Yuliman in Chapter 3) where budding artists could work with more established ones. Sukarno was a strong proponent of education as a priority for the new nation and there were national universities in Yogyakarta, Jakarta and Bandung; Sukarno himself had studied civil engineering and architecture at the prestigious Bandung Institute of Technology (ITB).

A program of tertiary-level training for art teachers was established in Bandung in 1947 as part of the University of Indonesia, which later amalgamated with ITB. In Yogyakarta, the Academy of Fine Arts (ASRI, now ISI) opened in 1950. In Jakarta, the art school IKJ (Jakarta Institute for the Arts) and later the cultural centre Taman Ismail Marzuki (as noted above) made important contributions to promoting art. Yuliman refers to the growth of art education in Chapter 3 but does not make the point that, outside of Bali, which had its own centres for teaching and learning traditional arts, Java was the focus for formal art teaching, and young artists had to travel to its centres to study. This posed particular problems for women, most of whom found it difficult to leave their families and

51 Recent studies have reconsidered the relationship between ‘Cold War culture’ and art history, see Phoebe Scott, Yvonne Low, Sarena Abdulllah and Stephen Whiteman, ‘Aligning New Histories of Southeast Asian Art’, in Whiteman et al., Ambitious Alignments, 2.
52 Abbreviation for *Manifes Politik* (Political Manifesto): MANIPOL was Sukarno’s new state philosophy based on ‘USDEK’, an acronym for Undang-Undang Dasar 1945 (the 1945 Constitution); *Sosialisme* (Indonesian Socialism); *Demokrasi* (Guided Democracy); *Ekonomi* (Guided Economy); and *Kepribadian Nasional* (Nationalism).
54 The ITB arts faculty has been through several changes of name, see further ITB, ‘History’, accessed 7 March 2021, www.itb.ac.id/history.
live alone in distant cities. It has been estimated that until the 1980s ‘there were approximately five male students to every female student in the art schools’. ⁵⁵


During 1965, Sukarno’s risky politics at home and abroad, his ambiguous support for the PKI and the parlous state of the Indonesian economy caused such tensions that many Indonesians—urban and rural—felt a crisis was looming. In the early hours of 30 September, six of Sukarno’s senior generals were murdered. Claiming that the security of the nation and the president were threatened, General Suharto took control of Jakarta and led, or condoned, reprisals against members, actual or suspected, of the PKI.

Robert Cribb and Michele Ford have summarised the massacres that lasted for at least five months after the murders of the generals on 30 September 1965:

In the course of little more than five months from late 1965 to early 1966, anti-communist Indonesians killed about half a million of their fellow citizens. Nearly all the victims were associated with Indonesia’s Left, especially with the Communist Party (PKI) that had risen to unprecedented national prominence under President Sukarno’s Guided Democracy. The massacres were presided over and often coordinated or carried out by anti-communist sections of the Indonesian army, but they also engaged wider elements of Indonesian society—both people who had reason to fear communist power and people who wanted to establish clear anti-communist credentials in troubled times. ⁵⁷

---


⁵⁶ Quote from Mohamad, In Other Words, 92. Goenawan Mohamad is no stranger to the violent deaths of close relatives. When he was a child, Dutch soldiers executed his father and his uncle.

1. CONTEXTUALISING ART IN INDONESIA’S HISTORY, SOCIETY AND POLITICS

Writing in 2010, Cribb and Ford point out that it has only recently been possible to begin documenting the events of 1965–66 from records kept by the New Order regime. Astri Wright, referring to the late 1980s when she was interviewing artists for her sensitive and thoughtful study *Soul, Spirit, and Mountain: Preoccupations of Contemporary Indonesian Painters*, noted: ‘A great deal of the work by LEKRA artists and others was destroyed in the aftermath of 1965 and artists resist talking, even among themselves, about the period’.

The New Order Is Established, 1966–73

On 11 March 1966, General Suharto was formally installed as president. He announced that his government would institute a ‘New Order’ and ‘order’ became the leitmotif of his presidency. Initially he had the support of Western powers (who were relieved to see the end of communist influence in Indonesia) and those Indonesians who had feared communism would negatively affect their land ownership, business enterprises, and religious, intellectual and creative freedoms.

Such hopes were disappointed when Suharto and the military, which had become his to command in civilian as well as defence matters, controlled the 1971 elections and ensured that Suharto’s new organisation, Golkar, was ‘elected’. Suharto focused on the economic transformation of Indonesia described under the umbrella term of *pembangunan* (development). In return for ongoing political support, the New Order undertook to deliver economic and technological development for all Indonesians under a series of five-year development plans called ‘Repelita’ (*Rencana Pembangunan Lima Tahun*), which started in 1969. After the economic mismanagement of the Sukarno years, many Indonesians felt their lives would improve.

---

59 While many artists, writers and intellectuals who were not associated with, or suspected of being associated with, ‘leftist’ organisations or the PKI felt huge relief that the intense cultural ‘wars’ were over, for others, it was the opposite. Many artists, intellectuals and writers, however slight their association with ‘leftist’ culture, became victims of the retribution that followed Suharto’s takeover. Some were executed but most were imprisoned, detained or lived in exile outside Indonesia for many years. In 2012, Leila S. Chudori, one of Indonesia’s most respected authors, published the highly acclaimed novel *Pulang*. It sympathetically describes the fictional lives of Lekra members who were forced to live as exiles in Europe after 1966 and describes the impact of the 1966 killings on the exiles and their families. An English translation by John McGlynn, entitled *Home*, was published by The Lontar Foundation, Jakarta, in 2015.
There was a major emphasis on modernising Indonesia’s technology, agriculture, education and communication systems. An international oil boom boosted the national economy and private enterprise thrived with the government entering partnerships with Chinese business conglomerates. An upwardly mobile, aspirational middle class began to emerge, but many were left behind. The president and his ministers reiterated that self-denial for the common good was essential to success and that stability, constant guidance and vigilance were needed to stay on track.

The New Order included ‘culture’ in its five-year development plans. Keith Foulcher has analysed how it defined ‘culture’ to promote its national objectives:

New Order Indonesia has lent an extraordinary level of official promotion to the visual and decorative aspects of indigenous Indonesian cultures, from the restoration of national monuments, through the reproduction of traditional architectural styles, to the teaching in ‘Indonesian’ contexts of regional arts such as dance, and the proliferation of traditional crafts and motifs in all aspects of daily life.60

Foulcher also noted that, as more and more Indonesians became involved with the New Order’s agenda for shaping a ‘national’ culture, ‘oppositionist’ cultural activity entered into contest with the hegemony in shaping this cultural community adding to its pluralist character and contributing to its democratic potential’.61

Recent scholarship has pointed to the extent to which commercial artist and design group Decenta, established in Bandung in 1973 by artists Adriaan Palar, A. D. Pirous, G. Sidharta, Sunaryo, T. Sutanto and Priyanto Sunarto, was involved in formulating and representing a national culture directly at the behest of the New Order. Through large-scale commissions for building interiors and public art, the

61 Ibid., 316.
group perpetuated the idealised unified diversity of the nation, often using patterns and forms appropriated from the archipelago’s indigenous cultures.  

There were also those who refused to enter into any partnership with the New Order’s cultural projects and they fashioned their own forms of resistance and non-compliance, often at great cost to their personal freedom and, in some cases, their lives.

**Resisting the New Order and Bearing Witness, 1974–80s**

In January 1974, student-led demonstrations broke out in Jakarta in protest against the government’s links with foreign investors and with Indonesian Chinese conglomerates. Students were gaoled and 12 publications were closed. When students were again targeted in 1978, they responded by resisting in less public ways. They founded study clubs and community-based socioeconomic projects to support farmers and other workers. ‘Most conspicuous in their credo were the social democratic values centred on redistributing power from the state to civil society and from the rich to the poor.’  

Thus began the contemporary versions of community-based, bottom-up, non-government movements that still operate in the new millennium.

The poet Rendra, who believed ‘the function of the artist, the poet and the intellectual was to “guide or lead social change”’, had returned from studying dramatic art in the United States in 1967 and set up his own theatre workshop in Yogyakarta. Known as ‘Bengkel’ (Workshop) he rehearsed and performed his own dramas and poetry that became increasingly critical of corrupt leaders who neglected the welfare of ordinary people. In 1974 Bengkel was forbidden to play to audiences in Yogyakarta. When the ban was lifted for performances in 1977 and 1978,

---


63 Bunnell, ‘Community Participation’, 181.

64 Hooker, ‘Expression: Creativity despite Restraint’, 278.
Rendra was lionised by audiences, especially by those who had initially supported the New Order but now felt disillusioned. In Chapter 7, Caroline Turner refers to several artists, including Arahmaiani and Dadang Christanto, who were specifically inspired by Rendra’s public reading of his poems of protest against New Order corruption and violence, student activists, and the neglect of the poorest and most vulnerable members of society who were not included in New Order mega-development policies. In Bandung, too, theatre played a key role in communicating resistance to the New Order to broader audiences, and many of the artists whose names and work appear in this book were involved in Studi Klub Teater, an influential group in Bandung in the 1980s, of which artists Tisna Sanjaya (see Chapter 4) and Arahmaiani (see Chapters 4 and 7) were key members. Sanjaya describes his involvement in theatre and his burgeoning etching practice as mutually influential:

For instance … my etchings, there are many that have titles from the theatre in the 1980s, like The Thief’s Party. That was the title of the theatre-work by Rahman Sahbur … I was on the artistic team, making posters, making banners … at the same time, I was making etchings, and this was influenced by the scripts. And that also influenced the stage.

Sanjaya’s early years in the theatre formed the basis for what has become a highly formalised and disciplined practice, in which etching serves as a jumping off point, and a grounding, for works in television, painting, installation and performance art.

In 1975, a group of artists from the academies of Bandung and Yogyakarta decided to bring a breath of fresh air into the way art was being taught, especially with its emphasis on painting as the primary medium. As both Jim Supangkat (Chapter 6) and FX Harsono (Chapter 10) make clear, they wanted to create a ‘New Art Movement’ (Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru,

---


GSRB) that looked at social and political issues ‘with the intention of experimenting with the search for a national Indonesian identity’. Harsono remembers that the New Order’s ‘militaristic and repressive policies at this time’ raised issues that he felt had to be addressed in his art and in his actions: ‘I could no longer just interpret a situation or condition without becoming involved in that situation myself. I became increasingly involved with NGOs and activists who opposed Suharto’s policies’. He acknowledges that the repression, overt and covert, practised by the regime against ‘dissidents’ was stressful.

It was no secret that ‘[t]he New Order promoted gender differences’. Kathryn Robinson has written eloquently about the ‘officially sponsored images of femininity’ that the New Order developed to promote their ideology of the nation as a big family with women always ranked as ‘subordinate to men in both state and home’. While analysts inside and outside Indonesia during the period of New Order political hegemony, that is, before 1998, ‘were justifiably critical of the government’s efforts to domesticate and depoliticise women and to coopt them into the vast machinery of a repressive regime’, in the decades that followed it was possible to see that New Order health and education policies had improved life expectancy for all citizens, that child marriages had begun to decline (though they still exist in many rural areas) and that all children were being compulsorily educated to at least the end of primary school. The impact of these policies on women and girls began to be seen in the late New Order period and thereafter, when women played increasingly public roles as activists and agents for change. This was also evident in the number of women studying art at tertiary level in Jakarta, Bandung and Yogyakarta, where ‘40 per cent of students accepted into visual art studies’ were women.

In Chapter 8, Alia Swastika describes in more detail the negative effects of the New Order on women artists, in particular the development of state ibuism (mother-ism) and the pressure on women to be both mothers and career professionals.

68 FX Harsono, Chapter 10 (this volume). See also Chapters 5 and 7 (this volume).
69 Ibid. See also Hatley, ‘Cultural Expression’, 228.
71 For a careful and considered analysis of the complexities of the effects of New Order policies on Muslim women, as well as their responses to the increasing influence of ‘Islam’ (in its many manifestations), see Suzanne Brenner, ‘Islam and Gender Politics in Late New Order Indonesia’, in Spirited Politics: Religion and Public Life in Contemporary Southeast Asia, ed. Andrew C. Willford and Kenneth M. George (Ithaca New York: Southeast Asia Program Publications, 2005) 93, 97.
During the 1970s, Umi Dachlan (1942–2009) was one of few women who made a career in art as both an academic at ITB and as a practising artist who exhibited her work alongside male contemporaries. She has been admired for the contemplative and reflective depth in many of her works as well as her technical skill.

---

73 Ibid. For a sensitive and in-depth study of women artists in Indonesia, see Wulan Dirgantoro, *Feminisms and Contemporary Art in Indonesia: Defining Experiences* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017), doi.org/10.1017/9789048526994.

74 For example: ‘Blending abstract expressionist approaches with figurative symbolism, Umi’s works offer a visual style that combines elegant, static minimalism and formalistic tendencies with a rhythmic play of strong, vivid colors.’ See Carla Bianpoen, Farah Wardani and Wulan Dirgantoro, eds, *Indonesian Women Artists: The Curtain Opens* (Jakarta: Yayasan Senirupa Indonesia, 2007), 253.
When she was in her 60s, Dachlan painted in stronger, more vibrant colours and her work ‘is marked by intense concerns about human relations and values pertaining to unequal power relations, to suppression, as well as to oppression’. In the 1980s, she witnessed a bull fight in Spain and later revealed the impact it had on her: ‘I immediately recognised the similarity with conditions in our society’. She felt that the bull was like the ordinary people of Indonesia at that time, and that in the fight to the death, the odds were stacked in favour of the matador. These words suggest that Umi Dachlan came to see Indonesia’s ordinary people as always dominated by those in authority.

It was during this decade of the 1980s that increasing numbers of farmers were forced off their land by development projects for the upper middle class, such as housing complexes and golf courses. Huge new industrial estates attracted labourers from rural areas ‘to service the booming low-wage manufacturing sector’. As well, mining and deforestation caused by illegal logging by conglomerates caused environmental degradation, life-threatening mudslides and loss of livelihoods for locals displaced by multinational companies.

There was a range of responses to these disastrous conditions—‘a host of new labour, environmental and women’s organisations were formed, linking up with international movements and helping to transform the political agenda in Indonesia’.

One of the first non-government organisations established during the New Order period, and still very active, is the respected LBH (Lembaga Bantuan Hukum Jakarta/Jakarta Legal Aid Institute). It was set up in 1969–70 by Indonesian lawyers as a pro bono organisation to provide legal aid to the have-nots and victims of human rights abuses, including political prisoners. LBH was (and is) supported by the government of Jakarta; in the early years of the new millennium alone, it has helped well over 100,000 individuals in the special region of Jakarta. Other branches of LBH work elsewhere in Indonesia. In 1982 at a public conference, one of the directors of LBH Jakarta, T. Mulya Lubis, called on writers

75 Bianpoen, Wardani and Dirgantoro, *Indonesian Women Artists*, 255.
77 Ibid., 161.
78 See further ‘Tentang Kami’, LBH Jakarta, accessed 20 March 2021, bantuanhukum.or.id/tentang-kami/.
to expose ‘injustice and “structural violence” which takes place against the economically and politically disadvantaged’. 79 It was artists, as well as journalists and writers, who followed Rendra and others in using their skills to draw attention to the growing state-sanctioned injustice and violence of the New Order. 80 Despite bans and even brief periods of detention, they supported victims of New Order policies and, by doing so, risked retribution for criticising those policies and the politicians and military who enacted them.

Another non-government organisation (NGO) that worked in cooperation with artists in Indonesia during the 1980s was WALHI (Wahana Lingkungan Hidup Indonesia/Indonesian Forum for the Environment). Established in 1980, WALHI works across diverse issues—for example, agrarian conflict, indigenous rights, and coastal and marine degradation and deforestation—through a platform that reaches beyond environmental issues to their impact on society, striving for ‘economic, social and ecological justice for this generation and those to come’. 81

In 1985, WALHI sponsored the artistic project and exhibition Proses '85, which included FX Harsono, Moelyono, Bonyong Munni Ardhie, Harris Purnama, Gendut Riyanto, and which encouraged artists to undertake field work and research into social issues caused by environmental mismanagement. Harsono’s documentary photographs of his work with communities affected by mercury poisoning in Jakarta Bay is echoed in the projects he has pursued in his career since, as described in Chapter 10. Moelyono too has pursued similarly ‘people-oriented’ (kerakyatan) processes in his work since the 1980s, and has continued to collaborate with WALHI and other NGOs, as described by Kent in Chapter 2.

One example of social action in support of farmers in Central Java, whose land was being forcibly acquired for a new dam at Kedung Ombo near Salatiga, stands for many others. In 1988, when students from the nearby Christian University of Salatiga learned the farmers were not only being

80 Halim HD, a cultural organiser in Solo, Central Java, recounts how, in the early 1980s, he and other artists countered the New Order proscriptions against political activity by establishing ‘working groups’ (kumandungan), inspired by a suggestion from Rendra. They networked with similar groups elsewhere and created ‘cultural pockets’ as a ‘channel for the efforts of the artistic community to create public space’. See Halim HD, ‘Arts Networks and the Struggle for Democratisation’, in Reformasi: Crisis and Change in Indonesia, ed. Arief Budiman, Barbara Hatley and Damien Kingsbury (Monash University: Monash Asia Institute, 1999), 289.
forced from their land but also were receiving inadequate compensation, they staged protests that attracted national (and international) support for the victims of developmentalism.

A major artistic statement of support for the farmers was Dadang Christanto’s mass installation in Jakarta Bay, which was clearly visible to ordinary Indonesians who flocked to Ancol to enjoy the scenery and amusements there. The vast number of figures—naked humans who appear rigid with terror—is confronting (see Figure 1.8). Their nakedness emphasises their extreme vulnerability and suggests the overwhelming nature of the losses they have suffered without any redress to justice. Their vulnerability and the Indonesian word *manusia* (human being), used to describe them in the title of the installation, emphasise that they are humans like us, the viewers; that bonds of humanity bind us together; and that we all share ‘human rights’.

*Figure 1.8: Dadang Christanto, 1001 Manusia Tanah (1001 Earth Humans), 1996.*

Ephemeral sculpture. One thousand life-size fibreglass figures set in the sea off Marina Beach, Ancol, North Jakarta. This work is a testimony to all humans displaced by economic development, including the farmers of Kedung Ombo (see Chapter 7). The artist was the 1,001st figure in his performance in the sea with the figures. Image courtesy the artist.
New Order development depended on access to cheap sources of labour. Wages were below poverty levels and working conditions were often unsafe, or worse. Strikes and protests were crushed by the military. The rape and murder of a young factory worker, Marsinah, by the military because she demanded better conditions for her fellows in East Java in 1993, became a public scandal. Moelyono produced an installation exhibition commemorating Marsinah’s life and death in Surabaya in the same year as her death, and he narrowly escaped prosecution due to representations from LBH. Marsinah (and others such as Wiji Thukul, see below) became a symbol of military abuse during the later years of the New Order.


In line with its depoliticisation policies, by the early 1980s, the New Order determined that the public expression of Islam would be confined to cultural expression. Political activity linked with Islam was not permitted. Respected Muslim leaders from both modernist and traditional backgrounds, such as Nurcholish Madjid and Abdurrahman Wahid, carved out a path for Islam that encouraged intellectual, educational, social and artistic activities without linking them with politics. Many, though not all, younger Muslims saw this as an opportunity to bring new vitality to Islamic thinking and to search for Islam-based solutions to socioeconomic issues such as human rights, gender equality, environmental degradation, religious tolerance and democratisation. By the late 1980s and 1990s, Islamic NGOs implemented many of these ideas and spread them through training programs run by NU and Muhammadiyah groups. This continues in the new millennium and now includes training in Islam-infused courses on subjects such as entrepreneurship for women and disaster relief.

---

Figure 1.9: Amri Yahya (1939–2004), Indonesia, Swargaloka – Jannaatun wa Na’iimuun (Garden of Delight), 1990–95, Yogyakarta, Central Java.

The work’s title uses the Classical Malay and Arabic terms for heaven/paradise to express a balance between the older and newer understandings of truth that are mirrored in the artist's choice of the traditional techniques of batik and the vibrant contemporary colours that express his design.

The emergence of increasing numbers of middle-class Muslims who shared in the economic prosperity of the New Order coincided with a worldwide revival of Islam in the 1980s. These aspirational Muslims realised they lacked a true understanding of their religion and they sought it through study groups and classes in Quran recital techniques and Arabic calligraphy. They had the money to make the pilgrimage to Mecca, to buy Islamic fashions and works of Islam-inspired art to display in their homes.

International experts in Islamic arts and cultures, such as Professor S. H. Nasr and Professor Annemarie Schimmel (both from the US) were invited to Indonesia and Malaysia to address overflowing conferences. A regular report was sent each month from Indonesia to the UK-based, upmarket publication *Arts & the Islamic World* detailing art events being held in Indonesia. A special report was devoted to the blockbuster exhibition of Islamic art held in 1995 at Indonesia's national Istiqlal (Independence) Mosque, with the backing of President Suharto, which attracted 11 million viewers (see Chapter 4, this volume). President Suharto had been supportive of this major cultural project because he was seeking increased backing from Muslim organisations. Ironically, he was losing the support of sections of the military and, like Sukarno before him, Suharto was forced to play a balancing game.

---

85 Amri Yahya (b. 1939) graduated from ASRI Yogyakarta in 1971 and was acknowledged as one of the pioneers and innovators of modern batik art. He held many overseas exhibitions, the first in Australia in 1957 and eventually including European cities, the US, the Middle East and all parts of Asia. He lived most of his life in Yogyakarta where he died in 2004, severely affected by the loss of his art collection when fire destroyed his gallery. One of his paintings includes a reference to Australia's support for Indonesian independence, see Ron Witton, 'Amri Yahya and the Sydney University Labor Club', *Inside Indonesia*, 24 August 2014, www.insideindonesia.org/amri-yahya-and-the-sydney-university-labor-club, accessed 20 May 2022. Biographical information from the catalogue, *Wajah Seni Lukis Islam Indonesia ke-3* [Faces of the Third Indonesian Islamic Art Exhibition], 15–17 May 1996, World Trade Centre, Jakarta (no further publication details).

86 Published for the Islamic Arts Foundation, London, by New Century Publishers, from 1982, with representatives in all countries with Muslim majority populations.
As well, in 1993, a new radical Islam-based movement was established by two former leaders of the banned violent movement Darul Islam that had killed 15–40,000 Indonesians in the early to mid-1950s. The new movement, known as Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), had its own terrorist agenda. It was the leaders of JI who, in mid-2000, masterminded lethal attacks in Indonesia. Islamic terrorism by Indonesians against their fellow citizens and foreigners was to become a major threat in the new millennium.

**The New Order Unravels, 1990–98**

By 1990, the atmosphere of tension and disillusion felt by many Indonesians was summed up by a report of a celebration of Indonesia’s forty-fifth anniversary on 16 August held at Taman Ismail Marzuki (TIM):

> the young men and women performing and attending the cultural performance at TIM that night cried out about a gloomy social reality. Their thoughts ranged over unemployment, the deteriorating environment, overcrowding of the island of Java and the future of an Indonesian population of more than 200 million, prevailing injustice, social gaps, ethnic and other social prejudices, conglomerates, corruption, lack of democracy and gloom over the lack of hope for effective participation.\(^87\)

As well as the socioeconomic issues pervading 1990s Indonesia and the obvious corruption and nepotism rife in the regime, especially in the president’s own family, violent and deadly clashes were occurring in East Timor, Aceh and Papua as the military crushed dissent. In 1991, over 90 East Timorese students were gunned down in the Santa Cruz cemetery in Dili where they had fled to shelter from the military. The massacre was caught on film, shown across the world and universally condemned.

A new generation of Indonesian students took up the cause of workers and farmers, their direct support for those suffering military or government discrimination differentiating them from student protesters of the 1970s. Instead of protesting on behalf of the ‘victims’ and trying to advocate for them with members of the elite, the students of the 1990s worked directly with the ‘underdogs’ through NGOs and direct community action.\(^88\)

---

88 Bourchier and Hadiz, *Indonesian Politics and Society*, 162.
Figure 1.10: Dolorosa Sinaga, *Satu Kata Saja: Lawan! (One Word Only: Resist!),* 2003.

Bronze, 36 x 30 x 60 cm. Image and permission: Dolorosa Sinaga. The figure is a lifelike representation of Thukul in appearance and dress.
One example of such direct action, by a man of the people rather than a student, concerns Wiji Thukul (b. 1963), the son of a pedicab driver. He became head of the People’s Art Network (JAKKER) and worked with kampong children of workers in his hometown of Solo, Central Java, to establish art collectives for them as well as supporting protesting workers and peasants. He wrote protest poems and was arrested several times. In 1996, he disappeared and, although his body has never been found, is assumed to have been killed by, or on the orders of, the military. His poems were read at protests by farmers and striking workers. This final verse of one of his poems was frequently quoted by protesters at their rallies:

if suggestions are refused without heed
voices silenced, criticism banned without reason
accused of subversion and disturbing
the peace
then there is only one word: resist! 89

Thukul’s work has regained resonance in recent years as families and advocates for the many ‘disappeared’ of the late New Order have found voice through human rights campaigns against legal impunity for perpetrators of violent crimes and murders. 90

The Fall of Suharto, 1998

Indonesia was the first Asian economy to be hit by the effects of the global financial crisis (GFC) in 1997. It was also the worst affected and the economic crash is now seen as one of the prime factors contributing to the end of Suharto’s presidency. As outlined above, protests against the regime had been increasing and military repression and censorship had failed to quell the dissent. Early in 1998, the Indonesian currency plummeted as a result of the GFC. This caused panic buying, the collapse of the stock exchange, closure of businesses and widespread unemployment. Educated women who had long been critical of Suharto’s gender policies had been meeting together and forming organisations such as Yayasan Jurnal Perempuan (Women’s Journal Association) and linking with

89 Ibid., 163, 179.
90 In 2017, a ‘sparse and quietly composed film’ about the poet’s last days, Istirahatlah Kata-Kata (the film was given the English title Solo: Solitude), played to large audiences in Indonesia, and won awards at Film Festivals around the world. See Elly Kent, “‘Istirahatlah Kata-Kata’: Young Audiences Discover a Dissident Poet”, Indonesia at Melbourne, accessed 26 March 2021, indonesiaatmelbourne.unimelb.edu.au/film-review-istirahatlah-kata-kata/.
international organisations such as UNIFEM. Increasingly concerned about the authoritarian actions of the regime, they needed a ‘cause’ to rally support for criticism of the government. When the price of milk rose 400 per cent in early 1998 as a result of the GFC, they found their cause. Calling themselves Suara Ibu Peduli (Voice of Concerned Mothers) they organised their first mass demonstration at a highly prominent Jakarta site in February 1998 and gained almost immediate sympathetic support. Titarubi (b. 1961) was one of the artists who actively supported the movement against Suharto and it was at this time, Wulan Dirgantoro notes, that themes of ‘political motherhood’ appear in her works.91

Other mass demonstrations across the archipelago were met with live bullets fired by the military, resulting in loss of life. On 12 May 1998, students protesting peacefully in Jakarta at Trisakti University were fired on by the military and four were killed. The next day mass violence broke out in Jakarta and shops and office blocks were set on fire. Hundreds of women were raped. Over 1,000 people were killed in Jakarta with more deaths in other cities. Ethnic Chinese were targeted, and tens of thousands of Indonesian Chinese left Indonesia. Many later returned.92 On 21 May 1998, Suharto finally bowed to pressure and resigned, handing over to his vice-president, Habibie. After 32 long years of New Order rule, most Indonesians could not believe he had gone.

In the Yogyakarta LBH office in December 1998, a group of students and young artists came together as Taring Padi (Rice Tusk). With their mission to direct creative practice to actively support and involve ‘the people’, they ‘were among the architects of the radical art actions that highlighted the Yogyakarta protest movement in 1998’.93 The group, who created their lo-fi collective artworks in a squat in the former ASRI building, remains active and extraordinarily influential in the early 2020s (see Figure 1.11). Many young artists’ political consciousness was forged in the heat of this troubled period, and political art has remained one of the dominant themes in the decades since. The events of 1998 and the effects on Indonesians of Chinese descent are discussed in Chapters 7 and 10 and

---

92 This summary is based on Edward Aspinall, Herb Feith and Gerry van Klinken, ‘Introduction’, in The Last Days of President Suharto, ed. Edward Aspinall, Herb Feith and Gerry van Klinken (Monash University: Monash Asia Institute, 1999), v–viii.
have been a theme in art, literature and film in recent years. In Chapter 10, FX Harsono provides a very personal account of his artistic responses to violence against members of the Indonesian Chinese community.

Figure 1.11: People’s Cultural Institute Taring Padi, Bangun Nusantara Tanpa Tetes Darah (Develop the Archipelago without Drops of Blood), 1998, Yogyakarta, Indonesia.

Woodblock print, ink and colour on paper, 52.0 x 40.0 cm (image). Gift of Damon Moon through the Art Gallery of South Australia Foundation 2012. Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide © Taring Padi Collective. Permission: Taring Padi.
One assessment of the effects of the fall of the regime, made shortly after the event, suggests that, despite the human tragedies, Indonesians united to support survivors, and artists and performers were an essential part of the process of recovery:

Though greatly shaken by economic hardship and the threat of ethnic and religiously based violence, communities are attempting to foster collaborative, inter-group activities and to provide support for the most needy. Even the horrific rapes of Chinese women during the May riots are shown to have had complex effects. While illustrating the brutal extremes of military-style violence, and processes of silencing and blaming of female victims, they have also angered and mobilised women to demand redress from the authorities, and pushed women's rights to the forefront of human rights campaigns. And gender violence becomes one of the themes taken up by cultural networks, in performances and other arts activities fostering democratic consciousness.\footnote{94 Arief Budiman, Barbara Hatley and Damien Kingsbury, ‘Postscript’, in Budiman, Hatley and Kingsbury, \textit{Reformasi}, 386.}

The New Millennium, 1999–2020s

GoenawanMohamad characterises Indonesia’s history as ‘a wounded history’, citing the violence of the Darul Islam guerrillas in the late 1940s–60s; the PRRI-Permesta rebellion of 1958; the shooting of Muslim protesters at Tanjung Priok (Jakarta) in 1984; and the violence in East Timor, Aceh and Papua.\footnote{95 Mohamad, \textit{In Other Words}, 228, originally published in \textit{ Tempo}, 27 February 2000.} He might have added inter-ethnic and sectarian-based violence in Ambon, Halmahera and Poso in Central Sulawesi and the persecution of Indonesian Shi’a and Ahmadis.\footnote{96 See Greg Fealy and Sally White, ‘Introduction’, in \textit{Expressing Islam: Religious Life and Politics in Indonesia}, ed. Greg Fealy and Sally White (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2008), 1–2, doi.org/10.1355/9789812308528, in which they also point out that there is much more to Islam in Indonesia than terrorism.}

The violence did not stop immediately after Suharto resigned. The displaced military fomented ethno-religious rivalries and instigated other forms of violence in various parts of the archipelago. It took a while for the apparatus of the New Order to disband or be disbanded and for a police force to be formed and replace the application of the law by the military.
It took a while to get used to Indonesia without Suharto and his family and cronies, the re-emergence of political parties and the retreat of the military to their barracks.

Preparations for the first democratic elections in Indonesia since 1955 marked the beginning of the reform period, known as Reformasi. Without New Order restrictions on Islamic political parties, there was a flowering of Islam-based parties. They did not do as well in the national elections as their leaders had expected when allegiance to Islam did not translate into votes for Muslim political parties. However, at the sub-provincial (kabupaten) level, ‘hard-line’ or literalist Muslim groups pushed for implementation of local versions of sharia law (Peraturan Daerah Syariah) and in some areas these were enacted and sometimes enforced by sharia officials (referred to as ‘sharia police’). The regulations focused on dress codes, especially for women, the attainment of basic levels of Quranic literacy, relationships between unmarried males and females, homosexuality and ‘deviant sects’ (i.e. persecution of members of Ahmadi and Shi’a groups). Local protests and complaints about statues and monuments did not gain much support but, in Jakarta from 1998, a well-organised Islamic vigilante group named Front Pembela Islam (FPI, Islamic Defenders Front) embarked on targeted attacks on nightclubs, bars and brothels. In 2005–06, an Anti-Pornography Bill was submitted to parliament backed by conservative Islamic political parties and supported by ultra-conservative, militant Muslim paramilitary groups such as Laskar Jihad. Blasphemy (against Islam), obscenity and pornography, as well as women’s dress and comportment, were the main concerns of the proposed Bill. Representatives of moderate Islamic women’s groups, as well as human rights activists, protested vigorously against the Bill and some amendments were made. But, in 2006, the FPI sued artists Agus Suwage and Davy Linggar, curator Jim Supangkat and models involved in an installation entitled Pink Swing Park shown in the

---

97 In contrast to this literalist and ultra-conservative interpretation of Islam, the Muslim mass social movement Nahdlatul Ulama organised campaigns to educate its members about the compatibility between Islam and democracy. This included respect for the place of art in Indonesian society, as long as that art did not conflict with Islamic values. See Virginia Hooker, ‘Artistic Expression in Non-Arab Islamic Cultures: Views from Indonesia’, TAASA Review 29, no. 3 (September 2020): 10–12.

2005 Jakarta CP Biennale exhibition and forced its closure. The Bill was passed into law in 2008 and remains highly controversial. FPI continued its proactive and often aggressive actions to ‘protect’ Islam well into the new millennium. Its charismatic, firebrand leader attracted a mass following that government claimed could threaten peace and stability, especially when authorities were calling for an end to large-scale mass gatherings as the COVID-19 pandemic ravaged Indonesia. In December 2020, FPI was officially banned for involving its members in violent activities.

These highly visible, socially (and often legally) coercive manifestations of ultra-conservative Islam’s influence in contemporary Indonesian society have prompted visual responses by both Muslim and non-Muslim artists, including Agus Suwage’s Tembok Toleransi (Wall of Tolerance) (see Figure 1.12), which invites viewers to lean into the installation to hear the soft sounds of the call to prayer. This experience contrasts with the calls to prayer broadcast at high volume through mosque loudspeakers in many parts of Indonesia today.

Another work, an unusual, embroidered image by Eko Nugroho, is a satirical depiction of a student of Islam. It was created in 2011 during the presidency of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, a former army officer and Indonesia’s first democratically elected president, who held office between 2004 and 2014. This was a period of political stability but also of sectarianism and ongoing corruption.


101 Born in Yogyakarta in 1977, versatile and multidisciplinary, his work was included in Contemporary Worlds: Indonesia, an exhibition at the National Gallery of Australia in 2019. See Introduction (this volume).

Figure 1.12: Agus Suwage (b. 1959), Central Java, Tembok Toleransi (Wall of Tolerance), 2012.


The interpretation of the work by James Bennett, curator of Southeast Asian Art and Material Culture at the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, identifies the figure as a religious student who holds both a copy of a religious text and a sword (a symbol of militant Islam) and wears an armband reading ‘Benci’ (Hate). The absence of the student’s head ‘suggests the absence of the senses associated with meaningful intelligence’. Concerning the idyllic scene that replaces the head, Bennett writes:

A rooster perches on the roof of a dwelling, a sight that Javanese people regard as a symbol of domestic harmony and prosperity. Set against a blue sky is the sacred volcano Merapi, the dwelling place of the jin guardian spirits of Java, which is located near Yogyakarta where Nugroho lives. The mountain invokes the memory of the ancestral heritage of Javanese society, whose practice of Islam was renowned for its religious tolerance and inclusion.¹⁰³

Nugroho imbued his work with symbols and allusions to Indonesia’s contemporary politics, the growth of sectarianism and decline in morals, and provided an idyllic picture of an earlier time when daily life was more harmonious and simplified. But he also included flames (from the fires of hell) beneath the religious student, suggesting that unless he changes his views of hate and prejudice, he is doomed for a life of eternal damnation.


Fabric, wire, rayon thread, machine embroidery, 122.5 x 90.5 cm. Gift of the Art Gallery of South Australia Foundation 2012, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide. Permission: Eko Nugroho.
1. CONTEXTUALISING ART IN INDONESIA’S HISTORY, SOCIETY AND POLITICS

Revisiting the Past

The Indonesian artists, critics and curators who pioneered the study of Indonesia’s modern art began their narratives with Raden Saleh. But there was little information available about him and he remained a somewhat distant figure. He came of age in the artistic sense in Europe and it was in Europe that Professor Werner Kraus located the archival materials that described Raden Saleh’s successes and achievements there. In 1995, Kraus and Supangkat spoke about Raden Saleh at a public lecture, attended by Indonesian artists among others, organised by the Goethe Institute. A reappraisal began but was overtaken by the political events of the GFC and the fall of Suharto. In 2002, Galeri Semarang (in Semarang) curated a major exhibition of works by 34 Indonesian artists who acknowledged Raden Saleh as an influence on their work. Among them was Heri Dono, who has since featured his own version of Raden Saleh in scores of his paintings. In 2004, Kraus spoke in Singapore about a new, ‘proto-nationalist’ interpretation of Raden Saleh’s painting of the Dutch arrest of Prince Diponegoro completed in 1857 (see Figure 1.4). Amir Sidharta attended the talk and immediately invited Kraus to deliver it in Jakarta, which he did. Thanks to the work of contemporary scholars, Raden Saleh and his works have become an inspiration to contemporary Indonesian artists and his motto, ‘Ehre Gott und liebe die Menschen’ (Honour God and love mankind), is one that resonates with many of them.

104 There is renewed interest in the role of Raden Ajeng Kartini and her sister as supporters of women’s art and crafts in her local area in the late nineteenth century. See Introduction (this volume); Enin Supriyanto, ‘The Mother of Indonesian Art’, in Indonesian Women Artists, ed. Carla Bianpoen, Farah Wardani and Wulan Dirgantoro, (Jakarta: Yayasan Senirupa Indonesia, 2007), 15–21.
In his 1970 essay ‘Painting in Indonesia: Issues Past and Present’, Yuliman argues that the shift to modernity in Indonesian art happened sometime in the 1930s when ‘the centre of creative energy’ shifted from society to the individual. This, he believes, was the beginning of a new art ‘that took the form of individual expression’. It was not many years after this that Chairil Anwar wrote his defiant (and self-centred) poem ‘Aku’ (I)—a shift had indeed begun.

Yuliman expands on his theory of shift in the centre of creative energy to the individual in this way:

we have developed a vision of the self as a vital centre, with potential, dignity and inviolable basic rights. The vision gives birth to the discourses and movements of renewal in social, educational, political and legal fields, which are still in process … Further, through modern intercommunication, the borders of Indonesia as an existential space are no longer the same as the geographical borders: we are witnessing the shifting of the horizons of philosophy, the realms and values of technology, horizons that are widening to encompass the world.

Yuliman concludes his essay by urging Indonesians:

to reach more deeply into the phenomena of painting—into the creative process of the artist, into the psychology of the artist, into the artistic endeavours and struggles that they traverse step by step, into all the fruits of their works and into the process of appreciation.

But, he says, ‘it is precisely this that is never done by Indonesians’. If it were, says Yuliman, there would be vital and innovative discussions about art that would provide new perspectives and provide valuable support for encouraging ‘an appreciation of art that is alive and intelligent’.

107 Yuliman, ‘Seni Lukis Di Indonesia’.
108 Ibid.
109 Ibid.
Yuliman wrote these words in 1970. He was to live another 20 years and he would have seen, as chapters in this book describe, that during that period Indonesians were reaching even ‘more deeply into the phenomena of painting’. This was in part a response to his own efforts as well as the encouragement of other Indonesian art critics and artists, who exhibited their works, taught in the academies, informal studios and collectives, and explored new forms and techniques.

In June 2014, a few weeks before the presidential election hotly contested by candidates Prabowo and Jokowi, the National Gallery of Indonesia held a solo exhibition of works by respected artist and arts journalist Yusuf Susilo Hartono.\footnote{Born in East Java in 1958 into a strict religious family, his father forbade him to develop his artistic talent lest the images be considered idolatrous. Ridden with guilt, Yusuf continued to draw and paint. In 1987 he met maestro Affandi at Taman Ismail Marzuki. Affandi complimented him on his drawings and advised him not to listen to critics or others but to look inside himself and listen to his heart. Personal email to Virginia Hooker, 26 November 2013.} Entitled Pe(s)ta Demokrasi (Festival/map of...
democracy), it took a critical look at the culture of democracy in Indonesia in a series of paintings, sketches and an installation. His works are visual readings of the fallout from Indonesia’s transactional politics and they remind his viewers of the widespread corruption, vote buying and broken promises that accompany each democratic election in Indonesia. In Figure 1.14, the sea of multi-coloured hands, many throwing the hand signs that represent their political parties, clutch envelopes of rupiah notes all set against a background of beautifully patterned whorls (perhaps an allusion to the inking of a finger after a vote has been cast) that read ‘Demokrasi’ (Democracy). Clearly these are the hands of people who have sold their votes. The white hands remind viewers of the high percentage of spoiled or donkey votes that are now a feature of Indonesian elections. Superimposed on the sea of hands is a chair (kursi) stamped with the emblem of the Republic of Indonesia, representing the parliamentary seats (kursi) that are at stake.

Figure 1.15: Deputy Minister of Education and Culture Professor Wiendu Nuryanti at Yusuf Susilo Hartono’s exhibition, National Gallery of Indonesia, 2014.

The deputy minister wrote ‘Save Democracy through Art’ on the visitor’s board after opening Hartono’s solo exhibition Pe(s)ta Demokrasi (Map/festival of democracy) on the eve of the presidential elections that brought Joko Widodo to power in 2014. Photograph courtesy Yusuf Susilo Hartono.
Indonesia’s artists are its intellectuals and philosophers of the visual. Deputy Minister Wiendu Nuryanti’s words ‘Save Democracy through Art’, particularly in the context of a presidential election campaign, imply that art can play an active role in public affairs and that it should safeguard democracy. They also recognise that artists are acutely observant of the political as well as the social aspects of their society, and that they should not remain silent about abuses of power. The examples in this book illustrate how Indonesia’s artists reinvent and play with ‘tradition’, knowing their viewers will understand the innuendos and allusions, using earthy humour and lyrical grace with all shades in between, to exquisitely express their subjects. When censorship, intimidation or even violence is used against them, they are not silenced and continue to create their art. As Minister Nuryanti’s words suggest, that is why Indonesia’s contemporary art matters.