The title of this chapter, ‘Artistic Ideologies’, is one I have borrowed from the eminent Indonesian art critic and historian Sanento Yuliman. Yuliman, who died in 1992, looms large over Indonesian art history, not least because his perspicuous and prescient texts firmly place Indonesian modern art in continuity with what came before, ‘emerging in the midst of living art traditions’. Yuliman insisted that these living traditions emerged from the people, were widely understood and functionally crossed into many social practices. Those who demand a social function rather than esoteric individualism in modern art, Yuliman argued, are actually looking for art that can be widely understood in society.¹

The idea that the art must be connected to society, and that it draws also on the traditions that remain in practice across Indonesia’s many cultures, remains a strong influence on many contemporary artists. This has given rise to a continuous flow of discourses that engender, encourage or even mandate individual artists to engage with society in the creation of their work. This chapter explores some of these discourses, including the social realism of revolutionary modern artist S. Sudjojono (1913–1986), which he called *jiwa ketok* (the visible soul); the prescribed participatory research

methodology of *turba* (going down below), mandated by the Institute for People’s Culture; the adoption of the concept of *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation) as a platform for collective art practice; and the adoption of conscientisation as a means of using art to empower communities. Each of these is laden with ideological overtones and historical contexts that, together, create an intellectual landscape that has been a touchstone for contemporary Indonesian art in its current forms.

The practices and concepts described here demonstrate that many contemporary artists in Indonesia are drawing on and responding to ideas that imagine a conjunction of individualist creativity and specific social responsibilities for artists, ideas that have long been embedded in Indonesian art. This situates contemporary artists in continuity with—to borrow again from Yuliman—established discourses of modern Indonesian art. Yet these discourses are not received uncritically and remain part of an ongoing dialectic with those from other disciplines, cultures and places.

To unpack these ideas around tradition, change, individuality and society in art, I begin by looking at *Kuda Binal* (*Wild Horses*). This delegated performance work by well-known peripatetic Indonesian artist Heri Dono (b. 1960), whose work also features prominently in Chapter 7, looks at the international context of the 1990s, incorporating traditional dance forms and contemporary iconography in an event that resulted in the scenes—or better yet, the experience—described below.

*Figure 2.1: Documentation of a meeting in Surakarta in 1985, titled ‘Situasi Seni Rupa Kita dan Seni Rupa Terlibat’ (*The Situation of Our Art and Art That Is Involved*).*

Image courtesy Indonesian Visual Art Archive.
The fire in the middle of the arena raged. Suddenly the sound of a drum thundered in the audience’s ears, followed by the sound of a gong, and the shrill call of five trumpets. Ten riders on kuda lumping then descended into the 10 x 10 metre arena. This was the beginning of the Kuda Binal performance … on the western corner of the northern town square in Yogya … Idioms from traditional art and symbols of modern society were inverted in this performance. Everything reflected wildness and humour. The heads of the ten kuda lumping are not all horse-heads … some sport human heads, others resemble animals, there are even those that depict mysterious creatures. Meanwhile, the ten actors wearing old fashioned clothes are also wearing gas masks, apparatus of modern man. They dance around while spraying kerosene and setting it alight, the only form of illumination for this performance …

Heri Dono’s painting and mixed media merge. Just look to the animals made from cardboard carried in this performance … These forms are precisely the same as the objects that always appear in his paintings. Barong, dragons and all manner of other creatures and the costumes of the 60 actors also quickly reveal the character and colours of Heri Dono paintings. The expressions in this performance were rough and wild, so the intensity was palpable.²

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² Raihul Fadjri, ‘Gebu Yogya 1992: Terobosan Kuda Binal’ [Yogya aflame 1992: The wild horse breaks through], Tempo 8, no. 8 (1992), accessed 19 January 2022, archive.ivaa-online.org/khazanahs/detail/1701 (author’s translation). Kuda lumping and barong are among a wide variety of rituals performed across Indonesia (and elsewhere) in which the performers identify with animals, either as ‘handlers’ or as the animals themselves. In kuda lumping a flat horse shape made of woven bamboo, rattan or leather is ridden by the dancers; barong resembles a Chinese lion dance, with two performers inside a costume sporting a fierce, animalistic countenance and an elaborately decorated body. Performers in these rituals often attain trance-like states, and can perform extreme feats; performances are frequently commissioned to mark significant social and community events.
This passionate prose describes a performance often cited as a seminal work in the history of experimental performance art in Indonesia.\(^3\) It appeared as part of the *Pameran Binal Eksperimental* (Wild experimental exhibition)—a rebellious event held to counter the formalist and formalised Yogyakarta Painting Biennale (1992)—in which the artists placed integral conceptual value on the active participation of individuals other than themselves. As the account above describes, Heri Dono inverted idioms from tradition, enlisting local grave diggers and stonemasons as dancers in a performance that parodied Central Javanese folk dance forms. In *Kuda Binal* the dancers’ movements were rough simulations of the ‘horse dances’ to which they referred. Traditionally, the horse dances, performed with woven horse-shaped silhouettes as props, are imbued with the barely

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controlled chaos of trance performance, but in Heri Dono’s version they appeared more animalistic, exaggerated by the uneven ground on which they were performed and the untrained movements of the performers (see Figure 2.3). Dono says:

They had never danced before. That was the first time. And they were bad … in terms of dance theory, they were wrong, their movements. But that was so interesting, because it became a new reference for dance … I was able to learn from the culture they usually practised, not as an academic problem, but as a new form of knowledge.4

Referring to European practice, Bishop argues that, before 1989, the traditions of performance art ‘valorised live presence and immediacy via the artist’s own body’.5 After the end of the Cold War, this ‘live presence’ was attached to the ‘collective body’ of a social group. In Indonesia, Dono’s *Kuda Binal* and other works that followed (e.g. *The Chair*, 19936; *Semar Farts*, 2000) are examples of this shift away from the focus on the artist’s own body. However, other artists, such as Arahmaiani and Tisna Sanjaya, continued to use their own bodies as a primary vehicle for their concepts, although both have increasingly involved others in their performances.

*Kuda Binal* exemplifies how artists in the 1990s adapted traditional forms to develop new, more widely accessible (or legible) visual and physical languages to communicate contemporary issues to urban audiences who were often recently arrived migrants to that space. It also provides an insight into the strategies that Indonesian artists have used to engage with society and community—the *rakyat* (the people)—through their art practice.

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4 Heri Dono, interview with the author, 2014.
Dono’s inclusion of his own paintings in Kuda Binal serves as an important tool in breaking down the partitioned categories of tradition and modernity, high and low art—particularly as the horse dances that inspired Kuda Binal are classified as ‘folk’ performing arts rather than the refined classical Javanese dance of the royal courts. This further demonstrates the integral role that Dono’s interpretation of tradition plays in his object artworks, and in the setting of the performance itself. Modern elements like gas masks and traditional elements such as the woven horse silhouette that the performers ‘rode’ while they danced, were brought together to raise particular existential issues around environmental destruction and pollution (see Figure 2.3). This departure was also enacted through the participation of stonemasons and grave diggers in the place of dancers, which opened productive sites for the reinterpretation of traditional roles created through their failure to master the intricacies of the dance:

The interesting thing is that psychologically, when people make mistakes in an artistic exploration (in their own field) they see it as something that shouldn’t happen, because you can’t make a mistake. But, if its someone from a different discipline—say I’m a painter then I make a dance, choreography—if there’s a mistake I don’t feel too strongly that I have failed.7

7 Heri Dono, interview with the author, 2014.
The primary role of participants, then, was to subvert audience assumptions and open up space for new interpretations.\(^8\)

Heri Dono’s departitioning reflects the anti-lyricism that Yuliman identified in the emerging art of the 1970s, works that moved away from the poetic and beautiful towards a more vernacular and everyday visual language. This manifested, in part, in the work of the Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru (New Art Movement)—known as GSRB—and their use of found material to produce works that Yuliman argued were ‘not a slice of the imaginary world contemplated at a distance, but rather the concrete object which physically involves the viewer’.\(^9\) In his 1979 essay ‘Perspektif Baru’ (A new perspective), Yuliman contends that these artists and, in particular, members of GSRB were trying to leave behind traditions that located art within a literal and metaphorical ‘frame’ that separated them from the sphere of lived experience.

The ideology of GSRB set the stage for artists like Dono to experiment with local and global idioms to create works equally accessible to local and international audiences. After anti-lyricism dissolved the constructions that kept Indonesian art inside literal and metaphoric frames, the next challenge for the expansion of the realm of aesthetic experience was the effort ‘to reject the impression that modern art is an ivory tower and re-instate its place in the midst of the praxis of social life’.\(^10\) The challenge was taken up by the *Pameran Binal Eksperimental*.

Bringing together disparate elements to imagine new roles and responsibilities for the artist, audience and participants, Dono drew attention to the dynamic and changing nature of tradition. He identified artists as generators of that change, creating new traditions by reordering the old. The brochure accompanying the show stated:

> Kuda Binal was born from an age-old tradition, and we recreate it here for you as contemporary art. We present it to each and every level of society. We hope it will open the door to the start of a new tradition.\(^11\)

\(^8\) The accompanying flyer reminded the audience ‘that this isn’t tradisional [sic] horse trance dance with the traditional bamboo horse … it’s *kuda binal!* So we hope that you’ll watch it with an open mind’, ‘Heri Dono Presents: Kuda Binal’ (Yogyakarta, 1992).
Dono explicitly expects the audience to negotiate their own meanings from the performance. As Yuliman had predicted in his 1969 essay ‘Looking for Indonesia in Indonesian Painting’, works such as Kuda Binal open a ‘multitude of frameworks for Indonesian art’.\(^\text{12}\)

The *Pameran Binal Eksperimental* also provided a platform for artists to challenge established categories of time, space and meaning in Indonesian art, creating the kind of experience that French theorist Rancière describes as an ‘aesthetic regime’ in which ‘art and life can exchange their properties’.\(^\text{13}\) But in *Kuda Binal*, rather than being exchanged, these properties were deliberately set on a collision path that resulted in a clash between the modern art establishment (and its separation from society) and traditional art (and its separation from contemporary life).

**Living Traditions: Gotong Royong**

In his engagement with his self-identified roots, Heri Dono’s practice is a very different project to relational aesthetics, which Bourriaud identified as emerging from the philosophies of the Enlightenment, Dadaism and Marx’s social interstices.\(^\text{14}\) *Kuda Binal* invokes and inverts tradition to question the order of things, and to develop new traditions and ideas. A similar tendency can be recognised in broader art discourses in Indonesia, where cultural concepts previously tied to tradition are recast in conversation with globally resonant art theories and practices to develop new, originary art discourses.\(^\text{15}\) One example of an originary Javanese cultural construction that has been invoked in contemporary art discourses in Indonesia is *gotong royong*.

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15 I borrow the term ‘originary’ from John Clark, who cautions that we must now reconsider modern art discourses in Asia through a postcolonial lens and recognise that the resulting works are now ‘originary works for the long-term and, in most cases, almost wholly endogenous genealogies of the modern’. John Clark, ‘The Worlding of the Asian Modern’, in *Contemporary Asian Art and Exhibitions: Connectivities and World-Making*, ed. M. Antoinette and C Turner (Canberra: ANU Press, 2014), 69–70, doi.org/10.22459/CAAE.11.2014.04.
An early painting by Heri Dono, *Gotong Royong* (1984) (see Figure 2.4), playfully illustrates this contested and appropriated social practice with a depiction of three distorted figures working in concert to lift a tiny bucket. *Gotong royong* (helping each other or mutual cooperation) is one of the fundamental principles of the modern Indonesian social system, coopted from traditional agrarian customs and promoted by the state at various points in the discourse of Indonesian nationalism and modernisation. Sukarno described the compression of the five points of the Pancasila—the five principles on which the Indonesian nation was founded—into one
main principal: gotong royong. Yet, renowned composer Suka Hardjana has questioned both the unique ‘Indonesianness’ of gotong royong and its contribution to the nation. In his keynote address to the Equator Symposium at Indonesia’s prestigious Gadjah Mada University in 2014, Hardjana emphasised the universality of formalised social cooperation, arguing that the state’s obsession with gotong royong results in a lack of emphasis on individual excellence, thus eroding national excellence.

The concept has certainly been used as a tool of repression and top-down social organisation. A gotong royong representative council was established as part of Sukarno’s political ideology of ‘Guided Democracy’ (1957–65), in which the role of opposition political parties was replaced by ‘functional groups’ such as the council. During Suharto’s New Order (1966–98), a number of additional functional groups that had also included gotong royong in their titles were amalgamated and eventually became the basis of Suharto’s Golkar political party, through which the New Order regime ruled.

Gotong royong is not only a political tool deployed as a national tradition; it is also often used to describe the system by which many Indonesians, especially those outside the middle class, access support and social welfare that might otherwise be provided by the state. In one example from 2010, following the disastrous eruption of the Mount Merapi volcano (see Map 2) near Yogyakarta that displaced 300,000 people, emergency aid and evacuations were initially organised by residents themselves, with enthusiastic support from arts organisations in the city. After residents were allowed to return to the mountain, communal effort locally described as gotong royong played a key role in clearing ash, sand and debris. These efforts were also supported by the coordination of local arts organisations such as Tlatah Bocah (Children’s World), a network of performing artists who organise an annual children’s performing arts festival.

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16 J. D. Legge, *Sukarno: A Political Biography* (London: Allen Lane, 1972). Sukarno identified the Pancasila as the five principles of nationalism, internationalism, democracy, social prosperity for all, belief in God.

17 Suka Hardjana, ‘Membaca Ulang Gotong Royong Tradisi dalam Perspektif Satu’ [Re-reading gotong royong traditions from the perspective of the one], keynote presentation at *Equator Symposium 2014: The One and the Many* (Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta: Yayasan Biennale Jogja, 2014).

18 Elly Kent, ‘Semua Tempat Sekolah’ [ Everywhere is school], in *The Third International Graduate Student Conference on Indonesia: Indonesian Urban Cultures and Societies* (Universitas Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta: The Graduate School, Gadjah Mada University 2011, unpublished paper).
As well as its manifestation in broader society, gotong royong makes important appearances in artistic discourse. In Indonesian art practice, the evocation of gotong royong dates back as far as the early years of the nation-state when the sanggar (studio collectives) still held strong influence over practice and it remains current for artists and institutions who wish to engender cooperation and social engagement. In 2011, architect and arts researcher Yoshi Fajar Krisnomurti (b. 1977) contextualised the philosophy and implementation of the 2009 Biennale Jogja within a gotong royong framework, describing how artists and art workers cooperated, collaborated, volunteered and donated food, board, time and artworks to realise the major arts event on a limited budget. In a different context, in 2014 a film documenting the working practices that were developed through the HackteriaLAB project used the principle of gotong royong to describe the interdisciplinary collaboration between artists and science students.

In 2017, Tita Salina (b. 1973) and Irwan Ahmett (b. 1978) exhibited the first iteration of an evolving diagrammatic wall drawing titled Gotong Royong—Autobiography during an exhibition in Poland. The drawing (Figure 2.5) illustrates a participatory conversation on gotong royong as artistic practice, in Indonesia and beyond, addressing many of the political, institutional, social and ideological manifestations of the concept.

Gotong royong is used by the actors in these contexts to describe collaborative practices that are among other underlying influences—such as social performativity and modernism oriented to social responsibility—on participatory practices for many Indonesian artists. Yet there is, anecdotally at least, another side to gotong royong in the arts: the exploitation of young artists in the implementation of projects ‘for the greater good’ of Indonesian art in a poorly funded arts environment. In this context, emerging art workers are frequently engaged in projects led by established practitioners as participants, as contributing artists or performers, frequently without recognition or payment.

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23 I have had a number of informal conversations with artists on this subject, specifically in relation to the implementation of programs associated with large-scale projects such as biennales and art festivals.
Figure 2.5: Tita Salina (b. 1973), South Sumatra, and Irwan Ahmett (b. 1975), West Java, Gotong Royong – Autobiography, 2014.

Evolving wall diagram, dimensions variable. Image courtesy the artists.
Anthropologist J. R. Bowen argues that, in Indonesia, ‘state and local actors are both continually engaged in the construction of “tradition” in a dialogue … in which the outcome is by no means pre-determined by the state’. This suggests the manner in which functions that might usually be fulfilled by the state become a field of practice for artists and institutions dealing with the failure, thus far, of the state to achieve strong welfare systems and resilient arts infrastructure. This is also the controversial field that Bishop has identified as a site for neo-liberalist state cooption of participatory art practice as a substitute for strong, state-supported welfare systems. Locating gotong royong—which focuses on the individual’s responsiveness and responsibility to her society—within arts discourses that also valorise autonomous creativity raises important questions around assumptions that Indonesian (or at least Javanese) traditions are inherently and exclusively communal. These questions are fundamental to the next two, specifically art-related concepts addressed in this chapter: jiwa ketok and turba.

#### Living Traditions: Jiwa Ketok

If an artist makes an art object, then that art object is none other than his own soul made visible. Art is the visible soul. So art is the soul.

This statement by Sudjojono, published in his 1946 essay ‘Art, Artists and Society’, described his fundamental philosophy of jiwa ketok, the ‘visible soul’. It has remained a point of resistance and consolidation over the decades since. In their 1987 catalogue for Pasar Raya Dunia Fantasi (Fantasy world supermarket), GSRB rejected the idea that the artist must retain an emotional connection to the artwork for it to be successful: ‘Emotional and intuitive ways of working—let alone a state of trance, were considered taboo’, a catalogue essay attributed to Jim Supangkat and Sanento Yuliman declared. Yet for many present-day Indonesian artists, Sudjojono’s legacy remains influential.

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25 In the late 2010s there were developments in the provision of arts grants by the Agency for Creative Economies, which provincially provided multi-year funding for events such as the Biennale Jogja.
Figure 2.6: S. Sudjojono, *Tjap Go Meh*, 1940.
73 x 51 cm. Image courtesy the National Gallery of Indonesia. Permission courtesy the S. Sudjojono Center, Indonesia. *Tjap Go Meh* depicts the Chinese lantern festival of the same name, and has been subject to various interpretations and visual analyses detailed by Agus T. Dermawan.  

Indonesian painter and theorist Stanislaus Yangni (b. 1982), for example, asserts that ‘(Sudjojono’s) credo of the “visible soul” was the first discourse of Indonesian fine arts’.\(^{30}\) She places this discourse alongside Deleuzian philosophy in her ruminations on the aesthetic in painting—contemporary and past, Indonesian and otherwise. In another example, in 2013 an exhibition called *jiwa ketok, Kebangsaan dan Kita* (The visible soul, nationalism and us) was held at the National Gallery of Indonesia. Contemporary artists produced diverse works demonstrating both resistance to, and nostalgia for, the kind of ‘social realism’ that *jiwa ketok* produced: images of the poor and the marginalised, the elderly and the ordinary reappeared but were, often as not, inverted, chalked over and recomposed with self-conscious and direct political references.

Sudjojono was well known for his fiery admonishments of slavish orientation to the West, yet he also advised young artists to study the techniques of Western painters. In 1967 Claire Holt wrote of Sudjojono:

> He believed that artists should be politically conscious and cited Picasso and Diego de Rivera as good examples. Art, he held, should be dedicated to the social and political struggle.\(^{31}\)

But for Sudjojono, this commitment to the social struggle did not suggest that artists should allow themselves to be beholden to society’s traditions or morals, rather that they should maintain their individuality. Yuliman argued that this focus on the individual as the centre of creative energy is one of three main tenets of Indonesian modernism. This motif recurs throughout Sudjojono’s writing, including in his essay, ‘Painting in Indonesia, Now and in the Future’:

> Every artist: the number one thing is to be founded on the artist’s own character. And an artist must be courageous in all things, and especially dare to give their ideas to the world, even though not a single member of the public regards them well.\(^{32}\)

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This dual commitment to the sociopolitical realm through the representation of the struggles of society and to the vehement privileging of the artist as independent from society sets the ‘climate’ (to borrow a term from Yuliman) in which present-day Indonesian artists create both individual and participatory works. For Sudjojono, the autonomy of the artist as an individual was imperative to the creation of art, which could only be beautiful if it remained truthful, created through confrontation with social realities. To this end, ‘realism’ is positioned as the primary goal of the artist, one inherently subjective in Sudjojono’s construction. However, as Yangni argues, this does not locate ‘realism’ as a technique or stylistic tendency, which would lead to a dead end. Rather, she contends that the ‘realism of jiwa ketok’ is associated with a consciousness of human history in the here and now. In claiming *jiwa ketok* as foundational art theory in Indonesia, Yangni reveals the ongoing interpretation of the ‘visible soul’ in contemporary arts practice. This continuing concern for the artists’ creative autonomy remains centred on consciousness and response to reality.

**Living Traditions: Turba**

The philosophy of *turba*—going down below into society—did not negate the emphasis on the artist as the centre for creative energy. In fact, Sudjojono was an influential member of Lekra and the formulation of *turba* as a philosophy of practice reflects his insistence that artists turn to realism for honest individual expression. Between 1950 and the 1960s in Indonesia, as in many places around the world, leftist ideologies were increasingly dominant in political and cultural discourse. The Indonesian Communist Party enjoyed an important seat at Sukarno’s table, and socialist organisations flourished in the community. The Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat (Institute for People’s Culture)—better known as Lekra—brought together art workers (including writers) from all disciplines to determine a functional role for the arts in Indonesia’s future. Lekra’s 1955 *Mukadimah* (Manifesto) declared that:

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33 Yuliman, ‘Seni Lukis di Indonesia’, 73.
35 *Turba* is an acronym from the phrase *turun ke bawah* or ‘go down below’.
In the field of art, Lekra urges creative initiative, and creative daring, and Lekra approves of every form, style, etc. as long as it is faithful to the truth, and as long as it strives for the utmost artistic beauty.

The *Mukadimah* also specified that ‘artists, scholars and cultural workers should be on the side of the people and serve the people if they are to produce works of lasting value’, thus establishing a clear ethical basis for the evaluation of artwork.\(^{36}\)

At Lekra’s first National Congress in 1959, *turba* was formulated as a methodology to ensure artists could meet the ethical values set out in Lekra’s early manifestos. Lekra distilled its modernist, outward-looking and socialist-nationalist philosophies into the ‘1-5-1 Principles’. These firstly set ‘politics as the commander’, then defined five sub-principles pertaining to: ‘combining individual creativity with the wisdom of the many’, the wide distribution of high-quality art, the harmonic combination of content and form, wholesome traditions meeting revolutionary modernity and the combination of revolutionary realism with revolutionary romanticism. Lastly, 1-5-1 dictated: ‘1: Go Down Below, through interviews and in-depth investigation of the conditions and aspirations of the people’.\(^{37}\)

It was this last aspect of the 1-5-1 Principles that came to dominate artistic methodologies. In Antariksa’s account of Lekra and visual art practice, he cites former Lekra member Hersri Setiawan’s (b. 1936) description of *turba* as a research method. Setiawan tells of a week he spent in the village of Saragedug, just east of Yogyakarta (see Map 2), to collect folktales: ‘In the afternoon we would hoe or weed, and in the evening … while we plaited reeds we would develop discussions about folk tales with the farmers’.\(^{38}\)

These folk tales became the basis for the literary works Setiawan wrote. From this we can see that, rather than benefiting those ‘below’ through artistic intervention, the purpose of *turba* was, at least from Setiawan’s perspective, to expand the perspectives of artists and cultural workers and

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their organisations. Noting that artists are generally born into middle-class urban families, Setiawan attests that *turba*’s purpose was to ‘catch the heart-beat of those below’ and re-voice the repertoire of art and cultural forms at this level of society. In contrast to Setiawan, for Amrus Natalsya, the head of Bumi Tarung—an artists’ group that took *turba* as its primary creative process—*turba* was knowledge: social knowledge that could then be offered to an audience. However, his understanding of this knowledge was somewhat narrow and arbitrary: ‘that farmers should be defended. That feudalism is bad’.

Of this contested, lauded and derided part of leftist art practice, Keith Foulcher, expert in Indonesian literature wrote:

> [*Turba*] was not only a description, but a working method. It expressed a particular concept of the relationship between cultural workers and ordinary people, and was intended to ensure that the artist was at one with the thoughts and feelings of the people, not an observer of their lives but a full participant in them.\(^{39}\)

Swastika sees *turba* as the origins of participatory art practice in Indonesia, saying it ‘indicates there was already a desire to be close to the subject’. She traces this desire back to activism and performance art in political demonstrations, during which artists invited fellow demonstrators to join them in performative protest.\(^{40}\)

While the legacy of *turba* inspires contemporary politically aware artists, the reality in the 1950s and 1960s was somewhat less romantic. For all the good intentions to ‘expand (art) out and up’, according to Lekra artist Djoko Pekik, Lekra promoted only folk-art forms at the sub-district level (*kecamatan*) and ‘high arts’ at the regency level (*kabupaten*). Kusni Sulang wrote of objections during the 1964 conference, when artists complained that they spent too much time making banners and had little time for creative work, much less *turba*. In the same letter, Sulang claims that the models for farmers that appeared in paintings were in fact city people in farmer’s clothing.\(^{41}\) Musicians similarly protested that so much time was spent performing at cultural events that there was no time for composition or consideration of the context.

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40 Alia Swastika, interviewed by Elly Kent, 2014. The works of artist collective *Taring Padi* (see Chapter 1) are prime examples of this tendency.
41 Antariksa, *Tuan Tanah Kawin Muda*, 79.
Foulcher has argued that Lekra’s art will remain ‘a site on which meanings will continue to be built’, and this has proven to be the case, as those working in the arts have, in recent years, increasingly referred to the literature and theatre produced by Lekra members. However, I argue that the artworks produced by Lekra, at least in the visual arts, have had limited impact on the discourse of Indonesian art.

Lekra’s philosophies, however, ‘combining individual creativity with the wisdom of the many’, and its conception of turba as a methodology that engendered artists’ participation in society, have greatly influenced the aesthetic form of Indonesian art. In spite of fractured implementation and ambiguous intentions, or perhaps because of them, turba remains an exemplar of socially engaged art practice in Indonesia, in the minds of artists, curators and cultural workers.

**Aggregated Knowledge: Kerakyatan and Conscientisation in Indonesian Art**

During the 1980s, the concept of the artist as a participant in society diverged from the concept of turba when artists began to actively seek ways to interpret their own experiences of ordinary life—rather than focusing on those of the ‘other’ as embodied in the rakyat. GSRB artist and writer FX Harsono (b. 1949) described this practice, and its attendant commitment to making more meaningful contributions to society through art, as ‘reformative’:

> Almost all reformative artists undertake some work outside their individual creative arts practice. Of course, they cannot live from their art alone, whether it is painting, sculpture or design. Initially these strategic efforts at survival were not acknowledged as a lifestyle which is at heart an artistic one, but then there emerged a new awareness among these innovative artists, that the act of earning a living and creating art form an inseparable unit.

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43 It should be acknowledged that many works of art and literature by members of Lekra were likely destroyed, and were certainly censored, during the purges of the New Order. Some works, particularly those of writer Pramoedya Ananta Toer, have gained international attention and wide influence, but works of art have had limited attention.
Lamenting its status, Harsono identified participation in society as a defining and undervalued aspect of ‘reformative art’ practice. In the past, the strong relationship between social situations and creativity in Indonesia had been linked to traditional art forms like shadow puppetry. However, for some Indonesian artists in the 1980s, it was instead an attempt to develop and deepen their understanding of the issues faced by Indonesian society. Harsono wrote:

However they struggle with poverty, immersing themselves with the poor, their involvement in NGOs and their efforts to expand the concept of sociology and culture … These activities are always regarded as having no direct connection to their creation of art, and tend to be ignored by art aficionados.

Revealing the tension between creative autonomy and social engagement, Harsono argued that the desire to manifest both in art practice was thwarted by modernist concepts of universalism and the pure autonomy of the arts. In later writing, Harsono used the word *kerakyatan* to describe this longstanding tendency, a term sometimes translated as ‘populism’ but that, in artistic discourse, refers to painting and art practices related to the fate of ‘those who are repressed by the government’s policies … so those that do not have the economic, social or political ability to resist’. The term also appears frequently in writings about Lekra.

Harsono traced the development of art concerned with the struggle of the populace through various stages of Indonesian art history. He identified shifts in the understanding of who the *rakyat* are and what role the artist should take in relation to them, attributing an expansion of the concept of *kerakyatan* to the emergence of artists involved in groups like GSRB and PIPA (Kepribadian Apa/What Identity) in the 1970s.

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46 FX Harsono, ‘Upaya Mandiri Seni Rupa Pembaruan’.
47 Personal communication with Harsono, 29 July 2015.
48 Foulcher, *Social Commitment in Literature and the Arts*, 41, 111.
The development in artists’ conceptions of which sections of society were experiencing suffering, Harsono wrote, was directly related to their expanding networks:

Drawing on their critical observations of the reality of existence and their interactions with society and groups outside the arts … they no longer identify the problems of the people as limited to the problems experienced by the *wong cilik* [little people/peasants], rather more diversely …. environmental pollution, eviction, workers, war, cultures of violence, the clash between modernity and tradition, and so on.\(^{50}\)

In one of his last essays, Yuliman too discussed the sense of restlessness among largely the same artists. Yuliman quoted phrases that various artists used to refer to the shifting direction of their practice: ‘publicly oriented’ (FX Harsono); ‘communication art’ (Gendut Riyanto, 1955–2003); and ‘art that is beneficial to society’ (Harris Purnama, b. 1956). Yuliman stressed that their art was often the ‘result of collaboration, and perhaps even with a role for the audience or the public (which thus changes their role, and that of the artist)’.\(^{51}\)

This shift in attitude to art practice and to the *rakyat* resulted in an increasingly direct pedagogical function for art, which artists like Moelyono (b. 1957), Arahmaiani (b. 1961) and Tisna Sanjaya (b. 1958) then developed through their interaction with NGOs, society and non-arts groups. It can be argued that this pedagogical or didactic function develops the goals of Lekra’s *turba*, a methodology that sought to expand artists’ experience and knowledge so that they could accurately represent the subjects of their artwork. However, among the artists of the late twentieth century, Harsono points to academic rather than experiential catalysts, which also influenced attitudes to participation:

Alignment (with society) begins with intellectual awareness due to educational background, not from the experience of living in the community. The younger generation, for example Moelyono, began to engage with NGOs, encountering participatory research methods.\(^{52}\)

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\(^{50}\) Ibid., 70.


\(^{52}\) Harsono, ‘Kerakyatan dalam Seni Lukis Indonesia Sejak PERSAGI Hingga Kini’, 85.
The concept of conscientisation gained cadence in Indonesia with the publication of Seni Rupa Penyadaran (Conscientisation art) in 1997. Addressing Moelyono’s art, philosophy and methodology, the book came at a time when Moelyono’s work in marginalised communities was attracting considerable media and curatorial attention locally and overseas. This was probably influenced by his networks with NGOs, burgeoning international interest in political art from the ‘periphery’ and the rapidly approaching fall of the repressive Orde Baru (New Order). The title of the book reflected Moelyono’s own ‘writing’ of his practice, and its influence among artists in the 1980s.

In this book Moelyono preserved the specific role he sees for art as a tool in emancipation. He values the role of aesthetics using the classical Greek words for feeling and sensation, and links them to the ‘development of dialogue that creates a critical consciousness … both through processes of working and the finished work as it is discussed with the broader community’. Thus, Moelyono brings aesthetics as a sensory experience together with consciousness and the capacity for subjective criticality. In his construction, the role of art and artists as catalysts in conscientising art is explicit, although it is the rakyat who are positioned as subjects and drivers in this process of creating new culture:

As creators of culture, the rakyat has the potential and right to visual art as a medium for dialogue … In the dialogue process, in the social reality, there is a need for concern, involvement, alignment, participation and contributions from accompanying professional or graduate art workers.


55 Moelyono, Seni Rupa Penyadaran, 44.
The specific role for artists that Moelyono identifies here was eclipsed by theories of participatory research and pedagogical aspirations in later publications, where the focus is primarily on Moelyono’s work as an example of the kind of sociological praxis that Freire defined as ‘reflection and action directed at the structures to be transformed’.  

Especially after he established working relations with NGOs, Moelyono’s work has demonstrated a strong focus on applying theory and practice to enacting social change. This is evident not only in his art projects but also in his propensity for writing, rewriting and publishing accounts of his work, and the pedagogical theories he develops within this work. His earliest and most frequently (self-)cited foray into pedagogic art practice involved an unexpected opportunity to voluntarily teach drawing in a small, isolated primary school in the village of Brumbun, East Java (see Map 2). Subsequently, in 1988 Moelyono was awarded an Ashoka Fellowship, which provided a stipend, allowing him to increase his activity at Brumbun. He also began to work closely with established NGOs such as WALHI (Environment Lobby) and API (Association for Sociology Researchers). API introduced Moelyono to the concept of participatory research and the pedagogical teachings of Brazilian Paulo Freire, and Moelyono quickly adopted these theories in explaining his own work:

I came to know terms and names such as participative, participatory, methodology, dialogical, transformative, Paulo Freire, Gramsci, and others that I had never heard or imagined when I was studying at art school.

In a 1989 forum, artist Siti Adiyati borrowed the term ‘conscientisation’ from Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and described Moelyono’s art as *Seni Rupa Penyadaran* or ‘Art for Conscientisation’.

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57 The Ashoka Fellowships, awarded by a philanthropic organisation funded by corporate partners, provide stipends for recognised ‘social entrepreneurs’ to support them to continue their work.
Moelyono’s work continues to resonate with new generations of Indonesians. These paintings draw on the techniques he used in the *Retak Wajah* (Cracks in the face) exhibition and were among the works produced during the *Bertolak-Bersanding Parallel Events*, in which Moelyono and Joned Suryatmoko mentored participating community organisations. Photograph: Elly Kent.

In Moelyono’s work there is a tension between the individual expression that contemporary art inherits from modernist discourse and the drive to play a tangible, quantifiable role in social change through deep creative engagement with others. The exhibition *Retak Wajah* (Cracks in the face), held at Cemeti Art House, clearly demonstrated this tension. The work followed up on the Waung Village project on which Moelyono’s final, failed painting examination for his undergraduate degree was based 25 years earlier. Waung’s swamps, previously subject to regular flooding, evaporated after the construction of the Wonorejo Dam (see Map 2). Moelyono’s subsequent artworks have regularly displayed statistical data and official documents such as maps, planograms and tables alongside artefacts of rural life. However, this distinctive aesthetic decision is rarely addressed (if at all) in literature on his practice.
The exception is Nindityo Adipurnomo’s impressive curatorial essay for the exhibition *Retak Wajah Anak-anak Bendungan* (Disintegrating faces of the children of the dam, 2011), which provides a nuanced account of the difficulties the maps, tables and planograms present for the artist and curator. Nindityo opines that Moelyono’s use of official documentation and data contrasted with items of bucolic material culture is a strategy to bring both perpetrators and victims into the gallery space to ‘record the fragility of the rural sector’. Yet, in his curatorial approach to Moelyono’s work Nindityo identifies a double-edged exoticisation, describing a debate they had while preparing the exhibition:

> I felt confronted by the calculated estimations of stereotypical middle-class urbanites that Moelyono felt it was important to target with this work. Phrases like ‘nouveau riche’ and ‘Facebook generation’ came complete with specific indicators of their characteristics (fast, cheap and instant); once again I was aware of an attempt to stereotype target audiences that made me feel uncomfortable (not to say hopeless) in my efforts to build a dialogue around Moelyono’s art in a gallery space.\(^{60}\)

Nindityo’s account of his frustration locates some of Moelyono’s work, which brought ‘village art artefacts’ that had been submerged by the dam project into the gallery space, as an exoticisation of ‘village art’ for a perceived urban ‘other’ in need of pedagogical realignment. Yet Nindityo retains his faith in the fundamental ‘anti-fetishist’ qualities of Moelyono’s work; his scepticism evaporates in his descriptions of the installation work that ‘transforms the exhibition space into confiscated land that will … be flooded’.\(^{61}\)

### Conclusion

I began this chapter by reflecting on the work of Heri Dono. His *Kuda Binal* performance inverted those modernist and Javanese traditions that establish values around the expert and layperson, tradition and modernity, and individual and communal expression, and set them on a collision course with each other. In doing so, *Kuda Binal* perfectly exemplifies the

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\(^{61}\) Ibid., 17–19.
aesthetic regime’s task of permeating the partitions between art and life, and, at the same time, shows how artists and institutions bring together local knowledge with global arts discourses to engender practices that focus on the *rakyat* as a primary subject.

While many artists of the twentieth century may have sought a definitively social role for Indonesian modernism, artists of the twenty-first century are drawing on a plethora of sources and ideas that echo, challenge and deconstruct those ideas. Contemporary Indonesian artists continue to engage with the art discourses developed across their nation’s short history, adopting, as the artists of the late twentieth century did, a multitude of positions and stances around ideas of artistic responsibility and autonomous creativity. Yuliman described an artistic ideology that rigorously attended to the deconstruction of binaries: high and low, common and rarefied, everyday and extraordinary, functional and esoteric, traditional and modern. This continues through the work of contemporary Indonesian artists who have embraced Yuliman’s approach. The departitioning of the commonly held distinction between the artists’ individual autonomy and their responsibility to society remains a site for groundbreaking artistic explorations. But the history of their predecessors and their concerns has not been forgotten.

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