Sanento Yuliman is widely recognised in Indonesia as one of the most important and influential art historians and critics in the country. Even before his doctoral studies in France in the late 1970s – early 1980s, Yuliman was building a reputation as an art critic with a deep understanding of Indonesian art history and a unique perspective on the genesis of Indonesian modernism. Much of Yuliman’s writings appeared in magazines and journals such as Budaya Djaya, and as a series of exhibition reviews published over 10 years in Tempo. His premature death in 1992 cut short the invaluable contribution he was making to the establishment of objective and knowledgeable art criticism in Indonesia, but a 2001 publication of selected essays, two recent books and an exhibition of his artwork and ephemera have re-established the relevance of Yuliman’s writing in Indonesia. Unfortunately, very little of Yuliman’s work has been translated for readers outside Indonesia, creating a disjuncture between discourses on Indonesian art within and outside the country. The text reproduced in translation here was published as a book in 1976 and has been lauded as ‘the first real art history to demonstrate formal

continuity across political lines’. While art historical scholarship has advanced in the intervening decades, this text represents an important window into the conceptualisation of not only Indonesian art history, but also the discourses that underpin art movements of the past and present.

Introduction

In this century two new genres of painting have developed in Indonesia. The first has flourished in Bali since the 1930s. This painting displayed several new tendencies that differentiated it from earlier Balinese painting traditions, however in general it still showed a clear connection with the art and culture of Bali. Because of this people could still refer to it as ‘Balinese painting’.

The second genre was painting that developed in the big cities, especially Jakarta, Bandung and Yogyakarta, which nonetheless included some painters who were trying to use elements from regional (traditional) arts, although they could not be considered part of the developmental framework of a regional culture.

This essay brings us to the second genre.

With regards to this second category of painting, people usually position Raden Saleh, from the nineteenth century, as the pioneer. Indeed he was the first Indonesian painter to take up new techniques and styles and also—in association with this—a new aesthetic. In addition, this painter became a legendary figure for most Indonesian painters in subsequent generations. In this role, he provided strength and inspiration for them as they struggled in their lives as artists.

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3 Editors’ note: the editors thank Dr Yuliman’s family for permission to publish it here. Unless indicated, the spelling of personal names and the footnotes and titles of works are given as published in Estetika Yang Merabunkan: Bunga Rampai Esai dan Kritik Seni Rupa (2020).
As a pioneer, Raden Saleh is in fact distanced from the first stage of the development of the new genre of Indonesian painting. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, in the absence of a cohort of fellow painters, Raden Saleh had no contemporaries in his own time, nor did he teach his painting style to a younger generation. Secondly—and this is more important—because of the difference in style.

About Raden Saleh

Raden Saleh Syarif Bustaman (1807–1880) began studying painting with A. A. J Payen, a Belgian artist who was brought to the Dutch East Indies by the (colonial) government to document the Indonesian landscape. He spent a long period in Europe (1830–51), absorbing the influence of the Romantic Movement on art there. Raden Saleh’s paintings

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Editors’ note: Sanento Yuliman gave a birth date of 1807 for Raden Saleh; however, the birth date of 1811 is used in a number of more recent scholarly sources and is used here in this volume except in primary sources such as this chapter and in quotations.
are known for their dynamic style, with scenes of adventure or drama, as seen in his painting ‘Between Life and Death’ (1848), which depicted the struggle between a bison and a lion; ‘Hunting Buffalo in Java’ (1870), which showed horse riders attacking a buffalo; ‘Forest Fire’, which depicted various animals confused by a conflagration; ‘Flood’, which depicted terrified people caught in a natural disaster, and so on.\(^5\) Raden Saleh’s paintings were paintings full of spirit.

About one generation after Raden Saleh, other Indonesian artists began to appear, and in greater numbers. The new painting began to grow and develop in Indonesia.

**Three Periods of Development**

We can trace three phases of this development.

The first period took place in the first 40 years of this [twentieth] century. The growth of painting was based on landscapes. Of course, painters of the time painted other subjects, for instance people, however landscapes took pride of place in their art.

The second period began around 1940. In this period we can see the growth of painting that intended to express experience. Furthermore, the character and mental state of the painter, which was generally stressed and anxious—was seen as important and had to be apparent in their paintings. In painting nature, people and objects, the painter’s emotions towards the object were seen as paramount.

The third period began after 1960. This period was marked by painting that was referred to as ‘abstract’. In these paintings people would struggle, or completely fail to see objects familiar from reality.

Of course, this division into three time periods does not mean that painters suddenly abandoned the style of painting in one era and shifted to a different kind of painting in the following one. Even today artists paint the landscape. And young painters who emerged in the 60s or 70s were not inevitably abstract painters. This division of phases is only intended to indicate which new tendencies emerged in each period.

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\(^5\) Editors’ note: this may refer to a work titled: *Banjir di Jawa* or *Flood in Java*. We have been unable to find reference to a painting titled *Flood*. 

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First Period (1900–40)

The growth of landscape painting at the beginning of the century was supported by several factors.

Causative Factors

One of the most important factors was the presence of a number of Dutch painters, both those who were brought over by the Dutch East Indies government for official business (for instance to document the natural and urban environment and so on, in Indonesia) and those who came because they had adventurous spirits and were attracted to the environment around the Pacific Ocean. There were even Dutch painters who had been born and raised in Indonesia. These painters introduced Indonesians to the landscape painting tradition that had been developing in the Netherlands over the preceding three or four centuries.

Thus we find a number of Indonesians who were interested in becoming landscape painters, such as Abdullah Surio Subroto (1878–1941), who studied at the academy of fine art in the Netherlands, Mas Pirngadi (1865–1936), Wakidi (b. 1889) and others. The techniques and style of painting in this era were then continued by Basuki Abdullah, Sukardji, Omar Basalamah, Wahdi and others.

Another factor was the aspirations of the European (bourgeois) middle class. In Europe, landscape painting developed in tandem with the emergence of the middle class. This social class, which was essentially the class of merchants and traders, were less inclined to the paintings of Biblical stories and classical literature that the aristocrats favoured. They preferred paintings that depicted ordinary subjects, for instance landscapes. Furthermore, the views of nature took them to places where they could rest for a moment from the bustle of trading and industry in the noisy and dirty city.

Merchants, traders, Dutch civil servants and tourists brought their aspirations to Indonesia. The upper class of Indonesian society, the educated class who often socialised with the Dutch, was influenced by these aspirations.

Thus, at the beginning of the twentieth century, consumers for landscape paintings of Indonesia were formed—merchants, traders, civil servants and tourists—all wanting to have souvenirs of the Indonesian world—and also the educated classes of Indonesia. Of course it is clear that the aspirations of these consumers spread to the lower echelons of society.
Another factor that led to the development of landscape painting was, of course, the fact that most painters enjoyed painting the landscape. This pleasure—as well as the proceeds from sales and the enthusiasm of the people (who were immediately impressed by landscape paintings that seemed like ‘a slice of reality’)—was for painters a considerable reward for their efforts. Painters like Abdullah Surio Subroto, Mas Pirngadi and Wakidi spent much of their time getting away from busy lifestyles, escaping to quiet places like the slopes of Mt Tangkuban Perahu, or the foot of Mt Merapi, Pelabuhan Ratu beaches or the Sianok Valley, contemplating the natural landscape and painting it diligently.

It seems as if in the natural environment that stretched as far as the eye could see, in its authenticity, its beauty and harmony, they found a friend who welcomed their sensitivity, and gave them comfort and enjoyment. For all of this, painters often depicted the landscape ‘not’ as it was in reality. On their canvases they made changes, for instance, ‘shifting’ a tree or scrub, and so on. It is as if by doing so they wanted to ‘improve nature’. They paid great attention to the impressions generated by colour, for example, coolness or heat. This was connected with positioning of painting as something that could be ‘refreshing’.

**Technique**

Landscape painters used techniques that were already customary and prescribed in Dutch painting, and that were taught in the fine art academies of the Netherlands. In these techniques, perspective had to be calculated precisely. The field of the painting was divided in three: the foreground, middle ground and background. One of these grounds, which would be given prominence, would be given a light source. The other grounds were muted or darkened. Colours were chosen according to the appropriate prescriptions, mixed well on the pallet in order to avoid blending on the canvas, which would make it look murky, and then applied very delicately to the canvas. In 1928, when Mas Pirngadi was teaching painting to Sudjojono, one of his students, he was disappointed to see the rough brushstrokes and dirty colours that Sudjojono had chosen. Pirngadi said:

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6 Editors’ note: these are picturesque sites in West and Central Java (see Map 2).
When you depict a cloud, use white, ochre and mix in a little vermillion. Then the shadows are those colours with blue added. To show the water of a rice field, use these colours with a little more ochre and blue. Ochre is the key colour. Avoid using black and white.7

But Sudjojono was in fact the main opponent of the techniques, style and aesthetic of landscape painting. With this opposition he initiated the second period in the development of a new Indonesian painting.

Figure 3.2: Mas Pirngadi, Pantai Pelabuhan Ratu (Queens Port Beach), 1927.
Oil on canvas 30 x 75 cm. Public domain.

About Sudjojono

Sudjojono, who was born in Kisaran, North Sumatra, around 1913, was convinced that painters should be free from rules, so that their spirit could pour out freely. Thus, painting was measured not by [the] speed with which it depicted an object, but by how intensely the passion (the connection to the subject-object) could be visualised in the lines that were brushed onto the canvas.

With this view, and by positioning landscape painting in the ‘Western’ camp, Sudjojono and other painters found motivation for their opposition. Sudjojono himself said: ‘I want to know how far behind the Europeans we are’.

7 Imam Buchori Zainuddin, ‘Latar Belakang, Sejarah Pembinaan dan perkembangan Seni Lukis Indonesia Modern, 1935-1950’ (thesis for the Fine Art Section of the Fine Art Department, ITB), 105–06.
These words contain a conviction that a path impassioned by the Indonesian spirit that they embodied would be a powerful resource.

In 1937, Sudjojono successfully exhibited alongside Europeans. He was praised. And about the same time he established PERSAGI [Persatuan Ahli Gambar Indonesia/Association of Indonesian Draughtsmen]. He became a key figure in this collective because of his ideas. Following this he also became an active member of POETERA [Pusat Tenaga Rakyat/Centre for the People's Power] and SIM [Seniman Indonesia Muda/Young Indonesian Artists]. His opinion that ‘painting is the soul made visible’ was encouraged by the atmosphere of the time, and was very influential on other painters. In 1945, Sudjojono declared ‘Go to Realism’. At the time he disagreed with the painting styles that were too expressive and which produced abstraction and distortion. He saw these paintings as impossible for the people to understand. Sudjojono declared that his ‘Realism’ in painting was more accurate, his paintings from this period seem almost like portraits.

Sudjojono persisted with his realism until around 1958. In 1960 his paintings appear to indicate that he had returned to his earlier convictions, and feature strong brushstrokes. However the themes of his paintings had not changed much. From the beginning he revealed strong connections to the events taking place around him.

Second Phase (1940–60)

Development

S. Sudjojono and several other painters established the collective Persatuan Ahli Gambar Indonesia (Association of Indonesian Draughtsmen), shortened to PERSAGI, in 1937 in Jakarta. In its four years of activity, this collective attracted about 30 painters. PERSAGI was chaired by Agus Djaja and its members included, among others, Sudjojono, Abdul Salam, Sumitro, Sudibio, Sukirno, Suromo, Surono, Setyoso, Herbert Hutagalung, Syoeaib, Emiria Sunasa and more. With regard to the ‘academic painting’
(as they called it) that was developing around them, they agreed to establish their own ‘academy’—by running lessons in their own homes, together. With regards to the colonialism that created an artistic atmosphere that seemed to cater only to the Dutch, and that created barriers to prevent Indonesian artists from emerging and being recognised, they agreed to break through and show the world that Indonesians too could paint and were capable of creating their own art that now carried ‘the stamp of an new unified Indonesia’. Because of his skills in writing and speaking, Sudjojono became the driver and spokesperson for PERSAGI.

Figure 3.3: S. Sudjojono, Angklung, Player, 1956.
Oil on canvas, 98 x 84 cm. Collection: National Gallery Singapore. Permission courtesy S. Sudjojono Center, Indonesia.
While the PERSAGI painters were working in Jakarta, in Bandung the painters Sjafei Sumardja, Affandi and Hendra Gunawan were working. Later, Sjafei Sumardja would become known as a prominent arts educator, while the others were recognised as important painters.

With the arrival of the Japanese occupation in Indonesia (1942–45), the painters faced a new reality. The Japanese military government, in its efforts to ‘foster an Eastern culture’ in order to ‘advance a Greater East Asian people’ saw it as necessary to mobilise cultural workers and artists towards ‘achieving the final victory of the war’.8

Hence, in 19459 they established the Keimin Bunka Shidoso (Cultural Centre), which provided a vehicle for artistic activities. Indonesian painters utilised this opportunity to train themselves and practise their burgeoning talents, at the same time introducing new painting styles to the broader community. Eventually the leaders of Indonesia themselves provided a place in which painters could practise, in the POETERA (Pusat Tenaga Rakyat or Centre for the People’s Power).

In the cultivation of painting during this Japanese era, Sudjojono, Agus Djaja and Affandi had important roles. A number of other painters also emerged during this time, including Otto Djaja, Kartono Yudhokusomo, Henk Ngantung, Djajengasmoro, Basuki Resobowo, Baharudin, Soebanto Soeriosoebandrio, Rusli, Barli, Mochtar Apin, Dullah, Harijadi, Hendra Gunawan, Kusnadi, Kerton, Trubus and others.

The political and military upheaval that followed the Proclamation of Indonesian Independence in 1945 did not stop painting. Most painters and political leaders believed that painting had a role in the struggle. The government’s shift from Jakarta to Yogyakarta in 1946 was followed by the migration of painters, and Yogyakarta became a centre for painting activity.

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8 See the speeches of the top brass of Keimin Bunka Shidoso at the inauguration of the office bearers. Published in the magazine Keboedayaan Timoer, 1/2603.
In Yogyakarta, Affandi, Rusli, Hendra and Harijadi formed the Seni Rupa Masyarakat (People’s Art) collective in 1946. A year later, in 1947, they joined with Sudjojono in Seniman Indonesia Muda (Young Indonesian Artists, or SIM), which was formed in Madiun in 1946, but moved to Surakarta in 1947 and eventually to Yogyakarta in 1948. SIM comprised many painters, among them Suromo, Surono, Abdul Salam, Sudibio, Kartono Yudhokusumo, Basuki Resobowo, Oesman Effendi, Srihadi Soedarsono and Zaini.

The painters of SIM made paintings about the struggle, among them many paintings as large as 2 x 3 metres; they also made posters, held exhibitions and published the cultural magazine Seniman (Artist), which attracted writers like Wiratmo Soekito, Usmar Ismail, Anas Makruf and Trisno Sumardjo into SIM’s orbit of activities. Trisno Sumardjo was even inspired to paint.

In 1945 Djajengasmoro and several of his friends formed the Pusat Tenaga Pelukis Indonesia (Centre for Indonesian Painters’ Power, or PTPI). They made paintings for the struggle, posters and banners with the conviction that ‘paint, pencil and paper will together with bullets and diplomatic words eradicate the remains of colonialism’.

Due to differences of opinion, in 1947 Hendra [Gunawan] and Affandi left SIM and established Pelukis Rakyat (People’s Painters). This collective also included Sudarso, Kusnadi, Sasongko, Trubus, Sumitro, Sudiardjo, Setijoso and others.

During the independence struggle there was an understanding and close connections between political leaders and painters. The Ministry of Information, the Secretariat for Youth Internal Affairs and the Headquarters for the People’s Security Force all became supporters of painting by making payments, creating infrastructure and commissioning works. Painters’ artworks were bought and collected by the government with the intention to establish the State Museum for the Documentation of the Democratic Struggle of the Republic of Indonesia.

Editors’ note: for locations of these cities across Java, please see Map 2.
11 ‘Perdjoengan PTPI’ [PTPI’s struggle], in Revoloesi Pemoeda [Youth revolution], 25 December 1945.
In this period the performance of painting was not only dominated by the struggle for independence and depictions of ordinary people, but also by the style of Sudjojono and Affandi.\(^\text{12}\)

**About Affandi**

Affandi was born around 1910,\(^\text{13}\) in Cirebon. He began making posters for a cinema in Bandung around 1933. In 1938 he joined PERSAGI, and after the war for independence he went around Europe to acquire the experience he felt he needed to develop his painting.

The progression of Affandi’s paintings demonstrates intense passion. Although in his early paintings the objects he painted were relatively recognisable, the sense of passion was already evident. Later, the lines of his paintings became more boisterous as time passed, until his later paintings were almost abstract, and the objects that he painted were difficult to recognise.

Affandi’s approach to painting can, at its boldest, be seen as a technique that trusts in the power of being overcome by emotion. An electrifying sensation, caused by his interpretation of the selected object, is then poured into the painting without much attention to the rules of painting.

Affandi’s way—and those of other styles—underlies a rising conviction that the line/brushstroke is like a note from the emotion of a unique moment that may never be encountered again.

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12 This is according to the testimony of Rivai Apin in ‘Pembicaraan Lukisan’ [Discussions of painting], *Mimbar Indonesia* [Indonesia forum], 28 August 1948.

13 Editors’ note: the date now given in most sources for the artist’s birth, including by the authoritative Affandi Museum, is 1907. However, the date of 1910 given by Yuliman is retained here since the chapter is a primary source. The birth date of 1907 is given in the caption for Affandi.
Figure 3.4: Affandi (1907–1990), Indonesia, *Self Portrait*, 1944.
The involvement of painting in politics during the independence struggle was perpetuated by SIM and Pelukis Rakyat after 1950, with a strong leaning towards communist ideology. Painters who wanted to free painting from politics distanced themselves. Oesman Effendi and Zaini had already left SIM in 1949 and joined the Gabungan Pelukis Indonesia (Indonesian Painters Alliance) founded by Suriksnna and Affandi in Jakarta in 1948. In 1950 Kusnadi, Sumitro and Sasonoko left Pelukis Rakyat and formed the Pelukis Indonesia (Indonesian Painters) with other members including Sholihin and Bagong Kusudiardjo.

Unlike SIM, which after 1950 became increasingly inactive, Pelukis Rakyat grew. This collective had close connections with many government figures, so Pelukis Rakyat received many commissions for paintings, sculptures and relief works for government buildings. This group also had close connections with Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat (Institute for People’s Culture—Lekra) that was founded in 1950 by the Indonesian Communist Party, which had an increasingly strong and broad influence in Indonesia from 1950 to 1965.

To counter this influence, especially after Manifesto Politik 1959 (Political manifesto 1959, published by Lekra), other political parties also formed cultural institutions, for instance the Indonesian National Party (PNI) formed the Lembaga Kebudayaan Nasional (Institute for National Culture or LKN).

Besides Yogyakarta, before 1950 there were painters’ collectives in other towns. We have already mentioned GPI in Jakarta. In Bandung there was Jiva Mukti (Spiritual Release, founded 1948; Barli, Mochtar Apin, Karnedi); in Surabaya Pelangi (Rainbow, 1947; Sularko). Then other collectives emerged. In Yogyakarta: Pelukis Indonesia Muda (Young Indonesian Painters, 1952; Widayat, G. Sidharta, Handrio); Sanggar Bambu (Bamboo Studio, 1959; Soenarto Pr, Muljadi W., Handogo S., Danarto, Arief Soedarsono); Bumi Tarung (Combat Arena, 1959; Amrus Natalsya).

Editors’ note: at the time of Yuliman’s writing, this view that the institute was an affiliate or organ of the Indonesian Communist Party was commonly held and promulgated by the New Order regime. However, the in-depth research of Keith Foulcher strongly supports the perspective ‘that there is a history of LEKRA, with its own internal dynamics, quite separate from PKI [the Indonesian Communist Party] political history’. Two leaders of PKI were present at the inaugural meeting of Lekra in 1950 but the other 15 present were ‘cultural workers’. See Keith Foulcher, Social Commitment in Literature and the Arts: The Indonesian ‘Institute of People’s Culture’ 1950–1965 (Centre of Southeast Asian Studies: Monash University, 1986), 17, 19fn37.
3. NEW INDONESIAN PAINTING

In Bandung: Sanggar Seniman (Artists’ Studio, 1952; Kartono Yudhokusumo, But Muchtar, Srihadi, A. D. Pirous); Cipta Pancaran Rasa (Create Emotional Outpouring 1952; Angkama Setjadjipradja, Abedy). In Jakarta: Lembaga Seniman Yin Hua (Chinese Artists’ Yin Hua Institute, 1955; Lee Man-Fong); Matahari (Sun, 1957; Mardian, Wakidjan, Nashar, Alex Wetik); Yayasan Seni dan Design (Foundation for Art and Design, 1958; Oesman Effendi, Trisno Sumardjo, Zaini). In Surakarta: Himpunan Budaya Surakarta (Surakarta Cultural Association; Murdowo). In Surabaya: Prabangkara (1952; Karjono Js) and in a number of other cities such as Madiun, Bukittinggi and Ujungpandang.

These collectives, apart from becoming places where artists could work and exchange ideas, also became places for young artists to study. It should be noted that painting lessons were also offered by the Badan Musyawarah Kebudayaan Nasional (National Consultative Body on Culture, BMKN) in Jakarta (1956) with Oesman Effendi and Zaini as instructors.

A formal educational institute to organise education in painting was only established around 1950. With regard to general education institutions that emphasised the importance of painting and other arts in the educational process, we must mention Taman Siswa (Students’ Garden), which was established by Ki Hajar Dewantara in Yogyakarta in 1922 and I.N.S., which was established by Moch. Sjafei in Kayu Tanam, Sumatra, in 1928.

However, an educational institute oriented to painting was established in Bandung in 1947: the Universitaire Leergang tot Opleiding voor Tekneleraren (Tertiary Training for Art Teachers) was headed by Dutch teachers, then later by Sjafei Sumardja from 1951, as a department in the Faculty of Technology in Indonesia University, which from 1959 became the Department of Fine Art in the Bandung Institute of Technology.

Another educational institution was formed in 1950, the Academy of Indonesian Fine Arts (ASRI) in Yogyakarta, gifted with the idealism of the pedagogist A. J. Katamsi. And this institution obtained full status as a tertiary education institute in 1968 as the Indonesia Tertiary Fine Art School Asri (STSRI or ‘ASRI’).
Basis of Art

There were various individual styles, various perspectives about art evident in painting during the period from 1940 to 1960. However, among this diversity we can see a general framework and within that frame there are more specific tendencies. We can say that painting in the second period was intended to express human experiences and human existence not as had been done in the previous period, which tried to depict a beautiful universe on the canvas. New painters, said Sudjojono in 1939:

Do not only paint peaceful shelters in the rice fields and the blue mountains … but they also draw the sugar factories and the scrawny farmers, the motorcars of the rich and the trousers of the youth… This is our existence, this is our reality. And painting which breathes this reality … is work that originates

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Editors’ note: alluding to Westernised young men who no longer wore the traditional dress of sarongs.
from our everyday lives, filtered through the life of the artist, not just coming straight out of everyday life but created and hurled … compelled by an inner coercive force.16

Painters observe closely the world that is visible around them. Before they work, their impressions or responses to the outside world must go first automatically into their soul, then a ‘psychological process happens internally’. ‘Only after this process is complete will the artist paint through the agency of their hand’.17

Or as Trisno Sumarjo declared in 1956:

Painters try to pay attention to everything that is there, moving and growing … the sky, the sea, the land, trees and animals … the gestures of people … those who work in the fields and in the factories or who laze about in the salons of the rich, those who are corrupt and those who struggle. They note the results; a shack or a building, traditional music or a symphony, a disco and a traditional court dance … And they process this with their creativity.

And:

Through this practice the artist forms a special space for their spiritual lives, because this space represents their own world, it is not conquered by the physical world, which may have a role in the provision of material or ‘inspiration’ for the cultivation of the spirit.18

Indeed, in art of this second period, it seems that there are two positions when it comes to the process of painting.

First, the objective position, that is the world around the painter, the social world and the visible world. From this position, through the senses, comes an impression or a response.

Secondly, the subjective position, that it is the ‘inner world’ of the painter: their character, temperament, emotions, imagination and all the processes of their spirituality that cultivate and thus change—their impressions and

16 SS101 [sic], ‘Kesenian Meloekis di Indonesia, sekarang dan jang akan Datang’ [The art of painting in Indonesia, now and in future], Keboedajaan dan Masyarakat [Culture and society], no. 6 tahun 1 (October 1939).
18 Trisno Sumardjo, ‘Kedudukan Seni Rupa Kita’ [The position of our arts], Almanak Seni 1957 (Jakarta: Badan Musyawarah Kebudayaan Nasional [Council for National Culture], 1956).
responses. Sudjojono’s proposition spells out: ‘painting is the visible soul’. This expression became commonplace among painters, and it was said that painting was ‘self-expression’, ‘emotional expression’.

So in painting there appear various forms that we can recognise as objects in reality: painters depict things, but in painting the form of the object is changed by the painter’s liberty to work with their own, diverse subjective powers. Furthermore, the object, or various parts of the objects can be arranged in new relationships, or even in a way that contradicts what we know of reality.

**Characteristics of Style**

Within this general framework there are several more specific tendencies.

**First Tendency**

The biggest is that painters look at their objects, then paint them directly or make sketches that are then developed into paintings. Their work is triggered by emotions that are associated with that object. They tend to distort the form of the object, its shape, proportions, colour. This happens because of the close connection between emotions and distortion. Peoples’ emotions are easily moved by things that diverge from what they expect, things that are not as they should be, not normal, including form. In painting, distortion becomes a way to evoke and express emotion.

Emotions are also associated with tension and movement. In painting, strong emotions will create tension and movement in the hands of the painter, and in the impression that is recorded in forms on the canvas. Distortion itself—forms that become longer or shorter, or which are twisted—suggest the workings of powers that pull or push. Furthermore the painter tends to the dynamic arrangement of form, which is supported by lines and firm brushstrokes, as well as those that float or bend, are all features in the paintings we are discussing here. In the painters’ working method, colours are mixed on the canvas and tend to be subdued; this is a feature of many paintings of the time.

Of course painters are not only moved to emotion by objects. They may be moved mostly because of the meaning of the object, its connection with their experiences and ideas, which can be associated with social life, or the life of the individual. In the period of development after 1940, many painters were interested in social experience, and many took diverse
aspects of the lives of the people around them as subjects to paint. To name a few: Sudjojono, Affandi, Hendra [Gunawan], Surono, Henk Ngantung, Otto Djaja, Dullah, Harijadi, Trubus, Tarmizi, Amrus Natalsy and more—most of these were members of SIM and Pelukis Rakyat.

Emotional expressions were diverse. They could be tense and fierce, for instance from Sudjojono before 1950 and Affandi; most of the paintings from the independence struggle also exhibit these tendencies, for instance the works of Henk Ngantung and Dullah, around 1947. But there was also joy and celebration, as in the works of Hendra, or humour as in some of Hendra’s work and in that of Otto Djaja.

However in this period there were not a few painters who tend to express their experiences in a more individual way, tending to expressions of personal emotions or sentiments. These artists rarely—or never—depicted social life. Examples of these artists are Basuki Resobowo, Rusli, Sholihin, Kusnadi, Oesman Effendi, Zaini, Nashar and others.

**Second Tendency**

Aside from emotional styles, there was also a broader tendency to more objective styles. Painters wanted to act as objective observers, and thus did not want to allow emotion to distort what they were looking at. Some painters swung between this and the aforementioned first tendency, including Sudjojono, Henk Ngantung, Harijadi, Dullah and Trubus.

In the developments of the period 1940–69, some critics were concerned to note that ‘modern painting’ was difficult for the broader community to understand. They advised painters to only paint ‘realistic’ works, in the sense of becoming objective observers and documenters.

Sudjojono himself declared in 1949 that artists should ‘Go to realism’, which gave rise to a polemic with Trisno Sumardjo. But among the painters of this ‘realist movement’ only Sudjojono and Trubus could really be said to have implemented this proclamation. However, in about 1960 Trubus revealed works that deviated from realism, and a considerable number of the works that Sudjojono exhibited in 1968 also showed a similar style.

Several communist critics, especially after President Sukarno’s Political Manifesto of 1959, attacked the shift to abstraction in Indonesian painting, and promoted ‘realism’. In spite of this, painters who were under the umbrella of the Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat (Institute of People’s
Culture, an organ of the Communist Party of Indonesia)—for instance the members of the Pelukis Rakyat at the time—generally continued to use various styles that were not, or were even a long way from, ‘realism’.

**Third Tendency**

There was also a greater tendency to subjectivity. There were paintings that demonstrated qualities of fantasy. Here we use the word fantasy to refer generally to various internal [imaginative] processes such as imagination, reverie, dreams, myths and so on. Psychology shows that these processes are meaningful and connected to reality, but what emerges from these processes is organised according to a logic than differs from that of reality as we know it in our conscious state. Fantasy can create images that are pleasant, and others that are frightening and terrifying. But all of this emerges from internal tensions that may be sub- or even unconscious, and that seek resolution through irrational processes.

These fantastical paintings reveal to us the logic of fantasy, not the logic of reality. Sudjojono’s *Sayang Kita Bukan Anjing* (*It’s a Pity We’re Not Dogs*, 1943) depicting two dogs with human heads, is a fantasy. So too is Harijadi’s *Biografi II di Malioboro*<sup>20</sup> (*Biography II on Malioboro*, 1947), which shows people in a scene assembled not according to the laws of space in reality, but with people flying around. In paintings like these, we can still recognise objects, but different objects—or with various parts of them arranged in relationships that diverge from those we’re familiar with in reality. These arrangements follow the logic of fantasy.

Painters who exhibit this tendency to styles that embrace fantasy include Agus Djaja, Sudibio, Sukirno, Handrio (before 1958) and Sudiardjo.

**Fourth Tendency**

The fourth tendency is towards decorative styles. In these paintings we recognise objects (trees, leaves) but their forms are stylised, turned into patterns. Characteristics of this style include lines or the impression of lines (because every shape must be clearly delineated), repetitive rhythms (because of repetition or the alignment of patterned elements) and neat and controlled compositions. In this tendency Kartono Yudhokusumo painted a perspective view of the guerrilla arena in Wonosari (1947),

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<sup>19</sup> Editors’ note: see fn 14 for clarification of this erroneous claim.
<sup>20</sup> Editors’ note: the main street in Yogyakarta.
a view of Dieng (1949) and even Bandung. In many of his paintings after 1950, Hendra seemed to move towards stylisation and a preference for the decorative traditions of Indonesia. Then came Batara Lubis—a painter who was deeply interested in decorative forms and who admired Kartono Yudhokusumo. He painted various scenes of the lives of the people in this style. We could say that this tendency to the decorative style spread from Hendra and Batara Lubis to other painters in Yogyakarta, like Widayat, Alibasyah and Bagong Kusudiardjo.

With these developments, the decorative style took another path. Painters did not stylise a particular object as a model in front of them (as did Kartono and Batara Lubis), but instead arranged various visual elements (line, colour, etc) to become shapes that only reminded people of objects in a general way, for instance a person, but not a portrait of a specific person. This is evident in paintings by Abas Alibasyah, Widayat and Suparto. We could say that these developments represent a shift from depiction (which refers to a specific individual object) to metaphor (which refers to a generalised concept). Thus the objective camp, which we mentioned at the outset, that is the external and visible world, the world of impressions or visual responses that are gleaned from the world around the painter, moved further away. Here the tendency to abstraction is even greater.

Towards Abstract Painting, 1955–60

In mentioning a broader tendency to abstraction, in fact we have broached the fifth tendency of the second period. However, this tendency points to a more important issue, which is the characteristics of the shift to the third period.

This tendency emerged particularly among a number of painters in Bandung, Jakarta and Yogyakarta. In Bandung there was Ahmad Sadali, Mochtar Apin, Srihadi, Popo Iskandar, But Muchtar and Jusuf Affendy. In Jakarta there was Oesman Effendi. In Yogyakarta there was G. Sidharta, Fadjar Sidik, Handrio and Abas Alibasyah.

In Bandung, this began with Sadali in 1953. Painters remodelled the form of objects into flat motifs, which was achieved by intersecting straight and curved lines. The whole painting was created with lines dividing up the surface of the canvas, as well as colours that evenly filled the geometrical fields created by the intersection of lines. Thus what was immediately
apparent in the painting, or what dominated one’s vision, was an arrangement of colourful lines and geometric fields, with the form of the object ‘submerged’ under this network.

Around the same time in Jakarta, Oesman Effendi divided the form of objects with lines and geometric fields too, so that, to borrow the words of a critic who was disappointed with Oesman Effendi’s exhibition in 1957, it seemed that ‘we are merely seized by a constructivist arrangement of lines, colours and fields’.  

In Yogyakarta, academic education at ASRI and exhibitions of works by Bandung painters in 1955 and 1958 prompted several painters to pursue abstraction more enthusiastically. This tendency was strengthened by G. Sidharta’s return from his studies in the Netherlands in 1958. Sidharta arranged various shapes, fields, colours, lines and textures. These arrangements very much remind the viewer of the objects that we recognise in reality, but their shapes have been dissected, deconstructed and flattened.

Approaching 1960, Handrio quickly grasped the concept that painting, through the arrangement of its elements, could be a kind of ‘visual music’. He tried working with this concept around 1963–64. He abstracted and reshaped musical instruments into geometric arrangements. For Fadjar Sidik, 1957–58 was a critical period. Through his observations of the developments in society around him, he became suspicious of styles that merely followed the general tendencies outlined above.

In 1960 he made a number of sketches, vignettes and paintings by arranging flat motifs together with quite clear basic geometric shapes, and which seemed to move in the space like living creatures. Often a motif will bring up a memory of various kinds of living beings including humans, animals and plants. Approaching 1960, the decorative style in Yogyakarta progressed with larger abstract works like those from the oeuvre of Widayat (from 1955) and Abas Alibasyah, as mentioned above.

So, while in earlier tendencies painters depicted objects, however distorted, stylised or manifested through fantasy, in this fifth tendency painters created forms freely. The reference to objects could be said to be merely a ‘hold’ on the idea in the midst of an abstract arrangement of shapes, or

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21 Basuki Resobowo, ‘Tugas Seni Membuka Mata dan Hati’ [The task of art is to open eyes and hearts], Siasat 1 (Mei 1957).
just a pebble cast to begin painting. Painters created visual arrangements expressive of emotions (lyricism), and to satisfy their feelings about form (aesthetics).

This fifth tendency took painting outside of the framework of the general tendencies in the second period mentioned earlier. It revealed a new direction and thus prepared the way for subsequent developments.

This new development was the emergence of abstract painting in Indonesia. But this development must not induce us to ignore an important aspect of the history of painting in Indonesia, that of continuity.

Continuity is not just evident in the stages that distance the visible outside world, but also primarily in a kind of ‘artistic ideology’. What this means is a shared complexity of thought, attitude and emotion, which becomes the shared basis for different individual practices, and which endorses diverse kinds of practice.

There are two important elements in this artistic ideology, first, respect for the painter as an individual who is free to create their own form and style. Of course, there is a force that opposes this, but this respect remains strong and widespread among painters. The second element is the belief, which, due to the communication among painters in the sanggar (atelier), at meetings and in educational institutions, has become a kind of teaching, that the elements of form and their arrangement, regardless of the object they depict, can give rise to, realise, or express valuable artistic emotions, sensations or experiences.

Sudjojono already believed—in the PERSAGI era, and also in subsequent years—that painting was the ‘visible soul’: that that character would appear in the quality of the brushwork, colours and shapes that appear in the formal elements and their arrangement and also that, therefore, painters could create major works even if they depicted small or insignificant objects.  

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Later, around 1949, Basuki Resobowo proposed a similar perspective even more emphatically. He said: in order to see painting one needs visual powers, so that one can respond emotionally to the shapes, lines and colours ‘without needing to think too much about what the object is intended to be’.  

Nashar said it more succinctly: ‘With regards to Artistry, it’s not a matter of what is being painted, but how’. 

This artistic ideology is what became the resistance to the growth of ‘realism’ and, conversely, the basis for the endorsement of the various kinds of distortion that appeared in painting after PERSAGI. It also became the basis for a larger tendency to abstraction from 1955 to 1960 and in many of the paintings since then. Finally, this ideology became fertile ground for the emergence of abstract painting.

**Third Period, after 1960**

Of course, all the styles we have discussed previously can be found after 1960. But what marked this third period was the growth of abstract painting.

**Overtures to Abstract Painting**

The term ‘abstract’ has several meanings. Here we use it to refer to a type of painting that does not depict forms that we know as objects or things that we can see in our surrounding reality: people, animals, plants, landscapes and so on. Paintings in this style don’t depict objects (hence they are called ‘non-objective abstracts’) or paint figures (hence they are also called ‘nonfigurative abstracts’).

Of course this doesn’t mean that abstract painting does not have any connection at all to the forms we recognise. Both painters and viewers of paintings live in a world of forms. The shape of humans, animals, trees, rice fields and mountains are a part of that world of form, and it is this that is usually painted. But there are also other shapes/forms. The earth can

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be seen from an aircraft, objects can be observed very closely (the surface of the land, or a stone for example) or we can look at objects through a microscope (micro-organisms, cells networks arranged like crystals, and so on), revealing to us a wealth of diverse visual forms.

There are also man-made forms: the shapes created by architects, mechanics, civil engineers etc. And finally there are forms that we find in mathematics, those made with rulers, compasses and so on. Our reception of this diverse world of forms, both physiological and psychological—occurs against the background of our experiences of form—an important factor in how we experience abstract paintings. The best preparation for ‘understanding’ or ‘enjoying’ abstract painting is the wealth and depth of our experience in this diverse world of visual forms.

**Period of Growth in Abstract Painting**

We have already mentioned a number of painters who showed a greater tendency to abstraction approaching the 1960s. All of them leaned towards abstract painting in the period after 1960; some for a moment, and others who continued their exploration of the style.

SRIHADI, in 1960, left behind the style that had occupied him up to that point, which he felt was ‘too cold’. He left behind the discipline of geometry and depictions of objects and made two kinds of experiment. In the first experiment the canvas carried an explosion of bright colours. In another experiment he stuck pieces of paper on the canvas and then mixed these with spontaneous sweeps of colour. From this experiment, Srihadi produced an abstract painting. Thus, abstract painting emerged in the development of new Indonesian painting. But for Srihadi it was fleeting. He painted this way only from 1960 to 1962.

**About Srihadi**

Srihadi became familiar with the work of ‘painting’ during the war in 1947, as a volunteer he sketched important events. He was born in Solo, in 1931, and here he gathered with Sudjojono, Affandi and others who were in SIM at the time. Indirectly he gained an education in painting from these painters.²⁵

²⁵ Editors’ note: Srihadi died in 2022.
In 1953 he studied in Bandung (now the Department of Art in the Bandung Institute of Technology). Here he learned to paint through the arrangement of lines, colours and space in a painting. In Srihadi’s paintings from this time there are a number of large lines that are arranged rhythmically, neatly. The object became unimportant, and in its place emerged harmoniously arranged colours.

Three or four years of painting later, Srihadi felt painting was dead and only depicted the sweet and beautiful. He felt trapped. The dynamism he felt in the past, in his paintings, made Srihadi want to animate his paintings. So from 1959 he began to reduce the lines in his works. Then in 1960–61, he painted free and dynamic scribbles with transparent colours. And here, through developing the ‘concept’ of painting, Srihadi produced ‘abstract’ painting.

Srihadi didn’t stick to his encounter with abstraction for long, after 1962, through dots of colour in his paintings, he found forms that resembled figures: so Srihadi returned to painting objects, including the horizon. In 1971 he even added the element of story to his paintings.

A. SADALI, in 1963, left behind geometric painting. His canvases depicted wide, bright colours and referenced no objects at all. In subsequent developments, Sadali’s canvases depicted sombre colours like ochre, deep blue and black. Texture began to play an important role. These textures appeared as if they were result of much effort and many natural processes; stretching and wrinkling, cracking and breaking, peeling and tearing, erosion and weathering, processes of aging and destruction.

In Sadali’s painting from this period there are no strong, wide brushstrokes that record the energy and emotion of the painter, and that activate our attention. All of the cracking and texture, the many scribbles and trembling, short scratches make every surface of Sadali’s paintings rich, challenging us to examine it calmly and closely, to be still and to contemplate. Obsolescence and strain, age and excess are indeed matters that should make us reflect. More so if Sadali places lustrous trickles of gold and gold leaf on his canvases or shapes that we can read as symbols:
a verse of holy text in Arabic script, a black cube that reminds us of the Kaabah, mountain shapes (kekayon = the tree of life) or movement from bottom to top (vertical).

Sadali’s attention to texture as an element of great importance in his paintings was achieved by using thick paint and sometimes attaching pieces of cloth to his canvas. These increasingly prominent textures brought his work into a state of relief. From around 1970, Sadali attached thick padding to his canvases.
FADJAR SIDIK, in 1963, produced abstract paintings in the form of geometric arrangements. However his more important abstract paintings were made after 1968.

As mentioned above, in 1960 Fadjar Sidik made a number of small sketches and vignettes, in the form of motifs composed from circles, triangles and so on, with these parts forming the shape of animals, humans and plants. After 1968 he discarded all these fantastical creatures. He then composed simple shapes based on circles, half circles and crescents, triangles, trapeziums, parallelograms and so on. Tens of shapes like this were lined up and scattered across the picture plane with bright, even hues of blue, red and yellow.

Fadjar created quite stunning degrees of irregularity because he always included variations in each basic shape and in their positions. In this way he avoided exactitude and precision, eschewing geometric rigour and mathematical systems. His paintings have elements of the feeling of nature (shapes in the form of moons, rocks, degrees of irregularity), and the living world (the shapes and rhythms of leaves). With these associations, Fadjar Sidik was able to achieve lyricism.

HANDRIO, in 1963–64 made abstractions and distortions of musical instruments. In 1965 he left the instruments behind and his paintings became arrangements of flat shapes and geometric forms. In subsequent developments he created illusions of space with these geometric forms. The results, like those apparent in his work from 1968, were a kind of construction that resembled architecture. Complex and dynamic geometric spaces intertwined seamlessly and endlessly to give emotional and symbolic overtones to Handrio’s paintings. And indeed, Handrio gave the title *Labirin* (Labyrinth) to his works (1968).

OESMAN EFFENDI, who around 1960 painted abstractions that were a long way from natural forms, began abstract painting in 1968. Contrast, harmony and variations in curved lines, brightly coloured spots pressed into the canvas. All of this forms an open composition with elements that move freely and rhythmically. Oesman Effendi’s paintings are like musical compositions. Titles like *Alam Perahu* (The World of Boats), *Pemandangan* (View) and so on, show how the painter saw his own paintings, or indicate the experience that his art drew on. Paintings like this have become lyrical experiences, about nature, or life, without painting nature or objects from life itself.
Many painters expressed their experiences of nature without painting objects from nature itself. They depend on the expressive power of visual elements and their arrangement. Even so, often, through division of the picture plane to form a horizon, through colours that are impure and rich with nuance, through the marks of texture, through the irregularity and variation of shapes and their arrangements, these paintings depicted forms that appeared to have their prototypes in nature. The painters didn’t paint nature, but the paintings had associations with, and the feeling of nature.

In this category we find the paintings of But Muchtar, Mochtar Apin, A. D. Pirous and Jusuf Affendy in the period 1968–69.

A. D. PIROUS took Arabic calligraphy as his main subject for painting from 1970. Here we find paintings that take another art form as their source of expression: the art of writing in Arabic on manuscripts and tombstones, as is frequently found in Aceh, where Pirous was born. Sometimes Pirous takes a holy verse and tries to distil its meaning through all the elements of his painting. Sometimes he may only take the movement and rhythm of that calligraphy.

We don’t intend to speak about abstract painters one by one. The main purpose of the discussion above is to provide a picture of some of the styles that have emerged in Indonesia since 1960.

We have indicated that the third period, that is the period from around 1960, was the time in which abstract painting in Indonesia developed. From the way that we delineate these periods, it is clear that the intention is not to declare that there was only abstract painting during this third period. However, at the very least, we can say abstract painting was the strongest realisation or manifestation [of painting], and in developments after 1960 it appears to have been particularly prominent.

The emergence of abstract painting redirected painters’ attention from a focus on aspects of experience that were tied to the presence of objects or things: views, people in the market, trees, boats and so on, towards a focus on more abstract experiences.

The experience that was ‘transmitted’ through Sadali’s paintings, for instance, was not an event from the social realm, or an experience of a fragment of the landscape, or an emotional expression that he was moved to by such things. What was conveyed was the experience that was evoked by looking at the process of destruction and decay and in nature
and life; not the destruction and decay of this or that object, but the process of destruction itself. When Oesman Effendi painted *Alam Perahu* or *Pemandangan*, his attention was not drawn to an experience that was bound to or glued to the form of a boat or a view. He was interested in the aspects of the experience that are more essential, more musical. Thus, as we have seen, many painters express their experience of nature without painting objects in nature itself.

The stimulus that shifted attention to more abstract experiences was also what lay behind the strength of the increased tendency to abstraction after 1960.

Popo Iskandar immediately comes to mind. This painter continued to take lyrical and existential experiences of nature as his starting point and he also maintained a relationship with particular objects from nature: the beach, a glimpsed landscape, flowers, cats, bamboo. However after 1970 he expressed his lyrical experiences with as few expressive tools as possible (as little colour and line as possible, etc). Thus the bamboo becomes white curved lines on a white field.

Several other painters worked on paintings that began as improvisations without thought of a particular subject. Then, if a form emerged, they developed that form as much or as little as was needed to take our thoughts to an object with which we’re familiar, even though that is never as clear as the objects in paintings prior to 1960. Among those painters were A. D. Pirous, Jusuf Affendy and Rustam Arief, in the period 1960–70, as well as Amri Yahya, D. A. Peransi and others.

There were also painters, in this third period, who created ‘abstract fantasies’. A ‘world’ inhabited by animated objects and figures was created on the canvas, although their identities were obscure. A fantasy far from the world as we know it. This can be seen in the paintings of O. H. Supono.

This new freedom of which we speak, also meant freedom to line up, or gather on the same platform, images of objects that originate in different realities. For instance, images from the world of things and images from the world of symbols and signs. This appeared, for instance, in some of Srihadi’s painting, and some of the works of young painters like Siti Adiyati, and more so in works by Suatmadji, who collected images that not only came from different realities, but also different styles.
Freed from ties to objects, painters explored different arts and different experiences. Painters could even develop their sensitivity to diverse ranges of experiences, building new perspectives and looking at various ‘realms of experience’ simultaneously. Thus it is as if we are asked to quickly jump from one world to another from one different style in one experience, all in one painting.

We could say that this period nurtured numerous kinds of new sensibilities with more multifaceted characteristics, and explorations of more complex experiences. The push in this direction explains why the changing styles of painters after PERSAGI were more dynamic than those of older painters. Compared to the changing styles of Sadali, Srihadi and Fadjar Sidik, the stylistic developments of Sudjojono, Affandi and Hendra [Gunawan?] feel static.

From the explanation above, it seems sufficiently clear that we have witnessed an experiment in experience, and this also means an experiment in form. Various forms have been explored, tested. Compared to painters in preceding periods, painters during this third phase evidently found intrigue and pleasure in visual elements and their various possibilities. For many young painters, the problem of form seems to have a primary role. In the paintings of Aming Prayitno, for instance, there are times when he only experiments with texture. Experimenting in this third period meant experimenting with materials and techniques.

Painting no longer alone means brushing paint over a canvas; a painter might attach pieces of paper, fabric, glass, metal and so on. Painters sew, weld, puncture the canvas and so on. Painters can act as assemblers and attach all kinds of objects and material with very advanced technology, as we see in works by Saptohudoyo. A number of other painters have experimented with the [wax-resist] technique of batik, including Abas Alibasyah, Amri Yahya, Bagong Kusudiardjo, Mudjita, Mustika and others.

A ‘spirit of experimentation’ is perhaps the correct expression with which to refer to this important impulse in painting after 1960. Mochtar Apin was a painter who clearly demonstrated this. He delved into several styles simultaneously over a short period of time. Perhaps this is a sign of restlessness in explorations of experience. For Mochtar Apin, creating
a work is not based on a known starting point, but a process that develops slowly and haltingly, with the intention of giving form to something in the subconscious. And all of this activity is experimental.²⁶

**General Critiques of the Third Period**

Abstract painting in this third period, although featuring many variations, is united by one characteristic: lyricism. It is all an expression of the painter’s emotions and sensations in experiencing the world. A painting is an expressive field, a place where it is as if painters ‘project’ their emotions and the beating of their feelings, recording the life of their soul. The painting is thus seen as a realm of imagination that has its own purpose, an imaginary or *irreal* world.

The world that appears in the picture plane is not connected to and is not even a conduit from the real-concrete world in which we who view the painting exist. It occupies a virtual world. As if to strengthen this imaginary plane the painting is contained with a frame, ‘isolating’ itself on the wall. In this way it presents forms that are not pictures of objects we know from our surroundings, but a world of imagination, that inside the realm of the picture frame is seen as an incarnation of the painter’s emotions and inner being in experiencing nature and the real world. A painting is an imaginative world, a lyrical world. Inside it, emotions are filtered and made manifest.

However, in this third period, we should note other phenomena among a number of young artists that go against this lyricism. These appeared around 1970. This anti-lyricism appears in two types.

In the first type, associations with nature and life, as well as emotions, are pushed aside. Of course there are feelings here, that is to say forms, or, in this case, a feeling of mathematical order, and rationality in form. Paintings become the arrangement of two or three simple geometric shapes that are repeated and arranged according to mathematical principles. These appear in paintings by B. Munni Ardhi, Harsono and Nanik Mirna in 1970–73. In other matters, painting is research, analysis, measuring and calculating, in the service of finding and revealing optical indicators within systematic structures, as in the paintings of Anyool Subroto and Sugeng Santosa.

²⁶ See the catalogue *Pameran Grup 18; 18–27 Agustus 1971, Jakarta* (Jakarta: Group 18 Exhibition, 1971).
In 1973 Danarto exhibited a number of large blank canvases in geometric shapes, without frames. In this experiment painting became the viewer’s own environment, forming a spatial place that exists and moves. Painting is no longer a fragment of an imagined world isolated on the wall, contained with a frame and contemplated from a distance. Painting becomes a concrete structural environment of its own, in which the viewer can observe and move. As Danarto said, he intended his work to be ‘simultaneously architecture, painting and sculpture’. Danarto can be seen as bridging pure form (dissociated from nature and life, without emotion) and anti-lyricism of the second type.

In this second type, anti-lyricism appears in tendencies to the actual and the concrete. If lyricism filters and transforms experiences and emotions into the imaginary world, then in this tendency it is as if the artist is avoiding that filtering and transformation. It is not a picture of objects

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27 Editors’ note: see Chapter 8 for a more extended discussion of the artist’s works and the context of this installation work.
that we look at, but the objects themselves on display. It is not a feeling of disgust that is filtered and satisfies the imagination, but rather a real and immediate sensation of disgust that is presented directly, without distancings it, which makes people turn away in disgust.

The experience is intended to achieve the most concrete and actual form possible. Art works are not a slice of the imaginary world to be contemplated at a distance, but a concrete object that physically involves the viewer. This was apparent in the *Pameran Seni Lukis 74* (Painting exhibition 74; B. Munni Ardhi, Harsono, Nanik Mirna) and *Pameran Seni Rupa 75* (Fine art exhibition 75; Jim Supangkat, Hardi, Harsono, B. Munni Ardhi, Siti Adiyati and others). If we must call their works ‘paintings’ it should be noted that their work is not ‘painting’ in the usual sense.

### Background to New Indonesian Painting

Works of art are born from the soul of the artist, through processing media, that is working with materials, tools and particular techniques. It is unquestionable that the work of art often depicts things particular and unique to the individual. But the soul of the artist, from which the work of art is born, grows and takes its form, is a matrix in which all the forces of history are at work. Here is where the connection that brings together the issues of the artist with those who are not artists. And it also results in the impression of a connection between one concept from a tendency and a concept from another tendency.

New Indonesian Art, which has grown in Indonesia, just like art in general, cannot wholly be 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.

Several historical powers are at work in the development of New Indonesian Painting.

First, cultural heritage. Basically, cultural heritage is part of the formation of a person's character, which is the basis of their relationship with the reality around them, and in this lies the spiritual connection between human intuition, human emotions and an unformulated reality. This connection, in Indonesia [now] and even more so in the past is not an
empirical, rational, straightforward and objective one. Indonesian society, despite changes that have taken place this century (especially in larger cities, where painting has developed), still appears to retain elements of the old culture.

To mention several of these characteristics, there is evident pleasure in the awesome, a tendency to depict something weird and supernatural, and to approach it via the mysterious. In visual art one of the clearest roles for cultural heritage is in the painting that we call ‘decorative style’. This has long occurred although with different bases.

Another is the power of history, which comes through social events and phenomena that take place around the artist, social life in upheaval, the struggle for the nation, the destruction of the integrity of traditional communal society, a national consciousness that motivates change, upheaval and reform and the aspirations of society; all of this creates a spiritual climate that is tense and anxious. This is reflected in the second style of painting. The growth of national consciousness that triggered the Youth Pledge of 1928 was also a social phenomenon that strongly influenced the advent of New Indonesian Painting. It manifested an enthusiasm for the creation of new art that differed from the traditional art that existed in regional cultures, and also a passion for showing the world that Indonesia as a nation could create its own painting.

The influence of the West was a reality that also had historical force. The colonial period, for instance, created contact between Indonesian painting at the point of its formation, and Western painting. Then, advances in global communication and the mixing of world civilisations resulted in visual art becoming a specific issue. Hence we see in the development of New Indonesian Painting an eagerness to seek new possibilities in the world of art through the history of the development of Western, European, Modern, Indonesian Art, systematically arranged in that order.

However not all of what is in Western painting was influential in Indonesia. The painters of the second period, for instance, were familiar with the various painting styles of the West, but they didn’t make use of all of them. The most popular Western painter was Vincent van Gogh, the pioneer of expressionism who lived in the nineteenth century. Another example was the analytical, rational and geometric style of painting that had grown in the West since the beginning of the twentieth century but was not
adopted by even one Indonesian painter until the years approaching 1960 when the influence of this style began to appear. Only after 1970 do we begin to see the influence of the West. The process of social change in Indonesia and the spiritual climate that accompanied it, explains this kind of ‘selectivity’.

New painting that grew in Indonesia was, in every way ‘Indonesian Painting’. Which is to say it was formed through the powers of Indonesian history. Of course this was yet to attain a stable existence, because it rested on supports that remained weak. It was confined to big cities and there even further confined to small sections of the educated and wealthy.

However, in spite of this, painting institutions, while not strong, proliferated. The number of educational institutions for artists grew, most important among them STSRI ‘Asri’ in Yogyakarta, the Department of Visual Art in ITB [Bandung Institute of Technology], and the Academy of Art, in the Jakarta Arts Education Institute. There were galleries for exhibitions in the major cities, among the most important being the Jakarta Arts Hall, the Exhibition Space at the Ismail Marzuki Centre and the Cultural Hall in Jakarta. Some collectors with interesting collections emerged in several cities.

Issues about art and painting made an appearance. Already a number of [new] approaches are being developed through more organised research into history and ideas. This can certainly fill the space that was previously occupied with the problems of Western painting. And it can also provide a rationale for Indonesian Painting, which is often greeted with suspicion.

So, there are many signs that, slowly but surely, Indonesian painting continues to grow.