Introduction

The 1990s was a tumultuous period of immense social, economic and political transformations in Indonesian history and also in art. The New Order of President Suharto came to an end in 1998 ushering in the period of Reformasi. At a global level, the decade also witnessed shifts in power balances with ongoing economic and political impacts and an unparalleled expansion of the international art world as well as the emergence of new discourses redefining contemporary art.

FX Harsono, Heri Dono, Dadang Christanto and Arahmaiani Feisal, all influential innovators in Indonesian contemporary art, were also among the Indonesian artists most exhibited internationally in the 1990s. I discuss their art in this chapter in both local Indonesian and international contexts and in relation to a critical question in art theory more generally—that is, whether ‘art can provide new models for cultural,
social and political understanding’ in the artists’ own local communities and, in a globalising world, contribute to understanding cultural identities and new ways of perceiving the world.¹

In Chapter 2, Elly Kent analysed the artistic ideologies that underpinned Indonesian art in the post-independence era.² By the 1990s, artistic developments were greatly affected not only by the mutability of Indonesian society and art but also by geopolitical transformations in the world. As historian Glen Barclay has noted, the global geopolitical ‘tectonic plates’ shifted in the second part of the twentieth century with first Japan then China and India becoming leading players globally and other nations, including Indonesia, rising economically and politically.³

These geopolitical and economic changes were to lead to a reconceptualisation of global frameworks for art and challenged the accepted theory of an art centre dominated by Europe and North America.⁴ The decade of the 1990s is now widely accepted as a watershed for global art history, theory and practice and the time when art theorists began to stress the need for new languages for contemporary art from outside a Western-dominated art world. As art historian Hans Belting wrote in 2009:

Contemporary art, a term long used to designate the most recent art, assumed an entirely new meaning when art production, following the turn of world politics and world trade in 1989, expanded across the globe. The results of this unprecedented expansion challenged the continuity of any Eurocentric view of art.⁵

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¹ Caroline Turner and Jen Webb, *Art and Human Rights: Contemporary Asian Contexts* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 111, take up this question in terms of human rights. Some material in this chapter is drawn from research conducted under Australian Research Council funded grants on art in Asia.

² See also Elly Kent, ‘Entanglement: Individual and Participatory Art Practice in Indonesia’ (PhD diss., The Australian National University, 2016). Sanento Yuliman and Jim Supangkat both examine the significance of these ideologies, see Chapters 3 and 6 (this volume).


⁴ While historical art from Asia had long been accepted into Western museums, modern and contemporary art had, for the most part, been framed as ‘derivative’ of Western art. In the 1990s, this was refuted by scholars—for example, at John Clark’s seminal conference at The Australian National University in 1991, ‘Modernism and Post-Modernism in Asian Art’, and at the conferences for the Asia Pacific Triennial in 1993, 1996 and 1999.

The early chapters in this volume provide examples of how well informed Indonesian artists were about world developments and new artistic connections. Many travelled or studied abroad, especially after 1945. It was not until the late 1980s and early 1990s, however, that Indonesian contemporary artists began to be regularly invited to major contemporary international exhibitions based in Western countries. Jim Supangkat, the most influential Indonesian curatorial voice for contemporary art in the last decade of the century, wrote in 2005 that there was growing interest in art of the ‘Third World’ (his term) in the 1990s, but before that ‘Indonesian art had been ignored by international art circles for decades’. He added that:

If one reviews the record of international contact before 1990, only once in the 50 years from 1940 to 1990 did Indonesia participate in a major international event. It was when Affandi—the most widely recognized painter in Indonesia—presented his paintings in the Second São Paulo Biennale in 1953. In contrast between 1990 and 2000, Indonesian contemporary art was shown in more than 100 international and regional art events, including prestigious international art events.

As a result, the Indonesian art world ‘made room’ for contemporary art.

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7 Jim Supangkat, ‘Art and Politics in Indonesia’, in *Turner, Art and Social Change*, 218–28, 220. Supangkat stated that it was not mainstream art in Indonesia, ‘which espouses the art of beautiful painting’, that attracted international attention. Yet audiences internationally were interested in this art. For example, audiences at the Asia Pacific Triennial (APT) exhibitions in Australia have been extremely enthusiastic about art related to spirituality and religion, such as the abstract and Islam-inspired paintings of A. D. Pirous (see Chapter 4, this volume). The Eurocentric viewpoint that Belting referred to is well expressed by Supangkat when he revealed that, at the Festival of Indonesia in the United States in 1990, major US art museums were not interested in taking the modern and contemporary art component that included some of Indonesia’s foremost artists and even suggested the exhibition ‘be shown in anthropological museums instead’. Jim Supangkat, ‘Indonesia: Multiculturalism/Multimodernism’, in *Contemporary Art in Asia: Traditions/Tensions*, ed. Apinan
Major exposure of Indonesian art in the United States and Europe began around 1990 with the Festival of Indonesia in the US followed by an exhibition organised in the Netherlands by the Amsterdam-based Gate Foundation in 1993. Indonesian contemporary artists had earlier been invited to participate in the groundbreaking Fukuoka Asian Art exhibitions in Japan. In the 1990s, the Asia Pacific Triennial (APT) exhibitions in Brisbane, Australia, beginning in 1993, and the Asia Society (US) exhibition Traditions/Tensions in New York in 1996 were important in including Indonesian artists. In the 1990s, Indonesian artists, as Supangkat noted, were selected for prestigious contemporary international exhibitions and for the growing number of biennales of contemporary art, a significant number of which were established outside Europe and North America. Many were in Asia, where a new regional art discourse was in formation. As well, biennales and museums began to appoint curators from the former ‘periphery’.


8 Indonesian Modern Art: Indonesian Painting since 1945 (Amsterdam: Gate Foundation, 1993).
9 The Fukuoka Art Museum initiated exhibitions of contemporary Asian art from the late 1970s. Networks were developed by the Japan Foundation through its Asia Center in Tokyo for exhibitions and conferences in the 1990s. ASEAN has provided opportunities for exchange. The Singapore Art Museum has, since 1996, been a centre for Southeast Asian contemporary art, complemented by the National Gallery, Singapore, from 2015. See Caroline Turner, introduction to Contemporary Asian Art and Exhibitions, ed. Antoinette and Turner.
10 Anthony Gardner and Charles Green, Biennials, Triennials, and Documenta: The Exhibitions that Created Contemporary Art (Hoboken, New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016), 3. Gardner and Green state that biennales ‘have come, since the 1990s to define contemporary art’ and many visitors ‘encounter contemporary art solely within their frames’.
11 For example, Thai Apinan Poshyananda curating Traditions/Tensions in 1996, Nigerian-born Okwui Enwezor curating Documenta (Germany) in 2002 and Indonesian group ruangrupa appointed as curators for the 2022 Documenta. The first three AP Ts also used a model of collaboration with curators and writers from each country. Until the 1990s, artists from elsewhere than Europe and North America (the so-called ‘centre’ of modern and contemporary art) were referred to as being from the ‘periphery’.
Supangkat and others note the significance of international engagement for Indonesian contemporary art. Participation in international events could offer artists resources, alternative platforms and the freedom for experimentation not readily available in Indonesia. However, questions have at times been raised about the framing of the art and whether local contexts and history would be understood by international audiences.\textsuperscript{12} It is important, I believe, to recognise that many Indonesians had already participated in the emerging new regional art discourses.

Academic and curator Agung Hujatnikajennong writes of the significance of art protests of the 1970s that led to new directions for Indonesian art in the 1980s and the emergence of regional exhibitions, symposia and publications in the Asia Pacific in the 1990s that helped shape a ‘paradigm shift’ in that decade. Indonesian artists over the ensuing two decades, he writes, became more ‘aware of their identity as a result of complex encounters with their historical and colonial past’. He suggests that, as well as looking back, the artists connected to ‘the global art forum’ and developed their practices ‘in parallel with their growing understanding of their involvement in the global communication system with its decisive technological and information changes’.\textsuperscript{13}

Art historian Terry Smith has described contemporary art as ‘becoming—perhaps for the first time in history—truly an art of the world’ meaning it comes from the whole world.\textsuperscript{14} Smith has defined three distinctive currents in contemporary art theory and practice. The second of these currents, and one I would suggest is particularly relevant to Indonesia:


has arisen from movements toward political and economic independence that occurred in former colonies and on the edges of Europe, and is thus shaped above all by clashing ideologies and experiences. The result is that artists prioritise both local and global issues as the urgent content of their work.\(^\text{15}\)

Indonesian artists such as Harsono, Dono, Christanto and Arahmaiani fit Smith’s designation well, in particular his statement that they prioritised ‘both local and global issues as the urgent content of their work’.\(^\text{16}\) As Kent writes in relation to Dono, they experimented ‘with local and global idioms, to create works equally accessible to local and international audiences’.\(^\text{17}\) It was an Indonesian expression and may also be viewed as part of the decentring process in global contemporary art that gathered momentum in the 1990s.\(^\text{18}\) This process, I suggest, did not just involve artists from ‘the periphery’ being invited into contemporary art circuits during that decade, but their active involvement in a reconceptualisation of contemporary art practice and discourse.\(^\text{19}\)

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What is apparent is that the artists within this region are confident in their local and regional specificity as well as in incorporating ideas which cross national boundaries—an art which engages with international art practice but is not dependent on international ideas imposed from the ‘centre’.


16 My analysis of these artists’ work is based on discussions with them since the early 1990s.

17 Kent, Chapter 2 (this volume).

18 An early forum was the Rockefeller–Asia Society conference in Bellagio, Italy, in 1997 (at which I represented Australia). There was strong criticism from Latin American, African and Asian delegates of the lack of artists from those regions in major global exhibitions. The first world Biennial Conference in Gwangju, Korea, in 2012 demonstrated the extent of the change over the next 15 years. The concept of decentring art is discussed, for example, by Partha Mitter in his ‘Interventions: Decentering Modernism: Art History and Avant-Garde Art from the Periphery’, *The Art Bulletin* 90, no. 4 (2008): 531–48, doi.org/10.1080/00043079.2008.10786408. Recent research has challenged the belief that innovations in contemporary artistic practice in the twentieth century were always reliant on the transfer of ideas from EuroAmerica to those on the ‘periphery’. Important publications on this include Reiko Tomii, *Radicalism in the Wilderness: International Contemporaneity and 1960s Art in Japan* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2016). Indonesian artists frequently utilised approaches drawn from local Indonesian modes of art as described in Chapter 2. Their approach to installation and performance, for example, was often significantly different from Western art practice, drawing on time-honoured modes from dance, theatre, ceremonies and storytelling. For a discussion of the complexity of these issues in Southeast Asian art historiography, see Nora A. Taylor, ‘The Southeast Asian Art Historian as Ethnographer?’, *Third Text* 25, 4 (2011): 475–88, doi.org/10.1080/09528822.2011.587948.

19 This is not to suggest that international involvement and recognition was a necessary validation for artists.
There are four interrelated themes that I want to explore in the art of the individuals I discuss below in relation to the question posed at the beginning of this chapter regarding art’s role in providing models for the future:

1. These artists envisaged their role as one connected to everyday life, a perspective they shared with many if not most Indonesian artists. This also related to Sanento Yuliman’s belief that art should not be separated from lived experience. As interpreted by FX Harsono, this role came with a particular responsibility to society. They did not, therefore, confine art to theoretical and aesthetic realms, a perspective adopted by some Western art historians, as noted by art historian Donald Preziosi. Writing in 1989, he described such a perspective as seeing:

   art as a second reality alongside the world in which we live day to day, rather than as one of the powerful social instruments for the creation and maintenance of the world in which we live.

   One of the essential contributions of artists beyond EuroAmerica to global art discourses, I have argued, was their commitment to the concept of art with a direct and necessary responsibility to society.

2. They shared an interest in the organisation of social and political structures as part of this belief in a responsibility to society. Their art was addressed especially to the marginalised and ordinary people often left behind in an era of globalisation and rapid economic change, both in Indonesia and elsewhere. This could include an art witnessing to injustice and political oppression. A key component is empathy, identified by Harsono in relation to his own work in Indonesia, an attribute that is also a prerequisite of effective cross-cultural dialogue in international contexts.

3. Questions of identity, inclusion and ethical relationships between human beings, especially in diverse and even divided societies, all critical subjects of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, were central

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20 Kent, Chapter 2 (this volume).
21 See Harsono, Chapter 10 (this volume).
24 Kent, Chapter 2 (this volume), shows the historical evolution in Indonesia. See also Virginia Matheson Hooker, ‘Expression: Creativity despite Constraint’, in *Indonesia beyond Soeharto: Polity, Economy, Society in Transition*, ed. Donald K. Emmerson (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1999), 262–94, for a detailed discussion of the context of art under Suharto, including censorship and the cultural policies of the New Order.
to their art. The concept of identity, while it incorporated individual identity such as ethnicity, religion or gender, was in Indonesian art also attached to cultural and collective community identity.

4. In all these respects, their art concentrated on means of perceiving and even reinventing the world in new ways. This frame of reference is frequently referred to as ‘world-making’ and in the late twentieth century had wide implications by connecting to broader global discourses related to human values, human rights and the future of humanity.

**FX Harsono: Art and Social Responsibility**

FX Harsono is without question one of the Indonesian artists most committed to expressing these themes in his art. As he told Hendro Wiyanto:

> I’ve never viewed myself only as my own self or as a lone individual. It is the awareness that I am part of the community that always encourages me to create works that have as their point of departure social issues, the things that are external to me.

For him, the role of an artist does not just consist in making art but comes with a ‘responsibility to society’, requiring the need for empathy in human and artistic relations for ‘without empathy, the community is just a voiceless object’.

As the catalogue to the exhibition of Harsono’s art at the Singapore Art Museum in 2010 states: ‘Any discussion of the history of contemporary art in Indonesia would be incomplete without an examination of FX Harsono’s art and practice’. Harsono has been a crucial theorist as well as an experimental artist in Indonesia and is also recognised as a major voice in the emergence of contemporary Asian art. Since the 1970s when,

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26 Hendro Wiyanto, *What We Have Here Perceived as Truth, We Shall Some Day Encounter as Beauty: A Solo Show by FX Harsono* (Jakarta: Indonesia Galeri Canna, 2013), 95.
27 See Harsono, Chapter 10 (this volume).
as a young art student, he challenged existing hierarchies for art, he has engaged in a dedicated exploration of questions of social and political justice, both through his art and in his work with NGOs working for societal transformation. This was undertaken in the context of significant limitations on freedom of expression under the New Order. Agung Hujatnikajennong states: ‘The development of his art has consistently demonstrated a genealogical link between conceptual strategies and the issue of contesting power in Indonesia’. 

Harsono was born in 1949 in Blitar, East Java, and has Chinese as well as Javanese ancestry. He was brought up as a Catholic. His father was a professional photographer whose photographs later provided inspiration for his son’s artworks examining killings of Chinese Indonesians in the late 1940s. When the New Order came to power in 1965–66, Harsono and other Indonesians of Chinese descent were forced to give up their culture, religion and family names.

Harsono played a critical part in the development of contemporary art discourse in Indonesia. He was co-founder in 1975 of the Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru (New Art Movement, GSRB). Although it ended in 1988, the GSRB was foundational to the period discussed here. There was, however, a price to pay for challenging the social order. As Sabapathy states in Chapter 5 in relation to GSRB artists, theirs was ‘a protest gesture with immense cost to the lives of those who delivered it’. The artists associated with GSRB utilised installation and performance and developed collaborative art

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29 Harsono (this volume) states: ‘I took up social and political issues with the intention of experimenting with the search for a national Indonesian identity’. See Turner and Webb, Art and Human Rights, for more on Harsono’s ideas of his own identity, including his ‘hybrid’ identity. See also John Clark, ‘Negotiating Change in Recent Southeast Asian Art’, Southeast of Now: Directions in Contemporary and Modern Art in Asia 2, no. 1 (March 2018): 43–92, doi.org/10.1353/sen.2018.0002, for a discussion of Harsono’s art in a wider context of artists negotiating both personal and collective identities; John Clark, The Asian Modern (Singapore: National Gallery Singapore, 2021), 333–45.
30 A depoliticised art, culture and Islam was favoured by the regime and censorship of the media and the arts was effected to control dissent. Harsono (this volume) says this was less for the visual arts. Nonetheless, artists and writers faced censorship and arrest, and, as the case of poet Wiji Thukul in 1996 shows, even death (see Chapter 1). A number of artists had spent time in gaol after Suharto came to power in 1965—including the brilliant painter Hendra Gunawan, who was imprisoned for more than a decade.
31 Quoted by Sabapathy, Chapter 5 (this volume). See also Kent’s analysis of Harsono, Chapter 2 (this volume).
32 Harsono’s artwork, Preserving Life, Terminating Life #2 (2009), using his father’s photographs, is illustrated in Chapter 10 (this volume). Harsono is the child pictured with his parents.
34 Sabapathy, Chapter 5 (this volume). Harsono, for example, was expelled from university for his actions in supporting the Black December Statement in 1974.
practices to critique policies of the New Order that had resulted in ruthless, exploitative, economic development; the destruction of traditional ways of life; corruption; and environmental disasters such as the crippling Minamata disease among children caused by industrial contamination. Harsono’s monumental installation of 50 panels, *The Social Change*, on a beach near Yogyakarta in 1983 exemplifies research underpinning art on these subjects. It was a commentary on the social costs of unregulated capitalism. A later installation work, *Voices from the Bottom of the Dam* (1994), referenced the murders of three farmers by the Indonesian military for demonstrating against a project to flood their rice fields to construct a dam, and included poignant materials such as clothing worn by the farmers.\(^{35}\)

By the 1990s, Harsono was producing powerful art works with a clear social message that were shown in Indonesia and abroad in major contemporary exhibitions. The translocation of these works into international contexts broadened their meaning to include wider discussions of human rights, democracy and political repression. The installation *Power and Oppression* (1992) was shown at the Artists’ Regional Exchange (ARX) exhibition in Perth, Australia, an important artist-initiated event focused on Southeast Asian artists.\(^{36}\) It comprised mounds of earth covered with apparently bloodstained cloths and broken branches, facing a chair ringed with barbed wire. The allusion to oppressive, even brutal, authority was unmistakable. In *Just the Rights*, exhibited at APT1 in Brisbane, Australia, in 1993, Harsono attached what looked like bound human bodies to wooden boards and included a copy of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This was followed in 1994 by images of hands, one tied by ropes, spelling out the word ‘democracy/demokrasi’ in international sign language, a work shown in Japan, Australia and the US.\(^{37}\) The symbolism of this work was clear to audiences in those countries, but, as Harsono tells us, the spies who came to his exhibition in Indonesia apparently could not decipher the meaning.\(^{38}\)

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\(^{35}\) Other socially directed artists created art about political violence, for example, Semsar Siahaan’s and Moelyono’s powerful works about the rape and murder by the military of a woman trade unionist, Marsinah, in May 1993. See Grace Samboh, ‘Consequential Privileges of the Social Artists: Meandering through the Practices of Siti Adiyati Subangun, Semsar Siahaan and Moelyono’, *Southeast of Now* 4, no. 2 (October 2020): 205–35, doi.org/10.1353/sen.2020.0010.

\(^{36}\) Images of *Power and Oppression* and *Just the Rights* reproduced in Chapter 5 (this volume), and *Voice without a Voice/Sig* [Demokrasi] in Chapter 10 (this volume). On ARX and the APT, see Christine Clark and Caroline Turner, ‘Cross-Cultural Exchanges and Interconnections from the 1980s and 1990s: ARX and the APT’, *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art* 16, no. 2 (2016): 167–84, doi.org/10.1080/14434318.2016.1240649.

\(^{37}\) Fukuoka Art Museum, Queensland Art Gallery and *Traditions/Tensions* exhibition.

\(^{38}\) Harsono (this volume).
Figure 7.1: FX Harsono, *The Voices Controlled by the Powers*, 1994. Installation with wooden masks and cloth. Dimensions variable. Image courtesy the artist.

*The Voices Controlled by the Powers* (1994) consisted of traditional wayang masks sawed off at the mouth, symbolising the denial of free speech by the New Order and the banning of the journal *Tempo* in that year (Figure 7.1). It was shown in Indonesia and later in the US in *Traditions/Tensions*. Harsono’s contributions to global art discourses on human rights and democracy through these exhibitions and others after Reformasi has been extensive and recognised. In 2015, for example, he was awarded the inaugural Joseph Balestier Award for the Freedom of Art.

Indonesia was hit hard by the Asian financial crisis of 1997 and suffered a severe economic collapse and political instability. Harsono created his now famous performance, appropriately named *Destruction* (*Destruksi*), for the *Slot in the Box* exhibition organised by Cemeti Gallery in Yogyakarta (1997) to address concerns regarding the fairness of elections. He wore a Western suit but with it the make-up of the demon

39 The rupiah experienced a dramatic fall in value, food prices rose, GDP declined and millions became unemployed (see Chapter 1, this volume).
40 At the National Gallery of Australia in 2014, Harsono stated that, although there had been a law in 1997 banning such activity in public spaces, many people defied this to attend. Cemeti, founded in 1988 by artists Nindityo Adipurnomo and Mella Jaarsma, was a major site for contemporary art.
king Ravana from the Ramayana. He set fire to, and used a chainsaw to destroy, three wayang masks on chairs—the masks representing the only three political parties that Suharto permitted to contest elections and the chairs being a symbol of authority or power (Figure 7.2; see also Figure 1.14).

The financial crisis was followed in May 1998 by organised attacks on Chinese Indonesians who were traditional targets in troubled times. Hundreds of people, mainly Chinese, were killed, shops were looted and at least 200 Chinese women were raped. This violence in the words of historian Jemma Purdey ‘was not normal or everyday. Unlike most anti-Chinese violence in Indonesia, it took place on a national scale, carried out by military agents with extreme brutality and purpose’. The May 1998 riots proved a turning point for those seeking change in Indonesia. Indonesian women especially were shocked and appalled by the rapes of Chinese-Indonesian women. Harsono made several artworks about the violence and rapes including Burned Victims (1998), a work of searing emotional intensity. He also worked with NGOs to help victims.

In recent decades, Harsono has continued to be an advocate for social advancement through artworks that include his series on the history of Chinese Indonesians, undertaken so that younger generations in Indonesia will know this dark history, and in the hope, he has said, that it will never be repeated.

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42 While the numbers are not verifiable, a fact-finding mission established by the Indonesian government reported over 1,000 dead. Coordinated rapes, evidence suggests, were used by the New Order in situations of unrest such as Aceh. Melani Budianta noted at an ANU conference in 2004 that Indonesian women banded together after the rapes. See also Kathryn Robinson, ‘Indonesian Women from Orde Baru to Reformasi’, in *Women in Asia: Tradition, Modernity and Globalisation*, ed. Louise Edwards and Mina Roces (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2000).

43 Other artists responded to the rapes, including Christanto and Arahmaiani.
Figure 7.2: FX Harsono, *Destruction (Destruksi)*, 1997.
Performance with wooden chairs, masks and chainsaw. Image courtesy the artist.

Heri Dono: Experimenting in Creating New Art from Old Traditions

In the 1990s, Heri Dono was almost certainly the most internationally exhibited Indonesian artist. His website notes that he has participated in 31 international biennales and many other exhibitions. Dono stresses the critical importance of communication in his art, communication that is highly effective in local and international contexts. He has collaborated in his work with musicians and dancers and, as Kent describes in her evocative description of *Kuda Binal*, with grave diggers, stone masons and amateurs. Dono is a multidisciplinary artist known internationally as a painter and for his highly original and engaging installations and dynamic performances, usually involving a number of performers and inspired by, and updating themes of, traditional wayang shadow puppetry and the Hindu epics, the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, stories that transcend time and seek a balance between good and evil.

45 Kent, Chapter 2 (this volume).
Dono’s art is distinctive in combining a lively humour with penetrating social comment in his communication with audiences in Indonesia and beyond. His imagery includes wayang, contemporary popular culture, comics, cartoons and television. Supangkat highlights the ‘expressive, wild and humorous’ images in Dono’s paintings and cites such artworks as the installation Watching the Marginal People as reflecting the tendency of Indonesian artists from the 1980s to look again to the grassroots life of ordinary people. This interest in the everyday lives of people is a distinctive feature in his work. Embedded in his worldview also are concepts related to Javanese cosmology, spirituality and morality, although he is interested in Indonesian cultural traditions beyond Java.

Like Harsono, power is a major preoccupation in his art, as are the negative aspects of power such as political falsehoods and the manipulation of ideas. These are subjects immensely relevant to the contemporary world. Although, as artist and academic Pat Hoffie writes, Dono adopted the role of a ‘joker’, he nonetheless presents a very serious conception of the role of art. He told art historian Astri Wright: ‘An artist is someone who wants to service art—but more important to me is, how can art serve humanity’. In Dono’s art there is, however, as Kent suggests, room for multiple interpretations and he clearly resists one interpretation of their meaning.

Dono was born in 1960 and had a middle-class upbringing as the son of a father who had joined the army under Sukarno. His mother was a teacher whose family were associated with the Yogyakarta Sultanate. From an early age he pursued an independent path and dropped out of the Indonesian Institute of the Arts in Yogyakarta three months before graduation. Instead, he chose to study with the wayang master Sigit Sukasman.

47 As shown in his work, Wayang Legenda, 1988.
48 Pat Hoffie, unpublished interview with Heri Dono, 1998. I am grateful to Professor Hoffie for access to this interview.
49 Wright, Soul, Spirit, and Mountain, 236. Wright was one of the first art historians to discuss his work. Dono also suggested to Wright that his art was concerned with ‘tragedy’.
50 Kent, Chapter 2 (this volume). Hoffie, unpublished interview, cites catalogues in which Dono discusses ‘the spiritual value of art work’ and ‘the role of the artist as communicator’, and in which he described art as ‘the thousand dimensions of truth’ and as ‘harbouring meaning that is open to a multiplicity of interpretations’.
51 ISI or the Institut Seni Indonesia Yogyakarta.
Figure 7.3: Heri Dono (b. 1960), Indonesia, *Campaign of the Three Parties*, 1992.

Synthetic polymer paint and collage on canvas, 98 x 98.5 cm. Collection: Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art. Acc. 1993.394. The Kenneth and Yasuko Myer Collection of Contemporary Asian Art. Purchased 1993 with funds from The Myer Foundation and Michael Sidney Myer through the Queensland Art Gallery Foundation. Image courtesy QAGOMA. Permission: the artist. The information from the QAGOMA website states: 'This work by Dono is based on the artist’s impressions of contemporary Indonesian politics in which the red figures represent the Partai Demokrasi Indonesia (PDI), yellow figures represent the Golangan Karya group (Golkar), and green signifies the Partai Persatuan Pembangunan (PPP). The white 'superman' figure represents power'.

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Dono has suggested, or certainly did so before the fall of the New Order, that his works were not about politics or even social problems, but he has conceded that his art mirrors politics and society. And we might add that humour and satire such as Dono employs is often a form of resistance. Apinan Poshyananda has said it is hard to accept his denial of political themes in his art. I would suggest that, if Dono has countered the idea of being described as a ‘political artist’, his art does open opportunities for questions to be explored and critical debate about social and political issues, such as in Campaign of the Three Parties, which is about elections under the New Order (Figure 7.3). His subjects have ranged from famine in Africa to sociopolitical satire. His work Gamelan of Rumour, for example, shown at APT1 in 1993, was an experimental sound piece put together with low-tech pieces found in local markets to create a mechanically operated musical instrument. Poshyananda argues that works such as Gamelan of Rumour (1992), Watching the Marginal People (1992) and Fermentation of the Mind (1993) ‘each comment in varying degrees on the tendency of Indonesian authorities to use propaganda and censorship to implement national policies and to control the minds of the masses’. 

In Dono’s performance The Chair—a meditation on the theme of power—actors play the part of puppets who challenge the absolute control of the puppeteer. His installation work Ceremony of the Soul (1995), a complex combination of themes related to Javanese spirituality and contemporary Indonesian society has, as a central element, stone figures whose torsos were carved by cemetery workers in a place where spirits are said to gather. As Poshyananda points out, however, the robotic figures suggest both obedience and the military (Figure 7.4).

53 ‘I am not involved in political or social problems … but my paintings, maybe they mirror politics or society. The main thing is that the social structure must be turned around 180 degrees’, quoted in Hoffie, unpublished interview. See Mythical Monsters in Contemporary Society: An Exhibition by Heri Dono (Singapore: Gajah Gallery, 1999), 2. His website states that he comments on ‘sociopolitical’ issues, see ‘Heri Dono’, accessed 24 October 2020, heridono.com/heri-dono/.


55 Paintings such as Campaign of the Three Parties (1992) show the three parties, PDI, GOLKAR and PPP, approved by the New Order. The Secret Boxes purchased by the Singapore Art Museum was later revealed to be about the killing by Indonesian troops of demonstrators in East Timor. Since Reformasi, Dono has reinforced the larger historical contexts of his art, for example, with works related to Suharto’s death and also to Donald Trump’s presidency in the US.

56 Dono experiments with sound and puts together works with helpers who normally repair goods like refrigerators or radios. Hoffie notes Dono’s interest in collecting from local markets (such as the World War I gas masks used in Kuda Binal). Hoffie, unpublished interview.

57 Poshyananda, ‘Roaring Tigers, Desperate Dragons in Transition’, 32.
Figure 7.4: Heri Dono, *Ceremony of the Soul*, 1995.


Possibly his most politically charged work was his installation for the Museum of Modern Art, Oxford, in 1996, when the Indonesian Embassy in London demanded that the catalogue be withdrawn from sale.\(^{58}\)

The installation displayed frightening images of soldiers, some with artificial legs, camouflage and a complex layering of issues that included military power and the ecological destruction of the environment. In the catalogue of that exhibition the following quotation was attributed to Dono:

> To destroy the feelings of fear, to be able to talk freely, to develop individual opinion. This is dangerous to the government, but I am optimistic. Information and human freedom cannot ultimately be stopped.\(^{59}\)

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58 David Elliott, ‘Dono’s Paradox: The Arrow or the Kris?’, *Art and Trousers: Traditions and Modernity in Contemporary Asian Art* (Hong Kong: Artasiapacific, 2021), 248–53. I am grateful to Professor Elliott for correspondence on this exhibition and access to the essay pre-publication. Professor Elliott outlines concerns from the Embassy at the time about what they stated were ‘misrepresentations’ of the political situation in Indonesia under then president Suharto and also explains the issues facing the artist and museum (p. 253).

Dadang Christanto: Witnessing to Injustice

Another Indonesian artist who has devised ways of addressing both local and global concerns and establishing direct connections with diverse audiences is Dadang Christanto. Christanto’s art is undoubtedly haunted by the events of 1965–66 in which his father was one of the victims, but it is also informed by a deep sympathy and empathy with all human suffering. Through painting, installation and performance, he has created art that witnesses to injustice and speaks eloquently to audiences.  

Christanto was born in 1957 in Tegal, a village in Central Java (see Map 2). In 1965 when he was eight years old, his father, a Chinese-Indonesian shopkeeper, was taken away by local militias as a suspected communist supporter and never seen again. It is supposed he was one of hundreds of thousands of victims who were imprisoned or killed, whose bodies have never been found and whose families and descendants suffered discrimination until the end of the New Order.

But Christanto’s project is not confined to Indonesia—he is, and has always been, concerned with violence across the world and in any time or place. He has confronted these realities particularly through his Count project, begun in 1999, that aimed to count all the victims of violence in the twentieth century. Choosing the broader focus of injustices in the world can perhaps help to put terrible events of the past behind us. As Jacques Derrida wrote of the twentieth century: ‘No degree of progress allows one to ignore that never before in absolute figures have so many men, women, and children been subjugated, starved or exterminated on earth’.  

Christanto grew up in his small village where his mother ran a batik shop. He remembers that he and his siblings were asleep when his father was taken away and has described how for months after his father’s arrest his

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61 Turner and Webb, Art and Human Rights, 49–57. Christanto is not certain his father was a member of the Communist Party, which was legal under Sukarno and one of the largest in the world. He may have allowed them to use his premises. Ariel Heryanto states that Indonesians of Chinese descent were not the specific targets in the killings although many were killed. Ariel Heryanto, State Terrorism and Political Identity in Indonesia: Fatally Belonging (London: Routledge, 2006), 9, doi.org/10.4324/9780203099827.

mother took food to the local prison hoping he was there. Perhaps one of the most traumatic aspects of their situation, shared with many other victims, was that the events could never be spoken of during the New Order and also perhaps the knowledge that some of their neighbours could have been involved in the killings.

Christanto was admitted to the Indonesia Institute of Art in Yogyakarta as a student of painting, despite screening processes that could deny entrance to the families of those accused of being associated with the Indonesian Communist Party or having left wing sympathies. After graduation he connected with the Bengkel Theatre founded by iconic poet and playwright W. S. Rendra and also with a Catholic education foundation for social justice, working with the Swiss Jesuit, human rights activist and follower of liberation theology, Fr Ruedi Hoffman.

Since then he has been involved in making art that, while relating to Indonesia, reaches out to audiences in many countries with a universal message related to human suffering and human rights with the aim of illuminating a sense of shared humanity. In 1987, Christanto took part in a revival of the GSRB in the exhibition Fantasy World Supermarket, exhibiting a work about a becak driver who committed suicide when he lost his livelihood. Another early work was Golf (1991), purchased by the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum. The subject was the appropriation of agricultural land for golf courses for the pleasure of the wealthy. It depicted a man hitting a golf ball that turns into a wayang demon. Another highly emotionally charged work was Bureaucracy (1991) in which a row of heads arranged like a stand of puppets each licks the back of the head in front. The foremost head wears a soldier’s helmet. In 1993, Christanto’s installation, For Those: Who Are Poor, Who Are Suffer(Ing), Who Are Oppressed, Who Are Voiceless, Who Are Powerless, Who Are Burdened, Who Are Victims of Violence, Who Are Victims of a Dupe, Who Are Victims of Injustice was selected for APT1 in Brisbane, Australia. Under the repressive Indonesian censorship laws at that time, it was not

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63 Interviews with the artist, 2015.
64 All records were suppressed until 1998. For a discussion of how 1965–66 affected Indonesian society beyond direct victims, see Wulan Dirgantoro, Chapter 9 (this volume); Dirgantoro, Aesthetics of Silence: Exploring Trauma and Indonesian Paintings after 1965, in Whiteman et al., Ambitious Alignments, 199–224.
possible for the artist to even suggest that the work was about Indonesia. Like many of his works, it was made of natural materials and the artist had laboured for more than a year to create it, his hands bleeding, he has said, ‘like my heart’. The 36 hanging pieces sculpted from bamboo gave the appearance of a forest, an allusive metaphor that the artist used to suggest that trees are silent witnesses to violence. The central sculptural element was in the shape of a human body on thin wooden stakes, representing the arrows that held up the body of Bhishma in the Mahabharata. In his mesmerising and emotional performance, which left many viewers in tears, the artist’s body was covered with clay—possibly a reference to buried victims. In many of his performances Christanto’s movements relate to time-honoured ways of honouring the dead, including acts of bowing, washing, strewing flowers or burning (Figure 7.5).

The artwork, the artist stated in his artist talk, was a memorial to suffering ‘in every time and place’. But it was also, he revealed nearly a decade later, a response to both the 1965–66 killings and the Dili cemetery massacre in 1991 when the Indonesian military fired on unarmed demonstrators in East Timor, which Indonesia had invaded and occupied in 1975. A student friend of Christanto’s was one of those killed. The audience responded to the work as a space of mourning. By the end of the exhibition, there were numerous flowers and notes left by visitors in front of the artwork. Most were not about Indonesia but, as the artist had suggested, commemorated suffering in world contexts with personal stories of grief and loss. Many mentioned the then current war and atrocities in the former Yugoslavia. Many others referred to a young Aboriginal dancer, Daniel Yok, who had died in Brisbane after an encounter with the police a few blocks from the gallery shortly before the exhibition opened. The audience thus made the artwork also a memorial to his death.

66 Discussion with the artist in 1992 when I selected the work for the exhibition. This interest in traditional materials can also be seen in the Philippines in the art of Santiago Bose and Roberto Villanueva.
67 Interviews with the artist, 2002–20.
68 Some messages related to black deaths in custody in Australia, the subject of a Royal Commission in 1991.
Figure 7.5: Dadang Christanto (b. 1957), Indonesia, *For Those Who Have Been Killed*, 1992–93.

Some viewers seeing his installation of a pyramid of ceramic skulls at the Traditions/Tensions exhibition in New York in 1996 identified it with the Cambodian genocide of 1975–79. One visitor to Christanto’s exhibition in Japan, They Give Evidence, left a message that appeared to apologise for Japan’s occupation of Java in the Pacific War; others in Hiroshima related the figures to the victims of the atomic bomb dropped on that city in 1945. Australian viewers of his work Heads from the North, in which bronze heads (portraits of his parents) float in a pool of water, have associated the work, not with Indonesia, but with refugees drowning while trying to reach Australia or Europe.

Christanto’s monumental 1996 installation 1001 Earth Humans/1001 Manusia Tanah, comprised 1,000 life-size figures placed in the sea at Ancol, outside Jakarta (with the artist the 1,001st). It was an unspoken testimony to the dispossession of villagers in the construction of the Kedung Ombo Dam in the mid-1980s (see Chapter 1 regarding this issue and for the image) and all the ordinary people condemned as collateral damage of economic development. Another major work, shown in Japan and Australia, was They Give Evidence/Mereka Memberi Kesaksian, an assemblage of larger-than-life naked sculptures, male and female, their extended forearms bearing bundles of clothes, as if witnessing on behalf of victims. He created Fire in May/Api di Bulan Mei (1998) at APT3 in 1999. He and his family were now living in Australia. He declared it was ‘a tribute … to the people, mainly Chinese, who died when mobs torched businesses and homes in the Indonesian riots’. But it was also a tribute to all who had died by violence and he referred specifically to the events in East Timor and to his Count project. 69

His art after the fall of the New Order has continued to be directed to the victims of 1965–66, as Dirgantoro discusses in Chapter 9 in this volume, and to victims throughout the world, including victims of war, terrorism and disasters such as the devastating tsunami of 2004 and the overwhelming flows of mud in East Java in 2006, a tragedy most probably caused by unregulated drilling for gas. 70 He has also reflected on themes such as the loss of traditional knowledge, collective memory and history in Indonesian culture such as in the painting Pahang (Figure 7.6). 71

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69 Forty-seven papier mâché figures were set alight. A struggle for independence from Indonesia was in process in East Timor at the time.
70 Interview with the artist. His art since Reformasi has also referenced those gaoled and detained under the New Order, such as Indonesian writer Pramoedya Ananta Toer. See Chapter 1 (this volume).
Arahmaiani: Between the Material and the Spiritual

Arahmaiani is unquestionably the best-known artist internationally among Indonesian women artists who emerged in the 1990s. Dirgantoro suggests that, in the 1990s, she was often the only woman representing Indonesia abroad. Arahmaiani is also considered a pioneer of contemporary performance art. She was born in 1961 and comes from an intellectual Muslim family. Her father was a noted Islamic scholar and

72 She prefers to be known only as Arahmaiani.
her mother introduced her to Javanese Hindu-Buddhist cultural legacies.\(^7^4\) An intellectual and a poet, she has, when asked about influences on her art, named, among others, Indonesian poet, dramatist and activist W. S. Rendra and German artist Joseph Beuys, both of whom combined art with activism.\(^7^5\)

Arahmaiani’s art addresses broad issues of humanity and crosses borders between philosophy, literature, poetry and social and ecological activism, linking the spiritual and material in sophisticated dialogue. She has explored in her art not only her Muslim faith but also Java’s Hindu-Buddhist heritage and more ancient forms of Javanese spirituality, including animism.

In her groundbreaking study of Indonesian feminisms, Dirgantoro discusses her art under the two main themes of religion and gender, but notes that Arahmaiani herself does not like the application of the Western term ‘feminist’ to her art.\(^7^6\) Dirgantoro tells us that when Arahmaiani was growing up she was inspired by spending time in the extensive library of renowned Indonesian female poet, philosopher and advocate for women Toeti Heraty.\(^7^7\) Kent stresses her work with communities as a key feature of her art.\(^7^8\) Dirgantoro (Chapter 9, this volume) applies the term ‘cosmopolitan’ to her art.

Arahmaiani has commented in interviews that she has learned much from the different circumstances of her life and the many cross-cultural situations she has experienced. When I first met her in 1996 she described

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\(^7^5\) Her work, *I Love You (After Joseph Beuys Social Sculpture)* (2009), alludes to Beuys whose concept of art and healing may have also been influential. See also Edwin Jurriëns, ‘Gendering the Environmental Artivism: *Ekofeminisme* and *Unjuk Rasa* of Arahmaiani’s Art’, *Southeast of Now* 4, no. 2 (October 2020): 3–38, 16, doi.org/10.1353/sen.2020.0006, who notes that in the 1980s she ‘continued her informal education in theatre and performance art’ with Teater Bengkel founded by Rendra. Arahmaiani graduated from the Bandung Institute of Technology in 1983, studied at the Paddington Art School, Sydney, in the 1980s, and at the Akademie voor Beeldende Kunst en Vormgeving, Enschede, the Netherlands, in the early 1990s.

\(^7^6\) Dirgantoro, *Feminisms and Contemporary Art in Indonesia*, 187. Dirgantoro discusses the link between feminism and performance and the way GSRB artists used the body as a site for resistance (171).

\(^7^7\) Dirgantoro, *Feminisms and Contemporary Art in Indonesia*, 178.

\(^7^8\) Kent, ‘Entanglement’, Chapter 4.
her lifestyle as that of a ‘nomad’. She has alluded to the fact that she was arrested while a student in 1983 for participation in street performances that, at the time, were deemed political activism. Extremely important to her art are environmental\textsuperscript{79} and art projects involving cross-cultural communication with communities relating to diversity and inclusion. She believes passionately that art has a role in society and in humanity’s responses to crises, and suggests that the future direction for art should be a space in which cultural and spiritual values can serve the development of society.\textsuperscript{80}

Arahmaiani has spoken out on many issues. Among these has been her criticism of dogmatic religious views and she has fearlessly denounced both militarism and patriarchy. For example, in 1999 she spoke in the Philippines about her role as a Muslim woman artist in Indonesia:

\begin{quote}
I realize it [is] a difficult way that I have chosen. The repressive government is operating on the basis of militarism in combination with Javanese Muslim feudalism and [a] patriarchal system, which I believe, breed a culture of violence—physically and psychologically. The system never gave enough room for women to express themselves freely apart from being a good mother, a good wife, a good daughter or sister, though she might also be a career woman at the same time.\textsuperscript{81}
\end{quote}

In her \textit{Manifesto of a Sceptic}, a performance from the 2000s, Arahmaiani set out her idea of the role of art. Some key points from the statement she made during the various performances include:

\begin{quote}
Art belongs to everyone and cannot be dictated to by interest of the market, politics or religion.

It is a liberating force and should encourage a new awareness of humanity and a new social consciousness.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{79} See Jurriëns, ‘Gendering the Environmental Artivism’, which deals in depth with this aspect of her art.


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She also stressed that art should be a ‘meeting point between material and spiritual, masculine and feminine’, a ‘vessel combining sacred and profane in one space’ and a ‘tool to examine and access reality’. Most interestingly, she considers art to be ‘a combination of courage, rebellion, rational and moral intelligence and conscience’ and a force offering ‘alternative values, changing values and even turning values upside down’.  

She has never been afraid to confront difficult issues. The Jakarta Post in 2017 described the controversy that had occurred when her painting Lingga-Yoni (1993) was shown in Jakarta in 1994 and the reaction of conservative Muslims, noting that the painting:

aroused their ire because it featured the Hindu image of male and female genitalia, Malay-Arabic letters saying: ‘Nature is a book’ and a copy of an inscription from the first Hindu kingdom in Java.

The painting has an interesting history. It was shown in Traditions/Tensions in New York in 1996, sold to a friend in Thailand, and finally purchased by the privately owned Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Nusantara (MACAN) in Jakarta in 2017. A second version was shown in New York and purchased by the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art at Cornell University.

There were also protests about her installation Etalase in the same Jakarta exhibition in 1994, because the holy Quran, a statue of Buddha, a pack of condoms, a Coca-Cola bottle, a mirror, a box of sand, a fan, a musical instrument and a photo were assembled together in a display case. It was withdrawn from display in Jakarta because of threats to the artist due to her choice of items for display and her use of the holy Quran. Etalase was shown again in Traditions/Tensions in 1996 and later in the exhibition Global Feminisms at the Brooklyn Museum of Art curated by Maura Reilly and Linda Nochlin in 2007. The museum’s description reads:

82 See, for example, Manifesto of a Sceptic (2009). There were several versions of this performance with some variations on the wording to be seen on YouTube.
84 Ibid.
‘Her installation, *Etalase*, brings together disparate symbols of Islam, Western culture, and sexuality’[^85] but this underestimates, I suggest, the rich complexity of the symbols in the work.

I will concentrate here on her work *Nation for Sale* (Figure 7.8) and associated performance *Handle without Care* at APT2 in 1996 (Figure 7.7) as encompassing the themes set out earlier in this chapter. Both artworks were highly effective in communicating her belief that a selfish way of living and a profit-driven exploitative capitalist system needs to be changed.

![Figure 7.7: Arahmaiani (b. 1961), Indonesia, *Handle without Care*, 1996.](image)

Performance by the artist with audio and video component for the Second Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, 27 and 28 September 1996. Video available online QAGOMA. Image courtesy the artist.

Figure 7.8: Arahmaiani, *Nation for Sale*, 1996.


*Nation for Sale* was about Western cultural imperialism as well as economic and gender exploitation. It featured, among other items, a Coca-Cola bottle, condoms, as well as plastic American toy soldiers wielding machine guns. M. D. Marianto states that it referenced ordinary people in Indonesia being seduced through popular culture while their sources of livelihood and culture were destroyed by neo-colonialism. He called *Nation for Sale* a metaphor for Indonesia at the time where people had been displaced from their lands for factories, women had become commodities and ‘the holders of the social and economic reins’ profit so that the nation is, in effect, sold. In her accompanying defining performance, *Handle without Care*, Arahmaiani wore a Balinese dancer’s costume and Western sunglasses and moved gracefully through the installation carrying, among other objects, a toy machine gun. It was impossible, having witnessed the performance in 1996, for Australians not to associate the Balinese costume with Australian and other Western tourists’ exploitation of the

tourist island of Bali. Arahmaiani’s focus was on the vulnerabilities of contemporary women in Indonesia in a globalised world. It is interesting to compare this work with Nindityo Adipurnomo’s equally elegant installation in the same exhibition, *Introversion (April the Twenty-First)* (1995–96), that commented on hierarchies in Javanese society through the symbolism of the *konde*, the formal hair arrangement worn by upper-class Javanese women, combined with images of Kartini, the nineteenth-century Indonesian female aristocrat who advocated education for women (see Figure 6.5).

The challenges for Indonesia in a globalising world that Arahmaiani explored in this early work have, in recent years, taken on a much broader global compass and complexity. Her community work in Indonesia after events such as a devastating earthquake in Yogyakarta in 2006 have translated into international settings and new dimensions of the ‘cosmopolitan’. Arahmaiani has taken her art most recently to the Tibetan plateau, a region widely known as the ‘third pole’ because of the significance of its water supplies to feed critical Asian river systems (Figure 7.9). The five-year project involves Buddhist monks and the Tibetan community planting trees and clearing rubbish and the community returning to growing their own food rather than importing it. It relates to numerous issues affecting the environment, including climate change. This might be termed not only environmental activism but also ‘world-making’ in the face of potential global catastrophe. It is dependent on both intensive cross-cultural negotiations and world-making on a transnational and transcultural scale. Arahmaiani’s work in these projects mirrors art historian Marsha Meskimmon’s suggestion of the ‘cosmopolitan imagination’ as ‘future-oriented and generative’ and of the affective capacity of contemporary art in allowing empathetic intersubjective connections between people across cultural and linguistic borders, ‘transforming our relationship with/in the world.’

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87 Arahmaiani was not the only Indonesian artist to comment on multinational exploitation. Dede Edi Supria’s painting *Labyrinth* (1987–88) shows a labyrinth of boxes with the names of multinational companies and the bodies of two Indonesian boys lying dead or injured (see Figure 6.4, this volume).


Arahmaiani, a Muslim, has spoken often about her fascination with and research into spiritual and religious traditions including:

the past cultures of Animism, Hinduism, and Buddhism in Indonesia, which left behind many temples—even the largest Buddhist temple in the world, Borobudur … Furthermore, there is the relationship in ancient times between Tibetan Buddhism and local Buddhism in what is now Indonesia (which in the past was of the Mahayana/Tantrayana sect). A monk known by the name Lama Atisha, who became a reformer of the Buddhist religion in Tibet and who founded Kadampa school, once studied for twelve years in the Buddhist university in Sriwijaya (the ancient kingdom in Indonesia), where he received the guidance of a local master by the name of Dharmakirti, who in Tibet is known as Lama Serlingpa.


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Figure 7.9: Arahmaiani, Shadow of the Past, Tibet, 2018.

Still from video of performance. Image courtesy the artist. This performance can be seen as a meditation on the spiritual traditions of humanity referring particularly to historical links between Buddhism in Java and Tibet as well as to the artist’s philosophical collaborations with academics at Passau University, Germany, and with spiritual leaders of many faiths, including Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity and Islam. Thus, she has said, her new works may be related to ‘a contemplation on the present condition of life’, including challenges of ecological destruction and the suffering of the poor and marginalised. 

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90 Arahmaiani, a Muslim, has spoken often about her fascination with and research into spiritual and religious traditions including:
Conclusion: Redefining the Contemporary in Art

The artists discussed in this chapter were part of a post-independence generation of artists in Indonesia who engaged closely with the concept of who Indonesians are and what their nation and society might become in the future as well as with issues of relevance and importance for humanity as a whole. They exemplify art and artists providing new models for cultural, social and political understanding in both local and international contexts referred to in the question posed at the beginning of this chapter and also Preziosi’s proposition cited earlier that art is one of the most powerful social instruments ‘for the creation and maintenance of the world in which we live’. All have reflected Terry Smith’s emphasis on the urgency and, one might add, the contingency of contemporary art practice. All have engaged in world-making. They and other artists from the former ‘periphery’ not only joined the new global art world in formation in the 1990s but also contributed to reshaping its discourses and redefining contemporary art for a new century in transcultural contexts.

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