

# Contemporary Aesthetics (Journal Archive)

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Volume 0 *Special Volume 3 (2011)*  
*AESTHETICS AND THE ARTS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA*

Article 7

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2011

## Playing With Shadows

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### Recommended Citation

Poshyananda, Apinan (2011) "Playing With Shadows," *Contemporary Aesthetics (Journal Archive)*: Vol. 0 , Article 7.

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## Playing With Shadows

Apinan Poshyananda

### Abstract

This essay reflects on the practice of the Indonesian artist Heri Dono, whose exhibition in Tokyo in 2000 is the anchor. It probes the cultural contexts in which the contemporary art of Dono plays out, identifying key trajectories that help clarify the concerns of this particular articulation: the locale of Yogyakarta, the mentality of the Javanese, and the device of the puppet presentation or the wayang, which derives from the ancient epics.<sup>[1]</sup> All this is located within the scheme of an exhibition of contemporary art and rendered in such a way that it conveys a certain aesthetic of hybridity and bricolage.

### Key Words

contemporary art, fantasy, Indonesia, modernity, social reality, Southeast Asia, theater, tradition, wayang

### 1. Introduction

Semar is a symbol of the guardian spirit of all Javanese and perhaps the most important figure in the shadow puppet play (*wayang kulit*). Semar, Petruk, and Gareng are the three great low clowns who are constant companions of the Pendawas (Skt: Pandava), the five famous hero brothers adapted from the Indian epic *Mahabharata* and placed in a Javanese setting. Semar is actually a god and the brother of Siva, king of all gods. Many opposing traits meet in the character of Semar, who is both god and clown, inwardly refined but clumsy and Falstaffian in appearance. Semar has been compared to Sir John Falstaff, the gross and funny character in William Shakespeare's *Merry Wives of Windsor* and *Henry IV*.<sup>[2]</sup> Both figures remind us that no completely adequate and comprehensive understanding of the world is possible because of the irrationality of human life. In a *wayang* story, Siva makes an attempt to bring peace between the Pendawas and the Korawas (Skt: Kuru) but is opposed by Semar. Arjuna, one of the five Pendawa hero brothers, is instructed by Siva to kill Semar, whom he loves. When Semar finds out, Arjuna is ashamed but persists in the task assigned to him in order to end the eternal struggle between the Pendawas and the Korawas. Realizing Arjuna's commitment, Semar burns himself, but instead of dying is transformed into his godly form and defeats his brother, Siva. Consequently, the war between the two sides of human begins again.

The *wayang kulit* is not simply a form of entertainment of flat, painted leather cutouts, or shadow puppets, casting large shadows on a white screen. These celebrated shadow puppets of Java have their origins in the ancient belief that shadows are the manifestations of ancestral spirits. Their rich cultural and literary heritage, together with the different forms of music, dance, and drama used in *wayang* have created bonds of mutual appreciation among Hindus, Muslims, and Buddhists for centuries. As a deeply rooted and highly sophisticated art

form, the *wayang* expresses the Javanese etiquette, which is focused on the depths of the self as pure *rasa*. *Rasa* is the inward-looking world view, borrowed from the Indian concept, with emphasis on "feeling" and "meaning."<sup>[3]</sup> It is believed that the enlightened person must keep psychological equilibrium and maintain placid stability. As part of Javanese ethics, it is not important to strive for happiness but to reach the psychological state of inner stillness, to become like a limpid pool of clear water in which one can easily see to the bottom. Not surprisingly, the mystical and ethical ideology of the *wayang* is still widely appreciated among Indonesians.

Stories represent the connection between man and the universe, the micro- and the macro-cosmos, the eternal struggle of nature against time, and the never-ending battles between good and evil.<sup>[4]</sup>

The *wayang* has been seen as a historical and moral code by which comparisons and judgments can be made of the present. The stories in the *wayang*, with their polite speeches and violent wars, have been compared to modern international relations where talks by diplomats prevail and bring peace but fighting erupts when the talks break down. Popular among the Javanese people, the *wayang* has been used as means for indirect and allusive suggestion, which is important in Javanese communication and social intercourse. The adaptation of *wayang* for educating people has rendered traditional values and concepts in a new form. For example, the *wayang pantjasila*, based on the five principles laid down for the foundation of the republic, was devised to educate the masses in the modern concepts of democracy and nationhood. Conversely, different kinds of *wayang* were used as allegorical vehicles to praise or criticize leading figures in the community. In *wayang revolusi*, events of the Indonesian struggle of independence (1945-49) are depicted using Sukarno and his followers as revolutionary heroes with the Dutch invaders presented as evil forces.<sup>[5]</sup>

Social criticism related to contemporary events, political gossip, and local rumors are commonly inserted into a *wayang* performance. As the audience views this sophisticated traditional art form, they are reminded by the puppeteer (*dalang*) of common events like party elections, economic crises, natural disasters, and village gossip. The *dalang* makes an astonishing virtuoso performance as he manipulates the *wayang*, directs the *gamelan* orchestra, and narrates the story.

## **2. Yogya: The Art Mecca of Java**

Yogyakarta (Yogya) is situated at the very core of the ancient region where the first great Javanese Mataram empires flourished. The area contains a formidable legacy of Indonesian cultural heritage. It embraces several stunning Buddhist monuments and Hindu temples from the eighth to tenth centuries, such as Borobudur and Prambanan. Despite its rapid transformation, Yogyakarta's attractions are the ancient sites, the royal palace complex (*kraton*), the court dances, and the *wayang* and batik workshops. Visitors appreciate both the serenity and austerity of the royal courtyards (*pendopo*) trapped in a timeless era. At the *sasana inggil* performance pavilion, the full eight-hour presentation of

*wayang kulit* can still be experienced. Yet Yogyakarta, with its sprawling village-like neighborhoods, is not just about the ancient past. Tourism has increased the exploitation of traditional and indigenous Javanese culture but has also boosted the income and livelihood of the Yogyakartans. On Jalan Malioboro (Garland-Bering Street), the bustling avenue is lined by houses with Dutch-décor facades advertising products like Lucky Strike and Marlboro. Shops and vendors sell batik, woven goods, bronzes, tee-shirts, and wooden *wayang* masks. On the busy pavements, one can find all kinds of goods, ranging from fake Rolexes and cheap cell phones to dried crocodile penises used as aphrodisiacs and medicinal herbs to cure migraines.

In Yogyakarta, the forces of modernization and globalization are noticeably not as intense as in Jakarta or Bali. Strong links with the traditions of pre-modern times are still evident, as sultanate and Islamic ceremonies mingle. As the center of the nationalist movement in the late 1940s, Yogyakarta has remained a symbolic and traditional place of activism and independence.<sup>[6]</sup> When President Sukarno came to power, several important artists, including Soedjojono, Affandi, and Hendra Gunawan, became active as members of the Young Painters of Indonesia (Seniman Indonesia Muda) in Yogyakarta. They believed that an art-for-the-people approach could serve Sukarno's philosophy of combining the elements of nationalism, communism, and Islam. For example, Hendra Gunawan became a member of LEKRA (Institute of People's Culture), a leftist organization affiliated with the Communist Party.<sup>[7]</sup> The ASRI (Academi Seni Rupa Indonesia) art academy founded in 1950 (later known as the Indonesia Institute of the Arts in Yogyakarta) resulted in artist oppression and socioeconomic inequality. After Sukarno's fall from power in 1965, socially active artists were suppressed, imprisoned, or changed their style. Instead of themes of everyday life, artists preferred depicting traditional subjects inspired by temple and epic scenes.

It was during the 1970s that the Indonesian New Art Movement (Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru), formed by artists from Yogyakarta, Jakarta, and Bandung, called for an art that reflected the entire spectrum of society. Many happenings and performances in Yogyakarta aimed political satire and cynical commentary at the government. Authorities began to suspect many artists of involvement in leftist groups and feared a revival of "Sukarnoism." Artists such as Semsar, Siahaan, Hardi, and Munni Ardi overtly expressed themselves against President Suharto and his policies.<sup>[8]</sup> Known as an inspiring place for art, Yogyakarta has long been a residence for renowned artists including Affandi (deceased), Djoko Pekik, Dadang Christanto (recently moved to Darwin), Lucia Hartini, Ivan Sagito, and Nindityo Adipurnomo. During 1997-1998, Yogyakarta was among the explosive places where political rallies and student demonstration against Suharto took place. Art students burned effigies of Suharto, while banners and posters of the late Sukarno appeared on the Jalan Malioboro.

### **3. Into Heri Dono's "Savage" Mind and "Ha-Ha" Logic**

I have encountered works by Heri Dono from Jakarta, Bangkok, Tokyo, Fukuoka, Brisbane, Kwangju, and Taipei to

Vancouver, New York, Bordeaux, and Vienna. Dono's works never fail to stimulate, arouse, and provoke the viewers to share his vision of a world full of humor and irony. Yet it is in his tiny studio tucked away among the rows of houses on Ronodigdayan Street behind the cinema and former military barracks in Yogyakarta that one can fully appreciate Dono's complex and exhilarating imagination.<sup>[9]</sup> The cramped, dimly lit rooms are in disarray, with objects strewn all over the place. Cartoon-like paintings depict gods and animals in garish colors; mannequins are scattered, with arms missing, breasts exposed, and penises erect; fiberglass heads with bulging glass eyes wear helmets and gas masks; old television sets lie broken on the floor; newspaper clips of Sukarno and Megawati Sukarnoputri are stuck on the walls; flying angels with electronic circuit hearts hover from the ceiling; a toy monkey rides a vehicle on the ladder with his head turned upside down. The atmosphere inside Dono's home vacillates between junk shop, second-hand toy store, and mechanical inventor's laboratory.

Eccentricity and the bizarre seem to be synonymous with Dono's character. Hilarity and absurdity also come to mind. Conversation with Dono is full of word play, mimicry, parody, and double entendre. These elements appear everywhere in his works. For Dono, laughter is not the means to deflect social embarrassment but a healing agent. Not surprisingly, numerous images of laughter can be experienced through his works. He wrote that laughter "includes ugliness around within us, the absurdity of ourselves and others, and the beasts with which we populate our internal and external worlds."<sup>[10]</sup>

Dono seems to communicate freely with his objects as if they have spirits and can talk back to him. They become his friends, cousins, and compatriots. By entering Dono's personal world, common sense perspectives break down. Instead, logical fallacies, obsessive playfulness, a pluralism of styles and eclectic mixture of related and unrelated concepts are freely explored.

Dono's interest in mythical thought can be seen as an intellectual form of *bricolage*. Claude Levi-Strauss introduced the notion of *bricolage* in his work, *The Savage Mind* (1962), indicating that it has the quality of improvisation and a level of contingency. A *bricoleur* utilizes residual elements the same way as myths operate.

Through *bricolage* new signs are created, but these signs do not relate exclusively to themselves. The term *bricolage* can be traced back to the French word *bricole* (meaning "putting things together in a manner of improvisation") and the Italian word *bricolla* (meaning "one who breaks").<sup>[11]</sup> Therefore, it is essential to appreciate that the milieu of the *bricoleur's* choice of his *bricolage* can imply the creation of new signs and the breaking open of already existing signs. If Dono is seen as a *bricoleur*, then his creativity and subversion of Indonesian traditions must simultaneously be appreciated.

Heri Dono's work implies a number of kinds of interpretation, hence, it would be a mistake to view Dono and his art only as modes of expression and reflections of savage and primitive thought. Caution should be taken not to project Dono's work simplistically as functional, ceremonial, and ritualistic in a

primitive/exotic setting. Having the influence of *wayang*, Batak folk tales, and the cultures of Sumatra and *Irian Jaya* does not mean that Dono's work simply falls in the category of primitive and tribal art. Assuming that his work is raw, untamed, and threatening, and therefore should be designated to art inspired by the savage mind, would be a misconception.

In a context of primitivism, Dono's art may allude to tribal objects, but it is not "primitivist." His interest in the subaltern, the homeless, and underprivileged children allows his work to be enriching and reciprocal with the public. Conversely, some of Dono's paintings reveal affinities with works by European masters such as Pablo Picasso, Joan Miro, and Paul Klee.<sup>[12]</sup>

Dono freely appropriates and mixes his appropriations with indigenous and local contents. This does not mean that these inspirations need be compartmentalized into direct influences, coincidental resemblance, and basic shared characteristics.<sup>[13]</sup> The method used by Western scholars like Kirk Varnedoe of juxtaposing images to determine affinities between modern art and primitivism, such as Paul Gauguin's *We Hail Thee Mary* (1891) and reliefs at Borobudur that depict the meeting of an Ajivaka monk, can be limiting.<sup>[14]</sup> In the case of European masters, the affinities of their work to tribal and primitive art from Papua New Guinea, Tahiti, the Congo, Zaire, and Irian Jaya are highly praised. The fact that these scholars perceive the idea that the primitive "looks like" the modern is ironic. In the case of contemporary artists from non-Western civilizations like Dono, frequently the preconception by critics and art historians of the direct influence of and derivation from modern Western masters tends to override the fact that these artists are free to choose and select from countless sources.<sup>[15]</sup>

Dono's curious hybrids fall in the zone of intersection, mediation, and cross-pollination between cultures. His *Spraying Mosquitoes and Smoking* (1985) appears to be inspired by Miro, with its strange comical monsters, spiky claws, and twisted bodies. Primitivism of the subconscious in Miro's paintings has been linked to the cult of the child, free drawing, sign language, and graffiti. In discussing Picasso's work, Dono said that he particularly admires *Guenica* (1937). Dono could have mixed and combined all these elements in addition to his interest in *wayang* and Batak's tribal woodcarvings of mystical patterns and mythical creatures. The open, gnawing mouths and snapping fangs in numerous works, such as *The Suppressor* (1989, cat. no.1) and *Where is My Head?* (1994, cat. no.2)

<http://www.mutualart.com/Artwork/Where-is-My-Head/5DA5A9F909C75380>, indicate something sinister and frightening. Aside from his biting satire about society's hypocrisy and absurdity, some might connect signs of violence and death to animism and cannibalism of the Bataks. Myths and stories like the three megalithic complexes in Ambarita, Sumatra, including a cannibal's breakfast table for which prisoner's decapitated heads were chopped up, cooked with buffalo meat, and drunk with blood by rajas, are sources that are far removed from the "primitive" works of Picasso, Miro, and Klee.<sup>[16]</sup> Dono's syncretism of indigenous contents may result in making his works appear sinister, but their humor and hilarity evoke drama and tragic comedy on stage.

Benedict Anderson observed that in Indonesia political communication through direct speech by means of discussion, rumors, gossip, and arguments is essential.<sup>[17]</sup> Its fluid and ephemeral nature contrasts against the symbolic speech expressed through cartoons, films, and advertisements. For example, Anderson discusses political cartoons by Sibarani, whose sharply humorous and eerie characters hark back to his Batak ancestors, with their reputation for being sinister and frightening (*serem*). The powerful and rough-hewn style of Sibarani's cartoons is accessible to the mass public. Iconographic density and caricatures of former vice-president Mohammad Hatta and the Masyumi leader Mohammad Natsir can be deciphered by Indonesian readers. Although Dono is not directly inspired by Sibarani's work, he recognizes the potential of cartoons and comic art as methods that can be employed to penetrate the opacity of sociopolitical order. In his statement, "Life is Cartoon," Dono expressed the view that rationality and logic are very limited, and the need to listen to nonsense has gained much interest.<sup>[18]</sup> Through irony and humor, critical messages are implied under a layering of symbolic elements. Critiques of political figures and sensitive issues are disguised behind shadows and masks. As in *wayang* stories, the world of cartoons, through its distortion and elaboration, can demonstrate the "really real" in Indonesian society.

By looking for contact and direct relationship with the viewer through laughter, humor, and indigenous references, Dono avoids traces of modernity, which relegates certain kinds of creativity to minor arts and curiosities. In this context, Dono attempts to overlap art and anthropology, which are seen as reciprocal but not always in equilibrium. Here, Dono shares concepts of intermixtures of art, rituals, rites of passage, and spiritualism as a "language" of communication. It is worthwhile to draw similar ideas found in recent art projects that strongly link with anthropology. With an awareness of the major pitfalls in discussing non-Western cultures and arts, Jean-Hubert Martin reminds us, in the exhibition *Sharing of Exoticisms (Partage d'Exotismes)* at the 5th Biennale of Contemporary Art of Lyon (2000), that old hierarchies and the prejudices of "other's people's art" tend to die hard.<sup>[19]</sup> As Martin wrote, "For a long time, it was accepted that artists, through their works, give an account of these marginal, popular, or exotic aesthetics. Today, when all the necessary means exist for acceding directly to the authors of these registers, one cannot continue to accept the idea of translations, appropriations, and borrowings based on them without also giving a hearing to the original representatives of these territories. From then on, one can talk about a 'sharing of exoticism' in the free circulation of signs, avoiding exploitation." Indirectly, Martini's warning against schematic binaries can be applied to how Dono's work is perceived. "On the one side," wrote Martini, "there is the West and its cultures which, while highly diverse, also represent, when it comes down to it, certain unity; and then there are the others, which are lumped together in what we regularly condense into a single entity. But these others are, in fact, innumerable in their diversity, and can never be reduced to generalities."<sup>[20]</sup>

#### **4. *Dalang* Dono's Scary Monsters and Super Freaks**

Dono was born and brought up among the six siblings in Jakarta, where his father served in the military. Since he was a child, he wanted to be an artist. After spending seven years at the Indonesia Institute of the Arts in Yogyakarta, Dono dropped out because he felt writing an art thesis was not part of becoming an artist. Frustrated with the academic system, Dono became aware of the possibilities of the *wayang kulit hen*, in 1987, he met the local puppet maker Sigit Sukasman. Sukasman founded the *Wayang Ukur* Group, which used traditional forms and stage effects to tell stories about heroism, devotion, and honor, alongside those of human rights and the distribution of power.<sup>[21]</sup> Dono realized *wayang's* potential as the key paradigm for communication with the masses through rich narratives. Fascinated by the exaggerations of facial expressions and the forward-stretched necks, large eyes, and gaping mouths of Sukasman's shadow puppets, Dono began to experiment in multiple disciplines, including painting, sculpture, music, dance, literature, and performance. Furthermore, he was willing to explore the possibilities of the *wayang* by making comparisons with Picasso's concepts of distortion and abstraction, and by introducing folktales in place of the classical *wayang* repertoire.

Dono fused various disciplines without questioning the problem of high art and low art. Realizing the potential flexibility in many art fields, Dono easily crossed over boundaries that often restrain creativity and expression. In most of his work, there are traces of puppetry and masquerade containing both comedy and tragedy. By inventing his own style of *wayang* performance, Dono allowed traditional Indonesian epic stories to co-exist with folklore and legends from the provinces in Indonesia. By believing that *wayang* belongs to the people, he felt that folktales, oral history, rumor, and gossip are parts of mass entertainment. Dono wrote, "Life is a fragment of the drama for human beings, such as puppets. It may be the strength of the system and the untouchable institutions creating the human beings to become puppetry on this Earth."<sup>[22]</sup>

*Wayang Legenda* (1988-1992)

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/bernardoh/5729434728/> is an important work inspired by Batakese folktale and legend. Dono performed as *dalang* as he orchestrated and produced the *wayang* performance. He created grotesque, freakish, and comical shadow-puppet characters related to the Batakese story of marriage between different castes and clans.<sup>[23]</sup> He felt that stories and tales from provincial places were as rich and imaginative as those from traditional Indonesian epics, which he did not altogether exclude. In *The Drunkenness of Semar* (1995), Dono reinterpreted the deity in the *Mhabharata* epic, transforming Semar into *Supersemar* (a parody of Superman and a local sweet-cake called *semar mendem*). The tipsy and jovial god-clown in a state of drunken stupor is symbolic of rulers and politicians whose sweet talk, oozing with charm and insincerity, often reflects their greed. Supersemar's wisdom/stupidity was intended as a critique of authority's abuse of power. Dono's double meaning of Supersemar is found in its acronym for the Decree of 11 March 1966, in which Sukarno signed a document bestowing wide powers on General Suharto (*Su, surat* = letter; *Per, perintah* =



order, affirmation; *Se, selebas* = eleven; Mar, Maret = March).<sup>[24]</sup> In Phartysemar (1998), Dono referred to Semar's power in the exhibition of sound art by selling jars of Semar's farts as weapons to fight evil forces. By taking the comical character of Semar a step further, Dono made the god's farts part of art.

There are affinities between Dono's play of surreal and macabre shadows with works by European artists such as Christian Boltanski's *Theatre d'Ombres (Theatre of Shadows)* (1984) and Annette Messager's *Eux et Nous, Nous et Eux (Them and Us, Us and Them)* (2000) in their exaggerations of monstrous forms projected on the surrounding walls. Yet it is clear that Dono's references to Indonesian symbolism require contextual explanation, just as installations by Boltanski (sixteenth-century ivory carvings of death and the armor of Albert of Brandenburg, Duke of Prussia ca. 1526) and Messager (Palace of the Popes, Avignon) require comprehension of referential works and site specificity, respectively.<sup>[25]</sup>

In *Watching the Marginal People 2000* (2000, cat. no.4), ten terrifying monstrous masks/faces with vicious teeth and bulging eyes move noisily from side to side. Through Javanese animism, Dono infused the belief that all things in the world have a soul. In this case, the monster's shifting eyes, which are electronically operated, are metaphors of dark spirits, manipulation, and alienation resulting from rapid social transformation and globalization. Like Burisrawa, the greedy giant *wayang* character, these monsters watch and wait with hunger. Their victims are the underclass and the underprivileged from peripheral places. In *Kuda Binal (Wild Horse)* (1992), volunteers, including children and gravediggers from Kleben, Yogyakarta, replaced puppets in Dono's performance, which took place near the Sultan's palace complex. Inspired by traditional horse-trance dance (*jaran kepeng*) with a bamboo dummy horse, Dono's version consisted of common people in gas masks and underwear worn outside their trousers performing a fire dance. The scenes contained contemporary events as well as mythology. The theme of the systematic destruction of nature by human greed and arrogance was shown through scenes of fighting battalions for the sake of peace. In the end, the dragon and *Tok tok* (representative of slaughtered creatures) eventually destroyed the entire universe.<sup>[26]</sup>

*Fermentation of Mind* (1994, cat. no.5) is a provocative work that comments on the tendencies of Indonesian authorities to use propaganda and censorship to implement national policies and to control the minds of the masses. Set in the gloomy space of a classroom or interrogating cell, nodding fiberglass heads (Dono's self-portraits) bend rhythmically behind school desks to the repetitive grainy sound emerging from broken speakers. These bald heads with closed eyes are propped up by metal rods and manipulated not by puppet strings but electronic circuits. Like some decapitated heads from war trophies on display, they are both sad and frightening. All things should have a soul, but because of propaganda and mass media these heads are empty of brains and are filled with selective information, dogmatic teaching, and chanting (*mantra*).<sup>[27]</sup>

In contrast, *Ceremony of the Soul* (1995, cat. no.6) consists of nine fiberglass heads (also portraits) on stone torsos, whose frontal posture, similar to sculptures made of stone found near Borobodur sites, suggests links with traditional Buddhist icons. When these stones were carved by grave diggers at the house of Dono's assistant, whose father was a soothsayer (*dukum*), Dono was informed that many spirits gathered there to meet. This led Dono to entitle this work *Ceremony of the Soul*. The robotic and wide-eyed stares of these military-decorated figures also show order, routine, and power. Wooden artificial limbs without hands lit by tiny light bulbs, and a hissing sound from tape recorders placed inside the carved torsos, evoke a combination of supernatural, military, and electronic forces. The hum of shaking yellow fans also adds to the dramatic effect. Yellow has a significant meaning. In this case, it is not symbolic of Buddhism but signifies the color of the Golkar (Golongan Karya) Party. When Dono created this work for the "Unity in Diversity: Contemporary Art of the Non-Aligned Countries" exhibition held in Jakarta in 1995, he risked getting into trouble with the authorities for its political implications. President Suharto and members of the Golkar Party who attended the opening of this international art event must have been informed about Dono's provocative installation. [28]

In *Gamelan of Rumor* (1992-93, cat. no.7), emphasis is placed on sound installation, an integral part of a *wayang* performance. The concepts of *gamelan* as musical instruments providing harmonious balance between different worlds and paleness for invisible guests are explored by Dono, whose orchestra plays magically without musicians. The human and the supernatural are connected by sound created by Dono's ingenious invention of electronically operated musical instruments. His experimental sound is intended to create notes that differ from those of the traditional *gamelan*. His low-tech engineering often breaks down, like the balance between humans and gods, who are sometimes on different wave-lengths. Commenting on high-tech communication systems, Dono wrote, "They often do not make sense, and also there is no meaning. The truth and falsities altogether become rumors and relatives." Dono described *Gamelan of Rumor* thus: "This work is the separation of truth from gossip, or fact from fiction. A discordant rhythm is set up which is like the soul of electricity within the machine." [29] Dono's concern about gossip and rumors is similar to Benedict Anderson's description of direct speech as a mode of political communication playing "low" (*ngoko*) against "high" (*krama*) types of speech. [30] *Ngoko* communication is direct, ephemeral, and hard to decipher, and is therefore appropriate for gossip and hearsay. The sounds that form Dono's *gamelan* are analogous to the political rumors that are part of Indonesian life.

The diversity in Dono's work allows him to criticize the socio-political situation in Indonesia through metaphor and parody. *Flying Angels* (1996, cat. no.8) symbolizes hope and freedom in the Indonesian current political climate. *Wayang* puppet features are combined with found objects and the rural sounds of crickets and other insects. Ironically, these angels with mechanical hearts seem to be floating aimlessly with no destination. *Political Clowns* (1999, cat.no.9) consists of rows

of fiberglass heads (Dono's self-portraits) similar to masked dramas (*wayang topeng*), linked to one another with electric circuits. These wires are connected to glass jars on the floor filled with urine energy. Like politicians, these clown's pale faces and permanent smiles cover the true personalities behind them. From tin speakers, a recorded male voice utters his love for money and desire to own the earth.[\[31\]](#)

Dono's performances also reflect Indonesia's socio-political milieu. In *The Chair* (1993), masked performers pretending to be puppets dance with shadows on both sides of the screen. The puppeteer who orchestrates and pulls the strings finds out that he too is a puppet. In *Double M* (1997), half-naked performers with masks made of crackers and painted faces stun viewers with their fake breasts and erect penises. Through parody and satire, the performers criticize the monopolization of automobile manufacturing by the Suharto family and Habibie's utopian dream of exporting airplanes and building nuclear plants in Java.

*Transmission (Transmisi)* (1999) consisted of an installation, video, and performance that took place at the Tennyson power station in Queensland, Australia. It was at a time of immense anxiety, as foreign relations between Indonesia and Australia became extremely strained. Violence and massacre in East Timor reached an uncontrollable stage, as Australian troops as part of the UN peacekeeping force were about to be sent to the island.[\[32\]](#)

### **5. From *Eating Shit* to *Interrogation***

Although Dono declared that he was not interested in politics, many of his works indicate otherwise. It would be difficult to imagine that in 1995, when confronted by *Ceremony of the Soul*, President Suharto did not see the explicit political implications of the work. In Dono's *Blooming in Arms* (1999), frightening figures with artificial limbs, wearing helmets and khaki uniforms, are clearly related to the military abuse of power in Indonesia. Dono's writings and interviews also indicate clearly that his art stands for the suppressed and the underprivileged.[\[33\]](#) Not surprisingly, some noises of discontent were heard from Indonesian authorities when Dono's works were shown abroad. Dono stressed that if his art is a critique on politics, then it is about ideology, not individuals. Recently, Dono admitted that with state-induced terror and turmoil in Indonesia, it is necessary for his art and message to communicate more directly with the audience.[\[34\]](#) Like many Indonesian artists, including Dadang Christanto, Moelyono, FX Harsono, Tisna Sanjaya, Eddy Hara, and Arahmaiani, Dono feels that it is no longer taboo to state explicit political contents in their oeuvre.[\[35\]](#)

In retrospect, Dono's 1980s paintings already revealed social and political problems through parody and mythology.[\[36\]](#) In the guise of gods, men, and monsters, often in conflict, fighting with weapons and gnawing teeth, the threatening forces of megalomania, greed, and corruption are shown. *Eating Shit* (1983, cat.no.10) is one of Dono's student works, and it evinces early signs of the discontent with authority and the restriction of freedom of expression. Forced to consume excretion with hands had tied and a cobra coming out of his anus, the main figure evokes a sense of degradation and

frustration. This work is referring to prisoners who had been forced to eat shit as punishment, and comparing them to art students in Yogyakarta and Bandung, who were trained to paint in the styles of the art institutions. In reaction to stylist reaction, Dono painted his work in flat mint colors. In *Episode 25* (1983), fantastic animals and monsters in candy colors battle as they tear apart and devour each other. In *The Suppressor* (1989, cat. no.1, a monster restrains a helpless victim with its claws as it urinates in the victim's gaping mouth. Dono's use of parody is not in any way blind, blank, or empty. On the contrary, the iconography and symbols related to mythology and *wayang* are meant to deflect or camouflage his direct comments on taboo subjects.

Dono's paintings are like stage arenas or *wayang* screens, where characters are displayed in a confined claustrophobic space. Disguised gods and demons, active conspirators, crusaders, villains, and victims intermingle in the process of metamorphosis or dismemberment. Like creatures with multiple organs, such as the morphs and mutants in comic books and sci-fi films like *Total Recall* and *X-men*, their anomalies and hybrids are feigned and simulated. Humorous and horrific, these characters contain a phantasmal parody and double-coding similar to the dubiousness and ephemerality found in *ngoko* messages. This kind of eclectic mixture becomes a signification of myth that can be seen as de-politicized speech. Within this space, Dono's myth is a conjuring trick where reality is turned inside out. The function of myth is to empty reality. This empty arena is then filled with super-bad and super-good characters, linking them to the fantasy world of dancing shadows. Another way of viewing Dono's work is to compare it with how writers such as Pramoedya Ananta Toer adapted *wayang* plots to feature the struggle of good to survive evil spirits.<sup>[37]</sup> Whereas in literary works such as Pramoedya Toer's *Awakenings* it is clear who are the devils, Dono's characters are sometimes mixed, as good deities are turned into crafty demons.

*Eating Bullets (Makan Pelor)* (1992, cat. no.11), *Three Pistols in the Back* (1992, cat. no.12), and *Campaign of the Three Parties* (1992, cat. no.13) were executed at a time of relative political stability in Indonesia. The scenes show war-mongering parties fighting in frenzy and confusion. In contrast, in *Dialog with a Pistol* (1998, cat. no.14), painted towards the end Suharto's troubled regime, the characters are easily decipherable. A soldier in a red helmet with dark glasses and Badman badge is blasting two bullets into the forehead of a man holding his hands in surrender. The background reveals a riot scene in Jakarta behind raised curtains. Dono described this work: "How can honor be found through holding a dialogue via the force of weapons?"<sup>[38]</sup>

Hindu myths feature strongly in *The Bearer of the Peace Discus* (1994, cat. no.15). Battle among grotesque beasts is disrupted as a flying goddess with a *Vishnu's cakra* (wheel) comes between them. The burly three-headed monster in military regalia and boots pissing in a glass symbolizes authoritative power against determined opponents. Dono's mythological signification anticipated the terror and turmoil that awaited the Indonesian people in the late 1990s. The resignation of Suharto as President on May 21, 1998 brought

an abrupt end to Indonesia's thirty-two years of New Order regime. Four years earlier, the cover of *Far Eastern Economic Review* (September 1994) featured a caricature of a smiling Suharto balancing on a high-wire economy.

The nepotistic culture seemed to be impossible to dismiss. Since his resignation, demonstrators have demanded that Suharto be placed trial for treason and corruption. Students wore smiling masks of Suharto at the Semanggi traffic rotary in Jakarta in protest against his crimes. Posters and cartoons depicted him as a demon with fangs.<sup>[39]</sup> During the topsy-turvy events as power changed hands from Suharto to Bacharuddin Jusuf Habibie to Abdurrahman Wahid, Dono captured the rapid transitions, as politicians, cronies, bankers, religious leaders, military generals, civilians, and students performed like human puppets on stage.

In *A Magician Who Never Killed* (2000, cat. no.16), the laughing magician with a decapitated head rides the Reform Order vehicle. Meanwhile, the opposing political power in the guise of a urinating demon tries to capture the magician in a mirror reflection, shooting at him through a telescope at close range, but misses. *The King Who is Afraid of Approaching Barong* (2000, cat. no.17) is a tale of a greedy king who is thrown out of power. Habibie is seen ejecting from his seat as the volcano erupts. He is attacked by a flying Superwoman, who is symbolic of Megawati Sukarnoputri, whose grandmother was a Hindu from Bali. Barong, the Lord of the Forest, a fantastic tiger-dragon who is the protector of mankind, is pulling the chariot to expel evil forces with white magic. The figure of an opportunist rides the chariot as the dragon and Garuda fly away from the leader of the puppet regime.<sup>[40]</sup>

Compared with *The Barong's Imagination of the Drunkard* (1991, cat.no.18), which relates to mythology and the puppet world, *The King Who is Afraid of Approaching Barong* is clearly more direct and political. The painting depicts Habibie as a pawn under high pressure due to a crisis stemming from ethnic riots, the East Timor bloodbath, and the Bank Bali scandal.

With the *ngoko* mode of speech, Dono explores the playful language of the street and slang (*plesetan*) that tease and taunt (*ngeledek*).<sup>[41]</sup> These puns and verbal games are turned into paintings that tease out some sensational incidents in Indonesia. *The Guard Who is Keeping the Bank's Key* (2000, cat. no.19) captures the scene of Suharto's allegedly ill-begotten fortune (some US \$15 billion), which a *Time* article (May 1999) claimed the President and his family acquired during his rule.<sup>[42]</sup> Masked puppets confront one another. One, as symbol of the people, holds the banner of a smoking Suharto. The other is Suharto's bodyguard, who has been holding the bank's key for three decades. According to Dono, the bodyguard is ordered to blow up the dynamite in his hand if anybody finds the bank key. In *Flower Diplomacy* (2000, cat. no.20), two figures talk sweetly to each other behind smiling masks. Like puppets on a stage with the curtains raised, they act out their roles but are ready to harm the other when sweetness becomes sour and bitter. Here, Dono is referring to the incident more than 30 years ago when Sukarno had to bestow power on Suharto, who went on to rule Indonesia under his own dictatorship.

Dono offers a cheeky and playful comment on larger-than-life icons that in reality are frivolous and pathetic figures.

*Superman Still Learning How to Wear Underwear* (2000, cat. no.21), depicting the American superhero learning how to put on underwear the right way instead of over his tights, is a direct satire. Dono observes that it is not just Superman who makes this ridiculous display in public but also Batman and Robin.

*Interrogation* (1998, cat. no.22) is one of Dono's most critical and dramatic works addressing the violence and suppression carried out during Suharto's dictatorship.<sup>[43]</sup> This video installation consists of five monitors with suspended fiberglass rifles pointing at the faces of five victims under interrogation. One scene is about the raids ordered by Jakarta military leaders on opposition leader Megawati Sukarnoputri's headquarters on July 27 1996. (As a result, more than 40 members of Megawati's supporters went missing, and Suryadi replaced Megawati as puppet head of the party.) Dono's message in this work is hard and direct, like a gun pointing at one's head. The viewer hears the heavy-breathing sound of fear as distressed victims are interrogated, and becomes witness as well as interrogator as the prisoners reveal fear and despair, flinching at the sound of bullets. In the background, recorded scenes of riots and demonstrations in East Timor, Jakarta, Yogyakarta, and Santa Cruz flow by in slow motion.

In contrast, *Inner City* (1999, cat. no.23) deals with political issues through humor and absurdity. A mannequin with a fiberglass head (Dono's self-portrait) stands in a *contrapposto* position, displaying his anatomical features like a classical statue. A closer look reveals that the figure is made of different parts of borrowed objects. The handsome figure has no arms; his hands are protruding from his shoulders. Like a mutant or human-robot, a small monitor inside his chest reveals scenes of riots in Jakarta. The sign, "Please look inside," written above his sexual organ invites the viewers to peep inside his red penis to witness a recording of the televised broadcast of Suharto's resignation.

## **6. Exhibiting Dono: Demons and Deities Dancing and Drinking in Edo**

As guest curator of Heri Dono's solo show at the Japan Foundation Asian Center in Tokyo held in 2000, I was given the challenging task of selecting and curating this exhibition in a relatively short span of time.<sup>[44]</sup> Taking into consideration the exhibition space and selected art works, I had to conceptualize how viewers of Dono's show in Tokyo could fully appreciate his creative force. The idea came during a research residency at the Bellagio Study and Conference Center in Italy in March 2000, when discussing international art exhibitions and how context plays a part in appreciation and understanding of artworks with my research colleague.<sup>[45]</sup> I felt that Dono's work should be exhibited in relation to the theme of shadows and realms. Viewers should have a sense of entering into another realm in which the boundaries of logic and absurdity are easily crossed over.

Dono has explained that screens and shadows are important in life. At times, they help to cover and conceal what cannot be displayed or heard directly. For Dono, truth cannot always run

a straight course but is more like the Javanese knife (*kris*) with its wavering edge. To understand a lot of things in Indonesia, one needs to look at the world upside down. His comment reminded me of the toy monkey in his studio that rides viewers up to look at Dono's exhibition with their heads turned upside down. Such an approach, however, would result in dizziness, headache, and low attendance of the exhibition.

The architectural setting and the exhibition space determine the viewer's perception, so the idea that they should feel like entering courtyards or pavilions became the starting point for the exhibition design. The idea of indoor/outdoor led me to think of open courtyards in Indonesia.<sup>[46]</sup> *Pendopo* derives from the Sanskrit word *mandapa*, meaning a pillared hall. These pillared, open-sided halls can be found in many temples of the Singasari-Kediri-Majapahit period of the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries in Java, and later temples in Bali have mainly adopted this form. *Pendopos* were adapted for the courtly architecture, as seen in the Javanese courts in Yogyakarta and Surakarta. Construction is often on raised plinths linked by staircases and surrounded by a moat and a wall. Spatial relationships can be separated between *pendopo agung*, the main *pendopo* for court ceremonies, and the *pringgitan*, a shallow hall in a similar form where dancing and *wayang kulit* performances sometimes take place.

In adapting the concept of a *pendopo-pringgitan* complex, a series of discussion between Dono, myself, the organizers, and the designers of the exhibition at the Japan Foundation were made. Meetings in Tokyo, Bangkok, New York, Amsterdam, and Yogyakarta were held to determine how this concept could be fully realized. As the exhibition design was established, the stairs and parts of the floors were raised to create a specific space that becomes Dono's realm. In fact, three realms have been loosely invented, belonging to gods, humans, and demons. These realms are in the care of three brothers, Batara Guru (who reigns the gods' realm), Semar (who protects humankind), and Togog (who advises the demons).

As viewers enter the exhibition space, they walk up and down these levels, which reveal creatures, human, gods, and angels. The sounds, smells, and moving images of *wayang kulit* arouse their senses. Soon they find out that these realms are interchangeable, as these characters overflow and overlap. Humorous, devious, and frightening, their behaviors seem unpredictable. Dancing and drunk, monsters become human as deities turn to demons. They are in a realm where down is up and logic is turned upside down.

The baby toad mascots designed by Dono for this exhibition somersault in the air. They look at the world from a strange perspective. But at times, seeing life from an upside down position can be refreshing and make a lot more sense. Dono's tongue-in-cheek creation of these tiny toads is meant to tease as well as remind us that often fact and logic are not as they seem to be. In fact, these teasing toads with bulging hearts might not be mascots but monsters. They could even be related to Venusaur (Fushigibana) or Poliwrath (Nyorobon), the Pokemon (Poket Monsters) monsters that await to be caught and manipulated like puppets by Pokemon trainers such as Ash (Satoshi).<sup>[47]</sup> After all in the realms of Dono,

demons and deities often look alike.

## 6. Conclusion

When Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur) became president in 1999, he inherited mounting internal problems as Indonesia faced uncertainties in political, economic, social, religious, and ethnic transitions. For instance, ethnic violence aimed at the Chinese community exploded even before Suharto left office in May 1998. Chinese women were gang-raped. Fear felt by other ethnic minorities erupted as the military massacred inhabitants in East Timor in 1999. In 2000, hundreds of people were killed in Aceh due to fighting for independence. Fighting between Muslims and Christians on the Maluku Islands has claimed thousands of lives.

When he began his presidency, Wahid had to withstand some larger-than-life icons. As the blind Muslim cleric mounted the presidential steps, the voice of a Javanese soothsayer (*dukun*) called the proceedings to a halt. The warning was that the "big man," the spirit of Suharto, was standing at the doorway. Wahid and his family waited as the soothsayer carried out a prayer ritual. Later, Wahid's daughter Yenny said that it was the black power of Suharto, trying to hurt them. There are all kinds of Supermen, but in Indonesia many of them are seen as belongings to puppetry.

Wahid was asked by a puppeteer at a *wayang* performance how becoming the president had affected him. He replied, "I am afraid I am also a player in a larger story that I don't control. I am a puppet that will be put back in the box when I am no longer needed."<sup>[48]</sup> But as president, Wahid still pulls many of the strings that control the marionettes of *wayang* characters on the political stage. When he came under the fire at the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR) in August 2000 for his handling of religious violence in Maluku Islands and the vulnerability of the economy and the currency, he humbly apologized for the malaise of Indonesia. He promised special autonomy to Aceh and Irian Jaya, separatist provinces at opposite ends of the vast archipelago. Also, he promised to give more power to Vice-President Megawati. But Wahid could not dispel the impression of an ailing man who is leading a nation that is in danger of tearing itself apart. As one writer in *The Indonesian Observer* wrote, "Waiting on Wahid is not easy."<sup>[49]</sup>

Despite creating some confrontational works on recent upheaval in Indonesia, Dono found the *wayang* to be the best medium for capturing the topsy-turvy events that have often been complex and opaque. In *Wayang Legenda: Indonesia Baru*, cartography has been incorporated as part of a *wayang* story of islands and provinces in the archipelago.<sup>[50]</sup> Represented as strange and morbid creatures, the volcanic islands of Krakatau and Anak Krakatau erupt while Sumatra, Sulawesi, Kalimantan, Bali, Lombok, Flores, Sumbawa, the Maluku Islands, Java, Irian Jaya, Papua, and Timor seem to be dancing like drunkards. It is the map and story of the new Indonesia, in which Timor is like an independent bird ready to fly to freedom—except that it has no wings. In *Lobi Lobi* (2000), Dono created superheroes, monsters, and gods to perform in the theater of shadows and puppets. It is a world where down is up and nothing is as it seems to be, analogous



to political arenas, where lobbyists talk in a sweet, flowery language, but the speeches behind the façade can turn out to be like sour fruits (*lobi*). As *dalang*, Dono does not offer a path for a new national awakening but a critique on the players in a larger story that he does not control. They are like deities and demons who seem to quarrel and fight in never-ending battles.

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Published on November 17, 2011.

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### Endnotes

You can see Heri Dono's work at:

<http://www.walshgallery.com/heri-dono-works/>

You can also see Heri Dono's Flickr photostream at:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/66881058@N00/page2/>

[1] David Elliott and Gilane Tawadros (eds.), *Heri Dono* (London and Oxford: Institute of International Visual Arts and Museum of Modern Art Oxford, 1996), p. 38.

[2] See Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (Harper Collins, 1973), pp. 132-140. Geertz gives useful insight on the Indonesian shadow-puppet play as a deeply rooted art form as well as a religious rite. He makes direct comparison between the characters of Semar and Falstaff. In his section on "Ritual and Social Change: A Javanese Example," Geertz refers to B. Malinowski's *Magic, Science and Religion* (1948) on how religion satisfies the individual's demand for a stable, comprehensible, and coercible world. The *wayang kulit* has been applied to promote stability through education, faith, and government control.

[3] *Rasa* refers to the traditional Javanese five senses: seeing, hearing, talking, smelling, and feeling. Feeling is further elaborated into taste on the tongue, touch on the body, and emotional feeling within the heart, such as sadness and happiness.

[4] Jayadeva Tilakasiri, *The Asian Shadow Play* (Ratamalana: Vishva Lekha Publication, 1999), pp. 62-127.

[5] In *wayang revolusi* and *wayang suluh* portraits of political leaders in modern attire are depicted and displayed in shadow-puppet theatre. The Tropen Museum in Amsterdam contains

some fine examples of these works. See Museumgids, "Wayang Revolusi" (Amsterdam: Koninklijk Instituut voor de Tropen, 1995), pp. 40-41.

[6] Astri Wright, "Drinking from the Cup of Tradition: Modern Art in Yogyakarta," *Indonesian Modern Art: Indonesian Painting since 1945* (Amsterdam: The Gate Foundation, 1993), pp. 39-56.

[7] Astri Wright, *Soul, Spirit and Mountain: Preoccupations of Contemporary Indonesian Painters* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 169-170.

[8] Brita Miklouho-Maklai, *Exposing Society's Wounds: Some Aspects of Contemporary Indonesian Art since 1966* (Adelaide: Flinders University, 1991), pp. 23-77. Apinan Poshyananda, "'Con Art' seen from the Edge: The Meaning of Conceptual Art in South and Southeast Asia," *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s-1980s* (New York: Queens Museum of Art, 1999), pp.142-148.

[9] From 1994-2000, I visited Dono's studio and interviewed him in Yogyakarta on several occasions.

[10] Statement by Dono in *Mythical Monsters in Contemporary Society* (Singapore: Gajah Gallery, 1998), p. 2.

[11] From the French word *bricole*, which roughly translates as putting things together in a manner of improvisation. Some dictionaries define it as pottering about, doing odd jobs. This word has often been used in the context the readymade art. *Bricoleur* can be translated as handyman, to be good around the house, or to be good craftsman. See Charles Merewether, "Fabricating Mythologies: The Art of Bricolage," *The Boundary Rider*, 9th Biennale of Sydney (Sydney: Biennale of Sydney, 1992), pp. 20-24.

[12] Jim Supangkat, "Heri Dono," *The First Asia-Pacific Triennial* (Brisbane: Queensland Art gallery, 1993), p. 13.

[13] Thomas McEvelley, "Doctor, Lawyer, Indian Chief," *Art & Otherness: Crisis in Cultural Identity* (New York: McPherson Publishers, 1992), pp. 27-56. McEvelley criticizes methods of art history and curatorship, in which non-Western art and primitive art are interpreted as validating the universal values of Western modern art.

[14] Kirk Varnedoe, "Gauguin," in William Rubin (ed.), "Primitivism" in 20th Modern Art: Affinity of the tribal and the Modern (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1984), pp. 186-187.

[15] Julie Ewington, "Between the Cracks: Art and Method in Southeast Asia," *ART AsiaPacific*, 3:4 (1996), 57-63. Ewington gives insightful observations on the interpretation and methods of Southeast Asian visual arts, using example of *wayang kulit* and works by Dono in her rich discussion.

[16] Robert Goldwater, *Primitivism in Modern Art* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1966), pp. 192-214.

[17] Benedict Anderson, *Language and Power: Exploring Political Cultures in Indonesia* (Ithaca and London: Cornell

University Press, 1990), pp. 152-173.

[18] [Dono](#), "Life is a Cartoon," *New Art from Southeast Asia 1992* (Tokyo: The Japan Foundation, 1992), pp. 117-119.

[19] [Jean-Hubert Martin](#), *5th Biennale d'Art Contemporain de Lyon: Partage d'Exoticismes* (Lyon: Biennale de Lyon, 2000), pp. 41-52.

[20] *Ibid.*

[21] Interview with [Sigit Sukasman](#), 10 August 2000, Yogyakarta. Sukasman gave an elaborate explanation on his method of making *wayang kulit*. He stressed that exaggeration of physiognomy and facial expression of his shadow puppets allow them to communicate more directly with viewers. However, traditional puppet makers might regard this work as too experimental. Sukasman discussed the wayang characters Arjuna, Semar, and Togog, and demonstrated his experiments with colored lights and shadow puppets on stage. See the pamphlet, *Wayang Ukur Sukasman* (Yogyakarta: Pondok Seni Sukasman, 2000).

[22] [Dono's](#) statement, *4th Asian Art Show Fukuoka* (Fukuoka: Fukuoka Art Museum, 1994), pp. 82-83. For [Dono's](#) discussion on his inspiration by *wayang kulit*, see [David Elliott](#) and [Gilane Tawadros](#) (eds.), *Heri Dono*, pp. 36-37.

[23] [Dono](#) was inspired by the Batakese tale of the magic wands, in which the outcome of incestuous love between a twin brother and sister was that their living souls were confined in petrified wooden forms. The magic wand was carved from these woods. A kidnapped boy was buried up to his neck and fed with food and later with molten lead. His brain was taken to prepare a magical substance, *pupuk*, which was then placed inside the wand. Such stories differ enormously from traditional *wayang kulit*.

[24] Interview with [Dono](#), 22 April 2000, New York.

[25] [Jean de Loisy](#), "La Baute in Fabula," *La Baute* (Avignon: La Mission 2000 en France, 2000).

[26] [Heri Dono](#), *Kuda Binal* (Yogyakarta: Alun Alun Utara, 29 July 1992).

[27] [Apinan Poshyanada](#), "Roaring Tigers, Desperate Dragons," *Traditions/Tensions: Contemporary Art in Asia* (New York: The Asia Society, 1996), pp. 30-31. Like the theatre for the dead, *Fermentation of Mind and Ceremony of the Soul* can be compared to the Toraja effigies of the deceased in cliff graves in Sulawesi.

[28] Interview with [Dono](#), 28 April 1995, Jakarta. [Dono](#) said that during the installation of his work he was frequently questioned by the official organizers of the exhibition regarding the meaning and use of military decorations on the stone sculptures. He was not allowed to enter the galleries while [Suharto](#) and other dignitaries were viewing the exhibition.

[29] For further discussion on Gamelan of Rumor, see [Martinus Dwi Marianto](#), "The Experimental Artist Heri Dono from Yogyakarta and His 'Visual Art' Religion," *Art Monthly*

*Australia*, no. 64, (October 1993), 21-24.

[30] Anderson, *Language and Power: Exploring Political Cultures in Indonesia*, pp. 152-153.

[31] Interview with Dono, 10 August 2000, Yogyakarta. Dono explained that the sound from the speakers is by his friend, whose voice sounds like Suharto speaking.

[32] During September 1999, at the time of opening events of the Third Asia-Pacific Triennial and *Transmission* performance in Queensland, an Australian army was leading a strong peacekeeping force of 7,000 troops to East Timor. One Indonesian magazine published a cover with a picture of an Australian bayonet buried in East Timor and a map labeled "Kangaroo Domino Game."

[33] See Dono's statements and captions in *Mythical Monsters in Contemporary Society*.

[34] Interview with Dono, 10 August 2000.

[35] For example, Tisna Sanajaya's *Thirty Two Years of Think with the Knees* (1999) depicts Habibie ecstatically licking the hand of Suharto. Surrounding the painting are tee shirts of Aceh and East Timor for sale and bamboo sculptures of men with erect torsos/pointed guns standing on their head. See catalogues *AWAS! Recent Art from Indonesia* (Yogyakarta: Cemeti Art Foundation, 1999), and *The Third Asia - Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art* (Brisbane: Queensland Art Gallery, 1999).

[36] See catalogues *AWAS! Recent Art from Indonesia* (Yogyakarta: Cemeti Art Foundation, 1999), and *The Third Asia - Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art* (Brisbane: Queensland Art Gallery, 1999).

[37] For discussion of Dono's paintings, see Marianto, "The Experimental Artist Heri Dono from Yogyakarta and His 'Visual Art' Religion," *Art Monthly Australia*, 21-24; Wright, *Soul, Spirit and Mountain*, pp. 233-239; Jim Supangat, "Heri Dono," *Southeast Asian Art Today* (Singapore: Roeder Publications, 1996), pp. 17-26; and Esmeralda and Marc Bollandsee, *Masterpieces of Contemporary Indonesian Painters* (Singapore: Times Edition, 1997).

[38] David Myers, "Politics and Intellectual Artists in Contemporary Indonesia: The World of Pramoedya Ananta Toer and Mochtar Lubis," in David Myers (ed.), *The Politics of Multiculturalism in the Asia-Pacific* (Darwin: Northern Territory Press), pp.137-153.

[39] See Dono's statements and captions in *Mythical Monsters in Contemporary Society*.

[40] See Jose Manuel Tesoro, "Open But Not Shut," *Asiaweek* (2 June 2000), 36-37. For writing on Indonesian culture of fear and the post-Suharto era, see *Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development, Stability and Unity: On a Culture of Fear* (Bangkok: Forum Asia, 1995) and Adam Schwarz and Jonathan Paris (eds.), *The Politics of Post-Suharto Indonesia* (Singapore: The Council of Foreign Relations, 1999), respectively.

[41] For discussion on *ngeledak* in recent Indonesian art, see Martinus Dwi Marianto, "Teasing Through Art," *AWAS! Recent Art from Indonesia* (Yogyakarta: Cemeti Art Foundation, 1999), pp. 42-43.

[42] Suharto denied this accusation, stating that he hardly has any money. On 8 August 2000, the Head of the State Prosecutor's Office Barman Zahir put forward a file and indictment to charge Suharto with violations of the law related to corruption and abuse of power. If proven guilty, he could face life imprisonment. See Anthony Spaeth, "Don't Cry for Suharto," *The Time* (19 June 2000), 18-19.

[43] Executed shortly before Suharto's resignation, Dono informed that in this work he wanted to be most direct, as there was no room for humor.

[44] I take this opportunity to thank the Japan Foundation for this kind invitation. I would like to express my deep gratitude to Ms. Yasuko Furuichi and her assistants for their tireless efforts in realizing this project.

[45] I would like to thank Dr. Vishakha Desai, vice-president of the Asia Society, New York, for her kind advice on Indian and Indonesian religious and court architecture. Discussion on this topic at Villa Serbelloni by Lake Como was most exhilarating. I also wish to extend my thanks to Mr. David Elliott, director of Moderna Museet, Stockholm, for his stimulating contribution on Dono's work during our discussion in Amsterdam on 15 July 2000.

[46] Helen Ibbitson Jessup, *Court Arts of Indonesia* (New York: The Asia Society Galleries, 1990), pp. 105-123.

[47] I would like to thank my son, Pirawuth Poshyananda, for introducing me to hundreds of Pokemon monsters. Logic and reality have never been the same since.

[48] Terry McCarthy, "Democrat...or Boss?" *The Time* (17 July 2000), 34-35; and Jose Manuel Tesoro, "Defiant Under Fire," *Asiaweek* (4 August 2000), 32-33. This article quoted Indonesian political analyst Soedjati Djiwandono as saying that, "In the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is still king."

[49] Roeslan Abdulgani, "Waiting on Wahid Is Not Easy," *The Indonesian Observer* (11 August 2000), 5.

[50] *Wayang Legenda: Indonesia Baru* (2000), see pp. 76-77.