



## Tension-Pleasure and Education Values of the Meta-Figurative of Indonesian Contemporary Paintings

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### Abstract

Meta-figurative is a physical aesthetic discourse that reaches beyond the physical beauty of ideal bodies (skeletal construction, muscles, and skins). The interpretation approaches used new criticism, according to Culler (2001), that goal to identify what the works repress or illuminate by concealing and portraying society and social attitudes. Meta-figurative encompasses exploration pertaining to the interchangeable position and condition between tensions and pleasures of bodies in the social space. Fifteen Indonesian contemporary artists are: Mangu Putra, Entang Wiharso, Chusin Setiadikara, Agus Suwage, FX Harsono, Ivan Sagito, Heri Dono, Ronald Manulang, Nyoman Masriadi, Nyoman Erawan, Putu Sutawijaya, Laksmi Sitaresmi, Made Djirna, Ugo Untoro, and Bob Sick Yuditha have been conducting creative efforts and questioning about matters of the bodies' position in the public space, conducting current interpretation through personal artistic and aesthetical language. There are five representation tendencies of meta-figurative paintings thematically, artistic images, and visual meanings: marginalized bodies, fictionalized bodies, bodies of expression, autobiographical bodies, and beyond famous portraits. Indonesian contemporary artists have made figurative subjects in their paintings to make statements, self-reflections, and moral voices of their country's socio-political conditions, which are educational values of Indonesian Contemporary Paintings in social meaning. Poverty, corruption, and anti-democracy practices still part of Indonesian daily realities are area protests for contemporary artists.

**Keywords:** meta-figurative, contemporary painting, critical reading, education values

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### INTRODUCTION

Through layers of figurative language, Indonesian artists want to say that national stakeholders still need much homework to materialize the nation's goals as regulated in the state's constitution. Ar-

tists choose marginalized bodies, and imaginative figurative characters, injure their self-portraits, and borrow heroic characters of famous names to show their moral stands. The tensions that endure in daily life, in their art practice, become challenges as well as ecstasy, albeit the risks of being

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protested everywhere.

Since the independence struggles against colonialism in the 1930s, Indonesian artists have been involved both in the physical war and moral war through their artworks when they founded The Persatuan Ahli Gambar Indonesia, Indonesian Association of Artists (1936), which produced social arts with figures as subjects by artists like S. Sudjojono, Hendra Gunawan, and Affandi. Also, during the New Regime era, artists were involved in the struggle for social justice, as were done by painter Semsar Siahan, and Gerakan Seni Rupa, New Art Movement (1970s), and the latest approaching the downfall of General Suharto's government (1998), there were also arts of defiance.

In the meantime, a decade following the reformed era, Indonesian contemporary art experienced the choice of figurative language with the birth of many more creative possibilities. However, one remains consistent and in line with history and has been the subject of figures as the moral language to protest social injustice, corruptive behaviors, and anti-democracy treatment. In iconological terms, figurative paintings tend to relate to the meaning of narrative on the romanticism of everyday heroism, as stated by Adnyana (2018).

This essay makes an original contribution to Indonesian art discourse by writing maps of five representation tendencies of meta-figurative paintings thematically, artistic images, and visual meanings: marginalized bodies, fictionalized bodies, bodies of expression, autobiographical bodies, and beyond-famous portraits. The five categories explain the visionary reach/stretch of vision and the visual revolution of the latest Indonesian artists' creative practice in giving meaning to human bodies. These visual meanings also identify with educational values, which means theme, artistic, and visual aesthetic forms reveal social attitudes.

## METHOD

This research chose fifteen Indonesi-

an contemporary artists who explored and visualised the aesthetic of figurative terms in their paintings. These artists are: Mangu Putra, Entang Wiharso, Chusin Setiadikara, Agus Suwage, FX Harsono, Ivan Sagito, Heri Dono, Ronald Manulang, Nyoman Masriadi, Nyoman Erawan, Putu Sutawijaya, Laksmi Sitaresmi, Made Djirna, Ugo Untoro and Bob Sick Yuditha. It's a qualitative research by purposive sampling that visual of contemporary paintings chosen by the identity of theme, artistic, and visual aesthetic. Then, the paintings were identified and interpreted with a new criticism approach. The goal is to identify what the works repress or illuminate by concealing and portraying society and social attitudes, according to Culler (2001).

This approach consists of criticism of the interpretation of visual languages of the artist's novelties. The figure is a term for bodies with multiple stages of meanings: artistic, aesthetic, and educational values that are constructed by visual representation of figures or bodies of human beings. Because bodies have become subjects to touch social issues that intimidate their bodies, and simultaneously critically reading the phenomenon of social pleasure about bodies. In the interpretation that meaning is a significant process, the meaning by the recipient of a sign is suggested by Eco in Hoed (2008).

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The beautiful concept of bodies (figures) in Indonesian contemporary art, indeed, has shifted from the basis of the ideal image of proportionate bodies, athletes, and also bodies disciplined by consumption patterns (common in model drawings) to the issues of bodies (with souls) with the desire for freedom in social space/domain. According to Godfrey (2020), the term contemporary art that is chosen echoes the problems we face in our daily lives: how to act, think, and believe. Contemporary art, he suggests, can be entertaining, provocative, and even irritating. Unarguably, the perception of the ideal body in the domi-

nant culture's view is inherently discriminative both physically and in discourse/discursively. Figurative painting, or representational art form, means any picture that contains any recognizable images of the object. One of the aliens' properties of figurative representations is that they are, in principle, readable to one extent or another, independently of place or time, as defined by Avital (1997).

Several Indonesian painters/artists have questioned this in the context of the exploration of figurative subjects to speak about the marginalized groups in the periphery and the poor. Morgan stresses that silent features of form draw attention to particular traits of type or individual (2000). Cartoonists have long understood the principle – we recognize the individual in caricature or the grotesque. It is also true of works of art which seek to emphasise aspects of human nature, such as gender, fertility, or power," Morgan (2000) suggested. Thus, figures in contemporary Indonesian paintings become a visual sign of many possibilities of human aspects. And the canvas surface becomes a medium for conceptual battle; bodies in the sense of the physicals are being woven and contrasted with the practice and perception of the dominant culture.

### **Marginalized Bodies**

Thus, bodies from secluded environments, isolated from urban modernization, became the choice of subject. Bodies without any tendency to become idols, but bodies that are born, grow, and live to honor life itself. Bodies that revere the souls more rather than simply beautify to parade physical amidst other bodies. The bodies being chosen were the souls' vehicles that created harmony with nature. Many artists trace the story of authentic bodies by visiting remote villages and even to mountainous regions.

The artist Gusti Agung Mangu Putra (born in Badung, Bali, 1963) often scales the mountains' steep roads in Kintamani-Bali, about 45 km from the Denpasar. In the Kintamani region, several villages are eco-

nomically isolated. As one of the ten best artworks, Mangu Putra, the recipient of The Philip Morris-Indonesia Art Awards 1994, familiarizes himself and records the villagers' daily lives. He recognizes well how diligent people must walk the steep terrains barefooted to cultivate the land, fetch clean water, and sell their produce to the market. All locations are separated by deep gorges and rocky roads, requiring much time. Bodies of the villagers are made into actors in Mangu's attempt to make sense of the injustice of prosperity. Meanwhile, in the concept of State politics, they are citizens who have an equal right to live decently.

Mangu Putra's work entitled "Watching a Carnival," 400 X 145 Cm (2 panels), 2008, oil on canvas, juxtaposes a mother carrying a baby with six children lining up on her side. Only the children wear shorts; the rest are naked with very happy and excited faces. Mangu Putra indicates they are watching a carnival (perhaps an Indonesian Independence Day carnival); although the painting does not show a carnival as such, by looking at the children's enthusiastic faces, there is definitely a carnival happening in front of them. Some of the children are waving empty plates and also a flag. The black and white painting with a combined technique of palette shows a family from Kintamani mountainous region very characteristically. The small flag is intentionally put to contrast with the waving empty plates. The small flag can be interpreted as a pledge of citizenship where the nation has to guarantee equal prosperity. Mangu is questioning the promise through his work.

The painter Chusin Setiadikara (born in Bandung in 1949) is also very familiar with marginalized bodies. Chusin's painting "Radjin" (230 x 250 Cm, 2003, oil on canvas) portrays a nude woman being juxtaposed with a gunnysack of chili peppers and a scale carrying a brand *radjin*. The nude woman is not a well-known figure, only an ordinary one painted provocatively nude pose. According to Chusin, this painting is only to tease the audience's in-

terpretation; perhaps they will think that the naked woman has a connection with the gunnysack of chili peppers and the scale. It is only a visual play that juxtaposes the drawing subjects with no particular intention to connect them visually or in meaning. Chusin understands more that each subject stands for itself. A point of view that subversively challenges the conventional way of seeing realities, particularly looking at artworks.

Artist Ivan Sagito (born in Malang in 1957) also does the same/similar exploration and reflection. He paints middle-aged women (*mbok-mbok*) in Yogyakarta to imprint the matter of how life's dignity must be maintained transcending suffering. Ivan thoroughly and with full empathy visited the villagers after the earthquake that struck Yogyakarta in 2006. Women wearing *kebaya* and *kemben* dress persevere in shouldering the catastrophe without wanting to be pitied. They still look straight ahead despite houses that have been made flat to the ground. Ivan portrays the women's faces as extraordinary in training/educating their bodies; bodies can be hurt, sad, and poor, but the soul/spirit must remain free and dignified.

These marginalized bodies' struggle, movement, and living modes are parts of Mangu, Chusin, and Sagito's creative research. Anonym personas; a conscious choice not to choose bodies enwrapped in pop cultures, becomes a serious and mature step to recognize and arrange the real body narrative. Popular names often prevent objective views about one's understanding of bodies. Because, in real life, the popular bodies only make use of anonymous bodies to control public space. The body of a popular name often discards the body's position as a physic with soul by their envious, greedy, power-monger mental game.

In the context of artistry, the three artists mentioned above chose a realist-photograph image to represent the drawing subjects. This is because they have such a mastery in the painting technique, where a realistic image is achievable through the

common technique and unique personal/individual techniques. Mangu, in contrast, used a palette technique, with colors piled up in such a way and some glazed. Chusin very often combined the oil paint technique with the charcoal drawing technique. Ivan has a great ability in transparent watercolor technique. Being established in the painting techniques is very important, which makes their works visually very characteristic and whole in materializing the concept.

The "Marginalized Bodies" category is present on the basis of reflection on the field. Meaning there are portraits of social bodies that become the foundation of the expression departure of the artists. The role of a more symbolic imagination is indeed apparent in Sagito's works by choosing the long braided women's hair as a representation sign of the social bodies of Javanese women. However, social critic themes through visuals are dominantly presented by images of imaginary figures and fictive maneuvering, very apparent in the works of Heri Dono, Made Djiwana, and Entang Wiharso, which are marked in the "Fictionalized Bodies" category. In this term, the figurative paintings, that human form communicates through individual, social, and cultural traits which reveal personal type as well as the context of the specific action, suggested by Morgan (2000). Each person of artist explored their feelings, perspectives, and also self-reflections on macro social conditions.

### **Fictionalized Bodies**

Figures subject in the Indonesian contemporary arts are also present in a very imaginative and fictive temperament. Meaning that figure images visually transcend the photographic boundaries. Figures become the artist's intuitive language to represent social bodies. Artists have more freedom to process and interpret bodies identities, either by intentionally elongating, fattening the proportions, or borrowing the representation of Javanese puppet figures. The most important thing is how the narration and the theme can



be expressed thoroughly without dealing with the body subject's photographic precision.

Also, unavoidably, fiction gives an unlimited opportunity for artists to fantasize about bodies. However, the desire formulated a critical social theme, sometimes make the imagination under the control of a discourse proposed by the artists. This condition poses a creative challenge for the artists and simultaneously a pleasure to always test imagination with/against reflection of critical thinking. Several Indonesian frontrunner contemporary artists embody this style of imaginative figures, namely Heri Dono, I Made Dzirna, and Entang Wiharso.

Heri Dono (born in Jakarta in 1960) intensively explores the *wayang* aesthetic style and infuses it into contemporary art practice. In addition to various object works, and installations, Heri Dono's paintings also combine the pattern/style of cartoon distortion with Javanese leather puppet characters. The figures are as though presence flat without volume, comical, and also naïve. No matter how sharp social critic themes are, their mocking is humorous when expressed through these types of figures' styles. This Indonesian artist, who has participated in numerous international exhibitions, also explores and brings children's cartoon figures into his works. The imaginary figures appear free, eclectic, plural, and hybrid, without any pretense to point to any particularities. According to Karnadi (2010), Hero Dono developed a kind of narrative by drawing upon local messages and contexts which he has experienced.

Unlike Heri Dono, the contemporary artist I Made Dzirna (born in Ubud, Bali, 1957), explores the primitive Balinese forms and wayang as the figures' narrative style. Lines strokes form figures that create symbolic narration. Dzirna, who in 1995 joined an artist residence program in Basel, Switzerland, in his most recent works, uses collages from Chinese coins (Chinese coins with holes in the middle being used in rituals that are lately reproduced

in Bali). This collage forms an imaginary figure narrating old myths and archaic human life. Dzirna simultaneously questions as well as attempts to create new interpretations of myths, like questioning the ritual practice of Balinese, who often are very wasteful and costly. He chooses to make sense of rituals from the context of philosophical substance.

Dzirna's painting "Money Flowers" (mixed media on canvas, 180 x 200, 2013) puts forward an imaginary figure, a human with a lizard tail wearing a money crown. The entire figure is formed from the *kepeng*, Chinese coins. This reptilian human is swarmed by flying termites and dragonflies, the insects flying around the money crown. While other animals, such as snakes, goats, and diminutive humans in mobs, are approaching. A syllogism, a metaphor, may portray how a human being with lots of money can behave like an animal that entices other animals to come near. However, Dzirna chooses mockery rather than vulgar criticism.

Meanwhile, the artist Entang Wiharso (born in Tegal, Central Java, 1967) does not entirely free the figures from the tendency to refer to a particular figure. Fictive figures are still based on a representation of the reality of social bodies. He often paints self-portraits with such freedom; imagination is still the sensor device to free the representation pattern from the photographic pressure. The combined realistic representation with imaginative figures make Entang's works so impressive, serious, and haunt their viewers.



**Figure 1.** Entang Wiharso, *Forbidden Exotic Country*, 300X600Cm, 2005, Entang Wiharso's Catalogue, *Intoxic*, Rumah Seni Yaitu, Semarang, 2007

Say, for example, Entang's work entitled "Forbidden Exotic Country" (300 x 600 Cm - 3 panels, oil on canvas, 2005), which bound to cause terror to viewers. Nude bodies, seated lining up on a sofa, some are scattered and piled up under a table, and some are tied up. Though the mouths of most of these bodies lying face up are closed, the impression they project is that of screaming in silence. Though the message is obscure, the most important thing that can be interpreted from this works is that the issue of nakedness from the larger social perspective is often considered disgraceful. Or, on a larger issue, how the body is perceived as a sinner that has to be thoroughly covered.

The fictive figurative subject is present to free the painting from the shackle of photographic representation since they are bodies invented from the imaginative ideas of the artist. What is preferred is the drawing subject's character, i.e., figures who tell stories. The three artists just mentioned freely distort the body representation to bring about imaginative bodies with personal character, but whole in telling the theme of social criticism.

In the fictionalized bodies category, the subject matter arises from the artist's realm of imagination, and some specific instance is linked with the mythology and the cultural artifact of the Indonesian past, such as the wayang world. The subject matter that emphasizes more on the spontaneity of the painting process, the writer explains in a subtheme, "Bodies of Expression." Some of Entang Wiharso's works show the sign of expressivity and spontaneity of figure image. Indeed, "Bodies of Expression" has a close affinity with fictive bodies, where the body image is not painted realistically but through the personal perception process of the artist. This is a position where personal expression is more important to the theme outpouring than the factor of drawing a realistic representation (Figure 1).

### **Bodies of Expression**

Artists do not always seem comfor-

table letting the painting practice run like a design technique requiring clearly planned stages. Many Indonesian contemporary artists treat body themes through spontaneous, quick, and free expression. Outpouring authentic feeling is more important than running after the subject matter's realistic sense. Only by allowing the spontaneous expression running, the artist feels the ease that all of his or her restlessness over something and ideas are expressed through the works.

The Indonesian artists who represent this tendency are Putu Sutawijaya, Ugo Untoro, and Bob Sick Yuditha. The three artists are of the same generation and go through formal education on the same campus, i.e., ISI (Indonesian Arts Institute) Yogyakarta; however, their come from different cultural backgrounds. Sutawijaya was born in Bali, while Ugo and Bob Sick come from Java. The three make bodies as subject representations that are pictured in informal figures.

Bob Sick Yuditha (born in Yogyakarta in 1971) presents bodies in spontaneous expressions of graffiti images. All kinds of body narratives appear full of scrawls, spiced with statements, scribble, and ornaments. Like graffiti, Bob Sick's paintings become an artistic expression pertaining to many things, including cynicism and social criticism. Yuditha express how informal figuration can expose many messages that educate audiences to know social problems.

Bob Sick originates from a bohemian artist who expresses a vagabond experience and a cultural memory expressed in the bodies of downtrodden characters. Bodies are distanced from ideal proportion and often appear emaciated, tall, and vulnerable. The ornament images are wild and free of contrasting colors to accommodate the expression. Bob Sick's strength lies in his ability to present his perception of the outside world with empathy on his personal canvasses.

Ugo Untoro's (born in Purbalingga, Central Java, 1970) works can also reveal a similar tone. The social bodies narrative

presents rich and poetic in Ugo's works. Unlike Bob Sick, Ugo's works are more minimalist in that informal bodies sometimes appear in their solitude, requiring no other sign, let alone merry ornaments. Ugo appreciated the silence. The bodies that are drawn spontaneously often as though they are reflective and in a mental battle. The body poetic in the works of this artist, who received the award of one of the five best works of Philip Morris Indonesia Awards 1998, indeed transcends the visual narrative. There appears to be a sense of psychological impression that these solitary bodies are heading for.

For instance, Ugo's painting entitled "Javasutra#2" (100 x 120 Cm, acrylic on canvas, 2008) presents a couple of male-female bodies done with a very minimalist stroke, and the rest of the canvas is washed in gray. The male body is black with a red face, while the female's is bright white. The two bodies are sweaty, as portrayed by the color that were allowed to drip and flow, creating a water rhythm. *Javasutra* is of course a translation of *Kamasutra*, the Indian erotic text about sexuality. In Java there is a similar text called *Serat Centini*. Ugo portrays a fragment of sexuality through a poetic rhythm of a pair of male-female bodies. Only with a brush stroke of red on the male figure can this painting talk about harmonious sensuality. The genitals are intentionally omitted from the picture representation. Unlike Sutawijaya and Bob Sick, Ugo prefers to present solitary bodies.

Sutawijaya (born in Tabanan-Bali, in 1971) brings up the subject of movements of nude bodies. Bodies moving in rhythm, like dancing, running, or peddling bicycles, are presented with spontaneous color strokes and brushes. Nude bodies without genitals, parading and telling themes of rituals and bodies in daily actions. Bodies in dynamic gestures appear in impressive landscapes created through textures and also from direct blotches of paints from the tubes.

Most of Sutawijaya's works are artistically emphasizing the strength of lines and monochrome color. Lines are produced

with strokes of blunt brushes using black china ink. The lines and strokes form the configuration of bodies in rhythmic motions; details are sacrificed. The sense of motion is more important than anatomical correctness. Exploring bodies in motions done with spontaneous means of expressing them makes Sutawijaya's works stand with very strong character.

The thing that ties these three artists into the category "Bodies of Expression" is their mutual preference to labor into how the psychological and emotional condition of the artists are poured out into the spontaneity of informal bodies. The bodies represent the artists' deeper emotive realities and not translating visual realities. Reality is only an impetus, while the final treatment is the artist's psychological impression through lines and a spontaneous painting process. To take a distance from a literal translation of reality is an artist's greatest challenge because reality is always tempting to be reproduced.

Reality is always tempting, especially if the reality is associated with the painter. For instance, the pride in his physical body is commonly done in painter's self portraits. But in the Indonesian contemporary arts, the tradition of self-portrait has developed into the a critical power of the personal body. Unlike "Bodies of Expressions," paintings carrying subjects of painters' biographical bodies still considering the interest of accurate expression of representation, especially to present the unique character of a body to ease identification. Sutawijaya's work "Always Alive" (140 x 190 Cm, mixed media on canvas, 2004), for example, in a subtle way is actually disclosing the artist's intention to explore his biographical body, in this instance in particular pertaining to his role as part of a Balinese cultural body, like the *kecak* dancers bodies. The painting "Always Alive" intentionally proposed how the anatomical body of the barong dancers not only represents the dancers' physical quality but also portray the sacred spirit of Balinese arts that survives today. So, the artist's personal physical images are understood

by the respective artist that it has moved from a mere practice of painting self-portraits.

### **Autobiographical Bodies**

Indonesian contemporary artists make personal bodies and face subject matters; they do not stop at the representation of body likeness in the pictures but maintain bodies and self-portraits as media of critical stance. Many things can be conveyed from facial expressions, and many events can happen on the artist's face and body. There are some who slice their facial pictures, and choose unusual facial expressions, as well as some who narrate many painful stories all over their bodies.

In the context of "Autobiographical Bodies," the artist's ego in taking pleasure in the body spell may be motivated by the promise of social status, popularity labels, and others often abuse self portrait practice into narcissism. The tension happens when the artist has to take distance from his or her ego and is willing to make their bodies and self-portraits as media to express a critical stance and to deconstruct the perception of excessive self-pride. The principle of being critical of oneself becomes the most fundamental awareness in the practice of "Autobiographical Bodies."

Say, for example, when examining the works of Nyoman Erawan (born in Sukawati, Bali, 1958), where one sees a face with both eyes shut tight and the rest is only drips and overflows of colors. A rock emitting fire flames pierced with needles hanging, interrupting the imperfect face. It's a summary of a very subversive representation of a portrait painting. In work entitled "Fire, Depression and Rock #3" (200 x 200 Cm, acrylic on canvas, 2009), Erawan proposes how self-portrait and portrait art has evolved from their original fate. The style of a drawing-based painting that originally is taken as an effort to capture an accurate picture of facial reality, a romantic interpretation of portrait art, by Erawan is challenged and tumbled by consciously wrecking the face drawing with pierces, cuts, color wash, and overflows as well

as presenting several drawing marks that are visually agitating like piercing needles, flames of fires, hanging rocks, or leaves in flames on his personal body and face.

Meanwhile, the Yogyakarta born artist (1974) Laksmi Sitaresmi uses her own body as a subject to narrate pains and unending life struggles. Take, for example, the work entitled "Just Enjoy This Life's Pains" (200 x 80 Cm, acrylic on canvas, 2005), where Laksmi represents her nude body pierced with nails, and each of the nail's end is attached with a string that has things tied onto it and also animals (a caterpillar, fish, and bird). Blood is pictured trickling from the wounds, but Laksmi is portrayed to remain silent, not hysterical. From the work's title, the injured body by nails and hanging burdens do not succumb to the ground; she enjoys the nearly unbearable pains as a responsibility to nurture the soul. Although it is not like a photographic portrait, Laksmi's painting remains very impressive in speaking about pain.

Different from Laksmi, the artist FX Harsono (born in Blitar, East Java, 1949) portrays his personal body gestures in a documentary way, like a historian studying historical documents. Harsono interviewed history makers and witnesses during the mass killing of innocent people accused by the Soeharto regime as members of PKI (the Indonesian Communist Party) in 1965-66. Harsono reassembles the names of the victims who most people have forgotten. For example, look at the work "Memory of the Erased Name #7" (triptych, oil on canvas, 120 x 150 cm each, 2010). Harsono portrays himself as writing the names of the victims in Chinese characters. He writes the names on a clear glass slab, so when viewed from the other side, the names resemble tattoos adorning Harsono's body. This painting is a still projection of Harsono's video art. This is a research-based work. He believes the beauty of art can also be a research path to reveal the historical truth.

Agus Suwage, a Purworejo-born artist in Central Java (1959), chooses face or



self-portrait more as an effort to create metaphors. See, for example, his self-portraits kissing a human skull, fashioning a pig's head, or in his open mouth appears an extraction of Edward Munch's "The Scream." He intentionally connects self-portraits with various icons. His works mock without anger. The feeling produced is more of a nuance of innocence and humor.

Expressions of depression, moaning, screaming, contemplative faces or laughing, smiling, or other funny expressions are chosen to convey matters outside the self. The choice of pose and unique means of expression of each artist tempts us to compare with how the Indonesian public space is now filled with self-portrait poses of people who claim themselves as leaders, politicians, or bureaucrats. Their poses are similar, blend smiles, and represent portraits lacking characters. Perhaps it is because publicity machines produce them. Perhaps it is because publicity machines produce them. The greetings accompanying the portraits are equally blended.

As an illustration, ever since the democratization of the election of government heads and legislative at the regional and national levels, bodies of famous names have advertised themselves haughtily in every intersection, public facility, public transportation, and even public toilet. Bodies wrapped in cosmetic attires, dominant cultural identities, power symbols, and contrived photographic gestures are all over in posters, banners, billboards, and stickers. The Yogyakarta public art activists call this general election advertisement that is placed carelessly "visual garbage." They often clean up these types of ads.

In addition to choosing bodies and self-portraits as subjects, some contemporary Indonesian artists also explore and reflect on famous bodies. Agus Suwage, for example, in addition to painting his body to speak out about the ironic macro social condition, borrows bodies and portraits of famous leaders. For instance, in his series of figures smoking cigarettes, he places a cigarette on the lips of famous people

such as Soekarno (the first President of Indonesia) and others. Famous bodies from the political, arts, and religious arenas are fascinating to reinterpret. This type of expression style belongs to the "Beyond Famous Portraits."

### **Beyond Famous Portraits**

Notably, the figurative subjects in contemporary Indonesian art have moved into and borrowed popular bodies, real or fictive. Often the figures chosen are historically recognized and individuals who have significantly contributed to human life. The choice of faces like Buddha, Mahatma Gandhi, Mother Theresa, Soekarno, and other celebrated faces, including world-renowned singers like Michael Jackson. And also popular fictive bodies like Batman, Superman, and others. There are artists who intentionally choose controversial political figures. For the latter, often, the portrait is represented with mockery. We can suspect the influence of the 1960 Pop Art movement in America and Europe inspired the creative character of contemporary Indonesian artists.

However, the works of these Indonesian artists remain specific in visual style with a genuine perspective of interpretation. These types of figurative paintings that bodies or images visualized in the procedure involve a dazzling interplay of geometry, figurative art, perspective, and psychology of visual perception, the intelligible perception used by artists to construct images of the world, suggested by Lazzaro and Murra (2013).

In the hands of Indonesian contemporary artists, famous portraits with heroic values in fighting for human freedom from colonialism, poverty, and wars are often juxtaposed with the reality of the poor, marginalized, and other socially low groups. How the figures contributed toward life and history is painted through a unique point of view, but the narrative of the historical background of the figure is very readily guessed from the works.

Say, for example, paintings of Sutjipto Adi, born in Jember, East Java (1957),

who paints Gandhi, Theresa, or Dalai Lama and others with images of compassion and nonviolent struggle. In some works, Adi paints many expressions of infant bodies besides the figures and portraits of that great figures. As though want to say how great the figure's contribution has been to uphold the new generation's optimism. Adi's painting technique appears in a tapestry of complex cubistic planes combined with unique drawing techniques creating imaginary spaces and dimensions to delve into the portrait's photographic realities and representation of the current social sphere.

At a certain time, the artist Ronald Manulang, a Batak-born artist from North Sumatera (1954), chose the Dictator Hitler figure in his works. Hitler was portrayed as pregnant showing funny facial expressions. The appearance of a photo-realistic of Hitler's face with a bulging stomach is certainly a unique perspective and subversive of how we currently perceive Hitler. Perhaps, Ronald loudly reminds us of the fascist potential progenies or mocks the possibility of certain people idolizing him again. This an exciting critique of how the current time visualizes history. It's a plea and a critical reflection, but refreshing; this is the strength of arts in creating perception and interpretation.

For example, Manulang's painting entitled "Expecting a New Born Child" (189 x 200 cm, oil paint on canvas, 2009) portrays the figure of Hitler as a pregnant woman nearing labor. Only the face is identical to Hitler, with longer pony brow hairs making it look funny. The anatomy, including the body and feet, is that of a woman. The gaze of this Nazi leader is cold, with suits widely open, exposing the bulging stomach. Gazing to the future or hoping the conceived progeny will have the same mentality. The gaze and Hitler's pregnant state are the most provocative part of Ronald's work, mocking the existence of this dictator.

The theme of pregnancy does invite its interpretation since this is where hopes and human hopes of the future is told.

In the context of "Expecting a New Born Child," this can be a paranoia of the possibility of history repeating itself or somebody intentionally hoping that history repeats itself. It is a state of mind of continual tension, and Ronald Manulang terrorizes our attention with the subversive visual representation. According to Adnyana, Remawa, & Sari (2019), Manulang painted a portrait of Hitler that created a new metaphor by reframing, recasting, and mobilizing signs as an aesthetic concept.

In the meantime, the artist Nyoman Masriadi (born in Mas, Bali, 1973) brings up the popular fiction figure. Masriadi expresses in a witty satire our daily life through painting the narrative of drawing subjects resembling the pattern of comic narrative. Complete with dialog bubbles, and he strengthens the drawings often adopted from popular fiction characters. Art also is a type of thinking/making that allows people to form and develop their characters, as Chamim et al. (2003) suggested.

The work "Sorry Hero, I Forgot" (200 x 300 cm, acrylic on canvas, 2008), for example, represents the two figures Batman and Superman in a dialog while they are in the toilets, in a separate cubicle. Batman complains about the people he helps who never say thank you, and Superman cheers him up by saying, "never mind, just let go, we'll see, OK." This fragment mocks the world of the superheroes, whether they do not need any reward for their good deeds or are genuinely sincere for the sake of doing good. No one expected that such a dialog would take place amongst heroes.

The Indonesian artists who put forward subjects about popular figures, fiction or real, are like bringing us to the questions about popularity. The language instrument of satire, humor, and comical becomes the choice to rewrite the position of favor. By presenting popular figures as subjects, the themes are made to go beyond localities and transcend the issue of the resemblance of the visual character of the figures. What's more important is how the interpretation is allowed to be as liberal

as possible to reread the figure's presence in a more expanded discourse arena. According to Chiu & Genocchio (2010), some art that has significantly impacted Indonesia employs anime, cyber-gaming, comic-book imagery, and Masriadi. In art practice, figurative painters access very complex levels of knowledge; to produce a painting requires, first, a deep analysis of the image of the reality and, afterward, the study of the reconstruction of this reality, suggested by De Molina (2014).

The artists' ways of expressing the subject matter of popular bodies tend to choose realistic images. The realistic image eases the connection between the viewers' memory with the artist's creative power in interpreting the actor/figure as the receiver itself. According to Abodunrin (2016), paintings have been used over time to express emotion and feeling to the perceiving audience. The artist's critical ways within the perspective freedom give the popular figure richer meanings using body, artistic visual, and social meanings.

## CONCLUSION

Figurative subjects on the Indonesian contemporary arts are marked by layers of ideas and visual imageries. And the first layer is a question about the quality of bodies that were the basis of visual art representation all this time. Bodies are no longer seen as an ideal posture to be recaptured exactly. Many artists depart from the admiration of the body's gestures, forms, and face criticism of how bodies become actors in the macro social narration. This sense accommodated education values that morality and democracy is represented in the new metaphor of aesthetic terms.

How will the audience define values of social character that are requesting figures or social agents visualized by the artists. The term is figurative/visual art recalls the role of the social-cultural context—the social, political, and cultural environment, suggested by Vasileva (2019) to tend the Bulgarian art, particularly painting. The perspective being developed is

often a condition of marginalized bodies, like in the works of Mangu Putra, Chusin Setiadikara, and Ivan Sagito. This creative framework makes marginalized bodies subjects in the "Marginalized Bodies".

The visual figurative indication also pertains to myths reinterpretation; heroic stories of the past that are narrated in chronicles or scriptures like Ramayana and Mahabharata being reinterpreted into the current context of progressing world. The world of *wayang* in the Javanese tradition is utilized as a path to query the conduct of contemporary people. The tall and elongated figure of *wayang* enriches the subjects of invented and imaginative bodies, which then also color the bodies of a marginalized lot, and the desire to mock the borzoi's group like in the works of Heri Dono, Entang Wiharso, and Made Djirna that are categorized into "Fictionalized Bodies."

Meanwhile, the way artists pour their mental mood pertaining to private and social bodies through an expression of spontaneous and free painting technique is categorized into "Bodies of Expression." Bob Sick Yudhita, Ugo Untoro, and Putu Sutawijaya are artists in this category. The three artists consciously take sides to the psychological condition in perceiving realities rather than yielding to repainting realities. Thus, the bodies present informal and distorted; the rest is an issue of a mental condition appearing on the canvas.

The next figurative subject framework is "Autobiographical Bodies," i.e., artists consciously make their bodies, faces, or private physical characters as the drawing subjects. They use their physic as a medium to speak of macro socio-political space. The artists often intentionally choose unusual portrait expressions like screaming in fear, sad, in pain, and laughing strangely. Many also shred their body representations by adding visual markings or certain cultural tools to show identity and to protest. This is a choice taken by Nyoman Erawan, FX Harsono, Laksmi Sitaresmi, and Agus Suwage.

Finally, Indonesian contemporary art also exploits real and fictive popular bo-

dies, such as the faces of heroic figures of this age, which is categorized as "Beyond Famous Portrait." The bodies are often juxtaposed with the figure's humanitarian works for marginalized people. Thus, the making of the paintings is often associated with contemporary socio-political realities. The artists choose the faces of Buddha, Mahatma Gandhi, Mother Theresa, Soekarno, and figures from Pop culture like Michael Jackson and others. Art critic, Avital (1997), read that figurative art (painting) is like all other symbol systems that emerged within culture; beginning with language, thought totemism, mythology, religion, and philosophy, and up to modern science, it is a sub-process of the total evolution of codes. The symbol system (evolution of codes) in figurative paintings also exposed values of education released by artists who took social-political phenomena on inspired themes, artistic, and aesthetic achievements. For how the popular bodies are lent into new interpretation to provoke social perception about the history and the figure's social role.

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