

FX Harsono's "Chronicles of Resilience" Remembers Indonesia's Dark History

BY SAMUEL SPENCER | FEBRUARY 25, 2016



FX Harsono's "The Light of Spirit," 2016.
(Courtesy of the artist and Tyler Rollins Fine Art)

FX Harsono, one of Indonesia's leading contemporary artists with a career spanning 40 years, is due to present his latest work at Tyler Rollins Fine Art in New York. The exhibition is titled "The Chronicles of Resilience." The artist is a central figure in the Indonesian art scene, which he helped establish, and his career has run parallel to the often tumultuous history of the country, which is reflected in his work generally and in much of the work in "Resilience."

Born in 1949, at the age of 26 Harsono was one of the 10 founders of the "Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru," or "New Art Movement," whose manifesto demanded more art experimentation, a widening definition of what art could be, and a commitment to producing more socially conscious art.

It was the latter that led to the next phase of Harsono's career. Following brutal anti-communist massacres and a military-aided coup, the country found itself under the dictatorship of Suharto for 31 years, beginning in 1967. During this time, Harsono's installations and exhibitions were often the most powerful anti-totalitarian statements made in the Indonesian art world.

Following Suharto's resignation in 1998, the country was in turmoil again, with riots and violence committed mostly against the Chinese and Chinese-descended populations. At that point, Harsono's work took a turn inwards. Perhaps inspired by the late 1960's slogan "the personal is political," he began making work about his family and his community, all Chinese-Indonesians facing hostility in the new Indonesia.

Now, with "The Chronicles of Resilience," the artist brings these two strands of his creative practice together. His two 2016 installations, "Memory of the Survivor" and "The Light of the Spirit," which feature in the exhibition, began with Harsono's discovery of photos of his father taken roughly around the time the artist was born.

The photographs led him to think about the East Java massacres of Chinese migrants that so many of his father's compatriots lost their lives in, and to locate the mass graves of those slain. His works in the exhibition are a testament and a memorial to these people, in mixed media and with an experimental flair that has been with the artist since the founding of "Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru."

"FX Harsono: The Chronicles of Resilience" runs March 3-April 9 at Tyler Rollins Fine Art.