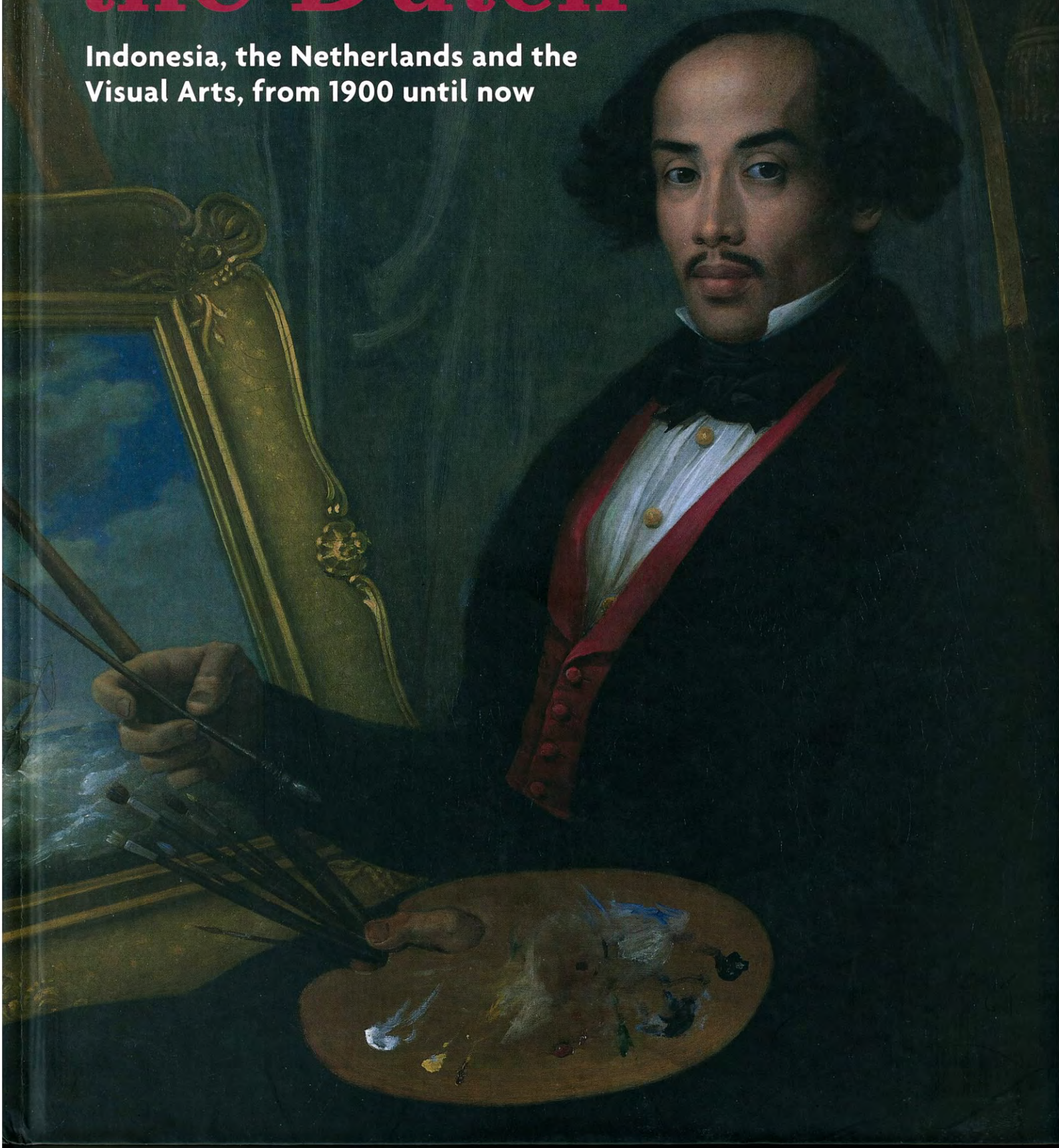


Beyond the Dutch

Indonesia, the Netherlands and the
Visual Arts, from 1900 until now



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Chinese-Indonesian Artists in Indonesia

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Is there a 'Chinese' art movement in Indonesia, and what does this art look like? A small number of Indonesian artists have Chinese ancestry. Their forefathers emigrated to Indonesia in the nineteenth or twentieth centuries. They often married Indonesian women and became integrated into Indonesian society. During the colonial period, the Chinese-Indonesian group enjoyed certain privileges, including being able to follow a Dutch education. During the period when President Soekarno was in power (1945-1967), Indonesia maintained cordial relations with China. The best-known Chinese-Indonesian painter, Lee Man Fong (1913-1988), emigrated to Indonesia from China via Singapore in 1932. His works show both Western and Eastern aspects. Like the majority of older Chinese-Indonesian artists, he produced Impressionist oil paintings. In addition, he developed a style based on traditional Chinese art. Lee Man Fong, who was Soekarno's 'court painter' and curator of the presidential art collection during the last years of the regime, put together the second edition of the series of books about Soekarno's collection in 1964. The first issue in 1956 was a gift from Mao Zedong to Soekarno on the occasion of his state visit to China that year.

After the gradual takeover of power by general Suharto in the years from 1965 to 1967, the Chinese population was faced with repressive measures. People had to change their Chinese names into Indonesian ones and the Chinese language was forbidden. Creating clearly recognisable Chinese art such as calligraphy was not tolerated in public life. The situation changed after Suharto's resignation in 1998. Nowadays many Indonesians with Chinese backgrounds have reverted to their original names, and writing and painting Chinese characters is very popular. In the field of art, this means that some artists – who had to work underground for years – are now finally able to flourish. One of them, Sidik W. Martowidjoyo (1937), has developed a unique way of painting on paper with a brush. He has been invited to China a number of times over recent years to give demonstrations and lectures. The continuation and development of 'traditional' Chinese art on paper is in the hands of a small group of artists.

The current generation of artists with Chinese-Indonesian backgrounds are mostly part of a politically critical avant-garde circle. Their paintings and installations bear witness to the position of the Chinese minority, which is still troubled. Many Chinese Indonesians belong to the economic elite and are Christians. The Chinese population and the Christian churches have over recent years regularly been the target of riots venting the frustrations about the poor economic situation. The artworks of FX Harsono (born in Indonesia, 1949) comment on the precarious position of the Chinese minority.

They call for Islam and Christianity to tolerate each other – toleration that was (and is) natural to the usual moderate brand of Islam. Harsono works with Catholic priests at creating a more tolerant climate in which people can get along together peacefully, whatever their ethnicity or religion.

The riots of 1998, which targeted the Chinese minority above all, remain an important subject for many Indonesian artists. Shortly after these riots, artists from differing backgrounds (Islamic, Christian, Hindu and Buddhist) showed their concern by putting on a joint exhibition. In addition, the



FX Harsono (1948)

Republik IndoChaos, 1999-2009
 charcoal, pencil on paper (5 panels),
 46.5 x 56.5 cm (51 x 61 cm incl. frame)
 collection of the artist

current global situation – in which contemporary Chinese art has become a key player in the international art world – has altered the way in which China is seen, in a positive sense. Artists from Chinese backgrounds, such as FX Harsono and Dadang Christanto, are benefiting from the greater political openness and the internationalisation of the Asiatic art market.